CONCEPT OF PRAJNA AND UPAYA

If we just enter into a Mahayana Monastery in any Himalayan region, we may notice that monks, besides other ritualistic objects keep Vajra (Tib. Dorje) and Ghanta (Thib. Thilbu) on chokje (small longish table). During the ritual performance a Dorje is held in the right hand and a bell in the left hand with a particular gesture. These gestures symbolically reproduce the conjugal play of wisdom and method as female and the male principles respectively and are represented by the two ritual objects viz; Ghanta and Vajra. While the Ghanta (Tib. Thilbu) stands for wisdom, the Vajra (Tib. Dorje) represents the method.

In the Tibetan Hagioraphical literature we come across a name of Ter-ston (Revealer of hidden Treasures) Dorje Lingpa. He is said to have visited Denzong several times in the remote historical time. The name of Darjeeling is most probably derived after the name of mystic saint, which means “The Place of Thunderbolt”.

The two objects as mentioned above also figure in sacred art, pictorial or sculptural. In the artistic representation they are seen either separately as also grasped in the hands of various gods and goddesses. The supreme manifestation of Buddha Vajrapani or Vajradhara is Chandorje and Dorjechhang respectively in Tibetan.

According to the traditional symbolism wisdom the bell as female principle should be brought in divine play being harmoniously blended with that of the male (Dorje) if ever the spirituality is to bear its proper fruit of Enlightenment. Usually this idea is expressed in the following analogy that wisdom is the eye and method the leg and that if one of these fails the man will be helpless. There is a happy parable current in Tibetan painting depicting this morale which runs as follows: Two men set out to the city of Nirvana, but neither could make much headway because one was blind while the other was lame. Eventually they decided to join forces so the lame man climbed on the blind man’s back and so they set out together with the man who had eyes pointing out the way while the man with sound legs advanced along it and thus they reached safely in...
the city. Hereunder we quote the parable from a Tibetan text, mdo-
'dus/Sutraamuccepaa:-
"dmos-long-mig-bu-med-pa-byar-bka-krigs-mam/
lam-yang-mi-shes-drung-khyer/"jug-pa-la-nus/
Shes-rab-med-na-mig-med-pa-rol-pbyin-long-a-yang/
mig-bu-med-pa-byar-chub-myur-du-reg-par-nus-ma-yin/"

Knowledge, in real sense, the one invariably given to it by
the Tibetan Lamas, is always to be regarded as "Concrete" that is to
say it implies equating of knowledge with the being, intellect with
existence, theory or vision with the realization. Wisdom to remain
as such therefore, demands the latent present of method and vice
versa.

The bell, which always bears the same devices and is cast
from a special metal yielding a clear and melodious sound (note) is
regarded as we have said earlier as the female principle. The handle
is crowned with head of a goddess Prajnâ-Prâramdî (Tib. Yum-chen,
the great mother ) or Transcendental Wisdom, here with Tara (Tib.
Sdro-lma)-the mother of the bodhisattvas or being dedicated to En-
lightenment. As for the Dorje, its symbolism is multiple; firstly, it is
an axial symbol implying stability and is signifying also the thread
of Enlightenment passing through the centre of every being or world
and especially of man, who is a central or axial being by definition;
hence is the frequent reference in the injunctions that this rare
opportunity should not be wasted but turned to profit while the
going is good.

In Yogâtantramûla- the symbolic definition of vajra is as
follows :-

\[\text{drtham sûram asusiryam acchelva-dhaka lahsam} \]
\[\text{adith avamâ-ca suñyata vajromucya} \]

Thus Sunyata is termed as vajra because it is firm and
sound, unchangeable, unpiercible, impenetrable, incomestible and
indestructible.

The axis of the Dorje is flanked by four (sometimes further
sub-divided into eight) phalangs, with constriction where the hand
lays hold of the Dorje in the middle. The phalangs correspond to the
four directions of space which between them "encompass" the
universe. A precisely similar symbolism attached to the three-dimensional cross of the Dorje is but a variant.

Wisdom cannot be pursued in isolation. According to Mahayana followers this is just the error of those who seek Enlightenment for themselves, ignoring the interest of other sentient beings and try to escape from the world without compensation and integration of the world. In contrast to this the Bodhisattva, who, is discarding his own exit into Nirvana until last of the sentient being is released.

Abstracting wisdom is bad, because it inevitably leads to a confusing of wisdom itself with what are merely its reflections in the discursive mind, mental formulations, or conceptualisation in general. All Buddhist schools agree that here lies the danger.

Secondly, method when divorced from wisdom has the effect of chaining the man fatally to the Samsara, the world of birth and death, without hope of escape.

