

# ROLE OF BUDDHIST SIDDHACHARYAS IN EXPANSION OF VAJRAYANA ART AND ICONOGRAPHY

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper aims at critically looking into the origin and development of the Order of the Buddhist Siddhās and their role in shaping the Vajrayāna art and iconography. The impact of Theory of Dhyani-Buddha, their consorts and series of emanations as propounded in the Guhyasamāja Tantra had been immense. The appropriation and sharing of the semiotics of new pantheon with the parallel evolving sampradāyas like Natha and Kapalika created a veritable multi-hued imagery of deities that has enriched Indian art and culture for aeons.*

**Keywords:** Dhyani-Buddhas, Guhyasamāja, Karunā, mahāsukha, Manjusrimulākalpa, Natha, Padamsambhava, Prajñā, sahaja, Śūnyatā, Upāya.

## INTRODUCTION

Vajrayāna school of Buddhism is believed to be a product of 3<sup>rd</sup> C.E. According to Lama Taranath, tantricism existed from very early times and was transmitted in the most secret manner possibly from the time of Asanga (3<sup>rd</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> CE) down to the time of Dharmakīrti (600-650 C.E.).<sup>1</sup> Thus for around 300 years tantricism was handed down from Gurus to disciples in the most secret manner before its followers could flourish in number and openly declare themselves as a sect. These teachings got sufficient publicity during the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> C.E. through the teachings and mystic songs of the 84 Siddhācarayas who incorporated Vajrayāna philosophy in their writings. It is also around this time that we see the inclusion of Vajrayāna deities in Indian art.

These Siddhas are believed to have been endowed with supernatural powers achieved through meditation and physical exercises and their names are recorded in Jyotirisvara's *Varnaratnākara*. An Account of their lives and works are preserved in Tibetan canon and in the histories of Bu-ston, Gos -lo-tsa-ba, Taranath, Sumpa-khan-po and others. They are also known from medieval Nepalese tradition as well as from their songs preserved in *Caryagitikosa* or *Caryascaryaviniscaya*.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that tantric and mystic practices as described in Vajrayāna literature were prevalent from antiquity and were well known to Buddha himself can be corroborated by an example from the *Pag-Sam-Zan-Zang*, a Tibetan text compiled in 1747 A.D. and the *Sadharmapundarika*, another Buddhist scripture. Both these texts have interesting references to Vajrayāna Buddhism. According to them, Buddha had assured Śāriputra, one of his chief disciples, that after countless generations, Śāriputra would be reborn as Padmasambhava ( Padamsambhava is also known as the Second Buddha across the Himalayan region and Mongolia), and he would attain enlightenment at Budhhakshetra Uddiyana, the place

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from where the Vajrayāna sect is believed to have originated. Moreover in *Sannyasa Upanishad* II.13 it is stated that though Buddha himself was well versed in tantrik rituals, he did not permit the use of *panchmakaras* by his disciples. Hence, even during his lifetime many monks revolted against his injunctions and were thrown out of the order. Probably this resulted into formation of secret conclaves called ' *Guhya-Samaja* '. The followers of *Guhya-Samaja* introduced their doctrines into Buddhism by the composition of a new *Sangiti* or collection of verses, all of which interestingly were supposed to have been delivered by Buddha himself in a secret assembly.

To understand this tantrik nature of the order, the paper will look into the interesting connection of Vajrayāna School to highly esoteric Shaivite orders like *Kapalikas* and *Natha Sampradaya* in the light of some textual and visual material.

## GUHYASAMAJA TANTRA

Bhattacharya dates *Guhyasamaja Tantra* to 3<sup>rd</sup> C.E. during Asanga's time and suggests that it was one of the earliest Buddhist tantras to be written.<sup>3</sup> His dating and contention agrees with Taranath's account. The text seems to have been an inspiration for later tantrik texts and was translated into Chinese during the 10th C.E. The translation in Tibetan forms a paThis text introduced two very important concepts into Buddhism. First was the element of *Shakti* (feminine power) and secondly the five Dhyani Buddhas with their female consort and extended family. From the latter arose various cults associated with the Vajrayāna and Buddhists were divided according to the relative importance given to one or the other of these Dhyani Buddhas. Moreover such a huge pantheon gave impetus to the creativity giving rise to beautiful depictions of these deities as described in various tantrik texts authored by various Siddhas. The purpose for which the *Guhyasamaja* was written seems to indicate a short and correct path for obtaining Buddhahood or emancipation through the Yogic processes. The philosophy of this text clearly suggests that perfection cannot be achieved by difficult and painful processes but only by the satisfaction of all desires can one reach the highest form of bliss. Hence, it vehemently criticizes the earlier strict and difficult rules and regulations followed by the Buddhist Sangha.

