

Research Article

**Women Education In Buddhism**

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**Abstract**

Women have competed with men in all domains in today's modern world, and have excelled in all areas. But this status was not the same in earlier times. In ancient India, women had a respectful position in society. But slowly this respect declined and women's position and education, respect, freedom were somehow missing. At such time, Buddha provide a little light to women and women education. Hence, in this paper, the researcher revealed the status of women in society and women education in Buddhism period along with its curriculum and methods of teaching, providing its possible relevance in today's world. It was a historical and analytical research, which took the help of various literary sources related to Buddhism.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, women education, curriculum, methods of teaching, historical.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Amusingly, while Indians have worshipped knowledge as the divine *Sarasvatī*, Indian women have been marginalized in the prolonged Indian history to academic acquiescence. Particles from the literate Indus Civilization (6000-1650 b.c.) contain goddess idols and female genitalia (yōni), although some seals show that in an arboreal religion there may have been priestesses. Male power, however, was also worshipped, and no indication of a matrilineal culture appears. The lack of gender gaps in households and public buildings suggests that women have freedom of travel, but we do not yet have much details about how and when education has taken place. The arrival in the early second millennium of patriarchal Aryan communities B.C. developed Indian perceptions of gender equality. The Vedas is recited at first by those woman initiates who wore the holy thread of the twice- born upper castes. Some brahmavādinis (women bard-poets) such as Lōpamudra and Ghōsha are confirmed to by the Rig Veda (1500–100 b.c.).

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There were energetic female writers, including Gārgi and Maitreyi in the Brahadaranyka Upanishad, and Sāvitrī in the Mahābhārata, even as late as 800 B.C. The Vedas became the sole domain of priests of the male Brahman caste, and the education of women became a component of that of men. Boys were taught around a pine, or on the open verandas (pyāls) of residences in open air schools. Meanwhile, in rooms identical to the pyals, where they learned the smṛiti and non-religious subjects such as algebra, higher caste girls frequently sat apart from the public eye. Women were viewed as complementary to men during the Vedic period. She has a status equivalent to that of an individual. They had equal rights to their education, but at their houses, optimum education was carried out. This was the prior state of women's education in the Vedic Era. Women's education was consequently ignored. In Gurukul, there were no provisions for their schooling. The teaching of women was ignored at the beginning of the Buddhist century. As Mahatma Buddha permitted the monk ladies in Vihara, the education of women flourished. They've been living apart. The Acharya, in the company of special priests or monks, lectured them. We thus read about knowledgeable women from 525 B.C., such as Queen Mahāgotāmi, the Buddha's foster mother, who struggled to score the first order of nuns. The Thērigātha, a sacred hymnal part of the Buddhist Pali canon, was written by educated female ascetics like Mitta and Patacāra. Because of the Parda system, women's education did not flourish during the Muslim era. The low-age girls could go to Maktab and have education, but for higher education, the guardians had to make provisions at their residences for their education, there were separate schools, but they generally got their education in their own households or even those of their teachers. There were no special state schools for girls under the company's rule and barely a few girls attended boys' schools. The Girls School was run mainly by missionaries and a handful by private bodies. Literacy rates for both genders were abysmally low at 6 percent (female) and 22.6 percent (male) on the advent of independence in 1947. They have steadily but progressively plodded along since then, and there has been a significant change since the 1980s. They expanded to 28.5 percent (female) and 53.5 percent (male) in 1981, and to 54.3 percent (female) and 76 percent (male) in 2001. However, in a state like Bihar, where ratings are 33.6 percent (female) and 60.3 percent (male), female education also walks well behind that of males, with inequalities higher than in Kerala, where they are 87.9 percent (female) and 94.2 percent (male).

