

## THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN VEDIC AND BUDDHA'S PERIODS

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Academic Article

#### Keywords

Women, Spiritualism, Enlightenment,  
Society, Empowerment

#### Received:

2021-10-17

#### Revised:

2022-11-29

#### Accepted:

2022-12-05

### ABSTRACT

During pre-Buddha era and contemporary ages of Buddha, the family, social and religious status of women in India was not at all dignified. In the male dominated society, they were subject to usual repressions. During these dark ages when humanity was raged to the ground, the Buddha brought about a revolutionary change for the emancipation of women. After five years of His enlightenment, Lord Buddha established the Bhikkhuni Sangha opening the door for women to practice religion and scriptures like their male counterparts. Attaining the right to live in union like males, women also got a complete scope for acquiring highest education and knowledge in all fields. For being relevant with the context, efforts have been made in this article to have a focus on the status of women during the Vedic period and the Buddha age.

**Introduction:**

Women are an inseparable part of societies and states. Concerted efforts of both men and women are crucial for the development and flourishing of family, society and the state. The womenfolk has an equal contribution like their male counterpart to all the welfare oriented works the world has so far accomplished. Hundreds of males in this world have been able to attain the highest name and fame with inspiration, courage and strength coming from their female counterparts. But in patriarchal society, women never received an equal status and dignity. They were always subjected to tortures and repressions without any reasons. The human civilization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed tremendous progress, but there has been no pause in the repression against women. Even the women did not get any opportunity to enter in religious places. In a words, the woman were always deceived, disgraced and oppressive in everywhere. The women were always fettered by the leaders of society and so called religious priests. The women have no right to do anything independently. They have no right to join any auspicious occasion. In fact the women live just likes a captive beasts. The Buddha gave salvation and gave equal status as like as men. The women at first have got same dignity as men. Its no doubt that the Buddha is only the first religious leader or preceptor in the history of the world who have given consent, i.e., the Buddha was the first preceptor sage? All human beings are equal, there is no discrimination between men and women, and caste and creed. The Buddha said

*na jaccā vasalo hoti na jaccā hoti brahmāno*

*kammunā vasalo hoti kammunā brahmāno.*<sup>1</sup>

In many cases, atrocities against women cross the brutality meted out to women during the medieval age. Women are falling victim regularly to the so-called social and religious rules and regulations. In fact, the womenfolk have been facing repressions in society in various ways since the ancient age.

In this article, I have discussed what was the social and religious position in the Vedic and Buddha's periods and have pointed out how did the Buddha has given freedom from the social and religious restriction.

**Status of Women during the Vedic Period:**

A study of history of ancient reveals that women never enjoyed an equal status with their male counterparts in society during the Vedic period. However, the womenfolk had some sorts of dignity in society during the Vedic era. The value of male child was definitely higher than a female

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<sup>1</sup> Suttanipāta, verse 136.

child; daughters were not seen neglected in society. During the Vedic and Upanishad age, women were seen fighting with courage along with their male counterparts in the war fields. They had an option of expressing willingness or unwillingness to proposals for marriage.<sup>2</sup> Sons and daughters had an equal value to parents. A genius and virtuous daughter used to enhance the pride of a family. It could be learnt from the Rigveda that like the sons the daughters used to get the scopes for learning the Veda and acquiring knowledge in all subjects.

During the Brahmin-Upanishad era, fathers, uncles, and brothers generally used to teach girls at home. In particular places, there were arrangements for girls to study at the residences of teachers or female hostels. Like the sons the daughters were given the sacred thread of a Brahmin or Kshatriya or Vaishya.<sup>3</sup> Males and females had an equal right to practice religion. There was no objection to uttering scriptures by women. It could be learnt from Ramayana that Sita used to offer Vedic prayers every day.<sup>4</sup> It is also known from the Rigveda that many women were able to attain the highest spiritual knowledge. At that time women used to enjoy a comprehensive freedom in society. Apart from studying religious scriptures, women used to acquire knowledge on philosophy. Many of those women were able to attain higher spiritual knowledge. For living a spiritual life, some of them preferred to remain unmarried. There were two groups of female learners during that period. One of the groups was known as Brahnavadini while the other was called Sadhyavadhu. Brahnavadinis did not go for marrying. They spent their whole life acquiring knowledge. The prime objective of their lives was to attain spiritualism. Sadhyavadhus used to study until their marriage.

