
Dhyani-Buddhas with Four Attending Bodhisattvas from Ratnagiri, Odisha and Its Importance in Buddhism

Sindhu M. J.¹

1. Ushodaya Residency, Rock Town Residents Colony, Sai Nagar, Chanakyapuri, Hyderabad, Telangana – 500 068, India (Email: meetindus@gmail.com)
-

Received: 25 August 2019; Revised: 04 October 2019; Accepted: 28 October 2019

Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology 7 (2019): 289-300

Abstract: Dhyani-Buddha images accompanied by bodhisattvas belonging to the ashtamahabodhisattva group have been reported from many sites in India. But from Ratnagiri, few images of Dhyani-Buddhas have been reported (Mitra 1981 Donaldson 2001) in which the main deity is accompanied by four bodhisattvas described in the Nishpannayogavali, as the attending bodhisattvas of the Dhyani-Buddhas in the vajradhatu mandala. Donaldson postulates the theory of existence of vajradhatu mandala in Ratnagiri based on the images of this type reported from the site. The identification of two other similar Dhyani-Buddha images from the nearby village by the author during field study accentuates the earlier theory as it adds Ratnasambhava to the earlier Dhyani-Buddha group comprising of Akshobhya and Amitabha. Correspondingly, the sculpture of a female deity reported from the same site also appears to be the part of the similar iconographic program at the site.

Keywords: Dhyani-Buddha, Ratnagiri, Bodhisattvas, Mahavairocanabhsambodhi-Sutra, Vajradhatu Mandala, Garbhadhatu mandala, Nishpannayogavali

Introduction

In Buddhism, *mandala* acts as a *yantra* for realisation of the self. The Buddhist stupa is identified by some scholars as the idea of a first *mandala* which became a model for the subsequent *mandalas* (Govinda 1982: 52). This idea of using the life events of the Buddha as a *mandala* (*ashtamahasthana*) is also advocated by Kinnard (Kinnard 1996). Later on, Buddhist ideologies underwent changes and life-events of the Buddha was identified with the meditative experience of Buddhahood in the form of the *Pancatathagatas*- Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, Amoghasiddhi and Vairocana in the west, south, east, north and the centre respectively. In the *Mahavairocanabhsambodhi-sutra*, Abhisambodhi-Vairocana explains that he has expounded the '*mandala*' which generates the Buddhas (Giebel 2005: 23) as it assists in the development and maturing of *bodhicitta* (Strong 1996: 307). *Mandala* theme eventually penetrated into Buddhist art and architecture and we find sculptural and stupa *mandalas* at various Buddhist establishments in different parts of the world. The *mandala* theme in Buddhist art and architecture is reflected in the architecture and sculpture of Odisha as seen in the stupa at Udayagiri and various sculptures and votive stupas obtained from different

Buddhist sites. The excavated stupa at Udayagiri preserves an iconographic program which has affinities with the *Mahakarunika Garbhodbhava Mandala* of *Mahavairocanabhisambodhi* (Donaldson 2001: 120). Here, each Dhyani-Buddha facing the cardinal directions is accompanied by two Bodhisattvas so that the four *tathagatas* form a primary circle while the eight Bodhisattvas form a second circle around them (Figure 1). One image from Ratnagiri shows affiliations to this type of representation. This image of Buddha in *abhaya-mudra* (Amoghasiddhi) and is accompanied by Manjusri and Lokesvara as attendants. The presence of such an image at Ratnagiri points to the existence of a similar iconographic program at this site too.

