The Erotics of Practice: Objects and Agency in Buddhist *Avadāna* Literature

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The collection of Indian Buddhist narratives known as the *Divyāvadāna* posits that there is a class of objects whose sight leads to the arising of *prasāda* in the viewer and that this mental state of *prasāda* leads the viewer to make an offering. In this article, I first describe the mechanics of *prasāda*—why it arises, in whom it arises, and the consequences of it arousal—as well as the various "agents of *prasāda*" (*prāsādika*) and the power they exert when seen. In discussing the field of effects of *prāsādika* objects, I consider Catherine MacKinnon's work on pornography to help clarify the politics of this configuration of *prasāda* as well as its ethical implications. Last, I discuss the aesthetics of *prasāda* and what this suggests about the function of Buddhist narratives known as *avadānas*.

IN CATHERINE LUTZ'S ETHNOGRAPHIC WORK on the rhetoric of emotional control in the United States, she contends that American women, much more than American men, are inclined to speak of their emotions as powerfully and potentially dangerous phenomena that need to be controlled; if they do not control their emotions, their emotions will control them. American women, Lutz concludes, tend to believe that they have less control than men over their emotions and as a result are somehow weaker, less rational, and more dangerous, for emotions are thought to prompt antisocial behavior. Emotions, in short, have great power because they so frequently compel us to action, even against our will.

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Although there is no Sanskrit or Pali word that corresponds directly to the modern American idea of "emotion," the narrative literature of early Indian Buddhism proposes that one can be controlled by one's mental states and that mental states, once arisen, can generate action. This belief is also widespread in later Buddhist literature.[1] In *The Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*), from perhaps the seventh century, Śāntideva explains that mental states may easily arise, take control of us, and lead us to misdeeds:

> Just as pain arises
> though it is not desired,
> anger arises forcibly
> though it is not desired.
> A person does not just become angry
> upon thinking, "I shall get angry,"
> nor does anger arise
> upon thinking intentionally, "I shall arise."
> All offenses and various vices
> arise through the influence of conditions.
> They do not arise independently.[2]

While a mental state, once generated, may result in antisocial behavior, it may also result in a meritorious deed. In what follows, I explore an example of this latter process that occurs in the *Divyāvadāna* (*Divine Legends*)—a compilation of Buddhist narratives from the early centuries of the Common Era written in Sanskrit. In the *Divyāvadāna* frequent mention is made of the mental state of *prasāda*—a term with a complex semantic range that has frequently, though not unproblematically, been translated as "faith," "graciousness," and "serene joy." Unlike the emotions that Lutz's informants describe, the arousal of *prasāda* is not a result of being weak or irrational but, rather, a product of the overriding power that certain external objects exert on individuals. Further, the ac-

[1] This belief has many similarities with the conception of the passions in much western philosophy. As Robert C. Solomon explains in a work titled *The Passions*, "'Passion' originally referred to *suffering* (as in 'the Passion of Christ'). Its meaning has expanded considerably, but the basic image—that in passion something *happens to us*—remains the same. The passions render us passive. . . . Various passions 'strike' us, 'overwhelm' us, 'consume' us, 'paralyze' us; we 'fall' into them, 'give away' to them, and we attempt to 'hold them down,' 'keep the lid on,' 'maintain control,' and 'suppress' them. In so far as passions are thought to be actions at all, they are merely *re*actions events beyond our control" (129–130).

[2] The original text reads: aniṣyamāṇam apy etac chūlam utpadyate yathā / aniṣyamāṇo 'pi balāt krodha utpadyate tathā // kupyāmīti na saṃcintya kupyati svecchayā janaḥ / utpatsya ity abhipretya krodha utpadyate na ca // ye kecid aparādhāś ca pāpāni vividhāni ca / sarvaṃ tatpratyayabalāt svatantraṃ tu na vidyate (Śāstri 1988: 162–163 [ch. 6, verses 23–25]).

tion engendered by *prasāda* is not a misdeed, an offense, or a vice but a meritorious act that yields tremendous karmic results.

THE MECHANICS OF *PRASĀDA*

Prasāda occurs most frequently in the *Divyāvadāna* in the following kind of scenario: a being sees the Buddha, *prasāda* arises in him or her, and the being makes an offering to the Buddha. The Buddha then foretells the reward that the donor will accrue as a result of his or her gift. This scenario can be seen, for example, at the beginning of two consecutive stories in the text—*The Story of a Brahman's Daughter* (*Brāhmaṇadārikā-avadāna*) and *The Story of a Brahman's Panegyric* (*Stutibrāhmaṇa-avadāna*). In the former, a brahman's daughter sees the Buddha, *prasāda* arises in her, and she offers the Buddha some barley meal as alms. The Buddha then tells her that as a result of her gift, thirteen eons in the future, she will attain awakening as the Solitary Buddha named Resolute (Supraṇihita). In the latter, it is a brahman who sees the Buddha and in whom *prasāda* arises; he, in turn, offers the Buddha a verse of poetry and is told that he will attain awakening as the Solitary Buddha named Praiseworthy (Stavārho).

What the text emphasizes in these accounts, and in others like them, is that certain objects (e.g., buddhas, images of buddhas, arhats, *stūpa*s), whether directly labeled as such or not, are "agents of *prasāda*" (*prāsādika*), and when particular individuals (generally the poor and disenfranchised) come into visual contact with such objects, *prasāda* arises in them. This experience of *prasāda*, in turn, is more than just being filled with faith, properly grateful, or favorably disposed—it also involves a compulsion to give. Offerings initiated by *prasāda* are objects of little market value—some barley meal or a stanza of poetry, some rice gruel, a single lamp, or a lump of clay[3]—yet they yield extraordinary results for the donor, such as future awakening. In these accounts the arousal of *prasāda* is represented as having less to do with an individual's personal efforts than with the force exerted by *prāsādika* objects; as "agents of *prasāda*" it is they, and not the individual, that are the primary cause of the arising of *prasāda*.

A variation of this scenario occurs in *The Story of a Brahman Named Indra* (*Indrabrāhmaṇa-avadāna*) and then again in *The Story of the Toyikā Festival* (*Toyikāmahā-avadāna*).[4] Though tropes are repeated in the *Divyāvadāna*, the Toyikā narrative is the only story that occurs twice and the only one that narrativizes and contextualizes the mechanics of *prasāda*

[3] See Cowell and Neil: 67.14–15, 72.12–14, 461.25, 90.1–3, 366.9–11.

