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AN INTRODUCTION TO
TĀNTRIC BUDDHISM

By

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To
The Revered and Beloved
Memory of
PROFESSOR BENIMADHAB BARUA

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PREFACE

The present work embodies substantially the thesis submitted by the author, and approved, for the Premchand Roychand Studentship of the University of Calcutta in 1937. Due to the abnormal conditions prevailing in the Country during and after the World War II, the author could not arrange to have his work published earlier, it is being published after a lapse of twelve years—an Indian *Yuga*. Though very late, the author feels it a duty to bring before the reading public the fruits of his labour in the hope that they may be of some use and interest to those who find pleasure in making an academic study of a religious subject.

Whether Vedic or Non-Vedic in origin, Tāntricism, both Brahmanical and Buddhistic, represents a special aspect of the religious and cultural life of India. A thorough study of Tāntricism is, therefore, indispensable for a close acquaintance with the special quality of the Indian mind. For a long time it was customary to hold that Tāntricism is an off-shoot of Hinduism, or that it constitutes only a particular phase of Hindu Sādhanā ; but researches in later Buddhism have now brought home that, so far as the extant literature is concerned, the stock of Tāntric literature is richer and more varied in the domain of Buddhism than in that of Hinduism. Much more, it is hoped, may be recovered or reconstructed from the Tibetan and Chinese sources. Thanks to the scholarly endeavour of the Oriental Institute, Baroda, which has published a number of important Buddhist Tāntric texts and made them available to the scholar and the general reader.

Tāntricism, whether Hindu or Buddhistic, (and we shall presently see that they are fundamentally the same) has been the target of all sorts of criticism,

charitable and uncharitable, from scholars, both Oriental and Occidental. It has often been styled as a school of religious mysticism, where the word mysticism is taken, more often than not, as a loose synonym for puzzling obscurity. The present author has, however, tried to keep his mind open as far as practicable throughout the whole study. His interest has mainly been academic and cultural. He has studied a considerable number of texts, both published and unpublished, gathered information, analysed and classified them and has then tried to give a correct exposition on textual basis, avoiding personal observations and judgment as far as possible. There are many things in the practices of the Tāntrikas which are undoubtedly unconventional; the author has tried to exhibit them without offering any apology or advocacy. If errors have crept in, in the form of mis-statement or mis-interpretation, they are due mainly to the fact that ancient religious literature, embodying complicated practices and subtle realisation, may not be deciphered properly by "our modern spectacled eyes."

The inspiration of the author came from another source. It is known to all students of the Modern Indian Languages that the literature of the early period—particularly in Bengali—comprises a number of songs and Dohās, dealing with the tenets of the Tāntric Buddhists. To understand and appreciate the meaning of these songs and Dohās the Tāntric background must be clearly understood. The present study was an attempt towards that direction. This study brought to the notice of the author many new and interesting facts which led him to pursue his study further and the findings of further researches in this direction have been incorporated in his book, *Obscure Religious Cults as Background of Bengali Literature* (published in 1946 by the University of Calcutta).

As the number of published texts on Tāntric

Buddhism is very scanty, the author had to collect his materials mainly from unpublished manuscripts. As there is no possibility of many of these texts being published in the near future, the author has deemed it proper to quote copiously from these manuscripts to illustrate his points and to substantiate his generalisations. This, the author hopes, will give the reader a better opportunity for making his own judgment and also for testing the validity of the statements made and conclusions arrived at. Because of the obscure nature of the topics discussed the author had to re-introduce some of them in different contexts, which made some amount of repetition unavoidable.

A few words should be said about the manuscripts, most of which are preserved in the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, some in the Central Library, Boroda, some in the library of the Cambridge University, some in the Bibliothéque Nationale, Paris. Except the manuscripts preserved in the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, all the other manuscripts were available to the present writer in rotograph through the courtesy of Dr. S. N. Dasgupta, M.A., Ph.D. (Cal. & Cantab.), D. Lit. (Rome), the then Principal of the Sanskrit College, Calcutta. Apart from the fact that the manuscripts, scribed on palm-leaves, or indigenous hand-made paper in Newari (old Nepalese script), the texts are full of corruptions. Further, the texts were not composed in strictly correct and elegant Sanskrit. The metre is often defective; words are sometimes used without proper suffix; wrong forms are used in analogy; *sandhi* is not treated as essential; pseudo-Sanskritic words have crept in due probably to the influence of the Vernaculars. Because of all these the author has not thought it wise to tamper with the reading of the manuscripts in the form of corrections. Corrections have been made or suggested only in cases where the mistake or the corruption has been palpable. As for

transcription, the author has experienced some typographical difficulty and a few words had to be left unmarked or without proper marking.

The author acknowledges his indebtedness to his predecessors, who have worked in the field. The nature and extent of such indebtedness have always been indicated in foot-notes. Reference of manuscripts include the folio number and the serial number in the libraries or institutions where they are preserved.

