

Buddhist Tantrism and Contemporary Concerns

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Abstract

Augustine brings back into contemporary focus the ancient Buddhist Tantric texts and their metaphysical as well as pragmatic concerns in attaining integration as having continued relevance. He does so through a clear and gradual exposition of the school and its main contentions.

Keywords: Tantrism, Vajrayana, Consciousness, Integration.

Introduction

Mahāyāna Buddhism flourished during the period between the second and the eighth century A.D., while between the seventh and the twelfth centuries, it was tantric Buddhism that dominated the scene. But the secretive and esoteric nature and the mystery surrounding the tantric texts and tantric lore make the exploration of Buddhist tantrism or *Vajrayāna* a difficult and delicate task. The cautious attempts to interpret these texts have been made with great apology, reluctance, and compunction. On account of its overtly erotic ramifications it is disowned in scholarly circles as an illegitimate child of *Mahāyāna*'s tryst with Tantrism. Hence most scholars refuse to stand squarely by tantric tradition and do not consider it as a viable template for ideal human life.

However, in recent years scholars of diverse cultural religious and ethical provenance have pitched in to interpret and possibly rehabilitate tantrism in the galaxy of Indian religio-cultural traditions. The task is an uphill one, and the path lonely, as *Vajrayāna* is a road less travelled by. The orientalist, cultural anthropologists, philologists, sociologists, archaeologists, and historians have contributed much to the understanding of tantrism in general and *Vajrayāna* in particular. The tantric influence has been so immense that it has genetically modified the Indian way of life, if not the view of life. Art, architecture, sculpture, painting and literature have all been flavoured by tantrism. *Vajrayāna* has been able to enter the innermost chambers of the human psyche and satisfy certain vital aspirations and yearnings of man as no other system hitherto. So much so, its amoral appearance attracts the ire only of the scholar, not of the commoner.

I

Tantra

The essence of *tantra* is revealed in its etymology which may be traced to the Sanskrit root '*tan*' (to spread) or from '*tantri*' (knowledge). Hence, '*tantra*' may be understood as 'that which spreads knowledge'.¹ Initially the word '*tantra*' was used to signify 'fundamental canons of a system of thought', any work, treatise, or handbook teaching some doctrine or practice, not necessarily a tantric one. The term '*tantra*' could also be related to the Sanskrit verbal roots '*tan*' which means 'to stretch', or 'expound', and to '*tra*' which means 'to save'. Hence '*tantra*' is 'that which saves'. This soteriological nuance of the term '*tantra*' assumes importance in the face of the common misconception that the primary aim of *tantra* is to procure mundane benefits.

The Tibetan equivalent of the Sanskrit word '*tantra*', '*rgyud*', literally means a 'continuum' or an 'unbroken stream', flowing from ignorance to enlightenment. This is significant especially in relation to the tantric praxis. *Tantra* puts into practice the homeopathic dictum of 'curing the like by the like' (*similia similibus curantur*). That is, unlike the *Sūtra* path, the '*rgyud*' enables dissonant emotions such as *rāga* (passion), *dveṣa* (wrath), *moha* (delusion) etc., to be transmuted into blissful states of realisation, without renunciation or rejection. This resonates with the spirit of the *Mādhyamikakārikā* that *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are essentially one and the same continuum.² Thus the tantric practitioner can cultivate an uninterrupted continuum between his ordinary initial mind, the advanced mind on the Path, and the fully enlightened mind of the Buddha.³

II

Tantric Innovations in Buddhism

Buddhist historians Buston and Tārānātha identified three principal turning points (*dharma cakra pravarttana* or Three Swings of the Wheel of Law) in the history of Buddhism. The first turning point was from the radical realism of the *Ābhidharmika* system (*Theravāda* and *Vaibhāṣika*) to the critical realism of the *Sautrāntika* school. The second transition was from this (critical) realistic phase to the radical Absolutism (*advaya-vāda*) of the *Mādhyamika*. The third phase was the transition from the *Mādhyamika* Absolutism to the Idealism of *Yogācāra* and later *Vijānavāda*. The emergence of *Mādhyamika* is an important watershed in the development of Buddhism because it is

1 '*Tanyate, vistāryate jñānam anena iti tantram*', S.B. Dasgupta, *An Introduction to Tāntric Buddhism*, 3rd ed., Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1974, p.

