

An Exhibition of Rare Thankas

by

Central Institute of Buddhist Studies

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Matighar, IGNC

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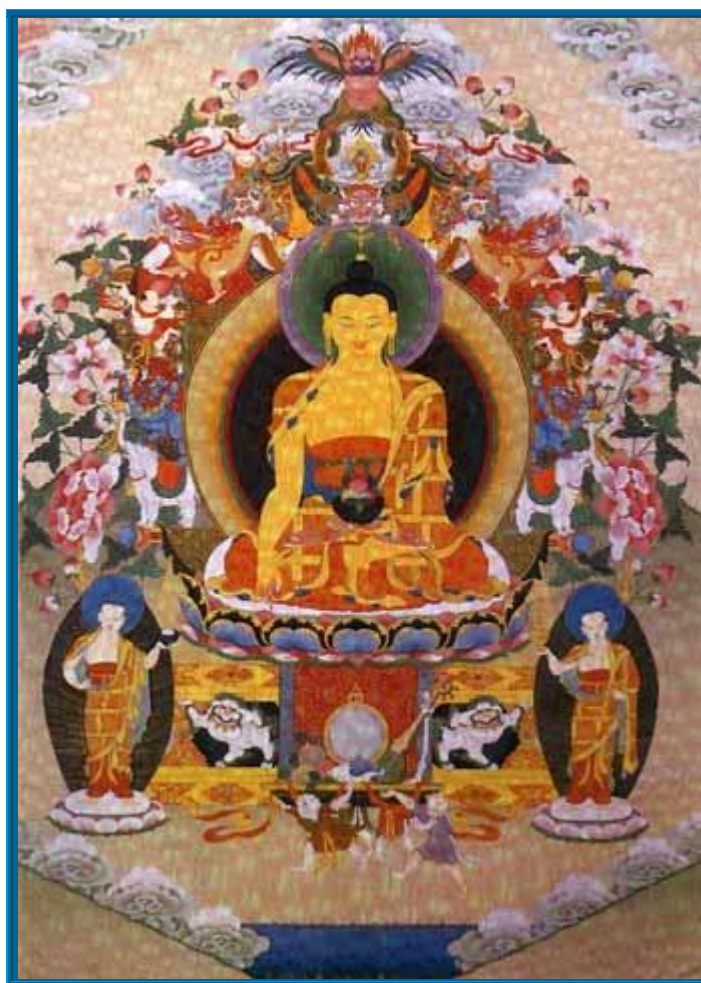
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Message of His Holiness the Dalai Lama



The Dalai Lama

MESSAGE

When so much of the Tibetan cultural heritage has been destroyed in its own land, related works of art are being preserved and created anew elsewhere in the Himalayan region. These Buddhist paintings are an expression of an ancient civilization. I am therefore very happy to know that the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, Leh, Ladakh is organizing a series of Thangka exhibitions in New Delhi, Samath (U.P.) and Hyderabad (A.P.).

We Buddhists of the Himalayan region regard most of these artifacts as sacred. They represent various aspects of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. All of them are a source of inspiration.

Appreciation of this kind of art has long been the preserve of experts. However, I trust that people visiting these series of exhibitions and reading the catalogues will come to a better understanding of the Buddhism of the Himalayas and a greater appreciation of its timeless values.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hingee' with a long, flowing horizontal stroke extending to the right.

January 3, 2001

Foreword



SECRETARY
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF TOURISM & CULTURE
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE
NEW DELHI - 110 001

Foreword

The Thankas are the portraits either of Buddha or Bodhisattvas. A Thangka illuminates the mystical experience and stages of spiritual development of the divine personality represented in the painting. Thankas have spiritual significance as well as aesthetic value. These are installed either in the family shrine or assembly hall of monastery as the objects of worship. The devotees offer votive offering such as fruits, flowers and light the butter lamp for a better life and spiritual development as well as love and compassion for all beings. The Thankas do not have religious value unless the divine spirit is infused in them. Consecration (*prana pratishtha*) is accomplished by Lamas according to religious rites.

The exhibition of these rare; Thankas is being organised in Delhi, Hyderabad and Varanasi by Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, Leh. Selection of Thankas has been made under the supervision of Ladakh Gompa Association from four different monasteries of Ladakh. Ladakh region, inspite of improvement in transport and communication, is still largely inaccessible. Consequently, Thankas in Ladakh monasteries have been shrouded in mystery for a long period of time. The object of this exhibition is to provide a glimpse of this rich legacy of Buddhist culture to people in different parts of the country .It is hoped that this exhibition will stimulate curiosity and determination to conserve this vast heritage.

R. V. Vaidyanatha Ayyar

January 29, 2001

Preface

The Department of Culture of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has shown an extraordinary magnanimity and vision in arranging an exhibition of Thankas in New Delhi, Hyderabad and Samath-Varanasi. The authorities and officials deserve our congratulations that they have taken up such a topic for the exhibition which has a very wide and far-reaching implication. It may open Up floodgates of knowledge and entertainment to the people who would get a chance to have a view and glimpse of the rare items which are seldom displayed.

The work to organize the exhibition has been rightly assigned to our Institute i.e., the to Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, Leh (Ladakh) which happens to attract the cream of intellect as found in Ladakh and other Himalayan regions and secondly which represents the centre of Buddhist learning and culture in Ladakh. Consequently as many as sixty Thankas have been collected from as many as four major gonpas (Buddhist viharas or monastic settlements comprising seminaries and residential abodes of the Buddhist monks and novices).

