CONCLUSION

1. Position of Buddhist laywomen in Modern society:

Since, in today’s world, the role of women in society is an issue of worldwide attention, it is a good opportunity to look at it from a Buddhist perspective. We will look at the religious life of Buddhist laywomen and their position in some Buddhist countries when the position of women in Buddhist societies was better than its counterpart in non-Buddhist societies of Asia,

Buddhist practice, in its purest form, has no place for rituals. In most of the religious rituals the sex (i.e. male or female) is more important, precedence, religious purity and the factors alike. Later developments in some Buddhist countries have seen the emergence of some rituals, but even this kind of simple ritual has not given any importance to the sex of the devotee. Buddhist rituals usually involve simple forms of worship, chanting or symbolic offerings, and all of these are allowed for men and women on equal terms.

The important role women play in community development, though sometimes overlooked, is well documented and will grow as women develop greater confidence in their abilities to move forward. By networking in their local communities, women spiritual practitioners can provide each other with encouragement and support for the spiritual values they share and learn to appreciate their differences. By developing solidarity on an international level, women can affect great benefit in the world through a sharing and mutual infusion of spiritual values directed at personal and social change. By bridging religious differences, women with the religious life set an example
for the people of the world to emulate in overcoming strife and discovering
commonalities in the human heritage on the deepest spiritual level.

"The Buddhist women’s movement emphasizes women’s social
problems along with the traditional agenda of spiritual liberation. It is
inspired by both the awakening social awareness of practicing Buddhists and
the awakening spiritual consciousness of women discovering, individually
and collectively, their own history of neglect and oppression, a history that
must be reversed in order to ensure that women are optimally engaged in the
continually challenging process of social renewal. Women’s increasingly
active engagement in social and spiritual renewal may yield quite a
revolutionary outcome."\(^{331}\)

The dialogue between Buddhism and feminism is a confluence of rich
narratives. Just as Buddhist perspectives on personal development,
nonviolence, and ethics can contribute toward social regeneration in Western
countries, feminist perspectives can contribute to social renewal in Buddhist
countries. Women’s experiences are being articulated and analyzed in ways
that may contribute to a rethinking and revitalization of Buddhists thoughts
and culture. Rather than investing in gold statues and temples, for example,
women are interested in creating more childcare programs, literacy programs,
meditation courses, leadership programs, health care training, Buddhist
hospice programs, rehabilitation centers, disaster relief programs, and creative
expressions of spiritual practice. As the marginalized enter the stream, they
inevitably change the stream. Women can move freely across sectarian and
ethnic boundaries and pool their energies as never before. New dimensions of

\(^{331}\) Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Buddhist Women Across Cultures, Sri Satguru, Publications, 2000, p. 31
understanding and benefit will surely open up as women in the life of Dharma find their own unique and individual voices for virtually the first time in 2,500 years of Buddhist history.

The Buddha recognizes the fact that these do not constitute the whole of her life. Buddha laid down a code of good living for women, to serve as a complement to the good life already enjoyed in his religion, to all his followers irrespective of their sex.

It is said that a good lay woman endowed with religious devotion, moral virtue and liberality as well as wisdom and learning, makes a success of her life in this world.

Social welfare programs directed by Buddhist women are having immediate constructive results for women in developing countries, including institutions for educating and training women, refugee relief projects, women’s shelters, health care projects, counseling centers, economic development projects, and meditation retreat centers. As important and compassionate as social service is, however, it would be unfair to promote the idea that women do social work while men meditate; it is not necessary to make a choice between mediation and service to humanity.

Such a virtuous lady who possesses religious devotion, cultivates virtue, is endowed with wisdom and learning and is given to charity makes a success of her life in this very existence. The duties of a woman as wife are to lead to domestic peace and concord. They are calculated to keep the family administration, the security of the family economic condition and its stability.

