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ON *PRAKRTINIRVĀNA/PRAKRTINIRVRTA*  
IN THE *BODHICARYĀVATĀRA*:  
A STUDY IN THE INDO-TIBETAN COMMENTARIAL TRADITION

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According to Tsong kha pa, writing in his early *Legs bshad gser phreng* commentary to the *Abhisamayālamkāra*, in general texts speak of four types of *nirvāna*: the *prakrti* or ‘natural’ *nirvāna*, the nonabiding (*apratisthita*) *nirvāna* of bodhisattvas and Buddhas, and the *nirvānas* with and without remainders familiar – although not necessarily with the same meaning – from both Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna Buddhism. The first of these, the *prakrtinirvāna* (*rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das*) is defined by Tsong kha pa as ‘the nature of *dharmas* which is free from extremes of verbal differentiation’.<sup>1</sup> It is clear therefore that for Tsong kha pa the *prakrtinirvāna* is a type of *nirvāna* although why it should be called this remains to be seen. It is a *rang bzhin*, a (fundamental) nature, the nature of *dharmas*. The Tibetan *rang bzhin* translates *prakrti* here, but of course it is more familiar as the Tibetan translation for *svabhāva*, inherent existence. The equivalence of *prakrti* and *svabhāva* in the expressions *prakrtinirvāna* and *prakrtinirvta* is attested from Sanskrit sources. Prajñākaramati, commenting on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:104cd (= Tib. 103cd) glosses the verse’s *prakṛtyā parinirvṛtāḥ* with *prakṛtyā svabhāvena parinirvṛtāḥ*. Interestingly, the Tibetan here uses only one expression, unusually in this context *rang gi ngo bo nyid kyis mya ngan las 'das pa*. *Rang bzhin* had been used for *prakṛtyā* in the verse, so the use of *rang gi ngo bo nyid* in the commentary preserves some sort of distinction although it lacks the clarity of the Sanskrit. For Prajñākaramati the equivalence of *prakṛtyā*

1 Lhasa edition of the *Legs bshad gser phreng*, reproduced in the microfiche edition of the *Yab sras gsung 'bum* by The Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions, New York, vol. 44, Tsa, folio 35b: *spyir myang 'das bzhir gsung rab las 'byung ste / rang bzhin dang mi gnas pa dang / lhag bcas dang lhag med kyi myang 'das so // de la dang po ni / chos rnam kyi rang bzhin spros pa mtha' dag dang bral pa'o // gnyis pa ni / sangs rgyas dang byang sems kyi myang' das so // tham gnyis la gnyis las / theg dman gyi dbang du byas pa ni /* This passage has been noted by David Seyfort Ruegg in his *La Théorie du Tathāgatagarbha et du Gotra*, Paris: Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1969, p. 450. On the translation of *spros pa* (*prapañca*) as ‘verbal differentiation’ see my ‘Some aspects of language and construction in the *Madhyamaka*’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 8 (1980), pp. 1-45, esp. pp. 30-4.

or *svabhāvena parinirvṛta* with *prakrtinirvāna* is attested from his subsequent comment – enormously important from the point of view of Tsong kha pa and the dGe lugs interpretation – that living beings have the nature of liberation ‘because of the continued existence in the continuums of all sentient beings of the *prakrtinirvāna* which is defined as absence of inherent existence’. This time the Tibetan for *prakrtinirvāna* is the usual *rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das pa*.<sup>2</sup> Much earlier the *Samādhirājasūtra* had spoken of all *dharma*s by nature (*svabhāvena*) conforming to an identity with *nirvāna*, ‘in all *dharma*s *nirvāna* is set forth’.<sup>3</sup> The idea that all *dharma*s are by nature ‘nirvanated’ is of course familiar from the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras* and works in the same genre. It is clear that for Tsong kha pa, presumably following Prajñākaramati, the *prakrtinirvāna* is another name for emptiness found in all *dharma*s without exception but particularly with reference to the mental continuum of sentient beings. It is the *nirvāna* which is the *rang bzhin* of *dharma*s. For a Tibetan there immediately resonates two references here. The *prakrtinirvāna* as an unchanging nature within the continuum of sentient beings, a *nirvāna*, carries with it a flavour of the *tathāgatagarbha* theory found in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. The *prakrtinirvāna* as a nature, a *rang bzhin*, in *dharma*s indicates Candrakīrti’s *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* on 6:181-2 in which Candrakīrti talks about the true nature of things, the *dharmaṭā* which is

2 See the Vaidya edition of the *Bodhicaryāvatārapaṇījikā*, Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960:

tan na kimcid atah sattvāḥ prakṛtyā parinirvṛtāḥ //104//  
 atah asmāt karanāt sattvāḥ prāṇināḥ prakṛtyā svabhāvena parinirvṛtāḥ  
 parimuktasvabhāvāḥ / nihsvabhāvatālakṣaṇasya prakṛtinirvāṇasya  
 sarvasattvasaṁtāneṣु sadā vidyamānatvāt /  
 = Tib.: de ni cung zad min de'i phyir /  
 sems can rang bzhin mya ngan 'das //103//  
 de'i phyir zhes te / rgyu des na sems dang srog rnams rang gi ngo bo nyid kyis mya  
 ngan las 'das pa yin la / yongs su grol ba'i rang bzhin yin zhing / rang bzhin med  
 pa'i mtshan nyid rang bzhin gyis mya ngan la 'das pa / sems can thams cad kyi rgyud  
 la rtag tu yod pa'i phyir ro /

The Tibetan is cited from the Cone microfiche edition produced by The Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions, New York, mDo vol. 26, folio 253b. Unless noted otherwise, all bsTan 'gyur texts will be taken from this edition. Verses from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, however, are from the version published with the commentary by the twelfth century Tibetan rGyal sras dNgul chu Thogs med: *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa'i rTsa ba dang 'grel pa Legs par bshad pa'i rgya mtsho*, Sarnath: Sakya Students’ Union, 1982.

3 Vaidya edition, Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, Ch. 24, verse 4 cd: evam śūnyesu  
 dharmesu nirvānam samprakāśitam // See also verse 6ab: sarvadharmāḥ svabhāvena  
 nirvāṇasamasadrśāḥ /

the same whether Buddhas occur or not, the true *rang bzhin, svabhāva*, of entities which is their emptiness of any *svabhāva*.<sup>4</sup> In dGe lugs thought these two frames of reference come very firmly together. The *prakrtinirvāna* is emptiness, which applies to all *dharmas*. In the mental continuum of sentient beings this emptiness is called the *tathāgatagarbha*, and with it goes other terms perhaps originally not thought of in this vein in the *Madhyamaka* context of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* such as 'purified by nature' (*prakṛtipariśuddha*) and 'radiant by nature' (*prakṛtiprabhāsvara*).<sup>5</sup> In Tibetan almost invariably the standard word for *nirvāna* – *mya ngan las 'das*, the transcendence of sorrow – is used for *prakrtinirvāna* and *prakrtinirvṛta*. If all *dharmas* are fundamentally or by nature *nirvṛta*, in Tibetan they have by nature transcended sorrow. There is a psychological and soteriological aspect implicit in the language used which draws together the two dimensions of emptiness and *tathāgatagarbha* in a much stronger way than is necessarily the case with the Sanskrit. In spite of the apparent identity of *prakrtinirvṛta* and *prakrtinirvāna* for Prajñākaramati, it is the former term which is used more often than not in Sanskrit texts, with its implications of 'by nature, fundamentally, from the point of view of inherent existence, extinguished', that is, empty. As the *sūtras* say, this is the nature of things whether there are Buddhas or not. It does not necessarily carry with it the direct psychological and soteriological overtones of '*nirvāna*'. And if we look at the use of these notions in the commentaries to the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* it is striking that there is no employment of what might be called '*tathāgatagarbha* concepts' in Indian commentaries on the relevant verses. These are, however, abundant in Tibetan commentaries, where the notion of the *prakrtinirvāna/prakrtinirvṛta* – and thus also the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* – become absorbed into the nexus of *tathāgatagarbha* thought.

The concepts of *prakrtinirvāna* and *prakrtinirvṛta*, and their relationships to the *tathāgatagarbha*, have been dealt with in his usual thorough and lucid way by David Seyfort Ruegg in his monumental *La Théorie du*

4 For a discussion of these issues in the context of *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* 6:181-2 see Paul M. Williams, 'Silence and truth – some aspects of the *Madhyamaka* philosophy in Tibet', *The Tibet Journal*, VII; 1/2, 1982, pp. 67-80.

5 For a short recent discussion of Tibetan views on the *tathāgatagarbha*, particularly from a dGe lugs point of view (the position of rGyal tshab rje), see Doboom Tulku, 'Tathāgatagarbha', *Dreloma* No. 14, July 1985, pp. 24-8. Doboom Tulku also has studied works by Mi pham, Kong sprul and Shākyā mchog ldan. He suggests that Rgyal tshab rje does not want to maintain that the emptiness of the mental continuum *alone* is the *tathāgatagarbha*. Rather this term can also apply to various potencies within the mind.

*Tathāgatagarbha et du Gotra.* Ruegg has noted some of the relevant verses from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, together with Prajñākaramati's commentary. In addition he has particularly devoted some space to a discussion of the *prakrtinirvāna* and the *prakṛtiprabhāsvāra* nature of *citta* found in the work of the eighteenth-nineteenth century Tibetan lama Gung thang 'Jam pa'i dbyangs. In common with late dGe lugs writings, Gung thang lama's work is a culmination of much that had gone before and is replete with subtle definitions and distinctions. As I have pointed out elsewhere, however, the contemporary study of Tibetan Madhyamaka is rather like shining a narrow beam at various points in a dark attic.<sup>6</sup> We cannot see the whole picture, we do not yet know much about relationships and rivalries involved, the development of ideas, alternative interpretations of the same text and how these relate to their Indian precedents. In spite of the pioneering work by scholars like David Seyfort Ruegg, we cannot yet write a history of Tibetan Madhyamaka. Ruegg has approached the issue of the *prakrtinirvāna* in Tibet largely through reference to dGe lugs materials. By way of a footnote to his study I would like to take just four verses of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* which their commentators deem to be particularly relevant to our issue, and see what of interest for understanding the development of Madhyamaka can be derived from looking at a wider range of Indo-Tibetan commentaries.

### 1) Indian commentaries

- a. Śāntideva seems to have lived during the early eighth century. His earliest commentator appears to be Prajñākaramati, who wrote the *Bodhicaryāvatārapaṇijikā*, which survives in Sanskrit, and was apparently written towards the end of the tenth century.<sup>7</sup> The Cone edition of the Tibetan text can be found in mDo 26, folio 39a ff. (abbreviated as *Praj.*)
- b. The *Bodhisattvacaryāvatārasaṃskāra*, by someone whose name was probably Kalyāṇadeva, was composed perhaps in the early eleventh century. The Tibetan alone survives, as with the other commentaries apart

6 See Paul Williams, 'Introduction — some random reflections on the study of Tibetan Madhyamaka', *The Tibet Journal*, vol. XIV;1, Spring 1989, pp. 1-9.

7 For dates I am relying on David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981. This is vol. VII, fasc. 1 of Jan Gonda ed., *A History of Indian Literature*.

from that by Prajñākaramati. It can be found at Cone mDo 27, folio 1 ff. (abbreviated as *Kaly.*).

c. Vairocanarakṣita lived at the same time as Atiśa, and was a monk at the great monastery of Vikramaśilā. His *Bodhisattvacaryāvatārapañjikā*, written in the eleventh century, is at Cone mDo 27, folio 95b ff. (abbreviated as *Vair.*).

d. The *Bodhicaryāvatāratātparyapañjikā Viśesadyotanī* was written by Vibhūticandra, from the monastery of Jagaddala, in about 1200. He accompanied Śākyasrībhadra to Tibet in 1204. The text is Cone mDo 27, folio 192b ff. (abbreviated as *Vibh.*).

e. Finally there is an anonymous commentary to chapters 9 and 10 of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the *Vivṛti*, mDo 27, folio 177b ff. (abbreviated as *Anon.*)

All these commentaries were found to be of interest in looking at the relevant verses from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Others listed in the bsTan 'gyur were not.