According to the Mahāyāna scripture the Mahākāruṇika Buddha himself had ordained his disciples to learn the five mahāvidyās (Five Great learnings—ābda (Grammar), Tarka (Logic and Epistemology), śilpa (Art and Craft), Cikitsā (medical Science). and Adhyātma (Spiritual Science). The Knowledge of these branches of learning is essential for the realization of Nirvāṇa and for the attainment of the Ominiscience, i.e., the Bodhisattvas are required to make tireless efforts towards the fulfillment of the Perfections (Pāramitās). According to one of the verses of the Bodhicaryāvatāra of Acārya āntideva, there is not even a single branch of learning which the Bodhisattvas can afford to skip from their scope of studies. Keeping this tradition in view, the Buddhist practitioners concentrate on the study and teaching of the Five Great Branches of learning.

Arya Maitreyaṇīśa has also opined in his *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* that without learning these Five Great Branches of Learning, even the best of the Aryas cannot attain Ominiscience. It is, therefore, essential for them to learn the Five Great Learning in order to remove the wrong views (mithyā-dīpātīs) of their disciples, to do favour to them in their goal of emancipation and to know the Jñeyadharmas set for them. Arya Maitreyaṇīśa is recorded to have said in one of his verses that the learners should be taught the First Four Mahāvidyās while the Bodhisattva should himself concentrate on the Adhyātma vidyā, i.e., Spiritualism of the highest order as Ominiscience is a must for the attainment of Buddhahood. It is also to be noted in this context that the First Four Branches of Learning are being taught the studied in many institutes, but the last one i.e., the learning of spiritualism can be acquired only at special centers of learning alone. In fact, Nirvāṇa cannot be attained without the accomplishment of the spiritualism.

In ancient period, the teachers used to be full of knowledge and the disciples were steeped in faith. Consequently the latter were able to acquire knowledge with ease and without stress. The Five Major Branches of Learning are also associated with Five Minor Branches of Learning. In fact, both are equally essential for spiritual advancement of the highest order.

AcArya áAkyā Pandita of Tibet has opined that Ominiscience is like endless sky. It is, therefore, essential to have knowledge of all subjects with the help of the intellect of one's own.

It is also to be noted that the Bodhisattvas required the practice of four prAtiṇamvits. These are Dharma Pratismavit, Arth PrAtiṇamvit, Nirukti PrAtiṇamvit and Pratibhāna PrAtiṇamvit. One has to acquire them for the attainment of knowledge till the end of his life. AcArya NAḡAṛjuna has also emphasized that one cannot understand the Absolute Truth without acquiring the support of Conventional Truth. The NirvAḷa cannot be had without the attainment of the Absolute Truth.

The Buddhist Art of Drawing and Sculpture were created for the purpose of spiritual practices. It is reported that the Blessed One had mentioned these branches of Art in many of his Sūtras and Tantras. The purpose of referring to these Arts was to liberate his disciples who were eager to be brought under the Vinayic discipline. The teachings of the TĀthagata are competent enough to quicken the process of the attainment of Omniscience in respect of his disciples. The practitioners in MahAyaṇa have to resort to the Mantrayāna practices in order to attain Buddhahood faster. Hence the need of the Arts for the spiritual practitioners.

The monasteries of Ladakha are today the most important institutions which represent the Buddhist Art traditions. They are a storehouse of many rare and fascinating Thankas. This exhibition is very important not only because one may be able to see these fascinating and unique Thankas for the first time but also for the reason that one may realize the importance of continuance of this wonderful and sacred tradition of Buddhist Art.

Many people have helped us in organising this exhibition and in the preparation of this catalogue. We are extremely thankful to the four gonpas for their help and for lending these rare Thankas for this exhibition. we would specially like to express our thanks to Shri Rajiv Yadav, Director, Department of Culture for his help and support in all matters.

At the end we would like to express our thanks to Aryan Books International for publishing this catalogue in an elegant manner and within a very short time.

Tashi Paljor

Introduction

The Meaning of Art

In general sense, art is mind-made craft which represents feelings, emotions and thoughts of man. There are many varieties in the art which symbolize the mental turbulence of human beings. It is a wonderful media, which brings down the high ideological thoughts of saints and scholars in pictorial forms. Moreover, the precious culture and civilization of the past can also be preserved in the form of arts. The Buddhist art of Ajanta and Ellora caves is the prominent example which illustrates the profound doctrines and practices of Buddhism.

Buddhist art is more than of aesthetic nature, because each and every image has esoteric values. Hence it generates more spiritual pleasure than the aesthetic one. Every image is symbolic and every part of the image has a significant and every part of the image has a significant meaning. Most of the images, e.g. of the Buddha and the stūpas etc., are made for use as sacred objects of religion. Therefore, the Buddhist art is not a mere creation of the artist's mental exercises. The art of Thankas in particular are regarded to be the records of mystic vision gained by saints or lamas during the concentrative meditation.

The origin of Art

The origin of Buddhist art may be traced back to the lifetime of the Buddha himself. We find many exegetical references to strengthen evidences in the Sutra texts, i.e., Vinaya and Tantra, including *Majjhīma Nikāya* and so on. These scriptures explain how to make the image of deities and spiritual figures. We find some other accounts regarding the origin of Buddhist art which state that on the earnest request of a princess of Singhalā, Buddha himself sent his own image painted on the cloth. Moreover, the kings contemporary with Lord Buddha used to send Buddha's Images as precious gifts to their closed friends. Thus, the above accounts prove that the Buddhist art originated in the 6th century B.C.

