Beware the Crocodile: Female and Male Nature in Aśvaghoṣa's *Saundarananda*

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ABSTRACT: In chapter eight of his *Saundarananda*, Aśvaghoṣa launches into one of the fiercest attacks on women that can be found in early Buddhist literature. He evokes animal imagery and symbolism to demonstrate a manipulative and (sexually) aggressive nature for women, which he juxtaposes with a comparably weak will for men. He utilizes similes of entrapment whereby violent, aggressive and poisonous animals, birds or reptiles (women) ensnare weaker creatures (men). For example, women are 'hordes of crocodiles in a river', hawks that prey on pheasants, or snakes, whilst men are deer escaping hunters, birds enmeshed in a net or elephants trying to avoid crocodile infested waters. Whilst Aśvaghoṣa's account of the sleeping harem women in the *Buddhacarita* has been cited by scholars of Buddhism and gender as representative of negative conceptualizations of women in ancient Indian Buddhist literature, the account in the *Saundarananda*, which is a far worse indictment of women, has received less attention. In this article, I will discuss Aśvaghoṣa's attack on women centering on his use of animal imagery to portray male and female nature. In so doing, a central aim of the article is to give ownership of the *Saundarananda* and *Buddhacarita* back to Aśvaghoṣa, whose accounts have previously been taken to be representative of views on women in early Buddhism. Through comparative analysis, whilst demonstrating the views of one male author, an ex-Brahmin poet, I will highlight these in direct contrast to other texts from early Indian Buddhism, which rarely present women in the same light. Finally, I will look at Aśvaghoṣa the author, and attempt to discern his own preoccupations and predilections.

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In this article, I want to look at anxieties of masculinity as expressed through the figurative language which likens women and men to animals in Aśvaghoṣa's *Saundarananda.* Aśvaghoṣa was a Brahmin convert to Buddhism and his views on women in his more popular poem—the *Buddhacarita*—have been in the past taken to be representative of universal views about women in early Indian Buddhism. In this contribution, instead of accepting that Aśvaghoṣa's views are hegemonic, I want to situate them within a particular socio-historical milieu in which social/male anxieties about women are evidenced more widely. Within this historical content of a developing, broader social anxiety about women, I seek to identify Aśvaghoṣa's poetry as a personal expression of this phenomenon and situate it less within Buddhism than on the boundary between the two dominating traditions, namely Brahmanism and Buddhism.

In chapter eight of the *Saundarananda*, entitled 'the attack on women' (*strīvighāta*), Aśvaghoṣa employs animal, bird and reptile similes and metaphors through which he illuminates this anxiety. As noted by Gerow (1971: 35), figures of speech, especially simile and its related form metaphor (*rūpaka*, metaphor or 'characterization') are the foundation of any forms of poetry. This is especially true of poetry in the Indian classical period. Thus, I want to assess Aśvaghoṣa's use of figurative language in the *Saundarananda* to illustrate my point.

Aśvaghoṣa lived during the Kuṣāna period, between the first and second century CE. Recently, in looking at women within this time period and more broadly 'between the empires',[2] Stephanie Jamison (2006: 213) has speculatively noted that:

> The notion of women's autonomy seems to have grown in the period we are discussing, the notion of a kind of subversive mental independence. It indeed was not just a notion, but embodied in the threatening figure of the heterodox female ascetic, for us most clear in the Buddhist bhikkhunī. And the later texts like Manu react to this independence with a crackdown (at least conceptually) on women's autonomous action and an almost startling misogyny, in contrast to the earlier texts.

In this article, I want to take Jamison's conclusion as a starting point and use it as a basis to assess Aśvaghoṣa's attack on women. Jamison's assessment is based upon her reading of Brahmanical rather than Buddhist texts. This trend, however, seems to exist within and between both traditions, although it appears not wholly pervasive in either. Aśvaghoṣa was himself bought up a Brahmin and clearly shows himself to be highly

2. This refers to the period after the end of the Mauryan empire (end of second century BCE) and the rise of the Gupta empire (beginning of fourth century CE).