[4] See Cowell and Neil: 76.10–80.10, 465.10–469.19. Cf. Dutt 1984, vol. 3: 1, 73.16–79.2.

both for when a buddha is alive and for when no buddha is in living and breathing presence. To summarize—

After arriving in Toyikā, the Buddha encounters a brahman working in the fields.[5] Not wanting his work to suffer, the brahman, instead of approaching the Buddha, pays his respects to him from where he stands. The Buddha then explains to Ānanda that the brahman has missed an opportunity to come and venerate two buddhas, for in the spot where he stands the remains of the Buddha Kāśyapa also lie buried. The Buddha then makes the undisturbed body of the Fully Awakened Kāśyapa visible so that the monks can cultivate *prasāda* in their minds, but it soon disappears. In the meantime, King Prasenajit hears that Kāśyapa's body is now visible, so he and many hundreds and thousands of others go to Toyikā, only to become dejected when they discover that Kāśyapa's body has disappeared. The Buddha confirms for them, however, that if one is "*prasāda* in mind" (*prasannacittaḥ*) and performs a variety of practices there—such as circumambulation or the offering of lumps of clay, heaps of pearls, lovely flowers, garlands, oil lamps, perfume, and so on—the result will be a vast treasure of merit. The Buddha then concludes:

> One may honor [a buddha] still living
> as well as one passed into final *nirvāṇa*.
> Being equally *prasāda* in mind
> there is no difference in merit.[6]

With regard to the mechanics of *prasāda*, what the story demonstrates is that "shrines" (*caitya*), which the text defines as "places" (*pradeśa*) that have been properly activated, can function as *prāsādika* objects. In this account the presence of these objects is a necessary condition for *prasāda* to arise and the consequent act of giving to ensue. It is possible that a visual connection is necessary for *prasāda* to arise in those individuals who make offerings at the Toyikā site, but proximity seems to be the primary cause.

As in the previous examples that involve seeing the Buddha, here too the process of *prasāda* at Toyikā is represented as happening rather perfunctorily, almost automatically. One goes to a shrine, *prasāda* arises, offerings are made (be they lumps of mud or oil lamps), and great rewards are predicted as a result of these deeds. Once again, the efficacy of *prasāda* does not rely on previously purifying the mind or cultivating proper intention but, instead, on being in the right place with respect to *prāsādika*

[5] For more on this story, see Schopen: 131–132; Strong.

[6] The original text reads: tiṣṭantham pūjayed yaś ca yaś cāpi parinirvṛtam / samaṃ cittaprasādena nāsti puṇyaviśeṣatā (Cowell and Neil: 469.3–4). Note, 79.19–20 reads *cittaṃ prasādyeha* instead of *cittaprasādena*).

objects. But how does all this happen with apparently so little effort, and what does it mean that it does?

THE POWER OF OBJECTS

In his discussion of contemporary ritual practices in a village in North India, Christopher Pinney offers an account of one practice that seems to happen, as it were, automatically. This practice, a six-sentence mantra that invokes Paramhaṃsji, is advocated by a local resident named C. B. Tiwari. As Pinney explains,

> The great appeal of the technique—and this is what Tiwari continually stresses—is that faith or belief is not necessary, desires will be fulfilled without belief (*bina vishvas*). The analogies that tumble forth from Tiwari's lips are all grounded in a technological world in which all that matters is effect: "Suppose that you want to use some electric power—you make a connection, fit your tube light, lay the wiring, provide a switch, connect this to the overhead wires. If the power is available, the tube is fine, the wiring is fine, the switch is fine, the tube light will come on—(*chalega!*)—with belief or without belief"—he flicked his thumb to and fro as though switching the current on and off. To produce surges of electricity in one's own life all that was required was the utterance of six sentences. (1997: 166–167)

Although this example of efficacy as electricity describes a verbal utterance and not a moment of visual engagement, the principle involved here well describes the visual logic that governs many of the interactions between practitioner and divine image that Pinney describes elsewhere (2002). What matters is being "plugged in"—reciting the right mantra or, as seems to be the case in the Toyikā example, being present in the right place and following ritual protocol. When the right conditions are met, the current will flow—be it electricity or *prasāda.*

The power of objects, both auditory and visual, to affect individuals seemingly automatically is also well attested in Sanskrit literature. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* it is said that when the women of Vṛndāvan hear the music of Kṛṣṇa's flute, their "minds are captivated by Kṛṣṇa,"[7] and regardless of the consequences, they promptly stop whatever they are doing—milking cows, feeding infants, even bathing—and go to him. Though various family members try to stop them, they are compelled by Kṛṣṇa's flute. They are drawn to him, and only physical force can hold them back. Those women who are restrained are overcome with desire and can only

[7] The original text reads: *kṛṣṇagṛhītamanasāḥ* (Śāstri 1983: 10.29.4).

meditate upon him. It is this cathexis that leads directly to their liberation from material reality and karmic bondage.

The listener of the tale, King Parikṣit, is baffled and asks how it is that these women, who know Kṛṣṇa only as a material being, a lover, can attain emancipation from material reality. In response, one commentator, Śrīdhārasvāmin, makes the following point: "The power of a thing does not require [our] understanding [in order for it to be effective]. The drink of immortality achieves its effects when it is drunk even if the drinker thinks otherwise."[8] Kṛṣṇa's power is not contingent on belief. All one needs is to be directly wired; one does not need to know how the wiring works.

Similar examples of the power of objects also occur in the *Mahābhārata*, but there the results are more sexual than spiritual and those affected are men, not women. For example, in *The Book of the Beginning* (*Ādi-Parvan*) (Sukthankar et al.: 1.120.1–13), Lord Indra, threatened by the sage Śaradvat's austerities, sends the nymph Jālapadi to stop him. When Śaradvat sees her, a shudder comes over him, and although he maintains his poise, "his semen flows forth, though he isn't aware of it."[9] In the following chapter (Sukthankar et al.: 1.121.3–5), the great seer Bharadvaja sees the nymph Ghṛtaci alight, just after she has bathed. The wind blows her skirt away, and he immediately ejaculates. In *The Book of the Forest* (*Āraṇyaka-Parvan*) (Sukthankar et al.: 3.110.13–15), a glimpse of the nymph Urvaśī has much the same effect on the great seer Kāśyapa; he promptly ejaculates, despite his long engagement in ascetic austerities.

In each of these cases, the sight of a divine maiden causes a man to have an orgasm spontaneously, even though each of these men is a religious practitioner engaged in rigorous ascetic discipline involving sexual abstinence. But despite the self-control they have acquired through their austerities, the right image leads them to ejaculate *automatically*, without their consent or even necessarily their awareness. The text assumes that humans have an "innate, species-wide disposition to respond to particular perceptual stimuli in predetermined ways," what Alfred Gell (44) terms "ethology." It is, as it were, a natural law.

But contrary to what these stories tell us, such visual and visceral interactions are *not* automatic. The electrical outlet that Tiwari describes has been socially engineered, and built into its construction is a cover plate that masks its origins and full range of functions. Bodily and visual practices, such as those that involve *prasāda*, have likewise been socially and culturally inscribed.

[8] The original text reads: na hi vastuśaktir buddhim apekṣate / anyathā matvāpi pītāmṛtavad iti bhāvaḥ (Śāstri 1983: comm. on 10.29.10).

[9] The original text reads: tena susrāva reto 'sya sa ca tan nāvabudhyata (Sukthankar et al.: 1.120.11).

