

# **THE WHEEL OF LIFE (*Bhavacakra*):**

**A Study on Buddhist Philosophical Art as Practiced in  
Pokhari Narayansthan VDC, Kavrepalanchok District**

A Dissertation Submitted to  
The Central Department of Buddhist Studies  
Tribhuvan University Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of  
Arts in Buddhist Studies

By

**SURENDRA KUMAR LAMA (TAMANG)**

T.U. Reg. No.:- 6-1-20-295-98



**CENTRAL DEPARTMENT OF BUDDHIST STUDIES**

Tribhuvan University

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

2017



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION



### 1.1 Introduction

The Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*) is a Buddhist teaching through art. The Wheel of Life depicts the basic teachings of the Buddha i.e. the Four Noble Truth, *Karma* and Cause and Effect (Dependent Origination) skillfully. So, the Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*) is philosophically based on the first teaching of the Buddha. The Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*) is one of the most striking and important illustrations of Buddha's teachings, capturing the key elements of rebirth, karma, and dependent origination. It is one of the most popular iconographies in Northern Buddhism. The Wheel of Life is called '*Bhavacakra*', '*Bhavacakka*' and *srid pa'i 'khor lo*' respectively in *Sanskrit*, Pali and Tibetan languages.

The Wheel of Life is a metaphysical diagram depicting the various realms of cyclic existence and the beings inhabiting these realms. It is primarily a visual aid to help us gain a clear understanding of the workings of human mind. It is a symbolic representation of *samsāra* found on the outside walls of Northern Buddhist dGonpas (monasteries). The *Bhavacakra* is popularly referred to as the Wheel of Life, and may also be glossed as wheel of cyclic existence or wheel of becoming or wheel of rebirth or wheel of *samsāra* or wheel of suffering or wheel of transformation. The Wheel of Life can be read by all including illiterate persons. It should not need esoteric knowledge. In other words, no esoteric knowledge is needed to understand the Wheel of Life. The Wheel of Life is a real picture of *Pratityasamudpada* or Doctrine of Dependent Origination. The Wheel of Life shows how limiting patterns are repeatedly based on a constricted understanding of life and human minds. The Wheel of Life is believed to have been designed by the Buddha himself in order to help ordinary people understand Buddhist teachings according to the Dalai Lama. Ajanta cave painting of the Wheel of Life, dated 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., proves how old the picture is. There are various reasons for the suffering. The Wheel of Life presents these very causes for human suffering. The Wheel helps us in attaining the Liberation from the *samsāra*.

In death ritual of Buddhist Tamang community of Pokhari Narayansthan VDC (PN VDC) of Kavrepalanchok (Kavre) district, the Wheel of Life plays significant roles.

During the funeral procession, the Wheel of Life Thangka is displayed. During *Minjyang* (Ti. *Jhyangpar*), a ritual performed in death ritual (*Ghewa*), some mantras of six realms of the Wheel of Life along with the name of the dead person are written or printed on a sheet of paper and burn it so that the dead person could go out of the *samsāra* and get liberation. *Necher Chhyoi*, the text followed in death ritual, deals about the six realms of the Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*).

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

Statement of problem is made through the followings research questions:-

- a. What are the details of the Wheel of Life?
- b. What is the philosophy of the Wheel of Life?
- c. What are the practices of the Wheel of Life among Tamang Buddhist community of Pokhari Narayansthan VDC of Kavrepalanchok district?

## **1.3 Objectives**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To study the iconographic description of the Wheel of Life
- To study philosophy of the Wheel of Life
- To study the practices of the Wheel of Life among Tamang Buddhist community of Pokhari Narayansthan VDC of Kavrepalanchok district

## **1.4 Rationale of the Study**

The following reasons rationalize for the selection of the study:

- i. The Wheel of Life is one of the Buddhist practices through art.
- ii. It can be understood by all including illiterate persons.
- iii. It is the best representation of the Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination and *Karma*.
- iv. It is one of the oldest illustrations of Buddhism.
- v. It is one of the best tools to teach the teachings of the Buddha. So, the Wheel of Life is painted right-hand side of the main door of a dGonpa.
- vi. It is one of frequently painted Thangkas.
- vii. It encourages people for the liberation from the *samsāra*.
- viii. The Wheel of Life Thangka is displayed in different occasions.

## **1.5 Literature Review**

The following texts of have been reviewed for this work:

*Buddhist Art* (2014): is written by Meena V. Talim, tells us about the characteristics of Buddhist Art. It also deals with the Buddhist cave paintings of ancient India. "The Wheel of Law of Causation in Ajanta Painting" is entitled in 'Group -B: Cave Painting' in the text. The mural display of the Law of Causation (*Pratīyasamutpāda*) at Ajanta is in Cave No. XVII which was completed near about A.D. 505, on the left wall of the verandah. The painting is supposed to be the first of its kind miniature painting in India and perhaps in the world. With the rise of the *Sarvastivādins*, the theory of *Patīccasamuppāda* became more popular and they were the ones who were instrumental in creating a mural of it at Ajanta. It became very popular in all Buddhist followers especially in Northern Buddhist followers. The origin of the Wheel of Life can be traced in the *Divyāvadāna*, which belongs to the 4th century A.D. It explains that monk Mahamaudgalayana had visited the world of *Pretas*, where he saw his parents suffering and thirsty. He offered them water but they could not drink it. He was so sad to see them. He also told the Buddha about it. Then Buddha decided to have the Wheel of Causation, with five interstices or shafts in it. The five existences are namely; Hell, Animal, Ghost, Human and God. The Buddha also recommended it to be depicted above the frame of the door. *Ajanata* painting seems to follow all the instructions given in the *Divyāvadāna*. There are six sections representing six worlds at Ajanta. Theravadin countries accepted '*Patīccasamuppāda*' in mere principles, but not in exuberant paintings. On the other hand, in Northern Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, the Wheel of Ajanta was accepted whole heartedly. The Tibetans imitated Ajanta frescoes in principle a modified adding some more artistic skills. It was very popular in Nepal, Tibet, China and Japan. The Wheel of Life has contributed not only to the world of Buddhism but to the world of art. The text is not sufficient for philosophical analysis of the Wheel of Life.

*The Wheel of Life* (2015)/*The Meaning of Life* (2000): is by Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV). The text illustrates how our existence, though fleeting and often full of woes, brims with the potential for peace and happiness, using the traditional Buddhist allegorical image of the Wheel of Life and teaching of the twelve links of dependent origination. We can realize that potential by cultivating a wise appreciation of the interdependency of actions and experience, and by living a kind and compassionate life. With regard to the history of the Wheel of Life painting, the author tells us that

the Buddha had made the painting for the Magadha king, Bimbisara to present the king, Udayana.

*The Wheel of Life (2008)*: is written by Kulananda that deals with the graphic representation of the Buddhist understanding of life which has an ancient symbol of tremendous spiritual significance through the present book "The Wheel of Life". The text systematically interprets the hub, the black and white segments, the six realms, the twelve links etc. shown in the Wheel of Life iconography. The author shows the six realms from a psychological perspective. Those are: Beauty (the God realm), Fierce competitiveness (the *Asura* realm), Neurotic desire (the Animal realm), Acute torment (the *Preta* realm), Lazy indifference (the Hell realm), and Creativity (the Human realm). The author seems to take the Buddha and Bodhisattva equally. The author uses the term "Buddha" in the term of Bodhisattva. It might create confusion among common readers. The Buddha like personality in every realm is not other than Bodhisattva who assists all the creatures of every realm based on their sufferings until their liberation from the *samsāra*.

*Freeing Yourself from the Cycle (2013)*: is written by Palden Drakpa. The text demonstrates the continuous cycle of birth and death one will have to undergo powerlessly as long as one remains under the control of karma and afflictive emotions, or the possibility of taking numerous fortunate and unfortunate rebirths, such as birth in the intermediate state, which are all impermanent and unstable. He explains the origin and details of the Wheel of Cyclic Existence. The text mentions that the Wheel of Life picture was drawn based on Buddha's teaching on the request of Magadha king, Bimbisara for reciprocal gift to Udrayana, the king of Ravena.

*Tibetan Buddhism (2004)*: is by L. Austine Waddell, observes the mystic cults, symbolism and mythology of Tibetan Buddhism. The text explains about the historical, doctrinal, monastic, buildings, mythology and gods, ritual and sorcery and popular Lamaism of Tibetan Buddhism. Buddha himself may have originated the picture of "The Wheel of Life" according as the text. The writer has attempted to reveals that the Tibetan picture of "The Wheel of Life" is the supplement of the particular painting of Ajanta (6th century A.D.) brought to Tibet by the Indian monk "Bande Yeshe", in the eighth century A.D.

*Images of Enlightenment* (2006): is by Jonathan Landaw and Weber Andy, answers the need for a clear and straightforward guide to the inner world of Tibetan Buddhist sacred art. Focusing on some of its most important and representative images, this richly illustrated book introduces the reader to the tradition of spiritual self-transformation embodied by these depictions of enlightened energy through clear iconographic representations and descriptions. The writers through their writing have attempted to show the Wheel of Life as a diagram depicting the various realms of cyclic existence. It is primarily a visual aid to help us gain a clear understanding of the workings of our mind. The author mentions that the Wheel of Life is said to have been designed by the Buddha himself to the king of Magadha, Bimbisara.

*Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* (2004): is written by David Snellgrove. The book provides a comprehensive survey of Indian Buddhism and its subsequent establishment in Tibet, where it was transferred more or less complete preceding its demise in northern India in the thirteen century AD. It is especially informative on the tantric period of Buddhist theory and practice from the eighth with the earlier evolution of Buddhist doctrines, the 'Three Tunings of the Wheel', during the first thousand years. The author deals mainly with the Buddhist conversion of Tibet. The great importance of the kingdoms of Central Asia along the ancient Silk Route in the gradual process of Tibetan conversion is emphasized here in the text. According to the author, the Wheel of Existence (*Bhavacakra*) is portrayed in the porch of every Tibetan Buddhist temple and the survival of a similar painting in Cave XVII at Ajanta reveals that such a practice was well established in Indian Buddhist monasteries.

*The Elements of Tibetan Buddhism* (2013): is by Richard E. Farkas. The text mainly discusses the Tibetan Buddhist vows and practices, rituals, ritual objects, symbols, deities etc. It also mentions the symbolic representations of Wheel of Life.

*Himali Kshetrako Nepali Boudha Parampara* (B.S.2063): is written by Ngawang Wosher Lama (Sherpa). The book explores the Buddhist traditions of Himalayan region of Nepal. Mainly, the author focuses his writings on dGonpas and activities within the dGonpas. Just a short description of the Wheel of Life relating to the Four Noble Truth is mentioned in the text in sixth chapter.

The above literature review provides affluent information about the historical, iconographic and philosophical background of the Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*). It

shows that none of these texts has gone through comprehensive way. Moreover, the practices of the Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*) are not studied yet. So, this study tried to display the Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*) comprehensively.

## **1.6 Research Methodology**

Methodology is the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study. It is the general research strategy that outlines the way in which research is to be undertaken and, among other things, identifies the methods to be used in it.

### **1.6.1 Study Site Description and Rationale for the Selection of the Study Site**

Timal or Temal, one of the popular places of Kavrepalnchowk district, was once the kingdom of Tamang King named Rinchen Dorje before the invasion of Gorkha regime. Timal is regarded as one of the main cultural hubs of Tamangs. Tamang Buddhist practices of Timal region are regarded as the genuine culture among Tamang community. Timal contains more than 12 VDCs. Pokhari Narayansthan VDC is one of them and it lies in the centre of Timal region. The following reasons have rationalized for the selection of the study site to meet the third objective of the study:

- i. Pokhari Narayan Sthan VDC is inhabited by the Tamangs.
- ii. The VDC is the centre of Timal region.
- iii. The VDC contains ten dGompas within.
- iv. *Ghelung Pahara*, the *sadhana cave* of Padmasambhav is also in this VDC.
- v. Many people here are Thangka Artisans.
- vi. No one has done previous research about the practice of the Wheel of Life in Tamang community of this VDC.

### **1.6.2 Research Design**

Descriptive Research is essentially a fact finding approach relative largely to the present, and abstracting generalizations by the cross-sectional study of the current situations. The application of descriptive research is more common in social science. Field Study Research is a scientific inquiry aiming at discovering the relations and interactions among variables in social institutions. The field study investigator studies the relations among the attitudes, values, perceptions and behavior of individuals and groups in situation. So, Descriptive Research Design and the Field Study Research Design were applied in this research.

### **1.6.3 Nature and Sources of Data**

Sources of data in this study were based on two aspects: one, primary sources and the other, secondary sources. The primary sources of data for illustrative guideline and philosophical description of the Wheel of Life are the Buddhist Sanskrit and Pali literatures. *Rudrayana Avadana*, *Sahadodgata Avadana*, *Salistambasutra*, and *Avalamban Sutra* are Sanskrit Buddhist literatures and *Maha-Nidana Sutta* and *Petavatthu* are Pali Buddhist literatures which are gone through to fulfill the first and second objectives of the study. The primary sources of data for the practice of Wheel of Life were elicited through the fieldwork with the help of developed questionnaire, interaction, and face-to-face talk. The secondary sources of data were based on the related literature, journals, articles, newspapers, websites, etc.

### **1.6.4 Sampling Procedure**

Pant (2010: 39) mentions that judgmental/Purposive Sampling is one which is selected by the researcher subjectively using his or her judgement. Such samples are selected from the population through researcher's intuition or on some other subjective basis. The selection of the sample is deliberate and purposive; it is not random. Thus, purposive sampling involves targeting a particular group because it is that group we are interested in.

The numbers of dGonpas of Pokhari Narayansthan VDC along with dGonpa members and Buddhist lay people of the VDC will be the universe of the study. From the universe, dGonpas were listed; and Lamas, dGonpa members, lay people, teachers, social activists, for the required information for the study was sampled for the interaction. For this, Judgmental/Purposive Sampling was applied

### **1.6.5 Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection techniques were based on two aspects: one, Primary Data Collection Techniques and the other, Secondary Data Collection Techniques. Qualitative data were elicited from the primary and secondary sources by using the following data generation techniques.

#### **1.6.5.1 Primary Data Collection Techniques**

For the primary data collection of Buddhist practice of the Wheel of Life in Tamang community, the following techniques were applied:



#### **1.6.5.1.1 Interview**

For the primary data collection to Buddhist practice of the Wheel of Life, questionnaire items were included in the interview schedule. Lamas, *Bonpos*, *Tambas*, *dGonpa* members and Buddhist followers from Narayansthan VDC of Kavrepalanchok district were interviewed.

#### **1.6.5.1.2 Observation**

Participatory Observation of the artisans preparing the Thangka of Wheel of Life was done. The observation of the artisans designing the Wheel of Life was made in the Thangka Art Foundation's studio in Bhaktapur. For iconographic observation of the Wheel of Life, the researcher visited to *Arya Avalokitesvara Dhyana dGonpa* of Pokhari Narayansthan VDC, *Shree Guru Lhakhang dGonpa* of Boudha and *Chhyorten Tashi Tamang Monastery* of Jorpati of Kathmandu. To meet the third objective of the study, the researcher also participated and observed the funeral procession and other death rituals in Pokhari Narayansthan VDC ward no. 4, Kavre. The funeral procession was observed in Nov. 24, 2016 and death rituals from Dec. 6 to Dec. 8 in the year.

#### **1.6.5.2 Secondary Data Collection Techniques**

The secondary data collection was carried out through the related Newspapers, Journals, Research Articles, Books, Periodicals, and Websites.

#### **1.6.6 Methods of Data Analysis**

The collected data from the fieldwork were edited, codified, classified, tabulated, analyzed and interpreted.

#### **1.7 Limitation of the Study**

This study is mainly focused on the iconographic and philosophical description of the Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*) and its practices among Tamang community of Pokhari Narayansthan VDC of Kavrepalanchok district. The study was accomplished based upon Northern Buddhism. The study does not explain Northern Buddhism in detail. This thesis also does not explain the Buddhist philosophy in detail. However it does explain only that part which is directly and indirectly related to the Wheel of Life iconography. The fundamental principles of Buddhism; the Four Noble Truth, Dependent Origination, and *Karma* are related to the Wheel of Life, which are briefly studied as its requirement in the study.

### 1.8 Time Limitation

The present thesis has been completed within three months. The first month of the program was spent on the survey of Sanskrit, Tibetan and English Buddhist materials, taking interviews and collection of data. The second month was spent on decoding, arranging and editing the raw data, organizing them into chapters. The third month was spent on finalizing the thesis with modification and revisions.



## CHAPTER TWO

### INTRODUCTION TO THE WHEEL OF LIFE (BHAVACAKRA)

#### 2.1 Art

Art is a reflection of creative human mind into an object. Art is a creation as well as performance like music, poetry and dance. Art is a skill or ability that can be developed by practice especially with scientific technique. Art has been categorized into two groups i.e. fine art and other arts by modern scholars. Painting, sculpture and architecture belong to fine art. Art objects are categorized as of three kinds; viz. the folks, the courts and the sacred. The contemporary Buddhist art falls on the third category.<sup>1</sup>

##### 2.1.1 Buddhist Art

The art related to Buddhist themes, *gurus*, *siddhas*, lineages etc are known as the Buddhist Arts. Buddhist arts are based on religious purposes. Some Buddhist arts are prepared for teaching illustration tools. For instance, the Wheel of Life is one of the best examples for the illustrative motive. Buddhist art is one of the means of Buddhist practice. Buddhist art is more than aesthetic piece because each and every image has implicit values which generate more spiritual pleasure than aesthetic one. Every image is symbolic and every part has a significant meaning to tell.<sup>2</sup> All Buddha images are representatives of Buddha, Scriptures as the representatives of *Dharma*, *Bhikshus* and Bodhisattvas as the representatives of *Sangha*.<sup>3</sup> Everything created as Buddhist art is prepared with the utmost care. The Buddhist art and Buddhist literature run in parallel; the echoes of manifestation of art-work can be heard in the contemporary Buddhist books.<sup>4</sup> The word ‘*sippa*’, ‘*sippayatana*’ (in Pali) or ‘*silpa*’, ‘*silpakala*’ (in *Sanskrit*) are used for the term craft or art in Buddhism. *Agarikasippa* and *Anagarikasippa* are two categories of *sippa*. Household skills that do not harm others and are devoid of sin such as jewelry making skill (*Manikara*), goldsmith’s skill (*Suvarnakara*) etc. are known as *Agarikasippa*. Monk’s craftsmanship like

---

<sup>1</sup> Milan Ratna Shakya. *Ancient Stone Image of Buddha & Bodhisattva in Nepal*. Kirtipur, Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), 2011, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Surendra Man Bajracharya. *Buddhist Heritage of Northern Nepal*. Lalitpur, Lotus Research Centre, 2008, P. 171.

<sup>3</sup> Min Bahadur Shakya. *The Iconography of Nepalese Buddhism*. Kathmandu, Handicraft Association of Nepal, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Meena V. Talim. *Buddhist Art*. vol. I, Delhi, Buddhist World Press, 2014, p. 27.

sewing and coloring robe (*cibara*), making the essential materials (*smanaparikara*) for a monk etc. are called *Anagarikasippa*.

