

CHAPTER IX

The Road Not to Be Taken: An Introduction to Two Ninth-Century Works Against Buddhist Antinomian Practice

PÉTER-DÁNIEL SZÁNTÓ, UNIVERSITEIT LEIDEN

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to share some reflections on two works, to the best of my knowledge hitherto overlooked, that discuss antinomian practices in Indian tantric Buddhism. Both are preserved only in Tibetan translation, but there can be little doubt that there were Sanskrit originals behind them. The two works are related, as they were written by master and disciple. The master, the otherwise unknown *Dharmendra (Tib. Chos kyi dbang po), was the author of a learned treatise on Mahāyāna practice, the title of which may be reconstructed as **Tattvasārasaṃgraha* (Tib. *De kho na nyid kyi snying po bsdus pa*). The lion's share of this text is more or less irrelevant for the present study, but it is perhaps not insignificant to note that for the author, it is the Madhyamaka which represents the ultimate teaching, while the Yogācāra is said to serve a propaedeutic purpose. In the last part of his work, the author, answering the question of a literary objector, explains why he does not discuss the Mantrayāna, that is to say tantric Buddhism. The position he adopts is, as far as I can tell, a rather rare one: he seems to accept the tantric revelation as perfectly valid, but he argues that its practices are to be avoided in the present day and age. The second work is by his disciple, the also otherwise unknown *Udbhaṭa Coyaga (Tib. Mtho btsun btso yangs, with several variants for the second element), the title of whose treatise can be reconstructed as **Mantranayāloka* (Tib. *Gsang sngags kyi tshul snang ba*). In the introduction the author explains that the position of his master was met with some controversy and that his own work aims to clarify that view. In other words,

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it is an apology written in *Dharmendra's defence. If we give credence to the colophons, both works were translated in Western Tibet in the first half of the eleventh century, as the Tibetan translator in both cases is the famous Rin chen bzang po, who passed away in 1055 CE. The Indian contributor to the work listed here first is one *Janārdana, whereas in the case of the other it is the somewhat better-known Padmākaravarman. This gives us an upper limit for dating the two texts. However, as I hope to show below, their age is much greater, perhaps by as much as two centuries.

2. The authors and their times

Nothing is known about the authors except what they tell us. *Dharmendra calls himself a follower of the Mahāyāna and the son of a brahmin called *Nāgendra (D 100r *bram ze Klu yi dbang po'i bu*). The authorship colophon styles him an *ācārya*.

His disciple is even more obscure. The first part of his name may be reconstructed as *Udbhaṭa (*mtho btsun*), but the second half is very problematic. It is variously spelt as *btso yangs*, *mtso yags*, *tso yag*, and *btso yags*. The variations suggest that this is not a translation but a phonetic transcription. The word is obviously not Sanskritic. The surname Choyaga is known in current Nepal, but it is extremely rare. Compare this with Newar¹ *coya* (vb.) “to write”, “to paint”, but also (n.) “writing”, “book”, *coyakē* (vb.) “to announce”, “to proclaim”. For the time being I interpret the *-ga* as a voiced and, if the form was *Coyag*, perhaps truncated Skt. *kan* suffix, therefore **coyaka* must mean something like “writer”, “painter”, or perhaps a title of office. In the authorship colophon, *Udbhaṭa is styled a “great *vajrācārya*” (D 78v *rdo rje slob dpon chen po*), a somewhat puzzling title in light of his views. He does not mention his master by name, but does refer to the title of *Dharmendra's work (D 76r) and the contents he discusses match the ideas of the **Tattvasārasaṃgraha* perfectly. Therefore there can be little doubt that his anonymous guru is none other than *Dharmendra.

If I am right to take the second half of *Udbhaṭa's name as a Newar word, then he was Nepalese in origin. Chances are therefore strong that both he and his master were inhabitants of Nepal.

The lower limit for the activity of *Dharmendra is provided by his referenced quotation of the opening verse of Śāntarakṣita's **Madhyamakālaṃkāra*

¹ Jørgensen 1935 [1989] s.v.

