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Sakyadhita

International Association of Buddhist Women

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Buddhist Women Completing the Fourfold Assembly of the Buddha: Cultivating Resilience and Seeking Awakening

by Marlai Ouch

The fourfold assembly is of the Buddha's original *sangha* incomplete or not inclusive in modern times. *Bhikkhunī*s (fully ordained nuns) are missing or excluded in many Buddhist traditions, including my Cambodian Buddhist community. Women in my Cambodian Buddhist community in the United States and in Cambodia lack access to Buddhist monastic education and ordination. As a Cambodian-American Buddhist resident of San Francisco with a doctorate in Educational Leadership from San Francisco State University focused on Social Justice and Equity, I co-founded the Cambodian Bhikkhunī Sangha Initiative. I have been working in partnership with Dhammadharini Monastery to support Buddhist women's communities and the revival of the Cambodian Bhikkhunī Sangha for about ten years.

The Cambodian Bhikkhunī Sangha Initiative supports ordained Theravāda Cambodian Buddhist women. It provides a path for Cambodian women who wish to be ordained to receive full ordination and supports their development. This initiative completes the fourfold assembly and establishes inclusivity in the Cambodian Buddhist community, enabling my community to survive and thrive (AN 4.70 and AN 4.32). When *bhikkhunī*s learn and practice the Buddha's teachings and teach others to do the same, they seek awakening for themselves and others (AN 5.20). To be awakened today means to make the Buddha's teachings accessible and available to everyone who wishes to learn and practice.

How can we enable the Buddhist women in my Cambodian Buddhist Community to complete the fourfold assembly of the Buddha when the structure of Cambodian Buddhism prevents women from becoming *bhikkhunī*s and denies their agency, other than as donors?

The Dharma talks by monks and other Dharma teachers reject the possibility of women becoming *bhikkhunī*s, dismiss the Dharma teachings in the Tipitaka that promote *bhikkhunī*s, and reject the existence of *bhikkhunī*s in modern times. Buddhist temples display no pictures or statues of *bhikkhunī*s. Buddhist schools are for boys only.

This structure denies women both knowledge and their agency to rise up and become *bhikkhunī*s. My efforts to support Buddhist nuns' aim to dispel the current structure of Buddhist institutions, create access for women to gain knowledge and agency, and provide opportunities and support for women who wish to become *bhikkhunī*s. By establishing the Cambodian Bhikkhunī Sangha Initiative, I also work to introduce the Buddha's teachings on *bhikkhunī*s and share scholarly research on the history of the lineage of Theravada *bhikkhunī*s in the Cambodian community.

Refuting Dharma Talks Opposing *Bhikkhunīs* *by Monks and Dharma Teachers*

I reached out to two *bhikkhu*s and one Dharma teacher who were most vocally opposed to *bhikkhunī*s and provided them with evidence that supports *bhikkhunī*s. The Dharma teacher accepted my evidence and changed his video setting on YouTube from public to private. One *bhikkhu* encouraged me to go public to refute his Dharma talks if I had enough evidence. The most vocal *bhikkhu* opponent of *bhikkhunī*s refused to view the evidence and blocked me from reaching him or his audience via Facebook or YouTube. In response, I created a video refuting each of the points he made in his main video opposing *bhikkhunī*s, using evidence from the Tipitaka and scholarly research, and shared it publicly via YouTube and Facebook. Since I have been blocked from his social media platforms, I was not able to share my video directly to his audience. I then added my video as a comment to his videos that were shared by other people. Through word of mouth, these actions will awaken those who hold strong beliefs opposing *bhikkhuni*s. So far, the response to this effort to awaken the Cambodian community has been silence.

Promoting the Buddha's Teaching on *Bhikkhunīs*

I snipped sections from the Cambodian Tipitaka that support *bhikkhunī*s, added photos to attract readers and viewers, and shared them publicly on Facebook. For those who are unable to read, especially women, I recorded readings of those sections, made them into videos, and shared them on Facebook and YouTube. For example, I extracted the entire section of the teachings in the Bhikkhunī Khandhaka in which the Buddha said to the monks, "I allow you to give the full ordination to nuns" and made it available via text and video. Likewise, in the *Sobhanasutta* (AN4.7) translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, there is a section where the Buddha addressed the *bhikkhu*s saying, "A *bhikkhu* accomplished in virtue, a learned *bhikkhunī*, a male lay follower endowed with faith, and a female lay follower endowed with faith… adorn the Sangha." I also recorded my reading of this section, made it into a video, and shared it on Facebook and YouTube. People in my community could not refute these records because they were not my words, but the Buddha's. My community started to become aware of the positive teachings of the Buddha on women. As a consequence, the number of negative comments about current *bhikkhunī* activities has decreased and become infrequent. This shows that attitudes in my community are starting to shift toward supporting *bhikkhunīs*.

Sharing Scholarly Research on the History of the *Bhikkhuni* Lineage

I shared Bhikkhu Bodhi's *The Revival of Bhikkhuni Ordination in the Theravada Tradition* on Facebook.[1] This book presents the case against and for the revival of *bhikkhunī* ordination and discusses challenges to both positions. I also shared an interview with Ajahn Brahm titled, "Why Not?"[2] and other research relevant to the Cambodian Bhikkhunī Sangha Initiative so that those in my community who can read and understand English could get a different perspective.

I also posted Anandajoti Bhikkhu's story of Bhikkhunī Sanghamitta, the daughter of Emperor Asoka, who brought 11 *bhikkhunī*s from India to Sri Lanka to ordain the first *bhikkhunī*, Queen Anula, and hundreds of her followers in Sri Lanka during the third century BCE.[2] I made the story into a video and added a section from the Cambodia Tipitaka on the ordination procedures to help explain why Venerable Mahinda bhikkhunīs was unable to ordain women and requested his sister, Bhikkhunī Sanghamitta, to ordain them instead. This information is critical for those viewers who are not familiar with the ordination procedures, to help them understand the history and not mistakenly think that *bhikkhu*s cannot ordain *bhikkhunī*s.

In addition, I shared "Sri Lankan Bhikkhunis," published in the *Daily Mirror Online* on May 16, 2016.[3] This paper connects the story of the current *bhikkhunī*s to the story of

the first *bhikkhunī* from the Buddha's time, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. Again, I made this story into a video so that those who cannot read could have access to this story. Furthermore, I shared an archived magazine published by the Buddhist Institute of Cambodia documenting that Cambodia used to have many *bhikkhu*s and *bhikkhunī*s during the reign of King Isanvarman I (616-626 CE).[4] This record was included in two different history books on Cambodian Buddhism. I made this record into a video so that those who cannot read could have access to this story. These records refute all the Dharma talks asserting that the *bhikkhunī* lineage died out 500 years after the Buddha entered *nirvāna*.

Introducing Current Theravāda Bhikkhunīs into the Cambodian Community

Once I had done enough research on my own, I visited three different *bhikkhunī* monasteries in California to learn and build friendships with them. I took photos and videos of their activities and shared them with my community via Facebook and YouTube. Their activities include Theravāda ordination ceremonies, teaching events, and ceremonies commemorating Buddhist events. With these friendships, connections of new discoveries began to emerge. I learned about and got connected to the first Khmer Theravāda *bhikkhunī*, who was ordained in Sri Lanka on February 18, 2018. I flew her to my local *bhikkhunī* monastery, Dhammadharini Monastery.

During Cambodian New Year in 2019, I worked with the abbess of Dhammadharini Monastery, Bhikkhunī Tathāloka, to introduce *bhikkhunī*s, including the first Cambodian *bhikkhunī*, to four different Cambodian temples in California. I am a supporter or a regular member of these four temples. I approached the head monk of each temple, or asked a friend who has a closer relationship with the head monk, to request his permission for me to bring *bhikkhunī*s to participate in the New Year events. The response was supportive and permission granted by each temple. Depending on my relationship with each temple or the head monk, the level of acceptance of *bhikkhunī*s participating in the New Year events varied. Two of the four temples fully accepted the *bhikkhunī*s and invited them to perform Buddhist chanting with them. One temple accepted them with hesitation. Another temple kept the *bhikkhunī*s in one corner of the temple, away from the ceremony activity and away from the monks. I had to ask the temple's lead organizer to include *bhikkhunī*s with the monks during the chanting and lunch. After asking the head monk, the organizer added spaces for *bhikkhunī*s to sit alongside the monks during the chanting and lunch. *Bhikkhunī*s participated at these temples multiple times at different Buddhist events. I documented these events and shared them with my Cambodian community via Facebook and YouTube.

In late 2019 and early 2020, I organized an international Theravāda *bhikkhunī* pilgrimage to Cambodia We first went to pay respects to one of the two Sangharajas of Cambodia. We were in Cambodia mainly to inaugurate a golden pagoda with bas-reliefs of *bhikkhunī*s that I supported to build. The inaugural ceremony was a three-day event and *bhikkhunī*s were able to give Dhamma talks on one of the two nights. Eight-precept nuns, Theravāda *samanerī*s, and Theravāda *bhikkhunī*s chanted the names of the thirteen foremost *arahantī*s to inaugurate the bas-reliefs of *bhikkhunī*s. We conducted research on Cambodian women in Buddhism at Angkor Wat and the Cambodian National Museum in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. We visited eight- and ten-precept nuns in white robes at four different monasteries. These nuns were able to see and ask questions of our international Theravāda *bhikkhunī*s in person.

Cambodian *Bhikkhunī Sangha* Initiative

With good and authentic friendships, an opportunity opened to sponsor the first three women from Cambodia for a Theravāda *samanerī* (novice) ordination in Malaysia in partnership with Dhammadharini Monastery in the United States and Ariya Vihara in Malaysia on April 30, 2022. Another opportunity opened up to sponsor a fourth woman from Cambodia for a Theravāda *samanerī* ordination in Bodhgaya, India, on November 12, 2022. These four *samanerī*s trained in Malaysia with their Dhamma teacher, Venerable Sumangala, the abbess of Ariya Vihara. I also supported an eight-precept nun from Cambodia, three Cambodian *samanerī*s ordained in Malaysia, a Cambodian *samanerī* from Germany, and two Cambodian Theravāda *bhikkhunī*s to support the Theravāda *samanerī* ordination of the fourth Cambodian *samanerī* and invited her for a pilgrimage to the Buddhist sacred sites in India after the ordination event. The two Cambodian Theravāda *bhikkhunī*s were the first and third Cambodians to be ordained as *bhikkhunī*s. The second Cambodian *bhikkhunī* could not join us in India.

The ordination program in Bodhgaya, India, organized by the United Theravāda Bhikkhunī Sangha International and the Bodhi Society of India, was to train and ordain three Theravāda *samanerī*s and 31 Theravāda *bhikkhunī*s. My sponsorship was to provide a first-hand experience of the Theravāda ordination on the international stage for the brave women who have paved the way for Cambodian *samanerī*s and *bhikkhunī*s of the future. These *bhikkhunī*s completed the four-fold assembly during a Kathina celebration at the Cambodian Monastery in Bodhgaya, India, on November 8, 2022. I documented their experiences and shared them on Facebook and YouTube. I also connected the sacred sites of their pilgrimage to the Buddha's teachings and made these into videos for those who could not read and therefore did not have access to the story. This sharing was to help my community become accustomed to seeing and accepting Cambodian *samanerī*s and *bhikkhunī*s.

The Cambodian Bhikkhunī Sangha Initiative has six Theravāda *samanerī*s and three Theravāda *bhikkhunī*s. The four *samanerī*s from Cambodia whose ordination I sponsored were Cambodian nationals. The others hold international citizenships. The four *samanerī*s had to continue their training at another *bhikkhunī* monastery outside of Malaysia once their Malaysian visas expired. They planned to return to Malaysia once they were able to or after they completed their scheduled training.

Sponsoring women to ordain and train abroad is costly, entailing visa limitations, language barriers, and uncertainties. In addition, more women have come forward requesting *samanerī* ordination after these four *samanerī*s. I raised these concerns to a Khmer *bhikkhu* I met in India, who suggested that I write a letter to each of the two Cambodian Sangharajas, which I did in December 2022. However, the letter did not reach the Mahanikaya Sangharaja of Cambodia or the second in rank. I have been working at the grassroots to get the letter to the Sangharaja or the second in rank. I have also been working to rally support to establish the Cambodian Bhikkhunī Sangha Initiative in Cambodia, to get permission to build *bhikkhunī* monasteries in Cambodia, and to gain acceptance for Theravāda Cambodian *bhikkhunī*s in Cambodia. These efforts are ongoing. Although similar requests have been made by Taiwanese *bhikkhunī*s currently in Cambodia, my requests have faced challenges because some *bhikkhu*s still believe that the *bhikkhunī* lineage has been broken and women can no longer be ordained. I have been working at the grassroots to gain acceptance and eventual approval for the *bhikkhunī* lineage.

Cambodia now has many relevant carved bas-reliefs: the Buddha giving *ovada* (teachings) to *bhikkhunī*s, the Buddha giving instructions for *bhikkhunī* ordination and for dual ordination by both the *bhikkhunī* and *bhikkhu sangha*s headed by the Buddha, *bhikkhunī arahantī*s flying in the air, the *bhikkhunī sangha* and Buddhist laywomen with the Buddha, Bhikkhunī Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, and the first *bhikkhunī sangha* residing in one monastery. I sponsored life-size statues of the Buddha's two chief male disciples and two chief female disciples. The statues were delivered and placed in a nuns' Dharma hall at another Cambodian monastery. Once the Cambodian Bhikkhunī Sangha Initiative has been accepted, *bhikkhunī* monasteries and Buddhist schools for girls and women will be established similar to those for *bhikkhu*s.

Notes

1 Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Revival of Bhikkhuni Ordination in the Theravāda Tradition* (Penang, Malaysia: Inward Path, 2009).

2 Nissara Horayangura, "Why Not? An Interview with Ajahn Brahm on Bhikkhuni Ordination," *Bangkok Post*, April 28, 2009. 2; and G. P. Malalasekera (trans. Ānandajoti Bhikkhu), "Arahat Sanghamittā's Story" (from Extended Mahāvamsa V, XV, XVIII-XX), n.p., 2012. https://www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net/English-Texts/Arahat-Sanghamitta/Arahat-Sanghamitta.pdf

3 "Sri Lankan Bhikkhunis," *Daily Mirror Online: Today's Paper.* http://www.dailymirror.lk/109871/Sri-Lankan-Bhikkhunis?

4 "30th Anniversary of Religious and Literary News," *Kampuchea Sorya Magazine* 7 (July 7, 1958): 577. http://5000-years.org/kh/play/55910/81

Dharma Friends
by Paula Arai

May the women you meet through Sakyadhita become your Dharma friends, for with the wise and compassionate ministrations of Dharma friends, we can blossom. An interchange recounted in the *Pali Canon* comes to mind:

> Ananda asks the Buddha: "Is it true that *kalyanamitra* are an important part of the spiritual path?"
>
> Buddha responds, "No, it is not true that *kalyanamitra* are an important part of the spiritual path. *Kalyanamitra* are the entirety of the path."

Dharma Friends are integral to the Dharma path because they share the aim to dissolve delusion, attachment, and aversion. They are committed to being there and encouraging us along the path of enlightenment. Companions that call us to live in accord with our highest principles respect us and care about our well-being. Dharma friends listen to our heart and attune themselves to our concerns, values, fears, and aims. They redirect us when we wander down an unhelpful path and uplift us when we are down. Dharma friends support us, make insightful observations, and walk with us on the path to liberation.

Dharma friends are those who blossom in the mud and help us blossom there, too. They empower us by generating sympathetic resonance, much like the Chinese Buddhist concept of *ganying*. *Gan* is a stimulus and *ying* is a compassionate response. For example, a stimulus might be that one friend who expresses anger over a recent event. The other friend may respond by observing that the anger could arise out of shame over an unresolved issue from the past. It takes astute insight to help effectively in such a situation.

Myriad causes and conditions give rise to events, so the skills required to meet suffering are often subtle, nuanced, and dynamic. In attuning to us and the fullness of the present moment, Dharma friends can set in motion waves of wise and compassionate energy. In other words, they see both the ways we suffer and our potential to be liberated. A Dharma friend, by definition, is a friend who does this.

Seeing the world through the eyes of a Dharma friend enables us to see both suffering and liberative healing. Doing so means becoming a Dharma friend to oneself. We are each our own oldest friend. We were there through everything. We know intricate details about events, even things stored in our bodies that have faded from our conscious memories. To heal requires self-compassion – to see ourselves with a piercingly clear mirror that also reflects the vast web of interrelationships that support, protect, and generate us. To perceive this involves accepting ourselves in all our particularity, complete with the shame that blankets our hearts, the fear that quivers in our bones, and the delusions that muddle our minds. It also involves engaging with the forces that flow through the structures that organize specific socio-historical contexts as well as the larger environmental conditions.

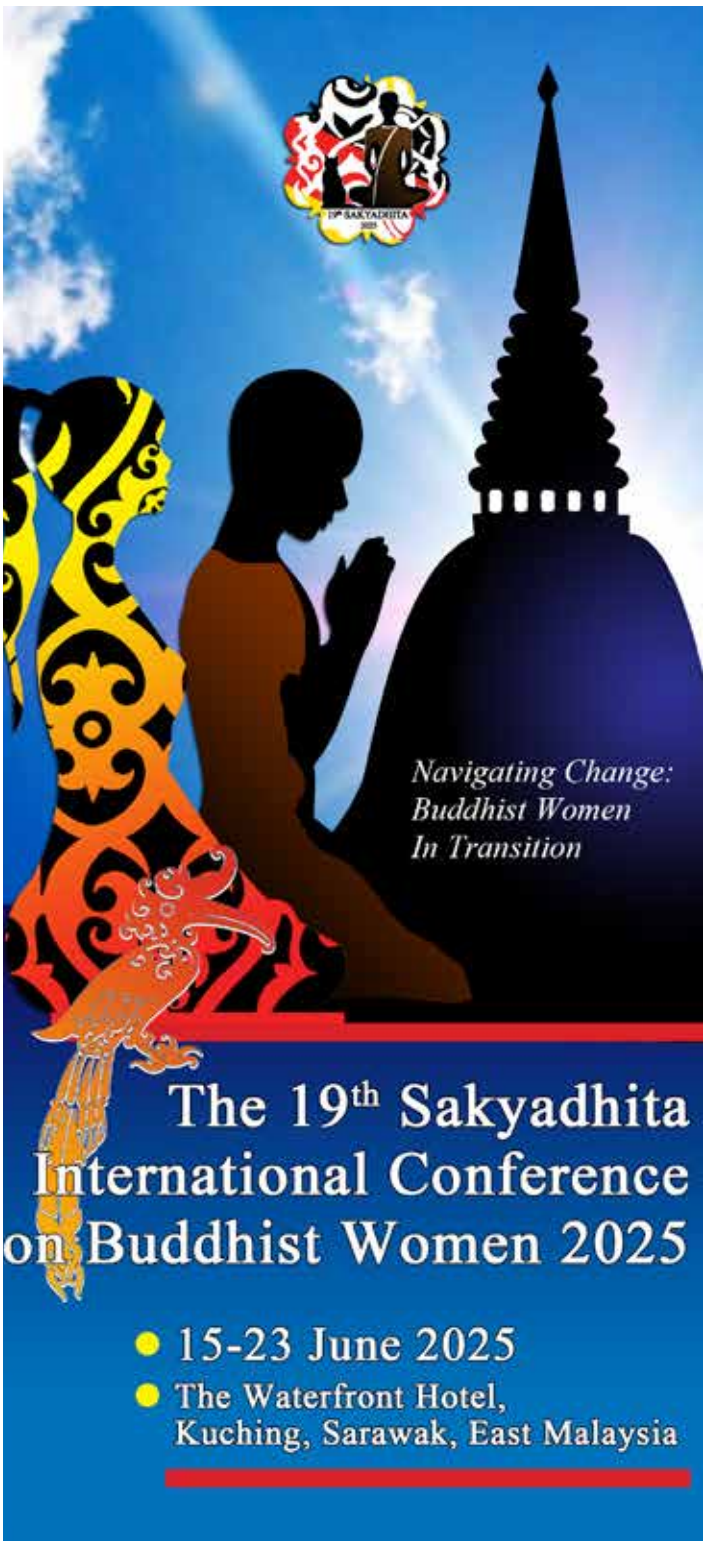
Being a Dharma friend to the world makes palpable the impact of narrow-minded, patriarchal, and small-hearted actions. Such exploits are potent and persistent. They produce layer upon layer of delusion that often diminish our sense of possibility and generate perceived obstacles to our liberation. They often distract us from our capacity to be compassionate. Approaching such situations in a relational, personal, emotional, and embodied way is to be a Dharma Friend to the world. Doing so facilitates the flow of liberation in the world.

