



ISSN 1076-9005
Volume 3 1996: 179-181
Publication date: 20 July 1996

Sexuality in Ancient India: A Study Based on the Pali Vinayapiṭaka. L.P.N. Perera, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka: The Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, 1993.

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This book is a comprehensive look at ancient Indian ideas about sexuality that L.P.N. Perera argues framed the *Vinaya*, the monastic code of Buddhist monks and nuns. Perera's command of the sources is praiseworthy; he amply draws upon data from Hindu art, architecture, and ancient texts to argue that early Buddhist monk-editors of the *Vinaya* responded to sexual impulses differently than the Hindus around them. Stressing that monastic Buddhists coped with their sexual urges by developing their minds—by suppressing, rather than repressing, their natural instincts—Perera focuses upon the psychological aspects of *sīla*, or the moral and ethical precepts of Buddhist clergy and laity alike. Indeed, Perera relies heavily on Freud and other giants of psychology in his exploration of ancient Buddhist attitudes about sexuality.

Thus, it is not surprising to find that Perera has Freudian ideas about what in sex is “normal” and what is not. For Perera, “only penial-vaginal human intercourse” (footnote, p. 90) is normal; everything else is “abnormal” and he documents it all in his chapters on “Hetero-and Homosexual Deviations & Intersexuality,” and “Further Deviations.” Moreover, Perera devotes many pages to demonstrating that “deviational sexuality,” i.e., anything other than heterosexual behaviour confined to the penis and vagina, was “clearly pre-Buddhistic” (p. 119). In other words, Perera argues that the deviant sexual behaviour to which the *Vinaya* alludes reflects the Hindu, rather than the Buddhist culture, of ancient India. Yet, he argues also that Hindu culture itself had been corrupted by the “loves and lusts of the West Asian neighbours” of Indian territory (p. 133; and also p. 154, where he traces pederasty to the Semites), suggesting strongly that Hindu culture's penchant for “deviant” sexuality was due to the corrupting influences of India's Semitic and Arabic neighbours.

In addition, the sexual practices referred to in the *Vinaya* that Perera finds unsavory were also due to “the baneful effects of city-life” (p. 130), or the movement away from villages toward rising urban centers that the Pali canon seems to reflect. In short, Perera argues that the downfall of Indian morality and ethics that helped to shape the *Vinaya* is the result of foreigners, on the one hand, and urban peoples, on the other, including the peoples of South India, over-sexed due to the hot climate of their area (p. 154).

Notwithstanding Perera's moralizing about what is healthy sexuality and what is not, and despite his outdated ideas about the relative significance of sex to rural people as compared to their urban counterparts (p. 78 and pp. 127-129), and his racial ideas, Perera has collected some very interesting data on early Buddhist ideas about fellatio, fertility, homosexuality, abortion, pederasty, eunuchism and countless other topics. Moreover, he

cross-references the *Mahābhārata* and the *Kāma Sūtra* among other texts in his elucidation of the sexual themes of the *Vinaya*, thereby affording us an extremely interesting insight into the culture which gave rise to the Buddhist monastic code.

Because of its broad scope and the thorough research it contains, I can see Perera's book being used in a class on Buddhist civilization, or religious ethics, especially if the instructor explains its shortcomings in advance!