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Guṇaprabha's *Vinaya-sūtra* and his Own Commentary on the Same

by P. V. Bapat

I have written a paper on Guṇaprabha's *Vinaya-sūtra*² and have given an idea of the general contents of the same by giving the names of its various chapters and indicating their correspondence with the *Vinaya-vastu* of the Mūla-Sarvāstivādins and with the Pali *Vinaya*.

Guṇaprabha (5th c. A.D.?) has written his own commentary (*Sva-vyākhyāna*) on the *Vinaya-sūtra* and he reveals several peculiarities of the Buddhists, which are quite novel to orthodox scholars. Elsewhere³, I have drawn attention to the use of the word *kṛt* by the Buddhists to indicate the abbreviation of a passage, almost similar to the use of *pe* (*peyyālam*) in Pali texts.

In this paper I want to draw attention to some other peculiarities of the Buddhists.

(i) *ādau Kriyāpadasya prayogaḥ*. (*The use of an action-word at the beginning.*)

Guṇaprabha, while commenting on the *Vinaya-sūtra* No.267 *Kārayeraṇ pādadhāvanikām*, says (Plate 111-A, Lines 2-3):

kāmakāro'tra, na niyama iti sandarśanārtham ādau kriyāpadasya prayogaḥ.

To show that there is an action of the will, an option, and not an inexorable rule, there is the use of the action-word at the beginning [of the *sūtra*], which says: "They may cause to be built a place where [monks] can get their feet washed". In the Sanskrit text of the *sūtra*, the action-word *kārayeraṇ* is used at the beginning of the *sūtra*. This suggests that the managers of a *vihāra* may, if they like, construct a place where monks could wash their feet. There is no rule binding upon them to construct such a place. This seems to be a very novel usage and Pāṇinian scholars assure me that

such a usage is not met with in orthodox grammatical systems.

In another place of the same commentary (Plate IVB, Page 1, Line 7) Guṇaprabha has a similar remark, while commenting upon *sūtra* No. 561:

kathanam bhikṣuṇyā'ntaritam āntarāyiko syād vā

“Declaring by the Bhikṣuṇī the impedimentary obstacles”.

This is a matter to be done in both the Saṅghas. This is a matter that involves a sense of shamefulness on the part of the Bhikṣuṇī (*lajjā-nimittam etat*). The commentary adds:

uk'tam tasmāt kāmācāra-vijñānārtham ādau kriyāpada-prayogah.

“Therefore, it is said: the action-word (*kathana*) is used at the beginning [of the *sūtra*] to indicate the voluntary nature of action”. The declaration depends upon her will.

This additional example confirms the intention of Guṇaprabha in attributing a peculiar interpretation to the use of action-word at the beginning of a *sūtra*.

(ii) *Woman's age at the time of her ordination into the Buddhist Order.* Guṇaprabha, while commenting upon *sūtra* 566

dvādaśatvam varṣānām upasampad vyūḍhatāyām

“In the case of a married woman, the ordination requires twelve years”, says:

kumārikāyāḥ viṃśati-varṣatvam, gr̥hoṣitāyāḥ dvādaśa-varṣatvam

“In the case of an un-married [woman] the requirement is of twenty years, and in the case of one who is married into [another] household, the requirement is of twelve years”. In the case of a *śikṣamāṇā* (trainee), the ages prescribed by him are respectively eighteen and ten.

This seems to be strange. Why is this distinction made between a married and unmarried woman? The age-limit of twelve years in the case of a married woman is also mentioned in Pali *Bhikkhuni Pātimokkha*, Pāci. 65-67; that of twenty years in the case of an unmarried girl also in the same work, Pāci. 71-73. In Pali *Sutta-vibhaṅga*, there is no indication as to how this period is to be counted, beyond that she has not reached the age of twelve or twenty (Vin. iv. 322, 327). In Sanskrit *Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya* also there is the mention of the limit of twelve (Pāci. 100, Page 245). E. Waldschmidt and Gustav Roth explain that this period of twelve is to be counted from marriage.⁴

In Pali *Vin* i. 66, and *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha*, Pāci. 75, we have the expressions, *Bhikkhu dasavasso* and *Bhikkhunī paripunnadvādasa-vassā*, in respect of a Bhikkhu or Bhikkhunī, who is qualified to give ordination (*upasampadā*) to another. It is the belief of the Buddhists that with ordination a new regenerated life begins and so their age is understood in Buddhist circles to begin with ordination. So in their cases their age is counted from their ordination. So a Bhikkhu of ten years standing and a Bhikkhunī of twelve years standing from ordination is qualified to give ordination to others.

