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# Eight Revered Conditions: Ideological Complicity, Contemporary Reflections and Practical Realities

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# Eight Revered Conditions: Ideological Complicity, Contemporary Reflections and Practical Realities<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Scholarly debates focusing on the “Eight Revered Conditions,” a list of conditions suggestive of the dependence of nuns on monks in early Buddhism, have long been the focus of scholarly debates. These debates, centering on the legitimation of a patriarchal Buddhism, have reached an impasse. Here I argue that this impasse logically flows from questionable reconstructions of the imperative and authoritative nature of these eight conditions in early Buddhism, perceived as *Buddhavacana*, or the word of the Buddha. In contemporary Sri Lanka, practitioners' reflections on the eight conditions suggest that they function less as imperative injunctions than as markers defining social and moral boundaries, in

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terms of which monastics conceptualize their world. I demonstrate that scholarly presuppositions of the hierarchical nature of the controversial conditions are contested by perspectives of current praxis, and may also possibly be questioned, at least theoretically, by the process of reconstructing earlier Buddhist realities.

### Introduction

The “Eight Revered Conditions,” (*aṭṭhagarudhammā/aṣṭaugurudharmāḥ*) sometimes translated as the “Eight Chief Conditions” or the “Eight Chief Rules,” which appear in many versions of the ordination account of the first nuns in Buddhism, are a list of conditions that appear to suggest the dependence of nuns on monks in early Buddhism. They have been addressed in various ways by students and practitioners of Buddhism. Although scholarly discussion of the conditions may be traced as far back as I. B. Horner, it is only in the last two decades that they have occasioned serious debate. The recent revival of the higher ordination of Theravāda Buddhist nuns has brought a heightened awareness of the manner in which these conditions differentiate between male and female monastics.<sup>2</sup> Those who validate the conditions, although not necessarily condoning them, do so on the grounds that they are the word of the Buddha or *Buddhavacana*. Those who wish to invalidate the rules do so mainly on the basis that they are not *Buddhavacana*. The apparent impasse in the debate concerning these conditions continues apparently unresolved and deserves further scrutiny.

Since 1997, most women training for the higher ordination (*sāmaṇerīs*) in Sri Lanka are required to know and observe the eight conditions as a prerequisite for their ordination. On interviewing Buddhist nuns about their views of the eight conditions, I noticed that their recognition of these conditions was more nuanced and complex than what

most textual scholars have proposed in their reconstructions of the conditions. Most interestingly, I uncovered a discrepancy between the way in which some monastics appear to understand the practice (or lack thereof) of the conditions and the way in which they theorize about them. I was left with the issue of how to reconcile the theory of these conditions with the theory of their practice (past and present) as well as to determine the relationship of purported and actual practice of the conditions today. Was it the case that these eight conditions once grounded and continue to legitimize an oppressive monastic praxis? How is it possible, as my research indicates, that some nuns today claim to follow the rules, yet may not actually do so?<sup>3</sup> How may one reconcile interpretations of these conditions provided by scholars with those suggested by recently ordained *bhikkhunīs*? How has the higher ordination of Theravāda Buddhist nuns affected and been affected by interpretations of these rules? What, if anything, can we learn from contemporary interpretations of these conditions that might possibly illuminate an understanding of them in past practice?

Without more evidence than we have at this time, it is difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct how these conditions may have factored in perspectives of early Buddhism. However, I think that current attitudes to these conditions among monastics may suggest alternative “readings” of them. Such readings challenge interpretations of the eight conditions which overstress the role of hierarchies in grounding relations between male and female members of the Buddhist monastic community.

I begin this article by examining select scholarly interpretations of the conditions and their significance. I indicate that although scholars may read the conditions in a variety of ways, a fundamental divide opens up between readings that are complicit in sharing in the ideology of the textual account itself and others that succeed in contesting it. The dif-

ference between the former and the latter is a difference in assumptions relating to the textual account of the first ordination of nuns in which the conditions are embedded. To use Catherine Belsey's terms, readings that support the ideology of the text see the text as "declarative," i.e., one that conveys information, or as "imperative," i.e., one that gives commands. However, readings that *contest* the ideology of the text provide a more "interrogative" reading of it, i.e., one which raises questions (83-84). In the interrogative text, the "position of the 'author' inscribed in the text, if it can be located at all, is seen as questioning or as contradictory" (85). Moreover, "the interrogative text refuses a single point of view . . . but brings points of view into unresolved collusion or contradictions. It therefore refuses the hierarchy of voices . . . and no authorial or authoritative voice points to a single position which is the place of the coherence of meaning" (85).<sup>4</sup> Some scholars and practitioners view the eight conditions as an interrogative text that is questioned in theory and practice.<sup>5</sup>

Discussions among practitioners, as evidenced in publications circulating within Sri Lanka and in my interviews with monastics, indicate alternative readings of the conditions which allow for the possibility of simultaneously affirming and denying them. I argue that whereas most scholars view these conditions as rules, that is, as explicit moral laws which may be observed or transgressed, some monastics effectively depart from this strict interpretation. Those who claim to observe the conditions differ in viewing them, not in the narrow sense of a rule, but rather as functioning more fluidly as *conditions* that participate in structuring the identities of *bhikkhunīs* or fully ordained nuns.

I indicate that the debate based in Sri Lanka on the eight conditions, although not always sharing the same hermeneutical spaces as that of Western scholarship, participates in similar interpretive tendencies. I investigate how these conditions are theorized and suggest that

contemporary understandings of the conditions among practitioners may provide insights into how they might have been viewed in early Buddhism.<sup>6</sup> This article does not seek to provide a textual or philological interpretation of accounts of the eight conditions. Rather, it is an attempt to investigate and relocate debates that have arisen among scholars and practitioners.

### The Eight Revered Conditions

The acceptance of the list of eight conditions appears as a necessary prerequisite for the entrance of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, the Buddha's adopted mother, into the higher ordination (*upasampadā*). Although the eight conditions have often been translated as rules (Fr: *règles*/German: *Regeln*) and “*dhammā*” is also used to refer to *Vinaya* “rules,” the multivalent connotations and detonations of the word *dhamma* as also meaning truth, reality, building block of reality and factor of existence or simply “thing,” perhaps provide more context for its meaning. Several scholars have indicated that the eight conditions were lacking the general format of *Vinaya* injunctions which were pronounced after specific, very practical problems were presented to the Buddha. Translating *garudhammā* as “rule” can be misleading. Textual accounts generally indicate that the eight *dhammās* were *conditions* that permitted and identified the ordination of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. In the Pāli account, each condition is followed by a statement that it be considered as a condition that is to be revered (*garukatvā*). “Revered conditions” seems to be a rendition that conveys the intended nuances of the text. Because this article focuses on the Pāli and Theravāda usage of the terms, I refer to the *aṭṭha garudhammā* as the eight revered conditions.

