Chapter Five

The Women’s Status in the Pure Land Buddhism

The Depiction of the Women Status in the Pure Land Buddhism

Recent developments in science and technology have affected all walks of life throughout the world. It has changed the world view of the people. The position accorded to women in traditional societies has also changed drastically in all spheres of activity whether it is social, religious, economic or political. Such developments have led us to ponder over the status accorded to women in the main religious traditions of the world. It is evident from the perusal of religious scriptures of different faiths that almost all of them depict women as a temptress and harbinger of all sorts of miseries in this mundane world. So profound is Amida’s great compassion that manifesting in conceivable Buddha wisdom. The Buddha established the vow of transformation into men. There by vowing to enable women to attain Buddhahood.¹

So far as the history of women in Buddhism is concerned one can find several passages in numerous Sūtras (early or later) which are clearly androcentric and deny their equal status in the clergy (Saṅgha). Many scholars have suggested that such elements were inserted into the texts later, while others argue that, the discrimination against women in Buddhism has its roots in Vedic society and is symptomatic of the patriarchal structure of human society since that time. The Buddha may seem misogynistic to us today, his attitude was liberal for the 6th - 5th century B.C.E.²

Whatever are the reasons, throughout the history of development or evolution of Buddhism, we do encounter misogynist and protagonist attitudes counter-influencing each other. However, it is a fact that women were part and parcel of Buddhism and were involved in each and every activity almost from the very beginning, whether it is the role of nuns, or of sponsors and supporters of the Saṅgha of ordained practitioners.

Against this background an attempt has been made to examine the status of women in the Pure Land Buddhism which is a branch of mainstream Mahāyāna Buddhism and one of the most popular schools in the Far East. The emphasis will be given to the following three points:

- The Position of women in society at the time of the Buddha,
- The Lord Buddha's attitude towards women - A Misogynist or A Protagonist of women's cause as reflected in the Pāli literature and
- The status of women in the Pure Land Buddhism.

1. **The Position of Women at the Time of the Buddha**

The Rigveda is regarded as the earliest literary evidence which provides valuable information about the earliest history of human civilization. During the Rigvedic times there are evidences indicating the honour and respect which women received in the society. In the realm of religion, too, they had access to the highest knowledge of the Absolute or Brahma. Women were allowed to perform religious rites, and even the knowledge of the Vedas was available to them. However, such liberal attitudes towards women changed in due course of time.
Available literary sources of post Vedic period reveal that in the contemporary society women, who constituted the half of the humanity, were the worst sufferer. They seem to have held an extremely subordinate position in the society. Women came to be considered as greatly inferior to men - both physically and mentally. They had very little option to opt for. Women seldom were allowed to make their own decisions. In all their roles, women were less powerful than were men. A typical woman spent her childhood serving and obeying her parents, her young age serving and obeying her husband and his parents, and her old age serving and obeying her grown up children.

"By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent."³

Women usually had to marry the person chosen for them by their parents or so called guardians. However, we do find few instances of young women who were given the choice of several suitors, but it was not a common practice. Once married, women had to obey their husband and in-laws. Her place was the home, under the complete whims and fancies of her husband.⁴ She not only had to perform all the domestic chores, but also had to bring up a large family. It was women's duty to cook, clean, bear and brought up children including the whole household affairs. The food left over by her husband was often the food for the woman. If she displeased her husband, he could beat her or throw her out of the house. Some of the priestly caste Brahmins married and lived with their wives yet regarded food cooked by women as impure and unfit to eat. Women were supposed to bear children for the family. If a married woman could not give birth to a

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³ Laws of Manu, V, 147-8.
⁴ Nasti strinam prthag yagno na vratam napyuposatham patim susrusate yena tena svarge mahiyate. Laws of Manu, V, 153 (English trans. Women have no sacrifices of their own to perform nor religious rites or observances to follow. Obedience to the husband alone would exalt the woman in heaven.)
child, or failed to produce any male offspring, she might be superseded by a second or third wife or even turned out of the house; for there was the strong belief that there must be a male child for the continuance of family line and the performance of the 'rites of the ancestors'. A myth was built up - that all women were regarded as sinful and the only way to keep them out of mischief was to keep them endlessly occupied with the task of motherhood and domestic duties.

The literature also mentions occasional elopements, without the permission of parents. Divorce could be initiated by the husband, but not the wife. Adulterous wives were punished with death, while adulterous husbands were not punished at all. There were instances in which husbands would give their wives away to other men. As marriage was considered a holy sacrament, a young girl who did not marry was badly criticized and despised by society.

In Buddhist texts there are references of courtesans or prostitutes. Some women chose this life for themselves. Others had less choice. It is recorded that in Vaisali, there was a law forbidding the marriage of a beautiful woman. In comparison to others courtesans were relatively independent, and could earn their own living. They had an accepted place in society.

