



Women in Spiritual Practice : Role and Status in Buddhist and Jain Traditions

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Abstract

This article explores the roles, status, and experiences of women in the Buddhist and Jain traditions, with a particular focus on their monastic opportunities, social roles, and the rules that guide their spiritual practice. In both religions, women have historically sought spiritual growth and liberation, but the ways in which they could participate in religious life have been shaped by institutional structures, doctrinal guidelines, and social norms. In Buddhism, the establishment of the Bhikkhuni Sangha allowed women to pursue full ordination and a life dedicated to ethical conduct, meditation, and teaching. However, the Eight Garudhammas, additional rules imposed on nuns, placed certain limitations on their authority and interaction with monks. These rules, recorded in early Buddhist texts, reflect the historical challenges women faced in gaining recognition and equal status within the monastic community. Despite these restrictions, women have played an important role in preserving Buddhist teachings, leading meditation practices, and contributing to the development of spiritual institutions. In contemporary times, women in Buddhism continue to assert their presence through leadership roles, scholarly work, and revival of traditional monastic practices in countries such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Nepal.

In Jainism, women have long been recognized as capable of achieving spiritual purity and liberation, particularly within the Śvetāmbara tradition. Female monastics, known as Aryikas, follow strict vows and ascetic rules that guide their daily conduct, including practices of nonviolence, truthfulness, celibacy, and detachment from material possessions. These rules not only provide a path for spiritual growth but also structure the community and maintain discipline. Social expectations, however, often influence women's participation in religious life, limiting certain opportunities for leadership or ritual involvement. Despite these challenges, many Jain women have contributed significantly to religious scholarship, temple life, and ethical practice, demonstrating the resilience and adaptability of female spiritual participation.

This study highlights the similarities and differences between the two traditions, showing that while both provide frameworks for women's spiritual engagement, cultural practices and institutional rules have shaped their experiences in unique ways. The article emphasizes the evolving participation of women, the continuing struggle for equality within monastic structures, and the ways in which women's roles in Buddhism and Jainism reflect broader discussions on gender, ethics, and spiritual authority.

Keywords: Women in Buddhism, Women in Jainism, Monastic Life, Gender Roles in Religion Spiritual Authority, Religious Practices, Ethics and Asceticism

Introduction

The role and status of women in spiritual and religious traditions have always been a subject of significant interest for scholars, practitioners, and society as a whole. In many religious systems, women have faced limitations in participation, leadership, and recognition. Buddhism and Jainism, two prominent religious traditions originating in ancient India, provide interesting and contrasting perspectives on women's spiritual opportunities and social roles. Both

religions emphasize ethical conduct, nonviolence, self-discipline, and the pursuit of spiritual liberation. However, the ways in which women can participate in religious life, attain spiritual authority, and engage with monastic practices differ considerably between these two traditions. Studying women's roles in these contexts is important because it sheds light not only on historical religious structures but also on contemporary challenges and opportunities for gender equality in spiritual communities.



In Buddhism, women have been part of the spiritual journey since the time of the Buddha. The establishment of the Bhikkhuni Sangha allowed women to take full ordination and follow a structured monastic life. Despite this opportunity, the introduction of rules such as the Eight Garudhammas imposed certain restrictions, including requirements that nuns show respect to monks regardless of seniority. These rules reflect the social and cultural attitudes of the time and highlight the challenges women faced in asserting spiritual authority. Studying these historical frameworks helps us understand how religious doctrines and social norms influenced the roles of women and how these limitations continue to affect Buddhist communities today.

In Jainism, women have long been recognized as capable of achieving spiritual liberation, especially within the Śvetāmbara sect. Female monastics, known as Aryikas, observe strict vows that guide ethical conduct, ascetic practices, and daily life. These rules provide women with a structured path for spiritual development, but societal expectations often limit their opportunities for leadership or participation in major rituals. Understanding the position of women in Jainism provides insights into how religious ethics, ascetic discipline, and social norms intersect to shape women's spiritual roles.

The objective of this study is to offer a comparative analysis of women's participation in Buddhism and Jainism, focusing on monastic opportunities, social roles, and gender perspectives. By examining historical texts, monastic codes, and contemporary practices, this study aims to highlight both the challenges and advancements that women have experienced in these traditions. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the importance of recognizing women's contributions to religious communities and understanding the ways in which evolving social attitudes continue to influence their spiritual engagement. This introduction sets

the stage for a deeper exploration of women's experiences, rules, and opportunities in Buddhism and Jainism, providing a foundation for a broader discussion on gender, ethics, and spiritual practice.

