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APPENDIX

THE SAMYAK FESTIVAL OF PATAN

Introduction

Of all the Buddhist festivals of the Kathmandu Valley, the Samyak or Dīpaṅkara festival seems to be unique in many ways. A special highlight of this festival is the display of many large images of Dīpaṅkara in the courtyard of Nāgbahāl.

The word ‘Samyak’ implies the oneness of all sentient beings. In Buddhist literature, we find three forms of enlightenment, namely *śrāvaka-bodhi*, *pratyeka-bodhi* and *samyak-sambodhi*. In this context, Samyak stands for ‘Perfect’ and Sambodhi for ‘Enlightenment’. The Samyak festival thus denotes those practices which lead to Perfect Enlightenment, namely, the path of the Bodhisattvas that will bring *samyak-sambodhi*.

The essence of this festival is the practice of Giving, or *dānapāramitā* – specifically, to monks (Śākyas and Vajrācāryas in the Newar Buddhist tradition) and to Buddhas, especially to Dīpaṅkara Buddha, who predicted Lord Śākyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment in a previous lifetime. At this time, Newar Buddhists also honor and venerate the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara, Ārya Tārā, and so on. Śākyas and Vajrācāryas are said to be householder bodhisattva monks. It is on this occasion that they receive alms and *dāna* from lay *upāsakas* and *upāsikas*. Often, those who give *dāna* or make offerings are referred to simply as *bhaktajana*, or devotees.

Śākyamuni’s past-life meeting with Dīpaṅkara Buddha

Once there lived a certain learned man who was well-versed in Brahmanical lore, who had 500 young Brahmins as pupils. One of these pupils was Megha, a young Brahmin who was learned, wise, judicious, and of keen intelligence.

Before long, he had learned all the Brahmanical mantras by heart. After completing his study of the Vedas, he left the Himalayas and went down

into the country below, in order to seek the fee due to his teacher. With his staff, water-pot, hat, sandals, and mantle, he entered many villages, cities, and towns, and each of these places became free of affliction and calamity through Megha's spiritual power. Along the way, he begged for money, and someone gave him 500 coins. He then decided to go to the royal city Dīpavati, in order to see the city of a universal monarch, made of the seven precious things, and delightful to behold. When he entered the city, he saw that it was in festive array. He wondered to himself, "What holiday do we have here today, or what dramatic performance, or what festival? Perhaps king Arcimat has heard that the young Brahmin Megha, on completing his study of the Vedas, has come down from the Himalayas and is on his way to the royal city of Dīpavati; hence this splendid decoration of the city!" And as he went on, he looked for someone he could question.

Just then, a young Brahmin girl came along — attractive, good-looking, reliable, gentle, and modest. She held a water jug and seven lotus flowers in her hands. Megha asked her, "Is there a festival in the city today?"

She replied with these verses:

You cannot, young man, be from around these parts;
a stranger from another city you must be.
You do not know that coming to this town is
the Benefactor of the World, the Bringer of the Light!
Dīpaṅkara, the leader of the world, the son
of king Arcimat, He, a greatly famous Buddha,
is drawing near. To honor him, this city
is decked in gay and festive garb.

Megha asked her: "How much did you pay for those seven lotus flowers?" She replied: "Five of them I bought for 5000 coins; two were given to me by a friend." Megha said to her: "I will give you 500 coins, and in return you give me those five lotuses, and with them I shall worship Dīpaṅkara, the Lord. You can honour him with the remaining two."

She replied: "You can have those five lotuses, but only on condition that for all future time, you take me as your wife. Wherever you may be reborn, there I shall be your wife, and you my husband." Megha replied: "My heart is set on supreme enlightenment. How can I think of marriage?" She answered: "No need to desist from your quest! I shall not hinder you!"

So Megha consented, and said: "In exchange for those lotuses, I take you for my wife. I will be able to worship Dīpaṅkara, the Lord, and continue to strive for supreme enlightenment." He gave her the 500 coins, and took the five lotus flowers. When he had heard the maiden speak of the Buddha, he was rapturous with joy.

Meanwhile, the Lord had set out for Dīpavati, accompanied by 80,000 monks, and by king Arcimat with 80,000 of his vassals and an entourage of many thousands. Megha saw Dīpaṅkara, the Lord, coming from afar. The Lord's body had the thirty-two marks of a superior man, as well as the eighty secondary marks. He was endowed with the eighteen special dharmas of a Buddha, mighty with the Ten Powers of a Tathāgata, and in possession of the four Grounds of self-confidence. He was like a great Nāga, and had done all he had to do. His senses were turned inwards, and his mind did not turn to outer things. He had won the stable assurance of Dharma, his senses were calmed, his mind was calm, and he had reached perfect self-control and tranquility, like a well-guarded Nāga who has conquered his senses — transparent as a pool, clear and unperturbed. He was beautiful and good to look at. No one ever got tired of seeing him, and there was nothing ungracious about him. The light which shone from his body extended as far as a league.