Buddhism was introduced in the central Tibet and adjacent areas during the 7th century AD. and at the same time the Buddhist art might also have begun. In the beginning the style of art in Tibet might have been purely Indian, but in the course of time there might have occurred certain changes in its style under the influence of the Chinese and Nepalese arts. That is why we find many statues of Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya carved out on huge rocks which are in pure Gandhāra style of art. Some other statues are also found which are entirely different from the previous ones which closely resemble the modern Tibetan style of art. There emerged many different styles in the Tibetan art such as *Sman-bris*, *Sgasr-bris*, *Tsang-bris* and so on. On the basis of drawing of lines and colouring, the differentiation may be made among them.

The subject matter of Thankas may roughly be classified into the following five categories:

1. *The Buddha and Bodhisattvas*

The Buddha is the one who attains perfect enlightenment by eliminating all kinds of defilements. The Bodhisattvas cultivate the bodhicitta and the awareness of emptiness. They are yet to attain the spiritual perfection. Their sacred figures are visualized with the lineage of spiritual transmission from teachers to disciples in order to take refuge and surrender. Both of them are primary factors to develop spiritual qualities.

2. *Yidam*

Yidam (Iāṅka Deva) is a chosen deity of the trainee. Yidams are exclusively sambhogakāya. Yidam represents his particular characteristic expression of Buddha nature. The trainee visualises to identify with his chosen deity which means to identify with his own primordial nature, free from its defiled aspects. In this practice, the trainee first develops intense devotion towards his guru who facilitates for the trainee to gain experience with guru lineage and then his own yidam. There are different kinds of yidam, e.g. wrathful, peaceful, semi-wrathful figure and so on. Moreover, yidams have both forms- male and female. The male symbolizes the method, viz, compassion, whereas the female represents wisdom, viz, awareness of emptiness. The union of male and female aspects is known as *yab-yum* (father and mother forms) which is an indication that the skilful action is impossible without unification of wisdom and method. This symbolism denotes the interaction of these two elements as an aspect of enlightenment.

3. *Dharmapalas*

Dharmapālas are the guardians of the Buddha's teachings and doctrines. Their function is to protect the trainees from deceptions and hindrances. They collect facilities for the trainees, so that they can easily observe the ordinances and make fruitful progress in spiritual practices. They promise to Lord Buddha to protect his teachings and remove the obstructions that comes in the dissemination of his doctrines in the world. Mahākāla and Mahākālī are very famous Dharmapālas in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

4. *Maṇḍala and Stūpa*

The basis of Maṇḍala is a palace with a central hall having four gates in the four directions. It is a particular mansion in which yidam lives with his consort and entourage. It differs in form according to the nature of yidams. Maṇḍala is always necessary when the disciple receives the tantric initiation. Maṇḍala is used by the trainees who have been introduced into practice of particular sādhanā. He practises being equipped with essential ritual objects, viz, vajra, bell and skullcup and so forth. No Tantric path can be developed without depending upon the maṇḍala.

Stūpa is a three dimensional form which represents the mind of the Buddha. It is considered a sacred object for veneration. It may probably be the oldest form of the Buddhist art. It contains the sacred relics of the Buddha or Bodhisattvas, holy texts and other precious things. There are many variations in the design of the stūpas. The basic features are common, just as the bottom, square base, a domelike

form, thirteen tapering, round steps, lotus form, a sun held by the crescent moon. The different parts of the stGpa represent five elements and the various aspects of the spiritual path.

5. The Illustration of the Teachings

Buddha's teachings may also be illustrated through the paintings. The painting of the wheel of life is a unique example which depicts the theme of four noble truths. It portrays how to visualise the afflictions in the mind and store the karmic forces. As a result the sentient beings have to be revolved endlessly in the saÆsAra. On the contrary, it also depicts the real path which shows how to eradicate the causes of sufferings and attain the salvation from saÆsAra. There are many other paintings which illustrate Buddha's teachings, viz, The portrayals which demonstrate the Vinaya rules and the paintings depicting how to develop the concentration of mind step by step and so on.

Preparation of Thangka

The Thankas are usually painted on the pieces of canvas. It is put in lukewarm water with glue and lime to wet. In order to dry it, it is The Thankas are usually painted on the pieces of canvas. It is put in lukewarm water with glue and lime to wet. In order to dry it, it is stretched on the thin wooden square frame. Its surface is rubbed with smooth object until it becomes ready for painting. The main guidelines are drawn first just as the border lines, a central perpendicular and two diagonals and so on according to the figures to be sketched. On the basis of them the main lines of figures are drawn with pencil. The background scenery is painted first and all the parts are gradually painted thereafter. Lastly the eyes are painted.

When the painting becomes ready, it is stitched to a narrow yellow silk border, then to a red silk border and finally to a larger border of blue silk in proportion to the size of the canvas. A flat stick is attached to the top of the Thangka to hang it and a heavy cylindrical stick at the bottom to keep it straight and firm. The two ends of the stick are fitted with caps made of gold and silver and other materials. The front part of the Thangka is then covered with wide and colourful silk. It protects the surface of the Thangka from getting damaged by dust and sun light. There are two narrow strips attached to the top bar which hang on the Thangka when the curtain is tucked up.

