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The Guhyasamāja-Tantra and its unique approach to the Buddhist Tāntric Traditions

Partha Sarathi Bhattacharya*

Backdrop: The word Tantra has different connotations according to several religious as well as philosophical backgrounds. Generally it is derived from the root tan means to spread (tanyate vistāryate jñānam anena iti tantra)1 though different scholars like Vācaspati, Anandagiri and Govindananda hold the root might be tatri or tantri in the sense of origination (vyutpādana) or knowledge. Since ancient time Śāstra-s was always designated through the term Tantra. As for example Sāmkhya and Nyāya philosophical system were known as Kapila-tantra and Goutama-tantra. But gradually this term was used in a very mystic sense through different esoteric braches in so many different ways. It is very difficult to estimate the proper time period regarding the origin of Tantra but it is almost established that it has a prolonged history and a vast portion of it has been lost in the dense of past. It is not platitude to say that the origin of Tantra was almost contemporary of the Vedas even before the propagation of the Vedas because in the Atharva-veda so many elements of Tantra were available. So, it is quite obvious that the practices of Tantra even several schools were almost in there but in later period so many different doctrines and philosophical outlooks has been incorporated with Tantra so that it became difficult to understand and became inaccessible to common people. As result several schools of Tantras became obscure and some of them were totally lost because of inadequate followers. This happens in respect of maximum number of Tantric branches including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and so on. Still some handful number of Tantric sects and their texts remain available that comes to our hand. In this paper we are trying to deal one of most antique treatises regarding Buddhist Tantra entitled with Guhyasamāja-Tantra and the process of Sādhanā-s as described in this text.

Keywords: Tantra, Guhyasamāja-Tantra, Bodhicitta, Prajītā, Karuṇā, Prajītopāya or Mahāsukha, Vajrasattva, Hathayoga, Sādhanā and Samādhi.

Prelude to the text Guhyasamāja-Tantra: The Guhyasamāja-Tantra also known as the Tathāgataguhyaka as well as Astādaśapatala probably belonged during the 3rd century C.E. to 5th century C.E.3 It strikes us more that the text like Guhyasamāja has not any proper authorship but scholars like Benoytosh Bhattacharyya had assumed the author of Guhyasamāja-Tantra was Asanga of 3rd century C.E. Benoytosh had prescribed two lofty views regarding this. First one is during the time of Asanga (the famous Yogācāra philosopher in Mahāyāna school) five Dyānī Buddhas were already introduced with their five Saktis or consorts in the process of Sadhana-s of Tantric Buddhism. The concept of Sakti was first introduced through the text Guhyasamāja so that it assumes the process of Sādhanā regarding five Dyani Buddhas with their Saktis during the time of Asanga was evolved in later than the time of Guhyasamāja. His second observation that it is said the Tantra was first introduced by Asanga from the Tusita heaven and preached in earth. The fundamental concept of Tanta is always associated with the embodiment of Sakti which has been first referred in the text Guhyasamāja as we said earlier. So, it might be possible that Asanga was responsible for speculation of the text though this assumption should need more scholastic consideration.

Evolution of Täntrism in Buddhist phenomena: As far as our knowledge is concerned the text Guhyasamāja is the earliest Buddhist Täntric text that had been written to introduce Täntric practices through different Sādhanas for emancipation. It also strikes us that several elements of Śakti or Śākta cult including their practices has been mingled with Buddhist philosophy even Yogic practices like Hathayoga were assimilated with Täntric practices through Buddhist Mahāyānic outlooks. It assumes since before the time of Asanga the Täntric Buddhist practices were well known and profoundly spread otherwise if the knowledge or Vidyā had been concealed then how other Yogic practices had been commingled with it? But

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the pertinent question is why these practices arose within the domain of Buddhism? Benoytosh Bhattacharyya had clearly mentioned the deterioration of Buddhism was happened due to three reasons. First one is the theory of Mahāsukha in the concept of Nirvāṇa because after the demise of Buddha this concept was interpolated and mislead through different ideologies. Second one is the different opinion among the disciples of Buddhist Sangha and they did not follow the same way that the Buddha had been shown them. Third one is the concept of Karuṇā which became a practice of self rigorism that means every individual Bodhisattva-s should be sacrifices everything for the emancipation of the suffering of humanity.5 As result they did not hold the unity of Sangha-s so that many other ideologies incorporated within the Buddhist sects which obviously started an era of declination. As result Buddhism were divided in many branches like so called Hīnayāna and Mahāyana. In the later period from Mahāyāna; Vajrayāna or Mantrayāna were also evolved. It is said in the Guhyasamāja that Buddhanaya or Bodhinaya is the utmost path while Mantranaya is a path of strong determination. Texts like Advayavajra-sariigraha (approximately 11th to 12th century C.E.) where the author Advayavajra had clearly discriminated various Buddhist schools. According to the author the Vaibhāṣika School absorbs Śrāvaka-yāna, Pratyeka-yāna. Mahāyāna school comprises Sautrāntika, Yogācāra and Madhyamika. Mahāyāna also subdivided into Pāramitā-naya and Mantra-naya.

