

THE ADVENT OF THE FIRST NUNS IN EARLY BUDDHISM⁽¹⁾

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The revival of the ordination of nuns in the Theravāda tradition is a long-standing issue of much, sometimes heated discussion culminating in a conference on this topic held in Hamburg from 18th to 20th July this year, the “First International Congress on Buddhist Women’s Role in the Sangha”. This was an opportunity to reread the Vinaya of this school in order to trace possible obstacles to, or, on the contrary, to find opportunities for the revival of the *bhikkhunī* ordination. The best way to begin such an investigation seems to be to look back in history, to turn once again to the foundation of order of nuns as related in the Cullavagga of the Theravāda-Vinaya in order to trace the necessary procedures.

This lecture, however, will start from quite a different point and present only the broad outlines, avoiding out the sometimes exhausting pleasures of learning about all the minute philological niceties⁽²⁾. For, it is intended to demonstrate rather, how a sequence of ideas, which were at first not at all connected to researches on the foundation of the *bhikkhunīsaṃgha*, developed gradually and step by step lead eventually to the discovery that the order of nuns was founded only after the death of the Buddha, when a group of non-Buddhist female ascetics joined the already existing community of monks, the *bhikkhusaṃgha*. It takes altogether fourteen steps to reach at this surprising result.

The beginning was a problem almost totally unrelated to the later results, which came as a real surprise, because they were in no way anticipated.

Since many years a strange wording in the LXVth Pācittiya rule for nuns in the Vinaya

⁽¹⁾ The text of the lecture delivered at Kyoto on 5th November 2007 is slightly enlarged. The orality of the original presentation has not been changed.

⁽²⁾ These are discussed in the full version, which appeared under the title “The Foundation of the Bhikkhunīsaṃgha. A contribution to the earliest history of Buddhism” in Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2007 (ARIRIAB 11). Tokyo 2008, p. 2-29.

of the Theravāda school created a considerable headache for Buddhologists, particularly those interested in the Vinaya. The centre of that problem, which appears very clearly in two rather different translations, is the number of twelve years given in the LXVth Pācittiya for nuns. The first translation by K. R. Norman reads:

*“If any nun should ordain [sponsor (for ordination), KRN] a married girl **less than twelve years of age**, there is an offence entailing expiation”.*

The second and much earlier translation by I. B. Horner in her “Book of the Discipline”, on the other hand, differs:

*“Whatever nun should ordain a girl **married for less than twelve years**, there is an offence of expiation”*

*yā pana bhikkhunī ānadvādasavassaṃ gihigataṃ vuṭṭhāpeyya, pācittiyaṃ, Vin IV 322,6**f.*

The controversy “twelve years old” versus “married for twelve years” was dealt with by Petra Kieffer-Pülz in a very long and comprehensive, circumspect and well researched article, which pays particular attention to the commentarial literature and appeared under the title “Ehe- oder Lebensjahre? Die Altersangabe für eine “verheiratete“ Frau (*gihigatā*) in den Regeln der Rechtstexte der Theravādin (Years of marriage or years of age? The age of a “married” woman as indicated in the rules of the legal texts of the Theravādin)” two yours ago in ZDMG 155. 2005.

P. Kieffer-Pülz formulates her result very clearly: “Thus it is according to my opinion **proven** that *gihigatās* could be ordained **at the age** of twelve”. This, of course, results in a glaring contradiction within the Theravāda-Vinaya: For, as it is well known, the lowest ordination age of a nun is that of twenty years, and every future nun is asked before ordination:

“Did you complete twenty years?”

paripuṇṇavāsativassā si Vin II 271,29.

Of course this obvious contradiction has been perceived by P. Kieffer-Pülz herself without, however, finding a really convincing solution to the problem she thus created. She suggests tentatively that the rule exempting the “married women”, called *gihigatās* in the original text, from the usual ordination age of twenty and ordain them at the age of twelve already, was formulated later than the questions about the obstacles to ordination. Furthermore, the Samantapāsādikā says nothing on this contradiction when explaining the relevant Pācittiya rule. Therefore, still according to P. Kieffer-Pülz, the exemption of the

gihigatās or “married” women was most likely regulated in *Kammavācanās*, the formulas to be spoken at the occasion of an ordination, which are, however, for the better part lost to us, because their tradition stopped once the order of nuns ceased to exist. Consequently, the possible content of the texts relevant in this particular case is unknown. Thus P. Kieffer-Pülz is forced to accept two assumptions to support her suggested explanation that the “twelve years” in the LXVth *Pācittiya* for nuns refers the age of the future nun: First, the *Pācittiya* rule was formulated later than the respective paragraph in the *Cullavagga* without harmonizing both, and second that there were some regulations in *Kammavācanās*, which are lost today, removing the contradiction. Both assumptions necessarily remain mere guesses, because neither can be substantiated. Moreover, this offends the golden rule that, if two assumptions are needed to remove one difficulty, chances are extremely high that the suggested explanation is wrong: On the contrary, one assumption should solve at least two problems.