## 2) Tibetan commentaries

a) *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa'i 'grel pa Legs par bshad pa'i rgya mtsho*, by rGyal sras dNgul chu Thogs med. Twelfth century. Published by the Sakya Students Union, Sarnath, 1982 (abbreviated as *Thogs.*).

b) *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa'i 'grel pa*, by bSod nams rtse mo (1142-82), the second Sa skyā hierarch. Contained in the *Sa skyā pa'i bka' bum*, Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1968. Vol. 2, pp. 457-515 (abbreviated as *bSod.*). According to David Jackson bSod nams rtse mo followed in this commentary Phywa pa Chos kyi seng ge (1109-69) who is known to have been hostile to the Prāsaṅgika approach. See David P. Jackson, 'Madhyamaka studies among the early Sa-skyā-pas', *The Tibet Journal* X;2, Summer 1985, pp. 22-3. The commentary also includes quoted material from rNgog lo tsa ba bLo ldan shes rab (1059-1109).

c) *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa'i 'grel pa Byang chub kyi sems gsal bar byed pa zla ba'i 'od zer*, by Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290-1364).

Included in Lokesh Chandra ed., *The Collected Works of Bu-ston*, part 19 (Dza), New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, Sata-Pitaka Series vol. 59, 1971, pp. 181-602 (abbreviated as *Bu.*).

- d) *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad gZhung don rab gsal snang ba*, by Sa bzang mati pañchen 'Jam dbyangs blo gros. Fourteenth century. New Delhi: Distributed by the Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Dolanji, H.P., 1975 (abbreviated as *Sabzang*.). I assume that this Sa skyā pa lama is the same as Sa bzang mati rin chen, who was a pupil of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1290-1361). The dates are possible, and some of Sa bzang mati pañchen's comments do suggest a possible *gzhān stong* orientation in his interpretation of Madhyamaka, as we shall see.
- e) *Spyod 'jug shes rab le'u'i tikkā bLo gsal ba*, rJe Tsong kha pa's (1357-1419) brief commentary on the ninth chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* contained in the *bTsong kha pa bKa' bum* published with the Japanese reprint of the Peking edition of the Tibetan Tripitaka, Tokyo-Kyoto, 1957, vol. 153, folios 1ff. (abbreviated as *Tsong*.).
- f) *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad rGyal sras 'jug ngogs*, by Tsong kha pa's pupil, rGyal tshab rje Dar ma rin chen (1364-1462). Sarnath: Pleasure of Elegant Sayings Printing Press, 1973 (abbreviated as *rGyal*.).
- g) *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod 'jug rnam bshad Theg chen chos kyi rgya mtsho zab rgyas mtha' yas snying po*, by the great historian dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba (d. mid-sixteenth century), a Karma bKa' brgyud scholar and pupil of the eighth Karma pa, Mi bskyod rdo rje. An enormous, rambling commentary, apparently published in Delhi, 1975 by the rGyal ba Karma pa's Rumtek monastery (abbreviated as *dPa'*).
- h) *Spyod 'jug gi 'bru 'grel dBu ma'i lam gyi sgron ma*, by the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud lama Padma dkar po (1527-92), Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1982 (abbreviated as *Padma*.).
- i) *Spyod 'jug shes rab kyi le'u'i tshig don go sla bar rnam par bshad pa Nor bu ke ta ka*, by the rNying ma lama 'Jam mgon 'ju Mi pham rgya mtsho (1846-1912). Contained in the *Collected Writings of 'Jam mgon 'ju Mi pham rgya mtsho*, Gangtok: Ngagyur Nyingmay Sungrab series, 1975. Volume 13,

pp. 1-97 (abbreviated as *Mipham*.). This commentary to the *Prajñā* chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* initiated a fierce written controversy with certain dGe lugs lamas the sources for which survive and would form an interesting and valuable field for further research.<sup>8</sup>

**Bodhicaryāvatāra 9:13 (= Tib.13cd/14ab) (ab)**

nirvṛtaḥ paramārthena saṃvṛtyā yadi samsaret /  
[buddho'pi samsared evam tataḥ kim bodhicaryayā //]

gal te don dam mya ngan 'das /  
'khor ba kun rdzob de lta na /  
[sangs rgyas kyang ni 'khor 'gyur bas /  
byang chub spyod pas ci zhig bya //]

If from an ultimate point of view there is cessation, from a conventional point of view there would be *samsāra* /

[Then the Buddha too would be in *samsāra*. Because of this, what is the point of conduct towards enlightenment? //]

Kalyāṇadeva alone of our commentators gives us a canonical reference. It is said in the *Prajñāpāramitā(sūtras)* that ultimately all *dharmas* are *mya ngan 'das* – here, to parallel the verse, *nirvṛta*, ceased or extinguished (f. 69b). The opponent argues against the Mādhyamika that it follows that a Buddha is in *samsāra* and the religious life is useless. One interpretation of this is that the opponent confuses *nirvṛta*, ceased, which applies to all *dharmas* from an ultimate point of view precisely because ‘from an ultimate point of view’ refers to a hypothetical inherent existence which simply does not exist – that is, from an ultimate point of view there is emptiness of inherent existence – with *nirvāṇa*, the attainment of enlightenment by (in this case) a Buddha. Thus for the opponent all are already enlightened (a view held consciously, of course, sometimes in a very strong sense, by some Tibetan and East Asian traditions influenced by the *tathāgatagarbha*). Since all are already enlightened there is no difference between a Buddha and others. Interestingly, the conclusion then is not that others can act like Buddhas – they patently cannot – but that Buddhas are in *samsāra*. Such an interpretation of the opponent’s position and its confusion is broadly correct, but it has no *consistent* linguistic basis

8 I also consulted the *Spyod 'jug 'grel pa Rin po che'i phreng ba* by the dGe lugs lama rGyal mkhan po Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1762-1837), New Delhi, 1979. It was disappointing. On the relevant verses he simply quotes at length the commentary by rGyal tshab rje.

in the Indian tradition, however, since *nirvta* and *nirvāna*, as we have seen, are sometimes used as equivalents. In Tibetan the distinction is not made at all. Nevertheless the binary opposition between innate cessation and enlightenment does underly the opponent's confusion and the Mādhyamika reply. On a deeper level, however, the real problem behind the opponent's objection here is an identification of *paramārtha* and *nirvāna* on the one hand, opposed to *samvrti* and *samsāra* on the other. There is a tendency sometimes (not the least in works on Christian-Buddhist dialogue) to think that the word for the ultimate way of things in Buddhism is *nirvāna*. Generally this is false, but there is some basis for it in Mādhyamika writings. Nāgārjuna states in his *Yuktisastikā* v. 35 that the Buddhas have proclaimed *nirvāna* as the sole truth. Āryadeva declares that *nirvāna* is emptiness (*Catuhśatika* 12.23). If *nirvāna* = *paramārthasatya* = *śūnyatā* then since *nirvāna* and *paramārthasatya* are in mutually exhaustive and exclusive opposition to *samsāra* and *samvrtisatya* respectively it follows that all *samvrtisatya* is *samsāra*. Since the Buddha, Śākyamuni as a historical figure, is not identical with *paramārthasatya* – while empty of inherent existence he is not emptiness itself – the Buddha must thus be included under *samsāra*. And if the Buddha is in *samsāra* then what chance is there for the rest of us! The false identities of *paramārtha* = *samvrti* and *nirvāna* = *samsāra* implied by the opponent in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:13 are more easily drawn from the Tibetan text which is less straightforward here in its grammatical relationships than the Sanskrit. It can easily be read as saying that 'If *paramārtha* is *nirvāna*, *samsāra* is *samvrti*.' This is indeed how it is read by bSod nams rtse mo: 'If the ultimate is *nirvāna*, and if *samsāra* is the verbal differentiations (*spros pa*) of the conventional... '(gal te don dam pa ni mya ngan las 'das pa yin na 'khor ba ni kun rdzob kyi spros pa yin na...: bSod. p. 495:4).

Clearly the opponent has confused an innate cessation (or enlightenment) which applies to all *dharma*s – their emptiness – with *nirvāna* as an event in time, the *nirvāna* which follows from cultivating the path. In the attainment of this *nirvāna* there is a difference between Buddhas and unenlightened sentient beings. Since the Tibetan makes no distinction between *nirvta* and *nirvāna* the issue of ultimately all being already enlightened – having transcended sorrow – is more glaring in Tibetan. It is not surprising, therefore, that in glossing this verse all our Tibetan commentators apart from dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba introduce the concept of the *prakrtinirvāna/prakrtinirvta* by name. Only Prajñākaramati and Vairocana among the Indians mention it, however, indicating possibly that the expression *don dam mya ngan 'das* – ultimate enlightenment –

suggested more immediately to Tibetans the *tathāgatagarbha* which, as we shall see, tended in Tibet to be identified with at least one of the dimensions of the *prakrtinirvāna*. Thus the slide from *don dam mya ngan 'das* to *rang bzhin gyis mya ngan 'das*, a fairly obvious move anyway, was perhaps even more obvious in the Tibetan context. There is no direct association in Indian Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka texts as far as I know of *prakrtinirvāna/prakrtinirvta* with the *tathāgatagarbha*. It is in commenting on the first part of the verse that the concept of *prakrtinirvāna/-nirvta* is introduced, thus underlining the fact that *nirvtaḥ paramārthena = prakrtinirvtaḥ*, but rather begging the question on the ultimate answer to the opponent's objection.

Prajñākaramati glosses the word *nirvtaḥ* in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:13ab with *svabhāsūnyatvād utpādanirodharahitah* – because of emptiness of inherent existence there is freedom from birth and cessation (the Tibetan adds 'etc.'). He explains that *paramārthena = paramārthasatyataḥ*. He then substitutes for *nirvtaḥ paramārthena* the expression *prakrtinirvānatayā*. Why is there *prakrtinirvānatā*? *Ādiśāntatvāt* – because of primeval calmness, calmness from the beginning. Translating from the Tibetan: “*Nirvāna*” – because it is empty of inherent existence (or ‘inherently empty’) there is freedom from birth, cessation etc. “Ultimately” is ultimate truth. “Inherently *nirvāna*” – because calm from the very beginning.” The Tibetan *rang bzhin gyis stong pa* parallels *rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das*. It is *nirvāna* because it is inherently empty; it is inherently *nirvāna* because it is calm from the beginning. Clearly it is *nirvta* – ceased – because it is empty. But *because* it is empty it is free of birth and cessation – birth and death (the same point is made by Vibhūticandra (f. 261a)). Freedom from birth and death is, of course, for Buddhism from its origins, *nirvāna*. Here, I suggest, lies the easy substitution seen in Prajñākaramati of *nirvāna* for *nirvta*. It is *nirvāna* because it is free from birth and death.<sup>10</sup> And,

9 mya ngan las 'das pa ni rang bzhin gyis stong pa yin pa'i phyir skye ba dang 'gag pa la sog pa dang bral ba yin la / don dam par ni don dam pa'i bden pa yin te / rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das par gdod ma nas zhi ba'i phyir ro / folio 200a.

