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An Anthology of Buddhist Tantric Songs, A Study of the Caryāgīti,
by Per Kvaerne. Oslo-Bergen-Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1977.
pp. viii + 275.



The author of this edition is to be congratulated for bringing out such a controversial but fascinating text of the Buddhist Tantra—controversial from the point of view of the original language as well as of interpretation. The linguistic controversy is a fundamental one due to the diversity of forms found in the text. The edition has wisely avoided the issue, but has tacitly accepted the general opinion which swings toward Bengali as the language of the text. “While adopting,” says the author in the introduction (p. 3) “the more usual designation ‘old Bengali’, I do not wish to commit myself to any definite position; it is perhaps doubtful whether the linguistic basis of CG can be reduced to a single dialect.” Since the language issue has been a controversial one since the first publication of the text in 1916 by H. P. Shastri, it would have been our added advantage, if the editor had discussed it once again. One point which is usually avoided by scholars, including the present one, is that the text must have belonged to different times and places, and for this reason it should show linguistic variation. And, perhaps, for that reason, the text bears features which resemble Maithili or Old Āwadhī—apart from the fact that it could be a specimen of Old Oriyā as well. I personally feel that when the anthology was compiled several centuries had already passed between the earlier and the later texts within it: hence the date of the text ranges between 700 and 1200 A.D.; and during this period these eastern languages had not yet become fully differentiated from each other. In addition, the language of the anthology, could not shake off the fetters of Apabhraṃśa. It would be worthwhile to consult some contemporary literature, the major bulk of which is in Apabhraṃśa, for linguistic clarification. Most scholars, if not all, have refused so far to recognize that some writers of the eastern school of Prakrit grammarians have recorded features of Apabhraṃśa which closely correspond with the language and vocabulary of *Caryāpadas* (e.g. *sāṇe*, *cikbīla*, etc.). This might also help scholars to fix the lower limit of the date of the text.

In selecting the readings of the text, the editor was very conscientious. He consulted three authorities—the text, Munidatta’s Commentary, and the Tibetan translation. In the case of doubtful readings a tendency to follow the Tibetan version is discernible, but the author has not always adhered to the latter. For example, in 1.4 (p. 67) the

editor has not followed the Tibetan rendering, despite the fact that the Tibetan has preserved the original meaning of the Bengali word. The passage in question runs thus:

Eriu chāndaka bāndha kapāṭera āsa/ sunupākha bhiri lāhu re pāsa

The reading *bhiri lāhu*, “come close (to you)” (p. 69) does not seem to be happy (as is also noticed by the editor). My feeling would be to accept the reading *bhiti loba*, which he discards and gives in the footnote (p. 68); *bhiti loba* would mean “the foundation of desire.” The author has another difficulty with *pākha* and *pāsa*, both meaning “side” in the same line, and so the word *pākha* is taken in the sense of “fan”, on the analogy of modern Bengali *pākhā*, by quoting Turner (7627) in this case against the evidence of Tibetan, which renders *pākha* as “side” (p. 69). Obviously there is no justification for using the two words in the same sentence with the same meaning. I wonder whether *pāsa* could be taken as *paśya* > *passa* > *pāsa* and *pākha* as “side”, in which case the line would mean “behold, the foundation of desire (is) empty on your side” (Comm. *Śūnyatā-pakṣaka*). This also agrees with Munidatta’s commentary “the fetters of desire” as is given by the editor in the bracket of his translation (p. 67). I believe there are other cases as well where some of the readings could also be adjusted in a similar way.

In his 64-page introduction, much information has been supplied. In part I, he discusses the text, the Tibetan translation, the title, the language, the author, the date of the *Caryāgītī* and the genre (pp. 1-8). Professor Kvaerne has given the names of the putative authors of the poems in a tabulated form, mentioning the number of verses attributed to each author but he has not discussed these attributions, as he says “it does not concern us” (p. 4). His section dealing with previous studies (pp. 9-16) of the text is quite informative, although some of the old Bengali texts published from Calcutta are not included. He has spared no pains in utilizing Munidatta’s commentary and the Tibetan translation (pp. 17-29) to establish a well-balanced presentation of the text. In his discussion of the religious background (pp. 30-36), two texts — *Hevajratāntra* and *Pañcakrama* — occupy most of his thoughts. But the verses of the text are so obscure and terribly shrouded in darkness that no amount of effort is helpful in understanding the underlying concept of tantric Buddhism (even with the help of the two texts mentioned above), so far as the old Bengali *Caryāgītī* text is concerned. Munidatta’s commentary and the Tibetan translation often confound all our attempts to reconcile the apparent anomalies in the imagery of the *Caryāgītī* (pp. 37-60). Professor Kvaerne’s attempt to unravel the riddle of the text in pages 41-60 is noteworthy. His essay on the concept of *Sahaja* (pp. 61-64) is well written. After introductory remarks, the text begins

with an English translation in part II (pp. 65-268). Notes to part I are given at the end of the book (pp. 269-275).

There remain a few observations about other aspects of the text. To his bibliography, which is extensive, should be added the latest work of D.N. Basu, *The Functional Analysis of Old Bengali*, (Calcutta, 1976). A thorough discussion of the metre of the text would strengthen our argument about the antiquity of the anthology. With regard to the arrangement of the text, my tendency would be to arrange the individual poems according to author, unless we believe that the text is from the pen of one single author. A word index including the variants would be very helpful to handle this sort of scholarly work, despite Sen's *Index Verborum of old Bengali*.

In conclusion I can say that this is a good edition which can be relied upon for all practical purposes.

Satya Ranjan Banerjee