

Chapter Four

Religious Symbolism and Rituals in Nepal

Encompassing the Himalayas within its border Nepal nestles between India and Tibet. It is the geographical areas that are mostly responsible in determining Nepal's religious aura. In the northern sections, where Tibetan influence is dominant, Buddhism in its Lamaistic tradition is prevalent. In the densely populated southern lowlands which appears geographically the same with northern India, Hindu saivism dominates. And in the mid-region of Nepal merging of Buddhism and Hinduism can be seen. Nepal was an official Hindu State just some periods back. Now it is a secular state. But the influence of Kingdom is still there. Brahmans have an important influence both on the rulers of Nepal as well as on the masses of the people.

Tantric Hinduism along with the touches of tantric Buddhism has its dominance. The religious rituals, art and festivals of Nepal reflect blends of Buddhism, Hinduism and animism but intellectually, in the ideas and thought patterns of the Nepalese upper social class, Hindu traditions dominate.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism view salvation as a major purpose of religion; both consider concentration on non-worldly a chief means of achieving salvation. A basic tenet of both these religions, is faith in reincarnation-the idea that each person has had previous lives and will have future lives.

Salvation, the main purpose of life, is not in opposition to the pursuit of knowledge. Religion and learning are closely interrelated in Hindu tradition. The Brahmin are very influential in Nepal, directly on religious activities and indirectly on secular instruction. Intuition and mysticism merged with magic as means of dealing with the universe. Even the traditional myths of Nepal are expressed in religious and mystical terms. Religious observances form a major role in the Nepalese calendar.

In order to understand the development of Hinduism and Buddhism in Nepal, it is necessary to view the treasured past that has been interwoven with myths and real facts in the history of Nepal.

Nepal's civilization dates back several thousand years. It is a mixed culture of Indo-Aryans & Mongoloid peoples. There are certain indigenous tribes like Newaris, Thamangs, Magars, Gurungs, Tharus and Limbas. Among them some of them looks like Mongoloid physique, while others are Caucasian in appearance. The name 'Nepal' was found on a pillar at Allahabad from the Gupta dynasty around fourth century A.D. From that time till the late 18th century, Nepal was known for Kathmandu valley. There are various types of invasion, beginning with the Licchavi invasion, three or four centuries after the birth of Christ which make its culture richer. There are two major influences which are responsible for Nepal's present cultural tradition. One is religion which owes its origin in the Hindu tradition, with modifications from Mahayana Buddhism, and with political decisions influenced by the priestly caste. The second is militarism, rooted in the Kshatriya caste which is mixed with Tantric religious traditions, with power usually seized and held through armed violence. A Hindu dynasty, known as Mallas, rules Nepal during 13th century onwards, during which the Nepalese culture specially the arts entered a golden age.

During the 13th & 14th centuries, upper caste Hindus took refuge in the mountains of Nepal due to Muslim invasion. Among them the Rajputs who used to settle in central Nepal and by the mid-sixteenth century has overthrown the rule of Gorkha. In 1768 Prithvinarayan Shah conquered the Mallas of Kathmandu valley. Later the Ranas took the charge. Jung Bahadur Rana was the founder of a dynasty of Prime Ministers where the king becomes the religious and ceremonial head. After that there were revolutions by the royalists and the rule of the Ranas came to an end.

In fact without going into detail if we try to measure the pulse of the Nepalese people regarding the power structure, it may be seen that the country is ruled and administered largely by three groups; the Brahman Caste, the Kshatriya caste and the Newar tribe. Coming back to the religious blend of Nepal, if we try to measure then it will be clear that historically Nepal is a perfect blend of different religious flavour Buddhism from India and also from Tibet and animistic fervour have produced in Nepal a unique amalgam. There are Nepalese who are Buddhists and Nepalese Hindus and both religious groups contain strong element of Tantrism, a cult with primitive magical and animistic trends. Both Buddhists and Hindus participate in one another's festivals, even they worship at one another's temples.

Many Buddhist symbols need to be considered within the culture of the people who follow it. Therefore, many of the early symbols relate to ancient India and can be found in Hinduism as well, although possibly with a somewhat different meaning.

The historical Buddha lived around the sixth century BCE, but no Buddhist artifacts are known from before the third century BCE. In the scriptures, it is mentioned that the Buddha did occasionally use image like the 'Wheel of Life' to illustrate the teachings. The first archaeological evidence, mainly of ornamental stone carvings, comes from the time of the Emperor Asoka (273-232 BCE), who converted to Buddhism and made it a popular religion in India and beyond.

In the second century BCE, people started to excavate Buddhist monasteries in rock, creating a large amount of artwork to withstand the ages. Probably the earliest typical Buddhist monument is the stupa, which was often specially decorated. The first actual Buddha images appeared around the first century BCE, so until then the artwork was largely symbolic in nature. But with the advent of Vajrayana in the 6th century, the history of Buddhism completely turned as it gave more emphasis upon imagination, visualization, rites and rituals, mandalas and a great collection of symbolic items, as a chief forms of spiritual practices which still thrives today in Nepal.

