“FOR THE SAKE OF WOMEN, TOO”:
ETHICS AND GENDER IN THE NARRATIVES
OF THE MŪLASARVĀSTIVĀDA VINAYA

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to the female disciples of Buddha Śākyamuni whose stories await us in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, including:

Bhikṣuṇī Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, Bhikṣuṇī Dharmadattā, Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarnā, Bhikṣuṇī Kṛśā Gautamī, Bhikṣuṇī Somā, Bhikṣuṇī Yaśodharā, Bhikṣuṇī Kacāṅgalā, Bhikṣuṇī Śailā, Bhikṣuṇī Kapilabhadrā, and, yes, Bhikṣuṇī Sthūlanandā,

and the countless other nuns who have kept and are keeping the Buddhist monastic path joyfully open for women of the past, those of the present and all those many yet to come.
Abstract

This dissertation explores the ethics that Buddha and his monastic followers practiced, as imagined in the narrative world of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya (MSV). The MSV is a multi-volume canonical text that has governed various Indian and Tibetan Buddhist monastic communities for nearly two millennia, and it is also hailed as a masterpiece of Sanskrit literature. Through close readings of the MSV’s many narratives, this dissertation is principally concerned to understand in what ways and to what extent its ethics is gendered.

The MSV regulates historical monastic communities, often addressing those communities through narratives. The text thus demands reading practices that reflect its status as both authoritative and multivocal. Deploying such practices, we note that Buddha’s practice of ethics in the MSV is marked by an intense attentiveness to human particularity and difference. In the ethics of the MSV, many features combine to constitute a person: caste, family, gender and other markers of social location, their relationships with particular others, as well as individual disposition and karma. Within Buddhist monasticism, gender emerges as one of the single most important determinants of social location and personal identity, profoundly impacting what is and is not possible for persons at any given moment. Buddhist monasticism’s interventions in prevailing constructions of female gender benefited women greatly, even though those mainstream constructions repeatedly re-inscribed themselves on monastic women’s lives, bodies and institutions.

With its intense focus on the body as a site for ethical cultivation, Buddhist monasticism offers women an alternate model of female embodiment. When gender is
institutionalized within monastic communities, we note moments of parity between the male and female monastic orders, along with the hierarchy that generally prevails between them. The hierarchical relationship between the monks and nuns’ orders is characterized by asymmetrical reciprocity, with each encouraged to offer different forms of care to the other.

Throughout, the dissertation assesses the constructions of gender imagined in the MSV’s narratives, asking to what degree and in what ways Buddhist monasticism succeeds or fails to enable women to engage in the work of self-fashioning that is its overall ethical project.
Acknowledgments

My career as a graduate student at Madison began the same semester Charles Hallisey joined the department, and other than his time on leave, I do not recall a single semester that I was not taking at least one class with Charlie. When possible, I took two. It was through Charlie's distinctive angle of vision that I learned to look at Buddhist texts and practices. It was through his encouragement and mentoring that I learned to imagine possibilities for a productive engagement between my life as an academic scholar and my life as a Buddhist monastic. It will be obvious that his interest in practices of reading and ethics of care thoroughly animate the work that follows. Although he left Madison in 2007 for Harvard and thereafter ceased to be my dissertation adviser, I did not thereby cease to consider myself a student of Charlie's, not for an instant. The unfortunate fact that his name does not appear on the committee list of this dissertation in no way diminishes that fact. While I make this attempt to acknowledge here the vast intellectual debt that I owe Charlie, I harbor no hopes that it can ever be repaid. The contributions of his thought are simply too deeply woven into the fiber of my own thinking about Buddhist ethics. And that is all for the good.

After Charlie departed for Harvard, Donald R. Davis, Jr. kindly agreed to guide this dissertation as it made the transition from a teeming pool of questions, ideas and stories, to the structured set of arguments laid out in the chapters that follow. Don’s work on dharmāśāstra, his high standards of scholarship, and his vision of the complex relationship between normativity and narrative form valuable components of the final product. In particular, his steady confidence in this project constitutes a great kindness that I carry
forward with me with gratitude. Don’s support was indeed a crucial condition for the completion of this dissertation.

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Sarnath, I had the great fortune of reading the Tibetan and Sanskrit side by side with Ven. Lobsang Norbu Shastri, head of the research department of the Central University of Tibetan Studies. L.N. Shastri’s enthusiasm for the ethical power of vinaya narratives, his encyclopedic knowledge of Buddhist Sanskrit materials and his tendency when reading Tibetan texts to translate into Sanskrit rather than English proved of immeasurable aid in navigating the world of the MSV. Despite his many other duties, Shrikanth Bahulkar of Pune unfailingly made time to share his own angle of perceptive vision on the Sanskritic world of the MSV, which greatly enriched this project directly and indirectly. Ven. Dr. Tashi Tsering, head of the Sakya department at CUTS kindly read Buston Rinchen grub’s ‘Dul ba dge slong ma’i gleng ‘bum with me. His hermeneutic insight is reflected in the epigraph he provided for the first chapter. The erudition, humility and gentleness of spirit of all four of these exceptional scholars form a rare and deeply inspiring combination.

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As the dissertation moved into the writing stage, Karen Derris and Susanne Mrozik were indispensable conversation partners. From reading and discussing early drafts of the translations of the narratives to hammering out the structure of the dissertation as a whole to reading each chapter of this dissertation; Susanne’s voice was always clear and always on target. The chapter on bodies in particular came into being out of a conviction of the importance of her insights into the connectedness of physical and ethical being in Buddhist thought and practice. I hope it attests to some of the richness of the questions her work opens in Buddhist studies.

Karen Derris read every draft of this dissertation, and her comments continually forced me to make the steps of my arguments clearer and to extend them further, at times in directions I myself had not foreseen for them. Karen’s own work on the importance of relationships in Buddhist ethics set the baseline for much of the final shape of this dissertation. The dissertation was truly produced in conversation with her, and was as much improved by her contributions as an exceptional thinker, as the process of writing was improved by her presence as an equally exceptional friend.

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thanks for his remarkable generosity in doing so, and for declaring this project ‘status green’ at just the right moments. Karen and Ed’s children, Ben and Rebekah Murphy, were tiny but mighty contributors to the joy and ease of the writing stage. Sharing their bedtime-story quests to Percy Jackson’s world of Greek gods and young heroes enriched those months with the wonder and delight of visiting new worlds in the company of those you love.

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returning to India to live out the ethics of caring for and being cared by such companions has lent great meaning and joy to the process of completing this dissertation.

My spiritual guide, His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, has been a centrally important presence in this dissertation. It was during a trip to see His Holiness that the narratives about women in the vinaya first suggested themselves as a dissertation topic. After learning of the topic, His Holiness strongly encouraged me to pursue the project, and himself read the nuns’ narratives, later retelling some of them in his public addresses to Tibetan nuns. His firm conviction that it was a valuable topic breathed the life into this dissertation that was a sustaining force through its completion. His presence continues after completion as well, when I return to Dharamsala to work on translations and engage in further research on bhikṣuṇīs. Though I may offer him all the respectful service of which I am capable, it is clear that this is always far exceeded by what I receive in turn. His Holiness’ immeasurable kindness and support for nuns illustrate the very best that can come of the asymmetrical relations of care that we see Buddha enjoining in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya.
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Introduction

One of the central games of life in most cultures is the gender game, or more specifically the multiplicity of gender games available in that time and place. The effort to understand the making and unmaking of gender, as well as what gender makes, involves understanding these games as games, with their inclusions and exclusions, multiple positions, complex rules, forms of bodily activity, structures of feeling and desire, and stakes of winning, losing, or simply playing. It involves as well the question of how gender games themselves collide with, encompass or are bent to the service of other games, for gender is never, as they say, the only game in town.

- Sherry Ortner, Making Gender

This dissertation explores the ethics that Buddha and his monastic followers practiced as imagined in the narrative world of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya (MSV). The MSV is a multi-volume canonical text that governed various Buddhist monastic communities in India and Tibet for nearly two millennia. Through close readings of the MSV’s many narratives, this dissertation is principally concerned to understand in what ways and to what extent that ethics is gendered.

As it is presented in the MSV, the project of Buddhist monasticism opens up possibilities for fashioning new personal identities, new subjectivities and new relationships to others and to oneself. The MSV’s narratives present the processes of first envisioning and then seeking to actualize such possibilities as embedded in
specific contexts, and conditioned by local contingencies, including the particularities of the individual engaged in such transformative processes. In the ethics as it emerges in these stories, a number of such particular features combine to constitute a person: caste, family, gender and other markers of social location, their relationships with particular others, as well as individual disposition and karma. All these factors have significant roles to play in regulating what is possible for any given individual. Not all the distinguishing features that mark an individual as different from others will be salient in any given moment in the process of ethical transformation. Yet in the narratives of the MSV, gender is undoubtedly the form of human difference that most often makes a difference. As we enter the narrative world of the MSV, it will become eminently apparent that gender consistently overshadows most if not all other constitutive factors in shaping persons’ opportunities, actions and experience as they seek to realize the transformative promise of the Buddhist monastic path. This is the case for men as well as for women, but their particular gender identity has significantly different implications for each, and must be navigated differently by each as they proceed on their spiritual paths. The central place of gender in the ethical project of Buddhist monasticism has gone almost entirely unacknowledged in studies of Buddhist ethics—perhaps because gender tends to have a more perceptibly limiting effect on women than on men, and the default person in such studies is so often taken to be male.

A focus on gender as constitutive of ethical persons need not—and in fact must not—crowd out consideration of other forces, precisely because it does not function
separately from them. However, this dissertation focuses on gender because within Buddhist monasticism gender emerges as one of the single most important determinants of social location and personal identity.

The narratives of the MSV offer productive sites for such a project, because they evince an intense interest in exploring the particular ways that women’s gender must be taken into account in their spiritual paths. They also display a high degree of awareness of the presence of misogyny in and around monastic communities. Among the ways the MSV has served Buddhist monastic audiences is both in conveying rules and other instructions for life in monastic communities, as well as in providing an exercise in educating monastics’ attentiveness to the particularity of persons and situations. As such, both its literary content and its form are involved together in forwarding the ethical program imagined and actively promoted by the MSV. In addition, the stories of the MSV describes an imagined past for the Buddhist monastic community that simultaneously regulates how that community exists in the present and moves towards its future. The practices of reading brought to bear on the MSV’s narratives must reflect this wedding of rhetorical purpose and literary imagination. To read in this way requires us to take the MSV’s status as a highly sophisticated work of narrative literature into consideration, in our assessment of every literary move it makes.

At the same time, our reading practices must acknowledge that the text is not only authoritative, but expresses its authority in many narrative voices. As we proceed through this dissertation, we will be seeking to develop strategies for engaging
productively and responsibly with Buddhist texts that are both multivocal and
authoritative. By productively, I mean drawing on them as resources for thinking about
the range of social relationships, subject positions and transformative possibilities the
text might enable or authorize for those who take them as authoritative. By
responsibly, I mean without resorting to interpretive strategies that claim that one
among the multiplicity of meanings authorized “really” reigns supreme, much less
denying the presence of other potential voices.

Deploying such practices of reading, this dissertation reads the narratives of the
MSV as sustaining an argument that an understanding of the project of Buddhist
monasticism cannot ignore gender, centrally situated as it is among a constellation of
forces that interact to shape ethical persons and the social institutions that they
populate. Beginning with an exploration of the attentiveness to human particularity
that marks Buddha’s practice of ethics in the MSV, we move to examine the
constructions of women’s gender in mainstream society, and the major modification
made to those constructions when women were allowed to join the Buddhist monastic
order. With its own intense focus on the body as a site for ethical cultivation, Buddhist
monasticism seeks to offer women an alternate model of female embodiment. As we
map the complex world within this text, this dissertation explores its presentation of
Buddhist monasticism as intervening in prevailing constructions of female gender—in
ways that benefited women greatly, even as those constructions repeatedly re-inscribe
themselves in women’s lives and monastic institutions.
Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Text

Any effort to draw on the MSV as a resource for the study of Buddhist monasticism must face a number of challenges. First among these is the text’s massive size and largely unmapped internal diversity. Next, the text was composed many centuries after the events it purports to describe, and those events mark the origins of the social formation for which it serves as a premier authority, making it impossible to read as a straightforward historical record of social institutions and practices, though this has certainly been tried. Finally, the MSV’s heavy use of narratives that communicate a wide diversity of positions and voices complicates our attempts to understand how the text was used by historical communities as their authority. In this chapter, we discuss the sort of practices of reading demanded by a text that is thus both multivocal and authoritative.

Chapter Two: Ethics

This chapter introduces the ethics practiced in and by the narratives of the MSV. These narratives display an extreme attentiveness to particularity, and allow us to chart the place of gender among those particulars. When Buddha and his main disciples care for others, their ability to respond perfectly to the other’s needs requires knowledge of all the particulars involved, including gender but also the other’s personal character and individual karma. This chapter argues that because only buddhas have knowledge of all
such particulars, the ethics of particularity proposed for unenlightened monastic
subjects is *per se* an ethics of imperfection. The monastic discipline handed down in the
*MSV* therefore assumes imperfect practitioners, even as it seeks to provide conditions
for a self-fashioning that allows ethical subjects to perfect themselves and the care they
may offer others. This chapter further addresses the tension between the *MSV*’s
concern to remain attentive to human difference and the particularity of situations and
its interest in codifying its ethical program in a way that can be generally applicable to
all those persons who adopt it.

**Chapter Three: Gender**

Gender is one of a number of ways in which ethical subjects are constituted in the *MSV*,
as everywhere else. Gender interacts with other determinative factors, such as caste,
family, and personal history, understood in terms of karma, to produce the social
locations and relationships within which ethical persons are formed. This chapter first
discusses how sexual difference and female gender are constructed in the society
depicted in the *MSV*. It then looks through the lens of one story genre—the *avadāna*—to
explore the ethical agency of subjects, asking how gender comes together with other
factors to shape what is possible for any given disciple of the Buddha. Finally, it charts
the ways, large and small, that the Dharma intervenes in women’s lives to significantly
expand the range of possible futures they may envision and actualize for themselves.
Chapter Four: Bodies

Bodies are cultural products, and they are products that Buddhist monasticism is very much engaged in producing. The vinaya directs an intense focus on the body as a site of disciplining and self-fashioning. This chapter charts a range of narrative moments in which the body is made a site for monastic re-negotiation of gender as well as for ethical formation. To do so, we explore the MSV’s ambivalence towards women’s physical beauty as opposed to that of men, its anxieties regarding female vulnerability in the face of male violence and desire, and finally women’s re-appropriations of their place within the male gaze.

Chapter Five: Community

This chapter looks at the evolution of Buddhist monasticism as a sustained (and partially successful) effort to re-imagine and re-create social and personal identities for women, through the creation of an alternate social order in which such identities can be enacted. The monastic communities are by no means genderless, but rather seek to construct gender differently than is done outside the monastery. The MSV’s narratives depict numerous moments in which constructions of female gender operative outside the monastic community are re-inscribed on gender within it. Among the ways we see this re-inscription is in the figuring of Buddha as an authority protecting his female monastic wards from exploitation by monks and other men. This chapter explores the gestures towards parity between the male and female monastic orders, as well as the hierarchical relationship that generally prevails between them. It especially notes the
asymmetrical reciprocity Buddha proposes as a principle for ordering the relationship between the monks and nuns’ orders, as well as his numerous efforts to curb the potential for exploitative domination of nuns by monks. The chapter ends with an assessment of the constructions of gender within Buddhist monasticism as they come to light in the MSV’s narrative imagination, asking to what degree and in what ways it succeeds or fails to enable women to engage in the work of self-fashioning that is the overall ethical project of Buddhist monasticism.
Chapter One: Text

Scriptural texts are like soft clay.

- Tibetan Proverb
The *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* served as the final authority for various Buddhist monastic communities in India, beginning from around the first century CE, and continues to do so for Tibetan communities today. The ways the *MSV* has been used by those monastic communities have varied over time, but its centrally visible place has endured. As an exhaustive guide to monastic life, the importance of the *MSV* for the study of Buddhist monasticism in India has only recently been recognized by scholars in Buddhist studies. Access to the riches of the *MSV* for thinking about social relations, ethics and law has been rendered difficult in part by the text’s peculiar combination of narrative form and legal code with an authoritative status. It is a text ostensibly preserved to tell Buddhist monastics how to live, yet it speaks in many voices. Further, these multiple voices were given scope of expression in particular historical and geographical locations, but are understood to address all Buddhist monastics everywhere.¹ On gender in particular, the *MSV* stakes out a wide range of positions that cannot be reconciled in any simple way.

Yet its position on gender is ostensibly definitive for Buddhist monastics who hold it to be canonical. The *MSV* offers multiple answers to any question posed by the monastic women (and men) whose personal relationships, social institutions and basic way of life are grounded in the visions of monasticism that are ultimately rooted in this text.

Much is therefore at stake in the reading of this text. To approach the *MSV* as an

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¹ That is to say, all those Buddhist monastics following the particular lineage that transmitted this text, mainly those in the Tibetan cultural arena. However, as we shall discuss below, different monastic lineages will have their own counterpart to the *MSV*, but the *MSV* itself does not recognize these competing lineages, and assumes it alone represents the monastic traditions founded by Buddha.
authoritative text pushes one to seek resolution to the issues it addresses, while to read it as multivocal pushes one to recognize the contingent and provisional nature of any such resolutions.

Our particular challenge in this chapter is to consider the sort of reading practices required to access the riches of the MSV responsibly. Such practices must acknowledge the local contingencies of the production and subsequent transmission of the text, within the limitations of the partial historical record left to us. Our reading practices must also be suited to the MSV as a particular text, whose form and content work together to create meaning as a literary text. We thus begin this chapter with an introduction to the MSV as a literary text composed and transmitted in certain historical and social circumstances. We continue in the second section of this chapter to propose practices of reading that will allow us to engage the MSV productively as a resource for understanding Buddhist monasticism’s vision of women and their relationships to others.

The first thing one notices about the MSV is its size. Filling thirteen volumes and nearly 8,000 pages, the MSV is enormous. But the MSV does not simply comprise a vast expanse of text; it is a veritable textual jungle, in whose wild and luxuriant

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2 The Tibetan translation of the MSV, which is the only extant complete version, occupies the first thirteen volumes of the Tibetan bka’ gyur in most if not all of its editions. In the Derge (sDe dge) edition, as one example, the MSV (Tibetan: ’dul ba) fills volumes ka through pa of the bka’ gyur ’dul ba section. An edition of the Tibetan translation of the first section of the MSV, the Pravrajyāvastu, has been published by Eimer 1983.

3 The figure of 8,000 pages is based on the Tibetan translation in the Derge edition (Situ 1976-79). This edition contains just under 4,000 double-sided folios. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to the Tibetan henceforth are to the ‘dul ba section of this printing of the Derge bka’ gyur, as scanned and distributed electronically by the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center.
thickets lurk all manner of textual genre. The MSV contains ritual instructions, an entire legal code, discourses by Buddha and his monastic disciples, procedural debates and spells for countering snakebite. But most of all, the MSV contains stories: stories about Buddha and his disciples, yes, but also tales of murderers, adulterers and small-town scoundrels, of maidens wise beyond their years and of love-struck young men, of pacifist soldiers who shoot arrows without tips and of a courtesan so beautiful she renders all her clients impotent. The MSV was pronounced a “masterpiece of Sanskrit literature” by the great Indologist Sylvain Lévi, who quite aptly characterizes the MSV’s author(s) as “a writer whose verbal enthusiasm and rampant imagination evoke the memory of Rabelais, and the best of Rabelais.”

This narrative world of the MSV has posed a problem for its modern readers, particularly those in Buddhist studies. Of the many uses to which one imagines Rabelais being put, training monastics hardly tops the list. Yet whatever else the MSV is or appears to be, Buddhist monastics in India and in Tibet have been investing it with the supreme textual authority over their communities for nearly two millennia.

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4 For the last, see Dutt 1984v3.1: 288 The rest recur repeatedly through the text. Henceforth, all references to Dutt’s edition of Gilgit Manuscripts will be to the third volume, published in four parts. I will indicate the word by Dutt as GM, and the part of the third volume in which any given passage occurs with a Roman numeral. This passage at Dutt 1984v3.1: 288 would thus be described as GM.i: 288.

5 Coming from no less an authority on Sanskrit literature than Sylvain Lévi; this assessment is praise indeed (Lévi 1932: 23-4.)

6 Lévi 1932: 23. Lévi goes on to describe the MSV as “stories, precepts and didactic lessons mixed and interpenetrating one another in an organic whole, sketched in a unique style, with the same brio, and the same richness of vocabulary and imagery.” Lévi 1932: 24. Though Schopen does not offer his own words of appreciation for the literary style of the MSV, he does often cite Lévi’s comments. Among many such instances, see and Schopen 2007: 203. For further discussion of the language appearing in the MSV, see below in this section.

7 Nalinaksha Dutt, who prepared the first edition of the MSV, comments in the introduction to one of the volumes: “There are several stories, some of them interesting. These are written in a lucid language, but savour more of a book of fables than a religious text.” (Dutt ii: v).
Following the split of the Buddhist monastic order into various sects after Buddha’s passing, each monastic community adopted and adapted its own monastic code and a textual corpus that articulates it. The legal code, the textual corpus and monastic training program they sketch out are all known as vinaya—a sign of the complexity of the idea of what “the vinaya” actually is. In the self-presentation of each sect, its vinaya stands as the single authoritative record of Buddha’s instructions for monastic life, and any given vinaya will generally ignore the presence of rival presentations of those instructions. In addition, each sect will generally transmit a large corpus of commentarial texts, along with a living tradition of oral commentary on those texts, and these too can form part of that sect’s vinaya.

Together, these guide the textual interpretation of the vinaya as a legal code regulating conduct within a monastic community. All Tibetan Buddhist communities today are ordained in the Mūlasarvāstivādin monastic lineage, and thus hold the MSV to embody the final word on the way of life that Buddha imagined for his monks and nuns.

As it does in Tibet today still, the text that is the focus of this study once served as the definitive vinaya text for the Mūlasarvāstivādin sect in India—and that vinaya is the major historical record left by that sect in India. That is to say, the text itself is our main source of information about its own production, early reception and

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8 This dissertation follows the established convention of italicizing only those Sanskrit terms that have not appeared in dictionaries of the English language. Since such terms as vinaya, bhikṣuṇī and pratyekabuddha are attested in such dictionaries (albeit without diacritics), they appear in roman font in this dissertation. For an extended discussion of this practice as well as a list of terms that need not be italicized, see the H-Buddhism discussion list.

9 In this dissertation, when referring the vinaya as text, I refer to it as the MSV. I use Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya to refer to the vinaya as a regulatory or legal code.
transmission.\textsuperscript{10} That text is partially extant in its original Sanskrit in manuscripts penned between the fifth and seventh century, and found in Gilgit, in what is now northern Pakistan.\textsuperscript{11} To adequately historicize the MSV, and to begin to understand how such an internally diverse and narratively ebullient text comes to regulate monastic life, we would need to know a great deal more than we currently do about the world in which it was created and circulated. Though its internal diversity indicates that it is not the work of a single author, we do not know who was responsible for compiling it, or whether it had a single compiler—as seems doubtful. Nor can we say who sponsored its production, or devoted the considerable resources necessary to copy its thousands of pages, generation after generation. We cannot speak with confidence of its contexts of oral circulation, though the narratives contain elements that indicate some history of oral performance.\textsuperscript{12} We cannot say with any certainty whether its audience was exclusively monastic or also lay.\textsuperscript{13} We do not know precisely how widely its rules were observed or just how often it was consulted. Nor are we sure to what degree—if any—

\textsuperscript{10} We do have external witnesses that argue (though not always conclusively) for the presence of the MSV scattered across the Indian subcontinent. The Sanskrit manuscript cache found at Gilgit, of course, attests to its use in that area of what is now Pakistan. The travel journey of the text’s Chinese translator offer signs of its usage in both Tāmrāliptī in eastern India and Nālandā (Takakusu 1982). A second Chinese monk’s travelogue places it in Kaśmīr in the 8th century (Lévi and Chavannes 1895). The Mūlasarvāstivāda sect itself is attested in an inscription in Nālandā (Huntington 1984: 225-6). Art historians find indications that it served as a source for some of the narrative paintings in possibly fifth-century Ajanṭā; Przyluski 1920: 313-31; Lalou 1925: 333-37; Lalou 1930: 183-5 and Schlingloff 1987. (For the many page references in the latter, see Schopen 1997: 286n70.)

\textsuperscript{11} The recovery of the MSV’s manuscripts itself makes a good tale. The manuscripts came to light near Gilgit, then under British colonial administration. The 1938 excavation of the main stūpa in which the manuscripts had apparently been interred was conducted with uncharacteristic speed, and it has been suggested that some of what the stūpa held made its way onto the private market. For an account of the excavation by one of those conducting it, see Kaul Shastri 1938. The history is documented in Jettmar 1981, and in von Hinüber 1979: 329ff, the latter in German.

\textsuperscript{12} See Rotman 2008: 19-30 for a consideration of possible oral uses of the narratives of the avadāna genre found in the MSV and excerpted elsewhere.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. On this question, see especially Granoff 1996: 88-89n20.
the representations of monastic life in its pages were understood by its readers to be literary portrayals of how that life was to be lived in their own times, or whether it was read even at its inception as a retrospective image of a world already then past and gone.

What we can now say with some degree of confidence is where and when, approximately, the MSV was stabilized in its current form. After decades of running debates within Buddhist studies—debates in which prominent scholars quietly revised their estimates by several centuries—it now seems most likely that the MSV was redacted in the first or perhaps second century of the common era, in northwest India. During these discussions, several scholars’ research raised the intriguing possibility that the MSV might represent earlier layers of text than does the Pāli vinaya whose seniority had long been unquestioned. Gregory Schopen’s sustained work on

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14 Among those more recent works that now present this dating as an accepted fact, see Schopen, 2004: 489, and Clarke 2007: 30, *inter alia*.

15 The history of modern scholarship on the MSV itself gives a sense of how tenuous our knowledge of the history of this important text has been. Étienne Lamotte’s declaration (Lamotte 1958: 727) that the MSV could have been compiled no earlier than in the fourth or fifth century of the common era was long given considerable authority, although he himself later estimated a date of as three or four centuries earlier (Lamotte 1970v3: xi, and xvii - xviii). Other scholars (in particular Édouard Huber) argued that the inclusion in the MSV of the same prediction regarding the Kuśān king Kaniṣka that had helped to suggest the late date to Lamotte in fact suggests the contrary—that is, that the text was compiled closer to the time of King Kaniṣka, namely the Kuśān era (Huber 1914). It was Lamotte’s own later work on the figure of Vajrapaṇi and on the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* that inclined him to accept the much earlier date for the MSV (Lamotte 1966). In the introduction to his edition of the Gilgit manuscripts of the *Saṅghabhedavastu* of the Sanskrit MSV, Raniero Gnoni simply puts the date of its compilation “back to the time of Kaniṣka” (Gnoli 1977: xix). André Barea seems to have inclined towards an early date for the MSV, based on comparative linguistic studies, and also on his work on stūpa worship and the early Buddhist councils as they are described in the various *vinayas* (Barea 1962: 86). In his *Les sectes bouddhiques du petit véhicule*, Barea places the *vinayapitaka* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda earlier than that of the Sarvāstivāda sect,” and likewise than the majority of other *Vinayapitaka*” (Barea 1955: 154). Lévi himself had tentatively pointed to a comparatively early date for the MSV, at least relative to the Pāli *vinaya*. (Lévi 1937: 84). Barea and Marcel Hofinger also weighed in to favor reading the MSV as representing relatively early material. In his work on the Second Council, Hofinger names the MSV and
the MSV for well over a decade has brought such discussions to the current tentative consensus that places the MSV in the first or second century of the common era in the north and northwest of India, where the Kuśān empire held sway. While this may place the final redaction of the MSV earlier than once thought, we should note that this is still some five centuries after the events its narratives purport to describe.

While it may be possible for us to establish a tentative date for the finalization of the MSV in its current form, the fact that we can date the MSV as a product should not obscure the long and gradual process through which that product came to be. Nor should it obscure the fact that its narratives were likely transmitted in some form or another for centuries before they were stabilized in the form we now have them. The starting point for these processes of story-crafting, transmission and redaction, the major moments of intervention in their evolution, and the concerns that guided those interventions remain opaque to scholarly view.

As Ernst Waldschmidt, Gnoli and others have noted, what is fully visible in the linguistics and stylistics of the end product is that the MSV is an amalgamation “of different texts, laid together in different epochs” or as Waldschmidt puts it, “a heavy mix of old and new ingredients.” Such a process of gradual agglutination leaves particular marks in a work of this immense size. On occasion, stories are repeated in

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the vinaya of the Mahāsāṅghika sect as containing the oldest extant accounts of that event (Hofinger 1946: 235-41, 256).

16 See, for example, Schopen 2004: 73-80.
18 Waldschmidt 1951: 120. Translation mine.
different wording with different details in different sections of the MSV. This may suggest that they were added at different moments by different compilers unaware of each other’s efforts, which would not be surprising given the text’s length of 8,000 pages. Or, the co-existence of divergent stories might just as well suggest a literary aesthetic in which both versions had merit, consistency was little valued and narratives were not judged by their correspondence to some independent historical reality. Thus the MSV’s internal inconsistency alone does not constitute proof of multiple editorial hands, or for a brief period of hasty redaction, as Gnoli would have it.\(^{19}\)

Nevertheless, even as the underlying structure of the MSV does not appear to have suffered greatly at the hands of redactors seeking organizational consistency,\(^{20}\) modern scholars have also noted a certain consistency of language use and style in the Sanskrit editions of the Vinayavastu, which occupy the first four volumes of the MSV as it is organized in the Tibetan canon. For example, Gnoli points to signs that verb forms were changed across the text,\(^{21}\) bringing about a greater uniformity of language use. In comparing passages from Gāndhārī and Turfan fragments, Richard Salomon also detects instances of more standardized use of Sanskrit in the MSV.\(^{22}\) Variations in language are harder to detect in other volumes. The remaining volumes are not extant.

\(^{19}\) Gnoli 1977: xx-xxi.n2.

\(^{20}\) See on this point Schopen 1994: 69.

\(^{21}\) In his introduction to his edition of the Gilgit manuscript of the Saṅghahedavastu, Gnoli notes: “in spite of some unavoidable linguistic diversities, the compilers endeavored to conform, as much as possible the text throughout all the work, though in a purely formal way. A characteristic example of this tendency is the upasankram verb that in the upasankrantaḥ form replaces, as a rule, all the aorists upajagaḥ, etc., which, on the contrary, recur in the same texts, as they were found in central Asia, in a stage consequently [sic] preceding their insertion in the Vinaya.” (Gnoli 1977: xx).

\(^{22}\) Salomon 2006: 364.
in Sanskrit, and the different volumes in the Tibetan were translated by several
different translation teams. The Chinese translation we have is partial and since it is
basically a retelling of those narratives by Yijing, it too gives us little to go on in
assessing the style of the original. By and large, the text conforms relatively closely to
the Pāṇinian grammatical rules that regulate post-Vedic Sanskrit, particularly when
compared to a great deal of other Buddhist texts produced in the early first
millennium, including many later works. The MSV’s language is, however, more often
described by scholars as ‘Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit.’ J. Prabhakara Shastry, with whom
I read large portions of the Sanskrit Vinayavastu, commented that the MSV has fewer
grammatical idiosyncracies, or what he identifies as ārṣaprayoga, than the Bhāgavata
Purāṇa, which he happened to be reading with another student at that time. He argued
that given the canonical status of the vinaya textual corpus, such usages would not

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23 See below for a discussion of the value of the Chinese translation in assessing the Sanskrit. In short, the
Chinese is “not without some omissions and inversions—even in the translated parts.” (Gnoli 1977:
xxiiiin5).

24 In fact, the editions of the Sanskrit MSV that had been published by the time of his work were
considered by Edgerton in his compilation of his Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary.
(Edgerton 1993 1953). If only for the circularity of arguing that a work used by the field to define
Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit does not meet the definition of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, I will not seek here to
dispute the categorization of the MSV’s language as such.

25 As the term itself indicates, ārṣaprayoga refers to the usage (prayoga) by ṛṣis of non-standard language.
The term ārṣaprayoga can only apply to language uses appearing in a respected text attributed to a
culturally authoritative figure, such as a ṛṣi or sage. While such ārṣaprayoga usages are acceptable when
they appear in such texts, they do not sanction the use of such language elsewhere by others. The
designation is a way of acknowledging that language does not conform to Pāṇinian grammatical rules
without dismissing it as erroneous, but also without allowing such usage to proliferate elsewhere in
future works. A very distant cousin perhaps to the concept of poetic license, the label ārṣaprayoga allows
Sanskrit literary culture to remain linguistically highly conservative in general, yet tolerant of
exceptions in the case of its best practitioners. A full consideration of this analytical category could bring
into question the appropriateness of dismissing the language in at least some Buddhist Sanskrit works as
‘Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit.’ For a useful discussion of the notion of ārṣaprayoga, see Cardona 1996.

26 After the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa ranks among the most popular works of
Sanskrit religious narrative for Hindu communities.
place the MSV outside the range of acceptable uses of language in Sanskrit literature. Lévi too weighs on this style of the MSV’s commenting that “by its very oddities, the language of the Mūla Sarvāstivāda Vinaya takes on exceptional importance; it displays Pāṇinian Sanskrit that has been shaped by its circulation through real life, in a process of normal alteration, at the boundary of the prakritis and on the verge of crossing over it, had the vigilance of grammarians had not made energetic efforts, and restored the masterful language to a sanctioned level through the development of new systems (first Kātantra, later Cāndra).” Gnoli echoes part of Lévi’s observation, calling the language of the MSV “almost colloquial.”

After the first or second century as the probable start date for the circulation of the MSV in something like the form we now have it, the next known event of import in the history of the text’s transmission was the composition of a digest of rules from the MSV known as the Vinayasūtra. This collection took the form of aphoristic statements that were memorizable but virtually unintelligible without the text’s auto-commentary, the Vinayasūtravyabhidhānasvavyākhyānam, or Vinayasūtravṛtti for short.

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27 Shastry, J. Prabhakara. Personal communication, Fall 2006 in Vishakhapatnam, India.
28 Lévi 1907: 122. Translation is mine.
30 Gunaprabha’s dates remains under dispute. Gregory Schopen places Gunaprabha anywhere in the fifth through seventh centuries CE K. Sasaki argues that he must have been active between 550 through 630 CE; Schopen 2004: 64-69; Yonezawa et al 2001: 14. Schopen reviews the state of the field regarding Gunaprabha’s life and scholarship in Schopen 1994: 63-64 and 2004: 64-69, 86n55, 126-8 and 312-318. A Sanskrit edition of the Vinayasūtra found in Tibet has been published (Sankrityayana 1981), as has a critical edition of the Vinayasūtra’s section on ordination, the Pravrajyāvāstu, with its auto-commentary the Vinayasūtravyabhidhānasvavyākhyānam (Bapat and Gokhale 1982). The Tibetan translation can be found in the Derge edition of the bstan ’gyur at ’dul ba wu 1. – 100a, (Barber 1991). Ongoing research into the Vinayasūtra and the Vinayasūtravṛtti is being conducted by the Study Group of Sanskrit Manuscripts in Tibetan at the Taishō University in Tokyo.
The *Vinayasūtra* and *Vinayasūtravṛtti* were both composed by Guṇaprabha, whose work rendered the rules that are embedded in the spectacularly unwieldy *MSV* accessible for use, by pulling them out of context and reorganizing them thematically.

Along with its size, another obstacle to the use of the *MSV* as a handy guide to rules was the fact that the *MSV* is divided into multiple sections that follow several different organizational principles, and those only loosely. The four major sections of the *MSV* are: the *Vinayavastu*, *Vinayavibhaṅga*, *Kṣudrakavastu* and *Uttaragrantha*. The narrative-heavy *Vinayavastu* occupies four volumes in the Tibetan and combines a very loose structuring around topics—such as rules for ordination (*Pravrajyāvastu*), the three-month retreat required of Buddhist monastics during the rainy season (*Varṣāvastu*), food and medicine (*Bhaiṣajyavastu*) and so on. The *Vinayavibhaṅga* contains detailed explorations of the monastic precepts, providing narratives describing the situation in which each precept was first established by Buddha and usually some exegetical clarification of its wording. The *Vinayavibhaṅga* is divided in two: one *vibhaṅga* for monks and one for nuns. The *vibhaṅga* section for monks is called the *Bhikṣuvibhaṅga*, occupies four volumes and is preceded by the *Bhikṣuprātimokṣasūtra*, which presents the precepts as a list to be recited ritually. While bhikṣuṇīs must follow many of the bhikṣus’ precepts, additional rules specifically for bhikṣuṇīs are covered in a separate work, called the *Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga*, and also preceded by a handy list of the precepts in the *Bhikṣuṇīprātimokṣasūtra*. The remaining two sections, the *Kṣudrakavastu* and *Uttaragrantha*, each in two volumes and neither following any simple thematical principles. Of the two, the *Kṣudrakavastu* is far richer in narrative material, while the
Uttaragrantha contains a number of shorter works include detailed guides to applying various rules first introduced in earlier sections.

As if this were not sufficiently complex, the two Vibhanghas are each organized by class of offense. Since some forms of any given transgressive behavior may be categorized by their weight as different types of offense, discussion of that particular activity can be scattered across various volumes. With each volume running in the area of 600 pages, this is no mean obstacle to the usability of the text. The MSV itself does offer some internal devices aimed at making the text more manageable in the form of uddānas, or terse and cryptic verses listing major topics of characters in the upcoming portion of text. These uddānas follow the flow of the text, and thus refer as much or more to narratives unrelated to any rules as they do to rules themselves. While Guṇaprabha does include a fair bit of narrative material, he does so only in the service of grounding a particular rule in its charter story. As such, a major difference between the two efforts is that unlike Guṇaprabha, the MSV’s compilers were willing to assist readers in navigating the text, but never at the expense of skipping its stories.

The next major recorded event in the life of the MSV was its arrival in China. The ordination lineage of the Mūlasarvāstivāda does not appear to have been transmitted to China. The Chinese Buddhist canonical collections contain complete

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31 On uddānas in the MSV, see Panglung 1980 and Clarke 2004. A vinayamāṭṭika, yet an alternate device that might, or might not ever have served as an aide to navigating the content of the MSV, is buried deep in the final volume of the MSV. While we know a good deal about the use of such māṭṭika, or explanatory lists, in abhidharma literature, our knowledge of their place in the use of vinaya texts is next to nil. On such lists in the Pāli vinaya, see Norman 1983c: 126. For a useful exploration of what can be said of vinayamāṭṭika in general, see Clarke 2004.
translations of four different vinayas—Dharmagupta,\textsuperscript{32} Mahīśāśika, Mahāsāṅghika\textsuperscript{33} and Sarvāstivāda Vinaya.\textsuperscript{34} Even in the case of vinaya texts that were never used as the basis for monastic life in Chinese Buddhist communities, knowledge of their contents was valued nonetheless. The Mūlasarvāstivādin sect’s vinaya text was partially translated into Chinese in the beginning of the eighth century by the great master Yijing, whose journey to India from China was largely motivated by his interest in acquiring more vinaya texts.\textsuperscript{35} The Mūlasarvāstivādin ordination lineage did not take root in China, although the MSV had an afterlife in Japan, guiding a revival of Buddhist monasticism in Japan that began in the seventeenth century and endures even today.\textsuperscript{36}

Yijing’s translation is preserved in the Taishō collection.\textsuperscript{37} Frauwallner describes Yijing’s translation as “not only incomplete, but also full of gaps,”\textsuperscript{38} and Lévi calls it a translation of the “belle infidèle” type.\textsuperscript{39} Certainly, compared to the Sanskrit edition we have from Gilgit, Yijing’s Chinese version of the MSV appears to be a loose retelling. According to this own account, Yijing encountered his Sanskrit edition(s) of the MSV in Bengal, whereas the extant Sanskrit manuscript was found on the other side of the

\textsuperscript{32} An annotated translation of the nuns’ section of this vinaya from the Chinese was prepared by Anne Heirmann [sic] (2002).

\textsuperscript{33} Akira Hirakawa (1982) translated the Bhikṣūṇī vinaya of the Chinese translation of the Mahāsāṅghika’s vinaya in English. The extant Sanskrit of the closely related Mahāsāṅghika-Lokottaravādin school was edited and published by Gustav Roth, and an annotated translation into French prepared by Edith Nolot. (Roth 1970; Nolot 1991).

\textsuperscript{34} Prebish 1994.

\textsuperscript{35} Takakusu 1982.

\textsuperscript{36} Clarke 2006.

\textsuperscript{37} T.1422-1451

\textsuperscript{38} Frauwallner 1956: 195.

\textsuperscript{39} Lévi 1912: 509.
subcontinent, near Gilgit in the northwest of India. Because Tibetans were engaged in
intensive contact with northwest India at the time the MSV was translated from
Sanskrit to Tibetan, it seems possible that Yijing’s Chinese translation was in fact rather
more faithful than it is generally taken to be, but to a different Sanskrit recension than
was interred in Gilgit and was translated into Tibetan. Even if so, whatever the
historical conditions may have been, the Chinese appears to represent a rather
different text than does the extant Sanskrit and Tibetan. Were the aim of this
dissertation to triangulate back to a putative original edition of the MSV, it would be
crucial to consider the Chinese translation. However, my aim here is to excavate the
vision of ethics and gender as it appears in the MSV that we do have, in the form that
became authoritative for Tibetan Buddhist monastic communities, rather than
construct a new and improved MSV that may or may not have been authoritative for
anyone. I thus refer to Chinese renditions of narratives only rarely, preferring to treat
them as appreciative reworkings of what we find in the extant Sanskrit and Tibetan.

About a century later, the MSV was later translated into Tibetan, in its entirety
or what we assume to be its entirety. The ninth-century Tibetan translation was
sponsored by the Tibetan kings, who issued a decree mandating that the MSV and only
the MSV be translated to serve as the foundational text for the monastic life in Tibet.
The result was a “scrupulously literal” translation that walks in near lockstep with

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40 The completeness of a text is far less easily proven than is its incompleteness. This is particularly so in the case of the MSV. Nevertheless, there is every indication that the Tibetan translation reflects the complete text as it was available to its translators in the ninth century.

41 Scherrer-Schaub 2002.

42 Lévi 1912: 509.
those portions of the Sanskrit we do have available, making the Tibetan translation a valuable resource for study of the MSV for the large swatches of text for which we have no Sanskrit.

However, the great 14th-century Tibetan polymath, Buston Rin chen Grub (1290 – 1364), noted disparities between the Tibetan translation of the Bhikṣuṇīprātimokṣasūtra in which the bhikṣuṇīs’ rules appear in list form, and the Tibetan translation of Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga that contains the charter stories describing their first formulation and exegetical discussions of the rules. His observations led Buston to conclude that the Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga is not affiliated to the Mūlasarvāstivādin lineage and thus does not belong in the MSV. Closer analysis and comparison to the Chinese, however, suggest that it is the Bhikṣuṇīprātimokṣasūtra whose sectarian affiliation must be questioned. These comments by Buston were brought to the attention of scholars in Buddhist studies by Claus Vogel and Gregory Schopen, and we may add to their references a more forceful statement of this conclusion by Buston at the end of his own commentary on the Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga, the dge slong ma’i rnam ’byed don gsal. This work

43 The numerous divergences we will note as we explore narratives in later chapters confirm this impression.

44 See again Schopen (2004: 284n67 and 2008: 231-232), who points to the likelihood that it is the Prātimokṣasūtra, rather than the Vibhaṅga, that was supplied from another vinaya lineage. Clarke (2007: 329n30) argues that the identification of the Tibetan vibhaṅga as Mūlasarvāstivāda should be considered secure, though that of the Prātimokṣasūtra may be questioned, drawing evidence from a comparison of the Tibetan to Yijing’s Chinese translation, noting that the enumeration of the rules in the Chinese prātimokṣasūtra matches that of the Tibetan vibhaṅga.

45 See Vogel (1985: 110) for the first instance. Schopen (2004: 284n67 and elsewhere) adds that Buston also makes this comment at the end of ’Dul ba dge slong ma’i gleng ’bum.

46 The full title of this work as found in the Lhasa Zhol edition of his collected works, in volume 22 or za, is dge slong ma’i rnam par ’byed pa’i don gsal bar byed pa snying po gsal ba. Buston therein concludes: Collected Works, za 45a5-6: ma’i rnam par ’byed pa bod du ‘gyur pa ‘di ni/ dge slong ma’i ltung ba’i grangs dang/ go rim
by Buston is, to my knowledge, the only full-fledged commentary on the
Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga by a Tibetan scholar, yet seems to have been entirely overlooked by
scholars of Buddhist studies. For the purposes of this dissertation, which looks at the
narratives found in the Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga rather than the rules as listed in the
Bhikṣuṇīprātimokṣasūtra, the sectarian affiliation of the Bhikṣuṇīprātimokṣasūtra is not of
great import.

At some point in the history of its transmission, it appears that the narratives of
the MSV ceased to be widely read within the monastic communities it ostensibly
governed.\(^{47}\) Somewhere along the way, numerous other commentaries on the
Mūlasarvāstivādin monastic rules contained in the prātimokṣa sūtras and vibhaṅgas were
produced in Sanskrit.\(^{48}\) The commentarial texts evince varying degrees of interest in
the MSV’s stories, mainly those of the nidāna (Tibetan: gleng gzhi) genre, which ground
each rule in the precedent that gave rise to it, but on the whole their focus is directed
at the MSV’s legal and regulatory pronouncements. This narrowing of interest in the
MSV took place sometime during a long and insufficiently documented period before
the ninth century CE, when Tibetan Buddhists inherited it and the Vinayasūtra from
their Indian predecessors. Today, the volumes of the MSV are carefully wrapped in silk
and placed high on the altars in Tibetan monasteries, while the Vinayasūtra is read,
studied and its aphoristic sūtras memorized and debated in the monastery’s courtyards. The Vinayasūtra is now widely referred to as the “root” vinaya text (Tib: ‘dul ba mdo rtsa ba), reflecting its replacement of the MSV as the source on which Tibetan vinaya learning is based.⁴⁹ The MSV itself is no longer part of the curriculum at any monastic educational institution, and is generally read only by the most learned of Tibetan vinaya virtuosi. However, some of the narratives of the MSV have indirectly found their way into Tibetan monastic literary culture, mainly via avadāna collections or through the occasional retelling of stories in commentarial works. Additionally, a number of Tibetan authors produced collections of selected charter stories from the MSV. Such collections are by no means exhaustive and tend to exclude biographical narratives and avadānas. In any case, the vast majority of narratives considered in this dissertation do not appear in either of the two main collections in this minor sub-genre.⁵⁰

It bears mentioning that as rich a source of narrative about women as the MSV is, it was not the only text preserved in the Mūlasarvāstivāda lineage concerned with women’s spiritual lives. As noted by Peter Skilling, the Mūlasarvāstivādins had once transmitted a counterpart to the Pāli Therīgāthā collection of verses attributed to nuns that until now has been the primary source for material for those seeking to study the

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⁴⁹ The term “root” (Sanskrit mūla; Tibetan: rtsa ba) is used to describe the senior-most text, teacher or other authority in a given lineage, evoking the sense of the deepest ground from which something springs. As such this nomenclature works to efface the Vinayasūtra’s derivative status.

⁵⁰ Buston is the first known composer of such texts, with his ‘dul ba gleng ’bum chen mo and ‘dul ba dge slong ma’i gleng ’bum, excerpting the charter stories for the vows of bhikṣus and bhikṣunis, respectively Buston 2000a and 2000c). dGe ’dun grub pa (1391-1474) also produced an important example in his ‘dul ba gleng ’bum (dGe ’dun grub pa 1970).
lives of women in early Buddhism.\footnote{Skilling cites two passages in the MSV in which the text is named, as well as a reference to a Bhikṣuṇīgāthā in the Chinese Saṃyuktāgama (Skilling 2001b:246). The two Sanskrit citations are Dutt iv:188.9 and Gn 1978 64.17; the corresponding Tibetan can be found in the Vinayavastu at Derge Ka 303a6 and Derge Ga 225b1, respectively.} Called the Sthavirīgāthā and paired with a similar text addressing monks, called the Sthaviragāthā, the pair of texts are mentioned in several places in the MSV. To those references collected by Skilling, we may add a further mention of the text appearing in the Tibetan translation of the commentary to the Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa-sūtra.\footnote{Āryasarvāstivādimalabhikṣuṇīprātimokṣa-sūtravṛtti. The mention of the Sthavirīgāthā is found at Derge bstan 'gyur 'dul ba Tsu 157b5, where it is entitled gNas bṛtan ma'i tshiṅs su bcad pa, the title attested in the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit passages where the original Sanskrit title appears.} Sadly, the Sthavirīgāthā is no longer extant in Sanskrit or in any other language.

As we have seen, the MSV’s place in the field of Buddhist studies has shifted considerably over the last half-century. Even its dating has varied over multiple centuries. Scholars have recently begun to move towards a consensus that the MSV was more important for the history of the development of Buddhist monasticism in India than the Pāli vinaya that was earlier thought to hold most sway.\footnote{Acceptance of this proposition is by no means unanimous, and too often still comments presented by otherwise careful scholars as representative of ‘the’ vinaya per se are true of the Pāli, but not of the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya. Lévi was already lamenting in 1907 that the Pāli vinaya had been “too long accepted to be the vinaya par excellence.” (Lévi 1907: 120). Yet a full century later, in 2007, Oskar von Hinüber argued that nuns had not been ordained during the time of the Buddha, based on the absence of any instances in which the Buddha addresses nuns directly. While this may be true of the Pāli vinaya, it is certainly not so of the MSV. von Hinüber 2007. (It should be noted that lively discussion followed his presentation, and that in the version of this talk revised for publication, von Hinüber does qualify his comments and notes exceptions in a footnote; von Hinüber 2008: 21.)} Yet the MSV continues to pose methodological challenges to those who would use it for studies of that history. The meagerness of the historical record surrounding its use by Buddhist communities is a serious impediment to any attempt to situate the MSV in an actual
historical world during the first half millennium of its circulation, and by the time that record thickens, in Tibet, the MSV’s role as arbiter of monastic life has been supplanted by Gunaprabha’s digest. The sheer size and dizzyingly complex structure are further impediments to simply managing the information internal to the text, much less coaxing forth a coherent view of gender, social relations, or any other topic one might wish to explore within it. However, reading the MSV as a work of literature with a great deal to say about those topics gives us a way to begin to engage this text. For, as this brief introduction should make quite clear, whatever else it is, the MSV is also a large and roomy literary home that generously hosts diverse and numerous narrative inhabitants.

Sources Used

In total, less than one sixth of the MSV survives in Sanskrit, almost entirely from the first of the four major divisions, the Vinayavastu. The major source for the Sanskrit MSV is the manuscript cache found in the 1930s near Gilgit, in what is now Pakistan.\textsuperscript{54} Although the surviving Sanskrit from Gilgit numbers roughly 1,000 pages, it does not represent a complete text of the Vinayavastu. Of the remaining three divisions of the MSV, there is next to nothing in Sanskrit. From the vibhaṅga division, there is only the

\textsuperscript{54} See note 11 above.
Sanskrit for the *prātimokṣa sūtra* that precedes the *vibhaṅga* itself.\(^{55}\) From the *Kṣudrakavastu*, several pages of an account of the foundation of the nuns’ order survive,\(^{56}\) and from the *Uttaragrantha* no Sanskrit has been identified thus far.

A reproduction of the manuscripts found at Gilgit was published in 1974 by Raghu Vira and Lokesh Chandra. The major critical editions of the Sanskrit *MSV* are Dutt, 1984 [1947], Gnoli 1977, Gnoli 1978a, and Gnoli 1978b. Bagchi 1970 is essentially a lightly redacted edition based on Dutt’s first edition, and is as likely to introduce new errors as it is to correct earlier ones. Scholars continue to produce editions of individual sections of the Sanskrit *MSV*, as well as more fragmentary manuscript portions, with a great deal of important work done over the past two decades.\(^{57}\) Scattered fragments of the *MSV* in Sanskrit continue to be identified, often within manuscript collections from central Asia, even as work advances on the editing and re-editing of previously identified manuscript fragments. So too do projects to offer bibliographic cataloguing of Sanskrit materials.\(^{58}\)

In the translations that appear in this dissertation, I translate from the Sanskrit where extant, and the Tibetan where not. For the Sanskrit, I follow Gnoli’s editions whenever available, indicating these sources as “Gn,” or Nalinaksha Dutt’s edition of the Gilgit manuscripts in four parts, all occupying the third volume of his *Gilgit*

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\(^{56}\) Ridding and de la Vallée Poussin 1920 and Schmidt 1993.


Manuscripts, published in four parts. These are cited as “GM,” followed by a roman numeral indicating the part of the third volume in which any given passage occurs.

The majority of narratives considered herein are not extant in Sanskrit, and are thus translated from the Tibetan. All references to Tibetan texts are to the Derge edition of the bka’ ’gyur edited by Situ Panchen, published as the from the sde dge mtshal par bka’ ’gyur, and scanned by the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center. These will be cited as “Derge,” followed by the syllable of the volume within the ‘dul ba section in which the MSV is found.

**Mining the MSV**

This dissertation brings heretofore neglected material from the MSV into ongoing conversations about Buddhist ethics, narrative and, especially, gender in Buddhist monasticism. However, the aim of this study is not the mere production of knowledge about these topics. As does all other scholarship, this dissertation enacts discursive practices that are both productive and purposeful. As the producer of such discourse, to aid readers I wish to be as explicit as possible about the aims and interests that determine the discursive practices in which I will be engaging. In this and the final section of this chapter, I will first critically explore the range of reading practices that have been deployed on the MSV by other scholars, and then ask what other practices it might warrant or require. Next I will explore the considerations this dissertation

59 Situ 1976-79.
weighs in its reading of the MSV for what it might allow us to see about gender in Buddhist monasticism. Finally, I will discuss my aims in doing so.

We begin with the uses that Buddhist studies has found for the MSV thus far. The MSV scholarship to which we are today heirs can be divided into an era before and an era after the work of Gregory Schopen, with the provisos that some European scholars writing in a more philological tradition continue in the trajectory set by the earlier era,\(^{60}\) while some work by scholars before Schopen diverged from this pattern as well.\(^{61}\) But by and large, prior to Schopen, academic studies of the MSV were most often driven by one or both of two sets of concerns: first, to situate the MSV and the sect that produced it temporally relative to the other surviving sects and their vinaya texts, and secondly, to compare the rules within the MSV to other vinayas rules. Both sets of concerns were enlivened by a quest for the origins of Buddhism.

With its philological emphasis, this era was enormously fruitful for the production of critical editions of the MSV, including Nalinaksha Dutt’s 1939 edition of the Gilgit manuscripts and Gnoli’s 1977-78 editions. Their works first introduced many scholars to the Sanskrit MSV and alerted them to its fecundity for further research. The work of scholars during this era also drew attention to many of the elements in the MSV that would allow later scholars to finally place the MSV at the opening of the first millennium in north India.

\(^{60}\) This is so of Klaus Vogel, Oskar von Hinüber, Ernst Waldschmidt, among others.

\(^{61}\) Among these we may number Édouard Chavannes, Marcel Hofinger, Marcelle Lalou and Sylvain Lévi, who diverge if only in treating the MSV as a work of literary interest in its own right.
When scholars in the earlier period analyzed the MSV’s chronology and its relation to other sects, they did so in hopes of determining which among the vinayas could tell us most about Buddha’s own time and the period of the early formation of monastic institutions. On the naive understanding of textuality prevalent at that time, the closer the moment of production of a vinaya text was to the events it purported to depict, the more reliable a picture of early Buddhism it could be held to display.

In Erich Frauwallner we have an early proponent of the possibility of connecting with early Buddhism through the MSV. 62 With his notion that vinaya texts might chart a trail back to the earliest moments of Buddhist textual and institutional history, Frauwallner postulated the existence of a pre-schismatic vinaya text, given cohesion and narrative force through its organization around the biography of the Buddha. In The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature, published in 1956, Frauwallner raised the hope of scaffolding back some “first great literary work of Buddhism”63 by text-critical studies of extant materials, among which he reckoned the MSV to be particularly promising.

Although Frauwallner’s proposal of a single original text was reproved by Lamotte soon after its publication, Frauwallner’s basic impulse to find in the vinaya our best chance at reconstructing early Buddhism continued to resonate elsewhere. This

62 Frauwallner 1956.
tendency persisted, and even as recently as 1989, we have from H. Matsumara an effort to weed out corruptions and find agreement in an effort to get at an Ur vinaya text.\textsuperscript{64}

Lamotte himself envisioned a gradual evolution of the vinaya texts and the narratives they contain, moving towards greater consistency later in time.\textsuperscript{65} In this, Lamotte inverted Frauwallner’s model for judging which vinaya texts can yield most insights into early Buddhism, with diversity providing a better marker for antiquity than agreement. Although there was considerably more to Lamotte’s revision of Frauwallner’s thesis, what he left in place was the assumption that vinaya texts best contribute to Buddhist studies as historical records of early monasticism, albeit irksomely difficult to date and handle. In the race to return to the days of early Buddhism—to which vinaya texts had been understood to be conveying us—one saw challenges to a long-cherished belief that the vinaya extant in Pāli had a decided head start, representing, as it was supposed, earlier Buddhism than might be available in any Sanskrit text.\textsuperscript{66}

Schopen himself at first placed the MSV no earlier than the fifth century, using that relatively late dating to advance his argument that archaeology and inscriptive evidence was prior and offered a better way to get at earlier points in Buddhism’s

\textsuperscript{64} Matsumara 1989.

\textsuperscript{65} Lamotte 1958.

\textsuperscript{66} After Levi’s 1907 comment to this effect, Schopen took up the call, arguing in numerous places that the Pāli vinaya does not show the signs he would look for to indicate it had developed as an early monastic code in India. For just one of numerous instances, see Schopen 1995: 122. In this move, Schopen affirms and offers evidence supporting the view of Lamotte, who argues in his magisterial work on the history of Indian Buddhism that the Pāli vinaya was used by Buddhists in Sri Lanka but had never served to guide any monastic community in India; Lamotte 1958: 167-8.
history. He later reversed that opinion, placing the date in the first or second century, as noted above. But his major break with his predecessors is that Schopen actually sought to make good on the promise of the MSV, drawing on its content as a resource for a social history of Buddhist monasticism. He did so by mining the MSV for data that could be extracted and placed alongside epigraphy and other material evidence to form a cohesive field of data. This process of selection of salient details from the MSV was conducted in service of an abiding aim stated again and again throughout his large opus of writings on Buddhist monasticism: to debunk the myth of the impecunious Buddhist monk living an austere life wholly given over to meditation and other pious acts, and to lay the blame for perpetuating such a myth at the feet of those whose view of Buddhist monasticism owed too much to texts and not enough to how it appears 'on the ground.'

What we have seen so far of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya would seem, then, to provide good grounds for asserting both a close contemporaneity and a close if not intimate connection between much of what it contains and the religious world of pre-Kuṣāṇ and Kuṣāṇ North India that is reflected in the epigraphical and archeological records. ... But our Code [Schopen’s term for the MSV] in any case also

67 Schopen 1997: 25. “Of our Sanskrit sources, almost all from central Asia, probably none is earlier than the fifth century, and the Gilgit Manuscripts, which appear to contain fragments of an Ekottarāgama, are still later.”

68 This is the clarion call of Schopen’s massively influential article “Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism,” and has been repeated in some form or another in nearly of his work since. (Schopen 1991) In fact, this was not the first time he had struck the now familiar note. In 1984, he writes: “In fact this epigraphical material has—as I have said elsewhere—at least two distinct advantages. First of all, much of it predates by several centuries our earliest actually datable literary sources. Secondly, it tells us what a fairly large number of Indian Buddhists actually did, as opposed to what—according to our literary sources—they might or should have done.” (Schopen 1984: 110).
provides us with a glimpse into the Buddhist monastic world out of which it comes, and it already indicates how far removed this world is from that preserved in popular works and textbooks and even in otherwise good scholarly work.  

Schopen’s use of the MSV as a resource for social history shares far more with his scholarly ancestors than might seem to be the case at first glance. The crucial continuity between Schopen and those who worked on the MSV before him lies precisely in their understanding of the relation of narrative worlds to ‘actual’ worlds, and a tendency to underestimate the implications of the fact that the MSV is a literary text, and not a historical artifact of roughly the same order as bones and stones.

Particularly in the initial years of his research, Schopen and his predecessors shared a broadly held—and largely unexamined—assumption that the text provides a window onto the Buddhist monastic world of the past. Largely missing from his analysis was the basic fact that this particular piece of evidence is textual. Schopen revised earlier notions as to just where in the past we are looking when we peer through the lens of the MSV. Aiming now at a later period, Schopen then classified the MSV along with archaeology and epigraphy as better sources for Buddhism on the

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69 Schopen 2004: 25.
70 Of course, the epigraphical inscriptions Schopen works with are also texts. But the methodological issues surrounding Schopen’s use of these sources is not the concern of this dissertation.
71 One of Schopen’s major contributions was to argue for the value of the MSV even if it was not composed in the infancy of Buddhist monasticism. In one of his numerous formulations, Schopen writes: “The accounts of Pilinda can almost certainly not tell us anything about what early Buddhist groups were. They, and the vinayas we have about them, can, however, tell us a great deal about what those groups had become. There are good reasons for thinking that neither account could have been redacted much before the first or second century C.E. Such a suggested date is, of course, usually enough to have a text or passage dismissed as ‘late’ and of little historical value. But to do so, I think, is to miss completely the importance of such documents: they are important precisely because they are ‘late’.” (Schopen 2004: 212).
ground than those used by what he elsewhere calls 'textual Buddhism'—a claim that is startling for its bid to efface the textuality of the MSV.\textsuperscript{72}

Indeed, the MSV's textuality has remained one of the blind spots in the scholarship produced thus far on that text. In a 1990 rejoinder to Schopen's work, Charles Hallisey writes of the dangers of using canonical vinaya texts as “a ready source for extracting usable historical data.”\textsuperscript{73} In that article, Hallisey questions Schopen's impulse to demand that the Pāli vinaya provide an image of Buddhist monasticism as it was led historically. In the work to which Hallisey responds in this article, Schopen had basically argued that the absence of rules regarding stūpas in the Pāli vinaya must mean that the mention of stūpas had been systematically excised from the text, since we know Buddhist monasteries had stūpas.\textsuperscript{74} As one factor complicating Schopen's use of the vinaya, Hallisey points out that monastics tend to rely heavily on secondary commentarial material—a fact that is even more true of the Mūlasarvāstivāda in Tibet than it is of Pāli-based monasticism. Hallisey writes:

\textsuperscript{72} As immensely productive as Schopen's scholarship has been for our thinking about the concerns of Buddhist monasticism, the impulse to take textual discussions of financial instruments or institutional formations as indicative of their presence in the world around the text requires better hermeneutical grounding than has been provided thus far. There is simply nothing in this method of reading the text that prevents one from taking the MSV as offering proof of the existence of all manner of man-eating demon in northwest India during that period, given the corroborating evidence of statuary and other archaeological remains that also refer to such creatures.

\textsuperscript{73} Hallisey 1990: 207.

\textsuperscript{74} In concluding his argument, Schopen says, “If this interpretation is not correct, and the Pāli vinaya did not contain such rules, then either it could not have been the vinaya which governed early Buddhist monastic communities in India, or it presents a very incomplete picture of early and actual monastic communities in India, and has, therefore, little historical value as a witness to what we know actually occurred on a large scale at all of the earliest monastic sites in India that we have some knowledge of.” Schopen 1997: 94.
This associated literature makes relating the canonical *Vinaya* to actual practice in diverse contexts more complex than has generally been admitted by students of Buddhism.\(^\text{75}\)

Schopen’s later work indicates a concern to address this charge. An initial response to Hallisey’s caveat at the difficulty of a simple move from text to world was to propose to simply bracket the text from the world. In an article in which he cites Hallisey’s cautionary note, Schopen says he will “correct some of what has gone before” by providing:

> ...a more comprehensive *sketch*, though by no means a complete study, of the place of monastic funerals in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya sources. Nothing more.\(^\text{76}\)

Schopen began increasingly to qualify his assertions about the relationship of information he culled from the *MSV* to the world it described. At times he scales his assessment of what the *MSV*’s musings reflect to simply the authors’ preoccupations, which in itself he rightly finds valuable. Schopen’s analysis also began to factor in the possibility that the authors’ interests might play some role in shaping the *MSV*’s representations. Writing five years after Hallisey’s cautionary comments, Schopen says:

> However tiresome it may be, we must start with particulars and particularity and look closely at how, for example, the literate members of these monastic Orders saw, or wanted others to see, particular and presumably significant moments in their own institutional histories.\(^\text{77}\)

\(^\text{75}\) Hallisey 1990: 207; cited in Schopen 2004: 287.

\(^\text{76}\) Schopen 2004: 287.

\(^\text{77}\) Schopen 2004: 195.
Nevertheless, we continue to find considerable slippage between evidence of a vinaya’s preoccupation with a topic or its ability to imagine an object or practice, and the actual presence of that thing or phenomenon at that time of the text’s composition or circulation.

A further issue that has plagued efforts to put the MSV to such uses is the fact that the MSV was pieced together from material initially composed over several centuries. The issue of how to use as a historical document a piece of evidence that belongs to no single period remains vexing. When the MSV recounts tales of unusual funeral or money-lending practices, or stories about the mischievous deeds of naughty monks, these might indicate such activity in the monastic communities when the MSV was finally redacted, or during one of its earlier layers of composition and agglutination. But then again, they might not. It might simply mean they were able to imagine such practices. In the case of, say, the many tales of misconduct in the vinaya, their presence might just indicate that the narrator(s) imagined that there once had been such activities, by some very naughty monks, when the monastic community was first formed. Alternately, it might reflect the narrators’ wish that their readers believe that the early saṅgha was rather badly behaved—perhaps so that the misdeeds of the narrator’s contemporary monks might seem less egregious, or conversely to set up a contrast to the relatively well-behaved monks of the narrator’s era. Or, quite possibly, the narrators feared that monastics might one day engage in such activities, and they thus emulated the figure of the Buddha in his anticipating the needs of future generations of monks, and fictitiously depicted such acts preemptively in order to
prohibit them. Or perhaps what we see at any given moment arises from the obviously fertile imaginations of the consummate storytellers whose art dazzles us as we read the MSV. After all, they have a right to serve too their own muses and amused audiences. And, of course, perhaps some combination of the above might be in play. The point is that without considering the fullness of its literary form, excerpted bits of content from the MSV cannot alone tell us which of these interpretations, if any, is sound. Thus far, scholars of Buddhist studies have too often set out to quarry the MSV for usable gems without serious regard for the sort of terrain in which they are embedded.\footnote{In her work on the Ugraparipṛchchhā, Jan Nattier sounds an important cautionary note against “the error of reading normative statements as if they were prescriptive,” a trend she rightly notes has plagued vinaya studies in particular. In her section on “Extracting Historical Data from a Normative Source,” Nattier then goes on to detail recommendations that would allow bits of data to be carefully “extracted” from their textual contexts. These principles seek to apply a healthy hermeneutics of suspicion to the text’s representations, but could go farther in taking into account the complexity of discursive practices at play in textual representations. For example, the first guideline, called the ‘principle of embarrassment’ allows an interpreter to take as very likely true any depictions of situations or practices that are unflattering to the author or the group to which he or she belongs. Describing this principle, Nattier relates a story from the Pāli vinaya in which monks fail to impress the lay community and sit around like “dumb hogs,” as the narrator puts it. Nattier concludes that this must reflect historical reality, because such a story “would hardly have been viewed as flattering to the Buddhist community.” (Nattier 2003: 63-69.) This principle is rooted in assumptions not only that authors’ aim are simply to paint themselves and their community in the best possible light, but also that a text’s means of pursuing that interest will always be perfectly straightforward. Given the MSV’s taste for the farcical and the bawdy, and its delight in describing its characters in unthinkably compromising situations, the application of such a principle would yield a truly hilarious picture of monastic life.}

In other words, modern scholarship has tended to engage what Dominic LaCapra calls the ’documentary’ aspect of vinaya texts, while ignoring their ’worklike’ aspects, or the texts’ capacity to produce effect in its readers. As LaCapra defines it:

The documentary situates the text in terms of factual or literal dimensions involving reference to empirical reality and conveying information about it. The “worklike” supplements empirical reality by adding to and subtracting from it. It thereby involves dimensions of the
text not reducible to the documentary, prominently including the roles of commitment, interpretation and transformation... With deceptive simplicity, one might say that while the documentary marks a difference, the worklike makes a difference—one that engages the reader in recreative dialogue with the text and with the problems it raises.\(^79\)

In the case of a text explicitly engaged in a sustained program of ethical disciplining, to overlook the differences the text seeks to make in its audience can only result in a significantly impoverished reading of the text. While we have gained immeasurably from Schopen’s careful culling of the MSV for a plethora of details useful in constructing a social history of Buddhist monasticism, Buddhist studies would be well served also by greater sophistication in the handling of the MSV as a literary source, but also as a religious text whose rhetorical aims range far beyond the conveying of data. As Pierre Hadot has shown in looking at classical Greek works, texts that are situated within transformative programs—as the MSV certainly is—have work-like effects on their readers that must be considered when understanding how those texts can be productive their field of readers. He notes:

> Above all, the work, even if it is apparently theoretical and systematic, is written not so much to inform the reader of a doctrinal content but to form him, to make him traverse a certain itinerary in the course of which he will make spiritual progress.\(^80\)

In this angle of vision, texts like the MSV are seen not simply as records of a past moment or as products of a cultural world independent of and situated outside them.

\(^79\) LaCapra 1983: 30.

\(^80\) Hadot 1995: 64.
Rather, the MSV works to shape its own context and produce its own future community of readers, through its effects on readers.

**Practices of Reading**

This dissertation will depart from the pattern set by Gregory Schopen and earlier scholars who have studied the MSV, in which the content of its narratives are taken as mimetic descriptions of actual historical practices, while the literary form of the narratives is regarded as largely irrelevant. The status of the MSV as a literary text remains one of the blind spots in scholarship on the text, and this project will seek to demonstrate the benefits of reading the MSV narratives as literary texts rather than as historical documents or legal code.

To begin to develop reading practices suited to that end, certain basic questions need to be considered. We have noted the severe limitations to what we can say of its historical contexts of production. In general, even our knowledge of the world in which the text evolved up to and during its period of final redaction remains sketchy. We do know something of the text’s later contexts of reception and transmission, particularly in Tibet. We also know that the text has ceased to be read by monastics in Tibetan Buddhist communities, if it ever was. But we know precious little of the earlier contexts of uses in India, and far less than would be necessary for a full historicization of the reading practices brought to bear on it. In short, we lack the most basic desideratum for
historicizing a literary text. Even without that, a full study of the MSV would need to address some very basic questions that have gone largely unasked in Buddhist studies, including: What kind of text is the MSV? In what literary genres does it participate? Who are its implied audience(s), its author figure(s), its central concerns, and what work might its discursive practices seek to perform?

Such a task could sustain many a book-length study. For the purposes of the present study, we will attend most closely to those issues that affect our reading of gender in the MSV. To begin with, we note that representations are profoundly rooted in the interests of those who produce and propagate them, as Edward Said has taught us.81 The MSV is a monastic text engaged in the distinctly charged activity of representing its own origins. Because the Buddhist monastic order sees its institutions and practices as founded and authorized directly by Buddha, and only by Buddha, its representations of his activities in founding and shaping that order in the past can act as productive tools for shaping that community’s present and future. Particularly in a text that combines narratives with an explicit regulatory function, there is a great deal at stake in how the monastic community chooses to imagine its origins.

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81 For one early formulation, see Said 1979: 272: “The real issue is whether there can be a real representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer.” Said then offers an answer to this question, in ways that have deeply informed Buddhist studies—though certainly not all corners of it—and that continue to have relevance for this dissertation. He says, speaking of representations of ‘the Orient,’ “it operates as representations always do. For a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual and even economic setting. In other words, representations have purposes, they are effective much of the time, they accomplish one or many tasks.” (Said 1979: 273) In discussing the worklike aspects of this text, we will be asking what might be the “one or many tasks” a given narrative representation accomplishes.
Further, this dissertation examines the representations of women in a monastic text that on the one hand offers vastly different possibilities for their personal empowerment, and on the other sets the boundaries within which women may seek to enact those possibilities. Any reading that does not take into consideration the politics of representation is bound to be simply subjected to the authority of those representations. And when it comes to representing gender, it is particularly incumbent upon us to allow for the potential interests of those putting forward any given representation. (This holds true as well for the representation presented by this dissertation; I will address the purposes of my own activity of producing discourses below.)

Our efforts to read with an eye to the potential interests of the representers is made more complicated—though certainly not impossible—by their anonymity. We have noted that the authorship is unknown, though its compilers and final redactors were mostly likely Mūlasarvāstivāda monastics living in the first century or so, in Kuṣān-controlled north India. We have noted that the MSV was likely redacted by monks. The narratives this study takes up may therefore be male representations of women and their experiences, though we cannot rule out the possibility that some of the narratives had been told by women at some point in their transmission history. As such, some of what we are hearing may well contain whispers (or more) of women’s voices. But if indeed the MSV is entirely the product of a male imagination, it is all the more noteworthy just how aware its narrators are of gender issues, how densely they populate the world of the text with women and how competently they describe
activities situated firmly by the text within women’s domain, such as child-rearing.\textsuperscript{82} Although one of the 13 volumes of the MSV is devoted to nuns and their precepts, narratives about nuns and lay women occur throughout the vinaya, and there is virtually no volume in which female characters are not given important roles in one narrative or another. In short, although on the whole far more monks and lay men appear than nuns and lay women, the MSV’s vision of the Buddhist community clearly comprises all four groups of Buddhist followers: monks, nuns, lay women and lay men.

Though we know nothing of its historical compiler, the MSV, like all other texts, does produce what Michel Foucault calls its own “author figure.” In his seminal 1970 article, “What is an Author?,” Foucault explores “the singular relationship that holds between an author and a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it.”\textsuperscript{83} On this model, the text itself communicates to its readers the sort of author they should imagine to stand behind it, initiating and authorizing its discursive practices.\textsuperscript{84} Historically the term ‘author’ would appear anachronistic in the case of the MSV, in which we rather see the hands of narrators, compilers and redactors. Nevertheless, the MSV rather explicitly points to a sort of “author figure” for itself, in its inclusion of an account of its own birth as a text, in the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{82} As one instance, in an incident we shall discuss below, the nun Sthūlanandā is portrayed entering a home and encountering a young mother alone, and at a loss as to how to care for her newborn. The narrator runs through a long list of caretaking acts that Sthūlanandā performs “in an instant.” Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 197b6-7.

\textsuperscript{83} Foucault 1980 [1970]: 115.

\textsuperscript{84} As Foucault describes it, “the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society.” (Foucault 1980: 124).
\end{footnotesize}
form of a description of the first council after Buddha’s passing. At that council, the
MSV tells us, a group of senior and highly attained monks formally agreed upon a
wording of the vinaya as accurately reflecting historical events and Buddha’s
instructions, and then entrusted the transmission of that collection to the one among
them who had recited it, Upāli. Upāli is not understood to be the MSV’s ‘author,’ and
indeed is frequently mentioned in it in the third person. Rather he appears as a mere
guardian of the textual collection in the precise form in which it was approved by the
council. In this way, the MSV not only represents Buddha’s founding activities and the
early community’s formal and collective agreement as to what Buddha’s instructions
were, but it also represents their assurance that care has been taken to hand down to
later generations the very text we now have entitled Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya.

In the end, Foucault’s term may be better stated in the case of the MSV to a
“compiler figure” or “authorial committee figure.” But his angle of vision does help us
to see that the MSV carries within itself its own seal of approval, its own authorizing
discourses. The MSV’s broad status as canonical or authoritative comes from within and
without. A range of other practices surrounding the transmission of the text also
contribute to the construction of its ‘author figure.’ Within Tibet where a formal canon
was fixed, the MSV literally heads off that canon, occupying as it does the very first 13
volumes of the canonical bka’‘gyur collection that literally rests on the altars of every
monastery of size or substance.

85 Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 290bff. Rockhill provides a close account
of this section of the MSV—part translation, part retelling, part summary. (Rockhill 1907: 148-161).
Within the narratives themselves, we note that the MSV’s stories are related by an unnamed omniscient narrator. Far more frequently than one finds in, say, Buddhist sūtra literature, the MSV’s narrator(s) tell us what unuttered thoughts run through people’s minds, as well as what they say and do. Here we see the narrators positioning themselves relative to readers as Buddha, the other figure whose omniscience is on full display for the view of characters within the text, as well as for us readers outside it.

The narrator never speaks in the first person, and makes no effort to disclose his or her position relative to the characters and events depicted. That is, unlike Buddhist sūtras that must begin with the phrase 'thus have I heard,' these stories do not assert that the narrator was a direct witness to the events or speech continued. But like the sūtras, the narrators present themselves as transparently privy to all events - as if they were reliable and fully authorized reports on the events and discourses they relate. Yet the MSV’s narrator(s) reveal their position in relation to the stories they are telling in a variety of ways. They offer editorial asides, often in the form of well-crafted aphorisms, or subhāṣitas. Just before portraying a young man killing his mother because she was obstructing his liaison with a local prostitute, the narrator makes his own horror eminently clear, saying, “Indeed, there is no wicked act those who chase objects of desire will not do. Thus, he of a merciless heart, whose [hope for happy] future lives was abandoned, unsheathed his dagger...” In another story, when Buddha

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86 Schopen notes this tendency, describing it as “one of their typical editorial or explanatory comments that are meant to account for some element of the action to follow, and frequently constitute cultural truisms.” (Schopen 2006: 490).

87 The elegance of the comment is clear in Sanskrit: kāmān khalu pratisēvamāṇasya nāsti kimcid ākaranīyam iti. The narrator continues to invest the telling of the tale with his unreserved obloquy and horror:
is about to intervene in a particularly bold and laudable way to protect a young woman, the narrator explodes with several pages of exhilarated encomium of Buddha, before resuming the narration. And when Buddha asks a factual question of Ānanda, the narrator routinely hastens to remind readers that buddhas already know the answer to questions they ask. In these and other ways, the narrators of the MSV put their own engagement with the narrative material on display for readers. Attending to such moments in the narration offers us opportunities to see how the narrators expect—or hope—their readers will respond.

The particular practices of reading this dissertation deploys must also take account of the imagined readership of the MSV, and our own position as readers relative to the text’s model readers. Here it is crucial to bear in mind that we do not know how widely the text and its narrative was actually read, or for how long after it was produced. The MSV’s imagined or model readers are not to be confused with living (or once living but now dead) historical readers. By contrast, imagined or model readers are born the moment the text came into being, or they may be born the moment the text is read. Drawing on the substantial body of literary theory on reading

“Thus, he of a merciless heart, whose [hope for happy] future lives was abandoned, unsheathed his dagger and cut her head off at the base. It fell to the ground. He killed his mother, and left.” (Dutt iv: 55).

88 Kṣudrakavastu. The praise begins at Derge Da 164b6 and continues through Da 166b2. This passage is not extant in Sanskrit.

89 This formula recurs many dozens of times in the MSV. I counted over a dozen occurrences in the first volume of the Tibetan alone. Sanskrit: jānakāḥ prcchakā buddhā bhagavantaḥ Tib: sangs rgyas bcom ldan ’das rnams ni mkhyen bzhin du rmed The first of the many times in the MSV appears in the Vinayavastu at Derge Ka 71a2. It occurs on the very first page of Dutt’s edition of the Sanskrit of the Vinayavastu. (Dutt i:i).
that seeks to deepen our understanding of texts and their connectedness to readers,\textsuperscript{90} we can attune ourselves to the anticipated uses of the MSV. Such anticipated reception of the text can be seen inscribed in the text in the figure of a model or imagined reader, regardless of whether the text is historically read that way—or even regardless of whether it was read at all. Distinguishing between actual and imagined readers makes sense in the case of a text that no longer has many actual readers, but that was conceived as a disciplinary tool to help transform historical subjects into model readers of a vinaya. The MSV’s status as chief arbiter of monastic life keeps it perpetually present as a disciplining resource for generations of anticipated readers who might at any moment come before that authoritative text. In a sense, whether or not anyone is listening, the MSV continues to tell its imagined monastic readers who they should be, as monastics if not as human beings. For any historical monastic reader who should choose to adopt a position before the MSV as its reader, any difference they perceive between that imagined reader and themselves is bound to bear ethical weight. In fact, our reading may need to take into account the possibility that the experience of oneself as an inadequate reader of the text may in fact be one of the worklike aspects of the texts, confronting its reader with her imperfections, proving her need for further disciplining of the sort the text provides, and spurring her on in her own ethical project of self-fashioning. Thus acknowledging the imagined reader in the text gives us a way to catch glimpses of the text’s own vision of who its readers might be, who they might

\textsuperscript{90} Among this vast corpus, this dissertation particularly draws on the work of Wolfgang Iser and Umberto Eco, in different contexts and for different purposes.
become, and how the MSV itself can play a part in supporting that transformative process.

Turning then to the imagined readership for which the MSV was prepared and preserved, we note that the purported function of the MSV is to serve monastic communities as their definitive canonical guide for regulating monastic life. The self-presentation of the text is that it offers the authoritative record of Buddha’s own pronouncements on all aspects of community life, the conduct of individual monastic and relations with larger society. These pronouncements are understood to have been binding not only for his direct disciples, but for all generations of the monastic order. As such, the MSV and other vinayas have a proleptic regulatory function. They are explicitly presented as tools for disciplining their readers to come—at least their imagined monastic readers. Such monastic readers are presumed by the text to be submitting to the vinaya’s disciplining regimen voluntarily. Authority is granted, and in exchange benefit is received. In the case of disciples’ relationship to Buddha, the authority that they invest in Buddha is understood to be reciprocated by Buddha’s care, as the perfect teacher and perfect guide—both terms used in the MSV to describe him. Indeed, one worklike aspect of the MSV narratives is certainly to create a Buddha figure who is a worthy repository of the trust and authority accorded him by the monastic communities, as well as lay followers.

Like the authority granted to Buddha by lay and monastic followers, so too the vinaya for monastics, at least in the MSV’s own imagining of its role in monastic life. In narrative after narrative, the vinaya as a method of training is presented as conferring
great benefits, in terms of the self-fashioning and other opportunities for well-being it makes possible. As the text that conveys this method, the MSV itself could thus be read as participating in Buddha’s ethics of care for his monastic followers, extended to them across the intervening centuries through the medium of the vinaya as text. In this sense, the MSV and its narratives constitute a site in which disciples can engage in that relationship of care with Buddha. The possibility that this engagement may be present in readers’ encounters with the narratives is another factor to consider in our assessment of the MSV’s narratives and the work they can do.

In one other way our reading must account for the peculiar position of the MSV as a monastic text addressed to monastics, and potential monastics. As an instrument in sparking and stabilizing monastics’ sense of personal renunciation for the household life, the MSV has clear interests in presenting lay society in the darkest possible terms, including the place of women in that society. The MSV’s interest in highlighting gender inequities—the brutality women experience in many narratives, their subjection to male violence and their portrayal as objects in the male gaze—may also have its place in the monastic project of turning its readers away from lay life, in which such brutality and violence are presented as commonplace. Our reading must account for the possibility that the stories about women’s lives are deploying that worklike aspect rather than (or in addition to) their documentary, in LaCapra’s terms.

As we have seen, the MSV is positioned to shift among a multiplicity of readerships, and affect them in a multiplicity of ways. Its narratives can construct an image of Buddha that then grounds the MSV’s own authority over monastic subjects, or
deepen their devotion to him. They can allow for readers long separated from Buddha in place or time to encounter his presence in the trans-historical space of narrative worlds. In this space, readers may enter into relationships of care with Buddha, or with the vinaya as his means of caretaking. The MSV’s narratives can serve some basic didactic or morally salutary effect. They can work to inspire or deepen renunciation. And they may work to challenge men and women in their understanding of gender relations, affirming or complicating the notions they brought to the text.

That, however, is not all the work they perform. The MSV is also a highly entertaining work of literature with a keen eye for the bawdy, the farcical and the fantastic. The Vinayavastu in particular, which occupies the first four volumes in the Tibetan, is less centered on monastic regulation than later volumes, and was the location of most of the stories selected by avadāna compilers for inclusion in their collections.91 Narratives from these volumes could have had appeal for lay communities, as Andy Rotman has suggested,92 and in general, we can assume a readership for the MSV that is monastic as well as lay. We can also be assured that among the other work the narratives did, one was to offer entertainment whose

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91 For example, of the 37 narratives found in the Divyāvadāna that were taken from the MSV, fully 29 of them came from the Vinayavastu. It may or may not be coincidental that these are precisely the volumes for which we find surviving Sanskrit manuscripts. The surviving manuscripts date to the fifth to seventh century. If by that time the MSV’s regulatory function had been supplanted by digests and commentaries in its early centuries of transmission in India as it would later in Tibet, and the MSV had ceased to be read directly, then the Vinayavastu manuscripts found in Gilgit may have been copied for their value to lay communities as much as, or more than, for monastics. However, if this did transpire, this shift still applies to historical patterns of readership, and not necessarily to the readership the text initially imagined for itself—and the latter is the only readership we can access through the text itself.

edifying (or at least not injurious) effect did not come at the cost of its power to amaze and delight.

Finally, the audience that the MSV anticipated certainly included women. One volume—the Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga—is devoted to rules for fully ordained nuns, or bhikṣunīs, though bhikṣunīs would also be required to have familiarity with the volumes for bhikṣus, since they shared rules with them. The fact that this volume exists in Tibetan suggests that it was clear to the Tibetan translators that the vinaya’s vision was addressed to women and men, since there do not appear to have been bhikṣunīs in Tibet at that time.93 Yet as indicated above, women’s biographies are as likely to appear in the Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga—the volumes of rules for monks—as they are in the Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga, and perhaps even more likely to turn up in the Kṣudrakavastu, which is particular to neither order. There is no ghettoization of stories of women, no assumption that women’s presence is to be contained, or perhaps that only women would be interested in stories about women. Alternately, the text’s sustained attentiveness to gender and depictions of women may also indicate a concern to shape men’s view of women as well as women’s sense of themselves. In our reading, this possibility too needs to remain in play.

93 Research into the presence or absence of bhikṣunīs during the early or later phases of the transmission of monasticism to Tibet is still patchy at best. A consensus seems to be forming that at least initially no bhikṣuṇī ordination was conferred, though there are accounts of intermittent bhikṣuṇī ordinations later (Tsering 1986: 28). Evidence of absence is hard to come by, of course, and Dan Martin appears skeptical that enough research has been done to prove there were no bhikṣunīs in the initial stages. (Martin 2005: 72-3).
What we see, then, is a tremendous diversity among its potential readership, in a text explicitly addressed to a monastic community imagined to span many centuries and great geographic distances. The geographical reach of the MSV maps as well onto other cultural worlds. As Schopen has noted, the narrators of the MSV are clearly well-versed in brahminical practices as well as the dharmaśāstra literature associated with it. They are also comfortable in other Sanskrit narrative worlds, and share characters and even at least one verse with the Rāmāyaṇa. It is a matter of debate whether the MSV or the Rāmāyaṇa came first, but it is clear that there is a great deal of intertextuality between the MSV and other works of Sanskrit literature as well, and that its narrators were intimately familiar with Sanskrit epics and other literary material. A familiarity with such materials would similarly enrich readers’ engagement with many of the MSV’s narratives.

As part of my research for this dissertation, I also read the Sanskrit text with an orthodox brahmin steeped in Sanskritic culture and its vast literature. This reading alerted me to ways in which the MSV can be read as unfolding in conversation with a brahminical culture. That reading called out aspects of the MSV that were rich in

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95 This verse reads sarve kṣayāṇa nicayāḥ patanāntah samucchrayāḥ | samyogā viprayogāntā maranāntam hi jīvitam || in the MSV, but substitutes ca for hi in the last pada when it appears in the Rāmāyaṇa. Vālmiki’s Rāmāyaṇa 2.105.16 and 7.51.10, and in the Tokunaga critical edition of the Mahābhārata at 11.2.3 and 14.44.18. The verse recurs throughout the MSV, and forms the standard utterance made by spiritually advanced practitioners as they are facing their deaths. As one instance, see GM iv: 57.