There are references of women slaves or lower-class servants who had not only to follow all of the orders of their masters and had to work day and night but also had no right to refuse the sexual advances of their masters. They could not marry without the permission of their masters. There are instances recorded in which slave women were beaten so regularly and heartlessly by their masters that they committed suicide.

In the field of religious practices, the position once enjoyed by women was denied to them. Women have also been regarded as the source of all the sins of the world and have been blamed for the misfortunes of men in this world and the next. There was also the belief that as women, no salvation could be gained - they had to be reincarnated as men.
before they were able to gain their salvation. She could not worship by herself, and it was believed that she could only reach heaven through unquestioning obedience to her husband, even if he happened to be a wicked person. Women were prohibited from reading the religious scriptures. The punishment for doing so was to have their tongues cut out. They were also discouraged from entering places of worship. If they were at all allowed to participate in religious practices, such participation was confined to their own homes, by attending to household religious ceremonies.

2. The Lord Buddha’s Attitude towards Women

It was in the midst of such extreme social discrimination and degrading attitudes towards women that the Buddha made his appearance in the Indian subcontinent. It is beyond imagination that such a pathetic situation of women in the contemporary society would have gone unnoticed to such a pragmatic religious leader like Lord Buddha and he would not have admonished his disciples or followers regarding it. In the following pages an attempt has been made to examine the available Buddhist literatures, canonical and non-canonical, in order to evaluate the attitude of Lord Buddha towards women.

According to the Indian tradition there are four class distinctions in Hindu system in which Brahmins encouraged a repressive and demeaning or suppression of women. Therefore, with the emergence of the Lord Buddha appears in India at that time could be the way of life to offer to women in which the principle of equality that propagated to offered women the opportunity to break away from the restrictions of home life. By the spread of Buddhism and rapid acceptance of women at that time to join in Buddhist Saṅgha communities in order to break away the social world of tradition and marriage which to be free from household chores and sexual slavery of world life. In this connection, we could say that whether the Lord Buddha attitude towards women should be supports the human rights movement for equality and democracy.
When one goes through the passages of Pāli literatures which deal with the matters of women there emerges two opposite views regarding the Buddhist attitude towards women, one, the Lord Buddha as a misogynist and the other, the Lord Buddha as a crusader of women's cause. In order to know that whether or not the Lord Buddha discriminated against women. According to the Tripiṭaka elsewhere that offers conflicting information regarding to the women status. The place and role of women in Buddhism may be considered in several ways;

1. The doctrinal statement relating to gender in the Buddhist teaching (which Buddhists call Dhamma).\(^5\)
2. The position of women in the religious and the secular life in India before the Buddha's time with that after.
3. Whether the Buddha’s teaching accords to women a position different to that accorded to men, as is the case in some other religious.
4. Whether the accident of the sex of one’s birth helps or retards progress on the Buddha’s path and indeed whether gender is itself a chance event or caused by pre-existing factors;
5. The past played by women in the early history of Buddhism notably during the Buddha’s own time;
6. The circumstances surrounding the establishment of order of Nuns (Bhikkhunis): and
7. The influence of Buddhism on the position of women in the countries where Buddhism became a living presence, it is not possible to consider all these questions in an outreach of this length. So the treatment of the subject has to be selective.

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However, in this connection, we may say that this hostile attitude to woman both in religion and in society was repeatedly criticized and challenged by the Buddha on numerous occasions. In the Kosala Samyutta the Buddha contradicts the belief that the birth of a daughter was not as much a cause of joy as that of a son.

“A woman 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, yea; such a son of noble wife becomes his country's guide.” (Kindred Sayings I. 111)

This was said to king Kosala who was apparently disappointed at the news that his queen had given birth to a girl.

It was also held in Indian belief that woman was intellectually inferior to man and therefore had no capacity to reach higher spiritual attainments. When asked by Ananda, the Buddha said that women are capable of becoming Arhata-s. If women follow the path of renunciation, they can become completely enlightened, just as men can. Elsewhere in the scriptures, the Buddha elaborates on this idea, while using the imagery of a chariot to explain the Buddhist path:

"Straight is the name that Road is called, and 'Free from Fear' the Quarter whither thou art bound. Thy Chariot is the 'Silent Runner' named, With Wheels of Righteous Effort fitted well. Conscience the Leaning-board; the Drapery Is Heedfulness; the Driver is the Dharma, I say, and Right Views, they that run before. And be it woman, or be it man for whom such a chariot doth wait, by that same car into Nirvana's presence shall they come."