The repeated emphasis on the feminine aspect through various stories and anecdotes points at the effort made to include the concept of *Shakti* in Buddhist pantheon which later on became an important part of religion, art and iconography. In the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter while describing the different ceremonies of initiation (*Abhiseka*) mention is made of Prajñābhiseka or initiation of the disciple with Prajñā (प्रज्ञा) or Shakti represented by a woman and whom the disciple has to accept and vow never to abandon in his life. This is known as ' *Vidhyavrata* ' and Buddhahood is unattainable without undertaking this vow (*vrata*). Hence we see how earlier rules of chastity were not only openly challenged but even considered futile.

Moreover in the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*, it is mentioned that Buddha never revealed the secrets of *Guhyasamaja* earlier because people in those times were not enlightened enough to grasp the mysterious doctrines and had to undergo number of births to attain Buddhahood while the followers of this system could attain enlightenment in a flash and would be able to take their place among *tathagatas* in this very life.<sup>5</sup> Hence the text attracted the attention of the later tantriks affiliated to Buddhism and enjoyed a great popularity among them. The Siddhacaryas and Vajracaryas were highly influenced by its teachings and we find many translations of commentaries made by them preserved in Tibetan Tangyur as most of the original ones in Sanskrit are lost. Some Siddhas like Indrabhuti and Padmavajra made digests of the whole tantra in their works, quoting as authority passages from the *Guhyasamaja* in support of their contentions. Among the earliest commentaries on *Guhyasamaja* by Siddhacaryas, those of Nagarjuna (645 C.E.), Shantideva (695 C.E.) Krishnacarya (717 C.E.), Lilavajra (741 C.E.), Ratnakarashanti (978 C.E.) are worth mentioning and it is through these writings that the text gained popularity among masses and a new form of Buddhism comprising of huge pantheon of deities, their families, extended families, associated deities etc started to develop.

## MAHASIDDHAS

*Mahasiddhas* are famous for attaining direct realization of the Buddha's teachings within a single lifetime, for their miraculous powers, and for giving impetus to tantrik art and thought in Buddhism. When Buddhism took root in Tibet, these Siddhas provided important links between Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, giving life to lineages and art forms which have continued in Tibet up to the present. Keith Dowman describes Siddhas as the men who embodied the tantric ethos and the aims and the ideals of Indian culture between 8<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> CE, as generators and directors of the creative energy that converted the people and transformed society.<sup>6</sup> According to him, the number 84 of the Siddhas is more symbolic than actual, as there is lot of discrepancy in their names in various texts. Thus the 84 Mahasiddhas can be seen as archetypes representing the thousands of adepts of the tantric way. However the most important names which comes across in almost all the genealogies as well as visual depictions are given in the Table 1.

Table 1: List of Important Buddhist Siddhacharyas

| Taranath's account<br>(1608A.D.)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Srichakrasamvara<br>(8 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.)                                                                                                                                                                                             | Sumpa Khenpo's account<br>(Early 12 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saraha/Rahulbhadra, the author of <i>Buddhakapala Tantra</i>, was born in a Brahmin family but ridiculed the caste system</li> <li>• Luipada, author of <i>Yoginisamcharya</i></li> <li>• Kambala and Padmavajra, authors of <i>Hevajra Tantra</i></li> <li>• Krishnacari, author of <i>Samputatilaka</i></li> <li>• Lalitavajra, author of <i>Krsnayamari Tantra</i></li> <li>• Gambhiravajra, author of <i>Vajraamrita</i></li> <li>• Kukkuri, author of <i>Mahamaya</i></li> <li>• Pito, author of <i>Kalachakra Tantra</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saraha</li> <li>• Nagarjuna</li> <li>• Siddhashabari</li> <li>• Luipada</li> <li>• Dombipa</li> <li>• Tili (Tilopa)</li> <li>• Naro/Naropa</li> <li>• Dombi junior</li> <li>• Kusalibhadra</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saraha</li> <li>• Nagarjuna</li> <li>• Sabari</li> <li>• Lui</li> <li>• Vajraghanta</li> <li>• Kacchapa</li> <li>• Jalandhari</li> <li>• Krisnacharya</li> <li>• Guhya</li> <li>• Vijya</li> <li>• Tailo (Tilopa)</li> <li>• Naro (Naropa)</li> </ul> |

