

survives the uncovering of further evidence for this important period. This is a picture that eschews outdated ideas of lay and/or female involvement, and instead concentrates on what Schopen and Silk have called the 'conservative' attitudes of early Mahāyāna texts, particularly their advocacy of the monastic life and therein the performance of the *dhūtaguṇas*, the permitted asceticisms, and the pursuit of the forest life. The SRS as a whole reflects this same picture, and in our story we should note that, having left his forest vocation, Supuṣpacandra, once he enters Ratnāvati, spends his days fasting and sitting sleepless through the night. The latter of these at least is one of the *dhūtaguṇas*. Indeed, the entire Supuṣpacandra story is suffused with an intensely idealistic aspirational quality that I have not really communicated so far, and this too contrasts sharply with the cooler legalistic tone of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya. Of course we would expect a legal text, i.e. a vinaya, to be cooler in tone, but perhaps we might not be far wrong to consider the possibility that each text reflects a certain kind of religiosity and maybe even a different kind of community.

Thus I hope we can begin to see that both in chronology and in preoccupation, these two texts, the MSV and the SRS, both appear to be located in the frame for the early Mahāyāna. All I have done here is suggest the parallel between them on grounds that have been cleared by others. But if this parallel is valid, here and elsewhere, then we at least begin to have rationally established sources for a study of the character of the early Mahāyāna in relation to its contemporary religious context. Without such sources, much of our theorising about the origins of the Mahāyāna remains speculation. I hope also that this paper serves to remind us of the value of narrative literature even for illuminating historical problems that are often construed largely in doctrinal terms.

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## AN ANTINOMIAN ALLEGORY

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Over the last ten years I have tried to think about how ideas of *law* and *state* fit into the Pāli Buddhist tradition. And that has necessarily involved thinking about how *antinomy* and *anarchy* fit into the Pāli Buddhist tradition. One approach I have tried was to ask whether Vinaya is law. The Buddha draws on legal rhetoric in the Vinaya, but he also draws on medical rhetoric. That does not make the Vinaya either a legal or a medical text.<sup>1</sup> This approach finally petered out when I realised that there is no *a priori* reason why *law* and *medicine* (categories taken from a tradition that knows nothing about meditation) should fit a Buddhist tradition that recognises meditation as one of the mental capacities. My next approach was via the *Aggañña Sutta* and the *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta*. Steve Collins and I collaborated to trace how this 'Buddhist social contract' developed through the Pāli Canon and Pāli Commentary into the subsequent history of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup> Collins subsequently wrote his book *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities* which says most of what is needed to be said about *state* and *anarchy*.<sup>3</sup> Which leaves the *legal* and the *antinomian* sitting reproachfully on my desktop.

Here, then, is my latest approach to the problem. This time, instead of looking at texts, I want to look at people. I want to look at the *Vinayadharas*, that is, the monks who specialise in the

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Huxley, 'The Vinaya: Legal System or Performance Enhancing Drug?', *The Buddhist Forum* 4 (1996), pp.141-63.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Huxley, 'The Buddha and the Social Contract', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 24 (1996), pp.407-20; Steven Collins, 'The Lion's Roar on the Wheel-turning King, a reply to Andrew Huxley', *ibid.*, pp.421-45; S. Collins and A. Huxley, 'The post-canonical adventures of Mahāsammatā', *ibid.*, pp.623-48; A. Huxley, 'When Manu met Mahāsammatā', *ibid.*, pp.593-621.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Collins, *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali imaginaire*, Cambridge 1998.

theory and practice of the Pāli Vinaya.<sup>4</sup> I have an interest in the publications of Burmese Vinayadharas from the sixteenth through to the twenty-first century. I have met a Vinayadhara or two, and I have corresponded with others. All of this tints the way I read the earliest texts in the Pāli tradition. Because I came to Asokan-era Elders' Buddhism having first learned about eighteenth century Burmese Buddhism, I assume a certain continuity in attitudes. Whatever is original in my view of early Buddhist developments stems from my willingness to assume that Buddhist institutions which existed recently in Burma must also have existed in fourth century CE Lanka and third century BCE North India. No doubt whatever is mistaken can be traced to the same source. Specifically, the people I want to talk about are three monks who were contemporaries of the Buddha. I shall treat each of them as representing an abstract legal or antinomian idea. I am, in other words, offering you an allegory – an allegory in which Ānanda, Upāli and Devadatta act out a theoretical quarrel about Buddhist attitudes to law.

