

Voice of the Void

Aesthetics of the Buddhist Maṇḍala
on the basis of the Doctrine of Vāk in Trika Śaivism



SUNG MIN KIM

The research undertaken here about Buddhist *maṇḍalas* is basically designed under the philosophical question how the visible dimensions of forms are related to their invisible contents. The textual sources in reference to Buddhist *maṇḍalas* teach that the essence of *maṇḍalas* is *śūnya* (void) and their forms are the reflective images (*pratibimba*) of *śūnya*. This volume investigates how the colourful form of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* represents the prime concept of *śūnya*, and what makes these *maṇḍalas* visually powerful, leaving the impression of “spiritual enhancement” in the heart of people who do not even know about the Buddhist doctrines.

The *maṇḍalas* permanently represented in the monastic complexes of Tabo and Alchi in the Western Himalayas have been focused in order to examine a prominent role of visual dimensions of *maṇḍalas*. In order to comprehend *maṇḍalas* in the context of Buddhist philosophy, the texts of the Yoga-Tantra class have been looked up. Especially, the references to the tantric visualization-practice throw light on the internal experiences with *maṇḍalas*.

Considering the fact that the Buddhist *maṇḍalas* have been developed as a method of Mantrayāna, being always combined with *mantras* and *mudrās*, this volume presents the concept of *vāk* (word, subtle sound, voice) as a key to explain how the ultimate state of *śūnya* and perceptible forms of *maṇḍalas* are related to each other. The doctrine of *vāk* developed in the tradition of Trika Śaivism in Kashmir provides us with a systematic way to explain the non-dualism between all phenomena, objects and the Supreme Divine. The doctrine of four levels of *vāk* is examined in the book for the purpose of interpreting the aesthetic phenomena and structuring the different levels of meanings of *maṇḍalas* from the aesthetic perspective. On the basis of the *vāk* theory, the external forms of *maṇḍalas* have been explored and their visual principles have been technically analysed, in attempt to answer the question: how do the colourful forms of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* resemble the formless *śūnya*?

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ISBN 13: 978-81-246-0756-5

Rs. 3200/-

US \$ 100.00

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Cataloging in Publication Data — DK

[Courtesy: D.K. Agencies (P) Ltd. <docinfo@dkagencies.com>]

Kim, Sung Min, 1971-

Voice of the void : aesthetics of the Buddhist maṇḍala on the basis of the doctrine of vāk in Trika Śaivism / Sung Min Kim.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 13: 9788124607565

1. Mandala (Buddhism) 2. Mandala in art. 3. Buddhist art—India — Tabo. 4. Buddhist art — India — Alchi Gompa. 5. Śūnyatā 6. Buddhist philosophy. 7. Kashmir Śaivism. 8. Tabo (Monastery : Tabo, India). 9. Alchi Monastery (Alchi Gompa, India). I. Title.

DDC 294.3437 23

© Author

First published in India, 2015

ISBN 13: 978-81-246-0756-5

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Printed and published by:

D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd.

Regd. Office : Vedaśrī, F-395, Sudarshan Park

(Metro Station: Ramesh Nagar), New Delhi - 110 015

Phones : (011) 2545 3975; 2546 6019; *Fax :* (011) 2546 5926

e-mail : indology@dkprintworld.com

Web : www.dkprintworld.com

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Prologue

THIS presentation of Dr. Sung Min Kim seeks to work out the innermost substance of Being in the unfathomed inner steppes of the mind in the transfinite forms irradiating the substantive deeps. It reveals a mind wrapped in gold of the raptures of the creative consciousness, true to her name Kim which means gold. One of major Sūtras in East Asia, is *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra* or the Golden Light Sūtra 金光明經 금광명경. It represents the resplendence of the rising sun like *brāhma muhūrta* (glorious moments of meditation) enshrined in the Gāyatrī hymn. In absolute silence of time the vessels of the spirit have been common awaking in the Vedic and Buddhist traditions. Both the Golden Light Sūtra and the Gāyatrī likewise seek the cosmic, the transcendent in the cadence of the golden light of the dawning day. Dr. Kim's perception of *maṇḍala* in the ambience of the fourfold *vāk* of the Upaniṣads and Trika Śaivism flows from her noble phylogeny of two millennia. From these precious seeds of time grows the *bodhi* tree of interpretation of Dr. Kim: the scintillating ripples of *śraddhā* and *sāadhanā* (faith and contemplation).

The Kims are descendants of the Princess of Ayodhyā. She arrived in Korea in CE 48 at Kimhae aboard a ship, heeding a call from Heaven. Rocks and ruins around Kimhae are proud heirs of this legacy. She became the queen of King Kim Suro and they founded the first powerful state in Korea, which continued till its end by Shilla in CE 532. In gratitude to the sea that allowed safe passage to the queen to his shores, the king built the Haeuensa “Temple of Sea Grace” that stands to this day on top of Mount Punsong. The simple subtlety of this queen incarnates in the heart of Dr. Kim so that she can dive deep into her Indic mind to make vivid the inherent but unobserved paths of the phylogeny of *maṇḍalas*. Dr. Kim captures the profound light of the metaplane of *maṇḍalas* of Vairocana or the Transcendent (Vai) Sun (rocana) who casts His sheen of eternity in our invoking minds. Dr. Kim's native Land of Morning Calm has been blessed with astounding pensive images of the Maitreya trinity. It is but spontaneous for her to realize, visualize and conceptualize the subtle vibrations of *maṇḍalas* of Tabo and Alchi, which were masterminded by painters and sculptors from Kashmir.

The monasteries of Tabo and Alchi are in the direct tradition of Rin.chen.bzañ.po

(CE 958–1055) who came to Kashmir to study the Sanskrit language. In the first period he spent seven years in Kashmir, in the second he was at Vikramaśilā and in the third period he was again in Kashmir to arrange the materials collected and to finish the translations undertaken with his first masters. Parahitabhadra of Kashmir worked at Tholing.¹ Rin.chen.bzañ.po had an image of his father made in Kashmir² by the famous artist Bhitaka. He returned to his country with thirty-two Kashmiri artists³. The work he began was continued with fervour by his disciples. Kashmir was one of the places where Buddhist masters prospered the most. Naropa, the great teacher of Marpa, too was from Kashmir. Somanātha, one of the greatest interpreters of Kālacakra, was a Kashmiri. To Kṣemendra's inexhaustible genius we owe *Avadāna-kalpalatā*. The tantric systems introduced by Rin.chen.bzañ.po were designated as the Kashmiri system.⁴ The “Great Paṇḍita of Kashmir” Śākyaśrī (Kha.chepaṇ.chen) was closely associated with the translation and graphic representation of *Avadāna-kalpalatā*. He carried it with him to Tibet in CE 1204 and presented it to Sa.skya Paṇḍita. It was translated into Tibetan in CE 1272 and enlivened the walls of the monasteries of Rgya, Snar.thaṅ and Jo.naṅ to inculcate the *pāramitā* perfections as a preparation to Supreme Bodhi. These Buddhist masters must have studied the works of Abhinavagupta whose literary activity flourished in CE 990–1020 as the most celebrated author on aesthetics and Kashmir Śaivism. The masters must have been influenced by his Trika philosophy as enunciated in his *Tantrāloka* and other works. Dr. Kim's ingenious exegesis of *maṇḍalas* as an expression of the fourfold *vāk* is evident in the confluence of the spiritual ambience of the concerned centuries and their intellectual space as well as in the artistic representations detailed by her on page 13.

Within the Buddhist tradition, *maṇḍalas* have been interpreted in different ways. In terms of architectonics a *maṇḍala* is a plan of the sanctum of a specific deity. The square parts are a two-dimensional diagram of a sanctum dedicated to a central deity and its olympian assembly. It has four gates in the four cardinal directions. The inner portion of the diagram has square structures which are the walls, pillars and other architectural elements of the sanctum. The round parts are psychic elements. Its innermost psychic chore is constituted by the eight-petalled lotus of the heart of the devotee wherein resides the main deity with his prominent acolytes. The other psychic elements are also round, like the outermost circle of fire (*ḥvālāvalī*) to burn the sins of

¹ Tucci 1988 (1932):64

² Ibid.: 66

³ Ibid.: 67

⁴ Ibid.: 39

the meditator. *Vajrāvalī* (circle of *vajras*) represents the solidity of the adamantine plane wherein the Vajrayāna practitioner has become a *vajra-being*, a *vajra-sattva*, one empowered to undertake Vajrayāna practices and rituals. The circle of lotuses (*padmāvalī*) is the purity of heart with which the devotee approaches the sanctum. Thus the psychic components of the circles of fire, *vajras* and lotuses in a *maṇḍala* are round, while the solid material components of the architectonic temple are square. A *maṇḍala* is thus a square and a circle, the squared material space and the circularity of psychospheres.

Representation as Trikāya

Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṃgraha (STTS) has been illustrated by Śubhākarasimha (CE 637–735) in *Gobu-shingan* (GS). According to GS, Vairocana is represented in *trikāya* as: *saṃbhogakāya* with his consort Vajradhātviśvarī, *dharmakāya* the absolute denoted by addorsed *vajras*, and *nirmāṇakāya* as a monk (not distinguished from Śākyamuni). All are represented in separate *maṇḍalas* in the four sections of STTS. The central deity of Vairocana is illustrated below from GS in the three *kāya*'s:



Vairocana as *saṃbhogakāya*
crowned and decked with
ornaments

Vajradhātviśvarī *alias* Vajriṇī
as the consort of Vairocana in
saṃbhogakāya



Vairocana as *dharmakāya* symbolized by
two vajras placed cross-wise at his back

Vairocana as *nirmāṇakāya* represented
as a monk

The flames of their spiritual vibrations are different in the four epiphanies. *Mantras* of each epiphany are different, naturally so. *STTS* views *maṇḍalas* primarily as the *trikāya* system, but its colophons of the four sections are viewed as four Samayas.

Samaya is one of the three main ways of awakening *kuṇḍalinī* in the Tantra to accomplish the highest state of enlightenment. The three ways are: Kaula, Miśra and Samaya. They explain the methods of awakening the primal force to lead to the abode of Śiva. The highest of all schools is Samaya. It is purely yogic without any external rituals. *Yogins* who follow this path illuminate all the *cakras* to the abode of Śiva which is the crown of the head (*sahasrāra*). This *yoga* of consubstantiation (*sam-aya*)

was the highest expression of Śaivism.⁵ Samaya is the foundation of *STTS*, the root Tantra of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala. *STTS* is divided into four sections representing four Samayas: *abhisamaya* (section 1), *vajra-samaya* (section 2), *dharma-samaya* (section 3) and *karma-samaya* (section 4). Each Samaya is symbolized by *maṇḍalas* of four epiphanies of Vairocana: Vajradhātu Vairocana (section 1), Trilokavijaya Vairocana (section 2), Sakala-jagad-vinaya Vairocana (section 3) and Sarvārthasiddhi Vairocana (section 4).

In Śaiva Siddhānta “the three paths of salvation are those of service (*caryā*), worship (*kriyā*) and meditation (*yoga*) all of which should be animated by the love of God (i.e. Śiva).⁶ All these ways receive divine knowledge (*pratijñāna*) from Śiva, by which is realized perfect union (Samaya) with Śiva. The terms *kriyā*, *caryā* and *yoga* relate to the three paths of realization, as is clear from the Śaiva tradition. To convert them into a classification system of the Tantras is a later development (Kim, p. 17), due to some misunderstanding. Śrīśaila was one of the five main religious centres (*maṭhas*) of the Śaivas, as well as a core centre of Tantric Buddhism as Śrīparvata⁷. Among the three outstanding texts of the Krama tradition of Kashmir is *Mahānayaprakāśa* which reminds the *Nayasūtra*, one of the fundamental texts of Vajrayāna. Thus, there was constant interflow of ideas between Śaivism and Tantric Buddhism in Kashmir as well as in the south (at Śrīśailam and Kāñcī *alias* Oḍḍiyāna).

The subtle observation of Dr. Kim on *sarva* in the title of *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṃgraha* is “a qualitative indication of ‘Supreme’, rather than a denotation of ‘all’”. Indeed *sarva* suggests the meaning of ‘absolute’” (p. 119). She has rightly suggested that *Sarva*, *Śarva* and *Śiva* are synonyms. Again, the equation *Sarvatathāgata-Vairocana Tathāgata* derives from the Śaiva tradition.

The vanquishment of Māra (*māra-vijaya*) by Siddhārtha before attaining *bodhi* to become the Buddha too is a reflection of Śiva destroying Kāma (the god of erotic love) with the fire from his third eye when Kāma attempts to disturb his ascetic trance. Kāma becomes Anaṅga (disembodied form) so that creation goes on. *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the Kālacakra says that Māra is the conscience which attaches us to life, to passion. He is the king of love and life. The word Māra is the non-sigmatic variant of Smara (the God of Love). Aśvaghōṣa says so clearly in *Buddhacarita* 13.2:⁸

⁵ Personal communication of Swami Ram in 1984.

⁶ Mariasusai Dhavamony, in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, 1987: 13.12.

⁷ Lokesh Chandra, *Cultural Horizons of India*, 1993: 3.154-57.

⁸ E.H. Johnston, *Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha*, Part II, 1936: 188.

*yaṃ kāmadevaṃ pravādanti loke
citrāyudhaṃ puṣpa-śaraṃ tathaiḥ |
kāma-pracār-ādhipatiṃ tam eva
mokṣa-dviṣaṃ mārāṃ udāharanti ||2||*

*Him whom in the world they call the God of Love,
him of the bright weapon and also the flower-arrowed,
that same one, as the monarch of the activities of the passions
and as the enemy of liberation, they style Māra.*

Siddhārtha was born when his mother Mahāmāyā was between forty and fifty, though she and her sister were married early in their youth to King Śuddhodana. The *bodhisattva* entered her right side in the form of a white elephant. The elephant seems to represent Gaṇapati to whom Mahāmāyā must have prayed to beget a son for long years and finally she dreamt being blessed by Gaṇapati (son of Lord Śiva). Śaivism may have been the original *dharma* of the Śuddhodana family.

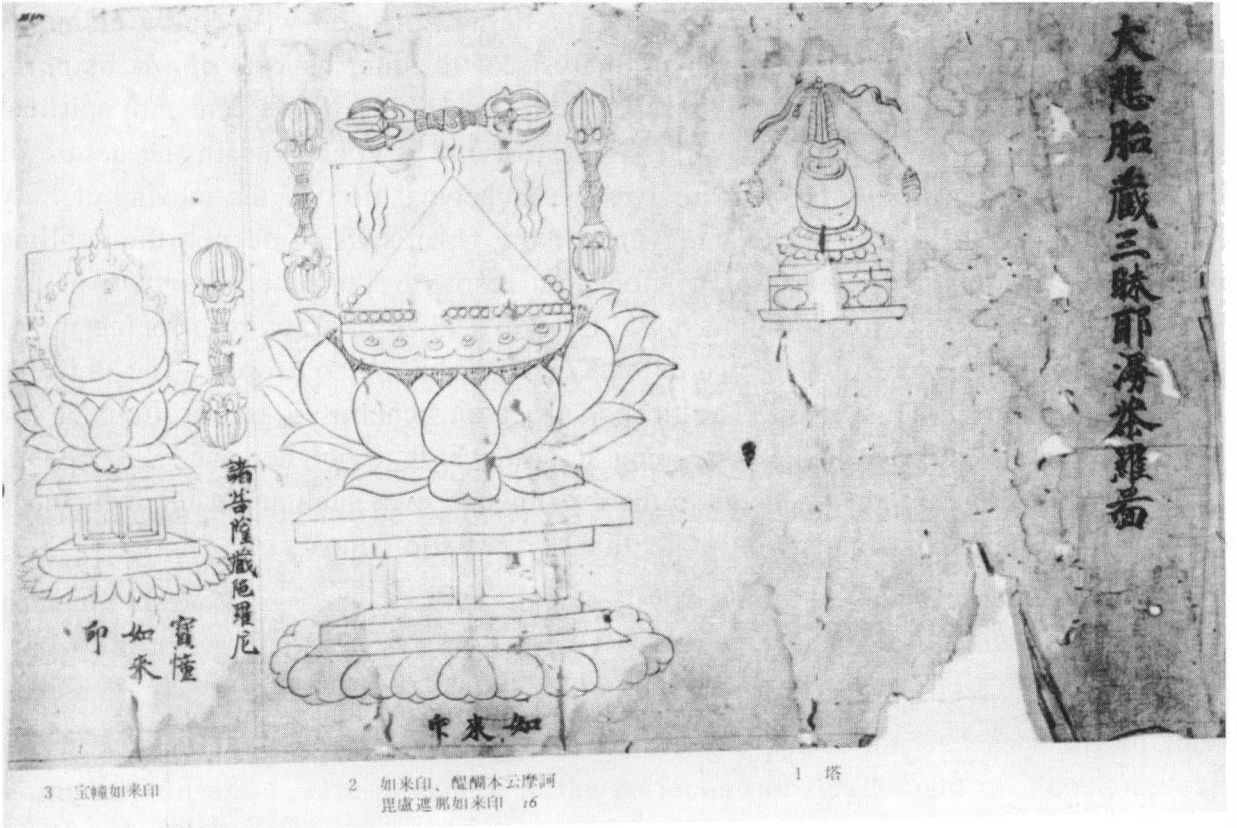
We have dealt with three ways of looking at the configuration of *maṇḍalas* in (i) architectonic terms, (ii) the *trikāya* paradigm, and (iii) as four Samayas. There is a fourth mode of representation on the physical plane (*kāya*), verbal plane (*vāk*) and the plane of mind (*citta*). They are graphically represented as follows: *kāya*, as an anthropomorphic icon, termed Mahābhūta Maṇḍala; *vāk*, as a *bījākṣara* (hieronym), termed Dharma Maṇḍala; and *citta*, as a symbol, termed Samaya Maṇḍala.

There is a fourth kind of Karma Maṇḍala for ritual performances, in which the deities are images made of metals for rites.⁹

Abhayākaragupta distinguishes *bhāvya-maṇḍala* for meditation from *lekhyamaṇḍala*, which is a graphic representation. He details the iconographic depiction of deities in *Niṣpanna-yogāvalī* as *lekhyamaṇḍala*, while *bhāvya-maṇḍalas* are detailed in *Vajrāvalī* as symbolic forms (*cihna*). For example, Vairocana in Vajradhātu Maṇḍala is represented in the meditational *maṇḍala* as a five-pronged *vajra* (*pañca-sūcika-vajra*).¹⁰ A line drawing of the *maṇḍala* of Abhisambodhi-Vairocana from Japan, based on *MVT*, is shown at the end of the book as the folded figure. This *maṇḍala* is popularly termed as Garbhadhātu Maṇḍala in Japan. The symbolic forms of Samaya Maṇḍala are illustrated by Ishida Hisatoyo in his *Mandara-no kenkyū* (vol. 2, pp. 32-54). It begins with the *samaya* symbols of Mahāvairocana and Ratnasambhava (p. xxxv).

⁹ See other interpretations of these four kinds of *maṇḍalas* in Lokesh Chandra and Nirmala Sharma, *Twin Maṇḍalas of Vairocana in Japanese Iconography*, 2012, pp. 39-40.

¹⁰ Masahide Mori, *Vajrāvalī of Abhayākaragupta*, Tring, 2009: 1, 269.



3 Ratnasambhava

2 Mahāvairocana

1 stūpa

The substantialism of the Jo.naṅ.pa School contains an echo of the Śaiva schools of Kashmir.¹¹ The teacher of the founder of this school was a *paṇḍita* from Kashmir.¹² The increasing stress on *mahāsukha* in the Rñiṅ.ma.pa School is influenced by *ānanda* (bliss) which is “one of three inherent properties of the real in Śaivite philosophy”.¹³ The philosophical ideas and symbols around the Bon mountain (*Bon.ri*) of Kailāsa are a “middle way between Rdzogs.chen and Śaivism”.¹⁴ Monk Bsod.nams.rgyal.mtshan of the Bkaḥ.rgyud.pa praises the human body as a means of salvation, “a motif that often recurs in the Śaivite schools”.¹⁵ When Bon began to be organized systematically it came under Śaiva influences which flourished in the bordering regions of western Tibet.¹⁶

¹¹ Giuseppe Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, 1980: 69.

¹² Ibid.: 259.

¹³ Ibid.: 81.

¹⁴ Ibid.: 219.

¹⁵ Ibid.: 265 n. 32.

¹⁶ Ibid.: 271.

Tibetan religious schools were constantly being suffused with Śaiva elements under new technical terms. The detailed analysis of the four aspects of *vāk* as *parā*, *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī* is a remarkable insight into the ascent into spiritual serenity and supernal vision, where the highest divine is conceived in the nature of sound and in its transience. Dr. Kim revives the archetypal flow of the moving eternity of *vāk* from the depths of the Brahmayāna of the Upaniṣads to deepen the sublime vision of *maṇḍalas*. The pearls of wisdom that resonate from the *antarjyoti* of Dr. Kim are precious seeds to grow into *bodhi* trees to realize the rapture of being in the scintillating ripples of *vāk*. In the words of Kōbō Daishi's *Hizō hōyaku* (The Precious Key to the Esoteric Treasury): "The deeper a person penetrates, the profounder the mind becomes, each stage being a stepping stone towards the higher one".¹⁷ The work of Dr. Kim is a journey that leads us to the ever higher, ever sublime, in the meticulous precision of analytical comparison of textual and artistic data.

Lokesh Chandra

¹⁷ Yoshito S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, 1972: 217.

Foreword

WHEN I visited the Alchi monastery for the first time, upon entering the Dukhang Hall, I experienced in a flash what this book describes in great detail. I was enveloped by the *maṇḍala*, so as to enter it and become a part of it, I was drawn into the centre from the periphery, in a process moving from the many forms to the emptiness from which they all spring forth. Once drawn within, the natural effect was to close my eyes, to contemplate in the inner vision (*pratibhā*) what the outer form had just so powerfully manifested. I stayed there for a long time, and when I opened my eyes again, I found a clarity and a confirmation. I was within the *maṇḍala*, and the *maṇḍala* was within me. All this arose prior to any analysis of the religious content or the details of the forms.

In a second flash, the idea came to me that the perfection and harmony of these forms had an exact correspondence in the perfection of the thought of a contemporary of the creation of these paintings: Abhinavagupta, the greatest Kashmiri mystic, philosopher, aesthetician of the first millennium. This correspondence fascinated me, because in both cases, the paintings of these *maṇḍalas* and the great tantric synthesis of Abhinavagupta's work (such as the *Tantrāloka*), their structural consistency and harmony, and the perfection of the detailed execution and expression were perfectly balanced. Neither does the structure overwhelm the beauty of all the parts, nor do the beautiful forms interfere with the overall conception. Part and whole are integrated. They represent in their respective media what the tantric dictum says: *sarvāṁ sarvātmakam* — “everything is related to the whole”, “every part reflects/contains the totality” (and other translations).

These two flashes of insight (*pratibhā*) were spontaneous, not prepared by any detailed study or analysis. But I found them wonderfully confirmed in the study of Sung Min Kim.

The author has requested me to write a foreword to her wonderful book, although I am not a Buddhist scholar or art historian. My qualification lies perhaps in the two areas which the present study embraces. One, the analysis of the principles of Indian art, which I have studied in the *Śilpaśāstras*, and especially in an extraordinary text

which the author also rightly quoted: *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*. There the geometric structure of any work of art (be it sculpture, painting, architecture) is given its full symbolic value, a value of which the traditional artists were deeply aware. The importance of the line, the point (*bindu*), the circle, etc. and their cosmic significance is hinted at in that text, thus making the sacred art a “mesocosm” between the microcosm of the body and the macrocosm. The same basic principles are relevant to Hindu and Buddhist art.

The second area is that of the Trika and Pratyabhijñā, commonly called (non-dualist) Kashmir Śaivism, with its great tantric exegesis. I was always convinced that the philosophy underlying the aesthetic concepts and principles of Abhinavagupta apply not only to poetics and dramaturgy, but to visual arts as well.¹

Sung Min Kim has made a great contribution to overcoming the dichotomy between the visual and the spoken or written word, between form and language. Form is another kind of language, with its “grammar”, “syntax” and poetry. That these are not vague ideas of correspondences but rather can be precisely related is the content of the present book.

The author has based her analysis of the *maṇḍalas* of Tabo and Alchi, the great monasteries of Spiti and Ladakh, on the pervasive theory of Vāk and its four stages – *parā*, *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikhari* – and she has done it so convincingly. It is in the framework of this philosophy of language, as originated from Bhartṛhari, contained in the Āgamas, and fully developed by Abhinavagupta, that the analysis of the relationship between the Form and the Formless, the differentiated and the undifferentiated can be meaningfully placed.

The present study effectively combines what is required for the understanding of such complex sacred art as Buddhist *maṇḍalas*: a knowledge of the texts (Sanskrit and Tibetan), the philosophy and the religious–spiritual background, aesthetic principles and artistic execution. Being an artist herself, trained in Indian art history and aesthetics, Sung Min Kim fulfils these core disciplinary requirements. Therefore her interpretation is based on aesthetic perceptivity and a deep understanding of the relationship between form and meaning. But more than that, the important contribution of her work is the bringing together of two traditions, Buddhism and Śaivism, and of

¹ Cf. my articles: “From Stone to God”, in R. Nagaswamy (ed.), *Foundations of Indian Art*, Chennai: Tamil Arts Academy 2002, pp. 28-37; “Light and Reflection: The Metaphysical Background of Aesthetics in Kashmir Saivism”, in K. Vatsyayan and D.P. Chattopadhyaya (eds.), *Aesthetic Theories and Forms in Indian Tradition*, New Delhi: Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture, Centre for Studies in Civilization, 2008, pp. 127-47.

two methodologies, related to “word” (*vāk*) and to painting and sculpture. Kashmir was a melting pot of religious, philosophical and artistic traditions around the beginning of the first millennium, and the interactions and influences between Śaivism and Buddhism contributed to their mutual development. Thus, the historical proximity of Abhinavagupta to the two great monasteries of Tabo and Alchi makes this attempt both valid and relevant.

Sung Min Kim has negotiated the difficult task of doing justice to both the aesthetic and the religious aspects of the Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. She has taken into account the artistic quality without neglecting the spiritual dimension, and placed both of them in the overall scheme of the four levels of *vāk*, since in both cases it is a question of manifestation out of the Unmanifest. Her interpretation is convincing, because such detailed analysis is not found in the field of the visual arts as it is in the context of language. Placing the Alchi *maṇḍalas* in the level of *sthūla paśyantī* (the gross form of the Visionary Word) is a stroke of genius. *Paśyantī* is the level of consciousness and of *vāk* which encompasses all in one act of vision, without being dependent on time sequence or analysis of details. It is thus close to the Supreme (*Parā*) which would correspond to *śūnya* in Buddhist thought. When *paśyantī* manifests at the level of form (*sthūla*) – whether in sound or in visual forms – it mediates between the Ultimate and the manifestation. This accounts for the intuitive, simultaneous vision of a *maṇḍala* before its component parts are comprehended or have become the object of ritual. In *sthūla paśyantī* the form comes close to pure consciousness (*saṃvid*), hence leading to a state of identification. The author shows the correspondence of *saṃvid* in Śaivism to *dharmadhātu* in Buddhism, as manifest in Mahāvairocana. In her interpretations the synaesthetic often plays a role, relating to a transformation of the visual as sound (as with *nāda* and the like).

Without going further into the content of the present work, I want to stress its originality, opening new vistas in the interpretation of sacred art – and not only for Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, which are particularly apt at presenting what the author calls “the essence” (*dharmadhātu*).² I am sure that the book will contribute to a deeper understanding of Buddhist art in both its aesthetic and spiritual content.

Varanasi

August 2014

Bettina Bäumer

² In this respect her work can be compared to the original approach of Alice Boner in understanding Indian art, especially sculpture, as for example in her book *Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass and IGNCA, 1990 (reprint).

Preface

It was about twenty-two years ago (in 1992) when I first witnessed the great ritual of Heruka Maṇḍala in Leh, in Ladakh, India. At the time I was an art student and my trip to India was triggered by a rather vague question about the meaning of artistic creations. My encounter with the ritual of sand-*maṇḍala* was unexpected and indeed overwhelming. First of all, the ritual of *maṇḍala* that was accompanied by the *mantra* recitation and *mudrās* had shaken my senses with their strong aural and visual powers. I was enraptured in the current of colourful visuals and penetrating sounds throughout the ritual that continued over the course of ten days. Above all, the final dissolution of *maṇḍala* into a flowing river after such an elaborate construction of the colourful form had given me the idea about what “the arts” should stand for: I thought I have seen the truest form of art. The impression of *maṇḍala* was so strong that I wanted to write an essay about it, when I returned to Korea after the journey. However, I could not grasp the topic, despite that, during the ritual, I had written some notes with technical descriptions; the subject was too formidable to be dealt within an essay. Moreover I had no knowledge either about the background or the philosophy of *maṇḍala*. However, my personal experience of the *maṇḍala* ritual in Leh and the mural paintings of *maṇḍalas* in the monastery of Alchi spoke about its profundity. I started researching the symbolic and religious meanings of *maṇḍalas*. At that stage, I was mainly concerned about the question of the relation between the concepts and the forms; however, I realized in due course that it is not the symbolic contents of *maṇḍalas* that make *maṇḍalas* visually powerful. Several years of research led me to the point of view that the deeper nature of *maṇḍalas* cannot be explored without touching upon the dimensions beyond concepts and symbols.

Buddhist *maṇḍalas* have been primarily dealt with in the context of religious practice. They have been understood as a design which helps the practitioner in exploring the inner realm during the rituals. It is said that the subtle forms of *maṇḍalas* re-created in the mind lead one to the core of *maṇḍalas*. The symbolic dimension of *maṇḍalas* has been doctrinally laid out in the visualization method of tantric practices wherein the external figures of a *maṇḍala* are, one by one, held in the mind and those

mental images gradually lead one to the realization of the Void (*Śūnya*). However, the technique of visualization is not known to ordinary people. In spite of their ignorance of the visualization technique, non-practitioners also respond intensively to the visuals of *maṇḍalas*, especially if *maṇḍalas* are accomplished by a high standard of arts. The response of non-practitioners cannot be simply named as the realization of *bodhicitta* (mind of enlightenment), *karuṇā* (compassion) or *śūnyatā* (the void), as is formulated for the tantric practitioners. Non-practitioners would not interpret their own experiences in such doctrinal terms, when *maṇḍalas* are spontaneously re-created in the mind. These internal images leave an impression of “spiritual enhancement” in the mind, which I define as “aesthetic”. The present volume investigates the phenomenon of how the Buddhist *maṇḍalas* speak to the heart, and from where their aesthetic power originates.

Most of this work has been completed for my doctoral thesis under the supervision of Prof. H.S. Shivaprakash in the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. It is only thanks to Prof. Shivaprakash that my quest for the meaningful visuals has been encouraged and possibly taken into a fruit.

I must above all express gratitude for the help and critical comments received from Dr. Ernst Furlinger. From the initial stage of the conception till the final refinement of the writings, he shared his knowledge about the subject and provided me with treasuries of research sources. Conversations with him stimulated me to carry on the research with enthusiasm and made me look at the subject from different angles. His critical comments helped me in organizing my fragmentary thoughts into a structure. I thank Dr. Bettina Bäumer in having read through my unripe synopsis and given me helpful comments. Also, I must express thankfulness to her for introducing the field of Trika Śaivism to me and for helping me out in comprehending the verses from the old texts. I must equally express my gratefulness to Dr. Christian Luczanits for giving me a number of practical guidance in regard to the researches on the sites of Tabo and Alchi. I appreciate his scholarly quality and great generosity that were proved by his detailed comments on my unorganized draft. I am grateful to Prof. Lokesh Chandra for his generous help in the matter of textual understanding of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. He generously shared his erudition and years of researches on *maṇḍalas* with me. I should not forget to thank the late Prof. Ramachandra Gandhi for helping me in relating my theoretical search with the creative activity of paintings. His questions about my paintings and academic interests stirred me to bring forth the question about the relationship between form and formlessness – which was the original title of the thesis – from its dormant state within my consciousness. I also owe thanks to Dr. Kapila

Vatsyayan whose presence and writings have been a continuous inspiration for my research and to Dr. Lolita Nehru who taught me how to write and how to organize ideas.

I must express my gratefulness to Geshe Tsewang Dorje of the Ngari Institute of Buddhist Dialectics in Ladakh for accepting my request for his personal instruction on the practice of tantric visualization. His compassionate teachings were extremely helpful in understanding the descriptions of the practice given in the old texts. I also thank Genla Takpa Jigmet of the Spituk monastery in Ladakh for sharing his understanding of visualization. I thank the monks of the Tabo monastery, especially Lama Ugyen Angrup, for explaining me the revived ritual of Vajradhātu Maṇḍala and Lama Sonam for helping me at the site of the research.

I gratefully acknowledge the staff in the Western Himalaya Archive Vienna, for providing me with valuable visual materials during my research period; the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund for having financially supported my doctoral research; Mr Tsering Wangchuk of Archaeological Survey of India, Leh, for his assistance. I also express my gratitude to Anil Pawar for his help in many practical matters during the research. I thank my parents for encouraging me all the way through the research. The equal gratitude should be expressed to my friends in Austria, especially Anni, Christa, Hemma and Fransiska for their constant help and love.

I would like to express special thanks to Dr. Jaroslav Poncar for the permission to publish his photographs and to Dr. Christian Luczanits who has not only granted me permission to use his photographs but indeed provided most of materials for the plates in this book. And with extreme gratitude I must mention the name of Michael Ianuzielo for his painstaking proof-reading and language correction.

I dedicate the book to my husband Ernst and our little daughter Yu Zin.

Vienna
August 2014

Sung Min Kim

Abbreviations

<i>DhĀ</i>	<i>Dhvanyāloka</i>
<i>DhĀL</i>	<i>Dhvanyālokalocana</i>
<i>DMS</i>	<i>Dharmamaṇḍala Sūtra</i>
<i>HT</i>	<i>Hevajra Tantra</i>
<i>ĪPK</i>	<i>Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā</i>
<i>ĪPV</i>	<i>Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī</i>
<i>ĪPVV</i>	<i>Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivimarśinī</i>
<i>LS</i>	<i>Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra</i>
<i>MV</i>	<i>Madhyāntavibhāga</i>
<i>MVBh</i>	<i>Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya</i>
<i>MVT</i>	<i>Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi Tantra</i>
<i>NS</i>	<i>Nāmasaṃgīti</i>
<i>NSP</i>	<i>Niṣpannayogāvalī</i>
<i>NT</i>	<i>Netra Tantra</i>
<i>PHṛ</i>	<i>Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam</i>
<i>PS</i>	<i>Pramāṇasamuccaya</i>
<i>PTV</i>	<i>Parātrīśikā-Vivaraṇa</i>
<i>RGV</i>	<i>Ratnagotravibhāga</i>
<i>ŚD</i>	<i>Śivadr̥ṣṭi</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Sāadhanamālā</i>
<i>SDPT</i>	<i>Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra</i>
<i>SpK</i>	<i>Spandakārikā</i>

<i>SpV</i>	<i>Spandavivṛti</i>
<i>ŚS</i>	<i>Śivasūtra</i>
<i>ŚSV</i>	<i>Śivasūtravimarśinī</i>
<i>ŚT</i>	<i>Śāradā Tilaka</i>
<i>STTS</i>	<i>Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha</i>
<i>SvT</i>	<i>Svacchanda Tantra</i>
<i>TĀ</i>	<i>Tantrāloka</i>
<i>TrK</i>	<i>Triṃśikākārikā</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Tattvasaṃgraha</i>
<i>VBh</i>	<i>Vijñāna Bhairava</i>
<i>VP</i>	<i>Vākyapadīya</i>
<i>VSU</i>	<i>Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad</i>
<i>VV</i>	<i>Vajrāvalī</i>
<i>YRM</i>	<i>Yogaratnamālā</i>
<i>YH</i>	<i>Yoginīhṛdaya</i>

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Introduction

THE central question of this work concerns, in a broad framework, the relation between the forms taken in the visual arts and their innate meanings embedded within. This research has been undertaken with the question of how the visible dimensions of artistic forms are related to their invisible dimensions. The invisible dimensions of visual forms are experiential in the arts, and their vital presence unfolds in both the process of artistic creation and in aesthetic relish. While we discuss the inlaid meanings of visual forms, we are naturally confronted with important questions: what is meant by the “embedded content”? Is this a symbolic implication or perhaps a metaphorical connotation?

From the outset, it should be discerned that there is a non-discursive meaning as well as discursive meanings that are charged into visual forms.¹ For example, the symbolic or metaphorical meanings of visual elements given in the fold of religious doctrines should be categorized as discursive meanings. The non-discursive layer of visual forms might merely be glimpsed in a flash, as we see in artists’ inspirations that result in the creation of new forms. For the purpose of investigating into the nature of forms and their relationship to the invisible dimensions of these forms, this volume focuses on Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, because they are as profound and multi-layered in their content as they are elaborate and rich in form. *Maṇḍalas* have been a perennial theme in the religious arts of India, and became even more elaborate in both form and concept in their Buddhist context.² The forms of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* are traditionally laid down on the basis of the vision attained at the state of the absorption into the non-conceptual world. The term *maṇḍala* designates different objects according to the context. It may refer to the system of bodily *cakras* wherein deities reside; or the secret ritual meeting of tantric initiates and *yoginīs* (*melaka*) where the participants usually form a circle; the ritual *maṇḍala* seen during the initiation; or even one’s own

¹ Langer calls it “essential import”. See Langer 1953: 373-74.

² For the historical development and the artistic influence of the *maṇḍala* form in Asian arts, see Leidy’s article “Place and Process: Mandala Imagery in the Buddhist Art of Asia” in Thurman 1997: 17-47.

body in the process of tantric *yoga*. *Maṇḍala* considered in this volume is limited to those visual objects permanently represented in the monastic complex and meant to be seen by the public during worship. The Buddhist *maṇḍalas* are generally characterized in the form of geometric structures with clear indications of the centre and the four cardinal directions; and the divinities are either represented in anthropomorphic forms or in symbolic forms, and are arrayed in a hierarchical order around the centre within the geometric layout.

The Question of the Relationship Between Forms and the Formless

Before discussing the question of visual forms and their inner content in Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, let us consider one concern found in the study of Buddhist arts: although the Ultimate Reality is defined *Śūnya* (Void), the Buddha that is the emblem of the Ultimate Reality, is also conceived in the form of the human body. One may see a contradiction in Buddhists' bowing down to Buddha images at the altar yet averring that the Buddha resides in one's own mind, not in the external images. However, it is not to the physical form, but rather to the spirit of the Buddha that devotees bow down. The physical form of the Buddha is placed at the altar in order to remind people of their own *bodhicitta* (awareness of enlightenment) and to mirror the Buddha in their heart. Another example would corroborate the suggestive characteristics of Buddhist images. Among the Buddhist communities of East Asia, the portrait of Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of Zen tradition, is revered and believed to have spiritual power; thus, monastic painters of the Zen tradition often draw his portraits. When they draw his portrait, it is not the beautiful face of Bodhidharma but the spirit imbued in his face that they feel challenged to draw. These two examples may typify the non-discursive meaning of visual forms embedded in the expression of Buddhist arts.

If we talk about form in the context of Buddhism, first of all, we are reminded of the great affirmation of Mahāyāna Buddhism: “*rūpa* (form) is *śūnya*, and *śūnya* is *rūpa*”.³ This assertion concisely exposes the non-dualistic foundation of Buddhist arts: the formless can be expressed by means of forms. The elaborate form of the Buddhist *maṇḍala* is, in concept, meant to represent *Śūnya*. But, how can we prove it or experience it? The Sanskrit word *maṇḍala*, literally meaning “the circle”, is the combination of two words *maṇḍa* (Tib.: *dkyil*) and *la* (Tib.: *kor*), respectively denoting “the chief divinity and the emanation” or *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*.⁴ Thus, we notice that

³ Cf. *Prajñāpāramitā Hrdaya-Sūtra*, tr. Müller 1894: 147-48.

⁴ The meaning has been explained in *DMS* of eight century CE. Cf. *DMS*, tr. Lo Bue 1987: 796.

the term itself contains the two counterparts: the formless Ultimate and multiple forms. The ritual concerning the creation of a sand-*maṇḍala* explicitly expresses the ideal of *Śūnya*, when the *maṇḍala* is destroyed to be dissolved in the flow of a river at the final stage of the ritual. However, how does *Śūnya*, the Buddhist term for the formless Ultimate, have anything to do with the colourful forms of *maṇḍalas* that are permanently painted on the walls of ancient monasteries and which have been preserved up to now? The question which is first encountered in regard to Buddhist *maṇḍalas* is how the bodily figures and primary colours in *maṇḍalas* can be consistent with formless *Śūnya*. When facing colourful *maṇḍalas* on the wall of these ancient monasteries, one is in a difficult position to understand the Buddhist ideal of *Śūnya*: these *maṇḍalas* seem contrary to “the Void” at the first glance. I, personally, had been struggling with the fact that Buddhist monasteries are filled with images, golden statues and colourful paintings, which, I felt, were contradictory to the Buddhist ideal of *Śūnya*. Nevertheless, one thing is clear: if the employment of colourful forms was contradictory to the quest for *Śūnya*, the presentation of colourful forms simply would not have been the perennial tradition of Buddhist art. Here, we must return to the Buddhist affirmation: *rūpa* is *śūnya*, and *śūnya* is *rūpa*. Colourful forms are present in Buddhist monasteries as a self-evidence of the non-dualism between forms and the formless, and what we investigate here is the question of these colourful forms of *maṇḍalas* and their relation to *Śūnya*.

Buddhist Maṇḍalas in the Context of the Religious Practice

The symbolic meaning of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* in the context of religious practice has been concisely expressed by David L. Snellgrove, a scholar of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism:

Maṇḍala, the primary function of which is to express the truth of emanation and return (*saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*), is the centre of the universe. . . . Its core is Mt. Meru: it is the palace of the universal monarch, it is the royal *stūpa*; it is even the fire altar where one makes the sacrifice of oneself.⁵

His words express the cosmic significance of *maṇḍalas*. In this text, two essential concepts of the *maṇḍala* are implied: the centre and its transformations. However, not all *maṇḍalas* are charged with cosmic meanings. Depending on the main divinity represented in the centre, the purpose and the meaning of *maṇḍalas* vary. For example, the *maṇḍala* of the eight Nāgas is for pacifying the venom of snakes;⁶ an interpretation

⁵ Snellgrove and Skorupski, 1977, vol. I: 32, n. 4.

⁶ Cf. *SDPT*, introductory commentary by Buddhaguhya, tr. Skorupski 1983: xxvii.

of overt cosmic symbolism is hardly appropriate for this *maṇḍala*. In his commentary on the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, Buddhaguhya remarks that each *maṇḍala* is designed for different purposes.⁷ Thus, one should clearly understand that the cosmic symbolism with an emphasis on “the centre and its transformation” is apt only when we deal with *maṇḍalas* of divinities who represent the Absolute. For instance, the *maṇḍalas* of Tabo and Alchi that are the main objects of the investigation in this book are centred on Mahāvairocana, who represents “the great illumination of Enlightenment” and “the absolute body of Dharma”. Thus, these *maṇḍalas* are charged with cosmic significance, involving such concepts as *Dharmadhātu* (Ultimate Dharma), *Śūnya* and *Bodhicitta*. As a ritualistic tool, Buddhist *maṇḍalas* mainly serve the practice of visualization. However, not every Buddhist is eligible to practice the visualization of *maṇḍalas*. First of all, one should be properly initiated in order to carry out the *maṇḍala* practice. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the practitioners are assigned according to their spiritual ability to particular *maṇḍalas* that are categorized into four groups. These four categories of *maṇḍalas* correspond to the Tibetan classifications of Buddhist Tantras: Kriyā, Caryā, Yoga and Anuttarayoga. Because Anuttarayoga Tantras mark the predominant stream of Tibetan Buddhism today, it is mainly the divinities of Anuttarayoga Tantras who are nowadays employed for *maṇḍala* practices. Thus, only spiritually advanced monks are said to be able to carry out *maṇḍala* practice.

Let us examine how the forms and the formless dimension of *maṇḍalas* are conceived by religious practitioners. For monks who practise with *maṇḍala* images, the pictorial *maṇḍalas* are not real *maṇḍalas*: they are merely reflective images (*pratibimba*). The real *maṇḍala*, which is the “Essence”,⁸ must be internally explored. During an interview I carried out in Ladakh in July 2007 in order to survey what *maṇḍalas* actually mean for contemporary Buddhist practitioners, Geshe Tsewang,⁹ a practitioner of Heruka Maṇḍala, said:

When the external *maṇḍala* is successfully internalized, the way how to practise *maṇḍala* is revealed.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The *maṇḍala* is called in Tibetan, *dKyilkor* (the centre and the circle), and also *sñinpo* which means the essence.

⁹ Geshe Tsewang Dorje is the director of Ngari Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, Leh, Ladakh. He is the former Disciplinarian (*Gekoe*) of Sera Jey Monastic University, Karnataka, India.

¹⁰ Personal interview in Leh, Ladakh, on 30 July 2007.

His statement confirms that the complicated external forms are not all about *maṇḍala*, and there are deeper dimensions to be explored. Unless the real *maṇḍala* is tasted, one could not know what the visual *maṇḍala* is merely by seeing it. Geshe Tsewang actually used the expression of “tasting a *maṇḍala*” to indicate its inner sensual experience. It is remarkable that a religious practitioner used the terminology of Indian aesthetics in explaining his spiritual experience, being unaware of what rich history the concept of “tasting” (*rasa*) has undergone in Indian aesthetics. The use of the metaphor, “tasting a *maṇḍala*” by a religious practitioner is particularly significant in dealing with the aesthetics of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*.

Buddhist *maṇḍalas* are taught to be the representation of *Śūnya*: the essence of *maṇḍalas* is *Śūnya* and their forms are reflective images (*pratibimba*) of *Śūnya*. It is said that realizing *Śūnya* of the self should precede the visualization of a *maṇḍala*. From *Śūnya* of the self, the deity is generated as the self. In visualization, the self becomes a divinity through *Śūnya* and returns to the self through *Śūnya*, and the deity of *maṇḍala* appears in *Śūnya* and disappears into *Śūnya*. The practice of *Śūnyatā*, *Bodhicitta* and *Karuṇā* (compassion) should precede the practice of *maṇḍalas*, and the Buddhist practice of *maṇḍalas* is essentially meant to strengthen the realization of the Truth that is *Śūnya*.¹¹ Thus, the *Hevajra Tantra* (*HT*), an Anuttarayoga Tantra says:

Bodhicitta which has both absolute and relative forms should be generated by means of the *maṇḍala* Circle, etc. (*maṇḍalacakrāḍi*) and by the process of Self-empowerment (*svādhiṣṭhānakrama*).¹²⁻¹³

HT succinctly explains about the essence of *maṇḍala* from the religious perspective. *HT* further teaches that *maṇḍala* is the essence which has the nature of void (*kha*) and purifies the sense faculties; thus, *Bodhicitta* is cultivated through *maṇḍala*.¹⁴ *Maṇḍalas* are also said to be the abode (*puram*) of the essence of all the Buddhas

¹¹ In a personal interview (4 August 2007), Geshe Tsewang of Ladakh emphatically stated that the *maṇḍala* practice should be based on *Śūnya*, *Bodhicitta* and *Karuṇā*.

¹² The commentary, *Yogaratanmālā* interprets the term *svādhiṣṭhānakrama* as the emanation of the Process of Perfection. Cf. Farrow and Menon 1992: 215.

¹³ *HT* II.4.35, Farrow and Menon 1992: 215. The *bodhicitta* has been translated by Farrow and Menon into “enlightened consciousness”, which I find inappropriate. I use the original term *bodhicitta* untranslated.

¹⁴ Cf. *HT* II.3.27. “The circle (*cakra*) is an assembly (*nivaham*) and having the nature of the space element (*kha dhātu*), it is that which purifies (*viśodhanam*) the sense objects (*viṣayā*) and other aggregates”, tr. Farrow and Menon 1992: 191.

(*sarvabuddhātmakam*)¹⁵ and bears the great bliss (*mahat sukham*).¹⁶ We see a clear notion in *HT* that *maṇḍalas* are defined to be the Essence (*sāraṃ*) or *Bodhicitta*.¹⁷ At the same time, they are the means to realize the Essence or *Bodhicitta*. Thus, we observe that, in religious practice, the notion of *Śūnya* combined with the concept of *Bodhicitta* is symbolically implied in the visual images of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*.

Buddhist Maṇḍalas as Works of Art?

Many attempts have been made to comprehend *maṇḍalas* primarily on the basis of their association with religious practices, because they accompany the rituals and spiritual practices. In the field of religious studies, their significance has been understood as the representation of doctrinal expositions,¹⁸ and their ritual process and ritualistic function have been unravelled.¹⁹ In these approaches, the visuals of *maṇḍalas* have been viewed within the framework of traditional interpretations, chiefly as symbols with discursive meanings; however, they have not been questioned in regard to their sheer visual aspect. On the other hand, their visual constitution has been the focus of art historical studies.²⁰ In the field of art history, efforts have been made to trace their formal development. The deities of *maṇḍalas* have been identified on the basis of the ancient manuals of the visualization,²¹ and the depicted *maṇḍalas* have been compared with possible textual sources.²² However, the scope of previous researches in the field of art history, while focusing on the visuals of *maṇḍalas*, does not seem to include their inner meaning. Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, though used in religious practices, are not merely one more item of religious paraphernalia. Neither are they the same as ordinary works of arts that are free from religious allegories. Being defined to be the object of religious arts, their inner contents and visual forms should be understood together.

Certainly for Buddhist practitioners, *maṇḍalas* are the sacred objects that accompany and help their path to the Enlightenment. Can *maṇḍalas* be seen as works

¹⁵ Cf. *HT* II.3.25, tr. Farrow and Menon 1992: 190.

¹⁶ Cf. *HT* II.3.26, tr. Farrow and Menon 1992: 190.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See Thurman and Leidy 1997; Khanna 1979.

¹⁹ See Wayman and Tajima 1992; Brauen 1997; Bühnemann 2003.

²⁰ See Malandra 1993; Leidy in Thurman and Leidy 1997; Luczanits 2008.

²¹ See Chandra and Vira 1995; Snodgrass 1992; de Mallman 1975.

²² See Klimburg-Salter 1999.

of art as well? One may question whether we can deal with *maṇḍalas* under the category of arts despite that they have been created in extremely ritualistic settings. The question may be, at the first hand, argued back on the basis that the separation between the religion and arts is a modern, Western convention, which resulted from the rise of individualism and the emancipation of arts free from the power of the Christian churches. The isolation of arts from religion in the modern concept of arts should be discerned as the freedom from the institutional authority of the church, not the denial of religion as a source of artistic inspiration. Even today, the validity of religion as the source of artistic activities remains intact. Secondly, we should be reminded that *maṇḍalas* are created by artists or monk-artists, yet not by ordinary monks. We should pay special attention to the fact that *maṇḍalas* have been permanently depicted on the walls in the monasteries of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. One is tempted to generalize, given that *maṇḍalas* are for the initiated, and thus are secret or esoteric. The initiation *maṇḍalas* are created temporarily to be the base of an internal visualization, which are to be dismantled after the rituals are over. Contrary to this generalization, *maṇḍalas* permanently painted on the walls of monasteries are open and publicly displayed. In such a case, they are meant to be seen by ordinary devotees; therefore, their visual dimensions play a prominent role. These *maṇḍalas* in particular should be studied in a context different from that of the initiation *maṇḍalas* in rituals or *maṇḍala thangkas* (roll painting on cloth) for visualization practices. They are works of arts, not restricted by their religious context.

One should especially note that *maṇḍalas* are appreciated even away from their religious meanings. Today artistically executed *maṇḍalas* are publicly displayed in exhibitions and people appreciate them even without knowing their ritualistic context or symbolic indications. People are overwhelmed by the exquisite forms and bright colours. However, the appreciation of *maṇḍalas* is different from that of ordinary pictures of portrait, still life or landscapes, in that the exquisite forms of *maṇḍalas* intend to lead one to feel something transcendental. One may have such experiences even without worshipping divinities delineated in *maṇḍalas*. These experiences would be better described in terms of the reaction of the heart, which we may call “an aesthetic rapture”. Such experiences unambiguously indicate the non-discursive inner meaning different from religious associations or discursive interpretations of symbols. In this context, they should be essentially seen as “an archetype”. *Maṇḍalas* can be aesthetically, or even spiritually appealing, without allowing their contents or meanings to be known, because their form, being “an archetype”, speaks to the heart at the non-discursive level.

The modern understanding of *maṇḍalas* as the mirror of our psyche can be attributed to Jung's research. His analysis of *maṇḍalas* created by his psychotic patients²³ demonstrates *maṇḍalas* as “symbols” that have been constantly recurring in diverse cultures, from the ancient to the contemporary. Jung observes that *maṇḍalas* appear in the process of individuation in case of his patients, in aid of self-healing, and he speculates that they spring from an instinctive impulse. He writes that many patients realize the reality of “the collective unconscious” as an autonomous entity, and these *maṇḍalas* are governed by the same fundamental laws that are observed in *maṇḍalas* from different parts of the world. He uses words such as “instinctive impulse”, “transconscious disposition” or “collective unconscious” to express the kernel of *maṇḍalas* as the archetype. Jung views the motif of *maṇḍala* as “one of the best examples of the universal operation of an archetype”.²⁴ Seen as an archetype, *maṇḍalas* are used as a psychotherapeutic method in the West. In this method, no meanings are given to patients. When patients are to copy *maṇḍalas* given to them, or when children in primary schools are given drawings of *maṇḍalas* and asked to fill the scenes with whatever colours they like, it is quite opposite to Jung's method encouraging the active imagination. Although it is not certain whether any contemporary therapeutic application of *maṇḍalas* in the West can be efficacious in bringing a desirable result, they are based on the idea that the heart spontaneously responds to the visual qualities of *maṇḍalas*, and that they have an influence in moulding the structure of the mind, whether consciously or unconsciously. Jung's writings on *maṇḍalas* urge us to uncover that *maṇḍalas* are primarily the archetypal or primeval space. In addition, we must pay attention to his statement in order to confirm that the *maṇḍala* as a recurring archetype can be explored in depth through the study of ancient texts.

Knowledge of the common origin of these unconsciously preformed symbols has been totally lost to us. In order to recover it, we have to read old texts and investigate old

²³ Jung 1973. Although Jung's researches on *maṇḍalas* of psychotic patients unearth the fundamental meaning of *maṇḍalas* as an archetypal symbol, his psychoanalytical interpretations of their visual symbols have little scope of application in regard to Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, because the cultural background of the symbols depicted in particular *maṇḍalas* has not been considered in his interpretations. The misapplication is exemplified by his interpretation of the burial ground as “the horror” without the consideration of its tantric context.

²⁴ Jung 1972: 69. From the conclusion of his article “A Study in the Process of Individuation”, translated from “Zur Empirie des Individuationsprozesses”, *Gestaltungen des Unbewussten*, (Psychologische Abhandlungen VII), Zürich, 1950.

cultures so as to gain an understanding of the things our patients bring us today in explanation of their psychic development.²⁵

In Jung's time, the translations of old texts into Western languages had not been done as extensively as they are today. Since then, crucial texts in relation to *maṇḍalas* have been translated into English, which have tremendously benefitted the present work.

Vajradhātu Maṇḍala and Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala from Tabo and Alchi in the Western Himalayas

In order to inquire into the relationship between the inner contents of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* and their visual forms, and to analyse the phenomenon that Buddhist *maṇḍalas* demonstrate an appeal even to the hearts of people outside the tradition and beyond its religio-symbolic meanings, the present volume narrows down its scope of examination to *maṇḍalas* in the monasteries from Tabo and Alchi in the Western Himalayas. These examples have been chosen because they display a rare refinement and sophistication as comparable with the classical arts, and also because they are one of the earliest *maṇḍalas* extant in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, which show the lively spirit, characteristic of the tradition before the Buddhist *maṇḍala* had been formally conventionalized and dogmatically fixed.

The monasteries of Tabo and Alchi were constructed during the period of the Second Diffusion of Buddhism (*phyi dar*) that was patronized by the Puran-Guge Kingdom in the Western Himalayas.²⁶ As is also observed in other monasteries established under the same historical background, such as Nako, Duṇḍkar, Sumda and Mangyu, Mahāvairocana (Great Illumination) is the central iconographic theme of the monasteries at this time. *Maṇḍalas* are not isolated paintings in Tabo and Alchi, but

²⁵ Jung 1972: 100. The quotation is from the conclusion of the article "Concerning Mandala Symbolism", first published, as "Über Mandalasymbolik", in *Gestaltungen des Unbewussten* (Psychologische Abhandlungen, VII), Zürich, 1950.

²⁶ The First Diffusion of Buddhism into Tibet was carried out during seventh-ninth centuries by the three Dharma kings – Songtsen Gampo, Trisong Detsen and King Relbachen – which has been ended by the Lang Dharma's persecution of Buddhism. The political upheaval resulted in the disintegration of the Tibetan empire into small principalities. At the end of the tenth century, Yeshe Ö, the king of western kingdom of Guge, demarcated the beginning of the Second Diffusion of Buddhism by motivating scholarly researches and translations of Buddhist texts. A number of translations of major Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Tibetan in the Second Diffusion of Buddhism are attributed to Rin-chen-zang-po who was sent by the king to India.

central to the whole iconographic programme, and vital in creating the world of the Buddha. Consequently, we encounter in these monasteries *maṇḍalas* related to Mahāvairocana. His position as the central divinity characterizes the Yoga Tantra class; thus these *maṇḍalas* with the image of Mahāvairocana at the centre are justifiably viewed in association with what Yoga Tantras say.

Dukhang (assembly hall) of Tabo is resplendent with valuable materials that require careful attention from various disciplines of study. Although the biography of Rin-chen-bzang-po (CE 958–1055) claims that it was he who founded the monastery of Tabo, the inscriptions there reveal that the monastery was founded by Yeshe Ö, c. CE 996. In so far as the present remains indicate, there are only two *maṇḍalas* represented in the *dukhang* in Tabo: Vajradhātu Maṇḍala and Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala. Vajradhātu Maṇḍala of Tabo is one of rare sculptural *maṇḍalas* set into architectural space. Alternately, the entire architectural space of assembly hall (*gTsug-lag-khang*) may be conceived as a *maṇḍala*, constituted by the thirty-three life-sized clay sculptures that represent the main divinities of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala. Another clearly recognizable *maṇḍala* – though it resists our preconception of a *maṇḍala* in the form of geometric layout – is located on the west wall of the assembly hall, on the right side to the entrance to the circumambulatory path (*skor-lam*) before the sanctuary (*dri-gtsang-khang*). It shows seventeen painted figures in a long rectangular arrangement. According to earlier researches on the site,²⁷ it is identified as the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala. The research on the inscription in the *dukhang* reveals that the construction of the wall paintings as well as the sculptural *maṇḍala* of Tabo may be assigned to c. CE 1042, during the renovation of Jang Chup Ö.²⁸

The oldest structure of Alchi monastery – i.e. *dukhang* – is almost contemporary to the restoration phase of Tabo, in the mid-eleventh century by Kelden Sherap, a follower of Rin-chen-bzang-po. *Sumtseg* (a three-storeyed structure) is thought to have been founded in the early thirteenth century by monk Tsultrim Sherap.²⁹ The *dukhang* is the congregational hall of the monastery, whereas the *sumtseg* is the three-storeyed temple, more conducive for personal worship and prayer. The monastery of

²⁷ See Klimburg-Salter 1997.

²⁸ Cf. Petech and Luczanits 1999. The iconographic programme, dating from the restoration phase CE 1042, includes painting, sculptures, inscriptions and extensive wall texts. The evidence of the paint underneath the *maṇḍala* sculptures makes it clear that the *maṇḍala* sculptures belong to the restoration phase.

²⁹ Cf. Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977.

Alchi offers us plentiful *maṇḍalas* that are more consistent with our conventional imagination of a *maṇḍala* in a geometric layout. The *dukhang* of Alchi is completely filled with *maṇḍalas* on the walls. Six large *maṇḍalas* of over 3 m in diameter each and a small *maṇḍala* of Akṣobhya over the doorway create a remarkable visual effect, especially through their prominent large circular frames. Among them, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala and Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala seem essential as much as their variations occupy entire walls of the second and third stories of the *sumtseg*. As far as the scholars have discovered, there are also *maṇḍalas* in the Durgatipariśodhana tradition in the *dukhang*.³⁰ Here the central divinity of *maṇḍalas* is associated with Mahāvairocana or Sarvavid Vairocana (Omniscience-Illumination). In addition, it should be also mentioned in the outset that the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā has a significant place in Alchi, being featured in two *maṇḍalas*: one in the *dukhang* and another in the *sumtseg*. The *sumtseg* accommodates ten *maṇḍalas* on the second storey and three on the third storey. The *sumtseg* is an architectural *stūpa*, which is traditionally revered as a form of *Dharmakāya*, and the inscription in the *sumtseg* reveals that its architectural space had been conceived to be a projection of Buddhist teachings.³¹ A three-dimensional *stūpa* is placed at the centre of the *sumtseg*, representing the concept of a *stūpa* within a *stūpa*, which is also demonstrated by the small twin-*stūpa* (*kakani chörten*) in front of the *sumtseg*. Seeing the architecture of *sumtseg* as a *stūpa* is important, because it clarifies the meaning behind the setting of *maṇḍalas* – i.e. essentially participating in the expression of *Dharmadhātu*.

Doctrine of Vāk

Maṇḍalas are one of the major concerns of Buddhist Tantras, and there is much reference to them found in the context of those tantric practices called *mantrayāna* (the way of *mantras*). Though the aesthetic dimension of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* is the main question of the present volume, the nature of *maṇḍalas* as understood in the context of religious practice shall also serve as valuable aid for the comprehension of the non-discursive Essence which is supposedly embedded within Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. In particular, references to the tantric visualization practice provide us with a key to interpret the internal experience of *maṇḍalas*. Through the visualization of a *maṇḍala*, the practitioner identifies the self with the various manifestations of the divinity, and

³⁰ Cf. Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: 39-40.

³¹ For the original Tibetan inscriptions and their English translations, see Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: 48.

thereby experiences the non-duality of self and divinity. Though there is a fundamental difference between an aesthetic viewing and the tantric visualization with regard to the way the visuals are processed, the visualization practice of *maṇḍalas*, systematically laid out by the tradition, demonstrates convincingly the innate depth of *maṇḍalas*, which could be related to the aesthetic immersion. Among the invaluable references that the practice of visualization gives us, the concept of “sound” – as comparable to the Sanskrit *vāk*, *śabda*, *dhvani* and the like – presents us a key to bridge between the ultimate state of *Śūnya* and the perceptible images, therefore to understand the Buddhist non-dualism of form and the Void. Because *maṇḍalas* are always combined with *mantras* and *mudrās* in tantric practices, it is necessary to ponder upon the notion of subtle sound that explains the conceptual basis of *mantrayāna*. The descriptions of visualization indicate that the metaphysical levels of form between *Śūnya* and the pictorial forms of *maṇḍalas* exist in the nature of sound, which is consistent with the fact that the visuals of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* have been elaborated in association with the *mantrayāna* practice, and *mantras* have been employed as the essential soteriological means to meet the Ultimate Dharma, according to Yoga Tantras. The concept of “subtle sound” plays a central part in analysing tantric practice, and it holds a crucial key to interpret the tantric methods of salvation.

“Sound” is a perennial theme in spiritual traditions of India, and it appears often in the descriptions of cosmic revelation or world manifestations. As the principle of divine manifestation and multiple creation of the world, “sound” has been explored in the book through the concept of *vāk*. *Vāk* (often translated as “speech”) is traced back to the period as early as that of *Ṛgveda*, and its theological and theoretical development may be represented by the philosophy of Trika Śaivism of Kashmir. The doctrine of *vāk* in Trika Śaivism synthesizes diverse streams of spiritual traditions: earlier Śaiva Tantras, Bhartṛhari’s philosophy of sound (*Śabdabrahman*), the Vijñānavādin’s philosophy of logic and the non-dualistic vision represented in the Pratyabhijñā (recognition) philosophy. The non-dualistic philosophy of Trika Śaivism is well pronounced in the profound aphorisms of the *Śivasūtra* by Vasugupta. The logical arguments of its non-dualistic theology have been carried out by the Pratyabhijñā School, represented by Somānanda (c. CE 900-50) and his disciple, Utpaladeva (c. CE 925-75). Abhinavagupta (c. CE 975–1025), who represents the culminating point of Indian aesthetics with his theory of *rasa* and *dhvani*, is the descendant of these philosophers of Kashmir, and he is the one who accomplished and synthesized the various streams of spiritual traditions on the basis of the non-dualistic philosophy of the Pratyabhijñā School. These key personages of Trika Śaivism of Kashmir are contemporary to the period when the region of the Western Himalayas was actively

interacting with Kashmir, in terms of the arts and religion as well as economy.³² Especially, Abhinavagupta is exactly contemporary to Rin-chen-bzang-po (CE 958–1055) who was sent to Kashmir for the collection of Buddhist texts and translated a number of Buddhist texts into Tibetan. His biography reveals the connection of early monasteries along the Western Himalayas with Kashmir.³³

The philosophical exegesis of Trika Śaivism, in my opinion, substantiates the non-dualistic philosophy of the Yogācāra Buddhists. Especially, the conviction of the Pratyabhijñā School that Śiva permeates everything and the *pratyabhijñā* of one's own identity (*ātman*) as Śiva leads one to salvation reminds us of the Yogācārin's exposition of *Tathāgatagarbha* (Womb of Enlightenment). Tucci has recognized the validity of Trika Śaivism of Kashmir in understanding *maṇḍalas*. In his book on *maṇḍalas*, he expressed his view that the Hindu *yantras* are “the quintessential reduction of the identical idea which the Buddhist *maṇḍalas* are based on”.³⁴ Consequently, he draws upon the Hindu Tantras even in interpreting the symbolic meanings of the Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. He interprets the Five Buddha Families in parallel with the five aspects of Paramaśiva or the five *tattvas* of the absolute plane in the *ābhāsa* system of Trika Śaivism: *śivatattva*, *śaktitattva*, *sadāśivatattva*, *īśvaratattva* and *sadvidyā*. And the five aspects of Śakti are also referred in relation to the Five Buddha Families.³⁵ Most of all, he pays attention to the concept of sound in understanding of *maṇḍalas*, and introduces the third chapter of Abhinavagupta's

³² The presence of Kashmir artists in Western Tibet has been discussed at length by Tucci in his *Transhimalaya* (1973). He mentions the artistic influence of Kashmir on Western Himalaya (1973). He refers to the importance of Mangnang and its paintings created by a number of artists from Kashmir summoned by Rin-chen-bzang-po (pp. 91-93). He exemplifies it with illustrations of a figure of a *sādhu* (Pl. 114) in affinity to the one depicted on terracottas from Harvan in Kashmir, as well as figures of divinities (Pl. 122) and an ivory statue from Western Tibet (Pl. 128). “Work such as this provides indisputable evidence of Kashmir influence in Tibet in the tenth-eleventh centuries, and similar examples from a later period have been found at Alchi in Ladakh” (p. 92). He adds examples from Tsaparang (Pl. 138), Tholing (Pl. 136) and Tabo (Pl. 129) as revealing their Kashmir origin.

Snellgrove also states about the same point (1977: 16): “It may be taken for granted, and we think quite rightly, that the main source of artistic work in Western Tibet and Ladakh from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries was north-west India, and especially Kashmir, which was then still a Hindu-Buddhist land, and which is often specifically mentioned in Tibetan sources.”

³³ Cf. Tucci 1988 (1932); Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: 86-92.

³⁴ Tucci 1961: 47.

³⁵ Ibid.: 50, 55-57.

Tantrasāra to explain the symbolism of sound which lays the basis for the relation between *mantra* and the emanation of images.³⁶ Tucci's attention to the texts of Trika Śaivism encourages us to look to their philosophy for the purpose of exploring Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. The vast cosmic vision of Trika Śaivism certainly renders parallel concepts that can be compared or applied to those of the Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, as Tucci's approach displays. In addition, the relationship between Kashmir Śaivism and Tibetan Buddhism has drawn attention of eminent scholars, and has been explored in terms of the history,³⁷ the religious practice³⁸ and the arts. The cultural connection between Kashmir and the Western Himalayas during the tenth to thirteenth centuries³⁹ is particularly relevant to the Buddhist *maṇḍalas* of Tabo and Alchi. One shouldn't ignore the fact that the artists had been brought from Kashmir to embellish these monasteries,⁴⁰ and that their work reflects the style of Kashmir arts.⁴¹ However, it is not the intention of the present volume that Buddhist *maṇḍalas* ought to be interpreted in terms of the philosophy of Trika Śaivism at the level of symbolic or doctrinal meanings. The application of the philosophy of Trika Śaivism to the symbolic meanings of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* ought to be avoided, because the doctrinal or symbolic meanings have been consciously endowed in the context of particular religious practices; thus, they should be interpreted within their own context. It should be clarified that the doctrine of *vāk* is referred to in this book for the purposes of interpreting the aesthetic phenomena and for structuring the different levels of the meanings of *maṇḍalas* from the perspective of aesthetics.

³⁶ Tucci 1961: 61-63.

³⁷ See Klimburg-Salter 1982.

³⁸ See the articles Bühnemann 1999; Ruegg 2001; Sanderson 1994, 1996, 2001.

³⁹ See Pal 1989.

⁴⁰ The presence of Kashmir artists in Western Tibet is especially well corroborated by Rin-chen-bzang-po's biography where the name of a Kashmir artist is mentioned. Bhidhaka and thirty-two are said to be brought by him, as was requested by the King Yeshe Ö. Cf. Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: 92.

⁴¹ Pal, while illustrating stylistic variations and their chronological order of mural paintings of Alchi, states that "the style of the murals in *dukhang* and *sumtseg* is generally considered to derive from Kashmir which was undoubtedly the principal source for western Tibetan artistic tradition at that time" (1982: 19). He presents paintings of western Tibet rendered in *dukhang* and *sumtsek* as "the only surviving evidence for inferring what Kashmir paintings once looked like" (ibid.), because no comparative paintings have survived from Kashmir. Luczanits states, "All the original paintings of Alchi and related monuments can be considered to have been made under the supervision of Kashmiri craftsmen, or at least the strong influence of a Kashmir school" (1997: 201-02).

The comprehensive philosophy of *vāk* in Trika Śaivism presents us a systematic way to explain the non-dualism between phenomenal objects and the Supreme Divine, which may be analogical to the relationship between multiple forms and the formless *Śūnya* presupposed in the teachings of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. It renders elaborate expositions concerning the nature of worldly manifestations and their relation to the Ultimate Origin, and mainly deals with the question regarding the relationship between the Unmanifest Source and multiple creations. Therefore, it is expected that the comprehension of *vāk* would impart the framework through which we can explain what makes the visuals of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* appeal to the heart of people even away from their doctrinal associated meanings. Moreover, the wide scope of *vāk* that encompasses the field of aesthetics has been already testified by the poetics of *dhvani* in the texts of *Dhvanyāloka* and its commentary *Dhvanyālokalocana*. *Vāk*, primarily viewed as the principle or vehicle of transformation, will be scrutinized in this book in its four aspects: *Parāvāk*, *Paśyantī*, *Madhyamā* and *Vaikharī*.

The doctrine of *vāk* also can be validly employed in regard to “the common origin” of various *maṇḍalas* as questioned by Jung. Let us briefly think of what is meant by “the origin”. From the religious perspective, the origin would be the Essence of the divinity, which is manifested in *maṇḍalas*. In respect to the visual dimension of *maṇḍalas*, their origin is the artistic inspiration that gives birth to such forms. Probably, Jung had not considered the artistic inspiration when he spoke of the origin of *maṇḍalas*, while possible that he had rather considered the origin in terms both religious as well as psychological. From the psychological perspective of Jung, the origin of *maṇḍalas* would mean ‘the Collective Unconscious’ that would give rise to the inner symbolic meanings. However, these concepts are not to be ultimately separated in the scope of

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- In regard to the arts of Tabo, the style of Buddha figures in the west wall of ambulatory corridor in *dukhang* of Tabo has been compared with the metal sculptures attributed to tenth-eleventh century Kashmir. One of the closest comparisons would be between the Maitreya Buddha in Tabo (Klimburg-Salter 1997: 181-82) and the standing Buddha in Cleveland Museum (Klimburg-Salter 1982: Pl. 27). Klimburg-Salter suggests two phases of artistic activity in *dukhang* of Tabo: the original in CE 996, and that of renovation in CE 1042. The second phase consists of four different stylistic groups. She attributes Group A (paintings in the ambulatory and clay sculptures of *maṇḍala* in the assembly hall) to the true Kashmir-derived style, and presumes that groups A and B (all the narrative paintings and the protectress in the assembly hall) may have been undertaken by the Kashmir artists, as stated in Rin-chen-bzang-po’s biography (Klimburg-Salter 1997: 51). She considers other groups of style to be derived from the Group A. Luczanits discerns that the style of thirty-three clay sculptures of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala is only partly comparable to the contemporary Kashmiri style, while the sculptures of Alchi are recognized as the “direct influence of Kashmiri art” (Luczanits 1997: 202).

vāk. If meaning and form are interrelated, then the devotional source, the psychic source, and the artistic source would be also interconnected, or even converge. The quest for the common origin of *maṇḍalas* could bring together the divinity, the deepest consciousness – what the collective unconscious in Jungian term suggests – and the artistic inspiration. The doctrine of *vāk* portrays its highest level *Parāvāk* to be the artistic inspiration (*pratibhā*) as well as the pure consciousness (*saṃvid*), and simultaneously worshipped as Devī (the Primeval Goddess), which may contain a crucial key in explaining that convergent origin of various *maṇḍalas*.

Primary Sources of the Research

The understanding of the doctrine of *vāk* in the present volume has been chiefly based upon those texts that represent the synthetic phase of Trika Śaivism, such as Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka* with Jayaratha's commentary and his *Parātrīśikā-Vivaraṇa*.⁴² The verses from *Spandakārikā* along with the commentary *Spandavivṛti* by Rājānaka Rāma have been also consulted.⁴³ For logical expositions of *vāk*, the invaluable sources are Utpaladeva's *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā*⁴⁴ with two commentaries of his own: a short one (*vṛti*) and a long one (*vivṛti* or *ṭīkā*), of which only fragments are available.⁴⁵ Abhinavagupta wrote a commentary on *ĪPK* – *Īśvarpratyabhijñāvimarśinī*⁴⁶ – and a much longer commentary on Utpaladeva's *Vivṛti Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivismarśinī* (*ĪPVV*). Relevant verses on *vāk* have been translated by André Padoux in French, whose English translation immensely benefited my understandings of *vāk*.⁴⁷

In order to comprehend *maṇḍalas* in the context of Buddhist philosophy, I have mainly employed the texts that belong to the Yoga Tantra class of Buddhist texts, with which the examples of Tabo and Alchi are associated. The primary texts on the Buddhist iconography such as *Sādhanaṃālā* (*SM*), *Vajrāvalī* (*VV*) and *Niṣpannayagāvalī* (*NSP*)⁴⁸ are only occasionally consulted, since the present research is more oriented towards the existential foundation of *maṇḍalas* than to their conventional pictoric appearances. The

⁴² *PTV*, tr. Singh 1988.

⁴³ *SpK* and *SpV*, tr. Dyczkowski 1994.

⁴⁴ *ĪPK*, tr. Torella 2002.

⁴⁵ Torella 1988.

⁴⁶ *ĪPV*, For the English translation see Pandey 1954.

⁴⁷ Padoux 1992.

⁴⁸ *NSP* and *VV*, two complementary works by Abhayākara Gupta (1064–1125) were written around CE 1100. Both texts describe in great detail twenty-six *maṇḍalas* from various tantric traditions. “*NSP* focuses on three-dimensional forms of these *maṇḍalas* for visualization (*bhāvyamaṇḍala*)

major texts often quoted in the present volume are *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi Tantra* (*MVT*) and *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha* (*STTS*).

MVT provides us with a profound philosophy of Mahāvairocana and fundamental concepts of the *mantrayāna*. We find invaluable materials that especially help in comprehending *maṇḍalas* of Mahāvairocana. The Tibetan text with Buddhaguhya's commentary has been translated by Stephan Hodge.⁴⁹ His translation includes *piṇḍārtha* as well. Although *MVT* is classified as a Caryā Tantra in the Tibetan tradition, it can also be categorized as an early Yoga Tantra. In the summarized commentary of the same Tantra called the *piṇḍārtha*, Buddhaguhya mentions only two classes of Tantras – Kriyā and Yoga –⁵⁰ which implies that the four divisions of Tantras are a later development. Buddhaguhya classifies *MVT* in the category of *ubhaya* (dual), which combines the orientations of both Kriyā and Yoga Tantras.⁵¹

STTS gives more direct references to the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala. Thirty-three clay sculptures in Tabo have been interpreted first by Tucci as the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala described in *STTS*. Along with the *MVT*, it is regarded as one of the most important texts of tantric Buddhism in East Asia. The text has been translated into Chinese by Amoghavajra c. CE 754. The Tibetan translation of *STTS* by Śraddhākaravarma and Rin-chen-bzang-po dates from the early eleventh century. There exist Tibetan translations of Sanskrit commentaries of this text by Śākyamitra and Ānandagarbha, who were active in the eighth century. In addition, a tenth-century Sanskrit manuscript has been published.⁵² This Sanskrit text consists of four major sections and a commentary section. In the introduction of its Sanskrit publication, Snellgrove outlines that the text contains “teaching of invocations of sets of divinities with instructions in setting up their *maṇḍalas* and in the rites and benefits concerned with them”.⁵³

→ and describes in detail the iconography of deities. *VV* explains the construction and ritual use of two-dimensional *maṇḍalas*, which are to be drawn (*lekhyamaṇḍala*) on the ground” (Bühnemann 2005: 5643). However, there is a different interpretation on the point, how these two texts are related to the *bhāvyamaṇḍala* and the *lekhyamaṇḍala*, as is given by Dr. Lokesh Chandra in the Prologue of this book (p. xvi). “According to Abhayākara Gupta, *Vajrāvalī*, a practical guide to all the preliminary rites preceding the initiation into *maṇḍala*, is the main text while the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, which deals with *maṇḍalas* in details, and *Jyotirmañjarī*, which deals with the *homa* ritual exclusively, are supplementary”. (Bühnemann and Tachikawa 1991: xvi).

⁴⁹ *MVT*, tr. Hodge 2003.

⁵⁰ Cf. Snellgrove 1987: 196.

⁵¹ *Piṇḍārtha* 4a, tr. Hodge 2003: 449.

⁵² *STTS*, ed. Snellgrove and Chandra 1981.

⁵³ *Ibid.*: 9.

Snellgrove translated some parts of the Sanskrit text into English in the introduction of the Sanskrit publication, and also in another publication.⁵⁴ Giebel has translated Amoghavajra's Chinese text into English, which comprises only the first part of the first major section, called *Vajradhātumahāmaṇḍalavidhivistara*. Amoghavajra's Chinese translation "tallies very closely with the corresponding portion of the Sanskrit text, the Tibetan translation, and Dānapāla's Chinese translation".⁵⁵ I have been benefited a great deal from Giebel's English translations as well as from those by Snellgrove.

One of the major commentators of these crucial Yoga Tantras is Buddhaguhya from the eighth century.⁵⁶ His commentaries of *MVT* have especially helped me in comprehending some cryptic words found in Tantras. He wrote a commentary on *STTS* called *Tantrārthāvatāra* and another on the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* (*SDPT*). Tāranātha mentions him as being very well acquainted with Kriyā, Caryā and Yoga classes of Tantras.⁵⁷ His own writing on the *maṇḍalas*, *Dharmamaṇḍala Sūtra*, despite being lost in its original Sanskrit, yet existing in Tibetan, presents us with discourse on *maṇḍalas* integrated from various Yoga Tantras. Its authorship has been attributed to Padmākara by Tucci; however, Lo Bue clarifies that it is attributed to Buddhaguhya on the basis of *Tanjur* (the second part of the Tibetan canon). *Dharmamaṇḍala Sūtra* (*DMS*) is a philosophical poem of 386 verses. Buddhaguhya states that he explains *maṇḍalas*' divinities and their palaces from all the great Tantras. In great detail it lists and describes the essential constituents of the conventionalized fivefold scheme of the Buddhist *maṇḍala*. It is thought to be the earliest known account of the conventionalized *maṇḍala* as we know today.⁵⁸

Another important Yoga Tantra for the study of Buddhist *maṇḍala* is the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*. The first translation of this Tantra from Sanskrit into Tibetan was made at some point at the end of the eighth century and was revised sometime before CE 863.⁵⁹ Some information is available from Tāranātha and the *Blue Annals*, which refer to three Indian commentators of this Tantra: Buddhaguhya, Ānandagarbha

⁵⁴ Ibid.; Snellgrove 1987.

⁵⁵ Cf. Giebel 2001: 7 (translator's introduction).

⁵⁶ Buddhaguhya was contemporary to the Tibetan King Khri-srong-lde-brtsan who ruled from c. 754 to 798. He is also contemporary to Padmasambhava and Śāntarakṣita. Cf. Lo Bue 1987: 788.

⁵⁷ Cf. Skorupski 1983: xxv, in the introduction to his translation of *SDPT*.

⁵⁸ Cf. Lo Bue 1987: 790.

⁵⁹ Skorupski 1983: xxiv, in the translator's introduction to *SDPT*.

(early ninth century) and his teacher Vajravarman.⁶⁰ Rin-chen-bzang-po (958–1055) translated two works of this Tantra. Skorupski's English translation of the Tantra is based on the Tibetan version which was translated from Sanskrit sometime during the first half of the thirteenth century by Lo tsa ba Chog, Chos rje dpal. Chapter II of this Tantra is especially useful for the study of Buddhist iconography and *maṇḍalas*. While the descriptions of the divinities in the text are simple and unelaborated, merely mentioning their *mudrās*, locations and colours, Vajravarman's commentary gives detailed accounts on the basic *maṇḍala* of Tantra⁶¹ and the divinities of the *maṇḍalas*. However, the text benefits the present research in the context of the visualization practice rather than in that of the visual elements of *maṇḍalas*, since the discussion of this book shall be limited to the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala and the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala.

Nāmasaṃgīti (NS) is a crucial source which speaks of the nature of the Ultimate as it had been understood in the period when *maṇḍalas* of Tabo and Alchi were established. The NS reflects the popularity of devotional practice in the eighth century; it was still popular in north-east India in the early eleventh century. The text was translated into Tibetan during the First Diffusion of Buddhism.⁶² A commentary to NS that has been affiliated to the Māyājāla Tantra has delineated the ritual of *maṇḍala* of Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara. The text has been understood as the devotional hymns for Mañjuśrī, and the title has been translated into “the Litany names of Mañjuśrī”. In contrast to the prevalent understanding of the text, Chandra draws a new understanding of the text, based on the titles of the Chinese, Tibetan and Sanskrit manuscripts.⁶³ He argues that NS is recited by Mañjuśrī addressing the litany of names of Advaya Paramārtha, i.e. Mahāvairocana in the context of Yoga Tantra.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ “From a short colophon at the end of a work by Ānandagarbha, who was a renowned scholar of the Yoga Tantras, we learn that Vajravarman came from Siṃhala (Sri Lanka) and was Ānandagarbha's teacher” (Skorupski 1983: xxv).

⁶¹ *SDPT*, tr. Skorupski 1983: 311-12.

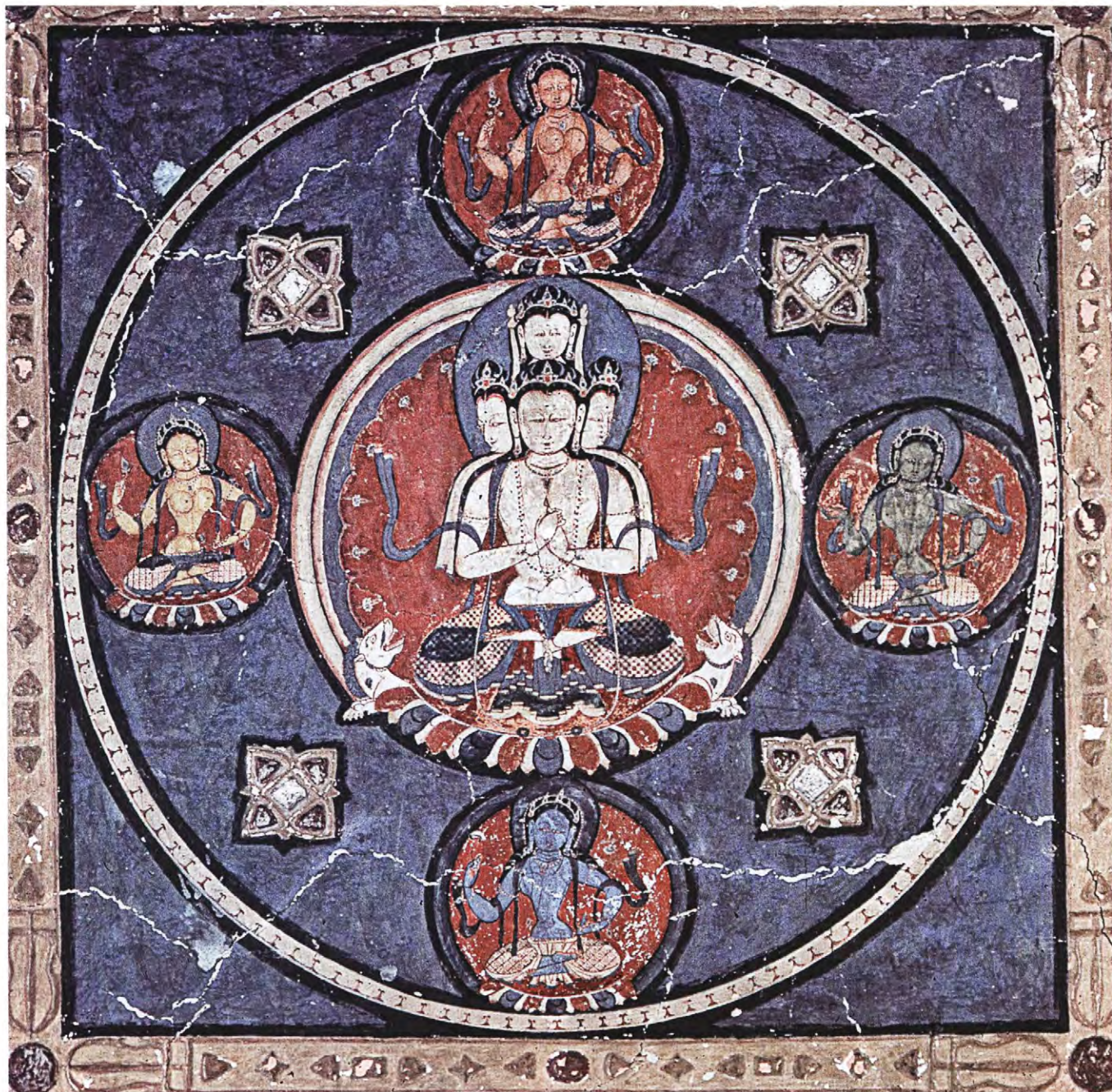
⁶² Cf. Davidson 1981, his introduction in the translation of NS. Also see Klimburg-Salter 1999: 317.