(D 85v = D 53r, ed. CXIII). Since Śāntarakṣita flourished in the second half of the eighth century, *Dharmendra must have been either a contemporary or lived later. It is perhaps noteworthy that he also refers to and quotes Kam-bala's *Ālokaṃālā*—or a version thereof—rather often (here I trace only referenced quotations: D 87r-87v = ?, 89r = ?, 91v = 174-177ab, 92r = 13, 93v = 205-206, 95r = 129-131, 95r-95v = 267).

The quotations from tantric sources will be discussed below in greater detail. What is important to note here is that the textual pool employed by both *Dharmendra and *Udbhaṭa reflects an exegetical environment typical of the ninth century. I have in mind works such as the *Sūtakamelāpaka* (better known by a title not attested in Sanskrit, *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa*) of the most famous of the tantric Āryadevas, the *Tattvasiddhi* of pseudo-Śāntarakṣita, the *Sāramañjarī* of Samantabhadra, and, to some extent, the *Nāmamantrārthāvalokinī* of Vilāsavajra. The highest doxographical category mentioned is the *yogatantra*; *yoginītantras* are not mentioned at all, neither the category, nor any text that is later classified into this category. Titles referred to are the following: the *Nayatrāyapradīpa* [of Trivikrama], the *Paramādya*, and the *Guhyendutilaka*. Unreferenced quotations can be traced as hailing from the *Guhyasamāja*, the (now lost) *Laukikalokottara-vajratāntra*, and, again, the *Paramādya*. Four verses are referenced with an unfamiliar title; three of these are either from the *Guhyasiddhi* or a common source.

Based on this circumstantial evidence I have little hesitation to state that both works must date to the ninth century and were possibly written in Nepal, although the evidence for the localisation, a tentative identification of an onomastic element, is quite feeble.

3. The debate

3.1 The position of *Dharmendra's opponent

*Dharmendra's work is written mainly in prose with occasional verses summing up a particular topic. It is very rich in quotations. The passage we are concerned with here is the last question asked by an imaginary opponent (D 98v-99r). His position may be summarised as follows. The Lord recognised that followers of the Mahāyāna can be grouped into three categories according to spiritual capacity: low, middling, and highest. For those of the highest

degree, he revealed the Mantrayāna (*sngags kyi theg pa*), by which one may achieve perfect enlightenment in a single moment. This vehicle differs in its means, but it does not differ in what those means lead to. How is it then that *Dharmendra would not teach the Mantrayāna?

To illustrate and validate his viewpoint, the opponent marshals five quotations from four different sources. Fortunately, all of these are popular verses and they are all extant in Sanskrit.

The first (D 98v) is a celebrated verse from the *Nayatrāyapradīpa* (D 16r)² summarising the differences between exoteric and esoteric Buddhism: although their aim is the same, the tantric path is supreme, because it is free of confusion, it has varied means, it is easy, and it is meant for the choicest individuals.

The second and third quotations (ibid.) are attributed to the *Paramādya*, somewhat surprisingly styled as *sngags kyi tshul*, **mantranaya* (D 241v and 242v).³ The central idea of these verses is that buddhahood and one's person are not different. This can be realised by achieving and maintaining—even outside formal sessions of visualisation—meditative union (*yoga*) with one's presiding/chosen deity (*svādhidaivata*). The method is said to be so efficient that even those who have not obtained initiation and possess little merit or wisdom can be successful.

² The verse is cited in the following form *inter alia* in Advayavajra's *Tattvaratnāvalī* (p. 21), the *Subhāṣitasamgraha* (part II, p. 7), and Sahajavajra's *Sthitisamāsa* (Ms. 11v, D 96v): *ekārthatve 'py asaṃmohād bahūpāyād aduṣkarāt | tīkṣṇendriyādhikārāc ca mantrasāstraṃ viśiṣyate ||*. With regard to the text in the *Subhāṣitasamgraha*, Bendall's reading *vajropāyād* for *bahūpāyād* is a simple corruption or a misreading. Some testimonies read *mantranītiḥ praśasyate* as the last verse quarter, e.g. Vibhūticandra's *Amṛtakaṇikoddyota* (p. 137). Ratnarakṣita's *Padminī* (Ms. 35v, D 73r) has further variants: *mahāprajñādhikārāc ca mantranītir viśiṣyate*. The original Sanskrit of this work was found only very recently.

