

Book Reviews

Anālayo. *The Foundation History of the Nuns' Order*, Hamburg Buddhist Studies 6. Numata Center for Buddhist Studies, Bochum/Freiburg, 2016 (278 pp.)*

Reviewed by Richard Gombrich

In his “Introduction” to this wonderful book, Anālayo writes: “Throughout this study, my intention is not to reconstruct what actually happened on the ground in ancient India, which in view of the limitations of the source material at our disposal would anyway be a questionable undertaking. Instead, my intention is to reconstruct what happened during the transmission of the texts that report this event. In short, I am not trying to construct a history, I am trying to study the construction of a story” (p.13). While one cannot but admire the modesty of this claim, perhaps my only criticism of the book is that it is slightly misleading. Of course, it would hardly be possible to dispute that no account of exactly how the Buddhist Order of Nuns came to be founded is possible. But what can be done, and has been done, is to show how and why many of the details that have come down to us are implausible, and then to show how and why the texts give the accounts that they do; and in performing this latter feat, Anālayo takes us much closer to what must in fact have happened.

After the brief “Introduction” there are 6 chapters, followed by a concise “Conclusion”. Finally come 52 pages of English translations of the seven canonical *Vinaya* texts which describe how the Order of Nuns was founded, all of which are versions of the same basic narrative.

* NB This book is available for free download at <https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/analayo/foundation.pdf>

Each of chapters 2 to 6 directly concerns an episode in the foundation of the Nuns' Order. Chapter 1 has no direct connection with this theme, and yet is of paramount importance, requiring to be read and re-read with close attention. It is called "Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī in the *Nandakovāda*". The latter is the name of a *sutta* in the Pali Canon, MN 146; a parallel version of the same content exists in the Chinese translation of the *Samyuktāgama*, and there are also a few other fragments of it in Chinese and Tibetan translation.

Anālayo begins the chapter as follows:

In this chapter my aim is to provide a case study reflecting attitudes towards nuns in early Buddhist canonical narrative, as a preparation for turning to the *Vinaya* accounts of the founding of the nuns' order.

Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is the central protagonist in the foundation history, as she takes the initiative and petitions the Buddha to allow women to go forth, herself becoming the first Buddhist nun. The way her personality and actions are described elsewhere in early Buddhist discourse literature provide a background for her role in the accounts of how the order of nuns came into being.

... I study the narrative portions of the discourse in particular, as these exemplify tendencies recurrent in other early Buddhist texts that involve nuns ... (p.15)

The "Advice to Nandaka" (*Nandakovāda*) is a short and prosaic, though quite detailed, account of how the monks establish a roster by which they take turns in preaching to the nuns, but when it comes to his turn a monk called Nandaka refuses. The Buddha then tells him to preach, and he does so. Up to this point is what Anālayo calls the "Introductory Narrative".

This "Introductory Narrative" has a parallel in the *Samyuktāgama* (SĀ), so close that a casual reader might fail to notice any differences at all, and will certainly fail to register the significance of the differences. However, Anālayo draws attention to eight points of difference between the two versions. In the cases where there is also a version preserved in one of the other texts, it coincides with the SĀ version. This already suggests that it is the Pali version which is innovating. In some cases, the Pali differs because it omits something which the SĀ says, by doing so shows less respect to the nuns; in others the Pali introduces a tone or suggestion faintly derogatory to the nuns.

One or two such details might well be regarded as accidents of textual transmission, but eight, all pointing in the same direction, surely not.

As Anālayo says, the Theravāda version shows “an attitude of distancing nuns in the sense of narratively positioning them at a distance from the Buddha and other monks, who do not speak to them directly, or treat them in a somewhat off-handed manner” (p.15) If it is shown that text after text of the Pali Canon, when compared to the parallel versions (many of them preserved in Chinese) are characterised by this feature, so that the importance of the nuns is systematically minimised, a penetrating light has been cast on the mentality of those who composed the versions that have come down to us.

Moreover, if their portrayal shows nuns at a disadvantage in an account of an episode in which they play a central role, there is likely to be much room for argument about why this should be so: for instance, the account may be the work of a single misogynist monk; or it may simply reflect what took place.

