

MAHĀYĀNA VIṂŚAKA AND SATTVĀRĀDHANAGĀTHĀ OF ĀRYA NĀGĀRJUNA

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Dimensions of Nāgārjuna

About one hundred twenty texts available in the Tibetan and the Chinese translations are accredited to Ārya Nāgārjuna (T. 'phags pa klu sgrab). Among them, a few texts have come down in Sanskrit; the rest are lost in original. The late Paṇḍit Jagannāth Upādhyāya of Vārāṇasī could bring considerable number of Sanskrit manuscripts from Nepal including some texts ascribed to Ārya Nāgārjuna. Literature remarks a wide dimension in Buddhism as enumerated below.

1. Madhyamaka-Dṛṣṭi (T. dbu ma'i Ita ba) referring to the views on the Madhyamaka doctrine innovated by Nāgārjuna on the basis of the teachings of Śākyamuni, the Buddha.
2. Tantra-nibandha (rgyud sngags bsdu pa) treatises on the esoteric Tantra practices in propitiation of deities like Tārā, Mahākāla, Vajrapāṇi, Hayagrīva etc.
3. Elucidation of Vinaya (dul ba) code of discipline in the monastic order.
4. Commentaries (S.ṭikā) of the Sūtra. (T. mdo) and tantra (T. rgyud) treatises.
5. Stotra (bstod tshags) and *prañidhāna gāthā* (smon lam tshigs bead.)
6. Abhisamaya (mngon par togs pa) texts on doctrinal analysis of the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra etc.
7. Lekha (sprin yig) and Parikathā (gtam) didactic writings in the form of letters and anecdotes respectively.
8. Rasāyana vidyā (bzo rig) on alchemy for preparing gold etc.
9. Cikitsā-vidyā (gso rig) curative therapeutics.

10. Nītiśāstra (lugs kyi bstan bcos) maxims on polity and morals.

The Tibetan catalogues (dkar chag) of the Bstan'gyur mentions as an author of the above varieties of works in Sanskrit Nāgārjuna and its Tibetan rendering Klu grub indiscriminately. Tohoku University collection of the Bstan'gyur (Toh. hence forth) No. 2888 cites Klu sgrub and 'gro bzang snying po who might be other than Nāgārjuna-garbha (klu sgrub snying po) a Tantra author of later days. In that respect the Chinese translators followed an order, though the namings of texts varied in many cases as discussed in the Nāgārjuna Literature in Tibetan by the author (Mādhyamika Dialectic and the Philosophy of Nāgārjuna. Central Institute of Higher Tibetan studies, Sarnath. 1977 pp 205-224)

Ārya Nāgārjuna

Regarding the biography of Ārya Nāgārjuna the Chinese and the Tibetan sources have dealt elaborately. Kumārajīva's Biography of Nāgārjuna is studied by Max Walleser (*Hight Commemoration volume*, London 1920 pp. 421-55, Nāgārjuna Publication, Delhi 7, 1979).

Presumably, Ārya-Nāgārjuna, who is said to have been a contemporaneous of Kaniṣka, the great Kuṣāṇa ruler was a mastermind polymath of his age. Ārya-Nāgārjuna became a mile-stone in the history of the Buddhist thought for his unique elaboration of the Buddha's sayings on the Middle path. His view point is thereby known as '*madhyamaka dṛṣṭi* a middle-way view' in between the Sautrāntika Sarvāstivāda and the Abhidhārmika;

and the Vijñaptimātratā ‘ideation only’ of the Vijñānavādin Buddhists who appeared later.

A humble submission is that the Buddhist Tripiṭaka literature preserved in different versions hold no ‘philosophy’, as the term ‘philosophy’ indicates in the conceptualization of the ‘absolute reality’ with reference to the ‘concrete’ or perceptible phenomenon. ‘Philosophy’ is construed by the Greek terms philo-sophia (love of wisdom or knowledge). In course of systematization of Occidentali and sciences, philosophy became especial branch of academic learning a study which deals with the ultimate reality or with the general causes and principles of the phenomena whether cognizable or non-cognizable. In that respect, the teachings of Gautama Śākyaputra the Buddha do not establish any dictum as ‘ultimate reality’, ‘absolute’ in abstract. Theologically, ‘absolute’ tends to the doctrine of God who acts as ‘independent’ for being perfect or complete, as the omnipotent, Gautama the Buddha was silent when such questions had been raised.

Historically, the Buddhists after the demise (mahāparinirvāṇa) of their Master had to face severe challenges from the Sruta Vedicists and the Smarta Brahmanical teachers since the pre-Christian days. The Buddhist nurtured the ethical altruistic approaches, as those were collected in the Sūtra and the Vinaya teachings. After the advent of the Mahāsāṅghikas in the second Buddhist council at Vaiśālī. The altruistic programs were taken in priority.

