



Saptasati Chandi - A Fresh Look

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An anecdote is found in Saptasati Chandi by means of which the author introduces what I consider to be a revolutionary idea. The far-reaching consequence of this idea and its application may require a very long time for its realization. But in and by itself it is certainly worthy of attention, atleast for suggesting a revolutionary change in the conceptual field, particularly in the concept of Jnana or knowledge in a broad sense. To my mind the proper application of this revolutionary idea in individual and social life would go a long way in solving some of the burning problems that confront us today in our face. In any case it opens a new vista in our consciousness of and dealing with ourselves and our fellow beings.

The anecdote runs as follows. King Suratha, driven out from his own kingdom and the affluent merchant Samadhi, rejected by his

wife and children, happen to meet each other near the hermitage of Medha Rsi, the seer. Then their dialogue begins. Both of them admit that even after

being thrown away from their own kingdom and family members and servants, these thoughts constantly haunt their minds while they are reminded of their past. They start ventilating their anxiety and astonishment to each other and later reveal the same to Medha with the hope of getting a solution. They labour under the impression that they are wise and yet their wonder knows no bound in realizing that though wise they are also infatuated. Their attachment towards apathetic relatives and the past has given them untold suffering and yet they have

been infatuated over and over again. They start enquiring from Medharisi as to how this could be possible and why all these are happening. By way



Goddess Cuttack Chandi



of reply Medha invokes *Saktitattva* (the theory of Sakti, the great power) in order to bring them home that man falls prey to infatuation under the influence of Mahamaya or the Great Power of Delusion. I am here concerned not with the implications of the abstruse philosophy of 'Mahamaya', but with what I would call the common-istic view of *jnana* or knowledge in a broad sense propounded by Medha just before the concept of *Mahamaya* is introduced by him.

According to Medha, *jnana* or knowledge in a broad sense is found in each and every creature. Man is certainly knowledgeable, but knowledge is not the monopoly of human beings alone. In the eyes of Medha all living beings, even animals, birds and deer are knowledgeable. Medha cites instances from animal world where creatures, like human beings, are infatuated on account of excessive attachment. Even as a bird, though itself seized by hunger, collects foodgrains for its children and feeds them out of great attachment, so also human beings with all their wisdom get themselves attached to their progeny in the hope of getting a return for their deeds. Thus, according to Medha, living creatures in general, whether man, beast or bird are found to be in the whirlpool of infatuation inspite of the fact that they do have *jnana* or knowledge in a broad sense. The knowledgeable person also is under the spell of the Great Power of delusion (*Mahamaya*); this is how it is and there is nothing to be astounded about it, says *Saptasati Chandi*. It is to be noticed here that according to Medha, the seer, each living being possesses knowledge in varying degrees. He strongly refuses to accept man's monopoly over knowledge. To my mind this unique illumination of Medha has far-reaching consequences. Adherence to this view cannot allow an iron curtain to be drawn between the knowledgeable and ignorant without reservation. It may be admitted that a person possesses

knowledge about a lot of things and yet he alone is not to be considered as wise or knowledgeable. On the other hand, a person possessing lesser information than him might have such wisdom as is inaccessible to the so called knowledgeable person. Under such circumstance it can be inferred how revolutionary it would be to hold that each one in the human society is in possession of some knowledge or other instead of drawing a line of demarcation between the so called wise and unwise. What to speak of human beings, creatures like birds and beasts are also not devoid of knowledge. Viewed from this perspective we have to reassess the well-known distinctions such as ignorant-wise, great-small, respectable-despicable, etc.

Will all these distinctions evaporate them ? Certainly not. Such discriminations will continue to remain in our day to day life. Difference will persist between great and small, wise and ignorant, but this will be simply a functional difference without any rigidity or absolutistic bias. It is beyond doubt that in the empirical world for the satisfaction of their practical needs people will gather around persons having proficiency and specialized skills and in return they will shower their affection and reverence on such persons. Others will be undermined in that particular respect. Importance attached to some as against others will be undermined in that particular respect. Importance attached to some as against others will be simply functional, however, and the concept of 'importance' itself will be seen to have no unalterably fixed significance to be determined by some abstract speculation. Once due importance is given to this in our social milieu it is not impossible to have fundamental and revolutionary changes in our thought process as well as in the evaluation of persons and social institutions. As an outcome of such revolutionary thought we may be impelled to search for new



values in the so called insignificant things, and in my estimation this vary thought could provide the foundation for what I would call a common-istic or mass ideology.