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6 Itthi ’ pi hi ekacciya seyya posa janadhipa medhavini silavati sassudeva patibbata. Tassa yo jayati poso suro hoti disampati evam subhagiya putto rajjam ’ pi anusasati. S.I.86

7 Samyutta Nikāya, I, 5,6.
Again in the _Therigatha_ women's capabilities of attaining spiritual goals is explicitly mentioned. When questioned about women, the _Buddha_ answers _Ananda_ in the following manner:

"Are the _Buddha_-s born in the world for the benefit of men? Assuredly it is for the benefit of females as well. When I delivered the _Tiro Kudha-Sūtra_, many women entered the Path as did also many deva-s when I delivered the _abhidhamma_ in _Tantisa_, have not _Visakha_ and many other _upasikawas_ entered the Paths? The entrance is open for women as well as men."

The same idea clearly echoes in the _Samyutta Nikāya_ also where Mara, as the personification of the forces of evil, strives in vain to dissuade _Bhikkhuni_ Soma from her religious endeavours:

"No woman, with the two-finger-wisdom which is hers, could ever hope to reach those heights which are attained only by the sages."

The words of _Mara_ are undoubtedly resonant of the beliefs of the day and the _Buddha_ was vehement in contradicting them. In answer to this _Bhikkhuni_ Soma illustrates the Lord Buddha's attitude to the spiritual potentialities of woman.

When one's mind is well concentrated and gathered together and wisdom never fails, does the fact of being a woman still make any difference?

Thus we find the _Buddha_ teaching that not only can women reach the same levels of enlightenment as can men, but women also follow the same path to get there. The _Buddha_ does not say that there are no differences between men and women. However, in

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9 *Yam tam isihi pattabbam thanam durabhisambhavam na tam dvangulappannaya sakka pappotum itthiya.* S.I.129.
10 *Itthibavo kim kayira cittamhi susamahite nanamhi vattamanamhi samma dhammam vipassato.* S.I.129
these statements, he seems to feel that any differences between men and women are unimportant in the pursuit liberation.

However, the portrait of the Buddha painted by the different text of Pāli canon does not always validate the efforts of women to practice a life of renunciation. We do find several examples where we confront with disparaging words about the women said by the Lord Buddha and his chief disciples.

Once Ananda, his cousin and personal attendant, asked Lord Buddha how he should behave with a woman, his reply to Ananda portrays woman's nature as perceived by him.

"Master, how shall we behave before women?" The Buddha says, "You should shun their gaze and if you happen to see her, you should not speak to her and if you should speak to her, you must watch over yourself."\(^\text{11}\)

In Aṅguttara Nikāya\(^\text{12}\) Lord Buddha is depicted as giving a sermon regarding the nature of women in disparaging words.

Women -folk are uncontrolled Ananda, Women-folk are envious, Ananda; Women-folk are greedy, Ananda, Women-folk are weak in wisdom, Ananda. That is the reason that is the cause why women-folk do not sit in a court of justice, do not embark on business, and do not reach the essence of the deed.

The accounts of institution of Bhikkhuni Sangha as depicted in Cullāvāgga\(^\text{13}\) does not seem to have been effected with as much ease as one would expect. According to these, the Buddha appears to have shown some reluctance to admit women into the Order. When Mahapajapati Gotami (his step-mother who nursed him and nurtured him when his

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\(^{11}\) DN II, (VRS), p.106.  
\(^{12}\) Kodhano, Ananda, matugamo; issuk: Ananda, matugamo; macharai, Ananda, mataugamo, dupanno, ananda matugamo - ayam kho, Ananda, hetu ayam paccayo, yena matugamo nera sabhayam nisidati na kammantam payojeti, na kambojam gaccati ti. (AN, II, NE, p.87)  
\(^{13}\) A., IV., 274 & Vin., II., 253.
mother passed away seven days after his birth) requested the Buddha to consent to the entry of women into his Order, he is said to have put her off three times, saying: 'Do not be interested O, Gotami, about the entry of women into my Order.'

But she did not loose her heart and she approached Lord Buddha again when he was in Kutagarasala (the gabled hall) of Vesali with a large group of Sākyān women, who wanted to be nuns, dressed as nuns, shave their heads, and walked barefooted. They arrived at the Buddha's door crying, with swollen feet. Ananda is moved by their determination and sincerity, and pleads their case with the Buddha. The Buddha at first refused to ordain the women, although he admitted that women who live the monastic life can attain arhatship.

Eventually, Ananda changed the Buddha's mind, and the women were ordained as nuns. However, he also warned that his teachings, which would have lasted a thousand years, will only last five hundred years because of the ordination of the nuns in the following words.

If Ananda, woman had not received permission to go out from the household life and enter the homeless state under the doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata, then would the pure religion, Ananda, have lasted long, the good law would have stood fast for a thousand years. But since, Ananda, woman have now received that permission, the pure religion, Ananda, will not last so long; the good law will now stand fast for only five hundred years.