Thinking that I might have finally found a solution to the vexing question of the ‘twelve years’, I went back once again to this rule only to be bitterly disappointed: My idea was completely wrong. This, now brings us to the first step: realizing the problem without being able to find any way leading to a satisfactory solution to it by using my totally wrong idea. This wrong idea, however, proved to be very fruitful and rewarding in the end, because it triggered the following considerations.

After having spent so much time over the years to figure out the true meaning of the ‘twelve years’, and thinking about it again now without achieving the slightest progress, it became more than obvious that no solution could not be found by concentrating on the figure ‘twelve’. Thus the second step was applying a rather general rule: If the key cannot be found by concentrating on one particular detail, try a different one, that is learning from a golden rule in aviation, which prescribes in case of the crash of an air plane: If one emergency exit is blocked and does not open, don’t lose your precious time there, but proceed to the next one immediately. Where, then, is the ‘emergency exit’ from the problem found in this rule? And this is the third step checking the context of the problematic word.

If you look briefly at the text which reads: *yā pana bhikkhunī unadvādasavassaṃ gihigataṃ vuṭṭhāpeyya, pācittiyaṃ*, there is a second problem not perceived as such so clearly until now that is the meaning of the word *gihigatā* always taken without giving it much thought to signify “married”.

However, why is *gihigatā* translated by “married”? The reason can be found easily by a simple look at the history of research. E. Waldschmidt, who was apparently the first scholar to translate this word, understood *gihigatā* to mean “married” in the *Pācittiyas* for nuns and translated “verheiratet” accordingly far back in 1926, obviously following part of

the Chinese translations.

I. B. Horner's translation "a girl married for less than twelve years" obviously follows Waldschmidt, as does P. Kieffer-Pülz, but evidently with some wise reservations as her cautious quotes enclosing "verheiratet" indicate; the last translator, K. R. Norman, uses "married girl".

However, a look at the references of the word *gihigatā* in the Theravāda-Tiṭṭaka, and disregarding later traditional interpretations by Chinese translators, reveals at once a surprising fact. The word occurs here in the Pātimokkha for nuns and only once again for a second time in the report on the first council, where the reason is given, why no single rule of the Vinaya should ever be changed after the death of the Buddha:

"Our rules are current among the householders (that is gihigata), and the householders know us"

sant' amhākaṃ sikkhāpadāni gihigatāni, gihī pi no jānanti, Vin II 288,16f.

Obviously, the meaning here cannot possibly be "married", but, as always understood correctly, "current among the householders" – a very different meaning indeed.

This leads to the fourth step, the very clear and simple insight that *gihigata* hardly can have two so very different significations in one text – both references are found in the Theravādavīnaya – and that the meaning of the word as used in the report on the first council is most likely correct, and was never subject to any serious doubt, because it concurs with the grammatical structure of the word and perfectly fits the context, while this cannot be said with the same confidence concerning the not yet completely understood LXVth Pācittiya for nuns.

Now, as you know, there is an old commentary embedded in the text of the Vinaya, the Vinayavibhaṅga, explaining the meaning of the individual words that occur in the text of the Pātimokkha. In this particular case this commentary explains:

gihigatā is called purisantaragatā

gihigatā nāma purisantaragatā vuccati, Vin IV 322,10 etc.

Because the meaning of the word *purisantaragatā* is far from being clear, this explanation just leads from one problem to the next, as it is unfortunately very often the case. Therefore, the fifth step necessary, is an investigation on the meaning of the problematic word *purisantaragatā*. Again the standard procedure is of course to check all relevant references, if there are any. Luckily, *purisantaragatā* occurs once more in a different context, a paragraph repeated a couple of times in various texts of the four Nikāyas of the Theravāda-Tiṭṭaka and consequently well known to all early Buddhists, a fact, which should be kept

in mind.

This lengthy paragraph on practices of non-Buddhist ascetics has been investigated very carefully and explained in great detail by W. B. Bollée more than thirty years ago in ZDMG 121. (1971) in his article “Anmerkungen zum buddhistischen Häretikerbild (Remarks on the Buddhist image of heretics)”.

Different practices are enumerated, among others:

“*He* (that is this particular kind of heretical non-Buddhist ascetic) *does not accept (food) from two persons eating, not from a pregnant woman, not from a nursing woman, not from a purisantaragatā . . .*”

paṭigaṇhāti . . . na dvinnaṃ bhūñjamānānaṃ na gabbhiniyā na pāyamānāya na purisantaragatāya na saṅkittisu . . ., D I 166,7f. = A II 206,12f. etc.

