

**Sri Lanka International Journal of Buddhist Studies  
(SIJBS)**

**Volume IX (2024)**

**MAHĀPAJĀPATĪ ORDAINED AT VERY FIRST  
ENTREATY, UPASMPADĀ WITH EIGHT PRINCIPLES  
OF RESPECT**

*BY VEN. Dr. BHIKKHU MIHITA*

**Editor in Chief: Ven. Dr. Polgolle Kusaladhamm**

**Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy (SIBA)**

**Pallekele, Kundasale, Sri Lanka**

ISSN 2345-9700

# Mahāpajāpatī Ordained at Very First Entreaty, Upasmpadā with Eight Principles of Respect

By Dr. Bhikkhu Mihita

## ABSTRACT

This article seeks to show that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was ordained by the Buddha at the very first opportunity, and the Higher Ordination (*upasmpadā*) was given at Vesali, handing down the Eight Principles of Respect (*aṭṭhagarukadhamma*). Pointed out also are some erroneous readings of the text as well as dubious English translations.

## Critical terms and concepts

Ananda; Buddha; Higher Ordination; Kapilavathu; King Suddhodana; Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī; Rains Retreat; *Sotāpanna*; Empty house' (*suññāgāra*); Garu(ka)dhamma 'Principles of Respect'; MSUP (Mind-Sensory Ultra-Perception); *Psychological going forth*, Shaving off Hair and wearing robes as ordination; *Upasampadā*; Vesali;.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is on *the ordination of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī*. Going against the prevailing politically correct view, of both scholars and Sangha, it seeks to show that she was indeed ordained *on the very first entreaty itself* made by her, Buddha spending the Rains Retreat in hometown Kapilavathu, following the passing away of King Suddhodana. The narrative regarding the topic under discussion is given in both the Sutta and the Vinaya Pitaka<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gotamī Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya (AN IV 274); Vin II 253-256.

## 2. MAHĀPAJĀPATĪ ENCOUNTERS WITH THE BUDDHA: A CHRONOLOGY

**Year 1 PE:** Buddha visits father King Suddhodana at his invitation in Kapilavatthu. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī becomes a *sotāpanna*.

**Year 5 PE:** Visiting Kapilavatthu again when his father is on his deathbed, he remains behind following the passing away, spending the Rains Retreat. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī visiting him, makes the first entreaty for *Women's Ordination* (i.e., not for her own ordination, although that would be implicit), understanding 'ordination' as *leaving the household*. Though cautioned against leaving home, she comes to be *ordained* by the Buddha by asking her to shave off her hair and don monastic robes

After establishing Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī into the Order, at the end of the Rains Retreat<sup>2</sup>, Buddha makes his way to Vesali. Ananda, now ordained, likely joins him, possibly with a few others, and continues to live in Vesali, but playing no particular role in relation to the Buddha.

**Year 7 PE:** The water dispute arises while the Buddha is in Vesali. And so he *flies* over, in a psi<sup>3</sup> skill, back to Kapilavatthu, and settles it. Impressed by the Dhamma, 250 each of Sakya and Kosala men requesting the going forth and given ordination, the 500 wives look to follow suit. Leading them, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī makes the second entreaty, still taking ordination to mean leaving home, when it is again turned down. Buddha returns to Vesali, 'going on tour', and likely taking no

---

<sup>2</sup> Notes Bodhi (Tr.), 2012, 1801,fn. 1728: "The chronology is unclear to me." The Commentary to AN states that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's visit to the Buddha occurred during the Rains Retreat following the Buddha's *first* visit to his father which was the first year Post-Enlightenment. But the matter may be resolved when it is taken to be on the *second* visit, as in our chronology.

<sup>3</sup> In parapsychology as in Western science, psi refers to psychic skills such as telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, psychokinesics, etc. Characterized for over 90 years as ESP (Extra-Sensory Perception), please see Mihita, 2021 for a repudiation and the suggested alternative nomenclature – **MSUP (Mind-Sensory Ultra-Perception)**.

less than a year or two. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and the women stay behind and continue their lives.