The major distinction between these Siddhas and other *sanyasis* was that the former lived with people at the grassroot level. Many of them married and did not shun the pleasures of life. They taught more by examples and attitudes than sermonizing and philosophizing. In fact, their contempt for hairsplitting logic and complex theological and philosophical debates can be seen in their various songs. Their teachings were completely unconventional and had no regard for societal rules and regulations. The ultimate goal that they strived for was '*Mahamudra siddhi*' i.e. the mystical experience of the oneness of all things and an ultimate feeling of emptiness '*Śūnyatā*' (Vacuity). The *mahamudra* is realized by fusion of *Śūnyatā* and *Karunā* symbolized esoterically by the *Yab-Yum* figures seen widely in the Vajrayāna art.

### VAJRAYĀNA ART AND ICONOGRAPHY

Italian scholar Giuseppe Tucci (1895-1984), who taught at Śantiniketan and established the research of various Buddhist texts, observes, "The Vajrayānic deities were subject to a long process of duplication and multiplication. To many Siddhas absorbed in their meditation the same deity appeared during its realization under different aspects. Thus it happened that the Sadhana increased, each one of them having its foundation on the particular epiphany which became manifested to the evoking saint. That is why there are so many varieties of gods and goddesses in their different aspects either appeased (*santa*) or wrathful (*raudra*). When the ecstasy ceased the Siddha who had evoked the deity in front of him, wrote down its description and the vidhi or the method by which to force the deity to manifest itself."<sup>7</sup>

The reason that there are huge numbers of deities is due to the difference of disposition, preference and intellectual acumen of the human being and the idea that each man has to find his goal according to his temperament. Thus each *yidam* represents a certain mode of goal orientation and goal attainment. Within the Buddhist religion, various techniques of visualizing these symbols have been developed as these were meant to produce them out of us (*utpanna krama*) and finally to make them disappear again in us. Thus the religious reality is apprehended in and through the life of these images. Their acceptance is a condition of understanding and of attaining richer and fuller religious insight (*Sampanna krama*). The identification of most of the deities is possible by referring to their various sadhanas as given in the Sadhanamala, an extremely important text of tantric Buddhism.

The extremely philosophical and idealistic concepts of Mahayāna had to incorporate various popular cults and rituals for propagation. Thus various tantric deities and cults came into its fold. Then, there was emergence of various *Dharinis*, a class of Mahayānic literature which was composed between 4<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> C.E. and which refers categorically to terms like *mantra*, *mudra*, *mandala karya*, *charya* etc by which usually tantric cults are characterized. Some of the important ones are as follows:

1. **Mahamayuri Vidyarajni**, which was translated into Chinese by Srimitra as early as 4<sup>th</sup> CE.
2. **Ekadashamukha**, translated into Chinese by Yashogupta in 6<sup>th</sup> C.E
3. **Nilakantha dharini**, discovered in Central Asia

Among the various Mahayānic cults like the cult of Bodhisattvas, cult of *Prajñāparamita* etc., the cult of five Dhyani Buddhas gained extreme popularity. Their iconographical antiquity can be gauged by their inclusion in the Gilgit manuscript dated to 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>C. AD and containing many mantras and dharinis. As will become clear from the *Table 2* this cult incorporated worship of various gods and goddesses separately and in *Yuganaddha* (united) form. The latter form suggests the union of *Prajñā* and *Upāya* and relates to the union of *Śūnyatā* and *Karuna* in Mahayana texts and *Shiva* and *Shakti* is Shaivite tantras.

