



The Evolution and Philosophy of Tantric-Buddhism

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Buddhism is a religion of peace, kindness, humanity and equality, which took birth in India during 6th century B.C. This religion became popular as it threw open the doors of organized religious life to all without any distinction of caste and creed. Buddha was very liberal in accepting the disciples into his religion, but the rules of morality imposed by him were very strict. Many of the “Bhikshus” failed to observe the strict principles and openly objected, for which they were driven out from the “Sangha.” They formed secret conclaves and suggested relaxations even during the life time of Lord Buddha.¹ The first council of the “Sangha” was held at “Rajagriha” after three months of the “Mahaparinirvana” of Lord Buddha. “Mahakasyapa” presided over the same council and steps were taken to settle religious disputes among the “Bhikshus”. In that council the “Suttas” and the “Vinaya Pitakas” were recited for the first time in which Upali and Ananda took important parts. The disputes arose among the “Bhikshus”



regarding doctrinal questions which could not be settled in that council for which the controversy increased. The next council was held at “Vaisali” after one hundred years, where some “Bhikshus” of progressive nature demanded for relaxation of strict rules. Their demand were not accepted in the council. Then the dissenters seceded and convened another “Mahasangha”. Thus the Sangha was divided into two separate groups. The orthodoxies were styled as “Sthabtrabadin” or “Therabadin” and the progressive group as “Mahasanghika”. Subsequently the “Stabirabadins” are named as “Hinayan” and “Mahasanghika” as “Mahayan”. The main point of difference between the two groups was that the “Stabirabadins” or “Hinayanists” looked upon Buddha as essentially a man of an exalted nature subject to human limitations of life and death, while “Mahayanists” looked upon Buddha as a superhuman being. This controversy resulted in the growth of two separate schools within the



province of Buddhism itself. The “Mahayanists” worshipped “Boddhistavas” and read “Mahayana Sutras”, while “Hinayanists” adhered to strict observance of the rules and principles prescribed by Lord Buddha.

The Mahayanists are of the views that “Lord Buddha is all might” for which they were called “Vaipulyabadin”. During reign of “Kaniska” a number of Mahayani literature were composed in the first century A.D. The Mahayana doctrines achieved full fledged form during the period from 2nd Century to 5th Century A.D. Nagarjuna was a great philosopher and preacher of Mahayan, who was residing at “parimalagiri” of Odisha during 2nd Century. He was famous for his Sadhana and renowned as “Tantric Shiromani”. In his literature “Manjushree Mulakalpa” he remodelled “Mahayan Sutras” in to Tantras. After him, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Dingnag, Sankasawami, Buddhaghosha and Dharmakirti have composed different literature of Mahayan sprang during 2nd century to 5th century A.D. They all belongs to Odisha, who composed all the literatures in Sanskrit instead of Palli. The imagination of “Boddhisattva” is the noble idea of Mahayan, the meaning of which is “Bouddhoya Sattwam aviprayosya it Boddhisattva” or man who desires to enrich the Boddhi.² The main principles of Mahayan are “Triakaya” i.e. “Dhamakaya”, “Nirmanakaya” and “Sambhoyakaya”, in which the super achievement of Boddhisattva has been described. The aim of the Mahayanists was to attain Buddhihood in and through different stages of Boddhisattva hood, which is a state of perfect knowledge about the void-nature of the self and nonself mixed up with an emotion of universal compassion for the redemption of all the suffering beings.³ The Mahayan Buddhism introduced seven kinds of worships i.e. “Vandana”, “Puja”, “Papadeshana”, “Purnyanumodan”,

“Adhyekshana”, “Beddhichltaraptad” and “Parinamana” to enrich the Boddhi. Adoption of “Satparamita” or six qualities like “Dana”, “Sheela”, “Kshanti”, “Biryā”, “Dhyana” and Prajna” are essential for “Sadhaka”. The “Sadhaka” worships “Prajnaparamita” as Goddess.

