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Morality and Monasticism: Reflections on Aṅgulimāla in Early Buddhism

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Abstract

Buddhist literature portrays Aṅgulimāla as a terrifying bandit who killed and wore the fingers of his victims as a garland. After meeting the Buddha, he reforms and becomes a renowned monk. This article analyses the narrative of Aṅgulimāla in the Pāli Canon and its commentaries, illustrating how early Buddhism dealt with the moral and ethical dilemmas of ordaining a former bandit. The narratives shifted the perception of Aṅgulimāla in the eyes of the hostile public. They provided explanations for his actions and tempered his fearsome character by showing that he was a victim of the vindictive schemes of his teacher and jealous peers. Aṅgulimāla's role as a "healer-monk" after becoming a bhikkhu further highlighted his complete moral transformation. He helped a pregnant woman deliver her child through the power of a *paritta*, or protective verse. The *Aṅgulimāla Paritta* became known for protecting women during pregnancy and childbirth, exemplifying the association of Buddhist monasticism with medicine and healing. The article suggests that the Buddha's intervention was influenced by the socio-economic disruptions caused by Aṅgulimāla's actions. Looking into the debates surrounding Aṅgulimāla's identity and religious background, the article points out his possible connections to *samaṇa* traditions, particularly the Ājīvikas. It further explores the theme of maternal compassion, reflected in the figure of Aṅgulimāla's mother, and draws parallels between mother's love and the Buddha's universal love. Thus, through the study of the Aṅgulimāla legend, the article examines Buddhism's approach to crime and reformation, ethics, gender, and narrative strategies within the textual traditions.

Keywords

Aṅgulimāla, Buddhist monasticism, *paritta*s, motherhood, healing traditions

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Introduction

The story of Aṅgulimāla is well-known in Buddhist narratives as well as in popular traditions. As a fearsome and murderous bandit, he was notorious for having slain hundreds of people in the Kosala kingdom. He wore the fingers (*aṅguli*) of his victims as a garland (*mālā*) around his neck, thus acquiring the name "Aṅgulimāla." His inner transformation after meeting the Buddha forms the heart of Buddhist narratives, which illustrate the Buddha's compassion towards all beings and extol the Buddhist ideal of *mettā* (loving-kindness). Under the guidance of the Buddha, Aṅgulimāla not only became a reformed person but also entered the Saṅgha, became an *arahant*, and later gained fame for his assistance and expertise in childbirth and maternal health. His story serves to show the power of the Buddha and his teachings, which subdued one of the most violent criminals of the time without using force.

Although Aṅgulimāla became popular and widely respected, his admission into the Saṅgha was initially controversial. The *Vinaya* rules prohibit the ordination of robbers like Aṅgulimāla (Vin.I.74). His violent past also led to popular outcry (MN.II.104), making it necessary to rationalise his acceptance and emphasise his inherent goodness. Aṅgulimāla's role as a healer becomes important in this context. The texts also introduce his mother, who wished to save him and brought him food, despite the danger. Thus, the narratives demonstrate how early Buddhism navigated the murky waters of morality and criminal reform, particularly concerning the *Vinaya* rules and popular reactions to the conduct of the monks. Finally, Aṅgulimāla's story highlights the role of the monastic Order in providing medical care to the laity, the significance of women, and the ideal of motherhood in Buddhist discourse.

The tale of Aṅgulimāla's conversion is found in the Pāli *Majjhima Nikāya, Theragāthā*, and their commentaries. It is also known in the Chinese translations of the *Saṃyukta-āgama, Ekottara-āgama*, and Chinese *Udāna* collections. Parts of the story are also preserved in Sanskrit fragments from Central Asia (Anālayo 2008, 140; Hartmann 1998, 357). The various accounts differ in certain details. For instance, in the two translations of the *Saṃyukta-āgama*, the story takes place in Aṅga and Magadha. The Sanskrit version also appears to locate it in Magadha. All other canonical accounts situate the story in Sāvatthī, the capital of the Kosala kingdom. The accounts further differ in relating the various elements or episodes that form part of the larger narrative. However, the core of the story is preserved in all versions (Anālayo 2011, 486–87). All these sources state that Aṅgulimāla chased after the Buddha in an attempt to kill him but was unable to catch him. After witnessing the Buddha's miracle and hearing his words, Aṅgulimāla abandoned his evil actions and became a bhikkhu.

Aṅgulimāla's Transformation in Buddhist Narratives

The earliest records of Aṅgulimāla's transformation are found in the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* (MN.II.97–105) and the *Theragāthā* (Thag. 866–891). Later commentaries expanded on the core narrative to provide background details and additional explanations.

The *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* does not provide any details about Aṅgulimāla's life, except the names of his parents, "Gagga" and "Mantāṇī," which suggest that he was a Brahmin. It introduces Aṅgulimāla as a terrifying robber (*cora*) who had ravaged numerous towns and villages in the Kosala kingdom. He is described as violent, "murderous", and "merciless" (MN.II.97). One day in Sāvatthī, after having his meal, the Buddha strolled on the path toward Aṅgulimāla's abode. Despite warnings from locals about the danger, he moved onwards undeterred. When Aṅgulimāla saw the Buddha, he tried to attack him, but to his shock, he failed to even reach him. Going as fast as he could, he could not catch up to the Buddha, who was walking at a normal pace. Bewildered at this impossible occurrence, Aṅgulimāla stopped and called out to the Buddha to stop as well. In reply, the Buddha said, "I have stopped, Aṅgulimāla, you stop too." This reply further perplexed him, and when he questioned how it was possible that the Buddha had stopped even while walking and that Aṅgulimāla was still walking even when he had stopped, the Buddha explained it through these verses:

> Aṅgulimāla, I have stopped forever,
> I abstain from violence towards living beings.
> But you have no restraint towards things that live:
> That is why I have stopped, and you have not. (MN.II.99)

The Buddha's emphasis on the word "stop," focused on moral rather than literal or physical meaning, had an immediate and profound effect on Aṅgulimāla. Upon being taught the Dhamma, he realised the evils of his actions, abandoned his weapons, and was ordained. He returned with the Buddha to Sāvatthī and stayed at the Jetavana monastery.