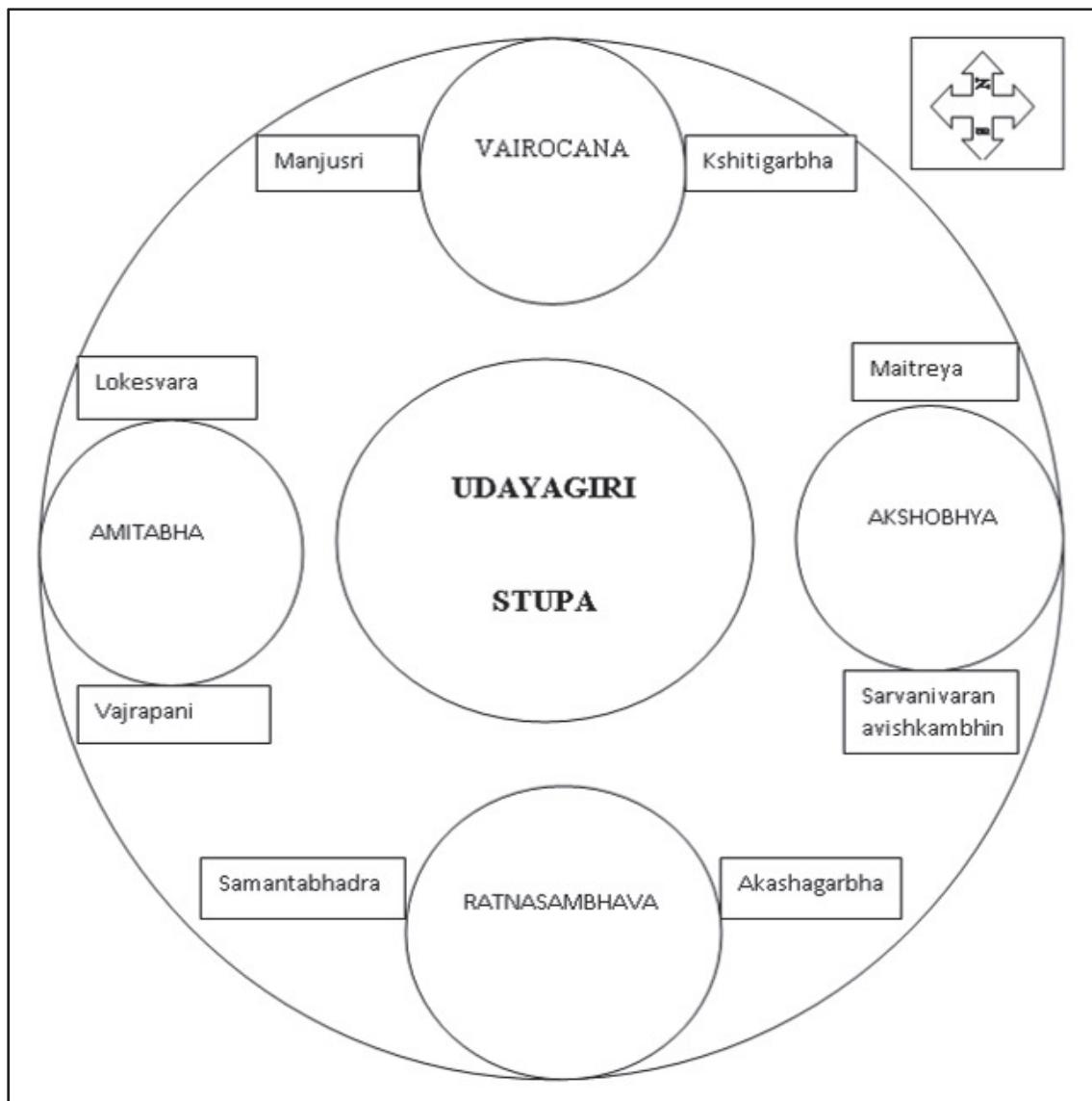


Figure 1: Garbhodhatu Mandala at Udayagiri

Buddha / Dhyani-Buddha with Four Attending Bodhisattvas

A unique category of sculptures in which four Bodhisattvas accompany one Dhyani-Buddha has been reported exclusively from Ratnagiri till date. As many as seven such

independent sculptures have been reported so far from Ratnagiri, and there are chances that even these must have been originally placed in the niches of a stupa.