The Mahayanic way of worship became Tantric system. Tantric elements such as “Dharini”, “Mantra”, “Mudra”, “Jantra” and “Mandala” were adopted and rules with rituals are being strictly observed during Tantric worship. The Mantra element seems to have been introduced in Mahayan Buddhism first in the form of “Dharini”. The meaning of “Dharini” is that by which something is sustained or kept. According to faith of Tantric Buddhism “Dharini” is capable of keeping the religion. The philosopher Vasubandhu divided “Dharinis” in to four categories such as “Dharma Dharini”, “Artha Dharini”, “Mantra Dharini” and “Kshanti Dharini”. He also adviced Sadhakas to realize essence of Mantras through concentration. There are 8000 stanzas of Mantras in “Astasahasrika Prajna Paramita”, which is an important Tantric literature of Buddhism. This important literature has been reduced to few stanzas and known as “Prajna Paramita Hrudayasutra”, which was further reduced to make room for the “Prajnaparamita Dharini”. The next step in this chain led to the conception of a “bija” in one syllable “pram”, in response to which “Sunya” may transform itself into the form of the goddess by name “Prajna Paramita”, who is a veritable metamorphosis of the Prajnaparamita literature.⁴ The “Dharinis” are said to be endowed with great powers. The mantras which are regarded as carrying great potency are composed of a string of syllables which bear no meaning etymologically. According to Vasuvandhu, the unmeaningness of Mantras is their real significance which is to be realised



through concentration only.⁵ The Mantras are very powerful only when they are applied in a strict manner. At the time of recitation of the Mantras the mind should be kept away from all sorts of impure reflections and should be concentrated on the letters of the Mantras only.

In Tantric Buddhism “Mudra” is important. The Mudras are generally taken to be mystic signs made by the particular position of hands and fingers. In “Sadhanamala” different types of Mudra such as Padma, Vajra, Ghanta, Shankha, Khadgaetc have been described.⁶ In Tantric literature Mudra expresses different meanings with the aim of obtaining final purification and final deliverance from the miseries of life.⁷ “Advaya vajra samgraha” describes four types of Mudras which are related to four types of realisation of bliss. Mandala is also important as Mudra. Mandala means the religious diagrammatic symbol. The Mandala is the magic circle containing mystic figures and diagrams were introduced to offer worship. After introduction of “Dharini, “Mantra”, “Mudra”, “Mandala” and “Jantra” the path to enrich Buddhahood became easy, for which this Tantric system was accepted by different categories of Sadhakas. In the early period of Mahayana “Manjushree Mulakalpa” was written by Tantra Shiromani Nagarjuna which is contemporary to “Prajna Paramita”, in which the method and rituals of Tantric worship, names of deities, Mudra or poses, Mandala or diagrams with all the processes have been described. Nagarjuna has also expressed his realisation in “Madhyamika Karika” for which he is called as the founder of “Sunyavada”. His disciple “Aryadeva” has written the findings of “Sunyavada” in “Chatusataka” and the same has been translated in Chinese language by Hiuen Tsang under the title “Satasastra Baipulya”. Nagarjuna and his followers by effort of their

Tantric realisation change the colour and tone of Mahayana to the extent of evolving a new “yana”, which is popularly known as “Mantrayana”. Accordingly “Mahayana” was divided into two school of thoughts i.e. “Paramitanaya” and “Mantranaya”. “Paramitanaya” is explained by the theories of “Sautrantrika” or “Yogachara” or “Madhyamika” and “Mantranaya” is explained by the theories of “Yogachara” and Madhyamika.⁸ The “Mantranaya” is blended with the theories : of both “Sunyavada” and “Vijnanavada”. “Prajnaparamita Sutra” is the guide Literature of “Sunyavada” and “Lankavatara Sutra” is the ideal literature of “Vijnanavada”. These two noble literatures are treated as “Prasthanwaya” or two noble paths to enrich Buddhahood. On development of Tantrism Mahayana was transformed into “Mantayana”. This transformation is most important change of development in the history of Tantric Buddhism.

Tantric Buddhism grew within the province of Mahayan and new process of attaining Buddhahood within shortest time was discovered by Tantra Siddhas. The new process is called “Guhyasamaja Tantra” in which another element was introduced. The new element is “Sakti” or woman was considered a manifestation of divine energy. The “Guhyasamaj Tantra” was also introduced for the worship of five “Dhyani Buddhas” presiding over five “skandhas” or elements of which the universe is composed.⁹ The theory of five “Dhyani Buddhas” is important and noble idea for quick attainment of Buddhahood. Besides this, some secret and immoral practices are found introduced in the “Guhyasamaja Tantra”. Scholars opined that this new system is the full-fledged development of Tantric Buddhism from which “Vajrayana”, “Sahajayana” and “Kalachakrayana” arose.¹⁰ These three divisions are the result of different ritualistic traditions of “Guhyasamaja Tantra”. The propounders of