2 '*Na samsārasya nirvāṇ āt kimcid aṣṭi viśeṣaṇam, Na samsārasya nirvāṇ āt kimcid aṣṭi viśeṣaṇam*," *Mūlamādhymakārika*, XXV, 19. (*Samsāra* has nothing that distinguishes it from *Nirvāṇa*. *Nirvāṇa* has nothing that distinguishes it from *Samsāra*)

3 Graham Coleman, ed., *A Handbook of Tibetan Culture*, Calcutta, Rupa & Co., 1995, Second Impression, 1997, pp. 391-392.

with the *Mādhyamika* that *Mahāyāna* Buddhism developed its religious potential to the full. Once Buddhism established itself as a religion especially under the patronage of emperor Aśoka (c.268-232 B.C.) tantrism lost no time in taking roots within its fold. This transgression into the region of religion laid the foundation for what we could call the fourth phase in the development of Buddhism – the tantric phase.

In the development of Buddhism, direct realisation of Wisdom (*prajñā*) was overshadowed time and again by an over emphasis on the exposition of doctrine. The *Ābhidharmika* system focused its attention entirely on the analysis of the universe into *dharmas*, which are *saṃskṛta* and *asaṃskṛta*, and classified them into *skandhas*, *āyatanas*, and *dhātus*.⁴ In this context *Mahāyāna* emerged to balance the scholasticism of the *Ābhidharmika*. The *Mahāyānists* discounted the claims of ratiocination and logic through its dialectic and replaced reason with intuition as the way to realise *śūnyatā*. But again, in the course of time, the *Mahāyānists* fell into the same trap, stressing the dialectic of the *Mādhyamika* and the doctrines of *Yogācāra* and their legacy, the Way of Perfection (*Pāramitāyāna*), presented itself to be a lengthy meandering towards the ultimate goal. In this context, the tantric masters developed a unique praxis based on the cosmic, mantric and occult elements and called it *Mantrayāna* or *Vajrayāna*. Thus arose *Vajrayāna* to balance the scholasticism of *Mahāyāna* and emphasise that its doctrine be supplemented with rigorous praxis. *Vajrayāna* did not contest the doctrinal claims of *Mahāyāna* or its ultimate goal but built, on the theoretical framework of the former, a system of praxis that would ensure the quick realisation of the goal. Thus the inner dynamism of the Buddhist thought itself, the religious quest of the believer and the socio-political and religious atmosphere of the time, fathered the birth of Buddhist Tantrism, which is now known as *Vajrayāna*.

III

Vajrayāna

Vajrayāna comes from the two words '*vajra*' and '*yāna*'. The term '*vajra*' is at times translated as 'thunderbolt', which symbolises Indra's power in Hindu mythology. In the Buddhist tradition, "the *vajra* is regarded as the symbol of highest spiritual power, which is irresistible and invincible. '*Vajra*'⁵ is therefore compared to the diamond, which is capable of cutting asunder any other substance, but which itself cannot be cut by anything." 'Diamond' signifies, preciousness, immutability, indivisibility, purity and clarity of the enlightened mind ("*abhedyam vajram ity uktam*")⁶ and hence

4 Theodore Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the word "Dharma"*, 3rd ed., Calcutta, Susil Gupta (India) Ltd., 1961, p. 3.

5 The Tibetan equivalent for '*vajra*' is '*rdo-rje*', (pronounced '*dorjay*'). '*rdo*' means 'stone' and '*rje*' means 'ruler', 'master', 'lord'. Therefore, '*rdo-rje*' is the king of stones, the most precious, i.e., and the diamond. Lama Govinda Anagarika, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, London, Rider & Company, 1960, this edition, 1969, p. 62.