But if we encounter a whole series of instances which suggest that there is “something slightly wrong” (Anālayo’s extremely apposite expression; see for example p.20 line 8) with how nuns have behaved, instances so trivial that they can easily pass beneath the radar, we have discovered powerful evidence that there was something more than “slightly” wrong with the preponderant attitude of monks toward nuns.

Thus the reader of this review should not be dismayed if I reproduce the eight points of difference between SĀ and the Pali MN versions (pp.25-6; I have made a few small changes in wording). Fully to explain their significance would require me to reproduce almost the whole of pp.17-25, so I must be content with whetting the reader’s appetite. I consider this tactic justified by the fact that readers can now download the whole book for themselves, as stated at the head of this review.

1. SĀ: The nuns are introduced by name and called “great disciples”. MN: neither of these.
2. SĀ: Mahāprajāpatī Gotamī sits down. MN: she remains standing.
3. SĀ: Without being asked to do so, the Buddha twice teaches the nuns. MN: The nuns ask the Buddha to teach them, but he does not.

4. SĀ: The Buddha asks the monks regularly to teach the nuns, because he is too old. MN: Why the monks should do that teaching is not explained.
5. SĀ: The Buddha waits until the nuns have left to enquire which monk has not taken his turn. MN: He ignores the presence of the nuns and discusses this delicate topic in front of them.
6. SĀ: The Buddha gets Nandaka to preach to the nuns by having him follow his own example. MN: He just passes Gautamī's request on to Nandaka.
7. SĀ: Nandaka remains silent, thus acknowledging that he had been at fault in not preaching. MN: Nandaka is praised and replies as if he had not been at fault.
8. SĀ: When Nandaka arrives to preach, the nuns welcome him politely. MN: They are as polite as if he were the Buddha.

Anālayo then goes on similarly to analyse the next section of the *sutta*. Nandaka teaches the nuns twice. According to SĀ, at the end of the first teaching, the Buddha tells the monks that all the nuns have as a result become “non-returners”, which means that they are just one step short of Enlightenment; after the second he announces that they have now all taken that final step and “reached the end of *dukkha*” (pp.28-9). The *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* version says the same. So do three Pali commentaries (on the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the *Thera-gāthā* and the *Therī-gāthā*) which refer to the episode. In the MN version, by contrast, we are not told anything about their attainments the first time, and the second time “the nuns had only reached various levels of awakening, the most backward among them being a stream-enterer” (p.30), i.e., the “lowest of the four stages”.

At first blush, a modern reader will probably surmise that the Pali version, which appears more sober and is less detailed, is the original – or at least the earlier – one, a hypothesis strengthened by the natural assumption that the text of a commentary is likely to be later than that of a *sutta*. Here again, however, Anālayo springs one of his many surprises. Over several pages (31-34) he shows that a simile which compares the nuns' Enlightenment to the moon reaching its fullest form jars with the explanation, used by the MN commentary, that some nuns “had from the outset only aspired to lower stages of awakening” (p.32). On this Anālayo comments: “I am not aware of a precedent for this idea elsewhere

in the discourses: ... that a monastic ...” wishes “to attain only a lower stage and will be fully satisfied with that.” He concludes that here again “the nuns are presented in a less favourable light,” their motivation being (uniquely?) sub-standard for monastics (p.33).

He goes on to connect another change in this story with a rule in the Theravādin *Vinaya* (*pācittiya* 23). This rule forbids monks to go to the nuns’ quarters to teach them (details on p.35). All versions of the *Nandakovāda Sutta*, however, record at the beginning that Nandaka went to the nunnery. But its final narrative says that Nandaka gave leave to the nuns to depart – as if they were the visitors. By this period, the monks were evidently “used to the idea that monks do not go to nunneries to teach”. This inconsistency in the narrative is further evidence “that presenting the nuns in a less favourable light is a later development that affected the Theravāda version of this discourse” (p.35).