“Vajrayana”, “Sahajayana” and “Kalachakrayana” were Indrabhuti, Laxminkara and Pitopada respectively all of whom belonged to Udiyan or Odisha.¹¹

“Vajrayana” is characterised as the “Path which leads to perfect enlightenment” in Sadhanamala, which may be termed as “anuttara Samyaka Sambodhi” in Sanskrit.¹² The word “Vajra” is used in a special sense to represent “Sunya”. The “Dharmakaya- Buddha of the Mahayanists seem to have been gradually replaced by “Vajrasattva or “Vajrakaya”. The “Vajrasattva” is generally taken as the Supreme Being in Tantric Buddhism, who is the Primal Enlightened one-the Adi-Buddha. This Adi-Buddha is in possession of five kinds of knowledge which are like five attributes of the lord. From these five attributes proceed five types of “Dhyana”(meditation) and from these five types of “Dhyana” there emanate five deities who are known as the five “Dhyani- Buddhas”. These five Dhyani-Buddhas are the five presiding deities over the five “Skandhas” or elements of which the universe is composed.¹³ They are Rupa (form), Vedana (feeling), Samjna (perception), Samskara (impression) and Vijnana (consciousness) and these five Skandhas, according to the Guhyasamajatantra, are presided over by the Dhyani Buddha, viz-”Vairochana”, “Ratnasambhava”, “Amitava”, “Amoghasiddhi” and “Akshobhya” respectively. The Dhyani Buddhas, like the Skandhas, are considered eternal and they manifest themselves without passing through the intermediate stage of Boddhisattva or in other words, without depending upon others for their origin.¹⁴ Another striking feature of “Vajrayana” is the introduction of “Sakti” particularly for obtaining emancipation through “Yoga” and “Samadhi”. According to “Guhya Samajatantra” this has been introduced

for “Prajnabhisika” or the initiation of disciples with Prajna or Sakti. The five Dhyani Buddhas are of five different families (Kulas) with their saktis. “Vajradhatvisvari”, “Lochana, Mamaki”, “Pandara” and “Aryatara” are the families (Kulas) of Vairochana, Aksobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitava and Amoghasiddhi respectively, who are the real symbol of “Moha,” “duesa”, “Chintamani”. “Raga” and “Samaya”. The five Dhyani Buddhas of five different Kulas (families) with their Saktis (divine consorts), Skandhas (elements), Mudras (Postures), Vahanas (vehicles), Varnas (Colours) and with their Boddhisattvas, Pratyeka Buddhas, Bijamantras etc are regarded as the emancipation of the Vajrasattva, the Primal Enlightened one Adi-Buddha, who is not only of the nature of “Sunyata” but also of the non-dual state of “Sunyata” and “Karuna”. In “Vajrayana” everything is “Vajra” or perfect void. The God worshipped is vajra, his image is Vajra, the worshipper is Vajra, the materials of worship are Vajra, the Mantras uttered are Vajra, the process of worship is Vajra and everything connected with the worship is Vajra. The supreme goddess of this school of thought are Vajrasvari, Vajradhari and Vajra-Varahi.¹⁵ Women adopted for the yogic practices were called “Vajra-kanyas”. Due to difference in rituals, worship and yogic practices, the Vajrayana divided into six categories i.e. Kriyatantrayana, Caryatantrayana, Yoatantrayana, Mahayogatantrayana, Anuttarayogatantrayana and Atiyogatantrayana. Vajrayana made remarkable contributions to Buddhism. There were eminent teachers in the Buddhist Vihars to impart teachings on the Tantras.¹⁶