knowledgeable in many aspects of Brahmanical lore (cf. Johnson 1998: xiii; Olivelle 2008 <no 2008 in refs> : xvii; Patton 2008). A strong relationship has already been established between Aśvaghoṣa's work and Brahmanical texts, most especially the Sanskrit epics. During this period of history, with the ensuing changes of dynasty between the empires, the fortunes of Buddhism and Brahmanism waxed and waned to some extent, some rulers patronizing Buddhism whilst others favoured Brahmanism. However, the rise of Buddhism throughout the period was significant, such that, as noted by Hiltebeitel (2001: 6ff. <avoid ff. give number>) and Fitzge <not in refs> (2004: 120–21) and reiterated by Olivelle (2005: 37–38), th mposition of the Sanskrit epics may well have been a reaction to the rise of Buddhism. Olivelle, concurring with this, added that perhaps the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* was also of this order—a response and attempt to reinstate Brahmans as the most powerful class within the communities living along the North Indian plains and forests (Olivelle 2005: 37ff. <avoid ff.>). Within this broader discourse of reactions and responses between the two traditions is where we can situate Jamison's speculation. Further, Olivelle, in his recently published translation of Aśvaghoṣa's other main work, the *Buddhacarita*, situates Aśvaghoṣa's work as something of a reply to the epics, enacting, for example, the positing of the Buddha as the new Rāma (Olivelle 2008 Taking all this into consideration, I want to argue that Aśvaghoṣa's 'a t startling misogyny' in the *Saundarananda* is a personal example of this broader social context and growing social anxiety about independent women.

Although, during the time of Aśvaghoṣa's writing Buddhist nuns had a significant presence within north Indian Buddhist communities, when reading Aśvaghoṣa one could easily come to the conclusion that the path of discipleship following the Buddha was a path only available to men, and that women were excluded from practising.[3] This was far from the situation, however. In an article from the 1990s, Schopen notes that the compliers of various Buddhist monastic codes were 'very anxious men' (1996: 563). According to Schopen, they were anxious about a variety of things, including women, and especially nuns, whom they took measures to contain, restrain and control. If we place Schopen's comments alongside those of Jamison, and Olivelle's conjecture that the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* was a response to the rise in popularity of Buddhism, situating Aśvaghoṣa's work within this context, we can begin to read into his texts this same male anxiety about women. In sum, these scholars demonstrate that this concern was not confined to one tradition or another, but perhaps there was some

3. Schopen's archaeological evidence demonstrates that among the extant donor inscriptions at *stūpa* sites—dating from the Kuṣāna period—that can be identified with an individual or individuals, a high percentage were donated by Buddhist nuns (1997: 238ff. <avoid ff.>).

parity between the two. Whether then one seeks to situate Aśvaghoṣa's misogyny on one side or the other is perhaps a mute point. However, as Aśvaghoṣa's work appears to demonstrate a certain degree of fear and disgust of women rather than a desire to contain and control them, perhaps in this regard one might be inclined to argue that his conversion was complete, as this sense of jeopardy is more visible in early Buddhism than Brahmanism.

However, misogyny such as that displayed in Aśvaghoṣa's *Saundarananda* is not the sole or even primary attitude to women discernible in each group of texts from the period. In my other works I have shown that the notion that women were viewed negatively within early Indian Buddhism has been overstated and that contrary to this there is a great deal that is positive in the extant textual record (Collett 2006, 2009a, 2009b and 2011). Also, one simply needs to bring to mind the main heroines of the epics—Draupadī and Valmikī's Sītā—to realize that there were representations of strong female role models from the period within Brahmanical literature as well.

Despite these many positive representations of women from contemporaneous literature, Aśvaghoṣa's fear and disgust of women features in both of his major works, although to varying degrees. With regards to both the *Buddhacarita* and the *Saundarananda*, Aśvaghoṣa took stories already known within the Buddhist tradition in which women are much less vilified and re-worked them into long (epic) poems. The *Buddhacarita* retells the legendary account of the life of Gautama Buddha, while the *Saundarananda* is a reproduction of the biography of the half-brother of Gautama, Nanda. The only version of Nanda's biography that pre-dates Aśvaghoṣa is the version in the *Udāna*, although there are verses attributed to Nanda in the *Theragāthā* as well.[4] The story in the *Udāna* begins with Nanda declaring to the monks that he cannot endure to follow the path of training any longer. The monks tell this to the Buddha who asked Nanda why this is so. Nanda informs him that, when he was leaving to go forth, a young girl, the beauty of the region, said to him, 'Come back soon!' As he is constantly thinking of that, Nanda cannot endure the monastic life. The Buddha then, by means of his magical powers, transports Nanda to a heavenly world inhabited by beautiful nymphs, in comparison to whom any human woman appears ugly. The Buddha asks Nanda which of the two are more beautiful, to which Nanda replies:

> Just as if, Venerable One, she were a mutilated monkey with ears and nose cut off, even so, Venerable One, this Sakyan girl, the beauty of the district, if set

4. *Theragāthā* verses 157-58. Other versions of Nanda's biography appear in the *Jātakaṭṭhakathā* (182), which in its extant form is later, although based upon stories in circulation prior to its completion. The later Buddhist commentarial tradition produces other versions of the narrative in the *Udāna*, *Theragāthā* and *Dhammapada* commentaries (*Udāna-aṭṭhakathā* 3.2, *Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā* 2.31-34, *Dhammpada-aṭṭhakathā* 1.9).