The hostile of attitude to women there are using a more holistic approach to understanding as many modern scholars handed down from antiquity. Therefore the

14 Alam Gotami. Ma te rucci matugamassa tathagatappavedite dhammavinaye agarasma anagariyam pabbajja ' ti. Ibid.
15 Bhabbo Ananda matugamo tathagatappavedite dhammavinaye agarasma anagariyam pabbajitva sotapattiphalam ' bi sakadagamiphalam ' bi anagamiphalam ' bi arahattaphalam ' bi sacchikatun ' ti. A.IV.276 & Vin., II., 254.
Tripitaka should be the only appropriate historical reference in which relating to women status. In this context, there was one of the key to find out that the strongly references to discriminate against women in which the legend of Prajapati Gotami who later on became Bikkhuni, in which the Lord Buddha showed the strong disapproval of the ordination of women as requested by Prajapati Gotami.

The Buddha also insisted that women have to take upon themselves the following eight rules (atthagarudhamma) which place the nuns in a position decidedly subordinate to the monks:\footnote{To summarize the contents on the above that the eight rules according to the Cullavagga given the eight rules as a safeguard for women.}

a. 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.

b. A nun must not spend the rains (Vassavasa) in a residence where there are no monks.

c. Every half month a nun should desire two things from the Order of Monks: the asking as to the date of the Observance (uposatha) day, and the coming for the exhortation (bhikkhunovada).

d. After the rains (Vassavasa) a nun must 'invite' (pavarana) before both Orders in respect of three matters, namely what was seen, what was heard, what was suspected.

e. A nun, offending against an important rule, must undergo manatta discipline for half a month before both Orders.

f. When, as a probationer (sikkhamana), she has trained in the six rules (cha dhamma) for two years, she should seek higher ordination (Upasampada) from both Orders.
g. A Monk must not be abused or reviled in any way by a nun.

h. From today, admonition (*Vacanapatha*) of monks by nuns is forbidden, admonition of nuns by monks is not forbidden.

On the above that eight rules should be the fundamental doctrine for the modern scholars to critical reading through the *Tripiṭaka*. But for the writer clearly shows that a part of the problem toward women that because the *Lord Buddha* to know thoroughly psychophysiology, correlations between the mind, behavior and bodily mechanisms of women. Moreover, by the influence of social tradition and religious, etc, at that time the Buddha has given the eight rules as a safeguard for women only (understand more in the next point of women status in Pure Land *Buddhism*).

Why does the *Buddha*, who is usually willing to bend over backwards to promote the growth and enlightenment of every person, suddenly so hesitant and gloomy when confronted with the opportunity to institutionalize a path towards enlightenment for women?

Looking at the problem from different angles, various plausible explanations of *Buddha's* unwillingness to initiate a *Bhikkhuni* Order could be given. The immediate objection was possibly *Mahapajapati* herself. Since she used to live a luxurious life of the palace and had never been acquainted with the experience of hardship, it was almost unimaginable to see the queen going from house to house begging for meals. It might be out of pity and compassion that the Buddha refused her request to join the Order because he could not bring himself to the point of letting her undergo such a hard and strenuous life in the wilderness.

Among other reasons given in this context, there are considerations such as the safety of women. To allow women to spend homeless lives required a great many precautions and protections. Women, being thought of as the desirously sex, invited many dangers. The *Buddha* was highly concerned about this fact.
Women were considered as the centre of household life. If permission was given for them to enter the Order and very many opted to do so, it would end in a number of serious problems. The home would lose its main foundation and moreover even the community of monks would lose the support of lay households which would not have women in them to carry on acts of supporting the Saṅgha by providing them with food etc.

All these arguments clearly point out that the Buddha's reluctance to admit women to the Order was not based on any inferiority concept about women. Buddhism placed the mother and father in the same position by comparing them to gods. Perhaps the elevation of the mother to the status of a Buddha living in one's own house as found in certain Buddhist countries such as Srilanka points out the respect and regard paid to the women-folk known popularly as the "mother sex."

Some recent commentators have argued that this incident never really happened, but was invented later in order to justify changes to the status of the Bhikkhunis which were made to bring the practice of institutional Buddhism more in line with socially accepted norms. In other words, the Buddha thought of men and women as equal, and made the Bhikkhus and bhikkhunis equal. After his death, the society could not deal with the existence of a group of women which were acknowledged to be equal with or superior to most men. Monastic Buddhism had to be acceptable to lay society, because the monasteries were completely supported by the lay people. Therefore, various rules were made to lower the status of the Bhikkhunis, and this story was invented to justify the change. This explanation of the story of the Buddha's reluctance is possibly correct. The scriptures were not written down until four hundred years after the Buddha's death, which gave plenty of time for small changes to creep into the stories.

So far as the imposition of eight rules (Atthāgaradhamma) on the Bhikkhunis by Lord Buddha are concerned, these rules should be treated as the gestures of submission on the
part of the Bhikkunis, but in no way diminish the Bhikkunis' ability to meditate and follow the path towards enlightenment. The Buddha may have seen this as the best way to preserve women's ability to work towards enlightenment within the confines of their society. These commentators generally explain the Buddha's statement about the amount of time his teaching would survive by saying that the Buddha felt that it was as valuable to reach twice as many people (both men and women) for half the length of time (five hundred rather than one thousand). It is possible that the Buddha thought his teaching would end sooner if women were ordained because he thought that society simply wouldn't accept a teaching which allowed that much freedom for women.

