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**A Comparative Study of the Bhikkhuṇī
Vinaya of the Theravāda
and
the Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya of the Mahāsaṅghika**

by

VEN. HUANG CHIUNG HUI

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of philosophy
of
the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka**

December 2003

Abstract

This study constitutes a comparative analysis of the Bhikkhunī Vinaya of Theravāda and Mahāsaṅghika schools of Buddhism with a detailed account of their historical background.

The first chapter deals with the early history of the Order of nuns mainly with reference to the Pali Canon and with relevant data found in the authoritative secondary sources both in English and Chinese. Attention was drawn to the pre-Buddhist women's position as recorded in Vedic literature and it was further clarified with reference to the Buddhist literature in order to explain their position at the time of the Buddha. The origin of the Order of nuns was explained taking both Theravāda and Mahāyāna sources into consideration. It is important that we have given a considerable attention to the contradictory statements found in those sources about the origin of the Order of nuns.

There are many divergent opinions among scholars about the schism of the order. We have utilized almost all the important primary sources in Pāli, Sanskrit and Chinese with the intention of giving a more reliable account of the schism of the order of Buddhist Saṅgha. The subject-matter of the second chapter fully deals with a comparative and an analytical study of those accounts. The main objective of this chapter was to clarify the historical background of the origin of the Theravāda and Mahāsaṅghika schools which are of our main concern.

As this is a study related to Vinaya rules, the third chapter was dedicated to explain the structure, nature and objectives of disciplinary rules taking the sources belonging to both the schools into consideration. Here, the classification, sub-divisions, common nature and aims of the Vinaya rules have been clarified in detail. In all cases we have tried our best to provide a comparative outlook regarding the classification, nature and objectives of Vinaya rules.

The chapter four which deals with the main aspect of our research compare and

contrast almost all the Vinaya rules mentioned in the Suttavibhaṅga of the Theravādins and the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya of the Mahāsaṅghikas. Though it seems unnecessary, we have quoted a large number of Vinaya rules mainly due to the fact that a comparison cannot be done in the absence of the rules themselves as they do not include coherent doctrinal aspects but various facts mutually unrelated. However, we have been able to give a common view to the rules by supplying several tables revealing their distribution to particular aspects. And this comparison reveals some important facts, hitherto not made known to the field, in connection with the ethical and philosophical basis of the Vinaya rules of both the schools. This can be considered as the contribution made by this research to the field of study.

It is a wrong conception that many scholars consider virtue or sīla (Vinaya) as relating only to the external behaviour or the organizational aspect of individuals or society. According to our observations with regard to philosophical and ethical basis of the two versions of Vinaya, the disciplinary precepts are more akin to the gradual progress of the mental and cognitive aspects of the Buddhist path than to the external behaviour or the organizational aspect of society. The fifth chapter clarifies this important fact mainly taking the relevant analysis given in Visuddhimagga into consideration.

Chapter six termed as conclusion provides a very short insight into the findings so far discussed in the foregoing chapters coupled with a summary of their content. It is a common view of the Buddhist scholars that the Vinaya rules have not been changed so much in Theravāda and Mahāyāna though the doctrinal developments can be found in them. Our conclusion goes against this common view by revealing that though the external structure of the Vinaya rules seems identical their basis and emphasis are changed in accordance with respective views and beliefs of the two traditions.