

The Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya on the Formation of Bhikṣuṇīs

Damchö Diana Finnegan

Perspectives on Bhikkhuni Ordination
Summer Semester 2014
University of Hamburg
Center for Buddhist Studies &
Women in Buddhism Study Initiative

Ways We Use Vinaya Texts in Discussions of Bhikṣuṇī Ordination

As a legal code?

As a source of evidence on
historical antecedents?

What kind of text is the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, anyway? A very, very long one.

17 18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

48

49

50

51

52

53

54

55

56

57

58

59

60

61

62

63

64

65

66

67

68

69

70

71

72

73

74

75

76

77

78

79

80

81

82

83

84

85

86

87

88

89

90

91

92

93

94

95

96

97

98

99

100

17 18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

48

49

50

51

52

53

54

55

56

57

58

59

60

61

62

63

64

65

66

67

68

69

70

71

72

73

74

75

76

77

78

79

80

81

82

83

84

85

86

87

88

89

90

91

92

93

94

95

96

97

98

99

100

17 18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

48

49

50

51

52

53

54

55

56

57

58

59

60

61

62

63

64

65

66

67

68

69

70

71

72

73

74

75

76

77

78

79

80

81

82

83

84

85

86

87

88

89

90

91

92

93

94

95

96

97

98

99

100

Image As Per Original Document

...and almost 8,000 more pages like these

What kind of text is the
Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya,
anyway?

Sūtras

Ritual manual

Cosmology

History of kingdoms

Buddha's biography

Jātakas

Avadānas

Narrative, narratives ...
and more narratives

Reading As Authoritative Text

- Not what the Buddha intended?
 - Set in stone or set in water?
 - Superseded by “easier” text:
- 6th/7th-century “Root” Vinaya
Vinayasūtra

Reading As Narratives

The great Indologist Sylvain Lévi called it a “masterpiece of Sanskrit literature” composed by someone “whose verbal enthusiasm and rampant imagination evoke the memory of Rabelais, and the best of Rabelais.” *

* Lévi, Sylvain. 1932. “Notes sur des manuscrits sanscrits provenant de Bamiyan (Afghanistan) et de Gilgit (Cachemire).” *Journal Asiatique* 220: 23-4.

Reading As Narratives

Issues in reading as history

- Date
(at least six centuries after
events described)
- Politics of representation
- Multivocal yet authoritative

Reading As Narrative

- The world of the *MSV* is densely populated by women
 - Women not confined to ghetto
- Their voices are heard, subjectivity imagined
- Narrator(s) acknowledge misogyny

Story One:
Gender is on the *MSV*'s Radar

Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī Arranges
First Dharma Teachings
for Śākya Women

“...the arising of the Buddha in the
world is for the sake of men,
not for women.”

Vinayavastu, Sanghabhedavastu

Making Bhikṣuṇīs

- Not a Process that ends when
vows are given

- Envisioning women
As full participants
in Buddhist monasticism

Story Two:
Just What Does a Bhikṣuṇī Do,
Anyway?

(Definitely not housework)

- Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī's part in defining a bhikṣuṇī's role
 - Class and gender; or, the advantages of being led by a queen

Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga

Story Three: The Buddha as Protector of Nuns

A Former Prostitute, a King,
a Brahmin and an Eye

- Females as vulnerable
to male predators
- The Buddha as protector
places nuns under monks
- Protecting bhikṣuṇīs from the
bhikṣus

Bhikṣuvibhaṅga and
Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga

Story Four: Bhikṣuṇīs Caring for Women

Carving out separate spheres

Bhikṣuvibhaṅga

“Gender pairing” *

* Skilling, Peter. 2001b. “Nuns, Laywomen, Donors, Goddesses: Female Roles in Early Indian Buddhism.” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 24.2: 241-274.

Some Final Reflections