AUTOMATIC ACTIONS, POLITICS, AND PORNOGRAPHY

One helpful way of thinking about these seemingly automatic actions follows from Pierre Bourdieu's well-known notion of habitus, whose "structuring structures" are said to inscribe in us a belief that many of our learned and conditioned behaviors are actually natural and innate. As Bourdieu observes, "Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness," and such a structure leads to what he terms *doxa*—the experience of "a quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization" such that "the natural and social world appears as self-evident" (164). In other words, the conditioned comes to seem unconditioned and natural—not contrived but somehow preordained.

Such a doxic view permeates the *Divyāvadāna*, for it presumes throughout that Buddhist cognitive and causal realities are natural laws, not religious creations. This conception of Buddhist teaching and practice is particularly evident in the *Divyāvadāna*'s accounts of *prasāda*. Inasmuch as the mechanics of *prasāda* abide by the laws of the natural world, the efficacy of *prasāda* is not particularly Buddhist in construction but is simply the way the world works. The laws that govern the mechanics of *prasāda* are the laws of karma, which in turn are the laws of nature. In the Toyikā narrative it is said that great rewards come to those who visit shrines of the Buddha and make offerings while being "*prasāda* in mind." Notice that no mention is made of this mental state being directed toward the Buddha. Seeing *prāsādika* objects makes one "*prasāda* in mind" regardless of one's thoughts, feelings, or intentions. Everyone at Toyikā is equally affected. Receptivity is the default. It would take some rupture or crisis to be otherwise.

In addition to this cognitive leveling of the practitioner's field of activity, the story also features a sociological leveling. While in *The Story of a Woman Dependent on a City for Alms* (*Nagarāvalambikā-avadāna*) the experience of *prasāda* is shown to be open to the poor and closed to gods and kings, suggesting a subaltern configuration for *prasāda*, in the Toyikā narrative the experience is represented as being available and efficacious for the hundreds and thousands of people who make *prasāda*-initiated offerings. Presumably these include King Prasenajit, "along with the women of his harem, as well as princes, ministers, military commanders, townspeople, and villagers [*sahāntaḥpurena kumārair amātyair bhaṭabalāgrair naigamajānapadaiś ca*]" (Cowell and Neil: 77.25–26). No sociological study of this representation of the practice is necessary. Individual tastes and habits are elided, as are, apparently, differences in gender, age, race,

and class. It is this representation of a sociological leveling, a uniformity of response, that brings to mind Bourdieu's observation that seemingly automatic behavior betrays a social and political agenda (164). Yet how does one get at the politics behind this discourse on *prasāda*?

An instructive analogy can be found in *Only Words*, Catherine MacKinnon's tract concerning the effects of viewing pornography. Like the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the probable source for the narratives in the *Divyāvadāna*, if not the *Divyāvadāna* itself (cf. Hiraoka), this is a legal text, and its mode of argumentation is similarly didactic. Though MacKinnon's piece relies on logic that at times seems tortuously stretched, its naturalized discourse regarding the power of pornographic objects has striking similarities with the rhetoric in the *Divyāvadāna* regarding the power of *prāsādika* objects. These similarities, in turn, suggest a more political reading for the discourse of *prasāda*.

In *Only Words* MacKinnon claims that consumers of pornography are compelled to live out the pornographic images that they see. These images, she claims, are performatives that men have no choice but to obey, and as such they are not mediated or moderated by intentions or thoughts that men may have. This is not to say that pornography does not contain or engender ideas, but, as MacKinnon explains, "the way it works is not as a thought or through its ideas as such. The message of these materials, and there is one, as there is to all conscious activity, is 'get her,' pointing at all women. . . . This message is addressed directly to the penis, delivered through an erection, and taken out on women in the real world. The content of this message is not unique to pornography. It is the function of pornography in effectuating it that is unique" (21–22).

Like others who have claimed that pornography can "provoke gut reactions" (Kuhn: 21) or elicit "'automatic' bodily reactions" (Williams: 5; cf. Mahābārata citations above), MacKinnon claims that pornography "manipulates the perpetrator's socialized body relatively primitively and directly. . . . This is men's beloved 'hard-wiring,' giving them that exculpatory sense that the sexual desires so programmed are natural and so operate before and beyond their minds —got there before they did, as it were" (61).

Much like the Toyikā narrative, MacKinnon's work elides differences between subjectivities, such as young and old, gay and straight, by positing that the spectacle of certain objects imposes a uniformity and inevitability of response. Furthermore, these reactions—regardless of whether they are "primitive" or, as in Bourdieu's habitus, learned—produce responses that are seemingly innate and automatic. MacKinnon's belief in the efficacy of pornography is not unlike C. B. Tiwari's belief in the efficacy of the Paramahaṃsji mantra; both share in the same notion that "faith or belief is not necessary, desires will be fulfilled without belief."

In addition to these similarities between the "hard-wiring" of viewers of pornography as described by MacKinnon and the mechanics of *prasāda* as depicted in the *Divyāvadāna*, the politics for which MacKinnon marshals her account also has its parallels in the *Divyāvadāna*. As a lawyer committed to the eradication of pornography, MacKinnon is concerned with the legalities that govern the production, dissemination, and consumption of pornographic images. One loophole that she sees in this legislation involves the notion that there is thinking—"mental intermediation," as she terms it—on the part of consumers of pornography when they see pornographic images. Instead, MacKinnon argues that pornography has so habituated and conditioned men in our society that pornographic images now evade these male viewers' critical faculties entirely, neatly bypassing the brain and addressing the penis directly. As MacKinnon explains, "I am not saying that . . . [a rapist's] head is not attached to his body; I am saying that his body is attached to his head" (24). Though MacKinnon's argument is ripe for critique—she accounts for differences neither among pornographic images nor among the subject positions of the viewers (cf. Butler)—her concern with the bodily effects of visual practices is a useful heuristic for understanding the politics of the discourse of *prasāda*.

It is the concern with the effects of visual objects, be they pornographic or *prāsādika*, that links together the prescriptive accounts in both the *Divyāvadāna* and MacKinnon's work. In both accounts certain images or words are more important for their function than for their content. Such polemics betray an agenda, and in MacKinnon's case it is apparent: Seeing certain images (i.e., pornography) inevitably leads certain individuals (i.e., men) to perform certain actions (i.e., acts of violence against women), and therefore such images should be banned. Likewise in the Buddhist case, seeing or being in the presence of certain images (i.e., *prāsādika* objects) inevitably leads certain individuals (i.e., the poor and perhaps others) to perform certain actions (i.e., acts of giving), and therefore such images should be sought out.

The politics of the discourse of *prasāda*, then, are the reverse of MacKinnon's. The message is not prohibitive but advocatory: Regardless of your age, gender, or mental faculties (though financial and social standing do seem to matter in some configurations of the discourse), go and see *prāsādika* objects and—as naturally follows—make offerings. The results will be most desirable.