The Values of the Thangka

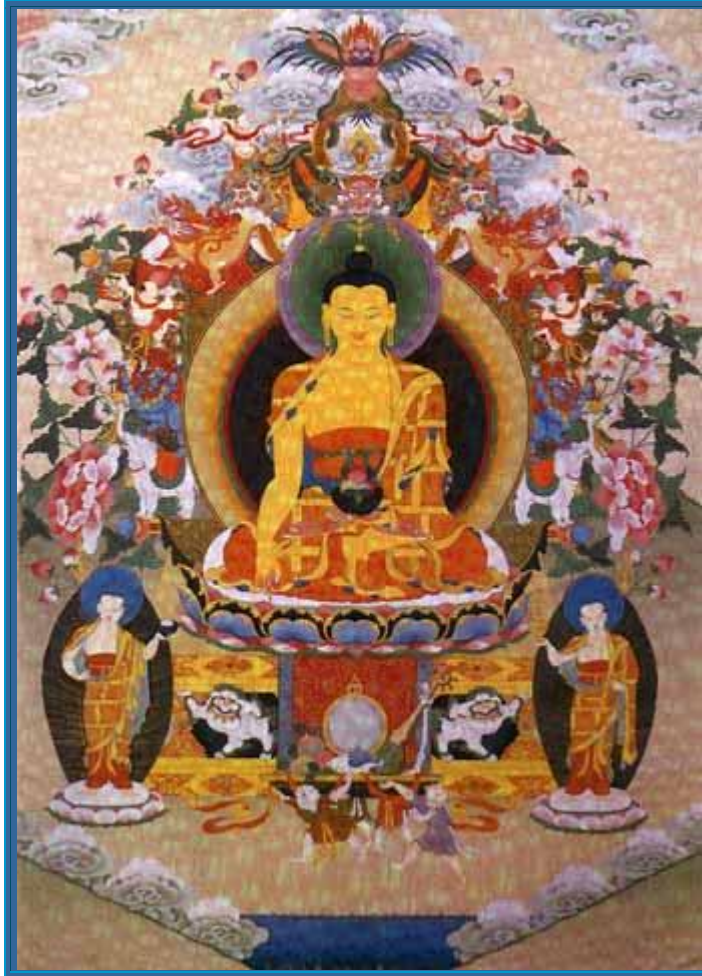
The Thangka has no value unless it has no effusion of the divine spirit. So, after completion of the Thangka, there remains the last important task of consecration (pratiÅkshA). It is done by gathering Lamas according to the rites of consecration. The three syllables OM, AH, HUM represent respectively body, speech and the mind. These are respectively inscribed on the back of the painted canvas, on the spot of head, throat and heart. During the consecration the Lamas sit in meditation and recite mantras. The particular deity is invoked and infused into the image. As a result it becomes a religious object. Thus, the Buddhist Thangka painting is totally based on religious themes. Both the patrons and the artists make the painting with spiritual motivation.

In the Thangka paintings the philosophical and mystical ideas are pictorially illustrated to the

visual level. Each and every image symbolises deeply rooted spiritual meaning. For instance, the sword of Muījūri is the symbol of wisdom which is used to destroy the ignorance, the root cause of all the sufferings.

Catalogue and Plates

Lord Sakyamuni Buddha



Lord Sakyamuni Buddha

Collection: Central Institute of Buddhist

Studies, Choglamsar, Leh (Ladakh)

School of art: *Sgar-bris*

20th century

Sakyamuni

In 6th century B.C. Sakyamuni Buddha descended to the world to show the right path to the fortunate beings, so that they may attain freedom from the cycle of existence. He practised all kinds of Bodhisattva's activities for countless aeons to attain perfect enlightenment. He delivered religious sermons for the benefit of all sentient beings travelling from one place to another till the end of his life. The Prajñāpāramitā is the central teaching of Lord Buddha which contains two major doctrines, viz, prajñā (wisdom) and upāya (method). In this Sutra, he explains explicitly the emptiness, the ultimate nature of phenomena.

The realization of the emptiness is an exact antidote of the deception of self as well as the phenomena which is the root cause of cyclic existence. In the same way, this Sutra delineates implicitly the different stages of the path to lead to Buddhahood which is the final goal of the sentient beings. It means that the trainee must practise the wisdom and method together in order to attain perfect enlightenment.

The central figure is Sakyamuni, the Buddha of the present age. His left hand depicts the meditation posture while the right hand is in the earth-witness-mudrā. He is portrayed cross-legged, seated on a marvellous throne supported by four lions. The carpet on which he is seated is designed with lotus flowers. He is flanked by his spiritual sons, Sariputra on the right and Maudgalyayana on the left.

Arya Manjusri



Arya Manjusri

Collection: Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, Chaoglamsar, Leh (Ladakh)

School of art: *Sman-bris*

20th century

Manjusri

He is the embodiment of the wisdom of all the Buddhas. According to one tradition, he attained perfect enlightenment countless aeons attained back. He purposefully descended to the world as a Bodhisattva for the welfare of all sentient beings. He was one of the eight chief disciples of Lord Sakyamuni who used to raise questions concerning the emptiness for the benefit of other listeners. The Buddhists believe that he is the sole deity of wisdom who blesses the devotees to sharpen their memory and intellect. As a result, a devotee can penetrate the vast and profound meanings of the Buddha's teachings. Hence the trainees pray and recite bĒja mantras of Manjusri. Without the blessings of MaĳuṇrĒ, no body can develop the realization of the emptiness.

This Thangka is the peaceful form of MaĳuṇrĒ. His right hand holds the sword of wisdom of emptiness for destroying ignorance, the root cause of the sufferings. His left hand holds a lotus flower on which the book of transcendental wisdom is placed. He is adorned with rich and precious ornaments and diadem. At the four corners, four different manifestations of Manjusri are depicted.