The tradition preserves two different ways of thinking about Vinaya, which I shall label Vinaya-as-a-social-practice and Vinaya-as-a-text. When the tradition treats the Buddha as the author of the Pāli Vinaya it emphasises the Vinaya-as-a-text. When it treats him as the Pāli Vinaya's exemplary interpreter, it emphasises the Vinaya-as-a-social-practice. 'Why insist on the distinction?' you will object. 'You have already distorted the Buddha's message by dividing Vinaya off from the more inclusive *dhamma-vinaya*.' I find it worthwhile to draw the distinction because I am interested in comparative discussion. How should we fit the Vinayadharas into a cross-cultural taxonomy of specialist ethical consultants? They are monks, of course, which itself suggests many Chinese, African and European analogues. But how do we label the Vinayadharas as a distinct specialism within the community of monks? Are they more like scholars or lawyers? By scholars I mean people who preserve ancient texts by teaching them to the next generation. By lawyers I mean people who inter-

<sup>4</sup> I mean by this particularly the *Khandhaka* (meaning 'Heaps of Stuff') and the *Suttavibhanga* (meaning 'Rule Analyser') written around 75 BCE in the language we now call Pāli.

pret and apply written codes of behaviour. The scholars teach a text; the lawyers perform a social practice. The Buddhist Canon does not specifically tell us whether Vinayadharas are nearer to being scholars or lawyers. (Nor, as I have complained elsewhere, does it tell us whether the Buddha used a Wintel PC or an Apple!) But there is a surprising amount of discussion of this issue in the Canon. At least there is, if you are prepared to adopt my allegorical reading of Ānanda, Upāli and Devadatta: Ānanda symbolises the Vinaya-as-a-text; Upāli symbolises the Vinaya-as-a-social-practice; Devadatta symbolises the antinomian strand in Buddhist thought.

Let us start with Ānanda, the Buddha's cousin and 'twin' (they were born on the same day). Some years after the Enlightenment, Ānanda became the Buddha's aide-de-camp, with special responsibility for preaching the Dhamma and memorising the text of most of the Buddha's Dhamma-talks. Some passages from G.P. Malalasekera's biography mention these responsibilities:

It is said that the Buddha would often deliberately shorten his discourse to the monks so that they might be tempted to have it further explained by Ānanda ... Sometimes Ānanda would suggest to the Buddha a simile to be used in his discourse, e.g. the *Dhammayāna* simile; or by a simile suggest a name to be given to a discourse, e.g. the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*; or again, particularly wishing to remember a certain Sutta, he would ask the Buddha to give it a name, e.g. the *Bahudhātuka Sutta*. It is said that he could remember everything spoken by the Buddha, from one to sixty thousand words in the right order, without missing one single syllable.<sup>5</sup>

Let us think about the text of the Pāli Vinaya. Compared with the seven other extant Vinayas which survive in whole or part, the Pāli recension of the *Khandhaka* has certain unique features. The Pāli text, at 950 pages, is shorter than the others and, unlike them, is divided into the Greater and Lesser Chapters. Whereas the others treat the first two Councils either as appendices or not at all, the Pāli Vinaya upgrades them into fully-fledged chapters.<sup>6</sup> The Pāli

<sup>5</sup> G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, 2 vols, London 1937 (repr in 3 vols, PTS 1997), I, pp.253-4, 262.

<sup>6</sup> Charles S. Prebish, *A Survey of Vinaya Literature*, Taipei 1994, p.83. This is

Vinaya, being a very self-reverential text, tells us why its *Khandhaka* is different from the others. It does this at a rather prominent spot. The final words of the Lesser Chapters of the *Khandhaka* read as follows:

'This legal dispute is ended, your reverences. What is settled is well-settled. Any more questions?'

Such were the ten issues as Revata put them, and the venerable Sabbakama's answers. Because there were exactly seven-hundred monks present, this speaking-together of vinaya subsequently became known as the *seven-hundred monks text* [V II 307].

The venerable Sabbakama is not a major figure in the Canon, but he has the great virtue of being the last monk alive who shared a cell with Ānanda. This passage constitutes a chain of transmission. The Vinaya-as-a-text was handed down from the Buddha to Ānanda, to Sabbakama, to the seven-hundred monks chaired by Revata, to the Elders. The Elders passed it on to the Mahāvihāra monastery in Lanka, and they passed it on to countless monks around the Bay of Bengal and the Gulf of Thailand. This collective effort has preserved a particular recension of the Vinaya, a speaking-together that happened at a particular time and place. On the authenticity of this transmission rests the validity of the entire Pāli monastic tradition: a 'monk' who, however inadvertently, gets Vinaya practice wrong is not a true monk. Ānanda is implicated in transmitting the Vinaya-as-a-text, and ultimately it is faith in the accuracy of this text that underpins faith in one's Vinaya orthopraxy.

