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The Buddha's Past Life as a Princess  
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# The Buddha's Past Life as a Princess in the *Ekottarika-āgama*

Ven. Anālayo<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In the present article I study the *Ekottarika-āgama* version of a past life of the Buddha as a princess.<sup>2</sup> I begin with some general observations on the gender of the Buddha's past lives as reported in *jātaka* narratives, followed by a translation of the relevant section from the *Ekottarika-āgama*. Then I compare this *Ekottarika-āgama* version to three other versions of this tale preserved in Pāli and Chinese, in particular in relation to the way they deal with the dictum that a woman cannot receive a prediction of future Buddhahood.

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## Pāli Discourse Jātakas

In what follows I first survey *jātakas* found in early discourse literature, arguably the earliest strata of *jātaka* tales attested in Buddhist literature, in order to provide a background for evaluating the *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse that reports a past life of the Buddha as a woman. Besides noting indications for the early development and significance of the *jātaka* genre through comparative study, my main focus is on the gender of the Buddha in his past lives.

My survey is restricted to *jātakas* that are found as discourses in the four Pāli *Nikāyas*, the only complete set of *Nikāyas/Āgamas* from a single tradition at our disposal. Moreover, I focus on Pāli discourse *jātakas* that have parallels in the discourse collections of other traditions, as these tales stand good chances to reflect a very early stage in the development of the *jātaka* genre. Such probably quite early specimens cover two cases in which the Buddha in a former life had been a wheel-turning king and four cases in which he had been a Brahmin.

The two discourse *jātakas* that feature a wheel-turning king are the *Mahāsudassana-sutta* and the *Makhādeva-sutta*. In both instances the Pāli versions agree with their parallels in identifying the respective wheel-turning king of that time to have been a past life of the Buddha.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the narrative function of the motif of the wheel-turning king, elsewhere I have argued that its description of the acme of worldly power serves to highlight the superiority of renunciation and of

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<sup>3</sup> DN 17 at DN II 196,11 and its parallels in Sanskrit fragments, Waldschmidt (*Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*: 354,9) (§34.166) and Matsumura (48,3), as well as DĀ 2 at T I 24b22 (which mentions six past lives as a wheel-turning king in general, a reference also found in the Sanskrit fragment version), T 5 at T I 171a19, T 6 at T I 186c7, T 7 at T I 203a6, and MĀ 68 at T I 518b8. MN 83 at MN II 82,22 and its parallels MĀ 67 at T I 515a8, EĀ 50.4 at T II 810a26, and D 1 *kha* 56a2 or Q 1030 *ge* 51b6.

undertaking the Buddhist path to liberation over any kind of secular happiness or dominion.<sup>4</sup> This would apply to both the *Mahāsudassana-sutta* and the *Makhādeva-sutta*, as well as their parallels.

One tale from the other group of four discourse *jātakas* concerns a Brahmin student (*māṇava*) who in spite of his initial resistance is convinced by a friend to visit the Buddha of that time and eventually decides to go forth as a Buddhist monk. This tale is found in the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* and its parallels, which agree that this Brahmin student was a past life of the Buddha.<sup>5</sup> Another tale in the *Velāma-sutta* features a Brahmin who makes a lavish offering. The merit accrued in this way does not match the act of taking refuge in the Buddha, since at the time of this offering there were no truly meritorious recipients of the Brahmin's gifts. The *Velāma-sutta* and nearly all of its parallels agree in identifying the Brahmin donor as a past life of the Buddha.<sup>6</sup>

Another two tales concern Brahmin *purohitas*. One of these tales, found in the *Kūṭadanta-sutta*, is again concerned with the superiority of taking refuge in the Buddha compared to the performance of a sacrifice.<sup>7</sup> In this case the parallel versions differ whether the Buddha was the

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<sup>4</sup> Anālayo (“Ma(k)hādeva” and “Nimi”).

<sup>5</sup> MN 81 at MN II 54,18 and its parallels MĀ 63 at T I 503a5, the *Mahāvastu*, Senart (1: 335,5), the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli (30,14) and D 1 ga 10a3 or Q 1030 nge 9a7.

<sup>6</sup> AN 9.20 at AN IV 394,11 and its parallels MĀ 155 at T I 678a7, T 73 at T I 879c19, T 74 at T I 882a13, and EĀ 27.3 at T II 645a9. Another parallel, T 72 at T I 878c11, gives the tale without identifying its protagonist as a past life of the Buddha, perhaps reflecting an earlier version of the story.

<sup>7</sup> DN 5 at DN I 145,32, which here forms part of a series of undertakings that are superior to the great sacrifice of the past: offering a building for the Buddhist monastic community, taking refuge, undertaking the precepts, and going forth under the Buddha and becoming an *arhat*.

Brahmin *purohita* or rather the king himself.<sup>8</sup> The other tale, found in the *Mahāgovinda-sutta*, concludes by indicating that the path to communion with Brahmā practiced and taught by the Brahmin *purohita* who is the protagonist of the tale did not lead to true dispassion and realization, unlike the path now taught by the Buddha.<sup>9</sup> Nearly all of the parallel versions agree that the Brahmin *purohita* was a past life of the Buddha.<sup>10</sup>

The narrative functions of the four tales involving Brahmins seem to be closely related to the need to demarcate the superiority of the early Buddhist tradition over contemporary Brahmins. One way in which this tendency expresses itself is by depicting actual conversion of a Brahmin, as in the case of the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* and its parallels. Another manifestation of the same tendency evident in the tales involving sacrifices and/or *purohitas* proceeds by showing that Brahminical offerings cannot compare to going for refuge in the Buddha, who teaches a path of practice superior to communion with Brahmā.

Similar to the two tales involving wheel-turning kings, these four tales concerned with Brahmins of the past would have been able to fulfill their narrative function even without being considered stories of a past life of the Buddha. The fact that the identification of a past life of the

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<sup>8</sup> According to DN 5 at DN I 143,26 the Buddha was the Brahmin *purohita*, whereas according to DĀ 23 at T I 100b26 he was the king. A Sanskrit fragment parallel then comes out with the rather puzzling indication that the Buddha had been both, fragment 408r4, von Criegern (35): *ubhayam apy ahaṃ bhāradvāja samanumarāmi api rājā kṣatryo mūrdhābhiṣikta evaṃrūpasya yajñasya yaṣṭā api brāhmaṇaḥ purohitaḥ evaṃrūpasya yajñasya yājita*.

<sup>9</sup> DN 19 at DN II 251,12.

<sup>10</sup> DN 19 at DN II 251,9 and its parallels DĀ 3 at T I 34a10 and the *Mahāvastu*, Senart (3: 224,5). Another parallel, T 8 at T I 213c14, just concludes by indicating that the Buddha told this story about the past and thus without providing any identification, which could be reflecting an earlier version of the tale.

