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“We Love Our Nuns”: Affective Dimensions of the Sri Lankan *Bhikkhunī* Revival

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“We Love Our Nuns”: Affective Dimensions of the Sri Lankan *Bhikkhunī* Revival

Susanne Mrozik¹

Abstract

In this paper I examine lay responses to the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival of the late 1990s. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted between 2010 and 2012, I argue that laity have very different concerns than do the scholars, activists, government officials, and monastic authorities engaged in public debate over the scriptural validity of the controversial revival. The primary concern of laity is whether or not they can get their religious needs met at their local *bhikkhunī* temple, not whether or not the *bhikkhunī* revival conforms to Theravāda monastic regulations (*vinaya*). Taking a rural farming village as a case study, I focus particular attention on the affective ties between laity and nuns, demonstrating that laity in this village express their support for the *bhikkhunī* revival in the language of love (Sinhala: *ādayara*, *ādare*). I analyze what laity mean by the word “love” in the context of lay-

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nun relationships, and what this can tell us about the larger dynamics of the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival.

Introduction²

The Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhist order of *bhikkhunīs*, or fully ordained nuns, was revived in the late 1990s after a gap of circa 1000 years. Since 1998 *bhikkhunī* ordination ceremonies occur regularly in the country.³ Estimates on the number of nuns in the new *bhikkhunī* order range between 1000 and 2000. The rapid growth of the *bhikkhunī* order is, perhaps, surprising given the fact that the Sri Lankan government and the *bhikkhu sangha* have not yet formally accepted the revival. Consequently, although it is legal to hold *bhikkhunī* ordinations and establish *bhikkhunī* temples, these temples receive no government funding, making it espe-

² I gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the United States-Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission, the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies, and Mount Holyoke College for my research on the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival during 2010-2012. Portions of this paper were first presented at a workshop conducted by the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies on the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival in Colombo, Sri Lanka, April 28-29, 2011. I thank the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies and, especially, the Colombo office for their support of the workshop. I also thank Manjula Aiyar, Kanchuka Dharmasiri, and Chamila Somirathna for helping me render my interlocutors' Sinhalese remarks into English. Finally, I am grateful to Karen Derris for insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

³ The largest *bhikkhunī* training and ordination centers are in Kalundewa (near Dambulla), Newgala (in Kegalle District) and Dekanduwala (in Kaluthara District); other temples also occasionally host *bhikkhunī* ordinations, and a new *bhikkhunī* training center has recently been established in Manelwatta (in Kelaniya) with hopes of hosting *bhikkhunī* ordinations in the future. As is the case with male monasticism in Sri Lanka, distinct *nikāyas*, or monastic sects, have emerged in female monasticism. The sectarian lines overlap between male and female *nikāyas*, but are not identical. For information on *bhikkhunī nikāyas* see Cheng *Buddhist Nuns*, and Premakumara De Silva.

cially hard for nuns to get a monastic education. There are, however, a number of prominent *bhikkhus* advocating on behalf of *bhikkhunīs*.⁴ Thus formal recognition of the *bhikkhunī* revival may well come in the not-too-distant future. Until then *bhikkhunīs* rely on lay support for all of their needs. As Janet Gyatso has observed, “the real fate of the new female [Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī*] order is being decided by the lay community” (5). It is precisely because laity support their local *bhikkhunī* temples—often with great enthusiasm—that the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* order continues to grow.

This paper examines lay responses to the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival, focusing particular attention on the presence of strong affective relationships between laity and nuns. Affective ties between laity and nuns became the focus of my research while I lived in a rural farming village for five months toward the end of a longer two-year period of ethnographic research in Sri Lanka. I am especially concerned in this paper with the use of the word “love” (Sinhala: *ādaraya*, *ādare*)⁵ to describe lay-nun relationships in this village. Laity told me that they “loved” their nuns. Just what laity mean by the word “love” and what

⁴ For instance, Ven. Inamaluwe Sri Sumangala Thera of the Dambulla chapter of the Siyam Nikāya has filed a case with the Sri Lankan Human Rights Council on behalf of *bhikkhunīs* requesting the government to register *bhikkhunī* monasteries and issue *bhikkhunīs* with national identity cards that acknowledge their status as *bhikkhunīs*. Were the government to grant this request, *bhikkhunī* monasteries would be entitled to government funding, including for education. Additionally, *bhikkhunīs* need national identity cards to sit for monastic examinations and even some secular examinations, such as those needed to enter universities (see “Sri Lanka’s Bhikkhuni Order in Deadlock,” *The Sunday Leader*, March 20, 2013; please note, however that the article contains some factual errors concerning the establishment of the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* order).

⁵ Written and spoken forms of modern Sinhala are different. The written form of the word “love” is *ādaraya*; the spoken form is *ādare*. I cite the spoken form when referencing comments made by my interlocutors. The same holds true for other Sinhala words such as *dāne* (*dānaya*) and *sil* (*silaya*).

this can tell us about the dynamics of the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival is the subject of this paper.

Lay responses to the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival have not received much attention. Public discourse on the revival on the part of scholars, activists, government officials, and monastic authorities still centers primarily on questions of the revival's scriptural validity. According to Buddhist monastic regulations (*vinaya*) new *bhikkhunīs* must be ordained by a quorum of both *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*. In the absence of a living Theravāda *bhikkhunī* lineage, South Korean and Taiwanese *bhikkhunīs*, who follow Mahāyāna rather than Theravāda Buddhism, made up the quorums that ordained the first Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs*. These Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* were ordained at international ceremonies held in India by South Korean (1996) and Taiwanese (1998) organizations. Opponents of the *bhikkhunī* revival thus argue that all Sri Lankan nuns are really Mahāyāna nuns and should not receive formal recognition by the government or monastic authorities.⁶ However much questions of scriptural validity matter to those engaged in public debate over the revival, my research indicates that lay patrons of *bhikkhunī* temples have very different concerns. Their primary concern is whether or not they can get their religious needs met at their local *bhikkhunī* temple, not whether the South Korean and Taiwanese ordination ceremonies conformed to Theravāda monastic regulations.

⁶ For further information on the history of the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival and some of the debates surrounding it, see Anālayo, Bodhi, Cheng *Buddhist Nuns*, Ranjani de Silva, Devendra/Kusuma, Goonatilake "Women Regaining," Gunawardena, Li, Heirman, Kieffer-Pülz, Mrozik "Robed Revolution," Salgado "Unity and Diversity," Wijayaratna, Wijayasundara, and Williams. This article goes under review shortly before the expected release of Salgado, *Buddhist Nuns*, which I expect to make important contributions to our understanding of Sri Lankan female monasticism as well.