⁶³ Cf. Chandra 1993.

⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*: 391-94.



Pl. 1 Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, left wall of *dukhang*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1981 (WHA V))



Pl. 2 Central chamber of Mahāvairocana, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, *dukhang*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1981 (WHA V))



Pl. 3 Mahāvairocana, the central chamber, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, dukhang, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1989 (WHAU))



Pl. 4 Chamber of Tārā, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, *dukhang*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1981 (WHAV))

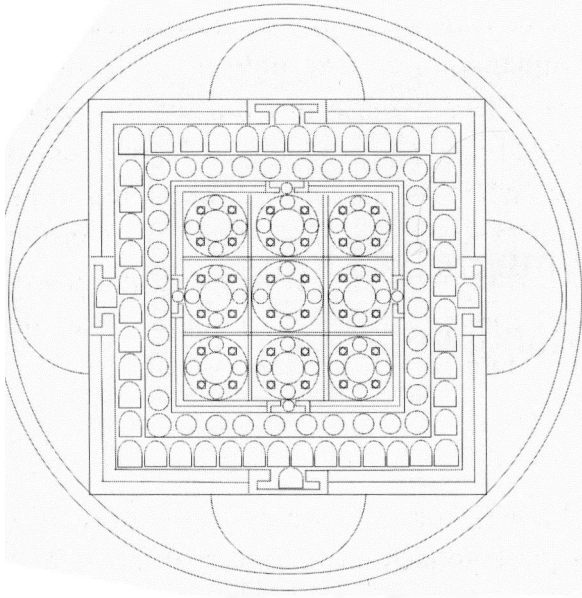
I.

Tangible Forms and Symbolic Meanings of Buddhist Maṇḍalas

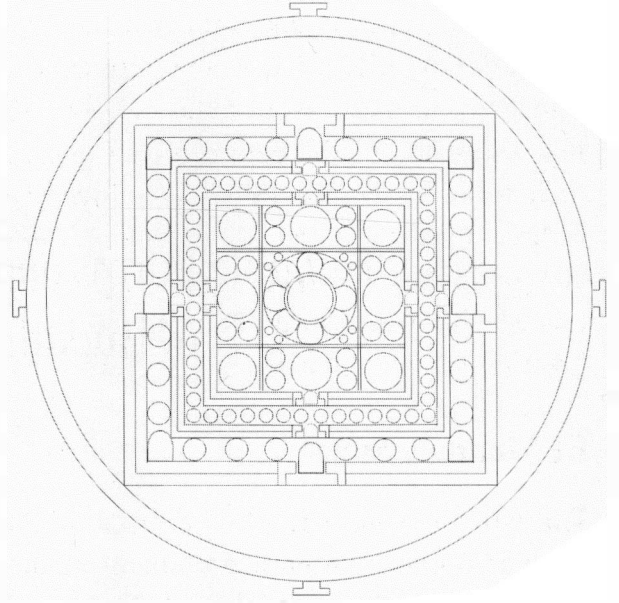
I.1 Maṇḍala Space

THE word *maṇḍala* implies a circular form. Knowing this, it is not surprising that a circular frame is often a prominent element in the composition of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. Especially in the examples of Alchi, all *maṇḍalas* have a circular outer frame. For example, a glance at the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala painted on the left wall of the *dukhang* in Alchi (*Pl.* 1) informs us that the entire *maṇḍala* is displayed in a circular arrangement. Along the circumference run lines of *vajras* and fire. A square is laid within the circle, with four elaborate *torāṇas* (gateways) at the four directions. Along the square, two bands give room for minor deities of the Maṇḍala. They surround another square which has the second set of four gates in the four directions, which lead the viewer's attention to the inner chamber of the Maṇḍala. The square space is again divided into nine smaller squares by golden lines of *vajras*. These nine squares accommodate nine concentric circles, each of which gives a room for each of nine major deities of the Maṇḍala (*Pls.* 2, 4). The deity Mahāvairocana to which the Maṇḍala is dedicated is painted within the central chamber (*Pl.* 3). The outer circular bands of these concentric circles are punctuated with four smaller figures placed in the four directions. The geometric layout of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala may be illustrated as follows (*Illus.* 1.1). Elaborate geometric structures of *maṇḍalas* in Alchi may be equally well demonstrated by the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala, placed right next to the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala (*Illus.* 1.2, *Pl.* 5).

Maṇḍalas are pictorially represented on cloth or on a wall, or they are spatially conceived in architectural space. In all cases, *maṇḍalas* are more than mere physical objects; while this might be obvious, it is often forgotten when actually encountered. They are meant to be internally entered by the viewer. However, one cannot enter a *maṇḍala* immediately, because it is like a fortified palace, surrounded by borders pictorially symbolized by fire, *vajra* and so on. A *maṇḍala* is a protected space,



Illus. 1.1: Geometric layout of Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, dukhang, Alchi

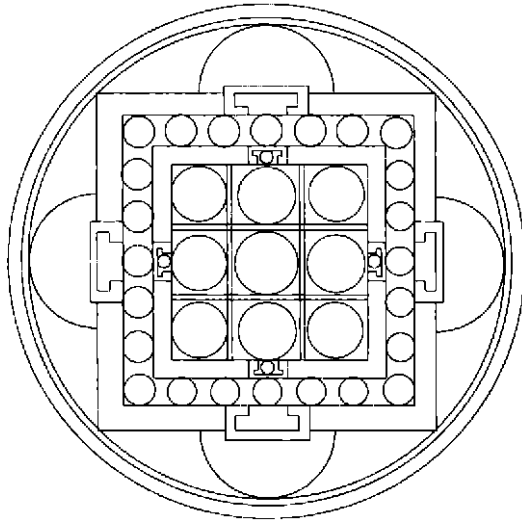


Illus. 1.2: Geometric layout of Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala, dukhang, Alchi

fundamentally sealed by several layers of walls. A wall in the *maṇḍala* structure functions as a protective screen, yet gates give a means of ingress. In order to enter the space within the walls, one should find one's proper entryway. Thus, there are series of gates that allow one's entrance to the innermost space of the *maṇḍala*. As is represented by the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala painted on the left wall in the *dukhang* of Alchi (*Illus. 1.2, Pl. 5*), it is most often protected by three layers of square walls which demarcate the three divisions of the *maṇḍala* space. Each layer of walls has four gates at the four quarters. It is significant that there are four gates that give access to the innermost space of a *maṇḍala*. The *maṇḍala* structure with four gates implies one's circular movement in *samādhi* or in initiation, which mirrors the traditional practice of *parikrama* (circumambulation) around a *stūpa*. Additionally, there are door guardians who watch the path toward the inner zone of the *maṇḍala*. "Entering a *maṇḍala*" means "being allowed to practise with it" in rituals. Entering the innermost space of a *maṇḍala*, having found one's way through the gates, indicates the spiritual advancement towards Buddhahood. However, it is not limited to its ritualistic context; its fundamental meaning lies in one's inner search for the Self.

In regard to one's approach to the centre of the *maṇḍala* ground, the unique feature observed in *maṇḍalas* in the *sumtseg* of Alchi may be mentioned. Whereas in the second storey, ten *maṇḍalas* of Vajradhātu Maṇḍala variations share a common

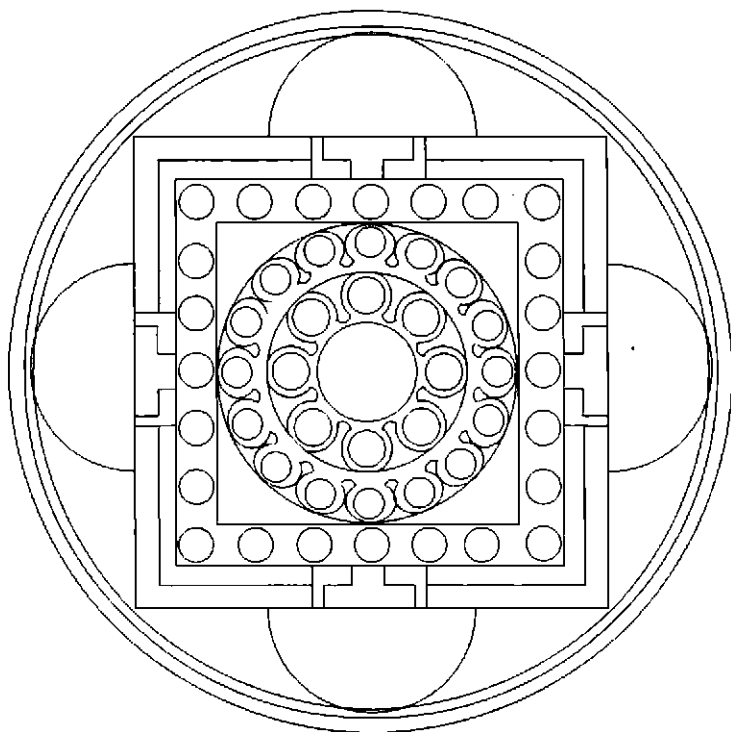
geometric layout, bound with two sets of four gates (*Illus. 1.3*), in the third storey three *maṇḍalas* of Mañjuśrī, Mahāvairocana and Prajñāpāramitā have only a single set of four gates in their layout (*Illus. 1.4 i-iii Pls. 6-8*). The difference in the number of gates that leads one to the centre of the *maṇḍala* ground could be understood in relation to their locations within the three-storeyed structure. When the *sumtseg* is considered to be a three-storeyed *stūpa*, these three *maṇḍalas* are at the place of the last round in the conventional three revolutions of *parikrama*. Having only one set of gates and being placed along the third round of *parikrama*, these *maṇḍalas* seem to signify that the practitioner has already come close to the central core of the maṇḍalic world.



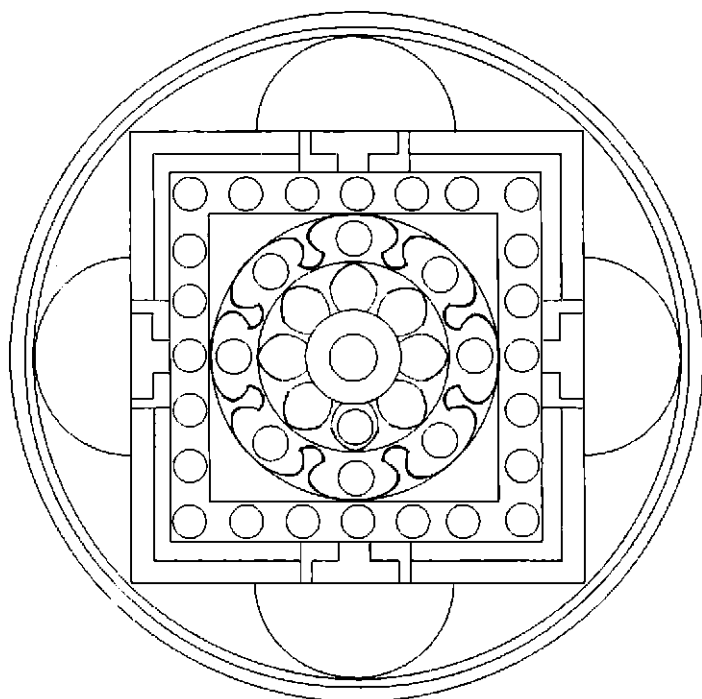
Illus. 1.3: Geometric layout of the ten maṇḍalas in the second storey of sumtseg, Alchi

The examples of Alchi illustrate how appropriately a *maṇḍala* can be characterized by the geometric layout and reinforced by circular dynamics. However, when we discuss about the characteristics of *maṇḍalas*, *maṇḍalas* without geometric layout should be also considered; there are vertical *maṇḍalas* employed by Śaivas, such as Trisūlābja Maṇḍala and Tritrisūlābja Maṇḍala¹ as well as linear *maṇḍalas* as we see in Tabo. These examples suggest that the geometric formation of divine residence is not indispensable. From these examples we cannot assert that the geometric layout represents the essential characteristic of every *maṇḍala*. Here we pay attention to the

¹ Cf. Padoux 2003: 225-38. Padoux points out a distinctive characteristic of Śaiva *maṇḍalas* — Trisūlābja Maṇḍala, Tritrisūlābja Maṇḍala — described in Abhinavagupta's *TĀ*. He states that in these *maṇḍalas*, the mental movement of the user is one of ascension or centrifugal, whereas the concentric geometrical structure of general *maṇḍalas* has a centripetal motion.

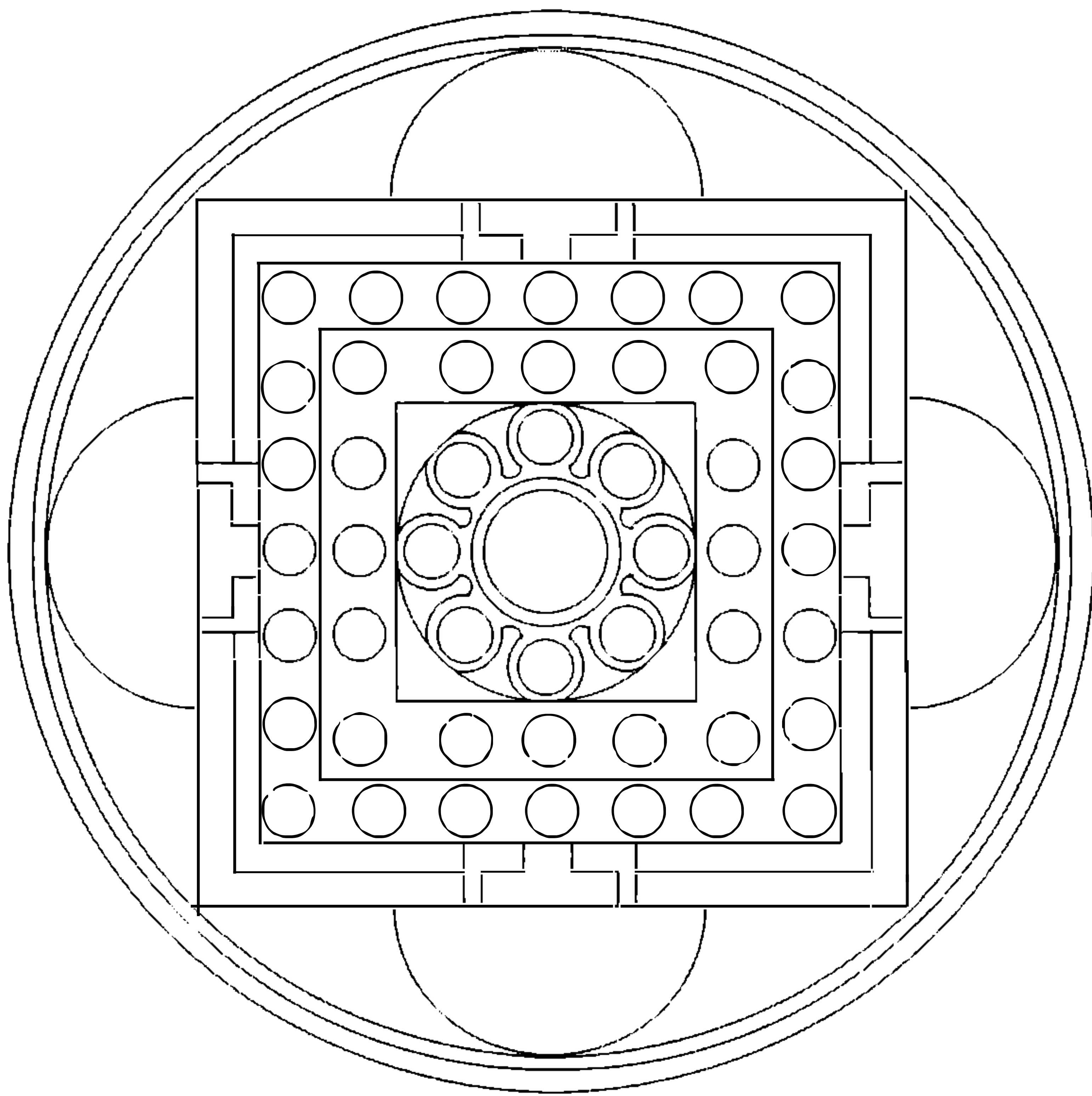


(i) Maṇḍala of Mañjuśrī



(ii) Maṇḍala of Mahāvairocana

Illus. 1.4: Geometric structure of three maṇḍalas in the third storey of sumtseg, Alchi



(iii) Maṇḍala of Prajñāpāramitā

Illus. 1.4: Geometric structure of three maṇḍalas in the third storey of sumtseg, Alchi

dukhang of Tabo, where the entire artistic scheme reflects the theme of “entering a *maṇḍala*”. Apart from the treasures of Vajradhātu Maṇḍala and Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala preserved in the assembly hall (*gTsug-lag-khang*) in the *dukhang*, one’s movement from the entrance room (*sokhang*) to the assembly hall where these *maṇḍalas* are placed betrays the concept of *maṇḍala*. The artistic scheme of the entrance room represents the fundamental human desires for prosperity and protection from perils, which in religious terms signifies “the fortification of the *buddhakṣetra* (the sacred world of Buddha)”. We see here various personages: eight Mahādevas of the Indian pantheon, including Gaṇeśa and Śiva; eight Great *Nāgas*; eight Planets; historical figures including the founder of the monastery, Yeshe Ö and his two sons (*Pl. 9*); the protectress of Tabo, Wi-nyu-myin (*Pl. 10*); several guardian figures such as two *dharmapāla* clay statues of Hayagrīva and Mahākāla at the doorway to the assembly hall. The entrance room may be compared to the periphery of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala.² Once one moves past all

² Cf. Klimburg-Salter 1997: 86. Klimburg-Salter proposes that the figures of the entrance room constitute the outer zone of *maṇḍala* on the following basis: the eight Mahādevas of the Hindu pantheon, eight Great *Nāgas*, eight Planets and the twenty-eight mansions are found

these worldly gods, tutelary deities and door guardians, one steps into the assembly hall, bending low to pass through a small, low doorway, as one should prostrate one's body to enter the interior space.

Entering the assembly hall is a significant step towards the *maṇḍala* ground's inner zone. In this hall, the most predominant sight is that of the thirty-three clay sculptures (*Pl. 11*) which demarcate the inner zone of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala. The four-bodied statue of Mahāvairocana (height 110 cm) is at the rear part of the hall (*Pl. 12*) and the rest are affixed to the middle portion of the walls as if they are floating in the intermediate space. These striking stucco images are placed so as to look down upon a visitor, creating a remarkable visual effect that transforms a physical space to a ritual, metaphysical one (*Pl. 13*). The narrative scenes of Sudhana and the life of Śākyamuni run below the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, respectively, based on the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* and the *Lalitavistara*. Those of Sudhana suggest the preliminary steps that one must pass before reaching “the inner space of the *maṇḍala* ground”. The backgrounds of these narrative scenes are either forests or houses or palaces, and houses or palaces here represent spatial compounds where the true teachings of Dharma are protected. City walls and gates feature frequently in the panels of Sudhana's pilgrimage;³ we observe that Sudhana is often depicted entering city gates, or leaving the city to find his spiritual friends (*kalyāṇamitras*) (*Pl. 14*). City walls and gates are not only important visual elements found harmoniously on various narrative panels, but also emphasize the hardship experienced when crossing the layers of walls in order to enter the inner

→ protecting the outer precincts of *maṇḍalas* listed in the early sources, such as *SDPT*. *SDPT* (tr. Skorupski 1983) gives the list of divinities for the periphery of the basic *maṇḍala* of the Tantra. According to the text, on the outside are the thirty-two divinities: the eight Śrāvakas to the east, eight Pratyekabuddhas to the south, eight Mighty Wrathful Ones to the west, and eight Messengers of the Wrathful Ones to the north. Further outside, there is a circle of sixty-four divinities: Four Great Kings in the four quarters, the Guardians of the Ten Directions on the left sides of the Four Great Kings, eight Planets, the Lunar Mansion, eight Great *R̥ṣis*, and eight Leaders of the lesser divinities. The text goes on to illustrate the minor divinities that are to be placed outside the circle of the sixty-four divinities, such as the four main Hindu gods – Indra, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara – presiding over the four continents. The same pan-Indian deities appear in the outer circles of Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala (*NSP* 21; Mallmann 1986: 2, 268-69). Since the paintings of entrance room, belonging to the foundation period (c. CE 996 or 1008), are presumed to be the outer ring of a *maṇḍala*, we can infer that the *maṇḍala* scheme had been already planned in the monastery of Tabo from the foundational period, although the major *maṇḍala* deities in the assembly hall are traced back to the renovation period (CE 1042).

³ See panels II, IX, XII, XIV, XIX, XX, XXV and XXXVIII as numbered in Steinkellner 1996.

core of Dharma. The repeated use of city walls and gates in Sudhana's pilgrimage is also related to the spiritual progress of the Tantric *sādhana*.⁴ The scene where Sudhana meets the master Ratnacūḍa especially draws our attention, because it is depicted within the setting of a *maṇḍala*-like structure, thereby telling us about the significance of the *maṇḍala* ground in relation to spiritual development (*Pl.* 15).⁵ Here, the composition is framed by a multi-cornered structure, with two doors at each of the four directions. In the illustration, Sudhana is guided by Ratnacūḍa; they enter the *maṇḍala*-like structure from the leftmost door and come to the centre, surrounded by eighteen Bodhisattvas bedecked with crowns and jewels. According to the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, this *maṇḍala*-like structure is the ten-storeyed house of Ratnacūḍa, which may be compared to the ten stages on the path of Bodhisattva. The *maṇḍala*-shaped structure in this illustration is an analogy for the inner space charged with true teaching. Some other panels of Sudhana's pilgrimage also display this circular *maṇḍala* structure,⁶ and these compositions express the spiritual symbolism of the *maṇḍala* ground.

Thematically, the wall of the assembly hall in the *dukhang* of Tabo is divided into three horizontal sections. The threefold division is apparently related to the ritual act of a threefold circumambulation. The upper part of wall presents many figures: the Buddhas of the Ten Directions (*Pl.* 16); the protectress of Tabo Wi-nyu-myin surrounded by her retinue and animals and the trinity of Amitābha–Avalokiteśvara–Samantabhadra (*Pl.* 17); the three Bodhisattvas – Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi (*Pl.* 18); various tantric figures; and Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala (*Pls.* 29-31). We further discover that the painting themes of the upper partition display its affinity to the inner zone of the *dukhang*, i.e. the circumambulatory path and the sanctuary. The circumambulatory path (*skor-lam*) that surrounds the sanctuary is painted with the thirty-two Bodhisattvas, consisting of sixteen Mahābodhisattvas in the lower row and sixteen Bodhisattvas above (*Pl.* 19), the eight historical Buddhas,⁷ the Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpa (*Pl.* 19), and the narrative scenes of Sadāprarudita in

⁴ McMahan (2002: 172) places the story of Sudhana's pilgrimage in parallels with the generation and completion stages of the tantric *sādhana*.

⁵ Cf. *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, tr. Cleary 1989: 114-16; Steinkellner 1996: 24.

⁶ See panels V, XIV, XX and XXXIX. The numbering of the panels has been adapted from Steinkellner 1996.

⁷ On the west wall are found the six historical Buddhas. However, it appears to have originally consisted of eight seated *buddhas*.

search for *Prajñāpāramitā*.⁸ The sanctuary (*dri-gtsang-khang*; 2.55 × 2.65 m) has a raised floor and is higher than the rest of *dukhang*. It contains stucco images of Vairocana,⁹ Avalokiteśvara and Vajrasattva, which are larger than life-size (*Pl.* 20). A pair of goddesses is painted on either side of these statues, and the entire walls of the sanctuary are painted with rows of Buddhas.

What we see in the artistic scheme of the assembly hall walls is not arbitrary. One might ask why the narrative stories of Sudhana and Śākyamuni have been placed at the lower zone, rather than at the top. If we consider the distinctive artistic themes of the three levels of the wall, we can infer that two different realms have been represented: one “human” and the other “divine”, intermediated by the figures of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala. Klimburg-Salter interprets the three levels in the assembly hall as being in connection with *trikāya*, having applied the iconographic programme of the eighth-century bSam-yas, first monastery of Tibet (modelled after the monastery of Odantapurī in Bihar) which became the model of the later monasteries to come in Tibet.

Thus, also at Tabo, the Buddhist through his circumambulation, at minimum three times, could ascend through the three bodies (*kāyas*). The *nirmāṇakāya* is represented through the spiritual pilgrimage of Sudhana and the Buddha Śākyamuni, the *saṃbhogakāya* is represented by the images of *maṇḍala* and the *dharmakāya* is represented by the images of Ten Buddhas and their attending Bodhisattvas, also the Tantric images.¹⁰

It is an insightful interpretation of the artistic scheme of the assembly hall. However, it should be applied only in a limited context, and we should not generalize every *maṇḍala* to be the representation of the *saṃbhogakāya*. The threefold wall division is significant in the context of the iconographic scheme that leads one to smoothly enter the *maṇḍala* space. Even without borrowing the technical terms such as *trikāya* or defining *maṇḍala* as *saṃbhogakāya*, it is certain that the lower and upper zones present

⁸ These narrative scenes have been identified by Luczanits. See his website, <http://www.univie.ac.at/itba/index.html>

⁹ Tucci (1988 [1935]: 78) identified the statue as Amitābha. However, Klimburg-Salter (1982: 160) suggested the identification of Vairocana on the basis of the lion vehicle, and the fact that older images of Vairocana are represented with *dhyāna mudrā*. The hypothesis of Luczanits – that the central Buddha might have been painted white – substantiates the identification of the statue as the representation of Vairocana. See Klimburg-Salter 1997: 143.

¹⁰ Klimburg-Salter 1997: 106.



Pl. 5 Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala, left wall of *dukhang*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1981 (WHA V))



Pl. 6 Maṇḍala of Mañjuśrī, rear wall, third storey, *sumtseg*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 2009)



Pl. 7 *Maṇḍala* of Mahāvairocana, left wall, third storey, *sumtseg*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 2009)



Pl. 8 *Maṇḍala* of Prajñāpāramitā, right wall, third storey, *sumtseg*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 2009)



Pl. 9 Painting of *sokhang*, *dukhang*, Tabo, showing eight Mahādevas, eight Great Nāgas, eight Planets and the founder of the monastery Yeshe Ö and his two sons.
(Photo C. Luczanits 1991 (WHAV))



Pl. 10 Protectress of Tabo, Wi-nyu-myin, *sokhang*, *dukhang*, Tabo.
(Photo: C. Luczanits 1994 (WHAV))



Pl. 11 View of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala with thirty-three clay sculptures in
gTsug-lag-khang, *dukhang*, Tabo. (Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHAV))



Pl. 12 Altar in front of the statue of Mahāvairocana, *gTsug-lag-khang*, *dukhang*, Tabo.
(Photo: C. Luczanits 1993 (WHAV))



Pl. 13 Clay sculptures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, gTsug-lag-khang, dukhang, Tabo. (Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHAV))



Pl. 14 Narrative scenes of Sudhana's pilgrimage, gTsug-lag-khang, dukhang, Tabo. (Photo: J. Poncar 1984)



Pl. 15 Narrative scene depicting Sudhana's meeting with the master Ratnacūḍa,
gTsug-lag-khang, dukhang, Tabo. (Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHAV))



Pl. 16 A part of Buddhas of the Ten Directions, upper zone of wall,
gTsug-lag-khang, dukhang, Tabo. (Photo: J. Poncar 2001 (WHAV))



Pl. 17 Upper zone of wall, gTsug-lag-khang, dukhang, Tabo. Wi-nyu-myin surrounded by
her retinue and animals (below). The trinity of Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara and
Samantabhadra (above). (Photo: J. Poncar 2001 (WHAV))



Pl. 18 Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī, upper zone of wall, *gTsug-lag-khang*, *dukhang*, Tabo.
(Photo: J. Poncar 2001 (WHAV))



Pl. 19 Bodhisattva Śuraṅgama (dPa'-bar-'gro-ba), circumambulatory path (*skor-lam*), *dukhang*, Tabo. (Photo: C. Luczanits 1994 (WHAV))

the Buddhist's spiritual journey both in the empirical and transcendental worlds; the lower zone below the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala has a thematic correspondence to the forepart of the *dukhang*, while the zone above the Maṇḍala is thematically akin to the inner part of the *dukhang*. Thus, we observe that there is an overall principle in the artistic programme that connects all the architectural divisions in the *dukhang* of Tabo.¹¹ At this point, it should be asked why the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala was positioned in the middle of the wall, and in the middle part of the architectural plan, which seems to indicate the middle of the two realms, i.e. the human earthly realm and the human transcendental realm. The understanding of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala in Tabo in the context of the entire architectural and decorative scheme induces a significant role of *maṇḍalas* as the mediator between the world of sentient beings and the world of the Buddhas.

As we see in the example of Tabo, the geometric layout is not necessary when the hierarchical arrangement of *maṇḍala* deities is fulfilled and one's entrance to the *maṇḍala* ground is ushered through a systematic array of religious symbols. However, later examples of *maṇḍalas* in every Buddhist country testify that the geometric layout of squares and circles has been preferred to the non-geometric ones in expressing *maṇḍalas*, despite that *maṇḍalas* could be created without any geometric layout. Why has the geometric layout become one of the most essential features of later *maṇḍalas*? Here, we need to pay careful attention to the difference between *maṇḍalas* of Tabo and those of Alchi. The same *maṇḍalas* appear in both sites with more or less same iconographic depictions of deities, and their artistic achievement can be attributed to the group of artists who shared the same aesthetic milieu. Nonetheless, their solutions in regard to the compositional setting of the deities of the same *maṇḍala* are different from one another. The *maṇḍala* of Alchi demonstrates the stage when the standard pattern of geometric *maṇḍalas* had already been established. Once the geometric settings for the deities have been explored, the composition with squares and circles becomes the essential mark of the Buddhist *maṇḍala*.

¹¹ While discussing the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala in Tabo, Klimburg-Salter (1997: 120) limits the sacred space to the entrance room and the assembly hall, and excludes the circumambulatory path and the sanctuary as parts of *maṇḍala*. While we might accept her view, the connection among the architectural parts should not be underestimated. One must remember that the core of the Indian temple is the inner sanctuary, *garbhagrha*. The ritual circumambulation and movement is designed in a way to allow one's access to the sanctuary to be smooth and gradual. In the temple, the main axial movement starts from the entrance room, passes the assembly hall and then in some cases one passes through an antechamber before the sanctuary. The main purpose of one's visit to a temple is achieved only when one meets the divine image enshrined in the sanctuary, often small and dark.

We will examine later what advantages are there for using a geometric layout in creating *maṇḍalas*, bearing in mind that the image of the *maṇḍala*, metaphysically enfolding the symbolism of the Ultimate and of *Śūnya*, is the sign positioned between that realm which has been externally displayed and the realm which is to be internally explored. Since an external image is the expression of inner contents, it is presupposed that the geometric layout has its association with the inner contents of the *maṇḍalas*; in this regard, what are the inner contents of the Buddhist *maṇḍala* that necessitate such a geometric layout? Keeping this crucial question aside for a later reflection, we now look at another prominent element of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, the anthropomorphic image of deities.

I.2 Maṇḍala Deities

I.2.1 Vajradhātu Maṇḍala

One might object to the inclusion of anthropomorphic images of deities as one of the essential components of *maṇḍalas*, by giving the example of Hindu *maṇḍalas*. Hindu *maṇḍalas* most often consist of geometric patterns and the syllables studded within it (*Pl.* 21). However, even in the Hindu context, the deities are essential. They are invoked by *mantras* and visualized with the support of geometric drawings of *yantras* through the process of ritual. Especially, it is the “viewing of the deities”, and not the precision of the drawings of *yantras* that is implied in “seeing *maṇḍalas*” at the time of initiation.¹² Thus, even in the Hindu context, the visualization of deities is an essential part of the *maṇḍala*. The difference between Buddhist *maṇḍalas* and Hindu *yantras* in general should be found at the point of whether the deities are projected in their “gross” anthropomorphic forms or rather implied in the subtler form of sound. In the Hindu context, it is said that the deities are too powerful and dangerous to be depicted with their iconographic features.¹³ However, Buddhist *maṇḍalas* in general visually present anthropomorphic images of deities.

In the assembly hall of *dukhang* in Tabo, the physicality of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala is directly experienced through the three-dimensionality of the Maṇḍala’s deities. The central statue of the four-bodied Mahāvairocana is placed on a throne at the back of the hall (*Pl.* 22). The four bodies are directed towards the four quarters, seated in *vajraparyāṅkāśana* with their hands in the gesture of *dharmacakrapravartanamudrā*. This statue of Mahāvairocana is positioned slightly higher than the level of the statues

¹² Cf. Törzsök 2003: 183-85.

¹³ Cf. *TĀ* XXVII.23.

of the Four Kula Buddhas, which are placed on the southern and northern walls. In this Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, the identification of the central image, and of the images of Four Kula Buddhas, is doubtless due to the clear representation of their vehicles, *mudrās* and body colours (*Pls.* 23-26). However, the rest of images can be identified only when we rely on the textual source *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha* (*STTS*) where we find reference to the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala.¹⁴ A pair of statues placed on both sides of each of the Four Buddhas comprises the Sixteen Bodhisattvas. They show diverse *mudrās* in their postures as if they are holding unknown objects (*Pl.* 27); also, they are seated on a lotus seat, not in the *vajraparyāṅkāśana*, but rather in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* (with only one foot visible, crossed over their thigh). The eight Offering Goddesses are located in pairs to the sides of the guardian figures along the eastern and western walls (*Pl.* 28). A pair of ferocious guardian figures is placed on the eastern wall and another pair stands at the entrance to the circumambulatory path. *STTS* describes the manifestation of the thirty-seven divinities, and not the thirty-three we see in the *dukhang* of Tabo. What is absent in the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala of Tabo are the four Mahāmudrās who are specifically defined as *pāramitā*, usually known as the consorts of the Four Kula Buddhas of the quarters, namely Locanā, Māmakī, Pāṇḍuravāsini and Tārā. According to Luczanits, these four missing goddesses in Tabo were represented by four clay symbols – *vajra*, *ratna*, lotus and crossed *vajra* – placed on the wooden throne, one between each of the four images of Mahāvairocana.¹⁵

The Vajradhātu Maṇḍala painted on the left wall of the *dukhang* in Alchi (*Pl.* 1) shows more or less similar *maṇḍala* deities as those in Tabo. The central figure is the four-headed Mahāvairocana in white, seated on the *vajraparyāṅkāśana* (*Pl.* 3). He has two arms and his hands are held in the gesture of *bodhyagrī mudrā* (the left index finger held by the right fist).¹⁶ At the four quarters are the Four Kula Buddhas, and at the intermediate quarters are their consorts, the Prajñā Goddesses. These figures that surround Mahāvairocana are two-armed and one-headed, except Akṣobhya in the east with four heads and eight arms. According to Luczanits, the wrathful representation

¹⁴ The clay sculptures of Vajradhātu Maṇḍala in Tabo have been identified, shown with photo representations and their locations in the plan of the assembly hall in Klimburg-Salter 1997: 101-03.

¹⁵ Cf. Luczanits 1997: 193-94.

¹⁶ However, there are traces of two additional upper arms, which reveal the possibility of another pair of arms that might have been hidden at the time of restoration.

of Akṣobhya indicates that the Maṇḍala is not the normal Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, but a Trilokavijaya Maṇḍala as is referred in *STTS*. In terms of iconography, it is worth noticing that, compared with those of Tabo, the four *Mahāmudrās* in the Maṇḍala of Alchi are represented anthropomorphically as goddesses, and that here, they are prominently shown in their own independent chambers each with four accompanying figures, whereas in the Maṇḍala of Tabo they remain purely symbolically shown. Sixteen Bodhisattvas are grouped into four so as to punctuate the four directions around Four Kula Buddhas.

Reading Maṇḍala Deities on the Basis of the Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha

The puranic story given in the first chapter of *STTS* reflects the concept of Vajradhātu Maṇḍala. When the Enlightenment of the Bodhisattva Siddhārtha is described in the first chapter, we encounter the name Vajradhātu, which means “the Invincible Diamond Body”. Here, Bodhisattva Siddhārtha, who would become Śākyamuni Buddha, is referred to with his variant name, Sarvārthasiddhi. It is Sarvatathāgata who guides Sarvārthasiddhi in the way of *mantra* to realize the highest Truth. By reciting *mantra*, the lunar disk is envisioned in the heart of Sarvārthasiddhi, which means that the *Bodhicitta* has risen. Through another recitation of *mantras*, *vajra* is visualized on the lunar disk. Into the *vajra* entered the Vajradhātu of the *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*¹⁷ of Sarvatathāgata. Having been consecrated by Sarvatathāgata with the name-consecration of Vajradhātu, Sarvārthasiddhi is called now Vajradhātu. The transformation of Sarvārthasiddhi to Vajradhātu implies the attainment of Enlightenment. The nature of Vajradhātu at the centre of our Vajradhātu Maṇḍala is well exposed in the conversation between Sarvatathāgata and Sarvārthasiddhi who would become Vajradhātu:

Vajradhātu said: “O Lord Tathāgata,¹⁸ I see myself as the Body of Sarvatathāgata (*sarvatathāgatakāyamātmānam*)”.

Sarvatathāgata replied: “O Great Being, conceive yourself as the Vajra of Being (*sattvavajra*), as the Buddha-Form (*buddhabimbam*) which possesses all excellent manifestations using *mantra*: OM *yathā sarvatathāgatas tathāham*”.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Kāya*, *vāk* and *citta* are often translated as body, speech and mind, respectively. The problem of the translation will be raised later in Chapter III.

¹⁸ In the translation of Snellgrove and Chandra (1981: 16), the Sanskrit term *tathāgata* has been understood as plural, thus translated *tathāgatas*. However, here the plural form should be seen as an expression of respect.

¹⁹ *STTS* I, ed. Snellgrove and Chandra 1981: 16. For the Sanskrit text, see Chandra 1987: 4.

We know from the above that Vajradhātu represents the Body of Sarvatathāgata, the *sattvavajra* (invincible core of Being), and the original form of Buddha which possesses all excellent manifestations — in other words, the invincible, yet conceivable manifestation of Sarvatathāgata that is itself the seed of all excellent manifestations.

The text continues with the Vajradhātu's petition: "Empower me, Lord Tathāgata, and stabilize this state of Enlightenment (*abhisambodhi*)".²⁰ Sarvatathāgata entered the *sattvavajra* of Tathāgata Vajradhātu to make him fully enlightened in the wisdom of the oneness of Sarvatathāgata (*sarvatathāgatasamatājñāna*), and Sarvatathāgata emerged again out of the *sattvavajra* as an expression of Vajradhātu's enlightenment. He was consecrated with three other *kulas* of *ratna* (jewel), *dharma* and *viśvakarma* (universal activity) before he ascended to the summit of Mt. Meru. After this, comes an exposition of five main divinities of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala:

Having reached there [it] empowered Tathāgata Vajradhātu as the totality of Sarvatathāgata (*sarvatathāgatatve'dhiṣṭhaya*) and [it] placed him on the Lion-throne of Sarvatathāgata and he faced in every direction (*sarvatomukhaṃ*). Then Tathāgata Akṣobhya, Tathāgata Ratnasambhava, Tathāgata Lokeśvararāja and Tathāgata Amoghasiddhi, having received themselves empowerment in the totality of Sarvatathāgata (*sarvatathāgatatvaṃ svayamātmānyadhiṣṭhāya*), in order to express the universal sameness (*sarvasamatāsuprativedhatvāt*) of the Tathāgata Śākyamuni with regard to the sameness of all directions (*sarvadiksamatāmabhyālambya*), took their places in the four quarters. . . .²¹

The above exposition of the deities of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala directs us to see that Vajradhātu's enlightenment resulted in immediate emanations in the form of centre and four directions.

Then the text describes the epiphany of the Sixteen Bodhisattvas and the remaining deities of the Maṇḍala. In the first chapter, they appear as members of *vajra kula*, but in the other chapters in parts III and IV, they appear as members of *dharma kula* and *ratna kula*. Their names change in accordance with the category of *kula* (lineage). The first chapter describes the Sixteen Bodhisattvas emanating from the *samādhi* of Vairocana

²⁰ *STTS* I, ed. Snellgrove and Chandra 1981: 16. For the Sanskrit text, see Chandra 1987: 4.

²¹ *STTS* I, tr. Snellgrove 1987: 242; cf. *STTS* I, ed. Chandra 1987: 5. Snellgrove translates *sarvatathāgata* as "all *tathāgatas*". However, I quote his translation, leaving *sarvatathāgata* untranslated. The problem of understanding *sarvatathāgata* as all Tathāgatas will be raised later in Chapter III. Therefore, the pronoun "they" for "all Tathāgatas" is changed in the quotation as "it".

who sits in the centre of the Vajradhātu manifestation. The division of the four *kulas* of *sattva*, *ratna*, *dharma* and *karma* is revealed in Vairocana's states of *śamādhi*, such as *sattva*-consecration-*vajra*, *ratna*-consecration-*vajra*, *dharma*-consecration-*vajra* and *karma*-consecration-*vajra*.²² The Sixteen Bodhisattvas are allocated to the Buddhas of the Four Directions, in groups of four, and the four chief Bodhisattvas – Samantabhadra, Ākāśagarbha, Avalokiteśvara and Sarvatathāgataviśvakarman – with variations in their names depending upon the *kula* allocation of the *maṇḍala* lead the groups.²³

After the epiphany of the Sixteen Bodhisattvas, the remaining deities of the Maṇḍala are described: four Mahāmudrās (Great Seals) called Sattvavajrī, Ratnavajrī, Dharmavajrī and Karmavajrī;²⁴ eight Offering Goddesses²⁵ and four Door Guardians.²⁶

Kula means the “family” or “lineage”; furthermore, it represents the evolutionary principle of emanations. *Pañcakulas* (the five families or lineages) are the basic units of classifying the emanations from the centre. The Five Buddhas representing *pañcakulas* constitute the main axes of the inner chamber of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala. However, the *STTS* follows the division of four *kulas* in regard to *maṇḍalas*. *Maṇḍalas* are given instruction in accord with the fourfold *kulas*: *Tathāgata*, *Vajra*, *Dharma* and *Ratna/Karma*. The *maṇḍala* for the *Tathāgata kula* is known as the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, and it is identical with the Trilokyavijaya Maṇḍala of the *Vajra kula*.²⁷ The analysis of Snellgrove, the editor of the Sanskrit text *STTS* states that the main *maṇḍalas* are shown to be fivefold:²⁸

²² Cf. *STTS*, ed. Snellgrove and Chandra 1981: 17-25.

²³ Cf. Snellgrove and Chandra 1981: 11.

²⁴ “They are, however, specifically defined as *pāramitā*, namely as Sarvatathāgatājñānasamaya, Mahābhīṣaka, Vajradharmatā, Sarvapūjā They correspond in their colours and positions in Maṇḍala to the four Great Goddesses – Locanā (SE), Māmakī (SW), Pāṇḍuravāsini (NW) and Tārā (NE) – as known in other tantras” (Snellgrove and Chandra in the introduction to the facsimile of *STTS* 1981: 31).

²⁵ SE: Vajralāsyā (Wantonness Vajra), Vajradhūpā (Incense Vajra).
SW: Vajramālā (Garland Vajra), Vajrapuṣpā (Flower Vajra).
NW: Vajragīti (Song Vajra), Vajrālōkā (Lamp Vajra).
NE: Vajranṛtyā (Dance Vajra), Vajragandhā (Scent Vajra).

²⁶ E: Vajrāṅkuśa (Hook Vajra), S: Vajrapāśa (Noose Vajra), W: Vajrasphoṭa (Bursting Vajra), N: Vajrāveśa (Enchantment Vajra) or Vajraghaṇṭa (Bell Vajra).

²⁷ Cf. Snellgrove 1987: 198.

²⁸ Cf. *STTS*. Snellgrove and Chandra 1981: 11, in the editor's introduction. Different *maṇḍalas* →

- i) Great Vajradhātu Maṇḍala of *Tathāgata kula*
- ii) Trilokavijaya Maṇḍala of the *Vajra kula*
- iii) Trilokacakra Mahāmaṇḍala of the *Vajra kula*
- iv) Sakala-Jagad-Vinaya Mahāmaṇḍala of the *Dharma (Padma) kula*,
- v) Sarvārthasiddhi Mahāmaṇḍala of the *Karma kula*.

In addition, four other *maṇḍalas* are affiliated to these main *maṇḍalas* of four *kulas*. Each of them has a subsidiary *maṇḍala* of “Four Symbols” (*caturmudrās*) whose primary feature does not change: Vairocana with four Buddhas at the cardinal directions. With the exception of the Trilokacakra Mahāmaṇḍala of the *Vajra kula* the thirty-seven deities comprise the basic setting of the main *maṇḍalas* of the four *kulas*. The thirty-seven deities are Vairocana and the Four Kula Buddhas, Sixteen Bodhisattvas, four Mahāmudrās, eight Offering Goddesses and four Door guardians.

What Do the Maṇḍala Deities Symbolize?

1) Mahāvairocana and Four Buddhas

At the centre of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala resides Mahāvairocana. The symbolism of Mahāvairocana is concisely outlined in the verses cited by Vajrapāṇi in the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi Tantra*.

I salute you who are *bodhicitta*!

I salute you who are the source of enlightenment (*saṃbodhi*)!

I salute you who are the embodiment of practice which is the levels and perfects
(*pāramitānaya*)!

I salute you who were the first to do it!

I bow to you who reside in *śūnya*!²⁹

In the above verses, we have a collection of the prime concepts of Mahāyāna Buddhism: *bodhicitta*, *saṃbodhi*, *pāramitānaya* and *śūnya*. Mahāvairocana is indeed the symbol

→ referred to in the text are given in *ibid.*: 9-10. Chandra (in Tucci 1988 [1935]: XXI-XXII) enumerates *maṇḍalas* given in *STTS* as twenty-four, counting six *maṇḍalas* under the four *kula* categories.

²⁹ *MVT* X.5, tr. Hodge 2003: 218.

of highest virtues of Mahāyāna Buddhism.³⁰ He is often conceived of as making the seal of *dharmacakra mudrā* because he preaches Dharma in the universe.³¹ As the Invincible Body (Vajradhātu) of Enlightenment, he represents *dharmakāya* of Dharma, while Śākyamuni Buddha is a *nirmāṇakāya* (embodiment) of Dharma. In Vajravarmaṇ's commentary on *SDPT*, Vairocana is said to represent the Wisdom Body (*jñānakāya*) that arises from *Dharmadhātu*.³²

The Buddha in the centre and the Four Buddhas at the cardinal points constitute the pentad of Buddhas. We observe that the five Buddhas in the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala are represented with their usual features and colours:

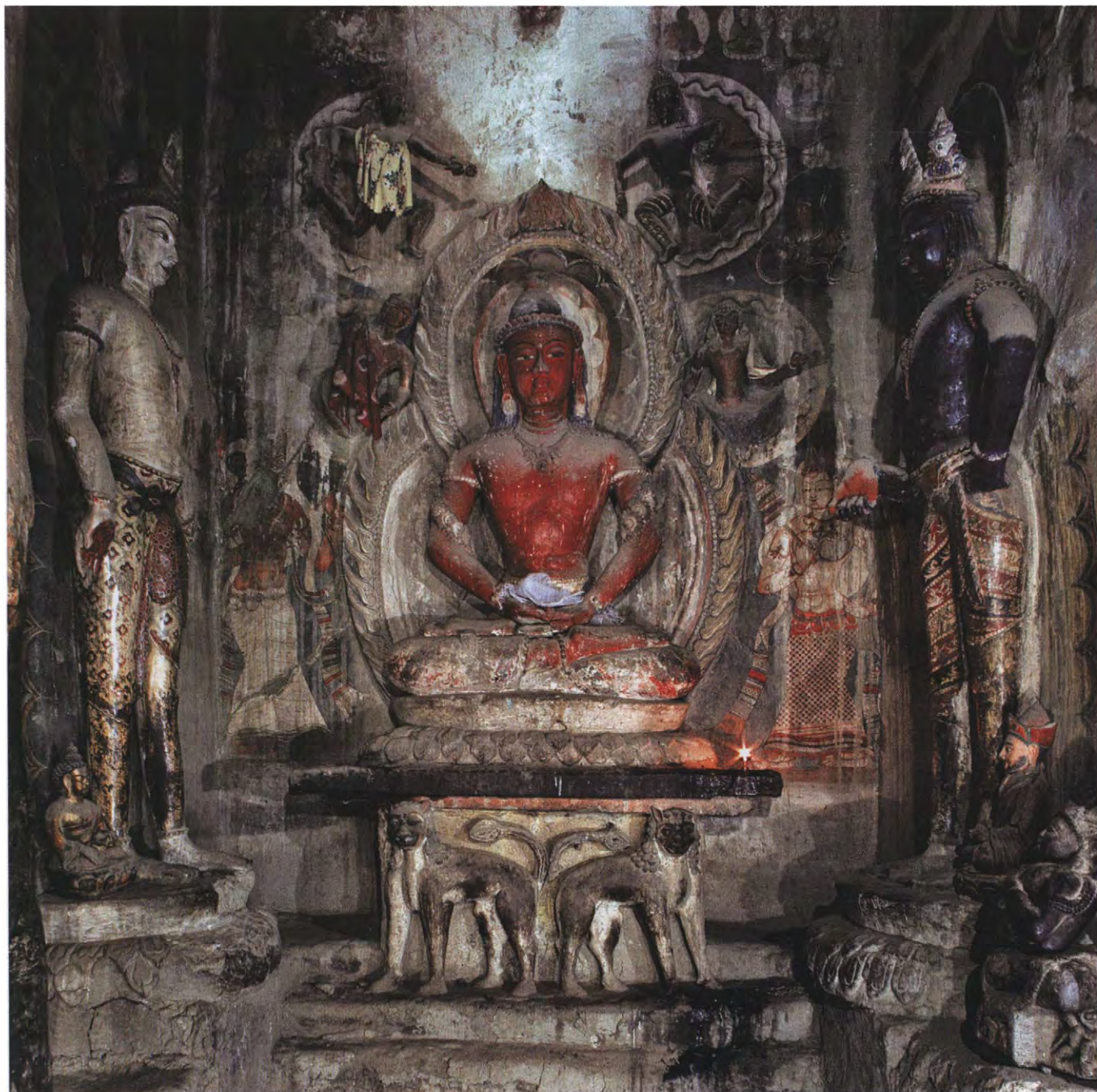
- i) Vairocana in the centre is painted white, and his hands are in the gesture of *dharmacakrapravartana mudrā*. He is seated on the lion throne.
- ii) Akṣobhya is the Buddha of the east, and is depicted in blue, with his hands in *bhūmiśparśa mudrā*. He is seated on the elephant throne.
- iii) Ratnasambhava is the Buddha of the south, usually shown in yellow with the gesture of giving (*varada mudrā*). He is seated on the horse throne.
- iv) Amitābha of the west is shown in red with *dhyāna mudrā*. He is seated on the peacock throne.
- v) Amoghasiddhi in dark green with his hands in *abhaya mudrā* is the Buddha of the north. He is seated on the *garuḍa* throne.

This set of five Buddhas is shown at the centre of the *maṇḍalas*. In the horizontal *maṇḍala* of Tabo, this set constitutes the conceptual centre. The names of these five Buddhas vary from *tantra* to *tantra*; however, their symbolism remains common throughout the Yoga Tantras. In the *Nāmasaṃgītī* (v. 59), the five Buddhas are explicated in correspondence to the five bodies of Dharma and five *jñānas*

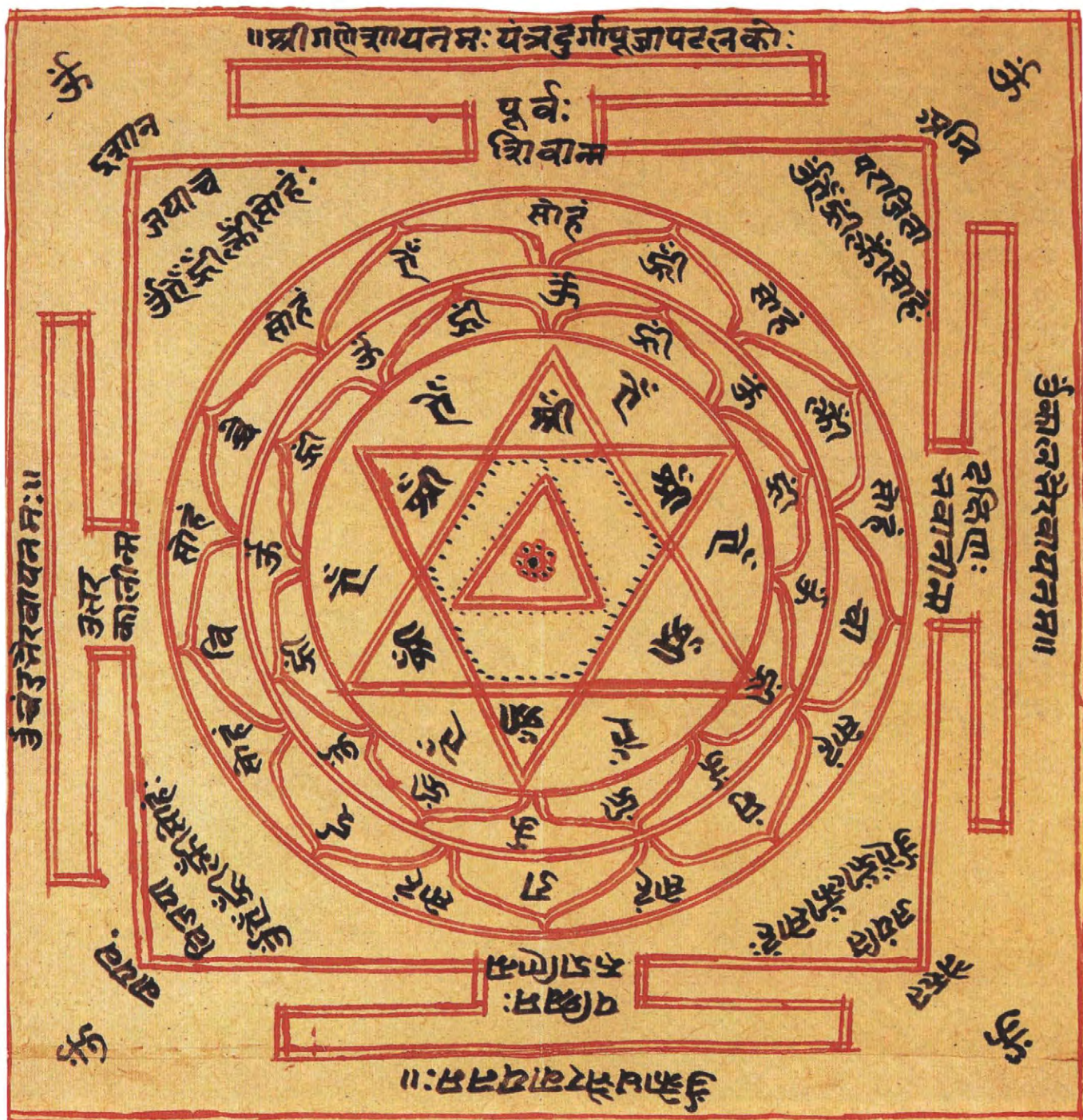
³⁰ According to Snellgrove, Sarvavid (Omniscient) and Vairocana (Resplendent) are two titles attached to Śākyamuni as the central Buddha (cf. Snellgrove 1987: 196). In Vajrayāna Buddhism, the following names indicate the transcendental Being beyond the Five Buddhas: Vajrasattva, Mahāvairocana, Vajradhara, etc.

³¹ “The Buddha (namely ‘Resplendent One, Adorned with Rays, Transformation-King’ Vairocana) is myself with a different name, preaching the Dharma in that universe and saving living beings.” (*Śūraṅgamasādhī Sūtra*, quoted in Snellgrove 1987: 196.)

³² Cf. Wayman and Tajima 1992: 55.



Pl. 20 Statues of Vairocana (Amitābha), Avalokiteśvara and Vajrasattva in *dri-gtsang-khang* (sanctuary), *dukhang*, Tabo. (Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHAV))



Pl. 21 Yantra of the goddess Durgā, Rajasthan, 19th century, Ink and colour on paper.

(Source: www.natha-yoga.com)



Pl. 22 Four-bodied statue of Mahāvairocana, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, *gTsug-lag-khang*, *dukhang*, Tabo. (Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHAV))



Pl. 23 Akṣobhya, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, gTsug-lag-khang, dukhang, Tabo.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHAV))



Pl. 24 Ratnasambhava, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, *gTsug-lag-khang*, *dukhang*, Tabo.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHAV))



Pl. 25 Amitābha, Vajradhatu Maṇḍala, *gTsug-lag-khang*, *dukhang*, Tabo.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHAV))



Pl. 26 Amoghasiddhi, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, *gTsug-lag-khang*, *dukhang*, Tabo.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHAV))



Pl. 27 View of two from the Sixteen Bodhisattvas: Vajraketu and Vajrahāsa, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, south wall, *gTsug-lag-khang*, *dukhang*, Tabo. (Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHA V))



Pl. 28 Offering Goddesses of Dhūpa and Lāsyā, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, east wall, *gTsug-lag-khang*, *dukhang*, Tabo. (Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHA V))

(knowledge). We read in Mañjuśrīmitra's commentary to the verses that the five Buddhas may be understood as the five bodies (*pañcakāya*) of Buddha: *svābhāvīkākāya*, *saṃbhogakāya*, *nirmāṇakāya*, *dharmakāya* and *jñānakāya*. And they represent, respectively, *tathāgata jñāna* (knowledge of *śūnyatā* or *dharmadhātu*), *ādarśa jñāna* (mirror-like knowledge), *śamatā jñāna* (knowledge of equality), *pratyavekṣaṇa jñāna* (knowledge of discrimination), *kṛtyānuṣṭhāna jñāna* (knowledge of the procedure of duty). In the tantric context, the five elements (*mahābūtas*) correspond to five syllables, five colours and five Buddhas who are the personification of five *jñānas*. Table 1.1 shows the corresponding concepts of the five Buddhas in tantric Buddhism. One may wonder how these various concepts like directions, colours, elements (*jñānas*) could ever be brought together and combined into such networks; the question arises often, as to what is the ground of these esoteric correspondences among different categories.

Table 1.1: Corresponding Concepts of the Five Buddhas

<i>Five Buddhas^a</i>	Vairocana	Akṣobhya	Ratna-saṃbhava	Amitābha	Amoghasiddhi
<i>Direction</i>	<i>Centre</i>	East	South	West	North
<i>Colour</i>	<i>White</i>	Blue	Yellow	Red	Dark Green or Black
<i>Element</i>	<i>Ether</i>	Water	Earth	Fire	Air
<i>Body of Dharma^b</i>	<i>Svābhāvīka-kāya</i>	<i>Sam̐bhoga-kāya</i>	<i>Nirmāṇa-kāya</i>	<i>Dharma-kāya</i>	<i>Jñāna-kāya</i>
<i>Skandha^c</i>	<i>Vijñāna</i>	<i>Rūpa</i>	<i>Vedanā</i>	<i>Sam̐jñā</i>	<i>Sam̐skāra</i>
<i>Jñāna</i>	<i>Tathāgata-jñāna</i>	<i>Ādarśa-jñāna</i>	<i>Śamatā-jñāna</i>	<i>Pratyavekṣaṇa-jñāna</i>	<i>Kṛtyānuṣṭhāna-jñāna</i>
<i>Bīja</i>	<i>OM</i>	<i>HŪM</i>	<i>TRAM</i>	<i>HRĪḤ</i>	<i>ĀḤ</i>

^a The names of the Five Buddhas vary. Here, names are taken from those of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala given in the *NSP*.

^b The correspondence is based on the Mañjuśrīmitra's commentary of the *NS*. See the translation of Davidson 1981: 26.

^c For the correspondences among the five *skandhas*, the five *jñānas*, and the five Buddhas in detail, see Govinda 1959: 108-110.

Though these correspondences are not always consistent – and especially the connections among colours, elements, *bījas* and the five Buddhas are often variable – the concept of *kula* may be thought to be the basis of these correspondences.³³ The five Buddhas are called Kula Buddhas because they represent five *kulas*³⁴ – *Tathāgata kula*, *Vajra kula*, *Ratna kula*, *Dharma kula* and *Karma kula* – which are expressed through the symbols of the *cakra* (wheel) *vajra*, gem, lotus and four-pronged *vajra*. Here, the term *kula* needs due attention. *Kula* is generally translated as “family”; however, we need to reconsider what is implied in the term *kula*. Tucci observes Pañca Kula Buddhas from the cosmogonical perspective. He states that Pañca Kula Buddhas signify, “in the meditation process, the four lines of evolution of things or of experience of indiscriminate primeval being”.³⁵ According to his understanding, *pañca kula* are the categories of “the different emanations of the cosmos from the indiscriminate primeval conscience”.³⁶ As the term *kula* means literally “multitude” as well as “family”, the cosmogonic implication of the term should not be overlooked, especially in understanding the visual component of the *maṇḍala*. The role of Pañca Kula Buddhas should be found in their being the principle in the process of emanation and absorption at the level of microcosm as well as macrocosm.

When we deal with the relationship between the central Buddha and the four Kula Buddhas in *maṇḍalas*, we should more carefully examine the general conception that the four Buddhas are the emanations of the central Buddha: is it the central Buddha Vairocana who is conceived to cause the emanation of the four Buddhas and the other divinities at the cardinal directions of the *maṇḍalas*? If we refer to *STTS* in regard to the emergence of the four Buddhas, we can observe that Tathāgata Vairocana is not

³³ Lama Anagarika Govinda explains such corresponding systems in following words: “In the symbolism of meditative processes, however, the leading principle is not a theoretical point of view, but the practice and the experiences derived from it. For this reason each school of meditation and each particular sect has its own system, which is maintained by tradition and passed on from master to pupil. Therefore in the distribution of *Dhyānī-Buddhas* and their *mantras* among the psycho-physical Centres (*cakras*) of the body, there can be no single and fixed system. It depends on the meditator, which particular symbol he wants to place into the centre of his contemplation, and from this choice depends the position of all the other symbols of the *maṇḍalas*.” (Anagarika Govinda 1959: 180-81)

³⁴ *STTS* presents us with *caturkula*, having combined *Ratna* and *Karma* into one.

³⁵ Tucci 1988 (1935): 71.

³⁶ *Ibid.*: 42.

the primary source, but is rather the efficient cause of the emanation of the four Buddhas. Let us ponder over some points extracted from the descriptions in *STTS*:

- i) Bodhisattva Sarvārthasiddhi attained Enlightenment when Sarvatathāgata entered the *sattvavajra* of his heart. Having arrived at the moment of Enlightenment, he was consecrated to be Tathāgata Vajradhātu (Vairocana). As the “expression of the Enlightenment” of Vairocana, Sarvatathāgata emerged again out of his heart.³⁷
- ii) Sarvatathāgata, emerging from the heart of Vairocana, consecrated him with three other *kulas* of *Ratna*, *Dharma* and *Karma*, before rising to the summit of Mt. Meru.
- iii) When Sarvatathāgata reached the summit of Mt. Meru, it empowered and enthroned Tathāgata Vajradhātu (Vairocana) in the centre. It empowered itself, and took its place at the four cardinal directions as the expression of the all-pervasion of the Buddha nature. Thus, the core of Vajradhātu Maṇḍala is established.³⁸

The first point tells us that Sarvatathāgata is the essence of the Enlightenment. The second point says that Sarvatathāgata is the prototype of the Kula Buddhas. The second and the third points together indicate that the four Buddhas are not only the emanations, but are also the agents of empowerment on the path to Enlightenment. We may formulate the relationship between the central deity and the four Kula Buddhas as follows:

- i) Vairocana placed in the centre represents the subject of the Enlightenment, the *Tathāgata kula*. Especially, his heart is the place to and from which the all-pervasive Buddha nature converges and diverges.
- ii) Four Kula Buddhas derive from the emanating nature of Sarvatathāgata.
- iii) Four Kula Buddhas represent Sarvatathāgata who gives the empowerment for the Enlightenment. Symbolizing four *kulas*, they are dynamic agents that empower a Tantric practitioner in the process of absorption.

From the above analysis, it is understood that it was the nature of Enlightenment that resulted in the immediate emergence of Sarvatathāgata from the heart of Vairocana. Here we are in the context where we should distinguish Mahāvairocana from Vairocana

³⁷ Cf. *STTS* I, tr. Giebel 2001: 23-24; cf. *STTS*, Snellgrove and Chandra 1981: 16.

³⁸ Cf. *STTS*, tr. Snellgrove 1987: 242; *STTS* I, tr. Giebel 2001: 25; *STTS*, ed. Chandra 1987: 5.

of Pañca Kula Buddhas. Mahāvairocana or Sarvavid-Vairocana indicates the Ultimate Dharma, beyond the five *kula* emanations. When, *NS* (v. 59) refers to the five Buddhas, it certainly points toward the sixth Buddha that encompasses the nature of five Buddhas.

A Buddha in his nature of five bodies, an overload by his nature of five types of gnosis (*jñāna*), wearing a diadem whose nature is five Buddhas, having five eyes, he maintains dissociation (*asaṅga*).³⁹

The above passage tells us that the five Buddhas are the bodily manifestations of a Buddha, i.e. Ādi Buddha (primeval Buddha). It suggests that it is incorrect to understand the central Buddha within the *maṇḍalas* of the Yoga Tantras to be the source of the four Buddha-manifestations. Moreover, the passage signifies that the source of the five Buddha-manifestations exists, yet is inconceivable, because of its nature of “dissociation”. The image we see at the centre of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala represents not only the Kula Buddha Vairocana but also Ādi Buddha Mahāvairocana, who is *akula* (the Absolute beyond the concept of *kula*).

It should be emphatically said that Enlightenment is the source of all emanations bearing the form of *maṇḍala*. When Mahāvairocana is said to be the source of emanations, it is the Ādi Buddha Mahāvairocana, the personification of the Ultimate, not the physical form of Vairocana in the centre that is being addressed. The physical image at the centre of the *maṇḍala*, which is the devotional focus and the final aspiration, has two levels of form: the manifestation of the Dharma, and the Dharma beyond. When the central divinity is seen as Vairocana of the Five Kula Buddhas, the centre does not alone represent the Ultimate. Even the image of Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara or Prajñāpāramitā in the centre of the *maṇḍala* is merely the reflective image of the Ultimate, although such figures play a crucial role in the spiritual journey that starts from the visuals of *maṇḍalas*. The central image of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala demonstrates that the visual image at the centre signifies the point where the physicality of the visible is experientially transcended, passing from Vairocana to Mahāvairocana, and from Kula Buddha to Ādi Buddha.

³⁹ *NS* (v. 59), tr. Davidson 1981: 26. Mañjuśrīmitra in the commentary on the text identifies the five bodies (*pañca kāya*) as *svābhāvikakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya*, *nirmāṇakāya*, *dharmakāya*, and *jñānakāya*. The fivefold gnosis (*pañcajñāna*) means: the very pure *dharmadhātu* gnosis, the mirror-like gnosis, the gnosis of individual inspection, the gnosis of equality and the situationally-effective gnosis. The five Buddhas (*pañca jina*) are: Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha and Amoghasiddhi. The five eyes (*pañca cakṣus*) are the corporal eye, the heavenly eye, the eye of insight, the eye of the Dharma and the eye of the Buddha; cf. *ibid.*, fns. 73-76.

2) *Sixteen Bodhisattvas*

From the *STTS*, we have seen that the Kula Buddhas in the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala ultimately represent Sarvatathāgata. The text tells us that the Sixteen Bodhisattvas are the sixteen *sattvas* of Sarvatathāgata. Thus, first of all, we should clarify that the Sixteen Bodhisattvas are not the emanation of Vairocana, despite the *samādhi* of Vairocana being the space where these Bodhisattvas take form.

The description in *STTS* shows a certain general paradigm in explaining how the Sixteen Bodhisattvas emerge. The reference that Vairocana's *samādhi* results in the emergence of the Sixteen Bodhisattvas, is important especially in regard to two aspects. First, it emphasizes the overwhelming processes of transformation implied in the physical forms of Bodhisattvas in the Maṇḍala. Second, it speaks of the relationship of the Sixteen Bodhisattvas to Vairocana, Sarvatathāgata and the four Kula Buddhas. We can understand the paradigm of their emergence from the following description, using the brackets marked with English letters where different terms should be applied in correspondence to different Bodhisattvas. Table 1.2 shows the terms to be placed in the corresponding brackets for each Bodhisattva.

1. Vairocana entered *samādhi*, called “(a)–Empowerment born of the *samaya* of Mahābodhisattva (b)” of Sarvatathāgata.
2. From the heart of Vairocana came forth the heart of Sarvatathāgata, called the *samaya* of (c) of Sarvatathāgata.
3. *Mantra* (d) came forth from the heart of Sarvatathāgata and condensed into one.⁴⁰
4. Vajradhara (or Vajrapāṇi) became the multitudes of (e) of Sarvatathāgata.
5. (e) entered the heart of Vairocana, and together they became one in the form of (f).⁴¹
6. From (f), there appear the figures of the Tathāgatas. They performed the various deeds of Sarvatathāgata.
7. The figures of the Tathāgatas became one in the heart of Vairocana, producing the figure of Mahābodhisattva (b).

⁴⁰ The description of the emergence of Ākāśagarbha makes clear the relation between the heart *mantra* of Sarvatathāgata and the sudden appearance of Vajradhara. Cf. *STTS*, tr. Giebel 2001: 33.

⁴¹ The stages 5 and 6 in the paradigm are sometimes omitted and one comes directly to the stage where the figure of Bodhisattva appears.

Table 1.2: Emergence of Sixteen Bodhisattvas in STTS, chap. I

	<i>a. Kula</i>	<i>b. Primary Bodhisattva</i>	<i>c. Aspect</i>	<i>d. Mantra</i>	<i>e. Visual Transformation</i>
1	Sattva	Samantabhadra	Knowledge	Vajrasattva	Knowledge- <i>vajras</i>
2	Sattva	Amogharāja	Hook- Summoning	Vajrarāja	Hooks
3	Sattva	Māra	Enrapturement	Vajrarāga	Flower – Weapons
4	Sattva	Prāmodyarāja	Great joy	Vajrasādhu	Applauses
5	Ratna	Ākāśagarbha	Consecration	Vajraratna	Empty space
6	Ratna	Mahāteja	Light	Vajrateja	Solar discs
7	Ratna	Ratnaketu	Wish fulfilment	Vajraketu	Multi-coloured banner
8	Ratna	Nityapṛītipra- muditendriya	Joy	Vajrahāsa	Smiles
9	Dharma	Avalokiteśvara	Dharma	Vajradharma	Dharma realm
10	Dharma	Mañjuśrī	Knowledge- Wisdom	Vajratikṣṇa	Wisdom swords
11	Dharma	Sahacittotpādita dharmacakra- pravartin	Wheel	Vajrahetu	Great <i>maṇḍalas</i>
12	Dharma	Avāca	Mindful- Recitation	Vajrabhāṣa	Dharma- syllables
13	Karma	Sarvatathāgata- viśvakarman	Karma	Vajrakarma	Karma-realm
14	Karma	Duryodhana- vīrya	Protection	Vajrarakṣa	Firm suits of armour
15	Karma	Sarvamāra- pramardin	Expedient means	Vajrayakṣa	Tusk-weapons
16	Karma	Sarvatathāgata- muṣṭi	Binding the <i>vajras</i> of <i>kāya</i> , <i>vāk</i> and <i>citta</i>	Vajrasandhi	Binds of all <i>mudrās</i>

Table 1.2: Contd.

<i>f. Concentrated Forms</i>	<i>g. Location</i>	<i>h. Symbol</i>	<i>i. Vajra Name</i>
Five-pronged <i>vajra</i>	In front	Vajra	Vajrapāṇi
–	Right	Hook	Vajrakaṛṣa
Great arrow	Left	Arrow	Vajradhanu
Great joy	Behind	Tuṣṭi	Vajraharṣa
Adamantine gem	In front	Adamantine <i>maṇi</i>	Vajragarbha
Adamantine sun	Right	Adamantine sun	Vajraprabha
Adamantine banner	Left	Adamantine banner	Vajrayaṣṭi
Adamantine smile	Behind	Adamantine smile	Vajraprīti
Lotus flower	In front	Adamantine lotus flower	Vajranetra
Adamantine sword	Right	Adamantine sword	Vajrabuddhi
Adamantine wheel	Left	Adamantine wheel	Vajramaṇḍa
Tongue	Behind	Adamantine mindful recitation	Vajravāca
Karma-vajra	In front	Karma-vajra	Vajraviśva
Great adamantine suit of armour	Right	Adamantine armour	Vajramitra
Adamantine tusk	Left	Adamantine tusk-weapon	Vajracāṇḍa
Adamantine bind	Behind	Mudrā	Vajramuṣṭi

8. (b) settled in the heart of Vairocana and uttered his *udāna* (inspired verse).
9. The figure of (b) descended from the heart of Vairocana. He took up his place on the lunar disc (g) of Sarvatathāgata and again requested instruction.
10. Vairocana again entered *samādhi*, called “*samaya* of (c) of Sarvatathāgata”.
11. Vairocana conferred upon (b) the *samaya* of (c) in the form of (h).
12. Sarvatathāgata consecrated (b) with the *vajra* name and calling him (i).
13. (i) uttered his *udāna*.

These Sixteen Bodhisattvas in the *STTS* are the sixteen *Sattvas* of Sarvatathāgata:

1. Four of the *Sattva kula* are the Great *Samaya* Sattvas; the Great *Bodhicitta*, the Hook-Summoning, the Knowledge of Enrapturement and the Great Joy of Sarvatathāgata.⁴²
2. Four of the *Ratna kula* are the Great Consecration Sattvas; the Great Consecration, the Halo of Light of One Fathom, the Great Benefit of Sentient Beings, and the Great Laughter of Sarvatathāgata.⁴³
3. Four of the *Dharma kula* are the Great Knowledge Sattvas; the Adamantine Knowledge of the Dharma-nature, the Knowledge-Wisdom, the Great Wheel-Turning Knowledge, and the Knowledge of *vāk* of Sarvatathāgata.⁴⁴
4. Four of the *Karma kula* are the Great Karma Sattvas; the Action of the Extended Rules for Offering, the Firm Armour of Great Energy, the Great Expedient Means, and the Knowledge of the Binding of All *Mudrās* of Sarvatathāgata.⁴⁵

The text clearly indicates that Vairocana’s *samādhi* is the space where the heart-*mantra* of Sarvatathāgata arises, and that the *mantra* is turned toward the visible form of a Bodhisattva. We encounter here a central concept of Buddhist deities. Ultimately, the visual form of a Bodhisattva has its support in *mantra*, and the *mantra* has its origin in the heart of Sarvatathāgata. With the agent – i.e. Vajradhara (or Vajrapāṇi) –

⁴² *STTS*, tr. Gibel 2001: 32.

⁴³ *STTS*, tr. Giebel 2001: 38-39.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: 45.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 53.



Pl. 29 Central divinity, Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala,
gTsug-lag-khang, dukhang, Tabo. (Photo: J. Poncar 2001 (WHAV))



Pl. 30 Akṣobhya-Māmakī, Ratnasambhava-Ločanā and four Uṣṇīṣas, Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala, *gTsug-lag-khang*, *dukhang*, Tabo. (Photo: J. Poncar 2001 (WHA V))



Pl. 31 Amitābha-Pāṇḍarā, Amoghasiddhi-Tārā and four Uṣṇīṣas, Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala, *gTsug-lag-khang*, *dukhang*, Tabo. (Photo: C. Luczanits 1993 (WHA V))



Pl.32 Central divinity, Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala, dukhang, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 2009)



Pl.33 Central divinity, *maṇḍala* of Mañjuśrī, rear wall, third storey, *sumtseg*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHAV))

the heart *mantra* from Sarvatathāgata undergoes various stages of transformations, before it takes the distinct form of a Bodhisattva. For example, the *mantra* of Vajraratna, having come forth from the heart of Sarvatathāgata, becomes Vajradhara, who became rays of light which fill every empty space; when the entire realm of empty space entered the heart of Vairocana, it took the form of a gem. From this gem, Tathāgatas appeared. Having accomplished the *siddhis* (yogic attainment) of Sarvatathāgata, they became one, thus producing the figure of the Mahābodhisattva Ākāśagarbha.⁴⁶

STTS tells us that Vairocana is the subject of *samādhi*, and that his heart is the ground where the visual transformations of Sarvatathāgata take place. However, he is not the source of the manifestations of the Bodhisattvas. Having been invoked from the heart of Sarvatathāgata, the Sixteen Bodhisattvas represent the sixteen aspects of Sarvatathāgata. The number sixteen is charged with a cosmogonical significance in Indian spiritual traditions, being associated with the ideas of totality and “limitless plurality”.⁴⁷ As much as these Bodhisattvas take shape in the Maṇḍala through this process, comparable to a cosmogonical evolution, the number sixteen in this context relevantly signifies the totality. Here, the totality should be justifiably ascribed to Sarvatathāgata. Sarvatathāgata as the principle of form-manifestation and the ultimate source of the *maṇḍala* deities will be examined further in Chapter III of the present volume.

I.2.2 Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala

In the *dukhang* of Tabo, Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala occupies the entire northern part of the western wall, above two clay statues of Offering Goddesses and the entrance to the circumambulatory path (*Pls.* 29-31). In their linear layout, each of seventeen deities are framed by a circular nimbus. The central divinity, Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara in the form of Mañjuśrī, is seated in the *vajraparyāṅkāśana* on the large pericarp of a colourful lotus (*Pl.* 29). No animal vehicle flanks his seat. He is four-headed and eight-armed. The central hands make the gesture of *dharmacakra mudrā*. From top to bottom his right hands hold a sword, an arrow and a *vajra*, while his left hands hold a bow, a book and a bell (a reasonable conjecture, as the shapes are obscured by erosion).⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *STTS*, tr. Giebel 2001: 33.

⁴⁷ Cf. Gonda 1977: 120-26. Gonda introduces the various references to the number sixteen and presents its implication of “totality”. He analyses the formation of such conception in terms of the perception of the lunar cycle.

⁴⁸ See also Klimburg-Salter 1999: 300.

Thus, we get the following sets of objects held in the hands of Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara: *dharmacakra mudrā*, sword–book, arrow–bow and *vajra*–bell. He wears a red-coloured, bejewelled crown decorated with five seated Buddha figures painted in five different colours: blue, white, light green, red and light yellow, obviously indicating the five *kulas*.⁴⁹ The eight figures right next to Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara holding wheels in their right hands are identified as the eight Uṣṇīṣas on the basis of *NSP*:⁵⁰ Mahoṣṇīṣa (east), Sitātapatra (south), Tejorāśī (west), Vijayoṣṇīṣa (north), Vikīraṇa (north-east), Udgata (south-east), Mahodgata (south-west) and Ojas (north-west). Each figure is seated on a lion vehicle, turning toward Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara (*Pls.* 30-31). Next to the Uṣṇīṣas on both sides are four Kula Buddhas. The delineation of these figures is more or less same as that of Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara: they are four-headed and eight-armed, seated in the *vajraparyāṅkāśana* on lotus pericarps. However, their facial expressions and body colours vary from Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara, and their animal symbols are painted under or both sides of their lotus seats. These four Kula Buddhas are identified on the basis of these animal vehicles and their colouration: blue-coloured Akṣobhya on elephants, orange-red-coloured Ratnasambhava on horses, red-coloured Amitābha on peacocks, and blue-coloured (conventionally, dark green) Amoghasiddhi on *garuḍas*. Next to these four Buddhas are placed their *prajñā* consorts.⁵¹ Like the

⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.*: 303-05. Klimburg-Salter compares the visual representation of Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara in Tabo with the descriptions of iconographic texts. This figure coincides with the description in *NSP* 21, except in colour and in the fact that the attributes in the upper two left hands are reversed. The figure of Tabo is painted in reddish white as described in the *Sādhanamālā*, whereas the *NSP* describes yellow for the divinity.

⁵⁰ Cf. Mallmann 1975: 386.

⁵¹ The identification of the *Prajñās* placed in relation to Akṣobhya and Ratnasambhava is given in different ways according to the types of *maṇḍalas*. In the description of the four female deities of the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara *Maṇḍala* in Tabo, Klimburg-Salter (1999: 303) identifies them as follows: the one next to Akṣobhya as Māmakī; Ratnasambhava–Locanā; Amitābha–Pāṇḍarā and Amoghasiddhi–Tārā. She introduces the location of the four *Prajñās* given in *NSP*: Māmakī in the south-east, Locanā in the north-east, Pāṇḍarā in the south-west and Tārā in the north-west. In Snellgrove's introduction to *STTS*, we find a different order in placement. Akṣobhya–Locanā, Ratnasambhava–Māmakī, Amitābha–Pāṇḍarā and Amoghasiddhi–Tārā. Snellgrove describes also a different set of *Prajñās* and their location whereas the location of the four Buddhas coincides with the above: Akṣobhya (E)–Locanā (SE), Ratnasambhava (S)–Māmakī (SW), Amitābha (W)–Pāṇḍarā (NW), Amoghasiddhi (N)–Tārā (NE). Cf. Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: 10. However, according to Vajravarmaṇ's commentary on *SDPT*, in the basic *maṇḍala* of the Tantra, Māmakī is placed in the south-east; Locanā in the south-west; Pāṇḍarā in the north-west; and Tārā in the north-east.

four Buddhas, they are four-headed and eight-armed, seated in the lotus pericarp, but without any animal symbols. Their bodily colours do not concord to the iconographic convention. The figure of Māmakī next to Akṣobhya is light red. The figure of Locanā beside Ratnasambhava is white. The figure next to Amitābha, Pāṇḍarā, is also light red. The figure next to Amoghasiddhi is Tārā in blue.

In Alchi, the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala is painted next to the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala (*Pl. 5*). The centre of the large circular layout of the *maṇḍala* is shown as a pericarp of a fully-bloomed lotus, which accommodates the presiding deity of *maṇḍala*, Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara (*Pl. 32*). Like in the Maṇḍala of Tabo, Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara is shown in white, four-headed and eight-armed. However, observation shows that some iconographic details of these two examples differ lightly from each other. In the Maṇḍala of Alchi, he is seated on his lion vehicle, and the colours of the three other faces are yellow to his proper right, blue to his proper left, and reddish-orange above. The attributes of eight hands are more or less same as the example of Tabo, except the presence of a book and an arrow in his upper right hands. There are eight Uṣṇīṣas placed around Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara on eight lotus petals.