> beside these five hundred water nymphs, does not compare to even a small fraction of them...
>
> (*Udāna* 3.2, in Steinthal 1982)

The Buddha tells Nanda that if he commits himself to his practice he will have access to the heavenly world and its beauties. Nanda thus focuses on his practice, but as he does, develops non-attachment and decreases his interest in sensual pleasures. It is this basic plot that Aśvaghoṣa follows in his poetic rendering of the story. However, there is one important change: the re-conceptualization of the young girl as Nanda's wife. The later versions that post-date Aśvaghoṣa, in the commentaries, follow this same basic plot, most of them rendering the woman as Nanda's wife.[5]

Although, in the *Udāna* story, the human girl is likened to a mutilated monkey in terms of her appearance, a distinct difference between this narrative, along with Nanda's verses in the *Theragāthā*, and Aśvaghoṣa can be discerned with regards views on women. In both, women are not blamed for sexually manipulating men, but rather the problem is apportioned as psychopathology; that is, it is Nanda's own predicament that he must work to overcome. As noted above, the *Udāna* narrative commences with Nanda lamenting that he is not fit for the life of celibacy, and when the other monks learn about his obsession with sensual pleasures, they tease him. The first of the two verses in the *Theragāthā* indicate the same, that Nanda owns the problem:

> Distracted by my addiction to ornamentation, I was conceited, vain and afflicted by desire for pleasures.
>
> (*Theragāthā*, verse 157)

In contrast to this, Aśvaghoṣa tends to blame women:

> Like creepers poisonous to the touch, like scoured caves still harboring snakes, like unsheathed swords held in the hand, women are ruinous in the end. When women want sex they arouse lust; when women don't want sex they bring danger... Women behave ignobly, maliciously spying out the weakness of others... When nobly-born men become destitute...it is because of women.
>
> (Sau. 8.31-34, in Covill 2007: 161)

Alongside this attributing a pernicious nature to women, most evident in the *Saundarananda*, goes an emasculation of men, who rather than being represented by the more usual, very male, bull or leonine figures of speech of the period are likened to docile, helpless creatures in the face of these injurious 'hordes of crocodiles', that is women. Although Aśvaghoṣa's is a

5. The wife may have been Aśvaghoṣa's invention, as his is the first reference to her. A wife is not mentioned *per se* in the *Jātakaṭṭhakathā* version, but the woman is called Janapadakalyāṇī, which is the compound in the *Udāna* version meaning 'the beauty of the district' but comes to be the name of Nanda's wife in at least one later commentarial account, and of his half-sister in others.

Buddhist text, the way men and women are portrayed, especially with regards to figurative language, bears a stronger resemblance to the Sanskrit epics in style.

With regards to the figurative language invoking animals to illuminate male and female traits, a close symmetry can be identified between Aśvaghoṣa's poems and the epics. In all three texts, the use of animal similes and metaphor to illuminate human characteristics is a constant though not overwhelming feature, subsidiary to the main plots. Typical for this period, all three texts liken men to lions, tigers and bulls, that is animals that symbolize strength, prowess and courage. Rāma, the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, is often said to be a tiger amongst men (*manjuvyāghra*) or a bull amongst men (*puruṣarṣabha*) or, less often, a tiger amongst kings (*nṛpaśārdūla*).[6] Similarly, in the *Mahābhārata*, the righteous Yudhiṣṭhira, along with his brothers and other significant male figures, is typically called a tiger amongst men (*puruṣavyāghra*), bull among men (*puruṣarṣabha*), and also, with the foci on lineage in the *Mahābhārata*, bull among Bhāratas (*bhāratarṣabha*).[7]

Although Nanda, the protagonist in the *Saundarananda* is not himself awarded such esteem in a replete manner as the epic heroes, we only need compare the birth of Nanda with a description of the righteous cousins from the *Mahābhārata* to evidence the similarity between their masculine stature. At birth, it is said of Nanda that:

> He was long-armed and wide-chested, with the shoulders of a lion and the eyes of a bull—and he bore the epithet 'handsome' due to his superlative looks.
>
> (Sau. 2.58, in Covill 2007: 59)

Similarly, in the *Mahābhārata*, when Arjuna and Bhīma along with Kṛṣṇa entered Jarāsaṃdha's palace, 'as Himālayan lions enter a cowpen':

> The people of Māgadha fell dumb with astonishment at the sight of them, broad-chested and imposing like elephants, tall as great columns. Those bulls among men passed through the crowds of people milling around the palace's three outer enclosures and strode proudly and fearlessly up to the king.
>
> (Mbh. 2.21: 30, in Wilmott 2006: 177)

