




Why Women Cannot Be Buddha?¹

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[Abstract]

Individuals who perform meritorious acts in order to be enlightened as Buddha in the future will need an important Dhamma qualification that is Dhammasamothan. This principle consists of eight associated qualifications: one of those is masculinity. In other words, it is suggested that only a gentleman can be enlightened like Buddha. Regarding on the fact that there is no clear reason the inferiors as stated in the Buddhist scripture; in addition, there are few researchers studying and mentioning the women's inferiors to become the Buddha. Therefore, this research aims to answer the questions why this masculine qualification is required, and why women cannot be enlightened as Buddha. According to the findings, the reasons why only men can be enlightened as Buddha are as follows: 1) the duties and missions of Buddha, 2) the natures and pains of women, 3) social, traditional and cultural conditions,

¹ This article is the partial fulfillment of the research study, the Buddhist Attitudes in Tripitaka towards Women.

and 4) the supports for Buddhist monks and householders who are men. The reason that women cannot be enlightened as Buddha is not because of the higher virtue of men. Women and men have equivalent potentials to perform meritorious acts and have intentions, but appropriate contexts and environments are necessary for realizing the intentions. Hence, the enlightened ones must be men.

Keywords: Buddha, Female Buddhists, Dhammasamothan

Introduction

In the current society, women have rights and roles that are equivalent to those of men in almost all aspects including social, economic or professional aspects. In the religious aspect, there are people questioning about Theravada's viewpoints about women. Theravada is the branch of Buddhism that Thai people respect. The issue is that it seems to depress women, which is evidenced in some statements from Tripitaka negatively state about women. Moreover, some statements indicate Buddhist viewpoints towards the women's inferiors to become the five types of the top people including Buddha, Chakravarti, Sakra, Brahma and Mara. It is stated that women cannot be these five types of people (Angu. Eak-Tuk-Tik. 12/163-167/164). These statements in Tripitaka caused misunderstanding and questions among people interested in women's rights as well as female Buddhists. It was questioned that why Buddhism has this attitude. There are people explained and provided reasons for the negative statements of Tripitaka towards the women. As a result, correct understandings and attitudes were made. Nevertheless, there are few researchers studying and mentioning the women's inferiors to become the five types of top people. There is also no clear reason the inferiors as stated in the religious scripture. Hence, women's right activists and some female Buddhists still have negative attitudes towards Buddhism. These biases may prevent some Buddhists to profoundly study Buddhism. Buddhism may also be criticized and blamed by the believers of other religions, especially for foreigners who are women's right activists or even Thai people. The misunderstandings also keep spreading.

Thus, this article aims at finding the reasons about one of the five factors that prevent the women. That factor is Buddha. The reasons for these statements in Tripitaka and the inappropriate qualities for the women to be enlightened like Buddha were studied in order to gain the understandings about the Buddhist attitudes towards the women and to develop broad attitudes towards the women's statuses in Buddhist aspect. The findings may be used for deciding whether Buddhism actually depress the women or not and whether the women cannot become top people like Buddha because of discrimination against women, Buddhist biases or any other reason.

Methods

This research is a documentary research which involves exploring, assessing, and analyzing of texts, documents and related information from two different sources: the primary and the secondary sources.

1. The primary sources: exploring Tripitaka both Thai and Pali versions.

2. The secondary sources: exploring Buddhist scriptures, texts and documents that are related to the topic. This includes the Commentaries (atthakatha), the Subcommentaries (tika, anutika), texts, research, articles, essays, journals, critiques, and other documents both in Thai and English.

After the completion of thorough analyses, the conclusion are provided for academic purposes.

Results

That the women could not be enlightened like Buddha is not because of Buddhist biases or discriminations. Once enlightened as a Buddha, the Buddha performs several duties and responsibilities which provides long-term benefits for Buddhism, Buddhist followers and companions. What is more, within the social contexts and the fulfillment of the mentioned duties, the women's physical and mental conditions limit the suitability to have this status. This is not because the men can perform

more meritorious acts than the women.