The account of the ordination in which the conditions are embedded is replete with inconsistencies that have attracted diverse de-

bates. The account relates how Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and 500 women of the Sakyan clan request the ordination several times and are refused until the monk, Ānanda, intercedes. The Buddha responds to Ānanda that if Mahāpajāpatī accepts the eight conditions that he lists, it will constitute her ordination.<sup>7</sup> Mahāpajāpatī receives this message and accepts the conditions. When Ānanda conveys news of her acceptance, the Buddha pronounces the much debated statement on the longevity of the doctrine being halved since women have been allowed to renounce. He also states that the conditions were laid down in advance “for the *bhikkhunīs*” as a means of containment, just as a dam might contain a body of water.<sup>8</sup> The Buddha goes on to permit the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*, whereupon the *bhikkhunīs* suggest that neither they nor Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī have received the higher ordination.<sup>9</sup> The Buddha refutes this by reiterating that the eight conditions constituted the higher ordination for Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. The eight conditions are listed below:

If Ānanda, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī accepts the Eight Revered Conditions, that should be her full ordination!

(1) A *bhikkhunī* who is fully ordained for a hundred years should greet a *bhikkhu* who is fully ordained but that day, i.e., by respectful verbal greeting, rising up, greeting with palms together and doing proper homage. This condition is to be treated with respect, esteemed, revered, and honored and should not be surpassed lifelong.

(2) A *bhikkhunī* should not spend the rainy season in a residential area devoid of *bhikkhus*. This condition too is to be treated with respect . . . and should not be surpassed lifelong.

(3) At the half-month a *bhikkhunī* should ask the *bhikkhusangha* about two things (*dhammā*): the question of the *uposatha* and the

approach for the instruction (*ovāda*). This condition too is to be treated with respect . . . and should not be surpassed lifelong.

(4) A *bhikkhunī* who has observed the rains retreat should observe the *pavāraṇā* ceremony in the dual *sangha* in three ways namely, what has been seen, heard or suspected. This condition too is to be treated with respect . . . and should not be surpassed lifelong.

(5) A *bhikkhunī* who has transgressed a *garudhammā*<sup>10</sup> should observe the fortnightly penance (*pakkhamānatta*) before the dual *sangha*. This condition too is to be treated with respect . . . and should not be surpassed lifelong.

(6) A female trainee who has trained in the training of the six rules (*dhammā*) for two rains retreats should request full ordination from the dual *sangha*. This condition too is to be treated with respect . . . and should not be surpassed lifelong.

(7) A *bhikkhu* should not be reviled or verbally abused by a *bhikkhunī* in any way. This condition too is to be treated with respect . . . and should not be surpassed lifelong.

(8) From this day onwards, for *bhikkhunīs*, a certain manner of speaking to *bhikkhus* is forbidden; but for *bhikkhus*, this manner of speaking to *bhikkhunīs* is not forbidden. This condition too is to be treated with respect . . . and should not be surpassed lifelong.<sup>11</sup>

### Early Reconstructions and Ideological Complicity

In this section I discuss the work of select Western scholars whose reconstructions of the eight conditions in early Buddhism assume that they function as rules. Some of these scholars, such as I. B. Horner and Mohan Wijayaratna, appear to sanction the conditions, whereas others,

such as Falk, condemn them. Despite their differing stances, these scholars appear to share in perpetuating an ideology that participates in the construction and the reconstruction of the conditions as a realistic and inevitable adaptation to an androcentric monastic and social environment. The authority and authorship of the conditions remains uncontested. These scholars demonstrate an intricate link between the ascription of a unified author (the Buddha, monk editors) to a text and the function of ideology. In treating the account of the eight conditions as either declarative or imperative, and/or accepting the conditions as *Buddhavacana*, these scholars further legitimize the eight conditions.

In her classic work, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*, Horner devotes an entire chapter to the eight conditions, which she refers to as the “Eight Chief Rules.” She considers them to be “precise and definite” (118) and states that because of them, “the almswomen were not to be independent of the almsmen” (119). Although Horner is critical of the “monk-factor” (xx) and the possibility of “alterations” and “inconsistencies” (xx) in textual traditions in her general introduction, these critiques remain undeveloped in her narrative on the eight conditions.<sup>12</sup> It is striking that her explanation of these conditions provides a relatively seamless account of the early nuns as depicted in numerous Pāli texts that do not derive from the account of the first ordination. Although she indicates that the eight conditions were unlike the *Vinaya* stipulations in not being occasioned by a recounting of a prior offence, she proceeds to explain these conditions in the context of later events. For example, she notes that several of the conditions correspond to later *Vinaya* injunctions that incurred expiation (*pācittiya*), and then proceeds to discuss the situations which gave rise to these injunctions as a means of explaining some of the eight conditions. The resulting discourse is a presentation of the eight conditions as rules that are consistent with later promulgations made by the Buddha, that is, they appear to become a part of a consistent and uniform text authored by a single subject. Consequently, her

account of the conditions suggests that they are declarative and imperative in the sense of imparting information and giving commands.

Wijayaratna, writing more than fifty years after Horner, shares with her a certain acceptance of the coherence of the account of the eight conditions. He agrees that the eight conditions appear to reflect the historical and social contexts of gender expectations. He affirms that conditions were placed in order “to protect the Community of Nuns” (19). Wijayaratna does note that it was impossible for Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to observe many of the conditions because institutional structures that were a prerequisite for the observance of the conditions were initially absent:

. . . the Eight Great Conditions were not commandments that had to be immediately executed; they were rather, obligations imposed on an organization that would be set up in time. *The necessary conditions for fulfilling the rules were not present at the beginning . . . As for the Eight Great Conditions, they were meant for a Community of Nuns already well established, whereas the foundations of such a community were still being laid.* (31)<sup>13</sup>

Although Wijayaratna, like Horner, indicates that the eight conditions were accepted as *Buddhavacana*, he departs from her by indicating some important practical problems, regarding their implementation. However, he fails to discuss them further. By glossing over the problems of how and why the eight conditions could be laid down as a prerequisite for the ordination of the first *bhikkhunī*, when the very means of observing the conditions were not present,<sup>14</sup> Wijayaratna becomes an active participant in reproducing the prevalent ideology of the ordination account.