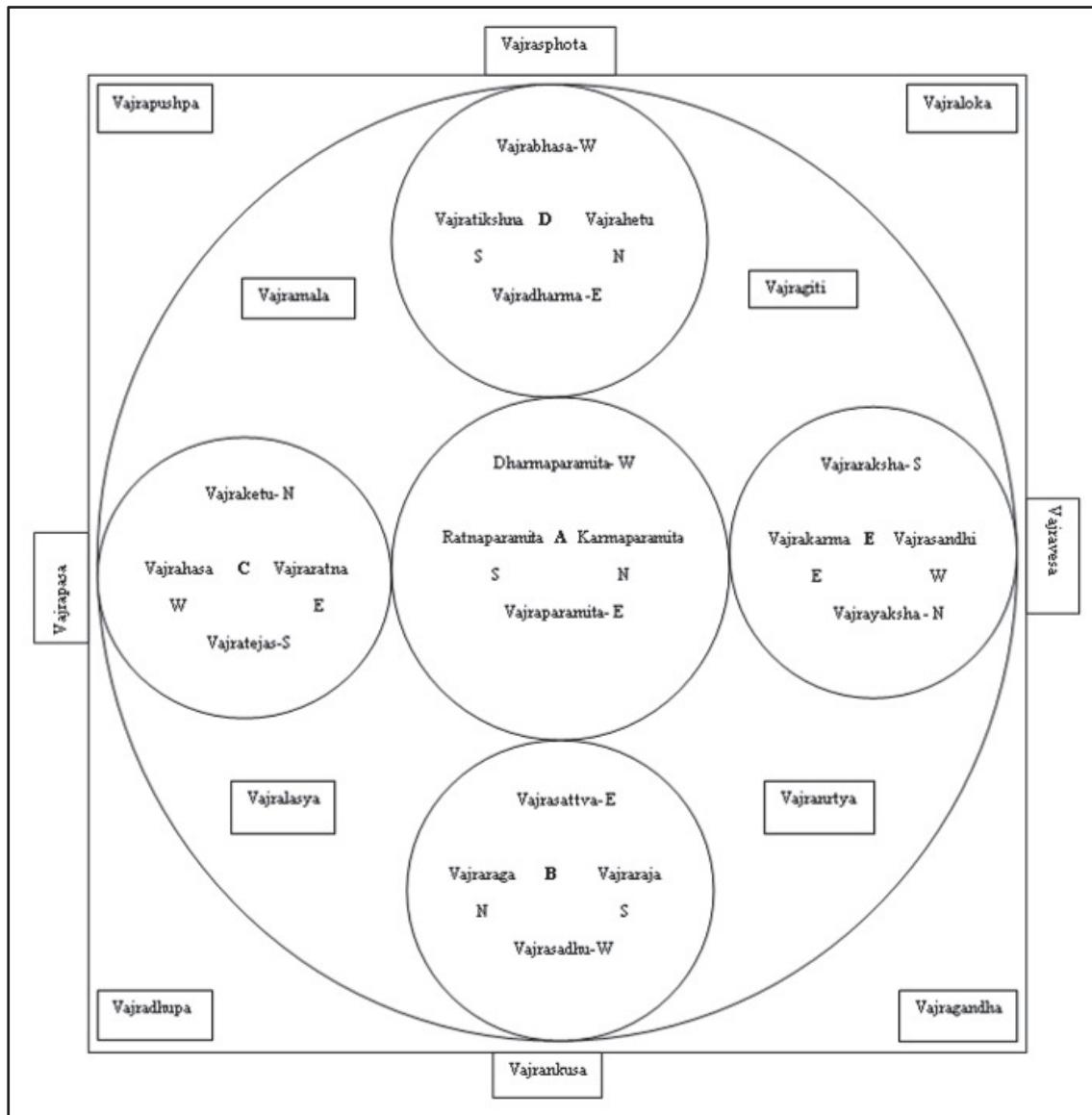


Figure 2: Vajradhatu Mandala based on the *Mahavairocanabhisambodhi-Sutra*
(A-Vairocana, B- Akshobhya, C-Ratnasambhava, D- Amitabha, E- Amoghasiddhi)

In this type of image, the tathagata is accompanied by four Bodhisattvas, two on either side represented at the top corners of the back slab. According to Donaldson, these images must have formed part of stupas which incorporated sixteen Bodhisattvas into the *mandala* design (Donaldson 2001: 126). In the *Nishpannayogavali*, sixteen Bodhisattvas are described in the *Vajradhatu-mandala*, four surrounding each Dhyani-Buddha (Bhattacharyya 1949: 54). This pairing originally corresponds to the *Vajradhatu-mahamandala* of the *Sarva tathagata tattva samgraha*. These Bodhisattvas are referred to in the Shingon Buddhist *sadhana* as the sixteen great Bodhisattvas who represent sixteen

births and stages of development that the Bodhisattva passes through after he attains awakening (Donaldson 2001: 126). According to *Nishpannayogavali*, these Bodhisattvas are; Vajraraga, Vajrasattva, Vajraraja and Vajrasadhu around Akshobhya; Vajraratna, Vajratejas, Vajraketu, and Vajrahasa around Ratnasambhava; Vajradharma, Vajratikshna, Vajrahetu, and Vajrabhasha around Amitabha; and Vajrakarma, Vajraraksha, Vajrayaksha, and Vajrasandhi around Amoghasiddhi (Bhattacharyya 1949: 54). Their attributes are also described in the *mandala* (Bhattacharyya 1949: 134-135).

