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## Canonical Exegesis in the Theravāda *Vinaya*

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# Canonical Exegesis in the Theravāda *Vinaya*

Bhikkhu Brahmāli and Bhikkhu Anālayo<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In the present paper the two authors examine dimensions of the canonical exegesis found embedded within the text of the Theravāda *Vinaya*. In part one, Bhikkhu Anālayo examines the word-commentary on the rules found in the *Suttavibhaṅga*. In part two, Bhikkhu Brahmāli takes up the function of narrative portions in the *Khandhakas*.

## Part I: The Word-commentary in the *Suttavibhaṅga*

The *Suttavibhaṅga* embeds its various rules in a canonical exegesis. One dimension of such exegesis is narrative, which introduces the original promulgation of a particular rule and presents various tales related to possible breaches and, at times, the ensuing amendments to the rule in

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question.<sup>2</sup> Another dimension is the word-commentary, *padabhājanīya* (or *padabhājana*), which serves to draw out the precise meanings and implications of the terms used in the formulation of the rule itself.

The coming into being of this part of the *Vinaya* seems to reflect a general tendency of material of a commentarial type becoming part of the text on which it comments. This can be discerned through comparative study in the case of several early discourses in the four *Nikāyas* and *Āgamas* (Anālayo “Influence”). Another example is the *Udāna* collection, where comparative study points to the existence of a versified nucleus accompanied by a more fluctuating prose, which due to its later date of completion only became part of the canonical collection in some reciter traditions (Anālayo “Development”). The same can also be discerned in the early stage of evolution of the *Abhidharma* (Anālayo *Dawn* 79–89). In view of the pervasiveness of this transmission pattern, it seems safe to assume that it would also have had its impact on *Vinaya* material.

Norman (19) explains that “the Old Commentary, which is really an analysis of words (*Pada-bhājanīya*) . . . defines the *Pātimokkha* rule word by word . . . the similarity between this method and that found in the *Niddesa* suggests that both belong to the same period.”

As noted by von Hinüber (17), regarding “the ‘commentary explaining individual words’ (*padabhājanīya*) . . . it seems rather significant that no mention is made of this part of the *Suttavibhaṅga* in the account of the first council since this might indicate that this account dates back to a time when the *padabhājanīya* did not yet exist.”

Similarly, Ñāṇatusita (xliii) points out that “the *Padabhājana* or *Padabhājanīya* . . . this basic glossary-style commentary is not mentioned

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<sup>2</sup> A study of several rules in the *pātimokkha* in relation to their accompanying narratives can be found in Schlingloff.

in the account of the first council which suggests that it was first recited as an independent commentary . . . and was inserted later, perhaps when the Canon was written down, into the Suttavibhaṅga as a supplement.”

Kieffer-Pülz (“Vinaya” 430), commenting on the whole of the material that in the *Suttavibhaṅga* serves a commentarial function in relation to the *pātimokkha* rules, points out that “a comparison with the structure of other schools’ *Vinaya-piṭakas* indicates that this commentary became fixed only after the Buddhist community had already divided into several branches. Since this commentary is included in the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, it enjoys authoritative status.”

As an example for such a word-commentary, here is the definition of the term *bhikkhu* as part of the canonical exegesis of the first *pārājika* regulation against a breach of celibacy (Vin III 24,3 to 24,12).

A ‘*bhikkhu*’ [means being called] a *bhikkhu* [because] ‘he begs’, a *bhikkhu* [because] ‘he has consented to the conduct of begging’, a *bhikkhu* [because] ‘he wears a patchwork robe’, a *bhikkhu* [because] of being called such [by others], a *bhikkhu* [because] ‘he acknowledges to be one’, a *bhikkhu* [because of having been ordained by the address] ‘come *bhikkhu*’, a *bhikkhu* [because] of having received higher ordination by way of going for the three refuges, a *bhikkhu* [because he is a source of] auspiciousness, a *bhikkhu* [because he is like that] in substance, a *bhikkhu* [because] he is in training, a *bhikkhu* [because] he has gone beyond training, and a *bhikkhu* [because] he has been higher ordained in a way that is unchallengeable and fit to stand by a complete community through a formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations.

