Nagarjuna the Alchemist -- A Legend at the Confluence of Buddhist and Śaivist Tantric Tradition

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Some amount of legend that tells about Nāgārjuna's accomplishment of *rasāyana* (elixir) exists in Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan sources. The legend appeared earlier in Hsuan-tsang's *Ta t'ang Hsi yu chi* and had been narrated for many centuries with various alterations. In the process, Tibetan tradition set the place of the story as *dPal-gyi-ri*, which is generally retranslated into Sanskrit as *Śrīparvata* by modern scholars.

Śrīparvata has been referred to as a Śaivite pilgrimage site since the time of *Mahābhārata* in the literary world of India. According to the *Kādambarī*, *Mālatīmādhava* and *Kathāsaritsāgara*, Śrīparvata was considered to be a haunt of Śaiva ascetics who engaged in tantric practices. In addition, Buddhist accounts also attested that Śrīparvata was regarded as a suitable place for tantric practices. In the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, it is said that if one performs a ritual on Śrīparvata, s/he will be able to accomplish any purpose through the recitation of *mantras*. This suggests that Buddhist ascetics also frequented the site.

The earliest text to refer to Śrīparvata as the abode of Nāgārjuna seems to be the *Caturaśītisiddhapravṛtti* by Abhayadattaśrī. In this miraculous stories of the eighty-four *siddha*s, famous *hatha yogins* such as Mīnapa, Gorakṣa and Caurāṅgi also appear among those *siddhas* who attain various magical powers. The legend of Nāgārjuna's abode on Śrīparvata was thus formed in the context

of the tantric tradition in which both Śaiva and Buddhist ascetics, who were called *siddhas* or *nāthas*, invented various kind of magical procedure including *rasāyana*. Nāgārjuna was considered to be a *rasāyana* master by not only Buddhists but also by Śaivas. A number of *rasaśāstras* refer to Nāgārjuna as a *rasasiddha*, and some of the *rasaśāstras* are actually attributed to him.

The relationship of Śrīparvata and Nāgārjuna is therefore to be traced back to a complex tantric background in which Śaivas and Buddhists frequently interchanged their saints and mutually borrowed each other's narrative patterns.