

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM (PRAJNA - PARAMITA)

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In the Ses-phyin (Prajna - paramita) part of bka-gyur, it is said that Maitreya (Byams-pa) was one among those present when the Buddha Sakya Muni delivered his discourse on Prajna-paramita while staying on the mountain Gridhar Kutaparvata (Bya-rgod Phun-po-'i-ri) in Rajagriha (rGyal-po'i-khab) which was later compiled by Kashyap (Hod-srun) in 21 volumes.

The first 12 volumes of Prajna-paramita (Ses-phyin) contain all the main aspects of the doctrine and the remaining volumes constitute abridged version of the same. These volumes analysing different aspects of Prajna-paramitas (Ses-phyin) deliberate upon 108 Subjects including the Five Aggregates (Phun-po lNa), Six sense organs (skye-mched Drug), Dependent origination (rTen-'brel, bCu-gnyis), Six Transcendental virtues (Pha-rol- tu-phyin-pa Drug), and Eighteen kinds of Voidness (sTon-nyid bCo-brgyad).

Principal Texts :

Some earlier authors consider the following as the principal texts on Prajna-paramitra (Ses-phyin) as contain in bka-'gyur :

I. The Six "Mother" works (Yum-drug) - (1) The Sata-sahasrika (sTon-phrag brGya-pa), (2) The Pancavim-satisahasrika (Nyi-phri lNa-ston-pa), (3) The Astadasa-Sahasrika (Khri-brgyad-ston-pa), (4) The Dasasahasrika (Ses-rab Khri-pa), (5) The Astasahasrika (brGyad-ston-pa), (6) The Samcaya (sDud-pa)¹.

II. The 11 "Filial" works (Sras bCu-gcig) - (1) The saptasatika-prajna-paramita, (bDun-brgya-pa)² (2) The Pancasatika (lNa-brgya-pa)³, (3) The Trisatika (gSum-brgya-pa), (4) The Prajna paramita-naya-sata-pancasatika (Tshul-brgya-lna-bcu-pa).⁴ (5) The Ardhasatika (lNa-ben-pa)⁵, (6) The Pancavimsati-prajna-paramita-mukha (sGo-nyer-lna-pa)⁶, (7) The Suvikrantavikrami-pariprccha (Rab-rtsal rNam-gnon Shus-pa)⁷, (8) The Kausika-prajna-paramita⁸ (9) The Ekaksari (Yi-ge-gcig-ma)⁹, (10) The Svalpaksara-prajna-paramita (Yi-ge-nyun-nu)¹⁰, (11) The Prajnahrdaya (Ses-rab-snyin-po)¹¹.

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1. bKa' - 'gyur. SES-PHYIN, I. No. 1.
 2. Ibid. No.3.
 3. Ibid. No. 4.
 4. bKa' - 'gyur. RGYUD. IX
 5. bKa' - 'gyur. SES-PHYIN, I. No. 6.
 6. bKa' - 'gyur. RGYUD. X.
 7. bKa' - 'gyur. SES-PHYIN, I. No. 2.
 8. bKa' - 'gyur. RGYUD. XIII.
 9. bKa' - 'gyur. SES-PHYIN, I. No. 7.
 10. bKa' - 'gyur. RGYUD. XII
 11. bKa' - 'gyur. RGYUD. XII.

The principal difference between the "Mother" and the "Filial" work is that the former contain the teaching about the process of intuition (Sans. Abhisamaya, Tib. mNon-rtogs) whereas the latter are dedicated only to the theoretical part, viz. the teaching of non-substantiality.

In the 136 volume of the Sutra (mDo) section of bsTan-'gyur, the first 16 volumes consist of commentaries on the Prajna-paramita. The exposition of Madhyamika (dBu-ma) philosophy of Nagarjuna (Klu-sgrub, c. 150 A. D.) and Aryadeva ('Phags-pa-lha) which runs into 13 volumes (XVII-XXIX) is based on non-else than Prajna-paramita.

However, among the bulky literature consisting of commentaries on the Prajna-paramita, there are 4 classes of works which ought to be regarded as the so called (Sin-rta'i Srol-'byed) "Way-layers of the Vehicle" as they interpret the meaning of the Prajna-paramita without taking recourse to the interpretations of other. They are :

(i) The 6 fundamental treatises of Nagarjuna on the Madhyamika system¹, viz. the Prajna-mula (rTsa-ba'i-Ses-rab), the Sunyata-saptati (sTon-nyid bDun-cu-pa), the Yukti-sastika (Rigs-pa Drug-cu-pa), the Vighraha-vyavartani (rTsod pa Zlog-pa), the Vaidalya-sutra (Zib-me rNam-thag-pa'i mDo). and the Vyavaharasiddhi (Tho-syad-grub-pa).

(2) The Prajna-paramita-arthasamgraha, alias Astasahasrika-pindartha (brGyad-ston-don-bsdus)² of Dignaga (Phyogs-glan), in which the contents of the Astasahasrika is systematized into 32 subjects.

(3) The Commentary on the 3 Prajna-paramita sutras, viz. the Satasahasrika (sTon-phrag brGya-pa), the Pancavimsatisahasrika (Nyi-phri lNa-ston-pa), and the Astasahasrika (Khri-brgyad-ston-pa) ascribed to the Kashmirian author Damstrasena (mche-ba'i-sde) and exposing the subjects in the form of 3 "media" (sGo-gsum) and the 11 "instructions" (rNam-grans bCu-gcig).