The key lies in flexibility and intimate responsiveness, like water moving through rocks in a river, caressing each stone, no resistance, only acceptance. The water does not experience a rock as being in its way or being in the wrong place. Water and rocks dance harmoniously. Rocks are the stimulus, *gan*, and the water is the compassionate response, *ying*. Over time the sympathetic resonance of rock and water transforms the landscape. Monumental changes occur as water offers its streaming ministrations to the rocks. The more we respond to the cries of the world, as water responds to rocks, the better a Dharma friend we are to the world.

Indeed, water is a vital Dharma friend, providing the planet and all its beings with life-sustaining nourishment. Oceans, too, are among our most fundamental Dharma friends. Often described as the womb of our planet, oceans provide conditions to produce life forms and protect them as they take shape. Women's wombs, too, are Dharma friends. A woman's body generates the conditions for a life to grow, even funneling calcium from the mother's teeth and bones to provide for the being growing inside her and channeling the interstellar heat that gave rise to iron that pumps through her heart so she can nurture the baby's heart.

Perceiving ourselves as Dharma friends activates our senses to attune to the whimpers in our midst. In response to the incalculable ways people harm, hold each other back, and worse, we can choose to be unflinching in our resolve to be compassionate, to alleviate suffering.

Excerpted from Paula Arai's unpublished manuscript, *Of Mud and Lotuses: Stories of Women Liberating Dharma*.



About Kuching, Sarawak

Kuching is the capital and the most populous city in the state of Sarawak in Malaysia.

As the largest state in Malaysia, Sarawak is home to 27 ethnic groups, speaking 45 languages and dialects, and each with their own stories, colorful cultures, traditions, and beliefs that makes Sarawak a cultural extravaganza just waiting to be explored.

Sarawak, the Land of the Hornbills, offers a unique plethora of culture, adventure, nature, food, and festivals. It is the place where the journey of endless exploration starts.

Register for the 19th Sakyadhita Conference today!
For international registration: sarawak2025reg@gmail.com
For general inquiries: sakyadhita2025@gmail.com
Accommodations: https://sakyadhita2025.kbs.org.my
□ Early Registration Deadline: March 31. □ Late Registration: April 1 to May 31.

KBS Buddhist Cultural Village

The KBS Buddhist Cultural Village is an initiative by the Kuching Buddhist Society (based on the vision and concept to create a Pure Land on Earth). Central in the Buddhist Cultural Village is Mi-tuo-yen (Amitabha Courtyard) where there is a Triple Gem Hall, Tee-chan Relics Hall, a vegetarian restaurant, bereavement and funeral service hall with crematorium and columbarium facilities.

9-layers Pagoda (Fa-hua-ta)

Thousand-hands Bodhisattva

Guanyin of the Southern-sea

Vajra Tower

Giant Sakyamuni Buddha Statue (replica of Bamiyang Buddha)

Conference Overview

Conference: The 19th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women 2025

Date : 15-23 June 2025

Venue : The Waterfront Hotel, Kuching, Sarawak, East Malaysia

Website : kbs.org.my

Email : kgbskch@gmail.com

Organised by:

Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women

Hosted by:

Kuching Buddhist Society

Supported by:

Malaysian Buddhist Kulapati Association

Supported by:

Malaysian Buddhist Bhikkhuni Association

Kuching Dhamma Vijaya Buddhist Centre

Sarawak Convention Bureau

Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia

Why Attend?

- ✔ Be in the forefront and integral in creating change for a better environment for female Buddhist to advance.
- ✔ Be in one voice, one heart, one mind support and rejoice in the progress of the advancement of Buddhist women community in the South Asian region.
- ✔ Be updated on developments and challenges in the global Buddhist women scene.
- ✔ Witness the historic establishment of the Sakyadhita Malaysia chapter.
- ✔ Enjoy the camaraderie in the gathering of daughters of the Buddha.
- ✔ Relish in the rich culture and charms of the exotic Borneo region.

Support Your Sisters!

Attending a Sakyadhita conference has transformed the lives of thousands of laywomen and nuns around the world. As a volunteer organization, Sakyadhita relies on your support. Please donate generously on the Sakyadhita website: https://sakyadhita.org/donate. Thank you!

Looking forward to welcoming you in Sarawak!

Grant Awards for a Digital Archive on Buddhist Women

by Rebecca Paxton

Sakyadhita is very happy and grateful to announce that we have received two grants: a Khyentse Foundation Award for Academic Development for $10,000 and an Uberoi Foundation for Religious Studies Grant for $10,981. Together, these grants will enable Sakyadhita to create a digital archive of materials by and about Buddhist women and their allies, including existing and future materials, from diverse religious perspectives. Our objective is to provide resources that can be downloaded and made available in libraries, temples, cultural centers, and public forums, to be displayed and distributed free of charge.

At present, there is no known archive in the world that fully documents the history and contributions of Buddhist women over the past 2,500 years. Nor is there any comprehensive documentation of the events and remarkable changes in Buddhist cultures and religious institutions that have been triggered by the re-inclusion of women in recent years. It is imperative to document these historical initiatives for the education, ordination, and full participation of women in the Buddha's *sangha*.

Since its inception in 1987, Sakyadhita has been a catalyst for an awakening of consciousness among Buddhist women worldwide. Prominent among these remarkable changes are issues related to leadership, the full ordination of women, and women's increasing participation in Buddhist institutions, Buddhist educational endeavors, social activism, contemplative practice, and the arts. A key contribution has been women and their allies working together to understand the different traditions and expressions of Buddhism across the world.

The archival materials documenting this historical, transformative movement have been collected and preserved by Sakyadhita, the world's largest and most active international alliance of Buddhist women. Scholars, students, Buddhist practitioners, and the intellectually curious are keen to have access to these materials to expand their knowledge of the current history of women in Buddhism and enable them to critically analyze the roles, achievements, and challenges encountered by Buddhist women practicing in a wide range of Buddhist traditions over the past twenty-five centuries. In addition, women have significantly contributed to propagating a system of ethics based on Buddhist principles of integrity, discipline, and compassion that is spreading in all levels of society, throughout Asia, North and South America, Europe, and elsewhere. Over the years, attendance at the biannual Sakyadhita International Conferences on Buddhist Women has expanded exponentially from 1,500 in Bodhgaya archive, India (1987), to as many as 5,000 in Seoul, Korea (2023).

This archive project, titled "Awakening the Daughters of the Buddha, Creating a Digital Archive," will continue the process of discovery, documenting and gradually expanding the stories, legends, and unique achievements of both eminent and ordinary Buddhist women, both in the past and yet to be revealed. This digital archive includes conference presentations, research papers, books, organizational plans, newsletters, photographs, audio recordings, and video resources that have been compiled by Sakyadhita since its founding. Gradually, the project can be expanded to include more and more resources.

The project entails the transfer of 584 videotapes in a variety of formats and the digitizing of hundreds of photos, negatives, and other historical documents, which is estimated to take many hours. The archivist we have identified to manage the digital transfer, Ramy Mam, is reliable and experienced. The digitized files will be stored on four 8TB Desk Drive SSD external drives, two of which will serve as master copies to be stored at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and Seattle University.

Panels on interreligious dialogue have been held at many Sakyadhita conferences, highlighting the connections between Buddhist and other religious traditions. For example, at the 14th Sakyadhita Conference in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, Parwatri Wahjono presented a groundbreaking paper on "Bedhaya Ketawang: A Sacred Dance of Mystical Union of The Ruler of the Land awnd the Ruler of the Sea," illustrating her disciplined Buddhist/Hindu training as a Javanese dancer at court. At the 12th Sakyadhita Conference in Bangkok, Thailand, women from the Catholic, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim traditions shared their insights on the meaning of liberation. To document cultural crossroads such as these and to support further research, digital versions of these archival resources need to be created and made available to students, faculty, libraries, and the general public.

The two grants that Sakyadhita received will be used to provide a stipend for a part-time archivist and equipment to transfer hundreds of files of historical and contemporary relevance to digital format. The files can then be safely stored and easily accessed and distributed. To safeguard the digital archive, the master files and working files will be replicated and stored to ensure their enduring benefit to historians, scholars of gender and religion, practitioners, and friends of Buddhism for generations to come.

"Sabbaṃ āditta̍ṃ": Contributions of Buddhist Women to Extinguish the Flames that Burn Our World

by Patricia Guernelli Palazzo Tsai

"*Sabba. āditta*" – all is burning – said the Buddha in the *Ādittasutta* (SN 35.28). All our five aggregates (*pañca skandha*) are burning, and our sense organs (*āyatana*) and faculties (*pañcendriya*) as well. All our perceptions, our relations with other sentient beings, and our environment are also burning.

In recent years, it has become inevitable to reflect on the emergency of environmental crises humanity is facing. Our world is burning. Our human society grows more each year, having surpassed eight billion people worldwide.[1] These billions of human beings share the same space with wildlife and nature. However, being unable to peacefully coexist, humans sought ways to dominate nature and transform the world into a profitable industry.

Human beings became monsters to the very world they live in, destroying and not reflecting on the consequences, such as climate change, pandemics, famine, and conflicts. Resources are finite, but our desires are not.[2] The fires of our greed, craving and attachment keep on burning not only ourselves, but literally setting the world we live on fire. However, we do not understand our roles in this collective and global society; we rather tend to decide our actions in a completely individualistic manner.

The Wheel Keeps Turning and Burning

Climate change, famine, social injustice and inequality, gender-based violence – all arise from afflictions (*kleśa*s), which are not only visible in an individualistic setting, but also from a collective perspective. Individual actions spread like ripples on water when someone throws a rock into it, affecting the entire lake. Similarly, individual afflictions can inspire decisions and actions that can cause immense suffering to others.

Thus, the world we live in is guided by laws and social customs that put as central the idea of the individual as supreme, leading to lack of responsibility towards the collective.[3] If it is something someone has done, it has nothing to do with me. This is how we learn and how we act socially.

These standards were elected when societies adopted money and the market as its idol.[4] The logic of this system is based on keeping the wheel of craving (in the sense of *rāga*, but also *tanhā* and attachment (*upādāna*) turning.[5] Neoliberalism calls individualism, craving and attachment virtues, and solidarity, moderation, and non-attachment as vices.[6] For this Neoliberal wheel to keep on turning, people need to compulsively desire for more or new things, buying, stocking, and then disposing them off. Human waste is discarded as fast as more things are bought. And with this, people are treated as things, being also discarded if they are not suitable for the system.[7]

Craving and attachment are the flames that keep burning our world. These flames are the driving force for

consumerism, and this is directly linked to the neoliberal ideology of turning virtues in vices, and vice-versa. This being said, the neoliberal way of life defies Buddhist core values. Moreover, gender-based violence can be linked to social injustice as well as inequality in working opportunities and pay – a direct result of lack of *upekkhā*.[8] And these problems are born from a globalized system that puts individualism as a supreme value. From a Buddhist perspective, Neoliberalism can be seen as a result of a strong belief in wrong views, that lead to the understanding of *t???ā* and *upādāna* as important factors for a world in which few can live and prosper, while everyone else should wither and die.

The problem is that all major religions and traditions believe that human existence, as well as the existence of all other sentient (and non-sentient) beings is undisposable. With this, all life has its dignity, which must be recognized and protected. This is why human rights, which also directly protect the environment, are central to religious ethical systems and also secular systems.[9]

Neoliberalism is a fierce advocate against human rights concerning the collective rights of peoples and nature.[10] For this reason, there is discussion on how Neoliberalism took control of the well-being industry and inaugurated the religious market, in order to change the common mindset to an individualistic one.[11]

***"Sabbaṃ āditta̍ṃ"* in Today's World**

"Everything is burning, said the Buddha in the the *Ādittasutta* (SN 35.28). Not only our bodies and minds, but all sentient beings, ecosystems, and so forth. The desire to accumulate possessions and consume to achieve happiness shaped a collectively individualistic perspective.

The world we now live in seems closer to the miserable realms of Buddhist cosmology than it was before, considering climate change, famine, and violent conflicts. This is due to material progress devoid of the development of warmheartedness and concern for all beings. The majority of people and all of nature experience the downside of material progress, that is, the lack of conditions to survive,

while a few have more than enough but are afflicted by other sufferings. In the *Lam rim chen mo* (Great Graduated Path to Enlightenment), Je Tsongkhapa quotes Vasubandhu's *Sambhāra-parikarthā* to explain that humans experience the sufferings of all other types of existence.[12] But all of these physical and mental/emotional sufferings have three unwholesome roots (Skt.tri-akuśala-mūla) as their main causes.

In short, the whole world and every aspect of existence is being burned by these afflictions, not only on a mental level, but also on a physical level. Everything is burning, just like a house on fire – a metaphor used by Je Tsongkhapa to create a sense of urgency to rescue all beings.[13] But in our current situation, not only the house, but the entire planet is burning, and the urgency just reached its climax.

Extinguishing the Flames: Buddhist Women as Firefighters

Historically, Buddhist women have been trailblazers in many aspects, opening doors that seemed impossible – for example, the first *bhiksunīs* in the *Therīgāthā* and later the inspiring example of Ārya Tārā. They provided women and the socially excluded opportunities, reshaping compassionate relief aid worldwide, protecting the environment, and creating safe spaces to mitigate gender-based violence.

There are still more examples of laywomen and nuns throughout the centuries that must be cherished. Buddhist women have been in the forefront of many changes we perceive today, with grassroots movements such as Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women, Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Foundation, Life Conservationist Association (Taiwan), Bhikkhunī Chan Khong (Vietnam), the Buddhist nun Chiyul (South Korea), the Drukpa Nuns (Nepal), the Thubstan Choskor Ling Nuns, spearheaded by Tsering Palmo (Ladakh), Ven. Jutipa Thappasuth (Thailand), Joanna Macy (US), Associação Buddha-Dharma (BR), and the inspiring lives of Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (US), Ven. Thubten Chodron (US), Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo (UK), Ven. Robina Courtin (AU), and many more.

It is important to constantly consider how Buddhist women have engaged in almost every sphere of social action, becoming firefighters in today's world. The violent flames and fumes of the fires of covetousness, greed, inequality, environmental damage, and so on, are being directly opposed by nuns and laywomen, but it is necessary to develop interreligious and secular dialogue with other groups lead by women for greater results.

Ecofeminism and all the discussion regarding alternative names and methodologies is not new, and it is not only about women but impacts the whole collective. Being mindful of that, the root causes of all that is burning our world, our relations, and our possibilities of preserving the Earth, our common home, for future generations, should be tackled with progressive values within religious and secular institutions.

As Buddhist women, we must unite with other religious and secular women to extinguish the flames of the idolatry of the market, as reflections of our greed and wrong views, being mindful of all the afflictions that give rise to such forms of individual concern and lack of compassion. Like Buddha Tārā, we must be ready to rescue all sentient beings who are destitute and shake all structures of oppression.

Notes

1 According to the UN: https://www.unfpa.org/press/world-set-reach-8-billion-people-15-november-2022.

2 "When you are discontent, you always want more, more, more. Your desire can never be satisfied. But when you practice contentment, you can say to yourself, 'Oh, yes, I already have everything that I really need,'" as the Dalai Lama said on "Oprah Talks to the Dalai Lama," *Oprah Magazine*, 2001.

3 This spread of individualization as a focal point for a society, disregarding the collective, is something fundamental to neoliberalism. The neoliberal mindset sells happiness as something individual and atomized. See Matthieu Ricard, *Altruism, The Science and Psychology of Kindness* (London: Atlantic, 2015), 381. Also see Ronald Purser, *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality* (London: Repeater Books, 2019), 25.

4 Campbell Jones, Martin Parker, and Rene Ten Bos, *For Business Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 101: "… we can see that the total amount of global trade has increased significantly, but that global poverty has increased, with more today living in abject poverty than before neoliberalism." Also, for a Buddhist take on greed and globalization, see Wallapa Kuntiranont, "The Buddhist Community Facing Globalization," Ulrich Duchrow, *Faith Communities and Social Movements Facing Globalization* (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2002), 32.

5 In the *Lam rim chen mo*, Je Tsongkhapa asserts: "The environmental effects of covetousness are that all excellent things will deteriorate and diminish every year, every season, month, and even each day, and will not increase." Joshua Cutler, ed., *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path*, vol. I (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2000), 238. Covetousness does not affect only the individual, but the entire collective, as noted by the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, *Uma Ética para o Novo Milênio* (Rio de Janeiro: Sextante, 2000), 18, 181.

6 For neoliberalism, idolatry of money, and absence of solidarity, see Jung Mo Sung, *Idolatria do Dinheiro e Direitos Humanos* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2018), 77.

7 There is an important discussion about which lives are worth mourning and which are not in Judith Butler, *De quem são as vidas consideradas choráveis em nosso mundo público?* (In Portuguese) (El país Brasil, 10 de julho de 2020. https://brasil.elpais.com/babelia/2020-07-10/judith-butler-de-quem-sao-as-vidas-consideradas-choraveis-em-nosso-mundo-publico.html.

8 *Upek?ā* is understood in this sense as equanimity, not being inferior nor superior.
9 See Patricia Guernelli Palazzo Tsai, *Responsabilidade Universal: Dialogando Dalai Lama e Direitos Humanos* (Valinhos: BUDA, 2022).
10 See Sung, *Idolatria do Dinheiro e Direitos Humanos*.
11 For a discussion of how Buddhism is being affected by this neoliberal mindset, see Patricia Guernelli Palazzo Tsai, "O Capitalismo como Religião e sua expansão de fronteiras no Budismo Mahāyāna Brasileiro," *Anais do X Congresso Internacional em Ciências da Religião PUC-Goiás*, [Place of Publication: Publisher] 2020. Also, Purser, *McMindfulness*.
12 See Cutler, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path*, 292.
13 This metaphor is used in the *Lam rim chen mo*, but also in the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* from Mahāpa??ita Śāntideva, Chapter 6, verse 70 (Patience). [Provide complete publication details,].

Dancing to Her Own Tune: Tina Turner in Her Dreams
by Karma Lekshe Tsomo

Rarely do internationally acclaimed performers publicly discuss their spiritual life. Tina Turner broke through many conventions in her music and in her personal life, notably in exposing the abuse she suffered in her marriage and her embrace of Soka Gakkai Buddhist practice. This short piece argues that Tina's religious convictions and her personal decisions can be understood as political acts. In bringing the issue of domestic violence to a global audience, her life's work was not only creative but also socially transformative.

Ordinarily, spirituality is not the first characteristic that comes to mind when we think of Rock 'n' Roll performers. But then Tina Turner, the Buddhist Queen of Rock 'n' Roll, was not an ordinary performer. For her, the spiritual life was central to her identity and her career as a performer. It was also, bhikuī argue, the core of her contribution to gender justice and social transformation.

