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Art. X.—Notice on Buddhist Symbols

B. H. Hodgson

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ART. X.—*Notice on Buddhist Symbols.* By B. H.
HODGSON, Esq.

[*Read 5th January, 1861.*]

To The Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society.

THE RANGERS, near Dursley, *Sept. 26th, 1860.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honour to transmit to you, for presentation to the Society, two sheets containing collectively 143 symbols of Buddhism, whereof the first 33, occupying the two uppermost lines, are taken from coins published in the J.R.A.S., but all the rest from the Saugata temples and images of the Valley of Nepal. To these sketches of Buddhist symbols I add six separate ones of celebrated characters, either belonging to, or most closely connected with, the same creed, and which also were obtained in Nepal, the four first from images in stone; the two last from illuminated manuscripts. The numismatic symbols, presumably Buddhist, were brought together, from printed sources, many years back, with the view of obtaining explanations of their import from the learned Saugatas of Nepal; and with the same view, everything in the shape of a symbol, which my immense collection of drawings taken from the temples, statues, and pictures of Buddhism in Nepal, contained, was similarly brought together and added to the former series. Of the result I have no distinct recollection at this distance of time; but I believe that more pressing objects intervened to shut out from my view and memory this project, and that no explanations were obtained. Nevertheless, as the whole of the symbols collected in Nepal are indubitably Buddhist, the copying having been both executed and supervised by men of that creed, I conceive that advantage may attend their publication at least, if not that also of the coin series,¹ because amid the mouldering ruins

¹ Considerations of cost have induced the omission of the symbols derived from coins. The curious will find them, however, in the Journals of the Bengal and London Asiatic Societies.

of Buddhism that are scattered over the plains of India, and elsewhere, where the faith has long since ceased to be professed, the curious investigator is too glad to obtain every help towards the determining of any given site as Buddhist, and not Brahmanical or other; and because also every such investigator when he finds a symbol of Northern Buddhism in a southern site is gratified and instructed with this evidence of the common character of the religion of Sakya, wherever professed.

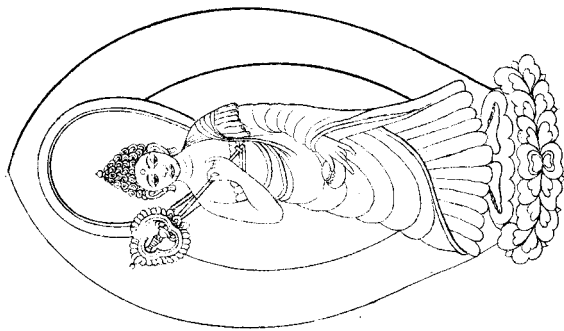
The six figures delineated are those of Ananda Bhikshu, the most illustrious of his order (1); of Maitwya, the Buddha yet to come (2); of Matsyendranath, the reputed Guru (3); and of Górákshanáth or Górákhnáth (4, 5, 6), the reputed siksha or disciple of the Matsyendra aforesaid.

Of the last I give one Nepalese and two Tibetan representations, because the character of this Nathésvara, and his alleged connexion with Matsyendra, seem to point to Náthism or Saintism as the bridge uniting the orthodox and heterodox, the Brahmanical and Saugata sects.¹

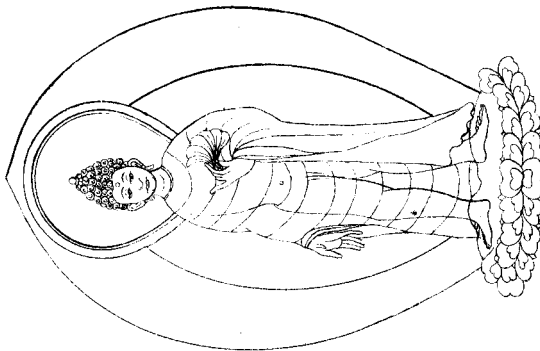
Matsyendra's car festival is as celebrated in Nepal as that of Jagannath in Orissa, whilst of the high pristine celebrity of Góráksha or Górkhanáth, we have evidence in the two facts, that he is the eponymous deity of the gallant Górkhas of Nepal, and that a large and rich district in the plains of India (Górákpúr) is named after him. More of Matsyendranath may be found in the translation of the Pancha Raksha, *apud* J.A.S.B., where the *quasi* Saiva attributes are more strongly brought out than they are in the present representation of him as identical with the fourth Dhyáni Bodhisatwa. In order to make more apparent the bearing and value of my Bauddha symbols, I subjoin a few extracts and references.