In terms of humanity, both men and women have equivalent potentials to perform meritorious acts and to have intentions to become a Buddha. Nevertheless, the appropriate conditions and contexts are required to fulfill the intentions. Both men and women need to perform prolonged meritorious acts and dedication before their intention can even approach the realization phase. Once, the woman approaches this phase and continues to have a strong dedication and intention to become enlightened like Buddha in the future, then the woman also needs to wish to abandon the female status. Thus, it should not be stated that women cannot be enlightened like Buddha; however, their natural conditions are not appropriate for enlightenment. Hence, the enlightened ones have the male statuses in the lives they are enlightened.

Discussion

The Qualities of Individuals Enlightened Like Buddha

The individuals who want to perform meritorious actions in order to be enlightened like Buddha in the future will need an important Dhamma qualification that is Dhammasamothana. If Bodhisattvas did not have this qualification, then there would be no prediction by Buddha and Bodhisattvas would be considered as “Aniyata Bodhisattvas” (i.e. unrealistic Bodhisattvas). It can be seen that Dhammasamothana is very important for the individuals wanting to be enlightened like Buddha in the future. There are eight qualifications as follows.

1. Humanity is the identity of a human being for realizing intentions.

2. Masculinity is the identity of a man.

3. Causality is a disposition.

4. Experience with the founder of the religion refers to meeting the founder when the founder was alive.

5. Ordination is to ordain a Buddhist institute or that of any other religion with the beliefs in actions and consequences.

6. Qualifications are such as Apinya and Chansamabat.

7. Superiority is the donation of one's own life for Sammasamphothichan.

8. Satisfaction is the pleasure in Buddhist aspect.(Mahamakut Buddhist University, 1994)

These eight qualifications are important for individuals who want to be enlightened like Buddha in the future. Any individual who did not have any qualification would not be predicted by Buddha. The second qualification is the masculinity. This qualification is compulsory. In other words, women cannot be enlightened like Buddha. However, it is explained by Phra Brahma Moli (Wilat Chanwaro) in Muneenattheep that Bodhisattvas must be male in the life that would be predicted in the Buddhist aspect (PhraBhramaMolee,1996). Nevertheless, there is no explanation about the life being enlightened like Buddha. The qualification of Bodhisattvas in this section for being predicted by Buddha is equivalent to the origin of the initial requirement that only men cannot be enlightened like Buddha, while women do not meet the requirement.

The Duties and Missions of the Individuals Enlightened like Buddha

After the individuals enlightened like Buddha (i.e. Trassaroo Annutarasamma Sammaphotichan),all of them would follow Buddhist ethics in order to help living things in the world by doing the five missions as follows.

- **Purapat mission:** Receive food offerings in the morning. Sometimes, Buddha received the food offerings alone. Sometimes, Buddha had followers who were monks. After receiving and having the food offerings, he would teach the people who appeared before him and offered him the foods. Then, he would go to a pavilion to provide teachings and conduct appropriate meditations for Buddhist monks. After that, he returned to his residence. He might sleep on one's side for a while before waking up and observing living things in the world.

- **Patjapat mission:** Teach people in the afternoon.

- **Pathomyam mission:** Teach Buddhist monks in the evening by

solving problems and explaining principles for the monks appearing before Buddha.

- **Matshimyam mission:** Answers the questions of angels since they would appear before Buddha after completing the Pathomyam mission.

- **Patshimyam mission:** Observe the living things in the world before the sun rise. This mission can be divided into three periods.

- **The first mission:** Walk back and forth in order to relax.

- **The second mission:** Sleep.

- **The third mission:** Wake up and sit in order to observe the living things in the world for two times in the morning and afternoon. (Suree Meepholkit and Wichian Meepholkit, 2003)

These five Buddhist missions are done with three Buddhist ethics as follows.

