

Works of Aśvaghōṣa as Incorporated in Tibetan Canonical and Non-Canonical Texts

Shedup Tenzin,
Dept. of Indo-Tibetan Studies
Visva-Bharati

In the early 19th century, Tibet was known as the *forbidden land* to the foreign travelers and remained *terra incognita* to the outside world due to which her unique culture remain intact within its own territory. In fact to the Indian Buddhologists, Tibet is quite well known as *Bhota desh* where Buddha's teaching especially Sanskrit Mahāyāna tradition was disseminated since the early 7th century AD. It is well known fact that Tibet preserves the lost Indian cultural heritage especially that of Nalanda tradition till today. Many of the lost Sanskrit palm-leaf Buddhist texts that were lost forever in India are preserved in several monasteries in Tibet. The history witnessed the discontinuation of Sanskrit-Tibetan translation programme in 13th century AD downwards. As a result of these 600 years of historical Indo-Tibetan translation project, about 5000 Sanskrit texts mainly concerned with the Tantra, Sutra, Philosophical Commentaries, Logic, Drama, Poetry, Lexicography, Grammar, Ayurveda, Avadāna, Jātaka etc. were translated into Tibetan. The Tibetan scholars have categorized this literary genre into *Kangyur* and *Tangyur* which is here refer to Canonical texts. The Non-Canonical texts here refer to the writings of Tibetan native scholars. Out of these 5000 Sanskrit works incorporated in Tibetan canonical texts, the 13 works are attributed to Aśvaghōṣa.

Since Tibetan translation is widely regarded as the faithful and accurate translation by many erudite scholars, the study of Tibetan version of the lost Sanskrit portion of *Buddhacarita* may be a complimentary to any Sanskritist who wants to restore the *Buddhacarita* in its full and original form. Therefore, Roma Chaudhuri in her work *Aśvaghōṣa* rightly mentioned that "there is no doubt that the original *Buddha-Carita* had as many as 28 cantos, of which the above Tibetan translation is the only preserved one in the original form". Unfortunately *Saundarananda* and *Sariputra-prakarana* are not translated into Tibetan. But one of the modern Tibetologists called Lobsang Jampel has translated the *Saundarananda* from Sanskrit into Tibetan and the translation of the first chapter of *Saundarananda* is published in the Tibetan language Journal called *Zamatog*.¹

One of the objectives of this paper is to pay homage and to recall the greatness of rather extraordinary geniuses, the Indian Pandits and Tibetan Lotsava² who were engaged in the translation team work in general and Sawang Sangpo (Sa dbang bzang po) and Lodoe Gyalpo (blo gros rgyal po) in particular deserves special appreciation who presented us with this wonderful text *Buddhacarita* or *Sangs rgyas spyod pa* in Tibetan version.

¹ Dobum Tulku, (edt), "mdzes dga' bo'i snyan ngag chen po", *Zamatog*, New Delhi: Tibet House, Series 1, 1989, pp. 130-148

² The term is a corrupted form of Lokcaksu in Sanskrit meaning "the eye of universe" or the translator. It's an ancient designation labelled to Tibetan scholars who are well versed in both Tibetan and Sanskrit

According to Lobzang Jamspal (Tibetologist & expert on Asvaghosh), seven stanzas from the first chapter and the thirty second stanza onwards from the fourteenth chapter of *Buddhacarita* in Sanskrit original are lost³. Lobzang Jamspal was of the opinion that these two works of Aśvaghoṣa serves as the compliment to each other e.g. the chapter on Kapilavastu, King Shudodana, Four Noble Truths, the attainment of nirvana or immortal etc. are presented in very brief form are presented elaborately in *Saundarananda*.⁴

Buddhacarita as edited by E.H. Johnston discovered the missing portion as following:

(i) Chapter-1, sloka 1-7; chapter-1, sloka 18th-first line; chapter-1, sloka 24th-last line; chapter-1, sloka 25 to 39; chapter-1, sloka 40-first, second and third lines.

(ii) Chapter-3, sloka 55-last line.

(iii) Chapter-9, sloka 20-last line.

(iv) Chapter-12, sloka 91-first and third lines. (Roma Chaudhuri).