The final section of this chapter (pp.36-9) is titled “Narrative Distancing”. Again, I have to skip much interesting material. I choose one example of what the title refers to, simply because it is so straightforward. It concerns an account “which portrays a nun giving a profound and detailed teaching to a lay disciple” (p.36). There are three versions, one of them in the MN. In the other two, at the end “the nun visits the Buddha herself to report about her teaching activities.” But in the MN it is the male lay disciple who visits the Buddha and delivers that report. “As a consequence, whereas in the parallel versions the nun is present when the Buddha lauds her wisdom, in the Pāli version she ... has no direct contact with the Buddha at all” (p.36).

Summarising the chapter (p.38), Anālayo says it shows “androcentric narrative strategies at work.” Here “the distancing of nuns takes place by ignoring their presence and not replying to their requests” while “presenting those who act without consideration towards nuns in a positive light.” The importance and abilities of the nuns are minimised.

It is striking that in this Pāli text the Buddha does not teach the nuns at all, though they ask him three times to do so; the contrast with his portrayal elsewhere in this literature as a compassionate teacher is glaring. This resembles the contrast “between the Buddha’s flat refusal to found an order of nuns, whose existence allegedly¹ spells decline for the whole tradition, and other passages according to which an order of nuns forms an integral part of the Buddha’s dispensation” (*ibid.*).

¹ The printed text says “presumably” but the author has informed me (private communication) that this is a mistake.

The next six chapters divide the story of the founding of the nuns' order into six episodes: "Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī's Petition", "Ānanda's Intervention", "The Buddha's Permission", "Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī's Ordination", "Decline". (Anālayo points out that his treatment in these chapters "incorporates revised extracts" from two of his previous articles (p.39, fn.1).)

Though some of the texts recounting this narrative are in *sutta* collections, it "is basically a *Vinaya* narrative" (p.41). As such, it is to be understood as a part of monastic education, seeking to inculcate in monastics particular moral values and attitudes; it is not merely "an attempt to present historically accurate information" (pp.41-2).

Anālayo grounds his approach on three principles. (1) "[M]aterial common to the seven canonical versions stands a good chance of reflecting a comparatively early textual layer." (I consider this an understatement.) (2) It is helpful to examine "the internal coherence of a particular passage within the entire foundation history." (3) It should likewise be compared "with other discourses or *Vinaya* passages that have a bearing on [its] narrative or doctrinal content" (p.42).

All versions agree that Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī approached the Buddha and requested ordination for herself and a group of female followers, and he refused (p.43). Three versions report that he suggested the alternative of shaving off their hair and donning robes – apparently to cultivate a life of celibacy in a protected environment at home. The versions that do not record his approving this alternative nevertheless describe that they did shave their hair and put on robes, so it is probable that his making such a suggestion is an early feature of the narrative (pp.51-8). We shall see that this is important.

That the Buddha made this alternative suggestion is often overlooked, and so therefore is its implication that the Buddha did not receive Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī's request with a blank refusal but offered a compromise. But the versions tend to multiply the number of times she made the request. Since all versions agree that in the end the Buddha acceded to the original request, "This final outcome makes a total rejection at the outset ... less probable ..., making it likely that the earlier versions of the narrative had only a single refusal," as two versions still do. So the multiplication of requests would reflect the tendency "to present Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and her mission in a decidedly negative light" (pp.53-4).

The chapter title "Ānanda's Intervention" refers to Ānanda's mediation on behalf of the would-be nuns, which ends by convincing the Buddha to found a

nuns' order. Both the theme of presenting the suppliant women and that of the compromise offered to them are further pursued, more evidence being supplied to corroborate Anālayo's hypotheses. The women arrive at the entrance to the monastery where the Buddha is staying, exhausted, covered in dust and weeping: the dust is to be taken literally and contrasts with the often mentioned cleanliness of the Buddha and Ānanda, but is also symbolic, since in the Canon the lay life is referred to as "the dusty path" and dust stands for desire for sense objects (p.62, fn.14); similarly, crying is "the opposite of the composure to be expected from a well-behaved monastic" (p.63). Thus, this "portrayal of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī's condition [though absent from some versions]... provides a clear example of the narrative strategy of distancing" (p.90). At the same time, Anālayo cleverly links this to his deduction that originally the Buddha had proposed a compromise: "neither the Buddha nor Ānanda is depicted as censuring her for having a shaven head and wearing robes" (*ibid.*, see also pp.66-7).

