

## Two Buddhist Cultural Festivals of Bhaktapur : Panchadan and Samyakdan

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*The Panchadan and Samyakdan festivals have their own significance among the various festivals celebrated in Bhaktapur, the historical city of Kathmandu Valley. As these festivals are especially associated with charity under Buddhism, it is celebrated annually by the local Shakyas, Bajracharyas and other Newars with reverence and devotion. It is mentioned in almost all scriptures that virtue is attained by giving alms. On top of that, it seems to have a special significance in Buddhism. According to Buddhist legend, the maternity tigress, who was dying of malnutrition, was given life by Prince Mahasatva (Nama Buddha) by cutting the flesh of his own body. Panchadan means giving away five elements to the monks. and Samyakdan is also called an alms, which is given to 5 Dipankar Buddhas, 4 Samyak Buddhas and Buddhist priests. The first of these festivals, Panchadan, falls on Bhadrakrishna Trayodashi every year according to the lunar calendar, and Samyakdan falls on the day of Makar sankranti every year according to the solar*

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*calendar. Definition and significance of these festivals and how to observe in the Buddhist society of Bhaktapur are analytically study in this article.*

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## **1. Background**

Panchadan and Samyakdan, both are Buddhist festivals. Panchadan is the festival of five summer gifts. The five different things including rice grains, unhusked rice grains, salt, money and pulses that are needed for one's daily life are donated. These days, as per one's will and capacity, people donate other things besides that. In this festival gifts are made by the laity to the monks observed by local Buddhist especially Shakyas and Bajracharyas. Buddhist antiques are displayed and gigantic effigies of Dipankar Buddha are paraded around the town. Since monastic Buddhism has been long extinct in Nepal, the receivers of the gift today are Buddhists priest, the Shakyas and Bajracharyas, who go begging alms to the house of their clients. However, the main highlight of the festival is the giving away of five elements (wheat grains, rice grains, salt, money and fruit). Traditional collections of artifacts are displayed in monasteries and households on this occasion.

Another festival Samyakdan is also called Samyakmahadan or Samyak Panchamahadan has relatively a greater significance and has aesthetically a lot more impact on Buddhism. Samyak means doing things in the right way. Especially for the Buddhists, it is an eminent opportunity to convey the message of doing dan (alms).

## **2. Methodology**

Both primary and secondary sources have been used to make the presented study authentic and reliable. Among the primary sources are the on-site study of various fairs and festivals, direct observation as well as interviews with related people and published texts, books, and writing articles under the auxiliary sources. Analytical, descriptive and comparative methods have been used to study the resources obtained in this way.

## **3. Panchadan Festival**

One month-long "Gunla parva" (festival) celebrated by the Newar Buddhist community of the Kathmandu valley falls in the month of Shravan-Bhadra. This month is considered sacred for

Buddhists as well as Hindus and other sects. This Panchadan festival also falls in this month. The Newars call it "Panjanra". This festival is celebrated in remembrance of Dipankar Buddha's first begging after he attained enlightenment (Shrestha, 2010). According to Buddhist mythology, when Dipankar Tathagata went to Dipavati Nagar for begging, King Sarvananda and a poor old woman came to give alms. But Tathagat took the first donation from the old woman's hand because the old woman's begging had more reverence and devotion than the king's (Slusser, 1982). This festival is believed to have started from the time Dipankar Tathagata went to Varanasi for begging and from this time onwards the Dwapar Era is believed to have started (Regmi, 1966). This festival is celebrated on Bhadrakrishna Trayodashi in Bhaktapur and Kathmandu, but in Lalitpur it is celebrated on Shravanshukla Ashtami. According to Buddhist texts "kapisavdan" and "pindapatravdan", Dipankar Buddha himself is said to travel Dipavati Nagar (city) on the day of Shravanshukla Ashtami to go for bhikshyatan (begging). The day of Bhadrakrishna Trayodashi is celebrated to commemorate the holy day that Dipankar begged in Varanasi in the Dwapar Era (Joshi, 2003).

On the day of Panchadan, the Buddhist monks who stays with their family, specifically Shakya and Bajracharyas visit the houses of local people to recite alms accompanied by the begging. Various grains like pea, wheat, paddy, maas (black lentil), black soyabean etc are donated in begging. Some householders even donated delicious desserts along with grains. In addition to the door to door donations, on the same day there is a tradition of making donations by setting up a Guthi (Trust) in Bouddha Baha and Bahils here. Although the Buddhists go to the Panchadan Jatra in their own dress, some Bajracharyas wear a special type of dress. This sequence continues throughout the day. In the evening, the Panchadan jatra is completed after the thunderbolt touches the pile of grain kept by Fubare, the last person to take arms (Slusser, 1982).

