



Exploring the Aspiration of Seeing a Buddha in Pāli Buddhism

Prof. Bimalendra Kumar, PhD

Department of Pali Buddhist Studies, Banaras Hindu University, India

Correspondence: bimalendrakumar9@gmail.com

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Abstract

In Pali Buddhism, the aspiration to see a Buddha is a profound and multifaceted theme that encompasses spiritual longing, devotion, and the pursuit of enlightenment. This aspiration is rooted in the belief that encountering a Buddha, particularly Gotama Buddha, the historical founder of Buddhism, offers a unique opportunity for spiritual growth and liberation. The desire to see a Buddha is often linked to the cultivation of faith, wisdom, and merit, which are essential components of the Buddhist path. There is the aspiration of seeing a Buddha or the Metteyya in the future. According to the second chapter Sumedhakathā (Bv II 59) in the Bv, there are eight dhammas (aṭṭhadhammasamodhānā), which are necessary to be resolved as aspirations for becoming Buddha. In the commentary of Majjhimanikāya, it is said that “These are the causes for the accomplishment of the resolution. In this paper there is an endeavour to make interpretation of these eight dhammas (aṭṭhadhammasamodhānā), which are necessary to be resolved as aspirations on the basis of Pali texts and its commentarial literatures. This exploration will delve into the significance of the aspiration to see a Buddha in Pali Buddhism, examining its role in the spiritual journey of practitioners and its relationship to key Buddhist concepts such as faith, wisdom, and liberation. By understanding this aspiration, we can gain deeper insights into the nature of Buddhist devotion and the path to enlightenment.

Keywords : Manussattaṃ, liṅgasampatti, hetusatthāradassanaṃ, Pabbajjāguṇasampatti, Abhinīhāro

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Introduction

According to Pali Buddhism, there is just only one Buddha in one world; two Buddhas cannot appear at one time. As for the concept of two Buddhas cannot appear at one time is available in the Sampasādanīya Sutta of the Dīgha-Nikāya (DN) and the Milindapañha. The Sampasādanīya Sutta indicates that “there have been in the past, and there will be in the future, Arahant Buddhas equal in enlightenment to myself,” and “it is not possible, it cannot be that in one and the same-world-system two Arahant supreme Buddhas should arise simultaneously (Walshe 424).” And further, in the Dilemma fifty-second of the Meṇḍakapañha of the Milindapañha, both of them Nāgasena and King Milinda discussed about why there will be only one Buddha at a time? Nāgasena said that this world-system can bear the virtue of only a single Tathāgata. If a second Tathāgata were to arise, the world could not only bear him, it would shake and tremble (Rhys Davids 48-51).

Therefore, the concept of “two Buddha cannot present at one time” establishes the concept of a succession of Buddhas in one world. It is proven in two Pāli canonical texts, namely, the Mahāpadāna Sutta (DN II 14) and the Bv of Khuddhaka Nikāya (KN). The Mahāpadāna Sutta describes the stories of the seven Buddhas, namely six previous Buddhas and the seventh Buddha Gotama (DN II 2). They are Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa and Gotama.

The Bv describes that the life stories of twenty-four previous Buddhas and twenty-fifth is Gotama Buddha (21). It is seen that the Bv arranges seven Buddhas from Vipassī to Gotama in the (DN 14) as the nineteenth to the twenty-fifth, and adds eighteen Buddhas from Dīpankara to Phussa as the first to the eighteenth. It is clear to see that the (DN 14) and the Bv completely establish the concept of a succession of Buddhas and the lineage of Buddhas from the past to the present in the Pāli tradition.

Moreover, in the v. 19 of the Pakiṇṇakakathā of the Bv, the Buddha Gotama foretold that “I at the present time am the Self-Awakened One, and there will be Metteyya (Bv 101).” Therefore, Metteyya may be considered as the twenty-sixth Buddha in the Pāli Buddhism. Since, Metteyya possesses the orthodox position in Pāli Buddhism, the Buddhists accept and believe in him as the future Buddha after the Gotama Buddha.