6 G.W. Farrow and I. Menon, trans., & eds., *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra with the Commentary Yogaratnamālā*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1992, I:1:4 (emphasis added).

in Buddhism 'vajra' is considered diamond. Though the diamond is able to produce all colours, it is colourless according to its own nature. Hence it is a suitable symbol of that transcendental state of emptiness, *śūnyatā* – the absence of all conceptual determinations. The *Yogaratnamālā*, a commentary on the , equates *śūnyatā* and *vajra*. "The void which is the firm essence, indestructible, indepletable, indivisible and not capable of being consumed is called *vajra*."⁷

'*Yāna*' literally means 'vehicle', which signifies the dynamic character of Buddhism. The idea of 'the way', of 'going', of 'movement' is a hallmark of Buddhism right from the start. We have expressions that exude this character, like, 'the eightfold path' (*aṣṭāṅgika-mārga*), 'the middle way' (*madhyamā pratipad*), 'the small vehicle' (*Hīnayāna*), 'the big vehicle' (*Mahāyāna*), 'the crossing of the stream' (*pāragatim*), 'the entering into the stream of liberation' (*sotāpatti*) and 'the Buddha as one who has 'thus come' or 'thus gone' (*tathāgata*).⁸ *Vajrayāna*, therefore, is aptly translated as 'the Diamond Vehicle'⁹.

IV

Vajrayāna: Buddhism in a New Key

Vajrayāna is a Buddhist phenomenon with deep roots going back to the *Ābhidharmika* and the *Mahāyāna* systems of Philosophy. The knowledge of *Vaibhāṣika* and *Sautrāntika* doctrines, as well as a clear understanding of the leading *Mahāyānic* insights, serve as a preface to the praxis of *Vajrayāna*. Tantric Buddhism profits much from the constructive philosophy of the *Ābhidharmika*, the de-construction initiated by the *Mādhyamika*, and the Idealism of the *Yogācāra*. It absorbs the essentials of these systems and recasts Buddhist thought in a new key.

Vajrayāna recognises the meticulous classification of the elements of existence (dharmas) into skandhas, āyatanas and dhātus by the *Ābhidharmikas*. Dharmas constitute the structural elements of existence, which cannot further be reduced. In *Vajrayāna*, the dharmas are not so much objects of speculation, as they are of meditation. For this purpose they are visualised as deities inhabiting the *maṇḍala* and finally as residing within the body of the *sādhaka*, the microcosm. The skandhas, the Five Aggregates of Phenomenal Existence, are the five *dhyāni* Buddhas who are the embodiments of the Five Aspects of Enlightened Awareness as well as the five evils (*doṣas*) which afflict existence. Similarly, the twelve āyatanas have been deified as the goddesses of the Hevajra and Nairātmyā *maṇḍalas* as we find in the Hevajra Tantra. While in *Ābhidharmika* systems the dharmas are real though momentary, in

7 "dṛḍham sārām asauśīrṣyam acchedyābhedyalakṣaṇam adāhi avināśi ca śūnyatā vajram uccyate" D.L. Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study, Part 1 & 2*, London, Oxford University Press, 1959, Reprint, 1980, Part 2, *Yogaratnamālā*, pp. 104-105.

8 Lama Govinda Anagarika, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, p. 261.

9 At times 'vajra' is also translated as 'adamantine' and *Vajrayāna* as the 'Adamantine vehicle'.

Vajrayāna, they are mere appearances of consciousness, as admitted also by *Yogâcâra*. Just as the dharmas, so also the deities, are the creations of the mind. In *Vajrayāna*, through the deity-*yoga*, the non-reality of the dharmas is experienced. The primary creation of the mind, according to *Yogâcâra*, is the subject-object duality (*grāhya-grāhaka dvaya*). When *nirvāṇa* is realised, the object is negated and the subject lapses and non-dual consciousness alone remains. Consciousness as Absolute is not subject to *pratītyasamutpāda*, but consciousness as subject (i.e., the creative mind) and its creations are.¹⁰ *Vajrayāna* also admits that the subject-object duality is *avidyā* and that the Ultimate Reality is non-dual consciousness experienced as Great Bliss.

Mādhyamika establishes the void nature of all dharmas including the mind since they arise based on causes and conditions. Besides, every view (*dr̥ṣṭi*) about reality is also ultimately void. By declaring *dharmāśūnyatā*, *Mādhyamika* demolishes the foundations of perception, namely, the senses (indriyas), the objects of sensation (*viśayas*) and the consciousness of objects (*viññānas*); the *dr̥ṣṭi-śūnyatā* dismisses all claims of reason to know the Ultimate Reality and ushers in intuition as the only means to realisation. *Vajrayāna* admits that the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality as something *svasaṃvedya* (directly experienced within one's body), lies beyond the ken of perception and ratiocination.

