

Replication of Buddhist Philosophy and Literature in *Charyāpadas*: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that Buddhist culture and religion has played a vital role in India and some of the Asian countries during late 6th century to the early 4th century BCE. Inspired by Buddhism, Indian sculpture, and painting flourished, poetic and dramatic literature developed, and spirituality thrived. The *Charyāpada* is a collection of mystical poems from the 8th-12th centuries, written in Old Bengali language. These poems are linked with *Mahāyāni* Buddhism, *Tāntrik* Buddhism mainly exploring spiritual themes and often composed by Buddhist Siddhas. They reflect the obscure and philosophical aspects of Buddhism widespread in ancient Bengali culture. Buddhist literature in a broader sense, includes texts like the Pali canon, Tripitaka and *Mahāyāni* sutras. These writings encompass the teachings of Gautama Buddha and later development within Buddhist traditions. If we scrutinize the *Charyāpadas*, we can see that there are two divisions in their literature: one division is on the core philosophical concepts, and the other is on the side of its applications in our day to day lives. In this paper, my attempt is to find out the philosophy of their literature, language and culture. through interpreting their texts to uncover the literature of this particular region of Bengali culture linked with Buddhist literature.

Keywords: *Charyāpada* Citta, karuṇā, Mahāyāni, pañcaskandha, sādhanā, karuṇā

Introduction

The *Charyāpada* is a collection of mystical poems from the 8th-12th centuries, written in early Bengali. These poems are associated with *Mahāyāni* Buddhism, *Tāntrik* Buddhism mainly *Sahajyān* and *Vajrayān* Buddhism. These *Charyāpada* is considered as a significant literature in the development of this particular Bengali literature related with philosophical theories and language. During that time Buddhist literature included scriptures like the Pāli canon and *Mahāyāna* sūtras, contained with the teachings of Gautama Buddha.

If we analyze the *Charyāpadas*, we can see that they have two sides, one is the side of philosophical theory, and the other is the side of *sādhanā*. The aspect of Philosophical theory is not its main

aspect, the main aspect is the *sādhana* theory. The reason for this is that the poets of the Charyāpada were mainly followers of a special esoteric method. Their main goal was to reveal the different processes of their pursuit and the various feelings associated with that pursuit. It has to be mentioned here that in the Pala Yuga, when these Charyāpadas were composed, there was an era of all round harmony in terms of our religion and culture. The philosophical background adopted in the Charyāpada was roughly composed by following Mahāyāna Buddhism. Among the schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism two main schools may be mentioned- the Nihilism or Mādhyamikavāda introduced by Nāgārjuna, and the Vijñānavāda or Yogācāravāda introduced by Maitreya, Asanga, and Vasubandhu.

Philosophical concepts in charyāpada literature

In the face of that case of *sādhana*, both *sādhanas* combined to create an integrated *Lokāyata sādhana*, in terms of meditation and practice. It is not always possible to distinguish how much Hindu and how much Buddhist material were found in the charyāpadas. Among the Charyāpadas we find some verses which are born from the general Buddhist thought, and it is stated that-

Bhavaṇai gahana gambhīrabaṅge vāhī/

Duānte cikhila majhe na thahī//charyapada/5

It means the entire flow of existence is likened to a river in Buddhism. As we see in a river, each water particle at each moment is separate from the other water particles, so the three existences within the flow we call *samsāra* flow, are momentary and separate yet all together form our one integral flow. Here one can find the echoes of ancient Buddhist thought referred to as the Mādhyamika concept.

Regarding *sādhana*, the Buddha first laid out a path of extreme austerity, and then he mentioned the middle path is the best. Here, we can see the hint of that middle path, but here we can also see that middle path is transformed to another form which is expressed in the opinion of the *Tāntric* sages. Emptiness is in one side of the fast-flowing river and compassion (*karuṇā*) is on another side. Emptiness is to the side of knowledge seeking renunciation path, compassion is to the side of skillful religious instinct. If we associate compassion or wisdom with emptiness or wisdom, wisdom cannot lead us to the narrow path of self-centered renunciation, and if we associate

emptiness or wisdom with compassion or wisdom, even the meritorious actions inspired by the ideals of *Bodhisattva* can never be the cause of attachment.

