

Input of Sanskrit Buddhist Texts on Mahayana Dharanis, Strotras and Carygitas of Nepal and its Importance to Buddhist World

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Introduction

Newar Buddhism: Problems and Possibilities

Over the last few decades, the Kathmandu valley has become the meeting place of Tibetan and Western Buddhists for the study of Buddhism. Renowned Tibetan Buddhist masters are busy offering initiations, conducting seminars and teaching sessions. Serious Western Dharma practitioners participating in these initiations and seminars seem to be less aware of the existence of a strong Buddhist tradition practiced by the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley. Very few of the Western and Japanese Buddhist have thought it worthwhile to explore indigenous Buddhist tradition in the Kathmandu Valley.

Most of these Western Buddhists hold the view that Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism is in all respects exhaustive in character while Newari Vajrayana Buddhism is only a corrupt form of Buddhism and hence warrants no observation, investigation or research. Of course, this view is erroneous. One needs to carefully consider the situation in a logical way before making such a hasty conclusion.

1.1 Some Problems in Newar Buddhism

The Newari form of Buddhism may be the oldest living tradition of Buddhism in the world. Buddhism as practiced by the Newar Buddhists of the Kathmandu Valley has some characteristic features not found in other Buddhist countries. It was the Buddhism of Shakyamuni as it manifested itself in the Himalayan region. Newar Buddhism can be classified along the tradition of Indian Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism, which derives its lineage from the Siddha tradition of the Nalanda and Vikramashila Monastic Universities of India.

Nepal Buddhism has not been given proper recognition in the World today, unlike Buddhism of Tibet and China, which have sets of religious text in their own languages, as it exists only in this small valley called Nepal Mandala. In the past 20-30 years, anthropological and ethnographic scholars have been studying and writing about many aspects of its culture. This traditional Buddhism of Newars has recently become the subject

of great interest and detailed study by Lienhard, Gellner, M. Allen, Bechert, and others. But they failed to recognize it as critically important form of Buddhism. It is a most important form of Buddhism, because it has preserved the original Buddhist texts in Sanskrit which were written and edited during the expansion of Mahayana Buddhism and subsequently translated into Chinese and Tibetan. Many scholars of Mahayana Buddhism have been studying the Sanskrit manuscripts, which are copied and preserved in Nepal Mandala. But they have failed to recognize that they belong to the Nepal Buddhism, and inevitably Nepal Buddhism itself. The important is not only that it has preserved and transmitted Sanskrit texts but also that Nepal-Buddhism sustains and transmits Sanskrit texts in ritual teaching. structure.

Some observers have found it to be in a pitiful condition. Not being able to cope with the modern situation the Shakyas and Vajracharyas are taking little interest in their own traditional religion and culture. The Vajracharyas are beginning to neglect taking Acharya Diksa (master initiation) with the result that there is a conspicuous decline in the number of Buddhist priests. The patrons (Skt. Jajaman) pay too little respect to these Buddhist priests because of their ignorance of Buddhist doctrine. These Vajracharyas get little remuneration in return for their services to their patrons in life cycle rituals. Thus, they are compelled to take up various secular professions. These are the obvious reasons for the decline of the traditional Buddhism of the Kathmandu Valley.

Furthermore, most of the Bahas and Bahis (Buddhist monasteries) of three illustrious cities, owing to the lack of proper conservation, are in a dreadful state of dilapidation. Nowadays, we see these Bahas and Bahis being replaced by concrete buildings. In addition, the rare Buddhist manuscripts which Nepal takes pride in are being sold in the common markets for exorbitant prices. We also see the ancient Buddhist sculptures and thankas, being exported to foreign markets. For all these reasons, scholars have begun to speculate about the hasty disappearance of this traditional Buddhism by the end of this century.

1.2 The Importance of Newar Buddhism as a living Sanskrit Buddhist tradition

The importance of Newars in South Asian Buddhist History has been discussed at great length by Lienhard in his paper "*Nepal ! The Survival of Indian Buddhism in a Himalayan Kingdom.*" Similarly in 1898 Prof. Sylvian Levi, who wrote "Le Nepal", discussed the survival of Sanskrit Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley. He, with the help of Pt. Kulaman Singh of Khabahal, translated into French the *Mahayana Sutralankara of Arya Maitreyanath*. Buddhism disappeared in India. The Theravada tradition flourished in Sri

Lanka, Burma and Thailand whereas the Vajrayana/Mahayana traditions were kept alive in Tibet, China, Japan, Korea and Nepal.

How Buddhism disappeared in India is still the subject of great controversy. How Newars kept Vajrayana Buddhism alive in the Kathmandu Valley is an interesting topic in itself.

1.3 Nepal as a treasure trove of Sanskrit Buddhist Manuscripts

In 1824. Mr. Brian Hodgson, a British diplomat in Nepal, discovered a great number of Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts in Nepal. The existence of these before his time was unknown, and his discovery has entirely revolutionized the history of Buddhism, as Europeans knew it in the early part of this century. Copies of these works, totaling 381 bundles, have been distributed so as to render them accessible to European scholars.

