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# ANTECEDENTS OF TANTRISM IN THE SADDHARMA-PUNḌARĪKA

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As an early Mahāyāna work, the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka* contains several elements that later evolve under the rubric of tantrism. Written in the first century A.D.<sup>1</sup>, the *Lotus* stands at the threshold of a new age in Buddhism and reflects the doubts and uncertainties accompanying the emergence of a more theistic, more catholic form of religion.

In order to select and develop tantric themes in the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka*, we must say a few words on tantrism itself. Several commentators suggest its relation to weaving: a thread, loom, web, or fabric, the unity behind all opposites, 'the interdependence of all that exists ... continuity in the interaction of cause and effect'<sup>2</sup>. 'The term *tantra* refers to a clearly definable type of ritual text common to both Hindu and Buddhist tradition, concerned with the evoking of divinities and the gaining of various kinds of *siddhi* by means of *mantra*, *dhyāna*, *mudrā* and *maṇḍala*.'<sup>3</sup> Bareau emphasizes ritualism as the dominant theme of the tantras: 'La majeure partie de son abondante littérature est consacrée à la description minutieuse de pratiques cultuelles, de leur symbolisme et du vaste panthéon auquel elles s'adressent.'<sup>4</sup> But underlying this elaboration of forms and ritual is the pervading concept of two-in-one 'upon which the whole complicated structure is reared'<sup>5</sup>. The doctrine of polarity and unity is central to the Madhyamika and Yogacāra schools and appears in the earliest strata of Indian civilization.

1. Nalinakasha Dutt, 'The Sanskrit *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka*', in P.V. Bapat (ed.), *2500 Years of Buddhism* (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1959), p. 159.

2. H. Guenther, 'Mantrayāna and Sahajayāna', in Bapat, p. 374.

3. David Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 138.

4. André Bareau, W. Schubring, and C. von Fürer-Haimendorf, *Les Religions de L'Inde*, Vol. III: *Bouddhisme, Jainisme, Religions Archaïques* (Paris: Payot, 1966), p. 206.

5. Snellgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Since the *Lotus* is a Buddhist text, I will not draw too heavily on Hindu sources, except for limited points of definition and comparison. Certain similarities are unavoidable. Several items in Hindu descriptions of tantric texts invariably appear in the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka*: magic charms, images describing the abode of gods, mystic figures, and celestial trees<sup>6</sup>.

From tantric Buddhism came not one but three schools. Offered as a corrective to the ritualism encouraged by monastic life, not even tantrism was able to escape this seemingly inevitable stage in the development of religion. From the original Vajrayāna evolved the Mantrayāna school, which replaced intellectual reasoning with intuition as a means of interpreting the phenomenal world. To prevent the mind from going astray and to aid in concentration, the student is given a series of *mantras* that strengthen the new attitude. Next comes the *maṇḍala*, and finally *guru-yoga*, to help the initiate realize 'the indivisible unity of one's self with the ultimate reality'<sup>7</sup>. In its final form, tantric Buddhism appears as Sahajayāna, literally 'born together': the mind, reality, and appearance arise together. Ultimately they are identical. 'Reality is one and indivisible and is split up arbitrarily into a number of opposites only by analytical methods and techniques of the intellect. Hence, the identity of Reality and Appearance can be experienced only by the intuitive process.'<sup>8</sup>

In the *Lotus*, frequent mention of gems reflects this oneness. At the same time, Sahajayāna emphasizes that intuition and intellect have different functions, that their mode of operation is not the same. Rejecting speculation and ritualism, it broke with Vajrayāna and proclaimed that:

la vérité doit être atteinte simplement par l'intuition, en sublimant les instincts et les passions et non pas en les supprimant. Seul l'être

6. B. Bhattacharyya, *Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba, 1964), p. 51.

7. Guenther, 'Mantrayāna and Sahajayāna', p. 376.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 377.

passionné est capable, selon elle, de travailler au salut en utilisant la force naturelle des passions et des instincts.<sup>9</sup>

This idea of redirecting one's energies appears in the *Lotus*<sup>10</sup>:

There are some sons of the Gina who dwell in the forest, abiding in vigour, completely renouncing sloth, and actively engaged in walking: it is by energy, that they are striving for enlightenment. (13)

