Buddhist Hymnal

- B. Ghosh

In earliest literary antecedent of Pali Sanskrit devotional poetry and hymnology is to be found in Theravada Pali and Mahayana Sanskrit canon and non-canonical literatures. But hymns are abundantly offered to Buddha Sakyamuni, foregone Buddhas, Future Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, female divinities like Tara, Prajnaparamita and lesser divinities. Following the translation of Sanskrit Buddhist Stotras or Stotras the Lamas of Tibet and other Himalayan regions also composed many devotional poetries. Even metamorphosed historical personalities like Mahaguru Padmasambhava, Tsongkhapa, Sakya Pandita, Longchen Rabjam etc. were eulogised through many praises and prayers.

The earliest hymns are found in Rigveda, Purusa-suktas, extolling the supreme impersonal godhead for the creation of the universe. Hymns to Hiranya-garbha – the Golden-germ and 4 gods like Vishnu, Agni, Indra, Varuna, Mitra and other vedic gods are also found in Vedas.

The hymns are inspired by abiding sentiment of human heart, but while the devotional spirit of God-seeker (Deouy) and god lover (Deus-Kama) in that far of age is nearly the same as that formed in later times the respective theme and mode of expression are

As in vedic and puranic literature we find worship and inspiring praise to natural phenomena the elaborate and somewhat mechanical rituals to "Homa" with its pouring of libations, chanting and repetition as formulas, was replaced by more personal and sensible mode of Puja, with its offering of flower, food, incense, song and dance. These modes of worship are amazingly found in the ritual worship of Bhubhath Mahayana and Tantrayana. Hymnology has various facets of devotional sentiment and devotional spirit. But here abstain from discussing them in detail.

"With the development of inexorable doctrine of Karma and rebirth Sanskrit literature became pervaded with deeply pessimistic spirit. The classical system of philosophy, which greater leisure had brought into existence, started with the presumption of human misery and occupied themselves with theories of its eradication; and in this procedure the heterodox religious system of Buddhism and Jainism agreed" (Ibid. p.102)

But very soon the higher poetry and philosophy invaded the field, and the Stotra became an important, if somewhat neglected, wing of the Kavya poetry itself. Asvaghosa's early eulogy of Buddha in his Buddha carita (XXVII) is unfortunately lost in Sanskrit, but the spurious gandhi-stotra-gatha, ascribed to him, has been restored and edited. This Sanskrit text is small poem in twenty-nine stanzas, composed mostly in the sonorous srstatha metre. It is a hymn in praise of Gauri, the Buddhist monastery gong, consisting a long symmetrical piece of wood; the theme of the poem is the religious message which its sound is supposed to carry when beaten with a short wooden club (Ibid. 103).

Of Asvaghosa's successor, Matreya has ascribed to his credit some twelve works in Tibetan and one in Chinese. Most of these are in the nature of Stotras, and some belong distinctly to Mahayana; but only fragments of Satapancasatika-stotra and Catuh-satapak-stotra,
penagric of one hundred and fifty and four hundred stanzas respectively, have been recovered in Sanskrit. Both these works are simple devotional poems in Slokas. They are praised by Chinese pilgrims yi-taing who spent 671 to 690 A.D. in India, to whom matsyota is already famous poet. The later Buddhist stotras are true to the manner and diction of Hindu stotras, the only difference lying in the mode and object of adoration. The Lokesvara-nataka of Vajrabhatta, who lived under desapal in the 9th century A.D., is composed in the elaborate sragdhara-metre. Describing the physical features and mental excellence of Avalokitesvara. In the same sragdhara-metre and polished diction is composed a large number stotras to Tara, who is the female counterpart to Avalokitesvara but who is absorbed with later Hindu Pantheon as an aspect of Sakti. It may be noted here in Mahayana-Vajrayana Sakti is replaced with Prajna. As many as ninety-six Buddhist texts relating to Tara are mentioned, but of these the Arya-Tara-sragdhara-stotra, in thirty seven verses, of the Kashmirian sarvajnamitra who lived in the first half of 8th century A.D., is perhaps the most remarkable. (Aspects of Sanskrit literature, p. 117). We come across the repeated reference to great similarity between Mahayana-Sutras and puranams, many distinguished scholars like Maurice Wintenitz, Keith, S.N. Dasgupta etc. in the field of Sanskrit literature have highlighted the theme in histories of the Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina literature.

