BUDDHIST ART IN NEPAL

All principal religious currents which animated India also registered their ripples in Nepal. Historically, Buddhism was the first established religion which reached Nepal perhaps as early as the time of Asoka. The early form of Buddhism believed in worshipping the Buddha through symbols and regarded the chakra or the enana as an important cult object symbolizing the Master. The immense popularity of chakras—worship in Nepal is indeed a relic of the Himalayan stage and well formed Lichchhavi chakras of a primitive hemispherical form are found in hundreds scattered all over the length and breadth of the Kathmandu Valley. It must, however, be admitted that except for the earliest enana at Patna Plate III,

which are attributed to Asoka, no other monumental images of the pristine Himalayan form have yet been identified in Nepal. It is not unlikely that the older folk divinities like Yaksha and Naga, which may have commanded popular worship in Nepal as they did in India, were assimilated in the Buddhist cult as acolytes or subordinate deities. The earliest image of the so-called Yaksha-Bodhisattva discovered in the valley and recently published is more likely to represent a Yaksha (presumably as an attendant of a Buddhist chakra) than a Bodhisattva who at such an early age represented the Buddha himself.

29
In course of time Hinayana, which comprised of the Sarvakaya
and Pratyakshadibhakaya and was a strict and rigour system, gave
place to the more humane Mahayana or Bodhisattvayana, symbolised
by the comparison of Bodhisattva Padmapani who is believed to have
attained nirvana until the entire mankind had attained deliverance. Mahay-
ana soon swept Nepal with the result that the simple chaitya began to
be decorated with Buddhist images and we start getting images of the
Buddha from ca. fifth century and of the Bodhisattva from ca. sixth
century onwards. Then followed successively the Tantrayana and the
Vajrayana, each ensuring further loosening of the rigours. This is
no place to go into their metaphysics and philosophy which are indeed
subtle and abstruse. Suffice it to say that to the solid base of the sastra-
sastra of the Yogachara school, which was an improvement on the sastras
of the Madhyamikas, the Vajrayanists added a new element of
mahamudra which marked the culmination of the liberalizing process of
Buddhist religion and philosophy. "Vajrayana introduced many innova-
tions of a revolutionary character. It introduced, for instance, the
theory of the five Dhyani Buddhas as embodiments of the five Skandhas
or cosmic elements and formulated the theory of the Kulas or families
of the five Dhyani Buddhas from which deities emerge according to need.
It introduced the worship of the Prajna or Sakti in Buddhism for the
first time and a host of other things including a large number of gods and
goddesses, their Sodhanas for the purpose of visualisation, Mantras, Tan-
tras, Yantras, Mudras, Mandalas, mystic realization, and psychic
exercises of the most subtle character."

Vajrayana was indeed a catholic and eclectic system which com-
bined the tenets and practices of the Buddhist Mantrayana as well as
Tantric Saivism and included in its preview the subtlest mystic experi-
ences and philosophical speculations to the grossest rites and practice.
Vajrayana also believed in psychic culture and the attainment of super-
normal powers known as siddhis. Distinguished adepts in these were
known as Siddhas. These spiritual attainments were often accompanied
by esoteric rites and practices involving not only animal and human
sacrifices and consumption of wine and meat but also indulgence in sexual
erogies. Such permissiveness was often abused and exploited by the
lesser adepts and the black sheep and led in course of time to the debase-
ment of these exalted cults.

Whereas under the Mahayana the pantheon had been limited to
the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas and just a few goddesses like Tara and
Bhairavi, under the new dispensation of Vajrayana there was a vast increase
of the pantheon and a prominence was given to the female element called
Sakti or Prajna. Under Vajrayana deification was carried to an excess
and all conceivable objects and ideas, including even abstract and phi-
losophical concepts, were anthropomorphised. Further, many fierce
divinities were introduced and the female deities were often represented in the pad-yum posture, i.e., in physical union with their consorts. Not being content with the five Kulāsā or Dhyani Buddhas, Vajrayana conceived of the Adibuddha or Primordial Buddha as the progenitor of even the Kulāsā and the Adibuddha was given the iconographic form of either Vajradhāra or Vajrasattva, who was often represented with his Sakti in pad-yum. It may be noted here that cultural intercourse with Tibet also played a considerable part in the multiplication of the female divinities and the deities represented in the pad-yum posture.