All commentators agree that what was new and important about Buddha's teachings about women was that women could attain arhatship and that women could do so by following basically the same path as men. Certain limitations were made on the social equality of bhikkhus and bhikkunis, and these limitations were probably made in order to increase societal acceptance of the monastic orders.

3. The Women Status in the Pure Land Buddhism

During its long history, Buddhism has evolved in various forms. The teachings of the Lord Buddha regarding codes of conduct, guidelines practices, and modes of teachings, meditative fables and philosophies have varied greatly over time and place.

According to the fundamental Buddhist principle whatever variations are there in the teachings of the Lord Buddha are natural and proper. All are necessary responses to the great variety of circumstances in which Buddhism has been propagated. Therefore, Pure Land Buddhism is the result of such developments and is a branch of main stream Mahāyāna Buddhism and one of the most popular schools in the Far East.

Pure Land Buddhism is based on the three Pure Land Sūtras, in which with the passage of time many commentaries were composed in the Pure Land Sūtras. Besides,
collections of believers’ biographies, Pure Land literature includes other types of works designed to promote faith in the Pure Land teachings.

So far as the question of the place of women in the Pure Land Buddhism is concerned our major concerned will be larger *Sukhāvatī-vyūha-Sūtra*, also called the ‘Aparimitayur Sūtra’, particularly the “thirty fifth vow” of the *Bodhisattva Dharmakara*,¹⁸ whose vows encompass his aspiration to become a Buddha and create an all inclusive Buddha-land to which (apparently) any being has the opportunity to be re-born into and where the aspirant may then achieve enlightenment under ideal practice conditions.

However, the attitude of women status in Buddhism is still the problem of controversy. The first group often holds that, Buddhism like other religions has placed an important role in perpetuating subordination of women that position and women status in India with the advent of Buddhism became worse, not better, as compared to their position and status in pre-Buddhist period. The secondly, trend of thought often advocates that the Buddha actually was an upholder of the doctrine of equality of sexes, that men and women were placed by the Buddha on the same footing and so on.

According to the Buddhist teachings, the purpose of the Lord Buddha appeared in this world was for the welfare and happiness of the many sentient beings, but not for any special living being. In this connection, the most important purpose of the doctrine of the Buddha is to aim at helping living beings in destroying all their fate and suffering so as to attain liberation and happiness in this common life.

¹⁸ As told in the *Sukhāvatīvyūhasūtra*, or *Sūtra of the Land of Bliss* (commonly known as the Pure Land Sūtra), countless eons ago, a king named Dharmakāra met a Buddha named Lokeśvararāja and renounced the throne to pursue the Bodhisattva path, who after witnessing the suffering of sentient beings, spent thousands of millions of years studying all the Buddha lands. Dharmakara then made forty-eight vows (pranidhana). He declared that he would not attain Buddhahood unless his vows for a perfect Pure Land known as Sukhāvatī, where all beings would advance along the Buddhist path and never again fall back into the cycle of rebirth, were accomplished. Once his vows were accomplished, Dharmakara Bodhisattva became Amitābha Buddha. He is now teaching the Dharma in his Pure Land and helping all who are truly sincere in their personal vows to be reborn there.
Additionally, in somewhere had to say that the women must actually come to despise their status to reborn as males. But, needless to say that in most of the other vows in the Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra are promised to all sentient beings that who will be reborn or aspire to reborn in the Sukhāvatī of the Amitābha Buddha. In this connection, we come to known that, there are without any mentioned that the women could not reborn in the pure land of Amitābha Buddha as a women form.

In any case, according to the historical implications of the discussion there are still several serious remaining relating to the women status in Buddhist society. Therefore, in order to judge the Buddhist doctrine in objectively, we should come to know and understand clearly the social background at the time of the Buddha, etc. Firstly, on the realm of history and thought, it was obvious that in ancient ages, generally speaking that; the king and emperors often respected men and looked down women. Women had no chance for freedom and equality, but they had no right to demand.

With the advent of Buddhism, it was true that the Buddha really opened the free door for women. Furthermore, the Buddha actually liberated them from the system of ancient Indian social religious thought by teaching them a way of life of a Buddhist to help them destroy their fate and reform their status in family as well as in society. Therefore, with the advent of Buddhism; after having followed Buddhism, there were many women attaining sainthood. So, we can affirm to say that, if someone considered that Buddhism was considered to look down women, it should be unfair and incorrect. Secondly, according to the realm of education and psychology some critics hold that the Buddha hurt and behaved unequally to women. Why was it that? Because, the Buddha only accepted women enter to the order when the lovely disciple of the Buddha, Ven. Ananda, made the third request of women’s behalf for the benefits of women.
Besides, the *Buddha* forced women to respect monks according to the *eight-special-rules* (P/S: *guru-dharma*)\(^{19}\) formulated by the *Buddha* himself, and then, the *Buddha* seemed not to be happy and satisfactory after giving admission to women to enter the Saṅgha. Because, the *Buddha Dharma* would be shorted five hundred years in its existed time, this declaration by the *Buddha*.

