

On Women as Teachers in Early Buddhism: Dhammadinnā and Khemā

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ABSTRACT

The present article investigates two prominent bhikkhunīs, Dhammadinnā and Khemā, who were renowned for their preaching abilities in the time of the Buddha. It focuses on two texts of the Sutta-piṭaka, the Cūḷavedalla-sutta and the Khemā-sutta, and demonstrates how and why these texts were among the most authoritative in providing a measure for spiritual leadership among bhikkhunīs in early Buddhism. Among women who taught the Dhamma, Dhammadinnā and Khemā attract attention because the texts show them teaching male listeners who even had a rather high status. The examples of female leadership presented are directed against a sceptical view concerning the spiritual capability of women and may be used as models by contemporary Buddhist nuns.

Keywords: Buddhist women, Buddhist nuns, Dhammadinnā, and Khemā

Introduction

Hermann Oldenberg, the famous German Indologist, had a very sceptical view of the spiritual capability of women. He states: ‘So there remained a truly insurmountable difference between the spirit(uality) prevailing in the Buddha and the Buddha’s disciples, and that which is the [inherent] nature of women and what this [nature] provides and looks for’ (Oldenberg 1881, 169).¹

To my mind, this view is inconsistent with the basic philosophical principles of the Buddha’s teaching, which imply that the individual has no fixed or predetermined ultimate nature. According to the Pāli canon, the nun (*bhikkhuni*) Somā²

1. Translated from the German by the author.

2. See the *Bhikkhuni-samyutta* 2 (S I 129), cf. also Thī 60–62, the third verse of which is modified.

had already rejected the view that women could not reach the goal because of their lack of intelligence (*paññā*), a view attributed to Māra the tempter, and perhaps to be interpreted as a reflection of Somā's inner voice. For her, womanhood (*itthibhāva*) is of no relevance if only one, well-concentrated (*cittamhi susamāhite*) and endowed with knowledge (*ñāṇa*), gains perfect insight into the *Dhamma*. Considering his particular standpoint, Oldenberg rather gives us the impression of being a representative of Māra. According to the *Apadāna*, the Buddha himself was already acquainted with the existence of such a wrong view, for he asks his stepmother Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī: 'Gotamī, in order to eliminate their wrong views, show your supernatural powers to the stupid ones who are doubting the full realization of the *Dhamma* by women!' (Ap II 535).³ Times have changed, but according to Alan Sponberg (1992, 12) the tendency to attribute a lower spiritual capacity to women is still alive among Asian Buddhists to the present day.

Without denying the fact that some of the traditional sources contain elements of androcentrism or even male exclusivism⁴ and give us a very traditional image of women, I would like to present two examples from the *Sutta-piṭaka* which not only refute traditional views about the nature of women and their alleged spiritual inferiority, but may also provide an ideal for Buddhist nuns, far from a one-sided emphasis on submissiveness and subordination. For this purpose I have chosen the nuns Dhammadinnā and Khemā, who have an exceptional standing within the Pāli canon. The *Sutta-piṭaka* not only contains stories about these women and poems attributed to them but, included in two *suttas*, also their teachings. These *suttas* point to the high intelligence and competence of the two nuns, not only by providing their words, but also by explicitly giving evidence of the acknowledgment of their wisdom. Both *suttas* are extremely noteworthy in several respects: by the constellation of the dialogue partners, by their two-part structure, by the profound dimension of their subject matters and their influence on posterity. Closely reading these texts, we will gain insight into two admittedly rare examples of *buddhavacana* uttered by female disciples. Through preaching, we can say, they directly followed the example of the Buddha himself who — on request of Brahmā Sahampati — instead of enjoying his awakening all alone, decided to pass on the *Dhamma* to others as well, and encouraged his disciples to do the same for the benefit of the people (Vin I 21 and S I 105).

Another reason for my choice is to show that, with regard to their personal background as well as certain aspects of their teaching, these two women have some points in common which make them stand out from the crowd.

Starting with the presence of these two women in the Pāli canon, I would firstly like to focus on aspects concerning their personalities, and, secondly, to

For similar utterances of Ānanda and the Buddha himself, see S V 155. As for the irrelevance of gender for release cf. also S I 33.

3. *Thiṇaṃ dhammābhisamaye ye bālā vimatiṃ gatā / tesam diṭṭhi-pahanātham iddhiṃ dassahi Gotamī.* (Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the author.) This verse indicates the importance of this issue to the Buddha, as represented in the Pāli canon. For *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* are usually forbidden to demonstrate *iddhi* to laymen (Vin II 112). For a very different translation of this verse, see Pruitt (1999, 192).
4. See for example M 124/M III 126, where the *bhikkhu* Bakkula boasts of never having taught the *Dhamma* to a woman, neither to a *bhikkhunī* nor to a female probationer or a female novice, and never having entered the *bhikkhunīs'* quarter since he went forth eighty years ago. And this is acknowledged by the *bhikkhus* as a wonderful and marvellous quality.

concentrate on the form and contents of the two *suttas* containing their teachings.

The Two *Bhikkhunīs* Dhammadinnā and Khemā in the Pāli Canon

It seems quite probable that both women are historical figures, contemporaries of the Buddha. Several texts referring to them were preserved through the centuries, and there are also references to them in manuscript fragments of texts of other Buddhist schools, of the Sarvāstivāda for example, written in Sanskrit or in canonical works translated into other languages such as Chinese or Tibetan.⁵ This means that we have to assume a very old line of tradition going back to the time before the first schism. Maybe the *bhikkhunīs* mentioned above were kept in good memory by the people so that even the male monk editors – however conservative – could not disregard them completely. Thus, they were offered as role models for female followers, a function which, according to the Pāli canon, is explicitly attributed to one of them, Khemā, by the Buddha himself. For he is said to have called her – together with Upalavaṇṇā⁶ – the standard and measure (*tulā* and *pamāṇam*) of the *bhikkhunīs*,⁷ a position which among the *bhikkhus* was held by Sāriputta together with Mahāmoggallāna.

Both women belong to the 13 eminent nuns listed by the Buddha in the so-called *Etad-aggam* ('this is the top') chapter of the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, Khemā because of her wisdom, Dhammadinnā because of her exceptional capability to expound the *Dhamma*.⁸ So, Khemā holds the same position among the 13 nuns as Sāriputta among the 41 monks, and Dhammadinnā holds the same position as Puṇṇa Mantāṇi-putta (A I 23).

5. For the Chinese version of the discourse spoken by Dhammadinnā (MĀ 210) cf. Minh-Chau (1991, 269–278) and Anālayo (2006, 174–180). For the Tibetan version of the same discourse, see a draft translation put on the internet by Smith (2006). The Chinese version belongs to the Sarvāstivāda, the Tibetan version, quoted by the commentator Śamathadeva in his *Abhidharmakośa-upāyikāṭīkā*, belongs to the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition, cf. Skilling 2000, 60.

For the *Khemā(therī)-sutta*, the first *sutta* of the *Abyākata-saṃyutta*, in contrast to other *suttas* of it (S IV 44, 2 and 7–11, cf. Akanuma 1958, 235), similar parallels are not available.

6. Upalavaṇṇā often appears paired with Khemā, in the *Mahāvastu* they are mentioned together as the two female chief disciples: *kṣemā utpalavaṇṇā ca agrā bheṣyanti śrāvikā* (Mvu I 251/ 1, 21).

7. S II 236; A I 88; A II 164.

8. A I 25/A 14, 5. 2: *Etad aggam bhikkhave mama sāvikānaṃ bhikkhuniṇaṃ mahāpaññānaṃ yadidaṃ Khemā*. 'Bhikkhus, this is the topmost of my women disciples who are *bhikkhunīs* possessing great wisdom, namely Khemā'. Cf. *Avadāna-śataka* no. 79 (Feer 1979, 295) where Kṣemā, the daughter of King Prasenajit, is called *mahāprajñānām mahāpratibhānām agrā*. A I 25/A 14, 5. 5: *Etad aggam bhikkhave mama sāvikānaṃ bhikkhuniṇaṃ dhamma-kathikānaṃ yadidaṃ Dhammadinnā*. 'Bhikkhus, this is the topmost of my women disciples who are *bhikkhunīs* expounding the *Dhamma*, namely Dhammadinnā'. Their names are also presented in the longer list (fifty-one *bhikkhunīs*) of the Chinese counterpart in the EĀ, cf. Huyen-Vi (1987, 47–58). Kṣemā is designated there as 'trés intelligente et éloquent' and Dharmadinnā as one who 'sait expliquer les différences entre les pratiques pour permettre un choix judicieux aux adeptes'. For Dharmadinnā cf. the widely differing translation of Anālayo (2006, 180, n. 35) which – with regard to the contents – seems more convincing to me. According to him, EĀ 5.2 speaks of Dharmadinnā's 'ability to "discriminate the meaning" and of her ability to "widely discourse on divisions and parts" [of the teaching]'.

Both women are among the *bhikkhunīs* to each of whom one of the 73 sets of verses comprising the *Therīgāthā* is attributed.⁹ These poems in turn are taken to belong to the earliest religious literature of the world with female authorship.