In practice, *Vajrayāna* introduced the theory of five dhyani buddhas as embodiments of the five *skandhas* or cosmic elements, formulated the theory of their kulas or families and also that of their emanations, the male and female deities thus giving rise to a huge number of deities in various mudras and postures. In the *Sadhanamala*, Dhyani Buddhas are to be meditated on as being in union with their female counterparts/shaktis<sup>9</sup>. Tantrik art compresses all of the important points of the Buddhist teachings into a very tight visual package of symbols where each image contains a central metaphor which in turn serves as the thematic matrix out of which the symbols emerge.

In the first chapter of the *Guhyasamaja tantra* itself, Buddha is seen multiplying himself by sitting in different *samadhis* (meditations) and constructs the mandala of five Dhyani Buddhas, their *Shaktis* and the four guardians of gates thus emphasizing the fact that these deities are none other than the emanations of the Adi-Buddha himself. The interactions between these deities comprise the whole section of this tantra. Moreover in every Buddhist tantric work, great importance is given to the theory of Dhyani Buddhas or the Five Jinās, the great conquerors. Either they are directly mentioned or the Bijamantras or deities emanating from them are mentioned. Hence it wouldn't be wrong to say that this concept serves as the very ground on which the grand structure of Buddhist pantheon is built. **Table 2** mentions in detail the various aspects of Dhyani- Buddhas.

Table 2: Dhyani- Buddha Pantheon in Vajrayāna

| Dhyani Buddha emanating from Adi-Buddha/Vajrasattva                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Color | Shakti/ Prajñā/ Nai-ratma                                                                                             | Cosmic element | Seed Syllable/ mantra              | Bodhisattva                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Amṛābha</b> (अमिताभ)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaning: Infinite light</li> <li>• Originates in West, from red syllable Hrīh (ह्रीः)</li> <li>• Resides in Sukhavati heaven</li> <li>• Embodiment of attachment and stands for vital fluid</li> <li>• Alphabets letters beginning with ta (retroflex) - ट, ठ, ड, ढ, ण</li> <li>• Transformation of emotional defilement(<i>kleśa</i>): Desire (raga)</li> <li>• Symbol -lotus</li> <li>• Main Gods emanating               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mahavala</li> <li>2. Saptasatika</li> <li>3. Hayagriva</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Main goddesses               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Various forms of Kurukulla</li> <li>2. Bhrikuti</li> <li>3. Mahasitavati</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Gesture- Dhyāna Mudrā</li> <li>• Throne-bearer-Peacock</li> <li>• Wisdom-Discriminating</li> <li>• Corresponding Body Centre at Throat- Visuddha cakra</li> <li>• Shape of Body centre- semi-circular bow</li> </ul> | Red   | <p>Pandāravāsīnī</p> <p>Embodiment of element of fire and has a lotus symbol</p> <p>Seed syllable: red <i>Pam</i></p> | Fire/ sanjñā   | Hrīh (ह्रीः) / Om<br>amitābha hrīh | Padmapani later becoming popular as Avalokiteshvara. Its symbol is rosary. Its famous mantra is Om mani padme hum ! |