Mr. Chapman in his paper on Anuradhapur, *apud* J.R.A.S., xiii. I. 171, observes, "The intimate connexion of these symbols with Buddhism, the wide diffusion and uniform character of that creed, are strikingly evinced by comparing the figures just described with those represented in Mr. Hodgson's Sketch of Buddhism in the second volume of the Society's Transactions. Mr. Hodgson's plate represents seven Buddhas, each seated on a kind of throne. Six of these thrones are decorated with emblematic devices and supporters, out of which

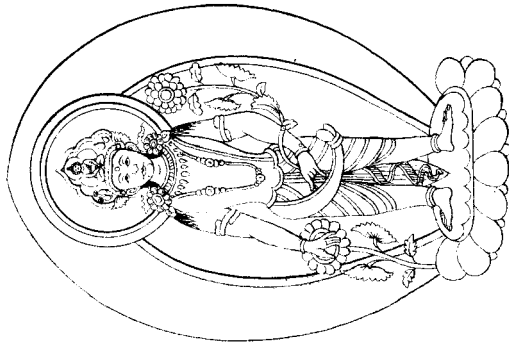
¹ See in J.A.S.B. my translation from the Swayambhu purána of the legend of the dessication of the Nága vása or valley of Nepal in its lacustrine state. In that legend the very close and significant connexion of the great orthodox and heterodox fanes of Nepal, or those of Pasupati náth and of Swayambhu náth, is shown.



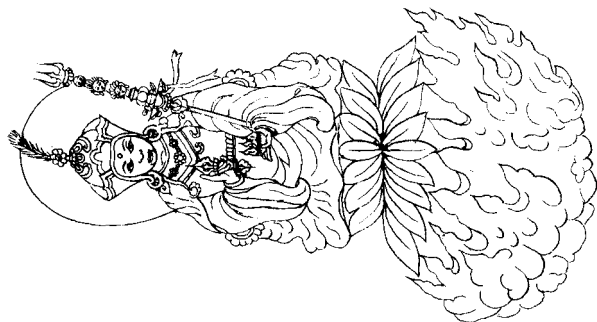
Ananda Bhikshu
from *Ben Baki* (or the *New Monastery*)
in the *Valley of Nepal*
(Holds the *Khikshari* and *Indrapatna*)



Mañjha Bodhisatva
from the *Monastery of Gopuch*
in the *Valley of Nepal*



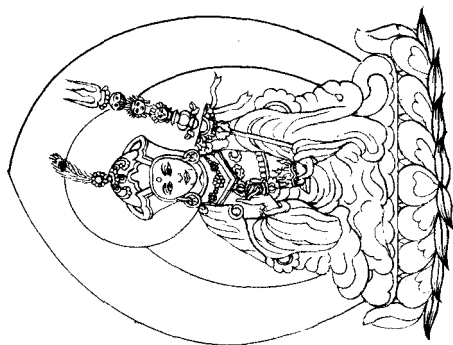
The Matsyendra Nath
of *Patana*
in the *Valley of Nepal*



*The Ganesha of the Tibetans,
from an illuminated M. S.*



*The Ganesha of Nepalase
of the Nepalese.
From the Image in the Temple at
Indra Chok of Kathmandu.*



*Another of the Tibetan Ganeshas,
from an illuminated M. S.*

five are identical with the figures sculptured on the slab, and the lotos ornament also is found on both alike." Again, Dr. Wilson in his *Essay on the Antiquities of Western India*, remarks (p. 49): "Many of the Buddhist figures at Ellora, and elsewhere, are quite intelligible from the papers of Mr. Hodgson."

