

**Going Against the Grain:
A Historical and Comparative Analysis of Renunciation
and Celibacy in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms**



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Abstract

This research is concerned with the concept of renunciation and celibacy in Buddhist traditions, and how it has evolved with respect to institutional, social and cultural aspects. The goal of this study is to trace the history of renunciation to Indian contexts and show how the practice of celibacy has evolved in Buddhist Monasticisms.

I hypothesise that the practice of celibacy is the most significant concept in maintaining Buddhist communal institutions. It can be used as the moral standard and ethical norm for both Buddhist monks and lay people. It has always existed alongside the growth and ramification of Buddhist sects and sectarian schools. Buddhism arose as one of the reformist *śramaṇa* traditions that opposed the Vedic sacrificial rituals of Brahmanism. The success of the *śramaṇa* movements made celibacy a central virtue within the broad spectrum of Indian religions, even that of the Brahmanism. The value placed on celibacy resulted in Brahmanism having to adapt and reinterpret celibate and renunciatory values.

Although the early Mahāyāna shows new forms of religious practice oriented around devotion to *bodhisattvas*, there is no evidence that Mahāyāna attempted to denigrate the monastic life. However, as Mahāyāna evolved fully, it became strongly critical of the *arhat* ideal of the Śrāvakayāna. With the development of the new teaching of *upāya* ‘skill in means’, Mahāyāna undertook the greatest degree of doctrinal adaptation, which may be seen as to deviate considerably from earlier Nikāya Buddhism. Consequently, the *bodhisattvas* are permitted to violate the monastic vow of celibacy. The root of monasticism was thus threatened. This was connected with the emergence of married monks in Kāśmir followed by Nepal. In Japan, although Buddhism was faced with the same phenomenon, clerical marriage obviously lies in the ideology of *mappō*, a belief in the decline of the Buddhist doctrine.

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List of Abbreviations

AB.	Aitareya Brāhmaṇa
AN.	Aṅguttara Nikāya
ĀpDh.	Āpastamba Dharmasūtra
Asl.	Aṭṭhasālinī
AV.	Atharvaveda
BrhU.	Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
ChU.	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
Dhp.	Dhammapada
DN.	Dīgha Nikāya
Jā.	Jātaka
KauṣU.	Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad
Manu.	Manusmṛti
Miln.	Milindapañha
MN.	Majjhima Nikāya
MuU.	Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad
Mvu.	Mahāvastu
P.	Pāli
PTS.	Pāli Text Society
RV.	Ṛgveda
ŚB.	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
SBhV.	Saṅghabhedavastu
Skanda.	Skanda Purāṇa
Skt.	Sanskrit
SN.	Samyutta Nikāya
Sn.	Suttanipāta
Śs.	Śikṣāsamuccaya
ŚU.	Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad
TU.	Taittirīya Upaniṣad
ThA.	Thera-Therīgāthā Aṭṭhakathā
Thag.	Theragāthā
Thig.	Therīgāthā
TS.	Taittirīya Saṃhita
Ud.	Udāna
Vin.	Vinaya Piṭaka
Vism.	Visuddhimagga

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Objectives of Research and Its Significance

This research is primarily concerned with the concept of renunciation and celibacy in the Buddhist tradition and how it has evolved with respect to institutional, social and cultural aspects. In this investigation, I will trace the origins of the development of Buddhist thought and the theory of world renunciation and monastic practices in Buddhist history, including Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism. The research has the following objectives:

- (1) To trace the origin and history of Buddhist renunciation and practice of celibacy in early Buddhism and investigate the reasons for celibacy and the attitudes toward sexuality from Buddhist perspectives.
- (2) To explore the adoption, adaptation and transformation of the ideal of celibacy in different Buddhist schools.
- (3) To comprehend the adaptive nature of the religion and evaluate a changing perspective on such an ideal and tradition in its relation to religious identity-formation.

In comparison with other topics of Buddhist monastic life, there is little scholarship in English on the Buddhist celibacy practice. The pioneers started their work on Buddhist monasticism during the last few decades of the 19th century and worked on relatively scant secondary resources. Among the more successful and recognised of these were Max Müller, Monier Monier-Williams, Hermann Oldenberg, Thomas Rhys Davids, Mrs. Rhys Davids, Edward J. Thomas, Miss I.B. Horner, Nalinaksha Dutt, Sukumar Dutt and Gregory Schopen. The topic is often mentioned in books and articles on early Buddhist history, but I have not found research devoted specifically to these subjects with an in-depth analysis of the growth and impact of the practice of celibacy in Buddhist traditions.

I hypothesise that the practice of celibacy is the most significant concept in maintaining Buddhist communal institutions. It can be used as the moral standard and ethical norm for both Buddhist monks and lay people. It has always existed alongside the growth and ramification of Buddhist sects and sectarian schools. However, although most Buddhist sects and sectarian schools broadly share this concept in their beliefs and practices, the original concept of renunciation and celibacy in early Buddhism

might be different from what some Buddhists perceive it to be today. The practice of celibacy has been constantly changing and it always faces challenges from many socio-cultural factors.

I aim to show from my findings a clear understanding of the practice of celibacy in the early institution of Buddhism and in different Buddhist traditions. Moreover, I hope my work will stimulate additional research on the topic so as to offer new insight into the dissemination of Buddhist tradition and religious practice.

My work deals with qualitative research techniques and most chapters employ text-critical techniques and historical analysis. In terms of sources and languages, the source texts of Brahmanism and Hinduism are examined in the original and in Sanskrit, and in English translation. For the Theravāda context, I will draw on primary sources in Pāli consisting of the *Sutta* and the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. In addition, I will use the Commentaries (*Aṭṭhakathā*), when the meaning of texts is not clear. For the Mahāyāna context, some of the earliest Indian Buddhist texts, the *Āgamas*, and the later Mahāyāna works in Sanskrit and Chinese will be used.

1.2 Background and Relevant Literature

1.2.1 Asceticism and Monasticism: General Orientation

The practice of celibacy is a complex religious phenomenon. It can be used to extricate oneself from what is perceived as impure, or to distance oneself from the transient world. For the aspiring Buddhist monk or Catholic priest, celibacy appears to be the choice to enter into a new social order and construct a new identity and status. Within the religious sphere, celibacy is one of the most essential features of asceticism/monasticism. This regimen assumes a variety of practices, in particular renunciation of the world and vows of celibacy. More specifically, renunciation and celibacy is taken as a condition and an ideal for the ascetic/monastic life as one of integrity and incorruption in body and mind. Before we get into the notion of renunciation and celibacy, we must first clarify the difference between “asceticism” and “monasticism”.

The word “asceticism” is commonly associated with “monasticism”, often referring to a religious lifestyle characterized by world renunciation with the aim of pursuing religious and spiritual goals. Throughout the history of religions, asceticism has served as a gateway to a life of

religious discipline and become a staple of monasticism. The word asceticism is derived from the Greek noun *askēsis*, meaning “exercise, practice, or training.”¹ In ancient Greece, the term *asceticism* was basically concerned with physical proficiency and often referred to the systematic exercise or training in the pursuit of a physical goal.² However, the concept of *askēsis* developed by Greek philosophers changed as it was applied to the realm of ethics and to other ideals such as mental facility, moral vitality, and spiritual ability. The ideal of training for a physical goal was converted to that of attaining a higher spiritual state or a more virtuous life by developing and training intellectual faculties.³

The new concept of *askēsis*, involving training the will against a life of sensual pleasure, was exemplified by the Stoics who advocated the idea of bringing the passion of the body under the kingly command of reason to achieve *apatheia*—a state of mind where one is not disturbed by the passions.⁴ Robert Thurman points out that warriors practiced asceticism in many ways, in order to develop greater strength and prowess to assure survival and victory. He says: “It seems evident that an important source of asceticism is warrior training, as the life-and-death context of battle is what makes the heroic self-overcomings involved in asceticism realistic. Spiritual asceticism definitionally or essentially must be understood in parallel and contrast with military asceticism, tracing this polarity all the way back into the archaic to the complementary and yet rival figures of shaman and war chief.”⁵

The term was then passed down from the Greeks to early Christians, who applied *asceticism* to the bravery and self-denial a martyr demonstrated when faced with the threat of death, and extended the term in the second-century to include the “discipline/practice of virtue”. As martyrdom decreased, the ascetic ideal was taken up by desert monks and anchorites until the monastic rules began to take shape. Saint Benedict (c. 468-547) and Saint Basil (c. 330-379), the great founding fathers of monastic rules, advised more moderate ascetic measures.⁶ In particular, Saint Benedict began the monastic threefold requirements for monks: poverty chastity, and obedience, including a vow of stability to discourage the unruly

¹ Kaelber 2005: 526.

² Ibid.

³ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. *Asceticism* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/37864/asceticism> [Accessed: 15 January 2014].

⁴ Klosko 2011: 151.

⁵ Thurman 2002: 108.

⁶ Flinn 2006: 62.

lifestyle of wandering monks.⁷

The value of asceticism has been a part of many religions and philosophies throughout history in strengthening an individual's will and his deeper spiritual powers. When the term *asceticism* is used in a religious context, it may be defined as a system of spiritual practices of the denial of physical or psychological desires that is designed to encourage interior vigilance so as to combat vices and develop virtues by means of self-discipline and self-knowledge in the context of seeking a spiritual ideal or goal.

The forms of asceticism found in the history of religions are manifold. The most common, however, are: renunciation or restriction of nourishment (fasting), sexual abstinence (celibacy), seclusion from society, renunciation of possessions (or at least restriction to the bare necessities), renunciation of everything that might be conducive to joy, and in extreme forms self-inflicted suffering (such as flagellation and self-mutilation).⁸ In today's usage, the term describes the exercise of renunciation in one's everyday life, and subordination of all daily living to the dictates of that renunciation.⁹ However, the methods of ascetics are quite naturally based upon the necessities of habitual life driven by natural instincts. Human beings variously need or want air, food, water, sleep, sex, clothing and shelter, companionship and status, communication, sense-pleasure, and a sense of identity. Therefore, in order to control these needs, asceticism involves the practices of breath retention, fasting, vigil, continence, poverty including nakedness and homelessness, isolation, silence, endurance of pain, and self-transcendence.¹⁰

Max Weber expanded the meaning of asceticism and included 'inner-worldly asceticism.' He made a distinction between "other-worldly" asceticism (the practice of monastics and renunciants) and "this-worldly" asceticism (the practice rooted in the vocational ethic of Protestantism). Here the ascetical achievement consists not in renouncing possessions, but in having no attachment to them. Such asceticism consists essentially of spiritual rather than physical discipline. This distinction has clearly provided the ground for an even more fundamental understanding of

⁷ Ibid., 463.

⁸ Fuchs 2006: 138.

⁹ Ibid., 137.

¹⁰ Thurman 2002: 110.

asceticism.¹¹

In general, the characteristic elements of asceticism according to Gerhard Schlatter's article in *The Brill Dictionary of Religion* are: (1) asceticism is always intentional, (2) asceticism must be voluntarily embraced, (3) asceticism must be painful in order to be designated asceticism, and (4) asceticism must be undertaken for its own sake, rather than for any concrete purpose.¹² For the last essential element, he explains: "This is not to say that ascetics must renounce the pursuit of all goals in their practices. However, their behaviour is not normally directed toward any immediate benefit in the present life; its orientation is to a transcendent goal [or leading to or ensuring a good result in the next world]"

Many religions encourage asceticism at periodic or designated times. However, for an elite group of specialists, renouncers or monastics, they demand that the ascetic lifestyle is maintained more or less continuously. These "permanent" ascetics may be associated with monasteries or other isolated and secluded areas, such as forests, deserts, jungles, or caves; or a mandate to wander homeless. Therefore, the conscious divergence from 'normal' society and the systematization of 'unusual' pattern of behaviour are essential for the ascetic life, leading to a self-demarkation from society or even from one's religious group.¹³

According to Robert Thurman, the ultimate goal of asceticism can be divided into two levels, mundane and spiritual. The former would be asceticism aspiring to states of extreme and permanent pleasure and calm, or some form of permanent oblivion. However, the latter works methodically to achieve the highest goal of the spiritual system, which might be self-absorption in an all-powerful god, as in Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, or self-extinction in a form of liberation, as in Buddhism.¹⁴ Ascetic techniques in many traditions are also said to bring magical or supernatural powers. So the ascetics naturally become the special mediators between the human, superhuman, and subhuman realms. Consequently, asceticism is essentially elitist and always regarded as superior.¹⁵

¹¹ Freiburger 2006: 3. For a more detailed "inner asceticism" see Max Weber, "Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, vol. I (Tübingen, 1920), pp. 17-206; translated by Stephen Kahlberg as *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

¹² Fuchs 2006: 138.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Thurman 2002: 109.

¹⁵ Fuchs 2006: 138.

The term *monasticism* derives from the Greek word *monos* signifying “one, alone.”¹⁶ It originally denoted religious practice of renouncing worldly pursuits in order to fully devote one’s life to spiritual work. According to this etymology, therefore, the original monastic agent may be a hermit, a wandering ascetic, or simply someone who is not married or a member of a household that observes the practice of isolating oneself from society.¹⁷ The term *monachōs* is the origin of the word *monk* in English which was first specifically used in Christian history in the early second century¹⁸ and applied mainly to anchorites or hermits within Christianity around the late third century. Some historians suggest Christian monasticism arose during a time of religious enthusiasm in Egypt.¹⁹

From the time of Origen of Alexandria²⁰ in the third century, to Saint Cyril²¹ in the fifth century, Christian leaders started to complain of the many ways in which Jewish life in the city influenced their faithful.²² Many Christians found it more difficult to live a godly lifestyle in the multicultural communities. Some of them turned their backs on society and fled to the desert, where they believed that quietude and self-induced hardship would make following Jesus easier. They formed themselves in small monastic groups in the desert areas of Judaea because of associations with the ministry as well as the death and resurrection of Christ. They are known as “anchorites” (from *anachoresis*: departure, withdrawal)²³ or “hermits” (from *eremos*: desert)²⁴.

The origin of anchoritic monasticism is traced back to Saint Anthony (c. 251-356 AD), who withdrew as a hermit to the Egyptian desert in 285 AD. He attracted followers and organized them into a community of hermits²⁵ living in a rigorous ascetic lifestyle, practicing sexual abstinence, fasting, and engaging in mortifications of various kinds, so as to achieve perfect penitence and discipleship.²⁶ At a deserted fort on the

¹⁶ Weckman 2005: 6121.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ McGuckin 2011: 149.

¹⁹ Johnston 2013: 286.

²⁰ Origen of Alexandria (185-254), one of the greatest Christian theologians, is famous for composing the seminal work of Christian Neoplatonism, his treatise *On First Principles*.

²¹ Cyril of Alexandria (376-444) was the Patriarch of Alexandria from 412 to 444. He was a prolific writer and a leading protagonist in the Christological controversies.

²² McGuckin 2011: 148-149.

²³ Galatariotou 2004: 75.

²⁴ Gothóni, René, and Graham Speake 2008: 41.

²⁵ Fitzmyer 1992: 141.

²⁶ McGuckin 2011: 394.

bank of the Nile, these hermits made the walls a barrier between themselves and all humanity, each living in their own hut around the fort. Thus the name “monk” (*monos*), which at first had meant one who lives alone, came to mean one who indeed lives alone but in company with many others alike in the same neighbourhood, believing he lived near to the presence of God.²⁷ Saint Anthony served as the prototype for monks who lived mostly alone with God as their only companion, and thus he is considered the Father of Orthodox monasticism, for his kind of monasticism remained the most cherished monastic ideal for the monks of the Eastern Orthodox Church throughout the ages.²⁸

The next step was taken a few years later by Egyptian Pachomius (292-348), who organized the monks among whom he lived into a community in southern Egypt, near Dendera. Under his leadership their huts were arranged in rows, and the lane (*laura*) between them gave the name “laura” to this first monastery. He formulated rules for monastic life: common abode, work, and prayer, uniformity in food and clothing, and a strict ascetical behaviour. Saint Pachomius founded nine such monasteries for men and one for women, all under the same rule, and the number of these communities increased rapidly.²⁹ It was Pachomius’s mission to refine the spiritual disciplines of poverty, chastity and fasting, and to add the disciplines of obedience to a central spiritual authority, self-support through industry, and full communal, or *coenobitic/cenobitic* (Gk. *koinos* “common”), living. Those monasteries thus cultivated a community life involving three key elements: poverty, obedience, and sexual abstinence.³⁰ Saint Pachomius’s contributions brought about a major change in the monastic tradition, and therefore he is recognized as the founder of Christian *coenobitic* monasticism.

George Weckmen has identified the following as the common and essential features of monasticism:³¹

- (1) *Special status*: the monastic person has a distinctive social status and relationship as a member of a special religious category of persons. Most monastics are at least theoretically members of a group, but they may not live with that group for most of their monastic life. However, their status can involve either a new home or homelessness, when compared to mainstream society.

²⁷ Hodges 2007: 131.

²⁸ Flinn 2006: 462.

²⁹ Hodges 2007: 131-132.

³⁰ Rademacher 2006: 1241.

³¹ Weckman 2005: 6122-6123.

- (2) *Specific discipline of life*: Monastic life is entirely oriented toward a personal religious goal. Hence, the monastics adopt special patterns of living and dedicate themselves to the practice of personal religious discipline in order to achieve the ultimate goal of the spiritual system. They live their religion radically and such a lifestyle is highly regarded by society, which often contributes to their material maintenance.
- (3) *Distinctive appearance*: Monastic status is indicated by special attire, modifications of the body (such as style of hair and/or beard), symbolic accoutrements (for example, begging bowl), daily schedule and specific diet. In all cases the monastic status represents a new or added identity expressed by signs, rites of initiation (frequently with a name change) and a specific behaviour regulating relations with the laity.
- (4) *Optional pattern or identity*: Monasticism exists as an option for some persons within a larger tradition and community; it is a special possibility that not everyone in that religious group adopts or is expected to adopt. The optional monastic identity may be central or peripheral to the larger tradition. In Jainism and Theravāda school of Buddhism, monasticism is central: the monastic is thought to be the only true representative of these traditions and the lay community no more than a subordinate support group.

Even though the defining feature of monasticism could not include communal life as a necessary factor, there can be no doubt that monastic existence is rarely completely solitary. Even wandering or hermit monks assemble periodically. Therefore, the term monasticism often refers to monastics' living in community and, thus in the Western societies embraces three forms of monastic lifestyles: the *coenobitic* (living in community with other monastics), the *eremitic* (living in seclusion from society as a recluse or hermit), and *peripatetic* (travelling from place to place).³²

Monasticism, thus, cannot be understood simply in terms of asceticism, i.e. self-denial and the acceptance of pain. Asceticism is usually associated with painful and rigorous disciplines, but not all monasticism prescribes difficult or unusually painful practices.³³ Monasticism, on the other hand, should be understood as an organic outgrowth of ascetic movement characterized by *anachoresis*, or withdrawal from the

³² Ibid., 6121.

³³ Ibid., 6123.

community and the rest of society. What distinguishes monasticism from the broader category of asceticism is monasticism's emphasis on withdrawal, on solitude.³⁴ Harpham describes a distinction of the power of withdrawal between the socialized orientation of *coenobiticism*, with its emphasis on defending oneself from error or mistake, and the transcendent power orientation of *eremitism*, which “goes on the offensive, seeking to embody and exercise supernatural power.” For Harpham, both the social and the solitary ascetic access power, but through different means: *eremites* renounce the world and gain themselves: *coenobites* renounce themselves and gain the [other] world.³⁵

For most religions the rules or discipline are of utmost importance in all forms of monastic lifestyle, whether *coenobitic* or *eremitic*, and they vary widely between traditions and monasteries. The avoidance of sexual activity and arousal, however, has been fundamental to the majority of the world's monastic orders. Most rites of passage and various forms of monastic activity also require some form of self-denial and self-discipline, usually for purification or preparation for a significant ritual event. The term *monasticism* thus implies celibacy or living alone without a spouse in the sense of sexual abstinence, which became a socially and historically crucial feature of the monastic life.

1.2.2 Buddhist Asceticism and Monasticism

In tracing the history of Buddhist monastic communities, Collins³⁶ states that Buddhist monasticism is probably the oldest monastic system in the world. Buddhist monasticism has its origins in India and dates back to the lifetime of Śākyamuni Buddha at a time when a number of non-Vedic ascetic movements were gaining adherents.³⁷ Reginald Ray suggests that ascetic practices were the central focus of Buddhism in early days, but later were marginalized with the growth of settled monasticism.³⁸ Upon examination of the pre-Buddhist ascetic tradition, a development in the meaning given to the notion of *tapas*, literally ‘heat’, can be observed. Buddhist texts often refer to non-Buddhist ascetic practices and give accounts of their austerities.

³⁴ McGuckin 2011: 393.

³⁵ Harpham 1992: 29.

³⁶ See Steven Collins's *Introduction* in Wijayaratna 1990: ix.

³⁷ There is a general agreement among Western scholars that the Buddha died within a few years of 480 BC. However, there is another reckoning which would move these dates forward to 368 BC. The so-called short chronology is attested by Indian sources and their Chinese and Tibetan translations, while the so-called long chronology is based on the testimony of the Sinhalese chronicles. See Bechert 2005: 64.

³⁸ Ray 1999: 295-317.

At the beginning of Buddhist Era, the Buddha was in one of many different renunciatory groups in the uninhabited regions of north India and experimented with various techniques of asceticism. Asceticism³⁹ had a huge influence on Indian religions, and the Buddha himself had intimate personal experience with all the ascetic practices which were known and practiced by many śramaṇic groups of his time. According to hagiographies of the life of the Buddha, the *Bodhisattva* lived in the wilderness, practiced breath-control, wore only animal skins or bark clothing, subsisted on fruits and roots, fasted for long periods, strictly controlling his intake of food and eating only a single grain of rice, or a single jujube fruit.⁴⁰ The *Bodhisattva* practiced and mastered the radical ascetic regimen they advocated, to such an extent that he ate virtually nothing and shriveled to nothing more than skin and bones.

Then, Sāriputta, when I tried to touch the skin of my belly, I took hold of my backbone, and when I tried to touch my backbone, I took hold of the skin of my belly. Because I ate so little, the skin of my belly stuck to my backbone. And because I ate so little, when I thought, “I will evacuate my bowels” or “I will urinate, I would fall down on my face then and there. Sāriputta, when I stroked my limbs with the palm of my hand to soothe my body, the hairs, rotted at the roots, came away from my body as I stroked my limbs with the palm of my hand, because I ate so little.⁴¹

The *Bodhisattva* realized that he had taken the path of austerities to its limit: “Whatever recluses (*śramaṇas*) or brahmins in the past have experienced painful, agonizing and intense sensations as the result of their exertions, this has been the limit, no-one has gone further than I

³⁹ The variety of such ascetic forms are (1) fasting, (2) celibacy, (3) poverty, which may include begging, (4) seclusion or isolation from the ordinary society, and (5) self-inflicted pain, either physical (through such means as whipping, burning, or lacerating) or mental (e.g., contemplation of a judgment day, of existence in hell, or of the horrors associated with transmigration).³⁹ See Kaelber 2005: 527.

⁴⁰ See *Mahāsaccaka-sutta* (MN. I. 242-246) and *Mahāsthānāda-sutta* (MN. I. 63-83).

⁴¹ MN. I. 80: *So kho ahaṃ, sāriputta, ‘udaracchaviṃ parimasissāmi’ti piṭṭhikaṇṭakam yeva pariggaṇhāmi, ‘piṭṭhikaṇṭakam parimasissāmi’ti udaracchaviṃ yeva pariggaṇhāmi, yāva-ssu me Sāriputta udaracchavi piṭṭhikaṇṭakam allīnā hoti tāy’ev’ appāhāratāya. So kho ahaṃ Sāriputta: ‘vaccam vā muttam vā karissāmi’ti tath’eva avakuḥḥo papatāmi tāy’ev’ appāhāra-tāya. So kho ahaṃ Sāriputta, tam-eva kāyam assāsento pāṇinā gattāni anomajjāmi, tassa mayham, Sāriputta pāṇinā gattāni anomajjato pūtimūlāni lomāni kāyasmā papatanti tāy’ev’ appāhāra-tāya.* Trenckner (eds.) 1978: 80. Hajime Nakamura’s Translation. See Nakamura 2001: 181.

have.”⁴² Nevertheless, it was the recollection of his meditation as a child under the rose-apple tree that prompted the *bodhisattva* to abandon his extreme austerities after six years of harsh ascetic practice.⁴³ The *Mahāsaccaka-sutta* describes the incident:

I remember when my father the Śakyan was plowing the field: I sat in the shade of a rose-apple tree, secluded from sensual pleasures and unskillful mental states; accompanied by reasoning and investigating, I entered and abided in the first *jhāna*, with rapture and bliss born of seclusion. Could that be the path to awakening?⁴⁴

This episode suggests that the intrinsic qualities of the Buddhahood are already present in his young age, and it plays a pivotal role in the *bodhisattva*'s journey toward renunciation and eventual awakening. The *bodhisattva* undertakes the Great Renunciation because he has tasted the possibility of liberation—something universally available to anyone who tries.⁴⁵ The *Mahāvastu* provides us with another interesting detail. In this text, the meditation under the rose-apple tree was not his first meditation. Actually the *bodhisattva* had been immersing himself in *dhyānic* states since he was born. The text tells us: “At the time the boy had achieved a tranquil concentration and they thought he was asleep”.⁴⁶

After realizing that the path of severe self-denial was too extreme and not helpful in attaining enlightenment, the *bodhisattva* then rejected the ideals of austere asceticism as well as self-torture. He devised a path balancing extreme asceticism (self-mortification) and hedonism (self-indulgence), which can lead to the achievement of *bodhi* (awakening). The Buddha called his path the Middle Way or *madhyamā-pratīpat* (P. *majjhimā paṭipadā*).⁴⁷ All the Buddha's essential teachings were given in his First Sermon, “the Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Law” (Skt.

⁴² MN. I. 246: *Tassa mayham, aggivessana, etad-ahosi: 'ye kho keci atītam-addhānaṃ samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā opakkamikā dukkhā tippā kaṭukā vedanā vedayimsu, etāvaparamaṃ, nay-ito bhīyyo.* Trenckner (eds.) 1978: 246.

⁴³ Nakamura 2001: 183.

⁴⁴ MN. I. 246: *Tassa mayham, aggivessana, etad-ahosi: 'abhijānāmi kho panāham pītu sakkassa kamante sītāya jambucchāyāya nisinno vivicc'eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharitā, siyā nu kho eso maggo bodhāyā'ti? Tassa mayham, aggivessana, satānusāri viññānaṃ ahosi: 'eso va maggo bodhāyā'ti.* Trenckner (eds.) 1978: 246.

⁴⁵ Sasson 2012: 81-84.

⁴⁶ Mvu. II. 31-32. Jones (trans.) 1952: 29.

⁴⁷ At the most general level the Middle Way is meant to capture the moral and ethical teaching that one's life and actions should steer a middle course between the extremes of views (*dvaya*): hedonism and asceticism.

dharmacakrapravartana, P. *dhammacakkappavattana*), in which he clarified the doctrine of the “Four Noble Truths” (Skt. *catvāri āryasatyāni*, P. *cattāri ariyasaccāni*) and the “Eightfold Path” (Skt. *aṣṭāṅgika mārga*, P. *aṭṭhaṅgika magga*):

There are two extremes, O monks, which he who has given up the world ought to avoid. What are these two extremes? A life given to pleasure, devoted to pleasures and lust; this is degrading, sensual, vulgar, ignoble and profitless. And a life given to mortifications; this is painful, ignoble and profitless. Both these extremes the Perfect One has avoided, and found the middle path, which makes one both to see and to know, which lead to peace, to discernment, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.⁴⁸

Although the Buddhist emphasis on moderation militates against extreme asceticism, we know that ascetic practices are deeply woven into the fabric of the Buddhist tradition.⁴⁹ Hence, Buddhism in its origins is somewhat ambivalent about the usefulness of asceticism. On the one hand, Buddhism denies that physical asceticism alone can procure for the practitioner the highest spiritual goals. On the other hand, there can be no question that Buddhism requires its more serious practitioners not only to renounce worldly life but also to train diligently in self-discipline and self-control.⁵⁰

Even though it was difficult to remove the old idea of self-mortification, the Buddha is said to have spent considerable effort in re-defining the role in terms of inner mental effort, purity, and understanding, criticizing those who simply observed spectacular mortifications. The Buddha considered the Indian tradition of using asceticism in order to obtain power and/or pleasure through rebirth among the gods to be merely another form of entrapment in the life cycle of *saṃsāra*. The Buddha strongly opposed practicing austerities so blindly since they merely cause self-suffering and are simply meaningless. Except for rational austerities (the use of rational means to seek enlightenment for oneself, and to help

⁴⁸ SN. V. 420: *Dveme, bhikkhave, antā pabbajitena na sevitabbā. Katame dve? Yo cāyaṃ kāmesu kāma-su-khal-li-kānu-yogo hīno gammo pothujjaniko anariyo anattasamhito, yo cāyaṃ atta-kila-mathā-nuyogo dukkho anariyo anattasamhito. Ete kho, bhikkhave, ubho ante anupagamma majjhimā paṭipadā tathāgatena abhisambuddhā cakkhukaraṇī nāṇakaraṇī upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya samvattati.*

⁴⁹ Johnston 2013: 89-90.

⁵⁰ Smith, Brian. 2005. “Hindu and Buddhist Asceticism.” New Dictionary of the History of Ideas. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3424300056.html> [Accessed: 16 April 2014].

others attain liberation), all other austerities are considered outer path asceticism.⁵¹ As the Buddha described in *Cūḷa-Assapura-sutta*:

If through mere nakedness a naked ascetic who was covetous abandoned covetousness...If through mere dust and dirt...If through mere ritualistic bathing...If through mere dwelling at the root of a tree...If through mere dwelling in the open air...If through mere continuous standing...If through mere taking of food at stated intervals...If through mere recitation of incantations...If through mere wearing of the hair matted...and that is why I do not say that the recluse's status comes about in a matted-hair ascetic through the mere wearing of the hair matted.

How, *bhikkhus*, does a *bhikkhu* practise the way proper to the recluse? When any *bhikkhu* who was covetous has abandoned covetousness, who had a mind of ill will has abandoned ill will, who was angry has abandoned anger, who was resentful has abandoned resentment, who was contemptuous has abandoned contempt, who was insolent has abandoned insolence, who was envious has abandoned envy, who was avaricious has abandoned avarice, who was fraudulent has abandoned fraud, who was deceitful has abandoned deceit, who had evil wishes has abandoned evil wishes, who had wrong view has abandoned wrong view, then he practises the way proper to the recluse.⁵²

The Buddha created an alternative, symbiotic community and organized the highly individualistic ascetical traditions that preserved the necessary aspects of asceticism and at the same time abolished the extremely deregulated practice of extra normal ascetic life.⁵³ Many passages in *suttas* can also be found where the words *tapas* and *śramaṇa* are used in

⁵¹ Sheng Yen 2007: 81-83.

⁵² MN. I. 282-3: *Acelakassa ce bhikkhave – pe – rajojallikassa ce bhikkhave – udakorohakassa ce bhikkhave – rukkhamūlikassa ce bhikkhave – abbhokāsikassa ce bhikkhave – ubbhaṭṭhakassa ce bhikkhave – pariyāyabhattikassa ce bhikkhave – mantajjhāyakassa ce bhikkhave – jaṭilakassa ce bhikkhave jaṭādhāraṇamattena abhijjhālussa abhijjhā pahīyetha byāpannacittassa byāpādo pahīyetha – pe – micchādīṭṭhikassa micchādīṭṭhi pahīyetha, tam-enam mittāmaccā nātisālohitā jātā-eva nam jaṭilakam kareyyum jaṭilkattam-eva samādapeyyum: Ehi tvam bhadramukha jaṭilako hohi, jaṭilakassa te sato jaṭādhāraṇamattena abhijjhālussa abhijjhā pahīyissati. byāpanna cittassa byāpādo pahīyissati – pe – micchādīṭṭhikassa micchādīṭṭhi pahīyissaṭṭhi. Yasmā ca kho aham bhikkhave jaṭilakam-pi idh'ekaccam passāmi abhijjhālum byāpannacittam kodhanam upanāhim makkhim paḷāsim issukim maccharim saṭham māyāvim pāpiccham micchādīṭṭhim, tasmā na jaṭilakassa jaṭādhāraṇamattena sāmāññam vadāmi. Trenckner (eds.) 1978: 282-283.*

⁵³ Thurman 2002: 112.

the approved sense to describe the lifestyle of monks and nuns. So it may be pointed out that the moderate rule that developed for the Buddhist monastic community (*saṅgha*) was based on the cardinal practices of asceticism.

When Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin, proposed severe forms of asceticism, requesting the Buddha to approve the Five Points (P. *pañca vatthūni*, Skt. *pañca vastūni*) as compulsory rules for all Buddhist monks,⁵⁴ the Buddha rejected such a proposal because of its extreme ascetic nature. Yet whilst the Buddha realized the futility of extreme asceticism, he left some space for those individual followers who were more inclined toward ascetic practices, such as Mahākāśyapa. In this case, the Buddha allowed for a number of ascetic practice called *dhutāṅgas* (P. *dhutaṅga*).⁵⁵ In the Theravāda tradition, the thirteen *dhutaṅga*⁵⁶ and four *nissaya* 'resorts'⁵⁷, are virtual emblems of the *saṅgha*. These practices should not be mistaken for the path itself but understood as only preparatory for the path; they only bear the aim at eliminating all forms of attachment. They are mere practices that enable the mind to be rapidly and easily purified, an absolute prerequisite for the development of attention and concentration.

It is true that the Buddhist emphasis on moderation militates against extreme asceticism. Yet the *dhutāṅgas*, even though they are somewhat marginal as practices, are moderate ascetic practices used to cultivate self-discipline characterized by equanimity, vigour, and contentment. The

⁵⁴ The *dhutaṅga* of Devadatta in the Pāli-Vinaya (Vin. II. 196-197) are: (1) to live in the forest and not in villages; (2) to live from alms and not to accept invitations; (3) to use only rags for garments and not to use clothes of laypeople; (4) to live under a tree and not to take shelter under a roof; and (5) not to eat meat. See Deeg 1999: 183-218.

⁵⁵ The word *dhutaṅga* etymologically means "merits attained by cleansing" It is derived from √*dhu* 'to wash, clean, purify, sprinkle'. Generally this term is used to refer to "a set of practices leading to the state of or appropriate to a *dhuta*, that is to a scrupulous person" or "precepts by which the passion are shaken or quelled." The Chinese commentary elaborates with an analogy of shaking off the wearisome dust from cloths by fluttering. This is as if dust alighted on your clothing and you shook it off, you could get rid of the dust. See Ganguly 1989: 18-19.

⁵⁶ In Theravāda contexts, the classical list of ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*) includes thirteen items: wearing patchwork robes recycled from cast-off cloth, wearing no more than three robes, going for alms, not omitting any house while going for alms, eating at one sitting, eating only from the alms bowl, refusing all further food, living in the forest, living under a tree, living in the open air, living in a cemetery, being satisfied with any humble dwelling, and sleeping in the sitting position (without ever lying down). Mahāyāna texts like the *Rāstrapālapariprechā*, the *Maitreyasīmaṅgala-sūtra* and *Ratnarāśi-sūtra* mention radical ascetic practices called *dhūtaguṇa*. They are the same as the Theravāda list except they omit two rules about eating and add a rule about wearing garments of felt or wool. See Schopen 2005: 15-16.

⁵⁷ The word *nissaya* means the ascetic customs known as the four 'resorts' or 'dependences': begging for alms, wearing robes made from cast-off rags, dwelling at the foot of a tree, and using fermented cow urine as medicine (as opposed to more palatable medicines like molasses and honey).

goal is not to mortify the flesh but to help the practitioner cultivate the central Buddhist goals of restraint in thought, deed, and word.⁵⁸ They are beneficial for all those who are able to put them into practice. However, if a *dhutaṅga* involves such great difficulty or overly strenuous effort on the part of an individual, one shouldn't practice it. Also, if one can eliminate desire, selfishness, and egotism by more moderate means, the more radical physical austerities are unnecessary. As Richard Gombrich relates, “the *dhutaṅgas* represent a limit to what the Theravādin tradition will sanction by way of mortifying the flesh.”⁵⁹ Therefore, it can be seen that the aim of these practices lies in providing an environment as auspicious as possible for renunciation.

As Buddhism began, the Buddha was confronted with great difficulties in seeking to teach a new pattern of ethics, a new religion, and to form a new community founded on his civilizing ethic. The Buddha introduced many changes so that Buddhist monastic life differed considerably from Brahmanism. Buddhism inevitably had to face the broad problem of refashioning the outlook of a people already moulded by the traditional systems. As Perera points out: “The Buddha is sometimes seen encountering die-hard Brahmins and other ascetics who are unable to appreciate his point of view ... and whenever this occurs, with no hesitation the Buddha would state the facts of the case.”⁶⁰

Throughout the history of Buddhism, there were two ideal modes of behaviour in communities of celibate male and female monastics. The two are: (1) *eremitic* ascetic life, represented by the wandering ascetic Buddha and his fellows who were concerned with the practice of strictly renunciative solitary retreats in sometimes remote areas before the time of the establishment of monasteries, and (2) *coenobitic* community life, represented by monks and nuns who engaged with monastic brethren and lay society, and were concerned with active monastery affairs, communal academic studies, and ritual practices. Both modes of behaviour were validated by the account of the Buddha's life, reflecting the origins and historical developments of Buddhist monasticism.⁶¹

Nonetheless, monastics, even those who may choose to take up a solitary life from time to time, belong to the Buddhist *saṅgha*⁶² which is

⁵⁸ Wilson 1996: 42-43.

⁵⁹ Gombrich 2006: 70.

⁶⁰ Perera 1993: 57.

⁶¹ Nietupski 2005: 6126-6127.

⁶² The term *saṅgha* is synonymous with *gana*, which indicates a political, professional, commercial group, or assembly of elders who govern tribal states. Hence the word *saṅgha* generally means ‘an

considered one of the three jewels (*triratna*) along with the Buddha and the *dharma*, and Buddhists are encouraged to take refuge under these three jewels.⁶³ The Buddha discovered the *dharma* and made it known to the *saṅgha* who preserved and embodied it. Consequently, the Buddha envisioned his *saṅgha* as a Jewel of the Community (*saṅgharatna*), a specially protected society within society, to enable individuals from his time onward to establish an extraordinary standard of ethical, religious, and intellectual life oriented to transcendent individual and social fulfilment. The monastic discipline (Vinaya) promulgated by the Buddha was thus developed to shape the *saṅgha* as an ideal community, with the optimum conditions for spiritual growth.⁶⁴

The Buddhist monastic communities are quite diverse, ranging from extremely large and wealthy urban monasteries through modest communal monasteries, to forest, cave, and mountain monasteries.⁶⁵ The Buddha himself is the model of the Buddhist forest dweller (*āraṇyaka*). He attained enlightenment while sitting at the foot of a tree (*vrkṣa-mūlika*)⁶⁶ and after the steady growth of his movement he led his fellow practitioners to seek shelter in forests and caves and to beg for food. During the annual monsoon season, heavy rains and floods made it impossible for the mendicant to wander and beg. Thus places of shelter for *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* became necessary. According to the tradition, the first monastery called the Jetavanārāma at the city of Śrāvastī was established, with the encouragement of King Bimbisāra, and financial support of a wealthy merchant of that town, Anāthapiṇḍika.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, most monasteries were built on the outskirts of towns and villages, so their close proximity to the town made alms-collection rounds easy whilst providing enough isolation for the monastics to do meditation retreats without being disturbed by the hustle and bustle of city life.⁶⁸

Although Buddhist monks and nuns eventually settled into permanent communities, the wandering lifestyle never lost its allure. The main form that Buddhist monasticism has taken always involves a formal act of renouncing the world, accepting a life of poverty, adhering to the

assembly of monks' in the sense of the 'Community' of monks and nuns with the Buddha as its teacher. See Olson 2010: 144; and Buswell 2004: 780.

⁶³ In the process known as taking refuge, the statement *buddhaṃ śaraṇaṃ gacchāmi, dharmam śaraṇaṃ gacchāmi, saṅgham śaraṇaṃ gacchāmi*—"I go for refuge to the Buddha, I go for refuge to the dharma, I go for refuge to the saṅgha" has been the primary, shared affirmation of Buddhists.

