

# **Feminine Spirituality and Its Dignity: History of Buddhist Feminine Philosophy**

By  
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## **Abstract**

In recent decades, the position or the role of women has not only been awakened but also an issue of considerable worldwide interest, both in the West and East. In all societies, particularly in the West, there have been strong innovative positions and creative thinking concerning women in all spheres of activity, which has influenced a significant change in the role played by women in social, economic, and even political life.

In spite of the production of many works, both academic and non-academic, on the transforming status of women in Buddhist societies, there are, however, still three misinterpretations or erroneous views persisting in the scholarship of Buddhism and feminist studies. According to Altker, “Buddhism is an ascetic religious tradition and has not devoted much attention to the duties and ideal of laywomen.”<sup>1</sup> Another (wrong) view is appeared in Rita Gross’s work<sup>2</sup> as suggested by Oliver Abhinayake in his recent article.<sup>3</sup> The third view, in my modest opinion, is the attribution of women as temptress or evil as wrongly understood by Diana Y. Paul.<sup>4</sup> In addition to this, there are many people who regrettably failed to distinguish between absolute philosophical interpretations or doctrinal Buddhism and later institutional developments. The paper aims to explore the feminine spirituality and its dignity, based on the Pali canon, and examines whether above views contradict to the fundamental and doctrinal teachings of the Buddha. The paper also interests to explore the social, religious, and spiritual roles of women during the time of the founder of Buddhism, the Buddha. The paper also discusses the two aspects of Buddhism and Gender Studies. That is, the absolute philosophical interpretations or doctrinal Buddhism and later institutional developments.

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<sup>1</sup> A.S Altker, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, (Banaras: Banaras Hindu University, 1956), 208.

<sup>2</sup> See Rita Gross. *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History: Analysis and Reconstruction of Buddhism*. (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), 130.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver Obenayake, *The Position of Women in the Theravada Buddhism*, *The Journal of Buddhist Studies* (Colombo: Centre of Buddhist Studies, 2004), Vol. 1, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Diana Y. Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Image of the Feminine in Mahayana Tradition* (Berkeley: Lancaster-Miller Inc, 1979), 3-60.