Herein a *bhikkhu* who has been higher ordained in a way that is unchallengeable and fit to stand by a complete community through a formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations, this is what is meant in this case by the designation of a ‘*bhikkhu*’.

In Anālayo (“Cullavagga” 421 note 23) I already noted briefly that this definition could only have come into being once all *bhikkhus* ordained by the Buddha personally or by other *bhikkhus* by way of the simple procedure through going for refuge had passed away.<sup>3</sup> At that time, the only *bhikkhus* to be taken into account were indeed just those ordained by a formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations. In other words, from a historical perspective this passage must stem from a time considerably later than the first *saṅgīti* at which, according to the traditional account, the *Vinaya* was recited. According to the Theravāda *Vinaya* account, by this time other aspects of the first *pārājika* had already been discussed in detail (Vin II 286,26). This confirms the assessment by the scholars quoted above of the evidently late nature of the *padabhājanīya*.

Whatever the date of its coming into being, however, in its present form this word-commentary is binding for a monastic ordained in the Theravāda tradition. In the case of the first *pārājika* such definitions are of considerable significance because they determine if a breach of the rule has been incurred. This is not a minor matter as, *pace* Clark (“When”), a breach of a *pārājika* results in the loss of one’s communion with the monastic community of the four directions, rather than being only applicable on a local level (Anālayo “Legal”).

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<sup>3</sup> As noted by Kieffer-Pülz (*Verlorene* 360f), this problem is also raised in the commentarial tradition.

This word-commentary in fact continues after its definition of what makes one a *bhikkhu* in the full legal sense by explaining how this status can be given up such that an intentional breach of celibacy no longer results in an infringement of the corresponding *pārājika* rule. Given that such a rule only applies to those who are fully ordained monastics, giving up one's higher ordination avoids a conflict with monastic law and thereby enables the one who has taken this step to take higher ordination again at a later time. Such an option is not open to one who has incurred a breach of a *pārājika*.

Giving up one's status as a *bhikkhu* can take place in the following ways (Vin III 26,<sup>33</sup> to 27,<sup>9</sup>):

Here a *bhikkhu*, being dissatisfied and discontent, wishing to depart from recluseship, repelled, ashamed, and disgusted with being a *bhikkhu*, longing to be a householder, longing to be a lay disciple, longing to be a lay attendant [at a monastery], longing to be a novice, longing to be [an ascetic] of a different tradition, longing to be a disciple of [an ascetic] of a different tradition, longing not to be a recluse, longing not to be a son of the Sakyan, says and declares:

“I disavow the Buddha” . . . “I disavow the Dharma” . . . “I disavow the Community” . . . “I disavow the training” . . . “I disavow the *Vinaya*” . . . “I disavow the *pātimokkha*” . . . “I disavow its recitation” . . . “I disavow my preceptor” . . . “I disavow my [monastic] teacher” . . . “I disavow my [monastic] co-dwellers” . . . “I disavow my pupils” . . . “I disavow our common preceptor” . . . “I dis-

avow our common [monastic] teacher” . . .  
 “I disavow my companions in the holy life”.

He says and declares:

“consider me a householder,” “consider me a lay disciple” . . . “consider me a lay attendant [at a monastery]” . . . “consider me a novice” . . . “consider me to be [an ascetic] of a different tradition” . . . “consider me to be a disciple of [an ascetic] of a different tradition” . . . “consider me not to be a recluse” . . . “consider me not to be a son of the Sakyan.”

The text continues working through various alternative formulations of basically the same intent. Unless the monk has in this way clearly communicated his decision to give up the status of being fully ordained in the presence of another human who is capable of understanding what is being said, a breach of celibacy, to stay with my example, results in the irreversible loss of the status of being a fully ordained monk.

This basic state of affairs does not change with the *śikṣādattaka* observance found in some *Vinayas*, *pace* Clark (“Monks”), which appears to be merely a more elaborate and institutionalized version of the basic option, mentioned above, to revert from being a fully ordained monk to the stage of being a novice (Anālayo “Legal”). Whether as a *śikṣādattaka* or a novice, the status of being a fully ordained monastic has been definitely lost.