³ These verses are also often cited and they are usually attributed to the *Śamvara*, which adopted them from the *Paramādya*. I quote the verses as they are found in that text (Ms. 2v-3r, D 152r-152v): *ātmā vai sarvabuddhatvaṃ sarvaśauritvaṃ eva ca | svādhidaivatayogena tasmād ātmaiva sādhyat ||; utthito vā niṣaṇṇo vā caṅkraman vā yathāsthitaḥ | prahasan vā prajalpan vā yatra tatra yathā tathā || amaṇḍalapraviṣṭo vā sarvāvaraṇavān api | svādhidaivatayogātmā mandapuṇyo 'pi sidhyati ||*.

This idea is emphasised by the next (*ibid.*), unattributed verse, which corresponds to *Guhyasamājatantra* 5.3ab-2cd.⁴ Here it is stated that even those who have committed heinous crimes such as the five of immediate retribution can achieve accomplishment in this supreme vehicle, that is to say, the Mantrayāna.

The last verse spells out the method of achievement: it is through pleasure, and not by tormenting the body, that one obtains buddhahood. The stanza is unattributed, but it corresponds to a quotation in the *Tattvasiddhi* (D 30v), where the source is given as the *Laukikalokottaravajratāntra*, a lost scripture.⁵

3.2 *Dharmendra's answer

*Dharmendra silently acknowledges that the cited stanzas are part of valid revelation. He must have done so, since otherwise the refutation would have started with something to the effect that he does not accept these scriptures as authoritative (*buddhavaśana*), or even their condemnation as the words of the Devil (*mārabhāṣita*). In fact, in his elaboration he praises the tantric means as being profound. He chooses to pin down his opponent on another point (D 99r-99v), suitability, stating that in this day and age there are no such “supreme” persons who would be worthy for tantric practices, and chances are that there will not be any in the future either.

What follows is an elaboration on this point with various metaphors. Nowadays, so *Dharmendra, people “burn” their mental continuum with the firewood consisting of false views such as that of “I” and “mine”, which stems from ignorance. Their minds are scattered by the wind of their own conceptualisations, adrift owing to the waves of affliction, sick because of their involvement in perverse views. How could such people be suitable for the practice of tantric methods that are vast, profound, beyond this world?

⁴ Perhaps this is a rearrangement of the author, or he is citing a different recension. As far as I can see, this problem is irrelevant for the present enquiry. The two lines are: *śidhyanti agrayāne 'smin mahāyāne hy anuttare || ānantaryaprabhṛtayo mahā-pāpakṛto 'pi ca* |.

⁵ This is only one of many earlier scriptures that have been “lost”, that is to say, no longer extant in Sanskrit and not translated into Tibetan or Chinese. The verse is: *sukhena labhyate siddhir na siddhiḥ kāyatāpanaiḥ | yasmāt samādhisambhūtaṃ buddhatvaṃ sarvasaukhyataḥ* ||. Note that *Dharmendra's quotation has **bodhiḥ* for both occurrences of *siddhiḥ*.

The Lord, continues *Dharmendra, taught the Mantranaya in the old times, when there indeed were aspirants of quality. But, since he is omniscient and sees everything, he realised that in the future it will not be so, hence he also banned tantric practices. To illustrate this point, the author gives four scriptural quotations.