10 It is probably also *nirvāna* because it is a ‘blowing-out’ of the concepts of inherent existence through emptiness, like fire without fuel, an image frequently used in our commentaries, particularly on *BCA* 9:35. Compare all of this with the discussion by Candrakīrti in his *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* on 6:112. Candrakīrti quotes from the *Ratnameghasūtra* to the effect that all *dharmas* are calm from the beginning, free of birth, *prakṛtyā parinirvtaḥ*. Therefore they are always without birth (*de phyir 'di ltar ston pas chos mams kun / gdod nas zhi zhing skye bral rang bzhin gyis / yongs su mya ngan 'das pa gsungs gyur pa / de phyir rtag tu skye ba yod ma yin //*). In his commentary he explains that ‘all *dharmas* are calm’ is because they are the sphere of calm gnosis

Prajñākaramati adds, it is *prakrtinirvāna* because of calmness from the beginning. Calmness is of course another old image for *nirvāna*. Nāgārjuna speaks of *prapañcopaśama*, the calming of verbal differentiations, and Candrakīrti in his *Prasannapadā* commentary to *Madhyamakakārikā* 25:24 explains *nirvāna* from a Madhyamaka point of view using as equivalents terms like *upaśama*, *śānta* and *upaśānta*. *Nirvāna* is the complete calming of all verbal differentiations and distinguishing signs.<sup>11</sup> For Prajñākaramati, therefore, the expression *prakṛti* in *prakṛtinirvānatayā* is glossed by the *ādi* in *ādiśāntatvāt*. Things are calm from the beginning because they are fundamentally *nirvāna*. The notion of *prakṛti* carries with it the idea of not being adventitiously the case but rather fundamentally, always, in the order of things.<sup>12</sup>

Let us turn now to some of our Tibetan commentaries to *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:13ab. The distinction between innate ‘enlightenment’ and that attained through following the path means that the *prakṛtinirvāna* is

(*jñāna/ye shes*). This is because they are not born. They are not born because they are fundamentally ceased or ceased from the point of view of inherent existence, that is, empty of inherent existence (*rang bzhin mya ngan 'das*). The gloss on this is that if something had an inherent existence (*rang bzhin* or *ngo bo*) that hypothetically could be born. But it does not, so there is no birth. In other words he thinks of *rang bzhin* — *prakṛti* — as an equivalent of *svabhāva*, and *prakṛtinirvāna/prakṛtinirvṛta* as equalling ceased, i.e. not born from the point of view of *svabhāva*, or inasmuch as they have *svabhāva*. Candrakīrti goes on to explain that there is never any birth. Thus there is *prakṛtyā parinirvṛta*. The expression ‘from the beginning’ means that it is not just the case that *dharmas* are not born from the point of view of the yogin’s gnosis, but also from the transactional (conventional) point of view *dharmas* are not born with their own inherent natures (*rang gi bdag nyid kyis*). ‘From the beginning’ is a synonym for ‘from the first’. Things are always like this; it is not that they are one way for enlightened beings and another for unenlightened beings. ‘Always’ here carries both a time reference and also a soteriological implication. Thus for Candrakīrti, because things are always completely ceased from the point of view of inherent existence, there is never any birth of such inherently-existent things. Because there is no birth their absence of birth forms the object of the yogin’s gnosis. Because this entails that their object is a non-object, the gnosis is calm (Cone ed., mDo 23, ff. 286b-7a). Thus for Candrakīrti here, things are free of birth and death because they are *nirvṛta/nirvāna*, rather than the other way round. There is little difference, however. For *dharmas* to be *nirvṛta*, ceased, is for them to be subject to neither birth nor death. This fact psychologically carries with it resonances of *nirvāna*. They are thus ‘*nirvāna*’ because *nirvṛta*.

- 11 iha hi sarvesām prapañcānām nimittānām ya upaśamo’pravṛttis tan nirvānam / sa eva copaśamah prakṛtyavopāśāntatvāc chivāḥ / In P.L. Vaidya ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra* of Nāgārjuna with the commentary: *Prasannapadā* by Candrakīrti, Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960. Cf. Anon. f. 180b: spong lugs kyi don dam par ni mya ngan las 'das pa yin zhi dang zlog nas...
- 12 The same sense of *prakṛti* is implied, it seems to me, by Candrakīrti at *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* 6:112.

almost universally employed in Tibet to explain the opponent's objection and its solution. And unlike all the Indian commentaries we have looked at *rang bzhin mya ngang 'das* in our Tibetan commentaries is from the earliest textual material available on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* used along with such terms as *rang bzhin rnam par dag pa*, fundamental or natural purity (*prakṛtivisuddhi*), a term known in particular from the tradition of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, where it refers to a characteristic of the *tathāgatagarbha* on both the level of cause and of fruition, and is contrasted with the *vaimalyaviśuddhi*, the purity from all adventitious taints which characterises what is usually known as *nirvāna*. The *prakṛtivisuddhi* is a sort of primeval 'liberation' which is not disjoined from the fundamental nature of the mind, which is radiant (clear-light), and is not the result of disconnection from adventitious taints. It is always there, the fundamental purity of the mind which enables us to say that there is a sense in which the mind is always enlightened.<sup>13</sup> The connection of this *tathāgatagarbha* concept with the *prakṛtinirvāna* appears obvious, but it appears not to have been made in Indian Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, and it brings into the notion of emptiness, even the emptiness of the mental continuum referred to by Prajñākaramati, mentalistic conceptions such as the clear-light nature of the mind which were not present at this point in the original Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka *Bodhicaryāvatāra* frame of reference. The flavour of the *prakṛtinirvāna* is prone to become in Tibet more psychological and less (anti)ontological, more to do with the mind (it is after all *mya ngan 'das*, transcendence of sorrow) and less to do with emptiness.

The earliest Tibetan commentarial material on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* I have access to are the quotations from rNgog bLo ldan shes rab contained in *bSod*.<sup>14</sup> rNgog was a pupil of Sajjana, the author of the only Indian sub-commentary to the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (See *La Théorie*, p. 35), and rNgog lo tsa ba was one of the most important early transmitters of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* to Tibet. Commenting on BCA 9:13ab rNgog speaks of 'that ultimate *dharmatā* of one's own mind' as the *prakṛtinirvāna* (*rang gi sems kyi chos nyid don dam pa de rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das pa yin*). This, of course, is perfectly compatible with the comments by Prajñā-

13 For the textual material from the *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā* here see Ruegg's *La Théorie*, pp. 257 and 421: *tatra prakṛtivisuddhir yā vimuktir na ca visamyoγah prabhāśvarāyāś cittaprakṛter āgantukamalāvisamyoγāt*.

14 I do not know which work by rNgog these are from. Did he write a commentary on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*? Ruegg refers in *La Théorie* to a commentary to the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, but I do not have access to it.

karamati, but rNgog goes on to speak of *samsāra* and natural purity being without distinction ('*khor ba dang rang bzhin rnam par dag pa'i cha nas khyad med pa'i phyir ro*: bSod. p. 495:3). From the ultimate point of view, which is to say from the perspective of *prakrtinirvāna* which here equals *prakrtiviśuddhi*, there is no distinction. It is clear that rNgog is thinking in *Ratnagotravibhāga* terminology. Whether that is compatible with Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka as an interpretation of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* depends on how rNgog interprets the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, and its relationships to the Madhyamaka conception of emptiness. Leonard van der Kuijp, in his *Contributions to the Development of Tibetan Buddhist Epistemology* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, p. 43), has pointed out that for the later lama Shākyā mchog ldan (1428-1507) a stress on the *prakrtiviśuddhi* is indeed a characteristic of rNgog's interpretation of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, but this *prakrtiviśuddhi*, as with the later dGe lugs pa, is apparently just another name for absence of inherent existence, emptiness. Some other Tibetan writers, however, associated rNgog with the origins of *gzhan stong* absolutism (*ibid.*, p. 41). It seems that we can see in rNgog's comments here on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* his assimilation of the *prakrtiviśuddhi* of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* with the *prakrtinirvāna* of Prajñākaramati, which is of course said by the latter to be the absence of inherent existence in the continuums of sentient beings. According to Shākyā mchog ldan this contrasts with the approach of another of Sajjana's Tibetan disciples, bTsan kha bo che, who derived from the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and other works attributed to Maitreya not just a *prakrtiviśuddhi* but a *prakrtiviśuddhijñāna* (*rang bzhin mam dag gi ye shes*), a fundamentally pure gnosis or awareness which is also the fundamental or natural clear-light (*rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal ba/prakrti-prabhāsvara*) and the *tathāgatagarbha*. Later, as we shall see, these concepts too are employed in Tibetan exegesis on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. For the moment, one must hesitate to suggest with any certainty that a systematic interpretation of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka conception of the *prakrtinirvāna* in Tibet in the light of the *tathāgatagarbha* theory originated with rNgog bLo ldan shes rab, but he undoubtedly provided an early and noteworthy precedent.

The use of *rang bzhin mam par dag pa* in explaining the *prakrtinirvāna* of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:13ab is continued by a number of our other Tibetan commentators. The dGe lugs tradition is very careful to preserve what it conceives to be a pure form of Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka. The *Ratnagotravibhāga*, however, was interpreted by dGe lugs writers as a Prāsaṅgika text; the *tathāgatagarbha* is taken as the emptiness of inherent existence in a

mental continuum, and is thus equal to the *prakrtinirvāna* when applied as by Prajñākaramati to the mind of sentient beings. Tsong kha pa comments that 'For the Mādhyamika, because all *dharma*s are ultimately free of all verbal differentiation, there is the *prakrtiviśuddhi* or *prakrtinirvāna* which is free from birth, old age etc. ultimately' (*dbu ma pas don dam par chos thams cad spros pa thams cad dang bral bas don dam par skye ba dang rga ba sogs dang bral ba'i rang bzhin rnam dag gam / rang bzhin gyi mya ngan las 'das pa yin yang /*: Tsong. folio 6b).<sup>15</sup> For Tsong kha pa, clearly, *prakrtiviśuddhi* and *prakrtinirvāna* are here synonyms; both refer therefore to the nature of entities as ultimately free of birth, old age and death, i.e. emptiness.<sup>16</sup> rGyal tsab rje makes the dGe lugs view even clearer. There exists a distinction between the *prakrtinirvāna* and the *nirvāna* which is purity from adventitious taints (*glo bur rnam dag gi myang 'das* = the *Ratnagotravibhāga*'s *vaimalyaviśuddhinirvāna*). The former does not depend on cultivating the path, since it is the true nature (*dharmaṭā*) of all whether there is cultivation or not. The latter is obtained through cutting *samsāra* with its continuum of birth and death (rGyal. p. 218). The term *vaimalyaviśuddhi* is placed in opposition to *prakrtiviśuddhi* in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. Like Tsong kha pa, therefore, rGyal tsab rje is here identifying *prakrtinirvāna* with *prakrtiviśuddhi* and the *tathāgatagarbha*. The same point is made by Mi pham who shows some evidence of relying on rGyal tsab rje in his commentary to the ninth chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, although as we shall see he by no means accepts all rGyal tsab rje's views. Mi pham uses the expression *glo bur dri bral gyi myang 'das* (p. 16), the *nirvāna* free from adventitious taints. dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba, however, (or at least an opponent) shows some interesting differences which may just indicate a move further in the direction of an ontologically stronger interpretation of the *tathāgatagarbha* than that of rGyal tsab rje.

15 Reading a number of Tibetan commentaries from different times one after the other, incidentally, it is even more obvious than usual how distinctive are dGe lugs commentaries in continually drawing attention to the fact that Madhyamaka negation occurs only from an ultimate point of view. What is negated is *inherent* existence, *ultimate* existence, being *truly* established. No opportunity is lost to clarify through drawing attention to this point.