Let us turn to Upāli, the barber's son from Kapilavatthu who became *Vinaye agganikkhitto*, the chief repository of the Vinaya. Malalasekera tells us that:

Various instances are given of Upāli questioning the Buddha about the Vinaya regulations ... The monks seem to have regarded Upāli as their particular friend, to whom they could go in their difficulties ... Buddhaghosa says that while the Buddha was yet alive Upāli drew up certain instructions according to which future Vinayadharas should interpret Vinaya rules, and that, in conjunction with others,

rather like putting the *Acts of the Apostles* on the same footing as the *Gospel*. It makes an authority-claim about the generation that outlived the Buddha.

he compiled explanatory notes on matters connected with the Vinaya.

His last sentence bears repeating: the Great Vinaya Commentary says that the earliest commentarial texts were spoken by Upāli. Upāli, we might say, authorises the commentaries as Ānanda authorises the canonical text. In the Pāli Vinaya we have seen that the last words of the Lesser Chapters refer, tangentially, to Ānanda. The last words of the Greater Chapters refer, directly, to Upāli, the spokesman for Vinaya-as-a-social-practice. After hearing a discourse by the Buddha on how to distinguish the letter and spirit from the letter alone [V I 357] Upāli replies with a character sketch of the archetypal Vinayadhara, the *beau idéal* of Vinaya-as-a-social-practice:

What kind of man do we most need to lead our Order's business?  
What virtues equip a monk for leadership?  
First he must be moral, a paragon of self-restraint,  
One against whom accusations will not be credible.  
Second, he shall not be shy to speak in public:  
Without stutter or digression, he will get his point across.

He is able to respond to objections:  
He knows when to speak, when to let others speak.  
He respects the Elders, while standing by his own Teachers,  
He shows judgement, knows his lines, and can join in debate.

Master of dialectic and teacher of multitudes,  
He wins the debate without hurting opponents.  
As ambassador on our Order's behalf  
He follows his brief without conceit.  
He knows whether what you've done counts as an offence:  
If it is, he knows how to remove your stain.

He can analyse the grounds for probation and restoration.  
He shows equal esteem within each generation –  
The elders, seniors, the middle-aged, the youth.  
Our leader should be clever and a helper to many [V I 358].

A mere two lines describe the external ethical standards a Vinayadhara should set himself, while the remaining lines describe his

<sup>7</sup> Malalasekera, I, pp.409-10.

social role, both within the monastery and in the world outside. Upāli's job-description suggests that a Vinayadhara spends most of his time talking to people, rather than sitting in meditation or reading books or judging people. Neither lawyer nor scholar it would seem, but closer to a Chief Executive Officer, or village headman.

The *Suttavibhaṅga* paints a rather different picture. It shows Upāli judging people (or rather, expressing his opinion as to how the Vinaya should be applied to a specific case). At the end of the chapter on theft is a ten-page interpretation of precedents. It contains forty-nine difficult cases touching on the interpretation of *taking what has not been given*, and their resolution. The first forty-five of these were decided by the Buddha himself. Thus case number forty-six inaugurates the post-Gotaman Buddhist law reports. It records a case in which Upāli's opinion (that a monk is innocent of theft in his dealings with his lay-patron) prevails over Ānanda's [V III 66]. Thus the Canon. My allegorical reading of the Canon sees this as a victory for Upāli's Vinaya-as-a-social-practice over Ānanda's Vinaya-as-a-text. Such a victory would prefigure more than two millennia of Pāli interpretative tradition. The tradition has, in fact, always looked to Upāli rather than to Ānanda in such matters. It was Upāli who knew which Vinaya questions needed to be elaborated, Upāli who had frequent question-and-answer sessions on Vinaya with the Buddha. It is Upāli, not Ānanda, who stands at the head of the lineage of Vinayadharas. Upāli handed all his knowledge on to Dasaka, who passed it to Sonaka, who taught it to Siggava, who ... and so to the monk who ordained you, and to the monks that you will ordain.