**Year 9 PE:** Likely under pressure from women, now seeing more and more men making it into the ranks of Sangha, but in a personal conviction as well, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī makes it to Vesali, along with a good number of committed Sakyan ladies, when she, now around or past 60, undertakes the long trek of over 200 to 300 km (but see later) to Vesali. Buddha, having waited for the *treasured* moment, hands down the GD, with Ananda serving as the medium / tool. GD accepted, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī receives her **Higher Ordination**. The accompanying ladies are offered the opportunity as well, allowing monks to ordain them.

## EXPANSION

We now expand upon this brief overview.

### Encounter 1: Buddha Visiting the Palace at Father's Request

The first time Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī meets the Buddha is one year following his Enlightenment when he visits his father<sup>4</sup>. But there is no record of any specific encounter with Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī on this occasion, except that she becomes a *Sotāpanna*, listening to the Teaching on the Dhammapāla Jataka given to the King<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> “Seven years later [counting from the time of renunciation], after word of his enlightenment reached Suddhodana, he sent nine emissaries to invite Siddhartha back to the Shakya land. The Buddha preached to the emissaries and their entourage, who joined the *Sangha*. Suddhodana then sent a close friend of Siddhartha, Kaludayi, to invite him to return. Kaludayi also chose to become a monk, but kept his word to invite the Buddha back to his home. The Buddha accepted his father's invitation and came to visit his home. During this visit, he preached the *dharma* to Suddhodana.” <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suddhodana>>.

<sup>5</sup> “In Dhammapāla, a village of Kāsi, there lived a family whose head was Mahādhammapāla. The Bodhisatta was his son, and was called Dhammapala-kumāra. He went to study at Takkasilā. There the teacher's eldest son died, but among all the lamentations it was noticed that Dhammapāla did not weep. Questioned by his fellows as to how he could refrain, he answered that as it was impossible for anybody young to die, and so did not believe his friend was dead. The teacher asked him about this, and found that in Dhammapāla's family no one had died young. Wishing to know if this were true, he left Takkasilā and went to the home of

## Encounter 2: Buddha Visiting the Dying King

The second time she was to meet the Buddha is when he visits his dying King four years later<sup>6</sup>. But again there is no specific recorded encounter with Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī.

## Encounter 3: Buddha Staying Behind for Rains Retreat

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's first direct encounter with the Buddha relating to the issue of women's ordination is when, following King Suddhodana's passing away, the Buddha stays behind in his hometown of Kapilavathu, on the rains retreat<sup>7</sup>:

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was dwelling among the Sakyans, staying at Kapilavatthu in the Nigrodha Park, observing the rainy season retreat together with a great company of monks. At that time Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī

---

Dhammapāla, carrying with him the bones of a goat. After his welcome had subsided, he announced to Dhammapāla that his son was dead, and begged him not to grieve. But Dhammapāla clapped his hands and laughed, saying that such a thing could never be as no member of their family ever died young. He then told the Brahmin, in answer to his query, that they owed their longevity to the fact that they lived good lives." The story was related to Suddhodana, who told the Buddha how, when the Buddha was practicing severe penances, some gods came to him (Suddhodana) and said that his son was dead. But he refused to believe them. Suddhodana was Mahādhammapāla and the teacher Sāriputta (J.iv.50-55). At the conclusion of the Jātaka, Suddhodana became an anāgāmī and Mahā-Pajāpatī Gotamī a *sotāpanna*. DhA.i.99; J.i.92."

<[http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali\\_names/maha/mahadhammapala\\_jat\\_447.htm](http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali_names/maha/mahadhammapala_jat_447.htm)>.

<sup>6</sup> "Four years later, when the Buddha heard of Suddhodana's impending death, he once again returned to his home

and preached further to Suddhodana at his deathbed. Finally he gained Arahantship." <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suddhodana>> It is to be noted that this visit is erroneously shown as the first. See Bodhi (Tr.), 2012, fn. 1728, p. 1801, indeed creating the confusion.

