

BUDDHA DĪPAṆKARA TWENTYFOURTH PREDECESSOR OF GAUTAMA

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Buddhism in all its forms goes back to the life and teachings of Gautama Buddha. While the austerities practised by Buddha till he attained enlightenment appeal to the Pali or Southern school called **Hinayana**, his life of service and compassion for 45 years after the attainment of Enlightenment is the authority to Sanskrit or Northern school called **Mahayana** (S. Radhakrishnan, preface, Pali Tripitaka, Ed. Kashyap).

The **Buddhavaṃsa**, in **Khuddakanikāya** or "the collection of smaller pieces", gives an account of the Previous Buddhas with whom **Bodhisattva Gautama** had come in contact and who had made prediction that **Bodhisattva Gautama** would attain perfect Enlightenment. It is interesting to note that the Jain mythology also gives a similar account of the previous **Tirthankaras**, it is all the more interesting that even the number of the previous Buddhas and that of **Tirthankaras** are not very different (Kashyap, *Khud. Nik. vol. VII*). **Dipaṅkara Buddha** is remembered specially and held in high esteem for the reason that according to legend it was while **Dipaṅkara** was the Buddha that **Gautama Buddha** was an ascetic named **Sumedha** and had made his vow to become Buddha.

Buddhavaṃsa (edited by Morris in P.T.S 1882), contains poetical legend of the 24 Buddhas who are supposed to have preceded **Gautama Buddha** in the last twelve ages of the world (**Kalpa**). After the introductory, one chapter is dedicated to each of the 24 Buddhas. It is related in case of each single Buddha, how he sets the **Wheel of Law** in motion and how -- with but trifling differences -- the principal events in the life of **Gautama Buddha** were enacted in the life of each of the former Buddhas. It is **Gautama Buddha himself** who narrates the life story and speaking in first person, he recounts who he himself was in each of the preceding lives, how he worshipped the Buddha, and how his own **Buddhahood** had been foretold by the Buddha of that time. "The only part which is a little more imaginative and poetical is the second chapter" (**Winternitz: A History of Indian Literature, vol. II; Buddhist literature p 161**), which deals with **Dipaṅkara**, the first Buddha. **Maurice Winternitz** noted here that usually the Buddha was **Sakka (skt. Śakra)**, the king of the Gods, another time a lion, the king of beasts, twice a king of the Nagas, once a yakṣa and several times an ascetic.

We quote an account of Dīpaṅkara Buddha as briefly narrated by Winternitz. "Gautama Buddha was at that time a rich Brahman named Sumedha, and he relates in verse (7-27) which are reminiscent of Theragathas, how one day he felt disgusted with the world; how he cast off the wretched body, as though it were dirt, and withdrew to a hermitage in the Himalaya. This was precisely his campaign of conquest throughout the world, and men and gods worshipped him. Sumedha, the hermit, comes too, and at a marshy spot loosens his plaited hair, spreads it out on the dirty ground, with his hamper garment and his cloak of skins, and lies face downwards, (This scene has often been depicted on Buddhist monuments, probably it already appeared on the stupa of Bharhut) inspired with the wish that the exalted Buddha Dīpaṅkara, with his host of disciples, may step over him without having their feet soiled by mud. Prostrate on the ground, he resolves to become a Buddha one day and bring salvation to the world. Dipankara approaches and prophesies the future greatness of Sumedha. The inhabitants of the ten thousand worlds make a joyful noise and signs and miracles happen, as it always the case when future Buddha is foretold. But Sumedha determines to realise in himself all the ten perfections (Pāramitās), in order to fulfil the preliminary conditions of Buddhahood." (A History of Indian Literature, vol. II pp. 160-161).

