Since the ancient time women in every culture have become subject of subordination, suppression, and exploitation. Patriarchy and patriarchal mentality are causes for such kind of life of women. It is because in male-dominant society, men have all sorts of power. As possessor of administrative and legislative powers, men prepared the rules in such a way that automatically women were marginalized; they could not claim their rights in any aspect of life. Hence, it can be said that the subordination of women is nothing but the play of power politics. Such play of power politics has been played in almost every culture in the world in order to subordinate the women. Indian culture is not an exception to this. In India same kind of power politics has been played.

Indian culture accepts the ultimate goals of life. These goals have been elaborated by advocating theory of Purushārthas. This theory advocates that there are four kinds of Purushārthas; namely, Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa. Feminist critique of this theory has exposed the power politics of patriarchal mentality behind such theory that we have seen in the last chapter, so we will not go into its detail. At this juncture we will concentrate only on Mokṣa.

Mokṣa means liberation from cycle of birth and death. One could obtain Mokṣa only when one had knowledge of Vedas and knowledge of ultimate reality. Naturally a person who had knowledge alone will be liberated. However this condition of having knowledge for liberation cannot be fulfilled by women. It is because Vedas as well as knowledge of reality was available in

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1 Bansi Pandit; *The Hindu Mind: Fundamentals of Hindu Religion and Philosophy for All Ages*, p. 121.
Sanskrit and women were prohibited to learn Sanskrit. Naturally women could not claim for liberation. It shows that on one hand Purushārthas theory tells us that Mokṣa can be obtained by every individual and on the other hand keeping knowledge as condition for Mokṣa it prohibited women for obtaining Mokṣa. At the time of the Buddha also women were deprived from the right of Mokṣa. However, these women were aware of their rights and were ready to fight for it. Hence, when the Buddha founded his religion and established the Saṅgha, they decided to fight for their right of liberation. Their fight for liberation is characterized as the first feminist movement in India which took place 2500 years ago. Perhaps this is the first feminist woman movement in the world. This movement paved the path for women to acquire their right for Mokṣa or Nibbāna. So let us see how women fought for their rights.

3.1 First Feminist Movement in India and in the World

After the Buddha had cremated his father, King Suddhodana, he stayed at Viharanigoradharam, in Kapilavattu city. One day Mahāpadāpatī Gotamī, his foster mother, come to see him. She paid her respects to him, sat one side and said, “Lord Buddha, would you please give women the opportunity to be ordained in your Dhammavinaya.” The Buddha said to her, “Gotamī, please do not be delighted with that, it is very hard to live a monastic life in the Dhammavinaya.” She implored the Buddha in a similar way three times, but got the same answer of rejection to her request. She was very sad and left in tears. After a while the Buddha left Kapilavattu city, and went to Vesalī city. There he stayed at Kotagarasāla in the Mahāvana forest.

At that time, Mahāpadāpatī Gotamī with five hundred Sajayanīs princesses, were also ordained together with her, shaved their heads and donned the patched-up robes of Buddha’s monastic followers. They left the city and set out to find the Buddha. It was a long journey and when they arrived,
they were utterly exhausted. Gotamī, overcome by the journey and by the Buddha’s refusal, sat at the gates of the monastery with tears. There Ānanda saw her and asked her, ‘Lady, why are you crying like this?’ She replied to him, ‘Ven. Ānanda, because the Buddha did not permit women to be ordained in his Dhammavinaya.’ Ānanda said to her, ‘please wait for me here for a while, I am going to beg the Buddha on your behalf.’ After he had said that, he went to see the Buddha, paid respects to him, sat on one side and asked him to allow women to be ordained, but he got the same answer. He then asked, ‘Lord Buddha, can women attain enlightenment?’ The Buddha said to him, ‘Ānanda, yes of course they can.’ He said, ‘If they can, why don’t you allow them to join the Sangha, learning and practicing directly, especially your foster mother who looked after you when you were young.’ In fact, the Buddha at first denied Gotamī her chance to be ordained. She was refused three times. Finally, Buddha agreed and she was ordained. The admission of women into the life of Pabbajā in Buddhism and the women being capable of attaining the higher fruits of religious life as far as Arhatship has been accepted by the Buddha to his disciple Ānanda in the discussion about Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s request.²

In this way, Ānanda, the Buddha’s close attendant stepped in and negotiated on her behalf. In this way after the negotiation of Ānanda, the Buddha gave permission to establish the Bhikkunī order and the first feminist movement got its success. The importance of this movement is that the women fought for their right of Mokṣa by following non-violence and peaceful way. Further, these women protested against gradation, they decided to break the tradition but all their efforts were mainly based on dialogue and debate and not controversy. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī created the awareness of the right of Mokṣa among the women through dialogue. Similarly these women convinced the Ānanda about their rights through dialogue. Hence it is a very good example of

² AN.IV.276.
a woman who fought for the rights of women brought empowerment to her kind.

Although the Buddha became ready to establish the Śaṅgha for Bhikkhunīs, he made eight rules which every woman who wanted to become Bhikkhunī had to follow. The Buddha laid down a set of special rules, or the so-called Eight Heavy duties (Garudhammas) that established the conditions for women’s ordination, and nuns were required to strictly adhere to them for the rest of their lives.

When Ānanda convinced the Buddha for the Bhikkhunī order, the Buddha said to Ānanda, ‘Ānanda, if Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī can accept the eight Garudhammas (Aṭṭhagarudhammas), the rules of training for a Bhikkhunī, then I will allow her to take ordination of these rules eight rules, the first, seventh and eight indicate that nuns had to depend on their fellow brethren. The remaining five rules of these eight rules were more or less disciplinary and pertaining to the technical side of the Śaṅgha. These eight chief rules served as a framework for a distinct community of nuns in the Buddhist Order.

There is always a debate regarding these rules. The issue or the debate is whether the Buddha had voluntarily given permission or not. Before discussing this issue let us see what these rules which are also known as Garudhammas are:

1. A Bhikkhunī who has been ordained (even) for a hundred years must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, salute with joined palms, and do proper homage to a monk ordained but that day.

2. A Bhikkhunī must not spend the rains in a residence where there are no monks.
3. Every half month a Bhikkhunī should desire two things from the Order of monks: the asking (as to the date) of the Observance day, and the coming for the exhortation.

4. After the rains a Bhikkhunī must ‘invite’ before both Orders in respect of three matters: what was seen, what was heard, what was suspected.

5. A Bhikkhunī, offending against an important rule, must undergo mānatta (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 Bhikkhunī.

8. From today admonition of monks by Bhikkhunīs is forbidden, admonition of Bhikkhunī by monks is not forbidden.¹

After memorizing the Eight Heavy Duties, the Lord Buddha’s disciple Ānanda returned to inform Prajāpatī, the aunt, the Buddha’s words. She accepted all eight rules without reservation. She was delighted because how she could enjoy the fruits of Nibbāna. She said:

“I accept all the Eight Heavy Duties, and shall abide by them without fail throughout my life, like a young girl or boy who enjoys her/his beauty, having bathed and shampooed, accepted a garland of flowers, accepted it with her/his hands and puts it on her/his head.”²

The insistence on these Āṭṭhagarudhamma is the most vital issue in the establishment of the Bhikkhunī Sāsanā (Monastic Order of Nuns).

¹ Vin. VII, 323-324 quested in Talim, Meena; Life of Women in Buddhist Literature, p. 23.
² http://www.thaibhikkhunis.org/media/Was_the_Buddha_a_Sexist.pdf, Access on 19 April 2012.
There was a delay by the Buddha in giving permission to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī; He laid eight conditions for the women to follow to get access to the monastic life. The eight conditions or rules are like the bridge on a river by means of which one is enabled to cross over to the other bank. These eight conditional rules are obligatory and these eight rules need to be observed in order to maintain the propriety and procedure in the monastic order of the Bhikkhunīs (Nuns) in relation to the Bhikkhus (monks). The Bhikkhunīs were not to violate these eight conditions.

Regarding these Eight Garudhammas, there is a debate in modern Indian and western feminist discourse. According to them, these eight rules appear to be the blatant violations of the norms of equality, freedom and fair justice to women. It would have been appropriate to have given equal number rules to both the orders – of the monks and also of the nuns. However, before making criticism on these rules, it is necessary to take into consideration the contextual framework behind the establishment of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha (The Order of the Nuns in Buddhism). The order of the Bhikkhus is considered to be the more mature and responsible body on account of its seniority. It was supposed that the monks would have to play the role of spiritual leadership to the order of Bhikkhunī. The second and third Garudhammas show that the Bhikkhunīs were required to seek assistance of the Bhikkhus in the monastic rituals such as the Pātimokkhuuddesa (The recitation of the code of monastic laws) and Bhikkhunovāda (The coming for the exhortation). After some of these powers were transferred to the Bhikkhunīs and they got the authority to recite the Patimokkha. Even then the right to instruct remained with the Bhikkhus.³

This dependence and the supposed leadership of the order of monks, the second of these eight Garudhammas forbade the Bhikkhunīs for going into for the rains-retreat in a place where there were no Bhikkhus. The third

³ Vin.II.255-259.
Garudhamma implies the reliance of the Bhikkhunīs on the order of Bhikkhus in the performance of the two functions of Uposathapucchaka and Ovāda upasan-kamana (the day of the observance day and the exhortation). Both these conditions as such are in order to maintain safety and security of the nuns and the protective responsibility of the monks to safeguard them and secondly to carry out the specific procedure of the administrative set-up of the larger organization of the order of nuns. The third, fifth and sixth garudhamma concern with major items of the administration in the Buddhist monastic community. The performance of the Pavāraṇā (Inviting admonition), the imposition penalties and the conferment of Upasampadā (approaching or nearing the ascetic tradition) or higher monastic status are the acts to be carried out jointly together with the monks. Some amendments were carried out and some concessions were granted.

