



**A STUDY OF THE ROLES OF BHIKKHUNĪS IN
THE THAI SOCIETY**

Bhikkhunī Sobhita Malikul

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements of the Degree of
Master of Arts
(Buddhist Studies)

Graduate School
Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University
C.E. 2017



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The Graduate School of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University has approved this thesis entitled, "A Study of the Roles of Bhikkhunīs in the Thai Society," submitted in partial fulfillment the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Buddhist Studies.

(Phramaha Somboon Vuḍḍhikaro, Dr.)

Dean of Graduate School

Thesis Examination Committee:

(Asst. Prof. Ven. Dr. Phra Rajapariyattimuni)

.....Member

(Dr. Amnaj Buasiri)

.....Member

(Ven. Dr. Phramaha Nantakorn Piyabhani)

.....Member

(Dr. Soontaraporn Techapalokul)

Thesis Supervisors : Phramaha Nantakorn Piyabhani, Dr.

Chairperson

: Dr. Soontaraporn Techapalokul

Member

Researcher:

BHIKKHUNI SOBHITA

(Bhikkhunī Sobhita Malikul)

Thesis Title : A Study of the Roles of Bhikkhunīs in the Thai Society
Researcher : Bhikkhunī Sobhita Malikul
Degree : Master of Arts (Buddhist Studies)
Thesis Supervisory Community
: Phramaha Nantakorn Piyabhani, Dr., Pāli VIII, B.A.
(English), M.A. (Buddhist Studies), Ph.D. (Buddhist
Studies)
: Dr. Soontaraporn Techapalokul, B.A. (Economics),
M.A. (Economics), M.S. (Telecommunications), Ph.D.
(Buddhist Studies)
Date of Graduation : March 15, 2018

Abstract

This paper uses a qualitative approach. It is a mixture of both historical and documentary research, based as much as possible on original text, and in-depth interviews of five prominent bhikkhunīs in Thailand. It consists of three main objectives namely: (1) Study the prominent figures of bhikkhunī saṅgha and their achievement in the history of Buddhism, (2) Analyze the contributions of bhikkhunīs to the Thai society, (3) Suggest for improvement of the roles of bhikkhunīs in the Thai society.

This research concludes that the Buddha set his determination since right after his enlightenment to allow for ordination of women and to institute the bhikkhunī order as one of the fourfold pillars of Buddhism, namely: Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs, Upāsakas and Upāsikās in order to sustain his Sāsana and spread his teachings into the future. The eight garudhammas are not rules but recommendations meant to ensure the continuity of the Sāsana. Dual ordination as specified in the sixth garudhamma was meant to prevent bhikkhunīs from just giving ordination on their own. It was rather meant to honour bhikkhus the roles of Upachāya. In the case of having no existing bhikkhunī saṅgha, the Buddha gave clear decision that bhikkhus should perform bhikkhunī ordination. The revival of Theravāda bhikkhunī ordination in Bodhgayā in 1998 is thus legally correct whether from single or dual ordination considerations. Its validity is based on the precedent that according to the canonical Vinaya as set by the Buddha himself when he delegated the ordination of the followers of Māhā Pajāpati Gotamī to the bhikkhus.

Currently, more than 150 Thai bhikkhunīs are residing in 30 provinces and abroad. From the interviews of the five prominent bhikkhunīs, the researcher has found that despite the hardships and obstacles which they all had to endure, they are now very happy and are determined to follow the Buddha's footsteps in spreading the Dhamma and helping with community development and education to the best of their abilities. They have played a great roles in offering Dhamma education, meditation training and even bringing about "socially engaged Buddhism" to the awareness of the general public. Even though the position of bhikkhunīs in the Thai society is not clear at present, it is inevitable that bhikkhunīs will play an increasingly important roles in the Thai society. It is a matter of time that the legal validity of single ordination of bhikkhunīs by bhikkhus will become well-known and bring about true understanding about the Buddha's intention for the roles of bhikkhunīs in the fourfold saṅgha.

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If any beneficial results may arise from this research, I dedicate them to worship my parents, my ordainers, my advisors, my teachers, and those who supported me throughout the whole process and those whose names are or are not mentioned above. May the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha protect them and eventually speed them on the path to “*nibbāna*”

Bhikkhunī Sobhita Malikul

15 January 2018

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Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance of the Study

Bhikkhunīs' earnest motivation has sustained them since their successful reemerge in Thailand as pioneers in a women's *Saṅgha* reform period.

Not only has their pure intent of transcendence towards *nibbāna* as an ultimate goal inspired and uplifted their hearts, but the pure intent of the Buddha to establish the four-fold *Saṅgha* of: Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs, Upāsakas and Upāsikās in order to alleviate human suffering and bring forth happiness, stability, and human dignity in this world has energized them as well.

In accordance with each individual woman's talents, spiritual giftedness, as well as, their communal and cooperative efforts, moreover, a social movement of an increased roles and status for women in Thailand and Southeast Asia as Bhikkhunīs is arising and meeting the needs of women who have been neglected because of the lack of appropriate resources. Woman to woman—the relationship between women and women to women and girls when counseling and offering shelter as needed is helping the community to reduce and solve social problems of teen pregnancies, child abandonment, marital difficulties, the spread of HIV/AIDS, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, sex trafficking, rape,

violence and the manipulation of women, drug use and drug trafficking, female alcoholism, and suicide.

The fundamental principles of Dhamma used to develop human beings are the same as ones used to develop women in Buddhism—that is—*Puññakiriyā-vatthu*, known as the “laity *Tisikkhā*”, or the foundation for the Threefold Training of the monastic. *Puññakiriyā-vatthu* is composed of *dāna*, *sīla* and *bhāvanā* which are the practices of right action, right speech and right thoughts in order to reduce suffering (*dukkha*). Regarding the Threefold Training or *Tisikkhā*, they are morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) wisdom (*paññā*), the three moral training for higher behavioral development and mental states that aim towards *nibbāna*. The methods to educate or train women in Buddhism are identified as: (1) the study of the scriptures (2) the practice (3) the becoming a lay women disciple, and (4) the becoming a *Sāmanerī* or a *Bhikkhunī*.

Accordingly, this thesis will explore the accomplishments of *Bhikkhunīs* in Thailand as sustainable examples of human development aiming at analyzing an evolution of *Bhikkhunī* Saṅgha along its development path, ranging from the first *Bhikkhunī* Saṅgha in the Buddha’s time up to the present day, focusing on the state of becoming a *Sāmanerī* or a *Bhikkhunī* and their roles status for sustainable human development. The finding of this research will uplift the ideas which can facilitate *Bhikkhunīs*’ sustainable acceptance in the Thai society in order to positively and profoundly improve the society and upgrade the quality of Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1.2.1 Study the prominent figures of Bhikkhunīs Saṅgha and their achievements in the history of Buddhism.

1.2.2 Analyze the contributions of Bhikkhunīs to the Thai society.

1.2.3 Suggest for improvement of the roles of Bhikkhunīs in the Thai society.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

1.3.1 Who are the prominent Bhikkhunīs in history of Buddhism and what are their achievement?

1.3.2 How do Bhikkhunīs contribute to education, Dhamma practice and social work in the Thai society?

1.3.3 What are the roles and problems of Bhikkhunīs in the Thai Society?

1.4 Definition of Terms

1.4.1 **Maechee:** a white-robed woman with shaven head who observes eight precepts and lives in a temple in Thailand

1.4.2 **Samanerī:** a female novice who observes ten precepts for at least two years in preparation to become a bhikkhunī

1.4.3 **Bhikkhunī:** a woman who has taken Higher Ordination (full monastic ordination in Buddhism and 311 precepts) also known as Phrapuying (female monks). A Bhikkhunī literally means a female alms mendicant. A Bhikkhunī is different from a Maechee in Thailand by the fact a bhikkhunī's roles in the Buddhist Society is similar to a bhikkhu,

whereas Maechee is legally considered to belong to the upāsikā group of Buddhists. In actual practice, Maechee’s position lies in between that of an ordinary layfollower and an ordained monk.

1.4.4 **Bhikkhunī Saṅgha:** This is a Pāli term for an assembly of a group of women who have gained higher ordination and they form one part of four divisions of the Buddhist Society. After becoming Bhikkhunīs, they have privileges to act like monks in the religious activities.

1.4.5 **Roles:** the position or purpose that someone or something has in a situation.

1.5 Literature Review

Bhikkhu Analayo¹, in his book regarding the controversy on bhikkhunī ordination, examined the legal validity of the revival of the ordination that had happened in the 1998 Bodhgayā ordination as the starting point of the modern Theravāda Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in the world. Mahā Pajāpati was originally the first woman to receive higher ordination. In her case this took place by accepting the “eight principles to be respected,” garudhammas. Since the sixth garudhamma stipulated that dual ordination by both Saṅghas is required for higher ordination. Mahā Pajāpati asked the Buddha how she should proceed in relation to her female followers, since she alone could not form a quorum needed for ordination by bhikkhunīs.

¹Bhikkhu Analayo, “The Legality of Bhikkhunī Ordination”, Center for Buddhist Studies, University of Hamburg, Dharma Drum Buddhist College, Taiwan, 2013.

Unlike the case for higher ordination of bhikkhus, the Buddha is on record for explicitly stating that the earlier form of only accepting the three refuges is now being abolished. “The second regulation for bhikkhus on the topic of **bhikkhunī ordination** is not preceded by any explicit abolishment of the first prescription that bhikkhus can ordain bhikkhunīs”. In the 1998 Bodgayā ordination case, the subsequent ordination of female candidates carried out by Theravāda bhikkhus only is therefore legally valid.

Bhikkhunī Dr. Lee and Bhikkhunī Bhadra² traced in detail the roots of the Theravāda Buddhist Saṅgha development from India to Sri Lanka and then onwards to China. In particular, this article indicated the research work of Dr. Hema Goonatlaka in tracing the Sri Lankan Bhikkhunī Devasara’s impact in China, with a follow up analysis of the similarities of Theravāda and DharmaguptaVinaya traditions. Between 429 -432 AD, Bhikkhunī Devasara with a group of Bhikkhunīs travelled from Sri Lanka to China and established the Bhikkhunī Order. In China before that, for 100 years Bhikkhus had ordained women directly as the Buddha instructed in the Cullavagga.

“Anujanami Bhikkave, Bhikkhunī Upasampademum,”

“I allow, Oh, Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunī to be ordained by you.”

However, when the Sri Lankan Bhikkhunīs arrived, they re-ordained the women and established China’s current system of dual ordination by Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī Saṅghas in accordance with the Theravāda tradition as recorded in the First Buddhist Council. According to a

²Bhikkhunī Dr. Lee and Bhikkhunī Bhadra, “Nun’s Calling Takes Many Turns”, **The Bangkok Post**. Opinion and Analysis Section. (Tuesday, May 29, 2001): p.12.

Vinaya analysis, the Dharmagupta Vinaya tradition prevails in China. It is a sub-division of the Theravāda. The Vinaya Suttas or discourses of the Buddha of the Dharmagupta are essentially the same as in the Theravāda. The later developed Abhidhamma, or Commentaries, differ. All Vinaya rules found in the Dharmagupta Bhikkhunī Pratimoksa are precisely the same in content as those in the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha. The only difference is the order in which the rules appear, and the Dharmagupta tradition has many more rules than the Theravāda.

It can be concluded that the Dharmagupta Bhiksuni Vinaya rules as they function in China today are the same as the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Vinaya rules. This article marks the starting point of the modern Bhikkhunī movement in Thailand as it has released into the Thai society the birth of the modern Sri Lankan Bhikkhunī movement with implications for its rapid development in Thailand.

Emma Tomalin³ explored female empowerment in developing contexts, the emergence of styles of ‘religious feminism’ which argue for re-interpretations of religious systems that are consistent with the ‘core’ values of the tradition as well as ‘feminist’ thinking. Such a strategy is attractive to women who wish to employ a religious narrative to guide their politics of empowerment rather than relying upon the secular rhetoric of mainstream (western) feminist discourse. A key challenge, however, faces ‘religious feminists’ since women rarely occupy the positions of status and authority in religious traditions that would enable

³Emma Tomalin, “The Thai Bhikkhunī Movement and Women’s Empowerment”, University of Leeds, United Kingdom, **OXFAM Publication**, April 2006.

them to challenge misogynistic tendencies. The first Buddhist nun Mahāpajāpati was ordained by receiving eight special rules, *garudhammas*, from the Buddha.

In Sri Lanka, before the arrival of Bhikkhunīs from India in the fourth century BCE, it is recorded that Bhikkhus alone were permitted to ordain women (Li 2000: 183). Such a departure from the conventional ordination procedure has not, however, been the strategy that has been employed to revive the ordination, firstly in the USA (1988) then in India (1996) and Sri Lanka (1998). Advocates of the Bhikkhunī ordination in Thailand typically refer to the necessity of the ‘fourfold saṅgha’ when asked their reasons for wishing to see its introduction in Thailand. Thus, the introduction of the Bhikkhunī ordination into Thailand is not only considered to be significant for religious reasons, which would benefit women, who have chosen a renunciate life, but also for its potential to be empowering to women more broadly.

1.6 Methodological Approach

This work is a qualitative research. It is a mixture of both historical and documentary research approach based as much as possible on original text and in-depth interview research. In addition to this, other important sources are the research work of past and contemporary researchers and scholars in the same field. Moreover, to study the Buddhism, the historical influences of Buddhism and the revival of Buddhism in the present day, the researcher will explore and analyze the related data or sources such as printed books, encyclopedias,

journals, handouts, internet, CDS/DVDS and E-books. All these documentary sources will be included in the scope of this research study.

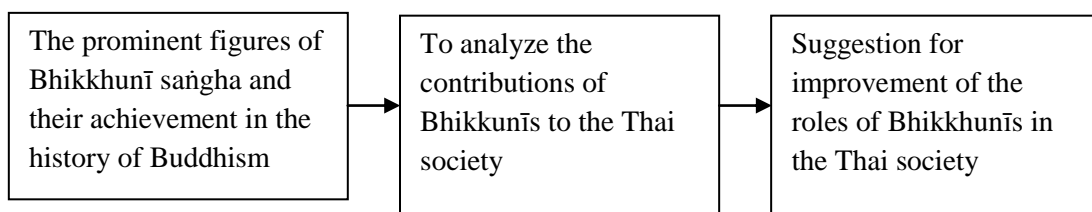
For in-depth interview, the instrument employed to the research comprises three positive psychology questions:

1. Does it work?
2. Is it improving?
3. Is it right?

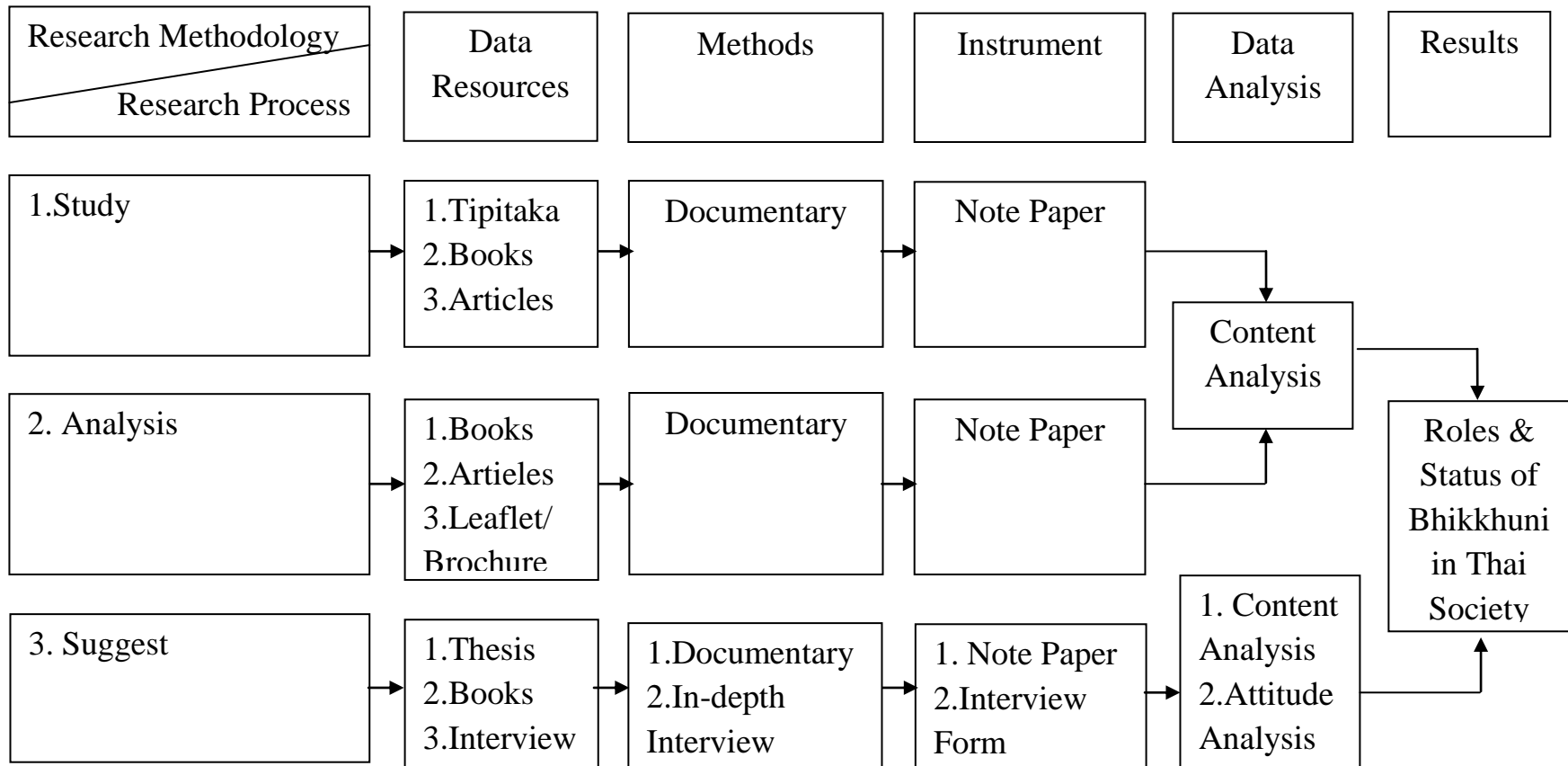
Therefore, the methodology of research will be divided into three stages, as follows:

- 1.6.1 To collect the materials from the available literature that relates to the purpose of the present study.
- 1.6.2 To study those materials to find the answers as set in the objectives and question of the research.
- 1.6.3 To create a thesis based upon the study and understanding of the research.

Conceptual Framework



Research Process



1.7 Expected Advantages of the Research

The following findings and advantages may be expected:

- 1.7.1 Gaining a fuller understanding regarding the history of Bhikkhunīs from the past to the present and their achievements.
- 1.7.2 Enhancing the frontier of knowledge concerning Bhikkhunīs' contribution to education, dhamma practice and social work in the Thai society.
- 1.7.3 Understanding the roles of Bhikkhunīs in the Thai society.

Chapter 2

History and Development

The Buddha is the most completed one of humanity. He applied his wisdom and compassion to help all sentient and insentient beings, regardless of skin color, race, and class, rich or poor. The disciples who have been converted by the Buddha, according to their level, age, and gender, are divided into four groups which are the Bhikkhus (*Monks*), Bhikkhunīs (*Nuns*), upāsakas (*laymen*) and upāsikās (*laywomen*). In each group, they should practice and maintain their own Vinaya, but the highest groups are the Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunīs who need to practice and maintain fully the Vinaya. Here the Bhikkhunīs' background can be summarized.

2.1 The Early Bhikkhunīs

2.1.1 The First Bhikkhunī: Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī

The first women (Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī) who requested ordination was the Buddha's step-mother. According to the Cullavagga, when the Buddha was staying near Kapilavatthu in the Banyan Grove, Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī approached and requested him to grant permission for women to be higher ordained and live as the Order of Bhikkhunīs. She begged to the Buddha, saying "Lord, it were well that women should obtain the going forth from home into homelessness in this dhamma and

discipline proclaimed by the truth-finder.”¹ The Buddha refused her request. She repeated three times but the Buddha still gave the same reply.

Witnessing the hardship and Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī’s grief, Venerable Ānanda, the Buddha’s chief attendant and his cousin, appealed to the Buddha three times for women’s ordination but the Buddha refused. Respectfully, Venerable Ānanda questioned the Buddha: “Lord, are women, having gone forth from home into homelessness in the dhamma and discipline proclaimed by the Truth-finder, able to realize the fruit of stream-attainment or the fruit of once-returning or the fruit of non-returning or perfection?”² The Buddha replied that they were capable of attaining it. Then, Venerable Ānanda appealed to the Buddha again for permitting women admission into the Order of Bhikkhunīs. The Buddha, however, required the acceptance of eight additional rules (*garudhamma*) as a condition of their ordination. The eight additional rules vary slightly in different Vinaya texts. The eight rules³ are:

- (1) A bhikkhunī, even if she enjoys a seniority of a hundred years in the Order, must pay respect to a bhikkhu though he may have been a bhikkhu only for a day.
- (2) A bhikkhunī must not keep her rains-residence in a place where there are no bhikkhus.

¹I.B. Horner, **The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka)**, Vol. V (Cullavagga), (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1992), pp. 352.

²*Ibid.*, p. 354.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 354-6.

- (3) Every fortnight a bhikkhunī must do two things: To ask the bhikkhu Saṅgha the day of *uposatha*, and to approach the bhikkhu Saṅgha for instruction and admonition.
- (4) When the rains-residence period is over, a bhikkhunī must attend the pavarana ceremony conducted at both the assemblies of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, in each of which she must invite criticism on what has been seen, what has been heard or what has been suspected of her.
- (5) A bhikkhunī who has committed a Saṅghādisesa offence must undergo penance for a half-month, pakkha manatta, in each assembly of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs.
- (6) Admission to the Order must be sought, from both assemblies, by a woman novice only after two year's probationary training as a candidate.
- (7) A bhikkhunī should not revile a bhikkhu in any way, not even obliquely.
- (8) A bhikkhunī must abide by instructions given her by bhikkhus, but must not give instructions or advice to bhikkhus.

Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī agreed to the conditions. It is mentioned in Dhamma Guptaka Vinaya, Pāli Cullavagga X and other sources regarding the origin of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha⁴ that this raised a number

⁴ The story of Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī's becoming a Bhikkhunī can be found in Pāli Cullavagga X (I.B. Horner, MA (tr.), **The Book of the Discipline**, Vol 5. (Oxford: PTS, 1992, pp. 352-6.

of issues and the interpretation of the rules has been varied and sometimes controversial.⁵

After Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī accepted the above rules, the Buddha permitted women's ordination. Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī was the first woman who entered the Bhikkhunī Order, and five hundred women following her, received the ordination. The Bhikkhunī Saṅgha thus began.

2.1.2 Expansion of Bhikkhunī Order at the Time of the Buddha

The wish to be a Bhikkhunī did not only occur in the mind of Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī but also in many women's minds at that time. The status of women was not in a good condition, as a result of the social discrimination created by the Brahmanic teaching. Therefore many women in stress under the patriarchy of men and this can be proved from stories which come in the *Therīgāthā*⁶ of Khuddaka Nikāya. In the *Therīgāthā*, while monks mention their liberation from defilements, in the *Therīgāthā* some nuns mention their liberation from husbands or difficulties in families.⁷

Once the order of Bhikkhunī was attracted by the power of the Buddha's teaching and the freedom which the new Order offered them.

⁵I.B. Horner (tr.), **The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-pitaka)**, Vol 5 (Oxford : PTS, 1992), pp. 354-5.

⁶Therīgāthā: often translated as Verses of the Elder Nuns. The ninth book of the Khuddaka Nikāya in the Sūtra Piṭaka of the Pāli Canon. It consists of 73 poems which are an earliest text clearly indicating that bhikkunīs recount their struggles and accomplishments along the road to Arahantship. Viewed 8 June 2016, <www.vgweb.org/manussa/BuddhaWomen.htm>.

⁷Rhys Davids, **Psalms of the Early Buddhists: I—Psalms of the Sisters** (Translation Series No.1), (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1994), p. 24

Many of these Bhikkhunīs attained to the supreme state of enlightenment. The stories, sayings and deeds of these distinguished Bhikkhunīs are recorded in many places in the Pāli Canon, most notably in the Therīgāthā, a compilation of verses articulated by these Theris when they saw the clear light of the Dhamma, and which constitutes a part of the Khuddaka Nikāya of the Sutta Piṭaka.⁸

In the Therīgāthā, those whose verses were recorded are some of the best known women disciples in early Buddhism, including:

Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī who was the first Bhikkhunī, Uppalavaṇṇā and Khemā, who were traditionally regarded as the foremost of Bhikkhunīs, as well as Kisāgotamī and Patācarā, who figured in the best known stories of early Buddhism. The members of the order belonged to all walks of life. Some were former courtesans like Ambapālī and Vimala, others were of royal lineage like Sumeda and Sela. There were distinguished exponents of the Dhamma like Dhammadinnā, scions of noble or merchant families like Buddha Kundalakesā, Sujāta, and Anopama, not to mention those of humbler origins like Puṇṇika, the slave girl, or Chanda, the daughter of a poor Brahmin. The actual number of Therīs involved is not known. Patācarā is credited with having 500 personal followers, and there are several unnamed Therīs to whom

⁸The Therīgāthā is an anthology of verses by Buddhist nuns during the Buddha's lifetime. It is one of the books of the Pali Canon and is the complement of the Theragāthā an anthology of verses attributed to monks. There are other instances of authoritative teachings by women in the Buddhist Canon, which may be contrasted with the absence of significant texts by females in the scriptures of other religions. Viewed 8 June 2016, <www.vgweb.org/manussa/BuddhaWomen.htm>.

sayings are attributed.⁹ Buddhists point out that the accomplishments of these Therīs of old are that they gave living proof of the Buddha's utterance (Sam.Nik., 1, 5, 6):

Yassa etdisa yāna	The one who takes this vehicle
Ittiva purisassa va	Be it a woman or be it a man
sa ve etena yanena	This is the only vehicle
nibbanasseva santike	That can reach <i>nibbāna</i> peace.

Apart from these Therīs and Arahantas there were many women from all walks of life who embraced the Buddha's teachings. They became *sāvakas* and *upāsikās*, students and servitors of the Buddha and the Saṅgha. Their names have gone down in Buddhist legends and their piety are well known.

2.1.3 The Thirteen Etadagga (the ideal, excellence)

Bhikkhunīs: Herstory¹⁰

After the establishment of Bhikkhunī institution, a large number of women were drawn to the Saṅgha. It was recorded in the Therīgāthā (Psalms of the Sisters)¹¹ that thousands of bhikkhunīs and laywomen attained various levels of spiritual development. Among the Bhikkhunīs, at least thirteen were praised by the Buddha, including Gotamī, foremost

⁹The great number of women who figure in the Buddhist texts may be contrasted with the fewness in the Gospels, where they are usually cast as servitors of Jesus, never as teachers in their own right. Viewed 8 June 2016, <www.vgweb.org/manussa/BuddhaWomen.htm>.