<sup>7</sup> As in the translation by Horner (Vin I.; Vin II 252). While AN 8.51 makes no specific mention of the

Buddha observing the rains retreat, it includes the line "having stayed at Kapilavatthu as long as he wanted" (*kapilavatthusmim yathābhirantaṃ viharitvā*) (as in Bodhi (Tr.), 2012, 1188). This clearly suggests that he didn't leave right after the funeral but stayed behind at Kapilavatthu to spend the Rains Retreat.

approached the Buddha, paid homage with her head at the Buddha's feet, stepped back to stand to one side and said:

“Blessed One, can women attain the fourth fruit of recluseship? For that reason [can] women in this right teaching and discipline *leave the household* out of faith, *becoming homeless* to train in the path?”

The Blessed One replied: “Now, Gotamī, do not have this thought, that in this right teaching and discipline women *leave the household* out of faith, *becoming homeless* to train in the path. Gotamī, you *shave off your hair like this, put on monastic robes and for your whole life, practice the pure holy life.*” [Here and next, italics added by way of highlighting.]<sup>8</sup> .

Request in the form of suggestion made thrice, Buddha gives the same answer.

#### Encounter 4: Following Water Dispute

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s second opportunity to raise the question about women leaving the household life comes when the Buddha arrives in Kapilavatthu to settle the dispute between the Sākiyans and the Koliyans as to the right to take water from the river Rohinī. When the dispute had been settled, and war avoided, the Buddha preached the Kalahavivāda Sutta<sup>9</sup>. Inspired, five hundred young men, 250<sup>10</sup> from each of Sākiyan and Koliyan<sup>11</sup>, join the Order. Abandoned by their husbands, and apparently desperate, their wives, too, go to the Buddha, led by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. And she pleads with him: “Lord, it were well that women should obtain the *going forth from home to homelessness* in this dhamma...”.

<sup>8</sup> ‘‘sādhu, bhante, labheyya mātuḡāmo tathāgatappavedite dhammavinaye agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajja’’nti. ‘‘Alaṃ, gotamī! Mā te rucci mātuḡāmassa tathāgatappavedite dhammavinaye agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajjā’’ti. (Vin II, Gotamī suttam, atthakkanipāṭapāli, 51).

<sup>9</sup> Sn 4.11. See also: DN 21; MN 18; Sn 5.14

<sup>10</sup> While the numbers are likely rounded, the number from each side being equal may also be from the pen of the scribes.

<sup>11</sup> Koliyans are related to Buddha on the mother’s side.

Request made thrice, and denied again, Buddha “set out on tour toward Vesali. Wandering on tour, he eventually arrived at Vesali”.<sup>12</sup>

### Encounter 5: Accepting Garudhamma

The final encounter with the Buddha comes when Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī shows up at the entrance of “the hall with the peaked roof in the Great Wood” in Vesali where the Buddha was staying. She goes there “with a good number<sup>13</sup> of Sakyan ladies<sup>14</sup>”, and stands with “bruised feet”<sup>15</sup>. Seeing them, Ananda comes to be moved, and talks to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, when he is told that they were here looking for ordination.

Ananda speaking to the Buddha on their behalf, the Eight Garudhamma come to be handed down. Accepted by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, she receives her *higher ordination*. While *the ordination is still only in relation to her*, it opens up the opportunity for the others. When this happens at the hands of the Sangha as per the Buddha’s direction, the wider **Women’s Order** comes to be established *formally*.

Here then are the ‘Eight Principles of Respect’ (*aṭṭha garudhamma*)<sup>16</sup>, the first being the seeming rub:

1. A nun who has been ordained even for a hundred years must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, salute with joined palms, do proper homage to a monk ordained but that day.

<sup>12</sup> Bodhi (Tr.), 2012, p. 1188. *Atha kho bhagavā kapilavatthusmiṃ yathābhirantaṃ viharitvā yena vesālī tena cārikaṃ pakkāmi. Anupubbena cārikaṃ caramāno yena vesālī tadavasari.* (AN IV 274).

