

CONCEPT OF PRAJNA AND UPAYA

• *Bhajangovinda Ghosh*

If we just enter into a Mahayana Monastery in any Himalayan region, we may notice that monks, besides other ritualistic objects keep Vajra (Tib. Dorje) and Ghanta (Thilbu) on chokje (small longish table). During the ritual performance a Dorje is held in the right hand and a bell in the left hand with a particular gesture. These gestures symbolically reproduce the conjugal play of wisdom and method as female and the male principles respectively and are represented by the two ritual objects viz; Ghanta and Vajra. While the Ghanta (Tib. Thilbu) stands for wisdom, the Vajra (Tib. Dorje) represents the method.

In the Tibetan Hagiographical literature we come across a name of Ter-ston (Revealer of hidden Treasures) Dorje Lingpa. He is said to have visited Denzong several times in the remote historical time. The name of Darjeeling is most probably derived after the name of mystic saint, which means "The Place of Thunderbolt".

The two objects as mentioned above also figure in sacred art, pictorial or sculptural. In the artistic representation they are seen either separately as also grasped in the hands of various gods and goddesses. The supreme manifestation of Buddha Vajrapani or Vajradhara is Chanadorje and Dorjechang respectively in Tibetan .

According to the traditional symbolism wisdom the bell as female principle should be brought in divine play being harmoniously blended with that of the male (Dorje) if ever the spirituality is to bear its proper fruit of Enlightenment. Usually this idea is expressed in the following analogy that wisdom is the eye and method the leg and that if one of these fails the man will be helpless. There is a happy parable current in Tibetan painting depicting this morale which runs as follows: Two men set out to the city of Nirvana, but neither could make much headway because one was blind while the other was lame. Eventually they decided to join forces so the lame man climbed on the blind man's back and so they set out together with the man who had eyes pointing out the way while the man with sound legs advanced along it and thus they arrived safely in

the city. Hereunder we quote the parable from a Tibetan text, *mdo-'dus* (*Sutrasamuccaya*)-

"dmu-long-mig-bu-med-pa-bye-ba-krag-khrig-rnams /
lam-yang-mi-shes-grong-khyer-'Jug-par-ga-la-nus /
Shes-rab-med-na-mig-med-pha-rol-phyin-lnga-yang /
mig-bu-med-pas-byang-chub-myur-du-reg-par-nus-ma-yin //

Knowledge, in real sense, the one invariably given to it by the Tibetan Lamas, is always to be regarded as "Concrete" that is to say it implies equating of knowledge with the being, intellect with existence, theory or vision with the realization. Wisdom to remain as such therefore, demands the latent presence of method and vice versa.

The bell, which always bears the same devices and is cast from a special metal yielding a clear and melodious sound (note) is regarded as we have said earlier as the female principle. The handle is crowned with head of a goddess *Prajñā-Pāramitā* (Tib. Yum-chen, the great mother) or Transcendental Wisdom, here with Tara (Tib. Sdrol-ma)-the mother of the *Bodhisattavas* or being dedicated to Enlightenment. As for the Dorje, its symbolism is multiple; firstly, it is an axial symbol implying stability and is signifying also the thread of Enlightenment passing through the centre of every being or world and especially of man, who is a central or axial being by definition; hence is the frequent reference in the injunctions that this rare opportunity should not be wasted but turned to profit while the going is good.

In *Yogatantramālā*- the symbolic definition of vajra is as follows :-

*dr̥dham s̄aram asaṣīryam acchedya-abhedya laksanam/
adāhi avināśī-ca śūnyatā vajramucyate//*

Thus Sunyata is termed as vajra because it is firm and sound, unchangeable, unpierceable, impenetrable, incombustible and indestructible.

The axis of the Dorje is flanked by four (sometimes further sub-divided into eight) phalangs, with constriction where the hand lays hold of the Dorje in the middle. The phalangs correspond to the four directions of space which between them "encompass" the

universe. A precisely similar symbolism attached to the three-dimensional cross of the Dorje is but a variant.

Wisdom cannot be pursued in isolation. According to Mahayana followers this is just the error of those who seek Enlightenment for themselves, ignoring the interest of other sentient beings and try to escape from the world without compensation and integration of the world. In contrast to this the Bodhisattva, who, is discarding his own exit into Nirvana until last of the sentient being is released.

Abstracting wisdom is bad, because it inevitably leads to a confusing of wisdom itself with what are merely its reflections in the discursive mind, mental formulations, or conceptualism in general. All Buddhist schools agree that here lies the danger.

Secondly, method when divorced from wisdom has the effect of chaining the man fatally to the *Samsāra*, the world of birth and death, without hope of escape.