As a Buddhist and a student of Japanese at UC Berkeley in the 60s, I vividly remember taking in the Ike and Tina Review with a few dozen people in a small club near San Francisco. As a musician totally immersed in the musical and political ethos of the day, I will never forget the sheer dynamism Tina emitted as she electrified the room. The night stretched into a magical musical wonderland of raw sound, movement, and emotion like nothing I'd ever experienced before, even in the musical heyday of the 60s.

The next time I saw Tina was in 1970 at Blaisdell Arena in Honolulu. The arena was packed with a crowd of thousands, many of them stoned, exurberantly expressing their joy and excitement with abandon. That evening, I made sure to include a Japanese friend in our international ragtag band of graduate students. Later in life he became a UN expert on rice, but since "small kid time," as we say in Hawai'i, growing up in a diplomatic family in South America, he had been a huge fan of Elvis Presley, regaling us with his hip twists and facial expressions until some of us literally rolled on the ground with laughter. Naturally, I wanted to introduce him to Tina's music and her internationally renowned "best legs." Tina was in rare form that night, captivating every moment with her unique dynamism. As she grasped and massaged the microphone in a sexually explicit style, I despaired that my friend might totally lose it.

It was only later that I learned the story of this exquisite woman and shared it with the students in my university classes on Buddhism. The clip from "What's Love Got to Do With It?" is a moving illustration of spiritual awakening and its liberating power. In the clip, after nearly being beaten to death by Ike, a clearly traumatized Tina (played by Angela Bassett) discovers Buddhist chanting. The scene is moving and instructive on many levels, as her friend and fellow backup singer gently embraces her and compassionately introduces her to Soka Gakkai Buddhist practice.

Tina's story has now been beautifully captured by Ralph H. Craig in a 2023 book, *Dancing in My Dreams: A Spiritual Biography of Tina Turner* (Eerdmanns, 2023). As Jan Willis, professor emerita of Religious Studies at Weslayan University, points out in her foreward, Craig places Tina's spirituality front and center in his telling, with heart. He points out Tina's eclectic, holistic religious repertoire that combines Black Baptist elements, metaphysical beliefs, and Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhism. Looking for guidance, she studied with psychics and astrologers, and eventually landed on Buddhism as the core of her spiritual life. She discovered that the Soka Gakkai practice of chanting helped clear away unpleasant thoughts and also brought tangible benefits, such as prosperity and worldly success. Eventually, chanting, which she understood as a form of prayer, gave her the strength to escape her intensely abusive relationship with Ike and the confidence to actualize an independent, liberated identity. This liberating confidence enabled her to take her place and find her voice as an internationally acclaimed solo performer.

The question that intrigues me is not so much why Tina relinquished her power in the early decades of her career. Her youth, social background, and gender norms at the time help explain that. What I would like to better understand is how she eventually was able to seize her power and capitalize on it in the face of horrendous domestic abuse.

Tina was sixteen when she met Ike, and was captivated by him and the music scene he opened up for her. Throughout her marriage to Ike, she was extremely loyal and grateful to him for lifting her out of a life of narrow options in Nutbush, Tennessee. When they married, she even promised never to leave him. Despite the brutality she suffered at Ike's hands, she was indebted to him for getting her started on a brilliantly successful musical career. Having been abandoned by her own parents, she did her best to raise four sons to adulthood, even amidst the chaotic circumstances and unpredictability

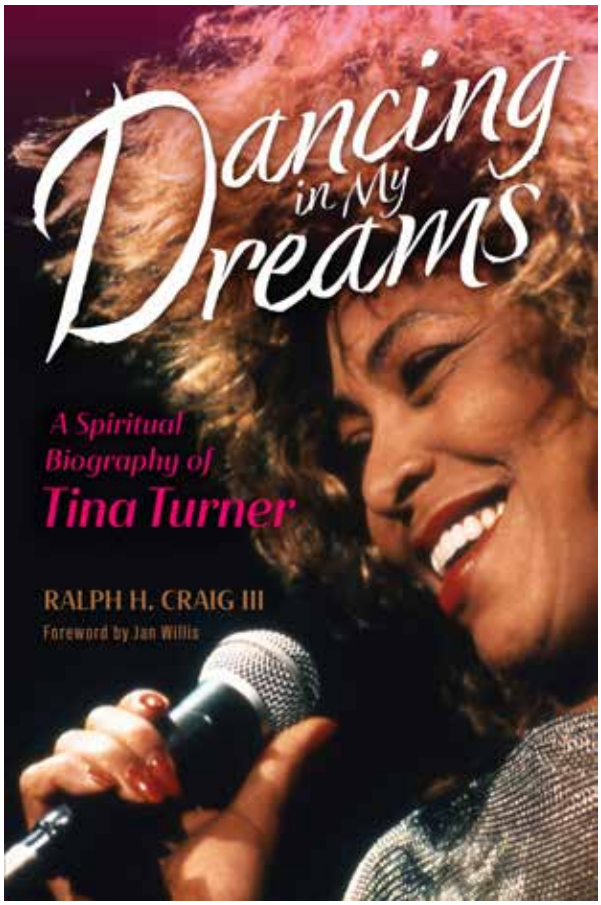
of Ike's cocaine-fueled rages. As the violent abuse escalated, Tina exerted her professional independence to a greater degree than ever before, until finally in 1976, at great risk to her safely and security, she managed to escape the abusive relationship once and for all.

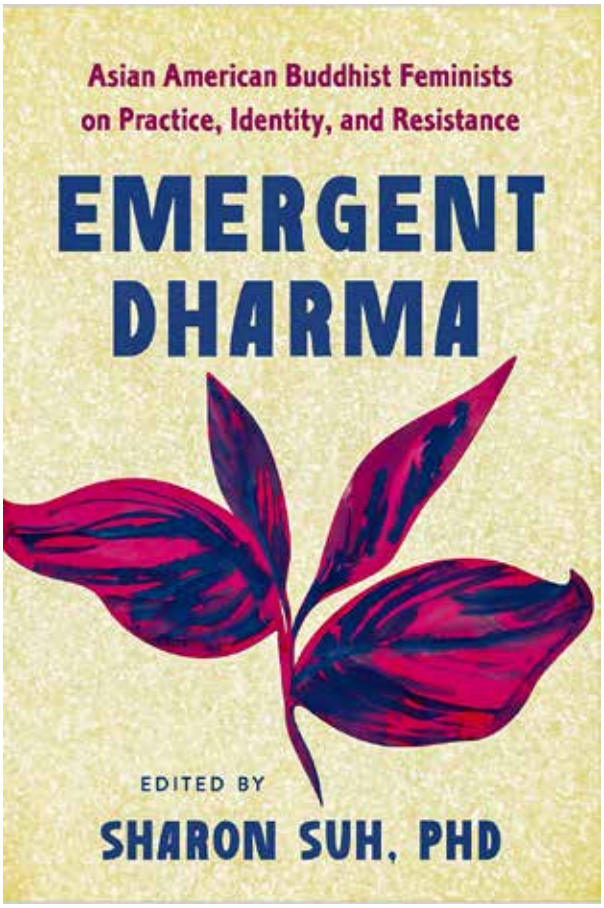
Although Tina is rarely portrayed as a social activist in the typical use of the term, she actively and quite publicly acknowledged and refused to accept the domestic violence she experienced, sending a message that women deserve protection in their homes and under the law. With music as her medium, she signaled to millions of fans worldwide that she rejected the violent abuse that had been meted out to her in her marriage. In courageously expressing her resistance to the brutality of unequal power dynamics, she acted as a precursor of the #MeToo movement that erupted like a storm in 2017. Thus, in asserting her independence and exposing the hideous crime of domestic violence, Tina was 40 years ahead of her time. Coincidentally or not, her transparency and move toward greater self-reliance dovetailed with a public declaration of her Buddhist identity.

The violence of empires against Black bodies, both overt and internalized, is well attested. At the risk of her life, Tina spoke truth to power through her music, as in "We Don't Need Another Hero." Her biographer, Ralph Craig, understands Tina as a Buddhist teacher whose concerts constituted a spiritual experience for millions, energizing many with a power they had never felt before. In this way, Tina's concerts gave her a global platform to exercise what he sees as religious authority and also to make a contribution to world peace and social transformation through her music.

Exercising resistance against unjust structures of authority may take many forms. Whether the struggle be directed to racial justice, gender justice, economic justice, legal justice, or political justice, there is not just one way to wage these struggles. Blatant confrontation may be effective in some cases, but it may also backfire. Recall, for example, the disproportionately negative publicity generated by eight broken windows during the 1999 Seattle WTO protests, overshadowing the disciplined efforts of an estimated quarter-million demonstrators.

Tina Turner embodied women's power and expressed it not only raucously on stage, but also in spirtual chants, children's songs, and authentic laughter through myriad social media channels. Consciously or intuitively, she demonstrated through her life decisions and her contemplative wisdom that effectively overcoming injustice is a creative process. Because the brutalizing forces of violence are incalculable and growing, humanity must leave no stone unturned to find a solution. Maybe, Rock 'n' Roll holds a clue. Long live the legacy of Tina Turner, Buddhist Queen of Rock 'n' Roll.





Kuan Yin: A Gender Fluid Bodhisattva for Our Times
by Myodo Jabo

> To study the Buddha way is to study the self.
>
> To study the self is to forget the self.
>
> To forget the self is to be enlightened by everything.
>
> To be enlightened by everything is to free one's body and mind, and those of others.
>
> Dogen Zenji (1200–1253), *Shōbōgenzō*

Personal Reflections on Gender[1]

What makes a woman a woman? Is it her life-bearing capability of a womb? Is it the "crowning glory" of her hair? Is it her breasts? (Yes, men have breasts, too, but they are not typically seen as a secondary sexual characteristic like they are for women.)

I recall a woman discussing this in a small group setting. We were attending the Rains Retreat at Deer Park Monastery in Escondido, California. It was the spring of 2004, and I had been calling myself a Buddhist for about eight months. The speaker was a breast cancer patient.

She had lost her breasts to surgery and her hair and menstrual cycle to chemotherapy. She was wondering if she was still a woman.

We had no answers for her. It was not that sort of session, anyway. It was simply a time for each person to share what was coming up in their hearts and minds during the hours of silent meditation. Answers were neither required nor expected.

I remembered her some eight years later when I received my own breast cancer diagnosis on my 48th birthday. In my first surgery, one breast was removed. A month later, with the first dose of chemo, my body went into what I call "thermonuclear" menopause. I stopped menstruating that day, mid-cycle, and never had another period. All my remaining eggs were killed by the chemo drugs. Even though I had never wanted children, I still briefly mourned the lost potential.

About 12 days after my first dose of chemo, my hair started falling out. To add insult to injury, it was a painful process. It turns out that hair follicles do not "go gentle into that good night,"[2] but rather die kicking and screaming. I knew the day was coming and had already had my hair cut short from my below-the-shoulders, pre-cancer style. Still, I mourned the loss of my hair, which I had always thought was one of my better features, just as I had mourned the loss of my eggs.

And there I was: one breast, which was going to have to come off eventually, bald, and infertile. Was I still a woman? This time, I had answers. My answer was and is, "Yes, I am woman, hear me roar," because I choose it. I choose to be a woman and therefore, I am.

It had nothing to do with my body or "form," as we say in Buddhism. And it certainly had nothing to do with what was written on my birth certificate. It was simply how I felt – more feminine than masculine, although both are at play in all of us all the time. And both are societal constructs that have nothing to do with biology.

When I meet transpersons, I am happy to treat them as whatever gender, including none, that they present as. If I could choose to be a woman when I had no breasts, eggs, or hair, then so can anyone else.

Kuan Yin's Move from Male to Female in China Speaks to the Impermanence and Emptiness of Gender

Buddhism has adapted to whatever culture it has migrated to. In my own country, the United States, Buddhist groups gather to meet on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings for no other reason than that is when Christian groups gather, and that is what people are accustomed to. In Japan, Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines occupy the same religious temple compounds. Tibetan Buddhism has assimilated many of the shamanic practices of the indigenous religion of that land, Bön.

Just as Buddhism as a whole has acculturated itself, so have the *bodhisattva*s, the holy men and women on the path. When Avalokiteśvara migrated from India to China, he was renamed Kuan Yin. Avalokiteśvara is commonly translated as "The Lord Who Looks Down (with Compassion)." Kuan Yin means "Cry-Regarder," while the alternative, Kuan-shih-yin is "Regarder of the Cries of the World."[3]

Perhaps because Avalokiteśvara did not have a solid mythology at the time his cult arrived in China, it was relatively simple for the Chinese to create their own legends around this new being in their lands.[4] Those legends reflected what the people needed at that point in time: a feminine construct of compassion.

Kuan Yin was venerated in China as early as the first century C.E.[5] They were depicted in art largely as male up to the tenth century, although some popular manifestations of Kuan Yin were feminine as early as the fifth century.[6] Sometime around the eleventh century, their iconography began to shift to more feminine representations. Since the fifteenth century, Kuan Yin has been seen almost exclusively as female.[7]

There are several theories as to why the Chinese saw Kuan Yin as female. Perhaps they saw compassion as a more feminine characteristic than a masculine one. It could be that they perceived a female reference in Kuan Yin's *mantra*. Or perhaps the Chinese merged them with a pre-Buddhist goddess of seafarers.[8]

Kuan Yin's feminine transformation could also have been a reaction to the patriarchal governance of institutions of Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism. Had these two religions not lacked feminine icons, the transgendering of Kuan Yin may not have occurred.[9]

Regardless of why the Chinese chose to change Kuan Yin's gender – or alternatively, why the *bodhisattva* decided to change it – the fact is that gender representations of Kuan Yin are impermanent. Just as our physical forms change over time, so does the iconography of Buddhism, especially that of Kuan Yin.

Some Modern Buddhist Leaders Still Reject Kuan Yin's Gender Identification Change

Some members of the orthodox Buddhist clergy have refused to acknowledge Kuan Yin's transformation to female, even when Kuan Yin was depicted as a woman in art and literature. Even today, there are Buddhist monasteries venerating images of Kuan Yin that follow the conventions of iconography from the Tang Dynasty (618–907), showing them as male.[10]

There are undoubtedly strong reasons for those in power, in this case men, not wanting to give up having an extremely popular *bodhisattva* identified as one of their group. In today's world, when women and transpeople have finally found their voices, it is unfortunate that Kuan Yin's shift in gender is not universally accepted.

A *Bodhisattva* Who is Unattached to Gender and Form Demonstrates Resilience

When speaking of gender, it is important to note the distinction between relative and absolute. On the relative level, men and women are different. Men cannot bear children; women can. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), "On average, women globally are paid about 20 percent less than men."[11] Gender makes a difference.

On the level of the absolute, there is no gender. Just as ultimately there is no form at all, and gender is one aspect of form. The reason that I find this distinction important is because of all the male teachers who have told me that gender is irrelevant. My own Zen teacher, who founded a Zen order, said there should be no distinction between monks and nuns, and that all genders would be called monks. When I asked him why we could not refer to all of us as nuns, he seemed genuinely confused. Why is the default the masculine term, I wondered. I never received a satisfactory answer.

Buddhist teachers who are part of a dominant group, by virtue of gender, race, or class, may try telling those in the minority or lacking power that these things do not matter, referring to the absolute. Western male teachers have been known to say things like, "(E)nlightened mind is beyond gender, neither male nor female."[12] That answer is fine as far as it goes. But it does not go very far towards equity in the relative world. On the relative level, gender matters. And yet not to Kuan Yin. Kuan Yin chose to move from the dominant gender to the subjugated one. That is a powerful lesson in resilience.

According to the American Psychological Association, "Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands."[13]

The *bodhisattva* Kuan Yin chose to adapt to the needs of the world. Rather than running from the difficulties inherent in belonging to a member of a vulnerable group, Kuan Yin embraced the opportunity. Much like the Tibetan female Buddha Tara, Kuan Yin made the decision to be female.

Having been male, female, and androgynous, Kuan Yin

demonstrates the ability to adjust to external demands. When China needed a female manifestation of compassion, Kuan Yin was not deterred by the limitations of the female form in the relative realm. They were not put off by difficulties or challenges. Rather, they overcame any potential negative repercussions and thrived in whatever form they chose to manifest.

While we can acknowledge the role of gender in the relative world, the example of Kuan Yin reminds us that, ultimately, gender is as empty as all other phenomena. The Buddha advised us not to become attached. We can take that advice while continuing to strive for gender equality. Reminding ourselves that gender is strictly a relative concept may be a good start.

Lessons Modern Buddhists Can Learn about Gender Identity and Awakening from Kuan Yin

In the *Lotus Sutra*, there are a total of 33 manifestations of Avalokiteśvara, including female ones. The various forms are provided to suit the understandings of different readers.[14] In his book, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, Peter Harvey says;

> His manifestations in many worlds are in forms that may include a transformation-body Buddha, an *arhat*, a Hindu god, a monk, nun, layman, or laywoman. He even manifests himself in hell realms and in the worlds of ghosts or animals. In one Chinese painting, he is shown appearing in the form of a bull, in order to convert a butcher from his wrong livelihood. His various manifestations may mysteriously disappear after they have appeared to help someone, or they may live out a full life, or even a series of them, as in the case of the Dalai Lamas of Tibet.[15]

Regardless of why the Chinese people decided to re-gender Kuan Yin, let us presume that Kuan Yin was in agreement with this decision. If we accept Kuan Yin as an actual being, rather than a human-made construct, what can we learn from this gender transformation?

First, we learn that gender is simply another aspect of form. And form is emptiness, at least according to the Mahāyāna schools of Buddhism. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. Gender is emptiness, emptiness is gender. In other words, gender has no independent arising. Rather, it arises from causes and conditions, which are certainly influenced by karma.

I have always enjoyed movies where the male lead is a personification of a horrible misogynist in his life and is forced to come back – already as an adult, because it's a Hollywood movie – as a woman. One has to wonder how frequently this occurs to various beings due to the presumption of negative karma around women.

Another teaching inherent in Kuan Yin's gender transformation is that gender is ultimately not important. To put it another way, a specific gender is not needed for awakening. Although there are teachers alive today who believe that only men can become enlightened, the Buddha told Ananda that women could awaken just as men could. That reasoning, in fact, is why the Buddha changed his mind and decided that women could ordain as nuns.

However, the Buddha noted that the ordained path would be more difficult for women than for men. Let us look at some of the reasons why that is true. First, most women are not as physically strong as most men. This is a generalization, of course, but it is still accurate for most people. The arduous walking lifestyle that the Buddha embraced could prove difficult for some women. Second, because most women are shorter than most men, their legs are not as long and their strides are shorter. This means that nuns would have to take more steps each day just to keep up with the monks. Then there is the matter of menstruation in ancient times, before

modern hygiene. Clearly this was something that women dealt with, but that does not mean it was not a challenge. Since women were accustomed to dealing with menses, perhaps the Buddha's concern was for the reaction of the monks.

These are just a few of the more obvious, physical examples of why a life of renunciation might have been more difficult for women than for men. Yet Kuan Yin, who began life as a man, chose to change into a woman, embracing these challenges fully.

Kuan Yin, "The one who hears the cries of the world," is not attached to their gender, whether presenting as male, female, or androgynous. Compassion knows no gender, nor does awakening.

Gender is perhaps the single aspect of form with which most people identify most strongly. As Rita M. Gross writes, "Many people, both women and men, simply cannot imagine that they might be without their specific gender markers and traits."[16] Gender is marked on our birth certificates and becomes, in most countries, legally enforceable. Therefore, if we can relax our grip on our sense of self with regard to gender, we can let go of similar attachments to race, eye color, and so on. We can learn that the other aspects of form are ultimately equally insignificant.