#### **2.1.1.1 Origin of Buddhist Art**

Buddhist arts such as making *stupas*, *vihara* etc. prevailed at the time of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. The Buddha himself had suggested making stupa keeping relics of close disciples Sariputra and Maudgalyana after their *parinirvana*. But, Buddhist arts were limited to symbolic form in the beginning. The anthropomorphic form of image was developed centuries after the Buddha's *Mahaparinirvana*, with the development of *Gandhara* and *Mathura* School of Art. Images of the Buddha were made in 1<sup>st</sup> B.C. – 1<sup>st</sup> A.D. and became popular after the advent of king Kanishka who took personal interest in Buddhism.<sup>5</sup> *Samyuttanikaya Gaddulabaddhasutta* II states that the Buddha once gave *dhamma* discourse with an example of a painting named *Carana*.<sup>6</sup> In *Mahamangala Sutta Pali*, Buddha told about thirty eight *mangals* (blessings). One of them is to be skilled in crafts (*Sippanca Mnagalam*).<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in the *Sigalovadasutta* of *Digha Nikaya*, Buddha told about five major duties of parents towards their children. Among them to teach the *sippa* to their sons is one of the prominent duties of each parent.<sup>8</sup>

#### **2.1.1.2 Salient Features of Buddhist Art**

There are some distinct features of Buddhist art which are enlisted below:<sup>9</sup>

- i. Buddhist art is religious
- ii. Pursuit of transcendental feelings
- iii. Continuity of art traditions
- iv. Buddhist art is art of the people, by the people and for the people
- v. Role of Nature

#### **2.1.1.3 Categories of Buddhist Art**

The categories of Buddhist art is broadly divided into three parts as follows:<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

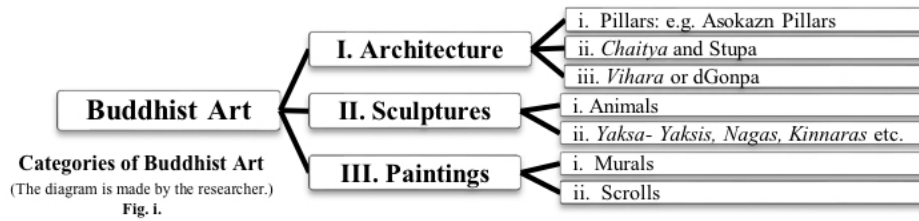
<sup>6</sup> Milan Ratna Shaky, *op. cit.* (f.n. 1), p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Dharmarakshita, translator. *Suttanipata*. Varanasi, Motilal Banarasida, 1977, p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> *Digha-Nikaya*. (Dunda Bahadur Bajracharya, translator and editor. *Digha Nikaya*. Lalitpur, Pavitra Bahadur Bajracharya and et al., 2000, p. 493)/( T.W. Rhys Davids, translator. *Dialogues of the Buddha*. vol. III, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, p. 181)

<sup>9</sup> Meena Talim, *op. cit.* (f.n.4), pp.9-12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 12.



#### 2.1.1.4 Subject Matter of Buddhist Paintings

Painted images can furthermore be classified according to their function.<sup>11</sup>

- Plain iconic representations of divine figure i.e. Buddha, Bodhisattva etc.
- Narrative paintings, which place the figures within a historical or legendary story, such as Buddha's life
- Didactic paintings, which symbolically represent religious truths  
The Wheel of Life is a didactic painting.
- Astrological diagrams and *Mandalas*
- Representations of offerings, specially offerings made to protective deities in order to gratify and placate them

#### 2.1.1.5 Development of Buddhist Art

Beginning with symbolic art form, the Buddhist art reached at zenith in its development in Gupta period, which is also known as the golden age of art. Again in Pala period, because of the influence of Vajrayana Buddhism, symbolic esoteric art was developed. All the Buddhist schools of art revolve around stories from various lives of the Buddha; *Jatakas*, Philosophy or legends.<sup>12</sup> Basically, the development of Buddhist art is categorized as follows:

##### 1.1.1.5.1 Period of Symbolic Art (An-iconic Representation)

An-iconic representation or symbolic art was flourished since the beginning of Buddhism and lasted till the Sunga period.

##### 1.1.1.5.1.1 Buddha Period

Stupa, *Vihara*, *Gandhakuti* etc. were made during Buddha's life time. He himself instructed to build stupa after the *parinirvana* of his disciples Sariputra, Maudgalyana and others. There was no image related to Buddha and his life during his life time. Only symbolic art could be found related to his *Dharma*.

<sup>11</sup> David P. Jacson. *The Nepalese Legacy in Tibetan Painting*, New York, Rubin Museum of Art, 2010, p.5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, P. 41.

#### **1.1.1.5.1.2 Mauryan Period (4<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.)**

In this period too, symbolic art was crucial. Pillar Art, Script carving etc are main features of the period. Asoka (r. 269-232 B.C.E.), the most powerful third ruler of the *Maurya* dynasty made incomparable contribution to preservation and expansion of Buddhism. Asoka erected many stone pillars around Buddhist sacred places. 13 Asokan pillars, with smooth surface, have been discovered.<sup>13</sup> Those pillars' height are 30 to 40 feet and they have Asokan inscriptions, inscribed in *Brammi* script e.g. Asoka pillar of Lumbini.

#### **1.1.1.5.1.3 Sunga Period (2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.)**

The trend of carving Jataka scene around a stupa was developed during this period. The art found in this period is more decorative than in *Maurya* period though the period was also dominated by symbolic art.

#### **1.1.1.5.2 Period of Anthropomorphic Form (Image of Buddha and Bodhisattvas)**

Anthropomorphic form of image in Buddhism began with the development of *Mathura* and *Gandhara* School of Art.

#### **1.1.1.5.2.1 Kusan Period (1<sup>st</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.)**

The Buddhist art, developed in *Kusan* Period, should be studied categorizing into two schools of art i.e. *Mathura* and *Gandhara* School of Art. The images of Buddha and Bodhisattvas were created for the first time in this period. Before this period, since Buddha's time to *Sunga* period, only symbolic art played crucial role in Buddhist art world. The glorious period of *Mathura* started from the beginning of Christian era. It gave a new dimension to Buddhist art. The art products of this school are made of locally available materials like spotted sandstone from Sikri. It created for the first time the representation of Buddha and bodhisattva in art forms. Numerous Buddha images related to his previous and present life event were produced by *Gandhara* School of Art. It is believed that the first human figure of the Buddha was found from *Gandhara*. The *Gandhara* School drew upon the anthropomorphic traditions of Roman religion and represented the Buddha with a youthful Apollo-like face, dressed in garments resembling those seen on Roman imperial status.<sup>14</sup> Most of the Buddha

---

<sup>13</sup> Bina Pawan. *Bharatiya Murtikala ka Etihad*. Delhi, Easter Book Linkers, 1991, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Mahendra Ratna Shakya. "Early Buddhist Stone Sculptures of Nepal". Dissertation submitted to Central Department of Buddhist Studies, T.U., Kirtipur, 2062 B.S., p. 23.

images from *Gandhara* were the creation of the Graeco-Buddhist artist. Later it became the source of inspiration to the artist of central Asia and Far East.

#### 1.1.1.5.2.2 Gupta Period (4<sup>th</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.)

*Gupta* period is known as the Golden age of art because of its peak of perfection of indigenous Indian art. While it maintained *Kushan* art tradition, it also developed into something more beautiful and aesthetically more attractive creation. The Buddhist arts in this period seem to be more influenced by Mahayana Buddhism.

#### 1.1.1.5.3 Period of Complex Iconography (Symbolic/Tantric Image)

##### Pala Period (8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century A.D.)

Buddha and Bodhisattva images with multi heads and hands and other specific features were seen in this period because of the Tantric influence of Vajrayana Buddhism. Again, symbolism played significant role in Buddhist art.

The development of Buddhist art is also traced from following site as *Sanchi* and *Bharhut* School, *Mathura* School of Art, *Gandhara* School of Art, *Amaravati* School of Art, and *Sarnath* School of Art<sup>15</sup>

#### 2.1.2 Icon and Symbol

Philosophy has valuable meaning which is often represented by symbols. Those symbols are nothing more than a sign or an outline until it is not linked with philosophy. When a symbol/outline (general) is attached to a specific context and philosophy, it (the symbol) becomes “ICON”, which has specific meaning and philosophy. All the “ICONS” are symbols; but all the symbols are not Icons. e.g.

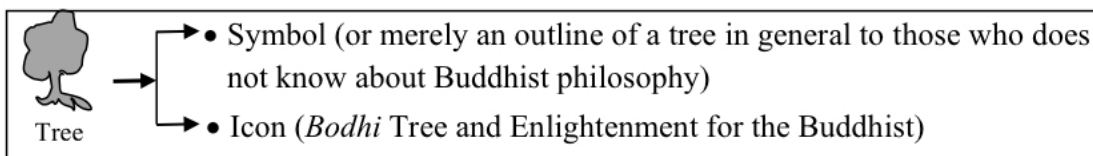


Fig. i .(The diagram is made by the researcher.)

#### 2.2 Introduction to the Wheel of Life (Bhavacakra)

The Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*) can be introduced as follows in detail.

##### 2.2.1 Introduction

The Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*) is the practice of the basic teachings of the Buddha i.e. the Four Noble Truth, *Karma* and Cause and Effect (Dependent Origination)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 17-29.

through the art form. It vividly describes how human beings are trapped in a counterproductive maelstrom of suffering and how this process can be reversed, showing how Buddhists place themselves in an ever-changing universe of cause and effect.<sup>16</sup> The Wheel of Life is one of the fascinating illustrations of Buddha's teachings, capturing the key elements of rebirth, karma, and dependent origination. It is one of the most wellknown iconographies in Northern Buddhism. The Wheel of Life is called 'Bhavacakra', 'Bhavacakka' and *srid pa'i 'khor lo'* in *saṃskrit*, *Pali* and Tibetan languages respectively. It is one of the most important visual depictions of the Buddhist understanding of life.<sup>17</sup> It shows us how the cyclic processes of *saṃsāra* work, and it points out the path to *Nirvana*. The Wheel of Life is a mirror waiting to be looked into; a map waiting to be followed. It is a diagram depicting the various realms of cyclic existence and the beings inhabiting these realms, is primarily a visual aid to help us gain a clear understanding of the workings of human mind. It is a symbolic representation of *saṃsāra* found on the outside walls of Northern Buddhist monasteries. The *Bhavacakra* is popularly referred to as the wheel of life, and may also be glossed as wheel of cyclic existence or wheel of becoming or wheel of rebirth or wheel of *saṃsāra* or wheel of suffering or wheel of transformation. The Wheel of Life shows us how we repeat (or even how we are) limiting patterns based on a constricted understanding of life and of our own minds.<sup>18</sup> It can be read by all including illiterate persons. No any esoteric knowledge is needed to understand the Wheel of Life. The Wheel of Life is a real picture of *Dharma* taught by the Buddha. It brings together the theory of Buddhist teachings and the practice of ordinary life. The Tibetan 'Wheel of Life' surprisingly portrays episodes from the Theravadin text *Dhammapadaatthakatha* in the sectors and displays a story of Indra in *Deva* and *Asura*- Sectors.<sup>19</sup>

At Ajanta, in Cave No. XVII, on the left wall of the verandah, there is a mural displaying the "Law of Causation" (*Pratityasamutpada*) which has almost vanished and only fragments have been left for us.<sup>20</sup> This mural laid a foundation to exhibit the

---

<sup>16</sup> Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV). *The Wheel of Life*. Translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins, foreword by Richard Gere, 199 Elm Street, Wisdom Publications, 2015./Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV). *The Meaning of Life*. Translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins, foreword by Richard Gere, 199 Elm Street, Wisdom Publications, 2000, p.1.

<sup>17</sup> Kulananda. *The Wheel of Life*. Varanasi, Pilgrims Publishing, 2008, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> Meena V. Talim, *op. cit.* (f.n.4), p. 173.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 169.



Wheel of Causation and was followed enthusiastically by Northern Buddhist regions in the world. Theravadins accepted “*Paticcasamuppada*” in mere principles, but not in exuberant paintings. They show *Paticcasamuppada* only in diagram, not in picture. They are concerned only in theory. The Tibetans (8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) imitated Ajanta fresco (6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) in principle and exhibited the wheel by adding some more artistic skills which was popular in Nepal, Tibet, China and Japan, and contributed not only to the world of Buddhism but to the world of art.<sup>21</sup>

In death ritual of Buddhist Tamang community of PN VDC of Kavre district, the Wheel of Life plays significant roles. During the funeral procession, the Wheel of Life Thanka is displayed. The text followed in death ritual, *Necher Chhyoi* (Text) deals about the six realms of the Wheel of Life. During *Minjyang* (Tib.: *Jhyangpar*) process, some mantras of six realms of the Wheel of Life along with the name of the dead person are written or printed on a black Nepalese paper. The paper is burnt ritually so that the dead person could go out of *saṃsāra* and get liberation or at least could get rebirth in higher realms.

### 2.2.2 Origin of the Wheel of Life

The *Divyāvadāna*<sup>22</sup>, a Sanskrit anthology of Buddhist tales, from the early centuries of the Common Era, mentions that the Wheel of Life was originated during the time of the Buddha. Dalai Lama also supports the statement.<sup>23</sup> *Rudrāyaṇa-avadāna*, 37<sup>th</sup> story of the *Divyāvadāna* explains why the Buddha made the first illustration of the Bhavacakra and *Sahasodgata-avadāna*, 21<sup>st</sup> story of the *Divyāvadāna* deals with how the illustration is made. Thus, the *Divyāvadāna* takes back to the time of the Buddha for the origination of Wheel of Life. Palden Drakpa also gives credit of origin of the Wheel of Life to the Buddha. He presents a passage from *Untangling the Vinaya* (Skt. *Vinaya-vibhanga*, Tib. ‘*Dul ba lung rnam ’byed*) to support his argument. The passage reveals:

The Buddha, while staying in the Bamboo Grove in Rajgriha, asks Ananda why Sariputra and Maudgalyayanaputra are so often to be seen with such a large following. Ananda replies that Sariputra and Maudgalyayan, being so outstanding, respectively, in wisdom and psychic power, are both especial adept in demonstrating the five realms of transmigrant beings, from which teaching the people at large have experienced very great benefit. At the end of Ananda’s reply, the Buddha, asserting that this was indeed the reason, said,

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> Vide: Annex I and II.

<sup>23</sup> Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV), *op. cit.* (f.n. 16), p.1.

“Ananda, the two great *bhiksus*, Sariputra and Maudgalyayanputra, will not always be present. Therefore, I advise that a five-part wheel be painted in the vestibule.”<sup>24</sup>

“Maudgalyayana’s Descent into the *Preta* Purgatory”, the *Avalamban Sutra*<sup>25</sup>, dating to before the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. narrates that monk Mahamaudgalyana visited the world of *Pretas* (Hungry Ghost realm), where he saw his parents suffering and thirsty. He gave them water. But, they could not drink it. So, he was so sad and told everything he had seen to the Buddha. The Buddha explained the theory of *Karma* and he decided to have the Wheel of Causation, with five interstices or shafts in it. He also recommended it to be depicted above the frame of the door (*dvarakosthaka*).<sup>26</sup> Thus was born the image known as ‘The Wheel of Life’.

The introduction of the pictorial details is ascribed to the great Indian monk Nagarjuna, who lived in the second century A.D., under the patronage of the successors of the Scythian king Kanishka, who we know from Hiuen Tsiang employed artists in great numbers in the decoration of Buddhist buildings.<sup>27</sup> The Wheel of Life painting was done in the earlier days of the Mahayana and is the only painting of this topic at Ajanta. The *Sarvastivadins* (by about 1<sup>st</sup> B.C. to 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D.) had drifted away from Theravada and had formed a new Mahayana cult. They took the initiative to depict painting of *Pratityasamutpada* at Ajanta.<sup>28</sup> The painting of the Wheel of Causation at Ajanta proves that the Wheel of Life was originated along with the origin of Mahayana Buddhism.

Northern Buddhists’ picture is a copy of the Wheel of Life from Ajanta, brought to Tibet by the Indian monk, “Bhante Yeshe” in the eighth century A.D.<sup>29</sup> Bhikkhu Khantipalo further states that from India the pattern of this wheel of was taken to Samye, the first Tibetan monastery, by Bante Yeshe and there was the *Sarvastivada* lineage of ordination.

### 2.2.3 Significance of the Wheel of Life

One of the reasons why the Wheel of Life was painted outside the monasteries and on the walls (and the practice believed to have been encouraged even by the Buddha

---

<sup>24</sup> Palden Drakpa. *Freeing Yourself from the Cycle*. Translated by Tenzin Gyaltzen, Dharamsala, the Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 2013, p.12.

<sup>25</sup> L. Austine Waddell. *Tibetan Buddhism*. Varanasi, Pilgrims Publishing, 2004 L, pp. 98-99. (See Annex III)

<sup>26</sup> Meena Talim, *op. cit.* (f.n. 4), p. 171.

<sup>27</sup> L. Austine Waddell, *op. cit.* (f.n. 25), p. 108.

<sup>28</sup> Meena Talim, *op. cit.* (f.n. 4), p. 170.

<sup>29</sup> L. Austine Waddell, *op. cit.* (f.n. 25), p. 108.

himself) was to teach this very profound Buddhist philosophy of life and perception to more simple-minded farmers or cowherds. So, these images on the Wheel of Life are just to communicate to the general audience. One of the chief functions of the Wheel of Life is to describe the processes whereby humans are cycled in ‘the round of rebirth’.<sup>30</sup> The Wheel of Life is a symbol of tremendous spiritual significance which can be used to help locate ourselves- to see ourselves, to some extent at least- as we really are. We will then know not only what we have to do, but also how to go about doing it.<sup>31</sup> Northern Buddhists, through the Wheel of Life, have attempted to simplify *patīccasamuppāda* by displaying different figures on the rim of the wheel, more distinctly. More interesting however is that they have stuck to the original Theravada ideologies by portraying the same fabrication in the different sectors of wheel.<sup>32</sup>

#### 2.2.4 Types of the Wheel of Life

The Wheel of Life found in Northern Buddhism has two types based on its style. Those are old style and new style. The old-style is based upon the *Divyāvadāna*, while the new-style introduces new features. The great reformer, Je Tsongkhapa (b. 1357 C.E.), founder of the *Gelugpa*, gave authority for the division of the Wheel into six instead of five. Bikkhu Khantipalo prefers to retain the old-style representation according to the text as it agrees perfectly with Theravada teachings. New-style is given in the attached plate, and it differs from the “old” only in the introduction of a figure of Avalokita or the Bodhisattva of Mercy, in the form of a Sage or *Muni*, into each of the six worlds of re-birth, and in one or two different pictorial symbols for the causes of re-birth.<sup>33</sup> Based on its artefacts or forms, the Wheel of Life is broadly categorized in two groups: painting and sculpture. The Wheel of Life is mostly found in the form of wall paintings (in dGonpas) and Thangka paintings (scroll painting). It is rarely carved in sculptures.

#### 2.2.5 Iconographic Description of the Wheel of Life

The Wheel itself is divided into four concentric circles.<sup>34</sup>

- Hub<sup>35</sup>
- First Layer: The Black and White Segments<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Meena Talim, *op. cit.* (f.n. 4), p. 183.

<sup>33</sup> L. Austine Waddell, *op. cit.* (f.n. 25), p. 109.

<sup>34</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 6 P.8.

<sup>35</sup> *Vide*: pl.n. iv.

- Second Layer: The Six Realms<sup>37</sup>
- The Outer Layer: The Final Circle: The Twelve Links<sup>38</sup>

### 2.2.5.1 The Hub

At the hub of the Wheel of Life, we find a cock, a snake, and a pig, each biting the tail of the one in front.<sup>39</sup> But, *Divyāvadāna* suggests depicting a dove, a snake, and a pig. Meena Talim also mentions a dove, a snake, and a pig in the centre of the wheel.<sup>40</sup> In some iconography of the Wheel of Life, a snake and a cock are coming out of the mouth of pig. In some iconography, pig follows a cock and the cock follows the pig so that it makes endless loop. Generally, a pig is shown in black or brown colour, a cock in red or multi-colour and a snake is in green colour.

### 2.2.5.2 The Second Layer: The Black and White Segments

There are the light and dark half-circles just outside the hub.<sup>41</sup> In the dark half-circle, beings face downwards or they are being pulled down by the demon. But, in the light half-circle, persons face upward. A bodhisattva is leading them. The first layer, the white and black segments, has twenty one figures. Against a white background, ten are going up on the left side by doing positive evolutionary actions that bring beneficial results, and against a black background, eleven are diving down the right side by doing negative actions that bring suffering.<sup>42</sup>

### 2.2.5.3 The Third Layer: The Six Realms of saṃsāra (Tib. rikdruk)

The third layer, outside of the black and white segments has six parts or five somewhere in the Wheel of Life which are divided into two categories, one upper or fortunate beings and another are lower or unfortunate beings. *Divyāvadāna* explains the five existences, namely; Hell, Animal, Ghost, Human and God. Out of these five, three worlds should be displayed prominently, namely Hell, Animal and Ghost; the other two should be of God and Human.<sup>43</sup> God and Human realms are regarded as the upper beings whereas other three realms are regarded as the lower beings in

---

<sup>36</sup> Vide: pl.n. iv.

<sup>37</sup> Vide: pl.n. ii and iv.

<sup>38</sup> Vide: pl.n. iii and iv.

<sup>39</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Meena Talim, *op. cit.* (f.n. 4), p. 171.

<sup>41</sup> Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV), *op. cit.* (f.n. 16), p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Marilyn Rhiie and Robert A. F. Thurman. *Worlds of Transformation: Tibetan Art of Wisdom and Compassion*. Foreword by Dalai Lama XIV, edited by Robert A. F. Thurman and et al., New York, Tibet House in association with The Shelly and Donald Rubin Foundation, 1999, p. 447.