The Buddhist Tantra in generally divided into three schools i.e. Vajra-yāna, Kāla-cakra-yāna and Sahaja-yāna. Vajrayāna or Tantrayāna was evolved from the later phase of Mahāyāna. India during the time of Buddha was sunk through various kinds of local superstitions, sorcery, folk believes as well as rites and it could not be possible by Buddha to forbid all kinds of local practices because his aim was to spread a universal true dharma. But some of his disciples were more engaged to enjoy happiness and prosperity of this world rather to attain the *Nirvāṇa* or the path of Buddhahood. So, when Buddhism was flourished all over in India they were gradually mixed up with them therefore various Tāntric practices were evolved within the shelter of Buddhism and popularized as Tāntric Buddhism.

Fundamental concept of Tantric Buddhism: The Secret Union: The innermost aspect of Tantra is union or "The secret union" of the body, speech and mind of all Tathāgatas. Body, speech and mind are the fundamental components of all living beings. In Buddhist Tantras body is represented as the material form or is called Nirmānakāya whereas speech and mind represent as spiritual and absolute form called respectively Sambhogakāya and Dharmakāya. These three Kāyas lead a viral role in Tāntrism. Body, speech and Mind are personified of Vairochona, Amitābha and Akṣobya. It is called "Secret" because not only they are withheld from the world but also one who is entering the path of Tantra will understand it properly. 8

The core concept of Tantric Buddhism stands on two pillars; one is Prajñā and another is Karuṇā. According to the text Advayavajra-sa ingraha as we mentioned earlier Prajñā without Karuṇā and Karuṇā without Prajñā has no vitality and if these two states assimilated then it is called Prajñāpāramitā. So, the state Prajñāpāramitā is the summum bonum of Tantric Buddhism. Tantric Buddhism always gives emphasis on the three fundamental dimensions of life i.e. Kāya (body), Vāk (speech) and Citta or Manas (mind). The supreme manifestation of Buddhist pantheon is named as Vajrasattva. According to the text Hevajra-Tantra "which is inevitable as well as impenetrable is called Vajra and the assimilation of Kāya, Vāk and Citta is called Sattva. He who holds both the qualities is called Vajrasattva."

Uniqueness of the text Guhyasamāja-Tantra: As we know earlier Tantra in generally means knowledge or Vidya. Guhya literally means concealed i.e. knowledge which has been not discussed in public. According to the text body (Kāya), speech (Vāk) and mind (Citta or Manas) are altogether characterized as Guhya and this whole approach is also associated with the society (Samāja) that is why it is called as Guhya-samāja-Tantra. In the 18th chapter of this text it is said the practices or Sādhanā of Buddhahood i.e. Bodhisādhanam is very precious and among all the paths this Vidya leads to the utmost destination of a seeker. But

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first we have to clarify what is the Bodhisādhana? Bodhisādhana is a process where a seeker can practice the two most vital essence of Buddhism i.e. Prajñā and Karuṇā to achieve the stage of Bodhicitta. Through this practice his or her mind became purer and full of perfect knowledge and compassion. It is said Bodhicitta is nothing but the assimilation of Sūnyatā and Karuṇā.12 In this stage he or she can emancipate from the circle of Bhavacakra i.e. all kind of earthly desires, attachments, sufferings, pains and the circle of birth and rebirth process. As soon as the ground is prepared he will uplift in the state of Nirvāņa and became Arhat or an enlightened one. Vajrayana and Mantrayana became very popular and their differentiation became so vague that no one could distinguish these two sects separately in later period. This indication is also prominent in respect of the text Guhyasamāja where it is said the path which is abstaining from all kinds of meaningless folk rituals is called Vajra which is also known as Mantra or Mantrayana.13 Again this text holds which is also associated to all kind of action with all minds also called Mantrayana.14 The text Guhyasamāja is so unique according to our observation because as far as our knowledge is concerned this is the first literally document is Buddhism where the Yogic processes regarding Sādhanās were assimilated with Buddhist observations. The purpose of this text is to obtain Buddhahood through an easy way because no one can want to go through a difficult and painful way. 15 Even this text has prescribed through the path of Guhyasamāja anyone can attain enlightenment even in one birth. It is said that Buddha has prescribed the essence of Boddhicitta through this text in a very short period of time because there are countless number of Boddhisattvas like sand of the river Ganges who did not attain Boddhicitta properly. That is why if anybody has interest to attain Buddhahood; he or she will go through the path of Guhyasamāja-Tantra. 16 Another uniqueness of this text Guhyasamāja-Tantra is that the initiation of Sakti in Buddhism. Probably this is the first literally document in Buddhism which gave more importance in Sakti worship which has been followed through different authorities in their different works in the domain of Tantric Buddhism. Another important thing that strikes us Buddhism always prescribed non-violence; but this text gives all kinds of relaxation to the Sadhaka-s. All kinds of luxuries like flesh, fish, wine, women etc which is prohibited very strictly in Buddhism, he can enjoy. In the Guhyasamāja everything is permitted. Menstruation of women, semen, and urine also they can drink if they wish so. 17 Even the blood of men, flesh of elephant, horses, dogs, cow he can eat. 18 So, these characteristic of this text made a unique approach in the domain of Buddhist Tantrism.