Moving beyond form, we can then begin to release our clinging to the other aggregates (Skt: *skandhas*) that define us, namely feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness. Suddenly or gradually, all the things that we believe make us "us" begin to lose importance. And thus, our dissatisfaction with life, our suffering (Skt: *duhkha*), diminishes.

Is that not the entire point of Buddhism? To reduce our suffering, and that of others, by releasing our grasping minds. The primary thing that we grasp onto is our sense of self. Within that sense of self, the primary thing most people identify with is gender.

Kuan Yin does not have a personal sense of self. Kuan Yin is the very embodiment of compassion, content to appear according to the needs of sentient beings: as male, female, or somewhere in between. Kuan Yin has released the small "I" in favor of something much more expansive. So can we.

Notes

1 A note on pronouns: I have chosen to refer to Kuan Yin using gender neutral pronouns. The exception is when referring to a specific manifestation (such as Avalokiteśvara) who was only known as one gender or the other.
2 In reference to the poem, *Do not go gentle into that good night*, by the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas (1914-1953).
3 Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 131.
4 Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, Kindle Edition), 15.
5 Variously transcribed as *Guan Yin, Guan Yim, Kuan Yim, Kuan Yin*, etc.
6 Harvey, 183.
7 Yü, 6.
8 Ibid., 21.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 6.
11 International Labour Organization (ILO). https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1126901.
12 Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism Beyond Gender: Liberation from Attachment to Identity* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2018), 8.
13 American Psychological Association. https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience
14 Ko Kok Kiang, *Guan Yin: Goddess of Compassion,* 2004, 10.
15 Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 131.
16 Gross, *Buddhism Beyond Gender*, 5.

Pioneer Buddhist Chaplaincy Services Organized by Bhiksunīs and Laity at Public Hospitals in Hong Kong
by Ngar-sze Lau

This article explores the core values of a pioneering organization initiated by a group of *bhiksunī*s and laywomen to provide regular Buddhist chaplaincy services at public hospitals in Hong Kong. Although some Buddhist monastics visited cancer patients in the 1990s, regularly organized Buddhist chaplaincy services at public hospitals in Hong Kong were lacking. Hong Kong, with its colonial background, had only Christian hospitals providing chaplaincy services at that time. In 2011, the Centre for Spiritual Progress to Great Awakening, which was established in 2009 by the Chinese *bhiksunī* Hin Yeung, initiated a Buddhist chaplaincy program to provide spiritual care for patients in public hospitals.

After Bhiksunī Hin Yeung passed away in 2015, 12 Buddhist chaplains and over 300 volunteer spiritual ambassadors came together and continued the work. By 2021, Buddhist chaplaincy services were provided across 16 hospitals with 45,000 visits made to patients. Life education programs about facing death, old age, and terminal illness were organized to support the public in alleviating mental suffering. These socially engaged activities have greatly contributed to a positive image of Chinese Buddhism in Hong Kong despite some misbehavior among monastics in Buddhist circles. This paper examines the development of this organization and its Buddhist teachings with a case study.

Connections

In late August 2023, I received a message via a whatsapp group from a longterm friend, Wai-yee. It was bad news about the deteriorating medical condition of her 14-year-old daughter, Hoi-ching. Hoi-ching was suffering from bone cancer and now the cancer had spread to her lungs.[1] Hoi-ching had been staying at the Hong Kong Children's Hospital and had been missing school. I had met Hoi-ching on two occasions when she was a young child. Wai-yee requested me to introduce her to a female Buddhist counselor, as she was not able to connect well with her current male counselor. Meanwhile, I organized weekly online meditation sessions with Wai-yee to help her calm down.

This was the time of the Covid-19 pandemic and hospitals in Hong Kong had to impose very strict social distancing policies for visitors as a precaution against the spread of Covid-19 infections in the hospital. Patients were only allowed visitors who were family members or a registered chaplain. The visitor had to comply with two pre-entry requirements: to provide evidence that he/she had fulfilled the vaccination requirements of the country and present a negative result of the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test.[2] The situation was challenging for patients staying in the hospital.

I recalled that my student Stella volunteered at a non-governmental organization that provide Buddhist chaplaincy

services to patients. I contacted her hoping for some sort of support for Wai-yee and Hoi-ching. Stella responded with enthusiasm and made an effort to contact Bhiksunī Miao Lian, a trained Buddhist chaplain. Bhiksunī Miao Lian provided professional support and care to both mother and child throughout, until Hoi-ching passed away on the first of October. She went on to assist Wai-yee with the funeral arrangements.

Chaplaincy and the Emergence of Buddhist Chaplaincy in the West

The word "chaplain" originated from medieval Latin "*cappella*," meaning "little cloak."[3] During the fourth century in France, there was a reluctant Roman soldier who wished to become a monk (now the Catholic Saint Martin, who is well-known for his compassion and humility). One winter night, out of compassion, he cut his fine cloak in half with his sword and gave it to a beggar who was freezing. After doing that, he had a vision of Christ wearing a half-cloak. Martin was so inspired by that vision that he left the army to pursue a religious vocation. The half-cloak (*capella*) became a sacred relic and was guarded by *cappellani*, or chaplains (appointed priests). Over the centuries, chaplains became associated with pastoral and spiritual care.

In the contemporary context, the word "chaplain" generally "refers to a lay or ordained representative of a religious tradition attached to a (usually) secular institution," including a school, hospital, prison, or military unit.[4] In today's secular and multi-faith environment, a chaplain is expected to work with respect for diversity and pluralism. Although historically chaplains are associated with the Christian faith, there are three types of chaplaincy. The first is ecumenical chaplaincy, in collaboration with different kinds of Christian chaplains; second is multi-faith chaplaincy; and third is generic chaplaincy, serving all faiths and no faith.

Buddhist chaplaincy has emerged in Western countries with a heritage of Christian chaplaincy. By contrast, Buddhist chaplaincy is not commonly found in Buddhist countries in Asia. Since the 1980s, Buddhist chaplaincy has become increasingly popular in the US and the UK. Interestingly, the first Buddhist chaplaincy was founded in the context of the prison system, for example, the Angulimala Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy Organization founded in the UK in 1985 and the Prison Dharma Network (today the Prison Mindfulness Institute) founded in the US in 1989. Buddhist chaplains later worked in the military and in healthcare systems. Although Buddhist chaplaincy is expected to serve patients who are Buddhist, it usually falls into the categories of multi-faith and spiritual care, and the "generic chaplaincy" model, which serves those of any faith or none.

The training and accreditation required of a chaplain depend on the nature of the chaplaincy services offered, such as healthcare or military, and the level of commitment of the chaplain, whether professional or volunteer. In the US, the accreditation standard in the healthcare context has been developed systematically. Most professional chaplains require certification from the Association of Professional

Chaplains. For example, a Master's degree in religious studies in a recognized faith with a practicum of supervised training in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at an accredited site is required. In the US, there are seven institutions, including the Harvard Divinity School and the University of the West, that offer a Buddhist spiritual care curriculum. These curricula include sacred literature, pastoral care, counseling, and spiritual practice.

Traditional Christian chaplains are expected to be ordained, whereas monastic ordination is not a requirement in the Buddhist schools and traditions. The objective of a Buddhist chaplain is to alleviate suffering from physical and emotional pain, such as fear, anger, depression, loneliness, and grief.[5] A Buddhist chaplain should act as a guide who has investigated suffering in their life experiences to assist in transforming the suffering of others. With the stability of mind derived from their own spiritual practice, Buddhist chaplains guide patients through possible healing, awakening, and transformation. J. D. Kinst argues that chaplains should also acquire basic counseling skills, be familiar with self-reflection, and have sufficient knowledge about Western psychology, including transference, counter transference, and the impact of trauma and depression.[6]

Chaplaincy Services in Hong Kong

It is understandable that in Hong Kong, with its colonial history, chaplaincy services at hospitals were provided by Christian chaplains. Especially after 1960, Christian churches were involved in providing education, health care, and social services to the growing number of refugees from mainland China.[7] In 1982, St. Mary's Hospital established the first palliative care team in Hong Kong. In 1986, Ruttonjee Hospital established both a palliative care team and the Hospice Service Association. The following year, Haven of Hope Hospital, United Christian Hospital, and Nam Long Hospital also established hospice units. Nam Long Hospital is a government-subsidized facility dedicated to the care of cancer patients. In 1989, palliative care beds accounted for one-third of the beds there.

Some Buddhist monastics have been visiting cancer

patients in hospitals since 1990, but the visitations were not regular and public hospitals in Hong Kong lacked organized Buddhist chaplaincy services. For example, Venerable Hin Hung, who began studying Buddhism in 1983, volunteered such services together with a Dharma brother at Nam Long Hospital until 2003.

The 43 public hospitals and medical institutions in Hong Kong provide basic religious and spiritual care services. In May 1984, a Christian priest named Chen Yihua started the first public hospital pastoral services at Alexander Grantham Hospital. In 1991, the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong set up a committee to carry out hospital spiritual care work. In August 2011, Queen Mary Hospital was accredited as the first public hospital in Hong Kong to provide full-time Buddhist chaplaincy services, a pioneering initiative in the Buddhist community. Since then, Buddhists who receive treatment at the hospital have had the option to choose the type of care they wish to receive, based on their own religious beliefs.

Bhiksunī Hin Yeung, Founder of the First Buddhist Chaplaincy Organization

The Centre for Spiritual Progress to Great Awakening (SPGA) was established by Bhiksunī Hin Yeung (1958–2015) in Hong Kong in 2009 with the motto "True Love is Borderless, Together We Overcome Hardships." A talented visual artist and school teacher, she ordained as a nun at Po Lam Chan Monastery in 1992. She then devoted herself to giving Dharma talks and serving underprivileged groups, especially elderly and ill patients. In order to meet the growing demand for Buddhist hospice and spiritual care services in the Hong Kong community, the SPGA established its first Buddhist Chaplaincy Unit (BCU) in 2011.

After Bhiksunī Hin Yeung passed away in 2015, due to the efforts of her successor Bhiksunī Chuan Deng and a team of lay volunteers, the BCU is now providing chaplaincy services at 17 hospitals and hospice service units, with over 45,000 visits to patients to date. The BCU has more than 12 trained Buddhist chaplains and 300 volunteers called Spiritual Envoys serving those in need. Their services were further enhanced with support from the D.H. Chen Foundation from 2022 to 2025, when a community education program on life and death, the Hospital Outreach Caring Service and Buddhist Life and Death Education Program, was launched. This program is available to the general public. Professional training courses are organized to nurture qualified Buddhist chaplains and Spiritual Envoys. The team of Spiritual Envoys makes regular visits to patients in the general medical wards, while the Buddhist chaplains focus on serving patients in the Clinical Oncology and High Dependency Units, making frequent bedside visits to provide continuous spiritual support to patients in need during their stay in hospital. The Buddhist chaplains also provide hospice services to terminally ill patients in an effort to accompany them on their end-of-life journeys.

The Passing of Hoi-Ying

When Hoi-Ying passed away, I was extremely grateful for the expediency with which Bhiksunī Miao Lian was able to provide hospice services to Wai-yee and Hoi-ching within two days. According to SPGA, a Buddhist chaplain serves as a companion, listener, and support provider for patients during the course of their medical treatment. A Buddhist chaplain not only provides bedside spiritual care and support to the patient, but also for the patient's family and friends. At the request of terminally ill patients and their family members, Buddhist chaplains can also offer advice on funeral services, prayers, and the chanting of *sutra*s.

Wai-yee contacted me for spiritual support for Hoi-ching when the doctor told them that Hoi-ching did not have many more days to live. Wai-yee was hoping the spiritual support would help Hoi-ching peacefully breathe her last. Three days before her death, Wai-yee told us that Hoi-ching did not want to close her eyes to sleep for fear of death. I was extremely saddened by the news to the point that I could not hold back my tears and kept sobbing for half an hour. For the funeral arrangements, Wai-yee followed the advice of Bhiksunī Chuan Deng and conducted a low-key funeral for Hoi-ching with a wake in the morning. Funerals for adults are usually arranged in the evening, with the cremation of the body the next morning.

Although Wai-yee and Hoi-ching were Buddhists, Hoi-ching attended a primary school based on Protestant values and the majority of her former classmates and their parents were Christian. Wai-yee was in a dilemma as she could not decide on the type of funeral service to arrange. She consulted Bhiksunī Chuan Deng, who skillfully suggested that the funeral service be divided into two sessions. The first session was conducted from a secular approach through sharing group photos and videos of Hoi-ching and her classmates on short tours and in choirs. More than one hundred guests, including her former classmates and their parents attended the session. After a 15-minute break, a half-hour Buddhist scripture chanting and ritual was held, giving the guests a choice to leave after the first session or stay on for the ceremony. This innovative manner of conducting the funeral service made it convenient for everyone to attend, regardless of their religious beliefs. It gave them the opportunity to bid farewell to this cheerful teenager who lived a short life and allowed everyone an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of life and the inevitability of death. In this way, Hoi-ching's passing was consistent with the understanding of Buddhist chaplaincy in the West as a "generic chaplaincy" model that can serve people of any faith with spiritual care.

Conclusion

A week after the funeral, Wai-yee came by my office wearing a smile and looking relaxed. Under the smile, I was aware that Wai-yee was still grieving and would need time to overcome the sadness of losing her beloved daughter. Yet I felt that she could breathe a sigh of relief after a traumatic period of facing Hoi-ching's death and feeling helpless. The support of Buddhist chaplaincy was crucial and she could now pick up the pieces and move forward. The support given through these socially engaged services contributed greatly to creating a positive image of Buddhism in Hong Kong.

Notes

1 This is an actual case. Wai-yee and Hoi-ching are pseudonyms. Wai-yee, a few friends, and I were committee members of the Buddhist Studies Society at the university where we studied in the mid-1990s. See "Bone Cancer: Teenagers and Young Adults." https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/cancer/cancer-types-in-teenagers-and-young-adults/bone-cancer-teenagers-and-young-adults. Accessed March 3, 2023.

2 Administering the third dose for the Vaccine Pass commenced on 31 May 2022. https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202203/20/P2022032000438.htm; for the Vaccine Pass arrangement of HKSAR, see the webpage https://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/vaccine-pass.html

3 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2015.

4 Jane Compson, "Buddhist Chaplaincy," *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 333–36.

5 J. Block, "Toward a Definition of Buddhist Chaplaincy," *The Arts of Contemplative Care: Pioneering Voices in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Pastoral Work*, ed. C. A. Giles and W. A. Miller (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), 3–7.

6 D. J. Kinst, "Cultivating an Appropriate Response: Educational Foundations for Buddhist Chaplains and Pastoral Care Providers," Ibid., 9–16.

7 After the civil war in China, over three million refugees and thousands of Buddhist monastics fled to Hong Kong in the 1950s.

The Evolution of the Feminine in the Concept of Māra: A Gender Analysis *by Kustiani*

In India, the idea of the existence of gods was accepted. One of them was the god of death, called Māra. Māra is a term that has been in existence for a long time in Indian beliefs, mythology, demonology, and in Vedic texts. Michael D. Nichol says, "Indeed, given its appearance in literature across Buddhist sectarian lines and material culture from the north, central, and southern areas of India, one could easily argue that Māra is a 'pan-Indian' Buddhist deity."[1]

In many Buddhist texts, Māra can transmigrate into the physical form of a woman. The *Padhāna Sutta* describes the female temptation of Māra to Prince Siddhartha on the banks of the Nerañjarā River. The *Māradhītu Sutta* describes the temptation after the Buddha's enlightenment by the three daughters of Māra: Tanhā (Craving), Arati (Boredom), and Ragā (Lust). This may serve as evidence that Māra can manifest as or take the form of a woman.

In a discourse in the Ekanipata of Anguttara Nikāya, however, it is mentioned that a woman cannot become Māra. This literary reference poses a contradiction. If a woman cannot become a Māra, then how can Māra manifest in the physical form of a woman, a transformation described in many *sutta*s? This raises the question: "Is there an evolution of ideas regarding the emergence of the feminine in the concept of Māra?" This article explores this question.

Māra in Indian Belief Prior to Buddhism

In order to understand the meaning of the word Māra more clearly, we will first study the translation of the term Māra in various Buddhist dictionaries. The *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (vol. 6) explains that the word Māra comes from the root "Mṛ" in the Vedic language, meaning death, killing, destroying, and bridging death. Sometimes the term Māra is applied to the whole of existence, or the realm of rebirth, as opposed to *nibbāna*.[2]

According to the mythological concept in the Vedic tradition, Māra is titled Lord Yama, the god of death. Meanwhile, in Buddhist cosmology it is believed that Lord Yāma is the god of *kāmaloka* whose job is to question all beings who are born in hell (*niraya*).[3] In Buddhist cosmology, Yama has no authority to determine the duration or the intensity of punishments received by beings who are reborn in hell. This indicates that there are different understandings of Yama in both the Vedic tradition and in Buddhist cosmology. Moreover, we see different understandings of Māra in the Vedic tradition, where it is the title of the god Yama with the authority to determine the death of beings, and in Buddhist cosmology, where Yama is a god in the *kāmaloka*, the desire realm, which is a lower realm. With this understanding, it can be concluded that Māra in the Vedic tradition refers to a person or figure, whereas in Buddhism it is more likely to be an adjective, referring to an afflictive mental quality or condition that hinders the attainment of enlightenment.

Because the word Māra is an adjective, the word has no gender, so it is neither male or female, masculine or feminine. Some commentators argue that the concept of Māra undergoes an evolution in its conception, to align common beliefs with Buddhist principles. One says, "It must be noted here that it was intended that these Vedic associations lingered in the background while the new god of death and evil thus modelled was made to play a much modified role in his new form and in a new setting."[4]

The common belief in a demon or spirit or entity that disturbs the human struggle to gain enlightenment exists not only in Buddhism, but also in Jainism. It can be seen in the story of Jaina Mahavira, who struggled to attain enlightenment and was disturbed by Meghamalin, who employed all possible means to prevent Jaina Mahavira or Parsvhanatha from achieving enlightenment. The concept of Māra in Buddhism adopts and is influenced by the mythological concept of Māra as a title for the god Yama and also by the mythological concept of disturbing spirits in Jainism. Even so, it is acknowledged by some scholars that the adoption and influence of the mythological concept of anger in Buddhism has not crossed this line. It is important to note that "the symbol of Māra has thus been used as a doctrinal device to warn disciples of the need to be steadfast in their efforts."[5]

Māra in Early Buddhism and Its Evolution

Descriptions of the activities and also the transformations of various forms of Māra are recorded in the Māra Samyutta of the Samyutta Nikāya. In this *samyutta*, there are 25 *sutta*s that give information about the encounter between Māra and the Buddha and some of his disciples. The Hatthirājava, a *sutta* of this Samyutta, explains that Māra could change its shape into an elephant, which has extraordinary physical qualities to frighten and terrorize the Buddha. The *Subha Sutta*, the third *sutta* of this *samyutta*, explains how Māra could take beautiful as well as hideous forms. The next *sutta*, the *Māratajjanīya Sutta* (M.N. I. 331), records how the Buddha's disciple Ariya Moggalana encountered Māra. In this story, Māra came into the belly of Moggalana. After observing this Māra, Mogallana realized that Māra has been his nephew during the lifetime of Buddha Kakusandha. Moggalana was also reborn as Māra at that time.

Another *nikāya* that explains Māra can be found in the Ekanipata of the Aṅguttara Nikāya. This *nipata* explains mental qualities and why people have certain mental qualities. Good qualities are useful to prevent people from falling into wrong views, for example, the wrong view that everything that exists is permanent and a source of happiness The discussion at the beginning of the Ekanipata shows that this text focuses on spiritual development and on teachings that lead to spiritual progress. The next topic of discussion in this *nipata* is Buddhist cosmology, for example, the impossibility of a *sammasambuddha* and a *raja cakrawati* existing in the same world system.

