

## 10. The *laukika* : *lokottara* contrast in Mahāyāna Sūtras and Śāstras

The motif of the mundane level of *samsāra* being overcome by the supramundane/transmundane level of the Ārya, or of the Buddha himself, is not confined to the Vajrayāna alone. Reference has been made above to emanationist and docetist motifs in the Candrādi-utpatti chapter of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* (*supra*, p. 31) and to the *topos* of subordination and submission in the same Sūtra (*supra*, p. 57). Although these schemas are distinguishable as paradigms and models, it appears that they may converge in so far as a *Laukika* who has submitted to the supramundane may come to be seen as a sort of emanation of the latter in a docetic perspective. Furthermore, the docetic emanation or projection (*nirmāṇa*) and the divinity of the religious substratum who enters into a convention (*samaya*) and offers his vow (*samvara*) as well as his formula (*mantra*) to the representative of the *lokottara* level both operate on the *laukika* level which in either case stands in structured opposition to the *lokottara* level.

A further interesting instance of the idea of the mundane level being overwhelmed by the supramundane in the canonical and commentarial literature of the Prajñāpāramitā may be cited here. On the two Paths of the accumulation of the wholesome salutary factors – the *sambhāra-mārga* – and of practice – the *prayogamārga* – the exercitant is classified as a *prthagjana* ‘worldling’, and is accordingly situated on the *laukika* Path. But on reaching the Path of Vision – the *darśanamārga* – and when continuing onwards on the Path of meditative Realization – the *bhāvanā-mārga* – the exercitant, although still some way removed from the ultimate level of one beyond training (*aśaikṣa*, i.e. the *buddha*), is considered a ‘Noble’ (*ārya*) on the *lokottara* level. Thus, in the frame of the traditional description of the Buddhist Path, the contrast mundane : supramundane noticed above takes on a primordial significance that is both soteriological and gnoseological.

Buddhism has, in addition, distinguished between the supramundane Path of meditative realization (*bhāvanāmārga*) just mentioned, which is specific to the Buddhist Ārya, and a way of meditative realization (*bhāvanā*) that is on the contrary regarded as mundane (*laukika*), and which is common to all practisers and Yogins. In this case, then, the contrast *laukika* : *lokottara* is employed in order to differentiate between what is

specific to Buddhism at its higher levels and what is not specifically Buddhist, in other words what is held in common between the Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions of India.<sup>105</sup>

A highly significant reference to the subordination of the mundane to the supramundane is to be found in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (ii, p. 33). In this important canonical text of the Mahāyāna, Śakra, the lord of the gods, together with the fourty thousand Trāyastrimśatkāyika Devaputras, the four Lokapālas (i.e. the Cāturmahārājakāyikas) with the twenty thousand other Mahārājakāyikas, Brahmā Sabhāpati with the ten thousand other Brahmakāyikas, and the ten thousand Śuddhāvāsa Devaputras<sup>106</sup> all take their places in the great assembly (*parṣad*) of the Buddha's auditors where their lustre (*avabhāsa*, resulting from the maturing of their previous good deeds) is overwhelmed (*abhibhūta*) by the might (*anubhāva*), glory (*tejas*) and sustaining force (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of the Buddha. The divinities thus outshone are specifically those – such as the Thirty-three and the Mahārājakāyikas – situated on the level of the Kāmadhātu – and those – the Brahmakāyikas – connected with the four Dhyanas on the intermediate level of the Rūpadhātu, and the Śuddhāvāsa gods on the high (but still far from supreme) level between the fourth Dhyāna and the Ārūpya level.<sup>107</sup>

In the relevant passage of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, this outshining by the Buddha of the limited lustre of the gods, which comes to an end when their stock of good works is exhausted, has been referred to as an obscuration (*dhyāmīkaraṇatā*) of the gods and godlings by the overwhelming effulgent rays (*bhāḥ*) emitted by the Buddha (ii.1ab):

*dhyāmīkaraṇatā bhābhir devānāṃ yogyatāṃ prati/*

With respect to aptitude (*yogyatā*), there is obscuration of divinities by rays [emitted by the Tathāgata].<sup>108</sup>

<sup>105</sup> For some references see D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Buddha-nature, Mind and the problem of Gradualism*, p. 195 f.

<sup>106</sup> On this last category in the Pali tradition, see Malasekera, *DPPN*, p. 1190. And on the other categories listed here see above, pp. 49 f., 59.

<sup>107</sup> For the taxonomy, see, e.g., *Mahāvīyutpatti* nos. 3072 ff.; the Lokanirdeśa chapter (chap. iv) of the *Abhidharmakośa*; and E. Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, i, p. 759 ff.

<sup>108</sup> The Tibetan translation of *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* ii.1ab reads:

That is, the level of continuing karmically conditioned bondage in the round of existences (*saṃsāra*) is symbolized by the gods and godlings, who are themselves fettered to *saṃsāra* and whose relative lustre is therefore outshone, and thus overwhelmed, by the Buddha's transmundane and supernal radiance.

