

LINNART MÄLL. *Studies in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā and other Essays*, Delhi: Motilal Bandarsidass, 2005, pp. 228. ISBN 81-208-2747-3

The emergence of the Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics in the early 1960s in the former Soviet Union was a great event for all humanitarian scholars of the country. The new ideas and methods developed by the representatives of this school (Y. Lotman, A. Piatigorsky, V. Toporov, Vyacheslav Vs. Ivanov, M. Gasparov, and others), in spite of the prohibitions of official Marxist ideology, opened new opportunities for the comprehensive study of such cultural phenomena as language, religions, text, folklore, etc. The Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics managed to publish its own journal, *Sign System Studies*, in which a short but brilliant article, 'The Zero Way' (p. 13), written by Estonian buddhologist Linnart Mäll appeared in 1964. A short time later his essay 'A Possible Approach Towards Understanding Śūnyavāda' appeared. These articles demonstrate an absolutely new approach towards the main Buddhist concepts and texts, an approach based on deep understanding of the role of structure in the process of the formation and functioning of religious texts. His latter works also demonstrate different sides of this innovative approach, and that is why the book is not simply a collection of unrelated essays but, on the contrary, is a representation of the integrated methodology which Linnart Mäll applies not only to Buddhist texts and concepts but also to the study of such texts as the *Bhagavadgītā* (see his essay 'The Light Path and the Dark Path', p. 105) and *Dao de dzin* (see his essay 'The Course of Translation', p. 119).

The majority of the essays composing the book are however dedicated to the analysis of Buddhist texts and Buddhist terminology. According to Mäll, the terminological analysis of Buddhist texts has the highest priority in buddhological studies, because 'on one hand, it involves investigation of inner links—related to both content and form—within particular texts and, on the other hand, consideration of modern science in the process of creating meta-terminology' (p. 8). The approach applied by Linnart Mäll in his buddhological essays gives us an opportunity to perceive concepts which are usually hidden from modern readers and researchers. For example, in his essay 'Studies in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*' Mäll in detail analyses key terms of Mahayana Buddhism: *dharmā*, *bodhisattva*, *śūnyatā*, *prajñāpāramitā*, *tathatā*, etc. The inner and outer links established by Mäll for these terms help us attain a proper understanding of the Buddhist path of liberation in its connection to the text itself. Mäll presents the text of *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* as a system which includes the reader of the text as an element. Consequently, *dharmā* is presented by Mäll as a text which because of its structure is able to generate not only other texts but also specific states of mind necessary for the final liberation. This

‘text-reader’ system makes it possible to analyze the dynamics of different states of consciousness in their connection with traditional textual background (produced by this textual background). This undoubtedly opens new opportunities for the study of traditional religions and cultures.

A portion of the essays in the book is dedicated to general cultural problems. In the essay ‘Semiotics as a Possibility for the Study of Religious Texts’, Mäll continues the discussion on the connection between text and mind. ‘The process of understanding is in essence a process of creating text, and consequently, a state of mind can also be viewed as a text’ (p. 173). And it is possible to agree with Mäll’s statement that this method gives us an opportunity ‘to open aspects of Buddhism that have previously been overlooked’ (p. 174).

In the essay ‘The Concept of Humanistic Base Texts’, Linnart Mäll presents humanistic base texts—the Gospels of Christianity, *Bhagavadgītā* of Hinduism, Sūtras of Buddhism, and *Lunyu* of Confucianism—‘as the greatest influencing factor in the history of recent millennia’ (p. 175). Finding the common features in the functioning of these base texts in different traditional societies, Linnart Mäll comes to the conclusion that these texts are still ‘of cardinal importance in the ever-growing influence of humanistic ideas on the development of human society’ (p. 192).

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