When he had seen the Buddha, Megha identified himself to him, and said to himself: "I also will be a Buddha in the world." He then recited these verses:

Long is the time before this vision could arise.
Long is the time before Tathāgatas appear.
Long is the time until my vow shall be fulfilled:
Yet a Buddha I'll become, no doubt about it!

Thereupon Megha, feeling the thrill in his whole body, his mind filled with sublime joy and exaltation, threw those five lotus flowers to Dīpaṅkara, the Lord. The flowers remained suspended in midair, and formed a circle round the Lord's radiant head. The young Brahmin girl also threw her two lotuses. They also stood suspended in the air, and so did those thrown by other people. This was one of the miracles by which Buddhas impress people, so that they may be receptive to the truth. The Buddha sustained this canopy of flowers, which stood above him in the air, so as to edify those beings who

saw it, and to bring joy and happiness to Megha, the young Brahmin. And this canopy was lovely and fair to behold, with four pillars and entrances, garlanded with strips of colored cloth.

When Megha saw these lotus flowers suspended about the Lord's radiant halo, and how lovely and pleasing they were, his body was flooded with great joy and gladness, and a sublime decision arose in his mind. He put his water-pot to one side, spread out his deer-skin cloak, and threw himself down at the feet of Dīpaṅkara, the Lord, wiping the soles of his feet with his hair, and aroused within himself the following thought: "Ah! May I too at some future period become a Tathāgata, with all the attributes of a perfect Buddha, just as this Lord Dīpaṅkara is just now! May I too turn the wheel of the highest Dharma, as this Lord Dīpaṅkara does just now! Having crossed over, may I lead others across; having been freed, may I free others; having been comforted, may I comfort others — as does this Lord Dīpaṅkara! May I become like him, for the weal and happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the sake of a great multitude of living beings, for their weal and happiness, irrespective of whether they be gods or men!"

Dīpaṅkara, the Lord, with a Buddha's supreme knowledge, knew how ready Megha, the young Brahmin, was to turn towards enlightenment. He knew that his past store of merit, as well as his recent vow, were without fault or defect, without blemish or scar. So he now predicted his future enlightenment, in these words: "You shall be, young Brahmin, in a future age, after immeasurable and incalculable aeons, in Kapilavastu, the city of the Śākyas, a Tathāgata by the name of Śākyamuni; an arhat, a fully enlightened Buddha, perfect in knowledge and conduct, well-gone, a World-knower, unsurpassed, a leader of men to be tamed, a teacher of gods and men. Like me, you will have a body adorned with the thirty-two marks and the eighty secondary marks. You will have the eighteen special dharmas of a Buddha, be mighty with the Ten Powers of a Tathāgata, and confident with his four grounds of self-confidence! Having crossed over, you will lead others across; having been freed, you will free others; having been comforted, you will comfort others; having won final Nirvāṇa, you will help others to win it — as I do now! You will turn the wheel of the highest Dharma, preside over a harmoniously united body of disciples, and both gods and men will listen to you and believe. What I am now, that you will become one day — for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the

world, for the sake of a great multitude of living beings, for their weal and happiness, be they gods or men!"

Origin legends of the Dīpaṅkara Festival of Patan

In about the 14th century, during the medieval period, descendants of king Bhāṣkaradeva Varmā (1045–48 CE), who founded the Golden Temple or Hiraṇyavarṇa Mahāvihāra, established a religious trust in which the sponsors would honor ten elders as the embodiments of the Bodhisattvas who had actualized the ten perfections. One of those descendants married a lady from Bhaktapur belonging to the Ṭhakūrī dynasty. While the donor was participating in this trust, he invited his son's father-in-law and feasted him with due honor and respect.

During the ceremony, the in-laws carefully observed all the rituals and performances except for one special, secret ceremony, in which their participation was not required. However, since the father-in-law was not privy to that secret ritual, he was offended.

