Buddhist Avadāna Literature in Medieval India:  
The Legends of the Elders in the Avadānakalpalatā and the Aśokāvadānamālā  

YAMASAKI Kazuho  

1. Introduction  

The Avadānakalpalatā (Av-klp) is a piece of Buddhist narrative literature in 108 chapters composed by Kṣemendra (ca. 990–1066). The Aśokāvadānamālā (AAv-m), which is a collection of Buddhist narrative stories and belongs to the category of Avadānamālās, is a versified adaptation of older Buddhist works and is thought to have been composed after the eleventh century.¹)

The seventy-second chapter of the former and the second chapter of the latter are devoted to depicting the legend of the elder, Upagupta, who converted King Aśoka to Buddhism. The Kṣemendra and the AAv-m versions of this legend consist of the episode of the courtesan Vāsavadattā and that of the victory of Upagupta over Māra. It has been pointed out that the AAv-m quotes, with modification, a number of verses from the Av-klp.²) The AAv-m version of the legend also shows the same tendency. Focusing on the episode of the courtesan Vāsavadattā, the present paper aims to show that the two works, dealing with the same episode, have different stances on Buddhism.

STRONG [1992] has worked on Kṣemendra’s version of the legend of the elder, Upagupta, from a slightly different angle, examining historical and ethnographical aspects of the version, but no studies have ever tried to approach the AAv-m.³)

2. Episode of Vāsavadattā in Kṣemendra’s Version  

2.1. Structure  

In order to show the above-mentioned stances, it is necessary to consider the immediate source of Kṣemendra’s version of the episode of Vāsavadattā. For this purpose, it will be useful to provide an overview of Kṣemendra’s version which consists of forty-one verses.⁴) Here is a comparative table of narrative events in Kṣemendra’s version and in other
Buddhist Avadāna Literature in Medieval India (K. YAMASAKI)

versions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Av-kp</th>
<th>Divy</th>
<th>AYWZh</th>
<th>AYWJ</th>
<th>XYJ</th>
<th>FFZ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) v. 1</td>
<td>350.24–352.1</td>
<td>117b24–c12</td>
<td>157b7–c2</td>
<td>442b28–c10</td>
<td>305b4–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) vv. 2–5</td>
<td>352.1–352.12</td>
<td>117c12–21</td>
<td>157c8–10</td>
<td>442c10–14</td>
<td>305b16–20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) v. 6–9</td>
<td>352.28–353.13</td>
<td>118a1–10</td>
<td>157c27–158a10</td>
<td>442c20–28</td>
<td>305c1–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) vv. 10–16</td>
<td>353.13–18</td>
<td>118a10–15</td>
<td>158a11–16</td>
<td>442c28–29</td>
<td>305c10–11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) vv. 17–19</td>
<td>353.18–20</td>
<td>118a15–16</td>
<td>158a16–18</td>
<td>442c29–443a1</td>
<td>305c11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) vv. 20–22</td>
<td>353.20–24</td>
<td>118a16–19</td>
<td>156a18–21</td>
<td>443a1–3</td>
<td>305c11–14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) vv. 23–30</td>
<td>353.24–355.24</td>
<td>118a20–27</td>
<td>156a21–158b3</td>
<td>443a3–6</td>
<td>305c14–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(h) vv. 31–36</td>
<td>355.24–356.13</td>
<td>118a28–b17</td>
<td>158b3–c9</td>
<td>443a6–8</td>
<td>305c18–306a5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(j) vv. 39</td>
<td>355.29–356.5</td>
<td>118b22–25</td>
<td>158c25–27</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>306a6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(m) vv. 40–41</td>
<td>356.6–22</td>
<td>118b25–118c8</td>
<td>158c27–12</td>
<td>443a9–13</td>
<td>306a7–306b12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Motto. (b) Gupta has two sons named Asvagupta and Dhanagupta. (c) Upagupta is born to a perfume vendor named Gupta. He grows up to succeed to the family business. (d) Śānakavāsin visits young Upagupta at his home and asks him to practice contemplation of impurity. (e) A courtesan named Vāsadattā attempts to seduce Upagupta into a sexual relationship but fails completely. (f) Vāsadattā attempts to squeeze money out of a son of a rich merchant. (g) Vāsadattā murders the son for money. (h) The king of Mathurā orders that Vāsadattā be executed for murder. Vāsadattā’s limbs get cut off. (i) Upagupta pays a visit to Vāsadattā who is at death’s door. (j) Upagupta tells Vāsadattā that the human body is a mere cluster of impurities and preaches the four noble truths to her. (k) Vāsadattā obtains srota-āpatti (‘entrance into the stream’) and dies. (l) Vāsadattā is reborn in heaven. (m) Śānakavāsin allows Upagupta to be received into the order of monks. Upagupta attains arhatship.