<sup>43</sup> Meena Talim, *op. cit.* (f.n. 4), p. 171.

*Divyāvadāna*. At Ajanta, the Wheel of Causation has six sectors.<sup>44</sup> The first three realms Gods, Demi-gods and Human realms are fortunate beings and next three Animal or Beast, Hungry ghosts and Hell realms are the unfortunate beings. The Wheel of Life, found in Northern Buddhist dGonpas, contains five realms in older version and six realms in new version. The old-style is based upon the *Divyāvadāna*, while the new-style introduces new features. The great reformer, Je Tsongkhapa (b. 1357 C.E.), founder of the *Gelugpa*, gave authority for the division of the Wheel into six instead of five. Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, the embodiment of the compassionate aspect of Enlightenment, appears in each of these realms.<sup>45</sup> In each realm, the Bodhisattva holds up an object that shows what the beings there need in order to take the next step in their spiritual development.

#### **2.2.5.3.1 Deva Loka: Gods Realm**

The top part of the third layer is God realm. Pali and *Sanskrit* words which are usually translated as 'god' come from a root which means 'to shine.' The gods are the shining or radiant ones who live in unalloyed happiness and pleasure. The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara appears in this world as a white Buddha with a lute. The wish-fulfilling tree grows from the Demi-god realm, blossoms and bears fruits here in the God realm. There are three regions within the god realm, the desire, pure form, and formless regions.<sup>46</sup> The desire region again has six regions. There are sixteen pure form heavens above the six desire heavens. Above the sixteen pure form heavens are the four formless heavens.

#### **2.2.5.3.2 Asura Loka: Demi-god Realm**

To the right of the gods is the realm of demigods.<sup>47</sup> They are also called the jealous gods or *Titans*. Male *asuras* are ugly and muscle-bound; female *asuras*, who are often a cause of fight among the males, are voluptuous and alluring. Both sexes are highly driven to sexual conquest.<sup>48</sup> They have a wish-fulfilling tree, the fruits of which grant all desires, but it blossoms and bears fruits in the God realm and enjoyed by Gods. The *asuras* are usually depicted at war with the gods- fighting for possession of the

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 173.

<sup>45</sup> Kulandada, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Padmasambhav. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Discovered by Karma Lingpa, translated by Robert A.F. Thurman, London, HarperCollinsPublishers, 2011, p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV), *op. cit.* (f.n. 16), p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 28.

Wish-fulfilling tree. Avalokiteshvara appears in the Demi-god realm as a green Buddha holding a sword.

### 2.2.5.3.3 Manusya Loka: Human Realm

The next to the God realm or Demi-god realm is Human realm. Avalokiteshvara appears in the world of the Human realm as a saffron-coloured Buddha carrying a begging-bowl and a staff with three rings. In the picture the following phases of life are depicted amongst others<sup>49</sup>:-

- 1<sup>st</sup>. Birth in a cottage.
- 2<sup>nd</sup>. Children at play.
- 3<sup>rd</sup>. Manhood, village scenes, people drinking wine under shade of a tree, a man playing a flute, women spinning and weaving, a borrower, two traders, a drunken man.
- 4<sup>th</sup>. Labour by sweat of brow, men tilling a field, gathering fuel in a forest, carrying a heavy load.
- 5<sup>th</sup>. Accident, a man and horse falling into a river.
- 6<sup>th</sup>. Crime, two men fighting, one under trial before the judge, and one undergoing corporal punishment.
- 7<sup>th</sup>. Temporal government: the king and his ministers.
- 8<sup>th</sup>. Old age- decrepit old people.
- 9<sup>th</sup>. Disease, a physician feeling the pulse of a patient.
- 10<sup>th</sup>. Death, a corpse with a Lama feeling whether breath be extinct, and a Lama at the head doing worship, and a woman and other relatives weeping.
- 11<sup>th</sup>. Funeral ceremonies. A corpse being carried off to the funeral pyre on the top of a hill, preceded by a Lama blowing a thigh-bone trumpet and rattling a hand drum; he also has hold of the end of a white scarf which is affixed to the corpse. The object of this scarf is to guide the soul by the white path to the pyre so that it may be disposed of in the orthodox manner, and have the best chance of a good re-birth, and may not stray and get caught by outside demons. Behind the corpse-bearer is a porter with food and drink offerings, and last of all a mourning relative.
- 12<sup>th</sup>. Religion is represented by a temple placed above all other habitations with a Lama and monk performing worship; and a hermit in his cell with bell, *vajra*- scepter, and thigh-bone trumpet; and a *stupa* or *caitya* (*ch'irten*) circumambulated by a devotee.

### 2.2.5.3.4 Tiryagyoni Loka: Animal Realm

On the bottom half of the wheel, we see on the left side the realm of animals. Different animals seem to be fearful in this realm. In the picture, land and aquatic animals of various kinds are depicted which are devouring one another, the large preying on the small; an also small ones coming to catch and kill the larger ones. Human hunters also are setting nets for, and others are shooting game. Domestic animals are shown laden with burdens or ploughing and being loaded; some are being milked and shorn of their wool, others are being branded or castrated or having their nostrils bored, others killed for their flesh or skin, etc.<sup>50</sup> In water is shown a *Naga* or merman's house, with its inmates in grief at being preyed upon by the *Garuda*, a

<sup>49</sup> L. Austine Waddell, *op. cit.* (f.n. 25), p. 103.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 104.

monster bird, like the fabled *roc*, which by the rush of air from its wings cleaves the sea to its depths in its search for *Nagas*.<sup>51</sup> The blue Avalokiteshvara with a book is standing in the Animal realm.

#### **2.2.5.3.5 Preta Loka: Hungry Ghost Realm**

Next to the realm of hell is Hungry Ghost realm. They are groups of ungainly creatures huddled together. Their distended bodies are the color of smoke, and they appear insubstantial as if made of mist. They have huge stomachs but very tiny throats such that only the smallest amounts can enter; even that becomes unbearable as it scalds its way down the throat.<sup>52</sup> Their arms and legs are spindly and frail and their heads are carried on long. They have tiny mouths, no thicker than a needle. They have wide, staring eyes, filled with pain and longing signified by their red color. Filled with pain and longing, they stare into the world with a blank gaze of endless yearning.<sup>53</sup> Pretas are described as naked, ugly, smelly and black in the *Pretavatthu* of *Khuddaka Nikaya* of *Sutta Pitaka*. There are only a few leafless trees to give shelter from the chilly wind that blows through this realm. The red Avalokiteshvara with real fruits and drinks appears in the world of the Hungry Ghost.

#### **2.2.5.3.6 Naraka Loka: Hell Realm**

The sector at the very bottom depicts the hells- eight hot hells, the eight cold hells, and neighboring hells.<sup>54</sup> The hells are engulfed in flames and in each section presiding demons inflict a variety of torments on their unfortunate victims.<sup>55</sup> The smoke-coloured Avalokiteshvara with amrita, divine nectar is seen in the world of Hell. Pictures of hell in the Buddhist tradition are typically shown as places of intense pain and torment, where its victims are subjected to the most excruciating tortures, inflicted on them by presiding demons. Flames engulf the entire realm which is unbearably hot, though there are regions of ice also, which yield the painful experience of cold. *Sanjiva* (Again Revived), *Kalasutra* (black lines), *Samghata* (concentrated oppression), *Raurava* (weeping and screaming), *Maharaurava* (greater weeping and screaming), *Tapana* (heat), *Pratapana* (highest heat), and *Avichi*

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV), *op. cit.* (f.n. 16), p. P7.

<sup>53</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 30.

<sup>54</sup> Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV), *op. cit.* (f.n. 16), p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 33.

(endless torture) are the eight hot hells and *Arbuda* (blistered or chapped), *Nirarbuda*, *Atata*, *Havava*, *Ahaha*, *Utpala*, *Padma*, and *Pundarika* are the eight cold hells.<sup>56</sup>

#### 2.2.5.4 The Outer Layer

The outer layer, the rim of the wheel of *samsāra*, consists of twelve segments or units. These links are not clearly mentioned in *Divyāvadāna*. The Ajanta Cave no. XVII, the Wheel of Causation Painting, displays these twelve links. But, unfortunately, four segments (*Nidanas*) of dependent origination are missing (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> links).<sup>57</sup> The Twelve Segments from the top clockwise are as follows:

- i. In the first segment, a blind man with a stick gropes his way forward.<sup>58</sup>
- ii. Next, a potter appears creating a new pot from clay and water.
- iii. Next to the potter, we see a monkey climbing a flowering tree.
- iv. Then, we see a boat with passengers.
- v. In the next segment, an empty house with five windows and a door.
- vi. The next link is depicted by a man and woman embracing.
- vii. The seventh link is depicted as an arrow or stick in the eye.
- viii. Then we see a woman offering a drink to a seated man.
- ix. The picture depicting the ninth link shows a person collecting fruits from a tree.
- x. A couple copulating or a pregnant woman appears at the tenth picture.
- xi. A woman giving birth to a baby is seen after the tenth link.
- xii. At last, an adult carrying burdens or a dying person appears.

#### 2.2.5.5 Out of the Wheel

The Buddha<sup>59</sup>, Yama<sup>60</sup> and the Moon<sup>61</sup> or a Bodhisattva<sup>62</sup> are depicted out of the wheel.

##### 2.2.5.5.1 The Figure Holding the Wheel

The whole Wheel is grasped tightly in the hands and jaws of a great monster- *Yama*, the *Dharmapala*, the Lord of Death.<sup>63</sup> It has third eye on its forehead. The wheel is held with its teeth, hands and legs. It also has five skulls on its head.

---

<sup>56</sup> L. Austine Waddell, *op. cit.* (f.n. 25), p. 93-95.

<sup>57</sup> Meena Talim, *op. cit.* (f.n. 4), p. 182.

<sup>58</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Vide: pl.n. iv.

<sup>60</sup> Vide: pl.n. iv.

<sup>61</sup> Vide: pl.n. iv.

<sup>62</sup> Vide: pl.n. xii.

<sup>63</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 9.



#### **2.2.5.5.2 The Buddha**

In the upper right-hand corner of the Wheel of Life, the Buddha appears. The Buddha is pointing out the moon on the top left corner.

#### **2.2.5.5.3 The Door to Nirvana or the Moon or a Rabbit**

In the upper left-hand corner of the Wheel of Life is a temple with a seated Buddha. Somewhere, a Bodhisattva or the moon or *svastika* shaped clouds appears in the upper left-hand corner.

#### **2.2.5.5.4 At the Bottom: The Stanzas**

In some iconography of the Wheel of Life, some stanzas are written at the bottom or top. The Buddha himself advised to paint the two verses, ‘Gather up ... an end to suffering.’<sup>64</sup> *Divyāvadāna* states that the two verses should be added as an inscription.

#### **2.2.5.6 Other Iconographic Variations of the Wheel of Life (Bhavacakra)**

There is no single agreed version of the Wheel of Life.<sup>65</sup> The Wheel of Life is variations based on its iconography and colour. The main variations of the Wheel of Life are as follows:

##### **2.2.5.6.1 Variation at the Hub<sup>66</sup>**

The Wheel of Life has three animals in the hub. In some iconography, both a bird and a snake emerge from the mouth of a pig.<sup>67</sup> In place of a cock or rooster, a dove is alternatively depicted. In some iconographies, either a pig follows a cock or a snake.<sup>68</sup> The hub of the Bon Wheel of Life is differently mentioned. The Bon Wheel of Life has only one pig body with snake, pig and cock heads, with snake tail.<sup>69</sup>

##### **2.2.5.6.2 Variation at the Second Layer: The White and Black Segments**

The half two circles outside the centre, the white and black segments, are sometimes missed in depictions of the Wheel of Life.

##### **2.2.5.6.3 Variation at the Third Layer: The Realms of Saṃsāra<sup>70</sup>**

*Divyāvadāna* mentions the six realms. But, *Ajanta* Painting of Wheel of Life shows six realms of *saṃsāra*. Old-style Tibetan Wheel of Life contains only five realms and

---

<sup>64</sup> Palden Drakpa, *op. cit.* (f.n. 24), pp.12-13. (Also see Ch. Three, n. 3.2.5.4)

<sup>65</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> Vide: table n. III.

<sup>67</sup> Vide: pl. n. IV.

<sup>68</sup> Vide: pl. n. IV, XI & XII.

<sup>69</sup> Vide: pl. n. XV.

<sup>70</sup> Vide: table n. IV.

a new-style Tibetan Wheel of Life has six realms. And, Bodhisatvas standing in the six realms are not depicted in older version of the Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*).

#### **2.2.5.6.4 Variation at the Outer Layer: The Twelve Link of Causation**

At the outer layer too, there are some variations in iconography generally in the first, third and ninth links of the twelve link causations.<sup>71</sup>

#### **2.2.5.6.5 Variation at the top right and left<sup>72</sup>**

At the top right corner of the Wheel of Life, the standing Buddha appears. But, somewhere seated Buddha is also depicted. In some paintings, a Bodhisatva is also seen. At the top left corner, the moon is depicted. But, in somewhere a rabbit or the Buddha or Bodhisatva is seen.

### **2.2.6 The Illustration of the Wheel of Life within the Theravada Tradition**

Theravada literature has not mentioned the actual pictorial execution of a “Wheel of Life”. The Wheel of Life within Theravada tradition is illustrated only in a diagram of words and lines. It is not in pictorial form. But, Theravadian illustration of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination is more detailed and complicated. Illiterate persons do not understand completely. One needs a certain knowledge to understand the Theravadian Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*) whereas; the Wheel of Life found in Northern Buddhism can be understood by all including illiterate persons; it needs no esoteric knowledge.<sup>73</sup>

The *Petavatthu*, a Theravada Buddhist scripture, included in the *Khuddaka Nikaya* of the Pali Canon's *Sutta Pitaka*, is composed of 51 verse narratives, each explaining how unwholesome deeds led to the rebirth of a being into the miserable realm of the "hungry ghosts" (*peta*). The different worlds mentioned in *Petavatthu* are hell, ghost, human, and deva (*brahma* world). The text focuses on practicing the *Dharma*, being generous by giving alms and sharing the merit that one receive in order to be born in the heaven or *brahma* world. Unwholesome deeds lead one to the ghost world or hell.

In the *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, the famous commentator Buddhaghosa *Acarya* says that the beginningless round of rebirths is the ‘Wheel of the round of rebirths’ (*samsāracakka*); Ignorance (*avijjā*) is its hub. Ageing-and-death (*jarā-marāṇa*) is its rim, and the remaining ten links are its spokes.

---

<sup>71</sup> Vide: table n. V.

<sup>72</sup> Vide: table n. VI.

<sup>73</sup> Vide: pl. n. V & VI.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PHILOSOPHY OF THE WHEEL OF LIFE (BHAVACAKRA)

#### 3.1 Study Context

The Wheel of Life depicts a certain doctrine of Buddhism. The followings doctrines of the Buddha help one to understand the philosophy of the Wheel of Life:

##### 3.1.1 The Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths is the Buddha's first discourse delivered to the five ascetics namely Kaundinya (Pal. Kondanna), Bhadrīka (Pal. Bhaddiya), Vashpa (Pal. Vappa), Mahanama (Pal. Mahanama) and Ashvajit (Pal. Assaji) at the Deer Park (Sarnath) after his enlightenment. The Four Noble truths are as follows<sup>74</sup>:

##### 3.1.1.1 The First Noble Truth: The Truth of Suffering (Dukkha)

*Dukkha* is an important Buddhist concept, commonly translated as "suffering", "pain" or "unsatisfactoriness". *Dukkha* is one of the three marks of existence, namely *dukkha* (suffering), *anatta* (not – self) and *anicca* (impermanence). Within the Buddhist sutras, *dukkha* is divided in three categories:

- **Dukkha-dukkha (pain of pain):** pain, illness, old age, death and bereavement
- **Viparinama-dukkha (pain of alteration):** violated expectations, the failure of happy moments to last
- **Sankhara-dukkha (pain of formation):** *skandhas* and the factors constituting the human mind

##### 3.1.1.2 The Second Noble Truth: The Truth of the Cause of Suffering (Samudaya)

The Buddha discovered that the direct cause of suffering desire or craving that sprouts from ignorance. Here in Buddhism, ignorance doesn't mean 'knowing nothing at all'. Here ignorance means not other than ignorance of not knowing the Four Noble Truths. Ignorance is not seeing things as they really are. It is failing to understand the truth about life.<sup>75</sup> Ignorance is the underlying cause of suffering, while craving, attachment, aversion, and the rest are the secondary or immediate causes of

---

<sup>74</sup> Ringu Tulku Rinpoche. *Daring Steps Toward Fearlessness*. New York/ Colorado, Snow Lion Publications, 2005, pp. 22 - 54.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Della Santina. *The Tree of Enlightenment*. Reprinted, Taipei, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1997, p. 36.

suffering.<sup>76</sup> Craving is another root cause of suffering. Craving is categorized in three groups namely sensual craving, craving for eternal existence and craving for non-existence.

### **3.1.1.3 The Third Noble Truth: The Truth of the End of Suffering (Nirodha)**

*Nirodha*, the cessation of *dukkha*, *Nirvana/Nivvana*, liberation, is the Third Noble Truth. *Nirvana* is possible by eliminating the causes mentioned in the Second Noble Truth. Once we come to know the causes of suffering, now the question before us is how to eradicate them, which leads us to the Third Noble Truth of the Buddha. It is the ignorance that has to be removed for the end of suffering, but how can anyone eliminate it? According to the philosophy of Buddhism, an individual can get rid of ignorance by attaining *nivvana/nirvana*. Then, what is the path to *nibbana/nirvana*. The answer is stated by the Buddha in his Fourth Noble Truth.<sup>77</sup>

### **3.1.1.4 The Fourth Noble Truth: The Truth of the Path leading to the End of Suffering or the Noble Eightfold Path (Magga)**

There is a path, the one that is discovered and practiced by the Buddha himself. This noble path consists of eight ways. So, it is called the Noble Eightfold Path (*astanga-marga*). The eight steps of the path are: Right View/Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness/Attention and Right Concentration.<sup>78</sup> These eight paths are again classified into three stages. They are *Sila* (Morality), *Samadhi* (Mental culture or stillness) and *Panna* (Wisdom). They are three basic principles or three pillars of Buddhism, which can be developed over many lifetimes with diligence, and which will lead us to ultimate peace.<sup>79</sup> A person strengthens his *Sila* or moral discipline by practicing Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood.<sup>80</sup> *Samadhi* or mental culture is developed practicing Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. The development of *Sila* and *Samadhi* will give rise to *Panna* or

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>77</sup> M.V Ram Kumar Ratnam. *Buddhist Ethics in Impermanence*. New Delhi, D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd, 2011, p. 28.

<sup>78</sup> *Digha-Nikaya* (Dunda Bdr Bajracharya, *op. cit.* (f.n. 8), pp. 367-368)/( T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *op. cit.* (f.n. 8), pp. 343-345) and *Majjhima Nikaya* (Dunda Bahadur Bajracharya, Traslator and Editor. *Majjhima Nikaya*. Lalitpur, Pavitra Bahadur Bajracharya and et al., 2000, p. 272)/(I.B Horner, Translator. *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings:Majjhima-Nikaya*, vol. I, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, p. 362).

<sup>79</sup> K. Sri Dhammananda. *The Buddhist Way*. Taipei, the Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, P.11.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

wisdom which comprises Right Understanding and Right Thought.<sup>81</sup> Through Right Understanding and Right Thought ignorance, attachment, and aversion can be eliminated.<sup>82</sup>

### 3.1.2 Theory of Karma

*Karma* (Pāli: *kamma*) is a *Sanskrit* term that literally means "action", that is to say, the act of doing this or that. *Karma* is intentional, conscious, deliberate action motivated by volition, or will.<sup>83</sup> The theory of *Karma* is a fundamental doctrine in Buddhism. This belief was prevalent in India before the advent of the Buddha. Nevertheless, it was the Buddha who explained and formulated this doctrine in the complete form in which we have it today. In Buddhism, *karma* means more like 'willed action', and the Buddhist theory of *karma* tells us simply that all willed acts, of body, speech, or mind, inevitably have outcomes, and that the quality of those outcomes, whether they contain joy or grief, will depend upon the mental state that motivated them.<sup>84</sup> According to the law of karma, a wholesome action, sooner or later results in a wholesome fruit or result, and similarly unwholesome action results in an unwholesome or unwanted fruition.<sup>85</sup> The results of the good and bad *kamma* can ripen either within this lifetime or hereafter.<sup>86</sup> By avoiding these ten unwholesome actions, we can avoid their consequences.<sup>87</sup> The general fruit of these unwholesome actions is suffering.