THE AUTHOR.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author takes this opportunity of recording his deep sense of gratitude to Professor S. N. Dasgupta, the great Indian Philosopher, for the help, advice and encouragement the author received from him. Professor Dasgupta drew the attention of the writer to the subject of his study and procured for him many manuscripts from abroad. Some portions of this work were published in the journal *Indian Culture* in the form of separate articles ; for this the board of editors deserves thanks from the author. The author received help from Father Pierre Fallon, M.A., in preparing the press-copy of the manuscript. The author acknowledges his indebtedness to Professor K. N. Mitra, M.A., under whose affectionate care the research on the subject was carried on. The author thanks the Registrar (Offg.) of the Calcutta University, Sri Satishchandra Ghosh, M.A. and the Superintendent (Offg.) of Press, Sri Sibendranath Kanjilal, B.Sc., DIP., PRINT. (Manchester) for the interest they took in the printing and publication of the book.

ASUTOSH BUILDING,
January, 1950.

S. B. DASGUPTA.

ABBREVIATIONS

B. N.	... Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
C. L. B.	... Central Library, Baroda
G. O. S.	... Gaekwad's Oriental Series
J. R. A. S.	... Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
R. A. S. B.	... Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY

(i) *Mission Of The Tantras In General And The Buddhist Tantras In Particular*

The primary concern of the Buddhist Tantras is not to establish a definite system of metaphysical thought. Just as the Hindu Tantras, taking for granted the fundamental tenets of the Darśanas, apply them to a practical effort of realisation, so the Buddhist Tantras, on the basis of the Mahāyāna principles, dictate practical methods for the realisation of the supreme goal. Ideas, current in other religious circles, are also incorporated. These Tantras are primarily concerned with the *Sādhanā* or the religious endeavour, but not with any system of abstract philosophy. The philosophical portions introduced here and there can neither successfully explain the various practices and rituals, nor are they always relevant to the topics with which the Tantras are generally concerned. The main object of the Tantra literature is to indicate and explain the practical method for realising the truth, and so, the abstract metaphysical speculations could never find any prominence in it. The different metaphysical systems deal with the nature of the reality and the philosophic method for its realisation ; whereas the Tantras lay stress on the esoteric methods for realising that reality. In short, the Tantra, whether Hindu or Buddhistic, has to be regarded as an independent religious literature, which utilised relevant philosophical doctrines, but whose origin may not be traced to any system or systems of philosophy ; it consists essentially of religious methods and practices which are current in India from a very old time. The subject-matter of the Tantras may include esoteric *yōga*, hymns, rites, rituals, doctrines and even law, medicine, magic and so forth.

Etymologically the word *Tantra* may be taken to mean any kind of elaboration (if derived from the root *tan*, to spread), or to mean knowledge (if derived from the root *tantri*).¹ Taking the first derivation, *Tantra* may be explained as that which spreads knowledge (*tanyate, vistāryate jñānam anena iti tantram*). There is thus a wider connotation of the word *Tantra* to mean any 'expanded' literature which deals elaborately with any department of study either in a theoretical or in a practical manner. Thus some systems of philosophy have often been referred to as *Tantras*, e.g., *Nyāya-tantreṣu, Sāṃkhya-tantreṣu, or Cikitsā-tantreṣu*, and so on. But it has also a limited connotation inasmuch as the word *Tantra* means an esoteric literature of a religious and practical nature. It is difficult to say how the use of the word *Tantra* in this limited sense became so important that in common parlance the word seems to have acquired almost entirely this specialised sense. The treatment herein followed is limited to this specialised *Tantra* literature as a practical esoteric science.

Because of this practical nature of the *Tantras*, they have never been the subject for pure academic discussion. They have always been transmitted from the preceptor to the disciple in the most secret manner and it has always been held an unpardonable crime on the part of a *Sādhaka* to let the uninitiated into the secret of their *Sādhanā*.

A critical study of the nature of Tāntric Buddhism will reveal that there is no organic relation between Tāntricism and Buddhism of any form. It is not a fact that Buddhism, in the course of evolution in any of its aspects, developed within its arena the composite practices known as Tāntricism; on the other hand, Buddhism, in the later phases of Mahāyāna, seems to have *adopted* these practices, which were a growth of

¹ See an article *General Introduction to Tantra Philosophy* by Dr. S. N. Dasgupta in his *Philosophical Essays* (Calcutta University).

the soil and as such a common heritage both of the Hindus and the Buddhists. In short, Buddhism did not evolve them out of its own materials. We have said that as a religious science Tāntricism has its independent history ; its association with Buddhism may historically be explained with reference to the spirit of catholicity which characterises Mahāyāna Buddhism as a whole. It will be more correct to say that the Tāntric theological speculations that are found in the Buddhist Tantras represent the gradual transformation of later Mahāyānic ideas, effected through the association of the various Tāntric practices, than to say that the practices are there because of the theological speculations.

