

DOI: 10.31857/S032103910015604-7

CITY AND MONASTERY:
STORIES OF FOOD DONATION FROM PĀLI VINAYA
(*Suttavibhaṅga and Mahāvagga*)

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The compendium of rules of conduct for Buddhist monks and nuns known as Vinaya contains a series of stories about ascetics who relied on alms to survive. These stories present a variety of everyday situations that reflect the relations between the ancient Indian monastic community and surrounding society. The article attempts to identify the problems causing concern to the compilers of *Vinaya-piṭaka* and to show how various relationships between city and monastery contributed to the formation of a new social hierarchy. Such an interest was manifested particularly in the urban environment because the lack of overlap between social status and material well-being was most sharply felt in that milieu.

Keywords: Buddhism, Pāli Canon, Vinaya-piṭaka, ancient Indian city, Buddhist monastic community

The emergence and development of urban culture in the valley of the Ganges led to radical changes in the structure of ancient Indian society, in which new social groups were taking shape – groups characterised not merely by new functions but also by a range of special outward signs distinguishing them. At a time when the urban environment was unavoidably experiencing fairly complex stratification, associated first and foremost with craft production and trade, the situation was further complicated by the appearance of religious communities, which had established specific links with the urban population. Small

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This article is a translation of: Александрова Н.В., Русанов М.А. Город и монастырь рассказы о дарении пищи из палийской Винаи «Суттавибханга» и «Махаватга»). *Journal of Ancient History* [*Vestnik drevney istorii*] 81/1 (2021), 62–79. DOI: 10.31857/S032103910013521-6.

groups of students following their itinerant mentors, who preached to them about various paths to salvation, were gradually growing in size and emerging as Śramaṇa movements and communities, which developed a hierarchy all of their own and were creating their own canonical literature. The figure of the Buddhist monk – with his shaven head, clad in his saffron-colored habit (*kāṣāya*) and holding a bowl for donations – became a common sight on the streets of Śrāvastī or Vārāṇasī.

Religious communities of this kind were able to maintain a stable status status, after merely preparing a specific compendium of rules for the everyday life of their members. For Buddhist monks and nuns, the *Vinaya* was one such compendium, which included both rules and also numerous stories providing explanations of the need for various prohibitions and recommendations. In this section of the Buddhist canon extremely detailed clarification of the rules for obtaining and using food was provided. The food eaten by the residents of Buddhist monasteries was naturally also discussed on more than one occasion in general works on Indian Buddhism and also in specialist research¹. In Buddhist teaching, however, the *Vinaya* developed mainly in one of two directions: attempts were made to put together a picture of the monastic community's way of life in ancient India² or to explain the disciplinary prescriptions in the context of Buddhist soteriology, in order to establish the link between doctrine and the way of life of its adherents³. This involved turning to texts on the subject of monastic food by those who sought to establish what the composition of monastic rations should be or to illustrate the rejection of harsh asceticism fundamental to Buddhism within the context of Indian culture, which usually requires fasting (a typical feature of Jain ascetics⁴ in particular).

In this paper we sought to draw attention to another question, which can be raised when we consider the materials from the *Vinaya*, which have the theme of food in common. It is precisely in connection with food that the hugely important interaction between monks and the laymen supporting them comes into play, i.e. the giving and receiving of food⁵. It is true to say that one of the main questions, which were of concern to the authors of the *Vinaya*, was the existence of the community as a social organism bringing together monks and laymen. The subject of food was very revealing in this respect.

Yet it is impossible to understand the role of food in those social relationships, which the Buddhist community shaped, without considering material from the pre-Buddhist tradition. The subject of food constantly attracted the attention of those who created the Vedic canon. In Brahmanical prose, food became an important focus for conceptualisation and in the context of those speculations, which were always being raised by the priestly élite, general

¹ Crosta 2015.

² See, for example, Daswani 2006.

³ See, Holt 2015; Analayo 2017.

⁴ Glasenapp 1999, p. 419; Johnson 1995, pp.196–200; Zheleznova 2018.

⁵ In a monograph devoted to the subject of donations (*dāna*) to the monastic community (Findly 2003), significant material has been assembled on the role of laymen in the “exchange of gifts and merits”. In this article, however, our attention is focused precisely on the subject of offering food as one kind of *dāna* and the mechanisms, which facilitate the functioning of this ritual: the latter are considered through analysis of specially selected texts and shaped through their specific features.

cultural ideas associated with food were reflected as well: otherwise they would have remained without an outlet.

One of the versions of the cosmogonic myth, as presented in the Brāhmaṇas, has a direct link to food. The creator-deity (Prajāpati) identified with hunger and death, creates all that exists with the intention of swallowing it: “He has decided to eat everything he has created. [Since they say]: ‘He shall truly eat (*ad*) everything’ and that is why the name for what is limitless [everything] is *aditi*” (*Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* X.6.5.5)⁶. This cosmogony of hunger equates the whole world with food and he who brought forth this world, Prajāpati (literally – “The Ruler of posterity”) appears in the role of an eater.

Therefore the whole fullness of being can be expressed through the unity of food and eater. He who has achieved *atmana* says of himself: “I am food, I am food, I am food. I am an eater of food, I am an eater of food, I am an eater of food. [...] I am food, I shall eat the eater of food (*aham annam annam adantam ādmi*). I have overcome the whole world” (*Taittirīya-Upaniṣad*, Bṛhgu section, 10.6)⁷. Within the framework of this world outlook, the whole world and its existence are presented as an unending cycle of food. It is important to note that this process includes a social hierarchy, in which internal relations are expressed through a metaphor of eating. An address to Prajāpati includes the following text: “The Brahman is your mouth alone, with this mouth you shall eat kings and with this mouth you shall make me an eater of food. Your mouth alone is king and with this mouth you shall eat the people, with this mouth you shall make me an eater of food” (*Kauṣītaki-Upaniṣad* 2. 9)⁸. In the Vedic era relations between people and ruler were often clarified through images of food and eater⁹. For that reason, while statehood was taking shape, the king, when he was collecting taxes, was presented as a consumer of food and the accumulation of his riches as his satisfaction¹⁰.