⁶⁴ Harvey 2012: 88.

⁶⁵ Buswell 2004: 556.

⁶⁶ Johnston 2013: 578.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁸ Keown and Charles 2013: 659.

monastic code, and accepting a life of celibacy. Buddhists insisted that as soon as one recognizes that this world is like a “house on fire,”⁶⁹ one should give up the worldly life and join the monastery. There, in the company of other monks or nuns, one can pursue a regulated life of study, meditation, and self-discipline similar to the monastic lifestyle pursued in other religious traditions. The intention of such a regimen is absolute detachment from the world, control of one’s body and senses, and turning inward to achieve liberation.

1.2.3 Buddhist Celibacy in Transition

During the later Vedic period, which extended roughly as far as the middle of the first millennium BCE, significant changes were taking place in Indian society and religion. In the light of the emerging individualistic interest in intellectual attainment, traditional ritual activity related to the sacred fire and the offering of sacrifice was relegated.⁷⁰ At this time there were already in existence a number of ascetic movements that were non-Vedic groups challenging Vedic authority, often called the “heterodoxies”.

Buddhism was one of these reformist ascetic institutions that emerged against the dominant Brahmanism with a proper understanding of *karma* and rebirth. Indeed, the Buddha can be credited, not with the invention of the *karma* and rebirth theory, but rather with transforming the old concepts into the karmic eschatology through the Buddhist doctrine of *karma* (‘deed’, ‘action’), and the closely related doctrine of *samsāra*. At the age of twenty-nine, the prince Siddhārtha had gone forth from home to a homeless state in search of spiritual enlightenment and had cut himself off from all worldly ties. As a new *śramaṇa*, he followed the system of asceticism and adopted various severe austerity practices. He committed to celibacy (*brahmacarya*), not as a temporary vow such as the student in Brahmanism, but as a lifelong commitment in the same way as other contemporary mendicants (*parivrājaka*). After reaching Enlightenment, he commenced his duties as the Buddha teaching the kernel of his message, the ‘Noble Truths’, that contained his answer to

⁶⁹ Dh. 146 *Ko nu hāso kim ānando
niccam pajjalite sati,
andhakārena onaddhā
padīpaṃ na gavesathā.
“Why is there laughter? Why is there joy
although (the world) is always burning?
Shrouded in darkness
why not seek the light [=wisdom]?”*

⁷⁰ Mishra 2010: 21.

the question of how to extinguish suffering. Consequently, the Buddhist monastic community became established together with the growth of the lay community. At the same time, the ideal of renunciation and celibate life was widely advocated.

The institutional beginnings of early Buddhism were characterized by a marked ascetic tendency to poverty (*daridrya*), contentment (*saṃtōṣa*), homelessness (*anagāriya*), solitude (*viveka*), moral self-discipline (*tapas*), and sexual abstinence (*brahmacarya*).⁷¹ In contrast to other ascetic movements, from the time of its beginning the institutionalized form of Buddhist monasticism was well organized as it developed a monastic discipline (Vinaya) for monks and nuns that regulated their behaviour within the community (*saṅgha*) and towards the laity.

For the monastic community, however, the threat of sexual temptation has usually been viewed suspiciously as a serious obstacle to progress on the path of liberation.⁷² A classical Brahmanical myth describes how the great sage, Viśvāmitra is enticed and trapped by the celestial nymph Menakā and spends some years with her, resulting in his begetting a daughter. Similarly, in the *Mudulakkhaṇa Jātaka*⁷³, the Buddha teaches a monk who is unsatisfied with celibate monasticism since he has seen a beautiful woman on his alms round and developed lust for her. When the Buddha confronts him, he admits that his problems are caused by sexual desire. The Buddha responds by telling him his own past life in which the *bodhisattva* was an outstanding ascetic with supernatural powers (*abhijñā*) as a result of this training and austerity. While flying through the air one day, he was distracted by the sight of the queen. In a moment of sexual arousal, all the fruits of years of discipline were lost because of lust.⁷⁴

It can be seen in the story that even a person of high spiritual calibre like the *bodhisattva* could not escape the fires of desires. On the spiritual path, controlling sexual urges and overcoming desire for sense-pleasures (*kāma*) is thus crucial. As Peter Harvey states: “desire is the first of the five hindrances to meditative calming, and in lists of the three kinds of craving, the four sorts of grasping, and the four deep-seated ‘cankers’ on the mind, the first item always has sense-pleasures as its focus”. This comes with the attainment of arhatship, the fourth and final stages of

⁷¹ Ibid., 102.

⁷² Glassman 2004: 762.

⁷³ The *Mudulakkhaṇa Jātaka* is Jātaka story no. 66.

⁷⁴ Jā. I. 306. See Chalmers 1895: 161)

awakening, only the arhat who has completely extricated himself from craving can declare, “...birth is at an end, that the higher life [*brahmacarya*] has been fulfilled, that what had to be done has been accomplished and that after this present world there is no beyond.”⁷⁵

To maintain the ideal of celibacy and complete sexual abstinence, the Buddha himself functions as the voice of authority on matters of monastic discipline. Thus the monastic rules are said to have gradually evolved in response to incidents that occur and rules have been introduced on a case-by-case basis, to judge whether or not certain behaviour is acceptable or contradicts the religiosity of Buddhist monasticism.⁷⁶ The Buddhist monastic order (*saṅgha*) is mainly united and shaped by its rules embodied in the monastic disciplinary code of conduct for monks and nuns (Skt. *prātimokṣa*, P. *pātimokkha*), consisting of a greatly enlarged number of more than two hundred precepts.⁷⁷ What is distinctive about the monastic disciplinary code of conduct that comprises the first part of the Vinaya is that every rule the Buddha set down—including those that deal with sexual behaviour—was made in response to specific transgression.⁷⁸

The *pātimokkha* lists three different levels of offense governing sexual activity short of intercourse. The most serious transgressions are the four basic rules of defeat (*pārājika*)⁷⁹: to refrain from killing or abetting the killing of a human being, from taking what is not offered freely, from sexual activity, and from false claims about spiritual attainments.⁸⁰ These four *pārājika* are sometimes called “expulsion offenses,” because transgression of any of these rules entails expulsion from the order⁸¹ since it is seen as evidence that the offender has a mind incapable of enlightenment, which is the whole reason for existence for the monastic

⁷⁵ The phrase—*khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karaṇīya nāparaṃ itthattāyāti*—is perhaps the most common characterisation of the *arhat* as found in *nikāyas*. See Katz 1982: 2.

⁷⁶ Olson 2010: 144.

⁷⁷ The specific number of rules in the *prātimokṣa* sections of the various Buddhist canons has differed. The Chinese canon contains 250 rules for monks, the Tibetan canon 253, and the Pāli canon 227. See La Vallée Poussin 1976: 26. For the translations of the *Prātimokṣa* texts of the Mahāsāṃghika and Mūlasarvāstivāda sects, see Prebish, Charles S., ed. 1996. *Buddhist Monastic Discipline: The Sanskrit Prātimokṣa Sūtras of the Mahāsāṃghikas and Mūlasarvāstivādins*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

⁷⁸ Skudlarek 2008: 51.

⁷⁹ For the Pāli Vinaya pertaining to *pārājika*, see the section “Defeat” in Horner 1949: 1-191.

⁸⁰ Sparham 2004: 742

⁸¹ With the exception of the Theravāda Vinaya, however, all other extant Buddhist monastic law codes (Dharmaguptaka, Mahāsāṃghika, Mahīśāsaka, Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda) contain detailed provisions for monks and nuns who commit *pārājikas* but nevertheless wish to remain within the *saṅgha*. These monastics are not expelled. Rather, they are granted a special status known as the *śikṣādattaka*. See Clarke 2009: 1-43.

order and the monastic pursuit.⁸² At the second level of offense are the thirteen *saṅghāvaśeṣa* (P. *saṅghādiseṣa* ‘meeting of the *saṅgha*’); five of them relate to sexuality, include masturbation (intentionally arousing oneself to the point of ejaculation), lustfully touching a woman, and speaking lewdly to a woman. When *saṅghāvaśeṣa* rules are broken, restoration required confession to a community of at least twenty monastics, plus a probationary two-week seclusion for reflection and reform.⁸³ This shows that there is still a chance for rehabilitation.

Finally, there are several more minor offenses (*pācittiyās*) that are cleared simply by confession to another *bhikṣu*, for example, lying down in the same dwelling as a woman, teaching a woman the *dharma* at length without an intelligent man present, and sitting alone with a woman in a private place.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, according to the Vinaya even the semblance of sexual misbehaviour, such as a monk allowing himself to be massaged by a woman, to joke and play with her, to stare into her eyes, to secretly relish her voice, to reminisce over past encounters with her, to look with envy at sexually active laymen, or to lead the holy life in the hope of being reborn in a sensual heaven, is considered a subtle breach of the celibate life.⁸⁵

The Buddha cautioned laypeople against sexual misconduct, but he prohibited any sexual activity for monastics and emphasized celibacy as the cornerstone of Buddhist monasticism. According to Bhikkhu Bodhi, there are two reasons for this: (1) sexual activity ties the monastic to a life of domestic obligations detrimental to his spiritual training, and (2) sexual activity in deed, word, and thought only perpetuates craving, while the quest for liberation requires the restraint of all expressions of sexual desire.⁸⁶ To this end, celibacy helps monks and nuns to achieve outer and inner freedom and affords a spiritual path toward Enlightenment. Thus, Buddhist monastics were required to adhere to this rule in order to fulfil their purpose of pursuing liberation.

By devoting themselves wholeheartedly to their spiritual practice and by willingly giving up normal family and social life, the *saṅgha* earns material support from the lay community and deserves the respect of the laity. The lay people, in return, gain merit by supporting the *saṅgha*. For

⁸² Skudlarek 2008: 55.

⁸³ Chappell 2004: 721.

⁸⁴ Bhikkhu Bodhi 2013: 263-264.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

this reason, the Vinaya insists on the greatest measure of discretion in order to avoid any occasion that could lead a *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣuṇī* astray or to being blamed of such misconduct.⁸⁷ At the same time, such a strict ban on all sexual activity has preserved the Buddhist *saṅgha*'s image as a model of the highest standards of conduct in the eyes of the lay community.⁸⁸

As a religious tradition that has spread widely to diverse geographical regions and has been shaped by different cultures for over two thousand years, the Buddhist perspective on sexuality and celibacy cannot be said to be the same for all Buddhist schools and sects. Vulnerability to sexual temptation, however, remains a benchmark of spiritual fallibility in Buddhist traditions. The major area of difference is over the rules of monastic life, which, in its celibate, mendicant form, has been kept alive to a greater degree in Southeast Asia in countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, where the Theravāda school is dominant. However, as Buddhism spread from India to other regions of the world, celibacy—a regulation promulgated by the Buddha about which there was little debate at the time—has become a root cause of disagreement and has engendered a great deal of controversy because of the difficulties it entails. The Theravāda School understands itself as representing an original form of Buddhism, so there has been a tendency to strongly advocate renunciation and celibacy as the culmination of the spiritual life. Since monastic life is highly regarded, Theravāda monks are highly esteemed. On the other hand, scandals involving Buddhist monks have upset members of the public, leading laypeople to question their faith.

From the late first century CE, the Kuṣāṇa empire, centred in Bactria, took in the whole of north India as well as large areas of western Central Asia. The presence of their empire from the Ganges valley to the Silk Road undoubtedly contributed immensely to the dissemination of Buddhism, perhaps spread or at least encouraged by travelling merchants, and certainly spread by Indian monks.⁸⁹ At the same time in China the

⁸⁷ Skudlarek 2008: 56.

⁸⁸ The Buddha promulgated Vinaya rules for ten reasons. Among these reasons, the seventh and eighth reasons are closely connected with the lay community. “Therefore, monks, I shall lay down a training rule for the *bhikkhus* for ten reasons: (1) the well-being of the *saṅgha*; (2) the comfort of the *saṅgha*; (3) the restraint of bad-minded persons; (4) the comfortable living of virtuous monks; (5) the restraining of defilements pertaining to this life; (6) the warding off of defilements pertaining to the next life; (7) the inspiration of those without faith; (8) the increase of those with faith; (9) the long-lasting of the True Dhamma; (10) and the support of the Vinaya.” (Vin. III. 21)

⁸⁹ Williams 2009: 130.

Eastern or Later Han dynasty (25–220 CE)⁹⁰ held sway over most of China and the eastern end of the Silk Road. Thus Indian and Chinese cultures were in direct contact. Mahāyāna, within a few hundred years of its inception in India, spread into China by around that time. As interest in Buddhism grew, there was a great demand for Buddhist texts to be translated from Indian languages into Chinese. This led to the arrival of translators from Central Asia and India.

In Buddhism's transmission to China, where Confucianism and Daoism were already well established, some of the problems it faced related to its monasticism. It was contrary to the dominant Confucian ethics, which demanded that every individual marry and rear children to fulfil the obligation of filial piety (*xiao*, 孝) toward parents and family.⁹¹ Chinese reaction to Buddhism and their critique of the religion thus understandably center on what is perceived as a frontal assault on the family and household. On the issue of renunciation, the Chinese suggested that to leave one's home (*chujia*, 出家) is an offense that includes abandoning one's parents to lead a life of mendicancy, the cessation of ancestral sacrifices, the mutilation of one's body by shaving one's hair, and the effective severance of one's lineage by taking a vow of celibacy, if the family has no other male heir alive.⁹² Moreover, the emphasis on the ancestral cult, ritual sacrifices, and filial obligation made opponents view Buddhist celibacy as a violation of lineage maintenance and a radical disruption of the institution of marriage, which was believed to be the greatest relationship of humans (*ren zhi dalun*, 人之大倫).⁹³ As a severe critic, Xun Ji of the Liang, observed:

Nowadays monks and nuns would not cultivate crops. ... This is their first offense against canonical morality ... All of us living sentients unite as husbands and wives in order to bear sons and daughters, but the laws of the barbarians (*hufa*, 胡法) reverse the matter. ... This is their second offense against canonical morality. ... They practice abortion to kill their son, and yet they would feed

⁹⁰ Zürcher 2007: 41.

⁹¹ According to Confucius (孔子), honouring one's parents involves more than merely food for their living and sacrifices when they embark on their postmortem way to becoming honoured ancestors. He said: "If no deference is involved, then what is the difference between the way one treats one's parents and the way he treats his livestock?" (*The Analects of Confucius*, 论语: 2.7.)

⁹² Yu 2005: 98-99.

⁹³ Mengzi 孟子 once said: "That male and female should dwell together, is the greatest of human relations" 「男女居室，人之大倫」。 (*Wanzang Shang*, 万章上: 2) For the translation, see Legge (trans.) 2006: 89.

mosquitoes and their eggs [because this is the way
Buddhists obey the injunction not to take life?].⁹⁴

Given that China had no tradition of celibate religious professionals, it is not surprising that the renunciation and celibacy of monks and nuns from the beginning of Buddhism in China attracted attention and were regarded with some suspicion.⁹⁵ This becomes clear, for instance, in John Kieschnick's work on celibacy in East Asian Buddhism:

In short, given beliefs about sex and reproduction, already in place in China before the entrance of Buddhism, to take a vow of abstinence before one had an heir would usually have been considered extremely eccentric, physically unhealthy and, considering views of life after death, dangerously short-sighted.⁹⁶

Although in the early centuries of the first millennium the practice of celibacy did not blend readily with the traditional Confucian emphasis on family life, the order of monks and nuns was eventually established in China. The monastic practices undertaken by them gradually came to be interpreted as the highest form of filial piety.⁹⁷ Historically, at a time of social change, Buddhism put down its roots and reached maturity during the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) before reaching its peak at the beginning of the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE).⁹⁸ Nevertheless the establishment of Mahāyāna Buddhism in China would not have succeeded without the involvement of Buddhist monks in direct contact with India, and the related translation activities.

Traditionally, Chinese and other East Asian monks and nuns have adhered to the full precepts of *prātimokṣa* of the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya for over 1500 years. Apart from precepts of the Vinaya, Mahāyāna came to develop “Mahāyāna precepts” that were unique to the *bodhisattva* vocation. This emphasis was incorporated into the *bodhisattva* path as an essential element of the *pāramitā* (perfection) that the *bodhisattva* was expected to cultivate.⁹⁹ As a result, Mahāyānists have taken the distinct “*bodhisattva* Path”, *bodhisattvacaryā*, and believe that *bodhisattvas*, as depicted in texts such as the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* and the *Upāya-*

⁹⁴ Yu 2005: 99.

⁹⁵ Harvey 2012: 211.

⁹⁶ Kieschnick 2007: 227.

⁹⁷ Baroni 2002: 224.

⁹⁸ Poceski 2004: 141.

⁹⁹ Getz 2004: 674-675.

kausalya-sūtra, are allowed to override ethical precepts by, for example, compassionate stealing, non-celibacy, or lying, for the purpose of benefiting others.¹⁰⁰ Mark Tatz suggests:

Ethics for the *bodhisattva*, to put the matter briefly, is based upon the code for all monastics (the Vinaya), yet it is not circumscribed by it. Skill in means may supersede the monastic rule. The Buddha illustrates this supersession with the most shocking examples he can discover in his own lives. Not only did he commit murder—he also broke celibacy.¹⁰¹

In Tibet, Buddhism became the dominant form of Northern Buddhism from the sixth century CE during the reign of Songtsen Gampo (c. 618-650).¹⁰² When Buddhism was disseminated in Tibet during the ninth and tenth century tantric texts and practices were well established in India and many of the monastic universities that were centers for the transmission of the *dharma* were also centers of Vajrayāna study and practice.¹⁰³ The Tibetan idealized community is pervaded by the nature of the *Guru* (Tibetan *Lama*), who is seen as able to lead disciples to Buddhahood in one life, further augmented by *vidyādhara* or *siddha*. *Vidyādhara* are said to be highly motivated bodhisattvas who utilize esoteric meditation, including sexual pleasure, to quickly attain high spiritual goals.¹⁰⁴ The adept Saraha, one of the Indian Tantric *Mahā-siddhas*, for example, says that a man may develop perfect knowledge without being a monk, while married and enjoying sense-pleasures.¹⁰⁵ In Vajrayāna Buddhism, there is an elaborate system of sexual yoga, engaging in sexual intercourse performed as a visualisation rather than physically.¹⁰⁶

Among Tibet's main schools of Buddhism, the one most open to practices such as sexual yoga is the Nyingmapa¹⁰⁷, which is the oldest one. In the Nyingma communities that predominate along Tibet's southern fringe, householder *lamas* (*sngags pa*) are more common than

¹⁰⁰ Harvey 2000: 139.

¹⁰¹ Tatz 1994: 2-3.

¹⁰² Powers 2007: 144.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁰⁴ Sparham 2004: 743.

¹⁰⁵ Harvey 2000: 141.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁰⁷ Nyingmapa (rNying ma pa; “Old School”) is the Red Hats Buddhists of Tibet. Their Buddhism retained an element of pre-Buddhist beliefs and practices. Nyingmapa is the oldest of the four orders of Tibetan Buddhism which traces itself back to Padmasambhava.

celibate monks.¹⁰⁸ They regard sexual desire and pleasure as a shortcut or a door to liberation for the advanced practitioner.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, they allow for communities of monks and laity surrounding a single married *lama* figure, with the institutional possibility of attaining high lama status within a single life-time through sexual yoga and three-year retreats.¹¹⁰ In contrast, the Gelukpa¹¹¹ that dominated Central Tibet is rather stringent in their celibacy requirement. The Gelukpa was initiated as a protest against the sexual abuses and lax practice of the Nyingma, who ate meat and consumed much alcohol. While advocating celibacy, vegetarianism, and the restricted use of alcohol, the Gelukpa criticised Nyingma for not demanding monasticism.

In Japan, an important development was the way the monastic and lay distinction gradually diminished. A most radical position on the precepts is asserted in a document called the *Mappō-tōmyōki* 末法燈明記.¹¹² This work had been traditionally attributed to Saichō (767-822), founder of the Tendai school. Saichō had brought back Buddhist practices from China, but set aside the customary monastic precepts as he thought they were too difficult to keep in an age of moral and spiritual decline so long after the time of the Buddha. He retained only the *bodhisattva* precepts, which do not require total celibacy.¹¹³ Saichō argued that teaching was better suited to the period of the decline of Buddhism. In his writing, Saichō frequently cited a number of scriptures that described friction within the Buddhist order and the deterioration of Buddhist practice which would come after the Buddha's death.¹¹⁴ He argued that the changed circumstances of the current age required new forms of religiosity in which monasticism has become an anachronism. The *Mappō-tōmyōki* says on this point:

If there were Dharmas of precepts, there may be
the breaking of the precepts, but since by now there are no

¹⁰⁸ Childs 2008: 101.

¹⁰⁹ Harvey 2000: 142.

¹¹⁰ Mills 2013: 312.

¹¹¹ Gelukpa (dGe lugs pa; "System of Virtue") is known as the Yellow Hats. They reformed the practice of the Nyingma and adhere to the rules of monastic discipline. Gelukpa was founded by Tsong Khapa (1357-1419) and became the largest order of Tibetan Buddhism.

¹¹² The perception of decline of Buddhism, *mofa* (J. *mappō*), appears in China Buddhist literature from the fifth century. By the second half of the sixth century in China, there arose a model of historical decline in Buddhism over three distinct eras, named True Dharma (*zheng-fa* 正法), Weakened Dharma (*xiang-fa* 像法), and Final Dharma (*mo-fa* 末法). See Blum 2002: 77-78; Nattier 1991: 138-139.

¹¹³ Harvey 2000: 147.

¹¹⁴ Groner 1984: 170-173.

Dharmas of precepts, what precepts are there to break? And since there is no breaking of the precepts, how much less is there the keeping of the precepts?¹¹⁵

Later, at the beginning of the Kamakura period (1192-1333), the decline of the aristocratic class and its fierce struggles with the military class for political supremacy brought so much confusion and distress that the people began to accept the pessimistic view of *mappō*. The Kamakura reformers found in the idea of *mappō* an incentive to innovation, leading to the reformulation of new religious ideas.¹¹⁶ In particular, the *Mappō-tōmyōki* was extremely influential on Shinran who went much further than the *Mappō-tōmyōki*, pointing out that there was no reason to differentiate between monks and other beings, since we are all destined to be embraced by Amida's compassion.¹¹⁷ Shinran (1173-1262), founder of the Jōdo Shinshū school, viewed celibacy as part of a futile attempt to save oneself, rather than depending on the saving power of Amida Buddha.¹¹⁸ Having dreamt that the *Bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara told him to marry, he thus broke with the Buddhist tradition of clerical celibacy¹¹⁹ but continued to dress in robes and shaved his head as monks do.¹²⁰ He introduced a kind of married clergy, and advocated the family as the centre of religious life. From this period the role of monk became less central, with less esteem, and so Buddhism became more lay-orientated.¹²¹ In the Meiji period (1872), as part of its modernization of Japan, Japanese monks were ordered by government authorities to adopt common surnames and were allowed to marry, to have children, and to eat meat.¹²² Such 'clerical marriage' was gradually accepted until it was practiced extensively by the start of the Second World War.¹²³ Since then, Japanese clergy have become married, raised their families in the temples and allowed their sons to inherit the temples.

¹¹⁵ Rhodes 1980: 91-92.

¹¹⁶ Nattier 1991: 138-139.

¹¹⁷ Marra 1988: 292.

¹¹⁸ Harvey 2000: 147.

¹¹⁹ Glassman 2004: 762-763.

¹²⁰ Dobbins 2004: 766.

¹²¹ Harvey 2000: 148.

¹²² Tomatsu, Yoshiharu. 1995. "The Secularization of Japanese Buddhism: The Priest as Profane Practitioner of the Sacred." Paper, the American Academy of Religions, Philadelphia, November 16. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.inebnetwork.org/thinksangha/tsangha/tomatsusec.html> [Accessed: 15 May 2014].

¹²³ For the most thorough study of Japanese clerical marriage, see Jaffe, Richard M. 2001. *Neither Monk nor Layman: Clerical Marriage in Modern Japanese Buddhism*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

This development has had a major impact on Korean Buddhism.¹²⁴ In Korea, at first only a few ‘monks’ were married, but this trend increased rapidly during the Japanese occupation (1904–45), due to attempts to Japanize Korean life.¹²⁵ Since then, anti-Japanese feeling has led to a move to re-establish celibacy for all clerics; non-celibates have now lost control of the majority of temples and are few in number.

Today there have been massive social, cultural, political, economic, and technological changes across Buddhist communities. On the one hand, the ideal of celibacy has been promoted and protected in many ways and has remained relatively stable. On the other hand, rules regarding celibacy will undoubtedly continue to evolve in Buddhist traditions in the future, as monasticism and its code of conduct continue to be challenged by secular globalization and other factors.

1.3 Summary of Chapters

My research is divided into six chapters, of which the first one is the introduction and the last one presents the general conclusions of the work. This first chapter begins with an overview of asceticism and monasticism, followed by a survey of Buddhist monasticism in Indian contexts and the adaptation of the celibate ideal in new territories. The following five chapters are organized as follows.

Chapter 2 explores, from a western perspective, the ambiguous key terms involving celibacy such as abstinence and chastity. This is followed by the history of celibacy in a western context, taking up the problem of disagreement about celibate life of clergy between Catholics and Protestants.

Chapter 3 examines the renouncer tradition and the traditional ideal of renunciation in the Indian context, which reveals its influence on the emergence of Buddhism. During the evolution of classical Hinduism, we see the shift of modes of religious life in the *āśrama* system. I suggest that this new formulation implies a conflict in the value of the ideology of renunciation between the new and old systems.

Chapter 4 looks specifically at renunciation and celibacy in early Buddhism. The first part investigates the interaction between two

¹²⁴ Kim 2008: 125–165.

¹²⁵ For the articulated debate of adopting clerical marriage and schism between celibate and married clergy in Korea, see Buswell 1992: 25-36.

traditions: the *śramaṇa* and the *brāhmaṇa*. The second part surveys the life of the Buddha as the ideal exemplar of the spiritual quest and the institution of Buddhism in the early period. The last two parts attempt to trace back the origins of *brahmacarya*: highlighting its importance as the most fundamental institution of Buddhism and as the cornerstone of Buddhist monastic life.

Chapter 5 demonstrates the emergence of the *bodhisattva* ideal in a lay-oriented context. In this chapter, I discuss the different theories about the origination of Mahāyāna and philosophical doctrine, especially ethical views that contradict the *arhat* ideal in early Buddhism. I continue with the concept of ‘skill in means’, describing how Mahāyāna adapted the teaching of the Buddha to suit changing circumstances. I discuss how a tendency to misinterpretation may be caused by such flexibility in the teaching. I also show that historical evidence of the appearance of married monks in Kāśmir was as a consequence of the devaluation of Buddhist Monasticism.

The final chapter provides an overall integrative summary of key findings and identifies issues surrounding monastic practice in modern Buddhism, such as Buddhist clerical marriage. I stress the importance of the celibate ideal and the necessity to maintain the model of celibate monastics.

Chapter 2

Celibacy in its Historical Western Context

2.1 Definition of Celibacy, Abstinence and Chastity

Celibacy is one mode of coming to terms with one's sexuality. It exists as a coherent sexual discourse in many different cultures. In Western culture, especially the Roman Catholic Church, celibacy is a widely recognized characteristic of a priest and it is required and valued as a purely disciplinary law of prime importance in maintaining the dignity of the priesthood. Since its origins, clerical celibacy has provoked much public defence by the church authorities who were aware of how problematic the policy was in practice. This makes it a fascinating and challenging study for the historian of religion. To understand the appearance of celibacy in the Western context, we shall look at the earliest references to celibacy as well as the development of the practice of celibacy linked by a chronological timeline of Christian history.

Defining the term 'celibacy' may sometimes be tricky since what it can mean in any religious contexts is not absolutely clear. To make it clear, we actually have to bring it into specific semantic contexts, e.g. how does 'celibacy' relate to the terms 'abstinence' and 'chastity'. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (2001-2011), the English term *celibacy* originates from the Latin term *caelebs*, which means 'unmarried'. This word derives from two Proto-Indo-European stems, **kaiwelo-* 'alone' and **lib(h)s-* 'living'.¹²⁶ This definition is similar to a certain extent to that in the new Oxford English Dictionary (1989), which defines celibacy as "the state of living unmarried" and celibate as "unmarried, single, bound not to marry."¹²⁷ From this, the use of the term celibacy in the sense of "being unmarried" is simply not clear in its operational definition and has also led to some very confused theorizing.

The American Heritage Dictionary (2000), on the other hand, views "abstaining from sexual intercourse" as the primary meaning of celibate in contemporary usage. In the usage note, it also states:

Historically, celibate means only "unmarried"; its use to

¹²⁶Online Etymology Dictionary. *Celibacy*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=celibacy> [Accessed: 27 March 2014]

¹²⁷Pearsall, Judy, and Patrick Hanks, eds. 1998. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

mean “abstaining from sexual intercourse” is a 20th-century development. But the new sense of the word appears more or less to have displaced the old, and the use of celibate to mean “unmarried” is now almost sure to invite misinterpretation in other than narrowly ecclesiastical contexts. Sixty-eight percent of the Usage Panel rejected the older use in the sentence “He remained celibate [unmarried], although he engaged in sexual intercourse.”¹²⁸

Here we can see that the religious use of the term has penetrated the common usage; a celibate is not simply an unmarried person but one who has resolved not to get married, especially for religious reasons. This clarification sheds light on the concept it expresses and suggests a shift in meaning from fact to obligation. Such obligation intentionally indicates that celibate life is not just about not engaging in matrimony and not just about not having sexual relations, but about both, and even more. For example, in the canon law of the Latin Catholic Church (a section of obligations and rights of clerics) the word ‘celibacy’ is specifically used to mean “the commitment not to marry and to remain unmarried”. It cites: “They are to observe continence and celibacy. Continence means refraining from genital sexual activity, and celibacy means remaining unmarried. The canon, therefore, obliges clerics (except married deacons) not to marry or have sexual relations.”¹²⁹ This statement clearly reaffirms that a cleric is not simply an unmarried person but one who is to observe the abstinence from sexual activity.

There is another word, ‘abstinence’, which often used interchangeably with the word ‘celibacy’ since their meanings are very similar in modern day society. This English term *abstinence* is derived from the Latin term *abstinentia*, from the verb *abstinere*: *ab(s)- ‘from’ and *tineo- ‘to hold or to refrain’. Its synonyms are ‘continence’, ‘self-denial’, and ‘temperance’.¹³⁰ It originally meant the voluntary self-denial of food and drink, or denial of one’s sexual activity.¹³¹ In the west ‘abstinence’ commonly refers to abstention from the alcoholic beverages.

¹²⁸ Picket, Joseph P., ed. 2006. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

¹²⁹ Coriden 2004: 66-67.

¹³⁰ Picket, Joseph P., ed. 2006. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

¹³¹ Online Medterms Medical Dictionary. *Abstinence*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=21655> [Accessed: 30 March 2014].

However, ‘to be without sex’ is a loose definition, and can lead to confusion between ‘abstinence’ and ‘celibacy’. ‘Abstinence’ can be temporary denial of sex, or can mean staying virgin or delaying having sex until marriage. It is also possible to be abstinent in a relationship (postponing sexual relationships), but ‘celibacy’, in contrast, means a permanent state of being without both any sexual relationship and a spouse or partner. Celibacy is thus much more than not having sex; it is the solemn vow a person makes to never enter the married state, especially for religious reasons or at least for making life more meaningful and productive. Although abstinence, in some cases, could have a similar objective of achieving personal growth, empowerment, and building self-esteem, it is less intentional than celibacy. ‘Abstinence’, therefore, has certain limitations because one could be very promiscuous, be involved in many sexual activities, and still remain temporarily abstinent technically. To put it in a nutshell, all celibate people should be abstaining, but not all who abstain are celibate.

Again in canon law, ‘abstinence/continence’ means “refraining from genital sexual activity”, which is a prerequisite for ordination to the priesthood, and a candidate must profess this obligation publicly and for life. The abstinence we are discussing thus belongs to the state of celibacy since both are often used reciprocally to refer to abstinence from sexual relations as well as marriage.

Unlike abstinence, ‘chastity’, as described in the Catholic Encyclopedia, is the virtue which excludes or moderates the indulgence of the sexual appetite. It is one form of the virtue of temperance, which controls, for right reason, the desire for and use of those things which afford the greatest sensual pleasures.¹³² Even though chastity is freedom from sexual impurities, it is not necessarily freedom from sexual activity. This means that chastity does not require total abstinence from sexual activity. In Christianity, chastity is a virtue required of all people according to their state of life: between married people, conjugal chastity moderates the desire in conformity with their state of life; in unmarried people who wish to marry, the desire is moderated by abstention until (or unless) they get married; and in those who resolve not to marry, the desire is sacrificed entirely.¹³³ Since chastity can be applicable to the condition of

¹³² Catholic Encyclopedia. *Continence*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04330b.htm> [Accessed: 15 March 2014].

¹³³ Hardon, John A. 2013. *Catholic Dictionary: An Abridged and Updated Edition of Modern Catholic Dictionary*. New York: Random House LLC.

marriage¹³⁴, it may be seen as being less restrictive than abstinence, which parallels much more the state of celibacy. Whereas chastity is a lifestyle choice for everyone in a virtuous way proper to his or her state in life,¹³⁵ celibacy is only for some. For this reason, celibacy must also be carefully distinguished from chastity. Nevertheless, when we speak of priestly celibacy, the virtue of chastity is certainly implied, but in this instance the virtue is assumed to give shape and spiritual meaning to that state in an especially enhancing way.

2.2 Celibacy in the Pre-Christian Era

Celibacy emerged in various contexts in the ancient Mediterranean civilizations. Its origin can be traced back to the ancient Greek and Roman Empire, influenced by Greek mythology. Such a notion is evidenced by the attributes of the three Virgin Goddesses: Athena (Minerva), Artemis (Diana), and Hestia (Vesta) and by the special status granted to the Vestal Virgins (virgin boys and girls) in Roman times.¹³⁶ In ancient Roman society, the requirement that the ‘Vestal Virgins’ of Rome remain celibate indicates that celibacy had some place in a very ancient stratum of Roman religion.¹³⁷ Jennifer Larson, writing on Greek and Roman Sexualities, observes:

Both Greeks and Romans associated ideas of purity and pollution with sexual activity. The gods often required that worshipers approach them in a ‘pure’ state, having abstained from sexual relations for the specified period of time. Abstention from sex resulted in a state of ‘purity’ known in Greek as ‘hagneia’ and in Latin as ‘castimonia’. This is the state Plutarch ascribed to Vestal Virgins at Rome.”¹³⁸

Vestal Virgins, who were six in number, were strictly celibate priestesses of Vesta. They were chosen by the king in accordance with the regulation, brought to the temple before puberty and were required to keep their virginity for thirty years. As Larson quotes: “The King

¹³⁴ Most Christians view marriage and physical intimacy between husband and wife as a Sacrament: sacred, holy, and even central to the community of faith. As it was reaffirmed in Hebrews 13:4: “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” See *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹³⁵ There are three forms of the virtue of chastity: the first is that of spouses, the second that of widows, and the third that of virgins.

¹³⁶ Chen 2010: 78-81.

¹³⁷ Doniger 1999: 189.

¹³⁸ Larson 2012: 12.

ordained thirty years of purity (hagneia) for the sacred virgin (7.13; Plutarch *Life of Numa* 10.1).¹³⁹ Since the Romans exalted the Vestal Virgins as the goddesses and the highest religious officials in Rome, they received many splendid honours from the city. Nonetheless, they were punishable if they broke their vows. Misdeeds were punished by priests, and those who had lost their virginity were sentenced to a shameful and pitiful death by live burial.¹⁴⁰ The Romans believed that the prosperity of Rome depended upon the dedication of the vestal virgins.¹⁴¹ As Jackson Spielvogel points out: “There are said to be many clues which indicate that a priestess who is performing a holy ritual is no longer a virgin, but the principle clue is that the fire goes out, something which the Romans fear more than all catastrophes, since they believe that whatever was the cause of the fire going out, it warns of the destruction of the city”.¹⁴²

Virginity and premarital chastity were an essential requirement for young women in ancient times, who were supposed to be in closer contact with divinity and nature owing to their sexual purity. Consequently, young women were thrust into marriage just after puberty to eliminate any possibility of a sexual lapse¹⁴³ due to the loss of virginity considered as an irrevocable act and often bewailed.¹⁴⁴ In ancient Greece and Rome, citizens, except the Vestal Virgins, were socially expected to reproduce and the abundant production of children in marriage was practically a social duty.¹⁴⁵ Since the integrity of the household is vitally important to the state, its officials began to intrude into the affairs of the household and thus those that chose to remain single were penalized by government legislation. Within the framework of the earthly household, celibacy would be equivalent to suicide.¹⁴⁶

Nevertheless, Ancient Greek civilization also developed the idea of abstinence for men, which is known as the ascetic celibacy of the philosopher. The Greeks believed mental energy was lost with semen at intercourse; thus abstinence was preferred by philosophers as fitness of body and mind. Stoic philosophers, such as Seneca and Epictetus, advocated restraint of passion and praised celibacy.¹⁴⁷ Seneca rejected sex

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Jackson 2009: 127.

¹⁴¹ Salisbury 2001: 361.

¹⁴² Jackson 2009: 127.

¹⁴³ Abbott 2000: 23.

¹⁴⁴ Chen 2010: 79.

¹⁴⁵ Olson 2008: 9.

¹⁴⁶ See the introduction in Launderville, Dale. 2012. *Celibacy in the Ancient World: Its Ideal and Practice in Pre-Hellenistic Israel, Mesopotamia, and Greece*. Colledgeville: Liturgical Press, p. xxxvi.

¹⁴⁷ Berry 2000: 176.

for pleasure, not because sex was sinful, but because succumbing to passion signified being out of control.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, Epictetus regarded celibacy as important to avoid distractions and to allow the mind to focus clearly on the complex task of scholarly inquiry.¹⁴⁹ He advocated celibacy as helpful on the way to wisdom and serenity.¹⁵⁰ It is notable that celibacy has also been advised by philosophers seeking to prevent sensual contamination of the ideas they espouse. Furthermore, the emphasis on asceticism in the classical world, particularly among those Greek philosophers, was a source of inspiration and confirmation for the celibate ideal of the early Church; continence was envisioned as an ideal and set the stage for Christian celibacy.

An ideal of celibacy appears to have been not only rare in the pre-Christian Era, but also seems to have been alien to the ancient Israelite religion and early Judaism. In the Hebrew Bible, barrenness and childlessness were at times viewed as either a test or a punishment by God and even as a cause for disgrace (Genesis. 16:2; 30:2; 1 Samuel 1:3-11). In the Rabbinic period (70–589 CE), Jewish males, according to religious law, had an obligation to marry in order to continue their people’s bloodline and to restrain immorality. Furthermore, early marriage was strongly recommended by the time the man was in his teen or, at the latest, in his early twenties. To remain celibate was therefore viewed as sinful. Michael S. Berger quotes: “Every man is obligated to marry a woman in order to reproduce. Anyone who is not involved in reproduction is considered as if he or she is a killer, a reducer of the place of people on this earth, and causes God’s presence to leave the Jewish people”.¹⁵¹ Also, to be celibate within marriage, even if one had already had progeny, constituted a breach of the marital contract.¹⁵²

Although the practice of celibacy was not common in ancient Judaism, it appears that in the late Second Temple period (second century BCE–first century CE) some religious movements or Jewish religious sects were celibate. The Essenes, for example, had a particular attitude towards marriage that distinguished them from general society. The description of the Essenes’s way of life is preserved in Josephus’s writing emphasising. Josephus says:

¹⁴⁸ Val Webb 1999: 18.

¹⁴⁹ New World Encyclopedia. *Celibacy*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Celibacy> [Accessed: 15 May 2014].

¹⁵⁰ The Family Encyclopedia of Sex. *Celibacy*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.sexuality-encyclopedia.com/dr-ruth/Celibacy> [Accessed: 15 May 2014].

¹⁵¹ Berger 2005: 103.

¹⁵² Braun 2008: 41.