The general opinion seems to be that in their infancy, they had to be under the supervision of parents, under the safety of husbands in their youth; and they had to be under their sons' influence in their old age. Therefore, it was felt that there was no freedom they deserved. Their key position was considered to be that of housewives, according to their husbands' wishes, handling the affairs in the house. A woman was generally considered a family liability and the men had to share the responsibility of taking care of her. This is why the birth of a female infant was viewed in a household as a symbol of misfortune. From the event affiliated with King Pasenadi of Kosala, how unhappy the father felt at the birth of a daughter is seen. He came to the Buddha

and cried when this King was told that his wife had given birth to a daughter. The Buddha had to soothe him by saying that good sons are as good as good daughters. Hence, it can be observed that women education took a turn in Buddhism period. So, the researcher will further explore, the status of women and women education in this study.

## 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There are many such studies that explore the status and education of women in Buddhism, let's have a look on some of them:

**Mookerji (1947)** studied Buddhism philosophy and the ancient and Buddhism educational philosophy was examined in depth. This study shows singular feature that it has been molded and influenced more by religious than political or economic forces in the course of its history, a peculiar characteristic of ancient Indian or Hindu civilization. **Dewaraja (1994)** studied that the Buddha inaugurated a campaign for the liberation of Indian womanhood. But he did succeed in creating a minor stir against Brahman dogma and superstition. The Buddha saw the spiritual potential of both men and women and founded after considerable hesitation the Order of Bhikkhunis or Nuns, one of the earliest organizations for women. **Yifa (2003)** examined the roles of women in Buddhist literature, contrasting the ancient and the present, and how a curriculum for women is introduced by Humanist Buddhism in order to address historical social inequality. In the Buddhist tradition, he believed that women can and should play an important role. Education is important for doing this. The social circumstances in contemporary Taiwan have allowed women's participation in Buddhism to flourish; the massive development of women's education there has been a significant contributing factor. **Raju (2007)** observed the Status and Education of Women with Particular Regard to Buddhism and Dr. B R Ambedkar. The detailed descriptive and analytical research was performed which revealed the status of women according to Buddhist values. This analysis shows that if we really want to see women as normal human beings, the two great philosophies, i.e. Buddhism and ambedkarism, will help to alter the mind set of Hindu men and thus ensure that the values of Hinduism are changed. **Yu (2013)** revealed that in present, Taiwanese nuns are highly educated and outnumber monks significantly. In the past of Chinese Buddhism, both traits are unprecedented and are noticeable in the culture of Incense Light (Xiang guang). Passing the Light is the community's first in-depth case study, which was founded in 1974 and remains a small but prominent order of highly trained nuns who are committed to educating lay adults Buddhism. **Bhardwaj (2010)** examined the role of women in various strata of society In the Buddhist Jatakas. The researcher did the historical analysis and comprehensively analyzed the material. The study found that both men and women were complementary to each other. The life of a man is not feasible for a woman and the fundamental system is come to a still stop. **Sirimanne (2016)** explored the issues from a Theravāda perspective using scriptural sources as well as recent works, conceding that while there is ambivalence towards women in the Pāli Canon and bias in institutionalized practices, Buddha's acceptance of a female monastic order and the unequivocal affirmation of their equality in intellectual and spiritual abilities in achieving the highest goals clearly establish a positive stance.

**Paudel & Dong (2017)** discussed

many difficulties that women following Buddhism are facing and focused on the birth issues in Buddhist culture and religion in his article. **Devi (2020)** studied that women did not inhabit the similar place as they did in the Vedic period. Buddha rejected to declare women into his Sangha. But after some time due to the determination of his dear pupil Ananda, Buddha had allowed about 500 women along with his step- mother for admission in Viharas with many restriction and reservations. Buddhist Sangha had given attention to the cultural development and social uplift of the women.

Thus. It can be concluded by reviewing some studies on women education in Buddhism that even it was a turning point in the status and education of women by Buddhism, still it had some limitations. So, the researcher tried to study it in detail in this paper.

### **3. STATEMENT OF THE STUDY:**

The investigator studied women education and status of women in Buddhism period, hence this paper was titled as:

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### **4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

**The researcher undertaken the following objectives for this study:**

1. To study the status of women in Buddhist period.
2. To study the status of women education in Buddhist era.
3. To study the methods and curriculum of women education in Buddhist era.
4. To criticize women education of Buddhist period to find any relevance of the same in today's world.