Meanwhile, the citizens of Kosala gathered at King Pasenadi's palace to demand the incarceration of Aṅgulimāla, and the king set out with his forces to capture him. On the way, he paid a visit to pay homage to the Buddha. When asked about his mission, he explained it as capturing the robber. The Buddha then asked what the king would do if he discovered that Aṅgulimāla had given up his murderous ways, joined the Saṅgha, and was living a righteous life. Pasenadi replied that the former bandit would be venerated and supported with alms, robes, lodgings, and protection. Upon learning that Aṅgulimāla had reformed, the king paid his respects. As Aṅgulimāla was living an abstemious life in the forest, relying on alms and wearing rags, he refused the king's offer to provide for him. The king marvelled at the might of the Buddha, who, without using any force, was able to subdue a criminal who had previously overpowered all forces and weapons. The king's feelings reflect the feelings of the laypeople on learning this story. The text does not offer any explanation for how or why Aṅgulimāla became a robber. The main focus of this part of the *Sutta* is to affirm Buddhism's virtues and the Buddha's transformative influence.

Following King Pasenadi's visit, the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* describes the famous episode of Aṅgulimāla and a pregnant woman. During his alms round, Aṅgulimāla came across a woman suffering from acute labour pains. He related her condition to the Buddha, who instructed him to

return to the woman and proclaim that he had never intentionally taken a life. Aṅgulimāla feared that this would be a deliberate lie, following which the Buddha amended the words and pronounced what became known as the *Aṅgulimāla Paritta*: "Sister, since I was born with noble birth, I do not recall that I have ever intentionally deprived a living being of life. By this truth, may you be well and may your infant be well" (MN.II.103). The phrase "noble birth" signifies Aṅgulimāla becoming a "stream-enterer" (*sotāpanna*) by embracing the Noble Eightfold Path. Buddhist texts describe four kinds of noble persons: stream-enterers, once-returners (*sakadāgāmi*), non-returners (*anāgāmi*), and *arahants*. When Aṅgulimāla returned to the woman and uttered those words, she was cured of her pain and gave birth to a healthy child.

Although Aṅgulimāla was a learned monk and *arahant*, he could not completely evade the consequences of his previous actions. He avoided the fate of a bad rebirth by becoming a stream-enterer and was freed from the cycle of rebirth after becoming an *arahant*. However, his previous bad *kamma* bore fruit in his present life. Once, the people of Sāvatthī assaulted him when he entered the city for alms, leaving him battered and bruised. Seeing his condition, the Buddha informed Aṅgulimāla that he was suffering the fruits of his actions, for which he would otherwise have been subjected to hundreds and thousands of years of torture in hell (MN. II.104).

Towards the end of the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta*, Aṅgulimāla utters the verses that also form part of the *Theragāthā* attributed to him (Thag.866–891). It begins with Aṅgulimāla asking the Buddha to stop and the Buddha's reply, which inspires the change in him and leads him to renounce his evil actions. The poem goes on to exalt the virtues of the Buddha's teachings and the beauty and benefits of applying those teachings in one's life. Interestingly, the *Theragāthā* also reveals Aṅgulimāla's given name. It mentions that his name was Ahiṃsaka (translated as "harmless" or "non-harmer"), which was fitting for him, even though he had been a "harmer," or "Hiṃsaka," in the past.

The commentaries elaborate on Aṅgulimāla's story. Buddhaghosa's *Papañcasūdanī* (MA. III.328–44) provides the commentary on the *Majjhima Nikāya*, while Dhammapāla's *Paramatthadīpanī* (ThagA.III.54–64) contains the commentary on the *Theragāthā.* These texts give a background to his birth and upbringing, as well as an explanation for his killings. In evolving the story, the commentaries also temper the ferocity of Aṅgulimāla's character. The two accounts are mostly identical, except for minor differences that reflect Dhammapāla's attempt to resolve the inconsistencies present in Buddhaghosa's narrative (Gombrich 2006, 137).

Both versions describe him as the son of the chaplain to the king of Kosala, born under the constellation of thieves and hence destined to become a robber.[1] The tale is embellished with

[1]A similar explanation is found in certain *Jātaka* stories where the *bodhisattva* is born as a robber. The *Satapatta Jātaka* (J. no. 279) explains that he became a robber from "a fault of the horoscope"; the *Kaṇavera Jātaka* (J. no. 318) says that he was born under "the star of the robber."

fantastical elements. For instance, the texts state that at the moment of his birth, all the weapons in the kingdom began to shine brightly. The king was alarmed and questioned the chaplain about it. The chaplain explained that the phenomenon was caused by the birth of his son, who was fated to become a robber. They considered killing the boy, but since he would operate alone (as opposed to being part of a band), he was permitted to live. The *Papañcasūdanī* (MA.III.329) says that he was given the name Ahiṃsaka ("harmless"). The *Paramatthadīpanī* says he was named Hiṃsaka ("harmful"), which was later changed to Ahiṃsaka (ThagA.III.55). The commentaries further relate that he was sent to Takkasilā for his studies and became the best and most favoured student of his teacher. Bitter and envious of his success, the other students conspired against him by convincing the teacher that he had seduced his wife. In retaliation, Aṅgulimāla's teacher instructed him to embark on a murderous mission, framing it as a gift to his teacher, as was customary at the time. The commentaries also explain the garland of fingers. While differing in minor details, both versions concur that he started weaving the fingers into a necklace to keep count of his victims. Both texts further state that because of his terror, the population of the nearby villages and towns deserted their homes and migrated to the city of Sāvatthī (MA.III.329–30; ThagA.III.56). When he needed only one more finger to complete his count of one thousand, his mother came to know about him. She asked her husband to bring him back, but when he refused, she set out toward Aṅgulimāla's abode herself, bringing food to feed her son. At this point, the Buddha intervened. Knowing that it would be impossible to save Aṅgulimāla from rebirth in hell if he killed his own mother, as matricide is one of the five heinous crimes in Buddhism that cannot be exonerated[2], the Buddha intervened and enabled his reformation.

The commentaries thus expanded on Aṅgulimāla's legend to make it more relatable to the people and addressed the questions that the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* leaves unanswered. The major interpolations include providing a background on Aṅgulimāla's birth and education, offering explanations for his actions, and introducing his parents (particularly his mother) into the narrative. In doing so, they do not simply furnish additional details to the story; it can be argued that they alter the morals at the heart of the story and the dominant impression that it leaves in the mind of the listener. Previously portrayed as a merciless killer who laid waste to towns and villages without any reason, he is now depicted as a respectable student wronged by his teacher and colleagues and induced by others onto the path of wickedness. In Buddhaghosa's account, he even initially objects to his teacher's orders, expressing that he belonged to a family that harmed no one (MA.III.329). Although the commentaries were later textual developments, their contents cannot be considered mere narrative inventions by the authors. Monika Zin has argued that the commentarial episodes, such as the story of Aṅgulimāla's mother, existed from an earlier date and were taken from a canonical text which is no longer extant. This is corroborated by the depiction of these episodes in reliefs from Gandhāra and Amarāvatī, which predate the commentaries by a few centuries (Zin 2001, 708–9).