Given the importance of the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival to *bhikkhunī* movements worldwide, I was surprised to find that Sri Lankan laity are often unfamiliar with the history of their own *bhikkhunī* revival. Indeed unless they have personal contact with a *bhikkhunī* temple, they may not even be aware that a revival has taken place. How is this possible? An alternative female renunciant order of ten-precept nuns (*dasasilmātā*) was founded in 1905 at a time when there was still insufficient support for a *bhikkhunī* revival in Sri Lanka. Ten-precept nuns are technically not members of the Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhist sangha, although they live celibate monastic lives. As their name suggests, they observe ten, rather than the full complement of 311 *bhikkhunī* precepts. Today ten-precept nuns, who still outnumber nuns in the *bhikkhunī* order, wear monastic robes so similar to those of *bhikkhunīs* that to the untrained eye they may be difficult to distinguish.⁷ Thus many Sri Lankans do not know that there are now two distinct orders of nuns in their country.

The ongoing confusion and occasional blurring of distinctions between ten-precept nuns and *bhikkhunīs* deserve a separate treatment in another paper. The point I wish to make here is that *even* lay patrons of *bhikkhunī* temples may know very little about the *bhikkhunī* revival. For instance, one elderly lay female patron of an urban *bhikkhunī* temple actually did not know that such a revival had taken place. She insisted that the nuns she knew in her youth—long before the 1990s revival—were *also* *bhikkhunīs*. Of course, many (perhaps, even most) lay patrons do know that a revival took place, but these too are usually unfamiliar with its history. More to the point, the historical fact of a revival and the often technical scriptural and historical debates concerning that revival are

⁷ Nirmala S. Salgado discusses the history of ten-precept nuns' robes in "Religious Identities." For discussion of why ten-precept nuns might opt out of *bhikkhunī* ordination, see Bartholomeusz, Mroziak "In the Company," and Sasson.

far less important to Sri Lankan laity than to scholars, activists, and public officials. Although it is not surprising that Sri Lankan laity would have different concerns, it is surprising that we still know so little about lay points of view. This paper focuses attention on lay patrons of *bhikkhunī* temples. It explores the nature of affective ties between laity and nuns. More specifically, it explores a particular expression of these ties in one rural farming village, arguing that laity in this village express their support for the *bhikkhunī* revival in the language of love.

By focusing on affective ties between laity and nuns, this paper contributes to scholarship on lay-monastic relationships, more broadly, in Sri Lanka. Most pertinent is Jeffrey Samuels' ethnographic research on affective ties in Sri Lankan *male* monastic culture. Samuels argues against utilitarian analyses of lay-monastic relationships, which characterize these solely in terms of an exchange of services. Laity give monks food, clothing, shelter, and medicine; in exchange monks give laity "religious instruction, ritual performance, and the opportunity to make merit" (*Attracting the Heart* xxiii). Although such exchanges are central to lay-monastic relationships, Samuels cautions against reducing these relationships to an exchange of services. He demonstrates that "the forces that bring and hold together groups of Buddhists—monastic and lay—include affective bonds that are, themselves, deepened by common histories, similar values, shared sentiments, and collectively held aesthetic standards" (*Attracting the Heart* xxiv).

Samuels is especially concerned with shared aesthetic standards of monastic appearance and deportment. Like Buddhists elsewhere, Sri Lankans place great stock in visible performances of virtue, for instance, in the slow and serene gait of a monastic (Mrozik *Virtuous Bodies*). Samuels demonstrates that the feelings of "anger, disgust, pleasure, and awe," which may be triggered by the appearance and deportment of monks, constitute both aesthetic and moral judgments (*Attracting the Heart* 29).

Such feelings, he argues, play a major role in determining the monastic communities with which Sri Lankans choose to associate (*Attracting the Heart* chapter 2). Samuels thus espouses a cognitive theory of emotions, drawing this from Martha Nussbaum, who has argued that emotions are not opposed to reason—as was assumed in the Enlightenment elevation of reason over emotion—but rather emotions themselves are “appraisals or value judgments” about persons and things that matter to us (4). Following Nussbaum, Samuels defines emotions as “cultural judgments of people and institutions” (*Attracting the Heart* xxiv).

Although Samuels and I have different intellectual aims in our respective studies of male and female monasticism, there are exciting points of convergence. Indeed, my research lends strong support to a number of Samuels’ arguments. First, like Samuels, I believe that we need to pay careful attention to the role emotions play in “determining and influencing the bonds and commitments that laypeople make to specific monastics, to particular monastic institutions, and to the Buddhist religion” (*Attracting the Heart* 107). This may be especially the case for *bhikkhunīs* who, unlike *bhikkhus*, depend solely on laity for their survival. Second, like Samuels, I believe that emotions reflect “cultural judgments of people and institutions” (*Attracting the Heart* xxiv). Specifically, I argue that lay expressions of love for *bhikkhunīs* reflect judgments about their monastic conduct and service. Although I agree that shared aesthetic standards of monastic appearance and deportment are an important aspect of such lay expectations (Mrozik *Virtuous Bodies*), I am not primarily concerned with aesthetics in this paper. Instead, I focus on lay evaluations of the conduct and services of *bhikkhunīs*, more broadly. We will see that lay patrons of *bhikkhuni* temples regularly praise *bhikkhunīs*

for their virtue (*sil*)⁸ and for the quality of their ritual, educational, and counseling services.

Sri Lanka is a country where the Buddhist laity enjoy regular, close interactions with male and female monastics. With the exception of forest monasteries, Buddhist temples, which are often small in size, are located in Sri Lankan villages, towns, and cities. Thus it is not surprising that laity develop close affective ties with both *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*, as they interact on a regular basis.⁹ I will argue in this paper that the close affective ties between laity and monastics, *in general*, in Sri Lanka, have become a critical source of support for *bhikkhunīs*, *in particular*. *Bhikkhus* and *bhikkhu* temples receive material support from the Sri Lankan government, but at this time *bhikkhunī* temples receive no such support whatsoever. Thus “the real fate” of the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* order is indeed “being decided by the lay community” (Gyatso 2010, 5). Therefore this paper, which focuses attention on *lay* responses to the *bhikkhunī* revival, may suggest new avenues of analysis for scholars as well as new strategies of engagement for pro-*bhikkhunī* activists in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

Finally, by focusing scholarly attention on one particular expression of lay support for the *bhikkhunī* revival, namely, their expressions of love for their *bhikkhunīs*, this paper also seeks to contribute to a growing body of research in Buddhist Studies on the significance of emotions in Buddhist life. This research challenges older scholarly as well as popular stereotypes of Buddhism as a tradition that “idealize[s] emotional detachment and particular forms of social disengagement” (Trainor 524).