#### *Antecedents*

Tantric elements appear early in the literary history of India. From the *Atharva-Veda* emerged a belief in *mantras*, that never quite left the Indian mind. The *Śrauta-Sūtras* exerted such an influence that 'it was almost impossible to separate religion from ritualistic worship and mystical utterances'<sup>11</sup>. Before long ritual came to dominate Vedic religion. In the course of time this ritual became a magical operation, 'independent of the gods, efficacious by its own force and capable of producing good as well as bad effects ... Correct recitation of the *mantras* was the most important means of producing the desired effect.'<sup>12</sup> The *Dīgha-Nikāya* contains a complete *suttanta* described as a protecting spell for averting evil spirits<sup>13</sup>. The concept of two-in-one appears often throughout the *Upaniṣads*, with the duality of Brahman as *nirguṇa* (attributeless) and *sagūṇa* (possessing attributes). The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* explains:

Verily, he had no delight. Therefore one alone has no delight. He desired a second. He was, indeed, as large as a man and a woman closely embraced. He caused that self to fall ... into two pieces.

9. Bareaux, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

10. H. Kern, *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka or The Lotus of the True Law* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963). To prevent a surfeit of footnotes, I will put references to the text of the *Lotus* right after the quote itself.

11. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. IV: *The Age of Imperial Kanauj* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1955), p. 259.

12. Haridas Bhattacharyya (ed.), *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV: *The Religions* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission, 1956), p. 213.

13. Majumdar, *loc. cit.*

Therefrom arose a husband ... and a wife. Therefore this (is true) ...  
 'Oneself ... is like a half-fragment.'<sup>14</sup>

It may also be seen in the early Sāṃkhya school, with its vision of a universe evolving from two principles: inert nature (*prakṛti*), and pure consciousness (*puruṣa*). Whatever happens arises from the interaction of the two. Without *prakṛti*, the conscious element cannot act.

According to Bharati, *mantras*, *maṇḍala*, initiation, pilgrimage and circumambulation, are all part of the pre-tantric tradition, but in a marginal way. With tantrism they become central as a technique of ritual for contemplation<sup>15</sup>.

Even in the early Buddhist church, monks probably reacted to the austere philosophy of the Master. The schism at the Second Council provides some indication of this. 'India in Buddha's time was so steeped in superstition that any religion which dared forbid ... magic, sorcery, and necromancy would hardly be able to withstand popular opposition.'<sup>16</sup> However, there is little to indicate these elements played a significant role in the development of early Buddhism, and it is only from the time of the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka*, in the first century A.D., that such features as *mantras* became more prominent. Actually, most early Mahāyāna texts contain a section exhorting the gods and demons to protect those who read and write the sūtra<sup>17</sup>. These magic formulas, or *dhāraṇīs*, first appear in the *Lotus* and the *Lalitavistara*<sup>18</sup>.

Philosophically, tantra is a not unexpected product of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which matured in Northern India under the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta empires. By the time of Fa-Hsien, it possessed a fully developed

14. Robert E. Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 81.

15. Agheananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition* (London: Rider and Co., 1965), p. 17.

16. B. Bhattacharyya, 'A Peep into Later Buddhism', *Journal of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, X, Pts. I, II (April, 1929), p. 7.

17. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

18. Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), p. 407.

canon and *objets de culte*<sup>19</sup>. One of the strongest links between Theravāda and Mahāyāna, *nirvāṇa*, reappears in the tantric age as *mahāsukha*. The saintly life was questionable with a dubious existence for its goal. The Mahāsukhavādins offered more tangible satisfaction, 'holding out a promise that even when *nirvāṇa* is attained there remains something and that something ... *vijñāna* – continues ... in eternal bliss and happiness'<sup>20</sup>. Such a belief underlies the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka*, with its promise of bodhisattvahood for the faithful after countless aeons.