[2] The five crimes are: killing one's mother, killing one's father, killing an *arahant*, injuring a Buddha, and causing a schism in the Saṅgha (AN.III.146).

There are two ways in which the commentarial traditions reframe Aṅgulimāla's viciousness. Firstly, they introduce an element of inevitability by providing a horoscopic rationale for his immoral actions. He was predestined to become a brigand due to his birth under the constellation of thieves. Despite knowing this, the king allowed him to live. Secondly, having been induced to kill because of the corruption of others, his own volition or intent behind his actions was greatly reduced.

By making these adjustments, the commentators transform the account from one that illustrates the positive impact of the Buddha's teachings on even the worst criminals into a story about an essentially good person who was led astray and ultimately guided back to the correct path. Matthew Kosuta (2017) has discussed how this evolution of Aṅgulimāla's story changes the core teaching and meaning of the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta,* particularly its implications on how one achieves the state of enlightenment (*nibbāna*). Even though Aṅgulimāla's evil actions would have resulted in a huge store of bad *kamma,* he attained *nibbāna,* which prevented him from suffering its results in his future births. He had to endure beatings from the people of Sāvatthī, but compared to the trials he would have to endure in future rebirths, this repercussion seems mild. The main takeaway of all versions of the story is that the Buddhist path has the capacity to reform even the worst elements of society. However, the two iterations of the legend differ in the Buddhist values that enable liberation. According to Kosuta, the narrative in the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* exemplifies the effect of the Noble Eightfold Path, which constitutes the "*kamma* which leads to the destruction of *kamma*" described in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (AN.II.232). The results of evil *kamma* from the past are reduced with the help of the Eightfold Path. Now, one must already have an accumulation of good *kamma* from previous births, or already be an essentially good person, to attain *nibbāna* in the present lifetime (Kosuta 2017, 35–9).

Besides the Pāli *Nikāyas*, Aṅgulimāla's story is also preserved in several extant Chinese translations. Two of them are translations of the *Saṃyukta-āgama,* probably belonging to the Mūla Sarvāstivāda tradition; one is a translation of the *Ekottara-āgama*, the affiliation of which is undecided; and two are individual translations (Anālayo 2008, 140). These are dated to the fourth-fifth centuries CE. A comparative analysis of the story of Aṅgulimāla's conversion in the various accounts has been provided by Anālayo (2008, 2011). He notes that while there is a tendency of exaggeration in the narratives, the Buddha's fearlessness in the face of danger and his message rooted in the Four Noble Truths lie at the heart of the story. He also highlights how it was not a miracle, but the Buddha's wise words that inspired Aṅgulimāla's transformation.

Aṅgulimāla's later life, after suffering injuries at the hands of the enraged public, is mainly reconstructed from his verses in the *Theragāthā*. These verses reveal that he retreated into forests, mountains, and caves, living a solitary life (Hecker 1997, 330). Aṅgulimāla celebrates his transformation, noting that his given name "Ahiṃsaka" now befits his character (Thag.879). He extols the value of performing good deeds to atone for his previous bad actions (Thag.871–2). He also

speaks of his "enemies", probably referring to those who had hit him, and advises them to also listen to and follow the Buddha's Dhamma, which would stop them from harming him or anyone else (Thag.874–6). The *Theragāthā* affirms the idea that his transformation symbolised a social and spiritual rebirth for him. Aṅgulimāla says that he was previously a Brahmin by birth, "highborn on both sides," but now he is the son of the Buddha (Thag.889). The poem does not, however, clarify the time and manner of his death.

Figure 1. Pakkī Kuṭī (Aṅgulimāla Stūpa) from North-East (Image by author)

Traveller accounts attest to the enduring legacy of Aṅgulimāla. In the seventh century CE, Xuanzang recorded several important structures in Sāvatthī, including the Aṅgulimāla Stūpa. He noted that it was located to the east of Pasenadi's palace and was the place of Aṅgulimāla's conversion (Beal 1906, 2–3). During his archaeological explorations, Cunningham identified it as the brick building called *Pakkī Kuṭī* in the complex of Maheṭh, the ancient city of Sāvatthī (Cunningham 1871, 334–35). However, Hoey identified another stūpa known as Stūpa 'A' as the Aṅgulimāla Stūpa. He considered the *Pakkī Kuṭī* to be a later building related to the "Hall of the Law" mentioned by Xuanzang. The interior of the *Pakkī Kuṭī* consists of perpendicular brick walls forming square and rectangular chambers, with a curved wall and a square chamber lying at the centre of the mound (Vogel 1911, 108–110).

Contentions and Accommodations in the Tradition

Aṅgulimāla has remained a popular figure in Buddhist legends and imaginations, widely honoured as an exemplary figure for his transformation and meritorious deeds. However, his acceptance into the Saṅgha did not go unchallenged. Pāli sources provide evidence of public outrage and rejection. Even after receiving the Buddha's favour and being venerated by the king, Aṅgulimāla was not forgiven by the people, who took matters into their own hands and punished him for his crimes. Furthermore, the texts curiously do not offer any resolution regarding the effects of his actions on society, particularly the families of his victims. Buddhism does not endorse violence or retribution, but it permits the punishment of bandits or robbers who harass the public, considering it to be the result of their evil actions (Singh 2025a, 58). However, compassion and moral reform remain at the heart of Buddhist discourses on punishment and the treatment of criminals (Harvey 2009, 49–55). The goal is not to punish offenders but to help them change and become accepted members of society (Loy 2000, 150–51; Harvey 2009, 57–9). In the case of Aṅgulimāla, Buddhism takes a rehabilitative approach, focusing on character reformation instead of retribution. Since Aṅgulimāla had already reformed, there was no need for him to be punished (Loy 2000, 150). Understandably, it would have been more difficult for the masses to accept this.