Once, when the son was invited to Bhaktapur for dinner with his in-laws, he was asked about this secret ritual. Subsequently, the son invited his father-in-law to the secret ritual in which the Ten Elders were offered milk rice. The father-in-law, with evil intent, secretly poisoned the milk rice and offered it to the Ten Elders. The Ten Elders, knowing the malice of the guest from Bhaktapur, chanted the *dhāraṇī* called 'Purification of poison', and ate all the food as if though were fit to eat. As a result of their Dhāraṇī recitation, they were unaffected, but in return the man from Bhaktapur experienced deadly suffering as though poisoned, even though he did not ingest the poison.

After consulting with astrologers, it was reported that this was a karmic consequence which afflicted the one who poisoned the food, and it could be annulled only when he confessed his sin to the Ten Elders. The poisoner confessed accordingly, and then the Ten Elders instructed those donors and sponsors who were present: "O devotees! Evil is growing in this world; your father-in-law, without any offence caused by our side, committed a great crime out of spite, and hence has to undergo this suffering as a result of his actions." They then sprinkled some holy water on the sinner and cured him in an instant, with the power of the Ten Elders' bodhisattva motivation.

Confessing his grievous fault, the sinner asked for their forgiveness, and pledged that he would not cause suffering to anybody in the future. He praised the awesome power of the great compassion of the Ten Elders.

Then the Ten Elders said, “O Man of Nholā Vihāra of the Ṭhakūrī Dynasty! From now on, we will not be able to repeatedly return to this world; instead, we will appear in the form of these Ten Elders (the *Daśapāramitā Ājus*). Please venerate and respect these elders as though they were themselves the bodhisattvas of the Ten Perfections. You will in turn receive equal benefits and merit, and finally achieve ultimate happiness.” Speaking thus, they disappeared.

Because of this extraordinary event in the past, the Ten Elders are venerated till today as the Bodhisattvas of the Ten Perfections. Newar Buddhists traditionally invite them as honored guests at their rites and wedding ceremonies in order to receive their blessings.

Several years after this event, a man called Bhālibhārada, of the Ṭhakūrī Dynasty, fell into severe poverty and had to do the menial job of collecting cowdung. He began to deposit the cowdung he gathered in his storeroom. Because of his poverty, he could not bear to tell his wife that he was storing cowdung rather than treasure in the storeroom. He was worried that she would see the cowdung, so he hid the key. Once he forgot to hide the key and his wife found it lying on the ground. Out of curiosity, she opened the storeroom and found that all the cowdung had turned to gold. As he came back from the river, he was told that gold had been discovered in his storeroom. His wife told him that she never expected her husband had hidden such a vast amount of gold in his treasury. She asked why he suffered so much in spite of his tremendous wealth.

With great joy he told his wife, “O my beloved wife! With the blessings of the Triple Jewels, we received a vast amount of wealth. We have suffered because of our past non-virtuous deeds, but similarly, we received this vast wealth due to our past acts of generosity. Therefore, we should now establish a trust to further the cause of dharma, which brings benefits both for this life and the lives to come. What kind of dharma should we follow? Let us decide.”

Then his wife proposed that they follow Viṣṇu, and suggested that he spend their wealth on worshipping the god. On the other hand, her husband preferred to follow the religion of Buddha, because it was handed down in his family for generations. But his wife was firm in her decision. He thought

it not proper to press the point, for this might sow discord in their conjugal life.

Therefore he devised a plan to solve the problem. He proposed to test the power of both religions, namely, Vaiṣṇavism and Buddhism. They designated a seed of camphor for Buddhism and a Tulasī flower for Vaiṣṇavism. They accepted that whichever plant sprouted first, they both would follow the corresponding religion. So they planted the seeds and waited. After some time, the couple saw the camphor sprouting first, and so they decided to adopt the way of the Buddha.

From that time on, they established a trust called the Samyak gūṭhī. The trust committee is obliged to regularly invite the presence of all the images of Dīpaṅkara belonging to the various vihāras of Patan, along with all the images of Ārya Tārā and the entire Buddhist Saṅgha consisting of Cailakas, Śrāmaṇeras, Brahmācārya *bhikṣus*, Śākya *bhikṣus*, Vajrācāryas and so on.

The date assigned for this event is Phālgūṇa Śukla Tṛtīyā, ie. the 3rd day of the waxing fortnight of the month of Phālgūṇa. On the eve of this date, the committee elders are to hold a respectful reception for all the invited deities and offer them lamps. The following day, one should make full offerings (Samyakdāna) to all the invited Buddha images, Bodhisattvas and Tārās. Since the event required a lot of resources and manpower to convene, Bhālibhārada donated a substantial estate and funds towards its sustenance.