We now briefly relate Tibetan Buddhist School of thought. First we take up the Gelugpa spiritual method i.e., Gelugpa or righteous Sect or reformed school, or the established Church of Tibet. According to this school, the spiritual concept can be summed up in three words: study, meditation and contemplation. The Gelugpa text (the golden way), the standard treatise of the order composed by its founder Tsongkhapa, the object to be strives for, is the simultaneous acquisition of vipakasmita (Lhagmtong) or Transcendental Vision and Samsthā (shi-gnas) abiding tranquility, which respectively correspond to the active and passive poles of contemplation. In the teaching of the school, the compassion is actually identified with the method itself. This coupled with a pushing of impermanence to the point of recognizing the voidness or lack of self-nature of all things, brings the spiritual traveller to that sublime state where vision transcends all possible expression and when every agitation is stilled in the peace that passes understanding. The Nyingmapa, Kagyuapa and Sakyaapa have almost the same views about Prajñā (shes-rab) and Upaya (Thabs). The ingenious literature of all Tibetan Buddhist sects, abounds in new interpretation of twin concepts of sātra, or the Mahayana texts rendered in Tibetan from Sanskrit, and Tanic litera-
ture. Study and research of these literature will shed further light on
the of above concept.

Hereunder we discuss some concept from Buddhist Sanskrit
texts. It is well-known to the scholars in the field of Buddhistic studies
that there is a book extant in Sanskrit Prajñapāramitāśāstra-sūtra-
dhah of Ananga-Vajra (G.O.S. Vol XLIIV ch.1 verse 1) which expounds
whole theme from various angles.

To attain perfect bliss either for self or for the three worlds,
the wise must first do away with the notion of existence while one
should not go either to the opposite extreme of adopting a nihilistic
view (non-existence). In the above text the author says: It is better
to have the imagination of existence (bhava-kalpana) then that of
non-existence (abhava-kalpana) for the burning lamp can be extin-
guished; but if it be not burning at all can it be extinguished? niraññi
svātttha dṛṣṭa nīrayatā kām gāthāṃ kṛṣṇa. (S.B. DasGupta, An Introduction
to Tantric Buddhism p.36 Calcutta 1958).

He, who abandons the idea of both the real and unreal,
attains a state which is neither Samājā nor nīrayā, and this is Pure
Knowledge (Prajñā). In realising the truth one should meditate neither
on the void (śūnyatā) nor on the non-void (adyatā), when the
conception of egohood (ahamkāra saññāpā) does not determine itself
in the negative manner as non-void or in the positive manner as void
it becomes bereft of all basis of thought, the wise therefore, without
any attachment and desire, absolutely skillless, untroubled in mind and
freed from the constrictive imagination of a beginning as an end,
pursue the path of pure knowledge (Prajñā).

The Pāññāsiddhi also asserts that the ultimate truth is neither
positive nor negative, for in the positive there is the possibility of all
the defects (sūtra-dosā-prāsaṅga) and in negative there is no way left
for the relief of all sorrow (G.O.S.Ch 1 verse 19-20).

Pure knowledge is neither with any form (sākāra) nor is it
formless (nirākāra). If the knowledge had any form, it would have
been samācāra (conditional and defiled) as all existence is. Had
knowledge, on the other hand, been absolutely formless, there would
have been no possibility of becoming omniscient, and without om-
niscience there would be no possibility of universal compassion
(Pāññāsiddhi ch.vi). A distinction is drawn here between ordinary
knowledge (Jñāna) and the knowledge of the highest truth. The distinction is ultimately the same as that between Prajñā alone and Bodhicitta, the combination of both Prajñā and Karunā. The Prajñā however is nirodakalpa i.e., free from all the false constructions; while the tattvajñāna with which there is the existence of universal compassion (Karunā) should not be taken as a complete cessation (niscit-tatā) of consciousness (S. B. Das Gupta : An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism, p.39).