The good laywoman has also her duties for the development of her religious life, religious devotion (saddhā), moral virtue (sīla) and a generous disposition (cāga).
Thus a very different model of non-monastic lay Buddhism is being created among Western Buddhist. In this model, for lay as well as for monastic practitioners of the religion, the heart of their involvement in Buddhism is a commitment to the practice of meditation and the study of Buddhist teachings. They may not engage in such disciplines as intensively as monks and nuns do, but they do them frequently and, at intermittent intervals, quite intensively. Many Western Buddhist laywomen, using this method of combining worldly life with serious Buddhist practice, have actually been able to pursue more advanced meditation practices and philosophical studies compared to their counterparts in Asian countries.

The conversation between Buddhist and feminist voices necessarily takes place across several crucial divisions, all of which are formidable. It moves not only between East and West but between secular and religious, male and female, traditional and modern. Though difficult to negotiate, these divisions are well worth exploring, for they reveal the diverse perspectives at play in the identities of many contemporary Western women.

Women who join the order are committed not only to their own personal spiritual practice, meditation dharma study, devotional practice, and observance of the precepts, but also are committed to the life of the order itself. They meet regularly on a weekly, monthly, and annual basis to meditate, communicate, and discuss matters of mutual and spiritual interest. A monthly order journal contains reports on the practice of Dharmacharinis and Dharmacharjis worldwide. Friendships, and living and working relationships, are cultivated wherever possible. These may be temporary, such as evening Dharma study groups or weekend retreats in the countryside, or more permanent, such as running a residential retreat center.
The Buddhist Order has both men’s and women’s wings, reflecting an important aspect of how the order has evolved over time. For women, it is an opportunity to explore and discover their potential apart from men, to find their own way of doing things, rather than automatically taking the men’s lead. In single sex situations, women can concentrate on their own spiritual, intellectual, and practical affairs without conflict or tension stemming from male, female reactions and issues.

In principle, women can play as big a part as they wish in ensuring that the Dharma flourishes in the modern world, based on effectively going for refuge. For personal development, it may be sufficient to know one essential Dharma teaching, such as “all conditioned things are impermanent,” focusing the mind single pointedly on this phrase. But to share the Dharma with others and help create facilities where others can practice meditation, it is necessary to be articulate, practical, and well versed in the teachings. We may also need to be able to converse with bank managers and property dealers, and other practical matters. In Mahāyāna terms, we need to cultivate (upāya kauśalya) skill in means. Otherwise, although we may be able to transform ourselves, we can do very little to help transform the world.

In many parts of the world, women are still heavily conditioned by society to think of themselves primarily as mothers and caregivers of families. Women and children must be educated to believe that many things are possible for them. A special responsibility falls on Western and Eastern Dharma sisters and brothers to help Dharma sisters in need of greater education, both secular and religious.

In addition to addressing possible deficiencies in secular education, those who think of themselves as “laywomen” must be on the lookout for any unhelpful elements in their social conditioning if they are to become effective
in working for the Dharma. Possibly one of the greatest contributions laywomen can make to the survival and spread of the Buddhadharma is to cease blind support of the Bhikkhu Saṅgha.

If being a laywoman in Asia means feeling duty bound to serve and venerate the Bhikkhu Saṅgha under any circumstances, then it may be better to give up thinking of oneself as a laywoman and to think more in terms of being a woman in Dharma who goes for refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha “for as long as life lasts.” The ideal image of the Buddhist laywoman is not only to fulfill their responsibilities and duties in the family and society, but also to participate in religious affairs, for example, take part in daily worship, go regularly to the temple, and give alms to the priest at the temple. Some send their children to Sunday Dharma classes for religious education, they attend meditation and Buddhadharma classes at the monastery, and they contribute to roles within religious communities and religious tradition.

Nowadays, in Western countries, most women have a good job, high education, and high position in society. But they often confront many problems in family affairs when fulfilling their duties as both a mother and a wife. As a woman in a high position, her job demands a sense of duty and accountability; she does not have adequate time to look after her family. So she wins much but loses, too. Many of western women get divorced and lose the chance of having a happy and healthy family and successful children, although, they are doing well in society by occupying many positions such as policewomen, directors, actresses, etc. They are even first in many artistic works.

