



Damming the Dhamma: Problems with Bhikkhunīs in the Pali Vinaya¹

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Journal of Buddhist Ethics 6 (1999):292–312
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In the clichés of contemporary science, little equals the devastating power of water running out of control. Having just moved to Winnipeg, which experienced the “flood of the century” a couple of years ago, and having seen the huge Red River Floodway which circles half the city of 700,000 to protect it from the ravages of flooding, I have developed a new appreciation for the image. In Buddhist terms, the flood carries equally negative connotations of raging power, devastation, destruction, and contamination. The flood is one of the most commonly used metaphors of *samsāra* and all that it conveys. Similarly, metaphors of obstructions to the flood, or measures to cross it, convey the opposite. The Buddha’s *dhamma* is often compared to a raft, *nibbāna* to the far shore.

Thus, in the story of the inauguration of women’s ordination, when the Buddha utilizes the metaphor of a dam for the eight special rules he imposes upon Mahāprajāpatī Gotamī as a condition of ordination, the implications are clear. The presence of women in the order poses a serious and inescapable threat to the *dhamma* and *vinaya*, liable, like a flood, to wash away the edifice he had so carefully built up.

Women’s entry into the Buddhist *sangha* is both highly significant and terribly dangerous within the worldview of this narrative. Given the

emphasis on preserving the *dhamma* throughout Pali literature, we should expect to see the story seriously address the reasons for the danger posed by women's ordination. Yet in the story, the reasons why women pose such a threat and the logic of how subordination can alleviate the threat are not explored. Nor are they explored in other recensions. The story appears in virtually identical form in almost every recension of the *Vinaya* still extant.² The similes of the house prey to robbers, the rice field stricken by disease, and the sugar-cane attacked by red rust are also consistent in the differing accounts of the story.³ Similarly, all accounts present the metaphor of the eight rules holding back the threat of devastation as a great dam on a river prevents flooding. The threat, the danger, and the solution are consistent in all accounts, as is the narrative reticence to explain why women's ordination poses such a threat and how institutional subordination can avert it.

Scholarship on women in Buddhism has attempted to fill this lacuna, mostly by placing the story within a hypothetical chronological schema positing either an early egalitarianism amended by later, less forward-looking editors,⁴ or a gradual progression from an inherent sexism, even misogyny, to the development of egalitarianism in Mahāyāna, even Vajrayāna.⁵ Alternately, studies of the story have attempted to place the story within its sociological context, insofar as we can reconstruct that context,⁶ or to situate its language within the context of the *Vinaya*'s legalist discourse.⁷

These previous studies are important contributions toward our understanding of the story which plays such a crucial role in the history and contemporary situation of women in Buddhism. However, I continue to feel dissatisfied with the solutions posed. None answers the question of *why* women pose such a dangerous threat or *how* institutional subordination is a logical means of averting it. Additionally, all study the text for glimmerings of historical circumstance without accounting for the obvious literary features of the story. Yet the story of women's ordination is precisely that, a story.

Alan Sponberg is one of the few scholars to address the obvious literary features of the story. Arguing that the notorious inconsistencies in Pali presentations of the feminine should be understood not as a "simple inconsistent ambivalence," but rather as a "rich multivocality," he interprets the story as a literary compromise between contesting voices in the early *sangha*; as response to historical events rather than as description of those events.⁸ Exciting as Sponberg's analysis is, however, it still does not fully resolve the issues raised by the account of women's ordination. Why should one of the contesting voices insist on the decline of *saddhamma*? How can women's subordination help preserve the *dhamma*?

This paper poses a possible solution. Following Sponberg's insight into the literary features of the story, I analyze the story in a literary context, the context of the Pali *Vinaya*, treating the *Vinaya* itself as a story with a beginning, a middle, and an ending.⁹ The *Vinaya* represents a very formalized statement of both the individual and communal dimensions of monastic life. It prescribes the activities, appearance, decorum, and lifestyle of individual *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*. It also specifies the procedures and protocol for the administration of the *sangha*. In so doing, the *Vinaya* authorizes and delimits the mandate of the monastic community over its members and in relation to its supporting community. In the terms of my analysis, it articulates a model of self-identity and a set of guidelines for the expression of that identity.

This model of identity is perhaps most evident in the frame narratives that pervade the *Vinaya*, opening both major categories of rules (the *Sutta-Vibhaṅga* and the *Khandhakas*), and introducing each individual rule. These introductory stories, or frame narratives, describe the particular circumstances underlying the necessity of the rule and its characteristics. They provide justification for the rule and place it in a meaningful context. The "master-narrative" which frames the *Vinaya* as a whole is the Buddha biography. It is in the context of the Buddha's realization of *nibbāna* and his subsequent teaching career that the rules of the *Vinaya* make sense. We see this very clearly in the frame narratives of the *Vinaya*'s main sections and individual rules. The *Khandhakas* and *Vibhaṅgas* both open with a description of the Buddha's activities which explains and justifies the type of rules contained in each category. In the *Mahāvagga*, which opens the *Khandhakas*, the frame narrative describes the Buddha's experience of *nibbāna*, his decision to teach, and the subsequent origins of the *sangha*. The rules and procedures of the rest of the *Khandhakas* are thus placed in the context of the Buddha's enlightenment and are explained by his decision to institute a monastic community. Similarly, the *Suttavibhaṅga* opens with a description of the attributes of the Buddha's enlightenment and introduces a dialogue in which the Buddha explains to Sāriputta how the longevity of *brahmacariya* under Buddhas of the past was determined by their introduction of the *Pāṭimokkha* or failure to do so. The *Suttavibhaṅga*, therefore, is contextualized within the cosmic dimensions of Buddhas of the past.

Each individual rule in both sections is also placed in the context of the Buddha's teaching career. The stories introducing each rule open with a statement of the Buddha's location at the time of formulation. For the vast majority of rules, the Buddha himself voices the rule and its modifications.¹⁰ Though there is general agreement among scholars that the *Vinaya*

was compiled and much of it composed after the Buddha's death,¹¹ his presence and voice function to authorize and validate the rules and the *Vinaya* as a whole.¹²

I am interested in the nature and function of that authority as a way of understanding why women's ordination is considered so dangerous in the story and how institutional subordination can logically avert the danger. If, as I maintain, the Pali *Vinaya* consists of a systematic transference of the authority of the Buddha onto the *sangha* as a corporate body, and if that authority is presented as inherently masculine, then women, by definition, cannot embody the ideal and, therefore, cannot be treated as full members of the *sangha*.