Bodhicitta and the assimilation of Prajñā and Upāya: The stage of Prajñopāya or Mahāsukha: The text Guhyasamāja gave emphasis on the nature of Bodhicitta because their chief object is to attain Bodhicitta and also to achieve superhuman power through Yogic process. According to the 18th chapter of this text there are two kinds of Siddhis or perfection; one is Sāmānya (ordinary) and another is Uttama (excellent). In the Guhyasamāja we have seen a prolonged discussion about Boddhicittavajra. As we discussed earlier the concept of Bodhicitta is very vital to know the relevance of the Vajrayana sects. Bodhi actually means enlighten but it is not too easy to establish. We have seen in the second chapter of this text that Lord Tathagata worshiped with other Dyani Buddhas like Aksobhya, Amoghasiddhi, Amitābha, Ratnaketu and Vairocana with their body, speech and mind. Interestingly they all had described the essence of Boddhicitta according to their own experience. Prajña does not attempt transformation whereas Karuṇā is essential for all human being. Thus Prañā is absolute even Kīpā or Karuṇā also seems to be absolute and if they commingle with each other that are called permanent cognition. 19 When this commingles takes place there is neither the knower nor the knowledge. 20 It's like the combination of milk and water. 21 Once it mixed up no one can discriminate which is water and which is milk. Similarly in this stage there is

neither doer, nor any enjoyer, nor any receiver, nor any giver, nor any object to be given or nor even taken.²² This is called the stage of non-duality, personified as Vajrasattva;²³ profoundly known as Prajñāpāramitā; the embodiment of all the Pāramitas, or Samatā or equality or the Mahāsukha.24 In this way a Yogi will surpass all the existence of Bhāva and Abhāva and gone beyond the transcendental stage where there will no distinction in between

Conclusion: The whole work of Guhysamāja Tantra is nothing but the assimilation of the Yogic processes with Tantric Buddhism to achieve the highest level of mental and physical dimension. If we simplified our observation, Tantra actually tried to maintain both the earthly desire and also the spiritual process. If a man cannot fulfill his physical hunger he cannot proceed further to achieve spiritual destination. Here Tantra played a vital role to balance both the physical and mental needs. As we know the path of Buddha is a "Middle way" or Majjima panthā because he could realize no one would attract a path which is full of self regorism and abnegation. That is why he had preached three fundamental tenets of Dharma which is applicable to all religion i.e. Sīla, Samādhi and Prajñā. Here Tantra opens another gate for spiritual process. They give more emphasis on the praxis. Tantra gives us an opportunity to open up another dimension of life. As we seen various Tantric branches were associated with Buddhism but it does not mean all the root of Tantra comes from Buddhism. The uniqueness of this text Gughysamāja-Tantra is that it not only introduced the concept Saktis into the Buddhism but also entwined various Yogic processes to enrich the practices to achieve beyond the stage of physical and mental stratum. Tantra always gives emphasis on practical process of Sādhanā; not to emancipate from all earthly attachment. Tantra with the combination of Yoga makes perfect enlightenment which is illustrated magnificently in the text Guhyasamāja-Tantra. That is why this text still relevant to consider the evolution of Tantric Buddhism and also the process of Sadhana to achieve the stage of Mahasukha or permanent happiness.