W. B. Bollée concludes that *purisantaragatā* should mean here most likely an “unfaithful wife”.

However, in the light of later post-canonical evidence, this meaning is not confirmed. For, e.g., in the definition of the word *itthi* “woman”, the traditional understanding of this term can be easily observed:

“*Woman means purisantaragatā, the other is a virgin*”.

itthīti purisantaragatā itarā kumārikā, Sv 78,16 = Ps II 209,28.

Consequently, the tradition here takes *purisantaragatā* to mean a “non-virgin”. Other passages confirm this traditional understanding.

Furthermore, a more practical reason contradicting the assumed meaning “unfaithful” is that a wandering ascetic could hardly be expected to know whether or not a woman offering alms was a faithful wife or not. Therefore, Bollée’s suggestion needs some adjustment.

As seen by traditional Theravāda interpreters, the semantic field of the word *gihigatā* that is “non-virgin” is different from, and much wider than that of the common Pāli-words used for “married” that is *pariggahitā* or, used more frequently, *ānītā*.

Moreover, if *purisantaragatā*, as the commentary to the Pātimokkha indicates, really is a synonym of *gihigatā*, then both are taken by the Theravāda tradition to mean “a woman, who is no longer a virgin”, married or not.

If, however, the word *gihigatā* is understood following this tradition reflected in the Vinayavibhaṅga as “a woman who no longer is a virgin”, but not necessarily as “married”, there are of course obvious consequences for the interpretation of the crucial figure ‘twelve’ in the rule that no *gihigatā* of “less than twelve years” should be ordained as a nun.

It is, however, not really certain that this traditional explanation is necessarily cor-

rect⁽³⁾. For, it is easy to guess, how the commentator arrived at his interpretation.

The Gabbhinīvagga of the Pātimokkha for nuns in the Theravādavīnaya begins with two rules forbidding the acceptance for ordination first of a pregnant woman (*gabbhinīṃ*, Vin 317,19**) and then of a nursing woman (*pāyantīṃ*, Vin 318,14**). Then follows the fifth rule of this chapter on the *gihigatā* separated by two rules concerning the *sikkhamānā*, a “novice under training”. This interrupted sequence of women, who may or may not be ordained, that is “pregnant woman, nursing woman, non-virgin” (*gabbhinī, pāyantī, gihigatā = purisantaragatā*), certainly does not look overly exciting. Therefore it never caught any attention. However, this sequence can be compared to the paragraph on the practices of non-Buddhist ascetics just mentioned, where an identical sequence using the very same terms is found. This brings the fifth step to an end, which allowed to find the source for the explanation of *gihigatā* as *purisantaragatā* in the Vinayavibhaṅga, which could be derived ultimately from a *suttanta* text. For, a commentator, who was not sure about the meaning of *gihigatā* could easily take the parallel sequence *gabbhinī, pāyantī, purisantaragatā* as a model and transfer *purisantaragatā* rather mechanically to his Vinaya-commentary in order to explain the rare word *gihigatā*, which was obscure to him. If so, he thus made a more or less probable guess and nothing more. It is not at all unlikely that the commentator really used this paragraph on non-Buddhist ascetics, because it occurs in the Dīgha-, Majjhima- and Aṅguttaranikāya, and was, consequently, part of the respective *bhāṇaka* traditions and thus certainly well known to all monks.

On the other hand, the different and perhaps earlier author of the report on the first council knew and used the very rare word *gihigata* in quite a different and most likely correct meaning: “current, known among householders.” Consequently, the LXVth Pācittiya rule for nuns might have meant something totally different originally, if the meaning “a woman known to the householders for twelve years” is assumed for *gihigatā*. The original rule most likely not referred to “non-virgins” let alone “married” women – these ideas were introduced only by the commentator and by modern translators. Perhaps it was originally an attempt to bar alien wandering female ascetics and to ensure that only those women could join the order, who were known to the lay community for a certain period to guarantee their good reputation.

If these deliberations are correct, this brings us nearer to a solution of the problems, which surround the LXVth Pācittiya rule for nuns, and this explains why a misunderstood rule never fit into the legal system and, necessarily, created problems for later interpreters

⁽³⁾ During the discussion, an interesting idea about the meaning of *purisantaragatā* was suggested by W. Knobl, Kyoto: Deriving the word from Skt. *purīṣa* rather than from Pāli *purīsa* (*puruṣa*), a meaning “menstruating woman” could be considered.

from ancient times to the present day.