Both of them belong to the 40 nuns whose biographies and legends are told in the canonical collection of the *Therī-Apadāna*.¹⁰ Khemā is also mentioned several times in the *Jātakas*.¹¹

Of course such prominent women apparently had followers of their own, and, moreover, even brought some of them to full realization.¹² According to the Chinese tradition, on one occasion Dhammadinnā even tried to convince the apostate Devadatta of the need to repent his evil deeds.¹³

However, these two women are not only repeatedly mentioned within the Pāli Canon but — and this is most exceptional and interesting — they are even depicted in the role of active ‘protagonists’ in a dialogue: Dhammadinnā in the *Cūlavedalla-sutta* (= CvS: M I 299–305/M 44), Khemā in the *Khemā(therī)-sutta* (= KhS: S IV 374–380/S 44,1).

If we rely on the *Apadāna*, Khemā’s and Dhammadinnā’s placement in the list of outstanding nuns seems to have been derived from the information given in these two *suttas*.¹⁴ Thus, the emphasis placed on their intellectual capacity, intelligence, wisdom and competence is not limited to the list of leading *bhikkhunīs* (*agga-sāvikā*) but can be traced back to the two *suttas* (KhS and CvS).

9. Thī 12, which has a parallel in the verse DhP 218 (where the adjectives, however, have masculine endings), is attributed to Dhammadinnā, and Thī 139–144 to Khemā. Two of Khemā’s verses (Thī 141–142) are identical with two verses of the nun Selā (Thī 58–59), and Thī 139–140, with minor differences to verses of the nun Vijayā (S I 131).

10. Ap II no. 23 is about Dhammadinnā and Ap II no. 18 about Khemā. The *Apadāna* collection may be seen as a kind of appendix to the *gāthās*, quoted to a large extent in Dhammapāla’s commentary (Thī-a).

11. See Malalasekera (1937, 728).

12. Sikkā renounced the world in the presence of Dhammadinnā and became herself a great and successful preacher of the *Dhamma* whose teaching ‘the wise (*sa-paññā*) absorbed like travellers absorb rain from a rain cloud’ (cf. Thī 54–56; Ap II 607 no. 35; Thī-a on Sikkā’s verses: Pruitt 1999, 80). A certain unknown *Therī*, who according to the Thī-a was a nurse of Mahāpajāpati and had gone forth along with her lady, heard the *Dhamma* from a *bhikkhunī* identified as Dhammadinnā (cf. Thī 69–70 and Pruitt 1999, 99–100). The *Therī* Vijayā, according to the Thī-a (156) a former friend (*sahāyikā*) of Khemā, instructed by Khemā, attained arhatship (cf. Thī 169–174 and Pruitt 1999, 204–206). Perhaps because of this close relation they have two verses in common. The Chinese counterpart to A I 25 presents her among the outstanding *bhikkhunīs* because of her possessing the four special knowledges (*pratisamvid* = Pāli *paṭisambhidā*) by which she does not fear anything nor feels weak. Cf. Huyen-Vi (1987, 47).

In the *Bhikṣunī-Vinaya* of the Mahāsāṃghikas, Dharmadinnā is also mentioned as an instructor. On the occasion of explanations concerning the second *guru-Dharma*, i.e. about *upasampadā*, she is depicted as *upādhyāyini* (female teacher) who is very active on her pupils’ (*antevāsini*) behalf, see Roth (1970, 52–57).

13. Anālayo 2006, 180, n. 35.

14. See Pruitt (1999, 29 and 174). In both stories of the *Apadāna* the account of the placing by the Buddha follows directly after the summary of the respective *sutta*.

Remarks on the Two Nuns and Their Personal Background

While in the two *suttas* themselves nothing is said about the personal background of the two women, we learn from other sources (Ap II and commentarial literature such as Thī-a; Mp; Dh-p-a; Ps) that both women were of noble birth: Khemā was born as the daughter of King Madda from Sākalā¹⁵ and Dhammadinnā as the daughter of a wealthy merchant (*setthi*) from Rājagaha;¹⁶ both had lived in a relationship before they became nuns, Khemā was a chief consort of King Bimbisāra of Magadha and Dhammadinnā was the wife of Visākha, a rich merchant or treasurer (*setthi*) like her father; both husbands, being themselves already followers of the Buddha, supported the decision of their wives to become nuns. Proof for this positive attitude is the fact that each of the women was provided with a golden litter (*sovaṇṇa-sivikā*) in which they were carried to the *bhikkhunis'* residence.¹⁷ So it looks as if the going forth was celebrated as a happy and desirable event. In the case of Khemā the commentary even says that it was her husband King Bimbisāra who arranged the meeting of his consort with the Blessed One, while she refused to see the Buddha for fear of being reproached for vanity.¹⁸

A side note on Dhammadinnā's going forth

In order to get a further impression of the attitude of Dhammadinnā's husband towards the spiritual capacity of women, I would like to draw attention to an interesting dialogue between Dhammadinnā and her husband before she asked permission to go forth (Ps 357). It reminds us of the dialogue between Ānanda and the Buddha recorded in the account of Mahāpajāpati's ordination, when Ānanda asks whether women, having gone forth, are able to realize the four fruits of the Path, and the Buddha gives a positive response (Vin II 254).

Similarly, Dhammadinnā asks her husband after he has become an advanced lay follower of the Buddha and has changed his behaviour towards her accordingly: 'Can this *Dhamma* only be attained by men, or can this *Dhamma* also be attained by women?' The lay follower (*upāsaka*) Visākha answers: 'What do you say, Dhammadinnā? Those who have entered [the Path], are heirs to it; each one who has the qualification does attain it'.¹⁹ After that she is permitted go forth (undertake *pabbajā*).

The version of this very episode told in the commentary on the *Therīgāthā* differs from the above and shows a woman with a good amount of self-confidence. In response to the suggestions of her husband concerning her future household life and the transfer of his whole property to her because of his decision for a monk-

15. Pruitt (1999, 169), verse 36 of Ap no. 18. (There the town is named Sāgalā.)

16. Pruitt (1999, 28), verse 23 of Ap no. 23.

17. Mp I 345 for Khemā; Ps II 357 and Mp I 361 for Dhammadinnā — according to Thī-a (Pruitt 1999, 26) the litter was provided by her husband Visākha while according to the Ps it was, as in the case of Khemā, King Bimbisāra of Magadha who, being acquainted with Visākha, provided it. Similarly in Jaina monasticism, renunciation was celebrated as a big feast with litter and procession, cf. Deo (1956, 466).

18. Pruitt (1999, 165–166).

19. Ps II 357: Dhammadinnā: *Kim nu kho eso dhammo puriseh' eva labhitabbo, mātuḡāmena pi sakkā laddhun ti?* Visākha: *Kim vadesi, Dhammadinne, ye paṭipannakā, te etassa dāyādā; yassa yassa upanissayo atthi, so so etaṃ paṭilabhatī.*

ish life, Dhammadinnā, wishing to renounce the worldly life like her husband, replies: 'My dear husband, ... I will not swallow what you have spat out'.²⁰

Both women surpassed their husbands by attaining a higher spiritual level than they did, for they had reached the fruit of arhatship very soon. Their husbands remained lay followers; Visākha, husband of Dhammadinnā, according to the *Apadāna*, had reached the state of a non-returner (*anāgāmin*). He is called a friend or companion (*sahāyaka*) of King Bimbisāra of Magadha, together with whom he went for the first time to the Buddha and listened to the *Dhamma* (Mp I 361). King Bimbisāra, husband of Khemā and known as a great friend and protector of the Buddha, is recorded to have become a stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*) while the Jaina scriptures say he was a Jain.

Both women are even connected with each other by legendary tradition. According to the *Apadāna*, under Buddha Kassapa, the immediate predecessor of the Buddha Gotama, they were among the seven daughters of Kikī, King of Kāsi (= Benares), who had the following names:

Samanī, Samaṇaguttā, Bhikkhunī, Bhikkhudāyikā, Dhammā, Sudhammā and Saṅghadāyikā.²¹

In the time of the Buddha Gotama these seven princesses and sisters were reborn respectively as as:

Khemā, Uppalavaṇṇā, Paṭācārā, (Bhaddā) Kuṇḍalā(-Kesā), Kisā-Gotamī, Dhammadinnā and Visākhā.

Among these prominent *bhikkhunīs*, all of whom are also listed among the 13 foremost *bhikkhunīs*²² and the most famous of the laywomen, Khemā had been the eldest sister Samanī, and Dhammadinnā the sixth sister Sudhammā. There are further parallels in terms of structure and content in the account of the previous lives of these seven women. Apparently, this legend is intended to show that they were connected with each other through several births. Perhaps the tales reflect some kind of network emerging among the leading female disciples in the time of the Buddha.