Performing the requirements of their religion, which were an expression of the interaction between men and gods, was based on, among other things, the meaning of food. In this context attention was no longer focused on food and the individual partaker of it, but on the meal shared by the host with his guest. The Vedic *yajña* is always compared in Brahminic prose with the ceremonies of hospitality. A donor, after inviting gods into his home, would feed them and then eat the remains of the sacrificial food with the priests who were assisting him. The main purpose of these ritual acts was to establish mutual obligations which brought together the donor-host and the invited gods. The individual with the status of the master of the house, fed not only gods but also ancestors. In this case the rite did not involve shared eating of food, since participation in such a meal would have acquainted the donor with the world of the dead¹¹.

After considering this system of ideas in general, it can be said that there is a single concept on which it is based – a concept which determines the whole structure of relationships – the possession of food. The master of food is a figure possessed of importance and independence both within human society and also within the confines of the whole cosmos complete with gods and ancestors. It is precisely in his capacity as the owner of food that a king exercises

⁶ Romanov 2010, 174.

⁷ Syrkin 1991, 93.

⁸ Syrkin 1991, 54.

⁹ Rau 1957, 94.

¹⁰ Romanov 1978, 31.

¹¹ Romanov 2002, 150–151.

his rule and the master of a household arranges his system of connections, which determine his place within the hierarchy of society and the universe.

The ideas expressed above can provide an explanation for the most important feature of Indian asceticism. Unlike ascetic practices in many other cultures, in India, for an individual to turn his back on the world meant a complete renunciation of obtaining food and possessing it. In other words, the ascetic (the Buddhist or Jain monk, the Hindu *śaṇyāsīn*) could only eat donated food. Since the production of food makes a man its master and, therefore, places him on one or other step of the social ladder, the only way to remove himself from that system is to cease all productive activity. Paradoxically this asceticism ties him who has renounced the world to a lay community (in city or village), since in order to survive he depends on householders able to share food with him. The usual location for a Buddhist monastery would be on the outskirts of a large city or in places through which busy caravan routes passed. Withdrawal from society does not therefore involve spatial distance, but first and foremost renunciation of earnings and, as a result, renunciation of former social status.

Buddhist monks through this process come to form a significant social group of a new type which, on the one hand, is outside society based on the Varna principle and the profession to which an individual belongs, but on the other is inextricably linked to society. This interconnection can be described as an exchange of “gifts” (*dāna*) received by the monks and “merits” (*punya*) received by laymen¹². In this context the most important and the daily gift is food, or charity (*bhikṣā*, from which is derived the word *bhikṣu* or monk, literally “beggar”).

It is not surprising that the theme of receiving food occupies such a prominent place in the Buddhist tradition. In the hagiographic literature, tales of the four main deeds of the Buddha include episodes involving the donation of food: his birth (Brahma brings to the Bodhisattva a “drop of strength”¹³), his enlightenment (the daughter of the village elder brings him rice pudding¹⁴), the first sermon (merchants from Trapaṣa and Bhallika bring the Buddha a honey dish, after which he acquires the strength needed to embark upon his preaching activity¹⁵) and the *parinirvāṇa* (when the blacksmith Cunda arranges the Buddha’s last meal for him¹⁶).

The exclusive importance, which is attributed to food in the Buddhist hagiographic tradition, is also in line with the important role played by the monastic rules of the *Vinaya* relating to receiving food.

In the section entitled “*Suttavibhaṅga*”¹⁷, which includes the *Pāṭimokkha* (Sanskrit *pratimokṣa* – a list of prohibitions obligatory for every monk or nun), the rules concerning food are outlined with a considerable amount of detail. In this most important part of the *Vinaya*, misdeeds are classified according to how serious the transgression is. The transgressions range from serious sins, leading to life-long exclusion from the monastic community, to minor infringements of monastic etiquette, which only involve a reprimand. The prescriptions relating to food are concentrated in the fifth and sixth sections: the *Pācittiya* and *Pāṭidesanīya*, i.e. these do not involve particularly serious breaches of the charter and only require of the offender a public acknowledgement of his guilt for him to achieve expiation.

¹² Findly 2003, 268–272.

¹³ Aleksandrova, Rusanov, Komissarov 2017, 362, 385.

¹⁴ Aleksandrova, Rusanov 2012, 45–51; Aleksandrova 2018, 41–44.

¹⁵ Aleksandrova, Rusanov 2019a; 2019b.

¹⁶ Waldschmidt 1967, 88–119.

¹⁷ Oldenberg 1879.

Another source for material of this kind is the sixth chapter of the *Mahāvagga*¹⁸, entitled *Bhesajjakkhandhako*, the “Chapter on medicines”. Although this chapter is devoted to illness suffered by monks and the medicines they can use, it contains numerous rules and stories concerning food.

According to the *Vinaya* the Buddhist monk must obtain food by collecting alms: during the morning he would leave the confines of his monastery holding a bowl for offerings. This daily activity dictated in many respects the way his life was ordered and it was reflected in the structure of the main canonical genre – the *sūtra* (or *sutta*), in which the Buddha often encounters his interlocutors and those who listen to his sermons, when they are outside their monastery in order to obtain offerings. Apart from specially defined cases connected with calamities or sickness, it was not permitted to store food or prepare it in the monastery¹⁹. What the monks succeeded in collecting, they were supposed to eat by midday, since eating after that time was regarded as a sin (*Pāṭimokkha*, V. 37). The composition of food and drink was also laid down according to rules: there exist various lists classifying permitted types of produce²⁰. These are the most general of stipulations regarding eating for Buddhist monks.