96 Schopen also notes this in a number of places. For one, see Schopen 2006: 491.

97 At one point, after a passage about encounters between brahmans and Buddhist monks that he thought had obviously been written by someone with classical brahminical training, my inimitable teacher and reading partner J. Prabhakara Shastry shook his head, and commented, “This book is all about brahmans: Brahmans, brahmans, brahmans.” Personal communication, October, 2006.
resonance with other literary worlds. These readings are valid in their own right, and fully grounded in the work of the text itself. But they cannot be taken as evidence of historical relations between Buddhist and brahminical communities in general. There is simply no way to assess to what degree readers were—or the narrators expected them to be—familiar with such literature, and the MSV certainly does not depend on such knowledge to yield other useful and enjoyable readings. Nor does such a reading of the MSV as a “thoroughly Indian” text, or a text thoroughly saturated with Sanskrit culture, preclude many other possible readings.

The ethics we will see displayed in the MSV is highly attentive to the particulars of each ethical subject, and invites us to be attentive to the factors conditioning readers as well. This dissertation therefore does not make assumptions as to what other texts other readers had access to. The encyclopedia of knowledge available to readers of Buddhist texts changed over times, and varied greatly in different locations as well. I have thus preferred to the greatest degree possible to allow the text to tell us what we need to know about its own world, and so keep to a minimum comparison to other versions of these narratives or other vinayas. Although such comparisons yield rich new readings of those narratives, that is not the task of this study.

Our efforts to craft a practice of reading must further account also for the MSV’s size and internal diversity. The multiplicity of literary genres contained within the MSV poses one major issue our practices of reading must acknowledge. We have noted that its narrative content far outweighs its legal material, with numerous accounts purporting to describe a wide variety of activities of the early monastic order in India.
However, the MSV’s narrative interests also range far afield to include cosmological accounts of the inception of the world, histories of then-ancient clans and kings, biographies of ordinary monks, nuns and lay followers, as well as stories belonging to the jātaka and avadāna genres. Jātaka and avadāna tales recount, respectively, events from Buddha’s past lives and from the lives of other monks and nuns, often depicting morally charged situations or character traits. Each established genre will anticipate that its model readers bring particular sets of expectations to their encounter with the text.

A further distinctive element of this text is its size—longer than most encyclopedias, in fact. With such heft, it would be surprising for the MSV to be consumed in its entirety. If only for its size, it is entirely possible that the MSV was used then as it is now by modern scholars: as a vast and rich field to be mined for the elements they need for the purposes at hand, rather than for its consistent or sustained presentation of any unitary vision or argument. Indeed, we know that compilers of later avadāna collections did just that, selecting stories from the MSV to set alongside others that participate in the same literary genre. However, unlike much of the selective use to which this text has been subjected at the hands of modern scholars, these compilations do not entail disregarding the form or genre of the narratives. Rather, they indicate a recognition that narratives in the MSV were able to create meaning even when read as individual pieces, and could be used to create new meanings when placed in different contexts.

98 We will take up in chapter two the strong indications that the Mūlasarvāstivādin lineage had a particular role in establishing the avadāna as a recognized literary genre.
Many though not all the stories in the MSV reflect a distinctive style and narrative voice. The stories are generally told in a sparse prose, which Gnoli evocatively describes as “a style both plain and vivid.” While the MSV does make intensive use of stock phrases, the narrators often elide these phrases to avoid repetition, with an indication to the reader to supply the missing phrase. This assumes on the part of its readers a high degree of literacy with the text and its idioms across narratives, and also allows for a quality of quickness to the narration. Stories are punctuated with verse, and do pass on occasion into a highly ornamented register, most often reserved for descriptions of Buddha or disciples’ moments of spiritual attainment. Yet the MSV also includes long verse passages, as well as aphoristic prose. J. Prabhakara Shastry, a scholar trained in classical Indian literary theory (alaṅkārika), characterized the style of the Vinayavastu as “kāvyā - without much alaṅkāra, but kāvyā nonetheless,” and a “very elegant style.” Shastry made a distinction, however, between the stylistic designation of the individual narratives within the MSV, which he calls kāvyā, and that of the text as a whole. The text as a whole was vinaya, on his analysis, and the individual narratives within it could be read as kāvyā but not without reference to their location within a work of vinaya.

In short, the size and the MSV’s apparent lack of anxiety over internal narrative consistency cautions us against reading out a uniform coherent vision for the text as a whole. What we commonly find are rather suggestive patterns with scattered counter

examples. In this sense, the MSV does articulate sets of concerns, but does not insist on their resolution. Now and perhaps at other moments in its long history, the MSV offers itself as a fertile site for the contestation of visions of Buddhist monasticism—contestations such as those of Schopen’s “on the ground” Buddhism against “textual” Buddhism, but also contestations among monastic visions of what their own communities should be.

This dissertation too participates in ongoing envisioning and revisioning of what monastic communities might be, especially with regard to their constructions of gender. Any study of gender in the MSV will necessarily be implicated in the particular gendering of Buddhist monastics, and will be charged with productive power not only because of the richness of its text’s narrative imagination but also because of the authority invested in it by Tibetan monastic communities today. In the course of researching this project, I read the MSV with Tibetan monks who were accomplished scholars. Although all had studied the Vinayasūtra and other secondary works, only one had previously undertaken serious study of the MSV, and he had done so as part of a research project on bhikṣuṇī ordination. Although the MSV is no longer a part of the functional canon for Tibetan monastics, as we have noted, it officially retains the final word on matters of monastic dispute.101

101 The processes of interpretation and citation of authoritative sources on the ground are of course more complex than this. For one, different schools of Tibetan Buddhism follow different commentarial lineages on the vinaya. Although the authority of the MSV formally trumps that of the Vinayasūtra, the Vinayasūtra is the most authoritative vinaya text that Tibetan monastics have actually memorized and/or studied. Thus it is the Vinayasūtra that they tend to draw on most for authoritative statements on the vinaya. Further, in this lineage the Vinayasūtra is held to render the root vinaya more accessible, and clarify any ambiguity found in it, as any good secondary source should.
The matter of greatest contention in Tibetan Buddhist monasticism at present is the viability of offering bhikṣuṇī, or full, ordination to women in the Mūlasarvāstivāda lineage. Bhikṣuṇī ordination has not been offered to date by Tibetan monks, based on the procedural requirement that a quorum of bhikṣuṇīs fully ordained for at least ten years is needed to confer full ordination on women. Although there were some ordinations,¹⁰² no such quorum of qualified bhikṣuṇīs ever appears to have existed within Tibetan Buddhist communities¹⁰³—that is, until the late twentieth century, when European, American and some Himalayan Buddhist nuns began traveling to receive bhikṣuṇī vows.¹⁰⁴ They did so from monastic communities following an alternate ordination lineage, that of the Dharmagupta, which was transmitted within Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese monastic communities. In the heated discussions surrounding bhikṣuṇī ordination for Tibetan nuns, the MSV has once again become a resource to which monastics turn as they seek to take—or defend—positions in that debate. Producing studies of gender in the MSV at such a historical juncture cannot be merely an “academic” act, whether the scholar writing is a member of the Mūlasarvāstivāda monastic community or not.¹⁰⁵ The MSV is simply too charged with authority for any

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¹⁰² See Diemberger 2007 for the biography of Chos kyi sgron ma (1422-1455), the first woman in the Samding Dorje Phagmo reincarnation lineage, who received bhikṣuṇī ordination in Tibet. For references to several other such known instances, Martin (2005: 72-3) and Tsering and Russell (1986: 28-29).

¹⁰³ Tsering and Russell 1986: 28-29; Martin 2005: 72. Tashi Tsering, asked by the Tibetan government-in-exile’s Department of Religion and Culture to research the viability of offering bhikṣuṇī ordination to Tibetan nuns. His 1986 report follows his mention of such ordinations with accounts of the criticisms heaped on those who conferred it.

¹⁰⁴ A good deal of literature is now available documenting that process. For a summary overview of the process among Tibetan nuns, see Tsedroen 2008. For an analysis that situated this process among a range of intersecting discourses, see Mrozik 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Perhaps the most palpable proof of this is a conference organized at the request of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama in July of 2007 at the University of Hamburg. At that conference, the International
interpretation of its position on gender to remain inert amidst the current
contestations of women’s role in Tibetan monastic communities.

This dissertation seeks to engage the MSV as a complex text that positions itself
differently for different readers, and that must be read with an eye to the particular
positions it might take at any given narrative moment. In our reading, we are also
positioning ourselves in particular ways in relation to the text. I am a scholar
employing a hermeneutics of suspicion in my reading of the text, and thus occupy one
position relative to the MSV. I am also a female Buddhist monastic ordained in the
Mūlasarvāstivāda lineage governed by the MSV, and thus also occupy an additional set
of positions relative to the MSV, and bring to bear a particular set of aspirations and
concerns to my reading of it. I read in confidence that the hermeneutics of suspicion
and the concerns I also bring to the text cross-pollinate one another in productive
ways. The concerns I bring by no means overdetermine my reading, any more than
bringing to bear a discomfort with religious piety or a distrust of institutional
formations need determine other scholars’ readings of the MSV. But rendering my
positions relative to the text explicit may assist others in their use of the scholarly
work produced from those positions.

Congress on Buddhist Women’s Role in the Sangha: Bhikshuni Vinaya and Ordination Lineages, academic
scholars working on vinaya around the world presented their research, in an effort to reach a consensus
as to whether and how research indicated that bhikṣunī ordination might be conferred in the
Mūlasarvāstivādin lineage. Even the work of those academics who opted not to accept the invitation to
speak at the conference have an impact, since those who did draw on the research of those who did not,
and since Buddhist monastic communities are turning to academic researchers for their expertise on
vinaya matters, and for the authoritative voice of the educational institutions who declared them
competent.
When discussions turn to the MSV’s presentation of gender, perhaps the most oft-repeated story is that Buddha’s initial hesitation in allowing women to ordain, and his stipulation that the first nun accept eight conditions—the infamous gurudharmas or heavy rules—that make her subordinate to men. The repeated rush to return to this narrative moment has tended to crowd out the many other very different moments in the MSV, including the overwhelming number of moments in which Buddha is portrayed as nurturing the female monastic order that he did create. Thus rather than attempt to contextualize or argue against the moment of hesitation—or other moments of apparent misogyny—in this dissertation I seek to bring other moments into view alongside them.

This dissertation’s major intervention is through reading the MSV with an eye out for other possibilities it might envision for the construction of gender in Buddhist monasticism. It proceeds toward this broader aim from close readings of the text’s many narratives about women. By listening attentively to the tone set for women by Buddha’s relationship to them in the MSV’s narratives, by their relations with one another and by the narrators’ own responses to those relations, this dissertation aims to provide other resources for thinking about the meanings of gender in Buddhist monasticism today.

While I may find myself counted among its presumed target audience, from the outset it is clear that my own reading is just one of the many possible readings in a wide range of possible visions that the text can yield. To take up the Tibetan proverb serving

106 For one discussion of these rules, see Heirman 1998, Tsomo 2004, inter alia.
as the epigraph to this chapter—that ‘scriptural texts are like soft clay’\textsuperscript{107}—we note that there never comes a moment in which the final form of the text, its ultimate communication, is fixed. Rather, it remains pliable in the hands of those who take it up in earnest and work with it. Our reading of the MSV can give new shape and meaning to the malleable material of the scriptural text, though the range of possible meanings it can yield is bounded by the conditions of the material itself.

Just as the MSV can support many readings, it can also support many Buddhisms. Buddhist studies’ increasing willingness to speak of “Buddhisms” rather than “Buddhism” is in large part a result of the application of insights from Said’s work on orientalism,\textsuperscript{108} and has resulted in a heightened care within Buddhist studies to avoid claims to be able to speak for all of Buddhism based on the study of any single iteration of it. This project will similarly steer well clear of claims to represent a single Buddhist vision of gender—or much less “the Buddhist” vision of gender. Rather, we will seek to learn all we can from particular visions of gender found in the MSV, in the conviction that Buddhist studies in general will be amply enriched by an exploration of a set of perspectives on gender in Buddhist monastic communities, even though they were not shared by all Buddhists at all times.

In short, the fact that the MSV does not offer a transparent window into the past in no way diminishes its value. How a society imagines itself is important. How it

\textsuperscript{107} {\textit{lung} nams ni ‘jim pa dang mtshungs pa yin}. The term ‘\textit{lung}’ could also refer to texts in general, textual citations or scripture. Dr. Tashi Tsering, personal communication, Sarnath, March 2009, quoted to me as we were reading a story from the MSV together.

\textsuperscript{108} See Almond 1988, and Lopez 1995, for some examples of this movement.
imagines its origins in particular can exert a powerful force shaping—limiting and enabling—the experiences of those sharing that vision. The monastic community that Buddha formed and that continues to exist today is trans-local and trans-historical, and thus is a community that cannot assemble in any single time and place. That community can, however, constitute itself within the vastness of narrative worlds, where readers are continually invited to bridge distances in time and space through acts of imagination. Among other things, this dissertation seeks to exercise, and educate, that imagination.

The narrative worlds of the MSV may now lay dormant in their place in the Tibetan canon, but the Tibetan monastic communities have opted to keep that space open for the MSV. The MSV’s narratives thus stand ready at any moment to begin addressing their long-anticipated readers once again.

At the same time, the monastic community is also changing, as it encounters new historical conditions and embraces members shaped by new cultural conditions. As it does, the soft clay of the MSV stands ready to yield new forms as it is taken up by new pairs of hands. Yet those who would fashion new forms from it must in turn understand the material—its potentials and its limitations. One service this dissertation will offer is to provide tools for scholarly readers of the MSV to use as they both assess and produce new forms.
Chapter Two: Ethics

If there is such a thing as the truth about the subject matter of ethics—the truth, we might say, about the ethical—why is there any expectation that it should be simple? In particular, why should it be conceptually simple, using only one or two ethical concepts, such as duty or good state of affairs, rather than many?

Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*
An Ethics of Imperfection

In this normative world, law and narrative are inseparably related. Every prescription is insistent in its demand to be located in discourse—to be supplied with history and destiny, beginning and end, explanation and purpose. And every narrative is insistent in its demands for its prescriptive point, its moral.

Robert Cover, “Nomos and Narrative”

The MSV is a text on ethics in many senses of the term ethics. It outlines a code of conduct. It sets boundaries for right and wrong. It is concerned with identifying and depicting the highest existing moral authority. It seeks to ground that moral vision in an understanding of possible human goods, including happiness. It describes a way of life conducive to human flourishing. It explores a range of human virtues. It encourages its readers to consider their potential for goodness, and it urges them to pursue its vision of a good life. It situates persons in relationships that imply duties and rights, but that also create opportunities for transformation. It considers our obligations to care for others and to allow them to care for us. And, in a sense of ethics that is of direct interest to our inquiry, the MSV is deeply concerned with human difference, and its implications for persons’ relationship to others. Our goal for this chapter is to explore the forms of ethics practiced by Buddha and other figures depicted in the narratives of the MSV, and enjoined on its ideal readers. We do so in order to understand the concerns that guide the MSV’s presentations of gender, and as a necessary foundation for

asking how gender matters in Buddhist monasticism, and why. Along the way, we will begin to lay groundwork for later projects to allow the MSV’s vision of Buddhist ethics to speak to other conversations outside Buddhist studies or gender studies.

The narratives of the MSV offer an especially rich field in which to explore the concerns of this dissertation, precisely because narratives present ethical subjects, behavior and practices as embedded in particular contexts, in ways that other textual forms do not, and in ways that a legal code or a list of ethical principles alone cannot. Narratives bring ethical guidelines into the realm of the specific, the contextualized, the shifting of situations. They deploy such guidelines for transformative purposes that gain meaning only when they are pursued by particular persons. And unlike philosophical or commentarial texts, when Buddhist narratives address ethics, they cannot avoid identifying the particular social location of the ethical subject, including gender.\footnote{Although as Charles Hallisey has pointed out, stories about animals are one way to sidestep the caste or other markers of social status of characters, nevertheless in the case of stories of animals in the MSV, gender is often specified.}

Attending to narratives not only allows us to track how the ethics of the MSV grapples with gender; it also throws into sharp relief the MSV’s own sustained interest in the particularity of ethical situations and subjects. This dissertation’s turn to narratives as a way to understand Buddhist ethics is certainly not the only possible move. Buddhist thinking about ethics is explored both in narratives and in more abstract philosophical or commentarial texts.\footnote{Of course, Buddhist commentarial texts often include a great deal of narrative material as well. For one exploration of the relationship between narrative and what he calls “systematic thought,” focusing mainly on temporality, see Collins 1998: 121-133.} As a complex text, the MSV includes both narrative and commentarial moments, though it is overwhelmingly given over to storytelling of all sorts, with brief bursts of
commentarial discourse appended to the end of some narratives. In the MSV and other texts addressing monastic ethics, commentarial discourse tends to center on the precepts that bind monastic behavior. This dissertation explicitly opts not to take the complex of rules, or the commentarial discussions of them, as the definitive site of Buddhist ethics. This is in contrast to most scholarly work done to date on the vinaya’s ethics, which has more often focused on the list of rules that collectively regulate the life of monastic institutions and individuals. These rules appear listed in the Prātimokṣa sūtras contained in the MSV, at the head of the vibhaṅga section, in which are found descriptions of the context in which the rule was first expositied by the Buddha.

When read together with the vinaya narratives that depict their creation, it becomes clear that the rules of conduct for bhikṣuṇīs do far more than regulate her actions. As we shall be exploring in detail in chapter five, on the formation of the nuns’ community, Buddha’s legislative interventions served to carve out a new social role—the role of a Buddhist nun—by articulating rules that made clear to the lay community, to monks and to the nuns themselves, just what a bhikṣuṇī in Buddha’s order could and (more importantly) could not be asked to do. Buddha’s prescriptions and proscriptions create new relationships between persons and between communities, and these relationships are gendered in ways that become fully apparent only when we consider the social situations that occasioned the rules. As the twentieth-century legal theorist Robert Cover puts it, “Once understood in the context of the narratives that give it meaning, law becomes not merely a system of rules to be observed, but a
world in which we live.” The MSV offers an eloquent affirmation of this insight, even as it allows us to add that this world in which we live is thoroughly gendered.

Monastic rules themselves are not universally applicable to members of the monastic order: some rules apply only to monks, others only to nuns, while some are shared by male and female monastics. There are thus two Prātimokṣa sūtras in every vinaya, one for male and the other for female monastics. In this and in many other ways, the rules themselves reflect the attentiveness to the particularities of the ethical subjects that is very much in evidence in the narrative themselves. As we shall see again and again, one particularity that persistently re-asserts itself as determinative of ethical positions is gender.

In any case, while the rules and the sūtras that enumerate them have served as a lightning rod for scholarly interest in vinaya ethics, they comprise but a miniscule part of the MSV itself. The sūtras occupy 84 pages as against some 8,000 for the MSV as a whole. The overwhelming bulk of this hefty text is devoted to narrative explorations of diverse subject matter. It is worth wondering why it is that this text devoted to monastic formation should have chosen narratives as the most satisfying genre to work in. It is also worth asking what we as a scholarly community may be missing by focusing on the abstracted rules.

One feature that the narratives allow us to see, but the rules are less likely to reveal if taken in isolation, is the vinaya’s extreme attentiveness to human particularity. The rules themselves appear within narratives known as nidāna (Tibetan: gleng gzhi) or charter stories, which serve as the precedent for each newly articulated monastic precept or rule. These

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112 Cover 1995: 96.
charter stories present the multiple processes whereby the precepts regulating Buddhist monastic conduct were first formulated in response to specific situations, and in many cases, later modified as situations evolved. Tibetan Buddhist commentators devised a nine-fold division for vinaya rules, reflecting the fact that the status of rules was subject to such frequent revision by Buddha. These nine are: 1) those actions that were initially prohibited but later permitted, 2) those that were initially prohibited but later made mandatory, 3) those that were initially prohibited and ultimately left as prohibitions, 4) actions that were initially permitted but later prohibited, 5) those that were initially permitted but later made mandatory, 6) those that were initially permitted and ultimately left as permissible, 7) actions that were initially mandatory but later made permissible, 8) those that were initially mandatory but later prohibited and 9) those that were initially mandatory and in the end remained mandatory.

Reading the narratives that chart these revisions yields a different sense of the deontological status of the rules than one might have simply taking the final list of permitted, banned and prescribed actions. First, we note that the MSV narratives show rules created in response to particular situations, and only in response to particular situations. Next, they are revised with no apparent hesitation when new situations arise. What ends up as an apparently universal and fixed set of precepts appears (when read with the narratives) to be little more than the latest response to a series of ever-shifting circumstances. Reflecting that sense of bounded-ness to a particular situation, the MSV’s narrator(s) use a standard phrase to report

113 *dgag sgrub gnang gsum*. For a fuller exploration of the nine variations, known as *mu dgu* in Tibetan vinaya commentaries, see Ka 113b4-122a4 of mTsho sna ba Shes rab bzang po’s 13th century ‘*dul ba mdo rtsi’i ’grel pa legs bshad nyi ma’i’ od zer*, one of the two major Tibetan works of vinaya exegetical literature, in which an entire section is devoted to the topic. My thanks to Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedorpen both for bringing this discussion to my attention and locating the textual source for it.
Buddha’s summoning of the monastics to hear a new ruling: “On that occasion, in that case, in that context.”  

Although the end result of these negotiations are fixed sets of precepts that are indeed universally applicable to those members of each of the Buddhist monastic orders who hold those precepts, focusing on the end result masks an acute sense of the contingent nature of rules, and an obvious lack of any sense of the sanctity of rules per se.

Following the MSV’s example, let us observe this impulse in a narrative context. This particular story—the case of a monk gone mad and his culinary cure—puts on display the type of ethics Buddha practices, contrasting it to that of his disciples.

This charter story took place in Śrāvastī. At the time, the venerable Saikata went crazy, and his mind became unhinged. Due to that, he was wandering here and there. The brahmins and householders (grhapati) saw him, and said, “Whose son is this venerable one?” Some others said, “Such-and-such householder.” They said, “If he had not gone forth among the protector-less bhikṣus who are sons of Śākyas, his relatives would have treated him. The bhikṣus presented the matter to the Lord. The Lord said, “In that case, ask a doctor to diagnose Bhikṣu Saikata.” When they arrived at the doctor’s, they said, “Sir, a bhikṣu is afflicted with such-and-such illness. Please prescribe [some] medicine.”

“Noble Ones, have him take raw flesh. He will recover.” [Ka 282a]

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114 Sanskrit: asyam utpattau asmin nidāne asmin prakaraṇe; Tibetan: byung ba ’di dang/ gleng gzhi ’di dang/ skabs ’di la. The term nidāna or gleng gzhi is also used as a technical term to denote a charter story for a rule, as noted earlier.

115 Sanskrit: unmatta kṣiptacitta; Tibetan: sems khrugs te snyos par gyur.

116 Sanskrit: āhiṇdate; Tibetan: ’phyan pa

117 For a discussion of the uses of this term in Buddhist Sanskrit texts to indicate members of a social group distinct from and likely lower than brahmins and ksatriyas, and also of a certain social standing and wealth, see Nattier 2003: 22-25 and Chakravarti 1987: 65-93. If homeowners could be shorn of its associations with lawnmowers and mortgages, it might be a better translation.
“Sir, what is he, a cannibal?”

“Noble One, otherwise, he will not be able to recover.”

The bhikṣus presented the matter to the Lord, [GM.i.x] and the Lord said, “If a doctor says this is the medicine for him, and he will not be able to recover otherwise, he should be given raw flesh.” The bhikṣus thus gave it to him. He did not eat it.

The Lord said, “Blindfold him, and then give it.” They gave it, and quickly removed the blindfold. He saw what had been smeared on his hands, and vomited.

The Lord said, “The blindfold should not be removed right away. Rather, first place clean and savory food and drink in front of him. After his hands are washed, then it should be removed.”

He recovered, but had developed a longing for that very thing, and the bhikṣus presented the matter to the Lord. The Lord said, “When one has recovered, one should train according to the established rules as they have been properly set forth. If one takes [raw meat then,] one will be in violation.”

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118 Or any demon who eats people: puruṣādaḥ.

119 Tibetan here adds, “This medicine of his is good.” de'i sman 'di legs.

120 The Sanskrit here is occasionally fragmentary, and Dutt attempts a reconstruction from the Tibetan. In such cases, I follow the Tibetan rather than his reconstructions, and thus have inserted the Tibetan between brackets in place of Dutt’s reconstruction. As indicated above, here and henceforth for the Sanskrit texts I use either Gnoli’s editions where available, or Dutt’s edition in four parts, all occupying the third volume of his Gilgit Manuscripts, to which I refer as GM. Gnoli’s editions will be indicated as Gn. (Dutt 1947; Gnoli 1977, 1978a and 1978b.) This and all subsequent references to Tibetan texts are to the Derge edition from the sDe dge mtshal par bka’ gyur as edited by Situ Panchen and scanned by the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center. (Situ 1976-79) Bhaisajyavastu. GM.i.: ix-x, and corresponding Tibetan at Derge Ka: 281b-282a5. Sanskrit: śrāvastyāṃ nidānam | āyuṣmān saiketa unmatattāh ksiptacittās tena tenāhiṇḍate | sa brāhmaṇaṅghra- [Tibetan: khyim bdag dag gis mthong ste de dag gis smras pa/ shes ldan dag ’di su’i bu zhiṅ yin/ gzhan dag gis smras pa/ khyim bdag che ge mo zhiṅ gi’o/ de dag gis smras pa/ sha yka’i sras kyi dge sbyong mgon med pa rniams kyi nang du rab tu ma byung na’-pyaprajājītāḥ | yadi na pravrajito bhavājīvājīvat āśya cikitsā kṛtābhāvāsyaḥ | etat prakaraṇam bhikṣavā bhagavāva ārocayantī | bhaga | [Tibetan: bcom ldan ’das kyi’s bka’ stsal pa/ dge slong dag de lts bas na dge slong bye ma sgyes kyi dpyad sman pa la dris la byos shig/ sman pa’i drung du dong nas bzhin bzang’as dge slong zhiṅ ’di ’dra ba’i nād kyi’s thebs kyi’s ca glānyan | bhaisajyāṃ vyapadiṣa/ ārya āmamāmsāṃ paribhūjatu | svastho bhavājīvāt | bhadramukha kim asau puruṣādaḥ | ārya na sakyam anyathā svasthena
This incident is told as part of a cycle of stories in the MSV’s *Bhaiṣajyavastu* or *Section on Medicine* in which monks are prescribed medicinal items that they find inappropriate for a monk to consume. In each case, they respond indignantly to the doctor’s prescription, protesting either, “What am I, a hedonist?” or “What am I, a cannibal?” depending on whether the prescribed cure is considered luxurious or barbaric. They then seek counsel from Buddha, who invariably tells them that if it is medicine that is needed to recover, one should take it.

Common to all these stories is a contrast between the monks’ ethics grounded in a fixed sense of their own identity, on the one hand, and on the other, Buddha’s highly flexible adaptation to circumstances. Behind the monks’ “What am I, a cannibal?” reply to the suggestion that they eat raw meat, we see an implicit assumption that a person’s essential nature determines what they should or should not do. In this thinking, if you are not a demon or cannibal, you ought not eat raw meat. If you are not a hedonist, you ought not to use moisturizers. Further, the mandate they perceive that such foodstuffs are not to be consumed has a sort of absolute deontological status for them. The ethical principle these monks seem to be operating under is what we may describe as an extreme form of universalist or generalist ethics, in which one never does certain things and always does others, irrespective of the specific context. This is opposed to Buddha’s context-sensitive model of ethical agents who under some circumstances behave in a certain way and under other circumstances behave in another. This context-sensitive

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_Tibetan: sman gyi gzhi._
sensitivity seems so strong that Buddha does not simply issue a blanket guideline to the monks to adapt to the context, for in many cases one does in fact need to stick to the rules. Indeed, at the end of this story, Buddha points out the limits of the special circumstance that had made eating raw meat permissible. Once that circumstance has changed and the monk is no longer mad, Buddha urges adherence to the customary rules.

Based on this story alone, it might appear that Buddha was practicing a sort of situational ethics, in which the illness is treated as an exceptional case in which the otherwise universal rules are temporarily suspended. But as we look further into the narrative world of the MSV, it becomes rapidly clear that the ethics that Buddha practices is responding not only to situations but to the particularities of the persons before him in ways that go far beyond a situational ethics.

This is especially so of a second sort of narrative in the MSV. Only a minority portion of the MSV’s narrative material performs the function of authorizing specific precepts or behavioral guidelines. Many narratives form part of the avadāna genre of multi-life biographies, to which we shall return in the next chapter. But the MSV includes a wealth of narratives that depict Buddha guiding his disciples, monastic and lay, in ways that yield a richly detailed imagination of Buddha and his disciples engaging in ethical relations with others. While the charter stories sketch out for us an ethics that is highly responsive to the given situations and the social locations of those within them, in other narratives we see an ethics moving beyond the attentiveness to situations and social locations that are found in the rule-bound stories, to include other aspects of the particular person with whom the ethical agent is relating. Most notably, when Buddha and his main disciples care for others, their
ability to respond to the others’ needs requires knowledge of all the particulars involved, including social location and gender, of course, but also the minutest details of the other’s personal character and their individual karma. Again, a narrative might serve best here to make the point.

Buddha and his monastic followers have committed to spend the three-month rains retreat in a town, where it turns out that the only food available to them is feed barley that had been meant for horses. Buddha accepts the offering of barley, and the following narrative is set in motion:

Then the Lord said to the Venerable Ānanda, “Go, Ānanda. Have the barley prepared for the Tathāgata.”

Consenting to the Lord, Venerable Ānanda said, “As you say, Revered One,” and took the Lord’s portion, and went to where there was an old woman. When he reached there, he said to that woman, “Sister, please prepare this barley for the Tathāgata.”

She said, “Noble One, I am old. I can’t. But there is this young girl. Give [it to] her.”

Venerable Ānanda approached her. “Sister, would you be able to prepare barley for the Tathāgata?”

She said, “Noble One, I will sort through it on one condition: that you give me a talk.”

\[\text{\textsuperscript{122}} \text{pratyaṃśam ādaya; Tibetan: bka’ bzhin stsal occurs throughout the MSV in the sense of accepting a task given to one, or acceding to a request.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{123}} \text{Dutt reads asyā anuprayaccha; Tibetan has ‘di la stsol.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{124}} \text{anuprayaccha; Tibetan: tshig ‘ga’ gsung blta na.}\]
He said, “Prepare it, and I will give you [a talk].”

She began to prepare it, and asked, “Noble One, who is this ‘Buddha’?”

Venerable Ānanda reflected, “If I narrate to her a description of the Buddha, the qualities of the Buddha are profound. A situation might come about that she will not understand it. Thus instead let me narrate for her a narrative describing a wheel-turning king.”

For the next eight pages, the story relates the discourse on the seven precious accoutrements of a wheel-turning king, given by Ānanda to the young woman, who cleans the barley as she listens. Ānanda’s narration is timed perfectly such that after describing the first four preceding accoutrements one-by-one—the jewel, the wheel, the elephant and the horse—he gives an account of the fifth, a jewel of a woman (strīratna) just as the chore is wrapping up.

By the time Venerable Ānanda had described in detail the [wheel-turning king’s] jewel of a woman, the girl had prepared the barley. She fell at his feet and proceeded to make a resolute aspiration.

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125 buddhavarṇodāharaṇa; Tibetan suggests praising: bsngags pa’i brjod pa
126 Qualities of buddhas here translates buddhadharmāḥ; Tibetan: sangs rayas kyi chos rnam.
127 Bhaisajyavastu. Sanskrit at GM.I: 30-31. tatra bhagavān āyuṣmantam ānandam idam avocat | gacchānanda tathāgatasārthāya yavān parikarmayeti | evam bhadanteti āyuṣmān ānando bhagavataḥ pratyāṃśam āddya yenaḥyatamā vrddhā strī tenopasaṃkrāntah | upasam-[31]-kramya tāṃ strīyam idam avocat | bhagini tathāgatasārthāya yavān parikarmikurṣāḥ | sā kathayati | ārya aham vrddhā na śaknombhi | api tv esa taṇḍulikā dārikā | asā prakarṇavatīti | āyuṣmān ānandas tasyāḥ sakṣām upasaṃkrāntah | bhagini śaksyasi tvaṃ tathāgatasārthāya yavān parikarmikartum iti | sā kathayati | ārya samayenāham parikarmayāmī | yadi me ālāpam anuprayacchasi | sa kathayati | parikarmaya dāsyāmīti | sā parikarmayitum ārābdhā | prcchati ca | ārya ka eṣa buddho nāma iti | āyuṣmān ānandah samākyati | yady aham asyā buddhavarṇodāharaṇam kariṣye gambhirā buddhadharmāḥ sthānam etad vidyate (yad asau na viṣṇyaśatīti) yat tv aham asyā ca(kraratna)varṇodāharaṇam udāhareyam iti. Corresponding Tibetan text at Derge Kha 136b6-137a4.

128 Sanskrit: strīratna; Tibetan: btsun mo rin po che. The jewel of a woman is one of the list of seven valuable accoutrements (saptaratna) with which a wheel-turning king is endowed. Not only a jewel of a women, but other humans make this list as well: Such a king naturally has a jewel of a grhapati and a parināyaka. The latter two may roughly evoke a Home Minister and a Minister of Defense.
“Noble One, by this root of goodness, may I become the jewel of a woman of a wheel-turning king.”

Then Venerable Ānanda took the barley that had been prepared, and went to where the Lord was. Having arrived there, he presented the barley to the Lord.

Lord buddhas are ones who ask while knowing. The Lord asked Venerable Ānanda, [Kha 140a] “By whom was this barley prepared, Ānanda?”

“Revered One,”¹³⁰ by such-and-such brahmin girl.”

“Did you have any conversation with that brahmin girl in the interim,¹³¹ Ānanda? In that case, Ānanda, report in detail to us all the conversation¹³² that you had in the interim with the brahmin girl.”

Then Venerable Ānanda reported in detail to the Blessed One all the conversation that he had had in the interim with the brahmin girl. After he had thus spoken, the Blessed One said this to Venerable Ānanda, “Ānanda, why did you not narrate for the brahmin girl a description¹³³ of buddhas?”

“Revered One, it occurred to me that the qualities of buddhas are profound. A situation might have occurred whereby¹³⁴ this girl would not understand. Thinking that, I narrated a description of wheel-turning kings.”

¹²⁹ Sanskrit: praṇidhāna; Tibetan: smon lam. This important category will be explored fully in the next chapter, in the section on narrative personhood and karma.

¹³⁰ Sanskrit: bhadanta; Tibetan: btsun pa.

¹³¹ antarākathāsamudāhara. Edgerton cites this as the only instance of this compound. Tibetan has lhan cig skabs kyi gtam.

¹³² It seems Ānanda may have gestured an affirmation.

¹³³ tat sarvam → tatsarvam To construe this we have to assume that the tad refers not to samudāhara, which is masculine, but to the entire statement, which can then be in neuter.

¹³⁴ Again, Tibetan here indicates a praise: ci phyir sang rayas kyi bsngaags pa ma brjod.

¹³⁵ Sanskrit: sthānam etad vidyate, a phrase that appears with great frequency in the MSV. Here Tibetan renders it in several slightly different ways in this passage, always very literally as: gang lags pa’i gnas de mchis yod pa and as gang yin pa’i gnas de yod pa zhig.
“Ānanda, you have failed.’ Had you narrated a description of buddhas to her, a situation might have occurred whereby she would have generated an irreversible mind to [achieve] unsurpassed, perfectly completed enlightenment. But now, Ānanda, this girl will become the jewel of a woman of a wheel-turning king.’”

The tale appears to end well for the girl: By displaying for the young girl a vision of a possible future for herself—that of a wheel-turning king’s jewel of a woman—Ānanda’s intervention leads her to direct her aspirations towards that end. We are told that as a result of Ānanda’s discourse, she will go on to become a wheel-turning king’s wife. Buddha’s confirmation of that immediately propels her to a privileged social status even before that fact. Yet Buddha’s remark to Ānanda tells us in no uncertain terms that this is a narrative about failure. There is no indication that Ānanda lacked the will to do her well, only that he misread the situation. It is important to note that Ānanda does attempt to adapt his teaching to the circumstances of the person before him. Yet knowing only that she was a young female whom the older woman thought would be suited to clean barley for Buddha, he misjudges the young

\[136 \text{ kṣiṇas tvam ānanda. More colloquial might be 'you blew it.' More literally, 'you are lost.' It could be taken as 'you have been diminished or wasted or destroyed, or you are weak or feeble or miserable or poor. The Tibetan is considerably softer, with ma legs pa byes, a phrase that usually translates na sōbhanam kṛtam.}

\[137 \text{ Again: sthānam etad vidyate.}

\[138 \text{ GM.i.37, yāvad āyuṣmālān ānandaḥ strīratnam vibhajati tāvat tāyā dārikayā te yavāḥ parikarmitāḥ | sā pādayor nipatya pranidhānaṁ kartum ārabdhā | ārya anēnāhaṁ kūśalamūlena rājīśaḥ cakravartīnaḥ strīratnam syām iti | athāyuṣmān ānanda yavān parikarmitān ādāya yena bhagavāṁs tenopasamkṛntaḥ | upasamkṛarya bhagavato yavān upānāmayati | jānakaḥ prcchakaḥ buddhaḥ bhagavantaḥ | prcchatai buddho bhagavān āyuṣmanto ānandam | kenaite ānanda yavāḥ parikarmitāḥ | amukayā bhadanta (brahmanadārikayā | kim abhūt te ānanda tāyā brahmanadārikayā sārdham antarākathāsamudhāraḥ | tena hy ānanda yāvāṁs te bhūt tāyā brāhmaṇadārikayā sārdham antarākathāsamudhāraḥ tattvamasyam asmākam vistārenārocyaya | athāyuṣmān ānando (yat ta)vyābhūt tāyā brāhmaṇadārikayā sārdham antarākathāsamudhāraḥ tattvam bhagavato vistārenārocyayati | evam ukte bhagavān āyuṣmanto ānandam idam avacat | kasmāt tvayānanda tāyā dārikayā buddhavarnodāharaṇam na kṛtam | mama bhadanta evam bhavati | gambhīryā buddhadharmāḥ sthānam etad vidyate yad asau dārikā na vijñāsyatītī | mayā tasyāḥ cakravartivarṇodāharaṇaḥ kṛtam | kṣiṇas tvam ānanda | sa cet tvayā tasyā buddhavarnodāharaṇam kṛtam abhāvisyat sthānam etad vidyate yat tu yām anuttarāyāṁ samyaksambodhāu avaiwartikaṁ cittam upādītam abhāvisyat | api tv ānanda bhāvisyasyasau dārikā rājīśaḥ cakravartīnaḥ strīratnam. Corresponding Tibetan text found at Derge Kha 139b5-140a6.}
girl’s potential to be guided towards the higher attainments that a different teaching could have brought about. For this, he is harshly rebuked by Buddha. Neither Buddha nor the narrators explicitly accuse Ānanda of underestimating her because of her gender. But the fact that he selects a topic in which the figure she might conceivably identify with is a queen indicates that he has tailored his discourse precisely on the basis of her sex. Ānanda addresses her as a potentially great woman, rather than as a potentially great being, and she misses her chance at the higher greatness because of this.

Ānanda’s imperfect care of the young girl directs her to a future far inferior to what Buddha envisioned as possible for her. Ānanda fails the young woman by underestimating her capacity not only to understand what a buddha is, but also to become one herself. Running through this story and throughout the MSV is an assumption that even the highest spiritual attainments are in principle possible for all, though the moves an individual can make at any given moment towards actualizing that potential are highly conditioned by the presence of a number of other factors. It was a limitation on Ānanda’s part that he did not see beyond some of those factors—her youth and gender—to notice that he had an opportunity to set her in incontrovertible motion towards buddhahood.

This brief exchange gives us a taste of how the MSV works, articulating a clear and often complex view of ethics in narratives presented without commentary. This narrative, for example, takes it for granted that we have an ability to intervene to assist others in actualizing their potential, and that failing to recognize and seize those opportunities is a failure deserving of strong censure. Buddha’s reprimand of Ānanda suggests that the possibility that we might care well for others implies a responsibility to do so. Yet in order to practice the
ethics of care that Buddha is promoting in this passage, Ānanda would have needed to know more of the young girl’s particular aptitudes at the moment of their encounter than he did. Our responsibility to care for others implies a responsibility to develop our own wisdom—wisdom that might be best called “ethical wisdom.”

In contrast to the unenlightened Ānanda, when Buddha directs a teaching at individual persons, he does so after taking into consideration not only their obvious social location, as Ānanda appeared to be attempting to do with the young girl, but also their particular personal predisposition, latent tendencies, character and nature. It is precisely this that Ānanda did not account for in crafting a talk to give her. Buddha’s teaching is so often described as taking such factors into consideration that the MSV has a stock phrase that the text’s narrator(s) of which often elide large parts, expecting the reader or reciter will be sufficiently familiar with the phrase to supply it themselves. In its full form, it is as follows:

Then, having understood her intentions, propensities, character and nature, the Lord gave the sort of Dharma instruction penetrating the four truths of āryas, through which, once she had heard it, Kacaṅgalā shattered with the thunderbolt of wisdom the mountain of the view of real personal

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139 Sanskrit: āśaya; Tibetan: bsams pa. Often paired with anuṣaya; see following note.

140 Sanskrit: anuṣaya; Tibetan: bag la rnal ba. Like āśaya, anuṣaya is an important technical term in Buddhist psychological discussions. Although I would tread gently when importing explanations from abhidharma texts to explain the MSV, an entire chapter of the Abhidharmakośa is devoted to explicating the term anuṣaya, while āśaya is addressed in chapter four, at iv.25. (de la Vallée Poussin 1923:31).

141 Sanskrit: dhātu; Tibetan: khams.

142 Sanskrit: prakṛti; Tibetan: rang bzhin.
existence that has risen up with twenty peaks and then actualized the fruit of stream entry.

The woman in the story from which the passage above is taken, Kacāṅgalā, is an aging servant woman, whose evident social location might well have led Ānanda to conclude that a simpler teaching would be in order. But unlike Ānanda, Buddha is able to tailor his teaching precisely to the needs of persons in front of him, because he is able to perceive their precise inner dispositions. However, we saw in the case of the young barley-cleaning woman that Buddha was also able to perceive her aptitudes without ever having met her. Within the hierarchy of ethical actors that the MSV displays for us, Buddha rests at and defines the apex. The form of ethical particularism we see here has Buddha as its ultimate practitioner, and, as becomes clear in the MSV, the only perfect practitioner.

The MSV does know of multiple levels of spiritual attainment, or other forms of enlightenment besides the samyaksambodhi or the perfect and complete enlightenment of a buddha. Among Buddha’s female and male disciples there are many who have attained the highest level of spiritual realization available to them, arhatship, and like Buddha they have

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143 Sanskrit: satkāyadṛṣṭi; Tibetan: ‘jig tshogs la lta ba. Also translated as view of a personal self, or when translated from Tibetan, view of a transitory collection.

144 Bhaiṣajyavastu. GM.i: 21. tato bhagavatā tasyā āśayānusayaṁ dhātum prakṛtiṁ ca jñātvā tādṛṣī cāturāryasaṃprativedhiki dharmadeśanāṁ kṛtā yāṁ (śrutvā) kacāṅgalayā vimsatiśūkharasamudgatam satkāyadṛṣṭiśailam jñānavajreṇa bhittvā srotāpattiphalanānāṁ sākṣātkṛtāṁ. Corresponding Tibetan text found at Derge Kha 132a205.

145 Unlike arguments that may be sustainable for Pāli texts, the MSV not only envisions women as arhats, but has a feminine form of word ‘arhat’ to denote them: arhantinī, used in reference to a number of bhikṣunīs, including Kacāṅgalā whom we have just encountered. The Tibetan here also takes pains to specify a feminine form to the term for arhat, dgra bcom ma. There appears to be no feminine form for arhat in Pāli, and Ellison Banks Findly argues there are no clear instances of the term arhat ever having been used in reference to a woman anywhere in the Pāli vinaya or Nikāya collections of discourses. (Findly 1999: 58) A different feminine form, arhati, is attested in the Avadanaśataka and the Śikṣāsamuccaya. For references, see Edgerton. For instances of the feminine form of arhat, arhantini, or dgra bcom ma in the MSV, see GM.i: 22.9/Derge Kha 132b3 used in reference to Kacāṅgalā; Gn 1978b: 41. Derge Nga 136a5 used in reference to Yaśodharā; and in Tibetan for which we have no Sanskrit, Derge
the ability to apprehend the four aspects of a person listed here: their intentions, propensities, character and nature.\textsuperscript{146} While an ordinary person could conceivably have some knowledge of another’s nature and character, in the buddhology of the MSV, knowledge of another’s intentions and propensities is accessible only to those with higher spiritual attainments, and in particular with forms of clairvoyance that are a fruit of meditative practice. In the MSV, those disciples of Buddha who are arhats have this capacity. Ānanda had not attained \textit{arhatship} at the time he was attending Buddha,\textsuperscript{147} but Buddha had other disciples who did, and this same phrase that appears above regarding Buddha’s perception of Kacaṅgalā’s “intentions, propensities, character and nature” is used to describe similarly effective teachings given by nuns and monks who \textit{have} attained \textit{arhatship}.\textsuperscript{148} Further, as numerous narratives make clear, Buddha’s ability to perfectly tailor his teachings to his listeners is understood to rest also in his ability to perceive the full details of their karma. But as becomes painfully apparent at other moments, although Buddha does encourage his disciples to engage in ethical care for others, as he does, like Ānanda, they often fall short. Thus Buddha as a perfect ethical agent urges his disciples to engage in a form of ethics that they simply are not able to practice perfectly: an ethics in which the widest range of particulars are taken into account when acting.

\textsuperscript{146} These four are known as the “four knowledges.” Sanskrit: *caturvidyā; Tibetan: khyen pa bzhi (Bod rgya 2000: 307) This term is little understood in Buddhist contexts. In his \textit{Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit} Damsteegt identifies it as a purely brahminical term, citing Luders (Damsteegt: 1978.249.) Though indeed in that context it may well be, it also would appear to have other uses. One may only guess at the polemical overtones in setting up this parallel between the four objects of Buddha’s omniscient knowledge and the four vedic textual collections.

\textsuperscript{147} The MSV recounts the well-known story of Ānanda’s attaining of \textit{arhatship} after Buddha had passed away, at Kṣudrakavastu Derge Da 309aff (Sanskrit not extant).

\textsuperscript{148} For example, it is said of the Bhikṣuṇi Kṛśā Gautamī in the Kṣudrakavastu at Derge Da 135b5. It is also said in the Bhikṣuvibhaṅga of Bhikṣuṇī Dharmadattā at Derge Cha 190a5. The verbs for knowing in these two passages are \textit{shes} and \textit{khong du chud}, respectively, rather than \textit{mākyen}, most likely as part of a pervasive tendency in Tibetan translations to reserve a separate honorific register for use to describe Buddha.
An ethics in which the right choice is understood to vary based on all the particulars of the situation requires an understanding of those particulars. Knowledge, or perception of particulars, thus takes on a crucial role in the Buddhist ethics of particularity. Just as there are clearly demarcated levels of perceptive powers linked to distinct levels of spiritual attainment, so there will be a clear hierarchy among ethical agents. As we have seen, the particulars that ethical agents would need to know to respond adequately to others’ needs and abilities is simply unavailable to those without the ability to read others’ intentions and predispositions. This is available only to ethical agents at a particular level. Worse yet, the range of particulars that might potentially have bearing on a given situation is in principle infinite, and therefore accessible only to those endowed with infinite perception, or omniscience, along with the ability to differentiate among the infinite mass of details, to ascertain which details are relevant and which are not. Thus it is impossible for anyone but a wise and omniscient being to know all the potentially relevant particulars, and therefore to engage in a perfect ethics of care.

Such a being, in the world of the MSV is a buddha, and only a buddha is such a being. This means that Ānanda and the rest of the ordinary unenlightened beings who comprise the vast majority of Buddha’s disciples will regularly fall short in their efforts to engage in the ethics of care that Buddha is encouraging in the MSV. For all ordinary beings, this ethics of particularity is per se an ethics of imperfect care. This does not absolve unenlightened ethical subjects of the obligation to care for others. But it does imply that, as long as they remain unenlightened, the care they offer will always fall short of the ideal, and the ethics they live

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For two very different works on Buddha’s omniscience, drawing on different bodies of Buddhist thought, see McClintock 2002 and Anālayo 2006.
and practice will be an ethics of imperfection. Yet the MSV also insists that ordinary beings are capable of moving beyond the ordinary; they are understood to be capable of enlightenment, and thus of eventually reaching a moment of offering perfect care. The obligation to offer the best possible care to others thus spurs ethical agents forwards toward the spiritual attainments that will allow them to offer perfect care.

Situating Buddhist Ethics: Shared Topographies

One aim of this dissertation is to point to potential avenues for later exploration in bringing Buddhist ethics into conversation with ethical thought outside Buddhist studies. One obstacle that has seriously frustrated attempts to do so is that for all its shared interest in ethical themes, Buddhist thinking about ethics seems to do little of what we often expect thinking about ethics to do. On the whole, Buddhists texts exhibit little interest in articulating the underlying principles that should guide moral decisions. They do not directly speak in terms of moral obligations or rights. For all the energy they expend identifying, classifying and analyzing ethical actions and agents, Buddhist commentators do not often take great delight—or even pains—to enunciate meta-theories about ethical behavior or being. And if we were to try to do that enunciation for them even in the case of a single text, the MSV, we could not say that any singular normative ethical theory is organizing the complex range of ethical reasoning and activity we can observe practiced within and by the MSV itself.
Yet it is very, very clear that the compilers of the MSV and the characters within it do care deeply about ethical formation and ethical conduct. Even so, even when opportunities present themselves for Buddha to expound on the philosophical underpinning for the ethics he practices and encourages, in the stories of the MSV, we do not see him doing so. Instead, we see him setting an example as to what an ethically excellent being would do in that particular context, in relation to that particular person, and then making it clear to his disciples that those are the standards to aspire to, even if it is clear they cannot succeed fully.

As other observers of Buddhist ethics have rightly noted, we see moments that would fit the definition of numerous types of ethics as they are broadly categorized in most Euro-American moral theory—as deontological, consequentialist, and virtue ethics—as well as moments that do not clearly fit any single definition well. For example, before banning a particular behavior that had come to his attention because it was incurring the disapproval of lay society, Buddha often says, “rightly do they criticize,”150 and simply forbids the behavior thenceforth. In reproaching certain actions, Buddha frequently also says, “That which is not the way of an ascetic, not harmonious, not appropriate, [and] not conducive to the way is not to be done by a monastic.”151 Such moments give the impression that an aesthetic appeal is being made to some unstated model for virtuous behavior. On other occasions, when monastics are confronted by critical lay persons asking them to do something against one of the precepts, those monastics can be heard explaining their conduct with a simple “Lord

150 Tibetan: rigs par ’phya’o. This is a recurring phrase. For one instance, see Kṣudrakavastu at Derge Da 137a4: dge slong dag dad pa’i bram ze dang khyim bdag rnams ni rigs par ’phya’o.

151 Another stock phrase, appearing among many other places in the Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga at Derge Ta 45b4-5. sangs rayas bcom ldan ’das kyi sde sbyong gi tshul ma yin pa/ rjes su mthun pa ma yin pa/ rung ba ma yin pa/ tshul dang mthun pa ma yin pa de ni rab tu byung bas bya ba ma yin no zhes rnam par smad pa mdzad do.
Buddha forbids it,” and Buddha never corrects this stance. By virtue of the authority of their legislator, the rules in such moments seem to have their own self-evident deontological status. However, another familiar refrain in the MSV in Buddha’s discourses to his monastics is the comment that “the result of thoroughly black actions is thoroughly black, that of mixed actions is mixed, that of thoroughly pure is thoroughly pure; therefore in this manner should one train, Bhikṣus: having given up thoroughly black actions, and the mixed as well, effort is to be made only towards the thoroughly pure.” In this vision, and through much of the expositions of karma in the MSV, actions seem to be valued simply for the results they bring. In short, the MSV imagines Buddha to practice virtue ethics, and to make consequential and deontological arguments as well. Rather than speak of any ethical “system” at work in the MSV, it thus makes more sense to speak, as Charles Hallisey does, of styles of reasoning about ethics, guided by something like a Buddhist ethical particularism.

In the previous section of this chapter, I provided a descriptive analysis of ethics as it is practiced in the MSV, without attempting to resolve its tensions into categories recognized in Euro-American moral philosophy. We have proceeded this way in the conviction that it is best to first try to allow the MSV to suggest the terms on which its ethics work, before attempting to place it into conversation with other ethical thinking. This section will now begin to situate what we have seen in the MSV within ongoing discussions in Buddhist studies, and make some initial suggestions as to how the MSV’s ethics, as we have described it, might contribute to

152 bcom ldan ’das kyi bkag go appears in the Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga at Derge Ta 202a1.
153 ekāntakṛṣṇānāṃ karmanāṃ ekāntakṛṣṇo vipākaḥ | vyatimিśrānāṃ vyatimিśrāḥ | ekāntaśuklānāṃ ekāntaśuklaḥ | tasmāt tarhi bhikṣava evam śikṣitavyam | ekāntakṛṣṇānāṃ karmānyāpasya vyatimिśrānī ca ekāntaśuklāneṣv eva karmasvābhogah karanīyaḥ. Appearing, for example, at GM.i.109.
154 Hallisey 1996 and 1997, as well as numerous class lectures and other informal forums.
discussions in ethical philosophy more broadly. In the next section, I will turn back to the
MSV’s narratives to ask what those larger discussions allow us to see in a major ethical
problematic in the MSV: its simultaneous valuing of ethical particularism and its concern to
establish a generalized rule-based code of conduct for monastics.

Within the field of Buddhist studies, we find two major approaches to the exploration
of ethics. One major strain is well summarized by the title of the major work of Damien Keown,
its most prolific practitioner: The Nature of Buddhist Ethics. Keown has had a major voice in
conversations concerned with classifying Buddhist ethics in terms set by Western ethical
philosophers, a task he sees as essential in order to bring Buddhist ethics into comparative
dialogue with Western ethical systems. Part of this project involves investing effort in
“pressing for th[e] consistency and in searching for the moral logic behind the complexity.”
Keown rejects both consequentialism and deontologism as inadequate characterizations of
Buddhist ethics, and turns instead to Aristotle, to propose that Buddhist ethics are best
understood as a form of virtue ethics. More recently, Charles Goodman has produced a
thoughtful study of much of the same material Keown took up, but argued that Buddhist ethics
be seen as fundamentally consequentialist. Meanwhile, Phillip Olson, looking at different
material, relates Zen Buddhist ethics to Kantian ethical thinking, and concludes that Zen
Buddhist ethics are best understood as deontological. Such works have succeeded admirably
in bringing Buddhism into a domain where it can be discussed by those studying Western

155 Clayton 2006: 118.
156 Keown 1992. Also seeking to categorize Buddhist ethics in Western philosophical terms, Barbra Clayton (2006)
finds a qualified form of virtue ethics at work in the Mahāyāna text she examines.
157 Goodman 2009.
158 Olson 1993.
ethical thought. But such projects run the danger of doing so by selectively extracting from Buddhist texts those tenets that most fit categories generated in response to very different concerns. This dissertation shares with these scholars an abiding interest in engaging with Buddhist ethics in a way that can be productive for those thinking about ethics outside Buddhist studies, and also finds it frequently productive to experiment with concepts from Euro-American ethical philosophy in looking at Buddhist ethics. But this dissertation will not share their concerns to identify a system that Buddhist ethics follows as a whole, whether that system be one categorized in terms set by Western philosophy or not. Rather, this dissertation aims ultimately to contribute to such comparative conversations by first exploring the ethics at work on its own terms in its own domain. We proceed in this way, with the confidence that Buddhist ethics will speak to our concerns, once we have learned how to listen to its voice.

The second major approach to Buddhist ethics is exemplified in the work of Charles Hallisey, Karen Derris, Anne Hansen, Susanne Mrozik, and Donald Swearer. This second orientation participates in an interpretative turn within Buddhist studies that seeks to redress a long-standing de-historicizing and de-contextualizing tendency in the field. From the perspective of this turn to the local and the particular, the claims of any one perspective, text or movement to represent “the” Buddhist view per se appear highly suspect. The object of study of this second approach to Buddhist ethics has shifted from a singular entity called “Buddhism” to recognize a persistent plurality of objects. Along with a concern to historicize, this orientation in Buddhist ethics is committed to taking seriously the literary forms in which Buddhist ethical thought is transmitted, understanding that the form and content together are

159 For a concise display of the fault lines in these approaches to Buddhist ethics, see the published exchanges between Hallisey and Schilbrack in the Journal of Buddhist Ethics. (Hallisey 1996, Schilbrack 1997 and Hallisey 1997).
productive of meaning. As Hallisey and Hansen have demonstrated in their work on Buddhist ethics and story literature, narratives are an important locus for both the articulation and the production of ethical values. In this, their work has helped clear out the space within which this project can take place.

Additionally, this dissertation explores a juncture within the Buddhist monastic imaginaire where personal development—understood as self-fashioning—is inextricably linked to the cultivation of an other-regarding ethics. The mapping of that juncture unfolds in dialogue with two major strains of ethical thinking outside Buddhist studies, as articulated respectively by Foucault with his explorations of ethics in terms of care of the self, and by Paul Ricoeur with his interest in considering how one lives for and with others. At the same time, a number of discussions in Euro-American moral philosophy offer conceptual tools and language that can be useful for thinking about the MSV’s ethical moves. Some of the language developed by feminist ethics and by ethical particularism is singularly well-suited to describe the ethics we see Buddha practicing in the MSV’s narratives. I will save the exploration of ethical particularist discourse for fuller consideration in the next section, and take up here that of feminist ethics.

We have pointed to Buddha’s attentiveness to details, to the particulars of context and person. We also note a distinctive ethics of caring at work, and that the cultivation of ethical persons is a project enacted in relationship to others. I would like here to offer a brief and schematic sketch of a series of moves made by feminist thinkers, highlighting in particular

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160 Hallisey and Hansen 1996.
their resonance with ethics as we see it in the MSV, in order to suggest ways they may enrich
our thinking about Buddhist ethics. My aim is not to attempt to stake out a place for Buddhist
ethics in this larger theoretical terrain, but rather to suggestively point to similar
topographies that might merit further exploration later.

The interest in ethics of care within Buddhist studies in general, and this dissertation in
particular, can be traced directly to the work of Charles Hallisey, for whom the category has
become integral to his research and teaching alike. Even outside Buddhist studies, the term
“ethics of care” has a fairly short history, and can be traced back to Carol Gilligan and Nel
Noddings, who each made it the focus of their groundbreaking work in the 1980s. Both
thinkers argued against what they saw as a particularly male view of ethics as centered on
discrete individuals making abstract and impersonal moral choices, and in favor of what they
saw as a particularly female ethics centered on relationships and attuned to personal
differences. This angle of vision noted that the domestic domain had too often been considered
to be outside the domain of “real” ethical activity, taken to be the public sphere. They argued
that instead the domestic domain should be considered a domain of intense ethical activity,
precisely because it was such a fertile domain for the cultivation of caring relationships.
Further, Noddings proposed that “relations will be taken as ontologically basic, and the caring
relation will be taken as ethically basic.” As such, Noddings’ ethics can also be described as a
relational ethics. In Noddings’ formulation, this form of ethical action responds to the
individual person and situation at hand, rather than reasoning from a set of general principles.

Noddings 1984: 3.
Instead of proceeding deductively from principles superimposed on situations, women seek to “fill out” hypothetical situations in a defensible move towards concretization.\footnote{Noddings 1984: 36.}

This ethics of caring demands that ethical agents must engage with others in the fullness of that person’s particularity, as opposed to treating them as if they were interchangeable with abstract others. As Noddings puts it:

To act as one-caring, then, is to act with special regard for the particular person in the concrete situation.\footnote{Noddings 1984: 24.}

Seyla Benhabib takes up this insight in an influential 1986 article, introducing a distinction between “generalized and concrete others,” and arguing that universalist or generalist moral theories are unsustainable. Their insistence on taking as the starting point of ethical theorizing an undifferentiated or “generalized other” renders such theories ultimately incoherent for several reasons. For one, Benhabib suggests, in order to relate ethically to others, we must first recognize them as concrete individuals, with their own “individuating characteristics.”\footnote{Benhabib 1986, especially pp. 410-415.} Only with such a basis could we then move from concrete others and behave in ways that take their needs and rights into consideration as more “generalized others,” whose needs and rights can then be seen as equal to that of ourselves or others. The feminist ethics articulated by Gilligan and Benhabib makes one more connection that will prove useful as we consider the MSV’s stories about women. They link the forms of ethical particularism that they envision to the embedding of ethical subjects and relationships in their

\begin{enumerate}
\item[165] Noddings 1984: 36.
\item[166] Noddings 1984: 24.
\item[167] Benhabib 1986, especially pp. 410-415.
\end{enumerate}
own personal narratives. Evocatively, Gilligan at one point contrasts generalist forms of ethics construed as “a math problem with humans” to her preferred forms of ethics construed as “a narrative of relationships that extends over time.”

In this conception, the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights, and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. This conception of morality as concerned with the activity of care centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as fairness ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules.

As such, this vision of narrativity can be applied not only to the recognition that personal identities and relationships are not given, but unfold as stories told as they are lived over time; it also applies to a style of thinking that attends to contextualization and particularity in ways that will be familiar to us in the ethics practiced and narrated by the MSV.

In brief, this mode of feminist thought asserts:

Women’s moral judgment is more contextual, more immersed in the details of relationships and narratives. It shows a greater propensity to take the standpoint of the ‘particular other’... The contextuality, narrativity and specificity of women’s moral judgment is not a sign of weakness or deficiency, but a manifestation of a vision of moral maturity that views the self as a being immersed in a network of relationships with others.

169 Ibid: 19.
170 Benhabib 1986: 403.
This formulation of an ethics of care is not without its problems, particularly in its tendency to essentialize one particular gendering of women, making it harder to conceive of other constructions that support new possibilities for women and men as well. Yet their work has been productive for the field of ethical theory in general, and in any case, this strand of feminist thought has been developed further since these three initial statements of it. We need not follow that trajectory, though, since it has already provided us with suggestions for thinking about ethics that will continue to resonate evocatively through the remainder of this dissertation.

In the meantime, the image that emerges in the MSV of Buddha’s practice of ethics is one that evokes these thinkers’ emphasis on caring for others in a way that requires attentiveness to them as the concrete and particular others. The narratives of the MSV set up the vision of a perfect ethical agent whose care of others—all others—proceeds precisely through an awareness of the fullness of the particularity of each. Meanwhile, the MSV itself, in its own intense narrativity—its incorporation of a veritable literary canon within itself—offers a site for exploring this feminist ethical system’s conviction that narrative modes of understanding serve such ethical aims admirably. In its literary form itself, the MSV is deeply committed to narrative modes of understanding—and simultaneously to communicating that understanding—of what it means to practice ethics. As a central resource for the monastic orders’ own practice and training in ethics, the very form of the MSV argues that narrative lies at the heart of the ethics, particularly of an ethics understood as the cultivation of ethical persons in relation to others. In its portrayal of ethical agents and subjects who act, think and

171 A few works that trace the later course of this line of thought are Benhabib 1992 and Tronto 1993.
172 Sylvain Lévi first described the MSV as precisely that: a canon unto itself. (Lévi 1937: 78).
experience within the specificity of narrated contexts, the MSV offers fertile ground for learning to see one’s own life as unfolding narratively.

**Human Particularity and the Uncodifiability of Ethics**

As Aristotle consistently says, the best generalizations about how one should behave hold only for the most part. If one attempted to reduce one’s conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then, however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong—and not necessarily because one had changed one’s mind; rather one’s mind on the matter was not susceptible of capture in any universal formula.

John McDowell, “Virtue and Reason”

The impulse we have seen in the MSV to attend closely to the particularities of persons and situation appears to push in a rather different direction from the impulse to codify broadly applicable and binding rules for monastics. Yet both impulses are very much in evidence in the text. If the MSV was unsettling at first glance in its wedding of Rabelaisian narratives to guidelines for ascetics, that of its ethical particularism and legal codification would seem to make an odder marriage still. In this section, we will observe this unlikely pairing, asking how the vinaya, whose process of formulation appears so fluid and responsive, resulted in a legal code that has remained unchanged for nearly two millennia. As we watch Buddha aspire to articulate a way of life that can be enacted within many contexts, what we see will suggest that the vinaya’s “extremely detailed set of rules” may actually reflect more a sense of the inadequacy of rules to cover the particularity of living situations, than it does any conviction in

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174 The vinaya is thus described by Gyatso (Gyatso 2003: 107), and evidently so to most any reader of the MSV.
their final codifiability. The rules will be preserved as a crucial means of defining and bounding a lasting way of life, even as that life is only made fully livable in particular contexts through the operations of narrative.

We have taken care to speak thus far of a Buddhist ethics of particularity or a Buddhist ethical particularism, for while it bears strong family resemblances to other theories of ethical particularism, the ethical particularism we see on display in the MSV was developed in response to its own distinct historical and cultural contingencies, as any good particularist theorist would of course recognize. We turn now briefly to modern Western theories of ethical particularism for language that will be helpful in talking about some of the tensions we have already seen at work in the particular brand of ethics that the MSV’s narratives show Buddha practicing.

We can let Margaret Little introduce the issue:

A great deal of discussion in ethical theory has recently centred on the particularity of moral situations. In some cases, the point of discussion has been to emphasize how important it is to attend to the nuances and contextual details of a case before applying any moral norms, rules of principles to it. But in a number of discussions, the point has been to question the idea that there are any moral norms, rules or principles capable of codifying the moral landscape.\textsuperscript{175}

In such discussions,\textsuperscript{176} particularists find the articulation of universal ethical guidelines or principles—and therefore a codification of rules such as we see in the vinaya—to be

\textsuperscript{175} Little 2000: 276.

problematic. Drawing on both Aristotle and Wittgenstein, some theories of ethical particularism refer to an “uncodifiability of ethics,” pointing to a fundamental inadequacy of universal rules—or generalities as they are now more often called in such discussions—to account for the infinite diversity of human experience and the practical world we live in. To apply this language to the MSV, not even a being with perfect knowledge of the particulars could be expected to produce perfect legislation. In a passage that has served as a resource in discussion about the codifiability of law, Aristotle wrote:

Law is always a general statement, yet there are cases which it is not possible to cover in a general statement. In matters therefore where, while it is necessary to speak in general terms, it is not possible to do so correctly, the law takes into consideration the majority of cases, although it is not unaware of the error this involves. And this does not make it a wrong law; for the error is not in the law nor in the lawgiver, but in the nature of the case: the material of conduct is essentially irregular.\textsuperscript{177}

Nevertheless, Aristotle certainly does accept rule by law, even as his ethics are careful to acknowledge the errors that laws involve. Summing up Aristotle’s qualified acceptance of rule by law, Nussbaum writes:

The law is authoritative insofar as it is a summary of wise decisions. It is therefore appropriate to supplement it with new wise decisions made on the spot, also appropriate to correct it where it diverges from what a good judge would do in this case. Here again we find that particular judgment is superior in both correctness and in flexibility.\textsuperscript{178}

\textsuperscript{177} Aristotle \textit{et al} 1996: 134.

\textsuperscript{178} Nussbaum 1992: 69.
These insights help us to track some of Buddha’s moves as a legislator. The rules of the vinaya are basically a set of instances of Buddha’s “particular judgment.” We have noted Buddha’s flexibility in revising rules in response to changing situations. We also see an apparent lack of concern to bring the legal code to a point of final closure. Buddha appears to address the drawbacks of relying on generalist rules by simply applying a particularist stance to the rules themselves, using them to prevent particular situations from arising, and defining them ever more narrowly as the occasion demands.

A brief story may best make clear the extremes to which the MSV has Buddha following this particularist inclination, even while establishing general precepts. In a charter story that is tempting to read as a satirical exploration of the impossibility of matching particular and generality, Sthūlanandā, a nun renowned for her cunning and creative misbehavior gives a Dharma discourse to a gathering of men when their wives are not present. She uses the opportunity to reveal the women’s deepest secrets, and the lay community criticizes not only Sthūlanandā for this, but other nuns as well, and begins to withhold alms from the remainder of the nuns. Buddha rules as follows:

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179 The use of humor in the MSV has been discussed by Schopen and Clarke. (Schopen 2007 and Clarke 2008) Both these works cite numerous references to other less sustained discussions of humor in the MSV, or the alleged lack thereof. Clarke notes that the Buddhist vinaya has been singled out as singularly lacking in humor (Clarke 2008: 2 of unpaginated pdf file). More recently, John Powers comments of the Pāli vinaya, which he calls simply the Monastic Discipline, that “one would have to have a generous view of humor to find any in these passages.” (Powers 2009: 97). Yet Janet Gyatso began her essay on Sex in Buddhism by commenting on the evident humor of its treatment in the vinaya, and indeed it is hard to advance far in such discussions without noting such. (Gyatso 2005: 273-4) Frankly, it is hard to imagine anyone who has read the MSV to miss the text’s comic dimensions. If the Pāli vinaya echoes with the sound of barely stifled giggling for an attentive listener, the MSV surely resounds with bursts of irrepressible laughter.
The case of this criticism was presented to the Lord. Thereupon, in the Lord’s thinking, whatever fault had come about was all due to teaching the Dharma, so [he said,] “In that case, the Dharma is not to be taught.”

And so after they had entered [homes] for alms, the brahmins and householders [Ta 202a] said, “Noble Ones, please teach the Dharma.”

They said, “The Lord has forbidden it.”

The brahmins and householders said, “Surely the alms of our house are also forbidden,” and they too became deprived of alms.

This was presented to the Lord, and the Lord said, “In that case, one should teach the Dharma in five lines.”

When the Lord said that they should teach the Dharma in five lines, they did not know how to do so, so the Lord said, “Householders, form is impermanent. Feelings, discernment, compositional factors, and consciousness are impermanent.”

When they proceeded to teach the Dharma in five lines, afterwards those brahmins and householders said, “Noble Ones, why are you not explaining much Dharma?”

“Householders, the Lord has permitted only that much.”

“Noble Ones, are you undertaking to explain a pinch worth of Dharma?” After that, the brahmins and householders, “Just as you are teaching us less Dharma, we will offer you less alms.”

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180 Tibetan: *dgongs pa*. Note here the figure of the omniscient narrator reporting on the unstated thoughts of the omniscient author of the laws, Buddha. This is by no means the only such instance in the *MSV*.

181 Tibetan: *nyes pa*.

182 The feminine form for the equivalent of *ārya* is used here. Tibetan: *'phags ma dag*. 
And this case of their becoming impoverished in terms of alms was also presented to the Lord, and the Lord said, “The Dharma is to be taught in six lines.”

When the Lord said this, since they did not know how to do so, the Lord said, “Householders, eyes are impermanent. Householders, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind are impermanent.”  

The cycle of dissatisfaction and revision of rules repeats itself, until Buddha modifies the rule again, stipulating that nuns may teach men, but only when other females are present.

Yet the story does not end there. A group of naughty nuns, wanting to give a Dharma talk to men when no women are present, decide that having a female fowl, monkey, or sheep present would meet the criterion for teaching men only when there are also females in attendance. Their stratagem is discovered, more criticism ensues, and Buddha finally states...

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183 Tibetan: *sprig ka*; Sanskrit: *sprkkā*. This refers to *trigonella corniculata*, a sort of fenugreek. The expression apparently indicates that the portion offered is stinting and of low value.

184 *Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga*. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 201b3, with story ending at 203a4. kha zer bar byed pa'i skabs de bcom ldan 'das la gsoł to / de nas bcom ldan 'das kyis dgon gsang cu gung zad ci byung ba de thams cad ni chos bstan pa la las byur gyi s de lta bas na chos bstan par mi bya'o / de dag yang bsod snyoms kyi phyir thugs pa na / bram ze dang / khyim [Ta 202a] bdaq rnams kyis smras pa / 'phaqs ma dag chos shod cig / de rnams kyis 'di skad ces smras so / bcom ldan 'das kyis bkag go / bram ze dang / khyim bdaq de rnams kyis 'di skad ces smras so / bdaq caq gi sdum pa'i bsod snyoms kyang daqg laqs mod / de rnams yang bsod snyoms kyis phongs par byur pa na / bcom ldan 'das la gsoł ba dang / bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal pa / de lta bas na tshig lnga'i chos bstan par bya'o / bcom ldan 'das kyis tshig lnga'i chos bstan par bka' stsal pa na / de rnams kyis ma shes na / bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal pa / khyim bdaq gaugs ni mi rtaq go / tshor ba dang / 'du shes dang / 'du byed rnams dang / rnam par shes pa ni mi rtaq go zhes bya ba'o / gang gi tshe de rnams kyis tshig lnga'i chos bstan par brtsams pa dang / de nas bram ze dang / khyim bdaq de rnams kyis 'di skad ces smras so / 'phaqs ma dag ci'i slad du khyod kyis chos mang du mi bshad / khyim bdaq bcom ldan 'das kyis de tsam zhig bca' ba mzdad do / 'phaqs ma dag ci khyed sprig ka'i rin chen gyi chos shig bstan par rtsom mam / de nas bram ze dang / khyim bdaq de rnams kyis 'di skad ces smras so / ji lta bdaq caq la chos nyung du bstan pa de lta rdaq gi bsod snyoms kyang nyung du 'bul lo / de lta bsod snyoms kyis phongs par byur pa'i skabs de / bcom ldan 'das la gsoł ba dang / bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal pa / tshig drug gi chos bstan par bya'o zhes bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal pa na de rnams kyis ma shes na / bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal pa / khyim bdaq mig ni mi rtaq go / khyim bdaq rna ba dang / sna dang / lce dang / lus dang / yid ni mi rtaq go zhes bya ba'o.

185 *bya gag* could refer to a chicken, duck or other fowl. According to Lokesh Chandra, *bya gag* can translate the Sanskrit *kukkuṭa*, *kurkuṭa*, *kṛmi*, *baka* or *śālika*. The text also refers to someone naked (*byil mo*), though the context is unclear.

186 These nuns’ willingness to interpret the category of female, to which they and the other nuns all belong animals mirrors the lay followers’ defining too widely their category of untrustworthy nuns. The failure to
the rule in its final formulation: Bhikṣunīś are not to teach the dharma to men—even in just five or six lines—unless a female who can understand\textsuperscript{187} is present. No other narrative situations arise to spark further revisions and the precept stands. But note that Buddha does not specify any female, which also could leave open space for infant girls or other uncomprehending auditors, but defines a category perfectly suited to the occasion depicted in this narrative: a female capable of monitoring what is said. Just as the lay donors had defined too widely the category of naughty nuns from whom alms should be withheld, so the naughty nuns define too widely the category of female, comically placing themselves in a class with she-monkeys.

This story also indicates that knowledge of particulars must be accompanied by a knowledge of how to organize or group those particulars into meaningful categories. That is, it requires a knowledge as to which particulars are relevant or “salient,” as some ethical articularists describe it. In any given situation, persons can be identified in a vast—in principle, limitless—number of ways, precisely because the particular features of that person can be understood or approached from a potentially limitless range of different angles, and connected to potentially limitless contextualizing factors. The selection of particular features taken to “matter” about a person or situation fundamentally affect our response, and thus shapes our impact on others as we seek to care for them. As suggested by Ānanda’s exchange with the young woman who cleaned the barley, deciding that a person’s age or gender is the most salient factor leads us to offer them certain forms of care rather than others: telling them

\textsuperscript{187} Tibetan: rig pa’i bud med.

\textsuperscript{187} Tibetan: rig pa’i bud med.
stories about the greatness of the queen, rather than about the greatness of buddhas. When her sex is seen as the most salient feature about the young woman, she is grouped with other marked by that particular feature, and the narrative Ānanda relates inspired her with its images of the best in that class: a jewel of a woman. Had he taken her spiritual capacity as the most salient feature, the outcome would have been radically different, Buddha’s response implies. The choice among particulars is not a matter of epistemological or even ontological accuracy, for she is indeed marked by the attributes of being a woman and young, as well as endowed with the capacity for enlightenment, but the choice as to which attribute should be taken as meaningful and relevant is a matter of tremendous ethical import, the narrative tells us. for on that choice rests her enlightenment itself. The absence of this last sort of knowledge that will leave lasting marks on the monastic community after Buddha passes away, as we shall see in a moment.

Returning to Buddha’s law-making practices, in this story of Sthūlanandā and elsewhere, the MSV presents us with a vision of a legislator who is well aware of the limitations of law, and willing to adapt his general rules to the particulars, apparently endlessly. These legal interventions can also be used to construct new forms of relationship and, as we shall say in the chapter on community, Buddha uses them to fashion a revised construction of gender for the women who join his order. The creation of new rules constitutes a key tool in Buddha’s crafting of a way of life that can survive him because its contours have been thickly mapped through his legislation. We might say that Buddha’s lawmaking entails a remarkably fluid codification of rules that can morph indefinitely, narrowing in scope potentially forever, as a
means of ensuring its ongoing relevance. The MSV also, and crucially, includes two narratives that tell us that Buddha envisioned this process of infinite adaption as continuing after his death as well. The first of these narratives shows Buddha authorizing his monastics to change the rules by consensus after he is gone, and the second indicates their determination that they did not know how to do so.

Both stories appear in the Kṣudrakavastu. In the first narrative we find Buddha giving what nowadays we might call his ‘ethical will’ to his disciples, at the end of his days. On his deathbed, Buddha says to the monks gathered around him:

“Bhikṣus, after I the teacher have passed away, you should not entertain the thought that your teacher is not there and there is no teacher, because I have instructed you how to recite the Prātimokṣa sūtra every half month. From today onwards, it is your teacher and it is the teacher. Bhikṣus, having come together, the assembly should make clarifications among the trifling and minor rules of training, and live at ease.”

With this statement, Buddha empowers the monks to act collectively as lawmakers, ensuring his particularist revisioning could continue as new situations arose. With the mention of the “trifling and miscellaneous” rules of training, the implication is that the monks are not to change the major rules. This might be presumed to refer to the heaviest

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188 As Jonathan Z. Smith has noted, canonical lists of all sorts are made subject to ongoing processes of “limiting and overcoming that limitation through ingenuity” (Smith 1982: 52).

189 Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 288a4-6. Rockhill also retells the MSV’s account of this conversation in his Life of Buddha. (Rockhill 1907: 140).

190 Ironically, this empowerment to change the minor or ‘miscellaneous’ (phran tshogs) rules appears in the Section on Miscellany, Kṣudrakavastu or phran tshogs kyi gzi.
classes of offenses, or at a minimum to the \textit{pārājika} class of offenses, which includes such basic rules of training as celibacy and not taking human life.\textsuperscript{191} But even this much, it seems, the monks were either unwilling to presume, or were all too willing to presume and therefore could not reach consensus.

This second narrative is set some time later, after Buddha has passed away, and during the time of the first council. The dating and purpose of the Buddhist councils have been the subject of great scrutiny and debate, to which we need add nothing here.\textsuperscript{192} Sticking to the story as the \textit{MSV} tells it,\textsuperscript{193} the monks have gathered for a council that will determine, among other matters of the monastic community, how the vinaya and other teachings of Buddha are to be transmitted. This council takes place at the urging of Mahākāśyapa, who has emerged as a leading figure in the monastic order at this point after Buddha’s passing—in a development that bodes very badly for nuns, as we shall see later. Mahākāśyapa first stipulates that Ānanda may attend only on condition that he serves as the water-bearer to the saṅgha. The \textit{MSV}’s narrators’ sympathies here lie clearly with Ānanda, as the text repeatedly describes him here as “Ānanda, who had been the Lord’s personal attendant and to whom several discourses had been addressed directly,” as it reports Mahākāśyapa’s moves seeking to have Ānanda excluded from the proceedings altogether, on the basis that he alone among them has not yet attained \textit{arhatship}. Ānanda asks Mahākāśyapa to show him forbearance, saying he has done nothing to

\textsuperscript{191} Basically, breaking of any of the \textit{pārājika} rules of training—four for bhikṣus and eight for bhikṣuṇīs—automatically abrogates one’s monastic ordination. For a concise discussion of this term, see Heirman 1999.

\textsuperscript{192} This debate can be followed in de la Vallée Poussin 1908, Hofinger 1946, Demiéville 1951, Waldschmidt 1954, Przyluski 1955, Bareau 1962 and Nattier and Prebish 1977, just for starters.

\textsuperscript{193} Rockhill’s \textit{Life of the Buddha} tells the story of the first council, as it appears in the \textit{MSV}, sometimes translating and partly summarizing. (Rockhill 1907: 148-161).
harm the teachings, and Mahākāśyapa then proceeds to upbraid him, surveying a litany of faults Ānanda has committed. We may note that two of these “faults” that incur Mahākāśyapa’s righteously indignant and very public berating of Ānanda involve occasions when Ānanda had been supportive of women in their efforts to gain ordination and access to Buddha. For our present argument, what is relevant is that also among these faults is the fact that Ānanda did not follow up on Buddha’s comment about changing the “trifling and miscellaneous rules of training,” to ascertain precisely which rules qualify as such and which do not. Of the eight faults with which he charges Ānanda, Mahākāśyapa devotes almost as much time to this point as to the other seven combined.

Moreover, you have faults such as this: On the occasion when the Lord said, “I\(^\text{194}\) [have instructed you how] to recite the Prātimokṣa sūtra every half month, [and], when reciting the trifling and minor moral precepts, the bhikṣu saṅgha should loosen [them]\(^\text{195}\) and live at ease,” you did not ask which are the trifling and minor rules of moral training.\(^\text{196}\)

Mahākāśyapa then goes through a long litany of the many different ways that the distinction might be parsed between what is trifling and minor and what is not. He concludes by saying:

\(^{194}\) The best way to construe this otherwise puzzling *ngas is as part of a direct quote that Mahākāśyapa is making of the previous statement by Buddha that he is referencing here. He does not complete the entire statement, but omits the verb that *ngas governs (*bstan pa). This reading also appears in the Peking edition, at Peking ‘dul ba Ne 290baff.

\(^{195}\) *phyir klo* is more often found spelled as *glod*, to release, unbind, slacken. Lokesh Chandra finds attestation for *glod pa* to translate *samavaghāta*, which suggests do away with altogether. Grammatically, no subject is specified for the unbinding, thus it may mean the rules are undone or the assembly disperses.

\(^{196}\) Rockhill (1907: 153) also describes this comment. *Kṣudrakavastu*. Sanskrit not extant for this passage. Derge Da 307b6-7. *gzhon yang khyed la nyes pa ‘di dag yod de / bcom ldan ‘das khyis gsungs pa *ngas za ba phyed phyed cing so sar thar pa’i mdo ‘don pa de’i tshe gang gis tshul khrims phra mo dang / phran tshogs dag ‘don na / dge slong gi dge ‘don gyis phyir glod la bde ba’i reg pa la gnos shig ces byung na / de’i tshe khyod khyis tshul khrims bslab pa phra mo dang/ phran tshogs gang lags, zhes ma zhus pa’i phyir ro.*
“Having understood it, [one] bhikṣu observes the four pārājikas for males, while others observe the thirteen saṅghāvaśeṣas. The heretics will thus get their chance [to find fault, saying:] ‘The Dharma of the ascetic Gautama is like smoke. When the ascetic Gautama was around, the rules of training for his disciples were adhered to correctly; but now it’s just acting however you please and relaxed; if they want to, they do it. If they don’t want to, they don’t do it.’ This being the case, it is a fault that you did not ask the Lord, for the benefit of people of the future.”

“Venerable Mahākāśyapa, it is not that it is nothing to be ashamed nor not something very shameful. [Da 308b] However, at the time, I was afflicted by pain at the thought of the grief of separating from the Tathāgata.”

In one sense, Mahākāśyapa is right to be distraught over Ānanda’s omission, since failure to act on Buddha’s authorization to adapt the vinaya to changing times has left Buddhist monasticism with a legal code that has been formally static for many long centuries. Yet if we step back from the world of the text for a moment, we see that this presentation of the council as fixing the current formulation of the vinaya is wily indeed. From our historical position outside the MSV, in a scholarly world that knows of multiple vinayas, we are able to see what no single individual canonical vinaya acknowledges: Monastic communities did adapt their vinayas. We cannot say who, where, when or how with any certainty, but we know that

197 Tibetan: khong du chud pa
198 Tibetan: mu stegs can. This usually translates the Sanskrit tīrthika.
199 This account is related in Rockhill 1907: 153-4. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan translated here can be found in the Kṣudrakavastu at Derge Da 308a6-308b1. de ltar dge slong gis khong du chud pa nas phas pham par ’gyur ba bzhi la gnas shing/ kha cig ni dge ’dun gyi lhaq ma’i chos bcu gsum la gnas pa mu stegs can qgis skabs rnyed de / dge sbyong gau ta ma’i chos ni dud pa bzhi du gyur to / dge sbyong gau ta ma bzhugs pa’i tshe ni nyan thos kyi bslab pa yang dag par sdom zhi ng/ da ltar ni ci dga’ bar spyod cing lhod par gyur te / ‘dod na ni de bzhi do byed / mi ’dod na ni mi byed do / de bas na khyod kyis ma ‘ongs pa’i skye bo rnam la phan par bya ba’i phyir bcom ldan ’das la ma zhus pa nyes so / btsun pa ’od srung chen po ngo tsha med pa’am/ rab tu ngo tsha med pa ni ma [Da 308b] lags mod kyi / bdag de’i tshes na de bzhi gshegs pa dang bral ba’i mya nγan dran pa’i sdu gsal qgis gzir to.
they did, and we can certainly guess why. We see the proof of adaption in the plurality of vinaya textual corpuses, even if each text ignores the others and thus preserves the vanity of being the sole heir to Buddha’s vinaya teachings. The differences in the particulars of their rules tend to be found among what we may now call “trifling and miscellaneous” matters of training—or those differences are relatively trifling and minor.

At some time point during or before the first centuries of the common era, when it was stabilized in the canonical form that we find today, the MSV’s pretense of being unchanged and static since the time of Buddha translated into actual canonical paralysis. At some point, the tweaking ended, its authoritative form was fixed, and the rules followed by Mūlasarvāstivādin monastics ceased to evolve along with shifting circumstances. The sites of contestation must then shift to commentarial texts, where creativity and flexibility in the interpretation and application of existing rules compensates to some extent for the inflexibility in regard to modifying rules outright. And so, within the Tibetan monastic tradition that follows the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya, all the rules preserved in this first or second century document from India remain on the books for monks and nuns in Tibet and the other farflung places to which Mūlasarvāstivāda monastics have migrated. Tibetan monastics today deploy a wide range of other hermeneutic strategies for authorizing the adaptation, say, of dress codes designed for the Gangetic plains to Himalayan heights or to the streets of downtown Zurich. But these changes to rules that have proven unsustainable or cumbersome must take place extra-legally, and basically entail disregarding the vinaya rules themselves. The narrative of

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Even granting the rather preposterous concession that one of the extant vinayas might actually reflect the body of rules Buddha left behind, we can still say that all of the vinaya, minus one, exercised the option of changing their rules.
the council’s decision to leave untouched the rules wins the day, and the position now taken is that only Buddha can change the vinaya—and Buddha is no longer here to do so.\footnote{von Hinüber 1995:7. This notion undergirds the quipster’ clever retort—and one I have heard myself—that nuns in the Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition who want full ordination therefore have to wait for Maitreya.}

This authority invested in Buddha stems not from his position as leader of the saṅgha. The MSV itself shows Mahākāśyapa and others in positions of leadership, formal or informal. Rather, Buddha’s unquestionable authority stems from his status as a perfect ethical being—a status the narratives themselves present as rightfully his. Although the council is said to be populated by 500 arhats, evidently their knowledge is inadequate to determine which rules are crucial to keep and which are trifling and thus can be changed. In ethical particularist terms, Mahākāśyapa and the 499 other arhats do not know which features of the rules are salient and which are not. Thus no matter how well their clairvoyance equips them to perceive details, they lack Buddha’s ethical wisdom in discerning what to do with them.