20. Pruitt (1999, 26), translation of Thī-a 16: *Nāhaṃ ayyaputta tayā vanta-vamaṇaṃ ācamissāmi*. This is almost identically with Mp I 361: *Ayyaputta, evaṃ sante ahaṃ tumhehi chaḍḍita-khelaṃ vamaṭa-vamaṇaṃ na sīsena ukkhipitvā vicarissāmi*. Cf. also Dh-p-a IV 229. This utterance goes along with a formula used several times in the Pāli canon which judges about the household life this way: 'Household life is crowded and dusty; life gone forth is wide open. It is not easy, while living in a home, to lead the holy life utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell' (here uttered by the Buddha cf. M 36/I 240 trans. Nāṇamoli and Bodhi 2001, 335). Both episodes together remind us, in certain points, of the dialogue between Maitreyī and her husband Yājñavalkya in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.4 and 4.5). Maitreyī prefers knowledge of immortality to a life with the riches left by him, who had decided to renounce worldly life.

21. See Pruitt (1999, 169; 243; 150; 138; 230; 28); where in quotations from the *Apadāna* verses the sisters are always listed in the same order. The same connection of the seven sisters also occurs in the verses of *Jātaka* no. 547 (story of Vessantara, Jā VI 481); cf. also Mp I 405, the commentary on Visākhā. The legend of King Kikī's virtuous daughters has even survived in a transformed version in the Mahāyāna *Sūtra* of the *Buddha Teaching the Seven Daughters* cf. Paul (1979, 15–25, esp. 17–23).

22. The six *bhikkhunīs* and even Visākhā are also listed among the fifty-one eminent nuns of the EĀ, cf. Huyen-Vi (1987, 47–58).

Remarks on the Two Suttas: *Cūḷavedalla-Sutta* and *Khemā(Therī)-Sutta**Remarks on the main dialogue partners and their constellation*

Both discourses show a similar situation characterized by an extraordinary constellation of persons. We can note four exceptional parallels between the two cases:

1. The teaching part is not assumed by the Buddha, but by a member of the *Śaṅgha* or follower of the Buddha.
 2. The person teaching is not a man but a woman.
 3. The two participants of the discourse are of opposite sex.
 4. The man is the instructee, the woman the instructor.
1. (The teaching part is not assumed by the Buddha)

There are some examples of male disciples who preach to ascetics, to lay followers or to other *bhikkhus*. In the 152 *suttas* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, more than 20 are spoken by *bhikkhus*. This role is mostly taken by main disciples such as Sāriputta (9 *suttas* in the M), Ānanda (7), Kaccāna (4), Moggallāna (2), Anuruddha, Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta, and sometimes by less famous *bhikkhus* such as Bakkula or Bhūmija.²³ The motive for this varies. Ānanda replaces the Buddha because the Blessed One suffers from back ache. Kaccāna is able to explain in detail what the Buddha has said only in brief and the *bhikkhus* did not understand (cf. M 38; 133; 138). Other *bhikkhus*, for instance Sāriputta, continue with a subject the Buddha has brought up. Sāriputta sometimes seems to be testing the level of knowledge of one or the other of his fellow monks. Generally, the Buddha wants all his disciples, whether male or female, monastic or lay, to be able to teach the *Dhamma* to others before he attains *parinibbāna* (cf. D 16/D II 105 and its parallels S V 261–262; A IV 308–313; Ud 63–64). Accordingly, some of the *suttas* spoken by disciples obviously concern events that took place after the Buddha's death (cf. M 84/M II 90; M 94/M II 162–163).

2. (The person teaching is not a man but a woman)

In the *Sutta-piṭaka* a female teacher is an exception. A *bhikkhunī* may teach lay people as in the case of Dhammānā and Khemā, or at most other *bhikkhunīs* (cf. Thī), but never teaches *bhikkhus*. Yet, rare examples of a teaching laywoman can be found, for example the servant Khujjuttarā who retells the *Dhamma* she heard to other lay people, in this case even to her lady, Queen Sāmāvatī of Kosambī, whom she converts. Based on this case she was praised by the Buddha as the foremost of the learned (*bahussutānam*)²⁴ laywomen and the collection

23. See Nāṇamoli and Bodhi (2001, 20–21).

24. A I 26. Among the monks it is Ānanda, who was accorded this title. At S II 236, A I 88 and A II 164 the Buddha calls her together with Veḷukaṇḍakīyā 'the standard and measure (*tulā/pamāṇam*) of my female lay followers'. For her story see Malalasekera I (1937, 719–721).

of 112 short discourses of the Buddha called *Itivuttaka* was attributed to her.²⁵

3. (The two participants of the discourse are of opposite sex)

The Buddha himself teaches women, laywomen — the benefactor Visākḥā for example, and the prostitute Ambapālī, as well as *bhikkhunīs* (cf. Thī). Occasionally, he teaches a thousand women at once and he also preaches to a mixed audience.²⁶ For the obligatory instruction and advising (*ovāda*) of the *bhikkhunīs*, a highly qualified monk had to be chosen.²⁷ The best and best known among those who accomplished this task was Nandaka, at the end of whose speech the five hundred *bhikkhunīs* who, ordained with Mahāpajāpatī, attain at least stream-entry.²⁸ Monks were not supposed to instruct nuns without an authorization or without being asked to do so.²⁹ From the *Sutta-piṭaka* we know that teaching laywomen was quite possible for them, cf. the *Verahaccāni-sutta*, where the *bhikkhu* Udāyi preaches to a brahmin lady and her male student.³⁰

4. (The man is the instructee, the woman the instructor)

The rarest situation is that of women instructing a man and it is astonishing that a constellation like the one presented in the two *suttas*, the CvS and the KhS — where, on request, women preach to men — is to be found at all. A similar case is that of the *bhikkhunī* Kajangalā in the second *Mahāpañha-sutta* (A V 54–59) where Kajangalā, requested by the laymen (*upāsakas*) of her town, expounds to them the brief saying of the Buddha without having heard the explanations of the Buddha or his disciples before.³¹

25. Cf. It-a 29–33.

26. Cf. S V 360–361/S 55, 11 and e.g. S V 372–375/S 55, 23.

27. Eight requirements should be satisfied by a monk before he could be selected to the role of a *bhikkhunovadaka* (cf. Vin IV 51). According to the Sp (577–578) the monks entrusted with that task had to attain three degrees of learning covering a studentship of fifteen years. The advisers to *bhikkhunīs* (*bhikkhunovadakas*) should know the three *Piṭakas* with their commentaries. From the seven *Abhidhamma* texts they should master the commentaries of four.

28. Cf. the *Nandakovāda-sutta*: M 146/M III 270–277 and A I 24; cf. also the Thī-a on Mahāpajāpatī's verses (Pruitt 1999, 182).

29. For the restrictive rules concerning the instruction of women by monks in general see Vin IV 20–23. As evidence that this was not considered a problem in practice, compare for example the end of S 47,12/S V 161 where the Buddha explicitly asks Sāriputta to repeat his *Dhamma* exposition to *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*, male and female lay followers (cf. the same utterance to Sāriputta D 28/D III 116). Horner (1975, 368) comments on the instruction of women by monks: 'It is likely that this *pācittiya* offence, instituted owing to the complaints of the pious almsmen, is a later interpolation of the editors, and had no place in the initial spreading of the *Dhamma*'.

30. S IV 121–124/S 35, 133. There also exists a Sanskrit version of this *sutta* (cf. Waldschmidt 1980).

31. In the *Avadāna-śataka* (chapter 8, no. 78, s. Feer 1979, 290–293) her name is Kacaṅgalā (290, n. 1). It has to be the same person, for she is said to have expounded in detail the doctrine given by the Buddha in brief. Only in this context, the audience of male lay followers has — perhaps out of decency — turned into *bhikkhunīs*.

The fourth noteworthy example of such an extremely rare constellation of a woman teaching a man is that of Therī Puṇṇā or Puṇṇikā, whose story is handed down in the *Therīgāthā* and *Apadāna*.³² Living as a slave girl who served as a water carrier in the house of the famous merchant Anāthapiṇḍika, she was set free and permitted to become a *bhikkhunī*. The poem ascribed to her contains a dialogue from which we learn how she addresses an unnamed brahmin who believes in purification by water (*udakābhisecana*) as releasing from evil action. With her astute arguments she converts him to become a follower of the Buddha's teaching. Here, a learned man of the upper class is even called ignorant by a former slave girl (*Thī 240: te ... aḷānantassa*).

The peculiarity of this extremely rare constellation of a man being instructed by a woman is emphasized by the fact that one of the listeners is a person of highest worldly status, namely a king — King Pasenadi of Kosala is the dialogue partner of Khemā — and the other one is a person with the closest relationship to the instructor and therefore just as exceptional — her former husband Visākha is the dialogue partner of Dhammadinnā.³³ Both men come of their own accord to the *bhikkhunīs* and, acknowledging the superior status of renunciants, they treat them very respectfully.