According to a chronicle, the committee could not continue its activities every year because of certain unavoidable circumstances. However, the Buddhist Saṅgha of Hiraṇyavarṇa Mahāvihāra managed to hold this event every fourth year. The tradition continues today, thanks to the organizers of the Samyak Festival who managed to sustain it over the centuries.

Historical Background

The earliest documentary evidence of the existence of Dīpaṅkara images is found in a palm-leaf document dated 565 NS (1345 CE) in the collection of Paṇḍita Hemraj Shakya. It mentions that a donor, Jaya Rāja Bhāro, gilded a Dīpaṅkara Buddha image with gold lent from the Brahmācārya *bhikṣu* Śrī Akhayaśrī Thapāju, of Śrīpulacho Mahāvihāra.

Further evidence of this festival is found in another palm-leaf document from Dīpaṅkara Vihāra, dated NS 596 (1476 CE), which records that the

Śākyabhikṣus of Hiranyavarṇa Mahāvihāra had sent an invitation to the Ten Elders of Dīpaṅkara Vihāra in Bhaktapur to attend a Samyak feast.

Another palm-leaf document dated NS 599 (1479 CE) from Paṇḍita Hemraj Shakya's collection is an invitation letter in which the Samyak festival organizer invites the *bhikṣus* of Yampi Mahāvihāra for a Samyak feast to be held in Taḥbahāl.

Among the several known alms-bowl inscriptions, the most ancient is dated NS 645 (1525 CE). It says that on the eight day of the waxing half of Śrāvaṇa, ie. Śrāvaṇa Sukla Astami on a Thursday, Śrī Harṣasiṃha's wife Herasmi, together with their sons and daughter, who hailed from Nyākhāchowk Vihāra, offered this alms bowl to the Dīpaṅkara Tathāgatas and the Sarva Saṅgha, and wished for happiness and prosperity from the merits of this generosity.

In another document, a *bhikṣu* of Nakabahāl sent an invitation to King Mahendra Siṃha (NS 837–843) to attend a special feast — Samyak — at Hiranyavarṇa Mahāvihāra in the month of Māgha, NS 839 (1719 CE). Apart from these documents, no any other evidence has come to light to substantiate the early history of this august festival.

It is now thought that faith in Dīpaṅkara among the Newar community derived from the Buddhist traditions of the Kuśāna kingdom. Mary Slusser's discussion of Dīpaṅkara Buddha in Nepal was the first to postulate a connection to the Gāndhāran region:

The cult of Dīpaṅkara Buddha achieved little popularity in India, except in Gāndhāra, whence it spread to Central Asia and China. Given the relatively late date of its prominence in Nepal, the Dīpaṅkara cult very likely came from this direction. Since Dīpaṅkara Buddha is considered, among other things, to be a protector of merchants, one can suppose he came into fashion in the period of the Three Kingdoms as the patron of Newar Traders who then so diligently plied the Tibet trade.³⁰

With the discovery of a Kuśāna sculpture from the reign of Jayavarman, dated 185 CE, found at Hāndigaon and Mālīgaon, scholars are of the opinion that images of Dīpaṅkara have their origin in the cultural exchanges between the Kuśāna dynasty and the Kathmandu Valley.

³⁰Slusser, *Nepal Mandala*, p.293.

One of the earliest Nepalese images of a standing Buddha displaying the 'prediction of enlightenment' gesture was published by Mary Slusser.³¹ However, the inscription on the base identifies it as Śākyamuni, the gift of a Śākyā nun of Yamgal Vihāra, Patan, made in 591 CE. Since images of Śākyamuni Buddha and Dīpaṅkara Buddha are both known to display this prediction of enlightenment gesture, identification is problematic and difficult.

The earliest image that can definitely be identified as Dīpaṅkara Buddha dates to the 13th century, and is located at Guita Bahī, Patan.³²

List of Deities Displayed in the Dīpaṅkara Festival

1. A Svayambhū Caitya
2. Vajrasattva image
3. Vajrasattva's crown
4. Bhego Āju
5. Kvābahā Āju
6. Vasudharā
7. Jaṭādhārī Lokeśvara Karuṇāmaya
8. Buṅgama Lokeśvara
9. Chasan deo
10. Embodiment of Lagankhel Stūpa
12. Ārya Tārā from Tangabahā
13. Dīpaṅkara from Tangabahā
14. Dīpaṅkara from Kobahāl
15. Dīpaṅkara from Dhumbahā
16. Ārya Tārā from Dhumbahā
17. Dīpaṅkara from Chukabahā
18. Dīpaṅkara from Kulimbahā
19. Dīpaṅkara and Bhalibhāro from Kvābahā
20. Bahapa Deva
21. Dīpaṅkara from Wambahā
22. Dīpaṅkara from Daubahā
23. Dīpaṅkara from Taḥbahā
24. Dīpaṅkara from Bubahā

³¹Slusser, p.448.