Nancy Auer Falk, referring to the conditions as the “eight special rules,” shares complicity in an ideology of the ordination account in a somewhat different manner. Although she appears to question the con-

ditions as *Buddhavacana*, she affirms that their authority is grounded in Buddhist tradition and asserts their impact on past and subsequent realities (162). She states that the conditions were “imposed on the women as a price for allowing them to found their order. These provided that the women would be permanently subordinated to the men” (159). Assuming that the conditions were practiced as stated textually, she suggests that even though the rules involved subordination, because women of the time in India “had always been subordinated to men . . . nuns apparently did not find these rules oppressive . . .” (160). Projecting the power of this subordination into the future, she suggests that the conditions “meant that women would never be leaders in the life of the whole community or have any decisive voice in shaping its direction” (160). Like Horner, her presentation of the conditions is couched, albeit resentfully, in terms of in/equality and in/subordination. Like Wijayaratna, she raises some questions concerning the conditions while yet allowing these to remain unresolved.

Horner, Wijayaratna and Falk all read the account of the conditions critically. However, their interpretations on the legitimacy of the conditions, whether as *Buddhavacana* or as foundational for the tradition, border on the re/construction of ideology which Belsey suggests may be seen as “a set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, smoothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which in practice it evades and masquerading as coherence in the interests of social relations . . .” (53). The ideological complicity evident in the presentations of those who write in the same vein as Horner, Wijayaratna, and Falk continues to this day, especially among those who magnify the significance of these conditions in defining monastic praxis, whether it be to affirm or to refute them. Scholars have only fairly recently begun to depart from this implicit ideological stance on the conditions, arguably in response to new contexts and debates incurred by the reinstatement of the higher ordination for women.<sup>15</sup>

### Contesting Ideologies; Contemporary Reflections<sup>16</sup>

In this section I investigate select scholarly publications appearing in Western languages that explicitly question the coherence of the account of the eight conditions as well as its impact in Buddhist traditions. Such scholarship which contests traditional discussions on the conditions has, unsurprisingly, arisen in the wake of renewed interest in studies on women and Buddhism.<sup>17</sup> More specifically, this new approach has been spurred on by the establishment of major international Buddhist women's organizations such as NIBWA/Yasodhara and Sākyadhītā, which attempt to maintain grass-roots contacts in predominantly Buddhist countries and strive to network globally, and most importantly, are supportive of the reinstatement of the higher ordination for women of all Buddhist traditions.

Rita Gross, writing in the early 1990s as both a feminist and a Western Buddhist scholar-practitioner, is well aware of the activities of the Sākyadhītā International Organization (29). Referring to the conditions as “special rules,” she agrees with Falk in suggesting that the conditions negatively affected the leadership of women in early Buddhism (38). Although she ascribes a certain historicity to the impact of the conditions, whose practice she infers was observable and observed, she departs from Falk in constructing an argument concerning how and why the account of the eight conditions may not have been *Buddhvacana* (38-39). Attempting a feminist reading of the conditions, Gross is one of the first Western scholars to suggest complicity in a shared ideology, an “agenda of maintaining male control over women,” among those practitioners who consider the conditions authoritative (39). Although she refers here to contemporary Buddhist practitioners, she may well have regarded this as a bias within scholarship itself. Gross clearly contests a perceived patriarchal consciousness in the textual account of the ordination. She herself, however, is not unbiased in her reluctance to concede

the possibility of developing gender equity from within a Buddhism that is practiced in predominantly Buddhist countries (133-135).<sup>18</sup>

Following Gross's lead in interpreting the rules as a form of "institutional subordination, not spiritual subordination" (Gross 37), Alan Sponberg refers to the rules as an embodiment of "institutional androcentrism" (13). While focussing his analysis on the Pāli account of the ordination he refers to it as "a document of reconciliation, as a symbolic, mythologized expression of a compromise negotiated between several factions . . . including the nuns and their male supporters . . ." suggesting that this account was "a later attempt to rationalize and legitimize post facto what had already become the status quo" (16). According to him there was a need to address public concerns and "to deal with the social unacceptability . . . of an autonomous group of women not under the direct regulation and control of some male authority" (17). Sponberg's investigation of the ordination account and the eight conditions is a serious scholarly contestation of the authority as well as the social impact of the text. Referencing several scholars, albeit primarily in his footnotes, and indicating a need for more inter-textual and intra-textual study, he raises a number of issues concerning the chronology and historicity of the account and opens up doors for further research (32-33).

At about the same time that Gross and Sponberg were writing about the eight conditions, but from very different locations and without referring to Gross and Sponberg, Ute Hüsken and Bhikkhunī Kusuma similarly challenged the ideology of the text. Hüsken, addressing an academic audience, provides one of the first intra-textual studies in Western scholarship contesting the eight conditions which she translates as rules (*Regeln*). Bhikkhunī Kusuma, on the other hand, speaking as the first women in the Theravāda tradition to receive the full ordination in 1996, addresses activist scholars and practitioners at an International Sākyadhītā conference in 1998.<sup>19</sup> Hüsken seemingly agrees

with Horner concerning the editorial role of the monks in transmitting the texts, and refrains from critiquing Horner's presentation of the conditions.<sup>20</sup> Although her writing appears to rely heavily on Horner in comparing the conditions to later *Vinaya* prescriptions, she differs in explicitly noting textual inconsistencies and raises important historical issues regarding their formulation (160, 164). In conclusion, she demonstrates that numerous contradictions imply that the conditions "did not represent an original conception, but rather the outcome of a later development" (170). She suggests (not unlike Gross and Sponberg) that because of changes that possibly occurred after the demise of the Buddha, members of the *Sangha* may have attempted to use the conditions as a means of strengthening the male monastic order. Bhikkhunī Kusuma provides several critiques of the conditions, among which she indicates, as have others before her, that they did not conform to contexts which generally gave rise to *Vinaya* regulations (8). Most importantly, she suggests what has been reiterated in ongoing debates in Sri Lanka, namely, that the eight conditions, if applicable, may have only been of relevance to the ordination of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and not to those of other women who were ordained at her time (7). By also demonstrating that the conditions were unknown at the time of the first establishment of the *Bhikkhunī Sangha* in Sri Lanka in the third century B.C.E., she begins to address concerns that are current in Sri Lanka. Indicating implications for contemporary monasticism, she concludes that there "is clear evidence that the *garudhammas* are not a *Vinaya* requirement, either as precept or as practice" (9).