In *Yogâcâra*, multiplicity is reduced to the fundamental duality of subject-object. In *Vajrayāna* too all, distinctions are reduced to a fundamental bi-polarity. It must be noted that there is no duality within the Ultimate Reality, though *Vajrayāna* concedes a basic bi-polarity experienced at the penultimate state, which is ultimately bridged by the coalescence of polarities. In *Yogâcâra*, the object is negated and the subject lapses; but in *Vajrayāna* there is no negation or cancellation of any of the polarities but the union of the two. *Vajrayāna* regards the two fundamental *Mahāyāna* principles, *śūnyatā* and *karuṇā*, as constituting this bi-polarity, and in the true spirit of tantra, ascribes gender to them as female and male and their union as the non-dual reality.

In *Vajrayāna* the dominant speculative tendency of Buddhist philosophy is put aside in favour of a predominantly experiential approach. The analytical skills of the mind employed by the *Ābhidharma* in creating the matrix of dharmas is down played in *Vajrayāna*, in favour of imaginative thinking, which enables the *sādhaka* to visualise the dharmas in the form of deities within the confines of a *maṇḍala*, both external and internal. Hitherto Buddhism depended on terms and concepts to express its findings, but *Vajrayāna* employs colours, sounds, symbols and figures to express its meditative realisations. To demonstrate that reality is beyond concepts and categories, paradoxes and the language of negation are generally employed; but in addition to these, *Vajrayāna* employs, *sandhyābhāṣā*,¹¹ sign language, song and dance as well

10 A.K. Chatterjee, "Pratītyasamutpāda in Buddhist Philosophy," *Our Heritage, Bulletin of the Department of Postgraduate Research Sanskrit College, Calcutta*, vol. xix, Part I, January-June, 1971, p. 17. D.E Linge, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977, pp. 61-62 (emphasis added).

11 It is the tantric code language used between the Guru and the disciple within the Circle of Initiates. For details

as iconography in its grotesque form. Our conventional frame of mind often casts its shadow upon the Ultimate Reality, and attempts to present the latter in reference to the conceptual framework of the 'is' and the 'not-is'. The iconography of the deities, especially of the wrathful ones with such weird features as, protruding teeth, multiple limbs, and non-human features, give a galvanic shock to our normal frame of mind. In *Vajrayāna*, iconography is at the service of metaphysics and it is deliberately made incongruous to our trite frame of mind in an attempt to reformat our mental make up.

V

The Vajra Metaphysics

Metaphysics is concept-dependent as T.R.V. Murti states, "Language is not an accidental, dispensable garb which could be put on and put off. It grows with thought, or rather thought grows with it."¹² The shackles of language are so unavoidable that even to think of it we need the help of language, as Gadamer says, "All thinking about language is already once again drawn back into language. We can only think in language, and just this residing of our thinking in a language is the profound enigma that language presents to thought."¹³ Can there be any respite from thinking? Does metaphysics begin and end in thinking? Or at least, can analytical thinking be complemented by imaginative thinking?

The *Mādhyamika* effort has been to demolish the myth that thinking and the resultant concepts are essential to knowledge of reality, the goal of all metaphysics. Concepts, for the *Mādhyamika*, are the greatest obstacles to knowledge as A.K. Chatterjee points out, "It is not merely language as employed in metaphysics that is at fault; it is rather language as such...*śūnyatā* is the total rejection of the pretensions of language to mirror reality. Language cannot describe; it can only distort or falsify."¹⁴

The gospel of *Mahāyāna* is the gospel of silence (*paramārtho hi āryāṇām tūṣṇim bhāva*). It may be argued that the 'product' of philosophical enquiry is the silence of reason (*tūṣṇim bhāva*) but not the 'process'; in the process, which is thinking, the only trust worthy medium is concepts. As A.K Chatterjee points out, "Conceptual thinking has to be, not only thinking on concepts, but also thinking by means of concepts..."¹⁵ The monopoly of analytical thinking in philosophy, employing concepts and categories, seems to have made metaphysics arid, sterile and tasteless,

cfr. Augustine Tomy, *Yoga Tantra: Theory and Praxis*, Delhi, Sri Satguru Publications, 2008, pp. 125-126

12 T.R.V. Murti, "The Philosophy of Language in the Indian Context", Harold G. Coward, (ed.), *Studies in Indian Thought*, Collected Papers of Prof. T.R.V. Murti, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1983, p. 358.