Buddhist spirituality always supports women, bolstering them to develop their abilities and advising them to practice more and more compassion and love toward humankind. For instance, in ancient China, an
emperor Wu Ze Tian (武則天) was not only successful in her political rule; she was also successful in supporting people, religion and her nation as well. With modern life, women must confront handling the benefits of material life, money and reputation, because they can least to social evils and corruption when they have power in their hands. Lord Buddha said:

"We live happily indeed, free from greed among the greedy! Among people who are greedy, let us dwell free from greed!"332

And on women's way to serve society, there are some people who support them, but there are some who do not support them. Therefore, women often suffered and fell lost. Sometimes, they are in the zenith of life, but sometimes they are in the lowest. Thereby, they are often under stress, losing and winning. According to Buddha's teaching, the root of all losses and wins is greed, hatred and ignorance. The best way to overcome all greed, hatred and ignorance is by practicing virtuous behavior. Buddha stated:

"Victory breeds enmity; the vanquished one dwells in sorrow; the composed person lives happily, disregarding both victory and defeat."333

And:

"Blessed indeed are we who live among those who hate, hating no one; amidst those who hate, let us dwell without hatred."334

As the Buddha suggested, good people need:

"For the sake of oneself, or for the sake of another, one should not long for a son, wealth or a kingdom. He who does not crave success or prosperity by wrongful means is indeed virtuous, wise and honorable."335

332Dhp., C, XV. Verse No. 199.
333Ibid., Verse, No. 201.
334Ibi., Verse, No. 197.
335Dhp, C, VI, Verse No. 84.
According to Buddhism, a human being is his own boss. The goal of the teaching of Buddha is to show them the truth of suffering, its cause, its cessation and the way to the cessation of suffering from those aggregates by themselves but not distinguished by male or female.

It is said that, the encounter between Buddhist and feminist ideas has spawned a Buddhist women's movement that embraces individuals of many cultures, united by their Buddhist values and feminist commitments. With shared values of compassion and loving kindness, a sense of immediacy, faith in women's potentialities, and a willingness to step out of familiar conceptual frames, Buddhist women around the world have initiated intercultural dialogue on a deeply personal, deeply spiritual level in the religious life. Women are proving the immense value of listening to different voices and learning from the wisdom of each. They are ready to explore a new mode of spirituality that is open-hearted, inclusive, wise, and genuinely kind.

2. Purpose of Women's education through the image of Queen Śrīmālā:

Education is everybody's human right. In fact, education of women is to be considered more important than that of men. The University Education Commission has rightly remarked: "There cannot be an educated people without educated women. If general education had to be limited to men or to women, that opportunity should be given to women, for them it would more surely be passed on to the next generations."336

In course of history the role of women changes from time to time depending upon the economic conditions and political structure of society. In the Buddhist literature we find that one of the remarkable features of ancient India was the high level of culture and social status which women enjoyed.

336 The University Education Commission, New Delhi India, 1948-48
The Buddhist women were allowed access to different branches of knowledge. There are evidences to suggest that the gifted ones among them often took part even in religious and philosophical discussions.

Today, when the role of women in society is an issue of worldwide interests it must be interesting for us to re-look at it from a Buddhist perspective. Lord Buddha’s teachings for human beings on what the world really is, what a man really is, on individuals’ problems, their causes, their cessation, their way to their cessation, and on spirits of individualized education, really imply the meaning of a way of education which has showed very clearly in the Tripiṭaka. Buddhism must be known as a way of life bringing peace and happiness for individuals as well as for their commonwealth, and must be regarded as a major subject of philosophy, psychology, and educational psychology. This new branch of education will offer people a new regard to values and attitude of life leading to the calm of desire and ill-will, and to the destruction of wrong perception and thought. This branch of education will help women analyze their own mind, behavior and trouble to find the right way to live: they will come to recognize that happiness does not ask them to do anything more than stopping their desires, and that the very present moment of the here-and-now is when they really are free from troubles, because it always is completely new.

The study of the image of a laity woman in the Śrīmālā sūtra has opened the new way to education for women. There is no acceptable excuse for denying women the opportunities to develop their fullest potential. 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 question of the position accorded to women in the main religious traditions of the world.
Provision of educational opportunities for women and girls has been an important part of the Buddhist's role in the field of education from early Buddhism to recent time. The history of women in Buddhism; the role of women, and the images of women from the Buddha's teachings through today, includes Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Zen, and Tibetan Buddhist traditions, through this a Buddhist women's education is shown.

