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**The Origin of *Pabbajja* Ordination Formula**

**Abstract**

Ordination in Buddhism follows a logical sequence and is categorized into two primary types: (1) Pabbajja ordination and (2) Upasampadā ordination. Pabbajja is intended specifically for initiating "samaneras" (novice monks) and "samaneris" (novice nuns), while Upasampadā is designated for the ordination of "bhikkhus" (fully ordained monks) and "bhikkhunīs" (fully ordained nuns). The Pabbajja ordination serves as the preliminary step to Upasampadā, as one must first undergo Pabbajja before advancing to Upasampadā. Each type of ordination possesses its own distinct system, purpose, and objectives. This paper provides an overview of the original Pabbajja system, focusing on the ordination of novices. It also outlines the three levels within female ordination: the Samaneri (female novice), the Sikkhāmāna (female probationer), and the Bhikkhuni (fully ordained nun). Additionally, this article details the procedures involved in Pabbajja for both male and female novices.

**Keywords:** Pabbajja, Three Refuge, Applicant, age, Sāmaṇerī, Sikkhāmāna.

**Introduction**

 The term *pabbajja* is derived from *sāmaṇera* hood. There is another meaning for this term which is “going forth from home life to homeless state”. Its precise meaning is to stay away from worldly life or society. This has become a common tradition of lifestyle for world “renouncers” since the pre-Buddhist time. Those who renounced the world might have done so with an aim perhaps to practice the noble *brahmacariya* life. They lived alone or in community, going for alms-food, moving from one place to another as mendicants. Renunciation such as wandering mendicants, wandering ascetics and homeless ascetics existed long before the dawn of Buddhism. In Buddhist literature, some expressions incorporate the sense of “*pabbajja*” such as *tapasa* *pabbajja*, “going forth taking up an ascetic life”; *isi pabbajja*, “going forth taking up a hermit life”; *sāmaṇera pabbajja*, “going forth taking up the life of a *sāmaṇera/* *sāmaṇeri*” in the teaching of the Buddha; *upasampadā-pabbajja*, “going forth taking up the life of a *bhikkhu*” in the teaching of the Buddha; *aññatitthiya-paribhājakapabbajja*, “going forth taking up the life of a wanderer or a mendicant in other heretical sects”,[[1]](#footnote-1) and *Ājivaka pabbajja*, “going forth taking up the life of a naked ascetic” and so on. In the context of this article, this term *pabbajja* means the admission of a *sāmaṇera* into the *Sangha* as implied in the expression *sāmaṇera* *pabbajja,* “one who gives up the worldly life to become a *sāmaṇera*”.

 In the beginning of Buddhism, there was no discernibly difference in the method of conferment of “*pabbajja* and *upasampadā* ordinations” as both ordinations could be accomplished only with the *saranagamana* formula. However, in tracking the historical incidents like the ordination of young Upāli and his companions in Rajagaha,[[2]](#footnote-2) a clear distinction is made between the statuses of the two types of ordination. The Buddha instructed the *bhikkhus* not to confer *upasampadā* ordination to anyone under the age of twenty years specifically referring to the group of seventeen boys headed by Upāli. The reason given was their immaturity, being under the age of twenty, their behavior was found very childish and immature such as making noises from night until dawn.

 Therefore, it should be assumed that the age restriction was imposed by the Buddha to safeguard the solitude of elder *bhikkhus* and their tranquil meditation practices. For this reason, the separate name of *sāmaṇera* was applied to those of a younger age classification. This is a different lifestyle suited to the *Sangha* members at a younger age. Thus, *pabbajja* or *sāmaṇera* ordination became the ordination for the younger candidates under twenty years of age. It is necessary to briefly illustrate here why there was the imposition of an age restriction with reference to an incident involving a father and his son.

