A bhikkhuni (Pali) or bhikṣuṇī (Sanskrit) is a fully ordained female monastic in Buddhism. Male monastics are called bhikkhus. Both bhikkhunis and bhikkhus live by the Vinaya, a set of rules. Until recently, the lineages of female monastics only remained in Mahayana Buddhism and thus are prevalent in countries such as Korea, Vietnam, China, and Taiwan but a few women have taken the full monastic vows in the Theravada and Vajrayana schools over the last decade.

In Buddhism, women are as capable of reaching nirvana as men. According to Buddhist scriptures, the order of bhikkhunis was first created by the Buddha at the specific request of his aunt and foster-mother Mahapajapati Gotami, who became the first ordained bhikkhuni. A famous work of the early Buddhist schools is the Therīgatha, a collection of poems by elder nuns about enlightenment that was preserved in the Pali Canon.

Bhikkhunis are required to take extra vows, the Eight Garudhammas and are subordinate to and reliant upon the bhikkhu order. In places where the bhikkhuni lineage was historically missing or has died out, due to hardship, alternative forms of renunciation have developed. In Tibetan Buddhism, women officially take the vows of śrāmaṇerīs (novitiates); Theravadin women may choose to take an informal and limited set of vows similar to the historical vows of the sāmaṇeri, like the maechi of Thailand and thilashin of Myanmar.

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The tradition of the ordained monastic community (sangha) began with the Buddha, who established an order of Bhikkhus (monks). According to the scriptures, later, after an initial reluctance, he also established an order of Bhikkhunis (nuns or women monks). However, according to the scriptural account, not only did the Buddha lay down more rules of discipline for the bhikkhunis (311 compared to the bhikkhu's 227 in the Theravada version), he also made it more difficult for them to be ordained, and made them subordinate to monks. The bhikkhuni order was established five years after the bhikkhu order of monks at the request of a group of women whose spokesperson was Mahapajapati Gotami, the aunt who raised Gautama Buddha after his mother died.

The historicity of this account has been questioned, sometimes to the extent of regarding nuns as a later invention. The stories, sayings and deeds of a substantial number of the preeminent Bhikkhuni disciples of the Buddha as well as numerous distinguished bhikkhunis of early Buddhism are recorded in many places in the Pali Canon, most notably in the Therigatha and Theri Apadana as well as the Anguttara Nikaya and Bhikkhuni Samyutta. Additionally the ancient bhikkhunis feature in the Sanskrit Avadana texts and the first Sri Lankan Buddhist historical chronicle, the Dipavamsa, itself speculated to be authored by the Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Sangha.

According to Peter Harvey, "The Buddha's apparent hesitation on this matter is reminiscent of his hesitation on whether to teach at all", something he only does after persuasion from various devas. Since the special rules for female monastics were given by the founder of Buddhism they have been upheld to this day. Buddhists nowadays are still concerned with that fact, as shows at an International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha held at the University of Hamburg, Germany, in 2007.

In Buddhism, women can openly aspire to and practice for the highest level of spiritual attainment. Buddhism is unique among Indian religions in that the Buddha as founder of a spiritual tradition explicitly states in canonical literature that a woman is as capable of nirvana as men and can fully attain all four stages of enlightenment. There is no equivalent in other traditions to the accounts found in the Therigatha or the Apadanas that speak of high levels of spiritual attainment by women.

In a similar vein, major canonical Mahayana sutras such as the Lotus Sutra, chapter 12, records 6000 bhikkhuni arhantis receiving predictions of bodhisattvahood and future buddhahood by Gautama Buddha.

The Eight Garudhammas

Female monastics are required to follow special rules that male monastics do not, the Eight Garudhammas. The origin of the Eight Garudhammas, the special vows taken by female monastics, is unclear. The Buddha is quoted by Thannisaro Bhikkhu as saying, "Ananda, if Mahaprajapati Gotami accepts eight vows of respect, that will be her full ordination (upasampada)." Modern scholars have shown that this story abounds in textual problems, and cannot possibly be a factual account. According to the scriptural accounts, the reason the Buddha gave for his actions was that admission of women to the sangha would weaken it and shorten its lifetime to 500 years. This prophecy occurs only once in the Canon and is the only prophecy involving time in the Canon.