This predicament in turn invests the option of renouncing one’s status beforehand with considerable legal importance for members of the monastic tradition. As pointed out by Ṭhānissaro (*Buddhist* 41),



if a bhikkhu disrobes in an invalid manner, he still counts as a bhikkhu and is subject to the rules whether he realizes it or not. If he then were to break any of the *pārājika* rules, he would be disqualified from ever becoming a bhikkhu again in this lifetime.

In a recent article published in this journal, Pandita (128) disagrees with this conclusion,<sup>4</sup> arguing that an allegedly earlier way of disavowing the training is still valid. He refers to this alternative as the “physio-social way,” apparently intending physically leaving the monastery and socially leaving monkhood by no longer wearing monastic robes.

As two clues to what he believes to have identified as exemplifying how this physio-social way works, Pandita (118) refers to the case of a monk who dreamed of sex and then thought he should leave the monastic order (Vin III 39,10), and to the case of a nun who had become pregnant and left the order when her pregnancy had become visible to others (Vin IV 216,4).

Closer inspection shows that both instances are not cases of a successful disavowal of ordination. The first does not involve a breach of a *pārājika* at all, as it only happened in a dream. In fact the story ends with the monk being told by Upāli that no offense had been incurred. The second is a case of having lost communion through sexual inter-

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<sup>4</sup> The reference in Pandita (128) is to page 55 of the 3rd edition published 2013 of *Buddhist Monastic Code I*. In the second edition of *Buddhist Monastic Code I* that I have at my disposal, which has also been published in the same year 2013, the passage occurs on page 41. The same passage is then found on page 44 in a digital 3rd edition published 2013, available at <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/bmc1.pdf>. This gives me the impression that there are three different versions of the same book published in the same year. In all three versions, however, the relevant discussion occurs on the first page of chapter three, titled “Disrobing.”

course earlier and then concealing it until this was no longer possible. Given that the nun had already lost her status when she engaged in sex, she could no longer successfully disavow it.

In addition to referring to these two examples, Pandita (121) reasons that “the Buddha . . . prescribed the legal way to leave the Order not when a particular monk was leaving the Order, but only as an emendation to the rule of First Defeat (Vin III 23; Horner 40–42).” The reference is to the episode of a group of Vajjī monks who engaged in sex and later asked to be granted ordination again, which the Buddha is recorded to have refused. Pandita (123) concludes that “the concept of the formal disavowal of the training has appeared only as an emendation to the rule of the First Defeat,” an emendation that took place in response to the episode of the Vajjī monks.

In the *Vinaya* account the episode of the Vajjī monks indeed leads to the explicit addition of the phrase “without having disavowed the training and without having revealed [one’s] weakness,” *sikkhaṃ apaccakkhāya dubbalyaṃ anāvikatvā*, to the rule regarding the first *pārājika* (Vin III 23,33). However, the introduction to the episode of the Vajjī monks already uses the same set of phrases to describe the conditions under which the Vajjīs engaged in sexual intercourse, *sikkhaṃ apaccakkhāya dubbalyaṃ anāvikatvā methunaṃ dhammaṃ paṭiseviṃsu* (Vin III 23,4). This gives the impression that “the concept of the formal disavowal of the training” was already in existence at the time when the Vajjīs engaged in sex, rather than coming into being only when the Buddha was informed of their behavior. It would hardly make sense for the episode introducing the conduct of the Vajjī monks to refer to a disavowal of the training, had such disavowal not been in existence in some form or another.

In fact, the function of the *padabhājanīya* is to explain and define, not to promulgate or prescribe something new. Thus the word explana-

tion translated above only implies that the listed ways of disavowal of one's higher ordination are from now on those considered legally valid from the viewpoint of *pārājika* casuistry. It does not imply that these ways had never been in use earlier and only came into existence with the arising of this word-commentary.