<sup>13</sup> This is my translation, as in the English idiom, of *sambahulāhi sākiyānīhi saddhiṃ*, the term *sambahulā* translated as ‘several’ (Horner, 1992, 352) and ‘a number of’ (Bodhi (Tr.), 2012, 1188).

<sup>14</sup> But Yasodhara may not have been among them, understandably not wanting to exert any pressure on the Buddha.

<sup>15</sup> As in Ananda’s words to the Buddha: “her feet swollen and her body covered with dust body, miserable and saddened, weeping with a tearful face..”.

<sup>16</sup> VIN II 255 (Translation as in Horner (Tr.), 1992, 354-55).

2. A nun must not spend the rains in a residence where there are no monks.
3. Every half month a nun should desire two things from the Order of Monks: the asking as to the date of the Observance [*uposatha*] day, and the coming for the exhortation.
4. After the rains, a nun must 'invite' before both orders in respect of three matters, namely what was seen, what was heard, what was suspected.
5. A nun, offending against an important rule, must undergo *mānatta* discipline for half a month before both orders.
6. When, as a probationer, she has trained in the six rules for two years, she should seek higher ordination from both orders.
7. A monk must not be abused or reviled in any way by a nun.
8. From today on, admonition of monks by nuns is prohibited.

## DISCUSSION

We begin with the first entreaty made by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī at Encounter 3:

Q & A	MAHĀPAJĀPATĪ GOTAMĪ	BUDDHA
1	“Can women attain the fourth fruit of recluship?”	[Noble silence]
2	“For that reason [can] women in this right teaching and discipline leave the household out of faith, becoming homeless...”	“Now, Gotamī, do not have this thought, that in this right teaching and discipline women leave the household out of faith, becoming homeless to train in the path.”



3	... to train in the path?”	“Gotamī, you [a] <i>shave off your hair like this</i> , [b] <i>put on monastic robes</i> and [c] <i>for your whole life</i> [d] <i>practice the pure holy life.</i> ”
---	----------------------------	---

### CHART I: Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s Questions & Buddha’s Answers

First, as in Row 1, Col. 3, what Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī gets is a noble silence to her question, “Can women attain the fourth fruit of recluseship?”. It may be noted that when invited for alms by a devotee, Buddha’s acceptance was through silence. This then means that the Buddha’s response to her question was an agreement that yes, indeed, women can attain the fourth fruit.

But, as in Row 2, Col 3, the Buddha seeks to clearly hold off women in general. But this, however, was only by way of a cautioning about *leaving the household and going homeless*. He then proceeds to guide Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, as in Row 3, towards her *personal* ordination. The Buddha’s response then clearly shows that he goes beyond the general issue raised by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī at the collective level, taking it to the personal level, but that while hinting that the path was open to her towards liberation, there was no need to have the thought of leaving the palace.

It may be noted here that in separating the individual from the collectivity, he is also indeed *opening the door for women’s ordination* – i.e., by **admitting her** to

the monastic life. He specifically says, "... *shave off* your hair ..., put on *monastic robes*" and practice the pure holy life "*for your whole life*"<sup>17</sup>.

These words of the Buddha are not considered an 'ordination' by most. But why would robes be asked to be worn if not admitted to the order? Why would the hair be shaved? Having no hair and being in a robe are what mark a monk from the laity, then as it is today<sup>18</sup>. So, asking that she put on "*monastic robes*" and "*for your whole life*" should amply speak to a ordination. Wearing the robes means giving up lay clothing. Living with hair shaven and in monastic robes for the whole life means a *lifetime commitment* as in the case of male or female sangha even today.

Interpreting the directions to shave and put on robes as being no ordination can only be seen to be on the basis that it entailed no leaving of the household life, Gotamī, herself guided by it, given that male ordination, by now into its 5th year PE, required it. However, in recommending that she shave off and put on the monastic robes, it seems clear that the Buddha was in no way reversing the monastic code set up for the Bhikkhus. One of the three locations recommended by the Buddha as being appropriate for meditation and having a quiet life is an 'empty house' (*suññāgāra*)<sup>19</sup>. Buddha's expectations was that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī would naturally continue to be in the living quarters of the Palace, turning it into an 'empty house'.