BUDDHA BIOGRAPHY IN THE PALI VINAYA¹³

The Buddha biography as it appears in the Pali *Vinaya* is much less elaborate than in later more developed biographies.¹⁴ It also differs in its emphasis on the Buddha's experience of *nibbāna*. The *Khandhakas* open with a description of the Buddha immersed in contemplation of his *nibbāna* and end with events in the *sangha* following his *parinibbāna*. The rest of his life is clearly of little concern to the redactors of the *Vinaya*. But even with the centrality of *nibbāna*, priority is not given to the characteristics of the experience, but to what the Buddha *does* with it. What does the Buddha do? He travels, extending the experience geographically (he moves to four different trees, reveling in the bliss of his awakening), socially (he encounters beings representing different social groups), and cosmically (he encounters beings from different cosmic realms). His awakening is an event for all beings in manifest realms. Up to this point, however, it is still confined to the Buddha. He has yet to teach the *dhamma*, yet to incorporate these others into the sphere of his *bodhi*, though the boundaries of his sphere impinge upon them.

When he does teach the *dhamma* to the group of five, dramatic events unfold: *devas* sing, the worlds shake, and light permeates the manifold realms. Significantly, this does not happen with the Buddha's enlightenment, but with Koṇḍañña's *dhamma*-vision, his insight into the nature of causality and cessation prompted by the Buddha's words. The world-shaking events do not happen until an outsider has penetrated the boundary of the Buddha's *bodhi*. The doors are now open and the Buddha can accept Koṇḍañña into the sphere of his enlightenment.

However, Koṇḍañña, like all the monastics to follow him, does not need to be enlightened to enter that sphere. Rather, it is within that sphere that he is able to attain *nibbāna*. He does, however, need to purify his perspective.

Repeatedly in this episode the narrative stresses the concept of purity: the “true” *brahman* is devoid of *āsavas* and protrusions (*ussada*) that impinge on the world (*Mahāvagga* I 2); both the *nāga* king and the *catuddisa* kings protect the Buddha from defilement (the *nāga* from the elements; the *catuddisa* kings from dirtying his hands, *Mahāvagga* I 3–4); Brahmā argues that because some people lack defilements (*apparajakkhajātikā*) they are capable of learning the *dhamma* (*Mahāvagga* I 5.6); Upaka recognizes the complete purity (*parisuddha*) of the Buddha’s appearance (*Mahāvagga* I 6.7); and the Buddha declares himself a conqueror because he alone is undefiled (*anupalitta*) and free of *āsavas* (*Mahāvagga* I 6.8–9). Clearly, purity is an important concept in the narrative. It encompasses all aspects of the enlightened being, of which the Buddha is the epitome. It pervades his body (Upaka’s recognition of his appearance), his speech (the pure *dhamma* with which he will combat the impure *dhamma*), and his mind (his pure comprehension of the four noble truths which led to his enlightenment).

It also marks him as separate from the worlds represented by the various beings initially encountered by the newly awakened Buddha. Prior to his conversion of Koṇḍañña, before he preaches a word of the *dhamma*, he manages to attract a *brahman*, a *nāga* king, the *catuddisa* kings, an unnamed *devatā* and his first *upāsakas*. All recognize his accomplishments without him speaking a word.¹⁵ Their gifts and homage mark their recognition of him as somehow other than they are, as worthy to receive, as a productive field of merit. They also recognize a boundary around him. The *brahman* and the merchants stand at a respectful distance from him and the *nāga* king encircles him to protect him from cold, heat, flies, mosquitoes, wind, and snakes. Significantly, the *nāga* thinks to prevent contact (*samphassa*) between these elements and the meditating Buddha (*Mahāvagga* I 1.2). The homage and gifts given to the Buddha reinforce this boundary, this ontological difference between the Buddha and his audience, though the audience includes distinguished representatives of various super-human realms (the *catuddisa* kings and the *nāga*-king).

These interactions play a crucial role in the narrative. By virtue of his attainment of supreme buddhahood, the Buddha is superior to all kinds of beings,¹⁶ a superiority the narrative portrays them as recognizing: the *brahman* asks the Buddha to define a true *brahman*; the *nāga* king protects him and pays him homage; the merchants, *devatā*, and *catuddisa* kings affirm his worthiness to receive gifts; Brahmā depends on him to save the world; and his former colleagues find themselves receiving him with honor, despite their intentions to ignore him (*Mahāvagga* I.10–11).

The Buddha of the introductory narrative of the *Mahāvagga*, there-

fore, is a being characterized by purity of body, speech, and mind, by a physical and ontological separation from the condition of ordinary or supernatural beings, and by a concomitant superiority that derives from his purity and his separateness.

EMBODYING BUDDHA: APPROPRIATION OF A PARADIGM

These characteristics are also paradigmatic for the *sangha* as it is presented in the *Vinaya*. If we read the *Vinaya* as a story progressing from the beginning, marked by the Buddha's enlightenment and early teaching career, through the middle, marked by the introduction of the *Pāṭimokkha* code,¹⁷ to the ending, marked by the Buddha's *parinibbāna*, we can detect a process of transference of the characteristics and authority of the Buddha onto his *sangha*.

The first indication of the process of transference is the Buddha's commission to his newly formed *sangha*. When the Buddha commissions the *sangha* to teach in his place, he explicitly compares it with himself:

Free am I, monks, from all snares, both those that come from divine sources and those that come from human sources. You, monks, are also freed from all snares, both divine and human. Go, monks, on tour for the benefit of the common folk, for the happiness of the common folk, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the benefit, the happiness of the gods and human beings. Let not two of you go the same way. Teach the *dhamma*, monks, that is lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle, and lovely at the end. Explain in spirit and in detail the *brahmacariya* that is perfectly pure and entirely fulfilled. There are some beings who are languishing from not hearing the *dhamma*, yet lack defilements and are capable of learning it (*Mahāvagga* I 11.1).¹⁸

Just as the Buddha is completely devoid of attachments, so is the *sangha*. Just as the Buddha travels from tree to tree, extending the geographical presence of his enlightenment experience, so he disperses the *sangha* in all directions.¹⁹ Just as the Buddha extends the social parameters of his enlightenment by preaching the *dhamma*, so does he compel his *bhikkhus* to preach. Just as the Buddha is convinced to teach by the existence of some beings without defilements, so does he convince his *sangha*. Just as the Buddha's enlightenment is marked by the last temptation of Māra,²⁰ so is his mandate to the *sangha* marked by the appearance and conquest of Māra.²¹

The process of transference of the Buddha's *bodhi* onto the newly formed *sangha* is well underway. The identity of the Buddha as an enlightened being merges completely with that of the *sangha*. The Buddha's purity in body, speech, and mind also characterizes the *sangha* which, at this point in the narrative chronology, contains a membership comprised en-

tirely of *arahants*. Their bodies travel to expand the *dhamma*, they speak the same *dhamma*, and their minds are completely lacking in attachment. They are utterly separate from the condition of normal folk and are subject to the same kind of homage as that received by the Buddha. Their status has become completely transformed. In assuming the identity of the Buddha, the identity of the *sangha* has become characterized by the same tripartite foundation of purity, separation, and hierarchy.