### **3.1 Cultural Activities**

There are series of activities that are followed during this festival. On the day prior to the main festival, the purification is done by taking bath and cleaning houses and Bouddha Bihars. Buddhists start displaying the idol, image, photo or Paubhas of Lord Buddha in their houses and Buddha Bihars. The next day, on the main day of festival, Buddhist as well as many Hindu Newars donate to

Bajracharya and Shakyas to pay homage to Lord Buddha because they are considered as symbols of the Buddha and his disciple. In this way, Bajracharya and Shakya who come to the house of local Newars are honored according to the rules of Grihastha Ashram and other sweets and fruits are also served with Kheer (rice Pudding). On this day, in addition to the charity work, local people also donate food items on the roads as well as in the Bouddha bihars (Vajracharya, 1986).

In Bhaktapur city, the beginning of Panchadan work is started from Aadipadma Mahabihar, Tubaha, Suryamadhi. On that day, the priest of Bhaktapur from Bajracharya and Shakya caste, eat Kheer (rice pudding) as a special meal. As in Kathmandu, Buddhist statues, Paubha Paintings are displayed on houses, shops, Bihars etc. in this day. Newars, specially Buddhist Newar of Bhaktapur have set up Guthi (Trust) for Panchadan and this festival is being conducted with the income of the same, such as the Guthi of Chitrakars of Tachapal tole and Vaidyas of Inacho tole can be taken. Some of Panchadan Guthi are run within the brothers having blood relationship. In these kind of Guthi, the responsibility of organizing the Panchadan celebration is rotated among those brothers. For example, if the elder brother organized the Panchadan this year, then the second one will organized the same next year. That is, one year the Big brothers does it and the next year the small brother does it. Similarly, there are few other Guthi of Shakyas of Inacho which do not function actively and is there just for name (Kayastha, 1993).

Even though this festival is majorly celebrated by Bajracharya and Shakya, the local farmers and middle class people from other community also involved themselves in this festival by donating grain and food items to (Buddhist Monks) beggars in the morning of Bhadrakrishna Trayodashi. In the case of Bahal and Bahil, Thakali (main/head person) of Guthi and in the case of the home, the head of the household, give alms. Begging at home is initiated by the family priest. Those who come to beg for Bhikshya (donations) are first worshiped and weared Jajankaa (sacred thread). After that, Panchadan (five donations) are given by placing it in a bowl (pindapatra). Then Kheer, fruits etc are served and at the end Dakshinaa (offering) is given. Apart from Shakya and Bajracharya, other Newars also do the work of giving arms, but only Shakya and Bjracharya can take donations. Before going to beg in the charities, Thapaju is in the forefront. Thapaju means the local original religious leader of the Buddhists. The beggars do not have to go to all the

charities to collect donations. However, there is a tradition of begging in at least seven places. The grain donated in this way is up to five Pathis (a certain quantity) of one ordinary beggar. The origin of this festival tells that the activities performed on this day seem to follow the begging done by Lord Buddha in different cities and districts. The tradition of begging from house to house by Buddhist teachers must have been practiced to commemorate and propagate the perceptions of Lord Buddha (Shrestha, 1978).

### **3.2 Dipankar Jatra**

Dipankar's Jatra (procession) is done in Bhaktapur on the day of Panchadan. This Panchadan Jatra of Bhaktapur is considered to be unique and different among the 3 cities of Kathmandu valley, including Lalitpur and Kathmandu because of the tradition of taking the statue of Dipankar Buddha along in the procession as there is a belief that Dipankar Tathagat himself came to Dipavati town for begging and it does memoirs that Dipankar received panchadan from Sarvananda, the king of that city. The incident related to Dipankar Tathagat is described in Bouddha scripture "Pindapatravadan" (Joshi, 2003). On that day, during the procession, the devotees carry the idol of Dipankar god and go around the different places of the city. In this way, rest is also done in various Tola (street), Chowk (square) and Dabali (stage), so that the local devout devotees can worship properly. In some places, it is customary to kneel and praise while worshipping. In this way, after the Lord Dipankar is enthroned in about 58 places of Bhaktapur city, this procession is completed in the evening. While Dipankar was resting in the Dabali (stage) on right side of bhairavnath temple in Taumadhi Square, head of guthi (trust) of Tarchhen Baha, Sakotha, comes to bid farewell. It is believed that the Panchadan festival was completed after the idols of Dipankar were finally parted in a traditional farewell in Sakotha before being returned to their original place. Before this, the Dipankar Buddhas go Bhairavnath and offer Abhayajnan through dance to the tune of classical Pongabaja Buddhist stotra so that Bhairavnath can remain calm.