Historical Context

Understanding the historical context of women's roles in Buddhism and Jainism is essential to appreciate their spiritual and social positions. Both religions emerged in ancient India around the 6th–5th centuries BCE, a period when patriarchal social norms heavily influenced daily life. Women were often confined to domestic roles, responsible for household management, child-rearing, and supporting male relatives. Religious participation for women was limited, and opportunities for leadership or spiritual authority were rare. Despite these societal constraints, both Buddhism and Jainism recognized women's potential for spiritual growth and offered structured paths for their engagement, though in different ways.

Women in Ancient Buddhism: Spiritual Practice,

Rules and Social Norms

In ancient Buddhism, women were granted opportunities for spiritual practice and monastic life, though often within frameworks that reflected the societal norms of the time. The establishment of the Bhikkhuni Sangha by the Buddha allowed women to become fully ordained nuns, a significant step in religious inclusion. However, the introduction of the Eight Garudhammas, additional rules for nuns, imposed certain limitations, such as requiring nuns to show respect to monks regardless of seniority. These rules highlight the gendered dynamics within early Buddhist monasticism.

Despite these constraints, women like Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, the Buddha's aunt and stepmother, played pivotal roles in the early community. She was the first woman to be ordained as a nun and is revered for her dedication and leadership. Additionally, texts



like the Therīgāthā (Verses of the Elder Nuns) provide insight into the lives and spiritual attainments of early female monastics, showcasing their contributions to the Buddhist tradition.

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī : The First Buddhist Nun

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was born into a noble family in the city of Hamsāvati during the time of Buddha Padumuttara. Inspired by witnessing a bhikkhunī being honored by the Buddha, she aspired to achieve the same distinction. In her subsequent life, she was reborn as the younger sister of Mahāmāyā, the mother of Siddhārtha Gautama, and became his aunt and stepmother. After King Suddhodana's death, Gotamī, along with 500 women, approached the Buddha to request ordination. Initially, the Buddha refused, but after Ananda interceded on her behalf, Gotamī agreed to accept the Eight Garudhammas, and she was ordained as the first bhikkhuni.

The Therīgāthā: Voices of Early Buddhist Nuns

The Therīgāthā, part of the Pāli Canon, is a collection of poems by early female monastics. These poems offer personal accounts of their spiritual journeys, struggles, and attainments. For instance, the verse of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī reflects her deep understanding and practice of the Dhamma. The Therīgāthā serves as a testament to the spiritual achievements of women in early Buddhism, highlighting their roles in preserving and transmitting the teachings.

The Eight Garudhammas: Rules for Nuns

The Eight Garudhammas (Pali: aṭṭha garudhamma) were additional rules imposed on Buddhist nuns when the Bhikkhuni Sangha (community of nuns) was first established by the Buddha. These rules acted as conditions for women to be granted full ordination. On one hand, they opened the door for women to participate in monastic life, which was revolutionary in ancient India. On the other hand, the rules

placed women in a subordinate position to monks, regardless of age or seniority. This reflects the gendered dynamics of the time, where even religious life mirrored wider social hierarchies.

The Eight Garudhammas are as follows:

1. **Seniority to monks:** A nun, even if ordained for a hundred years, must respect and bow to a monk ordained that very day.
2. **Residence:** A nun must not spend the rainy-season retreat in a place where there are no monks.
3. **Fortnightly rituals:** Nuns must request monks to come to them for uposatha (fortnightly recitation of rules), teaching, and guidance.
4. **Rains-retreat ceremony:** After the rains retreat, nuns must perform the pavāraṇā (confession ceremony) before both monks and nuns.
5. **Discipline:** A nun who has committed a grave offense must undergo mānatta (discipline/penance) for half a month under both monks and nuns.
6. **Higher ordination:** A woman must receive higher ordination (upasampadā) from both communities, first from the nuns and then from the monks.
7. **Admonition:** A nun must never abuse or insult a monk in any way.
8. **Teaching:** Nuns are not permitted to teach monks, but monks may teach nuns.

These rules ensured that women could enter the monastic path but under conditions that highlighted male authority. Despite this, many nuns like Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī (the Buddha's foster mother and the first bhikkhuni) and the elder nuns in the Therīgāthā attained high spiritual realization. Their poems and teachings show that women were equally capable of enlightenment, even within restrictive structures.