There seems to be no essential difference between Tāntricism within the province of Hinduism and that within the province of Buddhism. Apart from the multifarious accessories, to judge by the essentials, Tāntricism, both Hindu and Buddhist, lays stress upon a theological principle of duality in non-duality. Both the schools hold that the ultimate non-dual reality possesses two aspects in its fundamental nature,—the negative (*nivṛtti*) and the positive (*pravṛtti*), the static and the dynamic,—and these two aspects of the reality are represented in Hinduism by *Śiva* and *Śakti* and in Buddhism by *Prajñā* and *Upāya* (or *śūnyatā* and *karuṇā*). It has again been held in the Hindu Tantras that the metaphysical principles of *Śiva-Śakti* are manifested in this material world in the form of the male and the female ; Tāntric Buddhism also holds that the principles of *Prajñā* and *Upāya* are objectified in the female and the male. The ultimate goal of both the schools is the perfect state of union—union between the two aspects of the reality and the realisation of the non-dual nature of the self and the not-self. The principle of Tāntricism being fundamentally the same everywhere, the superficial differences, whatever these may be, supply only different tone and colour. While

the tone and colour of the Hindu Tantras are supplied by the philosophical and religious ideas and practices of the Hindus, those of the Buddhist Tantras are supplied by the ideas and practices of the Buddhists.

If we analyse the Buddhist Tantras we shall find three elements in them, *viz.*, (1) the unsystematised metaphysical fragments taken from the different schools of Buddhistic thought, particularly from Mahāyāna Buddhism and also from cognate Hindu thought ; (2) a Tāntric theology, which, though substantially the same as found in the Hindu Tantras, utilised relevant later Mahāyānic ideas ; (3) practices. Apart from the fundamental theological position, we find in the Hindu Tantras the ideas of Vedānta, Yoga, Sāṃkhya, Nyāya-vaīśeṣika, the Purāṇas and even of the medical sciences and the law books—all scattered here and there ; so also in the Buddhist Tantras we find fragments of metaphysical thought, which are all taken from the leading schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism as influenced by Upaniṣadic monism. Ideas are often put side by side indiscriminately without knowing their import and importance, and as a result we find Śūnya-vāda, Vijñāna-vāda and Vedānta all confusedly jumbled together. The leading tenets of early Buddhism also lie scattered here and there side by side with the Mahāyānic and Brahminic ideas and the other Indian systems like Sāṃkhya and Yoga also have been frequently introduced in a rather distorted form.

For all practical purposes, let us first of all try to take a general survey of the philosophical and theological background of the Buddhist Tantras and then the three elements, spoken above, will be taken into consideration in order.

(ii) *The Salient Features Of Mahāyāna As Contrasted With Hīnayāna*

Buddhism has been historically as well as philosophically divided into two great schools, *viz.*, Hīnayāna

and Mahāyāna. By Hīnayāna is generally meant the Pāli Buddhism of the earlier period and it is also popularly known as the Southern Buddhism and its followers are found in the Southern countries like Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Java, Sumatra, etc.; by Mahāyāna Buddhism on the other hand is meant the later Sanskrit Buddhism current in the Northern countries like China, Japan, Tibet, Nepal, etc.¹ The later Buddhists would style their school as the Mahāyāna or the 'great vehicle' in contrast to the narrow and orthodox school of the Buddhists of earlier times, whom they would designate as belonging to the Hīnayāna or the 'little vehicle'. In the *Mahāyāna-sūtrāṅkāra* of Asaṅga the Hīnayāna has been condemned as very narrow because of its five points of difference with the Mahāyāna. These are, firstly, the narrow aim of self-liberation and, secondly, the narrow teachings to realise that aim, thirdly, the narrow method applied for this realisation, fourthly, insufficiency of equipment and, fifthly, the shortness of time within which final liberation is guaranteed.² In fact, the Mahāyāna school is always characterised by a broadness of outlook, and deep sympathy for the suffering beings. But it may be observed in this connection that as on the one hand this freedom of thought, broadness of outlook and the spirit of liberalism saved Buddhism from the walls of narrow scholastic dogmatism and raised it from the selfish hankering after personal liberation to the sublimity of a religion for the suffering humanity, on the other hand, it contained also germs of indiscipline and revelry of wild thoughts which were responsible for the incorporation of all sorts of practices in Buddhism.

The word Mahāyāna, as we find it mentioned in

¹ Many Mahāyāna scholars of recent times, however, think that the Mahāyāna view is as old as the Hīnayāna.