Allowing a criminal or a brigand to enter the Saṅgha certainly raised tensions. This is clearly evident from the *Mahāvagga*, which mentions that "a thief (wearing) a garland of fingers" (*aṅgulimāla*) had been ordained as a monk. On seeing him the people "were perturbed, then alarmed, then ran away, then they went by a different route, then they turned in another direction, then they closed the door" (Vin.I.74). When the Buddha heard this, he proclaimed that a thief wearing an emblem (*dhajabaddha*) should not be allowed to go forth, and those who allow such a thing to happen commit an offence of wrong-doing (*dukkaṭa*). Although the term "aṅgulimāla" here does not occur as a proper name and thus cannot be taken to refer specifically to the bandit named Aṅgulimāla, the injunction is an undeniable reference to this famous figure. Given that the *Vinaya* rules explicitly forbid the admission of the finger-garland-wearing bandit into the Saṅgha, Aṅgulimāla's widespread acceptance and reverence in contemporary as well as later traditions is puzzling. These contradictions suggest that efforts to rehabilitate the infamous bandit were not entirely successful during his lifetime. Further narrative strategies to extenuate Aṅgulimāla's offences were developed in later traditions, which cemented his memory and legacy as an exemplary figure. Xuanzang's account (Beal 1906, 3) confirms that the story of his teacher's corruption and his mother's intervention had become well-known by the seventh century CE.

Aṅgulimāla no longer posed a threat after becoming a stream-enterer. However, the people remained suspicious and vengeful about a widely feared criminal entering the Saṅgha. The *Vinaya* injunction against admitting robbers like Aṅgulimāla could have been placed to placate the angry masses. It also addressed the fear that other criminals would wrongly take advantage of

the protection offered by the Saṅgha and evade justice, just as Aṅgulimāla had secured legal immunity by becoming a monk. This highlights the practical constraints of applying the principle of rehabilitative justice espoused by the example of Aṅgulimāla. Transforming the heart of a killer may be possible, but reintegrating him into society was even more challenging. It would also be difficult, as some scholars have suggested, for others who came after the Buddha to follow in his footsteps, for they would "not have the capacity nor the authority" to recognise the hidden goodness in criminals and take up the task of reformation and rehabilitation (Hecker 1997, 327). The *Vinaya* rule would deter other monks, who did not have the insight and knowledge of the Buddha, from "indiscriminately ordaining criminals" (Anālayo 2011, 497 n. 279). It is also possible that the rule was made to emphasise that Aṅgulimāla was no longer a finger-garland-wearing bandit. The Buddha knew that he had undergone a genuine transformation, but others would not have been assured. The clear prohibition of bandits who wore finger-garlands reiterates that there was no reason to be alarmed by Aṅgulimāla's admission into the Order.

The widespread hatred for the bandit also raises the question of why he was ordained as a bhikkhu in the first place. The *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* and other early versions of the story do not address this issue. For these early texts, which are principally concerned with religious perspectives, investigating the reasons or logic behind the Buddha's decision was not necessary. Their objective was to exalt Buddhist virtues and the power of the Eightfold Path. The commentaries, as we have seen, explain the Buddha's decision to save and ordain him through their interpolations. They rationalise his admission into the Saṅgha by making him a victim of circumstances. Although the change in Aṅgulimāla's character is significant for his story, it should be noted that the Buddha also taught other evildoers and embraced them within the fold. Ajātasattu, who had committed the heinous crime of killing his father, was taught the Dhamma by the Buddha. Having confessed to his evil actions, he took refuge in the Buddha and became a lay follower (DN.I.85). However, since he had committed the unforgivable crime of killing his father (AN.III.146), the Buddha explained that he was fated to be reborn in hell. Those reborn in hell could still come back to the human realm and become an *arahant*, as the story of Mahā-Moggallāna, who had killed his parents in a past life, shows (DhA.III.69–70).

Many of the miraculous and exaggerated elements of the story, such as the unrealistic number of fingers, are dramatic constructions intended to enhance its impact. These can only be studied for their symbolic or metaphorical meanings within literary and religious contexts, and cannot be taken literally. The problem of robbery and murder, however, is a pervasive issue in all societies and would have caused significant distress for people during the Buddha's time. The king asked if Aṅgulimāla would work solo or in a band. Since he would work solo, he was not initially perceived to be a serious threat, but the problem of bands of robbers was clearly a cause of concern in early historic Indian society. Buddhist texts like the *Jātakas* depict bands of robbers as disruptive entities, usually raiding border villages (where state authority was

probably weaker) or waiting at the entry of forests near frequently travelled routes to attack and loot the travellers (J. nos. 48, 63, 76, 79, 120, 265, 279, 459). Their terror could sometimes become so alarming as to "transform from regular nuisance to a sincere political threat against state authority" (Saha 2015, 153), forcing the king to take action.

The *Takka Jātaka* (J. no. 68) presents another story of a robber's transformation through the virtues of Buddhism. Here, the chief of a band of robbers (Ānanda in a past life) is influenced by the *bodhisattva* to renounce the world and become a recluse. Unlike the case of Aṅgulimāla and the Buddha, the *Jātaka* story does not centre on moral transformation; it comes about as a positive outcome of the exemplary presence of the *bodhisattva* and not as his deliberate decision to liberate the robber. In contrast, the Buddha's encounter with Aṅgulimāla is entirely intentional. It brings us back to the question of why he chose to ordain Aṅgulimāla.

The answer perhaps lies in the greater political and socio-economic disruptions caused by Aṅgulimāla. The threat posed by him, even though he operated solo and not as part of a band, was grave enough to cause the Buddha's intervention in what would usually fall under the jurisdiction of the king. In this instance, the Buddha subdues a criminal, effectively rendering the king powerless in executing his duties. The Pāli commentary even notes that Pasenadi was fearful of the bandit, and his visit to the Buddha was made with the purpose of asking for advice and insight on whether his mission would be successful. If the Buddha indicated that he would fail, it would have provided a valid excuse to withdraw (Anālayo 2011, 494).

A figure like Aṅgulimāla would have been recognisable by the general public. Although he was a robber, some distinctions set Aṅgulimāla apart from other figures in Buddhist narratives. The most obvious differences were the motive and method. Robber groups were known to plunder houses or villages/towns, attack and loot caravans, or abduct people and demand ransom in exchange; senseless murder was seldom their *modus operandi*. Their actions were primarily aimed at acquiring treasures. Aṅgulimāla's distinctive notoriety lay in his inexplicable bloodthirst and grisly act of mutilating his victims. Robbers were generally organised in bands, while Aṅgulimāla was a terrifying force all on his own. He was perceived as being so powerful that he was described as being able to single-handedly defeat men "in groups of ten, twenty, thirty and even forty" (MN.II.98). It is also likely that his base of operations lay near the city of Sāvatthī—the political seat of the Kosala kingdom and the *vassavāsa* residence of the Buddha for most of his career—instead of far-off border villages. This makes it easier to understand why the Buddha took a great interest in him.

