

Submission to the Bhikkhunī-Revival Subcommittee Meeting on the Current Stage of Research on the Bhikkhunī Vinaya

Tuesday 8th August 2548 BE

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This essay aims just to give you some impression of the stage of our research into problematic areas of the bhikkhunī Vinaya that we have identified so far and a sense of how broad the range of interpretive options is, using two detailed examples. The views expressed here are not meant to be taken as final or complete, and they should be understood as representing just my personal opinion at this stage. Bhante Sujāto and I have been working partly together and partly independently on this issue. We agree on the fundamental point that reviving the bhikkhunī lineage is good if it is done well, although I think we have different approaches to what ‘doing it well’ means in detail. So it ought to be understood that Bhante Sujāto has contributed most of the good information in this essayette, and anything objectionable is likely to be my responsibility.

The two rules I would like to use as examples of the broad range of interpretive options available are: Bhikkhunī Saṅghādisesa three and the rule about living in wilderness.

Bhikkhunī Saṅghādisesa Three:

yā pana bhikkhunī ekā vā gāmantaraṃ gaccheyya | ekā vā nadīpāraṃ gaccheyya | ekā vā rattim vippavaseyya | ekā vā gaṇamhā ohīyeyya | ayampi bhikkhunī paṭhamāpattikaṃ dhammaṃ āpannā | nissāraṇīyaṃ saṅghādisesaṃ ||

If any bhikkhunī should go between villages alone, go to the farther bank of a river alone, spend a night alone or lag behind a group alone, that bhikkhunī too commits an immediate offence, one to be escaped from by means of the remainder of the Saṅgha.

Bhante Sujāto has collected, translated and begun comparing and evaluating all the rule formulations, origin stories and explanations (vibhaṅga) of all the rules directly related to this one in all the Vinaya recensions¹. The strongest and first impression one gets from comparing all the sources is that they are more inconsistent and obviously confused about this rule than most other rules; normally the various Vinaya recensions agree in meaning almost identically and are often very similar in phrasing too, probably more so in the Bhikkhus’ rules.

There are difficulties in comparing phrases across languages; the translations in Chinese and Tibetan are inevitably less precise than those in Indic languages. I think the confusion is also probably because originally the meaning of the rule was quite specific, but with the loss of a few phrases (crucially ‘addhānamaggam’) the meaning got lost and the various schools tried to make sense of it again but in different ways. The explanation (vibhaṅga) in the Pāli is just four phrases long, it is so extremely terse

¹ We are able to examine all the Indic languages and Chinese translations directly but so far we are only able to rely on Sis. Dr. Karma Lekshe Tsomo’s translation of the Tibetan Mūlasarvastivāda Bhikṣuṇī-Prātimokṣa Sūtra. It would be very helpful if we could find help from someone fluent in the Tibetan language to help to compare the Tibetan translations in detail. I would be particularly interested in learning whether what Sis. Tsomo translates as “goes along the road alone” (p.85) would likely represent Sanskrit ‘adhvānamargaṃ pratipadyeyya’ (should walk on a long road/ journey) or just ‘gaccheyya’ (should go). If you are able to help, or know someone who might, please contact me at bh.santi@gmail.com. Thanks.

as to allow for many possible interpretations, of which the traditional Pāli commentaries have chosen one of the most draconian and impractical.

Further, from a historical perspective, the Vibhaṅgas were definitely completed later than the rule formulations in the Pātimokkha. (This is one of the problems I see with Charles Prebish's classification of the Pātimokkhas as 'paracanonical', the other the problem is that this concept of a 'text' is inconsistent with the nature of the oral transmission.) This is why normally the rule formulations in the various schools are more similar to each other than the origin stories or the explanations.

Given the evident confusion about this rule going back long before the Vinaya recensions were closed, and the historical fact that the Vibhaṅgas are partly compiled from earlier sources and partly created later, by disciples, and therefore do not have equal credibility compared to the rule formulations, which are supposed to have originally been spoken by the Buddha himself -- given all this, I think there are good grounds for working out our own interpretation of this rule, cautiously, and based as closely as possible on the texts, but without relying on an uncritical and unhistorical literalist assumption about the authority of the texts. I believe this approach is justified by the Four Great Criteria taught by the Buddha (which in the age of oral transmission would also have applied to the Suttas and Vinaya themselves) and evidently how the interpreters in the early schools worked too.

Our research on this rule is not yet complete; it will take far more work to prove whatever interpretation we decide on than to form an initial hypothesis about what the rule probably originally meant specifically. At this stage, our working hypothesis about what the rule means is this:

The first clause of the rule (using the Pāli numbering but the Ma-L wording of the rule) is similar, almost parallel, to Bhikkhus' Pācittiya 67 (in the Pāli numbering) about travelling on foot by arrangement with a woman on a long journey alone². Therefore, I personally think that the formulation in the Mahāsaṅghika Lokuttaravāda (Ma-L) recension³ is likely to be the most ancient.