Arya Maitreya



Arya Maitreya

Collection: Spituk monastery

School of art: *Tsang-bris*

20th century

Maitreya

He is regarded as a future Buddha who will come down in the world to liberate the sentient beings when Sakyamuni's teachings will disappear from the earth. It is believed that at present, he lives in the Tuṅḡita Loka in the form of a Bodhisattva. On the humble request of Asaṅga, he composed five books in order to disclose the implicit contents of the Wisdom Sutra of Sakyamuni Buddha. The different stages of the path, viz, the five spiritual paths and the ten grounds of Bodhisattva are the steps that are to be traversed from the ordinary level i.e., Pīthakjana stage up to the Buddhahood. Moreover, he is reported to have held that the sentient beings are innately endowed with Buddha nature (Tathāgata-garbha) and therefore, it is proved that the sentient beings can attain Buddhahood by eliminating the mental defilements.

Arya Maitreya is the central figure depicted as sitting in the chair decorated with various precious ornaments. It symbolizes that he is ready to get up from the chair and come down in the world. His hands are in the preaching gesture and hold lotus flowers. He is flanked by his two chief disciples, viz. Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī on his right and left respectively. On the lower right is Atiśa and on the left is Tsongkha. On the bottom right is Brom Stonpa, on the left Ngog Legspai Sherab and in the centre is Padmasambhava. In the right corner of the bottom is Pektse and on the left Vajrapāṇi).

Padmasambhava



Padmasambhava

Collection: Takthog monastery , Leh

School of art: *Sman-bris*

20th century

Padmasambhava

He was the great mystic saint from India who had tremendous miraculous powers. He brought Buddhist Tantra in Tibet in the 8th century A.D. and introduced its learning and practice. He is venerated by all Tibetans as the second Buddha. He subdued the local deities and demons who were obstructing the construction of Samyas monastery. He crushed down and bound them by oath to protect the Buddha's teachings. According to the plan of Khresong De Tsan, the king of Tibet, he helped him to build up Samyas as a great monastic college with a big campus. He helped āntarakĀita to set up many blocks, viz. teaching, translation, meditation and so forth. In this way Buddhism was gradually disseminated in Tibet. His contribution is amazing in the spread of Buddhism in Tibet.

Padmasambhava is portrayed in his Padmākara form and is flanked by his two consorts, e.g. Mandarava and Eshy Tsogyal on his right and left respectively. He holds the vajra in his right hand in the gesture of preaching. His left arm holds the khaṅvāṅga and the left hand holds a skullcup and a jar filled with ambrosia.

Saṃanta-Bhadra is depicted in the top centre and is flanked by Vajradhara and Maitreya Buddha respectively. In the upper left corner is Avalokiteśvara and on the right corner is Amitābha. In the bottom right is Bodhisattva āntarakĀita and on the left king Khri Sang De Tsan. In the lower right is guru Tak and on the left Singdongma.

Atisa



Atisa

Collection: Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, Choglamsar, Leh (Ladakh)

School of art: *Sman-bris*

20th century

Atisa

In the 10th century AD. Atiṇa took birth as a prince in Bengal. He became eminent as a learned Buddhist master in the Monastic University of Vikramaṇiḷa. He realised that the bodhicitta is the main stem to blossom the flower of perfect elightenment. He voyaged through the sea to Suvarṇadvēpa to receive secret instructions on bodhicitta from the guru (spiritual teacher) in Suvarṇadvēpa. He cultivated bodhicitta and reintroduced it in India.

On the humble request of the king of western Tibet, he visited Tibet. During that period, the meaning of the Tantra was misconstrued and the Vinaya principles were endangered. Conflict among the followers prevailed. The followers of the Vinaya opposed Tantra and vice versa.

They conceded that no one can practise the Vinaya and Tantra together. The king requested him to rectify the faults that were infused into the Buddha's teachings. In order to do that he composed a book entitled *Patha-pradipa* which represented the heart of the Buddha's words combining the vast instructions given by Maitreya to Asanga along with the profound legacy transmitted by Mañjuśrī to Nāgārjuna. In this way he founded the Kadampa sect and disseminated the pure and stainless teachings of both the Sutra and Tantra.

The central figure is Aḥaṛya Atiṇa who is surrounded by different portrayals which depict that Atiṇa is preaching Buddhistic doctrines to his disciples.

Guhyasamaja



Guhyasamaja

Collection: Spituk monastery

School of art: *Tsang-bris*

20th century

Guhyasamaja

He belongs to the father Tantra. This Tantra emphasized on the development of the illusory body rather than on clear light. It is one of, the highest Yoga Tantras which belong to the new translation school. Guhyasamaja belongs to the vajra family and develops such a quality which transmutes anger. He embraces his consort with his main arms. His central hand holds vajra and the upper right hand a bell. His upper right hand holds the wheel of Dharma and the lower right hand a lotus. His upper left hand holds the flaming jewel of ratna and the lower left hand a sword. Thus he unifies all the five principles. His consort bears the same attributes. She is the prajñā or wisdom and Guhyasamaja is upāya or method. The embracing of both of them symbolises the union of the pure illusory body and the actual clear light.

When the trainee attains the Buddhahood, his pure illusory body and the actual clear light transmute into enjoyment body and wisdom body respectively,

Guhyasamaja represents the union of the clarity of the pristine consciousness and its emptiness which produces the supreme bliss. The vajra and bell together symbolises the union of bliss and emptiness. His three faces represent the transmuted energy of attachment (raga), hatred (dveṣa) and ignorance (moha).

Cakrasamvara



Cakrasamvara

Collection: Spituk Monastery

School of art: *Sman-bris*

18th century

Cakrasamvara

He belongs to the mother Tantra of the highest Yoga. This Tantra emphasizes on cultivating the actual clear light rather than the illusory body. It also belongs to the new translation school of Tantra.

He subdues the Rudra of ego through transmutation of passion. Thus Cakrasamvara stands on the body of Rudra and his consort. His blue colour symbolises the cosmic Dharma dhātu of space which is devoid of all the qualities. The passion is the principle of Padma family to which Cakrasamvara belongs.

