

Dhyani Buddha : Concept and Relevance

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Almost all books on Buddhist Iconographic Pantheon is based on the concept of five Dhyani Buddhas, namely, Vairochana, Akshobhya, Amitabha, Amoghasiddhi and Ratnasambhava. However, the expression Dhyani Buddha is not found in any textual sources. But, in spite of this, Alice Getty and others have used this expression without explaining the reason for the absence of this expression in the textual sources. The expression was floated in the parlance of Buddhist Iconography at a later stage. Amritananda collected it which is research in a floating Buddhist traditions in Nepal under the patronage of Brian Hodgson, the then Governor of Nepal, used the expression Dhyani Buddha in all his recordings, including in his celebrated composition *Dharmasamgrahakosha*. He also did not explain why he used this expression.

The well-known text on Buddhist Iconography, namely the *Sadhanamala* and the *Nishpannayogavali* and *Vajravali* of Abhayakaragupta do not use the expression Dhyani Buddha. There the expression used is either simply Buddha or Jina. In view of this, the use of the expression Dhyani Buddha has been criticised as non-authentic and also as a grammatical gloss. The criticism is based on the argument that the Buddha is supposed to have passed the stage of *dhyana* or meditation after he had achieved the Supreme Knowledge, and therefore, he can no longer be referred to as a *dhyani*. The argument suggests that at best one can conceive of the expression Dhyani Buddha which is the suggestive of the association of *dhyana* with the Buddha conceiving that he had passed the stage of *dhyana*. Some discussions about the validity of the expression Dhyani Buddha have been taken up by some scholars with very shaky explanation.

In the well-known Mahayana text *Mahavastu Avadana* there is the mention of three types of Buddha, namely, Past (*atita*), Present (*prastyutpanna*) and Future (*bhavishya*). It does not mention any other type of Buddha. The concept of Dhyani Buddha was a contribution of the later phase of Mahayana Buddhism under the dispensation of *Vijnanavada* or scientific speculation known as the *ghijnana* or *dhyana* system. In the text known as *Avaya Vajra Samgraha* it is stated that *dhyana* is of five types (*dhyana-panchadhasmrittha*). It is mentioned that the concept of *dhyana* or concentration of the mind of the devotee was the source of the origin of the concept of the Dhyani Buddhas of five types, namely: Amitabha, Akshobhya, Amoghasiddhi, Vairochana and Ratnasambhava. Each of them was visualized with a specific colour and *mudra*, namely, red and *dhayanamudra*, blue and earth touching *mudra*, yellow and *abhayamudra*, white and teaching pose, green and *varadamudra*, respectively.

In the view of this, it can be assumed that the *ghiyani* or *dhyani* devotee had visualized these five Buddhas in their meditation (*dhyana*) and nomenclated them as the Dhyani Buddhas. Infact, they thus became the five Visionaries Buddhas or Dhyani Buddhas.

In the celebrated *stuti* (based on eulogy) of Vishnu beginning with *Santakaramvohujagasayanameghavarnasubhangam*, etc. there is a line which is as follows:

Yoginamdhyana-gamyam, meaning Vishnu in this form is visible only to the *yogis* (saintly devotees) in their meditation. Similarly, it seems that Dhyani Buddhas were also conceived as visible only to the *dhyanis* (saintly devotees) in their *dhyana* (*dhyaninamdhyana-gamyam*). Thus the expression Dhyani Buddha does not seem to be entirely unfounded.

With the above mentioned five visionary Buddhas one more was also added later in the name of Adibuddha or Vajrasattva or the Primordial Buddha. With these six was constituted the entire infrastructure of the Buddhist Pantheon. Envisaging that the divinities were the manifestations of these six indifferent dispensations and circumstances.

Above mentioned six doubtless were the Buddhist substitute of Brahmanical *gotra* (lineage-linkage) system which was based on manifestations of

the seven *Rishis* (saints), the mental creations (*manasaputras*) of Brahma, the Creator par Excellence.

Buddhist divinities were classified into five or six families (*kulas*) so that they could be identified in accordance with their head of the family (*kulesha*) for the determination of their respective colour and hand gesture. The word *kula* has been defined in the *Avhidhanottara Tantra* (meanings of words not covered under the conventional Lexicons or visionaries) as *jinasutra* or the generic linkage of families. Significantly, in the *Sadhanamala* and elsewhere the so-called Dhyani Buddhas are mentioned as the Jinas. This explains the connectivity of the entire system of a generic infrastructure of the Pantheon.

There is another way of interpreting the Dhyani Buddhas. They seem to be the five facets of Gautama Buddha at the time beginning with obtaining the Supreme Knowledge and ending with deliverance of the first Sermon at Sarnath. In the entire episode Gautama was in the sitting posture and exhibiting a particular hand gesture symbolising the different stages of the activity.

The above mentioned five stages were visualized as the five Dhyani Buddhas. Each of them was represented with the relevant hand gesture and also with a particular colour symbolising the substance of Gautama Buddha at that relevant stage. However, this interpretation may seem to be an afterthought for explaining visionary element of the pentad.

In the later stages of the development of Buddhism there was a need for explaining the origin of the various divinities for being incorporated into the infrastructure of the Buddhist Pantheon. For this purpose the thinkers stipulated appropriate reasons for the incorporation of various divinities and for arranging them into a logically valid system to explain the entire Creation Myth in terms of the cosmic order.

It is, therefore, clear that the floating of the expression Dhyani Buddha was not any fluke or whimsical interpolation of Amritananda. This development was already there in the quotes of progresses in the Buddhist ideology with appropriate logistics.

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