

Gyendruk: The Six Ornaments

The six ornaments or *gyendruk* (རྒྱུ་རྒྱུག) is common artistic back-support or *gyapyöl* (རྒྱུ་ཡོལ་), which is found around the Buddha statue in Bhutan and the Himalayan Buddhist world. The decorative background most likely developed from the artistic backdrop and periphery containing floral designs and representations of mythological animals, created for divine image. Such back-support was created in ancient Indian art in the form a decorative *torana* arch. The six ornaments commonly encircle the Buddha and are created for both paintings and three-dimensional images of the Buddha. The six are as follows:

Elephant

At the bottom of the arched back-support are two white elephants flanking the Buddha. The elephant is considered an ornament due to its strength and trunk (སྤང་ཆེན་མཆེ་བའི་རྒྱུན་). It is also likely that the elephant was considered initially the ornament of size (སྤང་ཆེན་ཆེ་བའི་རྒྱུན་) for its large size, and accompanying stability and firmness. It represents the perfection of concentrative meditation (བསམ་གཏན་གྱི་ཕར་ཕྱིན་) among the six perfections. The elephants are sometimes portrayed as offering incense and butter lamp to the Buddha.

Lion

Above the elephants are two lions with elegant turquoise coloured mane. The lion is considered as an ornament for its elegance and turquoise coloured mane (སེང་གེ་རལ་པའི་རྒྱུན་). It is also likely that the elephant was initially considered the ornament of display (སེང་གེ་རལ་པའི་རྒྱུན་) for its elegance and agility. It represents the perfection of wisdom (ཤེས་རབ་གྱི་ཕར་ཕྱིན་) among the six perfections. The snow lion is a very common subject of artistic creation throughout the Himalayas,.

Sharabha Hybrid

The third animal commonly included in the six ornaments is an interesting hybrid of a deer or antelope with horns, fangs or claws. It can have a head of a goat, body of an antelope or horse, feet of a lion, etc, mainly to symbolize the union of strength, speed, agility, performance, etc. Known as *sharabha* or *tamo*, it is an ornament of flowery design (མི་རྟོག་གི་རྒྱུན་) or perhaps the ornament of being non-obstructive (མི་ཐོག་པའི་རྒྱུན་). The hybrid animal represents the perfection of effort or zeal (བརྩོན་འགུལ་གྱི་ཕར་ཕྱིན་) of the six perfections.

Dwarf

Holding the crossbeam of the throne are two strong and stout dwarves. The figures represent a group of strong and wild men who appear in ancient tales. These strong men are commonly depicted as short and stout figures with enormous strength in Himalayan Buddhist art and architecture. They are considered ornaments of strength (རྣམ་ཆེན་ལྷོ་བས་གྱི་རྒྱུན་) and represent the perfection of perseverance and fortitude (བརྗོད་པའི་ཕར་ཕྱིན་) among the six perfections.

Makara

Above the crossbeam supported by the dwarfs are highly intricate figures of *makara* which is a hybrid water-dwelling creature combining the features of a crocodile, elephant, fish,

etc. The *makara* is an ancient Indian artistic symbol of power and is presented in different forms and styles across the Himalayas. It is considered as the ornament of flourish (ཚུ་མེན་པ་ཏའི་རྒྱན་) and represents the perfection of discipline (ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་ཀྱི་པར་ཕྱིན་) of the six perfections.

Naga

The sixth figures are two *naga* spirits, who often have half-snake bodies and are believed to dwell in the subterranean world. The subterranean world of nagas is considered to be blessed with much wealth and abundance. Thus, the two beautiful and clean *nagas* are considered ornaments of wealth (སྤུ་མོ་ནོར་གྱི་རྒྱན་) and they represent the perfection of giving (ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་ཀྱི་པར་ཕྱིན་).

On the top of the set of six ornamental figures, one can also find a *garuda*, a mythical bird, holding a snake in its mouth and hands. The six figures are also set in the decorative foilage of decorative flowers, leaves, fruits and clouds.

The decorative back-support of the six ornaments are theoretically said to be reserved only for the images of the Buddha but it is not uncommon to find other mythical or historical religious figures sculpted there.

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