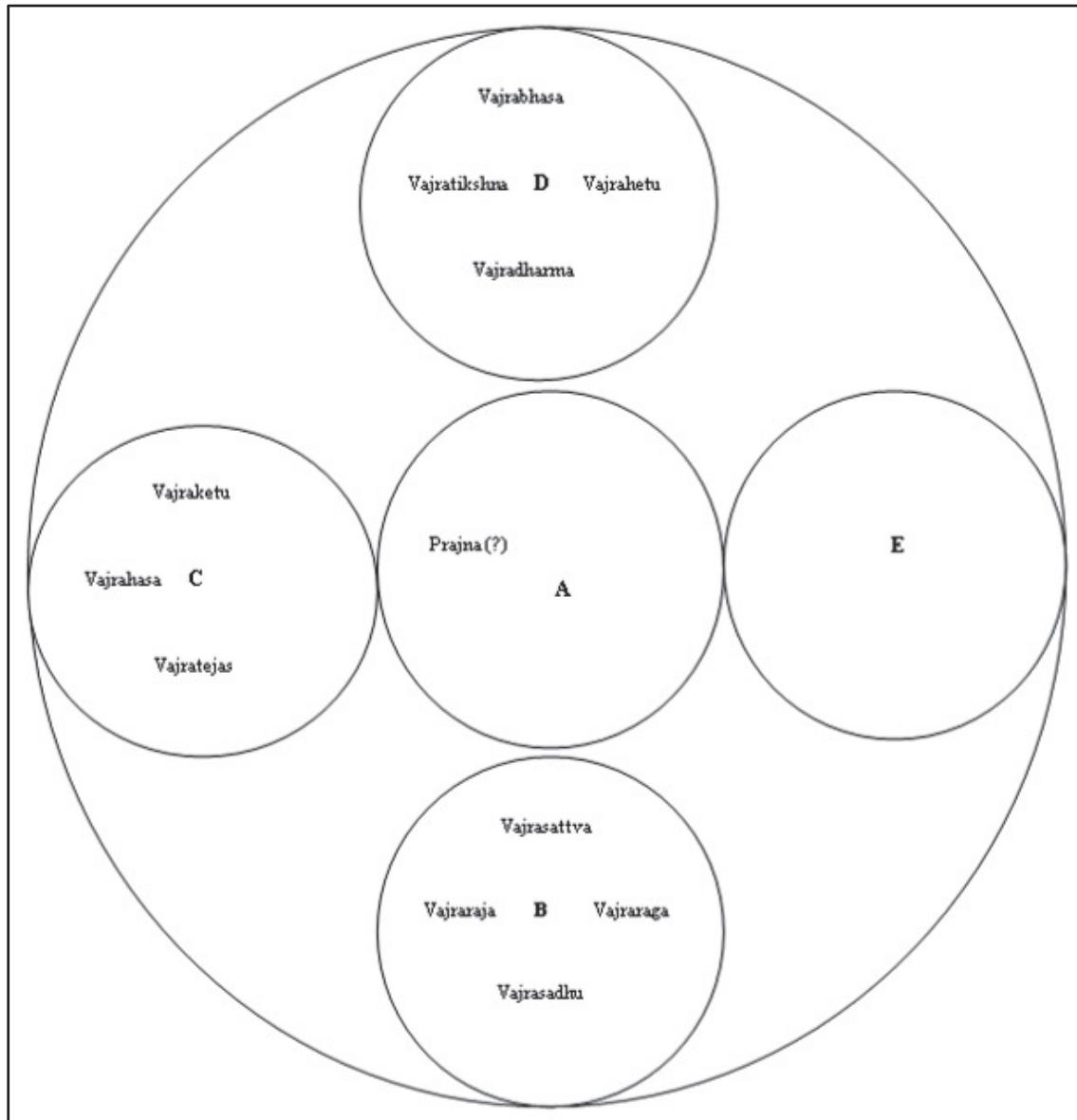


Figure 3: Probable Iconographic Program (*Vajradhatu Mandala?*) at Ratnagiri
(A-Vairocana, B- Akshobhya, C-Ratnasambhava, D- Amitabha, E- Amoghasiddhi)

There are also four female deities, known as perfection goddesses, and each is paired with the Buddha of her respective family. Sattvavajri accompanies Aksobhya,

Ratnavajri accompanies Ratnasambhava, Dharmavajri accompanies Lokesvararaja and Karmavajri accompanies Amoghasiddhi. Additionally, the four inner offering goddesses Vajralasya, Vajramala, Vajragiti, and Vajranrtya take their places in the four corners of the inner zone of the *mandala* while Vajradhupa, Vajrapuspa, Vajraloka and Vajragandha; the four outer offering goddesses are positioned in the corners of the outer zone of the *mandala*. Finally, there are the four gate-keepers Vajrankusa (east), Vajrapasa (south), Vajrasphota (west), and Vajravesa / Vajraghanta (north) (Figure 2).

Four images of Buddha accompanied by four Bodhisattvas each have been reported from Ratnagiri by Mitra (Mitra 1981: 458, 465); two of them from the village and the other two housed in the S.D.O compound. She has described one of these images as Akshobhya (Mitra 1981: 423) and the others as those of Buddha in *bhumisparsha-mudra* and *dhyanamudra* respectively. These four images have also been described by Donaldson who has tentatively identified them as Akshobhya and Amitabha with their accompanying Bodhisattvas as described in *Vajradhatu-mandala* (Donaldson 2001: 126). He also advocates that their occurrence at Ratnagiri imply that they formed a part of an iconographic program of the *Vajradhatu-mahamandala* (Donaldson 2001: 126) (Figure 3). During the course of field-work for this study, similar images of Ratnasambhava and Akshobhya were noticed in a temple compound of the Ratnagiri village, very near to the site. Another comparable image was retrieved during the scientific clearance work of the Mahakala Temple area. This image has a damaged right palm which makes the identification of the tathagata difficult, but the Bodhisattvas appearing on the back slab suggests the identification of the main figure with Akshobhya. These images are described here.



