Notes & Topics

THE ANCIENT PATH OF THE BUDDHAS

The article on Upanishadic terms in Buddhism (pp. 3-13) traverses a controversial ground involving academics as much as believers. The controversy boils down to Buddhism’s notion of Atman and we invite scholars to throw light from Tibetan and Mongol literary sources.

It is appropriate to add here, for the general reader, that as Brahmanical terms in Buddhism raise a presumption in favour of borrowing, Buddhist terms like Buddhika or Nusatra in Brahmanism have the same bearing. If the Buddha had appropriated the thunder (Vajrab) from Upanishads, Nagarjuna returned it in a refined form; Gaudapada, Govinda, and Sankara retrieved it. In Tibetan tradition Sankara is a beneficiary and a remoulade of the Dharma. Bharrhadr’s Vidyapadhai, drawn upon by the Jonangpa school of Tibet, drew considerably from Buddhist.

Sankara is ever known to have offered this salutation to the Buddha,

श्रुत्नमयामार्नमार्यामेवः कविदत् तद्भावज्जवानां सक्नवहि।

व बुधः युध्येत् गोविन्दविनामितः।

Rudhrakrishnan takes the word Buddhika for the historical Buddha, Gautama Siddhartha. Those who deny the historic allegation that Sankara was “a Buddha in disguise” would read this as any or all the Enlightened before Sankara. Rudhrakrishnan’s particularisation does not diminish the glory of Sankara but emphasizes the preceous historic legacy which, along with others, contributed to the greatness of Sankara’s philosophy.

A millennium and a half before Sankara, Gautama Siddhartha said I have discovered an ancient track. In often times the Enlightened Ones trod this path. (Sanyanta Niky 12.6). The encounters between the two creeds resulted in exchanges at different levels from philosophy to rituals. While the worshippers of Siva adapted much from the Buddhist Tantras as practiced in the north west (Swat-Gilgit) or in the north east (Lohe-Brahmaputra). Guru Padmasambhava of Udayana had no less authority among the Hindu devotees than Rish Vasishta of Kamarupa. The worshippers of Vishnu adored Gautama Siddhartha as an Avatar.
"O you of merciful heart denounced the Veda where the slaughter of cattle is taught: O Kesara, you in the form of Bodhisattva, victory to you, Hari, lord of the world." (Frg. trans. Radhakrishnan)

The Buddha's revolt was primarily against the animal sacrifices and the social injustice sanctioned under the label of Vedic idolatry. The Buddha preached against ego either in life or thought; he refined and redefined the Vedic Ego. With the humility of a Bodhisattva, Gautama Siddhartha affirmed that he had found a lost path.

NIRMAL C. SINGHA

SEVEN SOVEREIGN JEWELS

RGYAL-SRI RIN-CHEN SNA-BO-DUN on pages 19-27 is a fresh interpretation of the symbolism of a sovereign's Seven Precious Jewels from the erudite pen of Lama Angurkha Govinda and will no doubt engage the experts in several fields of religion and anthropology in pursuing the matter further.

As a student of history, I draw the notice of the general reader to a similar institution in Vedic polity. The royal consecration called Rajsuya consisted of a number of rituals. While most of these rituals were purely or dominantly of the nature of sacrifice in ordinary sense, one unique ritual related directly to kingship, namely, Ratna-bhavishya (Jewel-offerings). While in other rituals the sacrificer was usually called Yajaman or Suyamana, in the Jewel-offerings he was called Sajjan.