The scholars discussed in this section contest the coherence of the account involving the eight conditions in reading it interrogatively—clearly indicating, as Belsey states, that the text "refuses a single point of view . . . but brings points of view into unresolved collision or contradiction" (85). Moreover, these scholars reject the notion that the conditions represent an expression of *Buddhavacana*. The location of Bhikkhunī Ku-

suma, who writes as a leading *bhikkhunī* as well as a scholar and practitioner who has the ability to reach an international audience as well as a grass-roots one in Sri Lanka, brings a new dimension and practical context to our reflections and reconstructions of the eight revered conditions.

### **Sri Lankan Contexts (I): Theories of Practice<sup>21</sup>**

In this section I focus on the writings of those scholars, practitioners, and scholar-practitioners whose works originate from within Sri Lankan Buddhist contexts and whose conversations primarily, though not necessarily exclusively, address those contexts. Although these works may appear to echo concerns similar to those of scholars published in Western languages, they write, for the most part, from different locations and with different intentions. The growing scholarly and public attention given to the text of the ordination account and the eight conditions (both in Western languages and in Sri Lanka) is relatively recent and is most likely tied to the increasing visibility of Ten Precept Mothers<sup>22</sup> in the 1980s and the emergence of Theravāda *bhikkhunī* ordinations since the 1990s. I suggest that scholarship on the eight conditions today may be usefully located within the context of the practice of the eight conditions, or at least, within that of the theory of their practice.<sup>23</sup>

My research of available materials from the 1970s and 1980s suggests that the increased visibility of the *dasa sil mātās* in Sri Lanka is necessarily concomitant to and probably interrelated with the growing interest in the concept of a Theravāda *bhikkhunī* order. I indicate how the renewed focus on both emanated from a variety of sources including state activism, the mobilization of the mass media, institutionalization of *sil mātā* organizations and even the publication of onsite scholarship. Mirroring the works of Western scholars, the writings

emerging from Sri Lankan contexts tend to define discussions of the eight conditions in terms of the same binary opposition; that is, they focus the debate in terms of whether or not the conditions are validated in reference to *Buddhavacana*. The result is a similar impasse in the ongoing conversation about the conditions.

Dhammavīhārī, a scholar-monk, writing subsequent to the first ordination of Theravāda *bhikkhunīs* in 1996, suggests that the eight conditions are “. . . the most vital issue . . . in the founding of the Bhikkhunī Sāsana” (41).<sup>24</sup> However, the first mention I have found of the conditions in popular sources in Sri Lanka appears in a 1934 article by the prominent scholar G. P. Malalasekera, who adopted the same ideological frame of reference as Horner and others discussed above. He suggests that the conditions were “safeguards” that preserved the “supremacy of the male members of the order” (47). Unlike some of the others, however, Malalasekera was writing from within a Theravāda Buddhist context and in Sri Lanka. Moreover, as George Bond notes, Malalasekera, in his capacity as President of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress and a respected public spokesperson, was a prominent participant in the renaissance and reformation of Buddhism in his time (Bond 76-85). Malalasekera's article proved seminal and has been referenced in numerous publications that supported the ordination of nuns (Weeraratne, *Buddhist* 18; Weeraratne, *Bhikṣuṇī* 14-15; Ngnānaṣīla, *Bhikṣhunī* 109; Dhammāloka Anunāhimi 89). Most recently, it was published in its entirety in the *Commemorative Magazine of the Bodhgaya International Full Ordination Ceremony*.

Media coverage of the possibility of reviving the *Bhikkhunī* order in the 1970s and early 1980s was sporadic. Although news items tended to focus on the legitimacy of the revival of the order according to Theravāda lineage issues, there was little discussion of the eight rules *per se*.<sup>25</sup> When television became more readily available in Sri Lanka in the 1980s, the *dasa sil mātās* literally became more visible in the public

eye, prompting renewed interest in the revival of the *Bhikkhunī* order.<sup>26</sup> In 1983, the government began collecting data on the *sil mātās* and contributed, albeit minimally, to the education of *sil mātās*. A few news items mentioned the eight conditions.<sup>27</sup> However, until and after the publication by Urugamuve Vangīsa Himi that I discuss below, the popular focus was still on the legitimacy of reviving a Theravāda *Bhikkhunī* order without a pre-established lineage of Theravāda nuns.<sup>28</sup> It is perhaps not insignificant that on-site interviews among *dasa sil mātās* were first conducted by scholars in the 1980s. While studies by Thamal, Bloss and Devendra (1987) focussed specifically on contemporary contexts of the *sil mātās*, those by Tessa Bartholomeusz and Nirmala Salgado also began to interrogate canonical issues in conjunction with their research on *sil mātās*. Bartholomeusz, who conducted interviews in 1988-1989, is probably the first scholar to have engaged *sil mātās* on discussion concerning the eight conditions (136-137). Research interviews conducted by the scholars of the 1980s inevitably affected contemporary self-reflections of Buddhist nuns.

The first scholarly study in Sri Lanka focusing on a discussion of the eight conditions was published in 1986, as part of a larger work written by a monk, Ūrugamuvē Vangīsa Himi, recounting the history of the establishment of the *Bhikkhunī* order in India and Sri Lanka. The chapter devoted to the eight conditions uncovers a number of intra-textual inconsistencies concerning each of the conditions and concludes that “it is difficult to accept the historicity of the *garudhammas*” (38). Most importantly for the ensuing debate of the 1990s, the author indicates that even if Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī did affirm the eight conditions, observance of these conditions was not requested of the 500 Sakyan women (38-39). Furthermore he boldly suggests that even if Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had accepted the eight conditions, she may have done so in reference to a different set of eight conditions that are unknown today and were edited out of the *Chullavagga* (37). Vangīsa

Himi's publication is important not only as a ground-breaking critique of the conditions but also for its broader impact on Sri Lankan scholars and practitioners alike.

Since the publication of Vangīsa's work, the debate in Sri Lankan circles has, like that of the Western scholarship discussed above, often focussed on the authorship and validity of the ordination account and the eight conditions. However, the Sri Lankan reflections on the conditions are written from a somewhat different location, that is, one in which the conditions have direct relevance to the emerging ordinations of Theravāda Buddhist women. In addition to the familiar issue of whether or not the conditions are *Buddhavacana*, the local debate has brought further into focus a more immediate problem which allows monastics to reject the conditions even while accepting them as *Buddhavacana*. This controversy, first highlighted by Vangīsa Himi and Bhikkhunī Kusuma, centers on the possibility that observance of the eight conditions was intended for Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī alone, by virtue of her having been ordained by the Buddha. In contrast, her 500 female companions were ordained by monks and, ipso facto, may not have been required to observe the same prescriptions. Arguments on the conditions are developed in the 1993 commemorative volume dedicated to Sanghamitta, *2300 Saṅghamittā Jayanti Saṅgrahaya*. One essay by a well known monk indicates the presence of several textual inconsistencies, and concludes that the traditional account of the conditions was of doubtful historicity (Nyānarāma Himi 208). The other essay (by a *sil mātā*) accepts them as a valid prescription for female renunciant practice and suggests that after Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī received the conditions from the Buddha, the 500 Sakyan women approached the *Bhikkhu Sangha* for the ordination and also accepted the conditions (Mithrānyaṇissari Silmātāwa 134). These two articles highlight the core of the debate concerning the eight conditions and also open doors for discussion among practitioners in Sri Lanka.