Education for Buddhist women is a problem in the society of Buddhism. In the time of the Lord Buddha, the role of women was raised to be equal with men; the Sangha is either of monks or nuns, and either of layman or laywoman.

In ancient India the position of women does not appear to be very happy one. Generally, women seem to have been looked upon as being inferior to men. And, at times they were considered as being on the same level as the Sudras, the lowest of the four castes. Their freedom was extremely limited. The general view appears to be that they had to be under the care of parents in their childhood, under the protection of husbands in their youth; and in their old age they had to be under the control of their sons. Therefore, it was thought that they do not deserve any freedom. Their main role was considered to be that of housewives, managing the affairs in the house according to the wishes of their husbands.

Women did not have educational freedom. Education was not considered as being of any importance to women. Their religious freedom, too, was restricted. As they had only little freedom, their chances of performing meritorious religious rites, too, were very limited.

Buddhism does not restrict either the educational opportunities of women or their religious freedom. The Buddha unhesitatingly accepted that women are capable of realizing the Truth, just as men are. This is why he
permitted the admission of women into the Order, though he was not in favour of it at the beginning because he thought their admission would create problems in the Sasana. Once women proved their capability of managing their affairs in the Order, the Buddha recognized their abilities and talents, and gave them responsible positions in the Bhikkhuṇī Saṅgha. The Buddhist texts are the record of eminent saintly Bhikkhuṇīs, who were very learned and who were experts in preaching the Dhamma. Dhammadinna was one such Bhikkhuṇī, Khemā and Uppalavanṇā are two others.

In Buddhist countries in general, a man who is interested in spiritual training enters a monastery and has immediate access to in-depth literary, liturgical, and contemplative training; but the same evolution for women has somehow been less formal and systematic than that of men. Obviously, where there is lack of opportunities for higher academic training for women, fewer qualified teachers emerged. In the absence of highly qualified women teachers, women had less access to religious education, a cycle which was self-perpetuating.

Considering this point, it can be argued that if a woman has a higher education, has open mindedness, inquiring and alert mind, capable of seeing their fullest potential, has the curiosity to know the nature of the world around her, and has interest in history, religion and literature and also enjoys and values them, then her generations will learn these interest and attitudes from her.

Regarding the importance of women’s education, Edit Head, the famous Hollywood designer, stated in the forewords of Douglas Basil’s book: ‘Women in Management’: “Education is the greatest prerequisite for success for any women. In my own case, although I am now a designer for the movie industry and my formal education was not in design, the scholastic
preparation that I obtained in the university provided me with the confidence and understanding necessary for my life-long career.”

Universal education is a relatively recent development. In the past, females were usually educated in the home in those areas which were felt to be of practical concern for them, namely, cooking, sewing, childrearing, and skills related to livelihood. By and large, being proficient in knowledge was not seen as particularly necessary for women until modern times. For the most part, religious lore has been transmitted orally in the home and in the local religious setting.

We appreciate the associations of the world concerning education, health, and culture, which they have paralleled to the women’s movement; the NGO organizations, with their differing ideological backgrounds have organized women at the grassroots level in welfare and charity, and the services oriented to providing housing, health, education and skills training for income generating activities. These services are oriented toward meeting the practical needs of women in poverty to make them better mothers and wives. The history of NGOs over the last 25 years shows that they have been involved in getting better drinking water facilities, social welfare schemes such as tailoring and crèche children’s facilities, transport services for villages, the installation of street lights and the development and improvement of public health centers.

When the entry of women into formal education systems began and became established in the world was rather late in our history. This was due to the cultural and conditional situation at the time. In some Asian countries

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337 Marganred & Thomas, Women in Management, 1975, 48
338 Renuka Sharma, Other revolution, p. 173.
these practices did not begin until the time of 19th century, but gained wider acceptance only in the mid-20th century.\textsuperscript{339}

There are many women associations in the world today. These associations help to increase education for women and examine in-depth the role and goals of education in the process of national development towards a secular, socialist and democratic society and endorse new viewpoints of human rights in the struggle for freedom, education, hunger, ignorance and ill health.