- Perform meritorious actions for the world.
- Perform meritorious actions for relatives.
- Perform meritorious actions as Buddha(Ibid).

It can be seen that there were many duties and missions for the individuals enlightened like Buddha. They must be close to people and Buddhist monks all the time. Therefore, the individuals wanting to be enlightened like Buddha must always be diligent and visit different places. Their bodies must be strong without obstructing these meritorious actions.

The Nature and Sufferings of Women

In Phra Suthatapidok Arwenikkasoot, it stated the five suffers of women as follows.

“Buddhist monks have to consider that women have five suffers that are different from those of me as follows.

The women in this world who are going to be married would have a suffering from being away from their relatives.

The second suffering is that the women have menstruation.

The third sufferings is that the women can be pregnant.

The fourth suffering is that the women might have to give births to their children.

The other suffering is that the women might have to entertain men. These are the five sufferings of women that men do not have.”(Sang. Sor Lor10/ 462-466/ 252)

It can be seen that the ones of the five sufferings that is a tradition is the first and second sufferings that women might be able to avoid if they are ordained. Nonetheless, the natural sufferings that are the second and third sufferings are important obstacles for living as monks or performing the Buddhist missions like Buddha. These sufferings that are giving births and having menstruation are ones of the causes of fear, anxiety, pain and uneasiness(LakwatPalara, 2002).

Not only the five sufferings of the women, but they also have natures that may be easily affected by emotions since they are emotional and inactive (Ibid).

For the eight habits, the women have unreasonable depression(Ibid). These emotional and mental problems are partially caused by their physical nature. Therefore, they have physical, mental and emotional conditions different from men who are manful.

The Reasons that Women Cannot be Enlightened like Buddha: Analyses

Phra Phromkunaporn (P. A. Payutto) (2001)provided the two following explanations:

- In terms of humanity, either women or men have potentials and opportunities to be enlightened like Buddha.
- For being enlightened like Buddha as men, it involved Buddha’s two components: the discoveries of truths and religious announcements. Before being enlightened, individuals must diligently perform meritorious

acts. Therefore, it is difficult for the women to have that kind of lives. After being enlightened, the individuals must be able to visit places alone. This is not appropriate for the women. As a result, the enlightened individuals must have the statuses of men. It means that all individuals have the rights to be enlightened like Buddha, but the individuals must be men while performing the meritorious acts and propagating the religion.

Phra Sri Pariyattimollee (2001) provided opinions about Tripitaka, which states that women cannot be enlightened like Buddha. The reason may be that the men have the characteristics suitable for understanding the Buddhist principles and performing meritorious acts. However, this may not be true.

Piksune Dhammanantha (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Chatsuman Kabilsing) resented an article, *Women in Buddhism*, by a Japanese scholar whose name is Kajiyama Yuishi in *The Eastern Buddhist Journal* in autumn of 1982. This article states that the beliefs that women cannot be enlightened like Buddha have the origin of about 600 years after Buddha's lifetime. Yuishi explained that the mentioned beliefs were not in the first chanting in unison because of the lack of Pali and Chinese evidence. Nonetheless, there are records in both Pali and Chinese scriptures. Hence, these beliefs might originate during the late third centuries before the Christian Era or after the beginning of Mahayana (Chatsuman Kabilsing, 1989). At that time, there were understandings that Buddha was not an ordinary individual. There was a tendency that he might be worshiped as a god. It was explained that he had the 32 characteristics of emperors according to Indian beliefs. The 10th Mahapurisak states that Buddha must have a penis. This was the origin of the understanding that individuals enlightened like Buddha must be men, while women cannot be enlightened like Buddha because the women do not have penises. This belief has been maintained for thousand years. Later, there are teachings developed in order to imply that the women who perform meritorious acts at the advanced level may become transgender (Thammanantha, 2003).