The process continues throughout the *Khandhakas*. The first set of procedures instituted after the frame narrative concerns the admission of men. Men who are not eligible for ordination include those who are diseased (*Mahāvagga* I 39.7); those in service to a king (40.4); a thief marked by a sign (*dhajabaddha cora* 41),²² wanted by authorities (42–3), or who has been punished (44); someone under twenty years of age (49); a homosexual (*paṇḍaka*, 61);²³ a matricide (64); a parricide (65); one who has killed an *arahant* (66); a seducer of *bhikkhunīs* (67); a schismatic (67); one who has shed the blood (of a *Tathāgata*) (67);²⁴ a hermaphrodite (*ubhatovyañjanaka*, 68); one without a preceptor (69); one without a bowl or robe (70); or someone with any kind of physical disability, ranging from loss of limbs, to birth defects, to old age (71).

A concern for wholeness underlies these emphases. Wholeness of body is a requirement for ordination.²⁵ Men cannot be ordained whose bodily integrity is breached in any way, whether by disease, uncertain sexual characteristics,²⁶ or physical deformity. Their moral integrity must also be intact — violence against parents, *arahants*, or a Buddha automatically disqualifies a candidate. And their personal integrity involves a social dimension as well. Men bonded to the social world by ties to the army, to servitude, to punitive retribution, or to filial obligation are not permitted entrance into the *sangha*.

This integrity is also evident in the emphasis on group cohesion. Not only must a candidate affirm his personal integrity, but, for a legally valid ordination, the *sangha* must also conform with an ideal of group solidarity. A quorum of ten *bhikkhus* indicates institutional acceptance of the candidate by silent approval. Thus, the wholeness of the individual corresponds with the wholeness of the institution which embodies the wholeness of the Buddha.

The requirement for institutional wholeness is even more obvious in the section on the *uposatha* rite which follows that on ordination. The *uposatha* involves the gathering together of all *bhikkhus*²⁷ within the *sīmā* boundaries for the complete recitation of the *Pāṭimokkha*. Prior to the recitation, *bhikkhus* have had the opportunity to confess any transgression to each other, thereby purifying themselves of it. The *Pāṭimokkha* is recited

by an experienced, competent (*vyatta paṭibala*) *bhikkhu* who lists the rules and inquires of the convened *sangha* if all are pure (*parisuddhi*) with regard to each category. When the *sangha* conveys its assent with silence, he affirms that complete purity is attained.

The *uposatha* rite thus represents symbolically the reaffirmation of *upasampadā*, required bi-monthly of all monastics. In coming together for what Jotiya Dhirasekera has termed a “ritualistic purge,”²⁸ *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* reaffirm the purity, wholeness, separateness, and hierarchy they assumed when they became members of the *sangha*. On an individual level, *uposatha* represents a periodic review of one’s conduct as a renunciant. On a communal level, *uposatha* actually binds the community together, affirming that the *sangha* is a united body.²⁹ The parameters of accountability remain the same: the individual’s purity in body, speech, and mind is scrutinized during the *uposatha* rite by the entire assembly of *bhikkhus* which is required to join together with their bodies, chant the rules together with their voices, and examine with their minds the truthfulness of their declaration of purity.³⁰

The physical boundaries of the individual *bhikkhu* must be structurally intact, just as the geographical boundaries of the *sangha* must be intact. Any breach at the micro level (the individual) produces a breach at the communal level (the local *sangha*) which breaches the transcendent level (the universal *sangha*). The boundaries thus define and preserve the very identity of the *bhikkhu*, the local *sangha*, and the universal *sangha*. To be a *bhikkhu* in this model is to be perfectly pure with respect to body, speech, and mind, fully separate from physical, social, and psychological bonds, and unquestioningly compliant with one’s place in the hierarchical schema within the *sangha*.

The characteristics of the identity of an enlightened being are consistent throughout the story, whether they apply to the Buddha himself or to the *sangha* that emulates him. The sphere of enlightenment transcends space and time; it is cosmic in its dimensions. As long as the boundaries between the sphere of *bodhi* and the defiling world of *samsāra* remain intact it can be embodied by a pure community (the *Cātuddisasangha*) and by a pure individual (the ideal *bhikkhu*). Physical containment, social detachment, and psychological control are vital components of purity at both a communal and an individual level.

This condition of complete purity, however, is very vulnerable. A breaching of the boundaries at an individual level intrudes upon the purity of the community and the structure of the cosmos. In the *Vinaya* the cosmos shakes on two occasions. The first is when Koṇḍañña enters the Buddha’s sphere of enlightenment by attaining the *dhammacakka*

(*Mahāvagga* I 6.37), and the second is when Sudinna impregnates his former wife (*Pārājika* I 5.9). It is this vulnerability to rupture and concomitant defilement that explains the extreme emphasis on boundary formation and maintenance throughout the *Vinaya*. The boundary between pure and impure is fragile and must be fortified. As is clear in the frame narrative to the *Suttavibhaṅga*, however, the boundaries are destined to collapse. The *brahmacariya* will decline, as it has in past aeons under previous Buddhas (*Pārājika* I 3).³¹ The point of *Pāṭimokkha* is not to nullify the decline, but to postpone it for as long as possible. This is the explicit rationale for instituting the individual rules of the *Pāṭimokkha* code.

The postponement of decline is also the implicit rationale for the *Vinaya* as a whole. At key points in the narrative chronology of the *Vinaya* the threat of impurity explains and justifies the need for stronger boundaries. The Buddha is convinced initially to teach because of the existence of an impure (*asuddha*) *dhamma* in Magadha (*Mahāvagga* I 5.6). It is this decision that leads him to open up his sphere of enlightenment to Koṇḍañña, and consequently, the disturbance to the cosmos. Similarly, it is the entrance of impurity (*asuddha*) that marks both the necessity of instituting the *Pāṭimokkha* and the beginning of the decline of *brahmacariya*. Again, the event is accompanied by a disturbance to the cosmos.