In the Pāñcarātra of Nāgarjuna-pāda we find four gradations in the sūnyā doctrine. The first is Śunya, the second ati-Śunya, the third Mahā-Śunya, and the fourth or the final is the saraś-Śunya and these are all different according to their cause and effect. The first stage Śunya has been explained as light (Āloka) Prajñātappannah-āloka Prākritbhūtah. It is relative (Paratantra) by nature, aloka śunyaṃprajñā ca cittam ca paratāntrakam. In this stage mind has got as many as three purportless states (dosa) associated with it, such as sorrow, fear, hunger, thirst, feeling etc. The second stage viz., ati-Śunya is said to be the manifestation of light (Āloka-bhāsa), it shines like moon-rays and it proceeds from theformer (alokeya-jana), and while saraś is said to be Prajñā, ati-Śunya is said to be Uṣṇa or the means. It is said to be of the nature of constructive imagination (Pakāsana) and it belongs to the mind, as its (mind’s) state (cittasika). It is also said to be the right (pārākṣa), the solar circle (sūrya-mandala) and the thunderbolt (vaṭṭa). The third stage viz. Mahāśunya proceed from union of Prajñā and Uṣṇa aloka and āloka-bhūta or śunya and ati-Śunya, and it is called the intuition of light (Ālokapalabihī) and it is of the absolute nature (pari niṣpanna), yet is called ignorance (acalākṣaya). It has also been said to be the śvāhathāna-cittam. The fourth stage, viz. sarva-Śunya (all void or perfect void) is free from all three-fold impurities and is self-illuminant. It is called perfect void because it transcends the principles of delimitation. It is the purified knowledge - the ultimate. th - it is the supreme omniscience (ibid p.41).

We have seen above how the sūnyā doctrine of the Mahayanaic philosophers was adopted by the esoteric Buddhists, but the emphasis of Mahayana is not only on sūnyatā, as a religion it is characterized by its stress on universal compassion adopted by these Tantric Buddhists in toto.
According to Dr. S. B. Das Gupta the concept of Kālacakra is not a distinct school of Tantric Buddhism, but a particular name for the vajrayana school. It will be clear also from the text Sekadhesāra which is a commentary on the Sekadhesa section of the Kālacakra-tantra. There it is said that ultimate immutable and unchangeable one remaining in the skylike dharma-dhatu (the element underlying all the dharmas) is called Kāla; it itself is the immutable knowledge; Cakra implies the unity of the three kinds of existence - the manifestation of Kāla. It (the Cakra) is the body of Lord - point like, containing the potency of existence of the universe, Kālacakra, therefore, implies exactly the same as the unity of Prajñā and Upāya.

Kāla means, the state of absorption in the original cause potency, this is the state of Śunya-deva; it is the pure consciousness of the principle of subjectivity, cakra on the other hand means the principle of knowledgethability or the cycle of world process which is also the principle of Upāya-Kālacakra which therefore means absolutely unified state of Prajñā and Upāya (Ibid pp. 46 and 49).

The Vajra-sattva, as the Lord supreme of the Tantric Buddhists representing monolithic conception of the Godhead, has variably been described in the Buddhist Tantras with all sorts of positive and negative attributes. He is Bhagavan as he possesses bhaga which means that which breaks or removes, Śunya-deva or Prajñā removes all afflictions and drives away māra and so the Śunya-deva is called the bhaga. He is saluted as the Śunya-deva-essence, transcending all imagination, omniscient of Pure Wisdom.

Vajra-sattva is not merely of the nature of Śunya-deva, it is a non-dual of Śunya-deva and karuṇā, to imply that the void-consciousness is also of the nature of identity of both Śunya-deva and karuṇā. In the Hrdaya-tantra, Upāya, and Prajñā have been described under the imagery of yogin and the Mudrā (the great woman to be adopted in yogasadhana) and the Bodhiśatta is the perfect union of yogin and mudra who stand for karuṇā and Śunya-deva respectively.

Kṛṣṇopāya bhave yogi mudrā hetuvīyogataḥ/ Śunya-deva karuṇābhinnah bodhibhāmanti srītam//

Patala X, Ms p.306(a) quoted by S. B. Das Gupta (Ibid. p.93)
In all classes of Buddhist Tantras most important thing is the stress on the union of Prajñā and Upāya in philosophical sense or the esoteric yogic sense.

The authority of the renowned Buddhist Acarya like Arya-vimala-kirti and other have often been quoted, who are said to have stressed the truth that Upāya is bondage when unassociated with Prajñā, and even Prajñā is also a bondage when unassociated with Upāya; both of them again become liberation when the one is associated with the other. Their co-mingling through the instructions of the competent teacher, like the inseparable co-existence of the lamp and the light, will conduce to success in realising the real nature of the self and the dharma. Whatever practices there are, they should therefore be preceded by a knowledge or rather the realisation of the true purport of the union of Prajñā and Upāya. The carinal principle of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha says the Dākini-vaśra panjara, points to the state of citta shining in the unity of śūnyatā and karuṇā.