The Buddha had visualised the order of the monks and that of the nuns as a single organisation. Therefore he considered it wise and proper to link up the order of Bhikkhunīs with the more established and senior group of the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. It is really the safety and the well-being of the female members (nuns) of his order that the Buddha has shown such anxiety and such foresight.

In the remaining three Garudhamma the first, the seventh and the eighth are to be examined against this contextual background of the social and psychological conditions in those times. The Buddha’s advice in this respect is: yatha bhikkhū sikkhanti tathā tesu sikkhāpadesū sikkhatha.⁶ The Buddha desired the order of the nuns to be faultless. These three conditions show the Buddha’s concern both for the public esteem and for the moral soundness of his order. The eight conditions have been laid down to establish the governance of the order of the nuns. The Buddha’s purpose is to maintain the communal harmony. These rules maintain the administrative procedure and are of

⁶ Vin.II.258.
disciplinary nature. These rules concern with the technicalities of running the large organisation and the need of coordination between the two monastic orders – of monks and of nuns.

These rules are laid down for the administrative purposes and as disciplinary measures. Although the feminist point of view, these eight rules are discriminatory, partial and biased against the female and detrimental to womanhood. Yet these rules need to be taken into the proper perspective of the contextual backgrounds from the point of view of moral soundness, security and public opinion and the specific times.

In Durga Bhagwat’s “Early Buddhist jurisprudence (Theravāda Vinaya-laws)”, it is commented that the attitude reflected in the eight conditions appears to be unsympathetic to women. The position of woman is degraded on these rules. The eight garudhammas were laid down by the Buddha as a condition governing the establishment of the Bhikkhunī Sāsanā. It appears doubtful that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī accepted these conditions meekly. It is hardly true to the spirit in which she accepted the conditions without any protest. In the Chinese Vinaya texts, it is recorded that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was disturbed on account of the first condition of even a hundred year old nun would salute to a monk junior on years. However Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī pointed out the bad conduct of Bhikkhu to the Buddha, and asked him how and why woman has to give respect to such Bhikkhu, the Buddha said to Gotamī it is not necessary to give respect to such immoral monks. Gradually this rule was also eliminated from the eight rules. The request that was made by her to change the condition was accepted by the Buddha. In the organisation of the Sāsanā social considerations, moral and ethical values and their observance are more important.

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7 Durga Bhagwat; *Early Buddhist jurisprudence (Theravāda Vinaya-laws)*, pp. 163-165.
Another challenge to the eight rules is recorded in Bhikkhunī Khandhaka in Dharmagupta Vinaya. The question is raised there whether the Bhikkhunīs can accuse the Bhikkhus under any circumstances. The Buddha declined this request too. This shows that they were protests against the harsh and unfavourable conditions laid down. The Buddha had to safeguard his organisation of both the Orders – of monks and of nuns and did not want it to be disintegrated through disrepute and discontent. Even in those times, there was a section from the order of Monks (Bhikkhus) that opposed the establishment of the order of Nuns (Bhikkhunīs). It was considered to be a danger for the continuation of the Order. The Buddha desired to avoid possible rivalries of the Bhikkhus and the Bhikkhunīs and to maintain healthy and harmonious relations between the two groups.

With regards to these rules some scholars have raised a problem of interpolation. There are some problems with the historicity of the story. There are some significant differences between the Pāli and the Sanskrit versions of the story of the ordination of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. It is doubted if it is a literal historical account of the establishment of the order. It is rather supposed to be a complex document of how the existence of an order of nuns was resolved centuries after the Nirvana of the Buddha. The lack of historicity then makes it a mythic account of the tensions with the early community of the nuns and how these tensions were eventually reconciled. In the tenth chapter of Cullavagga second of the two Khandakas of the Theravāda Vinaya, the Pāli text appears. There are six different episodes recorded i) Mahāpajāpatī requests the Buddha who declines the request three times, the location is Kapilvatthu ii) Mahāpajāpatī meets with Ānanda in Vesālī iii) Ānanda mediates Mahāpajāpatī’s behalf iv) The Buddha’s consent is given conditionally on the observance of the eight rules in addition to the normal monastic rules v) Ānanda communicates the decision to Mahāpajāpatī and she accepts the eight conditions and vows that she will never transgress them vi) Ānanda
communicates Mahāpajāpati’s acceptance. Thereupon the Buddha declares the prophecy that the result will be in the Dhamma enduring for only five hundred years rather than for one thousand years. The eight rules were like a dam so that water will not overflow a reservoir. \(^8\) The Pāli text has six episodes but the Sanskrit text is a continuous single whole episode – all the events take place on the same day at the same location and are narrated in the first person by the Buddha. In Aṅguttara-Nikāya, there is a slightly shortened version of the story. The story of the ordination of Mahāpajāpati Gotamī is in the Pāli text has its focus on the integrity of the monastic institution and not on women themselves. \(^9\) It is therefore the rationalization of the theme of reconciliation and compromise. The Buddha has recognised and validated each of the different positions of the conservatives and those who make the socially sensitive majority. The focus is on the public opinion and the social reaction. What is appropriate, what is morally acceptable and what is ethically correct is what the Buddha wanted to advocate to his followers in both the orders of the monks and of the nuns.

Besides this debate regarding the eight rules, there is also point of debate regarding what the Buddha had converted on the possibility of Bhikkhuṇī Saṅgha.

At that time, the Venerable Ānanda went to see the Lord. Having sat on one side, he said to the Lord, “Lord, Mahāpajāpati Gotamī has accepted the Eight Heavy Duties. The aunt of the Lord has now been ordained.” The Lord said to Ānanda, “Ānanda, if women had not renounced their household lives and ordained in the religion of the Tathagata, the holy life would have lasted long, the core teaching of Buddhism would have remained for a thousand years. Because the ordination of women has occurred in this religion of the

\(^8\) Tsomo, Karma Lekshe; Buddhist women and social justice: ideals, challenges, and achievements, pp. 235 - 236.
\(^9\) AN.VIII.51-52.
Tathagata, the holy life will not last long; the True Dhamma will last only 500 years.

Ānanda, in 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 long, as sugarcane field invaded by red rust will not remain long, even so the True Dhamma will not last long.

Ānanda, as a man builds a large surrounding dike to prevent the flow of water, I prescribe the Eight Heavy Duties for the nuns to adhere to for the rest of their lives without fail.”

Of course, Buddhists who are traditionally trained take for granted that the passage above is an actual quotation from the Buddha. Therefore, they take it to mean that women are inferior to men, and they are cause of destruction of the religion.

Ānanda learned Aṭṭhagarudhammas, and went to tell Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī what the Buddha had said. She was delighted and said to Ānanda, ‘Venerable Ānanda, I accept the eight garudhammas and I will keep them with me all my life.’ When Ānanda heard that, he went back to report to the Buddha. The Buddha said to Ānanda, ‘since she has accepted these eight disciplines, she is a now a Bhikkhunī.’ Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was the first Bhikkhunī in the Buddhist tradition and the only one who became a Bhikkhunī by means of this ordination method. She became a Bhikkhunī by accepting the eight garudhammas which Ānanda had brought to her.

Actually, before Buddha had decided to raise the status of women to be ordained or in the monastic Order, he foresaw the danger of admitting them,

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10 Vin.II.256
11 AN.VIII.51-52.
refusing three times Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s request to admit woman to the Order as Bhikkhunī. So, Āṭṭhagarudhammas or Garudhammas are laid down in the letter of the law with the following purpose:

1. To select and test the woman who wanted to be ordained if her mind is strong and sincere enough when she is ordained, whether or not she can endure the hardship, including other rules, because the Buddha realized about woman’s mind that it is sensitive and cannot endure hardship.

2. To train the woman who wanted to be ordained as a Bhikkhunī. They were given basic knowledge. In order to become a Bhikkhunī, a woman had to be a Sikkhamānā for two years, she had to stay with Bhikkhunīs closely and learn how to follow all the precepts.

3. To prevent the pregnant women or to prevent the woman who had breast-feeding baby from being ordained in order that she had not to give birth to a child and look after the child as a Bhikkhunī. This would allow the public to criticize that she had a husband or had inappropriate conduct for recluse hood. This could cause disrepute in Buddhism.

4. In order to have Bhikkhunīs take pride in their recluse hood in order that they had not to conduct something which was dangerous to their religious life that was difficult to obtain. This is because what is difficult to get is always of high worth.

5. To prevent a lot of woman to be ordained and to prevent false ordination.12

Eight Disciplines or Āṭṭhagarudhammas indicate a subordination of Bhikkhunīs to Bhikkhus can be denied. These rules may be explained in terms of practical necessity. Thus Rule 2 recognized the dangers to which Bhikkhunīs would be exposed to if they spent the long period of retreat in isolated areas.