Cakrasamvara has twelve arms and four faces which represent four Buddha families. His main hand holds the vajra and bell and represent non-duality. His other hands hold attributes such as an elephant, a skin shawl, which symbolizes the fearlessness, an axe, a hooked knife, a trident, a skull, a hand drum, gut lasso, khaṇḍiga, skull and the head of Brahmā and so forth.

He wears the garland of fifty two heads and the tiger skin skirt of a warrior. He wears the crescent moon in his top knot of the hair. He stands in the dance posture having transmuted passion into Karmic energy. He wears the bone and jewel ornaments.

His embrace with his consort represents the intelligence and energy; and the union of the wisdom of nirvana and samsara. He stands on Mahadeva and Umadevi who represent the ego. They rest on solar disc which represents prana.

Vajrabhairava



Vajrabhairava

Collection: Spituk monastery

School of art: *Sman-bris*

18th century

Vajrabhairava

He is the most wrathful form of Mañjuśrī. He is the embodiment of total wrath. His anger is so terrific that it may consume even himself. He is the nature of emptiness which is expressed in the form of extreme rage. He has bull's head which symbolises the ignorance which is transmuted into discriminating wisdom. He has nine faces, sixteen hands and thirty four legs. His right legs are slightly folded and the left legs stretch. The central face is bull's face with two horns and its complexion is dark and in the angry form. The second face is of a demon and the top face is Manjusara which is in peaceful form. Each and every face has three eyes. All hands hold different kinds of instruments to threaten the defilements. All hands and the body are decorated with many different kinds of ornaments.

He crushes many evil spirits under his feet. His lowest arms hold his consort and the hands hold skull cups. His consort embraces him. Her complexion is also dark. She has two hands, one face and three eyes. He has many faces, so that he can look in all directions. It signifies the omnipresence of his anger. He has many arms and legs, therefore, nobody can escape from his fury. He has the wisdom of equanimity and thus treads equally on all aspects of ego. His consort feeds and reinforces his countless vengeance. The central figure is Vajrabhairava with his consort. At the top is Tsongkhapa, upper right corner is Mahākāla and on the left white saviour. On the left side is Vaiṣṇava and on the right is protector. At the bottom Mahākāla and Yamadaka, lower right corner is Pectse and left is Nezer.

Mandala



Mandala

Collection: Central Institute of Studies, of Buddhist

Choglamsar, Leh (Ladakh)

School of art: *Tsang-bris*

20th century

Mandala

The maḷ·ala is a very complex building of yidam. It is separated from the profane world by different fences. The outermost circle is made of burning flames in the five alternative colours. It is called Meri in Tibetan. The second fence is adorned with the chair of vajras which is called Dorje Raba. The third ring is formed with lotus petals. Inside the circles, the proper maḷ·ala is situated as a splendid palace in the square shape. It has four comers and four wonderful doors on each of its four sides of the walls which are attached with four gate projections. It has many steps from the bottom to the top~ such as raja, vedi, stambha, kapola, canopy and the like

. It is decorated with various ornaments, such as wheel of Dharma, parasol, lotus, lunar disc and the prong of a cross of vajra. The roof of the Maḷ·ala is also ornamented with jewels, banner in flask, saints and parasol and so forth. The inner side of the Maḷ·ala is sub-divided by two diagonals into four triangles which have equal size. It contains a further circle in the centre with vajra symbols. The innermost centre of the maḷ·ala is a creative locus of the mystery where emerge the rays of the void. The Yidam resides in the centre of the maḷ·ala who is surrounded by the entourage of four or eight Buddhas. He is attended by four high ranking goddesses. Maḷ·ala is a very essential factor to receive the initiation of any Yidam. It is also necessary for the trainee who gets practice of any Tantric meditation.

Here, the mandala of Avlokiteṣvara is illustrated. In the upper portion of the maḷ·ala are some deities viz., on the left corner is white Tara, in the centre, Vajradhara and on the right UĀmiĀavĒjaya. In the lower portion Manjusri and Vajrapāli are portrayed. These are outside the Mandala.

Sarahapa



Sarahapa

Collection: Hemis Monastery

School of art: *Sman-bris*

18th century

Sarahapa

He was born in a Brahmin family in East India whose mother was a *·jkinç*. He studied Brahminic literature and became a famous scholar. He had faith in Buddhist Tantra and was practising it along with Brahminism. As a tantric, he was allowed to drink alcohol which restored energy in physical body. He was accused by Brahmins of drinking and appealed to the court of the king. He freed himself from the ordeals imposed on him by the king. After the judgment, the king acquitted him of drinking alcohol. He even ordered the Brahmins to drink alcohol if they could perform the feats that Sarahapa did. After this bad incident, he left for Nalanda and took ordination. He deeply learnt Sutra and Tantra. He strove to preserve and promote the Buddha's teachings.

After some time, he fled to South India in search of a qualified consort who would help him in practising Tantra. He adopted a daughter of a *·jkinç* as a consort who was making arrows. He used to roam from village to village selling arrows with her consort. His name, therefore, became Saraha, the arrow shooter. When 12 years of meditation were over, he still did not attain perfection. He was inclined to leave for the mountain solitude. His consort advised him saying, "physical solitude itself will not bring you liberation so long as the seeker and the sought do not dissolve (fuse) in the inner solitude of your mind." By the realization of the contents of the utterance Saraha suddenly attained perfection. In this Thangka, the central figure is Mahasiddha Sarahapa who holds an arrow with his hands. In the top centre is Buston holding a secret scripture. In the right corner is Nigjijuna whose head is shaded with snake umbrella. In the lower right corner is Dombipa. In the bottom is Padmavajra and in the lower left corner is Tsoskys Dorje.