Another major publication in Sinhala, *Nivan Maga: Kantha Vimukti Ankaya*, which devotes itself to Buddhist women's spirituality, was published in 1994. This work includes essays by Pearl Perera and Dhammaratana Himi which self-consciously enter the debate by discussing relevant Sinhala publications on the eight rules. The essay by Perera is particularly significant in underlining the bi-polar nature of the argument. Perera provides a list of references to academics and practitioners from Sri Lanka and elsewhere who she believes reject the conditions as *Buddhavacana* (47-50). Proponents of this view such as Saparamādu, Kodikāra, and Ngānaṣīla *Bhikkhunī*, have produced independent publications that include a rationale for why Theravāda *bhikkhunīs* today need not observe the conditions. The debate which had been primarily textual and academic in most Western scholarship came to have immediate practical implications as monastics such as Talalle Dhammāloka Himi, Bhadra Theraṇiya, and Pānadurē Vajira *Silmātāva*, who have participated in ordination ceremonies, shared their perspectives on these conditions.

By 1999, the pioneering *Bhikkunī* Kusuma submitted a doctoral dissertation on the *bhikkhunī Vinaya*. Her dissertation, researched primarily in Germany under the auspices of Friedgard Lottermoser, a German Pāli scholar, and submitted to a university in Sri Lanka, devoted an entire chapter to an intra-textual study of the eight conditions. This thesis was translated and published as *Bhikkhunī Vinaya* and made available to the Sinhala reading public. Contextualizing declarations made by the Buddha in general, *Bhikkhunī* Kusuma indicates that there are no other circumstances in which gender alone becomes the basis for the establishment of a rule (37-39; 61). Similarly, she indicates that the apparent insistence on following certain conditions "life-long" ignores, among other things, the event of the nun who disrobes (40). Like Vangīsa Himi, she argues that chronological inconsistencies reflected in the interface between the account of the conditions and the establishment of

*Vinaya* injunctions indicate a redundancy in the text: several of the conditions were similar to propositions that were purportedly established after the ordination of *bhikkhunīs*. She further demonstrates that the prerequisites for observing some of the conditions could not have predated the introduction of the *Bhikkhunī Sangha* (46, 48, and 53). In her chapter on the eight conditions, Bhikkhunī Kusuma, meticulously investigating each condition and presenting numerous textual inconsistencies relating to each, concludes that the eight conditions could not logically have been *Buddhavaṇṇa* (49, 53, and 65).

Interpretations of the ordination account and the eight conditions advanced by Sri Lankan and Western writers share a common frame of reference, namely, both highlight *Buddhavaṇṇa* or tradition as the definitive criteria of validity. Yet, the latter seem more oriented to religious praxis rather than abstract theorizing. The difference in contexts of Western and Sri Lankan writings is primarily, though not necessarily exclusively, a difference of theory in practice. Western publications on the eight conditions are primarily written by and for an academic audience. Here the theorizing remains, for the most part, theoretical. Publications circulating in Sri Lanka, whether in Sinhala or English, are often intended by and for practitioners where theorizing has a more immediate, practical applicability. The question remains as to how, if at all, the debate on the authoritative nature of the eight conditions plays out currently among practicing monastics.

### **Sri Lankan Contexts (II): Practices beyond Theory**

In this section, drawing on discussions with nine Buddhist monastics, I investigate a variety of monastic perspectives on the theory and practice of the eight conditions.<sup>29</sup> Bhikkhunī Kusuma rejects observance of the conditions as a prerequisite for life as a female renunciant in no uncer-

tain terms. However, she is not typical of most *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka; she is bilingual and caters to a cosmopolitan and global audience of scholars and practitioners. Predominantly Sinhala-speaking *bhikkhunīs* have given me significantly differing responses to questions on the eight conditions. These vary from indifference or ignorance of the conditions to claimed observance and knowledge of them. Monks who have supported the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* have been outspoken in their insistence on the relevance of the conditions for *bhikkhunīs* in the past and the present (Vajiragnana 46). One leading monk I interviewed rationalized the legitimacy of the conditions for *bhikkhunīs* today by appealing to their purported relevance for all *bhikkhunīs* in the past. My research demonstrates that monastics today are sometimes positioned both to claim observance of the conditions while simultaneously denying them to a certain extent. I suggest that alternative ways of “reading” the conditions provide insights into perspectives that have previously been neglected.

The following discussion I (P) had with *sāmaṇerī* Mittā (M) demonstrates a somewhat perfunctory, if not evasive attitude to the conditions.

P: Have you heard about the eight *garudhammā*?

M: I have heard of them.

P: So . . . you know what they are . . . do you accept them?

M: Well . . . I can't say . . . what we are trying to do is to remove defilements. (*klēṣa*) . . . to say that this is wrong or that is wrong . . . we cannot say that . . .

P: Do you accept them or not?

M: Whatever the case . . . well, our objective is *nirvāna*.

P: Do you accept them . . . or?

M: I do not know, because I generally am not one who looks at books . . .

*Sāmaṇerī* Mittā claimed to neither accept nor reject the validity of the conditions. Evidently, the conditions had little significance for her, even as she awaited full ordination as a *bhikkhunī*. Another *bhikkhunī* somewhat amusedly questioned the validity of the conditions on the grounds that they were prescribed only for Mahāpajāpati Gotamī: “The *asṭagarudhammā* were not preached to everyone, they were only preached by the Lord Buddha to one person,” she said, echoing arguments made in publications available in Sri Lanka. For her the conditions, though possibly *Buddhavacana*, were simply irrelevant. Three *bhikkhunīs* whom I spoke with were adamant in affirming the relevance of the conditions while also acknowledging observance of them. They insisted that the eight conditions were a necessary condition of their *upasampadā*. Most interestingly, however, they seemed to lack a detailed knowledge of what the conditions denoted and were hesitant to speak about them. I reproduce an excerpt of my conversation with one of these *bhikkhunīs* below:

B: We cannot stray from the *asṭagarudhammā* . . .