In his “Councils as Ideas and Events in the Theravāda,” Charles Hallisey draws our attention to “the historical importance of the idea of a council for understanding the collective actions of those who convened, participated in and accepted the authority of a council.”\footnote{Hallisey 1991: 148.} He further calls for a “history of the reception of these ideas in subsequent contexts.”\footnote{Ibid.} We noted earlier that the MSV’s account of the first council constitutes its own authorizing discourse, by which it declares itself to be the authentic representation of Buddha’s activities in caring for his monastic community. In the Mūlasarvāstivādin lineage, this account of the first council is itself a record of sorts as to how some Mūlasarvāstivādins—the narrators of this account—
viewed the council as an imagined event in their own history. Remembering that the MSV was likely compiled no earlier than the first century CE, the history is already long, and the culture in which monastics are living certainly would have been subject to great changes during that elapsed time. Not only are the story’s narrators creating—or at least shaping—the idea of the council with their representations. They are also among those who have “accepted the authority of the council.” The MSV’s presentation of it, and the traces we find of the narrators’ own relation to the council’s determinations, constitutes a record of how they themselves received it. This is not the place for a detailed study of that representation, but we may note how sympathetically it depicts Ānanda’s distress at Buddha’s imminent passing, and yet how clearly the MSV also mourns the lost chance to follow his deathbed wishes. The narrators allow Mahākāśyapa plenty of verbiage to air his disappointment, but at the same time give us a glimpse of the endless quibbling that would ensue had the decision gone differently. The MSV narrative shows that neither the assembled saṅgha together nor Mahākāśyapa as its new leader are able to come to a decision even as to how to distinguish major from minor rules, and thus indeed how unlikely it is that they would be able to continue Buddha’s practice of particularity-sensitive rule-making. The narrators thus seem to consider the failure to maintain Buddha’s practice of ethical particularism to be a lamentable loss, even as they agree that having to live by generalist rules made by imperfect beings would be even more lamentable. What does not appear ever to have been considered was to dispense with rules altogether.

Much more broadly, simply by insisting on the preservation of the plethora of narratives, the narrators of the MSV do provide us with an eloquent expression of their stance
towards their vision of a Buddha who practices a highly particularist ethics. The tracing of the
genealogy for the universalist legal code back to a Buddhist ethical particularism is put on full
display right on the surface of the canonical vinaya text itself. So too is the transmission of a
narrative context for each and every rule. That inclusion of narratives made the text
extremely unwieldy. In a manuscript culture with monsoons that wear away at manuscripts
annually, the insistence that thousands of pages of story material must be copied manually in
order for a set of rules to be transmitted is an articulate comment indeed. The law can survive
without Buddha, the MSV seems to insist, for we have the narratives.

The MSV’s narrators also appear to underscore the complexities of setting a
particularistic ethical vision within a universalizing rule-bound world. On occasion, narratives
work to complicate the very rule whose formulation they are presenting. One particularly
striking example comes in a story about a man who had killed his mother because she was
obstructing his liaison with a woman he fancied.\footnote{Pravrajyāvastu. GM.iv.53-61. Tibetan at Derge Ka 120a7-124a2. Any temptation to read this story in gender terms is rapidly averted when we note that in the MSV this long narrative is repeatedly verbatim immediately afterward substituting ‘father’ for ‘mother,’ with only a detail or two changed. Our Sanskrit manuscript gives terse instructions to the effect that as with matricides, so with patricides, and moves on to the next topic, but the Tibetan more obediently copies the story out in full.} The man later regrets his action deeply,
ordains and exerts himself with such determination that he soon masters the entire corpus of
teachings, becoming a “holder of the \textit{tripiṭaka}, a preacher whose quick-witted eloquence was
them of his matricidal past. The case is brought to Buddha’s attention, and he promptly tells the monks to kick him out, saying:

“Bhikṣus, you should remove a person who has killed his mother from this Dharma and vinaya. A person who is a mother-killer is someone whose nature will not develop in this Dharma and vinaya. Therefore, from now on, Bhikṣus, when approached by someone seeking renunciation, one should ask him, ‘You are not a mother-killer, are you?’ One who gives renunciation without having asked becomes guilty of a transgression.”

The monk goes to a remote area, where he meets a lay follower who becomes deeply devoted to him and builds him a monastery. The monastery flourishes, attracting many monks “from diverse directions and countries,” and “under his instruction, many attained arhatship.” The years pass, and the monk dies peacefully. According to Buddhist teachings on karma, those who have killed a parent must go to hell immediately upon death, and this mother-killer is no exception. But his time in hell lasts but a few moments, and he is next reborn as a deva, or celestial god, and on his very first night as a deva realized the truth. One of his students who had attained clairvoyance perceives this, and tells others. Their faith in the Dharma is greatly increased. The story ends with the group all proclaiming together:

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206 The story does not make clear what the legal nature of this expulsion might be, although the MSV does provide procedures for forms of expulsion from the order. It appears that he remains a monk, after he leaves the place he had lived.

207 nāśayata. On the nāśanā (Pāli: nāsanā) form of legal expulsion, see Hüskens 1997 and Nolot 1996.

208 Based on this rule, still today the question, ‘You are not a mother-killer, are you?’ is asked of candidates during Mūlasarvāstivādin ordination ceremonies.

209 Pravrajyāvastu. GM.iv.56-57. ṃātṛghātakaṃ putḍalam asmād dharmavinayāt | aprarohaṇadharmaṃ bhikṣavo mātṛghātah putḍalo ’śmin dharmavinaye | tasmāt tathā bhikṣavo yasya kasyacit pravrajyāpekṣa upasākṛmati sa tena praṣṭavyo [57] māsi mātṛghātaka iti | aprṣṭvā pravrajayati sātīsāro bhavati. Corresponding Tibetan found at Derge Ka 121b6-7.

210 GM.iv.57. nānādigdeśa.

211 GM.iv.57. tasya cāvavādena prabhūtair arhatvaṃ sāksātkṛtam.
“Oh, the Buddha! Oh, the Dharma! Oh, the Sangha! Oh, how well-spoken is the Dharma, in which today even evildoers of this sort who went to calamitous states\textsuperscript{212} are attaining such a collection of good qualities.”\textsuperscript{213}

In this telling, the narrator goes to great lengths to underscore the mother-killer’s great contributions to the Dharma: in his knowledge of it, in taking care of other monks, and in inspiring others in the Dharma. It is made clear that though indeed his own spiritual attainments had to wait for another life, they blossomed richly the very moment he passed on to his next life, and that this blossoming was a source of goodness to others. At the same time, not once in this 8-page story does the narrative name the monk, identifying him only as “the mother-killer.”\textsuperscript{214} It is as if the narrators remain obedient to the rule and to Buddha’s vision, adding to our horror, refusing to name the evildoer, and generally letting the rule push in one way. Yet even as they repeat Buddha’s insistence that the monastic community is no place for mother-killers, they highlight his great achievements as the leader of his monastery’s saṅgha, thus also showing readers the matter from quite another angle at the same time. There is no sense of shying away from the complexity of human ethics, even in a narrative that results in a universal rule banning the ordination of all mother-killers, for all times and in all places. At the very least, it seems fair to say that the compilers of the \textit{MSV} did not understand the rules and the narratives to stand in a simple relationship to each another, and were letting their readers see that too.

\textsuperscript{212} \textit{vinipāta}; Tibetan: \textit{log par ltung ba} – that is, lower realms of rebirth.

\textsuperscript{213} \textit{Pravrajyāvastu}. Sanskrit found at GM.iv.61. \textit{aho buddhah aho dharmah aho saṅghah aho dharmasya svākhyātatā | yatredānīm evaṃvidhā api pāpakāriṇo vinipātagatā evaṃvidham guṇaganam adhigacchantī}. Corresponding Tibetan found at Derge Ka 123b4-5.

\textsuperscript{214} When I commented on this to J. Prabhakara Shastry, he responded vehemently, “That’s right. He does not get a name.” See too Alan Cole’s comments (2005: 286) on the statement made by leaving character unnamed, in regard to the nameless goddess who transforms Śāriputra into a woman in the \textit{Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra}. 
In such moments, too, the MSV evinces a remarkable level of comfort with the imperfect fit of rules to the situations they are meant to address. However conclusively stated they may be, such rules simply do not present themselves as the final word on the matter. In the end, the ethics of the vinaya is an ethics of imperfection, through and through. Yet our imperfect state is only temporary, in the Buddhist understanding, and in any case there are many ways to live imperfection. The question remains as to why anyone would knowingly follow rules that are acknowledged to be merely products of a process ended by Buddha’s passing away at an arbitrary phase of their evolution. We recall Mahākāśyapa’s concern that the order might then be accused of having been strict in their discipline while Buddha was there, but become self-indulgent later. One option may be that if the rules on occasion come up short in addressing situations that arise, the great abundance of narratives can always be counted on to fill the gaps, educating monastics’ imaginations in making the leap from particular to universal and back again, even as they tamper the expectations of finding a perfect fit.

Yet perhaps a further distinction would be helpful here as well: a distinction between the specific content of the rules and the effect on persons of living a rule-bound life: a life of voluntary adherence to discipline, whatever the content of that discipline might be. It has been noted that keeping kosher and observing other aspects of the halakhic life has the effect of keeping the awareness of the lawgiver present throughout all aspects of life, and of affording observers with manifold opportunities to enact their obedience to His will. In that same spirit, likening the vinaya as a code of conduct to halakha might be at least as productive

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215 As just one enunciation of this stance, see Fishbane 1987: 83-113, and especially 88.
for our understanding of Buddhist monastic ethics as likening it to, say, the rules of Benedict.\textsuperscript{216} The observance of vinaya does not prompt monastics to recollect or obey a creator, but it does work in a range of other ways for monastics. Vinaya training permeates virtually every corner of monastics’ daily lives: food, dress, housing, hygiene, comportment, subsistence. Countless moments of active self-disciplining thereby also permeate monastics’ lives.

Monastics’ visible restraint in conduct also signals to lay supporters that a monastic is living a different life, by different rules—quite literally—and therefore is worthy of respect and admiration. As monastics observe the vinaya, they also have the opportunity to enact their confidence in the ethical wisdom of the Buddha who authored those rules (and this is particularly so when the rules seem outdated or irrelevant.) In short, many purposes are served by living a rule-bound life. And none of these effects are particularly dependent on the specific content of the vinaya’s rules, but only on the presence of rules—and the more rules, the better. Thus Buddha’s apparently cavalier attitude towards refining rules to narrow their field of application, and his prolificacy in instituting new ones.

Yet the content of the vinaya does matter, and its specifics shape monastics’ lives and the sorts of selves they can fashion with the vinaya discipline, in specific ways. Most importantly for our purposes, rules prohibiting certain forms of conduct for nuns created boundaries within which certain gendered roles could be excluded, as new ways of being a woman—a monastic woman—were allowed to emerge. At the same time, the vinaya also includes stipulations to ensure that female monastics continued to enact gendered positions

\textsuperscript{216} For one instance of the latter, see Henry 2002.
that place them in direct subordination to their male counterparts, even as it made monks responsible for particular forms of caretaking of nuns.

For now, we may note that the particulars of the monastic rules can have one set of effects, while the fact of abiding by them has yet another—not least among which is to afford continual occasions for monastics to discipline themselves, and to engage in the very particular forms of subjectivity implied in working on oneself as an object of fashioning.

**Monastic Discipline and Self-Fashioning**

The distinction between the content of rules and the fact of living by those rules opens up yet another aspect to the practice of ethics as we find it in the MSV. As we have seen, the monasticism envisioned in the narratives of the MSV assumes imperfect practitioners offering imperfect care to others (and to themselves), even as it seeks to provide conditions for a self-fashioning that allows ethical subjects to perfect themselves and the care they may offer others. As such, Buddhist monasticism—like other monasticisms—can be understood as a site of ethical formation that is supported by a variety of what Michel Foucault calls “technologies of the self.” As he defines it, technologies of the self “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own body, souls, thought, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.”

Foucault himself took a number of historical moments in Christian monasticism as sites for explication of what he

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meant by technologies of the self,\textsuperscript{218} and Charles Hallisey and a number of other scholars in Buddhist studies have also directed Foucault’s angle of vision towards various Buddhist practices.\textsuperscript{219} Foucault’s analytical tools can be useful in describing the project of Buddhist monasticism as construed in the vinaya. In the context of the MSV, monasticism may be said to involve a set of disciplinary practices employed willingly with the aim of transforming oneself into a perfect ethical subject.\textsuperscript{220}

The great number of vinaya restrictions, and the fact that they do entail imperfect generalities, also makes it more than likely that a monastic will not keep them perfectly. The mandatory biweekly confessions ceremony anticipates those failures, and serves to confront monastics with their own ethical imperfection, on a regular basis. The expectation of imperfect enactment is evident as well in the vinaya’s rich array of ritual and legal measures prescribed when rules have been violated. Vinaya rules are organized by categories of gravity, and different classes of monastic rules come with different instructions for rehabilitating those who transgress them. Such penalties for transgressions have as their aim not retribution—that is left largely to the workings of karma—but to restore the transgressor’s good standing in the monastic community and “repair” their damaged vows, as Tibetan translators put it.\textsuperscript{221} As Donald R. Davis says of punishment in Hindu law, punishments in the Buddhist monastic law emphasize rectification and deterrence rather than retribution.\textsuperscript{222} But unlike Hindu law, there

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid: 43-49.
\textsuperscript{219} For just a few examples relevant to the study of gender, see Faure 1998 and Mrozik 2007.
\textsuperscript{220} Mrozik (2007: 48) notes the same with regard to bodhicitta.
\textsuperscript{221} The Sanskrit term for the ritual confessions ceremony, posadha, is rendered into Tibetan as gso sbyong – literally, restore and make pure, with the explicit idea that vows that had been damaged by transgression can be returned to their former ‘purity.’
\textsuperscript{222} Davis forthcoming: 137ff.
is no authority wielding the threat of corporal or pecuniary penalties. The community may impose vinaya rules, but membership in that community remains fundamentally voluntary, and ritualized confession remains the primary means of addressing the vast majority of such infractions. It may be put open for discussion whether the penalties for violating vinaya rules are best seen as punishment that is imposed (daṇḍa) or penance that is willingly undergone (prāyascitta). To the degree that the measures taken to allow vinaya transgressors to restore them to good standing in the community are willingly undergone, they become another means for the monastics’ training in disciplinary practice: another technology of the self that gains its meaning and efficacy only within the community.

The Buddhist teachings offer both technologies of the self and a set of rhetorical discourses designed to persuade persons that it is in their best interest to deploy those technologies. Buddha’s discourses—as found in the vinaya as well as in other Dharma texts—evince two movements that are crucial for this rhetorical project. First, they portray the existing ‘worldly’ life that persons are living as unsatisfactory, and simultaneously cast doubt on the value of persons’ current personal identity and social location, particularly those of laypeople. These identities are of course gendered, and as such the portrayals can have particular potency and poignancy for female readers. Second, they challenge the inevitability of a person’s existing identities while offering new visions of what is possible for that person—visions that are satisfactory and valuable in ways the person’s given identity are shown not to be. We may say that the Dharma in this understanding supports a shift from identity as given, to identity as made—a claim we will give more substance in the next chapter.
In other words, Buddha offers the disciplinary practices of monasticism along with discourses aimed at getting people to join that monastic community. It may be tempting, but would be far too simplistic, to suggest that it is through Buddha’s discourses—or 'the Dharma’ in general—that persons are made to wish to engage in such disciplinary projects, while the saṅgha community and its vinaya constitute the way to do so. For one, the narratives in the MSV also participate in the Dharma’s rhetorical project, in ways that we must take into consideration as we engage in reading practices appropriate to the MSV. However, for the purposes of our analysis here, we may call the saṅgha community the site for the enactment of the project of ethical self-fashioning that is both envisioned and constructed as an object of desire by the Dharma.

As Foucault notes, technologies of the self imply “certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes.”\(^{223}\) The rhetorical discourses within the Dharma aimed at producing dissatisfaction with present identities and enthusiasm for new ones qualify as techniques for acquiring certain attitudes. Among such technologies, we also (and famously) see Buddha teaching meditation in numerous Buddhist texts. It has also long been noted that the place of meditation in Buddhist monastic life has been greatly overstated,\(^ {224}\) yet many of the MSV’s narratives do present meditative and other solitary practices as a recognizable feature of the monastic life. However, the disciplining of ethical subjects that is the project of Buddhist monasticism is a fashioning of the self enacted largely through and in dependence on others. Buddhist monasticism organizes its subjects in a particular social formation: the

\(^{223}\) Foucault 1988: 18.

saṅgha, or monastic community. It does so not only because the activities of lay life crowd out other possibilities, but in recognition of the fact that possible selves are shaped by others, that a person's social location—their relationships, their family, their caste, their economic status and, of course, their gender—is constitutive of who they are, and limits who they may become. Joining the monastic community is a change in social location par excellence.

Yet monastics remain deeply involved in relationships not only with one another but with non-monastic as well. The MSV's attentiveness to the painful aspects of lay life and its consistent portrayal of the suffering that comes from a life driven by desire can be read not only as part of a rhetoric aimed at inspiring and reinforcing monastics' decision to leave such a life behind. Given the understanding in the MSV that monastics continue to be bound by obligations to lay followers, as well as to their own family members, the repeated reminders of the distress and turmoil plaguing those still living within the household can be read as part of a rhetoric supporting an ethics of care for others. The MSV is rich in narratives of pain and distress, and particularly so when depicting the lives of lay women. Such narratives can serve as a powerful component in enhancing not only monastics' commitment to their own self-fashioning, but also their commitment to assisting others in theirs—including those others who have not managed to leave behind the web of problems and pain to which Buddhist monasticism seeks to create an alternative.

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225 We will explore the implications of monastics' ongoing recognition of family relations in Chapter Five, on community.

226 Julia Leslie points to the importance of narratives for bringing into focus the dimensions of human suffering within the brahminical tradition as well. She writes: "The fact is that soteriological texts like the Upanisads do not adequately convey the emotional context of suffering. For this we must turn to the narrative tradition." (Leslie 1999: 29).
As I read it, the ethics of care articulated in the MSV ultimately involves assisting others to create a new and more perfect identity for themselves, and engaging in disciplinary practices to that same end for oneself. The teachings of Buddha and his senior disciples constitute a form of care for others wherein they present others with different kinds of possible futures and possible selves for themselves. At the same time, monasticism and its distinctive social conditions aim to allow those possible futures to be created and lived. Both the successes and the failures of Buddhist monasticism to live up to that aim are evident in its responses to the intransigence of gender as a constitutive category within the monastic community. In the project to shift from identities that are given to identities that are made, the MSV’s handling of gender throws into relief the conditions under which technologies of the self can be deployed, and the limitations on just how much can be re-made with them.
Chapter Three: Gender Constructions

Venerable Nandaka thought, “Women have little wisdom,” and thinking that, he taught the Dharma [to a group of bhikṣuṇīs] with meanings, sentences and words that were abridged. Because they were wise, they asked him progressively more difficult questions, to which Venerable Nandaka replied.

*Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, Bhikṣuvibhaṅga*
**Gender in the Mix**

In the ethical understanding of the *MSV*, however imperfectly it may pursue this end, the monastic community has goodness as its chief aim: goodness brought about by caring for oneself and by caring for others—others who have joined the community as well as those who have not, but who instead offer material support, hear its teachings, observe its example, or hold it in their awareness as a possibility for themselves. An ethics of care in which one supports others in envisioning and actualizing new future for themselves must take into account those factors that limit as well as enable those possible futures. The *MSV* tells us that the care monastics offer to one another and to those outside the community will depend on their knowledge of the particulars necessary to offer perfect care. Caretaking will be effective to the degree that ethical agents are attuned to the particulars that mark out any person, and endowed with what we may call the “ethical wisdom” to determine which among all those particulars are salient in any given situation at any moment. This ethically charged action of identifying the salient features of a person is intimately connected with the organization of the social world. Social groups can be formed when features that certain persons happen to share come to be seen as meaningful, or salient. Further, taking any single attribute as salient creates divisions between those who share that attribute and those who do not. Conversely, within a social world in which differences of race, class or gender mark strong boundaries between persons, a person’s race, class or gender is more likely to present itself as relevant to any efforts to care for that person, or to their own efforts to care for themselves. There are many forms of difference between persons, but not all those differences matter enough to
make a difference in what persons can be, and do, and have done for them. In the social world imagined in the MSV, gender is a difference that nearly always makes a difference. But not always, as Buddha’s criticism of Ānanda’s inspiring the young woman to become a jewel of a woman indicates. Gender will mean different things for different women at different times, because gender interacts with other factors—particularly social location as indicated by caste or family, and personal history as indicated in the MSV by karma. At the same time, men and women are both gendered, but differently—that is the point—and what being gendered means for women differs dramatically from what it means for men.

The broad aims of this chapter are to ask how and under what conditions gender works as a difference that matters for women in the narratives of the MSV, as well as how gender interacts with other forms of social difference and personal attributes to shape what is possible for women. We do so with an eye to the ways that Buddhist monasticism served to intervene in those formations to change women’s personal trajectories and, ultimately, to gender women differently.

In the process, we will be bringing to bear terms of analysis that the text itself does not use. Yet the narrators of the MSV evince great awareness that women—by virtue of their being women—face obstacles not shared with men. That is to say, they are sensitive to the difference that their gender makes to women. As the epigraph to this chapter indicates, the narrators of the MSV are fully cognizant of the presence of outright misogyny in women’s lives, and the harmful effects it can have on women. That is to say, they are attentive to ways that people’s

227 I draw here on the terms of analysis developed in Gregory Bateson (1972: 315), where among the infinite range of ways in which any given object of event differs from others and all else, what counts as “information” are the differences that will later make a difference.
ideas about women can harm women. We will start by letting the MSV present some images of what gender looks like in its world—that is, how women’s lives (experiences, activities, and aspirations) are inflected by the fact of being women, as defined in the narratives. The category of gender is theorized thinly in the MSV, if it can be said to be theorized at all, so this will mean looking primarily at the thick descriptions that the MSV is so prolific in providing.

Buddhist studies is still very much in the early stages of coming to terms with gender as an analytical category, with some approaches highlighting misogynist positions taken by some texts, others seeking a basis for gender parity, and several other combinations thereof. Rather than challenge any of the individual positions staked out thus far, this project acknowledges this diversity, talking it as a sign of the complexity of gender that such a range of voices can find support for their views in Buddhist texts, practices and institutions. It is also a sign of the massive historical shifts and geographic spread of Buddhism, as well as the internal diversity that is to be found even in a single time and place. It may bear restating in this context that this study looks only at one text—albeit a massive and internally variegated text—and also that its aim is not to determine a single position the text might take on gender or on women. As we read the MSV’s narratives, we do so with no expectation of finding any one singular vision of gender in the MSV, and in this we will not be disappointed. Our aim is rather to confront this text’s multivocality around the issue of gender, in a way that calls forth some of its less frequently voiced positions.

With that in mind, we begin by noting that the social implications of the differentiation of human beings into the categories of women and men is a major interest of the MSV’s narrators, and one they can frequently be seen puzzling over. The MSV’s narratives are acutely
attuned to the particular ways women’s gender shapes their possibilities, but they do not promote any coherent vision of an essential female inferiority. Rather, I read the narrators as themselves often struggling to reconcile the simultaneous acknowledgment of female equality in terms of spiritual capacity with their social subordination to men.

Charles Hallisey identifies a broad Buddhist tendency to recognize both spiritual equality and social difference:

In their reflections on the religious life, Buddhists have affirmed both human equality and human difference. They have, however, generally seen human equality as being of greater spiritual significance—all humans have the capacity of becoming awakened, regardless of their social locations—but of lesser social significance.\(^{228}\)

This co-presence of affirmations of spiritual equality and social difference will recur throughout the narratives of the MSV, as will the impulse toward managing social difference through hierarchical relations that he also notes:

Buddhists have consistently emphasized human difference in organizing their communities. These communities have historically been organized quite hierarchically, with standards of worth and prestige organizing the relations between monks and laypeople, men and women, old and young, powerful and oppressed.\(^{229}\)

The fact that there seems to be no urgency to translate spiritual equality into social terms itself will significantly inflect—and limit—the scope of the impact of the Buddhist challenge to the gender constructions we will be exploring below. To rephrase this in the

\(^{228}\) Hallisey 2001: 113.

\(^{229}\) Ibid.
terms we have been using here, it would seem that social differences make more difference, or are more salient, than sameness in terms of spiritual potential. The narratives indeed portray a strong tendency to organize men and women in hierarchies that are invariable in terms of who ranks higher. Yet the recognition of a distinct set of attributes—those of spiritual significance—that can level the ground between persons also significantly complicates the hierarchical differentiation between men and women. Although this passage refers only to the hierarchical relations between “monks and laypeople,” the Buddhist monastic order also includes nuns, and when the difference that matters is that between monastic and laypeople, ordained women take a place with monastics, and thus securely above lay men, within Buddhist social hierarchies. As we will be exploring with great care in the chapter on community, by making ordination status a more salient feature than gender, Buddha does manage to fundamentally reorder women’s relations without directly confronting the social formations that would order them differently.

Before we will be ready to watch that re-ordering, we first need to chart the established ordering against which it pushes. Let us allow a narrative to begin that task for us. After enlightenment, Buddha had returned to his hometown of Kapilavastu and was teaching massive assemblies of his kinsmen. This story offers one of the more striking articulations of women’s awareness of disadvantages arising from their gender position, and depicts the first time that the women of Kapilavastu attend Buddha’s public Dharma teachings.

Lord Buddha was staying in the Nyāgrodha Tree Park in Kapilavastu. [Ga 222b] When the Lord was establishing the Śākyas in the truths, they came to the Lord three times to see him. The Lord taught them the Dharma again and again. As was the practice of King Śuddhodana, he went surrounded by the assembly of
Śākyas, to see the Lord three times. On another occasion, the Lord was seated in the midst of a gathering of many hundreds, and he taught the Dharma, sweet as pure honey. And a gathering of many hundreds [Gn.1978a.60] listened to the sweet Dharma from the Lord, their sense faculties unwavering. With his great kingly wealth and his tremendous royal power, surrounded by the assembly of Śākyas, King Śuddhodana had come into the presence of the Lord to hear the Dharma. After hearing the Dharma, he left.

After that, upon hearing the Dharma in the presence of the Lord, Mahānāman the Śākya generated faith, and went home, saying, “Ah, Buddha! Ah, the Dharma! Ah, the Saṅgha! How fruitful is the arising of the Buddha for us!”

The senior wife of Mahānāman said, “Noble Son, what is this?”

He said, “Today in front of an assembly of many hundreds, the Lord taught that sort of Dharma such that upon hearing it, many hundreds of thousands of beings attained great insights.”

She said, “Noble Son, what you say, that ‘the arising of the Buddha is fruitful for us,’ is true. The arising of the Buddha is fruitful indeed for you, not for us. As for why that is, it is since the arising of Lord Buddha in the world is for the sake of men, not women.”

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230 *apareṇa* —> *anēdaṇa*.


232 Sanskrit has *madhuramadhura* while Tibetan has *snyan pa snyan pa*. Both can mean sweet or melodious. On the image of Buddha’s speech as fluid see Gummer 2000.

233 *agramahiṣī*; Tibetan: *chung ma dam pa*.

234 *āryaputra*; Tibetan: *jei sras*. This is a standard term of address used by a wife to her husband in the MSV.

235 *Īḍrṣī* —> *Īḍrṣo*

236 For *mahān viśeṣa*; Tibetan: *khyad pa chen po*. See Edgerton (1954: 501) for the definition of *viśesādhiṃgaṃ* as referring to attainments that come when one ‘grasps one thought so intently that dhyāna is attained.’

237 Gnoli has *saphala eva yusmākam*, but Tibetan reads *khyed cag kho na la ’bras bu dang bcas pa lags*, as if they were translating *yusmākam eva saphala*. 
He said, “Dear lady, don’t say that. The Lord has compassion for the benefit of all beings. You (pl.) should also go and [Ga 223a] listen to the Dharma from the Lord in person.”

The wife’s perspective here is shockingly feminist, and Mahānāman is duly distressed. He has heard enough of Buddha’s teaching to assert that it is meant to be of benefit to all beings, which emphatically does include women. If women do not receive the benefit it offers them, surely that is their own want of initiative, in his view, and not any fault in the teachings themselves. Eager to make good on the inclusive rhetoric he has detected in the Dharma, Mahānāman is impervious to any social impediments to actualizing that ideology of inclusiveness.

She said, “Three times His Majesty approached the Lord to see him, surrounded by the assembly of Śākyas. We would feel shy listening to the Dharma directly in front of His Majesty. So if His Majesty would go once in the early morning, we could listen to the Dharma from the Lord in the afternoon.”

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238 *bhadre*; Tibetan: *bzang mo*. This is the standard term of address used by a husband to his wife in the MSV.

239 *Sanghabhedavastu*. Gāndhāra: Gāndhāravîrīyaṃ | yodā bhagavatā śākyāṃ satyesu pratikṣāyatās tadā te trir bhagavantāṃ <darśanāya> upasamkramanti | ṛṣeṇāṃ bhagavān abhikṣṇāṃ dharmaṃ deśayati | ācārām ṛṣiṇaḥ śuddhodanasya śākyabhaṅgaparivṛtasya trir bhagavantāṃ <darśanāya> upasamkramitum | yāvad aparāṇa samayena bhagavān anekasatāyah parsadāḥ purastān niṣanno dharmaṃ deśayati kṣaudraṃ madhv ivāvadakāṃ | anekasatā ca parsad bhagavatāḥ sakā- [Gāndhāra: Gāndhāravîrīyaṃ] śān madhya-rājardhaḥ mahātā rājāniśvāḥ śākyabhaṅgaparivṛtyo bhagavatāsakaṇḍam upasamkranto dharmasāvanāyāḥ sa dharmaṃ śrutvā prakrāntaḥ | tato mahānāma śākyo dharmaṃ śrutvā bhagavato ‘ntike prasādajātaḥ svaghrām gataḥ kathayati | aho buddha aho dharma aho sangha saphalo ‘smākam buddhotpādaḥ iti | mahānāmaṃ ‘gramahisīḥ kathayati | āryaputra kim etat | sa kathayati | adya bhagavatā anekasatāyah parsadāḥ purastād iḍrīśi dharmaṃ deśito yam śrutvān eva śān mahān viśeṣo ‘dhiyataḥ iti | sā kathayati | āryaputra yat kathayasi saphalo ‘smākam buddhotpādaḥ iti satyam etat | saphala eva yusmākam buddhotpāda nāsākam | kim karaṇam | yasmat puruṣānāṃ arthāya bhagavān buddho loka utpanno no strīṇām | sa kathayati | bhadre maithaṃ kathayā | sarvasattvabhaktanampi bhagavān | gacchata yūyam api bhagato ‘ntikād dharmaṃ śṛṇuta. Corresponding Tibetan text found at Derge Ga 222a7-223a1.

240 *jihrema* – we would be ashamed, feel shy, blush; Tibetan: *g.yar tsha*
Mahānāman the Śākya thought, “I will go and inform the king.” But then he thought again. “It would be awkward to solicit the king on behalf of my own wife. Mahāprajāpatī is highly esteemed by the king. He considers that whatever is heard from her is to be done. Thus I will inform her of the matter.”

Mahānāman is willing to advocate for his wife, but hesitates to do so before the king. We are reminded of the “shyness” of his wife that makes it unseemly in her view for women to go into the teaching site, a public domain presented as saturated with the (male) power of the king. The sense of awkwardness that arises when one considers acting in a way that contravenes gender roles is not simply gendered as a feminine feature that held his wife back, but is shared by Mahānāman. Fortunately, he finds a way to address his wife’s concerns while maintaining gender solidarity, by appealing to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī. As we shall see, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is situated ideally to serve as the advocate for women, as she does again and again in the MSV. Her association with two powerful men—with Buddha as his foster mother and with King Śuddhodana as his chief queen, lends her social power. Her location at the peak of the political order in Kapilavastu serves to offset the location her gender assigns for her in a subordinate position. In the case of joining the monastic order, the existence of competing hierarchies that cut across gender hierarchies can work to erode a woman’s

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241 Literally, duḥkham, but Tibetan: mi phod gyis - not able to handle, do not dare to do. I thus take duḥkham in the sense of uneasy, difficult.

242 Text here and below has Mahāprajāvatī for Mahāprajāpatī.

243 Sanghabhedavastu. Gn 1978a: 60. sā kathayati | devaḥ Śākyagaṇaparivrūtas trir bhagavantām darśanāyopasamkrāmati | vayaṃ jihrema sammukhaṃ devasya purastāḥ dharmanā śrotuṃ | tad yadi deva ekam vāram gacched pūrvāhnārāmbhe vayaṃ apy aparāhne bhagavato ‘ṛiti kād dharmanā śrṇuyāmah | māhānāmā Śākyah saṃlakṣayatu | gacchāmi devaṃ prabodhayāmi iti | punah saṃlakṣayati | duḥkhaṃ svadārānām arthāya devo viṃsāpyati | mahāprajāvati devasaṃ bahumatā | tasyāḥ śrṇuyāmanāḥ <yat> kartavyāṃ manyate | tasyā etam arthaṃ nivedayāmītāḥ. Corresponding Tibetan text found at Derge Ga 233a1-3.
location on the bottom rung assigned her by her gender—or place her there more firmly based on where she falls in the ordering of the other hierarchy. In this case, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s social elevation in terms of her class position marks a new difference that can supersede gender difference. Her social status also, and importantly, combines with other unnamed personal qualities that give her power over the king, as we see here:

[Mahānāman] went to where Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī was, and having reached there, [Gn.i.61] he presented the matter to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī.

She said, “Let it be so. I will inform His Majesty.”

Then the householder Mahānāman went home and informed the wives of the Śākyas. Then the wives of the Śākyas and other wives 244 went to where Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī was.

Having approached her, they said this to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī: “Gautamī, you know what? We have heard that in front of an assembly of several hundreds, the Lord teaches sweet, sweet Dharma, sweet as pure honey. The assembly of several hundreds listens to this sweet, sweet Dharma directly from the Lord with their sense faculties unwavering. So we too wish to listen to the Dharma in the presence of the Lord. Please inform the king of our matter so that the king would go before the Lord in the morning and we in the afternoon.”

She said, “Sisters, it is excellent that you have given rise to this thought. 245 Please wait a moment while I go see King Śuddhodana.”

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244 tāḥ śākyāyinyāḥ anyāś ca; Tibetan has shA kya rnams kyi chung ma dang/ gzhan dag gi chung ma rnams.
245 cittam upādītam; Tibetan: sms bskyed pa. Evocatively, the term used in both Sanskrit and Tibetan is synonymous with the term bodhicitta, the state of mind or thought that makes one a bodhisattva.
246 Saṅghabhedavastu. Gn 1978a: 60–61. sa yena mahāprajāvatī gautamī tenopasaṃkrāntaḥ upasaṃkramya mahā- [61]prajāvatī gautamyā etam artham nivedayitavān | sā kathayati | evam bhavatu | evam prabodhayāmi iti | tato mahānāmnā grhapatinā grhaṃ gatvā śākyāyāninām āroccitam | tataḥ tāḥ śākyāyinyāḥ anyāś ca yena mahāprajāvatī gautamī
Here we note that the Śākya women are not content to let Mahānāman speak for them to Mahāprajāpati Gautamī. We also note that Mahāprajāpati Gautamī does not act on the request until after the women themselves come to make their voices heard. When the conversation is among women, there seems no need to explain why it was not viable for women to go to listen to the Dharma teachings addressed to the king with his retinue and the major male citizens of the town. This is in contrast to the two times when women discuss the situation with men, when they give two distinct explanations why they cannot go among the male assembly to listen.

Then Mahāprajāpati Gautamī went to where King Śuddhodana was and having approached, she said to King Śuddhodana, “Do you know what, Majesty? [Ga 223b] I have heard that in front of an assembly of several hundred, the Lord sits teaching the sweet, sweet Dharma, sweet as pure honey. The assembly of several hundred listens to this sweet, sweet Dharma directly from the Lord with their sense faculties unwavering. The Śākya women have also heard of this, and they would like to hear the Dharma. Thus Your Majesty should enter into the presence of the Lord in the morning, and I will take the Śākya women and enter into the presence of the Lord in the afternoon. What is the reason for this? Since they are occupied with housework in the morning, they do not have the opportunity to enter into the presence of the Lord.”

Corresponding Tibetan text found at Derge Ga 233a397.

247 Śākyānikābhiḥ; Tibetan: shA kya’i mchis ’brang rnams kyi
248 tāh pārvāhne grhavyāpārvavārprūṭāh; Tibetan: snga dro ni de rnams bsdum pa’i bgyi ba dag bgyid pa
As was the practice of King Śuddhodana, when Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī was giving orders he remained standing, with his body stiff as a rod, and the king did not sit down until Mahāprajāpatī had completed her giving of orders.

With his head bowed, he said, “Gautamī, so shall it be.”

Following that, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, accompanied by 500 Śākya women, went to the Nyāgrodha Tree Park to hear the Dharma directly from the Lord.

The narrators in this story sketch for us a portrait of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī as a woman capable of wielding great authority over men—in fact over the most powerful man in the kingdom. Men hear her speech as commands, yet she herself is willing to listen to women. She practices solidarity with her gender, taking their case straight to the king, yet restates it more effectively to him. Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī does not seek to explain women’s affective experience when made to sit among powerful men, as had been hinted at by Mahānāman’s wife, and she gives no other argument why men and women must attend teachings separately. It seems Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is unwilling to ground her case to the king in women’s subjective experience of bashfulness at being out in public amongst powerful men. Instead, she points to the obvious practical component of gendered roles that keep women occupied with

Saṅghabhedavastu. Gn 1978a: 61-62. atha mahāprajāvatī gautamī yena rājā śuddhodanās tenopāsaṃkrāntā | upaṣaṃkramya rājānaṁ śuddhodanam idam avocat | yat khalu deva jānīyāḥ | śrutam mayā bhagavān aneṣaṣṭāyāḥ | parṣadaḥ purastān nīṣaṇṇo madhuramadhuram dharmam desayati kṣaudram madhy āvaṇeṣākṣam | aneṣaṣṭātā ca parṣad bhagavato ‘ntikād dharmam śrṇoti anīṣiṣṭamāṃnair indriyaiḥ iti | śākyānīśatāḥ ahaṃ evam śrṇatām ākāṃkṣanti dharmam śrotum | tad arhasi devah pūrvāhne bhagavatsakāśaṁ upaṣaṃkramituṃ | ahaṃ api śākyānīkā ādāya bhagavatsakāśaṁ aparāhne upaṣaṃkramisyāmi | yat karaṇam | tāḥ pūrvāhne gṛhvāyāpavyāpyाश�

Corresponding Tibetan text found at Derge Ga 233a7-233b4.
domestic activities in the morning, with leisure time available only once the preparation of the midday meal has been completed. Even as the narrators make the point in large ways in this story that Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is a commanding women, in this small detail they show us the skill that would earn her such a position.

More broadly, this account draws attention to ways that the particular gendering of women can serve to impede the inclusive promise of the Dharma. In having Mahānāman’s wife point out that if only men are hearing it, then the Dharma is not serving women, no matter what its message, this first or second century text is giving voice to an extraordinarily early feminist sensitivity. At the same time, it shows a willingness to adapt local practices to find solutions to those imbalances. In this social world, respectable women are not comfortable mixing with men in the public sphere; so create a separate forum for them. The narrative makes women themselves crucial agents in bringing about those adjustments, although the women’s agency here is exercised through dialogues with the men who will then implement their suggestions.

In the MSV, narratives not only alert readers to the need to take steps to redress obstacles to women’s access to the Dharma that are built into their gendered roles. They also portray women as active agents in remedying the inequity that they perceive but men do not. They also make clear that the misogyny in men’s minds constitutes another challenge, as we see in the epigraph to this chapter. In the following incident, Buddha declares himself too old to keep up his full teaching activities, and asks the senior bhikṣus to take turns teaching the nuns in his stead. A senior bhikṣu named Nandaka fails to appear to teach the nuns when it is his turn. The nuns go en masse to Buddha, prostrate at his feet and sit off to one side to listen to
Buddha’s discourse, without uttering a word of complaint about Nandaka’s neglect of his commitment to give them Dharma talks. After they leave, Buddha inquires why the nuns had had to come to him for teachings, and thus learns of Nandaka’s dereliction of his duty to the nuns. He summons Nandaka and impresses upon him the importance of his role in teaching the bhikṣuṇīs, pointing out that he is asking Nandaka to perform the exact duty as Buddha himself had done toward them. When Nandaka does deign to teach the nuns here is what transpires:

Utpalavarṇā and her retinue of 500 bhikṣuṇīs went to where Venerable Nandaka was. Upon arriving there, they prostrated with their heads at the feet of Venerable Nandaka, and sat off to one side. Venerable Nandaka thought, “Women have little wisdom,” and thinking that, he taught the Dharma with meanings, sentences and words that were abridged. Because they were wise, they asked him progressively difficult questions, to which Venerable Nandaka replied.

This brief anecdote draws our attention not only to the presence of male misogyny and the ways women end up short-shifted by it. The narrators go further than simply reporting the abridging of Nandaka’s teaching, though. After reporting his thought that women lack wisdom, they make clear in their very next breath that his misogynist view is utterly mistaken, “because they were wise.” In fact, with no further editorial comments, the story goes on to depict the nuns as having been placed in mortal danger by this monk and his misogyny,

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250 No pluralizing particle appears here, thus number is not clearly specified. Thus it could suggest she was wise or they were wise.

251 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ja 87a5-7. de nas ut+pa la'i mdog 'khor dge slong ma Inga brgya tshe dang ldan pa dga' byed ga la der song ste/ phyin nas tshe dang ldan pa dga' byed kyi rkang pa gnyis la mgo bos phyag 'tshal te mtha' gcig tu 'dug go/ tshe dang ldan pa dga' byed kyis bsams pa/ bud med kyi yul ni shes rab chung ba yin no snyam nas de la don dang/ tshig dang/ yi ge mdor 'dus pa 'dus pa dag gis chos bstan to/ de shes rab can yin pas gong nas gong du 'dri bar byed nas tshe dang ldan pa dga' byed kyis lan btab cing.
because it has grown so late by the time he has responded to their questioning that the city
gates are closed and the nuns are forced to spend the night in the woods. While in the woods,
they are surrounded by bandits who had come to attack the city. Utpalavarṇā, the senior nun
amongst them, takes charge, and easily protects all 500 other women with her from the
pending assault by the bandits. Buddha later roundly criticizes Nandaka for his behavior
during this situation, though not for his misogyny. Mental states are generally not regulated
by the vinaya, but only physical or verbal acts. Thus Nandaka is reprimanded for the fact that
he failed to wrap up his teaching before dark, an act that the narrators have separately told us
was caused by his underestimation of his female audience. The narrators in this tale indicate
their awareness that women are given less than could benefit them, based on men’s
underestimating them—echoing the angle of vision displayed when we saw Ānanda opting to
tell the young woman about wheel-turning kings’ wives rather than about buddhas.252 It is
worth noting from the outset that this story appears in the section of the vinaya ostensibly
devoted to explicating the code of conduct for bhikṣus, the Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. We may perhaps
infer that it is not women who need to be told that the misogyny that affects them is
unwarranted.

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252 See above, in the chapter on ethics.
Becoming Men and Women

Up to now we have been using the category of gender as a useful tool of analysis, and it should be clear at this point that the MSV itself does have an understanding that women are positioned differently in various contexts simply by virtue of being women, and that the assumptions made about what attributes adhere to them as women are fundamentally mistaken. But it is important to acknowledge that the MSV does not explicitly wield a notion of what we call gender, as opposed to sex. As Janet Gyatso notes in her article on sexual classification in the Pāli vinaya, the categories of gender “seem to have been understood, perhaps unreflectively, as being based specifically upon sexual characteristics.” This can be said as well of the MSV. The narratives consistently assume that persons’ gender identity will flow directly and rigidly from the “fact” of their biological sex. However, the “fact” of persons’ sexual identity itself is far from stable. The vinaya does not see sex finally fixed at birth, but rather anticipates the possibility of sexual identity changing during the course of a lifetime. Provisions are made in the vinaya for this instability of sexual identity. A monastic whose sex changes simply shifts to the appropriate order, male or female, with no loss of seniority and no fuss. For all the gaps between men and women as they are gendered in this text, and for all the nuanced differences in their rules and status and treatment, these rulings assume that literally all that distinguishes a bhikṣuṇī from her male counterpart are her genitals.

This charter story took place in Śrāvastī. Venerable Upāli asked the Lord, “Venerable, if a bhikṣuṇī changes sex, what should be done with regard to her?”

253 Gyatso 2003: 90.
and the Lord replied, “Upāli, place that one at the same age among the bhikṣus. Moreover, that becomes full ordination and bhikṣu-hood.”

In other words, although the ritual procedures for ordination are quite different for bhikṣus and bhikṣunīs, and the precepts they have formally agreed to abide by are likewise distinct, nevertheless, if a female monastic becomes biologically male, no further ritual or symbolic transformation is necessary. The mere change in sex makes the newly masculinized bhikṣu a member in good standing in the community of monks, and there is no loss of seniority, seniority being directly determined in the monastic order by “age” understood as time elapsed since receiving that level of ordination. Upāli goes on to ask about the case of a bhikṣu whose sex changes and the advice is identical. If the sexual identity of either a bhikṣu or bhikṣunī then changes a second time, they just shift back, Buddha says. A third sex change becomes a problem, but is certainly within the range of what the MSV sees as possible.

Moreover, the vinaya imagines sex change happening at any moment. This becomes clear from a long series of questions put to Buddha by Upāli, the monk to whom will fall the responsibility for reciting the vinaya at the first council—and one certainly sees why, from his ability to imagine every possible circumstance in which a rule might be instantiated. Literally

\[254\] The Tibetan need not specify gender, and does not do so here. I translate de to retain that open-endedness.

\[255\] *Kṣudrakavastu.* Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 160a5-7. gleng gzi ni mnyan du yod pa na ste/ tshe dang ldan pa u pA lis sargs rayas bcom ldan ’das la btsun pa dge slong ma las mthshan gyur na/ de la ji lta bur bgyi zhes zhus pa dang/ bcom ldan ’das kyis bka’ stsal pa/ u pA li de ni lo du lon pa de bzhin du dge slong gi nang du zhog shig/ de yang bsnyen par rdzogs shing dge slong pha’i dangs por ’gyur ro.

\[256\] The MSV presents these as three separate conversations on the matter, but reports them consecutively. *Kṣudrakavastu.* Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 160a7-160b6.

\[257\] Such cases do not appear to be understood by the MSV as mere hypothesis or conjecture but as events fully within the range of the actual. A Tibetan bhikṣu and vinaya scholar with whom I discussed these rules commented in passing that in fact over the past decade or so just such a case had occurred, in which a Tibetan bhikṣu in south India had had a spontaneous sex change and become a woman. Tibetans have no bhikṣunī order, and the former monk returned to lay life. Personal communication, Geshe Rinchen Ngodrup, Sidhpur, India. Spring 2009.
several dozen situations in which sex change could take place are explored over the course of the first 200 pages of the Uttaragrantha section of the MSV, and several other are sprinkled elsewhere in the same section of the MSV.\(^{258}\) Upāli in this volume asks how to handle a situation where a bhikṣu changes sex and becomes a bhikṣuṇī in the midst of stealing,\(^{259}\) while touching a woman,\(^{260}\) and in the midst of engaging in a long list of other possible forbidden acts.\(^{261}\) It is also imagined that the sex change could take place during sexual intercourse.\(^{262}\) And what if bhikṣu changes sex during the rains retreat, when boundaries are set and shifting of residence is prohibited? Does this mean the person has not correctly entered rains retreat? No, the rains retreat is fine, Buddha assures him. The newly female monastic should just relocate to the bhikṣuṇīs’ residence.\(^{263}\) So too if a man changes sex during the ordination

\(^{258}\) A great number of scholars have noted the phenomenon of sex change in various Buddhist texts, but a focused study of the various types of sexual transformation remains a desideratum. Those who mention sex change include Bapat 1957, Paul 1979: 166f, Schuster Barnes 1981, Faure 2003: 100, Gyatso 2003: 110f, Nattier 2003: 98, Cole 2005: 284-7 Scherer 2006, Young 2004: 191-210 and 2007, and see the index of Powers 2009. However, because these sources either do not consider or take no more than a cursory look at the MSV’s presentation of sexual transformation, I also include in this section references to some passages in the MSV that a fuller study might take as points of departure.

\(^{259}\) Uttaragrantha. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Na 4a6. Immediately afterwards comes the question what if it is a bhikṣuṇī who changes sex while stealing. In either case, their ordination is ended by that act of stealing.

\(^{260}\) Uttaragrantha. Derge Na 14a2-3. Here too the question about a bhikṣu having a sex change will touching a woman is followed immediately and in the same language as the eventuality of a bhikṣuṇī having her sex change while touching a man. The gravity of the transgression in both cases is identical.

\(^{261}\) See from Derge Na 3a to 91a, right through to the end of the lung zhu ba chung ngu section of the MSV’s Uttaragrantha. For commentarial discussion of the legal implications of sex changes, see the Vinayāgamottaraviśeṣāgamapraśnavṛtti, extant in a Tibetan translation under the title ‘dul ba lung bla ma’i bye brag lung zhu ba’i ’grel pa found at Derge bstan ’gyur ’dul ba mdo ’grel Dzu volume.

\(^{262}\) Uttaragrantha. Derge Na 3a3-4.

\(^{263}\) Uttaragrantha. Derge Na 252b7-253a1 btsun pa dge slong gis dbyar tshul du zhus pa na mtshan gyur na tshul du zhus pa zhes bya’o/ au pa li tshul du zhus pa zhes bya’o/ des gnas der gnis par bgyi’am/ au pa li ma yin te/ dge slong ma’i dbyar mo khang du song la gnas par gyis shig.
ceremony itself. Not only is sexual identity seen as unstable, this instability is itself taken in stride.

Equally possible in Upāli’s view is the eventuality of a bhikṣuṇī changing sex and suddenly becoming a bhikṣu during any of these same acts, and he seeks Buddha’s guidance how such actions should be addressed. It bears stressing here—particularly in light of the oft-quoted comments from Pāli commentaries presenting female-to-male transformations as boons and male-to-female transformations as calamitous for the former male—that the MSV itself in these passages does not distinguish in any significant way between female-to-male and male-to-female transformations. Were it the case that the MSV imagined that sex change from male to female was associated with “extraordinarily negative conduct” whereas female-to-male transformation could only result from acts of great beneficence, then it would be unthinkable that an ordained woman could become a man while breaking every manner of monastic rule, up to and including illicit acts that could constitute grounds for expulsion from the monastic order. But this is precisely what this section of the MSV envisions, again and again and again. John Powers’ comment of “Indian Buddhist literature” that “when men change into women it is commonly portrayed as a tragedy for them and as a result of

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264 Uttaragrantha. Derge Pa 70b3-4.

265 In other Buddhist texts, the view is put forward that it is far more difficult for a women to spontaneously change into a man, because this takes great positive merit, as compared to men changing into women, attributed to negative karma that is seen as easier to come by. Powers quotes Buddhaghosa to make this point. But the MSV is perfectly evenhanded in these passages, nearly always asking about both male-to-female and female-to-male changes in identical terms.

266 See for example, Powers 2009: 138.

267 Virtually the only differences that emerge are due to the differences in the precepts of bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs, and the resultant discrepancies in which vows should be considered binding, those applicable to the former or latter sex of the transformed monastic.
extraordinarily negative conduct,” may hold for other texts, but it is most emphatically not the case in this instance of Indian Buddhist literature.

In any case, the term most often used in these passages in Tibetan is mtshan ’gyur or mtshan gyur—perhaps parivṛttavyāṇjana, though I have not encountered the term in the extant Sanskrit portions of the MSV—change of mark, with mark serving as a common euphemism for genitals. Sex change in these cases entails the appearance of the opposite sex’s genitalia in the place of the previous sexual organ. The term indriya (Tibetan dbang po) that is used generically to refer to sexual identity is also a term denoting the sexual organs. Although this is nowhere made explicit, the image that emerges here of sexual identity is of something that does not permeate the being or body of the person, but resides in the sexual organs, such that if those organs change, the entire sexual identity changes. In the MSV’s strong linking of sex to gender, this means the entire gender changes too.

Upāli’s many questions about cases of sexual transformation suggest a great deal of concern to stabilize sexual identity in the monastic community. Ambiguities in sexual identity will of course pose major problems in a social formation built around celibacy and around the separation of female and male monastics into two distinct orders. As Janet Gyatso makes clear,

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269 Lokesh Chandra has this as vyāṇjanaṃ parivartate.
270 For a rare instance where the mechanics of sex change are even minimally considered, see Uttaragrantha ay Derge Na 19a2-3.
271 As Gyatso notes in her own discussion of the term (Gyatso 2003: 106n52), a more detailed exploration of the term and the terrain it maps would be most useful.
272 This is in distinct contrast to what Toril Moi describes as the model of ‘pervasive sex’ she finds in Thomas Laqueur’s (1992) account of the initial emergence of theories of sexual difference in the eighteenth century. These early conceptualizations “picture biological sex as something that seeps out from the ovaries and the testicles and into every cell in the body until it has saturated the whole person.” (Moi 2001: 11).
a great deal of exegetical gymnastics were required to arrive at neatly delineated categories of male and female. Given the porousness—or mucosity, as Gyatso calls it, echoing Luce Irigaray—of the boundary between male and female sex in the view of the vinaya, sexual identity appears in great need of defense. A third category of differently-sexed beings served to carve out a space in between that was neither male nor female, thereby holding the two sexes safely apart, notionally at least.

On the other hand, Buddha’s responses to Upāli’s many, many queries seem to suggest that sex changes are, as Gyatso aptly puts it is “a relatively innocuous event.”\(^\text{273}\) A vision of a radical instability in sexual identity is evident not only in the unexpected one-off mutations of sex discussed here. The MSV also describes a category of person whose sex changes twice a month (\textit{paksapaṇḍaka}), one half of the month spent as a female and the other male.\(^\text{274}\) Such persons are laconically defined as those who ‘become male half the month, female half the month,’\(^\text{275}\) as if such fluidity of sexual identification was readily comprehensible as part of the social landscape, and thus required no further comment.

In the long segment of the Uttaragrantha documenting Upāli’s requests for clarification of vinaya law, the possible contexts for sex changes are not grouped together separately or treated as special cases. The legal implications of sex change are merely explored in the context of reviewing each of the various rules and the possible extenuating circumstances that

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\item \textbf{273} Gyatso 2003: 111.
\item \textbf{274} The Tibetan term for such persons in the MSV is \textit{zla ba phyed kyi ma ning} or \textit{zla phyed pa'i ma ning}. For a brief discussion of this category of sexual being, see Gyatso 2003: 97 and \textit{passim}. Gyatso (2003:96ff) also details other forms of sexual ambiguity and instability.
\item \textbf{275} Uttaragrantha. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan at Derge Pa 52b6: \textit{zla ba phyed kyi ma ning} \textit{zhe na}/ \textit{zla ba phyed ni/ phor 'gyur}/ \textit{zla ba phyed ni/ mor 'gyur ba'o}. A slightly longer gloss on the term is given in the Vinayavastu at Derge Ka 95a5–6. \textit{zla ba phyed pa'i ma ning} \textit{zhe na/ gang} \textit{zla ba phyed ni bud med} \textit{zla ba phyed ni skyes par 'gyur ba'o}.
\end{itemize}
could arise and complicate their adjudication. And the solutions are startlingly uncomplicated: If a bhikṣu changes sex, just treat her like a bhikṣuṇī. If it is a bhikṣuṇī who suddenly becomes male, treat him like a bhikṣu. The exceptions to this straightforward approach are but few.

The simplicity of Buddha’s proposals can be read in two slightly different ways. Either an assumption is being made that the relation of sex to gender is direct and unproblematic in general, and the presence of male genitalia is the necessary and completely sufficient condition for being a man, and for occupying fully the social positions in which this gender identity places one. Or, we may need to limit the application of Buddha’s vision of the implications of sex change to the monastic sphere to which the questions refer. It could be that Buddha is suggesting in these responses that sexual identity in his monastic order has fewer social implications. Being male or female may be of more restricted meaning in the monastic as opposed to lay communities, and for monastics can be resolved primarily in reference to the sets of vows one observes and the monastery one lives in. As a lay person, by contrast, one’s sex might determine one’s social obligations and familial relations, in ways not so easily addressed. In other words, it may be that gender’s role is more circumscribed—though certainly not eliminated—in the monastic community. We leave this as a provocative proposal for the moment, as we turn our full attention to the gendering of monastics in the chapter on community.

Thus far our discussion has followed the common practice of distinguishing between sex as a biological category dividing human females and males, and gender as the result of specific social and cultural interventions by which humans are made into women and men. It is time to question the adequacy of that distinction for the task that lies ahead. On the one
hand, maintaining this distinction allows us to draw out moments when the narratives are challenging the prevailing gendering of men and women. This will stand out more clearly when contrasted to their assumption of the (relatively) more stable and unconstructed biological basis of sex. Sexual identity is relatively more stable in the sense that although one individual may flip-flop back and forth between categories, the boundaries of the distinction between a female and a male body is not laid open to question or reconfiguring. This is in contrast to the sort of conduct or social position permissible for men and women, which the very existence of a monastic life option for women throws wide open for rethinking.

On the other hand, this thesis will share in the perspective of Donna Hathaway and Judith Butler’s work in noting that sex, sexual difference and bodies are also effects of social practices and interpretive moves. Adopting this stance as we read the narratives of the MSV will allow us to detect the multiple processes whereby bodies are also socially formed, in ways that do not become evident when we treat bodies, as the inert material on which Buddhist monastic discipline works. In the next chapter, in fact, we will be reading monastic discipline as a set of processes through which bodies are made meaningful components of ethical life. In any case, it is eminently clear from the MSV’s use of the “third sex” to widen the gap between female and male sexed persons that sexual distinctions also require hermeneutic intervention, and a very good deal of it, as Gyatso’s work has shown. More basically, the MSV explicitly presents sex and bodies themselves as the products of intentional activity, in the

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276 Butler 1993 and Haraway 1990.
278 Gyatso 2003.
form of karma. It is precisely because they are seen to spring from particular causes and conditions, and not simply given naturally or inherently at birth that sexual identity and bodies can be changed in the course of a life. Thus in the worldview of this text, the processes whereby sentient beings become embodied as male or female are not “natural” in the sense of inevitable or essential, but rather are “cultural” in the sense of produced by human activity and resulting from personal agency. Thus the fact that the MSV does not distinguish between a “natural” sex and “culturally constructed” gender is less problematic for our analysis. In the same spirit, we will thus continue to make analytical distinctions between sexual identities and the set of cultural processes whereby persons in differently sexed bodies are then gendered as women or men, but we do so only for what it allows us to see in the text, and with the understanding that the distinction is heuristically expedient, but not ultimately sustainable.

To continue staking out the range of positions taken by the MSV regarding the importance and finality of sexual difference, we may note that this text also contains an account of the initial development of human sexual difference, as part of a rather obtuse cosmogonic account told in the Saṅghabhedavastu. In that narrative, the original ancestors of human beings had mental bodies, and “no one was identified as a women, nor as a man. Instead, they were only reckoned as ‘beings.’” The mythological account charts a process whereby these beings act on their desires to taste the goodness of the earth. The consumption of the “juices” (pṛthivīrasa) and other substances of the earth causes their body to becomes less and less mental and more physical, at the same time as they take on more and more features

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279 Or, more precisely activity by humans or other species of sentient beings, given the Buddhist theories of rebirth.

280 Gn 1977: 8. na strī praṇayate na puruṣo nānyatra sattvaḥ sattvāḥ iti sāṅkhya gacchati.
recognized as human. Before there were sexual differences, there had emerged difference in skin colors—that is, differences in varṇa—(literally, “color”)—that we might understand here as caste or racial difference. Because of the pride of “those who had a high opinion of themselves on account of their color,” the natural goodness of the earth degenerated, and people subsisted on coarser and coarser food substances. Next comes the first appearance of sexual difference, caused by the consumption of a fruit that had not been forbidden, and that was eaten by both those beings whom it would make male and those whom it would make female.

Then, a difference in organs appeared for those beings as they were eating the unplanted and unplowed taṇḍu fruit mouthful by mouthful.

For some, [there appeared] female organs, for some male organs. Those who had female organs and those who had male organs stared each other straight in the eyes. As they cast their eyes upon one another, they became aroused. The more aroused they became, the more torn asunder they became. The more torn asunder they became, the more they began to oppose one another. And other beings saw that being[s] opposed to [other] being[s], after seeing this, they

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281 Gn 1977: 10. varṇābhimanikānām
282 indriyanānātvaṃ prādurbhūtāṃ; Tibetan: dbang po tha dad pa byung par gyur. Zwilling and Sweet (2000: 117) briefly mention this account as part of their argument that Buddhists do not accept a third sex. Although they appear to have consulted only the Tibetan, nevertheless they correctly speculate that for Tibetan dbang po, the Sanskrit term used here was indriya.
283 kavaḍikārāhāropakarmaṇa; Tibetan: kham gyi zas su rim gys.
284 anyonyaṃ caṇṣuṣā caṇṣur upanidhyāya paśyanti; Tibetan: gcig la gcig mig gis mig tshugs su la’o.
285 saṃrakta: Tibetan: kun tu chags so.
286 avadīrṇāḥ; Tibetan: zhen pa, suggesting grasping or clinging. The Sanskrit avadīrṇāḥ nicely also holds the sense of separate or torn apart. Although the tone veers too much to the colloquial, something like ‘came undone’ or ‘were torn up’ in the sense of confused or addled might capture this sense in English. Followed by vipratipaṇṇāḥ, which can mean either they diverge in opinion or become mutually opposed, as well as fall into wrong behavior, the Sanskrit manages to suggest that this divergence or separation itself accompanies a progression towards ethical degradation.
287 sattvaṃ sattve vipratipaṇṇāḥ; Tibetan: sms can gys sms can la log par zhung s. pa, the latter especially with a sense of went wrong, went astray.
threw mud and clods of earth and pebbles and potsherds. 

And they said, [Ga 260a] “Shame on you vulgar people.” Shame on you doers of what is not to be done. Shame on you vulgar people. Shame on you doers of what is not to be done. Oh, how is it that you beings are now defiling another being?”

The sexing of the human race leads to sexual activity, presented as perfectly mutual. It is the existence of sexual difference that becomes negatively valued because of that, and not the presence of women per se. The negative valuing of this appearance of sexual difference is rooted in both the mere appearance of difference as well as in sexual activity, seen as a mutual dishonoring or corruption of the other. Sexuality is not presented as intrinsic to beings, but is something evolutionarily picked up along the species’ downward spiral from a more refined celestial state to fully grounded embodiment as humans. At this point, what we recognize as gender difference has not appeared. There is only the apparently unsettling apparition of biological differentiation, and sexual activity. But beings next begin to build houses, apparently as a place to engage covertly in sexual activity. The anatomical differences alone do not need covering, but the sexual activities do, and thus it takes not a fig leaf but a whole house to conceal the problem caused by sexual difference. Although we leave the story here,

288 kapāla; Tibetan suggests bit of brick or potsherd: ayo mo.
289 grāmyasattva. Sanskrit again alluding to the settlements to come, and their association with ‘vulgar’ deeds.
290 dāsāyasi; Tibetan: sun dhyung. The latter can have the sense of ruining, breaking or undermining.
291 Sanghabhedavastu. Gn 1977: 11. tataś ca te sattvā akṛṣtoptam taudulaphalaśālim kavaḍikārāhaṇopakramaṇa paribhukta va nātvaṃ prādurbhātah | ekeśaṃ strīndriyaṃ ekeśaṃ puruṣendriyaṃ | tatra yeṣāṃ strīndriyam yeṣāṃ ca puruṣendriyaṃ te ‘nyonyaṃ caksuṣā caksur upanidhyāya paśyanti | ye yathā caksuṣā caksur upanidhyāya paśyanti tathā tathā samraktaḥ | yathā yathā samraktaḥ tathā tathāvadirmāḥ | yathā yathāvadirmāḥ tathā tathā vipratipannāḥ | adṛkṣur anye ‘pi sattvāṃ sattvāṃ sattve vipratipannāṃ | drṣṭvā ca punah pāṃśu api ksipanti loṣṭam api śārkarā api kapālāni api evam cāhuḥ | dhī grāmyasattva akāryakāra dhī grāmyasattva akāryakāra | kathām idānīṃ tvam bhoh sattva sattvāṃ dāsāyasiḥ. Corresponding Tibetan text found at Derge Ga 259b5-260a1.
we do so in the confidence that it will be within the domestic sphere that gender (as opposed to sex) will be formulated.

If the cosmogonic account and the handling of sex changes combined to create the impression of a lack of concern over sexual difference, the great weight of numerous narratives push in quite another direction. As we have seen, the MSV’s narrators are in fact well aware that how human beings are distinguished within social formations differs greatly based on which sexual identity they bear, in ways that fundamentally shape their options and experiences.

**Women are Gifts Men Give Each Other**

In order to understand how the map out the interactions among Buddhist teachings, monastic institutions and women’s gender constructions, we begin with the contours of gender in the social world the MSV imagines to exist around the Buddhist order. The narratives of the MSV paint a densely detailed portrait of the world women inhabit outside the monastery.\(^{292}\) This portrait is not uniform or monochromatic, and the MSV narrators often seem to delight in complicating their own generalities. However, a rough canvas emerges as a backdrop against which particular female characters can stand out in their complexity. On that broad canvas, women are wards, under the protection of a man to whom they are related—most often as daughter or wife, but sometimes as mother. If they are not associated with a particular male,

\(^{292}\) It should be noted that the MSV knows of other female ascetics, followers of other renunciate orders, including Jain. For a study of the representation of one such woman who also appears in the MSV, see Feer 1897. For discussions of mendicant women from brahminical perspectives, see Olivelle 1993: and Jamison 2006: 205-210.
they will either be courtesans (or prostitutes) or they will live precarious and marginal existences, most likely as beggars. Lay women are overwhelmingly situated by the MSV in the domestic domain, and their social identity is virtually determined in terms of the man to whom are attached. While over 100 female characters are given names in the MSV, that is far exceeded by the number of women simply identified in terms of a male figure with whom they are associated, even when that male himself is identified only by caste or profession: the wife of so-and-so, so-and-so’s daughter, the merchant’s wife, the brahmin’s daughter and so on. These crucial relationships to a male present themselves as simply given in women’s lives, either by virtue of having been born to a certain family, or by virtue of the decisions made for her by her relatives. While the Sanskritic world around the MSV certainly knows of multiple forms of marriage, the most common form is patrilocal marriage arranged by male relatives, in which young girls are given away as brides in the form of kanyādāna, literally “gift of a girl.” Marriage in the form of kanyādāna is by far the most common within the MSV as well, with girls almost invariably given to a groom from the same caste, or comparable family. Although such gifting of girls on the one hand seems designed to rob women of their agency, as we shall see, women on the whole are far from powerless victims in the narratives of the MSV. Yet the forms of agency they do recover for themselves will be profoundly shaped by the social institutions and practices that treat them as objects of exchange.

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293 For a summary of the eight standard forms of marriage, see Kane 1997 vol.ii.part.i.516-26. Jamison (1996: 207-250) offers an insightful presentation of marriages in terms of their positioning of women in her chapter on Women and Marriage. In the MSV, Shayne Clarke has located a list of seven types of marriage, for which no explication is offered. See Clarke 2007: 198n86 for a discussion of this passage he found at sTog ‘dul ba Ca 332a5-333b7, sTog ‘dul ba Nya 119a2-120b4, Viśeṣamitra’s Vinayasamgraha Peking bstan ’gyur ’dul ba ’grel pa Phu, 167a2=5, and Mahāvyutpatti, 9448-9454.
As we allow the MSV to tell us what we need to know about how the gender of women is construed in its world, we must read the MSV’s representations of women’s lives with an awareness of the text’s overall project. The MSV is a text aimed largely at monastics who have given up lay life but accepted responsibilities as caretakers of those who remain lay. In its attentiveness to human frailty, the MSV’s narratives can present the act of leaving home for a monastic path as exacting a great personal sacrifice and sometimes rooted in an experience of genuine renunciation that monastics later find difficult to sustain. As we noted in the previous chapter, the vinaya makes numerous rhetorical moves that sustain monastics in their commitment to renouncing themselves, and keep them aware of the suffering of others who have not. It should come as no surprise for its narrators to evince a taste for darker depictions of lay life. In fact, the MSV itself shows us that it is aware that stories of the difficult lives faced by laywomen can have powerful effects in stabilizing or protecting monastic women’s personal sense of renunciation for what they left behind. We see the effect of such storytelling in a story told twice in the MSV—one in the section for nuns, the other in the Kṣudrakavastu.

This charter story is set in Śrāvastī. At the time when the stupid man Virūḍhaka, slaughtered the Śākyas—although they were not at fault and had done no harm—and the Śākya women lost their brothers, husbands and fathers, and were afflicted by suffering, they ordained in the well-spoken Dharma and vinaya.

Suffering is like the sound of a bell. As soon as their grief had passed, they were afflicted by the kleśa\(^\text{294}\) of intense desire, and could not bear it.\(^\text{295}\)

\(^{294}\) nyon mongs, the standard Tibetan term translating the Sanskrit kleśa. Possible English translations include afflictions, disturbing emotions or thoughts, etc.

\(^{295}\)
At this point, the narrator makes some comments on the strength of women’s desire that we will take up later. As the narrative continues, the nuns, unsure how to handle their own desires, go to see the MSV’s favored naughty nun, Bhikṣuṇī Stūlanandā, who gives them the following decidedly un-monastic advice:

She said, “Sisters, what is there to understand here? You are young, in the prime of life. Give your vows back to me, and go enjoy yourselves with wealthy men, head merchants, caravan leaders, or even some illegitimate boys, or boys of dubious parentage. If I were young, I would go with you.”

From among them, some said, “Sisters, what she said is right. Let’s go and enjoy ourselves.” Someone else said, [Da 135a] “Sisters, since it is rare for women to attain ordination in the well-spoken Dharma and vinaya, let us go ask the Noble Kṛṣā Gautāmī.”

They said, “Sister, fine. Let’s do that.”

They went to see Kṛṣā Gautāmī, prostrated at her feet, and said, “Noble One, the kleśas are hard to grasp. When they are misleading [us] women, please explain how we can avert them.”

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296 Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 134b1-3. gleng gezi ni mnyan du yod pa na ste/ nam skyes bu glen pa 'phags skyes pos shA kya rnams la nyes pa med cing gnod pa med par bsad pa dang shA kya'i chung ma rnams kyi ming po dang/ khyo dang/ pha rnams las bral bar gyur nas sdu bsngal gyis nyan mongs te legs par bshad pa'i chos 'dul ba la rab tu byung ngo/ sdu bsngal ni dril bu'i sgra dang 'dra ste/ nam de dag mya ngen dang bral ba dang de'i tsho 'dod chaqs rab tu che ba'i nyan mongs pas gzir te bzod par bya ba ma nus so. An alternate and abridged version to this story appears in the Bhikṣunīvibhanga at Derge Ta 282a4ff.

297 See chapter five.

298 This phrase khrims phul refers to disrobing, or leaving the monastic order, which can be done by formally offering back one’s vows.

299 yongs su spyod.
She said, “Sisters, do not grasp even at the name of the objects of desire. Why is that? Because desire [entails] little happiness and great suffering, and has many faults. Kṛṣā Gautamī proceeds to quote to them a teaching by Buddha on the faults of desire and benefits of going forth, a teaching we will also find below repeated by another nun to a young laywoman interested in ordination. Kṛṣā Gautamī then personalizes the teaching for them:

“Would you like to hear the suffering I experienced because of desire in other lives? Or do you wish to hear my experiences in this life?”

They said, “Noble One, set aside for the moment the sufferings you experienced because of desire in other lives, and please tell us what you experienced in this life.”

They said this, and she told them in detail how it happened that she suffered the loss of her father and mother, and husband and children, and the suffering of eating her son’s flesh. They were shaken, and their hairs stood on end. After they had listened, they looked into Kṛṣā Gautamī’s face, and she understood their mental dispositions and propensities, their characters and natures, and

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299 Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 134b5 - 135a3. nu mo dag de la shes par bya ba ci zhig yod/ khyed cag ni na chung dar la bab pa yin gyis deng la khrims phul te nor can dang/ thshong dpon dang/ ded dpon dang/ gzhon yang nal gyi bu dang/ su'i bu rtol med pa rnam dang lhan gcig tu yongs su spyod cig/ de ste nga yang gzhon na ni khyed cag dang lhan cig tu 'gro'ö/ des de dag bslus pa dang rkar pa la phyag 'tshal te dong nas yang smras pa/ che zhe 'phaags ma sbom dga'/ mo na re 'di la shes par bya ba ci zhig yod ces zer ro/ de dag las kha cig gis che zhe des smras pa legs kyis 'dong la yongs su spyod do zhes smras pa dang/ kha cig [Da 135a] gis smras pa/ nu mo bud med rnam kyis legs par bshad pa'i chos 'dal ba la rab tu byung ba ni rnyed par dka' na skad cig 'phaags ma skem mo go' tu mi la yang dri'o/ de dag gis che zhe legs kyis de bzhin du bgyi'o zhes smras te/ de dag skem mo go' tu mi'i drung du dong ste rkar pa la phyag byas nas 'phaags ma nyon mongs pa ni gzung bar dka' ste/ bud med rnam la slu bar bgyid na bdag cag gis ji ltar brtag par bgyi bar bshad du gsol/ des smras pas/ che zhe dag 'dod pa rnam kyi ming yang ma 'dzin cig/ de ci'i phyir zhe na/' 'dod pa ni bde ba chung la sdiag bsgal che/ ryes pa'i dmigs mang ngo.

300 Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 162b.

301 Or, for the sake of objects of desire ‘dod pa'i phyir.

302 Again, this could refer to desire itself or to objects of desire ‘dod pa'i phyir.
gave the sort of Dharma teaching that causes one to correctly realize the four nobles’ truths.\(^303\)

The teaching she then gives causes them to attain stream-entry, the first of the four levels of spiritual attainment available to Buddha’s followers according to the MSV.

This story about storytelling offers an open display of the MSV’s narrators’ awareness of the transformative power of stories, and especially of the stories of suffering as a layperson when told to wavering monastics, and stands as a cautionary note to us readers to bear in mind that this concern may color the telling of the MSV’s stories.

This narrative about narrating suffering follows a far more detailed account of a torturous trail of suffering that was the life of Kṛśā Gautamī before meeting Buddha and leaving behind her life as a laywoman.\(^304\) Of particular interest in this shorter version we have just seen is Kṛśā Gautamī’s comment that she is narrating the sufferings she experienced “because of desire” or “due to objects of desire,” for although men may be the objects of desire for the women listening to this narrative, it is left unclear whether the desire that causes Kṛśā Gautamī to suffer is her own desire or the desire of the men whom we will see abusing her. In a

\(^303\) Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 135b 3– 5. ci bdag gis tshe gzhon du ’dod pa ’i phyir sduag bsnagl myong ba de mnyan par ’dod dan/ ’on te tshe ’di la myong ba rnams mnyan par ’dod/ de dag gis ’phaqs ma khyod kyi tshe gzhon du ’dod pa ’i phyir sduag bsnagl myong ba ni re zhig zhog la gang tshe ’di nyid la myong ba rnams gsungs shig ces srmas pa dang/ des de dag la ma dang/ pha dang/ khyo dang/ bu rnams las bral ba ’i sduag bsnagl dang/ bu’i sha zos pa ’i sduag bsnagl ji llar gyur pa zhib tu srmas pa dang/ de dag skyo nas pa sna kun gyi khang nas g.yos te rna ba byo nas skem mo gau ta mi’i gongs du btaa pa dang/ des de dag gi bsam pa dang/ bag la nyal ba dang/ kham dang/ rang bzhin rnams shes nas ’phaqs pa ’i bden pa bzhin yang dang pa rtaas par ’gyur ba de lla bu’i chos bshad do.

\(^304\) Anton von Schiefner renders a version of this story in his collection of stories from the Tibetan bka’ ’gyur canonical collection, translated into English as Tibetan Tales. von Schliefner 1906: 216–226. This version, which appears to be a retelling that stays very close to the Tibetan, nevertheless contains a very basic error. von Schliefner takes the child sent to train with courtesans to be the girl Kṛśā Gautamī rather than the boy. (von Schliefner 1906: 216–217) It should be noted that the life story told of Kṛśā Gautamī in the MSV varies greatly from the well-known story of the mustard seed told of her in the Pāli. (Pruitt 1999: 22–232.) Some of the elements of the life of Kṛśā Gautamī in the MSV are attributed in the Pāli to Therī Paṭācārā, with whom the Pāli Kīsā Gautamī shares a verse in the Pāli (Pruitt 1999: 143–4).
narrative told at a leisurely pace, for 15 pages, Kṛśā Gautamī is first given in marriage by her father to a man who hates women so much that his vituperations against them even leads a group of merchants traveling with him to stop associating with prostitutes, as had been their practice. Kṛśā Gautamī is given to him in marriage, but returns to her parents’ home to give birth. Nearing the end of her second pregnancy, she begins the trip back to her parents’ home in an ox cart with her husband and their second child. When she goes into labor on the road, her husband walks off to take a nap under a tree, leaving her to give birth in the company of their first son. A poisonous snake bites the napping husband as he sleeps, and he dies. The rest of her family is killed off in one freak incident after another—one son is eaten by a fox, another drowns, and her parents are struck by lightning. Grief-stricken and left without relatives, she takes refuge in the home of an older woman, who soon hands her over, against her wishes, to another man. This second husband abuses her daily, and when she gives birth to a son, he fears the two will gang up on him, and brutalizes her to the point of forcing her to eat her own son’s flesh. Her son dead, she runs away, but even then her troubles do not end, as she is passed from one man to another, at one point literally buried alive in the grave of her latest “husband,” and finally loses her mind, to be restored to sanity only by meeting Buddha. She asks to ordain, Buddha entrusts her to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī who ordains her, gives her meditation instruction and Kṛśā Gautamī becomes an arhantinī and exemplary figure in the women’s monastic order.

By the time we reach the moment when Kṛśā Gautamī uses the tale of her own experiences to dissuade the Śākya women from returning to lay life, the narrators have already been working hard to show readers of the MSV just how horrifying that life story was.
The MSV’s narrators pause a moment to tell us that when Kṛśā Gautamī finishes relating her story to the Śākya women, they sit looking into the face of this senior nun. At this moment, we get a glimpse of the power of this story, as a story told by one woman who has escaped those cycles of abuse to other women contemplating a return to a life of relationships with men. Her story takes us to the extremes of what it means to be a woman subject to the vicissitudes of both misfortune and domination by unkind men. The MSV acknowledges the sensationalist extremeness of this tale, telling us that word spreads among the monastic community about her past, and the monks whisper to one another about her when she comes to visit Buddha.

Yet for all she goes through, the narratives do not cast Kṛśā Gautamī in the role of an entirely passive object, even if she is handed off as if she were one. She protests, resists and finally runs away. The MSV includes several other stories of women resisting marriages that were arranged for them, and we will turn in a moment to one in which an unwanted marriage is successfully averted. First, though, the account of how Kṛśā Gautamī is made the wife of the abuser bears a closer look. This story marks the only instance I have come across in the MSV in which a woman was consulted by someone arranging a marriage for her, and it is also—surely not coincidentally—the only account I encountered in which another woman is doing the arranging. After she loses her first family, Kṛśā Gautamī ends up staying in the home of the older woman, who is herself bereft of a husband and eking out a living spinning thread. When

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305 In a text the size of the MSV, there is no guarantee that no other such stories are awaiting discovery. Unfortunately, the only guide to the narratives of the MSV—Panglung Rinpoche’s Erzählstoffe des Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya—valuable as it is in many ways, is far from complete. (Panglung 1981) Apart from omitting the last two volumes of the MSV entirely, his attention to women’s stories strikes me as particularly cursory, with missing or erroneous details.
a weaver who often buys the older woman’s thread from her notices that some of the thread is more finely spun than usual, he asks the woman where it comes from. She replies:

“Son, there is a single woman staying in my house. This was spun by her.”

He said, “Mother, why don’t you give her to me? I don’t have a wife either. I will provide her with food, clothes, and whatever is needed for her living.”

She said, “Son, wait a while. I will ask her, and give you an answer later to what you say.”\footnote{Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 128a2-3. bu bdag gi khyim na bud med gcig cig ’dag ste/ des bkal ba ’di yin no zhes smras pa dang/ des ma ma khyod kyis ci’i phyir na bdag la de mi sbyin/ bdag la yang chung ma med do/ bdag gis de’i bza’ ba dang bgo pa dang ’tsho ba’i yo byad dag sbyar ro zhes smras pa dang/ mos bu re zhi’i de la gsal bar bya ste ci zer ba las lan phyir sbyin no zhes smras pa.}

After the weaver (who is never named) leaves, the old woman presents the proposal to Kṛṣā Gautamī:

She did not accept, and the [other woman] told her that was mistaken, and went there and accepted. After that, the weaver fixed the astrologically auspicious day, date and minute,\footnote{This is a recurring description of arranged marriages, though usually the parents of the bride and groom set the time together, based on astrological calculations.} and took her home. And he was a harsh person and unstable, and in anger was continually beating her with a stick and with his hands.

She said to that older woman, [Da 128b] “Mother, you have offered me to a monstrous cannibal.\footnote{srin po.} Every day he beats me with a stick and with his hands, and I do not know what to do.”

“Daughter, until you have given birth to a son, he will beat you. But as soon as you finally have a boy, you will be the boss of the house, so do not be unhappy.”
At some later point, when she became pregnant, the weaver became loving toward her. But she despised him.  

We will leave Kṛśā Gautamī’s story here, but take away from it a few observations. First, in the story, although male characters appear to wield power and agency over Kṛśā Gautamī, none of her husbands are ever named. The narrators are much more interested in the female characters, and place at the heart of this story a wide range of women: courtesans, the older woman and the housewife Kṛśā Gautamī, all of whom at various points live unattached to any man. By casting a woman as the person who hands her to such a fate, this story makes it vividly clear that women are not simply pawns in games played by men. The social practices surrounding marriage implicate anyone in the position of seeking to care for women, male or female. The older woman makes her reasons for going against Kṛśā Gautamī’s own wishes clear: “a woman without support is sitting in a place of suffering. Men who are strangers will take advantage [of you.]” Her comment assumes a very dim view indeed of men as predators, and this is an assumption the narrative as a whole works very hard to reinforce. Women need to be under the stewardship of one man to keep the others at bay. If the man under whose stewardship she is placed turns out to be a drunk, unstable or abusive—and Kṛśā Gautamī’s second husband is all three—so much the worse. It is hard to see how Kṛśā Gautamī’s story is a story suffering “because of desire,” unless we take this to mean she suffered because of men’s desire for her, or more broadly due to living in a world ruled by desire. But the point is,
women’s positioning as a gift a father would give to another man in marriage is presented here
as an attempted solution to the problem of male gender as it is construed by this text, not just
female. Constructions of male and female gender are, of course, produced in dependence on
one another.

Men’s power may lie in their brute physical strength and in their social role as providers, but women have their own power. The old woman seems to take in stride the reports of spousal beatings, and to see a solution in the dominance Kṛśā Gautami can gain by producing another male—a son. Women’s power, she seems to say, is reproductive. Wield that power, or wield nothing. The narrators concur with this gendered construction, and transform the vicious abuser into a doting husband the moment her womb swells to display her own potency. This reproductive power has important sociological dimensions, as the narrators also point out: As mothers, women can gain allies in the male children who are dependent on their care when young. To bring the point home, the narrators tell us it is fear of the power that the mother-son axis will yield in the house—coupled with his own need for absolute dominance—that sparks the man’s infanticidal impulses.

After she had given birth to the boy, she opened the door and he entered, and after she had paid respect to him, she said, “Lord, please be joyful. A male child has been born to you.”

He was overwhelmed with anger toward her, and was still utterly overwhelmed with malice toward her. He thought, “If she despised me even before she had a
son, now that she has had a son, she will have the boy on her side, and will definitely have him kill me.”

We have noted that the MSV narratives take as normative the arranged marriages in which girls are given away by fathers or father figures. The MSV also displays selective acceptance of other brahminical assumptions about women’s place at men’s side in marriage.

As Kane explains in his *History of Dharmaśāstra*:

The purpose of marriage, even according to the Rgveda, was to enable a man, by becoming a householder, to perform sacrifices to the gods and to procreate sons.  

Yet when the narratives of the MSV are depicting households with no visible Buddhist identity, such as those in which Kṛṣā Gautamī had lives, they omit almost entirely any sense of wives’ ritual role as a companion in sacrificial duties, instead highlighting her procreative contributions. We may say that in the domestic sphere, the MSV narratives place less stress on women’s symbolic ritual role and more on her biological being. This observation will take on greater importance later when we turn to the ways in which monastic discipline seeks to regulate women’s bodies, and their relations to their bodies.

Outside the monastic sphere, however, contestations over women’s lives are frequently structured around the crucial moment when a marriage is arranged. By contrast, in men’s

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310 *Kṣudrakavastu*. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 128b3-5. *des bu byung nas sgo phyed ba dang de nang du ’ongs pa la des gus par byas te smras pa/ jo bo dayes par mdzod cig/ khyod kyi bu pho zhiag btsas so/ des de la khro bas kun tu khébs pa dang ni ma bral ayi gnod sams kyis kun tu khébs par gyur te/ *des ’di bu ma byung bas kyang bda’g la bnyas par byed na/ gang gi tshe ’di ’i bu skyes par gyur na ’di dang bu bsdongz nas bda’g la gdon mi za bar gsod par byed do snyam bsams nas.*


312 As carefully explored in Jamison (1996) the role of wives as ritual companions extends well beyond the sacrificial context as well.
stories, the fact of marriage is treated far more casually, often dispensed with in a stock phrase “he took a wife from a comparable family.” However, what may look in such moments like pure male agency over female objecthood turns out on closer examination to be far more complex.

Let us take a second narrative, set within the home, that offers a young woman a very different trajectory. In a good example of the MSV’s narrative style, with its sparing use of telling details, we hear first of a friendship her father forms with another leading merchant of the town.

The two of them used to compete with each other in terms of wealth. One said to the other, “My wealth is superior to yours.” The other said, “My wealth is superior to yours.” The two of them became close friends. From time to time, one gave a gift to the other. And the other too likewise gave a gift back. And the two of them became close friends.

Before either of them have children, the two arrange for their future offspring to marry, should one have a boy and the other a girl. The arrangement of this marriage is explicitly construed as an extension of the friends’ affection for each other. They arrive at the idea while lingering together after a town meeting, reluctant to part from each other’s company:

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313 tena sādṛśāt kulāt kalatram ānītam. For example, see GM.i.87.

314 Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 161a1-3. de dag gcig la cig phyug pas ’gran te/ gcig na re khyod pas ni longs sphyod kyi rayu bdag gi khyad zhus so/ gcig na re khyod bas longs sphyod kyi rayu bdag gi khyad zhus so zhes smra’a/ de gnyis phan tshun mdza’ bar gyur te/ gcig gis kyang dus dus su skyes bskur/ gcig gis kyang de bzhin slar bskur nas de gnyis phan tshun mdza’ bar gyur to.
The householder Datta asked, “Dear friend, even when the two of us have passed away, our friendship should continue through our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren. What means is there to that [end]?”315

They commit to marrying their children. The first to be born is a girl, our heroine Dharmadattā. This baby girl is greatly welcomed by her family. Eight nannies are assigned to care for all her needs, and relatives gather to celebrate her birth festival for 21 days.316 Her father’s friend sends gifts of jewelry and clothing for the newborn girl:

With the thought that she would be his daughter-in-law, he sent a message saying, “Dear friend, when I heard that you had a girl, I was extremely delighted. Since these are the clothes and jewelry offered to the daughter of a dear friend, it is right that you accept them.” He accepted them and sent back the message, “Dear friend, this is well done. So the familial bond is arranged and if you have a boy, I will give her to him.”317

Soon the friend’s wife gives birth to a boy, and Dharmadattā’s father reciprocates with the same gift of clothes and jewelry for the boy, and the same affectionate message. The story then skips forward to the young girl’s expressing the wish to ordain:

When Dharmadattā had grown, wishing to go forth, she prostrated at her father’s feet and said, “Father, please give me permission to go forth in the well-spoken Dharma and vinaya.”