Figure 4: Image of Akshobhya

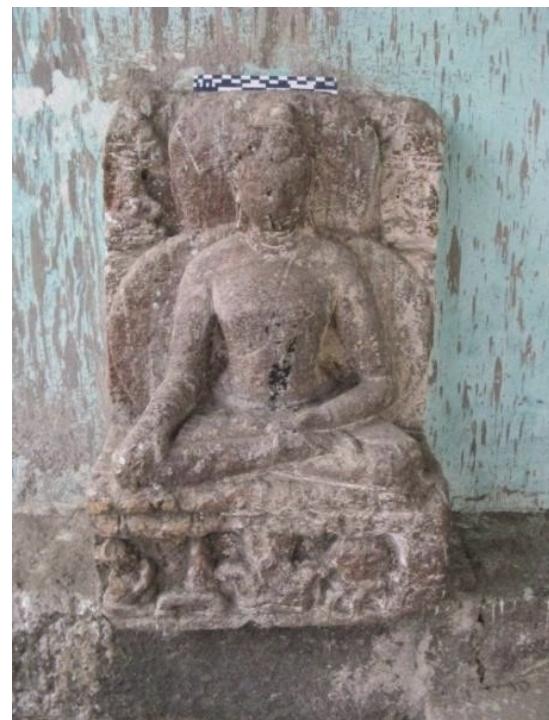


Figure 5: Image of Akshobhya

An Image of Akshobhya (Figure 4), 51.5 cm high from Ratnagiri reported to have been removed to Jajpur by Chanda (Chanda 1930: 13), is at present housed in the Jajpur S.D.O compound building. Here, the deity is seated in *vajra-paryankasana* on a *visva-padma* and is dressed in an *antarvasa* and an *uttarasanga* that covers his left shoulder and arm and displays *bhumisparsha-mudra* with his right palm whereas the left one rests on his lap. The auspicious signs of Buddha, like the dignified poise, half-closed eyes, elongated ear lobes, *urna*, *usnisa*, *kambugriva* etc. are present. Behind the head of the figure is the oval halo bordered by a row of thunder bolts.

The back slab also displays four other images, two on either side of the halo of the main deity. All of them are seated in *vajra-paryankasana* on a *visva-padma*, but their attributes vary. The upper figure on the right side holds a defaced elongated object (*ankusha* as prescribed for Vajraraja in *Sarva tathagata tattva samgraha?*) with both hands, whereas the corresponding figure on the left also holds some defaced object (*vajras* in both hands as prescribed for Vajrasadhu in *Sarva tathagata tattva samgraha*) near its chest. The lower figure on the right-side places his right hand at the chest while the left is held against the waist. The attributes are defaced but appear to be *vajra* and *ghanta* respectively, which are the attributes of Vajrasattva. The corresponding figure on the left side holds a fully drawn bow with an arrow in his hands kept at the chest level. These attributes correspond to Vajraraga. The pedestal has figures of two devotees, one on each corner and the central space is occupied by two elephants standing back to back. Behind the image is the Buddhist creed in characters of about the ninth century AD (Mitra 1981: 424).

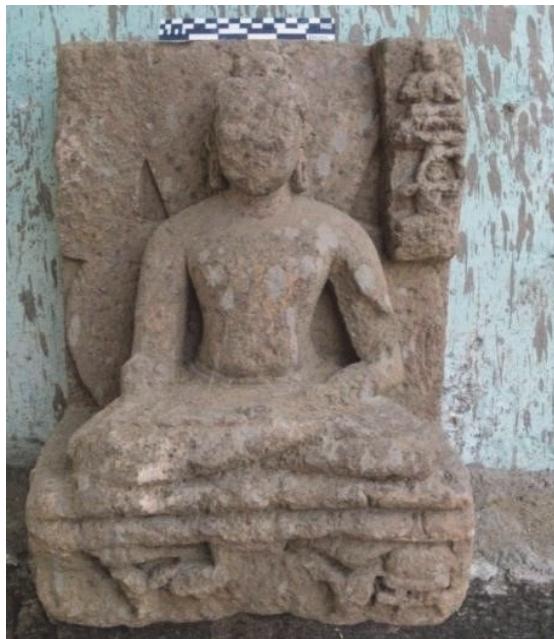


Figure 6: Image of Akshobhya



Figure 7: Image of Amitabha

The second image of Akshobhya is at present in the Gopalji temple, Ratnagiri village (Figure 5). The image is seated in *vajra-paryankasana* over a *visva-padma* and displays

bhumisparsha-mudra. There is a bolster behind the back of the image. Behind the head is an oval plain halo on either side of which is seated the four Bodhisattvas, two each on either side in *vajra-paryankasana*. The two lower figures to the right and left sides of the main image have their attributes intact and may be identified as Vajraraga and Vajrasattva respectively. The other two images as well as the facial features of the main image have been defaced very badly. They could have represented Vajraraja and Vajrasadhu, but their identification remains tentative. The pedestal of the sculpture has a devotee and some offerings. This image (52x36 cm) may be stylistically attributed to the ninth-tenth century AD.

The third image of Akshobhya was identified during the field-work for this study. This image (50x35 cm) is also in the temple premises like the previous one and has stylistic affiliations with the same (Figure 6). Here, the right hand of the image along with a portion of the back slab has been damaged because of which the Bodhisattvas represented on this side have been chipped off. At present, the two Bodhisattvas to the left of the main image survive. The lower one is Vajraraga, holding the fully drawn bow with an arrow. The Bodhisattva above this figure, also seated in *vajra-paryankasana* holds some indistinct oblong object in his left hand while the features of the right hand is damaged making the identification difficult. The upper Bodhisattva is described as displaying the *mudra* (*sadhukara-danabhinayam?*) by placing the two hands at the chest level (Bhattacharyya 1949: 134). So, the image may be tentatively identified as that of Vajrasadhu. The pedestal of this ninth-tenth century AD image has some offerings on a tripod, but the figure of the devotee is broken and lost.