Robbers also posed a serious economic problem. The *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* describes the total abandonment of districts as people fled from Aṅgulimāla's terror (MN.II.98). This would have been catastrophic for the local agrarian economy, resulting in the "loss of livelihood" for most residents (Anālayo 2008, 141). Robbers also frequently intercepted travellers and traders moving

along important trade routes. In ancient India, the "Grand Route" of the north, known as *Uttara-patha,* served as the main artery of internal and external trade networks. It connected the major commercial and urban centres of northern India, and linked them with Central Asia and Syria (Chandra 1977, 2). It also connected the major Buddhist centres with each other. Sāvatthī was an important city that lay on the route extending from Takkasilā to Kāsi and Mithilā. Buddhist literature states that merchants from Sāvatthī travelled to Takkasilā for trade. Routes from Sāvatthī also reached important cities such as Sāketa, Kosambī, Rājagaha, Saṅkissa, and Champā (Chandra 1977, 12–18). Thus, a fearsome figure like Aṅgulimāla could potentially disrupt the local economy and larger socio-economic structures.

A criminal who had massacred and terrorised the country to such an extent that entire habitations were deserted and people feared travelling across the routes nearby would have constituted a significant concern for the Saṅgha, which depended on people for alms and patronage. While it is probably an exaggeration that not only towns and villages but entire "districts" (*janapadā*) were deserted because of a single man, it is possible that people fled the areas near Aṅgulimāla's dwellings because of him. Anālayo points out how the *Sutta* describes the Buddha's encounters with cowherds, shepherds, etc., several times on the way to Aṅgulimāla, thus contradicting its own claim that the entire region was abandoned (Anālayo 2011, 488–89). Nevertheless, the fear and danger of venturing out could have restricted the movements of monks and nuns, and limited the areas that they could safely visit for their daily alms rounds. Furthermore, the socio-economic well-being of the lay followers was a principal concern of the Saṅgha. Thus, the story can also be understood as an example of the interdependency of the Saṅgha and the larger society.

The Historical Identity of Aṅgulimāla

Providing a satisfactory background to Aṅgulimāla was a difficult task, as the disagreements or contradictions found in the various texts indicate. Even though Dhammapāla's account closely follows Buddhaghosa's *Papañcasūdanī*, having been either copied or paraphrased from it, he makes some changes in an attempt to resolve the inconsistencies present in the latter's version. For instance, Buddhaghosa tells us that Aṅgulimāla was asked to kill a thousand people, and he started taking their fingers only to keep a record of the number of his victims (MA.III.330). Dhammapāla alters this and makes his teacher directly demand a thousand fingers (ThagA.III.55). This rather unconvincing explanation for the finger-garland has prompted Richard Gombrich to investigate the identity of Aṅgulimāla with respect to the religious milieu of the period, concluding that he belonged to a group of early Śaiva/Śākta worshippers who represented an early Tāntric tradition. This is based on his examination of the term *"mahesi"* ("great sage"), which occurs in the verses describing Aṅgulimāla's first encounter with the Buddha. Translations of that particular line describe Aṅgulimāla reflecting that he had not honoured a great sage (*"mahesi,"* referring to the Buddha) in a long time, which raises the question of which great sage

he might have previously revered. Noting that the text was corrupt and confusing, Gombrich undertakes a fresh analysis of the verses and proposes that the term could be *"maheso"* (a title of Śiva) (Gombrich 2006, 137–52). Thus, Aṅgulimāla becomes a worshipper of Śiva. His garland of fingers is interpreted as the fulfilment of a vow (*vata*), similar to the practices of Tāntric orientations of Śaiva/Śākta worship.

Gombrich also identifies other possible references to the Śaiva/Śākta tradition within the Pāli Canon, although these are notably few and vague. In the *Theragāthā,* a couple of verses attributed to a monk named Mahākāla describe his encounter with a woman named Kālī in a cremation ground. She cuts off the thighs, arms, and skull from a corpse and piles them together on the ground. Mahākāla gains insight after observing this (Thag.151–52). The commentary explains that Mahākāla was a merchant who became a bhikkhu after hearing the Buddha preach in Sāvatthī. He decided to practise meditation in a cemetery where the woman Kālī, who was a "corpse-burner," laid out the different parts of a corpse for him to meditate upon. Gombrich takes the name of the monk to suggest that he was a Śaiva/Śakta, and that "Kālī" referred to the goddess of that name, well-known in later Puraṇic and Tāntric Hinduism (Gombrich 2006, 158-60). He also lists several other allusions to the worship of Śiva or Kālī in the Pāli texts. This includes the mention of a god named Śiva and a god named Īśāna (a Sanskrit name for Śiva). Kālī is named as the mother of Māra in the *Māratajjaniya Sutta* (MN.I.332–38), while a bad-tempered nun who was called Caṇḍakālī appears several times in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (Gombrich 2006, 160–62).

The suggestion that Aṅgulimāla represented a member of the Śaivite sect has been made earlier as well. James Legge, in his translation of Faxian's account, describes "Aṅgulimālya" (Sanskrit for Aṅgulimāla) as "a sect of Śivaitic fanatics, who made assassination a religious act" (Legge 1971, 56 n. 2), which the robber had been forced to join—a description reproduced by Ernest J. Eitel (Eitel 1888, 13). Samuel Beal also refers to Aṅgulimāla as a sect founded by the finger-garland-wearing brigand (Beal 1906, 3 n. 7). However, there is no evidence to support this description. Accounts by the Chinese travellers do not indicate any sectarian affiliation of the robber; it appears to be an unfounded addition by various translators (Maitrimurthi and von Rospatt 1998, 177 n. 25). Xuanzang's account, however, has an interesting note that Aṅgulimāla was elated to see the Buddha coming towards him because his teacher had told him that killing the Buddha would ensure a rebirth in the Brahma heaven (Beal 1906, 3). This version of the episode is found in the Chinese *Ekottara-āgama* (Anālayo 2011, 491) but is absent in the available Pāli texts.