315 Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 161a4-5. khyim bdag byin pas mdza’ bo grogs po bdag cag gnyis dus las ‘das kyang phyi nas bu dang/ tsha bo dang/ yang tsha dang/ sum ta dag gi bar du yang mdza’ ba’i rgyun ni gcad par bya na/ de la thabs ji lta bu zhid bya zhes dris pa dang.

316 This is the MSV’s stock description of a pampered upbringing for a beloved child, and will be said of the boy child as well.

317 Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 161b4-6. bdag gi mna’ ma yin par yid la yod pas des de la gos dang rgyan dag bskur nas mdza’ bo grogs po khyod la bu mo zhiig byung bar thos nas bdag rab tu dga’ ste/ mdza’ bo’i bu mo’i gos dang rgyan bskur ba ’di yin gyis blang ba’i rigs so zhes spring pa dang/ des de blangs nas slar lan spring pa/ mdza’ bo de ltar byas pa legs kyi gnyen yang byas khyod la bu pho zhiig byung na de la sbyin no.
He said, “Daughter, you have already been promised to Viśākha, the son of Ri dags sgra.\textsuperscript{318} That is your family, so it is inappropriate for me to permit that now.” Saying this, he did not give his permission.

From time to time, Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarnā used to come to that house, teaching the families. Dharmadattā said, “Noble One, I wish to go forth in the well-spoken Dharma and vinaya, receive full ordination and live as a bhikṣuṇī, but my father did not give permission and is guarding me,\textsuperscript{319} and he does not even let me go outside. So could you not ordain me right here?” [Da 162b]

She said, “Daughter, that you have produced this thought is good.\textsuperscript{320}

Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarnā goes on to give Dharmadattā the same talk on the benefits of ordination as we heard Kṛśā Gautamī giving the Śākya women. Encouraging the young girl in her aspiration, she tells Dharmadattā she will ask Buddha. Although this goes against all the standard monastic practices, Buddha allows Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarnā to go alone as a messenger to Dharmadattā and give her refuge, lay precepts, and the ten precepts that comprise the initial level of ordination, all while she is still in the household, and directly against her father’s explicit wishes. Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarnā does so, and Dharmadattā is overjoyed. Taking advantage of the young woman’s elated state of mind, Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarnā gives her a

\textsuperscript{318} Because I have found no attested Sanskrit for this name, I prefer not to speculate on a reconstruction, and thus leave it in the Tibetan. Here the Derge is quite consistent in the spelling of ri dags rather than ri dwags

\textsuperscript{319} Tibetan: bsruns. On the guarding of young women by their fathers, and of wives by husbands, see Jamison 2006: 201–3. Jamison reads the heightened emotionalism of dharmaśāstra texts around the need to ‘guard’ women as connected to an increasing recognition of the women’s mental agency, along with the growing presence of unmarried religious women.

\textsuperscript{320} Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 162a5–162b1. nam bu mo chos sbyin skyes pa dang/ de rab tu ‘byung bar ‘dod nas des pha’i rhang pa la phya’g tshal te/ pha bda’g legs par bshad pa’i chos ‘dul ba la ra’u du bdyung bar gso/ la zhes smras pa dang/ des smras pa/ bu mo khyod ri dags sgra’i bu sa ga la sngon khyod btang zin te/ khyod kyi khyim thab de yin te/ njas ni gnang du mi rung nga zhes zer nas ma gnang ngo/ khyim der dge slong ma ut-pa la’i kha dog ces bya ba rigs pa dang ston par byed de dus dus su ‘long ngo/ chos sbyin gyis ‘phags ma bda’g legs par bshad pa’i chos ‘dul ba la ra’u tu ‘byung bsnyen pa rdza’gs shing dge slong ma’i dngos po thob par tshal ba bda’g gi phas mi gnang zhing bsruns te phyir ‘byung du yang mi ster na khyod kyi s ‘di n’id du rab tu mi ‘byung ngam zhes smras pa [Da 162b] dang/ des bu mo sens de ltar bsksed pa legs so.
teaching that causes her to attain the first level of spiritual attainment, stream entry (Tibetan: *rgyun du zhugs pa*; Sanskrit: *srota-äpanna*). Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarṇā then returns to Buddha and reports what transpired, and he has the bhikṣuṇīs assemble to authorize Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarṇā to give Dharmadattā the next level of ordination, the two-year probationary šikṣamāṇā training. She does so, explains to her how to train according to that level of ordination, and again gives Dharmadattā a Dharma talk. The young woman at once realizes the next spiritual attainment, that of the once-returner (Tibetan: *gcig phyir ldog pa'i 'bras bu*; Sanskrit: *sakṛdāgāmin*). On that basis, Dharmadattā engages in the šikṣamāṇā training for two years. All the while, she lives at home, apparently without shaving her head or wearing the otherwise mandatory robes, since no one in her home is aware that she has ordained. But they do notice she has become a beautiful young woman, and word of this reaches her father’s friend:

> Then the householder Ri dags sgra heard that the girl Dharmadattā had become a young woman, and he sent a message to the householder Datta, “Dear friend, since the boy has become a young man and the girl has become a young woman, let us check for an auspicious day, and take her as the wife of the young man.”

And he sent a message saying, “Dear friend, that is good. Let’s do so.”

The wedding invitations go out to relatives and business associates in distant towns. The two men are eminent citizens of Śrāvastī, and the entire city is swept up in the preparations. The king has his ministers call for the tributary territories to send their local products, and festive decorations transform the town. Wedding guests arrive and swell the town’s population to bursting.
Then, when Dharmadattā saw all the preparations set up, she asked the people in her household, “Well, what is this unscheduled festival?”

They said, “This unscheduled festival has been created by the power of the collection of goodness that you previously accumulated. This unscheduled festival has been created, and they have arrived, to give you away as a bride.”

When she heard this, terrified, she prostrated at her father’s feet. She said, “Father, this is not what I wish. Will you permit me to go to the bhikṣuṇīs’ monastery called King’s Park?”

He said, “Daughter, before you were born you were given to the son of the householder Ri dags sgra, Viśākha. So now I have no control. That is your family. Since the Kosala King Prasenajit, and his queens, princes, servants and servant girls, and the wider population and even the masses who have arrived here from their countries know of this, how could I now give you permission? What, do you want me to get my friends and siblings and relatives put in jail to die? You are going tomorrow as a bride, so please act that way. Since friends, my people, and relatives and many people too have gathered here, do not say a word of this. You are very young, so you don’t understand. Give up the practice of brahmacarya!”

Thus he ordered her, and she engaged in focusing her attention on the path with effort, but could not find a way to become free of desire.\textsuperscript{322}

\textsuperscript{322} \textit{Kṣudrakavastu}. Derge Da 164b1-6. \textit{de nas chos sbyin mas yo byad sbyar ba rnams mthong nas nang gi skye bo dag la kye dus ma yin pa’i dus ston ‘di ci zhih yin zhes smras pa dang/ de daq gis khyod kyis sngon gyi legs pa’i tshogs rnam par bsags pa’i mthus na dus la ma bab pa’i dus ston chen po byas te/ khyod baq mar gtang ba’i phyir dus la ma bab pa’i dus ston chen po byas te/ de daq nye bar’ongs so zhes smras pa dang/ des thos nas skraq ste pha’i rkang pa la phyag ‘tshal te/ yab bdag ‘dod pa ‘tshal ba ni ma laqs na rgyal po’i kun dga’ ra ba zhes bgyal ba dge slong ma’i dbyar mo khang du mchir ci gnang zhes smras pa dang/ des smras pa/ bu mo khyod ma skyes par khyim bdag ri dags sgra’i bu sa ga la byin pas/ da ni nga la dbang med do/ khyod kyi khyim thab de yin te/ de la bur ni yul ko sa la’i rgyal po gsal rgyal dang/ nang gi bsun mo dang athon nu dang/ bran pho dang/ bran mo dang/ skye bo mang po dang/ yul so so nas lahgs pa’i skye bo miang po dag kyang shes na ngas khyod da ji ltar gnang bar bya’/ ci bdag mdza’ bo dang/ phu nu dang/ gnyen rnams bton rar bcug ste ‘chi bar’ ‘dod dam/ khyod ni sang baq mar ‘gro ba ltar gyis shig/ mdza’ bo dang/ bdag gi mi dang/ gnyen dang/ skye bo mang po dag kyang ‘dir ‘dus na/ de
Although in some ways her father’s scolding reads like a modern response to a bride’s cold feet while the guests wait outside, this passage signals a great deal more. First, it is worth noting here that while both the boy and girl have had their marriage partners chosen for them, the practice of patrilocal arranged marriages has very different implications for women than for men. As we see here, the girl is positioned as an object of exchange, which the new owner comes to collect. In this case, the gift of the girl has already been given. The father explicitly indicates that he himself has no agency at this point. In fact, she was never his, since even before she had come into being, she had been given to the other family. While he may once have had complete authority to gift her as he wished, he already exercised that in the past and thus has it no longer to wield. His daughter now belongs to another family, even if she has remained in his care until delivery is taken and the transfer is effected. This presents an extreme version of the fundamental position daughters have within their natal families: they are to be kept safe for a time, until the inevitable moment comes for them to be shifted out to the family in which they will spend their adult life. Dharmadattā’s marriage takes on the shape of an exchange between two leading merchants, based on a verbal contract, and it thus becomes his duty not only as a father but as an upstanding businessman and a prominent member of the local merchant community to fulfill the delivery order. The narrative does not trivialize the father’s friendship with the groom’s father, but it does tell us it was built on the exchange of gifts, and on competition over acquisitive prowess, as indicated by the wealth accumulated. Along with the binding nature of the girl-gifting decision he made in the past, he

\[ \text{skad ma zer ci/ kh{y}od rab tu gzhon bas ma rtoqs te/ tshangs par spyad pa spyod pa thong zhig ces bsgo ba dang/ de brtson pas lam yid la byed pa sgom pa la zhugs na’ dod pa dang bral bar bya ba’i thabs ma rnyed do.} \]

\[ ^{323} \text{For an evocative modern anthropological exploration of the institution of kanyādān, as it is called today in Hindi, and the transient place it makes of a women native families, see Raheja 1995.} \]
expresses concerns about the king’s reaction. The narrative reminds us that living under the rule of a king makes her father and his relatives subject to potential imprisonment in unpredictable ways. Whether the concerns about imprisonment were genuine or not, his father situates the relinquishing of her as a bride within a nexus of social responsibilities by which he himself feels bound. Thus her father tells her he experiences his own position as helpless, with his options also limited, by his concerns as a merchant to honor his contractual obligations, by the weight of respectability, and by his status as subject of a kingdom. Without ever challenging the basic premise of giving girls as gifts, the MSV presents men too as confined by the social practices regulating the exchange of women, but in different ways than women. Social practices regulating the exchange of women place restraints on the agency of all involved. Dharmadattā’s gender determines her options, but her father’s agency is also dispersed over time, in the sense that he had say over his daughter’s life earlier, but later becomes bound by his own actions in the past.

We will defer for the moment the completion of Dharmadattā’s story here—but with the assurance that its ending is happy. For now, we have now explored what it has to show us about the particular ways that the social practices in the MSV position women and work together with gender constructions in complex ways to shape what is seen to be possible for them. On the whole, the possibilities for women to change social location outside the monastic community were highly limited in this social world depicted in the MSV. Women are consistently associated with a male guardian—almost always her father or husband—and her social location is virtually inseparable from his. Indeed, while many female characters in the MSV are named, many more are not, but rather are identified in terms of the male to whom
they are connected. Women’s social location changes mainly only when they are married or widowed, and neither of these are processes in which they are given any say. Of course, the arranged marriages that are the norm in the MSV are arranged for men as well. But because of the social implications of being a woman—that is, because of the way women’s roles are gendered—the boundaries of her family are more constitutive of a woman’s life, and limit her possibilities differently, and more fully. Further, she is sent from the home in which she was born and developed affective ties to a subordinate position elsewhere, rendering a newlywed woman in vulnerable in her new home (and dependent on her husband’s good will) in very particular ways.

The one visible female domain outside the home is that of the courtesans or prostitutes, who also densely populate the narratives of the MSV. One of Buddha’s closest female disciples had been a prominent prostitute, and we shall return to the figure of these women who make their living outside the household in the next chapter. For now, we simply note that even those women who live outside a male-dominated household also tend to orient their lives in basic ways toward men.

In short, family and larger social structures coincide here to position women as men’s dependents. Women in the MSV are largely limited to domestic occupations, and to social locations that are defined for them by the men to whom they are attached. As we saw in the case of Kṛṣā Gautamī, the system of placing women under the protection of one man—any man—to keep others at bay has devastating consequence when that man has a taste for abusing the position of power created for him by this society’s marital practices and gender constructions. But regardless how or whether men are fulfilling their presumed role as
caretaker and guardian, this social world grants tremendous power to men over women simply by virtue of their respective sexes. The MSV pays particular attention to the ways that gender also combines with social location and time to determine persons, and it explores these connections through a literary genre all its own. We turn now to that genre, the avadānas.

**Karma and the Grammar of Personhood in the Avadānas**

The MSV has a distinct vision of persons as unfolding over time, in ways that must be taken into consideration when caring for them. The avadāna genre, which may well have been pioneered by the MSV itself, offers a narrative device for displaying personal histories that extend over multiple lifetimes. The avadānas highlight continuities as well as discontinuities across lives, but one aspect of persons seen to be highly persistent over time is gender, or sex, as these narratives portray persons born again and again with the same sexual identity. This vision pushes us in a contrary direction to the apparent fluidity of sexual identity as imagined in the vinaya rules anticipating multiple sex changes within a single life. In this section, we will explore the MSV’s rich use of the avadāna to situate gender, or sex, within a complex view of persons as regulated by karma, another constitutive element that shapes what is possible for ethical persons, female and male. Because they offer an imaginative vision of the situations faced by women and the aspirations they made many eons past, the avadānas articulate for us an abiding view of gender and women’s response to it.
The MSV makes heavy use of the *avadāna* genre, with narratives of this type appearing in every volume of the MSV, save one, and as many as 33 cycles of *avadāna* narratives appearing per volume. Drawing on the research of numerous other scholars, many of whom had argued the same, Andy Rotman has made a compelling case for the assertion that the *avadāna* genre actually originated in the Mūlasarvāstivādin lineage that produced and preserved the MSV, and there seems no need to repeat his arguments here. Whether or not the *avadāna* is a literary invention of the MSV or a genre that they simply propelled to its later popularity, it is very clear that the narrators of the MSV exploit its potentials in exceptionally creative ways both as an ethical and as a literary device.

*Avadānas* are stories told by Buddha to monastics to draw connections between actions or events that transpire in the narrative present with actions done or events to come in past or future lives. In the MSV, Buddha usually relates *avadānas* in response to monks’ puzzlement, or incredulity, about unusual events or other unusual story elements. For the purposes of this

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324 A quick survey of the MSV turned up 114 separate *avadāna* cycles, with each cycle often containing multiple past-life stories to explain a single present life. The final volume of the *Vinayavastu*, containing the *Sanghahchedavastu*, Derge Nga alone had 33 such *avadāna* cycles. The *Vinayavastu* as a whole boasts, on my informal count, 54 *avadāna* cycles, while the two-volume *Kṣudrakavastu* has the next highest concentration, with 25 in total. Again, based on a casual count, the four volumes of the *Bhikṣuvibhaṅga* contain 28, nearly half of which occur in the final volume, Derge Nya—a volume that is particularly rich in narratives featuring female characters in general. The single volume of the *Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga* has five, while I found only two in the final volume of the *Uttaragrantha*, and not a one in Derge volume Na. Again, this survey was neither exhaustive nor particularly systematic, and there could well be more.


326 Feer notes that this framing is found with great frequency in the *Avadānāsātaka* but is largely absent from the *Karmaśātaka*, as is the common formula dividing actions into black, white and mixed. He further notes that whereas the *Karmaśātaka* includes descriptions of the educational curricula of distinct castes such are rare in the *Avadānāsātaka*. Feer concludes partly on the basis of these dissimilarities that the two *avadāna* collections were produced by distinct sects bound by ties of rivalry, though not enmity (Feer 1901: 60). However, we must note that features found in the *Karmaśātaka* but not in the *Avadānāsātaka* and vice versa can be found in the MSV.
dissertation, we will explore the *avadānas* of the MSV through three broad patterns. In the most common pattern, the connections revealed through the narrative are causal and driven by karma, either looking backward to a past life for a cause of what occurs in the present, or ahead to a future life for a result of an action in the present. These chains of causality are described in the MSV as *karmaploti*, or streams of karma, as they flow from the past through the present and continue on to the future, linking all three. Actions done and buried deep in persons’ past lives are shown to result much later in the present-life experiences they had appeared to be undergoing without any choice. Alternately, present life actions may be said to have unanticipated consequences in the future. These chains of cause and effect function according to the MSV’s understanding of karma.

In a second pattern, which Feer calls “parallel *avadānas*,” the narratives reveal relationships and also behavioral patterns that repeat life after life. The persistence of gender is perhaps most evident in *avadānas* from this latter category. In a third recurring pattern, an agent’s own resolute aspiration (*praṇidhāna*) is described as the force linking events in the past and present or in the present and future. Most often, a person’s achievement in a present life is

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327 Feer’s studies of the *Karmaśataka* (Feer 1901) and *Avadānaśataka* (Feer 1891) collections led him to classify *avadānas* into several types: 1) “*avadānas* of the present” that describe karmic acts whose consequences are immediate or will take place in the near future, 2) “parallel *avadānas*” where events simply seem to repeat themselves exactly 3) “*jātaka avadānas*” that describe past actions whose effects are seen in the narrative present, and 4) “historical *avadānas*” that may also fit other types but are especially marked by depicting figures known from Buddha’s biography or other Buddhist historiographic texts (Feer 1901: 55-56). That Citing Feer, whose organization is somewhat more complex, Strong (1979: 227) takes this division into retrospective and forward looking as the main types of *avadānas*. Based on his study of the *Divyāvadāna*, much of which was excerpted from the MSV, Tatelman (2000: 7) identifies a variation of the temporal patterns of *avadāna* in which a prediction by Buddha looks ahead to the fruition of a present-life deed or, most often, resolute aspiration.

328 This category collapses the more commonly drawn distinction between *avadānas* that 1) explain the past and 2) predict the future, to allow other patterns to emerge.

329 For an explication of the structure of *avadānas* based on these temporal divisions, see Rotman 2008: 2.

330 Feer 1901: 56.
shown to mirror an achievement they had observed someone else attain in a past life, and then made a strong aspiration to be able to achieve in the future. Within this type we also find aspirations made in the present whose future successful outcome Buddha foretells. All three types of avadānas link two actions and events that transpire in distinct time periods—generally past with present or present with future—but the force linking the two will differ. Our first type of avadānas shows karmic causality sparking results that are generally involuntary, the second sets up patterns of regularity and repetition, and the third reveals the power of voluntary aspirations. Looking at the MSV’s avadānas in this way brings into focus a number of distinct ways that the narratives figure personal agency. At the same time, it allows us to see that gender is narrated in different ways in each of these three types of avadānas.

Avadāna narrators use theories of karmic causality to present persons as the authors of their own lives, but they also draw on a sense of persons as intensely related to others, such that people traverse their multi-life trajectories in the company of specific others, and serve as models for one another in redirecting those trajectories in ethically potent ways. This matters for us because this study’s main concern to chart the gendering of women in the MSV requires us to explore a number of ancillary questions: what sort of agency are persons in general imagined to wield, how if at all does women’s agency differ, and therefore how much self-fashioning can the Dharma make possible for them, and how.

We turn first to the most common pattern of avadāna found in the MSV. These avadānas that embed a person’s current life within an ongoing chain of karmic events can radically subvert our readings of that life, and can urge us to reconsider where we locate agency. Experiences of personal tragedies in which persons seem utterly powerless in the grip of
external events are turned on their heads, with the victim revealed as the unintentional author of their current experiences, through deeds done in a past life. At the same time, actions done in the present are stated to dramatically redirect the future. In this sense, even persons who seemed to have had the status of objects buffeted about in a narrative about their present life turn out to have had tremendous agency in shaping their current situation, but in the past, even as they continue to hold the power to change future events. Personal agency in this vision is simply distributed over multiple lives, where the causal act is separated across lives from the resultant experience. A person acts as agent in one life, and then in a future life appears as the subject formed by that act. The explicit ethical aim of these stories is to encourage persons to recognize their role in shaping their own experiences, and to take a hand in acting in ways that create the experiences they want and avoiding those that bring unwanted consequences. The MSV uses the same term (vyākṛ; Tibetan: lung bstan pa) to describe Buddha’s narrating of future outcomes of current actions and his narrating of past causes for present terms. A nominalized form of this verb, vyākarana (Tibetan: lung bstan) more often translated as “prediction” is the same as the Sanskrit term for grammar. Like grammar, presentations of this system of causal patterns can be descriptive or generative. Within the MSV’s ethical program of self-fashioning, the avadānas instruct readers in a grammar they can use to author new plots for themselves or better read those narrative they are not living.

To watch the avadāna’s narrative ethics in action, we turn to an avadāna told after the narration of the life story of Kṛśā Gautamī. This avadāna intervenes in our understanding of her ostensible victimhood, and offers her an agency despite any appearances to the contrary.

331 As just one of many, many examples, forms of the verb vyākr govern karmapati in nearly every few lines of the description of the avadānas told at Lake Anavatapta. Sanskrit found at GM.i.163ff.
One day after Kṛṣṇā Gautamī has come to prostrate at Buddha’s feet, the monks gather to speculate about the karmic chains that had led to her extraordinary life experiences.

Lord Buddha said to Venerable Ānanda, “Ānanda, why are the bhikṣus whispering in one another’s ears?”

And he told him in detail. The Lord said, “Ānanda, the ripening of sentient beings’ karma and continuum is inconceivable. All of what is worldly existence is one’s own karma. Karma is the place of birth. Karma is being reborn. Karma is what follows. Whoever has created some sort of karma will themselves experience its ripening.”

This terse formulation of karma in four parts—karma determining one’s environment, or “all of what is worldly existence,” the place one is born, the fact that one must be born at all and the details of the experiences one encounters after birth, and the notion that only the person who created a karmic cause will experience its result—can all be mapped onto theories of karma that appear in the more abstract texts of *abhidharma*. Yet whether or not we find lurking behind the presentation of karma in the *MSV* an abhidharmically-correct understanding of the doctrine of karma or not is immaterial. No such theoretical grounding is needed to read the narratives in which karma is put on display, for the *MSV* presents its own grounding. Buddha then continues with the more standard phrase to introduce avadānas:

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332 Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 131a1 - 3. sangs rgyas bcom ldan ’das kyis tshe dang ldan pa kun dga’ bo la ci’i phyir na kun dga’ bo dge srong rnams phan tshun rna bar bshub ces smras pa dang/ des zhib tu gsol to/ bcom ldan ’das kyis bka’ stsal pa/ kun dga’ bo sems can rnams kyi rayud dang las kyi rnam par smin pa ni bsam gyis mi khyab bo/ ’jig rten pa ’i rnam ni rang gi las so/ las ni skye gnas so/ las ni nying mtshams so/ las ni rjes su ’jug pa ste/ gang gis ji ltar las byas pa de rnam par smin pa so sor myong bar ’gyur ro.

333 A great deal of the academic work on karma has focused precisely on the theoretical presentations of such texts. A principal commentarial work in the *abhidharma* genre is Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa*, and remains the one most often turned to as a touchstone by the Tibetan Buddhist monastics who also rely on the *MSV*. For a study and translation in French of the second chapter, devoted to karma, see the first volume of de la Vallée Poussin, Louis. 1923-31.
The Lord said, “Bhikṣus, since Bhikṣunī Kṛśā Gautamī herself created the karma, piled it up, attained the collection [of conditions], ripened the cooperating causes, made them stream forward like a river, it was certain to happen. No one else will experience the actions that Kṛśā Gautamī does and accumulates. Bhikṣus, actions that have been done and accumulated do not ripen on an external earth element, nor on a water element, nor on a fire element or on a wind element. Rather, actions that are done, good or bad, come to fruition among the skandhas one has grasped, the dhātus and the āyatanas.

Karmic acts [Da 131b] are not destroyed, even if a hundred eons pass.  
[Yet] once they have met their moment, they bear fruit for embodied beings.

Buddha then narrates a story in which an orphaned girl is taken as the junior wife to a man whose senior wife had until then been barren. The senior wife then conceives, and gives birth to a son, while the younger wife herself remains childless. This junior wife is invited to help raise the child by the infant’s biological mother, but she remains plagued by jealousy and insecurity.

When she was raising him, some wrong ideas arose, namely, that it is the house of whoever has a son. That being the case, though she raised him, [Da132b] she thought, “That one will become the owner of the household and I will become the servant. So [I should] kill him.” Because of this wrong idea that she gave rise to, she shoved a bamboo splinter in the mouth of the child. He began to cry, afflicted by suffering, and the other asked, “Why is the boy crying?”

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This second pada varies slightly from the standard formulation of this verse.

Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 131a6 -131b1. bcom ldan ’das kyi sgsungs pa/ dge srong dags dge srong ma skem mo gau ta mI ngyid kyi las byas shing tshogs pas rayed cing rkyen smin pa ni chu bo bzhiṅ miṅg ngu da ’byung steq gis pa/ ’gyur ro/ skem mo gau ta mI las byas shing bsags pa/ ’gzh mnying ba mI ’gyur ro/ dge srong rnyams las byas shing bsags pa ni phyi rol gyi sa ’kham las rnyams pa mI smin/ chu ’kham la ma yin/ me ’kham la ma yin/ rlung gi ’kham las ma yin gyi/ zin pa/ phug po dang/ ’kham dang/ skye med s ’di ngyid la dag ba dang mi dge ba la las byas pa rnyam par smin te/ las rnyams [Da 131b] stor par mI ’gyur ba/ bskal pa dag ni brgya lOn kyung/ dus dang ’phrod nas thob pa ni/ lus can rnyams la ’bras bur smin.
She said, “Elder Sister, I do not know why he is crying.”

She took him, and began trying to cheer him up. She held him in her arms, kissed him, and even though she held him in her lap, she was not able to [cheer him]. When she was offering him her breast, she saw at once that a bamboo splinter had been shoved into his mouth. She swiftly opened his mouth and drew it out with her hand. The boy could not breathe, and died. She beat her breast, wept and threw herself on the ground. The men of the household came running and asked, “What is wrong?”

She replied, her voice choked with tears of compassion and love, “Ah! This co-foster mother, this evildoer, angered by her jealousy, stuck a bamboo splinter in my boy’s mouth and killed him!”

They too wept, and when the surrounding neighbors heard, they too came running. They cried, “Ah! This is unheard of! She killed a blameless little boy who had done no harm!”

Many people surrounded her on all sides saying this. She beat her breast and cried, and uttered a vow, “If I killed your son, may my husband be bitten by a snake! May a fox eat one son! May the other fall in the river and die! May my parents be killed by a lightning bolt! May I eat my son’s flesh and become crazy and agitated and roam all about.” Thus she vowed.

“Bhikṣus, what do you think? The second wife of the householder was Bhikṣuṇī Kṛṣṇā Gautamī herself. By the ripening of the karma of killing the boy and lying while vowing in this way due to being extremely overwhelmed by afflictions, her husband was bitten by a snake and died. One son was killed by a fox. Another fell in the river and died. [Da133a] A lightning bolt fell on her parents

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336 Tibetan: **glo bur zhig byes.** Literally: What happened was something sudden or never before encountered.
and crushed them. She ate her son’s flesh and roamed all about naked and crazy, with a mind wandering here and there.\textsuperscript{337}

In her relationship with her homicidal husband, described just pages earlier, Kṛṣṇa Gautamī had been portrayed in much the same position as the infant whose total dependence on her she abuses. But then in this narrative form, victim turns out to have been agent. Were Buddha to narrate an \textit{avadāna} for the “blameless little boy,” his tale would surely strip him of that pure victimhood as well. Yet in both stories, the narrators accentuated the helplessness of the “victim,” not denying them their provisional status as blameless and awakening our sympathy fully for it. The \textit{avadāna} genre insists that although it is terrible that we must endure such pain, we are, in fact, at the same time the authors and producers of the narratives of suffering that we live now or will live in the future. We are authors of those narratives, but our act in constructing the plot of the narrative we now live out was committed in a previous life, just as the unfolding of our present actions must await their moment in the future to come. At first glance, in terms of our \textit{experience} of ourselves as sufferers, it may seem to matter little

\textsuperscript{337} \textit{Kṣudrakavastu}. Derge Da 132a7-133a1. des de bskyed na log par rtog pa skyes te gang gi bu yin pa de’i khyim st/ de bas na ‘di bskyed kyang ‘di ltar khyim gyi bdag por [Da 132b] gyur pa dang/ bdag ni bran mor ‘gyur gyis ‘di ni gsad do snyam nas de log par rtog pas bskyod pas khye’u de’i khar smig ma’i thur ma zhiig btsugs pa dang/ des sdaṅg sBSDal gyis gzi’r bas ngu bar gyur nas des snyas pa/ zhe khye’u ‘di ci phyir ngu zhes dris pa dang/ des snyas pa/ che zhe ci’i phyir ngu ba ma ‘tshal to/ des de blangs te dqa’ ba bya bar brtsams te laq pas ‘khyud de ‘o byas nas pang par blangs kyang mi btub nas/ des de la na ma blad nas ji tsam bikas pa dang/ smig ma’i thur ma zhiig khar btsugs par mthong nas des myur du kha phyre ste laq pas drangs pa dang khye’u de dbugs med de dus las ‘das nas brang brdungs te ngu zhing sa la ‘gyel ba dang khyim gyi skye po rnam bruγuγnas ‘di ci nyes zhes dris pa dang/ des snying rje zhing brtse bas mchi mas brangs bzhiin du snyas pa/ ‘khe ma ma yar ma sdiig pa’i chos spyod pa ‘di phrag dog gis kḥros nas bdag gi bu’i khar smig ma’i thur ma btsugs te bsdal do/ de dag kyang ngu bar gyur nas ‘khor gyi khyim mtnes dag gis thos nas de dag gis kyang bskyugs te snyas pa/ ‘di ni glo bur zhiig byas te kyiis pa ‘di nyes pa med cing gnod pa med par bsdal do zhes zer pa nas/ de de la snye bo mang po dag gis e ma ‘o zhes zer zhing kun tu bskor to/ de ni brang brdung zhing sngu ne st ma’ ‘dor ba de st/ bdag gis khyod kyi bu gsal par gyur na bdag gi khye yang sprul gyis sngu te dus byed pa shog shig/ bu gci’g ni was sngos par shog shig/ gnyis pa chu bor lhung te dus byed pa shog shig/ pha ma gnam lcaγs kyiis gsad par shog shig/ bu’i sha yang sas la smyos shing ‘phyar ba’i sγs kyiis phan tshun ‘khyam par shog shig ces mna’ ma’i ‘dor ro/ ‘dge sλóng dag ji snyam du sγs/ khyim bdag de’i chung ma gnyis pa ni ‘di ltar ‘di bzhin dge sλóng ma skem mo gau tu ma’i ‘dor ro/ ‘dge sλóng dag ji snyam du sγs/ khyim bdag de’i chung ma gnyis pa ni ‘di ltar ‘di bzhin dge sλóng ma skem mo gau tu ma’i ‘dor ro/ ‘dge sλóng dag ji snyam du sγs/ khyim bdag de’i chung ma gnyis pa ni ‘di ltar ‘di bzhin dge sλóng ma skem mo gau tu ma’i ‘dor ro/ ‘dge sλóng dag ji snyam du sγs/ khyim bdag de’i chung ma gnyis pa ni ‘di ltar ‘di bzhin dge sλóng ma skem mo gau tu ma’i ‘dor ro/ ‘dge sλóng dag ji snyam du sγs/ khyim bdag de’i chung ma gnyis pa ni ‘di ltar ‘di bzhin dge sλóng ma skem mo gau tu ma’i ‘dor ro/ ‘dge sλóng dag ji snyam du sγs/ khyim bdag de’i chung ma gnyis pa ni ‘di ltar ‘di bzhin
whether a person we were in a past life created the narrative we now must live, or whether someone else entirely is in control: In either case, the causes were created and we now must undergo the experience of their results, as the twists in the plot of our lives present themselves to us as given either way. However, our relationship to the given-ness of our experiences of this life is fundamentally different when we assume, all appearances to the contrary, that we did determine our own direction, through karmic mechanisms that are regular and predictable and therefore can be changed once we understand how it works. This possible shift in subjectivity effected by rethinking agency is of the one major ethical promises held out by the MSV’s narrative manipulations of karmic self-understandings.

Yet even here, when Kṛśā Gautamī is cast in the role of a powerful agent as the one wielding total power over a helpless infant, the narrative reminds us that even at such a moment, she acts in this way “due to being entirely overwhelmed by afflictions.” With this comment, the narrative again dislocates the “agency” for her misdeeds to her own emotional states. Agent turns again into victim, but this time of her own emotions—emotional states that the Buddhist teachings are designed to counteract, and here the avadāna has used its twisting of the plot to brings its ethics all the way home.

And still this single avadāna is not finished complicating our understanding of personal responsibility, for in direct contravention to the principle stated at the outset, it is presented as her karmic act of killing and lying that causes her husband to undergo the experience of being bitten by a snake and her sons to die. Not only are karmic acts powerful; so too are relationships.
This presentation is not gendered—for the workings of karma affect male and female alike. Indeed, they are understood to affect humans, animals and other sentient beings alike. But their implications are different for men and women, and this is particularly so in terms of agency. In general, in this thesis as we explore the forms of ethical agency and subjectivity possible to women, even when the basic parameters is set by the understanding of karma explicated here, which is not gendered, the operations of karma will intersect with a range of other factors that are gendered in ways we will need to track. For women, the possibility to gain a form of agency by managing responses to adverse situations that arise can be of particular value, when women are located in positions created for them by others, as we have seen done through marital practices.

Our second type of avadāna narrative works to demonstrate the overwhelming power of relationships between specific individuals. In this type, agency seems to dissipate further, with characters repeatedly reproducing patterns that have persisted over many lives. Buddha often opens these avadānas by stating something to the effect that not only in this life did so-and-so do such-and-such, but in the past they did so too, and often to the same person. This pattern is found in the many tales in which Buddha’s cousin Devadatta sought to harm him, and in the many accounts when Ānanda was Buddha’s faithful companion. Buddha also tells such a cycle of avadānas that narrates an ongoing, multi-life connection to the woman he married in his present life, Yaśodharā as the Bodhisattva—as the Buddha is regularly designated before he attained enlightenment. Such narratives can then require us to re-

338 Peter Harvey (1995: 70) notes this persistence of relationships in Pāli sources, as does Jones 2001: 90-97.
339 See Lewis 2000:45-47 for a discussion of a cycle of stories linking the Bodhisattva and Yaśodharā in a number of other textual traditions.
interpret earlier stories, reading into them ineluctable patterns of relatedness. One such story is of a rare occasion in the MSV when a woman takes an active role in choosing her marriage partner. The narrative inverts the svayāṃvara—literally, “choosing for oneself”—model of marriage-making known in Sanskrit texts. Ministers had raised concerns at the Bodhisattva’s lack of interest in women, and then connive to place the Bodhisattva in the place usually taken by a woman in a svayāṃvara. In such marriage-making events, it is the woman who chooses her partner from a number of potential husbands who are put on display for her selection. Here it is the Bodhisattva who is meant to choose, although in the event the choice is taken from him, and it is his wife-to-be, Yaśodharā, who takes the initiative after all.

King Śuddhodana said, “Show all the girls to the prince and place whichever one pleases him into the harem.”

Then some of them said, “Your Majesty, since what pleases the prince is giving, let ornaments be given to the girls, and whichever causes him delight should be placed in the harem.”

King Śuddhodana said, “Do so.”

The ministers piled up heaps of various sorts of ornaments encrusted with precious jewels. Then King Śuddhodana had the homes and city swept and cleaned, and after ascertaining the astrologically auspicious day, date and time, he had a lion throne set up. After placing the prince Śākyamuni on that lion’s throne, he heaped up a pile of various sorts of lovely ornaments. The ministers, and other respectable people led by the assembly of men of Kapilavastu entered. After that, all the women entered, wearing accessories, jewelry and clothing in accordance with the wealth of their families, and

because the Bodhisattva [Ga 290a] enjoyed giving, he gave them the jewels. [Gn.ii.62]

The daughter of the Śākyan Daṇḍapāṇi, named Yaśodharā, was beautiful and in the full bloom of youth. When she did not go there, the Śākyan Daṇḍapāṇi said, “Daughter, the Bodhisattva is giving away jewelry, so go.”

“Father, do we not have jewelry?”

“Daughter, it is not about not having jewelry. The Bodhisattva will choose the woman whom he desires [for a wife].”

“Father, he may choose or he may not choose. But he alone is my husband.”

“Daughter, if so, then all the more must you go.”

The two of them went [there]. Thereupon, Yaśodharā, youthful and beautifully dressed, captivating the eyes and hearts of the great assembly of men, entered resplendent among all the women there, like a celestial maiden, and then she came with her subdued demeanor341 into the view of the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva had given out all the jewelry, and only his signet ring342 was left. The Bodhisattva showed343 it to her, and because he had supremely delighted her since beginning-less time, she ascended the steps of the lion throne, and pulled the Bodhisattva by the hand. The ministers and the leading dignitaries of the great assembly of men of Kapilavastu said, “Sirs, among all the women, this one is exceptional. Since she is capable of laying hold to the heart of the prince, she should be accepted.”

341 Sanskrit here describes Yaśodharā’s movement with the phrase used so often of arhats: śānteneryāpathena. Tibetan here reads spyod lam dal ba.
342 Gnoli corrects the Gilgit MS aśulīyakama to aṅgulīyakam; Tibetan confirms the correction, reading sor gdub brgya.
343 In perhaps a gentle foreshadowing of the role he will later play in Yaśodharā’s life, the Sanskrit and Tibetan both, the verb used here also means to teach or to explain; Sanskrit: upadarśita; Tibetan: bstan.
After that, King Śuddhodana accepted Yaśodharā with a retinue of 20,000 as the queen\textsuperscript{344} of Prince Śākyamuni.\textsuperscript{345}

Yaśodharā states as a simple fact her own determination that the Bodhisattva and no one else will becomes her husband. Yet with the avadāna format already familiar to their readers, the narrators can simply reference the cycle, in the line “because he had supremely delighted her since beginning-less time.” This is sufficient to remind us that the weight of many lifetimes as husband and wife are bearing down on both of them. This past pulls Yaśodharā, who pulls the Bodhisattva, and when the observers deem them a match, it is less a decision than the mere statement of an obvious fact.

The narrative playfully contorts the expected directionalities of choice in such matters. First they have the father, who might be expected to find a suitable bride for his son, handing the power of choice over to his son. However, that son is interested in giving but not taking—giving jewelry but not taking a wife. The groom is then chosen by his bride, as should happen

\textsuperscript{344} rājñā …antaḥpuraṃ praveśitā; Tibetan: btsun mor blangs.

\textsuperscript{345} Saṅghabhedavastu. Gn 1977: 61–62. rājā śuddhodanaḥ kathayati | sarvāḥ kanyāḥ kumāropdarśayāmah | yasyābhipretā bhavisyati tām antahpuram pravesayisyāmah | apare kathayanti | deva dānābhīruchī murārāh | kanyānām alankāro dāyatām | yasya parīṣṭājanayisyati tām antahpuram pravesayisyāma iti | rājā śuddhodanaḥ kathayate evaṃ kriyātam | amātyai api nānāprakārānām ratnavicitrānām alankārānām rāśir upasthāpitaḥ | tato rājñā śuddhodanena grhaśoḥbham nagaraśoḥbham ca kāryātva nakṣatratithimuhārtanter manḍape śīṃhāsanaṃ prajāaṇaḥ śākyamunikumāro niśādaṅgāḥ | śīṃhāsaṃsāmīpe canāṇāvicitrānām alankārānām rāśir vyavasthāpitaḥ | amātyā anyās ca kāpilavāsastavaprādhanāsammanato janakāyaḥ praviṣṭaḥ | tataḥ sarvakānāhy svakulabhāvānumūpaṇena vēsālakāraparicchadena praveśitaḥ | bodhisattvān dānārīcitaḥ tāśiṃ alankārāṃ dattaḥ [62] dānāpatiḥ śākyasya duhitā yaśodharā nāma rāpayuavaranvayasānugatā | dānāpatiḥ śākyenoktaḥ | putri bodhisattvo lankāraṃ dadati | sā kathayati | tāta kim asmākam alankārāṃ nāsti | putri na nāsti | kim tu yā bodhisattvasya kanyābhūrīcitaḥ tām asau varayāti | tāta varayatu vā mā vā api tu sa eva mama bhartā | putri yadyevaṃ sutarāṃ gantavyaṃ | gacchataḥ | yaśodharābhūhinavavayāḥ suveśa mahājananamanaṇayānāy ākṣipanti sarvas tāḥ kanyāḥ devakanyāḥ iñvābhāsamanā pravisa śānteneryāpathena bodhisattvāyā purāstād avasthitā | bodhisattvān sarvālayākāraṃ dattaḥ | aṅgulīyakam eva samavāśītam | bodhisattvānyā tasyās tad upadarśītam | tatas tayaḥ anādikālaprakārapranayayaḥ śīṃhāsanaṃpānakaḥ abhiruhyā bodhisattvahastāt svayam ākṛṣṭaṃ | amātyāḥ kāpilavāsastavaḥ ca pradhānasammanato janakāyaḥ kathayanti | bhavantah sarvakānāhīṃ īyām viśiṣṭā | śaknoti esā kumārasya cittāgraṃ kartuṃ | esā praveṣyatām iti | tato rājñā śuddhodanena yaśodhārā viṃśatikānīṣasāraṣṭīvārā śākyamunīṃ kumārasyāntahpuram praveṣitā. Corresponding Tibetan text found at Derge Ga 289b5-29a6.
in a *svayaṃvara*. But the narrators step in to evoke the *avadānas* that come at other moments in the *MSV* to depict their association “since beginning-less time” together, thereby forcing us to reinterpret Yaśodharā’s apparently willful choice. In the end, it turns out we are witnessing an elaborate re-enactment of a relationship that had already existed, since time immemorial.

In both the narratives we have just looked at, characters who are currently women are imagined to have been women in the past. Nearly all *avadānas* of women present them as female in past lives, and when men’s past-life stories are told, they are likewise depicted as male in the past. What the *avadānas* narrate for us is a general persistence of sexual identity over many lifetimes, such that gender (and sexual identity) turns out to be a particularly strong component of one’s personal history, even traced across lives. It has been commented of the Pāli canon that Buddha is never imagined to have been a woman in a past life in any of the *jatākas*—*jatākas* referring to a narrative form much like *avadānas*, but reserved exclusively for past lives of Buddha, in contrast to *avadānas*, which can be told of any person. In fact, as John Garrett Jones points out, amidst a tremendous diversity of births in the Pāli *jātaka* collection, Buddha is never once described as having been a woman, or even as a female animal. Even when Buddha appears as a tree-spirit or what Jones translates as a fairy, the Pāli word used is masculine. Karen Derris has drawn attention to an exception to this rule, a narrative in which the Bodhisattva was a women, found in an apocryphal Pāli *jātaka*.

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346 It is this moment that urges on us the comparison to a *svayaṃvara*, rather than taking this simply as simply a kingly exercise.

347 Jonathan Walters notes of the *Therī-apadāna* collection of narratives of nuns that nuns are all portrayed as having been women in all their past lives as well (Walters 1994:369).

348 Jones 2001: 28. I have not done a study of the *jātakas* in the *MSV*, which number in the hundreds of pages as well, thus cannot say with certainty that Buddha never narrates a past life for himself as a woman.

349 Ibid.
A similar stability of gender category applies to ordinary men and women as well, although the association between person and their particular sex is not as absolute in the MSV as it appears in the Pāli. For example, Buddha in the MSV relates separate avadānas for each of his two major male disciples—Śāriputra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana—in which each had been a woman. In fact, Śāriputra is renowned as supreme among Buddha’s male disciples for his wisdom, and Buddha tells the monks that it was during a past life as a woman that Śāriputra had created the cause to be able to later attain such an exalted level of wisdom. In neither case is an explanation given as to why they changed sex from one life to the other.

Nevertheless, for the most part the avadānas’ vision of persons incorporates gender as a category that is remarkably constant from one life to the next. This constancy is not theorized, but is woven into the fabric of the MSV’s imaginings through the narration of personhood, much as people in close relationships tend to be reborn in that same relationship to one another. For instance, along with the individual avadānas told of Śāriputra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana individually, Buddha narrates an avadāna cycle specifically tracking their friendship across multiple lives. In some cases, the persistence of relationality and gender dovetail, such that the possibility is left open that, for example, Yaśodharā is repeatedly born female because she is so strongly paired as spouse to the Bodhisattva who is repeatedly male.

In any case, in this intensely relational vision of the MSV, people pull others along with them

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351 Harvey (1995: 68-69) also notes this recurrence of gender over lifetimes.


353 Derge Ka 40b5-42b1.

354 This avadāna cycle and the competition between them on which it comments is found in the Bhaisajyavastu and is entitled the Śāriputramaudgalyāyanavarga. GM.i.163-171. Derge Kha 282a4-285b2.
from life to life, and are in turn pulled, distributing agency not only across lifetimes but across persons.

A third recurring pattern of *avādānas* offers the strongest form of agency, with a powerful act of willful aspiration in a past life serving as a direct cause for a future life’s experience or attainment. This pattern is often adduced to explain remarkable achievements by Buddha’s disciples, male and female. During the course of the *MSV*, Buddha declares various disciples to be supreme in point of particular qualities, with a separate list of those considered supreme among female disciples, and those supreme among the male.\(^{355}\) Thus Mahāmaudgalyāyana is famously recognized as supreme for his *ṛddhi*, or extraordinary powers, but less well known that he is said to be supreme only among the male disciples,\(^{356}\) whereas Utpalavarnā, the bhikṣunī whom we have seen ordaining Dharmadattā is supreme among the female disciples.\(^{357}\) These exceptional accomplishments are generally explained through this third type of *avādāna*. An *avādāna* cycle told for Dharmadattā herself follows this basic pattern, and is narrated by Buddha after he has declared her to be foremost in teaching the Dharma. The story is set during the time of another buddha, named Buddha Kāśyapa,\(^{358}\) long, long ago—so long ago that the life expectancy for human beings was 20,000 years.

“They held a great festival celebrating her birth, for three weeks—21 days—and gave her a name suited to her type (or caste or family). After she had grown up,

\(^{355}\) For a survey of the women declared supreme by Buddha, see Skilling 2001a.

\(^{356}\) Even this statement is destabilized in a narrative in the *MSV*, wherein Śāriputra is shown clearly besting his companion in *ṛddhi*. GM.i.163ff.

\(^{357}\) *Bhikṣuvibhaṅga*. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Nya 224b3-4.

\(^{358}\) A huge preponderance of the past-life stories of Buddha’s monastic disciples are set by *MSV* narrators during the time of Buddha Kāśyapa. This association between the *MSV* and Buddha Kāśyapa is deserving of further study; for a start see Schopen 1997: 28.
she wanted to go forth. But her parents did not allow her to go forth. There was an older bhikṣuṇī who used to come to that house from time to time to give teachings to the family. That girl said to that older bhikṣuṇī, ‘Noble One, I wish to go forth in the well-spoken Dharma and vinaya, but my parents don’t allow it, and do not even permit me to leave the house. Would it be possible to go forth in this very place?’

“She said this, and she replied, ‘Daughter, this should be asked of the Lord.’

“And she asked the Perfectly Completed Lord Buddha Kāśyapa, and he himself sent an emissary. After she had gone forth while she was living in that very household, she was granted the bhikṣuṇī vows and she was fully ordained by the two saṅghas. That elder bhikṣuṇī explained the Dharma to her, and she attained arhatship while she was living at home.

“Then that elder bhikṣuṇī thought, ‘This girl, while living at home, went forth by a messenger, and attained the vows of training and full ordination. She actualized arhatship while still living at home, and all this came about through me. By the roots of virtue of practicing brahmacarya during the time of the Perfectly Completed Lord Buddha Kāśyapa, may I too in that way go forth while living at home, during the dispensation of that brahmin youth of whom it was predicted that he would become the Tathāgata, the Unsurpassed Arhat, the Perfectly Completed Lord Buddha Śākyamuni when the lifespan of beings is one hundred years. May I attain the vows of training and attain the state of a bhikṣuṇī, [Da 170a] and may I actualize arhatship while living at home. And just as my preceptress was declared by the Perfectly Completed Lord Buddha Kāśyapa to be supreme among those who explain the Dharma, so too may I be declared by Śākyamuni, the Perfectly Completed Lord Buddha, king of the Śākyas, to be supreme among those who explain the Dharma.’
“Bhikṣus, what do you think? The one who was the older bhikṣuṇī was Bhikṣuṇī Dharmadattā herself. She spent one lifetime practicing brahmaṇacarya in the presence of the Perfectly Completed Lord Buddha Kāśyapa, and by the force of her resolute aspiration (praṇidhāna), she went forth through a messenger while living at home, attained the training vows, full ordination and the state of a bhikṣuṇī, abandoned all kleśas while living at home, actualized arhatship and was declared by the Tathāgata to be supreme among those who explain the Dharma.”

This story trails the life of Dharmadattā in all its major movements. Or rather, we should say that Dharmadattā’s life follows in its shadow, for although this narrative is told after, it took place well before Dharmadattā’s own life. We learn that it was on the basis of having witnessed another young woman living out the experiences of being denied permission, then ordaining while still at home and later becoming an arhat that Dharmadattā...
conceived the initial wish to follow in those footsteps. Dharmadattā’s remarkable ability to
explain the Dharma is traced back to her having observed another nun who had held the same
honor under a different buddha. But it is not merely from having witness others that
Dharmadattā gains the ability to accomplish the same herself. Nor is it the mere force of
aspiration alone that persons set themselves in motion toward goals they have seen others
accomplish. Rather, the resolute aspirations (Sanskrit: pranidhāna; Tibetan: smon lam) that are
made in these avadānas draw on reserves of potency created by such powerful acts as living
one’s whole life as a celibate, or in other stories, reverencing buddhas, pratyekabuddhas or
other spiritually advanced beings.360 Such acts create a “root of virtue” (Sanskrit: kuśalamūla;
Tibetan: dge ba'i rtsa ba) that will sprout and flower in later lives, in ways that can be directed
intentionally, through resolute aspirations. As such, this avadāna tells us that Dharmadattā’s
exceptional life came about both through others—others who modeled what was possible for
her—and through her own singular determination, first in living a life as a celibate and then in
generating the aspiration to do herself what she had seen others do. Dharmadattā in her past
life as the older nun has the thought as she considers what the younger nun had gained, “all
this came about through me.” As such, she recognizes her own role in co-creating the
achievements of the younger woman. The interdependence of persons and the distributed
nature of agency assumed here can be found not only in the past life side of the equation. The
implication is that it was through her own resolute aspiration in a past life that Dharmadattā
herself determined to ordain while still at home, but also that the older nun comes as a
messenger to ordain and teach her, just as she had done for the younger woman in the past. By

360 On resolute aspirations (pranidhāna) and their transformative power in general, see Strong 1979: 231-235.
this account, the force of Dharmadattā’s own karma summons the other to her aid. This narrative foregrounds the role of others on whom her actions will be modeled—but not only her actions: also the experiences she will undergo at the hands of others. Incidentally, this avadāna illustrates another marked feature of the MSV’s narrative imagination: the astonishing regularity not only of person’s lives, but of social formations and practices themselves. They might have had life expectancies of 20,000 years, but young women were still kept in the house home by parents who denied them permission to leave home. Then as now, buddhas formed monastic orders into which they could go forth, and other older women served as intermediaries in making that possible for them.

This story puts forward one of the strongest forms of agency we will see, where an act of will, in the form of a resolute aspiration, can create a whole lifetime of experiences. But this story simultaneously argues, in the persuasive way that narratives argue, that we need others to show us what is possible, and then later to actualize those possibilities. For us readers too, Dharmadattā’s tale models a recurring pattern of women modeling, inspiring and caring for other women.361

Yet what is most striking in this account is that the narrators do not imagine that when woman make great aspirations for future-life achievements, they do not aspire to be born male, or to “attain the state of a bhikṣu.” Rather, Dharmadattā first acknowledges that she has generated considerable positive karma by her practice of brahmacarya and by assisting the younger nun to become an arhat, and then formulates the aim to which she seeks to direct

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361 Ellison Banks Findly draws attention to such patterns of transmission in her article “Women Teachers of Women: Early Nuns ‘Worthy of my Confidence’” (Banks Findly 2000).
that karma: to achieve future spiritual attainments in the future, as a woman. In fact, the overwhelming tendency in the MSV’s narratives is that when women in avadānas accumulate virtue that they wish to direct toward some hoped-for aim in a resolute aspiration, they aspire to practice as women in the future as well. When Buddha describes the results of positive deeds done by women, he does not present it as leading them to become men. The goodness they create as women simply forms part of goodness they enjoy as women.

And for many of those women who were born and became bhikṣuṇīs in Buddha’s own time, Buddha tells the monks (and us) that they were born as bhikṣuṇīs because that is what they had aspired in the past to become—not because they somehow fell short of becoming bhikṣus. This is said of some of the very best of the nuns: Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarnā, foremost among the nuns in terms of extraordinary powers, Bhikṣuṇī Kacaṅgalā, foremost among the nuns in giving commentary on Buddha’s discourses, and Bhikṣuṇī Dharmadattā, foremost among nuns as a teacher or expositor of the Dharma. The assumption seen elsewhere that given the chance serious female practitioners would seek to be reborn male to advance on their path is simply not at work in these narratives.

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362 It is possible that there are clear counterexamples to this tendency somewhere in this massive beast of a text, but the pattern I have seen repeated again and again is for women to aspire to greater attainments in the future as women. I do not take the woman on the street as a clear example because her imagined future gender is not made clear.

363 In one of the few stories in which women do become men in future lives, that of Śāriputra, his past-life deed as a woman did not cause him to be born male, but rather it caused his wisdom. The aspiration made no reference to sex, only to the qualities aspired to.

364 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Nya 229a3 She had aspired to become chief female disciple (Tibetan: nyan thos ma) in terms of extraordinary powers (Tibetan: rdzu ’phrul; Sanskrit: rddhi).

365 Bhaisajyavastu. GM.i.24, where her use of feminine specifies her wish to be reborn as female agrā, just as her upādhyāyikā had been. Tibetan found at Derge Kha 133a4-133b2.
Furthermore, the MSV’s common presentation of women aspiring to become bhikṣuṇīs and female disciple of a future buddha indicates that it is taken for granted that the Dharma always provides a place for women as full members of its spiritual communities. As we will see in the chapter on community, the MSV assumes that wherever there were buddhas, there was always a female monastic order. The *avadānas*, in their imagining of the Dharma in times inconceivably long ago, give us a sense of what is taken to be integral to the Dharma. Lifespans may change from 20,000 years to 100 years over the eons, but what is expected to persist is that woman can and will reach attain the highest spiritual attainments of monastic life, and that the conditions will be sufficiently conducive for female practitioners that they will choose to do so as women. At the same time, by offering a grammar of personhood that can be generative as well as descriptive, the *avadānas* argue that however much a person’s social location, identity or life experiences may seem to impose themselves, the possibility of transformation and redirection are always there for those who know how to read and write the narratives of their own lives.
The Dharma as Intervention

Gender is the product of the hierarchical distinction of humans into women and men, but it is also a concept, which alerts us to the fact of that construction, and hence its possible transformation.

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The MSV shows us women contesting the mainstream social gendering that has them sit at home while men attend public teaching events, as did the wife of Mahānāman and all those who went with her to seek change. It shows them manipulating gender representations, as did Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī in her re-presentation of the appeal to King Śuddhodana. And it has them attempting to walk away from such roles altogether, as in the case of Dharmadattā. The narrators of the MSV on occasion revel in the display of images of strong women, of Bhikṣūṇī Utpalavarṇā sending the gang of bandits running for cover, and King Śuddhodana standing, straight as a rod, while his wife told him what was to be done. The MSV’s willingness to foreground women’s resistance to their gender roles in this way bodes well for the women in its orbit. So too does the text’s willingness to expose and discredit male misogynist assumptions, as it did in the case of Nandaka.

The MSV’s awareness of gender as a conditioning factor, coupled with the sensitivity to ways it impedes women’s opportunities, lays the groundwork for women in the MSV to engage with that conditioning productively. The MSV presents Buddha’s teachings and institutions—the Dharma and vinaya—as offering women a number of tools in that engagement. One such

Another is to re-configure aspects of existing gendered roles such that they accommodate women’s activity as spiritual agents. Yet the greatest intervention of the Dharma in women’s lives is the creation of a new social space in which they can take on roles as teachers, leaders and agents in their own right: the monastic order.

There is not a single spiritual attainment that the MSV does not portray women as capable of gaining—from the four fruits up to arhatship to pratyekabuddhahood up to the perfect and complete enlightenment of a buddha, or samyaksambodhi. In the soteriological scheme of the MSV, these are the final forms of spiritual attainment. For the men and women who are disciples of Buddha Śākyamuni, the highest option in that lifetime is arhatship. A second attained, pratyekabuddhahood, is possible only when no samyaksambuddha has come to the world, and since the world of the MSV is one in which Buddha and his Dharma are still fully present, characters in the MSV could only reach the aim of pratyekabuddhahood in some distant future life. The fruit of samyaksambodhi, or complete and perfect buddhahood, is reserved for only the most exceptional beings, and would be reached only after traversing an inconceivably long path. In the MSV, Buddha makes clear that he sees the seed of this future greatness in women as well. Not only do the narrators of the MSV have Buddha enunciate a vision of women as fully capable of all of the highest spiritual accomplishments, they frame his enunciations in ways that are sure to provoke strong reactions. Here, Buddha predicts the
future buddhahood of an indigent woman living on the streets, but then refuses to say the same of a king who has been sponsoring the monastic community for months.\footnote{This story is included in the \textit{Divyāvadāna} collection and can be found in a lucid English translation in Rotman 2008: 173-175.}

Meanwhile, there was a woman who was surviving off the streets,\footnote{\textit{nagarāvalambikā}; Tibetan: \textit{grong nyug ma}. A more literal though sociologically inaccurate translation might be “public ward.”} suffering intensely. As she was wandering about with a broken bit of pottery, begging for food, she heard the loud sound, the noisy sound. After hearing it, she asked some people, “Sirs, what is that loud noise and commotion?”

The others explained, “Prasenajit the Kosala king has given food to the assembly of monks with Buddha at its head for three months, and each monk was clothed in fabric with a price of 100,000, and ten million vessels of oil were brought together and a garland of lights was readied to offer.”

Then it occurred to the woman who was surviving off the streets, “This Kosala king Prasenajit is not satisfied with his merits. But \[even\] now he is making offerings, generating merit.\footnote{\textit{praṇidhāna}; Tibetan: \textit{smon lam}.} Let me too bring \[oil\] from somewhere and offer a lamp to the Lord.”

With her broken piece of pottery, she begged for a bit of oil and having lit it, she offered the lamp in the path of the Lord. Falling at his feet, she made a resolute aspiration:\footnote{\textit{upāsthiyika}; Tibetan: \textit{nye gnas}.} “By this root of virtue, just as this Lord Śākyamuni has arisen as a teacher in the world when the lifespan of beings is 100 years, so too may I in the same way become a teacher named Śākyamuni when the lifespan of beings is 100 years. And just as Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana are his supreme pair, his auspicious pair, the bhikṣu Ānanda his attendant,\footnote{\textit{Śuddhodana} his father, Mahāmāyā his mother, Kapilavastu his city and Rāhulabhadra his crown prince,}”

\footnote{\textit{Divyāvadāna}}
in the same way may I too have Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana as a supreme pair, an auspicious pair, [Kha 168b] Bhikṣu Ānanda as an attendant, Śuddhodana as father, Mahāmāyā as mother, Kapilavastu as city and Rāhulabhadra as my son, the prince. And just as this Lord will divide his relics and pass away into nirvāṇa, so too may I divide my relics and pass away into nirvāṇa.”371

Among the significant relationships of Buddha Śākyamuni that the woman lists, notably missing is that of his spouse. This omission allows it to remain unclear whether this woman is imagining herself becoming a buddha as a woman or as a man. Technically, the name Śākyamuni that she aspires to could conceivably be a feminine proper name, since the Sanskrit feminine form of the word muni (sage) can also be muni as well as munī. When Buddha himself repeats the list of relationships back in the prediction, he too leaves out Yaśodharā. At one point, he uses a masculine pronoun to refer to the future buddha, and at another a feminine pronoun.

While all those lights had gone out, that lamp that she had lit still blazed away. It is in the nature of things that the attendants372 of lord buddhas do not retire until lord buddhas have retired. Venerable Ānanda reflected, “It would be inappropriate, it would be unsuitable for lord buddhas to settle into their beds

371 Bhaiṣajyavastu. GM.I.89-90, yāvad anyatamā nagarāvalimbikā atīva duḥkhītā | tayā khaṇḍamallakena bhikṣaṃaṭantyā sa uccāsābdo mahāsābdaḥ śrutaḥ | śrutvā ca punāḥ prcchati | bhavantah kim eṣa uccāsābdo mahāsābda iti | aparaṇāḥ samākhyātān | rājā prasenajitā kosalaḥ bhikṣaṃaṭantyā haūkṣaṃ asāmbhagī bhikṣusāṁghas traināśīn bhogītāḥ | ekaikaṇ ca bhikṣuṇ | satasaḥasramāṇyena vastreṇācchādiṇṇaḥ tailakumbhakoṭīn ca samupāṇyāṃ dipamālām abhyudhyādo dātum iti | tatas tasyā nagarāvalimbikāyā | etad abhavat | ayaṃ rājā prasenajitā kosalaḥ punyair atṛptaḥ adya tv eva dānāni dadāti punyāni [GM.I.90] karoti | yat tv evaḥ api kutaṇcit samupāṇyāṃ bhavataḥ pradīpaṃ dadyām iti | tayā khaṇḍamallakena taisasya stokam yācitvā pradīpaṃ prajyāya bhavataḥ canikrame dattah | pādayoṣ ca nipatya pranidhānam kṛtam | anenaḥ kuśalamālena yathāyaṃ bhagavān śākyamunir varṣaṇātyāṣuyṣi prajyāyāṃ sāstā loke utpannah evam evaḥ api varṣaṇātyāṣuyṣi śākyamunir eva sāstā bhaveyam | yathā cāyaṃ śāriputramaudgalyāyanaḥ āgraṇyaḥ bhadrāṇyaḥ ānando bhikṣuṇ upasthāyikaḥ śuddhodanaḥ pitā mahāmāyāyāḥ mātā kapilastuṇaḥ nāgaraṁ rāhulabhadreṇaḥ kumāreṇaḥ evam māmāpi śāriputramaudgalyāyaḥ āgraṇyaḥ bhadrāṇyaḥ syād ānando bhikṣuṇ upasthāyikāḥ śuddhodanaḥ pitā mātā mahāmāyāyā kapilavastuṇaḥ nāgaraḥ rāhulabhadreṇaḥ kumāreṇaḥ putraḥ | yathā cāyaṃ bhagavān dhātuvibhāgaṃ kṛtvā parinirvāṣayati evam evaḥ api dhātuvarṇaḥ kṛtvā parinirvāṇayeyam iti. Tibetan text found at Derge Kha 168a2-168b2.

372 Sanskrit: upasthā[pakah] --> upasthā[yikah] Dutt’s reconstruction of upasthā[pakah] is clearly wrong, as just above Ānanda was referred to as upasthā[yikah] In both cases it is translated into Tibetan as nye gnas.
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in the light. So let me extinguish the light.” He tried to extinguish it with his hand. He was unable to. Then he tried with a corner of his robe, then with a fan, and in those ways he was unable to extinguish it either. For that reason, the Lord said, “Do not trouble yourself, Ānanda.” Even if the Vairambha winds were to blow, they would not be able to extinguish it, much less could a hand, a corner of a robe or a fan, since [GM.i.91] indeed this light was lit by the young woman with a great mental transformation. Furthermore, Ānanda, this young woman will become a tathāgata, an arhat, a perfectly enlightened buddha by the name of Śākyamuni when the lifespan of beings is 100 years, [Kha 169a] with Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana as supreme pair, an auspicious pair, Bhikṣu Ānanda as attendant, Śuddhodana as father, Mahāmāyā as mother, Kapilavastu as city and Rāhulabhadra as son, the prince. She too will divide her relics and pass away into nirvāṇa.”

The Divyāvadāna version of this story ends here with Buddha’s prediction of the woman’s enlightenment. But the MSV continues, noting that Buddha’s utterance of a

373 The conversation in Tibetan is a bit more elaborate (Kha 168b5-7), with Ānanda explaining what he had thought and what he had been doing.
374 Sanskrit: vairambha – A type of strong wind, and is one of the winds that will end the world. Tibetan: rnam par ’thor rlung.
375 Sanskrit: mahatā cittābhisamskāreṇa; Tibetan: sems kyis mngon par ’du byed pa chen po.
376 Sanskrit: tasyāgrayugam - His or its supreme pair. Although tasya is a masculine or neuter genitive singular personal pronoun, it agrees here with the preceding buddha in the masculine.
377 Bhaisajyavastu. Sanskrit at GM.i.90-91. yāvat sarve te dipāḥ parinirvāṇāḥ sa tayā prayālito dīpo jvalaty eva | dharmatā khalu buddhānāṃ bhagavatāṃ na tāvad upasthā(pakah pratisamālīyati) yāvan na buddhā bhagavatāḥ pratisamālīnā iti | āyuṣmān ānandāḥ samālakṣayati | asthānam anavakāśo yad buddhā bhagavatāḥ ālokaśayyāṃ kalpayisanti | yat tv ahaḥ pradīpam nirvāpayeyam iti | sa hastena nirvāpayitum ārabho na śaknāti tataś cīvarakarṣikena tato vyajanena tathāpi na śaknoti | bhagavān āha | mā khedam ānandāpatsyaśe | yadi vairambhā api vāyavo vāyeyus te’pi na śaknyur nirvāpayitum prāg eva hastacīvarakarnikō vyajanam vā | tathā [GM.i.91] hy ayaḥ pradīpas tayā dārikayā mahatā cittābhisamskāreṇa prayājitaḥ | api tv ānanda bhavisyatya asau dārikā varsaśāyasyaṣu prayāyām Śākyamunir nāma tathāgato’rhat samyaksambuddhāḥ | śāriputramaudgalyāyanau tasyāgrayugam bhadrayugam ānando bhikṣur upasthāyikāḥ śuddhodanaḥ pitā mātā mahāmāyā kapilavastu naqaraḥ rāhulabhadraḥ kumāraḥ putraḥ | sāpi dhātuviḥhāgam kṛtvā parinirvāyatīti. Corresponding Tibetan text found at Derge Kha 168b2-169a2.
prediction brings immediate worldly benefits to the woman, whose material needs are taken care of by Buddha’s lay followers.

After hearing this, in anticipation\textsuperscript{378} of her good qualities yet to come, the devout brahmins and householders provided for all her needs.\textsuperscript{379}

In effect, the lay community now sees the woman through Buddha’s eyes. Following the \textit{avadāna} grammar he teaches, they are able to anticipate her latent goodness, and begin to relate to the exalted vision of who she can and will become. This detail underscores the transformative power of predictions not only in showing the woman what is possible\textsuperscript{380}—for her own resolute aspiration already constitutes an audacious articulation of her ability to imagine that for herself—but also in showing that same vision to others.

The narrative goes on to draw a series of contrasts between the beggar woman and the king himself.

Prasenajit the Kosala king heard of this. In amazement, he took a thousand vessels of oil and made a lovely garland of lights, and placed a lamp made of four precious gems at the head of the pathway.\textsuperscript{381}

\textsuperscript{378} Sanskrit: \textit{ apekṣā}. Tibetan: \textit{bsam nas}.

\textsuperscript{379} \textit{GM.i.91. iti śrutvā śrāddhair brāhmaṇagṛhapatibhir asāv anāgata āṇo pekṣayā sarvopakaraṇaiḥ pravāritā}. Corresponding Tibetan text found at Derge Kha 169a3.

\textsuperscript{380} My entire discussion of predictions in this section is deeply informed by the work of Karen Derris. In her doctoral dissertation, Derris (2000) explores the way in which by giving predictions, buddhas are presenting the recipient of the prediction with an image of what is possible for them. This present thesis sees the same dynamic at work in other representational practices, and for that as well I am indebted to Derris and the angle of vision her dissertation opens up on encounters with ethically excellent beings.

\textsuperscript{381} \textit{GM.i.91. tathā rājñā prasenajitā kosalena śrutam | tato cismayajātas tailakumbhasahasram ādāya citrāṁ pradīpamālāṁ kṛtavān | catūratnamayai ca pradīpam caṇikramaśiras pratiṣṭhitavān}. Corresponding Tibetan text found at Derge Kha 169a3-4.
King Prasenajit models the external elements of his act of giving directly on that of the beggar woman, but multiplies the material offered by a thousand. Prasenajit then reminds Buddha of the vast offerings and immense service he has done in the past as well—the meals, the clothes, the reverential service—and points out that Buddha has yet to predict his enlightenment:

And yet the Lord has not predicted me to unsurpassed perfectly completed enlightenment. It would be good if the Lord would predict me too to unsurpassed perfectly completed enlightenment. Perhaps at some time I might become Pre-eminent in the World, a Leader.”

The Lord said, “Great King, profound is unsurpassed perfectly completed enlightenment. Its scope is deep. It is difficult to envision. It is difficult to know. It is not comprehensible through reason. Its domain is not comprehensible through reason. It is subtle. It is complete. It is something to be known by the skillful and the wise. It is not something to be easily achieved by one offering or one hundred offerings or one thousand offerings or even one hundred thousand offerings. Nevertheless, Great King, as one who wishes to attain unsurpassed perfectly completed enlightenment, offerings are certainly to be made by you. Merit is certainly to be generated. Virtuous friends are to be

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382 Tibetan also takes the sadhu as ‘it would be good’ rather than ‘predict me well.’
383 I find the kadāśvid hard to construe here. It seems suggestive of kadācid, but svid’s sense of ‘perhaps I might’ seems to be evoked here as well.
384 lokāyestyha and vināyaka are both epithets of a buddha. Prasenajit seems to be using them as synonymous with ‘buddha’, but in Buddha’s answer, he takes them literally, as describing an ordinary person.
385 Sanskrit: gambhirāvabhāsa; Tibetan: zab ba snang ba.
386 Sanskrit: duravabodhā; Tibetan: rtags par dka’ Or difficult to preceive.
387 Sanskrit: nipuṇā; but Tibetan: brtags pa’i rtags pa. Sanskrit could also be taken as skilful or clever. Edgerton suggests ‘subtle.’
388 Sanskrit: abhiprārthayitā —> abhiprārthhayatā.
relied upon, served and revered. In that way, you will one day become preeminent in the world, a great leader.”

When this was said, Prasenajit the Kosala king wept, his tears falling like drops of rain. Afterwards, Prasenajit the Kosala king wiped away his tears with a corner of his robe…

The narrative continues, with the king asking Buddha just what he had done that allowed him to become a Buddha, which prompts over 200 pages of jātaka tales narrated by Buddha to the king. The contrast of the beggar woman’s small offering to the king’s extravaganza of giving to Buddha makes clear that this narrative is not making a case to index spiritual merit either to the material offered or to the person to whom it is offered. Rather, it locates the crucial component of the act firmly in the mind of the giver, and tells us that that mind can be a woman’s mind, and still outweigh by far that of the great (male) king. Buddha’s description of the opacity and difficulty of enlightenment further heightens the value of what he has seen in the woman. Because she is a beggar, the narrative constitutes a simultaneous critique of both gender and class bias.

389 Bhaisajyavastu. GM.i.91–92. na cāham bhagavatānuttararājyaṁ samsyaksambodhdhaḥ vyākṛtah | sādhu bhagavān mamāpy anuttarārājyaṁ samsyaksambodhdhaḥ vyākuryūḥ | kādāsvid āhaṁ lokajyeṣṭḥah syāṁ vināyaka iti | bhaga-[GM.i.92]-vān āha | gambhirā mahārāja anuttarā samsyaksambodhiḥ | gambhirāvabhāsā durdṛśa duravabdhā atarkyā atarkyāvacarā sūkṣmā nipuṇā pañcitavijñāvedanīyā | sā na sukarā tvayaikena dānena samupānetum na dānaśatena na dānasahasrena na dānaśatasahasrenāpi tu mahārāja tvayā anuttarārājyaṁ samsyaksambodhimm abhiprārthayatā dātavyaṁ eva dānāṁ kartavyaṁ eva punyāṁ sevitavyāṁ kalyānamitrāṁ bhajitavyāṁ paryupāsītavyāṁ | evaṁ tvāṁ bhavisyaṁ kādācil lokajyeṣṭho vināyaka āha | evamukto rājā prasenajit kosalaḥ prārodīd aśrūṇi varṣayan | atha rājā prasenajit kosalasya cīvarakarṇaṇāsṛuny unmrjya … Corresponding Tibetan text at Derge Kha 169a6 – 169b4.

390 For an exploration of the ways that Buddhist “economies of esteem” link the merit accruing from acts of giving to the status of the recipient, see Heim 2000 and 2004.

391 Although taken together, the collusion of her lower gender and lower caste/class status suggests that this narrative is arguing for the power of resolute aspirations and offerings to buddha to lift even the lowest, nevertheless even by drawing on the sense of her socially disadvantaged position to underscore the assertion that this position does not constitute an obstacle to spiritual progress.
In this narrative, Buddha’s assertions of a woman’s capacity makes a king cry. In another story, they induce the ire of a brahmin man. In that tale, Buddha approaches a brahmin housewife while her husband is away, accepts food from her, and smiles. Upon being asked what has occasioned his smile, Buddha announces that by virtue of her merit in offering that food with faith, in a future life, this woman will attain pratyekabuddhahood, one of the three types of enlightenment known in the MSV, and will be known by the illustrious name “One of Extremely Good Prayers.” Word spreads quickly, and soon reaches her husband who has been out gathering flower and firewood—standard ritual items for use in his own religious practices. Angered, he confronts Buddha, accusing him of fabricating this prediction for the sake of the alms his wife had given. Incredulous that from such a minor act as giving a little alms such a great result could come, the husband asks Buddha, “Who would believe such a thing?” Buddha stands his ground and convinces the husband that it is both possible that his wife could become a pratyekabuddha based on such an act, and that he himself was speaking the truth when he said that she would.

This tale offers fertile material for thinking about the Dharma’s interventions for women in two separate ways. First it participates in the overall project we have already seen, of producing representations of women as spiritually capable, and shows Buddha actively engaged in disseminating and defending such a view. Second, it transforms the domestic

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392 Bhaiṣajyavastu. Derge Kha 95a7-97a4. This story forms part of the Divyāvadāna collection, and can be found translated in Rotman 2008: 135-142.

393 sa bon ’di tsam gyi ’bras bu ’di’o zhes bgui ba/ khyed la su zhiq yid che par ’gyur.
sphere into a site for the production of spiritual excellence in ways that are particularly relevant for women.\footnote{A fair amount of scholarly attention has been aimed at women patronage of Buddhist activities, institutions and structures more broadly. See Willis 1985, Falk 1990, Thapar 1992: 28-29, Willis 1992, Orr 2000, Skilling 2001b and Thapar 2003:255-6.}

Ellison Banks Findly makes a compelling argument that Buddhist understandings of the encounter between mendicant and donor differs fundamentally from Vedic patterns, in that the Vedic model treats the entire household as the benefactor, even if it was the woman who handed over the alms, whereas the Buddhist model shifts the focus from the household to the individual.\footnote{Banks Findly 2002. For a detailed and subtle analysis of the almsgiving encounter in Vedic representations, see Jamison 1996, especially her chapter on “The Anxieties of Hospitality,” pp. 153-203.} Further, she argues, what had been seen as “obligatory hospitality” is reconfigured in Buddhist contexts as “voluntary patronage.”\footnote{Ibid: 18.} This shift would have tremendous consequences for women. The preparation of food is gendered as a woman’s task in the MSV’s narratives, and women are directly involved in a large number of such mendicant encounters. By construing the almsgiving activity as an individual rather than a household act, a potent space is created within women’s domestic activities, wherein their actions can be framed as creating spiritual potency for themselves.\footnote{This presentation differs from, but does not contradict, the notion of sharing or transference of merit, for even if merit may be transferred to others, first one needs to generate the merit.} This understanding creates a possibility for women to serve not as mere representatives of the household—which will always be headed by a man—but as agents acting on their own account, all in the course of enacting their ordinary daily gendered roles. This understanding of the agency in giving fundamentally
reorders the domestic arena, such that in cooking and serving food, women are not limited to playing supporting roles to their husband or children’s spiritual well-being.\textsuperscript{398}

In one particularly strong articulation of the principle that the merit from giving belongs to the one who extended the hand in giving, we have a servant woman declaring her own personal ownership over the merit from her act of giving. A housewife declines to give alms to a shabbily dressed mendicant, and the servant asks for her own allotted serving of food, that she may offer it to him. The mendicant is revealed to be a pratyekabuddha, who inspires the prince to grant the city’s boon to the one who had offered him alms. Seeking to secure the boon for herself, the housewife argues that since she had given the food to the servant in the first place, the merit from giving should be hers. In a statement with rich implications for constructions both of class and gender in the MSV, the servant replies.

“You are the mistress, therefore you are the owner\textsuperscript{399} of my life, but not of my merit. Therefore I will not give it to you.”\textsuperscript{400}

The prince agrees, and grants the boon to the servant. What this narrative emphatically affirms is that for spiritual purposes, the donor is not an economic or domestic unit, but an individual: the individual who hands the food to the petitioner. Whether or not the merit from that act is then redirected to benefit others in the household is another matter, and would require an intervening volitional act on the part of the giver. The point is, the

\textsuperscript{398} For a discussion of ways that women as donors exhibit greater agency than normative texts leads us to expect of them, see Orr 2000

\textsuperscript{399} dbang. Or authority, lord, ruler.

\textsuperscript{400} Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 66b3. khyod jo mo yin pas bdag gi srog la dbang gi/bsod nams la ni ma yin pas mi sbyin no.
Almsgiving merit is created by the woman who distributes the food, and it is hers to keep or to share, even if her life itself belongs to others.

A separate narrative in the MSV offers a clearly gendered response to anxieties over the collective versus individual nature of a family’s act of giving.\textsuperscript{401} The tale is told in the Bhikṣuvibhaṅga and suggests that the female monastic order has a particular role to play in offering such merit-making opportunities to women. As the story opens, a wealthy man sits brooding:

When his wife saw him, she said, “Noble Prince, why are you sitting lost in thought, cheek in hand?”

“Good Woman, although my\textsuperscript{402} household is endowed with great wealth, I will not carry any of it as provisions on the journey to my next life. If I should offer it as food to Buddha and the rest of the assembly of bhikṣus, and clothe each with a set of calico cloth, that would be something I could take with me [Cha 99b] as provisions on the journey to my next life.”

His wife said, “Noble Prince, do so.”\textsuperscript{403}

The wife appears to participate in the decision, affirming what had been presented as a conditional statement and encouraging the act of giving. The husband does the inviting and the hosting, prepares the food himself and serves it with his own hand, and finally himself

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[401]{This stance contrasts to that taken by I.B. Horner 1930: 324.}
\footnotetext[402]{The Tibetan seems clear in using singular pronouns here: kho bo’i khyim for what I translate as ‘my household’ and bdag gis for ‘I.’}
\footnotetext[403]{\textsuperscript{403} Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Cha 99a6 - 99b1. chung mas mthong nas smras pa/ rje’i sras khyod ci’i sld du phya la ’gram pa gtad de sms khong du chud cing bzhugs/ bzaŋ mo kho bo’i khyim nor du ma dang ldan na bdag gis ’jig rten pha rol gyi lam rayags cung zad kyang ma khyer te/ gal te bdag gis sangs rayas la sogs pa dge slong gi dge ’dan bshos gsal te re re la ras bcos bu sar pa phruags re bskon na des bdag gi ’jig rten pha rol [Cha 99b] gyi lam rayags khyer bar ’gyur ro/ chung mas smras pa/ rje’i sras de bzhin mdzod cig.}
\end{footnotes}
hands the new set of robes to each monk. After hearing a delightful teaching, he escorts Buddha out.

After arriving home, as he was contemplating the memory of his giving on the top floor of his mansion, he said to his wife, “Good Woman, we have a great deal of provisions for the journey to the next life, so please be extremely happy and rejoice.”

His wife said, “You, Noble Prince, [Cha 100b] have provisions for the journey to the next life. I do not.”

“Good Woman, are our possessions not held in common?”

“No, Noble Prince, although our possessions are held in common, nevertheless I too would offer food to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and the rest of the bhikṣuṇī assembly, and offer cloth worthy of great beings. In that way, I too will come to have provisions for the journey to the next life.”

The householder said, “Good Woman, because we offered before, should we not offer later? Do so.”

The narrative is unwilling to simply include the wife as a mute and passive beneficiary of her husband’s religious acts, nor is she content with his suggestion that she see herself so. The presence of the bhikṣuṇī order provides her with a satisfying way to mirror her husband’s

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404 skol cag. This term, though not appearing in most published dictionaries, routinely appears often in the MSV as a first person plural pronoun. The online THL Tibetan Historical Dictionary recognizes skol cag gyis as “we two.”

405 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Cha 100a7-100b3. rang gi khyim ga la ba der song nas phyin pa dang/ steng gi khang brangs kyi gzhir gtoas pa na gtong ba rjes su dran par sgom pa na chung ma la smras pa/ bzang mo bdag cag gis ‘jig rten pha rol a yi lam rayaigs mang du khyer gyis mchog tu dga’ ba dang/ rjes su yi rang bar gyis shig/ chung mas smras pa/ tje’i sras kyi ni ‘jig rten pha [Cha 100b] rol a yi lam rayaigs bsnams na/ bdag gis ma ‘tshal to/ bzang mo bdag cag gnyis kyi longs sphyod daq thun mong ma yin nam/ tje’i sras ‘di litar skol cag gi longs sphyod daq thun mong laags mod kyi’ on kyang bdag gis kyang skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mi la sogs pa dge slong ma’i dge ‘dun bsos gsal te/ chen po la ‘os pa’i gos daq phul na de lta na bdag gis cang ‘jig rten pha rol a yi lam rayaigs ‘tshal bar ‘gyur ro/ khyim bdag gis smras pa, bzang mo ci sngar sbyin pa byin pas phyis sbyin par byar med dam/ de bzhin gyis shig.
act of “provisioning” for his journeys to future lives. The narrative goes on to relate the wife’s invitation to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and the bhikṣuṇīs, repeating nearly verbatim the terms used to describe the husband’s hosting of the male order. This time it is the wife who prepares and serves the food and offers the cloth, and it is to her that Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī directs a Dharma talk afterwards. There is concern that the quality of the cloth “worthy of great beings” is inappropriately high for the bhikṣuṇīs, but Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī decides that not accepting it would “impede the merit of the householder’s wife” and thus she provisionally accepts it. The narrative continues in ways that warrant further consideration, but what interests us here is that the narrative leaves in place the basic assumptions of the shared ownership of household property, while granting greater agency to the one who directly disposes of that property. As this narrative presents it, it is the one who prepares the food and distributes the goods who is recognized as engaging in the spiritually meaningful act of giving, and not the one who owns them or brought them into the household in the first place. Given the positioning of men as the heads of household who create wealth in the public sphere and then bring it into the household, with women engaging with that wealth only after it has entered the home, this careful distinction permits a reinterpretation of women’s almsgiving, creating major opportunities for women to engage in actions deemed religiously powerful, without fundamentally revising the prevailing social order.

Feminist thinkers have long noted that the distinction between private and public, or domestic and political, is “covertly gendered,” and that the relative value given to activities in the public sphere compared to the domestic is another way in which women are

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406 I will return to this narrative in the chapter on community, and thus set it aside for the moment.
disadvantaged.\textsuperscript{407} The MSV’s stories elevating the almsgiving acts of women constitute a major intervention to re-value the domestic sphere. We note that they do so in a way that challenges the “covert” devaluation of women’s domain but without eroding the basic contours of that domain.

Yet for all the re-valuing of the domestic sphere in ways that allows more rein to women, it is in the existence of a monastic order of women that the Dharma makes its major intervention in gender constructions. Let us return to Dharmadattā, whom we left on the eve of her unwanted marriage. Her story pits a young woman who refuses to accept that her only option in life is to marry, against her parents, household, society and king. We recall that for the sake of the young woman’s well-being, Buddha was willing to take her side. Flying in the face of both family concerns and the larger political context of this very public marriage, Buddha actively facilitates her efforts to set her life on another course, out of the household and into that nuns’ residence. He does so by permitting her to ordain and engage in monastic training against her parents’ wishes, and without leaving the home in which she was being held against her will. In this narrative, the presence of the bhikṣuṇīs and their local residence also stand as an alluring reminder of other possibilities. But in the end what convinces all those opposing her was not the involvement of Buddha or of the local bhikṣuṇīs, but the young woman’s own display of spiritual attainment. As we shall see, spiritual attainments and monastic ordination are tightly linked in this narrative, as elsewhere in the MSV.

\textsuperscript{407} For a sustained exploration of the mapping of men and women onto public and domestic spheres, and the associated disadvantaging of women it entails, see Elshtain 1993.
Continuing the story, after learning that she is about to be handed off to her husband, Dharmadattā seeks desperately to calm her mind. Meanwhile, far off in the Jetavana Grove monastery, Buddha perceives her troubles, since, “there is nothing whatsoever that lord buddhas do not know, or see or cognize, or cognize fully, and since buddhas are endowed with great compassion, and engaged in benefiting the world.”408 It is here that the narrators, barely able to contain their admiration, extol Buddha’s greatness for several pages, and then resume the narration, with Buddha’s response to the girl’s plight. He tells Ānanda:

“Ānanda, this is not the time for this girl to live further as a woman at home.409 It is not the place. This is not the place for her to enjoy objects of desire to cause pleasure. Rather, she is now to attain the fruit of non-returning and actualize arhatship.”410

First of all, we note that the narrators frame this as a pair of options, in which lay life or married life is primarily concerned with objects of pleasure—pursuing them or perhaps being taken as one oneself—whereas spiritual attainment by implicit contrast is freedom from that. This lays the groundwork for a tendency in the MSV that we will explore in greater detail in the next chapter, in which lay life is constructed as a domain where persons are susceptible to being treated as objects of others’ desires—a dynamic that bears particular weight for women.

408 Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 164b-7. sangs rgyas bcom ldan ’das la mi mkyen pa’am/ mi gzigs pa’am/ mi rig pa’am/ rnam par mi rig pa cung zud kyang med de/ sangs rgyas bcom ldan ’das rnams ni thugs rje chen po can/ ’jig rten la phan ’dogs par zhus pa.
409 khyīm du mi mo.
410 Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 166b4-5. kun dga’ bo bu mo de slar khyīm du mi mor gnas pa’i skabs ma yin/ gnas ma yin te/ dga’ bar bya ba’i phyir ’dod pa’i longs spyod la longs spyod pa’i gnas su’ di mi ‘gyur gyi ‘di ni da phyir mi ldog pa’i ‘bras bu theb ste dgra bcom pa mgnon du byed par ’gyur ro.
Additionally, we have here another case of Buddha’s omniscience, but also his willingness to intervene against social conventions based on what that omniscience tells him is possible for others to achieve. He points out that there remain two more levels of spiritual attainment for her—non-returning and arhatship. Unbidden, Buddha then has the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha convene and send Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarṇā as their messenger to grant Dharmadattā her full ordination in two separate visits to the home, first granting the brahma-caryopasthāna vows, an intermediary stage in preparation for full ordination, and finally upasampadā or full ordination. Dharmadattā had previously attained the first two of the four stages of spiritual attainment that culminate in arhatship, stream entry and once-returning, the first immediately after being granted the first monastic ordination of śrāmaṇerikā, or training in the ten precepts, and the second spiritual attainment after receiving her śikṣamāṇā ordination. In both cases, the spiritual attainment came directly after receiving the ordination and hearing a Dharma talk, and not after years of training with those precepts. The narrative presents a clear pattern in which monastic ordination itself serves as her springboard to spiritual attainments. Offering monastic ordination to Dharmadattā effectively means ushering her on to greater and greater spiritual attainments.