13 Hans-George Gadamer, "Man and Language" in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Tr.

14 A.K. Chatterjee, "The *Mādhyamika* and the Philosophy of Language", *Our Heritage, Bulletin of the Department of Postgraduate Research Sanskrit College, Calcutta*, vol.xix, Part I, January-June, 1971, p. 27.

15 A. K. Chatterjee, "Insight and Paradox in Buddhist Thought" in *Ānvīkṣikī*, vol. 6, July -Oct, 1973, p. 179.

satisfying only the cognitive aspect of man, while leaving his conative, emotive and affective aspects starving. Can there be a way of approaching reality that involves and absorbs the other faculties of the mind as well? Ortiz Javier Ugaz recommends the use of symbols, which according to him have also an 'affecting' side. Symbols are 'indefinite' and 'fluid' and can be understood only by participation or realisation (*anubhava*) and not by analysis. While the scope of reason is limited to the conscious sphere of man, symbols plumb beyond, delving into the unconscious as well.¹⁶

Vajrayāna has traced a novel way of 'doing metaphysics'. No doubt, conceptual thinking plays an important role especially in the philosophical preparation that precedes the praxis of *Vajrayāna*. But in *sādhana* proper, it employs imaginative thinking, or thinking in pictures, symbols, and figures. *Vajrayāna* combines two types of meditation, viz., the analytical meditation and the stabilising meditation. In the former, using clear, penetrative analytical thought, the yog unravels the complexities of his attitudes and behaviour patterns. In the latter, he concentrates on an object like the breath, or a visualised image without interruption.¹⁷ The visualised image is not two-dimensional, cold, or lifeless; it is full of life, three-dimensional, and made of radiant light. Visual thinking has an edge over the purely analytic thinking, in the sense, that it engrosses the whole person in the process. As a result the *sādhaka* has a more comprehensive apprehension of the ultimate reality.

Language is essential for expression but not for experience. There are experiences, which are beyond the grasp of words as Wittgenstein points out, "**There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words.** They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical."¹⁸ The *Vajrayānic* way of 'doing metaphysics' seems to emphasize experience over expression, imagination over analysis, and hence it is less dependent on concepts. *Vajrayānic* preoccupation is not with 'system-building' as in the case of most philosophies, nor is it 'system-breaking' as in *Mādhyamika*, but to enable the seeker to **experience** the Ultimate Reality (*svasaṁvedana*) than to **express** the experience of it. This effort calls for a shift of emphasis from conceptualisation to visualisation.

VI

The Vajra Body

The world is nothing but a phenomenon of consciousness, and so the material world is not an object of physics but an object of psycho-analysis. Our corporeality, the psycho-physical complex, is the fossilised form of our past consciousness. This shows the close

16 Ortiz Javier Ugaz, "An Approach to Traditional Indian Linguistic-symbolic Conceptions and their relation with Metaphysics" in *Ānvīkṣikī*, vol. iii, no. 2, August 1990, pp. 171-172.

17 Kathleen McDonald, *How to Meditate: A Practical Guide*, ed. Robina Courtin, Boston, Wisdom Publications, 1984, special edition, 1994, pp. 19-21.

18 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, No. 6, p. 522, as quoted in Shotaro Iida, "The Nature of *Samvṛti* and the Relationship of *Paramārtha* to it in *Svāntrik Mādhyamika*", *The Problem of Two Truth in Buddhism and Vedānta*, ed., Mervyn Sprung, Boston, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1973, p. 74 (emphasis added)

affinity between the physical and the spiritual. Yet, in several traditions the body has been conceived as diametrically opposed to the spirit and hence as something to be suppressed or discarded at the earliest.

Vajrayāna has rehabilitated the physical in the pursuit of the spiritual; rather, the physical has taken centre stage in its theory and praxis. Guenther opines that, "... the human body is the easiest form in which we can understand that which is most important to us..."¹⁹ The body is the laboratory where the psycho-spiritual experiments of the Vajrayānist are tested, perfected and carried on. It is the means to achieve higher planes of consciousness.

