NOTES & TOPICS

TANTRA IN MAHAYANA TEXTS

Apropos of S. K. Pathak’s learned article published in this issue a few other extracts from Pali literature may be presented here. I confine myself strictly to early Buddhism that is Pali literature and would not pad my note with similar, parallel or even identical extracts from Jain or Sanskya texts. I may be permitted to say that the ethos of Pantheism or Macrocosm was prevalent when Gautama Buddha the Supereman preached the Four Truths and the doctrine of Inter-dependent Causation but did not refer to any transcendental or miraculous agencies.

In, Brahmavara Sutta (Digha Nikaya, I. 1.) The Buddha said that the common man held him in high esteem simply for his excellent ethical perfection, and failed to understand his deep philosophy which did constitute his real greatness.

These brethren are trifling matters, the matters detail of which the unconverted man, when passing the Tathagata, might speak.

These brethren, are these other things, profound, difficult to realise, hard to understand, tranquillising sweet, not to be grasped by mere logic, subtle, comprehensible only by the wise, which the Tathagata, having realised and seen face to face had set fourth; and it is concerning these that they who would rightly praise the Tathagata in accordance with the truth, should speak: (Brahmavara Sutta: Mahasala 3 Max Muller SBE V. 26)

In Khuddakanikaya 2nd book - Dhammapada, Nakshakavagga occurs the cryptic expression.

Maha Uddana Kutha: Saha 368 6 8 1234

A true Brahmin goes scathless though he have killed father and mother and two kings of the warrior caste and a kingdom with all its subjects. (trans Max Muller, SBE.)

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A true Brahmin goes unceasingly though he have killed father and mother and two holy kings and an eminent man (lit. veyyagha—tigerrish man) as the fifth.¹ (ibid).

Beal in his translation of the Dhammapada Introduction p.5 a stanza quoted from the third book of Lañkavatāra as having been recited by Buddha, in explanation of a similar startling utterance which he made to Mahāmāt:—

"Lust, or carnal desire, this is the mother
Ignorance, this is the Father
The highest points of knowledge, this is Buddha,
All the Klesas, these are the Rahats,
The five skandhas, these are the Priests,
To commit the five unpardonable sins
Is to destroy these five
And yet not suffer the pains the pains of Hell"

(Max Muller, SBE Vol.X)

The two padas quoted above do not bear normal etymological or literary sense as in Gâyasamjô and Mahayana texts. Radhakrishnan elucidates the real sense conveyed in the stotras of Dhammapada as follows. "The verse is an exaggerated way of expressing the doctrine that a saint cannot commit any sin. Those who have attained enlightenment are lifted above the world of good and evil. They are beyond the reach of any temptation to evil."

"The commentator is startled by the literal view and so offers an allegorical interpretation that mother is passion, father is pride, the two violent kings heretical systems and the kingdom is sensual pleasure and veyyagha is represented as the place infested by the tigers of obstruction to final beatitude." — (Radhakrishnan, Dhammapada p. 152).

B.Ghosh

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OBITER DICTA ON ATISA AGAIN

Just as the material for this bulletin (1986:2) is completed for printing, we receive a copy of Jagadipati Buddha Jayanti Annual 1986 (Calcutta 1986). In this issue Lama Chimpa has written a length disputing the accepted facts that Dipankara Atisa did subscribe to the doctrine of Tantra, though he fought against Tantra abuses, and that he preached Kalachakra Tantra in Central Tibet. We have to notice this article because the Ven. Lama’s principal target is the undersigned, and his references are to articles in previous issues of this bulletin (1985:1 & 2). While we refer the interested readers to the special number of Jagadipati we present below only two contentions of the Ven. Lama.

According to the Ven. Lama, Kalachakra Tantra was preached for the first time in Tibet not before the middle of 11th Century AD and that Atisa died in the beginning of the 11th Century. It is well known and well admitted that Atisa passed away in 1054 near Lhasa. For this expression “beginning of 11th Century” Ven. Lama takes advantage of a slip of Sarat Das.

According to the Ven. Lama, Tara is not a Tantrik deity and cannot be Ishe (Yidam) of Buddhist (Mahayana) monk or saint. Practice of Tantra without Tara is like staging Hamlet without the prince of Denmark. We have no further comments.

There are many statements in Lama Chimpa’s article which are novel, original and unacceptable to Lamas and Tibetan scholars we have consulted.

The undersigned agrees with any reservations with one statement of Lama Chimpa, namely, “the Chinese people are not fools”. The undersigned has high opinion of calibre and diplomacy of the Han race. This agreement between us is full though the undersigned had no early schooling in China like the Ven. Lama.

-Nirmal C. Sinha

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