The rich and symbolic art of South Asia remains vibrantly alive in the form of mandalas, thangkas and sculptures. The alliance between the physical emanation and their inner and hidden spiritual aspects have attracted scores of scholars to examine and interpret these phenomena.¹

The ritual tools, rites and the performer, the art and the artist become one when their spirit is dissolved into the very act of their performance. That is the true essence of Buddhist meditation. The various tools and symbols, mantras, mandalas are the mediums by which the yogi achieves liberation. As Sthaneshor Timalina says that according to tantras, the deity and the practitioner are identical in their true nature. Tantric art mediated the ordinary realm of experience in which the artist or practitioner remains bound with the medium and become one.²

Both of these religions Buddhism and Hinduism have influence each other regarding culturally and philosophically. In this regard Hugo Kreijger says, "...That both

Hindu and Buddhist painting were executed by artists of a Buddhist persuasion is very likely the reason that both groups of icons are so similar in conception and composition.”³

In modern psychology, Freud and Jung have clarified many aspects of the subconsciousness in terms of symbolism. In Buddhism, the Buddha too discovered the so called Anusaya Kilesa in our unconscious mind. In order to access these more hidden and subtle aspects of our mind, symbols can be very effective in mind transformation.

C.G. Jung defines archetypes as ‘primordial images’, or archetypal figures that become activated and then clothed with personally derived emotional feelings. This occurs when an emotional [or spiritual] situation develops that corresponds to a particular archetype. For example the ‘Wise Old Man’, the ‘Divine Child’, ‘All-Giving Mother’, ‘Patriarchal Father’, ‘Temptress’ or ‘Trickster’- all are symbolic, recurring figures in dreams, literature and religions. When the archetypal level of the collective unconscious is touched in a situation, there is emotional intensity as well as a tendency for symbolic expression. Even sacred animals have symbolic meanings. T.C. Majpuria says, “...These animal motifs are, thus, lively, varied real and imaginary.”⁴

Nepal has been a very fertile land for religious harmony and tolerance. There has been unique example of Nepal where Hinduism and Buddhism have prospered together. In Kathmandu, there are many temples where we find the status of Buddha being prayed. There are many communities in Nepal who follow both these religions. Simultaneously, in this connection, we can have beautiful examples like Newar communities who follow Hinduism and Buddhism together. In Nepal we find both the roots of Hinduism and Buddhism. The main cause of development of Buddhism in Nepal is that the daughter of this land Bhrikuti was wed-locked with Emperor of China and what Bhrikuti did, was that she spread the Nepalese values along with Buddhist sermons into vast land.

Hinduism and Buddhism are two main and most important religions in Nepal. Both of these religions coexist in Nepal. This coexistence can be seen in many syncretic images like those of Harihara, Lakshmi-Narayana, Budhanila-kantha, Shyambhu, Hanuman, etc. In truth, both these religions have merged into one another in such a way that it is difficult to find differences. Buddhism emphasizes the basic character of older and parental faith, and that is Hinduism. It has become a vision that Buddhism has been born out of Hinduism. Hinduism is commonly called the Brahmanical religion among academic

circles. Both of these have cultural and religious tolerance. The relationship originated and developed out of the innate spirit of tolerance of one another's common religious philosophy and this permeates the life of the Nepalese people.

Buddhists and Hindus live together. They understand each other. They worship each other's gods (Buddha, being worshipped as god). They visit temples as well as stupas. It is, therefore, easy for us to understand the practice of animal sacrifices and the ceremony of *Sraddha* performed by the Buddhists living promiscuously among the Hindus. It is also interesting to realize that the Buddhist texts have Sanskrit language like *Prajnaparanuta* and *Sadhanamala*. Many terms are found in Buddhism from Sanskrit language for easiness. Pali is the main language of this religion. Pali is the language in the earlier Buddhist literature.

The Buddhist society is also divided into several castes like the caste communities of the Hindus. The infusion of Tantricism brought in the practice of animal sacrifices in the Buddhist fold, bringing it still nearer to Hinduism. It also introduced a sense of equality among Hindu followers and brought about some relaxation of restrictions in the field of morals as well as the dismissal of untouchability which was widely prevalent in the Hinduism.

The cult of Vajrayana marked a synthetic merge between the two sister cults of Saiva and Buddhist deities. The deities have been mentioned in and across the entire range of the royal charters, decrees and other documents issued throughout the wide expanse of history of these two religions. Pratapa Malla and Srinivasa Malla had an agreement and that was written in a copper plate. The agreement announces eternal friendship between them and that invokes different deities comprising Taleju, Guheswori, Pasupatinatha, Karunamaya, Machchhindranatha and Harisiddhi. It encompasses the gods of Buddhists and Hindus alike.

Similarly, there is another agreement and that is between Yogendra Malla and Jitamitra Malla. This agreement invokes Pasupatinath, Guheswori, Karunamaya, Garuda-Narayana of Changu-Narayana, Vajrayogini and Harisiddhi. The coins of Yoga Narendra Malla mention the names of Karunamaya and Lokanatha, both representing Machchhindranath. The coins have Buddhist and Hindu deities. The name of Lokanatha,, a Buddhist deity, occurs on the coins of Yogendra Malla, Vishnu Malla and Tejanarsimha Malla of I.alitpur. Karunamaya is on some coins of the rulers. The coins of Jaya Prakasha

Malla, a historical ruler of Kathmandu, show Pasupatinatha, Guheswori, Taleju and Kamari.