¹⁰ Dhammananda Bhikkhunī, **Herstory**, (Bangkok: RuenKaew Printing House, 2012), p. 10-73.

¹¹These psalms recite the great ecstasy and rapture the nuns obtained by their becoming ordained and thereafter attaining sanctity.

in giving Dhamma talks. (Aṅguttara Nikāya, IV: 347) Many laywomen were also praised for their spiritual qualities, including Visākhā for generosity, Samāvati for compassion, and Katiyani for unshakeable faith. These successes of women represented the completion of the four groups of Buddhists as instituted by the Buddha: *Bhikkhus* (monks), *Bhikkhunīs* (nuns), *Upāsakas* (laymen) and *Upāsikās* (laywomen).¹²

2.1.3.1 Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī Therī: Being the first Bhikkhunī, she was praised by the Buddha for being foremost in her long standing as Bhikkhunī. As a Bhikkhunī Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī practiced very earnestly and attained Arahantship with supernormal powers. She enjoyed the homeless life, living harmoniously with the other five hundred Ariyan Sakyan ladies, till her ripe old age. One day she happened to review her life-span and found it to have reached the end. She was then one hundred and twenty years old. She then quickly sought the Buddha and His great disciples to obtain their permission to attain parinibbāna (the final demise). The Buddha asked her to show her spiritual powers, which she deftly did to the awesome admiration of the audience consisting of the Saṅgha and the lay people. After cremation, Venerable Ānanda collected her relics in a bowl and offered to the Buddha. The Buddha took her relics in his palms and explained how the body is nothing but impermanent. He praised her for having longest standing among the bhikkhunīs and reminded both the Saṅghas to be mindful in their practice and mentioned the Seven Bojjhaṅgas as the path for the Saṅghas to persevere to end their sufferings.

¹² Tavivat Puntarigvivat, “Women’s Rights in AEC: A Thai Buddhist Perspective”, *Silpakorn University Journal*, (Bangkok: Silpakorn University, 2543/2000): 101-132.

2.1.3.2 Queen Khemā Therī:¹³ Just as Venerable Sarīputta was appointed the First Chief Male Disciple, Bhikkhunī Khemā Therī was appointed the First Chief Female. She was infatuated with her own beauty that had prevented her from going to listen when the Buddha preached Dhamma. Her husband King Bimbisāra, however, was very eager for her to overcome the infatuation and fear of the Buddha's criticism. The king devised a clever strategy to arouse her curiosity to visit the beautiful Bamboo Grove park and commanded his court to perform theatrical plays and compose songs about the fantasies of the royal park.

As she approached the grove, she saw the Buddha preaching Dhamma. Aware that she was nearby, the Buddha created an apparition of a heavenly beautiful lady fanning Him with a palm leaf fan. When Khemā saw the apparition, she was captivated. She was so impressed by the angelic loveliness of the apparition that the pride of her own beauty vanished instantly. As she was so entranced, the Buddha caused the young lady to age gradually until she was very old, decrepit and ugly who finally collapsed and died. Continuing to look, Queen Khemā saw the rotting corpse until only a heap of bones was left. Khemā was horrified. Realising how foolish she was, she immediately changed her attitude and realized the true nature of the decaying body in the youthful and the young. As guided by the Buddha, Queen Khemā became a Stream-winner. This means she had crossed the stream of craving, having

¹³Venerable Sayadaw U Panna Vamsa "Dawn of Buddhism" , Dhammikarama Burmese Buddhist Temple Penang, Malaysia : 1-22, p, 10, viewed 14 February 2017, <http://www.myanmar.net/nibbana/dawn_02.htm#23>.

destroyed doubts, wrong views and clinging to wrongful rites and ceremonies. Queen Khemā knew that she was then safe from miserable births in the lower existences and was happy with the human and divine life thereafter. The Buddha, who was guiding her, knew of this and quickly helped her further on by making her realize the transitoriness of all formations (things). She readily understood and realized Arahantship. Then the Buddha called King Bimbisāra and told him that Queen Khemā had attained Arahantship. She had to be ordained and would eventually pass away into *nibbāna*. King Bimbisāra readily agreed for her to be ordained as a Bhikkhunī.

Well-respected for her penetrative insight and wisdom Arahanta Khemā Therī could not ever again be tempted by sense pleasures, not even by Māra who was disguised as a handsome celestial youth. The Buddha declared her to be the wisest of His ordained female disciple and made her the leader of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha.

2.1.3.3 Uppalavaṇṇā Therī:¹⁴ Like the story of Khemā Therī, the First Chief Female Disciple, Uppalavaṇṇā was born in Savatthi to a prosperous banker and his wife. They named her “Uppalavaṇṇā” because the colour of her skin resembles the hue of the lotus flower. Upon her becoming of age, her father received many marriage proposals from suitors both rich and poor from all over the land. He was at a loss of what to do and whom to choose as a suitable husband to wed his only beautiful daughter. Not wishing to offend any suitors or their families, he continued to procrastinate. He further asked her if she would be willing to forsake marriage and be ordained as a

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Bhikkhunī. Uppalavaṇṇā was destined to achieve Arahantship in this life, so she readily agreed to renounce the world.

One day it was her turn to sweep the Uposatha hall. She took a lamp there and set about doing her task. When she had finished her work, she sat down to meditate. Fixing her eyes on the lamp, she took the flame as an object for the fire *kaṣiṇa* meditation. She kept up her vigil on this exercise until she attained all the *jhānas* and then went on to attain Arahantship. With this attainment also came the profound knowledge of the Dhamma, the powers of intuition as well as the great psychic powers. Soon after, the Buddha appointed her His Second Chief Female Disciple. Declaring her to be foremost in these powers, among the Bhikkhunīs.

There were also some episodes in her life to promote a better understanding of the dangers of sensual desire. In this connection, she used to recite a verse whereby the mother and her daughter, who loved the same man, treated each other as rival enemies, vying for the love of that man. This composition of verses reminded people about the dangers of craving for sensual pleasures. In another incident Uppalavaṇṇā was dwelling alone in the forest hut, the childhood infatuated cousin hid inside her hut and waited for her to return at dusk. He then raped her while she was sleeping and ran out of the forest to escape. His mortal sin however only allowed him just a few steps from the hut before he was swallowed up by a fierce flame that shot up from the bowels of the earth. He was wrapped up by the flame and sucked into *Avecī Hell*.

Māra, in a separate incident, tried to tempt and seduce Uppalavaṇṇā Therī but was thoroughly rebuked and sent packing back

empty-handed, dejected and disappointed. Arahanta Uppalavaṇṇā Therī declared to Māra that since her mind was pure, having self-control, possessing the six higher knowledge and had abandoned all craving for sense pleasures, she could no longer be enticed by sensuality earthly or divine.

The Buddha said that if anyone were to look up to someone as an exemplar of holy life, they should regard Therī Khemā and Therī Uppalavaṇṇā as such.

2.1.3.4 Paṭācarā Therī:¹⁵ Paṭācarā Therī was born in Sāvattihī to a rich family of doting parents. She grew up as a very beautiful daughter, closely guarded by her caring parents who built her a seven-storied mansion fortified by a heavy guard around it for her safety. Nevertheless, unknown to anyone she fell in love with her servant. With no intention of marrying the suitor chosen by her parents, she quickly connived a plan with the help of that servant to escape from her heavily guarded luxurious home to start a new life with him. She succeeded in disguising as a servant in rags fetching water and was able to fool the guards. The lovers met at the city gates and eloped to a distant village where they settled down as husband and wife. He became a farmer to start a family. She soon became pregnant and asked her husband to bring her back to her parents' home for childbirth.

The husband was scared of her parents because of their unsanctioned elopement. Anyway, unable to bear anymore procrastination she went by herself in her husband's absence. The husband later gave chase and found her by the wayside where she had

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 13-14.

given *birth*. With no purpose of proceeding further, they returned to their farmhouse. All was well, until she became pregnant again and when birth time was due, she again wanted to return to her parents' home. Repeated postponement again forced her to return to her parents' home with her small son by herself. Again the husband gave chase and found them along the country road, in a heavy rainstorm. She gave birth and told her husband to find them shelter. He ran off to do this but in doing so, was bitten by a poisonous snake and died instantly. Patācarā had to take care of her small son and her new born son as well as to brave the rainstorm, in the absence of her husband.

In the morning the rainstorm abated, but still there was no sign of her husband. Unable to wait any longer, she took her two sons and went in search of their father. Eventually she found the swollen contorted body and blamed herself bitterly for his death. Tearfully she went away towards her home in Sāvattī. On the way she had to cross a river. She first crossed the raging river with the new born baby and placed him on a leaf at the other river bank. She then came back for her elder boy but half-way in the river a big hungry bird swooped down and carried off the new-born baby. The mother Patācarā frantically waved her arms to drive the bird away but to no avail. Meanwhile the small boy mistook the arms of his mother to be a signal for him to go to her. Unable to reach her in mid-stream he fell into the raging river and was drowned.

In great anguish she wandered miserably on to Sāvattī, hoping for consolation and solace from her parents. On the outskirts of the city, she enquired about her family and was told that they were dead.

Their home was destroyed by lightning during the rainstorm the night before. She was told to look at the pall of smoke rising from the totally burnt building which was her parents' home. She was completely overcome by grief. Mad with grief and distraught with all the tragedies, Patācarā wandered naked, raving and wailing around the streets of Sāvattthī. No one helped or comforted her. Some even mocked and taunted her, calling her names.

Eventually she wandered into Jetavana Monastery where the Buddha was preaching Dhamma. When she wandered near enough, the Compassionate Buddha, knowing the history of her previous lives, approached her, brushing aside the people's intention to drive her away. He called her to Him, consoling her with gentle words and restoring back her senses. Becoming aware of her nakedness, she felt ashamed and crouched down on the ground. She was thrown a cloak to cover herself. She got up, came close to the Buddha, worshipped Him and implored Him to help her. She related to the Buddha the tragic losses of her whole family and property. The Buddha knew that she had been suffering these sorrows repeatedly and told her in verse that the tears she had shed in grief were more than the waters of all the oceans combined. There was no shelter or refuge to be found in the sons, daughters, father or mother, not any kinsfolk for they were subject to death. Knowing this, let the wise man (or in this case-her) cultivate the way leading to *nibbāna*. Hearing this she became calm and serene in her mind and attained Sotāpattimagga, the Stream-entry. She then requested to be ordained and became a Bhikkhunī.

Once, when she was washing her feet, she watched the bubbles ran along the soil and burst as soon as they were formed, while the water ran only a little way on but was also soaked up by the soil. As she was intently observing this phenomenon the Buddha projected an image of Himself and told Paṭācarā Therī that living a hundred years and not seeing the rise and fall, yet better indeed, was a single day's life of one, who saw the rise and fall. Upon hearing the Buddha's words, Paṭācarā Therī became an Arahanta. Then she became known as "Patita Carita" meaning "happy demeanor".

Paṭācarā of Sāvattihī is clearly the most tragic figures in Buddhist literature. The overprotected daughter of Sāvattihī seth, she who eloped with her servant boy. She gave birth to two sons, each time in the discomfort of the forest in inclement weather. During her last journey home, she lost all her family—children, husband, brother and parents—within the same day. Understandably, she went raving mad, but was in due course healed by the Buddha.¹⁶

The story of Paṭācarā is a clear example of the possibility to turn one's palm and make the best use of the unfortunate experience in life to further even a more wholesome and successful life.

2.1.3.5 Nandā Therī:¹⁷ When she was born, Nandā was lovingly welcomed by her parents. Her father was King Suddhodarna, also the father of Siddhatha; her mother was Mahā Pajāpati. Mahā

¹⁶ Subhā and the other nuns of the Therī.gathā: 76, viewed 14 February 2016, <<http://dharmafarer.org>>.

¹⁷ Hecker Hellmuth (2006-09-23), "Buddhist Women at the Time of the Buddha", Buddhist Publication Society, Retrieved 30 March 2007, <[https://en.wikipedia/w/index.php?title=Nanda_\(Buddhist_nun\)&oldid=751060215](https://en.wikipedia/w/index.php?title=Nanda_(Buddhist_nun)&oldid=751060215)>.

Pajāpati was the second wife of Suddhodarna and the younger sister of his first wife, the late Queen Maya. Nandā's name means joy, contentment, pleasure and was named as her family were especially joyous about the arrival of a new born baby. Among them was her brother Nandā, and her cousins Anuruddha and Venerable Ānanda, who were two of the Buddha's five leading disciples. Her mother, was the first Buddhist Bhikkhunī, having asked the Buddha to allow women into the Saṅgha. As a result of this, many other royal Sakyan ladies, including Princess Yasodharā, the wife of Siddhartha became Buddhist monastics. Thereupon, Nandā also renounced the world, but it was recorded that she did not do it out of confidence in the Buddha and the Dhamma, but out of blood love for her relatives and a feeling of belonging. One day, the Buddha requested all the bhikkhunīs to come to him individually, to receive his teachings, but Nandā did not obey. The Buddha let her be called explicitly, and then she presented herself, in an ashamed and anxious demeanour. The Buddha addressed her and appealed to all of her positive qualities so that Nandā willingly listened to him and was delighted in his words. He knew that the conversation had raised her spirits and had made her joyful and ready to accept his teaching. Since Nandā was so preoccupied with her physical beauty, the Buddha used his psychic powers to conjure the vision of a woman more beautiful than Nandā, who then aged quickly and visibly in front of her own eyes. As a result, Nandā could see, in a short time span, what could otherwise only be noticed in humans in a time span of decades: the recession of youth and beauty, the decay, the appearance of aging, such as wrinkles and gray hair. This vision affected Nandā deeply; she was shaken to the core.

After having shown Nandā this confronting image, the Buddha could explain the law of impermanence to her in such a manner that she grasped its truth completely, and thereby attained the knowledge of future liberation – Stream-Entry. As a meditation subject, the Buddha advised her to contemplate the impermanence and foulness of the body. She persevered for extended periods with this practice “faithful and courageous day and night”; She described this in her verses:

Sick, impure and foul as well,
 Nandā, see this congeries
 With the unlovely, develop mind
 Well-composed to singleness.
 As is that, thus will this likewise be.
 Exhaling foulness, evil smells,
 A thing it is enjoyed by fools.
 Diligently considering it,
 By day and night thus seeing it,
 With my own wisdom having seen,
 I turned away, dispassionate.
 With my own wisdom having seen,
 I turned away, dispassionate.
 With my diligence, carefully
 I examined the body
 And saw this as it really is –
 Both within and without.
 Unlusting and dispassionate
 Within this body then was I:

By diligence from fetters freed,
Peaceful was I and quite cool.

As Nandā had been overly concerned with her physical appearance, it had been necessary for her to apply the extreme of meditations on bodily unattractiveness as a counterbalance to find equanimity between the two opposites.

Later the Buddha recognized his half-sister as being the foremost amongst bhikkhunīs who practice *Jhāna*. This meant that she not only followed the analytical way of insight, but emphasized the experience of tranquility. Enjoying this pure well-being, she no longer needed any sensual enjoyments and soon found inner peace, despite having become a member of the Saṅgha out of attachment to her relatives. Among nuns who cultivate meditation, established in the supreme state, may the power of her qualities always be a blessing to us.

2.1.3.6 Dhammadinnā Therī:¹⁸ (As the most excellent of Dhamma teachers, attained to the supreme state, may the power of her qualities always be a blessing to us.) In family life Venerable Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā was married to a man named Visākha and were devoted to each other, enjoying a happy and comfortable life in Rājagaha. One day Visākha decided to hear the Buddha preaching the Dhamma and was very impressed by what he had heard. So he returned every day to listen to the Dhamma and soon after he became a Non-Returner (*anāgāmi*), the third stage of Buddhist Noble Attainment. This meant he had cut off all

¹⁸ Venerable Sayadaw U Panna Vamsa “Dawn of Buddhism,” Dhammikarama Burmese Buddhist Temple Penang, Malaysia : 1-18, p.13, viewed on 14 February 2017, <http://www.myanmar.net/nibbana/dawn_02.htm#23>.

attachments to sense pleasure as well as eradicated his ill-will and thus shattering his bondage of repeated birth in the cycle of rebirth (*samsāra*).

While going home one day, he resolved to give up home life and become a Bhikkhu. Upon reaching home, he explained to his wife Dhammadinnā, of his noble intention, then he handed over all his worldly wealth to her. His shocked but quick-witted wife then asked for permission to become a Bhikkhunī (female monk) instead; as she too had realized the worthlessness of worldly wealth. Visākha gladly consented and prepared suitable offerings for the Saṅgha. He escorted his wife to the Bhikkhunīs' residence, offered the gifts, after which presented her for ordination.

Once ordained, Dhammadinnā yearned to retreat to the forest to practice meditation in solitude. After obtaining permission she left Rājagaha and joined some like-minded Bhikkhunīs at the forest hermitage. After acquainted with the new surroundings, she practiced meditation intensively and because of her previous-life perfections, she soon attained Arahantship and uttered her triumphant paean of joy at her noble attainment.

Her noble victory had given her great insight and profound skill in explaining the Dhamma to others. Convinced that she had no further reasons to be there, she decided to return to Rājagaha where she could use her new Dhamma expertise to help and benefit others.

Her former husband Visākha, wanted to know why she had decided to return to Rājagaha. Knowing that it was rude to ask her outrightly, Visākhā chose to test her Dhamma knowledge instead. So

after paying his respects, he questioned her at length about the Dhamma, the path and its fruits and she answered him clearly and accurately. Finally he questioned her about Arahantship but Dhammadinnā did not answer, instead she sent him to see the Buddha.

On meeting the Buddha, the layman Visākha related the whole dialogue with Dhammadinnā in detail. After hearing his account of the dialogue the Buddha praised Arahant Therī Dhammadinnā saying that he regard for her as the Dhamma expositor and she was ranked as the most competent Dhamma teacher amongst all the other Bhikkhunīs.

2.1.3.7 Soṇā Therī:¹⁹ (As the foremost of energetic ones, established in that state, may the power of her qualities always be a blessing to us.) At the time of the Buddha, Soṇā lived in Sāvattthī and had ten children. She had spent her entire life occupied with the welfare of her children. She had enjoyed nursing them, feeding them, educating them and when they were older, finding suitable partners for them. Her whole life centered on her children and soon she was known as ‘Soṇā with many children’ Soṇā’s husband was a lay devotee of the Buddha. As his children were all married and his responsibilities reduced, he spent more and more time studying and practicing the Dhamma. Before long he was totally inspired by the Teachings. He decided to join the Holy Order. It was not easy for Soṇā to accept this decision, but instead of holding him back she decided that she too would lead a more religious life.

¹⁹ William Pruitt, **The Commentary on the Verses of the Therīs** (Therīgāthā-Atthakathā Paramatthadīpanī VI) by Ācariya Dhammapāla, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1998), p. 129.

With this in mind she divided up her wealth among her children and asked them to support her by providing her with the bare necessities of life. She then spent her time in religious activities as a lay devotee of the Buddha. For sometime all went well. Then, one by one, her children and their spouses began to feel that she was a burden to them. They had never really accepted their father's decision to join the Noble Order and they resented supporting their mother who was now spending most of her time in religious devotion. Forgetting how much she had done for them, they started quarrelling amongst themselves on an equitable division of her support and care. They all felt that it had been an unfair arrangement in which each of them had to bear an unfair proportion of her support. To them the mother who had sacrificed so much became a nuisance and a burden. This ungrateful treatment caused great suffering to Soṇā, who had sacrificed her entire life for her children. She became bitter and angry. She had expected her children to support her in her old age as was the custom in India. Having distributed her wealth among them she had no means to support herself.

Disillusioned, she decided to seek solace from the Buddha. After listening to one of the Buddha's nuns, Soṇā began to analyze her feelings and disappointment in her children. Had she sacrificed her life for them and nurtured them selflessly or had she done it with expectation of return? Had she given unconditional love to her children? How did her feeling compare with the compassion and loving-kindness the Buddha advocated? Soṇā decided to join the Buddha's order of bhikkhunīs to practice and develop selfless love and virtues. Following her husband's path, she became a bhikkhunī. Before long, however, Soṇā realized that

she had taken her old habits with her into the order. She was an old woman who was set in her ways. Joining the order had not changed her as a person. Often she was a target for criticism by younger bhikkhunīs as she had difficulties in changing her ways.

Soṇā realized that attaining spiritual purity was no easy task. Soṇā began to practice mindfulness and self-observation in earnest. She had to be aware of her emotions and weaknesses and discipline her mind. Because she had entered the order in her latter years Soṇā knew that she had to work with effort. She practiced meditation with urgency, often passing the entire night in sitting and walking meditation. So as not to disturb others, she started to meditate in the lower hall in the dark by guiding herself with the pillars. Before long her determination and effort resulted in Soṇā attaining Arahantship. She describes her attainment in her own words:²⁰

“I bore ten sons in this material body,
and then being weak and aged
I approached a bhikkhunī.
She taught me the Doctrine, the aggregates,
the sense bases, and the elements.
When I heard the Doctrine from her,
I cut off my hair and went forth.
As I trainee under her, the divine eye
was being purified by me. I know that
I have lived before [and] where I lived before.
And intent and well concentrated, I develop

²⁰*ibid.*, p. 129.

the signless. I have had immediate liberation.
 I have become quenched without clinging.
 When they are known, the five aggregates
 stand with root cut off. Shame be on you,
 miserable old age! There is now no renewed existence.

When the other bhikkhunīs returned they asked Soṇā for the hot water and she realized that she had not as yet boiled it. Using the supernormal powers that she now possessed and the fire element Soṇā heated the water and offered it to the bhikkhunīs, who reported her extraordinary feat to the Buddha. The Buddha declared Soṇā as foremost among the bhikkhunīs who put forth great effort and praised her effort and attainment by saying:

“One may live a hundred years indolent and lacking energy. Life for one day is better for one who makes a firm effort.”

The Great Hero was pleased with her excellent attainment and the Great Sage said she was foremost among those who make an effort.

2.1.3.8 Sakulā Therī:²¹ (As the foremost of those with the divine eye, with seeing well purified, may the power of her qualities always be a blessing to us.) Sakulā was born in a Brahmin family. She was also married and acquired faith in the Buddha at the time when he accepted the Jeta Grove as a monastery. One day she listened to the teaching of an Arahanta bhikkhu and was deeply stirred at which she

²¹ Bhikkhu Khantipalo, **Banner of the Arahants**, (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1979), pp. 140-141.

requested the Going-forth. Later, as an Arahanta, the Buddha assigned to her pre-eminence among those with the Divine Eye.

As I was living in my house
 I heard a bhikkhu teaching Dhamma,
 Dhamma I saw, stainless then—
 Nibbāna, the unchanging state.
 I left my son, my daughter too,
 My wealth as well, my stored-up grain
 And having had my hair cut off
 I went forth to the homeless state.
 Then was I a probationer
 Developing the path that's straight,
 I abandoned lust, aversion too
 And the pollutions linked to them.
 Accepted as a bhikkhunī
 I remembered former births
 Having made pure the Eye Divine,
 Spotless it is and well –developed.
 The conditioned as other* having seen.
 Arising causally, dissolving away,
 The pollutions all I abandoned then,
 Quenched, I have become quite cool.

2.1.3.9 Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesa Therī:²² (Kuṇḍalakesa Bhikkhunī was the most excellent of those with quick intuition, established in this very state, may the power of her qualities always be a blessing to us.) The daughter of Rājagaha seth, was an example of women (unrelated) who were highly trained intellectually, and who could not rest until they have found an opening for the exercise of their talents. Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesa, as a young girl, fell for and married an ungrateful young thief, who later tried to kill her. She outwitted and killed him instead. Then she became a Jain nun, practicing painful austerities. She had a public debate with Sārīputta at Jetavana but was defeated. Later, listening to the Buddha, she became an Arhanta and joined the order. (Thī 46/107-111)

2.1.3.10 Bhaddā Kapilānī Therī:²³ (Bhaddā Kapilānī was the foremost of those remembering previous births, may the power of her qualities always be a blessing to us.) When Bhikkhunī Saṅgha came into existence, she then joined the female Saṅgha and came to be known as Bhaddā Kapilānī. Having listened to the teaching of the Buddha, she soon became enlightened. She was praised by the Buddha for being foremost in remembering past lives.

2.1.3.11 Bhaddā Kajanā Therī:²⁴ Rāhula Mātā – Yasodharā Therī (Bhaddā Kajanā Therī was the greatest of those with higher knowledges, having conquered pleasure and pain, may the power of her qualities always be a blessing to us.) She was Yasodharā, Buddha's wife

²²Subhā, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

²³Bhaddā Kapilānī, viewed 16 February 2017, <www.dhammadjak.net/forums, viewed 16 February, 2017>.

²⁴Bhaddā Kajanā, viewed 16 February, 2017, <<http://archive.li/ypyr2>, viewed 16 February, 2017>.

and also known as Buddha Kajanā Therī or Rāhula Mātā. She was born on the same day as the Bodhisattva. She married him (Gotama) at the age of sixteen, and was placed at the head of forty thousand women, given to Gotama by the Sakyans, after he had proved his manly prowess to their satisfaction. Gotama left the household life on the day of the birth of his son Rāhula. It is said that just before he left home he took a last look at his wife from the door of her room, not daring to go nearer, lest he would change his mind.

2.1.3.12 Kīsā Gotamī Therī: (Kīsā Gotamī was the foremost of those wearing coarse robes, attained to the supreme state, may the power of her qualities always be a blessing to us.) Kīsā Gotamī was the wife of a wealthy man of Savatthi. After losing her infant child, she was in such painful grief and desperate for help to bring her child back to life. An old man told her to seek help from the Buddha.

The Buddha told her that He could do it only if she could find white mustard seeds from a house where no one had died. So she wandered about in this manner, hoping and asking around. There was not a single house where she could find the mustard seeds she sought. And when evening came, she thought, “Ah! It is a heavy task I have taken upon myself. I thought it was I alone who had lost a child (Mam’eva putto mato’ ti saññam akāsi), but The Buddha consoled her and reminded her that what she experienced was only natural. She sought to be ordained and soon was enlightened. Kīsā Gotamī became one of the teachers helping the Buddha to propagate the profound Dhamma to sentient beings.

2.1.3.13 Singālamātā Therī: (Singālamātā Therī was the highest of those resolved on faith. May the power of her qualities always bestow great peace, health, and happiness on us.) The Buddha praised her for being foremost in faith. Singālamātā herself having listened to the teaching of the Buddha even for the first time, she already gained sotāpanna, the first stage of the noble path. She left the household to become a bhikkhunī. Having seen the Buddha, coupled with her past intention and her good kamma she held fast to the practice and soon was enlightened.