The first two, amounting to four verses in total, are attributed to a somewhat mysteriously titled scripture, the *Gsang sngags kyi theg pa tshul* (**Mantrayānanaya*). The three verses in the second block are undoubtedly from the *Guhyasiddhi*, yet another early source; however, the first cannot be traced in the transmission available to us. Here is a tentative translation:

And this has been taught by the Lord in the Mode of the Vehicle of Mantras: “They [i.e. questionable tantric practitioners] are not versed in wisdom and they are soaked in the stains of egoism. Their behaviour beyond [the conventions of] the world will lead nowhere but the hells.” From the same source, “Those bereft of the splendid methods who practise perverse *samayas* and so forth and behave in opposition [to worldly morality] will fry in the Raurava hell. To give an example: [suppose] one were to throw a heap of grass and wood into a roaring fire; it will burn to ashes and will never resume its [previous] form [i.e. grass and wood]. In the same way, one devoid of [a proper understanding of] reality, committing curious deeds, will stay in hell after death as long as the sky abides.”⁶

⁶ D 99r-99v: *de yang bcom ldan 'das kyis Gsang sngags kyi theg pa tshul las | shes rab de ni mi shes shing | | ngar 'dzin dri mas spags pa rnams | | de yi 'jig rten 'das spyod pa | | dmyal bar 'gro ba kho nar zad | | ces gsungs pa dang | yang de nyid las | thabs bzang rnam par spangs nas ni | | 'gal ba'i dam tshig la sogs pa | | gang zhig gzhan du byed pa dag | de ni ngu 'bod dag tu 'tshed | | dper na 'di na rab 'bar mer | | rtswa dang shing la sogs pa'i tshogs | | bcug pa thal ba nyid 'gyur gyis | | slar ni rab tu skye mi 'gyur | | de bzhin de nyid rnam bral bar | | shin tu rmad byung las byed pa | | ji srid nam mkha' gnas par du | | shi nas dmyal bar 'gro bar 'gyur | | zhes gsungs pa [...]* Cf. *Guhyasiddhi* 1.33-35: *anyathā ye prakurvanti divyopāya-vivarjitāḥ | viruddhasamayādīni pacyante te tu raurave || yathā vahnau pradīpte 'smin tṛṇadārvādisaṃcayaḥ | prakṣipto bhasmatām yāti praroḥaṃ na punar vra-jet || tathā tattvavihīnās tu kurvanto 'tyadbhūtāni tu | vipannā narakam yānti yāvad ākāśasambhavaḥ ||*. Note, however, that *Dharmendra treats the verses as scriptural, since he refers to the speaker as the *bhagavān* before the first verse, and then says that the other three are from the same text.

The following two quotations are also extant in Sanskrit. Although they are marked in a way that would suggest two different *loci*, the verses occur in succession both in the *Sāramañjarī* (Ms. 35v, D 41r-41v) and in the *Tattvasiddhi* (D 27v).⁷

The first verse may have two meanings. If we take *kārayet* as a true causative, then the subject is presumably a teacher and the object a disciple. For the present debate, this is the more apposite meaning: a master must examine a disciple well before judging what type of teaching to bestow on him. However, in this register of Sanskrit the causative may substitute the simplex, in which case the subject is a prospective practitioner, who is enjoined to examine well the path he wishes to take. Failing that, it will be sixteen times more dangerous than entering fire. Only those, the second verse adds, who have a thorough knowledge of “reality” will obtain accomplishment; others court perdition.

*Dharmendra sums up by saying that according to these quotations, the *Mantranaya* is not for common people and that teaching it is not endorsed (*dgag pa*). He embraces this view and will therefore not teach the Way of Mantras.

3.3 *Udbhaṭa’s apology

3.3.1 The introduction of the **Mantranayāloka*

The sole aim of *Dharmendra’s disciple was to defend his teacher’s position concerning the matters related above. He does not discuss the exoteric *Mahāyāna* at all. The **Mantranayāloka* is entirely in verse and the meaning is sometimes difficult to understand. After the customary obeisance verse, this is what the author tells us:

Times are bad and men are of little worth. This is what my master saw and he did not endorse the teaching of the *Mantranaya*, hence