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12 Phramaha Kamol, Thavaro (Mangkhammee); The Status of Women in Buddhism, pp. 127-128.
Rules 3 and 6 might have been set up to see that the procedures in the newly established Bhikkunī Order would correspond to and benefit from similar procedures in the already established Bhikkhu Saṅgha. Rule 7 seems to be a restatement of the precept regarding ‘wrong speech’. But Rules 1 and 8 cannot be seen in any other light than a concession to male superiority. In practical terms Rule 1 must have been the most irksome and even humiliating in a society where the protocol attaching to salutation was very strict. The usual Buddhist rule which guided seniority was the number of years a person had spent in the Order, and while this continued to apply to Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunīs considered separately, any individual Bhikkhunī had always to pay respect to any Bhikkhu however junior the latter may have been. It is not surprising that it was from this rule that Prajāpatī Gotamī sought exemption (unsuccessfully despite the support of Ānanda). ¹³

Important point with regards to these Eight Rules is that even though Bhikkhunīs had to follow these rules within that they had created the space for themselves and developed themselves.

When the eight rules were imposed on the women to admit in the Saṅgha at that time Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was confident that women would gradually reach the respectable position in the Saṅgha. The observation of these eight laws reveals that they were not humiliating or harmful but were promulgated to keep a pure and amicable atmosphere in both the Saṅgha.¹⁴ Therīgāthā states that many women after listening to Gotamī’s religious sermons had joined the order which speaks of her missionary activities. She was very popular amongst the people and had a great rapport with them. The Buddha had appreciated her work and had declared that “she is the foremost jewel amongst women disciples.”¹⁵ With the admission of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī,

¹³ SN.I.5.6.
¹⁴ Talim, M.V.; Women in Early Buddhist Literature, pp. 19 – 21.
the Buddha started the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. Altekar mentions the admission of women to the Buddhist order gave a great impetus to the cause of female education among the ladies in commercial and aristocratic families. He also mentions that among the famous ladies in Buddhism are one of them like Saṅghamitrā, who went even to foreign countries like Ceylon and became famous there as teacher of the Holy Scriptures. Among the authoresses of Therīgāthā, who were all believed to have obtained the salvation, thirty-two were unmarried women and ten married ones. Buddhism declared that womanhood was no bar to salvation. Kīṣāgotamī had overcome the terrible loss of her son’s death, when she came to ordination. She then emerged spotless in her spiritual strength and insight. She attained the spiritual empowerment. Ubbirī came from the eminent family of Sāvatthī. She was brought to Pasenadi the King of Kosala and her daughter Jīra was born. Shortly her daughter died. Gautama the Buddha approached Ubbirī who was weeping and mourning eighty four thousand daughters have been buried here. The lord said and the grief for her daughter was taken out as the arrow is removed from the body. She too came to the fold of Lord Buddha and attained spiritual bliss. Patācārā Pañcasata refers to the number five hundred which means a great many, Patācārā gave solace and shelter to the homeless, the lost, the aggrieved woman. Patācārā gave comfort, support and direction to build a new meaning life to the women in distress. Later on, she brought them to the path of Righteousness. Kīṣāgotamī, Ubbirī and Patācārā had attained emancipation through their empowerment.

Buddha received pressing entreaties of his foster mother, he eventually decided with great reluctance to admit nuns into the Buddhist Order. Among the nuns of Therīgāthā the majority consists of women, who had renounced the

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17 Ibid.
18 Therī, 54, 56, 73.
world during their maidenhood. The career of preaching and evangelizing that was thus opened to women by Jainism and Buddhism attracted a large number of talented ladies, who distinguished themselves as teachers and preachers – Dhammadinnā, Khemā, Somā, Paṭācārā and Visākhā. Several inscriptions show that senior nuns had their own female disciples and novices and used to possess influence sufficient to collect funds necessary for the maintenance of the establishments. We find such heiresses, refusing tempting marriage offers and joining the preaching army of the new religion. Such for instance, was the case of Gutta, Anopama and Sumedha, who eventually became very famous preachers.20 Similar was the case of Saṅhamitrā, the daughter of Asoka, who went to far off Ceylon, to spread the teachings of the Buddha. Self-mastery, the taming of the self, and formation of character are among the highest ideals set forth by Buddhism; and Gautama might have conceived that an added reason for admitting women would be on account of the more stringent discipline that their presence would necessitate. He further added that conscious of all this he should have realized that now was the time to open the order without distinction of sex, as it had been opened earlier without distinction of caste.21

The eventual permission which the Buddha accorded to the admission of women to his order, gave an impetus to the spread of education and philosophy among the women. Many women led a life of celibacy, with the aim of understanding and following the eternal truths of religion and philosophy. This shows that the general average of intelligence and education among women must have been fairly high. A.S. Altekar has mentioned that Buddhist movement gave an indirect impetus to female education and produced a number of nun poetesses.22 What Gautama did for women shines as a bright light in the history of freedom; and it brought its own rewards, not fugitive but lasting.23

20 Therī, 54, 56, 73.
3.2 The Path of Bhikkhunī Ordination

A male Buddhist mendicant was called a monk (Bhikkhu), and a female Buddhist mendicant was called a nun (Bhikkhunī). The term “Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī” refer to a man or a woman who lives by alms. Thus the Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī devoted themselves to performing religious austerities while living by means of the requisites given him or her by lay believers. Once a person became a monk by receiving the full ordination (Upasampadā)24, their life was strictly regulated by the two hundred twenty-seven precepts for monks or three hundred thirteen precepts for nuns. The four groups (cutus parisad) of Buddhism were the monks, nuns, laymen and lay women.

Buddhist and Jain literatures give the impression that in those days society was tremendously attracted towards asceticism. The irresistible attraction towards renunciation of life is a striking feature of the Buddhist era. Moral deterioration and degeneration may have been the chief causes that led the people to seek refuge under the Buddha, whose doctrine was essentially based on Śīla, Samādhi and Paññā. Buddhist reformation was a moral reaction against a corrupt state of society. The Buddha advocated the doctrine of avoiding both the extremities and seeking the ideal of the “Middle Path”. Thousands and thousands sought refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha. This passion for renunciation extended also to the female sex. To this Buddhist monasticism added the idea of an organised community of nuns.

The path of Bhikkhunī ordination was not easy. It was because that though the Buddha was ready to establish the order for women; some people were against this as they believed that women were not capable to attain the Nibbāna. So they were creating the problems for them. Māra is representative of this kind of patriarchal mentality. He tried to seduce the Bhikkhunī and

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24 Hirakawa Akira; A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna, 61.
advised them to leave. So Bhikkhunīs had to face him. So let us see how Māra tried to seduce the women.

### 3.2.1 Māra Dialogue Poems

The Buddha is the good one and Māra is the bad one. Māra is all powerful enemy of goodness. In the dialogues, the potentially gigantic figure of Māra has become dwarfish. Māra speaks with a nun is the situation in many of the verses in Therīgāthā. Māra had dialogue with Vajira, Māra asks questions such as Who put this living being together? Who is the maker? Where does this being come from? Where will it end? These questions are about the riddle of life and death. Vajira answers that there is no being but there are the Skandhas. The chariot is made of a certain combination of parts. Similarly, it is a combination of Skandhas. Suffering is what exists, what endures and what disappears, what comes to an end. Māra the death realized that the Vajira, the girl has understood him. Dejected and defeated he disappeared.

There is another dialogue poem between Cālā and Māra which consists of three dialogues between Māra and Cālā, Māra and Upacālā and Māra and Sisupacālā. Māra and Cālā dialogue begins with Cālā’s statement about her being a nun and her attaining peace. Māra questions her reason of the renunciation. Cālā answers that the path of Dhamma was shown by the Buddha, born in the Sakya clan, He found the pain and suffering as the cause of sorrow. He taught her the right way and Māra Death is destroyed. Upacālā too repeats her being a self-composed nun. Māra advocates for the pleasures of body to her. Her reply about the Buddha’s teaching is the answer to Māra that is Death to become silent. The third dialogue is between Māra and Sisupacālā. The some question answer pattern follows. Sisupacālā tells that the whole
world is burning, burning in flames. The words of the Buddha brought her peace and Death is destroyed.

In Therīgāthā, the nuns tell about their past before their ordination and also about the present after the admission to the order. Māra knows both the phases of their careers. Māra seeks to know how and what changes have taken place due to their devotion to the Buddha and their tireless constant worship. Their finding the true path of righteousness is a milestone in their careers. The poems – in particular these Māra dialogues poems – bring out the situations in a dramatic and poetic style. In this way, everytime Māra tried to change the mind of Bhikkhunī and tried to convince them to become ordinary woman. However, the nuns who had strong determination and had strong faith on the Buddha, Saṅgha and dhamma forced Māra to run away.

‘O woman well set free! how free am I,  
How thoroughly free from kitchen drudgery!  
Me stained and squalid’ among my cooking pots  
My brutal husband ranked as even less  
Than the sunshades he sits and weaves always.’ ²⁵

A woman in verse 23 in Therīgāthā celebrates her freedom from the drudgery in the kitchen in the following words: I am free. I am completely free, I am now totally from the drudgery of the kitchen. Among my cooking pots in the kitchen, I was always stained, soiled and then my husband who used to weave sitting in the sunshade ranked me lowly. New I am free from that situation of drudgery and I now enjoy pure delight of my freedom and liberation from the kitchen.

That there was gender equality at a spiritual level between monks and nuns is expressed in several ways in other parts of the Palī Canon as well.