The link between ordination levels and levels of spiritual attainment is evident in the narrative’s decoupling of two stages in the full ordination procedure, that of brahma-caryopasthāna and upasampadā, such that each serves as a stepping stone to each of the two remaining levels of spiritual attainment. The first stage produces in her the next spiritual

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411 It can be argued whether these should be considered ‘ordination,’ but since they involve ritual ceremonies that allow individuals to pass from one monastic level to another, the term seems warranted at least in this looser sense.
attainment, that of non-returner, and Buddha then has both monastic orders assemble and grant her full ordination as a bhikṣuṇī, with Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarna again delivering the news as messenger. She does so, giving a Dharma talk that prompts Dharmadattā, now a bhikṣuṇī, to attain arhatship. This spiritual fruit made possible by her succession through the levels of ordination will at last change everything for Dharmadattā and her family.

As soon as Dharmadattā had actualized arhatship, she said to her parents, “Father and Mother, since I have attained arhatship, please permit me to go to King’s Park bhikṣuṇīs’ monastery.”

Thereupon the householder Datta and his wife discussed it between themselves, and said, “Daughter, if this is so, will the king not make us suffer for this?”

To that she explained to them [what had happened] in order, and said, “We should meet with the Lord.”

When she said this, they answered, “That is good. We will do so.”

After that, the householder Datta invited Lord Buddha and the rest of the bhikṣu saṅgha to his home. He sent a message to the householder Ri dags sgra, saying “Friend, the girl Dharmadattā is not capable of staying in the household. She will definitely ordain. So please come, and take her by force.”

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412 *nan gyis*. According to Lokesh Chandra, *nan gyis* is attested as translating the Sanskrit *prasabham*, *balāt* and *hathāt*. While *nan gyis* in indigenous Tibetan works covers the range of ‘with effort,’ ‘forcefully,’ ‘with exertion’ and ‘with zeal,’ the Sanskrit attestations incline me to take it here as indicating ‘by force.’

413 *Kṣudrakavastu*. Derge Da 167b1-4. *nam chos sbyin ma dgra bcom pa mngon du byas pa dang de’i tsh e pha ma la yab dang yum bdag gis ni dgra bcom pa mngon du bgyis khyi rgyal po’i kun dga’ra bar dge slong ma’i dbyar mo khang du mch'i na gnang bar mdzod cig ces smras pa dang/ khyim bdag byin pa dang/ chung ma dang gnyis grol byas nas bu mo de ltar na bdaq cag la rgyal pos ayod rmas par mi ’gyur ram/ de la rim bzhin du byas te/ bcom ldan ’das dang lhan cig tu song zhi g ces smras pa dang/ des smras pa legs kyi de ltar byi’o/ de nas khyim bdag byin pas sangs rgyas bcom ldan ’das la sogs te dge slong gi dge ’dun dga khyim du spyan drangs te/ khyim bdag ri dags sgra la mdza’ bo bu mo chos sbyin ni khyim du gnas su mi btub ste/ rab tu ’byung du gdon mi zas tshur shog la/ de nan gyis blang bar gyis shig ces spring ngo.*
The narrative draws a sharp contrast between the father’s shackling and the Buddha’s liberating actions in permitting her to ordain while at home. The juxtaposition of the invitation to the kidnapping of his daughter and the invitation of Buddha and the monastic assembly to a meal may invite readers’ horror, but it is unclear that the father’s main purpose is necessarily to see his daughter actually taken by force. By telling his friend to come and take her, he may be ensuring that if she does end up leaving home to join the monastic community, he will not be held liable for failing to do his utmost to fulfill his contractual relation to hand her over. His friend informs the king of the situation, and it escalates into a major public incident. As Buddha and the monastic community are fêted inside by Dharmadattā’s father and relatives, outside the entire town gathers to enforce the deal and seize the girl.

On that occasion, the householder Ri dags sgra, and his friends, siblings, relatives, the princes, ministers, cityfolk and many countryfolk, together with the boy Viśākha, took amulets, auspicious cord and powders, set out to take the bride, and sat down right at the householder Datta’s gate.\(^{414}\)

The meal finished, Buddha gets up to leave, and the monks and nuns file out after him in ordination order. As the newest, most junior bhikṣuṇī, Dharmadattā takes her place at the end of the line.

And Bhikṣuṇī Dharmadattā had taken the antidote to the three realms [of existence]. She had attained fearlessness. When the time came for them to take her as a bride, Viśākha, the son of the householder Ri dags sgra, together with his friends, siblings, relatives, the princes, ministers, cityfolk and many countryfolk began playing the various musical instruments. Dharmadattā

\(^{414}\) Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 168a1-2. de’i skabs su khyim bdag ri dvags sgras mdza’ bo dang/ phu nu dang/ gnyen dang/gzhon nu dang/ blon po dang/ grong khyer ba dang/ ljongs kyi skye bo mang po dang/ lhan ciq bu sa ga srung ba dang/ bkra shis dang zhib dag byas te/ bag ma len par chas te khyim bdag byin pa’i sgo drung nyid la ’kho’d do.
wanted to follow after the Lord, but then Viśākha, the son of the householder Rimsagsgra suddenly extended his arm and was preparing to grab Dharmadattā by the hand. And while all the countless people were watching, hundreds of thousands, Dharmadattā [Da 168b] rose up into the air above, like a swan king extending its wings, and she emanated various sorts of miraculous displays. At that, the householder Rimsagsgra’s friends, siblings, relatives, the princes, ministers and the great masses of cityfolk and countryfolk, as well as Viśākha, the son of the householder Rimsagsgra, and moreover the people who had come to watch the spectacle were greatly amazed, and they fell like a tree from its roots, to prostrate at her feet. “Sister, since you have attained these many good qualities of this sort, it is not the occasion for you to enjoy objects of desire. It is not the place. Please accept our apologies.”

In the narratives of the MSV, spiritual attainments leave visible marks on those who have achieved them. They have physical manifestations that cannot be denied, as here. As the story of Dharmadattā and other narratives demonstrate vividly, these perceptible transformations have a persuasive power that are keenly felt by the society depicted in the MSV. Upon witnessing the levitation, in their own physical display of their rightful place in relation to her, her would-be kidnappers and in-laws, the princes and ministers, fall prostrate

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415 This image evokes the moment of marriage itself, since grabbing the hand is a key ritual moment in standard brahminical wedding ceremonies. On pāṇigrahaṇa, the tying of the auspicious cord or manīgalasūtra mentioned above and other aspects of the marriage ceremony recognizable in the MSV’s descriptions of weddings, see Kane 1997 vol.ii, part.i: 531-36.

416 Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 168a5 - 168b3. dge slong ma chos sbyin ma yis khamgs gsum gyi ni gnyen po thob/ mi ‘jigs pa thob bo/ de bagy mar blangs pa’i dus la babs nas khyim bdag ri dvaṅs sgra’i bu sa gas kyang mdza’ bo dang/ phu nu dang/ gnyen dang/ aṣhon nu dang/ blos po dang/ grong khyer ba dang/ ljongs kyi skye bo mang po dang lhan cig tu der sil snyan rṣam pa sna tshaṅs pa gsal to/ chos sbyin ma bcom ldan ‘das kyi phyi bzhin phyir ‘byung bar ‘dod pa dang/ de nas khyim bdag ri dvaṅs sgra’i bu sa gas ‘phral la dpun pa bryaṅg nas chos sbyin gyi laq pa nas bsangs bar bshams pa dang/ chos, sbyin ma sen can grangs med pa bhraya stong gis mthong bzhin du ngang pa’i rgyal po ‘dab [Da 168b] ma bhrayang pa bzhin nam mkha’ la ‘phur te ram pa sna tshaṅs kyi chu ‘phrul bstan pa dang/ de nas khyim bdag ri dvaṅs sgra’i mdza’ bo dang/ phu nu dang/ gnyen dag dang/ aṣhon nu dang/ blos po dang/ grong khyer ba dang/ ljongs kyi skye bo mang po dang/ khyim bdag ri dvaṅs sgra’i bu sa ga dang/ aṣhon yang lṭa mo la lṭaṅs pa’i sems can dag ngo mtshar cher gyur ngs gshis mtṣa ba nas bcad pa bzhin du rkaṅ pa la phyang ‘tshal nas/ sring ma ‘di’ dra ba’i yon tan mang po thob na khvod ‘dod chags la spyod pa’i skabs ma yin gnas ma yin te/ byod par gsal lo zhes smras pa.
at her feet in respect and homage. Verbally they acknowledge that it is the display of her attainments that make them recognize she ought not to be bound to her place in the domestic realm of desire. Dharmadattā goes on to provide an equally spectacular display of her capacity as a spiritual teacher:

Thereupon Dharmadattā descended from the sky, and was seated in front of that large gathering of people and gave that sort of Dharma teaching by which as soon as they heard it, the many people, in the hundreds of thousands, attained special distinctions. Some actualized the fruit of stream entry. Some actualized the fruit of once returning. Some actualized the fruit of non returning. Some went forth under the Lord’s dispensation, and then after abandoning all kleśas, actualized arhatship. Some generated the mind seeking śrāvakas’ enlightenment. Some generated the mind seeking pratyekabuddhas’ enlightenment, and some the mind seeking unsurpassed perfectly complete enlightenment. From among that assembly, most were led to be inclined toward the Buddha, arrived at the Dharma and thoroughly directed toward the Saṅgha. Bhikṣuṇī Dharmadattā brought about the attainments, flourishing and great aims of beings, and then went to where the Lord was. When she arrived, she prostrated with her head at the feet of the Lord, and then left the presence of the Lord.\footnote{Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 168b3-6. de nas chos sbyin ma nam mkha’ las babs te/ skye bo mang po dag gi mdun du ’dag nas ’di lta bu’i chos bshad de sans can mang po brjya stong gis thos nas khyad par cher rtsogs te/ kha cig gis ni rgyun du zhus pa’i ’bras bu mgon du byas so/ kha cig gis ni lan cig phyir’ ong bu’i ’bras bu/ kha cig gis ni phyir mi ldog pa’i ’bras bu/ kha cig gis ni bcom ldan’ das kyi btstan pa la rab tu byung nas nyon mongs pa thams cad sphanas te dgra bcom pa mgon du byas so/ kha cig gis ni nyan thos pa’i byang chub tu sans bskeyed do/ kha cig gis ni rang sangs rgyas kyi byang chub tu/ kha cig gis ni bla na med pa yang dag par rdzogs pa’i byang chub tu/’ khor de dag las phal cher sansrg rgyas la gzhol la/ chos la ’bab/ dge ’dun la rab tu bab par bloo do/ de nas dge slong ma chos sbyin gnis theb pa dang/ phun sum thogs pa mneyed sans can rnams kyi don chen po byas te/ bcom ldan’ das ga la ba der song ste phyin pa dang/ bcom ldan’ das kyi zhab la mgo bos phyag’ tshal nas/ bcom ldan’ das kyi drung nas song ngo.}

Buddha has permitted her to ordain, despite her highly irregular situation. He sends Utpalavarṇā to her at key junctures. He opens the saṅgha community for her, and he has come
to the house to take his place with her inside as the groom’s forces gather outside, around the household. But Buddha does not intervene directly. Although the stage is set for a public showdown between Buddha and his community and the lay community of Śrāvastī outside the gate, Buddha simply walks past them. He does not act to defend or save Dharmadattā. Drawing on the inner resources the Dharma and vinaya have allowed her to develop, Dharmadattā saves herself by the dramatic display of her own attainments: the fruits of her own meditation to “make herself free from desire,” her own training in the vinaya precepts she has received, and her own ability to embody for the public the transformative promise of the Dharma—to empower anyone who would take it up to create their own futures for themselves.

It is her own visible embodiment of spiritual transformation that frees her from the enormous social and familiar pressure on her to marry. In the scale of factors determining a person’s place in this world, spiritual attainments trump age, gender, class and a host of other social considerations. The series of narratives we have reviewed in this chapter make clear that the MSV understands such spiritual attainments to be available in principle to all women. Yet they also recognize that sheer will is not enough to actualize that potential, for other factors do impinge in shaping what is possible at any given moment. Dharmadattā’s story makes an eloquent argument for the importance of others—of a bhikṣuṇī order to model other options—but also for the importance of monastic ordination for women. Each successive level of ordination that Buddha authorized the community to confer served as a powerful condition in producing such spiritual attainments, and allowing the young woman to find her way out of her prescribed wifely role and on to other life options. Dharmadattā goes on to become a major
teacher of the Dharma, and is recognized as supreme among all his female disciples for her ability to explain the Dharma, as we have seen. Among her disciples will be many nuns, and many lay women, but also men, including a troop of soldiers who take up a life of non-violence after hearing her teach. Dharmadattā’s realizations alone make her qualified to teach the ministers, princes and other prominent citizens of the town, as well as her would-be father-in-law and husband. Where previously Dharmadattā was powerless to even leave the house, the narrative thus offers a powerful argument for the capacity of the Dharma to pluck women out of the place allotted to them, lifting over all class and gender boundaries that had previously boxed them in.

The almsgiving exchange offers some challenge to the dynamic of covert gendering of the domestic sphere, but it could not do for Dharmadattā what we see here the existence of the female monastic order doing: offering scope for the fullness of her capacities. That scope is co-extensive, in the MSV, with the Buddhist monastic domain, which is constructed as precisely not the domestic domain yet not the domain of public life either, at least public understood as political or commercial. Buddhist monastic communities are, of course, deeply implicated in economic and social activity. But they are conceptually held apart from worldly life, and that ideological abeyance is instrumental in the creation of new possibilities for women. Somehow, under Buddha’s dispensation, it becomes acceptable for women to move out of the domestic

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418 The Tibetan canon preserves a reference to a sūtra in which Dharmadattā teaches her ex-husband, at Derge bstan ’gyur mngon pa Nyu 4b3, as Skilling has noted (Skilling 2001:250).
sphere and withdraw from its cycles of reproduction, perhaps because they were not seen as entering the ordinary public sphere.\textsuperscript{419}

Given the limitations to the range of possible futures open to women in the MSV, the existence of a female monastic order therefore constituted a particularly rare opportunity for women to create new futures and assume new personal and social identities for themselves. That is to say, it gave them access to the technologies of the self, or disciplinary practices whereby, as Foucault puts it, “a human being turns him- or herself into a subject.”\textsuperscript{420} We may also note that the newfound possibilities for self-fashioning within the monastic community will mean something different for the women in the MSV than they do for men. However, it is important to note that the shift from larger society into monastic community does not entail a sloughing off of gender as constructed by that larger society. These monastic communities themselves are thoroughly gendered, beginning right from the fact that one’s gender determines which order one joins, and which rules one follows. Further, within the narratives of the MSV, we can chart a process of negotiation whereby gender is repeatedly re-inscribed on female monastic communities and bodies.

\textsuperscript{419} In this understanding, the negative construction of women’s gender as not belonging to the public sphere seemed to be more trenchant than the positive construction of belonging at home. In other words, they may leave the home, so long as they do not do so for a career in the public domain—a place in which the only woman are prostitutes (or courtesans) or beggars.

\textsuperscript{420} Foucault 1983: 208.
Chapter Four: Bodies

In saṃsāra, without needing to direct efforts to it,
A body is extremely easy to attain.
In ten thousand million eons,
A worthy place to offer it is extremely hard to attain.

_Bhaiṣajyavastu, Mālasarvāstivāda Vinaya_

- Verse uttered by Mahāsenā,
after she had cut out a piece of her thigh
to make a medicinal broth for an ailing bhikṣu.
It has been said that bodies are cultural products, and indeed, the vinaya can be read as a guide book for their production. The apparent given-ness of the body as a component of personal identity is countered by a wide range of Buddhist discourses and practices that recast the body, making it not a fixed product or thing, but rather an ongoing process whose meanings as well as form can be subject to radical revision. This moves well beyond the sense of the instability of the physical form of the body that we noted in the understanding of the ever-present possibility of sex changes. Even without physical interventions on the bodily form, Buddhist monasticism is fully alive to the possibilities of remaking the meanings of embodiment, precisely because what matters about bodies does not depend on the body itself. As we saw in the MSV’s ethics of particularity, among the infinite particularity of persons only some features are salient at any moment, and that salience is determined by the context in which those particulars are now embedded, and the ends to which we wish to move in the future. Put a body in a different context and deploy it to different ends, and what matters about that body changes. The shift from mainstream society to monastic community, from a social world seen to be mobilized by desire to a social world animated by discipline, and the range of meanings that body has can also be made to shift dramatically. What matters about the body is not just its physical form, but how we inhabit it, what we do with it and what we can make it mean. Bodies that are marked in mainstream constructions of female embodiment as objects of male desire, and therefore as subject to control and protection by, from and for

Elizabeth Grosz writes: “The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past, it is itself a cultural, the cultural product.” (Grosz 1994: 23).
men, can be re-ordered as monastic bodies within the new social formation and system of meanings that Buddhist monasticism offers. Yet even as women can then live their embodiment as female differently, male desire does not disappear, nor do mainstream constructions of female bodies. Their presence will continue to inflect what women’s bodies can mean and do even within the new forms of female embodiment envisioned in the MSV. In this chapter, we will chart the efforts to remake women’s bodies in Buddhist monasticism, as a crucial site for the gendering of women overall.

In Buddhist thought and practice, as Susanne Mrozik’s work has made eminently clear, “body and morality are inextricably linked.” Buddhist monasticism wholeheartedly embraces the opportunities that bodies offer as sites for the disciplining of ethical subjects. For both Buddhist monks and nuns, physical comportment and personal grooming are the subject of extensive regulation, and monastics’ relationship to their body is explored in numerous narratives. Bodies are topics of concern and frequent discussion in the vinaya because they are understood to constitute potent sites for self-fashioning, as well as significant media through which monastics communicate to others. Shaved heads and robes immediately indicate an individual’s participation in a monastic community, and therefore their distance from other social locations. Subdued physical conduct can inspire faith in others, and its absence can jeopardize the well-being of the entire monastic community if it elicits censure on the part of

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422 Mrozik 2007. This entire chapter unfolds in conversation with Mrozik’s groundbreaking work on bodies in Buddhism. Her *Virtuous Bodies* charts the multiple ways in which “bodied being,” as she puts it, and ethical being, are interdependent in Buddhist thought, and provides us with several of the major analytical categories for this chapter.

423 For a discussion of the connections between women renunciates and the shaving of their head and their symbolic meanings, see Lang 1995.
the surrounding society that supports it. In other words, bodies are fully implicated in monastic subjects’ relationship to themselves and their relationship to others.

Bodies are always particular—always male or female, or some more complicated sex, as we have seen in the last chapter—but never just human. In terms of how our particularity interacts with other factors to determine us as persons, physical embodiedness comes under intensive scrutiny in the MSV. In its attentiveness to physical particularity, monastic regulations single out certain physical features—such as being mute, having webbed fingers, or having had one’s feet amputated—as disqualifying candidates for ordination. In these cases it is generally the social interpretation of those physical particulars that is problematic. Within all the attentiveness to physical difference and particularity, the single most determinative aspect of any given body for the vinaya is its sex. In fact, the absence of sexual organs is another physical feature rendering a candidate ineligible to ordain. Though celibacy is a mandated practice for monastics, a clear sexual identity is sine qua non for membership in the monastic community. As we have seen, for the MSV, the presence of male or female sexual organs is necessary and sufficient to determine a person’s sexual identity and to thus gender them and fix their social location. Gender is ineluctably indexed to the sex of the body. Because of this, a person’s relationship to her body can therefore impact how her gender is lived. In this chapter

424 The concern seems to be that such candidates will be thought to have entered the monastic order as a more expedient means of receiving alms rather than out of spiritual aspirations, and thus will diminish the credibility of those who could have supported themselves but actively chose not to, and who thus left behind better options when ordaining. Or, put less generously, the implication might be that such people would be thought to lower the prestige of the community as a whole. However, the open ordination of prostitutes, murderers and outcastes indicates that it is rather more complicated than a naked bid for prestige in the eyes of larger society. For an exploration of concerns other than avoiding social criticism at work in excluding some sorts of bodies from ordination, see Gyatso 2003: 93. On the social construction of certain physical characteristics in candidates for marriage in brahminical texts, see Lariviere 1996. On the linking of physical deformity and disease to karma, and the resultant interpretation of defective bodies as indicative of defective personalities, see Leslie 1999: 35-38.
we will explore some of the MSV’s particular gender constructions surrounding female bodies, as well as ways women find to work with or against (usually with) those constructions to make their bodies a source of strength.

The careful attention to discourses around bodies that has been one of the fruits of feminist theory has revealed that bodies are not simply given by nature but are rather deeply implicated in cultural processes that shape and determine them, much as other aspects of person’s identity. Earlier, feminists were concerned to point out to a series of implicit homologies at work in Western thought and cultures, in which female was to male, as body was to mind and as nature was to culture. In these cases, the latter member of all three pairs is valued over the former. Feminist interventions variously sought to challenge the conflation of female with body/nature against the male/mind/culture complex, to overturn the ordering by finding positive value in the female-body complex or to complicate the distinctions between body and mind or nature and culture altogether.425 While such insights might prove provocative in looking at Buddhist texts and practices, our analysis must begin from a different starting point, because the MSV does not share these assumptions about the relation of body to mind and nature to culture. This is not the place to wage arguments about the MSV’s theory of the relationships of body to mind, and indeed, it cannot be said to adhere strictly to any single theory. However, we do need to be aware that we will encounter other perspectives on bodies (and minds) at work in the MSV. The Sanskrit term which may be the closest equivalent to what is meant in such contexts as “mind” is citta, which encompasses a wide range of cognitive processes: volition, emotions, memories, as well as reasoning. It has been

425 Perhaps the most influential practitioners of this last move are Judith Butler, Donna Haraway and Elizabeth Grosz. See especially Butler 1999 and 1993, Haraway 1990 and Grosz 1994.
argued for that reason that citta might best rendered in English as heart-mind.\textsuperscript{426} In the MSV’s presentation of karma, a person’s body is a product of volitional acts done in past lives. Bodies, in that sense, come from minds. Further, the figuring of body and nature as stable essences over against mind and culture cannot carry the analytical weight in our texts that it does in those texts on which feminist theorists were more likely to be commenting. We have seen that the MSV can imagine the body morphing suddenly, and changing sex in an instant. In the vinaya, with its repeated reminders of impermanence as a fundamental principle of bodies, the body is hardly a more stable construct than the mind from which it ultimately derives.

Observers have noted this linking of the body in Buddhist texts with death, impermanence and desire,\textsuperscript{427} which may tempt us to conclude that corporeality is by definition problematic for the sort of spiritual progress imagined in Buddhist texts. However, although the sexuality of bodies is generally valued negatively in this monastic text, bodies \textit{per se} most certainly are not. Rather, bodies occupy a complicated ethical juncture in the MSV. We may begin with two sets of discourses Mrozik notes in Buddhist literature: “ascetic discourse” of this sort that emphasizes the body’s impermanence and impurity, and what she calls “physiomoral discourses” that code bodies as both markers of and conditions for morality.\textsuperscript{428} The MSV embeds bodies within both of these sorts of discourse. It also assumes the presence in mainstream society of a third set of discourses of desire, in which men’s bodies attract women’s desire and women’s bodies are vectors for male desire. Though desire is understood to be heterosexual and potentially reciprocal, these discourses of bodily desire are

\textsuperscript{426} Mrozik (2007: 3-4) advocates this translation, drawing on Sid Brown 2001: 9.

\textsuperscript{427} The fullest exploration of these connected concepts remains Wilson 1996, but see too, Collins 1997.

\textsuperscript{428} Mrozik 2007: 61ff.
nevertheless fully gendered, for in the *MSV* men’s desire is invested with the social and physical power to appropriate and control the female bodies that are the objects of their desire, whereas women’s desire is not. As such, though men in the *MSV* also can be inconvenienced by women’s desire for them, men’s desire combined with their positions of power over women to create problems for women that women’s desire for men need not.

We also see physiomoral discourses at work in the understanding of bodies as conditioned by karma, such that a person’s ethical conduct of the past can be read from her current body. Then, through a person’s relationship to her current body, her own future goodness can be created, or destroyed. At the same time, people in the *MSV* affect one another in ethically important ways through their bodies. As Mrozik puts it, “not only are bodies the effects of morality, they are also the conditions for particular kinds of moral agency.”

The juncture occupied by bodies in Buddhist monastic training offers a ground where ethics understood as an ethics of care of others meets with ethics understood as cultivation of the self.

Bodies can be seen as unremarkable in and of themselves, but in the “hands” of the right ethical practitioner can yield remarkable results. In one of the most extreme (of many) cases in the *MSV* of a woman wielding authority over her own body in ways that are redolent with ethical implications, a housewife who is a devout disciple of Buddha cuts flesh from her own body to make a medicinal broth.\(^430\) In this story, an ailing bhikṣu is in need of meat broth,

\(^{429}\) Mrozik 2007: 70.

\(^{430}\) Bhaiṣajyavastu. Derge Ka 284a4 -287b3. This narrative reappears in several other texts with varying degrees of differences, as explored in Hubert Durt (2005: 117-136). For example, an essentially parallel account of the story of Mahāsenā is told in the Pāli vinaya, but the donor there is named Suppiyā Vin. 1 216-220, in the English
which has been prescribed as necessary for his recovery. The woman’s husband is himself a major sponsor of the Buddhist order, and has just offered all the requisites to Buddha and his community for three months. He hears of the monk’s need, and asks his wife Mahāsenā to prepare a broth. But the king has declared a ban on slaughter in honor of the birth of his son, and there is no meat to be had anywhere in town. When she learns of this, without a word Mahāsenā takes a sharp knife, retires indoors and cuts flesh from her own thigh. She hands it to a servant girl with instructions to make a broth and deliver it to the bhikṣu. The ailing monk is cured by the broth. Reflecting that the housewife has served him her own flesh, the monk is deeply moved by her act, and has the thought:

After consuming the offering given with faith, it would not be right for me to just lie around. Instead, why don’t I make efforts to achieve what I have not yet achieved, realize what I have not yet realized, and actualize what I have not yet actualized.\(^\text{431}\)

By the efforts he then makes, the monk attains arhatship. Other monks recognize his arhatship as having been accomplished “in dependence upon Mahāsenā.”\(^\text{432}\) Buddha goes to visit Mahāsenā, now injured and incapacitated herself. He cures her and compares her deed to that of a bodhisattva.\(^\text{433}\) Upon hearing this, she declares, in verse:

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\(^{431}\) The surviving Gilgit manuscript ends abruptly in the beginning of this narrative, before the passage we examine here. Bhaisajyavastu. Tibetan found at Derge Ka 285a6-7. bdag dad pa byin pa longs skyad nas glos phab ste ’dua pa ni rigs pa ma yin gyi/ ma la bdag gis ma thob pa thob par bya ba dang/ ma rtoqs pa rtoqs par bya ba dang/ mgon sum du ma byas pa mgon sum du bya ba i phyir brtson par bya'o.

\(^{432}\) sde chen ma la brten nas. Derge Ka 286b3.

\(^{433}\) ci khyim bdag gi chung ma ‘di byang chub sens dpa’i sbungs nyams su myong bar byed dam/ Derge Ka 286a1. The version of this narrative in the MSV is alone among vinaya account in recording Buddha’s comparison to a bodhisattva (Durt 2005b: 124).
In saṃsāra, without needing to direct efforts to it,\textsuperscript{434} 
A body is extremely easy to attain. 
In ten thousand million eons, 
A worthy place to offer it is extremely hard to attain.\textsuperscript{435}

Although Buddha will go on to ban bhikṣus from accepting human flesh in the future, 
his praise of her act in giving remains unambiguous. In contrast to the other stories we have 
seen in which the virtue from almsgiving is seen to accrue to the one who prepares and hands 
over the meal, the narrators here tell us that her husband had requested her to make the broth 
in the first place, and that it was a servant who later does the cooking and delivery. Yet 
Buddha is unequivocal in treating Mahāsenā as the sole agent in this act. The narrators make 
clear that she did not consult anyone, but conceived the thought and took the decision on her 
own. This underscores her status as fully in possession of her own body, even if we assume that 
as a married woman she had been handed over to her husband as a girl-gift. Her self-sacrifice 
requires her to be able to see her body as flesh, on the same order as that of animals whose 
slaughter had been banned. Her act asserts that this body is hers to give, and that cutting it off 
to cure a bhikṣu constitutes a valuable use of it. As such, Mahāsenā puts her body directly to 
spiritual use, and in the process asserts her own control of it.

This narrative envisions the female body as nourishing others, and not only with milk. 
But it also understands that the woman’s volitional act in offering her body as nourishment 
has a separate power of its own. It is telling that Mahāsenā’s act served to heal the monk not 
only of his physical illness, but also of his spiritual shortcomings. The MSV differs from most

\textsuperscript{434} Tibetan: bsgrim pa carries both the sense of concentrating or directing attention, and making efforts.

\textsuperscript{435} Bhaisajyavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ka 286a1-2. \textit{bsgrim mi dgos par ’khor ba na/ lus ni shin tu rnyed par sla’i/ bskal pa bye ba stong rnams su/ sbyin gnas shin tu rnyed par dka’}. 
other versions of this story in describing the impact of her intentional act when contemplated by the monk afterwards.\footnote{See Durt 2005b. Note that the Chinese version of this story that Durt considers differs in numerous details from the Tibetan studied here.} Several other versions of the story omit entirely the sequence in which her food offering becomes the basis of the bhikṣu’s attainment of arhatship. In the \textit{MSV}, it is not her body, but her remarkable wielding of her body, that becomes a direct catalyst inspiring the monk to apply himself in earnest to the task of curing himself of his own spiritual ills. Not only does her body have a transformative impact when consumed, but her volitional intervention on her own body has a transformative impact when contemplated, and this latter impact is of most lasting value. This doubling of the levels of the monk’s transformation, physical and spiritual, allows us to distinguish the two significant (and analytically separate) moments of the woman’s own action. She harms her own body wishing to benefit the monk’s body, and this act ends up benefitting her own heart-mind, as well as that of the monk. The Buddha’s curative intervention then restores the balance on the physical level, returning health to the body she herself damaged to heal the monk. The narrative thus shows her act creating goodness for herself in terms of karmic rewards to come, and goodness for others whom she has inspired with that act. Her act is thus located firmly in the center of an ethics of caring for self and others, or caring for self through caring for others.

In Mahāsenā’s tale, the \textit{MSV} opens space for women to fashion themselves as ethically excellent agents in relation to their bodies, and through those bodies, in relation to others. Yet the \textit{MSV} elsewhere offers other moments of notable ambivalence about female bodies. Female bodies in the \textit{MSV} cannot escape the mechanisms of gendering, and will thus provoke complex responses by its narrators. As we explore the representations of women’s bodies and their uses
in this chapter, we will be situating those representations within a host of other discursive practices that together shape the place women may occupy in Buddhist monasticism. As Grosz comments:

Misogynist thought has commonly found a convenient self-justification for women’s secondary social positions by containing them within bodies that are represented—even constructed—as frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable, subject to various intrusions which are not under conscious control.437

The crucial phrase for us here is “not under conscious control.” Male and female bodies are both represented in the MSV as “imperfect, unruly, and unreliable,” with frailness retained as a particularly female bodily attribute that monasticism seeks to redress, as we shall explore below. However, it is toward the possibility of bringing the body and its “various intrusions” under conscious control that Buddhist monasticism directs a great deal of its disciplinary attention.

In “The Body in Theravāda Buddhist Monasticism,” Stephen Collins notes the close regulation of the body in Buddhist monasticism, but points at the same time to the particular focus in those regulations on the intentionality involved in that regulation. Several of his observations regarding monastic training based on the Pāli vinaya can be said as well of the Mūlasarvāstivādin.

But Buddhist jurisprudence (in this respect unlike much of Hinduism and Jainism) also recognizes that responsibility cannot be ascribed for unintentional infringements of its laws. In a more general sense, the standard Buddhist analysis of karma, actions and its results, always explains it as involving, and

sometimes simply as consisting in, intention. Moreover, this emphasis on intention reminds one that at the highest level of Buddhist spiritual training, where adherence to external prohibitions can be taken for granted, it is the inner existence of desire in any mental form which is the focus of attention.\footnote{Collins 1997: 189-190.}

The target of monastic discipline as it is portrayed in the *MSV* is not simply to inhibit or restrain the body, but also to use the body to cultivate particular mental states such as mindfulness, and freedom from desire. These mental states themselves are understood as participating in a complex of virtues, but they also involve monastics in distinct relationships with their own bodies, relationships that are ethically productive. The vinaya assumes that most women (and men) will manage to inhabit their mandated state of celibacy only through multiple acts of will and active moments of renewed renunciation, all of which are integral to their training. As Gyatso noted in the Pāli vinaya, asexuality disqualifies candidates for ordination.\footnote{Gyatso 2003: 95ff.} There is no preference for ordination candidates who are inexperienced sexually, and no suggestion whatsoever that virgins might be preferred candidates for ordination as Buddhist nuns.\footnote{On virginity in Buddhist thought, see Wilson 1996: 174-5.} Sexed bodies are the ground on which a good deal of Buddhist ethical formation takes place, for men and women both.

The narrators of the *MSV* seem particularly interested in exploring women’s appropriations of their own bodies and the distinct processes of ethical cultivation that this enables. It is often through such appropriations that the *MSV* depicts women negotiating how they are gendered. As we explore narrative constructions of women’s bodies in this chapter, a
pattern will begin to emerge. We have already begun to see the Dharma and Buddhist monasticism in particular intervening in gender constructions in ways that serve women well. These interventions are not revolutionary, in the sense that they leave much in place socially, and leave many assumptions about women unchallenged. Instead, they seem to work by pushing away at points of vulnerability, creating openings through which women can escape the containment in bodies that must sit in disadvantageous social positions. Throughout these maneuverings, what we will see is that even as the Dharma offers women a way to construct a different kind of body, and to live their embodiment differently, nevertheless mainstream social expectations and assumptions about their bodies will intrude on those efforts in ways that they do not do for men.
The Problem with Beautiful Women

The brahmin saw Lord Buddha, ornamented with the 32 major marks of a great person and with his body brightened by the 80 minor marks, adorned with the luster of the heavens, a thousand times brighter than the sun, like a mountain of jewels in motion, auspicious all around. Just by seeing him, [the brahmin] produced pure faith in the Blessed One. Twelve years of śāmatha [practice] does not produce a mind equal to this, nor does gaining a child for one who is childless, nor a treasure chest for a poor person, nor a royal coronation for one who has been desiring kingship, as for a person who has accumulated the roots of goodness, from the first sight of a buddha.

_Bhaiṣajyavastu, Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya_

Beauty is valued in many Buddhist texts as a form of non-coercive power. In the _MSV_, Buddha is often shown astounding those who see him with the exceptional splendor of his physical form, as in the epigraph above. His beauty has the effect of drawing disciples to the Dharma, and of deeply delighting them in the process. The attractive power of beauty thus becomes part of the constellation of good qualities that are put to good use by ethically excellent beings, in their practice of an ethics of care of others. In a world where body and morality are inextricably intertwined through physiomoral discourses, beauty can be understood as the external manifestation of some inner excellence, a sign that the beautiful person embodies more beauty within, and is thus worthy of respect and admiration. The ethical order that is written on bodies is also read and reaffirmed by bodies, with the frequent

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441 Bhaiṣajyavastu. Sanskrit at GM.i.69; Tibetan at Derge Kha157a4-7.

442 The valuing of beauty in general is of course by no means limited to Buddhist texts. Daud Ali explores the positive construction of beauty in medieval Indian society in his *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*, where he notes that both men and women are subject to broadly similar ideals of physical attractiveness (Ali 2004: 144-7). Ali points out that the Sanskrit terms used to describe male and female beauty tended to be the same, such as kānta, cāru, lāvanya, and rūpa, while several key features unite their ideal appearances: large eyes, lotus-like feet and hands, full red lips and shining toenails (ibid 147). All of these features are ascribed in the _MSV_ to beautiful persons as well.
gestures of placing one’s head at the feet of one’s betters, in a direct physical display of one’s acknowledged place in the hierarchical ordering of excellence, social or spiritual.

As Mrozik explores in *Virtuous Bodies*, bodhisattvas use the beauty of their bodies to inspire, guide and “ripen” others. In the *MSV*, a separate class of enlightened beings, *pratyekabuddhas*, are said to teach primarily through their bodies, not through speech, and their beauty forms part of the silent syntax they use to create particular responses in others.

Here we see a *pratyekabuddha’s* body at work:

That householder’s wife saw that his body was beautiful and his mind was beautiful, and thought, “Since he is an ascetic, a great being, I will offer him the meal.” She satisfied him with rich food, and offered the utpala lotuses to him. Since these great beings teach the Dharma with their bodies, but do not teach the Dharma with words, that pratyekabuddha performed the action of eating, and then out of compassion and affection for her, like a swan king spreads its wings, he arose into the sky above and proceeded to manifest miraculous displays of radiance, luminosity, rain showers and lightning. Since ordinary individuals rapidly hand their minds over to miracles, that householder’s wife became intensely respectful and prostrated at his feet.

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443 Mrozik 2007.
444 *lus mdzes pa* sems mdzes pa. This most likely translates the Sanskrit *kāyaprāsādikacittaprāsādikah*, which is more often translated into Tibetan in the *MSV* as *lus mdzes zhiṅg sens dang ba*. Elsewhere where we have the occurrence of that Sanskrit term preserved in the extant manuscript, the Tibetan renders it as *lus mdzes pa dang sens dang*. GM.i.80; Derge Kha 163b4. For a full exploration of the possible meanings of *kāyaprāsādikacittaprāsādikah*, see Rotman 2008b.
445 *Bhikṣuvibhaṅga*. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Nya 225b2-5. *khyim bdag gi chung ma des lus mdzes pa*/sems mdzes pa de mthong nas des bsam pa/’di ni, brtul zhus grub pa/’bdag nyid chen po de yin gyis zan sbyin no snyam nas/’des de zas bsod pas tshim par byas shing de ut+pa la dag gis kyang mchod pa byas so/’bdag nyid chen po de dag ni las kyi’chos ston gyi tshig gis chos mi ston pas rang sangs rayas de zas kyi bya ba byas nas/’de la snying brtse ba’i phyir ngang pa’i rgyal po ’dab ma brkyang pa ltar steng gi nam mkha’la mtnan par ’phags nas ’bar ba dang/’gsal ba dang/’char ’bebs pa dang/’glog ’byin pa’i cho ’phrul dag bya ba brtsams so/’so so’i skeye bo ni rdzu ’phrul la myur du sens gtod par byed pa yin pas khyim bdag gi chung ma des gus par sgrim pa dang bcos pas des rkang pa gnyis la phyag ’tshal te.
The woman goes on to make a resolute aspiration that will later be fulfilled. No emphasis is made on the gendering of this beautiful body of the pratyekabuddha as male, and we have already watched the miraculous actions performed by Dharmadattā to similar effect, when she arose in the air to awe and humble her would-be kidnappers. Nevertheless, there is a form of covert gendering at work: I have found nine occurrences of the common phrase kāyaprāsādikacittaprāsādikaḥ (Tibetan: lus mdzes zhing sems dang ba), a shorthand describing the calming and faith-producing effects of the beautiful bodies of enlightened beings; not one of these occurrences describes a female body, although the MSV does offer many portraits of women enlightened as arhats. While women’s displays of extraordinary physical powers (ṛdhhi) can inspire faith in others, their beauty is less likely to have such positive effects. In the MSV the bodies whose beauty is imagined to have powerful effects in attracting and awakening faith in others are most consistently male.  

However, even as it presents the male bodies of pratyekabuddhas as lovely and beneficial for others, the MSV also offers moments in which pratyekabuddhas’ own relation to their bodies is considerably less celebratory. In one narrative, a large group of pratyekabuddhas decides to end their lives en masse, saying, “What there was to be attained with this miserable body (kvāthakāya; Tibetan: lus rnag can), we have attained. Thus, let us enter the sphere of nirvāṇa, which is peace.” That is to say, they choose to end their lives,

446 I find the Tibetan term lus mdzes dang sens dang ba or some variation thereof used at Kha 163b4-5 to describe the Bhikṣu Mahākāśyapa seen by a woman, at Derge Kha 316b7 of a (male) brahmin sage seen by a man, and of pratyekabuddhas at GM.i.80; Derge Kha 163b4 seen by a man, Derge Ga 33b1 where inspired viewer is male, Nga 142a7 by a male viewer, Nga 225b2-5 where again a woman is the viewer, Tha 88a5 viewed by a woman, and Da 34b7 where the pratyekabuddha’s body inspires a group of men.

447 GM.i.5:[yad asmābhīr anena kvāthakāyaṇa prāptavyam prāptam tad yan nu vayaṁ sāntam nirvāṇadhātuṁ praviśema iti] Derge Kha 123b5-6. The Tibetan translation of kvāthakāya as lus rnag can suggests pus-filled.
discarding their bodies to pass on to the state of nirvāṇa that awaits them after death. The same male bodies that can be constructed as inspiringly beautiful for others through physiomoral discourses can be constructed as discouragingly miserable for oneself through ascetic discourses. Women’s bodies too can be worked on by both discourses, though are more likely to be constructed by ascetic discourses as disgusting for others than are male bodies.\footnote{Leslie (1999: 34) also notes this same ambivalence around women’s bodies in Hindu texts, citing instances where Śītā and Sāvitrī’s beauty is taken to reflect some inner goodness, even as women’s beauty is also negatively construed as a snare.} Female bodies are also far less likely to be presented as inspiring other with their beauty.

That said, the MSV does offer one narrative in which a woman’s physical beauty inspires faith in a man rather than sexual desire. In this scene, the woman in question is Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarnā, and she had been meditating in a thick forest with a group of other nuns, who opted to leave her behind rather than disturb her meditation to tell her they were returning to town. A large gang of crooks comes to hide out in the forest. Half stays with their ringleader to divvy up their spoils, and the other half goes out to scout out the woods. The scouting party come across Utpalavarnā as she sits alone, unmoving, in deep meditative absorption.

These latter saw Utpalavarnā sitting there. At that, some said, “Sirs, this is a stone figure.” Others said, “This is a human being.” Still others said, “This is a bhikṣu.”

There was one there who had some familiarity with bhikṣus, and he said, “This is a bhikṣuṇī, not a bhikṣu.”

“How do you know?”
“Bhikṣus sit in lotus position; bhikṣunīs in half-lotus.”

They were amazed and said, “Sirs, look at this bhikṣunī willing to spend the night alone in this terrifying forest!”

They went to their ringleader and the ringleader asked them, “Sirs, is there anything interesting to see in this dense forest of yours?”

“There is a bhikṣunī willing to spend the night alone in a terrifying forest like this. Come and see her.”

They went into her presence, and the ringleader saw Bhikṣunī Utpalavartā, lovely in form, attractive and beautiful. And when he saw her, he became filled with faith, and because of the faith that had filled him, he said, “Ah, this bhikṣunī is thoroughly good, she who is seated here like a moon and sun at night, lovely in form, attractive and beautiful. [Cha 97b]

Saying this, he moved to get her to arise. They said, “Why are you getting her up?”

“To offer her food.”

The one who was familiar with bhikṣus said, “She does not eat at inappropriate times.”

The ringleader said, “Why not?”

He said, “She has renounced eating at inappropriate times.”

\footnote{Taking gnyig nas in the sense of gnyig tu, possibly for ekānta.}
The ringleader said, “Ah! This bhikṣunī is doubly good, lovely in form, attractive and beautiful, and she has given up eating at inappropriate times.” And he said further, “I will give her beer to drink.”

One who was familiar with bhikṣus said, “She has renounced drinking intoxicants.”

The ringleader said, “Ah! this bhikṣunī is thoroughly good, lovely in form, attractive and beautiful, and she has renounced intoxicants.” And he also said, “I am not able to give alms to such a field worthy of offerings.”

The ringleader finally determines to leave a bolt of cloth and some alms for her to use later, tying it to a branch of a tree and formally consecrating the offering to her. They then leave her in peace, to finish her meditation. On this rare occasion when the body whose beauty awakens faith in others is a woman’s, it does so after we have been told that her body could be

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450 Interestingly, in a rare portrayal of a woman drinking alcohol in the MSV, Utpalavarṇā is shown sitting drinking with her fellow prostitutes in the story narrating her life before she ordained. Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Derge Nya 216a1.

451 Again, reading gnyig nas.

452 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Cha 97a2–97b4. de dag gis ut+pa la'i mdog 'dug pa mthong ngo/de na kha cig na re shes ldan dag 'di ni tho yor zhiq yin no zhes zer/ kha cig na re 'di ni mi zhiq yin no zhes zer/ kha cig na re 'di ni dge slong zhiq yin no zhes zer ro/de na dge slong gi rgyus shes pa zhiq 'dug pa des smras pa/ 'di ni dge slong ma zhiq yin gyi dge slong ni ma yin no/ji ltar shes/ dge slong dag ni skyil mo krong gis 'dug la/ dge slong ma rnams ni skyil mo krong byed kyis 'dug go/ de dag nang mtshar skyes nas shes ldan dag 'di lta bu'i nags 'jiqs su rung ba'i nang na dge slong ma gcig pu mtshan mo gnas par khas blangs pa llos zhes zer ro/ de dag dmaq dpon gyi gan du song ba dang/ dmaq dpon gyiis de dag la dris pa/ shes ldan dag khyed kyi naANG man pa can 'di na ngo mtshar cung zad mthong ba yod dam mchis te/ 'di lta bu'i nags 'jiqs su rung ba'i nang na/ dge slong ma gcig pu mtshan mo gnas par khas blangs pa mchis so/ de blus 'dong nga zhes de dag de'i drung du dong ba dang/ dmaq dpon gyiis dge slong ma ut+pa la'i mdog gaugs bzung ba/ blta na sduag pa/ mDzes pa mthong ngo/ mthong nas kyang mngon par dad par gyar nas de mngon par dad pa skyes pas smras pa/ kye ma dge slong ma 'di ni gnyig nas bzang ba yin te/ mtshan mo zla nyi mo ltar 'dug pa gang yin pa dang/ gaugs bzung ba/ blta na sduag pa/ mDzes pa gang yin pas so [Cha 97b] zhes de sblang bar brtsams pa dang/ de dag gis smras pa/ ci'i phyir 'di sIong bar byed/ zas sbyin par bya'o/ dge slong gi rgyus shes pa gcig gis smras pa/ 'di ni dus ma yin par mi za'o/ dmaq dpon gyiis smras pa/ ci'i phyir/ des smras pa/ 'di ni dus ma yin pa'i zas spangs pa yin no/ dmaq dpon gyiis smras pa/ kye ma dge slong ma 'di ni gnyis ka nas bzang ba yin te/ gaugs bzung ba/ blta na sduag pa/ mDzes pa gang yin pa dang/ dus ma yin pa'i zas spangs pa gang yin pas so/ yang smras pa/ 'di la chang blud par bya'o/ dge slong gi rgyus shes pa des smras pa/ 'di ni myos par 'gyur ba'i btung ba spangs pa yin no/ dmaq dpon gyiis smras pa/ kye ma dge slong ma 'di ni gnyig nas bzang ba yin te/ gaugs bzung ba/ blta na sduag pa/ mDzes pa gang yin pa dang/ myos par 'gyur ba'i btung ba spangs pa gang yin pas so/ yang smras pa/ kho bos yon gnas kyi zhing 'di lta bu la bsod snyoms kyis bsgrub par ma nus so.
mistaken for a man’s. We may know from other narratives that the nun in this story had been a well-known prostitute for many years before ordaining, and was said to have been a woman of extraordinary beauty, whose body naturally emitted the fragrance of upala flowers. But in this narrative, her body is marked as female only by the position in which her legs are arranged during meditation. Although the head of this gang of criminals was not present when the group had mistakenly identified her as male, we are offered an image of her as so mute and mentally withdrawn from her environment that she is in fact first taken for a statue. In that sense, she is only present as a body. Note that the men are not upstanding citizens, but rather are described as g.yon can, which can refer to crooks, cheats or swindlers. When reporting her presence to the ringleader, they stress that she is all alone and isolated in the forest.

Although we may also know from other stories that Utpalavarṇā is an arhantinī, and thus capable of flying out of the reach of any assailants, we also know she is not currently aware of her surroundings. The exceptional powers of perceptions of arhats only work when they specifically direct their attention to a given object, as we are told again and again in the MSV. Further, there are accounts of other arhantinīs being raped in the MSV, including the oft-told tale of Kapilabhadrā, the former wife of Mahākāśyapa, which we will explore below. If the narrators had been setting their audience up to expect the worst, there is no hint later that her beautiful body is at all productive of desire in these men. Upon seeing her, the ringleader first exclaims that she is thoroughly good (bzang ba) and then remarks on her beauty. Her beauty is linked to a series of inner virtues, and the revelation that she practices restraint with regard to eating at inappropriate times simply makes her “doubly good,” or “good from both sides”

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453 g.yon can can translate the Sanskrit jihma or khala.
(gnyis ka nas bzang ba), with her renunciation simply intensifying her beauty. Somehow, being seated alone in meditation, fearless in the forest, Utpalavarṇā’s beauty can be situated within a matrix of faith-inspiring virtues.

It would appear that to the degree that he relates to her as an ascetic rather than as a woman, her beauty can be seen as part of an ascetic matrix of faith-inducing virtues, rather than as part of a mainstream social matrix where female beauty is embedded in very different discourses and where men position themselves quite differently toward women. Far from adopting a position of power over this lovely woman, the ringleader comments on his own inadequacy to correspond as a donor to such a worthy recipient of alms. Yet he continues to seek ways to give, and his success in articulating his devotional respect is also part of the taming effect her body has on him.

Among Utpalavarṇā’s virtues is her confident courage in remaining overnight alone in the forest, and this is emphasized by a bhikṣu she encounters the next morning. She has returned alone to town in the early morning hours, and proceeds to the monastery at Jetavana Grove with a wish to offer the bolt of cloth she had received to the saṅgha. As she enters, she is stopped by Upananda, one of the infamous Gang of Six monks whose misbehavior gives rise to a good many of the bhikṣus’ precepts.

Upananda⁴⁵⁴ said, “If Upananda had to enter the dense forest even in the daytime, his hairs would stand on end. Sister, what is that you are carrying there?”

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⁴⁵⁴ nye dga’s —> nye dgas
She said, “A band of 500 thieves came there and having become inspired with faith, they offered me this out of faith.”

“Sister, you are an object of faith even for bands of thieves. But if it had been Upananda that they had seen, they would have beaten me with many lashes and taken me to carry their baggage.”

The naughty Bhikṣu Upananda is angling for the bolt of cloth she is carrying, but his praise rings true nonetheless. His envisioning of his own body in such a situation being treated as an object of abuse and vulnerable for the taking, underscores just how remarkable it is that in the view of such men Utpalavarṇā’s body was not coded as plunder.

Under the right conditions, the beautiful bodies of ethically excellent female agents can serve just as do those of similar men, to instill faith and prompt respectful admiration in those who see them. However, among the conditions that came together in the case of Utpalavarnā was an initial stripping of sexual identification, with those who perceived her mistaking her for a bhikṣu. Her shaved head and robes may have removed the gender-identifying markers, but her sitting style supplied the information needed to feminize her body for them. Nevertheless, Upananda’s remarks remind us that though his body is male, it would not have produced the same effect as Utpalavarnā’s. Whether a beautiful body is male or female, in order for the sighting of that body to awaken goodness in others, that appearance must be linked to inner ethical excellence. This narrative makes clear: Women are perfectly capable of

455 That is, they would have abducted him. Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Cha 98a4-5. nye dgas smras pa, nye dga’ ni nyin mo nyid nags mun pa can du zhus na yang spu daq aven du ’greng bar ’gyur ro/ sring mo khyer ba ’di ci yin/ dos smras pa/ chom rku na lnga brag yin sam der mchis nas de dag dad par gyur pas bdag la dad pa’i dbang du byis pa stsal to/ sring mo khyod ni chom rku na srya’ dad par bya ba yin gyi/ gal te nye dga’ de dag gis mthong du zin na lcag rgod mang pos brdabs te khur tsa bar khrid par ’gyur ro.
embodying faith-producing beauty, even if their bodies cannot always be read as such by those who perceive them.

One other female body is made an object of worship in the MSV, that of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, the aunt who raised Buddha, and whom we have already met as she intervened with the king to arrange for women to attend public teachings from Buddha. In this complex narrative, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī at the age of 120 opts to bring her own life to an end and pass into parinirvāṇa, much as we saw the group of pratyekabuddhas deciding as well. She requests and receives permission from Buddha to do so. For seven days, she offers one last round of teachings to the other nuns and to the female and male lay public, and then sits down alongside the 500 bhikṣuṇīs who have been her companions since she went forth. She sends forth light rays and other physical displays of her powers, as she passes through the levels of meditative absorption until she enters parinirvāṇa, as her death is described. Her passing is palpably marked by a great earthquake, by the falling of meteors and other indications that an exceptional event has taken place. This even is perceived by all the bhikṣus wherever they sat meditating:

When they saw that Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and her retinue of 500 had passed into parinirvāṇa, they thought, “When the Buddha’s aunt passes into parinirvāṇa, one should make an effort to perform one’s duties in worshipping her body, so I shall go.” With this thought, carrying fragrant wood, they went to the residence of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī. The Lord too proceeded to the residence of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī together with the great śrāvaka disciples
such as Kauṇḍinya, Mahākāśyapa, Vāśpa, Mahānāman, Aniruddha, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana and the great bhikṣu saṅgha too.\(^{456}\)

King Prasenajit comes with a lavish offering of 500 gem-encrusted biers for the cremation of all the nuns. His queens, princes and ministers also come to offer respect, as do Viśākhā, Anāthapiṇḍada and multitudes of other female and male lay followers.

Then Venerables Nanda, Aniruddha, Ānanda and Rāhula hoisted the bier of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī. The Lord too also took hold of it with his right hand. The rest of the bhikṣus hoisted the biers of the remaining bhikṣuṇīs. Then they carried it paying great honors, and placed the biers in an isolated open space. Then the Lord removed the upper robes of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and the 500 bhikṣuṇīs and [Tha 113b] said to the bhikṣus. “Bhikṣus, behold. Even when\(^{457}\) they are 120 years old, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and the 500 bhikṣuṇīs have no wrinkles or grey hair, like girls of sixteen years.”\(^{458}\)

The story itself is set in Kapilavastu, where Buddha was born and raised by Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī. In these final moments with Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, Buddha acknowledges his filial bond and mortuary obligations to her, as he extends his right hand to

\(^{456}\) Not extant in Sanskrit. Derge Tha 113a1-3. ji tsam na skye rgu ’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mî ’khor lnga brgya dang bcas pa yongs su mya ngan las ’das par mthong nas/ de dag ’di snyam du sems te/ sangs rgyas kyi sru yongs su mya ngan las ’das na/ de’i lus la mchod pa lhag par bya ba la brtson par byas ’dong ngo snyam nas/ de dag shing dri zhim po dag khyer nas skye rgu ’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mî ’dbyar khang du dong nga/ bcom ldan ’das kyang nyan thos chen po kun shes kau N-Di nya dang/ ’od srung chen po dang/ rlangs pa dang/ ming chen dang/ ma ’gag pa dang/ shA ri’i bu dang/ maud ’gal gi yi bu la sogs pa dang/ gshen yang dge spong gi dge ’dan chen po dag dang thabs cig tu skye rgu ’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mî ’dbyar khang du gshegs so.

\(^{457}\) Or possibly ‘if’. (Tibetan: na)

\(^{458}\) Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Tha 113a6-113b1. de nas tshe dang ldan pa dga’ bo dang/ ma ’gag pa dang/ kun dga’ bo dang/ sgra gcan zin gis skye rgu ’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mî khyogs bteg go/ bcom ldan ’das kyis kyang phyag g.yas pas bzun nga/ dge spong lhag ma rnams kyis kyang dge slong ma lhag ma rnams kyis khyogs bteg go/ de nas mchod pa chen po byas te khyer nas sa phyogs bar skabs dben par khyogs rnams bzha’ go/ de nas bcom ldan ’das kyis skye rgu ’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mî dang/ dge slong ma lnga brgya po dag gi las bla gos phud nas dge slong [Derge Tha 113b] rnams la bka’ stsal pa/ dge slong dag/ skye rgu ’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mî dang/ dge slong ma lnga brgya po ’di dag lo brgya nyo shu lon yang lus la gnyer ma dang/ skra dkar med cing bu mo lo bcu drug lon pa lta bu lta.
help sustain her on the journey to the cremation site. The final curious gesture of revealing Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s naked upper body to the monks foreshadows Ānanda’s removing Buddha’s robes after his passing so that a group of bhikṣuṇīs could see the one feature among the 32 that mark a great person that women had not been able to view—an act for which Ānanda will be harshly criticized later by Mahākāśyapa.\footnote{Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 308b2-4. This series of criticisms is explored in Findly 1992.} Since it is Buddha who uncovers the nuns publicly, there is no question that it be seen as inappropriate, but it bears asking just how we are to take this post-mortem display of the women’s bodies. The bodies are not presented as lacking sexual identity, but rather as likened to those of sixteen-year-old girls. Buddha will later explain that the karmic cause for their retaining their teenage beauty was created by a resolute aspiration made in a past life when they had been queens abandoned by the king when their beauty faded. As such, their deathbed beauty is not removed from the gendered and gendering discourses in which women wield their beauty as means to assure their desirability to men.

The vinaya includes enough prohibitions against amorous interaction with female corpses that we know death does not necessarily neutralize the sexual allure of female beauty, as Wilson notes in the very title of her work, *Charming Cadavers*.\footnote{Wilson 1996.} Because Buddha displays the bodies of all the women and not only Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s, it is apparently not simply her relation to him as mother that puts these bodies beyond ordinary categories of desire, making it safe to display them publicly in this way. The specification that she is 120 years old indicates that it is not simply their beauty that is on display, but rather the fact that their bodies
retained their nubile teenage form until an age when decrepitude is the norm. In his own old age, Buddha will comment that at 80 years old, the aging process had left him with “a body that is old and decrepit,” nearly falling apart, “like an old cart.” These passages offer us a study in contrasts between the deaths of Buddha and Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī. Buddha dies wracked by a painful gastric illness, in the middle of nowhere, unlike the passing of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, not brought on by illness, marked by great miracles and with her cremation attended by the eminent members of the fourfold Buddhist community.

In their voluntary passing into parinirvāṇa, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and the bhikṣuṇīs display a complete control over their own physical processes that contrasts starkly with the portrayal of the deaths of Buddha’s major male disciples due to illness and violent assaults. Thus we had perhaps best read Buddha’s display of the smooth and youthful bodies of these women as not primarily a display of female beauty, but rather a display of the defiance of the ordinary physical aging process.

All the stories of beautiful bodies we have examined thus far are the bodies of enlightened beings—Buddha, pratyekabuddhas and arhats. Physical beauty is, of course, identified in the narratives as a quality that ordinary women can also possess. The attractive power of that beauty is also recognized, but differently valued. The narrators of the MSV may have been monks, but they nevertheless prove themselves quite capable of producing detailed

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461 Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 246b7-247a1.

462 The town where Buddha lays down for his final rest is so remote that Ānanda asks Buddha why, with all the great cities in the land, he must pass away in the back of beyond. Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 264b5-6.

463 Mahāmaudgalyāyana is violently beaten and dies of his wounds, and at the same time Śāriputra falls gravely ill and returns to his native home to die. Tibetan at Derge Tha 238a3-240b3.
and highly appreciative descriptions of the beauty of female bodies, as we see from this story recounted by Buddha of one of his own past lives as Prince Sudhana.

Prince Sudhana saw the kinnara Manoharā, shapely, attractive, charming, endowed with a supreme richness of complexion, possessing all good qualities, ornamented by the 18 feminine features, propitious for the country, whose breasts were like golden jars or turtles, full, swelling upwards, firm, touching each other, fine, well-developed and jiggling, whose eyes were dark blue with red streaks, large and wide like new lotuses, with a lovely brow, with a long, high nose, with a lower lip like a precious coral jewel in the shape of a bimba fruit, with fairly firm and full cheeks, an extremely pleasing and distinguishing beauty mark on her cheek, evenly shaped joined eyebrows, beautiful like a completely full spotless moon such that the [day] lotuses blossom, long arms, three deep folds on her concave waist, her upper body leaning forward with the burden of her breasts, her beautiful buttocks shaped like a chariot wheel, hands like the inside of a plantain tree, of trunk-thick thighs that taper from the top, well-shaped and touching each other, with her veins well-concealed and well-placed beautifying all her limbs, with a collection of crest jewels, the palms of her hands reddish, her gait glimmering with the

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464 Though kinnaras are a sort of celestial being and thus not fully human, the narrators are describing her in terms readily recognizable from Sanskrit kāvya as features of beautiful women’s bodies, explicitly stating that she has the 18 characteristics of a woman, and thus her body is obviously presented as fully female.

465 prāśādika

466 janapadakalyāṇīṃ. Tibetan takes this as having a comparative sense: yul gyi mi bas bzang ba. More auspicious than the people of the land.

467 Tibetan omits this.

468 āḍṛḍha; Tibetan has ma rnyong - not stretched. I take the ā- prefix in the sense of slightly, fairly, quite.

469 aravinda, or Nelumbium Speciosum or Nymphaea Nelumbo, is a lotus that presumably should not blossom at night, but in the day.

470 Chariot wheels are big and round.

471 That is, delicate, white and smooth. However plantain trees are more commonly used to describe the shape of thighs because of the way they taper.

472 For karabhora.
sounds of delight\textsuperscript{473} made by her anklets, bracelets, necklace and pearl strands, [Kha 209b] with long, fine dark hair, just like Śacī\textsuperscript{474} when her waist ornament has slipped off, her feet enveloped in anklets and her stomach flat. Having seen her, her necklaces entangled and her complexion stunning like molten Jāmbū\textsuperscript{475} gold, the prince fell at once, bound firmly [GM.i.137] by the snare of passion.\textsuperscript{476}

In this love story, the prince and the kinnara live happily ever after, but the prince’s love for Manoharā—whose name itself means “captivating the mind”—distracts him to the point that he is incapable of governing the kingdom. As this passage indicates, female beauty is rendered problematic by its effect on men, primarily in arousing their desire. Suffice it to say that the trope of the dangerously bewitching female that has been well explored in other literature by Liz Wilson is known to the narrators of the MSV as well. In the narratives where the beautiful male bodies of enlightened beings produces faith in others, the inspired viewers are both men and women, in about equal numbers. Thus women can be moved by the beauty of members of the opposite sex without that experience leading to lust. (Note that here and

\textsuperscript{473} That is, their delight in being worn by her.

\textsuperscript{474} Śacī is the spectacularly beautiful wife of Indra, king of the gods.

\textsuperscript{475} That is, gold from the jāmbū river, prized for its fine color.

\textsuperscript{476} Bhaiṣajyavastu. GM.i.136-137. \textit{adrākṣit sudhano rājakumārīṃ manoharaḥ kinnarīṃ abhirūpāṃ darśanīyāṃ prāśādikāṃ paramayā varṇapuṣkalatayā sanmanvāgatāṃ sarvaśanamadudītāṃ aṣṭāsābahīḥ strilakṣanañā samalankṛtāṃ janapadakalyāṇīṃ kāñcanakalāsaḥkārāmapiṇṇatokathāninasamhatujaya-ārjavragalamānunstanīṃ abhinilarktanāṃ/sukavirūṣṭayā-navakamalasadṛśanayanāṃ subhravum ayatataṅgaṇāśāṃ vīdramanīnaratubimbahalasamsthānasadṛśadharoṣṭhitām ādrākapuriṇā-gāṇḍapārśvām atyartharāviveśaṇakarapatriīlakaṃ anupürvaracitasamhatabhṛvum arāvindāvāvikacasadṛśaparīṭaparimālalāśavipusāṃ pralambabāhum gambhīrātrivālīkasannatamadhyāṃ stana- bhārāvanāṃ/samānpūrvarādham rathāṅgasamsthitajaghanāṃ kādaṅgarbhasadrśakarāṃ pūrvarvuvartitasamnāṇhatu-saṁjñākarabhorum sunītadhārasrīcasasamhatasamhatarādharum samhita-manīcudām ārakramarātāṃ praharṣanāpūrabalayāhārārādhārārīgogasapavitNatagatiṃ āyataniṣāsākārāṃ prakāśanāmahābhūtadānacārurvṛnāṃ dr Śrīvā Kumāraḥ sahasā papāta baddho dr śṛdhāṃ [GM.i.137] rāgapāśena. Corresponding Tibetan text at Derge Kha 209a3-209b1.
throughout the MSV sexuality is presumed to be heterosexuality.)\(^{477}\) By contrast men seem unable to react similarly to the sight of the beautiful bodies of the enlightened women in the MSV, of whom there are many, and quite a few whose beauty is also noted. It is important to note that the assumption we see here of greater male desire—or at least lesser ability to control that desire—is in direct contradiction to a widespread gendering across Sanskrit texts, in which women are seen to have greater sexual desires than men. The narrators of the MSV also repeat this Sanskrit truism,\(^{478}\) but these narratives of beauty and desire are clearly telling us a different story, and constructing gender differently.

There is a more troubling implication here, for the capacity of beautiful female bodies to inspire faith is not simply obviated by the danger of awakening desire in their viewers. Ethically excellent women are shown in many narratives influencing, guiding inspiring and teaching other women. They therefore have considerable scope to be viewed by other women for whom their beautiful bodies presumably does not awaken lust and thus could awaken faith. But this does not happen. It would appear that the beauty of female bodies spills out from the context of male viewership, to be overwhelmingly read as sexual, whereas male beauty is not necessarily so. In short, the viewer of female bodies is covertly gendered as male, and a male

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\(^{477}\) If the anecdotal evidence everywhere else in the rest of the MSV were not enough, the Bhikṣuvibhaṅga makes it explicit in a commentarial gloss on the term “cohabit sexually” (nyal po byed pa). “A woman is a man’s object of sexual cohabitation (or sexual partner) and a man is a woman’s object of sexual cohabitation.” (Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Derge Ja 166b4) It is repeated in a slightly shortened form in the Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga at Derge Ta 228a2. Nevertheless, with its thickly detailed mapping of possible sexual incidents, the vinaya of course also depicts a number of same-sex encounters, between two women as well as between two men. See, for example, Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga at Derge Ta 278b, where two women are depicted sharing a bed “like a man and a woman.” But in the overwhelming majority of narratives, sexual interests are normatively expected to be hetero.

\(^{478}\) I discuss the MSV’s wielding of this truism in the next chapter, in the Forming a Community of Women section.
with little or no control over his own sexual desires. In this construction, beautiful female bodies are covertly coded as dangerous \textit{per se}.

However, the narratives of Utpalavarn\breve{\text{a}} and Mah\breve{a}praj\breve{a}pat\breve{\text{ı}} Gautam\breve{\text{i}} are able to envision female bodies as within view of men yet outside relations of desire. In the case of Utpalavarn\breve{\text{a}}, her beauty was paired with ascetic restraint. The awe-inspiring voluntary deaths of Mah\breve{\text{a}}praj\breve{a}pat\breve{\text{ı}} Gautam\breve{\text{i}} and the 500 bhikṣunīs situated their bodies firmly within their own disciplinary practice, while their beauty pointed to a defiance of the aging process itself. Under the right conditions, these narratives argue, the beauty of female bodies can be ethically valued. But in order for that to happen, their beauty must be reframed to point to something else besides sexual desirability. Within the \textit{MSV}, monasticism is seen as Buddhism’s best effort to offer women conditions for just such reframing of their physical embodiment.

**Female Frailty and Male Malice**

Explore the ways the \textit{MSV}’s narratives actively gender female as well as male bodies makes clear that a major issue with female bodies is their effect on men. Female bodies are subject to vastly different valuing in the \textit{MSV} than male bodies, precisely because of male desire. The beauty even of enlightened bodies cannot seem to break free of the centripetal pull of the gendering of female bodies as dangerous when beautiful. The beauty of female bodies is not only dangerous in tempting unsteady monks. In the world imagined by the \textit{MSV}, densely populated as it is with unscrupulous men, lechers and plain opportunists, women’s beauty can be dangerous to themselves, too. Although the problem with female bodies may lie in the
lustful minds of men, it is nevertheless a serious problem that women must face, whether they are enlightened or not, and whether they are monastic or lay. In this and the following section, we explore responses to women’s place in the male gaze, looking first at the ways that the figuring of female bodies as weak complicates those responses.

The possibility of rape stalks the narratives of the *MSV*, mobilizing constructions of female physical vulnerability in the face of male violence and desire. As is always the case, rape has implications that extend far beyond the physical trauma, and this is certainly so when the victim is a monastic. Sexual encounters are categorically prohibited for members of this celibate order. Thus compounding the physical and emotional trauma of rape for nuns are the difficult questions that the sexual contact raises about her monastic status.479

A narrative cycle depicting the tribulations of Kapilabhadrā takes us to the heart of these body problems. Kapilabhadrā is a beautiful woman who had been married to the famous monk Mahākāśyapa before he ordained. After Mahākāśyapa ordains in the Buddhist order, she takes up mendicant wandering on her own. They met fortuitously in the city of Rājagṛha, and he sees that she is flailing, and encourages her to ordain as a Buddhist nun. She does so, but is still troubled during almsround.

When she was going on almsrounds, crooks, lechers and connivers said, “One can take pleasure in such an attractive body even without possessing it.”480

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479 The legal status of monastic rape victims is a highly complex matter, and both merits and requires far more space than we have here to cover it adequately. It is complicated by an apparent difficulty on the part of the (male) vinaya interpreters to imagine that what they see as sexual encounter would be entirely free of pleasure for the woman involved.

480 *yongs su longs spyod*. This is almost certainly a euphemism for sexual enjoyment.
On some other occasion, in the morning Venerable Mahākāśyapa put on his lower robes, took up his Dharma robes and begging bowl and entered Rājagṛha on alms. Kapilabhadra too in the morning put on her lower robes, took up her Dharma robes and begging bowl and entered Rājagṛha on alms. Venerable Mahākāśyapa saw Kapilabhadra, and when he saw her, he asked, “Sister, are you fully happy in the Lord’s dispensation?”

She said, “I am fully happy in the Lord’s dispensation. I am not unhappy. However, like a fattened sheep, harm has come from this body. Wherever I go, men are facing me.”

Venerable Mahākāśyapa said, “Do not be troubled over almsround. Each day I will give you half of my own almsfood.”

Although the men in her path have not touched her, Kapilabhadra is aware of their ogling and made uneasy by it. She compares her own body to the body of sheep whose plumpness exposes it to the threat of slaughter, reminding us that women’s lives are affected not only by male actual violence but also by the specter of male violence of which their own beauty makes them tempting targets. Without specifying whether it is simply her beauty they find gratifying, or also her discomfort at being preyed upon, the narrators tell us that she is correct in feeling she is being visually consumed by men in a way that is on a par with, though

481 g.yar. Literally, men are facing me, in front of me, perhaps with the sense of ogling here.

482 Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 42b2-6. de bsod snyoms kyi phyir zhugs pa na/ g.yar can dang/ phyon ma dang/ zol pa dag/ gzugs 'di lha bur sting pa 'di yongs su longs spyod pa med par dga' bar byed do zhes kha zer ro/ de nas dus ghlan zhih na/ 'tshe dang ldan pa 'od srung chen po snga dro sham thabs bgyos chos gos dang/ lhung bzed thugs te rgyal po'i khab tu bsod snyoms kyi phyir zhugs so/ ser skya'i bu mo bzang mo yang snga dro sham thabs bgyos chos gos dang lhung bzed thugs te rgyal po'i khab tu bsod snyoms kyi phyir zhugs pa dang/ 'tshe dang ldan pa 'od srung chen pos ser skya'i bu mo bzang mo mthong nge/ mthong nas kyang 'di skad ces smras so/ sring mo ci khyod bcom ldan 'das kyi bstan pa la mgon par dga' am/ des smras pa/ bdag caug bcom ldan 'das kyi bstan pa la mgon par dga' ste mgon par mi dga' ba ma mchis so/ 'on kyang bdag ni lug tshon po dang 'dra bar gzugs 'dis gnod pa byung ste/ gang dang gang du mchi ba de dang de nas skye bo dag bdag la g.yar mchis'o/ 'tshe dang ldan pa 'od srung chen pos smras pa/ bsod snyoms kyi phyir nyan mongs par ma byed cig/ ngas khyod la nyi ma re re zhih rang gi bsod snyoms las phyed phyed sbyin no.
short of, actual sexual appropriation by the viewers. Her awareness of being “faced” by these men means her appearance as an object in their gaze is present to her wherever she moves through the social space of Rājagṛha. She is not able to simply inhabit her body as her own, but is troubled by having to contend with the visual appropriation of it—the not quite possessing of it—as a thing in the male gaze.

Mahākāśyapa’s response reflects just how difficult it is for women to transform the gendering gaze of male predators. Master meditator though he is, he certainly could have chosen to counsel her in ways to reconceptualize her relation to her own body, or offer her instruction in meditations that use the different Buddhist discourses around bodies to deconstruct her experience of its thinghood in others’ eyes. Instead, he physically intervenes to protect her from having to face the leering men by offering to share his food with her. We may recall that Mahākāśyapa appears elsewhere in the MSV as a strong opponent of women’s ordination, yet in this narrative, he does not discount her experiences as a nun, nor the real threat facing her. Yet in the process of caring for her in this way, Mahākāśyapa is adopting the gendered role that might be expected of him as her male guardian, which as her ex-husband he of course formerly was. His caretaking of her in providing her with her food clearly evokes their former marital ties, a fact that is not lost on the bhikṣus, some of whom comment:

“One hears that when this Mahākāśyapa was a householder, he stayed in the same house with this Bhadrā for 12 years, but not even once did he feel any longing, [Ta 43a] yet now he is giving her half of his almsfood.”

483 The narrator describes this as criticism (’phye ba). Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 42b7-43a1. ’od srung chen po ’di khyim par gyur pa na bzang mo ’di dang lhan cig khyim gcig na lo bcu gnyis ‘du kyung lan ’ga’ yang kun tu chuas pai’ [Ta 43a] sms kyang ma bskyed do zhes thos na da ltar ni de la bsod snyoms sbyin par byed do zhes ’phya bar gyur to.
Mahākāśyapa gives Kapilabhadrā (also known as Bhadrā) instruction, effectively becoming her meditation teacher, and she manages to attain arhatship. After he gets wind of the monks’ criticism of his manner of caring for Kapilabhadrā as his disciple, he tells her he has “performed all the functions [for her] that are to be performed by a virtuous friend,” and that she must now fend for herself because, as he puts it, her practice is now “her own.” To that end, Mahākāśyapa urges her to return to her hometown to benefit people there. However, in the meantime, King Ajātaśatru has been plunged into inconsolable grief after having caused his own father’s death. The ministers arrange the most extravagant forms of entertainment possible to cheer the king, bringing in thousands of dancers, actors, singers, acrobats, and musicians.

Yet still they could not dispel the grief of King Ajātaśatru. Then at some later point, Kapilabhadrā put on her lower robes, took up her Dharma robes and begging bowl [Ta 63b] and with her completely beautiful comportment, entered Rājagrha on alms. A wicked-minded minister saw Kapilabhadrā, lovely in form, pleasant to look at, beautiful, and with a body more [golden] in color than gold. And when he saw her, he thought, “This/She will remove the king’s grief.” With that thought, the minister seized Kapilabhadrā. He had her bathed with baths worthy of the king, and had her supremely adorned with perfumes, garlands of flowers, clothes and jewelry worthy of the king, and gave her to King Ajātaśatru. Then the previous karma that was created and accumulated by Kapilabhadrā absolutely had to occur. For instance, as the shadow of a mountain or a mountain peak is cast and falls upon the earth, in this same way the previous actions that were done and accumulated absolutely had to happen to

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484 Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan at Derge Ta 63a2-3.
485 shing 'dzegs mkhan. They are described as running and leaping. No Sanskrit equivalent given by Lokesh Chandra.
486 kun tu mdzes.
Kapilabhadrā. It was certain that she would experience them. Since they were streaming forward like a flood, at the moment when King Ajātaśatru saw Kapilabhadrā, he became passionate, and proceeded to experience bliss with her.

After being released by the husband to whom she had been gifted as a bride, she appears in the streets as a defenseless woman to the malicious minister, a pretty toy to be seized, polished up and presented to amuse the king. Kapilabhadrā appears like a pure object in this passage, not only in the hands of the minister, but in the order of the narrative as well, as it omits entirely her response to the situation. Yet the narrators tell us that with her own actions of the past, she herself had set into motion the unstoppable force that was propelling her forward into this situation. In this context, their comments cut like the double-edged sword that karmic causality constitutes. On the one hand, the reminder of karma intensifies her narrative positioning as helpless to change the course of what is now happening to her. On the other, it insists that she ultimately has no one else to blame. The latter move may erode some of the force of the apparent agency of the minister and king, but it does not place that agency back into her hands in the present, as we see as the story continues:

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487 Bhikṣunīvibhanga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 43a7-43b5. de ltar byas kyang rgyal po ma skyes dgra’i mya ngan bsang bar ma nus so/ de nas dus gzhon zhig nas ser skyai’i bu mo bzung mo snge dro sham thabs bgyos/ chos gos dang bzung bzed thugs [Ta 43b] te spyod lam kun tu mdzes pas rgyal po i khub tu bsd nshoms la zhiugs so/ blon po ngan sms can zhig gis ser skyai’i bu mo bzung mo gzung bsang ba/ lta na sdu pa/ mdzes pa/ lus gser gi kha dog bas kyang thag par mthong ngs/ mthong nas kyang de ’di snyam du sms te/ ’di rgyal po mya ngan sel bar byed do/ snyam du bsams nas/ blon po de ser skyai’i bu mo bzung mo bzung ste/ rgyal po la ‘os pa’i khrus rnams kyis khrus byas nas rgyal po la ‘os pa’i sdo dang/ me tog phreng ba dang/ gos dang/ rgyan gyi khyad par rnams kyis brgyan nas rgyal po ma skyes dgra la phul lo/ de nas ser skyai’i bu mo bzung mas sngon las rnams byas shing bsags pa gdon mi za bar ‘byung ba myong bar ‘gyur bar nges pa/ ’od pa bzhin du rnam par gnas te/ dper na ri dag gam/ ri’i rsi mo dag gis grib ma sa la babs shing mngon par ‘bab pa de bzhin du ser skyai’i bu mo bzung mo la yang sngon las rnams byas shing bsags pa gdon mi za bar ‘byung ba/ myong bar ‘gyur ba nges pa/ ’od pa bzhin du rnam par gnas pa yin pas re zhig na rgyal po ma skyes dgars ser skyai’i bu mo bzung mo mthong ma thag tu chags nas de dang lhan cig dga’ ba nyams su myong bar brtsams so.
Then on that very poṣadha of the 15th, when they were questioning, Kapilabhadra did not appear among the assembly. Then Mahāprajāpatī reflected and saw that Kapilabhadra had encountered trouble, and was in a painful situation. Knowing that she had encountered trouble, was in a painful situation and was uncomfortable, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī said to Utpalavarna, “Sister, direct your attention to Kapilabhadra.”

Then during that very poṣadha of the 15th, Utpalavarna went to the house of Ajātaśatru by miraculous means (Tibetan: rdzu ’phrul; Sanskrit: rddhi). Then Utpalavarna entered through an opening in a skylight, and said to Kapilabhadra, “Sister, [Ta 44a] since you have broken, abandoned, eliminated and thoroughly cast off the afflictions of the three realms to which you were habituated since beginning-less time, why don’t you actualize the corpse-like miraculous display (Tibetan: rdzu ’phrul; Sanskrit: rddhi) that is shared with all the non-Buddhists?”

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488 The biweekly monastic gathering for confession.
489 Or unhappy, mi bde bar ayur ba, an odd expression indeed to use of an arhat.
490 That is, she has attained arhatship.
491 ro dang ’dra bar. This phrase is puzzling. I have been unable to find a description of a form of miraculous display or rddhi described in this way or named thus. But the phrase ro dang ’dra ba does appear elsewhere in the MSV as a term of abuse. At Derge Nga 162b3, it appears paired with the phrase “spit drinker” that Buddha uses of Devadatta in the incident discussed by Lamotte 1970b and at Norman 1997: 158. The corresponding Sanskrit for this does survive, and for the Tibetan ro dang ’dra ba we have śava (Gn 1978b: 75). It is also used by King Bimbisāra addressing the non-Buddhist who had come to compete with Buddha precisely in their display of rddhi (Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 41a7). I am tempted to speculate that it may be a term of abuse rooted in an image of their bodies’ remaining immobile while they emanate different miraculous displays. Were it being used here to modify the non-Buddhists, one would expect a genitive particle (ro dang ’dra ba’i). The Peking edition confirms the Derge reading of this passage, at ‘Dul ba The 43a1-2. The only extant Indian commentary on this volume, the Āryasārvāstivādānālihikṣu vibhaṅga-vṛtti retells this story and even adds a pith explanation of how Utpalavarna had taught her to concentrate to display rddhi, but omits the phrase ro dang ’dra altogether (Derge bstan ’gyur ’dul ba Tsu 33b2-3. However, Buston in the retelling of this story in his dge slong ma’i gleng ’bum clearly takes the corpse-like to be a type of rddhi, calling it ro dang ’dra ba’i rdzu ’phrul, and omitting any reference to its being shared with non-Buddhists altogether, (Buston 2000a: ’a 2).
492 mu stegs (Sanskrit: tīrthika).
She asked this, and Kapilabhadrā replied to Utpalavarna, “Sister, I do not know the path of miraculous displays.”

Bhikṣunī Utpalavarna then gives Kapilabhadrā meditation instructions that evidently Mahākāśyapa had not given her, despite his claim to have done all for her that a teacher is to do. Kapilabhadrā masters the skill of miracles at once, and flies out the skylight of the chamber where she was being kept. In the end, when the king becomes aware that she is a bhikṣunī and arhatinī, after seeing Kapilabhadrā fly in the air, he faints, laments and apologizes. He falls at her feet, she forgives him and becomes his Dharma teacher.

Ironically, Utpalavarna is suggesting that the way out of the situation for Kapilabhadrā would have been to make her own body appear lifeless, projecting for the king’s view the appearance of a corpse. In one sense, Utpalavarna is arguing that the solution would be to embrace and accentuate the status of unanimated body that the situation was forcing on her. We have seen that Utpalavarna’s statue-like immobility had helped her not only survive her encounter with the crooks in the forest, but arise in their field of perception as an inspiringly beautiful apparition, rather than as an object for consumption. But there is another way to read Utpalavarna’s proposal that Kapilabhadrā issue forth a magical corpse-like apparition. To conjure up for the view of the king an image of her body as cadaverous is to force upon the

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493 Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga. Derge Ta 43b5-44a2. de nas gso sbyong bco lnga pa de nyid la dris na ser skyā’i bu mo bzang mo tshogs kyi nang na mi snang do/ de nas skyē rgu’i bdag mo chen mo bsams na/ re zhig na ser skyā’i bu mo skogs su chud/ nyam nga bar gyur pa mthong ngo/ skogs su chud pa dang/ nyam nga ba dang/ mi bde bar gyur par rig nas/ skyē rgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mls ut-pa la’i mdo g la smras pa/ phu nu mo ser skyā’i bu mo bzang mo la soms shig/ de nas ut-pa la’i mdo g gso sbyong bco lnga pa de nyid la rdzu ‘phrul gyas ma skyēs dygra’i khyim ga la ba der song ngo/ de nas ut-pa la’i mdo g skar khung gi bu ga nas zhus nas ser skyā’i bu mo bzang mo la ‘di skad ces smras so/ phu nu mo khyod kyi thog ma med pa’i [Ta 44a] dus nas goms pa kham s gsum pa’i nyon mongs pa rnam dral/ spangs/ bsal/ yongs su bzang na ci’i phyir khyod kyi rdzu ‘phrul ro dang ‘dra bu ma stegs pa thams cad dang thun mong pa ‘di mngon du ma byas/ de skad ces smras pa dang/ ser skyā’i bu mo bzang mo ut-pa la’i mdo g la ‘di skad ces smras so/ phu nu mo rdzu ‘phrul gyi lam mi shes so.

494 That is, if the reading of corpse-like to modify the display is correct here. See the caveat stated above in note to translation.
king the sort of experience of impurity of the female body sought by monks seeking to keep their own desires in check, through aśubha-bhāvanā meditations. These meditations, in which disintegrating corpses or other repulsive images of bodily foulness are used, are important tools in the ascetic discourses that construct bodies as unattractive and unworthy objects of desire. As Liz Wilson has noted, it is the desire-producing female body that is generally made the topic of such meditations. Here, though, Utpalavarnā is suggesting it be used to induce aversion in the king as a counter to the desire for her body that was keeping her captive. Utpalavarnā herself will later make a similar move when she herself is pursued by an unscrupulous man, in a story we will take up shortly. The desperate move to force this anti-desire meditative technique on another as a defensive measure to protect oneself from their desires is a sign of just how profoundly the constructions of women’s bodies are permeated by the presence of male desire for those bodies.

In the aftermath of the incident, other nuns step in to intervene, noting her absence and send out an emissary to help her escape the situation. The narrative also portrays the bhikṣuṇīs caring for one another, in a complex social world where other forces too need to be heeded, including the abuses of authoritarian royal power. In their efforts to care for Kapilabhadrā, the bhikṣuṇīs’ emissary literally swoops in from the sky and rescues her by teaching her the skills she needed to protect herself. The interventions of other nuns allows Kapilabhadrā to escape through the air herself, and later invert completely the relationship the king and his minister had foisted on her, making the king her deeply apologetic disciple. As this story tells it, women do have resources in the face of desirous and unscrupulous male viewers. Yet mainstream society’s discourses of desire overwhelming gender women as
instruments of men’s pleasure, and the presence of unchecked male violence against women in that society, together continue to exert formidable effects on monastic women as well as lay. Even women at exceptional levels of spiritual attainment are bound to run physical risks when they go forth alone into the public domain on almsround, this narrative suggests, and all the more so if her body is beautiful.

A separate incident involving Bhikṣunī Utpalavarṇā—to which we shall return for a fuller exploration below—yields one of the MSV’s most explicit statements of this construction of female bodies as physically vulnerable to predatory male desire. While she is staying alone in another dense forest to meditate during the daytime, a man seeks her out hoping for a sexual encounter. After she deflects his advance, he is angered and strikes her in the head. When the situation is reported to Buddha, he responds:

The Lord said, “Bhikṣus, women are less strong. Crooks, lechers, deceivers and the like will desire them. Thus, from this day forward, bhikṣunīs may not live in isolated places.”

This incident becomes the charter story that requires nuns to reside in settled places, a rule that significantly shapes the form of monastic life open to them. Land in settled places is more valuable, more likely to be controlled by the king or other political authorities, and thus harder to come by. Thus far, we know of only one named nuns’ residence, the King’s Park in

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495 *bud med ni mthu stobs chung ba.*

496 *g.yon can dang/ 'phyon ma dang/ zol pa la sogs pas 'dod par bya ba yin.*

497 *Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga.* Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 74b5-6. *bud med ni mthu stobs chung ba/ g.yon can dang/ 'phyon ma dang/ zol pa la sogs pas 'dod par bya ba yin pas de'i phyir deng phyin chad dge slong mas dgon par gnas par mi bya’o.*

498 For a detailed tracking of one of the minor implications of this rule—the prohibition on tossing waste over the nunnery’s wall—see Schopen 2008.
Śrāvastī, to which Dharmadattā had sought permission to relocate from her parents’ home. The very name of this residence reminds us that the prohibition on staying outside town would make nuns more beholden to king’s favors than need otherwise be the case. In a later narrative, once Dharmadattā has begun to gather large numbers of bhikṣunīs as her disciples, she is said to be living alongside Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, still in Śrāvastī and possibly (though not certainly) in the same King’s Park nunnery. The nunnery is described as too cramped, such that despite their exertions, the nuns do not flourish in their practice, “like utpala lotuses once they have been deprived of water.” This serves as a pointed reminder that the containment of nuns within towns can also have the effect of limiting the potential size of their communities. When Dharmadattā determines that something must be done about the overcrowding, she asks for the help of a lay sponsor, Viśākhā, a women whose story is also told in the MSV. Viśākhā is willing to fund the construction, but adds that tells Dharmadattā must first (and separately) procure rights to land from the king. Dharmadattā then goes to the queen and asks her to intercede with the king in a petition for land rights. This story ends well, for Dharmadattā is held in exceptionally high esteem, as is the lay sponsor Viśākhā, but it is clear that limiting the bhikṣunīs’ order to towns will mean that nuns will tend to be particularly dependent on royal or other high-end urban-based sponsorship.