The cult of the Dhyani Buddhas, who are assigned definite positions in the cosmogony of the stupa is quite popular in Nepal and may have been introduced from India as early as the seventh century A.D.

This is shown by the Dvivaka stupa chaitya palaeographically and art-stylistically assignable to the 7th century, which is carved with standing figures of Padmapani Plate IV.
DHYAKA VAHA CHAITYA, KATHMANDU PLATE IV

Buddha (is he Maitreya?). Vajrapani and Buddha in the lower portion and four identical Buddha images seated in dhyanasana, of obviously representing four Dharmi Buddhas, the fifth one being left unrepresented. A similar contemporary change from Ghâri,
Thus, the four figures of Buddha seated respectively in dhyanas, abhaya, varada and bhupopavarada, confirming that these represent Dhyan-Maitreya. A pair of Lakshadhi statues from the Alkonath, Kathesh Tod, Paim, display in the four arches Dhyan-Buddhas seated respectively in the maha, abhaya, dhyan and varada-mudras, the latter depicted in one case in the padmasana posture.

The cult of the Adbhuddha, which is equally popular in Nepal, grew in the Buddhist monasteries of eastern India not earlier than the tenth century. According to the Sarjanamala, Adbhuddha first manifested himself in Nepal in the form of a dream of fire and water in the seventh century a.d. This temple is identified as the Svenandhaka-chalaya, which is the most celebrated Buddhist monument in Nepal. According to a recent local tradition, Svenandaka is the self-born of the Adbhuddha, who manifested himself in the form of a lama.

Since the five Dhyan-Buddhas played a principal role in the formulation of the Buddhist pantheon, we may define their characteristic indicating the two sets which constitute form each.

The propitious of the delhi family is Dhyan-Buddha Akshobhya, who is blue in colour, exhibits bhupopavarada and presides over the eastern direction. His Svati is Lakshmi, his Bhuvanakanta is Vajrapani, his aggregate is rajam and a pair of elephants constitutes his vehicle. He holds, Ushas, Tosani, Chankashana and Buddhagana are the principal gods, while Maksara, Yama, Jajati, Papiyanandita, Mahayanavindra, Mahaapayangga and Nirvana are the principal gods occurring from him.

The Delphi family is presided over by Yama chit, who is blue in colour, exhibits bhupopavarada and is white in colour. His Svati is Vajrakshita's vajra and his Bhuvanakanta is Andhattha. He is assigned a place in the centre of the monad and is often shown between the east and south. Among skiu between their origin to him may be mentioned Moksha, Ushashanka, Bansari, Arunakan, Mahakasiya, Pinball, Shakti and Maitreya.

The new family originates from Abheda who is red in colour, shows the dhyanamudra and presides over the western direction. His Svati is Kshina and he is related to a pair of garudas. His Bhuvanakanta is Pinabuddha and his Bhuvanakanta is Pushkara. The prominent deities of this family include Ushas, Sakti, Vajrapani, Chankashana, Jambuda, Kangala, Bhikani and Jambudvipa.

The origins of the chitramay family is Ratnasambara who is yellow in colour, holds the svadhisthana and presides over the south. His Svati is Moudra, his Bhuvanakanta is teji, and a pair of him constitutes his vehicle. His prominent deities occurring from him include Vasubandha, Jambula, Gajangalya, Jambali, Mahabhasa, Pabhakarana, Mahasatika, Vajra and the twelve Panditas.
The samaya family is presided over by Amoghasthåja who is of green colour and exhibits abhayamudra. He presides over the north direction, his cognisance being nivorajra and vehicle a pair of Garudas. His Sakhi is Tara, while his Bodhisattva is Visvapuri. Principal deities of this family are Vishkambhin, Vighnantaka, Khaśtravani-Tara, Dhanadatta-Tara, Parashabhi, Mahamayuri, Vajrayodhita and the twelve Drarinita.