The ending of the *Vinaya* story conveys the same logic. The threat of decline prompts Mahākassapa to convene the first council to establish the true *dhamma* and *vinaya*, “before non-*dhamma* (*adhamma*) shines forth and *dhamma* should be withheld, before non-*vinaya* (*avinaya*) shines forth and *vinaya* should be withheld, before those who speak non-*dhamma* become strong and those who speak *dhamma* become weak, before those who speak non-*vinaya* become strong and those who speak *vinaya* become weak” (*Cullavagga* XI 1.1).³²

This account condenses the content and sequence of the whole of the *Khandhakas* which precedes it. A reference to the Buddha biography (in this case, its conclusion) opens the account as it opens the *Khandhakas* (*Mahāvagga* I 1–5). Likewise, the account refers to the impact on celestial regions of events in the Buddha’s life (the notice of various deities and their gifts) and death (the *mandārava* flower descending from the heavens). The decision to proclaim *dhamma* and *vinaya* is prompted in both cases by the threat of *adhamma* (Brahmā’s reference to the “unclean *dhamma*” and Mahākassapa’s desire to protect true *dhamma*), and the first action in each text involves the admission of selected persons. Furthermore, just as these people all become *arahants* immediately upon entry into the *sangha* (*Mahāvagga* I 6–10), so are all the participants in the council *arahants*.³³ Just as the *Khandhakas* move from admission to a discus-

sion of *uposatha*, and particularly to specifications for boundaries (*sīmā*) to enclose it, then onto the rituals of *vassa*, including the *pavāraṇā* and the *kaṭhina* rites (*Mahāvagga* II–VII), so the first council account includes an establishing of the social and physical parameters of the meeting venue (the *sīmā*), and requires Ānanda to confess various offenses.³⁴ These events are slightly different from the *uposatha*, *sīmā*, and *pavāraṇā*, but are clearly similar in structure and function. Similarly, the *kaṭhina* rite does not appear as such, but Ānanda does receive a large donation of robes. In short, the first council account incorporates in very condensed form the whole ritual life of the *sangha* as it is prescribed in the *Mahāvagga*.

The first council account thus presents the content and sequence of much of the *Khandhakas*. In so doing, it reflects the same emphasis on the characteristics of the enlightened being and the transference of those characteristics onto the *sangha*. The purity that defines that being also defines the convened *sangha*; the *sangha* is composed entirely of *arahants* (at least for the actual business of the meeting). The separation from worldly concerns and external defilement required to maintain the purity of the enlightened being is maintained by the council. The meeting is physically bounded, socially isolated, and emotionally detached.³⁵ Also, the hierarchy that both establishes and expresses the separation and purity of the enlightened being is clearly emphasized in the council account. The conclave is composed entirely of elders (*thera*) within the *sangha* and is firmly under the leadership of Mahākassapa, who not only convenes the meeting and selects participants, but also delegates himself as the chairperson who questions Upāli and Ānanda to prompt their recital of *Vinaya* and *dhamma*.

The convened *sangha* personifies the attributes of the Buddha as they are developed throughout the *Vinaya*: from the beginning where it receives his mandate to teach in his place, through the ending where it assumes his authority after his death. It assumes the identity of an enlightened being. But this enlightened being is a masculine being. In the introductory frame narratives initiating the expansion process, women are omitted (*all* of the beings initially encountered by the newly awakened Buddha are male).³⁶ Throughout the *Khandhakas*, *bhikkhunīs* are systematically excluded: like non–renunciants, transgressors, and novices, *bhikkhunīs* must be outside the boundaries during *bhikkhu*'s recitation of *Pāṭimokkha* (even though it includes the rules for *bhikkhunīs*, *Mahāvagga* II 36.1–2); similarly, they cannot be present at the *pavāraṇā* ceremony (*Mahāvagga* IV 2–14); they cannot be counted to make up the quorum required of any of the formal acts of the *sangha* from ordination of *bhikkhus* to disciplinary proceedings, to the major ritual events, nor can they split a *sangha* even if they side with schismatics (*Mahāvagga* VII 5.1); they cannot even protest statements ut-

tered during official proceedings, nor can they critique *bhikkhu* behavior.³⁷

A MASCULINE MODEL: THE PROBLEM WITH BHIKKHUNĪS

There are clear indications that the Mahāprajāpatī story is a product of the same worldview as the rest of the *Vinaya* narratives. The logic of identity conceptually based on purity, separation, and hierarchy is the same logic that applies to the story. In this story, however, they do not function to define the ideal renunciant or the ideal *sangha*, but their antithesis.

In contrast with the image of the ideal renunciant portrayed throughout the *Vinaya*, Mahāprajāpatī is depicted as dirty, travel-stained, weeping outside the gate. Clearly, she is not a paragon of purity in this description. She is covered in dirt, probably sweating, and has tears flowing freely down her face. Her tears in particular reveal the fraudulence of her renunciant garb.³⁸ Tears represent the physical leaking out of emotion, a complete lack of control. They are thus a symbolic manifestation of the *āsavas*, the “outflows” which presage the decline in *brahmacariya* in the frame narrative to the *Pāṭimokkha*.³⁹ Yet it is her tears that attract Ānanda.

Importantly, despite her evident impurity, she is dressed as a *bhikkhunī*. The contrast between her dress and her physical and emotional distress highlights the fact that she is not really ordained. In our story, Mahāprajāpatī realizes this: she stands outside the gate (*bahi dvārakohake ahāsi*) of the *vihāra*. Mahāprajāpatī knows she cannot cross the physical boundary into the *sangha* for she is not really ordained. Yet she is virtually indistinguishable from those who are truly ordained. Like *bhikkhus*, she is bald and dressed in the yellow robes of renunciation. She respects the *sangha*'s boundaries by remaining outside the physical parameters of it, yet, in assuming the garb of a renunciant, Mahāprajāpatī has breached the symbolic parameters of the *sangha*. Mahāprajāpatī's fraudulent dress represents a very serious challenge to the integrity of the *sangha* and the validity of those who are truly ordained. In assuming the guise of a *bhikkhunī*, Mahāprajāpatī has undermined the care taken in the *Vinaya* to admit only those deemed suitable to represent the *sangha*. She has obliterated the distinction that separates the lifestyle of renunciation from that of householders. In so doing, she ruptures the integrity of those boundaries and introduces the possibility of contamination.