The tantric insight that the body is a microcosm and the truth of the universe is to be found in the body has revolutionised the role of the body in the pursuit of the ultimate. T. D. Bhutia states, "If we identify our body with the universe by analysing all the tattvas within our body's biological system, we can discover the ultimate truth."²⁰ The various aspects of the doctrine and praxis are associated with the body in a homologous correspondence²¹. Every deity, be it wrathful or benign, is visualised as residing within the body just as in the *Bhagavad Gitā*, Arjuna sees the entire universe in the *viśva-rūpa* of the Lord.

Body is not to be shunned in the practice of *sādhana*, for, spiritual experience is closely linked to the awareness of the body. In Vajrayānic praxis, the body, gross and subtle, are extensively used; the former in *āsanas*, *mudrās*, and dances, and the latter in cakras and *nāḍīs*. The physical plane is not left behind in the spiritual flight, but elevated and transformed. *Vajrayāna* recognises the spiritual potential of the physical. The admission of the physical into the school of the spiritual has set at rest the imaginary strife between the body and the spirit and led to the harmonious integration of the two.

VII

The Vajra Psyche

The contribution of *Vajrayāna* in mapping the human psyche is probably unparalleled in the rest of Buddhist tradition. The fundamental mental afflictions and neuroses have been identified as the five *doḥās*, namely, *rāga*, *dveṣa*, *moha*, *īrṣya* and *paiśūnya*. As in *Mādhyamika*, *Vajrayāna* conceives them as the aftermath of false views (*vikalpa*). The Vajrayānist perceives them not as evils in themselves but as distorted energies, which can be transformed into powers and channelled to propel the human mind to achieve, super psychic states. Each vajra deity corresponds to a vital force within the depth of the individual, and by uniting with the various deities, the meditator makes contact

19 Herbert V. Guenther, *Tibetan Mysticism without Mystification*, Leiden, E. Brill, 1966, p. 59.

20 T. D. Bhutia, *Beyond Eternity through Mysticism*, Darjeeling, Dom Dorji Lhaden, 1994, p. 234.

21 For details cfr. Augustine Tomy, *Yoga Tantra: Theory and Praxis*, pp. 121-122

with both the positive and the negative forces within, transmutes them, and utilises them to achieve higher states of consciousness.²²

Vajrayāna also points out that, “within the human psyche there are tender feminine traits in the soul of the male and the hard masculine traits in the soul of the female.”²³ *Vajrayānic* praxis is devised in such a way as to enable us, “...to get in touch with our masculinity/femininity.”²⁴ The two genders are not considered obstacles to each other in spiritual praxis but complementary and necessary. When these two elements are harmoniously linked and integrated, one is liberated from the fatally dangerous one-sidedness.

VIII

The Vajra Therapy

The goal of psychoanalysis, as Robert Wicks points out, “...is to improve an individual’s psychological health by revealing to the individual that individual’s basic psychic structure and constellations of inner conflict.”²⁵ In this sense, *Vajrayānic* praxis is a form of tantric psycho-analysis. The *maṭāla* practice is an excellent way to delineate the geography of the human mind and map the labyrinths of forces that disturb the surface of the mind. The *kleśas* can afflict only at the subterranean level, but once they are hauled into the surface of consciousness they become tame and harmless.

Schuon points out that, “...the Buddhist *dharma* is not a passionate struggle against passions, it dissolves passion from within, through contemplation.”²⁶ This is true especially in the case of *Vajrayāna*. There are three familiar ways of working with emotions, viz., expression, repression, and dissipation. While ‘expression’ may further strengthen the wayward emotions; ‘repression’ causes depression, and ‘dissipation’, though least injurious, does not deal with the root problem. On the contrary, *Vajrayānic* method is to embrace the emotion. This is done by letting go the conceptual scaffolding, and wordlessly gazing into the physical sensation of the emotion. This staring at the face of emotions leads one to the realisation of their void nature.

The unique way of handling emotions which *Vajrayāna* has developed could serve as a tool in modern psychotherapy. According to Linda Reid, “It could be said that

22 Linda Reid, “Jungian Archetypes and Tantric Deities: A Comparative Expose” *Encyclopaedia of Buddhist Tantra*, ed., Sadhu Santideva, New Delhi, Cosmo Publications, 2001, vol. 2, p. 533.

23 Herbert V. Guenther, *Yuganaddha: The Tantric View of Life*, 2nd edition, Varanasi, Chowkhamba Publications, 1969, p. 6.

