



Gender Roles in Buddhism

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Abstract:

Some Buddhist practices and traditions don't support progressive gender roles which results in women still experiencing oppression within the Buddhist religion. With the rise of the feminist movement, women and members of the LGBTQ+ community use its theory in order undermine the traditional, heterosexual male-dominated gender hierarchy within Buddhism.

Oppression from Point of Birth:

- Birth of a women is seen as negative, while the birth of a male is valued.
- Paramatthajotika tells the story of a woman who wished to become a man because women are "disgusting".
- Forced to undergo many pregnancies, even when it is dangerous to their health until they produce a male
- Discouraged from wearing skirts, even when Buddhist males do.
- Buddhists in Myanmar believe that queer men's sexuality comes from bad karma in past lives. They are seen as "lesser than" Cis/ het women, reinforcing the idea that femininity (particularly femininity in men) is problematic and thus women are also put down because their femininity is seen as bad.
- the Implications of women's inferior status in Buddhism is reflective in the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Thailand.

Progressive Gender Roles:

- Feminist therapists pull from Buddhist practices/ ideals of self compassion when treating trauma from intimate partner violence, showing how Buddhism positively impacts the lives of women.
- Pali Buddhists support the traditional gender binary, however in instances of sex changes, they pass no judgement on the act of gender changes, reflecting the non judgemental nature of Buddha.
- There is a lack of specificity in LGBTQ+ language in Myanmar, creating an inclusive umbrella for women and LGBTQ+ members to unite under.
- Buddhist women in Taiwan are engaging in society in 2 different ways (mother and moral activist), which are both important and are both working towards challenging the patriarchal society.
- In Myanmar, a nationalist group named the Ma Ba Tha include women in leadership aiding Buddhist women to better lives.
- The bhikkhuni movement uses feminist ideals to destruct the male dominated hierarchy in Theravada Buddhism in Thailand.