To the east of the central chamber of Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara we see a blue-coloured Akṣobhya; to the south, yellow-coloured Ratnasambhava; to the west, red-coloured Amitābha; and to the north, dark green-coloured Amoghasiddhi. These four Kula Buddhas are four-headed and eight-armed. They are seated on their animal vehicles: elephants, horses, peacocks and *garuḍas* respectively. Each of them has four faces, of blue, white, red and yellow, and dark green, while the colour of the main face is same as that of the body. Akṣobhya's hand attributes are the pairs of *vajra*-bell, arrow-bow, *makara*-headed staff-string and sword-*mudrā*. The objects in Ratnasambhava's hands are sword-bell, arrow-bow, *makara*-headed staff-*mudrā* and *vajra*-fist. Amitābha holds sword-lotus, arrow-bow, *makara*-headed staff-*mudrā* and *vajra*-bell. The hand-held objects of Amoghasiddhi are difficult to define because of the deterioration of the figure, apart from an arrow and *makara*-headed staff in two of the right hands. Like in the case of Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, four Bodhisattvas are affiliated to each of the four Buddhas; these Sixteen Bodhisattvas are one-headed and two-armed. Around Akṣobhya are Bodhisattvas in white, yellow, red and dark green. Around Ratnasambhava are Bodhisattvas in yellow, red, white and blue. Around Amitābha are two Bodhisattvas in red and two in yellow. Around Amoghasiddhi are a Bodhisattva in white, another in yellow and two others in dark green. The objects held in the hands of these Bodhisattvas accord more or less with the symbols of the

Sixteen Bodhisattvas referred to in *STTS*: *vajra*, *aṅkuśa*, a bow and an arrow, a gem, the solar disk, a wheel, a sword, a book, and the like. On the intermediate quarters are four Prajñā Goddesses with features similar to the main deity and the Four Buddhas; four-headed and eight-armed. The inner square region is guarded by four Door Guardians at the four directions: Vajrāṅkuśa, Vajrapāśa, Vajrasphoṭa and Vajrāveśa. Fifty-two feminine divinities surround these main deities of the Maṇḍala. Based on a reading of *Vajrāvalī*,⁵² these feminine deities can be identified as twelve Bhūmis in the east, twelve Pāramitās in the south, twelve Vaśitās in the west and twelve Dhāriṇīs in the north. At the intermediate corners are four Offering Goddesses: Lāsyā, Mālā, Gītā and Nṛtyā. They are placed within a square “palace” that is itself guarded by additional, feminine door guardians. At the four quarters and four intermediate quarters of the outermost square band are the Eight Krodhas. They are of ferocious expression, with four heads and eight arms. These figures bear the appropriate colours according to their directions. Each of these Krodhas is flanked by two feminine divinities, for a total of eight: Puṣpā, Vajrarūpā, Dhūpā, Vajraśabdā, Dīpā, Vajrerṣyā, Gandhā and Vajrasparśā. “The Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the Good Age”⁵³ find their place on the outermost square band. All these divine figures are encircled by red nimbus, except the square band of fifty-two feminine deities. These red circles contrast with their blue background, producing a strong visual effect. The outermost circular rim is occupied by rows of figures; *yogīs* and Hindu deities such as Śiva, Pārvatī, Kārttikeya and Gaṇeśa are noticeable. As is the case with the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala of Alchi is composed of an extensive range of divinities, whereas that of Tabo displays only the major deities of the Maṇḍala.

The *Nāmasaṃgīti* (*NS*) may be used as the conceptual source of the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala. It is said that Mañjuśrīkīrti wrote (presumably in the early tenth century CE) the enormous commentary on *NS*, called the *Nāmasaṃgīti Ṭippaṇī*. Mañjuśrīkīrti’s commentary represents the exegesis of the text based on the Yoga Tantra system, and the new ritual structure delineated therein is called the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala.⁵⁴ In the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala, the presiding deity, Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara, is Mañjuśrī in his Mañjughoṣa aspect. According to Mallmann⁵⁵ the name Dharmadhātu-

⁵² Cf. Chandra and Vira 1999: 68-70.

⁵³ Identification following Snellgrove, in Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: 39.

⁵⁴ See Davidson, in his introduction to the translation of *NS* (Davidson 1981: 12). See also Chandra 1993: 384.

⁵⁵ Mallmann 1964: 20.

Vāgīśvara-Mañjuśrī is reserved for the aspect of Mañjuśrī (Mañjughoṣa) with four faces and eight arms, with the main hands forming the *dharmacakra mudrā*.⁵⁶ Mañjuśrī in the Maṇḍala is not merely the Bodhisattva of intelligence, but is also the spokesman of the Dharma; furthermore, he himself embodies Dharma. The description of the deity given in *NS* as holding a book of *prajñāpāramitā*, a sword, a bow and an arrow tells that Mahāvairocana is embodied in the image of Mañjuśrī.⁵⁷ *NSP* 21, while describing the iconography of the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala, mentions that Mañjughoṣa is of the nature of Mahāvairocana (*bhagavān mahāvairocanātmā mañjughoṣa*).⁵⁸

The practice of adoring Mañjuśrī, which may have catalysed the development of this grandiose *maṇḍala*, must have been based on his aspect as Mahāvairocana. And the prominent placement of Mañjuśrī – especially as demonstrated in the entire artistic schemes of Alchi – may be justifiably understood via his aspect as the spokesman or embodiment of Dharma. The placement of Mañjuśrī in the centre of the Maṇḍala confirms that he has been adored as the highest divinity Mahāvairocana, who is the main focus of Yoga Tantras.

In one of the three *maṇḍalas* painted in the third storey of the *sumtseg* of Alchi, the main divinity is the four-headed and eight-armed Mañjuśrī, seated in the *vajraparyāṅkāśana* position, upon the lion throne (*Pls.* 6, 33). However, in this *maṇḍala* it is questionable whether or not he represents Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara, because he holds four pairs of books and swords in his eight arms, and all his faces are white. Usually, the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara form of Mañjuśrī holds the pairs of book and sword, bow and arrow, bell and *vajra*, and his main hands are in the *dharmacakra mudrā*; also, his other faces show three primary colours: yellow, red and blue. In this *maṇḍala* of Mañjuśrī, the eight Uṣṇīṣas are absent. Instead, the four Buddhas and four Prajñā Goddesses are adjacent to Mañjuśrī. Although the *maṇḍala* of Mañjuśrī in the third storey of the *sumtseg* is differentiated from Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala, the observation of the Maṇḍala in relation to the two other *maṇḍalas* of Mahāvairocana and Prajñāpāramitā beside it informs us of the eminence of Mañjuśrī (*Pls.* 7-8). The *maṇḍala* scheme of the third storey of the *sumtseg* has been derived from the

⁵⁶ The name of Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara is found in *SM* 61. According to Bhattacharyya's study (Bhattacharyya, 1968: 103-04) on Buddhist iconography based on *SM*, Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara is a form of Mañjuśrī, and he is classified as the emanation of Amitābha.

⁵⁷ *NS* 150, tr. Davidson 1981: 37.

⁵⁸ *NSP* 21, ed. Bhattacharyya 1972: 65.

Table 1.3: Iconographic Scheme of Three Maṇḍalas in the Third Storey of the Sumtseg

<i>Layers</i>	<i>Maṇḍala of Mañjuśrī</i>	<i>Maṇḍala of Mahāvairocana</i>	<i>Maṇḍala of Prajñāpāramitā</i>
1 st	Mañjuśrī	Mahāvairocana	Prajñāpāramitā
2 nd	Four Buddhas and four Prajñās	Prajñāpāramitā	Four Prajñāpāramitās and four Buddhas in the <i>nirmāṇakāya</i> form
3 rd	Sixteen Bodhisattvas	Four Buddhas and four Bodhisattvas (or four Prajñās)	Eight Buddhas in the <i>nirmāṇakāya</i> form and four Bodhisattvas
4 th	Sixteen Bodhisattvas	Sixteen Bodhisattvas	Sixteen Buddhas in the <i>nirmāṇakāya</i> form

correlating concepts of the three central divinities of Mahāvairocana, Prajñāpāramitā and Mañjuśrī. These three *maṇḍalas* are based on similar geometric structures, consisting of large concentric circles in the inner chamber. (Illus. 1.4 i-iii) The iconographic settings within the structure clearly demonstrate the relationship among these three *maṇḍalas*. Table 1.3 displays the comparison of these three *maṇḍalas* in terms of the iconographic settings. Here the divinities allocated to a layer of the *maṇḍala* correspond to those placed at the same layer of the other two *maṇḍalas*. The hierarchical arrangement shown in these *maṇḍalas* verifies the affinity of the iconographic schemes of these *maṇḍalas*, which especially pronounces the status of Mañjuśrī to be equivalent to that of Goddess Prajñāpāramitā and of Mahāvairocana.

I.3 Colour

When one sees for the first time a Buddhist *maṇḍala*, it may well be its colour that is its first striking quality. For example, in the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, found in the *dukhang* of Alchi, the contrast and interplay of the primary colours are remarkable (Pl. 1). Here, on a blue background, we find anthropomorphic deities, row by row, painted onto red circles. Painted in white, Mahāvairocana is flanked by four female figures, one blue (eastern), the others yellow (southern), red (western) and green (northern), and the four Buddhas are in their usual colours: Akṣobhya in blue, Ratnasambhava in yellow, Amitābha in red and Amoghasiddhi in dark green. Akṣobhya is surrounded by four Bodhisattvas of blue (E), yellow (S), green (W) and red (N); Ratnasambhava by four Bodhisattvas of yellow (E), red (S), white (W) and blue (N); Amitābha by four Bodhisattvas of light red (E), blue (S), yellow (W) and red (N); and Amoghasiddhi by four Bodhisattvas of green (E), yellow (S), yellow (W) and dark green (N). The colour of each of the four Prajñā Goddesses is the same as that of their corresponding Buddhas, and four small female figures around each goddess are painted in the same colours as their respective goddesses.

By their colour can one identify the five Buddhas; however, any fixed colour scheme for the Sixteen Bodhisattvas often seems obscure, as is seen in the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala of Alchi. Even in the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala of Tabo, it is hard to recognize any fixed scheme in the colours of Sixteen Bodhisattvas. And, to compare the colours of the corresponding Sixteen Bodhisattvas in these two Maṇḍalas yields little fruit. One discernible rule in Alchi is that the colour of the four Bodhisattvas placed to the east of each *kula* Buddha coincides with that of their respective Kula Buddhas, which seems to tell us that these are the representative Bodhisattvas of the four *kulas*, and that their colour reflects their *kula* association. The relation of colour to directional position is noticeable in case of door guardians, who are conventionally coloured blue, yellow, red and bluish green for the directions of east, south, west and north respectively. In particular, the *maṇḍalas* in the *sumtseg* of Alchi displays the use of colours charged with symbolic implications. We observe that the *maṇḍalas* in the second storey of the *sumtseg* or in the *dukhang* are painted with five colours. Remarkably, in the *maṇḍalas* of the third storey of the *sumtseg*, only white, red and blue are seen (*Pls.* 6-8). The central images are painted white, and the deities of the east and the west have their conventional colours of blue and red, respectively. However, those of the south and the north are not painted with their conventional colours of yellow and green, but rather in white, as in the centre. Keeping in mind another distinctive feature of these three *maṇḍalas* of the third storey in the *sumtseg* – that their geometric *maṇḍala* fields consist of only a set of four gates, as distinct from other *maṇḍala* examples – their colour scheme should also be considered in relation to the inner progress in both the ritual and the meditation.

Let us now look at the general symbolic use of colours in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In Buddhism, colours are part of the *viññaptiḥ* (mind formulation), as are all other objects or qualities within our range of perception, in that they are derived from our consciousness. Vasubandhu explains as follows:

There is a representation of consciousness (*viññaptiḥ*) which appears in the form of colour (*rūpa-pratibhāsa*). It develops from its own seed (*svabīja*), which was there in the unconscious, namely *ālaya-vijñāna*. Then at the proper times it externalizes itself in the form of colour.⁵⁹

The above verses describe the general Mahāyāna position in regard to colour. It denotes that colours are perceived in association with state of consciousness. In the dualistic

⁵⁹ *Vṛtti* on *Viṃśatikā* 9, tr. Kochumutom 1989: 171-72.

worldview, colours stand for the phenomenal world (*saṃsāra*), whereas the absence of colour represents *nirvāṇa* or *śūnya*. In his commentary on *MVT*, Buddhaguhya speaks of the sensual nature of colour and *maṇḍala*:

The intrinsic nature of colour is to cause attachment. The interest of beings is aroused by the appearance of the colours and attributes of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and the drawing of the Mandala.⁶⁰

Having seen the sensual nature of colours that causes “attachment”, how can one understand how the cause of attachment can be used in a sacred circle designed to lead one towards Enlightenment? *MVT* explains the basis of colour use in *maṇḍalas*.

Although beings are attached to the realms by them, the Buddhas have preciously taught that they have the taste of *dharmadhātu*, therefore they are called “colours”.⁶¹

In conformity with our actual experience, this verse states that colours’ intrinsic nature of leading one towards delight and involvement⁶² is advantageous for drawing one’s attention. If their sensual aspects do not imprison the practitioner, they turn one’s attention to an optimal centre of concentration. Here lies the specificity of the tantric soteriology, in that the apparent dualism is undermined by the transformation of the apparently negative pole. The colours of *maṇḍalas* are the instruments to engage one into the state of *samādhi*. Thus, it is said that their colours have “the taste of *dharmadhātu*”; Buddhaguhya writes that this is because these colours are “of one taste”.⁶³ We learn in the text that colours used in *maṇḍalas* are fundamentally the aspects of this *Dharmadhātu*, and especially in Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, the primary colours are used intentionally with due consideration of their symbolic meanings. When their nature of delight and joy give way to the inner vision, colours let us taste the deeper flavour of *Dharmadhātu*.

Colours used in the *maṇḍala* are seen as aspects of *Dharmadhātu*, first of all, because they undergo the ritual of transformation. They are explicitly endowed with symbolic connotations by means of the visualization and empowerment of the syllables.

⁶⁰ *MVT* I.69, comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 123.

⁶¹ *MVT* II.69, tr. Hodge 2003: 122. Hodge assumes that original word for colour could be *rāga* or *raṅga*, because they both have colour and attachment among their various meanings (cf. Hodge 2003: 548, n. 30).

⁶² Cf. *MVT* II.69, comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 123.

⁶³ Cf. *ibid*.

How colours are empowered and transformed to reflect *Dharmadhātu* is described in chapter X of *MVT*, where the *vāk maṇḍala* is explained.⁶⁴ The ritual process can be summarized as follows: having prepared the *maṇḍala* ground, the master first transforms himself into Vairocana. Then, he imagines the colour pigments to be the vast *Dharmadhātu*, which is *Śūnya*.⁶⁵ One by one, all five colours are transformed. For example, the white colour is transformed first. The master imagines that the white pigment is the pure *Dharmadhātu* that purifies the realms of beings, and is itself Tathāgatas. Then, the syllable *ra* with a flaming aura is imagined and superimposed onto it. In this manner, red, yellow, green and black colours are in turn transformed. Buddhaguhya specifies in the commentary that the colours are transformed by the Buddha, who is generated by his *bija mantra*.⁶⁶ This ritual of colour transformation that precedes the making of a *maṇḍala* is based on the correspondence between the *bija mantras* and colours; furthermore, the association of colours with *bija mantras* lays the foundation for the other symbolic implications of colours in *maṇḍalas*.

Not only do colours attain symbolic significance in their relation to *mantras*, but the meanings of *mantras* themselves are also strengthened due to their correlation with colours. In the section of *MVT* that describes the colours, shapes and size of the deities of *citta maṇḍala*, it is read:

The mantras uttered by the Tathāgatas, likewise those uttered by the perfect Buddhas, should be known as white and yellow. That of Vajrapāṇi is multi-coloured. The mantra of Lokeśvara is white due to his type of action.⁶⁷

Buddhaguhya's commentary connects the colour white with the *dharmadhātu* nature of all phenomena, and yellow with enrichment and beneficence. The description of Vajrapāṇi's multi-colour is due to his nature as the "Awareness of Accomplishment" of those activities that benefit living beings; thus, his *mantra* is of every colour.⁶⁸ These references urge one to see the interrelation between colours and *mantras*.

MVT elaborates the symbolic connotations of colours in relation to *Dharmadhātu*.

⁶⁴ Cf. *MVT* X.17, tr. Hodge 2003: 225-26.

⁶⁵ Buddhaguhya equates *dharmadhātu* to *śūnya*, especially in this context (cf. *MVT* I.17, comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 226).

⁶⁶ Cf. *MVT* X.17 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 226.

⁶⁷ *MVT* XIII.35, tr. Hodge 2003: 273-74.

⁶⁸ Cf. *MVT* XIII.35, comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 274.

The five primary colours referred to in the *MVT* are white, red, yellow, green and black, different from the five colours in the *maṇḍalas* of Tabo and Alchi. One also observes that the correspondence between the symbolic categories and the colours is not always consistent. Nevertheless, the discourse on colour given in this Tantra exposes the fact that colours in *maṇḍalas* are employed not from any criterion of creating sensual beauty, but rather are consciously used in their symbolic context to represent multiple layers of reality. In chapter II of *MVT* Buddhaguhya explains that a five-coloured cord, used in laying out a *maṇḍala*, along with five colour pigments, should be imagined to be the fivefold Awareness (*jñāna*) of perfect Enlightenment.⁶⁹ The Tantra states that colour should be applied from the inside towards the outside, in the order of white, red, yellow, green and black.⁷⁰ According to the commentary, the sequence of colour application is determined by the intrinsic nature of each colour, and their symbolic correspondence to a fixed stage of spiritual development. White should be applied first because its intrinsic nature is *Dharmadhātu*. Next, red is applied, for the intrinsic nature of the red is involvement with beings by virtue of the *karuṇā* (compassion) which benefits beings through expedient means. Then, compassion ought to be encouraged. Therefore yellow is applied, the attribute of enrichment. Then, one becomes capable of carrying out everything, and so green must come next.⁷¹ Having been able to carry out all activities, one applies black which represents the subdual of evildoers; furthermore, the inner regions are black, because what is within is secret.⁷²

⁶⁹ Cf. *MVT* II.19 comm. and X.17 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 103, 227.

⁷⁰ *MVT* II.69, tr. Hodge 2003: 122-23.

⁷¹ Hodge gives an insightful understanding of green in its doctrinal connotation of “action”: “Green symbolizes the capacity to perform various different actions because it is not a primary colour but can be produced by the mixture of several other colours, thus combining the functions those colours symbolize” (Hodge 2003: 548, n. 31).

⁷² Cf. *MVT* II.69 comm. and X.17 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 123, 227.

II.

Multiple Layers of Form Implied in the Discourses on Maṇḍalas

II.1 Maṇḍalas in Association with the Notion of Trikāya and Triguhya

AMONG the several inscriptions that remain in the *sumtseg* in Alchi,¹ those towards the left of the feet of the colossal Maitreya are significant in that the purpose of the building is expressed; when one remembers the *sumtseg* to be both three-storeyed *stūpa* and *maṇḍala*, these inscriptions are important for understanding the meaning of the *maṇḍala*. After lamenting the impermanence of life and urging the practice of religion, they speak further:

Tshul-khrimsod (the founder), in order to demonstrate that possessions are non-substantial and to inculcate the essentiality of universal relativity, has set up these three receptacles of Body, Speech and Mind. In order to remove bodily impurities and to obtain a ‘human’ Buddha-Body (*nirmāṇakāya*), he has set up Mañjuśrī as a ‘Buddha-Body’ image. In order to remove vocal impurities and obtain a ‘glorious’ Buddha-Body (*sambhogakāya*), he has set up Avalokiteśvara as a ‘Buddha-Speech’ image. In order to remove mental impurities and to obtain an ‘absolute’ Buddha-Body (*dharmakāya*), he has set up Maitreya as ‘Buddha-Mind’ image.²

The inscription tells that the construction was motivated to demonstrate the “non-substantiality of possessions and the essentiality of universal relativity”, which is none other than the description of the Buddhist ideal of *Śūnya*. The ideal of *Śūnya* was the dominant doctrinal principle of this construction, which most likely influenced the whole artistic programme of the *sumtseg*. Another doctrinal concept glimpsed through

¹ Various inscriptions reveal that the temple was set up more or less as it is now arranged and some repair work was carried out in the sixteenth century, but re-decorators repainted the temple as it was originally (cf. Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: 48).

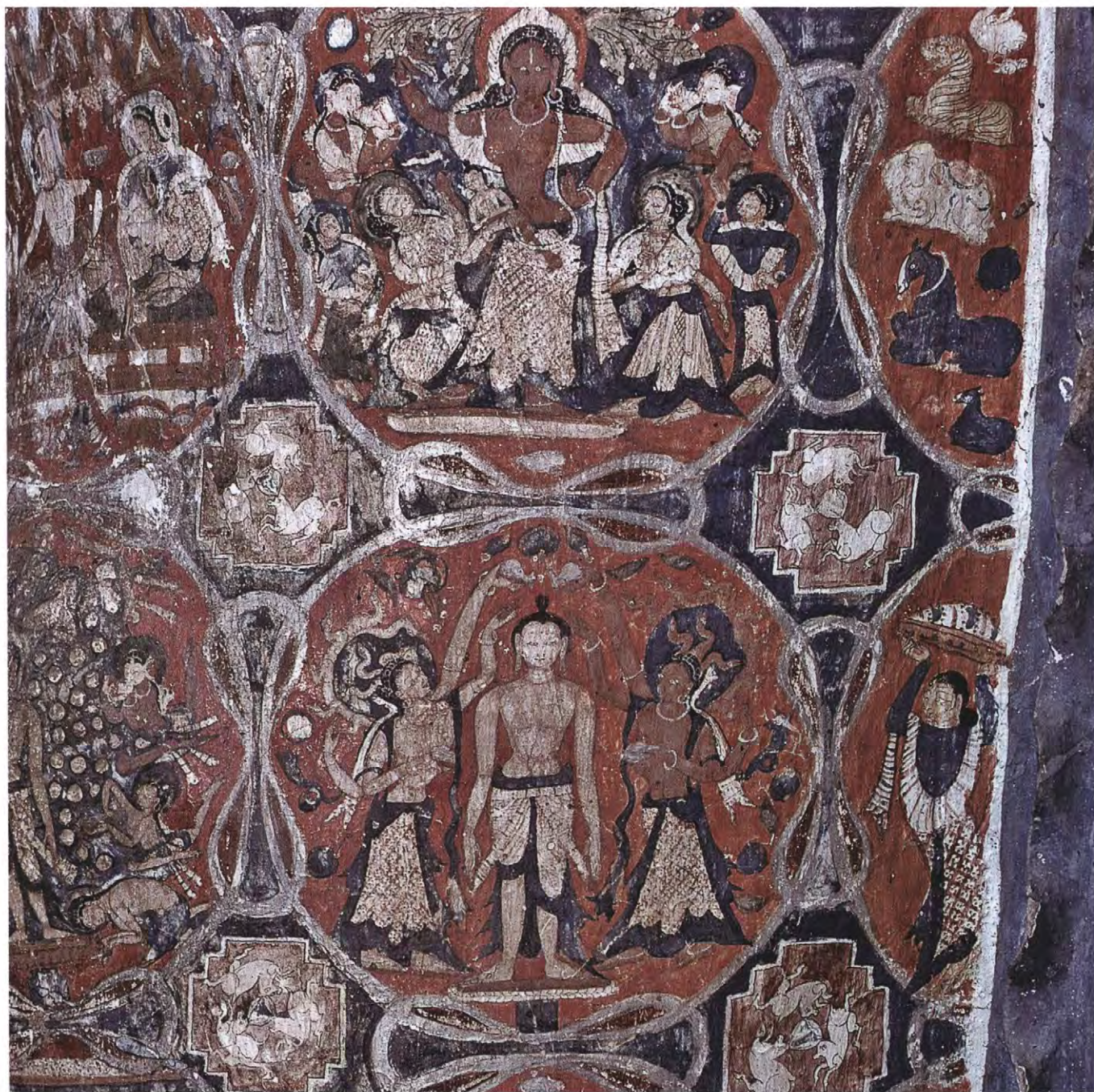
² Quoted from Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: 48. Its original Tibetan inscription is also given; *ibid.*: 48 n. 33.

these inscriptions is *triguhyā* of *kāya-vāk-citta*. The three-storeyed structure is meant to be the receptacle of *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*. The three colossal statues of Bodhisattvas, installed in the first storey, signify the purification of *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*, which is preliminary to the realization of *trikāyas* — *nirmāṇakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya* and *dharmakāya*.

One must remember that *maṇḍala* paintings, used in the *sumtseg* in particular and in monastic complexes in general, are to be understood through their philosophical association with *Śūnya* and other Buddhist principles, such as *triguhyā* and *trikāya*. These notions are crucial in establishing the non-dualistic relationship between the Buddha and the individual self. The three levels of *nirmāṇakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya* and *dharmakāya* tell how the Buddha Dharma is revealed to every sentient being. Furthermore, *trikāya* is frequently explained through an analogy to another set of *kāya-vāk-citta*. As observed in the above inscriptions from the *sumtseg*, the three Bodhisattva statues correspond to the set of *kāya-vāk-citta* as well as that of *nirmāṇakāya-saṃbhogakāya-dharmakāya*. The fourteenth-century *rGyal-rabs gsal-ba'i me-long* speaks of the three-storeyed structure in bSamyas in connection with those three manifestations of Buddha. According to the description, Śākyamuni and his retinue were represented on the ground floor, Vairocana and his retinue appeared on the middle floor, and the upper third floor was dedicated to Sarvavid Vairocana.³ In other words, the three storeys of bSamyas express a complete set of *nirmāṇakāya-saṃbhogakāya-dharmakāya* in their iconographic schemes. If we apply this concept to the three storeys of the *sumtseg*, we find an analogy: the first floor denotes *nirmāṇakāya*, and therefore themes such as the life of Śākyamuni, pilgrimage and the spiritual practices of the *yogīs* find their place on the *dhotis* of the three colossal Bodhisattvas found there (*Pls.* 34-36); the second storey, its walls completely covered by *maṇḍala* paintings, might represent *saṃbhogakāya*; and the third floor, with the three *maṇḍalas* of Mañjuśrī, Mahāvairocana and Prajñāpāramitā, would thus have been conceived as *dharmakāya*. Consequently, one may be reminded of the tripartite scheme seen in the assembly hall of the *dukhang* in Tabo.

Textual sources reveal that *maṇḍalas* are related to these crucial concepts of tantric practice; however, textual references are not always consistent in regard to the corresponding systems between the symbolic concepts and *maṇḍalas*. In Vajravarman's commentary on *SDPT*, *trikāya* denotes *jñānakāya* (wisdom body),

³ Cf. *rGyal-rabs gsal-ba'i me-long*, ed. Sørensen 1994: 378-79; quoted in Klimburg-Salter 1997: 105.



Pl. 34 Maitreya's *dhoti* with the narratives of Śākyamuni's life and some folk scenes, *sumtseg*, Alchi. (Photo: J. Poncar 1981 (WHAV))



Pl. 35 Avalokiteśvara's *dhōti* with various scenes of temples, *sumtseg*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar (WHAV))



Pl. 36 Mañjuśrī's *dhoti* with the theme of *siddhas'* yogic practices, *sumtseg*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1991 (WHAV))

samayakāya (symbolic body) and *karmakāya* (action body). They are respectively related to Vairocana, Śākyamuni and Vajrapāṇi, who arise from *dharmadhātu*, *bodhicitta* and *pratītya-samutpāda* (twelve links of dependent origination).⁴ Another variation of the set of three is found in another commentary of *SDPT*, known as *sNan baḥi rgyan*,⁵ where different *maṇḍalas* of the Tantra are associated with three *kulas*, three *mudrās*, *triguḥya* and *trikāya*.⁶

STTS presents four divisions of *maṇḍalas*: *mahāmaṇḍala*, *samayamaṇḍala*, *dharmamaṇḍala* and *karmamaṇḍala*. In his commentary on *STTS*, Buddhaguhya speaks of the deities of the four *maṇḍalas*, claiming them to have taken shape respectively from *kāya*, *citta*, *vāk* and *karma* of Sarvatathāgata.⁷ In *Tattvāloka*, another commentary on that Tantra by Ānandagarbha, the set of four (*kāya*, *citta*, *vāk* and *karma*) is associated with four *mudrās* and five Buddha families: *kāya-mahāmudrā* with Vairocana, *cit-samayamudrā* with Akṣobhya, *vāk-dharmamudrā* with Amitābha and *karma-karmamudrā* with Ratnasambhava or Amoghasiddhi. Here, the four *mudrās* correspond to the four *maṇḍalas*.⁸ In the commentary of *NS*, Mañjuśrīmitra identifies *mahāmudrā* with *saṃbhogakāya* (*devatākāya*), *samayamudrā* with *dharmakāya*, *dharmamudrā* with *vāk* and *karmamudrā* with *nirmāṇakāya*. However Surativajra's commentary gives a different arrangement: *mahāmudrā* with *dharmakāya*,

⁴ Cf. Wayman and Tajima 1992: 55.

⁵ *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorājakalpālokākāraṇāma* translated by Suvidyākaravarman and dBaṅ phyug rgyal mtshan T.T., vol. 76, no. 3454: 202-1-3 to 235-3-8.

⁶ See *SDPT*, tr. Skorupski 1983: xxvii-xxviii.

⁷ “In the case of the *mahā-maṇḍalas*, because the array of deities is an arrangement in the *rūpa-kāya* (Body of Form), one understands them (the *mahā-maṇḍala*) as comprising the magical manifestation of shapes (*vikurvāṇa*) from the treasury of inexhaustible Body. . . . The *samaya-maṇḍala* is characterized by an arrangement of thunderbolt (*vajra*), iron hook (*aṅkuśa*), arrow (*śara*) and so on, which are symbolizing agents for the way in which emancipation is comprehended; hence, comprises the magical manifestation of shapes from the arranged treasury of inexhaustible Mind. . . . The *dharmacakra* arranges and disposes the deities who stand for the practice which is the means of teaching how the Doctrine (*dharmā*) is comprehended; hence, is the blessing (*adhiṣṭhāna*) for the magical manifestation of shapes from the arranged treasury of inexhaustible Speech of all the Tathāgatas. . . . Accordingly, in the case of the *karma-maṇḍala*, it arrays the deities who are the offering and other rites; hence one should understand it as displaying in concise form the practice of all Tathāgatas for the aim of sentient beings.” (Mkhas-grub-rje's *Rgyud sde spyiḥi rnam par gźag pa rgyas par brjod*, tr. Lessing and Wayman 1998 (1968): 224, n. 20.)

⁸ Quoted in Mkhas-grub-rje's *Rgyud sde spyiḥi rnam par gźag pa rgyas par brjod*, tr. Lessing and Wayman 1998 (1968): 225.

Table 2.1: Maṇḍalas in Association with Symbolic Concepts in Buddhism**a. Vajravarmaṇ's commentary on SDPT**

<i>Jñānakāya</i>	<i>Vairocana</i>	<i>Dharmadhātu</i>
<i>Samayakāya</i>	<i>Śākyamuni</i>	<i>Bodhicitta</i>
<i>Karmakāya</i>	<i>Vajrapāṇi</i>	<i>Pratītya-samutpāda</i>

b. Commentary on the SDPT called sNañ baḥi rgyan

<i>Basic maṇḍala</i>	<i>Tathāgata Kula</i>	<i>Mahāmudrā</i>	<i>Kāya</i>	<i>Samḥogakāya</i>
<i>Uṣṇīṣa maṇḍala</i>	<i>Padma Kula</i>	<i>Dharmamudrā</i>	<i>Vāk</i>	<i>Nirmāṇakāya</i>
<i>Maṇḍala of worldly gods, e.g. Amitāyus</i>	<i>Vajra Kula</i>	<i>Samayamudrā</i>	<i>Citta</i>	<i>Dharmakāya</i>

c. Commentary on STTS by Buddhaguhya

<i>Mahāmaṇḍala</i>	<i>Kāya</i>
<i>Samayamaṇḍala</i>	<i>Citta</i>
<i>Dharmamaṇḍala</i>	<i>Vāk</i>
<i>Karmamaṇḍala</i>	<i>Karma</i>

d. Commentary on STTS by Ānandagarbha (Tattvāloka)

<i>Mahāmudra</i>	<i>Kāya</i>	<i>Vairocana</i>
<i>Samayamudrā</i>	<i>Citta</i>	<i>Akṣobhya</i>
<i>Dharmamudrā</i>	<i>Vāk</i>	<i>Amitābha</i>
<i>Karmamudrā</i>	<i>Karma</i>	<i>Ratnasamḥava/Amoghasiddhi</i>

e. Commentary on NS by Mañjuśrīmitra

<i>Mahāmudrā</i>	<i>Samḥogakāya</i>
<i>Samayamudrā</i>	<i>Dharmakāya</i>
<i>Dharmamudrā</i>	<i>Vāk</i>
<i>Karmamudrā</i>	<i>Nirmāṇakāya</i>

f. Commentary on NS by Surativajra

<i>Mahāmudrā</i>	<i>Dharmakāya</i>
<i>Samayamudrā</i>	<i>Samḥogakāya</i>
<i>Dharmamudrā</i>	<i>Jñānavāk</i>
<i>Karmamudrā</i>	<i>Nirmāṇakāya</i>

samayamudrā with *saṃbhogakāya*, *dharmamudrā* with *jñānavāk* and *karmamudrā* with *nirmāṇakāya*.⁹ These differing accounts render us a glimpse of the scholastic symbolism of these *maṇḍalas* in association with the *kāyas*, the *mudrās*, and the *triguhyas*. Although the correspondences between *maṇḍalas* and the symbolic concepts of Buddhism are not always consistent,¹⁰ from the above account we can understand that multiple layers of manifestations have been conceived to be associated with these *maṇḍalas*. (Table 2.1)

II.2 Multiple Layers of Form in Maṇḍalas

II.2.1 Three levels of Maṇḍalas: Svabhāva, Samādhi and Pratibimba

The words of Buddhaguhya presuppose different levels of form between the perceptible forms of *maṇḍalas* and their ultimate meaning of *Śūnya*. Since Buddhaguhya was the prime commentator of the important Yoga Tantras, his expositions provide us with a reliable basis for understanding the metaphysical dimensions of *maṇḍalas*.

In his commentary to *SDPT*, Buddhaguhya clearly specifies the relation between a *maṇḍala* in meditation and one physically delineated. He starts his exegesis on “the concise meaning of *maṇḍala*”¹¹ with the following verse:

Now I shall teach about the reflected image of the conceptual basic *maṇḍala*.¹²

It is remarkable to read the term ‘the reflected image of the conceptual basic *maṇḍala*’ because it signifies that there is an original image which is reflected. In other words, the original *maṇḍala* is conceptual and the tangible, externally drawn *maṇḍala* is a reflected image (*pratibimba*) of the original *maṇḍala* (*bimba*). Therefore, this verse clearly directs the reader towards a metaphysical dimension. On a following verse of *SDPT* “One should draw the outer *maṇḍala*”, he gives a detailed commentary:

⁹ NS, tr. Davidson 1981: 38, n. 127.

¹⁰ Cf. Snellgrove 1987: 250-51. In dealing with the tantric set of four Buddha-bodies in allocation to the four *cakras* in one’s body, Snellgrove mentions: “The allocation is so arbitrary and displays so many variations that this can scarcely be the case” (ibid.: 251). His comment on the tantric equation of four demonstrates how cryptic the allocation is.

¹¹ The complete section of Buddhaguhya’s “the concise meaning of *maṇḍala*” and verses of *SDPT* whose commentary it is meant for is translated by Alex Wayman (1990 (1973): 92-97).

¹² Ibid.: 93.

Cognition manifests. One must visualize the *samādhi-maṇḍala*. The outer *maṇḍala* is a reflected image of that, and since that is the required basis, one speaks of an “outer *maṇḍala*”; and in order to symbolize that, there is the expression “outer *maṇḍala*”.¹³

The commentary clarifies that the *samādhi-maṇḍala* is the basis of the outer *maṇḍala*. *Maṇḍala*’s image, externally produced, is the reflection (*pratibimba*) of the *samādhi-maṇḍala*, projected by the consciousness of the meditator. This only leaves the question of ‘where the *samādhi-maṇḍala* originates from?’

In the *Dharmamaṇḍala Sūtra* (DMS), Buddhaguhya renders us three levels of the *maṇḍala*, wherein *svabhāva-maṇḍala* is added to the above two categories of meditation (*samādhi-maṇḍala*) and image (*pratibimba-maṇḍala*). Buddhaguhya describes *maṇḍalas* from the perspective of the three levels of form: *svabhāva*, *samādhi* and *pratibimba*. *Svabhāva* (self-nature), often encountered as a synonym of *Śūnya*, may be equated to the nature of *Śūnya*, and its reference in association with *maṇḍalas* directly connects the perceptible forms of *maṇḍalas* to the formless Ultimate. According to DMS, the three levels of *maṇḍalas* can be outlined as follows:

- i) *Svabhāva-maṇḍala* is twofold: absolute and relative. “the *maṇḍala* of absolute self nature abides in the primeval state itself, just as it is, as nothing at all.”¹⁴ “The absolute may or may not be categorized.”¹⁵ The Absolute, which cannot be categorized, is identified with *bodhicitta* and *prajñā*, and “it is truly said to be the ‘essence’ of the *maṇḍala*, as taught in all the great *tantra*.”¹⁶ The absolute *svabhāva-maṇḍala* that may be categorized is exemplified by *skandha* (components of personality), *dhātu* (spheres of sense), *āyatana* (bases of consciousness) and *nidāna* (the twelve interdependent causes), and they are said to have the same essential nature as the gods and goddesses, in complete accordance with the Dharma.¹⁷ The text states that *maṇḍalas* of the relative *svabhāva-maṇḍala* appear as signs in order to represent the absolute truth.
- ii) *Samādhi-maṇḍala* is threefold: meditating on the divinity’s self-nature, studying his form and producing him skilfully.

¹³ Wayman 1990 (1973): 94.

¹⁴ DMS, tr. Lo Bue 1987: 796.

¹⁵ Ibid.: 795.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

- iii) *Pratibimba maṇḍala* is twofold: with images and with superior images. Six different kinds of media for the *maṇḍala*-making are given as the former – gold and silver, relieve shell, and so on. The superior image is explained to be threefold, as outer, inner and secret; the outer image is the body with the five limbs, the inner image is the five subtle *cakras*, and the secret superior image is the union of *vajra* and lotus.¹⁸

Three levels of *maṇḍalas* described by Buddhaguhya may be understood as three layers coexisting in a *maṇḍala* with varying levels of subtlety, rather than as three different types of *maṇḍalas*. The three levels of *maṇḍalas* include not only the external *maṇḍala* but also the formless and inconceivable *maṇḍalas*. The “image *maṇḍala*” refers to the material dimension of a *maṇḍala*. The “superior image” corresponds to the subtle form, if we interpret “the body of the five limbs” and “five *cakras*” to be respectively the gross and subtle manifestation of *pañcakula* (the five lineages). The *maṇḍala* of the secret superior image means the complete identification of the *vajra*, i.e. the practitioner, with the lotus which is the undefiled essence.¹⁹ The *maṇḍala* of meditation is related to the process of the contemplation of deities. The *maṇḍala* of *svabhāva* may signify the realm of *Śūnya*, as *Śūnya* is often defined as *svabhāva*.

However, some verses from the section about *maṇḍala*-related flaws or shortcomings give us another possible way to interpret how these three categories could be understood.

If you do not understand the *maṇḍala* of *svabhāva*, you will be at cross purpose in your view of *dharmatā* (absolute truth). . . . If you do not practise the meditation *maṇḍala*, there will be no result at all since your meditation will be pervaded by discriminating thought. . . . If you do not identify the *maṇḍala* of images, in your confusion, you will not taste the intended flavour: by failing to ensure the benefit of others you will be at cross purposes with the practice of enlightenment.²⁰

The practice of *maṇḍala* illustrated in this verse can actually be viewed as three different practices, involving the three categories of *maṇḍala*. However, since the

¹⁸ DMS, tr. Lo Bue 1987: 795-96.

¹⁹ The union of *vajra* and lotus does not necessarily mean sexual intercourse. The *vajra* here means the practitioner and the lotus symbolizes the pure essence which is not defiled by anger, lust and ignorance. Here the clause “the union of *vajra* and lotus” is interpreted with the help of Geshe Tsewang, in a personal teaching on 4 August 2007.

²⁰ DMS, tr. Lo Bue 1987: 800.

structure of the *maṇḍala* is described within the framework of the relative *svabhāva-maṇḍala* and since the other *maṇḍalas* are said to be identical,²¹ this possibility does not exclude the concept of a *maṇḍala* which has three levels of nature: *svabhāva*, meditation and images. We may be reminded that the absolute *svabhāva* which cannot be categorized is the essence of the *maṇḍala*. Additionally, when in *DMS* Buddhaguhya expounds upon the palace of the *maṇḍala*, he again illuminates the metaphysical dimensions of space within the *maṇḍala*. In the text, the shape of the *maṇḍala* palace is explained in the context of the relative *svabhāva-maṇḍala*, and its space is classified as fourfold: the exterior, the interior, the entrances and the foundation.

The outer shape is intended as a *stūpa*, a citadel, a royal residence and a pavilion (on) a mountain top.

The inner shape is decided in conformity with the various *tantras*, by the (Buddha) families and their functions.

As for the entrances, they have lower and upper (parts).

The lower ones consist of the actual entrance and the gateway; the upper ones are built in a way which is as beautiful as possible (with) mounting steps (round like) elephants' backs, and so forth.

As for the shape of the basis, it is boundless and level to infinity.²²

Buddhaguhya's exposition on the fourfold shape of the *maṇḍala* palace projects a picture of the *maṇḍala* consisting of layers of inner forms. This fourfold structure actually describes an internal transformation of form, smoothly grading from the physical level to the transcendental, proclaiming there to be inner forms beyond the pictorial shapes. "The outer shape" referred to above may mean the external forms of *maṇḍala* as we perceive it. "The inner shape" could mean the subtle form imbued with symbolic meanings that is grasped when one internalizes the *maṇḍala*. The text says that the inner shape is decided by five symbols – wheel, *vajra*, jewel, lotus and crossed *vajra* – which represent the five Buddha families (*pañcakula*).²³ After internalization follows the real entrance to the realm of Dharma in the state of absorption, which has two stages: low and high. The aesthetic elaborations over the doorways described in the above verse seem to imply the joy and bliss of the experience of entering. Having entered the *maṇḍala*, one is in contact with the realm of Dharma. The shape of *maṇḍala* at the state of complete absorption is "the basis", the realm of *dharmadhātu*. The text says:

²¹ Cf. *DMS*, tr. Lo Bue 1987: 796-800.

²² *Ibid.*: 796-97.

²³ *Ibid.*: 796, 801.

The extent of the basis is shown as infinite because of the limitless spread of the *dharmadhātu*.²⁴

The discourses of Buddhaguhya postulate that the *svabhāva-maṇḍala* is the origin of the external *maṇḍalas*, and that those *maṇḍalas* consisting of the palace, divinities and colours are basically supported by *dharmadhātu*. Their external forms are transformed through the stages of meditation, and the *maṇḍala* contains various layers of form, from the gross to the subtle and beyond. We have to bear in mind that the *maṇḍalas* are not static objects, but are rather objects that must be approached through an internal vision. It should be emphasized at this point that the *maṇḍalas* are precisely meant to be experienced through such a process. Thus, we should not be bound to the mere external appearance of a *maṇḍala*, but should instead try to discern how the visuals of the geometric palace, divinities and colours are transformed within the inner consciousness of the viewer. According to *DMS*, the visual details of divinities – bodily form, colours, marks of perfection, hand gestures, attributes, postures, mode of manifestation, ornaments and garments – are “used as token symbols for the realization, as methodical symbols for marking (the process) and as *mudrā* for this (tantric) practice”.²⁵ The images of divinities seen in *maṇḍalas* are comparable to the knots that should be untied in order to proceed further within the experience. They are akin to a door through which the inner room is attained.

II. 2.2 Maṇḍalas of Kāya, Vāk and Citta in the Mahāvairocanābhisambodhi Tantra

Now one might consider a different formulation to understand the levels of form in *maṇḍalas*. The discourse on the three *maṇḍalas* as described in *MVT* conveys non-hierarchical, horizontal layers of subtle forms that have taken the external shapes of *maṇḍalas*. *Maṇḍalas*, as explicated in *MVT* specifically denote “the spontaneous manifestation” and “the direct transformation” of the Perfect Enlightenment (*abhisambodhi*). The manifestation and transformation are the natural results of Vairocana’s Perfect Enlightenment, as the full title of the text indicates: *Mahāvairocana-abhisambodhi-vikurvati-adhiṣṭhāna-Tantra*. In a commentary on *MVT*, Buddhaguhya explains the term *vikurvati* (manifestation) as follows:

At the moment of his Perfect Enlightenment (*abhisambodhi*), he (Vairocana) spontaneously pervaded all of the Three Realms, unsurpassed by anyone, with the Adornments of his

²⁴ *DMS*, tr. Lo Bue 1987: 802.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 806.

Inexhaustible Body. . . . Likewise the Adornments of his Inexhaustible Speech also pervaded all of the Three Realms with the sacred Speech of the Buddha and taught the Dharma. And in the same way, the Adornments of his Inexhaustible Mind manifested as the various *cakras* of earth, water and so on, which arise from the mind with perceptual images.²⁶

Yet, the manifestations of Vairocana's *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta* are beyond the perceptible range (*gocara*) of ordinary beings, only perceived by pure Bodhisattvas such as Samantabhadra.²⁷ Thus, they are respectively transformed (*adhiṣṭhāna*) to the *maṇḍalas*, *mantras* and *mudrās* of the Tantra for the sake of trainees.²⁸ In this setting of *MVT*, *maṇḍalas* are viewed as the transformation of Vairocana's *kāya*, the Inexhaustible Body. On the other hand, it imparts the three *maṇḍalas* of *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*, which are collectively said to be "arisen from the matrix of compassion (*karuṇāgarbhodaya*)".²⁹ It is perplexing, if we attempt to establish a logically consistent system between the *maṇḍalas* of *kāya-vāk-citta* and *maṇḍala-mantra-mudrā* in the Tantra. The *kāya-maṇḍala* called Mahākaruṇāgarbhoḍbhāva Maṇḍala³⁰ is drawn two-dimensionally but is imagined in three dimensions. The *vāk-maṇḍala* has a *bīja* for each deity that must be combined with a *mudrā*. The *citta-maṇḍala* is also called the Secret Maṇḍala, and its drawing is described in chapter XIII. One should pay careful attention to the fact that the Tantra also describes the layout of *citta-maṇḍala*. It means that not only is *nirmāṇakāya* represented at the physical level, but also the *dharmakāya*, believed to be inconceivable, finds its representation in the physical realm. These three *maṇḍalas* are all conceived with external forms, taken as only "reflected images" of "the original image" in *samādhi*.

It is conceived in *MVT* that the three *maṇḍalas* of the Tantra are parallel expressions of *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta* of the Perfect Enlightenment, while the expositions of the *Dharmamaṇḍala Sūtra* imply that three *maṇḍalas* of *pratibimba*, *samādhi* and *svabhāva* lie within the grades of subtlety, from gross to subtle and beyond. By juxtaposing these two diverse exegeses of *maṇḍalas*, we conceive the varying layers

²⁶ *MVT* 3a-b, tr. Hodge 2003: 44.

²⁷ Cf. *ibid*.

²⁸ "All those same adornments of his Inexhaustible Body and so on are revealed for the sake of trainees as physical, verbal and mental attributes, by means of the *maṇḍalas*, *mantras* and *mudrās* in the Tantra. 'Adhiṣṭhāna' means he caused them to be present in the nature and the guise of body, speech and mind, by means of *maṇḍalas*, *mantras* and *mudrās*." (cf. *ibid*.)

²⁹ Hodge 2003: 33.

³⁰ It is elaborated in chapter II of *MVT*.

of forms in *maṇḍalas* as both parallel and in a series. Nonetheless, we find in both exegeses a clear conformity in comprehending the metaphysical source of physical *maṇḍalas*. *MVT* mentions two aspects of *dharmadhātu*: the Profound and the Extensive, which is reminiscent of the description of two aspects of *svabhāva-maṇḍala* – the absolute and the relative – given in *DMS*. The Profound is the *bodhimaṇḍa* (the core of Enlightenment), which refers to “the place where a Buddha becomes perfectly enlightened”, “the place of Perfect Enlightenment in the Akaniṣṭha realm”, and “the places of awakening to the Great Enlightenment in the abode of men”.³¹ The Extensive is the *svabhāva-maṇḍala* formed by the Inexhaustible Adornments of Vairocana’s *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*,³² which undergoes transformation into *maṇḍala-māntra-mudrā* of the Tantra and also into the three *maṇḍalas* of *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*. Thus, one sees that the three *maṇḍalas* of *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta* described in the Tantra are assigned to the Extensive aspect of *dharmadhātu*. Compared to the Extensive aspect of *dharmadhātu*, the relative aspect of *svabhāva-maṇḍala* lays the basis for the perceptible expression of *maṇḍalas* in *DMS*.

II.3 Practice of Visualization

The visualization practice of *maṇḍalas* demonstrates their innate depth, their internal and transcendental experience. Textual accounts of *maṇḍalas* are most often not any of methodical descriptions saying how pictorial *maṇḍalas* should be delineated in physical space, but rather are meant for the visualization and imagination in the inner space of one’s mind. The process of producing a *maṇḍala* takes place in the virtual space of *samādhi*. However, *maṇḍala* paintings display a significant similarity to the instructions given for meditative visualization, in terms of the physical characteristics such as a square layout with four gates, an eight-spoked wheel in the centre, or any anthropomorphic revelations of divinities. The present volume does not attempt to answer the question as to whether the meditation practice of visualizing a *maṇḍala* has influenced the *maṇḍala* arts or vice versa. Nevertheless, the descriptions of visualizing a *maṇḍala* certainly highlight the meditative background of the physical creation of a *maṇḍala*. They also demonstrate the inseparable relationship among the three main tools of the tantric ritual: *mantra*, *mudrā* and *maṇḍala*.

II.3.1 Process of Visualization

The process of visualizing a *maṇḍala* can be observed from the perspective of the transformation of the relationship between the subject and the object. The descriptions

³¹ Hodge 2003: 564 in the glossary.

³² Cf. Hodge 2003: 34.

of visualization given by contemporary practitioners help scholars in seeing the relation between the object of *maṇḍala* and the meditating subject. For example, Geshe Tsewang of Ladakh, a practitioner of the Heruka Maṇḍala meditation, describes the visualization process as follows:

First, one should study the external forms of a *maṇḍala*. Each detail – for example colour, posture, attribute of deities and their meanings – should be learnt and carefully registered in the mind. Then, one leaves the external forms of *maṇḍala* behind, and internally visualizes each detail in due course from outside towards the inside. Depending on the *maṇḍala*, the order of visual recollection differs. The images of deities are generated at one's own will, and due rituals for entering the *maṇḍala* should be performed. When all the detail has been visualized, one finally reaches the centre. The central deity is visualized in front of him. The deity gives the blessing to him in the forms of light or rainbow, etc. The blessing of the deity empowers the practitioner in the path to Enlightenment. The *maṇḍala* is to be practised regularly in order to strengthen the power to reach the highest Truth.³³

This process corresponds to the threefold *samādhi-maṇḍala* mentioned in *DMS*: meditating on the divinity's self-nature, studying his form and producing him skilfully.³⁴ The above description helps us in grasping the general pattern of visualization as it is practised today.

We now look into some references which have more direct relevance to the *maṇḍalas* of our concern. *SDPT*, one of the primary Yoga Tantras, provides us with valuable accounts in this regard. The following excerpts summarize the description given for the *maṇḍala* of Supreme Royal Maṇḍala (*maṇḍalarājāgrī*) in the Tantra:³⁵

- 1) It begins with the recitation: “*OM* the syllable *A*, the source of all *dharma*s on account of their non-origination from the beginning.”
- 2) By means of *vajra* produced from the syllable *HUM*, there arises the Air-Maṇḍala, on top of it the Fire-Maṇḍala from the syllable *RĀM*, on top of it the Great Waters from the syllables *VAM*, and on top of them the Gold-Maṇḍala from the syllable *KAM*. By means of *mantra HUM SUM HUM* in its centre, Mt. Sumeru is produced. It is empowered by the *mantra* and the *mudrā*. On top of Sumeru, by means of *karmamudrā*, a square palace with four gates is produced from the white syllable *BHUM*.

³³ Personal interview with Geshe Tsewang on 4 August 2007.

³⁴ *DMS*, tr. Lo Bue 1987: 795.

³⁵ *SDPT*, tr. Skorupski 1983: 26-31.

- 3) The inner *maṇḍala* has the eight-spoked wheel. At its centre is the Lion Seat with a lunar disc, and within the eight spokes there are also lunar discs.
- 4) Entering into a state of concentration known as “Sky Pervading”, the practitioner envisages, on the lunar disc resting on the Lion Seat, the vowels and the consonants melting into one another.
- 5) By means of the *mantra* whose *svabhāva* is the *bodhicitta*: “OM̐ SAGE SAGE GREAT SVĀHĀ”, he becomes fully perfected as Śākya lion.
- 6) Entering into a state of concentration as Lord Buddha, he should perform the *mantra* and the *mudrā*.
- 7) From the syllable A is produced a lunar disc in the heart of Śākyamuni.
- 8) Then on the lunar disc, the *mantras* of all the divinities are brought to maturation.
- 9) The *mantra* of each divinity is produced and five rays come forth from the *mantra*. These rays enter his or her heart.
- 10) The mingling of the *mantra* and the rays produces the perfect bodily forms. All the divinities of the *maṇḍala* should be envisaged one by one.
- 11) The text describes colours, *mudrās*, attributes, postures and locations as the characteristics of bodily forms of divinities.

The *maṇḍalas* of five elements produced from *bījas* are the foundation for further meditative constructions of *maṇḍala*. When the *maṇḍala* palace and its central seat are visualized, then begins the process of the production of images of deities. From items 4-6, the visualization of the central deity is described: one visualizes vowels and consonants melting into one another upon a lunar disc in its centre; by means of the *mantra*, one becomes the central deity and performs the ritual as such. Items 7-8 describe the generation of the anthropomorphic images of other divinities: syllable A is visualized in the heart. ‘A’ produces the lunar disc where the *mantras* of other deities come into maturation; the *mantra* of each deity and five rays coming out of the *mantra* mingle in the heart and produce the bodily form. Here, we witness the dynamic interplay between syllables and visuals, especially in the descriptions of “vowels and consonants melting into one another” or with “*mantra* and five rays mingling”. The role of syllable and *mantra* is seen to be essential in the process of visualization.

Now it is time to examine the description given in Buddhaguhya’s commentary

on *MVT*. It needs careful examination because it speaks in detail about the central role of the syllable *A* in the process of identification of the practitioner as the central deity, which has been briefly referred to in the above process from *SDPT* (item 7).

You should imagine any one of the four aspects of *A* as appropriate in the moon disc in your heart. Perceiving that the sound of this *A* signifies that all phenomena are unborn from the very beginning, you should dissolve your psycho-physical constituents (*skandhas*) into the *śūnya*, with the technique (*yoga*) [of realizing that] they are unarisen and unborn from the very beginning, or with the technique of reducing them to atoms. Having imagined that there is only *A* present in the moon disc, you should then, following the above method, dissolve both the moon disc and the *A* itself, which are without any objective basis, and maintain *samādhi* of *śūnya* for as long as you wish. Then arising out of the *samādhi* by virtue of your compassion, you should imagine that *A* in the area of your heart, with the conviction that it is like a magical illusion. With the technique of radiating light forth from that *A* and then drawing it back, you should transform yourself into the appearance of your tutelary deity. That should be done until you appear with certitude in the body-image of your tutelary deity. . . . Having thus transformed your own body into the body-image of the deity, you should imagine an *A* in your heart, and following that *A* you should imagine a moon disc, the *bodhicitta* symbol, which is like a mirror. It should be very radiant and unsullied. You should then imagine that the letter *A* in its centre becomes the Bhagavat Vairocana.³⁶

The visualization has been described in the context of the identification of the practitioner with the tutelary deity and its transformation into Vairocana. Here, the expansion and dissolution of *A* represent the transformational power found throughout the process. We will return to the significance of *A* when we deal with the tantric practice surrounding Sanskrit syllables.

In Mañjuśrīmitra's *Upadeśa* on *NS* we see the intimate relationship between the mantric sound and the visual form of the *maṇḍala*. Before the recitation of *NS*, the *mantra* “*a ā i ī u ū e ai o au aṃ ai*” should be pronounced. Constructing the basic *maṇḍala* are the rays of light shining through the *mantra*, which are the rays of light from one's own mind on account of the *svabhāva* of *Śūnya*. These rays of light are considered as the vowels (*āli*) and consonants (*kāli*). In the centre of the *maṇḍala*, Mahāvairocana is to be visualized. In the heart of Mahāvairocana, the Ādi Buddha is visualized. In the heart of the Ādi Buddha, *prajñācakra* (wheel of wisdom) is visualized. By reciting *mantra* of six *mantrarājās* six spokes are visualized on the *prajñācakra*.

³⁶ *MVT* VI.23 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 175-76. I have in the quotation used the term *śūnya* instead of the translation “emptiness” by Hodge.

Above that *cakra*, the *jñāna-sattva* in the form of syllable *A* is visualized. The rays of *A* are imagined to enter the practitioner in the form of the six *jñāna-maṇḍalas*. *Mantrin* begins the recitation of the text, being based on the six *maṇḍalas*, proceeding up to verse 157. Through the recitation of verses 28-41, one visualizes the words corresponding to the names recited which arise from the syllable *A*. They transform into the group of deities belonging to the *maṇḍala* of Bodhicittavajra (Mahāvairocana). They go forth to work for the sake of all living beings, and return to assemble again within the *maṇḍala*. In the same way, the recitation of the verses 42-66 generates the *maṇḍala* of Vairocana in the immediate retinue of the Mahāvairocana *maṇḍala*; by the verses 66-76, the *maṇḍala* of Akṣobhya arises in the east; from the verses 77-118, the *maṇḍala* of Amitābha in the west; from verses 119-42, the *maṇḍala* of Ratnasambhava in the south; and from verses 143-57, the *maṇḍala* of Amoghasiddhi in the north. Then, the twenty praises are recited (vv. 158-62), directed to the whole great *maṇḍala*.³⁷

II.3.2 Concepts Extracted from the Visualization Practice

The visualization process seen above, though not exhaustive, underlines some profound dimensions of *maṇḍalas* and suggests their metaphysical arena. Now some prominent concepts that play key roles in the processes of visualization will be taken into account.

The Syllable and the Bodily Form of Deity

Within the process of visualization we first observe a clear indication that the bodily form of a deity is associated with the syllable. Here, the perceptible form evolves from the seed syllable (*bīja*) of the deity; in other words, the *bīja* is the support of the bodily form of the deity. As the term *bīja* indicates, it is the seminal cause that would bring forth the form through planting and nourishing. The seed syllable, *bīja*, contains the innate divine form within it. By means of the recitation of *mantra*, the *bīja* of a particular deity is nourished to grow into a distinct form. The visualization of a deity on the basis of syllables is well described in a passage from the *Sādhana-mālā*, a tantric manual of meditation, describing the visualization of the Goddess Tārā.

Square, with four doors, ornamented with eight columns, surrounded by four verandas, embellished with four arches . . . in the midst of it he should imagine the moon, born by transformation from a double row of vowels, and above this, a *vajra* born by the

³⁷ The extraction is based on Davidson's translation of Mañjuśrīmitra's *Upadeśa* of *NS*. Cf. *NS*, tr. Davidson 1981: 45-47.

transformation of the syllable *TĀM*. From this the sun is born by the transformation of a double row of the following letters *ḌA, ḌHA, DA, DHA, YA, LA*.

When these two (sun and moon) are joined together, great bliss results. With the rays emanating from these seeds (that is the above-mentioned syllables) he may attract beings. Then, when he has caused the cycle of his protecting deities to penetrate (into himself) the *yogin* should actuate by mediation the Goddess *Tārā*, born of the transmutation of these indicative syllables.³⁸

The above passage from *SM* gives a detailed account about the process which has been outlined in items 3-5 of the above description from *SDPT*.³⁹ *SDPT* only briefly speaks of the process: “the practitioner envisages, on the lunar disc resting on the Lion Seat, the vowels and the consonants melting into one another”. *SM* specifies the moon born by the transformation from vowels, and the sun, transformed from consonants. Thus, it can be postulated that the description in *SDPT* of “vowels and consonants, melting together” signifies the complete union of the moon and the sun. The moon represents *bodhicitta* or *prajñā*, while the sun stands for *bīja* or *upāya*.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the lunar disc upon the lion seat that follows the visualization of the *maṇḍala* palace indicates the co-existence of the moon and the sun. The union of vowels and consonants is the basis of not only the distinct form of a deity, but also of the entire *maṇḍala* ground, according to Mañjuśrīmitra’s *Upadeśa* on *NS* wherein the intimacy between the *maṇḍala* and the *mantra* is well illustrated. *Mantras* of the vowels instigate the state of *Śūnya* towards manifesting in the form of light, which is *bodhicitta*, and the light consisting of vowels and consonants creates the basic *maṇḍala*, which gives birth to the six *jñāna-maṇḍalas*.

Outside the general role of syllables in the visualization practice, we observe that the syllable *A* has been especially esteemed as the source of multiple forms. For instance, in Mañjuśrīmitra’s account, the *jñānasattva* of the Ādi Buddha takes the form of the syllable *A*, and *A* is transformed into six *jñāna-maṇḍalas* to enter the body of the *mantrin*. In *SDPT*, the visualization starts with the salutation to *A*, wherein *A* is praised as the source of all *dharma*s (i.e. of all phenomena). In this process, the syllable *A* is visualized in the heart of the divinized self, and it produces the lunar disc, which is the source of all the deities of the *maṇḍala*. In Buddhaguhya’s commentary on

³⁸ *SM* (vol. I: 224), tr. Tucci 1961: 34.

³⁹ *Supra*, p. 98.

⁴⁰ The text specifies that the vowels and the consonants represent Wisdom and Means.

MVT it is also seen that the syllable *A* serves as the door through which one dissolves into *Śūnya* and is reborn with the body of the tutelary deity. The description given above from the *MVT* verifies the dynamic transformations of *A* throughout the process of visualization.⁴¹

These limited references to the tantric visualization practice, though calling for further investigation, may be enough to highlight the importance of looking into the auditory facet of the visual components of *maṇḍalas*. We see a close affinity among the descriptions of visualization from various texts, in that it is denoted that the bodily form of a deity or a *maṇḍala* is metaphysically founded on the union of *bodhicitta* and *bīja*. The description of visualization typically begins with imagining the lunar disc, i.e. *bodhicitta*. The lunar disc is brought to its subtle manifestation by means of consonants or via the *bīja* of a particular deity. The *bīja mantra* is literally the divine seed which contains the divine energy in a compact form. When it is planted in the soil of *bodhicitta*, it will bloom into *bimba* (the primary manifestation) in the metaphysical plane. Thus, it is the union of *bīja mantra* with *bodhicitta* that generates the *bimba* manifestation of a divinity.⁴² Here, we should keep in mind that the *bimba* manifestation of a *maṇḍala* is not the same as its perceptible pictorial forms. *Maṇḍalas* described in the tantric texts refer to their *bimba* form, which the practitioner creates internally, on the metaphysical plane.

A Compound: Maṇḍalas, Mantras and Mudrās

A reading of descriptions of the visualization practice shows that *mantras* play a crucial role in the visualization of a deity. It is *mantra* that stimulates *bīja* to unfold into divine form. In *Brhad Gandharva Tantra* it is stated: “*Bījas* contain innate divine forms within them and with just the utterance of *mantra*, the deity physically presents her or himself.”⁴³ It is easier to understand the intimate connection between *mantras* and *maṇḍalas* in regard to Hindu *yantras*; often the syllables, rather than anthropomorphic images of deities, are written within their geometric layout.⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Supra*, p. 99.

⁴² The idea is well represented in *HT* I.3.2: *prathamam śūnyatābodhiṃ dvitīyaṃ bījaśaṃgrahaṃ tṛtīyaṃ bimbaṇiṣṭattiṃ caturthan nyāsaṃ akṣaram*|| “first the realization of the void, secondly the seed in which all is concentrated, thirdly the physical manifestation, and fourthly one should implant the syllable” (tr. Snellgrove 1959, vol. I: 56, vol. II: 12).

⁴³ Tr. Woodroffe 1951: 245; cf. Joshi 1999: 81.

⁴⁴ In the context of Hindu ritual, we find a direct connection between *maṇḍalas* and *mantras* (cf. →

Conversely, Buddhist *maṇḍalas* do not immediately reveal their connections to *mantras*, except *dharma-maṇḍala*. While the power of Hindu *yantras* is assumed to derive from the power of *mantra* because *mantra* is the main means to invoke deities to reside within the *yantra*, Buddhist *maṇḍalas* to some extent conceal the mantric power behind their anthropomorphic representations of deities. However, a close look into the visualization or the ritual that employs the *maṇḍala* unveils the role of *mantra* in generating these *maṇḍala* deities. The auditory value of *mantras* is addressed towards the auditory aspect of *bīja*, thus *mantras* serve as the efficient agent to bring the forms out of the formless.

That visual images of *maṇḍalas* have a mantric basis is also stated in the historical record of the three-storeyed temple (*dBu-rtse*) of bSamyas.⁴⁵ Also, in order to explain the intimacy between the syllable and the divine image, Tucci quotes a verse from *Śākta Ānandatarāṅgiṇī*, in his book on *maṇḍalas*: “twofold is the aspect of Divinity, one, subtle, represented by the *mantra* and the other coarse, represented by an image”.⁴⁶ Here we may also consider *mudrā* in relation to *maṇḍala* and *mantra*. The *MVT* discusses *akṣara* (syllable), *mudrā* and *rūpa* as the three forms of the divinity.⁴⁷ Further, it describes two aspects of each form – the perceptible and the non-perceptible. The Tantra states:

→ Padoux 2003: 225-38). In *samaya-dīkṣā* described in *TĀ*, chapter XV, the initiand being blindfolded casts flowers on *triśūlābhja-maṇḍala* (ibid.: 228). When the cloth is swiftly removed “he, suddenly seeing the sacrificial area illuminated by the supernatural power of the *mantras* (*mantraprabhāvollasite sthale*), is possessed by them and identifies with them (*tadāveśavaśāc cchiṣyas tanmayatvaṃ prāpyate*).” *TĀ* XV.451b-452a says: “As a lover perceives directly the virtues of his beloved, in the same way [the initiand] made perfect by the descent of divine grace (*śaktipātasamskṛtaḥ*), experiences the presence of the *mantras* (*mantrasannidhi*)”. Padoux adds in this regard: “Tantric pantheons are as much structured groups of *mantras* as groups of deities”. And he again places emphasis on the power of the *mantra* in *maṇḍalas* in the context of the next step of Śaiva initiation, *putraka-dīkṣā*, which is underlined in *TĀ* XVII.1-3 and described in *TĀ* XVI.23-26: “Thus, pervaded with the power of the *maṇḍala*, that is the power of the *mantras* placed in this diagram, he will be all the more able to transmit this transforming power to the initiand” (ibid.: 230).

⁴⁵ “All the murals were [executed] in accordance with the manner of the Sūtra; all the figures (*lder tsho*) were [executed] in the manner of the Tantric Mantra” Sa-skyapa (bla-ma dam-pa) bSod-nams-rgyal-mtshan [1312-75], *rGyal-rabs gsal-ba'i me-long* [1368]. Sørensen 1994: 381.

⁴⁶ Cf. Tucci 1961: 60.

⁴⁷ Cf. *MVT* VII.3, tr. Hodge 2003: 208.

There are two types of letters (*akṣara*) – sound and *bodhicitta*. There are two types of *mudrā* – that with form and that without form. . . . The natural form (*rūpa*) of the deity is of two types – completely pure and the impure.⁴⁸

The perceptible aspects of these three forms obviously find their empirical correspondences in *mantras*,⁴⁹ *mudrās*, and *maṇḍalas*, which may be counted as the triad of tantric rituals. As Buddhaguhya explains, the three types of form describe the intrinsic threefold nature of the deity; *mantras*, *mudrās* and *maṇḍalas* are an inseparable compound which bespeak the intrinsic perceptible nature of the deity.

The process of creating a *maṇḍala* in *samādhi* includes the use of *mudrā* and *mantra* as part of its method. *Mudrā* has various meanings: a seal or stamp of authority or the imprint of the seal; a symbolic representation of a concrete form; an idea presented through hand gestures or facial expressions; a ritual hand gesture; a female partner for tantric practice; the Supreme Reality.⁵⁰ In relation to the visualization of *maṇḍala*, the term *mudrā* designates the ritual bodily gestures to invoke and imitate the deity. We have specific references of *mudrā* explained in the context of Yoga Tantras in the *Rgyud sde spyiḥi rnam par gag pa rgyas par brjod* of Mkhas-grub-rje (CE 1385–1438):

If one intensely contemplates a god in conformity to the acts in the province of a Buddha but does not apply the *mudrās* of the four Mudrās, then links of the path are missing.⁵¹

Here, it is explicitly stated that *mudrā* is the crucial factor to link with a deity – to invoke, visualize and identify with a god. Performing the *mudrā* of a deity implies the contemplation of that deity, which finally leads to self-identification.

One should not overlook the meaning of impressing with *mudrās*: it is the method of intense contemplation of a god.⁵²

Thus, *mudrās* designate the entire process of contemplation; or, it is the symbolic expression through one's body during the contemplation of a deity. *Mudrā* is the primary, immediate method to identify oneself with a deity.⁵³ The triad of tantric ritual

⁴⁸ MVT VII.3, tr. Hodge 2003: 208.

⁴⁹ Buddhaguhya in the commentary clarifies that sound refers to the syllable (*akṣara*) of *mantra*.

⁵⁰ Cf. Gupta 2005: 6219.

⁵¹ Mkhas-grub-rje's *Rgyud sde spyiḥi rnam par gag pa rgyas par brjod*, tr. Lessing and Wayman 1998 (1968): 227.

⁵² Ibid.: 229.

⁵³ Cf. MVT X.17, tr. Hodge 2003: 225.

instruments – *mantra*, *mudrā* and *maṇḍala* – appeals to our three major senses: auditory, tactile and visual. Being complementary to one another, they play important roles respectively as auditory, tactile and visual symbols in the cosmogonic manifestation of deities, and in one's absorption to *Dharmadhātu*. Considering the relationship of *maṇḍala* to *mantra* and *mudrā*, we can understand the visual aspect of *maṇḍala* akin to the sound of *mantra* and to the touch of *mudrā*. Also, it can be surmised that their forms are not confined to the surface levels of a picture, a recitation or a hand gesture, but rather extend into subtle dimensions related to one another, bound by a common metaphysical concept.

II.4 Non-dualism of Form and the Formless in the Practice and Theory of Buddhist Maṇḍalas

II.4.1 Non-dualism of Multiple Forms and Śūnya

The visualization of *maṇḍala* begins with imagining of the state of *Śūnya*. When the practitioner abides in the *samādhi* without perceptible form, he comes face to face with the deities invoked by their *mantras*.⁵⁴ Before making a *maṇḍala*, one should first be in the *samādhi*, in *śūnya*. The master (*mantrin*) should transform himself and his disciples into *śūnya*, before the teaching and practising of *maṇḍala*.⁵⁵ Of course, it must be asked if *Śūnya* is thereby innate within the visual component of *maṇḍala*. In regard to this question, we may recollect Buddhaguhya's description of the three levels of *maṇḍalas* in his *DMS*, i.e. *svabhāva*, *samādhi* and *pratibimba maṇḍalas*. According to the text, the *svabhāva-maṇḍala* is of two kinds: the absolute and the relative. It seems that Buddhaguhya refers to *dharmadhātu* or *Śūnya* when he states, "the *maṇḍala* of absolute *svabhāva* abides in the primeval state itself, just as it is, as nothing at all".⁵⁶ The absolute *svabhāva-maṇḍala* may or may not be categorized.⁵⁷ Of these, the latter is identified with *bodhicitta* and *prajñā*, and is said to be the "essence" of the *maṇḍala*.⁵⁸ In the commentary on *MVT*, *svabhāva-maṇḍala* is taught to be the

⁵⁴ Cf. *MVT* VII.6, tr. Hodge 2003: 212.

⁵⁵ The preliminary ritual required before teaching and making *maṇḍalas* has been mentioned in *MVT*, especially in chapter X, about the *maṇḍala* of *akṣaras*. It says: "Having brought to mind Sarvatathāgata, Bhagavat Vairocana transformed both himself and Vajrapāṇi into the primordial state of unbornness" (*MVT* X.4, tr. Hodge 2003: 217).

⁵⁶ *DMS*, tr. Lo Bue 1987: 796.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: 795.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

manifestation of Mahāvairocana’s Perfect Enlightenment, consisting of his *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*. The *svabhāva-maṇḍala* is the subject matter (*abhidheya*) of the text, and the *maṇḍala*, *mantra*, and *mudrā* of the text are the transformation of the *triguḥya* of the *svabhāva-maṇḍala*.⁵⁹ We can presuppose that the perceptible *maṇḍalas* seen and used in tantric practice are based on the *samādhi-maṇḍala*, being its *pratibimba*. The *samādhi-maṇḍala*, being *bimba*, has its origin in the *svabhāva-maṇḍala*. Thus, the *svabhāva-maṇḍala* has to be recognized as the transcendental origin of all *maṇḍalas*. The *svabhāva-maṇḍala* is said to be without perceptual forms and consists of *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta* of Perfect Enlightenment. Being the spontaneous and instant manifestation of Perfect Enlightenment, the *svabhāva-maṇḍala* is none other than *Śūnya*.

Practice of *maṇḍala* evidently represents non-dualism between *Śūnya* and *rūpa*, as is described by the following statement from *MVT*:

Furthermore, in all places, in all colours, shapes and bodies, they (bodily forms of deities) arise from inconceivable Awareness, therefore they are also inconceivable. The Awareness realized always becomes a diversity of Awarenesses for the sake of beings.⁶⁰

If we define *Śūnya* as “nothing” in the nihilistic sense and understand “no-form” as the opposite to “multiple forms”, we are still locked within the mindset of materialism, placing the concept of *Śūnya* only at the level of physical existence. At the physical level, *Śūnyatā* cannot be reconciled with the multiplicity of beings. However, once the mindset of duality is transcended, *Śūnyatā* is not the physical emptiness, but is rather the principle of being – as the Mahāyāna Buddhist defines *Śūnya* as *svabhāva* in a way. In an ultimate sense, *Śūnya* is not an object to be realized, but is the state of the Highest Realization in which there is no duality of subject and object.

The realization of the non-dualism of multiple forms and *Śūnya* is evident even in the early Mahāyāna Buddhist texts. An oft-quoted stanza from the *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra* makes a clear statement about the non-duality of form and “no-form”.

There are five *skandhas*, these he considered as by their nature empty. *Rūpa* is *śūnyatā* and *śūnyatā* indeed is *rūpa*. *Śūnyatā* is not different from *rūpa*, *rūpa* is not different from *śūnyatā*. What is *rūpa* that is *śūnyatā*, what is *śūnyatā* that is *rūpa*.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Cf. *MVT*. Introduction in Buddhaguhya’s commentary, tr. Hodge 2003: 44-45.

⁶⁰ *MVT* XIII.36, tr. Hodge 2003: 274.

⁶¹ *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra*, tr. Müller 1894: 147-48.

Especially in relation to *mantrayāna* practices, *MVT* presents a dynamic concept of *Śūnya* such a description as “the billowing forth of *Śūnya*”.⁶² In this dynamic concept of *Śūnya* conceived by tantric practitioners, *Śūnya* is not mere still and tranquil. It is comparable to the principle that causes constant waves in the ocean, but which itself resides within itself. It is not only the Dharma but also the principle and nature of all *dharma*s (phenomena). We observe that this non-dualism of *Śūnya* and *rūpa* finds for itself a robust position within tantric practice, as it views *Śūnya* as the vibrant principle.

Reading *MVT*, a question arises which is directly related to that of the relationship between forms and the formless in *maṇḍalas*. While Vairocana explains the creation of *maṇḍalas*, Vajrapāṇi ponders the riddle of using perceptual forms to realize something which is formless and inconceivable.

Buddhas are without perceptual forms, and reside in *dharmakāya*. If the Dharma they reveal is without attributes, unconditioned, unequalled, then why is this ritual with perceptual form taught for the mantra practice? It does not accord with reality!⁶³

In contrast to the serious and significant question raised by Vajrapāṇi, the answer given by Vairocana in the Tantra is flat and unsatisfying: it is merely to teach “the stupid who wrongly conceive of their environments” in darkness.⁶⁴ The commentary of Buddhaghūya on this topic is milder: “although its attributes of the Dharma are like that on the absolute level, it is also appropriate to describe things with perceptual forms in order to guide beings in the future”.⁶⁵ And he specifies the perceptible form to be “the condition of a perceiving subject and perceived objects”.⁶⁶ He seems to say that unless we transcend the condition of the dualism between subject and object, we learn something only from perceptible forms. He divides the perceptible form into two categories: those that bring about benefits and those that do not bring about any benefit. In this categorization, *maṇḍalas* have been included in the former group. The *maṇḍala* has been referred to along with *sādhana* and *mantra* practice as an example of one whose *svabhāva* is *bodhicitta* on the absolute level, thus, that brings about beneficial effects on the relative level. On the other hand, perceptible forms of things such as the calendar or constellations are at variance with the absolute level and also

⁶² Cf. *MVT* XIII.1 and XXIV.10, tr. Hodge 2003: 254, 368.

⁶³ *MVT* II.8, tr. Hodge 2003: 89.

⁶⁴ *MVT* II.9, tr. Hodge 2003: 89.

⁶⁵ Ibid. comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 90.

⁶⁶ *MVT* II.8 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 89.

do not bring about any beneficial effect, even on the relative level.⁶⁷ We can summarize Buddhaguhya's teachings as saying that those that bring about benefit have their foundation in *bodhicitta* on the absolute level, and that is why they are used in the spiritual practice.

II.4.2 Transformation of Śūnya into Perceptible Maṇḍalas

When a tantric practitioner employs a physical, visible *maṇḍala*, he orients himself toward *svabhāva-maṇḍala*. It should be remembered that, in the texts, the external *maṇḍala* is perceived to be the transformation of *svabhāva-maṇḍala*. It is this concept of transformation (*adhiṣṭhāna*) that connects the pictorial *maṇḍala* with the *svabhāva-maṇḍala*. The relation between the *svabhāva-maṇḍala* and the external *maṇḍala* lays the conceptual basis for the practice of visualization; it also answers the question of why *maṇḍalas* are used for spiritual practice directed towards the realization of Śūnya and the generation of *bodhicitta*.

The *citta-maṇḍala* imparted in *MVT* is taught to be the transformation of the *dharmakāya*. Since the *dharmakāya* transcends perceptible forms, it cannot be directly revealed. However, it may be revealed through that which resembles its qualities (*guṇa*). The Tantra states that it is revealed by means of its transformation into the *maṇḍalas* of earth, water, fire and wind.⁶⁸ Attention must be paid here to the point that the inconceivable *dharmakāya* is revealed within those perceptible forms which share its qualities; this must be considered together with Buddhaguhya's reference to perceptible forms bringing about beneficial effects.⁶⁹

- i) The inconceivable is revealed by its transformation into what shares its characteristics.
- ii) The *maṇḍala* is a perceptible form that must bring about beneficial effects, because its *svabhāva* is *bodhicitta*.

⁶⁷ Cf. *MVT* II.9 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 90.

⁶⁸ Buddhaguhya elaborates how the *dharmakāya* is transformed into the *maṇḍalas* of the four elements; the authentic, unchanging quality of the *dharmakāya* is revealed by its transformation into the *maṇḍala* of earth, because the earth is stable and unchangingly perfect, like a *vajra*; the *dharmakāya*'s nature of freedom from all concepts is transformed into the water *maṇḍala*; its attribute of liberation from all emotional afflictions is transformed into the fire *maṇḍala*; the ability to perform all activities is transformed into the wind *maṇḍala*. Cf. *MVT* XIII, commentarial introduction, tr. Hodge 2003: 254.

⁶⁹ Cf. *MVT* II.9 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 90.

Keeping in mind these two points, we come to the conclusion that the inconceivable Dharma, which may be called *Śūnya*, *dharmadhātu* or *bodhicitta*, has been transformed into the perceptible *maṇḍalas* which bear resemblance due to shared characteristics. The reason why perceptible *maṇḍalas* are used to generate *bodhicitta* and to realize *Śūnya* can be found in the concept of the transformation between form and the formless. By studying the perceptual *maṇḍalas* and entering them in *samādhi*, the qualities of the Ultimate are realized. Having established the transformational relation between perceptible *maṇḍalas* and *Śūnya*, two major questions remain: (i) what brings about this transformation? and (ii) what features of *maṇḍalas* resemble *Śūnya*?

Bimba (Image) – Pratibimba (Counter-Image)

As previously mentioned, the subtle *maṇḍala* exists in the domain of the inner absorption, and the perceptible *maṇḍala* is the reflection of another image. The original, the *bimba*, belongs to the metaphysical plane; the other is its *pratibimba*, mirror image. The visualization practice of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* has its foundation in the meditative vision, where bodily forms of *maṇḍala* divinities take birth from *Śūnya* with the help of *mantras* and *mudrās*. Especially in the discourse of the *svabhāva-maṇḍala*, the perceptible forms are extended across to the notion of *Śūnya* with the support of the concept of *bimba–pratibimba*; this suggests an inner meaning of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* which is non-discursive and different from their symbolic meanings. However, the primary question of the present volume remains unanswered: how do certain *maṇḍalas* appeal to people even without any knowledge of their forms, symbolism, or philosophy?

Nevertheless, these textual references make evident a crucial presupposition in approach to the question: when the inconceivable *Śūnya* is revealed and transformed into *maṇḍalas*, there is a resemblance between the perceptible forms of the *maṇḍalas* and the qualities of *Śūnya*. The external form of a *maṇḍala* is the transformation of the inconceivable *Śūnya* for the benefit of ordinary people. As has been noted previously, the tantric source clarifies that the external, gross *maṇḍalas* are actually meant to appeal to the “stupid” ordinary people.⁷⁰ Therefore, this volume’s unanswered question is actually in accord with the primary intention of visible, perceptible *maṇḍalas*. They can stir the heart of people prior to any doctrinal knowledge, because their forms resemble the qualities of *Śūnya*, which is the original state of the Ultimate Consciousness. Consequently, this volume’s primary question of “how do *maṇḍalas* appeal to ordinary people?” can be answered ironically on the basis of doctrinal

⁷⁰ MVT II.9, tr. Hodge 2003: 89.

exegesis: the aesthetic response to *maṇḍalas* is due to their being the representation of *Śūnya*. However, this leads to a more specific question: “in what way do external *maṇḍalas* resemble the qualities of *Śūnya*?” If their resemblance cannot be proven, one might conclude that it is merely a dogmatic belief that views *maṇḍalas* to be the representation of *Śūnya*.

To claim the visual dimension of *maṇḍalas* as parallel to qualities of *Śūnya* not only speaks much of tantric soteriology, but also bespeaks of a remarkable affirmation of visual forms, which further accentuates the spiritual dimension of these visual forms. The question “in what way do pictorial *maṇḍalas* resemble the qualities of *Śūnya*?” requires an aesthetic approach to *maṇḍalas*, as well as a philosophical and spiritual comprehension of *Śūnya*. Additionally, we need to look at the transformative power that works between the perceptible *maṇḍalas* and *Śūnya*. The factor of transformation (*adhiṣṭhāna*), as has been observed by means of the textual references, establishes the non-dual relationship between *Śūnya* and the pictorial *maṇḍalas*. Here it should be pointed out that it is through this transformational power that *maṇḍalas* lead ordinary people to experience *Śūnya*. The problem of whether this experience of *Śūnya* through *maṇḍalas* is direct or indirect demands intense philosophical discussion, which will not be dealt with here.

To sum up, reflection on *bimba–pratibimba* in this context brings us to three broad but important points to be explored in approach to our question: (1) understanding the qualities of *Śūnya*; (2) analysis of the visible, perceptible forms of *maṇḍala*; and (3) investigation of the transformational power in the context of tantric practice.

In the following chapters, these three points will be investigated from the perspective of the concept of *vāk*. *Vāk* is a valuable concept to explain the process of the creation or transformational power which is crucial to tantric practice. The doctrine of *vāk* not only elaborates upon speculations concerning the Absolute, but also systematically describes how the Absolute transforms itself into multiplicity. It explains step by step the process of transformation in both directions: i) the expansion of the formless Absolute into multiple forms, and ii) the absorption of the multiple into the formless Absolute. While it logically describes the non-dualistic relationship between multiplicity and *Anuttara* (the Highest), it provides the scope that could integrate the multiple layers of meanings implied in *maṇḍalas*, and help focus upon their aesthetic significance.

III.

Vāk in Tantric Buddhist Practices

WE shall examine in this chapter certain references of *vāk* in the Buddhist Tantras, so as to better appreciate the context within which the *maṇḍalas* were included in the artistic scheme of the monasteries of Tabo and Alchi.

The concept of *vāk* may be primarily placed within the broad framework of the cosmology conception of India. The Sanskrit term *vāk* is known already in the *Ṛgveda* as female aspect of the androgynous *Puruṣa* (Cosmic Man)¹ and continued to be a theme yielding profound insights in the Upaniṣads.² When the traditional post-Vedic texts explain the creation of the world, they employ various Sanskrit terms apart from *vāk* that also mean “the primeval sound”, such as *chanda*, *dhvani*, *nāda*, *śabda* and *anāhata*.³ These terms clearly place this vibrating energy of the creative source as the means by which the entire objective world manifests. Sound is an important concept in understanding the cosmological ideas of India. The *Vākyapadīya* (VP) provides us with valuable sources in this regard. It starts with the verse:

The *Brahman* who is without beginning or end, very essence is the word (*śabdatattvam*), who is the cause of the manifested phonemes (*akṣaram*), that appear as the objects, from which the creation of the world (*prakriyā jagato*) proceeds (*vivartate*).⁴

A clearer description of the role of sound in world-creation can be found in an oft-quoted verse from the same text.