ETHOLOGY, AGENCY, AND ETHICS

Two central ideas seem to be at work in this discourse of *prasāda*. First, when particular individuals see *prāsādika* objects, they become possessed

of *prasāda*. Unlike the Pali materials, the *Divyāvadāna* portrays the arising of this mental state as having less to do with the personal natures and predispositions of individuals than with the impersonal functioning and effects of conditioned existence.[10] Second, as it is made clear elsewhere in the *Divyāvadāna*, regardless of such individuals' desires, the mental state of *prasāda* seems to lead, invariably, to particular results—most often to an act of giving, which in turn yields beneficial results in the future, and occasionally directly to an auspicious rebirth. As it is explained in *The Story of an Upstart* (*Sahasodgata-avadāna*), being possessed of *prasāda* involves "doing the duty of one who has *prasāda*" (*prasannādhikāraṃ* + √*kṛ*; Cowell and Neil: 305.5–9, 308.13–309.1), and the text is explicit that this "duty" (*adhikāra*) is an almost compulsive need to make an offering.[11]

In short, the agency that motivates the mechanics of *prasāda*, whether this process involves a visual engagement or a physical one, seems to inhere as much in the object of engagement as in the subject. It is precisely this outside agency of *prasāda* that makes *prasāda*-initiated giving so effective. Within the rigid fatalism of cause and effect that is so conspicuous in the *Divyāvadāna*, only an outside force can generate a karmic intrusion that will allow one to escape from one's karmic destiny. This is not to say that the subject is simply a cipher that is only acted on but that the process of *prasāda* is represented as being so naturalized as to happen effortlessly and, it seems, regardless of a range of distinctions among particular subjectivities. This mechanism underlying *prasāda* is unquestioned in the text; objects can elicit automatic responses. What is presented in the *Divyāvadāna* is that *prasāda* can arise *in this way* and *from these particular objects*.

But now consider this vision of Buddhist ethics: Instead of the burden being placed on the individual to cultivate right thoughts and to perform proper actions, as is generally thought to be the case in Buddhist ethics (cf. Saddhatissa: 87–112), here individuals are represented as being able to proceed from seeing to giving and then on to a reward in the future with a bare minimum of personal effort and proper mental condi-

[10] This notion of individuals being moved by an agency outside themselves is particularly apparent in the case of the guildmaster's son in *The Story of Mandhāta* (*Mandhāta-avadāna*). When he sees the Fully Awakened Sarvābhibhū, "intense *prasāda* arises in him" (*atīva prasāda utpannaḥ*; Cowell and Neil: 226.27). This is then glossed by saying that "he is one whose mind has been made to be possessed of *prasāda*" (*prasādīkṛtacetā*; Cowell and Neil: 226.28). Although no agent is specified, it seems that the inspiration of *prasāda* is caused not by the efforts of the guildmaster's son but by the power of the Fully Awakened Sarvābhibhū's visage.

[11] The sense of *adhikāra* here is difficult to capture with a single-word translation in English. It is one's duty, one's obligation or prerogative, what one simply does, but yet it has a sense neither of coercion nor of being something that one could easily refuse to do. It is a duty, an impetus, and a compulsion but also a privilege. David Eckel and David Seyfort Ruegg suggest the French *métier* (personal communication).

tioning.[12] It is sufficient merely to enter the presence of a *prāsādika* object, see it, and then make an offering.

This is not to say, though, that one no longer needs to follow the Eightfold Path, for the benefits of the practice of *prasāda* are limited. In *The Story of One Foretold to Be a Cakravartin King* (*Cakravartivyākṛta-avadāna*), it is said that monks can also engage in this practice, but for them the results may not be desirable. When the Buddha points to one monk and explains that as a result of experiencing *prasāda* he will enjoy many millions of reigns as a *cakravartin* king, the other monks balk at spending so much time stuck in conditioned existence and give up the practice altogether. Although the experience of *prasāda* may be beneficial for lay people, these monks want a faster method to escape conditioned existence. For this end, "engaging in meditation, study, yoga, and contemplation"[13] proves more effective (Cowell and Neil: 344.18). Apparently monks, unlike the laity, can control their responses to *prāsādika* objects, cultivating *prasāda* or not as they choose.

Nevertheless, this mechanism of *prasāda* affects the very fundamentals of Buddhist ethics. For example, from the very outset of the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit *Dharmapada*, as well as the Pali *Dhammapada*, it is explained that an individual's mental state when performing an action is of paramount importance in determining his or her resultant condition. But from the perspective of the *Divyāvadāna*, the first two verses of the *Dharmapada*, if not those of the *Dhammapada*, are a call not to meditate or to do good deeds for a neighbor but to go and see an object that causes *prasāda* and then make an offering. As they exhort,

> If, with a polluted mind, one speaks or acts,
> then suffering follows as a wheel the draught ox's foot
> . . . If, with a mind possessed of *prasāda*, one speaks or acts,
> then happiness follows as a shadow that never departs.[14]

Perhaps, then, in the early centuries of the Common Era these verses were intended as a call to go on pilgrimage to where *prāsādika* objects could be found so that one's mind could be transformed from one that is "polluted" (*praduṣṭa*) into one "possessed of *prasāda*" (*prasanna*). Then happiness would follow, not to mention great karmic rewards in the future. With the establishment of many new monasteries in the first centu-

[12] Generally, the exercise of such personal agency is crucial in determining the value of an individual's actions. For example, a monk's intention while performing an act that transgresses monastic law is important in determining the degree of his culpability (Harvey).

[13] The original text reads: *dhyānādhyayanayogamanasikārayuktā* (Cowell and Neil: 344.18).

[14] The original text reads: "manasā ca praduṣṭena bhāṣate vā karoti vā / tato naṃ dukkham anveti cakram vā vahato padaṃ // . . . manasā ca prasannena bhāṣate vā karoti vā / tato naṃ sukham anveti chāyā vā anapāyini" (Shukla: 4, verses 1–2).

ries of the Common Era, most of them situated just outside of urban centers along trade routes and hence easily accessible (Heitzman), there very well may have been a concerted effort among the monastic community to encourage pilgrimage (as well as donations) to these sites. This certainly seems to be the point of the Toyikā narrative, and the same message is made even more explicitly in *The Story of Kunāla* (*Kunāla-avadāna*), which narrates King Aśoka's pilgrimage to sites associated with the Buddha and his chief disciples as well as the offerings that he made there. In *The Story of Koṭikarṇa* (*Koṭikarṇa-avadāna*) the venerable Mahākātyāyana explains that "Fully Awakened Tathāgata Arhats are certainly to be seen and certainly to be served."[15] The same is apparently true for other *prāsādika* objects as well.

