

On Controversies over Buddhist Nuns (1): Did Buddhaghosa Misinterpret *Anupasampanno* in the *Duṭṭhullārocana* Precept?

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1 Introduction

We have been interested in *Controversies over Buddhist Nuns* of Dr. Juo-Hsüeh Shih since we discovered it some years ago. The reasons for our interest is partly academic and partly personal.

Academically speaking, our interest mainly lies in her annotated translations of *Bhikkhuni-Vibhaṅga* and its commentary (part of *Samantapāsādikā*) since they are significant contributions to Pali studies. (We are not qualified to give any intelligent comment on other non-Pali sources that she makes use of)

Personally, on the other hand, we have been intrigued by her following statement in the introduction:

My initial study shows that although there was a general tendency in all the traditions *to create a stricter discipline for nun, which inevitably made them subordinate*, it is worth noting that in the later development of Buddhist monasticism, nuns in the Pāli tradition may have suffered the most severe “suppression”, to use G. Schopen’s word, in that greater protection and tolerance were granted only to monks and stricter restrictions were imposed only on nuns. (Juo-Hsüeh 17) [Emphasis added]

We do agree that Vinaya for nuns is stricter in many respects than that for monks, but we find her reasoning strange in that a more rigid discipline has inevitably led to the subordination of nuns. For, we cannot see any novice (*sāmaṇera/ sāmaṇerī*) getting subordinated by lay devotees because of the former’s discipline being stricter than the

moral precepts required for the latter, nor fully ordained monks and nuns getting subjugated by novices because of the Vinaya for the former being stricter than that for the latter. Our hunch is that, if nuns had really been subordinate to monks, the reason must lie elsewhere, not in the strictness of the discipline itself.

On the other hand, we have never felt that Vinaya in the Pali tradition is biased against nuns, or more favourable to monks, even at the time when we were thoroughly studying *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha* as a compulsory part of the curriculum in the Burmese monastic education. No wonder, one might say, but now Dr. Juo-Hsüeh has persuaded us through her book to think seriously about it. This is why we have been studying her work, especially the parts relevant to Pali Vinaya, to understand whether nuns in the Pāli tradition have really undergone such “suppression”.

This paper is the first result of such studies (and, hopefully, one of the many that would follow). Here we would argue that Dr. Juo-Hsüeh is misinterpreting Buddhaghosa when she cites him to show how he has modified the *Bhikkhuvibhaṅga* interpretation of the term *anupasampanno*.

2 Buddhaghosa and the term *anupasampanno* in the *Duṭṭhullārocana* precept

The following is the *Duṭṭhullārocana* precept and part of its explanation as given in (Vin 4.31).

Yo pana bhikkhu bhikkhussa duṭṭhullaṃ āpattiṃ anupasampannassa āroceyya, aññatra bhikkhusammutiya pācittiyanti... (“Should any bhikkhu announce a(nother) bhikkhu’s gross offence to someone who is not fully ordained, unless with bhikkhus’ official permission, this is an offence of Expiation.”)

Duṭṭhullā nāma āpatti—cattāri ca pārājikāni, terasa ca saṅghādisesā. (“Termed as *duṭṭhulla* (‘a gross offence’) are 4 Defeats and 13 *Saṅghādisesa*¹ offences.”)

Anupasampanno nāma bhikkhuñca bhikkhuniñca ṭhapetvā avaseso anupasampanno nāma. (“Termed as *anupasampanna* (‘a non-*upasampanna*, (i. e.) someone not fully ordained’) is anyone excepting a *bhikkhu* and a *bhikkhunī*”)

And Dr. Juo-Hsüeh’s comments are as follows:

So, according to the canonical commentary, it is permissible for a monk to relate another monk’s fault to nuns. But this opinion is modified by Sp: *bhikkhunī anadhippetā hoti, tattha bhikkhuṃ ṭhapetvā avaseso anupasampanno ti vuccati.* “A nun is not meant; here, one who has not been fully ordained

¹Horner translates it as “(an offence which in the earlier as well as the later stages requires) a formal meeting of the Order”(1.197). We have retained the Pali term, however, for the sake of brevity.

refers to anyone except a monk.” It is obvious that according to Sp it is prohibited to relate another monk’s fault to a nun, but the exclusion of nuns from the referents of *anupasampanno* is peculiar to the Pāli Sp...(17)

If we are to understand Sp as she interprets, then Buddhaghosa appears guilty of an interpretation distorted to provide unjustified tolerance for monks and also to discriminate unfairly against nuns. For, this precept is obviously supposed to protect monks from getting unnecessarily humiliated, and also to guard the image of the monastic order in public eyes. What Buddhaghosa has practically done, according to her interpretation, is to imply that such monks, and the Bhikkhu Order itself, must be protected from the community of nuns too.

However, the original Sp passage happens to show a picture very different from that presented by Dr. Juo-Hsüeh. It runs as follows:

1. *Navamasikkhāpade “duṭṭhullā nāma āpatti cattāri pārājikāni terasasaṅghādisesā”ti imissā pāḷiyā pārājikāni duṭṭhullasaddatthadassanattham vuttāni, saṅghādisesam pana idhādhippetan ti atṭhakathāsu vuttam.*
2. *tatrāyaṃ vicāraṇā. sace pārājikaṃ dhammaṃ ārocentassa pācittyaṃ na bhavēyya.*
 - a) *yathā samāne pi bhikkhubhikkhunīnaṃ upasampannasadde yattha **bhikkhuni anadhippetā hoti, tattha “bhikkhum ṭhapetvā avaseso anupasampanno” ti vuccati.***
 - b) *evam idha samāne pi pārājikasaṅghādisesānaṃ duṭṭhullasadde yadi pārājikaṃ anadhippetam, ‘duṭṭhullā nāma āpatti terasasaṅghādisesā’ ti etad eva vattabbaṃ siyā. (Vin-a 4.753.5-15)*

(The original text has been divided into its logical constituents and punctuation also changed as appropriate. The emphasized text is what quoted above by Dr. Juo-Hsüeh)

Now we would translate the text part by part together with comments deemed necessary.