### **5 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY:**

**The researcher generated following directional hypotheses for this study:**

1. The status of women was similar to men in Buddhist period.
2. The status of women education was similar to men education.
3. The methods and curriculum were impartial of women education in Buddhist period in comparison to men education.
4. The women education of Buddhist period has relevance in present education system.

### **6 SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE OF THIS STUDY:**

There was social inequality in society during the time of Buddha. This bigotry was according to man's occupation and origin. Brahmanism governed society and built the country's dominance. They cherished the right to religious instruction and preparation. Yet other groups of persons have been stripped of religious and educational freedom. In this

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instance, a religious movement in ancient India began in 600 B.C. And a new theory or method, called Buddhist doctrine or Buddhist philosophy, has been established. It can be said that a modern and unique system of schooling arose in ancient India on the basis of Buddhism and created an enormous movement that played a crucial role in reforming the education system. It is well accepted that the golden age of Indian culture and society dawned with the advent of Buddhism in India. Under the power of Buddhism, development has been made in all areas of Indian civilization. The primary goal of Buddhist education was the full growth of the character of the infant. This included his growth in physical, emotional, cultural and spiritual terms. Students became free from greed, lust and ignorance. Buddhist Education was wide open and available to the people of all walks of life. In the Buddhist era, religion was given top priority and education was imparted through it. The chief aim of education was propagation of religion and inculcation of religious feelings and education served as a mean to achieve salvation or nirvana. In the early history of Buddhism, however the permission was given to women to enter the order and gave a fairly good impetus to female education, especially in aristocratic and commercial sections of society. Large number of ladies from these circles joined the order and became life-long students of religion and philosophy. Thus, this study will be beneficial in all terms related to today's technological and self-centered world, which is lacking in values and satisfaction in their lives. Moreover, it can be advantageous for female education, which is also a major concern even in today's advanced period. This study will cover status and education of women in Buddhism period along with their methods, curriculum and relevance in today's world.

### 7 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study will be philosophical and historical in nature. literary sources based on Buddhism philosophy will be used for studying Buddhist educational system and other authentic literature in books, holy books (granth), magazines, and journals) will be the major sources for getting access to Buddhism. To support this study, the primary data and secondary data will be used in a systematic way. Related websites from Internet are also used as secondary sources of study.

### 8. STATUS OF WOMEN IN BUDDHISM

**Status of women at the birth of Buddhism:** Women seem to have occupied an incredibly inferior status in society in the pre-Buddhist period. Women were less dominant than Males in all their positions. **Janice Willis (1985)** says. "They were help mates at best and burdens at worst, but always they were viewed as being inferior, second class citizens". Women have been separated, abandoned, sold or destroyed simply because of men's preferences. It was prohibited to sending girls to teachers or educational centers; it

was laid down that only close connections such as father, brother or uncle could educate them at home. The status of women in India was, on the whole, poor in pre-Buddhist society, without due consideration and honour. Women were not granted independence as a daughter, a wife and a mother, and gave her very little authority. Household chores, child birth & bearing, serving parents, husband and in-laws were the primary duties of women those days. Humiliation in the form of child marriage, infanticide, vrats (fasts), customs, traditions, sati pratha, no re-marriage after the death of husband, divorce, living life without independence, respect and value, without any proper education was the fate of females. **Manu** declares that no sacred rite may be performed with mantras for women, his first reason is that they are weak and impure, his second reason was that they are ignorant of Vedic literature. Women and Sudras can, in the Aryan-Vaishnava system, have no property.