Knowers of tradition (Vedas) have declared that all this is the transformation of the word (*śabda*). It is from the *chandas* that this universe has evolved.⁵

¹ See Falk 1943: 3-14, 23.

² Cf. Falk 1943: 3-26; Padoux 1992: 4-29.

³ Silburn (1988, glossary) translates *dhvani* as “spontaneous resonance”, *anāhata* as “continuous inner resonance” or “the unstruck sound”, and *nāda* as “inaudible sound”.

⁴ VP I.1, tr. Iyer 1965: 1.

⁵ VP I.120, tr. Iyer 1965: 107 (*śabdasya pariṇāmoyamityāmnāyavido chandobhya eva prathamam etad viśvaṃ vyavartata*).

The vision of the sonic energy that originates from the Highest Principle which gives birth to multiple forms is reminiscent of the process of *maṇḍala* visualization, wherein the syllable *A* is the mediating principle between *Śūnya* and the bodily forms of deities.

Although *vāk* was speculated to be the divine creative principle as early as the *R̥gveda*, the earliest theoretical formulation of the concept of *vāk* is attributed to Bhartṛhari (mid-fifth century CE) in his *VP*.⁶ The exposition of *VP* has been further developed in the philosophy of Trika Śaivism. The tantric philosophers who elaborated the speculation of *vāk*, including Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta, are apparently influenced by Bhartṛhari's philosophy found in *VP*.⁷ Consequently, the concept of *vāk* has been studied largely within the field of Hindu Tantras or in the Indian philosophy of language; however, its importance has not been duly recognized in the study of Buddhist Tantras, except the attention paid by a few scholars.⁸ The profound meaning of sound, be it named in Sanskrit *vāk*, *śabda* or *dhvani*, is certainly not the invention of Bhartṛhari, or the sole domain of Hindu Tantrism. Even though the term *vāk* is frequently encountered as one of the *triguḥya* in Buddhist Tantras, and despite that the *mantra* practice is central in understanding Buddhist Tantras, the fundamental concept of *vāk* has not been prominently brought forth. The vital importance of the concept of *vāk* in Buddhist practice is evident in the fact that the two essential soteriological techniques of Buddhist Tantras – *mantra* and visualization – have a common background in the power of *vāk*. As the fundamental basis for the practices which use *mātrkā*s (alphabets), *bījas* and *mantras*, *vāk* serves as the guiding agent in *sādhana*s, and the power of *vāk* is at work during the transformations described previously, within the visualization process. Lama Anagarika Govinda remarks:

The knowledge of the creative sound lived in India. It was further developed in the various Yoga-systems and found its last refinement in those schools of Buddhism which had their philosophical foundation in the doctrine of the Vijñānavādins.⁹

It should be pointed out that the term *vāk* is charged with layers of meanings and symbolism, and that these symbolic layers of the term have often been overlooked while

⁶ Cf. Padoux 1992: 166.

⁷ Ibid.: 167.

⁸ Cf. Hodge 2003: 5. In the translator's introduction to *MVT*, Hodge gives a summary of the features of Buddhist Tantras: "Speculations on the nature and power of speech are prominent, especially with regard to the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet".

⁹ Lama Anagarika Govinda 1959: 26.

dealing with Buddhist practice and philosophy. The term *vāk* has been conveniently translated into “speech” in English. The routine translation of the term into “speech” often veils its profound conceptual layers, and obstructs its conception within metaphysical dimensions. Furthermore, the scope of *kāya-vāk-citta* is narrowed in its English translation as body-speech-mind, which causes a grave misunderstanding in that we try to interpret the concepts, more or less, purely in terms of human constituents. Especially, when we encounter the *kāya-vāk-citta* in the descriptions of the Absolute, we fail to grasp the meaning because our idea of body, speech and mind implicitly returns to a psycho-physical level. The English translation hampers any understanding of the subtle layers of the *vāk* concept; thus, we tend to view *vāk* as mere discursive speech.¹⁰ We should keep in mind that the translation of *vāk* and *citta* into speech and mind flattens these concepts and prevent us from considering them in their original context. The concept of *vāk* in the Buddhist context needs new academic emphasis, in accord with its significance in other Indian spiritual traditions.¹¹

III.1 Buddhist Practice of Syllables

The *mantra* practice had already occupied an important place in Mahāyāna tradition, indicating that the power of primeval sound had been recognized in the Buddhist context even before the establishment of the *mantrayāna*. The practice had already been introduced in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (believed to have originated before second century CE).¹² For example, in the story of Śilpābhijña, phonemes are taught to be the instrument to lead the practitioner to wisdom.¹³ In the *mantrayāna* practice, the sound of *mantras* and *akṣaras* (syllables) is understood to be the subtle manifestation of *Śūnya*. *MVT* explains that qualities

¹⁰ The present work keeps untranslated the original term *vāk*, even when English translations of Buddhist texts are quoted in the present volume. The problem of translating *citta* is not different. The problem of translating *cit* as “consciousness” has been raised and criticized in the context of Trika Śaivism. See Furlinger 2006. *Cit* should be discerned from *citta* in the context of Trika Śaivism; the former signifies the Pure Divine Consciousness, while the latter denotes the individual consciousness in which *cit* is in the state of contract. However, in the context of Buddhism, *citta* signifies both *cit* and *citta* in the sense of Trika Śaivism, and its meaning should be understood depending on the context of reference.

¹¹ See Falk 1943.

¹² The first Chinese translation of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* that includes the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* is assigned to the period around second century CE.

¹³ *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. See tr. Cleary 1989: 316-18. The story of the youth Śilpābhijña in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* informs us that the Buddhists had already known of the practice of phonemes, if it was not a part of the Buddhist practice.

of Tathāgatas are transformed into the letters of the *mantras*.¹⁴ Having spoken about the attributes of the Perfect Enlightenment, Bhagavān Vairocana declares:

Hence I revealed this reality in the form of letters, by the power of transformation, to illumine the world, and out of pity for beings I teach everything to them.¹⁵

The same Tantra views these syllables to be the receptacle of Truth and Reality, proclaiming that they illumine the world. It is believed that the properties of *mantras* at the absolute level are not created. Preceding any appearance of Tathāgata, it is *svabhāva* of all phenomena, and the *svabhāva* of the *mantras* of a *mantrin*.¹⁶ The sound of Sanskrit syllables and phonemes all performs as symbols within the *mantra* practice; they have esoteric value. For example, chapter II of *MVT* explains, “[the syllable] *A* is a gate to all phenomena because they are unarisen from the beginning. *Ka* is a gate to all phenomena, because they are without a purpose. *Kha* is a gate to all phenomena, because they cannot be perceived as objects, like the sky, etc.”¹⁷ Here, the phonemes are explained as gateways to *samādhi*. In *samādhi*, the transformation of phonemes into such gates is both relative and absolute. On the relative level, they manifest the Buddha’s qualities. Regarding the absolute transformation, they reveal the fact that all phenomena are unborn, even seen from the viewpoint of manifestation itself, and that they are intrinsically empty.¹⁸ The syllables with *anusvāra*, such as *ṇa*, *ṇa*, *ṇa*, *na* and *ma*, have been specifically explained to be the source of mastery, because *anusvāra* is the symbol of *Śūnya*. The syllables with the *anusvāra* are *lakṣaṇa* (signs) of *Śūnya*, and therefore they are endowed with all power.¹⁹

A Phoneme

In the expositions of *MVT*, the phoneme *A* is endowed with profound esoteric meanings, which may be compared to the archetype of all audible and inaudible sounds. The

¹⁴ Cf. *MVT* II.82-83, tr. Hodge 2003: 132.

¹⁵ *MVT* II.73, tr. Hodge 2003: 126.

¹⁶ *MVT* II.81, tr. Hodge 2003: 131.

¹⁷ *MVT* II.84, tr. Hodge 2003: 132.

¹⁸ Cf. Buddhaghūya’s commentary on *MVT* II.84, tr. Hodge 2003: 133. Cf. *MVT* II.83 comm.: “The relative is the transformation and manifestation of the Strengths, Fearlessnesses and so on, as words and letters. The absolute is the manifestation of the intrinsic emptiness of all phenomena, which are unborn and unarisen from the very beginning, as letters.” (ibid.: 132).

¹⁹ Cf. *MVT* II.85 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 135.

syllable *A* is associated with one's entry to *Dharmadhātu* in the *mantra* practice.²⁰ The following passage from *MVT* describes an esoteric definition of four syllables of *A*:

Immediately after he (Bhagavat Vairocana) had entered it (*samādhi*), there arose the four modes from a single sound, the sounds which make known the entire *Dharmadhātu* without remainder, whose strength abides in the *Dharmadhātu*, whose strength is equal to the unequalled, which arise from the fervent inclination (*adhimokṣa*) of the perfect Buddha and which having pervaded all of the *Dharmadhātu* became space-like: *NAMAḤ SARVATATHĀGATEBHYO VIŚVAMUKHEBHYAḤ SARVATHĀ A Ā AṂ AḤ* (salutations to Sarvatathāgata, who are all-forms and omnipresent! *A Ā AṂ AḤ*)

As soon as these essence of the perfect Buddha had arisen, then the sounds which make things known, characterized by the words of the essence of the perfect Buddha, sounded forth from each one of the gates, which communicate the entire *Dharmadhātu*.²¹

The above passage describes the four modes of *A*: *A Ā AṂ AḤ*. The fourfold power of *A* derives from *Dharmadhātu*. Because they abide in *Dharmadhātu*, they have unequalled power, and they are the essence (*hṛdaya*) of the perfect Buddha. They are the gates from which emanate those sounds that make known such things as pots, sheets and the like.²² Here one finds the fundamental basis of the *mantrayāna* method: sounds designating distinct or indistinct objects derive from the *Dharmadhātu*; since *Dharmadhātu* is the essence of words and sounds within mundane communication, by uttering “the essence” of these syllables along with their gross sound, one reaches *Dharmadhātu*. And in the Tantra, Vajrapāṇi requests Vairocana:

Please explain the ground of the perfect Buddhas, with whose attainment-accomplishing words the sons and daughters of good family abide in this very world, experiencing joy and happiness, without being out of tune with the *Dharmadhātu*.²³

By this request, one is advised to recite the syllable *A*. Here, *A* is the principle through which one could realize the non-dualism between *Dharmadhātu* and all phenomena.

As we have observed earlier, *A* plays an essential part in the process of visualization, and is the syllable of Mahāvairocana, according to *MVT*. In making the *vāk-maṇḍala*, it is said:

²⁰ Cf. *MVT* VI.106. *A* with *anusvāra* is visualized and imagined as the tranquil *dharmakāya* and the ground of all.

²¹ *MVT* VI.19-20, tr. Hodge 2003: 173-74.

²² Cf. *MVT* VI.19 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 173.

²³ *MVT* VI.42, tr. Hodge 2003: 180.

In the centre there is the Bhagavat Mahāvairocana. . . . He should draw either his *mudrā*, his body image, or his syllable. Of these, his syllable is A.²⁴

NS also explicitly informs that Mahāvairocana or the Ādi Buddha is born of A, and is itself A.

And in this way the blessed one, the Buddha, the completely awakened, born from the syllable A (*akārasambhavaḥ*), is the syllable A, the foremost of all phonemes (*sarvavarṇāgrya*), of great meaning, the supreme syllable (*paramākṣaraḥ*).²⁵

A is taken as the essence (*hṛdaya*) of all *mantras*, and all *mantras* are contained within A.²⁶ “It is the supreme life-energy, and is called the most excellent magnet.”²⁷ Four variations of A – A, Ā, AM, AḤ – in the doctrinal setting respectively signify Enlightenment, Practice, Perfect Enlightenment, and *Nirvāṇa*.²⁸ In *STTS*, A is instructed to be the heart *mantra* of every entry (*āveśa*).²⁹

Vāk Cakra

The *maṇḍala* of *vāk cakra*, which consists of syllables, has been expounded upon in chapter X of *MVT*. In the exposition of the *maṇḍala* of *vāk*, *vāk* is said to be the mediating agent between *nirmāṇakāya* and *dharmakāya*, and between all beings and *Dharmadhātu*. Thus, in the following passage, the emanations of the *maṇḍala* of *vāk* have been compared to “gates”.

Lord of the Secret Ones (Vajrapāṇi), behold the vast emanations of the Mandala of my *vāk cakra* which pervade limitless world systems, which are gates of purity, gates which satisfy all beings according to their wishes and make known the *Dharmadhātu* to each of them individually. They are at present engaged in the performance of Buddha activities as Śākyamunis in unlimited world systems that are more extensive than the realm of space. Yet, Lord of the Secret Ones, concerning that, beings do not know that this is the arising of the Mandala of Bhagavat’s *vāk cakra*, that they are Buddha Bodies arisen from the Essence [AM] of the arrayed of Adornments of *vāk* of the Buddha, which produces them to satisfy being according to their wishes.³⁰

²⁴ *MVT* X.19, tr. Hodge 2003: 228.

²⁵ *NS* 28, tr. Davidson 1981: 22.

²⁶ Cf. *MVT* IV.17, tr. Hodge 2003: 163.

²⁷ *MVT* VI.57, tr. Hodge 2003: 188.

²⁸ *MVT* IV.15, tr. Hodge 2003: 162.

²⁹ *STTS* I, tr. Giebel 2001: 70.

³⁰ *MVT* XXII.3, tr. Hodge 2003: 350.

It explains that the emanations from the *maṇḍala* of *vāk cakra* pervade all the worldly systems, which implies the all-pervading nature of *vāk*. These emanations are the gates between *Dharmadhātu* and all beings. Through these gates, *Dharmadhātu* is revealed within all beings according to what they wish, and through the same gates all beings enter the *Dharmadhātu*; therefore, they are called “the gates of purity”.³¹ The Śākyamunis, the innumerable *nirmāṇakāyas* found in every worldly system, are said to have been born from the *vāk cakra* in order to bring satisfaction to all beings. Also, Buddhaguhya clarifies the term *vāk cakra*: “it is called a *cakra* because *vāk* of the Tathāgata which arises in various kinds of forms, enters the [consciousness] streams of beings”.³² Thus, the expression of *vāk cakra* implies that *vāk* is the mediating agent between bodily forms (*kāya*) and consciousness (*citta*), as well as between all beings and *Dharmadhātu*.

III.2 The Highest Divinity Conceived in the Nature of Sound

Dharmadhātu

The verses of *MVT* VI.19-20 quoted earlier account regarding the evolution of sound: from a single sound, four ‘A’s arise; when these four ‘A’s have arisen, the subsequent sounds of mundane phenomena sound forth.³³ Here we come across a remarkable reference to “a single sound” that is the ultimate origin of all the words we use. In the commentary to the above teaching of the Tantra, Buddhaguhya adds that “the single sound” from which these four ‘A’s arise is both “unborn and unarisen”.³⁴ The association of four ‘A’s with *Dharmadhātu* as referred to repeatedly in these verses, suggests that the “single sound” refers to *Dharmadhātu*, and that here *Dharmadhātu* has been conceived as existent in a sonic form. It is noteworthy that the description of the cosmogony of “sounds which make things known” is followed by a salutation to Sarvathāgata in *mantra*; this implies that Sarvathāgata might be another name of this source of sound.

Sarvathāgata

Earlier in chapter I of this book, the term Sarvathāgata has been referred to in the context of the symbolism of *maṇḍala* deities as encountered in *STTS*. References to Sarvathāgata

³¹ Cf. *MVT* XXII.3 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 350.

³² Ibid.

³³ Supra, p. 115.

³⁴ Cf. *MVT* VI.19-20 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 174.

occur abundantly in descriptions of *maṇḍala* deities and *mantra* practices in Yoga Tantras. However, when the English translation of “All Tathāgatas” is given as equivalent to the term Sarvatathāgata, we tend to imagine a collection of innumerable Tathāgatas with personified forms, causing considerable confusion and hampers one from grasping the true meaning of the descriptions. The significance of Sarvatathāgata needs deeper consideration, and a question must be raised as to whether it means “all Tathāgatas” or if it is rather a proper noun replacing *Dharmadhātu*, with a further emphasis on its innate creative power. For the examination of the significance of Sarvatathāgata, here I pay careful attention to the opening verses of chapter I of *STTS*.

At that time, Sarvatathāgata filled this Buddha world (*buddhakṣetra*) just like sesame (*tilabimbamiva*) [seeds packed closely together in a sesame pod]. Then Sarvatathāgata gathered as if in a cloud and betook themselves to where the Bodhisattva and Mahāsattva Sarvārthasiddhi was seated at the place of enlightenment (*bodhimaṇḍa*). Manifesting the body of enjoyment (*saṃbhoga-kāya*), Sarvatathāgata spoke. . . .³⁵

The text continues, relating what Sarvatathāgata as manifested in *saṃbhogakāya* said to Sarvārthasiddhi:

How will you, who endure ascetic practices without knowing the essence of Sarvatathāgata (*sarvatathāgatatattvanābhijñātayā*), realize unsurpassed perfect enlightenment (*anuttaraṃ samyaksambodhīm abhisambhotsyase*).³⁶

The thorough pervasion of Sarvatathāgata in *buddhakṣetra* has been compared to sesame seeds packed into a pod. The metaphoric reference to sesame is significant because the literal meaning of *bīja* could imply an association of Sarvatathāgata with *mantra*. This association is more plausible when also examining the fact that Sarvatathāgata is said to have guided Sarvārthasiddhi on his way to Enlightenment through *mantras*, and that the entire group of *maṇḍala* deities are said to derive from those *mantras*, who themselves originate from Sarvatathāgata. The statement that Sarvatathāgata took the form of *saṃbhogakāya* when it communicated with the Bodhisattva in the *bodhimaṇḍa* indicates that Sarvatathāgata was in a different form before the manifestation of its *saṃbhogakāya*; probably, its state before the *saṃbhoga-kāya* manifestation is that of *dharmakāya*. As described with metaphors of sesame

³⁵ *STTS* I, tr. Giebel 2001: 23. When quoting the translation of Giebel, the term *sarvatathāgata* is left untranslated, though he uses “all the *tathāgatas*”. For the Sanskrit text, see Chandra 1987: 4.

³⁶ *STTS* I, tr. Giebel 2001: 23.

seeds, or of the contraction of air into clouds, Sarvatathāgata in its state of *Dharmakāya* may be envisaged as the innate dynamic forces of expansion and contraction. Though it is the *sambhogakāya* form of Sarvatathāgata in the *samādhi* of Vairocana that plays the major role throughout the text, it should be clearly realized that it is the *dharmakāya* form of Sarvatathāgata that must be understood to be the origin of all *maṇḍala* deities.

Furthermore, the question put forward in the voice of *sambhogakāya* Sarvatathāgata tells the reader that Sarvārthasiddhi should comprehend the Sarvatathāgata *Tattva* in order to attain this Perfect Enlightenment. It says that Sarvatathāgata is the principle of Enlightenment, the source of the knowledge of the Buddhas. It guided the Bodhisattva on the way to the Perfect Enlightenment, consecrated him as Vajradhātu-Vairocana and enthroned him in the centre of the *maṇḍala*. We should keep in mind that the references to Sarvatathāgata occur at vital points in the texts, which are related to transformation or spiritual uplift. While Sarvatathāgata is both the source and the ultimate aspect of the *maṇḍala* deities, Vairocana is the efficient cause of these formations. The *samādhi* opens the heart of Vairocana, and he becomes the channel through which Sarvatathāgata reveals his various forms in the *maṇḍala*. Here, precision regarding how the term *Tattva* is translated is crucial for a correct understanding of Sarvatathāgata. Even though the term *Tattva* features in the title of the text *Sarvatathāgata-Tattva-Saṃgraha*, the term *Tattva* has not received worthy attention. Thus, it is either taken to be insignificant, or is translated by the word “truth”. In this context, a glance at the writings of Chandra is enlightening. In one of his articles, he points out that the *Tattva* in the title of the text means “essence, core, heart”.³⁷ Bearing in mind that the term *tattva* has been used in Indian philosophical schools in the sense of “a category of reality”, thus applicable regarding any hierarchical understanding within these systems by convention, Sarvatathāgata *Tattva* is more reasonably interpreted as “the First *Tattva*”, “the Highest Principle” or “Essence”, which is named Sarvatathāgata.

The term *Sarva*, usually translated as “all”, also needs a new understanding; for this, we may look at another epithet for Vairocana, Sarvavid. Sarvavid (Omniscient One) may be understood as “the One with the highest knowledge” as well as “the One with all knowledge”. Similarly, *Sarva* in the Sarvatathāgata may be more appropriately interpreted with a qualitative indication of “supreme”, rather than in a quantitative denotation of “all”. Indeed, *Sarva* suggests the meaning of “absolute”. Therefore, we

³⁷ Chandra 1993: 385.

find *Sarva* as a name of God in the fourth stanza of the *Viṣṇu-Sahasranāma-Stotra*³⁸ where *Sarva*, *Śarva* and *Śiva* are introduced as names of Viṣṇu.³⁹ The use in the Sanskrit text of plural forms for Sarvatathāgata, such as *sarvatathāgatā* or *Sarvatathāgataiḥ*, should be seen to be expressions of respect within the Sanskrit grammar. The Sarvatathāgata *Tattva* is the origin of mantric power that brings forth the bodily manifestation of deities, and the knowledge (*abhiññā*) of this essence is the method to attain Perfect Enlightenment.

In *MVT*, the allusion of Sarvatathāgata as the source of *mantras* is explicit. In chapter XII, “The Dharma Letter Method, the All-penetrating Gate”, Vairocana, having explained the *samādhi* gates formed by the syllables and the letters of the *mantras*, praises the *mantra* method in the following verses.

This is the Dharma discourse regarding skill in the letter method, the process of abiding in the mantra method, that which is transformed by the transforming power of Sarvatathāgata, the process of upholding the deity, the skill in the method of all full and perfect Buddhas and the dance of Bodhisattva practice.⁴⁰

The message of this passage is unambiguous, saying that *mantrayāna* is based on the transformative power of Sarvatathāgata. Another reference to Sarvatathāgata in *MVT* is worthy of mention in order to demonstrate the correlation among Sarvatathāgata, *Dharmadhātu* and the essence of sound as conceived in the *mantrayāna* practice. In the closing scene of chapter II, we read:

As soon as the Bhagavat (Vairocana) had entered it (*samādhi*), Sarvatathāgata uttered a sound that permeated the *Dharmadhātu* and completely protected all the realms of beings without remainder, and spoke this powerful protector Queen of *Vidyā-mantras*: [. . .]⁴¹

Though these references to Sarvatathāgata are by no means extensive, they urge the reader to reconsider the significance of Sarvatathāgata in the *mantrayāna* practice. Sarvatathāgata could be a designation for the dynamic *Dharmadhātu*, which undergoes the transformation

³⁸ The *Viṣṇu-Sahasranāma-Stotra* is a hymn from the 149th chapter of Anuśāsana Parva of *Mahābhārata*.

³⁹ I specially thank Dr. Lokesh Chandra for having provided me with the information to support my understanding of Sarvatathāgata. He states in a personal correspondence, “*Sarva-tathāgata* thus means the Highest Tathāgata, endowed with all the supreme qualities”. And, he adds that “in the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, the mantra of Vajradhātu Vairocana is *om sarva-tathāgata mahāyogīśvara hūṃ* (p. 47)”.

⁴⁰ *MVT* XII.3, tr. Hodge 2003: 251.

⁴¹ *MVT* II.97, tr. Hodge 2003: 149.

into various forms. Its transformational power is conceived to be with the quality of sound; thus, Sarvatathāgata is comparable to the Primeval Sound, the source of all sounds.

Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara-Mañjuśrī

As the presiding deity of the Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala, Mañjuśrī is said to be one with *Dharmadhātu*, which is a designation for the Ultimate Dharma. Why is Mañjuśrī especially venerated as *Dharmadhātu* and regarded as a manifestation of Mahāvairocana? The basis for this seems to be his association with *vāk*, thus lending him the name Vāgīśvara. This name should be understood in the context of the prevalent tantric practice wherein the concept of *vāk* is intimately associated with the essence of a divinity, and with perfect knowledge.

Mañjuśrī represents *jñāna* (knowledge) and is thereby called *jñānasattva*.⁴² In Yoga Tantras, his nature is described in relation to *vāk* (sound). When Mañjuśrī is identified with Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara in the Maṇḍala, he is Mañjughoṣa (the gentle sound). The *mantra* of Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Mañjughoṣa is *a ā sarva-tathāgata-hṛdaya hara-hara oṃ hūṃ hrīḥ / bhagavān jñāna-mūrti vāgīśvara/mahāvāca sarva-dharma-gagan-āmala supari-śuddha Dharmadhātu-jñāna-garbha āḥ*.⁴³ Here, the recitation of “Jñānamūrti Vāgīśvara” (the form of knowledge, the Lord of *vāk*) and *mahāvāca* (great *vāk*) displays the nature of Mañjughoṣa as conceived in terms of *vāk*. The *mantra* of Mañjughoṣa given in the *Sādhnamālā* is same as that of Vāgīśvara – *oṃ vāgīśvara muḥ* – wherein *muḥ* is the *bīja* of Mañjughoṣa.

In chapter I of *STTS*, where the epiphany of Sixteen Bodhisattvas is described, Mañjuśrī says:

Oho I am thought of as Mañjughoṣa (gentle sound) of the Supreme Buddha (*sarvabuddhanām mañjughoṣa*), by whose wisdom which is formless, the essence of sound will be attained (*yatprajñāyā arūpiṇyā ghoṣatvamupalabhyate*).⁴⁴

In the commentary on *MVT* Buddhaguhya describes Mañjughoṣa as the nature of *prajñā* connected with *vāk*.

⁴² The complete title of *NS* is the *mañjuśrījñānasattvasyaparamārtha nāmasaṅgītiparīsamāptah* (from the colophon of Paris MS. 62; Filliozat 1941: 31). Other variant Sanskrit titles are given in Chandra 1993: 381-84.

⁴³ Cf. Chandra 2003: 2229.

⁴⁴ Snellgrove translates “*sarvabuddhanām*” into “all *buddhas*” and “*yatprajñāyā arūpiṇyā ghoṣatvamupalabhyate*” into “in that knowledge which is formless is conceived as sound”. Cf. *STTS*, ed. Snellgrove and Chandra 1981: 22.

He is the Insight connected with speech in nature. Having intellectually investigated and examined the general and specific attributes of all phenomena, that Insight brings about the direct realization of them.⁴⁵

We see that the remarkable connection between *vāk* and *prajñā* is implied in the tantric concept of Mañjuśrī. Mañjuśrī's prominent twofold association demonstrates the foundation of *mantrayāna*, in that the knowledge of *vāk* is the dominant means to attain *prajñā*.

The text *Nāmasaṃgīti* is interesting in relation to the association of Mañjuśrī with *vāk*, for it leads one to ask, "to whom are these verses directed?" One might well lose sight of the object of these devotional hymns, because one finds not only Vairocana and other names of Mañjuśrī like Vajratikṣṇa (v. 111), but it also gives names normally designating other divinities, such as Vajrāṅkuṣa or Amoghapaśa (v. 66). Scholars like Davidson⁴⁶ and Wayman⁴⁷ view the text as addressing Mañjuśrī; Chandra, examining the titles of traditional manuscripts in Chinese, Tibetan and Sanskrit, comes to the conclusion that the verses are devoted to the *Paramārtha of Yogatantra (Advaya)*, which corresponds to the term *tattva* (essence, core, heart) in the title of the *Sarvathāgata Tattva Saṃgraha*.⁴⁸ He underlines the role of Mañjuśrī as interlocutor in a number of Mahāyāna texts, such as *Saptaśatikā Prajñāpāramitā* or *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*. The homage to Mañjuśrī is given in the third verse of the chapter about *māyājālābhisaṃbodhi-krama* in the *NS*.

Oṃ homage to you, Embodied Knowledge of Insight (*prajñājñānamūrtaye*), Cutter of Suffering, Sharp as a *Vajra*. Homage to you, Lord of Speech (*Vāgīśvara*), Gnostic Body (*jñāna kāya*), Arapacana!⁴⁹

Once Śākyamuni summons Mañjuśrī and pays homage to him with these words, it is Mañjuśrī who gives instruction in the verses that follow. With the interpretation of Chandra as guide, one notices that those verses teeming with descriptions of various attributes and names are addressed to the Ultimate Dharma, *Paramārtha* or *Dharmadhātu*.

In *NS*, the Ultimate Dharma or the Ādi Buddha is often associated with *vāk* and

⁴⁵ Cf. *MVT* II.57 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 118.

⁴⁶ Cf. Davidson 1981.

⁴⁷ Cf. Wayman 1985.

⁴⁸ Chandra 1993: 385.

⁴⁹ *NS* 27, tr. Davidson 1981: 22.

mantras, consistent with the important place that the *mantrayāna* practice holds in the Yoga Tantras. The following verses verify the relation of *Paramārtha* to *mantra*.

Aspirated, unoriginated, without uttering a sound, he is the foremost cause of all expression, shining forth within all speech. — v. 29⁵⁰

Being highest with *mahāvidyās*, he is the protector; being highest with *mahāmantras*, he is the guide. Having mounted to the practice of the Mahāyāna, he is highest in the practice of the Mahāyāna. — v. 41⁵¹

Being Mahāvairocana, he is Buddha; he is a great sage with profound sapience, and as he is produced by the great practice of *mantras*, by nature he is the great practice of *mantras*. — v. 42⁵²

As the lord of *vāk*, the commander of *vāk*, possessed of eloquence, he is the master of *vāk*, unending in fluency, and with true *vāk* he speaks the truth, teaching the four truths. — v. 50⁵³

In addition to these excerpts, verses 65, 101 and 111 can be viewed as conspicuous examples that embody the conception of the Ultimate Dharma or the Ādi Buddha in association with *vāk*. Additionally, the Ultimate Dharma was shown later in this text in rich, multi-dimensional forms associated with *akṣara* and *mantra*.

To be realized by all Buddhas, as the enlightenment of the Buddha, he is supreme; devoid of syllables, his source is in *mantra*; he is the triad of the great *mantra* families. — v. 143

The progenitor of the significance of all *mantras*, he is the great *bindu*, devoid of syllables; with five syllables and greatly void (*śūnya*), he is voidness in the *bindu*, with one hundred syllables. — v. 144

⁵⁰ NS 29, tr. Davidson 1981: 23 –
mahāprāṇo hy anutpādo vāgudāhārarajitaḥ |
sarvābhilāpahetvagryaḥ sarvavāksuprabhāsvaraḥ ||

⁵¹ NS 41, tr. Davidson 1981: 23 –
mahāvidyottamo nātho mahāmantrottamo guruḥ |
mahāyānanayārūḍho mahāyānanayottamaḥ ||

⁵² NS 42, tr. Davidson 1981: 24 –
mahāvairocano buddho mahāmaunī mahāmuniḥ |
mahāmantranayodbhūto mahāmantranayātmakaḥ ||

⁵³ NS 50, tr. Davidson 1981: 25 –
vāgīśo vakpatir vāgmī vācaspatir anantaḡīḥ |
satyavāk satyavādī ca catuḥsatyopadeśakaḥ ||

Having all aspects, having no aspects, he bears four *bindus*;⁵⁴ partless, beyond enumeration, he sustains the limit at the level of the fourth meditation. — v. 145⁵⁵

Abundant references in *NS* to *vāk* and to *mantras* related to *Paramārtha* lead us to understand that *vāk* is the factor that connects Mañjuśrī and *Dharmadhātu*. The *vāk* nature of *Dharmadhātu* is the essence of Mañjuśrī's activities; in other words, the *vāk* nature of *Dharmadhātu* manifests in the *vāk* activity of Mañjuśrī. Through *vāk*, *Prajñā* is transmitted from *Dharmadhātu* to Mañjuśrī, and he is adored as the spokesman of the verses and teachings that reveal the nature of *Dharmadhātu* which is perceived in various forms. Since Mañjuśrī manifests the *vāk* nature of *Dharmadhātu*, he is Vāgīśvara. Thus, we see that *vāk* is the reason for Mañjuśrī being adored as the revealer of Dharma, and why he is identified with *Dharmadhātu*.

III.3 Association of Goddess Prajñāpāramitā with Vāk

The abundant pictorial representations of the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā in Alchi are significant, for they demonstrate the religious environment of the time – which informs equally about the background of the *maṇḍalas* painted next to them. Prajñāpāramitā has been extensively depicted in Alchi along with representations of Mahāvairocana, Śākyamuni, Mañjuśrī and many *maṇḍalas*. The image of Prajñāpāramitā depicted on the second storey of the *sumtseg* reveals her status to be comparable to Mahāvairocana (*Pl.* 37). Especially, the two *maṇḍalas* painted on the third storey of the *sumtseg* explicitly demonstrate the dynamic relation between Mahāvairocana and Goddess Prajñāpāramitā (*Pls.* 7-8, 38-39). As has been presented in Table 1.3, the innermost circle of Mahāvairocana in the *maṇḍala* of Mahāvairocana is surrounded by eight petals of a lotus, where only the image of Prajñāpāramitā is painted towards the east. Thus, Prajñāpāramitā is placed in this *maṇḍala* between Mahāvairocana in the centre and the set of four Buddhas and four Bodhisattvas in the eight directions. The *maṇḍala* of Prajñāpāramitā on the opposite wall gives greater importance to the Goddess; the central image of Prajñāpāramitā is surrounded by her four manifestations at the four

⁵⁴ Davidson 1981: 36, n. 120: “Bindu here means *bijamantra* . . . in this case *a ā aṃ aḥ*”.

⁵⁵ *NS* 143-45, tr. Davidson 1981: 36 –
sarvasaṃbuddhaboddhavyo buddhabodhir anuttaraḥ |
anakṣaro mantrayonir mahāmantrakulatrayaḥ || (v. 143)
sarvamantrārthajanako mahābindur anakṣaraḥ |
pañcākṣaro mahāśūnyo binduśūnyaḥ śatākṣaraḥ || (v. 144)
sarvākāro nirākāraḥṣoḍaśārdhārdhabindudṛk |
akalaḥ kalanātītaś caturthadhyānakoḍidhṛk || (v. 145)



Pl. 37 Prajñāpāramitā as Mahāvairocana, rear wall, second storey, *sumtseg*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 2009)



Pl. 38 Central divinity, *maṇḍala* of Mahāvairocana, left wall, third storey, *sumtseg*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 2009)



Pl. 39 Central divinity, *maṇḍala* of Prajñāpāramitā, right wall, third storey, *sumtseg*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 2009)



Pl. 40 Maṇḍala of Prajñāpāramitā, *dukhang*, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHAU))

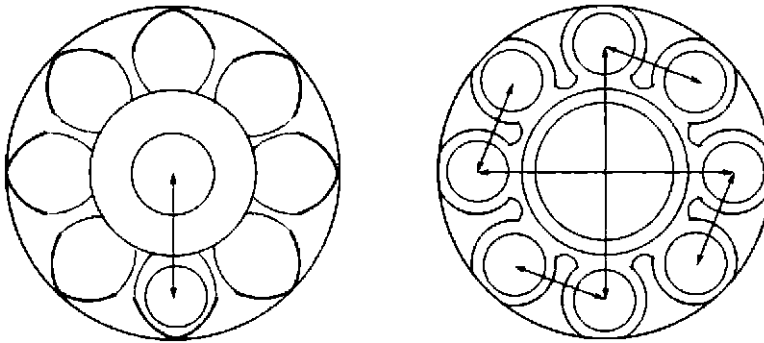
cardinal directions, and four Buddhas bearing *nirmāṇakāya* attributes are found at the four intermediate directions. These two *maṇḍalas* are evidently related to each other, and they show the unmistakable relationship among Dharmakāya, Prajñāpāramitā and the Buddhas. In these two *maṇḍalas*, the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā plays an important part in the centripetal dynamism of *maṇḍala*, with implications of both emanation and revelation (*Illus. 3.1*).

By being represented in the uppermost place in the three-storeyed architectural *stūpa*, Goddess Prajñāpāramitā displays her prominence in the iconographic scheme of the monastery, which is also noticeable in other contemporary monasteries of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. There are other *maṇḍalas* of Prajñāpāramitā in the *dukhang* (Pl. 40) and inside the small twin *stūpas* (Kakani Chörten) in front of the *sumtseg* in Alchi. In the Maitreya Hall of Mangyu, a *maṇḍala* of Prajñāpāramitā shows the Goddess with six arms, surrounded by other feminine divinities.

Let us consider the difference between the iconographic scheme of Alchi and that of Tabo in this context.

- i) Unlike Alchi, one finds no image of Goddess Prajñāpāramitā in Tabo. Only the narratives of Sadāprarudita in search of the *prajñāpāramitā* have been depicted in the ambulatory of the *dukhang* in Tabo.
- ii) The *maṇḍalas* of Alchi are characterized by their predominant geometric layout, absent from the *dukhang* of Tabo.

From these facts, it can be posited that prolific depictions of Prajñāpāramitā in Alchi may have an analogous relationship to the equally abundant geometric representations of *maṇḍalas* found there. It may be assumed that behind their visual



Illus. 3.1: Dynamism between Mahāvairocana and Prajñāpāramitā in the two maṇḍalas of the third storey of the sumtseg, Alchi.

representations of Prajñāpāramitā and the geometric *maṇḍalas* in Alchi one could find a common conceptual basis. Prajñāpāramitā has a prominent place in the iconographic scheme of Alchi; understanding the background of this representation can explain why such geometric *maṇḍalas* might have been created so prolifically. In this regard, one must examine the association of Goddess Prajñāpāramitā with the practice of *mantra*, especially keeping in mind the concept of *vāk*.

III.3.1 The Concept of Goddess Prajñāpāramitā

When the then-new Mahāyāna for the first time focused upon the philosophical concept of *prajñā*, hitherto unexamined in earlier schools of Buddhism,⁵⁶ *prajñāpāramitā* was one of the six *pāramitās* which the seeker-after-truth had to cultivate. *Prajñāpāramitā* was initially a designation for a particular group of literature and its teachings. However, *prajñāpāramitā* had also been further designated as “the Mother of the Buddhas (*jināna mātā*)” and, already in the early stage of its development, was conceived as a goddess.⁵⁷ Thus, the *Aṣṭasāhasrika Prajñāpāramitā* (from sometime between 100 BCE – CE 100) says, “the Saviours of the world who were in the past and these that are now in the ten directions have issued from her and so will the future ones be”.⁵⁸ And, within the idea of *ekayāna* that teaches the ultimate teaching of Buddhism to be singular (despite differing schools), integrating diverse “vehicles” (*yāna*) of thought, Prajñāpāramitā plays a central role as a goddess.⁵⁹ In the *Munimatālamkāra*, Abhayākara Gupta states:

Thus, the nature of the Mahāyāna is established as being only the one vehicle (*ekayāna*) and the absolute (*paramārtha*) absence of own being (*niḥsvabhāvatā*) of all *dharma*s. This (great vehicle) is the Bhagavatī Prajñāpāramitā. This (Prajñāpāramitā) is to be known

⁵⁶ Conze assigns the literature that informs the first stage of *prajñāpāramitā* thought to c. 100 BCE (cf. Conze 1967a: 124).

⁵⁷ In the first chapter (v. 15) of the *Ratnaguṇasañcayagāthā* (summary verses of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*) Prajñāpāramitā demonstrates the conception of “the mother of the Jinas” in the early development of the *Prajñāpāramitā* thought (cf. Conze 1967a: 125). On the basis of the iconography of the Goddess described in *sādhana* nos. 152 and 159 in the *Sāadhanamālā*, D.C. Bhattacharyya (1978: 45) sees the conception of the goddess conceived in association with the Five Tathāgatas as early as fourth century CE, since the *sādhana* no. 159 is ascribed to the authorship of Aśaṅga who belonged to c. CE 300. He ascribes the composition of *sādhana* no. 152 to the same period as no. 159.

⁵⁸ Tr. Conze 1978: 31.

⁵⁹ *Munimatālamkāra*, chapter I, “The Prajñāpāramitā itself, the Bhagavatī, is the essence of the Mahāyāna, the *ekayāna* precisely” (tr. Ruegg 1977: 295).

as the absolutely real (*pāramārthika*) *bodhicitta*, which consists of the non-differentiation of the Empty (comprehension of *śūnyatā*) and compassion.⁶⁰

Mäll stresses the *Dharmakāya* aspect of *prajñāpāramitā*, which seems relevant to the depictions in Alchi of the Goddess *Prajñāpāramitā* juxtaposed with *Mahāvairocana*. He remarks:

The authors of *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* saw the *Prajñāpāramitā* as the only embodiment of the teaching of all Buddhas, i.e. as *Dharmakāya*. Therefore all the respect that should have been paid to the Buddhas was transferred to the *Prajñāpāramitā*. The worship of the *Prajñāpāramitā* text is something that exceeds the worship of all other objects, mainly the worship of relics (*buddhaśarīra*).⁶¹

While his remark is perceptive, in that it draws attention to the *Dharmakāya* aspect of *Prajñāpāramitā*, the general conception of the Goddess represented in his remarks should be reconsidered in the context of the images of the Goddess in Alchi. It has been generally believed that the worship of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* is the background of Goddess *Prajñāpāramitā*, and that she is the personification of the book. It is the assertion of this present work that the adoration of the Goddess *Prajñāpāramitā* is more than the adoration of *sūtras*; she should be understood to be the source of Wisdom beyond words – *Dharmadhātu*. In the history of Buddhism, the *mantrayāna* was a later development of *Mahāyāna*, though the philosophy of the former adhered to the latter. In terms of Bodhisattva practices, the *mantrayāna* is, in general, distinguished from *Prajñāpāramitāyāna*. If the Goddess *Prajñāpāramitā* is merely a personification of the *prajñāpāramitā* texts in the sense of the early *Mahāyāna Sūtras*, then the profuse representations of the Goddess, painted next to the *maṇḍalas* which accompany the *mantrayāna* practice, seem awkward. Thus, it has to be more specified that Goddess *Prajñāpāramitā* is worshipped not as the personification of any particular book or books, but rather as the personification of the True Word or Essence that those books enshrine. Therefore, the worship of *Prajñāpāramitā* exceeds the adoration of any Buddha, Buddha relic or *stūpa*, because as the supreme reality (*bhūtaakoṭi*) she is the source of and basis upon which these objects are sanctified. The worship of *Prajñāpāramitā* as a feminine divinity should be understood in the broader context of the Indian spiritual tradition, in that the creative force of the Ultimate has been long conceived as such, as is observed in the early Vedic concept of *vāk*.

⁶⁰ *Munimatālaṃkāra*, chapter I, tr. Ruegg 1977: 297-98.

⁶¹ Mäll 2005: 68.

III.3.2 Goddess Prajñāpāramitā in the Mantrayāna

In the preface of his study on Buddhist iconography, D.C. Bhattacharyya generally presupposes that these images developed through the tantric belief in mantric syllables. He states: “The excessive increase in the number of divine concepts was mainly due to the Buddhist belief, during this period, in the efficacy of *mantras*”.⁶² According to his conception of Buddhist iconography, the *mantras*, being sacred and having efficacy, became deified and developed “with the relevant iconographic specification”.⁶³ His view underlines the importance of the *mantra* practice in the iconographic rendering of divinities. Conze also refers to evidence of the dissemination of the *mantra* practice within the early development of *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, even before the teaching of *Prajñāpāramitā* was incorporated within tantric ideology. When the large *Prajñāpāramitā* texts were composed, the forty-three *dhāraṇīs* were taught.⁶⁴ The *mantras* and *dhāraṇīs* became manifold and diverse through a number of short *sūtras* which were composed after CE 500, and Vajrapāṇi found great importance in these texts.⁶⁵ Conze states that the conception of *Prajñāpāramitā* had changed drastically under tantric influence.⁶⁶ He recognizes a particular passage of the *Adhyardhaśatikā* (n. XII) as the one truly tantric exposition of *Prajñāpāramitā*.

Thereupon the Lord Vairocana, the Tathāgata, again demonstrated this method of *prajñāpāramitā*, called the power which sustains all beings (*sarvasattvādhiṣṭhānam*): All beings are *Tathāgatagarbha*, because they all have the self-nature (*ātmatā*) of Samantabhadra, the great Bodhisattva; all beings are *vajragarbha* because they are consecrated (*abhiṣiktatayā*) with the *vajragarbha*; all beings are *dharmagarbha*, because all *vāk* transforms (or manifests; *sarvavākpravartanatayā*); *karmagarbha* [is] in all beings, because all beings exert themselves in doing deeds.⁶⁷

⁶² Bhattacharyya 1978: 1.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Conze 1967a: 135-36.

⁶⁵ Ibid.: 143-44.

⁶⁶ Ibid.: 146.

⁶⁷ *Adhyardhaśatikā* 12, quoted in Conze 1967a: 146-47. I have modified the translation of Edward Conze given in his article because his translation does not clearly reveal the fourfold concept of *kula* implied in the text. *Tathāgatagarbhāḥ* was translated by Conze into “embryonic Tathāgatas” and *vajragarbhaḥ* into “thunderbolts in embryo”. In my translation, *dharmagarbha* is what I assume from Conze’s translation “Dharma in embryo”. Conze translated *sarvavākpravartanatayā* into “because all speech comes to pass”.

Herein *prajñāpāramitā* is both the method and the power on the basis of which the Ultimate Dharma is revealed within all beings. In tantric conception, *prajñāpāramitā* is the power of transformation; therefore it makes it impossible for any being to be separate from the Ultimate Dharma. All beings adhere within the Ultimate Dharma in their four aspects – *Tathāgatagarbha*, *vajragarbha*, *dharmagarbha* and *karmagarbha* – which are identical to the four categories of *kulas* in the Yoga Tantra. The transformation of *vāk* has been especially mentioned in the tantric *prajñāpāramitā* text above as the basis of how all beings are not different from Dharma. It hints at the vital role of *vāk* in the concept of *prajñāpāramitā* in the tantric context.

***Is the Queen of Vidyā in the Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi Tantra
Identical to the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā?***

When studying the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā, one notices many references to the Queen of Vidyā (Vidyārājñī), found frequently throughout *MVT*. In a number of verses, the term ‘Queen of Vidyā’ is given in place of ‘*mantra*’. The general pattern where ‘the Queen of Vidyā’ occurs in the Tantra may be abbreviated as such: the Bhagavat Vairocana spoke the Queen of Vidyā “*NAMAḤ SĀMANTA-BUDDHĀNĀM* (or *NAMAḤ SARVATATHĀGATEBHYO*) [...]” with other *mantras* following afterwards; one such *mantra* praises the nature of this Queen of Vidyā as identical to that of space (*gagana* or *kha*).⁶⁸

We come across some passages in *MVT* that link the Queen of Vidyā and Prajñāpāramitā. In a passage of the Tantra, the Queen of Vidyā has been praised as “the mother of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas”, which is the epithet of Prajñāpāramitā.⁶⁹ When Buddhaguhya explains the meaning of the Queen of Vidyā in his commentary to the Tantra, his description coincides with the meaning of *prajñāpāramitā*.

Vidyā means knowledge and here it refers to the *prajñā* of Enlightenment. Queen is because the *prajñā* of Enlightenment is the most excellent of all *prajñās*, it is a queen.⁷⁰

The connection between the “Queen of Vidyā” and Prajñāpāramitā can be observed in another passage, when *MVT* gives instruction about the ritual required before the drawing of the *vāk-maṇḍala*.

⁶⁸ See *MVT* IV.12; VI.29; X.1.

⁶⁹ Cf. *MVT* IV.12, tr. Hodge 2003: 161.

⁷⁰ *MVT* X.1 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 217.

Having done the ritual to transform the colours, he should make the *mudrā* or *mantra* of the Blessed Lady Prajñāpāramitā and recite this Vidyā Queen eight times.⁷¹

It cannot be ascertained at this stage of the research whether “the Queen of Vidyā” and the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā are identical or different; further, any connection between these two in *MVT* might also be assumed to represent a stage when hitherto-discrete concepts had undergone a mutual assimilation. Another Goddess, Gagana-Locanā, can briefly be mentioned in relation to Prajñāpāramitā and the Queen of Vidyā. Gagana-Locanā, adored as the Mother of Buddhas in *MVT*,⁷² is described to be in the nature of *prajñāpāramitā* and the *prajñā* associated with the *abhisambodhi*.⁷³ In the aforementioned description of the Queen of Vidyā in her similarity to space (*gagana*), one sees a link between Gagana-Locanā and the Queen of Vidyā – however, it is difficult to know, fundamentally, whether these divinities should be understood as different names of one goddess. Leaving this problem aside for further separate research, one can only say with certainty that the Queen of Vidyā and the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā are linked with regard to their nature as *prajñā*, and that the concept of the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā in the *mantrayāna* practice can be explored on the basis of her affinity to the Queen of Vidyā. Regardless of the problem of whether she is identical with the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā, it is worthwhile to pay heed to the concept of the Queen of Vidyā because, as mention of her so undeniably indicates her nature of *vāk* and the importance of *vāk* in the Buddhist Tantras, this certainly could help bring forward an unexplored aspect of the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā in association with *mantras* and the concept of *vāk*.

The Queen of Vidyā: Vāk

The references to the Queen of Vidyā are more or less always in connection to *vāk* and *mantra* practices; she seems to imply a profound relation to the power of syllables. The following passage by Vairocana is later expanded by Buddhaguhya’s commentary, which clarifies that “the Queen of Vidyā” denotes the essence of the *vāk cakra*. *MVT* says:

There is a *mantra* phrase which arises from the Maṇḍala of *cakra* of Tathāgata’s *vāk* which is vast and penetrates into infinity; it is like a multi-formed gem, it completely perfects all aspirations, it is an accumulation of an immeasurable mass of merits, it abides

⁷¹ *MVT* X.19, tr. Hodge 2003: 227.

⁷² Cf. *MVT* II.18 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 108.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

in unimpeded realization and it is endowed with the power that is independent of the three times.⁷⁴

Buddhaguhya's commentary asserts that the above passage gives instruction concerning *mantras* for the *maṇḍala* – apparently meaning the *kāya-maṇḍala*, since this passage is drawn from chapter II which deals with producing this particular *maṇḍala*. Here, he describes *vāk cakra*, the Queen of Vidyā.

It (*vāk cakra*) penetrates and encompasses all realms of beings. Wish-fulfilling gem appears in various forms and carries out various actions so that beings may obtain what they desire. Likewise this Vidyā Queen also manifests in various forms for the sake of beings and carries out various activities for them.⁷⁵

This passage gives the words of Vairocana concerning *vāk cakra* in its nature of transformation and all-pervasion. According to Buddhaguhya's conception, the Queen of Vidyā personifies the nature of transformation and all pervasion of the *vāk cakra*. The Queen of Vidyā represents the power of the *vāk cakra*, and the source of *mantras*. And the power of the Queen of Vidyā is explained to function at the two levels: absolute and relative.

The strength to generate perception of that relates to the absolute level, and the strength to be unharmed by obstructions by all demons and opponents, through the power of this Vidyā, relates to the relative level.⁷⁶

Vidyā is understood as the power through which the tantric practitioners are unhindered by obstructions, which bespeaks the important place given to the Queen of Vidyā in this tantric practice. The Tantra teaches that one attains through the empowerment of Vidyā the unhindered reality, Sarvatathāgata.⁷⁷

This Vidyā Queen reveals Sarvatathāgata, she does not let you depart from the confines of the path of Three Dharmas and she causes you to perfect the Levels and Perfections.⁷⁸

Buddhaguhya thereafter explains the meaning of “she reveals Sarvatathāgata”.

⁷⁴ MVT II.95, tr. Hodge 2003: 148-49.

⁷⁵ MVT II.95 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 149.

⁷⁶ MVT X.1 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 216-17.

⁷⁷ Cf. MVT X.3, tr. Hodge 2003: 217.

⁷⁸ MVT XI.3, tr. Hodge 2003: 233.

By reciting this *Vidyā*, it will be as though you were seeing the intrinsically existent Maṇḍala (*svabhāva-maṇḍala*), the residence of Sarvatathāgata; the representational *maṇḍala* which has been drawn is shown after this *Vidyā*, or the *maṇḍala* of all the Buddhas is seen after reciting it.⁷⁹

The role of the Queen of Vidyā in the creation of an external *maṇḍala* is explicitly indicated above. In addition she has also been described as the divinity who reveals Sarvatathāgata:

The Bhagavat Vairocana entered the *samādhi*, called ‘Infinite Victory’. No sooner had the Bhagavat entered that *samādhi* than there emerged the Vidyā Queen called ‘Universally Unimpeded Power’, which arises from the sphere of Sarvatathāgata.⁸⁰

Sarvatathāgata may be understood to designate *Tattva* or *Paramārtha*, which means “the Highest Reality”, “the Essence” or “the Heart”. The definition found in *MVT* of the *svabhāva-maṇḍala* as “the residence of Sarvatathāgata” again confirms that Sarvatathāgata indicates the Essence, which is *Dharmadhātu*. Subsequently, it follows that the transformational power of the Queen of Vidyā is associated with *vāk*, and it is this power that reveals *Dharmadhātu*.

Yet, the Queen of Vidyā is not only the revealer of *Dharmadhātu*; she is *Dharmadhātu* itself. Buddhaguhya places the Queen of Vidyā at the ontological level of *Dharmadhātu*, informing that her power is independent of past, present and future. He states, “that which is unhindered in the past, present and future is *śūnya*, in other words, *Dharmadhātu*”.⁸¹ *MVT* also states that the experiential horizon of *Dharmakāya* is not different from that of the Queen of Vidyā; Buddhaguhya comments that this is evident, given that these two both perceive the true nature of things.⁸²

From these references, the characteristics of the Queen of Vidyā can be summarized.

- i) The Queen of Vidyā is the essence of the *vāk cakra* and is therefore the source of *mantra* as well.
- ii) A tantric practitioner who attains the ultimate realization, an unobstructed state without hindrances, does so through her power.

⁷⁹ *MVT* XI.3 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 233-34.

⁸⁰ *MVT* X.18, tr. Hodge 2003: 227.

⁸¹ *MVT* X.1 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 216.

⁸² Cf. *MVT* X.2 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 217.

- iii) She is the revealer of the Supreme Essence (*Paramārtha*; *Dharmadhātu*).
- iv) She is equivalent to *Dharmadhātu*. The experience of the Queen of Vidyā, that of the *vāk cakra* and the experience of *Dharmadhātu* are not different from each other.

***The Representation of the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā in Alchi
and the Textual Descriptions of the Trika Goddess Parā***

Certain characteristics of the Queen of Vidyā indicate the possibility of a relation between the Buddhist Goddess Prajñāpāramitā and the Trika Goddess Parā. The symbolism used in reference to the Queen of Vidyā bears striking similarities to that concerning Goddess Parā who has her origin in the philosophy of *Parāvāk*, the highest level of *vāk*. The iconographic specifications for the image of Goddess Parā in some Trika Śaivaite texts (including some south Indian examples, influenced by texts from Kashmir)⁸³ display a remarkable affinity to the representation of the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā in Alchi. The name of Goddess Parā varies, because the Goddess Parā of Kashmiri Trika is incorporated into and superimposed upon the local goddesses of different regions; depending on the source text, one finds ‘*Parā*’ as co-equivalent to goddesses such as Kubjikā or Tripurasundarī. These goddesses share a common theological base in the philosophy of *Parāvāk*.⁸⁴ Sanderson examines the descriptions given in various texts regarding the visualization of the Goddess Parā;⁸⁵ his research demonstrates that, while these descriptions are not exactly identical, there are still certain common features that are common to all, such as “white like the moon” or as a crystal; “in a white robe”; and having one, three or four faces. When she is described with four hands, she holds a rosary and a book in one pair of hands, and the other pair shows the gesture of *cinmudrā* (the thumb and the index finger forming a circle), with the other hand bearing a trident or a lotus.

The images of Prajñāpāramitā as depicted in Alchi show benevolent facial expressions and bear the *dharmacakrapravartana mudrā*. The hand attributes of these images are especially remarkable in their affinity to those which are prescribed for the Goddess Parā. Although there are slight differences, the lotus, book and rosary are common in all images of the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā. The *dharmacakrapravartana mudrā* was understood to

⁸³ See Sanderson 1990.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.: 32-42.

be a combination of *jñāna mudrā* (touching the chest with the left hand) and the *vyākhyāna mudrā* (presenting the right hand palm forward, with the tip of the index finger touching the thumb tip), respectively representing her aspects: *jñāna* aspect and the exposition aspect.⁸⁶ The *vyākhyāna mudrā* appears identical to the *cinmudrā* of the Goddess Parā. It should be, however, noted that the six-armed form of Prajñāpāramitā in Alchi does not correspond to any description of Goddess Parā with either two or four hands. This six-armed Prajñāpāramitā is rather unique; the usual representation of the Goddess is either with two or four arms.⁸⁷ Bhattacharyya says that no description of the six-armed Goddess has been discovered in any Indian Buddhist text, yet tells of a Chinese text that describes a six-armed form of Prajñāpāramitā.⁸⁸

On the second story of the *sumtseg*, an image of Prajñāpāramitā understood to be a female representation of Mahāvairocana is of particular note (*Pl.* 37). She is coloured white, with three clear eyes reminiscent of the three-eyed visage of the Goddess Parā as described in the second verse of her invocation in the *Parātriṃśikātātparyadīpikā*.⁸⁹

The iconographic similarity observed between the Buddhist Goddess Prajñāpāramitā in Alchi and the Hindu Goddess Parā seems to reflect at least a mutual interaction, if not co-equivalent assimilation. It is likely that this interrelation might have been aided by their commonly-held association with Sarasvatī, the ancient goddess of knowledge, who is also the goddess of *vāk* (Vāgdevī), or rather even this association would have given them access to Sarasvatī's iconographic features. The Goddess Parā is overtly associated with Sarasvatī in her aspect of "the embodiment of *vāk* (Vāgīśvarī)" or "of the alphabet (Mātrkāśarasvatī, Lipidevī)".⁹⁰ The Goddess Prajñāpāramitā is related to this ancient deity more so in her aspects of knowledge and inspiration; therefore, she is adored in Buddhism as the source of *prajñā*. The iconographic descriptions of Sarasvatī given in *Viṣṇudharmottara* are reminiscent of those of both

⁸⁶ Cf. Saraswati 1958: 129ff; cf. Bhattacharyya 1978: 43.

⁸⁷ For an exhaustive discussion about the iconographic features of the Goddess, see Bhattacharyya 1978: 38-39, 41; Shaw 2006: 171-80.

⁸⁸ Cf. Bhattacharyya 1978: 59-60. He informs that the Chinese *Dhāraṇīsamuccaya*, translated in about CE 1000, deals with a six-armed form of Prajñāpāramitā.

⁸⁹ The text is the commentary of the *Parātriṃśikālaghuvṛtti* composed in Cidambaram. "May the Supreme Power [Parā] protect you, [she who is as brilliantly white] as a markless moon, three-eyed, adorned with the crescent moon [upon her hair], her [two] hands showing the gesture (*mudrā*) and the book." – *Parātriṃśikātātparyadīpikā* 2, quoted and tr. Sanderson 1990: 33.

⁹⁰ Cf. Sanderson 1990: 43.

the lesser-known Goddesses: she is described as four-armed, white-coloured, dressed in white garments and bedecked with many ornaments; her four hands hold such attributes as a manuscript, a white lotus, a rosary, a musical instrument, a water vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*) and so on.⁹¹ The rosary is said to represent time and the vessel of the Goddess contains the nectarine fluid of all Śāstras.⁹² The reference of *kamaṇḍalu* should be seen in relation to the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā in *Pl.* 37; her third eye might not only be related to that of the Goddess Parā but also to that of the Vajraśāradā form of Sarasvatī in Buddhism.⁹³ As their iconographic resemblance overlap, the concept of the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā might possibly have been incorporated with the *vāk* aspect of Sarasvatī.⁹⁴

The passive visual impact of *maṇḍalas* cannot be properly understood away from their active, meditative dimension wherein the process of visual imagination is fundamentally co-ordinated by *mantras*. *Vāk*, the source of *mantra*, may be envisaged as the bridge between the multiple forms of *maṇḍalas* and the Ultimate Dharma. On the one hand, it is the power of transformation, both centripetally and centrifugally, as it reveals the *Dharmadhātu* to sustain in all beings and takes the practitioner to the realization of the *Dharmadhātu*. On the other hand, it is *Dharmadhātu* as much as its experience is equated to that of the *Dharmadhātu*. The conception of the Highest Divinity in the name of Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara-Mañjuśrī, or the references to Sarvatathāgata in relation to *vāk*, both demonstrates the tantric perception, and argues persuasively for the prevalence of the concept of *vāk* during the spread of *mantrayāna*. Though the topic remains as an issue for much deeper research, it is suggestive that the association of Prajñāpāramitā with the archetypal Goddess of *Vāk*, Sarasvatī and the Parā Goddesses surely implies a strong aspect of *vāk* within Prajñāpāramitā, which would not be separate or isolated from her attributes of *prajñā*.

The importance of the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā needs to be seen in the broad context of Tantrism, as a part of the overall cultural ambience, where *śakti* (divine energy) goddesses gained much popularity on the basis of the philosophy and practice of *vāk*.

⁹¹ Cf. *Viṣṇudharmottara* III.64 and 73, tr. Kramrisch 1928: 86, 97.

⁹² *Ibid.*: 86.

⁹³ Vajraśāradā has a crescent in her crown, is three-eyed and two-armed, carrying the book in the left hand and the lotus in the right (cf. Bhattacharyya 1968: 351).

⁹⁴ Āryasarasvatī, often revered by Buddhist tantrics, being also called Vajrasarasvatī, is of a white complexion, and holds in her left hand a lotus stalk with the Prajñāpāramitā text atop it (cf. *ibid.*).

The prominence that Prajñāpāramitā attained along with the maturation of Mahāyāna Buddhism, marks a palpable development: Dharma, as the Universal Principle, is conceived as of the nature of the Creative Feminine. “The apparent swiftness with which Prajñāpāramitā rose on the Mahāyāna horizon”⁹⁵ is surprising when one limits one’s study to her image as the Buddhist Mother Goddess amidst the patriarchal pantheon of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas: however, when one looks instead at the popular religions of the time, diverse in theology yet together taking part in the overall creation of religious images, it is not surprising to find the Buddhist Goddess of Wisdom clad in the garb of the ancient Vedic Goddess of *Vāk*. When considering the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā in the context of her affinity to the Queen of Vidyā, the Goddesses Parā and Sarasvatī, she clearly reflects the philosophy of *vāk*, which might well have influenced the geometric format of *maṇḍalas* as well as the whole spatial planning of Alchi.

⁹⁵ Shaw 2006: 167.

IV.

The Doctrine of Vāk in Trika Śaivism

ALTHOUGH the doctrine of *vāk* has been explored mainly from the perspective of language or literature, it directs to a metaphysical reality much broader than the levels of aural or verbal expression: it encompasses *all* sensual perception, expression and cognition, including visual images and thought processes. The exegesis of *vāk* essentially brings together the two extreme poles of Hindu theology – the indivisible Ultimate and the variety of phenomena – and suggests their non-duality by analysing the transformational power of the Ultimate, *Parāvāk*.

The conception of perceptible *maṇḍalas* as the reflective image (*pratibimba*) of the *samādhi-maṇḍala* hearkens to the concepts of *bimba–pratibimba* in Trika Śaivism.¹ Trika Śaivism maintains that the Divine Consciousness is mirrored in the universe, and that the universe is mirrored in the Divine Consciousness; ultimately, however, there is neither that which is reflected (*bimba*) nor the reflection (*pratibimba*), but only the independent free will (*svātantrya*) of the Divine Consciousness. The infinite variety which is mirrored in the Divine Consciousness is merely the expansion of the Divine Consciousness itself. As much as the concept of *vāk* is pivotal in explaining the logic of *bimba–pratibimba* in Trika Śaivism, it may similarly illuminate the relations among the tangible *maṇḍala*, the *samādhi-maṇḍala* and the *svabhāva-maṇḍala*, while providing us with valuable references regarding three crucial points which have been noted in chapters I and II of this book: (1) the qualities of *śūnya*, (2) the perceptible forms of certain *maṇḍalas*, and (3) the transformational power explained in the context of the *mantrayāna*.

It is indeed problematic to simply translate the Sanskrit term *vāk* as “sound”, “speech”, “word”, or “language”, since one of its central attributes is its multi-layered context; it is impossible to properly define this term without looking into its various

¹ Cf. Supra, pp. 109-110. For a short introduction to the concept of *bimba–pratibimba* in Trika Śaivism, see Swami Lakshman Joo 1991: 29-32.

levels. In order to dispel any naïve conception of *vāk* as ordinary, mundane speech, it is helpful to examine from the outset how the term *śabda*, which is equally complicated but usually translated as “word”, has been defined from the perspective of philosophy. The philosophy of Bhartṛhari gives many non-conventional meanings for this term;² these definitions may also be applied to the term *vāk*, as much as the theory of *vāk* has been developed on the basis of Bhartṛhari’s philosophy of *Śabdabrahman*. Aklujkar classified these various meanings of *śabda* into four groups:

- i) “Word” as an audible sound which conveys meaning.
- ii) “Word” as the mental impressions or images which correspond to the audible sounds that we call linguistic units.
- iii) “Word” as “a whole language, an entire system of linguistic symbols” or “a language, a collective set, a linguistic system” known by a person.
- iv) Ultimately, “word” is that principle, power, or force which is at the foundation of all linguistic knowledge. It is the entity that makes all individual languages possible.³

These four categories will help, at the least, in broadening one’s perception of the terms *śabda* or *vāk* in preparation for the traditional Trika reading of them.

IV.1 Four Levels of Vāk

Man speaks something through *vaikharī*, ideates through *madhyamā*, experiences some indeterminate state through *paśyantī* and experiences inwardly some truth through *parā*.⁴

This verse from the *Parātrīśikā-Vivaraṇa* (PTV) expresses how humans experience and cognize within the four levels of *vāk* – *vaikharī*, *madhyamā*, *paśyantī* and *parā*. Before beginning the commentary on the *Parātrīśikā*, Abhinavagupta, first describes the four levels of *vāk* in the context of the Devī’s question regarding the identity between *Anuttara* (the Highest, or the Absolute) and *kaulika* (bodily manifestations). It is implied in the exegesis that the four-levelled *vāk* is the essential principle on the basis of which is developed the non-duality of the phenomenal objects and the Absolute. In this context, these four levels are described as the transformation of the highest Lord through His *Śakti*.

² Aklujkar 2001.

³ Cf. Aklujkar 2001: 452-56.

⁴ PTV 5-9, tr. Singh 1988: 157, Sanskrit text p. 56.

The highest Lord is always intent on creativity (*visargaparamaḥ*) through His Śakti. He showers grace, manifests and withdraws without any restraint.⁵

Abhinavagupta keeps the four levels of *vāk* within the context of the manifestation of the highest Lord. *Parāvāk* consists of *Paramārtha* that is the undifferentiated consciousness (*cit-tattva*) of the highest Lord (*parameśvara*), meaning the Whole or the Complete. When His *icchāśakti* (power of will) awakens within the state of complete non-differentiation, *Parāvāk* is mirrored in the *paśyantī* where the “desire” to express is predominant, but the *vācyavācaka bhāva* (the principle of expression, literally “the nature of what is expressed and what expresses”) is still indeterminate, and the subject and the object of the cognition are still undivided. The differentiation between the subject and the object starts in the stage of *madhyamā*. In the *vaikharī* stage comes the determinate difference between them, and the object of expression attains a concrete form. In this way the commentary illustrates that the scripture called *Parātrīśikā* is the final result of the manifestation and the transformation of *Parāvāk* through three stages of *vāk*.⁶ From the above introductory notes on the doctrine of *vāk*, we can deduce the following points:

- i) *Parāvāk* or *Paramārtha*, the highest truth, is first echoed in an indeterminate form at the *paśyantī* level.
- ii) It is conceived in subtle forms on the *madhyamā* level.

⁵ *Trikahṛdaya* quoted in *PTV* 1, tr. Singh 1988: 14-15, Sanskrit text p. 5.

⁶ “So the inner content, i.e. question-answer which appears in the consciousness of the highest Lord in an undifferentiated way because of its being the highest truth, is thought of in the *paśyantī* stage in an indeterminate form (in *nirvikalpa* form) with a desire to put it in apportionment of letter, word and sentence; it is positioned with a sense of separateness in the *madhyamā* stage in a determinate form (i.e. in *savikalpa* form); it is finally expressed in the form of question and answer in the *vaikharī* stage, i.e. in gross speech consisting of *māyīya* letter, word and sentence. . . . The fact of question and answer (*vastu*) is an ever-present reality which is in the first instance, i.e. at the level of *parāvāk* without division. . . . The Self who is the natural state of all existents, who is Self-luminous, amusing Himself with question-answer which is not different from Himself, and in which both the questioner (as *Devī*) and the answerer (as *Bhairava*) are only Himself, reflects thus as I, ‘I myself, being thus desirous of wonderful delight knowing the truth as it is, appear as question and answer’.” (*PTV* 1, tr. Singh 1988: 15, Sanskrit text p. 5.) “This question-answer in its entirety resides really in the divine *parāvāk* whose quintessence is autonomy (*svātantrya*) which is independent of everything, which is unsurpassable and is able to bring about what is most difficult to accomplish, and which is not affected even by an iota of dependence on others.” (*PTV* 5-9, tr. Singh 1988: 108)

3. Finally, it is concretely formulated at the *vaikharī* level, where ordinary communication occurs.

These characteristics of the four levels of *vāk* are associated with the various roles of *śaktis*; at each stage of *vāk*, particular characteristics are brought forth by specific *śaktis*. Each *śakti* plays a crucial role in determining the nature of the relationship between the subject and the object of both the cognition and the expression. For instance, we have already seen that the rise of *icchāśakti* in *Parāvāk* entails the stage of *paśyantī vāk*. However, the state of *paśyantī vāk* is determined by *jñānaśakti* (power of knowledge); therefore, *paśyantī vāk* is – though still in an indeterminate form – characterized by the incipient differentiation between the subject and the object, or between what expresses (*vācaka*) and what is expressed (*vācya*).

The four levels of *vāk* correspond to three goddesses (Parā, Parāparā, Aparā) of Trika Śaivism as well as the five main *śaktis* of Śiva (*cit*, *ānanda*, *icchā*, *jñāna*, *kriyā*).

The Goddess Parā (*parā bhagavatī*), Consciousness-Power (*saṃvit prasarantī*) not different from Bhairava on the point of expansion according to Her essential nature, is said to be supreme *icchāśakti* (voluntary power). Her actual expansion as *jñānaśakti* (cognitive power) assumes the *parāpara* or *paśyantī* form and as *kriyāśakti* (conative power) the *aparā* or *madhyamā* form, etc.⁷

The supreme *icchāśakti*, the essential nature of the Goddess Parā at the point of expansion, should be understood as the dynamism of primary life-force rather than as the power of any particular or definite desire. The Goddesses Parāparā and Aparā result from the expansion of the Goddess Parā and they are manifested in the *jñānaśakti* (cognitive power) and the *kriyāśakti* (conative power). Table 4.1 shows their correspondence.

All these stages of the expansion are conceived as the aspects of Anuttara in the non-dualistic vision of Trika Śaivism, and the Parā (*parāvāk* or *Parāśakti*) is the pure

Table 4.1: Correspondence Between the Four Levels of Vāk, Three Śaktis and Five Śaktis of Śiva

<i>Four Levels of Vāk</i>	<i>Three Śakti Goddesses</i>	<i>Five Śaktis of Śiva</i>
<i>Parāvāk</i>	Parā	<i>Citśakti</i> and <i>Ānandaśakti</i>
<i>Paśyantī</i>	Parāparā	<i>Ichchāśakti</i> and <i>Jñānaśakti</i>
<i>Madhyamā</i>	Parāparā and Aparā	<i>Jñānaśakti</i> and <i>Kriyāśakti</i>
<i>Vaikhari</i>	Aparā	<i>Kriyāśakti</i>

⁷ PTV 2, tr. Singh 1988: 63, Sanskrit text p. 22.

state of *Anuttara*,⁸ which is characterized by complete awareness (*vimarśa*, *pratyavamarśa*, *cit*, *saṃvit*). The term *Anuttara* encompasses many diverse concepts, including as the complete union of Śiva and His consort, variously understood as Śakti, *saṃvit*, *cit*, *parāśakti* or *parāvāk*. The characteristics of the doctrine of the fourfold *vāk* become clearer when viewed in relation to its correspondence to the Śakti Goddesses and the powers of Śiva. While these systems of divine power explain cosmic creation and dissolution, the doctrine of *vāk* particularly well exposes their reflection in the microcosmic context such in the acts of cognition and expression.

Jayaratha⁹ describes the etymological dimension of the three levels of manifested *vāk* in his commentary on the verse of the Tantrāloka III.236: “When manifesting differentiation she is said [to assume] a threefold body known as *paśyantī*, *madhyamā*, and *vaikharī*, which is gross”. According to his commentary, *paśyantī* (seeing or visionary) is the consequence of *svasvātantrya* (autonomous self-determination) of *Parāvāk*. “When *Parāvāk* wishes to appear externally without producing the multiplicity associated with the *vācyavācakakrama* (the process of what is expressed and what expresses)”, it is called *paśyantī*, “because the light of *cit* still prevails” and “since she is a form of the Subject who sees (*draṣṭṛ*)”.¹⁰ Next comes the *madhyamā* (middle) stage, so-called because it intermediates between the subject who sees and the object to be seen (*drśya*). Here the act of sight or viewing (*darśana*) is predominant.

This is a plane where, although the process made of what expresses and what is expressed begins to unfold in outline, the [*vāk*] nevertheless remains grounded in the intellect (*buddhimātranīṣṭha*) in a form that is both manifest and unmanifest (*sphuṭāsphuṭarūpatvena*).¹¹

In the *vaikharī* (corporeal) stage, the objective world predominates and the multiplicity is clearly manifested. This stage is called *vaikharī* because *vāk* becomes completely bodily and extended through the development of phonemes, speech organs, the places of articulation and the articulatory process.

⁸ “Whether in the initial stage of *parā* or the final stage of *parā*, both of which are the expression of revered *parāśakti* and also in its stage of expansion in the form of *parāpara*, it is throughout the display of the immutable *anuttara*.” (PTV 4, tr. Singh 1988: 79-80, Sanskrit text p. 30)

⁹ TĀ III.236, tr. Padoux 1992: 170.

¹⁰ TĀ III.236 comm. (vol. II: 577), tr. Padoux 1992: 170-71.

¹¹ Ibid.

The three stages of *vāk* evolve from the highest state of *Parāvāk*, in terms of the relationship between the subject and the object. In *paśyantī vāk*, the subject (the *śabda* or the knower) is predominant, whereas in *vaikharī vāk*, the object (the *artha*, or the known) predominates. The *madhyamā vāk* intermediates between the subject and the object, *śabda* and *artha*, the knower and the known; it is the act of seeing, or the knowledge itself. The etymological meaning of the four levels of *vāk* given in Jayaratha's commentary of *TĀ* tells that the central concern of the doctrine is how the highest Subject is identified with the manifold objects. It confirms the openness of its scope, applicable not only to the linguistic field but also to other processes wherein the differentiation between the subject and the object is crucial. We may note the Devī's question in the *Parātriśikā* that entails the exposition of the four levels of *vāk* in the commentary of Abhinavagupta: "How does the *anuttara* immediately bring about the achievement of the multiple manifestations, by the knowledge of which one becomes one with *khecarī*?"¹² Ultimately, the doctrine of *vāk* explains how the non-dual state of Reality can be explained in spite of the manifoldness of objects and subjects.

The four levels of *vāk* can be viewed in two ways in respect to their sequences, as both emanative and absorptive processes. One's visualization of the *maṇḍala* in the *samādhi* is analogous to the emanative process of *Parāvāk* in the sense that the ideation of *śūnya* is ultimately followed by the manifest forms of the deities. Moreover, the artists' creations also analogize the emanative process of *vāk* in the sense that the execution of the artistic creation springs from the state of the formlessness and ends with concrete forms. On the other hand, the ritualistic process which is intended towards oneness with the Divine can be understood as tracing back from the corporeal to the pure consciousness and therefore is analogous to the absorptive process of *vāk*. For instance, one practice using a *bīja mantra* exemplifies the absorptive process of *vāk* wherein one's individual ego is dissolved through the physical sound of the *bīja mantra* into the transcendental heart of *mantra* itself, which is the pure light of the Divine. Furthermore, the process of aesthetic experience could be appropriately understood as the absorptive process of *vāk*. Given that the present volume is conducting an inquiry into the doctrine of *vāk* in relation to the aesthetic experience of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, we may look into each level of *vāk* in specific regard to the absorptive sequence.

¹² *Parātriśikā* 1, tr. Singh 1988: 5. *Khecarī* means "the one who moves in the vast void (*kha*) of Divine Consciousness".

IV.1.1 *Vaikharī vāk*

Vaikharī is Not Mere a Language, But is rather a Śakti in Its Essence

Vaikharī vāk is often understood as “the gross, spoken language”. Padoux, an eminent scholar of *vāk* in Trika Śaivism, states with regard to the levels of *vāk*: *Vaikharī* is the final materialization of a continual, timeless and unbroken process which, from *parā* and, metaphysically, without actually ever leaving her, starts with the visionary (*paśyantī*) and, through the intermediate (*madhyamā*), results in the corporeal (*vaikharī*).¹³

It is true that, in the traditional texts, the discussion of *vaikharī vāk* often entails illustrations of the emanational process of the phonemes. Thus it is rather natural that the *vaikharī vāk* is, at a first glance, equated to the category of gross language or speech, and that it is characterized by its phonetic aspect. In consequence, the *vaikharī vāk* – indeed, the entire doctrine of *vāk* – has been studied in the context of discursive language, especially in the domain of phonetics and grammar. Having accepted the general understanding of *vaikharī vāk*, the task of locating it within a discussion on aesthetics would go beyond the limits of its definition as language or speech. We need to carefully consider the characteristics of *vaikharī vāk* from its textual sources to examine whether it is merely limited to discursive verbal language. If the doctrine of *vāk* can explain the non-dualism of the Absolute with the manifold phenomena, it should include not only audible speech but also every object of every sense.

First of all, *vaikharī vāk* is defined as the state where *vācya* (what is expressed: meaning) and *vācaka* (what expresses: word) are divided,¹⁴ meaning that it consists not only of *vācaka* but also of *vācya* in its scope. If we suppose that *vaikharī vāk* is merely gross speech, the *vācya* aspect of *vaikharī* becomes difficult to explain.¹⁵ *Vaikharī* refers to the state “in which manifestation of difference of all the existents has proceeded fully (*vaikharīprasṛtabhāvabheda-prakāśa-paryantam*)”.¹⁶ *Vaikharī*

¹³ Padoux 1992: 219.

¹⁴ Cf. *PTV* 1, tr. Singh 1988: 8.

¹⁵ Padoux also mentions that *vaikharī* consists of *vācya* and *vācaka*: “*Vaikharī*, therefore, consists of all the elements of the ‘significants’ empirically manifested and perceptible to the ear, namely of ‘gross’ phonemes and speech. . . . But *vaikharī* also consists of all that has to be expressed (*vācya*), namely ‘gross’ images and representations belonging to conceptual thought, and material objects which form the manifested universe, which the Word brings into existence and words denotes.” (Padoux 1992: 220)

¹⁶ *PTV* 1, tr. Singh 1988: 9.

denotes the entire manifested world, and is not limited to the sense of language, and it clearly includes the words and objects which the words designate.

If *vaikharī vāk* is not mere a language, a question arises, “why has *vaikharī vāk* been described over and over along with the emanation of the phonemes?” The answer might be found on examining the descriptions of its association with the gross level of *prāṇa* that flows in a human body. Texts often describe the phonetic aspect of *vaikharī* as linked to the breathing process. The association of *vaikharī vāk* with *prāṇa* is explained in Rājānaka Rāma’s commentary of the *Spandakārikā* 48.¹⁷ He states:

The sole support of the form of *vāk* known as the Corporeal Voice (*vaikharī*) is the vital breath (*prāṇa*) that manifests the individual phonemes, etc. It manifests when the wind of the vital breath, impelled by the (conscious) exertion applied according to the intention of each speaker, strikes the chest and other.¹⁸

Further on, he writes:

When it (*parāśakti*) assumes the form of *vaikharī vāk*, it is said to be the gross power of action because its manifestation depends upon the pulse (*parispanda*) of the individual soul’s vital breath (*prāṇa*).¹⁹

Vaikharī vāk is manifested in the corporeal body with the support of *prāṇa*, and it starts its function when one wishes and intends to do particular actions.²⁰ Here, *vaikharī vāk* is the existential basis, or the precondition of the physical language or any expression out of our body or mind. We find another remarkable account from his commentary, which tells that *vaikharī vāk* is something subtler than the gross sound of the phonemes.

¹⁷ Available sources of Sanskrit manuscripts of *SpK* have different chapter divisions. I follow Dyczkowski’s numbering of *kārikās* in his translation (Dyczkowski 1994).

¹⁸ *SpV* 48, tr. Dyczkowski 1994: 131. Dyczkowski translates *vāk* as “speech”, which might mislead the understanding of the doctrine of *vāk*. Therefore, here I present the original term without translation.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 132.

²⁰ According to Rājānaka Rāma, *icchāśakti* corresponds to *Madhyamā vāk* (*SpV* 48 by Rājānaka Rāma, tr. Dyczkowski 1994: 132). Then we can interpret that the action of *vaikharī vāk* is triggered by *icchāśakti* in *madhyamā vāk*. Therefore, we read in the commentaries, “set in motion according to the will of the person” or “impelled by the (conscious) exertion applied according to the intention of each speaker”.

It is a form of sound common to all (*sāmānyadhvanirūpā*), having the form of the letters (*varṇa*) which are divided into vowels, consonants, and so forth, but it proceeds without being affected by the variety of those who speak it. This is how the aspect of *vāk* that is called the Corporeal (*vaikharī*), the receptacle of the breath (*prāṇamātrāśrayā*) manifested with the division of the phonemes, and so forth, expands (*vivṛttiḥ*).²¹

The above quotation is puzzling if the reader is limited to the idea that “*vaikharī vāk* is none other than the discursive speech”. One notes that the phonemes, sentences or languages are merely gross forms of *vaikharī vāk*, and its subtle dimension is in the nature of *sāmānya-dhvanirūpa*, which is not affected by individual variations of expression or form. One might understand from this that *vaikharī vāk* appears not only in the form of expressed verbal sounds, but it essentially rests in the subtle form of *dhvani* (resonance), which has a universal character. A verse from *TĀ* confirms that *vaikharī vāk* should be understood more in terms of its subtle dimension than being in the limited sense of physical language.

That which is the cause of the rise of the manifested phonemes is the gross *vaikharī*, whose work (effect) is speech, etc.²²

It is clear from this verse that the speech organ and articulation of language are merely the expansion of the gross *vaikharī*.

Vaikharī vāk is the Direct Cause of the Objective World

Returning to the question of why *vaikharī vāk* has been often described along with the process of pronouncing phonemes, it can now be understood that language is one of the most appropriate examples to describe the expansion of the subtle *vaikharī vāk*: the gross, vocal speech is, first of all, produced physically by means of the contact between *prāṇa* and the bodily organs. Distinct phonemes represent the function of the *prāṇa*, the vehicle or the channel through which *vaikharī vāk* manifests. As phonemes are mere examples of the expansion of *vaikharī vāk*, examples of this gross form of *vaikharī* would be infinite because *vaikharī vāk* “is expressed in varied scriptural and worldly forms (*śāstrīyalaukikādi-bahubhedaṃvyaktayām*)”.²³ Rājānaka Rāma names

²¹ *SpV* 48 by Rājānaka Rāma, tr. Padoux 1992: 217.

²² *TĀ* III.244b, 245a (vol. II: 582):

*yā tu sphuṭānām varṇānāmutpattai kāraṇaṃ bhavet |
sā sthūlā vaikharī yasyāḥ kāryaṃ vākyādi bhūyasā ||*

²³ Cf. *PTV* 4, tr. Singh 1988: 79. “*Kathayāmi* means: ‘I am expressing it by use of appropriate names the series of utterances up to *vaikharī* that arise from the venerable *parāśakti* and are expressed in varied scriptural and worldly forms’ . . .”

the phonemic manifestation of *vaikharī* as *varṇa-vaikharī* and, furthermore, refers to its musical manifestation (*svara-vaikharī*) as well.²⁴ The *vaikharī vāk* that produces the phonemes is the very principle that produces the objective world.

When [with the movement of the breath, *vāk*] reaches the cavity of the mouth and divides itself according to [the different] points of articulation [of phonemes] – the throat and the rest – it is called *vaikharī*. This [*vāk*], due to the impressions of the external world, transforms itself into such objects as pots and the like, and can thus be grasped by sight and the other [senses].²⁵

It may be understood, therefore, that in its essence, *vaikharī vāk* is energy. Its receptacle is the *prāṇa* (vital energy), and it appears in the form of *vācya* (the object) and *vācaka* (the subject) in dependence of the *prāṇa* of a living being.

Vaikharī on the Plane of Aparāśakti (Power of Differentiation) and Kriyāśakti (Power of Action)

Vaikharī vāk appears in the form of *vācya* and *vācaka*. From the above examination of textual sources, it becomes evident that *vaikharī vāk* is energy: it is *aparāśakti*, the energy that manifests differentiation within the entire phenomenal reality, between *vācya* and *vācaka*, between object and subject. Here, the sphere of objects dominates over the sphere of subjects, and the principle of *māyā* (delusion), which is also the manifestation of Śiva, hinders the identification between subject and object.