Cultural and religious tolerance can be observed in some other aspects as well. Lokanatha and Vajrayogini, though these gods belong primarily to the Buddhist pantheon, are also worshipped by the Saivites. Though primarily the Buddhists worship in *stupas* and *chatiyas*, they are also visited for the worship and reverence by a large number of Hindus.

Hindus and Buddhists do not have any barriers between regarding their festivals and rituals. Getting across the barriers of social and cultural sects and castes, the Hindus and the Buddhists both have almost a uniform system of rituals and rites. Both perform *yajna* and *kirtan*, being the most important and compulsory part of the rituals, as no worshipping or ceremony is considered complete without it. *Charu*, a mixture of grains of barely, rice, sesame, all soaked in ghee, is put into the fire at the completion of the construction of a *Stupa* or a temple. During the *Pancha-bali*, both Hindus and Buddhists offer ceremonial sacrifices of goats, buffaloes, pigs, and fowls. Some of the festivals, rituals and their tools are briefly described here.

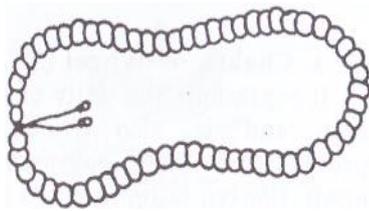
Agni is the personification of fire. It is the most sacred and ancient object of Hindu worship. Agni is fire on earth, lightening in mid-air and sun in the sky or heaven. Shiva often carries *agni* in one of his hands, especially in a dancing pose. It is also used as a weapon of war. Adi-Buddha also appeared from a flame. Agni, or God of fire, can also issue it from his body.



Shiva and Agni

Akshamala is a rosary made of beads. It is made of Rudraksha (*Elaeocarpus*) in

the Shaivite cult and of Tulasi (*Ocimum*) in Vaishnava cult. The Hindu creator God Brahma also carries a rosary in one of his hands. Saraswati, a Hindu and Buddhist goddess, also carries a rosary in one of her hands. Some Buddhist deities, like Avalokiteshvara, Prajnaparamita, Bhrikuti, Vasudhara, and other gods and goddesses, also have a rosary in their hands. The rosary has 108 beads, each of a uniform size, and a person always holds in the right hand when the beads are counted. When it is not being used, the *akshamala* is wrapped round the left wrist like a bracelet. A rosary is made of wood, seeds, bone, glass, crystal, turquoise, ivory. *Mantras* (magic formulae) are enchanted in course of computation. Repetition of the mystic formula or prayers contains the essence of a formal prayer, which acts as a powerful spell. The formula is in Sanskrit and is addressed to the deity. Different *mantras* are enchanted for different deities. Generally, Tibetan Lamas and laity chant the prayer of 'Om Mani Padme Hum' i.e. I hail to the jewel in Lotus. It is a prayer of Avalokiteshavara.



Akshamala, or Rosary



Akshamala

Ankusha (Goad) is the attribute of several Tantric deities. It consists of small wooden handle topped by a strong and sharp metal hook. When goad is surmounted by vajra, it is known as *Vajrankush*. Arrow (Tir) is a weapon for subduing the demonic force. It is used with a bow. It is a weapon carried by several deities, especially Kamadeva, God of love and passion whose bow and arrow are made of flowers. In the epic wars of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, several types of arrows were used. A Buddhist goddess, Kurkulla, holds in her principal pair hand a flowery bow charged with an arrow of flowery lotus. Chakra or Wheel represents the unity of all things and is also symbolic representation of Sakyamuni himself. *Chakra* is represented on various monasteries. Beside the *chakra*, there are shown two deers which were the first disciples of Buddha when he delivered his first sermon in Sarnath (India). This symbol is also called in Tibetan language *ridag choekor* and is depicted over the main entrance of almost every

monastery, especially on Transhilumpo at Shigaste and Jokhang Temple in Lhasa. Vishnu, one of the Hindu trinity, also holds a *chakra* in one of his hands. Krishna, incarnation of Vishnu holds a *chakra* or wheel as a weapon.



Wheel or Chakra

Conch Shell or Shell is called trumpet of victory and symbolises the spoken word. Right-handed conch shell is very sacred. In the epic of Mahabharata, conch shell was blown in the beginning of war was called *Panchajanya*, i.e. born of five. Sound is associated with primeval. It represents cohesive part of oneness and origin of elements. Indra also carries a conch shell called Devadutta. Lotus Flower (*Padma*) symbolises purity as the flower grows out of the mud. Similarly salvation can be attained in this world. It is called *Pema* in Tibetan language. Lotus is ultimate goal or enlightenment. It points out that love is free from earthly matters. Umbrella or Chatra is a symbol of early kingship and world-rule and protection of religion. Several icons are shown having canopy of umbrella. Gold Fish or Matsya symbolises spiritual liberation just as water permits fish to lead its activities freely. So Tibetan belief is that the soul of a human being is set free. Varuna, a Hindu God, rides on a fish. Vishnu had a fish incarnation. Fishes are also sacred for the Hindus. Fish represents truth and transcendental wisdom. Vase or Kalash symbolises purity. It is called in Tibetan language as Bhumpa. It represents a repository of wealth, good health and long life. Hindu Goddess Lakshmi also holds *kalash* in one of her hands.