To much the same effect might be quoted Prinsep, Cunningham, and Kittoe in the *Bengal Society's Journal*, as well as my own two letters in the *Oriental Quarterly Magazine*, No. 14 of 1827, and No. 16 of 1828, on the resemblance of the symbols of Buddhism and of Sivaism, wherein are pointed out, by my old Bauddha friend, in reference to Gāya, and by myself in reference to Java, very many instances of Saugata images having been, with utterly misleading effect, mistaken for Brahmanical gods, from inattention to those significant accessories which are always inseparable from such images. The whole of these in so many ways useful accessories I have therefore brought together, with no little trouble, by causing everything in the nature of a symbol or emblem found on any of the endless architectural, sculptural, or pictorial representations of Saugata fanes and deities, as copied for me in Nepal during my long abode there, to be detached from the temple, or statue, or picture exhibiting any such diagnostic mark, whether as an appurtenance of a deity or (as often happens) as a substitute for one.

As the *Oriental Quarterly*, above referred to, is scarce, I may add that the papers which appeared therein in the years 1827 and 1828, were reprinted in my volume on Buddhism, and will be found at pp. 203-11, and I may remark that the learned old Nepalese Buddhist's notes upon the great temple at Gāya, therein embodied, are exceedingly suggestive, showing how easily and decisively very many so-called Brahmanical images and emblems may be proved to be really Bauddha ones, by careful attention to their minute accompaniments; as, for instance, the eye proper to the 'charan' of Manjusri, or the ashtmangal and sahasra chakra proper to that of Sakya; or the tiny image of Amitabha placed in the forehead of the idols of Padmapani. The last time I passed by Bhagulpur I went to the adjacent ruins of Karnagarh, and found the officiating Brahman at a small fane making puja to what he called an image of Krishna. I silenced and astonished him by pointing to the tiny frontal appendage of the idol, which he had overlooked, just as Crawford had at Borobodor in Java, where, by this and similar oversights, he was led into the most serious errors. All the accessories of a pagan idol are significant; and if, therefore, they are all described, the idol can be safely identified, as I identified those of Padmapani and of Manjusri, at Pagan, in Ava, from

Colonel Yule's descriptions. But such descriptions to be useful must be insufferably prolix, and hence the value of such delineations as tell their own tale at a glance.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.,

BRIAN HOUGHTON HODGSON.

To the Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society.

THE RANGERS, Dursley, Gloucestershire,

Dec. 15th, 1860.

SIR,

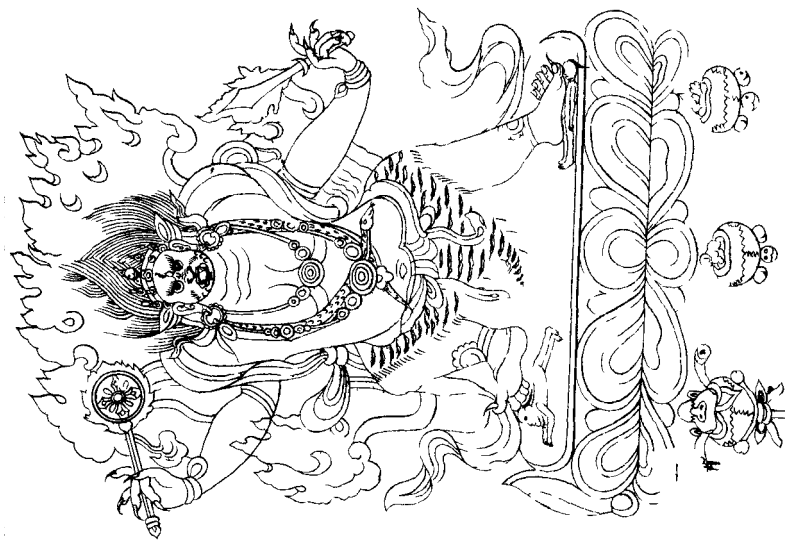
I have the honour to forward to you, for presentation to the Society, five sheets of drawings of Bonpa deities, which were made for me by a mendicant friar of that sect, named I'drophúncho, when on a casual visit to Darjiling, from his home at Ráhhö, near Táchindó. To the above drawings I add (for a purpose which will soon be apparent) a common printed copy of a Tibetan yantra, such as the people of Tibet ordinarily wear about their necks as a charm.¹

