

MADHYAMA-ṢAṬKA BY MAITRIGUPTA

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This brief text, which has no known commentary, identifies itself (verse 3) as an account of philosophic systems (a siddhānta). In it, Maitrīgupta focuses upon several schools' understanding of "middle way". Probably, the text was composed as a topical outline for teaching. It is one of a number of his works expounding images or technical terms from Mahāyāna tradition. A Sanskrit version survives, ¹ as well as one Tibetan translation. ²

The work was studied and translated into English by Sunitikumar Pathak, and published in the Adyar Library Bulletin in 1961. ³ There the Sanskrit is reprinted with emendations, and the Tibetan is transliterated from the Narthang edition of the Sacred Canon. To the study is prefixed an account of the author, Maitrīgupta. The use of Tibetan sources signals a knowledgeable and conscientious approach to the subject matter. However, insufficient materials were brought to bear for either study (that of the author, or that of the text) to avoid errors. This is an attempt to bring up to date our understanding of the text, but without correcting the work of Pathak on every point.

Maitrīgupta, also known as Maitrīpāda (to the Tibetans, Maitrīpa) and Advayavajra, is dated ca 1007-1085. ⁴ He is known, among other things, for his exposition of a variant of Mahāmudrā ("Great Symbol") philosophy known as amanasikāra. His usage of this term will be explored in context of the translation of another of his works. ⁵

The Tibetan redactor Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub, in his analytic list of works that expound the Amanasikāra system, describes the Six Verses as teaching the philosophic view that characterizes Tantrism. ⁶ This is the source of the Narthang catalogue's identification of this work as "teaching the tantric view" (Pathak 539-40). The comment describes the text, however, not the author.

Maitrīgupta shows how each of the four Mahāyāna philosophic systems defines the term "middle way". The term is used interchangeably with "freedom from the four extremes" (asserting eternalism, nihilism, neither, and both), and "dependent origination". In context of the correct approach, Maitrīgupta makes the further identifications "clear light nature of a meditational deity" and "non-dual great bliss". The terms "empty" and "un arising" are also adduced as equivalents.

Three verses present the views of three systems; three verses follow with the preferred interpretation.

To explain and expand the verses would in effect recreate the Mahāyāna sections of Advayavajra's Ratnāvalī, his full exposition of siddhānta. But a translation of the Ratnāvalī is forthcoming. ⁷ So let me limit myself to identifying the four systems, not all of which find room to be named in the "Six Verses".

1) Those who profess that cognition possesses forms (the Sākāra-vāda) describe the object of cognition as existing in a momentary mode. The Sākāra-vāda consists of the Sautrāntika school, which is regarded as Mahāyāna, plus the Sākāra-vāda branch of the Yogācāra.

2) Those who profess the absence of forms (the Nirākāra-vāda branch of the Yogācāra), describe reality as an expression of self-awareness.

3) Among the Madhyamaka, those who profess illusion-like nonduality (the Māyopamādvaya-vāda) describe reality as transparent, or clear light.

4) The Madhyamaka to which the author adheres, those who profess the unsupportedness of all phenomena (the Apratiṣṭhāna-vāda), is expounded in more detail in the second triad of verses.

In the edition that follows, the Sanskrit has been corrected by reference to the Tibetan, and to meter.

English Translation

1) To professors of Sākāra, "freedom from the four extremes" means understanding that the object of cognition exists in a momentary mode, empty of thought-constructions and lacking objectification.

2) "Middle way" is defined [by professors of Nirākāra] in terms of a self-awareness that is not nil; it appears as blue, etc. objects, but characteristics do not arise in it.

3) To professors of Māyopamādvaya, "freedom from the four extremes" is [to know that] the characteristics are false, and [in reality] clear light.

The following system has evidence for its beliefs.

4) To know the emptiness of objects is to know emptiness free of appearance and free of coverings. That is the Middle Way from which the "subsequent" or conventional has been purged.

5) Whether it is clear light or not, in reality it is unobjectifiable. Because things are by nature unarising in any way, we define "middle way" without reference to them.