Krishna blowing conch



Lotus



Umbrella (Chatra)



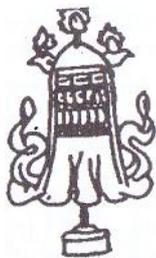
A pair of fish



Holy Vase

Banner symbolises victory and fortune. It is called in Tibetan as Gyaltsen. It also

symbolises good over evil forces, which hinder the success of noble goals. It also proclaims victory of good over evil. Tibetans use it in procession. Knot of Eternity, also called in Tibetan language *Palbhen*. Symbol of Eternity is law without beginning and end. It is also called lucky net or *brahmajala* representing the theories and philosophies of the universe. Aum (Om) is the symbol of the absolute and this sacred word encompasses the whole universe and it includes the past, present and future. *Om* is the essence of all that is sacred in the Hindu thought. It is chanted in the beginning of meditation, prayer, practice of yoga, and in fact all the time. It is past, present and future and goes beyond periphery of time. It is beyond the symbol of *Brahman* or universal soul. Om is the most potent of all *mantras*. It represents the universal knowledge. This eternal world is all: what was, what is and what shall be and what beyond is in eternity. Om is the mystic syllable of AU-M. It is venerated both by the Hindus and Buddhists. Devotees regard it very sacred and chant it only by lips. It is written when all void becomes manifested. Adi-Buddha also proceed from *Om*. In the word *Aum*, Adi-Buddha which is formless and passionless is represented in Triratna, i.e. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The letter AUM is the seed mantra of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, i.e. Tri-ratna. Aum is sublime and eve' thing originated from 'Om'. Most widely known mantra (magic formula) is the prayer 'Om Mani Padme Hum'. This prayer is dedicated to Avalokiteshvara.



Banner Endless links or knots of eternity



Aum

Axe is an important weapon of war. It is carried by Parshuram, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu. He descended to fight against Kshatriyas, the warrior caste at the request of Brahmins. It is also held by ferocious Tantric deities. In Buddhism it symbolizes the severance of worldly attachments. Sometimes Vajras are also fixed to it. Bell (Ghanta) represents female aspect and stands for *prajna* or wisdom. During worship, it is usually held in left hand while vajra or *dorje* in right hand. Bell and Vajra are inseparable ritual objects during worship. Symbolically ringing of tinkling bells during *arti* (waving of lamp) is to keep out other noises so that worshipper can concentrate on prayer. Bhumba (Water

vase) is used for keeping water. Water is required both in Hinduism and Buddhism in various religious ceremonies. Holy vase for keeping sacred water is called *kalash*. It is in the form of a jar with curved pipe for pouring water out of it. Sometimes, it is ornamented with semi-precious and precious stones. Holy vase made of metal is known as *bhumba*. Water is most important for rituals of both Hindus and Buddhists. Water is colourless, transparent, odourless, tasteless liquid. It is compound of oxygen and hydrogen (H₂O). Water from sacred rivers and ponds is used for rituals.

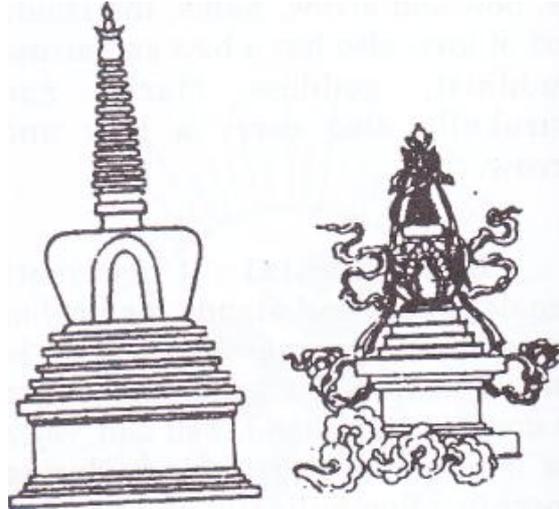
ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

On Mani Padme Hum

Bina (Lute) is a stringed musical instrument which is the favourite of Saraswati, Hindu and Buddhist Goddess of Wisdom, Learning and Arts. In Tibet, Mahasaraswati is depicted also with vina. Narad, a Hindu saint, always goes about with a lute. Chaitya represents the Buddhist universe and is a Buddhist sanctuary. It has square or round spires as steps on the capital. Each one represents a heaven. The uppermost is regarded as the highest peak of Mt. Sumeru, a mythical mountain when Bodhichitta loses itself in sunya (nothingness/void). On the four sides are depicted Dhyani Buddhas, i.e. Akshobhya in the east, Ratnasambhava in the south, Amitabha in the west, and Amoghasiddhi in the north. Sometimes, Vairochana is also depicted. Otherwise he is considered as centre of the *mandala*. In Nepal, they are called Pancha *Buddhas* or also called Tathagata's shrine and reliquary. In Tibet, Chaitya is regarded as a receptacle for offerings. It is a solid conical masonry structure intended as relic-holders. It is erected either in the memory of Buddha himself or some Tibetan saints. It is a massive hemisphere or solid dome called *garbha* or womb enclosing the relics. It is surrounded by elaborate plinths and crowned by a square capital called *toran*. The spire is called *chudamani* of 13 step-like segments which represent 13 Buddhist heavens. It is surmounted by a bell shaped symbol called *kalash* or holy vase. Above it is a tapering pinnacle having a lotus flower, crescent moon, globular sun and finally surmounted by a tongue-shaped spike representing sacred light or *jyoti* or Buddha. In the niche, a small image of Buddha is sometimes placed.