⁷ These are: *sunirūpya susaṃcintya praveśaṃ kārayed budhaḥ | anyathāgnipraveśo 'sya kalāṃ nārghati śoḍaśīm || tattvaṃ vijñāya yatnena yo 'dhimuktiṃ niṣevate | sa sidhyaty anyathā tasya mahānirayapātanam ||*. The Tibetan translation of the *Sāramañjarī* adds that these verses are from the “*Guhyendutilaka* etc.”. The attribution probably comes from the *Tattvasiddhi*, where the same pair occurs in a group of verses of which only the first three lines can be traced in the *Guhyendutilaka*. In *Dharmendra’s version, the reading was *tattvaṃ vijñāya *tattvena* rather than the one given above.

in his **Tattvasārasaṃgraha* he presented both reasons (**yukti*) and the intention [of the Lord] (**abhiprāya*) [that is to say, why he first taught the *Mantranaya* and why he forbid its practice later]. There were some dull-witted people who either did not understand [his reasoning] or they were [merely] jealous. They misrepresented [his views] and on account of their confusion [even] disparaged him. My effort [in writing this work] is dedicated to saving them before they fall like a moth into the fire that is the sin of abandoning him.⁸

The choice of verbs (“disparage”, *brnyas*; “abandon”, *spang*) seems to suggest that the people **Udbhaṭa* has in mind here are not members of the general public, but **Dharmendra*’s disciples.⁹

The next five verses elaborate on the same idea, but this time the aim of criticism is more general, that is to say not restricted to allusions to the master’s disciples. People, says **Udbhaṭa*, hear that phenomena are without self, and dimwits as they are, they immediately engage in practices worthy of the Materialists (*rgyang phan*, **cārvāka/lokāyata*). Their diet and behaviour are discretionary, they disparage gurus and *kalyāṇamitras*, their minds are overcome by concepts of “I” and “mine”. They commit all sorts of sinful acts

⁸ D 76r [vv. 2-5]: *dus kyi bdag nyid ngan pa dang* || ‘gro ba’ang skal ba med pa dag || gzigs nas bdag gi bla ma yis || gsang sngags tshul bshad bkag pa yin || ‘di ltar de nyid kyis mdzad pa’i || De nyid snying po bsduṣ par ni || de ma bshad pa’i rigs pa dang || dgongs pa yang na [read ni] bstan pa yin || gang yang blo dman kha cig ni || der des ma rtogs pa nyid dam || phrag dog yin par dogs byed cing || rmongs pa yis kyang de brnyes [read brnyas] byed || de spang sdig pa’i me nang du || phye ma leb ltar ji srid ni || ltung bar ma gyur de srid du || de skyob pa la bdag ‘bad do ||

⁹ Cf. *Gurupañcāśikā*, Ed. v. 10: *tannāthaṃ* [read *taṃ nāthaṃ*] *yo ‘vamaṇyeta* [read *nāvamaṇyeta*] *śiṣyo bhūyasacetasaḥ* [read *śiṣyībhūya kadācana*] | *sarvabuddhāpamāṇena sa nityaṃ duḥkham āpnuyāt* || and v. 14: *ye narakāḥ samākhyātā avīcīyādya bhayānakāḥ* | *tatra vāsaḥ samākhyāta ācāryasya hi nindanāt* ||. I intend to publish a new edition of this work, so this is not the place to go into detailed reasons for emending Lévi’s text in 10ab so heavily. Suffice it to say that in the new manuscript, the line reads *tan nāthan nāvamaṇyeta śikhyībhūya* (and not *śikhībhūya* as I erroneously report in my diplomatic transcript; in any case, also Lévi misread his source here, which actually has *śiṣyī*° and *kadācanaḥ*). This is how I interpret these verses: “Once he [i.e. the candidate for initiation] has become a disciple, he should never disparage that protector [i.e. the guru], for he shall invariably obtain suffering for having disparaged [one who is the equivalent of] all buddhas. [...] Verily, it is said that he shall find his abode in those frightful hells, taught to be Avīci and the others, by disparaging the teacher.”

without a proper understanding of the Buddha's true teaching. By this they destroy not only themselves, but also others. They are no better than demons who modify and hence destroy the Tathāgata's teaching. The author repeats his *pratijñā* with a different wording: his elucidation in the present work is dedicated to destroying these "demons".¹⁰