Yet perusal of the relevant texts from the *Pāṭimokkha* reveals that questions of prime concern to its compilers were not those concerning the number or composition of meals or when they took place. The attention of those who compiled the monastic code was focused on the actual situation involved in the acceptance of offerings – the moment of interaction between the monks and the laymen supporting them. The exchange of “gifts” for “merits” had to function smoothly, without interruption: everything which might interrupt it is viewed as a threat, is declared sinful and is forbidden. In a number of cases the link between one or other rule and the general question concerning relations between sections of the community only becomes clear from the stories which are cited in the *Suttavibhaṅga* or the *Mahāvagga* and provide a precedent leading up to the introduction of the prescription in question.

This corpus of texts contains a range of stories, in which the theme of merits linked to the donation of food is clearly to the fore. Naturally all the rules of the *Vinaya* are addressed exclusively to monks, but in this particular case the persons implicitly addressed in the stories are laymen, since it is precisely they who give alms and acquire merit.

The promise of merit is clearly presented in the story of a certain minister (*mahāmatta*), who invited a monastic community to a meal. He was, however, angered by the fact that the monks had already found time to eat early in the morning and were partaking of too few of the dishes which had been prepared for them. Later on, concerned by the fact that he had manifested his dissatisfaction, the minister sets off to the Buddha to ask whether feeding the monks in this way was of benefit to him. The answer given him by Tathāgatta is unambiguous:

When you, my friend, invited the community of monks led by Buddha to be your guests the next day, this was a source of great merit for you. When each of the monks accepted from you a handful of rice, this was a source of great merit for you. You have attained Heaven (*Mahāvagga*, VI. 25. 6).

¹⁸ Oldenberg 1882.

¹⁹ Frauwallner 1956, 94–95. Moreover accounts exist to the effect that in some regions there were stores of food in monasteries: see, for example notes by Fa-xian (5th cent.) about Khotan (Aleksandrova 2008, 116).

²⁰ Daswani 2006, 113–116.

Any story in the *Vinaya* ends with a formulation of a corresponding rule and in this case that rule is the ban on monks accepting food in the house of a layman. Yet the significance of the story is obviously of a wider nature than would have been required to explain the ban of this kind. From the Buddha's reply it follows that merit acquired by a donor does not depend either on the behaviour of the monks, who accepted the offering reluctantly, or even on the behaviour of the donor himself, who had manifested annoyance.

Within the system of values, which is reflected in the *Vinaya*, merit acquired through donation is so desirous that it even leads to a certain kind of rivalry between laymen. In one of the stories included, readers are told how a large group of people accompanied itinerant monks bearing supplies of food.

At the same time people from the locality in question loaded up carts with salt, butter, rice and solid food (*khādaniya*) and followed the community of monks led by the Buddha [having decided]: "When our turn comes, we shall prepare food [for them]." [And there were also] five hundred people who were eating the leftovers (*vighāsāda*). Meanwhile Bhagavan, who was moving from one place to another, came to Andhakavind. Then a certain Brahman, whose turn had not yet come, thought to himself: "Two months have passed, while I have been following the community of monks led by the Buddha and counting on the fact that when my turn came, I should prepare food. Yet my turn has not come. I am here alone and many of my family commitments are not being fulfilled. How will it be, if I peep into the refectory (*bhaddagga*) and supply what is missing there?" (*Mahāvagga* VI. 24. 1–2).

A situation of this kind was seen by the authors of the *Vinaya* as typical, as can be seen from another story, which took place in Kusinārā. Ananda's friend by the name of Roja, expressed the wish to become the only donor, who would personally supply the community with all that was needed. The Buddha rejected that suggestion, saying that many laymen wished to donate food. As a result turns were re-introduced for those who wished to feed the community. Roja, like the Brahman from the previous story, inspected the meal and supplied whichever products were lacking (*Mahāvagga* VI. 36. 5–6).

While the information addressed to the laymen appears fairly simple, namely that supplying monks with food is a valuable opportunity for acquiring guaranteed merit, addressing the members of the monastic community covers a far wider range of ideas associated with receiving food.

First of all those participating in this interaction need to understand clearly that they are all identical beings against the background of the whole varied range of Indian society. The main danger is that the image of those who receive gifts ceases to be clear-cut, since a wide variety of people can lay claim to this charity – other ascetics, beggars, pilgrims and travellers.

Precisely this fact can explain the presence in the *Suttavibhaṅga*, of the prescription to the effect that a monk may receive food at the place where food is distributed only on one occasion (*eko āvasathapindo bhuñjītabbo*). Pious Buddhist laymen arranged roadside shelters (*āvasatha*), where all travellers might receive food and water. In the *Vinaya* a story is told of how a group of six monks used to visit such a place every day and receive food there. Their behaviour became the subject of public censure and it became the direct pretext for the introduction of the following prohibition:

The people grew indignant, were filled with rage and anger: "How can those *śramans*, sons of Shakyas, linger [here] all the time, and eat offerings in the shelter?! The offerings in the shelter are not meant [only] for them, the offerings in the shelter are meant for everyone" (*Suttavibhaṅga*, Pācittiya XXXI).

On learning of this story, the Buddha called upon the guilty men and announced a new rule limiting the right to visit such a place to a single occasion.

The six monks, who had been constantly receiving food destined for any travellers, first refused to collect the offerings, which the laymen specially provided for Buddhist monks and then behaved like ordinary beggars, abandoning their monastic appearance when receiving offerings.