In particular, the education of women developed in Western countries while in Eastern countries their education developed very slowly. As an example, we can look at India, in 1951. The percentage of female literates was basically nine percent and by 1991 it had grown to about 40 percent literate. Compared to the male population the picture is not very bright. In 1951, 27 percent of men were literate, while in 1991, 64 percent of men were literate. As a consequence there are a number of basic education programs and innovative experiments being conducted, mainly by the NGOs.\textsuperscript{340}

NGOs are an organization that can be very useful to the government of countries and those governments should co-operate with the NGOs in the areas of education and furthering the plight of women. Much has been done to raise community awareness of the importance of educating females. Participatory methods are now commonplace and used by NGOs and governments alike to promote greater grassroots participation in education. UNICEF has two major awareness-raising programmes.\textsuperscript{341}

\textsuperscript{339} N. Desai & U. Thakkar, Women in India society, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid, p.55.
\textsuperscript{341} R.C. Mishra, Women’s Education, p. 238.
Of the education problem, the Bhikkhu Thich Chon Thien states in his work: "The concept of personality revealed through the Pañcanikāya", he suggests that:

"If education is not based on a right concept of personality created by a regard of wisdom, it will lead to a wrong course of transferring empty knowledge and unsuitable things of education to students, and will bring sufferings to life. Dominated by self-thought and self-perception, all standards of value in this education can only create an imaginative world for men to live, but not reality itself. What can people expect from this world if not a fateful loss of hope? What can people expect from economics, politics, competition, together with desires, ill-will, illusion, hatred, etc. If not building up on Earth a colossal market for good, weapons of mass destruction, etc, bring harms and fears?" 342

The Bhikkhu Thich Chon Thien has found the way of education through the Buddha’s teachings, exactly like the law of Dependent Origination. He adds:

"If education is based on non-self thought regarding a man as a compounded thing of dependent Origination or the five aggregates, but not an entity, education will find a right way for “what to educate” and “how to educate” men; the role of education then is helping persons see what they really are, what the world really is, and get rid of all causes of troubles and sufferings from them for happiness in the here —and— now. This is a positive solution for “educational crisis." 343

As introduced above, Buddhism emphasizes Morality, Meditation, and Wisdom; these three categories are the process of development of beings;

343 Ibid, p. 275.
therefore, education focuses on wisdom as the knowledge and the goal of education. It is the process of education that is the main key to opening the solutions for resolving the crisis of modern life of people in general and of the education of women in particular.

Women’s participation and influence in religion, government, families, communities, the economy and the provision of services is considerably good. It leads to more equitable development, stronger families, better services, and better child health. In addition to its benefits for girls and women, education is a uniquely positive force with a wide-ranging impact on society and human development.

In short, education of Buddhist woman improves the lives of girls and women. It allows women greater control of their lives and provides them skills to contribute to their families and societies. It enables them to make decisions for themselves and to influence their family. It is this power that produces all the other developmental and social benefits.

Conclusion:

Buddhism, as one of the main religions on earth, has made great contribution to man and his life. Buddhist doctrine provides the ethical basis as well as an analytical insight for human beings helping them to get rid of all afflictions and sufferings. Generally speaking, Buddhism aims to show the cause of suffering and the path leading to cessation of suffering, achieve the real happiness that is why Buddhism is known as a doctrine of human life, a great religion for man’s sake.

People of all times always wish safety, peace and happiness for themselves. A system of human religion or culture must therefore bring safety, peace and happiness to human beings. Such a system of education,
religion, or such a course of culture, must be based on an ideal system of education, philosophy, psychology, and an ideal pattern of education. These important educational problems must come from a religion as Buddhism which tells the truth of man, life and the inseparable relationship between them.

If a man cannot realize the interrelationship among man to man, man to society, he cannot realize the true happiness, values of being a human and life. Such relationships are the basis of an ordered society which is very close to individual’s happiness in present.