These depictions of probable "occult" and "antinomian" practices, while intriguing, are difficult to accept as part of an ancient Tāntric tradition. Scholars trace the origins of Tāntric traditions to the seventh century CE (Flood 1996, 158), approximately a millennium after the period of the Buddha. Additionally, the change from *"mahesi"* to *"maheso"* cannot be supported

if one considers other versions of the story found in Chinese translations, all of which refer to a great sage or man, giving no indication of the god Śiva (Anālayo 2011, 493–94 n. 258). There is also no historical evidence of Śaiva or Śakta devotees performing vows that involved adorning oneself with body parts of human victims as part of iconic identification with the deity (Maitrimurthi and von Rospatt 1998, 169–170). Alexis Sanderson, in his response to Gombrich, also explains that body parts that are ritually used in Tāntric practices are generally taken from corpses (Gombrich 2006, 152 n. 7), thereby casting doubts on why Aṅgulimāla would kill people for this. There is some evidence to suggest that the Ājīvikas practised mutilation as part of their initiatory rites (Basham 1981, 104–5), although these would have been self-inflicted. The *Tittira Jātaka* (J. no. 438) and its commentary also contain vague references to Ājīvikas practising "magical rites" involving blood (Basham 1981, 112–13).

Although the identification of Aṅgulimāla with Śaiva/Śakta worship has been questioned, scholars have not dismissed a "cultic dimension" to the act of wearing the fingers of victims (Maitrimurthi and von Rospatt 1998, 173). However, the exact nature of such cults is difficult to establish. There are some references to practices of human sacrifice by robbers, such as in the story of Saṅkicca, found in the *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā* (DhA.II.240–53). In this story, a band of five hundred robbers in a forest had made a vow to a deity (*devatā*) to kill whoever entered the forest and make an offering of their "flesh and blood." They are transformed after their encounter with the bhikkhu Saṅkicca. When a robber attempts to kill the seven-year-old Saṅkicca, the boy enters a *jñāna*. The robber's sword bends and bounces off the first time it comes into contact with him and, on the second attempt, the sword splits. After hearing his verses on fearlessness, the five hundred robbers decide to get ordained (DhA.II.247–50). Ten years later, Saṅkicca takes his nephew Atimuttaka as a novice. Atimuttaka is also captured by five hundred bandits for the purpose of being sacrificed as an offering. He is released on the condition that he will not tell anyone about their existence. Atimuttaka keeps this promise and does not warn his parents of the looming danger. The bandits are touched upon finding that he had kept his word, and all five hundred of them decide to ordain (DhA.II.253).

The story of Saṅkicca and Atimuttaka appears to be connected with the *Theragāthā* verses of the monk Adhimutta (Thag.704–725). The commentary identifies Adhimutta as the son of Saṅkicca's sister (ThagA.71). In the *Theragāthā,* a bandit leader tells Adhimutta that all those whom they had killed in the past "for sacrifice or for wealth" had trembled with fear, but Adhimutta shows no fear and utters three verses on fearlessness (Thag.706–8). These three verses are also spoken by Saṅkicca in the *Dhammapada* commentary (DhA.II.250). In another story of the *Dhammapada* commentary, five hundred bandits were chased into the forest by the people. When they met a forest hermit, the bandits followed the five precepts, which prevented them from even defending themselves. They were all killed and reborn in the Deva realm (DhA.IV.39–40). The incidents related to Saṅkicca and Adhimutta both suggest that during the Buddha's period, bands of robbers residing in forests killed people to make sacrificial offerings, likely to a forest deity. However, this cannot be equated with the practice of wearing the body parts of victims.

Pia Brancaccio has interpreted Aṅgulimāla as a representative of the "forest-dwellers" or "jungle tribes" of Indian traditions. She views his story as a reflection of Buddhism's treatment of the "wilderness," which was perceived to be "the realm of the fearful" (Brancaccio 1999, 105–8). Ancient Indian narratives associate robbers with forests. Organised robber groups are frequently depicted as living in forests. Bloomfield's work also shows how Indian literature (mainly Brahmanical and Jain texts) describes robbers through "ethnic designations," identifying them with certain tribes and castes (Bloomfield 1926). Brancaccio has looked at artistic representations of the brigand, particularly his depiction in Gandharan reliefs and the curious "crown" made from leaves on his head. She considers this in comparison with other similar representations associated with forest-dweller figures. Maurizio Taddei has suggested that the interaction between Grecian motifs associated with Dionysian iconography and the tradition of the *yakkha/yakṣa* in Indian Buddhism found expression in Aṅgulimāla's representation in Gandhāra (Brancaccio 1999, 108). However, there is no indication of Aṅgulimāla's connection with *yakṣas* in the main narrative, which Brancaccio acknowledges. Although we find forest-dwelling bands of robbers, it is difficult to identify Aṅgulimāla as a forested or tribal figure, for he is clearly stated to be from a Brahmin family from the earliest sources, born in the city of Sāvatthī and educated according to Brahmin traditions. Furthermore, wreaths made of leaves—a common headdress in Greco-Roman mythology and iconography—cannot be directly linked to forest-dwelling or tribal populations on the fringes of society, which were "tamed" by Buddhism. Floral wreaths also appear in association with *bodhisattvas* in Gandharan art (Anwar and Hameed 2021, 19).

During the Buddha's age, there were various *samaṇa* traditions. It is possible that Aṅgulimāla was a follower of a *samaṇa* teacher. In the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN.I.47–86), King Ajātasattu asks the various *samaṇa* teachers about the fruits of their way of life. Pūraṇa Kassapa taught "non-action" (*akiriya*), holding that causing harm, killing, or committing offences like adultery or burglary would not lead to any evil results. Makkhali Gosāla preached fatalism, saying that everything in life was determined by destiny (*niyati*), and hence there is no action or decision that could change the course of life and rebirths. Pakudha Kaccāyana taught that there were seven eternal elements including the life principle (*jīva*), which could not be changed or harmed. These three *samaṇa* views imply that killing is not wrong, that one does not have power over their actions to kill or not to kill, and that the eternal life principle cannot be harmed; thus, killing is not real. These doctrines and their teachers are associated with the Ājīvikas (Basham 1981, 17–20), raising the possibility that Aṅgulimāla was an Ājīvika follower. Ajātasattu also spoke to the Jain leader Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, the sceptic Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta, and the materialist Ajita Kesakambalī who denied the idea of survival after death and said that there were no karmic results.

