

## Equality of Gender According to The View of The Buddha

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### Abstract

*Equality of the gender has been interested and studied on the equality and right of the women as the same of the men. But in this study, the equality of gender mean accepting the ability of each other between men and women. For instance, being the soldier, taxi driver and the plane driver are best for men, while the nurse, beautician and taking care of children the women can do the best. In this study, the finding is in the area of Buddhism which has been shown there are 3 dimensions of Buddha's views in equality of the gender namely: action or doing, duty, and enlightenment.*

*The results of this study showed the Buddha did not have bias on the gender. His teachings showed the equality between men and women. The both of the gender can do the good and the bad thing as the same as a person. If one does the one's duty on the best, the one is able to get the good results. At last everyone in Buddhism can get the fruit of Buddha's teaching by practice the teaching of the Buddha. According to the study based on the Tripitaka, physiological sex is no obstacle to achieving enlightenment because in meditative practice, one's body is only a "form".*

**Key word:** equality of gender, Buddha view, Tripitaka.

### 1. Introduction

Equality of gender means that the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Equality does not mean "the same as" – promotion of gender equality does not mean the women and men will become the same.

The trends of gender equality have been raised in every aspects of social such as education, job, politics and religion. As the results of equality trend, there are changes in various roles of the women such as education, for example, the women can study in school and university as the man do and also the job at company or in government office. Women have increasingly become more involved in the work force and employment of women has shifted from primarily traditional female-oriented job to more non-traditional, and previously male-oriented careers. The important role is the politic; the women can be prime minister or president of their country.

Men and women differ in many important aspects, such as different occupations. They also work under different incentive systems, with females considerably more often than men working under piece rate pay schemes. Relatively few women hold top corporate positions; although in many countries women's educational attainment now exceed men's. Women are also less likely to run for elections and they represent a low percentage in national parliaments. The position of women has been a subject of considerable interest in recent decades. In all societies, particularly in the West, there has been a rethinking of the position accorded to women in all spheres of activity. This has resulted in a significant change in the role played by women in social, economic and even political life. This reappraisal has also touched on the view of the Buddha accorded to women as the main religious traditions of the world.

Buddhism is widely known throughout the world as a religion of peace and kindness. It is less known as a religion of gender equality. Women's position in Buddhism is unique. The Buddha gave women full freedom to participate in a religious life. The Buddha was the first religious Teacher who gave this religious freedom to women. Before the Buddha, women's duties had been restricted to the kitchen; women were not even allowed to enter any temple or to recite any religious scripture. During the Buddha's time, women's position in society was very low. The Buddha was criticized by the prevailing establishment when He gave this freedom to women. His move to allow women to enter the Holy Order was extremely radical for the times. Yet the Buddha allowed women to prove themselves and to show that they too had the capacity like men to attain the highest position in the religious way of life by attaining Arahantahood. Every woman in the world must be grateful to the Buddha for showing them the real religious way of living and for giving such freedom to them for the first time in world history.

## **2. Equality of Gender according to the View of the Buddha**

### **2.1 Equality of doing or action**

Doing or action is the teaching of the Buddha as the Buddhists believe and have adherent. The Buddha said do good receive good do evil receive evil. This teaching is not give only men or women, did not give to rich or poor one, but give for all. The Pali term Karma literally means action or doing. Any kind of intentional action whether mental, verbal, or physical, is regarded as Karma. It covers all that is included in the phrase "thought, word and deed". Generally speaking, all good and bad action constitutes Karma. In its ultimate sense Karma means all moral and immoral volition. Involuntary, unintentional or unconscious actions, though technically deeds, do not constitute Karma, because volition, the most important factor in determining Karma, is absent.

"I am the owner of my karma.

I inherit my karma.

I am born of my karma.

I am related to my karma.

I live supported by my karma.

Whatever karma I create, whether good or evil, that I shall inherit."