We now briefly relate Tibetan Buddhist School of thought. First we take up the Gelugpa spiritual method i.e., Gelugpa or righteous Sect or reformed school, or the established Church of Tibet. According to this school, the spiritual concept can be summed up in three words: study, meditation and contemplation. The Gelugpa text (*the graded way*), the standard treatise of the order composed by its founder Tsongkhapa, the object to be striven for, is the simultaneous acquisition of *vipāśyanā* (*Lhagmthong*) or Transcendental Vision and *Samāthā* (*zhi-gnas*) abiding tranquility, which respectively correspond to the active and passive poles of contemplation. In the teaching of the School, the compassion is actually identified with the method itself. This coupled with a pushing of impermanence to the point of recognizing the voidness or lack of self-nature of all things, brings the spiritual traveller to that sublime state where vision transcends all possible expression and when every agitation is stilled in the peace that passes understanding. The Nyingmapa, Kargyupa and Sakyapa have almost the same views about *Prajñā* (*shes-rab*) and *Upāya* (*Thabs*). The indigenous literature of all Tibetan Buddhist sects, abounds in new interpretation of twin concepts of sutra, or the Mahayana texts rendered in Tibetan from Sanskrit, and Tantric litera-

ture. Study and research of these literature will shed further light on the of above concept.

Hereunder we discuss some concept from Buddhist Sanskrit texts. It is well-known to the scholars in the field of Buddhistic studies that there is a book extant in Sanskrit *Prajnopāya- viniścaya-siddhih* of Ananga-Vajra (G.O.S.Vol XLIV ch.1 verse 1) which expounds whole theme from various angles.

To attain perfect bliss either for self or for the three worlds, the wise must first do away with the notion of existence while one should not go either to the opposite extreme of adopting a nihilistic view (non-existence). In the above text the author says 'It is better to have the imagination of existence (bhava-kalpana) than that of non-existence (abhava-kalpana) for the burning lamp can be extinguished; but if it be not burning at all can it be extinguished? *nirvati Jvalito dipo nirvṛtah kam gatim brajet.* (S.B. DasGupta, An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism p.36 Calcutta 1958).

He, who abandons the idea of both the real and unreal, attains a state which is neither *Samsāra* nor *nirvāna*, and this is Pure Knowledge (*Prajnā*). In realising the truth one should meditate neither on the void (*śūnyatā*) nor on the non-void (*aśūnyatā*), when the conception of egohood (*ahamityesa saṅkalpah*) does not determine itself in the negative manner as non-void or in the positive manner as void it becomes bereft of all basis of thought, the wise therefore, without any attachment and desire, absolutely sinless, unruffled in mind and freed from the constrictive imagination of a beginning as an end, pursue the path of pure knowledge (*Prajnā*).

The *jñānasiddhi* also asserts that the ultimate truth is neither positive nor negative, for in the positive there is the possibility of all the defects (*sarva-dosa-prasaṅga*) and in negative there is no way left for the relief of all sorrow (G.O.S.Ch.1 verse 19-20).

Pure knowledge is neither with any form (*sākāra*) nor is it formless (*nirakara*). If the knowledge had any form, it would have been *samskrta* (conditional and defiled) as all existence is. Had knowledge, on the other hand, been absolutely formless, there would have been no possibility of becoming omniscient, and without omniscience there would be no possibility of universal compassion (*Jñānasiddhi* ch.vi). A distinction is drawn here between ordinary

knowledge (*Jñāna*) and the knowledge of the highest truth. The distinction is ultimately the same as that between *Prajñā* alone and Bodhicitta, the combination of both *Prajñā* and *Karūṇā*. The *Prajñā* however is *nirvikalpa* i.e. free from all the false constructions; while the *tattva-jñāna* with which there is the existence of universal compassion (*Karūṇā*) should not be taken as a complete cessation (*niscit-tatā*) of consciousness (S. B. Das Gupta : An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism, p.39).

In the *Pañcakrama* of Nagarjuna-pada we find four gradations in the *śūnyatā* doctrine. The first is *śūnya*, the second *ati-śūnya*, the third *Mahā-śūnya*, and the fourth or the final is the *sarva-śūnya* and these are all different according to their cause and effect. The first stage *śūnya* has been explained as light (*āloka*) *Prajñōtpanna-āloka Prādurbhūtaḥ*. It is relative (Paratantra) by nature, *aloka śūnyam prajñā ca cittam ca paratantrakam*. In this stage mind has got as many as thirtythree impure state (*dosa*) associated with it, such as sorrow, fear, hunger, thirst, feeling etc. The second stage viz., *ati-śūnya* is said to be the manifestation of light (*āloka-bhāsa*), it shines like moon-rays and it proceeds from the former (*aloka-jnana*), and while *śūnya* is said to be *Prajñā*, *ati-śūnya* is said to be *Upāya* or the means. It is said to be of the nature of constructive imagination (*Parikalpita*) and it belongs to the mind, as its (mind's) state (*caitasika*). It is also said to be the right (*dakṣiṇa*), the solar circle (*sūrya-mandala*) and the thunderbolt (*vajra*). The third stage viz. *Mahāśūnya* proceed from union of *Prajñā* and *Upāya* *aloka* and *āloka-bhāsa* or *śūnya* and *ati-śūnya*, and it is called the intuition of light (*āloka-abdhi*) and it is of the absolute nature (*pari niṣpanna*), yet is called ignorance (*avidyā*). It has also been said to be the *svādhīsthāna-citta*. The fourth stage, viz. *sarva-śūnya* (all void or perfect void) is free from all three-fold impurities and is self-illuminant. It is called perfect void because it transcends the principles of defilement. It is the purified knowledge - the ultimate truth - it is the supreme omniscience (Ibid p.41).