Remarks on the style of the two discourses

Both dialogues strictly focus on the subjects under discussion and elements of narration are insignificant. Here, as in many other *suttas*, we get no personal information about the dialogue partners and their relationships, but come to know only their names, titles (king) or status within the *Saṅgha* (*bhikkhunī/upāsaka*). The fact that one of the two pairs consists of two persons intimately acquainted with each other, as they had been married, is derived only from external sources — from the *Apadāna* and the commentarial literature. Thus, the general nature of the doctrinal contents is emphasized, as can be seen from the fact that personal verb forms hardly occur. Nowhere in her speech does Dhammadinnā use the first person, and only in response to the last question does she employ the second person.³⁴ Khemā uses such forms only when she introduces her method chosen

The *Avadāna-śataka* also quotes a word of the Buddha praising her as one of the foremost *bhikṣuṇīs* because of her capacity of expounding *sūtras* in detail (*eṣāgrā sūtrānta-vibhāga-kartrīṇām*, wrongly translated by Feer 1979, 291) for which quality amongst the *bhikkhus* Mahākaccāna is praised. Her praise we also find in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* (cf. Skilling 2000, 63), but apparently it is missing in the list of fifty-one *bhikkhunīs* in the Chinese equivalent of A I 25 (cf. Huyen-Vi 1987, 47–58). The title of a Tibetan *sūtra* referring to this *bhikṣuṇī* 'Mahallikā(-pariprcchā)' (questions of an old woman) is perhaps a wrongly modified version of 'Mahā-pāṇha(-sutta)' (cf. Feer 1979, 292). However, in the Pāli canon she is not mentioned elsewhere except in the above *sutta*. Perhaps the tradition about her has partly been lost, because she had no real proper name but 'Kajāṅgalā' which refers only to the place where she lived.

32. Cf. *Thī* 236–251 and *Ap II* 611–612 no. 38 (cf. Pruitt 1999, 251–259).

33. Besides, in ancient India the husband had in fact a much higher worldly position than his wife, being entitled to treat her even similar to a slave.

34. M I 304: *Accasarāvuso* (you have gone beyond, friend); *nāsakkhi* (you were not able); *tvam ... puccheyyāsi* (you may ask); *dhāreyyāsi* (you should keep in mind). All these formulations are part of standard phrases used in certain situations. The first two are part of a formula which keeps the listener from continuing his questioning (cf. the two parallels S III 189 and S V 218).

to explain the attitude of the Buddha towards the ‘undeclared points’ (*abyākatā*) — the method of putting a counter question (*paṭipucchā*) to her partner in order to convince him with an analogy. It is the same quasi-Socratic method and the same formula, which, in the second part of the *sutta*, is adopted by the Buddha himself.³⁵ Khemā’s partner King Pasenadi uses the first and second person of a verb more frequently. But this is only done when he quotes first Khemā and later the Blessed One — ‘you have said’ or ‘you say’ (*vadesi*) — or himself, when he reports the *Dhamma* talk with Khemā to the Buddha: ‘I asked’ (*apucchim*). And at the end of the *sutta* he uses the formula of departure, which characterizes him as a very busy king.³⁶

Distance is also maintained in the way the four main dialogue partners address each other: the address mainly serves the purpose of marking the change of the speaker. So in each question, posed to either one of the *bhikkhunīs*, they are addressed as ‘revered lady’ (*ayye*); Khemā in each of her answers addresses her listener respectfully in the same manner as the Buddha, namely as ‘great king’ (*mahārāja*). Dhammadinnā addresses her former husband by adding his individual name, calling him ‘friend Visākha’ (*āvuso Visākha*). ‘Friend’ (*āvuso*) was the common form of address among monks, too. This style, characterized by distance and objectivity, and nearly without regard to worldly status and gender, might reflect a characteristic of Buddhist doctrine.

Remarks on the structure of the two suttas

Although the peculiar constellation of the main interlocutors is emphasized, this does not mean that the Buddha is completely absent in the two *suttas*. With reference to the central discourse he simply plays a secondary role, and yet his authority is not to be neglected. Except for the framework, both *suttas* consist of two parts. For they both contain a change of scene after which the Buddha is shown affirming the doctrinal correctness of the *bhikkhunīs*’ teaching, while in the second part of the *sutta* the *bhikkhunīs* themselves are absent. The custom of authenticating and certifying the contents of the teaching affects not only the speech of *bhikkhunīs* such as Khemā, Dhammadinnā and Kajaṅgalā; according to many *suttas*, the teaching of most notable *bhikkhus* like Ānanda, Mahākaccāna or Mahāmoggallāna is affirmed in the same way by the Buddha. This shows that the hearer’s doubts do not only concern female disciples. And it was not only lay people who had doubts whether the doctrine they had just heard was correct, but monastics as well.

As far as I can see, ten examples of an approval like this are given in three of the *nikāyas* (*Majjhima-*, *Samyutta-* and *Aṅguttara-nikāya*). Seven examples are almost literally identical with the pattern in the CvS (and in the *Kajaṅgala-sutta*

The last two are part of a formula which encourages the listener to have the words of the teacher checked by the Buddha, see below note 42.

35. S IV 376 and 378: *Tena hi mahārāja taññ’ev’ettha paṭipucchissāmi, yathā te khameyya, tathā naṃ vyākareyyāsi. Taṃ kim maññasi mahārāja?* ‘Well then, great king, I will question you about this same matter. Answer as you see fit. What do you think, great king?’ (Nāṇamoli and Bodhi 2001, 1381 and 1383). Cf. the almost identical formulation in the *Aggivaṅchagotta-sutta* at the beginning of the fire simile (M 72/M 1 487).

36. ‘Now, venerable sir, we must go [*gacchāma*]. We are busy and have much to do’ (Nāṇamoli and Bodhi 2001, 1383).

A V 57), but in contrast to the CvS, all of them concern the detailed expositions of the *Dhamma*, three given by Ānanda³⁷ to the *bhikkhus* and four given by Mahākaccāna.³⁸ Dhammadinnā, however, refers to the *Dhamma* of the Buddha only in her first answer of a total of thirty-four replies. If this is not an omission for stylistic reasons, this may reflect the high level of her knowledge.

Only three examples follow the form of affirmation used in the KhS. Two occur, like the KhS itself, in the section of the ‘undeclared questions’ and concern the teachings of Mahāmoggallāna about them.³⁹ The third shows Ānanda stating the identity of the Buddha’s answers with those given by Sāriputta to the same questions.⁴⁰ A few examples which show variations of these forms and combine elements of both types of approval may also be added and it is Ānanda again who goes to the Buddha to check the correctness of what a fellow monk (Sāriputta) had taught.⁴¹

The differences between the two types of authentication in the two *suttas* are the following: In the one case (CvS) the listener follows the advice given by the preaching disciple at the end of the discourse. This advice is phrased in a standard formula, which is directed at perhaps doubtful persons and reads like this: ‘If you wish to, friend Visākha, you can go to the Blessed One and ask him about the meaning of that. As the Blessed One expounds it to you, so you should keep it in mind’ (M I 304).⁴² And when the listener has approached the Buddha and reported the whole conversation to him, the Buddha first praises the preacher in high terms. In the CvS he says to the listener Visākha: ‘The *bhikkhunī* Dhammadinnā is wise, Visākha, the *bhikkhunī* Dhammadinnā has great wisdom’ (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2001, 403).⁴³

After this praise of his disciple’s wisdom, the Buddha assures the listener(s) that, on being questioned, his answers would have been identical with his disciple’s, and then he repeats the disciple’s advice — but in the form of an imperative: ‘Keep that in mind!’⁴⁴ According to the commentary, this procedure means that ‘the Buddha makes this *sutta* Word of the Conqueror, stamped as it were with the seal of the Conqueror’.⁴⁵ The intention of guaranteeing the canonical nature of the text might be the reason why the *Kathāvatthu*, which according to tradi-

37. S 35,116/S IV 97; S 35, 117/S IV 101; A V 228–229.

38. A V 259–260; M18; M 133; M 138.

39. S IV 394–395; S IV 397 (S IV 44, 7 and 8), which *suttas* — in contrast to the KhS — have a counterpart in the Chinese SĀ (cf. Akanuma 1958, 235).

40. A V 320–321, (11, 1, 7).

41. S II 34–37 and 39 (S 12, 24 and 25).

42. *Ākaṅkhamāno ca tvaṃ āvuso Visākha Bhagavantaṃ upasaṅkamitvā etam puccheyyāsi, yathā ca te Bhagavā byākaroti tathā naṃ dhāreyyāsi.*

43. M 44/M I 304: *Paṇḍitā Visākha Dhammadinnā bhikkhunī, mahāpaññā Visākha Dhammadinnā bhikkhunī.* Such praise of a woman for her intellect is so extraordinary that some tend to transfer the wisdom to Dhammadinnā’s husband. Cf. Pruitt who writes: ‘... the Buddha spoke Dh 421 before he praised Visākha’s wisdom’ (1999, 30, n. 2).