²⁵ Therī, verses, 23. “Sumuttikā sumuttikā, sādhumuttikāmhi musalassa. Ahiriko me chattakaṁ väpi, ukkhalikā me deduddhvaṁ väti.”
Ven. Dhammadinna, the nun already mentioned by Nyanasiri, provides one example. One of her most famous sermons was given to her husband, Visākhā, she takes the role of spiritual director rather than wife and the Buddha is recorded as saying afterwards, ‘if you had asked me, Visākhā, about this matter, I too would have answered exactly as the nun Dhammadinna.' In other words, her sermon is sealed as Buddha vacana, word of the Buddha. This is not an isolated incident. One way in which the words of the early nuns were authenticated was to declare them to be at one with the teaching of the Buddha himself. Also found in the Pali texts are nuns who openly assumed spiritual equality with their male counterparts. For instance, Ven. Bhaddā compares herself with Ven. Kassapa, one of the foremost monks surrounding the Buddha:

> ‘We both have seen, both he and I, the woe
> And pity of the world, and have gone forth
> We both are arahants with selves well tamed
> Cool are we both, ours in Nibbāna now!’

3.2.2 Bhikkhuni Pātimokkha

Pātimokka rules are necessary to obtain Dhyānās (meditative stages) which are very important for achieving emancipation. The purposes of the Pātimokka rules are for the welfare, for the comfort of the Saṅgha and to control and remove confusion, to empower monks and nuns to make righteous persons conscious about clinging to life and to destroy clinging to the next world, to make less happy and to happier, to remain steadfast and to maintain discipline and order of the Saṅgha. The Pātimokkha rules are to be recited on

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26 MN.I. 304-305.
27 Therī, verses 66. “Disvā ādīnavaṁ loke, ubho pabbajitā mayāṁ; tyamha khīṇasavā dantā, sītībhūtāmha nibbutā.”
In the beginning, Bhikkhus used to recite the Pātimokka to the Bhikkunīs, but later on the Bhikkunīs recited themselves. They are allowed to make confession of their transgression of laws and to carry on all the monastic proceedings as prescribed by the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. These Pātimokka rules are the initiating rules to maintain strict discipline and to establish a harmonious order in the life of the monks and nuns.

In addition to the eight chief rules, the nuns had to observe Pātimokkha rules. Pātimokkha laws were considered as essential rules and obligatory for Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. Pātimokkha is the beginning (adimetaṃ), important (mukhametaṃ) and chief of all meritorious characteristics (kusalaṃ Dhammānaṃ). Buddha has narrated ten causes for framing these rules for the welfare and comfort of the Saṅgha. These rules were commissioned for a mode of living together in a Vihāra harmoniously. This seems to be a first strict step to maintain discipline in the Order later on various rules were added to enhance exterior personality and interior individuality. These Pātimokkha rules have two sets: one for the monks and the other for the nuns.

There are eight Parājika (defeat) rules of which the first four common rules remind of the Four Rules of The Pañcasīla, to lead a chaste life, not to steal, not to kill and not resort to falsehood. The eight Parājika rules have been framed. Chastity is the virtue that is given the utmost importance in the framing of the rules of discipline, order and virtuous conduct in the life in the Saṅgha (order). The Parājika rules meant for chastity that is to be cultivated in life. The Parājika rules are almost identical with the Pañcasīla rules which are prescribed for the householder. Immorality, theft and falsehood are criminal offences which need to be kept away and violence is not to be practised. The principles of peace, justice, truth, non-violence and chastity are basic to rules framed for maintaining order, harmony and discipline in the life of the commoners as well.

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28 Ellison Banks Findly; Dāna: Giving and Getting in Pali Buddhism, p. 174.
as the monks and nuns. Lustful desire needs to be exposed. Cleanliness and purity need to be maintained and therefore the eight Parājika rules have been prescribed.

There are seventeen Saṅghādisesa (communal meetings) rules of which seven rules are common for both the monks and the nuns. Most of these rules are disciplinary and promulgated to mould the mendicant’s character. There are rules of guidance to nuns to regulate their relation to society. There are rules which are precautionary rules to avoid offences or to prohibit the splitting tendency. Saṅghādisesa (communal meetings) rules are the rules of the regulation of the life in the Saṅgha. That is the basic purpose of these rules. These regulating, ordering maintaining rules are meant to establish order, to maintain discipline and to mould character. Many of these rules are precautionary rules which take care of avoiding the probable offences. To avoid division, differences and to preserve morality, chastity and righteousness, these rules have been framed. There are rules based on morality which compel the members of the Order to lead chaste and righteous life. The Saṅgha life is to be regulated by these rules.

The next set of rules is of thirty Nissaggiya (confession with forfeiture) rules. Out of these thirty Nissaggiya rules. Sixteen rules were common to both the communities. It seems that these Nissaggiya rules were framed with a desire to wipe out defects and deficiencies of the human mind. These rules forbid tendency of hoarding, greed and heedlessness. These rules create a consciousness amongst the members of the Order regarding the solidarity of the Order. The best course is to avoid both the extremes of excess and deficiency. To be balanced through moderation, tempering of extremes is necessary to lead life. The lustful desire is to be avoided in order to maintain chastity. Purity of conduct is to be observed by staying away from the desire to obtain more than what is needed. Such a desire is greed for more. Greed is to be avoided. Hoarding and storing is forbidden. Carelessness should be
discouraged. There are thirty Nissaggiya rules, which are framed to provide a solid base of integrity to the Saṅgha (Order) of the Bhikkhunīs. Keeping to the bare minimum is expected and prescribed through these rules. Most of these rules are prohibitory rules. The way a robe or a rug is to be used is fixed by some of the Nissaggiya rules. Prohibiting from receiving gold and silver and prohibiting storing are regulated through some of the other Nissaggiya rules.

The Pācittiya (confession) rules are the rules of conduct. Moral behavior is essential to lead the life according to the path of righteousness. In details many of these rules prescribe how to conduct oneself in public as well as private life. The purpose of these rules is to maintain decorum, dignity, decency and devotion in the life of the nuns in their Saṅgha and outside in respect of the possible occasions of contacts with the fellow nun, monks, families and members of the society. These rules are framed to prevent mischiefs. These rules prescribe the manner in which a nun has take care of all matters related to the care from hair to toe and to the possible ways of conduct with others. There are One hundred and sixty six Pācittiya (confession) rules of which rules are exclusively for nuns and seventy rules are common to monks and nuns. Pācittiya rules are minor precepts. These rules teach the fundamentals of disciplinary life and therefore they have a prominent place on the recluse’s life. Some of these rules are about formalities etiquettes and manners. Such rules seem to have come into existence, since in the Order all types of people – rich and poor, cultured and uncultured – had clustered together. Therefore it became necessary to promulgate the minor rules in order to conduct and celibate life. These rules serve to control a human weakness to lead a righteous life. Many times, rules are repeated with minor changes. This is probably owing to observing of rules in a very literal sense or ignoring the purpose and the motive of the rules. Some of these rules were formulated and modified in deference to the wishes of the society for the laity class often received a due consideration from the Order. Some of these rules were
introduced to safeguard against mischievous dement prevailing in the society. These rules also discriminate the duties of the nuns from the duties of the housewife, in short, these rules aim at elevating their personalities by ensuring perfection.

There are eight Patidesanīya (violations which must be verbally acknowledged) rules. The Patidesanīya rules are rules prohibiting the eating of certain items if not ill. To violate such dictates would an offence. The offence will have to be confessed in the prescribed format. The purpose of these rules to take care of the rules prescribed and not to violate them. These eight rules are meant to restrict the greedy tendency. It might have then prevailed in the nunneries. A nun who is not ill but asks for ghee or curds, or oil or honey or butter or fish or meat or milk and partakes of it violates norm. She must confess the act, saying: “I am blameworthy, I have fallen in Dhamma therefore deserve to atone for Patidesanīya”. These eight rules are exclusively for nuns and they differ from Bhikkhu Patidesanīya Dhamma. It is necessary to think about the security to be provided to women. There are some spots and some places where women are not supposed to go and to visit such places alone, without any escort. Naturally, an escort, some protection, some company is needed. Moreover, privacy is also quite important for a woman. It is clear that men and women have equal status but the sense of security, the need of protection, the need for companionship, the threat of exposure, of assault and of manhandling is there more for a woman. This explains why there are more disciplinary and precautionary rules for nuns and why there are different sets of rules for nuns in the Order. Monks had to follow four Patidesanīya rules which mainly contained points of etiquette.

There are seventy-five Sekhiya (rules of training) rules which are common to both communities of Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī. These rules are the rules of training, framing, moulding, formulating and making the character and personality of an individual perfect. Goodness of conduct leads to the goodness
of character. Dignity is to be earned through actions that an individual performs. The rules of Sekhiya, training could be divided into three parts. The first fifty-six rules are concerned with etiquette and decency. These rules prescribe the observance of polite behavior to be shown by the recluse while visiting houses for alms-food. The rules from fifty-seven to seventy-two are concerned with the regard to be accorded to Dhamma. The remaining three rules are concerned with unsuitable ways of obeying the calls of nature and of spitting. The Sekhiya rules help to develop the character of a monk or a nun. There are Sekhiya rules from twenty to fifty-six which are exclusively for receiving food and partaking of food. It is remarkable to see that these rules particularly prescribe minor and insignificant formalities and etiquettes. All these rules go to mould outward personality of monk or nun. The person who is governed by these rules is bound to impress and create a good opinion in the society. These rules teach a recluse to conduct properly in the society and also guide him/her to lead a dignified life-rules also foster his/her self-respect and protect him/her from having to stoop down to a humiliating position. These minor precepts create self-confidence, self-reliance and self-assertiveness in the Bhikkhu - Bhikkhunī and thereby command confidence and respect of those who come in their contact. These rules initiate the recluse to set an example, and by their actions and work be an inspiration to the society in which he/she lives.