---

<sup>17</sup> It may be noted that there is no call here to get a bowl, as in the case of male ordination, it being irrelevant in the context of not leaving the household, but called upon to shave her hair and put on monastic robes.

<sup>18</sup> Indeed in the traditional ritual in relation to male ordination, having the hair shaven off is also symbolic. The first thread of hair shaved off, the novice is to take it in his hand and contemplate on it as indicative of impermanence. So shaving off hair is no mere act of shaving but a highly symbolic initiation to the holy life.

<sup>19</sup> The other two are 'making it to the bush' or 'making it to the foot of a tree' (*araññagato vā rukkhamūla gato vā*). This third option may well have been included by the Buddha in the context for the likes of the royalty and the wealthy who may have access to a household setting freed of the standard distractions. The specificity of location can also be said to be in parallel to the specificity of 'foot of a tree' as distinct from the wider and unlimited locales of the forest. So indeed Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī could be said to be the proximate cause for including the third accommodation. Interestingly this third option may well fit with contemporary times as well.

Was continuing to live in the royal household an impediment to her spiritual life? Husband passed away, and son and grandson taken to a monastic life, who would be in her way, physically as also psychologically? So was there anyone in the royal palace that would be in her way? The only ones interacting with her in the palace would be her female attendants. Would they be in her way? Or would they be not the ones who would continue to ensure Mahāpajāpatī a regular meal and attend to her other personal needs? Would such attention be an attraction back to the lay life to one who has cut off the hair and donned the robes? Hardly for someone surely already on the path. Indeed if any, the attendants themselves might come to emulate living a solitary life, though not seeking ordination. So, in essence, then, the palace was indeed an ‘empty house’.

Living in the context of a house was therefore no impediment for her to take to a spiritual life, i.e., a monastic life. The three recommended locales - forest, at the foot of a tree and empty house, are mere facilitative contexts. And there is nothing to say that taming the mind cannot be done in a palace home setting, or that being in the bush or under a tree would guarantee it! To explain it by way of a metaphor, one needs a bed to sleep on. It is only to facilitate sleep. But the bed is not sleep itself! Sleeping could be on the floor as well. Likewise, the bush may be facilitative of meditation, as would be under a tree. But neither the bush, nor the shade of a tree or equally an empty house equates the holy life. That is to say that just as meditation is not affected by which of the three types of locations one were in, nor would living the holy life be affected by being at an empty palace, as in the context of the circumstances of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. Indeed living in an empty house in the context of the palace also, of course, meant safety and security, at a time in India when women were held in no high regard in society. If this be the case then, that would be to further argue that Mahāpajāpatī was by no means denied ordination as per her request, but the *Buddha, in his creativity, found a way of allowing it*. To repeat for emphasis, being in an ‘empty house’ at

the palace, living by herself, would take away nothing of the conditions that comes to be met through physically leaving the household life, and no impediment to living a spiritual life.

What is implicit in the Buddha's words is that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī is allowed 'leaving the household' *spiritually*, making it a ***psychological going forth***, this for a full lifetime. What she has been denied is the *physical* going forth, meaning, leaving the house to be homeless. In sum, then, it can be said that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, indeed, has been allowed to 'go forth'. But would that not be equivalent to, and symbolic of, 'leaving the household'?

This then means that *all three conditions for ordination had been met* in the case of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. But to the modern day scholar or researcher, leaving the household seems to be everything, never mind the quality of mind!

By contrast, the *earliest* male ordination had none of these three ingredients. It began simply with words - [Oh] Bhikkhu, or 'Come Bhikkhu' (*ehi bhikkhu*), or if more than one, *etha bhikkhave*. There is not even a mention of cutting off hair, getting into robes, or living the holy life for the full lifetime, nor even requiring a begging bowl.

There was no *initiation* even in relation to the Group of Five (*pañcavaggiya*). The introductory words as in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta are, "Thereupon the Exalted One addressed the group of five Bhikkhus as follows...", and with no call to leave the household life. But the compilers of the Tipitaka have clearly had no hesitancy in recognizing the five as being *ordained*.