Figure 8: Image of Amitabha

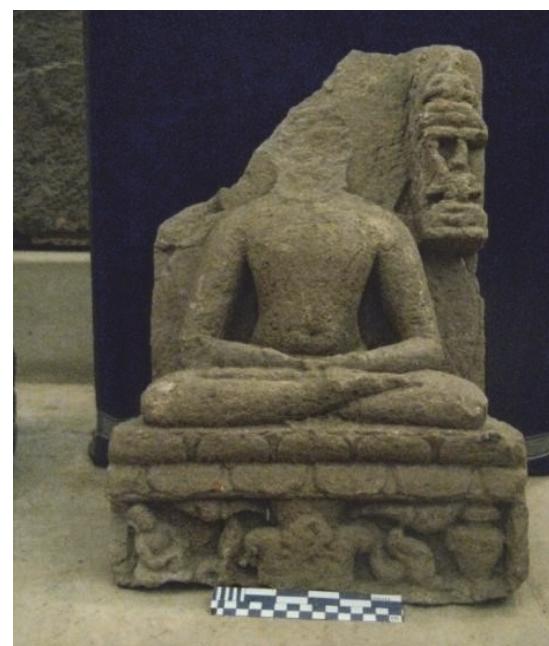


Figure 9: Image of Amitabha

The Amitabha image housed in the S.D.O compound is stylistically similar to its companion pair of Akshobhya at the same place (Figure 7). In this sculpture (50x36

cm), the deity is seated in *vajra-paryankasana* over a *visva-padma* in *dhyanamudra*. Behind the head is an oval halo bordered by a row of flowers. On either side of it are two Bodhisattvas each, seated in *vajra-paryankasana* on a pedestal. The upper figure to the right of the tathagata appears to be holding a conch in his right hand placed against the chest, while the left, at the hip holds some indistinct object. This figure corresponds to Vajrabhasa who holds a *dharma-sankha* and a *sucika-vajrajihva* (?) in his right hand. The corresponding image to the left is probably Vajrahetu in *dharmacakrapravartana-mudra*. The lower figure to the right is damaged beyond recognition, but the corresponding figure to the right may be identified as Vajratikshna who holds a *kripana* and *Prajnaparamita* in the right and left hands respectively. This would imply that the missing figure to the lower right must have been Vajradharma in the act of opening the lotus. Below the lotus pedestal are represented four seated figures. While two of them appear to be devotees, the other two are seated in *vajra-paryankasana* with hands resting against the chest, their attributes being indistinct. The image stylistically belongs to the ninth-tenth century AD.

The second image of Amitabha was acquired from the village and its exact find spot is unknown. The Buddha's posture and *mudra* are similar to the previous image, but the oval halo is plain (Figure 8). There is also a bolster behind the back of the image. The left side top portion of the back slab is missing along with the figures of two Bodhisattvas. The upper and lower figures to the right side of the main image correspond to Vajrabhasa and Vajradharma respectively. The pedestal of the image (50x36 cm) has some offerings in a bowl and a conch.

In a similar image acquired from the Mahakala Temple area, the face of the image and the left portion of the back slab along with two Bodhisattvas are broken and missing (Figure 9). The remaining two Bodhisattvas to the left are Vajraketu and Vajratikshna holding the conch and sword respectively. The pedestal has a kneeling devotee. The image is stylistically similar to the previous one and also to the two Akshobhya images at the village-temple, and may be ascribed to the ninth-tenth century AD.

The seventh image in this group is also a find from the village which was identified during the field work. This image (50x36 cm) is of Ratnasambhava; similar to the other images with respect to the accompanying Bodhisattvas (Figure 10). Here, the tathagata is seated in *vajra-paryankasana* over a *visva-padma* displaying the *varada-mudra*. He is dressed in an *antarvasa* with one of its ends spread on the seat like a fan and a diaphanous *uttarasanga* that covers the left side of his body. There is an elongated oval halo bordered with flame design behind the head of the deity. On either side of the halo are the Bodhisattvas seated in *vajra-paryankasana* over a *visva-padma*. The right-side top portion of the back slab is broken and missing because of which at present only three Bodhisattvas survive. The facial features of the main image are damaged. The attribute as well as the face of the Bodhisattva to the upper left side is also damaged. According to *Nishpannayogavali*, the Bodhisattvas accompanying Ratnasambhava are Vajraketu with a *cintamanidhvaja*, Vajraratna with a *mala* and *vajra-ghanta*, Vajrahasa

with a *vajra* in each hand and Vajratejas (*suryenavabhaasayati*). Thus, the three Bodhisattvas in this image starting from the left side top figure and moving clockwise, probably correspond to Vajraketu, Vajratejas and Vajrahasa. The pedestal if any, of this image has been lost and a kneeling devotee with folded hands is carved on the *visva-padma*.