16 It is interesting in the light of our previous discussion concerning *nirvāna* as freedom from birth and death that Tsong kha pa employs here not the Tibetan *'gag pa* — cessation (Skt. *nirodha*) — as used in the Tibetan translation of Prajñākaramati, but rather *rga ba*, the normal Tibetan expression for old age, thus implying also death, the end of life. Tsong kha pa is thinking of *prakrtinirvāna* as a *nirvāna*, a freedom from old age, sickness and death. Possibly this is explained by the context of the opponent's criticism.

Such a stronger interpretation would certainly have been familiar to a Karma bKa' brgyud scholar and pupil of Mi bskyod rdo rje.<sup>17</sup> Alone of our Tibetan commentators dPa' bo does not employ the expression *rang bzhin gyis myan ngan las 'das* at all. He does, however, employ the *rang bzhin gyis dag pa*. dPa' bo's opponent begins by saying that if there does not exist the inherent existence of obscuration then there would be Buddhahood from the beginning (*sgrub pa rang bzhin gyis med na gzod nas sangs rgyas par 'gyur*). *Samsāra* would thus not exist. Thus Buddhahood is something which is there when obscurations are removed, but the non-inherent existence of obscurations entails that there is Buddhahood already. For dPa' bo's opponent the non-inherent existence of obscurations must entail their non-existence at all, for otherwise there would be no problem. The issue here is not that all are enlightened already because all *dharma*s are empty of inherent existence. Rather all are enlightened because *obscurations* are empty of inherent existence. The obscurations do not exist, and there is already Buddhahood. It is not impossible that dPa' bo himself may accept these basic premisses of his opponent's position, with their resonances of a *gzhan stong* approach which would maintain the real existence of the Buddha-nature and the non-existence of adventitious defilements. Nevertheless he points out that even though there is no distinction between a Buddha and sentient beings from the point of view of fundamental purity, still conventionally there is a distinction of *samsāra* and non-*samsāra* depending on whether the conditions for *samsāra* such as ignorance and so on have been cut (p. 655). Thus ultimately there is no obscuration and the implication appears to be that we are not just empty of inherent existence but in terms of fundamental purity we have never been distinct from Buddhas. Conventionally, however, people obtain Buddhahood. In terms of expression there are only differences of nuance at this point from say, Tsong kha pa, but taken as a whole in the context of a bKa' brgyud tradition of *gzhan stong* thought dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba's distinctive discussion of this verse, whether it reflects his own view or not, indicates elements of an alternative perspective on the

17 It is a little unclear where Mi bskyod rdo rje stood on the *rang stong/gzhan stong* controversy. In his commentary to the *Madhyamakāvatāra* he strongly criticises well-known exponents of the *gzhan stong* position such as Shākyā mchog ldan. Nevertheless he also wrote another work expounding and defending the *gzhan stong* interpretation of the *tathāgatagarbha* and the *Madhyamaka* (the *dBu ma chen po* — see later), and attacking Candrakīrti. See my 'A note on some aspects of Mi bskyod rdo rje's critique of dGe lugs pa *Madhyamaka*', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 11 (1983), pp. 125-45, esp. note 39.

*prakṛtinirvāna* even in the context of a Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka work like the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.<sup>18</sup> Other commentators subsequently manifest clearer moves in the same direction.

**Bodhicaryāvatāra 9:104cd (= Tib.103cd)**

tan na kiṃcid atah sattvāḥ prakṛtyā parinirvṛtāḥ //  
de ni cung zad min de'i phyir /  
sems can rang bzhin mya ngan 'das //

That (mind) is nothing at all. Therefore sentient beings are fundamentally (or 'inherently') ceased. //

This is the only point in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* at which Śāntideva himself uses the expression *prakṛtyā parinirvṛtāḥ*. It occurs in the context of a search for the inherent existence of the mind, and is said with reference to sentient beings. It is in this context, as we have seen, that Prajñākaramati explains the concept of *prakṛtinirvāna* with reference to the absence of inherent existence in the continuums of sentient beings. It is possible that Prajñākaramati only glosses *prakṛtyā nirvṛta* with *prakṛtinirvāna* when he is specifically thinking of the context of sentient beings and their mindstreams. He appears to gloss *prakṛtyā parinirvṛtāḥ* (in BCA 9:104) with *parimuktasabhāvāḥ* – sentient beings are the nature of liberated (beings). It is *prakṛtinirvāna*, defined as the absence of inherent existence, continually existing in the continuums of all sentient beings. If so, this is a point which is completely lost in the Tibetan translation by *rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das* which fails to make any such distinction between *prakṛtyā parinirvṛta* and *prakṛtiparinirvāna* and also any distinction here between *prakṛtinirvāna* and *prakṛtiparinirvāna*.<sup>19</sup>

Among our Tibetan commentators there is a marked distinction in the vocabulary employed to explain the only use of *rang bzhin mya ngan 'das* by Śāntideva. The context of discussing the nature of mind immediately suggests the *tathāgatagarbha* and throws into contrast differing Tibetan

18 For a thorough discussion of the *gzhān stong* interpretation of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* with particular reference to the bKa' brgyud materials, see S.K. Hookham, *The Buddha Within: Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine according to the Shen-tong interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990.

19 Which is not to say that there is necessarily here any distinction to be made. The Sanskrit verse could read *prakṛtyā parinirvṛta* rather than *-nirvṛta* for pure metrical reasons, or the Tibetan could be subject to metrical constraints. In general, of course, Tibetan is perfectly capable of making linguistically the distinction if required.

approaches to a topic which formed no part of the original *Bodhicaryāvatāra* context. I have already suggested that the dGe lugs approach to the *tathāgatagarbha* may well have been determined to some extent by Prajñākaramati's own comments on this verse. Tsong kha pa explains that there does not exist even the very slightest thing which is truly established. Therefore all sentient beings are fundamentally (by nature) *nirvāna* (or 'ceased'), which is free from all verbal differentiations of truth.<sup>20</sup> For Tsong kha pa as always the emphasis is on absence of inherent existence, lacking true establishment. In this respect all sentient beings are no different from anything else. We have seen in the preceding verses of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* that the mind is not truly established. Because of this sentient beings are *nirvāna* by nature, for this *nirvāna* is emptiness, freedom from all verbal differentiations of true (i.e. inherently true) existence. Again, rGyal tshab strives to avoid any ambiguity, and in particular any notion that the *prakrtinirvāna* may be some inherently existing nature in the mind: 'There does not exist even the slightest thing established with inherent existence. Therefore the empty nature of inherent existence of the mind is the *prakrtinirvāna*'.<sup>21</sup> For Bu ston, writing rather earlier than Tsong kha pa and rGyal tshab rje, the emphasis however is not on absence of inherent existence in the continuums of sentient beings or otherwise, but on the contrast between an innate enlightenment possessed by all by their very nature, and a state of unenlightenment said to be the case due to being stained by traces of taints due to reification. This is not the case ultimately.<sup>22</sup> The contrast for Bu ston then is between the way things appear to be due to beginningless ignorance, and the way things always have been. In reality (*don dam par*)

20 bden par grub pa cung zad kyang med pa de'i phyir / sems can thams cad bden pa'i spros pa thams cad dang bral ba'i rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das pa'o / (f. 24a).

21 cung zad kyang rang bzhin gyis grub pa yod min de'i phyir sems rang bzhin gyis stong pa de nyid rang bzhin mya ngan las 'das pa'o / (p. 258). I find this comment a little difficult. The obvious way of reading it would be to take *de nyid* as meaning 'that very', thus 'That very empty of inherent existence mind is the *prakrtinirvāna*'. This, however, does not harmonise with the dGe lugs view that in this context the *prakrtinirvāna* is not the mind but the emptiness of inherent existence of the mind. Actually it would be much better to omit 'de' and read 'stong pa nyid'. As it stands, 'de nyid' must refer in some way to the *nature* of the mind as empty of inherent existence.

22 don dam par cung zad kyang yod pa ma yin pa de'i phyir sems can rnams rang bzhin te / rang gi ngo bo nyid kyis mya ngan las 'das pa grol ba'i rang bzhin yin yang sgro btags pa'i nyon mongs pa'i bag chags kyis nyams par byas bas ma grol bar brjod kyi / don dam par ma yin no // (p. 556). The material in italics represents portions of the verse commented on (with *ma yin* for *min*).

we have always been enlightened.<sup>23</sup> Bu ston stresses not the *prakrtinirvāna* as another name for emptiness but the *prakrtinirvāna* as a form of *nirvāna*. There is no necessary incompatibility with Tsong kha pa and rGyal tshab rje here – it all depends what we mean by ‘enlightenment’ in this context – but there is significant difference of emphasis and nuance. The same could be said of dPa’ bo gTsug lag phreng ba’s comment that ‘therefore the nature of the mind of sentient beings is from the beginning *nirvāna*, not defiled by verbal differentiation’ (*de’i phyir sems can gyi sems kyi rang bzhin gdod ma nas mya ngan las ’das pa spros pas ma gos pa nyid to /* (p. 869)), although the notion of not being defiled (*ma gos*) with verbal differentiations suggests as with dPa’ bo’s previous comments on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:13ab at least the possibility of some sort of enduring and pure substratum behind verbal differentiation.

It is in the commentary by Sa bzang mati pañchen to *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:103/4ab, however, that we really find ourselves in a terminologically and, I suggest, a conceptually different world from that of Tsong kha pa’s commentarial tradition on Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka works. Sa bzang states the following in his comment on Śāntideva’s critique of the existence of mind and his assertion that ‘That (mind) is nothing at all’: ‘That adventitious conventional mind, if it is examined, is not the slightest bit established. Therefore, because the ultimate *dharmaṭā* is invariable, sentient beings are established as having the essence (*snying po can*) of enlightenment, the clear-light nature of the mind.’ And Sa bzang supports his position with a quote from the *Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*: ‘The mind is not mind; the nature of the mind is clear-light’.<sup>24</sup> Clearly for Sa bzang the mind which is not mind is the adventitious conventional mind,

23 Cf. also Padma dkar po: *de’i phyir sems can rnams gdod ma nas rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las ’das pa’o /* (p. 160). Sentient beings are *nirvāna* by nature from the very beginning. The same point is stressed by *Thogs*. (p. 348) who, strangely, in his commentary makes no mention of *rang bzhin myang ’das* by name (in spite of Stephen Batchelor’s adding the dGe lugs interpretation in brackets to his translation from *Thogs*: Acharya Śāntideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan works and Archives, 1979, p. 153. It is one thing to read Śāntideva through dGe lugs eyes, but it is clearly another issue to read *Thogs* med, who was a Tibetan commentator and not a dGe lugs pa, some centuries earlier than rGyal tshab rje, through the eyes of rGyal tshab).