There are values of the current education that need to be re-evaluated and clarified through the Lord Buddha’s teachings.

Lord Buddha said: “*Let the wise man guard his thoughts, for they are difficult to perceive, very artful, and they rush wherever they list: thoughts well guarded bring happiness*”\(^{344}\)

It is evident that everybody is born to be happy but not to suffer, to serve his practical purpose of happiness but not any other purpose that does not relate intimately to it. It is also evident that one is searching for truth of life because of his peace of mind is here only. So, the main object of Buddhism is men, and the basic aim of Buddhist education is to bring happiness and peace to all living beings.

The idea of woman’s dignity as the basis for rights and prerogatives distinguishes sex by the idea of women’s special responsibilities to exercise responsible stewardship in family and social and to treat all life with respect.

\(^{344}\) Dhp. Verse. 36
Buddhism is a spiritual tradition that focuses on personal spiritual development and the attainment of a deep insight into the true nature of life. Ultimately, the Buddhist understanding of human dignity is rooted in the idea that we are able to choose the path of self-perfection. We can, in other words, consistently make those difficult choices for creativity, growth and development. Buddhahood or enlightenment is the state of self-perfection or a condition of fully developed courage, wisdom and compassion. The idea that all people, all life, in fact have this potential is expressed by the concept, stressed particularly in the Mahāyāna tradition, that all living beings possess Buddha-nature.

It would be useful to see what light Buddhism sheds on the present chaotic situation, and what wisdom it offers for self-adjustment under modern conditions and for healthy family and interpersonal relations. Though criticism is often leveled that Buddhism is a life-denying ascetic ideal, and that it is antisocial and antipolitical, it would be remembered that Buddhism embraces in its dispensation not only monks, and nuns, but also male and female lay followers. The intellectual and disciplinary training of the laity is as important a concern in Buddhism as that of the monks. Therefore Buddhism offers a social and a political philosophy, the goal of which is the creation of a society where human rights are safeguarded, human enterprise is the key to success, resources are well distributed and justice reigns supreme. It is said that Buddhism is not just a religion or a philosophy, it is in fact, a whole civilization, a full-fledged multi-faceted philosophy of life, designed to meet the secular and spiritual needs of man.

From what have been mentioned above, it is worth pointing out that the image of the woman laity in Śrīmālā sūtra plays an important role in the study of women in Buddhism. In this context the image of woman is expressed
through two levels. The first is the image of the laywoman in secular life. In the family, she plays the role of a mother, of a daughter, and of a wife. The second is the image of the laywoman in the religious life. Here, the female is linked with the ultimate spiritual life and to their contribution to the development and survival of Buddhism, from the times of the Buddha right up to the present times.

In family, religion and charity work, laywomen are most influential behind the scenes. They play the role of wife, mother and follower and they exert great influence in these roles. For example, during the Buddha’s time, Queen Śrīmālā promoted children’s education and encouraged other talents as a part of her duty. She also accepts ten great vows advocating Mahāyāna Buddhism, teaching the Tathāgāta thoughts. Jīva, the mother of Kumārajīva, gave up her life in the palace and guided her son to become a monk. She educated him to become a great Buddhist master who contributed tremendously to Buddhist sūtra translation. Buddha’s aunt, Mahāprajāpati, brought up Prince Siddhartha. After the Buddha enlightenment, she led five hundred women from the Shakya tribe to become nuns. They had to be willing to forget their positions in life and where they came from and accept the eight rules for showing respect to monks. She contributed to the establishment of the Bhikkhuni Saṅgha. These women are good examples in the Buddhist community.

Women during the Buddha’s time were living in a much more unfortunate situation than the women of today. They were regarded as very low and mere child bearers. They had little authority at home and did not play any part in public activities at all. A large number of these women followed the courageous example of Mahāprajāpati and embraced the homeless life advocated by the Buddha. They decided to break out of their accustomed
roles and to achieve freedom not only from the moral, social, and domestic restraints, but also in the realm of spiritual endeavor.