P: You must accept them?

B: Without fail . . .

P: Could you tell me what they are?

B: I cannot remember them now . . .

She hesitated for some time and then went on to recite six of the conditions only.<sup>30</sup> She stated that she had to observe them because this was

demanded of her by a senior monk ordaining her, on pain of her losing her identity as an *upasampadā bhikkhunī*.

A somewhat similar view was initially voiced by Sōmā Bhikkhunī, a senior *bhikkhunī* who has trained *sāmaṇerīs* for the higher ordination. Over the course of an extended discussion with me on the conditions she exhibited thoughts on the conditions that were nuanced and fraught with apparent contradictions. When asked if she accepted the rules she assented: “Yes . . . even if one does not accept them, the *Mahā Sangha* expects one to adhere to them . . . because it is under the Buddha that the *garudhammā* were prescribed . . . the head monk says that one should not reject them, otherwise the *Mahāsaṅghaya* will not give permission for the *Bhikkhunī Shāsana* to exist.”

Bhikkhunī Sōmā claims theoretically to accept the conditions, adding that they *must* be followed. Although she is well aware that the *Mahā Sangha* is far from unified in its views on the higher ordination of women, she maintains that her identity and *bhikkhunī* status are in jeopardy were she not to accept the conditions. She corroborates this when she admits to having learned the conditions as a part of her training, but somewhat amusedly confesses to not remembering them well.

We discussed the individual conditions. She recalled the first one on her own and initially stated “. . . yes, that needs to be accepted” but under her breath added “I do not understand what that means for *sīlaya* (moral precepts/ethics).” Later in the conversation, when we had looked at some of the other conditions, she adverted again to the first condition: “That is not a good one. That is the worst one. I think that really in fact as long as the *shāsanaya* (dispensation) is continuing in existence that (condition) involves a *pau*, (sin) for the *hamdurowō*, (monks) . . . One who has much *sīl*, having to worship another who has taken (precepts) just that day, is that not a sin?” Her initial insistence on the legitimacy of the conditions was segueing into an interrogation of what they represented.

Sōmā Bhikkhunī has taught at a Buddhist Sunday school but is not a scholar-*bhikkhunī*. Although unaware of the research done by Bhikkhunī Kusuma, whose Sinhala translation of the thesis was published the previous year, Sōmā Bhikkhunī was aware of the view that the conditions were a later interpolation.<sup>31</sup> As she continued her musings on the first condition, she became increasingly critical of its legitimacy. “There is nothing in the word *Dhamma* that says that there is a male/female difference based on *sīlaya*, (morality) is there? If that is the case, that is patriarchy . . . . If there is a difference of *sīlaya* of male and female, then there is no equality, no? The Buddha gave the *upasampadā* based on the equality of men and women, no?”<sup>32</sup> She also indicated that the observance of this condition was simply inappropriate, given the social context in which renunciants now lived: “Sometimes, when one goes to worship young (*upasampadā*) monks . . . they make a retreat . . . Well, we (senior *bhikkhunīs*) are like adults (to them), they get a little afraid . . . that is natural is it not?” Her agitation on the practical observance of this condition was very clear.

Turning her critical focus on another *garudhamma*, she continued: “So, is it not possible for a female to criticize a monk? Can one who troubles a female not get criticized? Just because he is a *bhikṣu*, no? Just think! As women, we must consider our security. We cannot allow a reverend *bhikṣu*<sup>33</sup> to do as he pleases without criticism. Now a monk is a male . . . . Now in our society today . . . there are some sexual involvements. So that must be criticized. We cannot remain silent while they do anything they want to, can we? (Raising her voice) That is not right!”<sup>34</sup>

We reconstructed the list of the conditions together as she was not confident in recalling the conditions in their entirety. Although she affirmed the validity of the second, fourth and fifth conditions, she questioned some of the others on very practical grounds. She began to reflect

on the third condition concerning the bi-weekly instruction given by monks to nuns:

S: In the early times, it was good to get the *avvāda* (instruction). Now in these present times, these days, one cannot go to the temple every two weeks.

P: You do not get to go?

S: One can go, but then there will be more issues raised.

P: Because the lay folk will think something?

S: Yes . . . stream-enterers. There are no stream-entering monks in the temples now. There are those who have the intention of becoming householders (*gihī*). So if a female were to go to the temple on a regular basis, (the monks) will not stay in robes . . . it would be difficult. That is not appropriate.

Here *Sōmā Bhikkhunī* questions the validity of the conditions based on what she sees as the declining morality of modern monks. She made no comment on the fourth condition. She dismissed the sixth condition, interpreting it as the requirement for women to observe six precepts for two years before the *upasampadā*. “We take ten, not six,” she said laughingly. This was clearly a reference to the irrelevance of this condition. Typically, a woman who is about to be ordained as a *bhikkhunī* in Sri Lanka has already spent several years as a Ten Precept Mother. The Ten Precepts are considerably more demanding and ascetic in nature than the six implied in the *garudhammā*.

In conclusion, she asserted that three of the eight conditions, (i.e., the second, fourth and fifth) were valid, but not the other five. Without prompting on my part, *Sōmā Bhikkhunī* raised the issue of the relevance of the conditions for nuns today. Asserting that these were prescribed for *Mahāpajāpati Gotamī* alone she stated: “The other 500

(women) were sent to the monks' temple . . . . So why have these (conditions) been given to us? They were not given to the other 500 . . . ?" She was clearly aware of the popular controversy in Sri Lanka.<sup>35</sup> Despite all her protestations, she insisted on allegiance to the conditions. ". . . we have been told that the monks would be totally opposed if we were to abandon the eight conditions . . . . There will be the greatest acceptance (of the *Bhikkhunī* order) in Sri Lanka if we have the eight *garudhammas*. It is after all an *upasampadā* that was not given that we took."<sup>36</sup> For Sōmā Bhikkhunī, the claimed, albeit questionable observance of the conditions is a marker of her *upasampadā* status and her newly-found *bhikkhunī* identity.