As the text gives no indication otherwise, it seems clear that the *padabhājanīya* explanation applies to the phrase *sikkhaṃ apaccakkhāya dubbalyaṃ anāvikatvā* even on its earlier occurrence, when introducing the episode of the Vajjī monks. In other words, from the viewpoint of the reciters of the *Vinaya*, what the Vajjīs did not do before engaging in sex, and what other monks should do in such a situation, is to disavow the training in one of the ways listed in the *padabhājanīya*.

Thus, the *padabhājanīya* on disavowal does not imply that the act of verbally renouncing the training as a monastic only came into being after the events described just before this word-commentary in the *Vinaya*. In fact, adopting such an interpretation one would have to conclude that the previously translated *padabhājanīya* passage, which defines the term *bhikkhu*, implies that *bhikkhus* only came into existence once this passage was formulated. This would lead to the absurd position that *bhikkhus* were not yet in existence when the episode concerning *bhikkhu* Sudinna led to the first *pārājika* regulation against a breach of celibacy. Clearly this does not make sense. Similarly, the present *padabhājanīya* passage on disavowal only formalizes a procedure that in some form must have been in existence previously.

Furthermore, as evident in the quotes by different scholars given earlier in this article, the *padabhājanīya* is a later text of a commentarial nature and there is no real basis for assuming that it must be attributed to something promulgated by the Buddha himself.

Now, according to the canonical *Vinaya* just putting aside one's robes is not a valid way of disavowal and monks who had sex after dressing in lay clothes or other types of non-Buddhist attire were considered to have incurred a *pārājika* (Vin III 34,21). Pandita (121) notes that the cases in this passage are about "monks who, without any clear prior intention to leave the Order, had sex." Pandita (129) then concludes that, presumably on the condition that one does have such clear intention, "the older physio-social way was not superseded by the newer legal way . . . if one uses the older way directly, the new way would not be required."

The conclusion proposed is based on an allegedly existing "older physio-social way," even though not a single instance has been pointed out in the *Vinaya* that documents the actual existence of this alternative. As mentioned earlier, neither the monk who dreamt of sex nor the nun who had become pregnant are cases of a successful disavowal of the training; nor are the Vajjī monks. In contrast, the cases where monks incur a *pārājika* by having sex after just putting away their robes and the definition in the *padabhājanīya* of how proper disavowal takes place imply that, without announcing his disavowal to someone else, a monk has not successfully given up his status. If he should then have sex, he thereby does incur a *pārājika*. Although on other occasions I have had to disagree with bhikkhu Ṭhānissaro,<sup>5</sup> in the present case his presentation is clearly the correct one.

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<sup>5</sup> This is in particular the case in relation to the validity of the revival of the *bhikkhuni* order, see Anālayo ("Bhikkhuni"), ("Cullavagga"), and ("Validity").

## Part II: The Significance of the Narratives for the Interpretation of the Rules and Procedures of the *Khandhakas*<sup>6</sup>

An important question in the study of the Buddhist monastic law is the role of the origin stories that form the background narrative for most of the rules. It has been suggested by Ṭhānissaro (“On Ordaining” 9 and “Postscript” 3) that these stories are of little interpretive value because they are sometimes an imperfect fit with the rules they belong to. A significant problem with this conclusion, meant as it is to encompass the entire *Vinaya Piṭaka*,<sup>7</sup> is that Ṭhānissaro only considers the origin stories found in one part of the *Vinaya* (the *Vibhaṅga*), while ignoring evidence from the rest (the *Khandhakas*). This is a significant methodological flaw, since the structures of these two parts of the *Vinaya* are rather different. I will discuss this difference briefly, before I go on to a more detailed investigation of the *Khandhakas*.

The Buddhist monastic law is organised into two main divisions.<sup>8</sup> The first of these, known as the *Suttavibhaṅga* or the *Vibhaṅga* for short, deals with the *pātimokkha* rules and their analysis, whereas the second, sometimes known as the *Khandhakas*, is a compilation of the remaining material. The two are structured quite differently. The *Vibhaṅga* consists of a series of rules, each surrounded by exegetical material, comprising an origin story and a multifaceted section that analyzes each rule in de-

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<sup>6</sup> I am currently in the process of translating the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (except the *Parivāra*), the first installments of which are available at [Suttacentral.net](http://Suttacentral.net). All translations in this part of the paper are taken from this translation project.