### **3.3 Significance of Panchadan Festival**

The importance of this festival is mentioned in a handwritten manuscript called Varshakriya, Bajramahakaltantra, Vajrasatwa bachan and Pindapatravadan Bouddhabachan-the fruits of charity

given on the day of Bhadrakrishna trayodashi are innumerable. Therefore, the human race will donate Pindapatradi to those all Shakya and Bajracharyas, who have done Chudakarma, the fruit is obtained as the mind desires (Vajracharya, 1986). Similarly, there is a lot of belief among the local about this festival. According to them, each item donated in Panchadan has its own significance. For example, by donating a Jajanka sacred thread, one will be born in high class family or becomes mighty in the next birth. By donating Kheer and fruits, innumerable virtues are obtained. Donating paddy, wheat, pea, black lentil seed, soyabean will fulfill all the desires of the mind in the next life and it is believed that virtue is obtained. Similarly, by donating clothes and grains, there are seven kinds of fruits will be obtained. They are semen, health, happiness, longevity, heroism, wealth, name and children. Also, donating money brings immense financial benefits. The main reason why king Sarvananda gave Panchadan to Lord Dipankar is for the happiness of the country and its people, so that the creatures do not have to suffer hell, let the inhabitants of hell be freed from the motion of hell, respect for religion, may everyone gets salvation. On this day, pea, maas, soyabean etc. seeds are cooked by soaking and eating its soup, it is believed that eating this hot soup cures many ailments. Due to these reasons, this festival is celebrated with pomp on Bhadrakrishna Trayodashi in Bhaktapur.

#### **4. Samyakdan**

Samyakdan is of great importance in the philosophy of Buddhism. This Samyakdan is given at different times and places in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. The day of Makar Sankranti (winter solstice) on (mid-January) every year in Bhaktapur city, this Samyakdan work is done in the open field in front of Thathubahi which is called also Shukravarna Mahabihar, near the current minibus park of Bhaktapur and on the west side of Napukhu. This work is done around 4- 5 pm, which can be done in a short time and in a short form. Although, Buddhist also have a 12-year Samyakdan, but this task seems burden some due to the large financial resources and large arrangements required. In this way, a large number of Buddhist would gather and donate food and other necessities to them. It is customary to perform Samyakdan on the ground under Kathmandu Swayambhu. However, when making special Samyakdan (donations), be it from the guthi or the benefactors at their convenient place (Joshi, 2003).

On the day of Makar Sankranti, five idols of Lord Dipankar are displayed in the open space in front of the Thathubahi, west of Bhaktapur city, in the presence of other deities. At this time, various Guthis (traditional trusts) have been set up to perform religious functions including worship of these deities. Of these, Sakotha Guthi is considered to be the main guthi. Nagadsher of Sukuldhoka set up a Guthi with cash and Jagatsher of Sakotha with land, and the same guthi still serves five Dipankar Tathaagats on that occasion in a large plate with Kheer, unsalted raddish vegetables, lentils, sesame bread with containing 12 dishes etc. Also a Pathi (a few quantity) of transferable rice is offered. Some offer rice, some offer kheer, some offer khichadi, biscuits, dakshina etc. according to their reverence and devotion (Munankarmi, 1986). On the day of Makar Sankranti, on the afternoon of Samyakdan, the Dipankar Tathagats, who have gathered in the open space in front of Thathubahi, reside in various Buddhist Monasteries in Bhaktapur. Such as samskrit bihar, jaykirti bihar Kuthubahi Bharwacho, Shukrabarna Mahabihar Thathubahi, Chaturbramha Mahabihar Tarchhen baha, bagachhen Sakotha, Mangaldharma Mahabihar Golmadhi, Dipankar bihar Kwathandau devanani etc. A Thapaju is living in Dipankar bihar. Thapaju means local main religious leader. Therefore, on that day, after offering prayers and offering alms to the Lord Dipankar including Samyak deities, Thapaju is also honored and Samyakdan are also given to him. Only then, the Buddhist priest Bajracharyas, other Bajracharyas and Shakyas are given Samyakdan. The place where Samyakdan is given is called Bhuyikhya where devout devotees give alms, according to their status, to the symbol of their faith such as Lord Dipankars with Samyak gods and priests, which are sitting there line by line. Among the items of donated in this way are grains like paddy, rice, wheat, pea, black mass, soyabean, etc. Similarly, laddu made by mixing flour, sugarcane, ghee and sesame seeds and bread, seasonally fruits, Dakshina etc. According to local old people, the Samyakdan given on this day is also called Panchadan, the difference is that Panchadan (five donations) are collected by going around different Tole (street), Plazas and Chowks of the city, while Samyakdan is a collection of donations in one place.