The texts ascribe to Ānanda a variety of arguments with which he tries to persuade the Buddha to change his mind – and finally succeeds in doing so.

Anālayo provides an excursus into MN142, the *Dakkhiṇā-vibhaṅga Sutta*, in which Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī tries to give the Buddha two robes and in the end he accepts only one of them; but the issues are complicated and the results inconclusive. One *Vinaya* account says at this point (p.77) that Ānanda tells the Buddha that former Buddhas have always had four "assemblies": monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. Since this is mentioned by some traditions in the context of the First Council, and since Anālayo has himself referred to this point in previous publications as part of his more general discussion of the Buddha's attitude to women, the reader is surprised to find that here this is mentioned in only one of the source texts, so it does not seem to be crucial. In the end Anālayo decides – convincingly – that Ānanda's clinching argument was the simple point, found in all versions, that women are fully capable of attaining Enlightenment. According to two accounts, this argument was in fact used by Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī as part of her original petition (p.76).

On his way to this conclusion, Anālayo provides a summary (3.4: "Women's Potential for Awakening") conspectus of the relationship of Māra to women. This turns out to be somewhat tenuous. In particular, we learn that "early Buddhist discourses do not unilaterally consider females as snares of Māra who lure innocent males into sexual desire. ... [I]t is the male Māra – and by definition only a male can be Māra – who stands for sensual temptation and sexual aggression" (p.81). Although surely the best known image of Māra at

work, at least in Theravāda countries, is the episode at the culmination of the Buddha's battle with Māra under the Bo tree, when Māra sends his three nubile daughters, Passion, Lust and Disgust, to seduce the Buddha by dancing before him, this is a later hagiographical development.

The next chapter, "The Buddha's Permission", is mainly concerned with the *gurudharmas*. These are 8 special rules for nuns; the Buddha makes their acceptance a pre-condition to his permitting the founding of the nuns' order. Though they concern *vinaya* matters, they differ from the *vinaya* rules which are found in the *prātimokṣa* codes – even though in content some of them replicate rules in the nuns' *prātimokṣa*. They differ in two features: that the standard narrative of how the Buddha came to promulgate a *prātimokṣa* rule is absent for the *gurudharmas*, and that the statement what penalty a breach of one of these regulations will entail is likewise missing. As for the former, the Theravādin *Vinaya* commentary "notes that the *garudhammas* are the only pre-emptive type of regulation found in the Theravāda *Vinaya*" (p.114 fn.73). The latter is not just of obvious practical importance in a law code; in every *prātimokṣa* code the rules are arranged and classified by the penalty which a breach entails. Anālayo comments that maybe "the *gurudharmas* were not considered to be legal rules properly speaking, but rather practical directives" p.113), but I do not find this helpful, since surely all of the rules were practical directives and the distinction sounds anachronistic.

Anālayo has chosen to approach the complicated topic of the *gurudharmas* by discussing the metaphors which accompany them. I feel that the uninitiated reader might have found the subject more accessible if he had begun by discussing the one positive feature they all have in common, the title *gurudharma*. Perhaps because many scholars have tackled this problem, Anālayo does not make clear his own view how one should translate the term. I disagree with such interpretations as "important rules" (Nolot: p.99 fn.27) and "weighty rules" (Swanepoel: p.101 fn.31); I have long thought that (whether or not one likes my particular choice of vocabulary) what the term refers to is "principles of hierarchy" – in other words, where authority lies. This fits Anālayo's suggestion that these rules may have begun as a "simple set of injunctions by the Buddha on how the order of nuns should relate to the already existing order of monks" (p.112).