The text then suddenly shifts to a discussion of gender and the differences between male and female human beings. It discusses the inability of a certain gender to achieve certain types of achievements, namely, that a woman is unable to become Māra. Is this statement in the Ekanipata directly from the mouth of the Buddha or was it added later, when the Tipitaka was written down? There is no strong evidence that it was inserted later but, from an academic point of view, we can question why the discussion about spiritual qualities suddenly shifts to a discussion about qualities based on gender. After mentioning the inadequacies of women, the Ekanipata returns to the discussion on spirituality: unwholesome actions of thought (*manoduccarita*), word (*vaciduccarita*), and deed (*kāyaduccarita*), which will surely produce sorrow and suffering, whereas wholesome actions will have the opposite result.

The inability of a woman to become Māra is clearly stated in the Ekanipata of the Aṅguttara Nikāya. In other words, it can be said that statements about women's inability to become Māra are statements based on primary sources. Based on this data, there is no embodiment of Māra or symbolic representation of Māra in female form. The embodiment or symbolization of a female figure as Māra would certainly contradict the statements denying that possibility found in the Ekanipata. But actually it is not like that. In several texts, both canonical texts and commentaries, we find several embodiments or symbols of Māra who appear in female form.

Evidence to support this can be found in the *Māradhita Sutta* (Sutta on Māra's Daughters) found in the Samyutta Nikāya. This *sutta* mentions that there were three daughters of Māra, namely, Tanhā, Arati, and Ragā.[6] It seems that this *sutta* had an influence on the development of Buddhist sculpture and painting. This can be exemplified by the depiction of Prince Siddhartha struggling to gain enlightenment and encountering the three seductive Māra princesses. In various sculptures and paintings, all three Māra princesses are depicted as very erotic and sensual.

When we return to statements in the Ekanipata, a question arises about contradictory concepts in two *nikāya*s regarding whether women can or cannot become Māra. Even if the Ekanipata Māra is taken to mean a Māra king (Raja Māra), this still raises questions. For example, how could an unmarried king suddenly have several daughters (*Māradhitā*). Or does

the teaching imply that Raja Māra was a man who had a wife and eventually had human daughters? Why does the general preference of families for having boys not apply in this context? The children who really care for the Raja Māra and who fight for the Raja Māra are daughters. This is quite surprising because it is usually boy children who are considered capable of helping and lightening the burden on their parents. However, in the context of Raja Māra, the children who are able to greatly benefit their parents are daughters.

Critical Analysis on the Evolution of the Concept of Māra

In a gender analysis, there are two things that deserve to be taken as material for contemplation: (1) Does the quality of Raja Māra need to be male? and (2) Why are Māra's children embodied in female form? It seems that concepts of social relations (which usually assume that the king or leader is a man, while women support the system behind the scenes) also colors the development of the concept of Māra in Buddhist literature. Whether this parallel is true or not is not central here. These questions are just flash points enjoining us to become gender conscious when reading about the concept of Māra.

To analyze the Buddhist understanding of the concept of Māra, we need to return to the original concept that the Buddha taught. One argument is that "The Buddha used Māra primarily to show the internal struggle against *dukkha*, but others have taken him outside the psyche even to where in his demonic forms he can now become an outside influencer."[7] Marasinghe states that "all worldly conditions which are contradictory in nature and hinder the attainment of enlightenment can be categorized as Māra."[8]

As we have observed, the concept of Māra has undergone an evolution, influenced by many factors, such as the Vedic tradition, the Jain understanding of Māra as seductress on the path to achieving enlightenment, and also the concept of demonology in India. The evolution of the concept of Māra needs to be studied more deeply, especially from the perspective of gender. The conventional understanding of masculine and feminine also influences the evolution of the concept of gender from time to time, from one period to the next.

Several evolutions are proposed in this article:

1. An evolution from early text to later text, with a shift in meaning from a spiritual context to an external physical context. Originally a depiction of something that hinders enlightenment, Māra later takes physical form or various forms, some of which are frightening, disgusting, or sensual and tempting.

2. An evolution from the concept of gender balance to gender bias. Initially, the concept of Māra was not associated with the concept of gender but later, differentiations between masculine and feminine arise. Raja Māra is depicted as a male figure whereas Raja Māra's children (Tanhā, Arati, Ragā) are depicted as feminine figures who tend to be erotic and sensuous.

For those who know Raja Māra as a masculine figure and Māra's children as feminine figures, analyses of gender distinctions may seem irrelevant, but in some contexts these distinctions have lead to a generalized understanding of women as Māra seducers. When men struggle or fail to maintain celibacy, or fail to struggle to reach enlightenment, women tend to be blamed because women are synonymous with Māra seducers. Gender distinctions are something that cannot be taken for granted.

Kustiani is chair of the Syailendra Buddhist College of Indonesia and leads a Buddhist women's organization called Wandani (Indonesian Theravada Women) in Central Java Province. In addition to teaching and social service activities, she likes to write, especially about women and gender. She has written about the absence of women rulers during the Maurya Dynasty, polygamy, and the role of women as depicted in Samyuta Nikāya. Currently, she is interested in the concept of Māra from a feminist perspective.

Notes

1 Michael D. Nichol, *Malleable Māra: Buddhism's "Evil One" in Conversation and Contestation with Vedic Religion, Brahmanism, and Hinduism* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2010), 10.
2 M. M. J. Mārasinghe, *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, vol. 6 (Sri Lanka: Government of Sri Lanka. 1996), 628.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 629.
5 Ibid., 631.
6 SN I.124; Mahanidesa I.181; Petakopadesa 9.
7 Benjamin W. McCraw with Kristof Vanhoutte, *Purgatory: Philosophical Dimensions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 304.
8 Mārasinghe, *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, vol. 6, 428.

Preventing Family Violence and Violence against Women among Buddhist Communities in Victoria, Australia

by Diana Cousens and Anna Halafoff

Family violence, including violence against women, affects significant numbers of people in diverse faith communities. The Royal Commission into Family Violence was completed in the Australian state of Victoria in 2015. In 2019, the Buddhist Council of Victoria received funding to develop training packages for faith leaders and communities. The project continued into 2023 and has worked with the Vietnamese, Chinese, Nepalese, and Tibetan communities to raise awareness and provide resources. Resources include help cards, a toolkit, posters, and videos, in multiple languages, as well as face-to-face training. In this article, the co-authors consider the successes and obstacles to tackling this issue in the Buddhist community.

Combatting Family Violence

Family violence is a significant problem in Australia. The problem is not confined to physical and sexual violence but also encompasses financial, emotional and psychological abuse. It can include social isolation and economic deprivation. This problem is found across ethnic and religious groups and affects people of all ages. Governments have tried different strategies to tackle it over many years. The most catastrophic outcome of family violence is death, and intimate partner violence is a major cause of homicide in Australia.[1] [2]

Faith leaders were identified as potential project partners in combatting family violence by the state government of Victoria's 2015 Royal Commission into Family Violence. Recommendation 163 proposed that training packages be developed for faith leaders and communities. This training would be available for faith leaders' pre-service training as well as continuing professional development.[3] Recommendation 165 reflected on the content of faith teachings and asked faith leaders and communities "whether any of their practices operate as deterrents to the prevention or reporting of, or recovery from, family violence or are used by perpetrators to excuse or condone abusive behaviour." This is a profoundly significant question.

The state government offered six faith communities funding to implement a pilot family violence prevention program and the Buddhist Council of Victoria (BCV) was successful in obtaining funding. This is the first time in Australia that the Buddhist community has received funding for a family violence project.[4]

The pilot project received funding of AUS$120,000, and ran from July 1, 2019, to August 31, 2021. The funding was used to employ a project officer, Jessica Wilson, who has considerable experience in social work and preventing violence against women. Associate professor Anna Halafoff from Deakin University was employed as a consultant, with expertise in gender and Buddhism. Jessica and Anna

also worked closely with the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health and Professor Catherine Vaughan of the University of Melbourne in the project's development and the implementation of programs and resources. The project team was guided by a BCV Reference Group, of which Dr. Diana Cousens was a member. The project was extended with a subsequent grant for a fourth year. Dr. Praveena Rajkobal was the next project officer and saw the project to its conclusion in August 2023.[5]

The project's first aim was to build the capacity of Buddhist community leaders to effectively identify, respond to, and prevent family violence, with a special emphasis on violence against women, as this was perceived to be the largest problem. Buddhists from a range of ethnicities and traditions attended training programs and co-designed resources aimed at preventing and responding to family violence for dissemination across the Victorian Buddhist community. The project was conducted according to a Participatory Action Research methodology. The pilot project's final report to the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet stated that: "The most significant success has been the co-design and production of culturally relevant resources for the community to build their skills in preventing and responding to family violence." The project was also informed by critical feminist scholarship on gender and religion, and gender and Buddhism in particular.[6]

The Technical Paper by Professor Catherine Vaughan made a number of observations drawn from the relevant literature, including that:

- faith leaders and communities may support women experiencing violence;
- women experiencing intimate partner violence often seek support from religious leaders; but on the other hand that
- faith communities may condone violence against women;
- faith-based beliefs may encourage women to endure extended periods of violence so as to preserve their marriage or family relationships, in spite of this placing them in danger.[7]

In terms of the Buddhist community, most Buddhist archetypes of enlightenment are male, and men hold far more positions of power and privilege within the majority of Buddhist organizations than women do. Buddhist teachings also denigrate female rebirth, require nuns to follow more rules than monks, and some traditions prevent women from obtaining full ordination.[8]

The project effectively commenced at the end of 2019 and we had planned to spend a lot of time sitting in temples getting to know both the lay and ordained communities in a relaxed and casual way. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic closed all the temples from the start of 2020 and so the project moved online. In 2020 and 2021, Melbourne became one of the most locked down cities in the world and so the project had much more limited interaction with temple communities than had originally been hoped. In spite of that, the pilot project involved the Vietnamese Quang Minh Temple, the Chinese Yun Yang Temple, the Theravadin Newbury Monastery, and the Tibetan Tara Institute. A total of 151 people participated in the pilot project, including 15 Buddhist leaders and 136 Buddhist community members, comprised of 127 women and 24 men.[9]

Activities of the pilot project included two rounds of three workshops for faith leaders (six workshops in total). Each workshop was two hours long and was delivered by the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health in January and February 2021. These workshops included a module on gender and Buddhism presented by Anna Halafoff. In all, 28 participants attended these workshops and 17 participants then attended a train-the-trainer session held at Quang Minh Temple. At Yun Yang Temple, 15 members attended tailored training conducted in Chinese. At Quang Minh Temple, Yun Yang Temple, and Tara Institute, three dedicated outreach workers were then trained to implement programs on how to respond to disclosures and facilitate referrals. Meet and greet events were held with local specialist family violence services and other service providers, such as the Victoria Police and a family lawyer at Tara Institute and Yun Yang Temple. The outreach worker at Quang Minh Temple designed and delivered three elder abuse education sessions to 75 Vietnamese participants in Vietnamese.[10]

Finally, an online community event featured presentations by the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and the Chairperson of Victorian Multicultural Commission, alongside prominent Buddhist leaders, who all made public statements that condemned violence against women and raised awareness of project resources.[11] We recommend viewing the Buddhist Council of Victoria website where you can find resources in a range of languages, including English, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Sinhalese. Resources include help cards, toolkits, videos, and posters.[12]

The second iteration of the project, which commenced during Covid lockdown in 2021 and concluded in 2023 has had to deal with three out of the four participating temples leaving the project. It may be that, after receiving the training, the leadership felt that there was nothing further to achieve, but it may also be due to volunteer fatigue, as attending training and participating in the project is unpaid work and yet another commitment for an already too busy Dharma center.

The first new project officer, Dr Virandi Wettewa, increased the number of materials in Sinhalese language and organized further work with the Vietnamese Quang Minh Temple. In addition, she arranged for the participation of the Nepalese community to attend five hours of training. The current project officer is working to include Sri Lankan temples and to redevelop the workshops, based on their needs. It has been very difficult to get new temples involved. The current focus of the government is on reaching the younger generation, particularly young men. We are attempting to do this via the youth-focused Dharma classes, which are Sunday schools, but at the time of writing this, it is still a work in progress. It can be difficult to demonstrate the need for family violence training, as involvement is voluntary and faith leaders may argue that the Dharma is already complete and covers the issue of harming others. We have countered this argument by saying that everyone can benefit from improving their communication strategies and conflict resolution skills. In addition, any non-resident convicted of a serious crime will lose their Australian visa. But there is not a ready recognition of family violence in the Buddhist community and there may be a reluctance to address what may be seen as a theoretical issue.

For those who have participated, the most significant change in the Victorian Buddhist community has been the increased capacity of members and leaders to identify family violence and support members who are experiencing family violence using faith-based, culturally appropriate resources. Prior to the pilot project, there was limited guidance for faith communities and none for the Buddhist community.

The Supporting Buddhist Communities to Prevent and Respond to Family Violence Toolkit was co-designed and developed by the community to support safe engagement with people affected by family violence as well as guidance on prevention actions.[13] The toolkit encourages members to draw on Buddhist teachings and practices in responding to and preventing family violence. This approach has resulted in greater acceptance and less backlash than using language and concepts directly from mainstream prevention frameworks such as the Change the Story framework.[14] In the toolkit, the BCV uses an assets-based approach to draw on Buddhist language, teachings and practices that support gender equality, such as nonviolence, universal love (Pāli: *metta*), compassion extended to all beings (Pāli: *karuna*), joy in the happiness of others (Pāli: *mudita*), and a mind of equanimity for each other (Pāli: *upekkha).* The toolkit addresses issues such as the normalization of violence against women. It states, "If a woman is told or believes being abused is her karma, she is likely to stay in a dangerous relationship. This belief not only increases her risk of being seriously hurt or killed, it also shifts blame from the person using violence and abuse and makes it the responsibility of the victim. Instead, we could say the victim's karma is being born in a time and society where family violence is against the law, and there is help available to her." Similarly, the Dos and Don'ts list suggests:

"Do address any faith based or cultural rationalisations that may be offered or questions they may have. Use Buddhist practices and teachings to promote safe and respectful relationships and non-violence."

The principals and values inherent in the Buddhist faith are largely compatible with the values underlying gender equality and ending family violence.[15] The project has demonstrated the ability of government to engage with the Buddhist community, and for the community to work together across the divisions of language, ethnicity, and Mahāyāna and Theravāda. It has developed a significant body of resources in several languages. However, the project has some significant limitations regarding funding, the community's recognition of the existence of the problem, and the sustained interest of temples to participate in the project.

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Notes

1 Statistics on homicide in an intimate partner setting are revealing. The figures below are for the whole of Australia and across eight years.

- Between 1 July 2010 and 30 June 2018, there were 311 IPV homicides across Australia.
- More than three quarters of all cases involved a male IPV homicide offender killing a current or former female partner (n=240, 77.2%). The vast majority of those male offenders had been the primary user of domestic violence behaviours against the woman they killed (n=227, 94.6%).
- Less than one quarter of all cases involved a female IPV homicide offender killing a current or former male partner (n=65, 20.9%). Even though the female partner was the homicide offender, in the majority of these cases she was also the primary domestic violence victim, who killed her male abuser (n=46, 70.8%).
- In six cases, a male IPV homicide offender killed a male partner. Of these, three homicide offenders were the primary abuser of the partner they killed; two offenders were the primary victim of abuse; and in one case both parties mutually used domestic violence against each other.
- There were no cases identified in this dataset where a female IPV homicide offender killed a female partner.
- IPV homicide occurs across a broad age range. There was an age range of 18 to 82 years for male offenders and 18 to 75 years for female homicide offenders. Homicide victims' ages ranged from 16 to 78 years for female victims and from 18 to 76 years old for male homicide victims.
- The duration of relationship between homicide offenders and victims in this dataset ranged from less than a year to 45 years. This demonstrates that IPV homicides can occur at any stage during a relationship."
- Source:https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/australian-domestic-and-family-violence-death-review-network-data-report-intimate-partner-violence-homicides-2010-2018/read/" \l "_Toc99015969". Accessed 5 February 2023.

2 Complete statistics on family violence in Australia can be accessed at: https://www.anrows.org.au/resources/fact-sheet-violence-against-women-accurate-use-of-key-statistics/

3 The Victorian Government's Royal Commission into Family Violence, conducted in 2015, recognised family violence as a "law and order emergency" and made two out of 227 recommendations that specifically mentioned faith leaders and communities (Vaughan 2019: 4). They were:
Recommendation 163: The Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship Multifaith Advisory Group and the Victorian Multicultural Commission, in partnership with expert family violence practitioners, develop training packages on family violence and sexual assault for faith leaders and communities. These packages should build on existing work, reflect leading practice in responding to family violence, and include information about referral pathways for victims and perpetrators. The training should be suitable for inclusion as part of the pre-service learning in various faith training institutes, as well as the ongoing professional development of faith leaders.
Recommendation 165: Faith leaders and communities establish processes for examining the ways in which they currently respond to family violence in their communities and whether any of their practices operate as deterrents to the prevention or reporting of, or recovery from, family violence or are used by perpetrators to excuse or condone abusive behaviour.

4 The Department of Premier and Cabinet, in the state of Victoria, Australia, contracted Professor Catherine Vaughan, an expert in gender-based violence, of the University of Melbourne, to work with the Victorian Government's Multifaith Advisory Group, on the Faith Communities Supporting Healthy Family

Relationships Participatory Action Project. They produced a Technical Paper in 2019, which then led to the DPC funding six Victorian faith community organisations to undertake programs to prevent family violence in their communities.

5 Associate Professor Anna Halafoff is returning to the project in 2023 to again act as a consultant.

6 The Technical Paper produced by Vaughan in July 2019, in partnership with the Victorian Government's Multifaith Advisory Group, summarized "the current state of knowledge about how faith communities, and in particular how faith leaders, can best **respond to and prevent family violence and violence against women"** (Vaughan 2019: 3). The researchers explained how faith communities contribute significantly to the shaping of social attitudes and norms, and thereby "have the potential to promote violence against women and family violence or conversely to protect against violence" (Vaughan 2019: 4 citing Flood & Pease 2006; Horne & Levitt 2004; VicHealth 2007).

7 Vaughan, 2019, 6.

8 At the same time, women have always challenged this inequality within Buddhism. This dates back to Buddha's stepmother Mahāpajāpatī's ordination, which eventually took place after her male ally Ānanda advocated on her and women's behalf, to our current times with global Buddhist cyber-sister's online and real-world activism through organizations such as Sakyadhita, and together with male support such as Ajahn Brahm and Bhante Sujato (Gross 1993; Kustiani 2013; Tomalin et al. 2015; Tsomo 2009).

9 The main cultural backgrounds of participants were Vietnamese (87), Chinese (18), European/UK Australian (16), Sri Lankan (5), Cambodian (1) and Tibetan (1). Their main languages spoken were Vietnamese (87), Chinese (18), English (16), Singhalese (5), Khmer (1) and Tibetan (1). Some data under "participant details" related to gender, cultural background and spoken language was not disclosed therefore not counted.

10 A recording of a subsequent information session at the Vietnamese Quang Minh Temple can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkrcNLHrxmI

11 Project resources include a Supporting Buddhist Communities to Prevent and Respond to Family Violence Toolkit – including a detailed Managing Disclosures Policy and Procedure section; a library of Buddhist teachings for use in Dharma talks to promote gender equality, women's leadership, promoting safety, and managing resistance to change; pocket-size help cards providing referral information for specialist family violence services in English, Chinese and Vietnamese; physical and digital posters with contact information for family violence support for Buddhist temples and institutions featuring prominent Buddhist leaders; a YouTube video series featuring prominent Buddhist leaders promoting prevention messages with English, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Sinhalese subtitles; a tailored train-the-trainer manual for preventing and responding to family violence in the Buddhist community; and a video by the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence addressing the Buddhist community.