The Madhyamika school of Nāgārjuna stresses the Middle Path but redefines the term. As propounded by the Buddha, it held an ethical meaning. It now becomes metaphysical, denying the separate existence of eternity and non-eternity, self and non-self. Reality is *śūnyatā*; all knowledge is relative, none is absolute. There is neither origination nor cessation, permanence nor impermanence, unity nor diversity, coming-in nor going out. In *śūnyatā*, nothing has an intrinsic nature. All phenomena approach reality only by contrast with their opposites. Subjective and objective, passive and active, internal and external are all interdependent and do not exist apart. This, in essence, expresses the tantric philosophy. Such a position, though not fully developed, is found in the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka*:

Nirvāṇa ... is a consequence of understanding that all laws (things) are equal. (129)

For the Tathāgata sees the triple world as it really is: it is not born, it dies not; it is not conceived, it springs not into existence; it moves not in a whirl, it becomes not extinct; it is not real nor unreal; it is not existing, nor non-existing; it is not as it ought to be, nor wrong, nor false. (302)

#### *Language*

From early times, words and sounds have possessed magic properties. Identified with Brahman, with the Vedas, with all the great gods, the

19. Hendrik Kern, *Histoire du Bouddhisme dans l'Inde* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1901), II, p. 441.

20. Bhattacharyya, 'A Peep into Later Buddhism', p. 3.

word OM enjoyed universal prestige since the *Yajur-Veda*<sup>21</sup>. Later Buddhist *mantras* reflect the *parittas* of Pāli literature, which protected the devotee from all evils<sup>22</sup>. As an aid to concentration and identification, these mystical utterances played a major part in tantric ritual, their power derived from association with a particular divinity and rendered effective by constant repetition<sup>23</sup>.

The unlimited efficacy of *mantras* is owing to the fact that they are (or at least, if correctly recited *can become*) the objects they represent.<sup>24</sup>

Each god has a *bīja-mantra*, a mystical sound which is its 'seed', its essence:

By repeating this *bīja-mantra* in accordance with the rules, the practitioner appropriates its ontological essence, concretely and directly assimilates the god.<sup>25</sup>

Such is the tantric position. In the *Lotus*, *mantras* serve a similar purpose, even a few words from the *sūtra* conferring the greatest of blessings:

All whosoever ... shall hear this Dharmaparyāya and after hearing, were it but a single stanza, joyfully accept it ... I predict their destiny to supreme and perfect enlightenment. (213)

While tantric texts stress *mantras* as an aid to concentration, the *Lotus* shows none of this, and salvation by faith often degenerates into mere worship of the *sūtra* itself, without the difficult training necessary to achieve a new consciousness:

Who shall worship that book with flowers, incense, perfumed garlands, ointment, powder, clothes, umbrellas, flags, banners, music, &c., and with acts of reverence such as bowing and joined

21. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

22. Anagarika Govinda, 'Principles of Buddhism', in Bapat, p. 357.

23. Snellgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

24. Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

25. *Ibid.*

hands ... I predict their being destined to supreme and perfect enlightenment. (214)<sup>26</sup>

Accordingly, mantric material in the *Lotus* seems more superficial than in later tantric texts. This is understandable, for in the first century A.D., Mahāyāna Buddhism had but recently asserted its claim to people's devotion, and the Mahāyāna preacher, with his promise of salvation, could not attract the masses without accepting the most prevalent symbols of *mantras*, *mudrās*, and *maṇḍalas*. Tantrism, on the other hand, required intense training with the aid of a *guru*. 'Nothing ... can be achieved ... It is impossible to follow mystic doctrines without a preceptor'<sup>27</sup>, whereas the *Lotus* demands little more than exposure to the doctrine :

He who after collecting this Dharmaparyāya into a volume carries it on his shoulder (holds it in high esteem and treats it with care) carries the Tathāgata on his shoulder. (321)

Any one who, on hearing a good exposition of it, shall cheerfully accept it and recite but one word of it, will have done honour to all Buddhas. (58)

At times, the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka* shows an almost Vedic concern for correct repetition of the *sūtra* :

And when that preacher, applying himself to this Dharmaparyāya, forgets, be it but a single word or syllable, then will I mount the white elephant with six tusks, show my face to that preacher, and repeat this entire Dharmaparyāya. (433)

This stress on exact reproduction down to the finest detail is central to the efficacy of *mantras* and accounts for the emphasis on a preceptor, despite careful directions given in the tantric texts themselves.