I think a 'long journey' means one of three yojanas or more, i.e. 24km. This is based on the phrasing of bhikkhus' Nissaggiya Pācittiya 16 ("...addhānamaggapaṭipannassa... ..tiyojanaparamaṃ...")⁴ and the explanation in the Ma-L⁵. '(Even) between villages' therefore means the next village after walking 24km alone (without another bhikkhunī). In historical perspective and given the confusion about this rule evident in all the texts I believe it would be reasonable to override the Pāli Vibhaṅga's comment

² The last two points are new discoveries due to comparing this rule closely with the bhikkhunīs' rule. 'Should walk on a long journey' is 'addhānamaggaṃ paṭipajjeyya', 'addhāna' is 'long' not just 'along' (anu). Walking was the normal mode of travel then, so whether to include all modes of travel or not under 'paṭipanna' is a matter of interpretation. Aj. Brahm has interpreted this as specifically about walking and not including travel in a vehicle, which would be regulated by the rules about sitting alone with a woman in a private and secluded place (there are exact parallels for these rules in the Bhikkhunī Vinaya). 'Alone' is what I now think the 'eka' in 'ek'addhānamaggaṃ' means, due to comparison with bhikkhunīs Saṅghādisesa three. If the comparison is valid, the 'alone' would probably mean 'without another bhikkhu' in this rule.

³ yā puna bhikṣuṇī bhikṣuṇīya vinā adhvāna-mārgaṃ pratipadyeyya antamasato grāmāntaram pi anyatra-samaye tatrāyaṃ samayo akāmikā bhikṣuṇī bhavati glānikā vā | ayam atra samayo | ayam pi dharmo prathamāpattiko. [Roth p.110] "Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya" of the Ārya-Mahāsaṅghika-Lokuttaravādins in BH Sanskrit, edited by Gustav Roth 1970,.

⁴ I wonder whether in the following phrase from the Pāli Vibhaṅga to NP16 'pantha' (path) might be a wrong reading for 'panta' (long, distant, remote): "bhikkhuno paneva addhānamaggappaṭipannassāti panthaṃ gacchantassa."? The PTS and VRI editions have 'pantha' and the Sri-Jayanti has 'patha', which unfortunately means the same.

⁵ "adhvāna-mārgā 'ti yojanaṃ dvi-yojanaṃ tri-yojanaṃ antamasato grāmāntaraṃ vā.

'A long journey': a yojana, two yojanas or three yojanas, the distance between villages."

"etā dāni bhikṣuṇīyo adhvāna-mārgaṃ gacchanti yāvataṃ anto sīmāṃ gacchanti kiñcāpi dūraṃ dūraṃ gacchanti anāpattiḥ Here now bhikkhunīs go on a long journey, as far as they go within the sīma, however far they go, there is no offence." [Roth p.110]

“agāmake araññake addhajojane addhajojane āpatti...”, found only in the context of other rules anyway, on the greater authority of the Pātimokkha’s support for a three yojana definition. It would also be worth researching whether there is any reference to either ‘addhānamaggam’ or ‘gāmantaram’ in the Arthaśāstra or whether three yojanas would likely be a sensible average of the distance between villages in the Buddha’s time (but the Arthaśāstra is quite a lot later).

Further, I would interpret ‘paṭipajjeyya/ pratipadyeyya’ as specifically *walking*, as Aj. Brahm has done in his Vinaya notes on bhikkhus’ Pācittiya 67. It is interesting how this relates to Pc66 too, about walking with a ‘caravan of theives’, which perhaps implies that travelling with a caravan (as in bhikkhunīs’ Pc37 & 39) does not mean riding in it but walking alongside for safety.

In ancient times, in fact just any time before automobiles, trains and busses, it would have been very normal for ordinary folk, and especially women, to travel further than the nearest market town only very rarely. So if it is correct to interpret the rule as about a long journey more than 24km then this would have allowed a bhikkhunī to walk alone almost anywhere she would normally have had to go while living in a certain place, only for journeying beyond that would she have needed a companion. It’s likely that this was just commonsense practice at that time and place and not very oppressive or even impractical then. However, now long distance travel is very common, but more often by vehicle than by foot, yet travelling by foot alone remains more dangerous relatively for a bhikkhunī than travelling in a vehicle. So, given the opportunity to distinguish between ‘paṭipajjeyya’ (walk) in this rule and ‘yāyeyya’ (ride in a vehicle) in bhikkhunīs’ Pācittiya 85, it seems reasonable to interpret it this way since it is possible without changing the phrasing of the rule, or even the Vibhanga, and it maintains the purpose of the rule, to keep the bhikkhunīs safe.

The clause or rule (depending on which recension) about spending the night alone definitely does not apply with the bhikkhunī-vihāra⁶. In the Ma-L (Roth) it is prefixed with a subheading ‘gāmāntaram ekaratram pi’, which implies that staying a night alone refers specifically to the context of the previous rule, i.e. while going on a long journey beyond her own village. There might be further support for this in the Sarvastivāda recension of the rule. How far outside the bhikkhunī-vihāra she is allowed to spend the night alone is not clear, so far most of the explanations seem to say nowhere. Even though this would be inconvenient, it’s harder to find as much wriggle-room in this rule, and the practical purpose is obvious. Unless we can find a precedent for limiting the rule to only outside the 24km range of her ‘own village’ (sakaḡāmo) I think it would be best to keep this rule as it appears. That would mean if a bhikkhunī is going to spend the night outside her regular vihāra she ought to either stay at another bhikkhunī-vihāra (incl. a Mahāyāna temple with bhikṣuṇīs) or go with another bhikkhunī to spend the night and be together at least at dawnrise (acc. the Pāli).