After marriage, they devoted their lives to achieving welfare and peace in family. In the Rigveda we come across the names some esteemed female saints. Of those saints Juhu, Indrani, Sarma, Urbashi, Ratri and Surya were at the height of goddesses. On the other hand, Shree, Medha, Dakkhina and Shradha were ideal ladies. About Brahnavadinis, the Rigveda says they were engrossed in studying spiritualism; no earthy passion could touch them. They regularly used to perform religious rituals and read sacred books and hold talks with renowned philosophers on critical issues of religion. At times, reputed philosophers had to accept defeat to them in debates. Facts about nine such Brahnavadinis, who had dedicated their lives for attaining high standard of spiritualism, philosophical knowledge and virtues, could be known. They were Bachh, Ghosha,

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<sup>2</sup> Sadhankamol Chowdhury, *Visuddha Majjhima Nikaya*, (Kolkata: Karuna Prokashani, 1415 BS).

<sup>3</sup> Subhra Barua, *Monastic Life of the Early Buddhist Nuns*, (Calcutta: Atish Memorial Publishing Society, 1997), 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Ramesh C. Datta, *The Great Epics of Ancient India*, (Delhi: ESS Publication, 1976), 66.

Apala, Bishwabara, Lopamudra, Romasha, Shashwati, Moitrayei and Gargi.<sup>5</sup> During the Ramayana era, a good number of women chose asceticism and demonstrated their feats in studying spiritualism. Among them, Shabari, Swaymprava and Anasuya were the leading ones. Besides, the word female traveler is found in the Jaina sacred books and Buddhist texts. This bears the testimony that from ancient age to the Buddhist era the custom of adopting asceticism by women was in practice. But no knowledge about any well-disciplined union of female saints like the Bikkhuni Sangha could be known.

### **Status of Women in Contemporary Buddha Era**

The freedom of women noticed during the Vedic Era was seen gradually hampering in the Brahmin age [Approximately BC 1500-500 BC]. During the Vedic age, the word 'couple' in its original meaning used to denote joint proprietorship of husband and wife over private homes. Similarly, equal rights of women like males were recognized in society in receiving education and participation in religious and social functions.<sup>6</sup> But due to the influence of Brahmanism the rights of women started declining and reached such a stage that the women simply became housewives under the authority of males while men turned out to be the proprietor of everything. Being gripped with prejudice, women even forgot their own existence also.<sup>7</sup> At that time women had no alternatives but accepting shelter of males or their subjugations. And as a result, the position of women was set at a point much below to males. However, women used to enjoy some sorts of the freedom in practicing religion. But they did not have a complete freedom in this regard. Because the religious decree was that a woman will have to remain under the command of father in childhood, husband in youth and sons in old-age. And because of this, no woman could do anything without permission from the house lord. So it can be easily said that during that period the woman folks were one kind of captive in society. From her birth to death a woman had to remain under the command of males. They required taking permission from their male guardians before taking any decision.

### **King of Bideha's Grandson, Sukriti Announced**

There is the well-known declaration of the scriptures that women are incompetent to enjoy freedom at any period of life. Even in high-born and endowed with beauty and possessor of protectors, women wished to transgress the restraints assigned to them. There is nothing else more sinful than women. Women are fierce. They are endowed with fierce powers. There are none whom they love or like so

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<sup>5</sup> Subhra Barua, *Monastic Life of the Early Buddhist Nuns*, 4-8.

<sup>6</sup> Bani Chattyopadhyaya, *Pali Shahittye Nari*, 2nd edition, (Kolkata: Punaccha, 1402 BS).

<sup>7</sup> Anant S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, (Patna: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1956), 58-72.

much as those that have sexual congress with them. Women are like those incantations that are destructive of life. Even after they have consented to live with one, they are prepared to abandon him for entering into engagements with others.<sup>8</sup>

The Brahmin domination brought down the status of women in society to such a lower level that their human existence ceased to exist; their social and religious freedom also came to an end. They were prohibited to utter the scriptures. Women were also obstructed to offer prayers at the temples. In this context Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda says,

At one time, they were even prohibited from reading the scriptures! Their punishment for doing so was to have their tongues cut out. Apart from that, they were also discouraged from entering the places of worships. Even if they were allowed to participate in religious practices, such participation was only confined within their own homes, pertaining to household religious ceremonies.<sup>9</sup>

Before the advent of the Buddha, the social and religious status of women was very humiliating and low. According to Brahmanism, the Shurda is the lowest of the four Hindu castes. They were considered as the meanest, the nastiest and the untouchables in the society. Likewise, women were treated in society like the Shudras. At that time, women had no entity in society.