Luipa



Luipa

Collection: Hemis Monastery

School of art: *Sman-bris*

18th century

Luipa

He was the prince of Singala (Sri Lanka) who fled to India from his kingdom in search of the Dharma teachings. He crossed the ocean and arrived at Rameshwaram in India. He discarded his valuable robe and ornaments and took the life of a mendicant. From there he moved to Bodh Gaya where the Āṣkyamuni had attained perfect enlightenment. He had the vision of a ĀṣkinĒ there who revealed to him the method of finding out the truth. He lived in a cemetery for sometime while seeking the perfection. He paid a visit to PĀṣkaliputra where he went to a common tavern for food. The hostess of the tavern was a earthy ĀṣkinĒ who recognised that his mind was still tainted.

In order to make him purified in his mind she offered him a bowl of putrid food. The prince repulsed on account of its smell and threw it away. She scaled him with angry words, "You still harbour the concept of good and bad in you. How then can you practise the doctrine?". He immediately understood her implication and abandoned his dualistic beliefs and superstitions.

For 12 years, he meditated near the bank of the river Ganga. His guru, a ĀṣkinĒ instructed him to eat fish entrails for twelve years. Hence, he lived on the meagre entrails of fish which were discarded by the fishermen. So, the fishermen called him Luipa. He attained perfection and his fame spread far and wide. The central figure is Luipa who holds the fish with his hand. In the lower left is a woman who is offering fish. In the upper right is Hevajra.

Naropa



Naropa

Collection: Hemis Monastery

School of art: *Smanbris*

18th century

Naropa

He was a wood seller from eastern India. He used to bring wood from jungles and sell it in the market. During that period, Mahāsiddha Tilipa lived in that area whose fame had spread far and wide. Naropa was attracted by Tilipa's fame and he started off to find out Tilipa. It was very difficult to find and identify him as he lived in disguise. At last, he met with Tilipa and begged him to offer Tantric initiation. Tilipa totally refused to do so.

Naropa, nevertheless, served him most faithfully. He provided everything that Tilipa required. In return, he received nothing from Tilipa, except abusive words and physical torture. Still he did not lose his devotion and served him continuously for 12 years.

Judging him for twelve years, Tilipa was fully satisfied with the unfailing devotion of Naropa. He realised that Naropa had become fully qualified to receive Tantric initiation. Tilipa conferred on him the Tantric initiation and taught him the secret doctrine propounded by Vajradhara. Naropa thereafter constantly meditated and attained the perfection within six months. He emancipated many people by conferring initiation during his life time. Maropa Lotsa was one of his chief spiritual disciples. Maropa introduced the six Tantric systems of Naropa in Tibet.

The central figure is Naropa. Two women are depicted offering him water and food on right and left respectively.

Melerepa



Melerepa

Collection: Chemre monastery

School of art: *Sman-bris*

18th century

Melerepa

He flourished in the 12th century A.D. in western Tibet. He had to face serious difficulties in his youth. He accumulated a myriad of evil deeds living at home. Once, he looked back on his own past life and he was remorseful in his mind. He repented on his evil deeds done in the past. He had strong aspirations in search of real path to liberation.

He, therefore, visited Lama Marpa to learn the path of atoning the sin and attaining liberation. Lama Marpa recognised his inner potency that he could develop the spiritual path. He planned in such a way that made Melerepa atone for the sin first and then reach the spiritual path.

He mercilessly tortured Melerepa through many ways. When Melerepa cleaned his mind from the sin, he taught the real path. Marpa made him retreat to living in solitude of a mountain cave. Faithfully obeying his instruction, Melerepa spent his whole life in the cave concentrating on retreating. As a result, Melerepa attained perfect enlightenment within his short span of life. Marpa founded Kugupa sect and Melerepa and Sgampopa propagated this order throughout Tibet. Mahāmudrā is the cardinal conception of *bka rgyud pa*. Mahāmudrā refers to the union of the great bliss and the clear light. It is developed through constant meditation. In the process of meditation, the practitioner makes wind enter, abide and dissolve within the central channel. As a result the clear light arises and one feels great bliss and at the same time he realises the emptiness. It is the real path to the perfect enlightenment. This is a figure of Melerepa who is portrayed in singing posture. He used to sing usually his own verses which contain religious themes. On the right side is his spiritual son, Raschungpa and on the left is sGampopa. In the lower left corner are two devotees paying homage to him.

Sachen



Sachen Kung sNyingpo

Collection: Matho Monastery

School of art: *Sman-bris*

18th century

Sachen

He lived in early 11th century A.D. in Sakya in Tibet. His father, Khon Kanchok Rgyal Po, was a mystic saint who received secret instruction of Hevajra from Dog Mi Lotsa and put it into practice. When Sachen was very young, Parilotsava was invited to be his tutor. Lotsava made him meditate to receive blessings from Manjusri. During the meditation, Sachen got the vision of Manjusri who blessed him. Moreover, Manjusri taught him a secret doctrine in very short verses which contain the theme of both wisdom and method. As a result, his intellect became very sharp. Thereafter, he studied deeply under the supervision of Parilotsava and became an eminent scholar and a mystic saint whose fame had spread throughout Tibet. Lani bras is an essence of Sakya pa order which is traced back to. Nagarjuna. Lam bras is the wisdom of non-duality of the clear light and voidness.

The cosmic consciousness is the clear light, everything is reflected in it and at the same time its nature is empty of inherent existence. The clear light and void can never be taken apart, because of their being the ultimate nature of the cosmic consciousness. The wisdom of such a reality is the true path to the perfection.