(4) The Abhisamayalamkara of Maitreya-Asanga which is a treatise expounding the indirect subject matter (Sugs-don) of the Prajna-paramita sutra, viz. that of the path (Marga, Tib. Lam) leading to the attainment of Buddhahood.

1. dBu-ma'i Rig - tshog Drug. Klu - sgrub.

2. bsTan - 'gyur. MDO. XIV.

A SUMMARY DEFINITION OF PRAJNA-PARAMITA (SES-PHYIN)

Prajna is the knowledge of things as they are (Yatha-bhutanana) which consist in knowing 'what exist as existing and what does not exist as 'not existing'(Santam va atthiti nassati, asantam van' atthiti nassati)¹. It is the non-dual knowledge (Jhanam advayam, Tib. gNyan-su-med-pa'i Ye-ses).

Non-dual knowledge of Prajna is the abolition of all particular view points which restrict and distort reality. Prajna as a non-dual knowledge is attained by the negation of synthesis of particular point of view. Therefore absolutism is established by the negation of duality as illusion.² In Udayana, absolute has been defined as-unborn (ajata), unbecome (abhuta), unmade (akata), uncompounded (asankhata). It as non-conceptual knowledge removes ignorance (Sans. Avidya, Tib. Ma-rig-pa) which conceptualize things.

Function :

Prajna, in a text is always referred as a function, never a quality although this does not mean that the former is not qualitatively determined. As a Tathagata (absolute) it function as a principle of mediation between the absolute (sunyata) and phenomenal beings.³

The transcending function of Prajna is that instead of bringing it into conflict with the nominal existence of all separate things it enlarges and expounded on it.⁴

Discriminating Awareness :

As a discriminating awareness (Sans. Pratyaveksana-jnana, Tib So sor-rto-gpa'i Yes-ses) it cognize all the separate objects and elements without confounding any of them.⁵

Prajna is called discriminating awareness because without it all the 10 perfections (paramitas) like charity (Sans. Dana, Tib. sByin-pa), morality (Sans. Sila, Tib. Tshul-khrims), patience (Sans. ksanti, Tib. bZod-pa), diligence (Sans. Virya, Tib. brTson-'grus), meditation (Sans. Dhyana, Tib. bSam-gtan) etc., would be like a blind man without a guide and cannot reach the desired destination.

Non-substantial Nature :

With the Prajna the five aggregates (Sans. Skandhas, Tib. phun-po-lna) material qualities (Sans. Rupa-sKandha, Tib. gZugs-Kyi Phun-po) sensation (Sans. Vedana-sKandha, Tib. Tshor-ba'i Phu'n-po), perception (Sans. Samjna-sKandha,

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1. Buddhist philosophy ; a historical analysis. David J. Kalupahana. Hawaii.
 2. Central philosophy of Buddhism. T.R.V. Murti.
 3. Central philosophy of Buddhism. T.R.V. Murti.
 4. Jewel ornament of Liberation. Chapter on Discriminating Awareness. Gampopa, trans. H.V.Guenther, Riden & Co. London, 1969.
 5. Sa-lam-gyl rNam-gshag mkhas-pa'i Yid-'phrog. mkhas-grub-rje.

Tib. Du-s'es-Kyi Phun-po), disposition Samskrata-skandha, Tib 'Du-byed-Kyi Phun-po) and consciousness (Sans. Vijnana-skandha, Tib. rNam-par-s'es-pa'i Phun-po) are broken up. The immoral roots of lust, hatred, ignorance and anger will be transformed into 3 moral roots of right conduct, right concentration and right insight.

The heart of wisdom is Prajna which has neither form nor characteristic. The objects of Prajna-paramita are emptiness, negation and non-duality. All dharmas are marked with emptiness. They are neither produced nor stopped, neither defiled nor complete. Where there is emptiness there is neither form, nor feeling, nor perception nor impulse, nor consciousness, nor eye or ear or nose or tongue or body or mind ; no sight organ element, no mind-consciousness element ; no ignorance, nor extinction of ignorance ; there is no decay and death, there is no cognition, no attainment and no non-attainment ; there is no self or a being or a soul, or person.¹

Prajna is formless because Bodhisattva who begins the courses in perfect wisdom do not abide by the form as the same is not appropriated in perfect wisdom. This concentrated insight of a bodhisattva is called "the non-appropriation of all Dharmas." It is vast, noble, unlimited and unsteady.²

Conclusion :

Finally to sum-up the brief account of Prajna-paramita (Ses-phyin), Dignaga in his Prajna-paramita-arthasamgraha uses the word Prajna-paramita as : (i) the monistic and highest wisdom personified as the Buddha in his Cosmical Body (Sans. Dharma-kaya, Tib. Chos-sku), and free from the differentiation into subject and object (Grahya-grahaka), (ii) the path leading to the attainment of this wisdom and (iii) the text (of the Sutras) containing the teaching which is conducive to the realization of the former two. The first is Prajna-paramita in the direct sense of the word (the climax of wisdom personified as the Cosmic Body of the Buddha), whereas the path and text are metaphorically likewise termed as Prajna-paramita, as being the factors bringing about the attainment of the highest monistic knowledge.

1. Bhagavate-prajna-paramita-hrdaya. (Ses-rab-snin-po. bka'-gyur. RGYUD.
2. brGyad-ston-pa (Astasahasrika-prajna-paramita)