24 *sems kun rdzob glo bur ba de ni dpyad na cung zad kyang grub pa min de’i phyir dang / don dam chos nyid ni nam yang ’gyur ba med pas sems can rnams ni sems kyi rang bzhin ’od gsal mya ngan las ’das pa’i snying po can du grub ste / yum las / sems ni sems ma mchis pa ste sems kyi rang bzhin ni ’od gsal ba’o zhes pa ltar ro /* (p. 381). For a discussion of this material from the *Astasāhasrikā* see Ruegg’s *La Théorie*, pp. 413ff.

and the mind which is not mind is contrasted with the clear-light nature of the mind. For the mind not to be mind is to be not established at all when placed under critical examination. Not to be established because not found under critical examination is the standard Prāsaṅgika formula for lacking inherent existence, that is, emptiness. Sa bzang wishes to draw a contrast between the adventitious conventional mind which is not found and therefore lacks inherent existence, and the ultimate *dharmatā*. He does not *specifically* say that this ultimate *dharmatā* does have inherent existence, but the structure of his comments implies that a contrast is being drawn and the *dharmatā* itself has not been touched by Śāntideva's preceding arguments. Sentient beings are established as having the nature of *nirvāna* – the Tibetan expression *mya ngan las 'das pa'i snying po* can immediately suggests the assertion of the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* that all sentient beings are possessed of the *tathāgatagarbha* (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po*), and the use of the expression *snying po* rather than *ngo bo* or *rang bzhin* must be meant to refer to the *tathāgatagarbha* itself. All sentient beings are established as having this essence 'because the ultimate *dharmatā* is invariable'. Again, the contrast is with the adventitious conventional mind (and invariability is one of the requirements for inherent existence). The Tibetan *glo bur* is as we have seen a term significant in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* context where it refers to the adventitious taints which obscure the pure nature which is invariable. Structurally here the reference is clearly to the same pure element, the invariable *snying po* which is here stated to be ultimate in contrast to the adventitious conventional. We have already seen that the *prakrtinirvāna* in Tibet became equated with the *prakrtiviśuddhi* of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, and thereby contrasted with the *vaimalyaviśuddhi* referred to in the same text. Here in Sa bzang mati pāñchen we find a further and quite self-conscious stage in the absorption of the *prakrtinirvāna* into the *tathāgatagarbha* and all that is entailed by such an absorption. With this goes the employment of the 'clear-light nature of the mind' as an equivalent for the *tathāgatagarbha*. We are not, I think, very far here from a form of *gzhän stong* absolutism based on the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and employed in a reading of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.<sup>25</sup>

25 It is clear in Sa bzang mati pāñchen's text that we have a final stage in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and *tathāgatagarbha* interpretation of the *prakrtinirvāna*. This shows the powerful influence of the *tathāgatagarbha* concept in Tibet in influencing the interpretation of texts which originally show no clear evidence of *tathāgatagarbha* thought. It also provides a basis for the placing of texts (in this case a Prāsaṅgika

**Bodhicaryāvatāra 9:111 (= Tib.110)**

vicārite vicārye tu vicārasyāsti nāśrayah /  
 nirāśritatvān nodeti tac ca nirvānam ucyate //  
 dpyad bya rnam par dpyad byas na /  
 rnam dpyod la ni rten yod min /  
 rten med phyir na mi skye ste /  
 de yang mya ngan 'das par brjod //

When the object to be investigated has been investigated, there exists no objective support for the investigating mind /  
 Because there does not exist an objective support (the mind) does not arise, and that ('also'-Tib.) is called *nirvāna*//

Our Tibetan commentaries make it clear there that what is said to be without objective support here is the investigating *mind*.<sup>26</sup> While nearly all the Tibetan commentators and a number of the Indian commentators employ the actual terms *prakrtinirvāna/prakrtinirvṛta* in commenting on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:13 and 104, on verse 111 not one of our Indian commentators employs the expression, while among Tibetans the actual expression is used by only rGyal tshab rje, bSod nams rtse mo, Sa bzang mati panchen and Mi pham. Even where the expression is employed, it is clear from the forgoing that it may well not mean the same to each commentator.

Let us start with rGyal tsab rje's use of the *rang bzhin myang 'das* in glossing *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:111. This is particularly significant since, as we have seen, for the dGe lugs tradition the *prakrtinirvāna* is another name

Madhyamaka text) in terms of Tantric practice where expressions like the 'clear-light' nature of the mind' become particularly important. I am not denying that it is *possible* to interpret Sa bzang's text here in a way perfectly compatible with Tsong kha pa. He could be referring simply to emptiness, absence of inherent existence in the mental continuum. But I think such an interpretation is highly unlikely, especially when it is taken in the light of his comments on other verses which we shall look at subsequently. There also remains the difference of language used. In spite of what is often thought, difference of language carries with it other differences. It is not simply an arbitrary matter. In fact what we seem to find is that while the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* tradition of Prajñākaramati influences the dGe lugs interpretation of the *tathāgatagarbha*, in Sa bzang mati panchen it is the reverse. It is the *Ratnagotravibhāga* which influences here his interpretation of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. The dGe lugs is firmly based in Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka. Other traditions sometimes found the *Ratnagotravibhāga* a useful text for bridging the theoretical framework of Sūtra and Tantric approach.

26 See, for example, Bu ston: rnam dpyod kyi rten med pa'i phyir yod med sogs su dpyod pa'i blo mi skye zhing / (p. 560).

for emptiness, and is to be distinguished from the *nirvāna* obtained by following the path, what we normally call *nirvāna*. rGyal tshab comments:

Because there does not exist a true subject (*chos can/dharmin*) as support, the object of negation (*dgag bya*) and the negating mind both do not arise with inherent existence. That also is said to be the *prakrtinirvāna*. Having understood directly that referent [i.e. emptiness], once one has familiarisation with it, it is said that one also obtains the *nirvāna* which is free of adventitious taints.<sup>27</sup>

For rGyal tshab rje Śāntideva's verse initially involves the interface between logic and Madhyamaka. There is neither object of negation nor negating mind existing *inherently*. For rGyal tshab rje this does not mean, of course, that they do not exist conventionally, which is the level on which logical operations take place. Thus Śāntideva is *not* saying that there should be no activity involving critical reasoning and analysis. The fact that the object of negation and the negating mind do not exist inherently means that they are empty of inherent existence. This is the *prakrtinirvāna*. Hence for rGyal tshab rje it is important to realise that Śāntideva does not mean that when the cognitive object of an investigation and the investigating mind cease that is *nirvāna*. *Nirvāna* is not a state of mind involving the calming of subject and object (and it would be even more mistaken to think that it could occur because of making the mind a blank). The *nirvāna* referred to by Śāntideva here is just emptiness, the *prakrtinirvāna*, and to indicate the calming of subject and object is simply another means of showing that subject and object are empty of inherent existence. Logical operations are not undermined on the conventional level, and it is emphatically not the case that the real liberating *nirvāna* can be obtained simply by calming the critical analytic mind. True, rGyal tshab adds that by familiarisation with emptiness one can obtain the *nirvāna* which is freedom from adventitious taints. But this does not help to explain Śāntideva's verse, since by familiarisation with any emptiness (absence of inherent existence), not just emptiness of negandum and negating mind, one can eventually obtain *nirvāna*. One possible reason for rGyal tshab's additional reference to the *vaimalyavīśuddhinirvāna* here may be that Tsong kha pa in his commentary on this verse makes no mention of the *prakrtinirvāna*. Tsong kha pa simply says that 'the investigating mind does

27 rten chos can bden pa med pa'i phyir na dgag bya dang bkag pa gnyis rang bzhin nyid kyis mi skye ste de yang rang bzhin gyis mya ngan 'das par brjod la / don de rtogs nas goms par byas pa la glo bur dri bral gyi myang 'das thob par yang brjod do / (p. 261 - *bkag pa* here must refer to the negating mind).

not have a true objective support, and because of the nonexistence of that it does not arise with inherent existence. By familiarisation with that referent, it said that one obtains *nirvāna'*(*mam dpyod la ni rten bden pa yod pa min la / de med pa'i phyir na rang bzhin gyis mi skye ste / don de goms pa las myang 'das 'thob par brjod do*: f. 25b). Thus for Tsong kha pa familiarisation with emptiness leads to *nirvāna*, and he is able to deal with Śāntideva's apparent association of *nirvāna* with the cessation of subject and object by first neutralising it through introducing references to noninherent or non-true existence – which allows existence conventionally – and second by the use of two levels to his commentary whereby the nonexistence of the investigating mind in the absence of its objective support is not *nirvāna*, but *nirvāna* arises from familiarisation with emptiness, of which absence of subject and object with inherent existence indicates one possible mode of access. So for Tsong kha pa, Śāntideva's reference to *nirvāna* is to what can occur eventually through familiarisation with emptiness. For rGyal tshab rje his initial response is to gloss Śāntideva's *nirvāna* as *prakrtinirvāna*, in other words Śāntideva is not putting forward at all the actual attainment of *nirvāna* here by sentient beings as a result of following the path.

There is a number of reasons why rGyal tshab rje and the dGe lugs tradition want to avoid any implication that Śāntideva is referring directly to the liberating *nirvāna* in this verse. Śāntideva's text could be taken to mean that *nirvāna* lies precisely in cutting all analytic thought through seeing that the object of investigation and therefore the subject cannot exist. This could be combined with the idea that *nirvāna* lies in a clear but blank mind, a mind free of any content, any data involving subject and object. Such a view is, of course, very strongly opposed by Tsong kha pa. Moreover, the suggestion that without object there can be no subject carries with it strong resonances of the Cittamātra tradition, where emptiness comes to mean not absence of inherent existence but precisely absence of subject and object in the truly existing non-dual mind stream.<sup>28</sup> Thus any suggestion that this is *nirvāna* might be taken to mean that *nirvāna* could be a really-existing non-dual mind stream. Moreover since for the Madhyamaka unlike Cittamātra absence of subject and object is not as such what is meant by emptiness (emptiness for Madhyamaka is *absence of inherent existence*), one might misunderstand Śāntideva to mean

28 The absence of *parikalpita* in the *paratantra*. For a discussion of Cittamātra in general, and these points in particular, see Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The doctrinal foundations*, London: Routledge, 1989, ch. 4, esp. pp. 86, 89-90.

that *nirvāna* could come through realising the absence of subject and object, without requiring a realisation of emptiness. The result of all of this is that for rGyal tshab rje *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:111 is taken to refer to the *prakrtinirvāna*, and not to *nirvāna*. *Nirvāna* for rGyal tsab rje is not in itself to be taken as the calming of the investigating subject in the absence of its objective support.

Yet the dGe lugs interpretation here is not at all how Śāntideva's verse is taken by some of our other commentators. Indeed the very structure of the verse rather suggests a summary of the stages of meditative practice. In the absence of an investigative object, the investigating mind does not arise. With the calming of both investigative object and investigating mind there is that calm, that cessation of all possible verbal differentiations, which is *nirvāna*. This, broadly speaking, is the bare structure of Cittamātra meditation practice. Prajñākaramati comments:

Having negated all reifying superimpositions, because of thoroughly knowing the nature of things, because there has been done that which was to be done, because of the nonexistence of engaging and termination there is nowhere clinging, nor also becoming indifferent. And that is called *nirvāna*, since it is the cessation of all the transactional (= conventional). Because of being everywhere without operation, because of complete calming, that indeed is designated as *nirvāna*.<sup>29</sup>

Very little needs to be said about this passage. The transcendence of all reifying superimpositions, the cessation of the transactional, complete calming, and the other expressions are all standard equivalents in Madhyamaka for the attainment of *nirvāna*. Perhaps most significant is the use of *kṛtakṛtyatvāt* — because there has been done that which was to be done — which has been since earliest times in Buddhism an unambiguous expression for the attainment of enlightenment (Pali: *katakaraṇīya*). There

29 sarvasamāropanisedham vidhāya vastutvaparijñānāt kṛtakṛtyatvāt pravṛttinirvṛttyabhāvāt na kvacit sajyate, nāpi virajyate / tac ca nirvānam ucyate, sarvavyavahāranivṛtteḥ sarvatra nirvāpāratayā praśāntatvāt tad eva nirvānam abhidhīyate //

The Tibetan is slightly but not significantly different:

sgro 'dogs pa thams cad dgag pa byas nas dngos po'o / de kho na nyid yongs su shes pas bya ba byas pa'i phyir / 'jug pa'i ldog pa med pa'i phyir gang la yang re ba med pa ste / gang la yang 'dod pa ma yin la / de yang mya ngan las 'das par brjod de / tha snyad thams cad log pa'i phyir ro / thams cad du bya ba med pa'i phyir rang bzhin gyis zhi bas de nyid la mya ngan las 'das par (the blockprint appears to follow this with *ba*, or should it read *rab*?) brjod (f. 257a-b).