One other story tells of a monk who settled in a place where corpses were cremated:

At that time a certain monk, dressed in nothing but rags, lived at a cremation site. He did not want to accept what people donated. He himself took offerings which had been intended for ancestors [left] in the cremation ground, under a tree and on the threshold and ate them himself. The people grew indignant, were filled with rage and anger: “How can that monk take our offerings to our ancestors and eat them? That respected monk is stout, he probably eats human flesh!” (*Suttavibhaṅga*, Pācittiya XL)

On hearing that, the Buddha reproached the monk and issued a ban on “food” which was “not donated” (*adinna*).

In this instance the monk demonstrates his asceticism and there are plenty of examples of this in the Indian tradition. He lives at a *śmaśāna* – a place regarded as the most impure of all – wearing discarded cloth (*pamsukūla*), which had probably been used to wrap corpses in, and feeding on offerings to ancestors previously scattered on the ground. This degree of self-abasement might seem to command respect, but laymen do not approve of such behaviour and even suspect the monk of eating corpses. The Buddha, as usual, associates himself with the condemnation from the onlookers and formulates an additional rule. Taking “what has not been donated” is usually associated with thieving in Buddhist texts, but in this particular case the term is used in a wider sense. It is no coincidence that at the very beginning of the story it is emphasised that the monk had not wished to accept charity. By so doing he had disrupted the basic relationships between the two sections of the community and rejected the social function incumbent upon the Buddhist monk.

While the rules outlined above are aimed at preventing the Buddhist monk from resembling other ascetics, in the *Vinaya* it is also possible to find prescriptions aimed at preventing him from resembling a “householder”, i.e. a man who possesses property – first and foremost food.

In this connection it is interesting to turn attention to a story about the censure, to which the highly respected monk Belaṭṭhāsisa was subjected.

At that time the Buddha Bhagavan was staying in Sāvatti, in Jetavana, in the monastery of Anāthapiṇḍika. The mentor of the respected Ananda, the respected Belaṭṭhāsisa was living in the forest. He would set out to collect offerings and bring back boiled rice to the monastery: after it had dried he would store it. When he needed food, he would soak [rice] in water and eat it. This meant that he could go for a long time without setting forth to the settlement to collect new offerings. The monks asked respected Belaṭṭhāsisa: “Why do you, our friend, venture into the settlement for charitable offerings only after a long period?” Then the respected Belaṭṭhāsisa told them what he was doing. “Does this mean, our friend, that you eat stored food (*sannidhikāraṇaṃ bhōjanam*)?” [they asked]. “Precisely that, my friend.” The monks, who made do with little, who were satisfied, modest, well-behaved and who loved to study, grew indignant and were filled with rage and anger, exclaiming: “How can that be, how can the respected Belaṭṭhāsisa eat stored food!” (*Suttavibhaṅga*, Pācittiya XXXVIII)

On this occasion the laymen are not mentioned in the story. The conduct of Belaṭṭhāsisa made the virtuous monks indignant. It was precisely they who informed Bhagavan about what had happened, the very man who had formulated the rule prohibiting the eating of stored food.

The reason which had led Belaṭṭhāsisa to store food is made quite clear in the story: he was living not in a monastery but in a forest and therefore he had been living the life of a hermit. This practice had always existed in the monastic world and it was regarded as perfectly permissible. At the same time the indignation of the monks in the text is not in any way justified. Belaṭṭhāsisa was living on offerings of food, as prescribed: he had not taken anything which had not been offered as charity. Between visits to the settlement however, he found himself in the position of a self-sufficient owner of food and, in the eyes of the other monks, that appeared as such a blatant transgression that the compilers of the *Vinaya* did not even regard it as necessary for them to outline the reason for their disapproval. The point was evidently not that Ananda's mentor was failing to go forth to collect offerings at regular intervals, but that he was from time to time self-sufficient, when he had adequate supplies. When he soaked dried rice, he resembled a householder engaged in the preparation of food.

The danger of identifying a monk possessed of stored food with a householder preparing food comes even more clearly to the fore in another story in the *Suttavibhaṅga*.

On one occasion Ananda informed the Buddha that too much food had been brought into the monastery. Bhagavan issued instructions for the excess food to be given to those "who eat leftovers" (the *viḥāsāda*). Preparations were made for a distribution of food and during the distribution Ananda, by chance, gave more flatbreads to one of the female ascetics than to the others, which gave rise to gossip. For our theme another episode, however, is more significant – one connected with the proponents of Ājīvika, a Śramaṇa teaching advocating extreme asceticism and opposed to Buddhism.

An Ājīvika appeared when food was being given out. One of the monks, after mixing rice with a large quantity of clarified butter, gave the Ājīvika a generous portion. After the Ājīvika had taken the offering, he departed. Another Ājīvika asked the first one: "My friend, where were you given this offering?" – "My friend, when food was given out by the Śramaṇa Gautama, the householder with a shaven head." This conversation between the Ājīvika was overheard by Buddhist laymen (*upāsaka*). These laymen came to Bhagavan and, when they arrived, they greeted Bhagavan and sat down to one side. After sitting down, the laymen said to Bhagavan: "These followers of a different faith seek to discredit the Buddha, they seek to discredit the *dharma*, to discredit the community. It would be right, Master, if the noble ones did not bestow offerings on followers of a different faith with their own hands." (*Suttavibhaṅga*, Pācittiya XLI).

After listening to their advice, the Buddha introduced a ban on distributing charitable offerings to "naked ascetics" (*acelaka*) and other ascetics – men (*paribbājaka*) and women (*paribbājikā*).