Roma Chaudhuri observed that "*The Chinese translation consists of 28 cantos which were translated by an Indian monk Dharmakṣema also known as Dharmarakṣa or Dharmakṣara who lived between A.D. 414 and 421. It is, however, not a literal translation, but rather a kind of elaborate paraphrasing. Therefore it is not of much use to us from the standpoint of the original work itself. Yet, it gives us, in a general manner, the sum and substance of Aśvaghoṣa's world-renowned Buddha-carita.*

The Tibetan translation is by Kṣitindrabhadra or Mahindrabhadra Matiraja (7th-8th century A.D.). It, too, like the Chinese translation consists of 28 Sargas or cantos". (Roma Chaudhuri)

From the translators' colophon of Tibetan translation of *Buddhacarita*, the eight adjectives have been added to his name as follows;

yul shā ke ta ka'i gser mig ma'i bu dge slong slob dpon snyan dngags mkhan chen po/ smra ba dang ldan pa phyogs su rnam par grags pa/ btsun pa rta dbyangs kyis mdzad pa'i sangs rgyas kyi spyod pa zhes bya ba'i snyan dngags chen po/

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³ Dobum Tulku, (ed.), "mdzes dga' bo'i snyan ngag chen po", *Zamatog*, New Delhi: Tibet House, Series 1, 1989, p. 130

⁴ Ibid, p. 133

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The English translation would be:

The great poem called *Buddhacarita* composed by Venerable (Bhadanta) Aśvaghōṣa, an inhabitant of Shaketa (referred as Ayodhya by Roma Chaudhuri) region, the son of golden-eyed (suvarna akshi putra), Bhikshu, Acarya, a great poet (mahā kavi), a great logician (Mahāvādin) who is popular in (all) directions, But it is important to note here that Roma Chaudhuri stated that "*the colophons in Aśvaghōṣa's most celebrated work Buddhacarita does not contain any information about him, not even his name.*" Roma has quoted from 18th or the last sarga from *Saundarananda* which is almost same (except the adjective Ārya) as quoted above in the translators' colophon of *Buddhacarita* in Tibetan version.

We come to know from the above colophon that Aśvaghōṣa is the native of region called Saketa. We also know that he shows his deep respect to his mother which is evidenced from the adjective "the son of golden-eyed" or "suvarnakshi putra". He refers to himself as a Buddhist monk, such as Bhadanta (bstun pa in Tibetan) and Bhiksu (dge slong in Tibetan). We can judge from the above Tibetan colophon that he is a multitalented scholar who is well versed in philosophy, poetry, and logic. That is Acārya, Mahākavi, and Mahāvādin. In the Tibetan canonical text, we find some of the minor works on Buddhist Tantric texts attributed to Aśvaghōṣa which is listed in the end of this paper.

Though *Buddhacarita* was incorporated in the Tibetan *Tangyur*, one of the two canonical texts, due to its linguistic complexity in Tibetan, it became not so popular in the Tibetan academic world. Lobzang Jamspal, a noted Tibetologist attempted to write the commentary on *Buddhacarita* with a view to disseminate this study in the Tibetan academic world.

Buddhacarita was translated by Sawang Sangpo (Sa dbang bzang po) and Lodroe Gyalpo (blo gros rgyal po). There is a hypothetical view that whether Sawang Sangpo (in Sanskrit it may be translated as *Ksitindrabhadra*) was an Indian or Tibetan scholar. From my personal point of view he was an Indian Pandit who was a co-translator from Indian side as in the case of all the Sanskrit-Tibetan translation work. Because the Tibetan Buddhist kings formulated the strict rules that in the case of Sanskrit-Tibetan translation projects, there must be at least one Indian Pandit and Tibetan lotsava should engaged in the project. Though in the translators' colophon of *Buddhacarita* in Tibetan version, though unusually this Indian Pandita name is written in Tibetan language, but nevertheless it should not be held that he was a Tibetan lotsava.

It is well established that *Buddhacarita* was translated into Tibetan in the 13th century AD probably in the great Sakya monastery during the Sakyapa rule in Tibet. This is evidence from the fact that the translators of *Buddhacarita* made a supplication in the end of this work in which they mentioned the name of Tibetan

Buddhist king and Tibetan sponsors who generously gave them financial and moral support in the translation project of *Buddhacarita*.⁵

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⁵ Ibid, p. 132

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Taranath maintained that Aśvaghōṣa is one of the epithets of Matriceta. Taranath in his work "History of Buddhism in India" reads, "This Acarya Matrceta was the same as the Brahmana Durdharsakala mentioned a little earlier. The same person was known under the following different names: Sura, Aśvaghōṣa, Matrceta, Pitrceta, Durdharsa, Dharmika Subhuti, Maticitra. etc".⁶

Accounts of debate between Aśvaghōṣa and Āryadeva as found in Tibetan source is quite interesting.. This account tells that Āryadeva the disciple of Nagarjuna went to Nalanda from Nagarjuna konda to debate against Aśvaghōṣa.

Tibetan accounts relate; "In his childhood he had been nicknamed "Parents Slave" because of his inordinate devotion to his parents. Later he was known as Aśvaghōṣa and practised meditation on Isvara; he attained a vision of the god, who offered him any siddhi that he desired. Aśvaghōṣa requested invincibility in debate. Isvara replied, "Let it be so. No one born from a woman's womb will ever be able to defeat you." So Aśvaghōṣa began debating with the various Buddhist groups in the south, and none could match him in that art.