<sup>7</sup> Except the supplementary work known as the *Parivāra*.

<sup>8</sup> Excluding the *Parivāra*.

tail. The *Khandhakas*, by contrast, in almost all cases consist only of a rule together with an origin story.<sup>9</sup>

Another important distinction between the two is found in the relationship between the rules and the narrative background. In the *Vibhaṅga*, the origin stories and the rules are largely separate entities that are easily distinguishable from each other. In the *Khandhakas* on the other hand, as I intend to show below, the rules and the narrative form a continuous whole, with the rules often having no meaningful independent existence.

It follows from the above that there is no a priori reason to think that the value of the origin stories in the interpretation of the rules is the same for the *Khandhakas* as it is for the *Vibhaṅga*.<sup>10</sup> Each division of the *Vinaya* needs to be investigated independently, especially those aspects that relate to structure. In what follows I will therefore limit my focus to the *Khandhakas*, with special emphasis on the connection between rule and origin story. In this way I hope to clarify the extent to which the origin narrative in the *Khandhakas* may be used in the interpretation of the rules and regulations they introduce.

There are a number of aspects to the textual integration between rules and narrative in the *Khandhakas*. One of these is the tendency for the rules to form a natural part of the narrative, with rules and procedures normally embedded in the narrative context without any disruption in the flow of the story. As I have noted already, this is very differ-

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<sup>9</sup> The main exception is the word-commentary on the introduction to the *pātimokkha* found at Mv II 3.4-8 at Vin II 103,12.

<sup>10</sup> This is quite apart from the question of whether Ṭhānissaro's findings are valid even for the *Vibhaṅga*, which would require a separate paper to investigate.

ent from the *Vibhaṅga* where the rules are set apart, and there is no overarching narrative from one rule to the next.<sup>11</sup>

Here are two examples of how the rules in the *Khandhakas* are embedded in the narrative (rules in italics):

(1) On one occasion a family that was supporting Sāriputta sent him a boy with this message: “Please give the going forth to this boy.” Sāriputta thought: “The Master has laid down a rule that a monk shouldn’t have two novices attend on him. I already have the novice Rāhula. So what should I do now?” And he informed the Master of what had happened. The Master said: “*Monks, I allow a competent and capable monk to have two novice monks attend on him, or however many he is able to teach and instruct.*” Soon afterward the novices thought: “How many training rules do we have that we should train in?” . . . (Mv I 55.1-56.1 at Vin I 83,19).

(2) Soon afterward the monks asked those wanting the full ordination about the obstructions without first instructing them. Those wanting ordination were embarrassed, humiliated, and unable to respond. They informed the Master, and he said: “*Monks, you should instruct first and then ask about the obstructions.*” They instructed them right there in the midst of the Order. Once more those wanting the full ordination were embarrassed, humiliated, and un-

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<sup>11</sup> In fact, in the *Vibhaṅga* there is sometimes a direct connection between two adjacent rules, as if the origin story and the Analysis in between did not exist. E.g. bh-sg. 10 and 11; bh-ani. 1 and 2; bh-niss. 6 and 7; bh-pāc. 21 and 22; bh-pāc. 49 and 50; bh-pāc. 68, 69, and 70. The *Vibhaṅga* thus gives the impression that at least in some cases the rules existed before the origin story and the Analysis were added.

able to respond. They informed the Master, and he said:  
 “Monks, you should instruct them to one side and then ask about  
 the obstructions in the midst of the Order.” (Mv I 76.2 at Vin I  
 93,32).

Much of the *Khandhakas* has this sort of structure, where narrative and rules form a continuous whole.

The above examples give an indication of the closeness of the relationship between the narrative context and the rules in the *Khandhakas*. But not only is the relationship close, often the two are inextricably linked. In a substantial number of cases the rules use pronouns or other place holders to refer to someone or something already expressed in the narrative. Here are some examples:

(3) “Monks, I allow you to give the going forth and the full ordination in those various districts and countries.” (Mv I 12.1 at Vin I 21,24).