6) To possess the clear light nature of a meditational deity is to be "free from the four extremes". To enjoy the nature of non-dual great bliss is identical with dependent origination.

Sanskrit Edition

catuṣkoṭivivirmuktāḥ/ jñānavastu sadkṣaṇīkam//
kalpaśūnyam anālabhyam/ viduḥ sākāravādināḥ//1//

svasamvitter anucchedāt/ nīlādīnām ābhāsanāt//
nimittānām anutpādāt/ madhyamā pratīpat matā//2//

catuṣkoṭivivirmuktaḥ/ prakāśālīkalakṣaṇaḥ//
māyopamādvayaścaīṣa/ siddhānto pramāṇasaṅgaḥ//3//

vastuśūnyā tu yā vittir/ nirāvilā nirañjanā//
madhyamā parīpat saiva/ tatprṣṭhe śuddhasamvṛtiḥ//4//

prakāśo vāprakāśo vā/ tattvato nopalabhyate//
sarvathājātarūpatvāt/ madhyamām apare viduḥ//5//

catuṣkoṭivivirmuktaḥ/ prakāśo devatātmakaḥ//
sukhādvayasvabhāvaśca/ pratītyotpādamātrakaḥ//6//

Notes

¹ Work no. 18 in Haraprasad Shastri, ed.,
Advayavajrasaṅgraha (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1937).

² Tibetan translation by Vajrapāṇi and Nags-tsho
Tshul-khrims-rgyal-ba. Otani Catalogue no. 3074, Tohoku
Catalogue no. 2230.

³ Sunitikumar Pathak, "The Madhyamaṣaṭka of Metri". Adyar
Library Bulletin vol. 25 (1961), pp. 539-49.

⁴ Mark Tatz, "The Life of the Siddha-Philosopher
Maitrīgupta". Journal of the American Oriental Society 107:4
(1987):698b. See also idem, "Maitrī-pa and Atīśa" in Proceedings

of the 4th International Seminar on Tibetan Studies (Munich 1985, in press); and idem, "Maitrīpa and Ratnākaraśānti" in Burmiok Athing Commemorative Volume (Dharmasala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, forthcoming).

⁵ Advayavajra, Amanasikāra-uddeśa, Tohoku no.

2249 = Shastri, ed., op. cit no. 21

⁶ Bu-ston, Gsan-yig p. 116. In The Collected Works of Bu-ston, part 26 (La). Published by Lokesh Chandra. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1971.

⁷ Tatz, tr., "Tattva-Ratnāvalī, The Precious Garland of Verses on Reality, by Advayavajra a.k.a. Maitrīgupta, Maitrīpa" in G. Kuppuram, ed., Recent Researches in Indian Society and Culture: Essays in Honour of Professor Upendra Thakur.

དང་མ་པོ་སྟོང་པར་མིག་པ་གད། །
སྒྲུང་བ་མེད་ཅིང་སྒྲིབ་གཤམ་གས་མེད། །
དེ་ཅིང་དབུ་མ་པ་ཡི་ལམ། །
རྗེས་ཐོབ་དག་པའི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཡིན། །

གསལ་པ་པར་མ་དེ་མི་གསལ་པ། །
དེ་ཅིང་ལ་དེ་དམིགས་སྒྲུ་མེད། །
རྣམ་ཀུན་མ་སྒྲིམ་པ་རང་བཞིན། །
གཞན་དག་དབུ་མ་པ་རྒྱ་འདོད། །

ལམ་པ་བཞི་ལམ་དེ་རྣམ་གྲོལ་བའི། །
གསལ་པ་སྒྲུ་མི་བདག་ཅི་དེ་ཅན། །
གཅིས་མེད་མཚོ་གཏུ་བདེ་བའི་དེ་ལྟ། །
ཉེ་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་བུ་སྒྲུ་མེད་གཅིད། །

དབུ་མ་དག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ། །
སྒྲུ་བ་དཔེ་རྣམས་པའི་དེ་ལ་མཛད་པར་རྫོགས་པོ། །
སྒྲུ་མ་བརྒྱ་ལྟེ་དང་། རྣམས་ཚོས་བསྒྲུ་དཔེ། །