As the table indicates, all the narrative elements of Kṣemendra’s version are common to other versions, except for (b) and (d). Other versions of the episode of the courtesan Vāsadattā to be taken into consideration are as follows:

- Divyāvadāna (Divy), chapter 26: Pāṁśupradāna (COWELL and NEIL 350.24–356.5)
- Āyūwang zhuan 阿育王传 (AYWZh), chapter 5: Shāṅgānwéixū yinyuán 商那和修因縁 (T2042, 117b24–118b25), translated by Ān Fāqīn 安法欽, [306 A.D.]
- Āyūwang jing 阿育王經 (AYWJ), chapter 8: Fō dīzī wūrén chuānshōu fācháng yinyuán xià Yōubōjídūo yinyuán 仏弟子五人伝授法藏因縁下優波薄多多因縁 (T2043, 157b1–157b4)
158c27), translated by Samghabhadra (僧伽婆羅), [512 A.D.]
- Xián yú jīng 賢愚經 (XYJ), Yōubōqìú tǐn dì liùshì 娑波毘提品第六十 (T202, 442b 28–443a9), translated by Huijué 慧覚, et al., [445 A.D.]
- Fù fāzàng yǐnyuán zhù àn 付法藏因緣伝 (FFZ), chapter 3 (T2058, 305b4–306a7), compiled by Jūjīyē 吉迦夜 and Tányào 㤅曜, [472 A.D.]

2.2. Possible Source of Kṣemendra’s Version

The legend of Upagupta in a complete form consists of three episodes: (I) The episode of the monkey who converts five hundred recluses to Buddhism; (II) the episode of Vāsavadattā; (III) the episode of the victory of Upagupta over Māra. Here is a comparative table of the structure of the legend of Upagupta.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type A</td>
<td>(I) → (II) → (III)</td>
<td>Divy, FFZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type B</td>
<td>(II) → (III) → (I)</td>
<td>XYJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type C</td>
<td>(I) → (II)</td>
<td>AYWZh, AYWJ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that Kṣemendra’s version is of type C. This might indicate that Kṣemendra wrote the episode of Vāsavadattā on the basis of the original of the AYWZh and the AYWJ. There is, however, evidence to eliminate this possibility of Kṣemendra’s version being based on the original of the AYWZh.

2.2.1. Concealment of Corpse

In Kṣemendra and the AYWJ versions, Vāsavadattā, after killing a rich man’s son, throws his corpse into a filthy place.

Av-kūp 72.18: nīksīpyāvaskaracaye tatas tam gatajīvitam | *avāpa vīpulam vītam sarthavāham praveśya sā || ‘Thereupon, having thrown [the merchant’s son] who had lost his life in a pile of feces and then invited the leader of caravan [into her room], she acquired vast wealth.’
AYWJ 158a17: 敷長者子取其身骸置不浄, “The courtesan... killed the rich man’s son [her former paramour], put the corpse in a filthy place,” (Li [1993: 131])

In the AYWZh version, on the other hand, Vāsavadattā buries the son’s corpse in the back court of her house.

AYWZh 118a16: 敷長者子埋著屋裏, «Alors cette courtisane, ... tua le fils de grande famille et l’enterra dans sa maison.» (Przyłuski [1923: 349])

2.2.2. Attainment of Fruition of Srotā-āpatti

To cite another example which illustrates the author’s theory, there is the mention in Kṣemendra and in the AYWJ version that Vāsavadattā obtains srotā-āpatti on her deathbed.

—1181—
Av-klp 72.38: upaguptakathāvāptasrotahprāptipralīthāḥ 8) sā dharmamārgapranayini drṣṭasatyā vyapadyata || ‘And then, by virtue of Upagupta’s preaching, having gained an intuitive insight into the [Four Noble] Truths and obtaining the result of srotahprāpti (lit. ‘reaching the stream’ = srotā-āpatti), she died longing for the path of dharma.’

AYWZh 158c14–17: 乃至優波笈多. 次第說法. 所謂四諦. 優波笈多更観其身. 観其身竟得厭欲界. 以自說法故通達四諦得彼含果. 婆娑婆達多得須陀洹果. ‘Upagupta then preached the Dharma, namely the four noble truths, point by point. He also contemplated the body, and through the contemplation of the body he realized the detestability of the world of desire. As he himself preached the Dharma, he thoroughly comprehended the four noble truths and attained the fruition of an anāgāmin, while Vasudattā attained the fruition of a srotā-āpanna.” (L1 [1993: 134])

In the AYWZh version, on the other hand, after Vāsavadattā’s death, deities inform a resident of Mathurā that Vāsavadattā attained the fruition of srotā-āpatti.

AYWZh 118b23–24: 時有天神語摩訶羅人. 優波笈多為婆娑婆達多說法得須陀洹. 命終得生忉利天。«Alors il y eut un esprit céleste qui dit aux gens de Mathurā: «Upagupta a exposé la Loi pour Vāsavadattā; elle est devenue crotāpampana et...»» (PRZYLUSKI [1923: 352])

2.2.3. Source of Kṣemendra’s Version

These discrepancies show that it is likely that Kṣemendra wrote his version of the episode of Vāsavadattā on the basis of the original of the AYWJ.

