

Notes & Topics

WHAT IS VAJRA ? —2

In the previous issue (Vol VII, No. 2) of this *Bulletin* I wrote in protest of the new fangled Powerbolt in place of the customary Thunderbolt as the English rendering of Sanskrit Vajra. Several scholars write in support. Some think that I have overstated in my zeal of writing English. My expression "Thunder and not Bolt is the essence of Thunderbolt" is suspected as an exercise in English.

My knowledge of Sanskrit (language) is poor and my knowledge of English (language) is poorer. I happen to read and write English as a student of history. For writing I try to follow the ideal of Japanese English and never care to practise Indian English or Chinese English. For translation I try to follow the Tibetan tradition e.g. Nirmanakaya as Sprul-sku and not Avatara or Living Buddha. I thus say that Thunder is the essence of Thunderbolt and that Bolt is not its essence.

In Sanskrit Vajra begins as the weapon of Indra, and both in Brahmanism and Buddhism this weapon is Thunder or Thunderbolt. One of the many names of Indra is Vajrapani.

In the most important Upanishad, *Brihadaranyaka*, occurs an interesting dialogue about the king of gods.

Q. Who is Indra ? A. Indra is thunder (stanayitnuh). Q. What is thunder? A. Thunder is thunderbolt (asanih:lightning). [Sankara renders 'asanih' as 'vajram' and derives 'vajra' from 'virya' which is destructive like Indra.]

Brihadaranyaka III, 9.6. with Sankara's commentary is reproduced below.

कतम इन्द्रः कतमः प्रजापतिरिति स्तनयित्नुरेवेन्द्रो यज्ञः प्रजापतिरिति कतमः स्तनयित्पुरित्यशनिरिति कतमो यज्ञ इति पशव इति ॥

बृहदारण्यकोपनिषद्, ३, ९, ६

कतम इन्द्रः कतमः प्रजापतिरिति, स्तनयित्नुरेवेन्द्रो यज्ञः प्रजापतिरिति, कतमः स्तनयित्पुरित्यशनिरिति । अशनिर्वज्रं वीर्यं बलम्, यत् प्राणिनः प्रमापयति, स इन्द्रः; इन्द्रस्य हि तत् कर्म । कतमो यज्ञ इति पशव इति—यज्ञस्य हि साधनानि पशवः; यज्ञस्धारूपत्वात् पशुसाधनाश्रयत्वाच्च पशवो यज्ञ इत्युच्यते ।

शाङ्करभाष्य ।

Nirmal C. Sinha

In Sakya Kabum (མཇུ་བཀའ་འབྲུམ་) we find four meanings of rDo-rJe (Vajra)-1. Dharmata Vajra (རྣམ་ཉེད་རྫོག་ཅེ་) 2. Lakshana Vajra (མཚན་མཐི་རྫོག་ཅེ་) 3. Guhya Vajra (ལམ་པ་བཞི་རྫོག་ཅེ་) and 4. Rupa Vajra (རྣམ་ཉེད་རྫོག་ཅེ་).

Dharmata Vajra is Sunyata itself. In Kanjur the question is posed:“ You say Vajra Vajra. What you mean by Vajra?” and this answer is offered “Vajra is hard, void, imperishable, indestructable, which can not be cut, which can not be burnt, that is, why it is called Sunyata Vajra.” In Tanjur a more precise definition is found:“Vajra is Dharmakayatmaka which is like Akasa (space).”

Lakshana Vajra that is the symbol of Vajra is made of iron, bronze or some sacred metal. The form of the symbol may be with nine spokes, five spokes, three spokes and sometimes with even unclosed spokes. The spokes represent virtues and functions. In a Vajra with nine spokes, the central spoke stands for Dharmadhatu. A Vajra with five spokes represents the five Jinas or Buddhas in upper half and the five mother goddesses in lower half. The five Buddhas are Vairocana, Amoghasiddhi, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, and Amitabha, that is the Five Wisdoms (ལེ་ཤེས་ལྔ་ལྔ་). The five deities are Mamaki, Pandaravasini, Tara, Locana, and Vajradhatvisvari, that is the Five Elements (རྣམ་ལྔ་ལྔ་). The two summits, called Dharmadhatu, are the two vanishing points and thus also known as Sunyata. The spokes are known to represent the horns (ས་) projecting from crocodile’s mouth and are regarded as instruments to draw out the sufferings of transmigration. The spine or centre of the Vajra consisting of the moon and eight lotus on either side of the moon is itself the sTon-pa-nid or sunyata.

The Secret Vajra as its name suggests has no known appearance. The Substantial Vajra is also a matter more for meditation than for portrait. Diamond has two names in Tibetan: rdo-rje rin-poche and rdo-rje-pha-lam (རྫོག་ཅེ་ལོ་པོ་ཆེ་བ་རྫོག་ཅེ་པ་ལམ་), and in hardness it is compared to the bones of Sho-thung (ཞོ་མཐུང་) that is Dadhi-chi. Hindu legends describe Indra’s weapon, thunder or thunderbolt, as made of Dadhi-chi’s bones. In Tibetan legends and literature rDo-rje is thought of in its material form as thunder or thunderbolt. I give below the extracts from Kanjur, Tanjur and Sakya Kabum describing rDo-rJe as sTon-pa-nid or Sunyata.

(१) བཀའ་འགྲུར།

རྩོམ་རྩོམ་ཞེས་བསྟུངས་པ། ཅི་ཕྱིར་རྩོམ་བརྗོད་པར་བྱ།
སྲ་ཞིང་སྤྱིང་པོ་ཁོང་སྤྱིང་མེད། བཀའ་དང་གཞིག་པར་བྱ་བ་མིན།
བསྟེན་པར་བྱ་མིན་འཛིན་མེད་པས། ཕྱིང་ཉིད་རྩོམ་བརྗོད་པར་བྱ།
རྩོག་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་བྲལ་ཞིང་། ཚོས་སྤྱི་འཛིན་པ་ནམས་སྤངས་པ།
ཚོས་ནམས་ཀུན་གྱི་དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད། ཕྱིང་པ་ཉིད་ཅི་རྩོམ་བརྗོད།

(१) བསྟན་འགྲུར།

རྩོམ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ནི་ནམས་མཁའ་ལྷ་བུའི་ཚོས་ཀྱི་སྐུའི་བདག་ཉིད་དོ།

(२) ས་སྐྱ་བཀའ་འགྲུམ།

ཚོས་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རྩོམ།

Kunga Yonten Hochotsang

GILGIT IN ANCIENT TIMES

Professor Buddha Prakash, in a learned account of ancient Gilgit (pp 15-40), has narrated the fascinating events of political history. For a non-specialist reader of the *Bulletin* it is necessary to state that the English renderings of Chinese terms like "tribute" or "tribute-bearer" are not to be understood in modern sense. The Han diplomatic diction has its own terms to describe protocol, gifts, etc. Vide Hugh Richardson's article on Fish Bag in *Bulletin*, Vol VII No 1.

Gilgit (Bruza), belonging to Tibeto-Buddhist complex, has an equally fascinating cultural history. A non-specialist reader may read Nalinaksha Dutt: *Gilgit Manuscripts* (Srinagar 1939), Vol 1, pp 1-45.

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