The third of our monks is Devadatta, the prince from Kapilavattu, Suppabuddha's son (and thus the Buddha's maternal cousin). In Malalasekera's words:

When the Buddha visited Kapilavattu ... Devadatta was converted together with his ... (five friends) and their barber, Upāli ... In one passage he is mentioned in a list of eleven of the chief Elders ... About eight years before the Buddha's death ... he conceived the idea of taking the Buddha's place as leader of the Saṅgha ... As his end drew near, he wished to see the Buddha, though the latter had declared that it would not be possible in this life. Devadatta, however, started the journey on a litter, but on reaching Jetavana,

he stopped the litter on the banks of a pond and stepped out to wash. The earth opened and he was swallowed up in Avīci, where, after suffering for one hundred thousand kappas, he would be reborn as a Pacceka Buddha called Aṭṭhissara ...

This is a dramatic story, and nowhere is it told more dramatically than in the Lesser Chapter VII on Schism. This epic is structured around the intertwined biographies of Upāli and Devadatta. Devadatta was the prince, the five friends were his entourage and Upāli was their barber (or valet, or personal servant). When it came time for them all to be ordained, Devadatta, to teach himself humility, nobly asked that Upāli be ordained first. The epic tells how Devadatta tried to split the Saṅgha, and how Upāli ultimately healed the division within the Saṅgha. That is to put it in lineage, or social-practice terms. To put it textually, Devadatta wanted to add new rules to the Vinaya, while Upāli retorted: 'nothing to be added, nothing left out'. Ānanda makes a guest appearance in the scene where Devadatta plots to send the giant elephant Nālāgiri amok to trample the Buddha to death:

Ānanda, seeing the animal rushing towards them, immediately took his stand in front of the Buddha. Three times the Buddha forbade him to do so, but Ānanda, usually most obedient, refused to move, and it is said that the Buddha, by his *iddhi*-power, made the earth roll back in order to get Ānanda out of the elephant's path.

But, the Chapter on Schism is mainly Upāli's story – indeed Homer would have called it the *Upaliad*. And other parts of the Canon endorse the triumph of Upāli over Devadatta. In the Vinaya debate over Kumāra-Kassapa's mother's pregnancy Devadatta and Upāli give conflicting Vinaya interpretations, but the Buddha endorses Upāli's opinion [Th 200].

Devadatta's dramatic end is an important demonstration of instant kamma, the doctrine that some actions are so heinous that they attract kammic consequences during this very lifetime. That is kamma's judgement on Devadatta. The Buddha's judgement on Ānanda has been recorded:

<sup>8</sup> Malalasekera, I, pp.1106-10.  
<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.251.



Say not so, Udāyī; should [Ānanda] die without attaining perfect freedom from passion, by virtue of his piety, he would seven times win rule over the devas and seven times be King of Jambudīpa. Howbeit, in this very life shall Ānanda attain to nibbāna [A I 228].

Judgement on Upāli, to round off all three characters, has been delivered by the generations of monks who have learnt their lineage off by heart, reciting the pupillary succession from Upāli to Dasaka to Sonaka and so on. Since Upāli symbolises the Vinaya-as-social-practice, and since Devadatta is his antithesis, I take Devadatta to represent the strand within the Buddhist tradition that is hostile to the Vinaya. I shall label this strand 'antinomian', despite it begging the question of whether we should regard the Vinaya as *nomos*. This will enable us to compare Buddhism with other traditions.

Many religious traditions are capacious enough to contain both a legalistic and an antinomian strand. Seventeenth-century England, for example, had legalistic Protestants like William Perkins (1558-1602), who took a close interest in what contemporary lawyers such as Francis Bacon and Edward Coke were up to: 'Divines must take lawyer's advice concerning extremity and the letter of the law; good reason then that lawyers take divine's advice touching the equity of which is the intent of the law'.<sup>10</sup> And there were antinomian Protestants such as the Ranters who moved from a premise that faith is enough *without* the deeds of law to a conclusion that faith should be *against* the law. The Mahāyāna monks deployed a similar antinomian stance in their arguments with the Elders. They insisted that Buddhism should taste of liberation, rather than musty legalisms. Vinayadharas, they implied, were liable to get so wrapped up in disciplinary technicalities that they forget to achieve enlightenment. An early Mahāyāna text extols Vimalakīrti as the greatest of the Buddha's generation.<sup>11</sup> It contains a series of anecdotes in which Ānanda, Śāriputta and other monks tell of the spiritual lessons Vimalakīrti gave them. Upāli narrates that Vimalakīrti came by one day while

Upāli was engaged in some Vinaya-as-a-social-practice. Two monks had broken the rules, and Upāli was telling them how to express repentance. Vimalakīrti reminded all three of them that sin and repentance are merely a delusion:

All phenomena derive from false views and are like a reflection in water or the mirror. He who understands this is called a keeper of Vinaya and he who knows it properly is called a Vinayadhara.