1. It is stated in the commentaries that, in the text “Termed as *duṭṭhulla* are 4 Defeats and 13 *Saṅghādisesa* offences” in the ninth precept (of the First Vagga of Expiation precepts), Defeats are mentioned for the sake of showing the sense of the word *duṭṭhulla*, yet the *saṅghādisesa* offence is required here (i. e. in this precept).

The *commentaries* mentioned above are obviously the ancient Sinhalese commentaries that Buddhaghosa relies upon. According to Buddhaghosa, they maintain that: (a) the canonical commentary (*Bhikkhuvibhaṅga*) shows both Defeat and *Saṅghādisesa* offences in the definition of the term *duṭṭhulla* only to show its literal sense (b) but only *Saṅghādisesa* offences are meant in the context of this precept.

At the first sight, it seems reasonable. Since this precept is supposed to protect monks from unnecessarily cruel humiliation, any monk having committed a Defeat offence no longer deserves such protection; he is not a monk any more. Besides, a Defeat after being committed is really an “ex-monk’s offence”, not that of a monk, so the phrase “another monk’s gross offence” (*bhikkhussa duṭṭhullaṃ āpattim*) is not applicable to Defeats.

However, Buddhaghosa does not like the ancient opinion so he argues against it as follows:

2. This (i. e. the following) is the consideration of that statement. If there were no Expiation offence to (the one who) reveals a Defeat offence:
 - a) Just as it is mentioned “Anyone excepting a monk is an *anupasampanna*” wherever a nun is not intended, even though the term *upsampanna* is the same for (i. e., applicable to) monks and nuns,
 - b) So also should it have been said “Termed as *duṭṭhulla* are 13 *Saṅghādisesa* offences” if a Defeat (offence) is not required, even though the term *duṭṭhulla* is the same for (i. e., applicable to) Defeat and *saṅghādisesa* offences.

If the definition of the term *duṭṭhulla* here expresses its overall literal sense only, as ancient commentators maintain, similar canonical definitions should also be interpreted as giving the literal senses of the terms they define. Indeed, the canonical commentary would have become inconsistent if it chooses, without a valid reason, to define a particular term literally but another term, contextually.

When Buddhaghosa, based on this logic, checks similar definitions, he finds evidence against the ancient view—the term *anupasampanna* as defined in the *Sahaseyya* precept (Vin 4.16).

To elaborate, the term *anupasampanna*, meaning “someone not fully-ordained”, literally refers to anyone excepting *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*. And it is accordingly defined in the canonical commentaries of some precepts which use the term. [See the *Padasodhamma* precept (Vin 4.14), the *Bhūtārocana* precept (Vin 4.25), the *Duṭṭullārocana* precept (Vin 4.31)] But we cannot say that it is literally defined in those precepts because the literal sense is also contextually appropriate therein.

On the other hand, it receives a definitely non-literal definition in the *Sahaseyya* precept (Vin 4.16): *bhikkhum ṭhapetvā avaseso anupasampanno* (“Anyone excepting a monk is an *anupasampanna*”). Why? Since that precept is supposed to prohibit monks from sleeping together with any *anupasampanna* for more than two or three days, the literal definition would have implied that monks are permitted to sleep together with nuns (since both are not *anupasampannas*). In contrast, *anupasampanna* defined as “anyone except a monk” is contextually appropriate in that precept.

Now, if the ancient commentaries are to be correct, we need a clear answer to the question: why does the canonical commentary break consistency by contextually defin-

ing the term *anupasampanna* in the *Sahaseyya* precept but doing it literally, even though contextually not appropriate, for *duṭṭhulla* in the *Duṭṭhullārocana* precept? No clear answer seems available.

Therefore, Buddhaghosa maintains that the canonical definition of *duṭṭhulla* should also be treated as of contextual nature. Then the inevitable implication would be that, if Defeats were not meant in this context, they should have been omitted from the definition text of *duṭṭhulla*. However, they are actually mentioned in the text, so they must be applicable in this precept. Otherwise the consistency of the *Bhikkhuvibhaṅga* text would have been broken. (There are further arguments and counter-arguments in the Sp text, but they are not relevant to our topic)

To sum up, we conclude that Buddhaghosa has no intention to modify the *Bhikkhuvibhaṅga* interpretation of *anupasampanna* in this precept since his purpose is only to discuss the referent of *duṭṭhulla* here, with the term *anupasampanno* being cited from the *Sahaseyya* precept for the sake of comparison. In other words, he has not attempted to rob nuns of the right to know the gross offence of a monk if another monk chooses to reveal it.

3 Conclusion

Dr. Juo-Hsüeh has cited and interpreted part of the Sp passage above as an example of the “suppression” that nuns have undergone in the Pali tradition. But, as we have argued, it is only a mistranslation and misinterpretation on her part.

We guess that part of this mistake may be attributed to her failure to critically examine the punctuation in Sp text. If the punctuation inserted in the Sp text had more reflected its logical structure, it might have been more difficult to misinterpret the text in that way. But, as mentioned above, this is only a guess, which she alone can confirm or deny.

On the other hand, we do not claim that our analysis, and the accompanying translation, is absolutely correct. We would like to see alternative approaches made by fellow Palicists.

Works Cited

Pali texts cited are PTS editions unless otherwise stated, and the abbreviations thereof follow the system of the Critical Pali Dictionary.

Horner, I. B. *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya Piṭaka)*. 6 vols. Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1938–66.

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