DĪPAṅKARA LEGENDS

Buddhavaṃsa describes the splendours of the first Tathagata Buddha that is, Dīpaṅkara in magnificent terms. The verses (15,27,28 and 31) are reproduced at end of the article. We give in short the details thus: Dīpaṅkara was 80 cubit tall, shining like big tree of lamps, he was always attended by 84,000 Arhats, he lived for 100,000 years and the Stūpa in which his remains were enshrined was 36 yojanas high.

Gautama Buddha, it is said, came down to this world from the Tusita heaven where he was the presiding god. He had reached that heavenly state by acquiring immeasurable merits in his several previous existences. There are two stories, one in the Mahāvastu: Dīpaṅkaravastu and the other in the Nidāna-Kathā, about his past life, in which he was assured by Dīpaṅkara Buddha that he would ultimately attain Bodhi, the Supreme knowledge. The two stories are as follows:

I. Mahāvastu : Gautama Buddha was once born as a Brāhmaṇa's son known as Megha Mānava. He completed his Brāhmaṇic education and came down to the plains of the Himavanta to procure the fee to be given to his Guru on the termination of his studies. He collected 500 coins (Purānas). He then went to see the capital Dīpavati and found the city in a festive mood. On enquiring he learnt from a beautiful young maiden with seven lotuses in her hand that the city had been decorated to welcome Buddha Dīpaṅkara. He thereupon

offered to purchase her five lotuses by paying 500 purāṇas. He was told that he could have them if only he would promise to take her as his wife. After remonstrating a little, he agreed to her proposal on her assurance that she would not stand in the way of his spiritual career. On seeing the glorious appearance of Buddha Dīpaṅkara, he became deeply reverential and attained the notion of non-duality (advayasamīhā). He became a devotee of Buddha by seeing the miraculous powers and expressed his devotion and admiration by wiping the lotus-like feet of Buddha by his long hair, and while doing so he developed the aspiration to attain Bodhi.

II Nidānakathā : Gautama Buddha was once born as Sumedha Brāhmaṇa at Amarāvātī in a very rich Brāhmaṇa family of pure lineage. He lost his parents at an early age. He learnt the Brahmanic sciences and was sick of the wealth left by his parents. He gave them away in charity and became an ascetic seeking immortality (amatamahānibbāna) a state free from origin and decay, pleasure and pain, disease or suffering. He realised that as everything in this world had two aspects, positive and negative so as an antithesis to origin (birth) there must be something unoriginated, and he was to realise it. He went to the Himalayas and took up an abode at Dhammaka mountain living only on fruits falling from trees. He soon attained perfection in meditation and six higher powers (abhiññās : The six abhiññās are: Iddhi (miraculous power), dibbasota-dhātu (heavenly ear), paracittaññāna (other's thought-reading), pubbanivāsaññāna (knowledge of previous births), dibbacakkhu (heavenly eyes) and āsavānaṃ Khayaññāna (knowledge of extinction of one's own impurities) occasionally he paid visits to the villages for salt and verjuice and one day came down to Rammaka, a city in a paccantadesavisaya (border country).

At that time Buddha Dīpaṅkara reached the city and stopped at Sudassanamahavihāra. Sumedha tapasa found all the people busy in making the place neat and tidy for welcoming Dīpaṅkara Buddha, and so he also came forward to take a share in the work. He was charmed by the glory of Buddha's appearance and wanted to lay down his life for him. Lest Dīpaṅkara Buddha should soil his feet in a miry place he lay flat on it like a birdge made of jewels (Maṇiphalakasetu) in order that he and his disciples, who were all arhats (perfects) might tread on his body. While so lying, he wished that he would not merely attain his own salvation by putting an end to the impurities which he could have easily done, but he would also become a Buddha in order that he might rescue endless beings from the stream of existence. At that time, Dīpaṅkara standing just before his head, made the forecast that the great Jaṭila ascetic would become a Buddha after numberless aeons, and related in detail where he would be born, how he would attain the supreme knowledge (bodhi), and who would become his chief disciple. The prediction was confirmed by many miraculous events including an earthquake, and there was no doubt left that Sumedha was a "Buddha-bijāṃkura".