### 3.1.3 Dependent Origination

Nothing exists unconditionally and absolutely. Everything is dependent on something other. The doctrine that everything is caused is known as the Doctrine of Dependent Origination (Pali: *paticca-samuppada*, Skt.: *pratityasamutpada*).<sup>88</sup> Interdependent Origination, Dependent Arising, Dependent Co-arising etc. are the different terms used for the topic. It is one of the most important and profound teachings in Buddhism. The Dependent Origination is deep and full of four seriously grave significances, namely it is,

- deep in meaning,

---

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Della Santina, *op. cit.* (f.n. 75), p. 45.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.76.

<sup>84</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p.6.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Della Santina, *op. cit.* (f.n. 75), p. 77.

<sup>86</sup> K. Shri Dhammandanda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 79), p. 23.

<sup>87</sup> Peter Della Santina, *op. cit.* (f.n. 75), p.79

<sup>88</sup> M.V Ram Kumar Ratnam, *op. cit.* (f.n. 77), p. 25.

- deep in principles,
- seriously grave in the rendering and giving of precepts,
- seriously grave in propounding.<sup>89</sup>

Interdependent Origination has a close relation with the Four Noble Truths. The principle of causality- the law of cause and effect is common to both Interdependent Origination and the Four Noble Truths. The four Noble Truths are divided into two groups- the first two (suffering and the cause of suffering) and the last two (the end of suffering and the path to the end of suffering). In both these groups, it is the law of cause and effect that governs the relationship. In other words, suffering is the effect of the cause of suffering, and the end of suffering is the effect of the path to the end of suffering.<sup>90</sup>

In very brief form, dependent-arising, labeled by the present Dalai Lama “Buddha’s Slogan”, indicates the interrelatedness of all things in the universe.<sup>91</sup> All things are relative, dependent on their causes, on their parts, or on their relationship to something else. Things are always in flux, always changing; there are no independent autonomous entities.<sup>92</sup> Emptiness expresses the same idea from another viewpoint. The various conditions that are responsible for the production of suffering are explained by the Buddha in the form of a chain of causes and effects made up of 12 links.<sup>93</sup> So, “the twelvefold theory of causation” is another name for the Doctrine of Dependent Origination. The principle, Dependent Origination not only identifies clearly about the problem of suffering and rebirth, but also shows the way to free ourselves from suffering. There are two principle ways we can understand these twelve components (twelve links of causation)<sup>94</sup>. One way to understand them is sequentially, over the course of three life times- the past life, the present life, and the future life.<sup>95</sup> Ignorance and volition belong to the past life. Consciousness, name and form, the six sense spheres, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, and becoming belong to this life. The last two components, birth and old age and death, belong to the future life.

---

<sup>89</sup> *Digha-Nikaya* (Dunda Bdr. Bajracharya, *op. cit.* (f.n. 8), p. 39-40).

<sup>90</sup> Peter Della Santina, *op. cit.* (f.n. 75) P. 97.

<sup>91</sup> Elizabeth Napper. *Dependent-Arising and Emptiness*. Boston, Wisdom Publications, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> M.V. Ram Kumar Ratnam, *op. cit.* (f.n. 77), p. 25.

<sup>94</sup> *Vide*: pl.n. III.

<sup>95</sup> Peter Della Santina, *op. cit.* (f.n. 75), p. 98.

The twelve links of causation, which is the foundation of all the other teachings of the Buddha's variously referred to as *the dhamma-cakka/dharma-cakra* or the Wheel of Becoming, *sankhara-cakka/samsara-cakra* or the Wheel of of Existence, *jamma-marana-cakka/janma-marana-cakra* or the Wheel of Birth and Death, *bhava-cakra* or the Wheel of Rebirth, *dvadasa-nidana* or the Twelve Sources, and *patticca-samuppada/pratitya-samutpada* or Dependent Origination.<sup>96</sup> Rice Seedling Sutra (Skt. *Śalistambasūtra*) is a short Mahayana sutra in which, Buddha taught the twelve links of Dependent Origination. Nagarjuna, Buddhist scholar of second century, founder of *Madhyamika* school, categorizes the twelve component parts of dependent origination into three groups namely; defilement, action and suffering. He mentions that the first (ignorance), eighth (craving) and ninth (grasping) come under defilement; the second (mental activities) and tenth (existence) come under action and the remaining seven (consciousness, name and form, the six bases of sense perception, touch, feeling, birth and aging and death) come under suffering. In the second and third verses, he further writes:<sup>97</sup>

Out of this threefold defilement twofold action originates; out of this twofold action sevenfold suffering originates;  
And out of this sevenfold suffering threefold defilement originates; that is the wheel of existence turning again and again.  
  
The whole world is just cause and effect, and sentient being is no different.  
Phenomena which are void simply originate out of phenomena which are void.

Following the forward order, one come to know the cause and effect of the cycle whereas, the reverse order leads to the cessation of the cycle. *Digha Nikaya* mentions:

Old age and death are due to Birth (or, Birth is the cause of old age and death.);  
Birth is due to *Bhava* (Becoming);  
*Bhava* is due to *Upadana* (Grasping);  
*Upadana* is due to Craving;  
Craving is due to *Vedana* (Feeling/Sensation);  
Feeling is due to Contact (*Phasso*);  
Contact is due to Six spheres of sense;  
Six spheres of sense are due to *Nama-rupa* (Name and Form/Mind and Matter);  
*Nama-rupa* is due to Consciousness or cognition;  
Consciousness is due to Activities;  
Activities are due to Ignorance.  
Thus does the entire aggregate of suffering arise.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup> M.V. Ram Kumar Ratnam, *op. cit.* (f.n. 77), p. 27.

<sup>97</sup> J.C Jamieson. Nagarjuna's Verses: On the Great Vehicle and the Heart of Dependent Origination. New Delhi, D. K. Printworld, 2001, pp. 16-17.

<sup>98</sup> *Digha-Nikaya*. (Dunda Bdr. Bajracharya, *op. cit.* (f.n. 8), pp. 218-223)/( T.W. Rhys Davids, *op. cit.* (f.n. 8), pp. 50-55) and *Majjhima Nikaya* (Dunda Bdr. Bajracharya, *op. cit.* (f.n. 78), pp. 50-56)/( I.B. Horner, *op. cit.* (f.n. 78), pp. 60-70).

Narada states the way of cessation of this entire aggregate of suffering as follows:<sup>99</sup>

The complete cessation of ignorance leads to the cessation of activities.  
The cessation of activities leads to the cessation of consciousness.  
The cessation of consciousness leads to the cessation of mind and matter.  
The cessation of mind and matter leads to the cessation of the six spheres of sense.  
The cessation of the six spheres of sense leads to the cessation of contact,  
The cessation of contact leads to the cessation of feeling.  
The cessation of feeling leads to the cessation of craving.  
The cessation of craving leads to the cessation of grasping.  
The cessation of Grasping leads to the cessation of actions.  
The cessation of actions leads to the cessation of rebirth.  
The cessation of rebirth leads to the cessation of decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.  
Thus does the cessation of this entire aggregate of suffering result.

Of course, there is substantial difference between the Theravada and Mahayana schools of Buddhism so far as the understanding of this fundamental principle is concerned. But, here, this study does not go through the detail of their differentiations because the iconography does not ask for it. The Doctrine of Dependent Origination here is only introductory.

### **3.2 Philosophical Description of the Wheel of Life (Bhavacakra)**

Actually, the Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*) is the practice of the basic teachings of the Buddha i.e. the Four Noble Truth, *Karma* and Cause and Effect (Dependent Origination) through art. The Wheel of Life is a metaphysical diagram of the Buddha's teaching, cause and effect. The basic teachings of the Buddha have been tried to express through the art i.e. the Wheel of Life. So, the Wheel of Life is philosophically based on the first teaching of the Buddha. The Wheel of Life is real picture of *Dharma* taught by the Buddha. The Wheel of Life represents the first two noble truths of suffering and its cause; the figures outside the Wheel represent the final two truths: the cessation of suffering and the path of spiritual development leading to this cessation.<sup>100</sup> Palden Drakpa states that the Wheel of Cyclic Existence and its details represent all the practices of engagement and abandonment related to the Four Noble Truths- the essence of description of the nature of cyclic existence and passing beyond suffering or the eighty-four thousand divisions of the teachings (*dharma-skandha*)- which the Buddha taught during the first promulgation.<sup>101</sup> The

---

<sup>99</sup> Narada. *The Buddha and His Teaching*. 5th ed., Mumbai, Jaico Publishing House, 2013, pp. 287-289.

<sup>100</sup> Jonathan Landaw and Weber Andy. *Images of Enlightenment*. Boston /London, Snow Lion, 2006, p. 36.

<sup>101</sup> Palden. Drakpa, *op. cit.* (f.n. 24), p. 11.



Wheel of Life serves as a powerful inspiration to look deeply into our own inner beings. According as the Buddhist view, humans exist in an unenlightened state. The goal of their earthly sojourn is to attain enlightenment and gain deliverance from the constant cycle of birth and re-birth which characterizes all sentient beings.

### **3.2.1 The Hub: The Three Poisons: The Second Noble Truth: The Truth of Cause of Suffering (Samudaya)**

Three animals; a pig, a cock, and a snake at the hub of the wheel of *samsāra* represent the “Second Noble Truth: the Truth of Cause of Suffering (*Samudaya*)”. These three animals are the representation of the three poisons, the root causes of suffering. The three poisons are Ignorance, attachment and aversion. These poisons keep on cycling the wheel of life until the enlightenment was attained. “A verse from *Emanated Scriptures of the Kadampas*’, a series of collected discussion of Je Tsongkhapa and his disciples, (Tib. *bKa’ gdams sprul pa’ki glegs bam*) chapter on dependent origination reads:

Attachment is like a rooster,  
Although confused with everything, yet to objects of desire  
One is warm, and out of ignorance  
Is not able to know what is clean and dirty,  
And gives grains, chaff, snot and sputum  
To one’s partner,  
And without contentment one consumes them.<sup>102</sup>

These animals represent a particular human failing or weakness, which stands as an obstacle to spiritual accomplishment. They are known as the 'Three Poisons' (Ignorance, attachment and aversion) (*Rag- Dwesh- Moha*). All of life's evils grow from them. By effort, *Sila-Samadhi-Prajna*, greed can be changed into generosity, hatred into compassion and ignorance into wisdom. To make such changes takes consistent effort over time, perhaps even over lifetimes, but it can be done.<sup>103</sup> In some iconography of the Wheel of Life, a snake and a rooster are coming out of the mouth of a pig and both the rooster and the snake grasp the pig’s tail in their mouths to indicate that lust and hatred depend on ignorance for their existence; without ignorance they are impossible. A pig, symbolizing ignorance drives the entire process.<sup>104</sup>

### **3.2.2 The Second Layer: The Black and White Segments: Karma**

The first layer, the black and white segments, represents the theory of *karma*. *Karma* literally means “action”. Motivated by ignorance, humans engage in virtuous and non-

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>103</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 14.

<sup>104</sup> Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV), *op. cit.* (f.n. 16), p. 4.

virtuous actions, which lead to rebirth in the six realms of cyclic existence. The light and dark half-circles just outside the hub indicate virtuous and nonvirtuous actions that are motivated by the triad of ignorance, desire, and hatred.<sup>105</sup> The beings in the darker portion engage in negative actions face downward to indicate that non-virtuous actions lead to lower state. But, in the light half-circle, beings engaged in positive actions face upward to indicate that virtuous actions lead to higher or more favorable states. Drakpa, Palden narrates that there is continuous cycle of birth and death as long as one remains under the control of *karma* and afflictive emotions, or the possibility of taking numerous fortunate and unfortunate rebirths.<sup>106</sup>

‘The Sutra of the Cause and Effects of Actions’<sup>107</sup>, one of the best preserved Buddhist texts, displays the reasons behind the dissimilarities of the world. It explains that he who in this world is handsome comes from a patient kind, and the ugly comes from amid anger; the needy comes from meanness; the high and noble comes from prayer and service, and the lowly and base comes from pride; the great and tall man comes from honor and respect, and short-legged man comes on account of contempt. It further explains that he who slanders the Law is born dumb; he who does not want to hear the Law is born deaf; he who kills babies of flying birds is childless; he who nourishes living beings has numerous children; he who is compassionate is born long-lived; he who kills living beings is born short-lived; he who gives gifts is born rich and he who reads and asks the sutra born intelligent.

### **3.2.3 Third Layer: The Six Realms of saṃsāra: The First Noble Truth: The Truth of Suffering (Dukkha)**

The third layer, the six realms, represents the “First Noble Truth: the Truth of Suffering (*Dukkha*)”. All the six realms are subject to *Dukkha* by their own different causes. Pride, jealousy, desire, ignorance, greed, and anger are the main causes of sufferings in the six realms. Motivated by ignorance-symbolized by the three animals in the centre, we engage in virtuous and non-virtuous actions- symbolized by the two half circles- which leads to rebirth in the six realms of cyclic existence.<sup>108</sup> All beings within the six realms are doomed to death and rebirth in a recurring cycle over

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p.5.

<sup>106</sup> Pladen Drakpa, *op.cit.* (f.n. 24), pp. 11-12.

<sup>107</sup> D.N. MacKenzie, editor. *The ‘Sutra of the Cause and Effects of Actions’ in Sogdian*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 5-9

<sup>108</sup> Tenzin Gyatso Dalai Lama, *op. cit.* (f.n. 16), p. 8.

countless times unless they can break free from desire and attain enlightenment. All beings are reborn into a lower or a higher realm depending on their karma while still alive. The lower three states are called the three evil paths, or three bad states. Each realm of the wheel has distinct drawbacks, by which they are drawn back again and again to the wheel (*saṃsāra*) from going out of the wheel.

### **3.2.3.1 Deva Loka: Gods Realm: Being a God Isn't Perfect**

Deva realm is a world of light and colour. Whatever they wish for simply appear: they have no need to work.<sup>109</sup> Beings whose acts are consistently meritorious, and who enjoy refined states of mind, are reborn as gods.<sup>110</sup> The gods are reborn in the heavens as a consequence of wholesome actions done in the past, observation of the codes of good conduct, and the practice of meditation. The happiest of the six realms is the realm of the gods though their happiness is impermanent. All the gods are also impermanent. Their lives are immeasurably long, and the higher the realm the longer the life, but like all other living beings the gods will die.<sup>111</sup> No matter how much they may enjoy their existence, when the force of their wholesome karma is exhausted, the effects of their good conduct and experience of meditation spent, the gods fall from heaven and are reborn in another realm.<sup>112</sup> Pride is the negative factor associated with gods. The realm of the gods is a place of great danger for spiritual aspirants. For that reason, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara appears in this world as a white Buddha, playing the melody of impermanence upon a lute, which is only one form that can the message of universal impermanence come home to the intoxicated gods.<sup>113</sup>

### **3.2.3.2 Asura Loka: Demi-god Realm: Jealous Gods and Paranoia**

The demigods are physically more powerful and mentally more acute than human beings, yet they suffer because of jealousy and conflict.<sup>114</sup> They have a wish-fulfilling tree; but it blossoms and bears fruits in the God realm and enjoyed by Gods. So, Demi-gods fight the Gods but are defeated and suffer greatly as a result. They fight among them as well. So, the *titans* know only warfare. Here there is no love, no gentleness, and no trust.<sup>115</sup> Avalokiteshvara appears in the Demi-god realm as a green

---

<sup>109</sup> Kulanada, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 23.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>112</sup> Peter Della Santina, *op. cit.* (f.n. 75), p. 91.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Buddha holding a sword of wisdom that destroys ignorance. Buddha tells them that it is only through true understanding, through spiritual insight, that they will ever be able to make conquests that will yield their heart's desire.

### 3.2.3.3 Manusya Loka: Human Realm: The Hope of Liberation

Human realm experiences joy and pain in almost equal measure. The miseries of human existence are classified into eight sections, viz.: The miseries of (1) birth, (2) old age; (3) sickness; (4) death; (5) ungratified wishes and struggle for existence; (6) misfortunes and punishments for law-breaking; (7) separation from relatives and cherished objects; (8) offensive objects and sensations.<sup>116</sup> Actually, human consciousness is neither ecstatic like that of the gods nor agonized, like that of beings in hell. It is neither fiercely competitive like the *asuras*, neurotically desirous like the *pretas*, nor mindlessly sensual like the animals.<sup>117</sup> Humans are aware of themselves and others. They have the capacity to act for the good. A human birth is considered the most favored of the six realms because it has the motivation and opportunity to practice the *Dharma* and achieve enlightenment. Human birth is difficult to gain due to following points of view:<sup>118</sup>

- First of all, it is difficult from the point of view of its cause. Good conduct is the foremost cause of rebirth as a human being, but truly good conduct is exceedingly rare.
- Second, human birth is difficult to gain from the point of view of number, for human beings are only a small fraction of the living beings that inhabit the six realms.
- Third, it is not enough simply to be born as human being, because there are countless humans who do not have the opportunity to practice the *Dharma*. It is therefore not only necessary to be born as a human but also to have the opportunity to practice the *Dharma*, developing one's qualities of morality, mental development, and wisdom.

It is said that all of us have circled in these six realms since beginningless time. It is also said that if all the skeletons we have had in our various lives we heaped up, the pile would exceed the height of Mount *Sumeru*, that if the entire mother's milk we have drunk in our countless existences were collected together, it would amount to more than all the water in all the oceans. Now that we have the opportunity to practice the *Dharma*, we must do so without delay.<sup>119</sup> That is why; Avalokiteshvara appears in the world of the Human realm as a saffron-coloured Buddha carrying a begging-bowl and a staff with three rings. A saffron-coloured Bodhisattva carrying a begging-bowl

---

<sup>116</sup> L. Austine Waddel, *op. cit.* (f.n. 25), p. 102.

<sup>117</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 39.

<sup>118</sup> Peter Della Santina, *op. cit.* (f.n. 75), pp. 92-93.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

and staff with three rings appears in the human realm to suggest the human beings to take up the spiritual life for the enlightenment.

#### **3.2.3.4 Pashu Loka: Animal Realm: No Sense of Humor**

Animals are particularly afflicted by being used for other's purposes and by their general incapacity for speech.<sup>120</sup> The principle cause of rebirth as an animal is ignorance.<sup>121</sup> The animal realm is said to be dominated by the threefold desire for food, sex, and sleep. They can be wild and ferocious when these desires are unsatisfied. In the realm of the animals, life is the life of the body. All endeavors are directed to the satisfaction of physical desires and the business of self-preservation. This depiction is a visual representation of the ignorant refusal to see beyond the needs of the body. The main feature of the animal realm is lack of the quality of highly developed self-awareness that differentiates humans from all other animals. So, the blue Avalokiteshvara with a book is standing in the Animal realm to teach self-awareness. Human has a developed culture. Cultural life stands as an intermediary between savagery and spiritual life.<sup>122</sup>

#### **3.2.3.5 Preta Loka: Hungry Ghost Realm: Craving That Can Never Be Satisfied**

Hungry ghosts are particularly troubled by hunger and thirst.<sup>123</sup> Greedy people are reborn in the Ghost world according as the *Petavatthu* of *Khuddaka Nikaya*. They are looking for food and drink, but they are unable to find it. Greed and attachment are the foremost causes of rebirth as a hungry ghost. Those whose behavior is consistently neurotic are born again as hungry ghosts- beings that are never able to satisfy their pain-filled longings.<sup>124</sup> Living beings in this realm suffer chiefly from hunger and thirst, heat and cold.<sup>125</sup> It is said that when the hungry ghosts see a mountain of rice or a river of fresh water and run toward it, they find that the mountain of rice is on a heap of pebbles and the river only a ribbon of blue slate.<sup>126</sup> Likewise, in the summer even the moon feels hot to them, while in the winter even the sun is cold. Whatever they manage to get into their tiny mouths instantly turns to excrement, ashes, or

---

<sup>120</sup> Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV), *op. cit.* (f.n. 16), p. 6.

<sup>121</sup> Peter Della Santina, *op. cit.* (f.n. 75), p. 90.

<sup>122</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 37.

<sup>123</sup> Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV), *op. cit.* (f.n. 16), p. 6.

<sup>124</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 21.

<sup>125</sup> Peter Della Santina, *op. cit.* (f.n. 75), p. 89.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

flames.<sup>127</sup> When we are in a state of deep addiction, we need to be given what we are really looking for. So, the red Bodhisattva with real fruits and drinks appears in the world of the Hungry Ghost and offers them the real food and drinks.

