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Madhyamika Buddhism Vis-a-vis Hindu Vedanta

(A Paradigm Shift)

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Many famous Hindu Indian scholars like Radha Krishnan, Svami Vivekananda and Nepalese scholars like Mr. Chudanath Bhattarai, Svami Prapannacharya have written that Buddhism is a reaction, a reformation of Hinduism. The Buddha tried to reform some of the malpractices within Hinduism, that is all. He never wanted to create a new religion. In short, according to these scholars, Buddhism is correct Hinduism without any malpractice and evils and what is now called Hinduism is malpractice and distorted form of the Veda-s.

There are three problems with this interpretation of the Buddha's teaching. One is that if these authors really believe that the Buddha came to reform evils, malpractice and wrong interpretation of the Veda-s then why are they themselves still following these evils and malpractices and not practicing the Buddha's teachings, the reformed form of the Veda-s? How warped and distorted are the minds of people who with one breath proclaim the Buddha as the great reformer of Hinduism and then turn around and call Buddhism (what Buddha taught) wrong. Some of these scholars have even gone to the extent of claiming that although the Buddha actually only wanted to reform the Veda-s, his disciples misunderstood him and created a new religion. How illogical to believe that the Buddha's own disciples did not understand him whereas Hindu Svami-s and Pandita-s 2000 years later really do understand the his message.

The second problem with this interpretation is that it implies that the Buddha was a Hindu. Simply because Suddhodana was a king and therefore called a Ksatriya is absolutely no proof that he was a Hindu. If the Buddha was really a Hindu why did he not call himself the great Brahmin or Mahabrahman like the great Ksatriya Vishvamitra.? It is strange to call the Buddha a proponent of Brahmanism when he called himself the great Sramana or Mahasramana. Although a lot of research remains to be done about Sramanism, it can certainly be said that a Sramana is not a Brahmana. Sramanism is itself as old as Brahmanism. Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, also called himself a Sramana. If the Buddha was merely reforming the Veda-s, why did he not call himself a Neo-Vedic, Neo-Brahman or a true Brahman i.e. Mahabrahmana? Why did he call himself a Mahasramana?

I would like to ask those scholars and their followers these questions. Nowhere in the Hindu Shastras are Sramana considered as part of the Vedic fold. And the Buddha called himself a Mahasramana. It was the custom of India from ancient times to call kings Ksatriyas be they of the Sramana or of the Brahmana group, and even if Suddhodana was of the Brahmin school (of which there is absolutely no proof), the Buddha certainly did not seem to have taken after Brahmanism but rather after

Sramanism. Sramanism cannot be called Brahmanism by any historical standard. The third problem is that the teachings found in Buddhism do not in any way appear as a reformation of Hinduism. Anyone who has studied Buddhism (if I am not talking about prejudiced Hindu oriented scholars) can see that there is a major paradigm shift between Hinduism and Buddhism, in fact, between all other religious systems and Buddhism. A paradigm shift cannot and should not be misconstrued as a reform. Reforms are changes brought about within the same paradigm. Paradigm shifts are changes in the very foundations. The very basics are completely different. In such cases, it is completely confused thinking to state that one paradigm is a reformation of another paradigm. So Sramanism is a system of religion based on a completely different paradigm to Hinduism and as such it would be a gross error to say Buddhism is a reformation of Vedic Hinduism. It is not a reformation, but a shift in paradigm. Even if the Vedic paradigm was the older, they are still different paradigms. But it is even questionable whether the Vedic paradigm is really older than the Sramana paradigm. After all, although Buddhism began with Shakyamuni, Sramanism is much older, and according to the findings of the Indus Valley civilization, was in the Indian sub-continent even before Brahmanism.

It is the purpose of this paper to show how Brahmanism and Buddhism are built on two totally different paradigms even though they share the same language. It is this sharing of the same language that has fooled most scholars, especially Hindu biased scholars who have therefore failed to be sensitive to the fact that these are two completely different paradigms with very little in common except the same cultural background, and their language, metaphor, analogy, and words. But as we shall see, the same analogies etc. express two different conceptual structures (paradigms). When we compare the Advaita Vedanta, especially as interpreted by Shankara and Madhyamika, be it the Svatantrika form of Bhabya or the Prasangika form of Candrakirti, the sharing of the same language, culture and analogies while talking about two different paradigms becomes obvious. Because of the use of the same language structure (be it Pali or Sanskrit) and the same analogies to express two different paradigms, many Vedantins or scholars of Buddhism with Vedantic backgrounds have been fooled into thinking that Buddhist Madhyamika is a re-interpretation of the Hindu Vedanta. Many think Buddhism is the negative way to the same goal (via negativa) and Hindu Vedanta the positive way (via positiva). One uses negation and the other affirmation but the Shunyata of Buddhism is a negative way of talking about the Brahma of the Vedanta.