### **Position of Women in the *Manusmṛiti*:**

The *Manusmṛiti* or the *Manusāṅhitā* framed during the post Buddha era [composition period approximately 200BC-200AD], was considered as a constitution of controlling the Hindu society. The discriminatory treatment of women in the Brahminical Dharma in Hinduism was further sharpened, revised and toughened in it. The rules and regulations of the *Manusmṛiti* meant for males and females, made women virtually outcasts in the society. Some of the rules and regulations relating to women in the *Manusmṛiti* are stated below:

*pitā rakṣati kaumāre bhartā rakṣati yauvane;*

*rakṣanti sthavire putrā na strī svātantryamarhati* [9/3].

Fathers will protect women during unmarried life, husbands in youth and sons in old-age. Women are not eligible for freedom.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Narasu, P. Lakshmi, *The Essence of Buddhism*, Asian Educational Services, (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1983), 90- 91.

<sup>9</sup> Dhammananda K. Sri, *Status of Women in Buddhism*, *Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*, (Kuala Lumpur: Publication of the Buddhist Missionary Society, 1983), 420.

<sup>10</sup> Sureshchandra Banarjee, *Women under Primitive Buddhism*, (Delhi: Manusamhi, 1999), 9.

A similar rule is seen in the chapter five of the *Manusmṛiti*:

*bālye piturvase tiṣṭhet, pāṇigrāhasya yauvane;  
putrānām bhartari prete, na bhajet strī svatantratām.*<sup>11</sup>

Women belong to father in childhood, to husbands in youth and to sons after the death of husbands. Women will not be in freedom.

*visīlaḥ kāmavritto vā guṇaur vā parivarjitaḥ;  
upacāryaḥ striyā sādhyā satatam devavatu patiḥ.*<sup>12</sup>

Wife will not be able to say anything if the husband is worthless and perverted. The husband will have to be treated as god.

In another place of the *Manusmṛiti*, it is stated that -

*mātrā svasrā duhitṛā vā nā viviktāsano bhavet;  
balabān indriyagrāmo vidvāṃsam pi karṣati.*<sup>13</sup>

In a house without male, do not sit on the same bed with mother, sister, or daughter because powerful sense organs subjugate educated men.

The *Manusmṛiti* is not ready to allow the womenfolk to have social, economic or religious freedom. Husbands will be owner of assets earned by wives. The following statement is the proof of that -

*bhāryā putraśca dāsaśca traya evādhanāḥ smṛitāḥ,  
yat te samadhigacchanti yasya te tasya tad dhanam.*<sup>14</sup>

The *Manusmṛiti* says, “Women do not require any ablution, fasting or vow independently. Wives will be able to get heaven serving husbands.”

*nāsti strīnām pṛithag yajno na vrataṃ nāpyuapoṣaṇam,  
patim śuśrūṣyate yena tena svarge mahīyate.*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 5/148.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 5/154.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 2/215.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 8/416.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 5/155.

About women character the *Manusmṛiti* has the following observations:

*paum̐ścalyācu calacittācu ca nausnehyācu ca svabhāvataḥ,  
raksitā yatnato apīha bharṭṛisvetā bikurvate.*<sup>16</sup>

Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however carefully they may be guarded in this (world).

*naitā rupam̐ parīkṣnte nāsām̐ vayasi sam̐sthitih̐,  
surūam̐ vā virūpam̐ vā pumānityeva bhunjate.*<sup>17</sup>

They do not consider beauty; they do not have any love in youth, either beautiful or ugly persons enjoy them.

According to the *Manusmṛiti*, serving the husband, making him happy and performing the household jobs properly are the only duties of a woman. Women do not need to take part in any work outside her home and even perform religious services. These instructions issued by the *Manusmṛiti* have definitely hampered the progress of the womenfolk. Manu has compared the killing of wife to the offence of drinking wine. According to him, killing a Brahmin is a great sin while murdering any Sudra, Vaishya or Kshatriya and wife is a minor offence. In this context Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said,

“One can quite understand why Manu should have said that the killing of Sudra, Vaishya or a Kshatriya was only an Upapataka. He was trying to establish that the Brahmin was superior to all these and only the killing of a Brahmin was a Mahapataka. But why did he apply the same rule to women? Only because a woman, in the eyes of Manu, was a thing of no value.”<sup>18</sup>

In the verses 89 and 90 of the chapter five of the *Manusmṛiti*, obsequies rites have been forbidden to renegades, travelers and brutal faithful persons. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar thinks Manu promulgated such provisions targeting the Buddhist Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunis. And Manu is the principal rival of Buddhism. According to him, the progress of Buddhism will be hampered if the women are obstructed to adopting asceticism.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 9/15.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 9/14.