2.1.4 Concluding remarks about Early Bhikkhunīs

We do know that the good name of the bhikkhunīs lasted far beyond the Buddha-time, supported by the atthagarudhamma “embankment” that the Buddha had constructed. There were many Arahantas among the bhikkhunīs and some of their discourses have survived in the Basket of Suttas. Their inspired poems spoken often at the moment of Enlightenment have also survived in Pali.

How these were included in the Tipitaka is not clear since there is no mention of bhikkhunīs taking part in the First Council: only five hundred Arahants were mentioned and they were all understood to be bhikkhus. Perhaps some bhikkhunīs did participate, but the records of both first and second Councils are lacking in detail.

After the First Buddhist Council, records of bhikkhunīs appeared more evidently in Sri Lanka and China. The Bhikkhunī Saṅgha continued to flourish in Sri Lanka for many centuries until their

disappearances during the conquest of the island by the Cholas, Tamil invaders from South India in the 16th-17th BE century.

However, long before the lineage of the bhikkhunīs died out in Sri Lanka, their Saṅgha was established in China by Sri Lankan Bhikkhunīs, as recorded in the Chinese work, “Lives of Bhikkhunīs”.²⁵

There are less literary records of the history of the bhikkhunīs in India. However, inscriptions found on stone pillars and caves in many places in India indicated that bhikkhunīs existed and were great supporters of monasteries all around India. However, we do not know whether their Saṅgha perished before its extinction in Sri Lanka, or continued right up to the final end of the Buddha’s teaching there, i.e., around 1742 BE at the time of the Muslim Turks invasion of Nalanda University.

2.2 After the Passing Away of the Buddha

2.2.1 First Signs of Opposition against Bhikkhunīs in the First Council²⁶

Three months after the Buddha’s passing away, Venerable Mahā Kassapa called a meeting which later is known as the First Council where 500 Arahants came together. Venerable Ānanda was enlightened just on the night prior to the actual meeting, hence he joined in as one of the 500. In fact, it would be difficult to do without his presence. He was the only one who memorized all of the Buddha’s teachings in the last 25 years before the Buddha’s passing away.

²⁵ Khantipalo, *op.cit.*, p.151.

²⁶ Dhammanandā bhikkhunī, **Theravāda Bhikkhunī Lineage**, (Bangkok: Thai Tibet Center, 2015), pp.19-22.

Venerable Mahā Kassapa presided over the meeting on a mountain just outside Rajagaha (presently called Rajgirh). Venerable Upāli was to recite the Vinaya as he was praised by the Buddha to be well versed in the Vinaya. And it was only obvious that Venerable Ānanda was to recite the Dhamma, which was all the Dhamma that Venerable Ānanda had heard and remembered directly from the Buddha.

An interesting incident happened before the actual recitation of Dhamma and Vinaya. The Saṅgha led by Venerable Mahā Kassapa pointed out five mistakes (*dukkata*) that Venerable Ānanda did, and the Saṅgha thought that Venerable Ānanda should confess.

Among the five, two of them concerned women. Here, we will look at these two mistakes that the Saṅgha thought Venerable Ānanda needed to confess.

One was at the time of the Buddha's passing away: Venerable Ānanda made a mistake by allowing women to pay respect to the body of the Buddha before the monks and some of the ladies' tears fell on the body of the Buddha.

Venerable Ānanda clearly said he did not see that as a mistake, for it was getting dark. He allowed the women to pay respect first so that they could get home safely. Please be reminded that hardly three months before this incident, the Buddha had just praised Ānanda for being the best of his attendants. He knew how to deal with people coming to see the Buddha. Judging from the Buddha's viewpoint, one would say that Venerable Ānanda did not do anything wrong considering the

circumstances. However, as the Saṅgha thought that he should confess, he made a confession.

Another mistake he was supposed to have made in the eyes of the Saṅgha was his intervention to help women receive ordination. This is the first evidence to show that not all the monks were happy with women joining the Order, but as long as the Buddha lived, none of them voiced their disagreement.

Perhaps this was the reason the Buddha did not agree right away for bhikkhunī ordination and this is perhaps why the Buddha set up the 8 garudhammas as extra conditions for women monastics in order to stop disagreement from other bhikkhus. However, the displeasure came out at the First Council and the blame was directed towards Venerable Ānanda.

Venerable Ānanda was very clear in his answer, he again said that he did not see that as a mistake as the lady who asked for ordination was none other than the Buddha's step-mother who breast-fed the baby prince Siddhartha herself. Venerable Ānanda clearly showed a good spirit: it was at this time that the Saṅgha was very fragile as the Buddha had just passed away. So he made the confession because the Saṅgha thought he should do so. He did his best to maintain the unity of the Saṅgha in spite of his own honour.

Interestingly, these were Vinaya questions but Venerable Upāli, who was supposed to be a Vinaya expert, did not seem to have any say in these arguments. It was considered appropriate that Venerable Ānanda should make confession on these acts performed some 40 years ago.

Considering that these Theras were all Arahants, they should not have any feeling of prejudice any more. Perhaps what they were concerned was the difficulty in the management of the monasteries especially in the area of monitoring and keeping in order the behaviours of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs who were not yet stream-enterers and the safety measures needed for safeguarding the security of bhikkhunīs.

2.2.2 Disappearance of Literary Documentations about Bhikkhunīs in India

The attitude of the Theras from the First Council set the grounds for the reason that there are scarce literary records about Bhikkhunīs in India as explained below:

- 1) The fact that the texts in India were nearly always written by men and that in their renderings the Bhikkhunīs were naturally not highlighted appears to be a reason for the Pali canon being rather silent about Bhikkhunīs. Although the Bhikkhunīs were also striking personalities, keeping even more Vinaya rules than the Bhikkhus, the references to them in the Canon are sparse.
- 2) When the Buddha addressed the congregation of his followers, he used the word ‘Bhikkhave’, denoting all categories of disciples: *Bhikkhus*, *Bhikkhunīs*, *Upāsakas*, *Upāsikās* who were present in the congregation. And as such, the Bhikkhunī did not need any special mention, because the Buddha treated them as equally important pillars for sustaining Buddhism in the future. Therefore,

this was another reason we could hardly find anything written specifically about Bhikkhunīs.

- 3) It is regrettable that the Bhikkhunīs who had performed extremely well and who devoted to the task of carrying the message of the Buddha with vigorous fervor should have declined from their privileged position before very long, contrary to the wish of the Buddha.

After the Buddha's passing away the Bhikkhunīs gradually declined in numbers, due to the difficulty of keeping monastic practices in the absence of proper supports. In addition, with rising influence of Hinduism, the status of women was placed at the very low echelon of the Indian society. Since the Buddhist community no longer offered women easy access into ordination, the Indian culture gradually fell backwards under Brahmanism and Hinduism influence. These go to explain the eventual disappearance of Bhikkhunīs from India.

Many sources point out that the end of Bhikkhunīs in India occurred around the 17th-18th century BE, due to invasion of the Muslim Turks. Buddhist monks and nuns were obvious targets for killing as well as destruction of Nalanda University, the hub of Buddhist activities and education around 17th-18th century BE. It took the devastated fire three months before all the documents in Nalanda could be totally burnt. This is another important reason we can hardly find documents about bhikkhunīs in India because if there were any, it would have been burnt in the Great Fire. The end of Buddhism in India and of the Bhikkhunī lineage occurred at about the same time as the invasion of Sri Lanka by the Tamils from Chola.

2.2.3 Traces of Bhikkhunīs in Indian Archaeology and Chinese Documents

Since fire destroyed everything, and as Nalanda was the main depositor and keeper of important Buddhist documents, most records and artifacts were destroyed by the Muslim Turks' army in the fire of 1742 BE. However traces about bhikkhunīs in India could be found among caves carvings and stone inscriptions or archeological findings. Documents recorded by Chinese monks who wrote about their experiences of the events and people they met along their travel route to India are, as far as we now know, the only literary documentation source about bhikkhunīs left in the history of Buddhism in India.

2.2.3.1 Inscriptions in Stone pillars and Stupas

1) During King Asoka's period

During King Asoka's period who reigned from 218-260 BE, evidences show that Bhikkhunīs still held high status in the Indian Society as the King himself was a great supporter of Buddhism and ordered many Asoka stone pillars and stupas built with inscriptions and relief sculptures about Buddhist beliefs, Dhamma and ceremonies. Among the groups of Arahāt monks whom he sent to spread Buddhism in nine directions, he sent his son and his only daughter, Venerable Mahinda and Saṅghamitta Therī to establish Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

In Sanci, the hometown of Venerable Mahinda and Saṅghamitta's mother, Queen Vedisa (Mahādevī), a great stupa was built by King Asoka for Queen Vedisa to commemorate the sacrifice of their royal children who left to spend the rest of their lives to establish

Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Traces of bhikkhunīs living in this area were found, among them 87 were named as donors together with royal women and lay-women.²⁷

In addition, an inscription was found showing the King clearly asked both the bhikkhu and bhikkhunī Saṅghas to see to the development of Buddhism. Should there be any bhikkhu or bhikkhunī causing difficulty with the Saṅgha, such a person should be expelled from the area.

“The stone inscription at Bhabara requests both bhikkhu and bhikkhunī Saṅghas to pay attention to dhamma and to meditate on those dhamma topics. In Sarnath, the pillar inscription found that King Asoka addressing people of Patliputra, asking them to see to the unity of both the Saṅghas. This was recorded in the 20th year of his reign.”²⁸

2) After King Asoka’s Period

Apart from Asokan inscriptions, a stone inscription found in Bodhgaya mentions about Bhikkhunī Kuranci, a former consort of King Indramitra, that she became an Arahat (Gaya Bodhgaya by B.M. Barua, II, p. 67).²⁹

In Kusana there is also a stone inscription about Bhikkhunī Buddhmitra, disciple of Bhikkhu Bala who was honoured with a title Tripitakacarya, one who was well versed in the Tipiṭaka.

²⁷Dhammanandā bhikkhunī, “Theravāda Bhikkhunī Lineage: Traces of the bhikkhunī saṅgha in Indian History and Archaeology”, (July 11, 2015), pp. 28-29.

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 27.

In Sanci, another inscription mentions Bhikkhunī Avisina, who was honored as Sutatigini, a title signifying that she was a learned scholar in the Sutta.

Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh, is well-known for being the center of Theravāda Buddhists in the south of India. It was also a site named in the Edicts of King Asoka for setting up a stone pillar. Fragmented inscriptions at Amaravati mentioned the existence of bhikkhunīs as donors in not less than eight places. Some of the inscriptions associated the names of bhikkhunī donors to their female teachers. “This is evident in an inscription, which states that “Mala, the female disciple of Samudiya, the female disciple of Aya-Pannavassa” had gifted a *padakka*, a stone slab image of Buddha’s feet.” Another describes the Bhikkhunī Budharakhita with her daughters and her gift of a oping stocne.

3) Literary Documentation by Chinese Monk.

Fa Hien, the Chinese pilgrim who travelled in India between AD 399-414,³⁰ recorded that when he arrived in Savatthi, he found a vihāra of Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī but there were neither bhikkhus nor bhikkhunīs living there.

However in Sankasya (Sankissa) 45 miles north of Kanouj there were thousands of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs.

In conclusion, bhikkhunīs existed for at least 1,500 years but with the waning of Buddhism and rising influence of Hinduism and

³⁰Dhammanandā bhikkhunī, “Theravāda Bhikkhunī Lineage: Traces of the bhikkhunī saṅgha in Indian History and Archaeology,” (11 July 2015), p. 28.

eventually the invasion of Muslim Turks, bhikkhunīs in India probably ended around 1742 BE, the year Nalanda University was totally

2.2.3.2 Inscriptions in Cave Monasteries

In the Cunnar cave, an inscription mentioning a bhikkhunīs' residence called Bhikkhunīs Upasaya, belonging to Dhammutriya women's monastery.³¹

In the Kanheri Caves, in the west coast of India north of Mumbai, traces of Theravāda monasteries with bhikkhunīs were found in many places. These caves date from 1st century BC (443 BE) to 9th century AD (1443 BE), Inscriptions on the Cave walls show lineage succession within the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. These caves started as a Theravāda monastery but later became Mahayana and Vajirayana shrine.

Bhikkhunī Dhammananda referred to inscriptions on the right hand side of the cave mentioning names of senior Theravāda bhikkhunīs with their junior bhikkhunī disciples, i.e., Bhikkhunīs Dhammadeva, Mula, Bodhi, Asalhamitta were disciples of Bhikkhunīs Mitsiri, Gada, and Padumanika.³²

Other caves in West India where traces of bhikkhunīs were also found. For example:

1. Bhaja cave Theravāda monasteries in Aurangabad housed Bhikkhunīs Saṅgha for more than 1,000 years.

³¹ Dhammanandā bhikkhunī, "Women Strengthening Buddhism" Published by Thai Tibet Center, Bangkok, Thailand, pp. 66-7.

³² Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy, 1949-50, p. 33.

2. Karle caves bear many rock-cut inscriptions about donations by bhikkhunīs and other monastic women from 2nd century BCE through the 2nd century CE, a period of about 500 years.

Areas where these inscriptions have been found spread far and wide throughout India. Some evidence was found on the base of Buddha images by identifying the bhikkhunīs who made the images as offerings to their bhikkhunī teachers. Also evidence was found of bhikkhunīs mentioned as donors on the base of stupas, viharas' doors and window sills. The names of donors often appeared on individual blocks of sculpture. In some cases, donors were shown in reliefs as worshippers.

Later on the status of bhikkhunīs might have declined, evidence was found mentioning their existence, but there were no honorary titles. There was only one place where the bhikkhunīs were addressed as bhadanti (teacher) and therīs (elders).³³

2.3 Bhikkhunī Dissemination to Different Lands

2.3.1 Spreading of the Bhikkhunī Order to Sri Lanka

After the passing away of the Buddha, in 275 BE Emperor King Asoka came to the throne. A great supporter of Buddhism, he sent Buddhist missionaries in nine different directions. Mahinda Thera, his own son, traveled to Sri Lanka to teach Dhamma and established the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. The sister-in-law of King Devanampiyatissa, Queen Anula (236-276 BE) of Sri Lanka, converted to Buddhism when he did. She became a Stream-enterer and asked him if she could join the Saṅgha

³³ Dhammanandā bhikkhunī, “Theravāda Bhikkhunī Lineage: Traces of the bhikkhunī saṅgha in Indian History and Archaeology”, (July 11, 2015), p. 28.

after listening to the teaching of Mahinda Thera. Arahant Mahinda refused the request saying that it is not allowed according to the Vinaya rules to give ordination to women who had not been ordained by Bhikkhunīs first.³⁴

Mahinda Thera told her that dual ordination by both the Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī Orders was necessary to become a Bhikkhunī. At least ten Bhikkhunīs must be present to form a Saṅgha, and the preceptor must have at least twelve years standing as a Bhikkhunī in order to give the precepts. He suggested that she ask King Devanampiyatissa to send a messenger to India to request King Asoka to send Saṅghamittā Therī, his daughter and some other Bhikkhunīs to give the ordination. A princess, Saṅghamittā Therī, a princess, had given up royal luxury to practice the Dhamma. She was an Arahanta and well versed in the Dhamma and Vinaya rules.

Thus King Asoka sent Bhikkhunī Saṅghamittā, his own daughter, along with ten other Bhikkhunīs to establish the Bhikkhunīs order upon the request from the King of Sri Lanka. King Asoka also sent a branch of the Bodhi tree from Bodhgaya with her.³⁵ Bhikkhunī Saṅghamittā and the other Indian Bhikkhunīs, together with the Bhikkhu Saṅgha, ordained Queen Anula and five hundred other women of the

³⁴Mhv, XV, 18-20, cited in Bhiksunī Rujing Mao, Qianjing, Bhiksunī Contributions to Education, Dhamma Practice and Social Work in Contemporary China, PhD Thesis, Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand, BE 2556 (2013), p. 12.

³⁵ Later, she embarked with 10 other bhikkhunīs for Sri Lanka bearing the southern branch of the Bodhi Tree under which the Buddha's Enlightenment took place. This was reverently planted in the capital of Anurādhapura and still more than two thousand years later, is accorded great devotion.

Royal court, established the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Sri Lanka, the first one outside India.³⁶

The Bhikkhunī Saṅgha continued to flourish in Sri Lanka for many centuries until their disappearance during the conquest of the island by the Cholas, Hindu Tamils from South India in the sixteenth century BE. There were internal fighting among the Singhalese princes who at times got support from the Tamils. Eventually in the year 1560 BE, the Tamils from Chola conquered Anurādhapura. It was left in total destruction. The capital was moved to Puḷattipura (Polonnaruwa) where again the Tamils attacked and held the Sri Lankan king captive in India for twelve years until his death. Numerous Hindu shrines were set up all over Puḷattipura. Perhaps the bhikkhunī lineage ended during this period.

The Bhikkhu Saṅgha could survive as it was scattered over the whole land but the Bhikkhunīs', concentrated in a few cities and towns, were vulnerable to destruction by the Cholian invaders. When peace later returned to Sri Lanka the kings of those times were either not interested in restoring the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, or more likely, were unable to do so for lack of pure bhikkhunīs.

2.3.2 Establishment of the Chinese Bhikkhunī Order

However, long before the lineage of the bhikkhunīs died out in Sri Lanka, their Saṅgha was established in China.

³⁶Mhv XVIII, 12-19, cited in Bhiksunī Rujing Mao, Qianjing, Bhiksunī Contributions to Education, Dhamma Practice and Social Work in Contemporary China, PhD Thesis, Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand, BE 2556 (2013), p. 12.

A Chinese monk in Liang Dynasty, Shi Baochang,³⁷ gave an account of the early beginning of the Order of Bhikkhunī in China in the early fourth century. One Chinese woman, Jingian, who lived during the Jin Dynasty was very enthusiastic to become a Bhikkhunī. Jingian was ordained by Venerable Zhishan together with 24 other Buddhist women to become Buddhist nuns. They established a Zhuling temple in Luoyang. This was the first Bhikkhunī Temple in China. Jingian was the first Chinese Bhikkhunī taking the full ordination (upasampadā) from the Bhikkhu Saṅgha only. During that period Chinese Bhikkhunīs were ordained by monks only. The Chinese Bhikkhunīs since Jingian conferred single-ordination but it was considered pure and valid.

The Bhikkhunī ordination being completed by both Saṅghas of Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī started in the Song Dynasty (429 AD) when a foreign boat captain named Nandi invited eight Bhikkhunīs from Sri Lanka to the capital of the Song Dynasty. They went to Nanking and lived in the Ching-fu Convent. After a time they asked the (partly-ordained) nun Seng-kuo whether any foreign bhikkhunīs had ever come to China. She told them that they were the first that had ever come. “Then how did previous nuns manage to have bhikkhunīs as well as bhikkhus to conduct their ordination (acceptance)?” asked the bhikkhunīs from Sri Lanka. “We were ordained by a senior bhikkhu,” said Seng-kuo. “Any woman whose nature prompted her to take the vows was accepted. The earnest desire of the candidates gave rise to this expedient, which is in some measure justified by the case of Queen Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī, the strength of her Eight Declarations of Reverence,

³⁷Baochang Shi, **Biographies of Bhikkhunīs** (Chinese: Bi-qiu-ni Zhuan), (Beijing: China Book Company Press, 2006), p. 13.

and afterwards she in turn acted as Sīla-upadhya (preceptress in the rules) to five hundred ladies of the Sakya clan.”

Taking the case of Queen Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī as a good example and precedent, Bhikkhunī Sengguo justified the validity of the single ordination observed by the Chinese Bhikkhunīs. But she still had some doubts, so she asked the question of the possibility of re-ordination by both Saṅghas. She also asked him if it was possible for nuns who had been ordained already (only by a Bhikkhu Saṅgha) to be re-ordained (with a Bhikkhunī Saṅgha). “Morality, Meditation and Wisdom”, he said “are all progressive states. If an ordination is repeated, so much the better”.

Venerable Gunavarman was pleased to offer his help. However the number of Sinhalese Bhikkhunīs was insufficient to give higher ordination to Chinese women who had already received earlier ordination from monks. According to the Vinaya rules, ten Bhikkhunīs are required to give ordination to other women. Therefore, these eight Sinhalese Bhikkhunīs remained in China to study the Chinese language.

The ship owner Nandi returned to Sri Lanka to invite eleven Bhikkhunīs headed by Bhikkhunī Devasara to come from Sri Lanka to China in AD 432. Unfortunately, Venerable Gunavarman passed away in the same year as the Indian Bhikkhu Saṅghavarman³⁸ arrived in Yangzhou. In the year AD 433, ten Sinhalese Bhikkhunīs gave ordinations to more than three hundred Chinese women at Southern

³⁸Venerable Saṅghavarman, was a sutra translator during the reign of Liu-Song (420-479). A native India, he is proficient in the Vinaya-piṭaka. He arrived in China in 433 AD, when Huiguo and other nuns of Yingfu Temple pleaded to the master for re-ordination with hundreds of Bhikkhunīs ordained as a result.

Grove Monastery. The Bhikkhu Saṅgha headed by Vinaya Master Saṅghavarman as the Preceptor gave the ordination, making this the first dual ordination of Bhikkhunīs in China.³⁹ It also marks the Chinese Bhikkhunī Order once again set up legally. Afterwards the ordination of the Bhikkhunīs in China branched out to establish the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Chinese Taipei, Korea and South East Asia, which has survived until the present day.

2.4 The Four-fold Saṅgha Development

Soon after the Enlightenment of the Buddha, Māra come to invite him to pass away, not wanting him to bring along too many good souls to *nibbāna*. But the Buddha said to Māra that until and unless the four assemblies of disciples of the Order: *Bhikkhu*, *Bhikkhunī*, *Upāsaka* and *Upāsikā*, were well established in the Dhamma and could take full responsibility for the unsullied continuation of the Sasana, he would not consider entering into Parinibbāna.

At this time there were no bhikkhunīs yet, meaning that the Buddha intended from the beginning, right after his supreme enlightenment as mentioned in the Mahaparinibbāna Sutta, that the Buddha told Venerable Ānanda that Vasavati Māra had approached him during his seven days meditation at the Goatherd's Banyan tree on the bank of the River Neranjarā at Uruvelā asking him to attain final *nibbāna* at that moment. The Buddha's reply to Māra was "Evil one, I shall not pass away, O Evil One! until not only the brethren and sisters of the Order, but also the lay-disciples of either sex shall have become true hearers, wise and well trained, ready and learned, carrying the doctrinal

³⁹ *opcit.*, p. 17.

books in their memory, masters of the lesser corollaries that follow from the larger doctrine, correct in life, walking according to the precepts—until they, having thus themselves learned the doctrine shall be able to tell others of it, preach it, make it known, establish it, open it, minutely explain it and make it clear—until they, when others start vain doctrine easy to be refuted by the truth, shall be able in refuting it to spread the wonder-working truth abroad! I shall not die until this pure religion of mine shall have become successful, prosperous,, wide-spread, and popular in all its full extent—until, in a word, it shall have been well proclaimed among men!”⁴⁰

In this statement of the Buddha, one does not see any regret or reluctance in the Buddha regarding the prevailing of the Bhikkhunī Order after his passing away. On the contrary, the Buddha has wished for its continuation.

Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā mentions in her book *Theravāda Bhikkhunī Lineage* that “Also in the *Pañcakanipāta*, when the Venerable Kimpila asked about the possible decline of Buddhism in the future, the Buddha predicted that it might happen if the four groups of Buddhists did not respect the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, the Sikkha (study) and if they did not respect one another.” But, immediately after the *Parinibbāna* of the Buddha, the social prejudice against women in ancient India once more started to re-emerge.

A certain incident reported to have occurred during the First Council as summarized in 2.2.1, gives a clue. Venerable Ānanda Thera,

⁴⁰T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, **Dīgha-nikāya: Dialogues of the Buddha**, Vol II, 4th edition, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1995), p. 120-1.

the custodian of the Dhamma and the personal attendant of the Buddha, was accused by the Council for showing concern for women by speaking up for their ordination leading to the setting up of the institution of the Bhikkhunī Order. Perhaps some bhikkhunīs did participate, but the records of both First and Second Councils are lacking in detail.

Nevertheless, we have found traces of Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Monasteries and communities of laywomen who gave fervent support to Buddhism up until 11th Century AD. The invasion by Muslim Turks put an end to Buddhism in, India around 11th -12th century AD about the same time as the conquer of Sri Lanka by the Tamils from Chola, South India.

Later on Sri Lanka got assistance from China and Siam to revive Buddhism. But revival of bhikkhunī lineage was not possible because of the principle of dual ordination required for ordination of bhikkhunīs as stipulated in the First Council.

In Thailand, the people who adhere to the principle of dual – Saṅgha ordination for bhikkhunīs conclude that there are only three groups of Buddhist disciples, namely, Bhikkhus, laymen and laywomen; as the bhikkhunī lineage had ended and never existed in Thailand. White-robed nuns are considered as belonging in the same category as laywomen.

Whereas those who understand the need for women monastics are trying to find ways for women who want to enter full monastic life to be ordained in some form of nuns but not requiring 311 precepts and not to be called Bhikkhunīs. This practice is contrary to the wish of the

Buddha in expecting the fourfold Saṅghas to flourish and exist as the main pillars of Buddhism.

The Buddha once said to Venerable Ānanda: “Yo Vo Ānanda Mayā Dhammo Ca Vinayo Ca Desito Paññatto So Mamaccayena Sathā.” “Ānanda, the Doctrine and Discipline I have set forth and laid down for you all shall be your teacher after I am gone.”⁴¹

From this statement, it means that the Dhamma and the Vinaya would represent the Buddha himself after he passed away. On the other occasion, the Buddha told Venerable Kimpila that the decline in Buddhism would be possible if the fourfold Buddhists did not respect the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, the Sikkha (study) and if they did not respect one another.

This means that the Buddha put great emphasis on the fourfold Saṅgha to be unified and respect one another under the framework of the Dhamma and the Vinaya in order to carry forward his teachings and sustain Buddhism after he had gone to Parinibbāna. Particularly his statement to Māra attested to this responsibility of the fourfold Saṅghas to be the main pillars supporting the Sassana.

Therefore it is appropriate that one should protect and ensure the continuation and unity among the fourfold Saṅghas: Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs, laymen and laywomen as a means to nurture and sustain Buddhism into the future.

⁴¹*ibid.*, p. 344.

2.5 The Origin of Bhikkhunī in the Thai Society

2.5.1 The Arrival of Buddhism in Thailand

In view of the increasing interest the world is taking in Buddhism and in view of the fact that Thailand is one of the countries where Buddhism still exists as a living force, it will not perhaps be out of place to know something of the story of how this great faith reached that country. Buddhism came to an area recorded as Suvarnabhumi⁴² (land of gold). The area should cover part of western Thailand and Eastern Burma.