They [the Essenes] turn aside from pleasures as an evil, and regard self-control and not succumbing to the passions as a virtue. Marriage they regard with contempt, but in adopting other persons' children who are still pliable for learning, they consider them as their own kin and mold them according to their customs. They do not reject marriage and the propagation that comes from it, but they guard themselves against the licentious allurements of women and are persuaded that not one of them keeps her pledge to one man.¹⁵³

It is noteworthy that the Essenes may have had a strong connection to Jesus, and appear to have figured in connection with the beginnings of the Christian movement.¹⁵⁴

2.3 Celibacy in the New Testament

Although there is no explicit mention of the practice of celibacy by any of prominent leading figures in early Christianity such as John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth, and Paul of Tarsus, there appears to be a link between celibacy and prophecy in some circles that can be found in the New Testament.

The mention of celibacy comes attached to Jesus' teaching about marriage and divorce, which states: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery". When his disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." Jesus, however, recommends celibacy for "only those to whom it has been given." Jesus seems to have favoured celibacy in this life for those people "who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:10-12).

Most influential was Paul's advice that Christians abstain from marriage and sex, given the imminent second coming of Christ (I Corinthians 7:25-38). Paul goes on to recommend celibacy: "He who refrains from marriage will do better," (I Corinthians 7:39) when it is undertaken in the context of expectations of God's coming kingdom.¹⁵⁵ He shows his clear

¹⁵³ Beall 2004: 15.

¹⁵⁴ Habermas 1996:17.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

preference for celibacy that the celibate enables individuals to dedicate themselves entirely to God, whereas the married life is divided: “I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided.” (Corinthians 7: 32-33) It is clear that Paul judges the celibate life to be “better” than the married life. Accordingly, Paul’s concern is probably related to the apparent celibacy of Jesus and John, at least to the extent that they probably belong to a similar sphere of influence.¹⁵⁶

In the Pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus¹⁵⁷ there is an interesting phrase that recurs also in early canonical legislation and patristic writings: “Now a bishop must be ... a husband of one wife”. Paul writes to Timothy stating that: ‘A bishop must be above reproach, married only once.’ (1 Timothy 3:2). Then writing to Titus, Saint Paul tells him to appoint, in Crete, presbyters ‘married only once’. (Titus 1:6). Writing to Timothy concerning deacons Paul says, ‘Let deacons be married only once’ (1 Timothy 3:12). All these statements seem to indicate that whoever takes on an ecclesiastical office need not necessarily be celibate, but after the death of his (first) wife, he may not remarry.

To sum up, for both Paul and Jesus their understanding of the kingdom of God was concerned with the life to come, and clearly there was approval of voluntary celibacy in their teachings. However, there is no indication that sexual renunciation was necessarily tied to becoming a prophet, and a pledge of celibacy was not yet expressly demanded from candidates applying for ecclesiastical office. Nevertheless, the apparent celibacy of Jesus, due in part to his itinerant lifestyle, and the apparent sexual abstinence of many of his disciples served as models for Christian practice, and later celibacy became associated with a veneration of the clerical lifestyle.¹⁵⁸

2.4 Celibacy in the Early Christian Church

In the first centuries of Christianity, due to eschatological expectations, many of the early martyrs emulated Jesus’s life to live in celibacy, for,

¹⁵⁶ Loader 2005: 216.

¹⁵⁷ The Pastoral Epistles consists of three books of the canonical New Testament: the First Epistle to Timothy (1 Timothy) the Second Epistle to Timothy (2 Timothy), and the Epistle to Titus. They are presented as letters from Paul the Apostle to Timothy and to Titus discussed the issues of Christian living, doctrine and leadership.

¹⁵⁸ Olson 2008: 11.

“when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Mark 12:25). Clement of Rome (c. 96) and Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110) speak of early Christians being celibate and imitating Christ.¹⁵⁹ In the beginning, both celibate men and celibate women lived in the same communities and this cohabitation of the sexes was viewed as involving a more rigorous ascetic effort. Thus was created the institution of the *subintroductae* (celibate women cohabitating with clerics or monks).¹⁶⁰

From the origin of the church up to the beginning of the fourth century, it is clear that there was no requirement or tradition of clerical celibacy, although some clergy assumed a celibate life after raising families and reaching ‘an advanced age’.¹⁶¹ Moreover, there was no canon law that obliged married bishops or priests to renounce sexual relations with their spouses. The first Christian ministers were married and took this for granted (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:5 and Matthew 8:14), and in some cases spouses helped them with pastoral duties. Several of Jesus’s apostles including Saint Peter (30-67), the first Pope of Rome, were married.¹⁶² For several centuries clerical celibacy remained an ideal rather than normal practice; married priests were urged to refrain from sexual relations with their wives in order to uphold the Eucharist.

Yet, after the end of the persecutions and the emergence of the church as a public institution, canonical legislation grew more substantial. By the fourth century we see the first signs of disquiet about the compatibility of marriage and priesthood. Celibacy then began to be enforced: the Council of Elvira, Spain, (c. 305-306) began a tradition of legislation by which bishops and priests were required to be chaste. The Council declared in canon 33:

Bishops, presbyters, deacons, and others with a position in the ministry are to abstain completely from sexual intercourse with their wives and from the procreation of children. Whoever, in fact, does this shall be expelled from the dignity of the clerical state.¹⁶³

The Elvira edict had only limited jurisdiction; many clergymen continued

¹⁵⁹ Daly 2009: 22.

¹⁶⁰ Wilson 2006: 150.

¹⁶¹ Hankins 2004: 606.

¹⁶² Cawthorne 2004: 5.

¹⁶³ Flemings 2008: 390.

to marry and have conjugal relationships with their wives.¹⁶⁴ A short time later, the First Council of Nicaea (325), convened by Constantine, rejected a ban on priests marrying requested by Spanish clerics. The practice of priestly celibacy began to spread in the Western Church in the early middle Ages¹⁶⁵, and then all clergy in major orders (Bishop, Presbyter/Priest, Deacon) in the West were called upon by Pope Siricius (385-386) to abstain from conjugal relations with their spouse and live with her “like brother and sister.”¹⁶⁶ A vow of celibacy on pain of deposition was imposed. At the end of the sixth century, Pope Gregory the Great (590 to 604) even specified that a married priest should “love his wife like a sister, but distrust her like an enemy,” and so avoid cohabitation by maintaining separate bedrooms.¹⁶⁷

However, this papal requirement applied only to Western Christendom. The Orthodox Churches of the East wavered on the extent and rigor of clerical celibacy by adopting on this point a different standard, ratified by a council held in Constantinople. The Council of Trullo (691-692)¹⁶⁸ resolved the matter, which they have maintained to this day. It forbade any of the higher orders (bishop, priest, deacon, and subdeacon) to marry after ordination. Only a bishop is obliged to remain celibate; the other orders can marry as long as they do so before being ordained and can carry on normal marital relations. Bishops are, in fact, normally chosen from the ranks of the celibate, that is, monks. In Canon 13, the Council stated:

Since we know it to have been handed down as a rule in the Roman Church that those who are deemed worthy to be advanced to the diaconate or presbyterate should promise to no longer cohabit with their wives we, preserving the ancient rule and apostolic perfection and order, will that the lawful marriages of men who in holy orders be from this time forward firm, by no means dissolving their union with their wives nor depriving them of their mutual relations at a convenient time. Wherefore, if anyone shall have been found worthy to be ordained subdeacon or deacon or presbyter, he is by no means to be prohibited from admittance to such a rank, even if he shall live with a lawful wife. Nor shall it be

¹⁶⁴ Nash 2007: 164.

¹⁶⁵ Heid 2000: 144.

¹⁶⁶ Bornstein 2009: 181.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Valantasis 2000: 289-291.

demanded of him at the time of his ordination that he promises to abstain from lawful relations with his wife.¹⁶⁹

Moreover in canon 12, the Council had defended the discipline of continence. Marriage was not unconditional, and whenever a priest acted liturgically as a priest he had to live a discipline of temporary continence.¹⁷⁰ The canon is clearly directed against the Latin Church and its practice.

Nevertheless, both the East and the West had the same goal: to see that the secular clergy stood out for its worthy manner of life and irreproachable conduct. However, the Eastern churches thought that this could be attained within the framework of marriage, whereas the West held that sexual continence was required from both married and unmarried clergy of the Western Church.¹⁷¹

2.5 Celibacy in Medieval Christianity

In the first decades of the eleventh century, the problem of the sexual lives of the clergy became a burning issue and the object of numerous measures on the part of the highest church authorities.¹⁷² At the turn of the first millennium, the church started to canonically regulate clerical marriage, mainly in response to clerical abuses and corruption. Of particular concern was the transmission at the death of a clergyman of church property to his wife and children.¹⁷³

In 1022, Pope Benedict VIII (1012-1024) responded to that concern by imposing new penalties at the Council of Pavia¹⁷⁴: children born to incontinent clergy were to be considered serfs of the church that their father served and could not be freed or given the right to own property. These measures, prohibiting the children of priests from inheriting property, ensured that church property (a source of revenue) would not be lost to secularization through inheritance. He also mandated strict celibacy, banning clerical marriage and forbidding clergy to live with any women, including their wives. Clerics refusing to separate from their wives, including bishops, were to be laicized. In 1055, a Roman synod

¹⁶⁹ Cholij 1989: 115-116.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 199.

¹⁷¹ Bornstein 2009: 181-182.

¹⁷² Ibid., 184.

¹⁷³ Cortes-Sjoberg. *Why are priests celibate?* [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.uscatholic.org/glad-you-asked/2009/08/why-are-priests-celibate> [Accessed: 15 May 2014].

¹⁷⁴ Cushing 2005: 62.

ordered clergy to send away their wives¹⁷⁵ and live henceforth in continence. In 1059, Pope Nicholas II convened a synod at the Lateran¹⁷⁶, which forbade the laity from attending Masses by priests who refused to leave their wives or concubines, implying that the sacraments celebrated by those priests were worthless.

Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085)¹⁷⁷ pressed the issue further in 1074, declaring that all clergy who did not immediately abandon their female companions would be deposed from their priestly office. Gregory VII attempted to put pressure on married clergy by rousing lay people against them in sermons and by working with local leaders to oust married clergy. For example, in the city of Milan, a group called the *Patarnes* supported by him began to brutally attack married clergy. Pope Gregory asked all laity to boycott divine service if a priest conducting it was known to be unchaste or married. The memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent state:

At that time (i.e. the time of Pope Gregory VII) the Apostolic See [the Papacy] was making a fresh attack on married priests; this led to an outburst of rage against them by people who were so zealous about the clergy that they angrily demanded that married priests should either be deprived of their benefices or should cease to perform their priestly duties.¹⁷⁸

Five decades after the Gregorian Reform, a formalized decree called the First Lateran Council in 1123 was issued by Pope Callistus II (1119-1124). Canon 21 states:

We absolutely forbid priests, deacons, subdeacons and monks to have concubines or to contract marriages. We adjudge, as the sacred canons have laid down, that a marriage contract between such persons should be made void and the persons ought to undergo penance.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ In the *Liber Gomorrhianus* (Book of Gomorrah) published by Saint Peter Damian in 1051, those legitimate wives of priests are no longer distinguished from concubines; rather they are condemned as “prostitutes”.

¹⁷⁶ Thomas 1992: 82.

¹⁷⁷ Pope Gregory VII was one of the most important and controversial popes of the Middle Ages. His elevation to the papacy came after a long and influential career in the papal court. The term “Gregorian Reform” served for a century to describe the period in which he lived. Gregory’s impact has been reassessed and most historians now refer to the “Reform Papacy,”

¹⁷⁸ Benton 1984: 51

¹⁷⁹ Tanner 1990: 194.

The culmination of this development was signaled by the Second Lateran Council (1139), which declared that any priest who cohabited with a woman (other than his mother, aunt, or sister, or a female servant) would be deprived of his office and his ecclesiastical benefice.¹⁸⁰ In 1563, the Council of Trent reaffirmed the tradition of celibacy.¹⁸¹ Since then any form of clerical marriage has been rejected and has disappeared almost entirely as celibacy has been required of Roman Catholic priests. However, the Catholic churches of the East have continued to allow priests to marry before their ordination.

Clearly, this represents a culmination of the reform movement, which can be interpreted as absolute prohibition. The Church was a thousand years old before it definitively took a stand in favour of celibacy in the twelfth century. From this time until the Protestant Reformation, the prohibition of marriage for all clerics in major orders began to be taken simply for granted.

2.6 Celibacy in the Protestant Reformation

The problem of clerical fornication remained endemic throughout the Middle Ages, involving even the Renaissance popes. Since Martin Luther and the other Reformers found no justification for celibacy in the New Testament, they denounced it as just one more restriction on Christian liberty imposed by the tyrant in Rome. Martin Luther, as a reformer, denounced priestly celibacy and reaffirmed the ancient teaching that marriage is praiseworthy. Luther condemned obligatory clerical celibacy, asserting that it was not good for all priests. Luther argued that the monastic vow of celibacy set clergymen apart from the laity, and furthermore these vows stood against the ‘word of God’ and against Christ because they violated the freedom of the gospel and made religion a matter of rules, statues, orders, and divisions rather than a spontaneous relation to God through Christ. Thus there was a danger that the vow of celibacy could become a substitute for faith itself. Luther also argued that marriage was superior to celibacy and raised its status, even though it was not regarded as a sacrament. In his work, *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he believed the compulsory celibacy of the priesthood should be abolished and conversely the freedom of marriage should be restored in order to leave every man free to marry or not to marry.

¹⁸⁰ Bornstein 2009: 185.

¹⁸¹ Sobo and Bell (eds.) 2001: 76.

The Reformation was the most massive frontal attack that the traditions of clerical celibacy and continence had ever received. It had to be answered. The theologians were divided in their opinions, with a few of them maintaining that celibacy for the clergy was of divine law and could not be abrogated; but most of them held more moderate opinions. The Council of Trent (1563) finally took up this matter and condemned the opinion that marriage was better than virginity, insisting on the superior excellence and blessedness of celibacy. That canonical law is notably cautious. It makes no assertions about the origins of the tradition, about its importance or about its necessity. It simply condemns three opinions concerning celibacy: first, that clerics in major orders and religious priests who have made a solemn vow of chastity can validly contract marriage; second, that the regulation of celibacy is a disparagement of marriage; and third, that those who, after making a solemn vow of celibacy, cannot observe it are free to contract marriage. However, the canon obliquely reaffirms the discipline of celibacy, but it does not do so explicitly and directly. It would seem to leave open the possibility of exceptions and dispensations. In the centuries between then and now the issue has occasionally surfaced again and again.

In contrast to the Orthodox tradition, Protestant Christianity exemplifies a different attitude toward the practice of celibacy and the attitudes towards celibacy divide most Protestants from Roman Catholics. As we have seen, throughout the history of the Protestant Reformation, Protestantism's relationship with celibacy has never been compromised. Protestant churches have been challenged to rethink and revise the very notions of sexuality that underlay their earlier teachings about celibacy. Presently, the reformed churches do not require clerical celibacy, and moreover celibacy for the kingdom of heaven as a lifelong choice and as an alternative to marriage has largely disappeared from the thought of the Protestant church.

Chapter 3

The Ideal of Renunciation in the Indian Context

3.1 Renouncer Tradition and Ascetic Practice

In the context of the Indian tradition, the cultural institution behind the manifestations of world renunciation and asceticism is called the “*renouncer tradition*”. The renouncer tradition has been a central and important ingredient in the sociocultural mix that contributed to the formation of the historical religions in India. Apart from Buddhist and Jain literary sources, the earliest influential source about the renouncer tradition can be found mainly in the Upaniṣads, and other Vedic writings.¹⁸² One needs to be reminded here that the principal Upaniṣads, which form the concluding ‘Vedānta’ (the end of the Vedas), are believed to have been composed during the late Vedic period in about the sixth century BCE¹⁸³, which witnessed major socio-political developments accompanied by changes in religious ideologies.

There is an ongoing controversy regarding the origins of the renouncer tradition. Olivelle notes on this point: “some contend that the origins of Indian asceticism in general and of the renouncer tradition in particular go back to the indigenous non-Āryan population. Others, on the contrary, see it as an organic and logical development of ideas found in the Vedic religious culture.”¹⁸⁴

Let us begin by considering the former assumption, which is believed to be related to the existence of non-Vedic and non-Āryan asceticism in ancient India. According to Romila Thapar, the earliest representation of an ascetic practice comes from the supposed ‘*Paśupati* seal’ of the Harappa Culture (c. 3000-1500 BCE).¹⁸⁵ *Paśupati* who, in Hinduism, is assigned the role of an ascetic (*mahāyogī*) is shown on the seal sitting cross-legged in meditation. This evidence should demonstrate that the religious practice existed in one form or the other in the Harappan culture that reached its peak around 2000-1700 BCE.¹⁸⁶ Thapar believes that such practice may have meant being temporarily abandoned society during periods demanding a condition of ritual purity (sacrifice).¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Olivelle 2001: 271

¹⁸³ Olivelle 1998: 6.

¹⁸⁴ Olivelle 2001: 273.

¹⁸⁵ Thapar 1978: 59.

¹⁸⁶ Pandit 2005: 8.

¹⁸⁷ Thapar 1978: 60.

By about the middle of the first millennium BCE, there is ample evidence of ascetic figures in the Ṛgveda, Atharvaveda and some texts such as the Upaniṣads and the Āraṇyakas. These figures do not have a ritual function and seem to be outside the brahmanical, Vedic community.¹⁸⁸ The very examples of those practitioners include the long-haired sage (*keśin*) or silent sage (*muni*)¹⁸⁹ described in the Ṛgveda and the wandering celibate brotherhood of *vrātya*¹⁹⁰ figured in the Atharvaveda, whose appearances and features can be interpreted as describing a kind of ascetic practice.

According to Mag Deeg, there is certainly a connection between the *keśin(s)* in the Ṛgveda and ascetic practice. Deeg states that the word [*keśin*] was a title for people belonging to a special religious group (similar to the *vrātyas*) rather than for an individual and, in particular, the Keśin Dārbhya¹⁹¹ shows features which can be identified as patterns of shamanism¹⁹² in achievement of special knowledge. These men have ecstatic experiences and visionary power, and they fly in the air as a result of their divine contact with the gods while exercising ascetic practices.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Flood 1996: 77.

¹⁸⁹ The term *muni* is affiliated with the verb *man-* meaning ‘to think, to deem,’ etc. According to Monier-William, the word *muni* refers to “an inspired saint, holy man endowed with divine inspiration or one who has attained more or less of a divine nature by mortification and abstraction; especially a recluse who lives alone and has taken the vow of silence”. (See Monier-William 2005: 785). For “silence” the word used was *mauna* (P. *mona*). Therefore the word *muni* means ‘one who has vow of silence.’ In the Ṛgveda, these *munis* are described as *vātaraśana keśin* (naked and long haired), a sign of total renunciation. The word *muni* is important in Buddhism, where the Buddha has the title *śākya-muni* (*muni* of the *śākya*). The Buddha is called “great *muni*,” and he also adopted the word *muni* for his order (*saṅgha*).

¹⁹⁰ The *vrātyas* are represented as a brotherhood of young men who were warriors and cattle-raiders. They served as a means for society to organise its young unmarried men, then perhaps all men may have spent some time as a member of such as a group, which may have, at least originally, acted as the ‘fighting force’ of the tribal group in times of war. Such *vrātyas* may have assisted in the expansion of Vedic-Brahmanical culture from the Kuru-Pañcāla region. See Samuel 2008: 115, 116, and 183.

¹⁹¹ Keśin Dārbhya appears as a group of (religious) outsiders, with special knowledge and behaviour in the context of the sacrifice. The word *dārbhya* refers to a sort of grass used within the sacrifice which is supposed to be an antidote against snakes and their poison. Therefore, the original meaning of *Dārbhya* could be “who has connections to the *darbha-grass*”, and this connection could have consisted of a group of *muni* intoxicating themselves by means of it. Later, the name is especially used for individuals who are searching for special knowledge in an unorthodox way, particularly through the use of intoxicates. See Deeg 1993: 109.

¹⁹² In general, the most important features of shamanism are (1) Ecstasy and its related techniques, sometimes achieved by means of intoxicating drugs. (2) Several forms and rites of initiation, especially ritual killing or/and dismemberment and a following “rebirth”. (3) Journey to heaven or to the yonder world (4) the special knowledge of the shaman, often acquired on his journey to the world beyond. This can also be knowledge of curing diseases. (5) The existence and appearance of assistant spirits (often theriomorphic), who appoint the shaman or accompany him on his journey and protect him, and so on. See Deeg 1993: 96.

¹⁹³ Deeg 1993: 112.

Other scholars such as Heesterman, on the other hand, see new celibate ideologies and institutions as integral developments of the older ritual religion of the Vedas with continuation occurring organically. For Heesterman, the development of brahmanical theory had been set off by the individualization of the ritual and it had to advance to its logical conclusion, that is, the interiorization of the ritual, which makes the officiants' services superfluous. The conflict caused by the interiorization of the ritual, however, is an inner conflict of the Vedic tradition, not a conflict between different opposed groups of people. With the interiorization of the ritual, Heesterman says, "we touch the principle of world renunciation, the emergence of which has been of crucial importance in the development of Indian thinking".¹⁹⁴

It is clear that the origins of asceticism in India are found in early Indian society and that it has a long history, although there is considerable disagreement regarding how long it took and how it emerged. However, references to ascetic regimens are few in the Ṛgveda, the earliest Vedic compilation¹⁹⁵, which was compiled (c.1300 BC)¹⁹⁶ by priests of the emergent Soma ritual cult for liturgical use. The earliest clear examples of asceticism in Atharvaveda compiled by priests of the *atharvan* (c. 900 BC)¹⁹⁷ were the regimens called *vrata* or *dīkṣā*, associated with Vedic study (*brahmacarya*) and worship.¹⁹⁸ Meanwhile, the further elaboration of priestly specialties resulted in collections representing the Yajurveda, where divine rule (*vrata*) increases in severity as the *vrata*-regimen (rules of abstention mainly from sexual prohibitions) followed by the *iṣṭi*

¹⁹⁴ Heesterman 1985: 38-39.

¹⁹⁵ The corpus of the Veda consists of a large number of works. The earliest work is that of the *samhitās*, also known as *vedas*. They are four *samhitās*: the Ṛgveda (hymns), the Sāmaveda (melodies), the Yajurveda (sacrificial formulas), and the Atharvaveda (a part of which includes magical formulas). The Ṛgveda is the oldest and the Atharvaveda the most recent of the collections. However, the canonical status of the latter has not been fully accepted and therefore the whole corpus is often referred to as 'the three vedas'. See Fernhout 1994: 29.

¹⁹⁶ See Gonda (ed.) 1977: 22, and Olivelle 1998: 5.

¹⁹⁷ References for the dates of Atharvaveda and earliest collections may be made to Gonda, J. 1960. *Die Religionen Indiens, Vol. 1: Veda und älterer Hinduismus*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer; and Winternitz, Maurice. 1981. *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. 1. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

¹⁹⁸ *Vratas* were explicitly used as a model for professional ascetic modes of *Vrātyas*, wandering ascetics, but were applied for both Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical ascetics. *Vrātyas*, mentioned in the Atharvaveda as a band of ascetic warriors, practiced a tradition of their own which was probably a mixture of early forms of tantricism and ceremonial worship of ancient deities through magical ritual. Some historians believe they were probably an early band of Vedic Āryans who were excommunicated by their successors for some religious reasons. Some believe that *Vrātyas* started the tradition of warrior ascetics and that the present Vedic practice of doing *vrata* (a sacrificial ceremony of longer duration) seeking favors from a personal deity is probably an ancient tradition practiced by the *vrātyas* and adopted by Vedic tradition subsequently. See Jayram V. *The Role Asceticism in the Development of Hinduism*. [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/essays/ascetics.asp> [Accessed: 1 February 2014].

sacrifice¹⁹⁹ and the *dīkṣā*-regimen (initiation rituals).²⁰⁰ These are the ritual assertion of self-control over human necessities that included restrictions on eating, sleeping, sexual activity, and other activities; such restrictions might be mild or severe, depending on the ritual purpose.

To achieve personal salvation, one of the underlying practices of such asceticism was extreme austerity, referred to as *tapas*. The Sanskrit term *tāpasa* designated an ascetic. The root \sqrt{tap} means “to heat,” “to burn,” and “to consume by fire.” The term also meant “to torment” oneself by subjecting oneself to suffering.²⁰¹ *Tapas* was originally used to denote the austere practice of ascetic observances by which the practitioner was considered capable of acquiring not only heat but also power and energy. This would give the practitioner power: so much power that it enabled one to challenge the heavens and thereby reach immortality and become deified.²⁰² According to Patrick Olivelle, three concepts are closely associated in Vedic cosmological thought: *yajña* (sacrifice), *tapas* (ascetic heat), and *śrama* (ascetic toil). Ascetic toil of *tapas* and *śrama* are associated with cosmogenic activities of the gods: the winning of heaven by the gods (AB. 2.13), and the winning of the nectar of immortality by the gods (ŚB. 9.5.1.2).²⁰³

One of the most conspicuous forms of *tapas* is *brahmacarya*. These two terms are often seen as identical. *Brahmacarya* was the most common practice of ascetics for a variety of reasons. The attachments caused by sexual desire were not seen merely as a distraction to serious ascetic life. It was believed that semen (*retas*) is the concentrated essence of a man’s vitality (*vīrya*), and is thus something to be carefully retained in order to gain greater spiritual accomplishment.²⁰⁴ When retained, this *vīrya* gives strength, courage, and determination, and the loss of it brings the opposite qualities such as weakness, cowardice, and scattered intelligence. O’Flaherty claims that the idea that power carried by semen is lost from one’s own body and transferred through sexual contact can be found in the Ṛgveda and Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad. She explains:

¹⁹⁹ The word *iṣṭi* is derived from the verb \sqrt{yaj} -, ‘to sacrifice’. The word *iṣṭi* meant an offering of fruit, butter etc. that did not include Soma or animal sacrifice. See notes in Roebuck, Valerie. 2004. *The Upanishads*. London: Penguin.

²⁰⁰ The word *dīkṣā* is derived from the verb $\sqrt{dā}$ ‘to give’ and $\sqrt{kṣi}$ ‘to destroy’ or alternately from the verb $\sqrt{dīkṣ}$ ‘to consecrate’ or from the desiderative form of the verb *dakṣ* ‘to grow, to increase’. In Indian tradition, it is an initiation given by a *guru*, usually by imparting a sacred word or series of words (*mantra*). See Grimes 1996: 117.

²⁰¹ Johnston (ed.) 2013: 89.

²⁰² Kloppenborg 1990: 51.

²⁰³ Olivelle 2008c: 33.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 60.

The Upaniṣads regard the loss of the seed [semen] as a kind of death. Great danger is therefore implied in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka text; a few verses earlier, it is remarked that, if a man has intercourse with a woman without knowing the proper *mantra*, “Women take his good deeds to themselves” (BṛhU. 6.4.2-3).²⁰⁵

In the Indian traditions, the connection between *vīrya* and *tapas* is clear. The purpose of the practice of *tapas* not only builds character of heat but also conserves virility (*vīrya*) and transmutes into a numinous energy (*ojas*) which pervades the whole of the body and mind. A person in possession of such ascetic energy was called a *tapasvin*, “one who possesses *tapas*.”²⁰⁶ Therefore, the *brahmacārin* is clearly a *tapasvin*.

Although a wide range of religious expressions concerning *tapas* appears in the *Ṛgveda*, the most influential *Ṛgvedic* speculations on *tapas* occur in such late cosmogonic hymns as 10.129 and 10.190, where *tapas*, existing prior to both divine and human beings, is linked in the procreative process with primordial desire (*kāma*), mind, order, and truth, a cosmic association that served as a template for late Vedic soteriologies as well as post-Vedic popular mythologies.²⁰⁷ As such, *tapas* is that process which produces both ‘magical heat’ and energy, inextricably associated with fertility and productivity. O’Flaherty notes: “although in human terms asceticism is opposed to sexuality and fertility, in mythological terms *tapas* is itself a powerful creative force, a generative power of ascetic heat.”²⁰⁸ Referring to the relation between *tapas* and *kāma*, O’Flaherty says:

...*tapas* (asceticism) and *kāma* (desire) are not diametrically opposed like black and white, or heat and cold, where the extreme presence of one automatically implies the absence of the other. They are in fact two forms of heat, *tapas* being the potentially destructive or creative fire that the ascetic generates within himself, *kāma* the heat of desire. Thus they are closely related in human terms, opposed in the sense that love and hate are opposed, but not mutually exclusive.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ O’Flaherty 1982: 31.

²⁰⁶ Olivelle 2011: 33.

²⁰⁷ Knipe 2005: 8997-8998.

²⁰⁸ O’Flaherty 1973: 41.

²⁰⁹ O’Flaherty 1969: 301.

The fertile creative power of *tapas* is the starting point of many cosmogenic myths. For example, in the Brāhmaṇas, it is through his *tapas* that Prajāpati, the creator, creates the world, fire, air, the sun, and the moon. O’Flaherty quotes:

Prajāpati was alone here in the beginning. He wished, ‘May I exist, may I reproduce myself’. He exerted himself and performed *tapas*, and when he was exhausted and heated, the waters were created from him, for waters are born from the heated man. The water said, ‘What is to become of us’ He said, ‘You shall be heated.’ They were heated and created foam. (ŚB. 6.1.3.1-2)²¹⁰

In this myth as well as others in the Vedas, *tapas* is clearly associated with various forms of creation—of water, of organic life, paradoxically of erotic/procreative power. *Tapas*, in all of these formulations, provides the ascetic or the renouncer with great sexual power—the power that gives him the potential for creative abilities as well as the right to use the power to good effect.²¹¹ Theoretically, *tapas* cooperates with *kāma* in keeping the created world together; *kāma* poses the strongest threat to ascetic world-transcendence, whereas *tapas* can be a weapon itself for world- and self-conquest.²¹² As Śiva says to Pārvatī, “By *tapas* one wins *kāma*,”²¹³ and this concept appears often in passages encouraging the practice of *tapas*.

However, in the Brahmanical tradition those regimens only constituted temporary ascetic practices deviating from normal life. This is particularly evident in the ascetic “career” of the *brahmacārin*, or Vedic student who entered the *brahmacarya āśrama*, or first life-stage, which was assumed for up to twelve years. Yet, at least until the promulgation of the Upaniṣads, the permanent state of ascetic practice, that is, asceticism as a profession, became a model of an ideal life. A prototype of *brāhmaṇa* ascetics can be found in the account of Yājñavalkya, a major figure in the Upaniṣads who decided to ‘go forth’ from home permanently in searching for immortality, eternal *atman/brahman*.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ O’Flaherty 1973: 41.

²¹¹ Reddy 2010: 86.

²¹² Knipe 2005: 8998.

²¹³ Skanda. 6.257.11. This is O’Flaherty’s translation. See O’Flaherty 1969: 320.

²¹⁴ Lubin 2010: 3-4.

3.2 Renunciatory Ideology: The Conflict in Value in the Upaniṣads

In order to understand the doctrine in the Upaniṣads as a reference to renunciation of the world, we shall briefly observe the origin and essence of the Upaniṣads. By tradition, the Upaniṣads are considered part of the Vedas that are not systematic or internally consistent like the earlier Vedas. Moreover, they are still regarded as *śruti*, or revealed knowledge, which means they share the same sacred status as the earlier Vedas.²¹⁵ The period of compilation of the Upaniṣads is estimated roughly between 600-400 BCE.²¹⁶

The Upaniṣads, the *Brahma-sūtra* (or *Vedānta-sūtra* of Bādarāyana) and the *Bhagavad-gītā* constitute the three founding texts (*prasthānatrayī*) of Vedānta, of which the Upaniṣads are the original texts (*mūla-prasthāna*).²¹⁷ As the final stage of the development of Vedic literature, the Upaniṣads represent the ‘end of the Vedas—*vedānta*’, so later schools of classical Hinduism that are based on the Upaniṣads make reference to them and interpret them in ways that suit their doctrines. Śaṅkara (in the early years of the ninth century CE), for example, has derived a coherent and systematic philosophy from the Upaniṣads in his Advaita Vedānta, emphasising the transcendent non-dual nature of Reality.²¹⁸

The earlier Upaniṣads were pre-Buddhistic. However, the later Upaniṣads likely emerged out of the same milieu and under the same cultural context as *śramana* traditions such as Buddhism and Jainism. Although Buddhists and Jains oppose orthodox Hinduism in the sense that they regarded the Vedas as fallible, each of these traditions share common features, have evolved side-by-side, and addressed similar issues, so obviously they must have influenced each other. The Upaniṣads are thus not only the source of Vedānta as described above but the

²¹⁵ The Vedas and the Upaniṣads had a special position: in the way they were called ‘*śruti*’, which literally means ‘hearing what is heard’. These *śruti* texts were not supposed to be written down. Instead, they were meant to be passed directly from teacher to disciple, by immediate listening. They show something that is directly ‘heard’, not indirectly ‘remembered’ or ‘*smṛti*’. *The Upanishads: An Introduction*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.infinityfoundation.com/UpnsIntr.pdf>. [Accessed: 27 March 2014]

²¹⁶ According to Patrick Olivelle, the first Upaniṣads were composed about the sixth century BCE and the later verse Upaniṣads certainly after the rise of urbanisation and possibly even after the creation of the Maurya empire in the late fourth century BCE. See “the social background of the Upaniṣads” in Olivelle 1998: 4-7.

²¹⁷ Śarmā 1996: 120-121.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

reference point of all Indian philosophy, orthodox and heterodox.²¹⁹

One of the most important of these developments which were to become normative for orthodox Hinduism (c. 600–200 BCE) was the concept of *karma*, rebirth and liberation (*mokṣa*).²²⁰ The concept of *karma*²²¹ predates the Hindu classical age, but during that era it came to assume a new meaning. In the Vedic period, *karma* referred simply to ritual action; it was the work that the priests performed to make sacrifice effective. However, in the development of the classical Hinduism (c. 200 BCE – 1100 CE), it came to include the idea of moral action, which included not just deeds performed by the body but also thoughts and words.²²² In the Upaniṣads, *karma* determines the form and status of one’s next birth. It refers to the causality which binds the consequences of an action to its cause, called the “fruition” of *karma* (*karma-phala*). The *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* links rebirths to a person’s *karma*: “Either as a worm, or as in insect, or as a fish or as a bird, or as a lion, or as a boar, or as a snake, or as a tiger, or as a person, or as some other in this or that condition, he is born again according to his deeds, according to his knowledge ...”²²³

Likewise the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* asserts that “he who is the doer of a deed, he is the ‘enjoyer’ of the consequences of whatever he has done”.²²⁴ In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, which is considered one of the oldest Upaniṣads, we also find the idea that one’s actions will determine one’s future birth. The text reads:

Now, people here whose behaviour is pleasant can expect to enter a pleasant womb, like that of a woman of the *Brahmin*, the *Kṣatriya*, or the *Vaiśya* class. But people of foul behaviour can expect to enter a foul womb, like that of a dog, pig or an outcast woman.²²⁵

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Thrower 1980: 46.

²²¹ The term *karma* is derived from the root \sqrt{kr} , which means ‘to do, make, perform, accomplish, cause, effect, prepare, undertake’. The word is the same as *karman* which is neuter. In the religious and philosophical sense, *karma* means an ‘action, potential’ which manifests itself as the moral result or consequence in lives hereafter. In the Vedic literature before the Upaniṣads i.e. Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas, *karman* meant ‘any religious act or rite as sacrifice, oblation, etc. especially as originating in the hope of future recompense and as opposed to speculate religion or knowledge of spirit.’ In the Brāhmaṇas *karma* is used to mean meritorious sacrificial work (*yajña*). The Śatapatha Brahmaṇa (1.1.2.1) says: sacrifice is the *karma*: *yajño vai kárma*. See Krishan 1997: 4.

²²² Muesse 2011: 69.

²²³ KauśU. 1.2. Krishan 1997: 18.

²²⁴ ŚU. 5.7.

²²⁵ ChU. 5.10.7. Olivelle 1998: 237.

Krishan points out the paradoxical relation of the idea of *karma* and the ethicization expressed in the Upaniṣads:

It is paradoxical that the Upaniṣads which postulated *karma* as a law of ethical discipline also seek escape from the operation of that law either in renunciation of worldly activity or in the grace of God. It is naive to explain away the paradox by justifying the law of karma in the context of the empirical reality and which loses its validity with reference to transcendental reality, or through an omnipotent creator who can liquidate *karmas*. In doing so the Upaniṣads unwittingly blurred the distinction between good and evil, *duṣkṛta* and *sukṛta*, pregnant for the growth of anti-nomianism in Indian philosophy and religion.²²⁶

Scholars debate as to whether the Brahmins encountered the *śramaṇas* and adopted their world-view and ideologies of *karma* or whether these doctrines were developed out of an amalgam of ideas stemming from within or outside the Brāhmaṇic tradition. To pinpoint the influence of these doctrines remains problematic but what is evident is the climate of late Vedic society. As Olivelle suggests, the rise of urbanisation may have been accompanied by a growing sense of dissatisfaction and unease, which may in turn have influenced the emphasis on human suffering. The inevitable suffering in life is reflected in the doctrines of *karma*, rebirth and liberation.²²⁷ The society and culture reflected in the principal Upaniṣads differ greatly from the early Vedic period; they reflect a social background of ‘court and crafts’ rather than ‘village and agriculture’.²²⁸

Although, as we know, the Upaniṣads assert continuity of certain elements with the older Vedas, some of the Upaniṣads are opposed to Vedic thought. The term “Vedānta”, which was later regarded as the “completion” or “consummation” of the Vedas, reflects the problem of the relation between the new light and the old.²²⁹ Klostermaier puts this forward: “Some authors treat them as a kind of protestant countercurrent to the prevailing Vedic sacrificial religion, others as a plain continuation of the same tradition. Both views have their merits and their evident

²²⁶ Krishan 1997: 26.

²²⁷ Olivelle 1993: 58-60.

²²⁸ Olivelle explains that there are very few agricultural metaphors and images in the Upaniṣads, while examples derived from crafts such as weaving, pottery, and metallurgy are numerous. These crafts, of course, could appear in village life, but the dominance of craft metaphors at least suggests a milieu somewhat removed from the agricultural routine of villages. See Olivelle 1998: 7.

²²⁹ Young 1983: 42.

shortcomings: the Upaniṣads quote the Vedas quite frequently and make use of Vedic ideas; they also contain anti-Vedic polemics and represent unorthodox viewpoints.”²³⁰

With regard to the contents of the Upaniṣads, we should not expect them to contain a systematic philosophy, but a string of more or less developed insights, theories, and principles. Sacrificial ritual is the key to understanding how the great metaphysical breakthrough of the Upaniṣads occurred. Whereas the earlier Vedas are centrally concerned with rituals and sacrifice, the Upaniṣads seem to reflect the outlook of the solitary ascetic rather than the world of the priest or religious official.²³¹ They denied the efficacy attributed to sacrifices, to funeral oblations, and gifts to the priests, which were the fundamentals of Brahmanic philosophy.²³²

One such conflict in value systems between the older Vedas and the Upaniṣads is evident from the doctrine of the three *ṛṇas* (debts) each individual has to repay in his life²³³— as recorded in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* of the *Yajurveda*:

A Brahmin, at his very birth, is born with a triple debt—of studentship to the seers, of sacrifice to the gods, of offspring to the fathers. He is, indeed, free from debt, who has a son, is a sacrificer, and who has lived as a student.²³⁴

Yet at the same time, the Upaniṣads devalue the importance of sacrifices— as recorded in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*: “The fools who hail that [the sacrifice and the rites] as the best, return once more to old age and death.”²³⁵ Olivelle asserts, “Sacrifice, the karma par excellence, far from being the source of immortality, is in fact a cause of human bondage and suffering. Ritual activity, therefore, is not only devalued but also acquires a negative connotation.”²³⁶

²³⁰ Klostermaier 2007: 156.

²³¹ Muesse 2011: 67.

²³² Karunyakara 2002: 32-33.

²³³ These three debts are (1) the debts to fathers of learning and founders of religious life (*rṣi ṛṇa*), (2) the debt to ancestors (*pitṛ ṛṇa*) and (3) the debts to gods (*deva ṛṇa*). The individual can repay these debts only by studying the Veda (or observing all the rules laid down for a *brahmacārin* in *brahmacarya āśrama*), begetting offspring (or entering the stage of a householder/*grhastha*), offering sacrifices according to one’s capacity as householder and as a *vānaprastha*/dweller. See Prakash 2005: 233.

²³⁴ TS. 6.3.10.5. See Olivelle 1993: 47.

²³⁵ MuU. 1.2. See Olivelle 2001: 276.