The issue here is not via negativa or via positiva at all but rather two different paradigms, or two different goals based on two different paradigms, or two diametrically opposed answers to the burning issue of mankind developed out of diametrically opposed paradigms. In fact, the Buddha, after long years of Brahmanic as well as Sramanic meditation, found the concept of Brahma (an ultimately real, unchanging, eternal substratum to this ephemeral transient world) not only inadequate to solve the basic issue of humanity i.e. sorrow (dukha) and questioned the very existence of such an eternal substratum; but also declared that a search for such an imagined (Skt. Parikalpita Atma) Brahman was a form of escapism and therefore not really spiritual but spiritual materialism.

Since the concept of Brahma, the truly existent (Skt. paramartha sat) is the very foundation of Hinduism (as a matter of fact some form of an eternal ultimate reality whether it is called God or Nature is the basis of all other religious systems); when Buddhism denies such an ultimate reality (Skt. paramartha satta) in any form, it cuts at the very jugular veins of Hinduism. Therefore it cannot be ontologically, epistemologically, and soteriologically said that Buddhism reforms Hinduism.

The affirmation of a ground (Skt. asraya) which is really existent (Skt. paramartha sat) and the denial that such an existent (Skt. satta) can be found anywhere, within or without, immanent or transcendent, are two diametrically opposed paradigms- not simply variation or reformations of each other. The Webster Dictionary defines reform: to amend or improve by change of form or removal of faults or abuse. The example I have given above of an eternal base without which Hinduism in its own language would be atheistic (Skt. nastik) and the denial (without any implied affirmation) (Skt. prasajya pratisheda) of such an eternally existing unchanging base

by Buddhism cannot be said to be a reformation but a deconstruction of the very roots of the Hindu thesis. That is why Buddhism is not a reformation of Hinduism but a paradigm shift from the paradigms on which Hinduism is based.

Many Hindu scholars believe that without an ultimate eternal reality, there can be no liberation from the changing, transient Samsara; therefore even though the Buddha denied the ultimate reality, he could have meant only conceptually really existing reality, not the eternal ultimate reality which is beyond concepts. Otherwise, there cannot be liberation. The fault with this kind of thinking is that it is measuring the thesis (which is no thesis) of the Buddha (or interpreting the Buddha) from within the Hindu paradigm. Remaining within the Hindu paradigm, an eternal ultimate reality is a necessity (a necessary dead end as the Buddha saw it) for the soteriological purpose i.e. for liberation. Since according to the Buddha there is no Brahma - such a concept being merely an acquired fabrication (Skt: parikalpana) learned from wrong (Skt: mithya) scriptures, hankering after, searching for such a Brahma is a dead end which leads nowhere, let alone liberation. The Buddhist paradigm, if understood correctly, does not require an eternal something or other for liberation. In Buddhism liberation is not realizing such a ground but rather a letting go of all grounds i.e. realizing groundless. In fact holding on to any ground is ignorance, according to Buddhism.

So in the Buddhist paradigm, it is not only not necessary to have an eternal ground for liberation, but in fact the belief in such a ground itself is part of the dynamics of ignorance. We move here to another to major difference within the two paradigms. In Hinduism liberation occurs when this illusory Samsara is completely relinquished and it vanishes; what remains is the eternal Brahma, which is the same as liberation. Since the thesis is that Samsara is merely an illusion, when it vanishes through knowledge, if there were no eternal Brahma remaining, it would be a disaster. So in the Hindu paradigm (or according to Buddhism all paradigms based on ignorance), an eternal unchanging, independent, really existing substratum (Skt. mahavastu) is a necessity for liberation, else one would fall into nihilism. But since the Buddhist paradigm is totally different, the question posed by Hindu scholars: "How can there be liberation if a Brahma does not remain after the illusory Samsara vanishes in Gyana?" is a non question with no relevance in the Buddhist paradigm and its Enlightenment or Nirvana.