On the above that mentioned, obviously, the eight special rules are actually necessary to all *Buddhist* nuns as well as to the existence of the *Buddhist Saṅgha*. Therefore, these eight rules should be considered as the natural principles of religious life. Moreover, the *Buddha* was indeed accepted women to be a member of the *Saṅgha*. In this case, must be the great compassion and loving kindness of the *Buddha* who has done for the real bliss and happiness to women and living beings.

However, nowadays people are often very confused about their ethical conduct and the way to attain peace in mind. So how do we bring our conduct and the way to get peace in line with our intention? With the passage of time many commentaries were composed on the *Pure Land Sūtras*. Besides collections of believers' biographies, Pure Land literature includes other types of works designed to promote faith in the Pure Land teachings. In this connection, relating to the doctrine of faith in order to offer a good condition for women to be reborn in the Pure Land of *Amitābha Buddha* was alleged blessing of never being reborn as women again. According to Paul Harrison declared the three conditions in stated that:

\(^{19}\) According to the *Cullavagga* given the eight rules as a safeguard for women as follow listed such as: (1) A nun must always show deference to monks; (2) A nun should not spend the rain-retreat (*vassa*) in a place where there are no monks; (3) The monthly *posadha* ceremony should be led by a monk; (4) At the end of the rain-retreat a nun must appear before the assemblies of monks and nuns to report on any actual or suspected breaches of the disciplinary rules; (5) If a nun commits a serious offence she must undergo expiation before both assemblies; (6) After her two-year period of training as a novice (*śrāmaneri*) is complete, a nun must be ordained by both assemblies; (7) A nun must never offend or insult a monk; (8) Nuns must never admonish a monk, but monks may admonish a nun.
“The necessary conditions are that, when they hear the name of Amitābha, they should (1) have faith (presumably faith in Amitābha and his salvific power) and (2) they should conceive the aspiration to awakening (bodhicitta). In others words, they should spurn, shrink from, despise or loathe their womanhood. The Bhikṣu Dharmākara is only putting his enlightenment at stake if those women who reject womanhood and wish to be reborn as men are again reborn as women, even though they have fulfilled the other conditions after hearing his name. That there may indeed be other women who fulfill the first two conditions and do not wish to cease being women is conceivable, but the essential point is this: that the blessing offered by this vow is of the sort that we might call “generalized”.\(^{20}\)

On the about that mentioned, could to say that the vows, in which advantages as a feeling happiness and blessings enjoyed not only reborn in the pure land of Amitābha Buddha, but with on the other realm of the Buddhas too. In Mahāyāna mentioned that there are tenth directions of the Buddha-field.

So far as the question of the place of women in the Pure Land Buddhism is concerned our major concern will be the Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha Sūtra, also called the Aparimitayur Sūtra, particularly the “Thirty Fifth Vow” of the Bodhisattva Dharmakara,\(^{21}\) whose vows encompass his aspiration to become a Buddha and create an all-inclusive Buddha-Land to which (apparently) any being has the opportunity to be reborn into and where (he) may then achieve enlightenment under ideal practice conditions.


\(^{21}\) As told in the Sukāvatīvūhasūtra, or Sūtra of the Land of Bliss (commonly known as the Pure Land Sutra), countless eons ago, a king named Dharmakāra met a Buddha named Lokēśvararāja and renounced the throne to pursue the bodhisattva path, who after witnessing the suffering of sentient beings, spent thousands of millions of years studying all the Buddha lands. Dharmakara then made forty-eight vows (pranidhama). He declared that he would not attain Buddhahood unless his vows for a perfect Pure Land known as Sukāvatī, where all beings would advance along the Buddhist path and never again fall back into the cycle of rebirth, were accomplished. Once his vows were accomplished, Dharmakara Bodhisattva became Amitābha Buddha. He is now teaching the Dharma in his Pure Land and helping all who are truly sincere in their personal vows to be reborn there.
This particular vow expresses Dharmakara’s aspiration to make his Pure Land available to the women who are currently living in samsāra. In Sanskrit the text\textsuperscript{22} reads: “Sacen me bhagavan bodhiprāptasya samantā aprameyāsammukhyeyācintyātulyāparimāṇesṣu buddhaksṣetressu yāḥ. striyo mama nāmadheyāṁ ś śrutvā prasādaṁ. samjanayeṣyur [Fujita: saṃ. jānayeṣyur] bodhicittam cotpādayeyuh strībḥāvaṁ. ca vijugupseran [Fujita: vijugupseran] jātivyativṛttāḥ samānāḥ saced dvītīyaṃ strībḥāvatilabheraṁ mā tāvad ahma anuttarāṁ samyaksambodhim abhisambudhyeyam”.