My discussions with monastics reveal that attitudes to the conditions are more complex than is suggested by the interpretations of textual accounts. The apparent impasse created by the debate among scholars as to whether or not the conditions are *Buddhavacana* does not take center stage at this grass-roots level. Here the argument for the conditions is based on a practical necessity, that is, to further the success of the *bhikkhunī* ordinations and comply with requests made by senior supportive monks. Yet, when senior *bhikkhunīs* who train others and claim adherence to the conditions can simultaneously profess ignorance and rejection of them, there is a different dynamic at work. Noncompliance with directives, while arguably implied in ignorance and critiques of the conditions, is not always explicit. Furthermore, affirmation of the conditions by some senior monks is not necessarily reflected in practice by the monks themselves. Some of these monks appear to remain supportive of *bhikkhunīs* who openly reject the conditions in their writings.<sup>37</sup> The mis/practices of the eight conditions indicate that the theory of the model implied by these conditions is not followed.<sup>38</sup> Clearly, the practical realities effectively represent both acceptance and denial of the conditions, what Pierre Bourdieu calls "a logic which is not that

of logic” (109). The eight conditions are perhaps more revered in scholarly discourse than they are or ever were in practice.

## Conclusion

The eight revered conditions have been the focus of much debate among scholars and practitioners because of their apparent legitimation of the subordination of nuns to monks in early Buddhism. Those who, while noting certain textual inconsistencies, represent the eight conditions as part of a somewhat coherent account of the first ordination are arguably complicit in reinforcing the very ideology suggested in the textual accounts. Others, however, are open to interrogating this ideology. The issue of whether or not the conditions are *Buddhavacana* can, for the most part, neither be proven nor disproven. Yet, both scholars and practitioners continue focussing on this issue . . . an issue that appears to have been given renewed attention in the recent context of the full ordination of women in Theravāda Buddhism. I suggest that the debates on the eight conditions, which have tended to center on whether or not the conditions were actually *Buddhavacana*, have reached an impasse. Moreover, I indicate that interpreting the textual account of the conditions as declarative or imperative on the one hand or as interrogative on the other is crucial to determining how the conditions might play out both in theory and in practice.

In addition to examining various attitudes to the eight conditions in theory, this article has also indicated how practitioners provide alternate readings of the eight conditions, hence effectively contesting them. In contemporary practice there are fully ordained nuns who challenge the relevance of the eight conditions in no uncertain terms. Some, in line with one view expressed in the debate among scholars, say that the eight conditions are clearly not *Buddhavacana*. Others who maintain the irre-

levance, or marginal relevance of the conditions, do so on the grounds that they were meant to guide the practice of Mahāpajāpati Gotamī alone and not all nuns. Yet other perspectives are offered by those *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka who suggest that an acceptance of the eight conditions is essential to their identity as *bhikkhunīs*. Those maintaining this view are sometimes uncertain of what the conditions are, thereby, in effect, challenging their authority in practice, or they may, in fact, question the applicability of individual conditions, despite a stated acceptance of them. Meanwhile, as I have indicated, there are also those who simply say that they do not know what the eight conditions are because their focus is on meditation alone.

Discussions with Buddhist practitioners today provide some clues as to how scholars may overcome the apparent impasse presented in the debate on the authority of the eight conditions. Whereas some practitioners may be explicit in their responses to the conditions, it is evident that these may include some whose practice preaches differently.<sup>39</sup> Such mis/practices of the conditions are indicative of alternative views that might even have implications for how they were received in early Buddhism, views which have hitherto been neglected by scholars and practitioners alike.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was presented at a meeting of the Augustana Faculty Research Forum in fall 2007. I am thankful in particular to the careful comments given by Pramod Mishra and Mwenda Ntarangwi. I am especially grateful to Indira Salgado for the encouragement she has given me in the course of my research for this article. I am indebted to Gisela Krey for her meticulous reading of this paper and especially her comments on my translation of the Pāli. Thanks are due to Paul Westman for his editorial thoughts on drafts of this article as well as to the anonymous readers and editors of the

*Journal of Buddhist Ethics* for their useful suggestions. An Augustana College Presidential Research Award supported the writing of this article.

<sup>2</sup> The terms “nun” and “monastic” are used loosely in this article. By “nun” I include women leading a professionally celibate religious life and who may or may not be fully ordained; by monastics I include nuns as well as those men leading professionally celibate religious lives who may or may not have the full ordination.

<sup>3</sup> There is no assumption here of hypocrisy, but rather a suggestion that practice cannot be limited to claims that might be made.

<sup>4</sup> Belsey's discussion focuses on the categorization and analysis of different texts namely, interrogative, imperative and declarative texts. Here, I examine a variety of ways (interrogative, imperative, and declarative ways) of approaching a basic version of a text.

<sup>5</sup> I refer to scholars and practitioners as groups that may sometimes overlap (as scholar-practitioners). Hence scholars may or may not be practitioners, and practitioners (lay and monastic) may or may not be scholars.

<sup>6</sup> Scholars often draw on social structures, such as rules to help interpret cultural and institutional organizations. In so doing they may “explain a social practice that in fact obeys quite different principles” (Bourdieu 19). I suggest that the current mis/practices of the eight conditions lend insights into how the conditions might possibly have been received in early Buddhism.

<sup>7</sup> The Pāli version: “*hotu upsampadā*” is clearly imperative.

<sup>8</sup> See Blackstone's article for an interesting literary analysis of this simile.

<sup>9</sup> This statement, which has provided one rationale for the revived ordinations of women, is well known in Sri Lanka, as is the suggestion made here that the conditions were given to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī alone and not the 500 other women. However, the pre-

ceding assertion that the eight conditions were presented to the “*bhikkhunīs*” in general as a means of containment, is often ignored.

<sup>10</sup> Insight into the context and possible meanings of this word are provided by Chung (227-234).

<sup>11</sup> This is a translation from the Pali text in the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana, CD-ROM (Vipassana Research Institute.)

<sup>12</sup> See Collett for a useful critique of Horner.

<sup>13</sup> The italics are mine.

<sup>14</sup> Unlike Wijayaratna, Bhikkhunī Kusuma not only indicates that several conditions presuppose the existence of particular *Vinaya* rules which were not in place until *after* the *bhikkhunī Sangha* had been established, she also indicates that this is a reason to take issue with the very authority of the conditions. Like Horner, Wijayaratna does not problematize this discrepancy in the chronology of the promulgation of the conditions in relation to that of their parallel *Vinaya* stipulations. Bhikkhunī Kusuma's question arising from a comparison of the fourth *dhamma* with a similar *Vinaya* rule is relevant to other *garudhammasā* and their *Vinaya* parallels: "How could such a *Vinaya* rule be applicable as a *Garudhamma* even before the arising of the *Bhikkhunī Order*?" (“*Bhikkhunī Vinaya*” 48)

<sup>15</sup> Belsey indicates that authors who continue to re/create ideology are those who ignore the inconsistencies and potential for transformation in texts (42). The increased, and perhaps undeserved attention given to the eight conditions in the past decade among scholars and practitioners is embedded in a context of renewal of women's ordination lineages, some of which yet remains complicit, i.e., in a manner that is similar to that of the scholars discussed in this section.