Yaksha - Bodhisattva
The earliest image he has is found in Nepal is the sandstone torso of a Yaksha - Bodhisattva Plate V.
which has only recently been brought to notice. Although the head, hands (except for some fingers of the left hand) and feet of the figure are missing, its stylistic affinity with the figures of early Indian Yakshas and Mathura Bodhisattvas leave no doubt that it belongs to the same genre. The sculpture is fully carved in the round, though it is more sensitively modelled in the front than at the back. It stands in samasthanka and shows a sturdy build with broad shoulders, heaving chest, strong thighs and not too flabby a belly. It dons an chausika uttarjya on the left shoulder, the gathered fold of the uttarjya being held in the clenched left hand of which only the thumb and traces of some fingers have survived. The stance of the figure and the treatment of the uttarjya and its folds, partly held in the left fist kept akimbo, are identical with the early Buddha — Bodhisattva images of the Mathura School. The rendering of the lower garment, however, differs from the said Mathura type in detail and is shown as almost diaphanous, though the double-wound waist-band is again akin to the Bodhisattva figure from Mahoji (Mathura). The modelling of the back is sketchy and follows the earlier tradition of the Yaksha figures. In fact the peculiar rendering of the buttocks, and the treatment of the kachchha of the dhoti and the looped and taillated ends of the kunga-hara at the back are strongly reminiscent of the figure of Manthikdra Yaksha from Pavaya.2

Since our figure wears a kunga-hara and a satabhicha dhoti, it is more likely to represent a Yaksha than a Buddha-Bodhisattva. But as already indicated, it imitates certain stylistic mannerisms of the early Bodhisattva type of Mathura and in some respect improves thereon by making the upper part of the body less stocky and more proportionate and by delineating the lower garment as practically diaphanous. Besides being the earliest known sculpture from Nepal, this figure is thus remarkable for providing a link between the early Yaksha and Bodhisattva types and is assignable to circa first century A.D.

1. Ancient Nepal, No. 4, pp. 37-39 pl.V.
2. Saga of Indian Sculpture (Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay, 1957) pl.4. (b).
BUDDHA

The earliest Buddhist sculptures found in the Kathmandu Valley are the standing figures of Buddha from Chabahil and Bangemari, which are both parts of the city of Kathmandu. While the former Plate VI,
is made of greyish stone and has both hands mutilated and the prabhavali missing, the latter Plate VII.

BUDDHA FROM BANGEMURA, KATHMANDU PLATE VII

is made of dark grey limestone and is excellently preserved with its oval prabhavali and two flanking figures of seated devotees with hands in anjalimudra. Both are sculpted in the fifth century Gupta style of India and are heavily influenced by the Samath school in respect of the sensitive modelling, the posture of standing with the weight of the body borne on the right leg and the left leg slightly advanced and the disphusious treatment of the drapery revealing the anatomy, particularly the two knee-joints, the bulging shoulder and the chest and the line of depression at the waist. The Bangemura figure, which is well-preserved, shows the right hand of Buddha stretched in abhaya and the left hand half-stretched holding the gathered ends of the saffron. A comparison of the two figures
shows that the hands of the Chabah Buddha, in spite of their poor preservation, were held identically. The Chabah figure shows a more sensitive modelling and greater affinity with the Samath type, and is closely comparable with the standing Buddha figure from Samath Museum (OICA NEG. No. 186/19). The Kangsawa Buddha, however, shows a distinctive oval prabhavali, decorated with a design of minute triangular petals at the edges and is notable also for introducing the kneeling devotees at the flanks. This figure also shows a pair of holes on each side of the head similar to those found on the Tilganga image of Vaihara Vijnata dated in year 339 (A.D. 463) of King Manadeva.