<sup>18</sup> Ambedkar, *The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Women*, (India: Mahabodhi Centenary Commemorative, 1991), 310.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Despite that the *Manusmṛiti* in particular verses honored the womenfolk. The verses said gods become happy where women are honored; all works (yoga, hom and worshipping gods) go in vain where the women are not respected.

*yatra nāryastu pūjyante ramante tatra devatāḥ,*

*yatraitāstu na pūjyante sarvāstatrāphalāḥ kriyāḥ.*<sup>20</sup>

Another verse said, women will have to be honored with ornaments, clothes and foods in festivals.

*tasmādetāḥ sadā pūjya bhūsaṇācchādanāsnaiḥ,*

*bhūtikāmairnarairnityaṃ satkāresutsaveṣu ca.*<sup>21</sup>

In the verse number 26 of the chapter nine, Manu said “women are ornaments of houses. The women are great fortunate as they produce children to save dynasty. They are eligible to be respected by all. And because of this, there is no difference between Goddess Lakshmi or Goddess Saraswati and wife in the house.

*prajānārthaṃ mahābhāgāḥ pūjārḥā grihadīptayaḥ,*

*striyaḥ śriyasca gehesu na viśeṣohasti kaścana.*<sup>22</sup>

The above comments of Manu indicate that he spoke for women independence.

### **Status of Women in Buddhism**

It has become evident clearly from an analysis of the philosophy and advice of the Buddha that the religious and philosophical course that was prevalent from the Vedic era to the pre-Buddhist age changed its direction in the Buddhist era after assuming a new shape. A revolution of conscience took place in the Indian society due to the change in the traditional course. The ideology of the Buddha was in root of that revolution.<sup>23</sup> Because of the influence of the religious and philosophical ideologies of the Buddha, prejudice, blind faith and fascination for Brahmin activities started fading away from the minds of the general people. Lord Buddha wanted to remove caste system, untouchable, prejudice and dogmatism of the Brahmin religion from the Indian society on one hand and establish an ideal society through ensuring equal rights of men and women and expand mass education on the other. This ideal social system introduced by Lord Buddha ensured an equal dignity of women in society along with males. Lord Buddha freed the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3/56.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 3/59.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 9/26.

<sup>23</sup> Bani Chattyopadhyaya, *Pali Shahittye Nari*, 49.



Indian women from captivity and gave due respect to their independent thinking. Lord Buddha showed the Indian women the path to achieving freedom from the lifelong subjugation under males. And at the same time, the womenfolk could realize that the religion introduced by Lord Buddha has the provisions for them to live a free social and religious life.<sup>24</sup>

The Buddha allowed equal rights to women like the men in society. He did not keep any difference between men and women in a society in practicing religion, meditation, learning scriptures, acquiring knowledge and education. The Buddha said to Ananda, “Oh, Ananda! the women who went forth from home into homelessness in the Tathāgatha’s prescribed *dhamma-vinaya*, they certainly acquired *sotāpatti*, *sakadāgāmi*, *anāgāmi* and arhataship.” (*bhabbo Ānanda, mātuḡāmo tathāgatappavedite dhammavinaya āgārasmā anāgariyaṃ pabbajjitvā sotāpattipalāṃpi sakadāgāmiphalaṃpi anāgāmiphalaṃpi arahattaphalaṃ sacchikānti*).<sup>25</sup>

He established the Bhikkhuni Sangha (the community of nun). The Bhikkhuni Sangha was the place for all women ranging from queens, princess, housewives, the rich and the poor, prostitutes, elites and others irrespective of caste and creed. Many oppressed women were able to enjoy the taste of freedom through adopting a Bhikkhuni life. But the conservative Brahmin society did not take in good grace the formation of the Bhikkhuni Sangha. They created obstruction to the Sangha at every step. And as a result, the Bhikkhunis had to endure harassments and defamation.<sup>26</sup> But the Buddha Bhikkhunis were adamant in achieving their objective. They said, “We do not like to chain out lives, we do not need the temporary peace and enjoyment of this world, we want salvation, ultimate freedom.”<sup>27</sup> It was virtually a strong blow to the social and religious management of the Indian society; and a social and religious revolution. Defying stringent rules and regulations of the society, Lord Buddha established the womenfolk at a dignified position in society. In this regard Dr. Jothiya Dhirasekara said:

This hostile attitude to women both in religion and society was repeatedly criticized and challenged by the Buddha on numerous occasion.... The Buddha pointed out clearly that woman had a dignified and important part to play in society and he defined it with great insight, fitting her harmoniously into the social fabric. She is a lovable member of the household, held in place with numerous relationships, and respected above all, as the mother of worthy sons. The sex did not matter, he argued, and added that in character and in her role in society, she may even rival men.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Horner, *Women under Primitive Buddhism*, (Delhi: Manusamhita, 1975), 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> Vinaya Pitaka Vol.i.254-255

<sup>26</sup> Sadhankamol Chowdhury, *Visuddha Majjhima Nikaya*, 2-3.

<sup>27</sup> Rabindra B. Barua, *Pali Shahityer Itihash*, (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1980), 245.

<sup>28</sup> Ambedkar, *The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Women*, 297.

According to the Buddha, difference between men and women should be determined on basis of their self-virtues. Because of good character one man can be worse than a woman and vice versa. In this regard, one instant of the *Samyutta Nikāya* can be mentioned here. Once, king Prasenjit of Shravasti went to Jetavana Vihar to meet the Lord Buddha. As the king took his seat after saluting Lord Buddha, one messenger arrived at the scene to inform the king that Queen Mallika Devi has given birth to a female child. Hearing the news, the face of king Prasenjit became gloomy. Lord Buddha could realize that the king was unhappy with the birth of his daughter. Addressing to the king, Lord Buddha said:

*itthī pi hi ekacchīyā seyya posa janādhipa,*

*medhāvinī sīlavatī sassudevā patibbatā.*

*tassā yo jāyati poso sūro hoti disampati,*

*tādisā subhagiyā putto rajjam pi anusāsati.*<sup>29</sup>

“King ! at times any daughter can achieve supremacy than a son. There are many women, who are meritorious. They respect father-in-law, mother-in-law and husband. They can give birth to those children who may accomplish good jobs and even rule the country.”

Lord Buddha was a person of sharp social and political consciousness. It was unique in excellence the prudence that Lord Buddha demonstrated in discussing Sapta Aparihaniya Dhamma on one hand and his social awareness on the other. The downfall of a nation or country will be impossible if the people and rulers of that country follow the Sapta Aparihaniya Dhamma. Here, the number 5 of Aparihaniya Dhamma, says, “A proper respect will have to be shown to good family women in society.”<sup>30</sup> And then this society and nation would be able to achieve progress and development.

‘Showing a proper respect to women’ denotes the freedom of women in social and religious fields and even in politics. Lord Buddha had been able to observe that the women folk did not have any independent entity in the then society. They were interned in the house. They had nothing to do except giving birth to children and serving the husbands. Women’s right to practice religion was confined to houses. Lord Buddha liberated the women from this state of captivity. According to Lord Buddha, men and women have an equal right to practice religion. During the then Brahmin social system, Lord Buddha allowed women to adopt asceticism and established the ‘Bikkhuni Sangha’, the first association of women in the history of religions of the world. The Sangha created

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<sup>29</sup> Sam yutta Nikāya, I: 86.

<sup>30</sup> Rajguru D. Mohasthabir, *Mohaparinibban Sutta*, (Chittagong: Sanubad, 1941), 3-9.

an excellent scope for the female ascetics to devote to spiritual studies and meditations like their male counterparts. Many of the female ascetics were able to attain enormous success in acquiring knowledge and fame. By dint of their ascetic practice many of the women were also able to attain absolute peace. In this regard, renowned Buddhist scholar Dr. K. Dharmanada said,

There is no doubt at all that the Buddha was the first religious teacher who gave women equal and unfettered opportunities in the field of spiritual development. Although he had on several occasions pointed out the natural tendencies and weaknesses of women in general. He also gave due credit to their abilities and capabilities. He truly paved the way for women to lead a full religious life. This implied that they were equally able to develop and purify their minds and realize the bliss of Nibbana as well as men. This fact is amply proven by the testimonies of Theirs (Nuns) during Buddha's time.<sup>31</sup>