It seems that the rule or clause about crossing a river alone is not limited to beyond the three yojana range but is an alternative criterion for a ‘long journey’, since beyond a major river due to unfamiliarity she would be more at risk. However, in the explanation in the Pāli it does seem to only apply to a major river such that when she has to wade across the water covers her waist. Thus it might be possible to limit this to wading across a river and not applying to a river with a bridge or ferry. However, some of the origin stories (which are extremely inconsistent and therefore probably quite late) say that the first offenders were raped by a ferryman when they crossed separately (Dharmaguptaka). This doesn’t necessarily mean that we couldn’t follow the Pāli’s lead and interpret the rule as specifically applying to wading across a major river and not crossing it any other way.

⁶ “bhikṣuṇī-vihāre anyatra” [Roth 134]

The clause ‘or lag behind a group’ (gaṇamhā vā ohīyeyya) only found in the Pāli, Dharmaguptaka and Mahīśāsaka rule formulations has probably been added from the earlier vibhaṅga to clarify the meaning of the first clause (ekā gāmantaram gaccheyya). If one accepts this point in the explanation, then the addition of this phrase would not change the meaning of the rule, only make it clearer. In the Pāli explanation that the offence under this clause occurs when she goes out of range of both sight and hearing. Since this is so much more practical than the within arms reach standard of some of the other recensions I would suggest using this standard.

One of the remaining problems in interpreting this rule is where to start counting the three yojana allowable range. Bhikkhus’ NP16 and Pc45, 66 and 67 do not explain where to start counting the distance in question. They only use a subjective and contextual method of interpreting the distance, i.e. it starts wherever one perceives it as starting. This leaves a lot of room for interpretation. So we could interpret it as starting from the bhikkhunī-vihāra, or from the boundary of the ‘village’ (incl. a single house, see below) from which one is leaving. Definitely the ‘long journey’ in question would have included overnight journeys. So trying to evade the rule by interpreting the three yojana range as starting from wherever one spent the previous night on one’s journey and just walk less than three yojanas a day would not be convincing. The explanation of NP16 also states: “...when he exceeds the three yojanas on the first footstep he commits an offence of dukkaṭa and on the second footstep nissaggiya-pācittiya...”.⁷ If, as I suspect, ‘addhānamaggaṃ’ and ‘gāmantaram’ are effectively synonymous in that both mean ‘three yojanas or more’, then this might imply that the very similar explanation of ‘ekā gāmantaram gaccheyya’ could be interpreted non-literally as meaning exceeding a certain distance rather than literally entering a village. However, weighing against this interpretation there is the necessity for a clear boundary for such a serious offence.

The non-offence clause in the Ma-L formulation of the rule ‘akāmikā’⁸ which we previously thought might mean ‘not desirous’ we have since realised means ‘unwilling’ here, this is also how Edith Nolot translated it in French (thanks to Prof. Mark Allon for this reference): “‘Contre son gré’ signifie qu’elle est arrêtée, ou par le cadavre d’un éléphant ...” - “ ‘against her will/wishes’ means that she is hindered by the body of an elephant...” So she takes akāmikā as ‘against her will’, as does the BHSD and the new PTS dictionary. The Ma-L and several other recensions also mention an exemption attributed to the Buddha when a bhikkhunī is ill.

⁷ tato ce uttari hareyya, asantepi hāraleti paṭhamam pādam tiyojanam atikkāmeti, āpatti dukkaṭassa. dutiyam pādam atikkāmeti, nissaggiyam pācittiyam. antotiyojane t̥hito bahitiojanam pādeti, nissaggiyam pācittiyam. aññassa yāne vā bhaṇḍe vā ajānantassa pakkhipitvā tiyojanam atikkāmeti, nissaggiyam pācittiyam.

⁸ “...anyatra-samaye tatrāyam samayo akāmikā bhikṣuṇī bhavati glānikā vā | ayam atra samayo... akāmikāti hasti-kaḍvareṇa aśva-kaḍvareṇa vā go-kaḍvareṇa vā manuṣya-kaḍvareṇa vā āvṛtā bhavati | glāniketi jarā-durbalā vā vyādhi-durbalā vā [... nagaroparodho vā] bhavati | pratyuddhṛtam bhagavatā padam anāpatti glānāya | ayam atra samayo” – ...except on the proper occasions, herein this is the occasion: she is unwilling or she is ill. This herein is the occasion. ... ‘Unwilling’: she is obstructed by the body of an elephant, by the body of a horse, by the body of a cow or by the body of a human. ‘Ill’: she is weak through age or illness, or her city is besieged.” [Ma-L Roth p.134] ‘Kaḍvara’ here equals Pāli ‘kaḷebara’ and English ‘cadaver’. However, the phrase it is most commonly used in in Pāli: ‘kaḷebarassa nikkhepo’ implies that it does not necessarily refer to a *dead* body in Pāli or Sanskrit as English ‘cadaver’ does.