Buddha is not invariably reported, or at times even different identifications can be found, gives the impression that these tales need not have been a *jātaka* from the outset.<sup>11</sup>

Whether parables or *jātakas*, however, for these stories to make sense and appeal to the ancient Indian audience, their protagonists must be male.

In the two cases involving a wheel-turning king, according to a dictum to which I come back later in the course of this article a woman is in fact considered incapable of fulfilling the role of a wheel-turning king.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, in the ancient Indian setting it is only natural that the Brahmins in the other four cases are males, since males were the standard students of Vedic lore and had the leading role in the performance of sacrifices and offerings. Besides the role to be played in a sacrifice, a Brahmin *purohita* also had a central role in the political sphere, acting on behalf of the king.<sup>13</sup> In sum, the role of a Brahmin *purohita* just as much as that of a king in the ancient Indian setting makes it natural that the protagonist is male, independent of whether the story is perceived by its audience to be a parable or an historical account.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. in more detail Anālayo (*Genesis* 55–71).

<sup>12</sup> According to the *Mahāvastu*, Senart (2: 70,1), in the ancient Indian setting kings in general were male, *na ca kaḥiṃ cit istriyo rājā, sarvatra puruṣā rājā*, “nowhere females are kings, everywhere males are kings.” Megasthenes, however, reports that in a part of India a ruling queen could be found; cf. McCrindle (147, 156, and 158) as well as the discussion in Altekar (186) and Scharfe (121f).

<sup>13</sup> As note by Gokhale, the way the *purohita* is described in Pāli discourses clearly reflects involvement in political administration and warfare (71). On the role and functions of the *purohita* in the commentarial Pāli *Jātakas* cf. Fick (107–117), on the *purohita* in general cf., e.g., Scharfe (112–118) and Schetelich.

<sup>14</sup> My survey only covers Pāli discourse *jātakas* of which parallels from other transmission lineages are extant, consequently I have not taken up AN 3.15 at AN I 112,27, a past

So in the above discourse *jātakas*, the maleness of their respective protagonists, whether or not identified as a past life of the Buddha, is a requirement of the narrative setting. The story would not have worked in the standard ancient Indian setting with a woman taking on these roles.<sup>15</sup>

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life of the Buddha as a king's wheelwright of which no parallel is known. In as much as the gender of the Buddha's lives is concerned, however, in the case of a wheelwright who works for the king it seems also natural that the protagonist is male. Another tale I have not taken into account is the story of Sunetta, because this is not a *jātaka* in AN 7.62 at AN IV 103,24 (nor in AN 6.54 at AN III 371,16 or AN 7.69 at AN IV 135,9, where he is also mentioned), but only in the parallels MĀ 8 at T I 429b28 and T 30 at T I 812c17, as well as in a discourse quotation; cf. Pradhan (472,3) and Dietz (98,32) (for further quotations cf. Lamotte (520 note 5)). In this case, too, the protagonist being a Brahmin teacher makes it natural that he is presented as a male.

<sup>15</sup> Stories from the past narrated in the early discourses rarely involve human female protagonists in exemplary roles, presumably reflecting the need for these tales to make sense in the context of the beliefs of the ancient Indian audience, given that Indian women rarely had the opportunity to occupy an exemplary position, apart from being the ideal housewife. As a result of this, there would have been little chance for a narrative to become a *jātaka* in which an exemplary woman features, who could then have been identified as a past life of the Buddha. One of the few stories from the past involving women illustrates this. This story depicts a housewife reputed for her patience who is being tested by her female slave, with the result that she is shown up for being in actual fact quite irritable and prone to anger; cf. MN 21 at MN I 125,3 and its parallel MĀ 193 at T I 744c12. Such a tale would stand little chance of becoming a *jātaka*, as this would require presenting the Buddha as either an irritable housewife or else a slave. Both protagonists would not concord with the tendency in the early strata of discourse *jātakas* to identify the Buddha consistently with positive and high ranking human personalities.

### Tales in the Pāli *Jātaka* Commentary

Another type of *jātaka* tale can be found in the Pāli *Jātaka* commentary. This *Jātaka* commentary purports to provide the narrative background for the delivery of stanzas preserved in the *Khuddaka-nikāya* of the Pāli canon. The tales themselves are strictly speaking not “canonical,”<sup>16</sup> although such distinctions may have been of little relevance for the audience of these stories.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the indication that the bulk of narratives in the *Jātaka* collection is not canonical does serve to highlight the fact that these pertain to a distinctly later level than those found among the Pāli discourses.<sup>18</sup>

As already noted by several scholars, the tales found in the Pāli *Jātaka* commentary draw on an ancient Indian narrative heritage.<sup>19</sup> Needless to say, this involves a development that would have been of pan-Buddhist significance and not confined to the Theravāda tradition. The tendencies for stories to turn into past lives of the Buddha can be illustrated with the example of the simile of a quail that is caught by a falcon. Found in a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya* and its *Samyukta-āgama* parallel, this tale serves to illustrate the need to avoid being caught by

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<sup>16</sup> For reflections on the notion of the Pāli canon cf., e.g., Collins, Dhirasekera, Freiburger (“Buddhist” and “Was”), and Warder.

<sup>17</sup> Derris comments that “it is important to note that the medieval audience would be unlikely to categorize *jātakas* as either apocryphal or canonical. When women and men heard any . . . *jātaka* they would receive it as part of the Buddha’s biography” (“When” 31).

<sup>18</sup> As pointed out by von Hinüber, such “Ur-*jātakas*” found among the Pāli discourses share as a distinct characteristic that they are entirely in prose (in contrast to the canonical *Jātaka* collection, which is in verse) (*Entstehung* 187).

<sup>19</sup> Cf., e.g., Franke, Kulasuriya (10), Laut (503), Ohnuma (“*Jātaka*” 401), and Norman (*Pāli* 79).

Māra.<sup>20</sup> What in the discourse versions is clearly just a parable, in the *Jātaka* commentary has become a past life of the Buddha, who is believed to have been the quail.<sup>21</sup> In line with the example provided by this story, the *Jātaka* commentary abounds in past lives of the Buddha as an animal, in contrast to the *jātakas* found among Pāli discourses, where he is a human being.

The tendency of turning popular tales into *jātakas* had the result that at times rather worldly narrations became records of the Buddha's past lives.<sup>22</sup> As a result of this, in some past lives he is shown to engage in quite objectionable conduct.<sup>23</sup> Compassion is also notably absent from many tales.<sup>24</sup> Clearly these stories did not come into being as illustrations of the future Buddha's cultivation of the qualities required for Buddhahood,<sup>25</sup> but were instead put to this use when they had already acquired the basic elements of their narrative plots.