2.5.1.1 Suvarnabhumi Period: During the time of Arahant Sona and Uttara's arrival to establish Theravāda Buddhism in Suvarnabhumi, around 3rd Century BC which was the time of King Asoka the Great who sent out missionaries on 9 various routes. Among them the Arahant Sona and Uttara came to Suvarnabhumi. Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A. Payutto) identified in Jarik Boon-Jaruk Dhamma (จารึกบุญ-จารึกธรรม) that the area where Arahants Sona and Uttara spread Buddhism was the ancient Nakorn Pathom. There was a legend that giant devil butterflies were catching young people to eat their flesh. Thousands of men and women were ordained during this period. There was a record that there was ordination (*pabbajjā*) of 1,500 women. But apart from that, we have no further information.

⁴²Dhammananda bhikkhunī (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh), **Bhikkhunīs in Thailand**, (Nakhonpathom: Buddhasavika Foundation, 2009), p. 4.

2.5.1.2 Dvaravati Period (5th century BE – 16th century BE): During this period, archaeological evidences dated back to 7-9th century BE (Amaravati period in India) were found in the form of Buddhists artifacts such as dhammacakka, Buddha images, stone inscriptions and stupas.⁴³ Later on Gupta artifacts dated 9th-11th century BE were also found.

All these documented and archaeological evidences showed that Buddhism reached Thailand before Dvaravati period and was flourishing during Dvaravati in the areas presently called Nakorn Pathom, Suphanburi, Lopburi, Kanchanaburi, Lampoon and some northeastern provinces like Nakhon Ratchasima, Kalasin etc. The original group of people who lived here were believed to be composed of Mon, Lua, Khmer and Indian settlers.

In Lampoon province, there is a legend that during the reign of Queen Chamadevī (formerly a Mon princess), the first ruler of Lampoon province about 1,300 years ago, there were bhikkhunīs in Haripunchai during her dynasty, of which 47 rulers ruled from 1206 BE – 1836 BE. There is an Uposatha called “Bhikkhunī Uposatha” still in existence. During Phra Kruba Srivichai’s time, it is believed that when he was under detention at Wat Phra That Haripunchai, he went to the bhikkhunī uposatha for performing Buddhist routines because he was not allowed to join the bhikkhu saṅgha for uposatha. But nobody knows what happened to these bhikkhunīs.

⁴³ Sompong Santisukwan , **An Analytical of Study the History of Buddhism with special reference to Dvaravati Period**, (Thai Version), Master’s Degree Thesis, (Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2550), pp. 75-7.

2.5.1.3 Sukhothai period: Thailand has been a Buddhist country since we were unified during the period of Sukhothai, our first kingdom in 13th Century AD. The kind of Buddhism that we accepted then was Theravāda from Sri Lanka, hence the Thai Saṅgha belong to Lankavamsa. During this time Sukhothai was considered the golden hub for the establishment of Buddhism, we did not however hear of ordination of women perhaps due to the fact that there was no bhikkhunī left in Sri Lanka at the time. Sukhothai as a kingdom lasted almost a century before we moved downward to Ayudhaya.

2.5.1.4 Ayudhaya Kingdom: (AD 1350-1767)⁴⁴ lasted for 417 years, this was the period where Thai people suffered through constant warfare with neighboring countries and internal unrest. Although the Thai culture was influenced by the presence of Brahmanism already established and deeply rooted among the Khmer people who were occupying and ruling Suvarnabhumi before Thai people migrated south from China. Buddhism was flourishing as the main religion giving the people mental strength, peace and hope. However with the lack of bhikkhunī lineage and the influence of Brahmanism, there was no incentives for bhikkhunī ordination during this time.

There was a record mentioned by Christian missionary who visited Ayudhaya of white-robed maechees, mostly old women practicing in the temple. They worked to serve the monks in the temple setting. Thai women's role in Buddhism is only supporters and servitors of the Saṅgha. Traditionally it has been the responsibility of the son to enter the monkhood once in his lifetime. Women play a secondary role, as a

⁴⁴ *op.cit.*, p. 4.

Thai saying goes “being the hind legs of an elephants while the men are the front legs.”

The fact that Buddhism was flourishing in Ayudhaya period is testified by Thailand, as it was called Siam then, sending a team of monks to reestablish Theravāda Buddhism called Siamvaṃsa in Sri Lanka in AD 1751 after Sri Lanka emerged from under control of the Cholas and wanted to reestablish Buddhism in the land.

With the Burmese invasion in AD 1767 it was very effective in not only destroying Ayudhaya as the capital but also uprooted Buddhist culture to a great extent. Many temples and Buddhists artifacts were devastated. Temples played a great role in the Thai society as they served as meeting places, schools, meditation centers and training grounds for martial arts. With the country under war, men were busy serving in the military to help drive out enemies while women were supporting them with food provisions and taking care of the sick and wounded. Sometimes, women also helped fight alongside men.

2.5.1.5 Thonburi period: (AD 1767-1782)⁴⁵ had King Taksin as the only monarch. He played a great role in purifying the Saṅgha, but his reign was too short and we did not witness any women in Buddhism.

2.5.1.6 Rattanakosin period: has been under the reign of the present Chakri dynasty from AD 1782⁴⁶ to present. Even from the King’s title one can see the strong Brahmanistic influence in the royal court and Thai culture in general. Nevertheless, Thailand is perhaps the

⁴⁵Sach, *opcid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁶Sach, *opcid.*, p. 5.

only country in the world where the king is, since 2475 BE, constitutionally stipulated to be a Buddhist and the upholder of the Faith. In the current amendment and drafting of the new constitution, there are a lot of debates about whether or not to stipulate Buddhism as the national religion.

For centuries Buddhism has established itself in Thailand and has enriched the lives of the Thais in all their aspects. Indeed, without Buddhism, Thailand would not be what it is today. Owing to the tremendous influence Buddhism exerts on the lives of the people, Thailand is called by many foreigners “The Land of Yellow Robes,”⁴⁷ for yellow robes are the garments of Buddhist monks.

Many of Thailand’s former Kings of the Chakri Dynasty played a great role supporting Buddhism.⁴⁸ During this period, Thailand has undergone a lot of improvements and progress in terms of Buddhist education and related laws.

King Rama I: The Ninth Buddhist Council for revision of the Tipitaka was held during his reign. He ruled the country not long after the ruin of Ayudhaya. So he encouraged the study and practice of Buddhism and ordered numerous temples repaired. Wat Phra Jetupon (or Wat Poh) and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha was built during his reign. Numerous large Buddha Images were ordered to be brought down from Sukhothai to Bangkok, the new capital city of Thailand.

⁴⁷ Sujib Punyanubhab et al, “Buddhism in Thai Life”: Buddhism in Cultural, Social and Economic Life, Banphot Virasai (A lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science, Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok 24, Thailand and Hon. Secretary-General, World Fellowship of Buddhist Youth (WFBY), Bangkok 11, Thailand), Funny Publishing Limited Partnership, (Bangkok: August 20, 1981), p. 79.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 11-16.

King Rama II continued with the repair and construction of temples. The construction of the Prang at the Temple of Dawn was started during his reign. He upgraded the study of Buddhism in the Pali language and sent a religious good will group to Ceylon to do study and research of Buddhism.

King Rama III ordered and oversaw the construction of many temples, Chedis and Buddha images himself. The great Reclining Buddha at Wat Po was built under his order. He encouraged his family and his senior councillors and their relatives to build temples both inside and outside of Bangkok.

King Rama IV had ordained as a monk before he became a King. He initiated the setting up of Dhammayuti Nikaya during his halfbrother King Rama III's reign. Several Pali books were translated into Thai. He initiated the rebuild of the Phra Pathom Chedi, the greatest and oldest Chedi in Thailand.

King Rama V founded two Buddhist universities in Thailand, Mahamakuta and Mahachulalongkorn Raja Vidyalaya to increase the progress of education in Buddhism and social stability in Thailand. The Tipitaka was revised and printed in the form of normal books (rather than written on palm leaves) using Thai characters for the first time. Most importantly he enacted a law declaring the Buddhist temple as a self-governing holy community while the state would be only the patron for the welfare of the religion.

King Rama VI: He initiated a new branch of study of Buddhism in the Thai language. He and many other writers, after the

example set by his royal father, contributed excellent texts of Buddhism. As a result, by this means Thais who did not know Pali could understand Buddhist Dhamma.

King Rama VII: A revised edition of the Tipitaka was published in 2470 BE, the contents were divided into 45 volumes. One important decree on bhikkhunī ordination was issued by the Supreme Patriarch Prince Jinavara Sirivatthana on June 18, 1928, forbidding Thai monks from giving ordination to bhikkhunīs, sikkhamānās and samanerīs.

King Rama IX: Thailand gained economic and social stability during this reign. As a result, the level of education of the population rose for both men and women. Like the previous kings, King Rama IX continued with construction and repairment of several temples. The Buddha Monthon was built during his reign. Many institutions and writers contributed a great number of books on Buddhism both in Thai and English. Many temples nowadays offer free Buddhist classes. Thai temples branch out to set up many monasteries in foreign lands.

Thailand today is noted for the equality of the two sexes in business and politics at least relatively in comparison to other countries. In the past two decades it has been observed that women are showing more interest in Buddhism particularly in meditation practice. However, the belief that bhikkhunī ordination is impossible led women to enter monastic life in the form of maechees and upāsikās instead.

2.5.2 Status of Thai Women in Buddhism

2.5.2.1 Status of Thai Women in Buddhism as Maechees

Due to the belief deeply held among Thai Buddhists that the Bhikkhunī lineage has disappeared since at least 800 years ago, there cannot be bhikkhunīs in Theravāda Buddhism. As a result, Thai women have been contented to play the role of supporters to the temples and enter into a peaceful life in the temples as Maechees as a way of gaining merits. Maechees shave their heads and wear white. They are not technically ordained (neither pabbajja nor upasampada) as they simply observe the eight precepts. White-robed nuns serve the temples with the chores that monks cannot do or do not have enough time or manpower to carry out by themselves; such as cooking, cleaning, gardening, sweeping temple grounds and doing temple decorations during temple festivities.

The Pali name for these nuns is *‘upāsikā’*, the same as the word calling the lay women who come to the temple regularly or stay in the temple temporarily or for a long period, observing the 8 precepts and helping to look after the temple. This word means literally ‘a woman who sits down near to (a Teacher): And this is how many nuns come to be ordained, having been attracted to the Dhamma taught by a famous Bhikkhu-teacher. In Thailand they are called Maechee, literally ‘mothers (an honorific for ‘women’) who are ordained’. In Burma, they are known as Thila-shin, literally ‘possessors of the precepts’ ‘while in Sri Lanka they are called Silmatavaru (lit. ‘mothers (honorific) observing the precepts)’.

Their status in Buddhist countries now does not usually approach the esteem in which bhikkhus are held by most people. People tend to believe that making offering to bhikkhus will give them more merits than offering to nuns. Popular estimation of the worth of nuns is

based on the number of precepts which they uphold (eight or ten precepts compared to bhikkhu 227 precepts) and their usual lack of Buddhist education and/or basic education in the past.

During the past two decades, the attitudes about maechees are beginning to change as a result of more attention paid to their education. In some places they have their own institutions and organizations. They can attend any of the two Buddhist universities or any open public university for general education as well as getting Buddhist education.

During King Rama IX's reign, the country was at peace at least with neighbouring countries. His long 70-years reign also provided shelter for internal peace despite political struggle among political parties. Therefore this was the period where social development took a great leap forward. Women as well as men received high education and became well aware of global development. This was the time we witnessed several women's achievements in the area of helping underprivileged children and sexually abused young girls or drug addicts to change their behaviours, gain new positive attitudes towards life and learn some Dhamma as means of understanding and learning the righteous way through life. We see a push for legislation to ensure equality for women.

On the United Nation's International Women's Day on March 8, 2002, an international committee of Buddhist clergy, scholars and laity selected and honoured Outstanding Women in World Buddhism. Out of the seven awardees, three were from Thailand for their outstanding contributions to Buddhism. Maechee Khunying Kanitha Wichiencharoen was named the first awardee. The other two women were Khun Mae Dr.

Siri Krinchai, an *upāsikā* who was a prominent meditation master, and Bhikkhunī Voramai Kabilsingh, the first Bhikkhunī in Thailand who was socially active in orphanage, educational and social welfare projects.

Among these three women, the two monastic ones were well known internationally for their social activities for lay people in distress. But Khun Mae Dr. Siri, an *upāsikā*, was well respected for her capabilities in the dhamma practice realm, i.e. her Vipassanā schools for insight meditation practice. Thai people tend to stay away or even deny the existence of bhikkhunīs and the possibility of bhikkhunī ordination. Therefore Maechee or Chee Phraam (*upāsikā*) is the answer to this denial.

Maechee Khunying Kanittha Wichiencharoen⁴⁹ was one of the first Thai modern women to have the opportunity for higher education both in Thailand and abroad. She exemplified in her efforts to set up the Emergency Home for Women and Children in Distress under the sponsorship of the Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women, of which she was the President. At present, this association is under the patronage of H.R.H. Princess Soamsawli. Maechee Kanittha was instrumental in getting the Association's project funded by the Sasakawa Foundation which generously provided funds for the construction and operation of the Women's Education and Training Center which until today offer vocational skills courses to poor and distressed women. She also launched the Association of Women Lawyers of Thailand and Thailand's first college for Buddhist Nuns- Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī Therī College in Korat. She was pivotal in her

⁴⁹ **Upasika-kanittha**, viewed 23 November 2017, <<http://www.dhamma.gateway.com/ubasika/kanittha/ubasika-kanittha-01.htm>>.

role as President of the Association of Women Lawyers of Thailand to push for legislation for equality for women.

Maechee Khunying Kanittha was an activist in her social commitment to help women and children in distress and upgrade women's education by means of giving them vocational training, on the one hand, to help them coping with living in the material world and dhamma, on the other hand, to nurture their hearts and souls to be able to endure hardship and go through life peacefully and meaningfully.

She was one of several active maechees who showed clear leadership in social works and Buddhist education for women. Maechee Sansanee Sthirasuta is another maechee who set up Sathira Dhammasathan as a place for the general public to go for Dhamma practice. She is noted for getting young girls to take the 8 precepts as chee phraams and practice at her meditation center for a period during school vacation. There are many other maechees who set up meditation centers or nunneries for teaching dhamma and meditation. Khun Mae Siri Krinchai is not a maechee but a devout 8-precept holder upāsikā who was well-respected for her Vipassana meditation school following the Wat Mahathat tradition.

On the other hand, there are a lot of Maechees who led a quiet, peaceful life practicing meditation at forest temples in many provinces either as disciples under famous Bhikkhu-teachers or after a while set up their own nunneries and practiced until they attained enlightenment.

Actually, there are a number of maechees and chee-phraams who attained enlightenment as testified by the fact that their bones and ashes turned into relics after cremation of their bodies. To name a few:- Maechee Kaew Sianglum,⁵⁰ disciple of Luang Poo Mun and Luang Ta Phra Mahā Bua Ñāṇasampanno; Maechee Naree Karun⁵¹ disciple of Luang Poo Mun, who lived at Wat Pa Suddhāvāsa, Sakhon Nakorn Province and upāsikā Kee Nanayon⁵² (Kor Khaosuanluang), an upāsikā, a lay woman who did not have her head shaven like maechee but she headed her Dhamma practice school for chee-phraams and practiced vipassana meditation until she reached Arahantship. For the two Arahant Maechees mentioned above, like many other cases of Arahants, when their bodies were cremated, their bones and ashes turned into relics.

2.5.2.2 Status of Thai Women in Buddhism as Bhikkhunīs

In the past Thai women, who would like to practice meditation and pursue a holy spiritual life to gain merits to upgrade themselves towards entering the Ariya Magga (Noble Path), would leave their homes and household responsibilities to spend their renunciate lives as maechees, not bhikkhunīs, out of the belief that the bhikkhunī lineage has ended.

⁵⁰**Maechee-Kaew Sianglum**, viewed 24 November 2017, <<http://www.tnews.co.th/contents/203013>, accessed on November 24, 2017>.

⁵¹**Maechee-Naree Karun**, viewed 24 November 2017, <<http://palungjit.org/threads>, accessed on November 24, 2017>.

⁵²**Upasika-Kor Khaosuanluang**, view 24 November 2017, <<http://www.dhammadjaknet/board/viewtopic.php?t=7317>>.

One problem in the Buddhist Dhamma society is that the status of the women who practice the Dhamma is not clearly identified. During the Buddhist era, the status of women who wanted to pursue monastic life was clearly identified as *samanerīs* and *bhikkhunīs*. The Buddha stipulated *bhikkhunīs* as belonging to one of his fourfold Saṅgha: namely, *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, *upasakas* and *upāsikās*; the four main pillars for sustaining Buddhism and ensuring the continuation of his religion.

Nowadays in Thailand we only have three types of Buddhist assemblies : namely, *bhikkhus*, *upasakas* and *upāsikās*. This is because maechees are considered to belong to the *upāsikās* category of the Buddhist Saṅgha. “*Upāsikās*” means a woman who are close to the Triple Gems, usually refers to the woman who observes the 8 precepts at least on the Buddhist days. Maechees regularly observe the 8 precepts and have their head shaven. Even though they wear their particular white uniform, but their status is not legally recognized. Therefore their status in the society depends on their behaviours and their contributions to the society. In many monasteries where maechees are serious dhamma practitioners, they would be well respected and sit next to the monks but on a lower level, before other *upāsikās*.

2.5.2.3 If Maechees could become Arahants, Why need to be Bhikkhunis ?

For maechees who are Arahants, their true observance of the “*sīla*” precepts must have gone beyond the eight precepts required of them. The precepts which they uphold penetrate beyond their body and

speech but govern their mind or thought process as well. Their mind purity is at least as much as or more than what is expected from a normal

They are the exception from ordinary maeches or upāsikās. In actuality the greater number of precepts which are required of bhikkhunīs provide the framework and rules to control behaviours outwardly and their mental state inwardly. The yellow robes lend its power of grace and holiness to enthrall and energize the person who wears them with serenity and rapture under a sense of having well-defined behavioural rules and a meaningful direction to work towards ending the cycles of rebirths and sufferings. The bhikkhunī uniform also works to define the boundaries of interactions with others including bhikkhus and the laity. Once they reach the Stream-Entry level (Sotāpanna) or higher, the bhikkhunī uniform saves other people from mistreating them and therefore prevents them from the risks of committing bad kamma from their ignorance.

In conclusion, higher ordination is beneficial to help guiding a fully ordained monastic women to lead the life directly dedicated to finding ways to eliminate *kilesa* (defilements) and *Avijjā* (ignorance). Greater observance in *sīla* and arduous practice of *samādhi* will result in *paññā*. This will pave the way to the four magga, the four phala and eventually to *nibbāna*.

In the past two decades, economic and social development in Thailand opened up opportunities for women to be in contact with foreign counterparts. Exchange of ideas in international organization meetings with Buddhist women from other countries gave Thai women the knowledge that pabbajjā of samanerīs and upasampadā of bhikkhunīs are

possible in other countries. For maechees or upāsikās who felt they would like to dedicate their lives to follow the Buddha’s footsteps, some of them even had visions of themselves wearing yellow robes or visions of having the presence of Buddha before them many times or some of them had seen their minds questioning their existence and their purpose of life since they were young girls. These are some of the reasons given by those who would like to be ordained as bhikkhunīs.

2.5.2.4 Sara and Chongdee: First Attempt at Samanerī

Ordination

The movement towards having ordination of Bhikkhunīs was started in BE 2471 (1928 AD)⁵³ by a man named Narin (or Klueng) Bhasit. He was the first person to start requesting for equal rights for women to be ordained as Bhikkhunīs. He reasoned that having Bhikkhunīs would make the four-fold Saṅgha complete. He donated his house as “Watra Narinvongsa” for his daughters, Sara and Chongdee who were ordained as Samanerīs when they were 18 and 13 years old respectively but only after 2 months they were arrested, defrocked and temporarily jailed. This was because it was against the Supreme Patriarch’s Decree. Somdej Phra Saṅgharāja (Komluang Jinnavarasirivatthana), the Supreme Patriarch, issued a Saṅgharāja decree forbidding Bhikkhus from giving ordination to Bhikkhunīs, Sikkhamānās and Samanerīs on June 18, 1928. Her father had to send a petition to HM King Prachadhipok to get them released from jail. Finally on March 12, 1929 HM King Prachadhipok ended this case by sending Narin his

⁵³Dhammananda bhikkhunī (Asso.Prof.Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh), **Bhikkhunīs in Thailand**, (Nakhonpathom: Buddhasavika Foundation, 2009), pp. 6-7.

decision ordering him to stop his movement for ordination of Bhikkhunīs. Thus, that put an end to the first movement toward Bhikkhunīs ordination.

Narin Klueng was trying to educate the public and to raise social awareness that women could have equal rights in the monastic life as well as men. But circumstances did not permit him.

2.5.2.5 Bhikkhunī Voramai Kabilsingh was a physical fitness teacher and a business women owning jewelry business. In 1955 she became interested in Buddhism because Luang Por Sod, a well-respected monk, miraculously cured her from her sickness requiring no medical operation. Later on, she went to study meditation under many masters in many temples famous for their vipassana methods. She started issuing “Vipassana Banterng Sarn”, a monthly magazine educating readers about insight meditation in 1955. This magazine continued for 32 years until 1987. Through miracles and faith in the power of the Buddha and his disciple monks, she decided to have her hair shaven and accept eight precepts from Phra Prom Muni (Pin Suvajo), Deputy Abbot of Wat Bavornnives Vihāra of Dhammayuti Nikāya. She was permitted to wear a pale yellow robe and called herself Nak Buad (monastic) not Bhikkhunī. Therefore it was considered acceptable by the Buddhist Council of Monks.

Voramai was ordained as Bhikkhunī called Ta Tao Fa Tzu in a Dhammaguptaka lineage in Taiwan in 1971 and became the first Thai Bhikkhunī.^{54 55} She converted her home into a temple for Bhikkhunīs called “Watra Songdhammakalyani” meaning “temple where women uphold the Dhamma”. It is located in Nakhon Pathom, a province near Bangkok.⁵⁶

2.5.2.6 Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā, daughter of Bhikkhunī Voramai, is the first modern Thai women who actively committed herself to uplift women’s education in Buddhism. One of her most active roles is her struggle to help Thai women gain the place as bhikkhunīs in the Thai Buddhist community.

She is the first Thai woman to be ordained in the Theravāda monastery belonging to the Dambulla Chapter in Sri Lanka. On February 7, 2001, she took her Samanerī ordination from Syamvamsa Bhikkhus at Tapodaramaya temple in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The whole event was presided over by Dhammaloka Bhikkhu of Amarapura, a Theravāda monk. In 2003, she was ordained a full bhikkhunī in Sri Lanka, the first Thai woman to be ordained in a Theravāda monastic lineage. Her ordination lineage is Syamopali from Dambulla Chapter.

⁵⁴Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King, **Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia**, viewed 2 May 2016.

<<https://books.google.com/books?id=6ZsTgYIINNsC&pg=PA269>>, p. 269.

⁵⁵Simba Shani Kamaria Russeau (1 November 2013) “Thai Women Don Monks’ Robes”, Inter Press Service, viewed 24 September 2014.

⁵⁶Prof Jan Willis, **Building a Place for the Therīs**, viewed 24 November 2017.

There are other Bhikkhunīs who received the ordination in Sri Lanka, such as Bhikkhunī Poonsirivara who left her family in the U.S. to come for ordination in Sri Lanka. Now she set up her Bhikkhunī Ārāma in Samut Sakorn Province, her original hometown. Bhikkhunī Vijjanī who owns and heads the Bhikkhunī Ārāma in Ban Rai District of Uthai Thani Province was also ordained in Sri Lanka. These bhikkhunīs could give ordination to samanērīs, but to be able to become a Pavattinī, they need to be bhikkhunīs for twelve vassa.

As a result, the majority of bhikkhunīs in Thailand got ordained from dual Saṅghas in the International Women Meditation Center, Rayong Province when the International Buddhist Women Meeting convened there. The Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in this case was composed of bhikkhunīs from different countries. Later on this type of dual- saṅghas ordination was done in other provinces whenever there was an international convention of Buddhist women. In most cases, bhikkhunīs were invited from many countries such as Bhikkhunī Dr. Lee from the US, Bhikkhunī Puñṇavatī from the US and Bhikkhunī Ming Jia from Taiwan and so on. At the time of this information collection, there were 160 bhikkhunīs, 48 samanērīs and 31 sikkhamānās in Thailand.

Chapter 3

Analysis the Contributions of Bhikkhunīs to the Thai Society

This chapter will focus on three headlines: 1) Contribution to Education, 2) Contribution to Dhamma Practice, and 3) Contribution to Social Work.

3.1 Contribution to Education

Education according to the Longman Dictionary Contemporary English, means “the process by which a person’s mind and character are developed through teaching, especially through formal instruction at a school or college.” Moreover, pertaining to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term ‘education’ refers to a process of teaching, training and learning especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills.

In the past, ones who made important contributions to the domain of education were monks. First, schools were set up within the compound of Wat (temple). In addition to their religious duties, monks taught the so-called three R’s—reading, writing and arithmetic—as well as other subjects, to local youngsters.

These Wat schools were distributed all over the country. They were operated at very minimal cost, since monks accepted no payment.

During the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), formal education came to Thailand, Government schools were set up one by one outside the Wat compounds. As the years passed by existing Wat schools have gradually been taken over by the Ministry of Education. Monks have played less and less active roles in formal education. Professional teachers have been trained. They have gradually replaced “monk teachers”. Buddhist monks have taught fewer and fewer subjects. The last subject that they are allowed by Ministry officials to teach is “civics and ethics.” Now their roles as teacher in the formal educational system of the country has virtually ended. But the legacy remains concretely as witnessed by a large number of school buildings, within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education or other governmental authorities, standing within the Wat compounds. The names of so many schools, well recognized for their high scholastic standards, are reminiscent of the active roles of Buddhist monks in time past. They are known by such descriptions as “Wat so and so School.”¹

In BE 2411 King Rama V – or Phra Chula Chom Klao – son of Rama IV, came to the throne at the age of sixteen and ruled the country for an impressive period of forty-two years, longer than any other king in the Bangkok period. After his coronation, he temporarily renounced the throne to be ordained as a Bhikkhu. This was because most of the Thai kings since the Ayutthaya period were usually ordained before the coronation day.