《摩訶僧祇律》卷 36 : 「不欲無罪」 (CBETA, T22, no. 1425, p. 518, b11)
'unwilling, no offence'

《摩訶僧祇律》卷 36 : 「餘時者不欲病」 (CBETA, T22, no. 1425, p. 518, b16)
here the occasion is this: unwilling, illness

《摩訶僧祇律》卷 36 : 「不欲病世尊說無罪」 (CBETA, T22, no. 1425, p. 518, b19)
'Unwilling, illness, the Buddha said is no offence'.

There are several non-offence clauses: If she is sick, weak because of old age or illness, she can walk as far as she needs with no offence. When her city is being attacked in war (nagaraparodha) or there is some other emergency (āpadāsu) she can walk as far as she needs to without offence. When she is travelling with another bhikkhunī as a companion and she is unwillingly (akāmikā) separated from her companion because of being obstructed or detained by any kind of obstacle; such as being surrounded and made to walk along with a group of corrupt men⁹. There is also no offence if she is unwillingly separated from her companion due to the companion leaving, disrobing, going over to another sect or dying¹⁰. Also, as usual, there is no offence for one who is mad or for the first offender. Sick is explained as just not being able to go on foot¹¹; thus it could include any situation where it would be significantly inconvenient to go on foot, including when she is not able to find a bhikkhunī companion to walk with her. When travelling in a vehicle with a man she also ought to have a companion because it is a private and secluded place, but in this case her companion can be any woman knowledgeable and competent to be a chaperone and witness, and not necessarily a bhikkhunī.

Whatever interpretation we come up with will definitely not be absolutely provable due to the inconstancy and confusion in and between all the sources. I think we can only aim for a reasonable, practical, moderate interpretation that definitely fulfils the purpose of the rule, stays as close as possible to the phrasing of the earliest sources, but without making life impossible for modern bhikkhunīs.

⁹ “eṣā evārthotpattiḥ | bhikṣuṇīyo adhvāna-mārgaṃ gacchanti | aparā dāni bhikṣuṇī prāsādikā darśanīyā taruṇī ucchvāsakārī vā praśvāsakārī vā mārgāto utkramitvā upaviṣṭā puruṣa-sārtho ca āgacchati | sā tehi parivāritā | te dāni āhaṃsuḥ | āryā prāsādikā darśanīyā taruṇī pratyagra-yauvane vartasi | kāmāḥ paribhoktavyāḥ | sā tvaṃ kiṃ pravrajitā | ko vā te nirveda iti | ahā pravrajitāsmi āhaṃsuḥ | ācakṣva tāvat yāvat te tad anantaram parivāriya dhārenti | tāvat tāyo bhikṣuṇīyo grāmāntaraṃ gatāḥ | tāye dāni kaukrtyam utpannam | sā mahāprajāpatīye gautamīye ārocayati | mahāprajāpatī gautamī bhagavata ārocayati | bhagavān āha | tena hi anāpattiḥ akāmiyāyeti ||

This is how it occurred: Then bhikkhunīs went on a long journey. Then later a certain bhikkhunī who was charming, beautiful and attractive left the road to urinate or excrete, when she returned some male merchants came. They surrounded her, and they said: “Noble lady, you are charming, beautiful and attractive, in the peak of your youth, come, enjoy sensual pleasures! Why do you go forth? Or what are you disillusioned with?” “I am a renouncer” she said. Having seen this, surrounding her, they took her with them. That bhikkhunī went between villages. She felt remorseful and told Mahāpajāpati Gotamī, Mahāpajāpati Gotamī told the Blessed One. The Blessed One said: “There is no offence because you were not willing.” [Roth p.110]

《摩訶僧祇律》卷 36：「復次諸比丘尼道路行。有一年少比丘尼。下道便利。在後諸賈客來見比丘尼端正。即便遮問。汝年少端正正應受欲。何以出家請說其故。比丘尼言。我出家何用問為。復言不爾。會當有意語我。答亦如初。如是戲弄已須與放去。到聚落已心生疑悔」(CBETA, T22, no. 1425, p. 518, b4-9)

“And then there were many bhikkhunīs travelling along the road. There was one young bhikkhunī who left the road for convenience. While she was staying behind, many merchants came and saw the beautiful bhikkhunī. They then obstructed her and asked: ‘You are young and beautiful, you should enjoy sensual pleasures. Why have you gone forth – explain your reason?’ The bhikkhunī said: ‘I have gone forth: why do you question so?’ And then they said: ‘not you!’ [不爾]. The group should have the intention to say ‘I’; the answer is also as at first[???]. Thus, playing her along, straightaway they left. When they reached the village her mind was worried...”

¹⁰ “anāpatti dutiyikā bhikkhunī pakkantā vā hoti vibbhantā vā kālaṅkatā vā pakkhasaṅkantā vā, āpadāsu, ummattikāya, ādikammikāyāti.” [Vin. PTS vol.4 p.230]

¹¹ “agilānā nāma sakkoti padasā gantum. gilānā nāma na sakkoti padasā gantum. – ‘Not sick’ means she is able to go on foot. ‘Sick’ means she is not able to go on foot.

Dwelling in the Wilderness

“On that occasion a nun lived in the wilderness. A rogue raped her. The Blessed One said this: ‘bhikkhus, a nun is not to live in the wilderness. If she lives so, she commits a dukkaṭa offence.’ [Cv. p.278.]