⁸ Again, I am using spoken rather than written forms of Sinhala in this paper when referencing comments made by my interlocutors. The written form of *sil* is *sīlaya*. See footnote 5 above.

⁹ The same is true for ten-precept nuns; I return to this point in my conclusion.

Kevin Trainor aptly comments that “the Buddhist ideal of nonattachment has perhaps turned attention away from the positive role that some kinds of emotion play in Buddhist tradition” (524). Recent scholarly studies of emotions, particularly as they occur in Buddhist literature, demonstrate that Buddhists have regarded the cultivation of emotions such as gratitude, serene joy, and shame as critical to ethical and spiritual development.¹⁰ To this growing body of textual studies of emotions, this paper makes an ethnographic contribution.

An Ethnographer’s Turn Toward Love

I did not begin my ethnographic research in the summer of 2010 intending to study love. Instead, I intended to map the diverse stakes—pro and con—Sri Lankan laity and monastics hold in the *bhikkhunī* revival. Two experiences directed my attention to the affective ties between laity and nuns and the ways in which emotions, more broadly, were shaping positive as well as negative receptions of the *bhikkhunī* revival in Sri Lanka. Although I will have occasion later in this paper to comment briefly on negative receptions of the *bhikkhunī* revival, this paper focuses primarily on positive receptions.¹¹

¹⁰ Please see bibliographic entries for Berkwitz, Hallisey, Heim, Mrozik (“Astonishment”), Rotman, and Trainor for references to some of these publications.

¹¹ I have addressed negative receptions in “In the Company” as well as in public talks (“Reflections on Feminist Studies,” “Ethnographic Insights,” “Contextualizing”) and will return to this topic in a future article.

The first experience occurred at a *dāne*, or alms-giving ceremony, for circa 2900 nuns in October 2010.¹² The *dāne*, which was offered by a Taiwanese *bhikkhunī* temple, took place at a Sri Lankan *bhikkhu* temple. The Taiwanese female monastic donors and Sri Lankan male monastic hosts are active supporters of the Sri Lankan Theravāda *bhikkhunī* order. The *dāne* was characterized as the first all-Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī dāne*, but it should be noted that nuns in the ten-precept order were also invited. The alms-giving ceremony was an important public demonstration of support for Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs*. *Bhikkhunīs*, with whom I have spoken about the alms-giving ceremony, express satisfaction and gratitude over the event. As a feminist scholar, however, I was—at least initially—disappointed with the alms-giving ceremony because it was entirely dominated by lay and ordained men. In the many hours of speeches honoring *bhikkhunīs* there was only one female voice—that of the Taiwanese abbess—speaking very briefly in a Taiwanese dialect that most attendees could not understand. As Wei-Yi Cheng aptly comments in her published account of the event: “While the re-establishing *bhikkhunī* sangha movement began as a Buddhist feminist movement, the first alms-offering ceremony for all Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* turned out to be a patriarchal manifestation” (Cheng “Cross-Tradition Exchange” 265). My disappointment, however, was tempered by the following experience: As the circa 2900 nuns processed into the temple to receive their lunchtime *dāne*, a laywoman standing next to me suddenly exclaimed with excitement and delight “My nuns! My nuns!” (*magē māṇiyō! magē māṇiyō!*). She then dashed into the procession and bowed to “her” nuns as they passed. This laywoman had travelled a great distance by bus with a group of nuns invited to the ceremony. I was struck by the difference in our re-

¹² I thank Wei-Yi Cheng for inviting me to this *dāne* and for introducing me to the work being done for *bhikkhunīs* by the Sri Lankan *bhikkhu* hosts and Taiwanese donors of the *dāne*.

sponses to the *dāne*. I was upset by the lack of gender equity; she was delighted by the sight of “her” nuns. The gap between our experiences directed my attention for the first time to the centrality of affective ties between laity and nuns. It also reminded me that human beings in their complex particularity always defy reduction to any totalizing narratives, including a feminist critique of patriarchy, *even when* that critique is relevant.¹³

It took another experience to get me to focus my attention on love itself. At the start of a five-month period of research in a rural farming village, the laywoman in whose house I was living told me, in the course of casual conversation, that she loved her nuns a lot (*meheṇin va-hansēlāṭa goḍak ādareyi*). She had said this before to me, but this time she followed her remark by lowering her voice and adding shyly: “Last *kathina* I gave three panties.” The *kathina* ritual is a yearly ritual at the close of the rainy season retreat when laypeople make offerings to monks and nuns of goods they are likely to need over the coming year. This particular laywoman made an offering—in her words, a *dāne*—of three panties, one to each of the nuns at the local village *bhikkhunī* temple. It is highly unusual for laity to speak openly about offering a *dāne* of panties to nuns. Cultural norms of female, and especially female monastic, modesty would discourage such comments. As such the *dāne* of panties is an interesting expression of lay love (*ādare*) for nuns because it suggests a high degree of intimacy between the laywoman and nuns. Indeed, when I asked the laywoman to define love, she said it meant “closeness” (*samīpa*). Following this conversation, I began to listen carefully to the language of affection used by laity to characterize their relationships with the nuns. As I did so, I heard the repeated invocation of love and

¹³ Many scholars have addressed the complex particularity of persons. My own attention to this issue has been sharpened especially by Das, hooks, and Spivak.

thus began a project in which I set out to ascertain what love means in the context of lay-nun relationships in a village *bhikkhunī* temple.

Love in a Sinhala Village Temple

The rural farming village is located in the Northwest Province of the country. It is a small Sinhala Buddhist village of circa 300 families. The majority of the population are farmers. There are also smaller numbers of office workers and laborers. Most families are middle class, by village standards. There are, however, a number of impoverished families (especially among the laborers) and one or two upper-middle-class families. There are several Buddhist temples in the immediate area, spanning four or five neighboring villages. Laity generally attend events at more than one temple even if their formal affiliation is with one particular temple. There are circa five *bhikkhu* temples in the immediate area, one other *bhikkhunī* temple, and one meditation center headed by a ten-precept nun. Thus patrons of the *bhikkhunī* temple where I conducted my research have experience with the full range of monastic options available today in Sri Lanka.