 According to the *Vinaya Mahāvagga Pāli,[[3]](#footnote-3)* the father was ordained as a *bhikkhu* and his young son as a *sāmaṇera*. The people who saw the old *bhikkhu* and the young *sāmaṇera* going on their alms-round complained that the child might have been born of his wife, a *bhikkhunī,* because the *sāmaṇera* was too young to go for alms-round. For this reason, when the Buddha came to know the situation, a rule was laid down not to confer the *pabbajja* ordination on one below fifteen years of age. It should also be observed from this story that from the age of fifteen up to twenty, boys should remain in the *Sangha* as *sāmaṇeras.* After a subsequent incident, out of compassion for two surviving young boys of a serious plague, the Buddha reduced the age limit for becoming a *sāmaṇera* to an age when one is able to scare a crow away. This pattern of developmental evolution of the rule is not unusual. The first proclamation of the rule limited the minimal age to fifteen years was changed following an incident to allow the ordination of a boy as a *sāmaṇera* when he reaches a minimum age old enough to scarce a crow away, a “*kakuddepaka*”.[[4]](#footnote-4)

 The two stories illustrate how and why the minimum age eligible to be initiated as a *sāmaṇera* and a *bhikkhu* were established. These two stories occurred prior to the *pabbajja* ordination of the Buddha’s own son, Rāhula (he was ordained two years after the Buddha’s enlightenment). The reason is that at the time of Rāhula’s *pabbajja* ordination, the Buddha re-affirmed thus: “*Anujanami, bhikkhave, tihi* *saranagamanehi sāmaṇerapabbajjam*”,[[5]](#footnote-5) “I allow you, *bhikkhus*, to ordain as a *sāmaṇera* with these Three Refuges”. This event was much later than the first *sāmaṇera*’s existence in the Buddha’s ministry because at that time, the permission to ordain a *sāmaṇera* at the proper age of *kakuddepaka* had been already given. Many rules for *pabbajja* were already framed at that time. In addition, the *pabbajja’s* inclusion of this formula can also be clearly seen from the Buddha’s original permission for both types of ordination thus: “*Anujanami, bhikkhave, imehi tihi saranagamanehi pabbajjam upasampadam*.”[[6]](#footnote-6) “I allow you, *bhikkhus*, to confer *pabbajja* and *upasampadam* ordinations with these Three Refuges.” Therefore, the *pabbajja* ordination of Rāhula marked the developmental point in the method of *pabbajja* ordination only in the sense that the Three Refuges from this point forward became exclusive to this type of ordination.

 Prior to the *pabbajja* ordination of Rāhula or to the *upasampadā* ordination of Rādha Brahmin, the choice of which ordination to receive may have depended on the desire of an applicant, since this common formula was applied to bestow either *pabbajja* or *upasampadā* ordination on the candidate. This is the way that the past missionary *bhikkhus* could ordain using the *saranagamana* formula depending on the wish of the candidates. Later, it seemed in part that the Buddha changed the procedures for the *upasampadā* ordination from this *saranagamana* to increase the gravitas of this sacred conferment of ordination. Starting with the *sāmaṇera* ordination of Rāhula, the *saranagamana* formula became exclusively assigned for the initiation of *pabbajja* ordination. Consequently, the *ñatti-catuttha-kamma* replaced the earlier *saranagamana* formula for the *upasampadā* ordination.

 The present-day minimum age for *pabbajja* ordination was given by the Buddha after the early version of this rule which fixed at fifteen[[7]](#footnote-7) was relaxed. The relaxation of this rule occurred due to the urgent needs of two young boys, who were the sons of Ven. Ānanda’s supporters. Since that incident, the minimum age stipulates that a boy can enter *sāmaṇera*-hood if he could chase the annoying crows away while eating. For instance, Rāhula, the sole son of the Buddha, received *pabbajja* ordination at the age of seven. There were also instances given in the *Pāli* canon regarding the *sāmaṇeras* who had attained *arahat-*ship at various ages as young as four, five and seven. To name a few, Ven. Ekadipiya became an *arahant* at the age of four; Venerables Pañcasilasamadaniya, Baduma, Valliya and Candanamaliya all became *arahants* at the age of five; Venerables Samkicca, Pandita, Sopāka, Revata and Badda all became *arahants* at the age of seven.[[8]](#footnote-8)

 The next important development in ordination procedure was the addition of special rules to both *pabbajja* and *upasampadā* ordinations. After the *upasampadā* ordination of Ven. Nanda, the Buddha’s half-brother and the *pabbajja* ordination of Rāhula, King Suddhodana informed the Buddha that the transition from a lay life to a homeless one was an extremely painful one for the parents, and requested that permission should be obtained from their parents before ordaining their young sons. The Buddha granted his royal father’s request. The additional rules of the *pabbajja* ordination state: “O *bhikkhus*, a boy without consent of his parents should not be ordained; if ordained, it is a *dukkata* offence”.[[9]](#footnote-9) In course of time, many rules for ordination came to be set in place as and when necessary to cover all aspects. Accordingly, it is proper here to present the overall procedure of *pabbajja* ordination.