In this legend, what became the immediate pretext for the ban were the words uttered by the enemies of the Buddhist *dharma*. The Ājīvika calls the Buddha the "householder with a shaven head" (*mundagahapatika*): in other words, from the point of view of a strict ascetic he accuses Buddhists of behaving like laymen, distinct from the latter only by their shaven heads. This defamation reaches the ears of the Buddhist laymen, who fear lest such utterances might discredit their community. The ban introduced by the Buddha, contains a significant reservation: it is wrong for monks to give offerings to ascetics "with their own hands" (*sahatthā*). In the commentary it is made clear that it is permitted to pass food to an ascetic with the help

of another person or simply to lay it down on the ground. It is evident that in such cases the passing of food will not legally be regarded as an offering and, therefore, a monk will not be performing the role of a householder.

It would be difficult to overlook the fact that what underlies all these stories is not so much concern regarding the moral striving towards perfection by the monk as the worry about how the monastic community might look in the eyes of laymen. For this reason, even monks who abide by strict rules may be subject to censure. Indeed, in most stories in the *Suttavibhaṅga* concerning food, the theme of “image” comes to the fore, serving one way or another as a warning to avoid careless actions, which could prove harmful.

In a number of cases attention is focused not on actions which might directly undermine the interests of laymen, but those which give rise to an unfavourable impression of monks. In one such episode the main “dissenter” against the Buddhist tradition is Devadatta.

At that time Devadatta, after losing property and respect, used to eat with his followers in many houses, each time making his preferences known. People grew indignant and were filled with rage and anger: “How can monks, sons of Shakyas, eat in many houses, each time making [their preferences] known?! Who does not enjoy well prepared food? Who does not relish what is tasty?” The monks heard these people who had grown indignant and were filled with rage and anger (*Suttavibhaṅga*, Pācittiya XXXII).

This story, related in order to explain the introduction of the ban on “group food” (*ganabhojana*) which, however, is permitted “at the correct time” (during illness, the distribution of monks’ garments, when travelling, sailing in ships, or when food is in short supply and also when an invitation is extended by a fellow ascetic). It is obvious that the nature of the ban does not fit the cited story, in which the indignation of the laymen and later that of the monks, who had overheard their conversations, resulted from the fact that Devadatta and his companions told (the verb *viññāpeti* means “to inform”) their donors of their preferences and not at all from the fact that the suppliants had arrived in a group. If we focus attention on the story itself, then the rhetorical questions addressed to the monks led by Devadatta imply an accusation against them of having striven after pleasures, as might ordinary people. They want to receive tasty food and do not wish to forgo the opportunity to do so. These monks undermine the image of the ascetic, who has to earn respect from laymen.

Another story gives an example of relations within the monastic community, which became the pretext for harsh criticism voiced by a layman:

At that time a nun, who had gone to find food in Sāvatti, saw a monk on her way home and said to him: “Noble One, take this offering”. He [said]: “So be it, sister” and he took everything she had. When the time came [to eat], she could not set off [again] to find food and she was still hungry. The second day [...] and also on the third day [...] and then on the fourth day, this nun walked on, weak with hunger. A merchant-householder was travelling towards her in his chariot and he said to the nun: “Move out of the way, noble sister!” She moved to the side and straightway fell to the ground. The merchant-householder apologised to the nun: “Forgive me, Noble One, that you fell because of me”. “Householder, I did not fall because of you, I simply have no strength”. “But why do you have no strength, noble sister?” Then the nun told the merchant what the matter was. After that the merchant took the nun home and began to grow indignant and be filled with rage and anger: “How could the respected ones take food from the hands of a woman?! After all, it is difficult for women to receive [what they need]”. The monks heard how the merchant grew indignant and was filled with rage and anger” (*Suttavibhaṅga*, Pāṭidesanīya I).

The Buddha, when he was informed of what had taken place, introduced an appropriate ban: a monk must not accept food from a nun, unless she is a relative of his.

The crucial moment in this dramatic story is not the selfish behaviour of the monk and not the meek self-sacrifice of the nun, but the indignation expressed by the merchant. It is typical that he should use the word “respected one” (*bhadantā*) in the plural, extending as it were his censure to the whole monastic community.

While in the last two cases laymen have appeared as observers of monks’ actions, in a number of other stories they personally are offended by actions of the latter. Sometimes there is mention of an offence committed against a donor. This was the case in relation to a certain “poor workman” (*daliddo kammakāro*).

At that time in Vesāli a series of excellent dishes [for monks] appeared. Then a poor workman thought to himself: “It would not be a bad thing if these people were to eat properly. I shall prepare food as well.” The poor workman then made his way to Kirapatika²¹. When he arrived he said to that same Kirapatika: “O, Noble One, I wish to prepare food for a community of monks led by the Buddha. Give me money for this.” Kirapatika was a man of faith and virtue and he gave the poor workman a sum larger than usual. Then the poor workman went to Bhagavan and when he arrived, he greeted Bhagavan and sat down to one side. After sitting down to one side, the poor workman said to Bhagavan: “Revered One, let Bhagavan agree to eat tomorrow at my house together with the community of monks.” “My friend, the community of monks is large – do not forget [this].” “Revered One, let the community of monks be a large one. I have prepared many jujube fruits. Drinks mixed with jujube fruit will be in abundance.” Bhagavan expressed his agreement through silence. Then the poor workman, on understanding that Bhagavan had agreed, rose from his seat, took his leave from Bhagavan, walked round the circle and went on his way. The monks heard that the poor workman had invited the community of monks, led by the Buddha, to come the next day and that there would be plentiful drinks mixed with jujube fruit. They went to collect offerings of food in good time and ate their meal. The people heard that the poor workman had invited the community of monks led by the Buddha and they brought the poor workman much hard and soft food. They informed Bhagavan about the time: “It is time, Revered One, the food has been prepared.” Then Bhagavan dressed at the beginning of the day, took his bowl and robe (*cīvara*) and made his way to the dwelling of the poor workman. On his arrival he sat down at the place indicated to him, surrounded by the community of monks. Then the poor workman began to serve the finest food to the monks. The monks, however, said: “Our friend, give us less food. Our friend, give us less food.” “Dear guests, do not think to yourselves that here is a poor workman, we shall take only a little. I have prepared much hard and soft food. Take however much you need, dear guests.” “Dear friend, we are not taking only a little for that reason. We assembled together early to go and collect offerings of food and have eaten. That is why we are only taking a little.” Then the poor workman grew indignant and was filled with rage and anger: “How could that be, that the persons invited by me should eat in another place?! Surely I should be able to give them what they need?!” [The people] heard how that poor workman grew indignant and was filled with rage and anger (*Suttavibhaṅga*, Pācittiya XXXIII).