My data comes from interviews conducted with laity and nuns in the rural farming village, as well as from participant observation at temple and village events. Additionally, I draw on interviews conducted with laity and nuns in other areas of the country in order to make larger points about lay responses to the *bhikkhunī* revival.¹⁴ The lay patrons I interviewed in the rural farming village identified themselves to me as

¹⁴ In the rural village I conducted interviews in eighteen lay households as well as with the three nuns of the local *bhikkhunī* temple. Additionally, I interviewed *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, and ten-precept nuns in eleven other temples in this district, along with many nuns and laity in other districts.

“subscribers” (*dāyaka*), that is, patrons of the *bhikkhunī* temple.¹⁵ As “subscribers,” they have committed themselves to giving a *dāne* of breakfast or lunch on a regular basis (monthly or bi-monthly), along with participating in temple events. Those with children send them to the temple’s Buddhist Sunday school (*daham pāsāla*).

Subscribers frequently mentioned their love (*ādare*) for the nuns in response to questions I asked about their relationships (*sambandhaya*) with the nuns and their feelings (*hāngīma*) for the nuns. Whenever subscribers spoke of love, I asked them to define love and also to give me examples of when they thought love was present in their interactions with the nuns. I was careful not to assume that I knew what subscribers meant by the word “love” or to assume that I could find out what they meant just by looking up the word in a dictionary. My goal was to learn what love meant in the everyday, colloquial usage of this village.

By far the most common way subscribers defined their love for the nuns was in familial terms. Several told me that since the nuns had abandoned their own families, the subscribers now constituted their families. As one laywoman put it:

Mothers, fathers, family people, they have left everyone to come to the Buddha’s *sāsana* [order]. . . . So we are their mothers and fathers. . . . It’s the subscribers who are their mothers, fathers, siblings, and people they are close to (*hitavattu[n]*). . . . If they have a sudden emergency, if there is some problem, in sorrow and in happiness, they tell us before they tell their parents.

¹⁵ The English word Sri Lankan laity use for “*dāyaka*,” is “subscriber” and thus I too use “subscriber” rather than “patron,” which is commonly used in scholarship.

Jeffrey Samuels has also observed this same tendency to conceptualize subscribers as parents of monastics, specifically of novice monks. He argues that contrary to what one might think by the designation of novice ordination as *pabbajjā*, or “going forth from home into homelessness,” “monastic ordination is a ritual through which one’s ties and social bonds become altered and expanded as they begin to embrace new communities of people, monastic and lay” (“Ordination” 230). He quotes the head monk officiating at a novice ordination: “Today these young monks have received the compassion and the concern of the devotees. These young monks will not miss their parents, because they will have many mothers and fathers” (“Ordination” 243; see also Samuels *Attracting the Heart* 65-66).

The most common relationship invoked between laity and nuns was indeed that of parents and children. Subscribers invoked this relationship not only with the two novice (*sāmaṇeri*) nuns of the temple, but also the fully ordained (*bhikkhuni*) head nun of the temple. The subscribers described themselves as being like parents to the nuns because they take care of the nuns. But they also described the nuns as being like parents to them because the nuns teach them how to live properly *and* because of the great affection and respect they have for the nuns. For instance, in the words of one laywoman:

The relationship is like they are parents to us . . . as much [as parents] they give us advice for living. In return we are like family members for the nuns. If they become sick—not just us, but the whole village—checks up on the nuns. . . . When villagers are suffering . . . the nuns also help us. Really they also check up on us. When we become sick they come and check up on us. Then if necessary, they chant *pirith* [protective scriptures]. At the very least they give *pirith* thread [white thread imbued with blessings of

scripture and tied around the wrist]. . . Then the nuns also bring up our mental state (*mānasikatvaya honda maṭṭamaṭa gannavā*). . . . We treat (*salakanavā*) them like we treat our parents.

But another laywoman reverses the relationship, characterizing subscribers as the parents in the lay-nun relationship:

[The head nun] truly treats (*salakanavā*) us like her own parents. We help her with everything, with whatever she does. She loves me very much (*harima ādareyi*) and calls me “mother” (*ammā*).

Subscribers frequently switched back and forth between characterizing themselves as children and as parents of the nuns.

As is suggested by the parent-child relationship, subscribers also believe that the nuns love them too. Indeed the laywoman quoted immediately above insisted that the nuns love her *very much* (*harima ādareyi*); similarly another laywoman told me that the nuns love her *especially* (*puduma ādareyi*). Further, these two subscribers clearly wanted me to know that they could claim a special place in the affections of the nuns. Just as I attempted to get information from my interlocutors that *I* regarded as important, they also attempted to direct me to the kinds of information that *they* regarded as important. There was, as Margaret Trawick has observed in her fieldwork on love in Tamil Nadu, an “intentionality” to their interactions with me (90). For subscribers, such as these two women, it was a mark of distinction in the village hierarchy to be able to claim a special place in the affections of the nuns and thus they made a point of letting me know how much the nuns value them as well.

Several other subscribers offered yet another way of conceptualizing love, namely, as a manner of speech. These subscribers suggested

that one of the ways the nuns love them is to speak to them in a kind (*karuṇāven*) manner. For example, the laywoman quoted likening the nuns to parents of subscribers because nuns give subscribers “advice on living” went on to say:

Love means that going to [the nuns] is like going to your parents. When any person goes [to the temple] we expect [the nuns] to welcome us without harsh words (*sāra pa-ruṣa*), with a smile (*hināva*), smiling and speaking kindly (*karuṇāven*), speaking calming (*sāmadānava*) and listening carefully (*sāvadhānava*). Even when we have troubles, even when there is a problem in our daily life, we can speak [with them] without fear. They make a nice environment.

Similarly, the laywoman who had gifted panties to the nuns stated:

They speak very differently than ordinary people. They don't speak quickly. They don't say things that hurt us. It's really good. [The nuns] speak in a way that pleases our heart/minds (*apē hita hādena vidihāta katākaranavā*).

The constant invocation of the parent-child relationship requires further comment. Love also implies respect, such as the respect children give to their parents. *Ādaraya*, the Sinhala word for “love,” has a range of meanings in both spoken and written idioms. Dictionaries, citing classical Sinhala literature, give the following definitions: devotion (*bhaktiya*), liking (*ālma*), affection (*snēhaya*), and respect (*gauravaya*). Especially important is respect (*gauravaya*), which in classical literature can serve as a synonym for *ādaraya*.¹⁶ Subscribers also linked affection and respect when they spoke of their love for the nuns. This is implicit in the characterization of nuns as parents, since parents (and elders more generally)

¹⁶ I thank Sandagomi Coperahewa for this information.

are held in high regard in this village, as elsewhere in Sri Lanka. Let us also note that the vocabulary to talk about how subscribers or nuns “treat” (*salakanavā*) each other connotes holding the other in high regard and “treating” them with all due hospitality and respect. Subscribers also made the link between love and respect explicit when they coupled the language of love and respect in interviews. For example, when I asked subscribers to describe their feelings (*hāṅgīma*) for the nuns, one laywoman responded: I feel a lot of respect (*gauravayak*), love (*ādarayak*), and closeness (*lengatukamak*).

