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GENDER EQUALITY IN BUDDHISM

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Abstract

Today in the epoch of globalization, it is important to determine common spiritual values determining different cultural values. These values make a basis for lasting intercultural bounds and help solve geopolitics problems with the help of objective criteria basing on the principles of mutual respect and equality. Hence, research of gender equality in Buddhism allows determining spiritual values and contact points of different cultures, which allow creating a dialogue between geopolitical partners.

Buddhism is a philosophy religion of reviviscence and freeing, but it is less known as religion of gender equality. As an argument proving impossibility of women reviviscence, contrary to men many Buddhist point at characteristic Karmic taboos, which constrain women from reaching enlightenment and freeing. However, real facts prove that few women in the history of Asia were equal to men as Buddhist thinkers. Many Buddhists all round the world believe that women due to their karmic abilities cannot become spiritually perfect. Nowadays, only three Buddhistic schools keep nun ordainment tradition. These schools thanks to women initiation into nuns, their approval and support, respect in sangha, could overcome Karmic restrictions.

Buddhism accepts the fact that men and women are equal in achieving freeing or nirvana. Buddhism is doctrine which praises reviviscence, overcoming personal imperfection, liberating oneself from sufferings.

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Keywords: Buddhism, woman, gender equality, reviviscence.



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1. Introduction

Resulting from the nature a man does not fit it completely, “sticks out”, showing incompatibility with it. Coming into the world he is “sinful”, obliges his life to something, resisting that he was to become a human. He is in the medium which trenches upon something without which the existence is meaningless. That is why “sin”, “suffering” are initial characteristics of the human existence, which lasts in suffering and sin.

Priority of suffering requires a human live in any situation (if he strives for humaneness in any situation and does not lower his life level to stagnant materiality) as in the given one: his life is also given to him, if he perceives it philosophically, its circumstances prophesy him maximum severities; overcoming them he comprehends infinite blessings of Genesis. Life as initial suffering, but not harmony and happiness, lost or forthcoming – these are what awaits a human and it is his life.

A human is born not free, though for freedom, which he cannot acquire due to his inborn sluggishness. He breaks out from unfreedom as from nature, and, first comes to (if comes) inside, to himself, second, understands that it is impossible to achieve the aim of his freeing, harmony is impossible. Human spiritual is something that keeps himself when it is impossible to exist; that protects alive from sluggishness. He cannot exist in it but he can exist without it either. If we follow the origin, where fibers of human composition come from, we can see they mix with universe. Here is human paradox: keeping relation, surpassing it knowing that it is unsurpassable. In this sense, a human is always on the edge looking into both abysses: both pure naturalness and pure humanness are equally unfit. A human can be himself going along this edge. If he takes one side, he will lose something that makes him a human. That is why he should possess: holy knowledge, holy thinking, holy speech, can take righteous actions, do holy work, holy strain, holy attention, holy self-control, that is get free from everything that pulls back.

Buddistic Dhamma is to become a human aroused and reflecting our potential of wisdom and sympathy. Being a woman or a man is just a part of our human nature. But believing that a woman is spiritually second or is in an unfavorable position is a trap of ancient patriarchal customs which exist nowadays. (Snelling, 1991).

2. Problem Statement

The problem is in irreducibility of feminine and male principles.

3. Research Questions

Buddha in front of complete enlightenment should have a slightest proclivity to women, without any violation or prejudice to any living being. Buddha is incapable of hatred to women. No kind is released from kindness, as it does no harm to any living being. Buddha’s message and learning has endless kindness and sympathy to all living beings, even those who did wrong, for example, tsar Adjatasattu, who killed his father for the sake of power, but was accepted by Buddha as a learner. Taking into account his kindness to all beings he was kind to women.

But how this kindness is evidenced in reality? Do we find that Buddha actively takes part in improving the social status and possibilities for women in early Writings? Fortunately, in Buddha’s case we have a close look, almost unique among historical figures of social participation. Buddha created

religious Sangha where he determined forms and norms of the perfect society. In Sangha he destroyed cast system and created consensual democracy with little hierarchy without centralized control. In religious Sangha we find Buddha's attention to women and improvement of her drawbacks which they had in ancient Indian society. (Strong, 1974). Peaceable disposition, forgiveness and tolerance are bases of relation to women.