¹Banphot Virasai, Buddhism in Thai Life, “**Buddhism in Cultural, Social and Economic Life**,” (Bangkok: Lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science, Ramkhamhaeng University, and Hon. Secretary-General, World Fellowship of Buddhist Youth (WFBY), 1981, p. 81.

King Rama V founded two Buddhist universities in Thailand. Mahamakuta Raja Vidyalaya² and Mahachulalongkorn Raja Vidyalaya,³ for the sake of increasing the progress and stability of the education of Buddhism. He also enacted a law concerning the administrative system of the community of Bhikkhus declaring that the Buddhist Organization should be a self-governing holy community, while the state would be the patron for the welfare of the church.

A vast number of books on Buddhism were written by many scholars; the most significant one by the Supreme Patriarch, Prince Vajirañanavarorasa, who was Rama V's half brother.

At present many education-minded Buddhist monks are still constructing schools. They may literally build school structures themselves or they may hire construction firms. The money comes from donations to pay for construction as well as operating costs. Teaching is conducted in accordance with the approved curriculum. Pupils are normally admitted free of charge.

Due to the ever increasing costs involved in the day-to-day operations, many Buddhist monks feel that it is necessary to turn over the schools which they have built and have already operated for a few years to the government. They are however contented, feeling that they have somehow contributed educationally to the country.

²Mahamakut Buddhist University (Educational Council of Mahamakuta-Raja-Vidyalaya) was established as Ecclesiastical Buddhist University on November 30, 1945 and officially opened on September 16, 1946.

³Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University (Mahachulalongkorn-Raja-Vidyalaya) was established as Ecclesiastical Buddhist University on January 9, 1947 and officially opened on July 18, 1947.

3.1.1 Buddhist Education⁴ in Thailand

Activities in relation to education in Buddhism are classified into three main categories :1) *pariyatti* means learning the theory of Buddha dhamma as contained in the Tipiṭaka 2) *paṭipatti* means following a formality of meditation practice and acting for proficiency. 3) *paṭivedha* means penetration or realization of the truth of the Buddha's teaching, i.e., attaining enlightenment.

Pariyatti Education: Basic courses of dhamma study are provided inside temples and monasteries. The “Nakdhamma” or Dhamma study curriculum consist of learning about the Buddha's life, Buddhist philosophy, the rules of discipline, and various types of moral conduct. This Dhamma study programme has three levels; each level requiring one year, so three years are needed to complete the programme.

Paṭipatti Education: The course in meditation teaches the theory and practices of meditation for purifying one's mind in order to achieve the highest aim of Buddhism, *nibbāna*. All Buddhist ordained women in Thailand must complete a course in meditation practice.

Paṭivedha Education: The higher level course “Abhidhamma” focuses on learning in detail about the third division of the ancient Buddhist texts (Tipiṭaka) and commentaries (from well-respected Buddha's disciples) that are included in what is called *Abhidhammathasaṅgaha*. There are nine classes, requiring seven-and-a-half years to complete. An Abhidhamma School is located at Wat Maha-

⁴Kritsana Raksachom, “Thai Buddhist Nuns and the Thai Buddhist Nuns' Institute,” Karma Lekshe Tsom (ed.), **Buddhist Women in a Global Multicultural Community**, (Kuala Lumpur, 2007), pp. 149-150.

dhātu in Bangkok and it is considered the first and the most famous school of Abhidhamma. The students include Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs, Samaneras, Samanerīs and laypeople.

In addition, the general education programs which include vocational skills, secondary education, and higher education are also offered. Bhikkhunīs and Samanerīs may also study at non-formal educational institutes. At the university level, they may study for a bachelor's degree, master's degree, or doctorate at two Buddhist universities in Thailand : Mahamakut Buddhist University and Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University or at any of the government's open universities throughout the country.

3.1.2 Prominent Bhikkhunī Contribution to Education

Contribution of Bhikkhunīs to education is the most important roles which Bhikkhunīs should uphold in order to gain acceptance for the place of Thai women as female monks in Thailand. The fact is that Bhikkhunīs have played a great roles in offering Dhamma education, meditation training and even bringing about “socially engaged Buddhism” to the awareness of the general public.

3.1.3 Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā

Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā⁵ is the first modern Thai woman who has actively committed and sacrificed herself with great responsibility pursuing many applaudable activities to uplift women's capability towards nurturing and strengthening Buddhism. One of her

⁵Dhammananda Bhikkhunī, viewed August 15, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhammananda_Bhikkhunī>.

most active roles is her struggle to help Thai women gain the place as bhikkhunīs or female monks in the Thai Buddhist community.

Foreseeing that education is the most important means for women to gain respect, and be well trained to be specially engaged, she sets up many training classes at her monastery for Thai and English-speaking Buddhists and non-Buddhists to learn about the Buddhist way of life and the Buddha's teachings. Her Arama certainly has a training program for international Bhikkhunīs.

3.1.3.1 History: Education, Career and Ordination

Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā, born name : Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (ฉัตรสุมาลย์ กบิลสิงห์), is a daughter of Voramai Kabilsingh and Kokiatt Shatsena. She was born on October 6, 1944. Chatsumarn received Buddhist instruction and trainings along with the nuns in her mother's monastery and became a samanerī when she was 13 years old. She says that her father, Kokiatt, was “the first Thai man I knew who strongly supported the revival of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Thailand.”⁶ Unusual for Thai women, Chatsumarn received very high formal education. After high school, she received her BA with honours in Philosophy from Visva Bharati University, India; her MA in Religion from McMaster University in Canada and her Ph.D. in Buddhism from Magadh University in India.⁷ During this time, she lived the life as a layperson getting married, having three sons and teaching for two years

⁶Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, **Thai Women in Buddhism**. (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1991), Preface.

⁷Dhammananda bhikkhuni, **Women Strengthening Buddhism**, (Bangkok: Thai Tibet Center, 2010), pp. 91-92.

at McMaster University in Canada and 27 years at Thammasart University in Bangkok, Thailand, in the Department of Philosophy and Religion.

At the back of her mind, she had always known that one day she would become a monastic in the Buddhist tradition. That time came in 2000 when she took early retirement from Thammasat University, arranged with her husband's permission to get a divorce certificate and received the Bodhisattva's precepts from the Fo Guang Shan order in Taiwan. On February 7, 2001, she took her Samaanerī ordination in Sri Lanka from Syamvamsa Bhikkhus at Tapodaramaya temple in Colombo. The whole event was presided over by Dhammaloka Bhikkhu of Amarapura who was a Theravāda monk.

In 2003, she was ordained a full Bhikkhunī in Sri Lanka, the first Thai woman to be ordained in a Theravāda monastic lineage, as Dhammanandā. Her ordination lineage is Syamopali from Dambulla chapter. In respect of and gratitude to Dhammaloka Bhikkhu for his arrangement for her ordination, she took the "Dhamma" prefix from his name to be the leading part of her Bhikkhunī name Dhammanandā. Her mother passed away two months after her ordination. Since then she has become the Abbess of the Songdhammakalyani Monastery, the Bhikkhunīs' Residence founded by her mother, Venerable Voramai, in the Muang District, Nakhonpathom province, Thailand.

In 2014, Dhammanandā Bhikkhunī was appointed as Pavattini by a Sri Lankan preceptor during a group ordination for women monks in Songkhla, Thailand.

While Dhammanandā has a somewhat global approach as evidenced by initiating an international newsletter publication or hosting an international conference, she has repeatedly stated that most problems in Thailand must be solved by the Thai people requiring no assistance from outsiders, including Western Buddhists. The solution she offers are generally down-to-earth, concrete, and practical with an occasional hint of idealism shared by other Buddhist modernists.

Christopher S. Queen comments in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movement in Asia* “[Chatsumarn Kabilsingh] believes that Buddhist women should have the opportunity to fulfill their spiritual aspirations completely, and that is only possible if they can be ordained as Bhikkhunī. For it is the institution of the Saṅgha that would provide women with real security and the opportunity to win the respect of the Thai laity”

Dhammanandā on her first day as Samanerī opined that “I do not choose to be ordained because I want people to recognize me. I did it because I want to carry on the heritage of the Lord Buddha. I am trying to revive the four pillars of Buddhism: Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs, laymen and laywomen that will sustain the religion into the future. I don’t mind if some people reserve different opinions about bhikkhunīs. The public will be the ones to judge our worth”⁸

⁸Atia Achakulwisut, “A Path Less Travelled”, originally in the Bangkok Post, viewed 15 August 2016, <<http://www.buddhanet.net/budsas/ebud/ebdha220.htm>>, which is part of the page “On the Restoration of the Bhikkhunī Order”.

3.1.3.2 Her Works and Achievements

She is a thinker, a writer, a speaker, a social worker and most of all, a teacher. She wrote many books and spoke at various forums both in Thailand and internationally on the topic of Women in Buddhism. Through her own books and magazine columns for which she writes regularly, she tries to lead her readers to be aware of the capability of women in various parts of the world in order to awaken and nurture Thai women's sense of responsibility and commitment toward strengthening Buddhism through becoming Bhikkhunīs.

She has been very active and outspoken on contemporary and controversial issues in Asian Buddhism especially on the place of women in modern Asian Buddhism. She is a well-known author of many books and articles. Those which were published before her ordination were under her birth name, Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh.

In 1988, she set up "International Buddhist Women Association and became its President between 1991-1995. In the meantime, she also became Chief Editor of an English-language Newsletter called Yasodhara which had started its publications in 1984 until 2014 before it was replaced by electronics social media. It was available in 40 countries.⁹ Some articles from the Newsletter are available online (http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/browse_JJ_Y011).¹⁰ A few years later in 1991, Dr. Kabilsingh organized the first

⁹Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King. "Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia", (New York: SUNNY Press, 1996): 269.

¹⁰"International Buddhist Women's Activities", **Yasodhara-Newsleter**, (13 April, 2009), viewed 25 April 2016.

international conference of Buddhist women held in Bangkok, Thailand.¹¹

It has been over 16 years since her decision to become a monastic, Dhammanandā has written more than 100 books and spoken at various conferences both in Thailand and internationally . She is considered to be a Buddhist modernistic writer determined to raise public awareness of the place of women in modern Asian Buddhism especially the Theravāda tradition in Thailand. She voices her concerns about issues generally thought to constitute “socially engaged Buddhism” such as Buddhism and environmental issues, Buddhism and poverty, feminism and Buddhism, prostitution (in Thailand), and Buddhism and education.

Prior to her ordination, Dr. Kabilsingh wrote several books, including *Thai Women in Buddhism* (1991) which discusses the position of Thai Buddhist women in the context of the Thai society, including those who choose to become Maechee. In the current Thai Buddhist community, most Maechees work as helpers in the monastery. They are regarded by most people as being in the lower class, either coming from a poor family or being broken hearted. Since before her ordination as bhikkhunī, she has put tireless efforts to reestablish the Theravāda bhikkhunī lineage in Thailand so that women may become fully ordained monastics and gain higher status and respect with higher level of responsibilities. The resistance which she has encountered comes from both laymen and monks in Thailand who believe female monastics are illegitimate and represent a departure from the Theravāda Buddhist

¹¹Chatsumarn Kabilsingh. **Thai Women in Buddhism**. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1991.

monastic system. Her work has caused some controversy in Thailand,¹² although she receives much support from a growing number of Western Buddhist women.

3.1.3.3 Education, Training and Development Programs for Women

Like her mother, Venerable Voramai, she would like to educate girls and women, help and counsel those with family or personal problems. She believes that Bhikkhunīs should and would be very capable of engaging in social services and help solve some of the country's social problems.

She further added that “I would be satisfied if I could serve as a refuge for women..... I am thinking of a small religious community which helps women develop their own spirituality and contribute something to society.”

As a fully ordained Bhikkhunī and a Pavattini now, she sets up many programs to help educate, train and develop women both monastics and lay women.

Songdhammakalyani Temple's Training Programs¹³ for International Women:

¹²Sanitsuda Ekakchai, “The Dhammananda controversy”, **The Bangkok Post**, (22 September 2001), viewed 4 April 2009, <<http://www.buddhanet.net/budsas/ebud/ebdha220.htm>>.

¹³**Songdhammakalyani-Temple**, viewed 15 August 2016, <<http://www.thailandqa.com/forum/showthread.php?21629-Songdhammakalyani-Temple%92s-training-programs-for-international-women>>

3.1.3.3.1 Living Buddhism :-

One-week International Program.

This program is designed for non-Buddhist, English speaking international visitor who would like to learn about the basic concept at the only Thai female monastery. There are no prerequisites but the applicant must be willing to follow the rhythm of monastic setting. The one-week program is organized during the rains retreat (July-Oct.).

3.1.3.3.2 BWR Class:-

Buddhist Women in Residence (BWR) Class performs during the Buddhist Lent. It is an annual three-months training course for Buddhist women, both monastics and lay. Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā will teach philosophic aspect of the Teachings of the Buddha, including reading, listening, speaking and especially writing approximately 150 hours through these three months.

3.1.3.3.3. Temporary Ordination Program:-

Songdhammakalyani Bhikkhunī Ārāma has organized temporary ordination since 2008. The bhikkhunī saṅgha here offers temporary ordination twice a year, April 6 and December 5. Thus the latest one took place on April 6, 2017, it was the 16th ordination given. Each time there would be 30, 40, 50 women joining. December 5, 2015 was a special one, there were 108 candidates. The occasion was to celebrate the completion of Yasodhara Vihāra. Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā has given Samanerī ordination to not less than 500

women. She has also been invited to give the same ordination in Payao, in the northern part of Thailand and also Songkhla in the south.

Songdhammakalyani Bhikkhunī Ārāma is the first and only temple¹⁴ in Thailand to provide a friendly space for international bhikkhunī to be trained together. Twice a week a group of five bhikkhunīs will go for alms, candidates to the program can follow them. This is one of the highlights for the monastic training. We have been able to preserve this Buddhist tradition in a pristine manner.

3.2 Contribution to Dhamma Practice

According to the Oxford Dictionary, Dhamma as a noun (in Indian religion) means the teaching of the Buddha, truth, or law that affects the whole universe, and according to Longman Dictionary “Practice (n) means something that people do often, especially a particular way of doing something or a social or religious custom. Thus, Dhamma practice means “to apply the teaching of the Buddha or the religious custom in our ways of lives.”

3.2.1 Contribution of Bhikkhunīs to Dhamma Practice

Although the Thai society does not fully or officially accept the status of women as bhikkhunīs, Thai bhikkhunīs are willing to work for the good of the Thai society through teaching Buddhadhamma, constructing kindergartens at institutes where bhikkhunīs serve as teachers, teaching children at various government schools, teaching

¹⁴thai bhikkhunīs, viewed 15 August 2016, <<http://www.thaibhikkhunīs.org/eng2014/index.html>>.

meditation to laypeople, counseling, teaching Abhidhamma, and teaching at Buddhist universities.

Bhikkhunīs who teach Dhamma can be classified into two types: 1) those who teach history and development and general knowledge about Buddhism especially Dhamma or the Buddha's teachings; and 2) those who teach meditation. Teaching Buddhism in the first category includes teaching Dhamma, Abhidhamma, and Pali language. These different aspects of teaching Buddhism can be found at Buddhist Bhikkhunīs' institutes, temples, and government schools. Bhikkhunīs may also teach meditation and some have become quite successful at it; especially recently, as more and more people become interested in learning and practicing meditation.

In Thailand, there are two types of Dhamma activities—teaching Dhamma to children and to adults. Teaching Dhamma to children refers to Dhamma study programmes for children from nine to twelve years old. The subjects covered include ethics, character development, and meditation practice. Cooking classes are also included. Their cooking activities are much appreciated during temple or school fairs especially on national holidays such as important Buddhist days, like Visakhapuja, and the birthday celebrations of Their Majesties the King and the Queen.

Teaching Dhamma to adults covers teaching meditation to villagers, including how to practise mindfulness in daily life, how to engage in wholesome activities, and how to avoid unwholesome activities. This type of teaching is deeply satisfying for most people.

3.2.2 Prominent Bhikkhunīs' Contribution to Dhamma Practice

When we talk about Dhamma,¹⁵ although we may say a lot, it can usually be brought down to four things. They are simply to know Suffering, to know the Cause of Suffering, to know the End of Suffering and to know the Path of practice leading to the End of Suffering. This is all there is. All that we have.

Every Bhikkhunīs have been ever practised the Dhamma. They believed that only meditation would evaluate our mind, not suffering. It is the important for every persons. Not only for Bhikkhunīs but also for humen being. When dhamma increased, our mind will develop and go into the path on Nibbāna at last.

3.2.3 Bhikkhunī Sīlanandā (สุดารัตน์ จันทร์ทวิศรี)¹⁶ (Sudarat Junthaveesri)

3.2.3.1 History: Education and Ordination

She was born in Bangkok on June 2, 1972. Her father and mother came from China. She has one brother and four sisters. She is the third child. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Marketing Management at Ramkamhang University and a Master of Arts in Buddhist Study (MA) from the International Buddhist College (IBC), Sadao, Songkhla Province, Thailand.

¹⁵Phra Ajah Chahn, "Some Advice on Practice," **Buddhism in Thai Life**, (Bangkok: Funny Publishing Limited Partnership Printing, 1981), p. 31.

¹⁶Suvida Saengsihath, "Women Buddhist Priests," **Moral Center Thailand** (in Thai), (June 2552), viewed 25 June 2016, <<http://www.moralcenter.or.th>>.

Since she was a young girl, she could not understand why sometimes when she was happy playing and having fun, then another feeling of unhappiness would enter her mind. This feeling kept haunting her. At the age of 24, her interest in understanding the workings of her own mind, that is the thinking and the feeling or sensation which arose within her mind and which she thought was beyond her power to control, led her to decide to leave her home to study for ways to manage her mind. Later on she learned that the bad part of her feeling was caused by what Buddhism called *kilesa* meaning defilement.

Because of her interest in mind searching and studying about herself, she became maechee during 1998-2002 at Suan Mokh Temple, Surat Thani, Thailand. During this time, she had the opportunity to learn about social problems. At one time she joined with the well-known social activist, Sulak Sivaraksa, in his group to do social development activities. Then she heard about the possibility of becoming a Bhikkhunī from the news of Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh's ordination as a Samanerī in Sri Lanka. Afterwards, she went for training about the roles and contribution of Bhikkhunī at Wat Songdhammakalyani for three months. Through these experiences, she gained many ideas to devote herself to Buddhism in her roles as Bhikkhunī and dedicating herself doing social works.

After she had gained total confidence, i.e., faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, she decided to be ordained as Samanerī and staying at Pyna Temple (Samnuksong Savetsomboon), Pathumtani province, Thailand for three weeks. Bhikkhu Khosin was her Uppachaya.

Four years later, she was ordained as Bhikkhunī on March 8, 2006 at Kutidao Temple, Ayudhaya province, Thailand. Bhikkhu Punnavimol was Uppachaya and Bhikkhunī Louis Kul Sue was Pavattini.

3.2.3.2 Dhamma Practice at Wat Pa Sukhato

After her ordination as Bhikkhunī, she realized that she would need further education in order to spread the Buddha's teachings and carry out social work to help develop the society. After attending the International Buddhist Women (Sakhayadhita) Conference in Malaysia, she became interested in receiving international education which she thought was important and necessary. Hence, she decided to attend the International Buddhist College (IBC) located in Songkhla Province, Thailand in July 2006.

Studying here, she had the opportunity to study about all the different Nikāya (Sects) of Buddhism including, Mahayana, Vacharayana and Theravāda. She also learned about and was impressed by the Bodhisattva's precept. "It is a good condition which we should grow within our hearts. We will not quarrel with one another if we see the other persons like they are our own selves. They are also Buddha's children. So, welcome them, be supportive and work together in unity."

After finishing her MA from IBC, she has been invited by Maechee Nudeaw to stay at Wat Pa Khamsorn Buddhaddhammasatri, Sawangdandin, Sakhonakorn Province since 2010.

To strengthen her meditation practice, after becoming a samanērī, she went to study and practice under supervision of Luang Por

Kumkien Suwanno, at Wat Pa Sukhato, located at Ban Mai Thaijalern, Ta Mafai Wan Sub- district, Ampur Kangkro, Chaiyaphum Province for four years during 2002-2006. Luang Por Kumkien was the Abbot and was very kind, full of compassion and helpful in guiding her through vipassana meditation. Luang Por used Dhamma in managing the monastery so that there was an atmosphere of unity and honouring one another. Bhikkhunīs and Samanerīs were treated with generosity and respect so that Samanerī Sīlanandā could devote her time to study the Dhamma Vinaya especially the roles and responsibility of monks.

In Kimpilasutra, the Buddha preached: “If Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs, Upāsakas and Upāsikās support and respect one another. The teachings of the Noble Truth will then remain strong for a long time. We will be able to feel the warmth in our mind and create the warmth of loving kindness in the society.”

Her Daily Routine at Wat Pa Sukato were as follows:

- 03.00 a.m. Morning Wake- up time
- 04.00 a.m. Chanting
- 06.00 a.m. Going on an almsround begging for food
- 08.00 a.m. Eating the Daily meal
(only one meal a day)
- 09.00 a.m Reading dhamma and doing the walking meditation
- 13.00 a.m. Sweeping the temple yard
- 17.00 a.m. Evening chanting, listening to a sermon and practicing meditation.

During her free time at Wat Pa Sukhato, she would practice the walking meditation, reading Dhamma books, assisting in the training of meditation to students who joined the temple meditation programme. Some students were astonished and glad to see a Bhikkhunī. She was able to reach out easily to female students and be understanding of their plights. Parents were happy that their daughters could consult with female monks about their personal problems. The students could come to consult with her on every problem. They normally came to practice meditation and exchange ideas under her kuti.

3.2.3.3 Bhikkhunī Sīlanandā 's Notion on Enhancing

Morality of the Society

Bhikkhunī Sīlanandā puts emphasis on practicing meditation as the key to self development. She says, “practicing meditation (*paṭipattidhamma*) can help mind development for monastics, Upāsakas and Upāsikās and but to a different degree depending on one’s career. If one choose to behave according to the Maṅgalasutta, carrying out one’s way of life and career in a simple manner leaving time for meditation with a peace of mind, not fighting with oneself but having a sense of mindfulness, forgiving and spreading loving kindness to oneself and others, then restlessness and agitation of the mind will gradually decline and eventually disappear. Meditation is a very important tool for self development. It will transform ourselves and our activities from *akusala* (unwholesome) to *kusala* (wholesome) depending on the quality of mindfulness. Internally, our mind will become gradually refined.

Bhikkhunī Sīlanandā explains that the meaning of practicing meditation is “knowing our mind especially through listening to and practicing the Dhamma of the Buddha, such as the five Sīlas and *Anatta* (non-self). Strengthening your mindfulness through practicing the “know”, that is the knowing everything at the moment it happens will lead to letting go. Know that state of mind, do not push it away. Listening to the Dhamma seems like planting a grain. Then the seedling of the state of awakening or enlightenment (Buddha) will grow.”

“Walking meditation practice to sharpen consciousness, or, be mindful of your thinking, speaking or action as it happens will peel off selfness in our thinking from *moha*. Knowing and letting go will gradually refine the mind. A delicate mind will know the degree of severity of *moha*. We must know our mind. No matter what impact we are receiving, we must let go and continue to do our duty.”

She sets as her personal goal to develop her own mind and *samādhi* by increasing and strengthening Sati. By this means, she is able to counsel and solve other people’s problems. This requires a strong and clear state of mind. In addition, she studies the Tipiṭaka and behaves in accordance with the Dhamma Vinaya: for example, attending or chanting the Pāṭimokha every fortnight. This is how she practices by herself without waiting for guidance from anyone.

3.2.3.4 Activities and a Process to Enhance Morality of the Society

Internally Change: Teach moral values to those whose attitudes have been incorrectly instilled since their very young age.

External Change: Practice insight meditation to stimulate their mindfulness (*sati*) so that they “know” what is happening, thereby become conscious of their outward behaviours toward themselves and others. When they have Sati they will know what is happening. They will have less *moha*. Through different techniques she teaches many ways of making merits such as:

1. Designing activities that make children think of the monastery as an important part of their lives. When they have any problems, they will go to the monastery for help rather than relying on unwholesome means.
2. Teaching Dhamma of the Buddha by relating to the story of their daily lives such as the Paṭiccasamuppāda using a simple example of being bitten by a mosquito etc.
3. Using games in teaching Dhamma. For example, the Sekiyadhamma Group uses a game to understand oneself by sitting on the round, each person drawing from the same given picture but the results turning out differently. It shows that things are different because different people have different perceptions.
4. Teaching moral values and virtues especially commending on the life history of meritorious persons: such as, praising the merits of fathers and mothers, relating the story of a diligent person, a dutiful son who looks after his parents with gratitude and showing pictures of physically or mentally handicapped children. This will activate the

children's mind to do something good and feel compassionate towards other people.

5. Meditation practicing both walking and sitting: many children experience that walking meditation could help reducing or eliminating their unhappiness (*dukkha*).

Bhikkhunī Sīlanandā received an Outstanding Women in Buddhism Award in 2008 at the Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women under the Royal Patronage of HRH Princess Soamsawali (APSW-Thailand)

3.2.4 Bhikkhunī Dhammamittā¹⁷ (นิตราภควดี/ร่วมมิตร ราชวงศ์)

(Pathomlokha Jhānavivitta Thavipāṭimokha Tipiṭaka Mahinthesaṅghamittā Dhammapala Theravadāpolbodhi Bhikkhunī)

Bhikkhunī Dhammamittā was born in 1956 at Bann Na Kok Moo 5 Lerng Nok Ta District, Yasothorn Province. Her original name was Miss Ruammitr Rajavongsa . She has one brother and six sisters. She is the second child of the family of farmers. When they were not planting, her father worked as a tailor and her mother a hairdresser. Her family was warm and hard working so that the children could receive high education. She graduated with an MA in Buddhism from Mahamakut-rajavidhayalaya University, Roiet Campus. The development of her mind has started since she was young. She always had questions and answers going on in her mind. She looked like a gentle and polite girl outwardly but she knew that her mind was not still.

¹⁷*ibid.*

She observed by herself that her body and mind had been growing together. Her mind had *hiri* and *ottappa*, not to speak ill of somebody and her speech was soft and gentle with loving kindness to other people. After she finished Rajapatra Ubolrachathani, not knowing what would be better to do with her life, she got married when she was twenty-two years old and had one daughter. She worked as a teacher for eleven years at Lerng Nok Tha School. She taught both academic subjects and morality. Her students loved her and called her “Mae Pra (Saint) of Lerng Nok Tha”.

She learned Dhamma from her real life. The point that brought her to ordination was the question: “Where could the best merit be obtained?” the answer was *nibbāna*. She realized this when Santiasoka Dhamma Army came to her school. There were discussions about the Five Precepts. *Sīla* would bring you to heaven, and other happy worlds; *Sīla* would bring wealth to you; and, finally *sīla* would bring you to *nibbāna*. A wisdom arose in her mind. “Loving material things, they will eventually deteriorate, but putting your love in Dhamma, there is no deterioration. From then on her goal has been *nibbāna*.”

