

POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE OF PALI AND BUDDHIST STUDIES
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**A Study of the Social Influence on Buddhist Monastic Ethics
for Women**

—Based on Pāli and Chinese Literary Sources

By

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Abstract

This research under the title “A Study of the Social Influence on Buddhist Monastic Ethics for Women – Based on Pāli and Chinese Literary Sources” was undertaken to examine the social influence on Buddhist monastic ethics for women with reference to pāli and Chinese literary sources. It is a well-known fact that disciplinary rules for monks and nuns were mostly laid down by the Buddha taking social conditions into consideration. But this fact has not adequately been proved by the modern scholars with reference to both Pāli and Chinese sources. So, I have tried my best to prove it through those sources and a summary of that research is given below.

Chapter one of the present study sets out the relationship between the society and Buddhist community in Early Buddhism. As we know, India was governed by the Aryans. Since their invasion, society had been divided into four castes which are called *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya* and *Śūdra*. This caste system influenced all aspects of society. Religious, political, cultural and economic lives of the people were all dictated by the caste system. Women had no rights or status in any of these areas. Specifically with regard to religion, they couldn't participate in rituals and other

practices.

After the Buddha attained Enlightenment, his teachings were accepted by many people who later joined the Saṅgha. Even though the Bhikkhus tried to purify themselves through the practice by following the Buddha, they still got a lot of complaints from society which prompted the formulation of the Vinaya twenty years after the Saṅgha was established.

Chapter two takes a look at social influences on the monastic ethics for Buddhist nuns in Early Buddhism. Although the Buddha's step-mother, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, asked to join the Saṅgha, which means to establish the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha for women at the beginning, the Buddha refused three times. The Buddha hesitated, but Ven. Ananda's urging made him change his mind. Finally, the Buddha conceded as long as Mahāpajāpatī agreed to observe eight conditions or the *aṭṭhagarudhamma*.

The *aṭṭhagarudhammas* were considered as the first rules made for Bhikkhunīs according to the Vinaya texts. But in later times, we find the Bhikkhunīs' Vinaya rules to be much more in number than those of the Bhikkhus. This section will present a comparative study of the rules of these two groups and how these rules were caused by the influence of society.

The influence of society on ethics and spiritual practices of the Buddhist nuns which were found in some Buddhist literature, such as *Bhikkhunī Khandaka*, *Therīgāthā*, *Samyutta Nikāya* are explored here.

Chapter three examines the social influences on the monastic ethics for women as found in the later Buddhist literary sources. When Buddhism was officially introduced to China, women were influenced much by the local culture was based on Confucianism and *The Anas of Emperor Huang and Laozi*. Through some Chinese Buddhist literature, especially some Buddhist apocryphal Sūtras, the women's subservient state in ancient times and the practices in the Buddhist temples, such as *The Blood Pool Sūtra* and *Gao Yun Sūtra* etc. have been discussed here. The Chinese Mahāyāna literature such as the *Lotus Sūtra* mentioned the idea of gender transference and the *Mahāpājāpati Bhikkhunī Sūtra* which describes 84 females with bad characters led people to believe that the female gender is considered as the inferior in Buddhism. With this background, the monastic ethics for nuns in the Chinese temples, which were based on the Bhikkhunī Vinaya rules, were influenced a lot by the above-mentioned texts. We can find these influences in later Chinese texts, such as *Dukkaṭa Made by Monks* and *The legend of Chinese Bhikkhunīs*. The content of the chapter three includes the above details.

Further, a comparative and analytical method was adopted in this chapter by comparing and discussing the similarities and dissimilarities of viewpoints towards females between the Confucianism and Buddhism.

The conclusion is intended to give a summary of the fore-going chapters and to present the contribution to the field of Buddhist studies through this research.