

Mother is the one who feeds us *Amrta* or guides us towards *Nirvana*.

The Sri Lankan Sinhala Buddhist also worships a 'Mother Goddess' known as '*Pattini Meniyo*'. Her origin is South India, and known among the Tamil Hindu community in Sri Lanka as 'Kannaki' from the epic *Silapadikaram* of Ilango Adigal. "In the low country infectious diseases and children's illnesses were cured by Pattini. In other areas this role was taken over by *Kiri Amma*; sometimes the Kiri Ammas were viewed as servants of Pattini, sometimes as her manifestations."

Since, there had not been a mother figure in the Buddhist tradition, in the popular religion, to satisfy the need of a mother figure, other female deities or legendary figures may have been absorbed into popular Buddhism in the same manner the Hindu gods had been accommodated.

All Mothers, (*sabbe satta*, human or animal) cultivate *Brahma-viharas* (sublime attitudes) – *Metta*, *Karuna*, *Mudita*, *Upeksha*. (loving kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, equanimity). Motherhood is a higher state compared to a general man or a woman. In conceiving, carrying, delivering and caring for a child, she goes through an experience which no man could ever imagine. In Buddhism, Mother becomes one with the universe, or the Brahma. Her love is pure and unselfish, like the love of a Buddha, or a true god.

Motherhood has often been associated with the feminine, and in a patriarchal society as the inferior, weaker, second sex, even though in reality, in the entire animal kingdom, the female is the stronger, superior and more intelligent sex. Motherhood is a higher state

than merely being masculine or feminine. A mother rises beyond the mere female or the male. She can feel love, empathy, kindness through sharpened senses. From the moment her ovum is fertilized by a spermatozoon, she becomes the creator of a new life, she becomes one with the universe, while she nourishes the embryo with her own blood, and then with her own milk, and throughout the life of the progeny, with true loving kindness. Since Buddha was trying to show the path for all humanity to escape from their suffering, he would never have discriminated against the women or had any bias based on caste, gender or social status. However, cultural factors had greatly influenced the inequality even in the Buddhist society after Buddha.

As Mother represents feminine gender, however much Buddha preached against all inequality, the Mother was still a prisoner of the culture, of the social norms. She was compelled to care for her children in addition to all the other household chores. That is why among the Bhikkhuni Sangha, in ancient India, we have come across mostly grandmothers who did not have any domestic responsibilities, young unmarried women and courtesans, who never had any domestic duties. Many of them were also rich, with their own wealth, or enjoyed the wealth and power of their families. That is probably why we find 500 matronly women following Maha Prajapathi Gotami to seek ordination in the Bhikkhuni Sasana. We also find 500 ladies from the royal and elite families in Anuradhapura following queen Anula to establish the Sri Lanka Bhikkhuni Sasana on the arrival of Sanghamitta theri.

The young Mothers with young children had greater responsibilities at home, and did not