

First Theravada Ordination of Bhikkhunis in Indonesia After a Thousand Years

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After being asleep for more than 1000 years in Indonesia, the lineage of Theravada bhikkhunis in Indonesia bounced back through Indonesia's first contemporary bhikkhuni ordination ceremony held on Vesak 2559 BE / 2015 CE, on Sunday (06/21/2015).

This ordination is a bright spot for the Indonesian Buddhist women who want to dedicate their lives by choosing to live the monastic way to realize the potential of spiritual attainment.

Aside from being a bright spot, the ordination aims to strengthen the four pillars of Theravada Buddhist sect in Indonesia, which consists of: male householders (upasaka), female householders (upasika), the Bhikkhu Sangha (male monastics), and the Bhikkhuni Sangha (female monastics).

The historic ordination was held at Wisma Kusalayani in Lembang, Bandung.

"This is a tremendous honor that Indonesia has hosted the international ordination of samaneris (prospective bhikkhunis) coming from abroad," said Bhikkhuni Santini, Chair of the Indonesian Theravada Bhikkhuni Association (Perbhiktin).

Ayya Santini, as she is more familiarly called, added that there were nine samaneris who underwent ordination, two of whom are from Indonesia and the other seven are from overseas. They were the bhikkhunis Vajiradevi Sadhika Bhikkhuni from Indonesia, Medha Bhikkhuni from Sri Lanka, Anula Bhikkhuni from Japan, Santasukha Santamana Bhikkhuni from Vietnam, Sukhi Bhikkhuni and Sumangala Bhikkhuni from Malaysia, and Jenti Bhikkhuni from Australia.

The ordination ceremony was led by the Venerable Bootawatte Saranankara from Malaysia as Bhikkhu Upajjaya and Bhikkhuni Santini as Bhikkhuni Upajjaya, as well as a number of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis from various countries who served as [Kammavacacariyas and] Kammavacarinis, and the invited witnessing quorum [of the Dual Sangha]. The ordination ceremony also received great attention in the presence of about 1,500 people to the extent beyond the seating capacity of the event.

The ordination ceremony began after lunch. The nine candidates for nuns performed circumambulation around the stupa three times in the back of the monastery complex located next to the guest house, while flowers were showered on the earth as the prospective bhikkhunis passed. The atmosphere was quiet and serene, with all attendees keeping solemn silence. The only sound audible was the repeated sounding of the bell.

After the circumambulation, the prospective bhikkhunis walked to the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis who then formed a procession together towards the Uposatha-gara building. Prior to becoming a certified place of ordination, the Uposatha-gara building was first officially opened by Ven. Bootawatte Saranankara and the ordination was officially opened by the Director General of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, Dasikin Buddha, which was followed by offerings of support to the prospective bhikkhunis by state officials and sponsors.

The ordination was done in two stages. The first stage was the ordination by Order of Bhikkhunis led by Bhikkhuni Santini, while the second phase of the ordination by the Bhikkhu Sangha was led by Ven. Bootawatte Saranankara.



"Based on historical information, ordination of bhikkhunis in Indonesia has no longer been carried out since more than 1000 years ago," said Chairman of the Committee Handani Widjaja. "Ordination of bhikkhunis today will be a historic moment, the process of progress and accelerated the spread of Buddhist teachings in Indonesia's beloved soil."

"From today, there is no longer any doubt for the Buddhists of Indonesia, especially women, to live this left home life, and becoming a female Samana/Bhikkhuni," continued Handani.

Meanwhile Dasikin did not deny the existence of several parties in the Buddhist religion who do not approve of the resurrection of the Bhikkhuni Sangha [in Theravada] after it being extinct since the 11th century.

"The Community of Theravada Bhikkhunis in Indonesia is the realization of gender equality in its role maintaining the Buddha Dhamma. Buddha himself has laid a solid foundation for the respect of women's rights, putting women as individuals who should be honored not only as a samana, but also revered as a mother figure," said Dasikin.

Theravada bhikkhuni Ayya Santini was the first in contemporary Indonesia, since becoming ordained as a bhikkhuni on April 15, 2000 until now, however, this has not been fully accepted by all Buddhists. Theravada bhikkhunis presence in Indonesia and a number of countries still raises pros and cons because some people think the lineage has been disconnected.

Ayya Santini's tireless fight for gender equality in the spiritual realm earned her the Outstanding Women in Buddhism Award by the United Nations in 2007 within the framework of International Women's Day.



Ayya Santini explained that ordination aims to provide positive inspiration to the Indonesian Buddhist women who have a desire to live life as a bhikkhuni. Moreover, it was a bright spot on a full recognition of the position of women in Buddhism in Indonesia.

"Basically Buddhism does not distinguish between men and women based on gender. Buddha himself emphasized that in a marriage, the husband and wife have the same responsibility," said Ayya Santini. Ayya hopes, through this ordination, that the Indonesian Buddhist women monastics will actively support the development of Buddhism in Indonesia.

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