When the Buddha approaches Aṅgulimāla "alone" and "unaccompanied," Aṅgulimāla sees him and thinks he is coming "as if driven by fate"[3] (MN.II.99). This could allude to the Ājīvika notion of fate or destiny (*niyati*). As previously mentioned, initiatory rites of

[3] The Pāli term used is *pasayha* ("by force").

the Ājīvikas may have included mutilation. They may have also practised magical blood rituals (Basham 1981, 104–13). Although these references are vague, they reinforce the possibility that Aṅgulimāla's teacher, who induced him to kill, was an Ājīvika. Aṅgulimāla's identity as a *samaṇa* follower could also have led the Buddha to recognise his potential for spiritual transformation.

Monks, Medicine and Maternity

The Aṅgulimāla story has significantly influenced Buddhist practices surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. The *Aṅgulimāla Paritta* continues to be chanted for the safety of expectant mothers and their children in countries such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand. This practice involves the doctrine of *saccakiriyā* or "act of truth" which is based on the belief that, as Gombrich states, "a solemn asseveration of one's righteousness in some particular respect can, by its truth, produce some desired result" (Gombrich 1995, 263). By uttering the truth that he had not intentionally taken a life since "being born in the noble birth," and blessing the pregnant woman by the power of that truth, Aṅgulimāla relieves her pain and ensures the safe delivery of her child. This *saccakiriyā* is found in the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* and forms the core of the *Aṅgulimāla Paritta.*

The term *paritta* denotes "protection" or "safeguard" (Gombrich 1995, 236; Harvey 1993, 53). These are texts, generally *suttas*, which are ritually recited by Buddhists for protection, and are powerful psychological tools for comforting the people dealing with the inevitable fears and sufferings of life. The ceremony of *paritta* chanting involves a *paritta*-thread and water (Harvey 1993, 53). It has been described as a medicine (*bhesajja*) in the *Milindapañha* (Miln.152). The tradition of *parittas* can be traced to the Buddha preaching the *Ratana Sutta* (Sn. vv.222–38; Khp.3–6) in Vesālī after the city had endured a devastating epidemic. The commentaries explain that the Buddha taught Ānanda the method to recite the *sutta*, after which Ānanda and the Lichchavi princes went around the city, sprinkling water from the Buddha's alms bowl and reciting the *Ratana Sutta* (Singh 2025b, 56–60). The association of sacred water with the *paritta* ceremony remains prominent today and is an important part of the *Aṅgulimāla Paritta* chanting ceremony. It has been suggested that the ritual of the *parittas* developed as a result of the incorporation of local traditions (Singh 2025b, 63). In current practice, monks stand as substitutes for Aṅgulimāla and recite the *Aṅgulimāla Paritta*. It is also considered beneficial for expectant mothers to drink the water which was used to wash the seat Aṅgulimāla sat in when he visited the pregnant woman's house and uttered the protective verses (Wilson 2016, 287).

Aṅgulimāla, who had killed nearly a thousand people, became ritually connected with the safety of one of the most vulnerable groups of people and with bringing new life into the world. This stark dichotomy brings the radical change in Aṅgulimāla's character into focus, making it clear that he was no longer a source of terror and torment for the people, but a blessing. This marked a pivotal moment in Aṅgulimāla's life. As previously discussed, the people were alarmed by his admission into the Saṅgha. The commentaries tell us that people closed their doors and refused to give him alms. He faced their disdain every day during his alms rounds. Despite

knowing that he would be turned away, he continued to perform his duty (MA.III.328–44; Thag. III.54–64). It was the incident with the pregnant woman that finally turned his image around, earning him the respect and acceptance of the people.

It is interesting to see how the commentary on the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* explains the Buddha's decision to have Aṅgulimāla perform the role of a healer. Buddhaghosa explains that an "act of truth" was not a "medical function." Rather, it was "done after reflecting on one's own virtue" (Hecker 1997, 328). The Buddha intended to change the populace's perception of Aṅgulimāla by guiding him. Knowing that he was struggling to get alms and unable to perform his duty as a monk, the Buddha instructed him to assist the woman. It helped inculcate a sense of safety in the people, ensuring that Aṅgulimāla would not suffer from a lack of alms food. It also made it possible for him to focus on his meditation and achieve the state of an *arahant.* Before this, he had been plagued by voices and visions of his victims pleading for their lives before they were mercilessly killed. Being an agent of healing and regeneration allowed him to finally let go of the past and attain *nibbāna*. (Hecker 1997, 327–8; Wilson 2016, 286–92). Aṅgulimāla's enduring association with pregnancy and childbirth is a testament to the enormous impact this had on the psyche of the lay Buddhist followers. That he came to be respected only after saving the woman explains why this aspect has remained prominent in popular imaginations and religious practice.

The episode of pregnancy and healing highlights two important aspects of early Buddhism: the connection of monasticism with medical practice, and the symbolic significance of women, especially mothers, in Buddhist narratives and philosophy. The story establishes a clear link between healers and monks, even though the commentary downplays the "medical function" of the act and shifts the attention to its significance for the former robber instead. The Buddhist monastic tradition has a long historical relationship with medicine and healing. It began as an essential component for the sustenance of the Saṅgha, necessary for a healthy monastic community. The Pāli Canon describes medical practices involving the treatment of various ailments (Zysk 1991; Vin.I.269ff; AN.V.218, 220), which are crucial for tracing the development of medical science as a discipline and the growth of medical establishments (*ārogyavihāras*) in Buddhist monasteries (Singh 2024, 147–151). The Buddhist tradition incorporated empirical systems[4] of diagnosis and treatment of various ailments, as evident in textual and archaeological sources. These included the domains of obstetrics, gynaecology, and paediatrics (Singh 2024, 166–70). Narratives like Aṅgulimāla's further highlight Buddhism's sensitivity towards care for pregnant women. In the *Udāna*, we find the similar story of Suppavāsa, who had endured a prolonged and painful pregnancy (Ud.15–18). Her devotion moved the Buddha, who blessed her and relieved her pain. Just as the Buddha uttered the words blessing her to deliver a healthy son, she was released from her suffering and gave birth.

[4] Kenneth Zysk has described two aspects of ancient Indian medicine: the religio-magic system and the empirical system (Zysk 1991). Under Buddhist monastic medicine, there was a shift from the religio-magic to the empirical system (Singh 2024, 146).