Lakwat Palarat (2002) provided opinions that the women who cannot be enlightened like Buddha might only mean the lives that they were women. They may be dedicated to reincarnate as men. Kopeeka, who did

not want to be a woman and want to be a man, reincarnated as a god in the second heaven. This can guarantee that the women could reincarnate as men, and there is a possibility for the women to be enlightened as men. Buddha's statement that women did not have statuses to be enlightened like him means that the Buddhist intentions and meritorious acts are not convenient for the women because they are quite sensitive and emotional. They also have physical difficulties for performing the meritorious acts. If they have the Buddhist intentions and dedicatedly perform the meritorious acts, then they will want to discard their gender in order to achieve their ultimate goal (LakwatPalara, 2002).

According to these attitudes, the two following issues can be analyzed regarding the reasons that the women cannot be enlightened like Buddha.

The women can have intentions to be enlightened like Buddha. The statement that women cannot be enlightened like Buddha does not mean that the individuals who are women by birth cannot be enlightened like Buddha if they have the Buddhist intentions and dedicatedly perform meritorious acts. However, they must abandon their gender and have the intentions to be gentle men since this is one of the eight principles of Dhammasamothan. This qualification is necessary for receiving the Buddhist prediction in order to become Bodhisattvas, who will be enlightened like Buddha in the future. In the life of Bodhisattva being enlightened like Buddha, this individual must be male because of the following reasons:

The Duties and Missions of Buddha: as previously mentioned, Buddha had many Buddhist missions and ethics for the world and relatives. He must also perform meritorious acts as Buddha. Because of the women's physical conditions, they are not appropriate and strong enough to take these burdens. To complete these Buddhist missions, individuals must visit and stay at dangerous places that are not appropriate for the women's natural conditions; for example, in the case of Phra Ubolwannatheree, who was raped by Nanthamanop. Moreover, if the women can be enlightened like Buddha, they will have difficulties in teaching followers about facts and answering the followers' questions. By doing these activities, they will have

to be close and occasionally provide personal supports for the followers. If the instructors and followers have different genders, then they and Buddhist companions may be criticized by other people from other religions. Thus, the statuses of the women are not suitable for doing the missions of Buddha.

The Nature and Sufferings for the Women: although Buddha completely abandoned his lusts, he must dedicatedly perform meritorious acts in order to obtain Samma Samphothiyan. Nonetheless, the women can be easily; for example, emotional and sensitive. Although they may be taught to be mentally and emotionally strong, their obstructive conditions such as menstruation are the difficulties for them to perform the meritorious acts. Men have fewer physical and mental obstacles than them.

Social, Traditional and Cultural Conditions: by considering the social conditions when Samana Gautama was born, it can be seen that the women had inferior conditions than men. The women were only followers, and their roles and statuses were not accepted. By using the social, traditional and cultural conditions of Samana Gautama as criteria, the women would surely not be socially accepted if they were enlightened like Buddha and they would have difficulties in propagating the religion because the men who grew up in the ancient Indian society would not follow or respect the women. Consequently, those men would not accept the women's teachings. Although the women might be enlightened like Buddha, it would be useless if they could not propagate the religion. Hence, the male status of Buddha was appropriate in the ancient Indian society for the public benefits.

The Supports for Male Buddhist Monks and Householders: if the women can be enlightened like Buddha, then there would be problematic consequences. The ordinary people who could not abandon their lusts and those who are male may have spiritual, verbal or physical acts that are not good for the enlightened ones who are women more easily than the enlightened ones who are men. Furthermore, the natural conditions of the women can easily make men be infatuated with. The enlightened ones who are women will have bodies that are more beautiful than others because of their meritorious acts. This can make the ordinary men who are men

perform sinful acts. To support men including Buddhist monks who have the most important roles of inheriting the religion and Buddhist householders to perform Buddhist acts and avoid sinful acts, the male status is suitable for the enlightened ones who will support the teachable ones.

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