De Corös considered the Bonpas to be the oldest sect of religionists in Tibet. In the Himálaya the name still lingers as the designation of the Exorcist of certain rude tribes, such as the Múrmí and Súnwár, tribes having almost no other religious observances than the mummeries of the said Exorcists. Not much is, I fancy, known of the Bonpa faith; but, as described to me by the Sikim Rája's Vakíl at Darjiling, whose opinion is entirely supported by the character of the drawings now first produced, there can be no doubt it is an integral part of Buddhism, and as such it was unhesitatingly spoken of to me by the Vakíl, who added that the Bonpa Vihárs are still numerous and wealthy in Tibet.

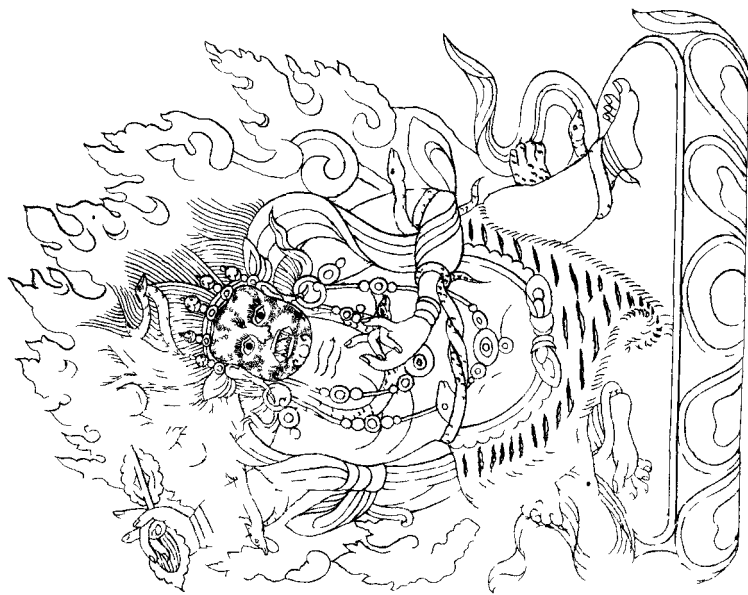
In the Himálaya there is nothing of the sort, nor can the solitary Exorcist of this or that rude and unlettered tribe, himself a member of the tribe and ignorant as his fellows, give one word of information as to the origin of his creed, or why he bears an appellation identical with that of a transhimálayan sect of Buddhists.

The drawings of Bonpa deities made for me by I'drophúncho, without any suggestion on my part, beyond the simple request that he would delineate for me some of the chief deities of his creed, speak for themselves. They are saturated with what we are accustomed to call Saiva and Sáktá attributes; and, without staying to discuss how far

¹ Omitted as very commonly known.