In Young Chung noticed that society as recorded in the Vinaya always criticized the bhikkhunis more harshly using "shaven headed strumpets or whores", whereas the bhikkhus were simply called "shaven headed". This harsher treatment (which also included rape and assault) of bhikkhunis by society required greater protection. Within these social conditions, Gautama Buddha opened up new horizons for women by founding the bhikkhuni sangha. This social and spiritual advancement for women was ahead of the times and, therefore, drew many objections from men, including bhikkhus. He was probably well aware of the controversy that would be caused by the harassment of his female disciples.

The Vinaya does not allow for any power-based relationship between the monks and nuns. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni wrote:
Nuns at the time of the Buddha had equal rights and an equal share in everything. In one case, eight robes were offered to both sanghas at a place where there was only one nun and four monks. The Buddha divided the robes in half, giving four to the nun and four to the monks, because the robes were for both sanghas and had to be divided equally however many were in each group. Because the nuns tended to receive fewer invitations to lay-people's homes, the Buddha had all offerings brought to the monastery and equally divided between the two sanghas. He protected the nuns and was fair to both parties. They are subordinate in the sense of being younger sisters and elder brothers, not in the sense of being masters and slaves.[1,4]

Ian Astley argues that under the conditions of society where there is such great discrimination and threat to women, Buddha could not be blamed for the steps he took in trying to secure the Sangha from negative public opinion:

In those days (and this still applies to much of present Indian society) a woman who had left the life of the household would otherwise have been regarded more or less as a harlot and subjected to the appropriate harassment. By being formally associated with the monks, the nuns were able to enjoy the benefits of leaving the household life without incurring immediate harm. Whilst it is one thing to abhor, as any civilized person must do, the attitudes and behavior towards women which underlie the necessity for such protection, it is surely misplaced to criticize the Buddha and his community for adopting this particular policy.[13]

**Becoming a Bhikkhuni**

The progression to ordination as a bhikkhuni is taken in four steps. A layperson takes the Five Precepts. The next step is to enter the pabbajja (Sanskrit: pravrajya) or monastic way of life, which includes wearing the monastic's robes. After that, one can become a śrāmaṇeri or "novitiate". The last and final step is to take the full vows of a bhikkhuni.

**The Fourteen Precepts of the Order of Interbeing**

The Order of Interbeing established in 1964 and associated with the Plum Village movement, has fourteen precepts observed by all monastics.[15] They were written by Thích Nhất Hạnh. In an interview, Chân Không described his approach:

In Plum Village, the Eight Observations of Respect that nuns have to observe towards Buddhist monks are not observed, as Nhat Hanh claims they were invented only to help the stepmother of the Buddha, and that one need only keep Nhat Hanh's 14 precepts properly. That's all. But of course he doesn't despise the traditional precepts. And I can accept them just to give joy to the monks who practice in the traditional way. If I can give them joy, I will have a chance to share my insights about women with them, and then they will be unblocked in their understanding.[16]

**Gelongma**

Gelongma (feminine term) (wylie: dge slong ma) or Gelong (masculine term) is the Tibetan word for a fully ordained monastic observing the entire vinaya. While the exact number of vows observed varies from one ordination lineage to another, generally the female monastic observes 360 vows while the male monastic observes 265.
Getsul and Getsulma (Tib <dge tshul>)(Skt <sramanera>) is the novice ordination, a preparation monastic level prior to Gelongma. Novices, both male and female, adhere to twenty-five main vows. A lay person or child monk too young to take the full vows may take the five vows called "approaching virtue" (in Tibetan genyen <dge snyan>). These five vows can be practiced as a monastic, where the genyen maintains celibacy or as a lay practitioner where the married genyen maintains fidelity.

Starting with the novice ordination (Tib. ge tsul) some may choose to take forty years to gradually arrive at the bhikkhu (Tib. gelong) vows of a fully ordained monk.\[17]\[18\] Others take the getsulma and gelongma vows on the same day and practice as a gelongma from the beginning, as the getsulma vows are included within the gelongma.