In Pali Canon women were considered tempters: there is no other form so tempting and desirable, such distractive obstacle in overcoming unrivaled world, as woman's shape. Understanding the nature of existence in Buddhism, and control mechanism we should change our attitude to the loss of attachment to it". This ideology blocks women as they are considered a barrier on the way to enlightenment. In the same way the role of Buddhist women was broken by early Makhayana's texts that meant that it was impossible to get freedom for women. According to White lotus Sutra, there is no example [woman], who reached Buddhahship because a woman can not take five ranks. In this chapter of Lotus Sutra the sex change happens from a woman Sagara masculine form (Paul, 1981). Then she proved herself as boddkhisavata. This text runs that women can not achieve nirvana and should continue Sansara until they are reborn as men. Buddhist text denies woman's role in early Buddhism. (Shokhin, 2011). In (Dandaron, 1996; Dondokov, 1993; Keoun, 2001) works, Buddhist female monkery is described in the context of monkery and monastery development in Ancient India.

Prajnaparamita, or Blessed Mother Heart of Wisdom Perfection is a part of the Female Principle. A human eliminating egoism in him comes to soul clarity, when Buddha appears inside his entity. He achieves wisdom or prajna. Combination of prajna (wisdom), the feminine principle, with good activity, (upai) the masculine principle, allows achieving spiritual heights and do good to all living creatures. We stress that "not just achieve spiritual heights" but with high spiritual knowledge "serve for the good of all living beings", that is to achieve one of the main perfection in Buddhism. (Rosenbergh, 1991).

Buddha advised on the roles and statuses of both genders in a family, which determine the culture of mutual respect. For example, in Sangha he described the responsibilities of a husband and wife:

A husband must: respect, be polite, faithful, hand her power over, present her jewelries.

A wife must: be hospitable to the relatives from both sides, faithful, save their property, have home-making skills (Dhammapada, 1960).

Buddha, knowing that tsar Pasenady from Kosala was displeased to know that his queen gave birth to a girl instead of a desired son assured a king: "A woman, my tsar, can be better than a man. She can be wise and virtuous, a loyal wife respecting her mother-in-law. ("Collection of joined lectures" – the third from five nikaya Sutta-Pitaka - CH 3.16).

Monks Code depicts Buddha's mercifulness to a woman witnessing possible sexual harassment of monks. We find two undetermined rules (aniyata) in "Patimokha" (the main list of rules which the monks follow), which claim to consider testimonies of trusted women by any sangha. Hence, women have the same potential for enlightenment as men. In early texts we find more distinct evidence of gender differentiation irrelevance for enlightenment. This proves the talk of a nun Sona with Mara who tries to talk her off enlightenment motivating that a woman may not achieve it. Sona answers that what has womanhood when sees Dhamma, when the mind is concentrated, when the knowledge is growing, there is no difference

if “I am a woman” or “I am a man” or “I am whatever” (“Collection of joined lectures” – the third from five nikaya Sutta-Pitaka - SN 5.2).

In the other place, Buddha evidences about greater number of inspired women learners. Including women into monks Sangha Buddha determined creation of the religious order, which is a breakthrough in female religious practice. It was courageous decision, taking into account the standards of that Indian society and problems it gave in a difficult and dangerous life in Ancient India. (Toynbee, 1995).

Besides, nun’s ordainment in Buddhism allowed women to withdraw from the household system of that time, but laid the groundwork for participation equally with men-monks in achieving the Third Value of Buddha – mind refinement. It means that Sangha where all Buddhist monks and nuns, both men and women, found their shelter.

Buddha protects nuns from dangers of austere life. Physical dangers happened on the way.

The examples of protection are:

- If a nun goes to a village or crosses the river alone, she should stay alone at night or go behind her fellow-traveler (s) alone ... this implies preliminary and consequent meetings of the Community.
- If some bikhuni (nun) stand or talks with a person in private, at night, without light - it must be admitted.
- If some bikhuni (nun) lustful, who received basic non-food or food from hands of a desired human, takes it chews it ... this implies preliminary and consequent meetings of the Community.