44. Cf. M I 304–305: *Mamañ ce pi tvaṃ Visākha etam atthaṃ puccheyyāsi, aham pi taṃ evam evaṃ byākareyyaṃ, yathā taṃ Dhammadinnāya bhikkhuniyā byākataṃ. Eso c’ ev’ etassa attho, evam etaṃ dhārehīti.*

45. Cf. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (2001, 1244, n. 480), referring to Ps II 371.

tion, was elaborated by Moggaliputta Tissa only 218 years after the *parinibbāna*, adopted this very type of justification.⁴⁶

The other, rarer type of approval, represented by the KhS, is less connected with the preceding conversation. It is less complicated and of a simpler form, but longer compared to the other type. The listeners do not report the talk, but ask the same questions twice, at first to the disciple of the Buddha and then to the Buddha himself, or occasionally vice versa, either to prove the correctness of the answers or to test the disciple. In this case it is not the Blessed One who states the identity of the two versions, that of the disciple and that of the Buddha, but the listeners themselves see it, and along with them the reader. The result of their examination seems to be surprising to them, for — instead of directly praising the disciple — they twice express their amazement that the disciple's answers are identical with those of the Buddha. They use, in an adapted way, the following formula, here uttered by King Pasenadi:

It is wonderful, venerable sir! It is amazing, venerable sir!

How the meaning and the phrasing of both teacher and disciple coincide and agree with each other and do not diverge, that is, in regard to the chief matter.

On one occasion, venerable sir, I approached the *bhikkhuni* Khemā and asked her about this matter. The revered lady explained this matter to me in exactly the same terms and phrases that the Blessed One used.⁴⁷

(After that, the king expresses once more his amazement.)

Thus, the second part(s) of the two respective *suttas* indicate that there is no difference, on the matters discussed, between the Buddha's wisdom and that of the two *bhikkhunīs*. Both forms of announcing the coincidence between the *buddhavaacana* and the disciple's teaching show that the disciples are accredited to the audience as fully adequate representatives of the *Dhamma* and the Buddha.

Remarks on the contents of the two discourses

In both discourses the subjects under discussion are of great subtlety and importance. Concerning the topic dealt with in the KhS, the Buddha has said elsewhere: 'Profound is this *Dhamma*, hard to see, hard to know, peaceful, sublime, not belonging to the sphere of logic, subtle, accessible [only] for the wise' (M 72/M I 487).⁴⁸ The same phrase which points to the transcendental dimension of the subject occurs in the Buddha's autobiographical report about his initial hesitation to teach the *Dhamma* just after he has become fully awakened.⁴⁹ In the *Apadāna* the

46. Cf. Norman (1983, 103).

47. Bodhi (2000, 1383). S IV 379: *Acchāriyam bhante, abhutam bhante, yatra hi nāma satthuno sāvīkāya ca atthena attho vyañjanena vyañjanaṃ saṃsandissati samessati na virodhayissati yadidam agga-padasmiṃ. Ekam idāhaṃ bhante, samayam Khemaṃ bhikkhunim upasaṅkamitvā etam atthaṃ apucchim. Sā pi me ayyā etehi padehi etehi vyañjanehi etam attham vyākāsi seyyathāpi Bhagavā.*

48. M 72/M I 487: *Gambhīro hāyaṃ vaccha dhammo duddaso duranubodho santo paṇīto atakkāvacaro nipuṇo paṇḍita-vedāniyo.* The same formula is repeatedly to be found in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* (D I 12; 17 etc.) and once also with regard to the status of the *Tathāgata* after death (D I 28).

49. See e.g. M 26/M I 167 (*Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*); S 6, 1/S I 136 (*Āyācana-sutta*) and other records about the same incident. In this context '*Dhamma*' refers to dependent origination and to *nibbāna*.

questions put to both the *bhikkhunis* were explicitly called profound (*gambhīra*) and subtle (*nipūṇa*) and the quality of their answers is seen as the reason why they are placed as foremost among the *bhikkhunis*.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the commentator Buddhaghosa, referring to the CvS, illustrates the sharpness of Dhammadinnā's mind in a nice way with the following simile: 'Dhammadinnā answered question after question as if cutting the [hollow] stalks of lotus with a sword'.⁵¹

And we need not only infer the wisdom of the nuns from their explanations but this quality is explicitly attributed to them: to Khemā by a servant of King Pasenadi and to Dhammadinnā, as mentioned above, by the Buddha himself. In the opening part of the KhS the servant recommends the nun Khemā and praises her to his master who wants to have a *Dhamma* talk with any available ascetic or brahmin. He says:

But sire, there is the *bhikkhuni* named Khemā, a disciple of the Blessed One, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One. Now a good report concerning this revered lady has spread about thus: 'She is wise, competent, intelligent, learned, a splendid speaker, ingenious' (Bodhi 2000, 1380).⁵²

And at the end of the CvS it is the Buddha himself who speaks in high terms of Dhammadinnā calling her *paṇḍitā* (wise) and *mahāpaṇṇā* (having great wisdom) (M I 304).

According to the *Manoratha-pūraṇī* (Mp 363), this praise of Dhammadinnā was preceded by another one: Before his praise mentioned above, the Buddha spoke a verse known from the *Dhammapada* (Dhp 421), hence referring to her as to one who does not grasp at anything, so as to be a [true] brahmin.

Contents and importance of the Khemā-sutta

Khemā's dialogue deals with the status of the *Tathāgata* after death. That issue is the subject of the last of four sets of metaphysical questions, all of which the Buddha left undeclared/unanswered (*abyākata*).⁵³ Her discourse is included in a section about these questions, the *Abyākata-saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*. It consists of eleven *suttas*, the first of which is the KhS.

However, the KhS — as well as six further pieces of this section (S IV 44, 2–6 and 11) — only deals with the last four of this catalogue of altogether ten questions, which in brief are the following: Does the *Tathāgata* exist after death, or not exist, or both, or neither? This fourfold question about the *Tathāgata* includes all the logical positions one can imagine.

50. Ap II 550 no. 18 for Dhammadinnā and 569 no. 23 for Khemā (cf. Pruitt 1999, 174 and 29).

51. *Dhammadinnā khaggena uppala-nāle chindantī viya pucchitaṃ pucchitaṃ vissajjesi* (Mp I 362, almost identical with Thī-a 18 on v. 12).

52. S IV 374–375: *Atthi ca kho deva, Khemā nāma bhikkhuni tassa Bhagavato sāvika arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Tassā kho pan' ayyāya evaṃ kalyāṇo kitti-saddo abhuggato: paṇḍitā viyattā medhāvini bahussutā citta-kathī kalyāṇa-paṭibhānā' ti*. The second phrase is also used to describe the excellent reputation of Mahākaccāna King Avantiputta had heard of (M 84/M II 83).

53. Skt. *avyākṛta-vastūni*, by many scholars compared with the antinomies in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, cf. Sturm (1996, 64–79). The standard list of these questions consists of two sets about the world with regard to the dimensions of time and space, one set about the relation of the mortal body and the life principle and the fourth set about the existence of the *Tathāgata* after death.

In her answers, Khemā refers to the Buddha's teaching, declaring that none of these four logical possibilities is adopted by him. To each of the questions she says: 'Great king, this is not declared by the Blessed One (either)'.⁵⁴ Asked for the reason why the Buddha does not take up a position on any of the four possibilities, Khemā in turn asks the king whether he would consider it possible to count the grains of sand in the river Ganges or the gallons of water in the great ocean. The king has to admit that it is impossible to calculate either of these and, referring only to the second simile, he points out: 'The great ocean, revered lady, is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom'.⁵⁵ The same terms are then used by Khemā to describe the undescribable *Tathāgata*:

Just so, great king, any physical form by which one might define the *Tathāgata*, that form, for the *Tathāgata*, is abandoned, cut off from the root, made [like] a palm stump, caused to disappear, [so that it is] not subject to arising any more. Freed from definition by physical form, great king, the *Tathāgata* is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom, like the great ocean.⁵⁶

For, according to her following argumentation, the one who has attained final *nibbāna* (*tathāgato param maraṇā*) cannot be described in terms of the five *khandhas* and therefore none of the four positions does apply (*na upeti*).⁵⁷

But is there any originality in Khemā's version of this often-discussed question? When compared with other versions, the difference lies in the fairly specific reason given here in order to explain why none of the four alternatives can be applied, as well as in the form of arguing in which the KhS differs from almost all other versions of this question. Khemā's answer skilfully combines two didactic methods: As mentioned above, she asks a counterquestion (*paṭipucchā*) to King Pasenadi, and by doing so, she employs a double simile trying to fathom the *Tathāgata*'s unfathomableness: grains of sand and the deep ocean. Thereby the *sutta* is enriched with an element of poetic style. But I have to admit, there is some overlap with the *Aggivaṅṅagotta-sutta* (M 72/M I 487–488), some phrases of which are even literally identical. This *sutta*, dealing at length with all of the *avyākata*-questions, is characterized by a similar combination of these features (counterquestioning and use of analogy — introduced by the same phrase as in the KhS). Though here the Buddha mainly uses the image of extinguished fire, in this *sutta*, surprisingly, the image of the deep ocean also occurs, namely in the phrase identical with that quoted above from the KhS. But in my view, this phrase fits better into the context and the main analogy of the KhS than into the *Aggivaṅṅagotta-sutta* where the fire analogy is central.