This rule is traditionally said to have been originated by the Arahant bhikkhunī Uppalavaṇṇā, the bhikkhunī disciple foremost in psychic powers. There are several other mentions of her living alone in the forest at the root of a tree (incl. SN PTS vol.1 p.131). Obviously, living alone in the wilderness is normally a praiseworthy quality in itself, the problem is just that it can be quite dangerous for a bhikkhunī.

The reason for bringing up this rule as an example is to demonstrate the breadth of possibilities for interpreting rules like this. There are at least four different explicit definitions of the distinction between village vs. wilderness, and possibly two more implicit ones, and there are at least four possible avenues for interpreting this rule.

Three of the four explicit definitions of the village vs. wilderness distinction are named the ‘abhidhamma-definition’, the ‘suttanta-definition’, the ‘vinaya-definition’ in the Visuddhimagga¹². The ‘abhidhamma-definition’ states that whatever is beyond the boundary post of the village is wilderness¹³. The Suttanta-definition states that wilderness is anywhere beyond five hundred bow lengths (pañcadhanusatikaṃ), which equals quite exactly 1 kilometre¹⁴, from the boundary of the village. The Vinaya-commentaries’ definition, which is based on the Suttavibhaṅga¹⁵, is the length of one underarm clod of earth throw by a medium sized man, not by youths showing off, from the

¹² “gāmo nāma yo koci ekakuṭiko vā anekakuṭiko vā parikkhitto vā aparikkhitto vā samanusso vā amanusso vā antamaso atirekacātumāsaniviṭṭho yo koci satthopi.

gāmūpacāro nāma parikkhittassa gāmassa sace anurādhapurasseva dve indakhīlā honti, abhantarime indakhīle ṭhitassa thāmamajjhimassa purisassa leḍḍupāto. tassa lakkhaṇaṃ yathā taruṇamanussā attano balaṃ dassentā bāhaṃ pasāretvā leḍḍuṃ khipanti, evaṃ khittassa leḍḍussa patanaṭṭhānabbhantaranti vinayadharā. suttantikā pana kākanivāraṇaniyamena khittassāti vadanti. aparikkhittagāme yaṃ sabbapaccantimassa gharassa dvāre ṭhito mātugāmo bhājanena udakaṃ chaḍḍeti, tassa patanaṭṭhānaṃ gharūpacāro. tato vuttanayena eko leḍḍupāto gāmo, dutiyo gāmūpacāro.

araññaṃ pana vinayapariyāye tāva ṭṭhapetvā gāmañca gāmūpacārañca sabbametaṃ arañña"nti (pārāo 92) vuttaṃ. abhidhammapariyāye `nikkhamitvā bahi indakhīlā, sabbametaṃ arañña"nti (vibha0 529) vuttaṃ. imasmiṃ pana suttantikapariyāye `araññaṃ nāma senāsaṇaṃ pañcadhanusatikaṃ pacchima"nti idaṃ lakkhaṇaṃ. taṃ āropitena ācariyadhanunā parikkhittassa gāmassa indakhīlato aparikkhittassa paṭhamaleḍḍupātato paṭṭhāya yāva vihāraparikkhepā minitvā vavatthapetaḃbaṃ.

sace pana vihāro aparikkhitto hoti, yaṃ sabbapaṭṭhamaṃ senāsaṇaṃ vā bhattasālā vā dhuvasannipātāṭṭhānaṃ vā bodhi vā cetiyaṃ vā dūre cepi senāsaṇato hoti, taṃ paricchedaṃ katvā minitabbantivinayaṭṭhakathāsu vuttaṃ.

majjhimaṭṭhakathāyaṃ pana vihārassapi gāmasseva upacāraṃ nīharitvā ubhinnaṃ leḍḍupātānaṃ antarā minitabbanti vuttaṃ. idamettha pamāṇaṃ.

sacepi āsanne gāmo hoti, vihāre ṭhitehi mānusakānaṃ saddo suyyati, pabbatanadīdīhi pana antaritattā na sakkā ujum gantum. yo tassa pakatimaggo hoti, sacepi nāvāya sañcaritabbo, tena maggena pañcadhanusatikaṃ gahetabbaṃ. yo pana āsannaḡāmassa aṅgasampādanatthaṃ tato tato maggaṃ pidahati, ayaṃ dhutaṅgacoro hoti.” [PTS Visd. pp.71-72]

¹³ “araññaṇ-ti nikkhamitvā bahi indakhīlā sabbametaṃ araññaṃ.” [Vibh. p.250]

¹⁴ A dhanu is an Indian long bow that is slightly taller than a man so that with the end on the ground secured by his foot the middle of the bow is at the right height for his arm. “Four aratni cubits are one dhanu, a bow-length, where one aratni is 18 inches, thus a bow-length is 6 feet and above, taking the standard size of archer as a six-footer and a little above. The bow's height is the height of the archer plus one measure of his head's height, as the upper end has to tower the archer's head.” Cp. also the table of weights and measures in the Arthaśāstra (a work on political science from about 3rd C. CE) at: http://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/fiindolo/gretil/1_sansk/6_sastra/5_artha/kautil_u.htm.