This passage from the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, the basic Śāstra of the Prajñāparamitā, stands at the beginning of its second chapter which treats of knowledge of the Path (*mārgajñatā* = *lam šes pa ñid*) leading ultimately to Omniscience in Buddhahood and, accessorially, of the soteriological and gnoseological concept of the Single Vehicle (*ekayāna*) whereby all Paths are shown finally to converge by being integrated in the supreme and perfect Awakening of Buddhahood surpassing all other spiritual attainments to be achieved by other, lesser paths. The aptitude (*yogyatā*) to which reference is made in *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* ii.1b is the aptitude cultivated by exercitants to generate this knowledge of the Path.<sup>109</sup>

According to Haribhadra's comment, the reference in this verse to the elimination of god-like pride (*māna*) serves to suggest, by an allusive hint (*vakroktiyā* = *tshig zur gyis*), the possession by the fit recipient (*ādhāra* = *rten*) of the aptitude necessary for generating the Path.

In Haribhadra's commentary, this section of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* has been placed in correlation with the above-mentioned Śakraparivarta – that is, the Indra-Chapter – of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*.

The theme of a 'twilight of the gods' – which in various extended contexts is a familiar *topos* in large sections of Buddhist literature – was again taken up centuries later by the Tibetan master Tsoñ kha pa. In the introductory verse of salutation in his *Legs bšad sñiñ po* we read: 'To the deity-of-deities, the Lord of Sages (*munīndra*), I pay homage, attending

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*lha rnam ruñ bar bya ba'i phyir/ 'od kyis mog mog por mdzad daiñ//*

This rendering suggests the translation: 'For effecting the aptitude of the divinities there is an obscuration [of their brightness] by [the superior brilliance of the] rays [emitted by the Tathāgata]'. The variant *śyāmikaraṇatā* is an inferior reading.

<sup>109</sup> On this passage see D. Seyfort Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatarbha et du gotra* (Paris, 1969), p. 189 ff. Cf. E. Obermiller, *Analysis of the Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, Fasc. ii (Calcutta Oriental Series, No. 27, London, 1936), pp. 197–8.

with respect (*gus pa* = *bhāva*, *bhakti*) before the lotus-feet of him who treats – just as the sun would the fire-fly – those [turning round] in the world of rebirths: Śambhu, Meghavāhana [Indra], Hiraṇyagarbha [Brahmā], the lord Anaṅga [Kāmadeva], Dāmodara [Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa] and the like who are all puffed up with swollen egoism (*abhimāna*) loudly uttering roars of overweening pride (*dregs pa*), [but] who then, once they have perceived his bodily form, [on their part bow down in homage before him] with their lovely diadems'.<sup>110</sup> That is to say, just as the sun by its very radiance, and without any additional effort, will totally outshine the fire-fly, so the Buddha, solely through his radiant nature, and without any additional effort, overwhelms even great gods still karmically fettered to the world.

Chronologically located between, on the one side, the narrative of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* passage or the distinctly soteriological-gnoseological purport of the *Abhisamayālamkāra* verse cited above and, on the other side,

<sup>110</sup> Tsoñ kha pa Blo bzañ grags pa (1357–1419), *Drañ nes legs bšad sñiñ po*, f. 1b:

*bde 'byuñ sprin la žon dañ gser gyi mñal/ |lus med bdag po tha gu'i lto la sogs//  
srid na dregs pa'i ña ro cher sgrogs pa'i/ |rlom pas 'gyiñ mams kyis kyañ gañ gi skul//  
mthoñ ba'i mod la ñi mas me khyer bžin/ |mdzad par gyur tshe mdzes pa'i cod pan  
gyis//*

*gañ gi žabs pad gus pas bsten byed pa/ |thub dbañ lha yi lha la phyag 'tshal lo//*

In his *Drañ ba dañ nes pa'i don rnam par 'byed pa'i mtha' dpyod 'khrul bral luñ rigs bai dūr dkar po'i gan mdzod*, *sKal bzañ re ba kun skoñ*, f. 1b, dPal 'byor lhun grub has paraphrased Tsoñ kha pa's salutation in the following metrically elaborate verse:

*gañ žig srid 'dir rlom pas rab bñiems mes po dpal bdag spyañ stoñ ldan pa sogs//  
gañ gi mdun na me khyer bcom bžin žum pa lhur len gtsug rgyañ nor bus kyañ//  
gañ gi žabs rdul ñer mchod thub dbañ thub pa'i chu skyes kun gyi gñen gcig pul//  
gañ žig zas gtsañ sras su grags pa'i gdugs dkar srid rtser 'god de'i žabs kyi pad  
mar 'dud//*

Concerning this important concept of 'pride' (*[abhi]māna*, *rlom pa*, *dregs pa*) consisting in a celestial's holding himself to be a great and powerful god superior to all, it may be noted that the *dregs pa/dregs ldan/dregs pa can* form a category of worldly (*'jig rten pa*) deities, for example in the context of the *'jig rten mchod bstod*. Cf. R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and demons of Tibet*, chap. 16 (pointing out, however, another use of the term *dregs pa* to designate a higher category of protector).