Tradition in South and East Asia

The tradition flourished for centuries throughout South and East Asia, but appears to have lapsed in the Theravada tradition of Sri Lanka in the 11th century C.E.\[19\] It survived in Burma to about the 13th century, but died out there too.\[20\] Although it is commonly said to have never been introduced to Thailand, Laos, Cambodia or Tibet, there is substantial historical evidence to the contrary especially in Thailand.

However, the Mahayana tradition, in China, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan and Hong Kong, has retained the practice, where nuns are called 'Bhikṣuṇī' (the Sanskrit equivalent of the Pali 'Bhikkhuni').

In 13th century Japan, Mugai Nyodai was ordained the first female abbess and thus the first female Zen master.\[21\] Prajñādhara is the twenty-seventh Indian Patriarch of Zen Buddhism and is believed to have been a woman.\[22\]

In Theravada Buddhism

The traditional appearance of Theravada bhikkhunis is nearly identical to that of male monks, including a shaved head, shaved eyebrows and saffron robes. In some countries, nuns wear dark chocolate robes or sometimes the same colour as monks. In the Theravada tradition, some scholars believe that the bhikkhuni lineage became extinct in the 11th to 13th centuries and that no new bhikkhunis could be ordained since there were no bhikkhunis left to give ordination. For this reason, the leadership of the Theravada bhikkhu Sangha in Burma and Thailand deem fully ordained bhikkhunis as impossible. "Equal rights for men and women are denied by the Ecclesiastical Council. No woman can be ordained as a Theravada Buddhist nun or bhikkhuni in Thailand. The Council has issued a national warning that any monk who ordains female monks will severely punished."\[23\] Based on the spread of the bhikkhuni lineage to countries like China, Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam, Japan and Sri Lanka, other scholars support ordination of Theravada bhikkhunis.\[24\]

Without ordination available to them, women traditionally voluntarily take limited vows to live as renunciants. These women attempt to lead a life following the teachings of the Buddha. They observe 8–10 precepts, but do not follow exactly the same codes as bhikkhunis. They receive popular recognition for their role. But they are not granted official endorsement or the educational support offered to monks. Some cook while others practise and teach meditation.\[25\][26][27][28][29][30]

White or pink robes are worn by Theravada women renunciants who are not fully ordained. These women are known as dasa sil mata in Sri Lankan Buddhism, thilashin in Burmese Buddhism, Maechi in Thai Buddhism, guurma in Nepal and Laos and siladharas at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in England.
Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, now known as Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, is a Thai scholar who took bhikkhuni ordination in Sri Lanka and returned to Thailand, where bhikkhuni ordination is forbidden and can result in arrest or imprisonment for a woman. She is considered a pioneer by many in Thailand.

In 1996, through the efforts of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women, the Theravada bhikkhuni order was revived when 11 Sri Lankan women received full ordination in Samath, India, in a procedure held by Dodangoda Revata Mahāthera and the late Mapalagama Vipulasāra Mahāthera of the Maha Bodhi Society in India with assistance from monks and nuns of the Jogye Order of Korean Seon.

The first Theravada bhikkhuni ordination in Australia was held in Perth, 22 October 2009, at Bodhinyana Monastery. Four nuns from Dhammasara Nun's Monastery, Ajahn Vayama, Nirodha, Seri and Hasapanna, were ordained as bhikkunis in full accordance with the Pali vinaya.

In July 2007 a meeting of Buddhist leaders and scholars of all traditions met at the International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha in Hamburg, Germany to work toward a worldwide consensus on the re-establishment of bhikshuni ordination. 65 delegates, bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, Vinaya masters and elders from traditional Buddhist countries and Western-trained Buddhologists attended. The Summary Report from the Congress states that all delegates "were in unanimous agreement that Mulasarvastivada bhikshuni ordination should be re-established," and cites the Dalai Lama's full support of bhikkhuni ordination (already in 1987 H. H. XIVth Dalai Lama had demanded the re-establishment of full ordination for nuns in Tibet). The only women's transmission lineage that remains is the Dharmaguptaka one, which is in use in East Asian Buddhism.

