

## Kamalaśīla and Bhāvanākrama: An Informative Study

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### Abstract

Kamalaśīla, a disciple of Śānarakṣita, was an eighth centurion Indian Buddhist master from Nālandā Mahāvihāra. He was the one who accompanied Śānarakṣita to Tibet at the request of King ThrisongDeutsan. He went to Tibet in the eighth century and stayed there for three years. During his stay, the famous philosophical debate known as 'Samye Debate' between Kamalaśīla and Hashang Mahāyāna (Moheyan) was held. In the debate, Kamalaśīla negated the distorted view introduced and spread by Hashang. By refuting his wrong views he reformed and established the right views there. As a result, he became famous as a great reformer.

Kamalaśīla composed seventeen texts which are preserved in Tengyur Collection. Among them, Bhāvanākrama (Stages of Meditation) is the masterpiece. The text is actually adorned with a set of three texts of meditation, better say compendium of three parts of meditation, written into Sanskrit residing in Samye, the first Buddhist Monastic Institution in Tibet. Later, it was translated to Tibetan by the Indian Paṇḍita Prajñāvarma and Tibetan translator Jñānasena. Though the text was composed in Sanskrit language, but it was not accessible in India for about 10-15 years. In 1939, Prof. G. Tucci had a visit to Tibet and discovered the manuscript of the first chapter of the text in its Sanskrit original from Pökhang Monastery and third chapter from Russia. After that he published them in Roman scripts. Later on, realizing the necessity, importance and preciousness, Late Ven. Gyaltsen Namdol, former restorer and researcher of Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Samath, transcribed the Roman manuscripts into Devanagari. After that he restored the rest part, did the Hindi translation of the entire text and got it published in 1985 from the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies. Apart from this Sanskrit restoration and Hindi translation several modern Tibetan and western translators have also translated it to English. The text particularly contains the subject matter of meditation, especially calm abiding (śamatha) and special insight (vipaśyanā). In addition, importance of compassion, pāramitā, four means of conversions etc., is also discussed in it.

**Keywords:** Vinaya, Pāramitā, Mādhyamika, Pramāṇa and Bhāvanākrama.

Kamalaśīla (Wyl. *pad ma'ingangtshul*, 740-795 C.E.) is popularly known in the Tibetan society as one of the three Eastern Svātantrikas indicating that their origin is from east India. He was an eighth centurion Indian Buddhist master from Nālandā Mahāvihāra. He was also one of the close disciples of Ācārya Śānarakṣita. Similarly, he was the one who accompanied Śānarakṣita to the Forbidden Land (Tibet) at the request of the second spiritual king of Tibet ThrisongDeutsan. The account regarding the activities performed by this holy master in India is not available, but at least it is confirmed that he was one of the most important Indian Buddhist masters professing the philosophy of the Yogācāra Madhyamaka School which developed in the eastern part of India during the eighth century. Regarding Kamalaśīla's appearance, Śānarakṣita prophesized the very activities he did in Tibet as under: "Although no non-Buddhist would be born in Tibet but the teachings of the Buddha would be divided into two sects, which would create disputes. During that time my disciple

Kamalaśīla might be invited and also be put to challenge in philosophical debate. Thus, the debate would be pacified in spiritual way and so on." Saying this, he kept the entrustment with Yeshe Wangpo. In reply Yeshe Wangpo said, "Since we do not know him, it would be difficult for us to invite. Kindly provide us a letter mentioning about it." Accordingly Śānarakṣita wrote, "O Kamalaśīla, a time will definitely come when the King of Tibet will invite you to Tibet. At that time, you must go there. If you do not go, you will lose the commitment of being a disciple of mine." Writing the letter, he left it with the king. Yeshe Wangpo, having appointed Śrīdhara (Wyl. *dpal 'dzin*) as the representative of the tradition, left for somewhere else. He arrived at Lho-Dak for practicing meditation.

Accordingly, as mentioned above, Ācārya Kamalaśīla went to Tibet during the reign of King Thrisong Deutsan. He stayed there for three years, i.e., from 792-795 C.E. During his stay, he negated the distorted view introduced and spread by Hashang, the then Chinese

monk. By refuting his wrong views he reformed and established the right views there. As a result, he became famous as a great reformer.