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<sup>20</sup> SN 47.6 at SN V 146,17 and SĀ 617 at T II 172c25; cf. also T 212 at T IV 695a12.

<sup>21</sup> Jā 168 at Jā II 60,23; Rhys Davids comments that "there can be no question as to which is the older document; for the *Jātaka* quotes as its source, and by name and chapter, the very passage in the *Samyutta* in which the fable originally occurs" (195).

<sup>22</sup> Winternitz observes: "so konnte jede noch so weltliche, dem buddhistischen Ideenkreise noch so ferne stehende Geschichte zu einer 'buddhistischen' werden" (90).

<sup>23</sup> Appleton points out that in some stories he "lies, steals, murders, and commits sexual impropriety" ("Place" 117 note 16); cf. also De (59) and Skilling ("Le *Jātaka*" 54).

<sup>24</sup> Schmithausen notes that "in den (meist vorbuddhistischen) Geschichten, die von den Buddhisten auf frühere Leben des historischen Buddha (als Bodhisattva) projiziert worden sind, spielt das Mitleid oft gar keine Rolle" (438 note 8).

<sup>25</sup> Cone and Gombrich point out that the idea that "the Bodhisattva is throughout these lives developing . . . [the] prerequisites for Buddhahood . . . certainly postdates most of the stories" in the *Jātaka* collection (xvii). In fact, according to Cummings, "most *Jātakas* at the time of Bhārhut were simply used as parables in illustration of the Doctrine, and did not yet carry any specific significance as stories of the Buddha's previous incarnations" (20); cf. also Sarkar (5).

Now, in the Pāli *Jātaka* commentary the Buddha's past lives are also consistently male. Here this is not a result of the narrative setting, but much rather would be a result of the way these stories came into being. When identifying one of the protagonists of a particular story taken from ancient Indian lore as a past life of the Buddha, it must have been natural, in fact perhaps even inevitable, that characters were chosen who were male.<sup>26</sup> This not only follows the precedent set by the discourse *jātakas*, but also conforms to the general notion that gender remains constant across different lives.<sup>27</sup> In this context, maleness would naturally have become a characteristic capable of providing some degree of constancy among otherwise widely different characters from the human and animal world. From a narrative perspective, maleness would naturally have stood out among the unceasing variations in these tales as an easily identifiable marker of continuity.

In sum, it seems to me that in discourse *jātakas* the previous lives of the Buddha are male due to the narrative requirement of the respective stories; in the commentarial Pāli *Jātaka* collection maleness serves to string together diverse stories as past lives of the Buddha.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Appleton sums up that “the fact that the Bodhisatta always happens to be male in his *jātaka* stories is simply because he is male in his final birth” (*Jātaka* 96).

<sup>27</sup> Consistency of gender would have been a natural notion in the Indian setting. Doniger points out that “in Hindu texts . . . very few, if any, gender changes occur in reincarnation . . . this dearth of gender transformations in Hindu stories of rebirth stands in strong contrast to the frequent changes of species that take place in reincarnation in texts like *The Laws of Manu*” (298); cf. also Appleton on the consistency in sex across lives in *Apadāna* narrations (“Footsteps” 43f).

<sup>28</sup> Appleton sums up: “that women cannot be *bodhisattas* was not, therefore, a careful considered doctrine *designed* to exclude women. It did, however, result in a great inequality, despite widespread recognition that women were capable of achieving arahatship” (“Footsteps” 47).

### **Jātakas and the Bodhisattva Path**

Once *jātakas* in general, be these found in the Pāli canon or elsewhere, came to be seen as exemplifying the conduct of a bodhisattva, however, the consistent maleness of the Buddha's past lives would have acquired a significance far beyond its original purposes. The fact that he was always male would have easily resulted in the notion that the path to Buddhahood, at least in its final stages, requires one to be male.<sup>29</sup> This is in fact spelled out explicitly in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, for example, according to which an advanced bodhisattva has left behind womanhood for good and will not be reborn again as a female.<sup>30</sup> The *Mahāvastu* indicates that those in the ten stages (*bhūmi*) leading to Buddhahood are all males.<sup>31</sup> In a similar vein, the *Nidānakathā* of the *Jātaka* commentary lists eight conditions that are required for being able to receive the prediction of future Buddhahood, consecrating one's condition of being a bodhisattva, one of which is possessing a male genital organ.<sup>32</sup>

It is against the background of this development, where maleness as the result of a narrative requirement becomes a requirement for actu-

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<sup>29</sup> As Appleton points out, "after the association of the stories with the *bodhisatta* path, his consistently male character influenced the idea that a *bodhisatta* must be male" (*Jātaka* 96).

<sup>30</sup> Wogihara (1930: 94,4): *bodhisattvaḥ prathamasyaiva kalpāsaṃkhyeyasyātyayāt strībhāvaṃ vijahāti bodhimaṇḍaniśadanam upādāya na punar jātu strī bhavati*; cf. also Dayal (223f) and Paul (212 note 7). Romberg notes that once "the aim was no longer to become an Arhat, but to become Buddha . . . this shift made, in fact, the situation for women worse, because a doctrinal foundation was laid for the necessity of changing the sex before being able to become enlightened" (164); cf. also Harrison, who sums up: "although both men and women can ride in the Great Vehicle, only men are allowed to drive it" (79).

<sup>31</sup> Senart (1: 103,11): *sarvāsu daśabhūmiṣu puruṣā bhavanti*.

<sup>32</sup> *Jā* I 44,20: *liṅgasampatti*; cf. also the discussion in Endo (253f). *Ps* IV 122,12 and *Mp* II 15,7 precede such a listing with the indication that a woman is unable to have the (full-fledged) aspiration for Buddhahood, *paṇidhānamattam pi itthiyā na sampajjati*.

al practice, that the tale of the Buddha's past life as a princess is best evaluated. In what follows I translate a version of this tale found as part of a discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama* and then study this version in comparison with three parallels. These are the *Padīpadāna-jātaka*, which forms part of the *Paññāsa-jātaka* collection, a collection that is not part of the *Jātaka* commentary related to the verses found in the *Khuddakanikāya*.<sup>33</sup> Another version occurs as part of the "Scriptural Collection on the Six Perfections" (六度集經), an assemblage of *jātaka* tales illustrating the Buddha's practice of the six *pāramitās*, preserved in Chinese translation.<sup>34</sup> The third parallel taken up in my discussion is part of a collection known under the title of being the "Scripture on the Wise and the Fool" (賢愚經), preserved in Chinese translation.<sup>35</sup>

The fact that a version of this story is part of a discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama* reflects a recurrent feature of this collection in incorporating late material not found in other collections of early discourses in the Pāli *Nikāyas* or Chinese *Āgamas*.<sup>36</sup> Neither its 'canonical' status nor differing times of translation, when compared to the Collection on the Six Perfections and the Scripture on the Wise and the Fool, offer suffi-

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<sup>33</sup> Jaini (*Paññāsa-jātaka* 396,1 to 402,3). On this text cf. also Jaini ("Padīpadānajātaka"); on other versions of this tale in Theravāda literature cf. Derris ("When" and "My Sister's"), Gombrich (70), Skilling ("Gotama's" 950 and "Quatre" 132f); and on the whole collection or other parts of it Sheravanichkul, Skilling ("Jātaka"), Unebe ("Not" and "Toward"), and Unebe et al. ("Three").