Compare this with the young men who, in the *Saundarananda*, come to the hermitage of the Buddha seeking to become followers:

> They are tall like golden columns, lion-chested and strong armed, potential vessels of wide fame, majesty and self-regulation.
>
> (Sau. 1.19, in Covill 2007: 37)

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6. Bulls and tigers were also important in the Indus Valley civilization, which is evident from their presence on some of the steatite seals and other remains from the period.
7. For such references to Rāma, see for example, Rām. 2.10.17, 2.13.18, 2.21 <is this ok?> 3.4.25, 3.4.27, 3.4.31, 7, for Yudhiṣṭhira, see for example Mbh. 2.2.31, 2.5.105 0 2.12.18, 2.14.5, 2.17.39.

Masculinity between the texts can be seen to be fairly established: men are tall, broad-chested, with easy leonine prowess and stoic, bull-like majesty.[8]

Although men are frequently symbolized through animal representation in terms of their qualities and characteristics, this is less so the case for women. The reason for this is because the social constructs for womanhood and femininity revolved around aspects not easily illustrated through animal imagery. The social construct for the period was circumscribed around female beauty on the one hand and domesticity on the other. Domesticity, or the roles of wife and mother, cannot easily be represented by invoking animal imagery. Although animals are parents, or more particularly mothers, the ways in which animals rear their young is not usually evocative enough of human parenting to produce such representations and portrayals. However, this does happen occasionally, such as when Rāma tells his mother he is exiled to the forest, and she replies she will be like a cow without its calf (Rām. 2.17.32), likening herself to a maternal bovine several times (Rām. 2.17.33 and 2.21.5).[9]

Secondly, female beauty in this period was very much tied up with notions of ornamentation: it was the ornamented and decorated female (or male, for that matter) body that was considered more becoming, 'the body adorned' as Dehejia (2009) puts it. It is therefore difficult to use comparisons with animals as they are not ornamented themselves. Nevertheless, two different animals are frequently used to symbolize female beauty: the graceful and shy gazelle and the elephant. This is again to do with notions of female beauty. The most becoming female form, as evidenced by Dehejia in early sculpture, is the quintessential hourglass shape- large rounded hips and breasts with an accompanying inhumanly tiny waist. The full thighs, part of the comely hips, seen on this form of a woman in early Indian sculpture are likened to the trunk of an elephant, as is said of Sītā's rounded and charming thighs (Rām. 3.46).[10] Moreover, there are the occasional animalistic references to women displaying strength, such as Sītā calling herself a lioness to Ravana's jackal, as he attempts to abduct her.[11]

8. Powers (2009) provides an investigation of the representation of the Buddha as the bull among men in early Indian Buddhism. Aśvaghoṣa does not draw on this epithet as much as does other early Buddhist literature, as suggested by Powers.
9. The cow is important in Vedic mythology, as is the bull, and these figurative allusions are suggestive of the viral bull and maternal cow of the Veda. See Doniger O'Flaherty (1980) for a discussion of the bull and cow in Vedic myth. According to Doniger, in the Veda, '[t]he good or evil cow is...assimilated to the figure of the good or evil woman' (1980: 251).
10. Also see, as one other example of many, Ambapāli, the ex-courtesan in the *Therīgāthā* (verse 267), who reflecting upon the ravages of old age says, 'Formerly, both my thighs were beautiful like an elephant's trunk, but in old age they are like stalks of bamboo...'
11. Women have also occasionally been likened to lions in early Mahāyāna Buddhism. See for example, the *Śrīmālādevīsiṃhanādasūtra*, on the women who roared like a lion (as does the

Looking more closely at the *Saundarananda*, many of the above uses of animal simile are evident. In Sanskrit poetry, a popular trope came to be the detailed evocation of the passion and emotionally charged attachment of lovers. Such lovers are often liked to *chakravāka* birds, a species which is said to go about in pairs and to exhibit distress if parted from one another. Aśvaghoṣa's *Saundarananda* is perhaps one of the first examples of this avifaunal representation. In the *Saundarananda*, when the Buddha-to-be and Nanda had grown into men and Gautama left for the forest, Nanda remained in his palace with his wife, 'making love his only concern' (*madanaikakāryaḥ*), as, 'Nanda was fitted for love, and so lived united with his beloved like a *cakravāka* bird with its mate' (Sau. 4.1 and 2, in Covill 2007: 81). At this point Aśvaghoṣa describes his delectable wife, the exquisite Sundarī:

> She seemed a lotus-pool in womanly form, with her laughter for swans, her eyes for bees and her swelling breasts as budding lotus calyxes... With her captivating beauty and manner to match, in the world of humankind she, Sundarī, was the loveliest of women.
>
> (Sau. 4.4-5, in Covill 2007: 81)

Once the narrative progresses and Nanda finds himself accompanying the Buddha to the forest for his unwanted life of discipleship, he laments his separation from his wife drawing upon once more the simile of the lovers as *cakravāka* birds. He despairs, 'I find no peace, like a *cakravāka* bird separated from its mate' (Sau. 7.17, in Covill 2007: 137).