The constant invocation of the parent-child relationship connotes not only affection and respect, but also a sense of mutual responsibilities. That is, such love assumes a mutual duty to care for one another. Parents care for children and, as they age, their children, in turn, care for them. So too subscribers care for nuns and, in return, the nuns care for them. Witness the comments of one laywoman:

Really, I like (*kāmati*) the nuns a lot. I can't even tell you how much love (*ādarē*), kindness (*karuṇāva*), and friendship (*maitriya*) I feel for them. What I mean is that they help us with everything. . . . There are some duties [*yutukam*] they perform for us and there are some duties we perform for them.

The characterization of love as a set of mutual responsibilities is also evident in how subscribers often defined love in terms of the activities they did for, and with, the nuns. Like the laywoman who had gifted the nuns panties, subscribers defined love in terms of particular kinds of *actions*. They spoke of caring for nuns when they are sick, preparing especially good food for them, being sure to look in on them regularly, and also going on pilgrimages with them. Love is manifest in the everyday activities of the temple as laity and nuns meet their respective obligations to care for one another.

The insistence on a mutual responsibility to care for one another raises an important point about subscribers' views of love. Their love is not unconditional. *Ādare* is not the loving kindness (*mettā*) or compassion (*karuṇā*) of Buddhist texts. Interestingly, the exemplars of love in Buddhist literature are mothers because they love their child without condition and without expectation of return. Thus the Buddha himself is commonly represented as the best mother of all because he feels towards all living beings the kind of love a mother feels for her only child (Dharmasiri 24, Gombrich, Mrozik "Materializations," and Ohnuma). Although subscribers routinely likened their love for the nuns to love one feels for both parents and children, this love is quite different from the idealized love of Buddhist texts. This love is given with explicit expectation of return. Subscribers' views of *ādare* imply a mutual fulfillment of duties (*yutukam*), that is, a mutual obligation to care for one another. This love is also far from unconditional. Subscribers' love for their nuns is conditional upon the nuns meeting lay expectation of monastic conduct and service. I would argue that this love is, in part, an act of discernment, that is, a judgment about whether or not these nuns *merit* their subscribers' affection and respect. Thus I agree with Samuels that emotions—in this case, love—reflect "cultural judgments of people and institutions" (*Attracting the Heart* xxiv).

Laities are explicit about the conditional nature of their love for the nuns. Several remarked that if the nuns did not do their jobs properly, they would not be able to stay in the village because laity would stop offering them food. As one laywoman put it: "They [the nuns] can win over (*hit dināganna*) the *dāyakas'* hearts. All three [of the nuns] can. Otherwise they couldn't stay. Our *dāyakas* love the nuns very much (*harima ādareyi*)." Some subscribers volunteered examples of lay withdrawal of support from other monastics in the past. These included withholding *dāne* and even throwing rocks at the temple gates of a different monastic community.

The conditional nature of lay support is not unique to this rural village. Throughout Sri Lanka nuns (and surely also monks) are themselves quite aware that ongoing lay support is dependent upon their ability to continue to meet their subscribers' expectations of monastic conduct and service. The head nun of this particular rural village temple was herself keenly aware of this fact, as is evident from the following event: Some subscribers had invited her to attend a movie that was scheduled for a morning screening at the local school. The movie, *Mahindāgamanaya*, depicts the establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BCE. Although the head nun was eager to see the movie, she did not attend. Why? Sri Lankan monks and nuns are not supposed to indulge in popular forms of entertainment like movies. Even though this movie celebrated the country's Buddhist history and even though it was being shown throughout the country in both public schools and temples, the head nun hesitated to attend. Before accepting her subscribers' invitation, she asked some *other* subscribers whether or not she should attend. At least one person indicated to her that he or she thought it inappropriate for her to do so. Although the head nun knew many subscribers were eager for her to join them, as she herself was, she could not risk even the perception of impropriety. As she said later: "When I do my work, I do it a little carefully. The villagers have different opinions. When you live in a village you can't just do what you want to do."

The head nun's remarks afford a glimpse of the "darker emotional struggles" of everyday life (Young). Love does not exist in isolation of other emotions, including difficult ones such as jealousy (*īrṣyāva/īrṣyā*) and anger (*taraha*), two emotions commonly cited in informal conversations in the village about strained interpersonal relationships among laity as well as monastics. Subscribers and nuns alike are aware that in a small community one needs to conduct oneself in such a way that one minimizes the possibility of becoming the target of jealousy or anger.

Even when love is present, they are also aware that love can quickly turn into something else when expectations are not met. Love is, in fact, quite fragile.

The “darker emotional struggles” are also evident in some of the negative responses to Sri Lanka’s *bhikkhuni* revival, particularly on the part of those ten-precept nuns who continue to reject the validity of that revival. As I have noted elsewhere, they have many reasons for doing so, but among them can also be something as personal as hurt feelings at being snubbed by former colleagues who have left the ten-precept order for the *bhikkhuni* order (Mrozik “In the Company,” see also Sasson). Such emotional struggles present challenges to an ethnographer such as myself. First, many of the Sri Lankans whom I have interviewed are quite cautious about revealing the presence of emotional struggles in their relationships with others, afraid that their remarks might be made public and cause them embarrassment or trouble later. Second, precisely for this reason, as an ethnographer, I sometimes have to forgo making or illustrating an intellectual point in order to ensure that no harm comes to my Sri Lankan interlocutors. No matter how much I disguise the identity of an interlocutor, members of his or her community might still be able to guess that identity were I to reveal some of the details surrounding a particular emotional struggle. Suffice it to say that however much love is present in this rural village, love goes hand-in-hand here—as everywhere in the world—with other more difficult emotions.