If we discuss the first *charyā*, where it has been mentioned that “*Kā taruvara pañca vi dāla*”, it means the combination of five factors *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *sañjā*, *saṅskāra* and *vijñāna* make the *pañcaskandha* of our body and the *pudgala* is like the ego, that exist in the body. In Buddhism, *pañcaskandha* refers to the concept of five aggregates or components that together make up the human personality and experience. These aggregates are: 1. *Rūpa* (Form): Physical or material aspects of existence. 2. *Vedanā* (Feeling): Sensations or feelings, whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. 3. *Sañjā* (perception): Recognition or perception of objects through the senses. 4. *Saṅskāra* (volitional formations): Mental formations, including thoughts, intentions and habits. 5. *Vijñāna* (Consciousness): Awareness or consciousness of an object. The concept of *pañcaskandha* is central to the Buddhist understanding of the nature of existence and is often used to illustrate the impermanence (*Aniccā*), un-satisfactoriness (*Dukkha*) and non-self (*Anatta*) nature of phenomena. According to Buddhist teachings, recognizing the interdependence and impermanence of these aggregates is crucial for attaining liberation from all kinds of suffering.

It is said in the seventh *charyāpada*-

Tē tini te tini tini ho bhinnā Bhaṇai kahnu bhava parichinnā

Je je āilā te te gelā.

Avaṅgavaṇe kāhnu Biman bhailā

In this verse, it has been mentioned that they are three, they are three- all they are different from each other, *Kāhnupāda* (a scholar) mentioned that they are not true, all are mundane thing. When we see some objects in front of us, we see them separately as three or many, but actually all are not separate. We see everything separated and separated by the sense of existence. What happened a moment ago is the same thing that is going on now.

In Buddhism, the concept of “moment” is central to understanding impermanence. It emphasizes that all things are in a constant state of flux and existence is a series of fleeting moments. The term ‘*khana*’ in Sanskrit refers to the smallest possible unit of time, highlighting the transient nature of

phenomena. In charyāpadas, we find an excellent description of the nature of this *samsāra*, where truth inherent in it in a verse of Luipada-

Bhāv na hoi abhāv ṇa jāi (29)

In Buddhism, *samsara* refers to the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, driven by karma. It is characterized by suffering and impermanence. Here, a concept “Bhavachakra” has been introduced to refer to the wheel of life or wheel of Existence. It is a symbolic representation of the cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth (*samsāra*). The wheel is divided into six realms, representing different states of existence. Here, the teaching behind the Bhavachakra is central to understanding the concept of *karma* and the path to liberation.

Death is not the end of our life; death is the end of the body i.e. our *sattā*. This blissful simplicity is actually the blissful ubiquity of eternal existence. All pervading blissful existence is like an ocean, each personal life is like a wave. As the waves rise and fall like the sea. No sense of deficiency is introduced here, actually *avidya* always disturbs an individual life, which is a kind of form of an ocean. Change is not indicated, after *skandha* subtraction that is our integral identities with pleasure, but there is no possibility of seeing him, the sighted-old individuals can experience about blissful existence, which is the only object within the eternal world. That’s why Sarahapada says-

Adbhūa bhavamohare disai para appaṇā/

E jaga jalabimbākāre sahaṅje suṇa apaṇā// 39

Despite other doctrinal differences, there is a consensus between Nagarjuna’s nihilism and Maitreya-Vasubandhu’s opinion on scientific objects. Similarly, there is no transcendental entity in *monodharma*. According to the nihilists, everything in the world came into existence from nothing; The manifestation of the eternal desires held in the eternal and unrecognizable various kinds of forms. Scientists will say that individual science is the manifestation of material, and this individual science is included in a collective science-scientists have named it *ālaya-vijñāna*. Knowledge is at the root of all our material objects; - all things exist in time, if there is no sense of time, how will it be possible to understand things? Time is the root of all forms of existence; it is not an external object- the sense of descent in *Cittavṛtti* for the movement of the mind is what

makes the sense of time possible. Therefore, time is entirely *chaittika or chaitsik*. When the desire of ignorance is rejected, *chittavritti* is rejected, when *chittavritti* is rejected, Kāla is rejected - *Vajrajñāna* is rejected then Kāla is rejected, and it is possible to be established in *dharmānairatmya* and *pudgala nairātmyavāda* that is established in emptiness.