The expression *rang bzhin gyis zhi ba*, calm by nature, in the Tibetan (the Sanskrit lacks 'by nature') may have suggested to rGyal tshab rje the *prakrtinirvāna*, but in context it is clear that Prajñākaramati is here referring to *nirvāna* itself.

can be no question here that Prajñākaramati is speaking not of the *prakrtinirvāna*, which he does not mention, but of the actual attainment of *nirvāna* as a result of following the path.<sup>30</sup> He is not the only one. Vibhūticandra too speaks of absence of diversifying constructions (*mam rtog med pa*) and freedom from clinging desire (*chags pa dang bral ba*), again standard expressions for the attainment of *nirvāna* (f. 276b: for *mam rtog med pa* see the next section on verse 35). None of our other Indian commentators refers to the *prakrtinirvāna*; almost all imply that the reference in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:111 is to *nirvāna* itself.<sup>31</sup>

Among our Tibetan commentators, bSod nams rtse mo does employ by name the *rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das*. It is this, he says, because the obscuration of reality is not ultimate (*de kho na'i sgrib pa don dam pa ma yin pas* (p. 507:2)). It may be, however, that bSod nams rtse mo is here referring to the view of rNgog lo tsa ba, who is mentioned on the next line but one, and it is possible that it was rNgog, again influenced by his use of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, who introduced the *prakrtinirvāna* as a possible gloss on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:111. bSod nams rtse mo's words would certainly fit with rNgog's approach, since in fact they amount to an explanation of the expression 'pure by nature'. It is called 'fundamental *nirvāna*' since obscurations, taints, are not ultimate, i.e. they are adventitious and therefore by nature, fundamentally, there is purity. Once more we find the opposition between an innate *nirvāna* and adventitious taints. This time, in context, the suggestion is that with the cessation of the investigative object and investigating mind the innate *nirvāna* shines forth. Sa bzang mati pañchen for his part specifically relates the strategy of Śāntideva's verse at *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:111 to one of the classic Buddhist statements

30 Prajñākaramati himself did not feel the problems which gave rise to a later Tibetan appeal to the *prakrtinirvāna*. In the case of rGyal tshab rje these were connected with problems in Tibet going back to Ho-shang Mahāyāna and the eighth-century debates (see Williams (1989), pp. 193ff), affected by the influence of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* on Tibetan thought in general and in this case Madhyamaka interpretation, exacerbated by a reaction against *gzhans tṣong* absolutism and a need to establish what to rGyal tshab rje was thought to be a pure Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka. Here we see what was possibly a Tibetan *contribution* to the interpretation of Madhyamaka. It is not enough to use Tibetan commentaries as if they necessarily give us clear and unambiguous access to the original meaning of Indian Buddhist texts.

31 To be fair, Kalyāṇadeva is unclear. He states that 'the investigating mind also has not arisen with inherent existence. That which has not arisen is declared to be *nirvāna*' (*mam par dpyod pa yang rang bzhin gyis ma skyes ba yin la / ma skyes ba de ni mya ngan las 'das par bshad do /* (f.82a)). There is no doubt this *could* be interpreted as referring to the *prakrtinirvāna*, but the actual expression is not used.

of *prakrtinirvṛta* from the Cittamātra tradition, *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* 11:51. There is a sequence. Inherent existence does not exist. Then there is absence of birth, absence of cessation. Thus calm from the beginning. Thence is established *prakrtinirvṛta*.<sup>32</sup> Sa bzang explains that since there does not exist a true referential object, the subjective mind also does not arise. That *dharmatā* also, which is the nonarising of object, subject and so on, is called the *prakrtinirvāna* because from the beginning it is completely calm of verbal differentiations.<sup>33</sup> We have already seen that for Sa bzang *dharmatā* occurs in the same context as references to the *tathāgatagarbha* and the clear-light nature of the mind. The *dharmatā* where neither subject nor object arise is from the very beginning completely calm of *prapañcas*. In the attainment of enlightenment there is attained that which has always been the case. Sa bzang's use of a Cittamātra text here at least hints that he would not be unduly worried at rGyal tshab's scruples concerning a remaining substratum to the cessation of subject and object. We shall return to this point later. Mi pham also speaks of the calming of all verbal differentiations. But he adds that when this happens that investigating mind also, like a wave in water, is said to be fundamentally *nirvāna* within the nature of the *dharmatā*.<sup>34</sup> The image here is of the investigating mind returning to that from which it came and of which it always is a part – the *dharmatā*. It follows from what Mi pham says that the investigating mind itself must be fundamentally, by nature, the *dharmatā*. The conventional is the ultimate, and the actual attainment of *nirvāna* through following the path and the primordial natural state of *nirvāna* turn out to be not substantially different. In spite of his employment of the expression *rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das* in glossing *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:111 the perspective of Mi pham is very different from that of rGyal tshab rje, and it is clear that the *dharmatā* here of which the investigating mind is a part cannot be the same as emptiness as understood by rGyal tshab rje. For the

32 In Sa bzang's Tibetan quote: *phyi ma phyi ma'i rten yin la / ngo bo nyid ni med pa yin / skye med 'gags med gzod nas zhi / rang bzhin mya ngan 'das pa 'grub* / (p. 382). Cf. *Sphutārthā* on *Abhisamayālamkāra* 4:2: *go rim bzhin du ngo bo nyid med pa dang / ma skyes pa dang / ma 'gags pa dang / gzod ma nas zhi ba dang / rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das pa'i mtshan nyid*. In Samdong Rinpoche and Rāmaśāṅkara Tripāthi, *Abhisamayālārikārvrttih* *Sphutārthā*, Sarnath/Varanasi: Kendriya-Tibbati-Ūcca-Śiksā-Saṁsthānam, Bibliotheca Indo-Tibetica 2, 1977, pp. 77-8.

33 *rtен dmigs yul bden par med pa'i phyir na yul can gyi blo yang mi skye ste / yul dang yul can la sogs pa skye ba med pa'i chos nyid de yang rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das par brjod de gdod ma nas spros pa nye bar zhi ba'i phyir ro* / (p. 384).

34 *spros pa thams cad zhi bas na / rnam dpyod de'ang chu la rlabs bzhin du chos nyid kyi ngang du rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das par brjod do* / (p. 76).

latter, the investigating mind may be empty, but it is not emptiness, and can certainly not be said (apart from the context of specific Tantric practice) to enter into the nature of emptiness.<sup>35</sup> There is perhaps greater ambiguity in dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba's discussion of the same verse, although his terminological world has some affinities with that of Sa bzang mati pañchen and Mi pham. The primordial *nirvāna* is said to be the innate or noncontingent nature of *dharmas*, which is to say this mere clear-light and empty absence as regards that which is to be put aside and removed, which is of course the inherent existence of *dharmas*, when the craving of reification and over-negation has been reversed.<sup>36</sup> Is dPa' bo saying that the 'mere clear-light' is the same as absence of inherent existence? Or is he saying that the mere clear-light shines forth in that empty absence? From what we have here it is difficult to tell. One thing anyway is clear. Although dPa' bo does not employ the expression *rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das* his use of *gzod ma nas mya ngan 'das pa nyid* is meant to refer to the same thing.

We have seen that Indian commentators on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:111 seem more or less united in taking it as referring to actual *nirvāna* rather than *prakṛtinirvāna/prakṛtinirvṛta*. Tibetan commentators often see it as a reference to *prakṛtinirvāna*, but their interpretation of *prakṛtinirvāna* differs – so much so that a reference to *prakṛtinirvāna* could also be a reference to actual *nirvāna*. Bu ston's terminological world is not that of Mi pham. He speaks simply of the calming of all minds of craving desire and absence of craving desire (*chags pa dang / chags bral gyi blo thams cad nye bar zhi ba*), the transcendence of all the transactional, and complete calming (*tha snyad thams cad las 'das shing rang bzhin gyi zhi ba*: p. 560).

35 For Mi pham the expression *de yang* – 'that also' – is clearly taken to refer to the investigating mind, which is thus said to be *rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das*. For rGyal tshab rje, on the other hand, it is equally clearly non-arising with inherent existence (*rang bzhin kyis mi skye*). What *de yang* is taken to refer to tells us what the commentator considers to be meant by *nirvāna* in this verse. Padma dkar po (p. 161) refers simply to non-arising. Sa bzang takes it to be the *dharmatā*, thus distinguishing his position *prima facie* from that of Mi pham. For dPa' bo it is the innate, non-contingent (*gnyug ma*) nature of *dharmas* (p. 874), presumably the same as the *dharmatā*; for Bu ston the complete calming of all minds of craving desire and absence of craving desire (p. 560); while for Thogs med it is that calming in the absence of arising of both object and awareness (p. 350). Clearly commentators differ considerably on what is being said to be *nirvāna* in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:111.

36 de ltar sgro skur gyi zhen pa log pa na chos rnam kyi rang bzhin bsal bzhag byar med pa stog zhing 'od gsal ba tsam 'di ni chos rnam kyi gnyug ma ste de yang gzod ma nas mya ngan 'das pa nyid tu brjod to / (p. 874).

Bu ston tends to follow in his commentary his Indian predecessors, and some of the language at this point, standard expressions for *nirvāna*, is familiar from Prajñākaramati. There is no mention of the *prakrtinirvāna*, and it seems clear to me that Bu ston is, like Prajñākaramati, thinking here of the actual attainment of *nirvāna*. This is even clearer in the earlier commentary by Thogs med. A number of our commentators have used the expression 'calming' in their commentaries, as we have seen an important Madhyamaka term frequently employed to equal *nirvāna*. Thogs med, however, initially glosses *nirvāna* as 'that calming also' (*zhi ba de yang*), but then explains that 'because of the absence of intentional object there is complete calming, as I have declared before' (*dmigs pa med pas rab tu zhi / zhes sngar brjod pa yin no /* : p. 350) There can be no doubt at all that Thogs med's reference here is to his commentary on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:35, where the expression *dmigs pa med par rab tu zhi* is used in the verse. Thus Thogs med specifically wants to link the calming of verse 35 with the calming which he finds in verse 111. This is important because with the possible exception of dPa' bo not a single one of our commentators, including the dGe lugs commentators, take verse 35 as referring to the *prakrtinirvāna*. Nearly all agree that this verse refers to the actual *nirvāna*. Clearly verse 111 is taken by Thogs med to refer to actual *nirvāna* and not *prakrtinirvāna*. By way of further clarification, therefore, let us look at verse 35.

**Bodhicaryāvatāra 9:35 (= Tib. 34)**

yadā na bhāvo nābhāvo mateḥ samtiṣṭhate purāḥ /  
tadānyagatyabhāvena nirālambā praśāmyati //

gang tse dngos dang dngos med dag /  
blo yi mdun na mi gnas pa /  
de tse rnam pa gzhan med pas /  
*dmigs pa med par rab tu zhi* //

When entity and non-entity do not stand before the mind /  
Then because there exists no other possibility, without intentional object it is  
completely calmed //

Prajñākaramati comments that the mind is completely calmed because all diversifying constructions are calmed (*buddhiḥ praśāmyati upaśāmyati / saravikalpopaśamāt*). It is like fire without firewood, another old Buddhist image for *nirvāna* repeated by a number of our commentators. Vairocanarakṣita also associates *nirvāna* here with the complete calming of all diversifying constructions (f. 143a), while our anonymous

commentary speaks of the calming of all *rtogs pa*, which should probably read *rtog pa*, *kalpanā*, an expression which has much the same meaning as *vikalpa*.<sup>37</sup> Among Tibetans bSod nams rtse mo refers to the arising of wisdom (*prajñā*) which is without appearance, which cuts the continuum of *kalpanās* (*rtog pa rgyun chad pa'i snang ba med pa'i shes rab skye'o* /: p. 499:1). Bu ston makes it quite clear that we are talking about the actual attainment of *nirvāna* here by stating categorically that it is the *apratishtitanirvāna* which is the complete calming of all diversifying constructions (*rnam rtog thams cad rab tu zhi ba'i mi gnas pa'i myang 'das 'thob bo*: p. 524), a point also made by Mi pham (p. 29). Earlier Kalyāṇadeva had gone even further, and shown how this verse can be taken to refer to both the *sopādhīśesa* and the *nirupādhīśesa nirvānas* (f. 72b).