In an acknowledgement of the danger women are exposed to in a world that sees their bodies as weak prey, Buddha’s response to care for the nuns in this social world takes the form of retracting them from more vulnerable position in solitary places. The MSV narratives themselves offer testimony that the perception of a need to protect women who are “less

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499 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Cha 188b5. chu med pa nas ut-pa la bzhin no.
strong” from the “crooks, lechers, deceivers and the like who will desire them” will have long-range, far-reaching consequences for monastic women.

It should be noted, however, that the MSV also imagines men as potential victims of rape, and articulates guidelines for interpreting the implications for the monk’s ordination status of being raped. But concerns about the potential rape of male monastics do not lead to rules preemptively preventing them from travelling alone, nor does it confine them to residing within town. In contrast to the handling of male rape, the anxieties about nuns’ safety that are refracted through the issue of rape seem to acknowledge tacitly that men’s rape of women is a violent enactment of male domination at least as much as it is about sexual desire.

It bears mention that not all the physical harm that the MSV imagines nuns exposed to from men has a sexual dimension. In one narrative, the malice a man directs at a bhikṣuṇī, here Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, is grounded in greed and competition for resources. A brahmin seeking alms has been turned away from a home, just as Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī approaches it with the same aim.

Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī also entered that home on almsround. That brahmin reflected, “When this baldie ascetic woman also enters, let’s see whether she doesn’t give her anything either, or if it is just to me [she doesn’t give to].”

With this thought, he waited a moment to watch on that occasion. Saying “The mother of the Buddha has come!” [the housewife] arose with great haste and set out a cushion. She went with great joy to fill her begging bowl with clean and first-rate food and snacks, and offered it to her. That brahmin became greedy

\[500 \text{dge sbyong ngo reg ma}\]
and intolerant. He approached and said, “Noble One, let me see what excellent things you have in your begging bowl.”

Being straightforward, she showed him. The brahmin spat in her begging bowl. Mahāprajāpati Gautamī said, “Son, why have you spoiled the alms? If you had asked, I would have given it to you.”

That brahmin lost his courage, and sat saying nothing. The bhikṣunīs repeated this incident to the bhikṣus, and the bhikṣus to the Lord. The Lord thought, “Other common men too will inflict violence on women, and produce a great deal of non-virtue, just as this ignorant brahmin man has done. That being the case, the bhikṣunīs ought to keep a cover on their begging bowls.”

Knowing this, he said, “Bhikṣus, other common men too will inflict violence on women, and produce a great deal of non-virtue, just as this ignorant brahmin man has done. That being the case, I permit bhikṣunīs [Da 180b] to keep a cover on their begging bowls.”

Buddha here explicitly links the abusive treatment by the brahmin to the fact that Mahāprajāpati Gautamī is a woman. Up to that point, there was nothing in the story

501 ‘tshe. Or, injure, harm, endanger.
502 bud med kyi rang gzhin - Although in native Tibetan this reads rather like a pronouncement about the nature of women, I take it to be a literal translation of sribhava, with the sense of “women” or “womankind.”
503 Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 180a2-180b1. skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mi yang khyim der bsod snyoms kyi phyir zhugs so/ bram ze des bsams pa/ dge sbyong mgo reg ma ‘di yang zhus na re zhiq ‘di la yang mi ster ram/ bdag gcig pu la yin blta bar bya’o snyam ste/ de de la skabs tshol zhing yud tsam zhiq de na sdod do/ des sangs rgyas kyi yum gshegs so zhes rings pa rings par langs nas stan brin ste rab tu dga’ nas song ste gtsang zhing bsod pa’i bza’ ba dang bca’ bas lhung bzed bkang nas phul lo/ bram ze de ser sna dang mi bsod pa skyes nas song ste smras pa/ ‘phaqs ma des re zhiq lhung bzed du phun sum tshogs pa ci mchis blta’o/ de yang drang bas des nye bar bstan to/ bram zes lhung bzed der mchul ma blaqs so/ skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mis smras pa/ bu ci phyir khyod kyi  bsod snyoms ma rung bar bya/ gal te khyod kyi  gso’l ba tib par gyur na njas de bzhin du byin par gyur pa zhiq/ bram ze de spobs pa med de cang mi smra bar ‘dag pa de’i skabs dge slong ma rnams kyi  dge slong dag la bzas so/ dge slong dag gis bcom ldan ’das la’o/ bcom ldan ’das kyi dge slong pa/ bud med kyi rang bzhin la ni skyes pa phal pa gzhlan yang ‘tshe ste/ ji liar skyes bu bram ze gi  mug des kyang ‘di bzhin du bsod nams ma yin pa mang du bskeyed do/ de la bas na dge slong ma dag gis lhung bzed kha g.yogs bcan bar bya bar mkhyen nas gsungs pa/ dge slong dag bud med kyi rang bzhin la ni skyes pa phal pa gzhlan yang ‘tshe ste/ skyes bu bram ze gi  mug des kyang ‘di bzhin du bsod nams ma yin pa mang du bskeyed do/ de la bas na rjes su gnang ste/ dge slong ma dag gis lhung bzed kyi [Da 180b] kha g.yogs bcan bar bya’o.
demanding that we interpret it as a story about gender vulnerability. It is unclear to me how a cover for the begging bowl would have averted this incident, for Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī had voluntarily given the brahmin access to it. But the narrative gives Buddha the opportunity to take measures to shield his nuns, like the contents of their begging bowls, from the malice of men, in some concrete way. The pose we see struck here—not entirely unlike the role of lay women’s male guardian—is one that Buddha will come back with in the next chapter, when we explore Buddha’s interventions to craft a balanced relationship between the male and female monastic orders.

However, before we conclude that the MSV is unambiguously gendering female bodies as weak and defenseless in the face of male malice, let us take two deftly drawn vignettes that argue otherwise. In one such story, the aggressor is Bhikṣuṇī Sthūlanandā, a female character whose creative transgressions singlehandedly prompt a vast number of the new rules for nuns. In the MSV’s narrative, she appears to have joined the monastic order as an opportunity to pursue an independent career. She is highly intelligent, with a similarly high sense of her own self-worth, and is extraordinarily ill-behaved. In this story, Sthūlanandā conceives a hankering after a handsome young incense seller. With their sanctioned contact with otherwise protected women, incense (or fragrance) sellers often seem to function in the MSV narratives much as did the milkman or the mailman for bored housewives in another social world. This particular incense seller has just married, and Sthūlanandā lets him know of her interest by inquiring coyly whether he is satisfied by his new wife. He becomes aware that the bhikṣuṇī has become attached to him, and comes to see her. She makes her excuses to the other nuns, and slips off to a solitary spot with him. When the time comes to actually break her vow of
celibacy\textsuperscript{504} at the last moment she has second thoughts. She tells the man to release her, and when he loosens his grip on her, thinking she just wanted to shift positions, she braces herself and kicks him once, cracking two of his ribs. He runs off coughing up blood.\textsuperscript{505} She returns to the bhikṣuṇīs’ residence, jubilant, calling out:

\begin{quote}
“I defeated the demon!\textsuperscript{506} I defeated the demon!”
\end{quote}

Then the bhikṣuṇīs heard her and asked, “Sister, did you attain the fruit of stream entry, or once returner or non-returner or the supreme fruit of arhatship? Of if not did you at least produce roots of virtue in the Buddha’s dispensation?”\textsuperscript{507}

The defeat of demons is a common Buddhist metaphor for winning the battle with one’s own desire, hatred and other mental afflictions (kleśas), and the nuns therefore quite sensibly assume Sthūlanandā is referring to her inner demons. She quickly disabuses them of this assumption, telling them it was nothing of the sort. When they ask just what demon is was that she defeated in that case, she tells them all that had transpired with the incense seller. The story makes its rounds until word gets back to Buddha, who makes a rule forbidding such conduct. But the incident does not end there. Some hundred pages later in a separate narrative, the encounter is evoked again by Sthūlanandā. In this episode, she returns after

\textsuperscript{504} Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 77b.

\textsuperscript{505} Literally, vomiting blood (khrag tu skyug) Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Derge Ta 78a3. Sanskrit not extant.

\textsuperscript{506} The word I translate here as demon, bdud is also used to translate the Sanskrit Māra.

\textsuperscript{507} Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 78a2-4 bdud bcom mo/bdud bcom mo zhes bso/ de nas dge slong ma de dag gis thos nas ’di skad ces smras so/ ci phu nu mo khyod kyis rgyun du zhugs pa’i ’bras bu mngon sum du byas sam/ lan cig phyir ’ong ba’i ’bras bu’am/ phyir mi ’ong ba’i ’bras bu’am/ ’bras bu’i mchog dgra bcom pa nyid mngon sum du byas/ chung ngu na gzhon dag sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa la dge ba’i rtsa ba bsheyed.
dark from a whole day spent giving Dharma teachings to local families. The bhikṣuṇīs ask her where she has been, and she tells them. They inquire:

“What bhikṣuṇī did you have with you as your attendant?”

She said, “I came alone.”

They said, “If someone parts you from your asceticism, what will you do?”

She said, “Didn’t you see me overpower that incense seller with one kick, breaking two ribs?”

Word of this situation spreads, and Buddha responds with a rule forbidding bhikṣuṇīs from spending the whole day outside the monastery alone. Presumably, personal histories of violent self-defense should not be counted on as a deterrent to would-be assailants.

Another story depicting female strength overpowering male has women’s violence deployed to protect another woman from another man’s unwelcome approaches. Here we find a famous rival of Buddha preying on his ex-wives in his absence.

Devadatta reflected, “I have done a great deal of injury to the ascetic Gautama, but I have been unable to kill him. Therefore let me go and steal his wives.” He went to Kapilavastu with that in mind. He sent a message to Yaśodharā, “The

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508 *rtul zhugs dang phral na. Phral* also has the sense of rejecting, discarding or eliminating, as well as separating from. This serves here as a euphemism either for rape. In the retelling of this narrative in his *dge slong ma’i gleng ’bum*, Bu ston repeats the same phrase (Bu ston 2000: ’a 12a6-7.)

509 *Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga*. Derge Ta 120a4-5. khyod kyi phyi bzhin ’brang ba’i dge slong ma su dang lhan cig son/ des smras pa/ kho mo gcig pu son to/ de dag gis smras pa/ gal te’ ga’ zhiq gis khyod brtal zhugs dang phral na khyed kyi’s ci byar yod/ des smras pa/ spos ’tshong gi khye’u gang yin pa rdog pa gcig bsun pas rtsi’ ma gnyis bcag pa khyed cag gis ma mthong ngam.

510 At this point, the Sanskrit and Tibetan both leave it unclear whether it is wife or wives to be stolen. Sanskrit: *dārāpamardam asya karomi*. Tibetan: *de’i chung ma dbrog par bya’o’/*. But in the discussion that follows, the Tibetan has the Śākyas assume he was aiming to steal wives, in the plural, while the Sanskrit uses the same indeterminate phrase—*dārāpamardam kṛ—as before.
ascetic Gautama went forth; I have come back for you. Let us enjoy relations with one another.”

She related\(^{511}\) this to Gopikā, [Gn.ii.260] who said, “Send him this message: ‘The Bodhisattva would approve if you and I join hands.\(^{512}\) If you would also approve, please come.’”

He shamelessly entered the harem. As he was coming up the stairs, He saw Gopikā. With a smile, he began to make āṇjali to her. She had the strength of an athlete.\(^{513}\) She squeezed his finger with her left hand, and blood came out. She tossed him into the Bodhisattva’s pleasure pond.\(^{514}\) As he fell he cried out. The Śākyas came running when they heard this.\(^{515}\)

Some of the Śākya men want to kill Devadatta, others point out that his descent into hell has already been predicted by Buddha, so they may as well let matters run their course, and in the end they let him go. In the absence of Buddha, who has abandoned her, Yaśodharā may seem vulnerable to the cunning advances of such male predators as Devadatta, even if she remains in the household of King Śuddhodana and thus technically under his protection. Devadatta evokes her precarious position as an abandoned wife in his letter, presenting himself as a better candidate for a husband. Living within the household headed by King

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\(^{511}\) Sanskrit: samākhyātam; Tibetan: bzlás pa.

\(^{512}\) Sanskrit has sahate; Tibetan is much stronger, suggesting he would delight in such a union: spro.

\(^{513}\) Sanskrit: mahānagnabalā; Tibetan has just tshan po che’i stobs can yin pa.

\(^{514}\) Sanskrit: krī/dunderdot apuṣkara

Śuddhodana, Yaśodharā and the many other women left behind by the Bodhisattva are ostensibly now under the king’s protection as their male guardian. The role of protective guardian takes on particular importance in just such situations when male intruders wish to penetrate the sanctity of the harem. Yet it is to her co-wife Gopikā that Yaśodharā turns in this moment of distress. Gopikā is one of the very few wives that the Bodhisattva singled out for himself, and is not simply one of the 20,000 women who devolved to him as part of the harem. She is technically a junior wife to Yaśodharā, but proves herself fully endowed with the wit and brute force to care for Yaśodharā and keep her safe from harm. Not only does she not shy from confrontation with Devadatta, she literally invites it. Yet even as it celebrates her athletic strength and situates her in the role of guardian that would usually be occupied by a man, this narrative acknowledges the constraints placed on her as a woman who in all likelihood will be expected to remain within the confines of the palace grounds, if not the harem itself. Gopikā works deftly within those limitations, entrapping Devadatta and luring him into her reach, where she can then exercise her physical prowess over him.

The image the narrators offer of the Śākyas coming running and wanting to kill Devadatta after Gopikā has already neutralized the threat and disposed of the intruder herself underscores nicely their practical irrelevance, even as they arrogate to themselves the role of judges. In the end, they step aside to let Devadatta’s karma take care of him in the long term now that Gopikā had singlehandedly averted the immediate threat. This narrative anticipates Yaśodharā’s future life as well, when she will leave the harem to join another community of

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516 The instant he had first seen Gopikā on her rooftop as he was passing her house in the street, the Bodhisattva brought his chariot to a sudden halt, and the two began communicating their mutual interest. *Sanghabhedavastu*. Sanskrit at Gn 1977: 64-5. Tibetan at Derge Ga 281a7ff.
women: the monastic community. In its portrayal here of the harem as a community of women who turn to one another for support and prove themselves equal to the task of caring for those who look to them for guidance and protection, the MSV offers a powerful pre-figuring of the bhikṣuṇī community.

That the MSV includes these representations of physically powerful female able to care for and protect themselves and one another from male predators suggests that the positioning of women in general as weak and vulnerable to male violence is understood to be liable to questioning. However questionable they may be, the bulk of the narratives we have seen in this section assume gender constructions that see men in positions of social power and physical strength over women that they are all too prone to abuse. Mainstream society’s discourses of desire and its representations of women as weak and vulnerable continue to make male desire a recurring problem for female bodies. However, skillful practitioners of the art of deflecting male desire may draw on ascetic discourses and conjure up corpse-like images of a female body as foul. Precisely because women’s bodies are situated within a number of divergent discourses about bodies, the possibility of constructing them differently is also continually present. The construction of monastic female embodiment will be the strongest play yet to shift from discourses that expose women to male domination to discourses that liberate.
Occupy the Gaze

[Āmrapāli] summoned painters residing in various countries and said to them, “Sirs, please paint on my walls whatever kings or ministers or wealthy men or chief businessmen or traders or leading merchants you have seen, exactly as they look.”

They painted them just as they had seen them. Then Āmrapāli adorned herself with her diverse jewelry and went to examine the work of the drawings. She asked, “Sirs, who is this?”

Mālasarvāstivāda Vinaya, Cīvaravastu

It is by now clear that the MSV’s narrators are acutely aware that female bodies can be taken as objects for visual consumption by lascivious males. They also at times portray women as themselves aware of this status, and note a range of ways in which women respond to that gaze. Although particular issues arise when the gaze on women is male and lustful, it is important to note that the vinaya insists that all Buddhist monastics, male and female, live intentionally in the gaze of others. Our inquiry in this section must first be situated within this broader framing of Buddhist monasticism, which engages seriously and directly with the social gaze directed at its subjects. Although the MSV clearly acknowledges the presence of a gendered and gendering male gaze on women, as we have seen, it also imagines all monastic subjects also existing in a gaze that is not particularly or necessarily gendered—a gaze that scrutinizes them first and foremost as representations of Buddha’s teachings. Male and female monastics alike are explicitly trained to use their appearance in the eyes of others for virtuous aims. Indeed, shame—an affective state that can arise when one imagines oneself to be viewed
by others—is valued and praised as the indication of successful monastic training,\textsuperscript{517} and is not
gendered as a purely feminine virtue.\textsuperscript{518}

Monastics are repeatedly urged to awaken or preserve the faith of lay observers of
them, by outwardly behaving in a way consonant with the internal pacification that is the
presumed aim of monastic training. This effort to keep up appearances is understood as
integral to the saṅgha’s role as guardians of Buddhadharma, and as responsible thereby for the
wellbeing of its lay followers. Many, many vinaya rules are explicitly formulated to avert
criticism by others, and to ensure that individuals uphold a certain image of how a member of
the Buddhist monastic community should look. It would be difficult to overstate the
importance of the concern to shape appearances in the vinaya, or how tightly this concern is
bound to the self-identity of monastics as caretakers (or potential caretakers) of others. In
general, to misbehave is one thing, but to be seen by the lay followers misbehaving is another
thing altogether. Such misbehavior constitutes a violation of the trust placed in the saṅgha by
its followers, as articulated through offerings of food, clothing and respect. Furthermore, and
crucially, any action that harms a lay follower’s faith in the Buddhist teachings is understood
to be harming that layperson in very serious ways. The MSV does not imagine itself
surrounded by other spiritual paths with sound ethics or valid teachers, and envisions a turn
away from Buddhist teachings as a turn away from right views and from the observance of

\textsuperscript{517} One of the ten benefits of monastic training mentioned often by Buddha in the MSV is that those who are
bashfully modest (ngo tsha shes pa) will live comfortably. For one listing of these benefits see Bhikṣunivibhanga at
Derge Ta 45b5-46a2.

\textsuperscript{518} That said, we should note that Yaśodharā is praised by Buddha after she ordains and attains arhatship as
foremost among the bhikṣunis who are endowed with bashful modesty or shame, or hrīmat; Tibetan: ‘dzem pa dang
ldan pa. The Tibetan shade over into timidity as well as self-restraint. Gn 1978b: 41. Tibetan found at Derge Nga
139a6-7.
basic ethics of non-harm, and thus a turn toward suffering. With this as the frame for their movements, Buddhist monastics are enjoined to lay claim to their place in the gaze of others as a means of caring for the viewers, and protecting them from suffering.

In this process, monastics are encouraged to see themselves as representatives of the teachings of Buddha and of the monastic community. They must actively embody the Dharma. In doing so, by no means do they function as pure objects, but rather as subjects in full possession of their own bodies, regulating and disciplining their physical movements with the idea of producing certain effects in others—most notably faith, or at least not criticism. This may seem similar in structure to the figuring of feminine gestures aimed at producing male desire, but differs significantly in several ways. First, if the sight of the monastic body is successful in producing its hoped-for effect on the viewer, there is a displacement of the faith away from the individual physical body whose movements produced it, onto the collective body of the saṅgha, and thence to Buddha and Dharma as well. Even if the viewer’s faith is directed at the faith-producing person as an individual, it is understood that monastics’ entitlement to veneration is itself rooted in their application of the Buddhist teachings. In this sense, the monastic body in the gaze of others is certainly not a thing, but closer to a symbol. Their seen body is a symbolic form that monastics actively cultivate, and in that cultivation

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519 I find it difficult to substantiate the argumentation in this section with scholarly references, for I am drawing here primarily on my own observations and experiences as a monastic subject undergoing this training. For one account of the performativity of Buddhist monastics, see Gombrich 1984. “In this view, heavily slanted toward the Sangha, sīla is the monk’s successful role performance. It makes it clear to society that he is being a good and proper monk….I must not be misunderstood to mean that any Buddhist ever thought of this sīla, this role performance, as a purely external matter. Certainly not. But there was an overwhelming demand for empirical evidence of a monk’s internal state, and in practice this demands seems to have been accepted, perhaps even unquestioningly, by the monks themselves” Gombrich 1984: 100. Collins (1997: 198-99) also notes monastics’ awareness of being under observation, and the striving for what he calls a “spotless performance,” echoing Gombrich.
give meaningful content to the form. That is to say, as monastics’ regulation of their body brings greater awareness and yields change in their mental attitudes, the body used as a symbolic form pointing to the efficacy of the Buddhist training becomes increasingly endowed with ethical content.

Second, the discursive practices at work here imagine the viewer’s place in relation to the monastic body they behold in the position of a respectful worshipper, manifested in the idealized form of placing their heads at the feet of the person they have been observing. Thus the successful execution of monastic movement in the gaze of others has as its outcome something very different from the possession of the seen body by the viewer, as would be the conclusion anticipated by the sexualized male gaze on feminine movements—remembering the MSV’s descriptions of sexual union with terms of “possessing” and “using” that we have seen. Instead, the aim of monastic movements is the taming of the viewer, and possibly a caretaking relationship with the person.

Finally, women’s gendered place in the male gaze differs from the monastics’ existence in the gaze of others, in that the latter is situated among a complex of what we earlier described as “technologies of the self,” in which monastic subjects are consciously fashioning themselves in relation to their own bodies. The monastic subject’s potentially caretaking relationship to those who observe her body is distinct from, though related to, her relationship to her own body as a site of ethical cultivation—ethical cultivation that has as its final aim her own liberation and enlightenment. Whether or not this technology can lead to that outcome is immaterial—though the MSV insists it can—for the mere engagement with her own body with that end in mind constitutes a drastically different relationship to the body than we have seen
in the depictions of lay women. Although we do indeed see anti-body ascetic discourses deployed in Buddhist monasticism, these are generally aimed at countering one aspect of embodied being—sexual desire—that interferes with the practice of embodiment that we have been discussing here. In important and pervasive ways, for monastics, living one’s embodied being correctly is integral to their ethical cultivation and their soteriological progress on the whole.

Nuns in the MSV anticipate and influence the gaze of others in this potentially liberating way, as part of their monastic training. However, as we shall see, the possibility remains that when they appear as objects in the gendered visual field of men, women’s bodies will deploy a range of other meanings and are liable to serve as a condition for the arising of other responses than those the monastic comportment is seeking to spark. In short, although Buddhist monastic practices available to women do make it possible for them to live their embodiment differently, male desire waits in ambush to re-objectify women who wander by, mendicant or otherwise. And in ways that will differ from males, female monastics must also contend with the less predatory gendering practices of the collective gaze of society more broadly.

Yet the MSV’s narratives repeatedly open the possibility of women engaging with even the most predatory gazes, or returning the gaze, differently, a possibility that the narrators of the MSV delight in exploring. Even when female bodies come to light as objects in the desirous male gaze, the MSV certainly does not see women as compelled thereby to experience themselves as pure objects. In Liz Wilson’s pioneering work on what the male gaze does to women in other Buddhist contexts, she writes, “to be the object of another’s gaze is to have a
diminished sense of one’s position as a subject.” In this chapter, we have effectively been seeking to apply Wilson’s major insights within the MSV’s narrative terrain, and here we find that they will require some revision. Thus far, we have explored narrative material that charts the placing of women in men’s gaze. In what follows, we will turn to some examples of women’s active responses to their position as objects in another’s gaze, and what we will find is that the MSV imagines women asserting very distinctive subject positions for themselves in the process. As it is portrayed in this text, women’s embodied subjectivity is brought into the monastic project of self-fashioning in terms of how they relate to their own bodies—and this is possible, even when in others’ eyes that body has the status of an object.

With this broader framing, we can turn back to our narrative world. We begin with two very different appropriations of the gaze by two lay women, Viśākhā and Āmrapālī, the former a young girl who will become a respected member of society, on occasion offering advice to the king (and a nunnery to the nuns), and the latter a courtesan who links herself to a different king. Viśākhā and Āmrapālī are both powerful women who become major supporters of the monastic order, but in the narratives of the MSV do not themselves ordain. In a sense, these two figures represent the peak of success in the two other major “careers” open to women in the MSV (besides nun): as mistress of the household and as courtesan. As such, a glimpse at their narratives allows us to stake out a range of positions women in mainstream society take

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521 This is in contrast to the Pāli narrative world, in which Āmrapālī (or Ambapālī as she is there identified) is said to ordain (Pruitt 1999: 260-269.) For explorations of various elements of Āmrapālī’s narrative cycle see Dumézil 1983: 28-34. For some discussions of Viśākhā as an exemplary donor, see Falk 1990: 131-141, in which she traces a textual pairing of Viśākhā with Anāthapiṇḍada as the consummate benefactors in Buddhist texts. A number of other articles taking up women’s roles as benefactors look at these two women in that capacity, including Willis 1985 and Skilling 2001b. With the exception of Skilling, these (like most other explorations of women in Buddhism) rely primarily on Pāli materials.
in relation to their bodies as viewed by others, before we ask what else the monastic construction of female embodiment makes possible for women.

We begin with Viśākhā, our young woman. The chief minister of King Prasenajit is reluctant to make a match for his youngest son, because his elder sons and their wives are frivolous spendthrifts. His friend, a brahmin, sets out to find a suitable bride for the remaining son. He travels far and wide, until he comes across Viśākhā as she and her friends head out to play in a park. From a distance, he observes that Viśākhā does not laugh, skip and cavort as do the other girls, but walks along at a measured pace, holding herself with a dignity and decorum that catch his attention. She keeps her maidenly body covered as she wades into a pond, while the others undress and splash about. When it is time to eat, she offers food first to the members of the entourage accompanying them, and only afterwards partakes of it herself. The brahmin follows Viśākhā for some time, assessing her deportment in various situations, and then finally confronts her. First he asks her to whom she belongs. She names her father. He tells her not to be angered if he asks a few questions. She smiles, and replies, that there is no cause for anger and he should proceed. Then he asks her why she was taking such care in her actions while the other girls frolicked freely. To make clear the parallel that is being built up in this passage, he contrasts the other girls and their uncontrolled movements to Viśākhā,

\[\text{kasya tvam}\ \text{Tibetan: khyed su'i.}\]

This same question as asked by Utpalavarnā’s father of the orphaned young man to whom he marries his daughter, after learning that the man had no relatives of his own (Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Derge Nya 216b3). The implication is that people are embedded in relationships to others that must be taken into account when effecting transfers, but if no one claims a person as their own, they are up for appropriation by others. After Utpalavarnā discovers that this husband is involved with her mother and flees, she is asked this same question by the head of the caravan she joins, and replies that she belongs to whoever gives her food and clothes (Derge Nya 217b1).
whom he calls literally “endowed with vinaya” or “of abundant or perfect vinaya.” In answer to the brahmin’s query, Viśākhā says:

“All girls are property to be sold by their parents. If my arm or legs are broken by my jumping up or falling down, who will ask for [my hand in marriage]? Instead, I would surely become something my parents had to take care of for my whole life.”

Her movements may be like those of a monastic who has the vinaya, but her apparent self-possession is grounded in a very different social position. In this startling reply, Viśākhā asserts that her body is not her own possession but one she is safeguarding for her parents. It is both to their advantage not to have to care for throughout her whole life, and to hers, and so Viśākhā’s relationship to her body is presented as a way to secure her own wellbeing and that of others. For this to work, she must treat her body as if it were indeed an article of trade. Her comment utterly dismisses the rhetoric of “gifting” of daughters and reframes it as a purely commercial exchange. In this comment, she provides a kind of confirmation of the analysis of Stephanie Jamison, who argues that the gifting of a daughter is one move in a complex set of exchanges. Viśākhā understands that those are the terms of engagement, and appears neither cynical nor resentful to be placed in such a position by her parents. She recognizes that this is simply a status she shares with all other girls, and so wields her body in such a way

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523 Sanskrit: vinayasampannā which the Tibetan takes as indicating completeness or bountifulness of her vinaya (dul ba phun sum tshogs pa) Cīvaravastu. GM.ii.54, Derge Ga 72b1.

524 Sanskrit: dravyam; Tibetan: rdzas. Material, substance, article, possession.

525 Cīvaravastu. Sanskrit at GM.ii.55. sarvā dārīkā matāpitror vikreyam dravyam | yadi mama utpatantyā nipatantyā vā hastaḥ pādo vā bhidyate ko māṃ prārthayate | na tvaham yāvajjīvan eva mātāpiroḥ posyā bhavisyāmi. Corresponding Tibetan text at Derge Ga 73a1-2.

that she can protect its value, and gain the most advantage in the situation at hand. In the process, she treats her own body as a site for self-disciplining and as a piece of property she must actively manage to ensure she comes out well in the bargain. Acknowledging that the body can be an object allows Viśākhā to refine her own subjectivity in working on that “object,” gaining a form of agency over her own future in the bargain.

The narrative further shows us that her physical discipline serves as the groundwork for other virtues, telling us that she is able to defer her own hunger and give food to the attendants first, which she does out of an awareness that they are less fortunate than she, as she later explains to the brahmin. Her attitude toward her body enables her to manage her own physical desires, in ways that are also reminiscent of monastic self-disciplining.

Continuing his interrogation of her, the brahmin asks her why Viśākhā entered the water fully dressed, lifting up her clothes as she went deeper into the water.

“Father, womankind [should be] modest and bashful. It would not be suitable for someone to see me undressed.”

“Daughter, who [would] see you there?”

“Father, I would have been seen by you yourself at that time.”

527 hrīvyapatrāpyasampanno mātrgrāmāḥ; Tibetan: ngo tsha shes pa dang khrel yod pa byed dgos. Her utterance appears to be descriptive statement in Sanskrit, but the Tibetan gives it a more openly normative sense. Edgerton records hrīr-apatrāpya and hryapatrāpya as Sanskritization of the Pāli hirottapa or hirotapa. This meaning is clearly confirmed by the Tibetan rendering. (Edgerton 1953: 623). Note above we have seen the use of hrīmat translated by ’dzem pa dan ladan pa for a similar sense.

528 Cīvaravastu. Sanskrit at GM.ii.55. tāta hrīvyapatrāpyasampanno mātrgrāmāḥ | yadi māṃ kaścit paśyatapāvṛtām ayuktam | putri kas tvāṁ tatra paśyati | tāta tvayaива tāvad ahaṁ drśtā syām. Corresponding Tibetan text at Derge Ga 73a3-4.
Viśākhā shows herself able to engage in a higher order of discourse of virtues of modesty and bashfulness, or shame, which we have seen are shared by monastics but here are gendered as particularly female. She also proves herself to be a consummate practitioner of it, anticipating a gaze on her even when ostensibly no one is watching, and the narrative proves her correct in doing so. However we may assess them, these statements are taken in the narrative as indications of her value, wisdom and even her power, and she is soon elevated from her relatively humble family origins to become the bride of the chief minister’s son. Viśākhā is celebrated in the MSV for her exceptional prudential or practical wisdom. The narrative more familiar to Euro-American readers for displaying the sagacity of King Solomon is ascribed in the MSV to her; that is, the story in which a dispute as to the real mother of a child is settled by proposing to divide the child and give each half.

Whether the narrative voice here is entirely male or not, they have sketched for us a portrait of a young woman who reflects on her social positions, describes her own experience of the practice of kanyādāna in harshly realistic terms, and consciously intervenes to protect herself and her parents. She is able to anticipate the presence of an unseen social gaze directed at her, and carefully crafts her own appearance in it. Viśākhā is no rebel. She does not challenge the social terms of engagement offered to her. But by discerning their underlying principles and using that knowledge, she is able to accomplish her own aims. By recognizing that others see her as an object, Viśākhā wields her own disciplinary power over her body, and manages to gain a great deal of agency for herself. It may be a contingent and indirect agency,

529 Viśākhā’s narrative cycle in the MSV would offer excellent material for thinking about this understudied Buddhist virtue.

530 In this version, having each grab an arm and start pulling.
but it is surely agency nonetheless. In brief, the narrators approvingly portray Viśākhā as occupying her place in the gaze of others so consciously and so masterfully that it becomes a sort of re-appropriation of that place.

The narrative of Āmrapālī presents a rather different way for a woman to occupy her place in the male gaze. In this tale, this famous courtesan finds a way to invert the male gaze—at least virtually. First, though, she herself will be paraded before the men of the city who wish to assess her beauty. Āmrapālī is no ordinary beauty; the MSV tells us she was born from a mango tree. There are so many suitors seeking her as a wife that her father fears he will gain enemies no matter whom he chooses. The town they live in, Vaiśālī, is ruled by a governing council, or assembly, and as a stratagem to avoid the enmity of powerful men, her father decides to put the matter to the assembly. He does so, and they respond as follows:

“Householder, the assembly has already made an ordinance in the past that a girl who is a jewel of a woman is not given away [in marriage, but] is to be used by the assembly. So bring her here for a bit. Let us see what sort the girl is.”

He brought her into the middle of the assembly. When they saw her, lovely and in the full bloom of youth, the entire assembly opened their eyes wide in amazement and proceeded to examine her from all sides. They said, “Householder, this is a jewel of a woman, to be used by the assembly. She is not to be given to anyone.”

\[531\]strīratnam gaṇabhogyam. It is unclear whether gaṇabhogyam should be taken grammatically as a form of gaṇabhogyā in the sense of public prostitute, placed in the neuter to agree with ratnam, but in any case the meaning is clear.

\[532\]Cīvaravastu. Sanskrit at GM.ii.17 grhapate ganena pūrvaṃ eva kriyākārah kṛtaḥ kanyā anivārīḥ strīratnam gaṇabhogyam iti | tad aññatām tavād asau | dārikāṃ paśyāmaḥ tān̄ thīti | sa tena gaṇamadhyaṃ niitā | tāṃ rūpayauvanasampannāṃ dṛṣṭvā sarva eva gaṇo vismayotulladṛśṭiḥ samantato nirikṣitum ārādhiḥ kathayati ca | grhapate strīratnam etad gaṇabhogyam na kasyacid deyam iti. Corresponding Tibetan text at Derge Ga 56b2-3.
Her father is distressed by this turn of events, and explains to her what her future holds. As we saw in the case of Dharmadattā’s father, we note again here that social practices surrounding the circulation of women can strip their male guardians of power as well. Her father tells her:

“Daughter, the assembly had already made an ordinance in the past that a jewel of a woman is to be used by the assembly, and since you are a jewel of a woman, I am powerless.”

Āmrapālī keeps a level head, and tells her father she will accept if the assembly grants her five concessions, which will have the collective effect of giving her greater autonomy and status—and less foot traffic. In an insightful comment on how women finds ways to navigate the currents of power, Āmrapālī—who is in no evident position to make any demands—nevertheless treats the situation as if there were still room for negotiation. Āmrapālī seems to share with Viśākhā a sense that girls are not simply given and taken, but traded off as goods, and trade implies the possibility of bargaining. She does not challenge their authority directly, but accepts it in principle. However, like a good defense attorney, or perhaps like a good salesperson, she reminds the Licchavis of their position of power, as well as the largesse they can afford to exercise, asking them to grant her five “boons.” (varāḥ) Her father takes her proposal to the men of the city, who find her requests reasonable and agree to her terms. Then events take an unexpected turn:

533 Cīvaravastu. Sanskrit at GM.ii.17 putri gaṇena pūrvam eva kriyākāraḥ kṛtaḥ strīratnaṃ gaṇabhogyam iti | tvam ca strīratnam ato’ham anīśvaraṃ. Corresponding Tibetan text at Derge Ga 56b5.

534 She asks for a house of her own, for her fee to be set at a hefty 500 kārṣāpaṇa coins, that only one man be allowed inside at a time, that no guards be stationed to observe those entering and leaving, and that she be given seven-days warning before soldiers can enter her home when conducting house-to-house searches.

535 GM.ii.18.
The Licchavis of Vaiśālī began to enter her house for the purpose of sexual enjoyment. There, due to their being enflamed sensualists, just as soon as they saw her their passion died out, and some when they touched her. Not one of them functioned as men toward her.

She thought, “These are not men. I must devise some method.” With that thought, she summoned painters residing in various countries and said, “Sirs, please paint on walls whatever kings or ministers or wealthy men or chief businessmen or traders or leading merchants you have seen, just as they look.”

They painted them just as they had seen them. Then Āmrapālī adorned herself with her diverse jewelry and when to examine the work of the drawings. She asked, “Sirs, who is this?”

We are taken through a who’s who of the important men of the times, until she comes to the last. Āmrapālī asks:

“Who is this other one?”

“The Magadha king, Śreṇi Bimbisāra.” [Ga 57b] Thus she asked about all of them, and they explained everything. Then after she had inspected all of them, her

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536 Where the Sanskrit reads uttaptavitatvāt, Tibetan has yul la chags ches pa’i phyir or “due to their great attachment to the object.”

537 Āsāvant. Sanskrit at GM.ii.18-19. vaiśālakā licchavayas tasyā gṛhaṃ praveṣṭum ārabdhāḥ paricārayitum | [GM.ii.19] tatra keśāṃcid uttaptavitatvāt sahadarśanād eva rāgo vigacchati | keśāṃcit sparśanād eva | [na] kaścit tayā puruṣakāryāṃ karotā | sa samlakṣayati | apumānasya ete | upāyasya vidhānaṃ kartavyam iti | tayā nānādeśanivāsinaś citrakarā āhūya uktāḥ | bhavanto yena yādṛśo rājā vā rājanātiro vā dhanī vā śreṣṭhī vā vanā vā sārthavāhō vā dṛṣṭaḥ sa tattādṛśaṃ bhitto likhatvāti | tair yathā dṛṣṭā likhitāḥ | tata āmrapālī nānālaṅkāravibhūṣita citrakarma pratyavekṣate pṛcchhati ca | ayāṃ bhavantaḥ kataraḥ. Corresponding Tibetan text at Derge Ga 57a4j6.
gaze fell\textsuperscript{538} on Bimbisāra. She reflected, “A tall and broad\textsuperscript{539} man like this one will be able to have sexual enjoyment with me.”\textsuperscript{540}

It turns out that King Bimbisāra is not only quite the philanderer but also a gossip,\textsuperscript{541} and asks his friends what interesting new women or courtesans they have seen. When he hears of Āmrapālī, although his own kingdom is feuding with Vaiśālī, and although she has been allocated for use by the Licchavis of Vaiśālī and surely not their enemies, King Bimbisāra secretly slips into town to spend time with Āmrapālī, and thus her aims are accomplished. He leaves her, but not before she becomes pregnant with his child.

The Licchavis’ response to Āmrapālī’s beauty offers a curious comment on the nature of desire, and this response is open to a number of interpretations. The narrators do not specify why the men who see her are rendered impotent. It may be because of her imposing presence. We might imagine it has to do with how she conducts herself before them. The implication could be simply that they were too thoroughly awestruck by her beauty—which from her botanical birth we know may not be entirely human. The narrative offers grounds for reading the narrative depiction of their impotence as a criticism of the Licchavis’ pride in appropriating a “jewel of a woman” for their own use. There is a notion in the MSV (and elsewhere) that some exceptional women simply are made for exceptional men, that a “jewel

\textsuperscript{538} Tibetan reads, “her eye became attached” - mig chags pa.

\textsuperscript{539} For ārohapariṇāha, Tibetan has chu zheng gab pa.

\textsuperscript{540} GM.ii.19 ayam aparah kah \| rājā māgadhah śrenyo bimbisārah | evam sarve tayā prṣṭās tair api sarvaiḥ samākhyātāḥ | tatas tayā sarvāṁ pratyaveksya bimbisāre drṣṭir nipātitā | sā saṃlaksayati | yādṛśo 'syā puruṣasyārohaparināhaḥ śāksyateṣa mayā sārḍham paricārayitum iti. Corresponding Tibetan text at Ga 57a7-57b1.

\textsuperscript{541} The MSV relates an episode in which the king sires a child with another woman whose husband was off on a long business trip. As the cuckolded man is at last on the final leg of his return journey, the king has him sent off on a second trade mission to gain time for the pregnancy to come to term.
of a woman” is a match for a wheel-turning king. Although there is a great deal in Āmrapālī’s tale deserving of fuller exploration, what is most significant for our purposes is her response to the situation she has been placed in by virtue of being an exceptional object of male desire.

The narrative has her trotted before the entire council for their inspection. For them to look at her from all sides, we must imagine that either she was made to turn around slowly so they can each get a good look from all angles, or made to remain stationary herself as she is circled by hordes of men sizing her up. Later, when her would-be local customers prove incapable of “functioning as men toward her,” she summons painters from other cities and kingdoms, and asks them to create images on her walls of the famous men they have seen elsewhere. She is, in effect, casting a wider net, bringing candidates for partnership to her own walls since she presumably cannot travel herself to investigate. Although she has been made courtesan of the men of Vaiśālī, and not of men in general, she blatantly disregards that fact. Even if this gesture never extends beyond her own four walls, by considering partnership with men of other cities, Āmrapālī is subverting these men’s’ claim that she is now theirs. It is surely no coincidence that she chooses King Bimbisāra, an archenemy of the Licchavis, and indeed the narrative points out that she asks who he is first before her eye is apparently drawn to him.

Indeed, Āmrapālī here may be seen to be exacting a sort of revenge on the Licchavis who had

542 In Ānanda’s description to the young woman who aspired to becomes one, we learn that every wheel-turning king gets his own “jewel of a woman (strīratna)” who is co-nascent with him, and effectively made for him. We saw too the acknowledgement that Yaśodharā was exceptional enough among women to be a “match” for the Bodhisattva. In the story of Prince Sudhana and Manoharā, when Manoharā is first captured by a hunter while she is bathing nude, she prohibits him from touching her, saying she is a woman not for the likes of him but for the enjoyment of kings. As such, the spontaneous dysfunction of the men may be making an argument against the pride of the Licchavis in aspiring to enjoy a women made for a wheel-turning king. Indeed, in a later episode, Āmrapālī will compete with the Licchavi princes for the right to be the first to offer a meal to Buddha when he reaches town, and although the princes argue that she is a prostitute and they are princes, Buddha holds to an earlier commitment he had made to accept her offering first.
appropriated her for their own enjoyment. The Licchavis later make her pay for her rebellion, and she will have to send away the child born to her from this union with Bimbisāra when she fears that their tormenting of the boy may escalate to murder.

Āmrapālī has summoned powerful men to her walls, and fixed them so she can gaze back at them appraisingly in her own domain, in a dazzling inversion of the male gaze we saw aimed at her in the assembly. Ever eager to depict and explore gender difference, our narrators tell us that unlike the Licchavi men who claim her as their public courtesan based solely on her physical beauty, Āmrapālī wants to know who the men are. When the female gaze is returned, the narrative seems to suggest, it seeks to see beyond the skin. Our narrators are careful to tell us that Āmrapālī dons her jewelry and dresses up, as if she herself were going out into public. She may have conjured up a situation in which she can gape at men to her heart’s content, but she enters their presence as if entering their view, and shows herself to them in a correspondingly elegant way. The gaze doubles back on itself here: Āmrapālī is aware that she too will be seen—an awareness of existing in the gaze of others that is so powerful that it shapes her responses even when the others are mere painted images of powerful men who have appeared on her walls on her command and will remain there to be seen at her will. This rich depiction of role reversal offers a glimpse at the MSV’s startlingly complex understanding of the range of subject positions available to women, as they imagine themselves in relation to those who watch them, and as they imagine themselves looking back.

When they become monastics, there is no living outside the gaze of others for women in the MSV. The inescapable social fact is felt keenly by the women in these narratives, even when there is no viewer in sight, or when the eyes are made of paint. Yet the women we have
been watching being watched in these narratives are far from inert objects. The MSV imagines even a woman who describes herself as merchandise and another who is handed over to the public for their sexual use to be making their own choices as to how to respond, and it shows their responses as highly effective. Viśākhā takes full ownership of her place in the gaze, while Āmrapālī proves that it can go both ways. By consciously occupying her place in others’ eyes, Viśākhā is able to craft a powerful place in society for herself. In Āmrapālī’s creative negotiations with the gaze, she finds ways to make choices about the partner she imagines for herself, and strikes a blow against the Licchavis at the same time. And although the narrators make no causal link between her selection of King Bimbisāra and his appearance on her doorstep, they are sympathetic enough in their portrayal of her to ensure she gets the man she sought.

If our hopes are to encounter women acting as free agents in the MSV denying men the right to appropriate or gaze upon them, we will be disappointed. But this should not blind us to the fact that they have founds ways to act intentionally on their social environment and personal situations to achieve the outcomes they sought. That is to say, they have recovered some agency for themselves in the most objectifying of situations, even if the agency we see them wielding is contingent on accepting aspects of the system that continue to limit them. These successes we see Viśākhā and Āmrapālī achieving in their maneuverings within the system may be limited successes, but for these women they are successes that matter greatly. Āmrapālī does not escape life as a courtesan, but she makes that life far more tolerable, and does end up with the man she had chosen for herself. Viśākhā’s recognition of the position marriage practices place her in allows her not to reform those practices but to make them
work for her, and the marriage she secures for herself catapults her to a respected position in a new family that values her prudential wisdom highly.

Sherry Ortner offers language that aptly describes the form of agency we see these two women wielding—and rewarded for wielding well—in these narratives. Ortner describes as “embedded agency” the forms of agency exercised by largely accepting and working through the terms of engagement set by the power structures and hegemonic discourses in which they find themselves. The notion of embedded agency allows us to see persons and the social systems in which they act and are acted upon as mutually constitutive, though in complex ways:

The challenge is to picture indissoluble formations of structurally embedded agency and intentional-filled structures, to recognize the ways in which the subject is part of larger social and cultural webs, and in which social and cultural “systems” are predicated upon human desires and projects.  

In her discussion of analytical strategies for addressing gender and agency, Ortner argues for a “necessity for retaining an active intentional subject without falling into some form of free agency or voluntarism.” To the end, she urges that our analysis of gender ought:

never lose sight of the mutual determination(s) of agents and structures, if the fact that players are “agents,” skilled and intense strategizers who constantly stretch the game even as they enact it, and the simultaneous fact that players are defined and constructed (though never wholly contained) by the game.

[544] ibid: 19.
Using the metaphor of “serious games” for the systems of structures, practices, and discourses, Ortner argue for an angle of vision in which those engaged in the serious game of gender are seen to be intentionally active within structures whose hegemony may often be formidable but is never complete. As lay women, Viśākhā and Āmrapālī operate as embedded agents working fully within mainstream social structures. By occupying fully the positions assigned to them, they are able to win victories in their own gender games.

When women take up new positions in the MSV’s social world as monastics, the social gaze directed at their bodies will continue to constitute a force that must be reckoned with. But the monastic understanding of what it means to move within the gaze of others allows for a reconfiguring of—though never a complete escape from—gender constructions of her female body.

**Decomposing and Recomposing Bodies**

For Viśākhā to emerge as a powerful woman in the MSV, she had first to reconstruct her relationship with her body. At a certain point in her childhood, she ceased to simply live her embodied being, and began to reflect on what it meant for her to be thus embodied, as a young woman in her social place. The MSV shows another woman deciding to ordain based on her encounter with a new way of seeing her own body, a perspective opened up for her when an arhat tells her what her body looks like in his view. Let us explore this narrative for what it can
tell us about how the MSV imagines Buddhist discourses about bodies to be potentially liberating for women.

We have already seen Bhikṣunī Utpalavarnā after her own attainment of arhatship, but the account of her life up to that point is a rich and complex tale—a tale that is very much about bodies and what people make of them. Our heroine is born in the Gandhāran city of Takṣaśila, and is an exquisite beauty, whose very name describes her body: Utpalavarnā, meaning “she who has the color of a blue lotus, or utpala.” Utpalavarnā has “an auspicious body, pleasing to look at, beautiful, with eyes like an utpala, with the scent of an utpala, [and] with a complexion like the filament of an utpala.” This utpala-colored girl has no brothers, and so her father determines not to give her away but to use her marriage as an opportunity to bring a man into the household as a son-in-law. Her father encounters a passing man who is an orphan with no household of his own to take a wife to, and he agrees to join theirs as Utpalavarnā’s husband. The father dies, and Utpalavarnā’s mother initiates an illicit affair with her son-in-law. After her first daughter is born, Utpalavarnā catches them in flagrante delicto, and says to herself, “Has this ill-fated woman seen no other man in Takṣaśila,” and, “Has this ill-fated man seen no other woman in Takṣaśila?” She throws her infant daughter at her husband in anger and disgust, covers her head and goes forth from the house, an act the narrators describe using a term that evokes the going forth from the household (khyim nas byung ba) into the state of homelessness that describes ordination into the Buddhist monastic

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546 ze ’bru. This can refer either to stamen or the anther, and often translates kiṅjalka, or the filament of a lotus.  
547 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Nya 216a4-5.
order.⁵⁴⁸ Indeed, Buddha will later use the full form of that very phrase to describe Utpalavarṇā’s own ordination.⁵⁴⁹ Alone on the road, Utpalavarṇā soon meets a travelling merchant who notes her beauty, and asks her to whom she belongs. She replies that she belongs to anyone who gives her food and clothes, and is soon set up by him as his wife. The man later brings her daughter home as a co-wife to her. Effortless feelings of affection are immediately present to Utpalavarṇā toward the girl, but when she is brushing the girl’s hair one day, she discovers the previously concealed head wound the girl had sustained as a child. Upon questioning, she realizes the girl is her own daughter, and comments, “There, I was co-wife with my mother; here, I am co-wife with my daughter. Therefore I must absolutely go.” Again she covers her head, and goes forth from home, again describes with a term reminiscent of monastic ordination. She meets a party of merchants as she leaves town and, as the narrators tell us in a laconic phrase that hints at a hopeless slide toward where Utpalavarṇā’s life is taking her, “again, she went along with them, and had sex with the traders, and went to Vaiśālī.”⁵⁵⁰ In Vaiśālī, though, she is approached by a group of prostitutes,⁵⁵¹ who point out that

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⁵⁴⁸ khyim nas byung ba. Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Derge Nya 217a7. A standard description in Tibetan of ordination in the Buddhist monastic order is khyim nas khyim med par rab tu byung ba, or “going forth from the household into the homeless state.”


⁵⁵⁰ Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Nya 218b5.

⁵⁵¹ There is no clear linguistic distinction made here that corresponds neatly to that between the English terms ‘prostitute’ and ‘courtesan.’ The terms used in this narratives are jud mthun ma and tshogs can ma, the latter meaning ‘woman belonging to the assembly’ (Sanskrit: ganikā)—suitable for a town such as Vaiśālī, ruled as it is by an assembly. However, I would caution against using the choice of Tibetan term as a clue to the inflection given. Although the MSV does use a range of terms to describe this category of women, their patterns of usage suggest that the translators may simply have had their own preferences, since some sections of the MSV employ only certain terms, and not others. In particular, the Bhikṣuvibhaṅga tends to use jud mthun ma and tshogs can ma, but not smad ’tshong ma, the term found most commonly in the remaining sections. Meanwhile, the term gzugs kyis ’tsho ba (Sanskrit: rūpajīvanā or rūpājīvā) appears in the Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga and Kṣudrakavastu, (both of which were translated by the same translation team) but not in other sections. Thus word choices are not particularly reliable guides for us here. Drawing instead on context, because Utpalavarṇā entertains hundreds of men at a time and appears to have undergone no particular education or additional skills training, I will describe her status as
they share a common profession, and ask her why she doesn’t join them. In two moves that prefigure her later membership in the bhikṣuṇī order, she now uncovers her head, and “enters among” this first female community that she finds.

The MSV’s avadānas tell us that persons are connected by invisible bonds of karma that reunite them life after life, and that principle of hidden relatedness comes back to haunt Utpalavarṇā within this very life. In a relentless series of scenarios, Utpalavarṇā abandons one child after another, but repeatedly slides back into unknowingly incestuous relationships with them. First, we watch as she partners with a large group of men, among which unbeknownst to her is her own son. Inexplicably resistant at first to having sex with her, when the boy is pressured into doing so, he falls in love with her at once. He manages to gain permission from the city to set her up as his own wife. He later brings in Utpalavarṇā’s second daughter as co-wife, who remains unrecognized until the bhikṣu Mahāmaudgalyāyana comes and tells the daughter, cautioning her not to be angry at her mother. When Utpalavarṇā hears of this, again she “covers her head and goes forth from the household,” now departing to ply her trade in Rājagṛha. Despite her efforts to shed her family relationships, they keep returning to haunt her. Each time she moves on herself or sends off a child, they reappear later in unrecognized forms in inappropriate relations to her, as lover or as co-wife. In successively grotesque ways, Utpalavarṇā turns out to be connected to her sexual partners through unseen bonds of kinship. Each time Utpalavarṇā discovers the previously hidden family relations in her new partnerships, she seeks to abandon those relationships. However, although she goes forth from


552 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Nya 222a5.
home three times, she has lacked a viable destination to go forth to. And each new place she goes, her connections to her unrecognized children follow her, as she walks further into tangled webs of incest.

We see again the importance of recollecting the particular agenda behind the MSV’s representational practices. The MSV is a text ultimately committed to celibacy as the most wholesome form of ethically embodied being. Its world is also one in which persons who are related in one life are continually reconnected in subsequent lives. That is to say, those one is partnered with in one life may have been one’s mother or child or son in a past life. Given an infinite number of past lives, the chances of this escalate exponentially. Factoring in the forces of karmic connections among persons, the possibility can become a downright probability. With its dark view of sexuality and the relationships built around them, this narrative is pushing its readers to confront the hidden potential for incest that lies at the heart of every sexual relationship. In fact, in the avadāna presentation of the “back-story” that will follow, Buddha explains that Utpalavarṇā created the karma for her incestuous relationships in a past life as a matchmaker. “At that time, she brought together many who were like sons with those who were like mothers, and she brought together many who were like brothers and sisters.” It is with this detail that the avadāna cycle of Utpalavarṇā ends, leaving the audience with a rather sobering reminder that even when marriages are intentionally arranged, people can still end up involved unwittingly in incestuous partnerships, even in this life.

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553 *bu lta bu mang po dag ma lta bu. Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Derge Nya 227a2-4.*

554 Derge Nya 227a2-4.
At last, however, Utpalavārṇā’s moment of escape from these patterns comes. As the
conversion scene opens, she has been providing her services to 500 young men in a park.

Venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana knew that it was Utpalavārṇā’s time to be
tamed, he walked about by a shade tree right next to them. Then one of the
revelers said “This Noble Mahāmaudgalyāyana is free of this sort of bondage to
the kleśas, but we are sunk in the swamp of desire.”

Utpalavārṇā said, “In Vaiśālī, I seduced the fragrance seller’s son, Mi sdug pa
thob pa.”

That reveler said, “What is the point of what you say? Did he not wish to be
seduced?”

She said, “What is this one? Is the man not endowed with a male organ?”

“The man is endowed with a male organ.”

“If I seduce him, what will you owe me?”

“Five hundred kārṣāpana coins. If you are not able to seduce him, what will you
owe?”

“To be set up as a wife to you alone.”

“Perfect. Do so.”

After Utpalavārṇā had agreed, she went to where the Venerable
Mahāmaudgalyāyana was and having approached him, she proceeded to make a

555 Silk (2009: 277n16) differs from Ralston in taking this as a description rather than a proper name, based in part
on the use of ‘so-and-so’ (Tibetan: che ge mo) to refer to him elsewhere. However the Tibetan scholar and monk I
consulted on this passage felt it should be taken as a name. Personal communication, Bhikṣu Lobsang Norbu
Shastry, Sarnath, 2006.

556 khyed la ci dbab.
show of all the feminine movements, feminine tricks, feminine artifice and feminine guile she had, and Venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana sat with his senses tranquil.

She reflected, “Since the touch of a woman’s place is poison, if I embrace him, he will come under my power.” And with that thought, she began to embrace him. Venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana, like a swan-king extending its wings, arose in the air and spoke in verse:

In the hut that is made of bones bound with ligaments, unclean, rotten and foul-smelling, reliant upon others yet held as “mine,”

the bag that is you, filled with filth, with channels for urine and feces that easily erupt in boils, [Nya 223a] are constantly oozing filth from the nine orifice paths.

If people knew you as I know you they would avoid you from afar like a field of shit in the rainy season.

Since childish beings shrouded by the darkness of ignorance do not know, like an elderly bull in the mud, they are made attached to you.

Utpalavarṇā too spoke in verse:

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557 gy o dag – gy o can refer to guile or cunning, or to movements, such as trembling or quivering. Here, the plural particle inclines me to differ from Silk’s rendering of this as guile.

558 bud med kyi yul is likely a euphemism for her genitals. The same phrase is used in the oft-quoted statement comparing monks’ contact with women’s genitals to that of a poisonous snake in the Bhikṣuvibhaṅga at Derge Ca 28b4, which we shall discuss in the next chapter. This could suggest that the phrase is thought to have been in wider circulation than the monastic context in which we have it preserved in the MSV.

559 This line is rather obscure. My thanks to Lobsang Norbu Shastry for this tentative gloss of gsong ldong. Personal communication, Sarnath, 2006.

560 See Silk 2009: 278n27 on a version of this verse in Pāli, also attributed to Mahāmaudgalyāyana.
One of Great Fortune, it is thus, as the noble one says. In the hut that is made of bones bound with ligaments, unclean, rotten and foul-smelling, reliant upon others yet held as “mine,”

the bag that is you, filled with filth, with channels for urine and feces that easily erupt in boils, am constantly oozing filth from the nine orifice paths.

If people knew me as the Noble One knows me, they would avoid me from afar like a field of feces in the rainy season.

Since childish beings shrouded by the darkness of ignorance, do not know, like an elderly bull in the mud, they are made attached to me.

One of Great Fortune, please come down Noble One, please teach the Dharma. In the teachings on supreme wisdom, I will be your disciple.\[564\]

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564 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Nya 222b1-223a5. tshe dang ldan pa maud gal gyi bu chen pos ut-pa la'i mdoq gdal ba'i dus shes nas de dag dang ha cang thag mi ring ba na shing jion pa zhiq gi drung na 'chaq cing 'duq go/ de na dga" 'dun gcig gis smras pa/ 'phaqs pa maud gal gyi bu chen po 'di ni nyon mongs pa'i 'ching ba 'di lta bu las grol ba yin gyi bdag cag ni 'dod pa'i dam du bying ba yin no/ ut-pa la'i mdoq gis smras pa/ bdag gis yangs pa can du spos tshong gi khye'u mi sdug pa thob pa tjes su 'jug par byas so/ dga' 'dun des smras pa/ de'i don ci 'di yang rjes su 'jug par byed 'dod dam/ des smras pa/ ci 'di skyes pa skyes pa'i dbang po dang stan pa yin nam/ 'di skyes pa skyes pa'i dbang po dang ldan pa yin no/ kho mos gal te 'di tjes su 'jug par bya na khyod la ci dbab/ KarShla pa Na lnga brgya'o/ gal te khyod kyi's 'di tjes su 'jug par ma nus na khyod la ci dbab/ khyod gcig pu'i chung ma khud pa'o/ ma nyes kyi's de ltar gyis shig/ ut-pa la'i mdoq gis khas blangs nas tshe dang ldan pa maud gal gyi bu chen po qa la ba der song ste phyin nas bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bud med kyi gyi go dang/ bu<null/>
When Mahāmaudgalyāyana comes to tame Utpalavarnā, he chooses specifically to walk right next to them in full view, pitting his own pacified movement against their passion-fueled sexual activity. The contrast here is not between some sort of ascetic inaction and their worldly actions, but between his self-controlled movement and their desire-driven movement. This juxtaposition of the two alternatives is clear to the men with Utpalavarnā, one of whom who identifies the former as freedom and the latter as bondage. Viewing Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s enlightened body, Utpalavarnā seeks to do to Mahāmaudgalyāyana what her life trajectory has repeatedly done to her: treat her first and foremost as a sexual object. She insists on sexing (and later gendering) his enlightened body, asking “Does he not have a male organ?” In another sense, Utpalavarnā also commits a cognitive error in relation to Mahāmaudgalyāyana, in that she fails to see beyond the flesh of the body in front of her to acknowledge the fuller personal identity of the being who is thus embodied. It is precisely this cognitive misstep that permits her to enter into sexual relationships with her children: the failure to recognize that a body is more than skin-deep, and that a person is more than a body, but brings to that body their own personal histories that are not found simply inscribed in any simple way on its surfaces. At the same time, she is failing to recognize that Mahāmaudgalyāyana is living his embodiment as a monastic, but insists on seeing him through mainstream social constructions in which, as long as he has a male organ, her relationship to him will be as an object of his desire. This is, of course, precisely the same form of failure that

skye bos bdag ni 'tshal gyur na/ dbyar dus slad sa'i gnas bzhin du/ thag ring rnam par spong bar 'gyur/ gang phyir byis pa gti mug gi/ mun pas bsgrigs pas ma 'tshal ba/ de phyir rdzab la glang rgyan bzhin/ de dag bdag la chags par byiyid/ skal pa chen po mar gshegs te/'phaqs pa chos ni bstan du gsol/ shes rab mchog gi bstan pa la/ bdag gis khyod kyi nyan thos byi.
will lead the brahmin in the woods to insist on denying her shift to a monastic embodiment from that of a sex worker.

As Utpalavarṇā seeks but fails to force Mahāmaudgalyāyana to relate to her as a man to a woman, Mahāmaudgalyāyana first allows her to go through the experience of witnessing the limits of her bodily powers. Here Mahāmaudgalyāyana sits, unmoved by her parading before him and displaying the full repertoire of her feminine charms. Her acts are thoroughly gendered as womanly, while his irresponsiveness proves his monastic gendering gives him the option to not respond to her in ways that are gendered male by mainstream constructions of bodies.

Her beauty may be a form of non-coercive power, and her skill in using that power up to this point has provided both her means of livelihood and source of personal power. This failure could precipitate a sort of crisis of identity, as Jonathan Silk suggests in his analysis of this narrative.\(^{562}\) However, this is but the first step in a conversion process that has three distinct phases. Next, Mahāmaudgalyāyana counters her unsuccessful wielding of her body and its feminine movements with his own physical movement of ascension into the sky—a miraculous form of movement that we as readers of the \textit{MSV} have been told is available to men and women both. Mahāmaudgalyāyana and Utpalavarṇā will each respectively be designated

\(^{562}\) Jonathan Silk offers a different reading of this conversion scene from the one I attempt here (Silk 2009: 156-161). In his analysis of the story of Utpalavarṇā, he notes what appears to be an inexplicably rapid turnabout on the part of Utpalavarṇā, and initially remarks that “for no apparent logical reason at all, save her inability to seduce one individual man,” she turns to a radically different lifestyle “ascetic where she was libertine, teleological where she was happy-go-lucky.” (Ibid,158). He attributes her conversion to two factors. First is the blow to her self-conception as a powerful seducer of men that is dealt to her when she fails to bring Mahāmaudgalyāyana under the sway of her charms. The second is the narrators’ unswerving faith in the ineffable power of Buddhist truths to win over anyone who is faced by them. Silk’s analysis is accompanied by a wonderful translation that manages to capture both the lucidity and narrative tone of the Tibetan prose.
the supreme among male and female disciples of Buddha in point of \textit{ṛddhi}, or visual displays of extraordinary powers. Among the spiritual qualities singled out by Buddha, the ability to emanate miraculous displays is the most rooted in physical appearances, and yet allow one to defy entirely the ordinary limitations of the body. Those who wield the power to emanate bodies come to know the body’s appearance as illusory. In another of the many stories of Utpalavarnā that could be read for what they tell us about embodied being, Utpalavarnā will use her powers of \textit{ṛddhi} to appear in a male emanation, as a wheel-turning king.\footnote{Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Da 92a7ff. Young (2007) offers an analysis of this story.} Utpalavarnā entered into the pitting of her seductive charms against Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s asceticism in competitive spirit, and Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s levitation is incontrovertible proof of physical powers far beyond those she herself has developed thus far. But as she beholds Mahāmaudgalyāyana in the air, the narrative’s audience knows that in a sense she is watching a display of her own latent capacity.

Next, the exchange of verses between the two provides the final moment in this conversion sequence, as Mahāmaudgalyāyana gives her a different way to see her own body. We must begin by acknowledging the specter in these verses of an entire genre of Buddhist writing, the \textit{āśubhabhavānā} text. In the wake of Liz Wilson’s work on this genre, it is difficult not to sense the misogynist impulse at work. The passage before us does not avail itself of any of the possible moves to construct the foulness of the body as feminine, even though the body in question is female. Mahāmaudgalyāyana makes mention of nothing that could not also be said of a male body, and other readings open up to us if we allow for this possibility that this narrative is doing something else to and for women. This is necessary for us to take seriously
the narrative’s proposition that Utpalavarnā finds this vision of bodily foulness to be immensely liberating.

First, the truth of the assertion that her body in itself differs radically from what it seems to be on the outside finds multiple witnesses in her own biography. A basic ignorance about bodies—their persistent opacity to her—is what prevents her from recognizing her children’s bodies when they come before her. Her ignorance about what lies inside her own body leads to a failure to know what her own body has produced. The knowledge of what bodies truly hold within them would have protected her from great sufferings.

Next, to the degree that a woman feels that her security or well-being in life depends on her physical attractiveness to men, her physical beauty will remain a nexus for anxiety and fear, particularly as it begins inevitably to fade. The MSV narrators are aware of these anxieties, as we have seen in the past life story of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and the 500 bhikṣuṇīs when they were queens kicked out in their old age by the king, because they had grey hair and wrinkles. The possibility of a life lived without having to rely on her ability to both awaken and satisfy male desire itself could present itself as a relief, particularly to a prostitute who already has three grown children.

But this narrative’s intervention cuts far deeper, aiming straight for the heart it sees beating silently under all these social dynamics: the illusory heart of desire. Beauty may work its non-coercive power over others, but in the view of many of the MSV’s narratives, the seductive power of beautiful women calls forth an opposing power in the other: the force of

\[\text{My thanks to Karen Derris for this insight, as well as her consistently insightful contributions to this analysis during our many conversations about this narrative.} \]
desire, which brings with it the other’s will to dominate what they desire. When that will to appropriate or dominate the other is a male will and the one to be dominated is female, in the gender constructions of this social world, it is given great scope to pursue its aims against the woman desired. When women exercise their own non-coercive power to awaken male desire, they become implicated in coercive relationships willy-nilly. Utpalavarṇā’s life story provides a long and painful document of this process. Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s view of the body is a critique of the illusions on which desire is built—illusions that go only skin deep, in his figuring of it. Although we have noted the physiomedical discourses that also construct physical beauty as a transparent marker of what is inside it, in the sense of indicating the beautiful person’s ethical goodness, the MSV is quite comfortable holding multiple discourses about bodies that serve well in different moments, but push in different directions.

The ability of teachers in the MSV’s narratives to shift among discourses is integral to their ability to care for others, just as is their knowledge of what that person needs. Here, the discourses deployed depend on the particular person to be liberated by them. The faith-inducing beauty of enlightened bodies is embedded in one sort of discourse about bodies, and works for particular people at particular moments. But here the beauty in question is a beauty that is wielded as a weapon to draw desire instead of blood. Mahāmaudgalyāyana opts to present that beauty through another discursive prism here, because that view of it is what will tame Utpalavarṇā. In this discourse of desire, her physical attractiveness is to be seen as an illusion, a fundamentally unwieldy weapon that destroys all in its path. To see through that illusion is to move away from ignorance and toward liberation from the cycles of desire and violence that it makes possible. On this account, her own participation in the patterns of desire
constitutes a rush toward suffering as toward a field of feces in the rains of summer. Utpalavarṇā’s rejection of her prior view of her own body as an integral part of that cycle is made possible by a new view, a view that cuts deeper to take in what is there below the skin, and that also opens up other ways of relating to herself and others.

At the same time, Utpalavarṇā has sought repeatedly to go forth and leave her family relations behind, but failed to do so because she did not leave behind relationships based on sexual desire. She also failed to do so because she had nowhere else to go. Her readiness to join the group of prostitutes bespoke a yearning for community that at last can be fulfilled. At this point, we should feel no surprise at all when Utpalavarṇā asks Mahāmaudgalyāyana to please descend from the sky, become her teacher, and allow her to ordain in the well-spoken Dharma and vinaya. Utpalavarṇā had, at last, found her home.

We move ahead now to another episode involving Utpalavarṇā, in an incident that appears in a slightly different form in the Therīgāthā collection of nuns’ verses in the Pāli textual tradition, where another nun, Subhā, is made the central figure. Given what we already know of Utpalavarṇā, it makes perfect narrative sense that she should be the protagonist in this exchange. If the MSV narrators did not simply inherit the attribution of this incident to Utpalavarṇā, the choice to do so reveals an acute sense of character development, for this story is well-suited to the character of Utpalavarṇā as she emerges across stories.

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While Utpalavarnā was acting as a prostitute in the six great cities, there was a brahmin who became exceedingly attached to her. He went there and venerated her with flowers, fruit and toothpicks.

She said to him, “Since you are of a high caste and I am of a low, what have you come here for?”

She asked this, and the brahmin said to Utpalavarnā, “I wish to meet with you.”

“If you have gold kārṣāpaṇa coins, you can meet me later.”

When the brahmin heard the words of Utpalavarnā, he went to the countryside seeking gold kārṣāpaṇa coins. Then at some other point, by relying on Venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana as her virtuous friend, Utpalavarnā gave up prostitution and attained the very state of arhatship. Furthermore, since she was staying in a dense jungle to meditate during the daytime, Utpalavarnā went to stay in a dense jungle for the day. And that brahmin [Ta 74b] came carrying kārṣāpaṇa coins, asking [about her] in the towns, cities, villages and royal palaces, and in this way arrived in Śrāvastī. Then the brahmin went to where Utpalavarnā was, and when he arrived, he greeted her saying, “May you be victorious and have long life!” and said, “Here, accept these kārṣāpaṇa coins.”

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566 In the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition, these six are counted as Śrāvastī, Sāketa (aka Ayodhya), Campaka, Vārāñāsī, Vaisāli and Rājagṛha.

567 bsnyen bkur byed

568 It is irresponsible to blithely apply social practices known from dharmāśāstra material to our narrative world. However, we do know from dharmāśāstra that it is acceptable for courtesans or prostitutes to accept as customers men from castes equal to our above hers, but not below. If this is in operation here, it would make her comment here rather curious. It could be read as an oblique critique of the humble gifts he proffers, in the sense that such gifts may be appropriate in an overture leading to marriage, when indeed this caste difference matters, but they are not appropriate if he is approaching her as a customer. Perhaps the narrators are simply displaying her playfulness, or coyness as she feigns innocence as to his intentions, or confidence as she toys with him, or haughtiness as she points out that her value is far higher than a handful or toothpicks. Or perhaps something else entirely is at work here.

569 khyad dang lhan cig phrad ’dod. Or embrace you.
After reflecting, she said, “Brahmin, I have abandoned that which is not the holy Dharma.”

She said this, and he said to Utpalavarnā, “Maybe you have abandoned it, but I haven’t.”

Then Utpalavarnā said to that brahmin, “Brahmin, to what part of my limbs has your mind become extremely attached?”

He said, “Your eyes.”

By her extraordinary powers (rdzu ‘phrul or rddhi), she placed her eyes on the palm of her hand, and said to the brahmin. “Brahmin, if you desire, take it.”

Then, as soon as that brahmin saw the eyes, he became stirred up and angry. He punched Bhikṣunī Utpalavarnā in the head and left.
The brahmin has greeted her with the benediction for victory and long life that is a customary greeting of brahmin to those in other castes. With that simple phrase, the brahmin is asserting his spiritual superiority over her, placing himself in the position of the one in whom spiritual powers are vested, and her as the one in need of his blessings. She points out what he surely already learned as he asked of her whereabouts—that her social location has changed dramatically and that she no longer engaged in what was against the Dharma, or unrighteous. He refuses to recognize her new status or treat her as a renunciate, but in so doing is forced to admit that he himself does engage in what is unrighteous. Just as the brahmin holds her renunciate status in contempt, Utpalavarna too expresses her indifference toward the gold coins that he had had to wander the countryside to collect. The narrators do not take the opportunity to depict his efforts to accumulate the princely sum she demanded. However, they do tell us that previously he had approached her hopefully and reverentially with rustic offerings that signal his status as a humble brahmin, but she raised the bar for him substantially. Now, when he returns, she has shifted the terms, placing herself once again outside his reach. The brahmin had been willing to defer his desire, but not to abandon it altogether.

She wastes few words, and at once counters his gaze perfectly with her own. If his gaze had sought to treat her as an object, she demonstrates the absurdity of such attempts to objectify others, when she isolates the object of his attachment and handles it as if it truly were a pure object. Despite the workings of his desire which would allow him to engage with her body parts as if they could be separated from the rest of her personhood, Utpalavarna’s own gesture asserts that she is still a whole person, and a person who owns and controls her
own parts. And as a whole person, she retains the right to say what happens to her parts, denying her viewer any proprietary rights his gaze might have pretended to. The fact that she is willing to cede a part of her body to him, and that she has the powers to do so proves conclusively that she is his spiritual superior.

Yet the brahmin is not schooled. Here a brief comparison to the story of Subhā makes clear what the MSV’s story is not doing. When Subhā tears out an eye to show her sexual pursuer, her act at once cools his ardor. Understanding the lesson she is giving with her deconstruction of the supposed locus of his attachment, he apologizes and leaves her—disfigured but not raped. Only when Subhā beholds the beauty of Buddha (with her remaining eye) does her lost eye re-appear. By contrast to the Pāli account, our story is noticeably free of disfigurement and gore, and its pedagogy is incomplete. In order to effect a transformation in the other, Subhā physically transforms herself, while Utpalavarnā’s transformation is not real, and momentarily averts desire but does not tame the brahmin. Utpalavarnā’s display of eyes in her hand is apparently just a magical display, for the narrators feel no need to show a cure or explain how her vision remains unimpaired later.

Unlike the young man in the Subhā story, the brahmin is simply unable to see Utpalavarnā as a renunciate, but instead insists on seeing her as a woman, right to the end. His desire is not dispelled, but transformed into anger, and he takes resort to violence, the last resort for those whose desires are thwarted. Stopping short of rape—perhaps her disembodied eyes dissuaded him from that at least—nevertheless he physically assaults her, establishing

572 The idea of the self as an owner is, of course, doctrinally unsound according to most Buddhist texts, but this narrative has its own vision to propound.
this simpler form of physical dominance over her. Utpalavarṇā escapes rape, but for the rest of her life the incident will limit her mobility (and that of all nuns), for it is in response to this incident that Buddha establishes the rule prohibiting women from living in solitary places. The fact that she was harmed in this exchange is a testament to the tenacity of the man’s unwillingness to let her set aside gender, or redefine how she is gendered. The narrative offers a vivid commentary on the intractable persistence of gender, and the ways gendered roles can be thrust on even the most exceptional women by men in positions of physical or social power. The nexus for such gendering here is the body, and the sexual desires directed at it. This narrative specifically situates male gendering of women in the persistent patterns of desire and violence from which the monastic life is designed to allow men and women to escape. Buddha’s rule is an attempt to withdraw women from places of vulnerability to male desire and violence and within the relative shelter of urban monastic settlements. But it also acknowledges that problematic gender constructions are bond to follow women wherever they go.

We have been exploring women’s responses to the male gaze, noting a tremendous range of subject positions, inversions and appropriations. In a sense, Utpalavarnā’s story marks an outer limit of how far such negotiations can go, both in terms of strategies and their effectiveness.

The MSV has a clear vision of bodies as important sites for re-negotiating what gender means. This intervention is certainly not executed without resistance. Buddhist monastics cease to engage in sexual activity, they shave their hair, and don different clothes, but because the body itself does not change, its given-ness may appear to be a baseline determinative
factor. But the body too is a product to be cultivated, and the vinaya comes with a full toolkit for use to that end. Even the most apparently static component of a person’s identity can be reconstructed in the monastic project of forming ethical persons.

Gender identity itself remains tightly bound to bodily form. Working on one’s relationship to the body therefore becomes a way to modify how the body itself is gendered. The narratives argue that even when others turn a sexualized gaze toward them, women do find ways to control that gaze. And by gaining new angles of vision on their own bodies, as happened for Utpalavarnā, their trajectories in life can change instantly.

Monastic life itself offers new possibilities for women to shift the social coding to which the female body is ordinarily subject. It does so both by offering women the disciplinary tools to use their relationships to their own bodies as part of their monastic practice, and in broader ways by creating a monastic model of embodiment for women as an alternative to the discourses of desire and the mainstream embodiment they support.

In the next chapter, we will turn to the monastic community as a site in which gender plays a complex and shifting role in shaping the new social formation that evolves. The mere possibility of an alternate community for women will have momentous meaning in the lives of the women we watch enter and flourish in the bhikṣuṇī order. Yet gender will persist in playing its part in the meanings women may find in their life as renunciate. Although their body may be virtually all they carry with them into their new social location, as we have seen, female embodiment itself bears social meanings that cannot so easily be shed.
Chapter Five: Community

Dharmadattā said to her retinue, “Sisters, the fact that the Lord has permitted bhikṣuṇīs to go forth, take full ordination and engage in bhikṣuṇīhood: This is all due to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī. “

*Bhikṣuvibhaṅga, Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*

Some [bhikṣuṇīs considering returning to lay life] said, “Sisters, since it is difficult for women to attain ordination in the well-spoken Dharma and vinaya, let us go ask the Noble Kṛṣṇā Gautamī.”

*Kṣudrakavastu, Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*
Forming a Community of Women

When the women in the narratives we have examined found ways to consciously occupy, contest or re-appropriate their socially given place to make it their own, they did so on their own behalf. Dharmadattā asked to be ordained at home herself, but did not ask that all women be allowed to practice a monastic path privately. Viśākhā used her wits to secure the best deal for herself, never asking that girls cease to be treated as merchandise. Āmrapālī sought better terms not for all courtesans, but as an exception for herself. As did the other women, Āmrapālī in a sense appealed to the assembly’s attentiveness to particularity, limiting her requests to a single situation: her own. They entertained her proposals on a case-by-case basis, and in this way Āmrapālī was able to modify what it meant to be handed off to a life as a public courtesan. One woman’s example and actions can constitute a new way to be a courtesan that then impacts what is thought possible for other courtesans, and thus impacts how the role itself becomes defined. But Āmrapālī did not expressly ask the assembly to redefine what it meant to be a courtesan—or what it meant to be a woman. However, when Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī seeks permission for women to ordain, she does so not as an exceptional concession for herself personally, but on behalf of women in general, and that is a very different sort of intervention.

As such, the move to create a monastic community of women cannot remain the sort of local, particular and contingent negotiation that we watched particular women making for themselves in the narratives of the MSV. Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s request to allow women to ordain is a bold and sweeping move to shift women from their supporting roles in the home or
the margins of society’s power zones to the central arena of the Buddhist world—for in the understanding of the vinaya, monasticism is indisputably the epicenter of the Buddhist imaginaire, the key site of prestige, power and transformative possibility. In petitioning for full entry for women in general, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is asking for more than the embedded agency that she and other women are able to wield as “skilled and intense strategizers who constantly stretch the game even as they enact it,” as Ortner puts it. Rather Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s proposal is tantamount to an effort to change the rules of the game outright. When her request is finally granted, forming a monastic order for women becomes an intervention that challenges the very idea of what a woman is. As it pushes to revise them, the bhikṣuṇī order will confront the full weight of the dominant gendering discourses at work in mainstream society. These confrontations will leave lasting imprints on the monastic community as it takes shape, and through those negotiations, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī will continue to play a major part in defining and defending the new identity and roles that women take up as they enter the monastic community.

Up to now, our excursions through the narratives of the MSV have allowed us to encounter women in the fullness of their particularity. However, the formation of the monastic community demands and underwrites a conceptual shift that operates not on the level of particulars but on a more universal level. Society’s ideas and ideologies about what women can (and cannot) do must shift in order for the women’s monastic community to be founded, and once it is founded those ideas will be challenged even further. When we began looking at gender in the MSV, we noted that gender in general and women’s gender more

specifically remained untheorized in the text, but came to light in multiple narrative
moments. We thus proceeded by allowing the narratives to present a thick description of how
gender worked on the ground sketched out by the MSV. But now we turn from particular
women’s negotiations for themselves to the community’s collective contestation at a general
level. With this, our inquiry into gender in the MSV moves beyond its initial charting of the
range of possibilities and positions taken by women in the narratives, to address ideas of what
might be possible for all women. In other words, where our discussion thus far has focused
largely on what was possible for given women in given situations, when we turn to the
community as a whole, we are asking what is thought possible for women in general.

At this analytical juncture, it becomes important for us to track a crucial but often
unmarked shifting between two major categories of analysis. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty
describes them in a different context:

The relationship between “Woman” (a cultural and ideological
composite other constructed through diverse representational
discourses—scientific, literary, juridical, linguistic, cinematic, etc.) and
“women” (real, material subjects of their collective histories) is one of
the central questions the practice of feminist scholarship seeks to
address. This connection between women as historical subjects and the
representation of Woman produced by Western\textsuperscript{574} hegemonic discourses
is not a relation of direct identity or a relation of simple correspondence

\textsuperscript{574} Here we recognize that the “West” has no monopoly on the production of hegemonic discourses, and we find it
at work in the MSV as well.
or simple implication. It is an arbitrary relation set up by particular cultures.575

The construct of “Woman” can be singular because it is a notional entity, a representational image that can be unified and homogenous because its only referent is itself, and not any actual persons. By contrast, women are always particular women, in the plural, and as such any category in which they might be grouped is by definition non-unified and internally diverse. (The same is true, of course, of men.) We have seen that the MSV’s narratives certainly recognize women as a non-unified group, who act as agents demanding rights as if they were indeed subjects of their own personal (if not collective) histories. Looking at narratives offered conducive conditions for observing the MSV’s handling of women as particulars. A caveat is in order, however, for at no moment in the MSV are we viewing “actual women.” We only ever see literary representations of women, whose form of participation in constructs of Woman is hard to assess, but never nil. Even the most concretely detailed story about a particular individual woman can still only produce a representation of a woman—a woman made of language, living in a textual world. Conversely, even the most allegorical narratives about women must embody imagined ideals in particular bodies, in particular social formations and situations—and both body and social world will be gendered in particular ways. Thus while we can become attentive to the distinction between the two categories, we cannot hope to encounter either in its purest form. In fact, even were we able to look directly at the lives and experiences of actual historical women, in no way would it be possible for us to isolate them from the representations and ideas about Woman, for what we (and others) think

575 Mohanty 2003: 19. Mohanty credits the formulation of this distinction to Teresa de Lauretis in her 1984 Alice Doesn’t: Feminism Semiotics Cinema.
we are and can become profoundly impacts how we behave and what we ultimately do become. It is for this very reason that the ethics of care Buddha practices operates by showing people new visions of their own capabilities, as we observed in the chapter on ethics.

Nevertheless, our attention to narratives has created a space for women as plural and particular persons to begin to come to light, despite the co-existence of competing discourses in the MSV that reflect a view of Woman that is less nuanced and more disempowering than those we have also seen at work. Indeed, the MSV contains numerous editorial comments that neatly encapsulate these negative representations of Woman. These comments at times appear oddly disconnected from the more particular vision of the narratives in which they are embedded. To take up just one of them, found within the story of the Śākya women who were plagued by restless desires after ordaining, and sought Krśā Gautamī’s advice, we read:

The Lord has said: Black snakes have five faults. What are they? They are angry. They are vengeful. They are hostile. They lack gratitude, and their poison is sharp. In the same way, some women also have five faults. What are they? They are angry. They are vengeful. They are hostile. They lack gratitude, and their venom is sharp. As for what the sharp venom of a woman is, it is that for the most part women have great desires.

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576 It is not specified where the quote of the Buddha ends.

577 The version of this passage that appears in the Kṣudrakavastu at Derge Tha 78b4 (see note below) reads ‘khu ba for snying ring.

578 bud med kha cig la. This is remarkably qualified compared to the usual general statements of the sort ‘x class of objects has y set of faults.’

579 phal cher – mostly, probably, for the most part. This is rather odd qualification to this sort of statement, which is often made clear and even overstated if only for effect.

580 Kṣudrakavastu. Not extant in Sanskrit. Tibetan found at Derge Da 134b3–5. bcom ldan ‘das kyi gsun s pa/ sbrul nag po la ryes pa’i dmigs lnga ste/ lnga gang zhe na/ khor ba can dang/ khon du ‘dzin pa can dang/ snying ring ba dang/ byas pa
This editorial comment is striking in several ways.\textsuperscript{581} For one, it diverges from the more common form of such aphoristic statements, which tend to be stated in the most general and even overstated terms, for effect and for the sake of pithiness. Here, the scope is carefully limited to “some women” and qualified with “for the most part.” Further, the comment comes within a narrative in which several women are afflicted by desire and actively seek out counsel on how to combat it, first from one woman who encourages them to pursue their desire, and then from another who urges them not to. In the end, it is the latter counsel they follow. It is as if the MSV’s narratorial eye to the diversity of women’s characters and its attentiveness to the particulars of women’s experiences prevents the narrators from subscribing wholeheartedly to misogynist comments that are clearly circulating in the form of such proverbial comparisons.

The comparison of women to snakes echoes loudly the oft-cited (at least in Buddhist studies) comment that Buddha makes to a monk who had had sexual relations with his ex-wife after ordaining, to the effect that “it would be better had you inserted your member in the mouth of a black snake whose venom is swift-acting, strong and sharp, than into a woman’s

\textsuperscript{581} This exact passage is repeated, with the same qualifications elsewhere, in another story about a woman who found the ascetic life too difficult. The phrasing there is nearly identical to our quote here, with the same qualifications to the generalization. (Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Tha 78b4-5). The story is told to explain the positive qualities of a woman, by narrating the past life actions that created the cause for those qualities. In the past life story narrated by Buddha, a brother and sister decide to live together side by side as ascetics in the forest. She decides to return to town, saying she cannot live on roots and berries any longer. He asks her permission to join an ascetic order, she grants it and he does so. After he attains enlightenment as a pratyekabuddha, he fulfills a promise to return to see her. She supports him with alms thereafter and experiences the karmic benefits from doing so for many hundreds of lives.
place.” The context for this statement is the first occasion upon which a monk broke the vow of celibacy, sparking the creation of the formal rule against sexual activity. It is clear that it is sexual activity by supposedly celibate monks that Buddha is condemning here in the clearest and most vivid terms, and not women _per se_. Indeed, the interpretations—by later commentators or academic scholars—that take this as a comment about women on the whole commit the same error of which they accuse Buddha: to be taking an isolated physical part of the woman for her entire person, and comments about transgressive contact with women's bodies for an articulation of Buddha’s concept of Woman on the whole.

The MSV’s narrators are certainly not above deploying such totalizing comments about Woman, and do not always qualify them as carefully as we see here. However, by deferring our examination of such comments, we have allowed the MSV’s narrative visions of particular women to emerge first as a context for such statements about Woman. When set against the backdrop of that far richer and very different vision of women, it becomes clear that such aphoristic comments are articulated within contexts that limit their scope. However, the _subhāṣita_-style aphoristic statements in which Sanskrit literary culture delights and abounds often break free of their textual constraints and circulate with lives of their own, as sound bites. While the repetition of such comments has its own impact, when scholarly interpreters and monastic exegetes alike take such statements as the definitive representation of how female gender is constructed in the vinaya—as a kind of handy description of Woman—they do so only by ignoring the contexts in which such statements are transmitted, as well the

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_582_ Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan at Derge Ca 28b3-4. _khroy ko kyi sbral nag po dug myur du khyab pa/ dug drag pa/ dug rno ba'i khar rang gi yan lag gi rnam pa bcug par gyur ba ni bla'i/ de ltar gyur pas bud med kyi yul la ni ma yin ma/._
overwhelming evidence of the narratives’ attentiveness to women as a diverse category of ethical agents. More generally, it is worth wondering whether difficulties in distinguishing clearly between these two categories, or between “Woman” and women might not be an issue frustrating some of Buddhist studies’ attempts to come to terms with gender in Buddhist texts—are they warmly inclusive? are they misogynist? are they just ambiguous? Sometimes these questions can only be resolved by ascertaining whether it is “Woman” or women who are under discussion, and how the two are related. In the MSV as elsewhere, what the narrators are comfortable showing women doing is not the same as the portrait that emerges from generalized discourse and editorial comments about Woman in general. One is often far more inclusive and empowering than the other.