There are some suttas, which specially describe the matter related to Metteyya story in the Pali Tipiṭaka:

1. Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Suttanta is the twenty-sixth sutta of Dīgha Nikāya, which describes that at the time of the people with an eighty-thousand-year life-span, Metteyya will appear in the world and teach the Dhamma (Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1975-82).
2. Buddhavaṃsa is the fourteenth book of Khuddaka Nikāya. According to Pakiṇṇakakathā in Buddhavaṃsa, Metteyya will appear in the world after the Gotama Buddha (Bv 101).

Moreover, the name of mother and father of Metteyya has been mentioned in Visuddhimagga and Aṭṭhasālinī. And other books such as Mahāvaṃsa, Cūlavaṃsa, Milindapañha, Sāratthappakāsinī (the commentary on Saṃyuttanikāya), Manorathapūraṇī (the commentary on Aṅguttaranikāya) also have been found some matters which is same as the Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Suttanta and Visuddhimagga. But there is one book named Anāgatavaṃsa in late Pali literatures, which is the first one, specially describing about the story of Metteyya’s life. Among the Metteyya sūtra, the Anāgatavaṃsa is relatively late. Thus, it is probable that the book was composed with reference to other books. A. K. Warder says that Kassapa used various sources in tradition, in the Canon and commentaries and perhaps others not known to us and put together a short narrative on the Buddha Metteyya. Presumably some later authors elaborated the traditions about nine more future Buddhas in the Dasabodhisattupattikathā (207).

Results and Discussion

The Aspiration of Seeing a Buddha in Pāli Buddhism

To see Metteyya in the future is the aspiration of the Buddhists. Why seeing a Buddha for the Buddhists are so important? According to the v. 59 of the second chapter Sumedhakathā in the Bv, there are eight dhammas, which are necessary to be resolved aspirations for one who is aspiring to Buddhahood. These aspirations are (Bv II 59).

Manussattam liṅgasampatti, hetu satthāradassanam;

Pabbajjāguṇasampatti, adhikāro ca chandatā;

Aṭṭhadhammasamodhānā, abhinīhāro samijjhatī (Horner 15).

Buddhaghosa further argues that a woman cannot fulfil one of the eight conditions to become a Bodhisattva. These conditions are recorded in the Nidānakathā of Jātakaṭṭhakathā (Tiwary 34; KN 309).

“The resolution which consists of a combination of the eight combinations- birth as a human being, the advantage of sex, the good fortune, the meeting with a Teacher, ordination, endowment of latent capabilities to higher knowledge, the dedication of one’s life and resolute will- reaches its fulfillment (Jayawickrama 18).”

Buddhaghosa further interprets that the term liṅgasampatti as ‘male sex’- ‘Manussattabhāvasmiṃ yeva hi thatvā buddhattam patthentassa patthanā samijjhatī, na nāgassa vā supaṇṇassa vā devatāya vā patthanā samijjhatī. Manussattabhāvepi purisaliṅge tthasassa patthanā samijjhatī, na itthiyā vā paṇḍaka napuṃsaka ubhato byañjanakānam vā patthanā samijjhatī. Purisassāpi tasmim attabhāve arahattappattiyā hetusampannasassa patthanā samijjhatī, no itarassa (Jayawickrama 34).’

It means that ‘the resolution of a person for Buddhahood made in a human existence is fulfilled. The resolution of a Nāga, a Supaṇṇa or a deity does not reach fulfilment. As a human being too, the resolution of a person in the male sex alone is fulfilled. But not of a woman, as enunch or of a hermaphrodite (Jayawickrama 34).’