² *āśayasyo' padeśasya prayogasya virodhataḥ |*
upastambhasya kālasya yat hinam hīnam eva tat ||
Mahāyāna-sūtrāṅkāra. Ch. I, Verse 10.

the *Awakening of faith in Mahāyāna* (*Mahāyāna-śrad-dho-tpāda-sūtra*) of Aśvaghōṣa,¹ meant the highest principle or reality, or the knowledge which is the primordial source of the universe as a whole ; and all the objects, animate and inanimate, are nothing but the manifestations of that one unchanging and immutable principle, and only through it final salvation of all beings is possible.² But historically Mahāyāna refers to the school of Buddhism which is styled by its adherents to be the great way to salvation because of the universality and generosity of its tenets. It is held traditionally that after the death of Buddha, there arose a great controversy among his disciples as to the correct interpretation of the sayings of the Master and also about the rules of discipline indispensable for a monk. Great councils were convened to settle these controversies. It is said that in the second council held in Vesāli the controversy finally ended in a split up among the Buddhists and the dissenters convened another great assembly (*Mahāsāṅgha*) to have a separate school of their own and they were known as the Mahāsāṅghikas. In this way, as time was passing on, the controversy between these radicalists and the orthodox elders (*thera*) began to be gradually accelerated and it finally resulted in the growth of the two separate schools ; the canonical tenets of the elders being styled as Hīnayāna, and that of the latter as Mahāyāna. Without entering into the details of the historical development of the Mahāyāna doctrine, it will be sufficient for our purpose here to draw an outline of the leading tenets of the Mahāyāna school and its points of controversy with Hīnayāna.

¹ Modern scholars are, however, loath to accept Aśvaghōṣa as the author of the work *Mahāyāna-śrad-dho-tpāda-sūtra*. There is again a great deal of controversy over the time of Aśvaghōṣa ; but Teitaro Suzuki says,—“ Suffice it to say that he lived at the time extending from the latter half of the first century before Christ to about 50 or 80 A.D.”

—*Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna*, p. 17.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 58-54.

(A) THE FINAL GOAL

As for the final goal the Mahāyānists believe that every man—nay, every being of the world is a potential Buddha; he has within him all the possibilities of becoming a *Samyak-sambuddha*, i.e., the perfectly enlightened one. Consequently the idea of Arhathood of the Hīnayānists was replaced by the idea of Bodhisattvahood of the Mahāyānists. The general aim of the Hīnayānists was to attain Arhathood and thus through *nirvāṇa* or absolute extinction to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death. But this final extinction through *nirvāṇa* is not the ultimate goal of the Mahāyānists; their aim is to become a Bodhisattva. Here comes in the question of universal compassion (*mahā-karuṇā*) which is one of the cardinal principles of Mahāyāna. The Bodhisattva never accepts *nirvāṇa* though by meritorious and righteous deeds he becomes entitled to it. He deliberately postpones his own salvation until the whole world of suffering beings be saved. His life is pledged for the salvation of the world, he never cares for his own. Even after being entitled to final liberation the Bodhisattva works for the uplift of the whole world and of his own accord he is ready to wait for time eternal until every suffering creature of the world attains perfect knowledge and becomes a Buddha Himself. Ordinary people of little merit would always take refuge in the all-compassionate Bodhisattva. To pray for the compassion of the Bodhisattva was deemed as one of the best ways of being relieved of all suffering.¹ The grand example of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's renunciation of *Nirvāṇa* in favour of suffering humanity, described in the *Kāraṇḍa-vyūha*, will inspire a feeling of sublime rever-

¹ Cf. *samanvāharantu mām buddhāḥ kṛpā-karuṇā-cetasāḥ |
ye ca daśa-diśi loke tiṣṭhanti dvīpado-ttamāḥ ||
yac ca me pātakam karma kṛtam pūrvam sudāruṇam |
tat sarvaṁ deśayisyāmi sthito daśa-balā-grataḥ ||* etc.

ence for all time to come.¹ The whole of Mahāyāna literature breathes this spirit of universal compassion, and all the metaphysical and religious discourses are introduced avowedly with the intention of rendering help to the afflicted in getting rid of their afflictions. In the text *Bodhi-caryā-vatāra* we find the Bodhisattva praying for the distressed:—"With clasped hands do I pray to all the perfectly enlightened ones in all the quarters,—light the lamp of religion for all that are fallen in sorrow for attachment. With clasping hands do I beseech all the self-controlled wise, who are bent on attaining the final extinction, to wait for innumerable ages,—let not this world be dark (without them). Let by all the good I have thus attained through these (righteous) performances all the sorrows of all the beings be completely pacified. . . . All my existence—all my happiness—all my good in the three worlds unconditionally do I renounce for the fulfilment of the desire of all beings. My mind is bent on *Nirvāṇa*, and everything has to be renounced for the sake of *Nirvāṇa*, but if I am to sacrifice everything let all be given to all things. . . . Let them sport with my body—let them laugh—and amuse; when the body is dedicated to them why should I take any more thought of it? Let them do any work they please to do with this body of mine; my only prayer is,—let not any evil come to them with reference to me. Let all that will