²³⁶ Olivelle 1993: 62.

Olivelle comments further that the ideological conflict concerning the two value systems is further presented as a contrast between village and wilderness, expressing the controversy on the issue of the relative value of engagement in social duties and renunciation. Olivelle quotes the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*:

Now, the people who know this, and the people here in the wilderness who venerate thus: “Austerity is faith” – they pass into the flame, from the flame into the day, from the day into the fortnight of the waxing moon ... from the moon into lightning. Then a person who is not human – he leads them to *brahman*. This is the path leading to the gods.

The people here in villages, on the other hand, who venerate thus: “Gift-giving is offerings to gods and to priests” – they pass into the smoke, from the smoke into the night ... from space into the moon. This is King Soma, the food of the gods, and the gods eat it. They remain there as long as there is a residue, and then they return by the same path they went.²³⁷

Likewise, in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (5.24.3-4.) we see the fire sacrifice being praised – it is likened to a mother, signifying nurture and protection. The text reads: “As around their mother here, the hungry children gather; so at the fire sacrifice, do all the beings gather.”²³⁸ However, the praise for the fire sacrifice is now contextualized with “knowledge of the self” that underpins the effectiveness of the ritual. As we are told further: “When someone offers the daily fire sacrifice with this knowledge, all the bad things in him are burnt up like the tip of a reed stuck in the fire.”²³⁹ The knowledge of the self is necessary not only for the sacrificial act but also for the individual’s salvation.

The “true self”, the core essence of the individual, is understood in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* as immortal and equating to *brahman*. The text reads:

The self (*ātman*) is the honey of all beings and all beings are the honey of this self. The radiant and immortal person in the self and the radiant and immortal person connected with the body (*ātman*) — they are both one’s self. It is the

²³⁷ ChU. 5.10.1-2. See Olivelle 2001: 276.

²³⁸ ChU. 5.24.4. See Olivelle (trans.) 1998: 245.

²³⁹ ChU. 5.24.3. Ibid.

immortal; it is *brahman*; it is the Whole.²⁴⁰

In the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, considered a later text of the early Upaniṣads, it is made clear that to attain immortality ascetic practices must accompany knowledge of the true nature of the self:

Like oil in sesame seeds and butter in curds, like water in the river-bed and fire in the fire-drills, so when one seeks it with truth and austerity, one grasps that self (*ātman*) in the body (*ātman*) – that all-pervading self, which is contained [in the body], like butter in milk. That is *brahman*, the highest object of the teachings on hidden connections (*upaniṣad*), an object rooted in austerity and the knowledge of the self.²⁴¹

It is clear that the self gains great cosmological and soteriological significance in the Upaniṣad with implications for the institution of asceticism. Hence, it is no doubt that asceticism, which is never accepted in the earlier source, is assumed an essential part of the equipment for attaining the absolute in the later texts. For example, in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (1.2.11) the attainment of the absolute is the reward of those who are wise, calm, of holy conduct, practice faith and asceticism, or, according to the *Praśna Upaniṣad* (1.9.10), the sun and the absolute are assured to those who give themselves up to holy conduct (*brahmacarya*), asceticism, faith, and knowledge, while rebirth is attained by those who hold that sacrifice and gifts are their action.

3.3. The Householder-Renouncer Opposition in the *Āśrama* System

Behind these great changes, the idealized progression lay in the tension between two differing modes of religious life—that of the householder, which is based in the world, and that of the renouncer.²⁴² The transition from the Vedic worldview to a new ideology around the quest for realization of the true self and liberation from *saṃsāra* gave rise to the existence of the pattern of the four *āśramas*, which was evolved as a way to absorb the new without discarding the old.²⁴³ The purpose of creating such a system that is generally accepted is to find a way to appropriate and transform modes of religious life by laying particular stress on ascetic

²⁴⁰ BrhU. 2.5.14. See Olivelle (trans.) 1998: 73.

²⁴¹ ŚU. 1.15-16. See Olivelle (trans.) 1998: 417.

²⁴² Lochtefeld 2002: 663-664.

²⁴³ Olivelle 2005: 8093.

life and providing a place and time for asceticism.²⁴⁴ As Olivelle describes: “attempts were made to find theoretical legitimations for the lifestyles of both the renouncer and the householder, the most significant of which was the system of the four *āśramas*.”²⁴⁵ With the development of the *āśrama* system, both modes of life, viz., the renouncer and the householder, clearly gained a legitimate place within the tradition.²⁴⁶

Let us first consider the meaning of *varṇāśramadharmā*—the “*dharma* of classes and *āśramas*”. In orthodox Hinduism, the four periods of individual life occur in the full lifetime of each one of us: childhood, youth, maturity, and old age. Each of these periods in Hindu philosophy is dominated by one of the four aims of life (*puruṣārtha*)²⁴⁷, which are virtue (*dharma*), success (*artha*), pleasure (*kāma*), and liberation (*mokṣa*). In principle, the demands of attainment of maturity are indicated by ‘*kāma*’, which stands for all the appetites of sensual pleasure. The demands of the social environment are indicated by ‘*artha*’, which means success, property, wealth, and power. That is, one has to acquire the social achievement so that one may maintain one’s household and support one’s dependents; but all this should be done within the limits of the moral law indicated by ‘*dharma*’ in this formula.²⁴⁸

It is during this period of orthodox Hinduism that the concept of *dharma* is linked together with many other concepts to form a consistent body of Hindu socio-religious theories.²⁴⁹ Two obligations (*dharma*) in particular dominate the concept of *dharma* in the *Dharma-śāstras*, one with regard to one’s position in society, that is, class (*varṇa*), and the other with regard to one’s stage of life (*āśrama*). These two concerns together became known as *varṇāśramadharmā* whose fulfillment was a sign of brahmanical orthopraxy and, indeed, part of an essentialist definition of a Hindu.²⁵⁰

The term ‘*varṇa*’²⁵¹ refers to the four classes of Vedic society which we know as ‘castes’: the Brahmins (*brāhmaṇa*), the nobles or warriors

²⁴⁴ Olivelle 1992: 52.

²⁴⁵ Olivelle 1986: 51.

²⁴⁶ Olivelle 1986: 158.

²⁴⁷ Early texts treating the goals of human life commonly refer to *kāma*, *artha* and *dharma* as the *trivarga* or “three categories” of possible human pursuits.

²⁴⁸ Morgan (ed.) 1987: 21.

²⁴⁹ Lawton and Morgan 2007: 4.

²⁵⁰ Flood 1996: 58.

²⁵¹ *Varṇa* generally refers to the appearance of something (its form and colour), and the term is used with significance in the R̥gveda to differentiate the Vedic Indians, who called themselves ‘noble ones’ (*āryas*), from the autochthonous peoples they encountered. See Lipner 1994: 72.

(*kṣatriya*), the commoners (*vaiśya*) and the serfs (*śūdra*). These four *varṇas* fit into a social hierarchy within the context of the related system of sub-castes or *jāti*.²⁵² The top three classes are called the ‘twice-born’ (*dvija*) because boys underwent an initiation (*upanayana*).²⁵³ The caste hierarchy is based on the polarity between purity and pollution, the Brahmans being the purest at the top, the outcastes or untouchables (*mleccha*), sometimes considered a fifth class, the most impure arranged at the bottom. Further division came about as a result of mixed marriage, through offspring from intercourse with lower caste concubines and casual intercourse across the caste barriers.²⁵⁴ As with the ‘*varṇa*’ system, the ‘*āśrama*’ system is concerned with the demands of the various modes in an individual’s life: they provide a paradigmatic model of how the twice-born or high-caste man should live. The four modes of religious life for a Brahmin are: a celibate student (*brahmacarya*), a householder (*gṛhastha*), a forest hermit (*vānaprastha*), and a wandering ascetic (*saṃnyāsa*).²⁵⁵

The term *āśrama* is a relatively new term in the Sanskrit vocabulary as it is neither found in the Vedic literature nor in the early Upaniṣads. Many scholars agree that the *āśrama* system is a completely new invention. Patrick Olivelle, for example, believes the *āśrama* system was introduced so that a scheme could be created within which the pivotal category of *dharma* could be extended to include religious modes of life different from that of the Brahmanical householder. The “creator” of the *āśrama* system intended to do to the diversity of religious lifestyles what the creator of the *varṇa* did to the diversity of social and ethnic groups.²⁵⁶ Initially the term *āśrama* referred to a ‘hermitage’ and came to be applied to the style of life of those Brahmans who lived there.²⁵⁷ Olivelle’s explanation is as follows:

The term *āśrama* has two related meanings. The first is that of a residence, often located in forests, where holy people live and perform religious austerities (*tapas*). This is by far its most common meaning; it is so used in Brahmanical, Buddhist²⁵⁸, and Jain literary sources, as well as in

²⁵² Olivelle 1993: 3-4.

²⁵³ Flood 1996: 58.

²⁵⁴ Werner 2005: 35.

²⁵⁵ According to the original formulation, all *āśramas* except that of the householder are regarded as celibate. See Olivelle 1993: 80.

²⁵⁶ Olivelle 1993: 100-101.

²⁵⁷ Flood 1996: 62.

²⁵⁸ The early Buddhist source use it with very different meaning: hermitage of a Brāhmaṇa ascetic or *jaṭila*. See Olivelle 1978: 28.

nonreligious texts such as drama, poetry, and fables. The second meaning of the term is that of a religious or holy way of life. The latter is, in all likelihood, a technical usage, as it occurs exclusively in Brahmanical literature and mainly within the context of the *āśrama* system.²⁵⁹

The *āśrama* system was created probably during or soon after the fifth century BCE²⁶⁰. The original formulation of the system is found in the four early *Dharmasūtras*²⁶¹, viz. *Gautama* (600–400 BCE), *Baudhāyana* (500–200 BCE), *Āpastamba* (450–350 BCE), and *Vasiṣṭha* (500–100 BCE)²⁶², and it differs markedly from the classical formulation found in Manu and later *Dharmaśāstras* (first to third centuries CE).²⁶³ Although the *Dharmasūtras* contain many rules concerning the lifestyle of a renouncer, they are rather tight-lipped when it comes to a rite of renunciation.²⁶⁴ Olivelle believes these early documents show the discussions and debates on the merits of the householder versus those of the non-householder (renouncer).²⁶⁵ Of these four texts, *Gautama* and *Baudhāyana* are opposed to the innovations of the *āśrama* theory, whereas *Āpastamba* and *Vasiṣṭha* present it as the accepted theory.²⁶⁶ In particular, *Āpastamba* clearly praises celibacy and says the celibate *āśramas* are superior. (ĀpDh 2.23.9).²⁶⁷ In the *Dharmasūtras* the *āśramas* are not regarded as successive stages through which a Brahmin must pass, but as lifelong undertakings and a freedom of choice open to the twice-born male. The time for making that choice is after the young adult (*brahmacārin*)²⁶⁸ has returned home upon completion of his Vedic

²⁵⁹ Olivelle 2010: 684. Olivelle considers *Gautama*, *Baudhāyana* and *Āpastamba* to be the older ones. With regard to the latter two, which are placed at c. 500-200 BCE and 450-350 BCE respectively by Kane, Olivelle believes that “we shall not be far wrong in concluding that at least one of these documents must have been composed by the beginning of the fourth century BCE” (Olivelle 1993: 102). Olivelle further thinks that *Gautama* is older than *Baudhāyana* (1993:83).

²⁶⁰ Olivelle 2008a: 158.

²⁶¹ The topics in the *Dharmasūtra* are devoted to the student, the order of a person's life (*āśramas*), the householder, occupations of the four classes, the king, impurity, ancestral offerings, women and marriage, property, inheritance and penances. See Olivelle, Patrick. 1999. *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Ancient India*. Oxford: World Classics.

²⁶² Olivelle 1978: 29.

²⁶³ Olivelle 2001: 271.

²⁶⁴ Freiburger 2005: 236.

²⁶⁵ According to the original formulation, all *āśramas* except that of the householder are regarded as celibate. See Olivelle 1993: 80.

²⁶⁶ Amongst all four of these texts, *Gautama* and *Baudhāyana* are opposed to the innovations of the *āśrama* theory, whereas *Āpastamba* and *Vasiṣṭha* present it as the accepted theory. See Olivelle 1978: 29-30.

²⁶⁷ Olivelle 1993: 80.

²⁶⁸ The *brahmacārin* is the Vedic student and clearly an ascetic as presented in Atharvaveda. As the *āśrama* system developed, a *bramacārin* is the first of four distinct life-stages. The term *brahmacarya*, which refers to the entire student *āśrama*, carries the central meaning of celibacy, which is regarded as a form of *tapas*. However, the *brahmacarya āśrama*, was approved of by the orthodox tradition long

studies.²⁶⁹

Around the beginning of the Common Era or a little thereafter, the original *āśrama* system was radically recast into its classical formulation encountered for the first time in the legal treatise of Manu (the *Mānava Dharmasāstra*²⁷⁰), which is generally assigned to around the first centuries CE.²⁷¹ It was in this period that the *āśramas*, which were originally alternatives and permanent stages of life, underwent a transformation into the system of four successive stages of life. The new system eliminates choice and transforms the *āśramas* from permanent and lifelong vocations to temporary periods solidified into successive stages through which the twice-born should pass as obligatory modes of life suitable for different periods of an individual's life.²⁷²

At the same time, the new system reaffirms the centrality of the householder suggesting that the Veda authorized only one *āśrama*, that of the householder.²⁷³ The *Dharmasāstra* places the householder above the other three as their very “source” or “womb” (*yoni*)²⁷⁴, while other *āśramas* do not produce offspring. According to Manu the householder’s *āśrama* is praised as the highest and the best. Manu states: “And in accordance with the precepts of the *Veda* and of the *Smṛti*, the housekeeper is declared to be superior to all of them; for he supports the other three,”²⁷⁵ and “those Brahmanas who thoroughly study the tenfold law (*dharma*)²⁷⁶, and after studying obey it, enter the highest state.”²⁷⁷ Here, Manu makes it clear that it is not necessary to become a renouncer to attain liberation; even a householder who follows the tenfold *dharma* can be liberated.²⁷⁸

before the third and fourth stages came into being. Thus, the *brahmacārin* may also be seen as a forerunner of the *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsin*. Like the *brahmacārin*, the *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsin* must also lead a life of complete sexual abstinence. See Kaelber 1989: 108-124)

²⁶⁹ Olivelle 1992: 52.

²⁷⁰ Olivelle 2008a: 159.

²⁷¹ Olivelle 1993: 137.

²⁷² Olivelle 1992: 54.

²⁷³ Olivelle 2005: 7817.

²⁷⁴ Olivelle 1978: 30-31.

²⁷⁵ Manu. 6.89: “But all (or) even (any of) these orders, assumed successively in accordance with the Institutes (of the sacred law), lead the *Brahmana* who acts by the preceding (rules) to the highest state.” See Bühler 1886: 214.

²⁷⁶ The tenfold *dharma* is explained in Manu. 6.91-92 as follows: (91) “By twice-born men belonging to (any of) these four orders, the tenfold law must be ever carefully obeyed.” (92) “Contentment, forgiveness, self-control, abstention from unrighteously appropriating anything, (obedience to the rules of) purification, coercion of the organs, wisdom, knowledge (of the supreme Soul), truthfulness, and abstention from anger, (form) the tenfold law.” See Bühler 1886: 215.

²⁷⁷ Manu. 6.93: “Those *Brahmanas* who thoroughly study the tenfold law, and after studying obey it, enter the highest state.” See Bühler 1886: 215.

²⁷⁸ Olivelle 1984: 134.

The “journey” through the *āśramas*, according to the new system, which one may call the classical, begins at the period of life led as a celibate student (*brahmacarya*) prior to embarking on the life of a householder (*grhastha*), discharging one’s debts to one’s ancestors by begetting sons and to the gods by sacrificing; the householder then retires to the forest (*vānaprastha*) to devote himself to spiritual contemplation; and finally he becomes a homeless wandering ascetic (*saṃnyāsa*).²⁷⁹ Here, the Vedic theory of three debts (*ṛṇa*) was conceived as a scriptural basis for the *āśramas* and used as an argument against the pre-classical system. Payment of the debts is carried out by fulfilling the obligations of the first two *āśramas*. That means, a man can switch from one *āśrama* only in one direction, and thus has to pass through the first three *āśramas* before renouncing.²⁸⁰

Following the classical theory of *āśrama*, even though *saṃnyāsa* is the stage that a man cannot abandon, it is obviously relegated to old age and retirement. As Manu (6.2) states: “when a householder sees his (skin) wrinkled, and (his hair) white, and the sons of his sons, then he may resort to the forest.” Here a man is able to set aside the worldly duties and devote himself to penance, mortification, and meditation. In the words of Manu (6.8): “let him be always industrious in privately reciting the Veda; let him be patient of hardships, friendly (towards all), of collected mind, ever liberal and never a receiver of gifts, and compassionate towards all living creatures.”

To enter the fourth *āśrama* (*saṃnyāsa*), he may take his wife with him if he wishes, but this is optional; he does bring the sacred fire to the new abode in order to perform certain specified sacrifices as prescribed in Manu (6.3-6.4):

Abandoning all food raised by cultivation, and all his belongings, he may depart into the forest, either committing his wife to his sons, or accompanied by her.

Taking with him the sacred fire and the implements required for domestic (sacrifices), he may go forth from the village into the forest and reside there, duly controlling his senses.

In this scheme, celibate modes of life are placed at the very beginning

²⁷⁹ Lochtefeld 2002: 663.

²⁸⁰ Olivelle 1986: 52.

(*brahmacārin*, the first *āśrama* during the period of studentship following Vedic initiation) and at the very end of a man's life (*saṃnyāsa*, the fourth *āśrama* during the last period of life as a world renouncer). The strictly ascetical mode of life—those of the hermit and the renouncer—are recast as an institution of old age.²⁸¹ This is the *āśrama* system that is common in later Hinduism. It is noteworthy that the third *āśrama* (*vānaprastha*, forest hermit)²⁸² had already become obsolete by the early centuries of the Common Era since it was closely connected with the fourth *āśrama* and so its passage to the final *āśrama* had become vague.²⁸³ Moreover, passage through the other three *āśramas* is today an ideal rather than a reality in the lives of most Hindus.²⁸⁴

Although the stages of householder and renouncer are both clearly the most important in the historical development of the *āśrama* system, the two figures would not go very well together, and often reflect the distinction between the society-centered and the world-renouncing ideologies that continued to exist side by side. While throughout the long history of Hinduism there are attempts to reconcile the householder and the renouncer ideals and their respective institutions, the man-in-the-world and the world renouncer remain in tension.²⁸⁵ In the prologue of his book, “*The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Tradition*”, Olivelle states:

The classical system in a special way was intended to blunt the opposition between the two value systems—the one centered around the married householder and the other around the celibate ascetic. The success of the scheme in resolving that basic conflict in Indian culture has been taken for granted by many scholars. I hope to demonstrate that a closer examination of the history of the system will show that the issue was never fully settled and that old battles had to be fought over and over again throughout the Middle

²⁸¹ Olivelle 2010: 687.

²⁸² According to Flood, the significant difference between the practices of *vānaprastha* and *saṃnyāsa* is the use of fire. He explains that *vānaprastha*, as hermits, practiced severe bodily asceticism, eating only certain kinds of food such as vegetables, flowers, roots and fruits and even practising extreme austerity such as sitting surrounded by five fires in the summer or wearing wet clothes in winter, in order to gain spiritual energy or ‘inner heat’ (*tapas*). Unlike the *vānaprastha*, the *saṃnyāsa* has gone beyond the Vedic injunctions of maintaining his sacred fires; living entirely by begging he does not cook his own food. In relinquishing fire and cooked food which are a symbol of culture, he is attempting to transcend the human world for a pure, trans-human realm of spiritual liberation. See Flood 1996: 63.

²⁸³ Olivelle 2010: 687.

²⁸⁴ Olivelle 2005: 7816-7817.

²⁸⁵ Flood 1996: 64.

Ages and down to modern times even after the *āśramas* had become part of the mainstream of Brahmanical theology.²⁸⁶

From Olivelle's comment, we can deduce that the position of renunciation within orthodox Hinduism is complex. It was still opposed in Indian society, at least at an ideological level, since Brahmanism was essentially a ritual religion and renunciation for Brahmanism is essentially a non-ritual state. However, we also know that within the Brahmanical tradition, the shift in emphasis from wandering mendicancy to the abandonment of ritual activity occurred over time.²⁸⁷ The ascetic institution of *saṃnyāsa*, including ideas of and attitudes expressed in the revolutionary paradigm, especially the anti-ritual firelessness (*anagni*) and the pro-celibacy stance, make it likely that they originated within a socio-economic background similar to that of Buddhism and Jainism. Therefore, in the light of what we have discussed so far, we shall not be far wrong in concluding that in the *āśrama* system we capture the voluntary institution of renunciation in orthodox Hinduism which shares the basis with other voluntary organisations, such as Buddhist and Jain monastic orders. This seems to show that it was a reaction to śramaṇic movements.

²⁸⁶ Olivelle 1993: 4.

²⁸⁷ Olivelle 2010: 688.

Chapter 4

Renunciation and *Brahmacarya* in Early Buddhism

4.1 The *Śramaṇa* Tradition: Heterodoxy and Dissent in Early India

It is accepted by many scholars that Indian culture evolved as an interaction between two traditions, the *śramaṇa* and the *brāhmaṇa*, which coexisted in India for a long period of time. Pande, for instance, points out that “in the Vedic period there existed two distinct religious and cultural traditions — the strictly orthodox and Āryan tradition of the *brāhmaṇas*, and, on the fringe of their society, the straggling culture of the *munis* and *śramaṇas*.”²⁸⁸ To link the interaction and mutual influence of these two traditions, Jaini stresses: “Despite their common origin, these two dominant traditions, the orthodox and the heterodox, gave rise to innumerable crosscurrents, sometimes completely losing their identity, and at other times merging in a confluence, only to re-emerge again in a new form and flow in opposite directions.”²⁸⁹

The *śramaṇa* movements are known to have existed in India about the beginning of the 6th century BCE.²⁹⁰ Fuller information about these *śramaṇas* is given in early Jaina and Buddhist literature where they are placed side by side with the *brāhmaṇas* but distinguished from them. The *brāhmaṇas* treated the *śramaṇas* with scant courtesy, calling them *muṇḍakas* (one who has been shaved) and *vasalas* (an inferior person, a wretch or a foul man). It is important to note that if we accept Jaina mythology, Jainism with its pre-historic background and its 24 Tīrthākaras preceded Buddhism by several centuries.²⁹¹

At the beginning of Christian Era, Clement of Alexandria (150-215), a Christian theologian, makes several mentions of the *śramaṇas*, both in the context of the Bactrians and the Indians: “the Indian gymnosophists (naked sages) are also in the number, and the other barbarian philosophers. And of these there are two classes, some of them called *Sarmanae* (Σαρμάναι), and *Brahmanae* (Βραχμαναι).”²⁹² As late as the fourth century BC the Greeks noted the distinction between *brāhmaṇa*

²⁸⁸ Pande 1995: 261.

²⁸⁹ Jaini (ed.) 2001: 48.

²⁹⁰ Varghese 2008: 261-261.

²⁹¹ Pruthi 2004: 137.

²⁹² Clement of Alexandria. *Exhortation to the Heathen*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.piney.com/MuClement.html> [Accessed: 25 July 2014].

and *śramaṇa*.²⁹³ Paul LeValley states:

Nearchus, who traveled to India in the army of Alexander the Great in 326 BCE, immediately noticed two Indian religious traditions: the *brāhmaṇas* (who at that time enjoyed official sanction as advisors to kings), and the *śramaṇa* who did not – the Gymnosophists [naked sages] being among this latter group. The ambassador Megasthenes, after living in India, confirmed this division into two main clusters, but could further distinguish the various *śramaṇa* groups only superficially by what they wore (or did not wear), or by where they tended to live.²⁹⁴

The hostility between these two traditions is reflected in the work of Patañjali (c.150 BCE), a *brāhmaṇa* and Indian grammarian, around three hundred years after the Buddha. He introduces the compound word *śramaṇa-brāhmaṇa* to indicate the unending hostility. In his grammatical treatise, the *Mahābhāṣya*, he gives ‘*śramaṇa-brāhmaṇā*’ as an example of a compound expressing hostile relation, along ‘cat and mouse’, ‘dog and fox’ and ‘snake and mangoose’.²⁹⁵ Hemacandra (1089–1172 AD), a Jain scholar monk, poet, and polymath who wrote on grammar, also cites the same example in an identical context in his grammar, emphasizing the traditional hostility between the *śramaṇas* and the *brāhmaṇas* that permeated medieval Indian society.²⁹⁶

Typically, the *brāhmaṇa* tradition is taken as oriented towards social life, and it developed an elaborate structure of rituals over an extended period. It also regulated the social institutions, the ‘caste’ system, the structure of social interactions, and did not see opting out of society as the only means to liberation.²⁹⁷ The *śramaṇas*, in contrast, represented a new phenomenon in Indian religious life, opting out of social life and searching for inner truth.

The Sanskrit term *śramaṇa* (Pāli *samaṇa*), generically translated as ‘those who strive’, is usually taken as being derived from the root $\sqrt{śram}$, meaning “to exert effort” or “to perform austerities.”²⁹⁸ The word

²⁹³ Pande 1995: 260.

²⁹⁴ Paul LeValley 2000: 143-144. See also Karttunen, Klaus. 1997. *India and the Hellenistic World*. Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society.

²⁹⁵ Kumari 1989: 12.

²⁹⁶ Jaini 2001: 49.

²⁹⁷ Balagangadhara 1994: 211.

²⁹⁸ Larson 1995: 67.

śramaṇa is found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* where it is placed side by side with *tāpasa* (one who practices religious austerities—from √*tap* ‘to burn’ or ‘be heated’), indicating that a *śramaṇa*, like a *tāpasa*, belonged to a class of ascetics, whereas in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, it has obvious reference to the shaven-headed ascetics who reviled the Vedas.²⁹⁹ So it is clear that this word *śramaṇa* referred exclusively to a member of heterodox orders³⁰⁰ or non-Brahmaṇical mendicant groups that began to appear in North India around the sixth century BCE.

The crucial difference, however, is that the *śramaṇa* groups did not accept the authority of the Vedas, nor did they accept the validity of the sacrificial system. *Śramaṇas* rejected the sacred utterances of the *brāhmaṇ* priests, the Vedas in their elitist language of Sanskrit, as well as the supposed superiority of the Brahmaṇical priests in the developing hierarchical social reality.³⁰¹ Brahmins strongly advocated a division of the social order based on the relative purity of the social duties known as the *varṇas*. From a brahmaṇical perspective, this social system was a reflection of *dharma*, the sacred order of the universe. The *śramaṇa* traditions did not oppose the division of society, in the sense of seeking to overturn the social order or replace it with an alternative; but they did not believe in the sacredness of that system. *Śramaṇas* believed it is merely a convenient, man-made way, having no bearing upon the spiritual advancement or purity of person.³⁰² Unlike the *brāhmaṇa* tradition, the *śramaṇa* tradition was led by men who came from all ranks of society.³⁰³ Having renounced society and become wanderers, they did not belong to the domain of the ‘caste’ system and thus were outside the ‘caste’ system. Many *brāhmaṇas*, indeed, joined the *śramaṇa* movements, thereby leaving their old tradition, and were assimilated into the new tradition, which was typically a classless one.³⁰⁴ By virtue of having abandoned all social commitments they were free to spend their time performing austerities such as fasting, remaining utterly motionless for long periods, abstaining from sleep, sexual pleasure and so on, and, of course, they would disseminate their teachings to the villages and cities and build up followers in society.

At the time of the Buddha, the main organized schools of *śramaṇas* were, besides the Buddhists, the Ājīvaka, Lokāyata, Jaina and Agnostic

²⁹⁹ Pande 1995: 259.

³⁰⁰ Jaini (ed.) 2001: 48.

³⁰¹ Larson 1995: 67.

³⁰² Long 2013: 46-47.

³⁰³ Warder 2000: 32.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

(Ājñāna) schools.³⁰⁵ Among the many *śramaṇas*, the Buddha and Mahāvīra³⁰⁶ were eminent teachers who claimed to have found a solution to the problem of human existence and delivered their religious discourses in order to offer the path to achieve emancipation. As Warder states:

For the most part such traditions appear to be attempts by various schools to assert the antiquity and absolute truth of their doctrines by attributing them to legendary teachers of the past who, if they discovered the truth, must be presumed to have discovered the same truth as more recent teachers of the school.³⁰⁷

Indeed, the answers to the quest for truth differed amongst *śramaṇa* schools, but most shared the idea that enlightenment could only be found by overcoming the seeds of innate ignorance.³⁰⁸ Most of the *śramaṇas* believed in transmigration in some form: either of a ‘soul’ or of a stream of consciousness from a dying body to a newly conceived one.³⁰⁹ In addition, most also agreed that the truly ideal state must involve liberation (*mokṣa*) from the cycle of rebirth.³¹⁰ The ideas of non-Vedic movements with associated notions of *karma*, rebirth and liberation had proven to be a real threat to the continuance of the *brāhmaṇa* tradition. Under the dominance of the *śramaṇa* traditions, the ritual of sacrifice (*yajña*) was transformed³¹¹ and replaced by asceticism (*tapas*) as a means of achieving the aim of life, salvation (*mokṣa*) from *saṃsāra*.³¹² The emergence of the *śramaṇa* thus marked the decline in the Vedic sacrificial tradition. Nevertheless, the *brāhmaṇs* reacted by developing philosophical and practical systems of their own, meeting the new ideas with adaptations of their doctrines.³¹³ As we have discussed in the previous chapter, one of the most important adaptations was the place made for renunciant asceticism in the form of *saṃnyāsa* as the last of the four traditional stages of life (*āśramas*).³¹⁴ While most of the *śramaṇa*

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 38.

³⁰⁶ Mahāvīra was not the first ascetic teacher of Jainism. There had been many other teachers before him called *īrthamkaras* or “ford-makers,” meaning teachers able to cross the rivers of suffering and to attain enlightenment. Some have claimed that the Jaina religion should be considered the oldest of the non-Āryan group, as an independent pre-Buddhist religion.

³⁰⁷ Warder 2000: 38.

³⁰⁸ Siderits 2007: 16.

³⁰⁹ Warder 2000: 34.

³¹⁰ Siderits 2007: 16.

³¹¹ Jacobsen 2013: 2.

³¹² Jaini (ed.) 2001: 51.

³¹³ Warder 2000: 35.

³¹⁴ Lochtefeld 2002: 639.

traditions had died out in India by the eleventh century, successive movements of *saṃnyāsin* (Hindu monks known as *sādhus*) have continued to be among the most dynamic representatives of Indian religion.³¹⁵

4.2 The Buddha and the Great Renunciation

Buddhism from its earliest days emerges with a clear paradigm of renunciation in the Buddha's hagiography marked by his going forth from the palace called the Great Renunciation (Skt. *abhinīṣkramaṇa*, P. *abhinikkhamaṇa*). All biographical accounts are thus imbedded in the social and spiritual phenomena from the perspective of world renunciation. One cannot understand early Buddhist monasticism without understanding this worldview and the values that led the Buddha to renounce the social ties and wealth as an heir to the throne and to establish the *saṅgha* in an alternative parallel society of world renouncers.

Departure from home to homeless state was the defining element of asceticism within Brahminical, Buddhist, and Jain traditions.³¹⁶ The technical term for the 'going forth' is *pravrajyā* (Skt.) *pabbajjā* (P.) which is also a common term for renunciation and connotes a departure from household life into the homeless state (P. *agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajjā*). It is a technical term which refers to the act of leaving the world and adopting an ascetic lifestyle. In a more technical meaning, it is the lower ordination or the preliminary of the two stages by which one become a Buddhist monk.³¹⁷

According to Pāli Buddhist tradition the term related to renunciation is *nekkhamma* (Skt. *naiṣkrāmya*) which is derived from the word *nikkhamma* (Skt. *naiṣkrāmya*) meaning 'to go forth from', 'to come out of', 'to leave the household life', 'to retire from the world', or 'to give up evil desire'. The word *nekkhamma*³¹⁸ is often used as equivalent to *nikkhamma* (or *nikkhammati*)³¹⁹ referring to the fact that one leaves household life and gives up all desires in order to lead a life as

³¹⁵ Whitehouse and Laidlaw (eds.) 2004: 91.

³¹⁶ Olivelle 2011: 107.

³¹⁷ Keown 2003: 222.

³¹⁸ Pali-English Dictionary. *Nekkhamma*. The Pali Text Society. [Online]. Available at: <http://dsal.srv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.2:1:692.pali> [Accessed: 30 June 2514].

³¹⁹ Pali-English Dictionary. *Nikkhamati*. The Pali Text Society. [Online]. Available at: <http://dsal.srv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.2:1:51.pali> [Accessed: 30 June 2514].

mendicant.³²⁰ In *Sammāparibbājanīya-sutta*, it says: “how should a *bhikkhu*, going out of the house, giving up desires, rightly wander as a Buddhist mendicant in this world?”³²¹

Siddhārtha Gautama, as previously mentioned, was one of the *śramaṇas* in Northeast India who went forth in roughly the sixth century BCE. The prince Siddhārtha’s ‘going forth’ is called Great Renunciation (P. *abhinikkhamaṇa*, Skt. *abhiṣkramaṇa*). The classical literature telling the story of the Buddha is found in Pāli texts such as the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* (‘Great Discourse on the Lineage’) of the Dīgha Nikāya and the *Nidānakathā* (‘Introductory Tale’)—an introduction to the commentary on the Jātaka, a collection of stories of the Buddha’s previous birth. It is also to be found in Sanskrit texts such as the *Mahāvastu* (‘Great Account’), the *Lalitavistara* (‘The Elaboration of the Play [of the Buddha]’), and in Aśvaghōṣa’s poem, the *Buddhacarita* (‘Acts of the Buddha’).³²² Additionally, there is a Chinese text called the *Fo-benxing-ji-jing* 佛本行集經.³²³ Most of these discourses include the events surrounding the Great Renunciation; generally the *bodhisattva*’s leaving the palace and his becoming an ascetic are differentiated and treated as separate events.

The biographical tradition as a whole agrees that, at some point, the *bodhisattva* grew tired of his life in the palace. He came to realize that the whole world does not enjoy such ease, but is exposed to suffering; becoming concerned and reflective, he muses on these matters, and resolves to give up his hedonistic pursuits. The *Nidānakathā*, for example, tells how the young prince Siddhārtha, who was living a life of luxury in Kapilavastu, desired to go forth after having seen the four signs (P. *catunimitta*, Skt. *caturṇimitta*): an aged man, a sick man, a dead man, and a *śramaṇa*. Deeply shaken by the realization of the impermanence of life, the prince returned the palace. The *Nidānakathā* describes the episode before ‘going forth’ in vivid terms:

And the *Bodhisatta* awoke and, seating himself cross-legged on the couch, saw that the women had thrown down their instruments and were asleep. Some were dribbling, making

³²⁰ Sasaki 1986: 5.

³²¹ Sn. 63: *Nikkhamma gharā panujja kāme, kathaṃ bhikkhu sammā so loke paribbajeyya...*

³²² Gethin 1998: 17.

³²³ The *Fo-benxing-ji-jing* 佛本行集經 was translated from Sanskrit by Jñānagupta (闍那崛多) during the Sui dynasty between 587-591 CE. For the following translation, see Samuel Beal, trans. 1875. *The Romantic Legend of Śākya Buddha*. London: Trübner & Co., which is a translation of the Chinese text.

their bodies wet, some were grinding their teeth, some were snoring, some were talking in their sleep, some had their mouths open, and some [lay] with their clothes fallen apart and horribly revealing their private parts. Seeing this great alteration in their appearance, he felt less and less sensual desire. The majestic building, like the adorned and prepared dwelling of Sakka, seemed [to him] like a new cemetery filled with various pierced corpses. The world of the three modes of existence appeared to him as a house on fire. “How pitiful it all is! How wretched it all is!” he cried lamentingly, and his mind was turned utterly to the thought of renouncing the world.³²⁴

In the middle of the night, when his wife Yasodharā had just given birth to a son, Rāhula, the prince gave instructions for a horse bridled by his servant Channa. The *Nidānakathā* gives a moving description of the event:

Then, thinking, “I must make the great renunciation of the world right now,” he arose from his couch, went to the door, and called out, “Who is there?” Channa, who had been sleeping with his head resting on the threshold, replied, “Prince, it is I, Channa.” “I have decided to make the great renunciation of the world today. Saddle a horse for me.”³²⁵

Having made the decision to renounce the world, the prince was filled with love for his son³²⁶ and wished to see him before his departure.

At that moment a lamp, fed with sweet-smelling oil, was burning dimly in the inner chamber. The mother of Rāhula was asleep on the bed strewn with many jasmine flowers, and

³²⁴ Jā. I. 61: *Bodhisatto pabujjhivā sayanapiṭṭhe pallamkena nisinno addasa tā itthiyo turiyabhaṇḍāni avattharivā niddāyantiyo ekaccā ekacc kākacchantiyo ekaccā vipalapatiyo ekaccā dnte khādantiyo ekaccā apagatavathā pākāṭabhībhacchasambādhaṭṭhānā. So tāsāṃ taṃ vipakāraṃ disvā bhīyyosomatāya kāmesu viratto ahosi. Tassa alamkatapaṭiyattaṃ sakkabhavanasadisaṃ pi taṃ mahātalaṃ vippavidghanānākuṇapabharitaṃ āmakasusānaṃ viya upṭṭhāsi, tayo bhavāādittagebasadisā viya khāyimsu, upaddutaṃ vata bho upassaṭṭhaṃ vata bho’ti udānaṃ pavatti, ativiya pabbajjāya cittaṃ name.* Hajime Nakamura’s Translation. See Nakamura 2001: 104-105.

³²⁵ Jā. I. 61-62: *So ajj’ eva mayā mahābhikkhamaṇaṃ nikkhamitum vaṭṭatīti’ sayanā vuṭṭhāya dvārasamīpaṃ gantvā, ko etthā’ti āha. Ummāre sīsāṃ katvā nipano Channo, ahaṃ ayyaputta Channo’ ti āha. Ahaṃ aṭṭa mahābhikkhamaṇaṃ nikkhamitukāmo, ekaṃ me assaṃ kappēhīti.*

³²⁶ In the *Atthasālinī* commentary, when Rāhula is born, the prince Siddhārtha not only makes the remark about a “bond”, but decides to renounce there and then, saying “I acknowledge the strength of my affection for my son (*putta-sineha*); I will cut this bond immediately before it grows bigger.” (As. 33-34)

resting her hand on the head of her son. Stopping with his foot on the threshold, the Bodhisatta thought, “If I lift her hand to take my son, she will awake; and that will prevent my going away. I will come back and see him when I have become a Buddha.” And he left the palace.³²⁷

Without having seen his newborn son, he left the city of Kapilavastu at midnight riding through the east gate of the city. He reached the river Anomā in the same night, and on the other bank he cut off his hair, put on the robe and spent his new life in a mango-grove near the village of Anūpiya on the outskirts of the city.

It is important to note that in *Sanḅhabhedavastu* of the Sanskrit *Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya* and Chinese Buddhist text, the *Fo-benxing-ji-jing* 佛本行集經 we find an alternative version of the Buddha’s biography which specifies the night of the Great Renunciation as the night of Rāhula’s conception.³²⁸ In *Sanḅhabhedavastu*, it is made explicit that the *bodhisattva* decides to have sex with his wife before leaving in order to prove his maleness:

Lest others say that the Prince Śākyamuni was not a man [Skt. *apumān*—a eunuch] and that he wandered forth without ‘paying attention’ to Yaśodharā, Gopikā, Mṛgajā, and the rest of his sixty thousand wives, [the prince entered his bedchamber]. And thinking ‘let me now “pay attention” to Yaśodharā,’ he did so, and Yaśodharā became pregnant.³²⁹

The *Fo-benxing-ji-jing*, gives a similar story but tells us the different reason: the *bodhisattva* expressly makes love to Yaśodharā in order to console her after their dreadful dreams:

After hearing the words of the prince, Yaśodharā, who had just experienced pain which her pleasant body had not experienced before, went back to her bed and fell asleep. The prince wanted to console Yaśodharā, and with the

³²⁷ Davids and Fausbøll 1878: 173.

³²⁸ Deeg 2010: 64-67.