As per Tengyur Catalogue of Derge Edition, name of seventeen texts ascribed to Kamalaśīla is available. The corpus of those texts is arranged and preserved in seven categories: Vinaya, Prajñāpāramitā, Madhyamaka/Mādhyamika, Sūtravṛtti, Lekha, Pramāṇa and Vichitra/Vividha. Bhāvanākrama (Wyl. *sgom rim*; Eng. Stages of Meditation) is one of them which is preserved in Madhyamaka category.

The presented text 'Bhāvanākrama' which is actually adorned with a set of three texts of meditation, better say compendium of three parts of meditation, written into Sanskrit by Kamalaśīla in the ninth century. He wrote it residing in Samye, the first Buddhist Monastic Institution in Tibet. Later, it was translated to Tibetan by the Indian Paṇḍita Prajñāvarma and Tibetan translator Lotsawa Yeshe De (Jñānasena). At present, the text is preserved in the four main Tibetan Editions-Derge, Cone, Narthang and Peking. Though the text was composed in Sanskrit language, but it was not accessible in India for about 10-15 years. In 1939, Prof. G. Tucci had a visit to Tibet and discovered the manuscript of the first chapter of the text in its Sanskrit original from Pökhang Monastery and third chapter from Russia. After that he published them in Roman scripts. Later on, realizing the necessity, importance and preciousness, Late Ven. Gyaltzen Namdol, former restorer and researcher of Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, transcribed the Roman manuscripts into Devanagari. Followed by it, he compared it with the Tibetan versions. As a result of his comparative study, he found the first page and haft of the last page were missing from its first chapter. In addition to that difference was also found in one or two verses as well as in few paras in the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions. Since the manuscript was very old, unclear and torn, few sentences in the first and third chapters were found incomplete. Ven. Namdol la completed the incomplete sentences duly consulted and compared with the Tibetan part. At the same time, he, having based the Derge Edition of the Tibetan part, had a comparative study with the other three main editions- Cone, Peking and Narthang.

Whatever differences were found in them, he put them in its footnote. After that he restored the second chapter as well as did the Hindi translation of the entire text and finally published it in 1985 from the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies. Apart from this Sanskrit restoration and Hindi translation several modern Tibetan and western translators have also translated it to English. Among those translators, Paramananda Sharma, Lobsang Jorden, Lobsang Chophel Gangchenpo, Jeremy Russel, E. Overmiller and so forth are the principal ones. Since the text particularly contains the subject matter of meditation, specially calm abiding (*samatha*) and special insight (*vipāśyanā*), and also it has not been translated to Bengali so far, me and my elder brother (Ramkrishna Das) contributed a little effort for translating the entire text to Bengali which has been published recently.

As per the available source, the great Kamalaśīla, before leaving for Tibet, was engaged in doing welfare of sentient beings in Nepal through spreading the sacred dharma of the Buddha. During his stay there he was invited to Tibet. The reason is that just after the death of Śānarakṣita, a Chinese master named HashangMahāyāna (HashangMoheyān) came to Tibet. There he propagated a kind of strange dharma. According to his thought, "Buddhahood cannot be gained through doing physical and verbal virtuous activities. Rather, it can be achieved by getting engaged in mental disengagement." By such explanation and interpretation he taught the system of practicing meditation. Many inhabitants of Tibet started following his thought. As a result, the continuity of teaching, learning and practicing propounded by Śānarakṣita was getting discontinued and decline. At that time, however, Ba-Ratna, Vairocana and few other disciples of Śānarakṣita were left unchanged. Owing to having differences between the systems of Śānarakṣita and Hashang, the followers and disciples mutually used to quarrel and debate. For the king, it became quite difficult to control the situation as well as convince and rule over his subjects. In the meantime, from Lho-Drak Khachu, Yeshe Wangpo was invited to royal palace in special case. After his arrival, he was reported the entire prior incidents. At the same time, he was also requested to find out a solution of that problem. In answer, the king was told that at the time

of death, Ācārya Śānarakṣita said these things to him: "In fact, wherever the Buddha Dharma has been spread, non-Buddhist logicians have also appeared there to vie with it accordingly. Buddhism has been spread in Tibet during the later phase of five hundred years. In such circumstances, though it would be disseminated more than what was expected, yet there would be no non-Buddhist teachers. However, a little dissension would definitely be found in connection with the Buddhist thought among the Buddhist exponents. At that time, one of my disciples who would be in Nepal might be invited to Tibet. After inviting him, appoint him in philosophical debate with that logician and king should also reconcile them. By virtue of spirituality the debate will be pacified." Accordingly, Yeshe Wangpo advised and requested the king to take appropriate move for it. Without making any delay the king sent envoys to invite the master. After their arrival in Nepal, they passed the king's message to the master. Accepting the invitation he proceeded. When he reached in Drag-Mar, the king and ministers extended him grand welcome.

