

**An epigraphical analysis of women as patrons in ancient India
with special reference to Buddhism**

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Women have toiled along with men in the creation and development of social, religious, political and economic institution. According to the 2001 census, India, the land of the Buddha is home to 3,881,052 female Buddhist devotees. There are an estimated 300 million Buddhist women worldwide, including more than 130,000 nuns. In broad terms, this is a modest attempt at undoing the androcentric bias in Ancient Indian Historiography, through the medium of epigraphic records, to highlight women as patrons in Buddhism period, given the fact that women for any given period have comprised almost half of the total population. It seeks to investigate the contribution of women in the growth of Buddhism in social, cultural, economic and spiritual terms. The idea is to assess and evaluate the achievement of these women and to see how and in what ways the admission of these members helped the cause of Buddhism. It attempts to study women not as a homogenous, monolithic entity but as multiple categories, and analyze their multi-level dynamics within the Saṅgha. Thus, this article in particular focuses on the contribution of these women patrons in material terms.

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