We have seen above how the *śūnyata* doctrine of the Mahayanic philosophers was adopted by the esoteric Buddhists, but the emphasis of Mahayana is not only on *śūnyata*; as a religion it is characterised by its stress on universal compassion adopted by these Tantric Buddhists in toto.

According to Dr.S.B.Das Gupta the concept of *Kālacakra* is not a distinct school of Tantric Buddhism, but a particular name for the vajrayana school. It will be clear also from the text *Sekoddesa-tika* which is a commentary on the *Sekoddesa* section of the *Kālacakra-tantra*. There it is said that ultimate immutable and unchangeable one, remaining in the skylike *dharmadhātu* (the element underlying all the dharmas) is called *Kāla*; it itself is the immutable knowledge; *Cakra* implies the unity of the three kinds of existence - the manifestation of *Kāla*. It (the *Cakra*) is the body of Lord - point like, containing the potency of existence of the universe, *Kālacakra*, therefore, implies exactly the same as the unity of *Prajñā* and *Upāya*.

Kāla means, the state of absorption in the original cause potency, this is the state of *śūnyatā*; it is the pure consciousness of the principle of subjectivity, *cakra* on the other hand means the principle of knowledgeability or the cycle of world process which is also the principle of *Upāya-Kālacakra* which therefore means absolutely unified state of *Prajñā* and *Upāya* (Ibid pp. 46 and 49).

The *Vajra-sattva*, as the Lord supreme of the Tantric Buddhists, representing monolithic conception of the Godhead, has variably been described in the Buddhist Tantras with all sorts of positive and negative attributes. He is Bhagavan as he possesses *bhaga* which means that which breaks or removes, *śūnyatā* or *Prajñā* removes all afflictions and drives away *māra* and so the *śūnya* is called the *bhaga*. He is saluted as the *śūnyatā*-essence, transcending all imagination, omniscient of Pure Wisdom.

Vajra-sattva is not merely of the nature of *śūnyatā*, it is a non-dual of *śūnyatā* and *karuṇā*; to imply that the void-consciousness is also of the nature of identity of both *śūnyatā* and *karuṇā*. In the *Hevajra-tantra*, *upāya*, and *Prajñā* have been described under the imagery of yogin and the *Mudrā* (the great woman to be adopted in yoga-sadhana) and the *Bodhicitta* is the perfect union of yogin and mudra who stand for *karuṇā* and *śūnyatā* respectively.

Kṛppopāya bhaved yogi mudrā hetuviyogatah/
śūnyatā karuṇābhinnam bodhicittamiti smṛtam//

Patala X, Ms p.30(a) quoted by S.B. Das
Gupta (Ibid. p.93)

In all classes of Buddhist Tantras most important thing is the stress on the union of *Prajñā* and *Upāya* in philosophical sense or the esoteric yogic sense.

The authority of the renowned Buddhist Acarya like Arya-vimala- kirti and other have often been quoted, who are said to have stressed the truth that *Upāya* is bondage when unassociated with *Prajñā*, and even *Prajñā* is also a bondage when unassociated with *Upāya*; both of them again become liberation when the one is associated with the other. Their co-mingling through the instructions of the competent teacher, like the inseparable co-existence of the lamp and the light, will conduce to success in realising the real nature of the self and the dharma. Whatever practices there are, they should therefore be preceded by a knowledge or rather the realisation of the true purport of the union of *Prajñā* and *Upāya*. The cardinal principle of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha says the *Dākini- vajra panjara*, points to the state of *citta* shining in the unity of *śūnyatā* and *karuṇā*.