He amplifies this: "Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and her followers have left the lay life behind. They have thereby entered the sphere of the monastic jurisdiction of the Buddha. In reply to their following him on his travels (instead of staying

at home as presumably originally envisaged), the Buddha now regulates how things should proceed in order that they should become fully part of the monastic community. In a way they have overstepped the limits inherent in the earlier permission given to them by the Buddha, who now promulgates a set of regulations on what they should not overstep in future. When considered in this way, the promulgation of the *gurudharmas* no longer creates a narrative incoherence, but rather can be seen as in line with the general procedure of laying down rules depicted elsewhere in *Vinaya* literature in response to some kind of overstepping of boundaries by monastics” (p.115).

Anālayo suggests, convincingly, that originally the Buddha laid down a set of 8 *gurudharmas* to establish how the two orders should cooperate (p.111), and that probably the rules underwent changes as time passed. The tendency built into these rules to subordinate the nuns to the monks must have begun early, and may, in my view, account for the term *gurudharma* itself. But the development was, not straightforward. Similes concerned with water are used for all the *gurudharmas*. The commonest compares each rule to a dyke. To a westerner this suggests restraint or control, and Anālayo quotes two interpretations by modern scholars who see the dyke as intended to hold back “the disruptive power of women”(p.93, fn.9). But Anālayo ripostes that in the Pali texts the dyke simile conveys no sense of destruction and does not relate to a flood (*ibid.*); on the contrary, “The accumulated power of the water which would be available if the dyke were to be opened illustrates the power accumulated through mindfulness of the body” (p.93). So he sees the simile as conveying protection. He thinks that such similes “could have originated from a concern [for the monks] to assist and protect” the new order, while “the remainder of the *gurudharmas* are more clearly aimed at subordinating nuns” (p.101).

An example of the latter is that “nuns are not permitted to criticise monks” (p.108). Here again, development does not seem all to have been in the same direction. Whereas according to several versions nuns may not criticise monks, elsewhere in the *Vinayas* there are reports that the Buddha made rules to restrain monks from behaviour for which they had been criticised by nuns. Furthermore, “according to two *aniyata* regulations found similarly in the different *Vinayas*, breaches of the rules by monks can even be pointed out by a trustworthy laywoman, and the monastic community has to take action accordingly... [S]o it seems safe to conclude that the formulation of the *gurudharma* prohibiting nuns in principle from any criticism of monks reflects concerns of later times” (p.109).

I cannot here even mention all Anālayo's discoveries in this area, but let me finally at least refer to two in passing. He discusses the complex and contentious matter of the monastic status, applicable only to nuns, of "probationer" (*sikkhamānā*), and points out that the recording in some *Vinayas* that a woman was found to have been ordained when pregnant "could hardly have happened if from the outset all candidates had been observing the probationary training, which requires [complete] celibacy" (p.98), so the probationary training was probably instituted later (p.99). He also tells us that "versions differ on whether only the order of monks or both orders are required for granting higher ordination" (p.97). The formulation of this rule (*garudhamma* 6) in the Theravāda *Vinaya* is of momentous importance, "since it provides the basis for a legally valid revival of the *bhikkhunī* order" (p.97 fn.21), as Anālayo explains in detail in the article printed earlier in this issue of the *Journal*.

Chapter 5 is on Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī's ordination. In this chapter we find the misogyny appearing in full bloom. Since it is something of a side issue, I shall omit the discussion of how Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī joyfully accepts the *gurudharmas* as if her head is being wreathed in flowers, and turn to how female renunciation is seen as problematic. The commonest simile describes the result as like a household containing few men and many women, which is therefore easy prey for robbers or rapists. Another simile compares it to a field of crops ruined by disease or bad weather. These similes originally envisage a disaster befalling the nuns which comes *from outside* (p.129), but Anālayo traces the process by which the meaning shifts so that it is the nuns themselves who are held to constitute a danger (p.130). In the end, every version conveys that the nuns are the source of danger, and the similes "illustrate the negative repercussions of founding an order of nuns" (p.130). Moreover, the term *brahmacariya*, which first denotes a life of celibacy, is now taken to refer to the Buddha's dispensation, "which now is being threatened by the existence of nuns" (p.133). Modern readers will be irresistibly reminded how even today it is so often the victims who are held responsible for rapes.