12 See: https://bcv.org.au/buddhist-family-violence-pilot-project/

13 The toolkit includes a Managing Disclosures Policy and Procedure, Flow Chart For Responding to a Disclosure, Dos and Don'ts when Responding to a Disclosure, and Minimum Standards for Newly Arrived Monks. The Managing Disclosures Policy and Procedure outline the importance of confidentiality, the limits of confidentiality, when to call the police, and refers to child safe standards. The policies and procedures strongly encourage secondary consultation and debriefing with local family violence services. The policy outlines guiding principles to inform appropriate and safe responses (safety first; seek advice from family violence professionals; support the choices of the person experiencing family violence). The procedure details appropriate responses centralizing the safety of the victim survivor and emphasizing belief, empathy, listening skills and basic safety planning. The procedures includes guidance on engagement with alleged or known perpetrators which emphasises safety and non-collusive statements. BCV strongly encourages community leaders and members to seek professional support when responding to disclosures from both victim survivors and perpetrators of family violence.

14 This was demonstrated through a research-based training module developed by Anna Halafoff (Deakin University) for the project which drew on Buddhist teaching and practices as enablers of gender equality.

15 In part, this accounts for the successful engagement of the four temples in the pilot project. Temple-based outreach workers play a vital role and, when they receive disclosures. are able to respond in-language with an understanding of the person's faith, community, culture and how these impact the person's experience of violence. Family Violence Help Cards were also developed and translated in community languages. The cards include information on identifying family violence, warning signs, what the police will do, intervention orders and support services for men, women and children and these are used when disclosures are made.

Female Ordination in Vajrāyana Mahāvihāra

by Urmila Tamrakar Manandhar and Ursula Manandhar

Nepal Maṇḍala is a region where divinities reside in every household, community, temple, and Vajrayāna monastery (*bāhā*/*bahī*). Nepal Maṇḍala's Buddhist tradition, also known as Newar Buddhism, is based on the Mahāyāna/Vajrayāna tradition and has a long history. However, three main Buddhist traditions are practiced equally: Theravāda Buddhism (southern Buddhism), Tibetan Buddhism (northern Buddhism), and Newar Buddhism (Vajrayāna Buddhism). The practice of Vajrayāna Buddhism is pursued by household monks (*vajracharya*s), Shakyas, and lay practitioners in Vajrayāna monasteries (*bāhā* and *bahī*).

The household monk tradition (*grihastha pravajita bhikkhu saṃgha*) is a unique feature of Newar Buddhism. The term *vajracharya guruju* is used to describe a male priest. *Vajracharya gurumaju* is the title of a female priest. Lay practitioners (male *upāsaka* and female *upāsikā*, respectively) among the Shakya and other castes, such as Tamrakar, Tuladhar, Tansakar, Sthapit, and Chitakar, play a dominant role in nurturing and continuing Buddhism in Nepal Maṇḍala. *Guruju, gurumāju, upāsaka*, and *upāsikā* roles are equally necessary in this regard. However, in Vajrayāna monasteries, *gurumāju* are not permitted at the main shrine dedicated to the Kwāpādyo deity. Even though female priests are seated beside male priests in every ritual, practice, and ordination ceremony, this prohibition is discriminatory toward women. The main reason given for this exclusion is that women are not ordained in a ceremony called *prabajya sa vara,* which is only open to men. This raises the question of why the *prabajya sa vara* ceremony is prohibited for women. Historical evidence, such as the Licchavi inscriptions from Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur in Nepal Maṇḍala, suggests that both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* were residing in monasteries that most likely belonged to the Mahāyāna/Vajrayāna tradition. Due to changes in the religious beliefs of the rulers, the system of double monasteries disintegrated and eventually disappeared. As a result, male religious leadership began to dominate, and women's ritual equality declined.

In 2021, with the goal of abolishing this longstanding discrimination, a group of Vajrachariya women was ordained in the Vajrayāna Vihāra in Lumbini. The ordination was performed by Bhikkhuni Dhammavati and Bajracharya Professor Dr. Naresh Man. The following year, women from castes other than the Vajracharya caste were ordained in the same ritual. Unfortunately, the traditional monasteries (*bāhā* and *bahī*) are still undecided about whether to accept this pathbreaking turn of events. Nonetheless, these two ordinations are a revolutionary step in revitalizing a rare ordination ceremony to ensure gender equality.

In the following sections, we will reconstruct historical evidence for women's leadership and ritual equality across castes and its contemporary resurgence in Nepal Maṇḍala.

Women's Ordination in the Vajrayāna Māhavihāra

Needless to say, women have just as much potential for enlightenment as men. When women demanded the establishment of a women's *saṃgha* at the time of the Buddha, however, it took six years for it to be formed. The delay forced women to endure a great deal of hardship. Several factors delayed the creation of the *bhikkhunī saṃgha* after the *bhikkhu saṃgha* was already in place.

At the instigation of five hundred royal women who wanted to become *bhikkhunī*s, the Buddha allowed the *saṃgha* to be established. The spokesperson for these five hundred women was Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, who nurtured Gautama Buddha after his birth mother Mahāmāyādevī passed away. Aside from the *bhikkhu*s and *bhikkhunī*s, there were many devout lay followers who provided the *saṃgha* with the basic necessities, such as food, clothing, and shelter. As noted above, these lay followers are referred to as *upāsaka* and *upāsikā*. The fourfold Buddhist monastic community (*catupariśada*) is comprised of *bhikkhu*s, *bhikkhunī*s, *upāsaka*s, and *upāsikā*s. Gautama Buddha himself stated that the *catupariśada* assembly is necessary for Buddhism to flourish. As a result, the ideal Buddhist social order was originally made up of these four groups.

Legends and Historical Accounts in Nepal Maṇḍala

To reiterate, the Nepal Maṇḍala is a region where divinities can be found in every home, community, monastery, and temple. A variety of cultural traditions coexist along with a distinct Nepalese form of Buddhism led by household monks and nuns. The *Swayambhu Purāna* is the most revered and oldest text among Nepalese Buddhists. According to this text, Krakuchanda Buddha taught three vehicles to awakening – the Srāvakayāna, Pratekbuddhayāna, and Bodhisattvayāna – at the valley's northern peak, Sipucho (Sivapuri), during the Bhadra Kalpa. Krakuchanda Buddha himself performed the ordination for those who wished, after

they became inspired by his teachings. There were *bhikkhu*s, *bhikkhunī*s, *upāsaka*s, and *upāsikā*s from various backgrounds among those who attended his teachings, and they were all ordained without exception or discrimination. However, this tradition of inclusive gender and caste ordination exists in the form of a myth and is not a historically documented fact.

In addition to the *Swayambhu Purāna*, there are legendary accounts of the Buddha visiting Nepal Maṇḍala. It is believed that the Buddha visited the valley during the reign of the Kirant king Jitedasti. There is no written or documented evidence of such a visit throughout history, but the Mūlasarvastivāda Vinayapitaka mentions that Bhikkhu Ānanda visited Nepal Maṇḍala. During an attack in which Vidudabha massacred so many Shakyas and Koliyas that their ethnic groups nearly became extinct, the Shakyas from Kapilvastu sought refuge in the Kathmandu Valley. It is possible that the *bhikkhu*s who were able to escape to Kathmandu established *vihāra*s and carried out *catupariśada* practice.

Historically, it is evident in various written sources that there were a substantial number of monasteries (*mahāvihāra*) in the Kathmandu Valley where *bhikkhu*s and *bhikkhunī*s resided and preached the Buddhadharma during the Licchavi Period (3rd to 4th centuries). This is supported by renditions of Nepal's chronology, travelers' accounts, other Buddhist texts, and so on. It is thought that even during the Malla Period (1201–1779), the *catupariśada*, including the Mahāyāna *bhikkhunī saṃgha*, was present and practiced as can be seen today. Vajrayāna Buddhism is one of the oldest Buddhist traditions still practiced in Nepal Maṇḍala today. It also consists of the four groups (*catupariśada*) – *guruju, gurumāju, upāsaka*, and *upāsikā* – that, according to Gautama Buddha, are essential to the advancement of Buddhism. They represent the four wheels of the chariot that carries Buddhism.

The Institution of Household Monks and Nuns

Household monks (*guruju*) are known as *bodhisattva bhikkhu*s in Nepal Maṇḍala, while nuns (*gurumāju*) are known as *bodhisattva bhikkhunī*s. The *bodhisattva bhikkhu*s are ordained through the *acha luyegu* rite. The *bhikkhunī* ordination became extinct in Nepal Maṇḍala at some point in history, but the positions of *bhikkhunī* and *gurumāju* are granted to women even without ordination. They are honored and placed next to *gurujus* during any ordination, ritual, or rite, and are given equal responsibilities, places, and positions. On the one hand, the five senior female priests are given a place and significance in the community and are permitted to enter the *agan* prayer room. Still, honor and exemption occur side by side. Bigotry limits the equality of *gurumāju*s and *gurujus*. *Gurumaju*s are not permitted to enter the Kwāpādyo and are not permitted to attend *saṃgha* gatherings. Even though the *catupariśada* framework is in place, it is not fully implemented as intended by Gautama Buddha. As a result, women face subtle and not-so-subtle discrimination.

Even though *catupariśada* is a sacred tradition that was once inclusive, the situation is quite different today. During the reigns of various kings in the valley, the custom and tradition of ordination became restricted within the caste system. Only male individuals from the Vajracharya and Shakya castes are permitted to participate. However, none of the *vihāra*s are interested in challenging this discriminatory culture. To eliminate caste and gender discrimination, for the first time in the history of Nepal, the newly established Vajrayāna Mahāvihāra in Lumbini, Nepal (the Nepali Vihāra), conducted ordination rituals for women and inter-caste individuals in 2021. They were appointed as *bodhisattva bhikkhu*s and *bodhisattva bhikkhunī*s.

Since it was customary that female priests ordain women, Nepal's seniormost *bhikkhunī*, Dhammavati Guruma, began the ordination ritual by shaving the heads of the candidates. The candidates' names were Nita Bajracharya, Jenia Bajracharya, Rabita Bajracharya, Rupa Bajracharya, and Sarala Bajracharya. The women were ordained as household *bhikkhunī*s. The following year, sixteen women from castes other than Vajracharya, Shakya, and Udaaya were also initiated. The group included Kamal Shova Shresthacharya and Urmila Tamrakar. This ceremony became national news. In ancient times, ordained *bhikkhus* and *bhikkunī*s visited the kings who reigned over the land as *rajkula gamana* and sought alms from them. Since Nepal is a democratic country today, the president, who is currently the head of the country, invited the candidates and offered them alms.

The Ordination Process

The ordination process consisted of a four-day ritual. Before beginning the ordination process, an offering known as the Goye Dan Tayegu was performed. During this ritual, money, betel nuts, and rice were presented to Bhikkhunī Dhammavati and the head priests who were going to conduct the rites. Next, each candidate had her hair shaved. As mentioned above, Bhikkhunī Dhammavati carried out the ceremonial shaving.

The candidates were then given their *bodhisattva bhikkhunī* names, and their previous names as members of their households were discarded for the time being. The ten perfections leading to Buddhahood served as inspiration for these names: Dana Paramita, Shila Paramita, Kshanti Paramita, Birya Paramita, and Dhyāna Paramita. They were also given *cibara*s (a type of robe) to wear during the process.

After the naming ceremony, traditional musical instruments were played, and all the candidates were welcomed into the Nepal Vajrayāna Mahāvihāra in Lumbini. Offerings were brought to Guru Maṇḍala. Guru Maṇḍala Puja was performed and the initiation ritual was carried out.

The following day, after once again welcoming the candidates into the *vihāra*, the head priest Chakresvara offered *pinda patra* and *sisalaku* to the participating candidates. The candidates wore wooden sandals and took seven steps while being sheltered by a traditional umbrella (*chatra*). The candidates were led into the shrine of the principal deity, Kwāpādyo, as they walked beneath the *chatra*.

The next day, the candidates were led in an alms procession while traditional music was played in the background. They started the procession by walking to

the Sacred Garden of Lumbini, then perambulated to the Buddhist University of Lumbini for alms, and finally walked to the city of Bhairava for the same purpose.

On the final day of the event, the president of Nepal at the time, Bidya Devi Bhandari, extended an invitation to them to visit the presidential residence, where she distributed donations to the participating candidates, as customary. After the candidates participated in the closing ceremony, which was held at the Sri Shatighata Vajradhatu Chaitya Mahabihara, they were given permission to return to their homes wearing their regular clothes. The candidates who participated in this ritual were hence known as *bodhisattva bhikkhun*īs. They are required to perform the *bodhicarya* practice throughout their lifetime. They will perform the Vajrayāna ritual practices on special occasions as well.

Conclusion

Śakyamuni Buddha taught the practices of Sravakayāna, Pratekbuddhayāna, and Samyaksambuddhayāna that are required to attain Buddhahood. Among these three vehicles (*yāna*s), the Samyaksambuddhayāna is the great vehicle in which an individual needs to perform the deeds of a *bodhisattva* to attain Buddhahood. A *bodhisattva* is an individual who does not necessarily renounce household duties but works with skillful means to attain enlightenment. In Nepal, a *bhikkhun*ī who is ordained with this ritual is called a household *bodhisattva bhikkhun*ī. Such a *bhikkhun*ī practices rituals in the household. As mentioned in the *Vacchagotrasutra Maghimanikaya*, these *bhikkhun*īs are equivalent to *bhikkhun*īs who have renounced the householder lifestyle.

In Nepal, many questions have been raised about how household *bhikkhu*s can be said to be Sthavira. The answer to this concern is well explained in the *Vacchagotrasutra Maghimanikaya*. The household *bhikkhu*s and *bhikkhun*īs are responsible for upholding the discipline of the five precepts (*pancaśīla*) and the rules of the Bodhisattva Pratimokśa Niyams.

Buddhahood is the ultimate goal of every Buddhist practitioner, regardless of whether they are renunciant monks or nuns, household monks or nuns, or other types of practitioners. Once they have attained the state of Buddhahood, they will be freed from all forms of suffering. According to the *Vachagotrasutra*, this system is analogous to the way small streams flow into rivers that flow toward the ocean and are destined to end in the ocean.

The female ordination that was conducted in Nepal in 2021 constitutes one of the historical moments that unify Buddhist practices by illustrating the ultimate destination described in Buddhist philosophy. The household *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhun*ī tradition is one of the unique features of Newar Buddhism. The erasure of the *bhikkhun*ī tradition signifies the absence of one of the wheels of the *catuparišada* social framework. Therefore, with the re-establishment of women's ordination at Vajrayāna Mahavihāra, we can say that the *catuparišada* has been made whole again.

Since it was unusual for the ceremony to be carried out among individuals or communities of different castes and among female members of the community, the ceremony was a contentious topic for Buddhist practitioners. Even though many people questioned the ritual, it was carried out with all the necessary steps. The event signaled the revival of one of the oldest traditions in Nepal. The ceremony today represents inclusiveness, nondiscrimination, and the unification of all individuals who are engaged in practicing the deeds of a *bodhisattva*.

Ursula Manandhar is a researcher in the fields of Museum Studies, Buddhist Art, Iconography, and Philosophy at Lumbini Buddhist University, as well as information technology and management. She recently earned a Master's degree in Museology and Buddhist Collection and is currently the head of research at the Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA), the country's first private art museum. She has penned a number of catalogs published by MoNA and is the editor of Paubha: Where the Divinities Reside, a source of information about a traditional form of Nepalese art that precedes the Thankha art genre. She is also a writer and editor for the Nepal Art Post, which provides information about the art market, the tangible and intangible heritage and culture of Nepal, and prominent Nepalese artists.

Nuns Lead the Jamtse Sand Mandala Tour 2024
Śrāmanerika Tenzin Dasel

From June 24-28, 2024, Tashi Gatsel Ling Buddhist Center in Maine, hosted the Jamtse Loving Kindness Tour of visiting nuns from Jangchub Choeling of South India. They came to Bates College and created a sand *mandala* in the Peter J. Gomes Chapel. They performed a Chod Ceremony and Dakini Dances, accompanied by instruments played by the nuns. The purpose of the Jangchub Choeling Jamtse Tour 2024 is to contribute to world healing and peace by sharing the unique Tibetan Buddhist practice of the sand *mandala*, to offer sacred religious performances, chanting, and by sharing Tibet's unique identity and treasures of cultural and authentic traditions.

Śrāmanerika Thukten Dema, a nun from Bhutan who is an administrator at Jangchub Choeling Nunnery and was the translator for the Jamtse Tour said, "The Medicine Buddha Mandala was being hosted at Bates College. At the request of our other sponsor, Tashi Gatsel Ling Buddhist Center of Maine, the creation of the *mandala* was to bring healing to the Lewiston community and state of Maine in the wake of the tragic mass shooting in 2023. We also recognize very deeply that there have been, and are daily, great tragedies in every part of the world. We want to express our sympathy and prayers together with all human beings sharing this planet and sharing the future of this home of ours."

We were also happy to perform the Chöd Puja, the sublime practice of cutting off self-cherishing and self-grasping for the sake of all sentient beings. Chöd, or "cutting through," is a spiritual practice in Tibetan Buddhism that

aims to overcome hindrances and obscurations. This practice is often used to heal mental and physical disorders, purify negative energies, and restore peace to the environment."

Several hundred visitors came throughout the week, including the mayor of the city, to observe the nuns constructing the Menla, or Medicine Buddha, sand *mandala*. The event gained wide media coverage and created many networking opportunities for the nuns and members of the college and local community. All events were free and open to the public.

A *mandala* is a graphic representation of the perfected environment of an enlightened being – in this case, Menla (the Medicine Buddha), who brings Universal Healing and Peace. A *mandala* can be read as a bird's-eye view of a celestial palace, with a highly complex and beautiful architecture adorned with symbols and images that represent both the nature of reality and the order of an enlightened mind.

On a deeper level, a *mandala* is a visual metaphor for the path to enlightenment: its viewers "enter" a world artfully designed to evoke attitudes and understandings of their own deepest nature. A *mandala* is both a microcosm and macrocosm of individual and universal transformative power. Upon completion of the intricate designs and complex iconography of the *mandala*, it is dismantled and the sand is offered back to the earth, to a natural body of water, as a powerful symbol of the transitory nature of life. The *mandala* is used to heal mental and physical disorders, purify negative energies, and restore peace to the environment.

On the final day, over a hundred people gathered in the chapel to witness the dissolution of the *mandala*. Those who wished were given small plastic bags containing the sacred sand, while the rest of the sand was ceremoniously swept up and placed in an urn. On this lovely late June afternoon, a procession of more than fifty people followed the nuns, who were playing the Tibetan clarinet (*gyaling*), down to Lake Andrews on the Bates Campus, where prayers were recited as the sand was poured into the water.

Tashi Gatsel Ling Buddhist Center (Field of Harmonious Gathering) has been in Maine for more than two decades and is a registered non-profit 501(c)3 religious organization. The Center upholds a nonsectarian Tibetan Buddhist tradition by sharing activities more broadly to promote peace of mind. The Center would like to thank the Lenz Foundation for providing a Women's Leadership in Buddhism grant that made this event possible.

Śrāmanerika Tenzin Dasel is the spiritual coordinator at Tashi Gatsel Ling (TGL) in Maine, USA. She led Sakyadhita meditation and workshops in 2017 and 2019. Since 2021, she has served as the volunteer Buddhist Spiritual Advisor at Bates College, and was the organizing leader of the 2024 Gathering of the Alliance of Non-Himalayan Nuns held at Thosamling Nunnery in India. She is currently collaborating with a local farm to establish TGL's yurt eco-Dharma demonstration project for off-grid living, fundentirely by donations.