Saraswati with Bina



Chaitya or Chorten

Chakra (Wheel) symbolises rotation of the world and also represents the wheel of *Dharma* (righteousness). Hindu God, Vishnu or Krishna, always carries a *chakra* or wheel. It is also used as a weapon. In Buddhism, it symbolises the wheel of law which turns twelve times or makes three revolutions for each of the four noble truths. It has eight spokes indicating eight-fold paths of salvation. *Chakra* is also depicted on the top of the Tibetan monastery with two deers as disciples. Here *chakra* also represents the Buddha. According to the *Kundalini Tantra*, there are seven *chakras* of the subtle body. The adept meditates on each power centre either in its own right or with the aid of external *mandala yantra*. There are seven chakras. The purpose of the Kundalini yoga is its awakening on which develops super-normal powers. When the coiled serpent *kundalini* makes its upward journey, it becomes connected with different *chakras* and the gradual illumination of each *chakra* brings attainment both on physical and mental planes. The first chakra is called *Muladhara chakra* situated at the root centre above the anus below the root of the penis. Above it is *Svadhithana chakra* which supports life breath. The third chakra is *Manipura* or lotus of the Navel. Next to it is *Anahata chakra*, which is the centre of the unstruck sound. The fifth chakra is called *Visuddha*. It is the centre of great purity situated in the pharyngeal region. The sixth chakra is named *Ajna*. It lies between the eyebrows and is known as the centre of command. The seventh chakra is called *Brahmachakra* or *Sahasara* or lotus of thousand petals. Meditation of these *chakras* helps one to attain various steps of realization. The *Sahasara chakra* is actually the mind, which controls all activities.

Pharsa (Battle Axe) is also called *Pa*. It is held by ferocious deities of Buddhism. Symbolised severance or cutting away of worldly attachments. It is a weapon which was

held by Parshuram, who exterminated Kashtriyas and help Brahmins. Parshuram was 6th incarnation of Vishnu. Dharmadhatu has different meanings in different context. It is also called *Dharma* realm or cosmos, universe. It also means mind, realm of truth. According to the *Swayambhu Purana*, Swambhu Dharamdhatu, Sunya rupa, etc. are synonyms. It is depicted in the stupa. *Dharmadhatu Jnana* is wisdom of all pervasive awareness. Dhoopdani or Incense Burner is a pot for burning incense in as an offering to both Hindu and Buddhist deities. It symbolises the fragrance of God's love. Incense is waved before icon. Dipa ia the light fed with *ghee* (melted butter) and offered to Hindu and Buddhist deities. It symbolises dispelling of ignorance and the illumination of mind and knowledge.

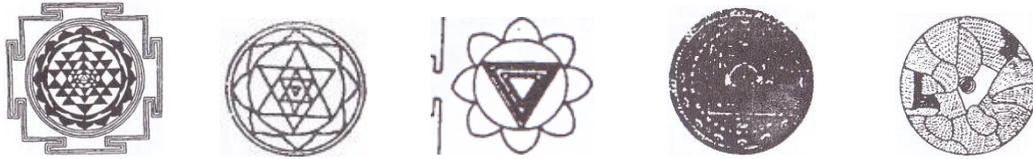
Mandala (Tibatan, Kyilokor) is a circular and spherical diagrams for visualization during religious practices. Mandala is the magic circles or symbolic offsprings. They are timeless and all-embracing.



Mandala

Mandala is one of the great symbols of human experience. It is the passage from state to state from material to spiritual. Its centre is eternity. Its periphery is perfection. There are different kinds of mandalas. *Shiva-Shakti Mandala* is the most important and most universal Hinduist mandala. It is also called Sri Yantra. It is a complex arrangement of triangle and lotus leaves. It expresses the whole motive energy of the universe. It is delicate balance of male and female principles. Downward position of triangle synthesises Shakti, the female principle which is active and creative. Shiva is the male principle and supreme consciousness. It reveals dualism. *Kali Mandala* is concerned with goddess Durga. Durga is greatly worshipped in Tantrism. At the centre of the yantra, Kali, the creative force of world is represented. It symbolises ceaseless cycles of destruction and renewal. In the mandala, Kali is represented as goddess or Triangle pointing downward. *Buddha Mandala* –is a form of mandala that has representation of Buddhism: five elements, five colours, five objects of senses, the five senses. Deities personified are

Vajrasattva as divided into five Buddhas: Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratansumbhara, Amitabha and Amoghasiddhi. Each one is associated with a particular colour, personality and a passion. *Vishnu Mandala* has Vishnu or one of his incarnations in the centre.