In some *Vinayas*, the thought that Buddhism is spoilt by the presence of nuns leads to fantasies which border on the hilarious. "Had an order of nuns not come into existence, life for the monks would have been a paradise. Instead of having to make an effort to seek out those who give alms, the monks would have found householders waiting by the roadside with food and drinks ready ... [They] would have invited the monks to take anything from their homes and followed behind them with the four requisites, beseeching them to accept offerings. The

monks would also have found themselves being invited to sit down in people's houses, just so that the inhabitants might gain some peace. As if this were not yet enough, householders would have invited the monks to step on their clothes and even on their hair, or they would have used their hair to wipe the monks' feet" (p.135).

This account is found in a Chinese version of a *sūtra*. There it is said to have happened under a past Buddha as a plot by Māra to corrupt monks and gain control over them. It is thus probable that originally it was intended humorously. But in the same *Madhyama-Āgama* the same passage is also used to describe what would actually have happened had no order of nuns been created (p.136).

Anālayo goes on to give several pages of negative statements made about women in various texts, showing how we can deduce that they are later additions. Early in this catalogue he writes: "[S]uch statements stand in direct contrast to the positive image of nuns [discussed below]. ... [A] consideration of women as invariably obsessed with sex and being slanderous and deceptive could not hold for the case of a fully awakened nun. Such statements also do not sit well with the attitude underlying the Buddhist evolution myth ... which sees the distinction between males and females as an evolution from a previous stage of sex-less beings." Thus both males and females derive "from the same type of beings" (p.141).

The chapter concludes: "Comparison of the different versions suggests a process of textual growth that has as its starting point the simile depicting a household with many women. This process of growth would have incorporated various and increasingly strident expressions of a negative attitude towards women in general and nuns in particular" (pp.145-6).

Chapter 6, "Decline", deals with the idea that the creation of an order of nuns was responsible for the fact that Buddhism, which otherwise would have lasted on earth for a thousand years, would die out after five hundred. With only small variations, this appears in all *Vinaya* accounts, and Ānanda is blamed for having persuaded the Buddha to permit it.

Anālayo writes: "The problem that the Buddha knowingly does something so detrimental to the duration of his dispensation is indeed not easy to solve" (p.151), and devotes two short sections to particular reasons for the implausibility of this claim. The first shows that there are canonical lists of nuns who were "exemplary in particular abilities, forms of conduct, or attainments" (p.152); Anālayo comments that "a nun can only be declared foremost in some respect if at the same time there were other nuns who had similar qualities" (p.153).

Secondly, there is a whole range of evidence that on many occasions and in various contexts the Buddha said that he had to have four kinds of disciples: monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. There is a stanza in some canonical texts which highlights that nuns particularly contributed to the dispensation through their learning (p.157), while monks did so through their virtue; and there is historical evidence suggesting that nuns were noted for their preaching (p.155 fn.24). Nuns can hardly have had a poor self-image, for in one *sutta* a nun tells her colleagues that “having performed an act of merit in a past life as a male, (s)he aspired to rebirth as a woman, and from then on kept doing acts of merit, repeatedly and explicitly choosing to be reborn as a woman” (p.153). “[T]he belief that being reborn as a woman is the result of bad karma is not reflected in the early discourses and the *Vinaya*, but is only found in commentarial literature” (*ibid.*). The increase in misogyny evidently continued for centuries.

At the first Council Mahā Kassapa, its convenor, forced Ānanda to confess that in persuading the Buddha to allow the formation of the nuns’ order he had done wrong. Mahā Kassapa “is the champion of asceticism, being himself foremost in the observance of ascetic practices” (p.173). He is also a brahmin who “represents the influence of brahminical thought. This influence is fairly evident in the accounts of the first *saṅgīti*, where several of the accusations levelled against Ānanda seem to originate from brahminical preoccupations, instead of being actual *Vinaya* offences” (p.174). That is indeed a noteworthy point; but can it bear the weight of the conclusion that follows?

Anālayo thinks it can. “It is in this setting that the negative appraisal of the existence of an order of nuns appears to have its home” (*Ibid.*) In particular, some texts put the dire prediction that because of the nuns the Buddha’s teaching will last much less long on earth than it would have otherwise into the mouth of Mahā Kassapa. “During the process of oral transmission, these attitudes would have migrated to become part of the foundation history of the order of nuns and thereby inevitably be attributed to the Buddha himself” (p.177).