Following the chapters on Nanda's enforced ordination, his wife's lament at the separation and his own, is the chapter which contains the attack on women. Here an ascetic comes upon Nanda in his yearning and imparts upon him his considered knowledge of womankind. The ascetic represents women as pernicious and duplicitous, thoroughly lacking in morality and solely self-serving, concerned only with manipulating others to satisfy her own needs. This is typified in the following quote, in which the ascetic asks Nanda a rhetorical question as to why women deserve his attention, and then continues:

> Women have no regard for handsome looks, wealth, intelligence, lineage or valor; like hordes of crocodiles in a river, they attack without discrimination. A woman never remembers sweet words, caresses or affection. Even when coaxed, a woman is flighty, so depend on her no more than you would on your enemies.
>
> (Sau. 8.37, in Covill 2007: 163)

In this representation of women, long gone is the 'captivating beauty and manner to match' of the exquisite Sundarī, and although women can be described as appealing, the ascetic warns Nanda that they are indeed always

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Buddha), and the nun with a name likening her to a lion on the *Gaṇḍhavyūhasūtra*, both in Paul (1979: 94ff. and 289ff.). <avoid ff.>

duplicitous, 'women's speech is honeyed but there is the deadliest poison in their hearts' (Sau. 8.35, in Covill 2007: 161). The ascetic, it seems, although despising women, feels sympathy for Nanda in his longing and ruminates with a list of metaphors which liken Nanda to an animal that has escaped great danger but seeks to be returned to its peril:

> How pitiful that the wayward deer has escaped from the great danger posed by the hunter, but now in his longing for the herd is about to leap into the net, fooled by the sound of singing! Here is a bird that was enmeshed in a net, freed by a well-wisher to glide through the forest of fruit and flowers, now voluntarily trying to get into a cage! Here is a young elephant pulled out of the thick mud at a treacherous riverbank by another elephant, that wants to once more descend into the crocodile infested river, impelled by its thirst for water! Here is a lad sleeping in a shelter with a snake, who, when woken by a mindful elder, is filled with confusion and tries to grab the fierce snake himself! Here is a bird flown away from a forest tree ablaze with a raging fire, that wishes to fly back there, its qualms forgotten in its longing for its nest! Here is a pheasant in a helpless swoon of lust when separated from its mate through fear of a hawk, living in wretchedness and attaining neither resolution nor modesty! Here is a wretched, undisciplined dog, full of greed but lacking decency and wisdom, who wants to feed once more on the food he has vomited!
>
> (Sau. 8.15-21, in Covill 2007: 155–57)

This passage represents the most interesting animal characterization in the *Saundarananda*, situated as it is within a thoroughgoing display of misogyny, but also in its displacing of robust masculinity with male feebleness and foolhardiness. As this passage is so interesting, I will take some of the image in turn and assess how female and male nature is being characterized. Firstly, man is represented as a wayward deer (*mṛga*). The word used adjectivally to describe the deer is *capala*, meaning 'fickle' or 'wanton'. These characteristics are much more often associated with women than men in the literature of the period. Later on in the *Saundarananda*, Aśvaghoṣa himself maligns women's incandescently fickle sexual fidelity, when he has the ascetic say '[j]ust as a cow, even when herded, goes grazing from one field to the another, so will a woman move on to take her pleasure' (Sau. 8.41, in Covill 2007: 165). Righteous men, however, should not be fickle (*capala*), as notes the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (4.177). Good monks as well, according to the Pāli Canon, should not have this characteristic.[12] In Sanskrit poetry and narrative, women's beauty and demeanour are often likened to those of a graceful gazelle. A woman can also be an unnerved doe, such as the frightened Sītā surrounded by demonesses (*rākṣasī*) while in captivity (Rām. 53.5 and 54.30). Olivelle notes of deer that they evoke charm and innocence, something often said of women.[13] He also notes that in the

12. See for example, the *Gulissāni Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (69) and *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Book 1.13. In Nanda's *Theragāthā* verse, above, Nanda calls himself fickle (*capala*).
13. Olivelle (1997: xxiii). The extant *Pañcatantra* is later than Aśvaghoṣa, although many of the

Pañcatantra deer only ever appear with a hunter nearby, as in Indic literature, they are represented as the ultimate prey (Olivelle 1997: xxiii). Here then, men are cast as fickle, effeminate creatures, easily frightened and easy prey.[14] Such a depiction is a far cry from the broad-chested, leonine epic heroes described above.