**The Original Procedures of *Pabbajja* Ordination**

The induction of the *pabbajja* was simply recitation of the *saranagamana* formula. The applicant for *pabbajja* must be a *kakuddepaka[[10]](#footnote-10)*, old enough to scarecrows away and must have parents’ consent[[11]](#footnote-11). This *pabbajja* ceremony actuallyrequires a *bhikkhu* to be an *upajjaya*. The applicant’s head is shaved and puts on ochrerobes. The Three Refuges (*saranagamana*) are repeated after one’s *upajjnya* and onethus becomes a *samanera*. The procedures were as follows:

1. Informing the *Sangha* of the intention to shave the head of applicant[[12]](#footnote-12),

2. Shaving the hair and beard of the applicant,

3. Dressing the applicant in ochre robes,

4. Having the applicant arrange the upper robe over one shoulder,

5. Having the applicant pay respect at the feet of the *bhikkhus*,

6. Having the applicant squat down on haunches,

7. Having the applicant form *añjali* with joined palms, and

8. Having the applicant repeat the Three Refuges three times after the *upajjhaya*.[[13]](#footnote-13)

After becoming a *sāmaṇera,* one has to observe the Ten Precepts (*dassasikkhāpada*)[[14]](#footnote-14), the ten excommunicable offences (*dasa nāsana*)[[15]](#footnote-15), and the fivepunishable offences (*pañca dandakamma*)[[16]](#footnote-16). A *sāmaṇera’s upajjhaya* looks after andimposes punishment when necessary and the other *bhikkhus* may impose punishmenton the *sāmaṇera* only after informing his *upajjhaya.* Any punishment should bedone by means of restriction, “*Āvarana*” but restricting a *sāmaṇera* from entering thewhole temple compound or from eating and drinking should not be done. The *upajjhaya* should not persuade or guide others’ *sāmaṇeras,* but may only ordain asmany *sāmaṇeras* as he is able to give the training to. This is the overall picture of the original ordination pattern and lifestyle of the *Sāmaṇeras.*

***Pabbajja* Ordination for female**

A female candidate has to receive *pabbajja* ordination from a *pavattini* by repeating the Three Refuges and keep the Ten Precepts just as a male *samanera* does. Thus, she becomes a *sāmaṇerī.* The procedures are the same as the *pabbajja* ordination in the *bhikkhu-sangha.* No minimum age for initiation of a *sāmaṇerī* is found in the *Pali* canon. The *Pali* canons mention three *arahant theris* Pañhadipika Theri, Ekuposathika Therī and Pañcadipayika Therī who had attained the *arahatta-magga* soon after their admission into the *Saagha* as *sāmaṇerīs* at the age of seven. They were possessed with the *patisambhidamagga,* four penetrative wisdoms, and *abhiñña,* the six types of psychic or divine powers. These instances indicate it is safer to take the same minimum age of a *kakuddepaka*,[[17]](#footnote-17) a person old enough to drive off a crow. However, in addition, a *sāmaṇerī* has to undergo the prescribed probationary period.

**The Practice of Probationary Period**

A *sāmaṇerī* before her *upasampadā* ordination has to take the vows of a *sikkhāmāna*, a probationary period prior to becoming a *bhikkhunī*. Upon reaching the prescribed age, she has to request for *sikkhāmāna-*ship from the *bhikkhunī-sangha*. Upon successful admittance, she is called a *sikkhāmāna[[18]](#footnote-18)* and has to practice the six rules for two years consecutively. On completion of *sikkhāāana-*ship, she has to request *upasampadā* ordination from the *bhikkhunī-sangha.*

**Conclusion**

Each side of the *Sangha* has their own specific ordination method. Although the *pabbajja* ordination evolved later than *upasamapadā* ordination, it is a prerequisite stage to *upasampada* ordination. Thus in the *bhikkhu-sangha, pabbajja* became the first class of ordination and is based on the *saranagamana* formula. The *bhikkhunī-sangha* also has *pabbajja* and *upasampadā* ordinations. However, an intermediate term of two years as a *sikkhāmāna* is required as a prerequisite to *upasampadā*.

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