The Buddha again addresses the group as 'O Bhikkhus', when they reply "Lord"<sup>20</sup>. Now there comes to be an acceptance of the Buddha as their Teacher, this establishing a clear Teacher-Disciple relationship. And such a relationship is no less clear when it comes to the Buddha and Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī when asked to shave off and don monastic robes.

It is understandable that in the case of the Group of Five, there was no call to leave the household life, since they were already 'wanderers' (*samana*) in the

---

<sup>20</sup> This is a poor translation of the term 'bhante', which means, "Venerable Sir". But the translation apparently has been made in keeping with the Hindu tradition, their mythical 'Gods' called 'Lords' (e.g., Lord Vishnu).

bush as was Samana Gotama himself. However, when it comes to the first *lay* male to be given ordination, namely Yasa, there was still no call to leave the household life either, even though he came from a luxury household life<sup>21</sup>. It was only *implicit*. The requirements of shaving the hair, putting on monastic robes and living a holy life for the full lifetime find no *explicit* expression either.

So while none of the aspects of a formal ordination was present in the case of Yasa, yet he is said to have (asked for, and) received *pabbajjā* ‘ordination’. When asked for the dual ordination, i.e., *upasampadā* as well, the Buddha’s words were, “Come, oh Bhikkhu. Well taught is the Dhamma. Lead the holy life to make a complete end of suffering”<sup>22</sup>.

For all the absence of formality and ritual when it comes to male ordination, nobody seems to deny that the one- or two-word call from the Buddha did not constitute an ordination. Nor is it denied that the verbal process relating to Yasa as not constituting an ordination either, even though it was ‘incomplete’ compared

to the finalized stage. Indeed when it comes to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, the word count was much, much more! Yet, it is not considered an ordination. Since this is as judged in comparison to the *advanced* stages of male ordination, it is to compare apples to *oranges*. An apple to apple comparison then would be *early* male initiation to *early* female initiation, while apples to oranges would be early female initiation to late male initiation.

If male ordination was now a grown up plant, it began with a single seed, namely, Kondañña, the first to gain insight to the Buddha’s teachings. Likewise can the Buddha’s proactive offer to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī be seen, at the deeper level, as the first single seed towards the plant(ing) of female ordination, she already a *sotāpanna*. So it can be said that in the process of initiating Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī

---

<sup>21</sup> See Narada, 1973 (2nd ed.), 59 ff.

<sup>22</sup> Notes Narada, 1973, 67 (ch 7, fn 3): “In the early days... , Upasampada, lit. replete with a higher morality, was granted with these words”.

with words and calling for change of look and attire, the Buddha was clearly giving her ordination.

Indeed, even at the point of laying down the GD, when the Buddha specifically says that accepting them would constitute Mahāpajāpātī Gotamī's **higher** ordination<sup>23</sup>, there was no *formal* ritual as in relation to male ordination of the time, specifically excluding the collectivity. Of course, we need to remind ourselves that excluding the collectivity would have no impact on Mahāpajāpātī Gotamī herself, already on the Path, spiritually as a *sotāpanna*, and externally, wearing monastic robes with hair shaven.

*So where then is the supposed denial of entry to the holy life for Mahāpajāpātī Gotamī?*

Just as Yasa knew that “Well taught is the Dhamma” by listening to the Buddha giving a teaching to his father, so had Mahāpajāpātī Gotamī, listening the Dhamma taught to her husband, not just once, but on two occasions – the first two visits of the Buddha to his father. So her case can be said to be closer to Yasa's than Kondañña's when the Dhamma was directed at the Group of Five.

If, as claimed with the above arguments, she had come to be admitted to the Order, one may ask why she was not addressed with the words ‘Oh Bhikkhuni’, paralleling the male-related ‘Oh, Bhikkhu’. One reason may be that the term had the connotation of the Buddha suggesting that she should be begging for alms, as is the meaning of the term *bhikkhunī*: “female beggar”. But that precisely is what the Buddha did not want her to be doing.