Lay expectations of monastic conduct and service

When I asked subscribers to tell me *why* they love their nuns, they praised their nuns’ conduct and service. Subscribers routinely told me that their nuns are *silvat*, that is, they are virtuous. Their concept of vir-

tue includes both the moral precepts of Buddhist monastic regulations (*vinaya*) and, as Samuels argues, shared aesthetic standards of monastic conduct and deportment (*Attracting the Heart* 29). Supporters of *bhikkhunīs* throughout the country sometimes assert that *bhikkhunīs* are, in fact, more *silvat* than *bhikkhus*. A common point of comparison is the fact that, unlike nuns, monks occasionally request meat or fish (*mas-mālu*) when laity invite them for an alms-giving ceremony. Laity regard such requests as both counter to monastic precepts and an undue financial burden. Another common point of comparison is the fact that, unlike nuns, monks have many opportunities to study and even work at universities (or other jobs). Thus laity complain that monks occasionally fail to fulfill their temple duties. Additionally, there are constant rumors about the misconduct of monks studying at universities. Ordination has long been a path of upward social and economic mobility for underprivileged boys because of the financial support the government gives monks for their educations. Thus boys not suited to a monastic lifestyle ordain and subsequently disrobe during or after their university educations. Ironically, gender privilege is a double-edged sword for monks. They have many more opportunities than nuns to pursue higher education and develop professional careers, but these very opportunities may push them into a monastic career for which they are not suited and/or make them vulnerable to lay gossip and criticism.

Subscribers in the rural village where I conducted this five-month period of research were more circumspect in their criticisms of monks than laity in urban areas of the country. Indeed only *some* of the subscribers criticized monks. Others whom I interviewed expressed satisfaction with the conduct and service of local monks. Further, even those who compared monks unfavorably to nuns routinely affirmed their high regard for the *bhikkhu* order as a whole. Some genuinely perceived no difference in the conduct and service of monks and nuns; others may well have done so but chose to keep their criticisms to them-

selves because they were afraid I might make their comments public. I recall a conversation with a husband and wife in which the husband quickly shushed his wife when she noted that “some people” say nuns’ *sil*, or virtue, is higher than that of monks.

When subscribers in this village and elsewhere in the country praised their nuns, two words came up repeatedly in interviews: clean (*pirisidu*) and orderly (*piḷiveḷin*, *piḷiveḷaṭa*). According to subscribers, nuns keep a clean and attractive temple. For instance, they noted the care with which the grounds were swept daily or the presence of well-tended gardens. According to subscribers, nuns also perform their rituals in an orderly manner. Rituals commonly cited in the rural village were veneration of the bodhi tree (*bodhi pūjā*), alms-giving (*dāne*) ceremonies, and yearly pilgrimages to Anuradhapura, Somavati, and Mahiyangana. Like “love,” “orderly” is a complex concept. One elderly laywoman and her middle-aged daughter, who praised the nuns for teaching them to perform rituals in both a “clean” (*pirisidu*) and “orderly” (*piḷiveḷaṭa*) way, gave the following example: When holding a *bodhi pūjā*, the nuns first ask the subscribers to clean the temple grounds, after which they conduct the *bodhi pūjā* in a carefully choreographed manner.

Other subscribers also suggested that “orderliness” connotes performing rituals without haste, observing that nuns may dedicate more time to the completion of rituals than monks. Witness the remarks of the following two laywomen:

When the nuns dedicate merit to someone [in a ritual], they do it at length (*vāḍiyen*). The monks do it very briefly (*keṭiyen*).

. . . even though the monks do [their work], they do it in a hurry (*hadisiya*). The monks are less systematic (*piḷiveḷa*

aḍuyi). . . . The nuns—not only our nuns, but other nuns too—do things methodically (*kramānukulava*).

The laywoman quoted immediately above maintained that she feels a lot of confidence (*vishvāsaya*) about the efficacy of the nuns' rituals, in part, because she never feels terribly rushed (*daḍibiḍi*).

If “orderliness” means performing rituals without haste, it also means performing them thoroughly. One layman complained that when monks come for an all-night *pirith* [protective scripture] chanting, they come late and leave early, in contrast to nuns, who come early and leave late. According to this layman, nuns complete the entire *pirith* cycle, but monks do not, rendering the nuns' ritual more efficacious.

Subscribers throughout the country also praised nuns for their accessibility. Here too the privilege monks enjoy sometimes works against them. Even if Buddhist laity have criticisms of *particular* monks or groups of monks, they hold the *bhikkhu* order, *as a whole*, in very high regard. Especially laywomen appeared at times to hold monks in such high regard that they were a bit intimidated by them. Witness the remarks of one laywoman in the rural village: “We have much more respect [*garu kirīma*] and fear [*baya*] for the monks [*svāmin vahansē*] than for the nuns. We're a little bit afraid [*baya*] to be close [*samīpa*] to them.” She explained this was, in part, because she thought of them as none other than Lord Buddha's sons. Her remarks brought to mind those of another laywoman in a different region of the country:

When we are with monks, we cannot be so [physically] close with them [*laṅgin inna bā*]. We can sit [closely] [*ekaṭa indaganna*] with nuns and ask them questions, talk with them. We can talk about anything [with nuns]. . . . We can ask them about anything. . . . We can ask nuns things we can't ask monks. . . . Even when we are practicing medita-

tion . . . we can ask monks questions [about meditation] too, but we don't go so near to them [*kiṭṭuvaṭama api yannē nā*] . . . with nuns we can even ask our question several times if we don't understand [the answer]. We don't question monks like that. We are not so "close" [using English word] to them.

This laywoman's hesitation to question monks during meditation instruction was due to the fact that she had to ask her questions from a physical distance *and* because she was afraid to admit to a monk that she hadn't understood his answer.

Both laywomen are intimidated by monks because they hold them in such high regard. The very fact that monks hold such high social status in Sri Lanka reflects, of course, larger patterns of gender hierarchy in the country. One laywoman from the rural village made this abundantly clear when she likened the respect women have for monks to the respect they have for their husbands. But the hesitancy of both women to get too "close" to monks also reflects norms governing interactions between laity and monastics. Women should keep some distance from monks, just as men should keep some distance from nuns. Thus women frequently underscored how easy it was for them to visit the nuns. As one laywoman in the rural village put it: We can talk to the nuns anywhere in the temple, even in the kitchen, even in the bathing area.

But surprisingly even laymen sometimes find nuns more accessible than monks. Because monks have so many responsibilities outside of their temples, they are not always available for laity. Thus a layman from another region of the country told me that he prefers to ask his local *bhikkhunī* temple rather than his local *bhikkhu* temple to conduct rituals for his family. He is especially pleased that, whenever he goes to the *bhikkhunī* temple, the head nun herself comes out to greet him. If for some reason she cannot do so, another nun will immediately come to

greet him. He felt that this is very different from the treatment he gets at his local *bhikkhu* temple where the monks are, in his words, too busy to attend to the needs of laity, especially, he added, poor people like himself.