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1 The equivalent word of Sanskrit Tantra in Tibetan is Rgynd, means continuity. The Sanskrit word Tantra gives more importance on theoretical aspects while the Tibetan root of Tantra gives more emphasis on its praxis. But both are simultaneously important to understand the innermost meaning of Tantra. Yoga Tantra: Theory and Praxis 2008, pp 19-22.

2. Tantra in Bengal 1978, p 1, "General Introduction of Tantra Philosophy" in Philosophical essays of

Surendranath Dasgupta 1941, p 151.

- 3. According to Benoytosh Bhattacharyya several Buddhist gods and goddesses as referred in the Guhyasamāja-Tantra probably the earliest version in the Buddhist pantheon. We will take the examples of Vajrasattva and Vajradhara. In the Guhysamāja-Tantra there is no clear demarcation line in between two gods whereas in the later phase of Buddhist pantheon they were entirely distinct. That is why he said "The mention of the deities referred to above in the Guhyasamāja shows that they were known in the 3rd century A.D. when the Guhyasamāja was composed." Guhyasamāja-Tantra 1931, p xxix. But scholars like Alex Wayman holds that the probable date of Guhyasamāja was either 5th century or 4th century C.E. He said "But I conventionally placed it in the fourth century A.D., with possible authorship of Indrabhūti the Great, who should not be confused with the later king of Indrabhūti." The Buddhist Tantras 1973, p 15.
- "It is thus very probable that Asanga had something to do with the Guhvasamāja Tantra, as otherwise 4. we cannot explain the reason of this coincident. It is very likely therefore that Asanga who belonged to the 3rd century A.D., is the author of the Guhysamāja Tantra." Guhyasamāja-Tantra 1931, p xxxiv.

Two Vajrayāna Works 1929, p ix. 5.

aho buddhanaya in divyamaho bodhinayottamam | .6.

aho dharmanayati santamaho mantranayati deham | Guhyasamaja-Tantra 1931, p 60.

tatra trīni yānāni, śrāvakayāna in pratyekayāna in mahāyāna in ceti| sthitayaś catasra h, vaibhā sika-7. sautrantika-yogācāra-madhyamakabhedena tatra vaibhāṣikasthityā śrāvakayānaṁ pratyekayānaṁ ca vyākhyāyate| mahāyānain ca dvividham, pāramitānayo mantanayas ceti... Advayavajra-sa nigraha 1927, p 14.

A Critical Study of the Guhyasamāja Tantra 1971, p 15. 8.

- abhedva vajram ityukta in sattva in trivavasyaikatā 9. anayā prajňayā yuktyā vajrasattva iti smṛtaḥ | 4| Ibid, p 15.
- trividha in käyaväkcitta in guhyam ity abhidīyate 10. samaja tir mīlana tir prokta tir sarvabuddhābhidhānakam || Guhyasamāja-Tantra 1931, p 152.
- aho sudurlabham idam upāya th bodhisādhanam | 11. tantra in guhyasamājākhya in tantrā ņāmuttarottaram | Ibid, p 149.

anādinidhana ti šānta ti bhāvābhāvāk şaya ti vibhum 12.

- śūnyatākaru pābhinna ti bhodhicittamiti smrtam | Hevajra-Tantra 2012, p 45. lokācāravinirnnıkta tit yadukta tit samayasambaram | 13.
- pālanatii sarvavajrais tu mantracaryeti kathyate || Guhyasantāja-Tantra 1931, p 156. asamāhitayogena nityameva samāhita h 14.
- sarvacitteşu yā caryā mantracary eti kathyate || loc. Cit. duskarair niyamais tīvrai h sevyamāno na siddhyati | 15.

sarvakāmopabhogais tu sevayaris cāśu siddhyati | Guhyasamāja-Tantra 1931, p 27.

- api tu bhagavantah sarvatathagata asmin guhyasamaje buddhabodhiri ksamalavamuhurttenaiva 16. nispādavanti | yadanaikair gatigānadīvālukāsamai h kalpai h ghatayanto vyāyacchanto bodhisattvā bodhirii na prapnuvanti | tadihaiva janmani guhyasamājābhirato bodhisattva h sarvatathāgatānārii Buddha iti sa mkhyam gacchati Ibid, p 144.
- virānnıtrahārak tyārtha in kuryāt siddhiphalarthina h 17. siddhate'muttaram tattvam bodhicittamanāvilam | mā risāhārādik rtvātha ris mahāmā risa ris prakalpayet... hastimārisarii hayamārisarii śvānamārisarii tathottamam | Ibid, p 26.

śvānamā rīsa rīt hyayamā rīsa rīt mahāmā rīsa rīt vidhānata h... Guhvasamāja-Tantra 1931, p 98. 18.