Lord Buddha evaluated men and women by their virtues. He never hesitated giving appropriate recognitions to men and women in accordance with their virtues and moral feats. He decorated with honor the members of the "Bhikkhu Sangha", who attained supremacy in acquiring knowledge and fames. Similarity, He also honored the members of the "Bhikkhuni Sangha", who attained name and fame in their stride for acquiring knowledge and spiritual feat. For example: among the chief women disciples, who are nuns of long standing, is Mahapajapati Gotami; among the women disciples, who are of great wisdom, is Khema; among the women disciples who had supernatural powers, is Uppalavanna; among the women disciples who are proficient in rules of discipline, is Patacara; among the women disciples who are dharma teachers, is Dhammadinna; among the women disciples who had meditative powers, is Nanda; among the women disciples who are strive energetically, is Sona ; among the women disciples who are clairvoyant, is Sakula; among the women disciples who are quick to win abnormal powers, is Bhadda Kundalakesa; among the women disciples who are able to remember past births, is Bhaddakapilani; among the women disciples who attained great supernatural powers, is Bhadda Kacchayana; among the women disciples who are the wearers of coarse robes, is Kisa Goutami; and among the women disciples who are those released by faith, is Sigalamata.<sup>32</sup>

Lord Buddha was very kind and sincere towards the women at homes. In the light of the *Mahāmaṅgal Sutta*, he described as the best wellbeing of the serving of mothers and feeding, clothing and sheltering of wives. Besides, in the light of Digha Nikaya 'Singalobad Sutta'<sup>33</sup> Lord Buddha called upon the house lords to give due respect to wives, have love for them, not to undermine them in anyway, provide them with food, clothes and shelters, and ornaments as per

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<sup>31</sup> Dhammananda K. Sri, *Status of Women in Buddhism, Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*, 423.

<sup>32</sup> Frank L. Woodward, *Gradual Sayings (Anguttara Nikaya)*, (Lancaster: Pali Text Society, 2006), 21-22.

<sup>33</sup> Bhikkhu Shilabhadra, *Digha Nikay*, (Kolakarta: Mahabodhi Book Agency, 1997), 563.

ability. According to Him, every man should have due respect for women. It is unwise to show any kind of disrespect and negligence towards women. In preaching and expansion of Buddhism, the women inside homes along with their male counterparts had an important role, apart from the Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis. They contributed to Buddhism through setting up, providing concepts and notions and serving the Bikkhus and Bikkhunis. Evaluating their virtues and contribution, Lord Buddha never hesitated to decorate them with various honors. For examples: among the women disciples, who are lay-followers, of those who first took refuge to Buddha's teaching, is Sujata; among the lay-women disciples, who minister to the Order is Visakha; among the lay-women disciples, who had wide knowledge Khujjuttara; among the lay-women disciples, who had kindness is Samavati; among the lay-women disciples, who had meditative power, is Uttara; among the lay-women disciples, who give choice alms-food, is Suppavasa; among the lay-women disciples, who nurse the sick, is Suppiya, among the lay-women disciples, who had unwavering loyalty, is Kaccayani; among the lay-women disciples, who conversed intimately is Nakulamata; among the lay-women disciples, who believe even from hearsay.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

According to the view of Lord Buddha there is no difference between men and women in the mental makeup though they have variations in the formation of physical structure. So, Buddhism strongly supports proving an equal right to men and women in various fields particularly in the participation of social activities and functions. According to Lord Buddha, men and women never differ in birth and gender variation, they are only different in their deeds. A human being, either a man or woman, becomes illustrious or infamous only by dint of their work and behavior.

Lord Buddha was able to bring about a revolutionary change in the social and religious arena. His resolute stance against various inhumane social customs such as the difference between men and men, racial discrimination, gender discrimination, and untouchables gave a strong blow to the social and religious management of the entire world, including that of the Indian subcontinent. Lord Buddha wanted to build a well-cultured society free from any sort of discrimination. In light of that, he set up a religious organization where the Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra had an equal right to access. In doing this, Lord Buddha had to face many obstructions. But He overcame the hurdles. Unfortunately, Buddhism was driven out of India as a result of tortures and repressions unleashed by the Brahmin society and subsequently by the Muslim rulers. And consequently the previous discriminatory religious and social rules and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

regulations and the provisions enshrined in the *Manusmṛiti* were again reintroduced in the Hindu religion and society. But the principle of equality in Buddhism is still in practice with high esteem outside India where the religion has expanded. We believe there will be no discrimination between men and women in society if this policy and ideology of Lord Buddha are followed.

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