Mandala or Magic circles Shiv-Shakti Mandala Kali Mandala Buddha Mandala Vishnu Mandala

Naga (Tibatan, Lu) is a serpent demigod (mermaids). Gautama's throne was supported by snakes. Buddha was also protected by snakes while meditating. Pustaka is a book of palm leaves oblong in size or a manuscript which is also oblong. Hindu God Brahma carries a sacred manuscript, the *Vedas*, in one of his hands. It is a symbol of wisdom. In Buddhism, the book represents the *Prajnaparamita*, a scripture of transcendental wisdom. This book was supposed to have been given by Buddha to Nagas for safe keeping till mankind becomes wise enough to understand it and it was recovered by Nagarjuna, a Buddhist saint, who founded Mahayana school on the basis of its teachings. In Buddhism, *pustaka* is the symbol of Manjushri, Prajnaparamita (Name of another goddess of the same name as that of scripture), Avalokiteshvara, Vasudhara, Chunda, etc. In some scriptures, a book is shown kept on a lotus flower.

Swastika (Fly-foot cross) is the compound word made of *su+asti* or that which is good. Swasti means auspicious, benevolent, a good deed or good wishes. It is considered auspicious and painted to ward off evil spirit. Its origin goes back to the Vedic times (4500 - 2500 B.C.) or may be earlier. Seals of swastika symbol have been found in Harappan excavation, which dates back about 2000 years. Swastika is a form of Greek cross. Ends of arms are bent at right angles. Right-handed Swastika moves in clockwise direction. Left handed swastika moves in counter clockwise direction. Hindus consider left-handed swastika as evil omen and suggest never to be used. However, in Bon religion of Buddhism, left-handed swastika is represented. In Hinduism, swastika represents Sun or Lord Vishnu. In the *Puranas*, it is mentioned as Sudarshan Chakra or wheel of Lord Vishnu. It symbolises constant changes in universe. Swastika is also associated with Sun as it is regarded that its arms represent rays of Sun. Swastika also represents god of fire and Ganesh. In the *Sidhanta Saar*, the hubs of swastika represent navel of Vishnu and four lines as four faces of Brahma. Swastika is worshipped during religious rites. In Hinduism,

during Diwali or Tihar, Hindu businessmen open their new account books and decorate it with swastika symbol and the words *Subha Labha* i.e. Auspicious profit. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, is also worshipped. Swastika is a symbol of good augury.



Swastika

Trishula (Trident) is also called *sula* the favourite weapon of Shiva and represents three functions i.e. creation, protection and destruction. It may also represent three *gunas* (qualities) i.e. *Sattva* (centripetal attraction of existence), *Rajas* (revolving of tendency called activity or multiplicity) and *Tamas* (rhythmic division controlled by time and space). It is also called Agni, A Vedic god. Hindu ascetics of Shaivite faith also carry it with them as it is regarded as destroyer of enemies. In Buddhism, it represents Tri Ratna (Three jewels) i.e. Buddha, Dharma (righteousness) and Sangha (Monastic order) and is carried by Mahakala, Padma Sambhava, Yellow Tara, Jambhala and Simhanad Avalokiteshvara.

Vajra (Tibatan, Dorje) is a small metallic object also called the Thunderbolt, which destroys all kinds of ignorance and enemies. It is indestructible. It is a symbol of Hindu God Indra. In Tantrism, Vajra symbolises male principle when it is held in the right hand. Bell symbolises the female principle when it is held in the left hand. The interaction leads to enlightenment. It is believed that Buddhist God got Vajra from Hindu God Indra and slightly modified by closing the points of darts. Vajra of Hindu gods has three flat darts, the points of which do not touch like those of Tibetan Vajras. The Tibetan variety is round and has four darts and the points are closed. Thus, it appears in the form of a lotus bud. A fifth dart runs through the centre of Vajra. Thus, there are 5 darts. Vajra represents 5 bodies of Dhyani Buddhas. In Vajrayana school of Buddhism, Vajra is the symbol of lingo or male sex organ.

The word Vajra is also used to designate a school of Buddhism called Vajrayana or the path or way of Vajra. This sect was the successor of the Mahayana, the great path. In Tibet all prayers, recitations and invocations are accompanied by several ritual objects,

including vajra or dynamite or master cutter which destroys everything and which is a symbol of boundless power. The double Vajra is the attribute of Bodhisattva Amoghasiddhi and his consort Tara. Vajra stands for skill or *Upaya*. Double thunderbolt is called *Vishva Vajra*. Sometimes, Vajra is placed vertically on a lotus.



Vajra

Wheel of life refers to the Bhavchakra mudra. It is also the wheel of transmigration. This type is very common and explains the Buddhist conception of life, death and birth. The wheel is held by a demon in his clutches. It is symbolic of impermanence. The depiction in the hub is symbolic of lust, anger, ignorance, and cardinal sins. In the segments of the wheel different worlds or rebirths are shown. In the outer rims are shown 2 scenes which represent the various stages through which man passes after birth. The wheel of life is painted, especially at the entrance of monasteries. It is the symbol not only of the mystery of evil and stress in life but of the teachings of Buddha. It is the form of an endless chain which consists of 3 animals, a pig, a red bird and a green snake swallowing each other's tails. These signify the sins of obstinacy, ignorance, evil desire and bad feeling. The wheel of Buddhism is divided into 12 pictorial symbols, each showing a different side of the universal senses.