This seemingly automatic connection between seeing *prāsādika* objects and serving them with offerings raises additional ethical issues. The mechanism of *prasāda* implies not an intention to give but a compulsion to give, and it is unclear whether the donor consciously recognizes this compulsion or not. The donor need not feel some personal desire or inclination to make an offering but only an external impetus to do so—such is the compulsion of *prasāda.*

Arjun Appadurai's work on praise and emotion in Hindu India offers insight into some possible implications of this formulation. He describes an instance of "coercive subordination" in which beggars bless and praise their (potential) benefactors "to trap them in the cultural implications of their roles as superiors, that is, in the obligation to be generous" (101).[16] Here Buddhist orthopraxy seems to be doing much the same; it traps individuals into giving. It provides the naturalized and necessary logic for what Bourdieu refers to as "bodily hexis."[17] Individuals who come and see *prasāda*-generating objects are compelled to make offerings. Not doing so would be tantamount to admitting that *prasāda* has not arisen in one. And if *prasāda* has not arisen in one, then presumably one has not accrued the vast amounts of merit such objects are capable of generating. This would be the rupture and crisis that I men-

[15] The original text reads: *draṣṭavyā eva paryupāsitavyā eva hi tathāgatā arhantāḥ samyaksaṃbuddhāḥ* (Cowell and Neil: 19.4–5).

[16] Judith T. Irvine makes a similar point in her work on the "affective registers" of the speaking styles of two Wolof castes—the nobles and griots. As she explains, "Extravagantly praising an addressee supposedly 'strengthens' the addressee and moves him or her to praiseworthy acts (such as distributing largesse). The audience, too, is moved and persuaded of the respectability of the person being praised" (154). Likewise, this social logic leads to a form of entrapment: "Whether or not you 'really feel' the particular emotion you display, your subjective experience presumably includes knowing that you should sound like a griot (about whose emotionality you have certain beliefs). Your attitude toward griots, and toward being for the moment associated with them, must color your feelings toward other aspects of the situation" (Irvine: 156).

[17] As Bourdieu explains, "Bodily *hexis* is political mythology realized, *em-bodied,* turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*" (93–94).

tioned previously, for among the laity, it is only the deviant who manage to get *prasāda* wrong.

AESTHETICS, EROTICS, AND FUNCTION

This deviancy, however, is revealing; it helps to explain the aesthetics of the experience of *prasāda* and the consequences of the elision of "mental intermediation," as MacKinnon calls it. When one gets *prasāda* wrong, the problem is not that one has deliberated and consciously made a choice that is somehow mistaken. The problem is that one has a faulty disposition, a faulty nature—or, to follow Tiwari and MacKinnon's metaphor, faulty wiring. As a result of this fault, seeing a *prāsādika* object results not in the state of *prasāda* and the making of a *prasāda*-initiated offering but in a libidinal pleasure and a consequent urge to give. This bifurcation of results highlights an overlap between *prāsādika* objects as those things that are ritually effective and those things that are "attractive," as in the frequently occurring string of epithets—"handsome, good-looking, and attractive."[18] In both cases, an individual sees the Buddha or one of his disciples and is aroused to give, but offerings that arise from a libidinal impulse are rejected.

In *The Story of Mākandika* (*Mākandika-avadāna*), for example, a wandering mendicant named Mākandika and his wife Sākali give birth to an incomparably beautiful daughter who is appropriately named Anupamā (Incomparable). When she grows up, her father decides to choose a husband for her based on this criterion: "I won't give this girl to anyone because of his high standing, nor because of his wealth or even his learning. Instead, I'll give her to whoever is as beautiful or more beautiful than she is."[19] One day, Mākandika happens to see the Buddha, "and at the sight of him, he is pleased and delighted."[20] He then reflects, "Such an ascetic as this one is *prāsādika*, is very good looking, and captivates everyone. Indeed, for every woman it is difficult to find a suitable husband, but how much more so in the case of Anupamā. I have found a son-in-law!"[21] Thereafter Mākandika informs his wife of his decision, and the two of them

[18] The original text reads: *abhirūpo darśanīyaḥ prāsādikaḥ* (Cowell and Neil: 2.26, 11.1–2, 26.2–3, 58.2, etc.).

[19] The original text reads: *iyaṃ dārikā na mayā kasyacit kulena dātavyā na dhanena nāpi śrutena kiṃtu yo 'syā rūpeṇa samo vāpy adhika vā tasya mayā dātavyeti* (Cowell and Neil: 515.23–25).

[20] The original text reads: *dṛṣṭvā ca punaḥ prītiprāmodyajātaḥ* (Cowell and Neil: 516.14).

[21] The original text reads: *yādṛśo 'yaṃ śramaṇaḥ prāsādikaḥ pradarśanīyaḥ sakalajanamanohārī durlabhas tu sarvastrījanasya patiḥ pratirūpaḥ prāg evānupamāyā labdho me jāmāteti* (Cowell and Neil: 516.14–17). The corresponding Tibetan reads: "He is fit to be the lord of all of Jambudvīpa, not to mention Anupamā [*'dzam bu'i gling mtha' dag gi bdag bor 'os pa yin na dpe med ma'i bdag por lta smos kyad ci dgos te*]" (Derge *Kanjur*, vol. *nya*, 171a1).

go to see the Buddha. When they catch sight of him, Mākandika's wife recognizes that the Buddha is a "great seer" (*maharṣiḥ*) and realizes her mistake. "He won't accept a girl as a devotee," she concludes. "Turn back. Let's go home."[22]

Disregarding his wife's assessment of the situation, Mākandika nevertheless has their daughter Anupamā adorned so that she may be presented to the Buddha as a bride. Mākandika's wife protests, and five times she concludes, "This husband won't accept a girl. Turn back. Let's go home.[23] Eventually, Mākandika does offer his daughter's hand in marriage to the Buddha, and the Buddha destroys any such aspirations she might have had with what he himself regards as "hateful words" (*pratighavacana*):

> Brahman, at the sight of this very daughter of Māra,
> I [feel] neither craving nor affection.
> Since I take no enjoyment in sense pleasures,
> I have no interest in touching her,
> even if she has been given to me,
> for she is filled with piss and shit.[24]

This account contains an odd mixture of sexualized and devotional discourse. At the sight of the Buddha, Mākandika is not filled with *prasāda* but is instead "pleased and delighted" and eager to offer the Buddha his daughter in marriage. Mākandika recognizes no impropriety in this deed, for within the domestic sphere a "gift of a maiden" (*kanyādāna*) is an appropriate offering (cf. Kane: 517–518). In this case, however, his arousal to give is in error. It arises not from *prasāda* but from libidinal desire. This is apparent when Mākandika first offers his daughter to the Buddha. He remarks,

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[22] The original text reads: *nāsau bhaktāṃ bhajate kumārikāṃ nivarta yāsyāmaḥ svakaṃ niveśanam* (Cowell and Neil: 516.28–29).

[23] The original text reads: *nāsau bhartā bhajate kumārikāṃ nivarta yāyāmaḥ svaṃ niveśanam* (Cowell and Neil: 517.11, 517.22–23, 518.5–6). Note, Cowell and Neil: 518.16–17 and 518.26–27 read *na eṣa* instead of *nāsau*.