### Debate and Defeat of Hashang

After Kamasila's arrival, seats and maṇḍala were arranged in the Jangchub Ling Monastery for commemorating the debate. Actually, two seats to the right and left for the two masters and one in the middle for the king were arranged in a room of the monastery. The king sat on the middle one, Hashang on the right while Kamalaśīla on the left one. The disciples of Hashang, i.e., the followers of sudden enlightenment sat in a row adjacent to Hashang while very few disciples of Kamalaśīla such as Yeshe Wangpo, Palyang, Vairocana etc., i.e., followers of gradual enlightenment sat in a row adjacent to Kamalaśīla arranged to the left. After that the king having shared entire incidents that happened earlier, welcomed them by offering garland of white flowers to each of them. Then, he passed a decree saying, "You two get engaged in philosophical debate. He who would win by presenting appropriate reasoning, the opposition would offer flower garland by relinquishing pride as per spiritual code of conduct. Thereafter, the loser should not stay here any longer." No sooner the king passed the decree, Hashang demanded, "Since I have attended first I shall raise question first." In answer, Kamalaśīla said, "Please present

the subject matter of your thought or view." Hashang started saying, "All cycle in the saṃsāra by experiencing the effects of heaven and unfortunate realms owing to individual virtuous and non-virtuous actions which are done duly motivated by the imagination of the mind. Once the imagination arises, no matter it is bad, even if it is good, one has to remain bounded in the saṃsāra due to it. As a result, he or she will not be liberated from saṃsāra. For example, no matter cloud is white or dark, the sky is covered with anything; no matter a dog is black or white colour but if it gets a kick, it will definitely and reciprocally bark. Therefore, Buddhahood cannot be attained by action or dharma connected to action. So, no imagination should be given rise to, nobody should imagine. By abiding without having any mental engagement, Buddhahood can be attained. The fabricated practice such as the ten spiritual practices like generosity, moral discipline and so on are prescribed for the foolish persons who are unable to practice the definitive meaning. To be engaged in this practice after achieving the definitive meaning is just similar to dethrone to the class of subject after being enthroned as a king or to find out an elephant even after possessing one. Therefore, as per my thought, the descending method similar to a Garuḍa that descends on the top of a tree is similar to the sudden teachings. On the other hand, the ascending method is similar to a monkey ascending up from down is the gradual teachings." According to Bu-ston Rinchen Drub, the conflict centered around two theses set out by Moheyan (Hashang Mahāyāna): "1. As long as one carries out good or evil action one is not free from transmigration. 2. Whosoever does not think of anything, whoever does not reflect, he will be totally free from transmigration. Not thinking, not pondering, non-examination, non-apprehension of an object-this is the immediate access [to liberation]."<sup>1</sup>

Kamalaśīla answered, "Your analogy is not logical. Does a Garuḍa descend on the top of a tree with fully grown wings that happen suddenly in the space or it descends there after making nest in a cave and wings gradually grow? Therefore, the first analogy is not correct. If the second analogy is accepted, then it will be a gradual

<sup>1</sup> Gomez 1983, p. 74

analogy. So, your analogy is not only incorrect but also contains incorrect meaning.”

What is the use of meditating on impermanence? Is only a part of the object negated or is completely negated on account of it? If the first one accepted, then sleep, unconsciousness etc., will become non-conceptual. If the second one is considered, then during the meditation of non-conceptuality, ‘I shall meditate non-conceptuality.’, does such thought require to be preceded? If required, then that will be conceptual and on account of it, logical thesis regarding entire conceptuality will be negated; will be broken. For example, ‘I am engaged in reticence.’ Simply using the sentence means saying something. Or ‘Do not gossip.’ Only using the sentence itself is gossiping. If the thought needs not to be preceded, then practice of meditation will necessarily need to arise in all.”