In *Bhikkhunī Pācittiya* 65, there is the expression *gihigatam* (corresponding to which in the *Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya*, Pāci. 100, we have *grhi-caritām*) and so there is no justification to believe that the age is not to be counted from birth. There are passages in the *Sutta-vibhāṅga* which may throw light on the problem of twelve years. *dvādasa-vassā ca kho bhikkhave gihigatā khamā hoti sītassa, unhassa*, etc.: “A married woman, O Bhikkhus, is able to endure cold, heat, etc . . .” On the contrary, about an unmarried girl below twenty, it is said that she is unable to endure cold, heat (*akkhamā hoti sītassa, unhassa*, etc. *Vin.* iv. 322, 327). So here we get the explanation of the distinction deliberately made between a married woman and an unmarried girl.

Bhadanta Maramba Ratanasāra of Vidyālaṅkāra campus of the University of Śrī Lanka in reply to my query writes that the Sinhalese Sanna (Comment) on the relevant word “twelve” explains that the period of twelve years is to be counted from the time of conception (*paṭisandhito paṭṭhāya*). This is a clear gloss preserved in the Sinhalese tradition, though in Buddhist Theravāda countries the tradition of a Bhikkhunī Saṅgha is lost. Professor A. Hirakawa of Tokyo also writes to me that in China, Korea and Japan there are *really* no Bhikkhunīs. There are only *śrāmanerīs*. He says that in the Pātimokkhas of different schools preserved in Chinese, the word twelve is to be interpreted as twelve from birth.⁵ There is no justification for interpreting it as twelve from marriage.

And this very interpretation is further strengthened by Guṇaprabha.

(iii) *Dharmas and anudharmas of a woman-trainee*

Guṇaprabha’s *dharmas* in which a woman is to be trained before ordination are different from those in Pali. He mentions six *dharmas* and six *anudharmas* (virtues and minor virtues) (Plate

IVA, Page 1, Lines 5-7). The six *dharmas* are: she should not (1) go alone on a road, (2) cross a river, (3) touch a man, (4) sleep with another in a lonely house, (5) go on an errand as a messenger-woman, and (6) conceal the moral lapses of others.

Bhikkhunī Vibhaṅga (*Vin.* iv. 319), however, while commenting upon *Pācittiya* 63 mentions as six *dhammas*, the five rules of a layman's good conduct (*pañcasīla*), namely, abstaining from murder, falsehood, stealing, intoxicating drinks and violation of celibacy, along with the sixth, abstaining from food at an improper time (that is, after mid-day).

The six *anudharmas*, which are not found in relation to a woman under training in Pali Vinaya, are given by Guṇaprabha as follows:

(1) Not to accept gold or silver, (2) not to shave off hair on private parts, (3) not to dig earth, (4) not to cut green grass, (5) not to relish what is not given, and (6) not to relish any kind of storage.

Most of these rules of *dharmas* and *anudharmas* are covered in the rules of Pātimokkha for Bhikkhunīs, but they are not prescribed for women-trainees in Pali. *Mahāvuyutpatti* (9320-21) also mentions these words but does not specifically enumerate them.

NOTES

1. "Discovery of a Sanskrit Text: *Vinaya-sūtra*", *Proceedings of the 26th Session of the International Congress of Orientalists* (held in New Delhi in 1964), 3, Part 1 (1969), 343-4.

2. Dr. V. V. Gokhale and myself have been working for some years upon Guṇaprabha's *Vinaya-sūtra* and his own commentary and we soon hope to prepare a critical edition of the first chapter of these texts for the K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna. We must make it clear that this *sūtra* text on which we are working is not the one given in the Microfiche plates MBB-1971-54, which were supplied to us by Dr. Christopher S. George of the Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions, New York. That *sūtra* is some ordinary text extracted from *Sarva-Thathāgata Dvādaśasahasra-Pārājika* text related to Vinaya, for the Buddhist laymen of Nepal. The manuscript of that text is dated 1793.

3. *Journal of the Department of Sanskrit*, University of Delhi, 1 (Dec. 1971), 58-62.

4. E. Waldschmidt and Gustav Roth, *Bruchstücke des Bhikṣuṇī-Prātimokṣa der Sarvāstivādins*, p. 245, notes 3-4.

5. For another additional evidence, see Vin.-sutra, Bhiksuni-Vibhanga, Prayascittika 49:

Pūrṇatāyām dvādaśa-varṣatvasya upasampad varṣāṇām: when the twelfth year is completed, there is the time of ordination;

and Sutras 54-55:

Upasampādane dvādaśa-varṣatvād arvāk pariṇītāyāḥ; vimśater anyasyāḥ:

In the case of a married woman, there is ordination when twelve years are completed; before that (there is the time of training); in the case of another, the period is of twenty.