Tala Mambur



Nanyun

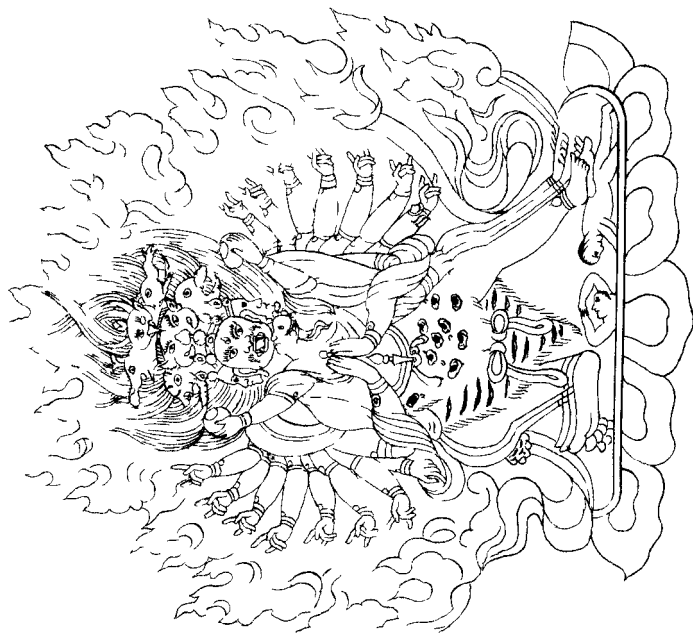
BONPA DEITIES

Drawn by Idrophuncho of Rakao near Tachinde and a Bonpa, Mondulard Frar

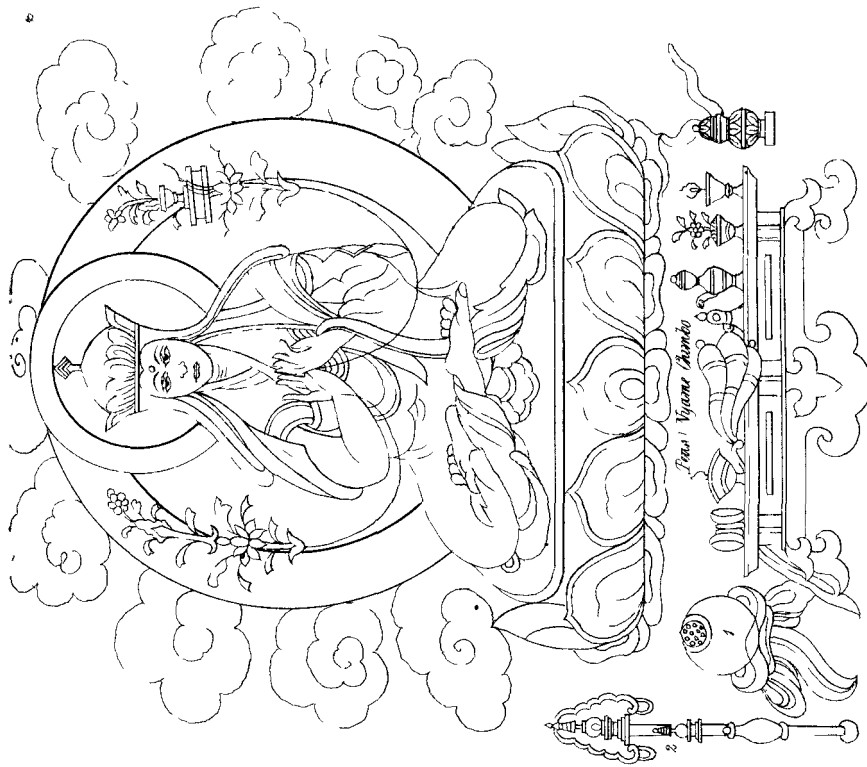


Standungmapo

BONPA DEITIES



Wasa Gnamba



1 The Vajrasa dach or punda, patron of the Vajrasa dach of Tibetans
2 The Khushan or enser of the Ngulshar Shongshar of Tibetans



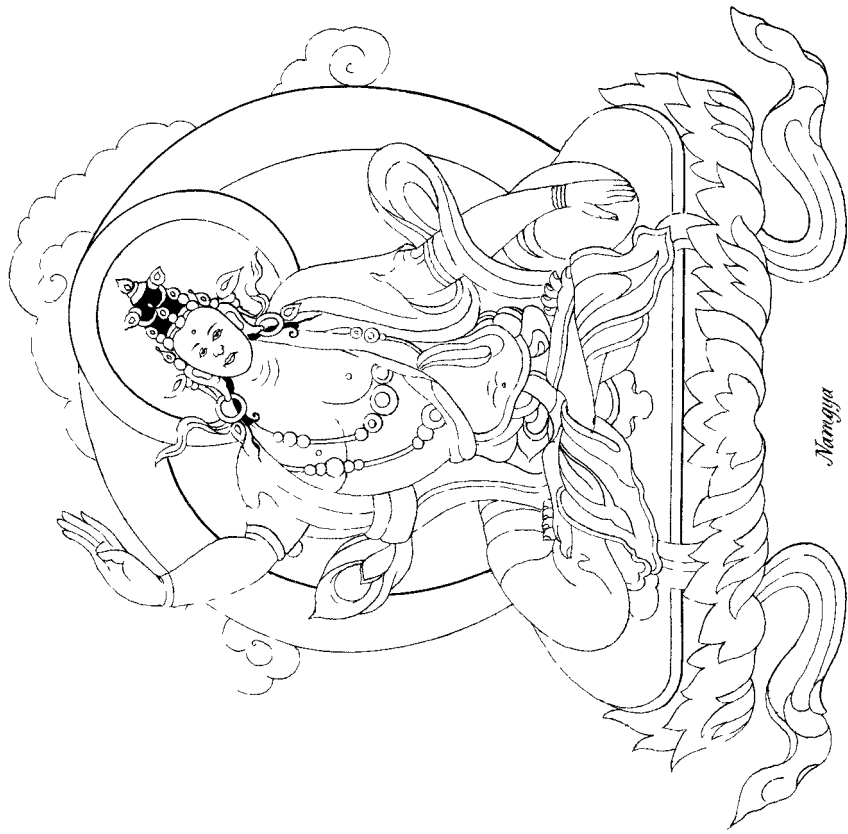
1 Khavur 2 Shongshar 3 Khavur 4 (Khavur: Khavur jar)