Body Compassing Our Way Out
by Sandra Ng Siow San

In 2016, I successfully completed my PhD thesis, in which I examined the potentially religiously and/or spiritually transformative meanings and experiences of pilgrimage by interviewing a total of 27 Buddhists living in Malaysia and Singapore.[1] The 27 participants included nine Malaysian-Chinese laypeople, nine Singaporean-Chinese laypeople, and nine Buddhist spiritual mentors consisting of four monastics (two Australians, one Malaysian, and one Sri Lankan) and five lay mentors (one Singaporean and four Malaysians). I wanted to learn why Buddhists go on pilgrimages. Where do they go? What do they bring home with them? How does this help them with being or becoming Buddhist?

I discovered that their initial motivations to embark on a pilgrimage – prescriptive, ambivalent, and/or a matter of fidelity – varied. Furthermore, their meaning-making of the pilgrimage practice, along with their Buddhist religiosity and/or spirituality, is multi-faceted, multi-layered, deeply personal, and creative. But unifying these diverse experiences is the importance of the body and the sense of self, revealing the value of what I call "body compassing"[2] as the body supports our practice through its truth-detecting and truth-telling capacities.

In 2020, when the coronavirus broke out, I could not help but notice that we all have in one way or another been "thrown" into a pilgrimage. If we can no longer physically visit the special places of the Buddhas, *bodhisattva*s, and beloved teachers, then how do Buddhists embark on pilgrimage now? This question highlights the value of the body in Buddhist pilgrimage, which is the purpose of this paper. I will reflect on the value of the body through selected narratives of two Buddhist women, CMT and Thubten,[3] thereby demonstrating that pilgrimage is an embodied practice in the here and now. I hope that the prominence of the notions of time and space as an integrated concept – Timespace – that supported my

thinking through the practices and meanings of pilgrimage will become clear also.

CMT, a 64-year-old Malaysian, because of the condition of her health, travels only when someone offers to provide her assistance during the journey. This is unlike my other 26 participants who are healthy, able, and free to travel whenever they wish to, assuming they have the time and money to do so. The healthy and able-bodied individuals, then, get to make sacred places out of a variety of spaces where they go. What about CMT? For her, the ordinary ways that she attends to her everyday life results in her "doing pilgrimage" in the here and now.

CMT articulates that she sees everyday life as doing pilgrimage: "I'm already doing everything mindfully because my speed is not there, so … I have to concentrate." This brings to mind Loy's perception of "time" from the Buddhist perspective. He states that:

> … time originates from our sense of lack and our futile attempts to fill in that lack. … [T]he temporality we live in is the canvas we erect before us on which we paint the dreams that fascinate us, because they offer the hope of filling up our sense-of-lack. It is not the only way that humans have tried to resolve their lack, but it has been a very important part of our way.[4]

The first question that comes to mind when reading the first line of the quote is: How does time relate to our sense of lack? Other questions follow: What is this relationship that time has with our sense of self, from which a sense of lack arises? What is time? What is a sense of self? What is a sense of lack? Does self-ness ironically create a sense that there is something lacking in us? Where do these experiences come from? As a result of this lack of self, we try to find different ways to fill the gap and make the sense of self appear more real, solid, invincible, and grounded.

Loy uses painting as an analogy for life. With a canvas before us, we can begin with any color, from primary, to secondary, to complementary colors. There are also a variety of tools (e.g., brushes, utensils, hands) and techniques (e.g., etching, stamping, mixed media) that we can use to create different effects, textures, and moods. We can add layers, painting color over color over color until the picture feels complete. The colors, tools, and techniques we use to paint reflect the way we choose to live life. How do we finish the painting? Or rather, how do we make the painting complete?

The project might take anywhere from hours to days, weeks, months, or years. This is like life, too, in how we choose to live and spend our days. Sometimes we take a step back to witness, observe, and assess the events that have taken place, or to recalibrate, make decisions, follow through on decisions, or change decisions. Thus, every color, stroke, line, circle, or dot is part of the process. One thing that is certain is that we do not know exactly how the painting will turn out. Still, it is our chance to make every part of the process matter. In this manner, the concept of temporality is apt in appreciating every moment as an opportunity for becoming. Temporality reflects the moment-to-moment dimension of our being through the ways in which we live mindfully. In this sense, time is an aspect of any lived experience.

On CMT's canvas, so to speak, she reflects on how she perceives and immerses herself in the process of living her life – a *new* life as she adapts to her health condition. In this new life of hers, she learns again what she already knew. But she now adopts different approaches and methods as she reconstructs her life. CMT is learning to "concentrate" and "do everything mindfully." By living this way, she puts her life into perspective with respect to her physical or spiritual wellbeing. Although she initially considered her pilgrimage as an "eye-opening" experience with touristy overtones, I posit that the journeys were indeed "eye-opening" because of how she overcame her difficulties while doing pilgrimage. Nevertheless, the journeys reminded her that she was able to "achieve and accomplish" certain things that she thought impossible because of her body's health limitations.

Doing pilgrimage in her everyday life, ordinary though it may have been, is not lacking in meaning as she gets to be present *with* her actions from moment to moment. She finds meaning in reconnecting and rebuilding a relationship with her sense of self, rather than her sense of lack as a differently abled individual. Instead of dwelling on how her disability might stop her from living her life, she uses it to appreciate and deepen her "becomingness of being"[5] by mindfully attending to her day-to-day activities while embracing her own body and life compassionately and lovingly. Perhaps by discovering that what we need has been available to us all along, we can also come to know that there is not as much inadequacy requiring further compensation as we might imagine. I attempt to reflect on this in the following narrative.

Thubten, a sixty-five-year-old Singaporean, aims to "eventually close that gap" of depending on external necessities to gain insight or to experience "that special thing." Doing pilgrimage is thus useful for the "newbie" Buddhist's focus and concentration on her practices. One of the desired outcomes of a pilgrim's journey is transcendental or mystical feelings and experiences. For Thubten, external necessities and awe-filled longings are perceived as a "state of attachment" that hinders rather than facilitates one's realization of "that final stage of enlightenment."

This is the paradox of pilgrimage. That is, while Thubten's pilgrimage aims at reducing her dependence on external materials, settings, or individuals, she is still in need of these externalities. Because of this, instead of bringing her closer to profound illumination, her journey to "that final stage" is prolonged or slowed down. Instead of diminishing the ego or sense of self, it becomes intensified. Thus, Thubten believes that "the ego takes so much to dismantle."

Accordingly, for Thubten the ego is perceived as antagonistic to her Buddhist religiosity and spirituality. However, I observe that this sense of self nonetheless demonstrates potential and capacity for supporting Thubten's Buddhist training and progress. Loy elucidates the supportive capacity of the self through its "sense of lack":

> The easiest way to understand lack is to think of it as the "shadow" of the sense of self. The Buddhist teaching of anatta, or non-self, implies that our sense of self is a construct, an ever-changing process, which doesn't have any reality of its own. Because it lacks any reality of its own, any stable ground, this sense of self is haunted by what I've called a *sense of lack* … [which originates from] our inability to open up to the emptiness, or ungroundedness, of the self. Insofar as we're unable to cope with that emptiness, insofar as we deny it and shy away from it, we experience it as a sense of lack.[6]

It is not that the individual does not exist or is invisible (non-self). Thubten, for instance, circumambulates around the Boudhanath Stupa at Kathmandu or meditates near the residence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Dharamsala. Both activities illustrate a kind of experience of the sense of self. Indeed, we all hold experiences of subjectivity, and that is what keeps us interested and invested in this self. However, this becomes problematic when the individual fails to comprehend this and assumes that each state of thoughts and emotions is everlasting; graspable experiences of the self thus illustrate the "shadow" (Loy 2005, 4).

To put it in another way, the "sense of lack" demonstrates the "shadow" effect of the individual's inability to understand, manage, and overcome the truth that every single being, circumstance, and experience is the result of a series of constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing processes (Loy 2005, 4). That lack of understanding, in turn, builds displeasure or frustration, thus evincing the other foundational teaching of Buddhism: suffering.

I posit that in addition to its "shadow," the ego nevertheless has a *light* effect on the individual as well. The ego acts as a protagonist, thereby encouraging the Buddhist's training, progress, religiosity, and spirituality. Our sense of self is an ongoing work-in-process. If we cling to the belief that the self can and will remain unchanged and everlasting, then we will find the truth of non-self extremely challenging and disturbing. This will lead us to experiencing the "lack" (Loy 2005, 4) in our sense of being. And while the ego is often frowned upon because it seems to prevent individuals from discerning their true natures, I observe that, in the case of Thubten, it is essentially the ego that pushed her forward in her Buddhist training and progress, despite the fact that she deems the ego an obstacle to her achievement of "that final stage of enlightenment."

An example of this is Thubten's participation in a retreat at Kopan Monastery in Nepal. During the retreat, she spent every day in meditation while observing noble silence. She articulates her ability to go within and know that it is indeed "coming from within": "You know you are *buddha* nature. You are meditating about something that's actually inside you but we are so … obscured from seeing [our] *buddha* nature." Doing pilgrimage affords the time and space for Thubten to learn in quietude. Perhaps during this time, she observed the speed of her mental activities and the pace of her bodily reactivities, enabling her to discern the sense of self from "within." Thus, she developed understanding that the states of experience and attachment are expressions of her multi-faceted and multi-layered subjective self. This subjective sense of self is nonetheless not predetermined, absolute, or concrete. The seemingly intimidating ego could potentially be debunked and deconstructed, or even befriended. This demonstrates how Thubten's ego is functioning to support, and not obstruct, her aspirations in making religious and spiritual progress in her Buddhist practice.

The ego is as much a friend as it is a foe, in other words. Perhaps the ego is a necessary foe, and this foe is necessitated inasmuch as it helps to shed light onto the path of Buddhist education, training, religiosity, and spirituality. The ego is also a necessary foe because only by noticing and learning from it can we realize, for instance, the importance of becoming mindful of what we choose to hold on to and what we choose to let go of. For this reason, I posit that the ego is a friendly reminder to individuals who, while walking on the path, need to pay attention to and maintain integrity[7] with one's body, mind, heart, and soul.

I observe and appreciate the ways in which CMT and Thubten juggle and interact with their sense of self and sense of lack. I am moved by each of their felt knowing as a result of their "doing pilgrimage," which is not bound by conventional understanding of the pilgrimage journey. CMT knows that she is still able to "achieve and accomplish" what she wishes for instead of dwelling within the limitations of her health condition. Thubten, through her meditative practices and inquiries, experiences internal unfoldings that lead her to knowing that "you are *buddha* nature" indeed.

These practitioners' relationships with their bodies are essential to their embodied practice and knowing. My appreciation for this carries through into my life-coach training, which values our bodies as truth-detecting and truth-telling compasses. By learning to check-in with our body and giving at least some attention to the messages it tries to convey, this seemingly ordinary practice can help us reconnect with our awareness and move closer to our

deep-rooted truths or *buddha* nature. I also do not mean that externalities outside of our body have nothing to offer. Rather, I recognize that our bodies already house the wisdom, knowledge, and fundamental qualities from which we can seek guidance, feel inspired, broaden awareness, and deepen our wakefulness as we navigate through this precarious world second by second, inch by inch, day by day.

Sandra Ng Siow San completed her PhD thesis at Monash University Malaysia and focused on teaching tertiary level learners until early 2022. Her interest in human journeys, practices, experiences, and meaning-making that manifest in multiple forms, shapes, and sizes never falters. All the stories and insights offered to her helped to engage, connect, and expand her cognitive, emotional, and somatic awarenesses, to look beyond and deeper into pilgrimage as not mere categorical travel to sacred places, but as a journey that is archetypal to humankind. She attempts to weave her research findings from various positions and perspectives. She welcomes questions and/or comments (siowsan@gmail.com) to expand communication beyond this page.

Notes

1 I use the terms "religiosity," "spiritual," and "spirituality" according to my participants' perceptions of Buddhism, thereby demonstrating their meaning-making of doing pilgrimage as part of their Buddhist training, understanding, growth, and transformation.
2 The term "body compass" is borrowed from my Wayfinder Life Coach Training with Martha Beck Inc.
3 These are pseudonyms.
4 David R. Loy, "Saving Time: A Buddhist Perspective on the End." In J. May & N. Thrift (eds.), *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality* (London: Routledge, 2001), 262–80.
5 Kenneth K. Inada, "Time and Temporality – A Buddhist Approach," *Philosophy East and West* 24: 2 (1974) 173.
6 David R. Loy, "Lack and Liberation in Self and Society: An Interview with David Loy," *Holos: Forum for a New Worldview* 1:1 (2005) 1–13. Accessed January 18, 2015, http://www.holosforum.org/davidloy.html.
7 I do not mean this as a moral or value judgement, but rather it is, as Beck states, that "To be in integrity is to be one thing, whole and undivided. When a plane is in integrity, all its millions of parts work together smoothly and cooperatively. If it loses integrity, it may stall, falter, or crash. There's no judgment here. Just physics." Martha Beck. *The Way of Integrity: Finding the Path to Your True Self*. New York: The Open Field/A Penguin Life Book, 2021, xiv.

Shared Stories: Buddhist Women's Initiatives on Community Well-being, Environmental Awareness, and Sustainable Happiness

by Sourajit Ghosh and Nguyen Thi Hanh

Global warming and the advent of the Covid crisis have caused all life forms on this planet experience suffering in profound ways. Sometimes the suffering is beyond control and to some extent beyond understanding. The world needs to be more conscious and united than before to develop more climate-friendly practices to mitigate these adverse effects through a greener approach based on principles of sustainable development and circular economies. The tangible and immediate effects of global warming on the natural ecosystem and its life forms are being explored by climate scientists and environmentalists. However, a serious question that needs to be addressed is the impact of climate change on human livelihood and mental health. As a community of global citizens, we need to provide society with a much simpler way of life, with less harmful patterns of consumption.

This article considers the "small is beautiful concept" advocated by eminent Economist E. F. Schumacher along with concepts of mindfulness and integrated well-being (a Buddhist approach) to advocate better strategies for community well-being in times of crisis. In this paper, we will explore recent initiatives by Buddhist women to prevent mass exploitation of natural resources, following minimalist consumption patterns, without sacrificing human essential needs. The need of the hour is to recognize the power of compassion in these difficult unforeseen times. The article also touches on the Buddhist philosophical tenets of non-dualism to address the need for an eco-feminism that acts collectively towards the well-being of mother earth and our shared connections with nature in a true deep ecological sense, considering ourselves an integrated part of nature rather than an external agent. This article presents specific cases of monasteries and nunneries in Vietnam (Kim Son Nunnery) and Northern India and their recent community support to mitigate global climate crisis for a better-shared future.

Reflecting on Fragility

The Covid crisis has led to deep reflection on the fragility of planet Earth. Marked by a fear of the unknown and the anxiety of loss that seized humanity, the disaster has also united us in sharing our emotions and seeing ourselves as a global family deserving of care and support from one another. Beyond our nationalities and languages, the common ground of suffering, the hope to overcome grief and loss, and humanitarian values and ethics have brought us closer together than before. Grief took many forms during the crisis from 2020 and 2021, stabilizing only after a worldwide vaccination drive: the loss of loved ones, mental health issues,

loss of earnings and jobs, the fear of uncertain futures, and disruptions in education for students. Though the online economy and communications became the new normal, human well-being and emotional health were adversely affected for many, at both the individual and the community level. Buddhist caregivers, with their *bodhisattva* vows of compassion and committed actions to relieve the sufferings of society played a major role in alleviating the many human struggles and challenges caused by the pandemic. While the causes for the world's socio-economic ills, including profit driven exploitation of natural resources and labor, are well known, climate change has resulted in natural disasters that disproportionately affect the world's poor. From a Buddhist perspective, the need to confront and reconcile the current multi-dimensional global challenges requires a multi-dimensional approach. Particularly urgent are actions that integrate philosophy, ethics, spirituality, and environmental science. As the scientist and environmentalist Fritjof Capra expressed it, "It is an intellectual, moral, and spiritual crisis of unparalleled magnitude and intensity in recorded human history."

More recently António Guterres, the secretary general of the United Nations in his opening remarks to the General Assembly's 76th session in 2021, said:

> The world must wake up. We are on the edge of an abyss and moving in the wrong direction. Our world has never been more threatened. Or more divided. We face the greatest cascade of crises in our lifetimes. The Covid-19 pandemic has supersized glaring inequalities. The climate crisis is pummeling the planet.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), environmental awareness and education complement spirituality, notably in Southeast Asian cultures that incorporate moral values to emphasize indigenous conservation traditions based on the teachings of the Buddha. Besides scientific and technological knowledge, the Taplow Declaration of 1992 acknowledged the fact that traditional knowledge and cultural exchanges are vital to accelerate sustainable development. The mindfulness-based approach to environmental crises and the concept of *karuna* (compassion) can assist in healing and can be adopted to recover from the crisis.

The Buddhist Perspectives on Nature and Our Interconnectedness

Instead of seeing the world from a dualistic mindset that considers "human" and "nature" as separate, we must see their unity. The traditional Buddhist worldview sees a holistic interconnectedness and interdependence among sentient beings and all forms of life. Plants are considered non-sentient, with the exception of those with one faculty (Pāli: *ekindriya*) that live in water.

From a Buddhist perspective, to act violently and irresponsibly toward the natural world has far-reaching moral and karmic effects on our lives both now and in the future. To be sentient implies the potential to experience, which applies to all, like a web of networks in a process. We cannot separate ourselves from the other links in the chain of life.

The first of Buddhism's five well-known precepts is the vow to refrain from killing a living being (Pāli: *panatipata).* The Buddha's teaching does not simply mean to refrain from killing people or animals but also refers to rejecting violence and cultivating loving-kindness (*metta*) and compassion (*karuna*). The Buddha provided several codes of ethical conduct and taught his followers to cultivate loving kindness for even the smallest of animals. Monks and nuns were expected to avoid causing injury to animals even by accident. To avoid harming worms and other animals in the ground, they were advised not to travel during the rainy season or to dig the earth. The Buddha was concerned about the unintended damage caused by excavating, chopping down trees, and destroying vegetable growth. He taught laypeople to choose a right livelihood (Pāli: *samma-ajiva*) and to avoid slaughtering and fishing.

Apart from adhering to the Buddhist precept of non-violence toward living things, Buddhists had a holistic view of life. The Buddhist perspective on animals illustrates an understanding of non-human animals and their integral place in the ecosystem. The Buddha tamed the furious elephant Nalagiri through the power of loving kindness, an example of kindness toward even aggressive wild animals. Numerous depictions of the Buddha's most significant accomplishments as a *bodhisattva* portray heroic deeds involving animals. There is a narrative about a parrot who refused to leave a barren fig tree because it was grateful for having been nourished. This story demonstrates the connections among all life forms on this planet.

In this regard, it must be well comprehended that the early Buddhist *saṇgha* members were termed forest dwellers (*āraṇyaka*). The Jātakas, stories about the previous lives of the Buddha, mention flora and fauna. The Buddha advised his followers to seek spiritual solace in nature, particularly in the forest, at the roots of trees, and in empty spaces. In quest of spiritual contemplation, the monks isolated themselves in retreats in the immense, open, and tranquil woods of the foothills. Because the monks lived in the forest, they stayed close to settlements, where they could access alms for food. Living in the forest led to the development of a forest culture and community-based care culture for flora and fauna. In the forest, the monks dwelled in harmony with wild animals and offered them protection, care, and friendliness. Many people believe that spirituality and nature are mutually exclusive, but this is not the Buddhist view. The monk Talaputta considers that there is no essential difference between himself and nature because they are linked with each other:

> This is Thera Talaputa's wish, living in the jungle as he did, to see no difference between the composition of his being and the material things

> of the world like grass, dry wood, and creepers. One gets naturally merged in the world in which one exists. There could be no over-inflation of the ego, which expands and spreads forcibly over every other thing around.