Comparison with Jainism and Marriage

Like Buddhism, Jainism also gave women a place in religious life. In Jainism, women who took monastic vows were called sādhvīs. Sādhvīs observed the five great

vows—non-violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-attachment.

Jain texts such as the Bhadrabāhu Samhitā and the Ācāranga Sūtra clearly outline the rules and discipline for sādhvīs. The life of a sādhvī was marked by strict austerity and restraint. They renounced household life, marriage, and material comforts to follow the monastic path.

On the other hand, women in Jain society who lived as lay followers also played an important religious role. Marriage was a central part of their lives. Laywomen:

- Observed vows and fasts (such as during the Paryushana festival),
- Preserved religious traditions within the household,
- Imparted religious education to children,
- Inspired the family to follow religious conduct.

Thus, Jainism offered women two paths:

1. **The monastic path** – where sādhvīs practiced strict asceticism,
2. **The household path** – where women, as wives and mothers, performed religious duties.

Women's Two Spiritual Paths in Jainism

Jainism recognized and institutionalized **two distinct spiritual paths for women**, reflecting both the ascetic ideal and the realities of family life

The Monastic Path (Sādhvīs)

Women who renounced worldly life became sādhvīs (female ascetics). Their practice was grounded in the Five Great Vows (Mahāvratas):

Ahimsa (Non-violence)

Satya (Truthfulness)

Asteya (Non-stealing)

Brahmacharya (Celibacy)

Aparigraha (Non-possession)

The Ācāranga Sūtra, one of the oldest Jain texts, lays down rules for ascetics including women, emphasizing strict control of body, speech, and mind, as well as the renunciation of sensual pleasures. For example, the text says:

"A nun should wander restrained, guarding her speech, guarding her mind, restrained in thought, restrained in sense-perception."(Ācāranga Sūtra, Book I, Lecture 6)\

The Bhadrabāhu Samhitā also highlights the conduct of sādhvīs, focusing on austerity, humility, and discipline. These sources show that women were expected to follow the same severe asceticism as male monks, although with greater emphasis on modesty and purity.

Role of Sādhvīs:

- They renounced marriage and family life completely.
- Practiced fasting, meditation, and penance.
- Were seen as role models of piety and self-restraint.
- Many became revered teachers within Jain communities.

2. The Household Path (Gṛhasthī Women)

For women who did not choose asceticism, Jainism gave a respected role within the householder (śrāvaka/śrāvikā) tradition.

Marriage was considered central for laywomen, but this did not reduce their religious importance. Women actively contributed to the household's religious life. Jain scriptures, such as the Upāsaka Daśāḥ (Ten Chapters on Lay Followers), emphasize the duties of lay devotees, which include both men and women.

Roles of Household Women

- **Fasting and Rituals:** Women took vows like the pañcha-anubhrata (five lesser vows) and practiced fasting during festivals like Paryushana and Sāmvaṣarī.
- **Transmission of Faith:** Mothers taught children Jain values such as non-violence and compassion.
- **Household Dharma:** They preserved religious traditions through daily rituals, temple visits, and charity.
- **Support for Monastics:** Laywomen often supported monks and nuns by providing alms, clothing, and shelter.



This dual structure gave women a clear space within Jain society: either complete renunciation as *sādhvīs* or devotion through family and religious duties as wives and mothers.

In Buddhism, nuns were granted ordination but were bound by the Eight Garudhammas, which placed them in a subordinate position to monks. In Jainism, *sādhvīs* were ordained with equally strict discipline and ascetic codes. In both traditions, renunciation of marriage was an essential part of monastic life. However, Jainism also provided laywomen with a significant religious role, while Buddhism often regarded marriage mainly as a worldly attachment that hindered the path to liberation.

Women in Ancient Jainism: Spiritual Liberation and Monastic Life

In ancient Jainism, women were recognized as capable of achieving spiritual liberation, with structured roles within the monastic community. The *Bhadrabāhu Samhitā*, an ancient Jain text, outlines the roles and rules for female ascetics, emphasizing their commitment to nonviolence, truth, and ascetic practices. This text reflects the structured approach to spiritual life for women in Jainism.

The Bhadrabāhu Samhitā: Legal and Social Framework

The *Bhadrabāhu Samhitā* serves as a significant text in understanding the legal and social status of women in ancient Jain society. It provides insights into inheritance rights, succession, and the legal standing of women, indicating a progressive approach to gender roles in that era. The verses from the book have been studied to correlate the content with the variables associated with the dignity of women in that era. This research highlights the importance of women's contributions to maintaining and propagating the Jain faith.