To help establish the Bhikshuni Sangha (community of fully ordained nuns) where it does not currently exist has also been declared one of the objectives of Sakyadhita, as expressed at its founding meeting in 1987 in Bodhgaya, India.

In Part Four of Alexander Berzin's Summary Report: Day Three and Final Comments by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama it is said: "But Buddha gave the basic rights equally to both sangha groups. There is no point in discussing whether or not to revive the bhikshuni ordination; the question is merely how to do so properly within the context of the Vinaya.

The Eight Garudhammas belong to the context of the Vinaya. Bhikkhuni Kusuma writes: "In the Pali, the eight garudhammas appear in the tenth khandhaka of the Cullavagga." However, they are to be found in the actual ordination process for Bhikkhunis.
According to the Summary Report as well as according to the other texts available from the congress there has not been a discussion on how and which of the eight gurudharmas discriminate against Buddhist nuns and how this can be changed in detail in the process of re-establishing the Mulasarvastivadabhikshuni ordination.

In Burma, the governing council of Burmese Buddhism has ruled that there can be no valid ordination of women in modern times, though some Burmese monks disagree. In 2003, Saccavadi and Gunasari were ordained as bhikkhunis in Sri Lanka, thus becoming the first female Burmese novices in modern times to receive higher ordination in Sri Lanka.

In Indonesia, the first Theravada ordination of bhikkhunis in Indonesia after more than a thousand years occurred in 2015 at Wisma Kusalyani in Lembang, Bandung. Those ordained included Vajiradevi Sadhika Bhikkhuni from Indonesia, Medha Bhikkhuni from Sri Lanka, Anula Bhikkhuni from Japan, Santasukha Santamana Bhikkhuni from Vietnam, Sukhi Bhikkhuni and Sumangala Bhikkhuni from Malaysia, and Jenti Bhikkhuni from Australia.

In Thailand, in 1928, the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, responding to the attempted ordination of two women, issued an edict that monks must not ordain women as samaneris (novices), sikkhamanas (probationers) or bhikkhunis. The two women were reportedly arrested and jailed briefly. A 55-year-old Thai Buddhist 8-precept white-robed maeechee nun, Varanggana Vanavichayen, became the first woman to receive the going-forth ceremony of a Theravada novice (and the gold robe) in Thailand, in 2002. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, previously a professor of Buddhist philosophy known as Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, was controversially ordained as first a novice and then a bhikkhuni in Sri Lanka in 2003 upon the revival of the full ordination of women there. Since then, the Thai Senate has reviewed and revoked the secular law banning women's full ordination in Buddhism as unconstitutional for being counter to laws protecting freedom of religion. More than 20 further Thai women have followed in Dhammananda Bhikkhuni's footsteps, with temples, monasteries and meditations centers led by Thai bhikkhunis emerging in Samut Sakhon, Chiang Mai and Rayong. The stance of the Thai Sangha hierarchy has largely changed from one of denial of the existence of bhikkhunis to one of acceptance of bhikkhunis as of foreign (non-Thai) traditions. However Thailand's two main Theravada Buddhist orders, the Mahanikaya and Dhammayutika Nikaya, have yet to officially accept fully ordained women into their ranks. Despite substantial and growing support inside the religious hierarchy sometimes fierce opposition to the ordination of women within the sangha remains.

In 2010, Ayya Tathaaloka and Bhante Henepola Gunaratana oversaw a dual ordination ceremony at Aranya Bodhi forest refuge in Sonoma County California where four women became fully ordained nuns in the Theravada tradition.

