

## **An Investigation on Feminist Response on the Rejection of Prajāpatī's Request to be ordained**

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### **Introduction**

It is needless to state that the beings in the world are different from each other. Specially, human can also be categorized based on various criteria and the Gender is one of them. Because of Gender difference, many issues have been arisen since the beginning of the human world. In the Pali Canon, Aggaññasutta in Dighanikaya and the Genesis in the Holy Bible are the best examples that reveals the religious point of view of the beginning of the world. Each and every religion in the world has to address the same issue because human world is more complicated and competitive. Therefore, one of the tendencies of beings is, vigorous wins by defeating weaker. In human world, there can be seen an issue between male and female. Sometimes male tries to dominate their dominance while female is struggling to save their rights. This sort of strivings can never be solved because male and female are totally different in biologically. Both groups have their own duty which is biologically acquired, to fulfil for the sake of the well-being of the society. In fact, no one can claim that either male or female as the best. The feminism is one of the modern approaches that taken place to save and protect the rights of women. As a result, feminists force whole society to have equal position for women in the world, same as male. Furthermore, they ask for equality same as male in religion, education, political, social etc. This paper will address the women's rights in religion with the establishment of Bhikkhuṇi Order and the feminist response to it.

### **Research Problem**

Women in ancient India had no social states and position but gradually, the position of women had changed. The Buddha and his teachings have been influential for such social changes drastically. Establishment of Bhikkhuni Order is the benchmark of the revolution. This paper discusses how the palace of women was uplifted in the ancient society with the establishment of Bikkhuni Order and the rejection of Prajapati's request to be ordain and feminist respond to it.

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## Methodology

This research mainly depends on library survey or textual analysis. The Theravada canonical texts, its commentaries and sub commentaries will also be utilized here as primary sources. Furthermore, other related primary texts are also utilized as pertinent with the context of discussion to go deep into concepts. Some modern compilations on feminism and feminist concepts will be used. Contextual and textual analysis have been utilized as the methodology.

## Discussion and Findings

Feminism is a collection of movements and ideologist aimed at defining, establishing and defending equal political, economic, and social rights for women. Furthermore, it includes seeking to establishment equal opportunities for women in aforesaid areas and it supports and advocates of the rights and equality of women. Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into various field and religion is one. Many feminists provoke their rights in religion and they criticize the religious fundamentalism which is not allowed women to practice freely. Somehow, Buddhist Order and Bhikkhuni ordination was questioned and criticized by many feminists by asserting that Buddhism is one of patriarch religions that is consisted of the misogynist, androcentric and androgynous attitude. Most probably they drag the eight laws (Aṭṭhgarudhamma) up which represents the Buddha's hesitation to admit women to the Order of mahasaṃgha, the great community and the rejection of Prejapati's first attempt to be ordained. The Buddha was not a misogynist who dispelled the women and he who one protected the women's rights. Feminists of Western world used to declare the aforesaid idea but it is further clear that they were not aware about the Eastern culture as well as Buddhism too.

In Indian context, Brahmin dominate the social authority and creativity was used to build up new social stratifications. As a result, Brahmin announced Mahābrahma the creator or almighty god who has power to control everything in the world, created the human based on four casts which was known as Chaturvarṇa. In the "Purusa Sukta" of "Rig Veda" unjustifiable social grading existed. As it is the social stratification can be explained likewise. Brāhmaṇa (Preasts), Kshastriya (Worriers), Vashya (Merchants) and Khudra (Servents). Even there was a group who didn't have any miner rights, known as outcast (pariah means untouchables) people. Female in this society was compared with a frog by Brahmin teachings. Moreover, female had no independent life and they had to be under controlled of male until the end of their lives. Though the woman is young, adult or elder, is not permitted to behave as her own. (Manusmṛiti, v. 147) This was very worst experience for the women in India at the time. Women were fed up with the system and they had been seeking alternatives for overcoming the situation. Politics, religion, economy, etc. were dominated by the Brahmin and used to cut women's wings.

The Buddha Gothama is known as messiahs of the women in India, who appeared for more than 2500 years ago and led beings to liberation which he has realized by himself. The Dispensation which is formed by the Buddha is fourfold as Monks (Bhikhu), Nuns (Bhikkhunī), Layman (Upasaka) and Laywomen (Upasikā). Among these four, two are representing the female communit. It clearly explains that there is no any discrimination on gender in Buddhism. The ideology of Equality and reconciliation is Buddhism, some sociologists said. According to Bhikkhuṇīkhandaka in Cullavaggapāli explanation, queen Maha Prajāpati the posture mother of prince Siddhartha, visited three times to the Buddha Gotham and requested ordination for women but the answer that was given by the Buddha did not her make happy. “Be careful, Gotami, of the going forth of women from home into homelessness in this Dhamma and discipline proclaimed by the Truthfinder.” Not only one Gotami requested three times and every time the Buddha has rejected. Most of the feminists recognize this situation as discrimination of women in Buddhism as well as the Buddha as misogynist. When the situation has crosschecked many reasons for the rejection seemed. Without having such a fair investigation, feminists have misinterpreted the situation.

Reasons for the hesitation to admit women to the order can be analyzed with detail as follows. The first is Close proximity between an order of celibate women and an order of celibate men could lead to sexual temptations. The second in ancient Indian society, women’s ideal role was leading the family. Women had to empower the family life and responsibility of family, children and husband. That was the thirst of the whole society and ancient Indian women had been fulfilling since long ago. The Buddha wanted to ensure the strong families in there. The third is the organizational difficulties that might arise in monastic institution that include member of both gender. The fourth is monks some nuns as unwanted competition both for limited material and for spiritual achievements. Fifth is if the Buddha accepted the Gotami’s the first request, society may have interpreted it as a kind of service for his family because at the initial stage there were many royal women to ordain including princes Yashodhara the wife when the Bodhistva was in household. Sixth is nomadic life is much difficult to practice by a lonely woman because of security and health concerns. Though the feminists look this down, the Buddha had patient enough to wait until the situation became a social issue. Then the Prajapati visited with the five hundred royal women and met Venerable Ananda and he became the helping hand for establishment of the Bikkhuṇī Order. Eight laws or Aṭṭhagarudharma was proclaimed by the Buddha and Venerable Ananda brought them to Prajapati and she accepted respectfully that became the higher ordination requirement of Prajapati. When we analyze the eight laws it is clear that these only for the sake of the protection of the women and nothing any discrimination and misogynist attitude behind it.

## Conclusion

Several centuries before the Cristian era began the Buddha and his followers have raised their voice up for the rights of women in Indian subcontinent. The Buddha did not encourage the women to renounce because women in Indian context had an ancient role to play. Meanwhile the Buddha wanted to have pleasant and peaceful community in his Order. Therefore, the Buddha promulgated eight laws for women to accept before entering the community. A person who wanted to save water should build a dam as same the promulgated eight laws to save female in the Order, commentary of Discipline (Samantapāsādikānāma Vinyatṭhakkathā) said. Reasons for the rejection of Prajāpati's requests was to protect the women from the social struggles and uplift the state of women in the Indian society. There is no point of disputing the feminist point of view because Buddhist attitude on women cannot be limited to mundane purposes.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Women, Eight Law (aṭṭhagarudhamma), Bhikkhūnī Order

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