³²⁹ SBhV. I. 81. See *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Sanḅhabhedavastu, Being the 17th and Last Section of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*, ed. Raniero Gnoli (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1977), vol. 1, pp. 81-83, vol. 2, pp. 30-44 (partial English trans., John S. Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1995), pp. 10-18).

pleasures of the five (senses) they entertained each other and then slept together.

Obviously, both texts present a rather different picture of the *Bodhisattva* at the crucial moment. Interestingly, this biographical episode demonstrates that the *Bodhisattva* could have achieved the highest worldly goals of a man can wish for: a kingdom, wealth, wives, and sons: nothing that a man should achieve is left unachieved. It proves that the *Bodhisattva* does not leave out of failure, but he chooses to leave in order to achieve the ultimate or supra-mundane goal. As John Strong points out: “Instead of turning away in disgust from sexuality and abandoning the family life, the *Bodhisattva* here, in his last act as a prince, affirms the householder's state and fulfills his sexual duty by engendering a son”.³³⁰

The Majjhima Nikāya's account of the Buddha's early life makes it clear that the *Bodhisattva* realises that the confinement of the household life does not offer the appropriate conditions for fully dedicating oneself to progress towards liberation; going forth was necessary for the awakening:

Full of impediments is the household life, a dusty path (a path of defilements); whereas the life of renunciation is like the open sky (free from hindrances). It is not easy to lead this holy life in all its perfection and purity like a polished conch-shell by a person living the household life.³³¹

According to the text, it seems that a flawlessly pure life is extremely difficult to live as a householder. Passages as the ones above imply that it is necessary to get rid of defilements and that this is more easily achieved by adherence to a life of strict purity, characterized by renunciation of the world. Although not made explicit here, the texts go on to relate how being able to practice the purest life leads here and now to the final goal, to *nirvāṇa*, in which all defilements are eradicated. So the texts assert that some form of reclusion involving detachment from the world is the ideal pre-requisite for the practice of *brahmacarya*.³³²

Alan Cole, in his book *Sex, Marriage, and Family in World Religions* lists four basic categories of Buddhist discourse that focus on familial

³³⁰ Strong 2009: 74.

³³¹ MN. I. 237: *sambādho gharāvāso rajāpatho, abbhokāso pabbajjā. Nayidaṃ sukaraṃ agāraṃ ajjhāvasatā ekanta-pari-puññaṃ ekanta-pari-suddhaṃ saṅkhalikhitam brahmacariyaṃ caritum. Yannūnāhaṃ kesamassuṃ ohāretvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajeyyan'ti.*

³³² The significance of renunciation for *brahmacariya* is explained in details in Perera 1993: 50.

issues. For the first categories, he proposes the language of renunciation which, he says, focuses on “negative aspects,” “the unsatisfactory and even dangerous aspects of family life.” He points out: “...one could also say that, even in the earliest statements, Buddhist rhetoric has a tendency to see life as essentially negative, but not in some Manichaeian sense of being evil, simply rather as something to avoid.”³³³ Serinity Young, with regard to the marital relationship, goes further and suggests that: “Despite the *Singāla-sutta*’s description of how a Buddhist should treat his parents, children, and wife³³⁴, in his own life the Buddha did not fulfil his obligations to his father, his son, or his wife.”³³⁵ Likewise, Liz Wilson discusses the idea of Buddhist renunciation as “a death to the social world that leaves grieving relatives in its wake.”³³⁶

Statements such as those quoted above lead to the question of why the world renouncer’s lifestyle is considered to be superior and what the Buddhists did intend to achieve by following the Buddha’s Path? To attempt to answer this question, we should start by examining the *bodhisattva*’s quest for awakening. As mentioned above, it was pointed out that the *bodhisattva* Gautama had a specific motive for renunciation. The reflection that motivated him to set out on his quest is expressed in more detail in the following discourse:

Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened *Bodhisatta*, I too, being myself subject to birth, sought what was also subject to birth; being myself subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, I sought what was also subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement. Then I considered thus: ‘Why, being myself subject to birth, do I seek what is also subject to birth? Why, being myself subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, do I seek what is also subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement? Suppose that, being myself subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is

³³³ Browning, Green, and Witte (eds.) 2006: 304.

³³⁴ In the *Singālovāda-sutta* ‘The Discourse to Siṅgāla’ (DN. III. 180), the Buddha taught the young Siṅgāla about the code of discipline (*vinaya*) for the householder which pertains to the happiness directly visible in this present life. There are different sets of social duties for laypeople of different social status, such as duties for parents; duties for sons and daughters, duties for teachers; duties for pupils; duties for husband; duties for wife; duties for friend; duties for leaders; duties for employee; duties for laymen towards *śramaṇas*; and duties for *śramaṇas* towards disciples.

³³⁵ Young 2004: 86.

³³⁶ Wilson 1996: 22.

subject to birth, I seek the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna.³³⁷

This account is given by the Buddha as he looks back and has been filtered so as to clearly contrast an average person's quest for worldly things that are subject to decay and death with the noble quest for what is not subject to decay and death.³³⁸ According to Buddhist doctrine, the worldly life is full of entanglement fraught with burning desires and gnawing concerns.³³⁹ The unmindful laypeople's is essentially the environment in which patterns of conduct and thinking develop that will continue to bind one in the cycle of birth and death (*samsāra*), and thus will lead only to sorrow and despair, endlessly repeated.³⁴⁰

As we have already seen, the cycle of rebirth is caused by craving (Skt. *trṣṇā*, P. *taṇhā*, a synonym of *kāma*) and attachment (Skt.; P. *upādāna*). While craving and attachment are the causes of birth, decay, and death, they also lead to suffering. Thus, craving leads not only to suffering here and now, but also to further suffering in the future in the form of rebirth and consequently to decay and death. Therefore, the elimination of future suffering by putting an end to the vicious cycle of existence (P. *samsāra-vaṭṭa*, *bhava-cakka*) can be attained by the elimination of craving, and the most effective way of eliminating craving is renunciation

³³⁷ MN. I. 163: *Ahampi sudaṃ, bhikkhave, pubbeva sambodhā anabhi-sambud-dho bodhisattova samāno attanā jātidhammo samāno jātidham-maṃ-yeva pariyesāmi, attanā jarādhammo samāno jarā-dhammaṃ-yeva pariyesāmi, attanā byādhidhammo samāno byādhi-dhammaṃ-yeva pariyesāmi, attanā maraṇadhammo samāno maraṇa-dhammaṃ-yeva pariyesāmi, attanā sokadhammo samāno soka-dham-maṃ-yeva pariyesāmi, attanā saṅki-lesa-dhammo samāno saṅki-lesa-dhammaṃ-yeva pariyesāmi. Tassa mayhaṃ, bhikkhave, etadahosi: 'kiṃ nu kho ahaṃ attanā jātidhammo samāno jātidham-maṃ-yeva pariyesāmi, attanā jarādhammo samāno ... pe ... byādhidhammo samāno ... maraṇadhammo samāno ... sokadhammo samāno ... attanā saṅki-lesa-dhammo samāno saṅki-lesa-dhammaṃ-yeva pariyesāmi? Yannūnāhaṃ attanā jātidhammo samāno jātidhamme ādīnavaṃ viditvā ajātaṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ pariyeseyyaṃ ...*

³³⁸ Anālayo 2010: 20.

³³⁹ In *Māgandiya-sutta*, the Buddha said to Māgandiya: "I have abandoned sensual lust, removed fever for sensual pleasure, and dwell free from thirst, with his mind inwardly stilled. I see other beings who are not free from the lust for sensual pleasure, consumed by craving for sensual pleasures, burning with the fever for sensual pleasures, indulging in sensual pleasures, but neither do I envy them nor do I delight therein. What is the reason for this? Because, Māgandiya, there is a delight other than sensual pleasure, other than unwholesome states which surpasses even heavenly joy."

MN. I. 501: *So aparena samayena kāmānaṃyeva samudayañca atthaṅgamañca assādañca ādīnavañca nissaraṇañca yathābhūtaṃ viditvā kāmataṅhaṃ pahāya kāmāpariḷāhaṃ paṭivinodetvā vigatapipāso ajjhataṃ vūpasantacitto viharāmi. So aññe satte passāmi kāmesu avītarāge kāmataṅhāhi khajjamāne kāmāpariḷāhena pariḷāyhamāne kāme paṭisevante. So tesaṃ na pihemi, na tattha abhiramāmi. Taṃ kissa hetu? Yāhayaṃ, māgaṇḍiya, rati, aññatreva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi—api dibbaṃ sukhaṃ samadhiḡayha tiṭṭhati— tāya ratiyā ramamāno hīnassa na pihemi, na tattha abhiramāmi*

³⁴⁰ Cole 2004: 280-281.

(*nekkhamma*).³⁴¹ In general, *nekkhamma* is defined as the abandoning, letting go (*pahāna*) of desires (*kāma*). The term *pahāna* provides a better understanding of the role of *nekkhamma* in the path to liberation. In comparison with *nekkhamma*, *pahāna* seems to be more a result of the contemplative process than one of its prerequisites.³⁴²

In the Buddha's teaching renunciation is thus seen as a prerequisite for liberation of the soul since it decreases external stimulation, making for a suitable tranquil environment for cultivating the mind. For that reason, in Indian cultural history there is great emphasis on cutting oneself off from the everyday world by living in the wilderness in small groups or in relative solitude in order to meditate and contemplate on the nature of the world.³⁴³ For an individual it is considered impossible to end the cycle of rebirth as householder, in which particularly sexual activity is the utmost *kāma-trṣṇā* that is deeply rooted in laylife. However, it can be ended by renunciation, and only the renouncer's life offers the path to make progress toward *nirvāṇa*.

Given the evaluation of the virtues of renunciation, the life of a householder is termed 'inferior' (*hīna*), mundane (P. *pothujjanika*) in comparison to the pure life of a renouncer. It is considered preferable to go forth from home to homelessness and seek delight in seclusion: "having gone from home to homelessness, let him yearn for that delight in detachment, so difficult to enjoy."³⁴⁴ To revert to the life of a householder from the life of a renouncer is considered 'death': "Monks, in the dispensation of the noble ones death is a synonym for the monk's stepping down from the holy life."³⁴⁵ A life of complete renunciation which culminates in enlightenment (*bodhi*) and the 'deathless', *nirvāṇa*, is therefore defined as one that is wholly fulfilled (P. *ekantaparipuṇṇa*), wholly pure (P. *ekantaparissuddha*), and polished like a conch shell (P. *saṅkhalikhita*), compared with the life of a householder, which is confined (P. *sambādha*) and dusty (P. *rajopatha*).³⁴⁶ It is clear that the Buddha places a higher value on renunciation as opposed to lay life as the latter is more intermingled with the world. The *Suttanipāta*, for example, says that the layman can never hope to emulate the monk—"even as the blue-necked peacock never can match the swan in flight"³⁴⁷ In the

³⁴¹ Kalupahana 1976: 60.

³⁴² Giustarini 2006:170.

³⁴³ Nayar and Sandhu 2007: 10.

³⁴⁴ SN.V. 24; DhP. 87-88: *okā anokaṃ āgamma viveke yattha dūramaṃ, tatrā' bhiratim iccheyya...*

³⁴⁵ SN. II. 270: *maraṇaṃ h'etaṃ, bhikkave, ariyassa vināyā yo sikkhaṃ paccakkhāya hināyā' vattati.*

³⁴⁶ Kalupahana 1995: 68.

³⁴⁷ Sn. 223: *Sikkhī yathā nīlagīvo vihaṅgamo*

*Milinda-panha*³⁴⁸, it is said that a lay stream-enterer should even bow to a monk of lesser attainment, as a way of showing respect to his way of life.³⁴⁹

Renunciation is regarded as an excellent form of virtue and a very important essential element of Buddhism, and the Buddha denounced very strongly the behavior of those renunciants monks who take monastic life as a lazy way of leading a comfortable life. The Buddha clearly points out that mere outward formal renunciation, such as shaving the head, putting on the yellow robe and going out with the alm's bowl etc. are not the real marks of genuine renunciation: "One does not become a *śramaṇa* by shaving the head if one is undisciplined and utters falsehood. How will one be a *śramaṇa* when one is full of desire and greed...?"³⁵⁰ Thus, it is clear that the real purpose of renunciation lies in giving up defilements and in realizing enlightenment. Outward renunciation has no intrinsic value, and may theoretically be dispensed with, whereas true renunciation is a matter of the heart and mind rather than the body. It is renunciation of the world of desires and aversions within, rather than of the renunciation of the worldly objects.

According to the Buddha, a monk who has realized the true nature of worldly life is incapable of reverting to the life of a householder even if kings and councilors, friends and relatives may try to tempt him by saying: "Come along, O man, why do you put on the yellow robe, why do you move about shaven-headed with a begging bowl? Come along, revert to the low [household] life and enjoy worldly pleasure and do meritorious deeds as well."³⁵¹ It is as difficult to turn him back to the household life as it is difficult to change the course of the Ganges.³⁵²

Nevertheless, the renouncing of the world should not be considered as a selfish escapism. Concerning the welfare of others, one might point out that no one can solve for others the problems that one has not yet solved

*Haṃsassa nopeti javaṃ kudācanaṃ,
Evaṃ giḥī nānukaroti bhikkhuno
Munino vicittassa vanamhi jhāyatoti.*

³⁴⁸ The *Milinda-panha* is the Indian non-canonical work about a dialogue between the Indo-Greek King Milinda (Menander) and the Buddhist monk Nagasena. The *Milinda-panha* was probably composed in north-west India about the beginning of the Christian era. The original text being lost, it survives in a Pāli translation of the original prepared in Ceylon.

³⁴⁹ Miln. 162-4. See Davids (ed.) 1890 [Reprinted, 1997]: 231-232.

³⁵⁰ Dhṛ. 264: *na muṇḍakena samaṇo abbato alikaṃ bhaṇaṃ, icchālobhasamāpanno samaṇo kiṃ bhavissati.*

³⁵¹ SN. IV. 190; SN. V. 53, 300-301: *ehi, bho purisa, kiṃ te ime kāsāvā anudahanti, kiṃ muṇḍo kapāla-manu-carasi, ehi hīnāyāvattitvā bhoge ca bhuñjassu, puññāni ca karohī'ti.*

³⁵² SN. IV. 190; SN. V. 53, 300: *... hīnā-yāvat-tissatīti netam thānam vijjatī'ti.*

for himself. Only when one has first helped himself can one then proceed with altruistic activity. As expressed in the Buddha's words: "it is not possible for one who is himself sunk in a mire to pull out another who is in the same situation. But it is possible for one who is not sunk in a mire to pull out another who is."³⁵³

It is important to notice that the ceremony of cutting off the hair reflects a key event in the Buddha's own life. In the *Nidānakathā*, we are told that the first act of the future Buddha after had 'gone forth' was:

Taking his sword in his right hand, and holding the plaited tresses, together with the diadem on them, with his left, he cut them off. So his hair was thus reduced to two inches in length, and curling from the right, it lay close to his head. It remained that length as long as he lived, and the beard the same.³⁵⁴

In ancient India, since it was believed that hair is equal to excrement, people throw away any food contaminated by hair.³⁵⁵ This belief can be found in a Vedic text, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, which explains the reason why a sacrificer must shave before his consecration:

He then shaves his hair and beard, and cuts his nails. For impure, indeed, is that part of man where water does not reach him. Now at the hair and beard, and at the nails the water does not reach him: hence when he shaves his hair and beard, and cuts his nails, he does so in order that he may become pure before he is consecrated.³⁵⁶

According to this interpretation, hair is seen to be equal to bodily waste. Thus, it is unsurprising that cutting hair was viewed as impure and the business of outcaste barbers.³⁵⁷ Moreover, hair may equally be seen as symbolic of the corpse because shaving the hair and cutting the nails was an important part of preparing the dead body for a funeral.³⁵⁸ In a slightly

³⁵³ MN.I. 40: *So vata, cunda, attanā palipa-palipanno param palipa-palipan-naṃ uddharissatīti netam thānaṃ vijjati. So vata, cunda, attanā apalipa-palipanno param palipa-palipan-naṃ uddharissatīti thānametaṃ vijjati.*

³⁵⁴ Jā. I. 64: *...dakkhiṇahatthena asiṃ gaṇhitvā vāmahatthena moliyā saddhiṃ cūlam, gahetvā chindi. Kesā dvaṅgulamattā hutvā dakkhiṇato āvattamānā sīsāṃ allīyimsu, tesāṃ yāvajīvam tad eva pamāṇam ahosi, massuñ ca tadanurūpaṃ ahosi.* See Davids and Fausbøll 1878: 177.

³⁵⁵ Hildebeitel and Miller (eds.) 1998: 28.

³⁵⁶ ŚB. 3.1.2.2. See Olivelle 2008b: 338.

³⁵⁷ Strong 2007: 74.

³⁵⁸ Strong 1992: 88.

different way, the symbolic significance of hair in Buddhism seems to be interpreted as a sort of symbol of the body in its impermanence and non-self since it consistently tops the list of the thirty-two loathsome constituent parts of the body.³⁵⁹ For a Buddhist monk, realizing the impermanence and impurity of the body is essential to uphold a celibate life. The importance attached to this specialized understanding of the practice by the Theravāda tradition may be seen in the wording of the ordination ceremony. A new monk, at his ordination, is supposed to formally and publicly recite the *tacapañcakakammaṭṭhāna*³⁶⁰, or formula of meditation on the perishable nature of the human body, as follow: *kesā lomā nakhā dantā taco—taco dantā nakhā lomā kesā* (hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin—skin, teeth, nails, hair of the body, hair of the head).

By extension, hair removal in the rite of tonsure may be seen as a preliminary step for the renunciant, symbolic of the will to cultivate the Buddha's path of purification in order to achieve enlightenment.³⁶¹ Here, the tonsure signifies renunciation of family life and the willingness to assume a new orientation: the fulfillment of a celibate life. As Karen Lang states: head shaving marks the beginning of a monk's ordination ritual; it signals his readiness to take his place in a community (*saṅgha*).³⁶² The complete shaving of the head, thus, has become the part of ritual preparation for becoming a Buddhist monk that occurs immediately preceding ordination. Karen Lang also suggests: "The physical action of shaving hair off the head cools the body: the intention of turning the mind away from the blazing sensual objects of this world cools the mind."³⁶³

4.3 Brahmacharya: its Origin and Meanings

The term *brahmacharya* (P. *brahmacariya*) is most prominent and prevalent not only in the Brahmanical tradition but also in *śramaṇa* traditions of Buddhism and Jainism. In Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist terminology, *brahmacharya* is the term used to designate the life of discipline leading to spiritual awakening.³⁶⁴ Celibacy, moreover, was considered a key component of this lifestyle in all these religions of

³⁵⁹ Hildebeitel and Miller (eds.) 1998: 3.

³⁶⁰ The *tacapañcakakammaṭṭhāna* means meditation or contemplation on the five dermatoid constituents: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin.

³⁶¹ Irons 2008: 518-519.

³⁶² Lang 1995: 35.

³⁶³ Ibid., 38.

³⁶⁴ Dhirasekera 1982: 50.

Indian origin.³⁶⁵ This notion of *brahmacarya* was pre-Buddhistic; the life of *brahmacarya* had a meaning and purpose to Brahmanism before the appearance of Buddhism. However, the Buddha's concept of *brahmacarya* differs considerably from concepts in Brahmanism.³⁶⁶ As Tachibana states:

The life of celibacy, which is usually expressed by the term *Brahmacarya*, was inherited by Buddhism from Brahmanism with a slight modification both in the terminology and the idea, or it may be better to say that Buddhism organized an order of Brahmacārins of its own according to traditions which were current when it arose, and its own principles.³⁶⁷

The term is a compound consisting of the two words *brahma* and *carya*. In brief, *brahma* literally means 'growth,' 'expansion,' 'evolution,' 'development,' 'swelling of the spirit and soul'³⁶⁸, whereas *carya* 'to be practiced or performed; proceeding, behavior, conduct'³⁶⁹ means to practice virtue, to perform a vow, to proceed or conduct oneself. In this sense, the ideal of *brahmacarya* is, therefore, the way leading to a pure and holy life or the attainment of the final ultimate truth. The term *brahmacarya* imparts a religious dimension to the *brahmacārīn's* studentship³⁷⁰ and thus carries the traditional connotations of being a Vedic student pursuing Vedic study, and being in the state of continence and chastity.³⁷¹

In Brahmanical tradition, the term *brahmacārīn* occurs first in the R̥gveda.³⁷² Here, the *brahmacārīn* is a powerful person, a poet, possibly generally referring to one who devoted himself to the acquisition of the knowledge, but nothing is indicated about studentship. It is in the Atharvaveda where it is first explained what *brahmacarya* actually mean. Some passages in the Atharvaveda clearly indicate a life of the

³⁶⁵ Cush, Robinson, and York (eds.) 2008: 113-114.

³⁶⁶ Perera 1993: 52-53.

³⁶⁷ Tachibana 1943: 98.

³⁶⁸ Monier-Williams 2005: 737.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 390.

³⁷⁰ The term *brahmacarya* often is interpreted as 'who walks with Brahman' in later Hinduism to denote the first of the four stages of life of an orthodox Hinduism: the student stage.

³⁷¹ Monier-Williams 2005: 738.

³⁷² RV.10.109.5:

*brahmacārī carati vevīṣadviṣṣaḥ sa devānām bhavaty ekam aṅgam |
tenā jāyām anvāvindadbṛhaspatiḥ somēna nītām juhvaṁ na devāḥ ||*

"The Brahmacari goes engaged in duty: he is a member of the Gods' own body."

"Through him Brhaspati obtained his consort, as the Gods gained the ladle brought by Soma."

See Griffith, Ralph T. H., trans. 1889. *The Hymns of The Rig-Veda*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

brahmacārin as wanderer who has a close association with his teacher (*ācārya*): “The Master, welcoming his new disciple, into his bowels takes the *Brahmacārin*. Three nights he holds and bears him in his belly. When he is born, the Gods convene to see him.” (AV.11.5.3); “Lighted by fuel goes the *Brahmacārin*, clad in black-buck skin, consecrate, long-bearded. Swiftly he goes from east to northern ocean, grasping the worlds, oft bringing them anear him” (AV.11.5.6).³⁷³ Gonda has observed that already at the time of the Atharvaveda the Veda studentship was an institution.³⁷⁴ Similar to the Atharvaveda, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa presents an analogy namely that of the student (*brahmacārin*)³⁷⁵ becoming an embryo ‘within’ the teacher (*ācārya*) for three days before his symbolic rebirth³⁷⁶: thereby becoming *dvija*, or ‘twice-born’.³⁷⁷

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad regards the *brahmacarya* as one of the three *dharmaskandhas*, each of which is capable of leading the adherent to a state of spiritual purification, or a “world of bliss” (*puṇyaloka*):

There are three types of persons whose torso is the Law (*dharma*). The first is one who pursues sacrifice, vedic recitation, and gift-giving. The second is one who is devoted solely to austerity. The third is a celibate student of the Veda living at his teacher's house—that is, a student who settles himself permanently at his teacher's house. All these gain worlds earned by merit. A person who is steadfast in *brahman* reaches immortality.³⁷⁸

Also, in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad we see two clear references to

³⁷³ This translation is Griffith's. See Griffith, Ralph T. H., trans. [1895-1896] 1985. *Hymns of Atharvaveda translated with a popular commentary*. 2 vols. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.

³⁷⁴ Gonda 1965: 235.

³⁷⁵ According to the Brahmins the *śūdra* is only physically born and in that capacity is called *ekajāti*, ‘having (only) one birth’. A man of one the three higher *varṇas* who has been initiated in Vedic lore is qualified as *dvijāti* ‘having two births’, or as *dvija*; ‘twice born’.

³⁷⁶ The process of becoming a *brahmacārin*—the *upanayana*—was directly linked to the oral transmission of the Vedas as a passport to the literary treasures of the Brahmins. The description of the *upanayana* establishes an explicit homology between “placing fuel upon fire” and ‘enkindling the mind.’ One of the items that the *brahmacārin* receives at the *upanayana* is a power-laden girdle (*mekhalā*) which is described as “born of *tapas*”. According to Pandey, the primary purpose of the *upanayana*, as originally conceived, was the beginning of a boy's education: any religious or other sacramentary significance came later. See Pandey 1969: 112.

³⁷⁷ ŚB. 11.5.4.16: “As to this they say, ‘When one has admitted a Brāhmaṇa to a term of studentship, he should not carry on sexual intercourse, lest he should generate this Brāhmaṇa from shed seed; for, indeed, he who enters on a term of studentship becomes an embryo.’” See Eggeling, Julius, trans. 1900. *The Śatapatha-Brahmaṇa. According to the text of the Mādhyandina School*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press. [online]. Available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbr/sbe44/sbe44001.htm> [Accessed: 15 April 2014].

³⁷⁸ ChU. 2.23.1. See Olivelle 1998: 197.

adolescent studentship in the persons of Satyakāma Jābāla (wishing to become a student)³⁷⁹ and Śvetaketu (returning home after his period of studentship).³⁸⁰ The importance of the observance of *brahmacarya* has been very keenly recognised in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. Here the life of *brahmacārin* is praised as, amongst other things, a way to find the Self which does not perish.³⁸¹ It is clear that Vedic studentship itself could find the Brahma-world which leads to liberation. Likewise, the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad gives *brahmacarya* along with truth, austerity and correct knowledge (*satyam*, *tapas* and *samyag-jñāna*) as a means of reaching the *ātman*.³⁸²

During the time of the early *āśrama* system, texts such as the Āpastamba Dharmasūtras regulated Vedic studentship in more detail. The student is required either to keep his hair matted or his head shaved; he is given a sacred thread, a girdle, a deer or an antelope (or sheep) skin and a wooden staff. He is required to collect firewood to tend the teacher's fire, and to eat only what he has begged and presented first to the teacher, avoiding items such as spices, salt, honey and meat. He must not engage in sexual intercourse³⁸³, nor look at a naked woman³⁸⁴, nor touch a woman³⁸⁵, nor desire a woman in his heart.³⁸⁶ At the conclusion of his period of study, he presents a fee to the teacher and takes a ritual bath. Thereby, he becomes a *snātaka* (literally, bathed person)³⁸⁷ and after that he take leave.³⁸⁸ The Āpastamba Dharmasūtras also describes the code of

³⁷⁹ ChU. 4.4.1: "One day Satyakā Jābāla said to his mother Jābāla: "Mother, I want to become a vedic student. So tell me what my lineage is." Olivelle 1998: 219.

³⁸⁰ ChU. 6.1.2: "So he went away to become a student at the age of twelve and, after learning all the Vedas, returned when he was twenty-four, swellheaded, thinking himself to be learned, and arrogant." See Olivelle 1998: 245.

³⁸¹ ChU. 8.5.3: "What people normally call "the embarking on a fast" (*anāśakāyana*), moreover, is, in reality, the life of a celibate student, for the self one finds by living the life of a celibate student does not perish (*na naśyati*)." See Olivelle 1998: 279.

³⁸² MuU. 3.1.5: "By truth can this self be grasped by austerity, by right knowledge, and by a perpetually chaste life. It lies within the body, brilliant and full of light, which ascetics perceive, when their faults are wiped out." See Olivelle 1998: 450-451.

³⁸³ ĀpDh.1.1.2.26: *maithunaṃ na caret* ||

³⁸⁴ ĀpDh.1.2.7.3: *na prekṣeta nagnāṃ striyaṃ* ||

³⁸⁵ ĀpDh.1.2.7.8: *nopajighret striyaṃ mukhena* ||

³⁸⁶ ĀpDh.1.2.7.9: *na hṛdayena prārthayet* ||

³⁸⁷ The word *snātaka* means one who has bathed or performed ablutions after finishing his studentship as a *brahmacārin* under a religious teacher. In older system, the parent of such a bath-graduate would find a bride for him, and he would get married. This term appears to be applicable to an individual even after he is married as description of *snātakas* seem to indicate their married status and their position as head of a household. See Olivelle 2008a: 159.

³⁸⁸ ĀpDh. 2.21.19: || *ata eva brahmacaryavān pravrajati* ||

The clearest statement is found in *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtras* (7.3) "After studying one, two, or all the Vedas, a person who has not violated his *brahmacarya* may enter whichever of the *āśramas* he prefers." Here, there is no such definite point mentioned for his decision to remain at the teacher's house for life. In the *Dharmasūtras*, the *brahmacārin* is presented with a choice - he may, so long as he

conduct of the Vedic student as ‘austerity’ (*tapas*).³⁸⁹ A breach of the code causes the ‘knowledge of the Vedas to slip away from him, as well as from his children’.³⁹⁰

At this point, we can summarize that *brahmacarya* is a discipline a student or a novice has to undergo when training under the guidance of a teacher, entailing an initiation that requires a celibate lifestyle for several years during the period of studentship. Since the initiated student was subjected to live a strictly chaste life, the term *brahmacarya* also has a wider meaning of conduct of controlled sexuality. The importance of *brahmacarya* in the case of *brahmacārin* is substantiated by the punishments on breaking the vow. If the *brahmacārin* goes to a woman (*avakīrṇin*), then according to Manu³⁹¹ he gets cleansed again by sacrificing in the night at a cross-ways to Nirṛiti (goddess of Corruption) a one-eyed ass. He, as the sinner, must put on the ass’s skin with the hair outside, and (with a red begging-bowl) beg at seven houses, making known his deed. He must eat only once a day, and bathe in the morning, at midday, and in the evening. Besides, the other offerings and atonement rites are also given.³⁹²

The conception of the *brahman* has a long history of development in Indian literature. In Brahmanic religiosity, *brahman* came to be seen as the substance underlying the whole cosmos. It usually denotes the one supreme, absolute being from which the entire universe develops, which pervades the entire universe, and into which the universe merges when it dissolves, and which, as pure consciousness, is the innermost self (*ātman*) of every being.³⁹³ Therefore, whatever the particular meanings and

has maintained his vow of celibacy, elect not to become a married householder, but to remain a permanent student or become either a wandering ascetic or a forest-dwelling hermit. See Scharf 2002: 97.

³⁸⁹ ĀpDh.1.2.5.1: *niyameṣu tapas śabdaḥ* ||

³⁹⁰ ĀpDh.1.2.5.2: *tad atikrame vidyā karma niḥsṛavati brahma saha-apatyād etasmāt* ||

³⁹¹ Manu. 11.119-124: (119) “But a student who has broken his vow shall offer at night on a crossway to Nirṛiti a one-eyed ass, according to the rule of the Pākayagnas.” (120) “Having offered according to the rule oblations in the fire, he shall finally offer (four) oblations of clarified butter to Vata, to Indra, to the teacher (of the gods, Bṛhaspati) and to Agni, reciting the Rik verse ‘May the Maruts grant me.’” (121) “Those who know the Veda declare that a voluntary effusion of semen by a twice-born (youth) who fulfils the vow (of studentship constitutes) a breach of that vow.” (122) “The divine light which the Veda imparts to the student, enters, if he breaks his vow, the Maruts, Puruhuta (Indra), the teacher (of the gods, Brihaspati) and Pavaka (Fire).” (123) “When this sin has been committed, he shall go begging to seven houses, dressed in the hide of the (sacrificed) ass, proclaiming his deed.” (124) “Subsisting on a single (daily meal that consists) of the alms obtained there and bathing at (the time of) the three savanas (morning, noon, and evening), he becomes pure after (the lapse of) one year.” For the translation, see Bühler, Georg, eds. & trans. 1886. *The Law of Manu*. Sacred Book of the East. Vol. 25. Oxford University.

³⁹² Meyer 1971: 256-257.

³⁹³ Cush, Robinson, and York (eds.) 2008: 114.

connotations of the term *brahmacarya* were, it had come to imply a “moral Absolute” and “[caste-] duty,” respectively.³⁹⁴

4.4 The Ideal of *Brahmacarya* in the Buddhist Context

In Buddhism, the term *brahmacarya* has nothing to do with the concept of Absolute reality. The Buddha evidently avoided such metaphysical meanings in the Upaniṣadic use and utilized it to refer the “moral life” or “noble life” in general.³⁹⁵ In the Buddhist sense, *brahmacarya* implies the “holy conduct” as the way to end suffering through renouncing the world and the study of *dharma*.³⁹⁶ Within Buddhism, several terms contain the word *brahma-*, reflecting the influence of Brahmanical terminology, for example, *brahma-vihāra*³⁹⁷, *brahma-loka*³⁹⁸, and indeed *brahma-carya*.

In the *Tevijja-sutta* (DN. I. 235), the Buddha ridicules two young Brahmins, Bhāradvāja and Vāseṭṭha, for claiming to know how to achieve union with Brahmā/Brahman when none of them has actually experienced this. He then recommends *brahmacarya* as the foundation of *sīla* (virtue), and the four *brahma-vihāras* (abodes of Brahmā) for higher meditative attainments and actual union. Then the Buddha proclaims himself as a worthy guide, referring to himself as the Tathāgata, “I know Brahmā and the world of Brahmā, and the way to the world of Brahmā, and the path of practice whereby the world of Brahmā may be gained.”³⁹⁹ Like Brahmā, the Buddha points out that he and his Āryan disciples who practice *brahmacarya*, are unencumbered, without hate or ill will, and are pure and disciplined. The discussion reveals that it is in purity of ethics and practice wherein lies the key to the higher, exalted states of mind and consciousness.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁴ Kalupahana 1995: 65.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Davids, and Stede (eds.) 1993: 494.

³⁹⁷ The term *brahma-vihāra* means a key set of four meditative practices often translated as the four ‘Immeasurables’, the four ‘Pure Abodes’, or the four ‘Stations of Brahma’. The four are *maitrī* (loving kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekṣā* (equanimity). The practice of the four *Brahma-vihāras* involves radiating outwards the positive qualities associated with such states of mind to all beings in the universe. See Keown and Prebish (eds.) 2013: 41.

³⁹⁸ The term *Brahma-loka* means ‘Brahma world’. It is used in two senses to refer to the heavens or spiritual realms in Buddhist cosmology; (1) as a collective name for the two uppermost spiritual realms, namely the Form Realm (*rūpya-dhātu*) and the Formless Realm (*ārūpya-dhātu*); (2) more specifically, the first three heavens of the Formless Realm. See Keown and Prebish (eds.) 2013: 41.

³⁹⁹ DN. I. 235: ... *na tveva tathāgatassa brahmaloke vā brahma-loka-gāminiyā vā paṭipadāya puṭṭhassa dandhāyitattaṃ vā vitthāyitattaṃ vā. Brahmānañcāhaṃ, vāseṭṭha, pajānāmi brahmalokaṃ ca brahma-loka-gāminiṃ ca paṭipadaṃ, yathā paṭipanno ca brahmalokaṃ upapanno, taṃ ca pajānāmi*”ti.

⁴⁰⁰ Johnson and Pallekele 2012: 223.

In the *Mahāgovinda-sutta* (DN. II. 220), the Buddha refers to one of his previous lives when he was a *brahman* named Mahāgovinda. At the end of which he renounced the world with many followers, practiced and taught the four *brahma-vihāra*, and instructed his disciples on the way to dwell with Brāhma (*brahmalokasahabyatā*). Those who understood his teaching completely were reborn in the *Brahma*-world. Those who did not understand it perfectly were variously reborn, evidently according to their degree of understanding, in the six worlds of the gods (i.e., heavens), from the highest to the lowest. The text concludes that even that kind of religious life could not bring people beyond rebirth in the world of Brahmā.

However, in the *Doṇabrahmaṇa-sutta* (AN. III. 223), the Buddha lists five kinds of Brahmins, all of whom have lived as a celibate student, that is, under tutelage (*komārabrahmacariya*) for 48 years. The Buddha indicates as the third kind Brahmins who keep to the brahmanical code, but who do not meditate, calling them ‘the limited Brahmins’ (*‘mariyāda brāhmaṇa’*). Here, the Buddha does not characterize the Brahmin institution of *brahmacarya* as unsatisfactory, but maintained that it has limitations (*mariyāda*).⁴⁰¹

From the texts above, it seems that the Buddha adopted the term Brahman/Brahmā to refer to the moral principle, covering not only physical abstention but also all actions performed through body, speech and thought.⁴⁰² Furthermore, the Buddha is seen giving a new interpretation to the Brahmanic concept of Brahma-reaching that accords with his teaching. Specifically, the phrase *brahma-bhūtena attanā viharati* “with *attā* (Self)⁴⁰³ become united with Brahmā” is similarly an adaptation of a Brahmanic metaphor when speaking with his Brahmins.⁴⁰⁴ The concepts of “becoming Brahmā” (*brahmabhūta*) and “attaining Brahmā” (*brahmapatti*) used by the Buddha had no associations of an absolute or a union with the God Brahmā in the Upaniṣadic sense. In his way of speaking, union with Brahmā is not a state of eternal existence as in Brahmins’ thought, but rather a state where one becomes pure: the perfection of the religious life which is akin to the higher stages of mind

⁴⁰¹ AN II. 223: *Yāva porāṇānaṃ brāhmaṇānaṃ mariyādo tattha brāhmaṇo t̥hito taṃ na vītikkamatī’ti, kho, doṇa, tasmā brāhmaṇo mariyādoti vuccati. Evaṃ kho, doṇa, brāhmaṇo mariyādo hoti.*— “According to the border of the ancient Brahmins, he stands there does not go beyond. Therefore the Brahmin is said to stand on the border. Doṇa, thus the Brahmin stands on the border.”

⁴⁰² Gupta 2005: 34.

⁴⁰³ Interestingly, a usage of *attā* as in this phrase gives the term a prominence that could leave room for interpretation about the notion of *attā/anattā* in Buddhist perspective.

⁴⁰⁴ Johnson and Pallekele 2012: 233.

purification and to *nibbāna*, the irreversible liberation from the cycle of *samsāra*.⁴⁰⁵ This is clear from the recurring statement recorded in the texts in which the Buddha's summons his followers, saying; "Come, O *Bhikkhus*, well declared is the Dhamma, follow the noble life for the complete ending of suffering"⁴⁰⁶ This method of granting admission and higher ordination came to be known as the *ehi-bhikkhu-pabbajā*. In making reference to '*pabbajā*,' the emphasis in the Buddha's exhortation is clearly on renunciation as being essential in the noble life of *brahmacarya*.

The term *brahmacarya* is rather complex and has a wide range of meanings. In the Buddhist context, the most important meaning is the 'Noble Eightfold Path' (*aṭṭhaṅgika magga*, Skt. *aṣṭāṅgika mārga*), often called the 'Path of Purification' (P. *visuddhimagga*). The eight constituent parts are: (1) right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*, Skt. *samyag-drṣṭi*); (2) right resolve (*sammā-saṅkappa*, Skt. *samyak-saṅkalpa*); (3) right speech (*sammā-vācā*, Skt. *samyag-vācā*); (4) right action (*sammā-kammanta*, Skt. *samyak-karmānta*); (5) right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*, Skt. *samyag-ājīva*); (6) right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*, Skt. *samyag-vyāyāma*); (7) right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*, Skt. *samyak-smṛti*); and (8) right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*, Skt. *samyak-samādhi*). The 'Noble Eightfold Path' may also be constituted as a scheme of the 'Threefold training' (*tisikkhā*, Skt. *trīśikṣā*): morality (*silā*, Skt. *śīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*pañña*, Skt. *prajñā*).

Another classification of the *brahmacarya* is presented by the great commentator Buddhaghosa, who offers different applications of the term as follows: (1) *dāna* - "charity"; (2) *veyyāvacca* - "rendering a service"; (3) *pañcasikkhāpadasīla* - "observance of the Five Precepts"; (4) *appamaññā* - "practice of boundless states of mind"; (5) *methunavirati* - "celibacy"; (6) *sadārasantosa* - "contentment with one's own wife"; (7) *virīya* - "effort"; (8) *uposathaṅga* - "observance of the Eight Precepts"⁴⁰⁷;

⁴⁰⁵ Gupta 2005: 34.

⁴⁰⁶ Vin. I. 12: *Ehi bhikkhū'ti bhagavā avoca, svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo, cara brahmacariyam sammā dukkhassa antakiriyāyāti.*

⁴⁰⁷ The Eight Precepts (*aṭṭhasīla*) are observed by laypeople during periods of intensive meditation practice and during *uposatha* (lunar observance) days. Usually the 1st, 8th, 15th, and 23rd of the lunar month are regarded as the *uposatha* days. The Eight Precepts are: abstinence from (1) killing; (2) stealing; (3) celibacy; (4) lying; (5) drinking liquor; (6) eating food after midday; (7) dancing, singing, music, unseemly shows, using garlands, perfumes, unguents, ornaments, and (8) using high and luxurious seats and beds. The Eight precepts based on the Five Precepts, with the third precept extended to prohibit all sexual activity and an additional three precepts that are especially supportive to meditation practice. The third precept of the Five Precepts is: *kāmesu micchācāra veramaṇī*—"to refrain from sexual misconduct", whereas the third precept of the Eight Precepts is: *abrahmacariyā veramaṇī*—"to refrain from sexual activity".