BONPA DEITIES



Pam tinda sakra

BONPA DEITIES



Nangya

such attributes can be truly regarded as more properly Brahmanical than Buddhist, or as borrowed by the Sangatas from their rivals, or as confined to northern Buddhism, I shall content myself at present with saying that these attributes are thoroughly worked into the Brahmanism as well as the Buddhism of the Himálaya, and into the Buddhism of Tibet, and of all the countries north of Tibet; that they have a wide scriptural basis in the copious Tantras of both creeds; and that they seem to me to have originated in an incorporation, into both creeds alike, of the rude superstitions of the primitive Turánians.

I do not myself think that these Tántrica traits are at all confined to the Buddhism of the north, because I perceive evidence of the contrary even in the drawings which accompany our European expositions of Buddhism in India, Indo-China, Ceylon, and Java; and I suppose that this Tántrika admixture may have originated in the prior superstitions of the sons of Tûr, forming the pristine sole population of all those countries, because those superstitions, as still extant among the *disjecta membra* of that population wherever found, exhibit a pre-valent Tántrika character (mixture of ferocity, lust, and mummery), and bear everywhere, from Siberia to Ceylon, a resemblance that amounts to identity.¹

It was long since observed by myself that these seemingly Saiva and Sáкта traits of Nepálêse Buddhism appear more especially to belong to what I then denominated the Aiswarika, or theistic sect of that creed, and the remark was subsequently confirmed by De Cörös, in reference to the Buddhism of Tibet. I will not reiterate what I have said elsewhere (*Buddhism of Nepal*, pp. 203-11), but, craving attention to the form of the Chaitya, alike in India, Ceylon, and Java, I will just mention a fresh proof of the common admission everywhere of this theistic sect, viz., that the grades of the spire of the Chaitya are not a merely architectural feature, but are typical of the *bhuvanas* or heavens of the celestial Bodhisatwas and Buddhas. Consequently wherever that gradated spire is found there we have, as it would seem, theistic Buddhism; and, that the gradated spire belongs to the Chaityas of India, Ceylon, and Java, alike as to those of Nepal, may be seen at once by a glance at the drawings in Ferguson, Tennent, and Crawford. In the plates of Crawford's work (not to cite others) may, moreover, be seen the frequent effigies of some of these Dhyáni or celestial beings, as I have elsewhere pointed out. And without

¹ Compare the "devil dance" of the Veddahs of Ceylon, *apud* Sir E. Tennent, with my account of the same performance by the Bódos of the Sikim Tarai, in *Aborigines of India*, pp. 171, 172. A more general comparison will but confirm the opinion expressed in the text.