Prof. Jayadeva Singh writes in his *"Introduction to Madhyamika Philosophy"*.

"Books on Mahayana Buddhism were completely lost in India. Their translation existed in Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan. Mahayana literature was written mostly in Sanskrit and mixed Sanskrit. Scholars, who have made a study of Buddhism, hardly suspected that there were also books on Buddhism in original Sanskrit".

In similar matter, Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji writes,

"One great service the people of Nepal did particularly the highly civilized Newars of the Nepal valley, was the preservation of all the manuscripts of Mahayana Buddhist literature in Sanskrit. It was the contribution of Sri Lanka to have preserved for humankind the entire mass of the Pali literature of Theravada Buddhism. This was also on to Burma, Cambodia and Siam. It was similarly the great achievement of people of Nepal to have preserved the equally valuable original Sanskrit texts of Mahayana buddhism."

Nepalese Buddhism has contributed to academic world by supplying the Sanskrit manuscript

1.5 Newar Buddhism As a Lay Bodhisattva Practice

It seems that there had been a provision for lay Buddhist monkhood which became very popular in the valley of Kathmandu, the validity of this tradition was also corroborated by the text "Sikhsasamuccaya" of Acharya Shanti Deva;

It runs thus:

*Punara aparam kulaputra bhavisyanti anagata adhvani grahstha pravajita
adikarmika bodhisattva.*

Concerning Adikarmika Bodhisattva Acharya Anupamavajra stands prominent. His works had a great influence in Nepalese Buddhist tradition. It is surprising and interesting to note that *Adikarmika Pradipa* which was composed in 1098 AD. by Anupamavajra had profound impact on the daily practice of Newar Buddhist society even till today. In this context it is perhaps befitting to cite the verses of *Adikarmapradipa*¹.

'k|)fDo >Lu'?g\ eSTof lhgfg -r_ ;;'tfg cy .
cflbsd{k|bLkf]xod\ tbly{Eof] ljlwot] .. 1 ..

lziof)ffd cfz'af]wfy{d\ lnVot] :kw{of g t' .
ctM zFGtb'MvfM ;j[] IfGt'd cx{lGt dfd\ k|lt .. 2 ..

tqfbf} bllzt o] t' dGqfM k"hflbsd{;' .
cfs[io]sq ;lDk)*] lnVoGt] t] t' gfGoyf .. 3 ..

d'vzf}rflbsd\ s[Tjf k|ftWof{g+ hk+ tyf .
gfd;+lultkf&d\ r s'of{t\ k|l)flwd]j r .. 4 ..

eb|rof{lbgf kZrfg\ gd:sf/+ k|s[To j} .
z'lr lgik|f)fsd\ tf]o+ hDenfo oyfljlw .. 5 ..

bb\ofb ci^f} ztfGo]j k|]t]Eo]z r'n'sf+:tyf .
kZrfg\ d[Rr}Tosdf{l b a'\$fbLgf+ r k"hg d\ .. 6 ..

u'/f]d{)*ns+ s[Tjf :j]i^b]j:o d)*nd\ .
k|!fkf/ldtfbLgf+ kf&+ s'of{b\ oy]lK;td\ .. 7 ..

s[Tjf k|blIf)ff+ t]Eof] k|l)flw+ r ljz]iftM .
af]lw;øjaln+ bTjf zf;g:o rL/l:y]ltd\ .. 8 ..

cfz+;o]t\ k|ãit]g r]t;f ;';dflxtM .
jGbgfk"j{s+ kZrfb\ u'?a'\$f+ lj;h{o]t\ .. 9 ..

To state briefly, it deals with the following practices of Newar Buddhists.

1. Taking Refuge in Triple Gems
2. Reciting Namasangiti
3. To recite Bhadracarya Pranidhan
4. To offer Preta bali
5. To Circumambulate Caitya, Buddha statues etc.
6. To perform Gurumandala rite
7. To meditate on tutelary deity
8. To recite Prajnaparamita and other Mahayana sutras
9. To recite Danagatha'
10. To perform Bodhisattva practices joyfully
11. To study Buddhist scriptures
12. Offering food to Triple Gems and tutelary deity before eating
13. Offer fivefold prostration to Buddha of ten directions
14. Sleeping in a lion's posture after meditating on Deity Yoga

k'gef]{hgsfn] r eStJo`hgsflbleM .
;j{ef}ltsdGq])f aln+ bb\ofb\ ljwfgtM .. 10 ..

g}j]B+ lqif' /Tg]if' xf[2a]/LTo} #tLsfqod\ .
cu|f;g+r]i^b]jZo kZrfb\ e`hLb\ oyfljlw .. 11 ..

pl%i^fxf/lk)*+ r bTjfxrdgdfr/]t\ .
bfgufyflbs+ kZrft\ kl&Tjf ljxf/]b\ a'\$fM .. 12 ..

afllw;øj]lqmofM ;jf{Zrt'yf{+ ãi^r]t;f .
k'gM k|bflifj]nfof+ ;\$d{Woogflbsd\ .. 13 ..

s[Tjf k|)fDo efj]g k`rf±}c{lvnfg lhfg\ .
b]jtfof]uo'Qm]g ;'Kotf+ l;+xzøoof .. 14 ..

pTyfg] r k'gM sfo{ jGbgflb ljlws[of .
cflbsld{s ;Tjfgf+ dfu{:tfjb\ co+ dtM .. 15 ..