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Akshobhya</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaning: Immovable</li> <li>• Originates in east, from blue syllable hum ह्रं</li> <li>• Vajra family</li> <li>• Alphabets ca (palatal)- च, छ, ज, झ, ञ</li> <li>• Transformation of emotional defilement(<i>kleśa</i>): Bewilderment(<i>moha</i>)</li> <li>• Vajraparyanka asana</li> <li>• Main Gods emanating:<br/>Huge number of gods, fearful ones, distorted face with bare fangs, protruding tongues, garlands of skulls etc. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Candarasana (secret worship)</li> <li>2. Heruka-various forms, single and in yab-yum with various female deities</li> <li>3. Hayagriva</li> <li>4. Jambhala</li> <li>5. Paramashava</li> <li>6. Trailokayavijaya</li> <li>7. Kalachakra</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Main goddesses <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Janguli</li> <li>2. Vasudhara</li> <li>3. Mahacinatara or Ugratara</li> <li>4. Ekajata form of Tara</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Gesture-Bhūmiśarṣa Mudrā</li> <li>• Throne-bearer-Elephant</li> <li>• Wisdom- Mirror-like</li> <li>• Corresponding Body Centre at Heart - Anahata cakra</li> <li>• Shape of Body centre- triangle</li> </ul> | Blue  | <p>Māmākī.</p> <p>Embodiment of element water</p> <p>Seed syllable: blue <i>Mam</i></p> | Water/<br>Vijnāna<br>(consciousness) | Hūm<br>Om Akshobhaya Hum | Vajrapani<br>Its symbol is Vajra. Usually represented as holding Vajra in his right hand standing with his legs crossed. Its mantra is Om Vajrapani hum!                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <p><b>Vairochana</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaning: He who is radiant like the Sun.</li> <li>• Originates in centre from white syllable Om (ॐ)</li> <li>• Tathagata family</li> <li>• Alphabets ka (guttural)- क, ख, ग, घ, ङ</li> <li>• Transformation of emotional defilement(<i>kleśa</i>): Aversion(<i>dveśa</i>)</li> <li>• Symbol: white discus</li> <li>• Vehicle: Dragon</li> <li>• 4 faces 8 hands</li> <li>• Single God emanating- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Namasangiti</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Main goddesses: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Various forms of Marici</li> <li>2. Vajravahni</li> <li>3. Cunda</li> <li>4. Janguli</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Gesture-Dharmachakra Mudrā</li> <li>• Throne-bearer-Lion</li> <li>• Wisdom-Dharmadhatu</li> <li>• Corresponding Body Centre at Crown- Sahasrara cakra</li> <li>• Shape of Body centre- Bindu(dot)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | White | <p>Locanā</p> <p>Embodiment of element earth</p> <p>Seed Syllable: white <i>Lam</i></p> | Akash/<br>Rūpa<br>(form)             | Om (ॐ) /Om Vairochana Om | Samantabhadra<br>Usually holds a blue lotus( <i>utpala</i> ) stem on which the family symbol of cakra or discus is shown. Its symbol is cintamani (magic jewel that ends all sorrow.). He, as emanation of Adi-Buddha is represented seated with the legs locked; without crown or ornaments, In his esoteric form, he is represented nude in blue color embracing his Shakti in white colour. Mantra is Om Samantabhadra Om |

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| <p><b>Amoghasiddhi</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaning: Almighty, he who achieves the goal.</li> <li>• Originates in north, from green syllable kham ख</li> <li>• Karma family</li> <li>• Alphabets pa (labial)- प, फ, ब, भ, म</li> <li>• Transformation of emotional defilement(kleśa): Jealousy (īrśya)</li> <li>• Symbol: Double thunder, visvavajra</li> <li>• Vehicle: Garuda</li> <li>• Main Gods emanating             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vajraamrta</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Main goddesses:-             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tara group esp. Shyama Tara</li> <li>2. Mahamayuri</li> <li>3. Other minor goddesses</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Gesture-Abhaya Mudrā</li> <li>• Throne-bearer-Garuda</li> <li>• Wisdom-All-encompassing</li> <li>• Corresponding Body Centre at root- Muladhara cakra</li> <li>• Shape of Body centre- square</li> </ul> | Green  | <p>Tārā</p> <p>Very popular in later Buddhism</p> <p>Embodiment of element air</p> <p>Seed Syllable: green<br/><i>Tam</i></p> | Air/<br>Samskāra<br>(Conformation) | āh (अः)/Om<br>Amoghasiddhi<br>āh hum   | <p>Visvapani or Karamsattva.</p> <p>In his right hand, he holds the <i>viśhva</i>, a 5-colored double-sceptre, which symbolizes his deeper nature. He coordinate the wisdom and power of all 5 elements(dhatu). This enables him to eliminate all karmic bondages. His mantra is: Om āh karmasattva ha hum svaha.</p> |
| <p><b>Ratnasambhava</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaning: The Jewel –born one</li> <li>• Originates in South from yellow syllable Tram त्र</li> <li>• Ratna family</li> <li>• Alphabets ta (dental) त, थ, द, ध, न</li> <li>• Symbol: Ratna</li> <li>• Vehicle: pair of lions</li> <li>• Main Gods emanating             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jambhala</li> <li>2. Ucchusma Jambhala</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Main goddesses             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Aparajita</li> <li>2. Mahapratīsarā</li> <li>3. Vajrayogini</li> <li>4. Vajra Tara</li> <li>5. Prasanna Tara</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Gesture-Varada Mudrā</li> <li>• Throne-bearer-Horse</li> <li>• Wisdom-Equalizing</li> <li>• Corresponding Body Centre at navel - Manipur cakra</li> <li>• Shape of Body centre- Circle</li> </ul>                                                             | Yellow | <p>Ākāśadhātviśvarī<br/>(ākāśa+ dhātu + īśvarī)</p>                                                                           | Earth/<br>Vedana<br>(Sensation)    | Tram (त्रं)/<br>Om ratnasambhava tram. | <p>Ratanpani or Kshitigarbha</p> <p>Its mantra is Om ha ha ha vismaye Svāhā.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