Aparā is placed where the world of objects predominates, dominated by Viṣṇu, Brahmā, and Indra, when they take in themselves *māyā* and the rest. This power, however, comes to them thanks to the grace only of the Supreme Lord (*parameśvaraprasādam*).²⁶

Vaikharī vāk is on the plane of *aparāśakti* where the power of action (*kriyāśakti*) predominates. As is implied by the elaborate accounts of *vaikharī vāk* found in the context of *aparāśakti* and *kriyāśakti*, the exposition of *vaikharī vāk* has its primary importance in the context of the non-dualistic soteriology. It is stated that *vaikharī vāk* is the source of fetters and bonds when its origin of *Parāvāk* is not recognized, but

²⁴ “Again, just as the expansion of this (power) in the form of the Corporeal Voice of phonemic sounds (*varṇa-vaikharī*) is infinitely (varied), so is its development in the form of the Corporeal Voice of music (*svara-vaikharī*) with its diversity of notes (*svara*), scales (*grāma*), ascending and descending patterns (*mūrcchanā*), runs (*tāna*), classes of melodic modes (*jāti*) and modes (*rāga*), etc.” (*SpV* 48, tr. Dyczkowski 1994: 131)

²⁵ *Vṛtti* on the *VP*, quoted by Somānanda in his *ŚD*, chapters 7-8, tr. Padoux 1992: 218, n. 120.

²⁶ *ĪPV* 1.5.13 (vol. 1: 254-55), tr. Padoux 1992: 216-17, n. 117.

once the knowledge of its true nature is attained, it is the source of liberation.²⁷ The understanding of *vaikharī vāk* as *aparāśakti* and *kriyāśakti* is central to the doctrine of *vāk*, because without the knowledge of its essential nature it is the source of bondage and will obstruct one's way to the Divine.²⁸ If *vaikharī vāk* is merely understood as the gross forms of language, or as the objective world, it is indeed the source of bondage to objects and concepts. In such a case, the next stage of *madhyamā* cannot be induced.

IV. 1.2 Madhyamā vāk

Madhyamā vāk has the Form of Dhvani (resonance) beyond Prāṇa (vital breath), and is supported by Antaḥkaraṇa (the internal organ of intelligence)

Regarding the emanative process of *vāk*, *madhyamā vāk* is the intermediate stage between *paśyantī* and *vaikharī*. *Vaikharī* is supported by *prāṇa*. Through *prāṇa*, *vaikharī vāk* – which is essentially energy – would manifest herself in bodily forms. The *madhyamā vāk* that precedes *vaikharī vāk* in the cosmogonical expansion exists beyond any individual experience of *prāṇa*. Rājānaka Rāma expounds upon *madhyamā vāk*:

Its nature is a peculiar resonance (*dhvani*) that has neither beginning nor end and arises spontaneously within the body of each living being independently of the effort exerted by vital breath.²⁹

It is said that *madhyamā vāk* manifests herself “spontaneously” beyond the *vaikharī* level that one experiences through the exertion of *prāṇa*. In the descriptions of the *dhvani* nature of *madhyamā*, one characteristic that is often emphasized is that of its timelessness.

²⁷ Cf. *SpK* 48: *seyaṃkriyātmikāśaktiḥśivasya paśuvartinī |*
bandhayitrī syamārgasthā jñātā siddhyupapādikā ||

“This Śiva’s power of action, residing in the fettered soul, binds it, (but) when (its true nature) is understood and it is set on its own path, (this power) bestows the fruits of *yoga* (*siddhi*).” (Tr. Dyczkowski 1994: xvii)

²⁸ “When this wealth of *vāk* is recognized in this way to be the power of the Supreme Lord, it bestows the highest perfection, but when it is conditioned by its association with the many fettered souls, it is the cause of bondage.” (*SpV* 48, tr. Dyczkowski 1994: 132)

²⁹ *SpV* 48, tr. Dyczkowski 1994: 130. Cf. Padoux 1992: 214. Cf. *Vṛtti* on *VP* which is also in Rājānaka Rāma’s commentary: “Transcending the operation of the vital breath (*prāṇavṛttim atikramya*), it is solely based on the (activity of) the intellect (*buddhi*).” (Tr. Dyczkowski 1994: 131)

“*Madhyamā vāk* arises spontaneously within the body of each living being.” But where? The texts say that its support or vehicle is *antaḥkaraṇa* (the internal organ of intelligence). Abhinavagupta gives an analytical description of *madhyamā vāk*:

Madhyamā, he [Utpaladeva] writes, is that energy of self-awareness (*vimarśaśakti*) which activates the internal organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*), which is to say *manas*, *buddhi* and *ahaṃkāra* resting (*viśrāntam*) on the substratum of vital energy (*prāṇādhāre*), the eightfold subtle body (*puryaṣṭakātmani*), in the central place between [the flow of the breaths: *madhyabhūmau*].³⁰

Madhyamā vāk is in essence the energy of self-awareness (*vimarśaśakti*), which is experienced through the function of our internal cognitive organs or *antaḥkaraṇas*: *buddhi* (intellect), *ahaṃkāra* (ego) and *manas* (mind). In other words, these internal organs are the field of its action. In regard to the locus of these *antaḥkaraṇas*, Abhinavagupta said they reside in “the substratum of *prāṇa*” and “in the *madhyabhūmi*, the central place between *prāṇa* (inhalation) and *apāna* (exhalation)”. The *madhyamā vāk* is beyond the *prāṇa*. Somānanda also states that *madhyamā vāk* manifests when *vāk* activates *antaḥkaraṇas* in its emanative process, and in its absorptive process it is attained through the twin currents of *prāṇa* and *apāna*.³¹ *Madhyabhūmi* is the point between *prāṇa* and *apāna*. This point is a point of access to *madhyamā vāk*, whose nature is the energy of self-awareness (*vimarśaśakti*) and where distinct thoughts are on the way to the indistinct Whole.

Objectivity is Covered by Subjectivity

The internal cognitive organs (*antaḥkaraṇas*) are made empirically manifest in the form of internal thoughts. Thought constructs (*saṃkalpa*) and discursive thoughts (*vikalpa*) appear in the *madhyamā*; therefore, Somānanda uses the term *viññānarūpatva* (plane of thought) for the expression of *antaḥkaraṇas* in the *Śivadr̥ṣṭi* (SD II.6).³² In the emanative process of *vāk*, it is the stage of *madhyamā* where the differentiation between the *vācaka* and the *vācya* emerges, and the subject and the object are separated

³⁰ *ĪPVV* 1.5.13 (vol. 2: 188), tr. Padoux (with the help of A. Sanderson) 1992: 207.

³¹ “When this sound (*śabda*) reaches a plane of thought (*viññānarūpatve*) where the desire to express the objects appear, this is called *madhyamā*.” It continues, “This is due to the movement of *bindu* and *nāda* (*bindunādamarutkramāt*)”. Utpaladeva comments upon this passage: “This word is called *madhyamā*. Due to the movement of *bindu* and *nāda* means due to the process/sequence of *prāṇa* and *apāna*.” (ŚD II.6 and comm., pp. 41-42, tr. Padoux 1992: 214, n. 113)

³² Cf. *Ibid.*

from each other. “The *madhyamā* reveals the duality of *vācaka* and *vācya*.”³³ However, it has both distinct and indistinct forms (*parāparā*). “Owing to the reflective awareness attached thereto (*vimarśavyāpārā*)”, *madhyamā vāk* shares the nature of *Parāvāk*, which is the undifferentiated reality.³⁴ On the other hand, the distinct forms of *vaikharī vāk* rest latently within *madhyamā vāk*. Abhinavagupta draws the example of a child to explain that the distinctive names and forms already exist in *madhyamā vāk*. Here distinctive names and forms are the constituents of the objective world, which is the direct effect of *vaikharī vāk*.

The phonemes [making up the words] that he is aware of and that are audible pertain to the plane of *vaikharī*, in regard to which he is as if born blind [that is, he can hear but does not know to what the words refer]. It is therefore necessary that *vaikharī*, together with the places and organs of speech articulation which make it up, should already exist internally within *madhyamā*.³⁵

The manifestation of the objective world at the stage of *madhyamā* is neither physical nor empirical, and the objective world, though manifest, remains dominated by subjectivity, as illustrated by the example of a child’s cognitive development.

The relationship between the subject and the object – or between *vācaka* and *vācya* in *madhyamā vāk* – certainly describes a critical point of the aesthetic experience. The following passage by Abhinavagupta concerning *madhyamā vāk* is revealing because it forms the foundation for the connection between the *madhyamā* stage and the initial stage of identification between the subject and the object during the act of aesthetic relish.

It (*madhyamā vāk*) consists of a form of knowing (*vedana*) that is a covering [by pure consciousness] of the clearly manifested object of cognition; just as in *vācya* is *vācaka*, here *vācya* also is superimposed. Such an imposition, consisting of a reciprocal mixing and covering [of these two elements], can happen only if *vācaka* is entirely [superimposed] on *vācya*, which is all the manifest, and if all the manifest [is imposed on *vācaka*], and not otherwise. A cloth cannot cover another one if it is three or four fingerbreadths shorter.

³³ PTV, p. 5, tr. Padoux 1992: 205 – *madhyamā punaḥ tayor eva vācyavācakayoḥ bhedom*.

³⁴ “Owing to the reflective awareness attached thereto, [appears] as grounded in the same subject (*ādarśya sāmānādhikaraṇyena vimarśa vyāpārā*).” (PTV, p. 5, tr. Padoux 1992: 205)

In the plane of *madhyamā*, the (Goddess) *Parāparā* fully develops as residing in the supreme consciousness (*paraśamvid*). Cf. PVT, pp. 147-48.

³⁵ PTV, p. 159, tr. Padoux 1992: 212, n. 109.

And this omnipresence of all in all (*viśvātmakatvam*) is due to this mutual mixing up of the natures proper to [*vācya* and *vācaka*].³⁶

Madhyamā vāk consists of the process of knowing (*vedana*), which is defined as “a covering of the clearly-manifested object (*sphuṭavedyapracchādaka vedanarūpā*)”. It is revealed in the process of knowing because *antaḥkaraṇas* are themselves the field of *madhyamā vāk*. “The process of knowing” denotes “the reciprocal mingling and covering of *vācya* and *vācaka*”, the complete superimposition of the *vācaka* (the subject) upon the *vācya* (the object). This reciprocal mingling and covering of the two elements of subject and object is a precise description of the initial identification experienced during the act of aesthetic relish. One should be reminded that *madhyamā vāk* has been also defined as a form of sight (*darśana*).³⁷ The identification between a viewer and an object during aesthetic relish is a state exactly where a reciprocal mingling of the viewing subject and the viewed object takes place.

If the stage of *madhyamā vāk* is understood in terms of this stage of identification, how can one answer the question, “does subjectivity predominate over objectivity in the initial identification during an aesthetic experience?”. In the first stage of an aesthetic experience, at a first glance objectivity seems to predominate over subjectivity, because the selfhood of the viewer is forgotten and only the object of appreciation comes into the fore in the aesthetic realm. However, a deeper observation reveals us that there is a process in here where the objectivity of the viewer melts into the subjectivity of the object, and thus the relative objectivity of the individual is overcome. The discursive thoughts and the phenomenal constituents of the viewer are at rest within the “subjective being” of the object. Abhinavagupta makes explicit the relevance of this stage of *madhyamā vāk* to that of one’s identification in the aesthetic experience when he describes the gross form of *madhyamā vāk*. He refers to “the sound (*dhvani*) produced by a drum or any other similar instrument” as an example of the gross form of *madhyamā vāk*, “because their sound is both distinct and indistinct (*sphuṭāsphuṭarūpatva*)”.³⁸ He explains that it is this undivided aspect (*avibhāga*) of *madhyamā* that makes it aesthetically pleasant.³⁹ Here, Jayaratha comments:

³⁶ PTV, p. 148, tr. Padoux 1992: 210. I have given the Sanskrit terms of *vācya* and *vācaka*, while Padoux translates them “the expressed” and “the expressing”. For the term *vedana*, I have used “knowing” instead of “knowledge” in order to emphasize the dimension of ‘action’.

³⁷ Cf. Jayaratha’s commentary of TĀ III.236 (vol. II: 577). Supra p. 145.

³⁸ TĀ III.241b-2a (vol. II: 580).

³⁹ TĀ III.242b (vol. II: 581).

By being attracted to that (the undivided), the state becomes like ‘identification (*tanmayībhāva*)’.⁴⁰

Madhyamā vāk is on the Plane of Icchāśakti, Jñānaśakti and Kriyāśakti

Textual sources variously associate *madhyamā vāk* with *icchāśakti* (power of will), *jñānaśakti* (power of knowledge) and *kriyāśakti* (power of action). According to Rājānaka Rāma in his commentary on *SpK*, *icchāśakti* corresponds to *madhyamā vāk*.⁴¹ However, the *PTV* emphasizes that “the plane proper to *madhyamā* is on the level of *īśvara*, which is *kriyāśakti*”.⁴² As we have seen with *madhyamā vāk* being defined as *vedana* or *darśana* (act of knowing or seeing), it is the action that intermediates between the knower and the known in the cognitive process; and between the viewer and the viewed in the aesthetic relish. On the other hand, the *madhyamā vāk* is said to be in the plane of *jñānaśakti*, because it acts in the field of the internal cognitive organs, *antaḥkaraṇa*. Abhinavagupta explains the association of the *madhyamā* with *kriyāśakti* in *PTV*, and draws further affiliations to *jñānaśakti* in the *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivimarśinī*.

Because that which is what is expressed by thought comes between [*paśyantī* and *vaikharī*] it is [called] *madhyamā*. Its nature is that of the energy of cognition (*jñānaśaktirūpā*).⁴³

The text says that when *antaḥkaraṇas* are activated by *madhyamā vāk* it operates its proper functions, which are *saṃkalpa* (intentional thought activity), *niścaya* (judgement) and *abhimāna* (self-reference); these constitute the dualistic thought construction (*vikalpa*). Thus, *madhyamā*⁴⁴ is revealed to be thought (*cintana*).⁴⁵

IV. 1.3 Paśyantī vāk

The Intense and Synthetic Awareness of the Undivided Whole

From the viewpoint of the cognitive process, *paśyantī vāk* is the stage prior to the thought construction of *madhyamā vāk*. According to Abhinavagupta, *paśyantī vāk* is

⁴⁰ Jayaratha’s comm. on *TĀ* III.242. (vol. II: 581): *tenātrāpyāśaktyā tanmayībhāvo bhavediti bhāvaḥ*.

⁴¹ *SpV* 48, tr. Dyczkowski 1994: 132.

⁴² *PTV*, p. 148: *madhyamā tāvat svādhikārapade kriyāśaktyātmāny aiśvare pade . . .* (tr. Padoux 1992: 210).

⁴³ *ĪPVV* 1.5.13 (vol. 2: 188), tr. Padoux (with the help of A. Sanderson) 1992: 208.

⁴⁴ *Vimarśamayī vāk* in the text.

⁴⁵ *ĪPVV* 1.5.13 (vol. 2: 188), tr. Padoux (with the help of A. Sanderson) 1992: 207-08.

the initial stage of insightful knowledge (*prathamajñānakāla*), wherein there is no distinction between *vācaka* and *vācya* (*vācya*vācaka*viśeṣayoḥ abhedah*).⁴⁶ One grasps the undivided whole in the *paśyantī* stage.

This Śakti which is full of the awareness (*vimarśa*) of Grace for the entire world is, to begin with, non-different from *paśyantī* who is *parāmarśamayī*, i.e. who is always cognizant of the essential nature of the Divine and who has a hundred powers which are boundless in operation.⁴⁷

Here, *paśyantī vāk* is clearly described as *parāmarśamayī* (consisting of a holistic awareness), while the term *parāmarśa* is also one of the attributes of *Parāvāk*, as we read in Jayaratha's commentary on *TĀ* III.236: "She is that who is in the form of *Parāvāk*, and who is *parāmarśa* whose nature is the *aham* (the absolute I)".⁴⁸ *Paśyantī vāk* is described as being very similar to *Parāvāk* in nature, as it is the first expansion of *Parāvāk*.⁴⁹ However, *Parāvāk* is described as *vimarśamayī* (consisting of self-reflection) or *ahampratyavamarśa* (the reflective awareness of *aham*), whereas *paśyantī vāk* is said to be *idambhāvarūpasya pratyavamarśa* (the reflective awareness of objectivity) which is based on *aham* (*ahambhāvaviśrānti*).⁵⁰

In *paśyantī vāk*, objectivity has not yet arisen and pure subjectivity prevails.⁵¹ Although subjectivity (*ahantā*) prevails in this state, the rise of objectivity (*idantā*) is imminent. The holistic awareness (*parāmarśa*) of "the subject who sees" (*draṣṭṛ*)⁵² that prevails the *paśyantī* stage is accompanied by the *icchāśakti*, the will towards

⁴⁶ PTV 1 (p. 4): "At the time of initial indeterminate knowledge in *paśyantī* in which there is no distinction in the word (*vācaka*) and the referent (*vācya*), there was obviously not any sense of difference between the word and its referent." (Tr. Singh 1988: 8)

⁴⁷ PTV 1, tr. Singh 1988: 8, Sanskrit text p. 2: *sā ca śaktiḥ lokānugrahavimarśamayī prathamataḥ parāmarśamayapaśyantyāsūtrayīṣyamān-ānantaśaktiśatāvibhinnā...*

Padoux translates *parāmarśa* as "the intense form of consciousness" and gives a better translation of *lokānugrahavimarśamayī* as "a self-representation filled with grace for the world" (Padoux 1992: 189).

⁴⁸ Jayaratha's commentary on *TĀ* III.236 (vol. II, p. 577): *asyeti parāvāgrūpasya ahamātmanah parāmarśasya, . . .*

⁴⁹ PTV, pp. 82-83: *paśyantyāpi parābhaṭṭārikāyāḥ prathamaprasaratvāt . . .*

⁵⁰ Cf. *ĪPV* I.5.13 (vol. I: 251-54); quoted in Padoux 1992: 192.

⁵¹ Cf. Jayaratha's commentary of *TĀ* III.236 (vol. II: 577).

⁵² Ibid.

differentiation. As a consequence, the emergence of *vācya* and *vācaka* is grounded, and “the lineament of differentiation starts”.⁵³ This differentiation begins because *paśyantī vāk* awakens the latent function of the *icchāśakti*. *Paśyantī vāk* is thereby described as belonging to the category of *parāparā* (or *bhedābheda*: both difference and non-difference) as much as does *madhyamā vāk*. However, at the *paśyantī* level, *ahantā* (I-ness, subjectivity) still prevails, whereas *idantā* (That-ness, objectivity) is made concrete at the *madhyamā* level.

Abhinavagupta also identifies it with *icchāśakti*.⁵⁴ In *ŚD*, to illustrate the connection between *paśyantī vāk* and *icchāśakti*, Somānanda draws the example of a potter. As a potter whose act of making a pot begins by cognizing the will, the *icchāśakti* of *paśyantī* is preceded by “the subtle expansion of consciousness” (*sūkṣma ullāsaś citah*).⁵⁵ Alternatively, *paśyantī vāk* is described as consisting of *jñānaśakti* in association with the *sadāśiva tattva*, contrasting to *madhyamā vāk* that is ascribed to the plane of *kriyāśakti* in association with the *īśvara tattva*. For example, we read:

. . . *paśyantī* where the differentiation is incipient, and *madhyamā* where the differentiation appears, that are in the form consisting respectively of *jñānaśakti* and *kriyāśakti*, in the essence of *Sadāśiva* and *Īśvara*. . . .⁵⁶

The division between the *icchāśakti* and the *jñānaśakti* is indefinite according to the following remark of Abhinavagupta:

⁵³ *PTV*, pp. 6, 15: *bhedāsūtraṇarūpāyām paśyantyām* (cf. Padoux 1992: 189, n. 53). Padoux (1992: 190) defines the *paśyantī* stage as “a transition between the complete undifferentiation and the commencement of differentiation”. He explains that the *icchāśakti* “corresponds to the moment that follows immediately after that of the first complete and undifferentiated awareness. This moment is characterized by a subtle vibration (*parispanda*) of consciousness, [. . .] a first non-discursive stirring of the will toward this objectivity” (ibid.: 194).

⁵⁴ *PTV*, p. 4: “*Paśyantī* becomes aware through the sole movement of consciousness of anything which, desired [by it], is specifically awakened by a definite cause.” (Tr. Padoux 1992: 193) *ĪPV* 1.5.13 (vol. 2: 189): *iyam eva ca icchāśaktirūpa*.

⁵⁵ *ŚD* 2.84-5 (p. 91): “Just as the agent, be it a potter . . . , or any other person, becomes aware (*vimarśa*), in the form of an act of will (*icchārūpeṇa*), that ‘a pot should be made’, likewise here (in *paśyantī*), the same situation [occurs]. How could the will that thus precedes [action], develop if there was not . . . a subtle expansion of consciousness intent on the prospective object?” (Tr. Padoux 1992: 194, n. 66)

⁵⁶ *PTV*, p. 6: *paśyantyām yatra bhedāśasyāsūtraṇām yatra ca madhyamā bhedābhāṣaḥ, tatra ubhauatra jñānakriyāśaktimaye rūpe sadāśiveśvarasāre*.

icchāśakti has for its nature the desire to know the object which is to be known (*bodhyabubhutsāsvabhāva*). The desire to know is, in fact, nothing else in essence but knowledge itself (*bodhasvabhāva*), for there the [prospective] object is already revealed in the full light of manifestation.⁵⁷

Forms of Objects are Resorbed in the Stage of Paśyantī vāk

Paśyantī vāk is proximate to *Parāvāk*, which is an aspect of *Anuttara*, the Highest or the Absolute. However, it is not transcendental and beyond one's grasp, for it can be experienced by means of the proper condition.⁵⁸ It can be deduced from the textual sources that the proper means include memory (*smaraṇa*) and meditative concentration (*samādhāna*).

A passage from the *Vṛtti* of *VP* quoted by Abhinavagupta in his *ĪPVV*, describes *paśyantī vāk* at the experiential level, brought about in this case by meditative concentration (*samādhāna*).

Paśyantī, although the sequentiality is entirely resorbed in her (*pratisamhṛtakramāntaḥ satyapyabhede*), possesses however the energy [that animates sequentiality] (*samāviṣṭakramaśaktiḥ*). . . . She is attained by mental concentration (*pratilabdhāsamādhānā*). The forms of the objects of knowledge appear in her as immersed in consciousness, their form being either resorbed or absent (*saṃvinniṣṭhajñeyākārā pratilīnākārānirākārā ca*). All this appears in her in a variety of discrete aspects or as forms fused into each other, or it may appear as having lost all form (*paricchinānāthapratyavabhāsā saṃsrṣṭārtha-pratyavabhāsā ca sarvārthapratyavabhāsā praśānta pratyavabhāsā ca iti*).⁵⁹

The description of *paśyantī vāk* from this state of meditation given above is important specifically in the context of aesthetic absorption, because it illustrates how multiple objects appear within this state. They first of all lose their distinct forms as they are immersed in *saṃvid* (Divine Consciousness). However, the author subtly differentiates the forms at this stage of *paśyantī* according to their individualities:

- i) They appear in subtle forms, while retaining their specific characteristics.

⁵⁷ *ĪPVV* 1.5.13 (vol. 2: 189), tr. Padoux 1992: 195.

⁵⁸ Cf. *ĪPVV* 1.5.13 (vol. 2: 195): “One must consider the plane of *sadāśiva* (*sadāśiveśvaraśā*) as a great *paśyantī* (*mahāpaśyantī*) in comparison with the innumerable *paśyantīs* of the individual knowers subject to *māyā*.” (tr. Padoux 1992: 201)

⁵⁹ *Vṛtti* on *VP* 1.142, quoted in *ĪPVV* 1.5.19 (vol. 2: 226), tr. Padoux 1992: 191.

- ii) They are infused into one another and create a unity.
- iii) They become void.

The observation of these three different descriptions reveals that they signify the transformation from a state of subtle forms to the complete dissolution of all forms. The forms of the objects of knowledge lose their distinct nature. At once with this, also within the *paśyantī* level, there occurs the transformation of *vāk* itself.

The other means by which one might experience *paśyantī vāk* is the act of recollection (*smaraṇa*). Abhinavagupta states the following in his *PTV*:

Paśyantī is touched (*vimṛśati*) solely through “the act of stringing together” of awareness (*bodhasūtraṇamātreṇa*) of anything that is desired (*abhīpsitaṃ*), and which is specifically awakened by a fit cause (*samucitakāraṇaniyama prabodhitam*).⁶⁰

He continues, saying that, out of many mental impressions (of such qualities as a dark blue colour or the like), one recalls (*smṛtirvimṛśati*) only what is awakened by the memory as its cause (*smṛtibījaprabodhakaicityāt*).⁶¹ The phrase “the act of stringing together of awareness” in the above quotation should be interpreted as “the act of recollection” in the context. Here, the distinct forms are unmanifested (*nahī prathamajñānakāle bhedo'tra āsphurat*). It is remarkable that, in this context, Abhinavagupta draws the visual example of *mecaka*, the dark blue colour or the eye of a peacock tail; this visual example implies that *paśyantī vāk* is attained not only by a transformation of gross language, but also through visual memory. These textual descriptions of *paśyantī vāk* lead to a discussion of the doctrine of *vāk* intimately connected to the aesthetics of visuals.

That the act of recalling (*smaraṇa*) opens the door to *paśyantī vāk* is crucial. In the *TĀ*, Abhinavagupta equates memory in its highest sense to the Divine Consciousness, *saṃvitti* established in the manifested multiplicity.⁶² Memory is said to be non-

⁶⁰ *PTV*, p. 4: *tatastu paśyantī yadyat abhīpsitaṃ tattadeva samucitakāraṇaniyama prabodhitam bodhasūtraṇamātreṇa vimṛśati*. . . . Padoux (1992: 193) translates the verse, “*Paśyantī* becomes aware through the sole movement of consciousness of anything which, desired [by it], it specifically awakened by a definite cause.”

⁶¹ *PTV*, p. 4: *yathā anekabhāvābhāvajñānasamśkārasamśkr̥tāyā mecakadhiyaḥ smṛtibījaprabodhakaicityāt kiṃcīteva smṛtirvimṛśati*.

⁶² *TĀ* 5.137-39: “Memory (*smṛti*), a recalling to mind (*smaraṇa*), is at the root of all the modalities of existence (*pūrvam sarvabhāveṣu vastutaḥ*); verily its innermost nature is the *mantra* (*mantrasvarūpa*). It is that which allows the apprehension of the deeper nature of these modalities

discursive (*avikalpa*) as well as discursive (*vikalpa*). In memory, although distinct objects are represented (*vimarśa viśeṣātmaka vikalpa rūpa*) and are thereby discursive, the potency of distinctive expression (*śabdabhāvanā*)⁶³ is shrouded (*saṃvartita śabdabhāvanārūpa*).⁶⁴ How can these two contradictory descriptions – both discursive and non-discursive – coexist? In regard to this question one should presuppose that in the state of memory there occurs a “transformation” from the discursive to the non-discursive, or vice versa.

The Gross Paśyantī is Nāda (resonance)

The descriptions given above of mental concentration and memory as the means to reach *paśyantī vāk* present a picture of *paśyantī vāk* as the subtle, internal synthesis of multiple forms. It appears unlikely for *paśyantī vāk* to be experienced by any of the five sense-organs, or for it to be nakedly manifest as any particular external object. However, *paśyantī vāk* is nevertheless also described as something that *can* be directly experienced by our senses. For instance, the *paśyantī vāk* is conceived to be of the nature of “such a subtle murmur” (*sūkṣmasaṃjalpasvabhāva*).⁶⁵ In *TĀ*, Abhinavagupta states:

The gross *paśyantī* (*sthūla-paśyantī*) that is in the form of resonance (*nādarūpiṇī*) as light and beautiful as a series of musical notes (*svarasandarbhasubhagā*), is not divided into phonemes, and so forth.⁶⁶

Here, it is “the undivided flow” of musical notes, not divided into distinct sonic units, that is given as an example of *nāda* and of the gross *paśyantī*.

→ when they arise (*sarvabhāveṣu rañjikā*). Memory, [indeed], induces this nature. Colouring [or taking hold of] all objective modalities, as it is present in the multiplicity of forms, it partakes of the innate nature of all things (*svasvabhāvasya saṃprāptiḥ*), it is consciousness (*saṃvitti*) in the highest sense [of this word] (*paramārthataḥ*), abiding in what has been manifested. Know that as such it is called supreme reality [or essence] (*parā*).” (Tr. Padoux 1992: 397-98). Cf. *ĪPV* I.4.1 (vol. I: 153): “Thus, he who remembers is none other than the supreme Lord (*evaṃ ca sa eva prameśvaraḥ smarati*)” (tr. Padoux 1992: 397).

⁶³ Torella translates *śabdabhāvanā* as “a potential linguistic articulation”. According to Bhartṛhari, *śabdabhāvanā* is present, in various degrees, in every cognition. It exists even in *avikalpa* cognition, though in a subtle form (cf. Torella 2002: 125-26, n. 42).

⁶⁴ Cf. *ĪPVV* 1.5.19 (vol. 2: 226), tr. Padoux 1992: 199.

⁶⁵ Cf. *ĪPVV* 1.5.13 (vol. 2: 190, l. 18) mentioned in Padoux 1992: 196.

⁶⁶ *TĀ* III.237b-8a (vol. 2: 578):
tatra yā svarasandarbhasubhagā nādarūpiṇī ||
sā sthūlā khalu paśyantī varṇādyaprabhāgataḥ |

Then, what is *nāda*? The Netra Tantra defines that the *nāda* is the sound that fills the world when *sphoṭa* (a form of sound; *dhvanirūpa*) expands from the invisible form of Śiva.⁶⁷ Abhinavagupta defines the *nāda* as “what is left of the experiencer’s synthetic self-awareness (*svātmaparāmarśaśeṣatā*) when all differentiating thought (*vikalpajñānadīnam*) disappears”.⁶⁸ According to Jayaratha’s commentary on *TĀ*, the *nāda* is the unstruck (*anāhata*), almost unmanifest, sound (*dhvani*),⁶⁹ the plane of the Divine Consciousness (*saṃvidam*) transcending the universe.⁷⁰ It is puzzling to find the description of *Parāvāk* in the context of *nāda*, which has been assigned to the gross *paśyantī* in the same text. However, this statement is logically tenable, because *paśyantī* is very close to *Parāvāk* in nature. In his commentary on *NT*, Kṣemarāja gives a detailed account about the *parā* aspect of *nāda*:⁷¹ it is the pure light of consciousness (*paracitprakāśarūpa*) and the reflective awareness (*vimarśātmaka*) where the subject (*ahantā*) and the object (*idantā*) are uncreated (*akṛtaka*), where the subject of the objectivity and the objectivity in the subject are co-identified (*sāmānyādhikarāṇya*), which is also known to be the state of *sadāśiva*.

A Śrividya text, the *Śāradā Tilaka*⁷² explains the cosmogonical process through

⁶⁷ *NT* 21.61-63 (vol. 2: 287-88): “When, from the invisible form of Śiva the *sphoṭa*, which is a form of sound (*dhvanirūpa*), expands, impetuously filling the world with sound (*dhvanināpūrayaṇ*), it is called *nāda*, O Master of the Gods, and *Sadāśiva*.” (Tr. Padoux 1992: 97-98, n. 33)

⁶⁸ *TĀ* IV.175, tr. Padoux 1992: 98.

⁶⁹ *TĀ* V.131 comm. (vol. 3: 1060). Synonyms of *nāda* are given in the *Nāda Kārikā* 16-7: “Therefore the existence of *nāda* (*nādaḥ parāḥ*) is established which is synonymous with *sumaṅgalā*, *mālinī*, *mahāmāyā*, *samanā*, *anāhata*, *bindu*, *aghoṣa*, *vāgbrahma*, *kuṇḍalinītattva* and the category of *vidyā*. These names have been stated in different Āgamas.” (Tr. Chakravarty 1992: 12)

⁷⁰ *TĀ* V.75 comm. (vol. 3: 1000):
nādadaśāṃśrayet’itivimarśātmikam viśvottīrṇaṃ saṃvidamāsādayeditartham |

⁷¹ *NT* 21.63 comm. (vol. 2: 288): *śaiva nādabhaṭṭārako ’kṛtakāhantedantā-sāmānādhikarāṇyavimarśātmakaparacitprakāśarūpaḥ iti nādaḥ sadāśivaḥ iti sāmānādhikarāṇyokter āśayaḥ* — “This blessed *nāda* is the pure light of the Supreme Consciousness when it becomes aware both of itself as the repository of objectivity and of this objectivity which dwells within itself, as being uncreated, of identical nature and as dwelling in the same substratum (which is itself). Such is *nāda*. And it is *sadāśiva*, namely the receptacle for the utterance of this identity in nature and substratum (or relating to the same object and residing in the same subject: *sāmānyādhikarāṇya*).” (Tr. Padoux 1992: 101, n. 46)

⁷² The *Śāradā Tilaka* (Forehead-ornament of Sarasvatī) is a basic matric digest along with the text *Prapañcasāra*. The author of the text, Lakṣmaṇadeśika or Lakṣmaṇa Deśikendra was a

the terminology of sound, in which *nāda* is the permeating sonic principle, akin to resonance, in contrast to the concentrated state of *bindu* (point; drop). After describing the Absolute permeated by *vāk*, this text says:

Out of the Supreme Lord (*parameśarāt*), overflowing with existence, consciousness and bliss (*saccidānandavibhavāt*), endowed with *kalā* (*sakalāt*), was born the [phonic] energy (*aśicchaktis*). Out of that came forth *nāda* (*tato nādo*) and out of *nāda* (*nadād*), *bindu* (*bindusaṃbhavaḥ*), which is a manifestation of the supreme energy (*paraśaktimayaḥ*), and which itself divides into three (*sākṣāt tridhā'sau bhidyate punaḥ*). Its three portions are called: *bindu*, *nāda* and *bīja*.⁷³

According to this text, both *nāda* and *bindu* have two levels of existence. *Nāda*, before the Supreme Energy (*parāśakti*) is concentrated into the form of *bindu*, is called *parānāda*, and the *nāda* at the other level that occurs after the division of the *bindu* is called *aparānāda*. The actual manifestation of *parāśakti* emerges from the form of *bindu*, which displays three divisions – *bindu*, *nāda* and *bīja* – for the on-going emanative process of creation.⁷⁴

The stages prior to the *parāśakti* manifesting the empirical creation have been elaborately described in *NT*. Here, one encounters three levels of *nāda* between *śakti* and *bindu*: *nādānta*, *nāda* and *nirodhinī*. The difference between *nāda* and *nādānta* (literally meaning “the end of *nāda*”) is illustrated in Kṣemarāja’s commentary on *NT*. He states that Śiva, the eternal knower, becomes aware in an undivided way (*āmarśa*) of *parānāda* that is like “the indistinct murmur of a brook”

→ Śaiva religious leader, reported to have been a pupil of Utpaladeva. Lakṣmaṇadeśika is commonly placed to the eleventh century CE. About the text, see Goudriaan and Gupta 1981: 134f.

⁷³ *ŚT* 1.7-8 (vol. 1: 16-17), tr. Padoux 1992: 87. The text continues to explain the cosmogonical process until the empirical world is created. *Śabdabrahman* comes into existence out of the threefold division of *bīja*, *bindu* and *nāda*, and assumes the form of *kuṇḍalinī*. Through the rise of *kuṇḍalinī*, the phonemes (*varṇa*) arise. Then come speech, the gods, the elements, and the whole empirical world. Cf. Padoux 1992: 87.

In Śaiva Siddhānta text *Mṛgendra Āgama Kriyāpāda* (I.2.), *bindu* is the outcome of *nāda* which again is the resultant of *śakti* (*śakternādo 'bhavat binduḥ*). When the *anāhata* sound becomes condensed in the inner recess of the mind as an inner cognition (*antaḥsaṃkalpa*), it gradually becomes well shaped like a round ball of speech (*sampiṇḍitavāgrūpaḥ*). It is named *bindu* because it is nothing but a drop (*binduriva binduḥ*). Cf. Chakravarty 1992: 4.

⁷⁴ According to the text, *aparā bindu* is of the nature of Śiva, *bīja* of that of Śakti, and *aparā nāda* is the union or mutual relation between Śiva and Śakti (cf. *ŚT* 1.8-9; Padoux 1992: 116-17).

(*avyucchinadrutanadīghoṣa*), and at the same time grows aware of the world and universe filled with *nādānta*, which is like “the echo of a bell without sound” (*dhvanināghaṇṭānuraṇanarūpeṇa nādāntena jagat viśvam āpūrayan*).⁷⁵ Here one should note that *nāda* is the indistinct continuous resonance, whereas the *nādānta* is the moment when the subtle indistinct vibration of *nāda* is dissolved, close to the state of absolute non-manifestation. On the contrary, when the *nāda* moves on towards manifestation, it becomes *nirodhinī* or *nirodhikā*. *Nirodhinī* is a state where *nāda* rests (*viśrāmyati*) and brings forth (*unmajjayati*) the deep pervasiveness (*adhara-vyāptim*) for manifestation by merging into its own pervasiveness (*svavyāpti-nimajjanena*).⁷⁶

The relevance of the concept of *nāda* in the context of the doctrine of *vāk*, especially in association with *paśyantī vāk*, is evident from Kṣemarāja’s exposition of *nādānta*.

Nādānta starts to radiate forth in order to bring the universe into manifestation, being replete with the energy of the Supreme Word (*parāvākśakti*) wherefrom it originates.⁷⁷

Here it is made clear that *nādānta* originates from *Parāvāk*, and it is this all-pervasion without manifestation that precedes the subtle manifestation of sound in the form of *nāda*. *Nādānta* may be imagined as a state between *Parāvāk* and *paśyantī*, or as the highest level of the *paśyantī vāk*. *Nirodhinī* is said to be the level where the dynamism peculiar to *mantras* appears; thus, it is also called *mantrakalā*.⁷⁸ The association of *mantravīrya* (the potency of *mantra*) to *nirodhinī* in particular can be best understood when one remembers that *paśyantī vāk* is defined in *PTV* as “the initial creative state of the energy of the highest *mantra*”.⁷⁹ The observation of the state of *nāda* and its diverse levels may help one comprehend the transformations of forms at the level of *paśyantī*.

Is Paśyantī vāk Comparable to Bindu?

Paśyantī vāk is the initial creative moment in the emanative process of *vāk*, where – after inconceivably subtle developments on the *parā* level – the unmanifested and

⁷⁵ Cf. *NT* 21.63, comm. (vol. 2: 288), tr. Padoux 1992: 102.

⁷⁶ Cf. *NT* 21.64 comm. (vol. 2: 289), tr. Padoux 1992: 103-04.

⁷⁷ *NT* 21.63 comm. (vol. 2: 288), tr. Padoux 1992: 102.

⁷⁸ Cf. *NT* 21.64 comm. (vol. 2: 289), tr. Padoux 1992: 104.

⁷⁹ *PTV* 1 (p. 5): *paramahāmantravīryavisṛṣṭirūpāyā . . .* ।

undivided Whole begins to unfold its *parāparā* dimension. It may be said that *paśyantī vāk* is at the border between *parā* and *aparā*. In the cosmogonic process described in *ŚT* and *NT*, *bindu* is the stage between *parāśakti* (the supreme power) and *aparāśakti* (the power of differentiation). *Bindu*, divided into its three divisions, represents the actual beginning of manifestation. The various stages from Parameśvara to *parābindu* according to *ŚT* – or from *unmanā* to *bindu* in *NT* – are analogous to the sequential development of forms from *Parāvāk* to *paśyantī vāk*. Comparable to the various stages of transformation within *paśyantī vāk*, the stages from *bindu* to Parameśvara seem to signify the process of swallowing the manifested back into their absolute, unmanifested source.⁸⁰ The relation of *paśyantī vāk* to *bindu* is difficult to clarify, because the textual sources give inconsistent descriptions of each concept and their relations. Nevertheless, to study the exposition of *bindu* as compared to *paśyantī vāk* would help in discerning the various stages of forms within *paśyantī vāk*, because both of them represent the initial creative moment.

The literal meaning of *bindu* is “a point” or “a drop”. As a geometrical point, it is positioned in between form and the formless; therefore in itself it implies many-layered metaphorical meanings. It is the source from which everything emerges, and to which all created beings return. Synonyms of *bindu* are given in the *Ratna Traya Parīkṣā*: *śabdatattvagoṣā* (the essence of the sonic element), *vāgbrahma*, *kuṇḍalinī*, *dhruvam* (the stable), *vidyā*, *śakti*, *parā* (the transcendent one), *nāda*, *mahāmāyā*, *vyoma* (limitless space) and *anāhata* (the unstruck sound).⁸¹ While *bindu* is understood through these many layers of meanings, its sonic nature persists, due to its intimate association with *nāda*. As explicitly said in *TĀ*:

It is a sound (*śabda*) in the nature of a subtle sound resonance (*nādātmaka*) present in all animate creatures and dwelling there (*sarvaprāṇiṣvavasthitah*), dividing between high and low [while] beyond all activity.⁸²

In the Sanskrit phonemic system, where vowels are seen as an expansion of the energy of Śiva, *anusvāra* is the *bindu* into which gathers the energy of every vowel from *a* to *au*, and from which begins the manifestation of Śiva through the agency of Śakti.⁸³

⁸⁰ The expositions of *bindu* given in *ŚT* and *Kāmakaḷāvilāsa* tell that “*bindu* and its division are therefore . . . the same gathering up and then dividing movement of Śiva’s energy” (Padoux 1992: 116).

⁸¹ Cf. *Ratna Traya Parīkṣā* 70-71, tr. Chakravarty 1992: 2.

⁸² *TĀ* III.113b-114a, tr. Padoux 1992: 276.

⁸³ Cf. *PTV* 5.

Instead of making an exhaustive survey of the multi-layered concepts of *bindu*, the present investigation shall focus on its particular qualities that relate to *paśyantī vāk*. As in *paśyantī vāk*, where subjectivity prevails and objectivity exists in an unmanifest form, *bindu* is conceived as the Knowing Subject. In this sense, *bindu* is said to have the nature of pure light, consistent to its being assigned to the plane of *sadāśiva tattva*.⁸⁴ In his commentary on the *Śivasūtra*, Kṣemarāja defines *bindu* as supreme light: *binduḥ paraprakāśaḥ*.⁸⁵ When Abhinavagupta explains in *TĀ* that the first principle *prakāśa-tattva* abides in the knower, the knowledge and the known,⁸⁶ he adds:

This pure light (*prakāśamātra*), shining while these three luminous aspects (*dhāmatraya*) remain, is called *bindu* (*vindu*) in the scriptures. It is regarded as Śiva's *bindu* (*śivavindu*).⁸⁷

In Abhinavagupta's *Tantrasāra* (chapter I), the light of Śiva, though it itself consisting of no-form, is said to make manifest all forms through *kriyāśakti*. When the phonemic emanation is explained, *bindu* is also equated to knowledge (*vedana*) and to light.

Then, at the end of the power of action, all that was to be done and has been accomplished is about to enter into the Absolute, but, before doing so, it all exists as *bindu* which is essentially knowledge (*vedana*) and pure light (*prakāśamātra*).⁸⁸

If we are bound to the definition of *bindu* as a point of concentrated energy or as a geometrical point, it is difficult to understand its description as the penetrating light of Subjectivity, sometimes found written in Sanskrit as *vindu*. In another passage from *TĀ* (III.110-11) which illustrates this aspect of *bindu* as both pure light and the Knowing Subject, we read:

Even at this stage that transcendent power (*anuttaraśakti*) though making its form clearly manifest and taking on limitations of the impurities of objectivity (*jñeyakalā*), it is yet always of the form of *bindu* (*vindurūpiṇī*). When *kriyāśakti* develops fully (*uditāyāṃ*

⁸⁴ *YH* (I.56ab): "The seat of Sadāśiva, O goddess, is in the *mahābindu*" (*sadāśivāsanamdevi mahābindumayamparam*), tr. Chakravarty 1992: 14.

⁸⁵ *ŚSV* 2.2, pp. 49-50, tr. Singh 1979: 87.

⁸⁶ *TĀ* III.130b-1a (vol. II: 486).

*itthaṃ prakāśatattvasya somasūryāgnitā sthitā ||
api mukhyaṃtatprakāśamatratvaṃ na vyapohyate |*

⁸⁷ *TĀ* III.133-34, tr. Padoux 1992: 273.

⁸⁸ *Tantrasāra* I, pp. 14-15, tr. Padoux 1992: 273.

kriyāśakta) in the realm of knowable objects, the instrument of knowledge, and the experiencing subject (*somasūryāgnidhāmani*),⁸⁹ the undifferentiated light (*prakāśa*) which pervades all is our Supreme Bindu (*vinduḥ paramo*).⁹⁰

Jayaratha comments on the above verses:

This (*vettīti vinduḥ*) is the autonomous knower (*svatantraḥ pramātā*) in the very act of knowing. Its nature is light, supreme indivisible (*avibhāgaḥ paraḥ prakāśaḥ*). He never loses anything from its original nature.⁹¹

The above references show that *bindu* – especially when written as *vindu* – is the principle of light and awareness which is unchangeable even in the turbidity of objectivity, and that it is the shining state of true awareness where one finds united the three conditions of knowledge: *pramātr* (the knower), *pramāṇa* (the knowledge) and *prameya* (the known). The use of the term *vindu* emphasizes a particular concept of *bindu* as the conceptual point where the manifold objectivity touches the Subjectivity. Here it may be appropriate to again quote a verse from *PTV*:

Paśyantī is touched (*vimṛśati*) solely through “the act of stringing together” of awareness (*bodhasūtraṇamātreṇa*) of anything that is desired (*abhīpsitaṃ*), and which is specifically awakened by a fit cause (*samucitakāraṇaniyamaprabodhitam*).⁹²

The association between the two concepts of *bindu* and *paśyantī*, brought together due to their functional parallels, is further strengthened under the *bodha* (awareness) aspect of *bindu*. The pure light and awareness represented by *bindu* is apparently none other than the narrative description of *bodha*. Particularly in *PTV*, when *bindu* is described as “cognizing the Bhairava nature of the heart”,⁹³ it is the *bodha* that perceives the Śiva nature of the individual heart. Just as *bindu* is recognized as the symbol of *bodhicitta* in tantric Buddhism, *bindu* being especially written as *vindu* could be a signifier of *bodha* in Trika Śaivism.

⁸⁹ Here, *sūrya*, *soma*, *agni* signify knower, knowledge and known – *pramātr*, *pramāṇa* and *prameya*.

⁹⁰ Tr. Chakravarty 1992: 18.

⁹¹ *TĀ* III.110 comm., tr. Padoux 1992: 274.

⁹² *PTV*, p. 4: *tatastu paśyantī yadyat abhīpsitaṃ tattadeva samucitakāraṇaniyamaprabodhitam bodhasūtraṇamātreṇa vimṛśati . . .* |

⁹³ *PTV*, p. 230: *bhairavātmavedanarūpatayā bindvātmakaṃ hrdayam* (*hrdaya* is in the nature of *bindu* that is represented in the cognition of its Bhairava nature).

IV.1.4 Parāvāk

Parāvāk is in the Plane of Parāśakti, That is, Anuttara

In the doctrine of *vāk*, *Parāvāk* is often described to be similar to *śaktitattva*, for example in the nature of *vimarśa* (reflective awareness), *sphurattā* (shining forth), *svātantrya* (spontaneity) and *camatkṛti* (wonder). Though the *Śakti* aspect of *Parāvāk* is particularly mentioned, *Parāvāk* is essentially inherent to the inseparable relation between Śiva and Śakti. Therefore, the divine light (*prakāśa*) is an important aspect of *Parāvāk*, without which there would be no pulsation that brings forth manifestation. In the following verse, *Parāvāk* is envisaged as having the nature of pulsation (*sphuritam*), *prakāśa*, the Self (*aham*) and the uninterrupted highest truth.

Beginning with *paśyantī* up to *vaikhari*, the *parāvāk* full of the wondrous delight of her own self (*svacamatkṛti*), resting within her own self which is all Light (*prakāśa*), continues pulsating (*sphurati*). That pulsation is indeed the Self (*aham*) which is uninterrupted highest truth (*avicchinatā paramārtham*).⁹⁴

While *Parāvāk* is described as the union of Śiva and Śakti – pure light (*prakāśa*) and the *citi* (consciousness) or *pratyavamarśa* (awareness) – it is seen as the heart of Parameśvara, the highest category within the *tattva* system.⁹⁵ The *vṛtti* of the *Īśvarapratyabhijñānakārikā* (I.5.14) by Utpaladeva mentions *Parāvāk* – identical to *citi* – to be the foundation of everything, including the Divine Self:

It (she) is not to be understood as the counterpart of non-being (*abhāvāpratiyoginī*) [but] it also pervades non-being (*abhāvavyāpinī*); it is existing (*sattā*), being (*bhavatā*), the subject of the action of being (*bhavanakartṛtā*); permanent (*nityā*), because untouched by space and time (*deśakālāsparśāt*). . . . It constitutes the foundation of the self of the supreme Lord, who is all things (*sā viśvātmanah parameśvarasya svātma pratiṣṭārūpā*); the various agamas call it the heart (*hṛdayam*).⁹⁶

When *parāvāk* is said to be the heart of the Highest Divine, this demonstrates a crucial basis for recognizing *Parāvāk* as *Anuttara*, which is occasionally called *Parāśakti*.⁹⁷ A

⁹⁴ PTV 1, tr. Singh 1992: 9, Sanskrit text p. 2. Jaideva Singh's English translation of “*tadevaṃ sphuritamavicchinatāparamārtham aham itī*” has been replaced by my own translation.

⁹⁵ *ĪPK* I.5.14: “It (she; *parāvāk*) is that which is said to be the heart (*hṛdayam*) of the supreme Lord (*parameṣṭīnaḥ*), in so far as it is his essence” (tr. Torella 2002: 121).

⁹⁶ *ĪPK* I.5.14, tr. Torella 2002: 122.

⁹⁷ *TĀ* III.249a (vol. II: 585): *anuttarā parecchā ca parāparatayā sthitā*.

verse from *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam* of Kṣemarāja presents an integral overview of these terms:

Having the form of *parāśakti*, *citi*, the goddess, who is the absolute freedom, consisting of the awareness of *anuttara* (*anuttaravimarśamayī*), non-different from Śiva, is the cause (of the world).⁹⁸

Citi, an aspect of *Parāvāk*,⁹⁹ is defined as “having the form of *parāśakti*” and “consisting of awareness of *Anuttara*”. Though it would be an extremely difficult task to systematically construct the specific relationships among the concepts of *prakāśa*, *citi*, *parāśakti*, *vimarśa* and *anuttara*, a preposition can be drawn that *Parāvāk* is not merely equated to *śakti tattva*, but is placed in correspondence to the Divine Absolute, expressed by the words *Anuttara* or *Paramārtha*. *Parāvāk* is the state of “complete Oneness”, where there is complete absence of any distinct objects.¹⁰⁰ Yet, it is present at all times, in every experient and in every object, because it is beyond time and space or any other limitations, and it utterly pervades the stages of *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī*.¹⁰¹ The nature of *Parāvāk* as being placed at the level of the Highest (*paramārtha*) is expressed in the following words of Abhinavagupta:

What is the stage of *parāvāk* (*parāvāgbhūmiḥ*) is the power of non-*māyīya* word (*amāyīyaśabdaśakti*) and is of the nature of the highest truth (*paramārthasvabhāva*). It is unconventional (*asāmketika*), natural (*akṛtaka*), having as its essence the stamp of the highest truth (*pāramārthikasamskārasārā*), and is inspired by the truth of the energy of the *mantra* of I-consciousness (*vakśyamāṇanayena mantravīrya bhūtāmśacoditā*).¹⁰²

⁹⁸ *PHṛ* 1 comm.: *parāśaktirūpā citiḥ bhagavatī svatantrā anuttaravimarśamayī śivabhaṭṭāarakābhinnā hetuḥkāraṇa* | Cf. Singh 1963: 46-47.

⁹⁹ Cf. *ĪPK* I.5.13.

¹⁰⁰ “In the *parā* (supreme) stage, there is, indeed, total absence of any object whatsoever” (*PTV* I, tr. Singh 1988: 12).

¹⁰¹ “The *parāvāk* which is non-dual, i.e. identical with the (supreme consciousness) is present in all experients always in her integral nature uniformly in all states, i.e. even at the level of *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī*.” (*PTV*, tr. Singh 1988: 8, Sanskrit text p. 2) Cf. *ĪPK* I.5.13, author’s *vṛtti*: “This is the First Word (*ādyā-vāc*), in which the expressible is undifferentiated, without beginning or end in that it is constituted by perpetual consciousness, autonomous” (tr. Torella 2002: 121).

¹⁰² *PTV* I, tr. Singh 1988: 9, Sanskrit text p. 2.

Parāvāk is the Pratyavamarśa (reflective awareness), the Essential Nature of Citi

One of the main characteristics of *Parāvāk* relevant here is the *citi-pratyavamarśa* (Divine Consciousness and pure reflective awareness). *Parāvāk* is defined as the “power of the activity of consciousness (*citikriyāśaktiḥ*), i.e. reflective awareness (*pratyavamarśātmā*)”.¹⁰³ In *ĪPK*, Utpaladeva explains *Parāvāk* in relation to *citi*:

Consciousness (*citiḥ*) has as its essential nature reflective awareness (*pratyavamarśātmā*); it is the supreme word (*parāvāk*) that arises freely (*svarasoditā*). It is freedom in the absolute sense (*svātantryametanmukhyaṃ*), the sovereignty (*aiśvaryaṃ*) of the Supreme Self (*paramātmanah*).¹⁰⁴

The above verse identifies *citi* with *pratyavamarśa*. It specifies that *Parāvāk* is self-manifested (*svarasoditā*) and is *citi-pratyavamarśa*. The author’s *vṛtti* of this verse dwells on its exposition while discussing *Parāvāk*; therein, *Parāvāk* is defined as the “primeval *vāk*” (*ādyā vāk*), which is “of the nature of eternal *cit*” (*nityacitsvarūpatva*), and its nature is described through such terms as freedom (*svātantrya*) and sovereignty (*aiśvarya*).¹⁰⁵ *Parāvāk* is envisaged as Divine Consciousness (*citi*), the subject of pure awareness (*pratyavamarśa*). In *ĪPV* Abhinavagupta elaborates upon *Parāvāk* as the source of conventional language, drawing upon aspects of *pratyavamarśa* and *camatkāra* (wonder):

Pratyavamarśa is “sounding forth” by nature that expresses internally (*antarabhilāpātmakaśabdanasvabhāvaḥ*). This *śabdana* (sounding forth) indeed has nothing to do with the “conventional” (*saṅketa*). The uninterrupted *camatkāra* (*avicchinna-camatkārātmaka*) that is seen as an internal nod of the head gives life to the letters *a*, etc. that is the conventional sound on the plane of *māyā* (*akārādimāyīyasāṅketikaśabda*). She is the basis of the awareness of fragmented objects (*ādi-pratyavamarśāntarabhitti-bhūtatvāt*). From ‘being fullness’, she is *parā*, and from ‘speaking and expressing the

¹⁰³ *ĪPK* I.5.14, author’s *vṛtti*: *śaiva pratyavamarśātmā citikriyāśaktitaḥ* ।

¹⁰⁴ *ĪPK* I.5.13: *citiḥpratyavamarśātmā parāvāk svarasoditā* ।
svātantryametanmukhyaṃ tadaiśvaryaṃ paramātmanah ॥
 (Tr. Torella 2002: 120)

¹⁰⁵ *ĪPK* I.5.13, author’s *vṛtti*: “This is the first word (*ādyā vāk*), in which the expressible is undifferentiated (*abhinnavācyā*), without beginning or end in that it is constituted by perpetual consciousness (*nityacitsvarūpatvenādyantā*), autonomous (*paratantra*). This is pure freedom (*svātantryam*), independent of any other reality, which has the name of ‘sovereignty’ (*aiśvaryaṃ*).” (Tr. Torella 2002: 120-21)

world by *pratyavamarśa*’, it is called *vāk*. Thus, she, essentially in the form of *cit* (*citrūpatayā*), resting in her own self, manifests (*udita*) and produces (*sadānastamitā*). She is the eternal “I” (*aham*).¹⁰⁶

By means of *pratyavamarśa*, *Parāvāk* expresses every form (*abhilāpti pratyavamarśena*) and resides at every level of cognition. However, *pratyavamarśa* itself is not involved in producing any conventional form; it is beyond such due to its being devoid of any mental construct (*vikalpa*).¹⁰⁷ It is the *camatkāra* aspect of *Parāvāk* that triggers the process of manifestations. It implies that *pratyavamarśa*, of the nature of “sounding forth” (*śabdanasvabhāva*), lies beneath all forms without being obstructed by this. That *Parāvāk* expresses the world through the *pratyavamarśa* denotes that *pratyavamarśa* embodies *Parāvāk* in the world. Particularly, awareness of the Self (*ahampratyavamarśa*), itself being the light (*prakāśātma*), is *Parāvāk*.¹⁰⁸ *Parāvāk*, being differentiated from ordinary audible sound, is at once the nature of sounding forth (*śabdanātmakābhilāpa*), permeation in the form of Divine Consciousness (*saṃvidrūpāveśī*), and the shining light within (*antaravabhāsamānaḥ*).¹⁰⁹

Parāvāk Permeates the other Three Levels of Vāk

Trika Śaivism presents a picture of the entire world as being constituted by *vāk*. *Parāvāk*, equivalent to *Anuttara* or *Parāśakti*, is the one that brings about congruency among the various levels of *vāk*.¹¹⁰ The analytical description of *Parāvāk* quoted above

¹⁰⁶ *ĪPV* 1.5.13 (vol. I: 252-54), tr. Padoux 1992: 175-76 with emendation.

¹⁰⁷ *ĪPK* 1.6.1: *ahampratyavamarśo yaḥ prakāśātmāpi vāgvapuḥ |*
nāsau vikalpaḥsa hyukto dvayākṣepī viniścayaḥ ||

“The reflective awareness ‘I’ (*ahampratyavamarśa*), which is the very essence of light, is not a mental construct (*vikalpaḥ*), although it is informed by the word (*vāgvapuḥ*). For a *vikalpa* is an act of ascertainment (*viniścayaḥ*) presenting a duality” (tr. Torella 2002: 128, Sanskrit text p. 27).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, *ahampratyavamarśo yaḥ prakāśātmāpi . . . |*

¹⁰⁹ *ĪPV* 1.6.1. (vol. I: 303) *viṣayarūpāt śrotragrāhyāt śabdād anya eva antaravabhāsamānaḥ saṃvidrūpāveśī śabdanātmakābhilāpo vāk*. Cf. Padoux 1992: 177.

¹¹⁰ *PTV* 3: “Abiding as she does in the form of power of hearing, she has that sovereign power (*svātantrya*) which consists in effecting congruous and suitable connexion by blending all sound in a meaningful whole. . . . For one attentively intent on knitting the words in a sensible whole, there may be clear comprehension to some extent. Therefore in such a case, it is the congruous connexion of the words which can be of use. It is the goddess *parāśakti* (the supreme creative power) who brings about the congruous connection.” (Tr. Singh 1988: 68, Sanskrit text p. 24)

(*ĪPV* 1.5.13), substantiates how the distinct forms originate from *Parāvāk*. The verse tells that it is due to the *śabda*-natured *pratyavamarśa* and to *camatkāra* that the *Parāvāk* manifest all forms. In the doctrine of *vāk*, even *vaikharī vāk* is present in *Parāvāk* (*parābhaṭṭārikāsaṃvidantargataṃ tu vaikharīpadam*),¹¹¹ and so is *Parāvāk* present in the *vaikharī vāk*.

Parāvāk is the primeval undivided state from which originates all power of the other levels of *vāk*; it denotes the state before any *māyā*-borne differentiation or limitation arises. Thus, it is defined as the state of *nirvikalpa*, devoid of thought constructs. Being itself *nirvikalpa* and *śuddhavimarśa* (pure awareness), *Parāvāk* radiates forth all manifestations in their various forms. The other levels of *vāk* are the forms brought forth by the radiant pulsation (*sphurattā*) of *Parāvāk* whose nature is light (*prakāśa*), being enraptured by the wonder of her own creation (*svacamatkṛti*).¹¹² Without *Parāvāk*, there would be no manifestation, and the world would be utterly insentient.¹¹³ As the source of all manifestations and expressions, it is not affected by the conventional rules, but rather persists under all the forms as “the effulgence (*vāṇmahasi*) of the highest *mantra* (*mantravapuḥ*)”.¹¹⁴ Here it is important to keep in mind that *mantra* often stands for *Parāvāk*, implying that something perceptible can indeed be esteemed as having the status of the Highest.¹¹⁵ One article of evidence that *Parāvāk* pervades even the *vaikharī* stage is demonstrated in the common experience that any cognition of a distinct object is impossible without the indistinct consciousness. While describing the pervasion of *Parāvāk* through the entire range of manifestation, Abhinavagupta states that no apprehension of distinction in *vaikharī* or *madhyamā*

¹¹¹ Cf. *PTV*, p. 158, tr. Padoux 1992: 218.

¹¹² Cf. *PTV* 1, tr. Singh 1992: 9. Sanskrit text p. 2.

¹¹³ “Without her (*Parāvāk*) there would accrue the condition of non-manifestation, in *paśyantī*, etc. and thus would arise the contingency of absolute insensateness (*jaḍatā*).” (*PTV* 1, tr. Singh 1992: 9, Sanskrit text p. 2)

¹¹⁴ *PTV*, pp. 193-94: All of this (diversity of divisions of phonemes) “abides in the great effulgence (*mahāmahasi*) of the *mantra* of *parāvāk* (*paravañmantra*), which is pure conscious awareness (*śuddhavimarśa*), subject neither to *māyā* nor to the conventions [of ordinary speech] (*amāyīyasāṃketika*)”. *PTV* gives us a concrete example of how a seer experiences the *parāvāk*. “Thus the sages see that the non-conventional body of the [supreme] *mantra* (*asāṃketikaṃ mantravapuḥ*) takes on mutually differing forms and they teach that it must be revered since it is that which brings about the conventions [of ordinary speech].” (Tr. Padoux 1992: 185-86)

¹¹⁵ For *mantra* conceived as *Parāvāk*, see Padoux 1992: 185, n. 45.

vāk is possible without *vimarśa* of *Parāvāk*, and the sovereignty of *vimarśa* never ceases.¹¹⁶

Throughout *PTV*, Abhinavagupta asserts a number of times that all three levels of *vāk* inhere within *Parāvāk*. Taking special note of phonemes, he explains that the objects of distinct experiences – whether one refers to external speech or inward imagination – are all present in *Parāvāk*.¹¹⁷ He affirms:

Therefore, though the condensation of the phonemes becomes distinct only in the *vaikharī*, yet it abides primarily in *parāvāk* which is all inclusive (*sarvasarvātmaka*).¹¹⁸

He explains that the difference in the *vaikharī* stage is due to the organs that generate the distinct experience, and in the state of *parā* these organs exist in the undivided whole (*sarvasarvātmaka*).¹¹⁹ The discrete division of objects and subjects within *vaikharī vāk* exists inwardly at the *madhyamā* and on the *paśyantī* levels as well. Without any differentiation at these two more subtle levels, the power of the senses that supports the distinct experience would not even exist at the *vaikharī* level, and no distinct internal thoughts could occur.¹²⁰ In this way, *vaikharī vāk* is thought to inhere within the *madhyamā vāk*, *madhyamā vāk* within the *paśyantī vāk*, and *paśyantī vāk* in *Parāvāk*. Ultimately, all three levels of *vāk* rest within the undivided state of *Parāvāk*.

So by this repeatedly thought-out reasoning, entering more and more in the interior, cherish that consciousness (*pariśīlyatām samvidam*) which is a mass of awareness and is all-inclusive, and therefore the abode of guttural and labial energies (also), and in which inheres that creative I-consciousness, viz. *aham* (*vimarśātmaka*) which is the very

¹¹⁶ *PTV* 5-9: “In the being of this indeterminate I-consciousness (*vimarśa*), its sovereignty of the creativity never ceases. In the *vaikharī* stage or in the *madhyamā* stage in which there is subtle *māyīya* objectivity, this kind of apprehension of difference (*bheda-vimarśa*) is not possible if it is completely excluded from the indeterminate I-consciousness (*bhāsanātirekī*).” (Tr. Singh 1988: 111, Sanskrit text p. 45)

¹¹⁷ Cf. *PTV* 5-9, tr. Singh 1988: 176-77.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Sanskrit text p. 64:

evam ca ghanībhāvo’pi vaikharīrūpe yadyapi sphuṭībhavati, tathāpi sarvasarvātmani parāvāgvapuṣi mukhyatayāvatiṣṭte |

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

quintessence of autonomy (*svātantryasāra*), which is the venerable phoneme, the highest *mantra* (*mahāmantrarūpavarṇabhaṭṭāraka*), and is (always) inherent within.¹²¹

IV.2 Vāk in Mantra Practice

IV.2.1 Mantra and Parāvāk

In *PTV* the multiplicity of the phenomenal world is represented by the expansion of Sanskrit phonemes and is described in accord with the Trika Śaivite system of thirty-six *tattvas*. The correspondence between the *tattvas* and the syllables is established for the purpose of *nyāsa* (the assignment of *mantras* to various parts of the body of the practitioner).¹²² The expression of the phonemes as a manifestation of the Ultimate has thus developed as a ritualistic tool, employed to reify the connection between the individual body (the microcosm) and the multiple deities who perform as personifications of the Ultimate (the macrocosm). Distinct sound comes into being at the *madhyamā* level, and the creative force imbued inside the phonemes has been named *Mālinī*, the Goddess of *madhyamā vāk*. The creative force within syllabic sound represents *tattvas*, the components of the world. The *nyāsa* ritual combines mental visualization, *mantras* and the gestures known as *mudrā*. But here, the sound employed is not that of the ordinary vernacular, but rather is the symbolic engagement of human language.

Mantras are countless in number. Some of them would seem to have been drawn from ordinary language; others, not. Also significant is that there is a hierarchy among *mantras*: some are regarded as superior because they allow access to a higher goal. The Trika philosophy describes different levels among *mantras* according to *upāya* (path or method) in question.¹²³ *AHAM* is used in *śāmbhavopāya* (spontaneous way to realize Śiva Consciousness); *SAUḤ* and *KHPHREM* for *śāktopāya* (resorting to *cit-śakti* in order to realize Śiva Consciousness, for example, practising the idea that the Śiva nature is truly in oneself); and a number of different *mantras* in the *āṇavopāya* (engagement of technical means in regard to the limited self in order to realize the Śiva nature in oneself).¹²⁴ If the *mantras* are to be employed towards worldly desires,

¹²¹ *PTV* 5-9, tr. Singh 1992: 177. Sanskrit text p. 64.

¹²² Cf. *PVT* 5-9. "In these letters of *Mālinī*, the structure of *śākta-śarīra* has been described in *Mālinī-vijaya* for the purpose of *nyāsa*. Thus the principle that 'everything else is in everything' has been completely demonstrated." (Tr. Singh 1988: 149, Sanskrit text 53)

¹²³ Cf. Padoux 1992: 389.

¹²⁴ Cf. Padoux 1992: 380-81. For a brief introduction to the three *upāyas* of Trika Śaivism, see Jaideva Singh's introduction to the *Śivasūtra* (Singh 1979: xxxi-lvii).

they are seen to be inferior. The superior *mantras*, such as *OM*, *AHAM*, or *SAUḤ*, are viewed as the seeds of creation itself, at the level of *Parāvāk*.¹²⁵ *SpK* compares certain important *mantras* to various organs of the body:

Seizing that strength (*bala*), *mantras*, endowed with the power of omniscience, perform their functions, as do the senses of the embodied. It is there alone that they (*mantras*), quiescent and stainless, dissolve away (*nirañjanāḥ*) along with the adept's mind (*sahārādhakacittena*) and so partake of Śiva's nature (*śivadharmiṇaḥ*).¹²⁶

The commentary of Rājānaka Rāma elaborates on this analogy of *mantras* to bodily organs:

As the sense organs perform different functions while being part of the same living being, while belonging to the same individual consciousness, likewise *mantras*, although equally vivified, in essence, by the infinite power of the divine *spanda*, have each their particular role and field of activity.¹²⁷

It is noteworthy that *mantras* are viewed as constituting the same consciousness – in this context, *spanda* – and that each *mantra* plays a particular role, as does a bodily organ in a living body. Thus, as there are some organs in the body that are essential to life, there are *mantras* that are more fundamental in the animating body of cosmic consciousness. For instance, *SAUḤ*, the *mūlamantra* of the *Parātrīśikā*, is likened to the heart of the Divine Consciousness, and is therefore called the heart (*hṛdayam*), or *amṛtabīja*. The potency of the whole universe lies in the form of *bijamantra SAUḤ*,¹²⁸ and all the perfections given in the Bhairava Tantras are said to be attained through this heart *mantra*.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Padoux expresses his comprehension of *mantras*: “The manifestation of Speech, at the highest level, often assumes the form of either *OM* or *AHAM*... or else of *SAUḤ*, the heart *bīja*, or of any other *mūlamantra*. Mantras, in this respect, though consisting of phonemes, are looked upon as their source: as the supreme Word. In such a perspective, the utterance of a *mantra* is identical with that of the Word which creates the world.” (Cf. Padoux 1992: 160)

¹²⁶ *SpK* 26-27, tr. Dyczkowski 1994: xvi.

¹²⁷ *SpV* 26-27, tr. Padoux 1992: 389.

¹²⁸ Cf. *Parātrīśikā* 25. “As the great banyan tree lies in the form of potency in its seed, even so this universe with all the mobile and immobile beings lies in the seminal *mantra* (*sauḥ*), the very heart of the Supreme.” (Tr. Singh 1988: 244, Sanskrit text pp. 92-93) Cf. *ibid.* 10: *hṛdayam bhairavātmanah*; *TĀ* IV.192-93 (vol. 3: 840), tr. Padoux 1992: 388.

¹²⁹ Cf. *PTV* 18, tr. Singh 1988: 204, Sanskrit text p. 77.

The vocalized sounds of *mantra* exist at the *vaikharī* level, and arguably at the level of *madhyamā*.¹³⁰ However, the true power of *mantra* (*mantravīrya*) derives from its basis in *Parāvāk*. Drawing from the example of *SAUḤ* and *KHPHREM*, *TĀ* relates that it is *parāmarśa* that endows *mantras* with their efficient power; without this, *mantras* are lifeless. From the following verse, we notice that the higher *mantras* are characterized by their nature of “heart” and their aspect of *vimarśa-prakāśa*, which is comprised by *Parāvāk*.

This synthetic and intense reflective awareness (*parāmarśa*), uncreated (*akṛtrimam*) and immaculate (*anābilam*), peculiar to these [two *mantras* – *SAUḤ* and *KHPHREM*], is known, [the masters] say, as “I” (*aham*). It is the very Light of Light (*parakāśasya prakāśatā*). It is the efficient power (*vīryam*) – in the nature of the heart (*hṛdayātmakam*) – of all the *mantras*. But for it they would be lifeless, like a living being (*jīva*) deprived of heart.¹³¹

We read in *ŚS* (II.1), *cittaṃmantraḥ*: *mantra* is *citta*. Kṣemarāja explains in his commentary of the text that *cittaṃ* “is that by which one cognizes (*cetyate*), one becomes aware of (*vimṛśyate*) the ultimate reality (*paraṃ tattvam*)”.¹³² He further equates *citta* to “the reflective awareness (*vimarśarūpam*) and consciousness (*saṃvedanam*) of *mantras* like *prāsāda* (*SAUḤ*), *praṇava* (*HUM* or *OM*) “which are in the nature of the fullness of pulsating radiance (*pūrṇasphurattā*)”.¹³³ Thus, in its ultimate sense, *mantra* is understood as *citta*, *vimarśa* or *saṃvedanam*, of the nature of full radiance. According to the same commentary, *mantra* is “that by which one deliberates (*mantryate*) secretly, or contemplates inwardly, and that by which one becomes aware of not being different or separate from the supreme Lord”.¹³⁴ Therefore, the proposition of “*cittaṃmantraḥ*” speaks of the function of *mantra* regarding the awakening the Ultimate Truth (*parā*), which is the undivided state. The reference of the *mantra* in equivalence to *citta* is also found in the Buddhist context. In the *Yogaratnamālā*, a commentary of *HT*, Kṛṣṇācārya¹³⁵ relates the nature of *mantra* to *bodhicitta*:

¹³⁰ PTV 28. In PTV, *SAUḤ* is said to be vocalization at the *madhyamā* level (cf. tr. Singh 1988: 253, Sanskrit text p. 96).

¹³¹ *TĀ* IV.192-93 (vol. 3: 840), tr. Padoux 1992: 388.

¹³² *ŚSV* 2.1, tr. Padoux 1992: 383-84.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ “In his *caryā* songs, Kṛṣṇācārya proclaims himself to be a Kāpālika *yogī*” (cf. Farrow and Menon in the introduction to the translation of *HT* and *YRM*, 1992: xi-xii).

The *Mantra* is that which when recalled (*manana*), saves (*trāṇa*). Thus *Mantra*, the nature of which is the non-duality of Voidness (*śūnyatā*) and Compassion (*karuṇā*), is the Enlightened Consciousness (*bodhicitta*). For the purpose of different practices *mantras* are composed of *ā* and other letters of the alphabet.¹³⁶

YRM affirms that *mantras* originate in *bodhicitta*;¹³⁷ it is the aspect of *citta* that charges *mantras* with their power and efficiency.¹³⁸ Without *citta*, *mantra* is a mere collection of phonemes. *Mantra*, being the *citta* of a devotee, connects him to the deity of the *mantra*; without *citta*, identification with the deity can never arise.¹³⁹

Not only is *mantra* a means to approach *Parā*, but also itself represents this dimension of reality. In the following verse from *ŚSV* of Kṣemarāja, *mantra* is unambiguously portrayed as having the nature of *Parāvāk*:

That whose body is knowledge is the blissful One in the form of the totality of sounds (*bhagavān śabdarāśiḥ*), whose soul is the pulsating radiance, the awareness of the perfection of the absolute “I” (*pūrṇāhaṃvimarśātmā sphurattā*), consisting in the undivided totality of the universe (*aśeṣaviśvābhedaṃmaya*). Such is the secret . . . of *mantras*.¹⁴⁰

And, *Parāvāk* is often described as the “highest *mantra*”:

¹³⁶ *YRM* I.1.28, tr. Farrow and Menon 1992: 20.

¹³⁷ *YRM*, beginning of I.2: “The different *mantras*, beginning with *om* followed by other syllables, are called *mantras* because they issue from the Enlightened Consciousness (*bodhicitta*).” (Tr. Farrow and Menon 1992: 25)

¹³⁸ *ŚS* II.3: *vidyāśārīrasattā mantrarahasyam*. “The secret of *mantras* is that being whose body is [pure] knowledge” (tr. Padoux 1992: 385).

¹³⁹ *ŚSV* 2.1: “The *mantra* is not a mere conglomerate of different syllables. It is the very mind of the devotee (*ārādhakacittam*) who, through intense awareness (*vimarśaparātvena*) of the deity of the *mantra* (*mantradevatā*), acquires identity (*sāmarasyam*) with the deity. . . . As said in the *Tantrasadbhāva*: ‘The life (*jīva* *abhūtā*) of *mantras* is she who is considered as the imperishable Energy (*śakti*)’.” (Tr. Padoux 1992: 384)

¹⁴⁰ *ŚSV* II.3, tr. Padoux 1992: 385; cf. *ĪPV* I.5.14: Here Abhinavagupta states that the heart is reflective awareness and the supreme *mantra* (*hṛdayaṃ vimarśarūpaṃ parāmantrātmakam*). “The *mantra* is the heart of everything (*sarvasya hi mantra eva hṛdayaṃ*). . . . It is in the nature of the free activity of consciousness (*mantraś ca vimarśātmā*), and the latter consists in the energy of the supreme Word (*vimarśanaṃ ca parāvācchaktimayaṃ*). [It is said] indeed in the Āgamas that but for these [*mantras*] there would be neither words (*śabda*), nor objects (*artha*), nor movement of consciousness (*citer gatiḥ*).” (Tr. Padoux 1992: 386)

This energy [which creates the worlds] abides first of all in the absolute consciousness beyond time and space, made of the supreme great *mantra*.¹⁴¹

Or,

This energy of the Supreme Word (*parā vākśakti*), which is not different from the light of consciousness (*citprakāśa*) is in the nature of the supreme great *mantra* (*mahāmantrarūpa*), eternally present and manifest. She is the active and living reflective awareness of the absolute “I” (*pūrṇāhaṃvimarśamayī*).¹⁴²

IV.2.2 OM Uccāra

The *bīja mantra OM* is also regarded as supreme, and its utterance is practised to reach the true nature of the Divine. We find many references to *uccāra* (the yogic practice of *mantra* vocalization) of *OM*¹⁴³ in *SvT* and *NT*.¹⁴⁴ Through the practice of the vocalization of *OM*, the upward movement of breath energy (*haṃsa*) reaches its highest point, called *unmanā*.¹⁴⁵ The twelve stages of *OM uccāra* are given in the following order: *A*; *U*; *MA*; *bindu*; *ardhacandra*; *nirodhiṇī*; *nāda*; *nādānta*; *śakti*; *vyāpinī*; *samanā*; and *unmanā*.

The practice of the utterance of *OM* starts with the successive utterance of *A*, *U* and *MA*. The nasal sound of *bindu* (the point) is vocalized after *MA*. One then progresses through the stages of *ardhacandra* (the half-moon), *nirodhiṇī* (the hindering), *nāda* (resonance), *nādānta* (the end of resonance), *śakti*, *vyāpinī* (the penetrating), *samanā* (with thoughts, or the mental) and finally to *unmanā* (without thought, the trans-mental). The experience of these levels of sound is accompanied by passage through the subtle *cakras* in the body. Here, the *bindu* of *anusvāra* after the utterance of *MA* is the point at which the sound transforms from physical to subtle.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ *PTV* 1, pp. 3-4: *sa ca śakti . . . prathamataraṃ paramahāmantramayāṃ adeśakālakalitāyāṃ saṃvidi nirūdhā . . .* (tr. Padoux 1992: 386-87).

¹⁴² *PHr* 12 comm., tr. Padoux 1992: 387: *citprakāśād avyতিরিক্তānityoditamahāmantrarūpā pūrṇāhaṃvimarśamayī yā iyaṃ parā vākśaktiḥ*. (Sanskrit: Singh 1963: 79)

¹⁴³ In Trika Śaivism, *uccāra* of *OM* is a code name for *kuṇḍalinī-yoga* practice.

¹⁴⁴ The *uccāra* practice of *OM*, as given in these texts, is described in Padoux 1992: 405-07.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *SvT* 4.262 (vol. 2: 166): *śivatattvagato haṃsa na caret vyāpako bhavet* (having reached the *śiva-tattva*, *haṃsa* subsides and becomes all-pervading), tr. Padoux 1992: 95, n. 28).

¹⁴⁶ According to *NT*, the utterances from *a* to *bindu* are correlated to the gross elements from earth to water.

The subtle sonic vibration becomes almost dissolved at the *nādānta* stage, and is absorbed into pure energy at the *śakti* stage. The stages after *śakti* from *vyāpinī* to *unmanā* are said to be of Śiva nature, and are described with the term *Śūnya*. *Vyāpinī* is *śakti* immanent within the manifestation, and it is called *mahāśūnya*. *Samanā* is the “Void of Tranquillity”, which transcends time and space.¹⁴⁷ *Unmanā* is defined as *niṣkalam ātmatattvam* (the undivided Self) and *sābhāsaṃ nirābhāsaṃ paratattvamanuttamam* (the highest, including all manifestation and beyond all manifestation).¹⁴⁸ *Unmanā* is the supreme transcendental energy, at one with Śiva and virtually identical with him.¹⁴⁹ Associated with the supreme Śiva (Paramaśiva), *unmanā* is described as the state completely pervaded by Śiva (*śivavyāpti*), and is the “void beyond void” (*śūnyati-śūnya*).¹⁵⁰

The following points in the exposition of *OM uccāra* are particularly significant in relation to our question of forms and formlessness within *maṇḍalas*.

- i) The transformation of sound observed in the *OM uccāra* is reminiscent of the transformation of *vācya* and *vācaka* through the four stages of *vāk*.
- ii) The stages of unmanifest energy from *vyāpinī* to *unmanā*, classified as the *Śiva-tattva*, are described as having the nature of *Śūnya*.

The speculation and practice of *OM uccāra* is the outcome of the intense experience of sound. It illustrates the continuity between the Cosmic Consciousness and the *prāṇa* of our body. By bridging two poles with subtle concepts between, their non-dualism is realized. It bears emphasizing that the process of *OM uccāra* provides a detailed classification of sonic forms which supplements the four divisions of *vāk*. The accounts of the stages from *bindu* to *unmanā* help one envisage the subtle dynamism that takes place from *madhyamā vāk* to *parāvāk*; in particular, the stages from *vyāpinī* to *unmanā*, with their characteristics defined in terms of *Śūnya*, may underscore any comparison between *Parāvāk* and *Śūnya*. Although it would be imprecise to draw any unilateral equivalence between the twelve stages of *uccāra* and the four levels of *vāk*, there is a certain correspondence between these two systems (Table 4.2). There could well be some difference of opinion concerning the demarcation of *madhyamā vāk* and *paśyantī*

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Fūrlinger 2009: 227-28; cf. Silburn 1983, introduction.

¹⁴⁸ NT 22.22 (vol. 2: 314).

¹⁴⁹ Cf. NT 21.60 (p. 285): *sāśaktiḥ paramā sūkṣmā unmanā sivarūpiṇī*.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. NT 21.61 comm.; TĀ 11.20; VBh 51; SvT 4.388.

**Table 4.2: Correspondence Between the Twelve Stages of
Om Uccāra and the Four Levels of Vāk**

<i>Twelve Stages of Uccāra of OM</i>	<i>Four Levels of Vāk</i>
<i>Akāra (A)</i> <i>Ukāra (U)</i> <i>Makāra (MA)</i>	<i>Vaikharī</i>
<i>Bindu</i> <i>Ardhacandra</i>	<i>Madhyamā (and Paśyantī)</i>
<i>Nirodhinī</i> <i>Nāda</i> <i>Nādānta</i>	<i>Paśyantī</i>
<i>Śakti</i> <i>Vyāpinī</i> <i>Samanā</i> <i>Unmanā</i>	<i>Parāvāk</i>

vāk. Yet, all would agree that the stages from *śakti* onwards find their parallel in *Parāvāk*. The stages of *śakti*, *vyāpinī*, *samanā* and *unmanā* are described in terms similar to what we have observed under the topic of *Parāvāk*.

Higher Levels of OM Uccāra and Śūnya

A study of the sensual experience of *sparśa* based on the Trika Tantras describes the metamorphosis at the level of *śakti* in between the subtle sound (*nāda–nādānta*) and *Śūnya* (*vyāpinī–samanā–unmanā*).¹⁵¹ One passage from *TĀ* affirms the understanding of *śakti* in her experiential form – touch (*sparśa*) – and tells a great deal about what happens between the manifested energy that produces forms and the transcendental energy that is beyond form. In *TĀ* (XI.29-31ab) we read in the context of *tattvas*:

In the earth, at the end of *guṇa* principle (from water to *guṇa*) and *māyā* (i.e. from *puruṣa* to *māyā*) there exist smell, taste and visual form, respectively, in the order of their comparative subtlety. In accordance to this established reason even at the end of the *śakti* principle there is a certain subtle form of touch, for experiencing which *yogins* are all the time longing. But consciousness (*saṃvit*) at the end of (above stated) touch shines as pure consciousness (*śuddhacit*) with the characteristic of void (*vyomarūpa*). Having risen (*rūḍha*)

¹⁵¹ Fūrlinger 2009.

there, one reaches the Highest (*parām*) whose nature is light by its own (*svaprakāśātmikām*).¹⁵²

This passage introduces the paradigm of the non-dualistic soteriology of Trika Śaivism, establishing relations among sensations at the level of the subtle body, *tattvas*, *śūnya*, *saṃvid*, *prakāśa* and *parā*. Here, it is *saṃvid* in the form of *vyoman* (the void of immensity) which characterizes the stages after *śaktitattva*, indicating the highest state of *Parā*. The four higher levels of *OM uccāra* – *śakti*, *vyāpinī*, *samanā* and *unmanā* – apparently unfold the multi-layered nature of *Parāvāk*. *Parāvāk* is the name for the undivided Ultimate, and this undivided Ultimate is experienced with a great variation of intensity. *SvT* (chapter IV) refers to the six successive stages of *śūnya* in correspondence to the *OM uccāra* system,¹⁵³ mentioning three *śūnyas* before *vyāpinī*: *ūrdhvaśūnyam*, *adhaśśūnyam* and *madhyaśūnyam*.¹⁵⁴ *Vyāpinī*, *samanā* and *unmanā* are allocated, respectively, to the fourth, fifth and sixth *śūnya*.