[24] The original text reads: dṛṣṭā mayā mārasutā hi vipra tṛṣṇā na [me] nāpi tathā ratiś ca / chando na me kāmaguṇeṣu kaścit tasmād imāṃ mūtrapurīṣapūrṇāṃ // <spraṣṭum hi dattām> api notsaheyam (Cowell and Neil: 519.14–18). Note, Cowell and Neil add *me*, though it is omitted in all of the manuscripts. E. J. Thomas suggests: "dṛṣṭā mayā mārasūtā hi vipra tṛṣṇā rāga cāpi tathā aratiś ca" (654)—that is, O brahman, I have seen Māra's daughters—Tṛṣṇā (Craving), Rāga (Passion), and Arati (Affection). This reading, Thomas notes, "corresponds in sense with the Pali version in the *Sutta-nipāta*, 835: *disvāna taṇham aratiṃ rāgañ ca nāhosi chando api methunasmin*" (654).

Spraṣṭum hi dattām follows Speyer: 359 (cf. Cowell and Neil: 521.1). Cowell and Neil read *praṣṭum hi yattām* (MS A, *yakām*; MS B, *yabhām*; 519.18). Thomas suggests *spraṣṭum hi pādād* (654). This emendation is on the basis of the second half of verse 835 in the *Suttanipāta—kim ev' idaṃ muttakarīsapuṇṇam pādāpi naṃ samphusituṃ na icche.* For the Tibetan, see Derge *Kanjur*, vol. *nya*, 172b2.

May the Blessed One look here at this virtuous daughter of mine,
she is beautiful, enchanting, ornamented, and lustful.
I offer her to you, and with her
you should behave like a man of virtue,
just as the moon in the company of [his consort] Rohiṇī in the sky.[25]

Although Mākandika addresses the Buddha as "Blessed One," seemingly acknowledging the Buddha's status as an eminent ascetic, he is apparently not aware that the Buddha is celibate, for he then tells him to accept his daughter and behave with her "like a man of virtue."[26] Following the analogy to the moon and his wife Rohiṇī, he should behave like a good husband. But Mākandika's focus on beauty as the sole determining factor for marriage contravenes Brahmanical injunctions as well (cf. Kane: 429–431). His response to the Buddha's beauty is multiply mistaken. He is both miswired and misguided.

By contrast, Mākandika's own wife recognizes the Buddha as a great seer, not a future son-in-law. Yet she seems to be confused about what offering should be made. First she complains that the Buddha will not accept their daughter as a devotee, as though they were offering their daughter to the Buddha as the prized gift of a new disciple.[27] As it is said in *The Story of One Protected by the Community* (*Saṅgharakṣita-avadāna*), "There is no better gift for a Tathāgata than a gift of a new disciple."[28] But then Mākandika's wife complains that the Buddha will not accept their daughter as a wife. Though the Buddha is many things to many people—a great

[25] The original text reads: imāṃ bhagavān paśyatu me sutāṃ satāṃ satīm / rūpopapannāṃ pramadām alaṃkṛtām / kāmārthinīṃ yad bhavate pradīyate / sahānayā sādhur ivācaratāṃ bhavān / sametya candro nabhasīva rohiṇīm (Cowell and Neil: 519.7–10). Note, for line 1, to preserve the meter, Thomas suggests *imāṃ bhavān paśyatu me sutāṃ satīm* (655)—that is, "look at this virtuous daughter of mine." Thomas emends *bhagavān* to *bhavān* because "a brahmin, it is well known, does not address the Lord as such, but as *bhavān*" (655). For the peculiar term *satāṃ*, Cowell and Neil query *satyām* (519n4). For line 3, J. S. Speyer suggests *rūpopapannā pramadā alaṃkṛtā kāmārthinī yad bhavate pradīyate* (359). For line 4, Speyer suggests *sahānāyā sādhu cared ratiṃ bhavān* (359). Also possible is *sahānayā sādhur ivācared bhavān*. For the Tibetan, see Derge *Kanjur*, vol. *nya*, 172a7.

[26] While the Buddha is referred to as an "ascetic" (*śramaṇa*), Mākandika is described as a "wandering mendicant" (*parivrājaka*), a term that here seems to denote a wayward form of renunciant. Likewise, in *The Miracle Sūtra* (*Prātihārya-sūtra*), the various "heretics" (*tīrthika*) who attempt to defeat the Buddha in a competition of magical powers are referred to as "mendicant heretics" (*tīrthikaparivrājaka;* Cowell and Neil: 146.19).

Adding to the confusion of sexualized and devotional discourse here is the ambiguity of the expression "like a man of virtue." It can also mean "like a saint"—more pointedly, like someone who is celibate. Speyer may be right, though, in concluding that this is "another instance of the hortative particle *sādhu*, not being understood by copyists and leading them into error" (359).

[27] In the corresponding Tibetan, however, Mākandika's wife concludes that "this husband won't accept a girl" (Derge *Kanjur*, vol. *nya*, 171a4), just as she does in the five times that follow.

[28] The original text reads: *nāsti tathāgata syaivaṃvidhaṃ prābhṛtaṃ yathā vaineyaprābhṛtam* (Cowell and Neil: 341.20–21).

seer, a teacher, a victor, and so on—he is a husband or a bridegroom to no one. In both cases, Mākandika's wife refers to their daughter as a "girl" (*kumārika*), an affectionate, diminutive, and even desexualizing term that in the voice of a mother might even be translated as "sweet little girl." Mākandika's wife, unlike her husband, appears to be wary of treating their daughter as a sexualized commodity.

As for the Buddha, he speaks "hateful words" to Mākandika's daughter to demonstrate his detachment from sense pleasures and to try to cultivate the same in her. Whereas Mākandika was swayed by the beauty of the Buddha, the Buddha explains that he is not swayed by the sight of Mākandika's daughter. He has a different nature, and this yields a different response.[29]

This story, with its paired motifs of *prasāda* and its perversion, is reminiscent of an episode from Maxim Gorky's childhood when he *inappropriately* kissed a miracle-working image of the virgin. As Gorky notes,

> She'll probably cause my arms to wither for carrying her with dirty hands. I loved the Virgin . . . and when the time came to kiss her, I tremblingly pressed my lips to her mouth, not noticing how the grownups did it. Someone's strong arm hurled me into the corner by the door. . . . You simpleton! said my master in a mild rebuke. . . . For several days I waited like one condemned. First I had grasped the Virgin with dirty hands, then I had kissed her in the wrong way. . . . But apparently the Virgin forgave my involuntary sin. (in Freedberg: 320)

"He behaved to her," David Freedberg notes, "impetuously and immaturely—as if she were some mortal woman, of the kind he knew, and not as some divine unknowable being. To her and not to it. Gorky's sin consisted in acting spontaneously on that basis" (320). Yet the sin, as Gorky notes, was "involuntary." Considering that the Virgin was "the most beautiful of all women on earth," Gorky's mistake was understandable. Never-