Yuga is a period in the Hinduism. Hindus do not believe in linear system of time but they believe in cycles. Cycle of time is divided into 4 periods called yugas : Krita yuga (Satyuga), Age of Truth (Treta yuga), Dwapar yuga, Kali yuga (Age of darkness).

Gau is a small metal amulet container or prayer box carried by many Tibetan Buddhists as a portable shrine or altar. The Gau usually contains an image of a personal deity, a blessed written prayer or a sacred yantra diagram and a small offering of rice. Gaus may vary considerably in size and shape, depending on the requirements of the owner. Smaller gaus range in size from 2 cm to 10 cm in diameter are often worn as jewelry and thus may be made of beaten silver or gold and heavily decorated inside and out with

precious stones or carvings. Larger gaus may have a window in front to view the contents and are generally encased in a protective cloth bag and carried slung over the shoulder.



Gau

A prayer wheel is a cylindrical wheel on a spindle, in which a scroll is placed with the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum written hundreds, even thousands of times. The wheel is spun in a clockwise direction (based on the movement of the sun across the sky), allowing with each revolution the accumulation of as much merit as though all of the mantra inscriptions were read aloud. Thus the more prayers a wheel holds, the more powerful it is considered to be. Traditionally, Tibetans and Nepalese use prayer wheels to accumulate merit and good karma; any accumulated merits that an individual may gather during a session of use are freely given to all other sentient beings. A prayer wheel should be held almost upright and spun smoothly and slowly; greater benefit is achieved if the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum is recited as the wheel is turned.



Prayer Wheel

In Hinduism and Buddhism, funeral rituals have some similarities and differences. These rituals are in religious tradition. Hindu priests and Buddhist Lamas provide spiritual

guidance to the dead on its ultimate journey to the eternal world. They provide elaborate rituals needed to propitiate gods and deities so that the soul may be given undisturbed passage by gods to its next destination. In Buddhist funeral ceremony, they convince the soul that it no longer belongs to this mortal world. They convince that it now needs to get prepared to travel to the ethereal world. The main aim behind such complex funeral ceremonies is to ensure that the departed soul doesn't get any difficulties in the netherworld for lack of proper guidance on way to heavenly destiny.

The Hindus, on the other hand, have a strong belief that the soul must hasten the departure of soul. They believe that once the person is dead, the soul prepares to depart immediately on its karmic journey. Therefore, they should cremate the body as soon as practicable. They think that the soul, otherwise, will linger on to this side of the world. According to the Hindu customs, the body is taken to the holy grounds and cremated as soon as possible.

It is customary for the Buddhists to bury their dead, but in some parts of the world, partly because of lack of burial grounds and partly because of Hindu influence, they cremate their dead and share the same burning ghat (river bank) with the Hindus. Hindus consider the bank of a sacred river good and holy for the cremation.

Like the Buddhists, the Hindus follow a large regiment in the disposal of the body. As the Brahmins chant funereal hymns, the living male member of the deceased family sets the first fire to the pyre. Unlike the Buddhists, who prefer immediate dispersal of the ashes over the river, the Hindus collect them in an urn for disposal in a special year-end ceremony. Besides the rituals, there are varieties of gods and goddesses who are common to both Hindus and Buddhist.

There is a figure of *Mahankal* in Kathmandu which is an emanation of Akshobhya. The imposition of his figure in miniature on the forehead indicates that. Other popular deities are Bodhisatwa Lokesvara under the name of Machchhendranatha and Taleju as a manifestation of Siva-Durga and Buddha Tara.

Hanuman is the great devotee of Rama. He is also included into the fold of Vajrayana. We can see Hanuman ensconced on an elevated seat in both Buddhist *Viharas* and Hindu temples. The Malla rulers adopted the figure of Hanuman for their banner. They had Hanuman's figure installed at the gates to the royal palaces at Kathmandu.

Bhaktapur and Lalitpur. Later the name of Hanuman Dhoka was given as in the case of the old palace at Kathmandu.



Hanuman Bhairava/Hanu Bhairava, consecrated in Patan Museum to protect it from enemies

Bhairava is a form of Siva. He receives homage from Hindus as well as Buddhists. He is called *Matapode* in common parlance. The figure of Bhairava is marked by a *mundamala*, which is a garland of human skulls. The figure has also a snake which is always with Siva.

Bhimasena is a hero in the Mahabharata. He is often defied by the Newar traders, but meanwhile they worship him in the expectation that he could bestow prosperity upon them in their profession of commerce and trade. Bhimasena has attributes of Siva and these attributes have been mentioned in the verses of Pratapa Malla. Pratapa Malla calls him *Sivapura*.

Pratapa Malla built a temple for an image of *Vasuki*. Vasuki was presented in the form of Narayana or Vishnu. Vasuki as the snake provides with enormous coils a seat for Vishnu. Snake is worshipped as god on the occasion of *Naga-Panchami* in the month of Sravana (July-August). They worship the snake god during the rains of the month. The worship is done as a propitiatory act, both by Hindus and Buddhists alike.