The next two verses side with worldly morality and emphasise the purity of the Buddha's teaching:

Abandoning proper behaviour as it is known in the world—with the exception of the Materialists—is not accepted even by the outsiders; what to speak of followers of the Buddha! [For] the [Buddhist] teaching [aims at] overcoming the [two] obscurations, i.e. the afflicting (*kleśāvaraṇa*) and the cognitive (*jñeyāvaraṇa*), as well as [at] vanquishing Māras. It is free of all faults and these numbskulls smear it with their filth.¹¹

3.3.2 The position of the opponents

The next eleven verses present the opponents' *pūrvapakṣa*. They state that in the *yogatantras* the Protector (*skyob pa*, **tāyin*) [i.e. the Buddha] did allow *yogins* to eat and act as they please. The authority of the *Guhyendutilaka* is evoked and a hallmark verse of that text is paraphrased: there is nothing that a *yogin* may not do.¹²

¹⁰ D 76r-76v [vv. 6-10]: 'di na chos bdag med pa ni | | thos pa can [=tsam] gyis blo ngan rnams | | phal cher rgyang ban [=phan] grub mtha' yi | | gzhung lugs la ni kun du brten | | zas dang spyod lam la sogs pa | | ngan pa rang dga' nyid du byed | | bla ma dge ba'i bshes gnyen yang | | mi shes dregs pas smod par byed | | bdag dang bdag gir 'dzin smyo byed | | cung zad tsam yang btsal bar ni | | mi nus bzhin du chos rnams kyi | | ngo bo med pa nyid du'ang smra | | thub pa chen po'i bstan pa yi | | de nyid don ni mi shes par | | mi bzad las kyis bcom pa rnams | | gzhan dag kyang ni rlag par byed | | bde gshegs gzhung du bcos pa yi | | bstan pa 'jig byed bdud de ni | | gzhom pa'i don du bdag cag gis | | de nyid cung zad bstan par bya |

¹¹ D 76v [vv. 11-12]: 'jig rten grags lam bzang spong ba | | 'jig rten rgyang pan [=phan] ma gtogs pa | | mu stegs pa yang 'dod min na | | sangs rgyas rjes 'brang smos ci dgos | | nyon mongs shes bya'i sgrib 'jig cing | | bdud rnams 'joms pa'i bstan pa ni | | nyes pa kun las rnam grol ba | | blo gros ngan pas dri mas gos |

¹² D 76v [v. 15]: de yang 'di ni gsal nyid du | | Zla gsang thig le la sogs las | | rnal 'byor pa yis mi bya ba | | ci yang med ces gsungs pa yin |. The paraphrase is undoubtedly of the famous verse: *nāsti kiṃcid akartavyaṃ prajñopāyena cetasā | nirviśaṅkaḥ sadā bhūtvā bhuṅkṣva tvaṃ kāmapañcakam* ||. This verse is quoted with some mi-

What counts as dharma-congruent or contrary to that, continue the opponents, is just a construct of the mind; there is no evidence to the effect that things in themselves are so. It is true that the Tathāgata has both promoted and forbidden tantric practices, but he forbade them, out of compassion, only to those who still hang on the idea that deeds bring about retribution. In reality all things are without a self, unreal like an *utpala* flower in the sky; they cannot therefore bring about suffering. Of course, one may object that this is the case with tantric practices as well. However, they are in a way special, inasmuch as they are empty but also bear fruit.¹³ When the mind realises the equality (*mnyam nyid*, *samatā*) of all things, it becomes pure and obtains enlightenment. When one realises the ultimate truth, namely that all phenomena are but an illusion, one becomes like a perfect *buddha* in this world, and may act in whatever way. If there is anything that the Buddha truly forbade for tantric practitioners, it is asceticism. Could one call a person who does not pay heed to scriptural statements such as “enlightenment is obtained through pleasure”¹⁴ a thorough connoisseur of the teaching? Surely not. Therefore all these objections are merely the prattle of those for whom the eye of wisdom is shut by the torpor of ignorance.

