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## CASE STUDY

## Buddhism And Gender Equality

 **Dr. Kamala Kant Bhoi \***

Neurologist & Associate Professor, Department of Medicine & Neurology  
Shri Balaji Institute of Medical Sciences, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India

**Corresponding Author:** \*Dr. Kamala Kant Bhoi 

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the complex relationship between Buddhism and gender equality, focusing on the "Buddha of Granting a Son" statue in South Korea. Through a case report and literature review, it highlights the interplay between cultural traditions and gender discrimination. The statue, while symbolizing good fortune and family prosperity, also perpetuates patriarchal values and son preference. This study argues that a nuanced understanding of cultural icons like this statue can inform discussions on gender equality and cultural heritage.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The "Buddha of Granting a Son" statue is a ubiquitous cultural icon in South Korea, often displayed in temples and homes as a symbol of good fortune and family prosperity [1]. However, this statue also reflects and reinforces traditional patriarchal values and son preference, contributing to gender discrimination and imbalance in South Korea [2]. This article explores the complex implications of this cultural icon for gender equality in South Korea and beyond [3].

### 2. CASE STUDY

The statue is situated in a Busan temple, where it is revered by devotees seeking blessings for their families [4]. The statue depicts a smiling monk holding a bowl, symbolizing abundance and prosperity [5]. However, its significance extends beyond its literal meaning, reflecting and reinforcing societal attitudes towards gender and family [6].



**Figure 1:** Buddha of granting a son



**Figure 2:** The most beautiful temple in S Korea- Busan

### 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The relationship between Buddhism and gender equality is complex and multifaceted [7]. While Buddhist teachings emphasize spiritual equality and the potential for enlightenment for all beings, the historical context and societal norms of ancient India influenced the religion's practices and interpretations [8].

**1. Ancient Buddhism's Stance on Gender Equality:** It is a topic of ongoing debate among scholars [9]. The Buddha's teachings on the nature of suffering and the path to enlightenment are often seen as egalitarian, emphasizing the individual's potential for spiritual liberation regardless of gender [10]. However, the historical context of ancient India, with its patriarchal societal norms, influenced the development of Buddhist institutions and practices [11].

**2. Key Aspects of Gender Equality in Ancient Buddhism:**  
**(a). Spiritual Equality:** Buddhist teachings emphasize the equal potential for enlightenment among all beings, regardless of gender [12].

**(b). Women's Ordination:** The Buddha allowed women to join the Sangha (Buddhist monastic community) as bhikkhunis (nuns), a significant step towards gender equality [13].

**(c) Limitations and Challenges:** Despite the advancements, women in ancient Buddhist societies faced various restrictions and societal expectations [14].

#### The "Buddha of Granting a Son" Statue Cultural Icon:

The "Buddha of Granting a Son" statue is a ubiquitous cultural icon in South Korea, often displayed in temples and homes as a symbol of good fortune and family prosperity [15]. However, this statue also reflects and reinforces traditional patriarchal values and son preference, contributing to gender discrimination and imbalance in South Korea [16].

#### Implications in South Korea and India:

The implications of the "Buddha of Granting a Son" statue are complex, reflecting both cultural exchange and the need for a nuanced understanding of local contexts [17]. In South Korea, the statue perpetuates patriarchal values and son preference, contributing to issues like sex-selective abortion and neglect of female children [18]. In India, similar challenges with son preference and gender discrimination are evident, particularly in rural areas [19].

### 4. DISCUSSION

The "Buddha of Granting a Son" statue is a complex cultural icon that reflects both the cultural significance of traditional values and the need for greater awareness of gender equality [20]. By examining this statue through a critical lens, we can better understand the interplay between cultural heritage and social justice [21]. The statue's cultural significance is deeply tied to patriarchal values and son preference, which have contributed to gender discrimination and imbalance in South Korea [22]. However, by reinterpreting the statue's significance and promoting more inclusive understandings of family and gender, we can work towards greater gender equality [23].

#### Promoting Gender Equality:

Promoting gender equality in South Korea and beyond requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the complex interplay between cultural heritage and social justice [24]. Some strategies include:

**1. Education and Awareness:** Educating the public about the importance of gender equality and the impact of patriarchal values on women and girls [25].

**2. Cultural Reform:** Encouraging a reinterpretation of cultural icons like the "Buddha of Granting a Son" statue to promote more inclusive and equitable understandings of family and gender [21].

**3. Policy Change:** Implementing policies that promote gender equality, such as laws against sex-selective abortion and policies to support women's empowerment [23].

### 5. CONCLUSION

The "Buddha of Granting a Son" statue is a cultural icon with complex implications for gender equality in South Korea and beyond. By exploring its cultural significance and implications, we can better understand the need for nuanced approaches to promoting gender equality and challenging patriarchal values.

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