¹ "It is said that when Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, after obtaining *Nirvāṇa*, was about to merge himself in the eternal *sūnya* from the summit of the Sumeru mountain he heard an uproar from a very remote quarter and became remorseful. He sat there forthwith in intense meditation, and immediately realised that the uproar was nothing but the wailings of the people at the disappearance of Avalokiteśvara, the all-compassionate Bodhisattva. In their utter helplessness at the prospect of losing the support of Avalokiteśvara, who was their only saviour from their worldly miseries and sufferings, they rent the sky with their bitter wailings. Avalokiteśvara was deeply moved and when he came to know about this he resolved within himself not to accept his well-merited emancipation so long as even a single individual on earth remained unemancipated." *An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism*—by Dr. B. Bhattacharya, p. 29.

“speak ill of me—that will do harm to me, that will laugh at me—be entitled to attain perfect knowledge.”

This feature of universal compassion was one of the most important factors that popularised Buddhism very much in the lands far and wide and gave the religion a deep humanitarian tone. It is by this emphasis on compassion and also on devotion that Mahāyāna Buddhism could very easily attract the sympathy and attention of millions of people and could also harmonise itself with the current religious trend of India.

(B) THE THREE SCHOOLS,—ŚRĀVAKA-YĀNA, PRATYEKA-BUDDHA-YĀNA AND BODHISATTVA-YĀNA

In connection with this question of universal compassion we may mention the general scheme of classifying the Buddhists into the Śrāvakas (*i.e.*, the hearers), the Pratyeka-Buddhas (*i.e.*, the individualistic Buddhas) and the Bodhisattvas (*i.e.*, those whose very essence is knowledge). The Śrāvakas are those who always listen to the preachings of the learned and try to follow them in their life. They try to understand the four noble truths (*ārya-satya*) and to attain *pari-nirvāṇa* through a right comprehension of them. They have mastery over the ten good actions, possess mental power (*citta*), but they have not the universal compassion (*mahā-karuṇā*) which might inspire them for the well-being of the suffering world. They are always busy with themselves and so are regarded as the lowest in the rank. The middle place is assigned to the Pratyeka-Buddhas. They are bent on self-control and generally lead a solitary retired life. They do not require the instructions of any teacher to guide them at every step. They can comprehend the cause and conditions (*hetu-pratyaya*) of things, and through a right comprehension of the nature of causality attain salvation for themselves. They too do not possess *karuṇā*

¹ Ch. III, Verses 4-6, 10-11, 18-15.
O. P. 105—2

and so are ranked below the Bodhisattvas. The Bodhisattvas are those who are more purified, have full control over their passions, have the right knowledge of all the expedients, have great resolution ; perfect enlightenment is their only support. Through their upward march through the ten stages (*daśa-bhūmi*) and through the constant practice of the *pāramitās* (the best virtues) they attain Buddhahood ; and they attain Buddhahood never for their own sake, but for saving the whole world. In them *mahā-karuṇā* has got the fullest scope and so they are the best of men.

(C) THE PĀRAMITĀS

In this connection we should also have a cursory glance at the Mahāyānic conception of the six *pāramitās* or the best moral virtues and the conception of the Bodhicitta or the mind as enlightenment, and the production of the Bodhicitta (*bodhi-citto-tpāda*). The *pāramitās* are the moral virtues through the practice of which the aspirer crosses the sea of existence and reaches the other shore.¹ These are charity (*dāna*), good conduct (*śīla*), forbearance (*kṣānti*), spiritual energy (*vīrya*), meditation (*dhyāna*) and knowledge (*prajñā*). After these virtues are acquired and the moral ground is prepared the aspirer is to produce a strong resolution in his heart for the realisation of his *citta* as perfect enlightenment. This is what is called the production of the Bodhicitta. The Bodhicitta proper involves within it two elements, *viz.*, perfect enlightenment of the nature of void (*śūnyatā*) and universal compassion for the beings (*karuṇā*) ; these *śūnyatā* and *karuṇā* combined together give rise to Bodhicitta. After its production, the Bodhicitta proceeds on in an upward march through ten different stages which are called the *bodhisattva-bhūmis* (i.e., the stages of the Bodhisattva). The first of these is the

¹ *Pāramitā* literally means that which takes one to the other shore.