26. See also page 320.

27. Bhattacharyya, *Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism*, p. 93.



*Mantras* 'should not be repeated too quickly or too slowly. The mind at the time of repetition should be free from all impure reflections'<sup>28</sup>.

*Dhāraṇīs*, a special form of *mantra*, also play an important part in the *Lotus* as well as in later tantric texts. Unmeaning strings of words that protected people from misfortune, the *dhāraṇīs* reached their full development between the fourth and the eighth century<sup>29</sup>. To the common man, they were a talisman, to the ascetic an aid to concentration:

To those young men or young ladies ... who keep this Dharmaparyāya ... in their memory or in a book, we give talismanic words *dhāraṇī-padāni* for guard, defense, and protection. (371)

Those that keep, read, comprehend, teach, amply expound it to others, shall ... attain such perfections of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind ... (354)

See how the creatures are in trouble, I pronounce thousands of koṭis of Sūtrāntas. (277)<sup>30</sup>

In the same way, merely mentioning the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara rescues the adherent from any danger:

In case ... creatures, carried off by the current of rivers, implore the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara, all rivers will afford a ford ... If a man given up to capital punishment implores Avalokiteśvara ... the swords of the executioner will snap. (407)

If some creature ... shall be bound in wooden or iron manacles, chains or fetters, *be he guilty or innocent*, then those manacles ... shall give way as soon as the name of the Bodhisattva ... is pronounced. (408)  
(Italics mine)

This last sentence and several others on page 408 and 409 seem to place a higher value on faith than on morality. And the power of Avalokiteśvara's name can be easily imagined absolving one from all manner of sin.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

29. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

30. See also page 96.

Bharati suggests three possible uses of *mantras*: propitiation, acquisition (of things not easily obtained through secular or other religious effort), and identification (merging with the supreme state or being that is indicated by the tradition)<sup>31</sup>. Accordingly, *mantras* in the *Lotus* are used for acquisition, while in tantrism, they serve as an aid to reaching identification.

A special form of language employed by tantra is *sandhyābhāṣā*, translated variously as 'twilight language' because of its double meaning, 'enigmatic language' (Burnouf), 'mystery' (Kern), and 'hidden sayings' (Müller).<sup>31a</sup> It evolved from the realization that ordinary language was unable to express the highest state of mystical consciousness. In this way, *sandhyābhāṣā* resembles the Zen *Koan*. By dissolving the idea of duality normal language imposes on us, it substitutes a language of ambiguity that only the initiate understands. Though not a central theme, the idea of *sandhyābhāṣā* appears several times in the *Lotus*:

Such is the mastership of the leaders; that is their skillfulness. They have spoken in many mysteries (*sandhābhāshya*); hence it is difficult to understand (them). (59)

I shall become a Tathāgata, undoubtedly, worshipped in the world, including the gods; I shall manifest Buddha-wisdom mysteriously (*sandhāya*), rousing many Bodhisattvas. (64)

May we also become such incomparable Buddhas in the world, who by mysterious speech announce supreme Buddha-enlightenment. (70)

Cautioning his disciples against those unprepared to receive the doctrine, the Buddha says:

Superior men of wise understanding guard the word, guard the mystery, and do not reveal it to living beings. That science is difficult

31. Bharati, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

31a. Cf. A. Wayman, *Concerning saṃdhā-bhāṣā/saṃdhi-bhāṣā/saṃdhyā-bhāṣā*. *Mélanges d'Indianisme à la mémoire de Louis Renou*. Paris 1968, S. 789–796.

to be understood; the simple, if hearing it on a sudden, would be perplexed; they would in their ignorance fall out of the way and go astray. (122)

The magical powers of speech and voice may be inferred from the following passages :

I am astonished, great Leader, I am charmed to hear this voice; I feel no doubt any more; I now I am fully ripe for the superior vehicle. (61)

Wonderful is the voice of the Sugatas; it dispels the doubt and pain of living beings; my pain also is all gone now that I, freed from imperfections, have heard that voice (or, call). (61)