It took her five years to give her family enough time to prepare themselves for her entering into a monastic life. She set out to practice Dhamma at Santiasoka at the Srisaket community (Srisa Asoke). Unfortunately she fell ill and instead went to practice at Wat Suandhammaruamjai, Yasothorn province. There she wore a dark brown coloured robe and upheld 10 Silas like a Samanerī but she was called Thosajarinee or brown colored Maechee to avoid complication. She had many obstacles against her ordination as a Samanerī both from the lay

people and the monks who were afraid of wrongdoings according to the traditional ordination system.

Even her physical conditions were against her will for ordination. At one time there was a lay person wanting to sponsor her trip to Sri Lanka for ordination but she fell ill instantly and the physical suffering overcame her mental well-being as well. So she changed to wear white robes for 10 years, practicing dhamma by herself and wrote 10 books during this time.

She was finally ordained as a Samanerī in November 5, 2003 at Wat Ban Nasabang, Tungnangoak Subdistrict, Amphur Muang, Yasothon Province. The ordination ceremony committee consisted of three monks and Luang Por Kammoon had asked for the Power of the Buddha as the chair figure of the ordination. But the lay people around the temple were afraid that it would be illegal. So she changed to wear white robes and took the monks and the lay people to Watra Songdhammakalayani where she was ordained as a Samanerī for the second time. She was ordained as a Bhikkhunī in March 8, 2006 at Kutidao temple, Ayudhaya province, Thailand on the International Women's Day of the United Nations having seven Bhikkhunīs from Twiwan, Thailand, Sri Lanka and the USA and also seven monks from four different countries as the Two Sanghas necessary for her ordination. Bhikkhu Punnavimol was Uppachaya and Bhikkhunī Louis Kul Sue was Pavattini.

She had taken many Dhamma courses such as studying Abhidhamma with the Ministry of Industry's Abhidhamma group, studying Pali from Bhikkhus invited to teach Samanerīs at Wat Na

Sabang. She studied Abhidhamma by air mail at Abhidhamma Jotika, Chulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. She is studying for her MA (in Buddhism) at Mahamakutraavidyalaya University, Roiet campus.

3.2.4.1 Notion of Enhancing Moral Values of the Society

There are two levels of instilling Moral Values into the Society.

1. The society level: to establish a Bhikkhunī Institute in order to give chance for Maechee and women to enter the monastic life from a young age. It is a means to maintain Buddhism and protect the culture from being misguided by the globalization tendencies.
2. At the individual level : to promote wholesome activities (to make merits for ourselves), bringing ourselves to obey by the Dhamma Vinaya of the Buddha. We need to get rid of our own misguided tendencies, not to give into Kilesa, loosen up, reduce our want/desire and eventually let go.

3.2.4.2 Activities to Facilitate the Merit System to the Society

First of all, Bhikkhunī Dhammamittā gave considerations to the limitation of the community surroundings. Wat Na Sabang was a small monastery with only two monks serving a village of 70 households. Most people were farmers with some income-earning hobbies so that they were in the lower middle income group. Luang Por Kammoon, the Abbot, was farsighted in instilling Buddhist moral values to the community and was very supportive of her activities. In 2004 she

initiated a Samanerī Ordination project, ordaining four more Samanerī . It was good that the village people would start to be interested in Buddhism and a lot of men and women were ordained as novices and Samanerīs. Buddhism started to prosper in this little community. This was an important way to activate the merit system within the society.

Other activities which draw the local people closer to Buddhism included:

1. Organizing donation efforts among the laity to improve the facilities at Wat Nasabang, building a water tank, a dwelling for Bhikkhunīs, kutis for monks and a dormitory for the lay people who came to practice meditation.
2. Activities on Saturday and Sunday at 10.00-14.00 p.m. during school vacation. The Samanerīs taught English and Moral to almost 20 persons between the age of five to ten years.
3. Activities of Bhikkhunīs and Samanerīs on Uposatha days during the Vassa. Lay people were invited to come to observe the five or eight p receipts for one day and one night. Bhikkhunīs and Samanerīs would lead the chanting and reading the Tipiṭaka. There were about 20 adults and children who came regularly.
4. With her gentle and kind personality, Bhikkhunī Dhammamittā undertook to contact the villagers and persuade them to join the temple activities.

5. Another activity which she has wanted to initiate for the future is to persuade more young people to practice Dhamma. As the adult Dhamma practitioners are getting older and older, but the new generation does not like to come to the monastery, she would like to set up a youth camp program in the summer vacation for girls to become Silajarinees for two weeks. They could keep either the five or eight precepts. It is designed to help them feel at ease in the monastery, as if the Buddha's home is their own home. They will help take care of the monastery, teach Dhamma, and do the chanting, etc. regularly.
6. An On-going activity is done by setting up the development center beneficial for body, speech and mind development. Teaching dhamma from the 84,000 dhamma kandha of the Tipiṭaka so that the students would have deep understanding from the material world point-of-view and from the Dhamma on topics such as, Samādhi, Sati, Paññā, Panna, feelings and practice.

3.2.4.3 A Process to Enhance the Merit System through other Activities:

1. Offering a dhamma course taught from the Tipitaka for three days or seven days to students, other adolescents, monastics, and the general public by experienced Dhamma training officers.

2. Publishing periodical documents to spread dhamma with answers for every question from readers.
3. Cooperating with government offices, schools, local community leaders and private organizations to offer dhamma courses from expert training officers.
4. Receiving those who want to practice dhamma as a daily routine into the monastery.
5. Using wire broad casting to spread the Buddha' Dhamma or teaching from well-respected monks. This will bring peace and happiness to the community.
6. On important Buddhist days, there will be meditation training and dhamma talk in the Buddhist Sunday school. The Buddha's Dhamma teaches us to understand how to organize our thinking and way of life which is suitable for our conditions. This is based on the same principles as following the Sufficiency policy of King Rama IX.
7. Setting up public welfare places like clinics or hospitals, free-for-all food halls, etc.

3.3 Contributions to Social work

3.3.1 Bhikkhuni Rattanavali¹⁸ (จําเนียร รัตนบุรี) (Jamnien

Ratanaburi) was born in September 26, 1960 at Chamai Sub-district,

¹⁸*ibid.*

Amphur Thungsong, Nakhon Sri Dhammarat Province. Her family was a typical rural family having faith in Buddhism according to the traditional Thai custom. Her parents had a rubber plantation. She had four sisters. She was the eldest. She loved to learn. After she finished Nakhon Sri Dhammaraja Teachers College, she went to Bangkok in order to study for a BA (Social Psychology) at Ramkhamhaeng University. She graduated with an MA (Social Policy and Planning) at Krurk University.

After she completed her BA, she thought that Psychology could not really explain the workings of the human's mind, but that the Buddha's teaching was the real science for the mind. She then studied and practiced Dhamma at Wat Phra Dhammakaya for six years. She was an Upasika upholding the eight precepts and working at the temple while at the same time learning the way of the Buddha. She realized that what the Buddha taught could be practiced until we could understand the inner workings of our minds. Finally, she decided to be ordained as a Maechee at Wat Paknam Pasicharoen for two years. During this time she realized that her status as an unsponsored Maechee put her in the lower echelon of the temple. She was keeping the eight precepts like the white clothed Upasikas but she had to do the cleaning, sweeping, cooking, selling flowers, candles and incense sticks to temple-goers and distributing Krathina envelopes asking for donation. Out of the 160 Maechees only five had the chance to study. Obviously, she was not one of them. Eventually, she made up her mind to seek for a meditation center elsewhere like in Chonburi and Karnchanaburi provinces where she could concentrate on doing meditation and vipassana on her own in

order to study the higher Dhamma as explained in the book written by Luang Por Wat Paknam.

Having done this for four years, she joined a committee called the “Thai Maechee Institute” at Wat Bovornivet. She navigated the pilot project to establish the Thai Maechee Institute from the beginning: surveying and selecting the area for setting up the Institute, receiving applications from students and mentoring the administration department.

Later she met Bhikkhunī Dr. Lee (Lingium) from the USA. It was then that she learned that women’s roles in Buddhism was not limited to just being a Maechee and that she could become a Bhikkhunī. After that she visited many Bhikkhunīs’ monasteries in Bangkok and met with Bhikkhunīs such as Bhikkhunī Gotamī (Dr. Prem Sukhsawasdi), a Thai born American citizen who was ordained in India. She learned of how to become a Samanerī but she herself was not sure that she could be ordained as Bhikkhunī legitimately in Thailand. It was so much against the belief instilled in her since she was young that Bhikkhunīs were non-existent since the Buddha’s *nibbāna*.

Later on, she met with three Sri Lankan Bhikkhunīs and one Lama Bhikkhunī from Tibet, it was then that she started to realize that Bhikkhunīs still existed in the world. The discussion about arranging for her ordination as a Samanerī in Sri Lanka began. However she had so many conflicting thoughts in her mind that she decided to go back home to rest at a small monastery near her house in Nakhon Sri Dhammarat province. Nevertheless, many newsreporters, Thai and foreign, followed there to interview her. It was then that her parents realized that

becoming Bhikkhunī would be good for her and gave her their permission in writing.

She was ordained as a Samanerī in 2002 in Sri Lanka. When she returned in Thailand, she could not find a Theravāda monastery to stay in. So she went to stay at the Pra Mae Guan Yin Bodhisattva's Hall, Chok Chai 4, Bangkok while working as an assistant researcher for The World Buddhism University located at the Benjakiri Public Park, Sukhumvit Road, Bangkok. During this time, she met with many difficulties traveling to work and received pressures from leading her life as a Samanerī, since the Thai society then had little knowledge about Bhikkhunīs. She withstood all the pressures carrying out her practice and spreading the Dhamma until her ordination as Bhikkhunī. She was ordained as a Bhikkhunī in an International Two-Saṅghas ordination ceremony in 2006 at Wat Kudidao, Amphur Muang, Pranakhon Sri Ayudhaya Province. The Upachaya was Pra Punnvimol. Her Pavattini was a Taiwanese Bhikkhunī named Louis Kul Sue.

At last her family was confident in her dedication. They offered the Thungsong land at Nakhon Sri Thammarat Province for building a Bhikkhunīs' Monastery. She set up on this land a Bhikkhunīs' Residence and a School for teaching Moral to children through the kitchen gardening activities, visiting and offering gifts to old people. She organized an award ceremony for Outstanding Women in Buddhism in the World every year and initiated establishing the International Women Meditation Center in Rayong Province. This place is the center for ordained women, ladies and young girls to study Dhamma and practice meditation. Now she is the President of the International Women

Meditation Foundation and Vice Chairman of the World Bhikkhunī Association.

3.3.1.1 Notion of Enhancing Moral Values of the Society

Bhikkhunī Rattanavalī has a strong opinion concerning the social structure in Thailand which is considered the land of Buddhism. More than 95% of the population are Buddhists. However the negative value judgment on Buddhist ordained women in Thailand, she believes results in the negative impact on the status of women in the Thai society. It leads to Thai women accepting their behind-the-scene roles of sacrificing self-interest for the family, as only the sons could earn the highest merits for their parents by ordaining as monks. Problems of sexual oppression, such as, sexual harassment in the workplace and child molestation are the results of the low respect for women. Therefore, she feels that it is necessary to uplift and promote the status of women in Buddhism, so that this will help women to regain respect from the Thai Society and reducing the negative value judgment attached to women in general.

3.3.1.2 Activities and a Process to Enhance Morals of the Society

1. Giving Awards to Outstanding Women in Buddhism. There were many people who supported her idea such as Bhikkhunī Dr. Lee; Pra Sri Pariyattimolee; Mr. Somchai Kusalachitto, Vice Rector for International Affairs, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University; Asst. Prof. Dr. Tavivat Puntarigvivat, Former Director of Institute of Research and

Development, World Buddhism University; Dr. Nanthasarn Srisalab, Secretary of the Organization for World Buddhist Relations and Arjarn Helen Jundhamitr, Instructor at the International Vipassana Yuwaputthikasamakhom. In 2002, it is the first year of presenting awards to outstanding women in Buddhism. It was organized at the Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women under the Royal Patronage of HRH Princess Soamsawali (APSW-Thailand). The timing was during the international women's week. This event is organized every year until now, this year being the sixteenth year. These award-giving event could motivate bhikkhunīs, samanērīs, maechees and *upāsikās* to show their potentialities against other countries' counterparts in this World Buddhist Women event.

2. Promoting ordination of many Thai women as Samanērīs and Bhikkhunīs. She supported sending some of them to study Dhamma in Sri Lanka. She also acquired sponsoring scholarships from many sources especially Bhikkhunī Dr. Lee so that Samanērīs and Bhikkhunīs could study for their Master's degrees in Thailand and abroad. She imparted her knowledge about Bhikkhunīs and Samanērīs to more than twenty Maechees who had come to study under her.
3. Restoring an old abandoned samnaksong building at Mu4 Amphur Tungsong, Nakhon Sri Dhammaraja Province (Samnuksong Awsrikirimart Mubannaiaw) and building the second Samnakhiksunisong at 434/1 Mu1 Chamai Sub-

district, Amphur Thongsong, Nakorn Sri Dhammaraja Province.

4. Organizing evening English classes for about 30 children in the villages nearby her monastery with the cooperation of their parents. Writing letters of recommendation asking for scholarships for poor students. Offering studying accessories and clothes for some students. These students were drawn closer to the monastery and were able to understand the Dhamma practice of Bhikkhunī. As a result, they practiced meditation, learning Dhamma in the process. Some villagers brought their children to stay at the monastery.
5. Training the students to do some good services to the community. She created a weekly activity for children to bring clothes to 1-2 elderlies in some other villages. The children had fun to go by bicycle in a group to create good relationship with other villages. In return the elders gave blessings and gave them some dhamma talks.
6. Giving consultation and assistance to some teenagers who faced some problems with respect to their minds, emotions and relationships with the opposite sex.
7. A future project includes constructing more residential buildings for Bhikkhunīs and Samanerīs.
8. Preparing a training project for women in general about the life of the ordained women in Buddhism.

The emphasis is not on building a big monastery requiring a large sum of money. All the residences will be built along the concept of being modest and clean with serene natural setting with a kitchen garden for growing vegetables for the temple.

Chapter 4

Suggestion for improvement of the Roles of Bhikkhunīs in the Thai Society

This chapter will discuss the opinions and ideas concerning the roles of Bhikkhunīs in two main headings: the opinions and ideas researched from secondary sources, and from in-depth interviews as the primary sources.

4.1 Secondary Sources Concerning Opinions and Ideas about the Roles of Bhikkhunīs

There are many people who have suggested different ideas about the status and role of Bhikkhunīs in the Thai society. The followings are a selection of well-known people who have expressed their opinions about Thai Bhikkhunīs.

4.1.1 Bhikkhu Analayo¹ in his book regarding the controversy on bhikkhunī ordination examined the legal validity of the revival of the ordination that had happened in the 1998 Bodhgayā ordination as the starting point of the modern Theravāda Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in the world. Mahā Pajāpati was originally the first woman to receive higher ordination. In her case this took place by accepting the “eight principles to be respected,” garudhammas. Since the sixth garudhamma stipulated that dual ordination by both Saṅghas is required for higher ordination.

¹Bhikkhu Analayo, **The Legality of Bhikkhunī Ordination**, Center for Buddhist Studies, Taiwan: University of Hamburg Dharma Drum Buddhist College, 2013.

Mahā Pajāpati asked the Buddha how she should proceed in relation to her female followers, since she alone could not form a quorum needed for ordination by bhikkhunīs. According to the canonical Vinaya set by the Buddha himself, the Buddha prescribed that bhikkhus should ordain bhikkhunīs. The implications are that , even though dual ordination is preferable, single ordination of bhikkhunīs by bhikkhus is the proper way to proceed if a bhikkhunī community is not in existence. Later on, upon request from the bhikkhunī side, the Buddha issued a second rule “Bhikkhus, I authorize the higher ordination in the community of bhikkhus for one who has been higher ordained on one side and has cleared herself in the community of bhikkhunīs.” The situation that led to this prescription was that the female candidates felt embarrassed on being interrogated about questions related to their sex by bhikkhus. The Buddha thus passed on this responsibilities to the bhikkhunīs.

Unlike the case for higher ordination of bhikkhus, the Buddha is on record for explicitly stating that the earlier form of only accepting the three refuges is now being abolished. “The second regulation for bhikkhus on the topic of bhikkhunī ordination is not preceded by any explicit abolishment of the first prescription that bhikkhus can ordain bhikkhunīs”. In the 1998 Bodgayā ordination case, the subsequent ordination of female candidates carried out by Theravāda bhikkhus only is therefore legally valid.

4.1.2 Phra Brahmaguṇabhorn (P.A. Payutto, presently Somdet Phra Buddhaghosājarn)² has expressed his views that bhikkhunī ordination is impossible because of problems arising from the Vinaya or disciplinary rules set up by the Buddha. One of the conditions for bhikkhunī ordination is that the ordination process must be carried out by both saṅghas: namely, the bhikkhu Saṅgha and the bhikkhunī Saṅgha. At present there is no bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Theravāda Buddhism, therefore ordination of bhikkhunī cannot be properly done in conformance with the Vinaya. In his opinion this matter is not within the decision power of the Saṅgha committee or the Mahā Thera Samakhom, it is the direct decision authority of the Buddha. Since the Buddha has gone into nirvana, there is nobody with the authority to make decision on this matter. However, understanding the need of women who wish to be ordained as bhikkhunīs the Saṅgha should have kindness toward supporting ordination of maechee (nuns) in order to offer women opportunities to carry out Dhamma practices.

4.1.3 Kamdee,³ has expressed in his research paper that there has been increasing demand from the Thai society for allowing women to be ordained as bhikkhunīs. In fact there has been a revival of Theravāda bhikkhunīs in Thailand by having the ordination rituals done

²Phra Brahmaguṇabhorn (P.A. Payutto), **Buddhist Views on Women and Bhikkhunī Ordination**, (Bangkok: Buddha-Dhamma Press, 2002 (BE 2545), cited in Nachchapapha Wasinghon (ณัชชปาภา วาสิงหล), *The Conflict Solution on Bhikkhunī Ordination in Thai society* (การแก้ปัญหาความขัดแย้งเรื่องการบวชภิกษุณี), PhD Thesis (in Thai), Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand, BE 2554 (2011), p.6.

³Duan Kamdee, **“The Bhikkhunī in Buddhism : An Analytical Study,”** Project Title of Buddhist Studies, Centre for Buddhist Studies, (Bangkok : Chulalongkorn University, 2001/BE 2544), cited in Nachchapapha Wasinghon (ณัชชปาภา วาสิงหล), *The Conflict Solution on Bhikkhunī Ordination in Thai society* (การแก้ปัญหาความขัดแย้งเรื่องการบวชภิกษุณี), PhD Thesis (in Thai), Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand, BE 2554 (2011), pp. 6-7.

by Mahāyāna bhikkhu and bhikkhunī Saṅgha. From the evidence and in the opinions of many high-ranking monks and Buddhist scholars in Thailand, such actions are not acceptable as they are not in compliance with the Vinaya ordination rules, set by the Buddha since the time that He gave permission for the ordination of Queen Mahā Pajāpati, his stepmother, and 500 of her relatives from the Sākya dynasty. As referred to by commentators of the Pali Canon written by the fourth Buddhist Council of the Tipiṭaka in Sri Lanka, bhikkhunīs by then had been separated according to Theravāda sect and Mahāyāna sect in the same manner as bhikkus. Whereas line of Mahāyāna bhikkhunīs has still been continuing in China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam; the line of Theravāda bhikkhunīs which spread from India to Sri Lanka has been broken since 17th BE. Thus he concludes that it is not feasible to revive Theravāda bhikkhunīs in Thailand.

4.1.4 Maitree⁴ et al. have reported their research (conducted on 4 groups of populations, namely, bhikkhus and novices, nuns, laymen and laywomen from five provinces) that bhikkhunī ordination in Thailand is not plausible due to many problems. The report points to the Vinaya issue, cultural disapproval, doubts about the properness of bhikkhunī ordination and line of succession, and the Supreme Patriarch’s Decree of BE 2471 forbidding monks and novices from ordaining females into bhikkhunīs. However, this report proposes that bhikkhunī ordination

⁴Somchai Maitree et al, “**A Study of the Feasibility of Bhikkhunī Ordination in Thailand**” (Thai Version), A Research Report, (Printing Group: The Secretariat of the Senate), cited in Nachchapapha Wasinghon (นัชชปาภา วาสิงหล), The Conflict Solution on Bhikkhunī Ordination in Thai society (การแก้ปัญหาความขัดแย้งเรื่องการบวชภิกษุณี), PhD Thesis (in Thai), Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand, BE 2554 (2011), p. 7.

could be carried out in other countries or by Saṅgha of other sects in Thailand provided that it was accepted by the Thai society. The best solution most likely to be acceptable by all parties involved would be for the bhikkhunīs to clearly identify themselves as bhikkhunīs ordained by Saṅgha from other countries or other Nikāya other than Theravāda. This solution will reduce conflicts and objections from those in opposition.

4.1.5 Raksachom⁵ has expressed her opinion about the problems of the disintegration of the bhikkhunī saṅgha in Theravāda Buddhism that the original bhikkhunī lineage existed during the Buddha’s time has ended. Even though there have been newly ordained bhikkhunīs in Sri Lanka, they could not be accounted as being ordained in the Theravāda tradition because the bhikkhunī preceptors from China had been ordained in the Mahāyāna tradition and within the Mahāyāna Uposatha. Scholars have claimed that Chinese bhikkhunīs’ lineage could be traced back to those ordained by Sri Lankan bhikkhunīs of the Abhayakirivihara since BE 975. They belonged to the Dhammaruchi Nikāya which obeyed by the rules of Vidulayavada sect. Their rules of practice were those of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Besides, the Chinese process of bhikkhunī ordination requires three steps which does not include the two years requirement of being ordained as Sikkhamānā. In addition, there exists no evidence of the continuation of the Theravāda

⁵Krisana Raksachom, “A Study on the Problems of the Disintegration of the Bhikkhunī Saṅghas in Theravāda Buddhism”, Ph.D. Dissertation. (Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2007, cited in Nachchapapha Wasinghon (นัชชาปภา วาสิงหล), The Conflict Solution on Bhikkhunī Ordination in Thai society (การแก้ปัญหาความขัดแย้งเรื่อง การบวชภิกษุณี), PhD Thesis (in Thai), Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand, BE 2554 (2011), p. 7.

bhikkhunīs in both India and Sri Lanka. Therefore, it can be concluded that the original bhikkhunī lineage since Buddha’s time has ended.

In a book on the Buddha’s life written by a British monk named Bhikkhu Sīlacara (J.F. McKenchnie) translated in BE 2484 by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, it is concluded that Theravāda bhikkhunī ordination having Queen Mahā Pajāpati as the first bhikkhunī only lasted 500 years and has subsequently gone into extinction. It is understandable as bhikkhunīs in later years faced a lot of problems from the lay society even more than those faced by male bhikkhus. During Buddha’s time most bhikkhunīs were high class people but in later years some bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs coming from all walks of lives resorted to live the lives similar to lay people. The Vinaya governing them gradually weakened. In addition, bhikkhunīs faced security problems both from inside and outside of the temple leading to parents being unwilling to let their daughters becoming bhikkhunīs. During this time Hinduism became widespread and the Hindu culture gave highest value to marriage as the culprit of virtue for both men and women. Thus, Buddhist influence especially in the Theravāda tradition began to deteriorate and finally bhikkhunīs in the Theravāda tradition went into extinction. Therefore, bhikkhunīs we see nowadays are Mahāyāna bhikkhunīs.

4.1.6 Kabilsingh⁶ has expressed her view that there are so many prejudices upheld against women in Thailand and which later on have been incorporated into Thai traditions and culture and believed to be the

⁶Dhammanandā (Chatsumarn Kabilsingh), “**Development of Women in Buddhism**” (Thai Version), A Research Report, (Bangkok: Song Siam Company Limited), 1996, cited in Nachchapapha Wasinghon (นัชชาปภา วาสิงห์), *The Conflict Solution on Bhikkhunī Ordination in Thai society* (การแก้ปัญหาความขัดแย้งเรื่องการบวชภิกษุณี), PhD Thesis (in Thai), Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand, BE 2554 (2011), p. 8.

teachings in Buddhism. In fact these biases come from the Indian culture, the belief of which is deeply rooted and founded on Brahmanism. In one of her studies on bhikkhunīs, she mentions that bhikkhunīs are referred to in King Asoka's stone inscriptions found in Sanchi and Saranath, India. Additional documentations found in Bodhagaya and Kushana show that during the 3rd century BE there were still bhikkhunīs in existence. Fa Hien, the Chinese monk who travelled to India in BE 942-957, wrote about many temples which he had passed along his long trek and had been impressed by the congregation of many bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs on important Buddhist days. Muslim Turks invasions were the main cause of the end to the bhikkhu and bhikkhunī institutions both in India and Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, both these institutions were eroding from within because of the gradual deterioration of their conducts away from the rule laid out by the Vinaya.

Understanding the weaknesses underlying the deterioration of the bhikkhunī institution in the past plus the revival of interests among women in present day to be ordained as bhikkhunīs, Kabilsingh suggests that the Department of Religion should have correct understanding about the lineage of bhikkhunīs which is still in existence and work to change the attitudes of those who still have misunderstandings in order to upgrade the status of women and allow women to demonstrate their capabilities to uphold and spread the teaching of the Buddha.

To increase effectiveness of women development, those involved with or responsible for this matter whether it is the Saṅgha, or the organizations involved with women development both in the public and private sectors, educational organizations, mass media and the

government that must cooperate in order to eliminate these prejudices once and for all.

4.1.7 Puntarigvivat⁷ supports ordination of bhikkhunī in his article that in Buddhism men and women have the same qualities for enlightenment, and women can achieve the highest level of Dhamma, i.e., enlightenment as well as men. However, due to biases on the part of the male side of the Buddhist institution, there have been prejudices against women continuously for a very long time. The Bhikkhunī institution, which is almost like a representative of the Indian civilization in an era of its peak cultural development, does not have a chance to get a foothold in Thailand. The only role acceptable for women who wish to be ordained is to become Maechees, whose status in many cases are lower than female laypersons. The rise in the number of prostitutes and increasing poverty among women could be due to the lack of a religious institution like the bhikkhunī institution which could provide women with a dependable shelter for spiritual uplift and a chance to have better lives in the Thai society.