### **3.2.3.6 Naraka Loka: Hell Realm**

The cause rebirth in hell is repeated violent behavior, such as habitual killing, cruelty, and the like.<sup>128</sup> Such actions are born of aversion, and living beings who commit them suffer the pains of hell until the unwholesome karma they have generated through such actions is exhausted.<sup>129</sup> Hell beings are reborn in more fortunate realms of existence when their unwholesome karma is exhausted. The depiction of this hell is an objectification of hatred, rather a visual depiction of what may await us if we fill our hearts with hatred instead of compassionate understanding. The basic features of hell are constant suffering and relentless pain inflicted by furious and vengeful beings. But this hell as all parts of our existence is a result of our own karma. It is upon us whether we wish to make our life a hell on earth and make every situation a torment for ourselves. The hell of the Wheel of Life is but that same mental state made manifest in all its painful detail. None can rest in peace that has in his heart a hatred for any other. There are the hells-on-earth that we find in war zones and places of acute poverty, and there are hells-within, where people suffer acute physical and mental anguish.<sup>130</sup>

The hell is not everlasting. Every process is impermanent. One will remain in hell as long there are undisciplined karmic energies keeping one there. A life in hell may extend over many aeons - perhaps this corresponds to the well-known experience of time dragging when we are suffering. Sometimes, when one is in a hellish mental state or fiercely gripped by pain, what one needs above all is just some immediate respite.<sup>131</sup> That is why; the smoke-coloured Bodhisattva with divine nectar (*Amrita*) is seen in the world of Hell. The divine nectar brings solace to all. The “*Avalamban Sutra*”<sup>132</sup> states that once one of nearest disciples, Maudgalyana went into the hell realm and became so sad seeing his mother’s condition.

---

<sup>127</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 30.

<sup>128</sup> Peter Della Santina, *op. cit.* (f.n. 75), p. 89.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>130</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 34.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>132</sup> Vide: Annex III.

### 3.2.4 The Outer Layer: The Twelve Causal Links: Dependent Origination

The outer layer or rim of the wheel represents the theory of “Dependent Origination” or the theory of “Cause and Effect”. John Powers states that the doctrine of dependent arising is closely connected with the idea of no-self, which holds that all compounded phenomena arise due to causes and conditions external to themselves, remain in existence due to causes and conditions, and eventually pass away due to other causes and conditions.<sup>133</sup> The outermost concentric ring of the Wheel of Life is divided into twelve units, each depicting a phase of the peculiar cycle of cause and effect which keeps one trapped in the six realms of cyclic existence mentioned above. Ignorance and volition belong to the past life. Consciousness, name and form, the six sense spheres, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, and becoming belong to this life. The last two components, birth and old age and death, belong to the future life. The activities whether good or bad rooted in ignorance which must necessarily have their due effects, only tend to prolong life's wandering. Nevertheless, good actions are essential to get rid of the ills of life. The Collected Teaching of the Father of the *Kadampa* Tradition (Tib. *bka' gdams pha chos*) mentions:<sup>134</sup>

Of things, a scripture says,  
Ignorance is [like] an old blind woman,  
Mental formations are like a porter.  
Consciousness is like a monkey.  
Name-and-form are like rowing a boat.  
Sense bases are like an empty land and a house.  
Contact is said to be like kissing.  
Sensation is like an arrow piercing an eye.  
Craving is said to be like drinking beer.  
Attachment is like reaching out to pluck fruit.  
Becoming is said to be like becoming pregnant.  
Birth is like the birth of a child.  
Ageing and death are said to be like a corpse being carried.

#### 3.2.4.1 Ignorance (*avidya*)

The blind man walking with the help of a stick stands for ignorance (*avidya*)<sup>135</sup>. Here ignorance does not mean “not knowing all”, but the ignorant of the Four Noble Truths. It is the not knowingness of things as they truly are. Ignorance is driving force of the cycle of birth, death and again rebirth. A paragraph of *Samyutta Nikaya* reads:

When ignorance leads the way, by the reaching of states unprofitable, shamelessness and recklessness follow in its train. In one who is swayed by ignorance and is void of sense,

<sup>133</sup> John Powers. *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York/Colorado, Snow Lion Publications, 2007, pp. 75-76.

<sup>134</sup> Palden Drakpa, *op. cit.* (f.n. 24), p. 27.

<sup>135</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 3), p. 45.

wrong view has scope. Wrong view gives scope for wrong aim, wrong aim for wrong speech, wrong speech for wrong action, wrong action for wrong living, wrong living for wrong effort, wrong effort for wrong mindfulness, and wrong mindfulness gives scope for wrong concentration.<sup>136</sup>

Ignorance is regarded as the root cause of all sufferings. About the ignorance, Tsonkhapa writes:

Ignorance is the root  
Of all the adversities of *samsāra*  
Which are dispelled by seeing  
The dependent origination you expounded.<sup>137</sup>

The person is old because the ignorance driving the process of cyclic existence is beginningless; the person is blind because ignorance is obscured with respect to the true nature of persons and other phenomena.<sup>138</sup> Likewise, the person hobbles with a cane because ignorance, no matter how much suffering it creates, has no valid foundation; it is not based on the truth and, therefore, can be undermined by wisdom.

#### **3.2.4.2 Volitional action (samskara)**

Depending on ignorance of the Four Noble Truths, arises activities (*samskara*). When ignorance ceases, action ceases. In other words, the cessation of action arises in dependence upon the cessation of ignorance. *Samskara* is illustrated by the potter making a pot on a wheel. These volitional actions are our deeply-rooted habits.

#### **3.2.4.3 Consciousness (vijñāna)**

A Dependent on activities arise rebirth-consciousness (*vijñāna*). The cessation of activities, leads to the cessation of consciousness. This links the past with the present. Consciousness is symbolized by a monkey climbing a flowering tree. The monkey swings from branch to branch- consciousness passes from existence to existence. But, the consciousness which moves from existence to existence is not unchanged in the process. What comes next is neither exactly the same as, nor entirely different from, what went before, but arises in dependence upon it.<sup>139</sup>

#### **3.2.4.4 Name and Form (namarupa)**

Due to the consciousness, name and form arises. So, the cessation of consciousness, leads to the cessation of name and form. Name and form link is shown as a boat with

---

<sup>136</sup> *Samyutta- Nikaya* (F.L. Woodward, translator. *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*. Introduced by C.A.F. Rhys Davids, vol. V, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2005, pp. 1-2.

<sup>137</sup> Tsonkhapa. *Pratityasamutpadastutisubhasitahridayam*. Edited by Gyeltsen Namdol, translated by Gyeltsen Namdol and Ngawang Samten, supervised by Ram Shankar Tripathi, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Varanasi, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1994, p. 2.

<sup>138</sup> Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV), *op. cit.* (f.n. 16), p. 9.

<sup>139</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 46



four passengers, one of whom is steering. The boat is form (*rupa*) and the four passengers are feeling, perception, volitions and consciousness. Consciousness is steering. These five factors are the five *skandhas*, the five ‘heaps’ or ‘aggregates’ into which the Buddha resolved the whole human psychophysical organism.<sup>140</sup>

### 3.2.4.5 Six Sensory Organs (*shadayatana*)

Due to the name and form, six sense spheres arise. So, the cessation of the name and form leads to the cessation of six sensory organs. In Buddhist thought, the mind is itself a sense organ, so the six senses are those of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and the mind.<sup>141</sup> In generally, there are twelve sense sphere- six internal and six external, which are the six sense powers and the six types of objects.<sup>142</sup>

Table I  
The Twelve Sense Sphere

Six Sense Powers	Six Sense Powers
1. eye sense power	Visible forms (colours and shapes)
2. ear sense power	Sound
3. nose sense power	Odors
4. tongue sense power	Tastes
5. body sense power	Touches
6. mental sense power	Other phenomena

### 3.2.4.6 Contact (*sparsha*)

In dependence on the six sense organs arises contact which is depicted by a man and woman embracing. Because we have the six human senses the human world impinges upon us.<sup>143</sup> The cessation of the six sense organs leads to the cessations of contact.

### 3.2.4.7 Sensation or Feeling (*vedana*)

In dependence on contact arises feeling, which is depicted by a man with an arrow stuck in his eye. An arrow in the eye shows feeling can be so strong they can blind us.<sup>144</sup> When contact ceases, the feeling also ceases.

### 3.2.4.8 Craving or Desire (*trishna*)

In dependence on feeling arises craving, which is depicted by a woman offering a drink to a seated man. And, with the cessation of feeling, the craving gets disappeared.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>142</sup> Tenzin Gyatso (Dalai Lama XIV), op. cit. (f.n. 16), p. 17.

<sup>143</sup> Kulananda, op. cit. (f.n. 17), p. 48.

<sup>144</sup> Richard E. Farkas. *The Elements of Tibetan Buddhism*. New Delhi. Cambridge University Press India Pvt. Ltd., 2013., p. 72.

#### **3.2.4.9 Grasping (upadana)**

In dependence on craving arises grasping which is depicted by a man gathering fruit from a tree. We want more and move towards the objects of our desires. The cessation of craving leads to the cessation of grasping.

#### **3.2.4.10 Becoming/Existence (bhava)**

The actions that we perform in this life are represented by the component known as becoming.<sup>145</sup> Becoming is represented by a pregnant woman or a couple having sexual intercourse. Due to grasping, becoming arises; the cessation of the grasping leads to the cessation of becoming.

#### **3.2.4.11 Birth (jati)**

In dependence on becoming arises birth, which is depicted by birth scene. When becoming ceases, the birth also ceases.

#### **3.2.4.12 Old age and Death (jara-maranam)**

Finally, in dependence on birth arises old age and death, which is depicted by a corpse. And the cessation of the birth, leads to the cessation of old age and death.

### **3.2.5 The Out of the Wheel**

The Buddha, *Yama* and a moon are depicted out of the wheel to show that they are out of *samsāra*.

#### **3.2.5.1 The Figure Holding the Wheel: Impermanence**

A fearsome figure holding the Wheel is the god of the death, the *Dharmaraj*, *Yama*, who stands for the great inescapable fact of universal impermanence. Here, he is witness to the fact that all things whatever are subject to change and to becoming other.<sup>146</sup> The *Dharmaraj* has five (or six somewhere) skulls on his head. The bone ornaments are the symbols of impermanent nature of the phenomena.<sup>147</sup> The Five Skulls on his head represent five aggregates<sup>148</sup>. Buddha says that all composite things are impermanent. The five aggregates are also impermanent. So, our body, made up of the five aggregates, is also impermanent. Everything in this *samsāra* is impermanent. About the impermanence, a *sutta* of *Salayatana Vagga* reads:

---

<sup>145</sup> Peter Della Santina, op. cit. (f.n. 75), p. 100.

<sup>146</sup> Kulananda, op. cit. (f.n. 17), p. 9.

<sup>147</sup> Min Bdr. Shakya, op. cit. (f.n. 3), p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> Five aggregates: form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedana*), perception (*saṃjñā*), mental activities (*saṃkāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna*).

The ear is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is ill. What is ill, that is void of the self. ...  
The nose, ...the tongue, ... the body, ... the mind is impermanent. What is impermanent that is  
ill. What is ill, that is void of the self. What is void of the self, that is not mine: I am not it: it is  
not my self. That is how it is to be regarded with perfect insight of what it really is.<sup>149</sup>

*Yama* also stands for the possibility of change for the better. Because things are impermanent, because they always change, every situation can be improved and we ourselves can grow and change for the better.<sup>150</sup>

### **3.2.5.2 The Buddha: The Dharmakaya Buddha: The Fourth Noble Truth: The Truth of the Path leading to the End of Suffering**

The Buddha standing on the top right corner represents the Fourth Noble Truth: the Truth of the Path Leading to the End of Suffering. Kulananda states that the Buddha pointing out the hare in the moon indicates the Bodhisattva path.<sup>151</sup> But here, we talk about the path related to the Fourth Noble Truth i.e. “The Noble Eightfold Path (*Magga*)”. The Buddha tells us the way to escape from the Wheel cultivating a deep altruistic attitude.

### **3.2.5.3 The Moon or Rabbit or Bodhisattva: The Door to Nirvana/ Liberation: The Third Noble Truth: The Truth of the End of Suffering**

On the top left corner is the moon, which represents liberation: the Third Noble Truth i.e. “The Truth of the End of Suffering”. Somewhere a temple with a seated Buddha is depicted on the top left corner. And, sometimes a Bodhisattva appears in the upper left-hand corner. The moon with a hare inside is also commonly seen at the place. A stream of beings rises from the Human Realms toward the temple at the top left corner, which represents *Nirvana*. Artists creating a Wheel of Life fill this corner in various ways. Sometimes the upper left-hand figure is a *Nirmanakaya* Buddha, representing bliss. And, sometimes *svstika* shaped clouds, which represents auspicious symbol in Buddhism. In Buddhist *Jataka* legend relates how Buddha was born as a hare in one of his previous lives, and in order to test his endurance *Indra* drew an outline of this hare on the moon, where it has since remained.<sup>152</sup>

---

<sup>149</sup> *Samyutta- Nikaya* (F.L. Woodward, Translator. *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*. Introduced by C.A.F. Rhys Davids, vol. IV, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2005, p. 2).

<sup>150</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 9.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>152</sup> Robert Beer. *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*. London, Srinidia Publications, 1999, p. 120.

### 3.2.5.4 At the Bottom or Top: The Stanzas

The Stanzas Shakyamuni affixed to the bottom of the first diagram of the Wheel of Life, which had such a profound effect on King Bimbisara's friend. These read:

Undertaking this and leaving that,  
Enter into the teaching of the Buddha.  
Like an elephant in a thatch house,  
Destroy the forces of the Lord of Death.

Those who with thorough conscientiousness  
Practice this disciplinary doctrine  
Will forsake the wheel of birth,  
Bring suffering to an end.<sup>153</sup>

In these lines Buddha indicates that if sufficient effort is applied in the three trainings of moral discipline (*sila*), concentration (*samadhi*) and wisdom (*panna*) as set forth in the dharma, even the heaviest sufferings of *samsāra* can be eliminated completely and for all time. Because the sources of all suffering- ignorance and the other ensuing delusions- are totally devoid of self-existence, the well-trained practitioner can overcome the Lord of Death as easily as a powerful elephant destroys a fragile grass hut.<sup>154</sup>

### 3.2.6 The Six realms and Mental States (Mind Only Philosophy)

Two great scholars of *Vijnanvada* (*Yogacar* School/ Mind Only School), Asanga and Vasubandhu (two brothers) made two general points to clarify the Mind Only Philosophy. Those are: i. Objects have no stable or fixed form of appearance, and ii. Objects appear even without an external stimulus.

Verses one to five, in *Vimsatikaprakaranam*<sup>155</sup>, Vasubandhu illustrates this with the reference to the experience of the beings of the six realms. He mentions that objects appear in different shapes and forms to different sentient beings according to their karmic condition. Vasubandhu presents the case of the wardens of the hell realms. The wardens of the hell realms would experience the same sufferings that of hell beings. But wardens are not in sufferings. According to Vasubandhu, river of purulence and other sufferings are mere creations of the minds of hell beings themselves. In other words, because of their unwholesome *karma*, hell beings project images of wardens who then proceed to torment them. Through the power of our

---

<sup>153</sup> Jonathan Landaw and Weber Andy, *op. cit.* (f.n. 100), p. 36.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.

<sup>155</sup> Vasubandhu. *Vijnaptimatratasiddhi: Vimsatikatrimsikabhigyanaprakaranadwayatmika*. Translated and edited by Mahesh Tiwari, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Varanasi, Chaukhamba Viddhyabhawan, 1995, pp. 1-7.

minds, we create the six realms of existence and then circle in them endlessly.<sup>156</sup> It is only our mind that creates the surroundings according as our own *karma*.

The six realms are actually the different mental states. Here, the realms of beauty, fierce competitiveness, neurotic desire, acute torment, lazy indifference, and creativity, show some of the different mental states we can occupy even within the course of a few hours.<sup>157</sup> We move from mental state to mental state, from one world to another. People who find themselves in prisons, tortured, killed, and so forth are undoubtedly experiencing situations similar to those of the hell beings; those who are miserly and avaricious experience a state of mind similar to that of the hungry ghosts; those who are animal-like experience a state of mind similar to that of animals; those who are quarrelsome, power-hungry, and jealous experience a state of mind like that of the demi-gods; and those who are pure, tranquil, serene, and exalted experience a state of mind similar to that of the gods.<sup>158</sup> Mind is the creator of all things.

Actions motivated by generosity, love, and so forth result in happiness, in states of existence like the human realm and the realm of the gods. But actions, done with an impure mind (motivated by attachment, aversion, and the like) result in unhappy states like those of the hungry ghosts and hell beings.<sup>159</sup>

---

<sup>156</sup> Peter Della Santina, *op. cit.* (f.n. 75), pp. 210- 212.

<sup>157</sup> Kulananda, *op. cit.* (f.n. 17), p. 19.

<sup>158</sup> Peter Della Santina, *op. cit.* (f.n.75), p. 94.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, p. 94.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### BUDDHIST PRACTICE OF THE WHEEL OF LIFE IN TAMANG COMMUNITY

#### 4.1 Study Context

Introduction to Tamang, Tamang religion and population etc. are briefly introduced before the study of Buddhist practice through the Wheel of Life among Tamang community.

##### 4.1.1 Introduction to Tamang

Tamang is one of the ethnic groups of Nepal who has own distinct and common geographical zone (*Tamsaling*), language (Tamang) and culture (Tamang *Rimthim*).<sup>160</sup> Tamang are the indigenous inhabitants of hills around the Kathmandu valley and northern region.<sup>161</sup> The majority of the Tamangs live in eight districts viz. Kavrepalanchowk, Makwanpur, Ramechhap, Dading, Nuwakot, Rasuwa, Sindupalchowk and Dolakh of Nepal. Traditionally Tamangs are Buddhist. Tamangs cover 5.81% (1,539,830) of the national population (26,494,504) as of 2011 census. The census shows that out of 1539830 Tamang, 87.29% (1,344,139) follow Buddhism, 8.88% (136,739) Hindusm, 3.56% (54,819) Christian and 0.02% (54,819) accept *Prakriti* religion. According to CBS (2011), Buddhist and Bon are 2396099 (9.04%) and 13006 (0.04%) respectively. Out of 2,396,099 Buddhists, 56.09% (1,344,139) are Tamang. Magar, Gurung, Newar and Sherpa respectively cover 14.24% (340,608), 13.68% (327,813), 5.92% (141,982) and 4.63% (111,068) of Buddhist population. In Pokhari Narayansthan VDC of Kavre district, Tamangs cover 84.006% (2,474) of the total population (2,945) as of CBS (2011). The second highest population is of Newar, who covers 4.001% (119) of the total population.

##### 4.1.2 Gonpas among Tamang Community

Monasteries are almost always translated as 'dGonpas'. 'dGonpa' literally means 'a place of solitude', a religious escape where monks are trained in the finer aspects of Buddhism practiced here. So, dGonpas means a place for meditation.<sup>162</sup> Tamang

---

<sup>160</sup> Ajitman Tamang. *Tamang Jatiko Chinari*. Lalitpur, National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities / Kathmandu, Nepal Tamang Ghedung, 2069, p. 3.

<sup>161</sup> Dor Bahadur Bista. *Sabai Jatko Phoolbari*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed., Lalitpur, Sajha Prakasan, 2071, p. 42.

<sup>162</sup> Surendra Man Bajaracharya, *op. cit.* (f.n. 2), p. 121.

have dGonpas in every sizeable village. It is estimated that there are around 4000 dGonpas scattered in Nepal. Of them, more than 1600 dGonpas have already been registered with dGonpa Management and Development Committee of Nepal Government and more than 70% dGonpas belong to Tamang community.<sup>163</sup> Pokhari Narayansthan VDC contains 10 dGompas within.<sup>164</sup>

#### **4.1.3 Buddhist Practice**

One can practice Buddhism through various means according to Buddhist tradition. Copying sacred Buddhist texts, sponsoring publication of Buddhist texts, making *chaitya* or *stupa*, white washing the *chaityas*, renovation of Buddhist shrines, circumambulation of Buddhist shrines, pilgrimage to sacred Buddhist shrines, Thangka painting, wall painting, Buddhist sculpture making etc. are also taken as ways of Buddhist practice.<sup>165</sup> Accumulation of merit is main purpose behind these all practices. All the Buddhist practices are based on certain philosophies. So, Buddhist practice is regarded as the application of the Buddhist philosophy. According to Buddhist tradition, one should accumulate merits through Buddhist practices for liberation. Accumulation of merits reduces poisons or obstacles of liberation (viz. *klesavarana* and *jneyavarana*).

#### **4.1.4 Buddhist Practice of the Wheel of Life**

The Wheel of Life is also a Buddhist practice through art. The Wheel of Life depicts the First Teaching of the Buddha, which I have already explained in chapter two and three. By painting the Wheel of Life, one is not only practicing the Buddha's basic teachings through art, but also expanding the teachings among people and conserving these fundamental philosophies of the Buddha. Furthermore, one can earn merit by doing so. According to *Divyāvadāna*, the Buddha suggested keeping the illustration of Wheel of Life on the gate way of *vihara* and appointing some Bikkhus to the illustration to the common people. *Divyāvadāna* mentions how king Rudrayana got liberation through the Wheel of Life illustration. So, it was since the Buddha's time, illustration of the Wheel of Life became the means of practicing the Buddha's teachings. The Wheel of Life Painting at Ajanta Cave no. XVII, dated about 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., is the live example of Buddhist practice through the Wheel of Life

---

<sup>163</sup> Ajitman Tamang, *op. cit.* (f.n. 160), p. 70.

<sup>164</sup> Vide: table n. VIII.

<sup>165</sup> Surendra Man Bajracharya, *op. cit.* (f.n. 2), p. 171.

which proves that the Wheel of Life was flourished with the development of *Sarvāstivāda* (by about 1<sup>st</sup> B.C. to 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D.).

#### **4.2 Buddhist Practice of the Wheel of Life in Tamang Community**

The Buddhist practice through the Wheel of Life can be found frequently in daily life, art, and cultural procedures in Northern Buddhism. Here, the research is concerned only on Tamang Buddhist community of PN VDC of Kavre. Among Tamang community, one can see the Wheel of Life on the wall of a dGonpa, on Thangka painting, in different cultural procedures, and so forth. The illustration and its philosophy are so popular among them and they practice it accepting by their heart. Thus, the Wheel of Life has significant influences among Tamang community of PN VDC.

##### **4.2.1 The Wheel of Life in Everyday Life**

The people of Pokhari Narayansthan VDC believe in past life and rebirth i.e. theory of *Karma*. Theory of *Karma* is depicted in the Wheel of Life in the second layer of the wheel. The Wheel of Life plays great role to lead the everyday life of the people. They always try to do wholesome works for at least to get born into the fortunate realms in the next life, as they believe. They believe that hell beings are the unwholesome doers in their previous lives. In this way, the Wheel of Life always reminds to the people about the present duties and next life.

##### **4.2.2 The Wheel of Life in Cultural Life**

The Wheel of Life Thangka is displayed during different rituals by Lamas. Lamas describe about six realms of the Wheel of Life in different ceremonies to their followers.

###### **4.2.2.1 The Wheel of Life, Mani Recitation and Their Belief**

The following mantras are frequently recited among Tamang community of PN VDC. They have certain belief reciting following mantras.

###### **4.2.2.1.1 OM MANI PADME HUM**

The Six Syllable Mantra, “*OM MANI PADME HUM*” of *Chengresi (Avolokitesvara)* is recited daily or occasionally by Lamas and some followers. Since the recitation of the mantra has certain benefits, a significance of reciting “*OM MANI PADME HUM*” as they believe, is getting freedom from the suffering of the six realms. Every syllable



of the mantra are written or printed or painted in different colour to represent the six realms of *samsāra*. The six syllables purify completely the six poisons or negative emotions: pride, jealousy, desire, ignorance, greed, and anger. These poisons are transformed, through the mantra, into their true nature, the wisdoms of the six Buddha families that become manifest in the enlightened mind. The six negative emotions are the cause of the six realms of *samsāra*. So, when we recite the mantra the six poisons are purified. Recitation of the mantra prevents rebirth in each of the six realms, and also dispels the suffering inherent in each realm. At the same time reciting the mantra completely purifies the aggregates of ego, the *skandhas*, and perfects the six kinds of transcendental action of the heart of the enlightened mind, the *paramitas* of: generosity, harmonious conduct, endurance, enthusiasm, concentration, and insight.<sup>166</sup> It is also believed that the recitation of the mantra protects from all kinds of negative influences, and different forms of illness.

Every syllable of the mantra “*OM MANI PADME HUM*” has significant roles to close the doors of the six realms which are as follows:

- “*OM*” closes the door to the suffering of being reborn in the god realm. The syllable “*OM*” is coloured white to represent God realm.
- “*MA*” shuts the door to the suffering of being reborn in the demi-god realm. The syllable “*MA*” is coloured green to represent the Demi-god realm.
- “*NI*” supports closing the door to the suffering of being reborn in the human realm. “*NI*” is saffron-coloured to represent the Human realm.
- “*PAD*” sets free from the suffering of being reborn in the animal realm. “*PAD*” is coloured blue to represent the Animal realm.
- “*ME*” ends the suffering of being reborn in the hungry ghost realm. “*ME*” is coloured red to represent the Hungry Ghost realm.
- “*HUM*” closes the door to the suffering of being reborn in the hell realm and the syllable “*HUM*” is smoke-coloured to represent the Hell realm.

The followers and Lamas not only recite the mantra, but also build *Mani-wall*, *Mhane* (*Mane*), *Mani-wheel* etc. in which the mantra is written or painted or inscribed. They also make necklace inserting the mantra. (See fig. no. 65 - 74)

---

<sup>166</sup> Sogyal Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Edited by Giffney and Andrew Harvey, revised and updated ed., London and et al., Rider, 2008, pp. 397-398.

#### 4.2.2.1.2 A A HA SHA SA MA

The Six Syllable Mantra, *A A HA SHA SA MA* is a mantra, which appears in the *Dzogchen Tantras*, one of the practices associated with the Tibetan Book of the Dead. The mantra has the power to “close the gates” to the six realms of *samsāra*.<sup>167</sup>

#### 4.2.2.2 The Wheel of Life in Funeral Procession

Having recited the Bardo Thodol, the dead body is taken new dresses on. The dead body is kept in *Vajraasana* and covered with white clothing. Then, the *mukuta* (crown) of *Panca* Buddhas (the Five Buddhas) is kept on the head of the dead body. The Wheel of Life Thanka is hanged on a wall.<sup>168</sup> Lama hangs Thankas of *Lugudugu*, *Sipa Khorlo* (the Wheel of Life) etc. on the wall nearby the dead body, before beginning the rituals.<sup>169</sup> To represent *Chengresi* (Avalokitesvara), *torma* is prepared. Lamas perform certain rituals. After performing certain rituals and watching *rtsi* (religious calendar), the funeral procession time is fixed. Rudra Singh Tamang states that there are certain lines while going to funeral procession. In the front of the line, a person leads carrying *satvij* (collection of seeds). Secondly, a person carries fire source. Thirdly, some persons carry *Dharjyu* or *Lungdar* (Wind-horse flag). At the fourth, a person carries *torma*. At the fifth position, some people carry Thankas of *Astamangala* (eight auspicious symbols) and the Wheel of Life.<sup>170</sup> Supporting the issue mentioned above, Tamang, Rabindra further says that these all activities are concerned with the religious respect to the dead person.<sup>171</sup> If the Wheel of Life Thanka is not available with Lamas, they use whatever they have. Those Thankas belong to Lamas. Lamas use Thankas in different rituals.

#### 4.2.2.3 The Wheel of Life in Bardo

The Tibetan word *bardo* means literally "intermediate state" and it is also translated as "transitional state" or "in-between state" or "luminal state". In Sanskrit the concept has the name *antarabhava*. The word *bardo* is commonly used to denote the intermediate state between death and rebirth, but in reality *bardos* are occurring continuously throughout both life and death, and are junctures when the possibility of

---

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 311.

<sup>168</sup> Rudra Singh Tamang. *Tamang Rite and Culture: Introduction of Tamba, Bon & Buddhist Culture*. Kathmandu, Tamang Society Research and Development Centre, Nepal, 2004, p. 189.

<sup>169</sup> Rabindra Tamang. *Tamang Rimthim: Tamang Sankar haruko Sankshipta Adyayan*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edi., Kathmandu, Shailung Books Pvt.Ltd. 2072 B.S., p.48.

<sup>170</sup> Rudra Singh Tamang, *op. cit.* (f.n. 168), p. 189.

<sup>171</sup> Rabindra Tamang, *op. cit.* (f.n. 169.), pp. 50-51.

liberation, or enlightenment, is heightened.<sup>172</sup> Entire humans existence can be divided into four continuously interlinked realities: 1) life, 2) dying and death, 3) after death, and 4) rebirth. These are known as the four *bardos*: 1) the natural *bardo* of this life, 2) the painful *bardo* of dying, 3) the luminous *bardo* of *dharmata*, and 4) the karmic *bardo* of becoming.<sup>173</sup>

Lama concentrates on the motivation to free the dying or deceased person from the sufferings of cyclic existence.<sup>174</sup> Once the introduction to the intermediate state of reality has been completed, the attending lama should closely observe the body of the deceased and seek to determine whether he or she has attained liberation from rebirth in cyclic existence.<sup>175</sup> If the deceased person gets liberation, the body will not smell; it will look just like a living person who is sleeping; distinctive cloud and rainbows will appear in the sky; and so many other auspicious signs will appear. If the consciousness of the deceased has not been emancipated, the face of deceased will turn grey and dusty; the body will begin to decompose very quickly; and will falls into intermediate state of rebirth, at which time, the attending lama should recite the introduction to that phase.

Once introductions to the intermediate states of the time of death, reality, and rebirth have been concluded, the attending lama should then recite; the Prayer for Union with the Spiritual Teacher, the Natural Liberation of Habitual Tendencies, the Hundredfold Homage, the Confession and the Liberation by Wearing.<sup>176</sup> At this stage, attending lama reads prayers specific to the present cycle.

One instruction of *Bardo* process says:

Hey, noble one! If you have not recognized the clear light by remembering what we have already said, from now your sense of your body from the preceding life will become vague, and your sense of your body of the emerging life will become more distinct. Then you will feel sad and think, "I am suffering so – now I will seek whatever body comes along!" Then you will move toward whatever appears, gradually and uncertainly, and the six lights of the six realms will dawn. The realm toward which evolution impels your rebirth will dawn most clearly. Hey, noble one! Listen to me! What are the six lights? The dull white light of the gods will dawn; and also the red light of the titans, the blue light of the humans, the green light of the animals, the yellow light of the *pretas*, and the dull smoky light of the hells – all these will dawn, these are the six lights. So your body's colour will become that of the light of the realm of rebirth.<sup>177</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> Sogyal Rinpoche, *op. cit.* (f.n. 166), p. 11.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Padmasambhav. *The Tibetan Book of Dead*. Revealed by Karma Lingpa, translated by Gyurme Dorje, edited by Graham Coleman with Thupten Jinpa, introductory commentary by the Dalai Lama XIV, London/New York, Penguin Books, 2006, p. 219.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>177</sup> Padmasambhav (tra. by Robert), *op. cit.* (f.n. 46), p. 180.

In this way, for dying or deceased person is guided by the attending lama. We can find the terms “cyclic existence” or “six realms” in the instructions frequently during the pray or reading.

#### 4.2.2.3.1 The Purification of the Six Realms

Sogyal Rinpoche states that the purification of the six realms is a practice used in life that employs visualization and meditation to purify the body of each of the six main negative emotions, along with the realms of existence they create. It can also be used very effectively for the dead, and is particularly powerful because it purifies the root of their *karma*, and so of their connection with *samsāra*.<sup>178</sup> The *Dzogchen Tantras*, mentions that the negative emotions accumulate in the psycho-physical system of subtle channels, inner air, and energy and gather at particular energy centres in the body. So, the seed of the hell realm along with its cause, anger, are located at the soles of the feet; the hungry ghost realm and its cause, avarice, rest at the base of the trunk; the animal realm and its cause, doubt, rest at the heart; the demigod realm and its cause, jealousy, rest at the throat; and the god realm and its cause, pride, rest at the crown of the head. Sogyal Rinpoche further writes:

In this practice of the purification of the six realms, when each realm and its negative emotion is purified, the practitioner imagines that all the *karma* created by that particular emotion is now exhausted, and that the specific part of his body associated with the *karma* of a particular emotion dissolves entirely into light. So, when you do this practice for a dead person, imagine with all your heart and mind that, at the end of the practice, all their *karma* is purified, and their body and entire being dissolve into radiant light.<sup>179</sup>

#### 4.2.2.4 The Wheel of Life in Minjyang (Ti.: Jhyangpar) (Ghewa Process)

The last ritual of *Ghewa*<sup>180</sup> (death ritual) is called *Minjyang* in Tamang community. The term “*Min*” means name and “*jyang*” refers to purify. So, *Minjyang* (Tibetan: *Jhyangpar*) is pure symbol of subtle body. It seems to be a little religious flag. The subtle body (Tamang: *namche*) of the dead person is converted (Tamang: *Rhrapne*) into *Minjyang* (*Jhyangpar*) and “*Bardo Thodol*” is recited to the subtle body. This process is called “*Nyapor*”. The subtle body is reminded not to fall in six realms. This ritual is repeated every seven days while performing “*Dunchi*” ritual.<sup>181</sup> And, its last ritual is performed at the last of *Ghewa*. *Minjyang* is written or printed on

---

<sup>178</sup> Sogyal Rinpoche, *op. cit.* (f.n. 166), p. 310.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>180</sup> Actually, *Ghewa* means *dharma*. Any activity done to accumulate merit is *dharma*. But, the common people in Tamang society seems to take the term “*Ghewa*” for the last ritual done in the name of dead persons.

<sup>181</sup> Rudra Singh Tamang, *op. cit.* (f.n. 168), p. 70.

a set of Nepalese paper by a Lama. On the paper, the name of dead person and some religious mantras (*Su. Aa. Nri. Ti. Pre. Du.*) are written in Tibetan language and script by a Lama. It is printed with wooden block. An image of *Chengresi (Avalokitesvara)* is also printed with the mantras. Name is written at the bottom of the mantras and picture of *Chengresi*. To represent six realms, six cards are erected with *tormas* making six rows with two-two *tormas* in each row. One side of the card has picture of Bodhisatva and another side contains explanation of sufferings of each realm. Lamas recite those explanations written backside of the cards and offer *tormas* to the god one by one. Thus, six *tormas* are offered to god to purify the subtle body to get rid from the sufferings of six realms.<sup>182</sup> The *Minjyang* at first is at the top of *dome* (palace of subtle body) and later it is taken out of the dome. Then, it is erected on molded triangular mud which is placed on a lotus *mandala*. The *Mandala* has six petals which represent the six realms. The *Minjyang* contains some religious mantras (*Su.Aa.Nri.Ti.Pre.Du.*).<sup>183</sup> *Su., Aa., Nri., Ti., Pre.and Du.* are the short forms of the six realms which represent God realm, Demi-god realm, human realm, animal realm, hungry ghost realm and hell realm respectively. Rabindra Tamang further explains that the syllables, *Su.Aa.Nri.Ti.Pre.Du.* represent forehead, throat, heart, navel, genital and feet of the dead person respectively. Before burning down the *Minjyang*, Lama describes about the six realms and suggests the subtle body to remember *Chengresi (Avalokitesvara)* for liberation from the six realms.<sup>184</sup>

The main aim of the *minjyang* ritual is:

- i. to stop the subtle body (*chitta*) of the dead person from being rebirth in the six realms and sending his/her *chitta* to the *Sukhawati Bhuwan (Amitabha Loka* or Pure Land) or,
- ii. to pray for the rebirth of the subtle body in the fortunate realms. Human realm is regarded as the best realm because *Dharma* can be practiced in this realm only, by which the liberation is possible.

Lamas recite “*Necher Chhyoi*” (text that deals with the six realms). They describe the six realms of *samsāra* one by one and *tormas* are offered.<sup>185</sup> At that time, subtle body is shown a picture of *Chengresi (Avalokitesvara)* advising to follow the Bodhisattva-

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p. 72. (also see pp. 69-73)

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, p. 207.

<sup>184</sup> Rabindra Tamang, *op. cit.* (f.n. 169), pp. 68-69.

<sup>185</sup> Rudra Singh Tamang, *op. cit.* (f.n. 168), pp. 208-209.

path and not to take rebirth in six realms of *samsāra*. *Nelung Chhyoi* (text) is recited after the *Minjyang* ritual.

### **4.2.3 The Wheel of Life in Northern Buddhist Art**

The Wheel of Life is a Buddhist art, through which, Buddha's teaching is depicted to communicate with general people. The roles of the Wheel of Life in Northern Buddhist art can be explained as follows:

#### **4.2.3.1 The Wheel of Life in Wall Painting of a dGonpa**

Most of the dGonpas of Northern Buddhism are full of wall paintings. When we go to any Northern Buddhist dGonpa, many paintings can be seen. One of the front wall paintings is the painting of the Wheel of Life. It is on the right hand side of the main door of a dGonpa. The *Divyāvadāna* mentions that the Buddha himself suggested keeping the illustration at the gate of a *Bihara* and appointing some Bhikkhus to explain the illustration to the visitors.

#### **4.2.3.2 The Wheel of Life in Thangka Painting**

Thangka is a scroll painting on cotton, or silk appliqué, or paper, usually depicting a Buddhist deity, scene, or *mandala*. Thangkas are traditionally kept unframed and rolled up when not on display, mounted on a textile backing somewhat in the style of Chinese scroll paintings, with a further silk cover on the front. Thangka serves as an important teaching tool depicting the life of the Buddha, various influential lamas and other deities and bodhisattvas. One subject is the Wheel of Life.

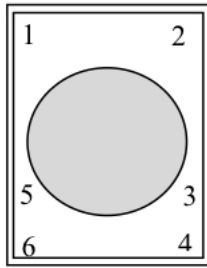
Dor Bdr. Bista states that Thangka is one of the specific skills of Tamangs.<sup>186</sup> Most of the Thangka artisans in Nepal are from Tamang community. The researcher himself learnt Thangka painting in his school life and almost all families from the village of the researcher have at least a Thangka artisan. So, many Tamangs are directly or indirectly involved in Thangka art.

The Wheel of Life Thangka is one of the main subject matters of Thangka painting. It is also one of the favourite Thangkas of all Buddhists and non-Buddhists. So, the Thangka showrooms or shops without the Wheel of Life Thangka can not be found in Nepal. The six realms of the Wheel of Life are also depicted in the background of

---

<sup>186</sup> Dor Bdr. Bista, *op. cit.* (f.n. 161), p. 44.

some *Mandala* Thangkas. The six realms in a *Mandala* Thangka Painting are located as follows:



Location of the Six Realms

1. God Realm
2. Demi-god Realm
3. Human Realm
4. Animal Realm
5. Hungry Ghost Realm
6. Hell Realm

(The fig. is made by the researcher)

**Fig. III.**

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 5.1 Summary

The Wheel of Life is one of the Buddhist practices through the art. It is a symbolic representation of *samsāra* found on the outside walls of Northern Buddhist monasteries to teach ordinary people about the Buddhist teachings. The Wheel of Life can be read by all including illiterate persons. No esoteric knowledge is needed to understand the Wheel of Life. It is a real picture of *Dharma* taught by the Buddha. The Wheel of Life presents those very causes for human suffering and helps one in attaining the Liberation from the *samsāra*.

The hub of the wheel represents the “Second Noble Truth of Cause”. At the hub, a pig, a snake and a cock are shown running on endless circuit which represent three poisons viz; ignorance, attachment and hatred. These three poisons are the driving force of suffering (*dukkha*). They should be avoided to get rid from the cycle of the *samsāra*. Ignorance is regarded as the primary cause of the suffering. All other causes are regarded as the byproducts of ignorance. The first layer white and black segments represent the “Theory of *Karma*”. In the dark half-circle, sentient beings are being pulled down by the demon to indicate that non-virtuous actions lead to lower states. But, in the white half-circle, persons face upward to indicate that virtuous actions lead to higher or more favorable states. A bodhisattva is leading them. The third layer of the Wheel represents the “First Noble Truth of Suffering”. The six realms of the Wheel of Life are full of sufferings. *Deva* realm is the representation of pride and pleasure. Because of these drawbacks, the gods forget the *Dharma* practice for the liberation from the *samsāra* and get reborn in the lower realm. They fight with the Demi-gods continuously as they feel proud of being god. Gods also lose their power gradually and need to die. So, god realm is also under the cycle of suffering. Demi-gods are suffered by continuous war. A human birth is considered the most favorable for spiritual realization because it contains a balance of pleasure and pain. Animals are eaten and tamed. Hungry ghost are suffered by hunger and thirst. The hell beings have constant suffering and relentless pain inflicted by furious and vengeful beings.