<sup>16</sup> I suggest that scholars in this section indirectly contest the ideologies that are represented in the previous section. Some scholars in this section may draw heavily on

those in the section above (for example, Gross from Falk and Hüsken from Horner), but they, unlike those discussed earlier, clearly interrogate the account of the eight conditions and its implications for early Buddhism.

<sup>17</sup> See Koppedrayer for an overview of recent publications on gender issues in Buddhism.

<sup>18</sup> Gross and Falk both share a certain complicity in attributing to Buddhists from Asia an inability to address and challenge inegalitarian injunctions.

<sup>19</sup> It is difficult to categorize the work of Bhikkhunī Kusuma as either “Western” or “Sri Lankan,” because it is arguably both. The essay that I refer to here, “Inaccuracies in Buddhist Women's History,” was first presented in English in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and was published in the U.S.A.

<sup>20</sup> Hüsken follows Horner’s example in comparing several of the eight conditions with later *Vinaya* injunctions (see her discussion of conditions two, three, four, and seven in particular).

<sup>21</sup> Boundaries of what is “Theravāda” and “Sri Lanka” are permeable: scholars and Buddhists practitioners dwelling in Sri Lanka both affect and are affected by scholarship and Buddhist traditions outside the geographical area that is Sri Lanka; Theravāda Buddhist women (from within and without Sri Lanka) train for the higher ordination in Sri Lanka, India, and Taiwan; Sri Lankans travel to Sākyadhitā and other international conferences throughout the world; Mahāyāna monastics assist in the training and ordination of Theravāda *bhikkhunīs*; access to websites, though limited, provide links to further discussions and finally, on-site investigations conducted by researchers like myself encourage renewed reflections on the eight conditions. Although participation of Sri Lankans in forums where the eight conditions, among other controversial issues, may be discussed is boundless, my focus here is on the Buddhist environment that is specific to Sri Lankan contexts.

<sup>22</sup> My reference here is to celibate Buddhist women who observe a list of Ten Precepts. They wear saffron robes and often live in ascetic communities. They do not have the full ordination of *bhikkhunīs*, and do not necessarily aspire to receiving it. For an extended discussion on Ten Precept Mothers see Salgado (“Religious Identities”).

<sup>23</sup> The relationship between academic investigations and local context is indicated in Cheng’s frustrated attempt to study attitudes to the eight conditions in Taiwan (85-90).

<sup>24</sup> It is noteworthy perhaps that publications appearing locally (in Sri Lanka) at this time, such as those by Dewaraja, Kariyawasam, and Hecker paid scant, if any attention to the text of the first ordination account, unlike the publications that appeared about a decade later.

<sup>25</sup> See (1) Ceylon Daily News (CDN) 21 Oct 1972, “Move to reestablish Order of Bhikkhunis in the Island”; (2) Times of Ceylon, 16 Jan 1974, “Government will help set up order for Buddhist nuns says President;”; (3) Ceylon Daily Mirror 16 January 1974, “Government will help to revive the Bhikkhuni Sasana,”; (4) and Sunday Observer 15 February 1981, “Buddhist nuns in China today”.

<sup>26</sup> *Sil mātās* appeared in the TV news on 6 May 1985 which announced a new program to help educate nuns as missionaries; 7 July 1986, the television news reported that for the first time ever special classes for *sil mātās* to study for the prestigious *pracīna* examination would begin. On 2 May 1985 The Minister for Cultural Affairs appeared on the television news broadcast with a large group of Chinese nuns. One purpose of his visit was to consider the possibility of bringing the *Bhikkhuni* order to Sri Lanka from China.

<sup>27</sup> For example, “Bhikkhuni Order” by D. A. Weeraratne, *Daily News* 1984.

<sup>28</sup> A particularly virulent public debate ensued for a period of six months in 1989 in the popular Buddhist paper *Budusaraṇa*. The debate between Amarasiri Weeraratne, an erudite Buddhist activist for the *bhikkhuni* order and a leading monk, ended without resolution when the editor requested the authors to terminate the discussion. Interestingly, this debate, focusing on Sri Lankan history and the legitimacy of establishing a

Theravāda *Bhikkhunī* order with the assistance of Mahayana *bhikkhunīs* ensued, not coincidentally in the context of increasing political turmoil and civil disobedience in the predominantly Buddhist south of Sri Lanka.

<sup>29</sup> My subjects include a senior Buddhist monk who has participated in the ordination of *bhikkhunīs*: six *bhikkhunīs*, one *sāmaṇeri* (novice) shortly before her *upasampadā*, and one Ten Precept Mother. The *sāmaṇeri* and *bhikkhunīs* interviewed in this section are all significantly influential head nuns in their own hermitages. Discussions took place in Sri Lanka in 2002 and 2004. Names of interviewees have been changed for purposes of anonymity.

<sup>30</sup> Another *bhikkhunī*, also recently ordained, was equally emphatic about the necessity of accepting the eight conditions. However, she was able to recall only three of them.

<sup>31</sup> Although Sōmā Bhikkhunī was cognizant of the inconsistencies in the textual account of the ordination, she was not conversant with the local publications about them.

<sup>32</sup> Sōmā Bhikkhunī returned to question this condition several times. It was clearly the condition to which she most objected.

<sup>33</sup> *Bhikshunvahanse*. This reference was made without intended sarcasm, as might be denoted in the English

<sup>34</sup> She did not seem to be clear in the difference between the seventh and eighth conditions, and seemed to interpret these together to mean that a monk might reprimand a nun, but not vice versa.

<sup>35</sup> A well known senior *dasa sil mātā* who oversees a training center for junior *sil mātās* and a vibrant Buddhist Sunday school was also conversant with this issue.

<sup>36</sup> “*No dunna upasampasadā nē gatte?*”

<sup>37</sup> Some monks from Sri Lanka who are supportive of the higher ordination are explicit about the need of *bhikkhunīs* to accept the conditions. Yet these same monks cannot but

be aware that a few of the *bhikkhunīs* they support have, in their publications, clearly rejected the conditions.

<sup>38</sup> Scholars have not considered the alternative views on the conditions that are presented here by practitioners. Such scholarship is indicative of seeing, as Bourdieu indicates, “action as merely *execution* of the model . . .” (29).

<sup>39</sup> Here I include both *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*. Some *bhikkhus* who insist on the observance of the conditions are supportive of *bhikkhunīs* whom they know are explicitly critical of them.

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