[29] The Buddha makes this clear in his response to Mākandika: "As one deluded desires sense-objects, / he may, O brahman, long for your daughter, / as she is beautiful and attached to sense-objects. / In this respect a man not free from attachment is quite deluded. // But I am a Buddha, best of sages, active [and engaged] / who has obtained supreme auspicious awakening. / As a lotus is undefiled by a drop of water, / I walk in the world also undefiled. // And as a blue lotus in muddy water / is certainly not defiled by mud, / in just this way, O brahman, in the world, / I remain separate from sense-pleasures." The original text reads: yasmād ihārthī viṣayeṣu mūḍhaḥ sa prārthayed vipra sutāṃ tavemām / rūpopapannāṃ viṣyeṣu <saktām> avītarāgo 'tra janaḥ pramūḍhaḥ // ahaṃ tu buddho munisattamaḥ kṛtī prāptā mayā bodhir anuttarā śivā / padmaṃ yathā vārikaṇair aliptaṃ carāmi loke 'nupalipta eva // nīlāmbujaṃ kardamavārimadhye yathā <na> paṇkena vanopaliptam / tathā hy ahaṃ brāhmaṇa lokamadhye carāmi kāmeṣu vivikta]" (Divy: 519.25–520.7). Note, I follow the queries of Cowell and Neil and read *saktām* (519n10) for *śaktām* (519.27) and *na* (520n2) for *ca* (520.4).

theless, his confusion between spiritual love and erotic love merited a strong-armed response.[30]

Gorky's response to the Virgin is not unlike Mākandika's response to the Buddha. Though the object is supposed to inspire *prasāda* and not erotic desire, the power and beauty of the object can stimulate an improper, libidinal response. To use Lyotard's language, it is as though one engages with such objects primarily in the figural realm—that realm in which "meaning is not produced and communicated, but intensities are felt" (Carrol: 31). Yet these intensities are then registered and responded to in a discursive realm, and this happens as though by default, without any conscious decision making.

As a result of this lack of "mental intermediation," these different responses to *prāsādika* objects involve an immediate and tactile grasping and, hence, a sensory and corporeal aesthetics. While a libidinal response to a *prāsādika* object entails an explicit erotics, the canonically correct response of ritual giving involves a more subtle erotics. The immediacy of the arising of *prasāda*, the result of this lack of mental intermediation, generates an erotic quality.[31]

In discussing visual practices in postcolonial India, Christopher Pinney makes much the same claim. As Pinney writes, "Within film, chromolithography and studio photography one can trace parallel movements which involved the abolition of the space of contemplation and the intensification of erotic tactility. . . . Contemplation—which was promulgated in India through colonial Arts Schools from the mid 1850s onward—might be seen as concerned with 'hermeneutics' in Sontag's terms, its abolition allowing the emergence of a new 'erotics'" (2002: 361).[32] It is this "new" erotics, this *interested* aesthetics, as opposed to Kant's disinterested variety, that Pinney terms "corpothetics."

Once again, a comparison with pornography is instructive, for there seems to be a similar aesthetics—or corpothetics—involved in visually

[30] A famous example of this confusion is Gianlorenzo Bernini's statue of Saint Teresa. She is clearly aroused, though it is unclear whether that arousal is a divine ecstasy or something more mundane.

[31] These erotic associations of *prasāda* are also found in its modern Hindi usage. For example, Hardev Bahri's *Rajpal English–Hindi Dictionary* contains the following entry: "buxom *bak sam* a. (of a woman) gay, frolicsome *prasannacitt, moṭi evaṃ ākarṣak.*" Here the physical attributes of a woman's sexuality are defined not as generating "*prasāda* of mind" (*prasannacit*) but as being "*prasāda* of mind," eliding the difference between the object and the state that it engenders as well as any notion of mental intermediation. Being buxom is also akin to being "plump" (*moṭi*) and "attractive" (*ākarṣak*). Like *prāsādika* objects, it draws things in; it is the agent of action.

[32] As Susan Sontag writes, "Ideally, it is possible to elude interpreters in another way, by making works of art whose surface is so unified and clean, whose momentum is so rapid, whose address is so direct that the work can be . . . just what it is. Is this possible now? It does happen in films, I believe" (11).

engaging with *prāsādika* objects and watching certain enunciative spectacles in pornographic films. And what is crucial about this analogy is the similarity of function of these two phenomena.

In her discussion of stag films Linda Williams distinguishes between the narratives of such films and the extranarrative enunciative spectacles that occur "when the bodies within the frame come so close that their means of relation is no longer looking but touching" (71). Explaining the tactile effect of such images, she writes, "It is, in short, as if the spectacle of the naked or nearly naked body . . . retards any possible forward narrative drive. It seems in effect to be saying, 'Let's just feast our eyes and arrest our gaze on the hidden things that ordinary vision . . . cannot see . . . who needs more?" (71). It is these images, she claims, that "seek to move us" (285).

If Williams is right, part of the power of pornographic films is that the intended function is effected not through the narratives of the films but through such extranarrative spectacles. According to Williams, this distinction between "narrative" and "number," between story and tableau, is a common trait of both pornographic films and movie musicals (130–134). But as is clear from Williams's account—and this is crucial—narration can be an *impediment* to the function. The central function of pornographic films is arousal, and this is effected through their spectacles, not their stories.[33] In Lyotard's terminology, it is not a discursive process but a figural one.

THE FUNCTION OF *AVADĀNAS*

All this raises some intriguing possibilities about the function of *avadānas*. Although scholars have claimed that *avadānas* were used to popularize Buddhism (Dutt 1930: 20), to inspire the laity (Weeraratne: 397), to educate the common people (Sharma: 19), to instruct young monks (Vaidya: xii), and to offer preliminary teachings (Tatelman: 12), the aesthetics of *prasāda* suggest an additional possibility.

The viewer of *prāsādika* objects and the viewer of pornographic spectacles both view images whose function is less to communicate than to arouse, and this function is effected naturally, effortlessly, and automati-

[33] Philip Lutgendorf makes a similar point in describing the tendency of the televised *Sāgar Rāmāyan* "to periodically halt the flow of its narrative to focus on stylized, posterlike tableaux, accompanied by devotional singing," which functioned "as a visual distillation for the contemplation of devotees" (230–231). According to Lutgendorf, contemplating this visual distillation led many viewers to experience bhakti—another term that is frequently, though not unproblematically, translated as "faith." In the *Divyāvadāna*, by contrast, bhakti is depicted as a false belief in unseen divine forces to intervene in human affairs (e.g., Cowell and Neil: 1.7–17, 231.23–232.3).

cally—or so it seems. But the listener of *avadānas* (or, more recently, the reader) is also confronted with similar extranarrative enunciative spectacles that "retard any possible forward narrative drive." This happens, for example, during *prasāda* episodes, wherein characters in the story and outside listeners alike experience a narrative pause. Occasionally these excursuses from the narrative are also extended, such as when they contain stereotyped descriptions of the Buddha's physical form.