Bu ston quotes from an unnamed source: 'Thus if there does not exist an object before the mind then, since the mind which apprehends that does not arise, there will be liberation from obscuration'.<sup>38</sup> It follows that for Bu ston the issue in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:35 is the calming of mind in the absence of its intentional objects. When these are both calmed, all diversifying constructions cease. In showing the impossibility of entity and non-entity Śāntideva is showing the impossibility of intentional objects and therefore subjects. Thus for Bu ston, Śāntideva's position on the attainment of *nirvāna* in 9:35 is a different version of the same argument in 9:111. There is no subject because there is no object; thus there is *nirvāna*. We have therefore additional evidence that for Bu ston Śāntideva's argument in *BCA* 9:111 is intended to set forth actual *nirvāna*. Reference to *BCA* 9:35 can also confirm that in spite of his use of the expression *rang bzhin gyis mya ngan las 'das* in his commentary on verse 111, Sa bzang mati pañchen also sees the cessation of subject and object as the attainment of actual *nirvāna*. On verse 35 he says 'if the object has ceased the subjective mind also is completely calmed. Thereby one will attain the supreme *nirvāna*' (*yul 'gags na yul can gyi blo yang rab tu zhi ba las / spangs pa mthar phyin pa'i mya ngan las 'das thob par 'gyur te*: p. 342). Thus for Sa bzang the attainment of *nirvāna* is through calming subject and object, and it is the attainment of a state which has also been the case primevally. He is concerned however that we should not confuse the

37 For a more precise discussion of differences in Madhyamaka see Williams (1980), cited in note 1 above.

38 de ltar yul blo'i mdun na med na / de'i 'dzin pa'i blo mi skye bas / sgrub pa las grol bar 'gyur ro // (p. 523).

cessation of the mind which is correlated with the absence of its intentional referent, with the cessation of all awareness altogether. An opponent argues that because the mind has ceased, gnosis (*ye shes/jñāna*: primeval awareness) also does not exist. This is not so, Sa bzang replies, since the *nirvāna* which is set forth by way of abandoning the mind which is adventitious consciousness, and the perfect Buddhahood which is set forth by way of approaching the ultimate Gnosis Body (*paramārthajñānakāya*) are synonymous.<sup>39</sup> Just to make sure that we know where these ideas come from, Sa bzang quotes from the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. Thus this gnosis (*jñāna*) which is there when subject and object cease and *nirvāna* is attained — abandoning the mind which is adventitious consciousness (*vijñāna*) — is the same as that perfect Buddhahood which is the ultimate Gnosis Body. One is reminded here of Sa bzang's previous reference to the adventitious conventional mind. It seems clear, I think, that for Sa bzang mati pañchen the adventitious conventional mind equals *vijñāna* which is abandoned when one abandons subject and object. This abandonment is *nirvāna*. The attainment of *nirvāna* however not only does not entail the cessation of all gnosis, but is actually the same as the ultimate Gnosis Body, which must equal here the ultimate *dharmatā*, the essence of enlightenment (= *tathāgatagarbha*), the clear-light nature of the mind. This *dharmatā* is the *prakrtinirvāna*, which has always been the case. In 9:104 Sa bzang speaks of the adventitious conventional mind (*sems*). Here at 9:35 he refers to the mind (*sems*) which is adventitious consciousness. It is clear that these two *sems* are the same. Thus Sa bzang does not consider that the refutation of mind in 9:111 includes a refutation of all *sems*, of *ye shes*, primordial gnosis, but only of *vijñāna*, (everyday) consciousness. For Sa bzang as for Mi pham, the attainment of enlightenment lies in attaining that which one has always been. The ultimate is a *jñāna* which is there primordially and which shines out when subject and object are calmed. Fundamentally there is no distinction, as rGyal tshab rje wants to maintain, between the *prakrtinirvāna* and that *nirvāna* which is attained through following the path. *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:35 and 9:111 both refer to the same attainment of *nirvāna*.

When 9:35, 9:104 and 9:111 are all taken together, Sa bzang mati pañchen's views as a commentator are I suggest very different from those

39 de la 'ga' zhig sems 'gags pas ye shes kyang med par 'dod mi thad de / rnam shes glo bur ba'i sems spangs pa'i cha nas bzhag pa'i mya ngan las 'das pa dang / don dam ye shes kyi sku mngon du gyur pa'i cha nas bzhag pa'i / rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ni don gcig pa'i phyir ro // (p. 343).

of Tsong kha pa and rGyal tshab rje, even if all are agreed that 9:35 at least refers to the actual attainment of *nirvāna*. Mi pham begins his comments on that verse by what is in effect an unacknowledged quote from rGyal tshab. Since there does not exist the extremes which form the refuge which is the intentional object for grasping as true, so without exception all verbal differentiations are completely calmed.<sup>40</sup> rGyal tshab rje is particularly concerned with refuting any possibility that emptiness itself is established with inherent existence. There can be no such thing, since with neither entity nor non-entity there can be no objective support for any inherently established entity. There is no third possibility. Thus all verbal differentiations are calmed. And rGyal tshab comments that in the case of a person who cognises emptiness directly even the verbal differentiation of dual appearance is in emptiness calmed. In the case of one who cognises emptiness through the medium of a generic image (i.e. prior to the direct cognition of emptiness at the level of the Path of Insight (*darśanamārga*)), even though dual appearance has not been stopped, still there has been stopped the verbal differentiation of definitive truth.<sup>41</sup> The implication here is that even those who have understood emptiness through reasoning alone, inasmuch as they have understood emptiness, do not think that anything, including emptiness itself, is truly established. Once more rGyal tshab makes a distinction – this time between the stopping of verbal differentiations (*prapañca*) of definitive truth which while a noble achievement does not in itself equal *nirvāna* and the stopping of verbal differentiations of dual appearance which, in general and in the last analysis can be said here to equal *nirvāna*. Thus to speak of calming all verbal differentiations does not necessarily equal *nirvāna*. Nevertheless *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:35 does indicate the calming which through cultivation eventually issues in *nirvāna*. *BCA* 9:111 on the other

40 Mi pham p. 28: (de las gzhan bden par grub pa'i rnam pa gzhan med pas na) bden 'dzin gyi dmigs pa'i gtad so mtha' dag med par spros pa ma lus pa rab tu zhi ba yin te / = rGyal tshab p. 288: (de'i tshe bden par grub pa'i rnam pa gzhan med pas) / bden 'dzin gyi dmigs pa'i gtad so mtha' dag med par rtogs par spros pa mtha' dag rab tu zhi ba yin te / In saying that the dGe lugs perspective and that of, say, Mi pham and Sa bzang are very different here I am not saying that a subsequent scholar could not succeed to his satisfaction in harmonising them. That is another matter.

41 stong nyid mngon sum du rtogs pa'i gang zag gi ngo na stong nyid la gnyis snang gi spros pa yang zhi la stong nyid don spyi'i tshul gyis rtogs pa la ni gnyis snang ma khlegs kyang nges don bden pa'i spros pa khlegs pa yin no / (p. 228). rGyal tshab subsequently goes on to attack the earlier Tibetan scholar s'Tod lung rGya dmar for holding the view that emptiness is truly established. Clearly, rGyal tshab says, he does not understand even the slightest tenet of the Mahāyāna.

hand teaches the absence of subject in the absence of object. This, for rGyal tshab rje, is not the actual attainment of *nirvāna*. Unlike some other commentators, for rGyal tshab verse 35 indicates not the absence of subject and object but pre-eminently the impossibility of entity or non-entity. The calming which eventually issues from this impossibility is the calm of emptiness and is, therefore, the actual attainment of *nirvāna*. Having made his distinctions, rGyal tshab rje follows Tsong kha pa (f. 11a) in seeing verse 35 as indicating the calming of verbal differentiations at the time of the Result (*'bras bu'i dus su*) through familiarisation with emptiness, that is, actual *nirvāna*.

Mi pham begins by plagiarism – or a homage – to rGyal tshab rje which makes the direction of his subsequent comments all the more pointed. For having calmed without exception all verbal differentiations, he continues to say that this is equality like the circle of the sky, where there does not exist speech, thought or utterance, explained analytically as a mere gnosis which is reflexive awareness (*so so rang rig pa'i ye shes tsam = pratিষ্঵াসামৃতীজ্ঞানমাত্রা*). It is indeed the final mode of being, that is, the ultimate.<sup>42</sup> And Mi pham continues by quoting at rGyal tshab rje Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamakākārikā* 13:8 – emptiness was taught by the Victors for the overcoming of all *drstis*, all dogmatically held viewpoints. Whoever takes emptiness as a *drsti* cannot be helped. It is, Mi pham says, just like the declaration of sixteen types of emptiness for the purpose of reversing various attachments to entity and non-entity. As regards that unitive (*zung 'jug=yuganaddha*) *dharmadhātu* which is the stopping of extremes of verbal differentiation, there is a distinction in the Mahāyāna of direct cognition and reasoning. Here, Mi pham tells us, people refer to the *dBu ma chen po*, the Great Madhyamaka.<sup>43</sup> What Mi pham is saying here is that when entity and non-entity are not established there is complete calming. This is the cessation of all verbal differentiations. Emptiness, which can be shown through analytic reasoning, has thus fulfilled its function. Emptiness shows absence of inherent existence in the object under analysis. Since we are now on the level of complete freedom from verbal differentiations, to say anything more about emptiness,

42 *so so rang rig pa'i ye shes tsam gyis rab tu phye ba smra bsam brjod du med pa nam mkha'i dkyil lta bu mnyam pa nyid do / gnas lugs mthar thug pa de lta bu yin pa...* (p. 28).

43 *dngos dang dngos med du zhen pa sna tshogs pa'i tshul bzlog pa'i phyir stong nyid bcu drug tu bshad pa lta bu ste / spros pa mtha' dag khegs pa'i zung 'jug chos kyi dbyings de ni theg pa chen po'i rtogs rigs khyad par ca yin la / der dbu ma chen po zhes tha snyad byed pa yin te /* (p. 29).

including any conclusion that with absence of inherent existence that is the end of the matter, is illegitimate. Such would be to cling to emptiness. Anything further is not, cannot be, on the level of words and therefore analytic reasoning. It takes us instead to the level of direct cognition. Since we are here free from verbal differentiations, the sphere of direct cognition is outside the range of refutation through emptiness. We also have no grounds in direct cognition, the only relevant sphere, for concluding with rGyal tshab rje that the direct cognition of emptiness, understood as absence of inherent existence, is all there is to this level. Rather, what we find on the highest level of direct cognition is strictly unutterable (and therefore cannot be said to be simply emptiness), but an appropriate expression for it is 'a mere gnosis which is reflexive awareness'.<sup>44</sup> This is truly the ultimate, known and known to be such directly. It is the unitive *dharma-dhātu* spoken of in conventional discourse by reference to the Great Madhyamaka. Mi pham's use of the Great Madhyamaka in this context makes it quite clear what he is talking about, and places his views firmly within a tradition in Tibetan thought going back many centuries. It seems possible from what we have seen that one of his predecessors was Sa bzang mati pañchen. As Leonard van der Kuijp has pointed out, *dBu ma chen po* in this sense is an expression particularly associated with the *gzhan stong* teachings of most notably, although by no means exclusively, the Jo nang tradition. Here the ultimate is thought of as a really existing radiant gnosis, eternal, unchanging, the same in enlightenment and unenlightenment, empty of those adventitious defilements which apparently obscure it in the unenlightened state but not empty of its own inherent existence.<sup>45</sup> Such a view was influenced in particular by the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and its *tathāgatagarbha* theory, and van der Kuijp has suggested that it may have developed originally from a school of meditators, concerned with meditative experiences, which grew up around the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and other works attributed to Maitreya. The Great Madhyamaka was frequently associated with Asaṅga, as the

44 Since it is outside the range of verbal differentiations, this reflexive awareness is not affected by the refutations of reflexive awareness found in Madhyamaka texts such as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and the *Madhyamakāvatāra*. For more on reflexive awareness in Tibetan thought see P.M. Williams, 'On rang rig', in Ernst Steinkellner and Helmut Tauscher ed., *Contributions on Tibetan and Buddhist Religion and Philosophy*, Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde Heft 11, 1983, pp. 321-32.