#### *Stūpas and Maṇḍalas*

The *Lotus* does not describe *maṇḍalas*, as such, but the figure of the *stūpa* contains similar qualities. Like it, the *maṇḍala* encloses the center of the universe. 'Its core is Mount Meru; it is the palace of the universal monarch ... the royal *stūpa*.'<sup>32</sup> Both the central point (*bindu*) of the *maṇḍala* and the center, *garbha*, or womb, of the *stūpa* contain the Buddha or some divine element. In tantrism, this place where all thought creation is absorbed comes to represent the Void<sup>33</sup>. Similarly, in the *Lotus*, a jeweled *stūpa* appearing in the sky opens to reveal a former Buddha, the embodiment of ancient wisdom, who has been extinct for thousands of years. After his discourse, Lord Śākyamuni enters the *stūpa* and sits down beside the ancient Buddha (237). The scene may simply be a further attempt by the author to harmonize his doctrine with earlier teachings. At the same time, it binds together disparate elements: ancient and modern, Theravāda and Mahāyāna. While tantrism uses the *stūpa* and *maṇḍala* as aids to reintegration of the personality, the *Lotus* invests them with magical properties :

32. Snellgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

... who in gladness of heart built for the Ginas Stūpas of brick or clay ; or caused mounds of earth to be raised in forests and wildernesses in dedication to the Ginas ;

The little boys even, who in playing erected here and there heaps of sand with the intention of dedicating them as Stūpas to the Ginas, they have all of them reached perfect enlightenment. (50)

The fusion of *stūpa* and *maṇḍala* appears in the *Lotus*, from a suggestion that images of the Buddhas be drawn on walls together with their holy signs :

Those even, whether man or boys, who during the lesson or in play, by way of amusement, made upon the walls (such) images with the nail or a piece of wood, have all of them reached enlightenment. (51)

Only two paragraphs later, the author attributes similar benefits to the figure of a *stūpa* drawn on the wall, and we can easily imagine the subsequent rearrangement of divinities within the magic circle. Even in modern times one finds elaborate *maṇḍalas*, in red chalk, scratched on the walls of peasant huts<sup>34</sup>.

One of the most important rites connected with the *stūpa*, *pradakṣiṇā* (circumambulation) is intimately bound up with the idea of pilgrimage. Though common to earlier Hindu and Buddhist ceremonies, it becomes far more central in tantrism, and there is hardly a tantric text lacking instructions for performing the ritual<sup>35</sup>. According to Eliade, approaching the essence or center of the *maṇḍala* resembles a march toward the center, such as the ritual circumambulation of a temple or *stūpa*. The idea of circumambulation is mentioned several times in the *Lotus* as a means of gaining salvation but is presented as a physical act, without indication of how it achieves its magical result :

Those who shall turn round that Stūpa from left to right or humbly salute it, shall some of them realize Arhatship, others attain Pratyeka-

34. Carl G. Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), p. 356.

35. Bharati, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

buddaship; others, gods and men ... shall raise their minds to supreme, perfect enlightenment, never to return. (247)

In this way, the *Lotus* never goes beyond a profession of faith and often sinks to the level of simple magic. It offers little else as a guide to spiritual development and the attainment of *nirvāṇa*.

### *Mudrās*

The term *mudrā* has several meanings. In tantrism it refers to a series of hieratic postures and gestures which function, like *mantras* and *maṇḍalas*, as an aid to achieving certain states of consciousness<sup>36</sup>. With few exceptions, such gestures play a negligible part in the *Lotus*. The only instance I have found is a snapping of the fingers, which effects the congregation less by its motion than by its sound:

... by which sounds all the hundred thousands of myriads of koṭis of Buddha-fields in every direction of space were moved, removed, stirred, wholly stirred, tossed ... from the place where they stood. (365)

### *Polarity and Conjunction*

The most important concept in tantrism is the conjunction of opposites, a fusion of disparate elements, physical and mental, leading the devotee toward a sense of oneness with the universe. As such, the theme is a far cry from the Buddha, who saw the world and attachment to it as evil, while the tantric sees the world as good:

He is not Buddha, he is not set free,  
If he does not see the world  
As originally pure, unoriginated,  
Impersonal and immaculate.<sup>37</sup>

In tantrism, the Mahāyāna theory of *śūnyatā*, the void, is carried to its logical limits:

36. Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

37. William T. DeBary (ed.), *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), I, p. 195.

Si tout est vide de nature propre, tout est identique ou du moins équivalent ... C'est là la vérité dont il faut se pénétrer et dont la compréhension parfaite constitue le salut de l'être. Pour atteindre ce but, toujours aussi lointain, aussi difficile à approcher que dans les anciennes écoles bouddhiques, on utilise des méthodes nouvelles.<sup>38</sup>

To this end are directed all the various approaches: the *mantras*, *mudrās*, and *maṇḍalas*. Moreover, 'tantrism multiplies the pairs of opposites (sun and moon, Śiva and Śakti, *īdā* and *piṅgalā*) ... and attempts to 'unify' them through combining subtle physiology with meditation ...'<sup>39</sup> Such a concept is found throughout the world's religions. What many object to is the introduction of male and female embodying the opposing principles, and the fusion of opposites as expressed by 'the union of male and female in the ecstasy of love'<sup>40</sup>. The concept of an original single undifferentiated human form appears in Buddhism as early as the *Dīgha-Nikāya* but is presented in an evil light:

And there are no men or woman then, for the beings living on earth are simply reckoned as beings.<sup>41</sup>

In women female characteristics appeared, and in men male. The women looked at the men too intently, and the men at the women, and so passion arose ... In consequence they took to coupling together. When people saw them they threw dust at them ... and shouted.<sup>42</sup>

Interpretations differ on the role of sexual intercourse in the ceremony. Govinda suggests that the male and female principles are not human beings but figural representations embodying states of mind and elements of meditation<sup>43</sup>. This seems the position of most commentators on the

38. Bateau, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

39. Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

40. Govinda, in Bapat, p. 365.

41. DeBary, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

43. Govinda, in Bapat, p. 369.

texts. However, volumes like the *Hevajra-tantra* make it fairly clear that the rite is to be performed in actuality.

Though occurring in several places, the conjunction of opposites is nota major theme in the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka*. Two adepts, Vimalagarbha and Vimalanetra, each display what Jung terms the union of irreconcilables, fire and water :

There they also emitted from the lower part of their body a shower of rain, and from the upper part a mass of fire ; then again they emitted from the upper part of their body a shower of rain, and from the lower part a mass of fire. (421)

On the other hand, one of the more important narrative episodes in the *Lotus* – the transformation of a female into male form – is an event often used in Buddhist iconography to emphasize the unity contained in *śūnyatā*<sup>44</sup>. Approaching his *parinirvāṇa*, the Tathāgata wonders who will transmit the message of the Lotus when he has departed. Rather than one of the venerable bodhisattvas, a woman emerges from the congregation. Even more curious is her change into masculine form<sup>45</sup> :

At the same instant, before the sight of the whole world and of the senior priest Śāriputra, the female sex of the daughter of Sāgara, the Nāga-king, disappeared ; the male sex appeared and she manifested herself as a bodhisattva. (253)

We can interpret this as the recalcitrant admission of woman to bodhisattvahood, but only at the price of relinquishing her decidedly feminine qualities. Such a position fulfills the Mahāyāna pledge to redeem all creatures. Perhaps only a figure who has completely realized the nature of the void can fully convey the message of the Lotus. The Nāga King's

44. Snellgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

45. The theme, but slightly modified, also appears in Hinduism, where Śiva is sometimes portrayed as half female. 'Here the antagonistic principles unite to constitute a single organism, a paradoxical representation of the intrinsically two-fold nature of the one-fold universe and its inhabitant, man.' See: Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1946), p. 216.

daughter embodies this perfectly in her fusion of male and female elements. Among the three classes of gods in Mahāyāna iconography, the highest no longer possess sexual organs or any sexual desire. They are regarded as masculine only because of their outer form, voice, and manner<sup>46</sup>, and often appear in sculpture without the vital member. At times, the *Lotus* retains the traditional Buddhist scorn for women; for example, in its description of paradise :

There no women are to be found; there sexual intercourse is absolutely unknown; there the sons of Gina, on springing into existence by apparitional birth, are sitting in undefiled cups of lotuses. (417)

Eventually the author softens his position, promising Buddhahood to all young men and women who preach or reverence the Dharmaparyāya (215).