See "Adikarmaprdipa" edited by La valley de Poussin in Etude Et Materiaux Boudhisme II
Partie, pp-186-187.

According to Newar Buddhist tradition, even after disrobing ceremony of Cudakarma, Shakyas and Vajracharyas do not cease to be bhikshus or Buddhist monks, but pass from the state of celibate bhikshus to that of Grihasthi bhikshus, a fact underlined by the name Sakyabhikshu used to refer to them down the ages.

Importance of preservation of Sanskrit Buddhist Dharanis, stotras and Caryagitas in CDROM:

Dharanis:

The Dharanis are the least explored branch of Buddhist Sanskrit literature in the Buddhist world although most of the monks of the northern Buddhist schools used them in their daily practice.

The special features of Nepalese Manuscript collection is the sort of work called Dharanis and strotra. The Dharanis can also be called simple sutras. These Dharanis and stotras have paramount importance for not only in Nepal but for all believers in Mahayana Buddhism. The recitation of these Dharanis and stotras is believed to bring into great merit and they are used to be worn as amulet to avert evils including thieves, fire noxious animal, to ensure long life quake etc.

The bhikhus and people in those days were much prone to these fears and compassionate bodhisattvas wanted ready means of getting rid of them.

It is believed that Buddha gave a sermons on these Dharanis according to the request of bodhisattvas. For example: Aparimitayur Dharanis is a good example for its efficacy in acquiring the longevity of life. It is said that great philosopher Nagarjuna had benefitted from this Dharani to save himself from his early death. These Dharanis were used as an antidote to these fears.

Nagarjuna Institute alone has a collection of more than 600 titles of Dharanis.

Asha Archives of Kathmandu Valley has a rich collection of 64 Dharani manuscripts.

Among them 24 are dated N.S.584-1064. (i.e.1464-1944A.D) Almost all the Dharanis are written in Sanskrit.

Strotras:

In prosperity or distress, the Nepalese people worship and pray to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for protection, good health, prosperity, family welfare and also for liberation from cyclic existence. In the Asha Archive alone there are 147 manuscripts of Buddhist hymns or strotras among them 36 are dated N.S.476-1056 (i.e 1356-1936 A.D).

Caryagitas:

Caryagita is the song or hymn used to be sung in Tantric ceremonies. Most of the authors of these songs or dohas were the Mahasiddhas of India and Nepal. Dohakosha of Mahasiddha Sarahapada was the most famous one. In Newar Buddhism these tantric songs are still sung by Buddhist Vajracharyas in special ceremonies like Ordination ceremony skt: Cudakarma or Master Initiation skt: Acarya abhiseka. Abundant manuscripts are still found in Asha Archives, Nepal Archives and Keshar Library.

The importance of these hymns cannot be over-estimated for the students of Prakrit, Apavramsa, Sanskrit or Hybrid Sanskrit. If we could not preserve it now its fast disappearance is easily discernible. A loss for the whole world indeed.

Conclusion

A prospect for Preservation of Sanskrit Buddhist Literature in CD-ROM version

a) Resources on epigraphists

Seeing the vulnerability and need for preservation of these Sanskrit Buddhist manuscript Nagarjuna Inc. has launched the input of these texts within its financial constraints. Our Institute has some resources on epigraphists who can handle these age-old manuscripts in Sanskrit.

b) Availability of Sanskrit manuscripts

Since there are plenty of Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts available in Kathmandu belonging to Asha Archive, Nepal Archive, and Keshar Library. There is a strong feasibility of a project on the input of Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts on CDROM for the benefit of research scholars and Buddhist practitioner in the global context.

c) Availability of cheap human resources

Nepal being a developing country there is several unemployed computer graduates. This project if sponsored by National Taiwan University, Center for Buddhist Studies or any other sponsors present in this meeting. I hope dozens of youth can find employment in this meritorious project.

We have divided our project proposals in three separate projects to be completed in 6 years.

First Phase: 1999-2000-

The input of entire Dharanis 600 in number, Strotras 200 in number and Charya gita 300 in number.

Second Phase: 2001-2002

The input of Nine Mahayana Sutras.

Third Phase: 2003-2004

Ritual texts and Avadana.