Most important, however, is that tracing the possible origins of the explanation of the word *gihigata* leads us to a paragraph concerning non-Buddhist ascetics which is, moreover mirrored in the Pātimokkha for nuns by the sequence of rules on pregnant women, nursing women and *purisantaragatā*.

Furthermore, while discussing the avoidance of nursing women etc. by certain groups of non-Buddhist ascetics, W. B. Bollée points out that a pregnant (*guvvinā*) and a nursing (*dāragam pejjamāṇī*) woman also figure in corresponding Jaina rules. Thus we enter common ground of Buddhist and Jain concepts and vocabulary.

When starting to look beyond Buddhism, – and this is the sixth step –, suddenly, besides *gihigatā*, a second unusual technical expression appears, which is also limited to the rules referring to the ordination of nuns. For when a nun is ordained this is expressed in the Pātimokkha for nuns by *vuṭṭhāpeti*, and not by the well-known technical term *upasampādeti*, which is used in the case of monks in the Pātimokkha, or monks and nuns in the respective chapters of the Cullavagga in the Khandhaka of the Theravādavīnaya. The technical word *vuṭṭhāpeti* occurs in a series of rules and is explained in the old commentary, the Vinaya-vibhaṅga in the following way:

“*vuṭṭhāpeyya means would ordain*”
vuṭṭhāpeyyā ti upasampādeyya, Vin IV 317,23 etc.

In the Khandhaka, on the other hand, exclusively *upasampādeti* is used and *vuṭṭhāpeti*, limited to the Pātimokkha for nuns, disappears altogether in the Cullavagga.

The exact meaning and etymology of *vuṭṭhāpeti* and its derivatives pose some intricate problems, which have been solved after a very careful investigation by K. R. Norman, who concludes that *vuṭṭhāpeti* as used in the Pātimokkha for nuns is to be derived ultimately from Sanskrit *upasthā* showing a development typical for the old Eastern language of early Buddhism. Once this obvious equation is found, then *vuṭṭhāpeti* / **upaṭṭhāpeti* is not only an “eastern” intruder into Pāli, where *upaṭṭhāpeti* means something quite different, that is “to support”, it is also the same technical term used by the Jainas for ordination and, consequently, again part of the common vocabulary current in eastern India at the time of the foundation of Buddhism and Jainism and accepted in different ways by both religions. This may well be the the ultimate root of the difficulties experienced by all translators. The word belonged to a special vocabulary brought into Buddhism by the first nuns, and was, obviously, kept as a never very clearly defined technical term in Buddhism considered traditionally to have the same meaning by and large as the typical Buddhist term *upasampadā*.

This is, however, not the only term referring to the ordination of Buddhist nuns and

nuns only, as it is important to emphasise, shared by Buddhism and Jainism. Thus the seventh step is a closer look at common Buddhist and Jaina vocabulary concerning the rules for monks and nuns in particular.

Every monk and every nun needs a personal teacher for instruction before and during the ordination. In case of a monk, this person is called *upajjhāya* (Vin I 95,20) in Buddhism, but for nuns a different term, *pavattinī* meaning “woman promoter”, is used as in the LXIXth Pācittiya for nuns:

“If any nun should for two years not wait upon the woman promoter [“instructor”, KRN], who had her ordained, there is an offence entailing expiation”
yā pana bhikkhunī vuṭṭhāpitaṃ pavattiniṃ dve vassāni nānubandheyya pācittiyaṃ, Vin IV 326,1**f.

The word *pavattinī* is explained in the canonical commentary as a synonym of *upajjhā(yā)*:

“vuṭṭhāpitaṃ means upasampāditam. Woman promoter (pavattinī) means teacher (upajjhā[yā]).”
Vuṭṭhāpitan ti upasampāditam. pavattinī nāma upajjha(yā) vuccati, Vin IV 326,4.

Again Buddhists share the term *pavattinī* with the Jainas, who also have *pavattinī* as the male counterpart. Consequently, *pavattinī* is used in exactly the same way in both religions, but restricted to nuns in Buddhism.

Moreover, Buddhism and Jainism agree in postulating some training before ordination, for which both religions use the same word *sikkhāpeti*. However, a period of training immediately precedes ordination for monks **and** nuns in Jainism, where the sequence *sikkhāvittae*, *uvattāvittae* describes the second and third stage in ordination:

“Shaving, **training**, **ordaining**, eating together, living together”
muṇḍāvittāe, sikkhāvittae, uvattāvittae, sambhuṃjittatte saṃvāsittatte, Sthānaṅga-s III 474f.

