

Women in Pali Buddhism: Walking the Spiritual Paths in Mutual Dependence (Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism)

Pascale Engelmajer

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The P?li tradition presents a diverse and often contradictory picture of women. This book examines women's roles as they are described in the P?li canon and its commentaries. Taking into consideration the wider socioreligious context and drawing from early brahmanical literature and epigraphical findings, it contrasts these descriptions with the doctrinal account of women's spiritual abilities.

The book explores gender in the P?li texts in order to delineate what it means to be a woman both in the context in which the texts were composed and in the context of their ultimate goal - that of achieving escape from the round of rebirths. The critical investigation focuses on the internal relationships and dynamics of one tradition and employs a novel methodology, which the author calls "critical sympathy". This assumes that the tradition's teaching is valid for all, in particular that its main goal, nibb??a, is accessible to all human beings. By considering whether and how women's roles fit within this path, the author examines whether women have spiritual agency not only as bhikkhun?s (Buddhist nuns), but also as wives and mothers. It offers a new understanding that focuses on how the tradition construes women's traditional roles within an interdependent community. It aims to understand how what many scholars have seen as contradictory and inconsistent characterizations of women in Buddhism have been accepted and endorsed by the P?li tradition.

With an aim to show that the P?li canon offers an account of women that is doctrinally coherent and consistent with its sociological facts, this book will be of interest to students and scholars of Buddhism and Asian Religion.



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