By the time, Kalacakra system originated, the number of Dhyani- Buddhas increased to six, to establish correspondence with the six-syllable (*shadakshari*) mantra, *Om mani padme hum*, popularized by earlier studied *Karandavyuha sutra*. The sixth element added was the element of 'awareness'. The Kalacakra Tantra created later on a *Shadanga Yoga* in contrast to the *Ashtanga yoga* enunciated by Patanjali. These six classes were superimposed over a five-old extension to generate 30 different figures/deities. The elements become deities for an enlightened mind. Skandhas in pure state are the Dhyani- Buddhas, and the elements as their consort. This was the deification of ideas at its best.

The sixth element in its pure form became the sixth Dhyani Buddha of Kalacakra system, *Vajrasattva*. *Vajrasattva* originates from syllable *hum* and is white in color. He holds *vajra* and *ghanta* in his hands unlike other Dhyani Buddhas, he wears all ornaments, crown and a rich dress. It is also represented in single and *yuganaddha* form (*yab-yum*). Its Shakti is *Vajrasattvatmika* with *kartari* in right hand and *kapala* in the left. The Bodhisattva is *Ghantapani*. Worship is always performed in secret and initiation is needed in the cult. The great mantra used to purify mind mantra is - *Om vajrasattva hum!*

The importance of the concept can be seen from its visual representations in most of the Buddhist monasteries where *vajrayāna* art has been preserved.

## BUDDHIST ICONOGRAPHY IN INDIA

Snellgrove<sup>9</sup> observes that at Lamayuru monastery of Mang-gyu (5 to 6 miles from Alchi in Ladakh) and the one at Tabo in Spiti (Himachal Pradesh), the central cult is that of the Central Buddha Vairocana. This cult is represented textually by the Tantras and their commentaries in which Rinchen-bzang-po and his collaborators took special interest while formulating the Tantra section of the Tibetan Buddhist canon. The main image in the shrine at Lamayuru is a well preserved Vairocana, seated on a lion throne, with garuda and a pair of makara forming a canopy to his outer halo. The other four Dhyani Buddhas are seated against the back wall, two on the either side. The left wall has mural painting of eleven headed Avalokitesvara and again a mandala of Vairocana. Similarly the main shrine room at Mang-gyu contains a central image of Vairocana with other four Dhyani Buddhas. On the walls, there are mandalas of Vairocana but they seem to have been repainted later as Mang-gyu is a living temple and has been renovated and repainted many a times. Nevertheless it is the eleven headed and thousand armed Avalokitesvara and unmistakable central position of the Vairocana image which stylistically and iconographically connects the site to both Lamayuru and Alchi.

The interior of the Sum-tsek , the three tiered temple at Alchi is dominated by three gigantic bodhisattva images representing Avalokitesvara, Maitreya and Manjusri, all three bodhisattvas, emanation of the Vairocana .The images also seem to be of the same inspiration as that of *Brihad Buddha* statues seen at Mulbek, Shey and ones destroyed at Bamiyan.