3. Episode of Vāsavadattā in AAvm

In the AAvm verses that constitute the AAvm version of the episode of Vāsavadattā can be classified into four groups,

Group (α) Verses quoted from the Divy version
Group (β) Verses quoted from the Av-klp version
Group (γ) Metrical adaptation of the prose parts of the Divy version
Group (δ) Verses attributed to the author(s) of the AAvm version

Verses of groups (α) and (β) form the structure of the episode. Verses in groups (γ), (α), and (β) reinforce the episode. Verses in group (δ) dramatize it. It is interesting to consider a few verses of group (δ), which narrate element (m) in Table 1.

N1 = NGMPP B94/7 13b12–14; T1 MatsuNamCat 37 = 24a12–24b2: sāntendriyo viśuddhāṅgah kh-ikkhiripāradhṛgyatī | sarvakleśan vinirjitya pariṣuddhatrimāndalāḥ | māraścaryāvinimukto bodhi- caryāsamaṇṭyātalāḥ || upasamāyādito *jñapaticaturthaḥ 9) prāptavān sudhiḥ | bhitvāvityogaṇāḥ sarvāḥ sadvidyāṃbhodhipāragah 10) || dhāraṇiparamodyogah samādhiparamodyataḥ | ‘The ascetic (i.e.,

— 1182 —

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Upagupta) who carried a bowl made of staff suppressed the functions of the sense organs and purified his limbs; he, after removing all defilements, purified the three spheres of giving (i.e., the giver, recipient, and act of giving); he, being free from following the course of conduct of Māra (i.e., the Evil One), devoted himself to following the course of conduct of Bodhisattvas leading to enlightenment. He, possessed of a brilliant intelligence, was ordained as a monk after passing the motion accompanied by three questions; he, after destroying a complete collection of things stemming from ignorance,\(^1\) reached the farther shore of the ocean of true knowledge. He made earnest efforts [to chant] dhārani and energetically endeavored to be deep in concentration.\(^3\)

N, 14a3; T, 248b8-9: so ‘rhan bodhicariprājñā pañcābhijñā yatiḥ sudhiḥ | sarvasattvahitārthāya buddhakāryam karisyati || ‘The ascetic, possessed of a brilliant intelligence, has become an arhat who is well versed in the course of conduct leading to enlightenment and who has the five supernatural knowledges. For the benefit of all living beings, he will accomplish what should be done by Buddhas.’

Verses of Kṣemendra’s version that narrate element (m) go as follows:

Av-klp 72.40-41: atrāntare śānavāsi samabhetya prasannadhiḥ | pravrajyām upaguptasya prāptakālam\(^1\) ananyata || so ‘tha pravrajitas tena prāpyaḥhatpadam uttamam | saddharmadeśanārāmbham vidadhe puravāsīnām || ‘Meanwhile, having come [to Upagupta], Śānavāsin, who has sharp intelligence, thought that the right time had arrived for Upagupta to enter an ascetic life. Then he was ordained as a monk by him (i.e., Śānavāsin). [And then] having reached the highest Arhat status, he began to preach the excellent law to the inhabitants [of Mathurā].’

In the AAv-m version, Upagupta is described as a person who has the characteristics of a Bodhisattva who has compassion toward all living beings, by means of applying to him hackneyed epithets found in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature. In the Kṣemendra version, on the other hand, Upagupta is not characterized as such a person anywhere. Kṣemendra’s greatest concern is to compose a superb narrative poem in a finished style, without employing worn-out expressions as far as possible and with no promulgation of Buddhist doctrine. The idea may also be gathered that Kṣemendra, as a poet, tends to cultivate brevity in style. This is supported by the fact that he leaves out narrative elements (b) and (d) in table 1, which are not central to the plot of the story.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion: (1) Kṣemendra wrote his version of the episode of the courtesan Vāsavadattā on the basis of the original of the AYWJ version. (2) In the Kṣemendra version, Buddhist doctrine serves merely to dramatize the episode. We may say that his stance on

\[\text{— 1183 —}\]
Buddhism represents the Hindu view of Buddhism in Kashmir circa the eleventh century. (3) The AAv-m version, however, aims solely at propagating Mahāyāna Buddhism and is supremely indifferent to originality. This suggests that the AAv-m version was written under circumstances under which Buddhism and Buddhist literary activity went into a decline and Buddhists were fairly desperate to spread their Buddhist faith among the common people.

*1 I wish to express my thanks to Profs. Kiyoshi Okano and Kei Kataoka for providing me the copies of the manuscripts of the Av-klp and the AAv-m; to Dr. Junko Matsumura for her valuable suggestions in improving the translation of the Av-klp and the AAv-m.

Notes


(This work was partially supported by a Grant-in-Aid for JSPS Fellows [25 · 10048])

<Key words> Avadānakalpalatā, Āyuwāng zhùăn, Āyuwāng jīng, Asokāvadānamālā, Upagupta

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— 1184 —