the more conventionally literary, and quasi mythic, context met with in Tsoñ kha pa's text, 'Hindu(ist)' materials have been exploited by Udbhaṭasiddhasvāmin in his \**Viśeṣa/Viśiṣṭa(?)*-*stava* and \**Sarvajñamaheśvarastotra*, by his brother Śaṃkarasvāmin (Śaṃkarapati?) in his \**Devatāvimarśastuti/Devātīśayastotra*, and then by Prajñāvarman in his extensive commentaries on the first and last of these hymns. The latter two works are especially rich documents attesting to the special use that has been made of such materials by Buddhists in India. In the colophon of the Tibetan translation of the \**Sarvajñamaheśvarastotra*, Udbhaṭasiddhasvāmin is described both as a Brahman (*bram ze*) and as a (Buddhist) *upāsaka* (*dge bsñen*). And in Tāranātha's *rGya gar chos 'byuñ* (ed. Schiefner, pp. 51–52) he and Śaṃkarasvāmin figure as having originally been Śaivas; but after a pilgrimage to Kailāsa – the mountain in western Tibet sacred to both Hindus as the abode of Śiva and to Buddhists as a holy place (*gnas*) – where Mahādeva/ Maheśvara/Śiva manifested himself as really a Buddha, he followed his brother Śaṃkarasvāmin in becoming a professed Buddhist, the Buddha being then represented in his \**Sarvajñamaheśvarastotra* as the true and authentic possessor of the qualities commonly attributed to Śiva.<sup>111</sup> As for Udbhaṭasiddhasvāmin's \**Viśeṣa/Viśiṣṭa*-*stava*, now unavailable in Sanskrit, it is interesting to note that it is no mere literary relic or fossil preserved in the bsTan 'gyur; for its Tibetan translation has been reprinted in recent times, and it has attracted modern Tibetan commentaries, one (by 'Bras mi ñag mkhan sprul Blo bzañ skal ldan) written in the nineteenth century and another (by Khu nu bsTan 'dzin rgyal mtshan) written in the twentieth century.

What Buddhist tradition has done here is as it were to TRANS-MYTHOLOGIZE, and thus to transmute, the (so-called) 'Hindu(ist)' deities

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<sup>111</sup> On Udbhaṭasiddhasvāmin's \**Viśeṣa/Viśiṣṭastava* and Prajñāvarman's *Tīkā*, see J. Schneider, *Der Lobpreis der Vorzüglichkeit des Buddha* (Bonn, 1993); and on Udbhaṭasiddhasvāmin's \**Sarvajñamaheśvarastotra*, see J. Schneider, 'Der Buddha als der wahre Śiva', *BIS* 8 (1995), pp. 153–87. On the \**Devatāvimarśastuti/Devātīśayastotra*, see Lobsang Norbu Shastri, *Supra-divine praise* (Sarnath, 1990); M. Hahn, 'Śaṅkarasvāmin's *Devatāvimarśastuti*', in *Vividharatnakaraṇḍaka* (Fest. A. Mette, Swisttal-Odendorf, 2000), pp. 313–29. – On the Kailāsa region as a place of contact between religions, see below, pp. 80, 123, 165 f.

in question, including even some supreme gods of Brahmanical mythology, making of them simple *laukika* or 'mundane' divinities, in a procedure that, *mutatis mutandis*, might perhaps be described as euhemerism in reverse.

The motif of the Buddha's overwhelming radiance considered above echoes a *topos* found already in the Buddha-hagiography. According to the Kṛṣṅgrāmaparivarta of the *Lalitavistara* (xi, pp. 129–130), at the time of the future Buddha's first meditation when seated in the shade of a Jambu tree, five Ṛṣis, strangely hindered in their flight overhead, considered whether this radiant boy was perchance Vaiśravaṇa, Māra, Brahmā-Sahā(m)pati, Indra the *vajra*-bearer, Rudra, Kṛṣṇa, Sūrya, Candra, or perhaps a Cakravartin-King. Yet, even as the young Bodhisattva, he outshone them all in his glory (*lakṣmī*) or majesty (*śrī*), and in his flaming brightness (*tejas*), in addition to checking the magical power (*ṛddhi*) of the poor astounded and abashed Ṛṣis, as was indeed perceived by a *vanadevatā* present at this marvellous event. This *topos* is followed in the same episode by the 'miracle' of the shade of the Jambu tree, whose shadow remained stationary round the meditating Bodhisattva even when the sun had passed the zenith and was declining, so that its scorching rays were unable to affect or vie with him.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> On this passage, and on parallels in the *Samghabhedavastu* of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins, the *Divyāvadāna* and the *Mahāvastu*, see J. W. de Jong, 'Buddha's first meditation in the Lalitavistara', in R. Torella (ed.), *Le parole et i marmi* (R. Gnoli Felicitation Volume), pp. 229–36.