Gender Stereotypes and Changing Patterns of Patronage

We see the emergence today in Sri Lanka of paired stereotypes: the “corrupt” monk and the “virtuous” nun. Stereotypes, of course, are always suspect. Surely not all nuns are “virtuous” and surely there are many “virtuous” monks! I have already noted a few of the ways in which the privilege monks enjoy can sometimes work against them. Both monks and nuns are advantaged *and* disadvantaged in different ways by their gender status. Monks, nuns, and laity have, for instance, informed me that nuns are more virtuous (*silvat*) than monks because women have more shame and fear (*läjjāva/läjjā, baya*) than men. One laywoman explained: If a man and woman have an affair, the man’s reputation survives intact, but not the woman’s. It is this double standard that inculcates in women—and thus also in nuns—high degrees of shame and fear. Thus some believe that nuns are better at keeping their monastic precepts than monks. Others believe that nuns are more suited to teaching Buddhist Sunday school classes for children (*daham pāsāla*) than monks. Why? Because, *as women*, they have more love (*ādare*) for children than do men. The gendered division of labor in Sri Lanka also works in favor of nuns. If there is a problem in a family, women, rather than men, go to their local temple for advice. Women find it easier to speak with nuns than monks because there are no restrictions on their association. Thus Hema Goonatilake argues that psychological counseling, in particular, “is

increasingly becoming a specialized task” for nuns in the country (“Sri Lankan Buddhist Nuns” 225).¹⁷

If psychological counseling is “becoming a specialized task” for nuns, academic careers are “a specialized task” for monks. It is striking that very few nuns pursue higher education, in contrast to monks who attend universities in great numbers. Likewise it is striking that at this time there is only one nun in the entire country on the faculty of a university, in contrast to the many monks who populate the university faculties. Supporters of the *bhikkhunī* revival routinely stress *bhikkhunīs*’ capacities to care for their subscribers needs in a variety of ways, but they have yet to stress *bhikkhunīs*’ capacities for more intellectual pursuits. This will likely not change until formal government recognition of the order comes and, with it, the resources to pursue higher education. Thus, just as is the case with monks, gender stereotypes work both for and against nuns. On the one hand nuns are regarded as more virtuous and more suited to children's education and psychological counseling than monks, but, on the other hand, monks are still regarded as more suited to academic careers, although those same careers make them vulnerable to lay gossip and criticism.

Criticism of monks is nothing new in Sri Lanka and certainly pre-dates the *bhikkhunī* revival. Laity have always made patronage choices based, in part, on their assessment of who most meets their expectations of monastic conduct and service. Samuels conducted his ethnographic research in a *bhikkhu* temple that was established by laity who had grown dissatisfied with their previous *bhikkhu* temple community. At issue here was the lower caste status of laity vis-à-vis both the *bhikkhus* of the previous temple and other subscribers of that temple. The lower caste laity felt themselves treated with disrespect by both parties and

¹⁷ Goonatilake is speaking here of both ten-precept nuns and *bhikkhunīs*.

could not, therefore, get their religious needs met (*Attracting the Heart* 8-9; see also Samuels “Buddhism and Caste”).

Today Sri Lankan laity have new patronage options. In many areas of the country there are now both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* temples, along with ten-precept nun temples. *Bhikkhunīs* are potentially a greater source of competition for *bhikkhus* than are ten-precept nuns. Why? Ten-precept nuns are not technically members of the *sangha* and thus cannot perform all Buddhist rituals. Especially important to laity is a ritual called the “*sāṅghika dāne*.” This is a meal, or *dāne*, offered to a small group of monks or nuns, who symbolically represent the entire *sangha*. Laity believe that they receive more merit when they symbolically offer a meal to the *sangha*, as a whole. *Bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* can represent the *sangha*, but ten-precept nuns cannot. There is some evidence that monks themselves are beginning to feel the competition. One *bhikkhunī* in a different region of the country told me that she had been asked by local *bhikkhus* to shut down her monthly full-moon (*poya*) day religious program because not enough laity were attending the *bhikkhu* programs. Another nun, also outside the rural village, told me that local *bhikkhus* had asked that the nuns remind their subscribers to bring *dāne* to the local *bhikkhu* temples as well. One of these was apparently having trouble receiving enough food, whereas the *bhikkhunī* temple was receiving ample *dāne*.

No matter what subscribers of the rural *bhikkhunī* temple think about the relative services of their local monks and nuns, almost all of them also patronize one or more of the circa five *bhikkhu* temples in the immediate area. Enthusiastic support for the nuns does not mean subscribers have withdrawn their support from the monks. There are a number of reasons for this: First, families have long-standing relationships of patronage with some of the *bhikkhu* temples in the area. Given the tightness of this small community, it would be unthinkable to end

such relationships. Second, laity believe that the more they give to the *sangha*, the more merit they earn; similarly, the more religious ceremonies they participate in at temples, the more merit they earn. In the logic of karma, more is better. Third, let us recall that however much Sri Lankans may criticize *particular* monks or groups of monks, they hold the *bhikkhu* order, *as a whole*, in very high regard. The nuns themselves have profound respect for the *bhikkhu* order and regularly communicate this to their subscribers. It is important to note that across the country nuns rarely express open criticism of monks. *Bhikkhunīs*, of course, are prohibited from criticizing *bhikkhus*. This prohibition constitutes one of eight “heavy rules” (Pali: *aṭṭhagarudhammā*) in Buddhist monastic regulations that institutionally subordinate *bhikkhunīs* to *bhikkhus*. I suspect that even without the eight “heavy rules” nuns would refrain from criticizing monks, given the larger patterns of gender hierarchy in the country.¹⁸ Thus nuns, like laity in the rural village, routinely express respect for the *bhikkhu* order.

Although Buddhist laity in the village and surrounding area support both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* temples, there are signs of changing patterns of patronage here and elsewhere in the country. As *bhikkhunīs* gain reputations for excellent monastic conduct and service, laity increasingly seek out the services of *bhikkhunīs*. Thus the subscribers in the rural village stressed to me that even laity, who are formally affiliated with temples in other villages, come to their *bhikkhunī* temple. Especially popular are the *bhikkhunīs*’ “orderly” *bodhi pūjās*, their Buddhist Sunday school, and their yearly pilgrimages. One elderly laywoman explained the popularity of the pilgrimages as follows: Their nuns perform rituals at pilgrimage sites (*pūjāvaka tiyēnavā*); other monastics just take their sub-

¹⁸ See Salgado “Eight” for an insightful discussion of the over-emphasis in scholarship on the eight “heavy rules.”

scribers to see the sites (*balanḍa vitarayi*). Thus there is the perception that participation in the *bhikkhunīs*' pilgrimages brings more merit.