A slightly different formulation of the relation between women and Woman may help us hone in on the issue of agency that we have been exploring. Susan Starr Sered rephrases Mohanty’s formulation to speak of women (who can act as agents) and the symbolic construct of Woman (which cannot). When analyzing gender in religious systems it is crucial to understand that two ontologically different sets of issues are involved. The first centers on women—that is, actual people who have varying degrees of agency within specific social situations. Women as agents can demand rights, enter into negotiations, and protest unfair treatment. ... The second set of issues centers on Woman—a symbolic construct conflating

583 Curiously, modern works that celebrate ways Buddhism is seen to empower women tend to emphasize the symbolic Buddhist constructions of Woman that come off well, rather than looking at the experiences of historical Buddhist women, or at the discursive practices within Buddhist texts and institutions that work to limit women’s agency.

584 Sered 1998.
gender, sex, and sexuality, and comprised of allegory, ideology, metaphor, fantasy, and (at least in male-dominated religions) men’s psychological projections.\textsuperscript{585}

Sered points out that the distinction between women and Woman can have particularly oppressive effects for women in religious discourses, because in religious traditions, symbols are “the coin of the realm” and thus liable to be subject to constant scrutiny and ideological pressures.\textsuperscript{586} When the narrative portrays Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī acting as a woman in Sered’s sense, exercising agency and asking for rights for all women to ordain, the power she wields is practical as well as symbolic, since she is not only seeking new possibilities for women, but also challenging the construct of Woman. The creation of a monastic order for women moves beyond the level of what women can do, for it entails the creation of a new “symbolic system”, or, better, a new discursive construct.\textsuperscript{587}

To draw on Foucault’s terms of analysis but adapting them for our purposes here, we may say that “Woman” is an obaject that does not pre-exist the order of discourse in which it appears. We may note with Foucault that discourses are practices that bring their own objects into being—in this case, the “object” in question being the construct of “Woman.” But with Ortner we also note that “players” in such constructs “are defined and constructed (though

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\textsuperscript{585} Ibid. p.194.  \\
\textsuperscript{586} Paraphrasing Sered 1998: 195.  \\
\textsuperscript{587} Part of the usefulness of these analytical distinctions is their heuristic power in both these models of understanding social formations. One way to understand monasticism is as an option in which individual women can in principle be extricated from one set of discourses or one symbol system—that of the household, the family, the social order at large—and find a place in a new one, that of the monastic order and the class of religious mendicants, who have (again, symbolically) left society behind. Of course, women monastics are then saturated with symbolic power, but it is no longer a symbol that gains its currency not from reproductive role, her value in the gifting exchange between father and husband, or her ritual or other functions in the domestic domain.
\end{flushleft}
never wholly contained) by the game.” This nicely describes the dynamics we have watched in the narratives, where, on the one hand the order of discourse, or the gender “game,” shapes women’s possibilities and positions in undeniable ways, while on the other hand women often do manage to maneuver themselves into modified positions. Yet what is possible for women to modify in local ways does not translate directly into modification of the construct of Woman, for its relationship to actual women is far from direct. That is to say, even if one woman manages to gain a position normally closed to other women, the definition of what women on the whole are capable of may not necessarily expand to incorporate the evidence of that example. Sometimes, she is labeled an exception to the rule, and the generalized notion of Woman remains unchallenged despite what one particular woman could do and be. However, once entire groups of women ordain, joining female monastic communities that are open to all women in principle, it is no longer possible to contain the overwhelming evidence of their examples within the category of exception or anomaly. The presence of large numbers of women in robes going on almsrounds and sitting to teach the Dharma—coupled with the open invitation for other women to do so—simply poses too great a challenge to what had been thought possible for them previously. As such, the Woman that appears in the order of the set of discursive practices that constitutes Buddhist monasticism will not be the same as the Woman that appears in other sets of discourses. The modification to what is seen as possible for all women—theoretically, at least—is simply too great and too public to leave the gender construct of Woman itself unmarked. Further, the respectful treatment that we will see Buddha insist that all bhikṣuṇīs are entitled to by all laypeople strikes a direct blow at the

social valuing of women more broadly. Although Buddha leaves untouched the normative values of women’s roles and activities in lay society at large, a great deal shifts due to the mere fact of arguing that under certain conditions—that of fully entering the monastic order—women can be worthy recipients of esteem and reverence by even those lay men that mainstream society places at its summit and accords the greatest value within its domain, as we shall see below.

In short, the act of creating a female monastic order would have tangible historical consequences for Buddhist institutions as well as those of other communities. It should therefore come as no surprise that the MSV’s narrative of that founding serves as a lightning rod for anxieties about those consequences. It may not surprise us much either to note that the comments here seem discordant with the tone we have seen Buddha taking before and after this point in the MSV’s depictions of his interactions with his female disciples. In brief, Buddha initially declines to permit women to ordain when requested by Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, and only later agrees after his attendant Ānanda intercedes. He stipulates that nuns must accept eight exceptional rules that have as one of their effects to rank all nuns below all monks. Buddha explains his hesitation by declaring that allowing women in the order will shorten the longevity of the Buddhist teachings and institutions. He further makes a series of highly negative analogies to women and the problems they cause, justifying the eight rules given them. Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī accepts at once, and the female monastic order comes into being.

Janet Gyatso provides us with a formulation of the interpretation of this account that has come to prevail in Buddhist studies:
This settlement has been understood by modern scholars as a nod to the demands of Indian society, and it reminds us of the central importance that the early Buddhist order gave to its public status and image in order to maintain the support of the laity. The idea is that these lay supporters would have been disturbed by the formation of a community of independent single women, and that they would have been mollified—and, most crucially, would continue to respect and underwrite the order—by the re-inscription of such celibate women in a submissive relationship to their male masters.\(^{589}\)

These concerns with the relationship to larger society are certainly a major factor in the pressures on gender constructions of women in the monastic order. Yet the processes of negotiation are more complex than the prevailing view summarized here suggests, as Gyatso herself goes on to note, and as we will be exploring in detail below. In any case, this narrative has far too often, and too simplistically, been taken to be representative of Buddha’s position on women in his monastic order. If nothing else, this dissertation’s wider exploration of the MSV’s narrative world must have made clear just how erroneous it would be to take this story as representative of how gender works in this vinaya text. To see how unsustainable that assumption is in the narrative view of the MSV, we need think only of the narrator’s uncontained delight in portraying Buddha’s risking the ire of the entire town of Śrāvastī to authorize Dharmadattā’s ordination and Buddha’s appearance at the showdown with her would-be kidnappers to support her wish to escape marriage.

In light of the sustained efforts by Buddha to support the women in his monastic order, all the attention given to the narrative of hesitation at founding it is not only scholarly

\(^{589}\) Gyatso 2003: 91.
problematic. This repeated return to the same story, at the expense of all other narratives telling a different story, risks becoming a kind of intervention in itself, insisting on one vision of the text’s handling of gender to the inclusion of the far more complex visions we have been teasing out from its many, very different narrative treatments of women.

However, the foundation narrative serves as a warrant for too many conversations about gender in Buddhist communities for us to avoid adding our voice to the chorus as well. It may be worth doing so as well because the version of this story preserved in the *MSV* differs in a few notable ways from versions that have garnered more attention in Buddhist studies. First, in the *MSV*’s version of the tale, despite the intimate family ties between Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and Buddha whom she raised from birth, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī never presents her petition for ordination as a personal request. Indeed, she frames her appeal in the broadest terms possible, grounding it in an implicit argument about equal gender opportunity. When she presents her request, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī does not go alone to see Buddha in his residence, but comes in the company of 500 other Śākya women, underscoring the public nature of her request. She bows toward him with her hands joined as she asks him:

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591 After initial confusion as to the sectarian affiliation of the passage, it has been identified as Mūlasarvāstivādin by Schmidt 1994, following Roth (1970: 5) and affirmed by Chung (2006b: 420). This manuscript does follow the Tibetan translation on the whole, with a few significant departures that we will note below. We can confirm their determination of a Mūlasarvāstivādin affiliation, but cannot agree that the manuscript follows the Tibetan “to the last detail,” Chung 2006b: 420 and Schmidt 1974: 158.
“Venerable, then, if there is the opportunity for [Sch-MS3a1] women to attain the four fruits of asceticism, may women to go forth in the well-spoken Dhammavinaya, receive full ordination and become bhikṣuṇīs, practicing brahmacarya in the presence of the Lord.”

When she has said this, the Lord said to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, “Gautamī, in just this way, practice brahmacarya with shaved head and wearing the saṅghāṭī [robe of a Buddhist monastic] as long as you live, alone, fully, purely and perfectly, and this will be conducive to your long-term aims, benefit and well-being.”

Buddha here is telling her to follow the renunciate life—formulated here as brahmacarya, as it often is described in the MSV, right down to her Dharma robes and shaved head—but at home, in private and outside a community. Buddha appears to be authorizing

592 Sanskrit simply puts the main verb in the optative, while Tibetan indicates that this is a request by its uses of gsol.
593 Tibetan omits Gautamī.
594 This is how I am taking the evam eva.
595 Departing significantly from the Sanskrit manuscript, the Tibetan has Buddha suggesting that she keep the outward appearance of a lay householder while practicing brahmacarya alone in private at home. The Sanskrit effectively is allowing her to live fully as a monastic, but not as part of a female community.
596 Sanskrit: kevalam. Tibetan: ‘ba’ zhi ng pa la.
597 A Sanskrit fragment containing much of this narrative was edited by Ridding 1920 and then again by Schmidt 1993. Although the portion I translate here takes place before the point at which the Sanskrit manuscript begins, this exchange is repeated verbatim in the Tibetan later, and the repeated portion is extant in full in the Sanskrit text. I will translate from the Sanskrit where it appears in the later repetition, noting the deviations from the Tibetan, which are on occasion of major import. I include both Sanskrit and Tibetan texts below for ease of comparison. I translate from Schmidt’s edition; His pagination is abbreviated as Sch, and the pagination from the manuscript is indicated along with it. Sch 242; MS3a1: mātrgrāmasya caturthasya śrāmaṇyaphalasyādīgamaḥ labhate mātrgrāmāḥ svākhyāte dharmmavinaye pravrajyām upasampadaṃ bhikṣuṇībhāvāñ caret mātrgrāmo bhagavato ‘ntike brahmacāryam ityevam ukte bhagavān mahāprajāpatim gautamīm idam avocat | evam eva tvaṃ gautami munḍā saṃghāṭypṛāvṛtā yāvajjīvaṃ kevalam pariśuddham pariṣuddham paryavadātam brahmacāryaḥ cara tuva bhavisyati dirgharātram arthāya hitāya sukhayeti | Tibetan found in the Kṣudrakavastu at Derge Da 100a7w100b2. btsun pa de ste bud med rnam gyi bral gis sbyong gi bras bu bzhis gids mug nas bud med rnas legs par [Da 100b] gsungs pa’i chos ’dul ba la rab tu byung ste bsnyen par rdzogs nas dge slob ma’i drungs po spyod cing bud med rnam bcom ldan ’das kyi drung na tshangs par spyad pa spyod du gsal zhes gsal pa dang/ bcom ldan ’das kyi skye dga‘i bdag mo chen mo la ’di skad ces bka’ stsal to/ gau ta mi khyed ’di ltar khyim mi mo’i gos dkar po gyon la nam ’tsho’i bar du de ’ba’ zhi ng pa la yongs su rdzogs pa/ yongs su dag pa yongs su byung ba tshangs par spyad pa spyod cig dang/ khyed la yun ring po’i don dang/ phan pa dang/ bde bar ’gyur ro/
everything short of a public display of her spiritual commitment and the formation of a social institution of monastic women. It bears mentioning that the Tibetan diverges markedly, and has Buddha telling her to wear the white clothes of a lay woman, making no mention of a shaved head.

The reply seems best suited to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī not as a spokesperson for womankind, but as an individual and particular person. As a queen with many servants at her disposal, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī might have had the freedom from domestic toil and other material conditions needed to be able to dedicate her time to some sort of spiritual practice without leaving home, but it is clear the same would not be true of the women of other classes. This fact would not be lost on her—remember, this is the same Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī who thought to point out to King Śuddhodana that men ought to go in the morning to see Buddha because women were occupied in the mornings with domestic work. She herself may not do housework, but she was aware that other women must.

Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is not satisfied by the limited and private path Buddha suggests, and repeats her request, verbatim, three times. Generally, in the MSV three times is sufficient to indicate one’s determination and virtually oblige one’s interlocutor to accede. But each time Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī asks, Buddha tells her to shave her head, wear robes and practice brahmacarya, but alone at home. Later, despite the fact that he has denied them permission to “go forth” from the household, when Buddha leaves town, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and the other 500 women shave their heads, don monastic garb and proceed to follow

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508 See Gender chapter above.
Buddha. When they catch up with him in a distant village, the narrative tells us in terms clearly sympathetic to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī:

With shaved heads and wearing improvised garments, they followed along to the place where the Lord had stopped for the night. Then as the Lord was wandering through the Vṛji territory, he arrived in the land of Nadika, and was staying in Gujivastu. Then Gautamī Mahāprajāpatī became tired, fatigued and exhausted. Even though she was stricken from the dust,²⁹⁹ she went to where the Lord was, and when she arrived there, she prostrated with her head at the feet of the Lord and sat off to the side.³⁰⁰

Having demonstrated her commitment, her physical forbearance in making the trek on foot, as well as the fact that she is not taking his ‘no’s for her answer, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī repeats the same appeal as before, three more times, and again three times receives the same denial. She then leaves the monastery compound and is sitting on the ground outside the gate, reduced to tears, when Ānanda finds her. He ascertains the reason for her weeping, and goes inside to ask Buddha on her behalf. He repeats her question verbatim once, and Buddha replies:

“Ānanda, do not request that women go forth in the well-spoken Dharma and vinaya, take full ordination and become bhikṣuṇīs. If you ask why not, Ānanda, it is because a Dharma and vinaya in which women have

²⁹⁹ *rdul* could also indicate that she is menstruation. Since she has been on the road, I am taking dust as a more likely reading here.

³⁰⁰ This passage does not appear in the Sanskrit manuscript edited by Ridding 1920 and in Schmidt 1973, but is set before the initial scene described therein. Tibetan found in the *Kṣudrakavastu* at Derge Da 101a1-3. *mgo bregs shing sbyar ma gyon te bcom ldan ‘das kyi dgongs ma’i dzu bral byin ‘bras rgya dgon gno/ de nas bcom ldan ‘das kyi yul btsi dza nas ljongs rgyu byin na di kar byon te na di ka’i ku dza ka’i gnas na bzhugs so/ de nas gau tu ml byi de btag mo chen mo lus ngal/ lus chad/ lus dub ste/ rdul gyis lus la phyag bzhin du bcom ldan ‘das ga la ba der song ste phyin pa dang/ bcom ldan ‘das kyi zhab la mgo bcos phyag ‘tshal te, phyogs gcig tu ’khod do.*
been ordained will not be long-lasting. Ānanda, just as a family with many women and few men will become vulnerable to assault and easily assaulted, such as by robbers and kidnappers,⁶⁰¹ in just the same way, Ānanda, a Dharma and vinaya in which women have been ordained will not be long-lasting. Ānanda, just as rounds of bolts of lightning⁶⁰² should strike a farmer’s⁶⁰³ flourishing field of sāli rice, such that his sāli rice itself would be damaged, brought to destruction and ruined by the calamity,⁶⁰⁴ Ānanda, in the same way, a Dharma and vinaya in which women have been ordained will not be [4b1] long-lasting.⁶⁰⁵

The analogies continue in this vein. Unlike some other versions of this narrative, Ānanda does not need to press Buddha further, or provide further arguments in favor. Nor

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⁶⁰¹ bandhusteyānāṃ; Tibetan: mi la rku ba rnams. The Tibetan seems to take this not as families who are thieves—"robber bands" as Frances Wilson renders it in the translation in Paul 1979: 84—but those who steal away family members, or kidnappers.

⁶⁰² Schmidt as aśanir nipata dvirvākrā; Ridding (1920: 125) here reads aśanir nirpatet vidyucaḥkāṛā. Tibetan reading ser ba’i ’khor lo mi bzad pa bubs nas could attest to a reading of cakra but has hail instead of lightning bolts.

⁶⁰³ Tibetan omits this. kārṣakasya grhapateḥ is more literally, the field of a “farming householder” or the landlord of a farm, indicating not a sharecropper but owner of the fields.

⁶⁰⁴ utsādāya vināśāyanyena vyasanāya. Tibetan has weakened, quite weakened, and unfit: nyams par ’gyur/ rnam par nyams par ’gyur/ tshul ma yin pas mā rungs par ’gyur ro.

⁶⁰⁵ Sanskrit at Sch 243-244; MS4a1-4b1. mā [t]e ānanda mātṛgrāmasya svākhyaate dharmmavinaye pravrajyā rocatāṃ mā upasampan mā bhikṣunibhāvah | tat ka heter [y]asminn ānanda dharmmavinaye mātragrāmāḥ pravrajyat nāsau dharmmavinayāṣ ca āpākāraḥ bhuvati] [Sch 425] tadyathā ānanda kulaṃ bhaṅgustikam alpaccharṣaṃ sāvaḥkāraṃ bhuvati supradhārṣakaṃ yad uta caurānāṃ bandhusteyānāṃ ca evam evānanda yasmin dharmmavinaye mātragrāmāḥ pravrajyat nāsau dharmmavinayāṣ ca āpākāraḥ bhuvati| tadyathā ānanda kārṣakasya grhapateḥ sampanne sāliṣetre aśanir nipata dvirvakā yāvad etasyaiva śifer utsādāya vināśāyányena vyasanāya | evam evānanda yasmin dharmmavinaye mātragrāmāḥ pravrajyat nāsau dharmmavinayāṣ ca āpākāraḥ | [4b] tiko bhuvati. Tibetan found in the Kṣudrakavastu at Derge Da 101b7-102a4. kun [102a] dga’ bo khyod bud med legs par bshad pa’i cho ’dul ba la rab tu byung zhes byen pa’i dzog zhes te dge dge ’dul ma’i dngos por ma gsal cig/ de ci’i phyir zhes na/ kun dga’ bo legs par bshad pa’i cho ’dul ba la bud med rab tu phyang ba na cho ’dul ba de yun ring du gnas par mi ’gyur ro/ ’di lta ste/ kun dga’ bo dper na/ khyi dge ’dul ba la la nag gnas sar med mi dge dge ’dul ma’i dngos por ma gsal cig/ de ci’i phyir zhes na/ kun dga’ bo legs par bshad pa’i cho ’dul ba la bud med rab tu phyang ba na cho ’dul ba de yun ring du gnas par mi ’gyur ro/ ’di lta ste/ kun dga’ bo dper na/ khyi dge ’dul ba la la nag gnas sar med mi dge dge ’dul ma’i dngos por ma gsal cig/ de ci’i phyir zhes na/ kun dga’ bo legs par bshad pa’i cho ’dul ba la bud med rab tu phyang ba na cho ’dul ba de yun ring du gnas par mi ’gyur ro/ ’di lta ste/ kun dga’ bo dper na/ khyi dge ’dul ba la la nag gnas sar med mi dge dge ’dul ma’i dngos por ma gsal cig/ de ci’i phyir zhes na/ kun dga’ bo legs par bshad pa’i cho ’dul ba la bud med rab tu phyang ba na cho ’dul ba de yun ring du gnas par mi ’gyur ro/ ’di lta ste/ kun dga’ bo dper na/ khyi dge ’dul ba la la nag gnas sar med mi dge dge ’dul ma’i dngos por ma gsal cig/ de ci’i phyir zhes na/ kun dga’ bo legs par bshad pa’i cho ’dul ba la bud med rab tu phyang ba na cho ’dul ba de yun ring du gnas par mi ’gyur ro/ ’di lta ste/ kun dga’ bo dper na/ khyi dge ’dul ba la la nag gnas sar med mi dge dge ’dul ma’i dngos por ma gsal cig/ de ci’i phyir zhes na/ kun dga’ bo legs par bshad pa’i cho ’dul ba la bud med rab tu phyang ba na cho ’dul ba de yun ring du gnas par mi ’gyur ro/ ’di lta ste/ kun dga’ bo dper na/ khyi dge ’dul ba la la nag gnas sar med mi dge dge ’dul ma’i dngos por ma gsal cig/ de ci’i phyir zhes na/ kun dga’ bo legs par bshad pa’i cho ’dul ba la bud med rab tu phyang ba na cho ’dul ba de yun ring du gnas par mi ’gyur ro/ ’di lta ste/ kun dga’ bo dper na/ khyi dge ’dul ba la la nag gnas sar med mi dge dge ’dul ma’i dngos por ma gsal cig/ de ci’i phyir zhes na/ kun dga’ bo legs par bshad pa’i cho ’dul ba la bud med rab tu phyang ba na cho ’dul ba de yun ring du gnas par mi ’gyur ro/ ’di lta ste/ kun dga’ bo dper na/ khyi dge ’dul ba la la nag gnas sar med mi dge dge ’dul ma’i dngos por ma gsal cig/ de ci’i phyir zhes na/ kun dga’ bo legs par bshad pa’i cho ’dul ba la bud med rab tu phyang ba na cho ’dul ba de yun ring du gnas par mi ’gyur ro/ ’di lta ste/ kun dga’ bo dper na/ khyi dge ’dul ba la la nag gnas sar med mi dge dge ’dul ma’i dngos por ma gsal cig/ de ci’i phyir zhes na/ kun dga’ bo legs par bshad pa’i cho ’dul ba la bud med rab tu phyang ba na cho ’dul ba de yun ring du gnas par mi ’gyur ro/ ’di lta ste/ kun dga’ bo dper na/ khyi dge }
does he now raise the issue of the personal debt Buddha has to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī for
having raised him, as is done elsewhere.⁶⁰⁶

Whatever else they may be doing in this passage, the narrators of the MSV make it very
clear that Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī stood before Buddha as a representative of other women.
After detailing the list of reasons why allowing women to ordain would have harmful
consequences for the Dharma on the whole, with no further coaxing, Buddha states the
condition under which he will permit women to ordain:

However, Ānanda, I enact women's eight heavy dharmas, for the purpose
of obstructing⁶⁰⁷ and so that there are no breaches, which women are to
observe their whole lives. Ānanda, just as after summer has passed, in
the autumn, a farmer builds a dam at the openings to the channels or
ditches, such that the water is obstructed and does not breach. Ānanda,
in just the same way, I enact women's eight heavy dharmas, for the
purpose of obstructing⁶⁰⁸ and so that there are no breaches, which
women are to observe their whole lives.⁶⁰⁹

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⁶⁰⁶ Retrospectively, however, Ānanda gives this as one of his motivations in asking. He does so, however, while
under personal attack by Mahākāśyapa after Buddha’s passing, and thus the comments need to be read with that
in mind. For a reading of other versions of the narrative of the foundation of the bhikṣuṇī order as a gesture of
filial piety and a reflection of the debt owed to mothers, see Ohnuma 2006.

⁶⁰⁷ Tibetan here specifies that it is in order to obstruct women, as if construing mātṛgramasya as modifying not
aṣṭau gurudharmān but rather āvaraṇāyānatikramanāya.

⁶⁰⁸ Tibetan goes considerably further here, indicating that women's faults (nyes pa) are to be obstructed. This does
not appear in the Sanskrit, which leaves open just what it is that is being obstructed.

⁶⁰⁹ Sanskrit at Schmidt 244. api tv aham ānanda mātṛgrāmasyaṣṭau gurudharmān prajñapayāmy
āvaraṇāyānatikramanāya yatra mātṛgrāmeṇa yāvajjīvaṃ śikṣā karaṇīyā | tadyathā ānanda kārṣako gṛhapatir varṣātyaye
sarutkālasamaye nādimukhe vā kulyāmukhe vā setum budhiṇyāt | yāvad evodakasyāvaranāyānatikramanāya evam
evānanda mātṛgrāmasyaṣṭau gurudharmān prajñapayāmy āvaranāyānatikramanāyā yatra mātṛgrāmeṇa yāvajjīvaṃ śikṣā
darunāya | karaṇīyā. Tibetan found in the Kṣudrakavastu at Derge Da 102a5–7. ‘on kyang kun dga’ bo ngas bud med rnams la daṅg
cing mi’ da’ bar bya ba’i phyir bla ma’i chos bryag bca’ pa la bud med kyi nam ‘tsho’i bar du bolab par bya’o/ de ‘di lta ste
kun dga’ bo khyim bdaṅ zhing pa dbyar ‘das te ston gyi du na chu bo’am yur ba yang rlung chu bcd na chu de ‘gags pas ‘da’
bar mi’ gyur ro’ kun dga’ bo de ltar de bzhin du bud med rnams kyi nyes pa daṅg cing mi’ da’ bar bya ba’i phyir bla ma’i chos
bryag bca’ bar bya’o/ de la bud med rnams kyi nam ‘tsho’i bar du bolab par byos shig.
With no further ado, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī accepts, the other 500 soon follow suit, and women’s right to go forth—and a community to go forth into—are born.

As presented here, the concern is quite literally about containment and control of women, about ensuring that when given a spot in the monastic order, they do not spill out from their allotted place. We are here in quite familiar territory; what is not usual is that it is Buddha who is made its cartographer.

However, the MSV gives us grounds to read Buddha’s show of reluctance to have women ordain as but a show, for the MSV also provides an account of a conversation between Māra and Buddha just after Buddha has attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree—and long before he balks at Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s request—in which Buddha speaks to Māra of his intention to establish a bhikṣuṇī order. In the MSV narrative, Buddha’s first post-enlightenment meal has caused him indigestion. Māra, ever watchful for opportunities to obstruct Buddha, approaches and encourages Buddha to pass away, now that he has achieved his aim of enlightenment. Buddha replies:

“Malicious One, I will not pass into parinirvāṇa until my śrāvaka disciples have become skillful, learned and wise, until the bhikṣus, bhikṣuṇīs, upāsakas and upāsikās are capable of defeating, with the Dharma, whatever opponents may arise, and capable of clarifying their own

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610 Sāṅghabhaddavastu. (Vinayavastu.) Gn 177: 125. Derge Nga 37a3ff.
611 Similar accounts of this conversation appears in other biographical presentations as well. See for example, the trapusabhallika chapter of the Lalitavistara. (Vaidya: 1958) na tāvad ahaṁ pāpiyān parinirvāsyāmi yāvan me na catasraḥ parṣado dāntā vinītā vyātā viśāradā bhavisyanti yāvat saprātihāya dharmān deśayitum iti. Tibetan found at Derge bka’ gyur mdo Kha 180a5-6.
612 parapravādaka: This refers to those who oppose in speech, and can carry the more narrow sense of those who speak out against or speak ill of. Tibetan has just pha rol gyi rgo ba.
position, and my brahmacarya [way of life] is widespread, to the point of having been well and correctly communicated, vastly among numerous beings, including gods and humans.”

Besides this explicit statement of a vision that includes bhikṣuṇīs—made before he had even created an order of bhikṣus and long before Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī will request him to do so—we also find a persistent naturalizing of the presence of women in the monastic orders of past buddhas. As we have seen in the avadāna materials, bhikṣuṇīs are simply accepted as part of the landscape that surrounds buddhas, just as are bhikṣus. This point is echoed by Ānanda later when he is challenged after Buddha’s passes away, and criticized by Mahākāśyapa for seeking full ordination for women. Ānanda defends his support of women’s ordination on several accounts, among which is the fact that he had been thinking that “just as the perfectly enlightened buddhas (samyaksaṃbuddha) of the past had the four circles of disciples, so too should this Lord.”

Given the presumed inevitability of the outcome, since we have Buddha telling Māra he would do so, we are given ample reason to read Buddha’s resistance as a
provisional display for reasons other than halting what we are told he has had in mind for years.

In any case, any reading of the depiction of Buddha’s qualms must start in the same place that the text in which it is embedded starts: well after the fact, and therefore with an awareness that a flourishing female monastic community did emerge under Buddha’s care. In doing so, we follow in the recent footsteps of His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa. Speaking to a group of Tibetan nuns about this same foundation narrative, this widely influential Tibetan monk comments:

There are quotations in the scriptures and treatises which say that ordaining women as nuns will make the Buddhist teachings disappear five hundred years earlier than otherwise. Some people cite these passages to scare you. Others try to explain them away, saying they should not be taken literally. In any case, I don’t think it is necessary to do either. The reason is that the Buddha himself not only decided to ordain women, he also granted women all the vows in the vinaya. If people cannot accept this, they should go and complain directly to the Buddha. Our responsibility is to keep the vows we have taken purely and to practice listening, contemplation and meditation to the best of our ability. If we do so, there is no need to worry that being a nun will bring any harm to the Buddhist teachings. For men who take ordination as well, there is no better way to serve the teachings than to maintain their vows and to study and practice.  

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619 His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, October 17, 2008, in an address to a group of Tibetan nuns gathered for their annual winter debate in Dharamsala, India. The Gyalwang Karmapa has emerged as one of the most visible supporters of full ordination for women practicing in the Tibetan tradition. At his behest, the talk, given in Tibetan was published in an English translation on his official website (Karmapa 2008).
In a sense, this is a powerful argument in favor of dismissing the misogyny of the foundation narrative altogether and taking our cues instead from the overwhelming historical fact that Buddha did create that community, and did support it later in multiple interventions.

Nevertheless, taken on its own, the tale of the origins of the bhikṣuṇī order is both complex and troubling, as is often the case with origin narratives of social formations whose shape is later contested. Indeed, a number of difficulties with this passage have led some scholars to argue that it must be the result of later emendation. Although this argument is sustainable, I do not wish to advance it here, mainly because I do not believe it necessary. We will not take that turn in this dissertation, precisely because we are seeking to develop practices of reading that allow us to engage productively and responsibly with Buddhist texts that are both multivocal and authoritative. We read them productively by drawing on them as resources for thinking about the range of social relationships, subject positions and transformative possibilities such texts might enable or authorize for those who take them as authoritative. We read them responsibly by avoiding interpretive strategies that claim that one among the multiplicity of meanings “really” reigns supreme, much less denying the presence of other potential voices. To that end, attempting to silence the voices—even the hegemonic voices—within those texts is neither valid nor desirable. Instead, taking cues from the ethics of particularity we have seen on display in the MSV—and from the ethics of imperfection it implies—we seek to deploy practices of reading that are attentive to the voices and angles of vision within the text that speak to the questions and concerns currently put to it. At the same time, we allow for the simultaneous existence of other voices that speak to the concerns of

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See Anālayo 2009 for a recent summary and analysis of the positions taken on this issue.
other historical moments and positions. Far from expecting to find a single response directed perfectly to our particular interrogative location, we acknowledge that the multivocality of the text is precisely what allows it to support the cultivation of particular ethical visions within the shifting historical and geographical situations in which Buddhist monasticism continues to find life. At the same time, we recognize the right of monastics in any given generation to draw only on those voices that are productive in their historical moment.

With this in mind, perhaps we can now better hear this narrative telling us (at least) two very different stories. In one of those stories, Buddha creates a radically different kind of social location for women, at the expense of the longevity of his teachings in general. From this angle, the very curious implication is that, as an omniscient being, Buddha knows that creating a female order will come at the cost of the longevity of his teachings, but he is willing to pay that cost. This narrative can be read to suggest that Buddha has determined that the benefits of a Buddhist monasticism that includes women, though lasting a shorter time, outweigh the potential benefits of a Buddhist monasticism closed to women but lasting longer in the world. At the same time, the more Buddha is represented as hesitating to create the community, the more doubts are raised to whether society is ready for women monastics. Thus, too, the clearer it is that the existence of such a community will have momentous impact on the lives of women (and men) in those social worlds touched by Buddhist institutions and ideas. As an acknowledgment of that momentousness, in various narrative moments, women express an appreciation for the fragility and rarity of the opportunity that they have gained within the Buddhist monastic order.

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621 See for example, the second epigraph to this chapter, above.
The other story this same narrative tells us is that women have to fight to be monastics, whereas men do not. Women face obstacles in this narrative because they are imagined to be obstacles. Any intervention they seek to make through direct confrontation is liable to be taken as confirmation that women constitute impediments and thus need to be impeded themselves. In the world of the MSV’s narratives, and in the foundation narrative in particular, women do exercise agency to great effect, but it is always an embedded agency, or an agency that entails accepting given restrictive conditions while working within them to gain new, less restrictive conditions. Even when Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī asks for a revision to the gender roles themselves—asks to be embedded elsewhere, we might say—she is not successful by means of her direct if respectful request or by her display of the ability to bear the hardships of ordained life. She is ultimately successful, but only by adopting the postures of helplessness (as she sits and weeps) and subordination (in accepting the eight gurudharmas) and by relying on a male relative, her nephew Ānanda. However much this may appear to be an abnegation of her active role in securing ordination for women, those who know how the power games work in this world recognize Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s intervention as her intervention. When Dharmadattā comments to her fellow bhikṣunīs, in the epigraph heading this chapter, that “the fact that the Lord has permitted bhikṣunīs to go forth, take full ordination and engage in bhikṣūṇihood: This is all due to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī,” she is expressing gratitude for the way of life Buddha is making possible for them—but it is gratitude directed toward Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, rather than toward Buddha or toward Ānanda. One of the effects of the origin narrative is a portrait of a victory won for women that is hard-won—and that it is won in large measure by the persistence, commitment and skillful strategizing of a woman.
How a Nun is a Woman

The ethics of particularity we have seen Buddha practicing in the MSV’s narratives aims to address persons in the fullness of their specificity, as we have noted. It is less concerned with challenging social order or articulating new constructs of “Woman,” and tends to prompt change more by example than by argument. Individual women are more likely to be supported through multiple exceptions to the supposed limits of what a “Woman” is and does than by the propounding of new ideologies. Yet once the female monastic community comes into existence, Buddha will enact rule after rule that stakes out new territory for his female monastic disciples to occupy. Within this monastic territory, new roles and relationships are established, as women find themselves relating differently to others and to themselves. As they engage in practices of self-fashioning, and serve different roles for the lay community, for monks and for one another, a new category of monastic Woman is articulated, and the identity of its members clarified and refined.

As seen more broadly in the MSV, the ethics of care that Buddha encouraged and himself engaged in proceeds by showing persons what is possible for them, and by facilitating their efforts to actualize that potential. By publicly announcing expanded roles for women, and practically instituting a social arena in which those roles can be enacted, the formation of the female monastic order participates fully in a Buddhist ethics of care. The insistence of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī that Buddha allow women to ordain, Buddha’s subsequent act of acquiescence and the many acts of those monks and nuns who then admit new members into
the monastic order become acts of care with immense relevance and meaning for the lives of all women, at least potentially. Not only does the availability of a monastic life impact those women who are themselves persuaded to join the order and undertake the projects of self-fashioning it offers, but also the very existence of the option for women to leave the household and join the monastic community will also bear fruits for those who remain in their home. Even if the option to become a nun is never exercised, lay women may hold it in their awareness as a broader horizon open to them. And the presence of other women flourishing in such communities stands as eloquent testimony to the capacities of women to fashion such identities for themselves.

Within the female monastic order, as depicted in the MSV’s narratives, we see women acting in ways not seen in lay society. We see nuns serving as teachers to other nuns, to lay women as well as to lay men. We see them engaging in intense meditation and creating their own personal liberation as arhantinīs. We see them displaying powers far beyond the ordinary. We see them serving as inspiration and fields of merit for the lay community. In short, we see them living essentially the same lives as others renunciates who happen to be male, and lives that are radically different to those available to women outside the monastic order.\footnote{As discussed above, the MSV does imagine the Buddhist order to have developed in a society in which there is a limited, largely marginal presence of individual monastic women following other non-brahminical paths of ascetics, but does not see these as organized female communities. Certainly, asceticism is closed to women in the mainstream brahminical society to which Buddha’s teachings are addressed.} This is by no means to suggest that gender disappears within the Buddhist monastic communities. On the contrary, there is no ungendered monastic community; there are two monastic orders, one female and the other male. As such, gender difference is the single most significant difference
in Buddhist monasticism, bar none. Nevertheless, women’s gender is constructed within Buddhist monasticism in ways that differ—and differ starkly—to its construction in society outside the monastic order. In other words, women do not cease to be women once they become nuns, but what it means for them to be women does change a great deal.

In this section, we will chart the constructions of female gender within the monastic order as they are articulated in relationship to the constructions of female gender without. At times we will note Buddha defending boundaries that keep the two sets of constructions distinct. At other times, the MSV shows him adapting the former when challenged by the latter. Just as the different understanding of what is possible for women that is presented by the example of monastic women living in female communities leaves its mark on the gendering of women who stay at home, at the same time, the reverse is also true: What it means to be a woman in the monastic order continues to be shaped by what it means to be one outside the order.

Importantly, outside gender constructions slip back in with family ties. When relationships between family members are recognized and accommodated within the monastic order—as they very clearly are—the distinct gendering of women that takes place within the family asserts itself to shape the gendering of monastic women who have left the home for the monastery. In the process, major aspects of those gender constructions that the formation of female monastic communities sought to shed are gradually re-inscribed on the bodies and

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623 Even the distinction between enlightened beings and ordinary beings, which might be said to be the soteriologically significant difference, is of far lesser import in the community life shared by Buddhist monastics. Arhats and even Buddha himself will eat, sit, sleep, meditate, recite sūtras and engage in ritual activities alongside their unenlightened fellow male monastics, and they do so apart from their female counterparts, while the enlightened nuns and unenlightened likewise share their lives.
communities of monastic women. What is also re-inscribed is a series of mandated dependencies of female monastic communities to male, which we explore in the next section of this chapter.

As it is portrayed in the narratives of the MSV, and as many scholars have noted, the Buddhist monastic order is a social formation that itself unfolds in relation to other social formations, on which it depends for legitimacy, material support and the recruitment of new members, and in contrast to which it defines itself, at least in part. This makes the monastic order particularly sensitive to the censure of society at large, even as it seeks to demarcate clear differences between its way of life and that of the lay world around it. Some portions of that surrounding lay society are Buddhist and others are not, and here as well we find friction between their opposing attitudes toward the Buddhist monastic community. As we watch the construction of women’s gender formed through the reciprocal jostlings of these various distinct but intimately connected social formations, we enter terrain where there is continual maneuvering, and where ground is lost as easily as it is gained.

Stephanie Jamison provides a view from outside the MSV attesting to the fact that that Buddhist monasticism’s challenge to other construction of gender did not go unnoted. In a carefully constructed and cautiously argued article, Jamison charts changes in the treatment of women in the dharmasūtra and dharmaśāstra texts composed in brahminical traditions in India over the course of the centuries following the establishment of the Buddhist monastic order for women. This is precisely the period coinciding with the transmission and final editing of the MSV. She writes:

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624 See Gyatso 2003, as discussed above in the section on the formation of the women’s community.
The model for the lone ascetic woman depicted in *Manu* and later texts was most likely derived from the “heterodox sects,” especially from Buddhism with its recent institution of orders of nuns. That women might live together, apart from men, and move about freely while pursuing a religious vocation must have been shocking enough to brahmin sensibilities; that the vocation was not that of the brahmin dharmic orthodoxy must have made it even more threatening. And I contend that part of the impetus for the intensely misogynist sentiments in *Manu* comes from the challenge posed by this new female type, the independent and religious unorthodox women. The growing anxieties about women’s agency which we have identified in these texts are crystallized in this rather alien figure. 625

Jamison observes that these texts’ increasing awareness of female agency provokes a reactionary restriction of women’s gender roles. Evidence of a backlash, of course, is evidence that the forward push was perceived and considered a cause for concern. A process of push and pull over the gendering of women is on display in the narratives of the *MSV* as well. Like many of the brahminical texts Jamison looks at, the *MSV* is redacted long after these adaptations to women’s gender constructions were first set in motion. Nevertheless, even if the *MSV*’s narratives cannot be read as historical documents of the actual negotiations that took place, traces of the controversies they spark linger on in the later memories. These traces leave their mark on the self-understanding of the Buddhist monastic community as having offered something new to women, in ways that were fraught with the uncertainties that go with innovation.

Throughout the MSV, and particularly within narratives depicting nuns’ conduct, confusion erupts over the gendering of women who become nuns. By the time the curtains open on the historical period imagined in the MSV’s narratives, the gender construct for men already included the role of an ascetic. The MSV’s narratives do present a process of defining and refining what it means to be a Buddhist ascetic in conversation with what is expected of ascetics in non-Buddhist understandings. But the process of defining and refining what it means to be a female Buddhist ascetic additionally takes place both in conversation with what it means to be a woman, in addition to what it means to be a Buddhist ascetic. Although as noted above the MSV does acknowledge the presence of other female ascetics, it does so vaguely, and these shadowy figures do not appear to have the status of a monastic community or to articulate distinct identities as female ascetics. What does emerge clearly, however, is that the ascetic role of Buddhist nuns repeatedly blurs over into non-ascetic roles, as those outside the monastic order expect women to step into roles that are distinctly gendered as women’s.

This confusion about the contours of their new role is shared by some of the nuns themselves, and we can especially count on Sthūlanandā to push the edges of what it means to be a nun, as opposed to a lay woman. Thanks largely to her, with Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī taking the lead at times in drawing the lines, Buddha creates injunction after injunction that map out a careful distancing of the place of bhikṣuṇīs from that of lay women. These rules also serve to signal to others the difference between monastic women and other women. Buddha establishes rules forbidding bhikṣuṇīs from wearing the jewelry of a lay woman, as well as

626 Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 20a7.
fragrances, and clothes. The concern to make visible to observers the unambiguous distinction of nuns from other women can be quite explicit at times. A series of narratives about the types of cloth that nuns may and may not wear should suffice to illustrate this concern. Dharmadattā, the young woman we saw escaping her arranged marriage, and then teaching the Dharma to her would-be in-laws, goes on to gather many disciples, including a troop of soldiers who regularly offer her the fine gifts they themselves are awarded by the king. In this story, Dharmadattā in turn has given a fancy cloak to another nun—one of the Gang of Twelve naughty nuns—who had hinted that she wanted it. Here is what ensues when this naughty nun wears the cloak in public:

As she walking about the highways and streets, the brahmins and prominent householders saw her and said, “Who is that over there, the wife of some rich person, or the wife of a lead merchant, or the wife of a caravan leader?”

Others said, “That’s *Cūḍanandā. (Tibetan: gtsug dga’ mo),”

When they took a look, they criticized, saying, “Sirs, the wives of the brahmins and prominent householders wear heavy and valuable clothes, and these ascetic women who are children of the Śākyas also wear heavy and valuable clothes, so what is the difference? What is [their]

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627 Bhikṣṇīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 20a5.

628 A wide number of rule regulate dress. Apart from those that stipulate the sort of robes that may be worn, there are several that specifically ban the use of cloth that might be worn by lay women. For examples, see the separate charter story in the Bhikṣṇīvibhaṅga at Derge Ta 187a6-188a6 and Derge Ta 188a6-189a6.

629 khyim bdag, i.e. grhapati.

630 šA kya’i sras: The standard Tibetan translation for śākyaputra used here in Tibetan with no gender marker.
thinking? What is there that makes them different?” Saying this, they insulted, heaped abuse and slandered.\textsuperscript{631}

The implication is obvious: to be accused of being no different than the wife of some brahmin or wealthy householder is a slanderous insult for a bhikṣuṇī. It may be worth noting that this anecdote also has the lay critics recognize the nuns as “ascetic women” who are “children of the Śākyas.”\textsuperscript{632} The latter is a term far more familiar to us when applied to monks, and used here without grammatically distinguishing gender. They are willing to group the monastic women as Buddhist monastics—as “children of the Śākyas”—but only if they refrain from looking like ascetics and unlike other women.

The nuns’ activities as well as appearances require specific differentiation from those gendered as belonging to lay women. In a series of narratives that are scattered across the \textit{Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga} but when placed together form a distinctive pattern, a nun—most often Sthūlanandā—is requested or herself undertakes to engage in certain activities that other nuns are then asked to perform. Those other nuns—nearly always Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī—balk and firmly state that they consider this inappropriate for them to do, and Buddha then steps in to forbid any bhikṣuṇī from engaging in that behavior. Several such narratives take us to the heart of women’s place in lay society: the home, where women are pictured engaged in housecleaning and childcare. These charter stories explore the potential slippage between the

\textsuperscript{631} Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 187b4-6. lam po che dang sraṅ du ’khyam pa na/ de bram ze dang khyim bdag rnams kyi mthong nas ’di skad ces smras so/ pha bi su zhiṅ yin ci nor can gyi chung ma’am/ tshong dpon gyi chung ma’am/ ded dpon gyi chung ma zhiṅ yin/ gzhan dag gis ’di skad ces smras so/ gtsug dga’ mo yin no/ bltas nas shes ldan dag bram ze dang khyim bdag gi chung ma gyang yin pa de dag kyāṅ lcī la rin che ba’i gos dag aṅ yon la/ shĀ kya’i sras kyi dge sbyong ma ’di dag kyāṅ lcī la rin che ba’i gos dag aṅ yon par khyad par ni ci yod/ bsam pa ni ci yod/ thā dad du bya ba ni ci ces smod par byed/ phyar ka gčod bar byed/ kha zer bar byed do.

\textsuperscript{632} Its use here to refer to women constitutes a powerful argument for taking it to mean “children”, rather than as “sons” as it is often translated.
position of a voluntarily mendicant woman entering a home seeking alms as opposed to an involuntarily mendicant woman seeking food, in exchange for domestic services rendered if need be. Both sorts of women can be taken as potential proxies for the woman of the home, as we shall see.

In our first such narrative, Bhikṣuṇī Sthūlanandā, our reliably transgressive nun, approaches a house seeking alms, but finds it in alarmingly poor condition. When Sthūlanandā engages the woman in conversation about the state of the house, the housewife replies:

“Noble One, do you have any experience at all with this?”

Sthūlanandā said, “Is there any craft or job that I have not learned?”

At that, the housewife said to Sthūlanandā, “Noble One, please be my helper.”

She said, “Who will give me alms?”

The housewife said, “After the work, I will offer [alms] even for the [nunnery’s] caretaker.”

Then Sthūlanandā put her begging bowl off to the side, tucked up her robes, and sprinkled water nicely in that house, swept well, made the beds, wiped down the metal vessels, the silver and gold vessels and set them aside, and made the whole house extremely beautiful. She took the parcel of alms and went to the summer residence. Then when the master of the house saw that, he said, “Good Woman, today you have really spruced up the house.”

633 byang ba - familiarity, skill, training, experience.
She said, “Sthūlanandā did it. I did not do it.”

He said, “Give her alms every day, and she will work as your servant.”

Then on some other occasion, Mahāprajāpati Gautamī entered that house for alms, and that housewife said to Mahāprajāpati Gautamī, “Noble One, Please be my domestic servant.”

She said, “Sister, if I did not work even as Śuddhodana’s domestic servant, will I do it now that I have gone forth? [Ta 305a] Sister, not to mention that by accumulating so much that is non-meritorious by speaking like this to one who is endowed with ethical conduct, are you producing the seed to be a slave? Moreover, have you seen or heard one who has gone forth working as a servant?”

She said, “Sthūlanandā.”

When she heard this, Mahāprajāpati Gautamī said, “This is what we have come to!”

634 ‘chid → mchid

635 Bhiksuni Vibhanga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 304b1-305a2. ‘phags ma khyod ’di la byang ba cung zad mna’am/ shom dga’ mos kyang ’di skad ces smras so/ kho mos bzo’i gnas dang/ las kyi gnas gang la ma byang ba ni gang zhig yod/ de nas khyim bdag gi chung ma des sbom dga’ mo la ’di skad ces smras so/ ’phags ma bdag gi go re long mdzod cig/ des ’di skad ces smras so/ kho mo la sus bsod snyoms sbyin par ’gyur/ khyim bdag gi chung mas ’di skad ces smras so zhes bya ba nas/ khang skyon la yang dbul lo zhes bya ba’i bar ro/ de nas sbom dga’ mos lhung bzed mtha’ gi yig tu bzhag nas gos dag brdzes te khyim de thams cad chag chag legs par btab/ phyag dar legs par byas nas mal bcas/ lcas kyi snod dang/ dngul gyi snod dang/ gsar gyi snod dag byi dor byas nas bzhag ste/ khyim de thams cad shin tu mdzes par byas so/ de yang bsod snyoms kyi khur blangs nas dbyar khang du sngon ngo/ de nas khyim bdag des mthong nas ’di skad ces smras so/ bzang mo khyod kyi de ring khyim gyi byi dor gtsang gtsang ltar byas so/ des ’di skad ces smras te/ ’phags ma sbom dga’ mos byigs kyi bdag gis ma byigs so/ des ’di skad ces smras so/ khyod kyi de la ni yi ma re re zhing bsod snyoms byin cig dang/ khyod kyi khyim gyi go re long byed par ’gyur ro/ de nas dus gzhana zhig na skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mi khyim der sbsd snyoms la zhuugs pa dang/ de nas khyim bdag gi chung ma des skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mo la ’di skad ces smras so/ ’phags ma bdag gi khyim gyi gi go re long mdzod de stsal/ des ’di skad ces smras so/ phu nu mo kho mos zas gtsang gi khyim gyi go re long yang ma byas na da rab tu byung nas [Ta 315a] bya’am/ de lta mod kyi phu nu mo khyod tshul khrims dang ldan pa la mchid stsal ba ni bsod nams ma yin pa mang du bsags nas bran mor ’gyur ba’i sa bon bskyed dam/ gzhana yang khyod kyiis rab tu byung ba khyim gyi gi go re long byed pa mthong ba’am thes pa su yod/ des ’di skad ces smras so/ sbom dga’ mo las so/ skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mos khyang ’di skad ces de khe nas bdag cig la yang gnas skabs ’di byang ba zhes smras pa.
When this incident is reported to Buddha, he affirms Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s conviction that this is beyond the scope of nuns’ roles, by instituting a precept banning the bhikṣunīs from doing housework. But even before Buddha steps in, as we see here, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī strongly signals to the woman that she has overstepped the bounds of what one asks of a bhikṣunī. Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī was aware of what Sthūlanandā apparently did not see: that her actions as an individual woman seizing opportunities for herself have an impact on what others then expect of monastic women as a group. She is aware of herself as a representative of that category to lay observers and thus aware of her actions as setting precedents for other nuns, whereas Sthūlanandā’s focus is narrowed to the local and limited opportunities that present themselves to her as a particular. In other words, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is aware that her personal actions participate in the articulation of a new gender construct, that of monastic Woman. Though it is Buddha who makes the laws for the community, in these stories, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is in the front line drawing the lines for the lay women to see.

Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s responses make clear both her own personal dignity, as well as the highly elevated class position she occupied prior to ordaining. But again, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī does not leave the matter at a claim to personal superiority, but rather generalizes that sense of dignity and elevated position to other bhikṣunīs. Her suggestion that the woman is generating the karma to be a servant by treating a bhikṣunī as if she were one makes a firm

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636 The rule as it appears in the prātimokṣa sūtra (Derge Ta 20b3) stipulates housework in general (khyim gyi las byed). Tibetan: khyim gyi go re long byed while the narrative in the Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga emphasizes the offering of service khyim gyi go re long byed. As domestic help (Derge Ta 314b1ff.) As noted in the first chapter on text, discrepancies between the formulation of rules as they appear in the Bhikṣunīprātimokṣasūtra and the Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga—both contained in the same volume of the MSV—led Buston and others to suggest that the two may not belong together, and that one may have come from a different vinaya tradition.
point about what a bhikṣuṇī’s role is and what it is not. She demands to know where the woman has seen or heard that it might be appropriate for a bhikṣuṇī to engage in housework in this way, as if it were so far from the norm for a bhikṣuṇī as to be unheard of. At this point, an implicit but forceful claim is made that female Buddhist ascetics should be treated primarily as ascetics rather than as women.

Yet to perform such services in the home of another is not simply a job indexed to gender; it is also indexed to class, as Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī indicates in her reference to the karma for servitude the woman is creating. Indeed, by offering an excessive amount of “alms,” the woman treats what is normatively a meritorious offering as a form of salary. The narrative quite skillfully shows Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī using a reference to her elevated status as the former queen to telegraph a message about the status of bhikṣuṇīs in general. A set of relations are suggested: bhikṣuṇīs are to other women as queens are to servants and common housewives. Drawing on her relatively high class status, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī works in a sense to mitigate her relatively low status in terms of gender, and she insists that bhikṣuṇīs in general belong in that higher position with her as well. Read alongside the earlier story of her issuing commands to King Śuddhodana as he stood at attention, this narrative offers a glimpse of the major ramifications of having a former queen as the founding head of the bhikṣuṇī order, and moreover a woman of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s commanding personal presence and sense of self-worth. These qualities enable her to articulate to the lay community the posture expected of them in relation to the nuns’ order at large, even if it takes the legislative authority of Buddha to formalize what she asserts. On the other hand, although the association of bhikṣuṇī status with high social classes may elevate the construct of monastic Woman, it
can also contribute to debilitating conflations of low class status with the gender construction of non-monastic women, as we shall see.

In another such story, Sthūlanandā has again entered a house seeking alms, and there encounters a new mother who apparently does not know how to care for her newborn. Sthūlanandā launches a barrage of questions as to why the house is in such a state. The story proceeds precisely as before, with the woman asking Sthūlanandā whether she knows anything about such matters, and Sthūlanandā responding with her rhetorical reply: “Is there any craft or art whatsoever about which I have no knowledge?” Across a range of narratives, Sthūlanandā projects an aura of extreme self-confidence and capability that the inexperienced new mother here apparently responds to as she reaches out for resources in her distress.

This time, it is a request to wash a newborn that she accepts, in exchange for an excessive amount of alms. The narrative goes on:

At that, Sthūlanandā put down her begging bowl, tucked up her clothes and took the baby. After rocking him for a little while, she scrubbed him down with soap, rinsed him with lukewarm water, poured medicinal eye drops into his eyes, drew a bindu with soft clay, brushed off his hair, spoonfed him honey and fresh butter, placed him in the crib and put him to sleep. Then she instructed her, “Do this every day.” [Ta 298a]

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637 This story is discussed in Clarke 2007: 326-331, where the concern is to indicate that this is not a rule about raising one’s own children but caring for those of others.
She took her parcel of alms and went to the nuns’ residence. Then when the householder came, he said to his wife, “Good Woman, today you have bathed the boy well.”

The wife explains to her husband that it was Sthūlanandā and not she who had cared so well for the child. In both these stories, the husbands come home and mistake the work done by Sthūlanandā for their wife’s handiwork, reminding us that the activity she has done is considered to be within the purview of the woman of the house. It is important to note that although Sthūlanandā has just offered childcare service in exchange for food, her parting comment to the woman is an instruction to her to continue doing the same for the child every day. In other words, she still sees herself as a teacher (of all sorts of things) and not necessarily a salaried servant.

The story continues, as Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī comes to the same house seeking alms, only to be told:

She said, “Noble One, I request you to bathe my child please.”

At that, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī said, “Sister, I have bathed the Bodhisattva. After that, I wash no other child. Sister, to speak like this to a bhikṣunī endowed with ethical conduct, are you further increasing your karma to be a servant? But in any case, Sister, from where did you see or hear of a bhikṣunī washing a child in this way?”

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638 Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 297b6-298a1. de nas sbom dga’ mos lhung bzed bzhag/ gos dag brdzes nas khye’u blangs te/ yud tsam zhiqh bskyod nas/ de’i ’og tu ’dag rdzas dag gis bkrus dril te/ de nas chu dron gyis bkrus/ mig tu mig sman blugs/ sa zhaq gis thig le briṣ/ skra’i byi dor byas/ sbrang rtsi dang/ mar sar gyis bskyod nas khul zhor bcug ste bskyod nas ’di skad ces khyod kyis ’di bzhin du nyi ma re re zhing khrus byas zhiq ces bsgo nas/ de nas [Ta 298a] bzhag ste bskyod ces khyo mmo chur byas nas khyo mas ma de la ’di skad ces smras so’ bzsang mo khyo mmo khyo de riṅ khye’u khrus byas pa legs so.
She said to her, \(^{336}\) “Noble One, Sthūlanandā washed him.”

Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī said, “This is what we have come to!”\(^{640}\)

As before, the narrative pits Mahāprajāpati Gautamī—who is above such menial tasks as child-washing both by her privileged relationship to Buddha and by her sense of what a nun does and does not do—against Sthūlanandā, who presents herself as eager for food, and indiscriminately endowed with all sorts of expertise. Yet a curious common ground underlies this twinning of the two nuns. As chief queen in the palace and as foster mother to Buddha as a child, Mahāprajāpati Gautamī did what other women do but in the highest possible way. Mahāprajāpati Gautamī thus presents herself as a married woman and mother \textit{par excellence}. But Sthūlanandā makes the same implicit claims for herself, by virtue not of her social status but in terms of her skills. Both Sthūlanandā and Mahāprajāpati Gautamī thereby are affirming their knowledge of these women’s activities. They both make clear that they know how to do what women in the home do, and they both present themselves as exemplary in that sphere. They each surpass the lay woman within the domain of what is gendered as women’s work in the lay society. They differ in that Mahāprajāpati Gautamī places her involvement in such a role in the past, making hard distinctions between what she did as a lay woman and what she now does as a nun, \(^{641}\) whereas Sthūlanandā allows the expertise from her past to linger into

\(^{336}\) ‘di → ‘di la.

\(^{640}\) Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 298a3-5. ‘pha-ga m’dag gi khye’u khrus gyis la stsol cig/ de nas skye dga’i bdag mo chen mos ‘di skad ces smras so/ phu nu mo kho mos byang chub sms dpa’ khrus te/ de las khye’u gzano ni ma khrus so/ phu nu mo kho mos byang chub sms dpa’ khrus te/ de las khye’u gzano ni ma khrus so/ phu nu mo kho byed dge slong ma tshul khrs dang ldan pa la mchid stsol bas/ phyir yang bran mor ‘gyur mor ‘gyur bu’i las gseg gam/ de lta mod kyi/ phu nu kho byed kyi/ ‘di ltar dge slong ma khye’u ’khrus ba ga las mthong ngam tlos/ des ‘di skad ces smras so/ ‘pha-ga m’sbom dga’i m’os khrus so/ skye dga’i bdag mo chen mos ‘di skad ces de kho nas kho mo cag la yang gnas skabs ‘di byung nge zhes smras pa’i.

\(^{641}\) In a retelling of this story in the commentary to this volume of the MSV, the Āryamūlibhikṣunīprātimokṣa-sūtravṛtti (BPSV), Mahāprajāpati Gautamī is presented as telling the housewife she has done great ill by having a
her present. Yet simply by presenting themselves as best at women’s activities, they both
acknowledge their basic participation in that gendered construction.

Once word of this incident reaches him via the grapevine, Buddha again affirms for all
monks and nuns what Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī had already told the women directly, banning
nuns from caring for children.642 With this rule, Buddha sets the parameters for what he is
forbidding wider than the particulars of the case. Rather than limit the precept to washing a
child, for example, Buddha instead legislates a broad boundary preventing nuns from engaging
in childcare in general. This rule will later be qualified somewhat, as rules so often are, in
important ways to which we will return shortly.

Spinning thread also appears in the MSV to be a woman’s job. We saw women making
an independent livelihood spinning in the story of Kṛśā Gautamī. Following the pattern that
has emerged, it may seem unsurprising that Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī also places this beyond
the range of what a bhikṣuṇī would consider doing, and that Buddha articulates a rule
forbidding nuns from spinning thread.643 This story follows the pattern we saw above, but

bhikṣuṇī wash her clothes, emphasizing the responsibility lay women have in understanding how a bhikṣuṇī is to
be treated, and not simply laying the blame on Sthūlanandā. Derge bstn 'gyur 'dul ba tsu 137b5.

642 Some of the wording in this rule suggests that even “taking” or “holding” of children might also be included in
this injunction. As formulated in the context of the charter story in the Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga, the rule reads: Derge Ta
299a6: yang dge slong ma gang bu len na ltung byed do - of which an overly literal translation might be: Any bhikṣuṇī
who takes/holds/receives (len) a child incurs a downfall. In the next line, its commentarial gloss mentions playing
with as part of the scope of this rule. This differs from its formulation in the Bhikṣuṇīprātimokṣasūtra that offers a
list of all the rules to be recited by bhikṣuṇīs as part of their biweekly confession ceremony. There it reads Any
bhikṣuṇī who cares for a child incurs a downfall: yang dge slong ma gang bu 'tsho na ltung byed do; Derge Ta 20a1.
This articulation of the rule in turn differs from its wording in the commentary on that text, the
Āryasarvāstivādinabhikṣuṇī-prātimokṣasūtravṛtti. This last would be unintelligible without its commentarial gloss,
but reads: Any bhikṣuṇī who arranges for a lineage (rgyud 'jog) incurs a downfall; yang dge slong ma gang rgyud 'jog
na ltung ba'o; Derge bstn 'gyur 'du lba Tsu 137b6. The gloss specifies bathing, dressing, feeding and so on. For a
discussion of the ways this one rule has been read, see Clarke 2007: 326-331.

643 Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 20b3. yang dge slong ma gang skud pa 'khal na
ltung byed do.
rather than Sthūlanandā, here the nun who agrees to spin thread is *Cūḍanandā whom we encountered above wearing fancy clothes. Upon finding a housewife worn out from spinning, *Cūḍanandā volunteers to spin to give the women a break, and to go off to fetch alms for her. Later when Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī comes to the same house, she is asked to spin while the householder gets alms for her. Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī replies:

She said, “Sister, if I did not spin even as a householder, would I spin now that I have gone forth? Nevertheless…” and “in this case” up to “a rule of training was established.”

The pattern for this narrative is by now so well-established that the text elides the remainder of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s responses, assuming the reader can supply it for herself. With this pattern, a tendency to pair class and gender begins to emerge as well. In this story, the nun is not seeking to exploit the householder for more alms, nor are the alms received said to be excessive. *Cūḍanandā’s offer to help spin was made in response to the lay woman’s expression of fatigue. The narrative therefore does not seem to be presenting this as an exchange of goods for services. Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s response does not target the fact that monastics do not do other people’s spinning. As before, she instead suggests that as a high-class lay woman she did not spin, and since being a bhikṣunī is higher still, of course she would not now spin. It begins to appear that the creation and preservation of a female monastic space in which the gender construction of lay society can be held at least partially at bay may come at a high cost indeed. We hover dangerously close at times in these narratives to a wholesale

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644 Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 305b5-6. phu nu mo kho mo khyim par gyur pa na yang 'khal ma myony na/ da rab tu byung nas 'khal lam de lta mod kyi zhes bya ba dang/ byung ba 'di dang zhes bya ba nas/ bslab pa bca’ ba i bar du mdzad de.
devaluing of the tasks that are associated with women in the mainstream gender constructions. The devaluing by Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī in this story may serve to help gain women acceptance for their hard-won identity as ascetics and the prestige that comes with that identity when it is assumed by men. But it does allow us to see ways that the protection of this new choice of life path for women can become complicit in a denigration of the paths that had formerly been available and that many women still trod.

With the establishment of the female monastic order, women do have the opportunity to move out of roles gendered as women’s and into a way of life that had previously been gendered as exclusively male—that of ascetic. But it appears at times that their participation in a formerly all-male category can also position them as superior to the category of lay woman from which they themselves have come, in ways that contribute to a gendered devaluing of lay women. It can be difficult in such moments to determine to what extent the MSV’s dark portrayal of the lives of lay women is part of its overall project to highlight the relative freedom women can enjoy in the monastic path, and when it becomes generalized misogyny. In the worst cases, the two are mutually reinforcing, particularly as a means of combating male desires, as Liz Wilson has so effectively demonstrated in her exploration of the use of images of women’s foulness in the so-called aśubha bhāvanā meditations on impurity to combat monks’ attachment.\(^{645}\) It is worth noting in this regard that the MSV itself imagines women-bashing to be effective in combating the sexual desires even of men who are not committed to a celibate path. We have seen this in the narrative describing Kṛśā Gautamī’s first husband, whose anti-

\(^{645}\) Wilson 1995a, 1995b and 1996.
woman talk during the trip from Gandhāra to Magadha dissuades his fellow merchants from engaging in sexual relations with the local prostitutes they ordinarily patronize.

However, there are moments that diverge strongly from such dynamics conflating women’s gender with a low class status. We find other indications in the MSV that the prestige granted to the nuns’ order can be based not on association with class, or on a devaluing of lay women, but on the perceived personal merit of individual nuns. In a story we shall turn to in a moment, when Sthūlanandā’s has a close brush with a man after propositioning him for pay, she warns him of the bhikṣuṇīs’ connection to King Prasenajit, and threatens that the king will cut off his hand if he so much as touches her. Despite the evidence of the scandalous behavior of the bhikṣuṇī before him, this man does not defame the bhikṣuṇī order as a whole, or deny that they are indeed favored by the king. Instead, he replies:

“You bad baldie, it is not the likes of you that he allows. The ones allowed are Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, Kṛśā Gautamī, Utpalavarṇā, Dharmadattā, *Bhadrikā and Kapilabhadrā—not a bad baldie like you!”

The list of nuns here, though headed by a former queen, cuts a wide swath across the range of classes in lay society, and includes a woman married to a weaver, a former prostitute, a brahmin and the daughter of a leading merchant. What unites them is their recognized

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646 Tibetan: bzang ldan ma. I have seen her named nowhere else but here in the MSV.

647 Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 313a7–313b1. Tibetan reads des ’di skad mgo reg mo ngan pa mo khyod ’dra ba ni gnang ba ma [Ta 313b] yin te/ gnang ba ni skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mo dang/ gau ta mi skem mo dang/ ut pa la’i mde dang/ chos sbyin dang/ bzang ldan ma dang/ ser skeya mo dag yin gyi/ mgo reg mo khyod ’dra ba ma yin no zhes smras pa.
spiritual excellence. In such moments, the promise of moving beyond the gender and class identities they sought to leave behind seems to bear fruit.

Besides housewife, we have also seen courtesan or prostitute presented as within the range of the role women may occupy in the MSV’s lay society. A full study of prostitution or courtesan culture as it appears in Buddhist texts of this period remains a desideratum, but it may suffice to say that prostitutes or courtesans are simply part of the social landscape in the MSV, and appear as figures in each of its 13 volumes. With these two roles effectively carving out the entire terrain of where and how a woman might make her life in the society depicted in the MSV, we might expect a tendency to assume that if a woman was not serving in the home, she must be taking that other route. Jamison notes just such a portrayal of female ascetics on the part of brahminical texts as well:

The Brahmanic response to the challenge posed by the female ascetic is to depict her as a woman of dubious morals, associating with questionable people dwelling on the fringes outside respectable life—while the male ascetic has few such aspersions cast on his reputation.

This view from the outside is echoed in the MSV as well. As Schopen points out:

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648 For two efforts to engage the category of courtesans (or prostitutes) as it appears in Buddhist texts, see Young 2004 and Dumézil 1983: 28-35, the latter focusing on the figure of Ānrapālī. There have been a few efforts to look at the same in India more widely, including Sternbach 1951, Thakur 1973, Chandra 1973 and Bhattacharaji 1987, of which only Chandra offers a full-length study. Prostitutes are explicitly discussed in Kautilya’s Arthaśāstra, which is a major source for several of these works. However, a sustained exploration of courtesan culture in early or medieval India is still very much a desideratum.

Buddhist sources themselves seem to suggest that it was an ongoing problem to mark and maintain a clear distinction between Buddhist nuns and prostitutes or loose women. For his part, Gregory Schopen further suggests that an injunction against standing at the door of their residence should be read in light of other texts in which standing at the entrance to their building is depicted as something prostitutes do. The MSV takes other opportunities to clarify boundaries between monastics and prostitution, including a number of slapstick accounts involving Sthūlanandā. In a number of narratives, Sthūlanandā herself exploits the homology between the independent position of nuns and of prostitutes, at times crossing the boundaries between the two. In one such tale, Sthūlanandā decides to put on a wig, borrow clothes and jewelry from some musicians, and set herself up as a prostitute. A customer balks at her stated day rate—a whopping 500 kārṣāpaṇas—but is persuaded to come up with the money after she says, “Just take a look at this gorgeous body.” When at the last moment she herself has second thoughts, the man grabs her wig, outing her as a shaved-headed nun. After the altercation in which he insults her, Buddha establishes a rule forbidding the wearing of wigs. Here, we see Buddha sticking closer to the particulars of the transgression in the formulation of the rule, as he often does. In this case, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī does not appear to set the record straight, but this function is performed by another set of monastic women who appear with great frequency in the MSV as the “bhikṣunīṣ of few

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650 Ibid, 237.
653 Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 313a1-313b3.
654 Karma Lekshe Tsomo (1996: 114, rule 126) translates skra brnyan as “hair ornaments” but based on the charter story in which the man begins calling her, “Bad baldie!” (mgo reg mo ngan pa) as soon as he grabs ahold and removes it, I take it as wig.
needs”—that is, a group of “good” nuns whose critical comments work to clarify the distinction between what is suitable for bhikṣuṇīs and what is not.

This narrative, and others, reaffirm the obvious distinction between the role and activity of a prostitute and that of nun, but there is still every indication that the monastic order is a place in which those who have once been prostitutes do have an opportunity to form new identities and lives for themselves, just as it is a place where former housewives may do so.

In the previous chapter, we followed Utpalavarṇā’s trajectory from a life as a prostitute into the monastic order. Although we also saw the brahmin seeking her out and insisting on treating her as if she still bore her former identity, Buddha himself not only gives Utpalavarṇā permission to ordain, but later designates her as supreme among his female disciples in terms of her miraculous powers (ṛddhi). In this sense, the MSV presents the Buddhist monastic order as offering a new identity to women—that of bhikṣuṇī—so clearly delineated and transformatively powerful that it can efface fundamental aspects of women’s social identities outside the monastic order. Utpalavarṇā’s ordination story dramatizes the possibility for a woman to re-invent herself in the monastic order in radical ways, shedding her former role as she takes up her robes.

The narrative of Utpalavarṇā’s entry into the order provides us with a description of Buddha’s emphatic public acceptance of her. In this, we gain a glimpse of how delicately it needed to be handled, and how social complicity was required in order for her transformation

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655 Tibetan: *don nyung ba’i dge slong ma dag*. The male order has a counterpart to this group, the “bhikṣus of few needs” (*don nyung ba’i dge slong dag*), who serve exactly the same function for the monks.
of identity to be effected. In that narrative, Mahāmaudgalyāyana first tells Utpalavarnā that she needs permission from her “husbands.” Without specifying who those “husbands” are, the narrative tells us the men from whom she asks leave to ordain found it difficult to take her request seriously:

She approached them and said, “My Princes, permit me to ordain.”

They said, “Gandhāra woman, why are you teasing us?”

“It is the truth. I am ordaining. I am not teasing you.”

They said, “In that case, go ahead and ordain.”

With this assurance that at least some of her customers will have no objections, Mahāmaudgalyāyana takes Utpalavarnā to see Buddha,

Having sat to one side, Venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana said to the Lord, “Sir, Utpalavarnā here asks for ordination, full ordination and nun- hood in this well-spoken Dhamavinaya.”

The Lord said, “Renouncing flawlessly would be good,” and undertook to write a letter himself to Mahāprajāpatī. When the Lord was writing the letter, King Bimbisāra came and said, “Lord, why has this prostitute come here?”

656 sa ’dzin ma means co-wife but could also refer to her birthplace of Gandhāra. Its masculine or gender-neutral form, sa ’dzin pa translates both the Sanskrit gandhāra. She has just addressed her with the term used by women for their husbands, as well as by courtesans to their clients, so it would not be unreasonable to take it as co-wife here, as well as in most of the other places the term appears in this narrative.

657 Bhiksuvibhāga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Nya 223b-7. de de dag gis gan du song ste smras pa/ rje’i sras dag bdag rab tu ’byung bar ci gnang/ de dag gis smras pa/ sa ’dzin ma ci’i phyir kho bo cag la co ’dri bar byed/ des smras pa/ mad par rab tu ’byung ste/, co ’dri bar mi byyid do/ de dag gis smras pa/ gal te de lar na rab tu byung shig.
The Lord said, “Great King, do not say this. She is your Dharma sister, and wants renunciation, full ordination and nun-hood in this well-spoken Dharma and vinaya.”

“Lord, to whom are you writing the letter?”

“Great King, to Mahāprajāpatī, who is in Śrāvastī.”

“Lord, I myself will safeguard [its delivery] to her.”

“Great King, that would be perfect.”

The king ordered it to be conveyed to her. Utpalavarnā received it and went to Śrāvastī. Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī gave her renunciation and fully ordained her.

I argue elsewhere that this narrative takes great care to display the validity of Utpalavarnā’s entry into the order, precisely because of her renown as a prostitute.\(^{659}\) Here we see she has first been made to secure the consent of her former clients.\(^{660}\) Next, a highly respected male member of the monastic order vouches for her, and serves as spokesperson for her request to Buddha. This echoing of Ānanda’s intervention on Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s behalf hints that an affirmative response is not to be taken for granted. But we have come a

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\(^{658}\) Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Nya 224a1-5. mtha’gcig tu ’dug nas bcom ldan ’das la tshe dang ldan pa mau ‘gal gyi bu chen pos ’di skad ces gsal to/ btsun pa ut+pa la’i mdo’i ’di legs par gsungs pa’i chos ‘dul ba la rab tu ’byung ba dang rdzogs par bsnyen pa dge slong ma’i dngos po ’tsnal lo/ bcom ldan ’das kyis bka’ stsal pa/ ma nyes kyi, rab tu ’byung ba legs so zhes bka’ stsal nas/ rang nyid kyis skye rgu’i bdag mo chen mo la ‘phrin yig bri bar brtsams so/ bcom ldan ’das ’phrin yig mdzad pa na rgyal po gza’gs can snying pos ’ongs te gsal ba/ bcom ldan ’das ‘jud mthun ma ’di ci’i skad du ’dir mchis/ bcom ldan ’das kyis bka’ stsal pa/ rgyal po chen po de skad ma zer cig/ khyod kyi chos kyi srin mo ’di legs par gsungs pa’i chos ‘dul ba la rab tu byung ba dang rdzogs par bsnyen pa dge slong ma’i dngos po ’dod do/ bcom ldan ’das gang du ’phrin yig mdzad/ rgyal po chen po mnyan yod du skye rgu’i bdag mo chen mo la’o/ bcom ldan ’das bdag gis kyang ’di la sel ba stsal bar bgyi’o/ rgyal po chen po, ma nyes so/ rgyal po de’i sel ba bskos so/ ut+pa la’i mdo’i gis ’phrin yig mnos te mnyan yod du sngon ba dang/ skye rgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mis de rab tu phyung rdzogs par bsnyen par byas te.

\(^{659}\) Bhikṣuvibhaṅga.

\(^{660}\) Finnegan, forthcoming.

\(^{660}\) Yijing’s Chinese rendition of this story has her refund the money and apologize (!), but not asking their permission to ordain (Taishō T23n1442).
long way since the founding story, and in the case of Utpalavarṇā, Buddha not only agrees to allow her to ordain, but publicly authorizes Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī to manage that ordination process. Buddha also publicly admonishes King Bimbisāra when the king refers to Utpalavarṇā as a prostitute. Strengthening the point, Buddha makes the potentially incendiary assertion that the king should view as his “sister” a woman who had just been in a park entertaining 500 clients at once. Buddha’s insistence that Utpalavarṇā not be labeled a prostitute any longer is even more remarkable given the fact that her ordination had not yet been effected. Even before she has fully adopted the new identity of nun, Buddha affirms that her old identity is not following her forward. Finally, a situation has been engineered in which the king himself ends up involved in the process of safeguarding Utpalavarṇā’s passage from the state of prostitute to that of nun. And this is not just any king: the narrators of the MSV have painted a portrait of King Bimbisāra as womanizer and a frequenter of courtesans, as we saw in the story of Āmrapālī. If the king’s approval is meant to stand in for social acceptance of this ordination, the change in attitude that this narrative shows Buddha bringing about should preemptively prevent social objections.

The Dharma—and its monastic insitution—serves here as an intervention so powerful that under the right conditions it can effectively dissolve the woman’s previous identity, allowing her to reconstitute herself within the new identity as monastic woman. Among those conditions needed are, of course, the presence of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and other monastic women, who ordain, train and act as her companions in her newfound spiritual community, and who together stake out this new and differently gendered identity as nuns. Yet, at least in
some cases, another condition needed in order for such change in identity to come about is the consensus and complicity of the society in which that former identity had taken shape.

The stance on prostitutes entering the monastic order is not yet finished. In another much less detailed story, we are told that Buddha institutes a rule forbidding the ordination of prostitutes. In this narrative, a prostitute is ordained, and the lechers and scoundrels say to one another, “This is an excellent thing she has done, because now we won’t have to give her food or clothes, but we will still have sex [with her].” The men go to where the former prostitute is and proceed to make lewd comments. Based on this—and apparently nothing more—Buddha makes it a downfall (pātayantika) for a nun to ordain a prostitute. The MSV is not particularly concerned to establish a clear chronology for Buddha’s legislation of the various rules, and for the most part any attempt to draw on details in the narratives to determine the relative sequence of events would require greater attentiveness to such things than the MSV cares to give. But here, it seems fairly safe at least to say that within the temporal world of the MSV, some passage of time elapses between the ordination of Utpalavarṇā and the events presented in this narrative. What processes intervened to close down the possibility for women involved in prostitution to fashion a new life and identity for themselves cannot be said with any certainty, but it seems likely that lurking behind this change in position is a great deal of contestation over the way monastic women’s gender is constructed.

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661 Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 306b5-307a3.
662 Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Derge Ta 306b6. da ni legs pa zhi g byas kyi btag cag gis de’i zan dang gos sbyin ni dgos te/ de lta mod kyi dga’ mgur ni spyad par bya’o.
In the negotiations we have charted thus far, strong distinctions were made between the gender constructions of lay woman and those of monastic women, in the areas of domestic activities and social roles. Two other significant domains of gendering also gain attention within the monastic order: the female body and the family. It will turn out that the gendering of the female body will be easier for monastic women to revise than is the gendering that comes with family relationships. We begin with the latter, perhaps the most persistent of all domains in which women's gender constructions are enacted in the world of the MSV.

The family is one social formation that Buddha is neither able nor perhaps willing to exclude from the monastic formation. It is clear from even a cursory reading of the vinaya that Buddhist monastics continue to acknowledge their ties to family members after they have ordained, and scholars have increasingly become aware of this fact. As the pre-eminent locus for the shaping and cementing of women's subordination to men in the lay world of the MSV, the preservation of family ties within the Buddhist order does not bode well for women. The recognition of family structures within monastic institutions has two major consequences for the shapes women's gender can take within them. First, on a particular and local level, women will be expected to relate to the members of their families in ways already established by the family structures outside the monastery. Second, relations within the monastery are liable to be figured on a larger scale along the patriarchal patterns prevalent in the family structures outside the monastery. We will return to this second impact of the monastic embrace of the

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663 See for example Skilling 2001b: 257-8, Cole 2004, Cole 2006, Clarke 2007, Schopen 2007b. The enduring importance of family bonds to those in the Tibetan monasteries still governed by the MSV will be likewise obvious as anyone who has spent time visiting such communities.
family in the next section of this chapter. For now, we will address the first, more local ways that family ties shape ties among individual monastics.

Apart from the numerous narratives in which mothers and daughters or fathers and sons are portrayed as sharing a monastic life, we also see men and women who had previously been bound by family relationships that continue to bear relevance after ordination. When individual nuns are bound by family ties to individual monks, the gendering of that relationship is reintroduced as part of their relationship within the monastic institution.

The narrative of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī on her bier sustained by the outstretched hand of her foster son, Buddha, offers one poignant image of the recognition of ongoing commitments between mother and son. We have already seen Mahākāśyapa’s sharing his alms with his ex-wife Kapilabhadrā to protect her from the men who were preying her on her almsrounds, thus transporting the husbandly role of provider into a monastic setting.

With this slide of women’s family roles into the monastery comes also the possibility of motherhood. We have seen that Buddha flatly forbade bhikṣuṇīs to engage in childcare. A different stance is struck when a nun gives birth to a child of her own. In this narrative, a bhikṣuṇī becomes pregnant through contact with semen on the clothes she was washing, but without actually having had sexual relations—one of the few ways in the MSV to imagine a situation in which a bhikṣuṇī might become a mother without having lost her status as a bhikṣuṇī in the process, given the ban on ordaining pregnant women.664 As a bhikṣuṇī, the new

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664 For a fuller exploration of this story, see Clarke 2007: 215-232 and 308ff. The details of her impregnation are odd, to put it politely: Suffice it to say that she contacts semen under dubious circumstances, while washing clothes for a bhikṣu who had been her “husband” and for whom she still carries a torch.
mother obligingly forswears caring for the infant, and as it is a male child, avoids even physical contact with him. This incident serves as a reflection on family, for her own relatives complain at her lack of maternal nurturing, and Buddha responds by stipulating that she in fact must touch, care for and raise her son. Immediately, though, we learn that once the door has been opened for the fondling of infants, other bhikṣuṇīs take turns passing the baby around and holding him in their laps. This weakens the boy’s health, and his relatives again intervene, leading to further clarification that brings us back into range to the initial ban on childcare: now nuns are not to touch children that are not their own. The narrative points out the nuns’ relatives are lodging these complaints “out of love,” and their rights to a voice in the child’s upbringing are never placed in doubt in this passage. Rather, we find both an unquestioned respect for the particular claims that family ties have on individuals, as well as Buddha’s multiple gestures seeking to contain the gendering effect of those relationships on the parties involved. Nevertheless, once the door is open for bhikṣuṇīs to engage in domestic service to her male relatives, the gendering of that service comes rushing in as well. As we shall see in the next section, Buddha will need to intervene to the apparently endless maneuvers by the less scrupulous monks as they seek to exploit the bhikṣuṇīs’ servile positionality.

This story of monastic pregnancy is a story not only about women’s family relations but also about their bodies. The nun’s pregnancy is neither normatively encouraged nor it is taken as grounds for dismissal from the order. In fact, the narrative neatly decouples the nun’s

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665 Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 143b1-5.  
666 Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 143b5-144a1. The negotiations continue, with further provisions made allowing the new mother to share quarters with her son while he is young.
reproductive capacity from the banned sexual activity that ordinarily would precede its activation. The latter is categorically banned, while the former appears to be accepted without much resistance, once it is established that the process is biological and not sexual. Given how frequently women’s sexuality and her biological body were conflated in the desirous male gaze that we explored in the last chapter, this is nothing short of extraordinary. Once monastic women shun their positioning as men’s’ sexual objects and embrace instead the celibate life, the MSV imagines multiple possibilities for re-negotiating the gendering of that same body, though not for de-gendering it.

In the end, it is the female body that marks a nun as a member of the female order. Women’s embodiment does clearly carry over into their lives as monastics, in the form of the ongoing male gaze, and the threat of rape and violence that are presented as ever-present potentialities for nuns. Yet the female body also exists outside that gaze, and we see that monasticism offers women opportunities to re-code their own female bodies in ways that are potentially liberating.

In one of the areas where female bodies are most obviously distinct from males—the uterus in which children are nurtured and that monthly releases blood—the MSV both echoes and places an unusual twist on the Indic notion of the impurity of female bodily substances. On the one hand, the MSV tells us that it is in the nature of buddhas that they never touch the walls of the womb in which they gestate in their final human life, and are not stained by any of the mother’s uterine fluids.667 The amniotic fluids, like menstrual blood,668 are considered

667 See on this Gnoli 1977: 42.
highly polluting in brahminical contexts, and in isolating the infant from the walls of the womb, the narrative affirms the view that her body is impure even as it shields the Bodhisattva from that impurity. Yet on the other hand, there are also narratives in the MSV that put forward a very different view, as we see in this account of a nun’s menstrual blood accidentally staining a stool belonging to the saṅgha.

In this story, the monks and nuns have assembled for Dharma instruction:

Among the bhikṣuṇīs who were there, one was not mindful, and blood leaked out and ruined the covered stool. Then the proclamation of the Dharma ended, and when the discipline master began collecting the seats, he saw that the covered stool had been ruined and was full of flies. The bhikṣus presented the matter to the Lord, and the Lord said, “Bhikṣus, in that case, when the bhikṣuṇīs come to listen to the Dharma, do not give them covered stools, and they are not to sit on covered stools.”

The Lord said not to give covered stools to bhikṣuṇīs who come to listen to the Dharma, and when they came to listen to the Dharma, those bhikṣus gave them uncovered stools, and at some point, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī came to listen to the Dharma, and they also gave her a stool that was not covered. She said, “Noble One, when I was living in the household never once did I have a seat that was not covered.”

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Leslie (1989: 283-7) explores the normative treatment of women’s menstrual cycles and the cycles of impurity associated with them, though taken from dharmaśāstra from a much later period than our text. For a brief but interesting exploration of this notion and its consequences, see Obeyesekere 2002: 389n77. Wilson 1996 and Hamilton 1995 both discuss the problem of leaking bodily fluids and impurity.
The bhikṣus said, “Gautamī, the Lord does not permit it. He has said, ‘When the bhikṣuṇīs come to listen to the Dharma, do not give them covered seats.’”

She said, “Noble One, [Da 156a] have I committed the error done by some unmindful bhikṣuṇīs?”

She said this, and the bhikṣus presented this matter to the Lord. The Lord said, “Bhikṣus, in that case, I authorize you to give covered seats to mindful bhikṣuṇīs who come to listen to the Dharma.”

The stance taken in this narrative would contrast sharply with brahminical society, in which no matter what a woman does, she is impure while menstruating. This narrative, however, makes it clear that the issue is not merely the fact that menstrual blood touched the saṅgha’s belongings, but that it then ruined the cloth covering the stool. The MSV’s narrators take care to note the presence of flies, as if drawing our attention to the damaging effect of the blood on the cloth, and away from the mere presence of the blood itself. Further, the monks later solve the problem by opting to distribute bare stools, rather than having the nuns sit on the ground or ban them from the monastery’s hallowed grounds outright during menstruation, the latter being a move certainly made in other contexts in the Sanskritic

Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan at Derge Da 155b-156a2. der dge slong ma gzhana chig gis dran pa nge bar ma bzhag ste khrag baq nas g.yogs pa’i khri’u ma rung bar gyar to/ de nas chos bsgraqs pa zin pa dang/ dge skos kyis stan bsdu bar brtsams pa na ji tsam na g.yogs pa’i khri’u ma rung bar gyar te sbrang bus gang ba mthong nas de ltar gyar pa dge slong dag gis bcom ldan ‘das la gso’l nas/ bcom ldan ‘das kyis ba’ stsal pa/ dge slong dag de lta ba na dge slong ma dag chos nyan pa’i phyir ongs pa la g.yogs pa’i khri’u mi sbyin na/ des kyang khri’u i g.yogs pa la ‘dag par mi bya’o/ bcom ldan ‘das kyis dge slong ma chos nyan du ongs pa la khri’u g.yogs pa ma sbyin cigs bka’ stsal pa dang/ dge slong de dag gis de dag chos nyan pa’i phyir lhags pa rmas la khri’u ma g.yogs pa byin pa dang/ ji tsam na skye a’i bdag mo chen mo chos nyan pa’i phyir ongs pa dang/ de la yang khri’u ma g.yogs pa zhi’g byin pa dang/ des ’phags pa bdag sngon khyim ma gns pa na yang khri’u ma g.yogs pa la cung zad kyang ma mchis so zhes smras pa dang/ dge slong dag gis smras pa/ gau ta mi bcom ldan ‘das kyis ma gnang ste/ dge slong ma chos nyan pa’i phyir lhags pa la khri’u g.yogs pa ma sbyin cigs bka’ stsal to/ des ’phags pa dge slong ma gang dag dran pa nge [Ta 156a] bar mi ’jog pa de bzhin du bdag kyang nyes pa’i dmigs ci bgyid dam zhes smras pa dang/ de ltar gyar pa dge slong dag gis bcom ldan ‘das la gso’l nas/ bcom ldan ‘das kyis dge slong dag de lta ba na gnang ba ni dran pa nge bar ’jog pa’i dge slong ma de dag chos nyan pa’i phyir ongs na de dag la khri’u g.yogs pa sbyin par byyes shig.
religious world. Even replacing covered stools with bare for nuns is unacceptable to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, whose objections to the uncovered stool she is given results in the rule being waived for nuns who are able to be mindful of their menstrual flow. She insists in the process that the operative ethical category to which such a rule might apply should not be ‘those with female bodies’ but rather ‘those who lack mindfulness of their female bodies.’ Such attentiveness to the precise domain over which rules apply is integral to the practice of the ethics of particularity in this text, and Buddha agrees, modifying the directive accordingly.