On the other hand, “A little mental engagement is required.”, if such explanation is made, correct discriminating awareness will necessarily be given up. Since through correct discriminating awareness, the reality of all phenomena referring to the non-conceptual *dharmatā* is realized, so if it is given up, then supra-mundane wisdom will necessarily be given up. In the absence of discriminating awareness, can a yogi abide in non-conceptuality through any means? If it is claimed by saying that through non-remembrance and non-mental engagement, one is able to engage in all dharmas, it will not be logical. Its reason is, in the absence of correct discriminating awareness non-remembrance of non-mental engagement in all phenomena is not possible.”

If it is claimed: “I will not be mindful with such dharmas, will not contemplate and will not be mentally engaged.” If meditation is practiced by thinking in such way, then, at that time, excess mindfulness and excess mental engagement will be practiced. If non-mindfulness and non-mental engagement are considered as the causes of non-conceptuality, then, that will not be possible in all circumstances because non-existence can never possibly become the cause of anything. On the other hand, if non-mindful is non-conceptual, then, owing to the absence of memory power and mental engagement during unconscious state, that will be non-conceptual. Despite all phenomena are empty by nature, no wisdom of realizing

emptiness will arise in the absence of discriminating awareness. Without the wisdom of emptiness obscurations cannot be purified. “Without depending on the wisdom of realizing emptiness, it will be possible through the above way.” If it is proclaimed, then, all will always be liberated by itself. Without becoming mindful and mentally engaged in any phenomenon, if practice of meditation is done with stupidity, how will correct application be possible? Practice of meditation with exhaustion of memory power or stupidity will cause the light of correct wisdom to be afar.

If the memory power gets exhausted and ignorance remains no more, how will non-mindfulness and non-mental engagement be maintained without discriminating awareness? “Despite remembering, I am not remembering; despite seeing, I am not seeing.”, such transparent matter should not be unaccepted. Therefore, when a yogi investigates and analyzes with his correct discriminating awareness, at that time he realizes all phenomena of three times as empty. At the same time, he also abandons wrong views. By virtue of the meditation on the integrated path of method and wisdom, he becomes free from all obscurations, and attains Buddhahood. Hearing such unprecedented answers from Kamalaśīla, Hashang became speechless and answerless of Kamalaśīla’s questions. After the settlement of the matter through philosophical debate, it came to be known as ‘Council of Lhasa’, although it actually was held at Samye.

### Contribution of the King

Meanwhile the king also issued a decree for all disciples to mutually challenge in debate. Accordingly Yeshe Wang poproposed: “Both the sudden and gradual teachings should be examined. If it is necessary to embrace the gradual teachings, no debate will be required for us because that is our thought. If it is necessary to embrace the sudden one, what will be left undone? If one is a Buddha since the beginning, what will be left to attain again? Just as to climb up a mountain one needs to go up step by step because it is not possible to climb up there at a time, just so if it is difficult to attain the first ground of Bodhisattva, then what else to say about the attainment of Buddhahood! Thereafter, according to the mental capacity of a practitioner he has to study the entire teachings. Followed by it, he has to understand their meaning

precisely by means of the threefold knowledge. Then having received training in the ten spiritual practices, he will have to achieve the state forbearance. Only after that he will be able to traverse the ten grounds after entering first one. Through accumulating twofold merits by following this method Buddhahood can be attained. According to your system, without accumulating merits, training of the mind and knowing the worldly activities, how is it possible to acquire knowledge of everything? Without doing anything without having anything, if death comes due to hunger, how will the omniscience be attained? Without becoming a Buddha how will infinite welfare of sentient beings be possible? Hearing these clarifications, Hashang Maheyen became answerless. As such he offered the flower garland to Kamalaśīla and admitted his defeat. At that time, the king also issued an ordinance mentioning that henceforth Nāgārjuna's thought had to be followed, the conduct of six perfections had to be practiced, ten spiritual trainings had to be implemented, mind had to be trained through threefold knowledge, and calm abiding and special insight had to be practiced by integrating the method and wisdom. After issuing the ordinance, he banished Hashang to China.