<sup>34</sup> T 152 at T III 38c5 to 39a7 (tale 73); on this collection cf. Shyu, translations of tale 73 can be found in Chavannes (263–266) and Shyu (180–183).

<sup>35</sup> T 202 at T IV 371b13 to 371c22 (this is part of tale 20); for translations of the Mongolian and Tibetan counterparts cf. Frye (198f) and Dhammadinnā; on the textual history of this text as a whole cf. Mair.

<sup>36</sup> Anālayo ("Zeng-yi" 824).

cient ground for deciding which version should be considered earliest.<sup>37</sup> As far as I can see, it seems best to consider all four versions as different executions of the same basic plot, without attempting to identify one of them as the source text.

### Translation of the *Ekottarika-āgama* Version<sup>38</sup>

In former times there was a king called \*Ratnagiri, who governed by relying on the *Dharma*, without any crookedness, being in control over this realm of Jambudvīpa. At that time there was a Buddha called Ratnaśikhi,<sup>39</sup> who was a Tathāgata, an *arhat*, fully and rightly awakened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, a Well Gone One, a knower of the world, a supreme person, a leader on the path of *Dharma*,<sup>40</sup> a teacher of gods and humans, called a

<sup>37</sup> Needless to say, an early version may be translated late and a late version early, depending on the vicissitudes of transmission, wherefore time of translation is not by itself a sure guide to assessing the earliness of a particular version.

<sup>38</sup> The translated text is taken from EĀ 43.2 at T II 757a26 to 758a6, which is part of a longer discourse. The first part of EĀ 43.2 describes the eightfold *uposatha* and thus is a parallel to AN 8.41 at AN IV 248,18. The exposition of the eightfold *uposatha* in EĀ 43.2 leads on to the topic of aspirations of the three vehicles, where the aspiration to become a Buddha then leads over to the topic of the future advent of Maitreya and his three assemblies of disciples.

<sup>39</sup> My rendering of the name follows the indication in Akanuma (543) (although given as the name of a prince); in the *Padīpadāna-jātaka*, Jaini (*Paññāsa-jātaka* 397,4), the Buddha's name is Porāṇadīpaṅkara.

<sup>40</sup> Nattier explains that “having taken *anuttarapurusa* as a separate title ... translators were left to explain the epithet *damyasārathi* on its own. In . . . Prakrit languages . . . *damya* would have been written *damma* . . . Ignoring the unaspirated character of the initial *d-*, this word was apparently read as *dhamma*, and the resulting \**dhamma-sārathi* interpreted as ‘charioteer of the Dharma’” (227); cf. also Minh Chau (326).

Buddha, a protector of the world, who had emerged in the world.

That king had a daughter called Munī with an exceptional countenance,<sup>41</sup> her face being of the color of peach blossoms, [757b] which was all the result of having in previous lives made offerings to Buddhas.

At that time that Buddha also had three communal gatherings, [just as the future Buddha Maitreya].<sup>42</sup> At the time of the first communal gathering of disciples there was a congregation of 168,000,<sup>43</sup> at the second communal gathering there was a congregation of 160,000, and at the third communal gathering a congregation of 130,000. All these were *arhats* who had eradicated the influxes.<sup>44</sup>

Then that Buddha gave a teaching to his disciples in this way: “Monks, you should mindfully sit in meditation, do not be negligent. Moreover, try to make an effort to study and recite the discourses and the precepts.”

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<sup>41</sup> EĀ 43.2 at T II 758c4 reports the Buddha Gautama identifying princess Munī as one of his previous lives. The corresponding type of identification can be found in the *Padīpadāna-jātaka*, Jaini (*Paññāsa-jātaka* 401,38), in T 152 at T III 39a6, and in T 202 at T IV 371c19.

<sup>42</sup> My supplementation is guided by the fact that the use of “also” seems to refer back to three communal gatherings under the future Buddha Maitreya mentioned previously in EĀ 43.2 at T II 757a18.

<sup>43</sup> Adopting the variant 初聲聞 instead of 聲聞初.

<sup>44</sup> DN 14 at DN II 5,6 and its parallels in Sanskrit fragments, Waldschmidt (*Mahāvādānasūtra* 74), as well as DĀ 1 at T 2b22, T 2 at T I 151c15, and T 4 at T I 160a10 similarly report that several former Buddhas had three such communal gatherings of disciples; as Waldschmidt points out, EĀ 48.4 differs in this respect (*Mahāvādānasūtra* 74 note 1).

The attendant of that Buddha was called Pūrṇa, he was foremost in learning; just as now with me the monk Ānanda is most excellent in learning. Then the monk Pūrṇa said to the Buddha Ratnaśikhi:

“There are many monks whose faculties are dull, who have neither the energy for the task of meditative concentration nor for study and recitation. Wishing for these people to find peace, to what category [of practice] would the Blessed One allocate them now?”

The Buddha Ratnaśikhi said: “Suppose there are monks whose faculties are dull and who are not fit for the task of practicing meditation [or recitation]. They should cultivate [the third] of the three activities [that lead] to a superior human condition. What are the three? They are: sitting in meditation, reciting the discourses, and assisting the *Saṅgha* in its affairs.” In this way, that Buddha gave such sublime teachings to his disciples.

At that time there was also an old monk who was not fit for the task of practicing meditation.<sup>45</sup> Then that monk had this thought: “I have now grown up to be ripe in age, and I am also unable to cultivate the task of meditation [or recitation]. Let me now aspire to practice a task that assists [the *Saṅgha*].” Then that old monk entered the town of \*Marīci to seek for oil to light lamps and come to worship the Buddha Ratnaśikhi daily by illuminating him without interruption.

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<sup>45</sup> On the negative image of old monks unable to learn cf. von Hinüber (“Old” 72–74).

Then the princess Munī saw this old monk begging in the streets of the town. She asked that monk: “Monk, what are you now seeking for?” The monk replied: “Your royal highness,<sup>46</sup> please know that I am old and feeble with age, I am not fit for the task of practicing meditation. Therefore I beg for oil to be used to worship the Buddha by continuously venerating him with illumination.”