In the view of the Buddha in case of equality of gender, there is no bias on the gender of His view. Everyone must accept the results of own doing. Everyone can be good morality or can be bad morality depending on personality, not on gender. Good or bad morality is depending on their doing or action. For example, when King Kosala was very disappointed as he heard that his Queen had given birth to a baby girl. He had expected a boy. To console the sad King, the Buddha said:

‘A female child, O Lord of men, may prove  
Even a better offspring than a male.  
For she may grow up wise and virtuous,  
Her husband’s mother reverencing, true wife,  
The boy that she may bear may do great deeds,  
And rule great realms, yes, such a son  
Of noble wife becomes his country’s guide,’ - (*SamyuttaNikaya*) – SN 3.16

Beside, Buddha talks about passion; he says that men are equally attractive to women and a cause for women to go astray. So Buddha actually talks about removal of passion, whether it is in males or in females. Tipitaka also tells about female nuns who were visited by devil in the form of handsome males and also it tells about males who were visited by the devils in the form of beautiful girls. So actually it is both ways. In *AnguttaraNikaya* Buddha tells that: There is nothing attractive to a female than smell of man, voice of man, touch of man, sight of man & thought of man. A woman should rise above these similarly there is nothing attractive to a man than the smell of woman, voice of woman, touch of woman, sight of woman & thought of woman. Buddha tries to be truthful to both sides. The only path is to extinguish the flames of passion and it applies to males & females both.

## 2.2 Equality of Duty

The duty means doing the work or the task. In society, everyone must do the work, and help each other. The duty start from family: father, mother, children. They do the duty each other. Besides, there are many organizations, such as school, temple, hospital, shop, university and so on. Those of organizations do the duties each other in the social. The duty of people in the social were done begin in the family. Everyone in the family do own duty as the member of society, each one must do own task not only in the work of mother or father but also the children. The people in the society can’t deny the duties because of the duty is the helping each other in the society. Especially in the family, the mothers have the role in caring the children, while the fathers always do the hard work outside of the house. The children get new experience from the old member of family and also learn from the educational institution. The duty is the valuable of people in the social, only one can’t do everything, such as the mother can’t do the work hard like the father do while the father can’t do the caring of the mother. We can’t say which one is the best. Mothers or fathers are the best. This is the duty of the member in the family. The members in the social also are the same, men and women may do the different work. In the Buddhism, the Buddha show the view about the duty such as the duty of teacher and student, duty of wife and husband, duty of parent and children, the duty is the task of the members in the social. All of them can do the duty on the best. Any one can’t be all things, because it is impossible for the one people in the social, it depend on the role or duty as they have. Any one may have more duty, such as someone have the duty as the teacher while have the duty as the student too. The Buddha

did not say the women can't do something but He say about the duty what they have and do. What are the duties of man and the women ? This question is vary because of it is difficult for answering. There are no answers that what is the duty of women or the duty of the men. In the past the duty is depend on ability of they do the duty. The man go to forest for finding out the food such as hunting the animal, while the women stay in the house for preparing the food and also take care the children. And in the city or town, the men do the duties as the soldier while the women do the food and doing the art and doing the beautiful material such as weaving. The different duties of men and women are not bias. But it is because the different of ability and appropriate of the gender, such as the duty of fighting, the man can do the best than the women do. While, the cooking and taking care the children the women can do the best than the man do. This is the appropriate of their ability of man and women. In any relationship, if one carries out one's duties and responsibilities well, this will support and bring happiness to one in this life and hereafter. In the Buddhist scriptures also deal with the responsibilities of husband and wife specifically, as outlined below.

**A husband has five responsibilities towards his wife:**

- He should be courteous towards her. This is easy in the early days of marriage, but ten years down the road special effort may have to be made. Sometimes a man comes home after a day's work and may take out the stress on his wife. He should realise his wife has spent a whole day doing housework which is not so easy either. He should use sweet words, like "darling" Then, the wife may feel better.
- He should not despise her, see her as inferior to him, as a person at his beck and call. He should not treat her like a slave.
- He should be faithful. Keeping a proper distance from other women is important, as lust is a tricky thing and one thing may lead to another.
- He should hand over authority to her, such as in financial and other household matters. She spends the greater part of the day at home and thus should be given the authority to make decisions with regards to it. As women are generally better at managing money, it would be right for him to let her be the treasurer and financial controller.
- As women by nature wish to look good, he should support her in her efforts to beautify herself. He should, within his means, provide her adornments, such as beautiful clothes and jewelry.

