

MADHYAMA-ṢAṬKA BY MAITRIGUPTA

Dr. Mark Tatz

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 to 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

catuṣkoṭiviniirmuktam/ jñānavastu sadkṣaṇīkam//
kalpaśūnyam anāmbhyam/ viduḥ sākāravādinah//1//

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

catuṣkoṭiviniirmuktaḥ/ prakāśālīkalakṣaṇaḥ//
māyopamādvayaścaīṣa/ siddānto pramāṇasaṅgaḥ//3//

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

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

catuṣkoṭiviniirmuktaḥ/ 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.

MADHYAMAṢATKA

DERGE TANJUR

༡༡། །ཀྱི་གར་སྐད་དུ། མ་རྒྱུ་མ་ལྟ།
པོད་སྐད་དུ། དབུ་མ་དུག་པ།

མངས་སྐྱ་ས་ལ་ཤུག་ཅེ་ཚེ་ལ་ལོ། །
མཐའ་བཞི་ལས་ནི་རྣམ་གྲོ་ལ་བའི། །
ཤེས་པ་སྐད་ཅིག་ལ་ཡོད་དེ། །
རྟོག་པས་སྐྱོད་ཞིང་དམིགས་པ་མེད། །
རྣམ་བཅས་སྐྱ་བར་ཤེས་པ་རྒྱ། །

ཚད་པ་མ་ཡིན་རུང་འི་གནི། །
སྐྱོན་པོ་ལ་ལོགས་པར་སྐྱུང་བ། །
དེ་ནི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་མ་སྐྱེས། །
དབུ་མ་པ་ཡི་ལམ་དུ་འདོད། །

མཐའ་བཞི་ལས་ནི་རྣམ་གྲོ་ལ་བའི། །
གསལ་པ་བརྒྱན་པའི་མཚན་ཉིད་དེ། །
དེ་ནི་སྐྱ་མ་ལྟར་གཉིས་མེད། །
ཚད་མའ་ལྟར་པའི་གྲུབ་མཐའོ། །

དང་མ་པོ་སྟོང་པར་རིག་པ་གད་།
སྤང་བ་མེད་ཅིང་སྐྱིབ་གཤམ་གས་མེད།
དེ་ཅིང་དབུ་མ་པ་ཡི་ལམ།
ཇི་སྲིད་དག་པའི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཡིན།

གསལ་པ་བཟུང་ཏེ་མི་གསལ་བ།
དེ་ཅིང་ལ་ཤིང་མི་གསལ་མེད།
རྣམ་ཀུན་མ་སྐྱེས་པ་རང་བཞིན།
གཞན་དག་དབུ་མ་པ་ལྟ་བུ་འདོད།

ལམ་པ་བཞི་ལས་ནི་རྣམ་གྲོལ་བའི།
གསལ་པ་སྟེང་བའི་གཉིད་ཅན།
གཉིས་མེད་མཚོག་ཏུ་བདེ་བའི་དེད་མ།
ཉེན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་བུ་སྤྲོད་ཅོལ་བའི་གཉིད།

དབུ་མ་དྲག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།
སྤྱོད་དཔེ་ལས་ལས་པ་མེད་ཏེ་སྤང་བ་རྫོགས་པ་སྟོ།།
སྤང་བ་རྫོགས་ཏེ་དང་། རྣམ་མཚོག་པ་སྤྲོད་པ་སྟོ།།