How much more evidence, then, do we need that Mahāpajāpātī Gotamī was indeed admitted to the order? Asking that she ‘shave off’ and ‘put on monastic robes’

---

<sup>23</sup> Notes Bodhi, “It is interesting how the subject of discussion shifts almost imperceptibly from the going forth (*pabbajjā*) of women to their full ordination (*upasampadā*)...” (Bodhi (Tr.), 2012, 1803, fn 1734).

can be said to make sure that she would get the message loud and clear that indeed she had now been admitted to the Order.

If we need any precedent in relation to male ordination, we have the case of Mahākassapa. It was a distinct form of ordination by “accepting an instruction” (*ovādapaṭiggahaṇūpasampadā*)<sup>24</sup>. This method of ordination, of course, is not shown in the Vinaya. But has Mahākassapa, who was responsible for the First Council, ever been considered to be not ordained? It is then the same method that is used by the Buddha in relation to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī as well.

It is clear that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had indeed “accepted the instruction” and done both – shaving and putting on robes. When she along with the other Sakyan ladies took to the road to Vesali to see the Buddha again, there is reference to barbers shaving off the hair of the ladies. This undoubtedly would have been at the behest of Mahāpajāpatī<sup>25</sup>.

But let us take none of the writer’s arguments to be valid. Still there is the case of the Buddha making “exceptions”, an example being in relation to Subhadda, the last to get ordained under him. The rule that had come to be established by now was that a disciple of another teacher looking for discipleship under the Buddha was to mark time for four months before being admitted. And, of course, by now, *upasampadā* was to be given after several years of *pabbajjā*. But says the Buddha, “I make individual exception”<sup>26</sup>, and then he asks Ananda to ordain him in his very presence, at both levels. So even if having no formal initiation of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī could be taken as by some to mean that she was not given ordination, taking the procedure as an exception made by the Buddha would take the last straw out of the hat of misreading!

<sup>24</sup> *“tasmā tiha te kassapa evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ tibbameva hirottappaṃ paccupaṭṭhitam bhavissati thesusu navesu majjhimesu cāti, ...”* (Vin 1. Pārājikakaṇḍam; 1. Paṭhamapārājikam; Sudinnabhāṇavāraṇṇanā).

<sup>25</sup> While in the Gotamī Sutta it is said that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, too, along with other ladies shaved off and put on yellow robes, this was clearly an offhanded input by the scribes.

<sup>26</sup> See Narada, 1973, 143 for details.

And the Buddha would certainly have been well aware that there was no need for Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to leave the household life, since attaining the fourth fruit of recluseship would be an inevitable outcome for a *Sotāpanna* that she already was – a stream going in one direction. In his psychic pro-cognition (*dibba cakkhu*), the Buddha was fully aware that regardless of where Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī would live, she was assured of attaining liberation in this very life.

So we ask again. Can it be any clearer that Pajāpatī was indeed ‘admitted to’, and not denied ordination?

The only point we need to note regarding the Eight Principles of Respect is the Buddha specifically says that accepting them would constitute Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s **higher** ordination.



**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (Tr.), 2012, Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Translation of Anguttara Nikaya), Wisdom.

Horner, I. B., 1992; 1993, *The Book of Discipline*, Vol V; 1992, Vol IV, Pali Text Society, UK.

Mihita, Bhikkhu, 2021, “ESP: Reality Turned Myth in Westernscience”, *Mindfield Bulletin*, 13.1, 319-.

Narada, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 1973, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, Singapore Buddhist Meditation Centre.

[http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali\\_names/maha/mahadhammapala\\_jat\\_447.htm](http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali_names/maha/mahadhammapala_jat_447.htm).

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suddhodana>.

<https://www.distancesfrom.com/np/distance-from-Kapilvastu-toVaishali/DistanceHistory/4993321.aspx>.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

AN        *Anguttara Nikaya*

MN        *Majjhima Nikaya*

DN        *Digha Nikaya*

Sp        *Sutta Pitaka*

Vin        *Vinaya Pitaka*