Next, men are likened to birds. Birds have a significant place in Sanskrit literary tradition and different types of birds have differing characteristics. In the above passage men are likened to birds three times, twice to what appears to be a generic bird, and once to a pheasant. In the first instance, the word used is a generic one—*vihaga*, which literally means 'sky-goer'. This bird, however, is enmeshed in a net (*jālasaṃvṛtaḥ*), thus evoking an image of a small, frail creature that is helplessness in its captivity. The poor creature cannot free itself, powerless as it is, trapped and entangled. The third avifauna reference is to a pheasant, who displays fear of hawks. The pheasant appears to be representative of fowl in mating, so obsessed with chasing and attracting the female that any encroaching danger barely distils their amour. Thus, the bird, in its 'helpless swoon of lust' (Sau. 8.15-21) loses all sense of dignity.

Next, men are compared to young elephants. In early Indian literature, elephants are used to represent and symbolize a variety of human traits and characteristics. Olivelle (1997: xxiii) says of the elephant that, in the world of the *Pañcatantra*, it 'has a split personality, being both domestic (docile, a good worker, intelligent) and wild (ferocious, unpredictable)'. As well as these two sets of characteristics, a rutting elephant represents a third type.[15] I have quoted two examples of elephant similes above, with women's thighs

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characteristics of the folkloric anthropomorphized animals noted by Olivelle in his introduction to his translation are similar to the characteristics inferred by Aśvaghoṣa . Although the extant *Pañcatantra* is later, many of the stories, of course, come from a common stock of folkloric stories, some of which can be identified on stone reliefs and sculpture dating from the Kuṣāna period and earlier. Likewise, the *Jātakaṭṭhakathā*, dated later in its extant form, sharing some stories with the *Pañcatantra* and retelling stories identified on earlier sculpture, represents animals similarly.

14. The art and literature of the period is not without a few references to the male deer, or stag. There is the well-known *jātaka* story of the golden stag (12), who offers his life for another (referred to in the *Milindapañha*, and depicted on the railings of the Bharhut *stūpa*). Also, although in the sculpture of the period deer are usually depicted in peaceful scenes, I have found one image in which two large deer are carrying riders upon their backs (Snead 1989: 102 Pl. 69). However, the combination with the word *capala*, and within the context of the overall passages, the stag does not appear to be the frame of reference here.
15. Covill (2009) includes a chapter on elephant figures of speech in the *Saundarananda*. As Covill notes, elephant imagery is used substantially during this historical period. She highlights that elephants are 'caught in the wild at an appropriate age...kept in captivity and subjected to a long and difficult training period' (p. 72). With regards to the above reference, Covill situates this as part of the overall 'training' of Nanda, likened to an elephant by Aśvaghoṣa with recourse to 15 different figures of speech.

being likened to the trunk of an elephant and the heroes of the *Mahābhārata* being represented as 'broad-chested and imposing like elephants' (Mbh. 2.21.30). Other symbolic aspects of the elephant are related to the taming of elephants. The *Saundarananda* itself provides two examples, such as when the princes mentioned earlier are said to have 'wandered with youthful unrestraint, like elephants without guiding hooks' (Sau. 1.34, in Covill 2007: 39). Also, in Nanda's lament, when he thinks of his beautiful wife he has left behind he 'gave a heavy sigh, like a newly caught elephant in confinement' (Sau. 7.4, in Covill 2007: 133). The picture painted of the young elephant above is of a semi-wild beast with the potential to be tamed, but which in its youth is foolhardy and ignorant of dangers. In the *Saundarananda*, Nanda is said to have been 17 years old when he leaves home with the Buddha. It is unclear how much time has elapsed between this event and his conversation with the ascetic, but one is led to believe Nanda to be still a fairly young man. However, as the notion of 'coming of age' during this historical period often involved children of seven or eight taking on adult responsibilities, it may well be that the young elephant does not represent a youth possessive of a foolhardy nature that can be ironed out with the advent of maturity, but rather an adult man who has somehow remained foolhardy and ignorant of the perils of a dangerous foe.[16]