First of all, to the Buddha and Nagarjuna, Samsara is not an illusion but like an illusion. There is a quantum leap in the meaning of these two statements. Secondly, because it is only 'like an illusion' i.e. interdependently arisen like all illusions, it does not and cannot vanish, so Nirvana is not when Samsara vanishes like mist and the Brahma arises like the sun out of the mist but rather when seeing that the true nature of Samsara is itself Nirvana. So whereas Brahma and Samsara are two different entities, one real and the other unreal, one existing and the other non-existing, Samsara and Nirvana in Buddhism are one and not two. Nirvana is the nature of Samsara or in Nagarjuna's words shunyata is the nature of Samsara. It is the realization of the nature of Samsara as empty which cuts at the very root of ignorance and results in knowledge not of another thing beyond Samsara but of the way Samsara itself actually exists (Skt. vastusthiti), knowledge of Tathata (as it-is-ness) the Yathabhuta (as it really is) of Samsara itself. It is this knowledge that liberates from wrong conceptual experience of Samsara to the unconditioned experience of Samsara itself. That is what is meant by the indivisibility of Samsara and Nirvana (Skt. Samsara nirvana abhinnata, Tib: Khor de yer me). The mind being Samsara in the context of DzogChen, Mahamudra and Anuttara Tantra. Samsara would be substituted by dualistic mind. The Hindu paradigm is world denying, affirming the Brahma. The Buddhist paradigm does not deny the world; it only rectifies our wrong vision (Skt. mithya drsti) of the world. It does not give a dream beyond or separate transcendence from Samsara. Because such a dream is part of the dynamics of ignorance, to present such a dream would be only to perpetuate ignorance.

To Buddhism, any system or paradigm which propagates such an unproven and improvable dream as an eternal substance or ultimate reality, be it Hinduism or any other 'ism', is propagating spiritual materialism and not true spirituality. To Hinduism such a Brahma is the summum bonum of its search goal, the peak of the Hindu

thesis. The Hindu paradigm would collapse without it. Since Buddhism denies this, it cannot be said honestly that the Buddha merely meant to reform Hinduism. As I have said, it is a totally different paradigm. Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism are all variations of the same paradigm. So truly speaking, you could speak of them as reformations of each other. But Buddhism has a totally different paradigm from any of these, not merely from Vedic- Hinduism.

This leads us naturally to the concept of the Two Truths (Skt. satyadvaya). Both Hindu Vedanta and Madhyamika Buddhism (and for that matter all forms of Buddhism) use this concept to clarify its paradigm. But again the same words point at two different paradigms. First of all the concept of the Two Truths clearly stated as in Buddhism comes into Hinduism only after Sankaracharya (7th / 8th century) whereas the Buddha himself used these words. But even though Sankara copied the use of these words from Buddhism and also copied many other conceptual words from Nagarjuna to elucidate his Vedantic paradigm, the paradigm that he tries to clarify with these words is different. In many places these conceptual wordings and analogies are forced to produce the meaning that is required for the Vedantic paradigm. In the Vedantic context, the Relative Truth (Skt. samvritti satya) is that this Samsara is an illusion and the Ultimate Truth (Skt. paramartha satya) is that there is an ultimately existing thing (Skt. paramartha satta) transcending / immanent in this world. The relative truth will vanish like a mist and the transcendent and immanent Brahma will appear as the only Truth, the world being false. To sum it up, the Vedantic Ultimate Truth is the existence of an ultimate existence or ultimate reality. Reality here is used as something which exists (Skt. satta).

However, the Buddhist Ultimate Truth is the absence of any such satta i.e. ultimately existing thing or ultimate reality. That is the significance of Shunyata - absence of any real, independent, unchanging existence (Skt. svabhava). And that fact is the Ultimate Truth of Buddhism, which is diametrically opposite to the Ultimate Truth of the Hindu Brahma. So Shunyata can never be a negative way of describing the Atman - Brahma of Hinduism as Vinoba Bhave and such scholars would have us believe. The meaning of Shunyata found in Sutra, Tantra, Dzogchen or Mahamudra is the same as the Prasangika emptiness of Chandrakirti i.e. unfindability of any true existence or simply unfindability. Some writers of Dzogchen and Mahamudra or Tantra think that the emptiness of Nagarjuna is different from the emptiness found in these systems. But I would like to ask them whether their emptiness is findable or unfindable; whether or not the significance of emptiness in these systems is also not the fact of unfindability.