Perhaps most serious, however, is her assumption of the authority of the Buddha himself. In the story, Mahāprajāpatī functions as a leader of women who parallels the Buddha's leadership of *bhikkhus*.⁴⁰ Despite the Buddha's initial rejection of her request, Mahāprajāpatī and her followers shave, don the yellow robes and follow the Buddha and his *sangha*.⁴¹ In defying the Buddha, Mahāprajāpatī overturns the hierarchical scheme main-

tained throughout the *Vinaya*. She poses a direct challenge to the Buddha's authority.

In so doing, Mahāprajāpatī and the women she represents also challenge and threaten each of the elements of the *Vinaya*'s tripartite conceptual foundation. By contaminating the *sangha*'s purity, breaching its boundaries, and overturning its hierarchy, the presence of female renunciants challenges the very identity of the *sangha* as it is constructed in the Pali *Vinaya*. In the logic of the Pali *Vinaya*, female monastics have no official place. To have women ordained in the order is to modify or overturn either the masculine model of enlightenment or the process of authorization by which that model is transferred onto the identity of the ideal monastic and the ideal *sangha*.

It appears, though, that the *Vinaya* redactors had no choice but to accept the presence of *bhikkhunīs*. They could, however, minimize the threat. Hence the "great dam" of the *garudhamma* which re-establishes the (proper) hierarchy of *bhikkhus* over *bhikkhunīs*, thus separating the *bhikkhu-sangha* from the flood of contamination and allowing it to (re-)gain its purity. The *dhamma* may be doomed with the entry of women into the *sangha*, but, given its prevailing logic, the *Vinaya* has done what it could to postpone the inevitable.

Notes

¹ This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Twelfth Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies in Lausanne, August, 1999. I am grateful for a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada which funded my travel expenses.

² Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), provides a thorough list of the texts in which this story is found, including several occurrences in Pali texts (AN IV, 278; *Milindapañha* IV, i, 55–61, and *Cullavagga* X), the *Vinayas* of the Dharmaguptaka school (preserved only in Chinese, T No. 1428, 22.923c9), the Mahīśāsaka (T No. 1421, 22. 186a14), and the Haimavata (*Vinaya-Mātrkā* (*P'i-ni mu ching*, T No. 1463, 24.818c4), the Sarvāstivāda *Madhyamāgama* (*Chung a-han ching*, T No. 26, 1. 607b9), and two texts of uncertain sectarian affiliation (*Ch'u-t'an-mi chi-kuo ching*, T No. 60, 1.857c29 and *Chung pen-ch'i ching*, T No. 196, 4.159b8).

To this list we can include the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins. For the story in Sanskrit, see C.M. Ridding and L. De La Vallee Poussin, "A Fragment of the Sanskrit *Vinaya: Bhikṣuṇīkarmavacana*" (*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 1 [1919]: 123–143) which is translated by

Frances Wilson, “The Nun” (in Diana Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, pp. 82–105). It also appears in the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Dulva*, preserved in Tibetan (11, f. 326b–338) and translated by W. Woodville Rockhill, *The Life of the Buddha* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1884), pp. 60–62.

Nattier has also missed a crucial appearance of the story in the *Vinaya* of the Mahāsāṃghika–Lokottaravādins, ed. by Gustav Roth, *Bhikṣuṇī–Vinaya: Including Bhikṣuṇī–Prakīrṇaka of the Arya–Mahāsāṃghika–Lokottaravādin* (Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1970), pp. 4–21, translated by Edith Nolot, *Regles de Discipline des Nonnes Bouddhistes* (Paris: College de France Publications de l’Institut de Civilisation Indienne, 1991), pp. 2–12. This omission in Nattier’s work is serious: it leads her to construct a chronological scheme in which the story appears after the sectarian divisions in Buddhism. The existence of these texts raises questions about her chronology. As it appears in the Mahāsāṃghika branch, the story must be treated as pre–dating the sectarian division. Granted that the story, as such, does not appear in the *Mahāsāṃghika–Bhikṣuṇī–Vinaya*, the text still refers to it in “other *sūtras*,” which Akira Hirakawa cites in *Monastic Discipline for the Buddhist Nuns: An English Translation of the Chinese Text of the Mahāsāṃghika–Bhikṣuṇī–Vinaya* (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1982), pp. 47–48, n. 2.

³ Some accounts omit or condense one or more of the three similes, but all employ the imagery of contagion and contamination concomitant with women’s entrance into the *sangha*. The Mūlasarvāstivādin account translated by Rockhill omits reference to the rice field (p. 61); the Sanskrit Mūlasarvāstivādin text omits the diseased rice field, but describes a field struck by lightning (Ridding and de la Vallee Poussin, p. 126; Wilson, p. 84); the Mahāsāṃghika–Lokottaravādin account omits reference to thieves entering the household, but presents three crops falling to disease (Roth, p. 9–10; Nolot, p. 12).

⁴ This theory was initiated by I. B. Horner in her seminal *Women Under Primitive Buddhism: Laywomen and Almswomen*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975 [repr. of London, 1930]). Other scholars have followed her lead. See, for example, Nancy Schuster Barnes, “Buddhism” (in *Women in Religion*, ed. by Arvind Sharma, Albany: State University of New York, 1987, pp. 105–133), pp. 107–108. For a similar perspective, see also Cornelia Dimmitt Church, “Temptress, Housewife, Nun: Women’s Role in Early Buddhism” (*Anima* 1 [1975]: 52–58), p. 54; Rita Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), pp. 34–38; Kajiyama Yuichi, “Women in Buddhism” (*Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 15 [1982]:

53–70), pp. 59–61; and Tessa Bartholomeusz, *Women Under the Bo Tree* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1991), pp. 55–61.

⁵ Diana Paul stands as the central figure in this chronological schema with *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahāyāna Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). Paul attributes the misogyny of “early” Buddhist texts to the Indian context in which they developed. It was only when Mahāyāna took root in China that truly egalitarian doctrines could flourish and develop further. See, in particular, Part III (pp. 245–302) which Paul presents as the exaltation of the feminine in female deities such as Kuan Yin (p. 307).