Lastly, men are compared to dogs. Mythology aside, dogs were generally not favoured in ancient India and not kept as pets, but considered lowly and polluting creatures.[17] They are associated with death and often depicted as scavengers tearing up and devouring corpses. Dogs seldom appear on sculptures from the period, but when they occasionally do, they are represented as scavengers, devouring a boar, for example. In contemporaneous *dharmaśāstr*ic literature, the polluting nature of dogs is evident in that the sound of dogs barking renders recitation of the Veda impure (*Dharmasūtra* of *Apastamba* 1.10.19). However, in this kind of literature many different animals are said at various times to be in some way polluting. In the *Mahābhārata* the nature of men is likened to the tarnished nature of dogs when Yudhiṣṭhira says of men in war that 'we are not dogs but we are like dogs greedy for a piece of meat'.[18] However, in the *Mahābhārata* dogs do seem to be raised in status on occasion to that of benign village animal, in that Yudhiṣṭhira is sometimes accompanied by a

16. For a discussion of the notion of 'coming of age' in early Buddhism and Brahmanism, see Collett (forthcoming a), chapter on Paṭācārā.
17. Dogs, along with snakes and crocodiles discussed below, all feature in myth from the period. For example, the god Yama has two dogs in the Vedic myths, and dogs are inferred in a lineal descent line in the *Mahābhārata*. Also, snakes or serpents are associated with both Viṣnu and the Buddha. However, these more positive representations in the world of mythology do not appear directly relevant to Aśvaghoṣa's figurative expressions.
18. Mbh 12.7.10 (trans. Fitzgerald) as cited in Hiltebeitel (2001: 171).

dog, and cruelty towards dogs is considered an undharmic act.[19] (Not only: this dog is called Dharma, and, in fulfilment of its name accompanies Yudisthira until the final act of ascending paradise!)

In a *sutta* in the Pāli Canon, Brahmins are said to be worse than dogs. Here the dog is again the most polluting of creatures.[20] In the later folkloric tales, Olivelle (1997: xxiii) notes that although dogs are not main characters in any of the stories in the *Pañcatantra*, they do appear in several, but are always 'despised as unclean and greedy, an animal without an ounce of self-respect'. In the *sutta* mentioned above, men are not only likened to dogs but are depicted as the worse kind of vile dog that wants to eat its own vomit. If this metaphor is taken to its full conclusion, it could be presumed that women are the dog's vomit. However, there is at least one reference in the Pāli Canon where sensual desires are likened to vomit, glossed as dog's vomit. This is a possible interpretation of the metaphor—men are lowly dogs desiring the most base and vile of experiences; sensual pleasure.[21]

Turning now to the ways in which women are represented in the same *sutta*, the females' duplicitous nature is illuminated by them being both dangerous and enticing. Thus, the deer has escaped the hunter (woman) but is still 'longing for the herd' (his love). The elephant wants to descend into the crocodile-infested river (women) because of its thirst for water (the love of women). Each metaphor except for the last evokes both a danger and a thing desired.

Danger	Attraction
hunter	herd
entanglement	cage[22]
crocodile-infested river	water
snake	shelter
hawk	mate

In terms of the 'woman as danger' aspect of the female, women are the hunters, pursuing the fickle deer. There are some instances of women being represented in this way in other literature form the period, as it is part of what appears to have been a social construct of female sexuality to depict women as sexual aggressors and men as hapless victims of the voracious female sexual appetite. The extent to which this has been depicted in early

19. See various discussions in Hiltebeitel (2001), such as pages 170–72 and 195–98. Hiltebeitel also notes that Yudhiṣṭhira's *dharma* is exemplified by his non-cruelty to a dog, p. 209.
20. *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, 5.19, see Freiberger (2009).
21. See Sumedhā's verse 478 in the *Therīgāthā*, and the commentary which glosses this as dog's vomit.
22. Here the cage represents the home comfort of the bird, but carried the same association as the English metaphor of the 'gilded cage'.

Buddhist texts has been overstated, but as the above passage demonstrates, such depictions do exist. I have shown elsewhere the problems with the idea of this as part of a pervasive social construct (Collett forthcoming b). The general parameters of this type of gendered portrayal are of women as temptresses and seductresses, seeking to entice and ensnare men. To quote just one other example, in *Therīgāthā* 72, the nun Vimalā speaks of her former life as a prostitute in which she sought to entice men into her lair: 'Having decorated this body, well painted, enticing fools, I stood at the brothel door as a hunter having laid out a snare'.