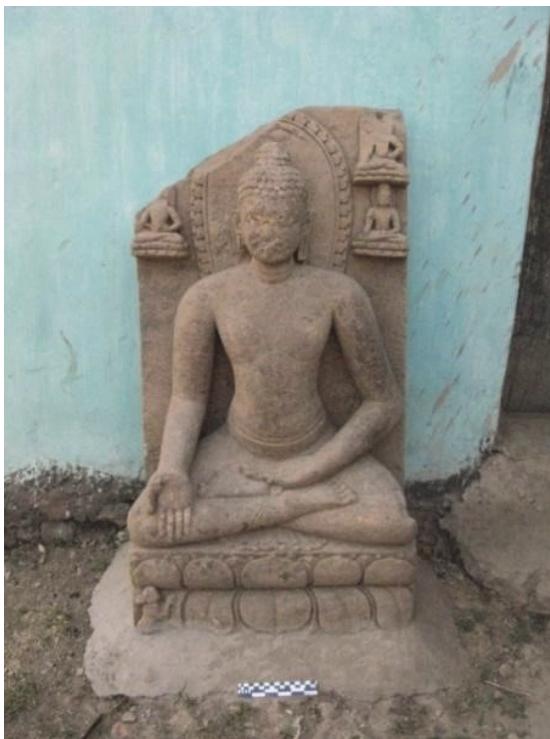


Figure 10: Image of Ratnasambhava



Figure 11: Female Deity

In an image of a female deity (Figure 11) retrieved from the village surrounding Ratnagiri, the deity is seated in *vajra-paryankasana* over a *visva-padma* displaying *varada-mudra* (?) with her damaged right hand (Mitra 1981: 460). The other hand is placed on her lap. She is draped in a sari and is adorned with ornaments like a *mukuta*, *kundalas*, *griva*, *chhannavira* type of ornament, *keyuras* with an ornate central piece and rows of *sankha-valayas*. Her hair is tied up as a bun. There is a plain oval halo behind the head of the image. The facial features are damaged, but *kambugriva* is present on the neck. The goddess is accompanied by four other companion goddesses; all dressed up like the central figure and are seated in *paryankasana*. They are placed two each on either side of the halo. At present, the two figures to the left side are broken and missing, but they were intact at the time of their procurement and are described by Mitra (Mitra 1981: 460). Stylistically, this image may be ascribed to the ninth century AD and resembles the Cunda images from the site in ornamentation and hair style.

This sculpture is similar to that of the Dhyani-Buddhas with four attending bodhisattvas. Altogether, they appear to be part of an iconographic programme to represent the *Vajradhatu-mandala* at Ratnagiri. In the *Vajradhatu-mandala*, Vairocana at the centre is surrounded by four tathagatas and sixteen Bodhisattvas. There are also

four female deities, known as perfection goddesses, and each is paired with the Buddha of her respective family. Sattvavajri accompanies Akshobhya, Ratnavajri accompanies Ratnasambhava, Dharmavajri accompanies Lokesvararaja and Karmavajri accompanies Amoghasiddhi. The attributes of these female goddesses are mentioned in the *Nishpannayogavali* according to which Sattvavajri displays *vajra* and *tarjani-pasa*; Ratnavajri displays the jewel and *tarjani-mudra*, Dharmavajri displays lotus and Karmavajri displays *visva-vajra* and *tarjani-mudra* in their right and left hands respectively. This implies that these goddesses are none but the *Prajnas* of the tathagatas. But, it is known that they are created after the likeness of the tathagatas and they are known as *panca-tathagata-swarupa* as well as *svabha* (reflection) of the tathagatas (Ghosh 1980: 91). So, it is probable that these goddesses may be represented similar to the tathagatas where their right hand displays the characteristic *mudra* while the left-hand rests on the lap. If we take this point into consideration, it is likely that the *Prajnas* were represented as attended by four female deities, similar to their consorts who are attended by four Bodhisattvas. An example to this is votive stupa 37 from Ratnagiri where the Dhyani Buddhas are accompanied by their *Prajnas* (Mitra 1981 Figure CCLI).

Eight other female deities, the personification of *pujopakaranas* are also mentioned in the *mandala*, four of whom also accompanies Tara in her various forms. But, the female deities accompanying this image do not appear to represent any one of them. Rather, they resemble the Bodhisattvas accompanying the similar images of Bodhisattvas from this site with regards to their attributes. Thus, the figure to the upper right side of the image appears to be holding two *vajras* at chest level, similar to Vajrahasa as per the description in *Vajradhatu-mandala* or Vajrasadhu as per the description in *Sarva tathagata tattva samgraha*. The corresponding image to the left places her right hand on her knees while her left hand is on the waist. The attributes are not clear but may correspond to Vajraketu whose identification mark is a *cintamani-dhvaja*. The lower figure on either side are represented as resting their left hand on their waist while the right hand placed at the chest level holds an attribute. The figure to the right holds a roundish object in the palm and may correspond to Vajratejas who is described as possessing a lustrous object. The corresponding figure to the left has some indistinct object in both her hands which appears to be a *mala* held with the right hand at the chest level and a *vajra-ghanta* held in the left hand placed near the waist which corresponds to the attribute of Vajraratna. These four Bodhisattvas- Vajrahasa, Vajraketu, Vajratejas and Vajraratna accompany Ratnasambhava in the *Vajradhatu-mandala*. So, there is a possibility of this female deity being the *Prajna* of Ratnasambhava and also a part of a similar iconographic programme at the site.