Another important deity and its various manifestations is Tara. She is the most popular goddesses in the Buddhist pantheon and has a parallel in brahmanical tradition too where she is worshipped as second Mahavidhya and seen as a form of Sati. Buddhists consider Tara to be the great mother goddess, the symbol of primordial female energy. Moreover she is considered as the consort of Avalokitesvara, the symbol of the primordial male principle. A number of early representations of Tara either alone, in company of her consort or accompanied by other Buddhist deities have been found in the Buddhist cave temples of the Western Deccan(6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> CE). Exhibiting the *varada* or *abhaya* mudra and carrying lotus in the other hand, these images represent the earliest form of the Tara seen in Indian art .In the course of time, the multiplication of the forms of the goddess also generated multiplication of the number of her hands, and variations started to be seen in postures. Various wrathful forms emerged. These various forms are seen abundantly in the paintings and sculptures during 8<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> C.E.

## SAHAJAYANA AND THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF PARAMPARAS

Siddhas were well known in the literature of medieval Indian alchemy. Two main offshoots of Vajrayāna which have been popularized by the Mahasiddhas are, Kalachakrayāna and Sahajayāna

| Kalachakrayāna                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Sahajayāna                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The theory explained by Abhinavagupta as wheel of time and the process of keeping oneself above its vagaries</li> <li>● The possibility of controlling time(<i>kala</i>) possible by controlling vital winds in the nerves through yogic practices followed by the Siddhas</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Against the prescribed codes of study, discipline, conduct worship and ritual</li> <li>● Dohas and songs of Siddhas as the main source of inspiration...The whole gamut of thought rejects purely philosophical discussions and debates as useless.</li> <li>● Everything lies in human frame. The path denotes the easiest and most natural way(<i>sahaja</i>) by which human nature will itself lead the aspirant to the truth</li> <li>● Conception of an internal female force below the navel region of a male corresponding to 'kula-kundalini' Shakti of the non Buddhist Tantras, similar to the Natha tradition</li> </ul> |

In philosophy, the term *Sahaja* denotes the ultimate inner nature of beings and elements and in a spiritual sense, it denotes the easiest or the most natural way by which human nature itself can lead the aspirant to realize the truth. It believes that by suppressing desires and thereby straining the human body with the prescribed codes of study, discipline,

conduct, worship and ritual truth can never be found. It considers the human body itself as the seat of all human experience including that of **Sahaja-Mahasukha**. According to the followers of Sahajayāna everything, every mystery, every answer lies in human frame; and the human body is in essence a microcosm of the universe. All their effort is channelised at realizing the wonders of one's own body and its immense power. The aim is to develop the hidden powers of mind which when properly harnessed can be more powerful than the material forces.

The interesting overlap between Buddhist Siddhacaryas, teachers of Kapalika sect and Nathas of Natha Sampradāya points at certain similarities between these highly esoteric cults. Many a *siddhas* are considered as Natha and also as Kapalika teacher. This exemplifies a common spiritual tradition followed by these great masters irrespective of the religion they followed or the religion with which they got associated. It throws light on the mutually inclusive nature of spiritual lineages (*parampara* or *gyud* in Tibetan) and religion in India. Interestingly Natha Siddhas consider the five main Nathas to be the emanations of Adinatha very much like five Dhyani Buddhas are treated as emanations of the Adi Buddha.

| Buddhist Siddhacarya | Natha          | Kapalikas<br>( as per Shabaratantra) |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Nagarjuna            |                | Nagarjuna                            |
| Luipa or Luhipada    | Matsyendranath | Minanath                             |
| Goraksa              | Gorakhnath     | Goraksa                              |
| Carpati              | Carpatinatha   | Carpata                              |
| Jaladharipa          | Jalandharnatha | Jalandhara                           |

All these three traditions lay a great emphasis on two major points:

- The imperative necessity of making the body sufficiently strong and fit before starting the Yogic practices
- Conception of an internal feminine force in the Nirmana cakra (cakra behind navel region) corresponding to that of *Kula-Kundilini* of non Buddhist tantras