Among the more dubious tantric elements are the *makāras*: *matsya* (fish), *māṃsa* (meat), *madya* (intoxicating drink), *mudrā*, and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse)<sup>47</sup>, all things rejected by early Buddhism. Some commentators interpret them figuratively. Kāṇha regards the practice of meat-eating found in the *Hevajra-tantra* as consuming the notion of the self, 'but the tantra itself by no means implies this'<sup>48</sup>.

Snellgrove brings the problem into sharper focus :

The deliberate eating and drinking of things abhorrent differs nothing in kind from the deliberate meditation upon unpleasant things, such as the gross nature of the corpse, practices which had previously been found helpful in overcoming natural aversion and instilling the virtue of indifference.<sup>49</sup>

The closest parallel offered in the *Lotus* is the prodigal son who develops his mental and moral powers to the full by working twenty years to clear a heap of dirt (106).

46. H. de Glasenapp, *Mystères Bouddhistes* (Paris: Payot, 1944), p. 35.

47. Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

48. Snellgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 9. 49. *Ibid.*, p. 40.



*Jewels*

The *Lotus* often describes Buddha's celestial realm in terms of very earthly ideals: gold, stones, and jewels. Throughout the book, the most common items are jewels, which occur well over fifty times in the shape of flowers, trees, thrones, stupas, censers, and umbrellas. The Buddhists, who rejected such earthly values, attributed other meanings to them. From the original tantric school comes the image of the vajra, the thunderbolt. Literally a diamond, it represents the indestructible Mystic Truth, the Wisdom that destroys all passions<sup>50</sup>. In the *Lotus* gems appear as the visual embodiment of wisdom:

In the same manner ... as that king of righteousness and ruler of armies took off the crown jewel which he had kept so long a time and gave it (at last) to the soldiers, so ... the Tathāgata now reveals this long-kept mystery of the law exceeding all others. (276)

The king of the law, great physician ... when he recognizes that creatures are strong, shows them this Sūtra, comparable to a crown jewel. (277)

The rareness of gems is thus homologized to the seldom glimpsed message of the Buddha. Of the items mentioned, lapis, gold (thread), and especially jewel trees possess color as their most striking quality. A test of the true believer is his ability to perceive the essence of these precious substances:

A test whether that young man or young lady ... believes in it (the Law) may be deemed the following ... They will behold here my Buddha-field ... consisting of lapis lazuli ... forming a chequered board of eight compartments with gold threads; set off with jewel trees ... By this test ... one may know if a young man or young lady ... had a most decided belief. (321)

50. Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1962), p. 200.

The essence of gems is their color, the essence of the vajra its lack of color, the prismatic emptiness that draws into itself all the colors of the spectrum, all the splintered fragments that man has come to regard as reality.

Composed of substances representing the seven colors of the rainbow, one of the magic stupas in the *Lotus* may be equated with the *vajra*. (147) The *stūpa* as *vajra* is spelled out more clearly in the *Hevajra-tantra*: the adept actually envisages the *vajra* transforming itself into a protected palace, with the god Hevajra enthroned in the center<sup>51</sup>. Similarly, the *Lotus* presents a great *stūpa* of jewels, containing the ancient Buddha seated in the center (236)<sup>52</sup>. Purity, energy, and perfection, are further attributes of gems:

Others complete their course by keeping a constant purity and an unbroken morality like precious stones and jewels. (13)

Energetic, without breach or flaw in their course, similar to gems and jewels. (25)

The *Lotus* mentions the Isle of Jewels (181), which we also find in Hindu iconography. A Rajput painting from the early nineteenth century reveals a pair of opposites in union with each other. The island is represented as a circular golden figure with shores of powdered gems, at the center a palace of precious stones and inside it, a jeweled canopy sheltering the Universal Mother on her jeweled golden throne<sup>53</sup>.