Conclusion

These images from Ratnagiri are unique finds, as images of this type have not been reported so far from any other Buddhist sites in India. From very early times, the religious ideologies were taught to the laity through manuscripts as well as through

visual aids (Misra 1998: 3). The sculptural art associated with a particular religion may be considered as a form of such a visual aid. The sculptures may also narrate a whole story or an important incident associated with the religion. For example, by the representation of Buddha in *bhumisparsamudra* singly or along with Mara, the whole episode of '*Maravijaya*' and subsequent enlightenment of the Buddha is conveyed to the viewer. So, the sculptures could be equated with text in themselves. The same theory is applied to *tantric* images by different scholars due to the paucity of textual description for many images and some scholars has taken it a step forward by identifying an entire monument as a text in itself (Malandra: 1996). Similar situation occurs in Odishan images as many of the iconographic types found here do not conform to any of the known iconographic texts. This implies that either there would have been a regional text which has not survived or as these scholars have argued, these images must have acted as a text by themselves. The existence of some texts pertaining to certain images from Odisha have been discussed by Tanaka who has identified *tantric* forms of Dhyani-Buddhas from Aragarh based on a lost Sanskrit manuscript whose translations are available in Chinese and Tibetan (Tanaka 2009: 217-233). These mandala images from Ratnagiri also come under similar category and they would have served as the representation of *Vajradhatu mandala* of the *Sarva tathagata tattva samgraha*.

Mandalas are believed to have the power to transform any space into a place of the Buddha. This place could be Bodh Gaya, the abode of enlightened Buddha or a Pure Land or one of the heavens. Two important monuments of Java; Borobodur and Candi Mendut are *mandala* stupas designed on the *Vajradhatu* and *Garbhadhatu mandalas* respectively. These two *mandalas* were brought to China by the Buddhist monks Amoghavajra and Subhakarasimha respectively and they are believed to have strong association with Odisha. Sculptures in Udayagiri stupa is intact and it corresponds to the *Garbhadhatu mandala*. The Ratnagiri sculptures described here appear to be part of a *Vajradhatu mandala*. Hence, one cannot ignore the possibility of existence of stupas corresponding to the *Vajradhatu mandala* at the site; similar to the *mandala* stupas in Java. Thus, the stupas at Ratnagiri and Udayagiri must have also served similar purpose in the Buddhist world.

References

- Bhattacharyya, B. 1949. *Nispannayogavali of Abhayakaragupta*. Baroda: Oriental Institute.
- Bhattacharyya, B. 1958. *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay.
- Chanda, R. 1930. *Exploration in Orissa*, Memoirs of Archaeological Survey of India (MASI) No.44. Calcutta: Archaeological Survey of India.
- Donaldson, T. 2001. *Iconography of Buddhist sculptures of Orissa*. Delhi: Abhinab Publication.
- Ghosh, M. 1980. *Development of Buddhist Iconography in Eastern India: A Study of Tara, Prajnas of five tathagatas and Bhrikuti*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Pvt. Ltd.

- Giebel, R. W. 2005. *The Vairocanabhisambodhi Sutra*. Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research. Retreived from http://www.bdk.or.jp/pdf/bdk/digitaldl/dbET_T0848.pdf.
- Govinda, L. A. 1982. The Origin of the Buddhist Mandala. In B. Baumer (Ed.), *Rupa Pratirupa-Alice Boner Commemoration Volume* (pp.49-55). Delhi: Aditya Prakashan.
- Kinnard, J. N. 1996. Reevaluating the Eighth-Ninth Century Pala Milieu: Icono-Conservatism and the Persistence of Sakyamuni. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 19(2), 281-300.
- Malandra, G. H. 1996. The Mandala at Ellora / Ellora in the Mandala. *Journal of the International association of Buddhist Studies*, 19(2), 181-208.
- Misra, B. N. 1998. *Nalanda (Art) (Vol. 2)*. Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation.
- Mitra, D. 1981. *Ratnagiri, Vol. I*. Memoirs of Archaeological Survey of India (MASI) No. 80., Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India.
- Mitra, D. 1983. *Ratnagiri, Vol. II*. Memoirs of Archaeological Survey of India (MASI) No. 80., Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India.
- Sindhu, M. J. 2014. "Iconography of Buddhist Sculptures at Ratnagiri (7th To 12th Century CE)". Unpublished PhD Thesis, Odisha: Utkal University.
- Strong, J. S. 1996. The Moves Mandalas Make. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 19(2), 301-312.
- Tanaka, K. 2009. Four Buddha statues from Haripur. Vol. 624, In *Stupa: Cult and Symbolism*, by G. Roth, F. Ehrhardt, K. Tanaka and L. Chandra (pp. 217-233). New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan.