

Bhadraghaṭa

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The Buddhist Goddess Vasudhārā is almost invariably associated with the Bhadraghaṭa as one of the attributes in her hand. This is particularly pertinent to her six-handed form which, surprisingly, is represented in the images found from Nepal, both in her sculptural and pictorial representations.¹ The earliest representation of the form with the Bhadraghaṭa in hand is found in the illustrated manuscript of *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-Prajñāpāramitā*, dated CE 1015, now preserved in the Cambridge University library.² Some discussion has been carried out by scholars about this form, and almost invariably this has been rendered in English as an auspicious vase.³ Liebert has mentioned the meaning of Bhadraghaṭa as a vase of fortune.⁴

It has to be mentioned that in a rare description of Goddess Vasudhārā found in the manuscript of the *Vajrāvālī* of Abhayakaragupta, Bhadraghaṭa is referred to be as the attribute of the left hand where as the right hand displays the *abhaya* pose.⁵ This form of the image, interestingly, is the same as being noticed in the images of the Goddess Lakṣmī worshipped in Bengal and contiguous areas of Eastern India.

It should be mentioned that the term invariably used is Bhadraghaṭa, and not merely *ghaṭa*. The suffix *bhadra* is perhaps more meaningful than it seems to be. The term *bhadra* is used mostly as a prefix or suffix to many other names and terms in various contextual meanings. For instance, Bhadra Kālī, Bhadreśvara, Bhadrалока, Bhadrapallī, Bhadrāsana, etc. There is no doubt that in the term Bhadraghaṭa the prefix *bhadra* bears a technical sense which cannot be merely auspicious or the sense of having treasures within the vase. Liebert has given a new meaning without mentioning the specific source of his information. According to him one of the meanings of the term Bhadraghaṭa is 'a bunch of Lotuses in a vase, symbolizing the birth of the Buddha'.⁶

There is no doubt that the lotus is used as a symbol for the birth of the Buddha, and for many other contextual associations in Indian iconography. But how Liebert found the symbolism of the birth of Buddha, and that too without the mention of the lotus in the vase concerned is not clear. It may be he has a genuine source of information which he has not disclosed.

The goddess Vasudhārā is associated with treasures as her name implies. Ostensibly Bhadraghaṭa may be thought to be the receptacle or the container of the treasures

that she obviously doles out to her devotees. But the *varada* pose in her six-handed form is referred to be a *Ratnavarṣī* or as showering of treasures.

One can perhaps interpret the imagery as of the showering of the treasures taken out by the goddess from the Bhadrageṭa that she holds in one of her left hands. But this interpretation could have been accepted if the other sources of information revealing the actual term of Bhadrageṭa were not available to us.

The *Abhidhānottaratantra* is a unique text of technical terms not covered by the usual dictionaries or glossaries. That is why the text is known as the container of knowledge beyond (*uttara*) the coverage of dictionaries (*abhidhāna*). Ostensibly the technical meanings given in the text bear tantric Buddhist connotation because the text concerned is of Buddhistic association of Tantric genre. This text has many manuscripts available in important holdings like the Asiatic Society, Calcutta; the Oriental Institute of Baroda; the Cambridge University Library of Cambridge, United Kingdom and the Darbar Library of Kathmandu, Nepal. The manuscript of this text preserved in the Asiatic Society library is the source that has been tapped in this article. However, many iconographic sources of information pulled out of the manuscript of this text have already been discussed earlier.⁷

The *Abhidhānottaratantra* manuscript contains a terse statement to reveal the actual Tantric Buddhistic connotation of the term Bhadrageṭa. The statement is as follows:

Camatkāra peṭiketi bhadrageṭam,⁸ meaning that Bhadrageṭa is the box or container (*peṭikā*) of strange and wonderful (*camatkāra*) things. This will obviously mean that the term Bhadrageṭa bears a magical connotation and is a potential source of unthinkable wonders.

The collection of the India Office Library, now renamed as the Commonwealth Library in London preserves a number of manuscripts mostly of the scrolled type of handmade paper. They contain the various aspects of Buddhistic traditions in Nepal. The then Resident Pandit Amṛtānanda collected them under the patronage of Brian Hodgson.⁹ In one such paper scroll the sense of Bhadrageṭa in the Tantric Buddhist context has been referred to with more clarity. It says as follows:

Bhadretiyādu ghaṭeṭika pātram.¹⁰ Accordingly, to this, the term *bhadra* means magical. The term *ghaṭa* is equated with the term *pātra*, meaning pot or container.

From the above it is very clear that Bhadrageṭa, associated with the goddess Vasudhārā is the receptacle, container, pot or vase of immense source of magical outcome not only of the type of treasures of money, but of any other thing that a devotee of the goddess Vasudhārā can ask for. The goddess is capable of doling out all the wishful fulfillment of the devotee because of this magical wonder container or Bhadrageṭa that she bears in her hand. Interestingly in another context the

Hodgson Paper equates Bhadrageḥaṭa with the well known concept of *Kalpataru*. The relevant information is as follows:

*Bhadrageḥaṭam kalpataruvat camatkarakam.*¹¹

This means that the celebrated *Kalpataru* or the Wish Fulfilling Tree that came out during the Churning of the Ocean (*Samudra-manthana*) and was eventually in the possession of Indra, the king of divinities, Bhadrageḥaṭa in the Tantric Buddhist context has the same potential of all types of wish fulfillment of magical dimensions.

From the above discussion it is clear that the goddess Vasudhārā with whom Bhadrageḥaṭa is invariably associated is the divinity of Tantric Buddhism, as also the goddess Lakṣmī of the Brahmanical pantheon, are so popular among the devotees because of their immense power to oblige the devotees with whatever they desire for. The goddess Vasudhārā, as has already been pointed out, combines the concepts of the goddesses of learning and of fortune.¹² This is also true in respect of the goddess Lakṣmī who is invariably associated with Viṣṇu with her dual concepts.

Endnotes

1. D. C. Bhattacharyya, *Tantric Buddhist Iconographic Sources*, New Delhi, 1974, pp.35-36,45.
2. D. C. Bhattacharyya, *ibid.*
3. D. C. Bhattacharyya, *Studies in Buddhist Iconography*, New Delhi, 1978, p.23.
4. Gosta Liebert, *Iconographic Dictionary of the Indian Religions, Hinduism-Buddhism-Jainism*, Leiden, 1976, p.35.
5. D. C. Bhattacharyya has discussed this in one of his articles on the unpublished materials of Buddhist Iconography, published in the *Bharati*, the Indological Journal of the Banaras Hindu University presented in the memory of Dr. R. C. Majumdar.
6. Liebert, *op.cit.*, p.35.
7. D. C. Bhattacharyya, *Tantric Buddhist Iconographic Sources*, New Delhi, 1974, the list of manuscripts mentioned in this work.
8. *Abhidhānottaratantra*, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, manuscript no.107 59, folio 37A.
9. D. C. Bhattacharyya, 'Art Historical Importance of Hodgson Papers', *Kala*, The Journal of Indian Art History Congress, Volume IV, 1997-98, pp.38-44.
10. Hodgson paper number 19.
11. Hodgson paper number 23.
12. This point has been discussed in detail by D. C. Bhattacharyya in his three books, namely, *Tantric Buddhist Iconography Sources*, 1974; *Studies in Buddhist Iconography*, New Delhi, 1978; *Iconology of Composite Images*, New Delhi, 1984. The Hodgson paper information has been provided by him to me from his personal collection of source materials.