

## A Study of Buddhist Bhaktism with Special Reference to the Esoteric Buddhism

Norio SEKIDO

The Sanskrit term *bhakti* is most often translated into English as “devotion,” and it has been mentioned *Bhaktimārga* especially in the *Bhagavadgītā*, the “path of devotion,” is understood to be one major type of Hindu spiritual practice. One can define that *bhakti* is the divine-human relationship as experienced from the human side.<sup>1)</sup> The *bhaktimārga* is a path leading toward liberation (*mokṣa*) from material embodiment in our present imperfect world and the attainment of a state of abiding communion with a personally conceived ultimate reality.<sup>2)</sup>

Modern historical approaches to Indian religion generally recognize some traces of *bhaktism* in a few of the Vedas and the classical Upaniṣads also and see it strikingly present in large sections of the epics including notably the *Bhagavadgītā*.<sup>3)</sup>

The present writer admits the historical process of *bhaktism*, which are primitive, early, middle and later *bhaktism* respectively.<sup>4)</sup>

Deep significance was attached to *bhakti* (devotion, faith, sincerity). Faith in Buddhism is expressed with the terms (*śraddhā*, *adhimukti*, *prasāda* and *bhakti*). Of these, *prasāda* is peculiarly Buddhistic. Faith appears in the form of purified mind (*pasanna-citta*); the unity of faith and wisdom is characteristic of Buddhist belief<sup>5)</sup>.

*Bhakti*, as mentioned earlier, which conveys the meaning of “definitely devotional faith” came to be used more frequently with the lapse of time<sup>6)</sup>.

Although the term *bhakti* is seldom mentioned in Buddhist literature, we can find the influence of *bhaktism* in Buddhist belief. The evidences

represent in the Pāli Cannon, King Ashoka's Inscriptions, Nāgārjuna's the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, Yaśomitra's the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and so on.

The original concept of faith in the Pure Land Sutras was not a devotional one (bhakti), but faith in teachings (śraddhā), which is highly different from faith taught by later Chinese and Japanese Pure Land Buddhists. It is preached the benefits of faith in the Amitābha Buddha, who is a dharmakāya. This faith must be related to Buddhist Bhaktism<sup>7)</sup>.

It is the pure and tranquil state of mind (prasāda) that is emphasized in the Pure Land Sutras. A stūpa-worship may be related to the Buddhist Bhaktism which the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* recommends in the 11th chapter<sup>8)</sup>.

In the Mahāyāna Buddhism, Gautama Buddha loses his human character and is endowed with superhuman powers. The *Jātakas* of Theravāda give place to the *Avadānas* or the glorious achievement of Buddha and his followers. So far as the Esoteric Buddhism concerned, there is practically nothing to distinguish it from the religion of Hinduism<sup>9)</sup>.

On the Esoteric Buddhism, let us listen to Benoytosh Bhattacharya<sup>10)</sup>. According to him, the Buddhist Tantras in outward appearance resemble the Hindu Tantras to a marked degree but in reality there is very little similarity between them, either in subject matter or in philosophical doctrines inculcated in them, or in religious principles. This is not to be wondered at, since the aims and objects of the Buddhists are widely different from those of the Hindus. He is right. For instance, it is the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*,

tad etat sarvajña-jñānamkaruṇā-mūlaṃ bodhicitta-hetukam upāyaparyavasānam  
iti<sup>11)</sup>

We say Vajrayāna "Diamond Vehicle", later called Tantric Buddhism also, is Esoteric Buddhism. This is highly sophisticated Buddhism. There are the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, the Diamond Peak Sutra, *Prajñāpāramitā-naya* or *Adhyardhaśatikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Eng. The Reason Essence Sutra) and so on.

The point is the great antiquity and consistent development of Tantric

tendencies in Buddhism. Already the Early Mahāsaṅghikas had a special collection of mantric formulas in their *Dhāraṇī-piṭaka*, and the *Mañjuśrī-mūlakaḥ*, which according to some authorities goes back to the first century A.D., contains not only mantras and dharanis, but numerous mandalas and mudras as well. But for even if the dating of *Mañjuśrī-mūlakaḥ* is somewhat uncertain, it seems probable that the Buddhist Tantric system had crystallized into a definite form by the end of the third century A.D., as we see from the well-known *Guhya-samāja* (Tib. *dpal-gsang-hdus-pa*) *Tantra*. In the Hevajra Tantra,

idaṃ jñānaṃ mahāsūkṣmaṃ vajramaṇḍaṃ nabhopamaṃ/  
virajakaṃ mokṣadaṃ śāntaṃ pitā te tvam asi svayam//4<sup>12</sup>//

And the Diamond Peak Sutra says to us

kathaṃ kulaputānuttarāṃ samyaksaṃbodhim abhisambhotsyase yas tvam sarva-  
tathāgatattvānabhi jñatayā sarvaduḥkarāṇy utsaḥasi.