Since his existence as Megha Mānava or Sumedha Brāhmaṇa, the Bodhisattva (i.e. one destined to be the Buddha) was born several times to acquire the ten supreme perfections (pāramitās) preparatory to Buddhahood, which he attained in his last mortal existence as prince Siddhartha. In his penultimate existence, he was born as the lord of the gods the Tusita heaven. (N. Dutt: Early Monastic Buddhism, p.p. 77-79).

We find in Nidāna Kathā, Lalitavistara and Mahāvastu Abhiniskramana Sutra (extant in Chinese only) Buddha legends giving the story of Buddha down to the events after enlightenment, but also records of the previous lives from the oldest time cycles when at the feet of Dīpaṅkara, the Bodhisattva first made the resolution to attain Bodhi.

Six previous Buddhas are mentioned in the Suttas. Longer lists vary, though all agree on Dīpaṅkara as the leading previous Buddha.

Sir Charles Eliot observing on actual historicity of some human Buddhas says "In the older books of the Piṭakas six Buddha are mentioned on preceding Gautama (Dig. Nik. 14/Mahāpadānasutta; Therag, 499: Sam. Nik XII 4-10) namely vipassī, sikhī, vissabhū, kakusanda, koṇāgama and kassapa. The last three at least may have some historical character. The Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hsien, who visited India from 405-411 A.D., saw their reputed birth places and says that there still existed followers of Devadatta (apparently in Kosala) who recognised these three Buddhas but not Gōtama. Asoka erected a monument in honour of Koṇāgamana in Nepal with a dedicatory inscription which has been preserved. In the Majjhima Nikāya (Maj. Nik. 50 Māraññiyasutta), we find a story about Kakusanda and his disciples and Gotama once gave (Dig. Nik. 14) an extended account of vipassī whose teaching and career are represented as almost identical with his own"(Hinduism and Buddhism vol. I p. 342.)

The Cariyāpiṭaka in the series of metrical narration, put in the mouth of the Buddha himself giving accounts of his previous lives, taken from the Jātakas, showing how he had fulfilled the ten pāramitās for the attainment of Buddhahood.

Extension of the legend went on in other schools also in different ways. The Lalitavistara has a list of fifty four Buddhas and Mahāvastu more than hundred, but both include Dīpaṅkara. We conclude our account with the comments of E.J. Thomas on the topic.

"In the doctrine of nature of Buddha we can see the development of new conceptions, the most important of these, are the belief in previous Buddhas, the theory of a great man (Mahāpuruṣa), who is to become either as universal ruler as a Buddha, the thirty two bodily marks of such a being and theory of Bodhisattva.

"It has been held that the belief in previous Buddha points to the actual existence of at least some of them, we know that Asoka enlarged stūpa of Koṇāgama, the fifth of six preceding Buddhas, and the Chinese pilgrims visited the stūpa of the last three of them. This only proves that the legend concerning them, then existed, but it does not prove these Buddhas to be historical, and more than the foot print of Buddha on Adam's Peak prove that he visited Ceylon" (The Life of Buddha, p. 218).

II

Whether the Preceding Buddhas were real or legendary the tradition about Dīpaṅkara as the Buddha of the past was as strong in the Theravada as in the Mahayana School. The enumeration of 24 predecessors of Gautama Śākya-muni found in Buddhavaṃsa begins with Dīpaṅkara Buddha. This lineage may be presented as follows: 1. Dīpaṅkara Buddha, 2. Koṇḍañña Buddha, 3. Maṅgala Buddha, 4. Sumana Buddha, 5. Revata Buddha, 6. Sobhita Buddha, 7. Anomadassī Buddha, 8. Paduma Buddha, 9. Nārada Buddha, 10. Padumuttara Buddha, 11. Sumedha Buddha, 12. Sujāta Buddha, 13. Piyadassī Buddha, 14. Atthadassī Buddha, 15. Dhammadassī Buddha, 16. Vipassī Buddha, 20. Sikhī Buddha, 21. Vessabhū Buddha, 22. Kakusandha Buddha, 23. Koṇāgamana Buddha, 24. Kassapa Buddha.