Recent developments

**America**

In 1997 Dhamma Cetiya Vihara in Boston was founded by Ven. Gotami of Thailand, then a 10 precept nun. Ven. Gotami received full ordination in 2000, at which time her dwelling became America's first Theravada Buddhist bhikkhuni vihara. "Vihara" translates as monastery or nunnery and may be both dwelling and community center where one or more bhikkhus or bhikkhunis offer teachings on Buddhist scriptures, conduct traditional ceremonies, teach meditation, offer counseling and other community services, receive alms, and reside. In 2003 Ven. Sudhamma Bhikkhuni took the role of resident female-monk at the Carolina Buddhist Vihara in Greenville, SC (founded by Sri Lankan monks in 2000); her new dwelling thus became the second such community-oriented bhikkhuni vihara in the eastern United States. The first such women's monastic residence in the western United States, Dhammadharini Vihara (now the Dhammadharini Monastery in Penngrove, CA) was founded in Fremont, CA, by Ven. Tathaaloka of the USA, in 2005. Soon afterwards, Samadhi Meditation Center in Pinellas Park, Florida, was founded by Ven. Sudarshana Bhikkhuni of Sri Lanka.
Sravasti Abbey, the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery for Western nuns and monks in the U.S., was established in Washington State by Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron in 2003. The Abbey practices in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya. It is situated on 300 acres of forest and meadows, 11 miles (18 km) outside of Newport, Washington, near the Idaho state line. It is open to visitors who want to learn about community life in a Tibetan Buddhist monastic setting. The name Sravasti Abbey was chosen by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron had suggested the name, as Sravasti was the place in India where the Buddha spent 25 rains retreats (varsa in Sanskrit and yarne in Tibetan), and communities of both nuns and monks had resided there. This seemed auspicious to ensure the Buddha’s teachings would be abundantly available to both male and female monastics at the monastery.\[58\]

Sravasti Abbey is notable because it is home to a growing group of fully ordained bhikshuni (Buddhist nuns) practicing in the Tibetan tradition. This is special because the tradition of full ordination for women was not transmitted from India to Tibet. Ordained women practicing in the Tibetan tradition usually hold an ordination that is, in effect, a novice ordination. Venerable Thubten Chodron while faithfully following the teachings of her Tibetan teachers, has arranged for her students to seek full ordination as bhikshunis in Taiwan.\[59\]

In January 2014, the Abbey, which then had seven bhikshunis and three novices, formally began its first winter varsa (three-month monastic retreat), which lasted until April 13, 2014. As far as the Abbey knows, this was the first time a Western bhikshuni sangha practicing in the Tibetan tradition had done this ritual in the United States and in English. On April 19, 2014 the Abbey held its first kathina ceremony to mark the end of the varsa. Also in 2014 the Abbey held its first Pavarana rite at the end of the varsa.\[59\][60] In October 2015 the Annual Western Buddhist Monastic Gathering was held at the Abbey for the first time; it was the 21st such gathering.\[61\]

More recently established Theravada bhikkhuni viharas include: Mahapajapati Monastery\[62\] where several nuns (bhikkhunis and novices) live together in the desert of southern California near Joshua Tree, founded by Ven. Gunasari Bhikkhuni of Burma in 2008; Aranya Bodhi Hermitage\[63\] founded by Ven. Tathaaloka Bhikkhuni in the forest near Jenner, CA, with Ven. Sobhana Bhikkhuni as Prioress, which opened officially in July 2010, where several bhikkhunis reside together along with trainees and lay supporters; and Sati Saraniya\[64\] in Ontario, founded by Ven. Medhanandi in appx 2009, where two bhikkhunis reside. (There are also quiet residences of individual bhikkhunis where they may receive visitors and give teachings, such as the residence of Ven. Amma Thanasanti Bhikkhuni\[65\] in 2009-2010 in Colorado Springs; and the Los Angeles residence of Ven. Susila Bhikkhuni; and the residence of Ven. Wimala Bhikkhuni in the mid-west.)