**Status of women in Buddhism period:** The analysis of existing literature such as *Purushertha* and other explains the status of women in the society at the time of origin of Buddhism. Buddha had a rather respectful, high-esteemed position for women, amid all diversified, orthodox attitudes of society against women in that period. Generally, according to Buddhism, all human beings are equal, since they are under the law of Karma and Tilakkhana. It does not matter if they are men or women, they are similarly entitled to do positive karma or bad karma and become a good person or a bad person. Depending on their good deeds or bad deeds, all men and women must face equal misery. The Buddha was strongly persuaded that there are very few differences between boys and girls. Buddha issued the Dhamma to both men and women, he also addressed all the households and spoke to the householders, and their women were eventually accepted as being able to act as a positive force in the society of the day. Later, the changes become evident. The arrival of a girl children no longer greeted with open-eyed and high pitched-voiced grief. A fair deal of flexibility has now been permitted. There was a critical turning point in women's religious life. Princesses and high-level ladies appear to have had a role in choosing their partners. But the middle class girls could not raise, because if they remained unmarried, they would be deemed to be shameful; and if they did, they would either be forced to an early child-marriage, or be bound to embrace the man of their parent's desire. At the time of the emergence of Buddhism, and in its early days, the status of unmarried women was higher than it had been in India before. The adoption of daughters has probably been an innovation. There is one description of Vati who, having been orphaned by the outbreak of the plague, was adopted by the householder Mitta. During the Buddhist age, an unmarried woman may be left unabused, contented, Well-occupied at house, and concerned for her parents and younger brothers and sisters. There's very few mentions in Buddhist literature for widows. But the status of the Widow in Buddhism in other religions such as Hinduism was distinct from that of the Widow. Of course, her life had changed, but there was barely any change in her social standing. She did not shave her head as a result, nor did she give up wearing jewelry and bright clothing. She didn't do anything that would expose her illness, including eating frugally, fasting and sleeping on mats. As practiced in Hindus who regard widow as an ill omen and impure, she did not have to be missing in domestic rituals. In Vedic texts, there is no prohibition on remarriage here and in some instances, widow married the brother of her husbands and hence we

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infer that it continues into Buddhist days through the Epic period. The bulk of women skilled workers were domestic-slaves, nautch-girls, and female singers. In addition to these, courtesans were a significant part of the female community who either did not obtain their livelihood, or who were not otherwise sponsored. In Buddhism wife is given a great importance in establishing a harmony with husband. In naming a wife a diamond who mixed the two virtues of chastity and dedication, both Brahmanism and Buddhism held common opinions. "In his speech, the Buddha addresses the bond between husband and wife." The husband should always respect his wife that he should love her and be true to Woman in Buddhism. He should maintain a dignified role and a decent life for her; earn her goodwill by timely presents, including jewelry. In her turn, the wife should supervise and care for household affairs; in all her duties she should be professional and enthusiastic. For one man has many wives, but not wife has not many husbands at the same time." From a reading of the Pali classics, it is therefore to be concluded that monogamy prevailed under Buddhism. Polyandry was practically non-existent. If a partner is found guilty of adultery or disloyalty, divorce is acceptable. Only on these grounds was a wife allowed to divorce her husband. If she went barren, he might put away his wife, and obviously if he thought her unfriendly, as seen by the case of Isidasi. It was assumed in Buddhahood that the state of complete enlightenment, could be achieved only by a male, not by a woman. The monk was barred from touching a feminine type under any pretext whatsoever. In the Buddhist view, the wife was both regulated and valued with equal regard. Property rights varied according to the availability of brother in a girl's life. The Buddha said that what a man can do can be done as well by a woman, sometimes even better. The philosophy of the Buddhists explains more about the self-realization of women by examining women's Self- perspective, Women's perspective on culture And the view of society on the woman. It is equally vital to remember that women's equality is critical. It is accomplished by her emotional and moral self-realization. Production and autonomous life. Women's self- realization makes her conscious of her qualities, the attributes and the prevalence and socialization cycles. There is a strong awareness of nature among women in society. The holistic essence of culture can be created through co-existence. Via his speeches, Gautama Buddha always tried to enlighten people on the Gender Gap Myth. Overall, girls enjoyed being valued and free in Buddhist era but with patriarchy. Buddha gave a new outlook to the society. His outlook was rational, which prompted the society to give fair treatment to women.