In the central figure is Sachen whose left hand holds a lotus flower. In the upper left corner is Hevajra and in the right Mahasiddha VirGpa and on the top is Vajradhara. He is flanked by his elder son, Sonam Tsemo and younger son Takpa Gyaltsen on right and left respectively. In the lower right is Kunga Gyaltsan and on the left Dogon Phagspa, in the lower corner is Ngorchon and in the left corner is Chardhen. At the bottom is Mahakala who has two hands.

Klong chen rab byam pa



Klong chen lab byam pa

Collection: Takthog mor

School of art: *Sman-bris*

20th century

Klong chen rab byam pa

He is the greatest thinker in rNying tradition. He was regarded as an incarnation of Mañjuṣrī. He restored rNying ma tradition by composing many books. He lived in early 14th century in central Tibet. He studied deeply both Sūtra and Tantra in Samyas monastic learning centre.

When he was 20 years old, he got a vision of Padmasambhava and his consort Tsoskyes Dorje, As a result, he was attracted to the *mkha gra snying thig*, the mystical teaching which is connected with Padmasambhava. He met Kumaraja who had deep knowledge and experience of Vimalamitra's teachings. Vimala's teachings had been summed up in the *Bla-ma sNying thig*. He composed *Zab no yang tig* in which the contents of both *Blo ma snying thig* and *mathkl gar yang ting* are fused.

In this way, Klong chen rab byam disseminated the doctrine of *rDzangs chen* which was taught by Padmasambhava. *rDzongs chen* is the central doctrine of *rNying ma pa* founded by Padmasambhava. it refers to the primordial consciousness which consists of two dimensions i.e. luminosity and void. Its innate nature is knowing and clarity and at the same time it is empty of inherent existence. The realization of such an entity is the exact path to perfection. The trainee should develop such a realization.

This is the portrait of Klong chen rab byam pa who was the incarnation of Mañjuṣrī. He is seated on lotus flower cross-leggedly. He bears a pandit's cap which represents a great thinker. He holds a lotus flower upon which is placed a sword. The sword signifies the wisdom of the ultimate reality. He holds a lotus flower in his left hand upon which is placed a *pothi* (book) on which a bell which represents that he is able to explain the contents of the Sūtra and Tantra in fearless voice.

Tsongkhapa



Tsongkhapa

Collection: Rizong monastery

School of art: *Sman-bris*

18th century

Tsongkhapa

He lived in the 14th century A.D. in the Amdo province of Tibet. He was the founder and reformer of Gelukpa sect. He is regarded as an incarnation of Mañjuśrī who is the embodiment of wisdom. Lord Buddha had prophesied that Sumati would come to Tibet and diffuse his doctrine there. He obtained the ordination of monkhood in his early age and commenced to study Buddha's doctrine. He travelled to central Tibet for higher education on Buddha's teachings. He deeply studied both Sūtra and Tantra for many years. Randawa was his chief teacher, from whom he specially learnt Madhyamika philosophy expounded by Nagarjuna. He composed many books on Sūtra and Tantra in which he tried to explicate the important and knotted points.

He emphasised the doctrine of relativity as taught by Lord Buddha. The void and relativity are the two different faces of the same reality which are the ultimate nature of the phenomena. *dBu mai Ltava* is the main conception of Gelugpa order founded by Tsongkhapa. The wisdom of the emptiness is called the central view or *dBu mai Ltava*. It avoids two extreme views, viz. Nihilism and externalism. Both are the main obstructions in achieving the perfection. These two extreme views can be eradicated through the mediation of *dBu mai Ltava*.

The central figure is Tsongkhapa who is flanked by his chief disciples, Gyal Tsab and Khasdup respectively on the right and left. He is in preaching posture. He holds a flower in his right hand upon which is placed a sword which signifies the wisdom to destroy the ignorance. He holds again a lotus flower in his left hand upon which is placed the book of wisdom i.e. Sūtra. In the top centre is Maitreya and his two spiritual sons. In the upper left corner is Amitābha and Medicinal Buddha in the right. Below left is Amitayū and Gelukpa lama on the right. On the lower right is Vajrabhairava and in the left is protector. In the bottom centre is Yamadaka and on right is Pectse and on the left is Nezer.

The details of the Thankas

The total number of Thankas which have been collected as exhibits for the Exhibition is sixty (60). These have been selected from four great monasteries (*gonpas*) of Ladakh, fifteen (15) from each one which are under the management of Ven. Lobzang Wangchuk, the President of All Ladakh Gonpa Association.

1. Rizong

The main Thanka from this monastery is gZigs pa Nga Ldan which consists of five different sub-Thankas. In these Thankas, the mysterious vision of Lord Tsongkhapa as revealed to his chief disciple Khasdupje in different places is depicted. These Thankas are regarded as a sacred objects for the rituals.

2. Chemre

The main Thanka from this monastery is bKa rGyud gser phren consisting of 15 sub- Thankas. The lineage of bka rGyud pa Lamas and their patron deities are portrayed. Through these successive Lamas the Mahāmudrā doctrine had been made prevalent in Tibet and the adjacent areas.

3. Takthog

The main Thanka from this monastery is Guru mTsan rGyad which consists of 8 sub- Thankas. The eight manifestations of the mystic saint Padmasambhava are depicted in these Thankas.

4. Matho

The main Thanka from this monastery is sakya Gong ma rNam nga which consists of five sub-Thankas. Five eminent Lamas are portrayed in these Thankas. It is believed that all these Lamas are the incarnations of Mañjuśrī.

CREDITS

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