Some Shentong scholars seem to imply that the Shentong system is talking about a different emptiness. They say that the Buddha Nature is not empty of qualities, therefore the Buddha Nature is not merely empty, it also has qualities. First of all the whole statement is irrelevant. Qualities are not the question and the Buddha Nature being empty of quality or not is not the issue. The Buddha Nature is empty of real existence (Skt. svabhava). Because it is empty of real existence, it has qualities. As Arya Nagarjuna has said in his Mulamadhyamika Karika: "All things are possible (including qualities) because they are empty." Therefore the whole Shentong / Rangtong issue is superfluous. However, in Shentong, the Buddha Nature is also empty and emptiness means unfindability. In short, the unfindability of any true existence is the Ultimate Truth in Buddhism, and is diametrically opposed to the concept of a truly existing thing called Brahma, the ultimate truth in Hinduism.

Now let's examine the Relative Truth (Skt. samvritti satya). In Hinduism, the Relative Truth is the fact that this world is an illusion (Skt. maya), it has no existence. In Buddhism, Samsara is interdependently arising. It has relative existence (Skt. samvritti satta) according to Tsong Khapa or it appears conventionally according to Gorampa Senge and Mipham. It is like an illusion (Skt. mayavat). Like all illusions, it appears interdependently based on various causes and conditions (Skt. hetu-pratyaya). It may be like an illusion but it is the only thing we have, there is nothing behind it or beyond it which can be called an ultimate thing or reality. The Ultimate Reality or Truth or fact in the Buddhist sense is the mode of existence of this illusion like Samsara i.e. (Skt. nihsvabhava) empty of real existence. So here too we find two different parameters to two different paradigms.

Now let us investigate some of the words used by both paradigms. One word that has created great confusion is 'non-dualism'. First of all Hindu Vedanta is 'Advaita' and the Madhyamika Buddhism 'Advaya'. Although they are sometimes used interchangeably by both systems, their meanings are as used in the two paradigms differ. In Hindu Vedanta, non-dualism (advaita) means one without a second (Skt: dvitiam nasti, Chandogya Upanishad). What is the meaning of this? That there is only Brahma which really exists, nothing else really exists. In other words - the world does not exist at all, it is only an illusion. The true English word for this is 'monism' according to the Webster Dictionary: the view that there is only one kind of ultimate substance. Since, as we have seen already that there is no such kind of ultimate substance in Madhyamika Buddhism the meaning of non-dualism (advaya) cannot be like in Hinduism. The Madhyamika scriptures very clearly defines advaya as 'dvaya anta mukta' i.e. free from the two extremes. The extremes are 'eternalism' into which the Hindu Vedantic Brahma falls and 'nihilism' into which many materialistic systems like Charvak fall. But it goes deeper. Non-dual knowledge (Skt. advaya gyana) is the state of mind which is soteriologically free from grasping at the two extremes of knowing in terms of 'is' and 'is not' and ontologically free from being 'existing' or 'non-existing'. 'Advaita Gyana' is however the knowledge of the one and only truly existing substance or reality called Brahma in Hinduism. It could also be called by any other name. Even if the Brahma is defined as beyond 'is' and 'is not' as in the Yogavasishta, it is only a roundabout way of saying that there is an ultimate reality, Brahma, which is beyond concepts of 'existing' and 'non-existing' and therefore it still falls within Eternalism. There is also the use of 'free from existence and non-existence' in Buddhism and 'beyond existence and non-existence' in Hinduism. 'Beyond' implies a third something which is neither, but 'free' does not necessarily imply a third something which is neither. Some Shentongpas define the Buddha Nature (Skt. Tathagatagarbha) exactly like the Brahma of the Vedanta without realizing it and even claim it to be a higher mediator's view which is not accessible to lower class logicians etc.