śūnyatā-karuṇābhinnam yatra cittaṁ prabhāyate/
so hi buddhasya dharmasya saṅghayāpi ca deśanā//
(quoted in the *Advaya-vajra-saṅgraha* p.96)

Upāya has again very nicely compared to a boat in the *Prajnopāya-viniscaya-siddhih*. There it is said that compassion is called *raga* (affection) as it affects or causes happiness to all beings who are distressed with infinite sufferings. The compassion is like a boat which brings all beings to the favourable shore, and it is for this reason that it is called the *Upāya*. The co-mingling of the *prajñā* and *upāya* like the mixture of water and milk in a state of non-duality is called *Prajnopāya* (p.93)

In the chapter of meditation on the ultimate truth (*tattva-bhāvanā*) of the *Prajnopāya-viniscaya-siddhih* it has been said that the truth is both *prajñā* and *upāya* combined together; for it is *prajna* as it is the absence of all phenomenalization (*niṣprapañca-svarupatvāt*), and it is compassion because like the wish-granting gem it does everything for the good of the beings, supportless is *prajñā*; and supportless (*Nirālamba*) is the great compassion; they should be united like the sky with the sky. In that stage there is no thinker - no thought - nothing to be thought of, there, all seeing of sights,

hearing of the sounds - muttering, laughing - enjoyment- doing of all deeds - all become yoga for a man. (S.B.DasGup ta: *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* p.94).

It is said in *citta-viśuddhi-prakarana* that as by rubbing of two logs of wood fire is produced which is pure in the beginning in the middle as well as in the end, and which shows everything by its illumination, so also by the union of *Prajnā* and *Upāya* the pure and luminous wisdom of the yogin is produced. The absolutely pure *dharmadhātu*, that is attained by properly churning of the milk of *prajna* and *upaya*, is the destroyer of both pleasure and pain.

In the foregoing discussion we have hinted that the conception of *Prajnā* and *Upāya* acquired a cosmological and ontological significance in course of time. In the conclusion we do not want to elaborate these topic in detail and only give a brief references to them.

Prajna as the passive principle is the *dharmakaya* the thatness (*tathatā*) with perfect purity and perfect knowledge in her; while the whole world i.e. *Sambhogakāya* and the *nirmānakāya* is a display of the *Upāya*.

According to esoteric doctrine, *varahi* who represent *Prajna* is spoken of as of the nature of knowledge, whereas God Heruka representing *Upāya* is spoken of as the knowledge. The concept of *Prajnā* and *Upāya* have important ontological and cosmological bearing on the four philosophical systems of the Nepalese Buddhism. They are (i) Svābhāvika, (ii) Aisvarika, (iii) Karmika; (iv) Yatnika. The Svābhāvika school holds that there is immaterial ultimate truth in the form of the soul substance; matter is the primordial substance from which the world proceeds. The matter has two modes which are called *Pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* and so are the powers of matter. Thus when these powers pass from the state of existence of the powers in the state of *nivṛtti* as rest as the abstractions from all phenomena, when the powers pass from the state of rest into their causal and transitory state of activity, the phenomenal world comes into existence, and it again ceases to exist when the powers repass from *pravṛtti* to *nivṛtti*. This *nivṛtti* is the *prajnā* and *pravṛtti* is said to be the *Upāya*.

In the aisvarika school these *Prajnā* and *Upāya* are defined as *adi-prajnā* and *adi-Buddha* and visible world is said to be created

from the union of the two. According to the *Prajñika* (a sub-division of the Svābhāvika school) Buddha as the principle of active power, first proceeds from *nivṛtti* or *adi-Prajñā* and then associates with her and from their union proceeds the actual visible world. The principle is symbolised as *Prajñā* being first the mother and then the wife of the Buddha. The triad of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha has often been explained as *prajñā* (dharma), *upāya* (Buddha) and the world (sangha). Produced by their union, Buddha symbolises the generative power, Dharma, the productive power and their union produces Sangha.

Lord Vairocana-the Lord Supreme- in *Dharma-cakra Mudrā*, which the Tibetans call thabs-dang-sherab (*Upāya and Prajñā*) as the union of wisdom with matter.

With this conception of *Prajña* and *Upāya* as *nivṛtti* and *pravṛtti* or as *Adi-Prajñā* and *Adi-Buddha* we may compare the concept of Siva and Sakti and the *aham* or the 'I-ness' produced by their union (*siva- sakti-mithunapinda*). According to Hindu Tantras the ultimate truth in the union of Siva and Sakti, Siva represents Pure Consciousness which is inactive-static aspect of the Ultimate Reality; while Sakti represents the world force - the kinetic energy of the Ultimate Truth. *Siva* is *nivṛtti* and *Sakti* is *pravṛtti* and in the ultimate state they remain in a Union of Oneness.

In Buddhist tantra *Prajñā* and *Upāya* are also called *Lalanā* and *Rasanā* which are the names for the two nerves *Ida* and *Pingala* well-known in the Hindu Tantric nerve-system.

The above discussion on the nature of Bodhicitta will bring it home to us that the central point of all Sadhanas of Tantric Buddhism was the principle of union.