¹⁵ gāmo nāma ekakuṭikopi gāmo, dvikuṭikopi gāmo, tikuṭikopi gāmo, catukuṭikopi gāmo, samanussopi gāmo, amanussopi gāmo, parikkhittopi gāmo, aparikkhittopi gāmo, gonisādiniviṭṭhopi gāmo, yopi sattho atirekacātumāsaniviṭṭho sopi vuccati gāmo.

boundary of a fenced village or the last house of an unfenced village (called leḍḍupāta) until either the wall of a walled monastery or the building in the monastery nearest to the village. All of these are based on one definition of ‘village’ which is: “‘Village’: means, even one house is a village, even two houses..., even three houses..., even four houses is a village, with humans or non-humans, fenced or unfenced, even a cowherder’s dwelling is a village, even one occupied only for the four months (of the rains) by (traveling) merchants is a village.”

What the Visuddhimagga calls the ‘Suttanta’ method is actually used only in the Vinaya as far as I know and then in contexts in which ‘wilderness’ implies danger. Since the context of this rule is also danger, this definition seems the most applicable. So there are two ways of interpreting the rule based on this observation of its context and purpose:

First, we could simply add a comment, a padabhājana: “araññe iti araññe sasaṅkasammate sappaṭibhaye. - ‘In wilderness’ means: in wilderness that is considered risky and dangerous.” This would mean she could stay almost anywhere that is not regarded as especially dangerous.

Or, secondly, we could apply the five-hundred bow lengths definition that is always used in contexts of danger in the Suttavibhaṅga (cp.eg. bhikkhus’ NP29¹⁶). This is also the definition we decided was applicable in case of distinguishing a default arañña-sīmā and a gāma-sīmā. I believe this is the most suitable definition of wilderness to use in interpreting this rule.

The Abhidhamma definition ‘whatever is beyond the boundary post of the village’ doesn’t seem either applicable or practical in this context. It seems quite an artificial and meaningless definition that is never applied anywhere in the Suttas or Vinaya. This is the third explicit definition. The Visuddhimagga also mentions another obscure definition by the reciters of the Majjhima commentary.

The fourth definition is the one used in the context of Parājika 2: “Wilderness means: having excepted village and the surroundings of the village (as defined above by leḍḍupāta) what remains is wilderness. The context of this definition is that stealing from either the village (/town/city) or the wilderness comes under Parājika 2. This definition would also be appropriately applied in the context of the Sekhiya-vata about proper etiquette when entering a village: being properly dressed, walking with one’s eyes downcast etc. but it is by no means the only or the most suitable definition to use in the context of the rule in question.

The first of the implied definitions I mentioned above comes from Suttas such as MN 108, Ganaka Moggallāna Sutta:

There are, brāhmin, the training rules formulated for the bhikkhus by the Blessed One, the One who Knows, the One who Sees, the Worthy One, the Fully Awakened One, and the Pātimokkha was recited by him. So on the Uposatha day as many of us as live dependent on one village-field* we all assemble in one place, having assembled we invite one who is able to recite it, when he is reciting if a bhikkhu has committed an offence we deal with him/ make him make amends

gāmūpacāro nāma parikkhittassa gāmassa indakhīle {indakhīle (ka0)} ṭhitassa majjhimassa purisassa leḍḍupāto, aparikkhittassa gāmassa gharūpacāre ṭhitassa majjhimassa purisassa leḍḍupāto. araññaṃ nāma ṭhapetvā gāmañca gāmūpacārañca avasesaṃ araññaṃ nāma. [Vin. PTS vol.3 p.46]

¹⁶ “upavassaṃ kho pana kattikapuṇṇamaṃ, yāni kho pana tāni āraññakāni senāsanāni sasaṅkasammatāni sappaṭibhayāni ... yāni kho pana tāni āraññakāni senāsanāni **āraññakaṃ nāma senāsaṃ pañcadhanusatikaṃ pacchimaṃ.**” [PTS Vin. vol.3 p.263]

according to the Dhamma, according to the Instructions. It is not the venerable ones who deal with us, it is the Dhamma that deals with us.” [MN108 PTS vol.3 p.9]

The term ‘gāmakhettaṃ’ literally translated as ‘village-field’ could mean simply ‘village’ or ‘village with its fields’, or ‘-khettaṃ’ could imply the later technical definition of a gāmasīmā or village boundary. However, the explanation of it is much simpler “however many of us as are dependent on one village (for alms etc.)”, so this could be another definition, albeit rather vague.

The first of the four interpretations I mentioned above is, using the fourth definition of village, anywhere literally inside a village or town.

Second, using the five hundred bow lengths definition anywhere within one kilometer of a ‘village’. There is considerable scope for interpretation within ‘village’. Since ‘even one house is a village’, and further, what is a ‘house’?

The word ‘kuṭi’ is usually used of a monastic’s hut, so a third possible interpretation would be that any hut solid enough to offer as much protection from an attacker as a house could be counted as a ‘village’. Then, ‘wilderness’ would be just the root of a tree, an overhang, a heap of straw, the open air etc. This is the second of the two implied definitions I mentioned above, it is stretching the terms though.