stage of *Pramuditā* or the stage of delight or joy. Here the Bodhisattva rises from the cold, self-sufficing and nihilistic conception of *nirvāṇa* to a higher spiritual contemplation. The second is styled as the *Vimalā* or the stage free from all defilement. The third is the *Prabhākarī* or that which brightens; in this stage the Bodhisattva attains a clear insight—an intellectual light about the nature of the dharmas. The fourth stage is the *Arciṣmatī* or ‘full of flames’,—these flames are the flames of Bodhi which burn to ashes all the passions and ignorance. At this stage the Bodhisattva practises thirty-seven virtues called *bodhi-pāṅṣikas* which mature the *bodhi* to perfection. The next is the *Sudurjayā* stage or the stage which is almost invincible. This is a stage from which no evil passion or temptation can move the Bodhisattva. The sixth stage is called the *Abhimukhī*, where the Bodhisattva is almost face to face with *praññā* or the highest knowledge. The seventh is the *Duraṅgamā* which literally means ‘going far away’. In this stage the Bodhisattva attains the knowledge of the expedience which will help him in the attainment of salvation. Though he himself abides here by the principles of void and non-duality and desirelessness, yet his compassion for beings keeps him engaged in the activities for the well-being of all the creatures. The eighth is the stage of *Acalā*, which means ‘immovable’. The next is the *Sādhumati* or the ‘good will’; when the Bodhisattva reaches such a stage all the sentient beings are benefited by his attainment of the highest perfect knowledge. The tenth or the last is the stage of *Dharma-megha* (literally the ‘clouds of dharma’), where the Bodhisattva attains perfect knowledge, great compassion, love and sympathy for all the sentient beings. When this last stage of *Dharma-megha* is reached, the aspirer becomes a perfect Bodhisattva.¹

¹ For a detailed study of the subject see *Aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism And Its Relation to Hīnayāna*, by Dr. N. Dutt, Ch. IV.

(D) THE DOCETIC CONCEPTION OF THE THREE KĀYAS

Another departure of the Mahāyānists from the Hīnayānists is in the docetic conception of the personality of Buddha. The Hīnayānists conceived Buddha only as a historical personage in the life and activities of Śākyamuni. But with the Mahāyānists Buddha is no particular historical man,—he is the ultimate principle as the totality of things or as the cosmic unity. But this highest principle has three aspects which are known as the three kāyas of the Buddha. These are,— (i) Dharma-kāya, (ii) Sambhoga-kāya and (iii) Nir-māṇa-kāya. The word Dharma-kāya is often explained as the body of the laws (*dharma*); and it may also be remembered that Buddha is said to have told his disciples that his teachings should be recognised as his own immortal body. But the word *dharma* is generally used in the Mahāyāna texts in the sense of ‘entity’; and the Dharma-kāya means the ‘thatness’ (*tathatā-rūpa*) of all the entities; it is in other words the *dharma-dhātu* or the primordial element underlying all that exists. It has been also termed as the Svabhāva-kāya¹, i.e., the body of the ultimate nature. It is described as devoid of all characters, but possessing eternal and innumerable qualities. It is neither the mind, nor matter—nor something different from them both. The nature of the Dharma-kāya is described in the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*² in the following manner:— “The Dharmakāya, though manifesting itself in the triple world, is free from impurities and desires. It unfolds itself here, there, and everywhere responding to the call of karma. It is not an individual reality, it is not a false existence, but is universal and pure. It comes from nowhere, it goes to nowhere; it does not

¹ But we shall see later on that Svabhāva-kāya or Sahaja-kāya or Vajra-kāya was another *kāya* invented by the Vajrayānists and the Sahajiyās as the ultimate stage even after the Dharma-kāya. This stage has also been styled as the Mahāsukha-kāya.

² Quoted in Suzuki's *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, pp. 228-24.

assert itself, nor is it subject to annihilation. It is for ever serene and eternal. It is the One, devoid of all determinations. This body of Dharma has no boundary, no quarters, but is embodied in all bodies. Its freedom or spontaneity is incomprehensible, its spiritual presence in things corporeal is incomprehensible. All forms of corporeality are involved therein, it is able to create all things. Assuming any concrete material body as required by the nature and condition of karma, it illuminates all creations. Though it is the treasure of intelligence, it is void of particularity. There is no place in the universe where this body does not prevail. The universe becomes, but this body for ever remains. It is free from all opposites and contraries, yet it is working in all things to lead them to Nirvāṇa.”

The Sambhoga-kāya is generally explained as the ‘body of bliss’ or the refulgent body of the Buddha. It is a very subtle body which manifests itself in the various conditions of bliss in the superhuman beings for preaching the noble truths and for arousing in the mind of all the Śrāvakas, Pratyeka-Buddhas and the lay Bodhisattvas joy, delight and love for the noble religion (*sad-dharma*). It has been explained in the *Śata-sāhasrikā* and the *Pañcaviṃśati-sāhasrikā* as “an exceedingly refulgent body, from every pore of which streamed forth countless brilliant rays of light, illuminating the *lokadhātus* as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges. When this body stretched out its tongue, innumerable rays of light issued forth from it, and on each ray of light was found a lotus of thousand petals on which was seated a Tathāgata-vigraha (an image of the Tathāgata, a sort of Nirmāṇa-kāya), preaching to Bodhisattvas, Grhasthas (householders), Pravrajitas (recluses) and others the dharma consisting of the six pāramitās.”