3.3.3 *Udbhaṭa’s refutation

*Udbhaṭa, much like his master, does not begin by dismissing the evoked scriptures as spurious. In fact, he does quite the opposite: it is true, he begins, that the *tantras* uttered by the Protector promote such ideas (more precisely: *samayas* and *samvaras*, tantric commitments and vows), but one must submit them to critical examination. This is what the bulk of the work does in the next forty verses (D 77r-78v, vv. 26-66).

If relying on things that are not to be eaten (*bza’ min*, **abhakṣya*) and improper sexual intercourse (*bgrod min*, **agamyā*) as the cause of enlighten-

nor differences in a number of 9th-century works, such as the *Tattvasiddhi* (D 27v), the *Sāramañjarī* (Ms. 35r, D missing, because this is a translation of a shorter recension), and the *Viṃśatividhi* (Ms. 7r, D 143v).

¹³ Here I have developed the opponents’ argument slightly. The passage (D 76v-77r) [...] ‘*di dag khyad ’phags pa’i* | | *tshogs pa dang ni ldan gyur pas* | | ‘*bras bu khyad ’phags nyid ’byin te* | echoes the central argument of the *Tattvasiddhi* (Moriguchi 1993: 167, D 26v): *viśiṣṭā hi sāmāgrī viśiṣṭam eva phalaṃ janayati*.

¹⁴ The short quotation may refer to several passages. One could be the verse from the *Laukikalokottaravajratāntra* given above (n. 5): *sukhena labhyate bodhi[h]*.

ment, how can it be that common people (*tha mal pa*, **prākṛta*[*jana*]) and animals have not been liberated yet? Moreover, things possess their own specific power (*nus pa*, **śakti*), which cannot be changed: turmeric is yellow and excrement is disgusting. Poison inevitably leads to death, washing results in cleansing, and things that are not to be eaten produce sin (*sdig pa*, **pāpa*); this is simply the way things are. One may object that the power of poison is verifiable. The author assures us that it can be inferred that things not to be eaten, etc. are efficacious in the same way, except that this is invisible.

In the next verses the author takes the debate to a social plane and his reasoning suddenly starts to sound like a socio-political pamphlet. Acts in opposition to worldly morality, so **Udbhaṭa*, will attract nothing but the scorn of society and the punishment of temporal authority. Ironically, he continues, *yogins* suddenly forget about the insubstantiality of things when they suffer, and in spite of their assertions that all things are insubstantial, they are not loathe to seeking profit and prestige.

Deluded people who commit perverse acts will first be disparaged by society at large and then be destroyed by the punishment of the king or another [temporal authority]. [...] Where does [your assertion about] the insubstantiality of things disappear, when it comes to being afflicted by hunger, thirst, cold, heat, torpor, and lethargy? How is it that *yogins* are not utterly ashamed when it comes to the desire of profit and being honoured, in spite of [their assertion that] all phenomena are without a self?¹⁵

**Udbhaṭa* then turns to the problem of effects beyond perception (D 77v, vv. 35-37). His opponents clearly like things that are profitable and shun things that cause pain. Why would they not accept then that there are indeed things to be adopted (*blang bya*, **upādeya*) and things to be avoided (*spang bya*, **heya*) whose results are only perceptible after death? If deeds and fruition do not form a causal relation, then why do the opponents even bother to make efforts to alleviate hunger and thirst?

¹⁵ D 77r-77v (vv. 31, 33-34): *phyin ci log gi las byed na* | | *re zhig 'jig rten smod byed la* | | *de bzhin rgyal po la sogs kyi* | | *chad pas rmongs pa 'jig par 'gyur* | [...] *bkres skom tsha grang rmugs pa dang* | | *gnyid sogs kyis rab gdungs gyur pa* | | *snang na de ru khyod kyi ni* | | *dnegos po med pa gang du song* | | *chos rnams thams cad bdag med la* | | *rnyed dang bkur sti 'dod pa nyid* | | *snang na rnal 'byor pa dag ni* | | *shin tu ngo mtshar cis mi byed* |