It is mentioned about the truth in all the tathāgatas. All the tathāgatas sit on the bodhimanda and they preach the truth before Sarvarthasiddhi who attains in the asphaṇakasamādhi. And also it is said in the Diamond Peak Sutra,

'Om yathā sarvatathāgatā tathāham' /

Om, I am that all the tathāgatas are//

According to Śāṅkara, bhakti means rather than much more sophisticated intellectual. His works form the foundation of all Saivaite philosophy, made use of ideas of Nāgārjuna and his followers to such an extent that orthodox Hindus suspected him of being a secret devotee of Buddhism. In a similar way the Hindu Tantras, too, took over the methods and principles of Buddhist Tantrism and adapted them to their own purposes much as the Buddhists had adapted the age-old principles and techniques of yoga to their own systems of meditation. This view is not only held by Tibetan tradition and confirmed by a study of its literature, but has also been verified by Indian scholars after a critical investigation of the earliest Sanskrit texts of Tantric Buddhism and their historical and ideological relationship with the

Hindu Tantras.

Therefore the *Hevajra Tantra*, satya-satya-parivarta, chap. 5

vajraṃ ḍombī bhaven mudrā padmaṃ nartī tathaiva ca/  
karma rajakī samākhyātā brāhmaṇī ca tathāgati//6//  
ratnaṃ caṇḍalinī jñeyā pañcamudrā viniścītā/

But this tantra said earlier,

idaṃ jñānaṃ mahāsūkṣmaṃ vajra maṇḍam nabhopamam/  
virajaskaṃ mokṣadaṃ pitā to tvam asi svayam//

Those who express a devotion of passionate attachment to the supreme-being, especially when the supreme-being is conceived as Krishna, Vishnu, Buddha, are sometimes dissatisfied with merely spiritual union after this earthly life. They yearn for the supreme-being's physical embrace of their present embodied selves. Bhaktas differ as to whether such union of the human devotee's body with the supreme-being's body is possible. Within this life, however, ecstatic moments of perceived union are fleeting. Permanent union brings with it an end to the bhakta's life in this world, as is dramatically portrayed in the stories of the merger of two of the Tamil Vail Vaiṣṇava saints Antal and Tiruppan Alvar into the supreme-being's image incarnation, Ranganatha. Similar stories are told of the Rajpat woman saint Mira Bai, absorbed with Krishna's image at Dvark, and of Caitanya, who, according to the local Oriya tradition in Puri, was absorbed into the image of Jagannatha.

To understand an alien experience we need to remember partially similar experiences familiar to us. Bhakti has both appealed to and puzzled non-indian people because they see in its central features Western monotheism combined with other elements that seem different or even totally alien. Many features of Hindu bhakti are also found in the more popular aspects of Jainism and Buddhism, and Pure Land Buddhism has incorporated much of bhakti at its very core.

We may show you good example connected to Buddhist Bhaktism, it is called the *Bhakti-sataka*. This consists of 107 verses, which is the only extant Buddhist work extolling devotional faith related to Bhaktism,

particularly the Later Bhaktism which the present author called earlier paper.

In this work Sri Rama Candrabharati (c.1200-1250), criticized the popular faith in Siwa, Vishnu, Brahmā etc. It is likely that Buddhist rivival in Srilanka has something to do with this poetical work.

- 
- 1) Jadnath Sinha, "Bhagavata religion: the cult of Bhakti", culturl Heritage of India, vol. IV, Calcutta 1956 (reprint), p. 146 S.N. Dasgupta "Hindu Mysticism"
  - 2) R.G. Bhandarkar, "Vaisnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems", Varanasi 1965 (reprint), p. 28. Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, Īśa Upaniṣad.
  - 3) Mircea Eliade, "Encyclopaedia of Religions", 'Bhakti', pp.130-134., Krishna Sharma, "Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement", 1987, pp.109-129.
  - 4) E.W.Hopkins, "The Epic Use of Bhagavat and Bhakti", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1911, pp.727-738., Minoru Hara, A Study of Bhakti", *Nihon-bukkyogakkai-nenpo* 28, 1962, pp.1-24.
  - 5) Kotatsu Fujita, "Hokkaido Daigaku Bungakubu Kiyo", No.6, pp.67f, Zenno Ishigami in *IBK (Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyu)*, vol.8, No.2, March 1960, pp.79-86., Akinobu Watanabe, *Buddhist Seminar*, No.13, May 1971, pp.51-68.
  - 6) Loyalty (bhakti, sneha, anuraga) to Lords in India, discussed by Minoru Hara, *Suzuki Nenpo*, No.8, 1971, pp.70-88.
  - 7) Name-mysticism or the archaic belief in name can be found in other traditions also as Mantra-yoga in Hinnduism, Dhikr in Mohammedanism, Philokaklia in the Eastern Church.
  - 8) Stūpa-worshipping must be related to Bhaktism,
  - 9) Sir Charles Eliot, "Hinduim and Buddhism", vol. III, London, 1954., E.J. Thomas, "History of Buddhist Thought", London, 1933.
  - 10) Benoytosh Bhattacharya, "An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism", 1932, p.47.
  - 11) Kamalāśīla's quotations, Shunkyo Katsumata, "Japanese Development of the Esoteric Buddhism", Shunju-sha, 1970.
  - 12) Shin'ichi Tsuda, "Anti-Esoteric Buddhism", 1987, p.249.

<Key Words> Buddhist Bhaktism, Hindu Bhaktism, Mahāvairocana-sūtra, Diamond Peak Sutra, Esoteric Buddhism Śraddhā

(Research Fellow, The Eastern Institute., Ph.D.)