¹ See *Aspects Of Mahāyāna Buddhism And Its Relation To Hīnayāna* by Dr. N. Dutt, p. 118.

The *Nirmāṇa-kāya* is the historical personage of the Buddha or the 'Body of Transformation'. The historical Buddha is regarded as an incarnation of the eternal *Tathāgata* or the manifestation in condescension of the *Dharma-tathatā*. *Śākyasiṃha* Buddha is only one of the incarnations of the *Dharma-kāya* Buddha and his life and teachings are sought to be explained as the 'apparent doings of a phantom of the *Buddha-kāya*',—'a shadow image created to follow the ways of the world' only to convince the ignorant people of the world that it is not beyond the capacity of a man to attain perfection. It is generally taken that the human Buddhas (*Mānuṣī* Buddha) like *Dīpaṅkara*, *Kaśyapa*, *Gautama* Buddha, *Maitreya* and others represent the *Nirmāṇa-kāya*; the *Dhyānī* *Bodhisattvas* (*Vairocana*, *Akṣobhya* and others) in their body of supreme happiness represent the *Sambhoga-kāya* and the *Dhyānī* Buddha in *Nirvāṇa* in a state of complete union with all the truths for time eternal represents the *Dharma-kāya*.

This *Tri-kāya* theory of the *Mahāyānists* developed these cosmological and ontological significance only in course of its evolution. Before it developed these cosmological and ontological meanings, the theory as mere *Buddhalogy* would be explained in the following manner:—¹

The quintessence of Buddha is Pure Enlightenment (*bodhi*) or perfect Wisdom (*prajñā-pāramitā*), or knowledge of the Law (*dharma*), i.e., the absolute truth. By attaining this knowledge *nirvāṇa* is also attained; the *Dharma-kāya* Buddha is the Buddha in *nirvāṇa* (*Samādhi-kāya*). Again, before he is merged into *nirvāṇa* he possesses and enjoys, for his own sake and for others' welfare, the fruit of his charitable behaviour as a *Bodhisattva*, and this is the Body of Enjoyment or the Beatific Body (*Sambhoga-kāya*). Again, human

¹ See an article, *The Three Bodies of a Buddha* by Prof. La Vallée Poussin in the *J.R.A.S.*, 1906, pp. 945-46.

beings known as the Buddhas, who are created by the magical contrivances represent the Created Body (Nirmāṇa-kāya).

But after the Tri-kāya theory acquires an ontological and cosmological meaning, Dharma-kāya means the void and permanent reality underlying the things (*dharma*), or, in other words, the uncharacterised pure consciousness (*viññapti-mātra*). Sambhoga-kāya means the Dharma-kāya evolved as Being, Bliss, Charity, Radiance, or the Intellect, individualised as the Bodhi-sattva. Nirmāṇa-kāya is the Transformation Body, which is the same as consciousness defiled and individualised as 'common people' (*prthag-jana*). Later on, this Buddhology, cosmology and ontology were all confusedly mixed up,—and we find the three Kāyas mentioned more often in their composite sense than either as pure Buddhology or as pure ontology.

(F) PREDOMINANCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS

Another notable phase of Mahāyāna Buddhism is the exuberant growth of philosophical thought in it. The sayings of the Master were sought to be brought to their logical and metaphysical conclusions, and there developed distinct systems of philosophical thoughts with a host of staunch exponents. The most remarkable is the evolution of the import of the word *śūnyatā*. In the old canonical works the term *śūnyatā* probably implied the momentary or the transitory nature of all entities; but the Mādhyamikas built up a new system of uncompromising nihilism through a different interpretation of the word *śūnyatā* and the Viññānavādins again in their turn contradicted the Mādhyamikas offering another interpretation of the word.

But we should not lay undue stress on the divisions of schools or sects thus made. It has often been said that these divisions of the *yānas* are merely provisional; they may be regarded as being relative and as

having only methodological interest; the *Laṅkāvatāra* says, they (the *yānas*) are but different methods suitable to different persons; when the mind returns to its original abode, there is neither the path nor any one who adopts it.¹ Śrāvaka-yāna, Pratyeka-Buddha-yāna and Bodhisattva-yāna have often been said to be the different stages in the same school of faith,—a Śrāvaka by further endeavour becomes a Pratyeka-Buddha, and he again by further endeavour becomes a Bodhisattva and the Bodhisattva becomes the Buddha himself.