Sahajayana is an important school of thought having a distinctive philosophy and process of Yoga. There were eighty four numbers of Sahajiya Sidhas, who have composed many literatures such as charya-songs and dohas. Sahaja stands for the ultimate innate nature, that



makes one realise this ultimate innate nature of the self as well as of the Dharma. The literal meaning of the word “Sahaja” is that which is inborn or which originates with the birth or origination of any entity (Sahajayate iti Sahaja). The word “Sahaja” literally means that which accompanies with birth and manifests itself as the primitive and natural propensities in man. The path that helps man to realise the truth through satisfying these inborn and fundamental propensities is, therefore, the most natural and easiest of all paths and hence, it is called the “Sahajapath” or “Sahajayana”.¹⁷ “Sahaja” can neither be explained by anybody nor any speech can express it, it is only realised by the self through the merit of serving at the feet of Guru. Santipada, Sarahapada, Tadakapada, Kahnupada, Luipada and other Siddhas of Odisha have composed so many songs basing on the philosophy of Sahajayana, which are called “charyagiti”. The Sahajiya Siddhacharyas, are in view that all the ways of religious worship should be through human instincts, for the reason that religion is meant for man and not the other way round. Hence the supremacy of human form must be recognised and under no circumstances should the natural and spontaneous transformations of mental and physical passions or their sublimation be suppressed. The Sahaja way of devotion does not, however, mean unregulated sexual pleasure, but desires of the human beings to be allowed to fulfill, form a part of it. Necessity of a Guru or a spiritual guide is must for “Sahajasadhana” to realise the Supreme Reality.¹⁸

“Kalachakrayana” is a phase of “Vajrayana”. It is said that the extreme development of the Tantric phase was reached with the “Kalachakra”, which, although unworthy if being considered a philosophy must be referred to here as a doctrinal basis. It is merely a coarse

Tantric development of the “Adi-Buddha” theory combined with the puerile mysticisms of the “Mantrayana” and it attempts to explain creation and the secret powers of nature, by the union of the terrible “Kali”, not only with the Dhyani-Buddhas, but even with Adi-Buddha himself.¹⁹ The word Kalachakra literally means the wheel of time. Scholars like H.P. Shastri explained that, Kalachakra is the wheel of destruction and Kalachakrayana means the vehicle for protection against the wheel of destruction.²⁰ This definition has also been explained in the Tantric text “Sri Kalachakra Tantra”, a manuscript preserved in the Cambridge University Library.²¹ It is clear that, the study of Kalachakra does not prove the theory of demoniacal Buddhas. Kalachakra is a deity and an embodiment of “Sunyata” and “Karuna” and is embraced by the goddess Prajna and represents the philosophical conception of Advaya or non-duality. He is regarded as the Adi-Buddha or the progenitor even of Buddhas, that is to say, the Dhyani-Buddhas. It is understood from the “Kalachakratra” that the Mandala (circle) of the deity is composed of all the planets and stars. The central deity “Kalachakra” is encircled by minor deities who represent time or time factor. Kalachakra means the absolutely unified principle of ‘Prajna’ and ‘Upaya.’²²

Odisha had a vital role in evolving Tantrayana. Tantrayana is a combination of Vajrayana, Sahajayana and Kalachakrayana and all these three branches of Tantrayana owes its origin to Odisha. Kamakhya, Srihata, Purnagiri and Uddiyana are four Tantric Pithas of which Uddiyana is the first and important Pitha. Most of the philosophers, scholars, Siddhacharyas and Sadhakas are found connected with Uddiyana. Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Dingnaga, Vasumitra, Triratnadas Sthiramati, Dhamapala, Chandragomini, Chandrakirti and



Dhamakirti all are connected to Odisha. Among eighty four Siddhacharyas Sarahapa, Nagarjuna (2nd), Savaripa, Luipa, Vajraghanta, Kambalapada, Padmavajra, Anangavajra, Indrabhuti, Padmasambhava, Laxminkara, Jalandharipada, Virupa, Kahnupa, Lilavajra, Darikapada, Pitopada, Bhusukupada, Kakkuripada and other prominent Siddhacharyas took birth in Odisha. Padmasambhava was regarded as Sakyamuni in 'Nepal and Tibet. Mantrayana, Vajrayana, Sahajayana, Kalachakrayana grew in Odisha. Buddhakapala Tantra, Yoginitantra, Hevajratantra, Samputa tilaka Tantra, Krushnayamari Tantra, Vajramruta Tantra, and Mahamaya Tantra were introduced by the Siddhacharyas of Odisha, which needs a special discussion. There are so many Tantrapithas named Surabhagiri, Bhojakagiri, Puspagiri, Udayagiri, Lalitagiri, Ratnagiri, Vajragiri, Solamapur, Jayashram, Jagadala, Vanasuranasi, Kuruma etc. were situated in Odisha. Tantric Buddhism had a long career with all its manifestations in Odisha that provided suitable field for its evolution, and development as reveal from the records and monuments.

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