A poorly preserved and defaced standing Buddha image found from the ruins of a Buddhist Vihara near Buddha Nikāyadhāra appears to be of the same style and date as the two figures discussed above.

The only early inscribed Buddha image is a limestone relief from Chapar, Patan showing the Buddha seated (probably in dhyanamudra), flanked on each side by a Bodhisattva carrying cinnabar and padma and wearing unusually tall kirtimukha. Artificially the relief is not of much significance, but the incription, assignable to the late sixth century A.D. is historically important for its reference to a gandha-kuti (Buddhist shrieve) and a bhikshu-sangha.

In the next stage the Buddha figures stand in graceful abhanga with their right hand stretched in the varadakṣaṇa and the left hand raised shoulder high, holding the gathered end of the sānghatā. To circa 7th century are assignable two such standing Buddha images carved in two out of the four niches of the samvatābuddha (primaite) bahiya at Dhuski Bahi, Kathmandu, one showing Mathura type of drapery and the other the weft drapery of Samath, but both revealing the kirtimukha with its knot and the looped scarf ends. A cognate limestone figure of standing Buddha is known from a private collection at Laxmi, Rampah Path, Kathmandu, Plate VIII,
BUDDHA FORM LAW FORM, KATHMANDU PLATE VIII

which is closer to Sarnath than any other sculpture from Nepal not only in respect of the treatment of drapery but also of refined modelling and delineation of facial features and meditative expression. The Dhvaka Baha figures, on the other hand, have a Nepalese physiognomical set and lack the luminous quality of the Ramabhad
Path Buddha. (It may be mentioned here that the figures in the remaining two niches of the Dhavika Baha chaitya represent Vajrapani and Padmapani, while the four smaller niches on the medi of its crowning rupa show identical Buddha figures seated in dhyanamana, representing the beginning of the concept of the five Dhyani-buddhas.)

Another sarvatobhadra image kept in the hinsa at Nag Bedal, Patan, shows standing figures of Padmapani, Maitreyya, Vajrapani and Buddha, the last being a replica of the Dhavika Baha Buddha denoting the Samatha drapery. That these figures are at least half a century later than those of Dhavika Baha is indicated by their developed modelling and iconographical features and the fact that all of them have flume-fringed oval nimbus and prabhavali. A large Buddha figure of black limestone in the Nag Bahl shrine nearby also pertains to a comparable date and style with its body type and drapery derived from Samadhi and its largeish oval head from Mathura.

There is a battered and defaced sarvatobhadra stele in a dry-up hinsa at Kasdi Tol, Patan, which is practically a replica of the N; Bahl stele discussed above. The conventionalized treatment of figures including that of the Buddha and the presence of bead-and-flame borders for both the nimbus and the prabhavali would indicate a ninth century date for it.

There is a prismatic late Lichchhavi chaitya in the Tha Bahl at Thamel, carved with standing figures of the Buddha wearing Mathura type of drapery on all the four sides of its lower portion. Two of them hold the right hand in the varada and the remaining two hold the same hand in the abhaya pose. But no two figures are alike and a variety is introduced by the divergent way in which the gathered ends of the sanghati are held in the left hand, which is either raised shoulder-high or stretched down in the danda-bhata. The drapery at the neck is, however, oddly depicted in all the figures which are stylistically assignable to the ninth century A.D.

The next stage in the evolution of the Buddha image is marked by the 11th high standing Buddha from Swamibhumi on Plate IX.
which follows the iconographical type of the Buddha figure on the Nag Bahal stela derived from the Sarnath model, but its facial features and modelling as also its developed flame-fringed oval nimbus and padmavali approximate the style of the early Pala Buddha figures of eastern India. The Buddha image lying half-buried on the Ayaghat resembles the Svayambhunatha image.
with this difference that its head is large and avoid. These two Buddha figures are stylistically attributable to c1cc A.D. 900.