Fourth, again using the more than one kilometer from a ‘village’ standard for ‘wilderness’, another more moderate interpretation of the phrase ‘even one house is a village’ would be to include a house used as the centre of a forest monastery because it would fulfill the same function as a layperson’s house in making the area around it safer and providing a refuge (with a telephone and lockable doors) if a bhikkhunī was being harassed by a man. Actually in practice if a bhikkhunī was being harassed by a man and had any chance of escaping at all then the first place she would probably run to would be the main house used as a meeting point in the monastery or nunnery rather than to a neighbour’s house. So this fourth interpretation seems very reasonable to me, and it would mean that a bhikkhunī could probably live almost anywhere as long as there is a main house within a kilometer by the shortest footpath where she could seek refuge if she were being harassed. Probably this would make Dhammasāra Nuns’ Monastery a perfectly suitable and allowable place for bhikkhunīs.

Other Problematic Questions in Need of Further Research

The other problematic rules we have identified as in need of further research are: the Garudhammas, the Story of Gotamī’s Request, the rule against fully enclosed toilets and the rule about not bathing naked.

Bhante Sujāto and I have both been working on the Eight Garudhammas (Vows to be Respected) and the narrative surrounding them which I call the Story of Gotamī’s Request. Bhante Sujāto has been following an approach of reducing the credibility of the narrative as a literal, historical account, as well as the Garudhammas, and even the whole Vinaya, by examining the history of the early councils and the compilation and editing of the Vinaya texts. This approach is valid but personally I feel cautious about how the information will be applied.

So, consciously trying to balance my teacher’s research, I have been working on what could be called an ‘apologetic’ interpretation of the Garudhammas and the Story of Gotamī’s request. ‘Apologetic’

argument does not necessarily mean pathetic or untrue¹⁷. I have already found ways and textual evidence for interpreting the eight Garudhammas in a non-chauvinistic way, and I'm working on diffusing the Story of Gotamī's Request too (although I have to reject the White Bones Red Rust simile on the grounds that it contains implications from a different, later phase of Buddhist culture). I am trying to imagine what the Story of Gotamī's Request might have meant to people in ancient India and later in Sri-Lanka, whether it is historically true or not is quite a different matter. It probably did not have the same meaning as we assume coming from such an extremely different cultural background. Briefly, I think Western feminist ideology is partly a reaction specifically to a Western Protestant Christian kind of chauvinism and there is an important difference between sexism and chauvinism that is relevant to the Indian concept of social roles (Emerson, Sources of Indian Tradition), as well as animistic vs. transcendent religions' different perspectives on masculinity and femininity, and how this relates to the Buddha's comments on caste and seniority in the Saṅgha too. I've noticed how some feminist ideologies rationally lead to extreme positions, even to the belief that choosing celibacy is necessarily, always mysogenistic (Spong, "Sins of Scripture"). I see this is as a kind of reductio ad absurdum demonstration that there is something radically wrong with certain extreme feminist ideologies.

Bhante Sujāto and I have both focussed on different ways of understanding the Story of Gotamī's Request as mythology, but really if we were following a proper methodology we ought to first collect and compare all the versions in all the sources, identify shared and unshared elements and use all the other techniques of textual criticism to discover which elements of the Gotamī Story are more likely to be early/ original and which elements likely to be later, and perhaps try to date the different strata, and only then after gathering all the evidence consider different mythic interpretations. This is a major deficiency in our research on this issue so far and I would like to invite anyone who's willing and able to help with it.

In my research on the Garudhammas I have found that every other translation of the Garudhammas I have seen so far is grossly inaccurate. Some of the translators seem to be deliberately making them seem as offensively chauvinist as possible, even quite dishonestly in some cases¹⁸. Garudhamma no.2 about not spending the Vassā in residence without a bhikkhu is explained in the Vibhaṅga as: "She is not able to go to the ovāda."¹⁹ So nowadays, with cars, this could mean several hours away since the bhikkhunīs only have to go for the ovāda once a fortnight. Garudhamma 5 definitely refers to a Saṅghādisesa offence only and not to transgression of the Garudhammas²⁰. This rule is significantly different in the Ma-L, where it says that a bhikkhunī who has committed a Saṅghādisesa must ask for

¹⁷ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_apologetics

¹⁸ For example, the translation by Phra Mettanando at <http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=8,2666,0,0,1,0>. He studied Pāli and Sanskrit at Chulalongkorn University, Oxford and Harvard, and received a PhD from Hamburg, so he cannot be excused on the grounds of ignorance for such an inaccurate translation.

¹⁹ "abhikkhuko nāma āvāso na sakkā hoti ovādāya vā saṃvāsāya vā gantum. 'vassaṃ vasissāmī'ti senāsanam paññāpeti pāṇīyaṃ paribhojanīyaṃ upaṭṭhapeti pariveṇaṃ sammajjati, āpatti dukkaṭassa. saha aruṇuggamanā āpatti pācittiyaassa. "A residence without a bhikkhu means a residence in which she is not able to go for the Ovada or to join in communion. When she decides on a lodging, thinking 'I will spend the Rains here', or when she prepares water for drinking or for washing or sweeps a cell she commits an offence of wrongdoing (dukkata); when she greets dawnrise there she commits an offence to be confessed (pacittiya)." [Vin. vol.4 p.313]