⁶ Taranath, (ed. by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya & trans. By Lama Chimpa & Alaka Chattopadhyaya) *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1997, pp. 131-132

However, his mother was a Buddhist and thought that if she sent him to Central India, he would meet his equal, be defeated and consequently be converted to Buddhism. “To prevail over a few monks in a remote part of the country,” she said to him, “is nothing spectacular. All the greatest Buddhist masters live in Central India. If you are victorious over them, your fame would indeed be well merited.” In Central India, finally Aśvaghōṣa had a debate with Āryadeva (the disciple of Ācārya Nāgarjuna) who came all the way from Nāgarjuna konda in south India. Aśvaghōṣa embraced Buddhism after losing his debate against Āryadeva and later on composed dozens of texts. These texts are translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan and now these are preserved in *Tangyur*.⁷

Apart from *Buddhacarita*, there are several works attributed to Aśvaghōṣa in Tibetan canonical or *Tangyur* section is as follows:

- 1) *Aṣṭākṣaṇa-kathā* (mi khom pa brgyad kyi gtam), Translated by Ajitabhadra, Sakya Hod (this is included both in Jātaka section as well as in Madhyamaka section of *Tangyur*)
- 2) *Śoka-Vinodana* (mya ngan bsal ba). Translated by Ajitbhadra and Sakya Hod (discovered mya ngan bsal ba (śoka-vinodana) from the dkar chag 'phang thang ma, the 9th century traditional catalogue)
- 3) *Daśa-akuśala-karma-patha-nirdeśa* (mi dge ba bcu'i las kyi lam bzang po bstan pa). Translated by Ajitbhadra and Shakya Hod
- 4) *Paramārtha-bodhicitta-bhavana-karma-varna-samgraha* (don dam pa byang chub kyi sems bsgom pa'i rim pa yi ger bris pa). Trans. by Padmakaravarman and Rinchen Sangpo
- 5) *Samvrti-bodhicitta-bhavanopadesha-varna-samgraha* (kun rdzob byang chub sems kyi sems bsgom pa'i man ngag yi ger bris pa). Trans. by Padmakaravarman and Rinchen Sangpo
- 6) *Pariṇamanā-saṃgraha* (bsngo ba shin tu bsdus pa). Translated by Danasila.
- 7) *Guru-Pañcāśikā* (bla ma lnga bcu pa). Trans. by Padmakaravarman and Rinchen Sangpo
- 8) *Vajrayāna-mūlāpatti-saṃgraha* (rdo rje theg pa rtsa ba'i ltung ba bsdus pa). (Translator's name not mentioned)

⁷ Tsonawa, Lobsang N., Aryadeva (Tib. 'Phags-pa-lha) and Aśvaghōṣa (Tib. Slob-dpon Dpa-bo) *Indian Buddhist Pundits* (Trans.) Dharamsala: LTWA, 2005, pp. 11-14.

9) *Sthūlāpatti* (Itung ba sbom po). (Translator's name not mentioned)

10) *Sri-mahākāla-tantra-rudra-kalpa-mahāśmaśāna-nāma-ṭīkā* (dpal nag po chen po'i rgyud drag po'i brtag pa dur khrod chen po zhes bya ba'i 'grel pa). (Translator's name not mentioned)

11) *Maṇidvīpa-mahākāruṇika-pañca-deva-stotra* (Nor bu glin gi thugs rje chen po lha lnga la bstod pa). (Translator's name not mentioned).

12) *Śat-pañcāśatka-nāma-stotra* (brgya lnga bcu pa zhes bya ba'i bstod pa). Translated by Sri Raddh karavarman and Shakya blo gros.

13) *Gaṇḍī-stotra-gāthā* (gaṇḍī'i bstod pa tshigs su bcad pa). Translated by rGyal ba'i sde and Dharma Yontan

AŚVAGHOṢA WORKS IN TIBETAN NON-CANONICAL TEXT

I came across only two works of Aśvaghōṣa in the non-canonical text, viz., the partial commentaries to *Buddhacarita* and *Saundrananda* by Lobzang Jamspal which was published in 1989.⁸

Though *Buddhacarita* was translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan by Sawang Sangpo (Tib. Sa dbang bzang po) and Lodroe Gyalpo (Tib. blo gros rgyal po) in the 13th century AD, and later on incorporated in the collection of Tibetan *Tangyur*, (one of the two Tibetan canonical texts), but due to its linguistic complexity in Tibetan translation, it was not widely spread among the world of Tibetan scholars. But in the year 1989, Tibet House based in New Delhi has published in its Journal known as *Zamatog* (Series 2) a commentary to some of the selected verses from *Buddhacarita* and *Saundarananda* by Lobzang Jamspal, a noted Tibetologist from Ladakh.

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⁸ Dobum Tulku, (edt), “mdzes dga' bo'i snyan ngag chen po”, *Zamatog*, New Delhi: Tibet House, Series 2, pp. 138-161