Charyāpadas have been deeply influenced by this idealism of Buddhist philosophy and have tried to explain the need and methods of the play of mind and restraint of mind in the world with the help of various metaphors. In one verse it is clearly said that by spreading the web of mind we are creating a web of matter- and we are binding ourselves in this web and the web created by Bhava and Nirvāṇa, Existence and Non-existence.

With the help of meditation and yoga practice, the *sādhaka* used to destroy this ignorant mind, there is a glimpse of it in many verses. Shantipada said in one of his verses-

Tuli dhuṇi dhuṇi ānsure ānsu/ ānsu dhuṇi dhuṇi nirbar sesu// Tause herua na pabiai/

Shanti bhani kin sa bhabiai

Tula dhuṇi dhuṇi Sune Ahariyu.

Suna laian apṇā catariu (26)

Here the cotton is the cotton of the mind - even if it is analysed and finished, it is the reflection of the world of material creation within it.

When the mind is purified through judgment-analysis-meditation-idea etc. it is understood that all thoughts are false. The mind has to be given to the world day by day by dissolving it into nothingness - when the mind is dissolved into nothingness then all ego-adherence also disappears forever and nothing else remains except a sense of self-consciousness. *Śūnyata* is not merely a word of ontological signification. Since all empirical things are devoid of substantial reality, therefore they are worthless. It is because of our ignorance that we attach value to worldly things. In Buddhism, when a person is absorbed in meditation, he immerses his whole mind or spirit in a particular object. *Sādhaka* always tries to establish his *Citta* or mind at a higher or higher level through the meditation process. At this time, *Citta* or mind starts scattering light from all around on the thought or object. This light radiates from the reservoir of knowledge and the light of wisdom guides him towards the land of eternal tranquility of *Nirvāna* or liberation. *Śūnyata* is not

merely an intellectual concept. Its realization is a means to salvation. When rightly grasped it leads to the negation of the multiplicity of the *dharmas* and to detachment from the passing show of the tempting things of life. Meditation on *Śūnyata* leads to *prajñā* (transcendental wisdom) which brings about the emancipation of the aspirant from spiritual darkness

About the concept of *Citta-binās*, *Bhādepāda* says-

Etakāl hnāo ācchilon, svamohe/

Eve moi bujhila sadguru bohen//

Eben chiarāa maku ṇathā/

Gaaṇa samude taliā paitha//35

Regarding the concept of *Citta-binās*, *Bhādepāda* explained that ‘Now I understand (all) in the sense of Sadguru. Now my *Avidya* has been destroyed and my *citta* has entered into the heaven ocean. Now I see that all the ten directions are empty, there is neither sin nor virtue in the mind. Here the sky is the sea of emptiness as the supreme wisdom, Just as the moon falls into the sea, everything becomes dark - at the same time, all sense of matter is extinguished- even if the mind-moon-emptiness is drowned in the sea, all the senses are extinguished-the saint remains established in one sense of non-dualism.

To describe the relation between world and mind and its no-dualistic relation *Aryadeva* (one of the disciples of charyāpadas) mentioned that-

Jahi maṇa india- pavaṇa ho ṇathā ṇa Jānami Apā Kanhi Gai Paithā

Chāndare Chāndakānti Jim Patibhāsai.

Cia Vikaraṇe tanhi tali paisai (31 numbers)

The moon shows the whole world through its light, as the same way through the *chittavikiraṇa*, the objects of this whole world can be exposed, actually mind makes the material world fruitful to us. By the Pāli word ‘*chitta*’ we mean ‘mind’. ‘Mind’ can be interpreted in various ways in philosophical considerations viz, *Citta*, *Mana*, *Vijñāna* (mind, thought or intellect). Mind can be said in one word - “*Chinteti Chittaṅ*”. That means the mind thinks. It must be remembered that to destroy ignorance - the mind must transform itself into the light of nature. Gautam Buddha believed

that the activity of the mind is at the root of all our activities. Any kind of action, whether good or bad, is done by the mind. Even Buddha had accepted that the controlling power of morality is the mind. One of the Theravāda texts *Dhammapada* opens with the verse “mind is the forerunner of all good and evil conditions”.