Perhaps one of the most interesting areas of changing patronage patterns are funerals. Throughout Sri Lanka monks still maintain a monopoly over this ritual, which is often the occasion for especially large donations to temples. Subscribers of the *bhikkhunī* temple follow local custom and invite monks to perform their funeral rituals even though many of them know that *bhikkhunīs* are entitled to perform these rituals themselves. Although monks perform the actual funeral rituals (i.e., *paṃsukūlaya*), subscribers have begun inviting nuns to attend the funerals as well. The head nun of the *bhikkhunī* temple, who had previously been a ten-precept nun, observed that she rarely was invited to funerals prior to her *bhikkhunī* ordination. Now the nuns are present at the funeral itself, and are also often invited to the *dānes* given on behalf of the deceased on the seventh day, three month, and yearly death anniversaries. Further, although all subscribers of the *bhikkhunī* temple invite *bhikkhus* to the seventh day *dāne*, some invite only the *bhikkhunīs* to the three-month and yearly *dānes*. One male subscriber of the *bhikkhunī* temple, unusually outspoken in his criticism of Sri Lankan *bhikkhus*, vowed to me that when he dies *bhikkhunīs*—not *bhikkhus*—will perform his funeral rituals. Finally, in remote areas of the country (*duṣkara pātta*), where there are shortages of monks, *bhikkhunīs* perform all Theravāda rituals, including funeral rituals. As one *bhikkhu* supporter of the *bhikkhunī* order put it: Because families are small today, fewer boys enter the *sangha* and those who do enter often disrobe, so “day by day the *bhikṣu sāsana* [order] is getting smaller (*aḍu venavā*).” He believes, as do other *bhikkhu* supporters of *bhikkhunīs*, that Sri Lanka desperately needs *bhikkhunīs* to “fill the gap” (*hiḍasa puravenavā*). Unlike some *bhikkhus*, especially younger ones, *bhikkhunīs* are willing to serve in remote areas. However much this is symptomatic of patriarchy, it is important to realize that *bhikkhunīs* them-

selves speak with pride of the fact that in these more remote areas *bhikkhunīs* perform *all* Theravāda rituals.

Conclusion

Bhikkhunīs are not the only recipients of their subscribers' love. *Bhikkhus* may also be recipients of such love *if* they meet their subscribers' expectations of monastic service and conduct, as is demonstrated by Samuels' research on Sri Lankan *male* monastic culture. There are, in fact, occasional references to the Sinhala word for "love" (*ādaraya*) in his publications (*Attracting the Heart* 38, 41; "Ordination" 243).¹⁹ I myself have heard the word "love" (*ādare*) invoked at an occasion honoring a Sri Lankan male scholar, who had particularly close relationships with monks. Nor is love limited to the official *sangha*. Let us return for a moment to the all-Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* alms-giving ceremony that I discussed at the outset of this paper. The laywoman who cried "My nuns! My nun!" and rushed into the procession to bow to her nuns, was expressing affection and respect for ten-precept nuns, rather than *bhikkhunīs*, as is indicated by her use of the epithet "*māṇiyō*." Close affective ties between laity and monastics *of various kinds* are not unusual in Sri Lanka. What is unusual is that, for the first time in over 1000 years, these ties are increasingly being formed between laity and *bhikkhunīs*. Thus I argue in this paper that close affective ties between laity and monastics, *in general*, in Sri Lanka have become a critical source of support for *bhikkhunīs*, *in particular*, as laity—rather than the government or male monastic authorities—decide the fate of the *bhikkhunī* order.

¹⁹ As one reviewer notes, Samuels "does not always reference Sinhala terminology employed for the affective states being described" (Young). I suspect if he done so, there would be more references to the word *ādaraya*.

In spite of the centrality of laity to the success of the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival, their responses to that revival have received little scholarly attention. Further, as we have seen, Sri Lankan laity have very different concerns than do the scholars, activists, government officials, and male monastic authorities engaged in public debates over the scriptural validity of the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival. Laity are primarily concerned with whether or not they can get their religious needs met at their local *bhikkhunī* temples. *Bhikkhunīs* have developed a reputation in Sri Lanka for being exceptionally virtuous (*silvat*) and for providing excellent ritual, educational, and counseling services. As *bhikkhunīs*, they are authorized to perform the full complement of Theravāda Buddhist rituals. With the exception of funeral rituals (and even this is changing), *bhikkhunīs* are increasingly sought after as ritual specialists as well as religious educators and counselors. Thus, laity are also increasingly forming close affective ties with *bhikkhunīs*.

The *bhikkhunī* order still faces significant challenges. Until the order is formally recognized by the government and male monastic authorities, the order will continue to struggle to fund and educate its nuns. Further, even if and when the *bhikkhunī* order is formally recognized, larger patterns of gender hierarchy in Sri Lanka are likely to cause difficulties for nuns (as they do for women everywhere in the world). These are significant challenges and deserve scholarly attention. I have, however, chosen to focus my attention on other matters in this paper, namely, enthusiastic lay support for *bhikkhunīs*. Taking one rural farming village as a case study, I have argued that subscribers in this village articulate their support for the *bhikkhunī* order in the language of love. I have sought to examine from an ethnographic perspective what laity mean when they say that they love their nuns.

We have seen that subscribers' views on love (*ādare*) are complex. They define love as particular kinds of actions performed for, and with,

nuns. Subscribers also define love in familial terms, imagining themselves as both parents and children of the nuns. Love connotes respect as much as affection, as is evident in the frequently coupling of the terms in interviews. Love may reside in a gentle tone of voice or a gift of panties. But this love is not unconditional. It implies a mutual obligation to care for one another. And, importantly, I would argue, for the survival of the *bhikkhunī* order, it entails a judgment about who most meets lay expectations of monastic conduct and service.

Women's access to full ordination as *bhikkhunīs* is one of the most pressing issues for contemporary Buddhists in both Theravāda and Tibetan Buddhist communities. The Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival is often cited as evidence that—no matter how difficult—it is possible to establish *bhikkhunī* orders where none yet exist. Prior to my fieldwork in Sri Lanka I was accustomed to hearing the stakes of the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* revival articulated (especially in international Buddhist arenas) in terms of gender equity, Buddhism's reputation in a world that (at least in theory) subscribes to egalitarian values, and/or debates over its scriptural validity (see Mohr and Tsedroen). I argue here that, for Sri Lankan laity, the stakes can also be articulated in terms of love.

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