**Similarly, a wife has five responsibilities towards her husband:**

- She should perform her duties well as a wife.
- She should also be hospitable to "the people around" (relations, friends and workers), maintaining a cordial relationship with them.

- Just as it is so for the husband, she should be faithful.
- Being given the authority in managing household possessions, which includes money that her husband brings home, she should protect them well.
- She should be skilful in discharging her duties and be industrious at it.

In equality of men and women in status of spouse, both of them must do the duty and responsibility each other; otherwise they can't reach the family happiness. The duty is important for spouse; wife and husband, without the responsibility to the family, the fail of their family will be rising. The duty is only different of task but is not inequality between husband and wife.

### **2.3 Equality of Enlightenment Attainment**

Nowadays many religionists like to claim that their religions give women equal rights. We only have to look at the world around us today to see the position of women in many societies. It seems that they have no property rights, are discriminated in various fields and generally suffer abuse in many subtle forms. Even in western countries, women like the Suffragettes had to fight very hard for their rights. According to Buddhism, it is not justifiable to regard women as inferior. The Buddha Himself was born as a woman on several occasions during His previous births in Samsara and even as women. He developed the noble qualities and wisdom until He gained Enlightenment or Buddhahood.

After the death of King Suddhodhana, MahaPajapatiGotami, who was already a lay disciple, asked the Buddha permission for women to enter the Order. Thrice Buddha refused the request. Whatever religion women are ordained, that religion will not last long. As families that have more women than men are easily destroyed by robbers, as a plentiful rice-field once infested by rice worms will not long remain, as a sugarcane field invaded by red rust will not long remain, even so the True Dharma will not last long.

Then Ven. Ananda asked, "Are women capable of realizing the state of Arahantship?" and Buddha replied, "Yes". Ven. Ananda made another appeal on behalf of MahaPajapatiGotami and, Buddha granted the request on condition that she accepted eight rules. The Garudhammas (Heavy Rules): The most cited evidence of gender bias in the early texts where reportedly imposed by the Buddha as he established the Nuns' Sangha. They are recorded in the Vinaya as follows:

1. A nun who has been ordained even for a hundred years must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, salute with joined palms, do proper homage to a monk ordained but that day.
2. A nun must not spend the rains in a residence where there are no monks
3. Every half month a nun should desire two things from the Order of Monks: the asking as to the date of the uposatha day, and the coming for the exhortation.

4. After the rains a nun must invite 'before both Orders in respect of three matters, namely what was seen, what was heard, what was suspected.
5. A nun, offending against an important rule, must undergo manatta discipline for half a month before both Orders.
6. When, as a probationer, she has trained in the six rules for two years, she should seek higher ordination from both Orders.
7. A Monk must not be abused or reviled in any way by a nun.
8. From today, admonition of monks by nuns is forbidden, admonition of nuns by monks is not forbidden——— I.B. Horner, Book of the Discipline, V.354-55.

The Buddha prohibited the women to become the monk at first, but after he saw the firm requirement of MahaPajapatiGotami and ability of her to reach the enlightenment. Then Buddha permitted the women to become the monk, but the Buddha knew that if the women are ordained, the religion will not last long as same as families having more women than men easily destroyed by robbers, as a plentiful rice-field once infested by rice worms will not long remain, as a sugarcane field invaded by red rust will not long remain, even so the True Dharma will not last long. To protect the religion, the Buddha offered the Garudhammas to the women to practice, then the religion will be long.