There are seven Adhikaraṇa Samatha (The settlement of issues) rules which are in Sammukkha Vinaya, Sati Vinaya, Amulha Vinaya, Patinnha, Yebhuyyasika, Papiyyasika and Tinavatharaka. The Adhikaraṇa Samatha rules are the rules of procedure that is to be followed when an offence committed is known or reported. The guilty is given a chance to express his or her views. The distribution of the noting papers (Salākā) is a remarkable feature of the system of delivering justice. The elderly, experienced and eminent persons are given due honour. Good is maintained. These are the seven proceeding which
are common to both the monks and the nuns. These proceedings display a healthy and democratic society of the Buddhist Saṅgha. The sobriety and foresight shown in this body of rules is indeed remarkable.

It is noticed that the nun had to abide by Three Hundred Eleven rules while the monk by Two Hundred Twenty-seven rules. In all there are One Thousand Eighty-one rules which are common to both the communities of the Three Hundred Eleven rules for nuns, there are One hundred thirty rules exclusively meant for nuns. There are some more minor rules for nuns – regarding taking a bath, twenty-four questions before ordination and some others. These are the major and minor rules which have been promulgated for the nuns on the Vinaya Piṭaka. There are eighty-four rules more for nuns than for monks – 311 rules for nuns against 227 for monks. The reasons for this discrimination are obvious. There are eighty-four rules more for nuns than for monks. Feminists may consider it discrimination. It is not discrimination but clear logic and pure practical wisdom to maintain the privacy and to protect the security of the nuns in the Order that so many more rules have been framed. The order needed to get a fair name and protecting the woman’s honour is the need in the framing of these additional eighty-four rules for nuns. The break-up of these rules shows the some evidence about the protective care necessary for the nuns and their honour. The first reason is to maintain security. Women cannot be allowed to reside in a far-off place as their safety cannot be guaranteed. Socially, women need to remain away from any unchaste conduct. Courtesy demands the same. The social conditions even today demand such precautions in respect of women. Safety, chastity and courtesy of women need careful maintenance, watchful vigilance and elaborate defense mechanism. These rules provide such a mechanism and therefore it need not be considered that more rules are there for women and less for men. There is nothing like favouritism but due regard to women’s condition in society is shown.
3.3 Self-Realization of Therīs reflected in Therīgāthā

While teaching Dhamma, the Bhikkhus had told their own experience of self-realization to convince the people that Nibbāna is possible in this world. In Therīgāthā recorded the verses of Bhikkhunīs Saṅgha who can attain the high intellectual wisdom and calm down their mind away from defilement as the practicing Dhamma and cultivate their mind to be silent, purify thought and avoid evils as the sermon of the Buddha states that:

‘To cease from all evil, To cultivate good,
To purify one’s mind, This is the advice of all Buddhas.’ 29

Along with the sermon of the Buddha; he taught the disciples to be away from the bad deed, to do good deed and making the mind purified are mentioned view in Buddhist Doctrine. The purification of mind is the path to solve and liberates the mind till it gets up to the topmost spirit as the emancipation of Arhatship from the release of oneself. The Enlightened One of purity of wisdom by vimuttis which appear in Therīgāthā as that, the most of Bhikkhunīs could bring her mind avoiding from the root of evils (Akusala). According to the Buddha’s instructions always teach the meaning and detail of the Doctrine which is good in the beginning, the middle, and the end of observing self-practicing discipline to be the Holy One.

Dhammapada gāthā explained that the mention of mind is important to control the body in attaining the objectives and aims of life. Human spirit can go up to high virtue with the self-meditation as the verse indicated the mind or spirit can be achieved by liberating the realm of silent mind or the supreme places in Buddhism such as in the verse below:

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29 Dhm, V. 183. “Sabba pāpassa akaranāni, kusalassūpasampadā, sacittapariyodapanāni etaṁ buddhānasāsanāni.”
Mind is the forerunner of all mental states, mind is the chief, and all mental states are mind made, if one speaks or acts with impure/wicked mid, because of that suffering follows one as the wheel of the chariot follows the hoof of the draught-ox.  

There are many evidently literary verses of Buddha’s stanzas to manifest in Therīgāthā which indicated the pure mind of Bhikkhunīs Saṅgha who can emancipate the high intellectual wisdom as the verses state below:

I sought delight in deck ing out myself
With gems and ornaments and tricks of art.
By baths and unguents, massage, I ministered
Unto this body, spurred by lusts of sense.

The verse 89 in Therīgāthā states: There were the days when the speaker was delighted in decorating herself. She used to wear jewel, ornaments and other artistic embellishments to beautify her. She used to apply fragrant essences and scents while taking her bath. She used to massage her body that was spurred by sensual lust. Those were the days of sensual pleasures which she has now left behind. She is now attending to her worship.

Then found I faith, and forth from home
I went into the homeless life, for I
Had seen the body as it really is,
And never more could lusts of sense return.

The verse 90 in Therīgāthā explains the thoughts on life in the following words: She left her home and domestic life. She became homeless in the

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30 Dhm.1. “Mano pubbagamā dhammā, Mano setthā mano mayā; manasā ce padutthena, bhasati vā karoti vā; tathonaṁ dukkhamanveti, cakkaṁ va vahato padaṁ”
31 Therī, verses, 89. “Vibhūśā maṇḍanaratā, nhāpanuucchādanehi ca; upakāsiṁ imaṁ kāyaṁ, kāmarāgena aṭṭita.”
32 Therī, verses, 90. “Tato saddhaṁ labhitvāna, pabbajiṁ anagāriyaṁ; disvā kāyaṁ yathābhūtaṁ, kāmarāgo samūhato.”
pursuit of her faith. She has realized the hollowness and the fleeting nature of her body. Now, the lusts of sensual delights will never move return to her.

All the long line of lives were snapped in two
Aye, every wish and yearning for it gone.
All that had tied me hand and foot was loosed,
Peace had I won, peace throned in my heart.  

The verse 9 in Therīgāthā contains the following idea: The long line of lives was broken into two divisions. Every wish and every yearning desire passed and turned into nothing. These ties of desires that bound her body, her hands and her feet were broken. She then experienced peace, peace of mind. She has won pure blessed peace which is now enthroned in her heart.

‘How should a woman’s nature hinder us?
Whose hearts are firmly set, who ever move
With growing knowledge onward on the Path?
What can signify to one in whom
Insight does truly comprehend the Norm? ’

The thought contained in the verse 61 is stated below: A woman’s nature cannot obstruct us, cannot hinder our path and cannot stop our forward more. Our hearts are firmly fixed on the path of righteousness. We now move on forever with ever growing knowledge onward on the path of Dhamma. The norm is now truly comprehended by intuition. Now other matters cannot attract the attention of such a steadfast devout follower of the Dhamma – the path.

‘O woman well set free! how free am I,
How thoroughly free from kitchen drudgery!

33 Therī, verses, 91. “Sabbe bhavā samucchinnā, icchā ca patthanāpi ca; sabbayogavisāmyuttā, santīṁ pāpuṇi cetaso.”
34 Therī, verses, 61. “Itthibhāvo no kiṁ kayirā, cittamhi susamāhite; āṇamhi vattamānamhi, sammā dhammaṁ vipassato.”
Me stained and squalid’ among my cooking pots
My brutal husband ranked as even less
Than the sunshades he sits and weaves always.’

A woman in verse 23 in Therīgāthā celebrates her freedom from the drudgery in the kitchen in the following words: I am free. I am completely free, I am now totally from the drudgery of the kitchen. Among my cooking pots in the kitchen, I was always stained, soiled and then my husband who used to weave sitting in the sunshade ranked me lowly. Now I am free from that situation of drudgery and I now enjoy pure delight of my freedom and liberation from the kitchen.

That there was gender equality at a spiritual level between monks and nuns is expressed in several ways in other parts of the Pāli Canon as well. Ven.Dhammadinnā, the nun already mentioned by Nyanasiri, provides one example. One of her most famous sermons was given to her husband, Visākhā, she takes the role of spiritual director rather than wife and the Buddha is recorded as saying afterwards, ‘if you had asked me, Visākhā, about this matter, I too would have answered exactly as the nun Dhammadinnā.’ In other words, her sermon is sealed as Buddha vacana, word of the Buddha. This is not an isolated incident. One way in which the words of the early nuns were authenticated was to declare them to be at one with the teaching of the Buddha himself. Also found in the Pāli texts are nuns who openly assume spiritual equality with their male counterparts. For instance, Ven. Bhadda compares herself with Ven. Kassapa, one of the foremost monks surrounding the Buddha:

‘We both have seen, both he and I, the woe
And pity of the world, and have gone forth

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35 Therī, verses, 23. “Sumuttikā sumuttikā, sādhumuttikāmhi musalassa. Ahiriko me chattakaṁ väpi, ukkhalikā me deṭṭhubhaṁ väti.”
36 MN.I. 304-305.
We both are arahants with selves well tamed
Cool are we both, ours in Nibbāna now!’ 37

3.4 Contribution of Bhikkhunīs to the Spiritual Development of the Society

A) Giving Spiritual Training to the People

A male Buddhist mendicant was called a monk (Bhikkhu), and a female Buddhist mendicant was called a nun (Bhikkhunī). The term “Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī” refers to a man who lives by alms. Thus the Bhikkhu & Bhikkhunī devoted themselves to performing religious austerities while living by means of the requisites given by lay believers. Once a person became a monk by receiving the full ordination (Upasampadā), their life was strictly regulated by the two hundred twenty-seven (227) precepts for monks and by three hundred eleven (311) precepts for nuns. The four groups (cutus parisad) of Buddhism were the monks, nuns, laymen and lay women.