Having read the whole book with care and admiration, I am disappointed to find that I am not convinced by this final point. Throughout the book we have read a series of demonstrations of how, albeit irregularly and inconsistently, misogyny distorted many textual accounts of how things came to be. This process began during the Buddha’s lifetime and evidently continued long after his death. The accounts of the first *saṅgīti* must originate from a time when the event was well within living memory, so I find it implausible that what Mahā Kassapa said on that occasion could have been represented as something the Buddha said

many years earlier. I have quoted just above Anālayo's conclusion on pp.145-6 to the previous chapter. It is the view of "the process of growth" which he there states that convinces me, not the dramatic and conspicuous distortion involved in this final hypothesis. As I see it, to accept this interpretation undermines the rest of the book.

In his four-page "Conclusion", Anālayo presents what he calls the "basic storyline" which he has teased out, and shows how the textual developments follow three "trajectories", which they share with other developments in the Buddhist tradition which began soon after the Buddha's death. The changes in how the Buddha himself was viewed Anālayo published in *The Genesis of the Bodhisattva Ideal* (2010), those in how the teachings were formulated he published in *The Dawn of Abhidharma* (2014); in all three cases his results – which I believe are going to stand the test of time – have come from meticulous study of the early canonical sources, mainly those preserved in Chinese and in Pali.

Both of these earlier books, along with an awe-inspiring torrent of articles, represent an extraordinary achievement, to which no other scholar of early Buddhism now alive can hold a candle. But I believe that Anālayo would himself agree that his personal achievement, however impressive and however gratifying, almost pales into insignificance compared to the dazzling revelation he has provided into what the Buddha achieved, and what we can learn from him if we are but willing to listen.

This book gives us a completely new picture of the Buddha's attitude to women and his treatment of them. Anyone with a grain of critical intelligence who learns about the Buddha cannot fail to be puzzled by the apparent inconsistency between his view of general human equality and his alleged reluctance to found an order of nuns, his alleged unequal treatment of nuns and monks, and his alleged prediction that the creation of an order of nuns would damage Buddhism so badly that it would halve the time when Buddhism would exist on this earth. Anālayo has shown that all these allegations, along with many others associated with them, are false; and he has done so by showing how they arose and gradually gained popularity.

Nor does the story end there: it is still alive and kicking – viciously. Those who survey world religions have come to take it for granted that none of them accords full honour and equality to women. In some cases – one only has to think of Christianity and Islam – these distressing facts are thrust before our

eyes almost every time we open a newspaper or turn on the TV news. So we take it for granted that every religion is bound to have this dark side – and maybe we attribute it to the antiquity of the religious traditions, and mutter to ourselves that this is how the world used to be, always and everywhere, and that one can but hope that over the centuries it will improve.

But Anālayo has shown that this passive acceptance will not do: it is based on lies. In the countries dominated by Theravāda Buddhism – Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand – the order of nuns died out just about a thousand years ago. At that point in Buddhist history, a woman could not be validly ordained as a nun unless she underwent a double ceremony, one held by nuns and the other by monks. So when, in a period of war and chaos, the nuns' order died out, it apparently could not be revived – ever.

However, in the article published earlier in this issue, Anālayo goes into full detail to prove that this is wrong. For when the order of nuns was founded, their ordinations were, of necessity, conferred by monks alone. The history of Theravāda jurisprudence tells us that the Buddha allowed this, because there was no other possibility, and he stated repeatedly that in a Buddha's dispensation there had to be nuns.

Now that women are beginning to assert their rights all over the world, it seems to me that Theravāda Buddhism is in a very dangerous position. Women can be ordained in the Mahāyāna traditions of East Asia, but not in those of Tibet or SE Asia (including Sri Lanka). Unless the religious authorities in those countries which for nearly a millennium have not ordained women act fast and decisively to reverse their position, they are committing mass suicide, and the religion they claim to venerate will surely be dead within a couple of generations.