This recalls the status of a *sikkhamānā* before the ordination (*vuṭṭhāpana*) in the rules for Buddhist nuns. A remark in the Samantapāsādikā that even a *sāmaṇerī* of sixty years must get it, shows that novices could be *sāmaṇerīs* for many years before their ordination. As a *sāmaṇerī* a future nun had to keep ten vows, while a *sikkhamānā* had to keep only six vows of these very ten vows during the two years immediately preceding ordination. Obviously, this does not make much sense. Therefore, it seems that here a tradition alien to Buddhism is perpetuated again without really fitting into the system, though this rule does

not create any problem either, quite in contrast to the *gihigatā*-rule, if the “twelve years” of that rule are understood to refer to the actual age of the future nun.

It is important to note that this tradition and this terminology used only for nuns and pointing to a source beyond and outside Buddhism, have been taken over unchanged in the Pātimokkha only in contrast to the Khandhaka, were there was at least an effort to partly harmonize the texts concerning nuns by following the model of the terminology used in the rules for monks. Thus the term *vuṭṭhāpana* was dropped and replaced by *upasampadā* in the Khandhaka in an attempt to integrate the nuns somehow, if only superficially into Buddhism.

Summing up these seven steps, the intermediate result is that there are surprisingly clear signals that the vocabulary of the ordination of nuns must have come from outside Buddhism.

The next and eighth step is to check this assumption against the text describing the foundation of the Bhikkhunīsaṃgha.

When the Buddha **is approached** by his foster mother, Mahāpajāpati Gotamī – and this is quite different from the **Buddha approaching** the first future monks himself – asking three times for the permission also for women to go forth as nuns, she is rebuked by the Buddha in a rather stern, almost rude way:

“Enough, Gotamī, you must not have that intention . . .”

alaṃ Gotamī mā te rucchi . . ., Vin II 253,8.

After being rebuked in this unfriendly manner by the Buddha, Gotamī does not give up, but returns. However, she returns now in the garb of an ascetic or a nun, and she does not return alone:

“Having cut the hair and donned yellow robes together with numerous Sākya women”

kese chedāpetvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā sambahulehi Sākiyānīhi saddhiṃ, Vin II 253,12.

When Ānanda sees her “standing outside”, as the text says, he asks the reason of her worries, and intervenes on her behalf with the Buddha himself, only to be rebuked in exactly the same way as Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was before him. However, Ānanda does not give in, but resorts to arguing and asks whether or not woman folk could reach arahatship. When the answer is affirmative, he succeeds in winning his case, but the Buddha is by no means pleased: As long as no woman enters the order, the teaching will disappear only after a millennium, if, on the other hand, women are admitted to the order, the duration of the teaching will be reduced by one half to only five hundred years the Buddha complains. The

consequences will be as disastrous as devastating diseases infecting a rice field or a sugar plantation. Therefore, the Buddha continues, a dam is necessary to at least contain this future disaster, and that dam are the eight severe rules (*garudhamma*, Vin II 255,5-27) valid only for nuns, mostly concerning the total subordination of the nuns to the order of monks. Lastly, when the order of nuns is finally created, and this point is of major importance, the Buddha does not ordain any nun personally but, – in sharp contrast to the ordination of the first monks of course performed by the Buddha himself –, the Buddha delegates the ordination of nuns from the very beginning:

“I prescribe (or: allow), monks, that the monks should ordain nuns”
anujānāmi bhikkhave bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasampādetuṃ, Vin II 257,7.

Moreover, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī does not receive any formal ordination by monks as her companions do, but she is declared ordained by her acceptance of the “eight severe rules” in front of Ānanda (Vin II 255,36 f.), not in front of the Buddha. Thus the Buddha is nowhere and at no time immediately involved in the ordination of any nun.

Two further points seem to call for some attention. Gotamī and all the Sākiyānīs look like a group of female ascetics with their leader, when they approach Ānanda in the garb of ascetics.

This calls for a comparison with the foundation of the order of monks in step nine: After the Buddha overcame his reluctance to teach, he went to the deer park near Benares, approached his former pupils and delivered the first sermon to them. Once these five ascetics were convinced and converted to Buddhism, the “Urgemeinde”, the first *saṃgha*, had come into existence.

According to the tradition, the order grew rapidly very soon. The next convert and sixth monk was the very rich and very tender Yasa immediately joined by his four friends – again five persons – and soon followed by their fifty friends. After the conversion of the thirty Bhaddavaggiya friends the avalanche of converts grew dramatically by the three Kassapas, who as *jaṭila* ascetics worshipped a fiery Nāga, with their altogether one thousand followers. In the same way as the first five monks, the five hundred followers of Uruvela-Kassapa and the others converted to Buddhism, and when they did so, the pupils followed their respective three teachers. The last major conversion related here is that of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, the future chief disciples of the Buddha. They were among a group of 250 ascetics attached to their teacher Sañjaya. When Sāriputta and Moggallāna made up their minds to leave Sañjaya and to follow the Buddha, they communicated their wish to their fellow disciples who immediately agreed. Only then they informed their teacher, who did not. On the contrary, Sañjaya explicitly forbade the conversion and tried to keep Sāriputta and Mog-

gallāna as followers loyal to himself by offering even joint leadership of his group of ascetics to both renegades. However, Sāriputta, Moggallāna and the rest are unimpressed, disobey and simply walk away. Sañjaya left behind alone immediately died: hot blood gushes from his mouth.