²⁰ Cp. eg. "Sace ācariyo **garudhammaṃ** ajjhāpanno hoti, parivāsāraho, antevāsikena ussukkaṃ kātappaṃ- kinti nu kho saṅgho ācariyassa parivāsam dadeyyāti. Sace ācariyo mūlāyapaṭikassanāraho hoti, antevāsikena ussukkaṃ kātappaṃ- kinti nu kho saṅgho ācariyam mūlāya paṭikasseyyāti. Sace ācariyo mānattāraho hoti, antevāsikena ussukkaṃ kātappaṃ- kinti nu kho saṅgho ācariyassa mānattam dadeyyāti. Sace ācariyo abbhānāraho hoti, antevāsikena ussukkaṃ kātappaṃ- kinti nu kho saṅgho ācariyam abhheyāti." and "tena kho pana samayena aññatarā bhikkhunī **garudhammaṃ** ajjhāpannā hoti mānattacārinī. atha kho tassā bhikkhuniyā etadahosi- "mayā ca na labbhā ekikāya vatthum, aññāya ca bhikkhuniyā na labbhā saha mayā vatthum, katham nu kho mayā paṭipajjitabban"ti?"

manattā from the bhikkhunī Saṅgha only and abbhāna from both, whereas the Pāli says manattā from both and doesn't mention abbhāna. Manattā (penance) for a bhikkhunī involves confessing to the Saṅgha every day for a fortnight, whereas abbhāna (rehabilitation) is a single ceremony. So the Ma-L version seems to be much more practical. Garudhamma 8 is the most serious if misinterpreted, the key term 'vacanapatho' is quite unusual and the meaning is not immediately clear from the etymology of the word. I believe it means specifically a formal accusation in the midst of the Saṅgha (a procedure that is never practiced nowadays anyway). I have amassed some evidence for this from the Pāli sources and the detailed explanation in the Ma-L Vibhaṅga, and I also heard from Sister Samacitta that this is how Master Yin Shun interpreted it in his essay (in Chinese) on the Garudhammas.

The rule about fully enclosed toilets is bizarre, the origin story in the Pāli easily rates as the most implausible in the whole Vinaya. One of the group of six nuns, having become pregnant, caused an abortion in the toilet, the Buddha (allegedly) said that henceforth bhikkhunīs shall not use a fully enclosed toilet, to use one for excreting is a dukkaṭa (urinating isn't included), but one with a gap at the bottom of the door was ok. Why on earth would the Buddha address the issue of using a fully enclosed toilet when the bhikkhunī in question had already committed two parājikas, for sexual intercourse and killing a human? On the positive side, the phrasing is very short, entailing only a dukkaṭa with no traditional vibhaṅga. So I would suggest just adding a major non-offence clause as a commentary to this rule: she is ill; 'she is ill' means she is not able to use a toilet with a space at the bottom of the door at that time. Actually, showers and toilets with a space at the bottom of the cubicle are quite practical for cleaning purposes.

Another problematic rule is the Pācittiya about not bathing naked, i.e. using a bathing cloth (Pc21). There is the question of whether it applies only outside or also in a shower room. The Vibhaṅga does not say, but since in ancient India it seems it was normal to bathe outside, probably it would be reasonable to interpret this rule as only applying when bathing outside. Bhikkhus are allowed to bathe outside at a river or pond with the water as a covering, i.e. naked, so presumably this is what bhikkhunīs are not allowed to do. Nowadays when bhikkhus bathe outside we would always use a bathing cloth anyway.

I have also made detailed presentations on the four unshared bhikkhunī Parājika rules (5-8) based on the Pāli sources for the Vinaya classes here at Santi Forest Monastery. They are currently in the form of projector presentations in OpenOffice Impress format, but they could easily be reformatted into a more convenient form for printing. If anyone would like a copy please email me: bh.santi@gmail.com.

In one of the Pāli chronicles there is a well known story of when King Duṭṭhagāminī of Sri-Lanka is said to have asked the Ven. Mahinda Thera, an Arahant and the son of King Aśoka who had sent him as a missionary to the court of Sri-Lanka: “When will the Sāsana truly have deep roots on the island?” and he replied: “When a young man born in Sri-Lanka, of Sri-Lankan parents, ordained in Sri-Lanka by Sri-Lankan bhikkhus, having learnt it thoroughly, teaches the Vinaya in Sri-Lanka, then, truly the Sāsana will have taken deep roots on the island.” The same principle surely holds true with the revival of the bhikkhunī lineage in Australia. Only when an Australian born bhikkhunī, ordained in Australia teaches the Vinaya in Australia will the bhikkhunī Saṅgha truly have made deep roots.

Another well known saying from the Pāli commentaries is: “Vinaya is said to be the life force of the Buddha’s Sāsana, as long as the Vinaya remains the Sāsana shall remain.” The practice of Vinaya in the Theravāda Forest tradition is treated as a devotional practice, since the Buddha instructed us to take the Dhamma and Vinaya as our Teacher after his death. This is why in my tradition we normally follow even the most obscure, trivial rules to the letter, not because they are important in themselves, but out of devotion to the Vinaya as the representative of our Teacher.

May bhikkhunīs truly flourish in the future; for their own benefit,
for the long lasting of the True Dhamma and for the benefit of all living beings.