In 2010 the first Tibetan Buddhist nunnery in North America was established in Vermont,\[66\] called Vajra Dakini Nunnery, offering novice ordination\[66\]. The abbot of this nunnery is an American woman named Khenmo Drolma who is the first “bhikkhuni,” a fully ordained Buddhist nun, in the Drikung Kagyu tradition of Buddhism, having been ordained in Taiwan in 2002.\[66\] She is also the first westerner, male or female, to be installed as a Buddhist abbot, having been installed as abbot of Vajra Dakini Nunnery in 2004.\[67\]

Also in 2010, in Northern California, four novice nuns were given the full bhikkhuni ordination in the Thai Theravada tradition, which included the double ordination ceremony. Bhante Gunaratana and other monks and nuns were in attendance. It was the first such ordination ever in the Western hemisphere.\[68\] The following month, more bhikkhuni ordinations were completed in Southern California, led by Walpola Piyananda and other monks and nuns. The bhikkunis ordained in Southern California were Lakshapathiye Samadhi (born in Sri Lanka), Cariyapanna, Susila, Sammasati (all three born in Vietnam), and Uttamanyana (born in Myanmar).\[69\]

**Australia**

In 2009 in Australia four women received bhikkhuni ordination as Theravada nuns, the first time such ordination had occurred in Australia.\[70\] It was performed in Perth, Australia, on 22 October 2009 at Bodhinyana Monastery. Abbess Vayama together with Venerables Nirodha, Seri, and Hasapanna were ordained as Bhikkhunis by a dual Sangha act of Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis in full accordance with the Pali Vinaya.\[71\]

**Burma**
The governing council of Burmese Buddhism has ruled that there can be no valid ordination of women in modern times, though some Burmese monks disagree. In 2003, Saccavadi and Gunasari were ordained as bhikkhunis in Sri Lanka, thus becoming the first female Burmese novices in modern times to receive higher ordination in Sri Lanka.[46][72]

**Germany**

The International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha: Bhikshuni Vinaya and Ordination Lineages took place in Germany, in July 18–20, 2007.

The first bhikkhuni ordination in Germany, the ordination of German nun Samaneri Dhira, occurred on June 21, 2015 at Anenja Vihara.[73]

**Indonesia**

The first Theravada ordination of bhikkhunis in Indonesia after more than a thousand years occurred in 2015 at Wisma Kusalayani in Lembang, Bandung.[48] Those ordained included Vajiradevi Sadhika Bhikkhuni from Indonesia, Medha Bhikkhuni from Sri Lanka, Anula Bhikkhuni from Japan, Santasukha Santamana Bhikkhuni from Vietnam, Sukhi Bhikkhuni and Sumangala Bhikkhuni from Malaysia, and Jenti Bhikkhuni from Australia.[48]

**Sri Lanka**

There have been some attempts to revive the tradition of women in the sangha within Theravada Buddhism in Thailand, India and Sri Lanka, with many women ordained in Sri Lanka since 1996.[74] In 1996 through the efforts of Sakyadhita, an International Buddhist Women Association, Theravada bhikkhuni order was revived, when 11 Sri Lankan women received full ordination in Sarnath, India, in a procedure held by Ven. Dodangoda Revata Mahāthera and the late Ven. Mapalagama Vipulasāra Mahāthera of the Mahābodhi Society in India with assistance from monks and nuns of Korean Chogyo order.[75] [76][77][78] Some bhikkhuni ordinations were carried out with the assistance of nuns from the East Asian tradition;[79] others were carried out by the Theravada monk's Order alone.[51] Since 2005, many ordination ceremonies for women have been organized by the head of the Dambulla chapter of the Siyam Nikaya in Sri Lanka.[51]

**Thailand**

In 1928, the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, responding to the attempted ordination of two women, issued an edict that monks must not ordain women as samaneris (novices), sikkhamanas (probationers) or bhikkhunis. The two women were reportedly arrested and jailed briefly. Varanggana Vanavichayen became the first female monk to be ordained in Thailand in 2002.[80] Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, previously a professor of Buddhist philosophy known as Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, was controversially ordained as first a novice and then a bhikkhuni in Sri Lanka in 2003 upon the revival of the full ordination of women there. Since then, the Thai Senate has reviewed and revoked the secular law banning women's full ordination in Buddhism as unconstitutional for being counter laws protecting freedom of religion. More than 20 further Thai women have followed in Dhammananda Bhikkhuni's footsteps, with temples, monasteries and meditation centers led by Thai bhikkhunis emerging in Samut Sakhon, Chiang Mai and Rayong. The Thai Senate has reviewed and revoked the secular law passed in 1928 banning women's full ordination in Buddhism as unconstitutional for being counter to laws protecting freedom of religion. The stance of the Thai Sangha hierarchy has largely changed from one of denial of the existence of bhikkhunis to one of acceptance of bhikkhunis as of foreign (non-Thai) traditions. However Thailand's two main Theravada Buddhist orders, the Mahanikaya and Dhammayutika Nikaya, have yet to formally accept fully ordained women into their ranks. Despite substantial and growing support inside the religious hierarchy, sometimes fierce opposition to the ordination of women within the sangha remains.