Eminent poet Kalidasa has ventilated his feelings through the lips of Yaksha. *Meghaduta* as follows - *Riktah sarvo bhavati hi laghuh purnata gauravaya* - which means that whatever is empty or void is light, and fullness makes the object weighty. It is a naked truth that nobody is weighty. It is a naked truth that nobody attaches importance to an empty object; people get attracted when the object is full in every respect. This is applicable *mutatis mutandis* in case of learning, wealth, knowledge, power, etc. But in the conceptual framework of the seer Medha even the animals and birds are not empty. Consequently we may learn to respect the so called light or empty objects for some of their inherent qualities and try to unfold such qualities for the immense good of mankind. Nothing is absolutely useless or despicable; importance can be attached to every thing considering our needs. Instead of having a photographic static view, based on an essentialist bias, we learn to have a non-essentialist, dynamic view of values. Here we come face to face with a conceptual remapping with far reaching implications.

A specific educational curriculum based on this illumination can be introduced. There should be specific arrangement to manifest and canalize the potential knowledge of the most backward and useless student in the class-room who is perhaps considered to be the most inefficient in a particular social set up. It has become customary to under-estimate students who have proved themselves failures, say in literature or mathematics. It is not an exaggeration to say that this is cancerous for the society. Our educational system is not advanced to the extent

so as to provide adequate opportunities for unfolding the inherent potentiality of every child. In a predicament like this thousands of innocent children are continuously ill-treated, humiliated and neglected in the so called age of science, whereas there is no dearth of so called wise and qualified academicians or rich and dignified persons in our society. And what exactly is the real contribution of these elites? We do not have any satisfactory reply if someone asks, where lies the glory of such knowledge, quality or riches? Does that glory contest only in this- that when out of millions of such unfortunate children some turnout to be thieves, others burglars, some pickpockets and another a devil, perhaps, the so-called wise and highly qualified elite will put them behind the bar or else will go on preaching sermons like, 'speak the truth', 'Be truly religious', etc. during their so called profound lectures? Are these elites to be considered as the very important members of the society while all others are insignificant and empty? *Saptasati Chandi* has uprooted this divisive consciousness, which is most pernicious, by what I would call a secularization and democratization of knowledge (and also of the grand delusion' despite knowledge). In my view many of the problems that have captivated our society through ages can be mitigated to a large extent if, instead of nurturing a monopolistic view of *Jnana*, due emphasis is given on thought of equality and if our educational system and social institutions are guided by such ideologies.

It may not be entirely out of place to mention here that is striking at the root of the age-old monopolistic theory the communistic through creates self consciousness and self-confidence in the so called despicable and the common. Which is the bedrock of any successful democratic set up. Not only that, under the impact of communism the so called uncommon man trains himself up to realize value in the common place instead of



neglecting it. The upliftment of the ignorant subject becomes the unfailing creation of the effective administration of the wise ruler. Far from despising ignorance, when delusion is conceived as a great and all-pervasive power (Mahamaya Sakti), the so-called ignorance itself becomes the school of learning, so to say, for the wise. In this framework one is to be considered elite only in so far as he is capable of unfolding the potential knowledge of man and is able to empower the so-called unwise with the dignity of wisdom. The conceptual remapping involved in the unique thought can thus be seen to have far-reaching implication.

True, monopolistic tendencies are very deep-rooted in the human society. It is not an exaggeration to state that negligence of the common place and the ordinary and an infatuated longing for the uncommon and extraordinary is an age-old disease. Having its source in the prevalent monopolistic tendencies, this longing makes us neglect each other, neglect the interests of those who are under our very nose- the millions and millions of people. It may or may not be possible to eradicate this malady completely, but the all-round development of the society will remain a myth unless this disease is at least recognized, diagnosed and brought under control. The existing



values, such as wisdom of the handful and a few in a static, essentialist, sense, need to be re-assessed in the light of the instructions of the *Saptasati Chandi*. It may be far-fetched to suppose that all aspects of the communistic thought in every detail follow directly from these instructions, but the cue can certainly be taken from Medha's revolutionary idea. It cannot be lost sight of that, nothing, no creature what-so-ever, has an intrinsic monopoly over others in view of the fact that both *Jnana* or knowledge in a broad

sense and the 'grand delusion' are so very normal to all living beings.

Like the demon Raktavirya giving birth to its prototype from each drop of its blood, monopolistic consciousness is multifaceted and monstrous. Even if one of its manifestation is rooted out, it appears in thousand other forms and encircles us in our unawareness. What is required is a ceaseless struggle in every nook and corner of human thought, by a deep penetration into the different layers of monopolistic consciousness, with *Saptasati Chandi* as our guide.

Courtesy : Orissa Review, October 1986.