Mahāyāna stand-point

Mahāyāna suggests a method (*naya*) for preservation of the Buddhist communities with reference to an avowed one i.e., Bodhisattva. Bodhisattva takes the solemn vow to redress the suffering of the beings who suffer physically, mentally or both. A Buddhist nurtures the ideals of being a Bodhisattva like in rendering altruistic service in respect to those who have been floating in the suffering since the time immemorial on account of the

deeds performed by ignorance. Alike a Bodhisattva therefore, a devoted Buddhist is determined to follow the *pāramitā* method (*naya*) in practice as prescribed in the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra and other Vipulya sūtras. For the mental makeup, a *pāramitā* practitioner becomes aware of the analytical knowledge about the phenomenal world referring to the *abhisamaya* (mngon par rtogs pa) view-points:

Ārya-Nāgārjuna was conversant in divergent facets of the Indian thoughts which had then prevailed among the Buddhists and the non-Buddhist *tīrthika* (mu stegs pa) by the 2nd cent. A.D. He further promoted a new approach how to equate the identity of the geophenomenal world (*samsāra*) with that of the highest state of Bliss i.e., Nirvāṇa, which a Buddhist aims at.

Bodhisattva vow :

Nāgārjuna thereby endeavored to justify the propriety of the Bodhisattva vow. According to him, the vow adhered by a Bodhisattva excels in measures to that which an Arhat strives. Both are avowed to render welfare for the cause of the worlds of beings. The Sattvārādhana Gāthā reads.

*sattārtthameva mayi tiṣṭhati sattva-śraddhā /
Nānyatra sā hyamaho’ dhigbhīta-sattvāḥ //
Caryāḍḍhamā karuṇayā rahitā bhaved yā /
Sambhāvvyate karuṇyaiva prahāṇamasyāḥ //*

(Re-translated from its Tibetan rendering of Buddha Varma and Chos kyi ye ses by Banarasi Lal, *Dhīḥ* XIV, 1992, pp 1-2):

Reverence lies with the beings only, not to others; Oh, I am succumbed. The poor livelihood is that which is devoid of compassion in the mind and that (livelihood) will be prospectus by pondering the compassion.

The said idea is reiterated in his Mahāyāna-viṁśaka with logical support:

The feeling of misery is experienced by imagining a thing where, in fact, it has no existence. Beings are tortured by poison of false notions regarding the object and its knowledge. Seeing these helpless beings with a compassionate heart one should perform the practices of the Bodhicaryā for the benefit of them.

*Bhāvadarśanato'hāve vedyate duḥkha-vedanā |
tayor jñānaviṣayayor
bādhyante kalpanā viśaiḥ ||10||*

*Ālokyā tān aśaranān karuṇā-vāsa-mānasah |
Sattānām upakārāya
bodhicaryāṃ samācaret ||11||*

(Mahāyāna-viṃśaka, Mm. V. Bhattacharya, Viśva Bhāratī, Nov. 1929, p. 12).

Mahāyānaviṃśaka:

Twenty three verses of the Mahāyāna-viṃśaka (T. theg pa chen po-ni nyi shu pa c. ta shang erh shi sung lung) is ascribed to Nāgārjuna according to the Tibetan and Chinese translations. The Chinese rendering suggests Mahāyāna *gāthā* (or *kārikā*) *viṃśaka śāstra*. Cordier (II p. 217) mentions two more texts 'Theg pa chen po nyi shu (Mahāyāna viṃśaka) and Dekho na nyid theg pa chen po nyi shu (Tattva Mahāyānaviṃśati and those texts are separate from Mahāyāna-viṃśaka edited by Susumu Yamaguchi in the eastern Buddhist (IV, 1927 Nos. 1-2, pp. 56-72, 167-76). Also, the texts named Mahāyāna viṃśaka and Tattva-viṃśikā in the Advayavajra-saṅgraha edited by Mm Haraprasad Shastri (Geikowad Oriental Series 1927. pp. 54, and 52 respectively) agree with the above referred texts by Cordier.

Mahāyānaviṃśaka ascribed to Nāgārjuna depicts the measures how to eradicate two mental veils (*āvāraṇa-dvayam*) namely, the Kleśāvaraṇa (Veil of turbidity) and the Jñeyāvaraṇa (veil of knowing the worldings with their respective nature of existence). According to the author, the phenomenal world is essenceless (*śūnyam*) having

no origination and no decay in reality. The origination and decay, which appear to be existent are thought construction (*citta-vikalpa*). The worldliness of phenomena appears to be originated and be decayed under the sequence of cause-and-effect conditionality, which is otherwise named *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependent origination).

*Paramārthena notpādo'nirodho' pi na tattvataḥ |
Buddha ākāsavat tadvat
sattvā apyeka-lakṣaṇaḥ ||2||*

*Nāsmiṃs-tasmīṃs tato
jātiḥ saṃskṛtaṃ pratyayodbhavam |
Śūnyam eva svarūpeṇa sarvajñajñānagocaraḥ ||3||*

Its Tibetan rendering makes explicit.