The rite of Jewel-offerings begins in the preparatory stage for the Rajsuya. The king makes offerings to certain appropriate deities on successive days at the houses of certain specific persons. These persons count up to 14. The list in Tantarata Sambhava enumerates 14 persons: Priest (Brahmana), Noble (Rajanya), Chief Queen (Mahishi), Neglected (Vaishiy), Army Chief (Senani), Ministrel (Suta), Village Headman (Grama), Carpenter (Khartrii), Charioteer (Suvratabhiri), Collector (Bhagadugu) and Master of Dice (Aishavaya). Each person symbolizes or represents a deity; Brahma represents Brhaspati, Rajanya Indra, Mahishi Aditi and so on and so forth.
It may be noticed that the different persons called Ratin in various systems, the different ritual limbs of community or state, significantly called Limbs of the Ruling Power. The Priest has the first place in all lists, except that in Satapatha Brahmana the preconclusion is for the Army Chief; the Chief Queen has a top place (third) in all lists. The Ratin is indeed the King's Jewel; it is for him (or her) that the King is consecrated and by worshipping the relevant deity the king earns the allegiance of the custodians of the deity. The loyalty of the VIP, in modern terminology, is sworn through the Rual; even the Neglected Consort or the Master of the Dice cannot be omitted, and in the context of a semi-tribal semi-territorial society, as the Vedic one, every potential source of power like Charioteer or Village Headman is recognized and propitiated. A comprehensive description of the ritual will be found in Heesterman: The Ancient Indian Royal Cession (The Hague 1957).

There are conflicting interpretations of the 'Jewel-offerings ritual'. Jayaavalk (Hindu Polyg) (Calcutta 1914/Bangalore 1944) holds that the ritual pertains the character of election and thus the consecration amounts to election of the king. A correct assessment, in my submission, is that of Ghoshal in Studies in Indian History and Colours (Calcutta 1957/1965), 'The true significance of the ceremony' in Ghoshal's words 'consisted in winning for the king the allegiance of these important persons'. Coomaraswamy, in Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government (New Haven 1947), reads this ritual as another symbol of the marital bond between the Purohit (i.e. Church) and the Raja (i.e. State). I do not accept Coomaraswamy's warning that the Vedic King's Jewels are not to be confused with the Seven Jewels of a Chakravarin (p. 77). Coomaraswamy admits that 'the categories partly coincide'.

Like many Vedic categories, both in doctrinal and ritualistic matters, Ratna itself was transmitted into Buddhism. Most of these categories undoubtedly underwent changes in content in Buddhism. It is not unlikely that the Seven Jewels of Sovereignty in Buddhism were a development from the King's Jewels as in Vedic policy. The Seven Jewels symbolize the vital limbs of state: in the Veda, Liana's language the Seven Jewels are the seven nerve centres of the body. Historical data about consecration ceremony of a Buddhist King in India are altogether lacking. Evidence from Northern Buddhist countries would testify to the Indian origins of such ceremony; these origins are to be traced in the Vedic (and Brahmanical) literature.

A recent celebration of the Buddhist Jewel-offerings was witnessed in Sikkim on 4 April 1965 at the GSER-HKHB-MNGAH-GSOL of
Miwang Palden Thondup Namgyal as the 13th Chogyal of Sikkim. For a student of Indian history, this recalled Indian Vedic and Buddhist ritualism. The Vajracharya (Bodo-rje skor-gdon of Padma-yang-ten: the royal chaplain and presiding priest) offered to the Chogyal, in iconic symbols, the Seven Jewels: Chakra (Discus), Chintamani (Wish fulfilling Gem), Mahishi (Consort), Mantri (Minister), Hasti (Elephant), Aswa (Horse), and Senani (Army Chief).

The Brihad-devata, a later Vedic compendium of deities and rituals, lists the Jewels thus: Discus, Chariot, Gem, Consort, Earth. Horse and Elephant.

Vishnu Paranu, a Brahmanical composition of a few centuries after Nagarjuna but anterior to the migration of Mahayana into Trans-Himalayas, lists 14 Jewels in two sets, Human and Animal. These are (i) Discus, Chariot, Gem, Sword, Armour, Flag and Treasury; and (ii) Consort, Priest, Army Chief, Charioteer, Soldier, Horse and Calf Elephant.

There were several eminent scholars like Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterjee (India) and Professor P.H. Pott (Holland) who witnessed the coronation in Sikkim and each scholar may enrich the pages of this Bulletin with their views. Meanwhile I expect a Sikkimese scholar to carry this discussion into the next number.

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