Crucially, the MSV thus gives female monastics a way out of the social coding of menstrual blood itself as impure. It also argues in this narrative that the bodies of bhikṣuṇīs in themselves are not problematic. It may not be possible stop the leaking of bodily fluids that are considered highly polluting in brahminical contexts. But that leaking itself can be brought fully within the domain of discipline and ethical cultivation. The author of this rule clearly does not see biology as destiny, at least in the sense that a bhikṣuṇī can determine the effects of her body in terms of how she relates to that body, by heightening her awareness of it. The problem is displaced from having a female body that menstruates to inattentiveness to those processes, and this re-frames the problem as something bhikṣuṇīs can address as part of their own disciplinary practices. Through training in mindfulness, this vinaya rule allows bhikṣuṇīs to re-negotiate how they live their embodied being, neither denying their female bodies nor being trapped in their social coding as impure. As in the treatment of the nun who became pregnant without sex, the monastic order accommodates nuns’ bodies as female and thus capable of gestating, delivering and breastfeeding children, in ways that can be fully integrated with her training as a nun.
Relating as Women to Women

We have charted thus far the careful enunciation of a new gender construction for monastic women. We have seen that when women become nuns, they also remain women: They are just women differently. In their relationships to lay women, we have seen nuns needing to assert a distinction between their roles as nuns and those of other women. In those moments, monastic women—always both women and monastics—stress their status as monastics. In this section, we look at moments in which nuns’ status as women, rather than as monastics, can be called out to connect rather than separate monastic women from lay women. This vision of monastic women relating in very different ways to lay women, not pushing them away to mark their difference but beckoning them hither to relate in a new ways is visible in multiple narrative moments. The MSV narratives show bhikṣunīs receiving material care and respect from lay women, and offering back spiritual care and Dharma teachings. Within these care-taking relationships, we see that nuns’ gender can be an asset in her teaching to women. The particular bonds of mutual caretaking that develop between monastic women and their lay disciples and supporters form the basis for a sort of parallel presentation of the male and female monastic orders, where nuns simply do for women what monks do for men. In an evocative echoing of descriptions of Buddha as father and mother to his students, one narrative shows Dharmadattā consciously projecting a maternal image as a means of reaching out to women who are potential disciples.

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670 On the figuring of Buddha as a mother elsewhere, see inter alia Gombrich 1972.
In the following story, Dharmadattā is living in a nunnery built for her and her disciples, at her request, by the lay woman Viśākhā whom we saw as a young unmarried girl and who has now grown to become a major support of both Buddhist monastic orders. The neighborhood is home also to a troop of soldiers who return from war to find that their wives have spent the time they were away with other men.

They proceeded to called and grabbed and beat them. The sounds of their weeping arose in the streets, loud and great, like the cries of horses and of elephants.  

The nuns hear the terrible noise even from their nunnery, and Dharmadattā determines that she can do something about it. Her method of reaching out to these adulterous women embraces fully her gender as a woman.

When some children came there, [Dharmadattā] gave all the boys that were there rapeseed oil, and had them rub the oil on one another’s heads, and gave them food with her own hand. To all the girls that were there, she herself rubbed rapeseed oil onto their heads, and gave them food with her own hands. The children took it with them and each went back to their own homes. When they reached there, their mothers asked them, “Who gave you all this?” They said, “The Noble [Cha 190a] Dharmadattā.”

Those wives reflected, “Truly, the Noble Dharmadattā is acting like a mother toward us.” With this thought, they became deeply devoted to her. They thought, “When our husbands went off to the battlefield, we

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671 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Cha 189b2-3. de dag gis chung ma de dag bcag cing bkug cing brdegs par brtsams pa dang/ srang dag na de dag ngu ba’i sgra rta’i skad dang/ glang po che’i skad lta bu’i skad mthon po dang skad chen po dag byung nga.
cheated on our husbands, so we ought to pay honor to the Noble Dharmadattā."\(^{672}\)

While their husbands are off at war a second time, they go to pay their respects to Dharmadattā as planned, she give them a Dharma teaching so effective that they all immediately attain stream-entry, the first of the four levels of spiritual attainment, become her disciples and return home. As their husbands return from the battlefield, they speculate amongst themselves just who their wives might be co-habiting with this time, but are shocked to see that they have turned over a new leaf. They inquire and learn that it was Dharmadattā’s Dharma talks that effected this radical change.

They reflected, “The Noble Dharmadattā indeed has tamed the untamed. Look, she has tamed them! By teaching the Dharma, the Noble Dharmadattā tamed those we could not tame by killing, restraining, beating or reprimanding. Since Noble Dharmadattā has benefited us, after we have seen the king, let us pay homage to the Noble Dharmadattā."\(^{673}\)

When the soldiers come before her, this remarkable teacher offers them instruction in the Dharma whereby they too at once attain the fruit of stream entry, and begin a life of non-

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\(^{672}\) Bhiksuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Derge Cha 189b. de na byis pa dag der 'ong bar gyur nas chos byin gyis de ni khye'u gang dag yin pa de dag la ni 'bru mar byin nas gcig gis gcig gi ngo skud du bcag ste rang gi laq gis bca' ba dag skyin par byed do/ bu mo gang dag yin pa de dag la ni bdaq nyid kyis 'bru mar gyis ngo bskus nas rang gi laq gis bca' ba dag skyin par byed do/ byis pa de dag gis de dag khyer te rang rang gi khyim dag tu dong ba dang de dag gi ma dag gis dris pa/ khyed cag la 'di dag sus byin/ de dag gis smras pa/ 'phags ma [Cha 190a] chos byin gyis so/ chung ma de dag gis bsams pa/ don gyis na 'phags ma chos byin ni bdaq cag la ma ma'i bya ma mdzad do snyam du rig nas de la mnon par dad par gyur te/ de dag gis bsams pa/ gang gi tshe bdaq cag gi khyim thab dag dmag gi gnas su 'dong ba de'i tshe na bdaq cag gis khyim thab dag bskyal nas 'phags ma chos byin la bsnyen bkur bya'o snyam mo.

\(^{673}\) Bhiksuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Derge Cha 191a1-3. de dag gis bsams pa/ 'phags ma chos byin ni ma daul ba 'dul bar mdzad po yin te/ des 'di dag btul ba lta stes/ gang gi phyir bdaq cag gis 'di dag bsad pa dang/ bcing ba dang/ brdeg pa dang/ spyo las gel bar ma nas pa dag 'phags ma chos byin gyis chos btan pas btul bas 'phags ma chos byin gyis bdaq cag la phan btags byis/ bdaq cag gis kyang rgyal po bglas te 'phags ma chos byin la bsnyen bkur bya'o snyam mo.
violence as soldiers, through which she will serve as their continual guide. The *MSV* devotes many pages to the relationship of these soldiers as disciple to Dharmadattā as their teacher or “virtuous friend,” of which the passage cited here is but a small sample.

Perhaps the most telling moment in this remarkable passage is the women’s response to Dharmadattā’s affectionate treatment of their children. Seeing her acting as a mother to those who are not her children leads them immediately to adopt a position of reverence toward her. In no way are the soldier’s wives depicted as women who value and celebrate motherhood *per se*. In fact, the narrative elsewhere indicates that they have neglected their homes—and presumably their children—as they caroused with other men in their husband’s absence. But when they see the signs of tender care their children have received at the hands of Dharmadattā, whose maternal function they recognize at once—they generate faith and the wish to go see her to pay homage to her. The clear implication here is that nuns do not need to adopt male gendered roles in order to be recognized as spiritual authorities worthy of reverence and ultimately, as teachers. This narrative, like many of those we have explored in this section, are found in the section of the *MSV* concerned particularly with the bhikṣus’ rules—the *Bhikṣuvibhaṅga*—and thus bhikṣus may be presumed to be the main audience for this argument that women can see other women as women and as teachers at the same time, and that they can also be teachers of men.

Whereas gender politics so often require women to efface any maternal image in order to move into social positions previously gendered as male, this story makes clear that this is not expected of them here. Just as being nuns does not require women to deny or reject their bodies as female, sitting in the authoritative role of a teacher does not require them to eschew
the maternal aspect of their caretaking relationships to others. But both female body and maternal role are re-inscribed as parts of monastic discipline and teaching activities.

This presentation of (monastic) women as teachers of (lay) women, as well as men, is paralleled by many presentations in the MSV of (monastic) men as teachers of (lay) men, as well as women. Indeed, drawing on a wide range of Buddhist texts, including the MSV, Peter Skilling makes a compelling case for a widespread practice of what he calls gender pairing. Skilling points to the existence of dual corpi of texts for men and for women, and argues that the tendency he finds to pair the genders goes beyond a “simple acknowledgement” of the existence of “sexual polarity” and is more prominent in Buddhist than brahminical or Jain literary traditions. This pairing is particularly evident in the MSV, with its Bhiṣṇīvibhaṅga and Bhiṣuvibhaṅga, and in the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition more broadly, with its paired Sthavirīgāthā and Sthaviragāthā collections of verses ascribed to the female and male elders, respectively, of which the nuns’ verse collection has not survived.

We have seen Buddha designating those among his disciples who are supreme in terms of various praiseworthy qualities, and he does so envisioning separate domains for men and women. Parallel lists evolve, with Mahāmaudgalyāyana supreme among his male disciples for his powers of miraculous displays; among females, Utpalavṛṇa is supreme. This suggests an understanding that men and women can excel at the same things, but that the circle of female

674 Skilling 2001b.
675 Ibid, 249-50
676 See above, first chapter of this dissertation and Skilling 2001b: 246.
677 Looking specifically at Mūlasarvāstivāda literature, Peter Skilling (2001a and 2001b: 252) details the practice of designating among his female disciples those who are supreme in various skills or qualities, paralleling a practice of doing do for the male.
disciples constitutes one domain, while the male disciples form another. In terms of identifying those who are outstanding in various skills, the two simply different groups engaged in the same activities, and are kept so notionally apart that comparison between them is unnecessary, even as it is assumed that what goes on within each will be similar. In these moments, the bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs are just different orders, one of which happens to be male, the other female.

We saw too in the avadānas a pattern whereby women were monastic or lay women in the past, aspire to become nuns in the future and have now succeeded in doing so. This establishes a sense of naturalness to a gender-bound separatism whereby even across lifetimes monks and nuns remain each on their own side of the divide. The firmness of the dividing line also creates the conditions for the two orders to function, at least at times, as if their spheres of activity were effectively independent.

Jonathan Walters has noted in the Pāli tradition a certain paralleling effect between Buddha and Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī—or Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, as she is there known. The MSV offers multiple gestures toward a similar figuring of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī as a counterpart to Buddha for bhikṣuṇīs and for women more broadly. We noted earlier the account of the lay woman who also wishes to make “provisions for the journey to the next life” by offering a meal and cloth to Mahāpajāpatī Gautamī and the bhikṣuṇī order, just as her

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678 Walters 1994; 373ff, but also passim 1996. Not all scholars accept his presentation. Bernard Faure, for example, finds it to be “exaggerated,” asserting that “she remains a mother and a widowed royal consort.” (Faure 2003: 183) However, in the MSV although we find the vast preponderance of the 500 or so narratives in which Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī appears as a figure to present her as a bhikṣuṇī. Only two are set before her request to ordain, one in which her dream on the eve of the Bodhisattva’s Great Departure is described, the second in which she orders the king to arrange for women to hear the Buddha.
husband had done for Buddha and the bhikṣu order. The language used in that passage in
describing the invitation, the arrival, mealt ime and departure is virtually identical when
speaking of Buddha as head of the bhikṣu order and Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī as head of the
bhikṣuṇī. As did the host for Buddha, the hostess first goes to where Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is
residing, prostrates to her and sits off to one side to receive a Dharma teaching. Mahāprajāpatī
Gautamī falls silent when the teaching is complete. The wife arises from her seat and makes
the respectful invitation to the bhikṣuṇī order to come to her home for a meal. In terms well
familiar to readers of the MSV—and echoing verbatim the same phrasing that had been used
moments before referring to Buddha, the narrative reads:

Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī assented to the householder’s wife by remaining
silent. Then, once the householder’s wife had understood that
Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī had indicated her acceptance by remaining
silent, she was extremely delighted and rejoiced in what Mahāprajāpatī
Gautamī had said. She prostrated at the feet of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī,
[Cha 101a] and then left the presence of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī.679

The wife then heads home to prepare the meal, and when the time has come, goes to
inform her and renew the invitation, as is standard for invitations made to Buddha in the MSV.
The description of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and her bhikṣuṇī saṅgha as they arrive at the house
also evokes Buddha’s place among his bhikṣus:

679 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Derge Cha 100b6-101a1. skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mls khyim bdag gi
chung ma de la cang mi smra bas dang du blangs so/ de nas khyim bdag gi chung ma des skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta
mls cang mi smra bas dang du blangs pa rig nas skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mls smras pa la myon par dga’ ba dang
rjes sa yi rang ba byas te/ skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta m’i rkang pa [Cha 101a] gnyis la mgo bo phyag ‘tshal nas skye
dgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta m’i drung nas song ngo.
She was completely surrounded by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha and was placed at its head. She proceeded to the place that the householder’s wife had arranged and when she arrived, she took a seat in front of the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha.

The description of her husband’s meal offering differs only in substituting Buddha for Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and bhikṣu for bhikṣuṇī. Details begin to diverge when the wife offers exceptional cloth to the nuns, superior to that of the monks, but for our purposes the pattern of mirror imaging has been established. Although the functions Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī provides for the woman in this story, serving as a field of merit and teaching the Dharma, is also provided on many narrative occasions by Buddha for men and for women, nevertheless when the wife in this narrative specifically wishes to carve out a sphere of giving activity that is hers alone, and not shared with her husband, she turns to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī—as if to gain some measure of autonomy, she must turn not to other men but to women as her targets of giving. Numerous other narratives in the MSV present nuns teaching groups of women—though like monks, they also teach male members of the lay community, as we saw in the case of Dharmadattā. But when a separation along gender lines is emphasized in the narrative—as, for example, when the women of the harem wish to have contact with monastics—a female dispenser of the Dharma is mobilized.

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680 Here the Tibetan has song for Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s going, continuing to preserve the high honorific form of gshegs for Buddha, a distinction that the Tibetan introduces and is not found in the Sanskrit.

681 Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Derge Cha 101a. dge slong ma’i tshogs khyis yongs su bskor cing/ dge slong ma’i dge ’dun gyi gong du bshams pa nyid la ’dug go.

682 About this too, Buddha created legislation permitting women to enter palaces, a rule created in response to a request for bhikṣuṇī to come to see female members of the court. Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan at Derge Ta 261b4-262b3.
This same separation and mirroring of functions is especially deployed within the monastic order itself. In story after story, when women approach monks seeking ordination, they are handed off to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī. This is true as well of Buddha himself, who is frequently described as “entrusting” women to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, as we saw in the case of the otherwise idiosyncratic ordination of Utpalavarnā. This trope is striking in that it has Buddha himself acknowledging Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī as the authority over the women’s order, and a sort of counterpart caretaker to himself. What he would have done for the candidate for ordination had that candidate been male, he sends to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī to do when the candidate is female.

According to the ordination procedures that become normative by the end of the MSV, the presence of both bhikṣus and bhikṣunīs is required to perform the full ordination procedure. Yet in many narratives, the narrative simply says, “Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī has her ordained and fully ordained.” This does not constitute proof that ordinations took place without the participation of bhikṣus, but it does reflect a narrative assumption that Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is effectively doing for the nuns under her care what Buddha does for the monks under his. As Buddha can confer ordination alone with a single phrase—ehi bhikṣo—so the MSV is laconic in its descriptions of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s activities of ordaining.

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683 On the use of this term to describe Buddha’s placement of women in Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s hands, see Finnegan forthcoming, as well as Skilling 2001a: 154n67.

684 For a few examples, see the ordination narratives of Kṛśā Gautamī and Kacāṅgalā (Derge Da 13b1-2 and GM.i.21), and below of *Guptā and Utpalavarnā.

685 I have not, however, encountered an instance of an ehi bhikṣunī formula used to ordain bhikṣunīs, by Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī or anyone else.
In one narrative, a bhikṣu encourages his former wife to wrap up the household affairs and go forth. This bhikṣu is Udāyin, one of the MSV’s Gang of Six naughty monks, who function roughly as Śthūlanandā, misbehaving in ways that spark legislation to prevent such conduct in the future thereby defining what is appropriate behavior for bhikṣus and what is not. Udāyin very much wishes to be the one to ordain his ex-wife, but after promising to ordain her himself, he has misgivings:

Udāyin thought, “Earlier too I was squelched\textsuperscript{686} by those black begging bowlers,\textsuperscript{687} so if I ordain a bhikṣuṇī, they will say ‘That Gang of Six is ordaining bhikṣuṇīs,’ and they will thoroughly squelch me.” Thinking this, he became discouraged, and took his begging bowl and robes, and went wandering to Rājagṛha.\textsuperscript{688}

This narrative takes it for granted that bhikṣus ordaining bhikṣuṇīs would be blameworthy and Udāyin knows that because he has been caught out before, he fears he will not be able to get away with this either. The following day, when his ex-wife has settled her household matters, he has moved on to a distant town. She turns up at the monastery explaining to the bhikṣus that she has left her household behind, and has come wanting to be ordained by her ex-husband who has promised to do so. They put her off, saying he has just gone from Śrāvastī to Rājagṛha (which is many days’ walk) to get a razor, and will surely come

\textsuperscript{686} The Tibetan term \textit{zil gyis mnan} can translate the Sanskrit \textit{jihmikṛtya}, \textit{parāhatya} or \textit{diyāmikṛtya} and its associated forms can render \textit{abhibhū} and \textit{parābhava}. It thus covers a semantic range from bested, surpassed, or exceeded to overcome, suppress or overpowered.

\textsuperscript{687} \textit{lhung bzed nag po} - a standard term of abuse directed at Buddhist monastics, most often in the MSV by other Buddhist monastics.

\textsuperscript{688} Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Cha 80b2-3, 'char ka ‘di snyam du sngon yang bdag lhung bzed nag po can rnam s kyis zil gyis mnan par gyur pas gal te bdag gis dge slong ma rab tu phyung bur gyur na drag sde dag gis dge slong ma rab tu phyung ngo zhes rya cher zil gyis gnon par gyur ro snyam du 'gyod pa skyes nas/ de lhung bzed dang chos ges thugs te rayal po'i khab ga la ba der rayu zhung sng.
back and shave her head with the new razor himself. She laments having left the status of a householder without yet attaining the status of a monastic, and sits crying in the monastery when the bhikṣuṇīs arrive for confession. They ask her what is wrong, and when she explains the situation, they reply:

“Silly woman, what bhikṣus ordain a bhikṣuṇī? Since bhikṣuṇīs ordain a bhikṣuṇī, come along. Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī will ordain you.”

They led her into the presence of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, and said, “Noble One, the housewife *Guptā here wishes to ordain.”

Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī ordained her and gave her full ordination.689

When the narrators describe the bhikṣus telling her to wait around for Udāyin to come back with the fresh razor from Rājagrha—and we can easily imagine them snickering at her gullibility as they walk off—they seem to be indicating that the bhikṣus lack any sense of responsibility to care for women seeking to join the bhikṣuṇī order. This brief incident indicates that only a woman foolish enough to be told someone walks to a distant city to get a razor would think that it was bhikṣus by whom a woman would be ordained. The distinct impression given here is that there are two monastic orders, each acting independently. If bhikṣus are formally needed to perform the full ordination ceremony for bhikṣuṇīs, as the rules tell us, they certainly do not understand themselves to be the key players in the ritual. Indeed, the monks scoff even at the idea that they would perform the initial ordination

689 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan at Derge Cha 81a. g.yengs ma dge slong dag su zhi g dge slong ma rab tu 'byin par byed/ 'di ltar dge slong ma rnam kyi g dge slong ma rab tu 'byin par byed kyi tshur shog/ 'phags ma skye dgu'i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mIs khyed rab tu 'byin par 'gyur ro/ de dag gis de skye dgu'i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mI'i gan du khrid nas smras pa/ 'phags ma khyim bdag gi mchis 'brang sbed ma 'di rab tu 'bying bar 'tshal lo/ skye dgu'i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mIs de rab tu phyang rdzois par bonyen par byas so.
ceremony (rab tu byung ba or pravrajyā) for nuns, although the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya does allow them that much. If the full ordination (bsnyen par rzdogs pa or upasampadā) Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is said to perform as well in this passage does include the authorizing presence of bhikṣus, they are presented as utterly immaterial to the actual process, unworthy even of mention. The narrative continues, recording the reaction of Bhikṣu Udāyin, who the narrators tell us had been deeply annoyed that he was not the one to ordain his ex-wife, to whom he is still quite attached.\textsuperscript{690} When she turns up already ordained, although we knew that he is disappointed by this turn of events, he determines who has ordained her, and then accepts the fact as follows:

\begin{quote}
“It does not matter whether Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī ordains you or I ordain you: it is fine. So come in, and I will teach you the Dharma.”\textsuperscript{691}
\end{quote}

On the one hand, Udāyin is no model monk, and appears highly presumptuous here in comparing himself to the head of the bhikṣunī order. However, according to the eight heavy rules that Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī formally accepted, technically as a bhikṣu he is in fact monastically senior to any bhikṣunī. Thus his casual recognition of the validity of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s actions in ordaining her grants a great degree of ritual autonomy to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, and literally makes her interchangeable with a bhikṣu.

\textsuperscript{690} This is the bhikṣu whose semen impregnates this very bhikṣuni in the story of monastic childbirth we saw in the previous section of this chapter. The relationship between the two is shot through with levels of complexity that I have had to set aside for the purposes of this dissertation, but would clearly merit further exploration in another context.

\textsuperscript{691} Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan at Derge Cha 82b7. skye dgu’i bdag mo chen mo gau ta mis rab tu phyung yang rung/ kho boz rab tu phyung yang rung ste legs kyis nang du zhugs shig dang chos bstan par bya’o.
It bears mentioning that this narrative is found in the *Bhikṣuvibhaṅga*, as was the description of the meal offering to the bhikṣuṇī order discussed above, as well as the description of Dharmadattā converting the women and their husbands. We clearly are not, therefore, looking at a perspective particularly crafted for women. That the bhikṣuṇīs are basically acting independently in taking care of their own is assumed to be so obvious that the woman who thinks otherwise is called a “silly woman.” In the *MSV*, men as well as women seem to take it for granted that the nuns are there in part to serve and be served by the women of the lay community, though they can also teach and receive offerings and reverence from lay men, just as monks can also teach and receive offerings and reverence from lay women.

This vision is possible precisely because monastic women are both monastics and women. This means they are Others for laypersons and also for monks, who are Others in distinction to which nuns’ identity in turn may be articulated. In relation to monks, the aspect of nuns’ complex and contextual identity that comes to the fore is their identity as women. In relation to laypersons, what was forged was their identity as monastics. We have watched thus far the nuns’ process of defining themselves in contrast to lay women. We now turn to see what it means to be a nun when juxtaposed to monks.
HIERARCHY AND ASYMMETRICAL RECIPROCITY IN RELATIONSHIPS OF CARE

With the founding of the bhikṣuṇī order, the Buddhist monastic community is split in two: a female and a male order. As we saw in the cosmogenetic account of the origin of human sexuality, in the monastic community as in the cosmos, sexual identity marks a difference that can cleave in two what earlier had been simply one. With its concern to acknowledge and account for human difference, the MSV’s ethics of particularity ensures that the difference between the male and female orders will be addressed, and that it will matter. This difference can be managed in many ways. We have seen moments in which a sort of parity prevails between the two, with the bhikṣuṇī and bhikṣu orders performing separate but parallel functions for their own members and for their respective lay followers. In the Buddhist imaginaire, as Charles Hallisey has noted, differences more often tend to be organized hierarchically. In the MSV, this tendency is clearly apparent between the bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī orders, with the same persistent subordination of female to male that we have noted outside the monastery as well. By the time the period of evolution described in the MSV is over, nearly all ritual procedures of the female monastic community will require the participation of the male community, while none of the monks’ procedures require the participation of nuns. The most senior among the nuns is made junior to the most junior of monks, in a hierarchy that appears to be as vertical as it is predictable.

Hallisey 2001: 113
However, in the hierarchical relationship between the male and female monastic orders, and within each order as well, we will see Buddha urging an asymmetrical reciprocity in which persons above receive reverential service from those below but then must give back other forms of care. That persons must reciprocate for the kindness received from others is not questioned in the Buddhist ethics on display in the MSV, but there is no expectation that they must reciprocate in kind. In fact, with this particularist vision of human difference, it would be inappropriate and unwise to assume that everyone should receive the same forms of care or that others necessarily need back the same forms of care that they offered. In its most radical form, the Buddhist ethics of particularity found in the MSV erode the ethical basis for treating others in identical ways—or for expecting the identical treatment back from them. Symmetrical reciprocity requires us to ignore the particular contexts and personal attributes that distinguish every ethical subject from others, and that determine what would be beneficial for each of them in that given moment. By contrast, asymmetrical reciprocity is both implied and demanded by an ethics rooted in an attentiveness to persons in the fullness of their social and personal complexity.

Translating the principle of asymmetrical reciprocity from the level of individual persons to that of groups is a charged and difficult process. Dividing monastic orders according to gender creates groups that share only one feature, and no matter how important that feature may be, each group remains internally divided by many others, as the MSV’s narratives make vividly clear. We noted Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī insisting that new categories be deployed—that of mindful bhikṣuṇī versus unmindful bhikṣuṇī—as a means of inflecting the totalizing grouping according to gender in the order. In the MSV, Buddha’s omniscience is
required to provide perfect care to just one individual, and the navigation of shifting situations between groups is more complex still. The asymmetrical reciprocity that links monks and nuns in relations of mutual obligations is articulated and then re-negotiated throughout various narrative incidents, and these re-negotiations in the MSV do not arrive at a point of closure, leaving the exact content and contours of these obligations open for further revision. In the shifting contexts of the MSV, the bonds that connect the two orders can be made to bear different meanings in the hands of skillful strategizers.

To the degree that the male and female monastic communities are seen as separate, the issue of hierarchical ordering was neither acute nor even evident. However, when the two come into contact, the difference translates—as if inevitably—into a relationship of hierarchy. The hierarchy does not negate the existence of the alternative vision of parity between the orders, nor do the moments of parity destabilize the hierarchy that is also present in the MSV. Rather, even as hierarchical arrangements do predominate between bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs, the parity supplements that vision with a sense of alternate possibilities.

Hierarchies between the male and female orders are articulated in the MSV spatially and symbolically at the same time. To begin with, however respectfully Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is presented as the head of the bhikṣuṇī order, the bhikṣu order has Buddha for its head—the phrase bhikṣusaṅgha buddhapramukha appears dozens if not hundreds of times in the MSV.693 It is a basic tenet of the MSV that no one can compare to Buddha. What is headed by Buddha by definition is superior to what is headed by anyone else. Further, the nuns and monks have separate residences, such that wherever Buddha resides, he is among monks. As

693 I actually counted the instances in Dutt’s first volume of the Vinayavastu Bhaṣajyavastu, and found 38.
we saw in the description of the physical configurations of Buddha and Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī seated with their respective orders, they are both in front and in the middle, at the top and at the center. Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī may be at the top and center of the bhikṣuṇī order, but Buddha, simply as Buddha, is by definition at the center of the Buddhist social world, symbolically as well as physically. When nuns wish to come to see Buddha, they come from outside the monastery, to which they are outsiders simply because their own residence is elsewhere. They must literally pass into and through the monks’ space in order to approach Buddha at the powerful center of this world, and this makes them beholden to the monks for access that monks do not always wish to grant, as we shall see in a moment. Thus while Buddha is among them, the separation of male and female orders places the nuns on the physical periphery in a way that appears compellingly natural.

The impulse to organize difference through hierarchy is everywhere in the MSV, and by no means is limited to gender difference. The MSV appears to assume that equality offers an unstable basis for social organization. One of the most evocative displays of this suspicion may be found in the story of the rivalry of Śāriputra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana. Known as the auspicious pair (Sanskrit: bhadrayuga; Tibetan: zung mchog) the two are consistently paired narratively, and generally portrayed as best of friends. The first section of the MSV itself is largely occupied with a long narrative of their first meeting and forming a friendship. This story carefully depicts the two as largely similar and evenly balanced in their differences—each is brahmin, from a prominent family, and has 500 students, but one has more wisdom.

694 Reading stories about Śāriputra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana is an excellent way to finalize one’s knowledge of the dual form in Sanskrit, for the two are paired linguistically in such narratives, as hands or eyes are elsewhere.
while the other has more wealth. After they ordain together, the two are each said to be
supreme within a different sphere of excellence, Śāriputra in wisdom and
Mahāmaudgalyāyana in miraculous powers (ṛdhhi). If ever there was a possibility for a portrait
of difference that is not resolved into hierarchy in the MSV, it would seem to be these two. Yet
the MSV offers a curious cycle of stories narrating competitive struggles that take place
between them. Śāriputra wonders just how great Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s miraculous displays
are, and then bests him in miracles. The monks are understandably puzzled, since Buddha has
designated Mahāmaudgalyāyana as supreme in such powers. Buddha then narrates a series of
five past-life stories in which the two engaged in friendly—and not-so-friendly—rivalry, and
then concludes with a firm declaration of hierarchy even in the midst of a separation of their
spheres of excellence:

However, pratyekabuddhas do not even know the names of those
concentrations, meditative stabilizations and absorptions that a
tathāgata has attained. [Kha 285b] The monk Śāriputra does not even
know the names of those that pratyekabuddhas have attained. The monk
Maudgalyāyana does not even know the names of those that the monk
Śāriputra has attained. The other śrāvaka disciples do not even know the
names of those that the monk Maudgalyāyana has attained. The monk
Śāriputra has miraculous powers and strengths that are greater than
that of the monk Maudgalyāyana, but with the idea that they are many, I
designated\textsuperscript{695} him foremost of those with miraculous powers.\textsuperscript{696}

\textsuperscript{695} Tibetan has des mang du gnas pa la dgeng nas ngas rdzu ‘phrul can rnams kyi mchog tu bstan to, a comparison that is
curiously omitted from Dutt’s reconstruction.

\textsuperscript{696} Bhaisajyavastu. GM.i.171; Derge Kha 285a-b. The Sanskrit here is “reconstructed” in two places by Dutt from the
Tibetan, and here too there are serious problems with that attempt. In the portions that are not reconstructed the
Tibetan shadows the Sanskrit closely. I thus translate this passage directly from the Tibetan. ‘on kyang de bzhin
Equality, this story suggests, provides the condition not only for friendship but also for competition that destabilizes the presumed balance between persons, and such imbalance is only resolved when a clear superiority is established. This presumption may help understand that preference for ranking between the male and female orders.

Indeed, the ranking of beings is a principle very much at work within each of the orders as well. In a charter story for the principle of hierarchy followed within the monastic order, a dispute erupts among monks as to who should be given veneration and respect, who should receive deferential greetings and prostration from whom and generally who should be ranked first among them. They are asking, in effect, what aspect of human particularity should be allowed to organize social formations. The monks are able to imagine a dazzling array of particulars that might serve as the guiding principle for hierarchical ranking. Ranging from caste, family and wealth, to beauty, eloquence, fame, learning, asceticism, realizations and finally spiritual attainments, these particulars include social location as well as personal qualities and values among their candidates. They do not, however, seem to imagine the possibility that all might bow and greet one another reverentially. Nor does Buddha propose this option, but affirms their basic impulse that a guide for hierarchical ranking is necessary. In the face of endless particularity, it seems, a social formation needs guideliness for determining which of those particulars matter most. For his ranking principle, Buddha points to seniority in terms of length of time holding full ordination in the Buddhist monastic order.
This choice of particularity as an ordering principle holds out the possibility of purely vertical hierarchy, since time is infinitely divisible. Even today Mūlasarvāstivādin ordination ceremonies include a calculation of the time vows were formally conferred, so that those who turn out to have been ordained on the same day can establish their seniority down to the minute. Buddha bases the hierarchical ranking on a clearly recognizable and indisputable determinant that serves to reaffirm the value of the ordination itself. It simultaneously discounts as principles for ranking the other particulars proposed, many of which are based on the social principles valued within lay society or on personal qualities that are not readily apparent and easily quantified. However, the ostensibly new alternate ordering Buddha proposes with this ranking shares two notable features with the established order outside the monastery. First, it echoes the structuring of social roles along chronological life-stages, such as āśramas or the broader allocation of respect to those elder in years within the family.\footnote{It is well beyond the scope of this dissertation to speculate as to the degree to which the āśramas were present as a pattern for the Buddhist order to emulate or reject or the degree of interaction with these Buddhist and brahminical institutions. For those who wish to do so, see Olivelle’s (1993) classic treatment of the āśramas.}

Secondly, and more crucially for the purposes of this dissertation, nuns are made the exception to this rule, as Buddha stipulates that a nun fully ordained even for 100 years must defer and prostrate to a monk fully ordained on that same day, although lay men and women both are to show respect and defer to nuns.\footnote{Śāyānāsanavastu. Derge Ga 188b3-4. dge slong ma ma gtogs te/ de ni bsnyen par rdzogs nas lo Bray a len kyang de ring bsnyen par rdzogs pa’i dge slong la phyag bya ba yin no.} The most basic rule of social organization at work here, if there be such a thing, is that recognition of difference leads to hierarchy and within that hierarchy, ordained versus non-ordained is the most fundamental distinction— with lay women bowing to ordained women. But following closely behind that distinction is...
that of gender. This narrative and the multiple practices it authorizes argue forcefully: among particulars, monastic ordination status matters most, with gender a close second.

Once introduced, the ranking along gender lines follows its invariable logic placing bhikṣuṇīs below bhikṣus. However, it is important to note that the primary distinction created with this move is still between the lay community and the ordained, with gender coming in only as a secondary differentiating factor. Although it keeps ordained women below men, it does rank them unequivocally above unordained men. By ordaining, women have the opportunity to step up in the social order, though as soon as they do they are bumping the glass ceiling. At the same time, Buddha’s ranking in this way reduplicates within the monastic order itself the relationship of lay to monastic. Nuns are to monks as all laypeople are to all the saṅgha, yet they are also within the saṅgha. As Janet Gyatso noted elsewhere, female monastics are figured as the inside other to the monks. This has the effect of shoring up the high status and assuring the prestige of monks, who are doubly elevated above the multiple others that surrounded them inside the saṅgha as well as without. When monastic women are the other to lay women, they gain status and respect, along with caretaking responsibilities as teachers and moral authorities. When monastic women are the other to monks, they lose status—but presumably should be recipients of care.

As it does everywhere else, in the monastic order the subordination of women to men carries with it the risk of exploitation, a fact of which the MSV is well aware. Scattered across the MSV we find multiple narratives that together sketch a pattern in which a bhikṣu first takes advantage of a bhikṣuṇī in some way, at which point Buddha gets wind of it, upbraids the

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monk and makes a rule to prevent the recurrence of such behavior. Unlike the preying on women that we see by lay men, the bhikṣuṇīs’ vulnerability to such exploitation is not based in male perceptions of her body as desirable, but in male greed for the goods nuns have received or the simple assumption that women are there to serve.

One such narrative makes clear that it is a nun’s commitment to maintain a respectful posture toward bhikṣus as bhikṣus that exposes her to exploitation.

It was the practice of Utpalavarṇā when she was going on almsround to offer the first portion to the saṅgha community, and afterwards to go elsewhere and eat herself. On one such occasion when she was on almsrounds, after she had offered the first portion to the saṅgha, and afterwards she went out for her own food, a bhikṣu who was a newcomer was going on almsrounds and because he was not skilled at the practice, he did not receive anything. Utpalavarṇā saw him and said, “Noble One, did you not receive anything?”

“She offered the alms she had begged for herself to that one on almsround, and went without food herself.

Upananda saw her, and thought, “This sister not only has great faith in the saṅgha community; she seems to have great faith for the person too. Let me test this.”

With this in mind, he analyzed and in the daytime when Utpalavarṇā went on her almsround, she offered the first portion to the saṅgha, and went on a second almsround on her own account. Upananda came and said, “Noble One, have you attained a little something?”
“Noble One, if I have and I offer it, will you accept?”

“As if it were the leftovers from a celestial palace.”

“Noble One, in that case, please hold out your begging bowl.”

He held out his begging bowl, and she offered her alms into the bowl.

Because Utpalavārṇā was weakened by not eating for a second day, she fainted and fell to the ground. Those without faith seized on the chance and criticized, saying, “Sirs, it is widely said that this Utpalavārṇā is without desires, so how is it that when she saw this attractive Śākya youth, she fainted out of desire and fell to the ground?”

As in most such narratives, the predatory bhikṣu is a member of the Gang of Six, or the famously naughty monks. Here, he preys on the Utpalavārṇā’s devotion and her willingness to put the needs of the bhikṣus above her own. This tale vigorously points out the perils of the placement of all bhikṣuṇīs lower in rank than all bhikṣus. At the same time, the narrators are signaling that the system in which esteem is offered to those above one hierarchically works only if those recipients are indeed worthy. When Buddha hears of this incidentally, he soundly rebukes Upananda, banning the bhikṣus thenceforth from taking food from bhikṣuṇīs who are

700 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Nya227a4wb4.
not their relatives. This exception to allow monks to take food from nuns related to them evokes a gendered practice of allowing the male members of the family to eat first, and with that, once again, via the allowances that acknowledge family ties among monastics, the normative social constructions of gender outside the monastic order find their way back.

This clause appears in the formulations of a number of rules that make it clear that bhikṣuṇīs are performing services for bhikṣus who are their kin that they are not permitted to perform for anyone else, and that it is acceptable for them to do so. The rule we have seen in the Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga forbidding bhikṣuṇīs from spinning would appear to insulate them from this activity, yet it must be read differently against the view from within the Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. There, we find Buddha summoning a monk who has given his wool to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and other bhikṣuṇīs to spin.⁷⁰¹

Lord Buddha asked Venerable Udāyin, “Udāyin, is it true that you have made a bhikṣuṇī who is not your relative spin your wool?”

“Yes, Venerable.”

Lord Buddha thoroughly upbraided him, saying, “This is not the way of a monastic practitioner. It is not conducive. It is inappropriate. It is not consistent with the way. This is not the activity of an ordained person.”⁷⁰²

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⁷⁰¹ For just one of many other such occurrences, see Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Derge Cha 84a4ff, in which we have a handy commentarial gloss on the term ‘unrelated,’ indicating it refers to blood relations over seven generations: nye du ma yin pa la zhes bya ba ni phyi mo dang/ mes po dan/ phrugs las brten pa’i bdun pa tshun chad ni nye du yin la de phan cad ni nye du ma yin no.

⁷⁰² Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. SANSKRIT not extant. Tibetan at Derge Cha 141b3-5. sangs rgyas bcom ldan ’das kyi tshe dang ldan pa ’char ka la rmus pa/ ’char ka khyod dge slong ma nye du ma yin pa la lug bal dag rmel du ’jud pa bden nam/ btsun pa mad do/sangs rgyas bcom ldan ’das kyi dge sbyong gi tshul ma yin pa/ rjes su mthun pa ma yin pa/ rung ba ma yin pa/ tshul dang mthun pa ma yin pa de ni rab tu byung bas bya ba ma yin no zhes nram par smad pa mdsad do.
The obvious implication, of course, is that as inappropriate and inconsistent as it is with the monastic lifestyle Buddha is crafting for his bhikṣus to ask a bhikṣunī to serve him in this way, it is quite fine to do so if she is a relative. Similarly there are rules that prevent bhikṣunīs from cooking, washing clothes and performing other domestic chores for bhikṣus who are not her relatives, leaving wide open the permissibility of nuns serving her male monastic relatives in such ways. The rules in some cases are ostensibly aimed at guarding celibacy, by preventing the intimacies that arise when performing domestic chores for others and handling one another’s clothes—intimacies that can be sexually charged in ways that are diffused when they are performed for one’s blood relatives. Yet the converse gendering of these domestic services does not hold, and we do not see rules allowing bhikṣunīs to ask bhikṣus who are her relatives to wash or cook for her, making it quite clear that that these exceptions preserve intact the gendered directionality of these domestic exchanges. Perhaps as a collateral effect of the recognition of family ties within the monastic order, the gendering of women as domestic servants is preserved, even if it is deployed only in the relationship between particular persons who may be thought to have imported that gendered relation with them when they entered the monastic order.

A very different narrative shows Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī reversing her previous vigorous refusal to spin thread. In this incident, she agrees to do so when requested by a bhikṣu, the Gang of Sixer, Udāyin. Although she accedes to his petition while she is on her way to see Buddha, she tells him she will have some nuns pick it up later. When the quantity of

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\[Bhikṣunīvibhaṅga.\] Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan found at Derge Ta 10b3-4. *yang dge slong ma gang dge slong nye du ma yin pa’i gos rnying pa ’khru’am/ ’tshed dam/ ’chags na spang ba’i ltung byed do.*
wool this greedy monk has amassed turns out to be excessive, the nuns grumble over it, and Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī replies:

“Sisters, the Lord has said that the following two are holy beings: Those who do not take on a responsibility they have not accepted, and those who complete a responsibility they have accepted. Therefore, since this is a responsibility that has been accepted, it must be completed. However much wool you are happy to spin, please spin and bring it back to him.”

Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s reference to a commitment that has been accepted reminds us of her own acceptance of the eight rules that formalize her and the other nuns’ ranking below monks. But even if her comment is taken more narrowly to speak solely of the acceptance of the responsibility to spin the wool, in either case, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī makes a virtue of the fulfillment of her voluntary obligations, framing it as the conduct of a holy being. She asks for the other nuns’ assistance, but only as much as they happily undertake to offer. At the same time, the quote warns against allowing additional responsibility to be foisted upon one.

Though she asks others to help her, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī herself is also spinning, presumably for the first time in her life, since she has said she never did so as a lay woman. When she goes to see Buddha, he asks her directly why her hands have turned red like the

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704 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan at Derge Cha 141a3-4. nu mo dag bcom ldan ’das kyis ’di gnyis ni skyes bu dam pa yin te/ khur ma blangs pa mi len pa gang yin pa dang/ khur blangs pa mthar phyin par byed pa gang yin pa’o zhes gsangs pas/ ’di ni khur blangs pa yin pas mthar phyin par bya dgos kyis/ khyed cag las gang gis ji tsam rmel bar spro ba de tsam rmel la de i gen du khyer te byin cig.
hands of a dyer.” After she replies that “Noble Udāyin” gave her wool to spin, Buddha summons Udāyin, reprimands him and makes a rule banning bhikṣus from giving their spinning to bhikṣunīs who are not related to them.

Here too even as Buddha protects female monastics from being made the domestic servants of monks, he preserves the possibility for such roles to persist between family members within the monastic orders. However, there are cases in which Buddha extends the protection of his legislation into those familial relationships as well. We see this in the narrative previously explored in which Utpalavarṇā is given a bolt of cloth by the crooks who had encountered her as she meditated overnight in the thick forest. Once she returns to town, she wishes to deliver the first portion of the alms she has received to the saṅgha, as is her practice. She proceeds to the monks’ resident in Jetavana Grove, where she encounters the monk Upananda. Upananda then maneuvers a situation in which she offers that cloth to him personally. We should note here the assumption that when she goes to make the offering to the saṅgha, she goes not to the nuns’ residence but to the monks,’ where Buddha is in residence. This reinforces what we have seen, that despite the doubling of the monastic orders as male and female, the monks arrayed around Buddha and living with him are seen as the inner heart of the monastic community as a whole.

After handing the cloth she was offered to Upananda, Utpalavarṇā goes to pay her respect to Buddha, and the following exchange ensues:

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705 Bhikṣuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan at Derge Cha 141b1-2. gau  ta mi ci'i phyir khyod kyi lag pa gnyis 'di lta ste/ dper na btsa blag mkhan gyi lag pa dmar ba ltar dmar ba dang shin tu dmar bar ayur.
At that time, Utpalavarnā’s five Dharma robes were in poor condition and even her upper robe was old. Thereupon the Lord said to Venerable Ānanda, “Ānanda, did the bhikṣuṇīs not get summer robes?”

“Yes they did, Venerable One.”

“Then why are Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarnā’s five Dharma robes in poor condition and even her upper robe old?”

“Venerable One, this sister is devout and good, and her mind is filled with virtuous thoughts. There is nothing whatsoever that she does not offer, or renounce completely to the Buddha, the Dharma, the saṅgha or to wishful bhikṣus. Along with that, after she received a bolt of cloth, she offered it too to the Venerable Upananda.”

“Ānanda, are bhikṣus accepting extra cloth from bhikṣuṇīs who are not their relatives?” [Cha 99a]

“Yes they are, Venerable One.”

“Ānanda if a bhikṣu attains [cloth] from a bhikṣuṇī who is not his relative without considering whether her own set of five Dharma robes is complete or not, nothing that is attained in this way should be accepted, even if it is a relative who offers it.”

Then the Lord said to the Venerable Ānanda, “Ānanda, give Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarnā a set of five Dharma robes from the main (monks’) vihāra.”

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706 gis —> gi

707 rnyed pa grub pa - more literally, accomplish the attainment of, and probably referring to the formal completion of the ritual for accepting and distributing those robes.

708 yid du ’thad pa can mean pleasant, attractive, but is attested translating the Sanskrit manorathā or manoramā.
Venerable Ānanda gave Bhikṣūṇī Utpalavārṇā a set of five Dharma robes from the main (monks’) vihāra. 709

Buddha has the monks assembled, forcefully upbraids Upananda, and makes it a rule that monks cannot accept robes from bhikṣuṇīs, even those related to them, without considering first whether she herself has enough of her own. In essence, Upananda was taking advantage of Utpalavārṇā’s renunciation and her respect for the saṅgha. This narrative reflects the hinged position nuns are in, making offerings of cloth and food to the monks as would the lay community, yet themselves also serving as recipients of such offerings from laypeople. Yet here a difference emerges in Buddha’s activities to regulate the monastics’ dealings with lay society and his activities to regulate monks’ relationships to nuns. In many stories in the MSV, Buddha does intervene to prevent monastics from taking advantage of the generosity of the lay community. He does so, for example, by forbidding monastics to encourage laypersons to go into debt to make offerings to the saṅgha or engineer situations in which they are offered finer quality goods than the lay supporters had planned to give and so on. Buddha acts in the vast majority of those cases either because criticism erupts within the lay society, after the simpler nuns “of few needs” themselves cast aspersions on their less principled fellow nuns. In the case of his moves to protect the nuns from exploitation by

709 Bhiksuvibhaṅga. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan at Derge Cha 98b5-99a3. de’i tshe na ut-pa la’i mdo gi chos gos lnga ngan cing snam sbyar yang rnyings par gyur nas/ de na bcom ldan ‘das kyis tshe dang ldan pa kun dga’ bo la bka’ stsal pa/ kun dga’ bo dge slong ma rnams kyis dbyar gyi gos kyi rnyed pa ma grub bam/ btsun pa grub bo/ o na ci i phyir dge slong ma ut-pa la’i mdo gi chos gos lnga ngan cing snam sbyar yang rnyings par gyur/ btsun pa srin mo ‘di m do dad pa dang ldan zhing bzang la dge ba’i bsam pa can laus te/ ‘dis sams rgyas sam/ chos sam/ dge ‘dun nam/ dge slong yid du ‘thad pa dang la ma phal bo’i yongs su ma btang ba ci yang ma mchis te/ ‘dis dang yang ras yug chen rnyed nas de yang ‘dis btsun pa nye dga’ la stsal to/kun dga’ bo dge slong dag dge slong ma nye du ma yin pa la ges lhag pa len tam/ btsun [Cha 99a] pa len to/ kun dga’ bo dge slong dag dge slong ma nye du ma yin pa la’i di snyam du ‘di’i chos gos lnga tshang ngam/ ‘on te ma tshang snyam du mi sens par ‘di liar thob bo co g leg par byed kyi/ nye du la ni byin yang len par mi byed do/de nas bcom ldan ‘das kyis tshe dang ldan pa kun dga’ bo la bka’ stsal pa/ kun dga’ bo dge slong ma ut-pa la’i mdo la gtsug lag khang chen po nas chos gos lnga byin cig/ tshe dang ldan pa kun dga’ bo es dge slong ma ut-pa la’i mdo la gtsug lag khang chen po nas chos gos lnga byin na.
monks, however, Buddha generally acts on his own, proactively, rather than responding to criticism. When it comes to protecting his nuns from his monks, Buddha does not wait for someone to point out the problem, but does so himself. This is arguably because men demanding service and respect from women cannot be expected to draw much attention, or strike those who notice it as unusual. But more importantly, because bhikṣuṇīs have been made subordinate to the bhikṣus, they have little room to make direct complaints or combat exploitation on their own.

In this story, Buddha makes a point of bringing the community together to state that the monks must be guided by concerns for the well-being of the nuns even when they are the rightful recipients of those nuns’ respectful offerings and service, and even if those bhikṣuṇīs are their relatives. We begin in this exchange to see another aspect of the monks’ position as the presumed worthy field of offerings: This position implies an ethical responsibility to care for the donor, and voluntarily limit their acceptance of offerings if they see it comes to the material detriment of the giver.

As we see with many of the stories that define bhikṣuṇīs’ roles and status in the saṅgha, all the narratives of this monk-exploits-nun-and-is-reprimanded-by-Buddha type we have explored here occur in the volumes of the Bhikṣuviśaṅga, and thus are clearly also directed at readers who are bhikṣus, and not solely at bhikṣuṇīs. As such, when Buddha intervenes to protect nuns from monks, he is addressing himself to the other males and positioning himself as the protector of the female monastics in his order. This role of protective guardian of women should be very familiar to us from the paternalistic patterns of lay society. When Buddha emerges as a protector of nuns from monks as well as from lay men, this itself echoes
the social positioning of women as belonging under the protection of the males who are responsible for them. Here the weight of the gender roles of larger society bears in heavily on monastic society.

We may note as well the echoes of that role present in the very charter story in which Mahāprajāpati Gautamī comes before Buddha with the shaved head and simple garb associated with that state. Unlike other vinayas, the MSV does not explicitly underscore Buddha’s duties to her as a son who might step in as guardian once her husband (his father) dies. But with shaved head and simple clothes, she appears before him as a widow for whom he might now be responsible according to gendered roles of guardianship. It also bears mentioning that among the first 500 nuns many are also women bereft of male protector, having become what we might call “ordination widows,” being left alone at home when their own husbands went forth. In ways both explicit and narratively implicit, Buddha’s place in the monastic order often seems to be understood as a sort of enlightened *pater familias*.

As Alan Cole has noted:

While these are difficult perspectives to extract from scarce historical remains, at the very least we can say that though Buddhism is regularly thought of as a religion of renunciation, its institutional form shows steady and close ties with the family that range from standard patron-priest relations up to much more interesting patterns of mutual recognition and legitimization that seem to involve the exchange and verification of symbolic logic.\(^{710}\)

\(^{710}\) Cole 2006: 301.
The MSV does present ways that the patron-priest relationships are inflected by family bonds, and we have noted above the ways this relationship come to light in the exceptions that Buddha makes for monks to seek service from nuns who are their relatives. In Buddha’s assumption of a role of protector of nuns, we also detect the pattern Cole notes, in which the symbolic logic of family roles also circulates within the monastic community.

It may be that monastics fall into patriarchal and gendered patterns of relationship because these are simply familiar to them from their lay life. It may be that the social organization within the monastery, however greatly it differs from lay society, especially for women, is grounding its sense of legitimacy in its similarity to what is already authorized by the surrounding lay society. It may be that the many ways in which models of relationship reproduce themselves culturally are simply too strong and too effective to allow Buddha’s monastic community to forge radically new models for the relationships between men and women. And it may be a combination of all of the above. But in any case, it is clear that in the end, the types of relationship created within the monastic community owe much to those found in lay society and in the family.

In this same insightful article, Cole identifies a number of stances that he sees Buddhism taking in relation to the family, several of which are readily apparent in the MSV. One is “the language of renunciation” in which texts seek to “generate distrust of at-home life and to urge the listener/reader to search for truth and value in the extrafamilial space of the
A second stance will have serious implications for the positioning of women within the saṅgha:

Second, there is a metaphoric language in which identity within the monastic setting is understood as a kind of replicate of the patriarchal family—a kind of corporate familialism in which the Buddha is designated as a master-father of sorts, with the clergy and the faithful understood to be his filial progeny.  

In the narratives of the MSV that we have just seen, this corporate familialism extends beyond metaphoric language. Cole himself comments that the rule of seniority within the monastic order reinforces the sense of being reborn into a new family, where membership is reset based on the new birth date one acquires upon ordination. The narratives we have explored show the corporate familialism gaining further life and meaning in the thickness of the day-to-day interchanges among Buddha and his daughters and sons.

This act of joining a new corporate family will affect women in profoundly different ways than it does men. First of all, the instant that Buddha’s position as head of the monastic order is modeled along family lines, the monks becomes his sons and heirs, whereas the nuns become his wards, to be protected and kept chaste, with their good reputations intact. To the degree that nuns are seen as daughters, they are less likely to be imagined as fully carrying on his lineage. Daughters’ membership in the family is secondary and terminal, for her own offspring will form part of another family. Here the pairing of male and female orders works

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712 Ibid.
713 Ibid: 305.
against nuns, for the female disciples that nuns bring into the family, ordaining and training them, may be seen as joining a distinct family, a family that is other to the inner family of monks that will carry on Buddha’s monastic lineage.

However, the comparison to the native family does allow the relatively favorable conditions women enjoy in the monastic family to come to light. In a society built on the patrilocal kanyādāna exchanges of women, the vast majority of women will experience a radical change in family affiliation at one point in their lives, and that will be a process determined for her by others. She will begin on the bottom rung of that new family—much as a newly ordained nun does in the monastic order—but in the lay family her ascension to a position of greater seniority will happen largely based on her reproductive success in becoming a mother of sons, as the narrators of Kṛṣṇa Gautamī’s story bluntly indicate. By contrast, however patriarchal the Buddhist monastic “family” may be, it is a family which women choose for themselves, and it is one in which their ability to progress in seniority is not pegged to biological processes beyond her control, but is guaranteed as long as she maintains her monastic discipline over time.

For this contrast alone, the implications of understanding the monastic order as a new sort of family does not unequivocally disadvantage women. However, to the degree that women’s position within the monastic family is modeled on their position in the extra-monastic family units, they will inevitably find themselves placed in positions of subordination to male counterparts in ways that again can seem deceptively “natural.” As long as Buddha as the enlightened family is on hand and vigilant in intervening to protect his female wards, the

714 Kṣudrakavastu. Derge Da 128b1-2.
harsh edges of their social subordination can be greatly blunted. What will happen when Buddha passes will be quite another story.

While Buddha is on hand, he does more than just ensure the bhikṣus do not abuse their position of power over bhikṣuṇīs, according to the presentation of the MSV narratives. Rather, Buddha charges those higher in the hierarchy with caretaking duties for those below them. In fact, the MSV articulates a vision of hierarchy in which persons are bound to one another in relationships of reciprocity—but a reciprocity in which what is given and what is received are different—what we may call relationships of asymmetrical reciprocity. As 21st-century readers of the MSV, it may be that our own post-enlightenment valuing of equality and our postmodern sensitivity to hegemonic power formations leads us to assume that hierarchy implies unilateral domination of those below by those above. This is not the assumption of the MSV, nor of many other Buddhist and non-Buddhist texts that circulated in the Indic world. On multiple occasions Buddha makes clear that the relationships he is crafting within his monastic community carry with them responsibilities of care-taking of various sorts. The same is very obviously the case in the relationships between monastic and lay communities as well, with the monastics serving the lay by preserving and offering them the Dharma that is seen as a source of great value and a cause of wellbeing, while the lay community offers material support and respectful service.

Within the asymmetrical reciprocity governing relations between the male and female monastic orders, we have seen Buddha in his old age making the senior monks responsible for instructing the nuns who had previously been coming to him for teachings. Even as Buddha makes the nuns’ order dependent on the monks for their presence in order to complete
various ritual requirements, including ordination itself, he also requires monks to perform those services, even during rains retreat when it would mean traveling outside the retreat boundaries. In another long and complicated narrative, the bhikṣus act on their own, without consulting Buddha, to make an ordinance forbidding bhikṣunīs from entering their monastery, in which Buddha happens to be resident. Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is thus turned away as she seeks to enter to pay reverence and receive teachings from Buddha, as she does daily. Noting her absence, Buddha asks if she has taken ill, is told no, and in this way learns of the situation, as follows:

“No, Venerable.”

“Well then why has she not come?”

He explained the situation in detail to the Lord. The Lord said, “Ānanda, the rule made by the bhikṣu assembly is a matter only of passing concern. However, the bhikṣunīs depend on the bhikṣus in many ways, and if they are not allowed to come, the reverential service will disappear...”

Buddha goes on to stipulate that while nuns must continue to ask monks’ permission to enter their monastery, the monk must in fact grant that permission. His comment here indicates that it is not only the reverential service offered by bhikṣunīs—which the bhikṣus

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715 GM.iv.142-3.
716 For an exploration of this story with very different interpretive interests, see Schopen 2004: 329-359.
717 mang ba could also mean more, but there is no other grammatical indication of a comparison here.
718 Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan at Derge Da 74a5-7. btsun pa/ ma lags so/ 'o na ci'i phyir mi 'ong/ des bcom ldan 'das la skabs de dag rgyas par gsel te/ bcom ldan 'das kyi bka' stsal pa/ kun dga' bo/ dge slong gis khrims su byas pa thog tu bab po/ 'on kyang dge slong ma rnams mi/ dge slong rnams la rag las pa mang ba yin zhir fol te de dag 'ong du ma bcug na bkur sti med par 'gyur ro.
who made the rule were apparently willing to dispense with—but precisely the bhikṣunīs’
dependence on the bhikṣus that entails commitments that the bhikṣus do not have the right to
shut out. Seen in this light, the calculated dependencies created between the two orders
appear to be at least as much about getting the monks to care for the nuns, as they are about
subordination.

The same principles of asymmetrical yet mutual caretaking prevail internally to each
of the two orders as well. In the charter story relating Buddha’s stipulation that seniority be
made the basis on which members of the saṅgha show respect to one another, Buddha gives
the example of four animals whose harmonious and virtuous lives together bring prosperity to
the entire kingdom in which they live.719 Once the four have established who among them had
been living in their part of the forest first—a partridge—they revere him as the elder, and the
rest are similarly ranked in order of arrival. Most attention in the narrative is directed to the
physical services performed by the junior members for the elder, and to the harmony created
among them by living according to an undisputed hierarchy. We have earlier noted in the
treatment of the friendship of Śāriputra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana a suspicion that equality
breeds disharmony and dispute. Yet as he narrates the story to the monks, Buddha makes it
clear that the hierarchy is aimed at producing more than mere harmony. Buddha speaks also
of the affection they harbor for one another, and then has them ask one another now that
their affection has grown and they are living respectfully, whether they still lack anything. At
this point, the elder animal begins to outline ways for the four of them to incorporate basic
Buddhist ethical guidelines into the life they share in the forest. They do so, and then the

partridge urges each of its juniors to teach those same principles to the animals within its corner of the animal kingdom. By following without contention the wise counsel of the elder, their community flourishes, as does the surrounding kingdom.

This narrative indicates that the observance of principles of seniority is a means to allow for a harmonious transmission of wisdom and ethical principles downwards along the chain of hierarchy and outwards to the surrounding community. But it also tells us that even as the respectful service flows upwards, there is every expectation that other forms of caretaking will flow downwards. The juniors care for the elders physically with respectful service, while the partridge cares for its juniors by dispensing wise advice, and ensuring that they live according to ethical guidelines that are understood to bring about their personal well-being and happiness. In this sense, an asymmetrical reciprocity is embedded in the MSV’s hierarchical relationships, and in its attentiveness to the particularities of difference.

At the same time, for all but the single senior-most member of such hierarchies, any given person can look upwards respectfully to some, and downward caringly toward others. No one is continually fixed in a posture of servitude or subordination, but rather all are positioned in multiple ways to multiple others with whom they live in the community. In terms of deconstructing the personal identity women were born to in the world outside the community. Within the monastic order, those who become senior have done so only by passing through training as a junior member. Once the juniors learn to live according to the counsel handed down to them, they are empowered to teach it to others, as the animals each did for their own kind. We see this expectation in the MSV’s narratives of bhikṣuṇīs teaching lay women.
What we also see is that bhikṣuṇīs care for one another. In the narratives we have explored in this dissertation, women in the bhikṣuṇī order bring other women into the monastic path, they have them ordained—presumably with at least the token presence of some bhikṣus—they give them meditation instructions, they notice when nuns are missing and send others out to find them, they teach, they correct one another’s erroneous behavior, they praise virtuous qualities and they exhort one another when enthusiasm for the monastic path wanes.

These asymmetrically reciprocal relationships are integral to the ethical training program of Buddhist monasticism. New members of the community must take a place at the bottom of the hierarchy, first, because the ethics of imperfection requires us to confront our own flaws, to adopt the position of spiritual and ethical trainee that acknowledges that we are less than we could be. Second, the ethics of particularity demands that the needs of newcomers to the training will differ from those in whom the discipline has been at work for some time. The hierarchy places persons in that junior position with the promise that by living in the monastic discipline, they do become more with time. The rules of seniority guarantee an upward mobility within the community, as the recognition of imperfection marks the starting point for a productive engagement with those imperfections, a steady but committed project of self-fashioning that is rooted in acknowledgement, but not, ultimately, in an acceptance of one’s own limitations.

Although nuns must pay obeisance to the monks as their seniors, they have room to rise within the ranks of seniority in their own order, and grow into roles of leadership within their own communities. This differs dramatically from the representations that the MSV’s narratives offer us of how lay women are able to care for other women in society outside the
monastic community. The old woman sends Kṛśā Gautamī to an abusive husband, convinced that it is a better option for her than life without a man’s protection. When Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī advocates for the women of Kapilavastu, her ability to secure rights for them to hear Buddha teach is entirely derivative of her connection to the king. No matter how impressive her own personal qualities, her ability to care for others extends only as far as the reach of the social power of the men to whom she is attached. By comparison, the nuns’ community offers scope for women to fill positions of authority and leadership for themselves. It is not difficult to imagine that without the requirement for the presence of bhikṣus to complete various ritual ceremonies, the bhikṣunīs might effectively go their separate way once Buddha was no longer among the bhikṣus. The MSV also contains a sketch of the highly unsympathetic stance Mahākāśyapa—who takes lead of the saṅgha after Buddha has passed away—scolding Ānanda for having encouraged Buddha to extend the monastic path to women and allow them to ordain, as we saw in the chapter on ethics. When Buddha is no longer present, only the precepts he created will remain to remind the monks that their acceptance of reverence and offerings from the nuns comes with obligations—and must be voluntarily limited to ensure it does not come at the expense of the nuns’ own welfare. The caretaking obligations that come along with the respect received will have important ramifications for the current discussions about full ordination for women in the Tibetan communities who follow the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya, as we shall discuss further in the concluding section of this dissertation.

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720 In one of the most blatantly misogynist statements made by any figure in the MSV, Mahākāśyapa tells Ānanda it was wrong of him to urge Buddha to end his reluctance to ordain women, because women’s behavior is utterly negatively inclined. (bud med rnams gnas ngan len kun tu spyod pas) Kṣudrakavastu. Sanskrit not extant. Tibetan at Derge Da 306b4.
However, the MSV is concerned with portraying the era in which Buddha is on hand to act as stewards and guide of his community, presenting it as a model of the early community and a model for later community. In that model of and for the community that the MSV imagines Buddha wishing for his monastic disciples, women are full members and perform identical functions as monks, within their own sphere. Even if gender discrimination is never erased from the monastic community as a whole, and much less so from mainstream society, the narratives of the MSV unequivocally portray the opening of the monastic path to women as an act of great consequence for those who will follow it as well as for those who will not. The MSV cannot be said to be pro-women in any simplistic way. But much less so is it anti-women. The narratives of the MSV in certain ways are clearly complicit in propagation of gender images that limit women. Yet they also offer us complex representations of society, intricate charts of the relationships between different social formations and the varying gender constructions they enable or resist.

In the end, the MSV imagines the monastic community Buddha created for his female disciples as a place where women serve as conditions for the ethical flourishing of others, even as the presence of other women serves in turn as a condition for their own self-cultivation. This, ultimately, is the promise held out to the women who join the monastic community, and it is a promise made in no other domain open to women in the social world of the MSV. By contrast, upward mobility through the ranks of the bhikṣunī order is guaranteed simply by observing monastic discipline over time.
Conclusions

Studies of the ways in which some sets of “texts”—media productions, literary creations, medical writings, religious discourses, and so on—“construct” categories, identities or subject positions, are incomplete and misleading unless they ask to what degree those texts successfully impose themselves on real people (and which people) in real time.

Sherry Ortner, *Making Gender*\(^ {721} \)

As a text authorizing a way of life that has endured over great spans of historical time and geographical space, the *MSV* has had to address a wide variety of audiences. Its intensive use of narratives allows the *MSV* to speak to those diverse audiences with many voices. Reading a text that is at once multivocal and authoritative requires particular practices of reading—practices of reading that allow those voices to suggest multiple possibilities, while acknowledging that the communities who hear those voices as definitive and directive will enact some but not all of those possibilities at any given historical moment. For centuries, the Tibetan monastic communities for whom the *MSV* is authoritative turned primarily to commentarial works based on the *MSV* rather than to the *MSV* itself as their guide to monastic life, in part because its length and internal diversity make it unwieldy. Yet recently, those communities have begun directing their attention to the *MSV* as a resource for settling the largest single vinaya question facing those communities today: the viability of offering bhikṣuṇī ordination to women in the Mūlasarvāstivādin lineage that Tibetan Buddhists follow. As such,

\(^ {721} \) Ortner 1996: 2.
when the MSV speaks once again to the monastic communities who have preserved it in their canons, it is read precisely for its perspective on gender. To interpret a text is to produce new representations of its meanings, and to do so at such an historical moment in the life of that text cannot be a neutral act—even from within the academy, whose stance on vinaya matters has increasingly come to count in such discussions.

Although recent discussions about women’s place in the Buddhist monastic order in the MSV may be tuned now to the frequency of modernity and its feminist programs, the narratives of the MSV themselves make it clear that the question about whether and how to accommodate woman in its vision of monasticism is nothing new. This dissertation has opted to look at gender through the lens of ethics, asking how the category of gender and sex fit into the ethical program of Buddhist monasticism as envisioned in the narratives of the MSV. This angle of vision has allowed us to situate gender among other forms of particularity that mark one human being as different from, or the same as, others.

Within the vision of ethics that the MSV portrays Buddha as practicing, an attentiveness to human particularity is the necessary starting point in any effort to care for others or to engage in projects of self-cultivation. Beginning from the broad and, in the MSV, unquestioned assumption that persons are capable of great transformation—of ultimately ending suffering and gaining perfect happiness—the main question becomes how to effect such transformation. Each person has her own distinct aptitudes, karmic histories, aspirations, self-understandings and social locations, and these particulars are instrumental in shaping to what is possible for her
at any given moment. In this vision of ethics, in order to offer perfect care to others, one needs knowledge of all these personal particulars, including the hidden details of karma, knowledge of the contexts in which persons must act to actualize their potential and finally the wisdom to discern which among all those particulars are salient, or relevant, to the contexts and project at hand. Only Buddha is endowed with such knowledge and ethical wisdom therefore, in the MSV, only Buddha can be a perfect ethical practitioner.

Buddha enjoins his disciples to care for others even though their efforts to do so will be limited by their ignorance of such particulars, and thus necessarily imperfect. The monastic training itself is construed in part as a means of training to be able to give better care to others and to oneself, and the MSV—with its rules as well as with its dazzlingly rich narrative imagination—understands itself to be the definitive guide to that training. Ethical wisdom that is transmitted through narratives provides an education uniquely suited to this vision of particularity and salience. Reading narratives always entails encountering ethics on the level of particulars, and the particulars communicated in a narrative are communicated because they are salient. The MSV’s intensive reliance on narratives allows the text to offer its readers a sort of education in particulars and their salience—an education in offering care to others that is less and less imperfect as one’s own ethical wisdom develops.

At the same time, within the infinite range of particular attributes that qualify persons, not all are relevant in any given context. In this particularist vision, some situations make certain attributes relevant—level-headedness in a crisis, leadership
skills in a battle—and some cultural worlds can make certain particulars matter across a broad range of situations—class, education, race, age, and, of course, gender. Whether a particular means anything will be determined by context, and so will what it means. When we read the narratives of the MSV for their handling of gender with this ethical program in mind, it becomes immediately apparent that the social world of the MSV is one that makes gender difference matter a great deal. Yet it is also apparent that it matters more in some situations than others, and that Buddhist monasticism offers a context in which gender continues to matter, but can be made to mean something different. In other words, the Buddhist approach to gender, as well as other categories of human difference, is to see them as contingent and contextual, and thus liable to reconstruction.

As we noted, gender is seen to flow directly from biological sex, but sudden change from one sex to another is seen as possible at any moment and relatively uncomplicated in terms of its social implications. Yet however porous the biological boundary between the sexes, once sex is assigned, the social boundaries set up to divide the members of each sex are firm, and sex then narrows greatly the range of possible social locations for that person. Within the mainstream society depicted in the MSV, once identified as female, persons may become housewives, courtesans or beggars, and little if anything else.

In the construction of gender in this social world, women are placed in the care of male guardians, and this status follows them from birth to death, even if the particular male whose ward they are made changes over time. Marriage practices that
make women gifts that men give to one another are seen to protect women from other men who would otherwise exploit her as unprotected prey, yet also expose women to potential abuse by the man who is authorized to protect her, should he be so inclined. While bearing in mind that the MSV’s narrators themselves are creating representations for certain purposes that may dispose them to paint lay society in the darkest possible terms, we note that they do imagine women brutalized at times within a social system that can leave men’s power over women unchecked. The narratives do not portray women as helpless objects in the hands of all-powerful male agents. But they do show systematic pressures that seek to position women as such, even as they show women finding ways to push back. At the same time, we note that the MSV’s acknowledges that women ordain from positions of social and personal strength, as well as from positions of weakness.

We noted that new opportunities for lay women to be spiritual agents was created by the idea that the spiritual benefit of offering meals to the Buddhist community accrues to the one who hands over the food and not to the domestic unit as a whole. This move suits well the tendency we noted for Buddhist interventions to leave social structures largely untouched, as they allow their modifications to gender constructions to seep back in other ways. In particular, Buddhist teachings as depicted in the MSV offer persons ways to relate different to the given features of their social and person identities, in ways that in the end will indirectly reconfigure those identities—though, of course, never entirely.
It hardly needs to be pointed out that in the early centuries of the common era in India, Buddhist and non-Buddhist women were generally assigned a lower place than men in the scheme of social things, within the monastic order and outside. This is obvious—perhaps painfully obvious—to anyone who reads Buddhist literature of that period with gender categories in mind. What is not obvious, and thus has merited pointing out, is that women occupied these lower places in the presence of competing visions of other places they might occupy in Buddhist worlds. The MSV imagines a beggar woman being told she will become a buddha, while the great king Prasenajit sheds tears when Buddha denies him the same prediction. The MSV imagines a woman who became a nun as a young girl inspiring an entire troop of soldiers to sell their weapons and cease killing. The MSV imagines these other possibilities, and it insists its readers see them too.

At the same time, the narrators of the MSV were acutely attuned to misogyny and its impact on women. That is to say, they are aware of the presence of negative ideas about women that are false but that people hold to be true, and that harm women. The interventions we observed Buddhist teachings and institutions offering in gender constructions take place both in the realm of ideas about women and on the level of practices and social institutions. In different narratives, Buddha indicates that he sees in women the capacity to attain all the forms of spiritual attainment detailed in the MSV: the four fruits up to and including arhatship that are the highest attainments that person can reach while they are Buddha’s disciples, pratyekabuddhahood that might come in a future life, and the full enlightenment of a buddha, though it is left
open whether they would accomplish such future life aims as women or men. Meanwhile, *avadāna* narratives present women actively seeking to be reborn as female practitioners in future lives. These narratives present gender as persistent across lifetimes, and at the same time, they show women perfectly comfortable with the prospect that they will continue their spiritual path in the future as women. These women, at least, do not share the idea that a female birth is to be avoided.

For the purposes of gender construction, the body is perhaps the particular attribute most likely to be seen as non-negotiably given. Yet here too, the *MSV* reveals bodies to be embedded in competing discourses that themselves can be negotiated, such that new ways of female embodiment become possible. Discourses of bodies as sites of desire make female beauty a liability even to enlightened women and to those whose sexual desires that beauty awakens. Physiomoral discourses in which beautiful bodies are markers of ethical excellence are most often deployed against the male bodies of enlightened beings. This imbalance is rooted in a tendency in the *MSV* to envision women’s bodies as subject to the lustful gaze of unscrupulous men, and to figure female bodies as weak, despite multiple depictions of women physically overpowering men. The *MSV* fully accepts the fact that persons exist in a world shared with others, who will watch us, and whose responses to what they see do affect us. Monasticism aims to turn this basic social fact to a virtue, by encouraging comportment and grooming that allows monastics to use their bodies to signal their own discipline and virtue and to inspire others towards virtue as well. The possibility to reconfigure the meaning of existing in the gaze of others has particular impact for
women in the MSV, whom we see consciously occupying their place in the gaze in ways that empower them without requiring others to modify their position as observers of that body. Yet by allowing women to become monastics, Buddhism offers its most radical intervention on female embodiment, by revising the social coding to which the female body is ordinarily subject. Female bodies are re-ordered as monastic bodies are they are brought into the social formation and the system of meanings offered by Buddhist monasticism. The monastic model of embodiment situates female bodies within alternative discourses that seek to counter the discourses of desire and mainstream models of embodiment, although as we saw they do so with limited success, for the mainstream models of embodiment prove as tenacious as the desires that mobilize them. Monasticism further grants women the disciplinary tools to use their relationships to their own bodies as part of their monastic practice, transforming the body into potentially liberating sites of self-cultivation, even if for others that body is still viewed as a site of desire or disgust or domestic service.

In their negotiations with their bodies and with their social roles, women in the MSV’s narratives often proved themselves skillful wielders of a form of agency we have followed Ortner in describing as embedded agency. Without seeking to revise the system of ideas, practices and institutions that shape what is possible for them as women, they simply made those systems work for them. By contrast, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s request that the monastic way of life be opened to women in general pushed beyond the bounds of such embedded agency. When she refused to accept Buddha’s proposal that she pursue a private spiritual career alone at home, she was effectively
insisting on a redefinition of the very idea of what a woman is and can do. That is to say, the formation of a monastic community of women both required a shift in the idea of what a Woman is, and once instituted, the examples of actual women enacting that new form of being a woman continued to pose challenges to prevailing gender constructions. These challenges met with resistance, and when women began to adopt an identity that had previously been seen as male—that of monastic, or ascetic—a process of collective thinking and rethinking about gender ensued. We saw Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī at times taking the lead in drawing distinctions between what women who are bhikṣuṇī do and what women who are lay do, with Buddha frequently stepping in to legislate firmer boundaries between the two. In the process, a great deal of nuns’ gendered identity as a woman was placed up for grabs and a great deal was made to persist into the monastic order. In particular, Buddha’s unwillingness to disregard family bonds within the monastic order meant that the gendered roles defined and reinforced within the domestic sphere slipped into the monastic order along with those familial relationships. To the degree that the community forming around Buddha was modeled notionally as a family, monastic women’s place in that family mirrored their subordinate place in the family structures outside the monastery.

The case of monastic women provided a vivid illustration of the way in which the particulars of a person’s identity take on different meanings when deployed in different contexts. In their relationship to lay women as teachers and as fields of merit, monastic women’s identity as monastics came to the fore. Those contexts suggested a certain parity between the male and female monastic orders, with each active in its
own largely distinct sphere of influence. Monastic women were seen to serve and be served by lay women (and sometimes lay men) just as monastic men serve and are served by lay men (and sometimes lay women.) Yet when monastic women were set alongside monastic men, the difference that came to matter was not the difference between lay and monastic but the difference between men and women. Once gender difference became the operative difference—the salient particular—the prospects for parity between male and female orders disappeared and relationships of hierarchy emerged as the principle for ordering the two.

As in the world outside the monastery, the role of protector or guardian that carries with it serious obligations to care for the person for whom one has been made responsible can be assumed or it can arrogated. The position of respect and power given to men both in the monastic hierarchy and the social is also liable to be exploited if that power is unchecked. Acknowledging this fact are multiples narrative depicting bhikṣus exploiting bhikṣuṇīs, with Buddha intervening with criticism directed at the bhikṣu in question and legislation forbidding such abuse of power in future.

At the same time, like the relationship between lay and monastic communities and the relationships between junior and senior members within each monastic orders, the social hierarchy that Buddha created between the bhikṣuṇī and bhikṣu orders brought the two parties into a relationship that was asymmetrical but in which reciprocity was still mandated. Monks were expected to reciprocate the reverential service offered to them by nuns by caring for nuns ritually—lending their presence as required in bhikṣuṇīś’ ordination, confession and rains retreat ceremonies—and by
providing Dharma instruction when requested. This relationship of asymmetrical reciprocity is rooted both in the MSV’s ethics of care and its ethics of particularity. To look at the hierarchical relationships that are clearly stipulated for monastic communities without an understanding of the ethics of particularity yields a very different view of what these hierarchies are doing for those communities, and makes it very difficult to see how they could be ethically productive. With a vision of the radical particularity of persons, it becomes clear that each contributes something of value to hierarchical relationships, but what each contributes will be different. Just as the particulars and their meaning and relevance do not remain static, neither does a person’s position in a given hierarchy.

When we initially we set out on this excursion through the narratives of the MSV, we began by noting that the narratives themselves are enlivened by commitment of the text as a whole to transmitting a complex view of monastic life that simultaneously promotes and regulates that life. The narratives must be read as participating in a textual project aimed at simultaneously conveying information and generating attitudes about the sort of community and way of life Buddha created through his formal teachings and through his personal interactions as well as through his legislation. In other words, the MSV speaks of the past of a community in order to affect a constantly-shifting historical present and to help create the future of that community.

The MSV is itself a work of great complexity and literary skill set down in its current form no sooner than five or six centuries after the events it purports to
describe. As such, it cannot be viewed as a window that allows us to see the historical
time it depicts, any more than it can be taken to mimetically mirror the time in which
it was written, though it may teach us about those contexts in less direct ways. When
the MSV offers representations about the genealogy of the social formation of Buddhist
monasticism, these are not simply descriptive, for what the MSV presents as
descriptions are also productive.

Like the MSV, scholarly studies also work as engines producing new
representations of what “Buddhism” is and was, and of how it came to be. Our scholarly
productive practices exist too in a world alongside other competing representations.
What Buddhist studies takes as its own object of study is claimed as well by others who
claim this object as their own. Scholarly representations of Buddhism carry a particular
authority, sometimes recognized by other authorities and sometimes not, but always
put forward with a confidence borne of their own institutional warrants. This seems
important to point out here, because current debates about bhikṣunī ordination mean
that the politics of representation of gender in Buddhist monasticism affect real
persons in real time, to echo Ortner’s concern stated in the epigraph to this conclusion.

Like the MSV’s narratives, these debates about bhikṣunī ordination bring
together a multiplicity of positions on gender. Though still a majority ethnically
Tibetan, the community of Buddhist saṅgha following the Mūlasarvāstivāda ordination
lineage today is nevertheless fully international. Its members have brought with them
to that community widely divergent experiences of their own gender identities, and
widely divergent expectations of how their gender should be accommodated within
that community. No single representation of how gender should be constructed within that community has, or perhaps should, prevail.

However, if the current trend continues among Buddhist women within Euro-American cultures to seek greater parity between the bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī orders, the MSV’s vision of separate but parallel spheres of activity for men and women stands available as a resource for re-imagining relations between genders. The depictions of women turning to bhikṣuṇīs for guidance and care, and as their own particular objects of reverence, could allow Buddhist communities to continue to practice the ethics of particularism in which the differences of experience and social position between men and women are acknowledged, without insisting that one is superior to the other. The suggestions of parity in the depictions of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī as a counterpart to Buddha within the bhikṣuṇī order could further serve as a textual warrant for the process of ensuring that the monastic order responds to the needs and expectations of the cultures within which it circulates. Should Buddhist communities decide that the gender hierarchies we have seen in many stories ought not to be carried forward into the 21st century, the multivalence of the MSV’s narratives allows this text to speak clearly to such aspirations.

The European enlightenment conviction that egalitarianism is the highest principle for ordering human society can make it difficult for those of us raised with that conviction to share the Buddhist vision that values hierarchy. Yet the MSV not only values hierarchy, it actively portrays the mandated dependencies among and within the four communities as highly productive for the spiritual and ethical program
that Buddhism envisions. Moving through the hierarchical of the monastic community forces persons to acknowledge that they depend on others, and to accept responsibility for those that depend on them in turn. It allows monastics to recognize themselves as beneficiaries of others’ care, as they seek to become better benefactors to others.

As the diverse voices that make up the Mūlasarvāstivāda saṅgha continue to debate the issue, the leader of that community who speaks with the greatest authority, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, has repeatedly expressed his wish to find ways to make bhikṣuṇī ordination available to women within the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition. In a speech in south India, he outlines his position:

For a thousand years, we have been calling our country, Tibet, a “central land.” However, we don’t have a complete set of the four circles of followers. Nevertheless, as we have fully ordained monks, who are the chief of the four circles of followers, it seems as if it might be adequate to have only that. And we have to make do with that. In this way, this is what is generally said. Nevertheless, at a period of time such as we are now in, if there is a possibility to do so, then we the followers of Buddha must restore the vow of fully ordained nuns (bhikshunis). This was a decision taken at one point by Lord Buddha that later became incomplete because of the subsequent disciples; lack of capability and due to their becoming negligent and carelessness. If something that has become incomplete can be made complete, then this is something we should do, isn’t it?... Our aim is to establish the complete set of four circles of followers.

722 As noted above, these four are: bhikṣus, bhikṣuṇīs, Buddhist lay men and Buddhist lay women.

723 Dalai Lama 2008: 28, 30.
The fact that the fourfold Buddhist community is incomplete is often taken as problematic because Tibetans therefore cannot be said to have fulfilled the definitional requirements for having achieved a “precious human rebirth.” But the fact that one of the four circles is missing from the Tibetan Buddhist community has implications reaching far beyond such definitions. Without a bhikṣuṇī order, the carefully balanced hierarchical relations crafted by Buddha among the fourfold communities lose their balance altogether if one party is removed. As the MSV has shown us, each of the four circles contributes something to the relationships among them, but what each contributes will be different. When this is lost sight of, there is a danger that those above will opt to receive what flows upwards to them without reciprocating. Sadly, this has characterized a good deal of the history of Buddhist monasticism in Tibet, where nuns’ acts of physical labor and offerings of respect to monks were frequently unreciprocated with the forms of care Buddha enjoined his bhikṣus to give. Nuns were left largely impoverished and undereducated, as the ritual steps necessary to ordain them fully were simply not taken. Not surprisingly, Tibetan Buddhism historically has been breathtakingly impoverished in terms of female leadership, particularly as

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724 In the gradual path presentation that has served as the organizing schematic in Tibetan Buddhism since it was introduced to Tibetan by Śrī Dipaṅkara Atīśa in the 11th century, having a life defined as a “precious human rebirth” is seen as foundational for progressing on the Buddhist path. Being born in a land in which the fourfold Buddhist community is present is one of the ten distinguishing features marking a life as “precious.”

725 That said, a number of bhikṣus did undertake to offer bhikṣuṇī ordinations in Tibet, but for undocumented reasons these remained isolated instances and a bhikṣuṇī order seems never to have developed; what is documented is stiff criticism at least some of these bhikṣus received from other bhikṣus for doing so (Tsering 1986: 28-29). The objections raised now are most often technical, centering on the fact that the presence of a quorum of bhikṣuṇīs would be required, and since the Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikṣuṇī lineage died out in India and was apparently never brought to Tibet in the first place, this would mean either accepting bhikṣuṇīs from the Dharmagupta lineage that was preserved and transmitted through China or holding the ceremony initially without bhikṣuṇīs. However, these debates about the means to establish bhikṣuṇī ordination have taken place in the absence of a consensus that the end itself was important to reach.
compared to the vibrant roles we have seen bhikṣunīs play in the MSV, turning to one another for support and care, and caring for their lay disciples.

Women ordaining today in the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition followed in Tibetan Buddhism may only receive ordination as novices, or śrāmaṇerikās, but cannot become bhikṣunīs in the Mūlasarvāstivāda lineage. As eternal novices, when women adopt the position of trainees that all Buddhist monastics adopt as new members of the saṅgha, this position becomes lifelong and thus does not fulfill its promise as outlined in the MSV. Without the possibility of monastic women growing into positions of leadership in their own order, and as caretakers of lay women as members of a bhikṣunī order, the ethically productive function of the hierarchical ordering is hobbled. If their place in the hierarchy has no path toward upward progression, monastic women remain beneficiaries of material support from the lay community and Dharma instructions from monastic men, with scope to offer back little more than their respect and material service to monks. The narratives show Buddha himself stepping in repeatedly to prevent just such an imbalance, ensuring that monks did not simply accept the nuns’ reverential service, but offered their ritual presence to enable the bhikṣunī order to function. This imbalance is detrimental to monastic men as well as women, for receiving without giving fully is as much a violation of the ethical bonds of the reciprocal relationship as is giving fully without receiving.

726 Though monastic women practicing in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition can go outside the Mūlasarvāstivāda lineage to receive bhikṣunī vows from the Dharmagupta upheld by Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists—and many have—this female monastic order could not participate ritually with Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikṣus. Furthermore, bhikṣunīs ordained in this lineage but still practicing in the Tibetan tradition have met a decidedly mixed reception by Tibetan bhikṣus.
The MSV’s narratives themselves offer evocative reminders of the debts owed one another for care received. Such reminders can counterweigh any tendency for those in positions at the top of hierarchies to forget that they bear responsibilities to others in turn.

A recent use of just such a narrative offers eloquent testimony to the fact that, in the hands of the right readers, the text’s vision of gender can speak productively to concerns of Buddhist women today, while remaining thoroughly committed to a vision of reciprocal caretaking. In a discourse to Tibetan nuns in 2008, the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa stated:

The Vinaya tells that when the bhikshuni Mahaprajapati passed into nirvana, Nanda, Aniruddha, Ananda, and Rahula carried her body to the cremation ground, the Lord Buddha himself supporting it with his right hand. I think that the Buddha’s compassionate hand always supports you nuns, never letting you down, so all of you should go joyfully and at ease down the path to liberation and bring great benefit to wandering beings.\(^727\)

In the end, the narratives in the MSV remain thoroughly dialogic, and thus fully capable of holding within themselves a range of voices. As times change, so too can the voices that the readers of the MSV hear speaking to them, and draw on for their guidance and inspiration. This is a way to draw on the resources the tradition itself left for its future generations to compensate for the fact that the monastic community opted not to follow Buddha’s deathbed advice to continue adapting the rules as

\(^{727}\) Karmapa 2008.
circumstances shifted. Clearly, times have changed, and along with them, women’s aspirations for themselves and society’s expectations of what should be made possible for them. For the MSV to serve as a resource in allowing Buddhist monasticism to correspond to those expectations and fulfill those aspirations, it is not necessary to prove that the MSV is a fundamentally feminist text, or is unambiguously empowering of women. It is only necessary to demonstrate that among the range of multiple positions it adopts towards women, there is one that does suit our times. I do hope this dissertation has done at least that much.
List of Abbreviations

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