Considering these conversions, it is quite obvious that the vast majority of the earliest followers of the Buddha were groups of former *aññatitthiyas*, ascetics, who used to be attached to various sects. This was not unusual. For, it was quite common to study with different teachers before making a final choice as the career of the Bodhisatva himself demonstrates.

In the same way as the three Kassapas, Gotamī and her five hundred Sākiyānīs join the Buddhist community together with their pupils and change their religious affiliation, which seems to have been common practice, if the many rules concerning *aññatitthiyas* “former heretics” in Buddhism (Vin I 69,1-71,30) and *aṇṇautthiyas* in Jainism or the change of loyalties of the Vajjiputtiyā monks to Devadatta and back to the Buddha are recalled.

If these conversions are considered, the particular vocabulary in the rules for nuns can be explained easily as remnants of the peculiar linguistic usage of these female ascetics in their own rules at the time before they converted to Buddhism.

In this respect, the somewhat surprising LXXVIIth Pācittiya for nuns finds an explanation, which ensures that a *sikkhamānā* is ordained after having given a robe to her teacher:

“If any nun having said to a trainee ‘If you, noble lady, will give me a robe, then I will ordain you’, yet if she is not afterwards prevented, should neither ordain her nor make an effort to get her ordained, there is an offence entailing expiation”.

yā pana bhikkhunī sikkhamānaṃ sace me tvaṃ ayye cīvaram dassasi evāhaṃ taṃ vutthāpessāmīti vatvā sā pacchā anantarāyikinī n’eva vutthāpeyya na vutthāpanāya ussukkaṃ kareyya pācittiyam, Vin IV 332, 17-20*.*

At a first glance this looks almost like the permission to bribe a nun, and was understood as such with considerable bewilderment. However, if the first nuns originally were non-Buddhist female ascetics, this rule can be put in a late Vedic context as most likely nothing else but the gift to a teacher, which was normally of course not solicited and made after the end of the time as a student during the *samāvartana* ceremony. Making a gift in advance instead at the time when approaching the teacher was frowned upon in the *dharmaśāstra* and consequently not altogether unknown. Among the usual gifts is of course a garment as stated, e.g., in the Āśvalāyanagr̥hyasūtra and in other texts.

The group of female ascetics joining Buddhism most likely knew a practice similar to this Vedic custom to offer a gift to the teacher, and preserved it. There is no corresponding

rule in the Pātimokkha for monks.

In contrast to the Kassapas and their followers, the future nuns are not ordained by the Buddha himself, but by monks. Furthermore, the *saṃgha* of nuns is created by accepting the whole group of ascetics, which never accompanies the Buddha, as the former *jaṭilas* do immediately after their ordination.

“Where there is Gayāsīsa, there he walked with a huge community of monks all of them without exception former Jaṭilas”

yena Gayāsīsaṃ tena cārikam pakkāmi mahatā bhikkhusaṃghena saddhiṃ . . . sabbe’ eva purāṇajaṭilehi, Vin I 34,12 f.

The tenth step then, will be to further investigate the relation of the Buddha to the nuns and to check the occurrence of relevant references in the Suttapiṭaka. The result is truly remarkable: the Buddha is never mentioned as talking to any individual nun in the four Nikāyas, while he converses of course frequently with individual monks, groups of monks, laymen or with laywomen such as Visākhā and even with Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī when she as an *upāsikā* offers him an extraordinary robe long before she becomes a nun.

When the Buddha dies, no nun is present, only monks and gods.

Thus while the Buddha only talks **about** nuns or receives reports **on** nuns occasionally, he never talks **to** individual nuns in any text of the four Nikāyas, while Ānanda does so occasionally. This brings us in the eleventh step to Ānanda and the nuns and to his relation to Mahākassapa.