³²Regmi, Vol. I.

25. Dīpaṅkara from Habahā
26. Dīpaṅkara from Jyobahā
27. Dīpaṅkara from Gujibahā
28. Buṅgama Lokeśvara from Gujibahā
29. Dīpaṅkara from Bhinchebahā
30. Dīpaṅkara from Ukubahā
31. Dīpaṅkara from Subahā
32. Tārā from Subahā
32. Dīpaṅkara from Yacchubahā
33. Tārā from Yacchubahā
34. Dīpaṅkara from Kirtipur
35. Tārā from Kirtipur
36. Dīpaṅkara from Jatibahā
37. Tārā from Jatibahā
38. Adinath Lokeshvara
39. Dīpaṅkara from Kirtipur
40. Tārā from Kirtipur
41. Tārā from Jadebahā
42. Tārā from Kirtipur
43. Tārā from Kirtipur
44. Tārā from Okubahā
45. Tārā from Okubahā
46. Tārā from Bhinchebahā
47. Tārā from Gujibahā
48. Tārā from Guhibahā
49. Tārā from Jyobahā
50. Tārā from Jyobahā
51. Tārā from Habahā
52. Tārā from Habahā
53. Tārā from Bubahā
54. Tārā from Bubahā
55. Tārā from Tabahā
56. Dīpaṅkara from Tabahā
57. Tārā from Tabahā
58. Tārā from Daubahā
59. Tārā from Wombahā
60. Deva from Micchubahā

61. Ja Jayemā Dīpaṅkara
62. Dīpaṅkara from Yatbahā
63. Dīpaṅkara from Dārikabahā
64. Dīpaṅkara from Ikhāchen bahā
65. Tārā from Chukabahā
66. Dīpaṅkara from Chukabahā
67. Tārā from Chukabahā
68. Dīpaṅkara from Ānandabahā
69. Tārā from Mikhābahā
70. Dīpaṅkara from Akibahā
71. Dīpaṅkara from Athabahā
72. Dīpaṅkara from Mubahā
73. Chilandeva
74. Tārā from Thyākā
75. Tārā from Nyākhāchowk
76. Maitridhvaja kamala Āju and Tārā
77. Hilān Āju and Tārā from Tājāpha
78. Dīpaṅkara from Wonbahā: Kun Āju
79. Dīpaṅkara from Hauga
80. Tārā from Hauga
81. Dīpaṅkara from Chāpāgaon
82. Tārā from Chāpāgaon
83. Dīpaṅkara from Bubahā
84. Tārā from Bubahā
85. Dīpaṅkara from Sibahā
86. Dīpaṅkara from Sibahā-Kachābahā
87. Tārā from Sibahā-Kachābahā
88. Dīpaṅkara from Sibahā
89. Dīpaṅkara : Bhāyo Āju
90. Tārā
91. Dīpaṅkara from Mubahā
92. Tārā from Mubahā
93. Tārā from Chibahāchuka
94. Bhikṣu Āju
95. Dīpaṅkara from Ibahi-Thāsandya
96. Dīpaṅkara from Bhinchebahā
97. Tārā from Bhinchebahā

98. Dīpaṅkara from Subahā
99. Tārā from Subahā
100. Dīpaṅkara from Thakunbahā
101. Tārā from Thakunbahā
102. Dīpaṅkara from Ilābahī
103. Tārā from Ilābahī
104. Dīpaṅkara from Dhunbahā
105. Tārā from Dhunbahā
106. Dīpaṅkara from Tabahā
107. Yatabahā Kāmi Āju
108. Dharmasīla Āju
109. Bhanasi Āju
110. Dīpaṅkara Munidhan (Dhākhwā)
111. Tārā (Dhākhwā)
112. Dinapani Āju
113. Dharmadhvaja Āju and Tārā
114. Dhusa Tārā
115. Gajendravajra Tārā
116. Dānamuni Dhākhwā Tārā
117. Bāgnarsimha Tārā Iku
118. Sākhati Jayemā
119. Jog Āju Habahā
120. Dīpaṅkara from Kvābahā Nāpit
121. Dīpaṅkara from Chikanbahī -Dhanad