Basically, the Śrīmālā-Sūtra and other early Mahāyāna scriptures teach that every Buddhist should aspire to become a fully enlightened being that is a ‘Buddha’. Such an aspirant is called a ‘Bodhisattva’, which means an ‘enlightened being’ (sattva) utterly committed to attaining full and perfect enlightenment (bodhi) at some future time. The Bodhisattva first aspires to attain Buddhahood, and then makes a formal resolve to do it. Laypeople might be Bodhisattvas just as well as clerics so long as the commitment is there, but the same practical impediments to the layperson’s success were still acknowledged, just as in the earlier literature. In the literature of some Buddhist schools of thought, family stories seem to have been developed around the personalities of some known family members from the early scriptures; a wife is advised to show her love by duties well-performed (though not specified), hospitality to family members, watching over the welfare of her husband, faithfulness, and industry in all matters. In return, she has a right to receive from her husband respect, courtesy, faithfulness, a certain amount of authority in the home, and gifts for her adornment.345 This is an advance over social norms that demand complete submissiveness, in that the wife has rights and is considered worthy of respect.

There are several Mahāyāna sūtras which have female Bodhisattvas. In these scriptures, the female figures are used to argue for a more equitable attitude towards the sexes based upon an accurate understanding of the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness.

In the Mahāyāna sūtras, women are symbolic of commitment to the traditional roles for females as being mothers, daughters and wives. They are

345 D. III. 190
the female Bodhisattvas, who live a worldly life but are dedicated to the Dharma and give generously for the support of the Saṅgha. They are absolutely vital to the existence of the religious community. They are also ideal women, worthy of being respected and who have responsibility towards the family members and the society.

It is said that Queen Śrīmālā, who speaks with the authority of a Buddha in the sutra named for her, is the best-known great female Bodhisattva. She is supremely wise and is therefore closely associated with wisdom as are all female Bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna literature.\(^\text{346}\)

Queen Śrīmālā as a compassionate Bodhisattva, she preached the teachings of the Buddha for the benefit and sake of living beings. Her love is never limited. As Vimalakīrti describes it to Mañjusrī:

"The love that is firm, its high resolve unbreakable like a diamond; the love that is never exhausted because it acknowledges voidness and selflessness; the love that is generosity because it bestows the gift of Truth without the tight fist of bad teachers; the love that is justice because it benefits immoral beings; the love that is tolerance because it protects both self and others; the love that is enterprise because it takes responsibility for all living beings; the love that is meditation because it refrains from indulgence in tastes; the love that is wisdom because it causes attainment at the proper time; the love that is liberative technique because it shows the way everywhere; the love that is without formality because it is pure in motivation; the love that is without deviation because it acts decisively; the love that is high resolve because it is free of passions; the love that is without deceit because it is not artificial; the love that is happiness because it

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\(^{346}\) Arvind Sharma, Women in World Religions, Indian Books Centre, p. 122

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introduces living beings to the happiness of a Buddha. Such, Mañjusri, is the great love of a Bodhisattva.”

Engaging in action is an important part of a Buddhist follower. This thesis tries to emphasize on both the organization’s work and the development of the Bikkhuṇī Saṅgha. Besides, the religious life of laywoman in Buddhism, in particular, and situation of women in society, in general, also has been demonstrated.

This work tries to introduce the image of a Buddhist lay woman, viz. Śrīmālā who found herself suddenly in ability to preaching the Buddhist Mahāyāna thought. Through her Buddhist practice she was able to realize that she could, depending on how she approaches to enlightenment and liberation, make an opportunity to create value to woman. She was able to convince all ladies in her kingdom took refuge in Buddha and became Buddhist lay women.

The ideal woman in this work likewise sought to find a way to use her capacities to contribute to the well-being of the secular life and the religious life. Since she still takes care for the family, kingdom, she also has deep faith in Buddha’s teachings.

In concrete, practical terms, this comes down to the idea that everyone has a mission a unique role that only she or he can play, a unique perspective to offer, a unique contribution to make happiness to human beings.

Through image of Queen Śrīmālā, the study of women’s religious life becomes particularly interesting and it suitable to conduct research on women in Buddhism.

347 The Vimalakīrti Sūtra, Ch. 7. P. 84