“Those” can only be understood with the aid of the background story.

(4) “Monks, I allow you to determine it for external use.”  
 (Mv VI 14.2 at Vin I 205,13).

Only the narrative makes it clear that the “it” refers to oil with alcohol.

(5) “Monks, I allow you to sprinkle it with mustard-seed powder . . . Monks, I allow you to fumigate it . . . Monks, I allow you to cut it with a razor.” (Mv VI 14.5 at Vin I 205,37).

The narrative makes it clear that the “it” in all three instances refers to a wound.



(6) “Monks, you should rinse them in water . . . Monks, you should beat them with your hands.” (Mv VIII 11.2 at Vin I 286,35).

The context shows that “them” refers to robes.

(7) “If they add flour or ash to sugar to harden it, it is still considered as sugar. Monks, I allow you to take as much sugar as you like.” (Mv VI 16.1 at Vin I 210,9).

The “they” is only comprehensible from the narrative context. It refers to workers at a sugar factory.

(8) “Monks, in this case a competent and capable monk should be in charge of the recitation of the monastic code.” (Mv II 17.1-2 at Vin I 115,36).

Only the narrative makes it clear that “in this case” refers to a situation where the most senior monk is incompetent.

(9) “Monks, an ignorant and incompetent nun should not instruct them. If she does, she commits an offence of wrong conduct. Monks, I allow a capable and competent nun to instruct them. . . . Monks, a nun who has not been agreed upon should not instruct them. If she does, she commits an offence of wrong conduct.” (Cv X 17.3 at Vin II 272,15).

“Them” refers to the candidates for ordination, and “instruct” refers to informing them about what disqualifies a candidate. This is only clear from the lengthy narrative that precedes the rule itself.

(10) “Monks, I allow you to do the proclamation even by clan name.” (Mv I 74.1 at Vin I 93,1).

Only from the narrative is it clear that “the proclamation” is part of the ordination procedure.

Many more examples could be added to this list. But even the above extracts do not adequately show the full extent of the interlinking between narratives and rules in the *Khandhakas*. Sometimes the relationship is so close that the rules are barely distinguishable from the narrative background. In these cases it is as if the narrative itself becomes an aspect of the rule. Below I give a few examples. As above, the rule is given in italics and the narrative context in normal font.

(11) “At one time monks from the group of six had created a boundary that crossed an existing boundary. They informed the Master, and he said: *‘Monks, the agreement on the first boundary is a legitimate procedure that is unchallengeable and fit to stand. The agreement on the subsequent boundary is an illegitimate procedure that is challengeable and unfit to stand.’*” (Mv II 13.1 at Vin I 111,12).

Only the narrative specifies what sort of boundary this rule applies to.

(12) “At this time, because food was scarce, the monks were satisfied even with a little. After reflection, they even refused. Now the whole Order was invited. Being afraid of wrongdoing, they did not accept. The Master said: *‘Accept, monks, and eat. I allow one who has eaten and expressed his satisfaction to eat non-leftovers that have been brought out.’*”

“Accept, monks, and eat,” is only comprehensible in the context of the broader narrative, which is here only quoted in part. (Mv VI 18.4 at Vin I 213,30).

(13) “Soon afterwards good monks objected when monks from the group of six performed an illegitimate procedure. The monks from the group of six became angry and bitter, and they made threats of violence. They informed the Master, and he said: ‘*Monks, I allow you to just state your view.*’” (Mv.2.16.5 at Vin I 115,6).

Here the rule is incomprehensible without the narrative context.

(14) “Soon the novice monks were being disrespectful, undeferential, and rude towards the monks. The monks complained and criticized them: ‘How can the novices behave like this?’ They informed the Master . . . He said: ‘*Monks, I allow you to punish a novice monk who has five qualities . . .*’ The monks did not know how they should be punished. They informed the Master, and he said: ‘*I allow you to place restrictions.*’” (Mv I 57.2 at Vin I 84,17).

Once again, the rule makes no sense without context.