### *Gods and Goddesses*

Among the myriad deities of tantric Buddhism, the five most important, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśri, Maitreya, Prajñāpāramitā, and Tārā, appear in the *Lotus*. Since all is *śūnyatā*, the gods themselves have no real existence. Embodying the various forces the initiate had to grapple with, they

51. Snellgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

52. The *stūpa* of gems is referred to several times in the text. See also: page 50 and 195.

53. Zimmer, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

served as an aid to concentration. From a study of the iconography Bhattacharyya suggests that the northern pantheon was not widely known before the eighth century A.D., 'nor was the philosophy, which may have warranted the formation of a pantheon, well-developed before that time'<sup>54</sup>. The *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka* contains some of the earliest references to these divinities. Avalokiteśvara, the most popular Mahāyāna figure<sup>55</sup>, is mentioned as 'the lord who looks in every direction'<sup>56</sup>. His first appearance is unrecorded. In northern India, he became prominent toward the third century A.D. and later received great veneration in Nepal and Tibet<sup>57</sup>. As we have seen, his name was sometimes used as a charm for good fortune and protection. Mañjuśrī, the first Bodhisattva mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures<sup>58</sup>, plays an important role in the *Lotus* as a cosmic master of ceremonies and lord of exegesis (16, 23). Preaching the law throughout the world (49), he also serves as assistant to the Buddha. In reply to a question from the congregation, the Lord Śākyamuni says: 'First have discussion with my Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, the royal prince, to settle some point of law.' (248) Later Mañjuśrī comes to embody all the Buddha-virtues (263-265). There is also reference to his future importance as promulgator of the law after the Buddha's departure (363). In a later text, the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, the Bodhisattva actually replaces Śākyamuni as leader of the congregation<sup>59</sup>. Still another deity, Maitreya, is the only Bodhisattva known to the early Theravāda school. According to legend, Aśaṅga ascended to heaven a thousand years after the Buddha's death, where he was greeted by Maitreya and initiated into the mystic doctrine of tantra. For this reason, Maitreya is often regarded as the founder of tantrism<sup>60</sup>.

54. Bhattacharyya, *Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism*, p. 126.

55. Getty, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

56. W. E. Soothill, *The Lotus of the Wonderful Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 31.

57. Getty, *loc. cit.*

58. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

59. J. Przyluski, 'Le Vidyārāja', *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, XXIII (1923) p. 306.

60. Getty, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

In the *Lotus*, he often conveys the congregation's thoughts and questions (9) and is already regarded as Lord of the Tushita heaven (286–289).

Female deities also assume their place in the tantric pantheon. The supreme truth of the Void, the goddess Prajñāpāramitā appears in the *Hevajra-tantra* as Nairātmyā, the 'absence of the notion of selfhood'<sup>61</sup>. Zimmer describes her<sup>62</sup>:

On the one hand, she represents the termination of delight in earthly or even celestial existence; on the other ... the adamant, indestructible, secret nature of all and everything.

Her corporeal form is not yet present in the *Lotus* but she is referred to as a means, a device for educating the followers (307). Further on, we find a long list of spells which Kern suggests are feminine words, epithets of the Great Mother, Prajñā, Aditi, Māyā (371). Another tantric deity, the Saviouress Tārā, joined the northern gods in the sixth century and by 1100, equalled any figure in the Mahāyāna pantheon<sup>63</sup>. Kern identifies her with Sāgarā, daughter of the Nāga king (251).

The first Chinese translation of the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka* was made around A.D. 255, with four other known versions by the fifth century<sup>64</sup>. Until that time, tantric Buddhism had not yet emerged as an integrated system, and few if any tantric elements had reached the Far East. From the seventh century, tantra, now the dominant theme in Indian Buddhism, spread to China and Japan, and probably effected a reinterpretation of earlier Buddhist texts that had preceded it. Guenther, for example, indicates that Mantrayāna and Sahajayāna form the basis of Zen Buddhism<sup>65</sup>. As one of the most popular texts recited in Zen temples<sup>66</sup>, the *Lotus*

61. Snellgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

62. Zimmer, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

63. Getty, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

64. Soothill, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

65. Bapat, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

must have been taught in a way that emphasized some of these tantric elements.

Many doctrines in the *Lotus* have little to do with Śākyamuni the Buddha, and Soothill goes so far as to describe its author as a 'pious fraud'<sup>67</sup>. There is, however, no such gulf between Mahāyāna Buddhism and the later development known as tantra. Just as Mahāyāna often goes beyond Theravāda, in some ways tantric Buddhism goes beyond Mahāyāna. Simple faith and metaphysical subtleties, without leading to reintegration of the personality, are of questionable value as a means of salvation. In tantrism, despite some of its more aberrant forms, this process of reintegration is the most important goal.

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67. Soothill, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

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