Whereas *SvT* chap. IV refers to the levels of *śūnya* in the absorptive sequence, in another chapter it refers to *śūnya* in the emanative sequence in relation to the stages of *OM uccāra*. In chapter XI, *SvT* shows how the world came (or comes) into being. The process of world creation starts from the churning (*kṣobha*) of the void (*vyoma*) by the heat (*svatejasā*) of Śiva, the effective cause of the world (*nimitta kāraṇa*).¹⁵⁵ It then continues:

From that, *śūnya* has arisen, from *śūnya*, *sparśa* (touch) has arisen (*samudbhava*). From that *nāda* has arisen. . . .¹⁵⁶

Kṣemarāja's commentary on the verse specifies the first *śūnya* as *samanā* and the second *śūnya* as *vyāpinī*, which is “the *śūnya* of Anāśrita Śiva”:

From that in the nature of the *samanāśakti* [comes] the void (*vyoman*). This void (*śūnya*) attains the state of *vyāpinī*, in the nature of manifesting the entire universe and dissolving it into non-being within the venerable Anāśrita (Śiva).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² *TĀ* XI.29-31a, tr. Chakravarty 1999: 304. His English translation *rūpa* into “colour” has been replaced by “form” above.

¹⁵³ Cf. *SvT* 4.289-94 (vol. I: 216-18); Silburn 1969.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *SvT* 4.289 (vol. I: 216).

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *SvT* 11.3a-4a. (vol. II: 308-09).

¹⁵⁶ *SvT* 11.5 (vol. II: 310).

¹⁵⁷ *SvT* 11.5 comm. (vol. II: 310), tr. Bettina Bäumer in personal communication.

This commentary clarifies that *samanā* signifies *śūnya* with the subtle vibration after the initial churning, and *unmanā* is the original state of Śiva “before the churn”. Thus, *śūnya* of *unmanā* can be understood as pure openness without even any subtle transcendental vibration. *Vyāpinī* is the state of pervasion.¹⁵⁸ As the above explanation of Kṣemarāja portrays, *vyāpinī* is associated with *śūnya* of non-being, the state where the lustre of the entire world is absorbed into absolute tranquillity and is thereby designated *mahāśūnya*.¹⁵⁹ The attainment of *unmanā* level signifies complete fusion with the Śiva nature (*śivavyāpti*), and it leads one to “the compact mass of *cit* and *ānanda* (*cidānandaghana*)”.¹⁶⁰

Various levels of *Śūnya* have been delineated in the system of *OM uccāra*. That the more subtle levels of the system have been described in terms of varying degrees of *Śūnya* displays that the dynamism exists not only in the category of being but also in that of non-being. *Śūnya*, from *śakti* to the *samanā* level – which can be categorized as non-being, consistent with the fact that they are called *Śūnya* – is a state in which there is still subtle movement, be it though transcendental. *Unmanā* is static, without any dynamism. The textual references to *Śūnya* in the context of the *OM uccāra* system have been drawn upon in an attempt to see the relation of *Parāvāk* to *Śūnya*. As a result, it may be proposed that there are various levels of *Śūnya* within *Parāvāk*.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. SvT 4.261 comm. (vol. I: 208) *vyāpinyām tvakkeśapade vyāptim labdhvā . . .*

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Kaviraj 1990: 92.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. SvT 4.261 comm. (vol. I: 208) “. . . attaining this *unmanā* energy, the pure light inseparable from the cosmic totality, he becomes completely fused with the Supreme Bhairava, the undivided mass of *cit* and *ānanda*.” (Tr. Padoux 1992: 406-07)

V.

The Doctrine of Vāk as a Theoretical Basis for Understanding the Aesthetics of Maṇḍalas

V.1 Parāvāk and Śūnya

V.1.1 References to Śūnya in Trika Philosophy

ONE frequently comes across the term *śūnya* in Trika texts, particularly regarding the description of *Anuttara* (the Highest), which demonstrates the characteristics it shares with Mahāyāna Buddhists. The concept of *śūnya* then represents the state where all creation is immanent, yet without any dynamism. In his *TĀ* (XXIX.133-35), Abhinavagupta uses the term *Śūnya* to refer to “the original state”, both before the dynamics of manifestation have occurred and after they have returned. He says:

If, with the consciousness of the heart (*hṛdayasaṃvittiyā*) thus exercised by means of any practice whatsoever, the quiescent form (*śāntaṃ rūpaṃ*) of Śiva manifests, one then gains access to the appeased state (*śāntaṃśivapadam*), similar to an unruffled sea. When one becomes established in that state, the whole host of the divine energies of the [main] wheel stand still, free of fluctuation, suspended in the void (*śūnya*), in undivided beatitude (*nirānanda*).¹

From these verses, *Śūnya* is the original state of the Cosmic Consciousness, the unobstructed state reached when one realizes the truth of the Heart (*hṛdaya*, essence). Similarly, in *PTV*, Abhinavagupta uses the term *śūnyarūpa* to describe the state of *vyoman* of *hṛdaya* (the open emptiness of the Heart). When he comments on verse 4 of the *Parātrīśikā*: *kauliko'yaṃ vidhirdevi mama hṛdvyomnyavasthitaḥ* (the plan of creation in accordance with *kula* abides in the ether of my heart), the term *śūnyarūpa* is used to describe the nature of *hṛdvyoman* where all the manifestation is held in a state of potentiality in the receptacle of Creation, which is analogously called “the

¹ *TĀ* XXIX.133b-5a (vol. VII: 3385), tr. Silburn 1988: 193.

heart". "Heart" is one of the main metaphors in Trika Śaivism for the dynamic, creative dimension of the Absolute. It can be experienced, because it is immanent as well as transcendent. It is also called *śakti*, *citi* or *Parāvāk*.²

While viewing *Śūnya* as the state of Highest Consciousness, what is really remarkable is that even the *Śūnya* after *Śūnya* has been conceived. As we have seen in the description of *unmanā*, the highest state that can be reached through yogic practice is said to be *śūnyātiśūnya*, the *Śūnya* beyond *Śūnya*, still yet characterized as *Śūnya*. *TĀ* assigns the term *śūnyātiśūnya* to this most supreme level of Paramaśiva, who is understood to be the thirty-seventh *tattva*, above Śiva, the highest *tattva* in Ābhāsa system.

Beyond the Śivatattva, is the *śūnyātiśūnya*, without any support (*anāśrita*), that is beautiful enlightenment (*bodhasundaram*), free (*svatantryam*), and without any differentiation (*sarvāvibhāgātma*). The thirty-seventh *tattva* is called Paraśiva.³

The *Śūnyātiśūnya* has been postulated as the all-inclusive principle called as the thirty-seventh *tattva*, beyond the comprehensive system of the thirty-six *tattvas*. *SvT* presents the seventh *Śūnya* above the sixth *Śūnya* of *unmanā*, and calls it *aśūnyaśūnya* (the non-void void).⁴ One of the meanings of *Anuttara* given by Abhinavagupta in his *PTV* signifies "beyond *ākāśa*" – i.e. "beyond *Śūnya*".⁵ In the passage from *TĀ* found above, *śūnyātiśūnya* is a term for the Highest beyond the highest manifestation, Śiva. However, a higher state than *śūnyātiśūnya* has been postulated in the commentary of *PHr* (4). It states that *śūnyātiśūnya*, equated with such terms as *prakāśābheda* (non-different from the Light) and *Anāśritaśiva*, is the first state to be manifest after Paramaśiva flashes forth with the desire to manifest the universe.⁶ Although attributing

² Cf. *PTV* 4 comm., tr. Singh 1988: 78, Sanskrit text p. 29.

³ *TĀ* XI.21-22a (vol. V: 2105).

⁴ Cf. *SvT* 4.292 (vol. 1: 217); cf. Padoux 1992: 96, n. 29. *YH* (3.174ff.) describes the meditation of the six voids which are correlated with *kalās* of *bīja* up to *unmanā*. Beyond these there are the great void (*mahāśūnya*), which is the supreme level (*param tattva*); cf. Padoux *ibid.*; cf. Silburn 1969.

⁵ *PTV* 1: "Anuttara is now analysed as *anut* + *tara*. *A* in *anut* means *avidyamāna* (not existing), *nut* in *anut* means impulsion, i.e. successive action (*kramātmakā-kriyā*) depending on the duality of going and coming, i.e. movement in space and time. So *anut* means that in which there is no impulsion of the successive movement. This *anut* is well-known among people as *ākāśa* (ether), etc. i.e. *śūnya* or void. 'Tara' is a sign of comparison, meaning better, higher. So, 'anuttara' means higher even than *ākāśa* or ether." (Tr. Singh 1988: 25, Sanskrit text pp. 9-10)

⁶ Cf. *PHr* 4 comm., tr. Singh 1963: 55.

the term *śūnyātiśūnya* to Anāśritaśiva is inconsistent with the reference above, where it indicates Paramaśiva, we yet cannot always universally fix these concepts into a concrete system, as their verbal descriptions are the outcome of subjective experiences and rely on personal expressions of those experiences in particular context. As Jayaratha clarifies while commenting on the above passage (*TĀ* XI.21-22a), the thirty-seventh *tattva* is postulated to clearly denote the nature of both transcendence and immanence within the highest principle, whereas the thirty-sixth *tattva* could only be understood as transcendental.⁷ He says: “However, there is no such *tattva* really existent”.⁸ Therefore, what is important to recognize is that the *śūnyātiśūnya*, whether designated to Anāśritaśiva or Paramaśiva, has the nature of both transcendence and immanence. The unimaginable Highest beyond *śūnyātiśūnya* of Paramaśiva has been also postulated in the notion of the thirty-eighth *tattva* (*TĀ* XI.22b-23a): not different from the thirty-seventh *tattva* in nature, but designating “the Highest” beyond any experience or definition (*anavacchinna*).⁹

At this point, it should be kept in mind that the *śūnya* of Trika Śaivism does not always represent the state of *Parā*, as is the case with Mahāyāna Buddhism. When the *Vijñāna Bhairava* tells to meditate on the *śūnya* of the five senses, the *śūnya* denotes the non-substantiality of the phenomena.

By meditating on the five voids of the senses which are like the various colours of the peacock’s feather, the yogī enters in the Heart of the absolute Void.¹⁰

In *VBh*, we see that objects that are ‘empty in nature’ have been taken as the basis for meditation – for example, the silence after sounds¹¹ or open landscapes¹² and even the physical body as void.¹³ These verses themselves reveal that these forms of *śūnya*

⁷ *TĀ* XI.21 comm., vol. V: 2106.

⁸ *Ibid.*: *nahi vastutaḥkiñcidevaṃ tattvaṃ sambhavati*.

⁹ *TĀ* XI.22b-23a, vol. V: 2107. However, the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth *tattvas* are same in nature, representing the highest state of undividedness (*avibhāga*), freedom (*svātantratva*), and consisting of *cit* (*cinmayatva*); cf. *TĀ* XI.28.

¹⁰ *VBh* 32, tr. Swami Lakshman Joo 2002: 33.
śikhipakṣaiścitra-rūpair maṇḍalaiḥśūnyapañcakam |
dhyāyato’nuttare śūnye praveśo hṛdaye bhavet ||

¹¹ Cf. *VBh* 41.

¹² Cf. *Ibid.* 60.

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.* 43.

have been employed towards the realization of the higher levels of *śūnya*, as exemplified above. Due to their physical or conceptual resemblances, they stand as the path to *Śūnya* within the *Parā* level, and thus are used for meditation.

In a different context, *śūnya* is a state comprised of experients (*pramātr*) that are bound to *māyā* (delusion) and limitation. In his *PHr*, Kṣemarāja explains that the manifold (*nānā*) universe is brought about by the reciprocal adaptation of the object (*grāhya*) and the subject (*grāhaka*). The verse is followed by commentary about the eight states of experients.¹⁴ Among them, the second level of experients, called *śūnya pramātr* or *pralayākala pramātr*, is characterized by the insensible *prameya* (object).¹⁵ Here, *śūnya* is the low state where consciousness (*cit*) is in the form of contraction.¹⁶ It is unawareness, similar to the experience of deep sleep.

The different notions of *śūnya* revealed in Trika Śaivism reinforce the idea that *śūnya* is no mere speculative concept or object of knowledge, but is rather an object or a state of experience: this is how diverse notions could have developed under the umbrella of *śūnya*. But, even at the low state, *śūnya* is not dissociated with *Śūnya* at the *Parā* level. Objects whose forms are indistinct have been placed above distinct forms (*sakala*), and are preferred for the purpose of reaching the Highest, *Anuttara*. Although the non-dualistic worldview of Trika Śaivism informs that all objects originate from the Highest, those objects that reflect this dimension of *Śūnya* within their forms are accepted to be the best method to attain the highest Awareness.

¹⁴ Cf. *PHr* 3, tr. Singh 1987 (1963): 52-54.

The eight states of experients are as follows: (1) Śiva is at the seventh level. (2) At the sixth level of *mantramaheśvara*, *sadāśiva-tattva* governs; the experience is dominated (*ācchādita*) by the consciousness of I (*ahantā*) and the *idantā* is incipient (*asphuṭa*); the object is both identified with and differentiated from the subject. (3) At the fifth level of *mantrēśvara*, *īśvara-tattva* governs; the entire universe is experienced as “I am this”; *idam* is distinct (*sphuṭa*). (4) At the fourth level of *mantras*, *śuddhavidyā-tattva* governs. (5) The third level of *vijñānākalas* exists above the *māyā-tattva*. *Vijñānākalas* are devoid of agency (*kartṛta*) and in the nature of pure awareness (*śuddha-bodhātmānaḥ*); the object of knowledge (*prameya*) – *sakalas* and *pralayākalas* are identified (*tatabhedasāram*) with the experients. (6) *Śūnya* or *pralayākala*. (7) The first level of experients, *sakalas* station from *māyā* to earth; *prameya* is limited and different from themselves (cf. Swami Lakshmanjoo 1991: 51-63)

¹⁵ Cf. *PHr* 3, tr. Singh 1987 (1963): 53-54.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*: 60.

V.1.2 Parāvāk and the Vijñānavādins' Absolute

Śūnya in Mahāyāna Buddhism

Śūnya, in the negative sense of physical emptiness or non-substantiality, has been well described in Buddhism, especially in the philosophy of the early disciples of Gautama Buddha and those of the Mādhyamikas.¹⁷ The dialectics of negation fully developed by Nāgārjuna in his philosophy of Śūnyavāda is a model to prove the emptiness of distinct form and language. Nāgārjuna's dialectics dealt with phenomena and refuted their validity. This can be interpreted as an attempt to show the imperfection of *vaikharī* (corporeal) level of existence. The apparent negation of language, propounded by most of the Mahāyāna philosophical schools, is due to "its limited capacities for expressing the truth of things, and its tendency to foster delusion".¹⁸ This is certainly characteristic of *vaikharī vāk*. Ultimately, this method of negation was used to restore "existence" from the phenomenal level to the higher level. The "higher level of reality" implied in the dialectics of negation is hinted at in the affirmation of Nāgārjuna: "*nirvāṇa* is not different from *saṃsāra*, and *saṃsāra* is not different from *nirvāṇa*".¹⁹

One should keep in mind that Mahāyāna Buddhists were not satisfied with any mere negation of phenomena, but rather were attempting to grasp the higher truth. While rejecting the corporeal reality of phenomena, they pursue the vision of Ultimate Reality and developed various meditation techniques to this end. Thus, it is evident that the Vijñānavādins develop a deeper speculation of *Śūnya*, where is seen the affirmation of *Śūnya* as the Ultimate. At this point, we find descriptions of *Śūnya*

¹⁷ In *PHṛ* Kṣemarāja explains that different philosophical traditions partly represent what the complete system of Trika Śaivism has achieved. In this regard, the followers of Buddha have been introduced as "maintaining that the fundamental principle is only a continuum of cognitions". And the Mādhyamikas have been viewed to be "considering *abhāva* (non-being) as the fundamental principle" (cf. *PHṛ* 8, tr. Singh 1963: 66).

¹⁸ McMahan 2002: 4.

¹⁹ *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXV.19-20:

*na saṃsārasya nirvāṇāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣaṇam, na nirvāṇasyasaṃsārāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣaṇam |
nirvāṇasya ca yā koṭiḥ koṭiḥsaṃsāraṇasya ca, na tayoṛ antaram kiṃcit susūkṣmam api vidyate |*

"There is not the slightest difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. There is not the slightest difference between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*. Whatever is the limit of *nirvāṇa*, that is the limit of *saṃsāra*. There is not even the slightest difference between them or even the subtlest thing." (Tr. Garfield 1995: 331)

comparable to *Parāvāk*. In the *Madhyāntavibhāga* of Maitreyanātha, *lakṣaṇa* (characterizing form) of *Śūnya* is explained:

... the non-being of duality (*dvayābhāvo*), and being of this non-being (*abhāvasya bhāvaḥ*).
It is neither a being (*na bhāvo*) nor a non-being (*nāpi vābhāvaḥ*).²⁰

Vasubandhu's commentary explains that, here, duality means the dual positions of the object apprehended (*grāhya*) and the subject apprehending (*grāhaka*), and that *Śūnya* is to be understood as both non-being (*abhāva*) and true nature (*svabhāva*).²¹

How is it not non-being? Because of the being of non-being of duality (*kathaṃnābhāvo yasmāddvayābhāvasya bhāva*).²²

Here, it is important to note that the *śūnya* of Buddhism designates not only the negation of any dualistic apprehension, but also the affirmation of non-dualism. Further, in the commentary of this text, Vasubandhu lists sixteen kinds (*bheda*: divisions) of *śūnya* (Table 5.1).²³

It is important to realize that here, *śūnya* is not merely a negative state of nothingness, but is the central notion which explains the various modes of existence. It is understood that *śūnya* is experienced in multiple dimensions, from the Ultimate to the phenomenal. The Ultimate *Śūnya* (*paramārtha-śūnyatā*) presents *Śūnya* as the Highest Reality, which apparently directs one's attention towards the description of *Śūnya* as the source of *maṇḍala* in the visualization practice, and which is comparable to the *Śūnya* aspect of *Parāvāk*.

The Buddhist *śūnya* also corresponds to the *pratyavamarśa* (Pure Awareness) of *Parāvāk*.

Śūnya is the Ultimate (*paramārthatā*) because of its scope of exalted knowledge (*āryajñānagocaratvāt*).²⁴

²⁰ *MV* I.13ab, tr. Anacker 1984: 217, Sanskrit text pp. 427-28.

²¹ *MVBh* I.13a, tr. Anacker 1984: 217.

²² *MVBh* I.13b, tr. Anacker 1984: 217, Sanskrit text p. 428.

²³ Cf. *MVBh* I.16c, tr. Anacker 1984: 219, Sanskrit text p. 429. The list of sixteen *śūnyas* as given in the *Bhāṣya*, and their secondary interpretations in Table 5.1 are based on the *Madhyāntavibhāga* I.17 and its commentary.

²⁴ *MVBh* I.15, tr. Anacker 1984: 218, Sanskrit text p. 428.

Table 5.1: Sixteen Kinds of Śūnya According to Vasubandhu

<i>Kind of Śūnya</i>	<i>Secondary Interpretation</i>
1. <i>Adhyātma-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of the fields of the internal senses = <i>bhoktr-śūnya</i> : śūnya of the experiencer
2. <i>Bahirdhā-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of the external elements = <i>bhojana-śūnya</i> : śūnya of the experienced
3. <i>Adhyātmabahirdhā-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of the internal and external elements = <i>dehaśūnya</i> : śūnya of the body ^a
4. <i>Mahāśūnyatā</i>	Great śūnya = <i>pratiṣṭhāvastu-śūnya</i> : śūnya of the habitat
5. <i>Śūnyatā-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of śūnya = śūnya of śūnya through which those śūnya are seen
6. <i>Paramārtha-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of Ultimate Truth = śūnya of all that is seen under the Ultimate Truth = śūnya of whatever object of understanding a Bodhisattva may resort to
7. <i>Samskṛta-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of the conditioned
8. <i>Asamskṛta-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of the unconditioned
9. <i>Atyanta-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of the greatness
10. <i>Anavarāgra-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of inferior and superior
11. <i>Anavakāra-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of no-rejection
12. <i>Prakṛti-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of nature
13. <i>Lakṣaṇa-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of defining marks
14. <i>Sarvadharmā-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of all laws or events
15. <i>Abhāva-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of non-being
16. <i>Abhāvasvabhāva-śūnyatā</i>	Śūnya of the self-being of non-being

^a Vasubandhu's commentary (*MVBh*) on the verse *MVI.17* (tr. Anacker 1984: 219) clarifies that the body is the seat of the internal sense-field (experiencer) and the external objects experienced, and that *adhyātmabahirdhā-śūnyatā* means "śūnya of the body".

Now, the present study can begin to further investigate the parallels between *Parāvāk* and the Vijñānavādin concepts of the Ultimate. When the perceptible *maṇḍala* is said to be a reflective image (*pratibimba*), the source of this image is to be traced not in the negative sense but rather in the creative sense of Śūnya, which is parallel to the other notions of *Tathāgatagarbha*, *Dharmakāya* and *Ālayavijñāna*. These notions of "the Ultimate", placed in the centre of the non-dualistic philosophy of the Vijñānavāda texts,

explain the creative dimension of *Paramārthaśūnya*,²⁵ and explicitly expose the dynamic aspect of the Ultimate; therefore, they draw a remarkable set of parallels to the concept of *Parāvāk*. To recognize the transformational aspect of the Ultimate conceived in both traditions of Mahāyāna Buddhism and Trika Śaivism is critical in dealing with the primary inquiry of this work: how the Buddhist *maṇḍala* resembles *Śūnya* from the perspective of the Trika concept of *vāk*. The affinity observed in these concepts of Highest *Vāk* and Highest Dharma would establish the justifiable ground for understanding Buddhist *maṇḍalas* on the basis of the theory of *vāk*. The closer look into the qualities of *Parāvāk* and Her transformation may illuminate through analogy the relationship between the Ultimate Dharma and its reflective image (*pratibimba*), the form of *maṇḍala*.

Parāvāk and Dharmakāya/Dharmadhātu

MV informs that *Dharmadhātu* is a synonym of *Śūnya*. It says:

Tathatā (suchness), *bhūtakotiḥ* (the reality-limit), *animittam* (the signless), *paramārtha* (the Ultimate), *dharmadhātu* (the ground of all events) are, in brief, synonyms (*paryāyāḥ*) for *śūnyatā*.²⁶

Dharmadhātu has been described in the *Prasphuṭapadā*²⁷ (a commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*) as possessing the nature of *ākāśa* (extensive space) and of *prakṛtiprabhāsvara* (natural luminosity).²⁸ Similarly, *prabhāsvara* (illumination) has been attributed to *Śūnya*.

How is *śūnya* neither defiled (*na kliṣṭā*) nor impure (*nāpi cāśuddhā*)? – Because of the luminousness of *citta* (*prabhāsvaratvāccittasya*).²⁹

²⁵ It is made explicit in *RGV* that these terms are synonymous to one another. Cf. *RGV* comm. I.86, tr. Takasaki 1966: 261.

²⁶ *MV* I.14, tr. Anacker 1984: 218, Sanskrit text p. 428.

²⁷ The full title of the text is the *Abhisamayālaṅkārikāprajñāpāramitopadeśaśāstraṭīkā*.

²⁸ In the *Prasphuṭapadā*, Dharmamitra (late eighth to early ninth century CE, cf. Ruegg 1977: 284) examined the penetration (*nirvedhabhāgīya*) of *gotra* as the ground (*ādhāra*) of practice (*pratipatti*). Dharmamitra's exposition of the nature of *gotra* included a description of *dharmadhātu*: "Concerning the nature of the *gotra* it has somewhere been stated to be the *dharmadhātu* [as in the following scriptural statement]: 'O Jinaputras, what is termed the *gotra* of Bodhisattva assumes *dharmadhātu*, it is as extensive space (*ākāśa*), and it is naturally luminous (*prakṛtiprabhāsvara*); the Bodhisattvas residing in it are born in the family of Buddha-Bhagavats of the past . . . future . . . and present.'" (T.T vol. 91, Êa: fol. 54a4-54b2, tr. Ruegg 1977: 289-93)

²⁹ *MVBh* I.22, tr. Anacker 1984: 221, Sanskrit text p. 431. *Śūnya* is seen neither pure nor impure, →

The qualities of limitlessness and luminosity may well be comparable to the attributes of *cit* and *prakāśa* found in the descriptions of *Parāvāk*. Its all-pervasiveness is emphasized more in the notion of *Dharmakāya*, which is compared to that space which pervades all forms.³⁰ So, it could be asked what the difference is between *Dharmakāya* and *Dharmadhātu*. In the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, which describes the two aspects of *Dharmakāya*, we find that *Dharmakāya* includes *Dharmadhātu* as one of its two aspects. The text says:

The Absolute Body (*dharmakāya*) is to be known in two aspects
 [One] is *dharmadhātu* which is perfectly immaculate,
 [The other] is its natural outflow (*niṣyanda*), the teaching
 Of the profound [truth] and of the diverse guidance.³¹

On the other hand, texts such as *MVT* have said that *Dharmadhātu* is also twofold, its aspects called “the Profound” and “the Extensive”.³² As mentioned earlier, the transformational aspect of *Dharmadhātu* has been referred to in *MVT* as being associated with the emergence of *maṇḍalas*, *mantras* and *mudrās*. The *Akṣayamatīrdeśasūtra* adds that this relation between essence and phenomena is connected to the notion of *Dharmadhātu*. According to the text, *Dharmadhātu* is constituted by twenty-two “realms”, of which four are elements, six are sense-organs, six are perceptions associated with the sense-organs, and six are objects of the senses. Though they are the main constituents of *saṃsāra*, *dharmadhātu* lies beyond *saṃsāra* by having absolutely no characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) which can be said to “reside” in any

→ neither undefiled nor defiled. The above verse explains one aspect of *Śūnya*. A description of another aspect follows: “How is it neither undefiled nor pure? Because of the adventitiousness of defilements in it” (*katham nākliṣṭā na śuddha-kleśasyāgantukatvataḥ*); cf. Anacker 1984: 221, Sanskrit text p. 431.

³⁰ Cf. *RGV*, concluding commentary on chap. I.145-47, tr. Takasaki 1966: 286:
 Just as space (*ambaram*) is considered to be all-pervading always,
 Similarly it is held to be always all-pervading;
 Just as space pervades all visible forms,
 Similarly, it pervades all the multitudes of living beings.

³¹ *RGV* I.145, tr. Takasaki 1966: 284.

³² Cf. *MVT* XIII.14 with the commentary of Buddhaguhya explaining what means “Profound” and “Extensive”, tr. Hodge 2003: 264; cf. *Piṇḍārtha* of *MVT* elucidating the topic of *saṃbhoga-kāya*, tr. Hodge 2003: 463; Buddhaguhya in the introduction to *MVT* advocates that those who are mainly oriented to the Profound and the Extensive Dharmas are qualified to practise *mantrayāna*.

of these realms.³³ One might note that the particular use of *Dharmakāya* or *Dharmadhātu* seems rather subject to its context. What is relevant to this present discussion is that the description of the twofold nature of the Ultimate Dharma be it called *Dharmakāya* or *Dharmadhātu* betrays a strong reminiscence of the doctrine of *vāk*. The concept of *Parāvāk* corresponds to that of *Dharmakāya* in the sense that it encompasses both the highest principle and all its manifestations; at the same time, it corresponds to the notion of *Dharmadhātu* that remains pure, in spite of its manifestation in every form and cognition. Also, its external, creative “outflowing” aspect may be compared to *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* or *vaikhari*, wherein is found discourse of Reality. Asaṅga’s commentary to *RGV* explains³⁴ that the first aspect of *Dharmadhātu* is perfectly pure (*suviśuddha*) and is the acting sphere of non-discriminative wisdom (*avikalpajñāna*). The second aspect is the natural outflow from *Dharmadhātu* (*dharmadhātu-niṣyanda*), which brings about the attainment of *Dharmadhātu*.

It (*dharmadhātu*) produces (*prabhava*) the communication (*viññapti*) among living being according to their faculties in discipline (*yathāvainayika*).³⁵

Dharmadhātu is Truth in the form of teaching (*deśanā-dharma*);³⁶ it is explicitly associated with the inner spirit of the teaching. The commentary refers to *Dharmadhātu* as the cause of the manifestation of *viññapti* (the image of cognition), which in Trika Śaivism is attributed to the *vāk* aspect of *Anuttara* (the Highest).

Parāvāk and Ālayaviññāna

Ālayaviññāna is the term which signifies the origin of multiplicity in the eight *viññāna* system of the Vijñānavādin. It denotes the primeval state where everything rests, invisible and unmanifest, but potentially existent. Thus the past, present and future co-exist in *Ālayaviññāna*. Just as *Dharmakāya* (or *Dharmadhātu*) has been understood as being twofold – one aspect not subject to change and the other with a transformational quality – *Ālayaviññāna* is also said to have two aspects. *Ālayaviññāna* is the source of seven other *viññānas*. Here the term *viññāna* encompasses every state from the pure uninterrupted state of Consciousness to daily discriminative cognitions. Through the system of the eight *viññānas*, Vijñānavādins explain the relationship

³³ The text is quoted in Wayman and Tajima 1992: 53-54.

³⁴ Cf. *RGV* I.145 comm., tr. Takasaki 1966: 284-85.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

between these two poles. *Ālayavijñāna* is absolute at one end of this spectrum, yet is transformative (*pravṛtti*) at the other end. The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* calls in the Sagāthakam (59) the transcendental aspect of *Ālayavijñāna* “*paramālaya-vijñāna*”, expressing its supreme quality; its aspect that undergoes transformation (*pariṇāma*) is called “*vijñaptir ālaya*”.³⁷ The former is *ālaya* as it is in itself and is known as *prabandha* (ceaseless). The latter is *ālaya* as the ground of mental representation (*vijñapti*), and is known as *lakṣaṇa* (the sign or manifested). It is primarily undefiled, yet appears in the dualistic mindset, devoid of purity, soiled by external defilements.³⁸ *LS* explains that *Ālayavijñāna* is not momentary when it is together with the habit-energy (*vāsanā*) of that which does not flow outward (*anāsrava*), but it is indeed momentary when it is found with the *manas* and *vāsanā* of evolving *vijñānas*.³⁹ Here one finds the conception of the Ultimate both in negative and affirmative terms, as is consistent with “being and non-being” and “neither being nor non-being” both equally applying to *Śūnya*. In its absolute aspect, it is envisaged as the waveless ocean, which is reminiscent of the same description for *saṃvit* or *cit* in the Trika Śaivite texts.⁴⁰ *LS* says:

It (*Ālayavijñāna*) is like a great ocean in which the waves roll on permanently but the [deeps remain unmoved, i.e. *Ālaya*-] body itself subsists uninterruptedly, quite free from fault of impermanence, unconcerned with the doctrine of ego-substance, and thoroughly pure in its essential nature.⁴¹

This passage presents the notion of the all-pervasive Absolute, unimpeded by space or time.⁴² A Trika Śaivaite text, *PTV* gives a direct reference to *Ālayavijñāna* equivalent to *Parāvāk*.⁴³ At the end of his elucidation of the *pratibhā*, Abhinavagupta refers to *Ālayavijñāna* as the undivided whole, the source of every idea and recollection. Here, *pratibhā* does not merely mean ‘the poetic inspiration’ as is often translated in the field

³⁷ Cf. *LS* II.37-38, tr. Suzuki 1999 (1932): 33-35, 231; cf. *ibid.*, introduction: xxv-xxvii.

³⁸ Cf. *LS* VI.220-21, tr. Suzuki 1999 (1932): 190.

³⁹ Cf. *LS* VI.235-36, tr. Suzuki 1999 (1932): 203.

⁴⁰ Cf. *PTV* 1, Singh 1988: 24, Sanskrit text p. 9.

⁴¹ *LS* VI.220, tr. Suzuki 1999 (1932): 190.

⁴² Cf. *TrK* 30: “It is the inconceivable (*acintyaḥ*), beneficial (*kuśalo*), constant ground (*dhātu*), not liable to affliction, bliss (*sukha*) and the liberation body (*vimuktikāya*) called the Dharma body of the Sage (*mahāmuneḥ*).” (Tr. Anacker 1984: 189, Sanskrit text p. 423)

⁴³ Cf. *PTV* 5, tr. Singh 1988: 94, Sanskrit text pp. 36-37.

of aesthetics, but rather designates the undivided Divine Consciousness (*nirvikalpa samvid*), identical to *Parāvāk*. It is further explained that *vikalpa* cannot arise by itself without *svātantrya*, and thus is based on the undivided consciousness (*saṃvid*) that is called the Supreme Goddess Pratibhā (*pārameśvarī pratibhā*). Then it continues:

Those, who are adept in discrimination (*vivekakuśala*), have experienced *Ālayavijñāna* in this very way.⁴⁴

Here, “adept in discrimination” apparently indicates the Buddhist School of Logic which was affiliated to the Vijñānavādin.

It should be noted that the notion of *Ālayavijñāna* represents the *Paramārtha-sūnya* as the creative source that puts forth the existential basis for everything; for this is often read the equation of the notion of *Ālayavijñāna* to that of *Tathāgatagarbha* (Womb of the Enlightened Ones).⁴⁵ *LS* says:

Tathāgatagarbha known as *Ālayavijñāna* evolves together with the seven *vijñānas*.⁴⁶

In this context, one can draw upon a particular aspect of *Parāvāk*: *Parāvāk* is the ground on the basis of which all levels of *vāk* exist, whether in subtle or in gross forms; every level of *vāk* inheres in *Parāvāk* and *Parāvāk* is manifested through every level of *vāk*. In the system of eight *vijñānas*, duality is seen to cause from the adherence of the *manas* to six sensory *vijñānas* and its non-adherence to *Tathāgatagarbha-Ālayavijñāna*; in the doctrine of *vāk*, the nature of duality is attributed to the non-realization of *Parāvāk* inherent to *vaikharī vāk*. Just as the dual states of *vaikharī* are restored to the non-dual state of *Parāvāk* by overcoming their adherence to those distinct parts of cognition, the realization of the *sūnya*-nature of these eight *vijñānas* makes the condition of duality cease.

While *Ālayavijñāna* is pure and unaffected, it forms the basis for all existence and cognition. Due to its aspect of *pravṛtti* (manifestation), it transforms itself into the

⁴⁴ Ibid., Sanskrit text p. 37. In this verse, *Ālayavijñāna* is compared to the undivided highest consciousness, *pratibhā*, and obviously we can place the Buddhists' *Ālayavijñāna* as equivalent to *Parāvāk*. But Padoux (1992: 200) places it at the level of *paśyantī* and gives a reference from *ĪPVV* where Abhinavagupta identifies *icchā-śakti* with *Ālayavijñāna*. Cf. *ĪPVV* I.5.5 (vol. 2: 99,1.7): *icchākhyālaya vijñāna*.

⁴⁵ Passages from *LS* explicitly identify *Ālayavijñāna* with *Tathāgatagarbha*. Cf. *LS* VI.221-23, 235-36, tr. Suzuki 1999 (1932): 190-93, 203-04.

⁴⁶ Cf. *LS* VI.223, tr. Suzuki 1999 (1932): 192-93.

seven other *viññānas*. Throughout this aspect of manifestation, it is the seed that contains everything (*sarvabījakam*).⁴⁷ In the state of sainthood (*arhatva*), the seventh consciousness, called *manas*, is produced (*vyāvṛti*) out of *Ālayaviññāna*, and in turn the latter becomes the object of the cognition (or *ālambam*) of *manas*; in this state, *manas* has the nature of “always reflecting” (*mananātmakam*) and indeterminate (*avyākṛtam*), though it is obstructed (*nivṛta*), being always conjoined with four afflictions.⁴⁸ *Manas* is conscious of the presence of *Ālayaviññāna*, but misunderstands it as “ego”, thus affecting the perception of the six other *viññānas*.

The relationship between *Ālayaviññāna* and *manas* is, to some extent, analogous to that between *Parāvāk* and *vaikharī vāk*.⁴⁹ One of the major characteristics of *manas* is the function of discrimination. We have seen that *vaikharī vāk* is also characterized by its nature of “distinction”, and that this function of distinction binds one to the world of phenomena. In the system of eight *viññānas*, phenomenal reality is produced by the discriminative cognition of *manas* via the six senses, reminiscent of the function of *vaikharī vāk*. It is dependent on *manas* as to whether one sees only the world of phenomena consisting of the six sense cognitions, or if rather one grasps the solitary reality (*vivikta dharma*) of *Ālayaviññāna*. *Manas* has these twin objects of cognition: one is *Ālayaviññāna* and the other, the six sense cognitions.⁵⁰ When the *manas* interprets the six *viññānas* as the act of ego in the discriminative dualistic framework (*vikalpa*), not seeing their basis in *Ālayaviññāna*, one is bound to the world of phenomena. Then what turns *manas* to see the non-apparent reality, *Ālayaviññāna*? It is the realization of the *śūnya* nature (specifically, *niḥsvabhāvatā*) of the six sense cognitions⁵¹ that reframes the relation between the Absolute and the world of phenomena. It changes

⁴⁷ Cf. *TrK* 2, tr. Anacker 1984: 186, Sanskrit text p. 422.

⁴⁸ Cf. *TrK* 5-6, tr. Anacker 1984: 186, Sanskrit text p. 422.

⁴⁹ *Prāṇa* is the sole support of *vaikharī*, and *saṃvid* is one of the synonyms of *Parāvāk*. The relation between *saṃvid* and *prāṇa* has been explained by Kallaṭa, quoted in Chakravarty 2001 (1988): 141: *prāk saṃvit prāṇe pariṇatā* (consciousness in its first creative upsurge manifests itself as *prāṇa*). Chakravarty adds: “*Prāṇa* so to say mediates between consciousness and the external manifestation in space and time.” (Ibid.)

⁵⁰ Cf. *TrK* 15, tr. Anacker 1984: 187, Sanskrit text p. 422. The six sense cognitions either arise altogether or not.

⁵¹ Cf. *TrK* 17, 23-25, tr. Anacker 1984: 187-88, Sanskrit text pp. 422-23. Anacker in his note on the translation of *TrK* 29, specifically explains *āśraya-parāvṛtti* (revolution at the basis that turns *manas* to see the Reality) in connection with *śūnya* (ibid.: 190).

the point of view of *manas*, allowing it to see that all the data from the sense cognitions are mere reflections of *Ālayavijñāna*. The role of *manas* in producing images of distinct objects may be compared to their production by *vaikharī vāk*, binding one to them. Yet, at the same time, *manas* holds the key for understanding the non-dual Reality comprising the Absolute and the world of phenomena. Therefore, it is evident that the realization of the negative *śūnya* in the system of eight *vijñānas* is the basis of realizing the higher *Śūnya*; that *śūnya* which is understood as a result of negation leads one to the Absolute *Śūnya*.

Parāvāk and Tathāgatagarbha

Just as the Vijñānavādins' texts tell of *Dharmakāya* and *Ālayavijñāna* having a twofold nature, so as well is the case with the notion of *Tathāgatagarbha*. *Tathāgatagarbha* has two natures: one is called *prakṛtistha gotra*, likening it to gold, which is immaculate; the other is *samudānīta gotra*, compared to the seed that germinates.⁵² It should be noted that the term *garbha* means not only the womb (*yoni*) but also the germ or the foetus. It has the aspect of the indivisible receptacle where everything evolves, yet at the same time it is the seed of evolution. In the doctrine of *Tathāgatagarbha*, one finds an unambiguous expression of a non-dualistic approach to Reality, as the following verse of *RGV* demonstrates:

O Śāriputra, the Ultimate Truth is a synonym of the mass of living beings (*sattva dhātu*).
The mass of living beings is, O Śāriputra, nothing but a synonym of *Tathāgatagarbha*.
Tathāgatagarbha is, Śāriputra, nothing but a synonym of *dharmakāya*.⁵³

In this passage, all objects in the phenomenal world are viewed as being essentially identical with the Ultimate.⁵⁴ Here, one observes successive identifications: *Paramārtha* with the world of sentient beings, the world of sentient beings with *Tathāgatagarbha*, and *Tathāgatagarbha* with *Dharmakāya*. Furthermore, the central message of these identifications is that 'all things have *Tathāgatagarbha* and are possessed by *Tathāgatagarbha*'. It is said that it is not the sense *vijñānas* that are subject to transmigration and which undergo pleasure and pain, but

⁵² *RGV* I.149, tr. Takasaki 1966: 288.

⁵³ *RGV* commentary on chapter I.1, tr. Takasaki 1966: 143.

⁵⁴ See another quotation given in *RGV* I.148 comm., tr. Takasaki 1966: 287. "The Tathāgata, being Reality (*tathatā*), is [identical with] the Matrix of these living beings (*garbhaḥsarvasattvānām*)."

Tathāgatagarbha.⁵⁵ In the non-dualistic philosophy of *Tathāgatagarbha*, everything is equal due to the existence of *Tathāgatagarbha*. *RGV* (I.27) says:

The multitudes (*rāśi*) of living beings are included in the Buddha's Wisdom (*buddhajñāna*),
 Their immaculateness is non-dual by nature,
 Its result manifests itself on the Germ of the Buddha (*buddha gotra*); therefore, it is said:
 all living beings (*sarve dehinah*) are possessed of *Tathāgatagarbha* (the Matrix of the Buddha).⁵⁶

According to this verse, the (Buddha) *gotra*⁵⁷ is the quintessence of the non-duality of

⁵⁵ Cf. *LS* VI.236, tr. Suzuki 1999 (1932): 204.

⁵⁶ *RGV* I.27, tr. Takasaki 1966: 197.

⁵⁷ Takasaki (1966: 21) gives the basic idea of interpreting the word *gotra*: “. . . among the Buddhist literatures is *gotra* = *dhātu* = *hetu*, or *gotra* = *bīja*. . . . In India, however, by a common use, this word means ‘family’, ‘clan’ or ‘lineage’, and analogically, it is used in the sense of ‘germ’, ‘mine’ or ‘matrix’.”

Snellgrove translates the term *gotra* as “fold”, when it is used in the meaning of a “category of people”, which is divided in terms of their spiritual ability. “*LS* describes no less than five folds, those of Disciple (*śrāvaka*), of Lone Buddhas (*pratyekabuddhas*), of Tathāgatas (i.e. for Bodhisattvas), of uncertain people, and of those who never desire salvation.” (Snellgrove 1987: 110) However, the term *gotra* underwent a semantic change. In the earlier concept of the *gotra*-division, only those who belong to the *tathāgata gotra* (lineage) could raise *bodhicitta* and attain the ultimate *nirvāṇa*. Thus, the term came to mean “the essence of Buddhahood” or the seed which has to be brought into maturity through the training of the mind. “The Sanskrit term used for ‘essence’ in this particular sense is *garbha*, which normally means ‘womb’ or ‘embryo’.” (Ibid.: 112) *Garbha* meaning both “womb” and “embryo” encompasses both “the fold” and “the substance”.

An objection against the doctrine of these variations of *gotra* has been raised, since it has been stated that because there is no differentiation in *dharmadhātu*, *gotra* cannot contain difference either. It is stated in *Daśadharmaka Sūtra*: “Just as one knows [the presence of] fire [by inferring it] from smoke . . . similarly one knows [the presence of] *gotra* of the intelligent Bodhisattva by means of [its] inferential mark. Concerning the inferential mark in this context, [54a] this refers to the fact that there are certain particular natural marks in a case where there exists some person possessing a particular sense base (*āyatana*). But it is not correct to speak of an inferential mark (*liṅga*) that indicates the presence of *gotra* where there is existence of *dharmadhātu*, because *dharmadhātu* is universal (*sāmānyavartin*). Hence the Lord (*bhaṭṭāraka*, viz. Maitreya-nātha) has stated that here *gotra* has *dharmadhātu* as its nature. Nevertheless, it is not the case that there are [therefore] no varieties [of *gotra*]; although it is settled that in reality *gotra* is one, still what the comparison has indicated to be the intended meaning is that the postulation of difference as such depends on peoples’ special *āyatanas* due to nature or to the process of perfection.” (Tr. Ruegg 1977: 290-91)

the phenomenal world and *Tathāgatagarbha*. It is the key concept for establishing the non-dualistic vision. According to Asaṅga's commentary, the idea that "every living being is at all times possessed of *Tathāgatagarbha*" has three meanings:

(i) *dharmakāya* of the Tathāgata penetrates all living beings (*tathāgata-dharmakāya-parispharaṇārtha*); (ii) the Tathagatā, being *tathatā*, is the undifferentiated whole (*tathāgata-tathatā-vyatirekārtha*); and (iii) there exists the Germ of the Tathāgata [in every living being] (*tathāgata-gotra-saṃbhavārtha*).⁵⁸

However, in the matter of whether the original *Tathāgatagarbha* is pure or defiled, the discrimination between the Buddha and the objects of the phenomenal world is valid.⁵⁹ As *Ālayavijñāna* is described as *sarvabījakam*, *Tathāgatagarbha* is both the seed (*bīja*) of all as well as the seed of Tathāgata – i.e. it is the cause (*hetu*) of the existence of the phenomenal world as well as of the acquisition of the *nirvāṇa*. The relation of the pure essence of Tathāgata (*tathāgatadhātu*) to the defilements of the phenomenal world is expressed analogically as "a germ" (*bīja*) and "the husk of a seed" (*aṅkuraḥ*).⁶⁰

Tathāgatagarbha is said to be both *śūnya* and *aśūnya*. It is *śūnya* in respect of "being devoid of defilement", and it is *aśūnya* in respect of "being" the *anuttara dharma* (highest principle).⁶¹ Asaṅga quotes a verse from *Āryaśrīmālā-Sūtra* (221):

Tathāgatagarbha is devoid (*śūnya*) of all the sheathing defilements, which differentiate

⁵⁸ RGV I.28 comm., tr. Takasaki 1966: 198.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* IX.37 quoted in RGV I.148 comm., tr. Takasaki 1966: 288:
Though being undifferentiated among all,
Tathatā (Reality), in case the purification is perfected,
Is [called] *tathāgatatva* (Buddhahood); therefore,
All living beings are possessed of the Matrix of Buddhahood.

⁶⁰ Cf. preceding the verse RGV I.115.

⁶¹ Cf. RGV I.155, tr. Takasaki 1966: 301:
The essence [of the Buddha] (*dhātu*) is [by nature] devoid (*śūnya*); of the accidental [pollutions] which differ from it;
But it is by no means devoid (*aśūnya*) of the highest properties (*anuttara-dharma*); which are, essentially, indivisible from it. //155//
Takasaki's translation of "the accidental which differ from it" betrays its dualistic frame of thought, which is inappropriate to infer into the *Tathāgatagarbha*. Here, "which differ" may mean "the nature of differentiation".

and separate. *Tathāgatagarbha* is by no means devoid (*aśūnya*) of Buddha-*dharma* which are indivisible, inseparable, inconceivable and far beyond the sands of Gaṅgā in number.⁶²

Here, it is noteworthy that “defilement”, the veil of *Tathāgatagarbha*, is described as the state of “differentiation” and “separation”. *Tathāgatagarbha*, which is the essence of a being, is said to be in a state of “non-differentiation”; as discussed above, in *vāk* is found the pair of “non-differentiation and differentiation” regarding “the Ultimate and its evolutes within it”. One of the central themes expounded upon in the doctrine of *vāk* is the dynamics between *Parāvāk* and the three levels of *vāk*, respectively, defined as non-differentiation and differentiation (*bhedābheda* or *vibhāgāvibhāga*). *Tathāgatagarbha* is said to be *buddha dharma*, which is “inconceivable, indivisible, inseparable from the wisdom (*amuktajñā*)”.⁶³ *Tathāgatadhātu* (a term equivalent to *gotra*), of the nature of the undifferentiated (*asambheda*), is the very sphere or domain (object) of the highest knowledge.⁶⁴ In other words, *Tathāgatagarbha* represents the undivided Whole which is revealed by the highest level of *jñāna* (knowledge). The highest knowledge implies the realization of the Undivided Whole, which can be interpreted to be *Paramārtha-śūnya*. Regarding the cognition of *Tathāgatagarbha*, the commentary on *RGV* (I.155) says:

Indeed, without the introduction to the knowledge of the highest truth of *śūnya* (*paramārthaśūnyatājñāna*), nobody can attain or realize the non-discriminative sphere (*avikalpadhātu*) [of the *Tathāgata*].⁶⁵

Associated with *Dharmadhātu*, *Ālayavijñāna* and *Tathāgatagarbha*, the Absolute has

⁶² *Āryaśrīmālā-Sūtra* 221c, quoted in the commentary of *RGV* I.155:

śūnyastathāgatagarbho vinirbhāgairmuktajñaiḥ sarvakleśaiḥ |

aśūnyo gaṅgānadīvālikāvyativṛttairavinirbhāgairamuktajñairacintyairbuddhadharmairiti ||

In the translation of Takasaki (1966: 301), additional interpretative phrases have been added in brackets: “defilements . . . separated [from the Absolute Essence]” and “Buddha-*dharma* . . . inseparable [from the Absolute Essence]”. Here in the above text I omitted those in the brackets because they seem misleading. *Vinirbhāgairmuktajñaiḥsarvakleśaiḥ* has been translated by Takasaki as “all the sheath of defilements, which are differentiated and separated”. However, the clause describes the nature of the defilements. Thus, *Tathāgatagarbha* is *śūnya* of all the defilements, which are sheathing, differentiating and separating.

⁶³ *RGV* I.86 and comm., tr. Takasaki 1966: 259.

⁶⁴ *paramatattva-jñānaviśyas tathāgatadhātuḥ* (*RGV* I.29 comm., tr. Takasaki 1966: 199).

⁶⁵ *RGV* I.155 comm., tr. Takasaki 1966: 302: *na hi paramārthaśūnyatājñānamukhamantareṇa śakyate 'vikalpo dhāturadhigantum sākṣātkartum |*

been commonly conceived as possessing a twofold nature in Vijñānavāda Buddhism: the unchangeable immaculate and the transformational. The transformational aspect of the Absolute lays the foundation for explaining how the realm of phenomena is not different from the Absolute. As described in Trika Śaivism, *Parāvāk* – while being described as *Paramārtha*, untouched by space and time – sustains itself in the realm of perceptible objects by means of its transformation into *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī vāk*. We notice that there is an accord between Trika Śaivism and Mahāyāna Buddhism in regard to the fundamental concept of the Absolute. While Vajrayāna Buddhism demonstrates the transformational nature of the Absolute to be found in one's keen awareness upon *vāk* through its *mantrayāna* practice, the concepts of the Absolute in Vijñānavāda Buddhism make evident the truth that the non-dualistic philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism fundamentally corresponds to the vision of *vāk* as conceived in Trika Śaivism.

V.2 The Non-dualism of Creation and Concealment within the Doctrine of Vāk

Although three levels of *vāk* – *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī* – ultimately originate from *Parāvāk* and essentially inhere within it, they are not identical to *Parāvāk* so long as they remain in the state where differentiation exists between *vācya* and *vācaka*.⁶⁶ It is significant that *vaikharī vāk*, though seen as the state in which the divine bliss has disappeared, does not degrade into “a fallen state, apart from the Divine”. It is the divine power of concealment that veils the true nature of the Divine in the phase of *vaikharī vāk*. However, *vaikharī vāk* is at the same time understood to be the completion of the divine creation. For the manifestation of form, two aspects of divine nature are involved: one of creation, another of concealment.⁶⁷ The creation of multiple forms is here seen as the concealment of the Divine Whole. The light (*prakāśa*) is obscured, thus the state of bliss (*ānanda*) is negated; pure awareness (*pratyavamarśa*)

⁶⁶ Cf. PTV 5-9: “Thus *vaikharī* herself, who has acquired development through *madhyamā*, so long as she remains in herself with words and their referents perfectly manifest, expressing mutual diversity and having the network of the categories of existence within herself, so long she is *aparā*. The development of the *madhyamā* stage which inheres in *parā* is known as *parāparā*, and also the growth of *paśyantī*. In her own self, *parā* is the divine goddess.” (Tr. Singh 1988: 156, Sanskrit text p. 55)

⁶⁷ SpK 46-47 (III.14-15), quoted in PTV 5-9. “The powers are ever in readiness to conceal his real nature, for without the association of words, ideas cannot arise.” Similarly, “The rise, in the bound soul, of all sorts of ideas marks the disappearance of the bliss of supreme immortality. On account of this, he loses his independence. The appearance of the ideas has its sphere in sense objects.” (Tr. Singh 1988: 193, Sanskrit text p. 71)

is invaded by the discerning mind in the hand of *māyā* (delusion). Without the concealment of the true nature of the Divine, no multiplicity of form could be accomplished. Kṣemarāja says in the *Parā Praveśikā*:

Thus, it (*akṣtrimāham*; *parameśvara*) is the origin (*karṭṛtvam*) of the life (*aḥatvam*) in this world; at the same time, the world (*jagataḥ*) is the result (*kāryatvam*) of and dependent (*adhīna*) upon the covering of light (*aprakāśatvam*).⁶⁸

Out of His or Her own freedom, the Divine emits (*sphurati*) the world within the Absolute Light (*prakāśa*). This is the beginning of creation, which is often described in the context of *Parāvāk*. The forms, thereafter manifested, are seen as the condensation of the divine vibration as well as the limitation of true, undivided nature, but are not seen to be fundamentally separated from it. “Condensation” means the imprisonment of the *nāda* nature of the Divine into the hard-shell of the objects of senses, and the petrification of the *śabda* nature into *varṇa* (literally, both phonemes and colours).⁶⁹

When the concepts of “creation” and “the created” are seen in such a philosophy wherein both revelation and concealment are inseparable, what could be the significance of “seeing multiple forms” or “hearing multiple sounds”? A non-dualistic worldview would allow such activities to ultimately restore the forms from the *vaikharī* level to the *Parā* level, which means a reversion to the *ānanda* experience of Light (*prakāśa*) and Pure Awareness (*vimarśa*). It is this experience of *Parāvāk* that has been the major theme of the aesthetic discussion in India. Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka describes aesthetic experience as follows:

The enjoyment of *rasa* takes the form of melting (*druti*), expansion (*vistara*) and radiance (*vikāsa*). This enjoyment is like the bliss that comes from realizing [one’s identity] with the highest *Brahman*.⁷⁰

Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s expression implies that the aesthetic experience has the same goal as the spiritual experience. When *SvT* (IV.275) teaches about the meditation particular to each level of *uccāra*, the spiritual experience at the *śakti* level (*śaktigatī*) is described to be “*sparśa* of the nature of supreme joy (*sparśānandātmā*)”.⁷¹ In the *uccāra* system, *śakti* is

⁶⁸ *Parā Praveśikā*, p. 3, translation with the help of Ernst Furlinger.

⁶⁹ Also see Larson 1974: 44.

⁷⁰ Quoted in *DhĀ* II.4, tr. Ingalls, Masson and Patwardhan 1990: 222. For Sanskrit, see *DhĀ* 1998: 83.

⁷¹ *SvT* 4.275 comm. (vol. 1: 212).

the stage from which the practitioner enters the level of *mahāśūnya*. In this regard, the experience of *ānanda* in relation to the experience of *śūnya* can be examined. Kṣemarāja's commentary on *SvT* provides a similar reference to *ānanda* in the spiritual experience:

After having adopted (*grhītvā*) the form of “end of sound” (*nādāntarūpatam*) and having come to rest (*layam yāti*) in the reality of *śakti* (*śaktitattve*), he/she – when *nādānta* has ended (*praśamyā*) – takes refuge (*śrayati*) in the “aperture of Brahman” (*brahmavile*) through the touch of joy of the Self (*ānandasparśātmatām*).⁷²

It is noteworthy that the experience of *śakti* is described along with the term *ānanda*, the universal bliss. From the viewpoint of aesthetics, *ānanda* is a state that occurs simultaneously with *camatkāra* (wonder), and both *ānanda* and *camatkāra* describe the culmination of the aesthetic experience.⁷³ On the basis of the understanding that the experience of *ānandasparśa* (the touch of bliss) happens at the *śakti* level, it can be inferred that the experience of *camatkāra* also occurs at this level – i.e. in between the experience of subtle resonance and that of *śūnya*, as we have seen in the *OM uccāra* practice. Therefore, it is supposed that the experience of *śūnya* comes after the experience of *camatkāra*. It is thereby deduced that *camatkāra* signifies the aesthetic wonder that arises when all manifested energy is absorbed into the transcendental energy, *śūnya*.

A question now arises: “Can one aesthetically experience *śūnya* when the culmination of the aesthetic experience is defined by the term *camatkāra*?” If *camatkāra* occurs when the subtle forms are dissolved, before the state of *śūnya* pervades, then even at its highest point any aesthetic experience cannot be more than a glimpse of *śūnya*. Swami Lakshman Joo, a contemporary practitioner of Trika Śaivism, asserts that *Parā* cannot be experienced in this body.⁷⁴ In such a case, though *ānanda* and *camatkāra* are often said to be of the nature of *Parāvāk*, the aesthetic rapture characterized by them would be interpreted as the experience of the highest stage of *paśyantī vāk*, where one has had a glimpse of *Parāvāk*.

V.3 Sanctification of Maṇḍalas on the Basis of the Doctrine of Vāk

It would now serve this study to examine the relation between *mantras* and ordinary language, for this is analogous to the relation between *maṇḍala* paintings and ordinary

⁷² *SvT* 4.260 comm. (vol. 1: 207), tr. Furlinger 2009: 235.

⁷³ Cf. *ĪPVV* vol. II, p. 177. “*Camatkṛti* means the act of a person savouring (*bhuñjānasya*), that is, the bliss constituted by the full achievement of fruition.” (Tr. Torella 2002: 118, n. 23)

⁷⁴ Swami Lakshman Joo 1991 (1985): 41.

visual representations. Ordinary language represents the product of *vaikhari vāk*, determined by conventional rules and comprised of mental constructs. However, the innate dualistic nature of ordinary language is superseded in the doctrine of *vāk* and it is restored to the non-dual source of *Parāvāk*, on the basis of which the *mantra* represents the direct revelation of *Parāvāk*.

In the doctrine of *vāk*, even ordinary language is seen to originate from and be grounded in *Parāvāk* in the same way as are *mantras*. In spite of that, *mantras* are distinguished from ordinary language. One may object to this distinction by refuting: “if everything in the objective world originates in *Parāvāk*, there cannot be any hierarchy among things”. This objection may also be applicable to *maṇḍala* paintings: “if everything originates from the formless *Śūnya* as Buddhist texts say, then there is no difference between *maṇḍalas* and ordinary objects”. A similar objection is indeed put forth in the attempt of some contemporary artists to deny any distinction between ordinary daily objects and works of art.⁷⁵ This dispute ultimately brings one to the question of why *maṇḍala* paintings are esteemed to be more spiritual than mundane art: if *mantras* are sanctified due to some objective basis, then on a similar basis would *maṇḍalas* be distinguished from ordinary objects. Therefore, this speculation on *mantras* can be looked upon in order to solve the question as to why *maṇḍalas* are specified as a means of meditation.

Mantras consist of a syllable or a group of syllables. They can be intelligible or unintelligible. There are even *mantras* that cannot be pronounced. Or, a *mantra* can be an intelligible sentence or a group of sentences, and be similar in appearance to ordinary speech. In the matter of how to define a *mantra*, Padoux answers, “*mantra* is a formalized utterance declared to be a *mantra*, ‘revealed’ by those texts and masters who are entitled to do so”.⁷⁶ *Mantra* is regarded as revealed, rather than a human creation. *Mantras* are governed by sacred rules, and by tradition are inherited from a spiritual preceptor. The practitioner must observe specific rules to pronounce a *mantra*. However, once a person is established in the state of *Parāvāk*, his speech stands beyond any conventional rules. *TĀ* says:

Whatever he who is established in the uncreated heart (*akṛtrimaitathṛdayārūṭho*) does, breathes or reflects, it is regarded as the recitation of *mantra* (*japa*).⁷⁷

⁷⁵ See the article of Hertz (1978) for the theoretical reflection on the development of the axiom, “art of non-art”.

⁷⁶ Padoux 1992: 379.

⁷⁷ Cf. *TĀ* IV.194: “One who has reached this uncreated heart, whatsoever he does, whatever he animates or thinks, all this is regarded as mantric recitation.” (Tr. Padoux 1992: 390) A person
→

This example is noteworthy because it implies that ordinary language can be *mantra* if it reveals the nature of *Parāvāk*. The consideration of the formal aspects of *mantra* tells us that its mere appearance cannot be a criterion in defining a *mantra*. A *mantra* can be a collection of lifeless phonemes at the level of *vaikharī*,⁷⁸ and ordinary speech can be a radiant *mantra* of *Parāvāk*; it depends on ‘how predominant is the *citta* (the consciousness)’ by which one identifies with the Undivided One, the Heart (*hṛdaya*).⁷⁹ In Buddhist terms, it is more specifically *citta* oriented towards *Bodhicitta* – as distinct from *manas* (the mind) inclined towards thought construction – that charges *mantra* with the power to lead one to the state of the undivided. It should be noted that ordinary language has a greater tendency towards discursive thought, whereas *mantra* orients towards non-discursive awareness. What is relevant is not any particular way of arranging sounds or letters, but rather their inherence to *Parāvāk*.⁸⁰ Due to the predominance of *citta*, *mantra* is differentiated from ordinary language. Furthermore, *mantras* are classified into hierarchical levels depending on how directly they represent the state of *Parāvāk*.

Analogous to the relation between *mantra* and ordinary language is the essence of *maṇḍalas* distinct from that of ordinary objects. Just as *mantras* that have limited functions to fulfil worldly goals are placed lower in the *mantrayoga*, so too with *maṇḍala*; despite complex rules required to accomplish their limited goals, those do not represent any essential characteristic of *maṇḍala*. As the recitation of *mantra* is ideally a process of one’s identification with the deity,⁸¹ so is the visualization of divinity in the form of *maṇḍala*. A *maṇḍala* is a cosmic form of divinity, with which a practitioner is ideally identified. This identification is attempted “by entering the *maṇḍala*”; without “entering the *maṇḍala*”, a *maṇḍala* remains an external object.

→ who achieved the undivided state of *Parāvāk*, while speaking, is free from conventional rules of language, that is *vaikharī*.

⁷⁸ Cf. *TĀ* IV.192-93; *ŚSV* II.1.

⁷⁹ Cf. *ŚSV* II.1.

⁸⁰ Cf. *PTV* 5-9. Abhinavagupta quotes the *Trikahṛdaya*: “. . . it is not only the position of the letters of a *mantra*, but the power of creative energy (*vīrya*) that is inherent in it that matters. It is by being preserved with that creative energy, that the *mantras* are really preserved, otherwise what remains constitutes merely a number of letters (*varṇa*).” Tr. Singh 1988: 150, Sanskrit text p. 54.

⁸¹ Kṣemarāja, in *ŚSV* II.1, says: “[The *mantra*] is the very mind of the devotee who, through intense awareness of the deity of the *mantra*, acquires his identity with that deity.” (Tr. Padoux 1992: 384)

When it remains external, it does not enter the self. Thus, “to enter the *maṇḍala*” also means that “*maṇḍala* enters the individual self”. In this process of identification, there occurs an intermingling of the concepts of subject and object. Once they are intermingled, the subject and object produce an indistinct form of cognition which is the state of the beginning of *madhyamā*. The rigid boundary between subject and object is dissolved through the very action of identification for which the *maṇḍala* has been created. *Maṇḍalas* are therefore primarily distinguished from ordinary objects in that the intention of their creation is that they are to be identified with, and will ultimately awaken *Bodhicitta*.

V.4 Gross, Subtle and Transcendental Forms of Vāk

V.4.1 Description of the Three Forms of Vāk in the Tantrāloka

In its description of *vaikharī*, *madhyamā* and *paśyantī vāk*, *TĀ* divides them each into three parts — *sthūla* (gross), *sūkṣma* (subtle) and *parā* (transcendental).⁸² The *sthūla* forms of *vaikharī*, *madhyamā* and *paśyantī* have already been briefly examined in Chapter IV. The gross *paśyantī* is exemplified by the harmonious oneness of beautifully arranged musical notes in the form of *nāda*. The sound of a drum, which is both distinct and indistinct, represents the gross *madhyamā*. Finally, the cause of physical speech is said to be the gross *vaikharī*.⁸³ The detailed description of these gross forms of all three levels of *vāk* is of particular interest from the perspective of aesthetics, because it unambiguously allows for sensual objects to be placed “beyond” the limited state where the Pure Light is obscured, and where the Pure Awareness is obstructed by the dualism of subject and object. The gross forms of *paśyantī* and *madhyamā vāk* are exemplified by objects which one can experience through the aural sense.

According to this description, the matter of aesthetic pleasure is decided by how much the dualism of subject and object is surmounted in order to generate the harmonious oneness. In the context of gross *paśyantī*, Abhinavagupta writes.

Undivided unity that consists in aesthetic pleasure (*mādhuryaṇi*) is called *śakti*.⁸⁴

He asserts that the one who is immersed in the *nāda* form close to *saṃvid* (Divine Consciousness) instantly experiences the state of *tanmayībhūti* (unity) because of its

⁸² *TĀ* III.237a (vol. II: 578): *tāsāmapī tridhā rūpaṃ sthūlasūkṣmaparatvataḥ* |

⁸³ *TĀ* III.237b-245a (vol. II: 578-82).

⁸⁴ *TĀ* III.238b (vol. II: 579): *avibhāgaikarūpatvaṃ mādhuryaṃśaktirucyate* ||

similarity to *saṃvid*. It is remarkable that *nāda* is said to be similar to *saṃvid* due to its harmonious unity of distinct sounds despite that it possesses form. In the case of gross *madhyamā*, the aesthetic quality derives from its qualities of non-distinction and non-division. For example, the sound of a drum is aesthetically pleasing because it consists of a single undivided note (*avibhāgasvaramayī*), and its repetitive rhythm (*tālapāṭha*) is also of the nature of the undivided. Jayaratha comments that absorption into the undivided-ness of the gross *madhyamā* leads one to a state of unity (*tanmayī bhāva*). In contrast, the gross *vaikharī* that brings about distinct sounds such as physical speech is too harsh to bring forth any aesthetic pleasure.

Abhinavagupta states that the gross form at each of the three levels of *vāk* begins with *anusandhānam* (the intention of a definite aim). For example, in the gross *paśyantī*, *nāda* is preceded by the determinate intention of “I play *ṣa*”, in the gross *madhyamā* by the intention of “I play sweetly”, and in the gross *vaikharī* by the intention of “I speak”. This subtle form (*sūkṣma*), which is *anusandhānam*, may well correspond to *icchā* (will), which characterizes *parāparā-śakti* as it is taught later in *TĀ*.⁸⁵ *Īcchā* of the *parāparā-śakti* results in the act of producing particular forms. *Anusandhānam* should be understood as the “spontaneous” apprehension of a form, which entails the intention of manifesting such a form. Abhinavagupta states:

The individual *anusandhānam* of three (levels of *vāk*) is indeed clearly apprehended (*saṃvedyate*).⁸⁶

The *parā* form precedes each of the *sūkṣma* forms of *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī*. The three *parā* forms are defined as “where Śiva, the *paracit* (supreme consciousness) resides”.⁸⁷ Jaideva Singh explains that the original forms of *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī* that inhere in their source, *parā*, are called *parā-paśyantī*, *parā-madhyamā* and *parā-vaikharī*.⁸⁸ According to him, the *parā* forms of *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī* are compared to *bimba*, whereas their state which is manifested is *pratibimba*.

⁸⁵ *TĀ* III.249 (vol. II: 585). The verse describes the three *śaktis* of Śiva that bring forth the manifestation: *parā*, *parāparā* and *aparā*. *Parā* is *anuttara*; *parāparā* is the will (*īcchā*); and *aparā* is the power of unfolding called “knowledge”.

⁸⁶ *TĀ* III.247a (vol. II: 583): *prthagevānusandhānatrayam saṃvedyate kila* ।

⁸⁷ *TĀ* III.248a (vol. II: 584): *tatparam tritayam tatra śivaḥ paracidātmakaḥ* ।

⁸⁸ Cf. Singh 1988: 109, n.

V.4.2 Significance of the Exposition of the Sthūla-Paśyantī and the Sthūla-Madhyamā

One might be misled to formulate simple correspondences between the three states of *parā*, *sūkṣma* and *sthūla* in respect to the three levels of *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī*, and therefore to simply call *paśyantī* the transcendental, *madhyamā* the subtle and *vaikharī* the gross. However, the doctrine of *vāk* establishes other terms as well: subtle (*sūkṣma*) *vaikharī*, transcendental (*parā*) *vaikharī*, gross (*sthūla*) *madhyamā*, transcendental (*parā*) *madhyamā*, gross (*sthūla*) *paśyantī* and subtle (*sūkṣma*) *paśyantī*. It is indeed significant that Trika Śaivism envisages not only the gross form of *vaikharī vāk* but also those of *madhyamā vāk* and *paśyantī vāk*. In such a philosophical framework, sensual objects are to be apprehended as manifestations not only of the *vaikharī vāk*, but also of the *madhyamā vāk* and the *paśyantī vāk*. In other words, the three stages of *vāk* are manifest in the forms that can be experienced through the five senses. The gross *vaikharī* is based on the subtle *vaikharī*, which is the definite intention towards and desire for such a form. The subtle *vaikharī* arises from the original *vaikharī* at the *parā* level. In this way, *madhyamā* and *paśyantī* also have their gross forms being based on their subtle forms of will to bring forth such forms, which in turn originate from their *parā* states. Therefore, *vaikharī*, *madhyamā* and *paśyantī vāk* inhere in the undivided state of *Parā*. *Parā* is the direct cause not only of *paśyantī*, but also of *madhyamā* and *vaikharī* because they exist in *Parā* as *parā-paśyantī*, *parā-madhyamā* and *parā-vaikharī*. In *Parāvāk*, everything shines and is apprehended as not separate from *Parāvāk*.⁸⁹

The important proposition of the doctrine of *vāk* – especially in relation to aesthetics – is that there are *vaikharī* objects, *madhyamā* objects and *paśyantī* objects. As seen in an earlier section, it is said that difference and diversity exists even in the *paśyantī* and *madhyamā* levels, but only at the stage of *vaikharī* is that difference distinct and perceptible as the powers of senses are fully awakened. In order to comprehend the three forms of the three levels of *vāk*, the dualistic structure of mundane understanding – that *vaikharī* indicates external objects, *madhyamā* the mental image or thought, and *paśyantī* the subtle beginning of cognition – must be overcome. Mental impressions and thoughts might be instead manifestations of *vaikharī vāk* if they be sufficiently distinct and discursive. On the other hand, external objects can be categorized as *madhyamā* or *paśyantī* according to which degree they reveal their undifferentiated

⁸⁹ Cf. PTV, tr. Singh 1988: 44: *tat paśyantyupari parābhūmiḥ bhagavatī–yatra sarvabhedenaiḥ bhātī ca vimśyate ca* ।

nature of *Parāvāk*. Thus, what decides the levels of *vāk* is the relation between the whole and its parts, regardless of whether the object in question is physical or mental. When the unity of the whole predominates over the parts to reveal *saṃvid* in an external object, it is restored to the state of *Parā*; then, such an object should be thought of a manifestation of *paśyantī vāk*. However, when the parts of an object predominate and the vision of the whole is obstructed, the object is not restored to the state of unity and thus remains at the *vaikharī* level. Therefore, it is read in *TĀ* that the aesthetic appreciation of external objects in representations of *madhyamā vāk* or *paśyantī vāk* leads one to *tanmayībhāva* (the state of unity),⁹⁰ wherein one experiences the Undivided Whole to some extent.

V.5 Transformation of Form in the Doctrine of Vāk

The four levels of *vāk* are essentially concerned with the relationship between the subject and the object, and they provide insight into the process of how the subject–object dualism is transcended in favour of the undivided, non-dual state. The doctrine of *vāk* describes the transformation from the distinct, divided state of subject and object to the non-distinct, undivided state of subject and object. The transformation of the relationship between *vācya* and *vācaka* as delineated in the doctrine of *vāk* is reminiscent of the transformation that *maṇḍalas* undergo in the process of self-identification. In other words, it can be defined as “the transformation of our awareness from the *vaikharī* level to the level of *Parā*”. *Vācaka* can be replaced by the terms *śabda*, subject or that which expresses, and *vācya* by the terms *artha*, object or that which is expressed. This process of identification — from the point of view of the doctrine of *vāk* — may explain the spiritual and aesthetic dynamics of *maṇḍala*, as well as possibly answering some important questions concerning Buddhist *maṇḍalas*: “why is it necessary to visualize the forms of the deities and their *maṇḍalas* in tantric spiritual practice?” or “why do Tantras put such emphasis on visualization (of *maṇḍalas*) in pursuit of the realization of *Paramārtha*?”

Stage of *Vaikharī vāk*

Within the *vaikharī* level of cognition or expression, a particular object is seen in terms of its distinct characteristics, and those characteristics define the object. It is the viewer who assigns these characteristics to the object. At this stage, the viewer and the viewed remain separate. At the *vaikharī* level, cognition is *vikalpa* (thought construct), and the viewer identifies the object with apparent characteristics, “not seeing

⁹⁰ *TĀ* III.239b-41a, 242 comm. (vol. II, pp. 579-81).

its true nature (*svabhāva*)”. It is the specific power of *vaikharī vāk* that produces these distinct forms. Thus, at the *vaikharī* stage, the viewer is the subject of the act and the viewed is the object of the act. Here, the act governed by *vaikharī vāk* brings forth the division between the subject and the object.

Stage of Madhyamā vāk

Madhyamā vāk is also characterized by the state of *vikalpa*, and the relationship between *vācaka* (that which expresses) and *vācya* (that which is expressed) is still based on the dualistic model. However, *madhyamā vāk* marks the point where the border between the subject and the object begins to break down. Here lies the power whose action – especially in the form of seeing or cognizing – bridges the subject and the object. It is distinguished from *vaikharī vāk* due to the predominance of subjectivity over objectivity, and to its being indistinct as well as distinct. It seems contradictory that *madhyamā vāk* is characterized as “the dualistic thought construct” and at the same time there is the “predominance of the subjectivity over the objectivity”. In fact, there are found several references that appear inconsistent if one merely considers *madhyamā* – or any other level of *vāk* – to be a fixed state. The study on *vāk* carried out for this present work suggests that the four levels of *vāk* are broad classifications that must be considered as a *continuous dynamic flow*. Therefore, these fourfold divisions are rather “dimensions” or “forms” of the One Undivided Reality of *Vāk*. As understood from reading the *Vṛtti* of the *Vākyapadīya* I.142, each level of *vāk* contains various sub-stages within its category.⁹¹ Therefore, *madhyamā vāk* should be understood as a range of stages, starting from the point where the distinctive thought process gives way to the non-distinct internalization, and ending close to the point where objectivity is completely covered by subjectivity. As related by Abhinavagupta, *madhyamā vāk* represents the initial state of identification where “a clearly manifested object is completely covered by subjectivity” and “the reciprocal mixing of the subject and the object” takes place.⁹²

Identification: Transformation from Vaikharī vāk to Madhyamā vāk

So, what causes this co-identification? The identification between the self and the object does not always happen, even though there is always contact between the subject and internal or external objects. If one is bound to *vaikharī vāk*, no such identification would occur, because *vaikharī vāk* is the power to bind one to the state of duality.

⁹¹ Cf. Supra, p. 158.

⁹² Cf. *PTV* (p. 148), tr. Padoux 1992: 210.

A passage from *PTV* explains what causes *vaikharī* to transform itself into *madhyamā* and the subsequent stages. In the context of the expansion of the creative power of Śiva, the text describes the contact of external objects with an experient. First, Abhinavagupta narrates the quality of Śiva, a name which could be replaced by “the Absolute” or “the Reality”:

Śiva who consists of *Parāvāk* and creativity (*visṛṣṭi*) in the form of expansion of the energy (*vīrya*) of the great *mantra* . . .⁹³

According to the passage, once objects of sense experience enter the experient through the inner or outer sense-organs, they abide in the “central channel” of the body (*madhyānāḍibhuvi*, viz. *suṣumṇā*) in the form of the sentient breath or life principle (*prāṇātmanā cetanarūpeṇa*), which is called *ojas*. This *ojas*, the energy resulting from the contact between the sense object and sense-organ, is diffused into and enlivens every part of the body in the form of “undivided power” (*avibhaktavīryarūpa*). *Ojas* inheres inside every part of the body. Then, when an “exciting” form or sound (*br̥ṃhakarūpaṃ rūpaśabdādi*) enters through a sense-organ (*indriya*), it awakens the “fire of passion” in the form of “the stirring of *vīrya*” (*vīryakṣobharūpa-kāmānalaprabodhakam bhavati*), due to the nature of expansion (*br̥ṃhakatvāt*).⁹⁴ In this exposition, the “exciting” sense experience is distinct from ordinary ones. A particular form or sound stirs the undivided power in the body – i.e. *vīrya* – due to its nature of expansion (*br̥ṃhakatva*). It may be inferred from its context that the *br̥ṃhakatva*, which causes this stirring of the undivided power in the body, represents Śiva’s expansion of creative power. The text up to here explains how the creative power of Śiva enters an individual body. Furthermore, the text describes the topic of sense experience in relation to aesthetic delight, demonstrating that the above process properly describes the moment when the significant contact between the viewer and the viewed entails the process of “reciprocal mixing”. The sensual pleasure is caused by the contact between *br̥ṃhakatva* of a form or sound (or any equivalent sensation) and the undivided power, *vīrya* of the experient; both *br̥ṃhakatva* and *vīrya* here represent the creative power of Śiva.⁹⁵ Or, as is mentioned specifically in the context of the aesthetic experience, it is the union between the creative cosmic energy (*mahāvisarga*) of the object and *ojas* (vital energy) of the subject – the dimensions or forms of the same Universal Power – that brings the delight in question:

⁹³ *PTV* 1, tr. Singh 1988: 42, Sanskrit text p. 15: *śivo hi paravānmayamahāmantravīrya-visṛṣṭimayaḥ* . . . The above translation has been given by the author.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *PTV* 1, tr. Singh 1988: p. 43, Sanskrit text p. 16.

Even a (beautiful) figure brought into prominence by the meeting of two eyes affords delight (*sukha*) only by the device of its union with the mighty seminal energy (*mahāvisarga-viśleṣaṇa-yuktyā*) which stirs up the energy of the eyes (*tadvīryakṣobhātmaka*); such is also the case when the ears hear a sweet song.⁹⁶

According to the earlier exposition, even if an object does not stir the *vīrya*, once it enters through a sense-organ, it abides within the body in the form of *ojas*. However, by the touch of the creative power of Śiva in the form of the *br̥mhakatva* (expansion) of an object, one's sense perception is led to an aesthetic delight. A verse that follows the above exposition expresses that the pleasure of the stirring of *vīrya* is produced by the creative power of Śiva – i.e. *vimarśa*.⁹⁷ It has been observed in an earlier section that *vimarśa* is the essential nature of *Parāvāk*. Here one should remember that *prāṇa* is the support of *vaikharī vāk*,⁹⁸ and *madhyamā* is defined as “the energy of self-awareness (*vimarśa śakti*) which activates an internal organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*)”.⁹⁹ The impressions of external objects remain in the *prāṇa* of the body, implying the level of *vaikharī*. The great change that occurs at the stage of *madhyamā* is marked by the role of *vimarśa śakti*. The contact between *br̥mhakatva* of an object with *ojas* (vital energy) signifies transcendence from the distinct and divided conception of the object. Once the object is removed from its dualistic frame by the *vimarśa śakti* – i.e. the *madhyamā vāk* – the act of viewing or hearing draws one towards an unobstructed vision of pure awareness. As *SpK* says:

This Śiva's power of action, residing in the fettered soul, binds it, (but) when (its true nature) is understood and it is set on its own path, (this power) bestows the fruits of *yoga* (*siddhi*).¹⁰⁰

Stage of *Paśyantī vāk*

The next level of *vāk*, *paśyantī*, is described as distinct and indistinct, just as *madhyamā vāk* is. It is characterized by both *vikalpa* (distinct thought) and *nirvikalpa* (without distinct thought). However, unlike *madhyamā vāk*, its objectivity only exists in a

⁹⁶ PTV 1, tr. Singh 1988: p. 43, Sanskrit text p. 16.

⁹⁷ *Vimarśa* is described as full of creative pulsation (*spanda*) of perfect Bhairava-consciousness (*paripūrṇabhairavaśaṁvid-ātmakam*), the absolute freedom (*svātantryam*), full of power of bliss (*ānandaśaktimayaṁ*) (ibid.).

⁹⁸ Cf. *SpV* 48, tr. Dyczkowski 1994: 132.

⁹⁹ Cf. *ĪPV* VI.5.13.

¹⁰⁰ *SpK* 48, tr. Dyczkowski 1994: xvii.

potential “germ” form. While *paśyantī vāk* is described as the state of *parāparā* – both distinct and indistinct – it is at the same time said to be close to the undivided state of *Parāvāk*. It has been earlier said that *paśyantī vāk* is reached when certain conditions are met; one of these is “memory”. When Abhinavagupta explains “memory” in *TĀ* we notice that the synthetic awareness of the multiplicity – in other words, the unity of the multiplicity or multiplicity in unity – is an important aspect of *paśyantī vāk*. This multiplicity certainly exists within *paśyantī*; yet unlike *vaikharī* or *madhyamā*, is also rest within the unity.

Memory (*smṛtiḥ*), a recalling to mind (*smaraṇam*), is at the root (*vastutaḥ*) of all the modalities of existence (*sarvabhāveṣu*); verily its innermost nature is the *mantra* (*mantrasvarūpa*). It is that which allows the apprehension of the deeper nature of these modalities (*bhavyasvarūpa*) when they arise. Memory (*smṛtiḥ*), [indeed], induces this nature (*svarūpa*). Colouring (*rañjikā*) [or taking hold of] in all objective modalities, as it is present (*sarvatrāvasthiteṇa*) in the multiplicity of forms (*anekākārarūpeṇa*), it partakes of the innate nature of all things (*svasvabhāvasya saṃprāptiḥ*), it is consciousness (*saṃvittiḥ*) and the ultimate truth (*paramārthaḥ*), abiding in what has been manifested (*vyaktiniṣṭhā*). Know that as such it is called supreme reality [or essence] (*parā*).¹⁰¹

This gives a critical exposition of *paśyantī vāk* in the context of memory, which is related to the process of identification. Above in the context of *madhyamā vāk*, we have read that it is the contact between *bṛṃhakatva* in the object and *ojas* in the body that brings forth the initial stirring of *vīrya* within an aesthetic experience. Now can be discussed the sequence of the aesthetic experience in the description of *paśyantī vāk*, found in passages such as “colouring in all existence with multiple forms in the way they are manifested. . .”. Multiple forms are grasped, as they are present. By doing so, the constituting forms of *paśyantī* partake of and become one with “the inner nature of all beings”. It is the synthetic vision (*parāmarśa*) of *paśyantī* that makes one able to take hold of multiple forms, and at the same time to become one with their inner nature, which is ultimately *saṃvid*. And this inner nature that the forms become identified with is *Parā*, as it is shown in the last part of the quotation. Finally, as “*mantrasvarūpa*” indicates in the beginning of the above quotation, the *paśyantī* level is based on *Parāvāk*,¹⁰² which is essentially *vimarśa*.

¹⁰¹ *Trīśiro Bhairava Tantra* quoted in *TĀ* V.137-39, tr. Padoux 1992: 397-98. Padoux’s translation of *paramārthaḥ* is “in the highest sense of the word”, which is replaced in the above translation.

¹⁰² Also see *ĪPV* I.4.1 (vol. I: 153): “Thus, he who remembers is none other than the supreme Lord (*evaṃ ca sa eva paramaśvaraḥ smarati*).” (Tr. Padoux 1992: 397)

Paśyantī is no static state, and neither are *vaikharī*, *madhyamā* or *Parāvāk*. The level of *paśyantī* is not only said to have multiple forms in a synthetic unity, but its forms undergo a transformation, since they are correlated to the process of cognition. Rājānaka Rāma's description of *nāda*, which represents the gross form of *paśyantī*, suggests that these transformations take place even within *paśyantī vāk*:

It (*nāda*) is a peculiar resonance (*dhvani*), similar to that of the buzzing of a bee, greedy for honey. It begins with (a sound like that of) the loud roar of the current of a fast flowing river and (then) becomes progressively manifest in increasingly subtler forms.¹⁰³

It has been observed in *Vṛtti* of *VP* that *paśyantī* is also described to be almost “without form”.¹⁰⁴ Distinct forms disappear in *paśyantī vāk*, and the forms of the objects of cognition undergo a transformation from the discursive to the non-discursive. From a cosmogonical standpoint, it is said to be the transitional stage between the Undivided Ultimate and the beginning of Its manifestation. In the reverse order, it marks the transitional stage from the fusion of distinct and indistinct forms to the Oneness of the Undivided Formlessness. Pure subjectivity shines in the stage of *paśyantī*. Therefore, *paśyantī* can be compared to *bindu*, suggesting the transition between the realm of forms to that of formlessness, the undivided Pure Consciousness. Before its complete dissolution into *Parāvāk*, *paśyantī* is reflected in the speculation of *bindu* as “the pure light” and “the knowing subject”.

Stage of Parā vāk

Parāvāk is essentially *citi*, *vimarśa* or *pratyavamarśa*, which is the pure awareness of the Undivided Ultimate. It is formless (*nirākāra*)¹⁰⁵ – yet, the descriptions of *Parāvāk* are accompanied by terms connoting visual input, such as *prakāśa* (light) or *sphurattā* (radiant vibration), at the subtle and non-physical levels. Even various dimensions of *Parāvāk* can be to some extent delineated into a hierarchy, with the help of the paradigm found in the twelve stages of *OM uccāra*. The stages from *śakti* to *unmanā* in *OM uccāra* can be compared to specific attributes of *Parāvāk*. For example, *śakti* is described as the stage where all the energy rests and is characterized by the term

¹⁰³ *SpV* 42, tr. Dyczkowski 1994: 119.