Women are also likened to crocodiles, a dangerous wild predatory creature. There is a folklore tale of an anthropomorphized crocodile that can be dated prior to Aśvaghoṣa and crocodiles do appear in sculptures of the time as well as being evidenced in mythology morphed into the *makara*. In art, they generally appear to represent water or a particular river, but are also occasionally depicted as being ridden (Bautze 1995: 27–28). The folkloric story of the crocodile is initially found in the *Cariyapiṭaka*, a Buddhist text that can be dated to the second century BCE.[23] This is the well-known story of the monkey and the crocodile, which later appears in the *Jātakaṭṭhakathā* and the *Pañcatantra*.[24] Olivelle's description of crocodiles in the *Pañcatantra* equates with Aśvaghoṣa's usage; they are the 'hidden danger lurking beneath the water of the lotus-pond' (1997: xxiii). Aśvaghoṣa twice likens women to crocodiles in the context of his attack on women. In both occasions he uses the simile or metaphor to evoke the feeling of a hidden danger lurking beneath the surface. This relates back to the ascetic's tirade on women when he warns Nanda that although on superficial appearance they are sweet and honey-tongued, beneath the veneer women are cruel and vicious. The ascetic says, 'they enthral with their charming talk and attack with their sharp minds'.

In the metaphor of the lad who grasps at a snake in the shelter, both aspects of women as danger/comfort are engendered once again. The snake is the lurking danger, just visible in one's peripheral vision, in the otherwise secure refuge/shelter. The snake in this historical period is represented in different ways. Aśvaghoṣa's metaphorical expression is closest to how Olivelle identifies the folkloric anthropomorphized snake in the *Pañcatantra*. Here, a snake epitomizes peril: 'A common image of danger lurking in the most unexpected of places is that of a snake hidden in one's house' (Olivelle 1997: xxiv). However, he also characterizes snakes as 'double-tongued and double-crossing' and notes there can be no friendship with a snake. This is a further reading than Aśvaghoṣa's usage dictates. Underlying the metaphor here, appears to be the more visceral and onomatopoeic qualities of a snake as seen in other places in Aśvaghoṣa's work and in the epics. In these texts,

23. *Cariyapiṭaka* 3.7. See Horner's translation (2007: 39).
24. *Jātakaṭṭhakathā* (57) and *Pañcatantra*, in Olivelle (1997: 146ff.). <avoid ff.>

used as a simile for human characteristics, the snake-like qualities of humans can represent an otherwise healthy/righteous/good human momentarily turned. Both women and men can be said to resemble a snake at times of anger or distress when they hiss like snakes when angry or are viperous in deceit. For instance, Lakṣmaṇa when made angry 'hisses like a snake' (Rām. 20[illegible]ok?>), or when Rāma's father calls his young wife a deadly poisonou[illegible]er when she turns on him and tries to manipulate him (Rām. 10.35). Demons too can be likened to snakes, such as the demoness who tries to trick Rāma. In this case the snake simply represents a writhing form of an otherwise noxious epic character. In the above quote from the *Saundarananda*, in which women are honey-tongued but poisonous, this is a more subtle manifestation of these varying usages; women appear to be enthralling and charming, but underneath are viperous.

From this assessment of figures of speech in Aśvaghoṣa's *Saundarananda*, in which women and men are likened to animals, and animal behaviour is evoked to represent gendered traits, some general conclusions can be drawn. Aśvaghoṣa's poem illustrates that a man faced with a beautiful woman whom he desires loses his easy leonine prowess and bull-like majesty. He is turned into an effeminate and easily frightened deer, a poor hapless bird, a dumb pheasant, a foolhardy young elephant, and a vile, salivating dog. A woman, on the other hand, when she spies a potential mate, becomes a predatory and deadly hunter, resembling a snapping crocodile or a swooping hawk. But this is not obvious, it is hidden behind honeyed words and an enticing allure. The viperous danger of women is almost wholly occluded from view, just as a crocodile lurks beneath the murky river's surface, ready to pounce, just as the snake slithers silently in the long grass. And this does seem to reflect an anxiety, perhaps an anxiety of emasculation, if that is not stretching the point too far. Nanda is the poor, hapless besotted fool, but rather than, as in the *Udāna* and *Theragāthā*, this being recognized as Nanda's own sad predicament, here it is articulated as malediction against women. Johnson and Covill, in spending much time working on translations of Aśvaghoṣa's poems both raise the question as to whether the struggle identified in the poems—to relinquish erotic love and the sensual pleasures of love-making—was a personal struggle for the poet.[25] Taking this one step further, I want to raise the question: is the fear and anxiety expressed about women in the *Saundarananda* also personal to Aśvaghoṣa? It is not conceptualized as such, quite the opposite actually, here it is a prefigured, universal dynamic between the sexes. However, somewhat ironically given the prejudicial nature of the writer, this dynamic appears to be a scenario in which women are the more powerful and very much have

25. '...for the passion with which he denounces the ordinary joys of life draw its force not merely from a revulsion of feeling, but also from the necessity of convincing himself' (Johnson 1998: xcvi–xcvii). Also see Covill (2007: 18).

the upper hand.

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