Monastic Life for Women: The Role of Sādhvīs

Women in Jainism held significant roles in religious practices and community life. They were active participants in rituals, festivals,

and the transmission of religious teachings. The *Bhadrabāhu Samhitā* and other Jain scriptures highlight the importance of women's contributions to maintaining and propagating the Jain faith. Female ascetics, known as *sādhvīs*, adhered to strict vows and disciplines, embodying the Jain principles of nonviolence (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), non-stealing (*asteya*), celibacy (*brahmacharya*), and non-attachment (*aparigraha*).

The historical context of women in ancient Jainism reveals a complex interplay between spiritual opportunities and societal norms. While women were granted avenues for spiritual engagement, these opportunities were often shaped by the prevailing gender norms and societal structures. Understanding this historical backdrop is crucial for appreciating the evolving status and contributions of women in Jainism.

Buddhism and Jainism reveal that while both traditions provided avenues for women's spiritual engagement, these opportunities were often shaped by the prevailing gender norms and societal structures. The primary texts and historical figures from these traditions illustrate the complexities and nuances of women's roles in ancient religious practices. Understanding these historical perspectives is crucial for appreciating the evolving status and contributions of women in these spiritual communities.

Monastic Opportunities: Bhikkhuni Sangha and Aryikas

Monastic life has been a central aspect of both Buddhism and Jainism, providing women with structured paths to spiritual growth, discipline, and liberation. While opportunities for women in religious communities were limited by social norms, both traditions developed formal frameworks to integrate female practitioners. These frameworks included specific monastic orders, vows, rules, and practices that defined women's spiritual lives.

Buddhism: Bhikkhuni Sangha



In Buddhism, the Bhikkhuni Sangha represents the formal monastic order for women. It was established by the Buddha after his stepmother and aunt, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, requested ordination for herself and other women. Initially, the Buddha hesitated, citing social norms and potential challenges, but he eventually agreed after the intercession of his disciple Ananda. The Bhikkhuni Sangha allowed women to become fully ordained nuns, giving them access to study, meditation, teaching, and participation in the monastic community.

Vows and Discipline in the Bhikkhuni Sangha

Nuns in the Bhikkhuni Sangha followed the Vinaya Pitaka, the code of monastic discipline, which included rules on conduct, speech, and interaction with monks and laypeople. The Eight Garudhammas were additional rules specifically for nuns. These included:

- 1 A nun, even if senior, must bow to a monk, regardless of his seniority.
- 2 Nuns must seek higher ordination from monks.
- 3 Nuns cannot admonish monks directly.
- 4 Other rules emphasized deference, obedience, and proper conduct.

While these rules aimed to maintain harmony within the Sangha, they also reflected the gender hierarchy of the time. Despite limitations, women like Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and later prominent nuns contributed significantly to teaching, preserving texts, and guiding novice nuns. Primary sources such as the Therīgāthā (Verses of the Elder Nuns) provide direct evidence of the spiritual achievements and daily lives of early Buddhist nuns (Therīgāthā, Pāli Canon, 1st–3rd century BCE).

Jainism: Aryikas

In Jainism, the female monastic order is composed of Aryikas, women who take full vows of asceticism. Unlike early Buddhist nuns, Jain female ascetics often lived in both solitary and community settings, strictly following vows such as:

Ahimsa (Nonviolence): Avoiding harm to all living beings, even insects.

Satya (Truthfulness): Speaking truthfully in all circumstances.

Asteya (Non-stealing): Avoiding taking anything not willingly given.

Brahmacharya (Celibacy): Complete sexual abstinence.

Aparigraha (Non-possessiveness): Avoiding attachment to material goods.

These vows structured daily life, guiding ethical conduct, meditation, and rituals. Aryikas often lived under the guidance of experienced monastics and were active participants in festivals, temple rituals, and community teachings. Historical evidence, such as the **Bhadrabāhu Samhitā**, outlines these roles, emphasizing both the spiritual and social responsibilities of women in Jainism (Bhadrabāhu Samhitā, c. 4th century BCE).

Rules and Limitations

Although both traditions provided monastic opportunities for women, limitations were present:

Buddhism: The Eight Garudhammas placed nuns in a subordinate position relative to monks, limiting leadership opportunities. Certain rituals and teaching responsibilities were restricted to senior monks, and nuns often required approval from monks for ordination or higher spiritual activities.