When that lady heard the epithet “Buddha,” she was delighted and thrilled, unable to contain herself. She said to the old monk: “Monk, from now on do not try to beg at any other place. I will myself support and assist you with oil and lamp wicks, completing your generosity.”<sup>47</sup>

Then the old monk accepted the offering of that girl and came daily to fetch oil to worship the Tathāgata Ratnaśikhi, keeping up this meritorious deed. He dedicat-

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<sup>46</sup> Adopting a variant that adds 王.

<sup>47</sup> In the *Padīpadāna-jātaka*, Jaini (*Paññāsa-jātaka* 398,31), the princess makes an aspiration for future Buddhahood when offering the oil to the monk, asking the monk to inform the Buddha of her aspiration. Notably, her aspiration involves a word play on the oil she has offered, *siddhatthata*, where she proclaims that her name in future will be Siddhattha (Skilling notes that the word play involved in this proclamation comes in the company of another word play between the offering of lights, *dīpa*, and the monk’s future name *Dīpaṃkara* (“Quatre” 132f)). For the princess to be proclaiming her own future name is noteworthy as the revelation of a future Buddha’s name is usually the task of the Buddha who gives the prediction, not of the one who aspires to future Buddhahood. Derris points out that “with this revised etymology, the princess’s presence is again asserted into the traditional biography insisting that the Bodhisatta’s lifetime as the princess cannot be forgotten. Indeed, her meritorious actions and aspirations enabled Prince Siddhattha to accomplish his aim. And thus the total frame of the Buddha biography is reshaped by the events of this female lifetime, from supplanting the first prediction of Buddhahood by the princess’s reception of the prediction of the prediction, to the resignification of the Bodhisatta’s final birth name” (“When” 40).

ed the offering for his supreme and true awakening, with his own mouth proclaiming:

“I am already feeble from age and my faculties are moreover dull, I have no wisdom for the task of practicing meditation. Endowed with the merits of this deed, wherever I am reborn, may I not fall into evil destinies. <sup>[757c]</sup> May [this merit] in future lives cause me to meet a Buddha, just like now the Tathāgata Ratnaśikhi, not different from [now], and may I also meet a noble assembly just like the noble assembly now, not different from [now], and may I be taught the *Dharma* just as now, not different from [now].”

Then the Tathāgata Ratnaśikhi, knowing what that monk had been thinking in his mind,<sup>48</sup> promptly smiled,<sup>49</sup> from his mouth five-colored lights emerged, and he said: “Now, monk, in the future, after innumerable eons, you will become a Buddha called the Tathāgata Dīpaṃkara, an *arhat*, fully and rightly awakened.”

Then the old monk was delighted and thrilled, unable to contain himself. His body and mind became firm with the intention not to retrogress and his facial complexion was superb and exceptional.

Then the girl Munī saw that the facial complexion of that monk was extraordinary. She came forward and asked: “Monk, now your facial complexion is very special and exceptional. What is the reason?”

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<sup>48</sup> It seems that, although the monk had only verbally expressed a desire to meet a future Buddha, etc., in his mind he also aspired to become a Buddha himself eventually.

<sup>49</sup> On the Buddha's smile cf. Balbir (91–97).

The monk replied: “Your royal highness, please know that the Tathāgata has earlier manifestly sprinkled me with ambrosia.”

The girl Munī asked: “How has the Tathāgata manifestly sprinkled you with ambrosia?”

The monk replied: “I have been given a prediction by the Tathāgata Ratnaśikhi. He said that in the future, after innumerable eons, I will become a Buddha called the Tathāgata Dīpaṃkara, an *arhat*, fully and rightly awakened. My body and mind have become firm with the intention not to retrogress. In this way, your royal highness, I have been given a prediction by the Tathāgata.”

The princess asked: “Has the Buddha given a prediction about me?”

The old monk replied: “Indeed I do not know whether or not he has given a prediction about you.”

Then, having heard what the monk had said, the princess mounted a vehicle [adorned] with feathers and gems and approached the Tathāgata Ratnaśikhi. She paid respect with her head at his feet and sat to one side. Then the princess said to the Buddha: “I am now the chief donor of the oil that was required,<sup>50</sup> constantly supporting and assisting [the monk]. Yet, the Blessed One has now given a prediction to that monk, only [for me] he has not manifested a prediction.”

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<sup>50</sup> Adopting the variant 是 instead of 見.

The Tathāgata Ratnaśikhi said: “The merit of the arousal of the mind with an aspiration [for Buddhahood] is difficult to measure. What to say about the bestowal of a material gift?”

The girl Munī replied: “If the Tathāgata will not give me a prediction, I shall myself cut off my life faculty.”

The Tathāgata Ratnaśikhi replied: “Now occupying a woman's body and seeking to be a wheel-turning king one will never gain it, seeking to be Śakra one will also be unable to gain it, seeking to be king Brahmā one will also be unable to attain it, seeking to be king Māra one will also be unable to attain it, seeking to be a Tathāgata one will also be unable to attain it.”

The girl said: “Is it certain that I will be unable to attain supreme awakening?”

The Buddha Ratnaśikhi replied: “You will be able, girl Munī, <sup>[758a]</sup> to accomplish supreme and true awakening. Thus, princess, you should know that in the future, after innumerable eons, a Buddha will emerge in the world. He is your good friend [from nowadays]. That Buddha will give you a prediction.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> The actual giving of this prediction is reported later in the same discourse, EĀ 43.2 at T II 758b26: “Then the Buddha Dīpaṃkara, knowing what that Brahmin was thinking in his mind, said: ‘Rise up quickly, in the future you will become a Buddha called the Tathāgata Śākyamuni, an *arhat*, fully and rightly awakened.’” The prediction by Dīpaṃkara also occurs elsewhere in the *Ekottarika-āgama*; cf. EĀ 20.3 at T II 599b14. Other instances of this prediction can be found, for example, in the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell and Neil (252,12), the *Lalitavistara*, Lefmann (415,20), the *Mahāvastu*, Senart (1: 239,6), and the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 785b25 (for another instance in the *Dhar-*

Then the princess said to the Buddha: “[So] the recipient is pure, [but] the donor is dirty?”

The Buddha Ratnaśikhi said: “Regarding what I now said, you should make a firm resolve with a pure mind.”

Then, having said this, the princess promptly rose from her seat, paid respect with her head at the Buddha’s feet, circumambulated him three times, withdrew and left.<sup>52</sup>

### Comparison with the Parallel Versions

The four versions of this tale taken into account in the present study show several noteworthy differences in their portrayal of this past life of the Buddha. One difference between the parallel versions concerns the main protagonist. The *Ekottarika-āgama* and the Scripture on the Wise and the Fool agree by introducing her as princess Muni.<sup>53</sup> The *Paṭipadāna-jātaka* differs in so far as it does not give her name.<sup>54</sup> According to the Collection on the Six Perfections, however, she was rather an unnamed poor widow who made a living by selling oil.<sup>55</sup> The role of a poor widow in the Indian setting, ancient or modern, has not been an enviable fate.<sup>56</sup> Compared to a princess, this is about as far down as one

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*mapada* of this tradition cf. Skilling (“Citations” 609 (16)), and the *Buddhavaṃsa*, stanza 2.60 at Bv 13,1); for further references cf. the survey in Lamotte (248 note 2).