It has been translated in the following way.

“May I not gain possession of perfect awakening if, once I have attained Buddhahood, any woman in the measureless, inconceivable world systems of all the Buddhas in the ten regions of the universe, hears my name in this life and single-mindedly, with joy, with confidence and gladness resolves to attain awakening, and despises her female body, and still, when her present life comes to an end, she is again reborn as a woman”\textsuperscript{23}

From the above translation, it is apparent that life as a woman is a terrible state of existence and in order to save women, Bodhisattva Dharmakara has made this particular vow which specifically states that his Buddhahood (and therefore the creation of his Pure Land, called Sukhāvatī) would depend upon the provision that any woman desiring to be reborn there would not suffer her next re-birth in a female body, i.e., she will endeavor to renounced and avoid her future rebirths in female body in order to attain enlightenment. In this way this particular vow of Bodhisatta Dharmakara portraits Pure Land sect of Buddhism as woman hater.

\textsuperscript{22} Ashikaga, 1965: 18; cf. Fujita, 1980: 35.

There are some of the texts in Buddhist history and doctrine has been interpreted as a rationale for discrimination against women and described their position in widely accepted. We can come to know how Buddhist texts became a justification for the role and status of women from ancient time to the present. So, the important ideas in revealing about a women status in Sūtras such as:

Firstly, the early Buddhist doctrine such as Samyutta-Nikāya\(^{24}\), in which mentioned the position of women in stated that whoever has such a vehicle, whether a woman or a man, shall indeed by means of that Vehicle come to nirvana. In this context, its means that the same teachings were given by the Buddha to his male and female disciples, the same spiritual path was opened to all the same goal pointed out.

Secondly, Aṅguttara-Nikāya\(^{25}\) says that womenfolk are uncontrolled, envious, greedy, and weak in wisdom, etc. Some Suttas have gone further saying that women are like fishermen…Their flattery is a net. Men are like fish; caught by the net…the sharp knife of the killer is to be feared. The women’s knife is to be feared even more. It is the essence of the woman-centric discourse in the Theravada Buddhist doctrine.

Thirdly, the early Buddhist text like Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra (well know as the perfect wisdom in 80,000 lines) given stated that every Buddhist should aspire to become a fully enlightened being that is a Buddha. Such an aspirant is called a Bodhisattva. In this context, the main idea is that laymen and laywomen can be a Bodhisattva. In this connection, the doctrine of emptiness (sunyata) allows all human beings equal in practicing the doctrine of the Buddha.

\(^{24}\) Samyutta Nikāya (collection of Clustered Discourses) is the third of the five Nikāyas in the Sutta Pitaka. In Samyutta Nikaya consists of 2,889 discourses, classified into 56 samyuttas, in which arranged in a special order by subject matter uttered by the Buddha and in response to different personalities, e.g. deities, Mara the evil one, nuns, Brahmins, king of Kosala, etc.

\(^{25}\) The Aṅguttara Nikāya which contains some stories in which contains list of women in the Saṅgha rather than stories is the central figures.
According to Richard Tennes has mentioned that “The Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sastra articulates “three obligations” inherent upon women, which demonstrate this cultural attitude: “as regards proper conduct for a women, if she is a child she should be subordinate to her father and mother, as a young woman, subordinate to her husband, and in old age, subordinate to her children”.

Fourthly, in the Lotus Sūtra (S: Saddhama-puṇḍarīka-Sūtra; C: 妙法蓮華経) represented that the eighth years old daughter (龍女) of the Dragon King (S: nāgarāja; C: 龍王) changes into a male Bodhisattva and then at once becomes a Buddha.

Fifthly, the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra records that the Buddha vowed, just after his own enlightenment to go on living until the Saṅgha of monks, nuns, male, female, lay disciples had been established and had proven successful. Success would be proved when all members of the Saṅgha had thoroughly learned the doctrines were fully practicing the disciplines. In this context, the Buddha also declared stated that the Buddha wanted to have an order for nuns. Furthermore, according to the Mahāparinibbāna-sutta stated that, soon after his awakening the Buddha proclaimed that he would not pass away until he had nun disciples who are wise and learned.