### 9 EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN BUDDHIST PERIOD

Women's education during the origin of Buddhist era was at its lowest level, as women's folk were hated in that context. They were considered by Lord Buddha as the root of all evil. So, during his lifetime, he recommended not to admit women in Monasteries. But after some time, because of the insistence of his dear pupil Anand, Buddha had allowed about 500 women. Along with his step-mother for entry to the Vihars with a lot of restrictions and reservations. The admission of women to Sangha was challenging enough. Two years of probation has been fixed for women-monks. They have not been given any permanent posting at the sangha. In addition, they had to live on their own, and they were taught by a unique monk twice a month. They still



couldn't live with the mentor either. Mainly women joined the Sangha Out of keen curiosity and care for Religious intense emotions. Some had entered it to get rid of the burdens of earthly relations as well. There were Bhikshunis whose spiritual awareness was very high and a good number of people could be influenced. The responsibilities of social care were also taken over by many Bhikshunis. They help the poor, orphans, etc., and they felt it was Prime responsibility to them. Many of them have been poets and authors. Few of them were also practised history and engaged Regularly in the politics of the day. Some of them even went to preach Buddhism in foreign countries, as poets and authors, Sheelbhattarika, Prabhudevi and Viyanka were popular in those days. The sister of Emperor Asoka Sanghamitra was a very famous bhikshuni who conducted outstanding Buddhist services. Buddhism would not limit either women's educational opportunities or their religious liberties. The Buddha unquestioningly acknowledged that, just as men are, women are capable of understanding the Truth. This is why he allowed women to be accepted into the Order, but at the beginning he was not in support of it because he felt their admission would produce problems in the Sasana. The Buddha acknowledged their strengths and skills until women showed their capacity to handle their affairs in the Order, and granted them accountable roles in the Bhikkhuni Sangha. The Buddhist scriptures record esteemed holy bhikkhunis who were highly learned and trained in the preaching of the Dhamma. Dhammadinna was one such Bhikkhuni. There are two others, Khema and Uppalavanna. Buddhism may undoubtedly appear to have the least patriarchal views towards women, in comparison to other barriers and bigoted religious traditions. There is no question that Buddha was the first religious instructor to provide equitable and unlimited opportunities for women in the area of spiritual advancement. And as he had pointed out the inherent characteristics and limitations of women on many occasions, he had also given due credit to their strengths and capabilities. He was genuinely paving the way for women to lead a complete religious life. They were willing, just as men were, to cultivate and purify their minds and understand Nibbana's bliss. In the days of Buddha, the testimony of the Theris (Nuns) speak amply to this reality. Through declaring them eligible for entry to what was known as the Bhikkhuni Sangha-the Order of Nuns; the Buddha opened the gates for the complete involvement of women in the world of religion, which really opened new avenues of culture and social service to women and adequate opportunities for public life. It earned women appreciation of their value to society, and dramatically increased their social standing. In Sri Lanka, the Order of Nuns flourished till 1017 A.C. In the reign of King Mahinda IV. It then disappeared and was not revived again. But the Order of Nuns was introduced into China by Sinhalese nuns, and still exists there as well as in Japan today. However, in the Mahayana tradition they occupy a subordinate place, and are by no means on par with the monks. The Buddha instructed his disciples on his deathbed to abide by the doctrine, the Dhamma, which was to be the ultimate guide. Of course, there is no gender in the Dhamma; the question is whether gender has anything to do with making the attainment of the Path simple or hard. The response to this again is clear — anyone, male or female, could practice the Buddha's path. The Buddha's decision to sanction the establishment of an Order for women in the fifth year after his enlightenment was a landmark in Buddhist and Indian history. Many of these Bhikkhunis attained to the supreme bliss of enlightenment. The stories, sayings and deeds of these distinguished Bhikkhunis are recorded in many

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places in the Pali Canon, most notably in the Therigâtha, a compilation of verses uttered by these Theris when they saw the clear light of the Dhamma, and which constitutes a part of the Khuddaka Nikaya of the Sutta Pitaka.