Following Paul’s lead, Janice Willis, “Nuns and Benefactresses: The Role of Women in the Development of Buddhism” (in *Women, Religion, and Social Change*, ed. by Y. Haddad and E. Findly, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985, pp. 59–85) describes a gradual historical progression from Pali to Mahāyāna texts in the positive portrayals of women. For a similar perspective, see Karen Lang, “Lord Death’s Snare: Gender-related Imagery in the Theragāthā and the Therīgāthā” (*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 2 [1986]:63–79), p. 78.

Depending on these studies, Rita Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) develops this trend even further, arguing that full flowering of an incipient egalitarianism had to await the development of Vajrayāna Buddhism (p. 57 and 114). However, Gross departs from Paul’s model in acknowledging positive portrayals of women in “early” Pali materials such as the *Therīgāthā*.

⁶ Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *A Comparative Study of Bhikkhunī Pāṭimokkha* (Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1984), Mohan Wijayaratna, *Les Moniales Bouddhistes: Naissance et Développement du Monachisme Féminin* (Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1991), pp. 29–30. See also Appendix 1 in his *Buddhist Monastic Life: According to the Texts of the Theravāda Tradition* (trans. by Claude Grangier and Steven Collins, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 158–163. Summarizing the results of these is Karma Lekshe Tsomo’s recent contribution, “Mahāprajāpatī’s Legacy: The Buddhist Women’s Movement: An Introduction,” *Buddhist Women Across Cultures* (State University of New York Press, 1999, pp. 1–44), pp. 6–7.

⁷ Ute Hüsken’s work is exemplary in this regard. For her study of the story, see “Die Legende von der Einrichtung des buddhistischen Nonnenordens im Vinaya–Piṭaka der Theravādin,” in *Studien zur Indologie und Buddhismuskunde*, ed. by Reinhold Grhnendahl, et al., Bonn: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1993, pp. 151–170.

⁸ Alan Sponberg, “Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism” (in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. by Jose Cabezon, Albany: SUNY, 1992, pp. 3–36).

⁹ In my analysis of the “Vinaya story” I follow the lead of Erich Frauwallner, *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medi ed Estremo Oriente, 1956), though I differ from him in emphasizing literary rather than historical features of the *Vinaya*’s usage of the Buddha biography. My analysis is supported by Buddhaghosa’s assumption of the importance of beginnings and endings. In his long discussion of the first council, Buddhaghosa highlights the authority and completeness of the Pali canon: “all this has three divisions, the first words of the Buddha, the intermediate words of the Buddha, and the last words of the Buddha” (*sabbam eva h’idaṃ paṭhamabuddhavacanam majjhimbuddhavacanam pacchimbuddha–vacanan to tippabhedam hoti*). N.A. Jayawickrama, ed., *The Inception of Discipline and the Vinaya Nidāna* (London: Luzac and Co. Ltd., 1962), pp. 147–148.

¹⁰ There are exceptions to this, usually in the secondary rules which modify or extend the application of the main rule. See, for example, the secondary rules in *Saṅghādisesa* IX, X, and XI. For a discussion, see I. B. Horner, *BD I*, p. xvi.

¹¹ Most scholars accept a relatively early dating for the *Vinaya* because of consistency among the recensions in the various schools. For the most part, the composition and compilation of the *Vinaya* as we have it, the theory maintains, must predate the schisms that follow the second council, c. 340 BCE. For a thorough discussion of the schism and debates in the scholarship about dating and reasons for the schism, see Janice Nattier and Charles Prebish, “Mahāsāṅghika Origins: The Beginnings of Buddhist Sectarianism” (*History of Religions* 16 [1977]: 237–272) and references therein. Recently, Gregory Schopen has challenged this theory, arguing that important sections of the Pali *Vinaya* dealing with *stūpas* have been either lost or intentionally omitted from the extant texts. “The *Stūpa* Cult and the Extant Pāli *Vinaya*” (*Journal of the Pali Text Society* 13 [1989]: 83–100). Scholars of Pali Buddhism refute Schopen’s claim in the next volume of the *Journal of the Pali Text Society* (15 [1990]). See O. von Hinüber, “*Khandhakavatta*: Loss of Text in the Pāli *Vinayaṭṭaka*?” (pp. 127–138); Richard Gombrich, “Making Mountains Without Molehills: The Case of the Missing *Stūpa*” (pp. 141–143); and, especially, Charles Hallisey, “Appropos the Pāli *Vinaya* as a Historical Document: A Reply to Gregory Schopen” (pp. 197–208). Steven Collins, however, affirms the cautionary note introduced by Gregory Schopen, arguing that the whole of the Pali Canon, indeed, the actual *concept* of the Pali Canon as a “closed list of

scriptures with special and specific authority as the avowed historical record of the Buddha's teaching" is best understood as the product of a particular lineage in Sri Lanka who employed their recension of the texts in a context of political struggles for hegemony in the fifth century as a "strategy of legitimation." "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon" (*Journal of the Pali Text Society* 15 [1990]: 89–126), p. 89.

¹² This point is made by almost all scholars studying the *Vinaya*. For example, see Horner, BD I, p. xvi, G.S.P. Misra, *The Age of Vinaya* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1972), p. 9, and John Holt, *Discipline: The Canonical Buddhism of the Vinayapitaka* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), p. 16.

¹³ For recent studies in the biography of the Buddha, see the excellent collection edited by Juliane Schober, *Sacred Biography in Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia* (University of Hawaii Press, 1997) which build on the influential article by Frank Reynolds, "The Many Lives of the Buddha" in *The Biographical Process*, ed. by Reynolds and D. Capps (The Hague: Mouton, 1976, pp. 37–66).

¹⁴ For a fascinating discussion of the development of the biography of the Buddha see Jonathan Walters, "Suttas as History: Four Approaches to the *Sermon on the Noble Quest* (Ariyapariyesanasutta)" *History of Religions* 38/3 (Feb. 1999): 247–284.

¹⁵ Some might see his conversation with the *brahman* as an exception to this. I think, though, that the *brahman* soliciting the Buddha's opinion as to what constitutes a *brahman* is at least an implicit recognition.

¹⁶ According to Ellison Banks Findly, the term "*arahant*" itself conveys status implications from which, in her analysis of Pali texts, women were exempted. She claims "[t]here is not a single case of the term being applied definitively to a specific woman in the *Vinaya* (disciplinary texts) or the *Nikāyas* (texts of the Buddha's sermons)." "Women and the *Arahant* Issue in Early Pāli Literature" (*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 15/1 [Spring 1999]: 57–76), p. 58.