The Kala style of seated as well as standing Buddha figures representing the Master in the vajrada, abhyaya, vyahyana and bhumaipata-mudras and wearing the Svacch brand type of wet drapery became stereotyped in Nepal and continued to be made here in limited quantity till the end of the 7th century. These are found in or around the Buddhist chaityas and viharas and a fair number of them may be seen at such Buddhist establishments as the Swayambunatha and the Mahabodhi Temple at Patan.

It is indeed easy to recognize the Buddha figures when they are represented as standing, but it is difficult to distinguish seated Buddha images from those of the Dhyanj Buddha which are indeed more popular in Nepal.

Sculptural representations of the life-scenes of the Buddha, relatively fewer in Nepal. Two sculptures of circa 9th century representing life-scenes, however, are remarkable for their elegant modelling and narrative vivacity. One of them from Yangal biti, Kathmandu, now in the National Museum, Kathmandu, is a fragment of the scene of Mara’s temptation, showing two charming daughters of Mara standing in seductive poses and trying to tempt the Master (portion broken off), with Mara’s host comprising ferocious goblins, demons and yakshas including a skeletal figure resembling Chamunda, a buffalo-headed demon and Ganesa wiggling axe, gesturing and launching assaults on the Buddha. The other from Doopatan now in the National Museum.
Nativity scene from Deopatan Plate X

Kathmandu Plate X represents the scene of Nativity and shows Maya Devi standing in a graceful tulasana holding a branch of the tree which has bent down and quickened to her touch with the infant Buddha standing on a lotus against an oval pabhavati, represented on her right flank. The newly born Buddha is being bathed by a pair of flying celestial
devotes with water mixed with lotus blooms from upturned vases. 
While the first sculpture is reminiscent of the same scene depicted in 
Cave 5 of Ajanta and is suggestive of contacts with the art of Decan, 
the other, with its supplie modelling and mellifluous contours is inspired 
by the classical art traditions of Mathura and Magadha. Some representa-
tions are known also of the descent of the Buddha from the Tryapistims 
bower, flanked by Brahma and Indra, the latter holding umbrella over 
the Master's head. These also date from the later Lichchhavi times.

Dhyani Buddhas

The Dhyani Buddhas are invariably represented dressed like the 
Buddha and seated in padmasana or vepraparyankonasana on a lotus with 
their hands held in one of the five mudras (associated with the Buddha), 
ofen carrying also a bowl in the lap. Normally such seated figures 
should be identified with the Dhyani Buddhas who are indeed very 
popular in Nepal and are placed in the specified directions of a chaitya 
or stupa. Thus Akshobhya with dharmachakra-mudra is assigned a place 
in the east, Ratnasambhava with the varada-mudra in the west and 
Amogasiddhi with the abhaya-mudra in the north. The place of Vairo 
chchini with the dharma-chakra or gyahabhsa-mudra being in the centre of 
the chaitya, he is generally not represented at all, but may sometimes 
be shown in the south-east between Akshobhya and Ratnasambhava.

It is indeed easy enough to spot the Dhyani Buddhas when they are shown 
with their respective vahana or cognizance marks, viz. vajra for 
Akshobhya, ratna for Ratnasambhava, lotus for Amitabha, chakra for 
Vairochana and vina or vina for Amogasiddhi. The last Dhyani Buddha 
is also distinguished by the canopy of serpent hoods under which he is 
often shown as seated.

Images of the five Dhyani Buddhas are very popular in Nepal and 
are found placed around the chaitya and stupas in the appropriate directions. 
The lower tiers of the larger chaityas and stupas also accommodate 
images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas relating to the respective Dhyani Buddhas, 
as seen on a late Malla chaitya behid the Rudkharma-mahabharata at 
Patan. Plate XI,

44
CHAITYA BEHIND RUDRAVARNA
MAHAVIHARA, PATAN. PLATE XI

Since the concept of the Dhyani Buddhas gained popularity after the seventh century, their images found in Nepal are generally later and gain greater vogue under rujgraha.