¹⁰⁴ *Vṛtti* on *VP* I.142 quoted in *ĪPVV* I.5.19 (vol. 2: 226): “The forms of the objects of knowledge appear in *paśyantī* as immersed in consciousness (*saṃvinnīṣṭhajñeyākāra*), their form being resorbed (*pratilīnākāra*), and absent (*nirākāra*)” (tr. Padoux 1992: 191).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *TĀ* IV.196.

ānanda which is associated with *camatkāra*. The *samanā* stage is associated with the *sphurattā* in the commentary of *NT*.

It (*samanā*) radiates (*sphurati*) in the form of the energy which brings forth the transcendental emanation (*mahāśṛṣṭiśaktirūpatayā*) that is the expansion of the countless cosmic emanations and withdrawals it holds within itself (*garbhikṛtāśeṣaviśvasṛṣṭis amhāraprapañca*).¹⁰⁶

However, it would be inappropriate to analytically allocate each attribute of *Parāvāk* to parallel stages from *śakti* to *unmanā*, because both the system of *vāk* and that of *OM uccāra* are extremely subtle. Moreover the descriptive terms referred to in these systems are meant to express the Undivided Whole. The purpose of comparing the attributes of *Parāvāk* with the higher stages of *OM uccāra* is to see the continuity that flows through the journey of forms from the *vaikharī* level to *Parāvāk*, and to understand the connection among their attributes – for example, the dynamic *camatkāra* juxtaposed to the formless *cit* and the absolute freedom of *svātantrya*. The higher stages of *OM uccāra* from the *śakti* level onwards apparently introduce the dissolution of form, step by step. Therefore, they give us the concept that the extremely subtle forms of *paśyantī* – parallel to *nāda* and *nādānta* in the *OM uccāra* system- gradually disperse and become one with the Absolute at the level of *Parāvāk*. Even in the stage designated as *Parāvāk*, the journey of forms does not stop; there is a continuous dynamism. The concept of form ends only at the final stage of *Parāvāk*, which may be compared to *unmanā* in the *uccāra* system. ‘Seeing the various levels within *Parāvāk*’ is important because they bridge and establish the continuity between the subtle forms of *paśyantī* and the formlessness of *Parāvāk*. It reveals the subtle ascension that takes place in the higher stages of the aesthetic experience, which is also related to the question, “in what way could *Śūnya* be attained by means of the aesthetic experience of *maṇḍalas*?” The exposition of *Parāvāk* in the nature of *Paramārthaśūnya* (the Ultimate *Śūnya*) explains how the subtle latency of form comes into being out of *Śūnya*, and how the multiplicity of forms ultimately returns to *Śūnya*.

¹⁰⁶ *NT* 21.61 comm. (p. 286), tr. Padoux 1992: 95, n. 25.

Notes

Through the study of Buddhist Tantras, one sees how *vāk* is thought to be the intermediate agent between *kāya* and *citta*, having the nature of both. Without the aspect of *vāk*, the *citta* aspect of Mahāvairocana can neither be revealed within the *kāya* of ordinary beings, nor can *kāya* of ordinary beings be said to be non-different from *citta* of the Ultimate Dharma. More importantly, it must be remembered that *vāk* is in no way limited to verbal expression which upholds discursive teaching or didactic instruction: it is rather a principle of every manifestation or expression. *Vāk* is the principle that binds the physical realm with the transcendental in a non-dual embrace. If *vāk* could be confirmed as the connecting agent between *kāya* of ordinary beings and *citta* of Mahāvairocana, then the relationship between the bodily forms of *maṇḍalas* and *Śūnya* (or *citta*) of the Ultimate Dharma could also be explained by means of *vāk*. Therefore the concept of *vāk* may be legitimately emphasized in regard to the investigation of how significant are *maṇḍalas* in the context of the spiritual search for the Ultimate Dharma.

However, a doubt still remains whether the concept of *vāk* as explained in the context of spiritual practice gives a satisfying answer to the question of this work, “why do certain *maṇḍalas* touch the heart of some people despite their having no knowledge of *maṇḍalas*?”. Is the aesthetic process of “seeing *maṇḍalas*” identical to the process of spiritual practice? Earlier, three points had been extracted for investigating these questions: (i) the visual forms of *maṇḍalas*; (ii) the nature of the Ultimate Dharma; and (iii) how the former is transformed into the latter. As the methodological framework of the investigation upon these three points, the four levels of *vāk* as described by Trika Śaiva philosophy have been studied in Chapter IV. The theory of *vāk* in Trika Śaivism defines the non-dualism of form and the formless through the classification of these four levels of *vāk*. It provides an elaborate exegesis about how manifested forms can be redeemed to the state of complete freedom. In such a framework, we perceive a theoretical basis to discuss the aesthetics of *maṇḍala*, and the study on the *mantra* practice of *OM* in relation to the doctrine of *vāk* throws light on the subtle transformation that takes place at each level of *vāk*. It confirms that the four levels of *vāk* are four loose categories that explain the continuous flow of transformation of forms. The higher levels of *OM uccāra*, being described in the Tantras in the terminology of *Śūnya*, lead us to see the link among *Parāvāk*, the Buddhist ideal of *Śūnya* and Vijñānavādin’s concepts of the Ultimate.

In the doctrine of *vāk*, everything is integrated within *Parāvāk*, and everything results from *sphurattā* (flashing forth) of *Parāvāk*. When *Parāvāk* manifests herself – though her nature of *vimarśa* and *prakāśa* is never impeded – the recognition of her real characteristics is hindered due to her transformation into *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī vāk*; on the contrary, the reality of *Parāvāk* is realized through the reverse transformation from *vaikharī* to *paśyantī vāk*. The four levels of *vāk* deal not only with transformation between the physical and the metaphysical, but also with perceptible objects at the levels of *madhyamā* and *paśyantī*. The exposition of the gross form (*sthūla*) of *paśyantī* and *madhyamā* displays another dimension of the doctrine of *vāk*, which is especially significant in the field of aesthetics. The affirmation of the gross forms of *paśyantī* and *madhyamā vāk* open space for discussing the spirituality of sensual forms; thus, this lays a crucial basis to explain the “sanctification” of *maṇḍalas*. And the transformations observed at the four levels of *vāk* unveil the inner journey that accompanies the “aesthetic relish”.

VI.

Establishing the Aesthetics of Buddhist Maṇḍala on the Basis of the Doctrine of Vāk

WHEN ordinary, non-initiated viewers look at *maṇḍalas*, they at times might be overwhelmed — not by doctrinal meaning or ritual significance, but by visual harmony of form and colour that *maṇḍalas* present. The fact that *maṇḍalas* are also permanently expressed on the walls of monasteries, as like those in Tabo and Alchi suggest that there is a fundamental aesthetic motivation behind these *maṇḍalas*. The question “how can *maṇḍalas* emotionally affect the hearts of viewers” has earlier led this present work to the observation that an aesthetic response to Buddhist *maṇḍalas* can be understood through their relationship to *Śūnya*. That observation has subsequently raised another question, “how do the external forms of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* resemble the qualities of *Śūnya*?” In relation to that question, the aesthetic scope of the doctrine of *vāk* has been examined. In the present chapter, the external forms of *maṇḍalas* will be explored from the perspective of the theory of *vāk*, in attempt to understand for what reason colourful Buddhist *maṇḍalas* are considered to be representative of the formless *Śūnya*.

VI.1 Redefinition of Maṇḍalas from the Perspective of the Vāk Theory

What Comprises the Maṇḍala

Vācaka Aspect

Maṇḍalas on the monastery walls are often viewed as “the physical support” from which meditation proceeds. Yet, one should keep in mind that the space of a monastery where *maṇḍalas* are found is not only for monks, but for the lay people as well. It is implausible to think that these *maṇḍalas* had been painted on monastery walls purely for esoteric rituals, because no *maṇḍala* could have been permanently painted on such a wall, in such a public space, for any esoteric ritual, be it meditative or initiatory. Thus, instead what should be postulated is that those *maṇḍalas* had another purpose to serve – and any occasional ritual use would possibly be secondary. It is logical to suppose that such *maṇḍalas* are present mainly for lay devotees, in a similar context

to how scholarship views the Buddhist wall-paintings of the Ajanta Caves. When the *maṇḍalas* are permanently expressed on the walls of monasteries, they are to be seen and appreciated by ordinary devotees who ardently wish for raising their *Bodhicitta*, yet who cannot always remember its permeating nature due to their involvement in *samsāra*. These Buddhist *maṇḍalas* are therefore more an artistic expression than a ritual instrument, standing for the inner vision of the non-dual ideal for the benefit of ordinary people with a dualistic mindset. It should be noted that they are presented as “an expression”, and when the expression is executed skilfully it is called “an art”. However, this art is different and distinct from that of narrative paintings on monastery walls – such as, again, the Ajanta Caves – the understanding of which is more straightforward, and the knowledge of which is pedagogical or doctrinal. In contrast, *maṇḍalas* are not meant for discursive teaching. They are the visual language which expresses the non-discursive Ultimate Dharma, and for this reason, they are called “the Essence”. The purpose of *maṇḍala* in Tabo and Alchi can therefore be formulated as such: “They speak for the inner vision of ‘the Essence’ for ordinary devotees”.

Vācya Aspect

The visual forms of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* signify a “meaning (*vācya*)” in their synthetic totality. Yet, the meaning of these visual forms is different from any denoted or associated meaning. The final meaning of these forms cannot be confined to any distinct object, but rather is non-discursive. Something non-distinct or unlimited should be postulated to be the object of these representations. Earlier in this book it had been seen that the tangible *maṇḍala* is a reflective image (*pratibimba*) of the *samādhi-maṇḍala* which is grasped at a subtle mental level,¹ and that the true meaning of *maṇḍala* is “the Essence”, because the gross, tangible *maṇḍala* originates from the Essence. The *maṇḍala* is said to be “the abode of the essence of all the Buddhas”,² because it contains the Essence. This Essence signified by the *maṇḍala* has been given many names, including *Bodhicitta*, *mahat sukham* (Great Bliss),³ *Śūnya* or *Dharmadhātu*, and others.

¹ See Buddhaguhya’s “the concise meaning of the *maṇḍala*” in his commentary to *SDPT*, tr. Wayman 1990 (1973): 92-97; *DMS*, tr. Lo Bue 1987: 795.

² Cf. *HT* II.3.25: Vajragarbha asks: “Why is the Maṇḍala Circle (*maṇḍalacakra*) known as the abode (*puram*) of the essence of all the Buddhas (*sarvabuddhātmakam*)?” (Tr. Farrow and Menon 1992: 190)

³ Cf. *HT* II.3.26. “Maṇḍala is said to be the essence (*sāram*), the Enlightened Consciousness (*bodhicitta*) and the great bliss (*mahat sukham*). Maṇḍala is so called because it holds the great bliss, that is, bears it.” (Tr. Farrow and Menon 1992: 190)

Problem of Vācya and Vācaka in Maṇḍalas

In this speculation on what *maṇḍala* is and what it represents is encountered the problem of word (*śabda*) and meaning (*artha*). *Maṇḍalas* have two aspects *vācaka* and *vācya*. The tangible *maṇḍala* is *vācaka* which expresses, and which is the object of visual sense. At the same time, the *maṇḍala* is *vācya*, in that the ultimate meaning of its form is the essence. The *vācya* and the *vācaka* converge, with the presupposition that the purpose of the tangible *maṇḍala* is to express the qualities of the Essence, and for the Essence to be tangibly revealed in the visible form of *maṇḍala*. If the *vācya* and the *vācaka* are intended to converge in a single expression, as is the case with Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, that expression must be distinguished from ordinary objects; indeed, such an expression has already transcended the limit of ordinary objects at the subtle level (*sūkṣma*) in its distinct intention (*anusandhānam*) itself. From the perspective of the philosophy of *vāk*, ordinary speech and distinct objects represent the state where *vācya* and *vācaka* are differentiated, which is the product of *vaikharī vāk*. Abhinavagupta traces the gross form (*sthūla*) of each level of *vāk* to its respective subtle form (*sūkṣma*), and the subtle form of each *vāk* is defined as the intention of creating its respective gross form.⁴ Thus, the gross form of *vaikharī vāk* springs from the intention (*anusandhānam*) of the *vaikharī* object, while the gross form of *paśyantī* springs from the intention of the *paśyantī* object. In other words, it is the intention to create the *vaikharī* or *paśyantī* objects that brings forth the *vaikharī* or *paśyantī* object.

We may now consider the ritual *maṇḍala* used for the practice of visualization from the perspective of the theory of *vāk*. Starting with the physical basis of the *maṇḍala*, the practice of visualization attempts to realize the Essence. Here, the physical form is intended for mental reproduction and inner absorption, and the physical form of such a *maṇḍala* does not serve its purpose if it is not meditated upon, and recreated in one's meditative space. This meditative *maṇḍala*, being the subtle re-creation of the external *maṇḍala* in the meditative space, exists beyond the physical realm. Still, it is not easy to state authoritatively whether the mental image of the *maṇḍala* is yet at the level of *vaikharī* or if it be already within *madhyamā vāk*; both interpretations are valid. It is still at the level of *vaikharī vāk* because all the differentiated details of the physical form are to be remembered and reproduced in the visualization, which means that the differentiating principle of *vaikharī vāk* still dominates in the mental representation. On the other hand, the mental image is certainly subtler and more conducive to the undifferentiated state than the physical image could be; thus, it can

⁴ Cf. *TĀ* III.245b-247a (vol. II: 583). Cf. *supra*. pp. 204-05.

be said that it also exists at the domain of *madhyamā vāk*. Probably the mental image of *maṇḍala* could be placed at the threshold between the *vaikharī* and the *madhyamā*.

In case of those *maṇḍalas* meant for visualization, their artistic standard could be secondary, because it is by means of one's meditative power that the *vācaka* aspect of the *maṇḍala* converges with its *vācya* aspect; also, the physicality of the external form is transcended in the meditative space of indistinctness. Here, it is in one's internal space that one passes the threshold of physicality. Hence, it may be said that those tangible elements of *maṇḍalas* remain merely at the *vaikharī* level if they are not internalized in meditation. Only when they are internalized and the central deity is identified with the self, do they serve their purpose in leading one through the *madhyamā* level and further to the *paśyantī* state, where the Essence is realized. This visualization can be interpreted as the process of identifying the *vācaka* and the *vācya*, on the path to *paśyantī* or *parāvāk*. In such a context, the *maṇḍala* may be compared to a guide map or a diagram of the meditation process, while the experience of the Essence remains esoteric and invisible.

On the other hand, a *maṇḍala* painted in a public space for the laity needs a different method to serve its purpose, because the Essence should be revealed even without involving the practice of visualization. While *maṇḍalas* intended for meditation seize the inner vision of the Essence within, those painted for the laity – such as those in Tabo and Alchi – should unfold the Essence more readily. If the nature of the Essence is not reflected in the external form, it remains concealed. If the Essence is not represented by the physical form of the *maṇḍala*, the *vācya* and the *vācaka* of the *maṇḍala* remain differentiated at the *vaikharī* level, and the *maṇḍala* might not be particularly arresting or impressive to the casual observer. The Essence should be reflected in their visible form, if the *maṇḍala* is to serve its purpose.

From the perspective of the theory of *vāk*, the state of “the Essence which is reflected on the external form of *maṇḍala*” is the state where the *vācya* and the *vācaka* are approaching union with each other. This state may be related to both *madhyamā* and *paśyantī* in varying relationships between the *vācaka* and the *vācya*, explained in the doctrine of *vāk*. *Madhyamā vāk* marks the initial stage of identification where the reciprocal fusion between the *vācya* and the *vācaka* takes place. In the *paśyantī* state, the fusion between the *vācya* and the *vācaka* has led to the almost un-differentiated unity, which is close to the state of *Parāvāk*.

Public *maṇḍalas* cannot be so rigidly bound to any particular level of *vāk*, despite this discussion about the relationship between their *vācya* and *vācaka* aspects.

However, the relationship between their *vācya* and *vācaka* aspects can be judged on an aesthetic basis of these *maṇḍalas*. Depending on how successfully the physical forms (*vācaka*) reflect the qualities of the Essence (*vācya*), a *maṇḍala* can echo the *vaikhari*, *madhyamā* or *paśyantī vāk*. Indeed, the success of a *maṇḍala*'s expression is determined by the level of art employed in its fabrication. When a *maṇḍala* is successful in expressing the qualities of the Essence, its *vācya* and *vācaka* aspects are in union, its ultimate meaning — the Essence — and its external forms are undifferentiated from each other. When the ultimate meaning unfolds in the external form of a *maṇḍala*, that *maṇḍala* is worthy of being identified as *paśyantī vāk*, which is close to *parāvāk*.

VI.2 Maṇḍalas of Alchi Interpreted as the Gross Paśyantī

It is art that accomplishes the revelation of the Essence in the sensual forms of *maṇḍala*. The high standard of art demonstrated in the *maṇḍalas* of Tabo and Alchi enlivens the visual forms from the *vaikhari* to the *paśyantī* level. It would now be fruitful to examine *maṇḍalas* of Alchi in comparison to the aspects of *paśyantī vāk*, and to interpret their aesthetic power on this basis of *paśyantī* dimension.

VI.2.1 Nature of Paśyantī vāk

First of all, it will be helpful to again touch upon the essential characteristics of *paśyantī vāk* to understand in what sense the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi could be seen in this light.

- i) *Paśyantī vāk* is characterized by *parāmarśa* (synthetic awareness) of the Undivided Whole. It is said to awaken only by the penetrating activity of *bodha* (enlightenment or awareness) (*bodhasūtraṇamatreṇa*).⁵
- ii) At the *paśyantī* stage, subjectivity prevails. However, this subjectivity has objectivity as its object of awareness (*idambhāvarūpasyapratyavamarśa*).⁶
- iii) There is no separation of *vācya* and *vācaka*, or of subject and object.
- iv) The unity of the whole predominates over the distinct parts.
- v) Various distinct forms are fused into one another to the extent that there is the non-existence of distinct forms. Therefore, with-form and without-form exist together (*parāparā*).

⁵ Cf. *PTV*, p. 4. Cf. *Supra*. p. 159.

⁶ Cf. *ĪPV* I.5.13 (vol. I: 251-54). See also Padoux 1992: 192.

Paśyantī vāk is the stage very close to *Parāvāk*, which is the pure trans-physical light (*prakāśa*), the pure awareness (*vimarśa*). *Paśyantī* is similar to *parāvāk* in nature, though the sense of objectivity – or the dualism of the object and the subject – is inchoate. It is described as the subtlest stage in the process of evolution and absorption at the microcosmic as well as at the macrocosmic level. It also represents the internal subtle synthesis of multiple forms of objects in the process of cognition.

However, the four levels of *vāk* are not always explained in any successive sequence. As seen above, Abhinavagupta in his *TĀ* describes his perception of three levels of *vāk* (*vaikharī*, *madhyamā* and *paśyantī*) in their own independent lines of development.⁷ According to his discourse about these three *vāks*, each *vāk* originates from *Parāvāk*, and each of these three levels of *vāk* has three manifestations (*rūpa*): gross (*sthūla*), subtle (*sūkṣma*) and transcendental (*parā*). Here, *paśyantī* is not only a subtle state but is also a sense object, and *vaikharī* is not only a gross manifestation but is also the subtle will (*anusandhāna*) that desires the creation of such a manifestation.

In the context of understanding *maṇḍalas*, both these aspects of *paśyantī* are relevant:

- i) *paśyantī* as the internal subtle stage of absorption and cognition;
- ii) *paśyantī* as the external object of sense experience.

The former is related to the mental procedure, and could somewhat explain the transformation of form that takes place at the final stage in the visualization of *maṇḍala*. The latter is concerned with a physical, sensual activity, and thus with the aesthetic appreciation of *maṇḍalas*. Evidently, the latter aspect of *paśyantī* is more significant for comprehending the aesthetic dimension of *maṇḍala*. The gross form of *paśyantī* described by Abhinavagupta opens a scope for recognizing the non-discursive dimension of form in *maṇḍalas*.

VI. 2.2 Speculation on Sthūla-Paśyantī

The gross form of *paśyantī* is often compared to “the murmuring sound of a stream”. In *ĪPVV*, the *paśyantī* is described to be “such a subtle murmur” (*sūkṣmasaṃjāpa-svabhāva*).⁸ In *TĀ*, the gross *paśyantī* is said to be “in the form of *nāda*”.⁹ In *NT*, *nāda*

⁷ Cf. *TĀ* III.237b-245a. Cf. *Supra.* pp. 204-05.

⁸ Cf. *ĪPVV* I.5.13 (vol. 2: 190, l. 18).

⁹ Cf. *TĀ* III.237b.

is compared to “the indistinct murmur of a brook” (*avyucchinadrutanādighoṣa*),¹⁰ and Abhinavagupta describes *nāda* “as light and beautiful as a series of musical notes”¹¹ which are not divided from each other.

Then, why is the murmuring sound of a brook comparable to *nāda* and *paśyantī*? The answer to this question seems crucial for understanding which objects in the physical realm could be said to reveal *paśyantī vāk*, which is close to *Parāvāk*, which is the creative, immanent and vibrant aspect of the Highest (*Anuttara*). First, the physical characteristics of a “murmuring brook” might be scrutinized. The murmur of a brook is an undivided sound, continuously flowing with neither beginning nor end; indeed, it even sounds like a repeating loop of a single unit of sound. Such a perception is even implicit in the fact that various different languages transcribe the sound of a flowing brook with an onomatopoetic word, and repeat the word in order to indicate a continuous flow – for example, in the Korean language, the syllable *jol* is repeated: *jol-jol-jol-jol*. . . . One hears oneness in that the repetitive sound endlessly continues. However, when one is absorbed into the murmur of a brook, one hears innumerable variations of sounds created by the water within the harmonious unity of the sound. A variety of tones, beats or even melodies start emerging. These various sounds seem to arise and disappear ceaselessly: before grasping one sound, another sound touches the senses, and that sound seems again disappearing before it can be seized. Within the unity of sound, multiple sounds are enfolded. It is the complete harmony and the union of multiple sounds – the synchronism of oneness and manifoldness – that makes the murmuring sound of a brook a valid analogy for the nature of *paśyantī vāk*. In the sound of a brook, multiple sounds are distinct. However, at the same time one cannot say that these multiple sounds are distinct because they are completely superseded by a larger unit of harmonious sound. These resonances are indistinct in the sense that they are thoroughly fused with one another, and they lose their discrete separation. These characteristics observed in the form of “the murmur of a brook” are reminiscent of the *parāparā* (indistinct–distinct) aspect of *paśyantī vāk*, described in the following verse:

All this appears in her (*paśyantī*) in a variety of discrete aspects or as forms fused into each other, or it may appear as having lost all form.¹²

¹⁰ Cf. *NT* 21.63 comm. (vol. 2: 288); cf. Padoux 1992: 102.

¹¹ Cf. *TĀ* III.237b.

¹² *Vṛtti* on *VP* I.142, quoted in *ĪPVV* I.5.19 (vol. 2: 226): *paricchinārtha-pratyavabhāsā saṃśṛṣṭārtha-pratyavabhāsā ca sarvārtha-pratyavabhāsā praśāntapratyavabhāsā ca*. (Tr. Padoux 1992: 191)

Abhinavagupta refers to “a series of musical notes” as an example of the perceptible form of *paśyantī*. If attention is paid to the analogy of “a series of musical notes”, one might also discover in there these characteristics of a brook’s murmur; it is the co-existence of multiple forms and the indistinct whole that makes “a series of musical notes” comparable to *paśyantī vāk*. Its various distinct notes are intertwined with one another till they merge into a single stream of musicality. It is reminiscent of the ocean – also a metaphoric image of the Divine Consciousness, in that the waves constantly come and go, yet still remains a part of the great ocean, its depths forever still. Each note plays its role and has its meaning in relation to the others; none is distinct within the flowing oneness, though all retain their distinct form. At the moment of one’s absorption into the sound, one’s hearing is directed not to any particular sound of any particular note, but rather to the musical essence (*rasa*) manifested by those particular sounds. It is this dynamic fusion of the various notes that is borne within the harmonious flow of sound, and it is that fusion which endows the distinct notes with any musical life. When distinct notes fail to be mingled in harmony, they remain distinct in disharmony, which is contrary to most traditional aesthetic sensibilities. “A series of notes” whose life abides in its nature of “distinct and indistinct” (*parāparā*) indeed manifests *paśyantī vāk* in its corporeal form.

However, why has Abhinavagupta allocated “the sound of a drum” not to the gross form of *paśyantī* but to that of *madhyamā*, even though its life abides also in the *parāparā* nature?

The sound of a drum consists of “a single note” and the repetitive rhythm, which literally express the undivided. In contrast, the sound of a string instrument consists of “multiple notes”, which create an undivided oneness. Though both forms of sound directly or indirectly convey the vision of the undivided, the difference lies in the means by which “the undivided” is conveyed. The sound of a drum represents the undivided through its unchanging, unvarying form, whereas the sound of a string instrument does the same by means of its variety of different notes. In case of the sound of a drum, the undivided does not express the whole that enfolds the many forms, whereas in the sound of a string instrument, the non-duality of the whole and the parts is physically present. Though *sthūla-madhyamā* (gross form of *madhyamā*) physically conveys a picture of the undivided form, its form, being technically simpler than that of *sthūla-paśyantī* (gross form of *paśyantī*), has a shortcoming in its ability to express the vision of “the undivided encompassing all divisions”. Here, multiplicity is inferred to be innate in its simple undivided form, whereas in the *sthūla-paśyantī* it has as prominent a place as does Oneness. The comparison of the sound of a drum with

that of a string instrument emphasizes an important characteristic of *paśyantī vāk*: “multiplicity in unity”. In *paśyantī vāk*, the multiple varieties of form are not merely the constituents of “the undivided” but are the instruments to create “the undivided”.

VI.2.3 Maṇḍalas and Nāda

The characteristics observed in the examples of the murmur of a brook and a series of musical notes render the nature of *nāda*. They provide a framework by means of which the aesthetic value of *maṇḍalas* could be established. Now, having returned to the topic of *maṇḍalas*, it is to be noted that the above analyses concerning these types of sound bring to light parallel characteristics exhibited by the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi. The above comparison between the sound of a string instrument and that of a drum is applicable to the visual field. The distinctiveness of the colourfully formed Buddhist *maṇḍalas* is accentuated when they are compared to a typical Zen drawing of a circle (Pl. 41). This one-stroke drawing used in East Asian Zen practice stands in stark contrast to the *maṇḍalas* of Indo-Tibetan tradition. The practice of drawing a circle is based on the belief that in its simplest form the circle represents not only the emptiness of *Śūnya*, but also its fullness and perfection. In the Zen tradition, the circle represents the image of Enlightenment or the true “I”.¹³ It is regarded as the archetype that expresses the Absolute. Thus, the cosmos is expressed in the simple drawing of a circle and the multiple forms that fill the cosmos are believed to be symbolically innate within it. The symbolism of a circle in the context of spiritual practice is more or less the same as that of Indo-Tibetan *maṇḍalas*. These two different expressions ultimately represent the universe of the Absolute. However, they use opposite, even contrary methods to represent the same. Now, comes the question: “why has the *maṇḍala* developed with complicated colours and forms, if the meaning could have been more easily represented by the mere drawing of a circle?”

Seen from the perspective of the theory of *vāk*, Buddhist *maṇḍalas* executed with variegated forms and colours coincide with the characteristics of *paśyantī vāk*, whereas single-stroked drawings of a circle may be compared to *madhyamā vāk*. Reminiscent of the characteristics of the sound of a drum,¹⁴ the Zen drawing of a circle also consists of a single form without any colour or without any elaboration of distinct forms. Multiplicity is not expressed, but theoretically implied in the philosophy of the black ink as well as in the symbolism of the circle. Here colours are omitted because they disturb the mind, resulting in the distortion of objects. Thus, the pure spirit is to be

¹³ Cf. Choi 1998: 170, 228.

¹⁴ Cf. *TĀ* III.242b-244a (vol. II: 581-82).

expressed through black ink, not through any appearance of multi-coloured objects. Whereas one of the prominent characteristics of *paśyantī vāk* is “the unity of multiplicity” or “the multiplicity in unity”, the ink drawing of a circle is neither concerned with colours, nor with any artistic fusion of multiple forms. The multiplicity is to be omitted and the white paper left intact, so as to portray *Śūnya*. Here, the indistinct principle of *Śūnya* is dominant so as not to give any place to colour or form, which is none other than the result of *vikalpa* (dualistic thought construction) that differentiates *Śūnya* from multiple forms. It is the opinion of the author that such a treatment of *Śūnya* derives from a negative, materialistic understanding of the concept. Although the indistinct principle of *Śūnya* is well represented in the ink drawing of a circle and consequently breaks apart the sheath of distinct forms, it does not realize the non-dualistic ideal in its physical form. It will be relevant at this point to refer to Abhinavagupta’s notes concerning *nāda*, to find that a product of *vikalpa* cannot be said to be *paśyantī* even if it affirms the non-dual ideal in theory. Abhinavagupta defines *nāda* as follows:

What is left of the experiencer’s synthetic self-awareness (*svātmaparāmarśaśeṣatā*) when all differentiating thought (*vikalpajñānādīnām*) disappears.¹⁵

Abhinavagupta’s definition of *nāda* helps in extracting the *avikalpa* (devoid of dualistic thought construction) nature of the perceptible representation of *paśyantī vāk*. The significance of the physical forms of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* should be emphasized, for they are the realization of non-dualism devoid of *vikalpa*.

On the other hand, the Buddhist *maṇḍalas* are also distinguished from Hindu *yantras* in terms of their aesthetic approach. Hindu *yantras* consist of geometric shapes and *bīja mantras* without any anthropomorphic representation of divinities (*Pl.* 21). As a result there is neither harmony nor tension among the diverse forms, though their geometric structures give a stark impression of “the Principle” and therefore raise a certain aesthetic emotion in the viewer. Although the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi are equally based on a geometric structure, their aesthetic approach is different for their displaying dynamic interactions of multiple forms within a rigid layout of geometric forms. They indeed exemplify the *nāda* nature of *paśyantī vāk*, creating various sounds within a harmonious whole by means of dynamic colours and forms. As the sound of a brook that can neither be caught nor be frozen in one’s sense perception, the dynamic forms in the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi continuously flow through the tension between the distinct and the indistinct, and between the perceptible and the trans-perceptible.

¹⁵ *TĀ* IV.175, tr. Padoux 1992: 98.

VI.3 Visual Elements of Gross Paśyantī in the Maṇḍalas of Alchi

There are certain characteristics particular to the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi that are suggestive of *paśyantī vāk*: their large-scaled format; their geometric layout and the hierarchical arrangement of the deities represented; the combination of geometric structure and curvilinear detail in the bodily forms of divinities; the synthetic harmony of five primary colours and their multiple tones. The present section shall attempt to analyse those visual elements of these *maṇḍalas* which help contribute to their *paśyantī* nature. The analyses will focus on how the distinct parts of a *maṇḍala* are integrated to the whole. Though the scope of analyses does not include the subjective experience of *maṇḍalas*, I shall dwell from time to time upon the inner response to these visual characteristics, because the act of seeing cannot be separated from the aesthetic process of internalization. These observable aspects, which manifest both multiplicity and unity, underline the *parāparā* (indistinct and distinct) nature of *paśyantī vāk*. The analyses that will be undertaken here attempt not only to propose that the Buddhist *maṇḍalas* of Alchi demonstrate a representation of *sthūla-paśyantī*, but also to deal with the question of how perceptible *maṇḍalas* resemble the qualities of *Śūnya*. Earlier, *Parāvāk* had been examined alongside the Mahāyāna concept of *Śūnya*. *Paśyantī vāk* is conceived to be very close in nature to *Parāvāk*. If these *maṇḍalas* are affirmed to be the gross form of *paśyantī vāk* (which is close to *Parāvāk*), the conclusion is that those *maṇḍalas* represent “something” very close to *Parāvāk*, and display the qualities of *Śūnya*.

In these analyses, the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi are taken as the example of *sthūla-paśyantī*, yet those of Tabo are not included. Although they are based on the same concept and share some common features, they are quite different from each other – chiefly in the matter of their geometric structuring of space. While the geometric layout is a prominent visual element in the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, the *maṇḍalas* of Tabo were designed with a linear structure for their deities. Though the *maṇḍalas* of Tabo demonstrate an equally high standard of craftsmanship as do those of Alchi in the matter of their execution, the linear arrangement certainly offers a different visual impact from that of the geometric layout of the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi. The visual effect of the geometric layout will be explained later, in relation to the concept of *maṇḍala*.

Second, the *maṇḍalas* of these two sites also differ in the matter of the range of their iconographic schemes. In Tabo, both the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala and Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara Maṇḍala depict only the central group of divinities; the divinities at the periphery are absent. Although the iconographic depiction in the entrance room of the *dukhang* in Tabo may be considered to be the peripheral divinities of the Vajradhātu

Maṇḍala, with the central group of the Maṇḍala displayed in the assembly hall, the separation of the central group of divinities from the peripheral group creates but little coherence among the divinities of the Maṇḍala in the eyes of viewers.¹⁶ For these reasons, the following analyses refer mainly to *maṇḍalas* of Alchi.

VI.3.1 Relationship of an Observer to the Large-scaled Maṇḍala

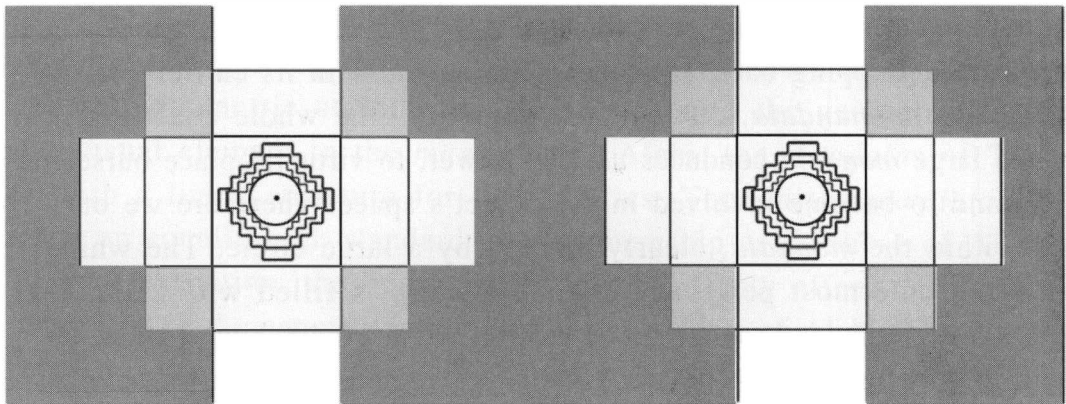
The *maṇḍalas* painted at Alchi are so large that, in dominating the visual perspective, they virtually include the viewer within them. When one sees such a *maṇḍala*, one generally first looks at its centre; this design principle needs careful study, since it plays a crucial role in determining the relationship between the viewer (the subject) and the *maṇḍala* (the object).

First, one should examine how the eyes of a devotee move across the *dukhang* of Alchi. We enter the hall of *dukhang* and bow to the Buddha Vairocana at the main altar. Within that subdued, sacred stillness, the devotee begins the ritual of circumambulation. This circumambulation is analogous to the spiritual pilgrimage itself, and the Maṇḍala of Sarvadurgatipariśodhana is painted at the beginning of the circumambulatory path so as to clear every obstacle in the path to Enlightenment. We then arrive to the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, or more precisely, the Trilokavijaya Maṇḍala (a variant form). One may stand and look at *maṇḍala* without necessarily understanding what each and every figure represents; however, the colours and forms are delightful and vibrant, and hint towards the presence of something profound; so, we remain before the *maṇḍala*, observing it. The pillars and the seat for the monks in the hall prevent us from stepping back and seeing the *maṇḍala* in its entirety, so we remain fairly close to the *maṇḍala*, difficult to “objectify” the whole construct. The close view of the large *maṇḍala* conduces us, the viewer, to virtually place ourselves within the object and to become involved in the object’s space. Therefore we ourselves are included within the *maṇḍala*, clearly marked by a large circle. The white rim that comprises the outermost periphery of the *maṇḍala* is filled with prominent black drawings of *vajra*, the stark contrast of black on white establishing a clear demarcation of the circular dwelling of the *maṇḍala*. Its diameter of approximately 380 cm

¹⁶ In fact, in Tabo, when the Vajradhātu ritual was revived in 2004 after a long break, monks had to paint a new Vajradhātu Maṇḍala in the *dukhang* despite that the original Vajradhātu Maṇḍala is still vivid and present, right there. When I interviewed Lama Urgyen of Tabo monastery in 2007 and asked why they had made the new *maṇḍala*, he answered that it was necessary because the old *maṇḍala* does not show all the divinities required for the *maṇḍala* ritual.

contributes to “the impact of enfolding” – clearly, it is much easier to create such an enfolding effect with a large circle than with a small one. In this case, the sense of “being enfolded within the *maṇḍala*” is immediate; it is also reminiscent to the state of internalization in the visualization practice, in regard to subjective involvement and absorption. We are immediately within the *maṇḍala* ground by simply looking at it; although what we see is a two-dimensional painting, the flat surface is transcended by the fusion of our body and the *maṇḍala*, and the layers of immaterial space are set to open beyond the two-dimensional field.

That the viewer is physically within a *maṇḍala* means that he or she is integrated within the *maṇḍala* ground. Physically incorporating the viewer into itself in this manner, the large scale of a *maṇḍala* has an apparently functional advantage. Probably, the same intention may be observed behind the three-dimensional Vajradhātu Maṇḍala in the *dukhang* of Tabo. Here, entering the assembly hall immediately brings the devotee into the inner zone of the *maṇḍala*, leading him surrounded by the three-dimensional *maṇḍala*-deities of over life size.¹⁷ Similar to this is the twin *stūpa* (*kakani chörten*) found before the *sumtseg* in Alchi (Pl. 42). *Stūpas* in general are believed to be a form of *Dharmadhātu*, representing the *citta* aspect of the Buddha. They are fundamentally *maṇḍalas* in the form of three-dimensional architecture.¹⁸ Particularly, the *kakani chörten* in front of the *sumtseg* demonstrates an elaborate *maṇḍala*-style plan (Illus. 6.1).



Illus. 6.1: Maṇḍala structure of the two chambers, kakani chörten, in front of sumtseg, Alchi.

¹⁷ One actually enters the assembly hall of the *dukhang* in Tabo from the east, just as *maṇḍalas* in general are entered from the east in the practice of visualization.

¹⁸ See Snodgrass 1992.



Pl. 41 Zen drawing of a circle, Seok-Jeong (born in Korea in 1980).
(Published in Choi (1998), p. 217)



*Pl. 42 Small twin stūpa (kakani chörten), in front of sumtseg, Alchi.
(Photo: C. Luczanits 2000 (WHAV))*



Pl. 43 Superstructure and the inner *stūpa*, interior of the *kakani chörten*, in front of *sumtseg*, Alchi.
(Photo: C. Luczanits 2000 (WHAV))



Pl. 44 *Maṇḍala* of Avalokiteśvara, *kakani chörten*, in front of *sumtseg*, Alchi.
(Photo: C. Luczanits 2000 (WHAV))

Its structure has two chambers and two towers. Each chamber demonstrates the concept of “a *stūpa* within a *stūpa*”, which seems to signify the Buddha, both transcendental and immanent. Each chamber is shaped like a cross at the ground level, and this cross transforms to a square towards the upper level. The inner *stūpa* is a multi-angled superstructure found on the upper level (*Pl.* 43). The interior is covered with murals, including *maṇḍalas* of Prajñāpāramitā and Avalokiteśvara (*Pl.* 44). Each chamber of the *kakani chörten* has a passage through the lower structure, and two openings connect the inner zone of the *stūpa* to the outer zone. It is remarkable that in Alchi one can actually enter the inner space of this twin *stūpa* and stand right below the inner *stūpa*, as *stūpas* in general are only used for circumambulation.

These large wall-paintings of *maṇḍala* or architectural *maṇḍalas* are different from small-scaled *maṇḍala thangkas* (scroll paintings) in terms of the relationship between the viewer (the subject) and the viewed (the object). A small *maṇḍala thangka* is used for individual meditation. A meditator is the subject who is initially distinct from the object. If the meditator attempts to enter the subtle space of *maṇḍala* behind its flat surface, the physical distance between the subject and the object has to be overcome by means of one’s inner visualization, implying the process of internalization. On the contrary, the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi created at a considerably larger scale include the viewer within their space even from the first glimpse, as do architectural *maṇḍalas*. While the fusion of the viewing subject and the viewed object is generated by means of the internalization in case of *maṇḍala thangkas*, it is externalized in the large-scaled *maṇḍalas* of Alchi.

VI.3.2 Geometric Layout

Circular Format

Maṇḍala literally means “the centre and the periphery” – in other words, a circle. *Maṇḍalas* are based on the meditative vision that emerges at the state of absorption. The dynamic of *maṇḍalas* can be summarized as the simultaneous flow of centrifugal and centripetal forces; the four Buddhas at the four directions conceptually play the role of axes in the dynamics of these forces. In this conceptual setting, the four Buddhas represent four lineages (*kulas*), manifesting the omnipresence of *Sarvatathāgata* throughout time and space. Their presence at the cardinal points mediates the centre to every direction, representing the four *jñānas* (insights). These four *jñānas* again converge into the *jñāna* of *Dharmadhātu*, symbolized by Vairocana in the centre.¹⁹ And

¹⁹ Cf. *MVT* II.12 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 104.

the Sixteen Bodhisattvas, being the emissions of the sixteen aspects of *Sarvatathāgata* in the *samādhi* of Vairocana, iconographically play the role of extending the centre to the periphery, while withdrawing the periphery to the centre.²⁰

It should be noted that in case of the linear *maṇḍalas* observed in Tabo, the dynamism of *maṇḍala* is rather conceptual, whereas it is explicitly expressed in the geometric *maṇḍalas* of Alchi. In the linear *maṇḍalas*, the dynamism of the centrifugal and centripetal forces is vivified only through one's familiarity with the iconography. Here, they are called *maṇḍalas* not because they are in the shape of a circle, but because they have the conceptual dynamics of a circle established by the hierarchical placement of the deities. For example, in the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala of Tabo, the four Buddhas are arranged not around the main statue of Mahāvairocana, but seated against the left and right walls of the assembly hall. They can be identified in relation to Mahāvairocana and other divinities only by the devotee who would have the knowledge of who these deities are. Even without any circular frame or any clear geometric layout, the dynamic relationships among these deities are established in the mental space of a devotee while he or she walks through them during the ritual of circumambulation. With the linear *maṇḍalas*, the concept of *maṇḍala* is established by means of one's knowledge of the deities and their interrelations; therefore, subsequent to the understanding of these divinities, the dynamism of a circle is internally created. Yet the circle in the mental conception is rather subtle and evasive, whereas the shape of circle can immediately display the inner dynamism among these divinities.

The process of laying out the geometric abode for the *maṇḍala* deities starts by defining the circular *maṇḍala* ground. The circle is the symbolic form of Space and Time, unborn and limitless. In principle, a circle is drawn by connecting points equidistant to a fixed centre. The way how a circle is drawn implies fullness and the union of multiplicity. The *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*, which provides a fundamental philosophy and symbolism of form for the Indian artistic tradition, also talks of the circle:

The breath of life (*prāṇa*) is (contained) in its form, even as the mind is in man (*puruṣasya manah*). The circle is time, according to the Vāstaveda. The movement of the circle is restricted (by its circumference), like the fluctuation of the mind (*cittavṛttiḥ*).²¹

²⁰ The number thirty-six, the number of the main divinities in the *maṇḍalas* of Yoga Tantras, has been examined by Tucci in its symbolic context. Tucci calls our attention to the esoteric meaning of the number thirty-six. He points out that thirty-six is the number of the *dhātu* (elementary categories) and also the number of the letters of the *mantra* (cf. Tucci 1988 (1935): 54-55).

²¹ VSU II.6 comm., tr. Boner, Sarma and Bäumer 2000: 56.

This verse shows the traditional conception of the circle analogous to the Cosmic Man (*Puruṣa*). The forms that arise inside the circle are as the *prāṇa* (breath of life) of the Cosmic Man.²² Since the circle has been perceived to symbolize the receptacle of the Cosmic Mind in the Indian artistic tradition, it is a rather natural consequence that *Bodhicitta* (Mind of Enlightenment) – *Dharmadhātu* or *Śūnya* in other words – is expressed in the form of circle, i.e. *maṇḍala*. If the circle symbolizes the Cosmic Man, the centre of the circle signifies the place where resides the primeval Cosmic Consciousness. *VSU* states that the centre (*bindu*) is like the soul (*ātman*) in man.²³ No circle is without a centre, by definition; if there is no centre, there is no circle. Typical traditional craft would employ a compass, in this case a wooden stick attached to a peg by a length of rope. The peg is fixed in an indentation at the centre; thus, the nature of the centre of the circle is hollow (*vila* or *guha*), which corresponds to *kha* or *Śūnya* at the metaphysical level. The hollow centre signifies *Śūnya* at the centre of the *maṇḍala*.

The symbolic significance of the centre of the *maṇḍala* is embodied in its aspect of *bindu*. The centre of a circle is called *bindu*, and the geometric centre of a *maṇḍala* is *madhyabindu* (or *marman*). While *bindu* has been examined in Chapter IV in regard to *paśyantī vāk*, it was seen that *bindu* is not merely the term for a physical point that is the beginning step of any sequence of transformation, but it is indeed a profound concept that encompasses the notion of knowledge (*vedana*) and pure light (*prakāśa*), denoting *bodha* (enlightenment). In the context of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, the centre is the door to *Dharmadhātu*. In the commentary on *SDPT* called the *Durgati-pariśodhanārtha-Vyañjana-Vṛtti*, Buddhaguhya explains:

The centre is taken as a round palace which is the symbol standing for *Dharmadhātu* . . . *Dharmadhātu* is primordially pure; the nave is a symbol showing that. . . . The nave, which is the circular palace of the centre, is *Dharmakāya*.²⁴

The *bindu* as the symbol of *bodha* and *Dharmadhātu* is physically expressed by the hole in the centre of the geometric layout of a *maṇḍala*, or by the anthropomorphic

²² Cf. *VSU* II.7 comm., tr. Boner, Sarma and Bäumer 2000: 56.

²³ Cf. *VSU* II.6, comm., *ibid*.

²⁴ *SDPT* comm. by Buddhaguhya, from the section which he calls “the concise meaning of the *maṇḍala*” (*PTT*, vol. 76, p. 22.1 to 23.1) tr. Wayman 1990 (1973): 95-96. These verses are drawn from the commentary to the following verse from *SDPT* (*PTT*, vol. 5, p. 84-4,5): “The casting of thread with diamond line is the casting of thread of the centre *maṇḍala*. Like the wheel of the law, it has sixteen spokes along with a nave.”



Illus. 6.2: Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, dukhang, Alchi, showing the basic visual structure that consists of circles

image of the Highest Divinity in the finished *maṇḍala*. In the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi and Tabo, Mahāvairocana signifies *bindu*. However, in the linear *maṇḍalas* of Tabo, the conceptual *bindu* does not coincide with the physical *bindu* of the *maṇḍala*. In Alchi, the *mudrā* of the central deity (Mahāvairocana or Sarvavid Vairocana) of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala coincides with the *madhyabindu* of the *maṇḍala*.²⁵ Furthermore, there are arrayed circles within circles of deities, the inner zone comprised of three rings (*Illus.* 6.2): the first circle marking the chamber of Mahāvairocana, the second one the group of four Kula Buddhas, and the third one the group of four Prajñā goddesses.

The association of *bindu* with *bodha* and *Dharmadhātu* explains why the circular format has been preferred in creating *maṇḍalas* for tantric practice. It is observed that the circle perceived as the receptacle of “the Universal Mind” has been deeply rooted in the artistic tradition of India, and that the centre of the circle represents the portal to realize the Universal Mind, analogous to *Dharmadhātu* or *Śūnya* in Buddhism. The basic symbolism of a *maṇḍala* is similar to that of a circle; however, *maṇḍalas* involve many more complicated forms than do simple circles. Here lies the artistic value of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*; within them, various forms and colours are employed in order to externally bring forth the *prāṇa* of Cosmic Man. In laying out the geometric structure of a *maṇḍala*, the initial circle is followed by a network of life lines (*prāṇa*), the basis for the execution of the various forms to come.

Geometric Divisions

The geometric layout of a *maṇḍala* should also be understood through the principle of *pañjara* (cage), a fundamental layout concept in the image-making traditions of India. *Pañjara* is a grid of vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines. It is the basic geometric layout on the basis of which the physical form of a divinity is drawn. Since at the cosmic level *maṇḍala* is also a bodily manifestation of a divinity, the geometric palace of the *maṇḍala* is none other than the *pañjara* and the various anthropomorphic divinities within correspond to the various parts of a divinity.

As much as any perfect circle cannot be drawn without a firmly fixed point at the centre, perfect forms (*surūpa*) cannot be produced in the traditional Indian arts without the *pañjara* lines.²⁶ VSU instructs that the first circle should be divided in order to

²⁵ The *mudrā* generally symbolizes *citta*. In the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala of the *dukhang*, Alchi, the *bodhyagrī-mudrā* of the central divinity is placed at the level of the heart; thus, here the *madhyabindu* conveys the symbol of *citta* more explicitly.

²⁶ Cf. VSU II.21 comm., tr. Boner, Sarma and Bäumer 2000: 63.

obtain the limbs of an image.²⁷ The cosmic implication of the lines that divide the circle is compared to the Creator's act of dividing the world,²⁸ and these lines and the white powder used for drawing them are named *vajra*.²⁹ These lines are canals of cosmic order (*ṛta*).³⁰ The principle of *pañjara* is a traditionally-established means to both outline the form of the "Unknown Essence" and to implant this Unknown Essence into the images. Thus, the lines of the *pañjara* are also called *tattvarekhā* (essential lines):

By depending on the essential lines (*tattvarekhā*), the soul of form (*rūpātmā*) is perceived also in the represented image (*pratirūpa*).³¹

As a variety of crops grow thanks to the rain, so do various forms arise from the lines, and thus they are compared to sacrificial offerings.³² When various forms (*pratirūpa*) are delineated on the basis of these lines, these forms are thought to become perfect and to approximate the essential form (*tattvarūpa*).

This symbolism of *pañjara* is seen in the process of creating a geometric layout for a *maṇḍala*, in that the form is generated out of the formlessness (*Illus.* 6.3). The following description is based on the drawing techniques for the Guhyasamāja Maṇḍala as explained by Rong-tha Blo-bzang-dam-chos-rgya-mtsho, a Tibetan master of Buddhist art and iconography in the nineteenth century.³³ Since I have not yet come across any sources which explain the drawing process of the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, we shall instead study the accounts of the Guhyasamāja Maṇḍala. Nevertheless, the structure of the Guhyasamāja Maṇḍala is akin to that of Vajradhātu Maṇḍalas and thus the study of one may well yield conclusions we can apply to the other. In the descriptions of the process that shall follow, some terms and descriptions are not based

²⁷ Cf. *VSU* II.9 comm., *ibid.*: 57.

²⁸ Cf. *VSU* II.7 comm., *ibid.*: 56.

²⁹ Cf. *VSU* II.4 comm., *ibid.*: 55.

³⁰ Cf. *VSU* II.23 comm. (*sā ṛtasya dhārā*), *ibid.*: 64.

³¹ *VSU* II.22 comm.:

tattvarekhāvalambane rūpātmapratyakṣaṃ bhavati pratirūpe ca

This sentence has been translated by Boner, Sarma and Bäumer (2000: 64) with a slightly different nuance: "By depending on the essential lines, the soul of form becomes manifest, and also that of the represented image".

³² Cf. *VSU* II.22 comm., tr. Boner, Sarma and Bäumer 2000: 64.

³³ Rong-tha Blo-bzang-dam-chos-rgya-mtsho 1971.

on the Rong-tha's writings, but rather for the sake of clarity I have given them descriptive names of my own devising. For example, "the Primary Circle" is given by me for the sake of ease of description.

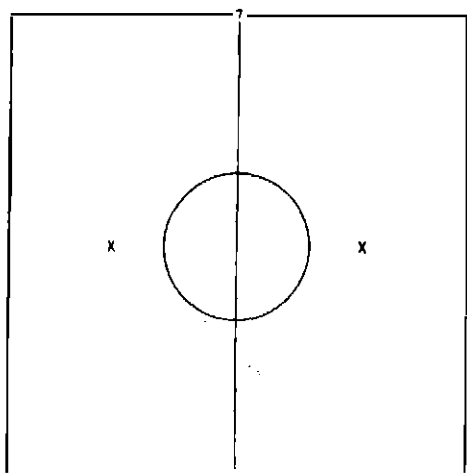
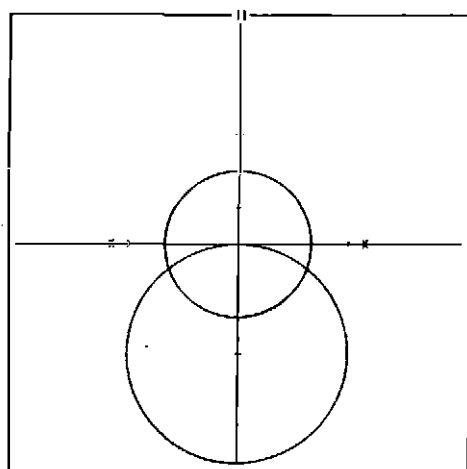
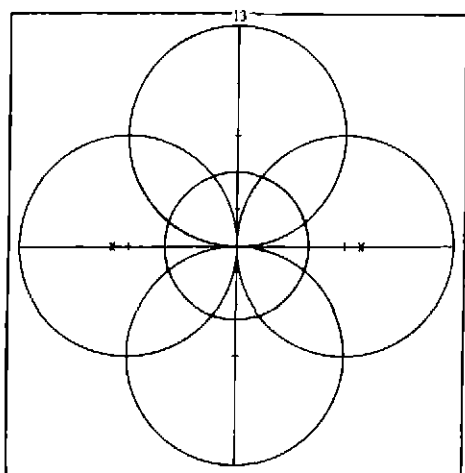
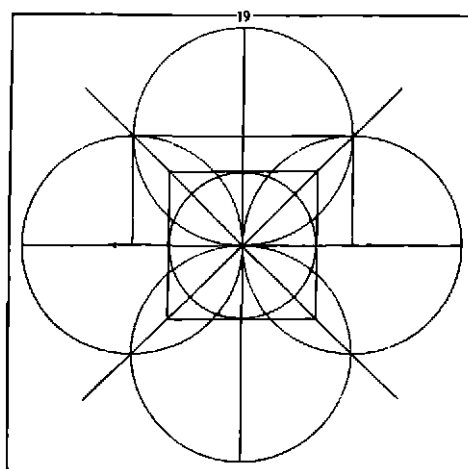
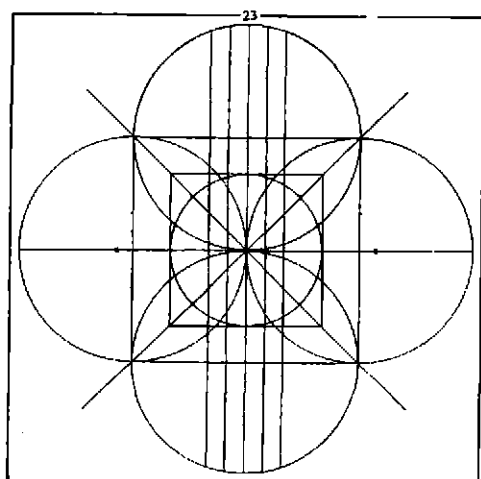
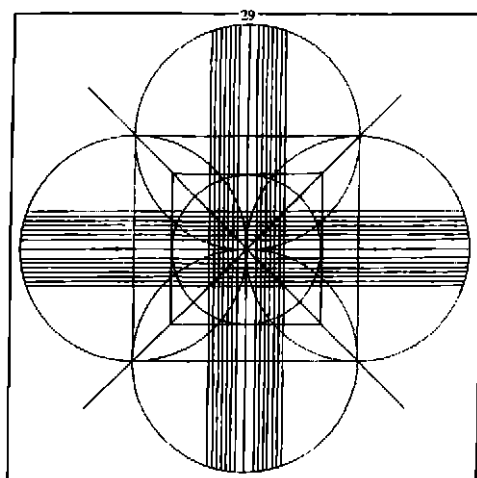
1. A circle is drawn first; it shall be referred to as "the Primary Circle" (*Illus. 6.3(7)*).³⁴
2. A vertical line is drawn through the centre, bisecting two points of the circumference and the centre, and a horizontal line is drawn, bisecting it. Thus, the four directions are created by the vertical and the horizontal axes which meet at the centre, *Madhyabindu*. The four directional lines composed by the vertical and the horizontal axes are the basis of expansion of *Madhyabindu* and the Primary Circle (*Illus. 6.3(7 and 11)*).
3. The *Madhyabindu* projects itself in the form of four *bindus* onto the four directional lines. On the basis of these four *bindus*, the Primary Circle emanates four larger circles (*Illus. 6.3(11)*). These four offspring of the Primary Circle shall be referred to as "the Emanative Circles". The ratio between the radius of the Primary Circle and that of the outer edge of the Emanative Circle is 2:3. Four circumferential points of these four Emanative Circles meet at the *Madhyabindu* (*Illus. 6.3(13)*).
4. Diagonal lines are drawn which connect the *Madhyabindu* with four meeting points of the four Emanative Circles. The diagonal lines mark the four intermediate directions (*Illus. 6.3(19)*).
5. Lines are drawn at the meeting points of the four directional lines and the Primary Circle, and these form "the First Square". The meeting points of two Emanative Circles adjacent to each other are also joined with lines, and these form "the Second Square". The ratio between the First Square and the Second Square is also 2:3. The Second Square unites the centres of the four Emanative Circles, and also each centre with the meeting points of two Emanative Circles adjacent to each other (*Illus. 6.3(19)*).
6. Next, gridlines are drawn, intersecting regularly across the circles and squares proportionally (*Illus. 6.3(23 and 29)*).

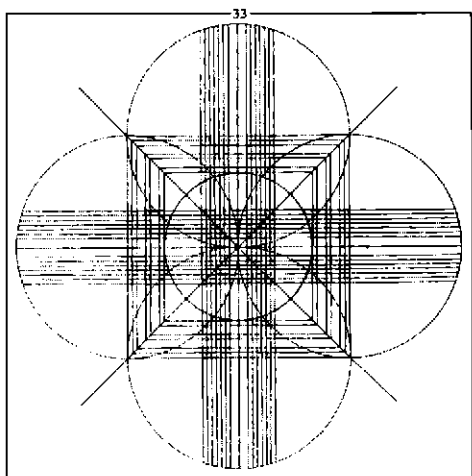
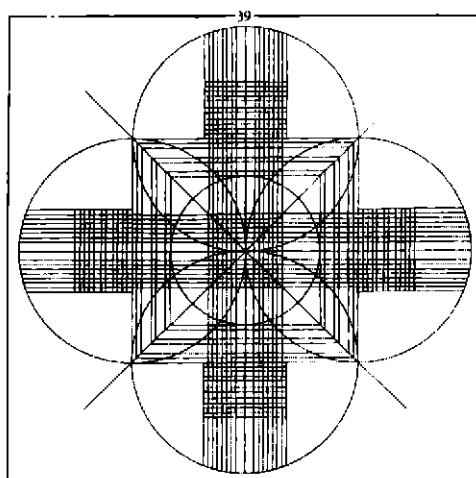
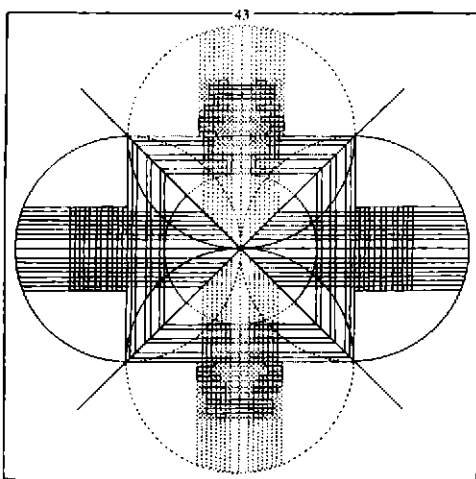
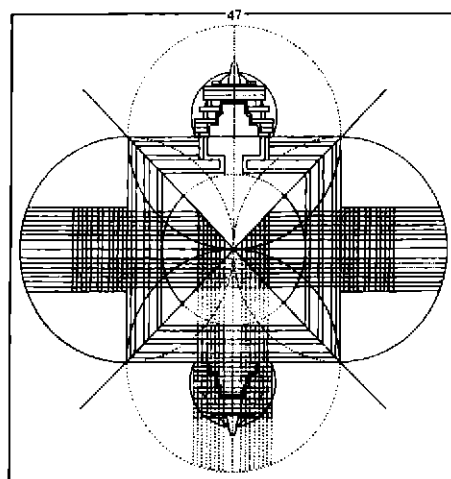
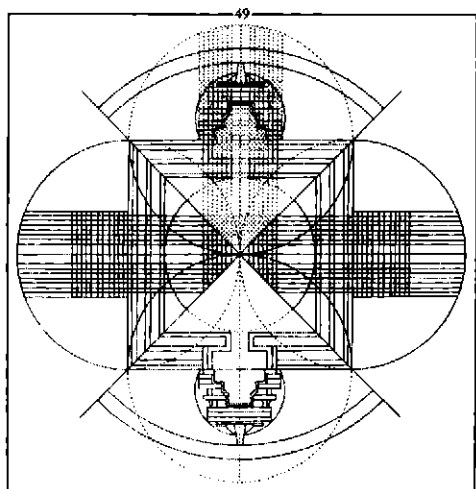
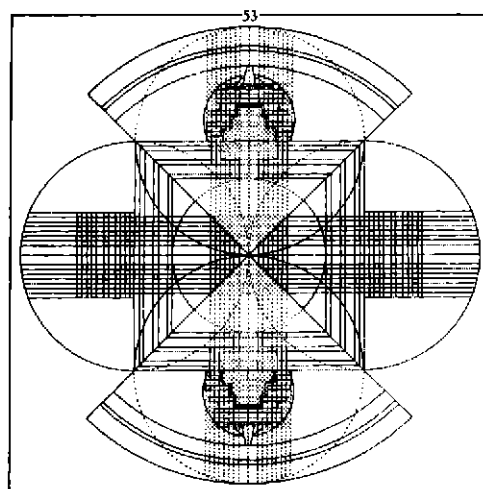
³⁴ The numbers given after the "*Illus. 6.3*" in the illustrations of the present book indicate the number of illustrations by Don-'grub-rDo-rje in Rong-tha Blo-bzang-dam-chos-rgya-mtsho 1971.

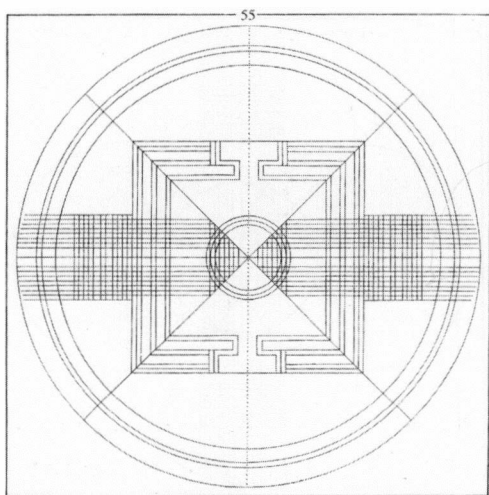
7. The square band formed by the First Square and the Second Square is again divided into smaller sections (*Illus.* 6.3(33)). These lines lay the basis for fixing the palace wall of the *maṇḍala*.
8. On the basis of the grid (made at point 6 above), gridlines are drawn in the four directions outside the Second Square, yet inside the Emanative Circles (*Illus.* 6.3(39)).
9. Based on these gridlines, the four gates are drawn (*Illus.* 6.3(43 and 47)).
10. Three circular bands (for the rings of fire, *vajra* and lotus) are drawn above the four gates. The Outermost Circle intersects the circumference of the four Emanative Circles at the four directional points. Therefore, the four Emanative Circles are again within a greater circle (*Illus.* 6.3(49 and 53)).
11. On the basis of the grid, the Inner Circle is drawn within the Primary Circle. The Inner Circle has two bands, for the motifs of radiance and *vajra*. It is divided into nine sections (*Illus.* 6.3(55 and 61)).

The above process of structuring a *maṇḍala* can be summarized in the following order of drawing:

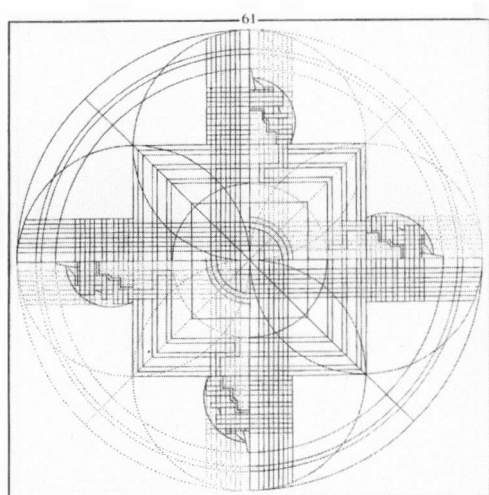
1. The original state of formlessness
2. *Madhyabindu*
3. The Primary Circle
4. Vertical and horizontal lines: the four directions
5. Four Emanative Circles
6. Two diagonal lines: the four intermediate directions
7. The First Square
8. The Second Square
9. Grid formed by the extension of four directional lines; the expansion of the dynamic principle
10. Division of the square band for the formation of the palace walls

*Illus. 6.3(7)**Illus. 6.3(11)**Illus. 6.3(13)**Illus. 6.3(19)**Illus. 6.3(23)**Illus. 6.3(29)*

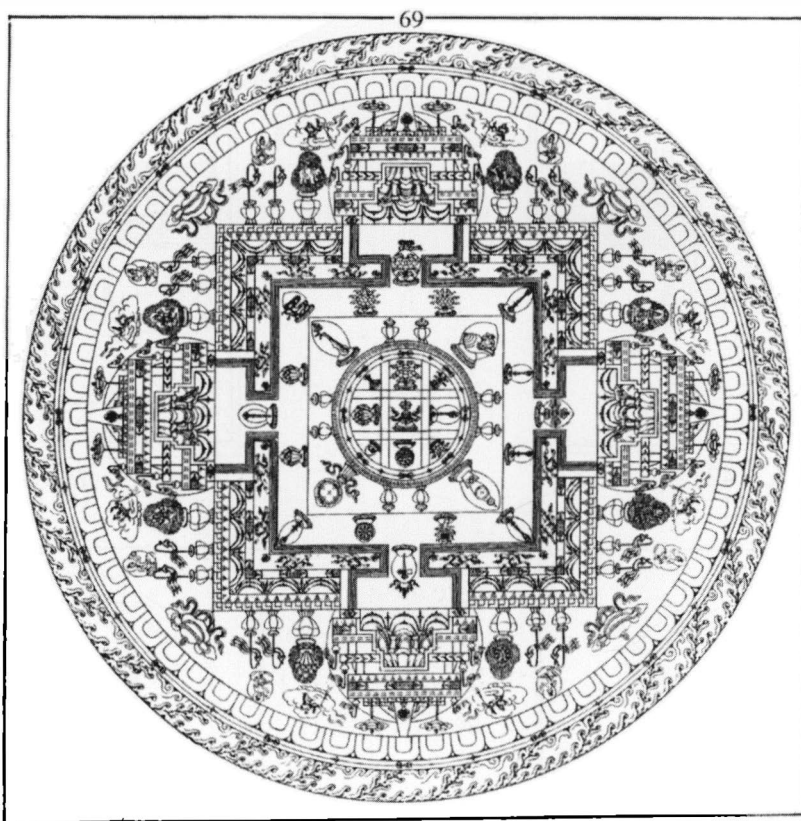
*Illus. 6.3(33)**Illus. 6.3(39)**Illus. 6.3(43)**Illus. 6.3(47)**Illus. 6.3(49)**Illus. 6.3(53)*



Illus. 6.3(55)



Illus. 6.3(61)



Illus. 6.3(69)

Illus. 6.3: Process of drawing the Guhyasamāja Maṇḍala, explained by Rong-tha Blo-bzang-dam-chos-rgya-mtsho; illustrations as drawn by Don-'grub-rDo-rje 7, 11, 13, 19, 23, 29, 33, 39, 43, 47, 49, 53, 55, 61 and 69

11. Extension of the grid outside the Second Square for the formation of the gateways
12. Four gates and gateways
13. Three circular bands and the Outermost Circle that encompasses the four Emanative Circles
14. The Inner Circle within the Primary Circle
15. Division of the Inner Circle into nine sections.

The process of creating the *maṇḍala* ground reveals the innate dynamism of expansion and the absorption in the geometric networking of space. This dynamism is conspicuous when it is seen how the circles are used. Primarily, the circle is a unifying principle, as is represented in its drawing method. In the layout, the Primary Circle results from the expansion of the *Madhyabindu*, and it is itself the basis for further expansion into the four Emanative Circles. These four Emanative Circles are the principles for further form projections, which remind one of the four Kula Buddhas in the *maṇḍala* metaphysics. These four Emanative Circles are again encompassed and unified by the greater circle at their extreme circumferences. The Inner Circle is traced within the Primary Circle as if the latter steps inwards towards the *Madhyabindu*. Thus, what is seen through the circles in the structure of the *maṇḍala* is the dynamism of the formless Essence that expands and again draws back. In the later execution of detailed images enshrined within this geometric structure, the dynamics of absorption turns again to expansion, as the images are drawn from the centre to the periphery.

We can also observe in the above process that the primary geometric shapes are divided into smaller sections in order to generate distinct forms. Gates and walls are drawn on the basis of the gridlines dividing the circles and squares. The grid is formed by means of the re-duplication of the vertical and the horizontal axes. The primary vertical and horizontal lines meet at the *Madhyabindu*, and they establish the four directions. The establishment of four directions signifies the penetration of four points at the circumference of the circle by the centrifugal force of the *Madhyabindu*. These primary vertical and horizontal axes serve as the primary vectors for the projection of forms. The vertical has two opposite orientations: up and down. The horizontal also has two opposite orientations: right and left. They invert and change in the centre; the *Madhyabindu* is the point that changes upward to downward, or vice versa; and the orientation towards the right changes its direction 180° at the point of *Madhyabindu*. Two pairs of opposite directions lose their characteristics at the *Madhya bindu*: the

four directions meet at the *Madhyabindu* and all their distinct characteristics of movement lose their meaning. The *Madhyabindu* is of zero mathematical value, and at the same time it implies everything, in that by representing the four directions, it serves as the foundation of all manifestation of form. Thus, the method of drawing the *maṇḍala* affirms that the *Madhyabindu* within represents *Śūnya* as the source of creation.

Principle of Order: The Proportion and the Act of Measurement

The process of creating the geometric ground of a *maṇḍala* demonstrates that the division of the *maṇḍala* space is not arbitrary, but is rather based on certain rules of measurement. In that sense, the proportion resulting from this measurement is the principle of order that would reveal *tattvarūpa* (essential form) in the plane of *pratirūpa* (represented form). It is also the principle of harmony that integrates multiple distinct forms into unity. The Sanskrit term for the measurement is *māna*, which derived etymologically from the root *mā*. *Mā* means “to make, produce, create” and “to build according to the standard of measurements”.³⁵ From its etymological context, one notices that the act of measurement itself implies the act of creation, and the act of measuring is indispensable to the creative process. In the spiritual context, the act of measurement is a means to bring the macrocosm to the microcosmic ground. In creating the Vedic ritual ground, measurement was executed on the basis of the length of a certain parts of the human body.³⁶ It is the way to relate parts to other parts, and parts to the whole.³⁷ By applying the dimensions of a man to the ritual ground, the whole ritual ground becomes the body of the person that would become one with the macrocosmic body of the world through the ritual process. Dagens defines the significance of *māna*: “A measurement whichever it is, is the expression of the relation between a known unit and the size of what is to be measured”.³⁸ The measurement is an approach to the unknown, invisible and inconceivable by means of the known. In the Indo-Tibetan tradition in particular, the element of proportionality takes precedence in creating sacred

³⁵ Cf. Staal 1992: 355-57.

³⁶ In creating the Vedic ritual ground, the standard of measurement is determined on the basis of the dimensions of the *yajamāna* who is carrying out the ritual. In image-making, the digit (*aṅgula*: length of a finger taken from the body) – a common unit for the measurement – refers not to the finger of a *śilpin* but to that of the image.

³⁷ For example, a *śilpa* text, *Mayamata*, says at XV.28cd-29ab: “The breath of the pillar at its top is what is called ‘module (*daṇḍa*)’; all the elements of the buildings are to be measured according to the value of the module” (Tr. Dagens 1992: 376).

³⁸ Dagens 1992: 371.

images. The merits and demerits of artistic works are judged in terms of the perfection of their proportion.³⁹ However, one should not expect any fixed proportion as a universal rule. Gega Lama, a contemporary Tibetan monk-painter, says:

Traditionally it is said that standardized proportions exist to avoid degeneration in the arts . . . one who is qualified is free to improvise and to introduce his own innovations wherever the standards are incomplete or there is something not clearly delineated by tradition.⁴⁰

An accomplished artist is allowed to set up his or her proportions according to his or her conception of the essential form (*tattvarūpa*). Thus, the proportion is to be understood rather as the act of dividing space with symbolic and aesthetic values than as the absolute rule of any fixed numerical values.

Nature of Madhyamā vāk

The process of drawing the geometric layout demonstrates the structural dynamics and their metaphysical implications built into the Buddhist *maṇḍala*. Consistent with the metaphysics of *pañjara*, the geometric layout of a *maṇḍala* serves as the channel between the *prāṇa* (vital breath) of the *Puruṣa* (Cosmic Man) and the forms within the ground. The visual principle is devised to contain the essential form (*tattvarūpa*) within the represented form (*pratirūpa*). The process of drawing the geometric layout involves the act of measurement and the decision of proportion, comparable to the recitation of *mantra* in the sense that it absorbs the mind of the artist into tracing *tattvarūpa*. Being both distinct and non-distinct, the geometric layout is a means to bring forth the distinct forms and resembles the Essence, in its non-distinction. On the one hand, it is a way for empirical forms at the *vaikharī* level to reach that of *Parāvāk*; on the other hand, it is a way for *Parāvāk* to reveal Herself in the corporeal forms at the *vaikharī* level. The geometric layout is meant for the corporeal life of the Essence. The cosmic breath is to be manifested in the rhythm created by the repetitive use of the geometric shape and lines. The rhythm turns more dynamic when the geometric forms are repeated, be they enlarging or diminishing, and the proportional divisions also enhance the rhythm in the *maṇḍala* space, which endows the *maṇḍala* with the quality of vital sound. The geometric layout of the *maṇḍala*, or of the *pañjara* in general, may well be compared to the sound of a drum that is at the level of *madhyamā vāk* according to *TĀ*. Like the sound of a drum in the orchestra that supports the exploration

³⁹ Cf. Gega Lama 1983, vol. I: 67-70.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 75.

of various tones and melodies while constantly repeating regular beats, the geometric layout produces the basic rhythm that supports the rise of various distinct forms. The *madhyamā* nature of this geometric basis is to be ultimately dissolved in the complete *maṇḍala* at the level of *paśyantī vāk*, as the sound of drums swell beneath the music of orchestra.

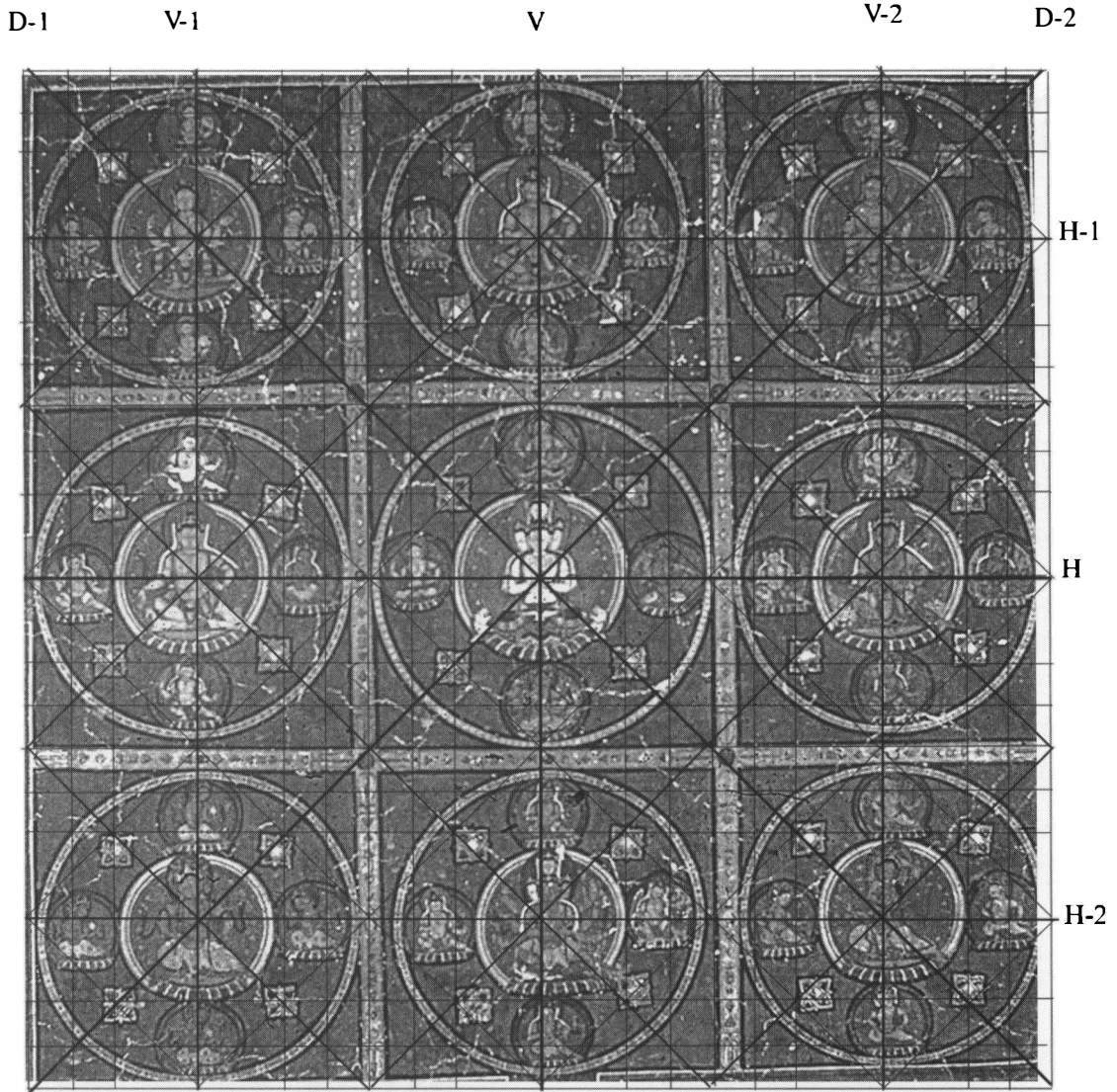
VI.3.3 Geometric Basis of Figures

Positioning Divine Figures on the Networks of Energy

It is important to note that a *maṇḍala* is a space allocated for divinities. The geometric layout accommodates divinities in accordance with their hierarchical status, with the highest divinity at the centre. The hierarchical placement of deities within a *maṇḍala* space expresses the network among the various categories of deities. As the compositional lines of *pañjara* is designed for tracing the limbs of a divinity, the deities of different categories are allocated along orderly divisions, each denoting different limbs of the Cosmic Mind. The dynamism of geometric shapes and lines is not confined to the drawing process of a *maṇḍala*'s geometric structure, but it is also a determining principle on the basis of which forms of various deities are fixed within the geometric layout. It would seem that the division of nine chambers with nine circles within is one of the most dominant schemes of *maṇḍala* composition in Alchi (as shown in *Illus.* 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3). Yet, apart from these visible geometric divisions, the invisible gridlines can be intuited in terms of the position of divinities. They are the lines of energy that flow through the figures of divinities that give coherence to the limbs of the divine body. *Illus.* 6.4 shows the trace-work of gridlines in the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala in the *dukhang* of Alchi. Though invisible, they work as guides for arranging the various deities.

The inner zone of this Vajradhātu Maṇḍala is divided into nine sub-squares. The individual circles of the five Buddhas are placed along the vertical and horizontal axis lines. The remainders of the nine divisions at the intermediate directions are set aside for the circles of the four Prajñā Goddesses. This *maṇḍala* consists of forty-five divinities in the inner zone, instead of twenty-five⁴¹ as envisaged in *STTS*. *STTS* does not refer to the emanation of these Prajñā Goddesses, but only mentions the emanation of four Mahāmudrās. If the four Prajñā Goddesses are understood to be identical with the four Mahāmudrās, they appear twice in *maṇḍala*: a group around Mahāvairocana and another group in the circles at the four intermediate directions. If they are identical,

⁴¹ The number twenty-five indicates five Buddhas, Sixteen Bodhisattvas and four Mahāmudrās. The eight Offering Goddesses and four Door-guardians are not counted in this number.



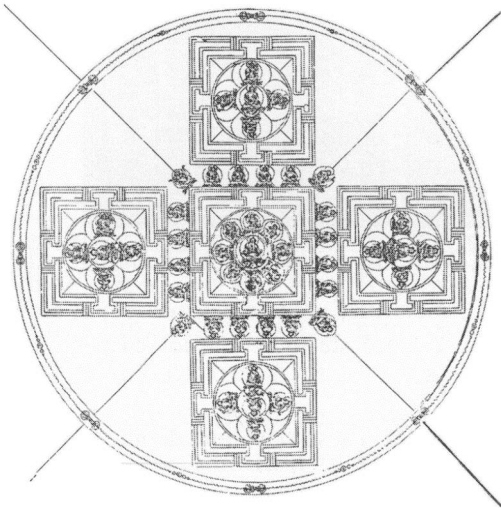
Illus. 6.4: Gridlines traced in the nine inner chambers, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, dukhang, Alchi.

These lines vary in their importance to the compositional structuring, with some lines being more important to the composition than others. The degrees of importance are to be considered while the compositional lines are initially traced.

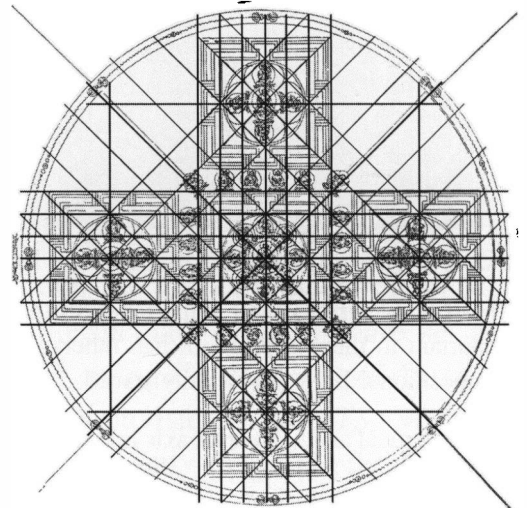
1. The vertical and horizontal axis lines (V, H) are the most prominent. These axial lines divide the entire *maṇḍala* space into four.
2. The inner zone is further divided into eight divisions by two diagonal lines (D-1, D-2).
3. The gridlines connect the *bindus* of the nine concentric circles (V-1, V-2, H-1, H-2).
4. The secondary diagonal lines are drawn parallel to the primary ones, intersecting the *bindus*.
5. Furthermore, the grid becomes finer and finer when the images of sixteen Bodhisattvas and their sixteen counterparts are related to one another. When the symbolic patterns at the intermediate directions of each chamber are connected to one another by means of diagonal lines, the composition gains further subtler dynamics.

the latter group may be seen as a projection of the former. What would have been the reason for representing Mahāmudrās twice? If this *maṇḍala* is compared with the same *maṇḍala* in the *dukhang* of Tabo, it is in Tabo that the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala is depicted more precisely and faithfully to the iconographic scheme of the root Tantra — *STTS*. On the contrary, in the *maṇḍala* of Alchi, the deviation from the textual source to add these four circles of the Prajñā Goddesses epitomizes the priority of compositional significance over the iconographic precision in fixing these *maṇḍala* deities. Another example of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala may help in understanding the compositional principle of the *maṇḍala* in Alchi. The illustration of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala that accompanies references to the *Vajrāvalī* portrays five individual *maṇḍalas* for the five Buddhas in its inner zone (*Illus. 6.5(1)*).⁴² *Illus. 6.5(2)* shows the compositional networks implied by the positions of the deities. Compared to that of the *maṇḍala* of Alchi, one sees a much less solid network of compositional lines (*Illus. 6.4 and 6.5(2)*).

Though the addition of the four circles of the Prajñā Goddesses in the *maṇḍala* of Alchi is not based on any textual instructions, it plays a significant role in creating a dynamic composition. Having been placed at the intermediate directions, these four circles of the Prajñā Goddesses enhance the thrust of the two basic diagonal lines in



Illus. 6.5(1): Vajradhātu Maṇḍala that accompanies references to the Vajrāvalī
(Source: Chandra and Vira 1995: 63)



Illus 6.5(2): Gridlines traced on the basis of the position of the divinities of maṇḍala

⁴² Cf. Chandra and Vira 1995: 63.

the inner zone. These diagonal lines are especially significant in the *maṇḍala* space because they add dynamic movement to the static vertical and horizontal axes. While the addition of four Prajñā Goddesses is seen to be crucial in laying the foundation of dynamics in the composition, the composition of nine chambers proves itself fitting for creating the solid networks of lines.