¹⁷ Here I encapsulate the *Suttavibhaṅga* within the structure of the *Khandhakas*, in particular within the section on the *uposatha*. Conceptually, the *Khandhakas* take precedence over the *Suttavibhaṅga*. The *Suttavibhaṅga* details and prohibits for individual *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* behaviours deemed offensive, and provides an account of the circumstances of the first infraction of each offence. In so doing, however, the text assumes elements of communal life which are articulated in the *Khandhakas*. The *sangha* itself is instituted in the *Mahāvagga* as are the admission procedures which undergird the very designation of "*bhikkhu*" and "*bhikkhunī*". Moreover, the *Pāṭimokkha* which is recited at the bi-monthly *uposatha* rite

is introduced, apparently for the first time, in Chapter II of the *Mahāvagga* which describes the origins and procedures of the *uposatha*. Since the *Suttavibhaṅga* is essentially the long version of the *Pāṭimokkha*, it is, in a certain sense, also contained conceptually within the *Mahāvagga*.

¹⁸ *mutt' āhaṃ bhikkhave sabbapāsehi ye dibbā ye ca mānūsā. tumhe pi bhikkhave mutā sabbapāsehi ye dibbā ye ca mānūsā. caratha bhikkhave cārikaṃ bahujanahitāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ. mā ekena dve agamittha. desetha bhikkhave dhamma ādikalyāṇaṃ majjhakalyāṇaṃ pariyosānakalyāṇaṃ sātthaṃ savyañjanaṃ kevalaparipuññaṃ parisuddhaṃ brahmacariyaṃ pakāsetha. santi sattā pparijakkhajātikā assavanatā dhammassa parihāyanti, bhavissanti dhammassaññātāro.*

¹⁹ Significantly, in both textual sources and in inscriptions, the term *cātuddisa sangha* (the *sangha* of the four directions) is used to designate the *sangha* in its entirety. This geographical metaphor apparently had wide currency from an early date in Buddhism. In his classic study, Sukumar Dutt interprets this designation as indication of an early itinerant stage of the *sangha*, arguing that originally monks did not live in dwellings but traveled constantly. *Early Buddhist Monachism* (London: Luzac and Co. Ltd., 1957), p. 13. For a stringent critique of Dutt's theory, see Dhirasekera, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, pp. 6–10.

²⁰ In the account of his enlightenment experience which opens the *Mahāvagga* frame narrative, Māra is vanquished in the third and final watch of the night (*Mahāvagga* I 1.7). In other accounts of the Buddha's biography, the conquest of Māra plays an elaborate and significant role. For a discussion and references to Māra in Buddhist and non-Buddhist sources, see E. J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha: As Legend and History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), pp. 70–80, 230–233, etc.; James Boyd, *Satan and Māra: Christian and Buddhist Symbols of Evil* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975); and Alex Wayman, "Studies in Yama and Māra" (*Indo-Iranian Journal* 3 [1959]: 112–131).

²¹ *Mahāvagga* I 11.2.

²² This is an interesting inversion of the famous story of Aṅgulimāla, the thieving mass-murderer who joins the *sangha* and attains *arahant*-hood (MN Sutta 86 and *Theragāthā* 869–891). In the *Vinaya* reference to a similar (murdering?) thief, the Buddha introduces his prohibition to the admission of *dhajabaddha* thieves after the ordination of a thief (*cora*) described as wearing a garland of fingers (*aṅgulimāla*) whose presence in the *sangha* terrifies people. Here, the prohibition refers specifically to thieves marked by a sign (*dhajabaddha*; Horner translates this as "wearing an emblem" perhaps in reference to the garland).

²³ For a discussion of the elusive *paṇḍaka* and Buddhist theories of sexual differentiation, see Leonard Zwilling, “Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts” (in *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender* ed. by Jose Cabezon, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992, pp. 203–214) and L. P. N. Perera, “Faculties of Sex and Related Phenomena in Buddhist Sexual Theory” (in *Buddhist Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honour of N. A. Jayawickrama*, ed. by David Kalupahana and W. G. Weeratne, Sri Lanka: N. A. Jayawickrema Felicitation Volume Committee, 1987, pp. 179–188).

²⁴ I.B. Horner follows the commentary in assuming *Tathāgata* in textual lacuna (BD IV, p. 113 n. 2).

²⁵ I am indebted to Mavis Fenn for this insight into the importance of wholeness in the *Vinaya*’s embodiment of the Buddha’s person.

²⁶ A miraculous transformation of sexual characteristics poses no problem for Buddhaghosa. See, for example, the case of the *bhikkhu* who changed overnight into a *bhikkhunī*. His (her?) cell-mate incurred no transgression for sleeping in the presence of a woman and the new *bhikkhunī* retained her (his?) previous status though now applied to the *bhikkhunī-sangha* (*Samantapāsādikā*, pp. 211–212). It is the fuzzy areas between male and female that disturb Buddhaghosa, just as they appear to disturb our redactor. *Paṇḍakas* and hermaphrodites (*ubhatovyañjanaka*) are consistently excluded from any interaction with the *sangha*.

²⁷ The text of *Mahāvagga* II addresses only *bhikkhus*. *Bhikkhunīs* are also required to attend an *uposatha* rite of their own under the guidance of a designated *bhikkhu* (*Cullavagga* X 6.1), but their rite is clearly separate from that of the *bhikkhus*.

²⁸ Jotiya Dhirasekera, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, p. 101.

²⁹ Almost all scholars agree that this binding together of a disparate community is one of the primary functions of the *uposatha*. See, for example, Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, p. 110.

³⁰ I am indebted to John Holt (*Discipline*, p. 130) for this analysis of the unity of body, speech, and mind in the recital of the *Pāṭimokkha*.

³¹ I use the term “decline” to refer to the breakdown of *brahmacariya* and the expected demise of *saddhamma* as it is used in the *Vinaya*. The idea of inevitable decline in other Pali sources refers to the cosmic cycle of evolution and devolution during vast periods of time. See, for example, the *Aggañña Sutta* (DN III, no. 27) and the *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda Sutta* (DN III, no. 26). For a discussion of the role of decline throughout Buddhist history and textual transmissions, see Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991).