***Karuṇā* (Compassion) in Sahajiyā Buddhism**

All these Charyākāras were Sahajiyā Buddhists. To some thinkers, Sahajiyā Buddhism has derived from Mahāyāna. The main point of Mahāyāna Buddhism is- if only emptiness is accepted, Mahākaruṇā (compassion) should be mixed with emptiness-then only emptiness will be accepted. Mahākaruṇā should be mixed with emptiness- this theory is spread in various ways in the Charyāpadas. In terms of sadhana, these sahajiyā sādhakas combine emptiness and compassion. We have seen that Kahnpada mentioned about the importance of karuṇā(compassion) by the following verse- “Nia deha karuṇā śūnamen heri”(10).

In order to understand the *sādhana* of *Sahajiyās*, there should be a general idea about the history of Sahajāna. All these trends originate from Mahāyāna Buddhism. When Mahāyāna developed with his ‘great vehicle’ there was a place for pilgrims from any community. A variety of people with different religious beliefs and traditional practices entered into the ‘great vehicle’ of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, two views gradually appeared - pāramitā- noi and mantra-noi. *Tāntric* Buddhism gradually changed their name to *Vajrayāna* buddhism. The word ‘vajra’ means ‘emptiness’ . So, the original meaning of *Vajrayāna* is ‘void-vehicle’. Generally, in Buddhist *tantras* -we do not find any mention of a special sect by the name of *Sahajiyāna*. It seems that this name was coined later after observing some characteristics and practices of a group of *Sādhakas* who were pro- *Vajrayāna*.

After achieving Buddhahood, Gautam Buddha had worked for the welfare of others. He mentioned about four kinds of sterling virtues (*Brahma Vihāra*) namely friendliness (*Mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), joy (*mudita*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) and if we follow, then these will lead us to happiness *Brahma Vihāra* which means dwelling place of Brahma, a form of celestial beings existing in heavenly worlds. Such a type of influence of this compassion is found in the Buddhist

Charyāpadas. *Brahma Vihāra* can transform a man into a superman. If we try to cultivate them, irrespective of creed, colour, race or sex, the earth can be transformed into a paradise. For the attainment of equanimity of mind and virtuous life the inculcation of truth, virtue, non-violence, restraint and control over mind were instructed.

By emphasizing this compassion, the *Mahāyāna* Buddhists made the ideal of Bodhisattva. The individual being can attain *nirvāṇa* that is liberation from the continuum of consciousness that has transcended the limitations and illusions of the self, by resorting through emptiness. Here the Mahājānis were against of attaining *nirvana*, without doing any service for the welfare of the society or without being of any kind of help to other beings.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, compassion became the motto of a form of religion. It is for the purity of this mercy that emptiness is desired, or this mercy is the source of meritorious deeds. But if one follows the path of selfless emptiness without compassion, he will turn away from the world and become completely self-centered. Here *Sarahapāda* mentioned in his *donhā* –

Karuṇā chaddi jo suṇṇahin laggū/

Ṇau so pabai uttam maggu//

The Ultimate goal of *Sahajiyā* Buddhist was ‘*Sahaj*’, the realization of an ‘*arupa*’ being within our ‘*rupa*’ and realization of an ‘*asarira*’ within our ‘*sarira*’. Charyākāras and Dohākāras have repeatedly mentioned that these are beyond our minds and thoughts. Another fact to be noticed in this context from the Buddhist *Sahajiyā sādhana* is that the *Sahaja* they mentioned as the extreme word ‘*sadhya*’. They also explained the *sahaja* as ‘*sahaja*’ and as an ‘*Sahajānanda*’. Then ‘*Sahajānanda*’ means ‘easy one.’ The meaning of *nirvikalpa* is the ‘*parama-ananda*’, and when one gets accustomed with this word one can easily attain this state of ‘*asarira*’.

Conclusion

Both *Charyāpadas* and mainstream Buddhist literature contribute to our understanding of the diverse expression of Buddhism across different regions and time periods. It seems to us that if the expansion of Indian civilization outside India is mainly due to the influence of Buddhism, then it must be said that we are undermining our ideals by ignoring its history, literature and philosophy.

We have to know where and how the new ideas which Buddhism gave to the Indian tradition, without which the history of India will remain inadequate.

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