(iii) *Philosophical Systems*

Now, after taking this general survey of the main features of Mahāyāna Buddhism let us take a bird's-eye-view of the philosophical systems of Mahāyāna; and as the metaphysical fragments, found in the different Tāntric literature, are nothing but indistinct echoes of these schools of Mahāyāna philosophy, we think it proper to go into some detail of these systems of thought. The Buddhist Tantras are based more on the Yogācāra school than on the Śūnyavāda,—and the monistic tendency of the Yogācāra school has often been consciously and unconsciously drawn to pure Vedāntic thought. It is for this reason that we shall deal with the Yogācāra more elaborately and we shall also try to explain very briefly the philosophical affinity of Yogācāra with Vedānta.

¹ *citte tu vai parāvṛtte na yānaṃ na ca yāyinaḥ* ||
Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra. Lévi's Edition, p. 822.

Cf. also:—
parāvṛtte tu vai citte na yānaṃ nāpi yāyinaḥ ||
Advaya-vajra-saṃgraha, p. 22.

Cf. also:—
upāya-kauśalya mameva rūpaṃ
yat trīṇi yānāny upādarśayāmi |
ekam tu yānaṃ hi nayaś ca eka
ekā ceyam deśanā nāyakānām ||
Saddharma-puṇḍarīka, Ch. II, Verse 69.
 The Bibliotheca Buddhica Publication.

Hiuen Tsang writes that when he came to India in the seventh century A.D. there were four schools of Buddhism, *viz.*, Sautrāntika, Vaibhāṣika, Mādhyamika and Vijñānavāda or Yogācāra. The former two belonged to Hīnayāna and the latter two to Mahāyāna. The Vaibhāṣikas took their stand on the *Abhidharma* literature and did not accept the authority of the *Sūtras*. They believed in the reality of the extra-mental world and according to them our knowledge of the external world is an exact copy of it and as such it is direct and real. The Sautrāntikas based their views on the *Sūtra* literature; they were also realists but like the Vaibhāṣikas they did not base the notion of the external existence on the evidence of our direct perception; it is but an inference. The point of discussion regarding the status of external objects between the Yogācārins and the Sautrāntikas may briefly be stated thus: the Yogācārins contend that the object of awareness and awareness itself are one and the same, *i.e.*, the different contents of knowledge as yellow, blue etc. are but diverse forms or transformation of knowledge itself; the Sautrāntikas hold that it may be admitted that the diverse contents represent the diverse forms of knowledge, or rather the content may be regarded as in some sense identical with the knowledge, if there must be something outside knowledge by the operation of which the diversity of the forms of knowledge or its contents could be explained or inferred.¹ Though the early schools of Buddhism were thus in a sense all realists they did not believe in the substantiality or the permanence of the world,—everything being momentary and as such ultimately void (*śūnya*).

Mahāyāna Buddhism has been roughly classed under two heads, *viz.*, Śūnyavāda, and Vijñānavāda or

¹ *Śāstra-dīpikā* (1-1-5).

Yogācāra. The distinction between the two schools is not, however, fundamental, and very often the one verges into the other. Nāgārjuna (100 A.D.) was the chief exponent of Śūnyavāda with its uncompromising spirit of negation. Another earlier current was flowing on with a spirit of compromise with the Upaniṣadic doctrine of monism. We find trace of the latter in as early a Mahāyāna text as the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, we find it somewhat systematised in the Tathatā doctrine of Aśvaghōṣa¹ and it took a definite turn of uncompromising idealism in the hands of the Vijñānavādins like Maitreya, Asaṅga, Vasubhandhu and others; and we may add here that this trend of thought attained fulfilment in the Vedāntic monism of Śaṅkara. Let us first of all understand the standpoint of the Śūnyavādins and then we shall try to trace the development of the other currents of thought in some detail.

(A) MĀDHYAMIKA PHILOSOPHY OF NĀGĀRJUNA

The Mādhyamika-vṛtti of Nāgārjuna, commented upon by Candrakīrti, begins with the declaration that the Mādhyamikas have no thesis to prove, their business is to contradict any and every thesis that may be offered by any school of thought. First of all is taken the principle of 'dependent origination' (*pratītya-samutpāda*) realised and preached by Lord Buddha himself. The phrase *pratītya-samutpāda* has been interpreted in two different ways by former commentators; ² but after refuting both these views Candrakīrti holds that the real significance of the theory of

¹ It has been hinted before that modern scholars are not sure about the authorship of the work *Mahāyāna-śraddhotpāda-sūtra* where we find the Tathatāvāda expounded.

² It may either be explained as the origination (*samutpāda*) of some existence (*bhāva*) getting hold of or obtaining (*pratītya*=*pra* + *√i* + *tya*=getting) some cause and conditions (*hetu-pratyaya*). Or it may be explained as the origination with reference to each and every destructible individual (*√i*=to go, to change, i.e., to be destroyed).