Jainism: While Aryikas could achieve liberation, societal norms sometimes restricted women's participation in leadership, community decision-making, or certain ascetic practices requiring travel or public presence.

Comparative Perspective

Both traditions emphasized rigorous discipline and ethical conduct for women, highlighting a belief in women's spiritual capacity. However, Buddhism formalized the female monastic community with specific rules that codified hierarchy, whereas Jainism emphasized personal ascetic discipline, with women's social participation embedded within broader community norms.



Modern Implications

Today, both traditions are revisiting these monastic frameworks. In Buddhism, efforts are underway in countries like Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Nepal to revive Bhikkhuni ordination fully, recognizing gender equality within the Sangha. In Jainism, Aryikas continue to uphold traditional vows while also participating in educational and leadership initiatives within their communities.

Social Roles and Gender Perspectives:

Women in Buddhism and Jainism

In both Buddhism and Jainism, women have historically balanced their spiritual pursuits with societal and domestic responsibilities. Their roles were shaped not only by religious doctrines but also by social norms, family expectations, and cultural practices. Understanding these roles provides insight into the broader participation of women in religious life and the unique challenges they faced.

Buddhism: Domestic Roles and Education

In ancient Buddhist society, women were often expected to manage domestic duties while also pursuing spiritual growth. Many women joined the Bhikkhuni Sangha after raising families or managing household responsibilities. For instance, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had already been the head of her household before becoming the first Buddhist nun, demonstrating that spiritual life was not necessarily in conflict with domestic experience (*Therīgāthā*, Pāli Canon, 1st–3rd century BCE).

Education for women in Buddhist contexts often included instruction in Dhamma, meditation, and ethical conduct. While formal education was limited compared to male monastics, texts like the *Therīgāthā* reveal that nuns were engaged in learning and memorizing Buddhist scriptures, delivering teachings, and guiding novices. Women also participated in rituals, festivals, and community observances, contributing to the spread and preservation of Buddhist practices.

Societal expectations, however, often imposed limitations. Women were required to follow the Eight Garudhammas, which reinforced a hierarchical relationship with monks and restricted certain leadership roles. Even within the monastic community, senior nuns had to show respect to monks regardless of age or spiritual attainment. Despite these constraints, female monastics gained recognition for their wisdom, discipline, and contributions to the community.

Jainism: Domestic and Community Roles

In Jainism, women's roles were similarly intertwined with family and society. While female ascetics (*sādhvīs*) pursued rigorous spiritual discipline, laywomen engaged actively in religious rituals, temple worship, and the teaching of ethical principles. Jain women were often responsible for performing daily pujas, participating in festivals such as Paryushana, and ensuring that religious practices were observed within their households (*Bhadrabāhu Samhitā*, c. 4th century BCE).

Education in Jainism emphasized ethical conduct, scriptural knowledge, and practical skills for maintaining religious observances. Women learned the Jain principles of nonviolence (*ahimsā*), truth (*satya*), and self-restraint (*brahmacharya*) and passed them on to younger generations. Historical records indicate that some women were highly learned, acting as teachers, writers, and custodians of religious knowledge.

Societal expectations in Jainism often placed limits on mobility, leadership, and public religious participation. While women could become Aryikas and achieve spiritual liberation, many were expected to follow domestic responsibilities before entering monastic life. Despite these limitations, Jain women made significant contributions to the spiritual and social life of their communities. Participation in Rituals and Religious Life

Both Buddhist and Jain women actively participated in rituals and festivals. In



Buddhism, women contributed to offerings, meditation gatherings, and public teachings. In Jainism, women were central to temple ceremonies, fasting rituals, and the transmission of religious stories. These practices allowed women to exert influence in religious spaces and ensured the continuation of spiritual traditions.

The social roles and gender perspectives in Buddhism and Jainism reveal a complex interaction between spiritual opportunities and societal norms. Women were able to engage deeply in religious life, both as monastics and lay practitioners, but their participation was often shaped by domestic responsibilities, education, and societal expectations. Primary sources such as the *Therīgāthā* and the *Bhadrabāhu Samhitā* highlight both the challenges and contributions of women, illustrating how they preserved, transmitted, and enriched spiritual traditions while navigating social limitations.

Comparative Analysis: Women in Buddhism and Jainism

The roles of women in Buddhism and Jainism share many similarities but also reflect significant differences shaped by religious doctrines, monastic rules, and social customs. Comparing these two traditions helps us understand how cultural norms and institutional frameworks influenced women's spiritual opportunities and societal participation.