54. S IV 375: *Avyākataṃ kho etam mahārāja Bhagavatā*, or on the second and fourth question: *Etam pi kho mahārāja avyākataṃ Bhagavatā*.

55. S IV 376: *Mahāyye, samuddo gambhīro appameyyo duppariyogāho ti*.

56. S IV 376: *Evam eva kho mahārāja, yena rūpena tathāgataṃ paññāpayamāno paññāpeyya, taṃ rūpaṃ tathāgatassa pahīnam ucchinna-mūlam tālā-vatthu-katam anabhāva-katam āyatim anuppāda-dhammaṃ*.

Rūpa-saṅkhāya vimutto kho mahārāja, tathāgato gambhīro appameyyo duppariyogāho, seyyathāpi mahāsamuddo.

57. In other contexts we read explicitly that also a living *Tathāgata* cannot be apprehended (M 22/M I 140: *ditṭhevāhaṃ bhikkhave dhamme tathāgataṃ ananuvejjo ti vadāmi* cf. also S 22, 86/S III 118–119).

In both cases it should be understood that the *Tathāgata* is immeasurable and indescribable. The idea of the *arhat* as being beyond description and calculation because of the absence of any definition (*saṅkhā*) through the five aggregates (*khandhas*), with which one tends to identify oneself, can be traced back to the *Sutta-nipāta*.⁵⁸

As we see, in this version the non-acceptance of any of the four positions is not explained with merely pragmatic reasons (*upāya*), for example with the irrelevance of the metaphysical tenets for release from suffering (as in M 63) or with the aim of protecting the hearer from confusion and bewilderment (as in M 72).⁵⁹ But here the reason for the reserved attitude and for the suspension of assent is obviously the limitation of rationality and conceptual thought.

This scheme of four rejected positions about the *Tathāgata* is probably one of the oldest examples of what is later called with a special Sanskrit term *catuṣkoṭi* or in Greek ‘*tetralemma*’.⁶⁰ And it was destined to have a great future in the philosophy of Buddhism, especially in the School of the Middle Way (Madhyamaka). This is because it served, together with the other three groups of undeclared questions, as a proper instrument to avoid a one-sided view and to keep the listeners from clinging to the two extremes: the annihilation view (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*) and the eternalistic view (*sassata-diṭṭhi*).

Contents and importance of the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta*

In contrast to the KhS, the discourse of Dhammānā (*Cūḷavedalla-sutta*)⁶¹ deals with a plurality of rather uncommon and less frequently treated subjects of the Buddhist doctrine.⁶² Very concisely and with considerable condensation, it touches on central points of the *Dhamma* whose understanding, because of its

58. See the words of the Buddha in the dialogue with Upasīva (Sn 1074 and 1076) where the fire analogy is used, too. And — in a similar way as in the KhS — the terms ‘calculation/definition’ (*saṅkha*) and ‘measure’ (*pamāṇa*) are rejected for the released one:

‘Just as a flame tossed about by the force of the wind,
Upasīva’, said the Blessed One,
‘one goes out and no longer counts [as a flame],
so a sage released from his mental body
goes out and no longer counts [as a sage].’

...

‘There is no measuring of one who has gone out,
Upasīva’, said the Blessed One.
‘That no longer exists for him by which they might speak of him,
when all phenomena have been removed,
then all ways of speaking are also removed’. (Trans. by Norman 2001, 136–137).

59. In the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* is to be found an enumeration of seven reasons for the Buddha’s non-answering (cf. Lamotte 1981, 155–158).

60. In early Buddhism normally only the *Tathāgata*-set has the form of a *tetralemma* while in later literature it is used for two of the other three sets, too, i.e. with exception of the set on the mortal body and life principle, which keeps the form of a dilemma. Therefore the number of the undeclared questions increased from ten to fourteen. For the subject *tetralemma/catuṣkoṭi* see Sturm (1996, esp. 53–63), for the Pāli canon.

61. The meaning of the term *vedalla* is not quite clear cf. Norman (1983, 16).

62. For the contents of this *sutta* in comparison with Chinese parallels cf. Minh-Chau (1991, 269–278) and Anālayo (2006, 174–180). For M I 299–300 cf. also the synopsis presented by Vetter (2000, 120–127).

precise definitions and fine distinctions, requires a high degree of spiritual development. The *sutta* contains a series of 34 questions⁶³ which can be divided into five complexes:

- I 1–7: Personality/identity (*sakkāya*)⁶⁴ – seen as the five aggregates (*upādāna-kkhandhā*) – and identity view,⁶⁵ which sees the aggregates as somehow related to ‘Self’.
- II 8–11: The noble eightfold path, its division into three main groups (*khandhā*): morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*), and explanation of one of its factors or groups: concentration (*samādhi*)
- III 12–20: The attainment of the highest stage of absorption: the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*), its relation to the three formations (*saṃkhāra*): the bodily, verbal and mental formation, and its conditions, phenomena and effects
- IV 21–27: Three types of feeling (*vedanā*): pleasant, painful and neither pleasant nor painful, and their relation to the underlying three tendencies (*anusaya*): to lust (*rāga*), aversion (*paṭigha*) and ignorance (*avijjā*)
- V 28–34: A chain of seven questions on counterparts (*paṭibhāga*) beginning with pleasant feeling and its counterpart, ascending to the search for the counterpart of *nibbāna*.

There is hardly any *sutta* covering the same wide range of subjects as this. In my opinion, the entire discourse, though looking like a mere compilation of various subjects, has been very carefully constructed.

It starts on a relatively low level of inquiry: The question about the five aggregates (*khandha*) and personality view (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*) refers to a state before one has attained the stage of a stream enterer (*sotāpanna*). And by several steps it proceeds to detailed explanations of the ninth and highest stage of absorption, the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*), or in short, attainment of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*), characterized as deathlike⁶⁶ and resembling *nibbāna*. Buddhaghosa, quoting a passage from the present *sutta* (M I 302), interprets the mind’s inclination to seclusion (*viveka*) after the emergence from cessation of perception and feeling as an inclination to *nibbāna*.⁶⁷ In a verse quoted

63. Counting the questions according to the change of the speakers, I came to this result.

64. *Sakkāya* literally means: ‘existing group’ or ‘group of existing things’, frequently translated as ‘personality’ or ‘identity’. It seems very delicate that the conversation of the former married couple begins with the topic of personality and its cessation.

65. *Sakkāya-ditṭhi*, subdivided into twenty classes, in regard to the five *khandhas*, is the first of the ten fetters (*saṃyojana*). Having been released from the first three fetters, one has realized the lowest level of the noble path (*sotāpatti*).

66. The explanation of the difference between this absorption and death is unmentioned in this discourse yet treated in the preceding *Mahāvedalla-sutta* (M 43/M I 296) and in the substantial parallel to the cessation-sequence of the CvS, i.e. the dialogue between the *bhikkhu* Kāmabhū and the well versed lay disciple Citta (S 41, 6/S IV 294) as well as in the Chinese and Tibetan parallels of the CvS (cf. Minh-Chau 1991, 270 and Smith 2006). For the parallels of the *nirodha-samāpatti* sequence within the Pāli canon (M 44, S 41, 6 and M 43) cf. Bodhi (2000, 1442, n. 297).

67. Vism XXIII, 708: *Vuṭṭhitassa kin-ninnaṃ cittaṃ hotīti? Nibbāna-ninnaṃ. Vuttaṃ h’ etaṃ: Saññā-vedayita-nirodha-samāpattiyā vuṭṭhitassa kho, avuso Visākha, bhikkhuno viveka-ninnaṃ cittaṃ hoti,*

by him in the same context, in the last chapter of the *Visuddhimagga* (Vism XXIII), this attainment is even equated with *nibbāna* already attained in this world (*ditṭh'eva dhamme*), and the ability to attain this (temporary) state is called a 'benefit of wisdom (*paññāya ānisaṃso*)'.⁶⁸ Thus, this verse corresponds to the heading of this chapter (*paññā-bhāvanānisaṃsa-niddeso*). This above-mentioned stage of absorption, reached by the combined powers of serenity/tranquillity (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*),⁶⁹ a state in which all mental activity ceases, is considered accessible only to non-returners or *arhats* after having mastered the eight other attainments of *samādhi*.⁷⁰ In the *Cūlagosinga-sutta* this stage is also described as the highest and most sublime among the 'comfortable' abidings reachable for human beings (M 31/ M I 209).

If, in accordance with the commentator Buddhaghosa,⁷¹ one assumes that the dialogue consistently progresses from a lower up to the highest level, it is not quite clear why that principle of progressing is, at one point, interrupted, for in all versions the sequence on the types of feeling (*vedanā*) and their respective tendencies (*anusaya*) follows after the section on the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*), while one would expect it in reverse order. But the commentary tries to connect both passages by saying that the questioner now wants to know which types of feeling have to cease before one attains the cessation of perception and feeling (Ps II 367). Besides, this topic (*vedanā/anusaya*) appears to be a good basis for the next sequence.