**Tibetan tradition**
When Buddhism traveled from India to Tibet, apparently the quorum of twelve fully ordained nuns required for bestowing full ordination never reached Tibet. There are singular accounts of fully ordained Tibetan women, such as the Samding Dorje Phagmo (1422-1455), who was once ranked the highest female master in Tibet, but very little is known about the exact circumstances of their ordination.

The Dalai Lama has authorized followers of the Tibetan tradition to be ordained as nuns in traditions that have such ordination.

According to Thubten Chodron, the current Dalai Lama has said on this issue[82]

1. In 2005, the Dalai Lama repeatedly spoke about the bhikshuni ordination in public gatherings. In Dharamsala, he encouraged, "We need to bring this to a conclusion. We Tibetans alone can’t decide this. Rather, it should be decided in collaboration with Buddhists from all over the world. Speaking in general terms, were the Buddha to come to this 21st century world, I feel that most likely seeing the actual situation in the world now he might change the rules somewhat...."

2. Later, in Zurich during a 2005 conference of Tibetan Buddhist Centers, His Holiness said, "Now I think the time has come; we should start a working group or committee" to meet with monks from other Buddhist traditions. Looking at the German bhikshuni, Ven. Jampa Tsedroen, he instructed, "I prefer that Western Buddhist nuns carry out this work...Go to different places for further research and discuss with senior monks (from various Buddhist countries). I think, first, senior bhikshunis need to correct the monks’ way of thinking.

3. “This is the 21st century. Everywhere we are talking about equality....Basically Buddhism needs equality. There are some really minor things to remember as a Buddhist-- a bhikshu always goes first, then a bhikshuni....The key thing is the restoration of the bhikshuni vow.”

Alexander Berzin referred to the Dalai Lama having said on occasion of the 2007 Hamburg congress

Sometimes in religion there has been an emphasis on male importance. In Buddhism, however, the highest vows, namely the bhikshu and bhikshuni ones, are equal and entail the same rights. This is the case despite the fact that in some ritual areas, due to social custom, bhikshus go first. But Buddha gave the basic rights equally to both sangha groups. There is no point in discussing whether or not to revive the bhikshuni ordination; the question is merely how to do so properly within the context of the Mahayana.[83]

Ogyen Trinley Dorje, the 17th Karmapa, has announced plan to restore nuns’ ordination[84]

No matter how others see it, I feel this is something necessary. In order to uphold the Buddhist teachings it is necessary to have the fourfold community (fully ordained monks (gelongs), fully ordained nuns (gelongmas), and both male and female lay precept holders). As the Buddha said, the fourfold community are the four pillars of the Buddhist teachings. This is the reason why I’m taking interest in this.[84]

The Tibetan community is taking its own steps to figure out how to approach conferring bhikshuni ordination to women ordained under the mulashravastavadinayana system. Meanwhile, steps have already been taken to cultivate the bhikshuni monastic community in the West. Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron established Sravasti Abbey in 2003.[85] It is the only Tibetan Buddhist training monastery for Western nuns and monks in the United States. Whilst the Abbey primarily practices under the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, it practices in the Chinese Dharmaguptaka Vinaya lineage. This has allowed the female monastics to take full ordination, travelling to Taiwan to take part in 6-8 week training programmes. In January 2014, the Abbey, which then had seven bhikshunis and three novices, formally began its first winter varsa (three-month monastic retreat), which lasted until April 13, 2014. As far as the Abbey knows, this was the first time a Western bhikshuni sangha practicing in the Tibetan tradition had done this ritual in the United States and in English. On April 19, 2014 the Abbey held its first kathina ceremony to mark the end of the varsa. Also in 2014 the Abbey held its first Pavarana rite at the end of the varsa.[60] The Abbey currently has ten fully ordained bhikshunis and five novices.[86]
Discriminating against nuns