The same rules are for monks who, though restricted by the oath, undergo lust and regulate their interaction with nuns. For example:

- If some bkhikhu (a monk) is sitting with a bikhuni (nun) in private, it must be admitted.
- If some bkhikhu (a monk) by agreement gets into one boat together with a bikhuni (nun), going up the stream or down the stream – except crossing the river – it must be admitted (Chung, 1999).
- Buddha cared that nuns and monks did not get into traditional roles did not do harm to nuns. Nuns’ Patimokka, for example, contains a rule:
 - If some bikhuni (a nun), when a bkhikhu (a monk) goes, splashes water on him or fans him it must be admitted.
 - More often it is a monk who will apply the rule:
 - If some bkhikhu (a monk) has used clothes, washed, dyed, or hackneyed by bikhuni (a nun), not related with him, these clothes must be confiscated and ruined.
 - If some bkhikhu (a monk) eats or consumes something, having received it with her hands from the hands of not related bikhuni (a nun) in the inhabited area, he should admit it: “Friends, I’ve committed the wrong action, which I must admit. I admit it”.

However, it is informative to observe, that contemporary nuns, in Theravada countries, who are not completely defined as bikhuni (a nun) and do not correspond to these original rules usually get into this

intended role of serving monks, exactly as Buddha was afraid of Women's perfection. In Suttas Buddha praises nuns' achievements. At least one nun Dhammadinna is mentioned in Suttas, in laconic aphorisms, where Buddha mentions, that he would explain this or that theme as she did. The Therigati, part Khuddaka Nikaya in Suttas, is a poem collection by early enlightened nuns which are the only scripts in all world religions directly devoted to religious experience of women (www.palitext.com).

Buddha's advance of women's religion and his early learners was successful in early Buddhism. The record made by tsar Ashoki, the Emperor of Great India and great doer and follower of Buddhism in III century BC, gives us a unique image of Buddhism state in India in two centuries after Buddha by his acts in the form of scripts in the stone. Tibetan princess – Eshe Tsogel, who lived in the 7th century, is mentioned in all biographies of the great Guru Padmasambkhava. She was gifted to Padmasambkhava by tsar Trisong Detsenom and later became his spiritual wife. Padmasambkhava basing on saintly life explained her Four Noble Truth. Then the princess studied Tripitaka (the learning common for all Buddhist schools, which contains the collection of rules for conduct, cosmogony and metaphysics). She learnt the karma law and what should be avoided in the behaviour, and some other information.

In the earliest Buddhist scripts many monks and nuns were called after their achievements as teachers, scientists and workers of the Good, including his own daughter Ashoki, Ven, or princess Sanghamita, who started nun Sangha in Sri-Lanka. It is interesting to note that the nuns' names are mentioned in these scripts as often as monks' names. This evidences about high respect of tsar Ashoka to nuns' Sangha, their achievements, and Buddha's compassionate and sage advice favorable to monks practice in unfavorable for women cultural environment.

Tkheravada Patimokkha, the main list of rules, which includes 227 rules for monks and 311 for nuns and other vinayika traditions. The number of rules is often considered as a gender tendency, but the real reasons do not accept this simple explanation.

The main reason for such a numerous list of rules for nuns is that nuns' Patimokkha was done later than monks' Patimokkha. Each of the lists is a picture of the aim, one was created earlier than the other. In fact, this list of rules increased during a very long period of time, some rules are for monks, the other are for nuns, but the main part is equivalent for both – monks and nuns.

Every Patimokkha is some kind of a main list for remembering and collective reading. Many rules for monks and nuns in Vinaya (Vinaya Pitaka, "Discipline Basket") are listed in "Monks Patimokkha".

Nuns' Patimokkha additionally includes most of the rules from Garudkhama, and nuns' Patimokkha does not include them. As it has been noted different rules protect nuns from harassment caused by gender factors in nuns interaction with monks and laypeople. Some of them are applied only to nuns that caused complaints of nuns against the wrong behaviour of monks. Nuns have more rules regulating sexual behaviour. The list of rules for every order both provides celibacy and helps monkery avoid compromising situations and keeps decency of monastic practice. But nuns' situation is stricter in this respect, may be because nuns are subjected to masculine aggression and can easily get pregnant. The same as contemporary parents pay closer attention to their daughters than their sons. Buddha seems to share this point of view.

Nearly every sect had certain gender prejudice, surpassing Buddha's best intentions, for example monks disappearance in many traditions of Sangha. Supposingly, it appeared mostly thanks to relations and constant pressure of androcratic culture on the most part of Asia.