In the Toyikā narrative, for example, when the brahman working in the fields first sees the Buddha, his vision is accompanied by a stereotyped description of the Buddha's wondrous physical form. He sees the Buddha,

> who is adorned with the thirty-two marks of a great man,
> whose body is radiant with the eighty minor marks,
> who is adorned with a halo extending an arm's length,
> whose brilliance is greater than a thousand suns,
> and who like a mountain of jewels that moves,
> is beautiful from every side.[34]

The brahman does not develop *prasāda*, however, for as the Buddha explains, the brahman was too far away to venerate him. Yet, in *The Story of One Praised as Griefless* (*Aśokavarṇa-avadāna*) (Cowell and Neil: 137.1) and even in an earlier incident in *The Story of the Toyikā Festival* (Cowell and Neil: 461.19), when a character sees the Buddha and then this description occurs, *prasāda* arises in that individual.

This stereotyped description, occurring immediately after a character sees the Buddha and immediately before *prasāda* arises, functions as a kind of description of the content of the *prasāda* experience. Put another way, this description is a discursive reading of a figural encounter—a moment, as it were, of the sublime put into words.

Such extranarrative interruptions also occur outside of the discourse of *prasāda*. Most notably, there are various stock descriptions of the powers and attributes of buddhas[35] and a stereotyped description of the qualities of arhats.[36] Many of these descriptions occur frequently and as such are often abbreviated with a cursory "and so on as before" (*pūrvavad yāvat*).[37] The most common of these stereotypical descriptions is a ten-

[34] The original text reads: dvātriṃśatā mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇaiḥ samalaṃkṛtam aśītyā cānuvyañjanair vīrājitagātraṃ vyāmaprabhālaṃkṛtaṃ sūryasahasrātirekaprabhaṃ jaṅgamam iva ratnaparvataṃ samantato bhadrakam (Cowell and Neil: 76.14–17, cf. 465.14–16).

[35] For example, "Now the Blessed One was self-controlled, and his followers were self-controlled [*atha bhagavān dānto dāntaparivāraḥ*] . . ." (Cowell and Neil: 125.24–126.13, 182.1–20, 267.14–268.5, etc.).

[36] For example, "He was free from attachment in the Three Realms [of desire, form, and formlessness] [*traidhātukavītarāgaḥ*] . . ." (Cowell and Neil: 180.25–28, 240.23–27, 282.1–5, 492.4–8, etc.).

[37] Such elisions occur for the above description of the Buddha (Cowell and Neil: 96.16–18) as well as for the description of arhats (Cowell and Neil: 18.26, 341.1, 342.6, 344.24, etc.).

fold list of characteristics applied to the Buddha. Generally, after an introduction explaining that in the past there arose in the world a particular Buddha, this list occurs as an enumeration of his attributes.[38]

But this list also occurs in another stereotyped passage, immediately after it is said that "the Blessed One is just like this—."[39] And in *The Story of One Foretold to Be a Cakravartin King* this list of epithets is shown to be not the content of the *prasāda* experience, as the previously mentioned list seems to have been, but the content of the meditative practice known as *buddhānusmṛti* ("Bringing to Mind the Buddha"). This is also stated more explicitly in the Pali materials.[40]

And so, my point: since some of these stereotyped descriptions function explicitly as objects of contemplation outside of the larger narratives in which they are embedded, perhaps others of these stereotyped descriptions—all of which, it should be noted, describe *prāsādika* objects—also function as extranarrative enunciative spectacles. Such "image-texts" (Mitchell: 89), which combine the power of icon and word, may resist discursive readings, but they are not extraneous to the message of their stories. Perhaps, in some sense, they are the message itself.

My sense is that there are different but complementary functions in the narrative and extranarrative components of these stories. The former is more legalistic, didactic, and discursive, and the latter is more impressionistic, contemplative, and figural. More loosely, the former seeks to teach us, and the latter, like the pornographic image, "seeks to move us."

CODA

The *Divyāvadāna* postulates that there is a class of objects whose sight leads to the rise of *prasāda* in the viewer and that this mental state leads the viewer to make an offering. Yet there is no indication that when an individual sees a *prāsādika* object and then *prasāda* arises in him or her, the individual is conscious that *prasāda* has arisen. *Prasāda* may lead one

[38] The Blessed One, it is said, "is a Tathāgata, an arhat, a Fully Awakened being, perfect in knowledge and action, a Sugata, a knower of the world, an unsurpassed guide for those in need of training, a teacher of gods and mortals, a Buddha, and a Blessed One [*tathāgato 'rhan samyaksaṃbuddho vidyācaraṇasaṃpannaḥ sugato lokavid anuttaraḥ puruṣadamyasārathiḥ śāstā devamanuśyāṇāṃ buddho bhagavān*]" (Cowell and Neil: 344.5–7, cf. 54.12–14, 141.17–19, 242.2–4, 246.5–7, 254.4–6, 282.20–22, etc.—and in abbreviated form, see 347.1, 464.15, etc). In some of these instances, the first three of these epithets—Tathāgata, arhat, Fully Awakened being—are skipped. For more on this list of epithets of the Buddha, see Griffiths: 60–66.

[39] The original text reads: *ity api sa bhagavāṃs* . . . (Cowell and Neil: 196.24–197.1, 290.11–13, 470.5–8).

[40] On the connection in the Pali materials between the practice of *buddhānusmṛti* and the *iti pi so* verse, a corresponding list of epithets minus the term *tathāgatha*, see the *Visuddhimagga* vii.2–67 (Warren: 198–213, trans. in Ñāṇamoli: 206–230), Harrison: 215–219, and Hallisey, vol. 2: 208–261.

to make an offering, but it does not lead one to a self-conscious awareness of its presence. Though *prasāda* can be postulated as the mental state possessed by one who has seen a *prāsādika* object and then made an offering to it, the immediacy of the experience of *prasāda* seems to preclude a self-consciousness of the experience of *prasāda* itself. The experience of *prasāda* is direct and affective; it is not mediated by conscious decision making or reflection. Hence, one's success or failure to respond *properly* to *prāsādika* objects is a manifestation of one's nature and disposition. It is, as it were, a question of one's wiring, or so these narratives would have us believe.

In addition to offering preliminary insight into the intricacies of Buddhist moral psychology, this discourse of *prasāda* also has important implications for our understanding of Indian Buddhist practice. The discursive message of the stories in the *Divyāvadāna* is that one should go and see *prāsādika* objects, be aroused by them, and make offerings. This injunction may have helped to justify the proliferation of the most conspicuous of *prāsādika* objects—the Buddha image—that occurred during the early centuries of the Common Era. Likewise, listening to these stories, with their extranarrative stereotyped descriptions of the Buddha, may have caused a similar form of arousal in the devotee, perhaps with similar results.

It is telling that one would make offerings at Buddhist sites, or perhaps upon listening to Buddhist stories, as an unselfconscious reflex. For an individual to see a *prāsādika* object and not make an offering is an admission that *prasāda* has not arisen, that one is miswired, trained in the wrong habitus, or even worse, aroused erotically, not ritually. Hence, the aesthetics of the experience of *prasāda* can have political significance. All this raises additional questions about the sociology of practice at Buddhist shrines. The so-called narrative art at these shrines does seem to offer some explanations, but a detailed discussion of these materials is a topic for another article. Clearly, there is no shortage of questions.

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