CHAPTER IV

THE EARLY BUDDHIST SAÑGHĀ AND ITS SOCIAL BACKGROUND

90. We have already referred to the close interrelationship that obtained between the early Buddhist Saṅgha and the society of the times (v. supra, 21-24). Before we proceed to an analysis and an evaluation of the data regarding sex in the Vinaya-pitaka, a few sociological observations on the nature and social background of the early Buddhist Saṅgha to which the Vinaya refers seem necessary as that would enable a better appreciation of the data we possess.

91. The early Buddhist monastic community broadly falls into two categories: firstly, there were those who renounced the world impelled by lofty motives. As stated, for instance, in the Nalakapānasutta (M.I.462 f.),1 they sought pabbajjā “through faith” — saddhāpabbajītā — on their own conviction that the brahmacariya under the Buddha was the surest guarantee to release from dukkha (empirical sorrow),2 and took delight in the brahmacariya: abhiratā brahmacariye (cf. M. I.463). Their life was one of contentment and happiness, and they lived with a sense of modesty and scrupulousness and with a desire for training; cf. Appicchā santuṭṭhā lajjino kukkuccakā sikkhākāmā (Vin. I, 44 passim). They are often referred to as “the noble disciples who have put forth exertion” — ariyā ārabdhavīriyā (M.I.19 passim) — and receive recognition as “the virtuous and the good”: silavanto kalyāṇadharmā (Vin.I, 73 passim). And, as the Kandarakasutta (M.I.399) shows, the Buddha was proud of the attainments of many of his disciples.3 As the Kakacupamasutta (M.I.124) implies, very many early disciples belonged to this category, and were amenable to the words of the Buddha: “My heart, O Bhikkhus,” says the Buddha, “was gladdened by the

1: Also cf. M.I.196.
2: loc.cit. Also A.I.147 f.