In the light of the above statement, we can conclude that the women’s status in Buddhism in general and women status in Pure Land Buddhism in particular influenced each other in regard to the position of Buddhist women over the time. That is why the


27 In the Lotus Sūtra (Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra) there are twenty eight chapters and elsewhere in Sankrit version there are only twenty seventh chapters, the especially that in the chapter twelve depicted that the daughter of nāga king Sāgara who is only eight years old, but wise and her faculties are sharp, especially she also well knows all the faculties and deeds of sentient beings. She attained the power of recollection (S: smṛti). She preserved all the profound secret treasures of the Buddhas and enters in deep meditation, in which well capable of discerning all dharmas. Then, she attained the stage of Bodhicitta and non-retrogression, etc, her virtues, thought, merciful and compassionate are perfectly to attained a harmonious mind of enlightenment.

28 DN 16 at DN II 105, 8: na ... parinibbāyissāmi yāva me bhikkhuniyo na sāvikā bhavissantā viyattā visāradā bahussutā.
Buddha stated that women and men should be equal in the possibility of enlightenment. Therefore, in the time of the Buddha presents, the women ordained as equal members in monastic community. There are many great enlightened and accomplished Bikkunis, even an early lay Buddhist woman such as Visakha also becomes enlightened in the first stage of sotāpanna (C: 入流).  

Furthermore, according to Rev. Patti Nakai has explained the thirty fifth vow differently. In doing so she gives reference to Akira Hataya of Otani University, Japan who, according to her, used to explain it in these words “the use of the word nyonin (女人) in Chinese translations of Buddhist Texts, though normally read as a compound noun “female-person” (i.e., woman), could also be read as an adjective and noun memeshii hito, “effeminate (weak, wimpy) person referring to either a man or a woman.” She further avers that ‘from this, I came to feel that Buddhist texts are not trying to exclude women from the path to enlightenment, but rather the teachings admonish both sexes not to fall into the negative traits stereotyped as “feminine” – that is, being cowardly, manipulative, or parasitic on others.

However, Richard Tennes puts forth another explanation behind the inclusion of the thirty-fifth vow into the text of the Larger Sūtra. According to him, “it may have come from the commonly accepted notion of the ‘five obstructions’. This concept which originated in India attempted to explain why women were not capable of attaining five

29 Visakha was the first female lay disciple of the Buddha and also the chief female lay benefactor of the Sangha. The Pubbarama monastery which dedicated with love and reverence to the Sangha was one of the favorite places of stay of the Buddha in the later twenty years of Buddha’s life. Visakha was well respected in the Sangha for her wisdom, generosity and for her managerial skills to took charge of the Bhikkuni Sangha and managed it efficiently. Visakha was authorized to arbitrate the issues and disputes that arose among the nuns; and between nuns and monks. After listening to a sermon delivered by the Buddha, Visakha, her grandfather and her five-hundred companions attained the first of the four stages, "Stream enterer" (Sotāpanna), that is the first stages toward the realization of liberation, leading to Arahatship. Visakha led a long and healthy life; and lived for over a hundred years.


particular states, that of Brahma, Indra, Mara, Cakravartin king, or Buddha. These human and divine entities, originating in Hindu thought, have been transformed in Buddhism overcoming into protecting deities.” He further opines that “whether or not the doctrine of the ‘five obstructions’ accounts for the actual inclusion of the thirty-fifth vow, the doctrine continued to be used in interpreting or rationalizing the vow’s existence.”

Richard Tennes and James Dobbins agree on the following assertion that “…it would be wrong to think that [Pure Land Buddhism’s] overtures to women were based on a principle of religious equality with men. Rather, Pure Land doctrine contained some of the same androcentric assumptions of other forms of Buddhism that relegated women to an inferior position. Hence, women who embraced its teachings had to endure the censure of their feminine identity on the one hand and to devise for themselves a constructive ideal of Pure Land on the other.”

For these reasons, it has come to light now that there were many contexts in the explicitly identified sources relating to the women’s status. Therefore, the specification about the feminine status identity should be relative to the culturally constructed and historical concept practices between in Theravāda doctrine and Mahāyāna doctrine. Thus, the aspirant of the idea of women status in the Pure Land should highlight the significance of a way to practice could provide a useful in the concepts Buddhist understanding in this moment life of what would be a pronouncement for the benefits of women in Pure Land Buddhist practice.

Moreover, the *thirty-fifth vow* in the *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra* clearly proposes what should be a widely provision accepted doctrinal for benefits of women in the specific Pure Land context of this society movement. It is also stated in this regard that this should be the light and opportunity for the status of women influenced the actual religious experience that who followed Pure Land *Buddhist* teachings.

To conclude what has been discussed in this chapter, it may be opined that the status of women in *Buddhism* has never been uniform. Since its inception, it has been dominated by cultural and doctrinal bias against women. However, it is a fact that women were involved in *Buddhist* activities almost from the very beginning, not only as fully ordained nuns, but also as sponsors and supporters of the communities (*Saṅgha*) of ordained practitioners. In the formulation of the Pure Land teachings, women were provided with an opportunity to bypass, through the provision of the “*thirty-fifth vow*”, what had become a widely accepted doctrinal truth.