The outer layer of the Wheel of Life represents the “Dependent Origination (*Pratīyasamudpāda*)” The wheel holder, *Yama*, the god of the death, represents impermanence. At the top right corner of the Wheel, the Buddha appears pointing to the moon, which represents path to enlightenment, the Fourth Noble Truth. The moon, at the top left of the wheel, symbolizes liberation, the Third Noble Truth.

The Wheel of Life plays crucial roles in different Buddhist practices in Northern Buddhism.

## 5.2 Findings

The findings of the research are enumerated as follows:

- The Wheel of Life is one of the oldest illustrations of Buddhism that is seen in a painting at Ajanta Cave no. XVII, dated about 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It was flourished with the development of *Sarvāstivāda*. The Wheel of Life was designed by the Buddha himself as stated in *Divyāvadāna*. In Northern Buddhism, the Wheel of Ajanta was accepted whole-heartedly by adding some more artistic skills. It is painted right side of the main door of a dGonpa. But, Theravada Buddhism accepted ‘*Patīccasamuppāda*’ in mere principles, but not in exuberant paintings.
- The Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination and Karma theory are depicted in the painting of Wheel of Life. So, the Wheel of Life is the best representation of basic Buddhist basic teachings. That is why; the Wheel of Life is one of the best tools to teach the Buddha’s aim of life to the general people.
- The Wheel of Life is one of the Buddhist practices through art which can be read by all including illiterate persons that does not need any deep knowledge to understand its meaning. In other words, no esoteric knowledge is needed to understand it. The Wheel of Life plays great role in everyday life of the Tamang people. They always try to do wholesome works for knowing the rebirth in fortunate realms for life. They believe that the hell beings are the unwholesome doers in their previous lives. In this way, the Wheel of Life always reminds to the people about the present duties and next life. The death is most important event of life in Northern Buddhism which believes that there is possibility of liberation from the *saṃsāra* even after death. The death is the gateway to go from the *saṃsāra* to *Nirvana*. The Wheel of Life encourages people for the liberation from the *saṃsāra*. In death ritual of Buddhist Tamang community of PN VDC of Kavre district, the Wheel of Life plays significant roles. During the funeral procession,

the Wheel of Life Thangka is displayed. The Wheel of Life Thangka is displayed in different occasions; like *Lhosar* (New Year), *Chhyoi-Dopa* (*Dharani* Recitation), *Lha-shopa* (Worship of Tutelary Deity), *Ngowa* (ritual after death), *Ghewa* (death ritual). There is certain ritual of purification of the Six Realms after the death of a person. *Necher Chhyoi*, the text followed in *Minjyang* ritual, deals about the six realms. Lama reads and explains the sufferings of all realms and as well as the ways to follow. During *Minjyang* (Tib. *Jhyangpar*) process, some mantras of six realms of the Wheel of Life along with the name of the dead person are written on a sheet of Nepalese paper and burn it down so that the dead person could come out of *samsāra* and get liberation. Most of Lama Gurus lack specific Thangkas like *Bardo* Thangka, Wheel of Life Thangka etc. So, they use Thangkas whatever they have during different rituals. Most of the old dGonpas among Tamang community of PN VDC of Kavre district have only interior wall paintings and lack the outer paintings. But, newly built and renovated dGonpas do not miss the wall painting of the Wheel of Life. Lamas seem more concerned with the rituals rather than clarifying the philosophical aspects, whereas the philosophy is the foundation of the rituals. Tamang Thangka artisans seem to be unaware of the philosophical aspect of the Wheel of Life. So, many drawbacks are seen in their paintings.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

- Its popularity is significant for the Art and Architecture of Northern Buddhism.
- Every ritual is based on certain philosophy, it would be better if Lamas clarified this background of ritual with philosophy.
- It would be fruitful if the Wheel of Life iconography was used as a tool for teaching the Four Noble Truth, the Theory of *Karma* and Dependent Origination.
- Tamang Thangka artisans should learn the basic principles of Buddhism.
- Further study on its historical aspect and practices of the Wheel of Life is needed for Northern Buddhist cultural development.

## ANNEX I

### THE DIVYAVADANA

The *Divyāvadāna* or "Divine narratives" is a Sanskrit anthology of Buddhist tales, many originating in *Mūlasarvāstivādīn vinaya* texts. It may be dated to 2nd century CE. The anthology contains 38 stories in all. The stories themselves are therefore quite ancient and may be among the first Buddhist texts ever committed to writing, but this particular collection of them is not attested prior to the seventeenth century. Typically, the stories involve the Buddha explaining to a group of disciples how a particular individual, through actions in a previous life, came to have a particular karmic result in the present. A predominant theme is the vast merit (*puṇya*) accrued from making offerings to enlightened beings or at stupas and other holy sites related to the Buddha.

This is the list of stories contained in the *Divyāvadāna*:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Koṭīkarṇa-avadāna</i>                            | 20. <i>Kanakavarṇa-avadāna</i>                  |
| 2. <i>Pūrṇa-avadāna</i>                                | 21. <i>Sahasodgata-avadāna</i>                  |
| 3. <i>Maitreya-avadāna</i>                             | 22. <i>Candraprabhobodhisattvacaryā-avadāna</i> |
| 4. <i>Brāhmaṇadārikā-avadāna</i>                       | 23. <i>Saṅgharakṣita-avadāna</i>                |
| 5. <i>Stutibrāhmaṇa-avadāna</i>                        | 24. <i>Nāgakumāra-avadāna</i>                   |
| 6. <i>Indrabrāhmaṇa-avadāna</i>                        | 25. <i>Saṅgharakṣita-avadāna</i>                |
| 7. <i>Nagarāvalambikā-avadāna</i>                      | 26. <i>Pāṃśupradāna-avadāna</i>                 |
| 8. <i>Supriya-avadāna</i>                              | 27. <i>Kunāla-avadāna</i>                       |
| 9. <i>Meṇḍhakagrhapativibhūti-pariccheda</i>           | 28. <i>Vītaśoka-avadāna</i>                     |
| 10. <i>Meṇḍhaka-avadāna</i>                            | 29. <i>Aśoka-avadāna</i>                        |
| 11. <i>Aśokavarṇa-avadāna</i>                          | 30. <i>Sudhanakumāra-avadāna</i>                |
| 12. <i>Prātihārya-sūtra</i> (The miracles at Śrāvastī) | 31. <i>Toyikāmaha-avadāna</i>                   |
| 13. <i>Svāgata-avadāna</i>                             | 32. <i>Rūpāvatī-avadāna</i>                     |
| 14. <i>Sūkarika-avadāna</i>                            | 33. <i>Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna</i>                 |
| 15. <i>Cakravartivyākṛta-avadāna</i>                   | 34. <i>Dānādihikarṇa-mahāyānasūtra</i>          |
| 16. <i>Śukapotaka-avadāna</i>                          | 35. <i>Cūḍāpakṣa-avadāna</i>                    |
| 17. <i>Māndhātā-avadāna</i>                            | 36. <i>Mākandika-avadāna</i>                    |
| 18. <i>Dharmaruci-avadāna</i>                          | 37. <i>Rudrāyaṇa-avadāna</i>                    |
| 19. <i>Jyotiṣka-avadāna</i>                            | 38. <i>Maitrakanyaka-avadāna</i>                |

#### Rudrāyaṇa Avadāna

**Rudrāyaṇa-avadāna**, 37<sup>th</sup> story of the *Divyāvadāna* explains how the Buddha gave the first illustration of the Bhavacakra to King Rudrayaṇa. According to this story, at the time of the Buddha, King Rudrayana (a.k.a. King Udayana) offered a gift of a jeweled robe to King Bimbisara of Magadha. King Bimbisara was concerned that he did not have anything of equivalent value to offer as a gift in return. Bimbisara went to the Buddha for advice, and the Buddha gave instructions to have the first drawing of the Bhavacakra made, and he told Bimbisara to send the drawing to Rudrayana. It is said that Rudrayana attained realization through studying this drawing.

.....

(Source: <http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php/Divyavadana>)

## ANNEX II

### THE SAHADODGATA AVADANA (Divyavadana 21, Mithila Edition, page 185 ff.) Translated by Ven. Pasadiko

"Lord Buddha was staying at Rajagaha, [\*] in the Bamboo Grove, at the Squirrels' Feeding-place. Now, it was the practice of Venerable Mahamoggallana to frequent the hells for a certain time, then the animal-kingdom, also to visit the ghosts, the gods and men. Having seen all the sufferings to be found in the hells which beings there experience as they arise and pass away, such as maiming, dismembering and so forth; having witnessed how animals kill and devour others, how ghosts are tormented by hunger and thirst, how the gods lose (their heavenly state), fall (from it), are spoiled and come to their ruin, and how men crave and come to naught but thwarted desires, -- having seen all this he returned to *Jambudipa* (India) and reported this to the four assemblies. Whatever (venerable one) had a fellow-bhikkhu or a bhikkhu-pupil leading the holy life with dissatisfaction, he would take him to Venerable Mahamoggallana (thinking): 'The Venerable Mahamoggallana will exhort and teach him well'. And (truly) the Venerable Mahamoggallana would exhort and teach him well. Such (dissatisfied bhikkhus) would again lead the holy life with keen interest, even distinguishing themselves with the higher attainments since they had been taught and exhorted so well by the Venerable Mahamoggallana. \* [the familiar Pali forms of names are used throughout.] "At that time (when the Lord stayed at Rajagaha), the Venerable Mahamoggallana was surrounded by the four assemblies consisting of bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, pious laymen and women. 6 "Now the illustrious Enlightened Ones who know, (also) ask questions. Thus Lord Buddha asked the Venerable Ananda (why the second of his foremost disciples was surrounded by the four assemblies). Venerable Ananda then related Venerable Mahamoggallana's experiences and said that he instructed discontented bhikkhus with success. "(The Lord replied:) 'The Elder Moggallana or a bhikkhu like him cannot be at many places (at the same time for teaching people). Therefore, in the (monastery) gateways a wheel having five sections should be made.' "Thus the Lord laid down that a wheel with five sections should be made (whereupon it was remarked:) 'But the bhikkhus do not know what sort of wheel should be made'. "The Lord explained: 'The five bourns should be represented the hellish bourn, that of the animal kingdom, of ghosts, of men, and the bourn of the gods. In the lower portion (of the wheel), the hells are to be shown, together, with the animal-kingdom and the realm of the ghosts, while in the upper portion gods and men should be represented. The four continents should also be depicted, namely, *Pubbavideha, Aparagoyana, Uttarakuru and Jambudipa*. [\*] In the middle, greed, aversion and delusion must be shown, a dove symbolizing greed, [\*\*] a snake symbolizing aversion, and a hog, delusion. Furthermore, the Buddhas are to be painted (surrounded by their) halos pointing out (the way to) *Nibbana*. Ordinary beings should be shown as by the contrivance of a water-wheel they sink (to lower states) and rise up again. The space around the rim should be filled with (scenes teaching) the twelve links of Dependent Arising in the forward and reversed order. (The picture of the Wheel) must show clearly that everything, all the time, is swallowed by impermanence and the following two verses should be added as an inscription: Make a start, leave behind (the wandering-on) firmly concentrate upon the Buddha's Teaching. As He, Leader like an elephant, did Nalagiri rout, so should you rout and defeat the hosts of Death. Whoever in this Dhamma-Vinaya will go his way ever vigilant and always striving hard, Can make an end of dukkha here and leave behind *Samsara's* wheel of birth and death. \* [These have not been shown in the accompanying drawing and neither does modern Tibetan tradition represent them. They are, respectively the eastern western, northern and southern continents of the old Indian geography.] \*\* [In modern representations a cock is always shown.] "Thus, at the instance of the bhikkhus, it was laid down by the Lord that the Wheel of Wandering-on (in birth and death) with five sections should be made in the gateways (of monasteries). "Now brahmins and householders would come and ask: 'Reverend Sir, what is this painting about?' "Bhikkhus would reply: 'We also do not know!' "Thereupon the Lord advised: 'A bhikkhu should be appointed (to receive) visitors in the gateway and to show them (the mural).' 7 "Bhikkhus were appointed without due consideration (to be guest- receiver), foolish, erring, confused persons without merit. (At this, it was objected:) 'They themselves do not know, so how will they explain (the Wheel-picture) to visiting brahmins and householders?' "The Lord said: 'A competent bhikkhu should be appointed.'"

.....  
Translation by Ven. Pasadiko from the opening paragraphs of the *Sahasodgata Avadana, Divyavadana 21*,  
Mithila Edition, page 185 ff.

(Source: Bhikkhu Khantipalo (1995-2011). *The Wheel of Birth and Death Access to Insight*  
<http://enlight.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-AN/an35414.pdf> )

**ANNEX III**  
**THE AVALAMBAN SUTRA**

(Dating to before the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.)

**Translated by: S. Beal**

**Maudgalyayana's Descent into the Preta Realm**

Thus have I heard. Buddha at one time was residing in the county of *Sravasti*, in the garden of *Jeta*, the friend of the orphans. At this time Mugalan, having begun to acquire the six supernatural powers (*irridhi*), desiring above all things, from a motive of piety, to deliver his father and mother, forthwith called into use his power of supernatural sight, and looking throughout the world he beheld his unhappy mother existing without food or drink in the world of *Pretas* (Hungry ghosts), nothing but skin and bone. Mugalan, moved with filial pity, immediately presented to her his alms-bowl filled with rice. His mother then taking the bowl in her left hand, endeavoured with her right to convey the rice to her mouth, but before it came near to her lips, lo! The rice was converted into fiery ashes, so that she could not eat thereof. At the sight of this Mugalan uttered a piteous cry, and wept many tears as he bent his way to the place where Buddha was located. Arrived there, he explained what had happened, and awaited Buddha's instruction. On this the Master opened his mouth, and said, "The sin which binds your mother to this unhappy fate is a very grievous one; from it you can never by your own strength rescue her, no ! nor yet all the powers of earth or heaven, men or divine beings; not all these are equal to the task of deliverance. But by assembling the priests of the ten quarters, through their spiritual energy, deliverance may be had. I will now recount to you the method of rescue from this and all similar calamities." Then Buddha continued : "On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month, the priests of the ten quarters being gathered together ought to present an offering for the rescue of ancestors during seven generations past, as well as those of the present generation, every kind of choice food and drink, as well as sleeping materials and beds. These should be offered up by which they shall obtain deliverance from the pains, and be born at once in a condition of happiness in heaven." And, moreover, the World-honoured One taught his followers certain words to be repeated at the offering of the sacrifices, by which the virtue thereof would be certainly secured.

On this Mugalan with joy accepted the instruction, and by means of this institution rescued his mother from her sufferings.

And so for all future time this means of deliverance shall be effectual for the purpose designed, as year by year the offerings are presented according to the form delivered by Buddha.

Having heard these words, Mugalan and the rest departed to their several places, with joyous hearts and glad thoughts.

.....  
Source: Waddel, L. Austine. *Tibetan Buddhism*, Varanasi, Pilgrims Publishing, 2004.

**ANNEX IV**  
**THE HEART OF DEPENDENT ORIGINATION**  
**by Ārya Nāgārjuna**

**Homage to the ever youthful Mañjuśrī.**

The twelve specific component parts, which the Sage called dependent origination,  
Can be fully treated as three: defilement, action and suffering.

The first (ignorance), eighth (craving) and ninth (grasping) come under defilement;  
the second (mental activities) and tenth (existence) come under action,  
While remaining seven (consciousness, name and form, the six bases of sense  
perception, touch, feeling, birth, and aging and death come under suffering – hence  
twelve phenomena can be treated as three.

Out of this threefold defilement twofold action originates; out of this twofold action  
sevenfold suffering originates;  
And out of this sevenfold suffering threefold defilement originates;  
That is the wheel of existence turning again and again.

The whole world is just cause and effect, and a sentient being is no different.  
Phenomena which are void simply originate out of phenomena which are void.

In recitation, in a lamp, in a mirror, in a seal, in a rock-crystal lens, in a seed, in a  
tamarind, in a shout,  
And even in the transmigration of the components of personal existence, the learned  
understand that there is no transference taking place.

But the ignorant, who imagine even the most subtle thing can come to an end,  
Do not see the significance of origination from attendant causes.

There is nothing to be taken away and nothing at all to be added here;  
The truth should be seen as truth and anyone who sees the truth is released.

.....

**Translated by R.C. Jamieson**

Source: Jamieson, R.C. *Nagarjuna's Verses on: The Great Vehicle and the Heart of Dependent  
Origination*. New Delhi, D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd. 2000.

## ANNEX V

### Mahānidāna Sutta

The *Mahanidana Sutta*, "The Great Discourse on Causation," is the longest and most detailed of the Buddha's discourses dealing with dependent arising (*paticca samuppada*), a doctrine generally regarded as the key to his entire teaching. The Buddha often described dependent arising as deep, subtle, and difficult to see, the special domain of noble wisdom. There are many versions of the dependent arising model given in the Canon. Hence, it is useful for us to know their various applications. The *Mahā Nidāna Sutta*'s presentation of the dependent arising is mainly concerned with the relationship between consciousness and name-and-form. This relationship is, indeed, the heart of dependent arising.

- 
- **Mahā,nidāna Sutta: The Discourse on the Great Connections**  
(*Dīgha Nikaya 2, Mahā Vagga 2*)  
Translated by Piya Tan ©2003  
Source: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/5.17-Mahanidana-S-d15-piya.pdf>
  - **Maha-nidana Sutta: The Great Causes Discourse**  
Translated from the Pali by **Thanissaro Bhikkhu**  
Source:<http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.15.0.than.html>

**ANNEX VI**  
**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**A Case Study of the Wheel of Life Practice among Tamang  
Community of Pokhari Narayansthan VDC, Kavrepalanchok, Nepal**

Name: .....	Age: .....	Sex: .....
Social Status: .....	Occupation: .....	
District: .....	VDC: .....	Ward no.: .....
Tole: .....		

1. Have you ever seen a Thangka? Yes  No
2. How do you define Thangka? .....
3. Is there any member in your family involving in Thangka painting? Yes  No
4. Have ever seen the painting of Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*)? Yes  No
5. Where have you seen? At dGonpa  In Thangka Painting  In a Book
6. How do you define *Bhavacakra*? .....
7. What is it called in your language? .....
8. What are the different types of *Bhavacakra*? .....
9. Why is it painted on the wall of a dGonpa? .....
10. By whom is it designed /painted? By local Tamang Artisans  By others
11. How is it designed /painted? .....
12. Is any Lama appointed to interpret the illustration? Yes  No
13. What are the roles of the *Bhavacakra* in Tamang Buddhist practices? .....
14. Do you really belief in the existence of different realms of *samsāra*? Yes  No
15. Who are gods? .....
16. Who are demi-gods? .....
17. Who are human beings? .....
18. Who are hungry ghosts? .....
19. Who are hell beings? .....
20. What merit is gained reciting the mantra, *OM MANI PADME HUM*? .....
21. What merit is gained reciting the mantra, *A A HA SHA SA MA*? .....
22. Do you believe in past life and rebirth? Yes  No
23. Why is Thanka displayed in funeral procession and other various rituals? .....
24. What do you know about *Bardo*? .....
25. What do you mean by *Minjyang*? .....
26. Why is the *Minjyang* ritual performed? .....

**Focused Group for the Interview:**

Lama (Priest), Followers, *Tamba* (Expert of Tamang history and culture), *Bonbo* (Witch-doctor), Thangka Artisans etc. from PN VDC, Kavre.