Buddha's hesitation was owing to the fact that he had to consider very carefully the implications of such a move. He had to balance the cultural background of the society, the attitudes of the people, and his concern not to endanger the Sangha by an unwise step, with the logical equality of men and women which flowed from the Dhamma. He felt that women were less able to deal with the tribulations of the daily secular life in a society ordered by men. He therefore bound the Bhikkhu Order by special rules in order to strengthen the former. Buddha is recorded as having said that the Sangha would not last for so long, as it would otherwise, because women had been admitted to the Order, but Dr Horner indicates the possibility of Bhikkhus editing the statement to decrease the importance which Buddha gave to women. Further statements in the Buddhist scriptures, that a woman cannot become a Buddha or attain the higher realms of Enlightenment 8 have to be accepted with caution for the same reason, and would certainly go against the central ideas of the Dhamma. The Bhikkhuni Order, once established, flourished. The membership came from the whole range of the social structure and included Yasodhara. Ven. PajapatiGotami was the most senior. Ven. Khema and Uppalavanna were the two chief Bhikkhuni disciples. Buddhist literature contains the *Therigatha*, psalms or verses of seventy-three elder Bhikkhunis, *Bhikkhuni-Samyutta*, more verses of ten elders and the *Apadana*, the biographies in verse of forty nuns contemporary with the Buddha, which are unique in the religious literature of the world 10. Both Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis wore similar dress, engaged in the same activities and aspired to teach the Dhamma and attain Arahantship 11. Some Bhikkhunis like Dhammadinna and BhaddaKappilani were famous exponents of the Dhamma.

When the Buddha allowed women to join the Order, a large number of women welcomed the opportunity given to women for the first time in Indian history. Some wanted to join the Order to

escape the dreadful life of having to remain in the kitchen for most of their time, some wanted to escape from a meaningless life of widowhood, and some were doing it as a fashion, or simply followed their close relatives. In the latter case, some of them proved to be trouble for the Sangha, but for most of the cases, these women were sincere in their spiritual search as it was the first time they enjoyed such freedom.

### 3. Conclusion

Equality of gender does not mean the men is same with the women, but mean that the men and the women can do the best on their gender. In fact, both man and women can do the same thing but it is not well all. This study is to investigate the equality on the gender in the view of the Buddha as shown in Tripitaka. Infact the nature of man and woman is different, especially the body or physical form. Then the view of the Buddha presses on the way of ability and habit between the genders. The clear example of this reason is being father and mother. The man only is the father, while the woman only is the mother. Last decade, the women have the duty only take care the members in family, but nowadays the women can be manager. In fact, the man did not deny the ability of women but at the last decade, the men have the duty of fighting in war. Only fewer women can do. Beside, the key important role of the rulers is the politic and fighter which can be seen in the history of Thailand. Then the ability of the ruler must be the fighter as the women difficultly can do. The role of the women then only stay at home and take care the children and do the beautiful things such as decorating the flower or make the cooking. The result of the study shown the three dimensions of perspective of the Buddha according to the equality of the gender are the action or doing, duty or task, and the ability of reaching the enlightenment. The important view is the form of the body, men or women is not matter for practice the Dharma of the Buddha.

In the case of doing or action, the women and the men are the same according to the proverb of the Buddha “do good receive good do evil receive evil”. This view is the law of nature; it is not for any kind of gender. On the case of duty, although there are the different of physical form between men and women, but the Buddha taught about the duty as the one can do each other. All of members in society have the duty or task. The duty in this means helping each other as the member of society. In the social, there are many careers such as taxi driver, nurse, doctor, teacher, and etc. those career help together in the society. For example the teacher teaches the children of taxi driver, while the teacher uses service of taxi driver. Then the existing of helping in society were present.

The concept of gender equality in Buddhism is first mentioned in the Tripitaka Vinaya, where the Buddha, when pressed for an answer from Ananda, proclaimed that it is possible for women to leave their household life by becoming Bhikkhuni (female monk). He also stated that it is possible for women to achieve different levels of enlightenment. Therefore, he allowed women to be ordained. Many of women in the Buddha’s time attained enlightenment at different levels, according to the TheriGatha Sutra in Tripitaka.

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