In the ancient Puranas many texts which were connected with the cult of the Hindu gods, were included and appended, such as Mājūrya (glorification of holy places), Stotras and Kalpas (sacred precept). In the same way there is also a Buddhist "Purana", the Svayambhū-Purana, which is not really a Purana, but a māhāmya. It is glorification of the holy places in Nepal, especially the Svayambhū-cetiya near Kathmandu. The work is a manual for pilgrims, and therefore, also contains descriptions of ceremonies e.g. for the worship of Naga so that they obtain rain, and many legends attaching to the various holy places. Thus for instance in chapter IV, the mani-cudadakāna is told by way of glorifying the river Manirahini. In Svayambhū-Purāṇa, Svayambhū, "the self-existence", which in Hinduism one of the names of god Brahman, appears as the
king as teacher of the world, seated on a wondrous Lotus, the root of which had been planted in bygone ages by an earlier Buddha. (A History Of Indian literature Vol. II. Buddhist and Jaina literature by M. Winteritz, 1939 p. 375-76).

There is a collection of Four Hymns Cotustava, of Nagarjuna in the Tibetan translation (French translation, by La Vallee Poussin, 1914). King Haraśravdhana (606-647, A.D.) who, under the influence of Chinese pilgrim Hsuen-Tsang, leaned more and more strongly towards Buddhism during the last years of his life, composed a *suprabhatā-stotra*, a morning Hymn in Praise of Buddha, in 24 verses and an *Asta-maha-aricaiya-stotra* (translation in Sanskrit by S. Levi, 1894), a "hymn in praise of the eight shrines," in 6 stanzas. The poet Vajradatta, who lived under king Devapala in 9th century is the author of the *Lokesvara-Satakam* the hundred (stanzas) in praise of Lokesvara. Poet become a leper owing to a curse, he implored Lokesvara i.e. Avalokiteśvara to help him. There is a devotional poetry-stotra in 9 stanzas, the *Saptā-Buddha*, "praise to the seven Buddhas, Vijñānabhairava, Vairochana, Kanakamuni & Kasyapa, and the Sakya and future Buddha Maitreya worshipped and invoked one after another. There are numerous stotras or stasvās, composed by devout Buddhists. In Tibetan canonical literature Tanjur commentaries, there is a collection of 71 important stasvās in Bṣod lhongs sections, Vol. Ka, Serial No. 1127. Folio-1-258. This contains Hymns to Buddhas. Bodhisattvas, Prajñāpanamita, Jatakas, even to Indian Buddhist saint like Vasumati from Pandita Vihara in Bengal.

While theology of Buddhist gods are abundantly discussed in vast Buddhist literature, the Hymnology - Stotras or Stavas, the devotional and inspiring invocation to Buddhist gods and goddesses, name in gestures denoting divine supermundane attributes, the recitation and contemplation of the Hymns bring about harmony and peace in the individual mind.

Hereunder, we propose to give some important Hymns which are available in Pali, Sanskrit and Tibetan along with English
NOTES


2. A translation into Tibetan of the slokas is given by Bu-ston Rinpoche in his Dsan-mdol ram-bsd (Bu-ston gung-bum, Vol.III. (gs), fol. 46a). It agrees with that given by 'Gos lo-tsa-ba. (Ibid.p.2-3).

BUDDHA PUJA PALI

I

I bow down to the victoriously passed beyond, who has conquered the enemy, to the perfectly enlightened one - The Buddha.