Perhaps it is most apt now to talk about two other words used commonly by both paradigms: 'Nisprapanca' (Tib: thro-me) and 'Avikalpa' (Tib: Tog- me). 'Nisprapanca' means non-fabricated and 'Avikalpa' means non-conceptual. In the context of Hinduism, it is the Brahma (the ultimate reality, the ultimate real, the ultimate existing) which is beyond concepts and non-fabricated. It also means a non-fabricated and non-conceptual knowledge of that Brahma. When I am using 'Ultimate Reality' as a synonym for the Brahma, I am using reality to mean something that exists as per the Webster's Dictionary. I am aware that reality also connotes 'fact' i.e. truth and with such a meaning could be used in Buddhism to mean Ultimate Fact/Truth. But as one of its connotations is 'existing', it is hazardous to use the words 'Ultimate Reality' in any Buddhist context and it is always safer to use the words 'Ultimate Truth' instead. Some English translations of Dzogchen, Mahamudra etc. have used the words 'Ultimate Reality' for Co-emergent Wisdom (Skt. sahaja jnana / Tathagatagarbha) rather indiscriminately without the authors even realizing that the use of such lax wording brings them not only dangerously close to Vedantins of one form or another, but also they are actually using Buddhist texts to validate the Vedantic thesis. If some of them object that their 'Ultimate Reality' is empty while the Hindu 'Ultimate Reality' is not; the Hindus can ask, "then how is it an Ultimate Reality in the sense of Ultimate Existing"? To avoid this confusion, it is safer and semantically closer to the Buddhist paradigm to use only 'Ultimate Truth'.

Now coming back to 'Nisprapanca' and 'Avikalpa', as for Buddhism, the first verse of Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamikakarika makes it clear that it is the 'pratityasamutpada' i.e. the interdependent origination which is nisprapanca and beyond concepts and it is the wisdom that realizes this that is 'Nisprapanca' and 'Avikalpa'. No Hindu Vedantin would agree that the Brahma is interdependent origination or interdependently originated. The same can be said of words like 'acintya' (inconceivable), 'anupamya' (inexpressible) or 'apratistha' (non-established) etc. for which we need not write separately. This naturally leads us to three crucial words and concepts used in the two paradigms: Emptiness, (Skt. Shunyata), Interdependent Origination (Skt. pratityasamutpada) and Brahma (the infinite, eternal, unchanging, truly existing, non-conceptual, unfabricated reality). Many Hindu writers from the 5th/6th centuries

onwards until today have tried to show that the Brahma and Shunyata mean the same thing. The Yogavasistha (7th/8th century) has even very explicitly stated that the Brahma and Shunya are the same reality (Chapter 3/5/5-6). Modern authors like Dr. Radhakrishnan, Svami Vivekananda and Vinova Bhave have also tried to show that they mean the same reality. Je Tsong Khapa says in his 'Pratityasamutpada Stuti Subhasita Hridaya' - "whatever is dependent on conditioned is empty of real existence". This statement makes it clear that dependent origination and Shunyata are two labels for the same condition - two sides of the same coin. Now I would like to ask these Hindu authors "Is Brahma (which according to them is the same as Shunya), dependently originated or origination?" Even here in the two words there is a difference. The Brahma can never be a dependent origination because it is a really existing thing. I am sure no Hindu would like to say this of the unchanging eternal independent Brahma. On the other hand, the significance of Shunyata is 'dependant origination' or 'nisvabhava' (non real existence). The Tathagatarbha, Mahamudra, Rigpa (Vidya) etc. cannot also be empty but not nisvabhava. Such as definition of Shunya (as not nisvabhava) would not only contradict the entire Buddhist paradigm but also would force such so-called Buddhist writers to fall into the 'all-embracing' arms of the Vedantin Brahma. If Rigpa, Mahamudra etc. is described without the correct emptiness, then such words as Mahamudra, Dzogchen, Rigpa, Tathagatagarbha are only new names given to the ancient concept of Brahma as found in the Upanishads (some of which are up to 600 years older than the Buddha). Such misconceptions of Ultimate Realities come not from Buddhist but actually from the Hindu Brahma in the garb of Buddhist scholar monks.