insisting too much upon this sort of evidence of so grave a matter, I would suggest that further inquiry can do no harm, and would beg of him who has the opportunity and insists that no such characteristic as even qualified theism, ever belonged to the Buddhism of the plains of India, to go the ruins of Karnagarh on the Ganges, near Bhágulpúr, and he will there find, in excellent preservation, that beautiful image of Padmapáni, the fourth Dhyani bodhisatwa, to which I before alluded as having, on the forehead, a figure of Amitábha, a celestial Buddha. Very many other similarly simple and intelligible proofs or presumptions might be cited, that the Buddhism of the north is the Buddhism of the south, and that that creed, let its apparent theism be worth what it may, everywhere bears the stamp of essential identity, even to the Tántrika traits. I will confine myself to one more instance. In the J.R.A.S., vol. XIII., part ii., p. 71, *et seq.*, Mr. Ravenshaw has given delineations and descriptions of what his informant called a "Sri yantra" and a "Siva yantra;" and Sir E. Tennent, in his work on Ceylon, vol. ii., p. 619, has a drawing of "a carved stone at Anarajapúr," but unaccompanied by any explanation.

Now I venture to affirm, with the utmost confidence, that both Mr. Ravenshaw's and Sir E. Tennent's figures are Saugata Mandalas—a sort of mystic circles of very frequent occurrence in all sorts of positions, and of many degrees of development, from the most simple to the most complex, but all based upon the representation (as Sir E. Tennent justly observes) of a lotos, which, I may add, the Buddhists regard as the type of creative power.

To the various compartments of the Mandala are consigned either figures or symbols of the deities of the Pantheon, the place of honour being the centre, and, as such, reserved for the more immediate object of the worship. And these Mandalas are inscribed either on stereotyping wooden blocks, in order that copies may be multiplied for wear about the person as charms, or they are graven in crystal or stone on the obtuse summit of minute models of the sacred hemisphere of Buddhism, such as are kept for domestic worship; or, lastly, they are graven on stone or metal, and placed upon a more or less raised pedestal, either within a hollow temple (Kútákára), or under some small merely protecting structure, or in the open air a few paces in front of the Eastern niche and idol of a large Chaitya. A great many of these Mandalas may be seen in the large collection of explained drawings presented by me to the Institute of France. It would be wearisome to go into all their details, or, at least, unfair to anticipate what may appear elsewhere. Suffice it, therefore, at present to say

that the triangle in the several forms presented by Mr. Ravenshaw (Plates I and II) is forthcoming among the Nepalese Bauddha symbols lately sent you ; that in pp. 125, 126 of my little volume on Buddhism may be seen the *Saugata* explanation of the triangle, so very like that given to Mr. R. of his ; and that many of the large Chaityas which have images of the Dhyáni Buddhas enshrined in niches near their base, one opposite each cardinal point of the compass, have also this "trikonákár yóni," one in each of the four interstitial spaces, similarly as the images enshrined in niches ; and avowedly representing the respective Saktis of the four Dhyáni Buddhas in question, or Akshóbhya, Ratna Sambhava, Amitábha, and Amógha Siddha.¹

At the great Chaitya of Swayambhunáth, to which Mr. Ravenshaw so shrewdly refers in the course of his remarks, the triangle thus makes its appearance four times, and there is also at Swayambhunáth a beautiful sample of a Mandala graved in copper on the slightly convex summit of a round pedestal, about breast high, and standing opposite to the Eastern niche, or that which enshrines the image of Akshóbhya Buddha, at the distance of some six feet from the niche and image.

Mr. Ravenshaw's figures 3, 4, of Plate I., no doubt represent, as he conjectured, and rightly, they might be intended to do, those minute spireless Chaityas, which the Nepalese use for daily worship, or for votive offerings, constructing them of river sand, or of clay, for the nonce, when they happen to have none, or are indisposed to part with any of more permanent and costly sort.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.,

BRIAN HOUGHTON HODGSON.

¹ Each of these celestial Buddhas has appropriate marks, consisting (besides diverse colours) of 1st, the *múdra* or position of the hands ; 2nd, the *váhana* or supporters ; 3rd, the *china* or cognizance (symbol) placed between the supporters ; 4th, fixed position in the Chaityas. Akshóbhya being always enshrined in the eastern niche ; Ratna Sambhava in the southern ; Amitábha in the western ; and Amógha Siddha in the northern.