

Fighting for Equality in Early Buddhism

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Abstract : During Buddha's time in the 5th century BCE, the Indian society was organized by a social stratification system called "the caste system" (Skt. varna), which still exists today. The origination of the caste system can be traced back to 1500 BCE within the ancient Vedic texts of the Aryans, the Indo-European nomadic people who migrated and settled in the Indus Valley region. However, the four-tiered hierarchical nature of the caste system created inequality, privilege, and discrimination based on hereditary transmission. After renouncing his royal status as a prince, Siddhartha Gautama spent six years in the forest, practiced austerities, mastered meditation, and eventually realized enlightenment. Thereupon, now referred to as "Shakyamuni Buddha" or "sage from the tribe of Shakya who has become awake," the Buddha founded the Sangha, a community of monks, nuns, and lay followers, where everyone was equal and treated equally. After providing a brief overview of Buddha's time, this talk will examine Buddha's Dharma or teachings on equality and his creation of the Sangha as "society within a society, which had a dissolving effect on society."

Keywords : equality, women, buddhism, discrimination

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