4.1.8 Mettānando⁸ has expresses his view that the allowance of bhikkhunī ordination by the Buddha could have occurred despite discontent of the Saṅgha who mostly came from the Brahman caste and

⁷Tavivat Puntarigvivat, “Buddhism and Women’s Rights”, **Journal of Silapakorn University**, 2000) cited in Nachchapapha Wasinghon (นัชปภา วาสิงหล), The Conflict Solution on Bhikkhunī Ordination in Thai society (การแก้ปัญหาความขัดแย้งเรื่องการบวชภิกษุณี), PhD Thesis (in Thai), Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand, BE 2554 (2011), p. 7.

⁸Mettānando Bhikkhu, “**The Happenings in BE 1 Book 2: Analysis of the First Buddhist Council (Sankayana) and Bhikkhunīs**” (Bangkok: Saeng Pra Artit Press, 2002), cited in Nachchapapha Wasinghon (นัชปภา วาสิงหล), The Conflict Solution on Bhikkhunī Ordination in Thai society (การแก้ปัญหาความขัดแย้งเรื่องการบวชภิกษุณี), PhD Thesis (in Thai), Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand, BE 2554 (2011), pp. 7-8.

were still adhered to the Indian culture. Bhikkhunī ordination emerged only due to the support of the Buddha whose authority was beyond question. After the Buddha passed away into *nibbāna*, many conditions regarding bhikkhunī ordination were laid down in order to limit bhikkhunī ordination leading to total elimination from India eventually.

4.1.9 Visālo⁹ in his article “The Happenings in BE 1 Book 2: Analysis of the First Buddhist Council (Saṅkāyanā) and Bhikkhunīs” that the allowance of bhikkhunī ordination for the importance of giving women equal rights or raising women’s status in society, but for providing them with better chance for self-training and furthering their Dhamma practice in order to pursue their highest potentials. Bhikkhu community and daily life’s routines under the framework of the Vinaya, offer Buddhist monks great opportunities for self-training and personal development. Given the same opportunity, allowing bhikkhunī ordination will increase women’s potential for education, personal development and for spreading the Buddhist Dhamma.

4.1.10 Bodhi,¹⁰ was of the opinion that the Vinaya should not be interpreted in a fixed manner whether bhikkhunī ordination could or could not be allowed to be revived in Theravāda Buddhism.

⁹Phra Paisal Visālo, “**The Happenings in BE 1 Book 2: Analysis of the First Buddhist Council (Saṅkāyanā) and Bhikkhunīs**” (Bangkok: Fiang Fa Printing Company Limited, 2003) cited in Nachchapapha Wasinghon (นัชชปาภา วาสิงหล), The Conflict Solution on Bhikkhunī Ordination in Thai society (การแก้ปัญหาความขัดแย้งเรื่องการบวชภิกษุณี), PhD Thesis (in Thai), Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand, BE 2554 (2011), p. 9.

¹⁰Bodhi Mahā Thera, “**Reviving Bhikkhunī Ordination into Theravāda Buddhism**”, (Nakhonpathom: S. Charoen Printing, 2009), cited in Nachchapapha Wasinghon (นัชชปาภา วาสิงหล), The Conflict Solution on Bhikkhunī Ordination in Thai society (การแก้ปัญหาความขัดแย้งเรื่องการบวชภิกษุณี), PhD Thesis (in Thai), Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand, BE 2554 (2011), p. 9.

Interpretation usually reflects the interpreter's attitudes and his own understanding framework as much as the intended meaning of the document. What should help clear up the decision concerning this issue is to ask the following question: how would the Buddha like the bhikkhu Saṅgha to handle this issue if He were living in the 21st century? Would He like to see us holding on to the conditional rule set originally 2500 years ago until women are now forbidden from becoming bhikkhunīs or would He pass his judgment on this Vinaya issue with kind generosity presenting the true Buddhist principle of fairness and no sexual discrimination?

4.1.11 Pariyatimoli¹¹, stresses that we have to take the Vinaya as the main principle because Theravāda Buddhism obeys the opinion of the 500 Mahā Theras in the first Buddhist Council presided over by Phra Mahā Kassapa Thera to review the Tipitaka after the Buddha passed away. Up to now Theravāda Buddhism has not cancelled any of the original chapters. Therefore, even though he has no objection to allowing bhikkhunī ordination, it cannot be done because the conditions laid out in the Vinaya cannot be met. Those who wish to become bhikkhunīs will have to strictly obey the ten precepts as a Samanerī and follow the Sikhamānā practice for two years. Afterwards the ordination process will have to be performed both in the Bhikkhu Saṅgha and the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. Since there exists no Theravāda bhikkhunī, bhikkhunī ordination can only be performed and is acceptable in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

¹¹Phra Sri Pariyatimoli (Somchai Kusalachitto) et al, Vice Rector for Foreign Affairs, Mahachulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University, **“Women in Buddhism”**, (Bangkok: Sukkhapap Jai Printing, 2001), cited in Wutthichai Aumbumrun (วุฒิชัย อ่ำบำรุง), Status and Roles of Bhikkhunīs in Thailand (สถานภาพและบทบาทของภิกษุณีในประเทศไทย), MA Thesis (in Thai), Faculty of Arts, Thammasat University, Thailand, BE 2550 (2007), p. 8.

4.1.12 Dhammanettiko¹² presents a report based on an amendment of his thesis that from studying the biographies of bhikkhunīs in their past lives and present until reaching enlightenment, he finds that Buddhist documents clearly separate between history of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs. He concludes that even the Tipitaka in its documentation style gives priority to the bhikkhus.

4.1.13 Changkwanyuen¹³ writes about the main cause preventing women from ordination as bhikkhunīs that it is due to the ending of Theravāda bhikkhunī lineage leading to having no bhikkhunī to perform the roles of an ordination preceptor. On the feminism front, he opines that equal rights issue should not be the deciding factor, because Buddha’s agreement to allowing ordination of bhikkhunīs was based on the fact that women had the capability to achieve enlightenment. The reason He set up difficult conditional ordination rules was due to his foresight of problems which bhikkhunīs would face. The rules were meant to provide security for bhikkhunīs.

4.1.14 Thavaro¹⁴ presents his thesis on “Women’s Status in Buddhism” covering status and roles of women in India during Buddha’s

¹² Phra Mahā Sungvey Dhammanettiko, **Bhikkhunīs and Enlightenment**, (Bangkok: Pradipat Press, 1994), cited in Wutthichai Aumbumrun (วุฒิชัย อ่ำบำรุง), Status and Roles of Bhikkhunīs in Thailand (สถานภาพและบทบาทของภิกษุณีในประเทศไทย), MA Thesis (in Thai), Faculty of Arts, Thammasat University, Thailand, BE 2550 (2007), p. 7.

¹³Preecha Changkwanyuen, **Women in Eastern Manuscripts**, (Bangkok: A printing house of Chulalongkorn University, 1998) cited in Wutthichai Aumbumrun (วุฒิชัย อ่ำบำรุง), Status and Roles of Bhikkhunīs in Thailand (สถานภาพและบทบาทของภิกษุณีในประเทศไทย), MA Thesis (in Thai), Faculty of Arts, Thammasat University, Thailand, BE 2550 (2007), p. 7.

¹⁴Phra Mahā Kamol Thavaro, **Women’s Status in Buddhism**, Master’s Degree Thesis, (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2000), cited in Wutthichai Aumbumrun (วุฒิชัย อ่ำบำรุง), Status and Roles of Bhikkhunīs in Thailand (สถานภาพและบทบาทของภิกษุณีในประเทศไทย), MA Thesis (in Thai), Faculty of Arts, Thammasat University, Thailand, BE 2550 (2007), p. 7.

era, female Buddhist monastics, their potentials and problems involving ordination of bhikkhunīs. He is of the opinion that Thai women are less knowledgeable about Buddhism than women in other countries. He concludes that basic education is the necessary foundation towards women development in order to increase their potentials.

4.1.15 Soponsiri,¹⁵ proposed that the Thai society is very sensitive to this issue of Bhikkhunī ordination. Despite the fact that women should have equal rights and freedom in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he felt that it would be necessary to organize a lot more public hearings on this issue.

The Thai society attached a very high social status to monastics. Therefore the questions surrounding Bhikkhunī ordination originated from the “war of position” rather than “different viewpoints” in interpretations of the Vinaya. He was of the opinion that the term “Nana Sangvasa” or “Cohabitation of monastics belonging to different sects” was only an allegation that the Thai Saṅgha used in order to protect their high position in the Buddhist Society.

In conclusion, Soponsiri proposed that both sides should respect each other’s rights and freedom as stated in the Constitution and not overstep the territory of the other side. For example, the Thai Saṅgha should not violate the rights of the Sri Lankan and other Saṅgha. Allegation of “Nana Sangvasa” against Thai Bhikkhunīs who had been

¹⁵Santisook Soponsiri, (Sathien Koses – Nagapradeep Foundation committee member), **Discourse the Otherness of Thai Bhikkhunī Thai Society**, Ph.D. Dissertation, (Graduate School: Rangsit University, 2015), cited in Sasipa Kaewnoo (ศศิภา แก้วหนู), *Discourse the Otherness of Thai Bhikkhunī Thai Society* (วาทกรรมความเป็นอื่นของภิกษุณีไทยในสังคมไทย) PhD Theses (in Thai), Graduate School, Rangsit University, Thailand, BE 2558 (2015), p. 156.

ordained in Sri Lanka would be a violation of the Bhikkhunīs’ rights and should not be done.

4.1.16 Subodha¹⁶ from Songdhammakalyani Arama, Nakhon Pathom province said that becoming a Bhikkhunī was her own decision after studying the Tipitaka and the Sutra Buddhist document deeply, she found that becoming a monastics was the only way to *nibbāna*, to get beyond the vicious cycle of sufferings.

Buddhism was the only religion, dated back 2,600 years ago, which treated men and women equally with the view that their potentialities to achieve enlightenment were not different.

In Buddha’s time, the Buddha had allowed Bhikkhus to provide ordination to Bhikkhunīs, until there came some requests from the women that it was not convenient to come before the Bhikkhu Saṅgha for ordination. Out of his kindness, the Buddha then allowed the Bhikkhunīs Saṅgha to ordain women first. After the newly ordained women learned the necessary Dhamma and Vinaya, then they could go in front of the Bhikkhu Saṅgha to be ordained again. This is called the Two- Saṅghas ordination.

The reestablishment of the Bhikkhunī order in Sri Lanka came about with this same reasoning. In Thailand, however, there was a statement that women could not and should not be ordained as

¹⁶Bhikkhunī Subodha, “Songdhammakalyani Bhikkhunī Ārāma, Nakhon Pathom Province,” 2012, cited in Sasipa Kaewnoo (ศศิภา แก้วหนู), Discourse the Otherness of Thai Bhikkhunī Thai Society (วาทกรรมความเป็นอื่นของภิกษุณีไทยในสังคมไทย) PhD Theses (in Thai), Graduate School, Rangsit University, Thailand, BE 2558 (2015), p. 153.

Bhikkhunīs because the Bhikkhunī lineage had ended and it was not possible to restore it.

Subodha felt that this conclusion was based on a misinterpretation or a half-hearted interpretation of the Tipitaka and not paying attention to the Buddha’s original intention and empowerment delegated to Bhikkhus.

She concluded that the dedication of women to devote their life to Buddhism by changing from the lay to monastic life was commendable and should be supported in order to allow women equal rights to attain enlightenment. This would help fulfill the fourfold pillars of Buddhism:- bhikkhus, bhikkhunīs, laymen and laywomen, entrusted by the Buddha to sustain Buddhism into the future.

4.1.17 Methaṅgura,¹⁷ Abbot of Wat Thung Pai, Chumporn Province supported ordination of Bhikkhunīs in order to fulfill the Buddha’s four-fold pillars of Buddhism, namely, Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs, laymen and laywomen. His main reasoning was that from present-day observations women need education and counseling in the Buddhist framework. Women tended to go to temples, listened to sermons and practiced meditation and *vipassanā* more than men. However, there were not enough monasteries with good qualified monks to teach Dhamma to women in a safe and peaceful environment. In addition, it would not be appropriate for a woman with personal problems to go to seek advice

¹⁷Phra Dusadee Methaṅgura, Abbot of Wat Thung Pai, Chumporn Province, “Talk about Bhikkhunī,” Ratthasapa Building 2, Bangkok, 2012, cited in Sasipa Kaewnoo (ศศิภา แก้วหนู), Discourse the Otherness of Thai Bhikkhunī Thai Society (วาทกรรมความเป็นอื่นของภิกษุณีไทยในสังคมไทย) PhD Theses (in Thai), Graduate School, Rangsit University, Thailand, BE 2558 (2015), p. 154.

from a monk; especially when frequent meetings between them could lead to allegations of immoral conducts against the monks.

Having monasteries with Bhikkhunīs would solve these problems and offer alternative “homes for peace of mind” to women. This could reduce the problems of drugs addiction among the teenage girls, as they could become Samanerīs to heal their wounded hearts instead of turning to drugs.

In addition, instead of relying on the male-dominant Dhamma teaching, Phra Dusadee opined that Bhikkhunīs could have points of view and approach to look at life and the women’s struggle for survival that are different from those of the male monastics. Allowing Bhikkhunīs to play a greater roles in the Thai Buddhist society would mean that the Buddha’s teachings could become more applicable to help the laity both men and women from their personal sufferings.

On the question of whether it would be possible or legitimate to give ordination to Bhikkhunīs in Thailand, he thought it would be a matter of time to change the majority viewpoint on the interpretation of the Dhamma Vinaya. In the meantime, one way to allow women to become fully ordained would be to design new form of women monastics and not calling them Bhikkhunīs.

However, all the stakeholders of Buddhism should cooperate to solve this Bhikkhunī ordination question with care. Not only relying on the amendment of laws but also all the participants of the Buddhist realm should look for ways to allow women greater roles to participate and

obtain Buddhist education perhaps by putting up funds for women's education in Buddhism.

The Thai Society should have knowledge about the possibilities and alternatives for ordination of Bhikkhunīs in order to promote women's participation in Buddhism.

4.1.18 Mekroongruangkul,¹⁸ a former Senator and member of a Subcommittee responsible for amending and developing laws concerning equal rights between the sexes is of the opinion that the society should pay close attention to the case of Bhikkhunīs and should stop neglecting but turn around to support and promote equal rights and liberty and provide protection for women's rights in practicing according to their faith in the religion, religious sects or doctrines.

In order to achieve this goal, many laws and regulations that deter or are in opposition to women's rights to practice according to their religious faith without obstacles and worries should be amended. The government must take upon itself the obligation to make sure there will be no discrimination at monastics and Dhamma practitioners.

4.1.19 Kivinichkul,¹⁹ found that the important factor contributing to the sexual discrimination and oppression was explained by anthropology that men seemed to be superior to women in terms of

¹⁸Sutada Mekroongruangkul , a former Senator and member of a Subcommittee responsible for amending and developing laws concerning equal rights between the sexes (NIDA, 2014), cited in Sasipa Kaewnoo (ศศิภา แก้วหนู), Discourse the Otherness of Thai Bhikkhunī Thai Society (วาทกรรมความเป็นอื่นของภิกษุณีไทยในสังคมไทย) PhD Theses (in Thai), Graduate School, Rangsit University, Thailand, BE 2558 (2015), p. 156.

¹⁹Bhikkhunī Ampika Kivinichkul , first Abbess of Fo Guang Shan Temple, Mahāyāna Temple in Thailand, 2014, cited in Sasipa Kaewnoo (ศศิภา แก้วหนู), Discourse the Otherness of Thai Bhikkhunī Thai Society (วาทกรรมความเป็นอื่นของภิกษุณีไทยในสังคมไทย) PhD Theses (in Thai), Graduate School, Rangsit University, Thailand, BE 2558 (2015), p. 167.

their physical or biological conditions which are due to the learning process and social and cultural evolution. The monopoly of power by men could be related to economic power by means of control of production capacity, resource division, the attempt to maintain balance between population and natural resources and wars.

At present the feminist movement has risen from the attitude and prejudice against Bhikkhunī ordination in Thailand. From the Theravāda point of view, in adherence to the Dhamma Vinaya, Bhikkhunī lineage has ended. Therefore with the limitations from the Vinaya, traditions and questions surrounding the legitimacy of the ordination process especially about the Bhikkhunī lineage in other countries, Thai bhikkhunīs should display their identity clearly as Bhikkhunīs from the countries which they were ordained. This would be acceptable just like the Mahāyāna Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunīs who have been able to participate in spreading Buddhism in Thailand with no opposition.

4.2 Alternatives to Ordination of Bhikkhunīs in the Thai Society

It has been popularly stated that bhikkhunī ordination under Theravāda Buddhism is not possible, since the Theravāda Bhikkhunī lineage in Thailand has ended for sometime. The question concerning the rightfulness of “Bhikkhunīs Ordination” at present is the main problem of being bhikkhunīs in the Thai society. Venerable Brahmaganabhorn²⁰ expressed his opinion about “Bhikkhunīs Ordination” that “In Mahāyāna Buddhism, bhikkhunī ordination is permissible.” But given the 2471 BE Somdej Phra Saṅgharaja Kromluang Jinavarasirivathana decree

²⁰Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto), “The Buddhist Discipline in Relation to Bhikkhunīs: Questions and Answers Phra Payutto and Dr. Martin Seeger,” (Bangkok: Phlidhamma Publishing, 2013), pp. 237-256.

forbidding Thai monks from giving ordination to bhikkhunīs, samanērīs and sikkhamānās, how can we revive bhikkhunī ordination in Theravāda Buddhism?

Phra Brahmaganaporn said that the option of not changing the “Principle” of Theravāda Buddhism but finding other alternatives to fulfill the “Want” could be a more direct way to solve this problem.

- 1) In the past that was probably how our predecessors solved this problem. This was probably how the concept of white-robednuns was born.
- 2) Create a new institution for higher ordained women to replace the Institute of Nuns. In some monasteries, white-robed nuns are called Sīlajarinis. This is one example of how to solve this problem, but the saṅgha has not had any decision on this issue.
- 3) Set up a new institution or organization or a new system like the one at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery from the lineage of Luang Poo Chah in London. There the women monastics wear a yellow robe and an extra robe just like monks and they chant prayers in the same uposatha. They are called “Sīladhara” . The Sīladhara Vinaya Training contains ten precepts of Sīla and 75 Seghiyawatra (Etiquettes for monks). They observe some of the Bhikkhunīs’ Pāṭimokkha. In their book of rules, it is explained clearly.

Although an alternative seems to aim toward giving women a chance to ordain in Buddhism, it does not mean to agree to change the

Bhikkhunī ordination rules from what the Buddha had laid out. But it is a kind of format of ordination rules to satisfy women's need to study the dhamma, practice meditation and serve Buddhism.

4.3 In-Depth Interview Instruments

There are more than 200 Bhikkhunīs now residing in 30 provinces in Thailand. The researcher selected some idol Bhikkhunīs who have had outstanding experiences to interview such as : Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā of Songdhammakalyanee Monastery, Bhikkhunī Rattanavalī of International Women's Meditation Center Foundation, Bhikkhunī Sīlanandā of Buddha Dhamma Women's Meditation Center, Bhikkhunī Dhammamittā of Watra Bhikkhunī Pāṭimokkha Dhamma Tipiṭaka and Bhikkhunī Saddhā Sīla Visuddhi of Daruneevivekasom Meditation Center.

The questions that were asked in the In-Depth Interview consists of three questions.

1. Does it work?
2. Is it improving?
3. Is it right?

In the first question "Does it work?" the researcher wants to know about the life of Bhikkhunī in the Thai society. They can take their life hardly or easily in daily life. The second question "Is it improving?" the researcher wants to know about improvement of being Bhikkhunī. Are there any improvement from the first day to be a Bhikkhunī until now? And the last question "Is it right?" the researcher wants to know about the feelings of becoming Bhikkhunī now. Is her determination

right or wrong? Is she proud of being Bhikkhunī in the Thai society in Thailand?

4.3.1 In-Depth Interview Results of Dhammanandā²¹

Does it work?

First of all, what did the Buddha intend about Bhikkhunī? The Buddha intended to establish the fourfold Saṅgha: *Bhikkhu, Bhikkhunī, Upāsaka and Upāsikā*. It is fulfilling the Buddha's wish as a sign of respect, to be truly respecting the Buddha for what he had intended about the bhikkhunīs. The issue is that we had done the part that is expected from the Buddha. The Buddha expected us to continue Buddhism by having this fourfold Saṅgha as the main agents to spread his Noble Truth.

About the bhikkhunī, can we reintroduce the bhikkhunī again? Because they said the bhikkhunīs had died out and it was impossible to revive. We have to come back and read The Bhikkhunī Vipunkha, the history to back up our understanding about the bhikkhunīs. The problem is that the monks and other people would say bhikkhunīs cannot be revived. They are gone, finished and cannot be revised. And how did bhikkhunīs get started yet? When the Buddha gave ordination to bhikkhunīs, were there any bhikkhunīs? No, there were no bhikkhunīs. Therefore, the first bhikkhunī, Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī, received ordination from the Buddha by receiving Garudhamma. But the other 500 Sakiyanis who followed her received ordination from other bhikkhus. The ordination of bhikkhunīs was allowed by the Buddha only if the women strictly agreed to receive the eight additional cardinal

²¹**Interview,** Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā, Abbess of Watara Songdhamma Kalyanee, Nakornpathom Province 73000, 9 February 2016, 13:00-14:00.

precepts for the line of conduct. That was how the Sakiyanis were ordained by the bhikkhus whom the Buddha permitted to ordain bhikkhunīs. “O Bhikkhu, I allow you to ordain bhikkhunīs.” Thus the ordination of bhikkhunīs started with only the bhikkhu saṅgha ordination.

Then after sometimes the women did not answer Antarāyikadhamma. What are these Antarāyikadhamma? There are two parts of Antarāyikadhamma. The bhikkhu would have 13 Antarāyikadhamma and Bhikkhunīs have 24 Antarāyikadhamma. These questions must be asked to make sure that you are in the right conditions to be ordained. The point is that these questions were not answered, because women felt shy in front of the Bhikkhus. If they did not answer, the ordination could not be continued. This the monks could not continue the ordination and went back to the Buddha and ask the Buddha how to proceed. The Buddha understood that the women felt shy, so He let bhikkhunīs ask Antarāyikadhamma. In addition, bhikkhunīs had to train the candidates first before sending them to the bhikkhu saṅgha. The ordination Saṅghakamma had originally been carried out in the bhikkhu saṅgha. (in Pāli it is called Anusitthi). These women went to the bhikkhu saṅgha and still felt very awkward. So the bhikkhu complained the bhikkhunīs were not sufficiently trained²². Some bhikkhunīs had trained the candidates but sent them to the bhikkhu saṅgha still not properly well-trained.

From then on a woman who trained the candidate must have been appointed by the bhikkhu saṅgha. A senior bhikkhunī or a teacher

²²The person who train candidates and ask Antarāyikadhamma is called Pavattini.

bhikkhunī who trained the candidate must be appointed as pavattini by the bhikkhu saṅgha. So if you trained bhikkhunīs as pavattini but you were not appointed from the bhikkhu saṅgha, that is called apati. However the ordination would still be finished by the bhikkhu saṅgha.

Is it right?

It's a very important question. Some people think that it is impossible because they don't understand, they don't have facts and they don't have information. Is it right about the ordination of the bhikkhunīs? The first ordination happened in 1998. There were nuns from many countries who went for ordination in Bodhigaya organized by Fo Guang San from Taiwan. There were at least 148 people receiving ordination at that time. But we will just focus only on the twenty dasasilamatas from Sri Lanka. So they were ordained by bhikkhus Saṅgha and bhikkhunīs Saṅgha. The bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs were from Mahāyāna Temples. It's difficult to continue as Theravāda. But Sri Lankan bhikkhus accepted bhikkhunīs ordination, because the Chinese bhikkhunīs lineage was or came from Sri Lanka. Way back in the year 433 the Sri Lankan bhikkhunīs went to China. However they still could not handle the fact that they came from Mahāyāna ordination. So therefore this newly ordained Sri Lankan bhikkhunīs were taken to Saranath and the ten senior Sri Lankan bhikkhus gave another ordination (Balikamma). This time it was purely Theravāda according to the allowance that the Buddha gave. It is the beginning of Theravāda bhikkhunīs. These twenty bhikkhunīs were the start for the Theravāda bhikkhunīs now. As of now many women went to Sri Lanka to receive ordination including herself. When they came back two of them were appointed by the bhikkhus saṅgha.

And these two pavattini started training the samanerīs so that they became bhikkhunīs. And this is the answer, it is right according to the Dhamma Vinaya.

Is it improving?

She herself was ordained as a Samanerī in 2001 and then she went back to be ordained as a Bhikkhunī in 2003. During the Vassa of 2003-2004 she stayed with bhikkhunīs saṅgha to learn about the Paṭimokkha and to keep the Vassa with her teacher. She could not leave her temple because her mother was so old (94 years). Soon after ordination in 2003, her mother passed away in June. After ordination it took her twelve years before she could ordain bhikkhunīs as pavattini. Now there are more than 100 bhikkhunīs in every part of Thailand.

About the saṅgha, in the beginning it was difficult to form the saṅgha which could recite Paṭimokkha. Four or five bhikkhunīs wanted to recite the Paṭimokkha together. They came to rotate as a saṅgha. Now there are enough bhikkhunīs to recite the Paṭimokkha and other bhikkhunīs can join to recite the Paṭimokkha with them. This year she ordained three bhikkhunīs in June. There are ten bhikkhunīs in her temple and she gives ordination as samanerīs twice a year (April, 6 and December, 5). Last year she gave ordination to 108, a big size, normally about 40 samanerīs. So far there are more than 500 samanerīs. The most important improvement is spiritual improvement. Her spiritual is improving and her physical much more stable.

She is very clear why she has ordained and how she can support Buddhism: helping other women to have the opportunity for self

development, i.e. mind development through ordination as samanerīs and bhikkhunīs; and learning through Dhamma education in order for them to be able to help other women through spreading Buddhism as the way to end suffering and enjoy happiness spiritually. These are her responsibilities. She has written many books on Buddhist teachings and about her life and her support and contributions for women development both physical and spiritual.

4.3.2 In-Depth Interview Results of Rattanavali²³

Does it work?

The life as Bhikkhunī is very good, better than other occupations. The status and the roles of a Bhikkhunī is very safe. She feels that bhikkhunīs can help the society a great deal. She thinks it is a full-time job to work for Buddhism. “The norms as prescribed by the Buddha are simple and mindful: begging for food, practicing meditation, and studying Dhamma for our own spiritual development. These are our daily routines. So the life is good both in terms of status and roles. It is a truly excellent life.”

Is it improving?