In the commentary of Majjhimanikāya, it is said that “These are the causes for the accomplishment of the resolution. Thus, for a woman where could there be Buddhahood when she is not even capable of making the resolution thereto”. However, the Buddha says in the Cullavagga that women who have left their household life and entered into the life of homelessness are capable of attaining the status of Sotāpanna, Sakadāgāmi, Anāgāmi and Arahāt irrespective of gender (Kassapa 374). Buddhaghosa explains it in the Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā that paṇidhi (aspiration, resolve) can be fulfilled only by man, not by woman (Chaudhary, Suttanipāta-aṭṭhakathā 60). In the Aṭṭhasālini, it is also explained that faculty of male sex (purisaliṅgam) is caused by strong moral actions (kusalakammas) (Bapat 259). On analysis of these three passages, one finds that all of them, in a way, point to the inferiority of a woman as a race (Chaudhary, Aspects 146).

Further, Ācārya Buddhaghosa in the commentary of the Suttanipāta comments on each term of the verse. He says that Abhinīhāra is the designated term of original resolution- Abhinīhāroti ca mūlapaṇidhānassetam adhivacanam (Chaudhary, SnA 60-61). Manussattam is to take birth in the form of Men (60-61). Liṅgasampattī is the name of attainment of nature of masculinity. Only in the form of men masculinity one can have fulfilment of his desire to become Buddha (60-61). Hetu is the name of excessive attainment of the arahatship. By exerting oneself and being able, one can fulfil his desire for the arahatship (60-61). Satthāradassanam is the visualizing before the Teacher (Buddha) (60-61). It is seen that the fourth dhamma is “Satthāradassana (seeing a Teacher)”. In the Buddhavaṃsa-

aṭṭhakathā (BvA), it illustrates of the meaning of “seeing a teacher”. As follows:

Satthāradassananti sace jīvamānakabuddhasseva santike pattheti patthanā samijjhati. Parinibbute bhagavati cetiyassa santike vā bodhirukkhamūle vā paṭimāya vā pacceka-buddhabuddha-sāvakānaṃ vā santike patthanā na samijjhati. Kasmā? Bhabbābhabbake ñatvā kammavipākapariccheda- kaññeṇa paricchinditvā byākātuṃ asamatthattā. Tasmā buddhassa santikeyeva patthanā samijjhati. (BvA 133).

It is seen that he BvA illustrates “seeing the teacher” is that one aspires only in the presence of a living Buddha, the aspiration of Buddhahood succeeds. It means that just only the Buddha can resolve one’s deep question, no others. Therefore, the aspiration of “Seeing a Buddha” is so important for one who aspires to Buddhahood. There is no view of ten directions of Buddhas in Pāli tradition, if one is eager to see a Buddha, he just only sees the present Buddha in the world.

Pabbajjā is the renouncing the household life and taking a life of monk (Chaudhary, SnA 60-61). Guṇasampatti is the attainment of five intuitive knowledges (pañca-abhiññā) and aṭṭha-samāpattis (60-61). Adhikāra is in the sense of sacrifice (pariccāga) (KN II 309). Chandatā is the name of desire to do something with great effort (Chaudhary, SnA 60-61).

Conclusion

From the above points, it can be summarized that there is just only one Buddha in one world; two Buddhas cannot appear at one time. Some Pali texts establish the concept of a succession of Buddhas and the lineage of Buddhas from the past to the present in the Pāli tradition. Since, Metteyya possesses the orthodox position in Pāli Buddhism, the Buddhists accept and believe in him as the future Buddha after the Gotama Buddha. The Metteyya will appear in the Bhadda kappa, and the Metteyya’s world will be good as per the information available in the texts. Further, the term Satthāradassanaṃ (seeing the teacher) is that one aspires only in the presence of a living Buddha, the aspiration of Buddhahood succeeds. It means that just only the Buddha can resolve one’s deep question, no others. Human existence, attainment of the (male) sex, cause, seeing a teacher, going forth, attainment of the special qualities, an act of merit, and will-power-by combining these eight things the resolve succeeds.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Abbreviations

Anāg	Anāgatavaṃsa
Ap	Apadāna
Bv	Buddhavaṃsa
BvA	Buddhavaṃsa-aṭṭhakathā
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
DN 14	Mahāpadāna Sutta
DN 26	Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta
JPTS	Journal of Pali Text Society
KN	Khuddhaka Nikāya
SnA	Suttanipāta-aṭṭhakathā
Verse	v.

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