Once Ānanda asks Mahākassappa to join him, when he is going to visit the nuns, and the latter does so reluctantly. After Mahākassapa preached in the nunnery, the nun Thullatissā shows her discontent and anger against Mahākassapa by saying “How could the noble Mahākassapa think that he should teach the *dhamma* while the noble Ānanda is present? This is like a vendor of needles who thinks that he should sell needles in the presence of a needle maker (*seyyathāpi nāma sūcivāṇijako sūcikārassa santike sūciṃ vikketaḅbaṃ maññeyya*, S II 216,1).” When Ānanda tries to defend this somewhat rude nun by saying:

“excuse (her). Women are stupid”

khamatha bhante Kassapa bālo mātugāmo, S II 216,11,

Mahākassapa gives Ānanda a rather stern warning not to side with the nuns against him, who was introduced by the Buddha himself to the *saṃgha*, while Ānanda was not. Hearing all this a disgusted Thullatissā leaves the order of nuns for good (S II 217,21).

The story continues – still in the nunnery – and relates how Ānanda lost all his thirty followers (*saddhivihārins*, S II 217,29), because he acted foolishly like a young man, as

Mahākassapa points out. Now, another nun intervenes. Thullanandā, well known from the Vinaya as a wrong doer in the introductory stories of the Bhikkhunīvibhaṅga, remarks: “How could the noble Mahākassapa, who was a heretic formerly (*aññatitthiyapubbo*, S II 219, 13) disgrace the noble Ānanda by calling him a young man (*kumāraka*, S II 218,23)” (S II 219,12-14). Again, Mahākassapa refers to his very eminent position by recalling the famous story of the exchange of robes with the Buddha at the time when Mahākassapa joined the order, a story which proves that Thullanandā is correct in her reproach. And again the nun Thullanandā, too, leaves the order of nuns.

This does not throw a very favourable light on Ānanda and shows at the same time that he was quite evidently not on good let alone on friendly terms with Mahākassapa, the leader of the order after the Buddha’s death.

Once Ānanda has to ward off the advances of a an anonymous nun who pretends to be sick to see him (A II 144-146) and twice Ānanda reports about meetings with nuns. Particularly interesting is a last reference to Ānanda’s meeting with a nun called Jaṭilā Gāhiyā (A IV 427,27), who asks Ānanda about the fruits of *samādhi*. This is clearly not a Buddhist nun as her designation “having sided with the *jaṭilas*” or less likely her name the *jaṭilā* Gāhī shows. Therefore she is another member of the group of woman ascetics or non-Buddhist nuns, who are mentioned in passing occasionally.

Besides Ānanda, only two further monks are mentioned as talking to nuns. Like Ānanda, the monk Moliyaphagguṇa becomes too friendly with nuns and is blamed for that (M I 122). Lastly, in the Nandakovādasuttanta (M III 270-277), the Buddha is first asked by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to instruct the nuns personally. He, however, does not even talk to her, but, as if Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī would not exist, asks Ānanda whose turn it is to teach the nuns and Ānanda points to the reluctant monk Nandaka. The monk Nandaka preaches to the nuns at the Rājakārāma only after being urged by the Buddha to do so, who later, however, praises his effort.

Exceptional and unique in the four Nikāyas of the Suttapiṭaka is the Cullavedallasuttanta, where the nun Dhammadinnā instructs her former husband, the *upāsaka* Visākha. She is highly praised for her wisdom by the Buddha after Visākha reports to him. Similarly, the nun Khemā talks to King Pasenadi at Toraṇavatthu who, after listening to Khemā visits the Buddha, asks the same questions again and is very pleased to hear exactly the same answers from the Buddha himself (S IV 374-380).

Weighing this evidence, that is the very rare presence of individual nuns in the *suttanta* texts and the astonishing absence of any *suttanta* mentioning the Buddha talking to any individual nun directly and personally, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that during the lifetime of the Buddha the Buddhists had an order of monks only and that this is exactly

the situation as reflected in the *suttantas*.

The absence of nuns in older Buddhist texts is all the more conspicuous when looking beyond Buddhism and comparing the very different attitude to nuns reflected in Śvetāmbara Jaina texts in the twelfth step. For, here in Śvetāmbara Jainism, the nuns are firmly rooted in the community, according to the tradition even since the time of Pārśva, the assumed predecessor of Mahāvīra. And Mahāvīra himself personally communicated frequently with the chief nun Candaṇā. Consequently, in contrast to Buddhism, there is neither any trace of reluctance to accept nuns and there is a common set of rules for both, monks and nuns, in Śvetāmbara Jainism, quite different from the two separate Pātimokkhas in Buddhism.

As tradition has it and as the figures of today confirm, nuns outnumbered monks in Jainism from the very beginning. Thus the nuns constitute a most important part of the Jaina community, while they were, as it seems, never really welcome to and somewhat badly integrated into the Buddhist community.