Skye ba don du yod ma yin/
gag pa' ng de nyid med de/
sangs rgyas nam mkha' ji bzhin la/
sems can rnam kyang mtshan nyidg eig // 2 //

Pha rol tshu rol skye med pas/
dus byas rten skyes de dag kyang/
Rang gi ngo bo ston pa nyid/
kun mkhan ye shes spyod yul can // 3 //

(kha chei pan di ta Anan da dang lo tsa ba dge slong Grag sbyor shes rab kyi bsgyur ba'//)

The other version reads:

dam pa'i don du skye med phyr/
de nyid du ni grol ba' ang med/
mkhs bzhin sangs rgyas de bzhin te/
sems can dang ni mtshan nyid cig//2//

pha rol tshu rol skye med pas/
rang bzin mya ngan' das pa' ang med/
de bzhin' dus byas mngon par stong/
kun mkhyen ye shes spyod yul yin.//3//

(Rgya gargyi mkhan po Tsan da kumara dang dge slong sa kya od kyi bsgyur).

As a result of that no conceptualization of the absolute or noumenon in an abstract sense is practicable. In the process of exoteric meditation Mahāyāna Buddhist practices beyond the perceptible sphere of psyche where the functioning mind becomes defunct. The in-depth supramind awakens to avoid any scope of differentiation between the individual (*sva*) and the other (*para*).

Sattvārādhana gāthā (or-kārikā):

The text in eleven verses, as re-constructed by Banarasilal in mendation of the matter published by Sylvain Lévi in the *Journal Asiatique* (Oct-Dec 1929, pp. 264-265) enhances the altruistic approach led by Mahāyāna. An emphasis is led upon the depiction of the human mind with worldings and empirical behaviors provided the compassion rises within.

*Kalyāṇa-kāramadbikṛtya gato' smi sidhim |
sattvārthameva tanumeṣa samudvahāmi |
naivam kriyeta yadi sattvahitam mayā ced |
vyartham karomi tanupoṣaṇa mannapanaibh ||*

A person who inclines to self-interest fails to achieve accomplishment in doing good and welfare to others unless the altruistic endeavors are applied to render service for benefit of others.

In this connection, the Janapoṣaṇabindu Nīti text, which is ascribed to Nāgārjuna reciprocates similar altruistic approach with a lien to understanding the *dharmā-nairātmya* and the *pudgalanairātmya*.

The *gāthā* in praise of 'Welfare of beings' (*sattvārtha-ārādhana*) refers to three spheres of mind; namely, the function mind (*pravṛtṭi-vijñāna*) of an ordinary person who adheres to the personal interest, the altruistic mind in respect of an avowed individual with strong determination to break down the realm of *māra*, which tends to allurements, hatred and delusion. Besides these two status, the text refers to the mind of an accomplished one (*siddha*) which becomes compassion-

ate to all beings, whoever suffers in the six world (*bhavacakra*: srid pa'i khor lo).

The last one succeeds in crossing over the worldliness of the phenomenal world by dint of his excelling service for the beings who have been floating in the ocean of suffering.

Nāgārjuna's personage

As stated above, Ārya-Nāgārjuna contributed in various dimensions of literature and that amounts to raise queries about his personage. Occasionally, Ārya-Nāgārjuna, the Mādhyamika teacher is not regarded as the same person who composed the Tantra treatises. Again, the Mādhyamika Nāgārjuna might not be the author of *Cikitsā-vidyā* and that of *Śilpavidyā* or *Rasāyana*.

Critically Speaking, the understanding or *Śūnyatā* (essencelessness), *Dharmanairātmya* (non-substantiality of phenomenon) remains out of reach to experience by a person unless the esoteric enterprise regarding the essencelessness and the non-substantiality of phenomenon be adopted though introversion. Under the state of introversion the psychosomatic rejuvenation functions spontaneously with the secretion of neuronc elixir (*amṛtarasa*) that a practitioner avails. A Tantra practitioner with his altruistic attitude expedites Bodhisattva enterprise by appropriate expedience (*upāya kauśalya*) where the *Pāramitā-naya* becomes a counterpart of *Mantranaya*. Among the nine Dharma- Paryāya texts, the sūtras like *Ārya Prajñāpāramitā*; and *Ārya Samādhirāja Sūtra* become supplement to *Āryamañjuśrī-mūla tantra*. Primarily, a differentiation of the sūtra and tantra appears to be artificial..

Alike a devout Mahāyānist bodhicaryā practitioner, Tantra practitioner intends to prolong personal longevity for rendering altruistic service (*sevā*) to the human society. Ārya Nāgārjuna might have explored the technique of preparing alchemic elixir (*rasayāna*) for his long life and the method to convert other metals into gold by his esoteric-Tantric expedience. No wonder lies that Ārya Nāgārjuna had a long life for centuries.