There is a respectable body of opinion within Buddhism which thinks of the Vinayadharas as an unwholesome specialism. Should we agree with these Buddhist antinomians?

Buddhism contains arguments on both sides. The Vinaya-piṭaka as a whole constitutes a weighty argument for the legalists. However, the antinomians can cite the dialogue between Bhaddali and the Buddha [M I 437-47]. One of Bhaddali's questions cuts at the root of the whole Vinaya enterprise:

What is the reason, your Reverence, why there were formerly fewer Vinaya rules and more monks who were established in profound knowledge? And why is the opposite now the case?

The Buddha accepts the factual basis of Bhaddali's question and attempts to explain it:

The answer, Bhaddali, is that the preponderance of rules and the scarcity of enlightened monks are both symptoms of the general deterioration in true dhamma and in life itself.

When things get worse, we get more law. If 'Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules',<sup>12</sup> this was partly, the Buddha would say, because he lived in simpler, older times than we do.

Back to my allegory. If Devadatta stands for antinomian Buddhism and Upāli stands for the Vinaya, then an allegorical reading of the Schism Chapter and the Kumāra-Kassapa case suggest total victory for Upāli. Such a one-sided conclusion would be uncharacteristic of the Pāli Canon. A passage from the Sutta-piṭaka neatly

<sup>10</sup> William Perkins, 'Epieikeia or a treatise of Christian equity and moderation', in Ian Breward, ed., *The Works of William Perkins*, Abingdon 1970, p.491.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Luk, *The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*, Berkeley 1972, pp.30-2.

<sup>12</sup> William Blake, from his annotations to Francis Bacon's *Essays*. Quoted in E.P. Thompson, *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law*, Cambridge 1993, p.19.

undermines Vinaya triumphalism by attributing an antinomian element to Upāli himself. Devadatta's downfall was his ambition to lead the Saṅgha. He exemplifies the spiritual pride that forever threatens the cardinal, ayatollah and reincarnate lama. Upāli, says the Sutta-pitaka, had the opposite ambition. Early in his monastic career, Upāli asked the Buddha for permission to leave human society altogether to become a solitary forest meditator. In reply, the Buddha advised him to remain in monasteries, where he could split his time between learning the Vinaya and meditating [A V 207; Mp I 172]. We might call this 'the Groucho Marx paradox in reverse': ambition for the job should count as disqualification for the job. As Groucho would not want to join any club that would have him as a member, Vinayadharas should not admit anyone to membership who asks them for admission. This episode in Upāli's life can be allegorised thus: there is a character trait associated with those who want to become Vinayadharas which gets in the way of enlightenment. To that extent, the antinomian critique of Vinaya is acknowledged by Upāli himself.

My antinomian allegory must end here. We have established that Devadatta is too antinomian, while Upāli is quite antinomian enough. Yet Upāli and Ānanda have both attained Nibbāna, and one day in the far future even Devadatta will become a Pacceka-buddha. Perhaps there is just one truth. Certainly there are different roads to it.

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(SOAS)

## NON-SELF NONSENSE

COLIN EDWARDS

### DEFINITIONS

SELF: *Collins English Dictionary*

1. the distinct individuality or identity of a person
2. a person's usual or typical bodily make-up or personal characteristics
3. philosophy (usually preceded by 'the') that which is essential to an individual, esp. the mind or soul in Cartesian metaphysics

ATTAN: *Pali-English Dictionary* (= PED)

4. the soul as postulated in the animistic theories held in N. India in the 6th and 7th c. B.C.
5. oneself, himself, yourself

PERSONALITY/BEING: *Sutta Pitaka*

6. ... these five aggregates affected by clinging are called personality (MLDB, p.396)
7. this is a heap of sheer formations. Here no being is found (CDB I, p.230)

Translators say the Pāli Buddha says there is no 'self'.<sup>1</sup> We often use 'self' to refer to the sum of a person's attributes including 'bodily make-up' (definition 2). Does Gotama think human beings do not exist? In the Suttas he talks to people as if they are real, and he perceives the all-too-realness of a person's 'make-up', a body-consciousness interdependence:

... This body of mine has form, it is built up of the four elements, it springs from father and mother, it is continually renewed by so much

<sup>1</sup> I do not mean to imply that the association of the 'non-self' idea with the Buddha originates from modern translations. Buddhaghosa, writing in the fifth century and believed to be following earlier commentaries, makes the association when he writes, '... "as to void": in the ultimate sense all the truths should be understood as "void" because of the absence of any experiencer ...' (Vism, p.521), though what he means by 'in the ultimate sense' and 'experiencer' is debatable.