The foundation of a nuns’ community (Bhikkhunī Saṅgha) was by the Great One after he had established the community of monks, and only on the instigation of Ānanda. The first type of an ordination of nuns according to tradition was the acceptance of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and five hundred Sakya women into the order by their acknowledging eight grave rules (garudhammas).

The Buddha’s purpose in founding an order of monks and nuns was to provide an environment in which spiritual development would be easier. The lay community provides monks and nuns with their basic needs - food,

37 Therī, verses 66. “Disvā ādīnavaṁ loke, ubho pabbajitaṁ mayaṁ; tyamha khīṇasavā dantā, sīṭibhūtamha nibbutā.”
clothing, shelter, and medicine – so they can devote their time to the study and practice of the Dhamma. The ordered and simple lifestyle of the monastery is conducive to inner peace and meditation. In return, monks and nuns are expected to share what they know about Dhamma with the community and act as an example of how the good Buddhist should live. They preach the thoughts of the Buddha.

To teach the thoughts of the Buddha means to teach Dhamma and to teach Dhamma means to teach morality. While teaching morality, Gautama Buddha gave importance to spiritual purity or purity of mind. It is because impure mind is cause of suffering so if we want to remove suffering then it is necessary to eradicate impurity of mind. This point can be further explained this way.

B) Giving Training to the People for Purity of Mind

Gautama Buddha was interested to make all human beings free from suffering. He believed that it is the human nature that is responsible for suffering as well as removal for suffering. It is because, according to him, Trṣṇā or uncontrolled and unlimited desire of man is cause of suffering and hence if one wants to make oneself free from suffering it is necessary to remove Trṣṇā. The eradication of Trṣṇā makes the individual free from suffering. While preaching this thought to the people he emphasized the significance of Dukkha-Nirodha-Saccā (Truth of cessation of suffering) and advocates that this way leads you to Nibbāna. Buddhist nuns were teaching this thought of the Buddha and were helping the people to in their attempt of removing suffering.

38 Geshe Tashi Tsering; The Four Noble Truths, Volume 1: Volume 1: the Foundation of Buddhist Thought, p. 8.
3.5 The Eminent Bhikkunīs in Buddhism: Āguttara Nikāya

And here are those thirteen Great Holy Buddhist Female Disciples:

1. The Honored Mahāpajāpatī was the wife of King Suddhodana (Father of Prince Siddhartha) in the Kapilavatthu Kingdom. She was a sister and co-wife of Māyādevī. Māyādevī gave birth to Siddhartha Gautama, but soon after the delivery of the new-born child, Māyādevī died. The entire responsibility of the new-born fell upon his faster-mother and maternal aunt, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. It is said that at that time she herself had given birth to Nanda. Her sacrifice was indeed great. She handed over her own son Nanda to the nurse. She looked after her sister’s new-born Siddhartha Gautama personally with great care and tenderness. Gautama was raised by her properly with due attention to his needs and growth. After the death of Siddhartha Gautama’s father Suddhodana, she lost the last binding tie. Her foster-son had by that time attained Enlightenment and had become the Buddha. As a representative of women Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī asked her son to give her peace of mind. Thrice she was refused but she had decided to convince him that a woman, if strong willed can be equal to man. Through the mediation of Ānanda, the Buddha consented to establish a monastic order for female ascetic devotees. Gotamī at Sāvatthī decided to go to Parinibbāna. After her Parinibbāna, the Buddha uttered fire verses in her honour: “She was a woman with great intellect (paññā) a gem of nuns (ratana) and her knowledge was extremely pure (parisuddhaṁ nanām). The verses Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī played an important part in Gautama Buddha’s life in his childhood and in the later years of the Enlightened One. She was the very first Bhikkhunī who renounced her worldly life in the service of the Dhamma (religion) and established the Saṅgha (order) for female ascetics. She was the principal lady of the Buddhist Order of Nuns.
Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was the Buddha’s mother Māyā’s sister. After her sister’s death after the son’s birth, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī breast fed him with her milk. After his becoming the Buddha, she followed him and joined the faith. Then five hundred of her followers requested her to place their request of establishing the order of the nuns in Buddhism. This is Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s ordination in the order. Her disciples contributed to the Therīgāthā along with her. All the five hundred followers became nuns.

2. The Honoured Khemā was the favorite queen of King Bimbisāra in the Magadha land. Buddha praised her as the nun Foremost in Wisdom, and she was acknowledged as the equivalent to Sāriputra on the monks’ side. Khemā was once wandering in Kosala country and arrived at Saketh-nagar of Sāvatthī: She halted near the city gates for a night. King Pasenadi of Kosala desired to visit a holy man for some discourse. Finding Bhikkhunī Khemā near the city gates and hearing the report of her intelligence, scholarship and oratory, the King visited her. He asked Khemā about an unanswered question – did Buddha exist after death or not? Khemā explained the matter elaborately and referred to the indeterminable problems. Khemā’s teaching impressed King Pasenadi and he later related the incident to the Buddha. The Buddha’s explanation of King Pasenadi’s question was in the same manner in which Bhikkhunī Khemā had explained word to word as was the Buddha’s explanation. Khemā came from a ruling family in Sāgala. She was very beautiful; her skin was said to be the colour of pure gold. She as a grown up woman had become the chief consort – favourite lover of King Bimbisāra39 when she visited the Buddha, the Buddha made an image appear before her of a very beautiful woman a more beautiful than Khemā – standing near him. Then the Buddha showed that beautiful woman passing from youth to old age with broken teeth, gray hair and wrinkled skin. This vision deeply impressed on

Khemā the truth of impermanence. Khemā was instantly enlightened. It was a rare transformation of a laywoman into a devoted nun. Bhikkhunī Khemā was an expert missionary who propagated the Buddha’s Dhamma very skillfully.

Khemā’s story is the variation of the Buddha’s experience of the pain and suffering in human life when he observed a sick man, old man person and a corpse. The story is repeated in order to emphasize the temporary and fleeting existence of the material and physical objects and pleasures. From the feminist point of view, it is significant as it is applicable to both the sexes – men as well as women. The general condition of human life is presented through the transformation.

3. The Honoured Uppalavāṇṇā was born in Sāvatthī. She was the daughter of a financier. She was renowned for her beauty. So many men from all over India wanted to marry her. Her rich father and did not know what to do. When he suggested Uppalavaṇṇā to leave the world, because of her religious leanings she accepted the suggestion and renounced the world and began to live in a forest as a solitary renunciants. The rash act of assault on her chastity by a sinner compelled her to take up residence within the community of nuns. The rash act of assault on her chastity by a sinner compelled her to take up residence within the community of nuns. One day in her deep concentration by making a lamp’s flame as the object of her meditation, she attained enlightenment. She acquired a number of supernatural powers including the ability to adopt another form. And was given the title of the most gifted a foremost in spiritual and magical powers. She was permitted to ordain other women, a rare privilege in the Order. Her ordination of remarkable laywomen Anaja, the wife of King Mahākappinā, is her distinguished contribution to the Dhamma. Uppalavaṇṇā among female disciples was considered to be equivalent to the Honored Moggallāna in the male disciples.

4. The Honoured Paṭācārā, she was born into a banker’s family in the town of Sāvatthī. One of the family servants was her lover and when her
parents arranged her marriage, she ran away with her lover and set up house in a remote place. She wanted to return to her parents for delivering her baby but her husband delayed her return to her parents. The next time, on the way to her parents’ house her husband died of a snake bite. She lost both her babies while crossing a flooded river. All the members of her parents’ family died in an accident. These tragic events affected her so much that she lost her presence of mind. In her wanderings she recovered her presence of mind through the Buddha’s advice. The Buddha accepted her in the community of nuns. Paṭācārā’s verses in the Therīgāthā, is an account of her moment of her enlightenment. She led a life of misery and despair as a widow. She attained Arhantship and later became the protector of women in the order of nuns.

5. The Honoured Nandā, she was the beautiful princess who was extremely well bred and graceful. Out of her love for her relatives, Nandā accepted the order of Nuns. Her thoughts were directed toward her own beauty and her popularity with the people. She was constantly worried about her good looks and outer splendor. She was selfish, conceited and self-centred and therefore she avoided correcting her ways. The Buddha appealed to all her positive qualities. She was enthralled with her own physical beauty; the Buddha gave her a graphic lesson in impermanence. The meditation lesson that was assigned to her was the contemplation of the impermanence and foulness of the body. The long practice of contemplation made her overcome her attachment to the body and attain indestructible peace. Later on the Buddha praised Nandā as the Foremost in Insight and Concentration among nuns who practised meditation. Her verses in Therīgathā appear that recount her disenchantment with the body.40

6. The Honoured Dhammadinnā, she belonged in a high caste society. She was very gentle and virtuous. She was married to Visakhasthī. She was a devoted an obedient wife to her husband. Once, upon hearing a sermon of the

40 Therī. 82-86.
Buddha, her husband told her that he thought of renouncing the world and so she could go to her parents taking his wealth. She was upset and she asked his permission to renounce the world and become a nun. In her new walk of life as a nun she did not make desired progress. She overcame this phase and ultimately earned Arhatship. When she returned to Rajagaha Visākhā, who had not yet become a monk with genuine curiosity asked her about the Buddha’s teaching. She calmly addressed him as “Brother Visākhā” and solved the questions put to her. Visākhā was so surprised that he went to the Buddha and repeated her answer to him. The Buddha told him that the nun Dhammadinnā has answered him in the same way as the Buddha would have answered. The Buddha praised her by called her “Pandita” – the intelligent lady Dhammadinnā helped to propagate the Buddha’s Dhamma. She became the Most Eloquent Dhamma Teaching of women disciples and the Chief of the Missionaries who preached the Dhamma of the Buddha.