## ANNEX VII

### TABLES

Table II  
**Different Between Gandahara and Mathura School of Art**

Gandhara School of Art	Mathura School of Art
1. Realistic style: Normal image 2. Usually wears a moustache. 3. Normal chest 4. Normal ear 5. Thin body structure 6. Heavy and folded drapery, which usually covers both shoulders. 7. Greek (Roman) style in Indian Subject matter 8. Usually plain <i>Aura</i> . In some image, <i>aura</i> is decorated at the edge by a zigzag line and slightly inclined to front. 9. The hair is arranged in wavy curls above the forehead with prominent <i>Usnisa</i> .	1. Idealistic/ Majestic style: Image with specific features 2. No moustache 3. Lion like broad chest 4. Fat body structure 5. Long ear 6. Light robe and covers only one shoulder 7. Own style 8. <i>Aura</i> is decorated 9. <i>Usnisa</i> on the head

Table III  
**Differences in the Hub**

Authors/Texts & dGompas' Paintings	Hub of the Wheel (Serially from a pig)
<i>Divyāvādāna</i>	a dove, a snake, and a pig
Tenzin Gyatso Dalai Lama XIV ( <i>The Wheel of Life: Buddhist Perspectives on Cause and Effect</i> ) & Wall Painting ( <i>Chhyorten Tashi Tamang Monastery</i> )	a pig, a snake and a rooster
Kulananda ( <i>The Wheel of Life</i> ), David Snallgrove ( <i>Indo-Tibetan Buddhism</i> ) & Wall Painting ( <i>Arya Avalokitesvara Dhayana Gompa</i> )	a pig, a cock and a snake
Palden Drakpa ( <i>Freeing Yourself from the Cycle</i> )	a pig, a pigeon and a snake
Wall Painting ( <i>Shree Guru Lhakhang Gompa</i> )	A pig and a cock + a snake (a cock and a snake coming out from the pig's mouth)
The Bon Wheel of Life	Pig body with three heads of; snake, pig, and cock; and with snake tail

Table IV  
**Differences in the Third Layer**

Authors/Texts	The Third Layer
Tenzin Gyatso Dalai Lama XIV ( <i>The Wheel of Life: Buddhist Perspectives on Cause and Effect</i> ), Kulananda ( <i>The Wheel of Life</i> ) and Meena Talim ("The Wheel of 'Law of Causation' in Ajanta Painting"), David Snallgrove ( <i>Indo-Tibetan Buddhism</i> ) & New version of the Wheel of Life	Six Realms
<i>Divyāvādāna</i> , Palden Drakpa ( <i>Freeing Yourself from the Cycle</i> ) and Old version of the Wheel of Life	Five Realms (god and demi-god together in a same realm)

Table V  
Differences in the Outer Layer

12 Links	Depictions	Authors/Paintings
1 <sup>st</sup> Link	An old blind person with a stick	T. Gyatso, Kulananda, P. Drakpa, D. Snellgrove
	A camel led by a man	Meena Talim ( <i>Ajanta</i> Painting)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Link	A potter making a pot	<i>Ajanta</i> Painting, T. Gyatso, Kulananda, P. Drakpa, D. Snallgrove
3 <sup>rd</sup> Link	A monkey	<i>Ajanta</i> Painting, T. Gyatso, Kulananda, P. Drakpa, D. Snellgrove
4 <sup>th</sup> Link	A man and a woman in a boat crossing through water	<i>Ajanta</i> Painting
	A boat	T. Gyatso, P. Drakpa, D. Snellgrove
	A boat with four passengers	Kulananda
5 <sup>th</sup> Link	A mask of the face of a man	<i>Ajanta</i> Painting
	A house with six windows	T. Gyatso, D. Snellgrove
	A house with five windows and a door	Kulananda
	An empty land and a house	Palden Drakpa
6 <sup>th</sup> Link	A man and a woman kissing or touching	T. Gyatso, P. Drakpa, D. Snellgrove
	A man and a woman embracing	Kulananda
7 <sup>th</sup> Link	An arrow or stick in the eye	T. Gyatso, Kulananda, P. Drakpa, D. Snellgrove
8 <sup>th</sup> Link	A drinking scene	T. Gyatso, Kulananda, P. Drakpa, D. Snallgrove
9 <sup>th</sup> Link	A man gathering fruit from a tree	T. Gyatso, Kulananda
	A monkey plucking more fruits	P. Drakpa, D. Snellgrove
	A man and woman having sexual intercourse	P. Drakpa
10 <sup>th</sup> Link	A woman sitting on a knees	<i>Ajanta</i> Painting
	A couple copulating or a pregnant woman	T. Gyatso, Kulananda, P. Drakpa, D. Snallgrove
11 <sup>th</sup> Link	Two persons sitting	<i>Ajanta</i> Painting
	A woman giving birth	T. Gyatso, Kulananda, P. Drakpa, D. Snallgrove
12 <sup>th</sup> Link	A feeble, weak man, one hand on the knee	<i>Ajanta</i> Painting
	An adult carrying burdens	T. Gyatso
	A man carrying a corpse	Kulananda, P. Drakpa, D. Snallgrove

Table VI  
Differences at the Top Right and Left Corners

Top Corner	Depictions	Authors/Painting
Top Right	The Buddha (standing and pointing towards the Moon)	T. Gyatso, Kulananda, P. Drakpa, Wall Painting ( <i>Arya Avalokitesvara Dhyana Gonpa, Chhyorten Tashi Tamang Monastery and Shree Guru Lhakhang Gompa</i> )
Top Left	The Moon ( with a rabbit in it)	Tenzin Gyatso Dalai Lama XIV, Kulananda
	The Moon	Palden Drakpa
	The Moon (with stanza)	Wall Painting ( <i>Shree Guru Lhakhang Gonpa</i> )
	Bodhisattva	Wall Painting ( <i>Arya Avalokitesvara Dhyana Gonpa, Chhyorten Tashi Tamang Monastery</i> )

Table VII

<b>The Relationship between the Wheel of Life and the Four Noble Truths</b>	
<b>The Wheel of Life</b>	<b>The Four Noble Truths</b>
• The Second Layer: Six Realms	• The First Noble Truth: The Truth of Suffering ( <i>Dukkha</i> )
• Hub: Pig, Snake and Cock (Three Poisons)	• The Second Noble Truth: The Truth of Cause of Suffering ( <i>Samudaya</i> )
• Top Left Corner: The Moon	• The Third Noble Truth: The Truth of the End of Suffering ( <i>Nirodha</i> )
• Top Right Corner: Standing Buddha, Pointing towards the Moon	• The Fourth Noble Truth: The Truth of the Path leading to the End of Suffering ( <i>Magga</i> )
<b>The Relationship between the Wheel of Life and Dependent Origination</b>	
• The Outer Layer: The Twelve Segments of the Wheel of Life	• Dependent Origination
<b>The Relationship between the Wheel of Life and Karma Theory</b>	
• The First Layer: The Black and White Segments of the Wheel of Life	• Karma

Table VIII  
dGonpas of P. Narayansthan V.D.C., Kavre

S. N.	Names of dGomapas	Sect	Names of main Lamas	Ward No.
1	<i>Shree Urgen Tharpeing</i>	Nyngmapa	Dorje Lama	4
2	<i>Tharpeing dGonpa</i>	Nyngmapa	Dorje Lama	4
3	<i>Thakchhen Dargeling dGonpa</i>	Nyngmapa	Amrit Narayan Lama	4
4	<i>Kashyapa Buddha Dargeling dGonpa</i>	Nyngmapa	Ratna Singh Lama	5
5	<i>Kashyau Buddha Jyangchhyuk Chhyorten dGonpa</i>	Nyngmapa	Dharma Singh Lama	5
6	<i>Sanga Chhyoiling dGonpa</i>		Gagan Dwoj Lama	6
7	<i>New Sanga Chhyoiling dGonpa</i>	Sakyapa	Krishna Bdr. Lama	6
8	<i>Arya Avalokiteswora Dhyana dGonpa</i>	Sakyapa	Kunga Dubsang Lama	7
9	<i>Temal Tharpeing Monastery</i>		Sanu Lama	8
10	<i>Domar Dekshaling Tomsumkunda dGonpa</i>	Nyngmapa	Ngawang Dorje Lama	9

Source: Field Survey, 2016 A.D.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### English Texts

- Bajracharya, Surendra Man. *Buddhist Heritage of Northern Nepal*. Lalitpur, Lotus Research Centre, 2008.
- Beer, Robert. *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*. London, Srinidia Publications, 1999.
- Buddhaghosa. *The Path of Purification*. Translated by Bikkhu Nanamoli, New Delhi, Samyak Prakashan, 2010.
- Davids, T.W. Rhys, Translators. *Dialogues of the Buddha*. vol. I, II & III, Reprinted, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2007.
- Dhammananda, K. Sri. *The Buddhist Way*. Taipei, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation.
- Dharmarakshita, translator. *Suttanipata*. Varanasi, Motilal Banarasida, 1977.
- Drakpa, Palden. *Freeing Yourself from the Cycle*. Dharamsala, the Library of Tibetan Wroks & Archives, 2013.
- Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. *A Manual on Formatting and Organizing Dissertations*. Kirtipur, Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, 2014.
- Farkas, Richard E. *Elements of Tibetan Buddhism*. New Delhi, Cambridge University Press India Pvt. Ltd., 2013.
- Gyatso, Tenzin, Dalai Lama XIV. *The Wheel of Life*. Translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins, forward by Richard Gere, 199 Elm Street, Wisdom Publications, 2015.
- . *The Meaning of Life*. Translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins, forward by Richard Gere, 199 Elm Street, Wisdom Publications, 2000.
- Horner, I.B, Translator. *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings: (Majjhima-Nikaya)*. vol. I, II & III, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004).
- Jacson, David P. *The Nepalese Legacy in Tibetan Painting*, New York, Rubin Museum of Art, 2010.
- Jamieson, R.C. *Nagarjuna's Verses on: The Great Vehicle and the Heath of Dependent Origination*. New Delhi, D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd. 2000.
- Kulananda. *The Wheel of Life*. Varanasi, Pilgrims Publishing, 2008.

- Landaw, Jonathan and Andy Weber. *Images of Enlightenment*. Reprinted, Boston / London, Snow Lion, 2006.
- MacKENZIE, D.N., Editor. *The 'Sutra of Sutra of the Causes and Effects of Actions' in Sogdian*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Maung, U Aye, Translator. *A Discourse on Paticcasamuppada*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Rangoon, U Min Swe, 2000.
- Napper, Elizabeth. *Dependent-Arising and Emptiness*. Boston, Wisdom Publications, 2003.
- Narada. *The Buddha and His Teaching*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Mumbai, Jaico Publishing House, 2013.
- Padmasambhav. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Revealed by Terton Karma Lingpa, translated by Gyurme Dorje, edited by Graham with Thuuten Jinpa, introductory commentary by Tenzing Gyatso the Dalai Lama XIV, New York, Penguin Books, 2006.
- . *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Discovered by Karma Lingpa, translated by Robert A.F. Thurman, first complete translation, London, HarperCollinsPublishers, 2012.
- Panta, Prem R. *Fieldwork Assignment and Report Writing*. Kathmandu, Veena Academic Enterprises, 1998.
- Powers, John. *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York/Colorado, Snow Lion Publications, 2007.
- Ratnam, M.V. Ram Kumar and K. Srinivas. *Buddhist Ethics in Impermanence*. New Delhi, D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 2011.
- Rezende, Tiffani H. *Life and Thanka*. Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2006.
- Rhie, Marylin and Robert A. F. Thurman. *Worlds of Transformation: Tibetan Art of Wisdom and Compassion*. Foreword by Dalai Lama XIV, edited by Robert A. F. Thurman and et al., New York, Tibet House in association with The Shelly and Donald Rubin Foundation, 1999.
- Ringu Tulku Rinpoche. *Daring Steps Toward Fearlessness*. New York/ Colorado, Snow Lion Publications, 2005.
- Rotman, Andy, Translator. *Divine Stories: Divyavadana*. Part I, Boston, Wisdom Publications, 2008.
- Santina, Peter Della. *The Tree of Enlightenment*, reprinted, Taipei, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1997.

Shakya, Mahendra Ratna. "Early Buddhist Stone Sculptures of Nepal." Dissertation submitted to the Central Department of Buddhist Studies, T.U., Kirtipur, 2062 B.S.

Shakya, Milan Ratna. *Ancient Stone Image of Buddha & Bodhisattva in Nepal*. Kirtipur, Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), 2011.

---. *Namo Buddhaya: A Buddhist Studies*. Kathmandu, Shrijana Devi Shakya for Buddhabhava, 2013.

Shakya, Min Bahadur. *The Iconography of Nepalese Buddhism*. Kathmandu, Handicraft Association of Nepal, 1999.

Shrestha, Romio. *Celestial Gallery*. Text by Ian A. Baker, foreword by Deepak Chopra, afterword by Robert A. E. Thurman, Om Books International.

Snellgrove, David. *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*. Bangkok, Orchid Press, 2004.

Sogyal Rimpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Edited by Gffney and Andrew Harvey, revised and updated ed., London and et al., 2008.

Talim, Meena, *Buddhist Art*, vol I, Delhi: Buddhist World Press, 2014.

The Modern Language Association of America. *MLA Handbook*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed., New York, the Modern Language Association of America, 2016.

Tsonkhapa. *Pratityasamutpadastutisubhasitahrdaram*. Edited by Gyaltsen Namdol, translated by Gyaltsen Namdol an Ngawang Samten, supervised by Shankar Tripathi, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Varanasi, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1994.

Waddel, L. Austine. *Tibetan Buddhism*, Varanasi, Pilgrims publishing, 2004.

Woodward, F.L., Translator. *The Book of the Kindred Sayings (Samyutta- Nikaya)*. Introduced by C.A.F. Rhys Davids, vol. IV & V, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2005.

### **Nepali Texts**

Bajracharya, Dunda Bahadur, Translator and Editor. *Digha Nikaya*. Lalitpur, Pavitra Bahadur Bajracharya and et al., 2000.

---. *Majjhima Nikaya*. Lalitpur, Pavitra Bahadur Bajracharya and et al., 2000).

Bhatanta Jatil, Translator. *Praticcasamudpada Dharma Deshana Chakra*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Bhatanta Jatil, 2069 B.S.

Bista, Dor Bahadur. *Sabai Jatko Phoolbari*, Reprinted, Lalitpur, Sajha Prakashan, 2071.

Gole, Mohan. *Tathyankama Adibasi Janajati*, Janasankhya, Bhasha ra Dharma. Udayapur, Aasha Maha Tamang, 2072 B.S.

- Jacson, David P. *The Nepalese Legacy in Tibetan Painting*. New York, Rubin Museum of Art, 2010.
- Jnanapurnika, Translator. *Pratīyasamutpada Mahan Upadesh*. Part one, Lalitpur, Shantisukhabas Prakashan Samiti, 1997.
- . *Pratīyasamutpada Mahan Upadesh*. Part two, Lalitpur, Shantisukhabas Prakashan Samiti, 2007.
- Lama (Sherpa), Ngawang Wosher. *Himali Kshetrako Nepali Boudha Parampara*. Kathmandu, Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), B.S.2063.
- Losang Namgyal Rinpoche, Interpreter. *Bodhipathdarpan*. Translated by Tika Sherpa, edited by Sampurna Kumar Lama and Punya Prasad Parajuli, Kathmandu, Namgyal Jhyangchhuv Chhyoiling Gumpa, 2012.
- Padmasambhav. *Bardo Thodol Chhenmo*. Translated and published by Mukesh Lama. Pal- Trul Rimpoche. *Kun Zang La-May Zhal-Lung*. Dolakha, Samten Choisling Gonpa, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 2068 B.S.
- Rana, Shridhar Shamsher. *Bodhipushpanjali*. Translated by Narayan Prasad Rijal, vol. 1, Byoma Kusuma Buddha Dharma Sangha, 2062 B.S.
- Samyaka Sambodhi Pranputra, translator. *Bishuddhimarga (The Path of Purification)*. Edited by Kondanya Sangharam, Kathmandu, Sukhi Hotu Nepal, 2001.
- Tamang, Ajitman, *Tamang Jatiko Chinari*, Lalitpur/Kathmandu, National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities/Nepal Tamang Ghedung, 2069.
- Tamang, Rabindra. *Tamang Rimthim: Tamang Sankar haruko Sankshipta Adyayan*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edi. Kathmandu, Shailung Books Pvt.Ltd. 2072 B.S.
- Tamang, Rudra Singh. *Tamang Rite and Culture: Introduction of Tamba, Bon & Buddhist Culture*. Kathmandu, Tamang Society Research and Development Centre, Nepal, 2004.
- Tamang Sanskar-Sanskriti Directory Committee. *Tamang Sanskar-Sanskriti Directory*. Darjeeling, India, Tamang Sanskar-Sanskriti Directory Committee/ International Tamang Conference, 2013.
- Thapa, Shankar. *Baudha Darshan Parichaya*. Kathmandu, Judgement Eyes Law and Company Pvt.Ltd, 2070 B.S.
- Tika, editor. *Bodhipathdarpan*. Kathmandu, Namgyal Jhyangchhyup Chhyoiling Gumba Thatha Baudha Jagaran Kendra, 2012.

## **Hindi**

Bagchi, S., editor. *Mulasarvastivadavinayavastu*. Vol. I, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Darbhanga, The Mithila Institute, 2000.

Basubandhu. *Vijnaptimatratasisshi*. Translated and edited by Mahesh Tiwari, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Varanasi, Chaukhamba Viddhyabhawan, 1995.

Dube, Akhilesvara Prasad, editor. *Pratiyasamutpada*. New Delhi, Northern Book Centre. 2005.

Pawan, Bina. *Bharatiya Murtikala ka Etihās*. Delhi, Easter Book Linkers, 1991.

Tararam. *Baudha Dharma Ka Mool Tatva*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., New Delhi, Samyak Prakashan, 2011.

## **Journal**

Sopa. "The Tibetan 'Wheel of Life': Iconography and doxography." *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1984, pp. 125-145.

## **PDF**

(Bhikkhu Khantipalo (1995-2011). *The Wheel of Birth and Death Access to Insight*)

<http://enlight.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-AN/an35414.pdf>

Caste Ethnicity Population.pdf

Divine Stories Book Preview\_0.pdf (*Divyavadana*)

Nagarjuna.pdf

National Population and Housing Census 2011 (Village Development Committee/Municipality) KAVREPALANCHOWK

[http://cbs.gov.np/image/data/Population/VDC-](http://cbs.gov.np/image/data/Population/VDC-Municipality%20in%20detail/24%20Kavre_VDCLevelReport.pdf)

[Municipality%20in%20detail/24%20Kavre\\_VDCLevelReport.pdf](http://cbs.gov.np/image/data/Population/VDC-Municipality%20in%20detail/24%20Kavre_VDCLevelReport.pdf)

(*Petavatthu*)

[https://what-buddha-said.net/library/pdfs/Stories\\_of\\_the\\_departed-petavatthu.pdf](https://what-buddha-said.net/library/pdfs/Stories_of_the_departed-petavatthu.pdf)

<http://mahamevnawa.lk/inenglish/stories-of-ghosts-from-the-petavatthu/>

Population Monograph vo3.pdf

Statistical Pocket Book 2014 (.pdf) - Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)

## **Internet sites (Accessed 12 January 2017)**

(*Divyāvadāna*)

[https://archive.org/details/pts\\_divyvadnacol\\_3720-0688](https://archive.org/details/pts_divyvadnacol_3720-0688)

<https://suttacentral.net/divy>



<http://www.chinabuddhistsmencyclopedia.com/en/index.php/Divyavadana>  
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/divyavadana>  
*(Rudrayanavadanam)*  
<https://suttacentral.net/skt/divy37>  
<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/khantipalo/wheel147.html>  
<http://www.himalayanart.org/pages/wheeloflife/index.html>  
[http://www.khandro.net/doctrine\\_rebirth.htm](http://www.khandro.net/doctrine_rebirth.htm)  
<http://traditionalartofnepal.com/the-wheel-of-life-explained/>  
[http://quietmountain.org/dharmacenters/buddhadendo/wheel\\_of\\_life.htm](http://quietmountain.org/dharmacenters/buddhadendo/wheel_of_life.htm)  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhavacakra>  
<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/depend.htm>  
<http://www.buddhanet.net/wheel2.htm>  
<http://www.buddhanet.net/wheel1.htm>  
<https://buddhismnow.com/2013/04/15/buddhist-wheel-of-life/>  
<http://ignca.nic.in/ex042019.htm>  
<http://www.uddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhistworld/about-pilgrim.htm>  
<http://webpace.ship.edu/cgboer/samsara.html>

### **Reference of Photos**

- **Field Study, 2016**
- **Thangka Art Foundation Pvt. Ltd.**  
Kathmandu, Nepal. Cell phone: +977-9860799545  
Email: buddha2038nepal@gmail.com & buddha2071nepal@yahoo.com
- **Himalayan Art Resources Inc.**  
17 West 17th St., 9th Fl. New York, NY, 10011& USA.  
E-mail: info@himalayanart.org & himalayanartresources@gmail.com
- **Buddha Thangka Painting Art School**  
Katheswoyambhu, Kathmandu, Nepal

Handwritten signature in red ink on a light green background. The signature is highly stylized and cursive, appearing to read "L. J. [unclear]".



*Signature*



*Signature*