(9) *ariyamagga* - “the noble path”; and (10) *sāsana* - the complete Buddhist way of life.⁴⁰⁸ What is clear from the connotation given by Buddhaghosa is that *brahmacariya* in all these cases meant virtuous living and should not be understood in a narrow way to only mean monastic chastity. It is worth noting that *brahmacarya* has its counterpart in the third precept of the Five Precepts (*pañcasīla*, Skt. *pañcaśīla*) for the laity, *kāmesu-micchācārā-veramanī* (Skt. *kāmamithyācāra-virati*).⁴⁰⁹ In the case of monks, *brahmacarya* is interpreted as *samañadhamma*, that is, the *dhamma* for those striving for inner calm or, following traditional interpretation, the duties of monks.⁴¹⁰ Thus, it is complete abstention from sexual lust the term *abrahmacarya-veramanī/virati* is used.⁴¹¹ Whilst the householders are not required to exert complete control like monks, they are at least expected to observe partial control, that is the Five Precepts.

4.5 Sexuality, Celibacy and Monastic Discipline

Similes that contrast the free wandering life of the celibate renouncer with the householder’s lack of autonomy are found repeatedly in the *Sutta Nipāta*. The *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta* (‘Discourse on the Rhinoceros Horn’), for example, warns against the familial ties and social obligations that entrap the householder.

Having given up son and wife and money, possessions and kinsmen and relative ... one should wander alone like the rhinoceros.

Casting off the marks of a householder like a mountain ebony tree shorn of its leave, leaving home, wearing the saffron robe, one should wander alone like the rhinoceros.

Having broken the ties of a householder, like a bird who has torn a strong net, not returning as a fire does not return to what it has burnt, one should wander alone like the rhinoceros. (Sn. 6)⁴¹²

The text makes it clear that the life of a Buddhist renunciant necessarily

⁴⁰⁸ Buddhaghosa 1989: 160.

⁴⁰⁹ Jain 1983: 142.

⁴¹⁰ Carter 1993: 13-14.

⁴¹¹ Jain 1983: 142-143.

⁴¹² This is Shayne Clark’s translation, modified from Richard Salomon’s. A Gāndhārī version of the Rhinoceros Horn Sūtra is preserved on a birch-bark scroll.

involves the abandonment of family, friends, and relatives, the forsaking of wealth and material gain, and going forth to wander alone like the rhinoceros (or its horn). Such a state of being single is compared to the strong, durable horn of a rhinoceros and the freedom of a bird flying without return. Liz Wilson invokes this *sutta* to make the point that “the early Buddhist renunciant was the antithesis of the householder tied down by family obligations.”⁴¹³ Similarly, Richard Gombrich points out “the first Buddhists were asocial, even antisocial.”⁴¹⁴ But Shayne Clarke questions these assumptions and argues that the Rhinoceros Horn ideal is perhaps best understood as ascetic rhetoric. He suggests that Indian Buddhist monks and nuns, those who left home for the religious life, continued to be identified with their family members in acts of religious giving. He claims that narratives from the monastic law codes depict monks and nuns returning home from homelessness for visits and meals and staying overnight and perhaps even longer in houses of their own kin.⁴¹⁵ The Buddha’s own visit in Kapilavastu after his enlightenment proves this fact. It thus becomes clear that monks and nuns had not necessarily severed all familial ties, nor did their family members consider those ties to have ended.

However, since the renouncer tradition stands in sharp contrast to family tradition, there is no question that the Buddha conceived family life as an impediment to a celibate life. While the Buddha condemns the imperfection of marital and married life, the sanctity of family life and the value of conjugal love are upheld in Buddhism. In other words, the Buddha appreciated the need of strong family ties in society, but not in the *saṅgha*. The family environment is a precious circumstance and opportunity for spiritual growth, second only to going forth. One of the most interesting narratives that proved this fact is the story of the monk Saṅgāmajī in the Udāna. He abandoned his wife and newborn son for the sake of *brahmacarya*. His former wife comes to him begging him to return to the home life, but he does not react. The wife even places the child at his feet, hoping that the sight of his own child will awaken some sense of family responsibility, but the monk Saṅgāmajī continues to wait passively for the scenario to end. When she finally does give up and returns home with her child, the Buddha praises him for his extraordinary restraint.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ Wilson 2003: 141.

⁴¹⁴ Gombrich 1975: 216.

⁴¹⁵ Clarke 2014: 151.

⁴¹⁶ Ud. 5-6. For an English translation, see Woodward 1996: 6-7.

From the discussions above it is clear that the goal of renunciation is inner freedom through giving up social obligations and family matters; the key difference between a renunciant and a layperson is the abstinence from all sexual activities. Thus, the ideal of homeless life was quintessentially a wifeless life, committing to the complete abstinence from sexuality.⁴¹⁷ Celibacy is considered as the cornerstone of monastic life. Sexual relationships may lead to procreation and setting up a biological family, and thereby entail social and family responsibilities. Consequently, although the householders might practice celibacy on special occasions or for a specific purpose for a specific period of time, they are expected to have sexual relations. In contrast, Buddhist monks and nuns who wish to live in carefree independence outside society view all sexual activities as obstacles to mental concentration.⁴¹⁸ To reduce the risk of sexual arousal including sexual contacts, they see the necessity to live voluntarily in a certain way, namely to live the noble *brahmacarya* to the best of their ability.

Brahmacarya is an integral part of the Buddhist celibate life with its essential principle of moral self-control; sexual desire is seen as problematic from several viewpoints. From the Buddhist perspective, sexual activity expresses quite strong attachment since sexual urges belong to the realm of the senses, and their gratification can reinforce one's thirst or craving for sense pleasures.⁴¹⁹ Among the three 'roots of unwholesome action'⁴²⁰, attachment to sensual pleasure (*kāma-upādāna*) as a form of greed (*lobha*) is prominent. According to the Abhidhamma, sensual pleasure is a lesser fault than hatred, but it is seen as taking a long time to uproot it.⁴²¹ Therefore, the craving for sense-pleasures (Pāli *kāma-taṇhā*, Skt. *kāmatṛṣṇā*) is an essentially negative state to be overcome on the spiritual path.

The concept of *kāma-taṇhā*⁴²² has a very broad usage which goes beyond

⁴¹⁷ Harvey 2000: 89.

⁴¹⁸ Conze 2001: 59.

⁴¹⁹ Wilson 2003: 139.

⁴²⁰ The three possible motivating 'roots' of 'unwholesome' action are: (1) greed (*lobha*), which covers a range of states from mild longing up to full-blown lust, avarice, fame-seeking and dogmatic clinging to ideas; (2) hatred (*dosa*, Skt. *dveṣa*), which reaches from mild irritation through to burning resentment and wrath; (3) delusion or spiritual misorientation (*moha*), the veiling of truth from oneself, as in dull, foggy states of mind through to specious doubt on moral and spiritual matters, distorting the truth or turning away from it, and misconceptions. (AN. V. 261)

⁴²¹ The three roots of the unwholesome are intertwined. Greed and hatred are grounded in delusion, and greed may lead to hatred. It is said that greed is a lesser fault, but fades slowly, hatred is a great fault, but fades quickly, and delusion is a great fault and fades slowly (AN. I. 200).

⁴²² Generically, the term *kāma* is translated in English as 'desire' of senses, especially sexual desire and the term *taṇhā* (Skt. *trṣṇā*) is translated as 'craving' for pleasurable sensation.

mere ‘genital sexuality’; it is basically the craving for ‘sensuous gratification’ rather than ‘sexual gratification’ and accounts for such manifestations as the need for diversion, the craving for excitement and the search for novelty.⁴²³ *Kāma-taṇhā* is the first of the five hindrances to meditative calming⁴²⁴, and in the lists of the three kinds of craving⁴²⁵, the four sorts of grasping⁴²⁶, and the four deep-seated ‘intoxicants’ on the mind⁴²⁷, the first item always has sense-pleasures as its focus.⁴²⁸ Many *suttas* refer to two significant terms, *pañcakāmaguṇa* and *kāma-rāga*: *pañcakāmaguṇa* refers to the five types of pleasure objects obtained by the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body, *kāma-rāga* refers to the desires and passions of a sensual nature. Thus the term *pañcakāmaguṇa* refers to the enjoyment of the five senses. In a still broader sense, *kāma-taṇhā* may be regarded as the ‘pleasure principle’, a term that represents the natural proneness to seek sensual pleasure.

According to the ‘Four Noble Truths’, *taṇhā* cannot be separated from the arising of suffering (*dukkha*) which leads rebirth (*ponobhavika*), along with lust and self-indulgence (*nandī-rāga*), seeking for temporary satisfaction (*tatrābhinandinī*) here and there. Craving or thirst keeps one bound to repeated sufferings and leads to dissatisfaction and dis-ease in the cycle of *saṃsāra*.⁴²⁹ ‘Ascetic life’ is seen as a powerful means to aid this. Once Śakra (P. *Sakka*), the ruler of the *devās*, asks the Buddha whether all ascetics were ‘complete’ in their ability to attain the final goal of perfection. The Buddha replied:

Only those ascetics who are set free through the entire destruction of craving are complete concerning the goal, the finding of salvation, the pure way of life and perfection.⁴³⁰

The notion of the entire destruction of suffering can also be found in the

⁴²³ De Silva 1979: 63.

⁴²⁴ The five hindrances of meditative calming are (1) *kāmacchanda* - sensuality (2) *vyāpāda* – ill-will (3) *thīna-middha* – sloth-and-torpor (4) *uddhacca-kukkucca* – worry-and-flurry, and (5) *vicikicchā* - skeptical doubt.

⁴²⁵ The three kinds of craving are (1) *kāma-taṇhā* - the craving for sensuality (2) *bhava-taṇhā* - the craving for renewed existence, and (3) *vibhava-taṇhā* - the craving for nonexistence.

⁴²⁶ The four grasping or clinging (*upādāna*): to sensuality (*kāma*), to views (*ditthi*), to rules and ritual (*sīlabbata-pārāmāsa*), to ego-belief (*attavāda*).

⁴²⁷ The word *āsava* means something that flows, and hence it is often interpreted as the impurities that flow into an individual to defile him. It has been translated as the ‘intoxicants’ or ‘cankers’. The four cankers are (1) *kāmāsava* – karmic propensity for pleasure (2) *bhavāsava* - karmic propensity for existence (3) *diṭṭhāsava* - karmic propensity for a viewpoint, and (4) *avijjāsava* – karmic propensity for ignorance).

⁴²⁸ Harvey 2012: 290.

⁴²⁹ Wilson 2003: 136-137.

⁴³⁰ DN. II. 283, 9-11.

description of the ‘two extremes’ and the Middle Way.

These two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth from the world: devotion to sense-pleasures (...) and devotion to self-mortification (...). Not following after these two extremes is the Middle Way, fully known by the Tathāgata, that produces insight and knowledge, leading to calmness, understanding, enlightenment and Nibbāna. (SN. IV. 330, 28-331, 9)

Here, the institution of the *saṅgha* is not mentioned, and *saṅgha* membership is not necessarily required. The ‘ideal ascetic’ in these texts therefore is not the *bhikkhu* in its institutional sense but the individual who is free through the entire destruction of craving. It is clear that one is ‘complete’ not because of one’s *saṅgha* membership, but because one has lived the ascetic life and entered the Middle Way: the right path of salvation.⁴³¹ The above quoted texts also suggest that such a way of life is the ideal basis for eradicating craving as the root cause of suffering, not only for the Buddha himself, but also for his followers, monks and nuns. The monastic life, or the life of those who came to belong to the *saṅgha*, was thus designed primarily by the Buddha for the sake of spiritual awakening in this sense of ‘ideal ascetic’. The basic ideal of a Buddhist monk then is stepping out from ordinary society, renouncing the ordinary household life and family matters and taking a vow of complete sexual abstinence.⁴³² The purpose of the monastic life is to provide aspirants with the ideal conditions for spiritual development, and *brahmacarya*, as a crucial part of the monastic life, is described as most conducive to achieving liberation from *samsāra*.

Those who become monks freely take upon themselves the rule of celibacy so that they can focus their minds and energies on spiritual training. The reason for the rejection of the sexual impulse is formulated in the Aṅguttara Nikāya as the extreme obsession of both genders with each of other: “No other form [sound, smell, taste, touch], *bhikkhus*, do I know, that persists in taking hold of a man’s mind as the form [sound, smell, taste, touch] of a woman” (AN. I. 1). As objects of sexual desire, the opposite sex is often seen as an obstacle for the celibate path of monk, and avoiding women at all costs is highly recommended. In the *Mātā-putta-sutta* (AN. III. 67) similar sexual attraction may arise even between

⁴³¹ Freiburger 2000: 9-11.

⁴³² Gethin 1998: 88.

a mother and her son (or between a parent and a child).⁴³³ The conditions for such a dysfunctional relationship arise from mutual attraction or dependence and the power of sexuality on account of the five senses. From these texts, it is clear why the Buddha frequently admonishes the monks to keep a social distance from women and to be mindful of them.⁴³⁴

This kind of admonition about women as a source of perpetual danger to all celibate monks is, of course, easily understood as a defence mechanism for monks. A dialogue between Venerable Ānanda and the Buddha illustrates this concern. On the occasion of his last instruction, the Buddha advised Ānanda about how monks should maintain a healthy social distance from women:

Ānanda asked: “How are we to conduct ourselves towards women?” The Buddha answered: “By not looking at them, Ānanda.” Ānanda objected: “But if we have to see them, how should we behave?” The Buddha said: “By not speaking to them, Ānanda.” Ānanda persisted: “But if they speak to us, how should we behave towards them?” The Buddha warned: “Then, Ānanda, keep your thoughts tightly controlled!” (DN. II. 141)

In order to maintain monks’ and nuns’ pure minds and prevent them from sensual pleasures which easily entrap them into unwholesome states, the Buddha set out numerous and meticulous rules governing their lives called the Vinaya.⁴³⁵ The Vinaya is divided into two basic parts: (1) a set of rules governing the life of the individual monk or nun known as the *prātimokṣa* (P. *pāṭimokkha*)⁴³⁶; and (2) regulations concerning the

⁴³³ In his book ‘*Riven by Lust: Incest and Schism in Indian Buddhist Legend and Historiography*’, Jonathan A. Silk shows the case of mother-son incest in Buddhist narrative, the Dharmaruci who is seduced, or perhaps even raped by his mother. See Silk, Jonathan A. 2009. *Riven by Lust: Incest and Schism in Indian Buddhist Legend and Historiography*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

⁴³⁴ Tan, Piya. 2009. *Sexuality: A Buddhist perspective*. [Online]. Available at:

<http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/31.7-Sexuality-piya.pdf> [Accessed: 15 January 2014].

⁴³⁵ The term Vinaya, derived from *vi*+*√nī*, is often rendered as (some variant of) training, education, discipline, or control. According to John Holt, the prefix *vi* connotes “difference,” “distinction,” “apart,” “away from,” etc. When combined with the verb root *√nī* which basically means “to lead,” it means “to lead away from” and thus indicates the “removal” and the control of the weaker instincts of the mind which hinder spiritual progress i.e. greed, hatred, delusion. See Holt (ed.) 1995: 3-4.

⁴³⁶ The term *prātimokṣa* has caused considerable confusion in the attempt to render a standard definition. The Monier-Williams dictionary of Sanskrit gives the meaning of *prāti+mokṣa* (from *mokṣa*, the desideration from of *√muc*) as “deliverance, liberation.” Rhys Davids and Oldenberg derive *prātimokṣa* from *prati-√muc*, taken in the sense of disburdening or getting free. E. J. Thomas also favors derivation from *√muc*, but he renders it “that which binds, obligatory.” Winternitz associated the

communal ceremonies and corporate ‘acts’ of the Sangha, beginning with admission to the order.⁴³⁷ The Vinaya refer to the established norms of the *saṅgha* that all members are expected to observe in maintaining their own monastic lives as well as the monastic order, and they must not swerve even at the cost of their life. In other words, although the Vinaya mostly deals with the specifics of individual ethical conduct, it is as much concerned with the complete purity or *pariśuddhi* (P. *parisuddhi*) of the community. Rupert Gethin views the Vinaya as having four main areas of concern: (1) the unity and cohesion of the *saṅgha*, (2) the spiritual life, (3) the dependence of the *saṅgha* upon the wider community, and (4) the appearance of the *saṅgha* in the eyes of that community.⁴³⁸

The Buddha is said to have set rules of monastic conduct in response to situations which arose as the Buddha’s followers grew in number. When a member of the *saṅgha* would act in an inappropriate way and the offense came to the attention of the Buddha, he would make a judgment on the case. This judgment was given in form of a rule, and then rules were formalized and became binding for the whole *saṅgha*, sharing standards of behaviour and cementing the communal identity of the monastic followers of the Buddha. The *prātimokṣa* is thus an inventory of offenses, being primarily a collection of liturgical formularies which comprises over two hundred rules for monks to abide by.⁴³⁹ For each breach of the rules, appropriate punitive measures are given.⁴⁴⁰ For example, in the Theravāda tradition the core is the twofold set of 227 rules for *bhikṣu/bhikkhu*, and 311 rules for *bhikṣuṇī/bhikkhunī*.⁴⁴¹ The *bhikṣu-prātimokṣa* contains eight categories of offenses, classified according to the degree of gravity. The *bhikṣuṇī-prātimokṣa* covers the same categories with the third (or *aniyata* offenses) being omitted. The eight categories of offenses can be listed as: (1) *pārājika-dharmas* —the offenses leading to lifelong expulsion; (2) *saṅghāvaśeṣa-dharmas* —the offenses which are atoned by an assembly of the *saṅgha* at the beginning and at the end in order to impose a public penance on the monk who has

word with redemption, based primarily on his reading of the Jātakas. See Prebish (ed.) 1996: 17. Pachow notes “In the Chinese and Tibetan translations, this is interpreted as: Deliverance, liberation or emancipation for each and every one and at all occasions, that is *prāti* stands for ‘each, every’ and *mokṣa* for ‘Deliverance.’ See W. Pachow, “A Comparative Study of the Prātimokṣa.” In *Sino-Indian Studies*, Volume IV, 1-4 and V, 1 [1951-1955], IV, 1, p. 20.

⁴³⁷ Gethin 1998: 86.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴³⁹ Since the different schools of Buddhism had different versions of the Vinaya-piṭaka, they often disagreed on such details as the number of rules: Sarvāstivāda: 263, Mūlasarvāstivāda: 248, Dharmaguptaka: 250, Mahāsāsaka: 251, Mahāsāṃghika: 218. See Holt (ed.) 1995: 40.

⁴⁴⁰ Prebish 1996: 2.

⁴⁴¹ With regard to the *pātimokkha*, Oskar von Hinüber opines that it refers to updating monastic law. See Hinüber 1995: 7-45; Hinüber 2008: 3-29.

transgressed; (3) *aniyata-dharmas* —the undetermined offenses; (4) *nihsargika-pāyantika-dharmas* —the rules entailing confession with forfeiture; (5) *pāyantika-dharmas* —the rules concerning expiation; (6) *pratideśaniya-dharmas* —miscellaneous matters requiring only confession; (7) *śaikṣa-dharmas* —rules concerning matters of etiquette; and (8) *adhikaraṇa-śamatha-dharmas* —the rules presenting a system by which offenses may be resolved.

The Vinaya rules connected with celibacy appear in the first category being listed among the most severe in the degree of violation. These first four rules form the category called the *pārājikas*, and are so named because a monk who commits any of them automatically forfeits his status as a monk and will never be readmitted into the *saṅgha* during his lifetime. These include (1) sexual intercourse, (2) theft, (3) deprivation of life (of a human), and (4) false proclamation of superhuman faculties. Here sex is considered the most serious bodily transgression from which one is to restrain. For that reason it is listed first, even before theft and murder. In this section, the Buddha's most basic definition of sex is simply that which is “not the true dhamma” (*asaddhamma*), but is instead “village dhamma” (*gāmadhamma*) or “vile dhamma” (*vasaladhamma*), which will just lead to expulsion from the *saṅgha*. The exact meaning of this term is given in the Vinaya: like a person, whose head is cut off, is unable to live with that mutilated body, a *bhikkhu* having associated with sex is not a *śramaṇa* (*assamaṇo*), and not a son of the Śākya Buddha (*asakyaputtiyo*), “*pārājiko hotīti seyyathāpi nāma puriso sīsacchinno abhabbo tena sarīrabandhanena jīvitum, evamēva bhikkhu methunaṃ dhammaṃ paṭisevitvā assamaṇo hoti asakyaputtiyo. tena vuccati pārājiko hotī'ti.*” — Is one who is defeated means: as a man with his head cut off cannot become one to live with that bodily connection, so is a monk indulging in sexual intercourse not a (true) recluse, not a (true) son of the Sakyans: therefore he is called one who is defeated.⁴⁴²

The original rule was enacted in the context of the sexual intercourse which the monk Sudinna had with his former wife. Sudinna's case is considered to be the first serious case of that nature that arose within the *saṅgha*. Sudinna sincerely wanted to go forth and lead a pure life in the monastic order. He struggled to convince his parents to allow it, finally succeeding only after threatening them with suicide. The conditions under which Sudinna feels obliged to have sex are quite clear: he is the only son of a rich family who did not want to lose their son and who also

⁴⁴² Vin. III. 28. Horner 1949: 48.

did not want to see their vast property perish in the absence of an heir. When he returns for the first time to visit his parents at their house they try once again to lure him back. Having failed in both efforts the mother pleads with him that at least he should produce an heir to their family. Sudinna feels he has to agree. Consequently he leads his former wife into the forest on a day she is fertile and has sex with the intention of impregnating her.

After this has happened, he is filled with remorse. He returns to his fellow monks and confesses his deed. They rebuke him heavily and remind him that the Buddha's teaching has been articulated for the sake of passionlessness. Then he is reprimanded again by the Buddha himself for his arrogance, his clinging, and other evils.

It would be better if Sudinna were to put his sexual organ into the mouth of a poisonous snake, or a fire-pit, rather than into the sexual organ of womenfolk. Why is that so? Because with the former he will die or experience agony, but he will not go to hell, to a lower realm. With the latter, i.e. sexual intercourse, he will go to hell, to the lower realms. (Vin III 23)⁴⁴³

Sudinna's story of sexual intercourse becomes the paradigmatic example of the first heaviest punishment for a monk which involves the perpetual expulsion of the transgressor from the monkhood (*pārājika*). Any monk who has sex is said 'to have fallen into defeat', and he is no longer allowed to remain "in communion" (*saṃvāsa*)—he is no longer a member of the order. Nevertheless, the Vinaya commentary *Samantapāsādikā* (221, 9) states that Sudinna was not found guilty of an offense entailing expulsion (*pārājika*) since he was the *ādikammika*, the "initial perpetrator" of an offense not yet defined as such. Here, the Vinaya (Vin. III. 33) as well as its commentary prescribe that the initial perpetrator is to be exempted from the respective punishment.

The Vinaya also gives the explanation of the transgression of *pārājika* in detail. It defines 'sexual intercourse' in the three modes being referred to as 'three paths' (*tayo maggā*) which are genital, oral, or anal intercourse.

⁴⁴³ According to the Buddha, transgression of the rules leads to negative kammatic consequences. For many rules the consequences of violation are believed to follow on immediately as a karmic law, and thus are ultimately considered as the individual's retribution. For Buddhist monks, commitment to the doctrine of *karma* motivates observance of the *prātimokṣa*, thereby contributing to the maintenance of celibate behaviours. See Dalzell 2011: 138.

This broadens the definition of the partner of sex, not confining it to heterosexual acts but opening it up to sexual acts between any two partners, homosexual or heterosexual, active or passive, and even with an animal. What really matters is whether or not a sexual act involves any of these ‘three paths’. Exoneration is granted only in case of unconsenting victims of rape.

The next category of offenses, which is called *saṅghāvaśeṣa* (P. *saṅghādisesa*) for the amendment of offenses committed, requires a *saṅgha-kamma* in the beginning (*ādi*) and at the end (P. *sesa*), or requires a formal meeting of the *saṅgha* at every stage. The thirteen offenses represent the lighter rules following the *pārājika*. Amongst these rules, the first five offenses deal with sexual transgressions: (1) masturbation, (2) lustfully touching a woman’s body, (3) speaking lewdly to a woman, (4) lustfully speaking in the presence of a woman, in praise of administering to one’s sexual need, and (5) functioning as a go-between, carrying a man’s sexual intentions to a woman or vice versa. The first *saṅghādisesa* offense concerns intentional emission of semen, unless in a dream (Vin. III. 112).⁴⁴⁴ This rule covers any sexual act not involving any of the three paths, enacted on oneself or between two other individuals. This rule was first laid down for a group of monks who engaged in masturbation in order to have health benefits, such as fresh features, a bright complexion and clear skin (Vin. III. 110). The offense requires two conditions: the intention to undertake the action and emission of semen [=ejaculation] to constitute a *saṅghādisesa*. Both conditions have to be fulfilled in order for one to be considered guilty. This means that the monk concerned has been considered not guilty technically if he thinks (wishes to emit), makes no effort, and emits semen; if he thinks, makes no effort, and does not emit; if he does not think, makes effort, and emits; nor if he thinks and emits without effort.⁴⁴⁵

It is interesting to note that for the most severe breach of discipline (*pārājika*), sex with animals, hermaphrodites⁴⁴⁶, *paṇḍakas*⁴⁴⁷, and males makes for a downfall as much as with women. But in the lesser offenses (*saṅghādisesa*), partner parity disappears. A sexual overture toward a woman earns a heavier punishment than toward any other kind of partner.

⁴⁴⁴ *sañcetanikā sukka-visaṭṭhi aññatra supinantā saṅghādiseso.*

⁴⁴⁵ Derrett 2006: 8.

⁴⁴⁶ A hermaphrodite is ‘one having the sexual characteristics of both sexes’ (*ubhato-byañjanaka*).

⁴⁴⁷ A *paṇḍaka*, or ‘one without testicles’, is often discussed in similar contexts as the hermaphrodite. The term has generally been translated as ‘eunuch’ – i.e. someone deliberately castrated – in the past,

For example, rubbing a woman with sex in mind is worse—incurring a sentencing by the *saṅgha*—than rubbing the body of a *paṇḍaka*, which incurs a lesser offense; or a man or an animal, which constitutes even a lesser offense. As Janet Gyatso explained: “What really made sex with a woman worse than any other kind was its practical upshot: marriage, children, the householder’s life; in short, *samsāra*, or what we have said “village dhamma” (*gāmadhamma*).”⁴⁴⁸

The lighter offenses include *pāyantika* (P. *pācittiya*) in which the breach of these rules requires expiation by confession. It is in this division that we find the offenses of a mostly moral nature such as lying, using abusive language, slandering, stirring up ill-will against a monk, showing disrespect, and killing living creatures etc. Some rules involves sexual inappropriateness, for example, lying down in the same dwelling as a woman (Vin. IV. 17) and teaching a woman the *dharma* at length without an intelligent man present (Vin. IV. 20).

The disciplinary code was not only concerned with sexual abstinence; it also tried to restrict relations between monks and nuns.⁴⁴⁹ For example, monks were not allowed to stay alone with a nun in a private room behind closed doors (Vin. IV. 68), nor to partake of a meal prepared by a nun without the help of some lay people (Vin. IV. 66-67). However, monks were allowed to accompany nuns on the highway by previous agreement if the road was regarded as dangerous.

The *prātimokṣa*, in sum, creates a framework to protect against sexual temptation as well as to maintain the ideal sex-free environment within the *saṅgha*⁴⁵⁰ by prohibiting sexual activity of any sort and by guarding against such inappropriate behaviour, so that it is easier for individuals to observe modest standards of conduct and consistently pursue monastic practices.⁴⁵¹ On the basis of this code the *saṅgha* has the authority to impose punishment on the offender, ranging from expulsion to sanctions of probation, penance, forfeiture, repentance or confession. By effectively enforcing the code of *prātimokṣa* and observing the fortnightly recitation ceremony related to this text, the *saṅgha* may attain the fruition of purity, harmony and spiritual liberation.

Traditionally monks and nuns gather on the fortnightly *poṣadha* (P.

⁴⁴⁸ Gyatso 2009: 280.

⁴⁴⁹ Wijayaratna 1990: 96.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 91-94.

⁴⁵¹ Dalzell 2011: 135.

uposatha) days—to recite the rules that make up the *prātimokṣa* and to confess any breaches.⁴⁵² Regular *poṣadha* recitals and the structure of the *prātimokṣa* that is recited there, serve to perpetuate a universally applicable code of discipline within the *saṅgha*. As the Buddha says in the *Mahāparinibāna-sutta*:

As long as the *bhikkhus* meet in harmony, adjourn from their meetings in harmony, and conduct Community business in harmony, their growth can be expected, not their decline.” (DN. 16)

⁴⁵² Gethin 1998: 90.

Chapter 5

The Reassessment of Celibacy and the Rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism

5.1 The Emergence of the ‘Lay Bodhisattva’ in Early Mahāyāna

As we have seen in the previous chapter, various precepts were laid down to regulate sexual behaviour for monks and nuns. For those who are unable to cope with the rigours of the celibate monastic life, the status of married householder is recommended. In Buddhism, marriage is essentially a secular contract of partnership in which the partners assume obligations towards one another, and it is considered the only appropriate forum for sexual intimacy.⁴⁵³ For the laity, sexual morality is governed primarily by the ‘third precept’. This precept prohibits ‘misconduct in things sexual (Skt. *kāmeṣu-mithyācāra*, P. *kāmesu-micchācāra*)’, so as to avoid causing suffering by one’s sexual behaviour. Adultery—‘going with the wife of another’ (AN. I. 189) — is the most straightforward breach of this precept.⁴⁵⁴ In other words, monogamy is the preferred and predominant model as shown in the following verse:

The understanding man should avoid the unchaste life, like a burning pit of coals. But if he is incapable of [living], a chaste life, he should not transgress against another’s wife.⁴⁵⁵

Moreover, the third precept is extended to intercourse with someone’s partner (a woman who is ‘in relationship’ with another man), with a woman who is engaged, with a woman who is still protected by a relative, or with a young girl who is not protected by a relative.⁴⁵⁶ Some early sources, such as *Aṭṭhasālinī*, Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the *Dhamma-saṅgaṇī*, specify such classes of women who are precluded as sexual partners (Asl. 98). In addition, obsessive sexual activities also come within the range of the third precept, as do other obsessive forms of sensuality. Apart from that, the pure and impure observance of the third precept also involves the solemn vow of fidelity typically made in a marriage, such as being straightforward and honest in the relationship.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵³ Keown 2013: 56.

⁴⁵⁴ Harvey 2000: 71.

⁴⁵⁵ Sn. 396. See Norman (trans.) 2001: 48.

⁴⁵⁶ Harvey 2000: 72.

⁴⁵⁷ Keown 2013: 59.

While lay Buddhists are free to marry and have families, there is a clear sense in Theravāda Buddhism that the lay status is inferior to the monastic one, and that it is appropriate only for those who are not yet able to sever the ties that bind them to the mundane world. Compared with monastic life, lay life is seen as having more obstacles to and lesser opportunities for persistent and consistent spiritual practice.⁴⁵⁸ Married laypeople may adopt the monastic practice of *brahmacarya* for shorter or longer periods; for example, in Theravāda countries it would be common for pious lay Buddhists to abstain from sexual relations during the twice-monthly *poṣadha* (P. *uposatha*) days. The lay observance of *poṣadha* requires the acceptance of the ‘Eight Precepts’, called *aṣṭāṅgika poṣatha* (P. *aṭṭhaṅgika uposatha*), and its aim and purpose is stated to be purification of a soiled mind by a proper process.⁴⁵⁹ The *Uposatha-sutta* says:

And how is there the purification of a soiled mind done by a proper process, Visākhā? ... As long as they live the Arahants, by abandoning impurity of life, dwell observing chastity, abstaining from unchastity, from sexual intercourse, dealings with women. So also do I abide this night and day abandoning impurity of life, dwelling observing chastity, abstaining from unchastity, from sexual intercourse, dealings with women. By this observance I too imitate the Arahants and I shall have kept the “Sabbath” [cleansing of the soiled mind] ... A Sabbath thus observed is of great fruit, of great profit. It is brilliant. It is of great radiance. (AN. III. 70)⁴⁶⁰

The Buddhist laity was given the responsibility of supporting the *saṅgha*, a duty that depended more on generosity and pious confidence in the *dharma* than it did on philosophical speculation.⁴⁶¹ There were five virtues for a Buddhist lay devotee (*upāsaka*) to perform: faith (*śraddhā*), morality (*śīla*), generosity (*tyāga*), learning (*śruta*), and wisdom (*prajñā*).⁴⁶² The Buddha encouraged both monastics and laypeople to become *ārya śrāvakas* or ‘noble disciples’ (literally ‘hearers’) who listen to the *dharma*. The ideal and practice pursued by the *bhikṣu* is regarded

⁴⁵⁸ Harvey 2012: 288.

⁴⁵⁹ Dutt 1988: 104-105.

⁴⁶⁰ Woodward 2006: 187-192.

⁴⁶¹ Berkwitz 2010: 68.

⁴⁶² AN. III. 80.

to be far greater than that of the *upāsaka*. The monk aims at *nirvāṇa* whereas the layperson aspires for the heavens, for a good rebirth in the world of deities (*devatā*) or that of mankind.⁴⁶³ However, as the disciples (*śrāvakas*) of the Buddha, they were both expected to follow the ‘Eightfold Path’ (*ārya aṣṭāṅgikamārga*) which comprises the whole of the spiritual life (*brahmacarya*)⁴⁶⁴ leading to the development of *śīla*, *samādhi*, and *prajñā*. How the eight factors are to be classified in terms of *śīla*, *samādhi* and *prajñā* is detailed as follows:

Right speech, right action and right livelihood---these dhammas are comprised by the aggregate of *śīla*; right effort, right attention and right meditation---these dhammas are comprised by the aggregate of *samādhi*; right view and right thought---these dhammas are comprised by the aggregate of *paññā*. (MN. I. 301)

The ‘Eightfold Path’ is used in the Pāli Abhidhamma to refer to the actual attainment of four specific spiritual attainments, namely *sotāpanna* (Skt. *śrotāpanna*, ‘the stream-winner’), *sakadāgāmi* (Skt. *sakṛdāgāmin*, ‘the once-returner’), *anāgāmi* (Skt. *Anāgāmin*, ‘the non-returner’), and the arahat (Skt. *arhat*, ‘the worthy [of great respect]’). Briefly, the Eightfold Path, which in fact incorporates a great number of spiritual exercises, constitutes the apex of the liberation process called ‘arahatship’. As Gethin describes it:

We start with the condition of the ordinary man (*puthujjana*) which is characterized by the continual fluctuation of the eight items (sometimes they are ‘right’, sometimes they are ‘wrong’); we finish with the condition of the *arahant* which is characterized by the eight items being firmly and fully ‘right’.⁴⁶⁵

Clearly, the mainstream ideal of early Buddhists was the *arhat*, the saintly purified one who had transcended all desire, conditioning, and

⁴⁶³ Lamotte 1988: 67.

⁴⁶⁴ Rupert Gethin explains that the *brahmacarya* of the eightfold path, the spiritual practice that is full and complete, stands in contrast to a *brahmacarya* that is somehow incomplete. He quotes the *Mahāgovinda-sutta* (DN. II. 251): “At that time I was the *brāhmana* Mahāgovinda. I taught my pupils the path to communion with the world of Brahmā. But that *brahmacarya*, Pañcasikha, did not conduce to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to full awakening, to *nibbāna*, but only as far as rebirth in the world of Brahmā. But now my *brahmacarya* conduces to complete disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to full awakening, to *nibbāna*. See Gethin 2001: 203.

⁴⁶⁵ Gethin 2001: 224.

defilements in individual enlightenment. This *arhat* ideal continues in the Theravāda, which is still the dominant school of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia: Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.⁴⁶⁶

During the early development of what became Theravāda Buddhism, the *arhat* ideal developed from an ideal readily attainable in this life into an ideal considered remote and impossible to achieve in one or even many lifetimes.⁴⁶⁷ George Bond shows this to be the case by quoting from some of the Buddhist narratives about the earliest disciples. Whereas such narratives describe how the five ascetics (*pañca-vaggin*) and the young man Yasa become *arhats* easily and instantly after hearing the *dharma*, in a number of other *suttas*, arhatship has become a more distant goal, requiring specified actions, such as renunciation of the household life and cultivation of certain qualities. Bond brings evidence from commentaries to claim that *arhats* are few and the path to arhatship is long:

For the commentators, the path had become central and arahantship a remote but controlling ideal. This distance is reflected in the fact that the commentaries speak of great arahants of the past but do not mention any contemporary arahants. ... Buddhaghosa says that few people reach the advanced stages of the path because “only one in a hundred or a thousand is able to reach even the intermediate stages” and of those who attain that much, “only one in a hundred or a thousand” progresses further (Vism. 375).⁴⁶⁸

No matter how long it would take to reach arhatship, the *arhat* ideal is still significant to Theravāda Buddhists. Furthermore, the *Jātakas*, the stories of the Buddha’s previous lives, has been one of the most popular tales across Theravāda countries, as prescriptive models for Buddhist practice, even for the lengthy and difficult *bodhisattva* path requiring heroic effort that leads to Buddhahood. In Theravāda Buddhism, the *arhat* ideal and the *bodhisattva* ideal are alternative paths to *nirvāṇa*; both involve a long and very similar set of systematic practice of the perfect virtues (Skt. *pāramitā*, P. *pāramitā/pāramī*). As parallel paths, the distinction between them is blurred, and thus the *Jātakas* can be relevant to both aspiring *bodhisattvas* and those wishing to attain arhatship, since both can practice the perfections albeit to different

⁴⁶⁶ Leighton 2012: 45.

⁴⁶⁷ Appleton 2010: 106

⁴⁶⁸ Bond 1984: 234.

levels.⁴⁶⁹ Appleton points out:

The lengthening and codification of the paths has two effects; it makes the glory of the Buddha and *arahats* greater whilst simultaneously making the path more accessible. With the two paths looking ever more similar and ever more long, everybody can have a place *somewhere* upon them.⁴⁷⁰

However, it is only in the Mahāyāna which is also called Bodhisattvayāna⁴⁷¹ (or Ekayāna)⁴⁷² that the concept of the *bodhisattava* becomes a serious ideal of the Buddhists. The early followers of Mahāyāna saw in the figure of the *bodhisattva* a much more demanding, yet fulfilling path of Buddhist practice. As a *bodhisattva* one makes a binding vow and dedicates one's efforts to become a Buddha who can help to release others beings from the suffering of *samsāra* by postponing one's own entry into *nirvāna* for the sake of mankind. As such, this path was extolled as a superior form of practice by which the Mahāyāna used to distinguish itself from the *arhat* path.

The social background of the origination of Mahāyāna has not yet been explained completely, although some theories exist.⁴⁷³ Much debated are the times and the places in which Mahāyāna arose. However, some disagreement is found surrounding several important issues. According to most Buddhist scholars, the Mahāyāna was a movement which originated in India some 300 or 400 years after the death of Gautama Buddha.⁴⁷⁴ It did not emerge suddenly, as a fully formed, self-conscious sectarian reform. Rather, Mahāyāna developed very gradually. It eventually became a concrete ideology that was extensive and more diversified than

⁴⁶⁹ Appleton 2010: 107.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁷¹ This term 'Bodhisattvayāna' or 'The 'Vehicle of the *Bodhisattvas*' is an alternative designation for the Mahāyāna or 'Great Vehicle', describing means or method by which *bodhisattvas* pursue their religious career. See Keown, Damien. 2004. "*Bodhisattvayāna*." A Dictionary of Buddhism. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095514804> [Accessed: 15 January 2014].