Some Buddhist writers give lame excuses about meditative experiences and theory being different. I would like to reiterate that such a meditative experience is not Buddhist but Hindu because it fits perfectly with the Hindu theory of reality. If meditative experiences are going to be different from the theory on which they are based, that would be tantamount to saying that the base has no relation to the path and fruit, or that path is one and the actual experience of the fruit (meditative experience) is another. At least the Hindu base-path-fruit is more consistent. They do not begin with non-real existence and end up with some kind of subtle existence. The Buddhist meditation experience must coincide with its base (basic paradigm). Yes, there is a shift from conceptual to non-conceptual during meditation, but that does not necessitate a shift from non-real existence to real existence. If reality is conceptually non-real existent, it does not become real existent non-conceptually. The true Buddhist meditative experience is 'non real existence' not 'real existence'. Some may say that 'non real existence' is only a concept. But the same can be said of 'real existence'. Since Brahma is 'real existence' by itself, independent etc. it cannot be a synonym for Shunyata. Some Shentong Buddhist writers who have not studied Hindu philosophy well enough try to give invalid excuses by implying that the Atma/Brahma of Hinduism is imagined, fabricated, whereas the Shentong Tathagatagarbha is non-conceptual (eg. Jamgon Kongtro Lodo Thaye - Gaining Certainly About The View; 5.2.4.2.). If one has read the Vedanta Shastra, one finds that the Atma (self) of the Hindu is also free from mental elaborations, like the Tathagatagarbha. So the crux of the difference lies in Emptiness, not in non-elaboration, non conceptual, luminous etc. The Atma of the Vedanta is also not accessible to inferior logicians and not negated by logic because it is uncreated, unconditioned, self existing, self-luminous and beyond concepts. So just stating that the Hindu Atman is fabricated and our Tathagatagarbha is not, does not really solve anything. The Atma is what remains after everything else that is not it, has been negated. Last of all, the Atman is not the ego (Ahamkar, Tib. ngak dzin) which is what the Shentong logic negates.

Another word that has confounded many Hindu Svamis is 'unborn' (Skt. ajat), 'unproduced' (Skt. anutpada). In the context of the Hindu Vedanta, it means that there is this Ultimate Reality called the Brahma which is unborn i.e. never produced by anything or at any time, which means it always was. A thing or 'super thing' even a 'non-thing' that always existed and was never ever produced at any period in time which is separate from this born, illusory Samsara. In the Buddhist context, it is the true nature of Samsara itself which although relatively appears to be 'born', ultimately is never born. Advayavajra in his Tatvaratnavali says, "The world is unborn says the Buddha". As Buddha Ekaputra Tantra (Tib. sangye tse tsig tantra) says, the base of Dzogchen is the Samsara itself stirred from its depth. Since the Samsara stirred from

its depth is interdependently originated, i.e. not really originated i.e. unborn and since Samsara is only relatively an interdependently originated thing but ultimately neither a thing nor a non-thing (bhava or abhava) that truly exists, the use of the word 'unborn' for Brahma (which is definitely not Samsara) and for Samsara itself in Buddhism are diametrically opposed. The true meaning of unborn (anutpada) is dependently originated (pratityasamutpanna), which is as already mentioned, the meaning of a nisvabhava (non-real existence) or Shunyata (emptiness). None of these can be a synonym for Brahma or anything that has kind of ultimate real existence, even if it is called Tathagatagarbha. There is no acceptance of an Ultimate Existence in any Buddhist Sutra. It is interesting that an exact word for Ultimate Existence (Skt. paramartha satta) in Tibetan Buddhism is very rarely used. It shows how non-Buddhist the whole concept is. One has to differentiate between existence (Skt. satta) and truth (Skt. satya) although they are so close and come from the same root in Sanskrit. Even in the Ratnagotra there is one single sentence (Skt. Yad yatra tat tena shunyam iti samanupasyati yat punartravasistam bhavati tad sad ihasthiti yathabhutam prajanati): "whatever is not found, know that to be empty by that itself, if something remains, know that to exist as it is." This statement is straight out of the Vaibhasika Sutras of the Theravada (Sunnatavagga) and Sautrantika Abhidharma Samuccaya. It seems to imply an affirming negative. First of all, this statement contradicts the rest of the Ratnagotravibhaga if it is taken as the ultimate meaning in the Sutra (as the Shentongpas have done). Secondly, since it is a statement of the Vaibhasika school (stating that an ultimate unit of the consciousness and matter remains), it cannot be superior to the Rangtong Madhyamika. Thirdly, its interpretation as what remains is the ultimately existing Tathagatagarbha contradicts not only the interpretation that is found in other Buddhist sutras as "itar etar shunyata" (emptiness of what is different from it) but also the Shentong interpretation of Tathagatagarbha contradicts all the other definitions of the Tathagatagarbha found in the Ratnagotravibhaga itself.

