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Photo: Anandajoti Bhikkhu

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Partnering to support
fully ordained
Theravada women



What is a Bhikkhuni?

A bhikkhuni (Pali) or bhikshuni (Sanskrit) is a fully-ordained woman Buddhist monastic, a female monk. Like their male counterparts, bhikkhunis are ordained by receiving the Vinaya, the text defining monastic discipline. The Buddha referred to his teaching as the Dhamma-Vinaya, the teachings and discipline or training.

Early Bhikkhuni History

The Buddha ordained women and praised the attainments of the many enlightened bhikkhunis in his Assembly. By the time of Emperor Asoka (304-232 BCE), the orders of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis were well established in India. He sent his son and daughter to Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BCE to spread Buddhism.

Arahanta Bhikkhuni Sanghamitta, Asoka's daughter, ordained Sri Lankan Queen Anula as well as many other women. Emperor Asoka also sent missionary bhikkhus and bhikkhunis to Southeast Asia. Scholars believe there were many bhikkhunis in the area now known as Thailand and surrounding countries centuries ago.

Bhikkhunis in Asia

In 429 CE, Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Devasara traveled to China with a group of bhikkhunis to establish a Bhikkhuni Sangha there. These Sri Lankan bhikkhunis gave higher ordination to more than 300 Chinese nuns at a monastery in Nanjing. A second group followed in 433 CE.

Protecting bhikkhunis,
we protect ourselves
and future generations.

China's bhikkhuni lineage has continued to the present day in an unbroken upasampada (ordination) lineage. This lineage eventually spread to Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam. There are now thousands of Taiwanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese bhikshunis.

The Loss of the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha

About the 11th century CE, the Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni Sanghas died out in India and Sri Lanka due to invasions, war, and famine. The Bhikkhu Sangha was revived multiple times by Bhikkhu Sanghas in neighboring countries. Sadly, this phenomenon did not happen for Southeast Asian women desiring ordination.

Bhikkhuni Sangha Revival

In the late 1990's, Theravada women began ordaining, thanks to the efforts of supportive monks and Mahayana bhikshunis who returned the gift of ordination they had received centuries before from their Theravada sisters. However these growing communities are still fragile and in need of significant support.



Photo: Anandajoti Bhikkhu Wat Therphidaram, Thailand

Our Mission

Nurture overlapping circles of support for the fledgling Bhikkhuni Sangha, to allow it to grow and thrive.

What We Do

- Raise funds to ensure bhikkhunis' basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and health care are met.
- Support and encourage the growth of new and established bhikkhuni monasteries throughout the world.
- Support bhikkhunis as they assume leadership roles and develop skills that enable them to be of service to their communities, both practically and spiritually.
- Provide a clearinghouse for information on bhikkhuni history, activities, challenges, and achievements.
- Educate lay practitioners about the essential role bhikkhunis play in protecting and spreading the Dhamma.
- Uphold the indispensable role monasticism plays in preserving the Buddha's teachings.