(15) “On one occasion a number of monks were traveling on a main road in the Kosalan country. Some of the monks entered a charnel ground to look for rags, but the others did not wait. The former monks obtained rags, and the other monks said: ‘Please give us a share.’ ‘But why didn’t you wait, then? We won’t give you a share.’ They informed the Master, and he said: ‘*Monks, I allow you to give a share to those who do not wait, but only if you are willing.*’” (Mv VIII 4.1 at Vin I 282,13).

This rule, as well as the two previous ones, is deeply embedded in the background story. So far as meaning is concerned, rule and narrative are inseparable.

(16) “At one time in a certain monastery, the village where the monks had entered the rains residence relocated because of criminals. They informed the Master, and he said: ‘*Monks, I allow you to move to where the village is.*’ The village was divided in two. They informed the Master, and he said: ‘*Monks, I allow you to move to where the majority is.*’ The majority had no faith and confidence. They informed the Master, and he said: ‘*Monks, I allow you to move to where those who have faith and confidence are.*’” (Mv III 10.1 at Vin I 149,19).

Again, these rules are incomprehensible without the framing story.

(17) “Around the same time dwellings were held together by straps of leather. The monks, being afraid of wrongdoing, did not sit down. They informed the Master, and he said: ‘*Monks, I allow you to sit down against a mere binding made of skin.*’” (Mv V 11.1 at Vin I 194,5).

Here the rule is cryptic without the context.

(18) “At that time monks were dyeing their robes . . . They did not know whether the dye was ready or not. They informed the Master, and he said: ‘*Monks, you should put a drop in water or on the back of your nail.*’” (Mv VIII 10.2 at Vin I 286,11).

The rule is just an extension of the narrative. It cannot exist independently.

(19) “*Monks, a nun should go to the appointment. If she does not, she commits an offence of wrong conduct.*” (Cv X 9.5 at Vin II 265,36).

That this refers to a forest monk meeting the nuns for the exhortation is only clear from the lengthy narrative that precedes this rule.

In each of the cases surveyed, the rule is virtually meaningless without the narrative context. The rules have no separate identity; rules and narrative form an indivisible unit. Although the above examples are far from exhaustive, they should suffice to show the indispensability of the narrative context for a proper interpretation of the rules in the *Khandhakas*.

There are, of course, many instances of rules in the *Khandhakas* that are comprehensible without the origin stories. This does not mean, however, that they can be treated as independent entities, but simply that the rules contain enough information to be meaningful on their own. Given the close relationship between narrative and rule elsewhere in the *Khandhakas*, it is reasonable to conclude that the origin stories have an inherent interpretative value. This holds also in cases where the rules can be understood on their own.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

The first part of this paper has argued that the word-commentary on the rules found in the *Suttavibhaṅga* serves to clarify legal implications of terminology used in the rules. Its formulation does not imply that the concepts it explains only came into being at the time this commentary was formulated.

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<sup>12</sup> It is possible, of course, that at times an origin story does not properly relate to the rule to which it belongs. Given the evidence provided here, however, this would have to be established by submitting appropriate evidence in that particular case.

In relation to sexual intercourse, it follows that a monastic who does not adopt one of the forms of disavowal of the monastic training recognized in this word-commentary does incur a *pārājika* resulting in a definite and irreversible loss of communion with the monastic community of the four directions.

The second part of the paper has established that the narratives and the rules in the *Khandhakas* need to be read as an integrated whole. The rules and procedures can only be properly understood in light of their narrative context, and they need to be interpreted accordingly.

This in turn is of considerable significance for the much debated question of *bhikkhunī* ordination. The foregoing shows that the *Khandhaka* narrative within which the rules on *bhikkhunī* ordination are embedded needs to be considered to gain a proper perspective on the legal significance of these rules.

### Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i>
Ani	<i>Aniyata</i>
Bh	<i>Bhikkhu</i>
Cv	<i>Cūlavagga</i> of the <i>Vinaya Piṭaka</i>
Mv	<i>Mahāvagga</i> of the <i>Vinaya Piṭaka</i>
Niss	<i>Nissaggiya pācittiya</i>
Pāc	<i>Pācittiya</i>
Pār	<i>Pārājika</i>
Sg	<i>Saṅghādisesa</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>

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