As a result, monastics regard nature as representing the forces of change and disintegration. In *The Poems of the Elders*, some monks and nuns have attained spiritual heights while enjoying the scenic beauty of India, the birthplace of Buddhist civilization.

The Mahāyana tradition mentions the metaphor of Indra's net in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, which sends a powerful ecological message. At each point where Indra's net intersects, there is a light-reflecting jewel, and each jewel includes an infinite number of nets. The gem at each intersection lives solely as a reflection of the others, and so lacks self-nature. Nonetheless, it exists as a distinct entity to support others. Similarly, every one of us exists as a distinct entity in our mutuality. Indra's net is an illuminating metaphor for delving into deep ecology, organizational networking, permaculture, bioregionalism, and for gaining a fundamental knowledge of Gaia. At the most basic intellectual level, the metaphor can assist us in transitioning from logical to dialectical thinking.

Overall, the Buddhist view of human-nature highlights that living beings are linked together and interdependent. Biotic communities are made up of these connections. In an ideal Buddhist community, human beings, society, and nature are all intertwined. Numerous individuals and groups have raised their voices and proposed good solutions to this modern era. In recent decades, prominent Buddhist teachers such as His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, and environmental protection movements initiated by monks and nuns, such as tree ordination movements, have been active in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Korea, Taiwan, and Japan.

Using Gandhian and Buddhist principles, the Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka strives to awaken villagers' minds to the ideals of sustainable development and self-sufficiency, devoid of materialistic objectives. The conservation project "Buddhist Perception of Nature" includes the Thai-Tibetan tradition as a good example. The Dalai Lama has articulated his hope for the future based on Tibetan Buddhist conservation perspectives, whereby sustainable development should be prioritized for densely populated areas. Thich Nhat Hanh always emphasised the principles of no self and dependent arising to ensure that human beings realize that they are an intrinsic part of nature, not an external agent. Care and compassion for nature will ensure well-being and harmony. If we ignore other life forms, we endanger them as well as our own very existence, because we are part of the chain. In his teachings, Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes "interbeing" and says that the future Buddha will be a *sangha*. Similarly, the Dalai Lama emphasizes that the future Buddha will be "green," implying that human beings should recognize the offerings of Mother Earth that nurture us. Conserving nature is an act of compassion.

To illustrate this principle, we draw on case studies of the humanitarian work and care provided by Buddhist nuns in several countries, with specific examples of nunneries located in the Indian Himalayas and Kim Son Nunnery in Vietnam. In the 21st century across the world, the climate crisis has produced disasters, desertification, and hunger due to lower groundwater levels, draughts, and floods. Ecological imbalances affect biodiversity, of which we are an integral part. From the teachings of Buddha, we understand that humans must take care of other life forms. Based on our actions (*karma*) and merit, we may also take birth in those forms.

Lotus from the Mud:
A Case Study from Kim Son Nunnery

Kim Son Nunnery was established in 1975 on the city's garbage dump at Vinh Luong Commune in the city of Nha Trang, Vietnam. Vinh Luong is a commune with a large number of poor people. Year-round forest farming does not provide enough food and clothing for them. Because they are worried about making a living, they neglect spiritual pursuits. For many years, Kim Son, the founder of the nunnery, often shared food, provided scholarships, and built houses of gratitude for his relatives to relieve some of their sufferings.

Over the years, the landfill has been transformed into green hills. Many trees and precious medicinal plants have been planted to serve the needs of the poor. Free education and vocational training are provided for poor children. Community workshops for people of all backgrounds, especially students, are held to raise awareness about protecting the environment and living according to the Buddha's teachings. Distributions of food to the hungry are organized during times of disaster and emergency. In addition to addressing the issue of poverty, people improve their understanding of the Three Jewels and how to live an ethical life.

Case Studies from the Indian Himalayas

In the Indian Himalayas, several nunneries in Darjeeling, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, and Ladakh have developed

eco-friendly temples. The nuns cultivate kitchen gardens, run on solar energy, and use *chulhas* (eco-friendly ovens) to cook food. Many nunneries offer environmental retreats to promote sustainable tourism and the emotional well-being of visitors from all over the globe. Thosamling Nunnery in Sidhpur, Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh, produces organic vegetables in its garden and follows a zero-waste recycling policy. Organic waste and paper are used to produce compost, and vegetables are used as cow food. Recycled materials are used to manufacture cushions, and harder plastics are used to make curtains and bags. Regular workshops are organized by the nunnery to teach the local women about waste segregation, recycling (for example, to make meditation cushions), and reusing materials. Several cleanliness drives are conducted for local children to increase awareness of plastic pollution, in an effort to keep the Himalayas clean for visitors and spiritual seekers.

Climate-oriented efforts are widely observed in nunneries affiliated with the Ladakh Nuns Association to cultivate medicinal herbs, as the region has been prone to flash floods and crop failures as an adverse victim of the global warming crisis. Apart from greening the landscape through medicinal plant cultivation, the nuns are social leaders who regularly make the local communities aware of waste management and the protection and conservation of medicinal herbs. One flagship project for the social and spiritual empowerment of Tibetan nuns in exile at Himachal Pradesh's Tibetan Nuns Project headquarters, Dolma Ling Nunnery, adopted the sustainable use of water through watershed management and reuse of nearby waterfall and glacier waters. The Kung Fu Nuns of the Drukpa Kagyu Lineages massively donated health aides to nearby villages, distributing food items like lentils, toiletries, and face masks to about 2,000 families along the India-Nepal border.

Conclusion

In recent years, Buddhist nuns all over Asia have emerged as regional and global community leaders, especially as caregivers to people in distress, acting on their broader *bodhisattva* vows of compassion to make people's lives easier during the crisis. Most importantly, what should be acknowledged is their effort to create parallel social philanthropy management models to ensure food security, eradicate plastic waste, implement waste management to minimize carbon emissions, and provide health care services to local communities. In this light, it must be observed that the nuns are spiritual leaders who are close to and support local villages and farming communities, while also empowering young girls through skill-based training for their livelihood and future financial independence. A

key point is the merit of reciprocation or *danā* (Pāli for generosity or charity), a twofold merit-making framework in which the society provides economic support for the practice of the monastics who, in turn, provide spiritual care for the society. In contemporary times, faith-based networks like these have been Sustainable Development Goals action centers guiding the community to a more spiritually based

A Buddhist Feminist Politics: Beyond Modern Dualism

Jing Liu

Innumerable Shades of Modern Ignorance

Modern patriarchy is now presenting to us an ominous picture of the human condition, with regard to world politics: colonialism, wars, the military power that is obviously out of control with its insatiable desire for more and more weapons – bioweapons, nuclear weapons, etc., etc. – and human blood, the environmental crisis which seems already beyond human beings' ability to control, and universal sexism, racism, oppression, and countless other problems. According to a famous novel, there are fifty shades of grey. In terms of modern ignorance, however, we've got innumerable shades.

At the root of this mess is modern dualism. Heidegger examined the essence of modern metaphysics as objectification. Feminist philosophers furthered the critique to the political arena. Carolyn Merchant, for example, disclosed the intrinsic connection between the objectification of nature and that of women. Val Plumwood proposed that dualism is colonialism (Plumwood, 1993, Chapter 2).[1] Objectification, that is, to make the other an object – be it a different sex, nation, a different political regime, persons with different skin color, from different classes, or nature, or other species – is domination. The question is then how to get ourselves out of dualism.

According to Buddhism, dualism is not primarily an epistemological or philosophical problem, but above all an existential one. This is where the concept speaks to our modern situation. Dualism originates from the fundamental ignorance of humans' being in the world, that is, the felt need for self-affirmation through negating others. In the twelve *nidanas* that the Buddha taught, ignorance is the cause of suffering in the world, constructed by the ego through the process of the ongoing body-mind mechanics. As long as one lives in ignorance, one is necessarily trapped in the dualism of self/other, self/world, and therefore the domination relationships of human/nature, man/woman, spirit/body, and subject/object. Ignorance primarily means not knowing, which designates the fundamental and ordinary status of human existence. That is, the world is presented as something other than myself. It stimulates, agitates, and drives the self that is constructed through the process of the five *skandhas*. Ultimately, ignorance is ignorance of reality. Insofar as we are not enlightened, we are always already trapped in delusion that is rooted in the duality of the self and the world. We are deluded by the illusory self, which is nonetheless constituted by the transitory world.

Overcoming Ignorance through Realizing Emptiness

According to the *Huayan Sutra*, ignorance is complete, ultimate, and primordial. But if we are trapped in the ego and commit suffering within the flow of karma, isn't it primarily because of the original ignorance that is so challenging to break through? In this sense, all evils are innocent. So why

does this fundamental ignorance exist at all? Where is its origin? In response to these questions the *Huayan Sutra* states:

All dharmas (phenomena) have no function
And have no substantial nature;
Therefore all of them
Do not know one another.

Like the waters in a river,
Their rushing flow races past,
Each unaware of the others:
So it is with all dharmas.

It's also like a mass of fire,
Blazing flames shoot up at once,
Each not knowing the others:
All dharmas are also thus.

Also like a continuous wind arises,
Fanning and drumming whatever it hits,
Each unaware of the other:
So also are all dharmas.

Also like the various levels of earth,
Each based on another,
Yet unaware of the others:
Thus are all dharmas.

Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body,
And mind, the faculties of sense:
By these one always revolves,
Yet there is no one that revolves.

With respect to the nature of things there is no arising (or passing away),

Yet they appear so;
Herein there is no revealer,
And nothing that's revealed.

Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body,
And mind, the faculties of sense:
All are empty and without self nature;
The deluded mind discriminates and they come to exist.

Seen as they truly are,
All are without inherent nature.
The dharma eye is beyond conception:
This seeing is not false.

Real or unreal,
False or not false,
Mundane or transmundane:
There's nothing but descriptions.

The arising and the dependent co-arising of all phenomena are illustrated by the flow of water, the burning of fire, the blowing of the wind, and the steadiness and continuity of the earth – the movement of the four elements. The moment-to-moment and life-to-life transmigration of all beings revolving around the six senses is just like this. Thus, the fundamental not-knowing or ignorance is left as it is in the natural process of the cosmos. The origin of the generativity of ignorance (i.e., the disclosing of ignorance as the event of *samsara*) lies in the nature of all *dharma*s, which is ultimately empty, wherein there is the arising and passing away, the dependent arising of all. If one looks closely into the six senses, one will find they are all empty, like any *dharma*. The world of suffering is constructed by the self through discrimination. Still, know that there is no such self. When one sees through the true nature of all and understands emptiness, thereupon the discrimination between reality and delusion, the mundane world of birth and death, and the supramundane world of *nirvana*, become only words.

The solution to the problem of dualism and ignorance is concurrent with the realization of emptiness, which is generally viewed as a symbol of enlightenment in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Emptiness is the reality of all *dharma*s. It is with the penetration of the reality of emptiness that dualism and ignorance are overcome, and the cessation of suffering is achieved.

All categories and discriminations are but dreams, including changing and unchanging, our attachment or nonattachment, and our awakening. They are lines drawn in the silent water of complete emptiness.

But our common sense tells us that suffering is not empty, especially our own suffering. The suffering of a child in Yemen starving from malnutrition is not empty. Neither is the suffering of the countless sentient beings empty. So how can emptiness be revealed to us?

The fact hardly seen by the world is that everyone's suffering is our own; that our comfortable life is built on the suffering of others. The freedom that we can enjoy at this moment is earned by some people's fight against the dominant power, being threatened, tortured, and imprisoned, sometimes with the sacrifice of life. Our full, satisfied stomach is because others are exploited by the social system and live in poverty and hunger. Our convenient modern way of living is built on the extinction of numberless species. We are not talking about some cruel "struggle for existence," the competition for limited resources. On the contrary, we are talking about the unity of all. All is one and one is all. This is the reality of the world highlighted by the *Huayan Sutra*, according to which the oneness can only be seen with the experience of emptiness.

When we say all *dharma*s are empty, the existence of all is not denied. It is rather a revealing of the true nature of all, that is, it is empty. It is precisely the existence of all that is empty. Emptiness is only existence. What is, *is* empty. *The Heart Sutra* illuminates this point: "Form is emptiness; emptiness is form; form is no other than emptiness; emptiness no other than form. Sensation, perception, volitional formation, consciousness are also like this."

Thus, as the *Huayan Sutra* illustrates, "there is no difference between emptiness and the world. Abiding in the world is also abiding in emptiness." (27.1) This is a point emphasized by all Mahāyāna schools, i.e., the oneness of samsara and nirvana, of the realm of the sentient beings and the Dharma realm, and so on. The ultimate reality is present, right here and now. The all-pervasiveness of emptiness should be conceived as such.

A Buddhist Feminist Politics

Next, I want to elaborate what Buddhist practice can contribute to world politics. I aim to establish a Buddhist feminist politics as a remedy for modern patriarchy. The goal of Buddhist practice is to achieve *nirvāna* or full enlightenment, wherein suffering is overcome, liberation and equality of all is reached. All forms of dualism are overcome in enlightenment. As we can see, this is why Buddhism rejects colonialist hegemony, or any form of oppression. Buddhist feminist politics calls for a politics that dares to aim at a society free of oppression, grounded in compassion and wisdom, one of liberation and equality of all -- not only all humans, but also all sentient beings.

One common idea held by many is that gender equity can wait until other urgent issues like global wars, global warming, the imminent systematic collapse of global economy, and so on are resolved. However, I propose that we drop our patriarchal delusions and face the fact. The fact is that these serious problems are not going to be fixed within the present modern patriarchal regimes, while both capitalism and communism are on a downfall. Feminist perspectives, rather than patriarchal ones, should be taken in order to offer solutions to the problems that are effectively ending our planet. It is the same with domestic issues. That is to say, we are not going to wait to delay feminist intervention until patriarchy solves the problems of unemployment, poverty, healthcare, housing and so on. That is not going to happen. We have to understand that these problems arise within the patriarchal frame. These social problems need to be addressed from feminist perspectives, with a feminist revolution.

The feminist goal of deconstruction of gender essence can be achieved through the teaching and the practice of not-self. That is to say, this body as a sexual object under the patriarchal gaze and this mind that is shaped by patriarchy are not me. They don't define me. Early Buddhism underscored the meaning of emptiness as "empty of self." There is nothing that can be grasped as a female essence, to be used against me, to oppress me. An understanding of emptiness reveals to us liberation from the patriarchal rule.

With regard to feminism, I see two major problems. The first one is the lack of international solidarity. But without solidarity, there is no sense of belonging to her sex, no gender awareness and action generated from the awareness. Therefore, a crucial step is to create organizations and social institutions to cultivate and foster domestic and international female solidarity. As long as women unite, patriarchy's days are numbered.

Without such solidarity, however, the deconstruction of patriarchy is but a dream.

The second problem is patriarchal marriage and family. Nowadays patriarchal marriage and family are incontrovertibly collapsing, with divorce rates soaring, and more and more people choosing not to step into marriage. Nevertheless, patriarchal ideology has led to vehement resistance and fierce counterattacks through politics, economy, and religion, dreaming about regression to some Middle Ages or old-dynasties. On the one hand, men still hold power and money tightly, making it extremely difficult for women to gain political power and economic benefits. On the other hand, patriarchy has been making every effort to indoctrinate women with patriarchal morality: that beauty is about being sexy, that the obedient mother who silently reproduces and rears children is *the* great female exemplar, ect., ect.

How does Buddhist feminist politics address these problems? What actions should be taken? I am going to list some actions to be taken from the perspective of a Buddhist feminist politics. They are tentative at this point, but nonetheless necessary to our goal of liberation and equality of all.

1. More effective feminist associations that are far-reaching and spread to remote areas around the world should be established, not only in major cities and small counties in Western states, but also in cities and villages in Asian countries, in China, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These associations will serve the purpose of cutting across class lines, deconstructing individualism, or any other ideological segregation to bring people together. They should bring about international and sweeping social changes from the root so that international solidarity can be built up. Women should form international associations to help one another and care about one another's fate for, under patriarchy, women share one common fate, that is, being oppressed. In terms of strategies the feminist revolution should be both bottom-up and top-down, so that it forms a circle, with all social areas involved.

Feminism in our age has become an elite game. We have feminist scholars weaving sophisticated theories, speaking

jargon not easily understood by many. Ask a woman in rural China if she knows about feminism. She does not, so she urges her daughter to step into marriage in her early twenties, give birth to a child before thirty, thus the patriarchal family reproduces itself. Because she does not understand feminism, she opposes it. This is true east and west. And we wonder why we see systematic fallback in regard to gender equity worldwide. This vicious circle has to be broken and replaced by a feminist one.

2. International feminist educational organizations need to be formed so that feminist awareness can grow internationally. Awareness is everything. Take a look at the Iranian women's struggle for the right to remove the hijab. The problem is that they don't seem to receive any conspicuous help from women around the world. There have been some protests, with little influence on the Iranian government. We must reflect upon this astonishing fact when men nowadays tighten bonds consciously by joining each other in wars. We have seen female leaders shouting out their firm solidarity with Ukraine without one word of support for their sisters in Iran or Afghanistan. Where have we lost our power? How can we regain it?

3. Feminist education should also be taught domestically starting from elementary school to higher education, the same way that patriarchal education functions. Feminist education serves as an antidote to the patriarchal education system. This, I would argue, is the foundation for a feminist revolution. Ideally, feminist education should grow so deep in a society that feminists should occupy all the different kinds of positions in different social areas. This is not a fantasy but something that has been happening all along.

Buddhism should actively join in the feminist revolution, and become part of it. In the process, the feminist turn of Buddhism will be accomplished.

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Notes

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A Profound Encounter: The Portland Buddhist Community Welcomes the Jangchub Choeling Nuns
by Namdrol Miranda Adams

In October 2024, the Portland Tibetan community experienced a deeply moving and transformative event with the visit of the esteemed nuns of Jangchub Choeling Nunnery, including trailblazer Geshema Yeshe Sangmo, one of the first

five Tibetan Buddhist nuns to receive the Geshema degree. Her presence was especially significant as many in the local Tibetan and Buddhist communities had never received teachings or initiation from a female monastic scholar.

The nuns were warmly welcomed and hosted with care and reverence, with teachings and a long-life empowerment held at the Tibetan Cultural Center and Maitripa College. Community members, especially women, responded with heartfelt enthusiasm. Around 50 women participated in the events, and many expressed how meaningful it was to receive teachings from a Geshema, describing it as a rare and empowering experience. Those who could not attend still contributed financially, reflecting the community's strong sense of devotion and support.

The teachings themselves were described as transformative. Geshema Yeshe Sangmo's personal and humble approach stood in contrast to more formal monastic presentations, offering attendees a deeply resonant and accessible spiritual experience. Her conduct was humble and helpful, embodying the values she taught, and further endearing her to the community.

The visit sparked a wave of interest in the nuns' spiritual offerings, with community members requesting further teachings and pujas at their homes. The event raised close to $8,000 to support the nunnery's needs, showing the depth of appreciation and commitment from the Portland Tibetan community.

For many, this was not just a visit but the beginning of an ongoing relationship with the Jangchub Choeling nuns – a connection that promises to enrich both the spiritual lives of individuals and the collective strength of the community for years to come.

This article is based on an interview with Jigme. https://www.jangchubchoeling.org/

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For memberships, donations, and valuable resources on women and Buddhism, visit the Sakyadhita website: sakyadhita.org.


종교와 창의성