This brings us to the word 'Nitya' i.e. eternal or permanent. The Hindu use of the word 'Nitya' for its ultimate existing reality, viz. Brahma is 'Kutastha Nitya' i.e. something remaining or existing unchangingly eternal, i.e. something statically eternal. Whatever the word 'Nitya' is used for, the Ultimate Truth in Buddhism, the Great Pandita Shantarakshita has made it very clear in his Tatvasamgraha that the Buddhist 'Nitya' (permanent) is 'parinami nitya' i.e. changing, transforming, eternal, in another words dynamically eternal. The Buddhist 'Nitya' is more accurately translated in English as eternal continuum rather than just eternal. I would like to remind some western translators of Nyingma and Kagyu texts that it is either the view of Shantarakshita's Svatantrika Madhyamika or the Prasangika view that is given during the instruction of 'Yeshe Lama' as the correct view of DzogChen.

Now finally I would like to show how the same analogies are used in the Vedantic Hinduism and Buddhist Madhyamika to illustrate different thesis. The most famous analogy in both Vedanta and Madhyamika is that of the snake seen in the rope. In Vedanta you have the famous Sanskrit verse 'rajju sarpa bhramanaropa tadvat Brahmani jagataropa' i.e. as a snake is imputed / superimposed upon a piece of rope so is the Samsara imposed upon the Brahma. Only the rope or the Brahma is real the snake, Samsara is unreal and does not exist at all. They are only illusions. If one studies this analogy, one realizes that it is not such an accurate analogy. The rope is not eternal like Brahma. Furthermore the rope is not unconditioned (Skt. asamskrita) like Brahma, so it is not really a good example or the proof of a truly existing independent Brahma. It is a forced analogy, and rightly so, because it is a Buddhist analogy squeezed to give a Vedantic meaning.

As for Buddhism, the rope stands for interdependent origination (pratityasamutpada) for which it is a good example being itself interdependently arisen from pieces of jute etc., and the snake imputed upon it stands for real existence, which is imposed on the interdependently existing rope appearance. Here it is the rope that is the true mode of existence of Samsara (unlike the snake representing Samsara in Vedanta) and the snake is our ignorance imputing Samsara as really existing instead of experiencing it as interdependently arisen. This interdependence or emptiness is 'parinami nitya' i.e. an eternal continuum and this is applicable to all phenomena. Of course, this interdependence is the Conventional Truth whereas nisvabhavata which is

synonymous to emptiness is the Ultimate Truth in Madhyamika. Although interdependence is itself conditioned, in reality it is unborn and empty; its true nature is unconditioned. But this is not an unconditioned reality like Brahma but an unconditioned truth i.e. the fact that all things are in reality empty, unborn, uncreated. Likewise the mirror reflection analogy is used to show that just like images which have no existence at all appear and disappear on the permanent surface of the mirror so too Samsara which is an illusory reflection on the mirror of Brahma appears on the surface of the Brahma and disappears there. In Buddhism this metaphor is used to show that Samsara is interdependently arisen like the reflection on the mirror. The mirror is only one of the causes and conditions and no more real than the other causes and conditions for the appearance of the reflection of Samsara. Here too the mirror is a very poor metaphor for the Brahma, being itself interdependently arisen like the reflection on it. Actually such analogies are good examples for interdependent origination (Skt. pratyasamutpada) and not for some eternal Brahma. The mirror Brahma metaphor is only a forced one. The same can be said of the moon on the pond analogy and the rainbow in the sky analogy.

In conclusion, I would like to sum it up by stating that Buddhism (especially Mahayana / Vajrayana) is not a reformulation of Hinduism or a negative way of expressing what Hinduism as formulated. Hinduism and Buddhism share a common culture and therefore tend to use the same or similar words. They do share certain concepts like Karma and re-incarnation, although their interpretations differ. The Hindu concepts of Karma and therefore reincarnation tend to be rather linear whereas the Buddhist concept is linked with interdependent origination (Skt. pratyasamutpada). The Theravada concept of interdependent origination (Skt. pratyasamutpada) is also rather linear but the Mahayana / Vajrayana concept is more non-linear, multi-dimensional, multi-leveled, interdependent, inter-latched. But all similarities to Hinduism end there. The Shunyata of the Buddha, Nagarjuna, Candrakirti is by no accounts a negative way of describing the Brahma of the Upanishads – Samkara - Vidhyaranya groups.

I would like to dedicate this article for the long lives of Ven. H. E. Ugyen Tulku, H. E. Chobgye Trichen, H. H. Sakya Trizin Rinpoche and Ven. Karma Thinley Rinpoche and to the 17th century Siddha Vajracharya Surat Vajra of Nepal, Tache Baha. May his lineage be re- instated.

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