In Sanskrit sources, list of previous Buddhas differs very widely in enumeration and nomenclature. The predecessors count anything from 6 (six) to more than 100 (hundred). In all these list, Dīpaṅkara features as the foremost, even though not as the first as in Buddhavaṃsa. The importance of Dīpaṅkara lies in the fact that he (Dīpaṅkara) had blessed the future Buddha (Gautama Śākyamuni) and prophesied Gautama's realization of full enlightenment in a future life. The story of the meeting presented here is gathered from the accounts of Sukhāvativyūha, Bodhisattvāvadāna-Kalpalatā and Kapisa-avadānam.

In Sukhāvativyūha, "when Lord was at Gṛidhakūṭa near the town Rājagṛiha, Ānanda asked the Lord for an account of the great Tathāgata, who had, in former ages, acquired the most perfect Body, The Lord in reply said, one of the earliest was Dīpaṅkara (R.L. Mitra: The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal, p. 231).

We give below brief legendary account of Dīpaṅkara Dharmaruchi/Timiṅgila Avadāna from Bodhisattvāvadāna-Kalpalatā of Kṣemendra (11th century A.D). We find the Dīpaṅkara legend in a somewhat different form. We extract the relevant portion of the story: "In another Kalpa two Brāhmaṇa brother, Mati and Sumati appeared at the sacrifice of Vāsava, king of Benares. They obtained whatever they sought from the king. The king's daughter, named

Sundarī became enamoured of sumati; but her suit was rejected by the stern Brāhmaṇa. Thus deeply mortified, she resigned the world, and became Bhikshunī. Sumati dreamt a strange dream, for the explanation of which he, inspired by the advice of rishi Pranāda, went to Lord Dvīpaṅkara, who lived at Dvīpavatī. There he met Sundarī and asked flowers from her. When offering him the flowers Sundarī prayed that he be her husband in the next existence. Sumati fell prostrate before the lord with his clotted hair scattered all over the ground, Lord Dvīpaṅkara trod them down, exclaiming 'you shall become a great Buddha, Sākyamuni by name; Mati, who was standing by, felt his Brāhmaṇic pride scandalised by the unbrāhmaṇic conduct of his brother but Sumati induced him to revere the Lord. I am that Sumati, Yaśodharā is Sundarī and Mati is Dhamaruchi", (R.L. Mitra: The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal, p. 71).

In kapiśa-avadānam, the following story said to have been told by (one of the former human Buddhas) Vipasyī, long before the Lord's advent. Here we find episode of Moneky named Jīānākara and Dīpaṅkara. Dīpaṅkara promised him transformation into man and gave him instruction in the philosophy of Buddha, the monkey was born a merchant's son named Dharmasrī. Dīpaṅkara granted him boon, saying "for good conduct, you are to become Sarvānanda, the king of Dīpavati (Ibid. p. 98).

दीपङ्करबुद्धवंसो



चत्रारि सतसहस्रानि, छलभिञ्जा महिद्विका ।

दीपङ्करं लोऽविदुं परिवारेन्ति सब्बदा ॥१५

असीतिहत्थमुब्बेधो, दीपङ्करो महामुनि ।

सोभति दीपरूक्खो व, सालराजा व फुल्लितो ॥२७

सतसहस्रवस्सानि, आयु तस्स महेसिनो ।

तावता तिट्ठमानो सो तारेसि जनतं बहुं ॥२२

दीपङ्करो जिनो सत्था नन्दारामम्हि निब्बुतो ।

तत्थेवस्स जिनथूपो छत्तिसुब्बेध योजनो ति ॥३१