śūnyatā-karuṇābhinnanā yatra cittaṁ prabhāyate/
so hi buddhasya dhammadya saṁghayāpi ca deśanā///

(quoted in the Advāya-vaśra-saṁgraha p.96)

Upāya has again very nicely compared to a boat in the Prajnāpāramitā-sūtra-sūtrabhāvī. There it is said that compassion is called rage (affection) as it affects or causes happiness to all beings who are distressed with infinite sufferings. The compassion is like a boat which brings all beings to the favourable shore, and it is for this reason that it is called the Upāya. The co-mingling of the prajñā and upāya like the mixture of water and milk in a state of non-duality is called Prajñāpāramitā (p.93)

In the chapter of meditation on the ultimate truth (tattva-bhāvanā) of the Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra-sūtrabhāvī it has been said that the truth is both prajñā and upāya combined together; for it is prajña as it is the absence of all phenomenalization (nispṛṣṭa-viśvamāna-praṇidhā), and it is compassion because like the wish-granting gem it does everything for the good of the beings, supportless is prajñā and supportless (Nirālambha) is the great compassion; they should be united like the sky with the sky. In that stage there is no thinker - no thought - nothing to be thought of, there, all seeing of sights,
hearing of the sounds - muttering, laughing - enjoyment- doing of all deeds - all become yoga for a man. (S.B.DasGupta in An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism p.94).

It is said in cittasamuddhisamkarmanac that as by rubbing of two logs of wood fire is produced which is pure in the beginning is the middle as well as in the end, and which shows everything by its illumination, so also by the union of Prajin and Upaya the pure and luminous wisdom of the yogin is produced. The absolutely pure dharma-dhātu, that is attained by properly churning of the milk of prajna and upaya, is the destroyer of both pleasure and pain.

In the foregoing discussion we have hinted that the conception of Prajin and Upaya acquired a cosmological and ontological significance in course of time. In the conclusion we do not want to elaborate these topic in detail and only give a brief references to them.

Prajin as the passive principle is the dharmadāya the thatness (tathatā) with perfect purity and perfect knowledge in her; while the whole world i.e. Sambhogakāya and the nirmanakāya is a display of the Upaya.

According to esoteric doctrine, tanashi who represent Prajin is spoken of as of the nature of knowledge, whereas God Heruka representing Upaya is spoken of as the knowledge. The concept of Prajin and Upaya have important ontological and cosmological bearing on the four philosophical systems of the Nepalese Buddhism. They are (i) Svābhāvikā, (ii) Asvarika, (iii) karmika; (iv) Yatnikā. The Svābhāvikā school holds that there is immaterial ultimate truth in the form of the soul substance; matter is the primordial substance from which the world proceeds. The matter has two modes which are called pravartiti and nirotti and so are the powers of matter. Thus when these powers pass from the state of existence of the powers in the state of nirottii as rest as the abstractions from all phenomena, when the powers pass from the state of rest into their causal and transitory state of activity, the phenomenal world comes into existence, and it again ceases to exist when the powers repass from pravartiti to nirottii. This nirottii is the prajna and pravartiti is said to be the Upaya.

In the asvarika school these Prajin and Upaya are defined as adi-prajna and ab-Buddha and visible world is said to be created
from the union of the two. According to the Prajñā (a sub-division of the Svabhāvikā school) Buddha as the principle of active power, first proceeds from nivṛtti or adi-Prajñā and then associates with her and from their union proceeds the actual visible world. The principle is symbolised as Prajñā being first the mother and then the wife of the Buddha. The triad of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha has often been explained as prajñā (dharma), sāya (Buddha) and the world (sangha). Produced by their union, Buddha symbolises the generative power, Dharma, the productive power and their union produces Sangha.

Lord Vairocana—the Lord Supreme—in Dharma-cakra Mudrā, which the Tibetans call thabs-dang-sherab (Uṣṇīṣa and Prajñā) as the union of wisdom with matter.

With this conception of Prajña and Uṣṇīṣa as nīyāti and pravṛtti or as Adi-Prajñā and Adi-Buddha we may compare the concept of Siva and Sakti and the aham or the ‘I-ness’ produced by their union (śivā- sakti-mithunapītaka). According to Hindu Tantras the ultimate truth in the union of Siva and Sakti, Siva represents Pure Consciousness which is inactive-static aspect of the Ultimate Reality; while Sakti represents the world force - the kinetic energy of the Ultimate Truth. Siva is nīyāti and Sakti is pravṛtti and in the ultimate state they remain in a Union of Oneness.

In Buddhist tantra Prajñā and Uṣṇīṣa are also called Lalana and Rasana which are the names for the two nerves Ida and Pingala well-known in the Hindu Tantric nerve-system.

The above discussion on the nature of Bodhicitta will bring it home to us that the central point of all Sadhanas of Tantric Buddhism was the principle of union.