<sup>52</sup> At this juncture, EĀ 43.2 at T II 758a6 continues with the advent of Dīpaṃkara Buddha.

<sup>53</sup> T 202 at T IV 371b28.

<sup>54</sup> Jaini (*Paññāsa-jātaka* 398,10).

<sup>55</sup> T 152 at T III 38c5.

<sup>56</sup> Cf., e.g., Adhya, Altekar (115–165), Brick (“Dharmaśāstric” and “Widow-Ascetic”), Courtright, Datta, Garzilli, Hawley, Jamison (205), Leslie, Mani, Nandy, Sharma et al.,

could get as a woman. Being a poor widow would probably signal to the audience of the Collection on the Six Perfections her lack of merits. At the same time, however, in the context of the present story it also conveys the message that even from the lowliest position in ancient Indian society one can rise to future Buddhahood.

The topic of the merits of the female protagonist comes up explicitly in the *Ekottarika-āgama* version and the *Padīpadāna-jātaka*, although in quite different ways. According to the *Ekottarika-āgama* presentation, her beauty was the result “of having in previous lives made offerings to Buddhas.” The *Padīpadāna-jātaka* instead highlights that her birth as a woman was the result of previously performed unwholesome karma.<sup>57</sup>

Another difference is that whereas in the *Ekottarika-āgama* account and in the Collection on the Six Perfections the monk is old and unlearned,<sup>58</sup> according to the *Padīpadāna-jātaka* he was highly accomplished, having memorized the three *piṭakas* and attained the five higher knowledges (*abhiññā*) and the eight meditative attainments (*samāpatti*).<sup>59</sup> This makes it less of a surprise to find that the princess does not receive a similar prediction as this outstanding monk. In the *Ekottarika-āgama* the low level monk whose mere maleness makes him fit to receive a prediction conveys more sharply the message that, however high positioned a female may be, she cannot match the domain of males.

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Upadhyaya (87f), van den Bosch, Wadley, and Weinberger-Thomas, to mention just a few.

<sup>57</sup> Jaini (*Paññāsa-jātaka* 398,10): *attano pubbakatena aparāpariyavedaniyanāmena akusalakammena itthi jāto*.

<sup>58</sup> T 152 at T III 38c7.

<sup>59</sup> Jaini (*Paññāsa-jātaka* 397,11).

It is also worthy of note that the *Padīpadāna-jātaka* not only does not assign a name to the princess, but also portrays her with less agency than the other versions. After making the offering on behalf of the princess, in this version it is the highly accomplished monk who inquires why she cannot be given a prediction. Here is the part that ensues after the monk's inquiry:<sup>60</sup>

Having heard it, the Blessed One said to the Elder: “Monk, it is not possible for me now to give a prediction to that princess, who stays in the condition of a woman.”

Having heard it, the Elder asked the Blessed One again: “Venerable sir, why is it not possible for you now to give a prediction to her, being in the condition of a woman?”

Then the Blessed One said this to the Elder: “Monk, it is not possible for me now to give a prediction to her, being in the condition of a woman, because that woman has not fulfilled the combination of eight conditions [for receiving a prediction].”

These are the eight conditions mentioned also in the *Nidānakathā* of the *Jātaka* commentary as necessary for being able to receive the prediction of future Buddhahood, one of which is the possession of a male genital organ.<sup>61</sup> So the princess can only receive a prediction that in future she will be given a prediction.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Jaini (*Paññāsa-jātaka* 399,14 to 399,20).

<sup>61</sup> See above note 32.

<sup>62</sup> Derris comments that “this ‘predicted prediction’ creates a space for a woman to be acknowledged as progressing along the bodhisatta path” (“When” 36).

In this way in the *Padīpadāna-jātaka* the princess does not meet the former Buddha at all; everything is done on her behalf by men.<sup>63</sup> In the *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse and the other versions she instead personally goes to meet the Buddha in order to find out why she did not receive a prediction.<sup>64</sup> Hence in these versions the discussion about a woman's ability to receive a prediction of future Buddhahood takes place between the former Buddha and herself.

According to the *Ekottarika-āgama* account, what prevents her from receiving such a prediction are the five impossibilities for women, namely being a wheel-turning king, Śakra, Brahmā, Māra, and a Tathāgata. The Collection on the Six Perfections mentions six, adding the impossibility that a woman could be a Pratyekabuddha.<sup>65</sup> In another publication I have discussed the late nature of this particular stipulation regarding the positions a woman cannot occupy.<sup>66</sup>

The addition of the possibility of being a Pratyekabuddha involves a shift in the presentation. The other impossibilities are related to the inability of women to take up leadership roles in ancient Indian society. Women are seen as not fit to occupy the heavenly rulership positions of a Śakra, Māra (a position not as attractive as the others), or Brahmā, as well as the secular and spiritual leadership roles on earth of a wheel-turning king or a Buddha. In contrast to these, however, the im-

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<sup>63</sup> Even the indication that the future Buddha Dīpaṃkara will give her the prediction is made to the monk who will become Dīpaṃkara, Jaini 1981: 400,12, followed by indicating that by dint of her offering she will pass away from the condition of being a woman and be reborn as a *devaputta* in the Tusita heaven.

<sup>64</sup> T 152 at T III 38c15 and T 202 at T IV 371c12.

<sup>65</sup> T 152 at T III 38c19.

<sup>66</sup> Anālayo ("Bahudhātuka").

possibility of a female to be a Pratyekabuddha seems to imply that women have lesser spiritual abilities.

A Pratyekabuddha does not occupy a leadership role comparable to a Buddha. The question of being a Pratyekabuddha is solely a question of spiritual ability, not one of spiritual leadership.<sup>67</sup> Considering it impossible for a female to be a Buddha reflects ancient Indian notions of leadership, whereas to proclaim that a woman cannot be a Pratyekabuddha amounts to proposing that a woman, by dint of her gender, is incapable of the degree of spiritual ability required for realizing awakening without the guidance of a teacher.<sup>68</sup>

Now the impossibilities mentioned in the Collection on the Six Perfections as well as in the *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse do not fulfill the purpose for which they are meant. The problem to be solved at the present juncture of events is to explain why a woman cannot be given a prediction of future Buddhahood. The impossibilities, however, are about a woman's inability to take up the office of a Buddha. They rule out that a Buddha could be female, but they do not imply that a woman cannot become a Buddha in a future life. Thus the impossibilities do not explain why the former Buddha could not predict that princess Munī (or her counterpart in the poor widow) will become a Buddha in the distant future.