In the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala of Alchi, the deities of the inner zone of the *maṇḍala* have diverse relations to one another in their placement, in contrast to the juxtaposition of deities in the outer zone of the same Maṇḍala. They are based on the invisible compositional networks wherein one divinity is related to others through vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines. They are fixed into a network of grids at the points of intersection. For example, the *bodhyagrī mudrā* of Mahāvairocana in the centre is in the exact same spot as the *Madhyabindu* of the entire *maṇḍala*, proving to be the centre of the networks of energy for the entire composition.⁴³

As the compositional lines grow in number, so do the number of compositional divisions, and the range of lines from important axial lines to subtle diagonals of relation becomes wider. In other words, as the compositional grid grows more intricate, the composition simultaneously becomes both more dynamic and harmonious. It is apparently due to a compositional concern as to why the diamond-shaped pattern is used at every intermediate direction within the nine concentric circles. (Pl. 45) The repetitive use of this pattern strengthens diagonal lines, and its visual importance is demonstrated by the elaborate technique of embossing used in its execution.

By tracing these compositional lines, it can be recognized that the vividness of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala derives in great part from the position of deities on the basis of the fine network of grids. The grid, being *pañjara*, represents the energy network of the elements. *VSU* defines the vertical as having the nature of fire, the horizontal, the nature of water and the diagonal, that of wind.⁴⁴ The nature of these three elements is of movement or flow. The crucial parts of the bodies of these deities are positioned at the junctions of these channels, and the interrelations of these deities in various postures are based on the innumerable energy lines in every direction. Yet, their major relations are established on the basis of the parallel lines of the vertical and horizontal axis lines, shown in *Illus. 6.4*.

⁴³ The *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad* compares the *madhyabindu* to be the life-breath of the earth (II.14) and of Brahman (VI.8 and 11).

⁴⁴ Cf. *VSU* VI.5, tr. Boner, Sarma and Bäumer 2000: 98.

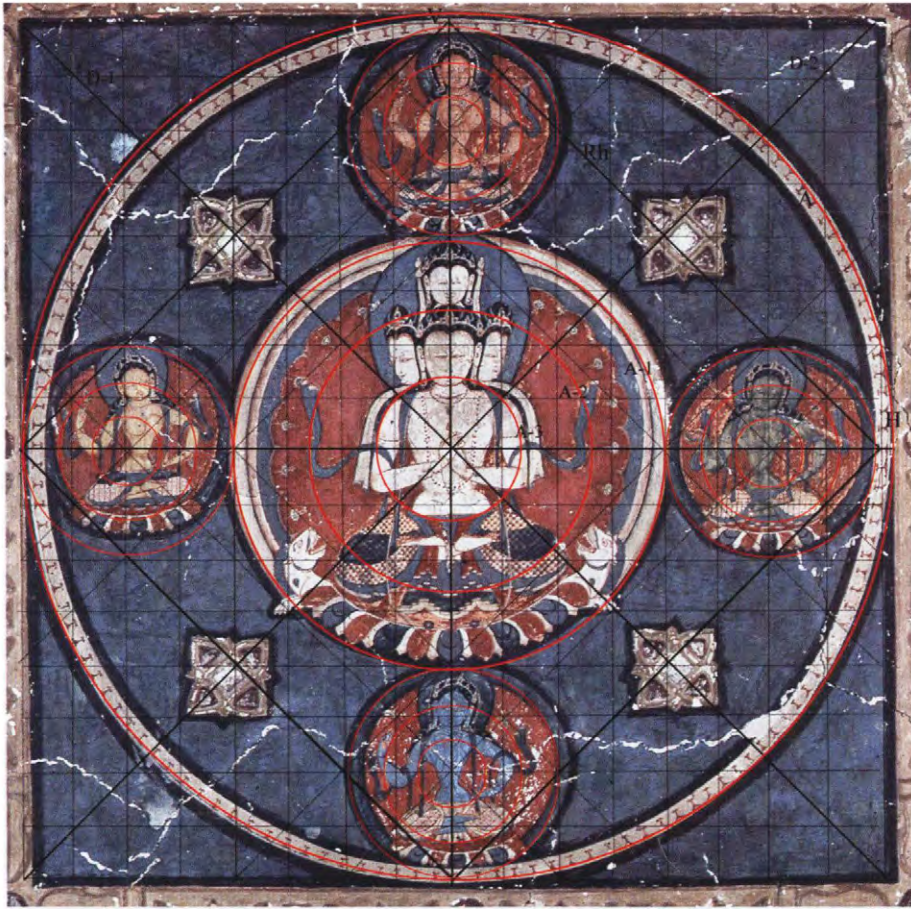
Delineation of Divine Images

We have seen above that the positions of the deities are established on the basis of the implicit, underlying grids. These basic compositional lines are further divided when the bodily forms of deities are to be drawn. Deities are represented in diverse postures on the basis of subtle lines elaborated from a basic grid-work. In a visual composition where bodily forms are represented, the posture of each figure is not viewed in isolation, but rather all the figures with their diverse postures together create a collective movement, comparable to a group dance. Various movements of deities placed in circular nimbus in the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala project invisible energy lines along different vectors. Here, two examples of the Mahāvairocana chamber and the Tārā chamber are selected to show that the deities of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala in the *dukhang* of Alchi are based on the fine grids that offer subtle axes for drawing the images of deities. (*Illus.* 6.6-6.8)

Geometric Abstraction of the Body

In the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala in the *dukhang* of Alchi it may be seen that the bodies of the *maṇḍala* deities are drawn on the basis of such geometry as circles and triangles. The body of Mahāvairocana is delineated with the aid of the diagonal lines parallel to those lines of the sixteen digits (*Illus.* 6.9), which form the triangles when incorporated with the parallel lines of horizontal axis H. As a result, the distinct parts of Mahāvairocana are comparable to a geometric structure made up of triangles (*Illus.* 6.10). Here it should be noticed that the form has been created with remarkable conformity to the symbolic content of the object of the expression. The triangle, the symbol of knowledge and fire,⁴⁵ here has been used by the artist's intuition as an expression of the symbolic body of knowledge and light – i.e. Mahāvairocana. In the example of Goddess Tārā, a number of regular circles are traced to constitute the body of the Goddess. The delineation of the body of Tārā is supple, yet dynamic. The bodily representation of the Goddess is not based on any naturalistic anatomy but on a geometric structure. *Illus.* 6.11 demonstrates the circular structure traced in the body as well as the movement of the Goddess. Within the frame of a circular nimbus, a number of proportional circles are traced, and the form of the Goddess is interpreted to be the assemblage of these invisible circles. The repeated use of a geometric form brings rhythm into the composition. These circles are placed with their centres along the axial lines of the sixteen digits of the circular nimbus. Because a circle intrinsically

⁴⁵ Cf. *VSU* II.15, tr. Boner, Sarma and Bäumer 2000: 60.



*Illus. 6.6: Gridlines traced in the chamber of Mahāvairocana
Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, dukhang, Alchi*

Illus. 6.6 shows the central chamber of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala in the *dukhang* of Alchi (Pl. 2). It consists of the main circle of Mahāvairocana in the centre and four circles of Mahāmudrās towards the four directions. The ratio of the diameters between the Vairocana circle and a Mahāmudrās' circle is 2:1. Thus, the chamber has the basic geometric form of a concentric circle. These five circles are placed in the form of a cross, and the positions of four Mahāmudrās are fixed in the shape of a rhombus within the large circular frame A. The *Madhyabindu* of the *maṇḍala* is placed at the point of *bodhyagrī mudrā* of Mahāvairocana. The vertical and the horizontal axes (V and H) radiating from the *Madhyabindu* join the four other *bindus*. The central circle of Mahāvairocana is double in diameter compared to those of four Mahāmudrās. Each of these five circles is divided into three and traced in the form of a concentric circle with their diameters in the ratios of 1:2:3. The bodily parts of the divinities are orderly arranged in conformity to the three divisions of the circles. The upper body of Mahāvairocana is traced within the inner circle A-3. His three heads and the low part of his body are arrayed within the middle circle A-2; and his head at the top and his lotus seat with two lion vehicles are drawn in the outer circle A-1. The tranquil posture of Mahāvairocana is mainly based on the vertical and the horizontal axes: his lower body on H and his upper body and faces are on V. Therefore, the potentiality of movements is not directly expressed, but lies dormant. The axial lines V and H may be divided into sixteen parts to draw the basic grids of A. Four representations of diamond-shaped symbols are found to just fit in four squares in the intermediate directions along the line of the rhombus Rh. The basic gridlines of A meet at the crucial points in the body of Mahāvairocana: the nose of the top face, *bindu* at the forehead of the front face, the throat, the hands in the *bodhyagrī mudrā*, navel, the knees, and the feet of the lion vehicles.

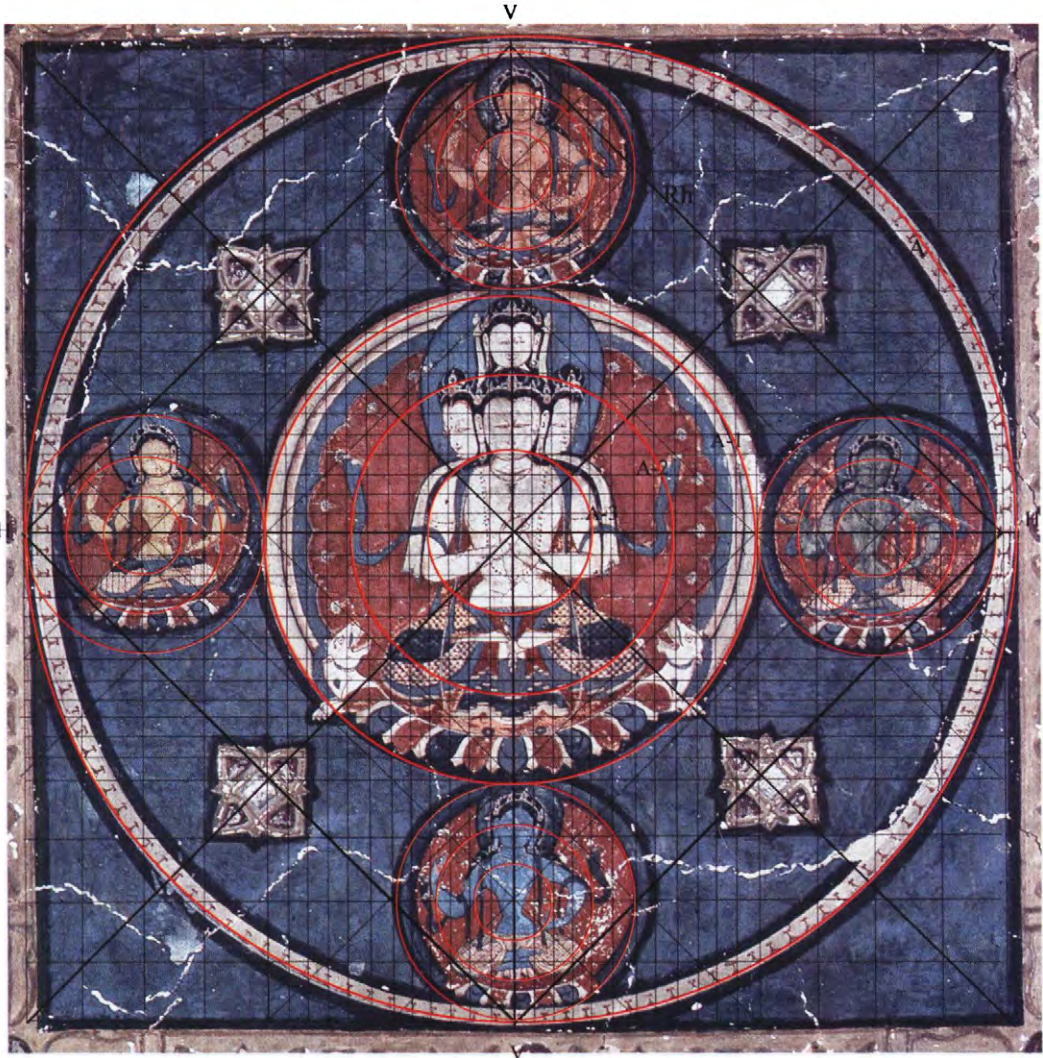


Illus. 6.7: Gridlines traced in the chamber of Tārā, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, dukhang, Alchi

Illus. 6.7 displays the compositional networks of the Tārā chamber in the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala. It consists of five circles: the main one in the centre accommodates the image of Tārā and the other four are for the feminine Bodhisattvas. The basic geometric structure is identical with the central chamber of Mahāvairocana of *Illus. 6.6*: five circles are set within the concentric circle with a diametric ratio of 1:2. As with the example of *Illus. 6.6*, it is helpful to understand the positions of the limbs of the deities if each of five circles is divided into three parts. The dynamically-posed arms of the deities resemble the *svastika*, and are delineated within each of the middle circles. Circle A may be divided into sixteen parts along the vertical and horizontal in order for proper proportions. The diamond-shaped symbols, as with the earlier example, are arrayed along the outline of the rhombus established by the four circles of the Bodhisattvas. In this chamber, the compositional centre does not coincide with any significant points of the body of Tārā, such as the navel, the hands or the heart. The axis of the body deviates from the central axes of V and H. The posture of Tārā is conspicuously asymmetrical, unlike other divinities in the centres of the nine chambers in the Maṇḍala. In the upper body of Tārā, the axis of movement flows parallel to the D-2-V, a line that divides the circle into sixteen digits. The line D-2-V-1, which is the main axis of the upper body, is obtained when a parallel line of D-2-V is drawn from the point *a*, i.e. the meeting point between A-2 and V. The axis of the lower body, D-1-V-1, is obtained by drawing a parallel line of D-1-V from point *p*, another meeting point of A-3 and V. While the parallel lines of the line D-2-V actually determine the proportion of the upper body in width, those from D-1-V help in expressing the upward thrust of the body.

All deities of the inner zone of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, except the five divinities in the central chamber, are given an identical posture in their lower bodies; their right legs are bent and the left legs are stretched. This posture of legs emphasizes the extended thrust in the lower bodies. In the image of Tārā, the line D-2-H merely determines

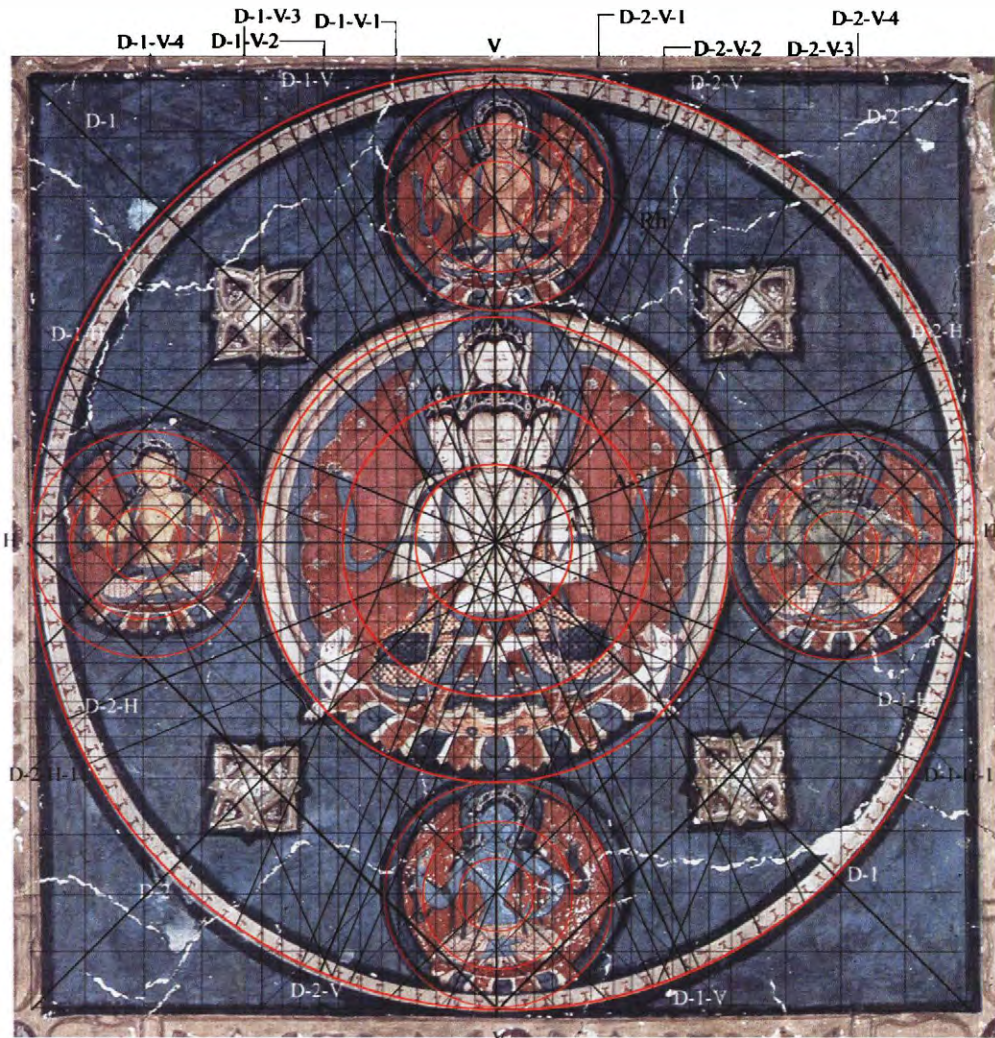
→ contd. on page 253



Illus. 6.8: Finer gridlines added to the Illus. 6.6

We need finer gridlines than those in *Illus. 6.6* in order to comprehend the proportion and delineation of the body of Mahāvairocana. *Illus. 6.8* traces subtler compositional grids that could have been the basis for delineating the body of Mahāvairocana. In *Illus. 6.6* the circle A-1 has been divided into eight parts along both axes, V and H. Here, each of these eight parts is divided into three, thus twenty-four divisions are formed. Along these finer divisions are some significant parts of the body: the *bindu* of the top face, the head *cakra* (*brahmavile*) of the frontal face, the pendant in the shape of inverted triangle, the soles of the feet and the bottommost part of the body. The vertical lines dividing the horizontal axis in twenty-four parts demarcate the width of faces and bodily details.

→ the outline of her right thigh, while the energetic posture of her lower body is primarily traced in parallel to the D-1-H. The lines derived from the D-1-H are also traced along the forearms in her active movements. In case of the four Bodhisattvas, the major axes of their lower bodies are not parallel to D-1-H, but rather to the diagonal axes of D-1 and D-2. Though the posture of their lower bodies resembles that of Tārā, there is a difference in detail due to the dynamic subtlety in the movement of Tārā. For instance, the left foot of Tārā is stretched lower than the right foot; therefore, the base of the image is at a slightly reclined angle, whereas the four Bodhisattvas are drawn on an even base.



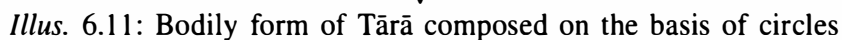
Illus. 6.9: Compositional lines for the delineation of Mahāvairocana, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala dukhang, Alchi

The lines of the sixteen digits are important for the delineation of the body of Mahāvairocana. The lines D-1-V, D-2-V, D-1-H and D-2-H serve as the support for deciding the angles of the limbs of the body. The lines D-1-V-3 and D-2-V-3 determine the lines of the two side-faces. The meeting of these two lines in symmetry produces a triangle with the inverted point that coincides with the navel. The lines D-1-V-4 and D-2-V-4 decide the chest line and the width of the halo. These two lines meet at a point that indicates the place of the genital *cakra*. The lines D-1-V-2 and D-2-V-2 pass through the outlines of the hands as well as the cheek lines of the frontal face. These two lines create two significant triangles. The upper triangle includes the front face and the triangular pendant, which emphasizes the inverted top of the triangle. Its top meets with the top of another triangle that includes the *bodhyagrī mudrā* of Mahāvairocana. The lines D-1-H-1 and D-2-H-1 meeting at the navel of the divinity run in parallel to the extended thighs, and form a triangle at the base. The lines D-1-V-1 and D-2-V-1 meeting at the top of the top head apparently constitute the basic form of the image.

The postures of the four Mahāmudrās are more or less identical. They are seated upright with their faces slightly reclined at angles, parallel to D-1-V and D-2-V. Their arms are extended to the circumference of the middle circles at a 90° angle, parallel to the diagonals D-1 and D-2. Their arms in the form of a *svastika* create the subtle movements.



Illus. 6.10: Bodily form of Mahāvairocana composed on the basis of triangles, extracted from the compositional lines shown in Illus. 6.9



The nimbus, the circle A-1, is divided into three, yielding A-2 and A-3. Four circles (C-1-1~4 in blue) are traced in the proportion of 2:9 in relation to A-1. Their centres are located on the sixteen-digit axial lines of the circle A-1, the centre of C-1-1, on the vertical axis V, those of C-1-2 and C-1-3 on the main diagonals, D-1 and D-2, and that of C-1-4 on the D-2-H. Five circles (C-2-1~5 in purple) are traced in with a 4:9 proportion in relation to A-1. Thus, the ratio between the diameters of C-1s and C-2s is 1:2. The centres of the C-2s are also located on the main axial lines: the centre of the C-2-2 on D-L; that of C-2-3 on the point where D-2-V and A-3 meet; that of C-2-4 on D-1-H; and that of C-2-5 on H. In the face of the Goddess, three circles (C-3 in brown) of the same diameter are traced along D-2-V-1, the axial line of the upper body. C-4 is a concentric circle of one of C-3 circles.

signifies movement through its form, when circles are repeated and overlap to greater or lesser degrees, they create the effect of a rhythm. The form of the Goddess Tārā, defined on the basis of the dynamic movement of circles, invokes a sense of harmonious vibrancy, which is in accord with the doctrinal symbolism of Tārā, that is, “the accomplished actions”.

Geometric Principles in the Creative Process

The compositional analyses presented with these illustrations might merely be hypothetical. In addition, the question remains unsolved as to whether the geometric grid had been actually used in delineating the *maṇḍala* deities or had it been more intuitively and spontaneously conceived by the artist at the time of creation. However, these analyses at least assure the presence of geometric principles in the delineation of the bodies of the divinities, which prove that the harmonious forms of these divinities in the whole composition of *maṇḍalas* in Alchi are a great deal indebted to their geometric basis.

The rhythmic composition of circles or triangles endows the network of grids (*pañjara*) with certain life-breath, which lays the foundation for concrete forms to come. The body delineated on the basis of these geometric principles demonstrates one of the perennial concepts of man in Indian traditions: the human body is permeated throughout by the cosmic principles, and the cosmic principles are symbolically revealed through geometric principles. Therefore, the human body drawn on this basis of geometry signifies an idealized body, saturated with the spirit of Cosmic Consciousness. Furthermore, the pragmatic aspect of the geometric principles observed in any artistic drawing processes, reinforces their symbolic content: the geometric lines and shapes help the artist see the relations among different parts of the body while he draws them, and also lets him observe the distinct parts in various relationships to the whole composition. If an artist sees only the distinct parts, the geometric lines are not required, because he or she would not be concerned about the “relations”. In the above illustrations, not even the decorations around the bodies of divinities are without meaning in the overall geometric structure. In *Illus. 6.10*, the pendant on the neck of Mahāvairocana is incorporated into the form of a triangle, and in *Illus. 6.11*, the bead hanging down from the neck of Tārā to her lotus seat plays a part in the geometric composition that expresses her circular movements. In the artistic process, the geometric principles primarily work at the pragmatic level to help bring forth a compositional balance among the parts, and to unite these parts into the correlated whole. These geometric principles are not only the means to enliven the nature of the

whole, but also to highlight the characteristics of the individual parts, when they are artistically applied. Distinct parts can reveal the nature of the image only when they are incorporated into the correlated whole.

VI. 3.4 Skillful Execution of the Distinct Parts

In the passages above, we have investigated the geometric principles that lie behind the *maṇḍala* structure and the bodily representations of deities. Geometric principles are certainly a decisive factor in the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, infusing the composition with a sense of dynamic harmony restoring the distinct parts to the non-distinct whole. However, the aesthetic power of these *maṇḍalas* in Alchi does not solely depend on geometric principles. Neither the geometry nor the iconographic completion is the sole cause of the visual power of these *maṇḍalas*; for instance, the geometric structure of the *maṇḍala* on the left wall of the *dukhang* in Mangyu is more elaborate than those of Alchi, and its structure evokes a certain aesthetic power – but nevertheless, the crude repainting of later periods diminishes its aesthetic merit. The figures of the deities in the *maṇḍala* of Mangyu that could avoid being repainted tell that the *maṇḍala* had originally been executed by the group of artists who would belong to the same artistic community behind the work at Alchi. Although the repainting had been faithful to the original form, the standard of artistic skills in the execution of details is much less sophisticated than that of the original. Thus, the example of Mangyu demonstrates the crucial role of artistic skill in engendering aesthetic power into *maṇḍalas*. If the geometric principle were to stand for the non-distinct nature of the Cosmic Mind, the artistic skill revealed in the execution of such details as bodily contours, ornaments or decorations enlivens these distinct objects and speaks for the realm of phenomena. In the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, the distinct parts are illuminated as much as is the non-distinct whole.

The Corporeality of the Body

The bodily form of the divinities in the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, though based on geometric forms and lines, are not purely governed by geometric principles. They display quite a strong contrast to other examples from later periods when the geometric principle supersedes the sensual qualities of the divine body (*Pl.* 46). For example, the image of Tārā – while her movement and bodily form are firmly based on geometric principles – is equally arresting in its sensual characteristics (*Pl.* 47). The parts of her body that are matched to the circular forms have been already shown in *Illus.* 6.11. Yet, not every part of her body is drawn in accord with a line or a circle. Some expressions are also quite natural: for example, the line that flows from her abdomen to her belly, or

the waistline that turns to the hip. The representation of her navel is based on an observation of the natural form. The delicate curves of her fingers and the wrinkles on her palms demonstrate a taste for the beauty of natural forms. The intention of a subtle movement of the face is betrayed in her delicate curvilinear eyelids and eyebrows. The gently-graded colours also emphasize the flesh-tones. The life-like quality of the image is enhanced by a delicate gradation of red on the eyes. Attention taken for ornamentation and decoration on the body of the Goddess displays the artists' obsession for technical details as well as the viewers' sensibilities. The beautifully patterned *dhoti* wraps her body, and its folds flow in sympathy with her lively movement. Further descriptions of the sensuous characteristics exhibited in the images of the Alchi *maṇḍalas* would merely belabour this point; they are already well recognized even among the non-academic community, so much that the small village of Alchi has become a booming tourist spot. In the context of the present discussion, it is important to note that these sensual features superbly represent the individual and distinct aspect of forms, in contrast to their geometric principles. In the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, said to be the reflective image of the Cosmic Consciousness or *Dharmadhātu*, the transient worldly forms are also on display.

Ornaments Revealing the Nature of the Divine

It has been seen that the decorations on the *dhotis* of the three colossal Bodhisattvas in the *sumtseg* in Alchi narratively express the nature and activities of the Bodhisattvas. The *dhoti* of Maitreya is decorated with Śākyamuni's life and some folk scenes (*Pl.* 34). Avalokiteśvara's *dhoti* shows various scenes of temples which enshrine different statues of divinities such as Prajñāpāramitā and Mañjuśrī, adored by devotees and monks (*Pl.* 35).⁴⁶ Mañjuśrī's *dhoti* is decorated with the theme of the yogic practices of the *siddhas* (*Pl.* 36). Likewise, in the *maṇḍalas*, the decorations around the bodies of the divinities are not only demonstrating the element of corporeality, but they also contribute to express the nature of the *maṇḍala* deities.

It may be worthwhile to dwell upon a remarkable visual effect created by the miscellaneous elements in the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi. The fluttering scarf ubiquitous to the deities there exemplifies how a decorative element can express the nature of the Divine. The lines supporting the scarf viewed in relation to the compositional grids prove that they play a strong role in reinforcing the geometric basis of the composition.

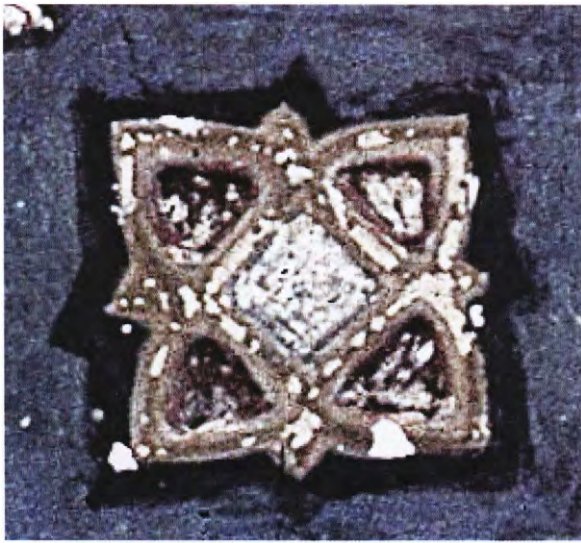
⁴⁶ Snellgrove suggests that these scenes represent probably places of pilgrimage in Kashmir. Cf. Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: 51.

Illus. 6.6 and 6.7 show that these flowing lines demarcate the middle circle A-2. However, they are not merely subordinate to the geometric composition, but rather enhance the rhythmic flow of the composition, while their irregular curves break the hard shape of the concentric circle. Careful observation of the lines of the scarf in these *maṇḍalas* of Alchi brings the realization that these scarves have been drawn with their two ends rising upwards. They flutter up not because of any implied breeze, but rather due to the inner energy of the *maṇḍala* deities, rising upwards.⁴⁷ In this sense, the rising scarf is a materialization of the abstract energy that springs forth from the deities. The visual effect of the scarf is evident in the image of Vajriṇī on the right wall of the second storey of the *sumtseg* (Pl. 48). In the image, the scarf draws particularly complicated yet symmetrical curves. The flowing lines of the scarf are integrated with the folds of the *dhoti*, and are further connected with the hairs of the divine vehicle. The distinct parts are integrated by the artists' vision, seeing through the relations among these distinct objects. Thus, the scarf, *dhoti* and lion are not independent objects, but rather they exist dependent on one another, and move in relation to one another. When these objects are integrated in the form of abstract wavy lines, though they remain distinct objects, they are at the same time non-distinct. The flowing curves thereby formed by these distinct parts result in non-distinct "musical" lines of waves within the circular nimbus.

The integration of the distinct parts of scarf and *dhoti* is not only found in the image of Pl. 48, but it is a common feature that characterizes every representation of Alchi *maṇḍala* deities. The waves also feature in the *maṇḍalas* of Tabo. There, they are combined with spiral patterns and are delineated with prominent lines, in a strong contrast to the background of the nimbus which has delicate creamy gradations (Pl. 49). A similar pattern of wavy lines is also used in one of the narrative panels of "Sudhana's pilgrimage" in Tabo, where Sārādhvaja emanates the multiple manifestations by his power of meditation. In that panel, the body of Sārādhvaja is joined with various manifestations within a circular composition through waves and spirals (Pl. 50).⁴⁸ In Tabo, the delineation of the waves is more distinct, and the symbolic

⁴⁷ The visual importance of the fluttering scarf is conspicuous in the goddess statues that surround the three colossal Bodhisattvas in the *sumtseg*. The stucco statues of these goddesses are three-dimensional and fixed on the wall by means of iron rods. In these statues, separate iron rods hold aloft fluttering scarves that wrap around the body of the goddesses.

⁴⁸ In the panel of Sārādhvaja where Sudhana meets the monk Sārādhvaja sitting in meditation, Sārādhvaja is depicted as emanating various beings from his body, such as Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, monks and soldiers. The *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* says that by the power of
→



Pl. 45 Diamond pattern in gold emboss, at the intermediate quarters in the inner chambers, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, dukhang, Alchi. (From a photo by J. Poncar 1981)



Pl. 46 Image painted over the Sudhana's pilgrimage, west wall, gTsug-lag-khang, dukhang, Tabo. (Photo: C. Luczanits 1991 (WHAV))



Pl. 47 Tārā, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, dukhang, Alchi.
(From a photo by J. Poncar 1981)



*Pl. 48 Vairocana (Vajriṇī) in the centre of Guhyavajra Maṇḍala, right wall, second storey, sumtseg, Alchi.
(Photo: J. Poncar 2009)*



*Pl. 49 Wave lines and spiral patterns painted on the halo of Bodhisattva Vajraratna, Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, south wall, gTsug-lag-khang, dukhang, Tabo.
(Photo: J. Poncar 1984 (WHAV))*



Pl. 50 Panel of Sāradvaja, Sudhana's pilgrimage, *gTsug-lag-khang*, *dukhang*, Tabo.
(Photo: J. Poncar 2001 (WHAV))

significance of the wave-line is more perceptible. As is clear in the narrative of Sāradhvaja, the waves express the vibrating powers that bring about phenomenal manifestation from the state of formlessness. The nimbus has been the space for symbolic decorations representing the nature of Dharma throughout the history of Buddhist arts.⁴⁹ So the waves drawn on the nimbus may be understood as the form of divine nature as is also the case with the clay sculptures of Tabo. In Tabo, these wave-lines are distinct as independent visual elements. On the contrary, in Alchi they are suggested by the combination of distinct elements, such as scarves, ornaments, *dhotis* and the bodies of the deities. The colour scheme of the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi emphasizes the prominence of these waves: with just a few exceptions, blue predominates, constantly applied to the halo and the rim of the nimbus as well as to the scarf and the folds of *dhoti*.⁵⁰ They create a lively, flowing blue band through the entire composition of the *maṇḍala*. The undulations of blue waves feature at regular intervals within the space of the *maṇḍala*, reminiscent of the traditional analogy of the ocean for Consciousness.⁵¹ The original state of Consciousness is the static centre free from waves; but due to the power of this centre arises every phenomenon, as waves

→ concentration he produces an inconceivable infinite body in each successive mental moment, and manifests an infinite variety of bodies. Cf. *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, tr. Cleary 1989: 73-84.

⁴⁹ The legend of the first portrait of the Buddha (cf. Gega Lama 1983: 42) tells about the symbolic context of the decoration on the halo. When King Bimbisāra of Magadha commissioned an artist to paint a portrait of the Śākyamuni Buddha, he was so overwhelmed by the splendour of the Buddha that he could not draw him while looking at him directly. Only when the Buddha set himself at the bank of a clear pool, the artist could draw while looking at the reflection on the water's surface. His drawing is said to have shown the central figure of the Buddha surrounded with designs symbolizing the twelve *nidānas* (twelve links of dependent origination). The pattern of twelve *nidānas* in the first legendary portrait of the Buddha may refer to the decoration in the halo. Thus, we see that the halo of the divine has been decorated with symbols that reflect the nature of Dharma. The halo at the back of the anthropomorphic form of the Buddha has undergone various changes in the history of Buddhist arts. The Buddha images created in the second and third centuries CE in Mathura region had the pattern of half circles at the circumference of the halos, whereas in the fifth century, in the same region, the halos of Buddha images were embellished with beads, lotuses and radiating lines. It was left empty in the Buddha statues from Sārnāth in the fifth and sixth centuries.

⁵⁰ In case the deity is coloured blue, the scarf and the folds of the *dhoti* are in dark green or black, and the halo is painted white.

⁵¹ Cf. *supra*, p. 192; Cf. *PTV* 1, tr. Singh 1988: 24, Sanskrit text p. 9; *LS* VI 220, tr. Suzuki 1999 (1932): 190.

constantly arise within the ocean. The waves wrapping around the bodies of the deities, rising up through the *maṇḍala* space, speak for the nature of the Divine.

VI.3.5 Five Primary Colours and Their Tones

Some regularity might be seen with regard to the colours of the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi:

- i) *Maṇḍalas* are painted on blue backgrounds.
- ii) The five Buddhas are white, blue, yellow, red and dark green.
- iii) The nimbus of the deities are painted red.
- iv) The halos are painted blue; if the deities themselves are blue, the halo is white or dark green.
- v) The scarves and the folds of the *dhotis* are painted blue. If the deities are blue, these features are painted dark green.

The colour schemes observed on the second and third storeys of the *sumtseg* in Alchi typify the symbolic use of colours in *maṇḍalas*. The five primary colours used for the ten *maṇḍalas* in the second storey are generally associated with the five Kula Buddhas and the five knowledges (*jñānas*). The threefold set of white, red and blue usually associated with *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*, respectively.⁵² Three *maṇḍalas* on the third storey of the *sumtseg* have been painted with these three colours, except that the gates towards the four directions are painted with the colour appropriate for their lineage. The sense behind these two different colour schemes for *maṇḍalas* on the top two levels of that *stūpa* might only be understood in dependence on doctrinal symbolism. It should be confessed that no comprehensive, universal principle behind the colour schemes in the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi could be ascertained during my research. For example, no principle behind the colours chosen for the bodies of Sixteen Bodhisattvas could be gleaned, because their colours vary from one *maṇḍala* to

⁵² In the process of visualization explained by Lama Zopa (a contemporary spiritual master of Tibetan Buddhism), the symbolic association of colours with *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta* has been described. Three syllables are visualized on the form of Shakyamuni Buddha: *Om* in white on his forehead, *Ah* in red on his throat, *Hum* in blue on his heart. They enter the body of a practitioner through his or her forehead, throat and heart. These three syllables signify the unsurpassable knowledge of a Buddha's *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*. Rays from the three syllables entering into the body of the practitioner means that they have received infinite knowledge of the Buddha's *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*. Cf. Lama Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche 1994 (1982): 74-77.

another. It seems that the symbolism of colours should be read in any particular context in a limited sense, perhaps piece by piece. Nevertheless the fact remains that the primary colours are used harmoniously in the *maṇḍala* of Alchi, regardless of the riddle of any supposed unifying principle of colour schemes. Since the present volume concerns one's intuitive response to *maṇḍalas*, even the doctrinal interpretation of colour would not directly help in understanding exactly how colours work to creating visually dynamic *maṇḍalas*.

The use of primary colours to express the Ultimate is a distinctive method that conforms to tantric soteriology. It is distinguished from the artistic method of the Far East where the quest for the Universal Principle excluded all primary colours from their paintings. The style of landscape painting of the Far East had been institutionalized during the Northern Song period (CE 960-1127) in China, and its philosophy has been established in accordance with the religious ideal of New Confucianism in its quest for the Universal Principle. The Universal Principle had been conceived as the Absolute Spirit transcendent to all mundane life. Then, in the Yuan period (CE 1271-1368), the ascetic character became stronger in landscape paintings within an environment of political seclusion. At this stage of development, the use of colour in art fell away, and paintings with bright colours were regarded as a reflection of worldly desire, which was vulgar. The Zen drawing of a circle, which has been compared earlier in the book with *maṇḍalas*, is also associated with such an artistic tradition with limited use of colour. The colours in the methodology of these artistic expressions are defined to be *samsāra* (the mundane) or worldly attractions that deprive one of a mind clear enough to see Dharma. In the expression of the Highest Truth, *samsāra* finds no place; thus, these colours are surpassed by black ink. In these paintings, colours are eschewed in favour of empty white spaces and a few strokes of ink. We see opposite forces at play in the Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, in terms of their attitudes towards colours, though both ultimately aim at the same goal.

In the context of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, colour is to be interpreted on the basis of a different logic: "We cannot see colours without light: that we see colours proves the existence of light". In darkness, neither colour nor form is distinct. Thus, distinct colours indicate the presence of light. The physical characteristics of colours refresh our understanding of them;⁵³ colours are not the properties of objects, but are themselves phenomena. Attention to the physical characteristics of colours subsequently leads

⁵³ Cf. Maund 2006.

one to see colour as a mere illusion, a view which somewhat resembles the negation of the Mādhyamika philosophers in denying any phenomenal object to be an independent entity. However, one should keep in mind that they certainly exist at the empirical level, and that they are further fully explored in the arts, as seen in *maṇḍalas*. In phenomena, they are perceived due to the interaction between light and object. The subsequent wavelength created by the interaction between an object and the light appears in the form of a distinct colour. The unique qualities of an object react in a unique way to light. Because objects have various degrees of reflectivity and light absorption, they appear to have different colours. However, colours are not merely illusions. While the constructed nature of colour demonstrates the illusory nature of phenomena, it shows “the power” that projects such an array of colours despite that objects do not physically bear colour within them. At the same time, it underlines the power of cognition that accompanies sensory activities to make distinct colours discernible. Thus, it may be remarked that “the power that projects and cognizes the multiplicity” is implied in the notion of distinct colours. The phenomenon of multiple colours is the revelation of such power. The power that functions at the sensory organs and produces the cognition of distinct objects or colours represents *vaikharī vāk* in the framework of the *vāk* theory.

In regard to the colours of a *maṇḍala*, one may suppose that the distinct primary colours of *maṇḍalas* are a revelation of the power that projects these colours and stimulates our senses to cognize their distinctiveness. As the five colours in *maṇḍala* represent the five *kulas* (lineages) which are the five channels of evolution and manifestation, they suggest this very principle of manifestation. From the perspective of the theory of *vāk*, creation is characterized by the process of distinction and differentiation. It is *vaikharī vāk* that functions as the power of differentiation and separation at the level of *aparāśakti*. The fact that the five primary colours are present in a *maṇḍala* implies that the power which brings about differentiation and distinction – i.e. *vaikharī vāk* – is at work. And the fact that we perceive distinct primary colours in a *maṇḍala* signifies that we have encountered the presence of *vaikharī vāk* in tangible form.

The artistic aptitude to create such a wide range of colours and hues in Alchi further emphasizes the principle of *vaikharī vāk*. In fact, it is this colour technique that endows *maṇḍalas* of Alchi with their great quality of corporeality. Comparing the repainted part with the original painting, one notices what role the colours play in generating their aesthetic power. Where the design is repainted, not only are the forms crudely drawn, but also the colouring has been done in single tones, without any of the delicate

hues. The crude execution of the repainting reveals no lively spirit, and thus the colour pigments pasted on the wall do not transform into a *pratibimba* (reflected image). In contrast, the original colours applied in are shaded and variegated. The delicate shading creates the sense of volume and gives weight to the bodies of the deities. In contrast to the naturalistic rendition of the bodies of the deities, their *dhotis* and the ornaments are flat in shade, and the halos and nimbus are painted in stark single tones. These decisions observed in the colour scheme imply the intention towards differentiation: the volume of a breast is differentiated from that of the hand; the weight of flesh is different from that of cloth, and so on. Thus, the observer encounters the principle of distinctiveness and particularity, characteristic of the realm of phenomena, having found its place in the picture of Ultimate Dharma.

VI.3.6 The Fusion of the Distinct and the Indistinct

Let us bring together what has been discussed above. Firstly, the large scale of *maṇḍalas* in Alchi has been seen vital in setting forth the subtle fusion between the subject and the object while observed. When the large circle is exhibited before the viewer, it encompasses their sight and demands their subjective involvement, which is comparable to the state of identification between the subject and the object during meditative visualization. Secondly, the geometric principle inherent in *maṇḍala* has been broadly outlined in terms of two constituents: (i) the geometric layout, and (ii) the position and pose of the divine body. In these analyses, the geometric principle has been primarily seen as the means to incorporate distinct forms within the non-distinct whole. Circles and basic geometric shapes build the divine palace in order to accommodate the concrete forms of deities. The deities are positioned in an orderly array according to their status, and their limbs are arranged in conformity to the geometric foundation. Due to its strong orientation towards the non-distinct, the geometric principles of the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi have been categorized in the present book as the gross form of *madhyamā vāk*. Their indistinct nature and their simple forms are comparable to the sound of a drum, which had been referred to as the gross form of *madhyamā vāk* in the *Tantrāloka*. Next studied was the proficient execution of bodies and details such as scarves, *dhotis*, jewelleries and the like. The delicate curvilinear forms found in their details breathe sensual vitality into the corporeal forms of deities whose poses have been structured upon a fixed geometric basis. These distinct parts of limbs and ornaments are shown in varying degrees of detail in the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi. The incorporation of some ornamentation into a larger unit was exemplified in the case of the scarves and *dhotis* that create the waves through the empty spaces of

the nimbus, as if revealing the nature of the Cosmic Mind in the form of vibrations (*spanda*). Then, we pondered the significance of the use of primary colours in *maṇḍalas*. The phenomenon of colour perception has been reflected as “the power” that makes objects appear with distinct characteristics. The power adheres both in the perceived and the perceiver. Having reflected upon the phenomenon of distinct colours and our sense perception, we interpreted the presence of primary colours in the *maṇḍalas* as the revelation of *vaikharī vāk*, the principle of differentiation, and that the subtle execution of colour stands for the accomplished action of *vaikharī vāk*.

The geometric principle represents the cosmic principle, and holds the key to the methodology of the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, expressing the Essence (*tattvarūpa*) through perceptible forms (*pratirūpa*). In the image-making tradition of India, the geometric principles are the means to cause the Cosmic Mind to pervade through the image of the human body. They are not merely symbolic, but in practice they are the compositional principle through which the distinct parts are restored to a harmonious whole. As an artistic principle, geometric forms have expressive quality and communicative power due to their innate dynamism. Therefore, they evoke particular natures and emotions through which the Essence reveals itself in distinct forms, and through which the distinct forms recall the Essence. The nature and emotion that the geometric forms evoke are non-discursive and indistinct. Thus, depicting the bodily form on the framework of geometric principles signifies the fusion between the distinct form and the non-distinct Essence. In Alchi, the intention to integrate distinct forms within the fold of the non-distinct whole is explicitly demonstrated in the different types of outlining the forms: whereas the divine forms are more lightly drawn, the geometric layout of *maṇḍala* is bold. In the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala in the *dukhang* it is clear that the circles and squares constituting the basic geometric structure are accentuated by strong black outlines, whereas the figures of the deities are more delicately outlined, with thin lines of red or blue. On the other hand, one can see a counterbalance of geometric principles in these accomplished works of art, in the curvilinear bodies of deities, in the detailed patterns on *dhotis*, or delicate ornaments – all painted with every colour at hand. The geometric principle, representing *madhyamā vāk*, turns the artistic creations towards the non-distinct whole, while the differentiating principle of *vaikharī vāk* full and exclusively realizes the separate, distinct details. Through *vaikharī vāk*, distinct forms are completed. And it is the manifestation of these detailed forms and colours that endows the symbolic image of *maṇḍala* with earthly life. On the other hand, it is the nature of *madhyamā vāk* that infuses the distinct creations with the sense of non-distinct whole. Without any

connection with the Essence, the distinct parts are lifeless. The *maṇḍalas* of Alchi are based on two equally prominent principles, of *vaikharī vāk* and *madhyamā vāk*. Then, how do we come to the hypothesis that the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi are the gross form of *paśyantī vāk*? For that, we need dwell on the actual experience of seeing them.

Looking at these *maṇḍalas*, their distinct elements and the non-distinct principles are not separate. Although *madhyamā vāk* and *vaikharī vāk* have been examined separately in our analyses, they are not isolated from each other in the *maṇḍalas*, and our perception of these two are inseparable. Hindu *yantras* or Zen drawings of a circle may be said to be the gross form of *madhyamā vāk*. However, the *maṇḍalas* with anthropomorphic forms of divinities are neither the gross form of *madhyamā vāk* nor that of *vaikharī vāk*. In the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, these two principles are equally powerful, and they together contribute to the visual dynamism. In the earlier analyses we have observed how the bodily parts are integrated on a geometric basis to the non-distinct Essence, and how the diverse parts are connected together to express the nature of this Essence. In fact, the *madhyamā vāk* and the *vaikharī vāk* brought forth from the earlier analyses are the fundamental principles of the creation of form within those *maṇḍalas*. When these two principles are successfully made evident in an artistic endeavour, together they create a flow, dynamism of vision where the various discrete forms are fused into a non-distinct whole yet at the same time with their distinct natures themselves also harmoniously finding their place within that whole. Immediately when we see the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, we are physically included into it. Though our eyes are naturally first led to the centre, our vision does not rest on the central figure, but the rhythmic repetition of form strikes us. Layers of circles, squares and triangles, both visible and invisible, constantly produce a visibly sensuous rhythm. The divine forms, with their strong attachment to the underlying geometric structure, add to the vibrant melody through their curvilinear forms. Colours and forms abound, in various notes, meters and stresses. Forms are mixed and melted into one another within the great circle of unity. The unity of the whole predominates over the distinct parts, and the distinct parts enliven the life of the whole. The distinct forms of *vaikharī vāk* are fused with one another and the dynamic interrelations of forms created by virtue of *madhyamā vāk* re-orientate the forms towards the formless Essence. Thus, the visual fullness of the *maṇḍalas* in Alchi, representing the gross form of *paśyantī vāk*, echoes the sound of a murmuring brook and the music of a string instrument, where each note contains the depth of the whole and the whole swirls in the great Void.

VII.

Aesthetic Power of the Maṇḍalas of Alchi

VII.1 Immersion into the Paśyantī vāk

THE primary purpose of a *maṇḍala* is to aid in the process of identification between the self and the Essence. Herein lies the difference between a *maṇḍala* and a beautiful but mundane object. Beautiful objects, if they encourage attachment which feeds desire, obstruct the clarity of the mind and thereby taint the processing of sensual data preventing any direct insight, which in Buddhism is called *pratyakṣa*. Attachment has the tendency of separating subject from object, because it binds both in a rigid pose; it fastens both of them to their phenomenal names and forms, and hampers them from the mixing with each other fluidly. Due to the separated condition of subject and object, the process of identification does not occur, and one's perception is occupied by names, categories and judgements. On the contrary, *maṇḍalas* are intended for the practice of identification, which re-orientates the dualistic relationship between the subject and the object. In religious practice, the *maṇḍala* opens the path of self-identification between the practitioner and the divinity, causing the Essence to resume its circulating throughout the body of the practitioner. In an aesthetic context, its *paśyantī* form accommodates the immersion of the viewer into the Essence and leads to the state of *tanmayībhūti*, identification with the Essence. *The Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad* confirms the potentiality of the visual forms, leading to union with the Divine.

As by sacrificial offerings rain is produced, thus by a harmonious form the mood of meditation is induced. As from rain food is produced thus from meditation arises absorption. By absorption men become divinized. As from food the life arises, thus from the state of absorption they experience union with That. The mind becomes steady.¹

¹ Cf. VSU II.22 comm., tr. Boner, Sarma and Bäumer 2000: 64, Sanskrit text p. 169:

yathā "hutyā vṛṣṭirbhavati tathā rūpasaubhagād dhyānabhāvaḥ sampratiṣṭhate ।

yathā parjanyaḍannaṃ sambhavati tathā dhyānāllaya upajāyate ।

layānmanujā divyā bhavanti ।

yathā 'nnāt prāṇaḥ sañcarati tathā layāttadbhāva manubhavanti, mano niṣcalaṃ bhavati ।

Here, the reference to “the harmonious form” is especially significant in the present context, because it is one of the primary characteristics of the gross form (*sthūla*) of *paśyantī vāk*. Thus, the *maṇḍala*, which has been devised to nurture the state of identification and immersion, had to be shaped in the harmonious form of *sthūla-paśyantī*.

The aesthetic experience of the *paśyantī* form of a *maṇḍala* depends on both the subject and the object of the experience. If the visual aspect of a *maṇḍala* is seen only through the physical eyes, and if their colours and forms are not relished through their greater unity, they remain at the level of *vaikharī*. Without the process of immersing the self into the visual object, the *maṇḍala*’s *paśyantī* form cannot be perceived, because *paśyantī* is characterized by the awareness of both the unity and every distinct part. Without the internal state of immersion, the synthetic insight cannot come into play. Therefore, when we say that the *maṇḍala* is a gross form of *paśyantī vāk*, this speaks of its visual potentiality, fulfilled only through its dependence on the viewer. The experience of the *paśyantī* form of a *maṇḍala* depends not only on the viewer but also on the artistic standard of its execution. I would say that not every *maṇḍala* exemplifies the gross form of *paśyantī*; and the above discussion on the *paśyantī* form of *maṇḍala* has focused on the examples of Alchi. It is comparable to the fact that not every series of musical notes represents *sthūla-paśyantī*. When a series of musical notes is not skilfully performed, it cannot be said to be a gross form of *paśyantī* merely because the composition has the potentiality to represent *paśyantī vāk*. Likewise, it is obvious that different *maṇḍalas* are of different qualities, though sharing a common theme. Artistic skill has an invaluable part to play in bringing forth the powerful harmony of *sthūla-paśyantī*. Here, the artists should be both technically trained as well as acquainted with that which they express – i.e. “the Essence”. If we compare the artistic requirement for a *maṇḍala* with the case of the Zen drawing of a circle, the difference is clear. In the latter case, no artistic training is necessary, whereas one should be spiritually trained so as to invoke power into one’s work.

The discourse on the aesthetic power of *sthūla-paśyantī* mentioned in *TĀ*² may be considered in relation to the question of how *maṇḍalas* appeal to the heart of people beyond their doctrinal content or associated meanings. While explaining about the gross form of *paśyantī*, Abhinavagupta states in *TĀ* that he who is immersed in the form of *nāda* instantly experiences the state of *tanmayībhūti* (identification) because of its closeness to *saṃvid* (Divine Consciousness).³ It is significant that the aesthetic

² *TĀ* III.238b (vol. II: 579): *avibhāgaikarūpatvaṃ mādhyamaṃśaktirucyate* ||

³ *TĀ* III.239b-240a (vol. II: 579):

quality of *paśyantī vāk* has been grounded on the basis of *saṃvid*. *Samvid* (Divine Consciousness) may be understood as co-equivalent to other terms such as Mahāvairocana or Sarvavid, all of which are ultimately *Dharmadhātu*. When the discourse on the aesthetic power of *sthūla-paśyantī* is applied to the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, we come to the conclusion that when we are immersed in the *paśyantī* form of *maṇḍalas*, we experience the state of *tanmayībhūti* because of the *maṇḍalas*' resemblance to *saṃvid*. The supposition that the aesthetic power of these *maṇḍalas* originates from their closeness to *saṃvid* is consistent with the realization brought by our preliminary studies on the Buddhist scriptures: *maṇḍalas* appeal to the heart of people even without any discursive knowledge about them because they resemble the Ultimate Dharma (*dharmadhātu*), and so they are understood on a non-discursive level by the viewer.

VII.2 Aesthetic Viewing of Maṇḍalas

Consequently, a basic synthesis can be formulated: artistically executed *maṇḍalas* are the reflection (*pratibimba*) of the Divine Consciousness (*saṃvid*), the Ultimate Dharma (*dharmadhātu*) and the Perfect Enlightenment (*saṃbodhi*). By taking the *paśyantī* form that resembles *saṃvid*, *maṇḍalas* embrace the viewer, allowing them to merge into the visual form of Consciousness. In the religious practices of visualization or meditation, formless Consciousness is experienced internally. However, it takes a visible form by means of the arts – in other words, *Parāvāk*, the source of expression, expresses Herself directly through the act of arts in the *paśyantī* form of a *maṇḍala*. Here, art may be compared to recollection (*smaraṇa*) and meditation (*samādhāna*) in the sense that its integrating act approaches *paśyantī vāk*. The aesthetic dimension of the *maṇḍala* differs from its spiritual experience during the practice of visualization in the matter of the externalization of the Essence. A difference also lies in how this visual element is processed. The religious practice of visualizing a *maṇḍala* involves its conceptual construction, and symbolic ideas are imposed upon the figures. The religious practitioner should learn the connotations and interpretations of what they visualize. For them, an external *maṇḍala* is meaningless without studying every detail. In the process of visualization, illusory images are deliberately constructed, and the practitioner is actively engaged in the act of imagination. On the contrary, when the *maṇḍala* is the object of an aesthetic viewing, it is free from doctrinal conceptions, and our eyes can see it with a purer vision. In that

→ *tadasyāṃ nādarūpāyāṃ saṃvitsavidhavr̥ttitah ||*
sājātyāntarma[ttanma]yībhūtirjagityevopalabhyate |

sense, the aesthetic observation of a *maṇḍala* is related to the philosophy of *pratyakṣa* (direct insight). *Pratyakṣa* has been recognized in Buddhist logic as the primary means of true knowledge, which may have contributed to the growing importance of visual representations as a soteriological vehicle in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Particularly with the development of tantric soteriology, it possibly could have helped form the philosophical foundation for the elaborate visual creations of *maṇḍalas*.

VII.2.1 Pratyakṣa

Pratyakṣa, direct insight, is free from thought constructs (*vikalpa*). It means “pure seeing” that brings true knowledge without the involvement of any discriminative acts, like judgement or naming. For a definition of *pratyakṣa*, the first chapter of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* by Dignāga provides with invaluable references.⁴ In this text, *pratyakṣa* is defined as “free from mental or conceptual construction (*kalpanā*)”,⁵ and *kalpanā* here means the act of associating (*yojanā*) an object with names or assigning any verbal designations.⁶ Also, it is stated:

That which is devoid of such conceptual construction is called *pratyakṣa*.⁷

In Dignāga’s definition of *pratyakṣa*, it is its *nirvikalpa* (devoid of mental constructions) aspect that has been pre-eminently placed. The practice of visualization, though said to lead one to the realization of the True Dharma, is distinguished from the method of *pratyakṣa* in terms of dealing with one’s approach to thought construction (*kalpanā*). If *pratyakṣa* is the method of “the non-discursive observation of *citta*”, the practice of visualization allows one to see *citta* by means of discursive construction, supported by the sense-*viññānas* and by *manas*. On the other hand, the aesthetic appreciation of a *maṇḍala* is close to *pratyakṣa* because it is devoid of the discursive function of *manas*.

The direct perception of certain images has been recognized in the Buddhist

⁴ The chapter of the text concerning *pratyakṣa* consists of an argument for the characteristics of *pratyakṣa* and the discussion on the nature of the two aspects of cognition – the subject and the object.

⁵ PS I.3, tr. Hattori 1968: 25.

⁶ Ibid.: cf. *Dvādaśāra-Nayacakra* of Mallavādin (ed. together with ‘Nyāyāgamānusāriṇī Nayacakravṛtti of Siṃhasūn’ by Muni Jambuvijaya. Śrī Ātmanand Jain Granthamālā no. 92, Bhavnagar, 1966: 59.2-60.1): *atha ka kalpanā nāma-jāti-guṇa-kriyā-dravya-svarūpāpanna-vastv-antara-nirūpaṇānusmaraṇa-vikalpanā* (cf. Hattori 1968: 83).

⁷ PS I.30: *yatraiṣā kalpanā nāsti tat pratyakṣam* (cf. Hattori 1968: 86).

tradition to lead one to a synthetic awareness. This is demonstrated by the legendary story about the first portrait of the Buddha. When Bimbisāra sent the portrait of the Buddha to his *dharma* companion, Utrayana, “he merely glanced at this portrait and had an intuitive understanding of reality”.⁸ Another story related to this portrait of the Buddha also mentions that merely seeing the portrait of the Buddha induced a profound experience.⁹ To speak more specifically about *maṇḍala*, Buddhaguhya writes that the visual form of a *maṇḍala* leads the mind to be identified with the Divine Essence. Buddhaguhya’s reference seems to make particular reference to the *paśyantī* nature of the graphic *maṇḍala*:

Your mind is grasped in perceptual image of *maṇḍala*, if it becomes one-pointed without shifting from that, then the mind is definitely contented, and you should know that the mind which has become contented in that manner is the abode of the *mantras*, that is, the heart.¹⁰

This implies that the *pratibimba maṇḍala* is not separated from the *tattvarūpa* or *svabhāva-maṇḍala*, and therefore the absorption into *pratibimba* causes the mind to be permeated by the Divine Essence. The supposition that “one’s immersion into the perceptual image of *maṇḍala* causes the mind’s permeation by the Divine Essence” affirms the association of the aesthetic observation of a *maṇḍala* with *pratyakṣa*.

VII. 2.2 Parāvāk and Pratyakṣa

Though the term *pratyakṣa* certainly emphasizes the role of the senses, there are other types of *pratyakṣa* than only that perception which is based on the sense-organs. Dignāga refers to a mental perception (*manasaṃ saṃvitti*) as *pratyakṣa*: despite that it is not dependent on any sense-organ, it is taken to be *pratyakṣa*, as it is free from *kalpanā*.¹¹ Two kinds of mental perceptions are given; that of external objects, and that of the self-awareness (*svasaṃvitti*) of the internal state.¹² While the conceptual

⁸ Gega Lama 1983, vol. I: 42.

⁹ Gega Lama 1983, vol. I: 42.

¹⁰ MVT VI.103 comm., tr. Hodge 2003: 203.

¹¹ Cf. PS I.6.

¹² Ibid. According to the *Vṛtti*, the former means the inner perception that cognizes the sense perception free from conceptual construction, and the latter means the inner perception of internal states such as desire, anger, pleasure or pain, etc. The *Vṛtti* of PS I.6 says, “The mental perception which, taking a thing of colour, etc., for its object occurs in the form of immediate experience (*anubhava*) is also free from conceptual construction. The self-awareness (*svasaṃvedana*) of desire, anger, ignorance, pleasure, pain, etc., is [also recognized as] mental perception because it is not dependent on any sense-organ” (Tr. Hattori 1968: 27).

construction is *kalpanā*, the non-conceptual awareness (*svasaṃvid*), the pure perception of conceptual construction (*kalpanā-jñāna*), is a *pratyakṣa*. In addition, the “yogin’s intuition, which is not associated (*avyavakīrṇa*) with any conceptual construction of the *āgama* and apprehends only a thing in itself” also exemplifies the *pratyakṣa*.¹³ Knowing that there are types of *pratyakṣa* which are not based on any sense-organ, one understands that the *pratyakṣa* cannot be confined to immediate sense perception. *Pratyakṣa* is primarily the direct perception of reality in the nature of *nirvikalpa*, which is non-discursive and non-distinct. The English translation of the term as a “direct sense perception” can cause misunderstanding, because sense perception is ordinarily characterized by its tendency towards discrimination and distinction, which is the opposite of *pratyakṣa*. The essential discourse of the theory of *pratyakṣa* lies not in “the senses” but in the “pure sight”, consistent with the penetrating concept of *darśana* in Indian traditions. The verbal root of the term *darśana* (√*dṛś*) means “to see” as much as does the root √*paś*, from which the term *paśyantī* is derived. Thus, the notions of *pratyakṣa* and *paśyantī* conjoin within the Indian tradition of *darśana*. In its meaning of “visionary”, *paśyantī* is the level of cognition in which the seers comprehend reality and “the Real” with their intuitive vision. The same emphasis on one’s direct perception of the reality is essential to the philosophy of *pratyakṣa*. Furthermore, the etymology of *pratyakṣa* given by Dignāga reveals another important facet of *pratyakṣa* that coincides with *paśyantī vāk*:

Because *akṣa* (the sense-organ) is the specific cause (*asādhāraṇa-hetu*), it is called *pratyakṣa* (literally “belonging to each sense-organ”), not *pratiṣṭhāya* (literally “belonging to each object”).¹⁴

It is significant that the term opposite to *akṣa* has been said to be *viṣaya* (the object of the sense). If the object has been used as the antonym of *akṣa*, *akṣa* implies the subject. *Ākṣa* has been translated in the above passage as “the sense-organ”, and *pratyakṣa* as “belonging to each sense-organ”. Yet, *akṣa* is also translated as “sensual perception”, and *pratyakṣa* into “before the eyes”, “direct” or “visible”.¹⁵ The consideration of alternative translations and of the different types of *pratyakṣa* underlines its adherence to subjectivity; *pratyakṣa* connotes “direct insight” rather than “sense perception”. These two characteristics of insight and subjectivity remind one of the etymological

¹³ Cf. *PS* I.6 and *Vṛtti*: *yoginām apy āgama-vikalpāvyavakīrṇam artha-mātradarśanam pratyakṣam*, tr. Hattori 1968: 27.

¹⁴ *Vṛtti* of *PS* in between I.3 and I.4, tr. Hattori 1968: 26.

¹⁵ Cf. Monier-Williams 1872: 3.

description of *paśyantī vāk* given in Jayaratha's commentary to *TĀ*: it is called *paśyantī* (seeing or visionary), "since she is a form of the Subject who sees (*draṣṭṛ*)".¹⁶

The prevalence of the light of *cit* (Consciousness) and the absence of *vācyavācakakrama* (the process of what is expressed and what expresses) in *paśyantī-vāk* also coincide with the nature of *pratyakṣa*. When the *maṇḍala* is defined as the gross form of *paśyantī*, aesthetic immersion into the *maṇḍala* is more convincingly understood as *pratyakṣa* due to the *parāmarśa* nature (synthetic awareness) of *paśyantī vāk*, and due to its closeness to *saṃvid* (Divine Consciousness). If one wants to affirm the spirituality of the visual elements of a *maṇḍala* in a philosophical context, one need look at the relationship between the doctrine of *vāk* and the philosophy of *pratyakṣa*. We see the influence of the philosophy of *pratyakṣa* in Abhinavagupta's philosophy of *pratyabhijñā* (re-cognition), fundamental to the doctrine of the four levels of *vāk*.¹⁷ As we have seen in the notions of *Śūnya*, *Dharmakāya*, *Ālayavijñāna* and *Tathāgatagarbha*, Mahāyāna Buddhism has conceived the Ultimate as having the nature of *nirvikalpa*. As the system of eight *vijñānas* demonstrates, the six sense-*vijñānas* construct the dualistic discrimination (*vikalpa*) of objects, and these *vikalpas* obstruct the view of the Ultimate. As the philosophy of *pratyakṣa* focuses on the discussion on the relation between the *nirvikalpa* (without thought construction) and the *savikalpa* (with thought construction), the doctrine of *vāk* primarily deals with the relation between the non-discursive Whole and the discursive multiple forms. Broadly, the doctrine of *vāk* is reminiscent of the idea of attaining *pratyakṣa* free from *vācyavācaka bhāvanā* (the principle of the expression and the expressed, or the subject and the object) in that the *nirvikalpa* awareness of *Parāvāk* is reached by means of overcoming the *vācyavācaka bhāvanā* of *vaikhari vāk*. *Parāvāk* can be compared to the state which is manifested in *pratyakṣa*, with its characteristics of "*nirvikalpa* cognition". In both cases, the element of pure sight predominates, and no distinct conception of an object exists. The *nirvikalpa* cognition is inexpressible in discursive words.¹⁸ The key point that true knowledge is defined to be "*nirvikalpa* free from the

¹⁶ Jayaratha's comm. on *TĀ* III.236 (vol. II: 577), tr. Padoux 1992: 170-71.

¹⁷ Cf. Padoux 1992: 180: "One knows that the thought of such authors as Abhinavagupta was strongly influenced by Buddhist logic. For Abhinavagupta, for instance, dualistic thought (*vikalpa*) is a mental construct which follows and is based upon an initial moment of thought devoid of all thought construction (*nirvikalpa*), which is pure thought, direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) of the supreme reality."

¹⁸ In *PS* I.5, it is given: "A thing possessing many properties cannot be cognized in all its aspects by the sense. The object of the sense is the form (*rūpam*) which is to be cognized [simply] as it is (*svasaṃvedya*) and which is inexpressible (*anirdeśyam*).” (Tr. Hattori 1968: 27).

bondage of *vācyavācaka*” is the same in both paradigms. There are technical differences between these two concepts, however, regarding (i) the relation between *nirvikalpa* and *savikalpa*;¹⁹ (ii) the nature of *vācyavācaka bhāvanā*;²⁰ and (iii) the evaluation of *vācyavācaka bhāvanā*.²¹ Since the point of this work is not to dwell

¹⁹ In Śāntarakṣita’s definition, *kalpanā* is the “apprehension” associated with an expression (*abhilāpinī pratītiḥ*) (cf. *TS* 1213, tr. Funayama 1992: 61). Free from *kalpanā*, *pratyakṣa* is “essentially not a cause of verbal expression, etc. (*kṣiptihetutvādyātmikāna tu*)”. (*TS* 1213, tr. Funayama 1992: 62.) Here, we find a description of the *nirvikalpa* state contrary to what is explained in the doctrine of *vāk*. In the doctrine of *vāk*, the *nirvikalpa* state is the existential basis for *savikalpa* states. The problem of whether *nirvikalpa* state is the basis of the act of *kalpanā* or if it is separate from it is related to the discussion of whether the conceptual construction occurs simultaneously with the sense perception (*indriyavijñāna*) or afterwards. The logicians of Vijñānavāda Buddhism argue for the simultaneous occurrence of sense perception and conception: “[sense cognition] is thus directly experienced in co-existence with a conceptual mental cognition (*vikalpakamanojñāna*). Therefore, it is evident that sense-perception is devoid of conception” (*TS* 1245, tr. Funayama 1992: 97). The simultaneity of *indriyavijñāna* and *manovijñāna* is the logical basis of why the former is devoid of the latter, and therefore fulfils the condition to be *pratyakṣa*. That they occur sequentially means that the former contains the element of the latter, and therefore cannot be *pratyakṣa*. In the concept of *pratyakṣa*, *nirvikalpa* occurs simultaneously with *savikalpa*, therefore is not associated with the latter; while the former leads one to the right knowledge and pleasure, the latter is the cause of ignorance and pain.

In contrast, the doctrine of *vāk* emphasizes that the principle that relates the *vācyā* to the *vācaka* (*vācyavācaka bhāvanā*) exists also in *Parāvāk*, though hidden (*saṃhṛtarūpa*). In the Pratyabhijñā philosophy of Trika Śaivism, the difference between *nirvikalpa* and *savikalpa* is merely based on the matter of which form the principle of expression (*śabdabhāvanā*) takes. (Cf. *ĪPK* I.5.19; *ĪPVV*, vol. II: 239-40; Torella 2001: 872.)

²⁰ They share the view that the *vācyavācaka bhāvanā* is the cause of bondage. However, the question about the essential nature of *vācyavācaka bhāvanā* is interpreted in different ways in these two doctrines, depending on their views on the relation between *nirvikalpa* and *savikalpa*. In the doctrine of *vāk*, though *vācyavācaka bhāvanā* functions at the *vaikharī* level, it is in its essence the manifestation of the Ultimate, and it inheres fundamentally within *Parāvāk*. On the contrary, in the theory of *pratyakṣa*, *vācyavācaka bhāvanā* is not at all associated with *nirvikalpa*, and it inheres only in the field of *savikalpa*.

²¹ The problem of how the *vācyavācaka bhāvanā* is dealt with is also seen in their understanding of the relationship between *nirvikalpa* and *savikalpa*. In the doctrine of *vāk*, both *vācyā* and *vācaka* would be re-absorbed to the original state of *Parāvāk* through the *parāparā* (or *nirvikalpa-savikalpa*) levels of *madhyamā* and *paśyantī*, whereas *vācyavācaka bhāvanā* is declared to be false in the theory of *pratyakṣa*. We see in the philosophy of *pratyakṣa* the rejection of the validity of *vācyavācaka bhāvanā* for attaining the right knowledge: “Hence, it is maintained that a signifier-signified relation (*vācyavācaka*) is only a falsely imputed thing”. (*TS* 1261, tr. Funayama 1992: 110)

upon these details, we shall curtail the discussion by ascribing the differences to the fact that *pratyakṣa* denotes a direct insight, which is an act or a means to Supreme Knowledge, whereas *Parāvāk* indicates the supreme state of pure consciousness. The theory of *pratyakṣa* describes the *nirvikalpa* of pure cognition, whereas the doctrine of *vāk* describes the *nirvikalpa* of the *Parāvāk* state. It will be more precise to place *pratyakṣa* as co-equivalent to *pratyavamarśa* (or *vimarśa*) – i.e. the non-discursive cognition of *Parāvāk* – rather than to *Parāvāk* itself.

Pratyavamarśa, described in *ĪPV* is analogous to the *pratyakṣa*:

Pratyavamarśa is “sounding forth” by nature that expresses internally (*antarabhilāp-ātmakaśabdanasvabhāvaḥ*). This *śabdana* (sounding forth) indeed has nothing to do with the “conventional” (*saṅketanirapekṣam*). The uninterrupted *camatkāra* (*avicchinna-camatkārātmaka*) that is seen as an internal nod of the head gives life to the letters *a*, etc. that is the conventional sound on the plane of *māyā* (*akārādimāyīyasāṅketikaśabda*), for she is the basis of the awareness of fragmented objects (*pratyavamarśāntarbhittibhūtatvāt*).²²

The *pratyavamarśa* is seen here as “not associated with any conventional”, which reminds us of *pratyakṣa* that is defined as pure cognition separate from conventional language.²³ It is the *camatkāra* aspect of *Parāvāk* that comes into contact with the conventional. Despite being the origin of every cognition, the *pratyavamarśa* aspect of *Parāvāk* transcends all fragmented cognition based on convention. In the *ĪPK*, Utpaladeva may have had *pratyakṣa* in his mind when he wrote:

Even at the moment of the direct perception (*sākṣātkāraḥ* *pi*) there is a reflective awareness (*vimarśaḥ*).²⁴

As the author’s *vṛtti* clarifies, the *vimarśa* here is “the *pratyavamarśa* of the object (*arthapratyavamarśaḥ*) in a subtle form”.²⁵

If *pratyakṣa* can be compared to *pratyavamarśa* or *vimarśa*, the *śabdana* nature of the latter may also be found in the former. Ascribing *śabdana* – the principle of

²² *ĪPV* 1, 5, 13 (vol. I: 252-54), tr. Padoux 1992: 175-76 with emendation.

²³ “The object free from verbal convention is not connected with a word (*śabdena yojyate*) and there is no conception (*vikalpa*) which is beyond the connection with a word (*śabdayojana*).” It is so because the word involves the fault of over-extension (*atiprasaṅga*). (Cf. *TS* 1260, Kamalaśīla’s comm., tr. Funayama 1992: 111) *Śabdayojana* means *nāmajātyādiyojanā*, which is the definition of conception by Dignāga. Also cf. *TS* 1257-58, tr. Funayama 1992: 108.

²⁴ *ĪPK* I.5.19, tr. Torella 2002: 125.

²⁵ Cf. *Ibid*.

expression or the nature of “sounding forth” – to *pratyakṣa* does not contradict the theory of *pratyakṣa*. When it is stated that there is no cognition of any object in *pratyakṣa*, the “object” here means “a causal basis (*nibandhana*) that is qualified by qualifiers (*viśeṣaṇaviśiṣṭārthagrahaṇam*) for ascertaining a given conceptuality (*savikalpakabhāva*)”.²⁶ “No cognition of an object” in *pratyakṣa* clearly indicates the absence of any foundation that might cause discursive thought or discrete form. In the *ĪPVV*, Abhinavagupta explains about *śabdha* in respect to the state of *nirvikalpa*. He says that the *śabdabhāvanā* (the principle of expression) subsists within the *nirvikalpa* state in a contracted form, and it expands in the *savikalpa* state.²⁷ The *śabdana* nature of *pratyakṣa* is implied in Ānandhavardhana’s statement in the *Dhvanyāloka*, where *dhvani* has been compared to *pratyakṣa*:

We may let our definition of *dhvani* stand just as the definition of *pratyakṣa* stands in Buddhist doctrine.²⁸

Dhvani in *DhĀ* denotes more than “a sound” or “the primeval sound”. It signifies the true Subject (*ātma*) of the poetry that invokes the Essence with suggestive power (*vyañjakatva*). The reference to the Buddhist *pratyakṣa* in relation to *dhvani* on the one hand confirms the relationship between *pratyakṣa* and *pratyavamarśa* (the non-discursive cognition of *Parāvāk*), and on the other hand it discloses the *śabdana* nature of *pratyakṣa*. Above all, as observed earlier in the quotation from *MVT* (VI.19-20) it was seen that Vairocana’s state of *samādhi* emanated the primeval sound, from which arose first the four modes of *A* and then every subsequent conventional sound – that which makes things known. Vairocana’s deep *samādhi* would simply be in the state of *nirvikalpa*, and it is not different from *pratyakṣa*, as yogic insight is also thought to be *pratyakṣa*. The Ultimate Dharma conceived in the form of sound – as, for example, Sarvatathāgata or Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara – reaffirms the *śabdana* nature of *pratyakṣa*. Furthermore, as *pratyakṣa* is the cognition of *Prajñā* or the cognitive state of *Prajñā* (which is beyond rational discursive level of knowledge), it is more reasonably conceived of having the germ of activity or expression (*śabdana*) within,

²⁶ *TS* 1257-8, tr. Funayama 1992: 108.

²⁷ Cf. *ĪPVV* I.5.19, p. 240: *saṃvṛtā hi śabdabhāvanā prasāritāṃśabdabhāvanām-vividhakalpanārūpām apekṣya tathābhūtaivaividhyakaplanāvaikalyāt nirvikalpety ucyate*. See Torella 2001: 872. The term *śabdabhāvanā* is a penetrating principle also in the philosophy of Bhartṛhari, which seem to have developed to the concept of *Parāvāk* by the Pratyabhijñā philosophers.

²⁸ *DhĀ* III.47, author’s *vṛtti*, tr. Ingalls et al. 1990: 672.

since *Prajñā* is associated with creative inspiration (*pratibhā*) and considered to be that which spontaneously brings forth every expression and action.²⁹

Maṇḍalas are not merely the foundation of the practice of visualization. The philosophy of *pratyakṣa* urges us to recognize the visual aspect of a *maṇḍala* in its own right and to evaluate the aesthetic immersion in respect of its own spirituality. Abhinavagupta maintained the aesthetic savour (*rasanā*, *carvaṇā*, *āsvāda*, *bhoga*) to be one of the types of perception (*prātītiḥ*)³⁰ and affirmed that aesthetic perception is different from discerning any denotation or interpretation.³¹ It may be said that the aesthetic observation of *maṇḍala* has a spiritual value even without involving any doctrinal interpretation. They are themselves replete with significant images, and an aesthetic immersion into these forms is akin to *pratyakṣa*. The accord between the aesthetic immersion into a *maṇḍala* and the *pratyakṣa* throws light on the innate spirituality of the visual components of the *maṇḍala*.

²⁹ In Abhinavagupta's definition of *pratibhā*, we see a direct association of *prajñā* with the creative inspiration: "*Pratibhā* is a *prajñā* capable of creating new things" (*DhĀL* I.6, tr. Ingalls et al. 1990: 120). In Mahāyāna Buddhism *prajñā* is inseparable from *karuṇā*, which spontaneously produces the expressions or the actions.

³⁰ Traditional categories of perceptions counted by Abhinavagupta in *DhĀL* II.4 are sensory (*prātyakṣikī*), inferential (*ānumānikī*), verbal (*āgamotthā*), intuitional (*pratibhānakṛtā*) and yogic (*yogipratyakṣjā*) perception.

³¹ Cf. *DhĀL* II.4, tr. Ingalls et al. 1990: 224, Sanskrit text p. 84.

Conclusion

MAṆḌALAS are the reflective images of the formless Essence, which may be called *Dharmadhātu*, *Śūnya* or *Bodhicitta* within the paradigm of the symbolic language of Buddhism. What *maṇḍalas* ultimately represent is the formless Essence. The main task of the present work was to explain in what way the perceptual forms of *maṇḍalas* resemble the formless *Śūnya*. The subtle levels between the formless origin and the perceptible forms have been articulated in the vocabulary of sound in the spiritual traditions of India; therefore, the philosophy of *vāk* has been chosen in the present volume to study the relationship between the tangible *maṇḍalas* and their formless origin. The doctrine of four levels of *vāk* introduces the paradigm of transformation that confers the means by which phenomenal objects are truly none other than a form of the Ultimate. Here, the Buddhist *maṇḍalas* of Alchi are suggested to be the physical manifestation of *paśyantī vāk*, which lays the ground to explain how *maṇḍalas* resemble *Śūnya*. Their resemblance to *Śūnya* is ascertained on the basis that *paśyantī vāk* is close to *Samvid* and to *Parāvāk*.

The Buddhist *maṇḍalas* of Alchi have been developed according to certain visual principles by means of which they attain the harmonious melody of *paśyantī vāk*. However, the application of such visual principles does not promise any success in drawing out *paśyantī* via a *maṇḍala*. Without the heart and skill of an artist, the visual guidelines remain mere potential, and without any immersion on the side of viewer, even a properly-made efficacious *maṇḍala* cannot convey the subtle sound of *paśyantī vāk*. I have attempted to illustrate the *paśyantī* form of *maṇḍalas* by analysing their visual principles. Although I have introduced certain elements as factors that constitute the *paśyantī* form of a *maṇḍala*, it should be confessed that the flowing music of *paśyantī vāk* is not merely the total sum of these visual characteristics. This retrospection may remind us of certain discussions in Indian aesthetics about the relationship between aesthetic essence (*rasa*) and its constituents – *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, *vyabhicāribhāva*, *sthāyibhāva* – asking “where does *rasa* come from?”, or “is *rasa* merely the sum of the four constituents?” As for the question, “then what brings forth the *paśyantī* form of a *maṇḍala*?” we need to turn our attention to an important teaching

of the doctrine of *vāk*: various levels of *vāk* adhere to *Parāvāk*. *Parāvāk* – comparable to the dynamic face of the Buddhist concept of *Śūnya* – is *pratibhā*, the incessant source of inspiration for artistic creation. The visual principles observed in the *paśyantī* form of Alchi *maṇḍalas* are the channel through which the Ultimate Dharma is revealed, and through which one's vision leads the self to the Ultimate Dharma. However, those *maṇḍalas* which merely imitate the visual codes without taking in the vibrating inspiration of *Parāvāk*, these have no power to appeal to the heart. It is comparable to the statement that *mantras* have no effect if they are not empowered by the heart. Thus, the visual elements that have been introduced during our analysis should be especially viewed in their relation to the "Essence" to explain the *paśyantī* form of *maṇḍala*. When the graphic *maṇḍala* imparts *paśyantī* derived from the direct inspiration of *Parāvāk*, the *vācya* and *vācaka* aspects of the *maṇḍala* are identified, and the *maṇḍala* becomes in truth the abode of the Ultimate Dharma, just as Tantras affirm.

Through their logical language, the Buddhist texts describe and attempt to prove the real nature of *Śūnya*. These logical languages appeal to the human brain and help to have the proper understanding of *Śūnya*. However, does the language of logic help in experiencing it? As is asserted in the *Tantrāloka*, the harshness of ordinary language does not help us to identify ourselves with the object of speech. Even when revealed through logical language, *Śūnya* remains in the realm of the object, unless it is relished. Meditation overcomes the separation of subject and object, and demonstrates a way in which *Śūnya* is experienced; the *maṇḍala*-based practice of visualization certainly represents a way of experiencing *Śūnya*. Yet it is not the only way to experience *Śūnya* through a *maṇḍala*. Whereas *Śūnya* remains in the internal space in the practice of visualization, it is revealed in the physical form of a *maṇḍala*. We need to recognize the aesthetic appreciation of a *maṇḍala* to be another way of approaching *Śūnya*, distinguished from visualization practice; the *maṇḍala* has a spiritual value even apart from its religious context.

In the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi we have seen how diverse postures, attributes and colours as well as geometric elements have been required to create the visual *dhvani* (resonance) that invokes *Śūnya*. The *paśyantī* nature of the *maṇḍala*, in its resemblance to *nāda* or the murmur of a brook, instantly touches the heart of the viewer and absorbs them into an otherworldly realm. *Śūnya* is what the *maṇḍala* expresses, and its visual forms are the sound which calls upon *Śūnya*. In the *paśyantī* manifestation, the ultimate meaning of the *maṇḍala* is identified with its external form. Through the arts that

create that *paśyantī* form, the ultimate meaning is experienced in a reflective form, and meaning and form melt together to become the non-distinct Whole. The non-differentiation between the meaning and the words in the *paśyantī vāk* of a *maṇḍala* explains why *maṇḍalas* are distinguished from ordinary images, and why they are used in the religious practices in attempt to identify oneself with *Śūnya*.

We often come across a certain prejudice among modern scholars, viewing the ancient religious arts without any regard for individuality or creativity. They stress the precise rules that had to be observed in the traditional way of representing the Divine. This idea finds its root in the modern assumption that individual creativity always clashes with tradition, and that following a tradition denotes the suppression of the individual. However, we often see that the same *maṇḍala* design might be of variable aesthetic standards. The difference in our aesthetic responses to them has to be more than the variation of personal judgements based on liking or disliking it. There is certainly a factor of individuality in the creative process of *maṇḍalas* that allows for this range of aesthetic standards. We should re-examine whether our concept of creativity is not confined to the matter of “a new shape” or “a new composition”. The *maṇḍalas* of Alchi lay in front of us another perspective to see creativity: creativity is the ability to directly communicate with the creative source, which according to Trika Śaivism is identical with *Pratibhā*, *Parāvāk*, *Citi*, *Śakti* and *Vimarśa*, and is at times symbolized as the Feminine Absolute (*Devī*). Here, creativity manifests this Source through the enlivening energy of that very Source, thus bringing together the meaning and the expression. They demonstrate the successful arts that re-present the deepest level of the Universal Mind in a tangible form. It is the artist’s creativity that allows the subtle *paśyantī vāk* to be unfolded within the corporeal form of a *maṇḍala*, and at the same time that artist’s creativity is the very revelation of the dynamics of *Parāvāk*. In the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, the artist’s creativity is affirmed in their ability to evoke the presence of *Śūnya* and to generate its dynamic power through established forms – rather than blithely introducing new shapes. Not only does the *paśyantī* form of a *maṇḍala* resembles the Universal Mind, but also the very arts that brought forth such forms mirror the Universal Mind, *Śūnya*.

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