After that incident the Buddha forbade his followers to eat several times in close succession (*paramparabhojana*).

In this story it is constantly emphasised that the layman, who expressed the wish to feed the community, was poor (*dalidda*), i.e. did not fully fit the role of donor. The Buddha himself warns him about ill-considered promises. It turned out, however, that as soon as that righteous man declared publicly his pious intention, other laymen came to assist him: the layman in charge paid more than was due and the neighbours supplied good food for the monks’ meal. The mere wish of the potential donor proved sufficient for the manifestation

²¹ Buddhaghosha believes that this must be a person by the name of Kira, who was known as *patika* or “Noble one” on account of his high position and influence (Malalasekera 12960, I, 606)

of generosity, which had made possible the earning of significant merit. Yet those who received the gift of food reduced to nothing the efforts of the “poor workman”, since they had rendered his gift superfluous. In this way there had been a breach of the correct interaction of two sections of the community, which guarantees its viability. The ban formulated by the Buddha was expressed in one interpretation of *paramparabhajana*, literally “eating in sequence”, but implicit in the story is a wider meaning: it is more than a simple condemnation of receiving food in several places in succession. After acquainting himself with the story, the reader is bound to conclude that any individual can be a donor for the whole community, regardless of his social status (here – a hired labourer, hired by the day) or material prosperity. In this situation a crucial aspect of Buddhist teaching is touched upon: it is precisely the fulfilment of *dharma*, which is important for assessing a particular individual, not his place on the social ladder, and for this reason the status of a donor ensures a higher position in the hierarchy than the status of the individual determined by his birth.

Another significant factor is the behaviour of the other party – those who accept the gift. It should not be forgotten that the offering made by a Buddhist donor is not to a deity (as it would be in Hinduism) but directly to the monastic community. For this reason the community can, through its behaviour, reduce to nothing all the worthy efforts of the donor.

A situation of this kind is also elaborated in another episode from the *Suttavibhaṅga*:

At that time a certain Brahmin invited monks to his house and fed them. The monks, after they had received sufficient food, went to houses of their relatives: some began to eat and others, after accepting offerings, went their separate ways. Then the Brahmin spoke thus to his neighbours: “O, Noble Ones, I have fed the monks. Come to me and I shall feed you as well.” The neighbours said: “How should that be, noble one, that you should feed us. Those whom you invited came afterwards to our houses: some began to eat, while others – after accepting offerings – went on their way.” Then the first Brahmin grew indignant and was filled with rage and anger: “How could that be noble neighbours, that after eating in my house, they then ate again in another place?! Surely I am able to give them what they need?!” The monks heard that this Brahmin was growing indignant and was filled with rage and anger (*Suttavibhaṅga*, Pācittiya XXXV).

This story provides the reason for the introduction of the rule, according to which he who has received sufficient food in one place, cannot accept food over again.

Despite a certain similarity between the shared transgression of the monks and the fault of their brothers in the previous story, attention should also be focused on a number of differences between the two situations. While the first case was concerned with a “poor workman”, the second is the story of a man with a high position in society (a Brahmin), who is clearly quite prosperous. The behaviour of the monks is also presented with different motivation in the two cases: while in the house of the day-labourer the monks were afraid they would not receive enough food and for that reason had eaten previously, there was no such risk when the monks were invited to the house of the Brahmin, since – as the compilers of the *Vinaya* underline – when the monks left his house there remained enough food for him to be able to feed his neighbours as well. Why did the monks not make do with what the Brahmin had offered them? Evidently what indicates the reason is the comment to the effect that they set out to “houses of their relatives”. For many members of the monastic community, the visit to relatives and receiving charity from them was a daily practice and, clearly, they did not wish to forego it. As a result, the Brahmin, who had performed a pious act, was subjected to criticism from his neighbours and accordingly his donor status had suffered.

In the *Suttavibhaṅga* there is also a story recounting the incorrect behaviour of a monk in the house of a layman. In this instance the monk does not cast any doubts on the merits of the donor, but makes him feel uncomfortable, thus giving rise to his irritation:

At that time a respected Upananda, a son of Shakyas, came to the house of his friend and sat down in the bedroom together with his friend's wife. The friend then came up to the respected Upananda, a son of Shakyas, and then greeted the respected Upananda, a son of Shakyas, and sat down at the side of the room. While sitting at the side of the room, the friend said to his wife: "Give our noble friend charity". The woman gave charity to the respected Upananda, a son of Shakyas. Then his friend said to the respected Upananda, a son of Shakyas: "May you now go on your way, noble friend, since charitable alms have been donated to our noble guest." Then the woman, after thinking to herself: ... "This man is irritated", said to respected Upananda, a son of Shakyas: Please noble guest, stay seated, do not go away." Then for a second time and for a third time the friend said to the respected Upananda, a son of Shakyas: "May you now go on your way, noble friend, since charitable alms have been donated to our noble guest." Then for a third time the woman said to the respected Upananda, son of Shakyas: "Please noble guest, stay seated, do not go away." Then his friend grew indignant and was filled with rage and anger. He said: "This noble Upananda is sitting in the bedroom with my wife. Despite my demands, he does not want to leave, but I have many things to do." (*Suttavibhaṅga*, Pācittiya XLIII).