Thereafter, the king entreated Kamalaśīla: "How can all dharmas be established as selfless through hearing and contemplation? Please write the answers in words." At the request of the king, Kamalaśīla composed the first part of *Bhāvanākrama* and offered it to the king. The king read it and having understood its meaning he was delighted. He asked: "If a wish to meditate the propounded meaning in the written part by sitting on a single seat, how will that has to be done?" In answer, the master composed its second part and offered it to the king. After going through it, being pleased, the king asked: "What will be the result when meditation will be practiced accordingly?" In answer, in order to discuss the presentation of result, he composed its third and final part. At the same time, in it, he also included the part of refuting the wrong thoughts of Hashang. The king was overjoyed to receive the entire part of the text. Meanwhile a doubt arose in Kamalaśīla's mind as controversy, dissension and doubt in the intent of Bodhisattva Śāntaraṅgita might happen in future. As an antidote to it, he composed another text titled

*Madhyamakāloka* (Wyl. *dbu ma snangba*; Eng. Light of the Middle Path) containing scriptural authorities and logical reasonings, and offered it to the king. In this way, he contributed incredible role in reviving, spreading and preserving the Buddha Dharma in the Snow Land, Tibet.

### Summary of *Bhāvanākrama* (Stages of Meditation)

How the core subject matter of the entire Buddha Dharma should be meditated by sitting on a single seat? For it, two proponents have propounded systematic and elaborated presentation of path. That presentation is included in *Bhāvanākrama*. So, one who wishes to attain that state should be effortful for the corresponding cause and condition. After all, great compassion, mind of enlightenment and, study and practice of *sādhanā* are the necessary causes of omniscience.

### Practice of Great Compassion

In general, all sentient beings in this universe are tormented with incessant and long term threefold sufferings. Seeing and thinking of the conditions of beings, the practice of great compassion is to be done for the sake of liberating them from those sufferings and causes of sufferings. While beginning the practice, it may be done basing the friends as object first. Gradually, the practice should be continued and enhanced by basing enemy and general beings respectively. After that all sentient beings residing in the ten directions should be focused equally. For example, just as affection and kindness spontaneously arises in a mother towards her single sick and tormented child, in the same way a kind of special compassion arises spontaneously in a practitioner for liberating sentient beings from suffering and cause of suffering. That compassion is called great compassion.

In fact, compassion has three forms-compassion, immeasurable compassion and great compassion. The first one can be generated even by ordinary practitioners, the second one by Śrāvakas and Self-Buddhas, and the last by the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. Even the great compassion itself also has three kinds-great compassion for merely observing sentient beings, great compassion for merely observing the Dharma and great compassion for merely observing the lack of true existence.

### Generation of Bodhicitta (Mind of Enlightenment/ Altruistic Thought)

Being motivated by the above-mentioned great compassion, one vows to establish all sentient beings in the state of the unsurpassable Perfect Enlightenment by means of the power of that great compassion. It is called Bodhicitta. This Bodhicitta actually has two causes—great compassion and non-dualistic thought. Great compassion is important in the beginning, the middle, and the end of the path. In the beginning, it is important as the germ of the abundant harvest of Buddhahood. It is important in the middle as a means of development, just as water is essential for the nurturing of crops. Finally, it is important at the end, for it ripens into the state of lasting happiness. Regarding non-dualistic thought, it refers to the wisdom that sees beyond the extremes of existence and non-existence. For the welfare of sentient beings, generation of Bodhicitta, the effects of causes, is indispensable. Without generating Bodhicitta, if one gets engaged in other practices, he may achieve great result until he is in the *saṃsāra*. But after generating the Bodhicitta if he gets engaged in the prescribed practices, the result will become inexpressible.

### Engaged in Practice

By generating Bodhicitta, if a Bodhisattva himself does not become disciplined, he cannot make others disciplined. For it, one needs to be engaged in the practice of generosity, moral discipline, forbearance and so on. Without its practice Perfect Enlightenment is not attained. In the practice of Bodhisattvas, practice of six perfections (*ṣaṭpāramitā*), fourfold immeasurable (*catvāripramāṇāni*), four means of conversion (*catvāriṣaṭgrahavastuni*) etc., several things are included, which are summarized in method and wisdom. So, without becoming satisfied with any one of these two, effort has to be made for the both until they become equal. It is because, if the practices of generosity, moral discipline, forbearance etc., are not conjoined by wisdom, it does not

become 'Perfection'. So, for the sake of arousing that wisdom, a practitioner should generate the wisdom acquired through hearing that causes one to understand the meaning of scriptures and treatises. Followed by it, the wisdom acquired through contemplation which discriminates between interpretative and definitive meanings as well as the wisdom acquired through meditation which causes one to meditate the correct meaning are to be obtained.

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