⁴⁷² The term 'Ekayāna' or 'The One Way or Vehicle' is a concept found in certain Mahāyāna texts such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, the *Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra*, the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* and the *Lankāvatāra-sūtra*, which teaches that the three Ways (*triyāna*)—the Śrāvakayāna, the Pratyekabuddhayāna, and the Bodhisattvayāna—taught by the Buddha all converge in the single Buddhayāna. In these *sūtras*, the term 'Ekayāna' is used in the sense of 'one path' as opposed to the two paths of the Śrāvakayāna, the Pratyekabuddhayāna. See Keown, Damien. 2004. "*Ekayāna*." A Dictionary of Buddhism. [Online]. Available at: <http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095745106?rskey=p6ESNs&result=6> [Accessed: 15 January 2014].

⁴⁷³ Nakamura 1980: 150.

⁴⁷⁴ Harrison 1987: 67.

the Śrāvakayāna or so-called ‘Hīnayāna’.⁴⁷⁵

In the following analysis of Mahāyāna’s origins and early development, we shall focus on the theory of Akira Hirakawa which links the emergence of early Mahāyāna with forest saints and the cult of *stūpa*. Hirakawa assumes that a contrast is continually drawn between the *śrāvakasāṅgha* (the monastic order) and the *bodhisattvagaṇa* (group or community of *bodhisattvas*). He suggests that the terms *kulaputra* and *kuladuhitr*⁴⁷⁶, frequently found in early Mahāyāna *sūtras*, denote Buddhist devotees, often with the added implication that they are *bodhisattvas*. Although the Mahāyāna community contains both laypeople and renunciants in the same way as in the Nikāya (pre-Mahāyāna) community, these terms show that in the Mahāyāna community laymen and laywomen were of considerable importance. Hirakawa believes that Mahāyāna Buddhism in its earliest formulation possessed actual communal forms that were different and separate from the monastically centered forms of Nikāya Buddhism.

However, Stephen Berkwitz and others claims that the theory attributing the rise of the Mahāyāna to a lay-dominated *stūpa* cult movement lacks good evidence to support it. Instead of focusing on a lay movement and the cult of *stūpa*, Berkwitz supports the alternative theory of Reginald Ray which attributes the origins of Mahāyāna to a forest movement of those who retreated to the wilderness in order to engage in intensive meditation and textual study in a more austere environment.⁴⁷⁷ Ray hypothesizes that the first step in the monasticization of the Mahāyāna would likely have been incohabitation within Nikāya monasteries of those with allegiance to the emerging Mahāyāna. Such monks, he says, would have lived in Nikāya monasteries, following their rule, but being understood or understanding themselves as followers of the Mahāyāna teaching. Ray points out:

It may also be that some forest renunciants, who belonged to what became the Mahāyāna, desired to live the less arduous renunciant life of the monastery. Sickness, old age, or simply the desire for a more secure and comfortable life could have been motivating factors. Because at first there

⁴⁷⁵ Gross 1993: 55.

⁴⁷⁶ These Sanskrit terms *kulaputra* and *kuladuhitr* mean ‘a nobly born son’ and ‘a nobly born daughter’ (of a respectable family) respectively. The equivalent terms ‘*kulaputta*’ and ‘*kuladhītu*’ are equally common in Pāli *sūtras*.

⁴⁷⁷ Berkwitz 2010: 72.

were no Mahāyānist monasteries, becoming monks for these people would have required undergoing Nikāya ordination and living by Nikāya *prātimokṣas*. Thus, they would have brought their Mahāyāna orientation and affiliation with them into the originally non-Mahāyāna monastic system.⁴⁷⁸

However, Hirakawa's work suggests the clear image of renunciant bodhisattvas in the early Mahāyāna tradition. Of particular interest is how lay *bodhisattvas* and renunciant *bodhisattvas* shared precepts, or *śīla*, namely, the *daśakuśalakarmapatha*⁴⁷⁹, whilst having contrasting conduct. The *daśakuśala* is, of course, the same set of ten virtuous actions that we find recommended in various Mahāyāna texts.⁴⁸⁰ This *daśakuśala* or 'śīla of the ten virtuous actions' is an ideal *śīla* to be observed by the renunciants and the laity alike; both renunciant *bodhisattvas* and lay *bodhisattvas* practice the *daśakuśala* as their primary and defining life rule. Nevertheless, this life rule seems to have had a slightly different form for the two types of *bodhisattvas*. For example, the third *daśakuśala*, *kāmesu micchācāra veramaṇī* prohibiting unethical sexual relationships, is for the lay *bodhisattva*, whereas for the renunciant *bodhisattva*, the rule means to refrain from sexual conduct altogether (*brahmacarya*).⁴⁸¹

In order to understand more clearly the beginnings of Mahāyāna Buddhism, we shall discuss an earlier Mahāyāna work, the *Ugraparipṛcchā-sūtra*⁴⁸², which is considered to have originated in a monastic milieu prior to the open split between Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism. Jan Nattier analyses this *sūtra* in her book 'The Bodhisattva Path: Based on the Ugraparipṛcchā, a Mahāyāna Sūtra'. She insists that the Ugra and other *bodhisattva sutrās* of roughly comparable age (e.g., the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, the *Akṣobhyavyūha*, and the *Kāśyapaparivarta*) never recommend the

⁴⁷⁸ Ray 1999: 413.

⁴⁷⁹ The practice of the ten virtuous actions (*daśakuśalakarmapatha*) is: abstention from killing (*prāṇātipātavirati*), abstention from taking what has not been given (*adattādānavirati*), abstention from sexual misconduct (*kāmamithyācāravirati*), abstention from lying or false testimony (*mṛṣāvādavirati*), abstention from slander (*paiśunyaavirati*), abstention from rough speech (*pāruṣyavirati*), abstention from talking nonsense (*sambhinnapralāpavirati*), abstention from covetousness (*abhidhyāvirati*), abstention from ill will (*vyāpādavirati*) and abstention from wrong view (*mithyādrṣṭivirati*).

⁴⁸⁰ Hirakawa 2005: 193.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 194.

⁴⁸² The *Ugraparipṛcchā-sūtra* was translated into Chinese by a layman named An Xuan 安玄, who was a disciple of An Shigao 安世高. An Xuan, of Parthian origin like An Shigao, came to Luoyang as a merchant toward the latter part of the reign of the Emperor Ling (r. 168-190). He worked there together with a collaborator, Yan Fotiao 嚴佛調, producing a translation of the *Ugraparipṛcchā*, the *Fa-jing-jing* 法鏡經, Taishō no. 322. See Nattier 2006: 89-94.

bodhisattva vocation to all Buddhists. Although the *sūtra* strongly advocates the renunciant life and the practice by renunciant *bodhisattvas*, it encourages and supports those who have undertaken the *bodhisattva* vocation, while at the same time attempting to preserve harmony within a Buddhist community that now offers its members two quite distinct, and unequal paths as *śrāvakas* and *bodhisattvas* respectively.⁴⁸³ Moreover, the renunciant *bodhisattva* presented in the *Ugraparipṛcchā-sūtra* is commonly exhorted to withdraw from society ‘avoiding contact with others’ to an even greater extent than most of his *śrāvaka* monastic counterparts, in pursuing perfection for attaining the state of a Buddha.⁴⁸⁴ The authors of the *Ugraparipṛcchā-sūtra* viewed the *bodhisattva* as someone who should be the most stringent practitioner within his category: the lay *bodhisattva* should emulate the monk, while the monastic *bodhisattva* should emulate the strictest forest renunciant.⁴⁸⁵

In sum, the *Ugraparipṛcchā-sūtra* upholds the ideal of the monastic, and more particularly, of the solitary renouncer who devotes his life to meditative practices pursued in isolation and does not challenge the *śrāvaka*’s aspiration as selfish and vain.⁴⁸⁶ Such a kind of *bodhisattva* appears to be different from the common view of a *bodhisattva* who is compassionate toward others, concerned for the welfare of all beings, expressing that concern in concrete and constructive activities to reduce the suffering of others. Based on the ample evidence in the *sūtra*, Nattier points out that:

Ray’s hypothesis that the *bodhisattva* path emerged among wilderness-dwelling renunciants thus comes closer to the mark than does Hiraekawas’s (at least as far as the Ugra is concerned), for he recognizes that the emergent *bodhisattva* vocation reflects an environment of strict asceticism, not a liberalized (or lay-influenced) community. Both scholars, however, fall into the trap of painting a monolithic portrait of “monastics” and then using this representation as evidence that the originators of the *bodhisattva* path must have come from outside their ranks ... In both cases the point that the Ugra’s authors were trying to convey is lost from view: that the renunciant *bodhisattva* is simply a particular type—

⁴⁸³ Nattier 2007: 86.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 132.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 130.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., xiii.

indeed, an exemplary type of monk.⁴⁸⁷

Like the *Ugraparipṛcchā-sūtra*, other *sūtras* such as the *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthita-sūtra* and the *Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchā-sūtra* (whose authorship is unknown) are likewise attributed to the *Bodhisattva* path leading to Buddhahood. These early texts are similar in that they all discuss the practices to be taken up by *bodhisattvas*. These practices include meditative concentration (*samādhi*) and altruistic giving (*dāna*).⁴⁸⁸

During this scholastic movement to popularize the *bodhisattva* ideal, the emphasis on *anuttarasamyaksambodhi* or ‘unsurpassed all-encompassing knowledge’ caused the ideal of arhatship to appear inferior to that of *bodhisattva* which finally led to Buddhahood. Although the old idea of arhatship is still seen as a good attainment, it was downgraded as somewhat limited. This placed the movement in sharp contrast to the *arhat* ideal.⁴⁸⁹ The early Mahāyānists, called Mahāsāṃghikas⁴⁹⁰, began to criticize arhatship as a spiritually inferior and incomplete attainment. Several Mahāyāna *sūtras* express that the *arhat* is worthy of blame for working exclusively towards his own salvation. He functions as an example, and in this way he arouses the desire in others to walk the same way, but besides this he is inactive and lacks the element of compassion. To highlight how the *bodhisattva* ideal considerably surpasses the *arhat* ideal, Paul Williams offers the following explanation:

There is however a problem here. Presumably Śākyamuni actually could have attained enlightenment for himself (the state of an *arhat*) in the presence of that previous Buddha. Why did he undergo the many, many rebirths necessary in order to follow the path to Buddhahood if the eventual goal of Buddhahood is not qualitatively different to—not in some significant way very much superior to—the state of an arhat? We are told that he undertook the long path to Buddhahood out of compassion, in order to be able to help others more effectively—but why? ... If there is something

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 98-99.

⁴⁸⁸ Berkwitz 2010: 79.

⁴⁸⁹ Leighton 2012: 46.

⁴⁹⁰ Mahāsāṃghika literally means ‘great assembly’. Mahāsāṃghika is one of the two schools into which the Buddhist community is said to have split after the second council of Buddhism, held at Vaisāli c. 300 BCE. The second group was the Sthaviravāda. The Mahāsāṃghikas started to elucidate the image of the *bodhisattva*, an ideal type that would be definitively described by the Mahāyāna School. See Irons 2008: 322.

qualitatively superior, it can only be described in terms of altruism, since there is nothing left for the Buddha to gain for himself beyond becoming an arhat. And if this Buddhahood is qualitatively superior, then those who do not attain an altruistic Buddhahood must be missing out on the highest spiritual goal.⁴⁹¹

In criticizing the *arhat* the early Mahāyānists are commonly thought to have been striking a blow against monastic elitism. Nowhere is such doctrine of Mahāyāna expressed more sharply than in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtrā* (Scripture of the Teaching of Vimalakīrti). This *sūtra* prides itself on its radical break with the Śrāvakayāna⁴⁹² and is severely critical of monasticism. It proposes as the central figure a pious householder (*gr̥hapati*) Vimalakīrti, a *bodhisattva* who is the true embodiment of the Mahāyāna ideal. He, without being ordained as a monk, attains a high degree of enlightenment as a layman, and throughout his career consistently lives the *bodhisattva* life. Though possessing a wife and children, he holds himself aloof from worldly pleasures and practices pure virtues. The *sūtra* describes such a ‘noble non-monastic’ as follows:

He wore the white clothes of the layman, yet lived impeccably like a religious devotee. He lived at home, but remained aloof from the realm of desire, the realm of pure matter, and the immaterial realm. He had a son, a wife, and female attendants, yet always maintained continence. He appeared to be surrounded by servants, yet lived in solitude.⁴⁹³

According to Paul Harrison, in early Chinese translation of Mahāyāna texts such as, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, the *Drumakinnararāja-paripṛcchā*, the *Kāśyapa-parivarta*, and the

⁴⁹¹ Williams and Tribe 2000: 137-138.

⁴⁹² The term Śrāvakayāna ‘Vehicle of the Hearers’ is the name given by the Mahāyāna to the early disciples who ‘heard’ the teachings of the Buddha and by practising them sought to become *arhats*. Like Hīnayāna, the term has a derogatory flavour (although in this case less pronounced) since the hearers are seen by the Mahāyāna as interested only in their personal salvation in contrast to the more altruistic path of the Bodhisattvayāna which aims at universal liberation. The term frequently occurs in the threefold classification of *Śrāvakas*, *Pratyekabuddhas* and *Bodhisattvas* which represent the three main types of religious aspirant. See Keown, Damien. 2004. “*Śrāvakayāna*.” A Dictionary of Buddhism. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100526153?rskey=XVmkLg&result=4> [Accessed: 15 January 2014].

⁴⁹³ Thurman 2010: 20-21.

Ugraparipṛcchā-sūtra, the lay Bodhisattva is expected to live a life free of attachment to family, and to aim to be ordained as soon as possible:

These *bodhisattvas* may well be in the world, but they are not of it. Like lotuses, they grow out of the mud of the passions, but because of their endowment with wisdom and skill-in-means they are undefiled by them. To ensure that they remain undefiled, they must be strict in their adherence to the Five Precepts, especially those relating to intoxicants and sex, hence a negative attitude to all possible objects of attachment, particularly wives and children, is often recommended. This incidentally reveals the extent to which these *sūtras* were written from a male point of view, since *bodhisattvas* are never urged to regard their husbands as demons, sources of misery and so on. The household life is in fact a curse, since it destroys all one's 'roots of goodness' and only heaps more fuel on the fire of the passions, consequently *bodhisattvas* are best advised to quit it as soon as possible.⁴⁹⁴

In much of this, the stereotype of Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* is akin to the ideal devout lay disciple in the Pāli *suttas* which might reach an advanced spiritual stage as the Theravāda tradition says. On the other hand, in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* lay practitioners do play a prominent part⁴⁹⁵ and they remain in the world without being defiled by its sensory delights.⁴⁹⁶ The *sūtra* evidently presents a rather different image of lay *bodhisattva* that conflicts with the image of an *arhat* in the pre-Mahāyāna period. The 'Hīnayāna' followers are represented in the *śutrā* as voice-hearers (*śrāvaka*) who have entered the monastic order and have heard the teaching directly from the Śākyamuni Buddha. They adhered to 'Hīnayāna' beliefs and strove to attain the state of *arhat*. As *pratyekabuddhas*⁴⁹⁷ (*P. paccekabuddha*) they are the frequent objects of Vimalakīrti's reproaches, and at times even ridiculed, because of their limited and self-centered aims and procedures, as contrasted with those of the *bodhisattvas*. In this text, the *bodhisattvas* are depicted as limitless in number, all-caring, capable of extending unbounded aid to others in

⁴⁹⁴ Harrison 1987: 75-76.

⁴⁹⁵ Harvey 2012: 112.

⁴⁹⁶ Berkwitz 2010: 85-86.

⁴⁹⁷ The term *pratyekabuddha* is often translated as 'solitary Buddha' which means a person who attains cessation without the benefit of hearing the teaching of a Buddha in a time when no Buddha's teachings are known in the world. (See Keown, Damien, and Charles S. Prebish, eds. 2013. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. London and New York: Routledge, p. 412)

search of enlightenment.⁴⁹⁸ Vimalakīrti ridicules the *arhats* in the name of the compassion of the ‘worldly’ *bodhisattva*, implying that these disciples of the Buddha are too attached to a deluded notion of purity.

The text presents the discussion between Śāriputra⁴⁹⁹ and a mature female called simply ‘the goddess’, who has been meditating and studying for twelve years. He is extremely impressed with her wisdom and asks her why she does not change her female sex. She replies that she has looked for the innate characteristics of the female sex and has not been able to find them, ‘How can she change them?’ She compares her femaleness to the femaleness of a magically created illusion of a woman, which Śāriputra agrees could not be changed since it possesses no innate determinative characteristics of its own. To demonstrate the understanding of emptiness that ‘the female form and innate characteristics neither exist nor do not exist’, she changes Śāriputra into the likeness of herself and herself into the likeness of Śāriputra and asks Śāriputra, who has been changed into a female form, ‘Why don't you change your female sex?’ Śāriputra is quite confused and the goddess lectures to him that if he could be changed into a female, then all women could also change into males, which is why the Buddha said ‘all are not really men or women’. Vimalakīrti then says to Śāriputra:

This goddess has in the past made offerings to ninety-two million Buddhas and can disport herself with the supernatural powers of a *bodhisattva*. She has fulfilled all that she vowed, has accepted the truth of birthlessness, and dwells in a state from which she will never regress. Because of her original vow, she can show herself anytime she wishes and teach and convert living beings.⁵⁰⁰

Since the *sūtra* is influenced by the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), the ideal *bodhisattva* in this text and *bodhisattvas* are aware of the non-duality of existence which erases the difference between male and female, pure and impure, or monastic and lay lives. Vimalakīrti, in his exposition of the *dharma*, particularly when he is addressing the voice-hearers or representatives of the ‘Hīnayāna’ thought, lays great emphasis upon the doctrine of emptiness, deliberately employing expressions that

⁴⁹⁸ Watson (ed.) 1997: 7.

⁴⁹⁹ Śāriputra (P. *Sāriputta*) was known for his wisdom and his expertise of the Abhidharma. With the Buddha's approval, Śāriputra preached the doctrine, and he was considered by the Buddha to be second in command of the order. Theravāda texts depicted him as a paragon of humility, compassion, and patience. See Olson 2009: 205.

⁵⁰⁰ Watson, Burton, ed. 1997. *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 92.

he knows will seem paradoxical or will shock them.⁵⁰¹

The text continues by calling attention to the realm of non-dualism. When Vimalakīrti lectures about *śūnyatā*, the goddess is so delighted that she sprinkles heavenly flowers on the assembly. When the flowers fall on the bodies of the great disciples, they stick on them and do not fall. The great disciples shake the flowers and even try to use their magical powers, but still the flowers will not fall off. This embarrasses the disciples, for to wear flowers is against the precept prohibiting novices and monks from adorning themselves. It is improper, says Śāriputra. The goddess proves her superior understanding of the Buddha's doctrine by saying to Śāriputra, the leader of the disciples.

These flowers are proper indeed! Why? Such flowers have neither constructual thought nor discrimination. But the elder Śāriputra has both constructual thought and discrimination. Reverend Śāriputra, impropriety for one who has renounced the world for the discipline of the rightly taught Dharma consists of constructual thought and discrimination, yet the elders are full of such thoughts. One who is without such thoughts is always proper. Reverend Śāriputra, see how these flowers do not stick to the bodies of these great spiritual heroes, the bodhisattvas! This is because they have eliminated constructual thoughts and discriminations.⁵⁰²

One thing is clear from the above discussion: tensions between the monks and the laypeople have determined from the outset the history of Indian Buddhism, which was torn between the ideals of celibate life and of active compassion. The latter notion found its full expression in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In early Buddhism, the ideal of the layman status is clearly inferior to that of the monks; laypeople simply hope for a better rebirth, whereas the monks strive for *nirvāṇa*. In the Mahāyāna, however, the lay *bodhisattva* ideal comes to challenge that of the *arhat* ideal. Indeed, the laypeople are more generally concerned with accumulating merits whereas the monks are usually engaged in pursuit of liberation—yet this is not always the case. Deliverance was not necessarily perceived as too distant a goal for certain laypeople who were trying to emulate Vimalakīrti. By contrast, improving *karma* was also one of the aims of monastic practice.⁵⁰³ Renunciation here appears unnecessary and celibacy

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁰² Thurman 2010: 59.

⁵⁰³ Faure: 2009: 135.

is by no means rendered relevant to awakening, as demonstrated by the layman Vimalakīrti's superior display of wisdom and 'skill in means' (*upāya-kauśalya*). Moreover, in this *sūtra*, the celibate life of a monastic and the monastic precepts forbidding sexual activity are shown to be only provisionally binding. For an 'advanced' *bodhisattva*, set on the goal of awakening, like Vimalakīrti, all manner of seeming transgressions are permissible if committed strictly for the sake of bringing other beings to awakening.⁵⁰⁴ To explain the importance of 'skill in means' pertaining to the morality of the *bodhisattvas*, and the paradoxical nature of some Mahāyāna moral discourse, we will examine this concept in greater depth in section 5.3.

5.2 Bodhisattva's Ethics and Attitude toward Renunciation

Many scholars have claimed that in the beginning of Mahāyāna Nikāya (Śravakayāna) and Mahāyāna Buddhism are not so clearly distinguished. It is claimed that no Mahāyāna *Vinaya* was produced in India.⁵⁰⁵ The Chinese monk and traveller, Faxian 法顯, in the early 5th century, while noting one town that had separate colleges for the Mahāyāna, did not distinguish an exclusive Mahāyāna sect.⁵⁰⁶ Xuanzang 玄奘, writing in the mid 7th century, noted that Mahāyāna and Śrāvaka monks lived together at Nālanda University.⁵⁰⁷ Half a century later, Yijing 義淨 noted a similar situation, with the monks sharing a common *vinaya*.⁵⁰⁸ Yijing observed no significant different in the life styles of Nikāya and Mahāyāna monks. Yijing traveled in India when Mahāyāna Buddhism was in its middle period. He noted that "those who paid homage to *bodhisattvas* and read Mahāyāna *sūtras*" were Mahāyāna practitioners, while those who did not do so were Hīnayāna.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁴ Wilson 2003: 154

⁵⁰⁵ Gombrich 2006: 4.

⁵⁰⁶ "At this *saṅgharāma* of the Mahāyāna order he obtained a copy of the Precepts (Vinaya), to wit, the Precepts of the assembly of the Mahāsaṅghika, which were those observed by the first great assembly, convened during the lifetime of Buddha. This work was given forth (or, handed down, promulgated) at the Jetavana temple. Besides this, the eighteen schools each have canons of their own, which are identical in their main tenour. In minor points of difference they may treat the subject with different degree of freedom." See Giles (trans.) 1877: 125-126.

⁵⁰⁷ "This *saṅgharāma* is only in which this law [the text refers to the law/rules of ordination] exists. ... a long succession of kings continued the work of building. ... Learned men from different cities, on this account, who desire to acquire quickly a renown in discussion, come here in multitudes to settle their doubts, and then the streams (of the wisdom) spread far and wide. For this reason some persons usurp the name (of Nālanda students), and in going to and fro received honour in consequence." See Beal (trans.) 1884: 169-170.

⁵⁰⁸ Takakusu (trans.) 2009: 14; Williams 2009: 5.

⁵⁰⁹ Hirakawa 1993: 257.

However, in terms of ethics (*śīla*), the foundation of Mahāyāna Buddhism differs from earlier Buddhism by emphasizing the obligation to save others, and that one's own salvation is not complete until everyone has been liberated. This means that Mahāyāna ethics cannot be isolated from the welfare of all living things. According to the Bodhisattvabhūmi⁵¹⁰, Mahāyāna ethics came to be seen as the threefold division of *śīla*: (1) 'the right conduct of self discipline', *saṃvaraśīla*, (2) 'the right conduct of accumulating beneficial actions', *kuśaladharmasaṃgrāhakaśīla*, and (3) 'the right conduct of acting for the benefit of sentient beings', *sattvārthakriyāśīla* (or 'the right conduct of caring for sentient beings', *sattvānuvrāhakaṃ śīlam*).⁵¹¹ In his work, 'Asanga's Chapter on Ethics With the Commentary by Tsong-Kha-pa', Tatz quotes the commentary of the Bodhisattvabhūmi and concludes as follows:

The first is described as the *bodhisattva's prātimokṣa*; it constitutes the ethics of withdrawal and, in the words of the Bodhisattvabhūmi (Ts. 97b), brings about mental stability. The second consists of the six perfections (giving, morality, patience, vigor, meditation, and wisdom) and other bases of training; it brings about the 'maturation' of the *bodhisattva* to Buddhahood. The third consists of service to others.⁵¹²

In caring for the welfare of others, *bodhisattvas* engage in ministering to the needs of others, as listed in the Bodhisattvabhūmi, for example, helping sentient beings in beneficial matters, advising on how to attain worldly and transcendent goals, gratitude for help received and returning it, inspiring and teaching others, and so on.⁵¹³ In this way, the

⁵¹⁰ The Bodhisattvabhūmi written by the Indian Yogācāra master Asaṅga in third or fourth century CE and was translated into Chinese by Dharmakṣema from India, between 414-412 and by Guṇavarman of Kashmir in 431.

⁵¹¹ Zimmermann 2013: 873.

⁵¹² Tatz 1989: 16.

⁵¹³ The eleven manifestations of the benefiting sentient beings, *sattvānuvrāhakaṃ śīlam*, are (1) helping sentient beings in beneficial matters; taking care of them in situations of suffering, such as illness; (2) showing the rules pertaining to worldly and otherworldly matters by explaining the appropriate means and teaching the *dharma*; (3) returning assistance to those from whom the *bodhisattva* has experienced help by being grateful and supporting them; (4) protecting sentient beings from manifold dangers; (5) dispelling worries about property and relatives; (6) providing those with all commodities who are bereft of them. (7) attracting followers with the *dharma* by offering oneself as a right refuge; (8) serving the wishes (of others) by approaching them in the course of time with greetings and conversations, by accepting food, drink, etc., by regularly operating worldly business, by coming and going when called for; (9) delighting (others) by proclaiming their real virtues, be it secretly or openly; (10) with affection, a mental disposition which aims at the benefit (of others) in order to turn (others) away from a state which is baneful (*akuśala*) and to direct (them) to a state which is beneficial (*kuśala*); and (11) and with the display of hells and other (shocking) realms of existences right in front of their eyes (created) by his supernatural power, he intimidates them (and) thereby (makes them move away) from baneful (modes of behaviors); in order to have them accept the

Mahāyānists brought a new mode of ethics that emphasizes moral virtue regarding others rather than exclusive personal development and self-control.

Moreover, in the chapter on ethics (*śīla*) of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, Asaṅga developed ‘four events/actions’⁵¹⁴ for moral transgression for a *bodhisattva* which are analogous to the ‘four monastic defeats’.⁵¹⁵ Consequently, this outlines a new set of training-precepts for *bodhisattvas* for the avoidance of two classes of offenses: (1) the four monastic defeats, and (2) ‘misdeeds’—four actions that break the vow of a *bodhisattva*.⁵¹⁶ It is notable that while a monastic transgression requires expulsion from the monastic community once one commits such an act, transgression as a *bodhisattva* only comes from doing one of the above repeatedly and without regret—or from abandoning the ‘thought of enlightenment’ (*bodhicitta*). What is more, the text states that the *bodhisattva* still has an opportunity to renew the *bodhisattva* vows in the same lifetime, but the monk who has already transgressed has no such opportunity.⁵¹⁷

The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* was the guidance for moral conduct for both lay and monastic *bodhisattvas* until the eighth century, when it was partly superseded by the ethical system of an Indian scholar-monk named Śāntideva.⁵¹⁸ Amongst the productions of the Indian Mahāyāna in the seventh century AD, the two texts written by Śāntideva are the most influential and come closest to a worked-out ethical theory for Mahāyānists: the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* ‘Introduction to Bodhisattva

teachings of the buddhas, he bends (their will), appeases them, and causes their amazement. See Zimmermann 2013: 876.

⁵¹⁴ The four grounds for the defeat of a *bodhisattva* are: (1) With a longing for gain and respect, to praise himself and deprecate another; (2) While goods exist in his possession, to coldheartedly fail to donate material things, because he has a nature of attachment to them, to those who are suffering and indigent, who have no protector and no recourse, who have approached in a properly suppliant manner; and, out of stinginess in doctrine, not to teach doctrine to those who have approached in a proper manner eager for doctrine; (3) The *bodhisattva* develops such involvement in anger that he cannot resolve it with the mere utterance of harsh words, but overwhelmed with anger he strikes, hurts, damages sentient beings with hand, clump of earth, or club; while focusing on just that aggravated angry attitude he does not heed, he does not accept even the others’ apology; he will not let loose that attitude; and (4) To repudiate the *bodhisattva* collection and, on his own or echoing someone else, to devote himself to counterfeits of the good doctrine, and then to enjoy, to show, and to establish those counterfeits of the good doctrine. See Tatz 1989: 64.

⁵¹⁵ The four monastic defeats sometimes called the four seminal transgression (*mūlāpatti*) are: uncelibacy, murder, theft, and false claim to spiritual attainment.

⁵¹⁶ Tatz 1989: 22.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵¹⁸ Śāntideva (c. 650-750 AD) was an Indian Mahāyāna monk associated with the Mādhyamika school of Buddhism and was an influential monk at Nālandā University.

Practice’, and the Śikṣāsamuccaya ‘Compendium of Training’.⁵¹⁹

The Bodhicaryāvatāra serves as a kind of handbook for aspiring *bodhisattvas* and is perhaps the best-known manual of Buddhist ethical conduct. If we compare the structure of the Śikṣāsamuccaya with that of the Bodhicaryāvatāra, both begin with generation of *bodhicitta* ‘thought of enlightenment’. This is followed by a description of the perfections (*pāramitās*)⁵²⁰ in the Bodhicaryāvatāra, which corresponds to the process of guarding (*rakṣā*) and purification (*śuddhi*) in the Śikṣāsamuccaya, and concluding with the cultivation of merit (*puṇya*), which sees full expression in the transfer of merit (*pariṇāmanā*).

In the Bodhicaryāvatāra, Śāntideva places emphasis upon the mental aspect of every theme which he treats. The Śikṣāsamuccaya, however, emphasizes the moral rather than the mental perfections.⁵²¹ As its title implies, the Śikṣāsamuccaya was compiled as a collection of quotations from Mahāyāna *sūtras* in which those *sūtras* were incorporated into a doctrinal and ritual system. Since it quotes extensively from approximately one hundred Buddhist classical sources in order to describe the training (*śikṣā*) of *bodhisattvas*⁵²², it is worth looking into its content. Thus the following discussion concerns Śāntideva’s re-evaluation of the new Mahāyāna ethics and his attitude towards Buddhist monasticism: although the *bodhisattva* path is open to all Buddhist practitioners both lay and monastic, the Śikṣāsamuccaya still regards a monastic lifestyle as most conducive to concentrated practice.⁵²³

In the Śikṣāsamuccaya, Śāntideva implies a stronger advocacy of monasticism, with its inherent renunciation, than is found in other Mahāyāna texts. Explaining the significance of renunciation, Śāntideva says: “the *bodhisattva* in each successive birth renounces the world” (Śs. 14)⁵²⁴; in a long passage on the praise of forest seclusion, he quotes the *Candrapradīpa-sūtra*:

⁵¹⁹ The former, Bodhicaryāvatāra, is a text of ten chapters containing over 900 stanzas and focusing on a variety of subjects ranging from the cultivation of the ‘thought of enlightenment’ (*bodhicitta*) to the practice of the ‘perfection’ (*pāramitās*). The latter, Śikṣāsamuccaya, is a collection of items arranged around 27 *kārikās* or verses which functions as a handbook or practical guide to Mahāyāna practice and thought. See Prebish 1993: 232.

⁵²⁰ The Six Perfections (*pāramitās*) are: (1) *dāna* – charity; (2) *śīla* – moral conduct; (3) *kṣānti* – endurance; (4) *vīrya* – strength; (5) *dhyāna* – contemplation; and (6) *prajñā* – intuitive wisdom.

⁵²¹ Matics 2007: 47-48.

⁵²² Mroziak 2007: 4.

⁵²³ Ibid., 5.

⁵²⁴ Bendall and Rouse (trans.) 1922: 15.

Never indeed shall one obtain the supreme and highest wisdom if he follows his lusts, with attachment to sons and wife, and follows the household life which he ought to loathe ... There never was a Buddha aforesaid, nor shall be in the future, nor is there now, who could attain that highest wisdom whilst he remained in the householder life (Śs. 193).⁵²⁵

To convince householder-readers to pursue monasticism, Śāntideva quotes the *Rāṣṭrapāla-sūtra*:

Whoever leaves the household life, with its innumerable faults, is always free from anxiety; they have delight in the forest, virtuous, their passions calmed, compassionate. The society of women is not with them, nor have they ever intercourse with men; solitary they live like the rhinoceros, pure of inclination, innocent. They take no pleasure in getting, they are not depressed if they get not; of modest desires, content with anything they get, free from delusion and hypocrisy (Śs. 196).⁵²⁶

Śāntideva's ideal of monasticism aims at non-attachment. For Śāntideva attachment to worldly goods, to relationships and property and honour, leaves humans unhappy in various ways. Most frequently, Śāntideva argues for non-attachment in terms of *karma*. For example, he says that house and family affairs are full of sin (*pāpa*), bad *karma*. He writes:

The thing that is given up has not to be guarded any longer, whereas what is in one's house has to be guarded. What is given up is for the destruction of desire, what is at home increases desire. The one never excites greed or fear, not so the other ... The one helps the path of enlightenment, the other the path of the Evil one. The one is lasting, the other is impermanent. The one is a source of happiness, the other of pain. The one makes for deliverance from sin, the other increases sin. What we give up, not what we keep by us, tends to our true enjoyment (Śs. 19).⁵²⁷

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 188.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 190

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 21.

Śāntideva offers ways to escape from those attachments, including monastic solitude and meditations on the foulness of the body. For the practice of monastic solitude, he urges that one live far away from others, avoiding the distractions of their company, longing to dwell in caves or in the forest:

Fully happy always on earth are they for whom everything is indifferent; and they who dwell in caves enjoy the ascetic's happiness; and they who own nothing, and those who have no belongings, they walk the world lonely as a rhinoceros, they go like the wind in the sky ... In the forest they seek always solitude, leaving the delight in village and town. Be always like the solitary rhinoceros: soon ye will obtain the boon of tranquillity (Śs. 195).⁵²⁸

A second practice is the meditation on the foulness of the body (the contemplation of impurity). To avoid feeling desire for sexual pleasures, one reminds oneself of the body's eventual and inevitable state of decay; and one mentally breaks the body down into its component parts and fluids (Śs. 209-11).

Śāntideva's work, like much pre-Mahāyāna thought, is at times strongly misogynistic, claiming the foulness of sexual lust and the dangers of the householder's married life for the goal of liberation. He claims that one's wife should be viewed as a guardian of hell: "that a wife must be regarded as an obstacle to virtue, to meditation, and to wisdom. And yet three more: she is like a thief, a murderer, or a guardian of hell" (Śs. 78). The overall direction of Śāntideva's views is closer to a more monastic text like the *Ugraparipṛcchā-sūtra*, which he quotes quite frequently.⁵²⁹ Śāntideva's stress on celibacy is made clear when he says that a true *bodhisattva* has no wife: "No son nor daughter has he [the true *bodhisattva*], nor no wife; no friend has he, ... therefore make no strife when once ye have forsaken the world" (Śs. 115). While four misdeeds of a householder against the path of renunciation⁵³⁰ are said to result in his rebirth as a disabled being, as a hermaphrodite, as a eunuch, as a

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 189.

⁵²⁹ Lele 2007: 127-128.

⁵³⁰ "The four principles are: (1) a householder causes hindrance to the thought of renouncing the world, or of receiving ordination, or following the Holy way amongst such of this fellow-creatures as have been called by Buddha's in the past; (2) a householder out of craving of wealth or craving for his son, not believing in the doctrine of the ripening of works, causes a hindrance to the ordination of son, daughter, wife, or the conclave of his kindred, because of his position as head of the house; (3) reviling the good law; and (4) anger against ascetics and Brahmans" (Śs. 69).

woman, or as some kinds of animal (Śs. 69), the passion of a woman, if directed towards a male *bodhisattva*, may lead to her rebirth as a man. In the Chapter 8, Śāntideva offers an example of a *bodhisattva* named Priyaṃkara who makes a vow to render his body capable of transforming living beings in physical and moral ways. Surprisingly, when women lust after him, they achieve excellent rebirths. Śāntideva writes:

By the vow of Priyaṃkara the woman who should look on him with passionate mind would put off her womanhood and become a man, an exalted being. Behold, Ānanda, such are his qualities: by whom some beings go to hell, by the same vow when he has brought them to birth amongst heroes and they fall into passion, they go to heaven, they become men ... (Śs. 168).⁵³¹

Śāntideva concludes his discussion by proclaiming that “when there is this opportunity for the good of creatures, a sin arising from passion is declared to be no sin”. (Śs. 168)⁵³² Here, the Śikṣāsamuccaya displays a deviant attitude towards sex. When the object of lust is a *bodhisattva*, lust results in merit instead of sin. Moreover, Śāntideva quotes from the *Akṣayamati-sūtra* where it is explained that “if he [a *bodhisattva*] sees the greater advantage for beings let him transgress the rule (Śs. 167). Śāntideva takes this to the point of saying that even the misdeed (*āpatti*) to be born in passion (*rāga*) is not an offense if it is a means (*upāya*) for the benefit of others (Śs. 168).⁵³³

It is clear that Śāntideva does not shy away from the position of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*, acknowledging that male *bodhisattvas* “practice enjoyment among the sexual” (Śs. 325) and female *bodhisattvas* “become a courtesan to draw men” (Śs. 326). Śāntideva, thus, appears willing to condone such bad acts even though they will result in bad rebirths, and to accept the authority of such *sūtras* even though he equally stresses the importance of monastic life.⁵³⁴ While acknowledging the high ethical standard of *Vimalakīrti*, Śāntideva still places a high value on the monastic life emphasising that the *bodhisattva*’s objective is “to release the whole world from the bondage and thirst of the household life; being themselves free from abiding in sensual pleasure of all sorts, they preach deliverance by going forth from the household life” (Śs. 330). It seems

⁵³¹ Bendall and Rouse (trans.) 1922: 145-146.

⁵³² Ibid., 165.

⁵³³ Clayton 2006: 104.

⁵³⁴ Todd 2011: 212.

that in Śāntideva's work does not clearly show any conflict between the value of monastic and householder life. Nevertheless, the theory that sex may be used by *bodhisattvas* as a 'skill in means' to benefit others will be discussed in depth in the next section.

5.3 'Skill in Means' and Compassionate Non-Celibacy

In this section, the concept of 'skill in means' or 'skilful means' in Mahāyāna Buddhism will be explored, firstly in a general sense and then as how it relates to breaching the vow of celibacy. The term 'skill in means', in short *upāya*, (Skt. *upāya-kauśalya*, P. *upāya-kusala/kosalla*) means skilful/wholesome/wise and applies to good actions. Good actions are usually seen as ones in conformity with ethical precepts. They sometimes might be actions which go against a precept with impunity due to their compassionate motivation.

Although the use of the term *upāya* is quite infrequent in Pre-Mahāyāna, it can also be found in Theravāda Buddhist texts: plentiful evidence exists of *upāya* as a skilful teaching method of the Buddha to adapt his message to the level of the audience so that it is effectively transmitted and he achieves this through wholesome interaction. A metaphorical description of 'skilful means' found in the Sutta-nipāta is presented as follows:

Just as one embarked upon a strong boat, provided with oar and rudder, could bring many others across there, being skilful (*kusalo*), thoughtful, and knowing the means thereof. In the same way, one who has knowledge and has developed himself, who is learned and unshakable, understanding it himself, could make others realize it, if they have the ability to listen attentively.⁵³⁵

A classic example of what amount to 'skilful means' in the Pāli texts, the Udāna (U. 22-3), is the Nanda story (the famous Sanskrit version composed in *kāvya* form by Aśvaghōṣa is known as the

⁵³⁵ Sn. 321-2. Norman (trans.) 2001: 39.