This story provides the basis for the prohibition banning monks from sitting in a house, where there is food, after they have made their way into inner chambers. This story is followed by a further two, which are also devoted to Upananda (*Suttavibhaṅga*, Pācittiya XLIV, XLV) sitting in a house together with the wife of its owner, but in those two stories there is no mention of food or charity.

These three stories are part of a long series about Upananda, which are scattered through different parts of the *Vinaya* and which are to be found in certain *jātaka* tales. In an attempt to generalize the material connected with Upananda, it is possible to single out as his defining characteristic, the urge to use his monastic status in order to gain material advantage. He is greedy, inclined to deceive others and often provokes disputes. His actions are constantly being criticised by the Buddha and providing the basis for the elaboration of new prohibitions aimed at limiting opportunities for monks to accumulate personal property²².

In this instance the subject under consideration is incorrect behaviour of monks while offerings are being received. Attention should be focused on a number of details, which have evidently been introduced into the narrative for a specific reason. Upananda is in the house of a "friend" (*sahāyaka*). As a result he is maintaining contacts which had been made at some time in the period of his life as a layman. His status is therefore unclear: he is in the house of a layman in his capacity as a monk who has come to receive charity, or as a guest who has come to visit a friend, which would have placed him at an advantage over an ordinary member of the community. The place where Upananda sits is defined in precise terms: he is in the "bedroom" (*sayanighara*). It is important to bear in mind, that the bedroom is an inner space within the house, which is completely closed to outsiders. The status of friend and guest does not in any way imply admission into such a room: restrictions of that kind would apply to anyone apart from an ascetic, given that the latter stands outside relations of a lay kind.

After Upananda has received the charitable offering, there is a disagreement between husband and wife: they turn to the monk with two opposite wishes. The husband asks

²² Malalasekera 1960, I, 393–396.

Upananda to leave and the wife asks him to stay. This behaviour by a woman is motivated by her thought: *pariyuṭṭhito ayam puriso*. The participle *pariyuṭṭhito* means “gripped by something” or “possessed by something”: as a rule the emotions involved are negative ones, such as *kāmarāgaparyuṭṭhita*, “gripped by passion and desire”. Yet, as noted by F. Edgerton, the Sanskrit form of this participle (*paryavasthita*) is, in most cases, combined with the word *krodha* meaning anger and in a number of cases it can be used on its own, implying “gripped [by anger]”²³. The wife of the householder, as viewed by the compilers of the text, evidently considers the behaviour of her husband as unjust and the result of his irritation.

The fact that Upananda complies with the wish of the wife and not that of the husband, leads to conflict, the results of which can have a negative influence on the life of the community, if a householder of this kind starts to regard visits by monks as an encumbrance. Upananda should have confined his role to that of a recipient of offerings.

The extent to which the compilers of the *Vinaya* tried to encourage caution with regard to questions concerning the image of the monastic community is made clear in the story about the military leader of the Licchavī, Sīha. For many years Sīha had protected the community of the Nigaṇṭha (Jains) but after his meeting with the Buddha he changed his ideas and asked the Bhagavan to accept him as a student. Although the Buddha admits Sīha into the community, he asks him to continue to supply the Nigaṇṭha with food (*Mahāvagga*, VI. 31. 1–11). This is unlikely to be a question of showing concern in relation to the followers of a different teaching, but rather the expression of an unwillingness to stir up conflict by tempting over to their side valuable donors, which might have undermined the authority of the Buddhist community.

In the *Suttavibhaṅga*, there are also story-lines concerning monks who deliberately cause loss to laymen. A striking example of this is provided by the story of the laywoman (*upāsikā*) referred to via her daughter’s name as “mother of Kāṇā” (*kāṇamātā*). This story is to be found not only in the *Vinaya* (*Suttavibhaṅga*, Pācittiya XXXIV), but also in the collection of Pāli *jātaka* tales²⁴. In both versions the narrative opens with Kāṇā, who had been given away in marriage to a husband in another village, coming to visit her mother. A short time later her husband demanded that Kāṇā should return home. Her mother felt awkward about sending her daughter back empty-handed. She was baking a certain cake (*pūva*), when a passing monk asked her for a food offering and she gave him the cake. The monk told her about another monk, who also appeared in that house and also received a cake. Then a third monk came by, followed by another and so, every time the mother baked a cake, it would be carried off by yet another monk. In the meantime Kāṇā’s husband was sending messengers and insisting on Kāṇā’s return: eventually he threatened that he would take another wife into his house. Indeed, that is what happened. When he learnt that Kāṇā was crying all the time, Bhagavan came to her mother, listened to her account of what had happened and comforted the laywoman with a sermon on *dharma*.

Immediately after that story there follows another, which depicts a similar situation:

At that very time a certain caravan was preparing to set off south from Rājagriha. One monk, who was collecting alms, came to that caravan in search of charity and a layman (*upāsaka*) gave that

²³ Edgerton 1998, 334.