45 For a brief further account of the *gzhan stong/rang stong* dispute in Tibet see my *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, pp. 105-9.

principal student of Maitreya (van der Kuijp (1983) pp. 36-46). Thus ideas thought of by dGe lugs writers as characteristically Cittamātra became absorbed into the Madhyamaka. Hence, perhaps, Sa bzang mati pañchen's use of the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*. Mi pham continues with further quotes from Nāgārjuna, who is of course one of rGyal tshab rje's principal sources, but understood in a very different way from rGyal tshab rje. Having mentioned the Great Madhyamaka Mi pham wishes to justify his position from the *Madhyamakakārikā*. Thus *MMK* 15:6: 'Those who see inherent existence, other-existence, entity and non-entity do not see the reality in the teaching of the Buddha' (*svabhāvam parabhāvam ca bhāvam cābhāvam eva ca / ye paśyanti na paśyanti te tattvam buddhaśāsane //*). For Mi pham 'reality' (*tattva*) is Reality, reflexively-aware Gnosis, there beyond entity, non-entity and so on, and beyond the reach of reasoning and any mere emptiness of inherent existence. This is supported by his quote from *Madhyamakakārikā* 18:9: 'Not dependent on another (Mi pham has 'not known from another' (*gzhan las shes min*), calm, not differentiated by verbal differentiations, without diversifying constructions, without multiplicity — this is the characteristic (definition) of reality' (*aparapratyayam śāntam prapañcair aprapañcitam / nirvikalpam anānārtham etat tattvasya laksanam //*)<sup>46</sup> Reality cannot be touched or undermined by verbal differentiations, and the calm referred to in *MMK* 18:9 immediately suggests *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:35 (and 9:111) which for Mi pham also indicates that Reality. The context of Mi pham's quotes from Nāgārjuna shows that for him these references to *tattva* are to be understood in the sense of the Great Madhyamaka. And Mi pham ends with a flourish: 'Therefore, through emptiness [understood] like that, extremes of verbal differentiation having sunk into the *dharmadhātu*, the two obscurations are completely abandoned and there is attained the *apratisthitianirvāna*'.<sup>47</sup> For Mi pham *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:35 thus sets forth the attainment of complete Buddhahood when approached through a correct understanding of

46 Quotations from the *Madhyamakakārikā* are from the edition by J.W. de Jong, Madras: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1977.

47 des na de ita bu'i stong pa nyid kyis ni spros pa mtha' dag chos kyi dbyings su nub nas sgrib pa gnyis po yongs su spangs shing mi gnas pa'i myan 'das thob par byed de / (p. 29). The sinking into the *dharmadhātu* here parallels the investigating mind with the nature of the *dharmatā* in Mi pham's commentary on 9:111. Thus the extremes of verbal differentiation too are of the same nature as the ultimate — pure reflexively aware clear-light gnosis. The two obscurations referred to are the obscurations of moral taints and the obscurations concerning the knowable. Overcoming both of these is in the *Mahāyāna* the attainment of Buddhahood.

emptiness (absence of inherent existence) and its function, its possibilities – and limitations.

On this crucial verse, but 9:111 too, we find a marked difference between the approach of the rNying ma pa Mi pham and the Sa skya pa Sa bzang mati pañchen on the one hand, and dGe lugs tradition on the other. However one should be careful not to create too great a polarisation. Not all Sa skya pas, for example, share the perspectives of Sa bzang and Shākyā mchog ldan, while Sa bzang and Shākyā themselves do not necessarily agree on all points. It is unclear to me whether our bKa' brgyud commentators Padma dkar po and dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba incline towards a perspective on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:35 with some similarities to that of Sa bzang and Mi pham or not. Padma dkar po makes it clear that the concern of 9:35 is with a stage of meditation, not pure intellectual analysis. Entity and non-entity do not stand before the 'mind which is free of taints' (*dri ma med pa'i blo yi mdun na*). At that time, having purified completely the three circles ('*khor gsum*'),<sup>48</sup> being without intentional object, there is complete calming. A bodhisattva who has attained a bodhisattva stage (*bhūmi*), at the time of meditative absorption, does not apprehend the appearance of an intentional object. When he has arisen from meditative absorption even appearances arise as mere illusions (*sgyu ma tsam du snang ba yang 'byung bas so*). When there is Buddhahood both the mind and all intentional objects determined by that mind are calmed in the (*dharma*)*dhātu* (*sangs rgyas pa na blo dang des bzhag pa'i dmigs pa thams cad dbyings su nye bar zhi bas*: p. 144), which Padma dkar po accepts as an equivalent of the *dharmakāya*. In commenting on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:35 Padma dkar po is certainly thinking of the attainment of meditative stages with Buddhahood at the end, but in treating this Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka text there is no clear evidence (apart from 'in the *dhātu*') that Padma dkar po wishes to gloss it with any hint of *gzhan stong* absolutism or its associated concepts. dPa' bo is in this respect equally unclear. He tells us that 'even that very stainless wisdom mind (*shes rab dri ma med pa'blo de nyid yang*) is always calm, having the nature of non-arising and non-cessation from the beginning. It is calm like that in the *dhātu* of reality'.<sup>49</sup> It is interesting that dPa' bo (and Padma dkar po?) includes under the mind to be calmed even the enlightened

48 The 'three circles' here are possibly agent, action and object of action, but more likely the three actions of body, speech and mind.

49 *shes rab dri ma med pa'i blo de nyid kyang gzod ma nas ma skyes ma 'gags pa'i ngo bo nyid tu rtag tu zhi ba yin pa de kho na'i dbyings su de ltar zhi ba yin no /* (p. 676).

wisdom mind. This would seem to place him at variance with, say, the positions of Sa bzang and Mi pham.<sup>50</sup> But it may not be quite as radical as it appears since, in *Ratnagotravibhāga* terms, what dPa' bo could be taken as saying is that the *vaimalyavīśuddhinirvāna*, that *nirvāna* attained through following the path, is dissolvable into the *prakrtinirvāna*, in other words, only the *prakrtinirvāna* is the ultimate way of things and the actual attainment of *nirvāna* from an ultimate point of view is lost in that. The implication of this, however, is that dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba distinguishes *prakrtinirvāna* from actual *nirvāna* and, unlike our other commentators, takes 9:35 as concerned with the *prakrtinirvāna*. Unfortunately in spite of the length of his commentary, dPa' bo leaves the issue unclarified.<sup>51</sup>

50 It may also place him at variance in a different way with rGyal tshab's comments on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:2, where rGyal tshab *does* want to maintain that the ultimate truth comes within the range of the mind. Discerning the ultimate does not entail the cessation of the non-dual mind. This is not at all the same, however, as saying that there remains a real inherently existing mind. For a discussion of these points see Williams (1982), note 4 above.

51 In the main body of my text I have not deemed it necessary to discuss the commentaries on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:150 (= Tib. 149), although these are also apparently relevant to our purposes:

evam na ca nirodho'sti na ca bhāvo'sti sarvadā /  
ajātam aniruddham ca tasmāt sarvam idam jagat //  
de ltar 'gag pa yod min zhing /  
dngos po'ang yod min de yi phyir /  
'gro ba di dag thams cad ni /  
rtag tu ma skyes ma 'gag nyid //

Thus there does not exist cessation, and never (Tib. omits 'ever' but adds 'also') does there exist entity /

Therefore all this world (Tib. 'all these beings') is (Tib. 'always are') not arisen and not ceased //

Among our Indian authors Prajñākaramati, and among Tibetans, rGyal tshab rje and Thogs med, all refer to the *prakrtinirvāna/prakrtinirvta* in commenting on this verse. In general none of the commentators really adds anything to what we have seen already in examining the other verses. dPa' bo, however, does make one additional enigmatic comment: 'All *dharma*s always transcend the mind, there does not exist speech, thought or utterance, by nature (*ngo bo nyid kyis*) [they are] simply purified from the beginning' (*chos thams cad ni rtag tu blo las 'das pa smra bsam brjod du med pa ngo bo nyid kyis gzod ma nas mam par dag pa kho na'o* (pp. 907-8)). Mi pham, of course, also employs the expression 'there does not exist speech, thought or utterance'. What precisely does dPa' bo mean by saying that 'all *dharma*s always transcend the mind'? For Mi pham this would be because all *dharma*s are *themselves*, in their nature, the ultimate Reality, the ultimate gnosis, as waves on water. For rGyal tshab it is because all *dharma*s are primevally lacking inherent existence. He would have to take 'mind' as equalling dualistic mind. It would however be a rather ambiguous and obscure way of putting it. In context dPa' bo is stating that all things, even *samsāra* and *nirvāna*, are just diversifying

I too have written at length, and I fear that I too shall have to leave the issue of dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba's own position on pure clear-light gnosis as the *dharmatā*, on the strength of these verses from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, undecided. For some of our other commentators, however, the issue is not undecided, and through looking at just a few verses from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* in the light of a range of commentaries we can see Tibetan developments, and the apparent influence of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* on Tibetan thought in areas where there was originally no sign or need of that influence. We can see that Tibetan commentators do not give us direct access to the 'original' meaning of an Indian Buddhist text — whatever that might be — but bring to bear a whole net of interpretive theories based on their attempts to synthesise a range of Indian material into complete Buddhist systems. The construction of systems differs as criteria and goals differ. Interpretation occurs in the light of a system which gives meaning, and as systems differ both synchronically and through time so interpretation differs. Depending on how the system sees itself and its direction a Tantric text in Tibet may be interpreted in the light of Madhyamaka thought. Or Madhyamaka through Tantric thought, with the *Ratnagotravibhāga* providing a useful bridge. Indeed the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, for example, may itself be interpreted in the light of its ability to serve as a bridge between Tantric thought and Madhyamaka. The result is that a Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka work like the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is interpreted in Tibet with reference to ideas which not only did not occur to either Śāntideva or his Indian commentators, but were perhaps unknown to them and if known may well have been considered irrelevant or of marginal interest. Their systems may have been different from those which subsequently developed in Tibet, and we cannot but see Tibetan interpretations of Indian Buddhist ideas as possible interpretations among many others. The point seems obvious, but it is worth remembering. At the present time, when Tibetan interpretations of Indian Mahāyāna ideas show a tendency sometimes to be given precedence over Indian material or taken to have the final say in understanding Indian or even Buddhist concepts, it may be worth underlining the point not only to scholars but also contemporary Western practitioners of Buddhism in general and Tibetan Buddhism in particular. Even more so to the scholars who are practitioners.

constructions which accompany reification. His appeal is to going beyond all, even the most rarified, diversifying constructions. But once more he has not expressed himself very lucidly.