Notably, in the *Ekottarika-āgama* version the exchange with the former Buddha leads to princess Munī somewhat directly confronting

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<sup>67</sup> For a discussion of the significance of the motif of the Pratyekabuddha, with a critical reply to suggestions made by Norman ("Pratyeka-Buddha"), cf. Anālayo ("Paccekabuddhas").

<sup>68</sup> Cooray notes that according to the developed Theravāda tradition a woman can aspire to become a Paccekabuddha, but of course needs to change sex in order to become one (244).

him with the query “[so] the recipient is pure, [but] the donor is dirty?” This depicts her as having the courage to inquire about the notion of the inferiority of female birth right in front of the former Buddha, who replies by encouraging her to make a firm resolve with a *pure* mind. This reply in a way seems to point to purification of the mind as being beyond gendered notions of purity, although it does so without actually confronting such notions.

The same gendered notion of purity also comes up in the Collection on the Six Perfections, although here the poor woman takes the inferiority of female birth quite seriously. The relevant part proceeds as follows, beginning with the Buddha's indication regarding the six impossibilities for women:<sup>69</sup>

The Buddha said to the woman: “With a female body one cannot be a Buddha, a Pratyekabuddha, Brahmā, Śakra, Māra or a wheel-turning king; these dignities are very lofty and cannot be attained with a female body. If it is your wish to attain these, you should relinquish your dirty embodiment and acquire a pure body.”<sup>70</sup>

The woman paid respect with her head [at the Buddha's feet] and said: “I shall now relinquish it.” She returned to her house and cleaned herself by taking a bath.<sup>71</sup> From afar she bowed down and said: “This body is made of the

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<sup>69</sup> T 152 at T III 38c18 to 39a3.

<sup>70</sup> This injunction by the former Buddha comes remarkably close to an encouragement to commit suicide, which according to a range of extant *Vinayas* is a *pārājika* offence for a *bhikkhu*; cf. Vin III 73,11, T 1422 at T XXII 195a14, T 1426 at T XXII 549c12, T 1429 at T XXII 1015c13, T 1436 at T XXIII 471a13, and T 1454 at T XXIV 501a17.

<sup>71</sup> Shyu comments that “when she was told that a female body is filthy, the widow . . . took a bath first. It seems she strived for the purity of a body” (185 note 460).

four elements, it is [anyway] not to be kept forever by me.”

She climbed up a building and formulated the aspiration: “May my filthy body now be for the benefit of hungry and thirsty living beings. I seek to become a male myself and receive a prediction of Buddhahood. Whatever living beings in this troubled world who are blind and have turned their back on what is right, who are inclined towards what is wrong and do not know a Buddha, I shall rescue them.”<sup>72</sup>

She threw herself down from up high. Those who saw it were chilled and shivered. Knowing her intention, the Buddha magically transformed the ground so that it became soft as if [receiving her with] a celestial net. Her body was visibly unharmed and had been transformed into a male one. [The widow-become-male] became dizzy with infinite joy, quickly approached the Buddha, and said full of enthusiasm:

“Receiving the kindness of the Blessed One, I already gained a pure body. Out of compassion, may I receive a prediction.”

The Buddha expressed his praise: “Your courage is extraordinary in the world. You will certainly become a Buddha, do not harbor any doubt about it. When the one who keeps the lamps burning [Dīpaṃkara] has become a Buddha, he will predict your name.”

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<sup>72</sup> Adopting a variant without 世.

In this way, in the Collection on the Six Perfections the poor widow actually attempts to commit the suicide which in the *Ekottarika-āgama* the princess had only threatened, saying that not being given a prediction she would cut off her life faculty. In the Collection on the Six Perfections this actual attempt to kill herself makes her acquire a male body.<sup>73</sup> Even though she has become male, the actual prediction given is the same as what the princess in the *Padīpadāna-jātaka* received, a prediction of a prediction. In both cases it is only when Dīpaṃkara has become a Buddha that a proper prediction of future Buddhahood can be given, including an announcement of the future Buddha's name.

Among the different versions of this *jātaka*, the account in the Collection on the Six Perfections takes the strongest place in denigrating the female body.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, however, the widow is depicted as actually succeeding in transforming herself. Alongside the appalling depiction of her attempt to commit suicide, this story at the same time also conveys the message that even a woman finding herself at the bottom of ancient Indian society is in principle capable of taking action and transforming her situation.

The Scripture on the Wise and the Fool brings up neither the impossibilities nor the eight conditions,<sup>75</sup> and it even does not resort to

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<sup>73</sup> On the change of sex motif cf. Anālayo ("Karma" 111–114).

<sup>74</sup> This is noteworthy in so far as the same collection contains another two stories with past lives of the Buddha as a female, and these do not involve such an advocacy of the superiority of males. These two stories, noted by Shyu (163), are tale 19, T 152 at T III 13a5, concerning a mother bird's willingness to sacrifice herself for the sake of her chicks, and tale 72, T 152 at T III 38a11, recording two lives as a virtuous wife. For another story of a past life of the Buddha as a virtuous woman by the name of Rūpāvati cf. the study by Ohnuma ("Story") and, on the theme of gender in relation to the bodhi-sattva ideal, the reflections in Ohnuma ("Woman").

<sup>75</sup> Kajiyama already noted that in T 202 the supposed impossibilities of women are not found (57).

giving merely a prediction of a prediction. Instead it presents a simple solution for the perceived conflict between being female and receiving an actual prediction. Here is the relevant part:<sup>76</sup>

Princess Munī heard that her noble monk friend had been given a prediction of becoming a Buddha. She thought in her mind: “The material for the lamps for the Buddha are all my possessions. Putting them up, the monk has now received a prediction. Only I did not receive one.” Having thought this, she approached the Buddha and personally told him what was on her mind.

The Buddha in turn gave her a prediction, saying to Munī: “In the future, after two incalculable eons and ninety-one [regular] eons you will become a Buddha, called Śākyamuni, endowed with the ten epithets.” Then, hearing the Buddha give this prediction, the princess was thrilled within and was transformed into a male who paid respect at the Buddha’s feet and requested to become a recluse. The Buddha in turn gave his permission.

This offers a rather simple and straightforward solution for the conflict with which all versions struggle: How to reconcile a past life of the Buddha as a female with the dictum that a woman cannot be considered a full-fledged bodhisattva. Even though this version also adheres to the doctrine of the superiority of a male body, it does so in a way that is considerably less offensive than its parallels.