7. The Honoured Somā, she was the daughter of the minister of King Bimbisāra. She would have been a woman of some status as her father held a powerful position – something like a prime minister, but with religious responsibilities as well. Before becoming a Bhikkhuni, she was in constant desperation and depression. Her dedication and devoted practice helped eradicate all tainted infatuation and defilement. Somā first heard the Buddha preach on a visit he made to Rajagaha. Her path followed a typical pattern of progressive involvement. The Buddha’s discourse had a remarkable impact and she first became a lay disciple. She then used her marginal power. She then became a laywoman and then a nun. The final development was her becoming a Arahant - “The Holy One”. She was praised as Foremost in Auspicious Quality and Perseverance in the Order of Nuns.41

41 Therī. 102-106.
8. The Honoured Sakulā, she came from Sāvatthī; she was a member of the Brahmin caste. It was in her town that an important Buddhist monastery was established in the beautiful park – Jeta Grove (Jetavan). A kind and devout follower Anāthapiṇḍika made this gift and Sakulā was present on that occasion. The ceremony of dedication for the new monastery was one of great splendor which was well-attended by several dignitaries. During this ceremony Sakulā decided to become a lay disciple. Still she was uneasy and anxious about her life in her mind. Later on, convinced by the preaching of an enlightened Arahant Brother, she decided to become a nun and entered the order. She then struggled and strove for insight and ultimately she attained Arhatship. She was singled one by the Buddha as foremost among the nuns; she possessed the psychic power of clairvoyance. She was called the Eye of Heaven (Eye Celestial) by the Buddha.

9. The Honoured Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesā, she was born in a financier’s family in Rajagaha. One day as a young woman sitting at her window she saw a highway robber being led to execution. Falling in love with him at first sight she begged her father to obtain his release. Her father bribed heavily and the robber was released. Her parents arranged their marriage. The robber – Satthuka - was the son of a king’s minister. Despite his prestigious family background and Bhaddā’s love for him, he was less interested in her love than in the jewels she wore. He made up the story of his vow of an offering to the cliff deity. Bhaddā made all the preparations and when they reached the top of the cliff, he told her about his intention of robbing her of her jewels. With her keen presence of mind, she expressed the desire to embrace him from the front and from the back. While embracing him from the back she pushed him over the cliff. She joined the Jain order of nuns due to her severe austerities. She was called Kuṇḍalakesā an account of her “curly hair”. She mastered all the Jain teachings but felt dissatisfied and wandered in search of the wisest teacher. She engaged many scholars in religious debate but could find no equal. At
Sāvatthī, there was a Dhamma-encounter (religious debate) between Sārīputra, the Buddha’s leading disciple and Kuṇḍalakesā. She was then sent to the Buddha. Her recognized her depth of understanding and gave her instruction. She attained immediate enlightenment. In a rare gesture of respect, the Buddha ordained her by simply saying, “Come, Bhaddā”. She became the most Learned Scholar of the Dhamma among all the female disciples.

This young mischievous and ebullient woman of the past was praised by the Buddha for the speed with which she gained enlightenment. Her tale of her former experiences: “I cut my hair and wore the dust”….. “Come Bhaddā” he said, that was my ordination.”

10. The Honoured Bhaddā Kapilāṇī, the legend goes, had many lives and knew them all. Many of these lives were intertwined with a certain man whose name was Kassapa. In her life contemporary with that of Siddhartha Gautama, Bhaddā Kapilāṇī was born into a wealthy family of the Kosiya clan. She grew up in Sagalu, the capital of the kingdom of Madde. One day as a child, she saw crows eating some insects that were wriggling among drying sesame seeds. This seemingly trivial but significant incident shaped her later decision to renounce the world. A similar incident influenced the boy Kassapa who resolved to become a renunciants when he grew up. Their parents arranged their marriage but the couple Bhaddā and Kassapa agreed not to consummate the marriage and will not have an heir. Mahākassapa was given ordination when he encountered to Buddha. Bhaddā’s course was more difficult. For five years she lived near the Jeta Grove (Jetavan) at Sāvatthī waiting. When Mahāpajāpatī established the monastic order of nuns, Bhaddā joined he. Bhaddā Kapilāṇī received full ordination and attained the great peace she sought. She recounts her experiences saying “and are both (Bhaddā Kapilāṇī and Mahākassapa) grown gentle. …quenched and cool.

42 Therī. 107-109; Dhm. 101.
She was one of the female disciple who was wife of Māhā Kassapa in their lay lives. Both had not consummated their marriage because they wanted religious lives but were forced into marriage. She could recollect their previous lives far back into the past.

11. The Honoured Bhadda Kaccāṇā or Bimbā, who once was among the close lady-in-waiting to Prince Siddhartha, came to the Order with a bestowed honor of achieving the Greatest Mindfulness among the woman disciples.

12. The Honoured Kīsāgotami came from a poor family of Sāvatthī. She was called “Kīsā” meaning thin. Her thinness was probably due to the poverty in which she had grown up, Gotamī was her family name. Kīsāgotamī was married to a banker’s son of considerable wealth. She gave birth to a son; she finally received an honourable place among her husband’s relatives. Her child died while still a toddler. Kīsāgotamī, who had never seen death before, went mad with grief. She was mentioned as the woman stricken with grief over her son’s death. In her state of insanity, she carried the dead child and lamented. She was then directed to the Buddha. She begged the Buddha for a miracle potion to bring her son back to life. The Buddha said, “Go and bring a white mustard seed from a house where no one has died.” She immediately rushed off in the innocent faith that if she brought a white mustard seed, it would miraculously bring her child back to life. She went from house to house, at each house asking and at each house learning that there too someone had died. The truth struck home. Her sanity returned, “Little son, I thought that death had happened to you alone, but it is not to you alone. It is common to all people.” She carried the body of her child gently to the forest and left him there. Returning to the Buddha, Kīsāgotamī requested and she received ordination.\(^\text{43}\) She became an eminent one among the nuns on account of her asceticism. Her austerity became her distinguished mark and she ultimately

\(^{43}\text{Dhm.278 verse 114.}\)
gained the peace of Nibbāna. She was praised by the Buddha as the Most Ascetic and Disciplined Effort in the Order of Buddhist Nuns. She carried her name “Sister Kīsāgotamī…with a free mind…has said this”. In a dialogue poem included in Saṁyutta Nikāya, Kīsāgotamī answers Mara, the Evil One, with her renewed spiritual insight…and death, you too are destroyed and show how she has overcome the horrible loss of her son’s death.

13. The Honoured Sigala’s mother, she was declared to be foremost among nuns who are released by faith.

These women disciples of the Buddha have attained enlightenment. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī: insistence on the equality of men and women, Khemā’s wisdom, Kīsāgotamī’s asceticism, Sakulā’s insight and foresight, Dhammadinnā’s oratory, Nanda’s keen penetration, Somā’s perseverance, Kuṇḍalakesā’s scholarship, Paṭācārā’s dedication and Uppalavānṇā’s intelligence etc. bring out the fact that they equaled in spiritual strength and dedicated devotion their male counterparts and justified their empowerment as seekers of the true Dhamma of life.

3.6 Contribution of Bhikkunīs to the Development of Buddhism

According to Buddhism, mind is an aggregation of morally good qualities like, Mettā (loving-kindness), Karuṇā (compassion), Muditā (sympathetic joy), Upekkhā (equanimity) etc. and morally bad qualities like Tṛṣṇā or Taṇhā, Lobha (greed), Dosa (hatred), Moha (delusion) etc. Morally bad qualities cause suffering in individual life as well as life of the society. Hence if we want to have peace in our life in the society, it is necessary to develop morally good qualities.
To develop morally good qualities, it is also important to establish good relations with the members of the society. Buddhism accepts three kinds of action; namely, mental action, bodily action and speech. Among these three actions, mental action is basic and bodily action and speech is reflections of mental action. Mental action is morally good then bodily action and speech will also become morally good. In the same way, if mental action is morally bad then bodily action and speech will become morally bad. The roots of morally good action i.e. mental action are alobha (non-greed), adosa (non-hatred), and amoha (non-delusion). If you develop these roots then automatically you have good relations with others consequently there will be peace. The roots of morally bad action are lobha, dosa, and moha. If you have these roots then you cannot have good relations with others. Consequently, there will be conflict in the society. In this way, Dhamma exposes the reasons and consequences of morally, good and bad action and advices us which we have to follow, if we want to have peace in the society.

The Buddhist nuns were teaching this thought to the people while going for alms. The nuns were aware of the fact that it was their livelihood; they were dependent on the alms giving to them by the society. So, it was their duty to give something to the society in return. Thus by teaching Dhamma, the Buddhist nuns were giving spiritual training to the members of the society.