Buddha is supposed to be 9th incarnation of Vishnu. Buddha came to be regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu as early as the 6th or 7th century, as also Krishna, who was recognized as such in the *Amarakosha*, a work of the 5th century, wherein he was described as the son of Vasudeva. It was the *Bhagavata Purana* highlighting the Krishna cult that first recognized Buddha as an incarnation. This was emphasized by the poet *Jayadeva* in his *Gita Govindam* several centuries later. The belief still holds strongly

among people in both Buddhism and Hinduism.

One of the oldest cults that prevail in the Indian subcontinent is that of the *Mother Goddess*. She is said to be representing various aspects of the mind such as anger, greed, envy, arrogance, eavesdropping, chimera and fault-finding, etc. The cult of the Mother Goddess in the form of *Azima* or grandmother was universally in vogue in Nepal and accepted by all. Female deities in Buddhism reflect and represent the aspects of the *Matrikas* of the Brahmanical religion. The role *Matrikas* in Buddhism is of great importance. King Pratap Malla mentioned and called in verses Vajrayogini Ambika (mother or Parvati), and Ugratara Nila-Sarasvati and Ekajata as representatives of Bhagavati herself. This is also a proof of blending of the two faiths. Without any doubt, this can be held as divergently convergent status of these two religions. This spirit underlies and emphasises the equation of *Tulaja* with the *Bhavani* of the Brahmanical faith and *Ugratara* of the Buddhist conception.

The goddess *Sitala* is shown to be presiding over the ailment of small-pox. She is also called *Azima*. There is a shrine of hers at premises of *the Svayambhu stupa*. She is worshipped by the Buddhists under the name of *Hariti*. This is very similar adoption like that of the Siva *linga* itself as the representative of *the Buddha*, in the mountainous regions. The deliberate adoption as well as adaptation is seen in *the practice of* worshipping the image of *Pasupatinath* as Buddha at *Deo Patan* once a *year*. To retrace our steps, *Sitala* is considered as inauspicious, riding on a donkey and being associated with a broomstick, a winnowing fan and pitchers. The thin veils which may separate the two deities are waved away by the adoptive and tolerant spirit of the adherents of both the sects of Hinduism and Buddhism.

The cult of *Kumari* is celebrated as a festival in Nepal, especially in Kathmandu and Lalitpur. Both Buddhists and Hindus worship *Kumari* as a goddess. The practice of worshipping a living goddess- usually a young girl is very distinct cult of Nepal. A young girl is chosen with much care. She is marked by auspicious signs and of noble upbringing and nature. This vogue is still popular among the Hindus. The Bengalis, on occasions of the Durga Puja, attribute the qualities of Goddess Durga to a young girl and worship her in living form.

In Nepal, the practice of the worship of *Kumari* in living form, includes the annual celebration of a processional festival (*Kumari Jatra*). This festival was introduced by Jaya

Prakasha Malla. It still continues to this day. In this annual autumnal festival, the chariots of *Ganesa and Bhairava* proceed that of Kumari herself. The selection of the living goddess is, however, confined to the families of Buddhist priests. Nevertheless, both Hindus and Buddhists pay homage to her as to any other deity.

The Ganesa's function is primarily celebrated as Ganesh is believed to be a destroyer of evils and obstacles, and bestower of success. Ganesh has been adopted and is worshipped in this role by both the Hindus and the Buddhists, from their Brahmanical brethren. His figure is placed at the entrance of monastries and temples. He is variously depicted with two, four, six, eighteen, or twenty hands, with an increasing number of attributes. He is fully adopted in the *Vajrayana* pantheon. He is worshipped and conveyed by the *Sadhanamala*, and the cult is known to have travelled as far as China. He is worshipped in the intermediate region of Tibet. For example, there is a sixteen-handed figure of *Ganesa* in a shrine to the south-west corner of Ranipokhari, opposite the north-west corner of Ratna Park (Kathmandu), accompanied by his spouse *Siddhi* (success personified) and that is very distinctive. Ganesh is also the guardian of the Bodhisattva Kumari and Mahankal alike in Nepal and Tibet.

Another example of blending is in the case of *Budhanilakantha* (Anantasayana Vishnu). That is in a village to the north-east of Kathmandu. He gets regard as Nilakantha Lokesvara by the Buddhists. The name Nilkantha is an attribute of Siva. It is said that he swallowed poison churned out of the ocean. This deity has, therefore, aspects of Vishnu, Siva and Lokesvara. The deity receives homage and reverence from the worshippers of the both religious sects.

In the same way, Gorakhnatha is linked both with Machchendranatha and with Lokesvara in Lalitpur. Gorakhantha is also involved in the *Bisket Jatra* of Bhadgaon and of *Vajrayogini* in Sankhu. The features of *Lokesvara, Tara, Pancha Buddhas, Prajna Parantita*, and Emanations of Sakyamuni and also the trinity gods are placed in the niche of many monasteries. These all details suggest and confirm the synthetic merge of both religious sects- Hinduism and Buddhism.

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