The main aim of the Natha aspirants very much like a Sahajayāna aspirant is to feel within his own self the ideal of non-duality which is possible by the attainment of immortality and renovation of the body.<sup>10</sup> According to the Natha texts moon (soma) is the symbol of immortality (*amrita*) which resides in the Sahasrara or the crown region of the body. In a normal human being, this nectar drips from Soma and gets consumed by the fire of the sun which resides in the navel region through a serpent like channel. The face of this channel from where the *amrita* is dropped is designated as the tenth door. These adepts claim that once the tenth door gets closed, *amrita* can be saved in the body which ultimately leads to immortality. The feat can only be achieved through vigorous '**KayaSadhana**' or disciplining of the body.<sup>11</sup> These methods and processes of Hatha Yoga have been explained in detail by Briggs<sup>12</sup> in '*Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*' and are very similar to ones followed by the Siddhacaryas. Hence, it is the cult of body that connects all these three esoteric sects and stands in contrast with *Vijñānavādīs* who believed in the primacy of consciousness. In a way, these sects are the carrier as well as the harbinger of materialist strand in Indian philosophy.

## SUMMING UP

Tantra took centuries to come out of the closet and its history up to the era of the Siddhas can only be conjectural. In a recent lecture, Dr. Raffaele Torella suggested that Tantricism provided a break from the Absolutist Buddhist philosophy. Buddhists incorporated it in a big way in their belief system and soon came up with a complex system of Tantrik iconography. Dr. Torella sees this change as Tantricism coming out of the shackles of asceticism and entering a world of a householder and altering it for ever. The dry logic of the Epistemological schools of Buddhist philosophy was soon countered by this very dynamic and vibrant system of thought which focused on the body, the microcosm, as a medium for ultimate emancipation.

Whether the *Kapalikas*, or a similar sect of primitive Shaiva Tantra, or heretical Buddhist monks, formed the first lineage of Tantra is not known properly, but somewhere around 3<sup>rd</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> C.E., a need arose for order and consistency in the system, and this could only be achieved by committing to palm leaf manuscript what until then had been purely oral

transmission. The *Manjusrimulakalpa* contained a body of Mahayana lore and also the basic father-tantra mandala of the Five Dhyani Buddhas; but the *Guhyasamaja-tantra* is considered to be the first of the root-tantras describing yoga techniques as well as the mandalas, mantras and rites associated with the propitiation of a particular deity and his retinue, in this case *Guhyasamaja*.

Bhattacharya interestingly observes " while the master logicians like Shantideva, Dinnaga, Dharmakirti were devising hair splitting arguments to interpret the world as a void entity, how tantric ideas captured the heart of Buddhism through the back door makes a very interesting historical topic"<sup>13</sup>

One has to see tantra and tantric knowledge as separate from religion and probably the tantric upheaval between 7<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> C.E. was the final blossoming of the yoga of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*) which gave way to yoga of devotion (*bhakti yoga*) in medieval times. The ultimate tantric mystery is *Mahamudra* and according to Dowman,<sup>14</sup> the sexual analogy of lovers achieving a sense of complete oneness while still in their own separate bodies is probably the best if not the only image capable of expressing this paradoxical mystery. The mystic sadhanas devised by Siddhas were translated into a wonderful array of visual depictions and deciphering the same images without understanding the esoteric aspect and the reason for their visual resilience, can lead to erroneous results.

The essence of the teachings of Siddhas providing the impetus for creating the wonderful works of art and architecture along with popularizing a different and more worldly form of Buddhism. This could be done because siddha brought spiritual realization into everyday lives. Saraha composes the secret instructions of the Mahamudrā, *chintāmani* for the samsāra:

" In the primordially clear sky-like nature there is nothing whatsoever to abandon or attain. This is Mahamudra free of a mental activity that aims for results. This very mind that aspires for a result is really uncreate from the beginning. Thus there is nothing to be gained or discarded at all."

The sky-flower doctrine of obtuse Buddhist philosophers paved way for the grounded maxims of Siddhas. The dichotomy between Samsara and *Nirvana* was erased through the power of mystical outpourings of poetries:

"Live as a child lives,  
the world is full of natural happiness,  
dance sing and enjoy it.  
Enjoy the pleasures of your senses  
but don't be attached to them...  
while drawing water, don't get wet."<sup>15</sup>

(Saraha's maxim)

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(Photo Credit for Illustrations 4-10 to *Himalayan Art* at <http://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setid=846>)

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Illus. 14



Illus. 15



(Luipa)



(Macchendra Nath)

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