Mahāpajñāpati Gotamī and her sister Māyā are the ‘Great Mother’ of the Buddhist tradition. It is an obvious designation for Māyā as the mother of the Buddha. It is also an equally appreciate description of Mahāpajñāpati Gotamī, who through countless lives had come to know all relations – mother, son father, brother, grandmother. Mahāpajñāpati Gotamī is clearly an old soul. She contains within herself the ocean of experience that makes her the appropriate founding mother of Buddhism.

“All pain is understood, the cause, the craving is dried up.
The Noble Eightfold Way unfolds, I have reached the state where everything stops.
But I have seen the Blessed One, this is my last body,
And I will not go, from birth to birth again.”

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was the first ordained nun, the founder of the order and the first woman Buddhist teacher.

Mitrā, one of the five hundred followers of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī in her poem talks about the change from lay believer to a nun. Mitrā appears to have been a devout lay believer, even anxiously so, and states: “I fasted and tasted”. In her case, she did not find the peace she sought until she became a nun. Her final lives underscore her newfound confidence. “I don’t long to be a god. There is no fear in any heart.”

The seven nuns from Siddhartha Gautama’s household have fully accepted the Buddha’s messages of renunciation and conveyed the message through dialogue. Tissā states: “Tissā, practice the practice.

Sumana points out: “when you throw away,
your longing to be,
you will live at peace.”

Sumana states that you will be peaceful if you throw away your longing

Upasamā: “Upasamā, You should cross
this flood, this place of death,
so hard to cross.”

Upasama says that the place of death is this flood which is difficult to cross.

Mitrā: “Cultivate good qualities
to gain peace.”
Mitrā counsel is to cultivate good qualities to gain peace.

Visākhā  “Practice the Buddha’s teachings;  
You won’t regret it!”

Visākhā’s explain, advice is to continue to follow the Buddha’s teachings. There will be no cause for regret.

Uttarā:  “With the root of craving uprooted,  
I have become cool and quenched.”

Uttarā says that she has attained peace and her thirst is quenched as she uprooted the desires from her mind.

Sangha:  “I gave up desire and hate.  
My ignorance was thrown out.  
I pulled out craving  
Along with its root  
Now I am quenched and still.”

Sāṅgha declares to give up desire and hatred. There will be everlasting peace and contentment when the craving is totally uprooted.

These verses are from Therīgāthā. Therīgāthā is a record of a major religious tradition in woman’s spirituality. These verses show how women have the capacity to realise and understand the highest religious goals of their faith in the same roles and to the same degrees as men. In Buddhism, women live in celibate communities, teach, are ordained and ordain others, preach, gather disciples and create religious poetry of great importance. The Therīgathā is a collection of seventy-three poems in the canon of the earliest Buddhist literature.

Therī means elder women or women who have grown old in knowledge and gāthā means verse, stanza or song. Hence, the Therīgathā are the poems of the wise women of early Buddhism. The Therīgathā is unique as a collection of original material documenting these achievements at the source of one of the world’s great religious traditions. While the religion’s founder was a man the nuns of the Therīgathā were his relatives and contemporaries. As they uttered buddhavacana, “the world of an enlightened one”, they were his spiritual equals. This shows Buddhism – one world religion that acknowledged from its very beginning the authority and equality of women in spiritual practice. The Therīgathā is based on the principle of the equality of women and men in the realm of the spirit and women’s ability to assume spiritual authority in the secular context.

What do these verses Buddhist nuns of about 2500 years ago instruct to their counterparts of the present times? The lives and poems of the Therīgathā instruct that there is a life beyond the illusions of the materialism of the present times. That is the different path chosen by the nuns of the Therīgathā and that even in prosperity there is dukkha – pain. The other way beyond materialism is the path of spirituality not only simply followed but created by women at the birth of one of the world’s great religious traditions. Not only these women turn away from materialistic lives, they turned towards a spiritual principle. The women of the Therīgathā shared a significant trait. Through direct personal experience, each realized the truth in the phrase: “Look within, then art the Buddha.” Their poems record and express this truth. The original Buddhist nun shows through their deeds and words an indisputable spiritual accomplishment.

Their simplicity of life is another lesson they desire to teach. These women lived on seven requisite and ate one meal a day. This was a middle way between indulgence and asceticism. This is a model of sustainability. Simplicity was chosen because it was the simple way of life. This the first Buddhist nuns have a special significance in the present times of corruption and
pollution. The Buddha’s dying words were “to be light unto yourself.” The Therīgāthā emphasizes the women’s spiritual authority – the authority to lead, to teach, to express, to hold any and all possessions within institutions and to control one’s own body, mind and spirit. Spiritual authority is not simply an individual matter, it pertains to social structures. The social structures of the sixth century B.C. India were somewhat supportive of women’s spiritual development. Abhirūpā Nanda’s poem provides a clue to seeking the structures relevant to the present times:

“Get rid of the tendency, to judge yourself
Above, below or, equal to others.”45

It is essential to first set right woman’s attitude towards woman herself towards others and towards social structures. The right shift in attitudes towards woman herself, towards society and of the society towards woman is considered desirable. This right shift deepens the self-realisation of woman by woman. This self-realisation enables woman to attain empowerment – In this respect it is also expected that the ranking model of dominators needs to be replaced by the partnership model. For a long time, the dominator model has remained in rogue in which one ranks above the other, the male dominator dominating above the woman for centuries. The partnership model is that in which social relations are primarily based on the principle of linking rather than ranking.

The lives and poems of the Therīgāthā is the record in itself of an invaluable source on ancient women. It is one of the oldest historical materials on ancient women by and about women. The Therīgāthā is a truly special in nature, as it provides support for the cultural shift that occurred in ancient period as the shift from women’s empowerment and spiritual authority to their disenfranchisement. The Buddhist nuns emphasize the truth that everybody should be her or his own light. This means not to imitate but to use the example

of these wise creative women to remove the veils of ignorance caused through the coverings of materialism, violence, aggression, corruption and pollution in the present times. The nuns of the Therīgathā show that each one can realize the highest truths if chastity, purity, sanctity, faith, patience, compassion, truth, non-violence, wisdom, character and spirituality are inculcated in human lives with full sincerity.

Buddhism brought with it a revolt against the caste system and also made an attempt to promote the cause of rights for women, for which in a spirit which was startlingly modern the women themselves were beginning to right. In order to promote the cause of rights for women it is essential to tear apart the thick gloom of ignorance. This ignorance is caused by the absence of woman’s attitude towards herself, woman’s attitude towards society and the society’s attitude towards woman. The verses in Therīgathā by the earliest Buddhist nuns show how the triple ignorance of the absence of specific attitudes is removed in the course of their admission to the order, their accepting simplicity and austerity in the life in a monastic order, their scholarship in the precepts of the Buddha. In the life in the order, the nuns realised the significance of the woman’s attitude towards herself. In the Order, no woman could think of her home or family. All her attention was concentrated on eight noble paths. She was to shun all temptations, all ailments leading her astray. After practicing austerities for a certain time, woman in the order was known as Bhikkhunī:

“Freed woman she, discharged is all her debt,
A Bhikkhunī trained in the higher sense.
All sundered are the bonds, her task is done,
And the great drugs that poisoned her are purged.”

A Bhikkhunī who is trained in higher knowledge has found that all her bonds are broken. She has accomplished her goal, her task is now completed.

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The great drugs that poisoned her formerly have lost their effect. She is purified of now and the purgation of ill-effects has taken place.

Somā is convinced of the inherently equal capacity of both the sexes for gaining Arhatship:

“What should the woman’s nature signify
When consciousness is tense and firmly it
When knowledge rolleth ever on when she
By insight rightly comprehends the Norm.”

A woman, who has rightly comprehended the norm through her insight, finds all knowledge rolling ever on. She is firm and earnest in her consciousness and has acquired the Path of Dhamma. A woman’s nature is no hindrance to accomplish the goal, to attain the Path.

It is clear that by intellectual and moral eminence a Therī might claim equality with the highest of the fraternity. Besides the above intellectual capacities which women in the Buddhist ages had proved beyond contradiction, the spiritual triumphs attained by them were also equally glorious. This is how women’s attitude towards herself became more transparent and more rewarding.

The removal of the basic covering has further led to the refinement of the woman’s attitude towards society and society’s attitude towards woman. It is indeed a matter of pride that the female sex could so successfully shake off pre-conceived notions of their religious incapacity and once set on the right path could pursue it so doggedly and defiantly of all earthly impediments and hardships that the Buddha was compelled to accede to them perfect religious quality. Kīṣā Gotamī practiced severe austerities to prove the spiritual potentialities of womankind. The pious lady declared “Nibbāna have I realised and gazed into the mirror of the holy Norm” ultimately the sex-distinction

47 SN.V. 2.
evaporated on the plane of spirituality. The refined attitudes towards herself and the society enabled women in the Buddhist period to attain empowerment in the spiritual and religious aspects of life.

A Leap Ahead

Buddhist nuns were empowered as the Buddha and other members of the society would listen to them and made them accept that women could attain the Nibbāna. These Buddhist nuns have not only empowered themselves but also enabled the members of the society to make them empowered in their attempt in making themselves free from suffering. Thus, they made a big contribution to the society. The Buddhist Upāsikās, who have not renounced the material life also empowered themselves and contributed for the expansion of the Buddhist thoughts in the society. In the next chapter we will how Upāsikās become empowered and what is their contribution in Buddhism.