Similarities

Both Buddhism and Jainism recognize the spiritual potential of women and provide avenues for them to pursue religious life. In Buddhism, the Bhikkhuni Sangha allowed women to receive full ordination and practice meditation, ethical conduct, and teaching (*Therīgāthā*, Pāli Canon, 1st–3rd century BCE). In Jainism, women could become Aryikas, following strict vows of nonviolence, truth, celibacy, and non-possession (*Bhadrabāhu Samhitā*, c. 4th century BCE). In both traditions, women contributed actively to the preservation and transmission of religious teachings, whether through

teaching novices, participating in rituals, or memorizing sacred texts.

Another similarity is the emphasis on ethical discipline and ascetic practices. Both Bhikkhunis and Aryikas adhered to structured daily routines, meditation, and moral conduct, demonstrating that spiritual attainment was not limited by gender. Women in both religions were also respected for their spiritual knowledge and ability to guide others within their communities, even if leadership opportunities were limited.

Differences

Despite these similarities, there are notable differences in structure and social integration. Buddhism formalized female monastic life with the creation of the Bhikkhuni Sangha and the Eight Garudhammas, which placed nuns in a subordinate position relative to monks. This hierarchy limited nuns' authority and public roles, even when they were senior in experience or age. In contrast, Jainism emphasized personal ascetic discipline over hierarchical control.

Aryikas could achieve spiritual liberation and maintain significant influence within their communities, although social norms often restricted their leadership in public religious spaces.

Education also differed between the two traditions. Buddhist nuns received instruction primarily in meditation, Vinaya rules, and scripture recitation, while Jain women balanced monastic learning with ritual expertise, domestic education, and ethical instruction in family settings.

Impact of Rules and Social Customs

In both traditions, formal rules and societal expectations shaped women's opportunities. The Eight Garudhammas in Buddhism reflected broader patriarchal norms, requiring nuns to show deference to monks, while still allowing for spiritual development. In Jainism, social expectations around family, domestic duties, and mobility influenced women's participation, although



ascetic vows provided a path for autonomy and spiritual focus.

These rules and customs impacted not only the daily lives of women but also their social status and visibility within religious communities. In both cases, women navigated these limitations creatively, contributing to the growth and continuity of their traditions while gradually challenging restrictions through practice, teaching, and scholarship.

The comparative analysis highlights that Buddhism and Jainism share a fundamental respect for women's spiritual capacity but differ in implementation. Buddhism emphasizes structured hierarchy within monastic life, while Jainism emphasizes personal discipline and ethical responsibility. In both cases, rules and social norms shaped women's experiences, yet women in both traditions demonstrated resilience and agency, leaving a lasting impact on their religious communities.

Conclusion

The study of women in Buddhist and Jain traditions reveals both the opportunities and challenges they have faced in pursuing spiritual life. In Buddhism, the establishment of the Bhikkhuni Sangha marked a historic moment for female monastics, offering a structured path for ordination, meditation, and teaching. Texts like the *Therīgāthā* and the Eight Garudhammas illustrate both the achievements and the limitations placed on women, reflecting the broader social and cultural norms of the time. Women such as Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī played pivotal roles in establishing the Sangha and preserving Buddhist teachings, demonstrating that women were active contributors to spiritual life despite hierarchical restrictions.

In Jainism, women have long been recognized as capable of achieving spiritual liberation. Female ascetics, or Aryikas, follow strict vows of nonviolence, truthfulness, celibacy, and non-attachment, reflecting a disciplined path toward enlightenment. The *Bhadrabāhu Samhitā* and other Jain texts highlight their religious,

ethical, and community contributions. Even when societal norms limited public participation, women actively engaged in rituals, festivals, teaching, and the transmission of religious knowledge, reinforcing their central role within the tradition.

Comparative analysis shows that while both traditions value women's spiritual potential, Buddhism emphasizes structured monastic hierarchy, whereas Jainism emphasizes personal discipline and ethical practice. In both cases, social customs and monastic rules influenced women's roles but did not prevent them from contributing meaningfully to their religious communities.

Overall, the study underscores the resilience, agency, and enduring impact of women in Buddhism and Jainism. Their experiences demonstrate a dynamic interplay between religious doctrine, societal expectations, and personal spiritual ambition. Recognizing and understanding these contributions provides valuable insights into the evolution of gender roles in spiritual traditions and offers lessons for contemporary efforts toward equality and inclusion in religious life.

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