²⁴ The *jātaka* about the mother of Kana is available in a Russian translation entitled “The *jātaka* about the Tom-cat” (Zakharin 1979, 309–312).

monk barley pudding (*sattu*). On his way out, the monk told another, who was also given barley pudding. Each time the layman had prepared this dish for his travels, it disappeared. Then the layman said to the people from the caravan: “Noble friends, please wait till tomorrow. Each time I prepare provisions for myself, they have to be given to the noble (monks). I shall be preparing [further] provisions.” “Noble friend, we cannot wait, the caravan has [already] departed.” After saying that the men [of the caravan] departed. The very same layman, who had been preparing provisions and set off later, was robbed by thieves. People began to grow indignant and were filled with rage and anger: “How can that be that shramans, sons of Shakyas, accept [charity] knowing no moderation?! This [man], after giving them offerings, set off later and was robbed by thieves.” (*Suttavibhanga*, *Pācittiya* XXXIV).

In the light of these two stories a rule was later established, which forbade monks to accept in the house of laymen more than two or three bowls of pies and food made of barley flour (*mantha*) and even those few bowls had to be taken to the monastery and the contents shared out with their fellow monks.

The characters in both these stories were referred to directly as Buddhist laymen (*upāsikā* and *upāsaka*). It is clear that these people cannot refuse a monk who has come to seek charity. What also unites these donors is that the importunate behaviour of members of the monastic community can lead to serious misfortunes: a woman loses her husband or a merchant his property. It is in cases such as those that social condemnation of the “shramans, sons of Shakyas” is at its most severe.

In some tales of suffering borne by laymen after their feeding of monks, the misery can assume an extreme form. A pious woman from Benares by the name of Suppyā, for instance, on hearing a request from an ill monk for meat broth, failed to find meat and cut off a piece of flesh from her own thigh. On hearing what had come to pass, the Buddha healed Suppyā and severely criticised the monk, who had asked no questions about the origin of the gift of food he had received. As a result a prohibition was issued to the effect that human flesh could not be used in food and it was also ruled that questions had to be asked on every occasion as to how meat had been obtained (*Mahāvagga*, VI. 23. 1–9).

We have considered fragments from the “*Suttavibhanga*” and the “*Mahāvagga*” and now we are able to make some general observations. What the attention of those, who compiled the *Vinaya* and elaborated the question of monks’ food, is focused on is not the inner life of the monastic community but its interaction with the surrounding world. All the prescriptions, which may seem far from consistent, become clear and acquire a general significance, if we focus on the main question in them and the stories shedding further light on that question — namely how the image of the Buddhist monk takes shape in the eyes of laymen, their potential donors. The formation of the pleasant image of the monastic community and the preservation of that image are based on principles expressed in the *Vinaya*, which can be laid out systematically as follows below.

A monk must live supported by charity and must not reject it. At the same time he needs to uphold his own identity: he must not allow himself to be associated with other ascetics and ordinary beggars. It is also unacceptable for him to resemble a householder capable of making donations. He needs to go out of his way to avoid situations in which he might insult or cause harm to his donor, i.e. everything which might make laymen avoid association with monks.

These principles make it clear that the task is not to persuade householders to support monasteries (that is the function of a sermon) but to retain them as donors. Keeping the latter interested in their role is bound up with the idea of “merits” (*punya*), a key feature of which

was their dependence on a person's own actions and not on the social groups to which he belonged – something which is determined by his birth. At the same time it is important that his merits are related not only to the prospects for his next re-birth²⁵. They made it possible for him to acquire authority within society during this life as well. Relations within the monastic community were laying the foundations for a new social hierarchy, which was taking shape above the traditional one. It was the urban population which first and foremost stood to gain from this, since it was precisely within its ranks that the problem arose concerning the mismatch between status and material prosperity.

In the texts of the Buddhist canon we encounter many individuals, whose position within traditional Indian society was often quite lowly: this would apply to successful traders, craftsmen, doctors or even courtesans. The merchant Anāthapiṇḍika, the merchant Cunda, the doctor Jīvaka and the courtesan Ambapālī, thanks to their generosity towards the monastic community, became symbolic figures in the city's Buddhist circles, the embodiment of the greatest merits.

Furthermore, in cases when a potential donor – for example a hired workman – does not enjoy high social status or prosperity, but expresses the desire to help the community, he will without fail receive support from those around him. This shows that sometimes intentions alone are enough to enhance status among Buddhist laymen.

Rivalry between donors, which is portrayed in a number of episodes in the *Vinaya*, testifies to the fact that the monastic community – in its capacity as a new social structure – not only interacted with laymen but also created new relationships within the city's population. Opportunities emerged for certain adjustments to the hierarchical structure of society, which were in step with what were, by this time, urgent needs for change. In this respect, the existence of monasteries was one of the ways in which questions of social stratification might be resolved. While the patronage of the ruling dynasties could provide major investment necessary for building monasteries, the everyday life of the Buddhist monastic community was bound up mainly with the presence of donors within urban circles.

The sources for our information regarding these everyday relationships are rather limited. It is difficult to form opinions of these relationships with reference to epigraphic or archaeological data. Even written accounts by pilgrims, consisting of descriptions of holy places and paraphrases of legends, hardly contain any such information. The only source in which a large variety of situations drawn from everyday life can be found is the Buddhist *Vinaya*. Yet a literal reading of this enormous work with its many variants does not provide an authentic historical picture. It would be wrong to assert that all the rules and regulations laid out in it were duly observed or that the stories included were all drawn from real life. The *Vinaya* provides extremely valuable material for any study of the history of Buddhism in the context of urban culture in ancient India, but only on condition that we focus our attention not on the direct assertions to be found in the text, but on the intentions which inspired its creators. An attempt to single out these practical implications in the rules from the *Vinaya* concerned with the subject of food and the narratives accompanying those rules has been undertaken in this article.

²⁵ Epigraphic material also testifies to the “passing on of merits” to other individuals – see: Schopen 1997, 30–42.

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