Liz Wilson has analysed the connection between Aṅgulimāla's recognition as a "patron saint of childbirth" and his past as a murderer, bringing in a feminist analysis of the role and representation of women in the story. She notes that there is a "conceptual link" between the two roles Aṅgulimāla takes as a killer and a life-giver. This link is established through the "shedding of blood," an inevitable part of both the act of killing and the act of giving birth (Wilson 2016, 285). She also draws attention to how women serve as catalysts in the events of his life, particularly in the commentarial narratives. It is Aṅgulimāla's mother, Mantāṇī, who is the catalyst for the Buddha's decision to intervene, and it is the pregnant woman who heralds his liberation. Furthermore, both Aṅgulimāla and the Buddha take on the regenerative roles of mothers. Aṅgulimāla helps deliver children, while the Buddha takes on a parental role when he guides Aṅgulimāla on the right path. The Buddha's teachings enable him to become a stream-enterer, which has been understood as a symbolic rebirth, or a "second birth," emphasised through the phrase "born with the noble birth" (MN.II.103; Wilson 2016, 285–295).

Buddhist texts hold a mother's love in high regard, often using it as a metaphor for Buddhist ideals. The *Mettā Sutta*, found in the *Sutta Nipāta* (Sn. vv.143–52), compares the ideal of *mettā* with a mother's love. It states, "Just as a mother would protect with her life her own son, her only son, so one should cultivate an unbounded mind towards all beings, and loving kindness towards all the world" (Sn. vv.149–50). Similarly, in the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa uses mother-love to describe the four "measureless states," viz., *mettā* ("loving-kindness"), *karuṇa* ("compassion"), *muditā* ("gladness"), and *upekkhā* ("equanimity"). Buddhaghosa says, "one abiding in the measureless states should practice loving-kindness and the rest like a mother with four sons, namely, a child, an invalid, one in the flush of youth, and one busy with his own affairs; for she wants the child to grow up, wants the invalid to get well, wants the one in the flush of youth to enjoy for long the benefits of youth, and is not at all bothered about the one who is busy with his own affairs" (Vism.321).

Reiko Ohnuma has described how, in Buddhist discourses, "mother-love" is compared with the love and compassion that the Buddha or *bodhisattva* has towards humanity. While the mother has intense "particularistic" love for her son, the Buddha's love is universal and equal towards all beings. She points out that mother's love is at once exalted for its powerful emotional potential and condemned for ultimately being a form of attachment or desire. This stands in contrast to the figure of the detached father often found in Buddhist representations (Ohnuma 2012, 12–39). For instance, in the *Vessantara Jātaka* (J. no. 547), the prince gives away his children. His wife is visibly distraught, but he remains impassive even though he is also heartbroken. Thus, the stoic father also serves as an idealised figure in Buddhist discourses. Both these parental representations are found in the tale of Aṅgulimāla. Mantāṇi's love for her son stands in contrast to her husband's indifference. Aṅgulimāla's father even proposes to kill him upon finding that he is destined to become a robber. When they realise that the finger-garland

bandit is their son, Aṅgulimāla's father remains indifferent while his mother goes out alone to find and feed him. Within the context of the story, it is the maternal ideal that is ultimately triumphant. The Buddha follows the example of Mantāṇī and goes to Aṅgulimāla, succeeding in bringing about a change of heart.

Conclusion

Exemplary figures from various religions serve to guide spiritual teachings and encode moral behaviour for their followers. These individuals embody the virtues idealised within their faiths and act as role models for believers. While some of these figures embody righteousness from the start, others experience profound moral transformation through the influence of the right teaching and abandon their wickedness to lead a virtuous life. Reformed through the power of faith, they lead pious lives and are immortalised in religious traditions and popular imaginations. In Buddhism, Aṅgulimāla is one such character who gained notoriety among the terror-stricken population of Kosala for his murderous rampage throughout the kingdom. In Christianity, the "thief on the cross" is promised by Jesus that he would be with him in Paradise, and St. Francis of Assisi converted three robbers through acts of kindness and mercy (Hecker 1997, 319). A story strikingly similar to Aṅgulimāla's is also found in the Jain text *Antagaḍadasāo,* in which a garland maker is possessed by a spirit and kills many people. One day, he began to chase a Jain disciple, but he was unable to reach him (similar to Aṅgulimāla's inability to reach the Buddha), which led to his transformation and expulsion of the spirit that had possessed him. After he became a monk, he was attacked by the relatives of his victims, which again mirrors Aṅgulimāla's experience (*Antagaḍadasāo*, 86–92; Anālayo 2011, 499 n. 286). The Jain texts were compiled in the Pāṭaliputra Council held around the 3rd century BCE, and finalised in the Vallabhi Council.

Although it is difficult to reconcile Buddhism's emphasis on non-violence and its strict condemnation of killing with Aṅgulimāla's exaltation in the tradition, his story nevertheless serves as an excellent example of the ways early Buddhism navigated moral dilemmas and addressed the pressing issues of the time. The Buddha reformed a feared bandit and paved the path for restorative justice in society. Buddhism touched upon one of the most vulnerable and relevant social issues of his time, viz., pregnancy and childbirth, through the legend of Aṅgulimāla. Under the guidance of the Buddha, a *mahābhiṣaja* ("great physician"), Aṅgulimāla learned healing practices and developed the *paritta* to help pregnant mothers and infants. By doing so, it can be presumed that he developed knowledge in the fields of gynaecology and paediatrics (Singh 2024, 167–8).

Buddhism takes a pragmatic approach to most issues, following the principle of the "Middle Path." The Aṅgulimāla legend also reflects the Middle Path and the pragmatism of Buddhist teachings. Ultimately, the moral transformation of a flawed and wicked character emerges as the highlight of the story, reflecting the significance placed on real-life implications of the Buddha's teachings in early Buddhism—in this case, the elimination of criminal forces and restoration of peace in society—rather than strict doctrinal codes for crime and punishment.

Abbreviations

AN: *Aṅguttara Nikāya*
DN: *Dīgha Nikāya*
DhA: *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*
J: *Jātaka*
Khp: *Khuddakapāṭha*
MA: *Papañcasūdanī*
MN: *Majjhima Nikāya*
Miln: *Milindapañha*
Sn: *Sutta Nipāta*
Thag: *Theragāthā*
ThagA: *Paramatthadīpanī*
Vin: *Vinaya Piṭaka*
Vism: *Visuddhimagga*

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