Alongside the differences found between the four versions, their basic agreement in recording a past life of the Buddha as a female who meets the one who will become Dīpaṅkara Buddha is worthy of note.

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<sup>76</sup> T 202 at T IV 371c10 to c17.

The narrative setting makes it clear that this tale is not a wholesale borrowing from ancient Indian narrative lore, but much rather a story that developed based on specifically Buddhist notions. The fact that the main protagonist is a female makes it safe to assume that the starting point of this tale would have been before the doctrine of women's inability to pursue Buddhahood was well established. Had this doctrine already been in vogue, the idea of showing the Buddha to have been a female would quite probably not have arisen in the first place.

This assumption finds confirmation in the fact that the parallel versions agree on the basic setting of a female aspiring to be predicted as a future Buddha, but disagree in the ways they accommodate the doctrinal restriction that only a male can be given such a prediction. This makes it to my mind clear that when the need arose to solve the "problem" of a woman aspiring to Buddhahood, the basic story was already in place and had already started to move into different transmission lineages, each of which then had to find its solution for this problem.

Judging from the narrative denouement common to the parallel versions, the basic story might at first simply have been about the powerful results obtained by making an offering, *dāna*. This is of course a very common theme in the wider *jātaka* and *avadāna* genre to which this tale belongs.

In the present case, making offerings of light ensures that the monk donor will become a future Buddha by the telling name *Dīpaṅkara*. This offering is so powerful that even the women who provided the raw ingredients for this offering will gain a similar reward, albeit some time later in reflection of the fact that her role in the actual offering is secondary. For the second donor to be a female could just reflect the

actual experience of monks who on their begging rounds regularly receive supplies from housewives.<sup>77</sup>

For the Buddha then to be able to relate this tale, he of course has to be identified with the housewife, since this is the one of the two characters whose gift comes to fruition later. Had he been the monk, he would have become Dīpaṃkara Buddha and no longer be around to tell the whole story now.

Once a restriction on the possibility of females to receive a prediction of future Buddhahood comes into existence, however, the in itself natural assigning to a female of the role of supplying the material requirements for an offering undertaken by a monk becomes problematic.

Whatever may be the last word on the coming into existence of this tale, the way the different versions struggle with the “problem” of a female being predicted as a future Buddha illustrates different modes of gender discrimination. Here the Collection on the Six Perfections in particular portrays how the feeling of worthlessness just because of having a female body can even result in suicidal tendencies.<sup>78</sup> The attitude of devaluing the female body has in later times found one of its perhaps most shocking expressions in the “Discourse on the Blood-pool” (血盆經), a text not included in the Taishō canon.<sup>79</sup> According to this text, the

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<sup>77</sup> As mentioned above in note 74 the pattern in Pāli *jātakas* where the Buddha is consistently a male in past lives does not hold for other *jātaka* traditions, so that it is not necessary to assume that this stricture must have influenced the present story from its outset.

<sup>78</sup> For a study of the notion that being born as a female is the result of bad karma cf. Anālayo (“Karma”); for a survey of studies of the India custom of self-cremation of women in response to the death of their husbands cf. above note 56.

<sup>79</sup> 佛說大藏正教血盆經, found in the 續藏經, CBETA: Xuzang no. 23 at I 414a4; or else in the 嘉興大藏經, CBETA: Jiaying no. 44 at XIX 164b9.

pollution women cause with their birth and menstrual blood will lead to their rebirth in a hellish lake full of blood that they will be forced to drink at regular intervals.<sup>80</sup> In other words, by dint of their female nature women are polluted and sinful, for which they deserve to be punished.

The *Padīpadāna-jātaka* can be seen to illustrate another form of discrimination by way of distancing women. This expresses itself in the princess being an unnamed person with little agency of her own who has no direct contact with the Buddha. Such distancing is a trait that recurs elsewhere in the Theravāda tradition. The Theravāda *Vinaya* reports fewer direct meetings between Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and the Buddha than other *Vinayas*.<sup>81</sup> In the *Nandakovāda-sutta* the Buddha does not even speak to her, whereas in parallel versions of this discourse transmitted by other schools he personally gives her teachings.<sup>82</sup> Such distancing does not only take place in relation to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī. The nun protagonist of the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* does not have any direct contact with the Buddha, whereas in the parallel version she personally speaks to him.<sup>83</sup>

Instead of such distancing, the Scripture on the Wise and the Fool shows that there are alternative ways of working with the basic tension underlying the plot of the Buddha's past life as a female. The solution offered in this discourse is considerably less drastic and its effect on a

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Takemi.

<sup>81</sup> This has already been pointed out for the Mahāsāṅghika-Lokottaravāda *Vinaya* by Roth (xl); for the other *Vinayas* cf. the references in Anālayo ("Theories" 139f notes 58 and 59).

<sup>82</sup> MN 146 at MN III 270,21 in contrast to its parallels SĀ 276 at T II 73c18, T 1442 at T XXIII 792a25, and D 3 ja 51b3 or Q 1032 nye 49a7; cf. also SHT VI 1226 folio 5Rb-c, Bechert and Wille (22).

<sup>83</sup> MN 44 at MN I 304,26 in contrast to its parallels MĀ 210 at T I 790a23 and D 4094 ju 11a3 or Q 5595 tu 12a7.

female audience can be expected to be less harmful than the distancing of the *Padīpadāna-jātaka* or the denigration of the female body in the Collection on the Six Perfections. Although the Scripture on the Wise and the Fool arrives at giving an actual prediction of future Buddhahood, it nevertheless still hinges on the idea that the female body must be transformed into a male one. Even this idea is no longer evident in the Tibetan and Mongolian versions of the Scripture on the Wise and the Fool, where she remains a woman and is ordained by the Buddha, evidently becoming a nun.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

In Pāli discourse *jātakas*, past lives of the Buddha are consistently male due to the narrative requirements of the respective tales. In the case of commentarial *jātaka* narrations, the precedent set in this way would have led to selecting maleness as the characteristic that helps to string together a broad variety of protagonists featuring in a variety of stories, taken from ancient Indian narrative lore and transformed into records of past lives of the Buddha. Once these were seen as illustrating the path a bodhisattva must follow, maleness could have easily come to be considered a requisite for progress to Buddhahood.

The tale of the Buddha's past life as a princess reflects a struggle, evident in each version, to reconcile the existence of such a story with the dictum that a bodhisattva should be male. The way each version goes about this reconciliation exhibits a range of different responses, reflecting the multi-vocality that is so characteristic of the Buddhist traditions in relation to the gender issue.

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Frye (199) and Dhammadinnā.

## Abbreviations

AN	<i>Āṅguttara-nikāya</i>
Bv	<i>Buddhavaṃsa</i>
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
Jā	<i>Jātaka</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i>
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
Q	Peking edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
T	Taishō edition
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>

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