#### **4.1 Cultural Activities**

There are more interesting acts that abide to happen before the Samyakdan like gathering of five Dipankar Buddhas at Bhaktapur

Durbar Square. The festival especially honors Dipankar Buddha who predicted lord Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment in a previous lifetime. In Bhaktapur, the Shakyas and Bajracharya gathered in a Samyak ground near the Napukhu pond accompanied by panchabuddha and samyak Buddhas that are offered chaku balls and rice as a grant.

There is no exact information regarding when and how the Samyakdan start-up of, however, there is a sort of word about how it started in Bhaktapur. As per the available resources, Samyak panchadan first took place in N.S. 787 (1666 AD) in Bhaktapur all arranged by Jayaratna Bajracharya who was fulfilling his father (Jayadev Bajracharya)' wish to do a grand donation to the Bajracharyas and Shakyas. With his capacity and supervision, he also renovated the current Thathubahi and held the first Samyak Mahadan over there.

During Samyakdan, all the five Dipankar Buddhas are gathered at Thathu bahi, But before that, a series of actions take place like the act of "La: Swa Wanegu", which means to go to the roadway to welcome the guests. In this event, the two Buddhas from Thathubahi and Kuthubahi go to Bhaktapur Durbar Square to welcome the other three Buddhas who come from three another bihars of Bhaktapur. After the conjunction of all these Buddhas, they directly go to the Thathubahi, where the priests welcome them by washing their feet. This act is marked as "Tuti Lichhayekegu". Thereafter, the Buddhas are placed in a row to begin the samyakdan. With the Buddhas, the other four Samyak Buddhas, the priests and then the other Shakyas and bajracharyas take their place to get alms.

#### **4.2 Significance of Samyakdan Festival**

Samyakdan is an annual event for the people of Bhaktapur which takes place in Western side of Napukhu each year during Makar sankranti (winter solstice). But the Samyak Mahadan is done once in five years and twelve years in Lalitpur and Kathmandu respectively.

Samyak here literally means doing things in the right way. Samyakdan often called Samyak panchamahadan or Samyakmahadan has relatively a greater significance and has aesthetically a lot more impact on Buddhism. Especially for the Buddhists, it is an eminent opportunity to convey the message of doing dan (alms).



## 5. Conclusion

Based on the above mentioned illustrations, Panchadan and Samyakdan festivals are being celebrated with special pomp and ceremony in Bhaktapur city. In this way, the local Buddhist Newars seem to be financially prosperous as these festivals are celebrated with pomp and splendor. During these festivals, the daughters of different Buddhist Newar castes such as Bajracharya, Shakya, Manandhar, Chitrakar, Tuladhar etc. wear various kinds of garments and adorn themselves with ornaments and engage in the festivities with the spirit of mutual unity and cordiality. Other festivals of Bhaktapur are also known for its aggressive celebration while environment of these Buddhist festivals are cordial and gentle. Many festivals are now limited to people selfishness as it is guided by the so-called modern and civilized believers in materialism world however these two Buddhist festivals motivates people to follow and implement the Buddha's teaching that human being should have compassion for the poor, the miserable, the helpless and should have a generous attitude towards humanity. In essence, these festivals convey the message that there should be an exchange of cooperation between human beings. Another thing is that some people say the five Dipankar Buddhas who are circumambulated during this Buddhist festival as the five Pandavs of Mahabharat, but this statement is not true. Because the Dipankar Buddhas are in the posture of offering Abhayadan (oblations) with the right hand and holding the Cheebar with the left hand, whereas Pandavas are holding weapons of war. Similarly, Dipankara Buddha renounced his throne, family, wealth and achieved enlightenment by doing penance, but Pandavas fought with their own relatives for the kingdom. These Dipankar Buddhas are 5 in Bhaktapur, 60 in Kathmandu and 100 in Lalitpur. However, these festivals are found to be a festival of joy for followers of Buddhism as well as religiously tolerant Hindu Newars.

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