Finally, the discourse culminates in an inquiry about counterparts, with the replies: painful feeling is the counterpart of pleasant feeling; pleasant feeling of painful feeling; ignorance of neutral feeling; true knowledge of ignorance; deliverance of true knowledge; *nibbāna* of deliverance. Lastly, there is a question on the counterpart of *nibbāna*, which puts an end to questioning because *nibbāna* itself is the final goal of the holy life, and therefore, one might conclude, without any counterpart.⁷² Thus, the last complex of questions, the section of

viveka-ponaṃ, viveka-pabbhāraṇ' ti. Cf. also Ps II 367 and Spk III 97 (on S IV 295): *nibbānaṃ viveko nāma* (cf. Bodhi 2000, 1444, n. 306).

68. Vism XXIII, 709:

Thus, wise men, developing noble wisdom, do attain this peaceful attainment, cultivated by the noble ones, called *nibbāna* here and now.

Therefore, the ability to attain this [state]

is also called the benefit of wisdom with regard to the noble paths.

For the equation of *nirodha-samāpatti* and *nibbāna* here and now cf. also Ps II 366, on M I 302 and Spk III 96 (almost identical with Vism XXIII, 705).

69. I.e. according to the Tibetan *Dharmadinnā-sūtra* (cf. Smith 2006), and according to the last question of the *Kāmaḥhū-sutta* 2 (S 41,6/ S IV 293–295). In the CvS, this topic is not treated and the Spk (III 97, on the *Kāmaḥhū-sutta*) does not comment on it either.

70. Cf. Vism XXIII, 702. Buddhaghosa assumes that the question on *nirodha-samāpatti* in both cases, that of Dhammadinnā as well as that of Kāmaḥhū (S 41, 6), had the purpose to find out if the nun or monk was familiar with this attainment, i.e. if she/he had realized the state of an *anāgāmin* or *arhat*, see the identical explanation in both commentaries, Ps II 365 and Spk III 94. Cf. Bodhi (2000, 1443, n. 299).

71. Pruitt (1999, 30, n. 1), translating Mp I 362: 'When he had questioned her, in every way in turn [*paṭipāṭiyā*], on those three paths whereunto he himself had attained, he questioned her, even as a learner [*uggaha-vasena*], about the paths that lead to Arahatsip'. The precise meaning of *paṭipāṭiyā* is, according to the PED: 'successively, in succession, alongside of, in order.

72. Only in the Chinese version and at Ps II 370, this answer is explicitly added, cf. Anālayo (2006,

counterparts, seems to connect the preceding section about feeling and its three types with the highest goal, viz. *nibbāna*. In the section about *nirodha-samāpatti*, *nibbāna* — some terms can be seen as paraphrasing it — was indirectly already made the subject.⁷³

In terms of logic, the succession of the seven links in the counterpart section does not seem fully consistent to me, either in the CvS (M I 304) or in the slightly diverging Chinese and Tibetan versions.⁷⁴ Unlike the case in two similar examples of such a series (S III 189 and S V 218), in this *sutta* the following question does not in each case begin with the item given by the preceding answer. The first two links, namely pleasant feeling and painful feeling are interrelated with one another; therefore, the next question begins with neutral feeling. And within the whole chain, the meaning of the term counterpart (*paṭibhāga*) varies: sometimes it serves to express the relationship of opposition, sometimes that of supplementation. Probably the succession can only be explained in a philosophical way.

This whole series of questions, appearing somehow like a game or riddle, reminds us of Gārgī's dialogue with the sage Yajñavalkya in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad*.⁷⁵ The latter takes place in a contest arranged by King Janaka, in which Gārgī disputes on equal terms with the male scholars, and her eleven questions also take the form of a chain of links which proceed from the lower up to the highest worlds (*brahmalokā*).

Being taught that *nibbāna* is the counterpart of liberation, Visākha asks Dhammadinnā a further question: 'Revered lady, what is the counterpart of *nibbāna*?' Answering this final question in the *sutta*, Dhammadinnā reveals her superiority to the questioner when keeping him from further questioning in the following way:

You have gone beyond the range of questioning, friend Visākha, you were not able to grasp the limit to questioning. For, friend Visākha, the holy life has *Nibbāna* as its ground, *Nibbāna* as its destination, *Nibbāna* as its final goal.⁷⁶

The first sentence reminds us of the wise woman Gārgī who pushed her debate with the sage Yajñavalkya to a point beyond which, as he told her, no further questions should be asked. He finally warned her: 'Don't ask too many questions, Gārgī, or your head will shatter apart! You are asking too many questions about

179, n. 34) and La Vallée Poussin's footnote 26 to AK I, 6 (Pruden 1988 I, 134): 'Dhammadinnā was questioned by her former spouse the householder Visākha: *kiṃ-sabhāga ārye nirodhaḥ?* She answered: *asabhāga āyusman viśākha (Madhyamāgama, TD 1, p. 788 c16, Vibhāṣā, TD 27, p. 162 bII)*'.

73. See the above interpretation of *viveka* (seclusion) as paraphrase of *nibbāna* (Vism 708; Ps II 367; Spk III 97 on S IV 295); furthermore, Ps II 367 and Spk III 97 interpret the three contacts (*phassa*) experienced by the emerging one — emptiness, signlessness and desirelessness — as contact with *nibbāna* and a *vipassanā*-related completion of the preceding meditative state.

74. For the differences cf. Minh-Chau (1991, 276–277); Anālayo (2006, 179) and Smith (2006). In all versions, however, the number of the questions and answers is identical.

75. BĀU 3, 6, cf. Olivelle (1998, 84–85).

76. M I 304: *Accasarāvuso viśākha pañhaṃ. Nāsakkhi pañhānaṃ pariyantaṃ gahetuṃ. Nibbānogadhaṃ hi āvuso viśākha brahmacariyaṃ nibbāna-parāyanaṃ nibbāna-pariyosānaṃ.* For my translation I have used Bodhi's (2000, 984), which is given for one of the two parallels (S III 180/S 23,1).

a deity about whom one should not ask too many questions. So, Gārgī, don't ask too many questions!⁷⁷

However, while here it is the woman Gārgī who puts difficult and subtle questions to the man Yajñavalkya in order to test his knowledge or to be herself the winner of the contest,⁷⁸ the roles in the CvS are reversed: the man appears as the tester. But in both cases the persons tested pass the test with brilliance. Thus, in some respects, Gārgī's dialogue can be seen as a 'forerunner' of the wise nun Dhammadinnā's discourse.

The CvS seems to have been a very well-known text since the early times of Buddhism. In the verses of the *Apadāna* the content is alluded to.⁷⁹ Quotations of this *sutta* can also be found in the commentarial literature: Dhammapāla mentions this discourse by name (*Cūlavedalla-sutta*) together with its circumstances and quotes literally the master's praise of Dhammadinnā.⁸⁰ Furthermore, pieces of information on this discourse and quotations can be found in the *Manorathapūraṇī* and in the commentary on *Dhammapada* 421.⁸¹

One of its main subjects had a great influence on Buddhist thought and philosophy. I am thinking of the sequence about the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*), which nowhere else in the *Sutta-piṭaka* is described as precisely as in the CvS, except in its parallel, the second *Kāmaḥhū-sutta* (S 41, 6) and partly in the preceding *sutta* (M 43). Due to this fact, Dhammadinnā's teaching seems to have served as an important source for Buddhaghosa's manual, the *Visuddhimagga*, and for its final chapter in particular, entitled the benefit of the cultivation of wisdom (*paññā-bhāvanānisamsa*), wherein a passage of the cessation-sequence is literally quoted.⁸² The tripartition of the manual corresponds to the three parts of the Buddhist path. So putting the subject *nirodha-samāpatti* under the above title means that this meditative attainment is considered belonging to the third part of the eightfold path: wisdom (*paññā*), and not, as one might expect, to *samādhi*, the second part.

77. Cf. BĀU 3, 6, cf. Olivelle (1998, 85) (trans.) and 84: *Gārgī mātīprakṣīḥ / mā te mūrdhā vyapaptat / anatīpraśnyāṃ vai devatām atīprchasi / Gārgī mātīprakṣīr iti*.

78. Competitions in knowledge, participating in which was usual also for women, appear to have been customary among Jains, see the commentary on the verses of Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesā or of Nanduttarā, the former Jains, at Pruitt (1999, 135 and 115).

79. Cf. Pruitt (1999, 29): 'Then this lay follower came to me and asked questions that are deep and subtle. I answered them all. The Conqueror was pleased with this quality and established me as foremost of the *bhikkhūnīs* in preaching the Doctrine. [He said,] "I do not see another who is equal to Dhammadinnā in regard to knowledge of the Doctrine; bear this in mind, *bhikkhus*". So I am wise, favoured by the Leader'. (Ap II 567-569).