According to Nattier, differing notions of decline and its causes lead to differing responses from the traditions that maintain them. For Theravāda Buddhists, the idea of inevitable decline leads to “a fierce conservatism, devoted to the preservation for as long as possible of the Buddha’s teachings in their original form. Set within the cosmological framework... (according to which ours is an age of general decline) and anticipating the disappearance of the Dharma within a finite number of centuries, this historical outlook views change of any kind as being — by definition — change for the worse. Thus the impulse to preservation (and, accordingly, the tendency to deny any change that may actually have taken place) is both understandable and expected” (p. 137).

³² *pure adhammo dīppati dhammo paṭibāhīyati, avinayo dīppati vinayo paṭibāhīyati, pure adhammavādino balavanto honto dhammavādino dubbalā honti, avinayavādino balavanto honti vinayavādino dubbalā honti.*

³³ Note, however, that Ānanda does not become an *arahant* until the night before the assembly. As the only non-*arahant* chosen to participate, his presence is anomalous. For a discussion of this and other anomalies associated with the character of Ānanda, see Michael Freedman, “Ananda in the Theravāda,” pp. 442–485 and Ellison Banks Findly, “Ananda’s Hindrance: Faith (*saddhā*) in Early Buddhism” (*Journal of Indian Philosophy* 20 [1992]: 253–273).

³⁴ This “trial” of Ānanda has been interpreted by many scholars as the chronological “core” of the first council account. See Louis de La Vallée Poussin, “The Buddhist Councils” (*Indian Antiquary* 37 [1908]: 1–18 and 81–106), pp. 11–12 and Bareau, *Les premiers conciles*, pp. 14–15. Jean Przyluski focuses on the account as it is preserved in *sūtras* rather than in *Vinayas*, arguing that the account reflects legendary themes associated with the seasonal rituals of the rains. At the conclusion of these rituals, Przyluski contends, the community purified itself by the reprimand and expulsion of a scapegoat, here personified by Ānanda. *Le Concile de Rājagṛha* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1926), p. 372, and especially, Chapter II, pp. 257–278.

³⁵ This is clear from Mahākassapa’s description of the calm response of passionless (*vītarāga*) *bhikkhus* to news of the Buddha’s *parinibbāna* (*Cullavagga* XI 1.1).

³⁶ Women do not appear in the account until the conversion of Yasa (*Mahāvagga* I 7.1–15), where they symbolically represent the world of entanglement from which Yasa must extricate himself. It is in seeing women in their disheveled condition that Yasa develops the perspective that entitles him to special treatment by the Buddha. It is in women that delusion, death, and suffering are most evident. And it is the women who remain

asleep while Yasa “wakes up” (*paṭibujjhati*). Note how in other biographies, it is Siddhartha himself who plays the lead character in this sequence. See the *Buddhacarita* or the *Mahāvastu*.

³⁷ *Bhikkhunīs* are prohibited from disciplining *bhikkhus* in any way: they cannot suspend the *pavāraṇā* of *bhikkhus*, reprove them, or remind them (*Cullavagga* X 20).

³⁸ Mahāprajāpatī’s emotional outburst resembles that of the *bhikkhus* who wept and wailed at hearing news of the Buddha’s death (*Cullavagga* XI 1.1). In contrast, *arahants* are perpetually calm. The argument that convinces the Buddha to admit women also carries connotations of impurity. The Buddha is indebted to Mahāprajāpatī because she nursed him, supplying him with the milk that flows from her breasts — a bodily secretion over which women have no conscious control and which symbolizes the emotional and social bond between mother and child. Note also that a *bhikkhunī* who gives birth must leave the *sangha* while nursing the child, even if she has committed no offense to become pregnant (*Cullavagga* X 25).

³⁹ In the Buddha’s explanation of the rationale for instituting the *sikkhāpada* and *Pāṭimokkha*, he explicitly states that none of the rules is necessary until *āsavas* have entered the *sangha*. By implication, when Sudinna impregnates his former wife, thus necessitating the first *sikkhāpada*, the *āsavas* have entered and decline is inevitable.

⁴⁰ In his work on the *Gotamī–apadāna*, Jonathan Walters argues that the Gotamī (Mahāprajāpatī) is the female counterpart to the Gotama (Buddha). Their clan–names reflect this, as does their treatment in the text. Both appear surrounded by their disciples (female and male, respectively); both save a group of 500 (nuns and monks, respectively) by their pity; both are worshipped by deities (Buddha by gods, Mahāprajāpatī by goddesses); and each pays mutual homage to the other. Walters also highlights a conscious (he argues) parallelism in the descriptions of their respective deaths in the *Gotamī–apadāna* and the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*. Jonathan Walters, “A Voice from the Silence: the Buddha’s Mother’s Story” (*History of Religions* 33/4 [1994]: 358–379), pp. 374–375. On the basis of these parallels, Walters argues for the historical existence of two separate paths for women and men in early Buddhism. My work on the *Therīgāthā* and *Theragāthā* tends to confirm Walters’ argument. In a detailed comparison of the texts’ use of terms, phrases, contexts, and characterizations, I discovered pervasive differences between the texts’ concept of *nibbāna*: while the *Therīgāthā* emphasizes *nibbāna* as struggle, the *Theragāthā* emphasizes *nibbāna* as an end to struggle. Though the texts are clearly designed as companion volumes, modeling the quest for *nibbāna* for women and men, respectively, this quest is slightly different for women and men. *Women in the Footsteps*

of the Buddha: Struggle for Liberation in the Therīgāthā (Curzon, 1998). Liz Wilson challenges Walters' argument, contending that the parallels are only "equal" if we ignore the gender connotations in the text. Instead, Wilson argues, Mahāprajāpatī's presentation in the *Apadāna* exemplifies the subordination required of all women in ancient India whether in the Buddha *sangha* or not. "Seeing Through the Gendered 'I'," pp. 44–51.

⁴¹ In the Mahāsaṃghika–Lokottaravādin account of the story, her leadership and her subversiveness are emphasized. After the Buddha has rejected her initial request, she returns to her friends and proposes that they shave, don the yellow robes, and follow the Buddha. She then says "if the Buddha allows it, we will enter the religious path. If not, we will do it anyway." *sace mo Bhagavān [anu]jānī(ni) śyati pravrajiśyāmo no ca anujānī(ni)śyati evam tu tāyi Bhagavato santike brahmacaryaṅ carīśyāmah. Bhikṣuṅī–Vinaya* 1.2 (Roth, p. 6). See also Edith Nolot's translation, *Regles de Discipline des Nonnes Bouddhistes: Le Bhikṣuṅīvinaya de L'Ecole Mahāsaṃghika–Lokottaravādin* (Paris: College de France, 1991), p. 3.