This remarkable difference between Jainism and Buddhism could be explained, if the Buddhists, who constituted themselves originally as an order of monks only, had to give in to some sort of social pressure from outside very soon, and were forced at an early date to establish an order of nuns, if only for the reason not to be disadvantaged against other religious movements such as Jainism and perhaps also the Ājīvikas. This may well be the message only slightly covered by the story of the Buddha's reluctance to accept nuns: The unsuccessful attempt of one faction of the early Buddhists to ward off what was unwanted, but had to be conceded in the given social and religious environment at the time.

Still the controversial acceptance of nuns – and that is the thirteenth step of reasoning – remained well-known enough among the Buddhist community to be mirrored in our texts. Ānanda stands for the pro-*bhikkhunī* faction, and Mahākassapa for his opponents. Ānanda is not only criticised in the texts cited above from the *suttantas*, but, of course, first of all during the first council presided over by Mahākassapa as the most prominent monk after the Buddha's death.

The account of the first council enumerates five bad mistakes committed by Ānanda introduced by the formula: “This, reverend Ānanda, was a bad deed that you ...” *idam pi te āvuso Ānanda dukkaṭaṃ ...*

In detail: 1. Ānanda did not enquire about the minor rules briefly mentioned earlier (Vin II 288,37), 2. Ānanda sewed a raincoat for the Buddha after stepping on it (Vin II 289,6), 3. Ānanda allowed women to be the first to honour the Buddha's body after his *nirvāṇa* which thus was defiled by their tears (Vin II 289,10), 4. Ānanda did not ask the Buddha to prolong his life, when the latter offered to do so before he decided to enter *nirvāṇa* (Vin II 289,16), and lastly 5. Ānanda favoured the acceptance of nuns (Vin II

289,25). Ānanda denies any wrongdoing but accepts the reproaches “in faith of the opinion of the venerable elder monks.”

All this points to a deeply rooted dissension, perhaps as bad as the earlier conflict with Devadatta. This conflict, however, was solved by the Buddha in contrast to the conflict concerning the admission of nuns to the *saṃgha*.

It is well known of course that both, Ānanda and Mahākassapa, the opponents in the controversy on the acceptance of nuns, survived the Buddha. Some of the *suttanta* texts, in which both monks figure, are even taken by the tradition to describe events after the death of the Buddha, and most likely rightly so. Consequently, there was no longer the authority of the Buddha to intervene and to end the quarrel in the community.

This is the result if an attempt is made to convert the information contained in these ancient texts of the Suttapiṭaka and in the slightly later formulated Vinayapiṭaka, which was well understood by contemporaries, into the historical account, which can be understood in our times. And this is the final and fourteenth step to ask why the story was presented in the way we read it today.

Historical events such as the foundation of both communities, monks and nuns, could be transmitted to later generations only by the means of expression available at the time. Even if based on historical memory, however strong or faint, the events had to be adjusted to the then current literary forms of a *suttanta* or a Vinaya text, allowing only for certain well-known protagonists to act.

In the same way as the ideas about the formation of texts and the compilation of the canon could be clad only into the garb of a council, the foundation of a new Buddhist community of ascetics, the order of nuns, had to be connected to the Buddha in one way or the other.

This was achieved in a really ingenious way by introducing Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and Ānanda to win over the Buddha, who, after having permitted the acceptance of nuns, withdraws and is above all quarrel and controversy. The prominent monks, on the other hand, Ānanda as the favourite of the Buddha and very near to him immediately before the *nirvāṇa*, and Mahākassapa as the most venerable monk at the time after the *nirvāṇa* and heir to the Buddha, may be considered as the heads of two conflicting currents within the *saṃgha* of the monks. The “Ānanda faction”, if one wishes to call it this way using modern terminology, was strong enough to prevail against their opponents and push through the acceptance of nuns, but not strong enough to prevent the “Mahākassapa faction” from expressing their misgivings in the texts: It would have been perfectly easy to cancel all attacks on Ānanda. This, however, was, luckily for us, not done. For the rift in the community was so deep and still very much present in the memory of those, who created the texts as we read them, that

it was impossible to cover it up by perfectly simple means of redaction.

Therefore, taking all the evidence preserved in the texts together and taking into account the means of expression available to those who formulated the texts as they are transmitted, it is not easy to avoid the conclusion that the introduction of the order of nuns was indeed an event at the end of the period of early Buddhism, not too long after the death of the Buddha, thus allowing to introduce nuns, if not in the *suttantas*, but at least in the *Therīgāthā*. Moreover, the controversy on the admission of nuns might have been – speaking in modern historical terms – between two factions, whether or not to accept a group of woman ascetics and their leader, who when they finally were allowed to join Buddhism succeeded in preserving part of their original rules and their language still dimly visible in the terminology of the *Bikkhunīpātimokkha* here and there.

Keywords nuns, female ascetics, ordination, Jainism, history of early Buddhist literature