24 “Honey on the Razor’s Edge – The Tantric Psychology of Genders on Roman(sic)”, *Encyclopaedia of Buddhist Tantra*, ed., Sadhu Santideva, New Delhi, Cosmo Publications, 2001, vol. 3, p. 604.

25 Robert Wicks, “The Therapeutic Psychology of ‘The Tibetan Book of the Dead’”, *Encyclopaedia of Buddhist Tantra*, ed., Sadhu Santideva, New Delhi, Cosmo Publications, 2001, vol. 3, pp. 721.

26 Frithjof Schuon, *In the Tracks of Buddhism*, trans., Marco Pallis, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1968, p. 20.

the aim of Buddhist *Tantra* is to penetrate into, harness, and transform the dynamic forces of the universe, which are no different from the psychological forces and archetypal constellations of our own psyche.”²⁷ The therapeutic uniqueness of the Vajrayānic praxis is that it enables passions to be turned into powers. Agehananda Bharati observes, “...if the intelligent in Modern India could view the Tantric tradition with that warm empathy which the builders of Khajuraho and Konarak must have felt, Tantrism in India may well be therapeutical for many cultural ills that beset her today.”²⁸

Conclusion

A system of metaphysics is a way of looking at things²⁹ and the ‘way of looking at things’ determines person’s understanding of reality and his/her relation to it. The ‘way of looking at things’ hitherto, has been predominantly rational, analytical and conceptual, where distinctions and differences hold sway over unity and identity. Another ‘way of looking at things’, though less frequented, is the intuitive way with its emphasis on unity, wholeness and oneness. *Vajrayāna*, like *Mādhyamika*, *Yogâcâra* and other Absolute systems, has recourse to the intuitive approach in the realisation of the ultimate reality.

The way of ratiocination is at the root of the fragmented vision of reality. Consequently, one finds oneself as distinct and distinguished from everything outside. This cellular perception of oneself leads to divisions and segregation in all other aspects of empirical life. Ideological differences, intolerance of other views and dogmatic sectarianism spring from a purely rational approach to things. Domination of one and the subjugation of everyone else in the social, political, cultural, and religious spheres, to name but a few, is a fallout of this approach. Such an attitude proves disastrous to world peace and harmony.

The Vajrayānic approach, on the contrary, is predominantly intuitive, which perceives differences as illusory, and highlights the underlying unity of all things. The *Vajra* method starts by reducing all plurality to a fundamental bi-polarity, and finally re-integrating them in a mystic unity. The individual is made to realise that the warring elements within him in the form of views and mental afflictions are nothing but distorted forms of the two fundamental energies, the static and the dynamic, the male and the female. *Vajrayāna* then employs a sophisticated praxis to achieve the mystic unity of this bi-polarity, which results in the re-integration of the individual.

The re-integrated person finds harmony with everything else in and through empirical experience. S/he is not bound by social conventions and prejudices but is liberated from the vicious and intolerant confines of subjectivity. Freed of the parochial

27 Linda Reid, “Jungian Archetypes and Tantric Deities: A Comparative Expose,” p. 533.

28 As quoted in Douglas Nik, *Tantra Yoga*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1971, p. 14.

29 A. K. Chatterjee, “The *Mādhyamika* and the Philosophy of Language” p. 3

mind-set, s/he finds that life is a web of inter-dependence. When the vision of reality is transformed, one would act no more in a self-centred manner, but purged of egoism and moved by compassion, s/he would devote to the welfare of all beings.³⁰

Vajrayāna proves to be an effective antidote against phobias and fears that afflict human life. The *Vajra* praxis is designed to make the psyche of the *yogī(nī)* adamant, and in this way s/he is fortified against mental afflictions. S/he is made to stare at the face of every type of fear, which s/he does through the visualisation of the wrathful deities. The *Vajra* method is not one of developing self-control or a stoic sense. In it there is no occasion for 'control', since afflictions do not afflict oneself any more; the *Vajra* theory and praxis take the sting out of mental afflictions, by discovering their nature as void. In this way, the *Vajrayānic* praxis makes one's psyche so strong and adamant, that, one remains unnerved by adverse circumstances. The *Vajra* perception and praxis could serve as a template for life and help address contemporary concerns in ways hitherto unexplored.

30 Tomy Augustine, "In Search of a Buddhist Ecology", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, New Series Vol. VIII, No. 3-4, July-October 2002, p. 168.