80. See Pruitt (1999, 29-30).

81. See Mp I 363 and Dh-p-a IV 230, cf. Pruitt (1999, 30, nn. 1 and 2).

82. Vism XXIII 708 = M I 302. It is the passage, already quoted above, concerning the inclination to *nibbāna* of one who emerges from cessation. Moreover, three further literal quotations of the CvS are to be found in the *Visuddhimagga*, the first two being: the passage about the three kinds of formations (*saṃkhāra*) which cease successively when one is attaining the highest stage of absorption (Vism XVII 527 = M I 302), and the passage about the relation between the eightfold path and its three main groups (*khandha*) (Vism XVI 514 = M I 301). The very source of these three quotations can be inferred from the quoted address: 'Visākhā'. However, the final quotation (Vism VIII 288-289 = M I 301 cf. also S IV 294), also taken from the passage about the three formations, does not contain any address.

Even apart from the Theravāda school, the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* or *Dharmadinnā-sūtra*, and some of its central points found a very wide-spread reception, for example in the Vaibhāsika (Sautrāntika) and the Yogācāra schools, and has played a very specific role in Buddhist doctrine up to the present day. For many controversies arose concerning the persistence and unbroken continuity of the stream of consciousness (*viññāna/vijñāna* or *citta*), the ability to re-enter ordinary consciousness from the state of cessation, and the implications and philosophical problems connected with different positions. It is discussed, for example, whether this ultimate state of absorption, considered to be a ‘pretaste’ of final *nibbāna*, could be characterized as total absence of mental activity.⁸³ Hence, the soteriological value of this type of meditation is often debated, too. Accordingly, this *sutta/sūtra* is frequently quoted by ancient scholars, for example by Vasubandhu,⁸⁴ as well as by modern ones, for example by Paul J. Griffiths in his case study about the attainment of cessation ([1986] 1991) and by Lambert Schmithausen (1987).⁸⁵ Schmithausen refers to it when he attempts to explain the genesis of the concept of the basic or store consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*).

What about the originality of this *sutta* within the Pāli canon? As a whole it seems to be unique, and for the most part it has no counterparts, although some doctrinal pieces correspond to those found in other *suttas*. As has already been mentioned, the cessation-sequence has but one substantial parallel in the second *Kāmaḥhū-sutta* (S IV 41, 6) which in turn, being without a closing narrative, looks like an excerpt cut off from a larger textual body. Except for the CvS and its above-mentioned parallel as well as a short passage of the *Mahāvedalla-sutta* (M 43), there is almost no canonical information about this controversial meditative state. And while the discussion on the identity view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) has three parallels included in other *suttas* (M III 17–8; S III 102; S IV 287), other sequences are impressive because of their uniqueness.

For example, the first complex of questions and answers contains an inquiry into the well-known Four Noble Truths, but is expressed in terms of personality (*sakkāya*), i.e. the aggregates, instead of suffering (*dukkha*).

Unusual also, in my opinion, is the presentation of the doctrine about the three types of feeling (*vedanā*), although its connection with the three underlying tendencies (*anusaya*), viz. lust, aversion and ignorance, partially parallels one other passage in the canon (S IV 205). Dhammadinnā demonstrates that there are cases in which a feeling arises without being accompanied by an underlying tendency which ought to be given up, namely the pleasant feeling born of seclusion in the first *jhāna*, the painful feeling caused by longing for liberation, and the neither pleasant nor painful feeling emerging with equanimity in the fourth *jhāna*.

83. Buddhaghosa repeatedly calls the meditator who attains this state ‘unconscious’ (*acittaka*), cf. *Vism* XXIII 705; 707; 708. Cf. also the discussion about the attainment of cessation and the problem of psychic continuity in the second chapter of Vasubandhu’s treatise *Karma-siddhi-prakarāṇa* (Anacker 2005, 101–111).

84. Anālayo (2006, 174, n. 1) points to altogether four quotations of this *sūtra* in Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* (AK 2,33; 6,3; 2,3; 1, 6) three of which concern the cessation passage.

85. See especially the introduction part I, 18 ff.; besides 149 and 165, and in part II the index locorum, looking for *Dharmadinnāsūtra* (469, n. 1136), *Cūḷavedallasutta* (663, n. 149) or *Majjhimanikāya* I 301 (665).

A further example of at least partial uniqueness is given by the last (fifth) complex of the discourse: the chain of seven questions on counterparts (*paṭibhāga*). Though there are two similar chains of questions to be found, in my opinion, this very chain is almost unique. The two other chains are shorter, as they contain only four or five links, and the succession of their links is less complicated but more schematic. Their questions do not aim at the counterpart, but at the purpose (*kim-atthiya*) (S III 189/S 23,1) or at the refuge/support (*paṭisaraṇa*) (S V 218/S 48, 42). However, whether the questions are on counterpart, purpose or support, the last two links, liberation (*vimutti*) and *nibbāna*, as well as the reply to the last question, are the same in each of the three cases.⁸⁶

Finally I would like to present the following distinguishing feature: While most *suttas*, and among them the KhS, are characterized by the frequency and length of repetitive passages, repetitions are avoided in the CvS. Admittedly, within the CvS the factors of the eightfold path are enumerated twice, but in a different context and, as I think, accidentally.⁸⁷ No repetitive narrative is inserted, except for the ordinary formulas on arriving and departing. In the CvS the assent and positive reaction of the listener, connected with the procedure of putting a further question, is described only once, namely after the first reply of Dhammadinnā, in contrast to the second *Kāmaḥū-sutta* (S 41, 6). There, density and flow of the dialogue are impaired by the recurrence of the same sentence after each answer.⁸⁸ This means that in the CvS even fixed formulations from the large pool of stock phrases are used rather restrictively and whenever used, they are of a kind which is less common.

Conclusions

Finally, let us reconsider the substance of the teaching presented by the two nuns. Though the contents of the two *suttas* differ — the KhS deals with but one topic while the CvS treats a variety of questions — they agree in some respects: Both discourses, being far from triviality, concern profound questions. They both aim somehow at the highest goal, *nibbāna*, the KhS in its personalized form by talking about the nature of the *Tathāgata*, the CvS by explaining successively questions in relation to the four stages of holiness as stated by Buddhaghosa.⁸⁹ The last question of the CvS, the question on *nibbāna*, is — strictly speaking — left unanswered, as is the question on the state of the *Tathāgata* after death in the KhS. And in both cases issues are treated which had a great influence on posterity.

The discourses of the two women demonstrate the depth of their understanding. They offer an illustrative example of their wisdom and knowledge, qualities which are corroborated by their being listed among the outstanding nuns and by the verses attributed to them. Furthermore, they indicate that even in the early

86. Cf. Anālayo (2006: 179, n. 33).

87. In the Chinese and Tibetan version the enumeration of its factors occurs only once.

88. The repeated formula serving as a bridge to the next question is: *Sādhu bhante ti kho citto gahapati āyasmato kāmaḥussa bhāsitaṃ abhinanditvā anumoditvā āyasmantaṃ kāmaḥuṃ uttarim pañhaṃ apucchi*. In the Tibetan version this interrupting or connecting formula is completely absent (cf. Smith 2006).

89. See above note 71. The successive order of the four paths is also alluded to in the DhP-a IV 230 (on DhP 421).

times of Buddhism, the spiritual development of women could reach the same high degree as that of men, and that they were acknowledged not only by other women who became their disciples, but by men of high social status and by the Buddha himself.

If disappointed by the fact that later on in history the successors to Khemā and Dhammadinnā do 'not appear to have enjoyed the same prestige or creativity one might have expected',⁹⁰ one should remember that in the history of Christianity leading nuns like Hildegard of Bingen are exceptional cases, too. But it may be comforting to know that even in a by and large patriarchally organized world, women do have a history and tradition of independent thought and practice.

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Abbreviations

A	<i>Aṅuttara-nikāya</i>
AK	<i>Abhidharmakośa(-bhāṣya)</i>
Ap	<i>Apadāna</i>
BĀU	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i>
CvS	<i>Cūḷavedalla-sutta</i>
D	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
Dhp-a	<i>Dhammapada commentary</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottar(ik)a-āgama</i>
Jā	<i>Jātaka</i>
KhS	<i>Khemā(therī)-sutta</i>
It-a	<i>Itivuttaka commentary</i>
M	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i>
Mp	<i>Manoratha-pūraṇī (Aṅuttara-nikāya commentary)</i>
Mvu	<i>Mahāvastu</i>
PED	<i>Pali-English Dictionary</i>
Ps	<i>Papañca-sūdanī (Majjhima-nikāya commentary)</i>
PTS	<i>Pali Text Society</i>
S	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>
SĀ	<i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i>
Skt.	<i>Sanskrit</i>
Sn	<i>Suttanipāta</i>
Sp	<i>Samanta-pāsādikā (Vinaya-piṭaka commentary)</i>
Spk	<i>Sārattha-ppakāsinī (Saṃyutta-nikāya commentary)</i>
Thī	<i>Therīgāthā</i>
Thī-a	<i>Therīgāthā commentary</i>
Ud	<i>Udāna</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya-piṭaka</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

90. Sponberg (1992, 7).

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