The Three Meditations of the Cakrasaṃvaramanḍala

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1. The Trisamādhī Ritual in Newar Buddhism

Newar Buddhists, who have lived in Kathmandu Valley since early periods, perform various kinds of rituals. In Newar Buddhist rituals, pūjā (offering worship) and homa (fire offering ritual) are commonly practiced. Among them, Trisamādhī is one of the most popular rituals. In most pūjās and homas, Newar Buddhist priests first perform Gurumandālapūjā, which is also one of the most fundamental rituals in Newar Buddhism. After the Gurumandālapūjā, they perform the Trisamādhī ritual. In this ritual, the priest meditates on the maṇḍala in which Cakrasaṃvara, considered a Buddha in the Tantric Buddhist pantheon, is the central deity.

Trisamādhī consists of processes of visualization (sādhana). They are (1) Ādiyogasamādhī (Meditation of the First Yoga), (2) Maṇḍalarājāgrisamādhī (Meditation of the Highest King of the Maṇḍala), and (3) Karmarājāgrisamādhī (Meditation of the Highest of the Ritual) or Sūkṣmayogasamādhī (Meditation of the Fine Yoga). These three processes are found in Indian Tantric Buddhist texts such as the Sarvavajrodaya, the Durgatipariśodhanatantra, the Pindikṛtatasādhana and so on. In the first process, Ādiyogasamādhī, the priest has a dim visualization of a maṇḍala and worships the maṇḍala. In the second process, Maṇḍalarājāgrisamādhī, the priest meditates upon the maṇḍala in detail. Then in the third process, the priest draws the maṇḍala into his body.

2. The Cakrasaṃvarasamādhī

Newar Buddhist priests perform the Trisamādhī according to the Sanskrit text entitled Cakrasaṃvarasamādhī. There are many printed texts and manuscripts regarding this text. Many mantras and descriptions of the ritual in this text are identical to the ones in the Śrīsaṃvaratrayodāśātmakārcanavidhi (TTP, No.4655, Vol. 82, 280, 5, 2-283, 2, 3). There are two versions of the Cakrasaṃvarasamādhī: one is a longer
version; the other is an abridged version. The longer version contains the three processes of visualization of the Cakrasamvaramaṇḍala, namely, (1) Ādiyogasamādhi, (2) Maṇḍalarājāgrīsamādhi, and (3) Śūkṣmayogasamādhi. In addition, it contains the muttering prayer (jāpyoga) and the offering worship of Bali (balipūjā) after the visualizations. On the other hand, in the abridged version, the detail meditation of the maṇḍala in the second samādhi and the whole third samādhi are omitted. The following explanation is taken from the longer version of the text.

In the Ādiyogasamādhi of the Cakrasamvaramaṇḍala, a priest first meditates on the deity Saṃvara, who has a white body and two arms, after meditating on emptiness (śunyatā). Then, the priest considers himself as Saṃvara. This meditation is the commencement of the visualization of the Cakrasamvaramaṇḍala. The meditation of the white-colored and two-armed Saṃvara is mentioned in the Indian Buddhist Tantric text, the Samvarodayatāntra (SU) 1).

After the meditation of Saṃvara, the priest places twenty-four seeds (bija) such as pum, jām, om, ām, etc., on the veins of his body for purification 2). These seeds represent the initial letters of the twenty-four sacred places, such as Puliramalaya, Jālandhala, Odiyāna, Arbuda and the like. These sacred places are situated in the eight directions of the Cakrasamvaramaṇḍala to be visualized in the second process of Trisamādhi, namely, Maṇḍalarājāgrīsamādhi.

After this purification ritual, the priest meditates on Saṃvara as a central deity of the maṇḍala. Here, Saṃvara is blue-black colored (kṛṣṇa), has four faces and six arms and embraces his consort. Next, the priest meditates on four gatekeeper goddesses such as Kākāsyā, Ulūkāsyā, etc., and four yoginis such as Yamaḍāti, Yamaḍūti and so on that surround Saṃvara. Here, the maṇḍala consists of nine deities. The Saṃvaramaṇḍala consisting of nine deities is not found in Indian Buddhist texts such as the Samvarodayatāntra, the Niṣpannayogāvalī compiled by Abhayākara-gupta in the eleventh or twelfth century, or the rGyud sde kun btus compiled at Ngor Temple in Tibet in the nineteenth century.

Then, the priest respectively meditates on the sun, Viśvavajra, Vajra-earth (vajrabhūmi), Vajra-chain (vajrabandha), Vajra-fence (vajraprākāra), Vajra-canopy (vajravitāna), etc. From this meditation, he creates the maṇḍala as a vessel in which the deities of are placed. After the meditation of the vessel, the priest again meditates on
Cakrasaṃvara who is accompanied by his consort. Then, he meditates on the other twelve deities of the maṇḍala. This maṇḍala consists of thirteen deities.

Next, the priest immediately meditates that Samayamaṇḍala and Jñānamaṇḍala (Jñānacakra) should be united. In this part of the text, it is not clear whether the maṇḍala of nine deities is Samayamaṇḍala or not. It is also not clearly defined whether the maṇḍala of thirteen deities is Jñānamaṇḍala or not. The text says, “Facing the Jñānacakra in the air, [the priest] should bow to it. Then [he] should draw it to the complete Samayamaṇḍala” (jñānacakram ākāsadeśe dṛṣṭvā abhimukham abhisamāpūjya samantasamayamaṇḍale praveśayet). This unity of Samayamaṇḍala and Jñānamaṇḍala is very similar to the system found in Indian Buddhist Tantric texts such as the Sādhanaṃālā. Ādiyogasamādhi ends with the worship of the maṇḍala and so on.

In the second process, namely, Maṇḍalarañjāgrisamādhi, the priest first meditates on Caturbrahmavimāhāra. After this, he begins to meditate on the Cakrasaṃvaramaṇḍala. Here, the maṇḍala consists of sixty-two deities. The priest first meditates on Vāyumaṇḍala, Aghimaṇḍala, Varuṇamaṇḍala, and Pṛthivimaṇḍala respectively. On the Pṛthivimaṇḍala, he meditates on Mt. Sumeru, a house where deities reside (kūtāgāra), Viśvavajra, a lotus and the letter hūṃ. Then, he meditates on the central deity Cakrasaṃvara and his consort Vajravarāhī. The iconographical features of the two deities are almost identical to those of Cakrasaṃvara and his consort in the Ch. 12 of the Nispannavogavāli (NPY).

Around the central deity, four dākinīs, namely, Dākinī, Lāmā, Khaṇḍarohā, and Rūpiṇī are situated. Around the four dākinīs, there are three circles, namely, Cittacakra, Vākcakra, and Kāyacakra, each of which has the nature of Dharmakāya, Sambhogakāya, and Nirmāṇakāya respectively. Each cakra has eight spokes (ara) in the eight directions. Therefore, three cakras contain twenty-four spokes in total. On these spokes, twenty-four sacred places such as Pulliramalaya, Jālandhara as mentioned above are placed. In those sacred places, twenty-four dākinīs, accompanying their consorts (dāka), reside.

The eight dākinīs in Cittacakra are called Khecarī (those who go in the air). The dākinīs in Vākcakra and Kāyacakra are respectively called Bhūcarī (those who go on the ground) and Pātalavāsini (those who live under the ground). This means that the
deities of the maṇḍala are placed in the air, on the ground, and under the ground. Here the Cakrasaṃvaramaṇḍala is considered as a three-dimensional one. Outside the three cakras, the four female gatekeepers and four yoginis are situated.

After the meditation of the maṇḍala the priest places Kāyacakra on his head, V-ākcakra on his throat, and Cittacakra on his heart. Then, he immediately combines the three cakras into one. This act clearly signifies the preparation for drawing the maṇḍala into the priest's body. After combining the maṇḍalas, the text doesn't immediately mention the third samādhi, that is, the yoga for drawing the maṇḍala into one's body. The four kinds of consecrations (abhiṣeka) and the pūjā of the maṇḍala follow the act of combining the maṇḍalas.

After that, the third process, namely, Śūkṣmayogasamādhi starts. First, the priest meditates on Sahajasamvara, who is white-colored, has one face and two arms. Then, he considers himself as Sahajasasamvara. After this meditation, he begins to draw each deity of the Cakrasaṃvaramaṇḍala into his body. After entering the priest's body, the deities are released all over the body. As mentioned above, the Cakrasaṃvaramaṇḍhisamādhi includes the muttering prayer (jāpayoga) and Bali offering (balipūjā) following the three meditations.

3. Conclusion

The Cakrasaṃvaramaṇḍhisamādhi seems to mention that the system of the three processes of visualization (trisamādhi) is common to the system in Indian Tantric Buddhist texts such as the Sarvavajrodaya, the Piṇḍikṣṭasādhana and so on. In the Sarvavajrodaya, the ascetic meditates on Vajrasattva and identifies himself with the deity in the first samādhi. Then, in the second samādhi, the ascetic, who was identified with Vajrasattva in the first samādhi, creates other deities of the Vajra-hātumāṇḍala.

On the other hand, the Cakrasaṃvaramaṇḍhisamādhi in Newar Buddhism refers to the visualization of the maṇḍalas consisting of nine deities and thirteen deities in the first samādhi. In the second samādhi, however, the text mentions the maṇḍala consisting of sixty-two deities. The former maṇḍala has a different iconographical system from that of the latter. In the meditations of the Cakrasaṃvaramaṇḍhisamādhi, there is no consistency between the first and the second samādhi. It is not like the systems found in the Savavarjrodaya and so on.
There is a difference in the ways of śādhanā between the Yogatantras and the Anuttarayogatantras. In the Yogatantras, such as the Sarvavajrodaya, the priest often meditates on a maṇḍala by gradually performing the hand gestures (mudrā). On the other hand, in the Anuttarayogatantras which give special reference to the Cakrasaṃvaranāṇḍala and Hevajraṇāṇḍala, the ascetic realizes a maṇḍala rather momentarily without mudrās. Regarding this, Newar Buddhist priest Rev. Ratnakaji Vajārācārya stated that mudrās are not necessary for the meditation of the Saṃvaranāṇḍala and Hevajraṇāṇḍala. It is probable that instant or immediate meditations have already been performed in the śādhanās of the Saṃvaranāṇḍala and Hevajraṇāṇḍala. Trīsamādhi is rather a progressing or gradual system of meditation. It seems that those instant meditations of Cakrasaṃvaranāṇḍala originally did not require the system of Trīsamādhi, which has a gradual feature. In the texts of Lūyipāda school and Ghaṇṭāpāda school, which mention the vesualizations of the Saṃvaranāṇḍala, Trīsamādhi is not found.

Newar Buddhist priest Rev. Bhadriratna Vajācārya explained that all visualizations of the maṇḍala have the system of Trīsamādhi in Newar Buddhism. The Cakrasaṃvarasamādhi seems to have been made with the intention of adopting the system of Trīsamādhi, although it originally did not need it.

1) In SU, this meditation is called ‘dvibhujasamvarayoga’ or ‘dvibhujaherukayoga’. In SU, the meditations of two-armed saṃvara are performed in the homa ritual, for paralyzing one’s body and so on. (Tsuda, Shinichi, The Samvarodayatantra: Selected Chapters, Tokyo, 1974, p.109 and p.138)
2) Newar Buddhist priest Rev. Ratnakajee Vajrācārya called this act ‘nādiśodhana.’
3) The names of the twenty-four couples are almost the same as the ones in NPY.
4) Here the priest receives four abhiṣekas, namely, Mukutābhiṣeka, Vajraabhiṣeka, Ghaṇṭābhiṣeka, and Nāmābhiṣeka from five Buddhas. And the priest also gives the same kinds of adhiṣekas to five Buddhas.