In March 1993 in Dharmasala, Sylvia Wetzel spoke in front of the Dalai Lama and other luminaries to highlight the sexism of Buddhist practices, imagery and teachings.[87]

Two senior male monastics vocally supported her, reinforcing her points with their own experiences. Ajahn Amaro, a Theravada bhikkhu of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, said, "Seeing the nuns not receiving the respect given to the monks is very painful. It is like having a spear in your heart".[88]

American Tibetan Buddhist monk Thubten Pende gave his views: "When I translated the texts concerning the ordination ceremony I got such a shock. It said that even the most senior nun had to sit behind the most novice monk because, although her ordination was superior, the basis of that ordination, her body, was inferior. I thought, "There it is." I'd heard about this belief but I'd never found evidence of it. I had to recite this text at the ceremony. I was embarrassed to say it and ashamed of the institution I was representing. I wondered, "Why doesn't she get up and leave?" I would."[88]

Family

The former wife of Buddha—Yasodharā, mother of his son Rāhula, according to legend also became a bhikkhuni and arahant.

Poems

There is the quite famous Therigatha collection of poems call Verses of the Elder Nuns[89] and a less known collection called Discourses of the Ancient Nuns[90]

See also

- Ordination process (Sangha)
- Unsui
- Upasampada
- Women in Buddhism

References

1. Macmillan Encyclopedia of Buddhism (Volume One), page 352
2. Book of the Discipline Pali Text Society, volume V, Chapter X
3. Routledge Encyclopedia of Buddhism page 822
7. Padmanabh S. Jaini (1991), Gender and Salvation Jaina Debates on the Spiritual Liberation of WomenUniversity of California Press, Berkeley ISBN 0-520-06820-3 "this is in contrast to Jain tradition which is always compared to with Buddhism as they emerged almost at the same time, which is non-conclusive in a woman's ability to attain final liberation Digambara makes the opening statement: There is moksa for men only for women; #9 The Svetambara answers: There is moksa for women;"
8. Alice Collett (2006). "BUDDHISM AND GENDER Reframing and Refocusing the DebateThe Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 22 (2): 55–84. “A brief digression into comparative analysis should help to illustrate the significance of these central texts. Although it is possible to ascertain (however unfortunately from just a few references) that women within the Jain śramaṇa tradition possessed similar freedoms to Buddhist women, Jain literature leaves to posterity no Therīgāthā equivalent. There are also no extant Jain texts from that period to match stories in the Avadānaśataka of women converts who attained high levels of religious experience. Nor is there any equivalent of the forty Apadānas attributed to the nuns who were the Buddha’s close disciples. In Brahminism, again although Stephanie Jamison has eruditely and insightfully drawn out the vicissitudes of the role of women within the Brahmanic ritual of sacrifice, the literature of Brahmanism does not supply us with voices of women from the ancient world, nor with stories of women who renounced their roles in the domestic sphere in favor of the fervent practice of religious observances.”


18. For example, the life story of Ven. Geshe Palden Tsering, born in 1934 in Zakok. He took the novice ordination at the Trashi Ganden Choepel Ling Tust. Archived from the original([http://www.trashiganden.com/ge she_pal_tseriing.htm](http://www.trashiganden.com/geshe_pal_tseriing.htm))on November 3, 2009 Retrieved 2010-02-04.


20. id, page 229


24. For example, the life story of Ven. Geshe Palden Tsering, born in 1934 in Zakok. He took the novice ordination at the age of eight (1942?); in 1973 he took the bhikkhu vows of a fully ordained monk.


33. "Why We Need Bhikkunis as Dhamma Teachers" (http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=70,9509,0,0,1,0) The Buddhist Channel 5 November 2011. Retrieved 15 August 2012.
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