“Our life and our saṅgha is improvable. Our saṅgha is very sacrificial and working full time. We leave everything such as our families, our husbands, our sons and our daughters. We are working and working at the sametime. It means that we follow the way of the Buddha to obtain *nibbāna*. It is the topmost of our targets. It helps us to reach the

²³**Interview**, Bhikkhunī Rattanavalī, Abbess of International Women’s Meditation Center Foundation, Ban Nern Soutong Road, Ampur Muang, Rayong Province 21000, Thailand, 5 February 2016, 09:00-10:00.

cessation of sufferings more than any occupation in the world. We help one another to work and enjoy working together to obtain our objectives.”

Is it right?

“It is correct 100%. We follow the Buddha 100%. The Buddha’s structure of disciples consists of the fourfold saṅgha. *Bhikkhu, Bhikkhunī, Upāsaka and Upāsikā* have their duties. We are living out the roles prescribed by the Buddha, therefore we are legitimate and not afraid. We work our hardest to serve the community and to help sustain Buddhism.”

4.3.3 In-Depth Interview Results of Silanandā²⁴

Does it work?

Definitely yes. Bhikkhunīs are most necessary for social development of the Thai society. Of course, there are a lot of obstacles along the way. People who are trying to do good things for the society almost always meet with obstacles. “We must hold on to our determination steadfastly.”

It took her three and a half years to live the life as a samanerī but eventually her good luck won out as she was finally ordained as bhikkhunī in 2006 in the International Bhikkhunī Ordination organized by Bhikkhunī Dr. Lee from the U.S.A. She also sent her to study for her MA. Bhikkhunī Rattanavalī was also very supportive for her further education.

²⁴**Interview**, Bhikkhunī Silanandā, Abbess of Buddha Dharma Woman’s Meditation Center, Ban Yang Kam, Kamnārd, Ampur Sawangdaengdin, Sakonnakorn Province 47110, Thailand, 11 February 2016, 14:00-15:00.

When she stayed at Wat Pa Sukato, lay people were surprised but very happy to see bhikkhunīs sitting on the same platform next to monks. A couple approached her to tell her about their teenage daughter who is suffering from being broken hearted but they did not feel comfortable and were afraid to go to a monk for consultation. A few days later they brought over their daughter to see her. So Bhikkhunī Sīlanandā persuaded her to practice mindful meditation (walking and sitting) and observe the eight precepts. The girl was gentle and obediently followed her advice. At the end she turned out as a fine, confident young lady who is now leading a good life and doing well in her career as a military officer.

After Bhikkhunī Sīlanandā finished her M.A. Buddhist Studies, at the International Buddhist College, Sadao District, Songkhla Province. She constructed her monastery at Ban Yang Kam, Kamsaard, Sakhonnakorn Province. It was like a forest and full of trees. In 2009, no one knew about her monastery. In 2011, she started the first Samanerī Ordination. Only a few women came to be ordained. These Samanerīs' parents brought food to the monastery. The parents used to drink alcoholic beverages but after coming to offer food at the monastery. They had to listen to Dhamma, practice meditation and try to observe the five precepts. They learned about heaven, hell and *nibbāna*. This changed their behavior, so they stopped drinking. Eventually this turned around their family life. Now they take good care of her and have good faith in Buddhism.

Yes, it works to change the small community here for the better and especially by giving women who want to be ordained a place in the society.

Is it improving?

“Yes, sustainable human development takes time. We must be patient and persistent in many ways.”

Formerly, lay people around her monastery went to the temple only to offer food to the monks (to do *dāna* as an act of making merits). Now she offers meditation courses for parents as well as the younger generation. She offers eight to ten days courses for *vipassanā*. Young men and women get to be ordained and this makes them feel proud of themselves. This opportunity has turned around the lives of many teenagers.

There are improvements both on the laity side and the saṅgha’. “For the two saṅghas, we have good Team Unity”. Each saṅgha separately works on our own development. There is no interference with each other, we accept the differences with loving-kindness (*mettā*). We help each other when it is needed.”

It seems that there is improvement of about 20% not only in the monastery but also in the country. However, there is a need for a Sappāya – convenient and peaceful place for people who are tired of worldly life.

In discussion about herself, the physical body has declined according to her age. About her mind conditions, she observes that her

thoughts change constantly. Hard work and difficulties help to strengthen her mind. The development comes slowly and making gradual progress. Sometimes her thought happens so quickly and finishes or stops too soon. She can see Tilakkhaṇa (happening-standing-stopping) in and out repeatedly.

The Dhamma Vinaya will help us to lead a comfortable life. The yellow robes do give us a comfortable shelter. The 311 precepts which we observe do put us on a higher level than being a samanerī, maechee or *upāsikā*. These precepts protect us and open the door to the Noble Path. Being a samanerī is a good step. The women who were ordained as samanerīs will have a good chance to grow up to be bhikkhunīs.

“I can say the Dhamma Vinaya provides us with a convenient, flexible and confident framework for living a monastic life. We will reach a higher state of mind. *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha* will gradually decline.”

Is it right?

It is right 100%. It's right and beneficial for 3 kinds of people:

- 1) people who seek solitude but they need to have good causes and contributing factors to be ordained;
- 2) people who follow the Brahmavihāra four principles or principles for virtuous existence; and,
- 3) people who want to end sufferings and go to *nibbāna*.

If anyone feels like that, she could be ordained samanerī and bhikkhunī. The Dhamma Vinaya will polish off our *Kīlesa* so that we will be totally true and sincere to our faith in Buddhism. Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunīs observe the Dhamma Vinaya not only among the Theravāda but also the Mahāyāna Nikāya. To cultivate our Paramitra, our saṅgha should act with loving-kindness (*mettā*) and be cooperative to each other, then we will succeed in everything. By following and observing the Dhamma Vinaya we will get rid of *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha*.

Last but not least, her point of view is that we must have a complete fourfold saṅgha as stated by the Buddha in order to achieve the target set by the Buddha, that is, helping people to get out of the vicious cycle of life sufferings. “It is right for our feminine sex because we act like mothers to help people who need help”

4.3.4 In-Depth Interview Results of Dhammamittā²⁵

Does it work?

For Bhikkhunī Dhammamittā everything goes well. About the society, Mahāthera or the law of the country, they are in the second place in terms of what is important in life. The most important is herself, she came into Buddhism and became bhikkhunī after making a great determination of her mind. In 2009-10 there is no bhikkhunī in Thailand. In 1990 she went to the monastery to practice by herself. She had a dream-like vision of herself wearing yellow robes. She must beg for food, not picking vegetables, nor receiving money. She wanted to be a bhikkhunī. At first she was opposed by her father and her brother, it was

²⁵**Interview**, Bhikkhunī Dhammamittā, Abbess of Watra Bhikkhunī Pāṭimokkha Dhamma Tipiṭaka Yasothorn Province 35120, Thailand, 30 March 2016, 16:00-17:00.

considered sinful for women to touch an alms-bowl, yellow robes etc. She could not say anything at that time but thought that these were things she had already done in the past. In her mind, women did not necessary stay and work at home as a housewife or cook. She was so tired of answering questions. She started to look for an ordainer. She knew about bhikkhunīs from overseas. There were some Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā's books about Sakayadhita. This group had a committee in Thailand. She learned about revival of bhikkhunīs in other countries. Mahāyāna Bhikkhunīs stayed in China, Taiwan and Korea. Before that she did not know anything about bhikkhunīs and thought someone was telling her a lie. Then she found out by herself and waited for an ordainer. She went to Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā's monastery first. In 2003 she was ordained as a Samanerī with determination to fulfill the fourfold saṅgha.

It is about kamma, citta-kamma. Human beings came from kamma. Kamma came from twenty-nine citta: kusala and akusala. We follow the path of the Buddha. In 2004 she founded the Sikkhadhamma Theravāda Bodhi Dhammapalathera (Ministry of Industry Club). In 2005 she was ordained as a Bhikkhunī after she met Bhikkhunī Rattanavalī and Bhikkhunī Dr. Lee. They organized ordination for her at Kudeedao Temple, Muang District, Ayudhaya Province. The ordainer Bhikkhunīs came from Taiwan, Cambodia and Myanmar. She was the first bhikkhunī to be able to chant the Bhikkhunīs Pāṭimokkha. She received an outstanding women award in Buddhism in 2005. From that day until now it is possible. In Buddhism we must be patient to struggle and to clear the way. There are now twenty Bhikkhunīs, six Sikkhamānās at her

monastery. The branch of the monastery are at Nakhonrachasima, Roiet, Nakhonpathom, USA. and Puthakham Mahawanwaysalee Forest, India.

Is it improving?

It is improving. She was the only one bhikkhunī in the past but now there are more than twenty bhikkhunīs. Sikkhadhammapala Theravāda Bodhi is the group that supports this monastery. It is unbelievable that we have developed so quickly. It is a miracle. It is like there is a supernatural hand or devas pushing, helping and guiding us to do many wonderful things. She can not say enough, but, like King Asoka in the former time who sent nine groups of dhammadūta to preach the dhamma, there are at present many invitations for Bhikkhunīs, Upāsakas and Upāsikās to be guest speakers or lecturers.

Is it right?

The Buddha gave his supreme permission to have the fourfold saṅgha as the main pillars supporting Buddhism. We do not imagine this up by ourselves. It seems that we received this permission right in front of him. When the timing is right, it seems like He was pushing us to do it. If we did not do it, it would be our false. Actually in Buddhism it is all about the highest truth: there is no country, no frontier, no segregation. It is the way to make merits to increase kusala. It is the choice for women to be ordained as samanērīs and bhikkhunīs. But it is a difficult path to reach enlightenment. Even the Buddha took 20 Asongkaya and 100,000 maha kappa of years before He could attain enlightenment. We must therefore accumulate our merits which in our community are called Puññakiriyāvatthu 30, Kusalakammapatha 30 and Pāramī 30 Navutti, i.e.

altogether 90 steps before we can gradually develop from an ordinary person to Sotāpatti-magga, Sotāpatti-phala until Arahantship. Monastic life is the only way to follow the Buddha's path. Remaining a layperson would inevitably get us involved with *Kīlesa* and akusala deeds. Ordination will put us in the right framework:- Samanerīs keeping 10 precepts and bhikkhunīs observing 311 precepts. These precepts can prevent us from Akusala. The Buddha called it a field for cultivating merits. The objective of ordination is to go to *nibbāna*. It is hard to attain this objective. We must practice until we can lift up our mental conditions.

The Buddha divided people into twelve types. They are like four kinds of lotuses: Ugghaṭitaññū, Vipacitaññū, Neyya and Padaparama. As for people who could reach the Ariya Magga, they are Magga four : Sotāpatti-magga, Sakadāgāmi-magga, Anāgāmi-magga and Arahatta-magga; Phala four : Sotāpatti-phala, Sakadāgāmi-magga, Anāgāmi-magga and Arahatta-phala. The Buddha said as long as the Dhamma is being practiced, the world will have arahats.

4.3.5 In-Depth Interview Results of Sila Visuddhi²⁶

She is the Abbess of Daruneevivekasom Meditation Center. This is the place that fourfold saṅgha can come to practice Mahāsatipaṭṭana four. There are always many people coming here to join

²⁶**Interview**, Bhikkhunī Saddhā Sīla Visuddhi, Abbess of Darunee Vivakasom Meditation Center, Amper Muang Payao, Payao Province 47110, Thailand, 22 April 2016, 15:00-16:00.

and practice Mahāsatipaṭṭana four. She wants to develop ordinary people into monks. She does not want to make amulets replica of Buddha, she would rather develop a layperson into a full monastic. In general many people want to practice meditation in order to develop their mind. During the Songkarn holidays more than 100 people came to practice at her temple.

The roles of bhikkhunīs in Thailand covers the followings:-

1. Build a monastery to serve the fourfold saṅgha.
2. Spread the teachings of the Noble Truth of the Buddha along the line of Mahāsatipaṭṭana four.
3. Accept the lay people into our monastery so that those who have family or psychological problems will have a place to stay. Not only will we provide them with shelters and food to develop their bodies, but we will also improve their state of mind with moral principles and the Noble Truth. They will be able to carry on their living in the society and become good members of the laity.

Hence, there are some bhikkhunīs in Thailand now whom she feels that their potentialities are quite capable to become spiritual leaders developing their communities with moral principles into becoming good fourfold saṅgha. All of the bhikkhunīs including myself obey the Dhamma-Vinaya of the Buddha and dedicate our lives to him. We will certainly maintain our monastic way of lives in order to help strengthening Buddhism.

4.3.6 Summary of Interviews

All of the bhikkhunīs who were interviewed were unanimous that living monastic lives as bhikkhunīs worked for their own spiritual development as well as fulfilling the Buddha's wish of having the fourfold saṅgha assemblies to spread Buddhism and his dhamma teachings to the general public. They all worked very hard to gain acceptance by the laity community. Their roles and status are gradually being accepted, and they are gaining more and more trust from young girls and their parents. They all felt this was the right way for them to play an important roles in women and community development by giving dhamma lessons and teaching meditation, thereby spreading the Noble Truth of the Buddha to help end the sufferings of the people.

The researcher is of the opinion that as the number of bhikkhunīs in Thailand increases and their roles and contribution to the community become inevitably evident and widespread, their status will automatically become uplifted. It is therefore a matter of time that the Dhamma Vinaya concerning bhikkhunī ordination will be reinterpreted in favour of allowing Thai monks to give ordination to bhikkhunīs as it was originally done for Sakiyani ladies during the Buddha's time.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

5.1 Conclusion

This research “A Study of the Roles of Bhikkhunīs in the Thai Society” is the objective of studying the prominent figures of Bhikkhunī Saṅgha and their achievements in the history of Buddhism, analyzing the contributions of bhikkhunīs to the Thai society and suggestion for improvement of the roles of bhikkhunīs in the Thai society. This research is a qualitative research.

In summary, the position of Thai bhikkhunīs in the Thai society is not clear. While some part of the Thai Saṅgha does not support the position of bhikkhunīs but some of the monks in Thailand think it is inevitable that bhikkhunīs will play an important roles in the Thai society. There are more bhikkhunīs in Thailand now who were ordained in Sri Lanka or Taiwan or by International Saṅghas in Thailand. They have begun to contribute their efforts on education, Dhamma practice and many social work projects while spreading the teaching of the Buddha.

5.1.1 Bhikkhunīs’ Hard Works Are Internationally Recognize

After studying the biographies of some well-respected bhikkhunīs with high achievements, The researcher observes that there were some developments during their young ages or some happenings in

their early lives which caused them to become interested in coming under the umbrella of Buddhism and to devote their lives to search for the Noble Truths as taught by the Buddha and to also help others from their sufferings. By so doing, they eventually find that becoming bhikkhunīs would be supportive of this roles and best serve their purposes. From my study, I have found that each and everyone of them had to go through so many obstacles and difficulties before they could become fully ordained bhikkhunīs.

The hurdles and hardships over which bhikkhunīs had to cross and overcome served to become the incentives pushing these bhikkhunīs to dedicate themselves and work hard toward spreading the dhamma education and practices to the communities around them. Most of them get involved in socially engaged activities in order that their contribution to the Thai society would become evident and beneficial to all parties involved.

In performing good deeds without expecting for their own personal returns to serve mankind for the benefit and happiness of the community, the country and even the world, bhikkhunīs need to have strong determination, perseverance and resolution to dedicate themselves toward strengthening Buddhism while also helping to pull other people out of their own sufferings. There are over 200 Thai bhikkhunīs now residing in 30 provinces and abroad. Their works and efforts both in Thailand and across the international networks have become apparently prominent.

Bhikkhunīs have become actively involved in monasteries across the countries. News media coverage of bhikkhunīs are positive and

present their active roles in many areas especially education, dhamma practice and social work. Many books and periodical articles have been written by Thai bhikkhunīs and well known to international readers so that their performances for Buddhism in the Thai society are becoming more evident and impressive. Compared to the year 1928 (BE 2471), the tide has turned and the Thai society is now more ready to accept bhikkhunīs as a part of the monastics.

5.1.2 Bhikkhunīs Having No Legal Status

While bhikkhunīs are quite well accepted and respected in some other countries, they do not have a clear position and are not legally recognized in Thailand. Having a legal framework to place bhikkhunīs in the right position in the Thai Buddhist context is necessary to give encouragement and moral support to bhikkhunīs, being one of the fourfold pillars of Buddhism, namely, Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs, laymen and laywomen. As attested in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, the Buddha expressed his intention to Vasavattī Māra during the fifth week after his enlightenment that He would not go into *nibbāna* until the fourfold pillars were well-versed in the Dhamma and had established strong foundation to spread Buddhism to the Deva and human worlds.

Currently, there is no Parliamentary Act that clearly defines the position and the roles of Thai bhikkhunīs in the context of Buddhism. However, there are laws providing protection for monastics ordained in foreign countries; and, the Constitution allows for every individual the liberty in choosing, performing rites and practicing any religious customs as he/she wishes. It will be fulfilling the Buddha's wish to work towards

enabling bhikkhunīs ordination and give formal recognition to their status in the Thai society.

5.1.3 The Researcher's Opinion

The researcher is of the opinion that it does not matter to which Nikāya (Sect or School) the bhikkhunīs belongs. The ultimate goal is how she positions herself in the way that she can best serve the community, the country, and Buddhism. The target group or the people who will benefit from bhikkhunī's contributions could be youngchildren, teenagers, working age, middle age, senior citizens, people with problems as well as lay supporters. She cannot avoid or stop the criticisms. The best way to deal with this situation is to do something that will benefit the society in the most concrete way. Indeed, each bhikkhunī has her own experience and individuality quite different from one another. Her performance or expression of her contribution to the society may differ depending on many factors and circumstances in each area. In terms of public relations, presently bhikkhunīs have technology to help them communicate or publicize their works much better and faster than formerly or during the Buddha's time.

In support of the researcher's conclusion, I have found a very interesting research study by Phra Dhammanettiko (Netnimitr).¹ He found that becoming Arahanta of each bhikkhunī was related to their background in the past lives and in this life. In one of the past lives, everyone of them had met a Buddha, made her strong determination to

¹Phra Mahā Sangvoey Dhammanettiko (Netnimitr), **Lives of Bhikkhunīs and Attainment of Arahantship: Only Those Appeared in the Therī Gata** Master's Degree Thesis, (Graduate School: Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University), 2536, p, 136.

attain enlightenment right in front of the Buddha and were accustomed to make many wholesome (kusala) deeds such as giving dāna or sacrificing for others during their past billions of lives. In the last life (paccimbhavigasatt), every bhikkhunīs even though coming from different background of family, education and personal character, could reach Arahattaphala (fruition) when her timing was ripe. The readiness to reach Arahantship was closely related to her past lives' backgrounds and the hard works and kusala deeds she had accumulated and in fact her relentless efforts dedicated to dhamma practices. Bhikkhunīs who attained enlightenment which was the ultimate goal of their lives realized through their own understanding that they would no longer be reborn, this was the end of their holy life (brahmacariya), their work was completed and no other work was needed to be done. This spiritual condition or this state of mind is called “nibbāna”

From the interviews of prominent Bhikkhunīs conducted for this thesis, the researcher has come to the same conclusion that the interviewees are very happy in their roles and are determined to strive effortlessly with the same ultimate goal in mind. i.e., nibbāna.

5.1.4 Problems and Obstacles Met during Research

The problems which had to be coped with during the research work are as follows:

The lack of information in the English language about the topic of this research—A Study of the Roles of Bhikkhunīs in the Thai Society— made it necessary for the researcher to collect information in

Thai language first, then translate it into English. This is the reason that it takes twice the amount of time spent on this research.

There were a lot of obstacles met in trying to communicate with certain bhikkhunīs or their institutions such as no answers, turned-off phones or the end party was there but did not want to answer the phone. These bhikkhunīs lived in different provinces in different parts of Thailand. The long distance made the research work more cumbersome as it took time to travel from the east to the west, to the north and south. At times the appointment dates were quite far apart so that a few days were wasted in between.

However, the researcher tried her best to collect as much information and details as possible to make sure that there would be sufficient and useful information for those who might wish to carry out further study on this topic in the future.

5.2 Suggestions for Future Research

The author is of the opinion that there should be a serious analytical study on the Buddha's statement about the fourfold pillars of Buddhism prior to his nibbāna. This should include the Buddha's intention about allowing ordination of bhikkhunīs and the subsequent development of the ordination process, until it becomes the process carried out by the two Saṅghas. Further discussions on Bhikkhu Analayo's analytical study on the legal validity of bhikkhunī ordination should be carried out to make it better known to the Thai general public.

On the social front, the roles of bhikkhunīs and their relationship with the Thai society should be further studied. It should

cover expectations from the Buddhist communities about possible contribution of bhikkhunīs to education, dhamma practice and social work in their efforts to uphold and spread Buddhism.

1. Do a comparative study between Thai bhikkhunīs and foreign bhikkhunīs to understand their ways of life and find ways and means to develop the potentialities and living conditions of Thai bhikkhunīs .
2. Study the possibilities and ways to provide women’s rights protection for bhikkhunīs particularly in the area of education, dhamma practice and their place in the society. This will help uplift their social status, energize and nurture their morale which is necessary for the development of their potentialities.
3. Study and analyze the roles of bhikkhunīs as one of the fourfold Saṅgha as set up by the Buddha. Investigate whether the leaders of Thailand—“the Land of Yellow Robes”—have done enough to steer forward along the path laid out by the Buddha especially in terms of Bhikkhunīs development as intended by the Buddha.
4. There should be a research study on “Expectations of the Laity towards Bhikkhunīs’ Roles and Responsibility” as one of the fourfold Saṅgha in spreading Buddhism in the area of education, social work and dhamma practice.
5. There should be a research study on the Chamadevi dynasty period to look for documented or archaeological evidences

for possible clues about the existence of bhikkhunīs during this period. Perhaps old documents kept in many wats in the North of Thailand written in Pāli or Sanskrit or the old Lanna language should be studied and translated. As a result, we will learn more about the spread of Buddhism in the North of Thailand.

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Appendix A : Interviewees' Contacts

1. Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā

the Abbess of Watara Songdhamma Kalyanee,
Nakornpathom Province 73,000,
Thailand.

Interviewed 9 February 2016.



2. Bhikkhunī Rattanavalī,

the Abbess of International Women
Meditation Center Women's Meditation
Center, Ban Nern Soutong, Taphong,
Amper Muang Rayong, Rayong Province
21,000, Thailand.

Interviewed 5 February 2016.



3. Bhikkhunī Sīlanandā

the Abbess of Buddha Dhamma Woman's
Meditation Sawangdaengdin,
Sakonnakorn Province 47110, Thailand.
Interviewed 11 February 2016.



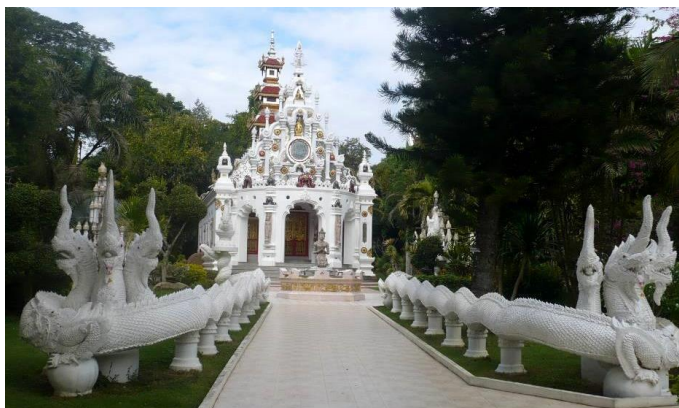
4. Bhikkhunī Dhammamāttā,

the Abbess of Watara Bhikkhunī
Pātimokkha Dhamma Tipiṭaka, Bungkum,
Amper Lerngnokta,
Yasothon Province 35120, Thailand.
Interviewed 30 March 2016.



5. Bhikkhunī Sīla Visudhi

The Abbess of Darunee Vivakasom
Meditation Center, Amper Muang Payao,
Payao Province 47110, Thailand.
Interviewed 22 April 2016.



Appendix B : Pictures of Bhikkhunīs' Activities



Figure 1: The Temporary Samanerīs Ordination at Watara Songdhamma Kalyanee, Nakornpathom Province is given twice a year on April 6 and December 5.



Figure 2: Interviewed Bhikkhunī Dhammamāttā at Watara Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha Dhamma Tipiṭaka, Bungkum, Amper Lerngnokta, Yasothon Province. 30 March 2016.



Figure 3: The Temporary Samanerīs Ordination (class II) dedicated the merits to bid farewell to the passing away of King Rama IX and welcoming the ascending to throne of King Rama X, His Majesty on 22 December 2016 – 7 January 2017 at Buddha-Dhamma Women’s Meditation Center, Sakonnakorn Province.



Figure 4: Interviewed Bhikkhunī Sīlanandā at Buddha-Dhamma Women’s Meditation Center, Sakonnakorn Province. 11 February 2016.



Figure 6: Bhikkhunī Sīlanandā lectured in the Seminar of Bhikkhunīs Saṅghas in 2016.



Figure 7: Interviewed Bhikkhunī Sīla Visudhi at Darunee Vivakasom Meditation Center, Amper Muang Payao, Payao Province, 22 April 2016.



Figure 8: Intensive Program of Vinaya Studies for Bhikkhunīs, Sikkhamanas and Samanerīs by Ajahn Brahmali, Bodhiyana Monastery, Perth Australia on 11-16th January, 2018 at Vijjaram Dhamma Center, Uthaitani.



Figure 9: Ajahn Brahmali and Vietnamese The Temporary Samanerīs Ordination s in the Intensive Program of Vinaya Studies at Vijjaram Dhamma Center, Uthaitani on 11-16th January, 2018.



Figure 10: The Temporary Samanerīs Ordination for students in vacation about one months every year at Suan Siri Dhamma of Bhikkhunī Poonsirivara in Samutsakorn Province.



Figure 11: Bhikkhunīs and Samanerīs attended the Landmark Forum at the All Seasons Place, Bangkok, Thailand by the conduct of Bhikkhunī Dr. Lee and Bhikkhunī Rattanavalī, Abbess of International Women Meditation Center at Rayong Province in November, 2016.



Figure 12-13: Outstanding Women in Buddhism Awards, 16th Anniversary on 7 March 2017 at the Emerald Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand by Bhikkhunī Dr. Lee and Bhikkhunī Rattanavali, Abbess of International Women Meditation Center, Rayong Province.

Biography of the Researcher

Name: Bhikkhuni Sobhita (Somthavil) Malikul

Address: 595/16 Ladprao Road

Bangkapi, Bangkok 10310, Thailand

Tel. 087-5989901

Email: sobhitamalikul@gmail.com

Ordination: 03 March 2012

Education: M.A. in Buddhist Studies 2017

Mahachulalongkornrajavidhyalaya University

AmpurWangnoi PhraNakhon Si Ayutthaya 13170

Thailand

B.A. in Management 1982

The Institute of Technology & Vocational Education

Din Dang District, Bangkok 10400 Thailand