*Yathāpi nāvaṃ daḥham āruhitvā
piyen' arittena samaṅgibhūto,
so tāraye tattha bahūpi aññe
tatrūpāyaññū kusalo mutīmā,
evampi yo vedagū bhāvitatto
bahussuto hoti avedhadhammo,
so kho pare nijjhāpaye pajānaṃ
sotāvadhānūpanīsūpanne.*

Saundarānanda)⁵³⁶, concerning the Buddha's half brother, who had been ordained by the Buddha himself just after having married a beautiful woman. After becoming a monk, Nanda still harbours thoughts of his wife, and yearns to return to lay life. The story tells us how the Buddha trained Nanda by showing him five hundred beautiful nymphs in a heaven realm, which Nanda agrees are far more beautiful than his wife. When the Buddha promises that he can obtain the company of these nymphs through ascetic practices, Nanda agrees to persevere with *brahmacarya*. He therefore continues his life as a monk with this in mind, until fellow monks criticize him for his low motivation, i.e. that he is practicing *brahmacarya* in order to seek the company of nymphs. Ashamed of this, he practices diligently and attains arhatship, and then releases the Buddha from his pledge to enable him to win the nymphs. The Theragāthā records Nanda's reflection and gratitude to the Buddha:

*Ayoniso manasikārā, maṇḍanaṃ anuyuñjisaṃ
uddhato capalo cāsim, kāma-rāgena aṭṭito ||
Upāya-kusalenāhaṃ, buddhenādicca-bandhunā
yoniso paṭipajjitvā, bhava cittaṃ udabbahin ti ||*⁵³⁷

Because of unreasoned thinking, I was addicted to ornament. I was conceited, vain and afflicted by desire for sensual pleasure.

With the aid of the Buddha, skilled in means (*upāya-kusalena*), kinsman of the son, I, practising properly, plucked out my mind (=desire) for existence.⁵³⁸

In the Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā, the commentary to the Udāna, we are told that the Buddha dispelled Nanda's dissatisfaction with his skill in means: *upāyakusalenā ti vineyyānaṃ damanūpāyacchekena kovidena buddhena bhagavatā hetubhūtena*—“On account of the Buddha, the Lord, by his wisdom in the expertise of training those disposed to training”.⁵³⁹ Here the key word is “disposed of training” (*vineyya*). To explain his training

⁵³⁶ The Nanda story is a popular anecdote and appears in full or in part in Pāli sources (Udāna 21–24, Dhammapada 13–14, Theragāthā 157–58, Jātaka no. 182, also commentaries on the first three of these and on Vinaya I 82), the Chinese *Fo-benxing-ji-jing* 佛本行集經 and the much later Sundarī-Nandāvadāna by Kṣemendra (no.10 in Avadānakalpalatā). Aśvaghōṣa's Saundārananda shares with them the principal narrative elements. The Saundārananda is quite different from the other versions since it uses a different genre which makes it much longer and enriched with decorative feature. Moreover, there is no attachment of the story of Nanda's past life as in Dhammapada and Jātaka. See Covill 2009: 94-95.

⁵³⁷ Th. 157-158.

⁵³⁸ These two verses are translated by Linda Covill. For a detailed discussion of the Nanda story, see Covill, Linda. 2009. *A Metaphorical Study of Saundārananda*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

⁵³⁹ ThA. 2:32-33.

method, the commentary uses a simile in the Buddha's defence; the Buddha, like a physician, exacerbates Nanda's symptoms of lust in order to purge him with the 'medicine of the noble path' (*ariya-magga-bhesajja*).⁵⁴⁰

However, the concept of 'skill in means' became crucial to the Mahāyānists emphasis of the '*bodhisattva* ideal' and the value of compassion in conjunction with wisdom in order to help people enter the *bodhisattva* path. The term *upāya* is widely used in a variety of ways in Mahāyāna Buddhism, for instance: (1) it justifies giving different teachings to people of different levels of understanding; (2) it allows even the advanced *bodhisattva* to stay within the world, appearing as an ordinary person, and to manifest himself in many forms to those who need his help; and (3) it allows the *bodhisattva* to sometimes transgress the moral precepts out of compassion.⁵⁴¹ That is to say, the concept of 'skill in means' achieves greater prominence and has become a well-known doctrine in Mahāyāna Buddhism. We shall now look at the importance of *upāya* in Mahāyāna texts.

Initially the concept of *upāya* was developed into a productive hermeneutical device to legitimise the *bodhisattva*'s skilful strategies of teaching by skilful deception that presupposed secrecy in order to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment. Michael Pye describes its importance:

The idea [=skillful means] finds concrete reference in particular practices which one performs in order to make spiritual progress. One should not think however that skilful means are therefore just elementary or peripheral aspects of Buddhism. [...] How could a *bodhisattva* free others if he were bound himself by the problem of their deliverance? Thus in terms of skilful means a *bodhisattva*'s true practice and the deliverance of others belong together. The Mahayanists saw the whole Buddhist religion as a vehicle for 'crossing over' and for 'bringing over', which are inseparable. In short, Buddhism is skilful means.⁵⁴²

The *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra* is best known for emphasizing the superiority of the metaphoric teaching of *upāya*. In the sixteenth chapter of the *sūtra*, a parable of a compassionate physician is offered whose sons

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Keown 1992: 143, 150-63, 185-91.

⁵⁴² Pye 2003: 158.

refuse, in their delusion, to take their father's medicinal remedy. The physician feigns death so that his sons, in their remorse, drink the potion and are healed.⁵⁴³ The text reads:

Through constant grieving their minds become clear, and only then do they realize that the medicine has fine color, aroma, and flavor. They immediately take it and the poison is completely driven out. The father, hearing that all his children have completely recovered, immediately returns and makes his appearance.⁵⁴⁴

The Buddha then reveals:

Although I am always here without extinction, through the power of skillful means I manifest extinction and nonextinction. If there are any sentient beings in other worlds who respect and believe in me, I will also teach them the highest *dharma*.⁵⁴⁵

In this sense, the Buddha is said to use *upāya* in adapting his teaching to the level of his audience's understanding. The implication in this text is that the deception is justified because it succeeds in detaching the person concerned from their deluded standpoint which will cause them to suffer, and brings them to a higher level of understanding which puts an end to suffering and delusion.⁵⁴⁶

Furthermore, the Buddha is said to use *upāya* in the way that he manifests himself on earth, ideally adapted to the needs of those who seek their help or teaching. In the *Upāya-kauśalya-sūtra*, for example, the *bodhisattva* takes a wife, Yaśodharā, not due to desire-attachment, but to reassure people that he is a real man. But his son is not born from the sexual union of his parents: "Rāhula is conceived apparitionally, transmigrating from among the gods: he is not born from the embryo of his parents."⁵⁴⁷ Also, the *bodhisattva* also pleases many young women in order to help develop their wholesome qualities: "some women who are afflicted by the great burning of sexual passion see the *bodhisattva* and immediately find themselves to be free from passion."⁵⁴⁸ These references to the

⁵⁴³ Bantly 1996: 147.

⁵⁴⁴ Kubo and Yuyama 1993: 227.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 238-239.

⁵⁴⁶ McFarlane 2006: 158.

⁵⁴⁷ Tatz 1994: 58. Also see Jones 1949: 121.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 59.

difficulties and sexual involvements the Buddha had in his life were not the results of bad *karma* on his part, but only teaching devices that he had skilfully conjured up to show how *karma* works, even though he himself was beyond the results of *karma*.

Another example of the use of *upāya* to teach others can be found in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* where Vimalakīrti himself is held up as the epitome of the skilful methods of *bodhisattvas*. He and other *bodhisattvas* can even manifest themselves as courtesans and assume seductive female forms that incite lust, but then teach the *dharma* to disciples: “They voluntarily become courtesans to attract men., but having won them with the hook of desire, they establish the Buddha-knowledge.”⁵⁴⁹ The text sees sexuality as a possible means through which lay *bodhisattvas* might help divest people of ignorance. The *bodhisattvas* have no desire, but only take that form in order to provide a teaching opportunity for men who would never willingly enter a Buddhist monastery but who frequent prostitutes. To further their duties they could also manifest as influential figures, such as village chiefs or prime ministers. The goal of this sort of ‘skill in means’ is essentially the same: helping beings to overcome desire in order that they might successfully pursue the path of *dharma*.

The most striking aspect of *upāya* is that it can justify an over-riding of precepts, such as killing, stealing, lying, or even breaking celibacy. When considering such an approach in terms of ethics, Mahāyāna has a greater tendency than Theravāda to adapt the precepts flexibly to circumstances. Thus, it can be ‘skill in means’ for the *bodhisattvas* to act in a way contrary to the moral or monastic code if by doing so they benefit living beings and contribute to their spiritual advancement. In other words, Buddhist precepts may sometimes be broken if this is an unavoidable part of a compassionately motivated act to help someone.

In the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra* (‘Concentration of Heroic Progress’ Sūtra), the *bodhisattva* Māragocarānulipta transformed himself into two hundred males (*devaputras*) of perfect beauty, identical with himself, and has sex with divine females (*devakanyā*) in Māra’s entourage in order to convert them to the *dharma* and extinguish all lustful thoughts. We find the following passage in the text: “When their desires were fully gratified, their craving disappeared. They aroused the high resolve and honoured the *bodhisattva*. Then the latter expounded the *dharma* as was

⁵⁴⁹ Lamotte 1994:185.

*saṃcintya gaṇikāṃ bhonti puṃsām ākarṣaṇāya te,
rāgāṅku saṃlobhya buddhajñāne sthāpayanti te.*

suitable to them, and they all conceived the aspiration for supreme perfect awakening (*anuttarasamyaksambodhicitta*).”⁵⁵⁰ Obviously, this text attempts to refute traditional teachings by modifying attitudes regarding desire and sexuality, showing how desire can be transmuted to an aspiration for awakening.

The theory that sexual intercourse may be used as a ‘skill in means’ to benefit others can also be found in the *Upāya-kauśalya-sūtra*, where the youthful *bodhisattva* Jyoti allows a woman to ravish him after 42,000 years of celibacy. The woman who falls passionately in love with him declares her lust, but he informs her that he is celibate and cannot give affection to her in return. She threatens to kill herself unless he does: “I may go to hell for breaking my vow of austerity. But I can bear to experience the pain of hell. Let this woman not die, but be happy.”⁵⁵¹ After twelve years of living with her, he then moves on, practices the *brahma-vihāras* and is reborn in the Brahmā world, and not in hell, due to his compassionate breaking of the vow of celibacy; his sexual interlude was motivated by compassion rather than by lust. The Buddha informs his audience that he himself was Jyotis, and his wife Yaśodharā was the woman who lured him into her bed. He concludes the story by stating that he could engage in sexual acts with impunity because of his advanced understanding of ‘skill in means’: “something that sends other sentient beings to hell, sends the *bodhisattva* who is skilled in means to rebirth in the world of Brahmā.”⁵⁵² It is clear that here ‘skill in means’ is used to attenuate the effect of grave transgressions. Such flexibility in Mahāyāna, then, is guarded from becoming licence by its association with compassion.

However, some may ask: is the ‘skillful’ breaking of precepts acceptable for all types of *bodhisattvas*? Tsong-kha-pa⁵⁵³, in his commentary to the “Chapter on Ethics”⁵⁵⁴, explains that a monk may kill, steal, and lie on compassionate grounds, but he may not have sex on such grounds, as this would put aside the basis of this training as a monk, with no real benefit to others. He says:

⁵⁵⁰ Lamotte and Boin-Webb (eds.) 1998: 177-178.

⁵⁵¹ Tatz 1994: 34.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 35.

⁵⁵³ Tsong-kha-pa (1357-1419) is the founder of Gelukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism. He is renowned as one of its most eminent scholars, meditators, philosophers and reformers. His Gelukpa orders emphasis is on extensive study supplemented with oral debate, combined with strict adherence to the rules of monastic discipline (Tib. ‘*dul ba*; Skt. Vinaya). See Powers 2000: 228.

⁵⁵⁴ Asaṅga’s ‘Chapter on Ethics’ is a part of his larger work ‘The Bodhisattva Stages’ (*Bodhisattva-bhūmi*).

Celibacy is in general the best way to accomplish someone else's welfare, and its relinquishment is no larger benefit to the other person. In particular circumstances, however, it is permissible for the layperson, though not for the monastic, to put aside his training and engage in something that is a basis for the *prātimokṣa* seminal transgression when he sees in it a larger benefit for a sentient being. Conversely, if it were permissible for the monastic as well, there would be no point in calling it a "laying aside of training."⁵⁵⁵

The *Śikṣāsamuccaya* says that such breaches of the precepts are acceptable *only* for an 'advanced' *bodhisattva* who has reached the noble stages (the seventh *bhūmi*)⁵⁵⁶, but they are impermissible for "one who has not yet attained a stage of meditation, but has walked in the six 'transcendent virtues' (perfections, *pāramitā*)."⁵⁵⁷ Tatz explains: "it does not suffice to course in the six perfections without having attained the Noble stages; one must be a *bodhisattva* endowed with skill in means and with a great compassion developed on the path for many aeons." Furthermore, for a *bodhisattva* who has taken the *bodhisattva* vow and learned to train skillfully in the training, he therefore possesses the thought of awakening that cherishes others. Having that thought, only if he finds no other means for awakening others can he, for example, have sex and the like.⁵⁵⁸

The *Upāya-kauśalya-sūtra* certainly acknowledges the potential *karmic* dangers of abusing the doctrine of 'skill in means', as it says that:

This explanation of the teaching of skill in means is to be kept secret. Do not speak of it, teach it, explain it or recite it in the presence of inferior sentient beings whose store of merit is small ... they are untrained in this skill in means ... they have no need to it. No one but a *bodhisattva* great hero

⁵⁵⁵ Tatz 1989: 213.

⁵⁵⁶ The *pāramitā* of *upāya* (skill in means) is connected with the seventh *bhūmi* (*upāya-kauśalya-bhūmi*). At the more advanced stages of the *bodhisattva* path, progress becomes more and more subtle. In the seventh *bhūmi*, the *bodhisattva*'s actions then become completely uninhibited and perfectly skillful. It is by virtue of *upāya* that great *bodhisattvas* (*Bodhisattva-Mahāsattvas*) transgress the precepts from motives of compassion and said to do no wrong. According to Har Dayal, a *bodhisattva* can pass away in *nirvāṇa* in the seventh *bhūmi* [an advanced stage], if he so desires. See Dayal 1999: 271.

⁵⁵⁷ Bendall and Rouse (trans. & eds.) 1999: 165.

⁵⁵⁸ Tatz 1978: 395.

is a fit vessel of this teaching of skill in means; no one else is to be trained in this teaching.⁵⁵⁹

In this section, we have explored the ways in which ‘skill in means’ is seen in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Most Mahāyāna texts that speak of *bodhisattvas* having sex with lust-obsessed women portray them as laypeople and not monastics, and so the ideal of monastic celibacy is maintained. Even when *bodhisattvas* use passion skillfully it is still clear that the final goal is eradication of desire and that sexual intercourse is merely an opportunity for facilitating a cognitive shift in deluded beings.⁵⁶⁰

5.4 Monastic Decline in Kaśmīr and Nepal: A Reflection of the Crisis of Celibacy

We have seen in the last chapter that Mahāyāna ethics from the beginning appears to have been quite flexible and as the centuries rolled on perhaps became even more so. In early Mahāyāna *sūtras*, the permission given to the *bodhisattva* to transgress the precepts in the cause of compassion is rather a glorification of the merits of compassion than an invitation to violate the moral or monastic discipline. Flexibility is thus permissible in the *bodhisattva* precepts if it means benefiting beings or liberating them from suffering; otherwise wrong deeds are in such cases not only permitted, they are said to be meritorious.

Although the detailed Vinaya procedure for ordination of monks and nuns remained consistent as Buddhism spread, the corresponding precepts for newly ordained monks and nuns were not as thoroughly described, leaving room for variations. The concept of the *bodhisattvaprātimokṣa* (*bodhisattva* precepts) in Mahāyāna thus seems to have existed to supplement rather than displace the authority of Vinaya ordination.⁵⁶¹ As Paul Groner states: “although some of these [Mahāyāna] *sūtras* were more respected than others by the monks, none of them occupied a position of such authority that it alone could serve as the major source for *bodhisattva* ordinations in the same way that the Vinaya had served as the authority for Hīnayāna [=Śrāvakayāna] full ordination.”⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁹ Tatz 1994: 87.

⁵⁶⁰ Powers 2008: 213.

⁵⁶¹ Adamek 2013: 67-69.

⁵⁶² Groner 1990: 223.

However, the problem of validating the Mahāyāna teaching would grow more complicated with Mahāyāna texts. Within the Mahāyāna, the Buddha's discourse is being redefined to mean 'whatsoever be well spoken' (*subhāṣita*), rather than meaning the actual words of Gautama (*buddhabhāṣita*). This is found in *Adhyāśayasañcodana-sūtra* quoted by Śāntideva in his *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, which maintains that all "inspired speech" (*pratibhāna*) may be considered the word of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*) if it fulfills four criteria:

O Maitreya, by four causes the word of the Buddhas may be recognised. What four? (1) O Maitreya, it refers to truth, not to untruth; (2) to the Law, not the not-Law; (3) it lessens sin, not increases it; (4) it shows the advantages of nirvana, not indicates those of continued re-birth ... When some one, Maitreya, utters or shall utter a word endowed with these four qualities, the believing young men and women will produce the idea of Buddha, of Master; they will hear this Law as he preaches. Why? Anything, Maitreya, that is well said, is a word of Buddha. And any one who shall reject such utterances, and say, 'They are not spoken by Buddha,' and produce disrespect towards them; such a hateful person does really reject all the utterances pronounced by all Buddhas; and having rejected the Law, he will go to hell, on account of a deed which is by nature an injury to the Law.⁵⁶³

Donald Lopez says in relation to the interpretation of *buddhavacana* in the *Adhyāśayasañcodana-sūtra*: "unlike the four *mahāpadeśa* [=reference of authority]⁵⁶⁴, the words are not judged to be the word of the Buddha based on the conformity with already accepted statements but based instead on their function: to destroy the afflictions and lead to *nirvāṇa*, certainly the most traditional of Buddhist aims, but in the absence of an omniscient arbiter, impossible to judge."⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶³ Śs. 15. Bendall and Rouse (trans.) 1922: 17.

⁵⁶⁴ In the *mahāpadeśa*, the institutional guidelines adopted by the early *saṅgha* subjected individual insight to the judgment of collective seniority and scriptural expertise. According to the *mahāpadeśa*, someone might claim that a specific teaching is the word of the Buddha because of it having been heard from one of four possible authorities: (1) from the Buddha, (2) from the community (*saṅgha*) of senior monks, (3) from a smaller group of learned elder monks, and (4) from a single learned monk. When someone claims to have heard a teaching directly from one of these four sources, the *saṅgha* may determine whether it is the word of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*) by ascertaining whether it corresponds to the teachings of the *sūtras* and is in agreement with the Vinaya. If it does, it is to be accepted as the word of the Buddha; if it does not, it is to be rejected. See Buswell and Lopez 2013: 502.

⁵⁶⁵ Lopez 1995: 28.

Another example of such validation can be found in the criteria of the nonconceptual gnosis⁵⁶⁶ of Mahāyāna. In pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism, the purpose of the monastic practice, as we know, is to eliminate defilements. However, in Mahāyāna texts, the only real defilement for a *bodhisattva* is conceptualization (*vikalpa*). Davidson points out: “since the elimination of this conceptualization occurs through nonconceptual gnosis (*sarvanirvikalpajñānāśrayatvena*) arising by means of the practices found in the Mahāyāna scriptures, the Mahāyāna is validated in this nonconceptual gnosis.”⁵⁶⁷ It is clear that the Mahāyāna texts are trying to supplant earlier forms of Buddhist identity that had been controlled and dispensed by the monastic institution.

Obviously, the risk of laxity was present, and the danger was made essentially real by the relaxation of the monastic system under the development of the *bodhisattva* ideal and *bodhisattva* precepts. The difficulty regarding the possibility of the layperson becoming an *arhat* has totally disappeared: the lay life is peculiarly suited for the task of a *bodhisattva*. In lieu, then, of the rigors of monasticism as the sole path to liberation, the attainment of Buddhahood was found to be available to the layperson in family life. The root of monasticism was thus threatened.⁵⁶⁸ One of the most striking phenomena is the case of Buddhism in Kaśmīr where married monks are reported to have existed from about the 6th century, almost five centuries after the arrival of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Kaśmīr. Before we take up this account it will be useful to trace the history and development of Mahāyāna in Kaśmīr.

According to the legend the valley of Kaśmīr was formerly a lake in the lap of the North-Western Himalayas. Culturally and socially it has all along been an integral part of the greater Indian civilisation. There has been considerable interaction between Kaśmīri scholars and the scholars in other parts of India. Buddhist tradition claims that Aśoka (273-232 BCE)⁵⁶⁹ sent missionaries to Kaśmīr in about 250 BCE and then Buddhism was introduced in Kaśmīr under his patronage. At the conclusion of the deliberations of the Buddhist Council held at

⁵⁶⁶ In Mahāyāna Buddhism, ‘gnosis’ (*jñāna*, *āryajñāna*) is knowledge of the nonconceptual and transcendental which is realized by those attaining higher stages.

⁵⁶⁷ Davidson 1990: 291-325.

⁵⁶⁸ Keith 1996: 297-298.

⁵⁶⁹ Aśoka was the third king of the Indian Maurya dynasty, grandson of Candragupta Maurya and son of King Bindusāra. He is famous for the edicts he ordered to be carved on rocks and pillars throughout the kingdom which provide invaluable historical and chronological information on early Indian Buddhist history. For an exhaustive study of Aśoka, see Lamotte 1988: 223-259.

Pāṭaliputra under the leadership of the elder Moggaliputra Tissa, Madhyāntika (P. Majjhantika) was sent to Kaśmīr and Gandhāra. 5,000 monks settled in Kaśmīr.⁵⁷⁰ However, the growth and development of Buddhism in Kaśmīr reached its pinnacle about three centuries later under the rule of the Kuṣāṇas, especially the great Kaniṣka (c. 78-151)⁵⁷¹ who held the fourth Buddhist Council in Kaśmīr.⁵⁷² Some important Abhidharma treatises were composed and Buddhist scholars of great eminence flourished. Itself a stronghold of Buddhism, Kaśmīr played a significant part in the spread of Buddhism to lands outside India up to Central Asia, Tibet and China.⁵⁷³

It will not be out of place to give accounts of the eminent Buddhist scholar and translator, Kumārajīva (350-409), who brought Buddhism from the valley of Kaśmīr and expounded the faith in Cháng'ān 長安, which was the imperial capital of China. His account in China reflects the fact that the ideal of celibacy was one of the biggest challenges in China, where the family is the base of ancient Chinese society and the cornerstone of all social ethics. Chinese laymen apparently still found the notion of a celibate monk more puzzling than admirable. Lü Guang 呂光, the ruler of Later Liang, who had no appreciation for Buddhist teaching kept Kumārajīva as a captive for seventeen years, using him as an advisor for political and military affairs. He would also make Kumārajīva the object of his not very delicate jokes by insisting on making Kumārajīva break the vows by getting married to a Kuchean princess. On several occasions, Kumārajīva was forced to have sex against his will by the unsympathetic ruler, who was determined that the great monk should produce heirs. John Kieschnick refers to the Buddhist source, Gaoseng zhuan 高僧傳 'The Liang Biographies' (2.1: 331c-332c):

The king then forced Kumārajīva to become drunk one night, and locked him in a secret chamber with the girl, after which time, we are told, Kumārajīva “surrendered his integrity”. After he arrived in China, the northern ruler Yao Xing, impressed by the monk’s intelligence, forced him to cohabit with no fewer than ten courtesans, arguing that otherwise his “seeds of the [Buddha]-law would bear no

⁵⁷⁰ Bamzai 1994: 71.

⁵⁷¹ Kaniṣka was the king of Gandhāra. He was renowned ruler of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty. Kaniṣka's reputation in Buddhist tradition is based mainly that he convened the 4th Buddhist Council in Kaśmīr. For more details on Kaniṣka's biography, see Lamotte 1988: 226, 368, 468, 648, 727 and 753.

⁵⁷² Bamzai 1994: 83.

⁵⁷³ Bakshi 1997: 198.

offspring!”⁵⁷⁴

Buddhist sources also state that from this point on Kumārajīva no longer lived in the monks’ quarters.⁵⁷⁵ The story of the king's treatment of Kumārajīva is indicative of a general disregard among non-Buddhists for the ideal of celibacy propounded by Buddhist monks, often coupled with a suspicion of the claims made for the sexual purity of monks and nuns. Consequently, attacks on the sexual mores of monks, and especially nuns, were standard fare in anti-Buddhist polemic in China.⁵⁷⁶

In the seventh century AD, Kaśmīr was fortunate to have a new ruler, Meghavāhana. He was brought from Gāndhāra and placed on the throne by the people; most probably he was a Buddhist and propagated the cult of *ahiṃsā* and erected a *maṭha*. He undertook the propagation of Buddhism with great zeal; he built several *vihāras* and *caityas* and prohibited the slaughter of animals. His queen, Amṛtaprabhā, built Amṛtabhavana for the use of Buddhist monks and also erected a *vihāra*.⁵⁷⁷ Although Buddhism under Meghavāhana flourished again, the Sanskrit chronicle, the Rājatāraṅgiṇī (‘The River of Kings’) by Kalhāṇa, reveals the degeneration of monasticism during that time. In his writing, Kalhāṇa states that Yūkadevī, one of Meghavāhana’s wives, who was eager to compete with her rivals (another of the king’s wives), built a *vihāra* of wonderful appearance at Noḍavana. Kalhāṇa explains it in detail:

In one half of it she placed those *bhikṣus* whose conduct conformed to the precepts, and in the [other] half those who being in possession of wives, children, cattle and property, deserved blame for their life as householders.⁵⁷⁸

Aurel Stein thus claims that “Kaśmīr had its married *bhikṣus* long before Kalhāṇa’s time”.⁵⁷⁹ La Vallée Poussin also alludes to this in his “Bouddhisme: Opinions sur l’histoire de la dogmatique”: “A day is coming when, in certain provinces, even the notion of monastic life is disappearing.”⁵⁸⁰ It is clear from this evidence that the notion of celibacy

⁵⁷⁴ Kieschnick 1997: 18-19.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁷⁷ Joshi 1977: 15-16.

⁵⁷⁸ Stein 1989 [Reprinted, 1900: 74 (note iii. 12).

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁸⁰ “Un jour vient où, dans certaines provinces, la notion même de la vie monastique disparaît.” See De La Vallée Poussin 1909: 341.

was in crisis.

During the reign of the Karkota dynasty, which ruled Kaśmīr during the 7th and 8th centuries, Buddhism and Hinduism prospered side by side under royal patronage, especially of king Lalitāditya (724-761 AD).⁵⁸¹ The rise of Mahāyāna and the growth of Tantrism had brought Buddhism very close to Śaivism. Buddhism, for its part, had developed a sacred pantheon full of gods and goddesses analogous to those of Śaivism and other Hindu sects. With the resurgence of Śaivism in Kaśmīr from the 8th century onwards, there was not much perceptible difference between the followers of the two faiths.⁵⁸² Buddhism, on account of there being married monks in Kaśmīr, had suffered and was in institutional decline, but it was by no means extinct until the advent of Muslim rule.

Similar to the Buddhist tradition in Kaśmīr, a striking feature of traditional Newar Buddhism is the absence of celibate monasticism. It will be more helpful to summarise the Buddhist monasticism in Nepal that has a good claim for being the oldest continuous local tradition of Buddhism. Nepal, as one of the first places outside the Gangetic basin to benefit from the introduction of Buddhism, always understood itself to be part of an extensive Indic tradition.⁵⁸³ Scholars believe that Buddhism took root in Nepal around at the time of Aśoka (c. 232 -238 BCE). The Svayambhū Mahācaitya, one of two important Buddhist shrines in Nepal, may date from this time.⁵⁸⁴ Nepal had become a stronghold of Buddhism, served as a channel of communication between Tibet and Buddhist learning centres in northern India, in particular the university of Nālandā⁵⁸⁵, since the days of its king, Amshuvarman in the seventh century AD.⁵⁸⁶ Newar Vajrayāna, at this time, retained its distinct local identity even though it was influenced from the Buddhist Pāla dynasty in Bengal.⁵⁸⁷ By 1450 the extinction of Indian Buddhism led to a crisis in Newar Buddhism, which reinvented itself as an independent tradition and shown a complex mix of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism.⁵⁸⁸

By the later Malla era (1475-1769), Newar Buddhism saw major changes in its organization. With the ‘domestication’ of Newar *saṅgha*, celibacy

⁵⁸¹ Kaw (ed.) 2004: 117.

⁵⁸² Ganhar 1956: 146.

⁵⁸³ Tuladhar-Douglas 2006: 9.

⁵⁸⁴ Tuladhar-Douglas: 2082.

⁵⁸⁵ Whelpton 2005: 29.

⁵⁸⁶ Hāndā 2001: 112.

⁵⁸⁷ Tuladhar-Douglas 2010: 2082.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

by Buddhist monks was gradually abandoned. However, ‘monasteries’ survived as institution, providing homes to members of the ‘householder monk,’ who called themselves *bare* (from the Sankrit term *vande* or *vandanā*, an ancient Indic term of respect of monks).⁵⁸⁹ The Newar Buddhist monks made the transition to householder, but adopted the caste name *vajrācārya* and *śakyabhikṣu*.⁵⁹⁰ They are married householder priests who served the Buddhist laity and continued to regard themselves as monks, holding caste initiation ritual derived from the ancient Buddhist monastic ordination rite.⁵⁹¹ During the ritual, *vajrācārya* and *śakya* boys are in effect monks for four days. This is fundamentally a hereditary priesthood.⁵⁹²

In Newar Buddhism, priesthood is also very importantly differentiated within the caste: only the *vajrācārya* may receive the consecration of a (*vajra-*) master (*ācārya abhiṣeka*), which entitles them to perform certain tantric rituals for others. Thus the *vajrācārya* priests are at the same time monks (in local perceptions), householders, and tantric priests; this last status is at the top of the religious hierarchy of Newar Buddhism.⁵⁹³ This means that the ascetic values of early Buddhism are preserved, but largely in restricted contexts or as temporary measure. Therefore, there are no permanently celibate monks, but rather a caste made up of priest and householders who have only a part-time priestly activity.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁸⁹ Lewis 2013: 708.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Whelpton 2005: 30.

⁵⁹² Sihlé 2006: 275.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ LeVine & Gellner 2005: 15.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

We have discussed various aspects of celibacy and shown how its interpretation and practice have evolved by tracing back the history of renunciation to early Indian Buddhist contexts and broadly following its development over a long period. In the Vedic period, before the rise of the dissenting religious movements, Brahmanism had remained predominant in Northern India for several centuries since the arrival of the Āryans in India around the second millennium BCE. This was the case until at least the sixth century BCE when, during the second phase of ‘urbanisation’⁵⁹⁵, Buddhism arose as one of the reformist *śramaṇa* traditions with a new ideology and practice. Buddhism mainly opposed the Vedic sacrificial rituals by reinterpreting the traditional brahmanical teaching, such as *dharma* (law), *karma* (action), *saṃsāra* (rebirth), and *mokṣa* (liberation).

The Buddha, so far as we know, adopted the word *śramaṇa* and the ‘world-renouncer’ ideology from the earlier renouncers, such as the *muni* (or *keśin*) and the *vrātya*, who seem to have been dissenters from the orthodox Vedic religion. The features of asceticism practiced by all of these *śramaṇas* were: celibacy, homeless wandering, and mendicancy—with a new religious ideal that replaced the householder by the celibate ascetic. They challenged the traditional Brahmanical orthodoxy, which held that priestly rites and the life of a householder were supremely valuable and meaningful.

With the emergence of Buddhism (and Jainism) there became a well-established new form of rational asceticism that avoided the two extremes of life, namely hedonism (P. *kāmasukhallikānuyoga*—self-indulgence) and severe asceticism (P. *attakilamathānuyoga*—self-mortification). Early Buddhism is manifest in the doctrine of the Middle Path (*madhyamāpratipat*). The centrality of celibacy – known as *brahmacarya* – within the emergent Buddhist asceticism is highlighted by the adaptation of the same term to refer to the ascetic life of a Buddhist monk. Whilst Gautama Buddha’s Great Renunciation (‘going forth from home to homelessness’) started from an individualistic standpoint, it clearly inspired other heroic acts of renunciation. As such, the Buddha is said to have formed a community (*saṅgha*), initially comprised to some

⁵⁹⁵ The urbanisation in India involves a time covering a period of about 5000 years. The first phase of urbanisation is associated with the Harappan, Āryan and Dravidian civilisation, dating back to around 2350 BC and the second urbanisation started around 600 BC. See Nath 2007: xv, introduction.

extent of married men who left behind wives and families. From the very start, the early order of *bhikṣu* was the homeless ones living in the forest or in caves and was an essential member of the Buddhist community. The monasteries (*vihāras*) came to be established and the *saṅgha* began to have a permanent residence.

Buddhism had predominantly ascetic features which actively promoted renunciation and promulgated celibacy. Starting from the time of the Buddha, its practice was characterised by the fundamental elements of poverty, homelessness, solitude, inoffensiveness and celibacy. Monastic life was rigidly structured with a strict discipline called the Vinaya that included a set of well-defined monastic rules that governed behaviour. By this self-restraint the ascetic or monastic could continue his meditation upon detachment from worldly desires.

The success of the *śramaṇa* movements, especially Buddhism and Jainism, made celibacy a central virtue within the broad spectrum of Indian religions, even that of the Brahmanical tradition. The value placed on celibacy resulted in Brahmanism having to adapt and reinterpret celibate and renunciatory values. Olivelle points out: “Brahmanical theologians who had no problem with the kind of asceticism represented by the *tapasvin*, the forest hermits living community lives and committed to *tapas*, found the new form of asceticism unacceptable. The key source of conflict was celibacy.”⁵⁹⁶

In attempting to cope with the ascetic threat of *śramaṇa* traditions, Brahmanical theologians developed a form of ‘domesticated asceticism’ by bringing back some forms of asceticism from the forest and the wilderness into the home and defining elements of household life as equal or even surpassing in excellence the ascetic life. It became evident in the new concept of the *āśrama* system, which pushed the ascetic and celibate life to old age, when a person would have completed his ritual and procreative obligations of the ‘three debts’ (*ṛṇa*). In this scheme, celibate modes of life were placed at the very beginning (*brahmacarīn*) and at the very end of a man’s life (*vānaprastha* and *saṃnyāsin*) leaving the prime of life and the productive years (*grhastha*) of sexual and economic activities. This is the *āśrama* system that is common in later Hinduism.

In Buddhist contexts, the scope of the term *brahmacarya* has widened to embrace both ethical conduct and other aspects of its teaching, not only

⁵⁹⁶ Olivelle 2011: 36.

for monastics but also for laypeople. However, the primary model for the most effective religious lifestyle in Buddhism is the celibate monastic life. This form of *brahmacarya* is essential for Buddhist monks because it indicates all relevant virtues which are auxiliary to liberation. Since Buddhist monks go forth and take a vow of celibacy in search of the path to end all suffering (P. *dukkha*) in the circle of *saṃsāra*, celibacy looms large among the strategies of social disengagement. Celibacy safeguards the monks from matrimony, reproduction, and the transmission of patrimony—in a word, from family and social matters which would tie them to the perpetuation of life in the social world. Moreover, the practice of *brahmacarya* is central to a regimen to control and conquer sensual desire by refraining from all kinds of sexual activity, whereas engaging in sexual relations increases a monk's desires, which Buddhists recognize as self-defeating.

Since sexual desire (*kāma-trṣṇā*) is not only an innate instinct but also an eminently social drive, it cannot be underestimated. Sexual desire impedes the monastic life of the *saṅgha* and thus the mastery of sexual desire is of paramount importance to the Buddhist renouncer. As members of the *saṅgha*, monks who cannot continue to practice *brahmacarya* are free to go back to the social world at any time, although it is described as a transgression, a 'turning back to the lesser' (P. *hīnāyāvattati*). However, what certainly cannot be done, as it leads to expulsion from the *saṅgha*, is precisely what the monk Sudinna did: to resume sexual relations without first renouncing one's vocation as a renouncer (*pārājika*).

The ideal of the celibate renouncer remains at the core of monastic life in South Asia and South East Asia. Scholars have traditionally characterized Theravāda Buddhism as more otherworldly and monastic in orientation than Mahāyāna Buddhism. Although the new Mahāyāna *sūtras* show new forms of religious practice oriented around devotion to *bodhisattvas*, there is no evidence that Mahāyāna traditions attempted to denigrate the monastic life. With the development of the Mahāyāna ideal of the *bodhisattva*, it is clear that the *bodhisattva* path described in the early Mahāyāna *sūtras* is the monastic path and always associated with monks. The earliest texts such as the *Ugraparipṛcchā* and *Upāliparipṛcchā* demonstrate that doctrinal developments backed asceticism and connected it with meditation and the renunciant *bodhisattvas* who practised in the wilderness.

It is evident that the Mahāyāna *sūtras* include monastic and lay interlocutors with teachings for both communities. This undoubtedly

constitutes a re-evaluation of the relative roles of the monastic and the lay practitioner, making it clear that the Mahāyāna tradition put less stress upon the monastic community in achieving the *bodhisattva* path. At the same time, Mahāyāna was more open to laypeople with aspirations by urging as many laymen and laywomen as possible to join the new path. However, in the earliest texts the path of the *bodhisattva* does not apply straightforwardly to all members; it is rather viewed as an optional vocation suited only to a few. Although tensions between *bodhisattvas* and *śrāvakas* are evident in these texts, they had not yet reached the point of generating a separate Mahāyāna community. It was only later that the divergent Mahāyāna stereotype reached its peak in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sutrā* where the layman *bodhisattva* seems to be prominent and trounces all the *śrāvakas*.

As Mahāyāna evolved fully, it became strongly critical of the *arhat* ideal, especially of the attitudes of the Śrāvakayāna towards liberation. Many Mahāyāna scholars, for example Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu, produced defences of the Mahāyāna tradition, defending the authority of the Mahāyāna teachings. In particular, the new teaching of *upāya* (or ‘skill in means’), which has its origin in an older layer of Buddhism, relativized the new ethical system on the basis of compassion. Śāntideva’s writings, such as the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* and *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, offer perhaps the clearest demonstration of a form of reasoning that an amoral deed can be considered acceptable because of beneficial results. Consequently, the *bodhisattvas* are permitted to steal, murder, and even violate the monastic vow of celibacy. It is clear that Mahāyāna schools have undertaken the greatest degree of doctrinal adaptation, which may be seen as deviating considerably from earlier Nikāya Buddhism.

Although both the adherents of the Nikāyas (or Śrāvakayāna) and Mahāyānists lived in the same monasteries, as was observed by medieval Chinese travellers, institutional fission was evident and provided a clear indication of what is widely reckoned as a schism in Buddhist monasticism. This schism was connected with the emergence of married monks in Kāśmir followed by Nepal, Tibet, Mongolia. In Tibet, some schools of Tibetan Buddhism, such as Gelukpa, insisted on celibacy whilst other schools, such as Nyingma, allowed sexual intercourse within a ritualistic context. However, even in countries dominated by Vajrayāna celibate monasticism is still a key feature of the Buddhist order.

Since celibacy remains the norm throughout most Buddhist traditions, clerical marriage has never been condoned. Japanese Buddhism, however, presents an exception – this despite the fact that the institution

of clerical marriage has never been accepted, but has been strongly criticised by many scholars and monastics. Although many Buddhist monks married secretly, Shinran, the founder of the Jōdō Shinshū school, was the first major leader to marry and have children openly. Although Japanese Buddhism was faced with same phenomenon as Newar Buddhism in Nepal and the modern Nyingmapa school in Tibet, the practice of allowing married clergy in Japan is different, since it obviously lies in the ideology of *mappō* which needs to be comprehended within the context of a belief in the decline of the Buddhist doctrine. In contemporary Japan, marriage and the family have permeated all but a small minority of temples that are reserved for monastic training. Buddhist clerical marriage has become so entrenched in Japanese life that the majority of the laity has a married cleric serving as abbot of their temple. However, the practice of celibacy never completely died out in Japan, as is evident in the development of Zen Buddhism, which represented a counter movement that partly returned to celibacy.

Although there was no space here to discuss this in detail, it should also be mentioned that in China, under the dominance of traditional Confucianism, Buddhist celibacy and monastic life were at first viewed as unfilial and destructive to society, but eventually Chinese Buddhists succeeded in interpreting monasticism as the highest form of filial piety.

Historically, no matter how challenging celibacy may appear to Buddhists, celibacy still remains a symbol of religious vocation and practice in Buddhism as one of the characteristics that marks the Buddha's followers. Its retention across the whole of the *saṅgha* for thousands of years is striking.

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