Yo dharmadha dharmadharmam.
Namo tathatvam dharmam.
Sarvadharma dharmam dharmam.
Mahamahamastakakasamudra. (1)
I bow down to the Supramundane Buddha, who having become victorious over the Forces of Evil and their retinue, seated on the basement of Bodhi-Tree, Attained complete Enlightenment.

II

चन्द्रमा खोलनें हरे कुमुदमलिति।
पुष्पमालि कुमुदन्ती विरियद्वाराहोऽहो।
पुष्पमलि कुमुदमलिन तु मोक्षा रामस्व।
कुमुदि मलस्यां यथा इन मे कायो तदार्थं विनस्यां।

I offer oblation to the benign Lotus-Feet of Lord Buddha, offering flower of beautiful hue, fragrance and endow'd with divine qualities; I offer oblation to Lord Buddha with this flowers, through the merits I earn, may I be emancipated from the worldly sufferings. As the (beautiful) flower (gradually) decays, the same way gross body decays.

III

नलस मे सर्वं अत्यं धृक्के ने सर्वं वर।
एतेन वधनवेन श्रादु हे जगन्मुद्य।

I have no other Refuge, The Lord Buddha is ultimate Refuge of mine; Through this utterance of truthful speech, may I become victorious and may good fortune prevail upon me.

श्रीब्रह्मदेविन निर्देश राज।
वर्षी दुर्विधि करणा गुणं।
पञ्चापारसिद्धं जलं।
वनानि हुदं भवसिद्धं।
I bow down to the Lord Buddha, who is overlord of Brahma-the creator, The Indra-the lord of gods, who is monarch among the men, The monarch the supreme;

Who is worshipped with five burning lamps of wisdom, who is blazing light is the Phoencian to lead others across the other shore of cyclic Existence (Bhavapara). (Tr. self)

II

BHAGAVAN ACARYA SHANKARA’S ELOQUENT
INVOCATION TO BUDDHA

घात्मकव्यासायायं पर -
निश्वासितहिताक्षायां: |
व आले कली योगिनाय चक्रवर्ती |
वे पुजः युधिष्ठिर नक्षिशल्लालः |

Whose slender legs like the sticks are fixed in Lotus-seat (Padmasana) posture on the ground,

Whose vision is fixed on the tip of nose, through the control over the breathing,

Who is universal monarch among the yogins, in the Kali-yuga. That Enlightened Buddha may adorn our heart.

This is the 9th verse of Vaisnava-dasasvatara, stotra, of Acarya Shankara (8th century A.D.) (Tr. self)
Homage to the Buddha!

Which is neither one, nor many, the foundation of great and excellent benefit to itself and others,

Which is neither non-existent, nor existent, equal to Heaven, of equal flavour of unconceivable nature,

stainless, immutable, peaceful, matchless, all-pervading, unmanifested.

I salute that, which is to be intuitd, the incomparable Spiritual Body (Dharma-Kaya) of the sires I.1.
Which is transcendental, inconceivable, consisting of a hundred well-achieved results, magnificent, which causes the source of joy of wise men to spread in the midst of a resplendent assembly, manifested in all the worlds of the Budhas, eternal, lofty, the voice of the Good Law. I salute this Body of Glory (Sambhoga-kaya). dwelling in the great Realm of the Doctrine.
Which to some shines like the lustre of fire in order to liberate all living beings,
Which, serene manifested to some the wheel of the Doctrine of Supreme Enlightenment,
Which, having destroyed the perils of the Three Worlds, manifested itself by various means, and in various forms,
I salute this Manifested Body (Nirmana-kaya) of Saints of great purpose, pervading the Ten Directions.3.

NIRVIKALPA-JINA-KAYA

Emancipated from the laws of the Three Worlds, equal to Heaven, containing all existences, pure, serene, profound, which is understood by yogins, endowed with the highest serenity, difficult of perception, hard to be investigated, of the highest benefit to one's self and others, all-pervading, causes,

I salute the Body of the Jinas, blissful, matchless, undifferentiated, of one form.4. (tr. Roerich)
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