Buddha called monks “swimming upstream” that symbolizes constant disagreement between Drakhma-Vinaiya, on the one hand, and public opinion and habit, on the other, those who cross Samsara stream with tears and pain, do not do in sane and establish in sane.

Holy Scriptures proclaiming gender equality became a matter of the ancient history, especially in India; many Buddhism statements were misinterpreted in order to keep gender discrimination. For example, the statement that a woman can not become Buddha. Perhaps, initially it was mild in the context, not significant for spiritual expectations of religious women. But the meaning of “Buddha” changed in later tradition of makhayana. Then the word “Buddha” was reconsidered so that it really constrained spiritual expectations of religious women. It supported the common opinion of Makhayama that women have unequal ability to progress on this way, or to reach enlightenment they should reincarnate as men. In the same way the rules of Garudkhamma can be easily treated as proving imperfection of women’s abilities.

4. Purpose of the Study

To disclose relation of heuristic (constructive) and selective Buddhist function in formation, functioning and development of gender equality.

5. Research Methods

The article analyses gender equality in the form of adequate historic-methodological reconstruction. Selection is viewed in general, without referencing to its opposition – conclusion problem (deduction), in connection with genesis of Buddhistic ideas of gender equality (Torchinov, 2000). General scientific and theological research methods make theoretical-methodological basis of this research. We used historical-comparative method, historicity principle, succession, integrity method and system method.

6. Findings

The article fulfils adequate historic-methodological reconstruction of traditional Buddhism fundamental theory on the issue of gender equality in order to overcome the drawbacks of phenomenological and local approaches to reviviscence genesis.

7. Conclusion

Buddha was incapable of hating women. His learning expresses unlimited kindness to all creatures, even those who made harm. That is why he had unlimited kindness to women. When it comes to enlightenment there is no man or woman but only truth. Buddhism admits gender equality in achieving freeing and nirvana. Buddhism proclaims “awakening from ignorance” that is freeing oneself, and its main aim is freeing from sufferings. Different additional rules protect nuns from harassments caused by gender factors, in communicating with monks and laypeople. Monk code proves Buddha’s trust to women witnessing possible sexual abuse of monks. We find two uncertain (aniyata) rules in monks “Patimokha” (the main list of rules for monks), which requires any sinagha to consider evidences that women have equal potential for enlightenment as men. But, even proclaiming gender equality on the way for religious salvage, Buddhism could not make them equal. Buddistic tradition put emphasis on the ideal of a goody woman – a mother of future worthy Sangha members, who were brought-up according to Dharma. A woman in all times was

destined to bear children and be a husband servant. It contradicted her desire to become a nun and devote her life to Buddha. That is why the way from the obedient to the nun was long and complicated, when a woman had an opportunity to leave it or be determined to become a nun. (Ulanov, 2013).

According to Buddhism, a man or a woman is an enigma, belonging to the sluggish space only partially, because he appeared as the result of a break but not as gradual pace. Besides nature-mind a human has something not derived from the nature – a “jump over abyss”, but not consequent movement. Human skeleton is similar to that one of amphibians, fish, mammals – nature marks all her creatures by one sign. But, a human has something unperceptible.

From nature a human inherits something that keeps him an animal. His mechanics is the same as of any organism; as he is from this world and lives here, his mechanics is common to that of the world.

But what makes him a human is not inherited. “A humane human” is what differs us from animals. A spirituality is not inherited but created by a human himself, and no matter how long his cultural history is he creates it anew: spiritual is his own, you cannot infuse some other’s spirit. This self creation is the main suffering of a human, it cannot be eased. Humanity is born in torture to become the only virtue and support of a human. A spiritual experience of ancestors nearly means nothing for an individual comparing with species experience for an animal.

A cultural layer over instincts is thin and in some cases (few in number) can hold them. In eternal struggle of animality inside a human with his culture (humanity) — an eternal drama is how keep spiritual from dissolving in animality. A human goes through sufferings which is a consequence of his past karma (karma means “work” or action, but also it is a result of action during singular existence which influences the following ones and the character during all consequent lives). The reason for suffering is wishing or being devoted to wrong things or to right things in a wrong way. The main problem of a human is in values misarrangement, valuing things or people too high, to which they cannot correspond. Nothing in the world deserves absolute respect and can be a basis for existence.

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