### 10. METHODS AND CURRICULUM OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN BUDDHISTERA.

- A) **Curriculum:** The Buddhist schooling did not neglect the secular and vocational subjects while highlighting the sacred subjects. Almost all subjects ranging from 3 R's to military training and medical education is included in the syllabus. Spinning, sewing, textile printing, tailoring, accountancy, drawing, Ayurveda, surgery etc. were the major subjects of Buddhist education. In addition to these subjects, an integral portion of the course was also comprised of various arts and crafts. Overall, the course of studies covered all arts and sciences, all vocational and industrial subjects. The curriculum was similar for male and female students.
- B) **Methods of teaching:** It was duly stressed to think, meditate and self-study. Hetu Vidya, or inductive system of logic, was introduced in viharas and monastic schools and the intellect of the pupils was educated by this method. Some disputes occurred during discourse and debates that were settled by eight pramanas, such as principle, logic, reference, analogy, interpretation, knowledge and inference. As it was during the Vedic period, the system of teaching was largely oral. The students used the rote to understand the content of various subjects. In addition, the important teaching strategies were lecture, speech listening, discussion, debate, deliberation and question-answer. Monitoring techniques were sometimes introduced and the responsibilities of educating and disciplining the other students were assigned to certain productive students. Theoretical as well as practical approaches were offered to pupils.

### 11. RELEVANCE OF WOMEN EDUCATION OF BUDDHISM IN TODAY'S WORLD.

A society can only move forward when the women's living in the society are shown due respect. She is the child's first tutor. Women are suppressed in terms of equity and freedom, notwithstanding all these facts. It is not only in Buddhism, but around the world, in all faiths that are practised. In Buddhism, the eight Gurudharmas, regarded as very strict laws Or monastic etiquette, have to be observed by a female nun. For a male monk, there are no laws like that. Buddhism says a bhikshuni should seek from the bhikshus for her higher education. It is possible that in contrast with bhikkhus, the gurudharmas have put bhikkhunis in a lower role. There are some laws of Buddhism that a bhikkhuni can obey and not the bhikkhus. When comparison to men, these laws often explicitly place women in a lower position. One of the Gurudharmas who argues that even a senior nun can bow down to a newly initiated monk demonstrates how subordinate women have been put in Buddhism. There are accounts from the time of Buddha, and then the female nuns are lauded for their intellect, skill and hard-working spirit. They have also identified them as male equivalents who are capable and successful. Several experiments have been carried out in the past and all of them have demonstrated that the problem of inferiority has a greater effect on culture over a long period of time. Compared to men, the role of women in Buddhism is perceived to be of

less significance. In Buddhism, there is a very small space for women. Women have always been considered a dependent commodity and lesser positions have been given. Yet the women of today have proven to be exceptional. As compared to men with their hard work, they have won a greater and equal position. In certain cases, they have also outclassed men. Thus, the relevance of women education by Buddhism can be utilized as providing value and respect to women in all fields. It can be given appreciation for providing women a fair chance to reach at top positions. Further, methods of teaching and various subjects of Buddhist education can be beneficial for today's educational system. Moreover, meditation and brain exercising are also advantageous for learning.

## 12. TESTING OF HYPOTHESES

- 1 The position of women was inferior from men in various aspects, despite of having a respectful and valued status in Buddhist period and removing some of evil customs and traditions of the society for a girl. Thus the first hypotheses that, "The status of women was similar to men in Buddhist period" was rejected.
2. There was more strict rules and regulations for female than male students in Buddhism education system. The positions were also not similar for male and female. Thus, the second hypotheses that, "The status of women education was similar to men education" was rejected.
3. The methods and curriculum were impartial of women education in Buddhist period in comparison to men education. Thus this hypothesis was adopted.
4. The role of Buddhist education for women can be used to provide meaning and reverence for women in all fields. It should be remembered for offering women an equal opportunity to achieve top positions. Thus, the fourth hypothesis that, "The women education of Buddhist period has relevance in present education system" is partially adopted.

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