The discussion is at this point brought back to the world of hermeneutics. If, as the opponents assert, and with this the author seems to agree, the word of the Buddha is to be divided into provisional sense (*drang don*, **neyārtha*) and final sense (*nges don*, **nītārtha*), why is it that the prescribed *samayas* are not interpreted as only provisional, i.e. something that needs to be interpreted, not to be taken at face value (D 77v, v. 38). In order to prove this point, in v. 39 (D 77v) the author evokes the authority of Jñānakīrti's *Tattvāvatāra* (traced in D 55r). The verse itself is a little difficult at first sight, but the idea is made clear by the comment affixed to the verse in the original.¹⁶ The point is that *samayas*, etc. were taught in order to gain control over *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas*, *piśācas*, and other such preternatural entities for those who need some kind of proof to gain trust (*vid rton*, **viśvāsa*) in the efficacy and therefore truthfulness of the Buddha's word. Those who wish to undertake such practices are free to do so, but the Buddha did not teach them as obligatory practices (D 77v, vv. 40-41).

The next verses develop *Dharmendra's central argument. *Udbhaṭa is willing to accept that certain great beings, true *yogins*, did obtain accomplishment by relying on *samayas*, but this is just impossible for the dimwits of the present age. The proof is that we do not see anyone's practice bearing fruit. The opponents have stated above that one may do as one pleases when one has become a perfect *buddha*, but, the author retorts, we have no such beings displaying the marks of a perfect *buddha* (D 77v-78r, vv. 42-49). The next verses (D 78r, vv. 50-56) are occasionally obscure and do not, as far as I can see, present new arguments. *Udbhaṭa also points out that the opponents simply fail to take into account the prohibition endorsed by the Buddha in the two verses also cited by *Dharmendra¹⁷ (D 78r-78v, vv. 57-61).

In the closing verses the author re-iterates his master's position, but he is not quite as dismissive. He says that generally the teaching of *tantras* should be concealed; should there ever be a worthy person (*skal dang ldan pa*, **bhavya*), he will hear this from his guru (D 78v, vv. 62-66). The final verse contains the customary dedication of merit gained from the composition.

¹⁶ D 55r: *gang zhig de bsgrub par 'dod pa rnams la de'i thabs ni 'di yin no zhes thabs bstan pa yin gyis* [read *gyi*] *nges par bya dgos so zhes bstan pa ni ma yin no ||*

¹⁷ Here we have a repetition of the verses beginning with *sunirūpya* and *tattvaṃ vijñāya*. See n. 7 above.

4. Reflections

This exegetical standpoint, namely that the teaching of certain antinomian practices does not concern the present age but some hoary past, is not unheard of. What is remarkable, however, is how very “modern” this text is. At least as far as I am aware, the next corpus where a similar view is expressed is in the late Śākta-Śaiva *tantras* of Bengal, where previously prescribed antinomian practices (drinking liquor seems to be the typical example) are exiled into the distant past: it was proper practice for men of yore, but not for the present Kaliyuga.¹⁸

These scholastic discussions, arguments and counter-arguments are quite fascinating in their own right and certainly deserve a more than a perfunctory treatment such as the one given here. However, what is perhaps even more important is the historical information we may gather from the polemic. If I read the debate correctly, it would seem that there was a small minority of Buddhist masters who acknowledged the validity of the tantric revelation but would not teach it. Their precise motivation cannot be ascertained, although some clues are present: inviting the scorn of society and the displeasure of temporary authorities must have been a pressing social issue and a very strong reason. On the other hand, it would also seem that not teaching tantric material resulted in the dissatisfaction of some students and co-religionists. *Dharmendra and *Udbhaṭa, if one may put it this way, chose to castrate the transgressive esoteric revelation, but they could not deny it. The latter strategy would have been much simpler, and thus one must infer that esoteric practice was, at least in the environment these two authors worked in, too well embedded to be rejected altogether.

¹⁸ See quotations listed in the introduction to the *Kāṭhīlāsatantra*, pp. 1–5.

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