

The Mandala: Its Structure and Functions

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1. Historical Background of the Mandala

1.1. Six Periods of the History of Indian Thoughts **Fig.1**

- (1) The age of Indus civilization, (2) the age of Brahmanism,
- (3) the age of Buddhism and Jainism, (4) the age of Hinduism,
- (5) the age of the political domination of Islam, and (6) the age of modern Hinduism

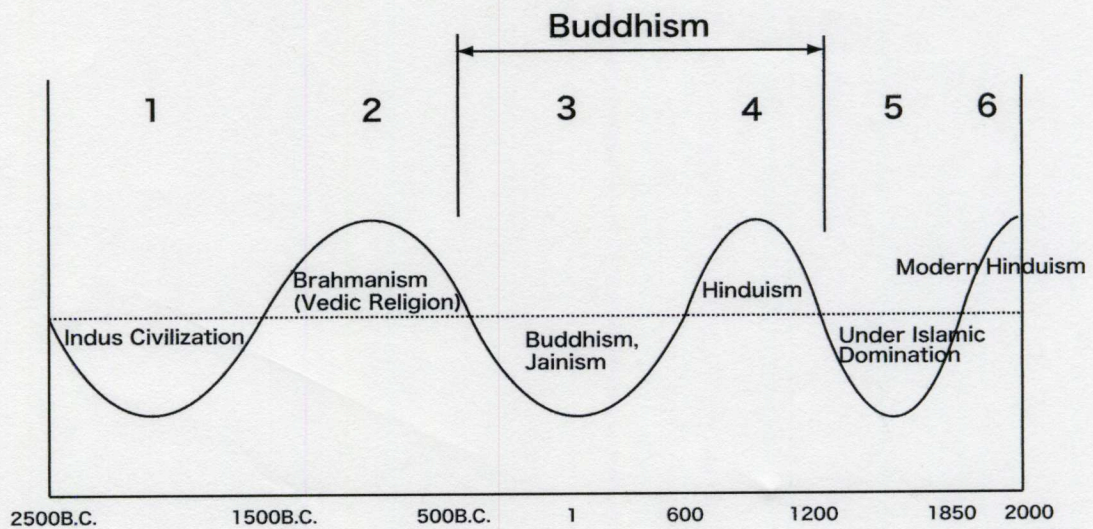


Fig.1

1.2. Three Periods of Indian Buddhism

- (1) Early Buddhism (500 B.C.~1st cent. A.D.) ... Theravada Buddhism,
- (2) Middle Buddhism (1st cent.~600 A.D.) ... Mahayana Buddhism, and
- (3) Late Buddhism (600~1200) ... Mahayana Buddhism

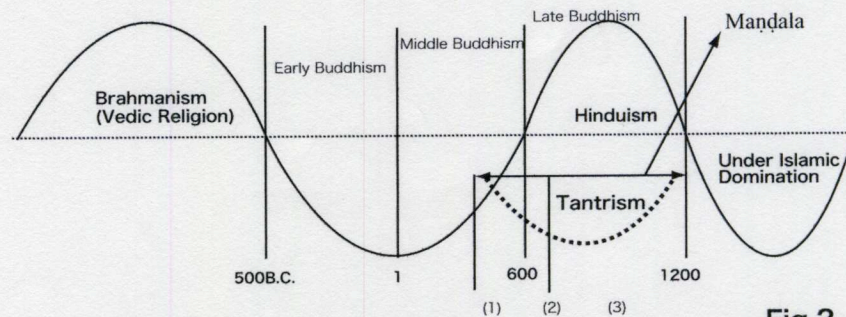


Fig.2

1.3. Three Periods of Indian Tantric Buddhism **Fig.2**

(1) Early Tantric Buddhism (350A.D.~600)

(2) Middle Tantric Buddhism (600~700)

Garbha-udbhava (Womb-born) Mandala **Fig.3** ... introduced by Kukai

Vajra-dhatu (Vajra-essence) Mandala **Fig.4** ... introduced by Kukai



Fig.3



Fig.4

(3) Late Tantric Buddhism (700~1200)

Hevajra, a Tantric (esoteric) Buddha **Fig.5**

(It was only in Tantric Buddhism that mandalas were used.)

1.4. Three Historical Elements of the Formation of the Mandala

- (1) The Formation of the Buddhist Pantheon ... Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Goddesses, Protecting Deities, etc
- (2) The Interest in World Image
- (3) The Growth of the Importance of Rituals in Buddhism



Fig.5

2. The Structure of the Mandala

2.1. Three Basic Elements of the Mandala

- (1) Deities residing in the Mandala **Fig.6**,
- (2) The Palace where the deities dwell **Fig.7**,
- (3) Actions (practices or rituals) directed to the complex of the denizens and the palace

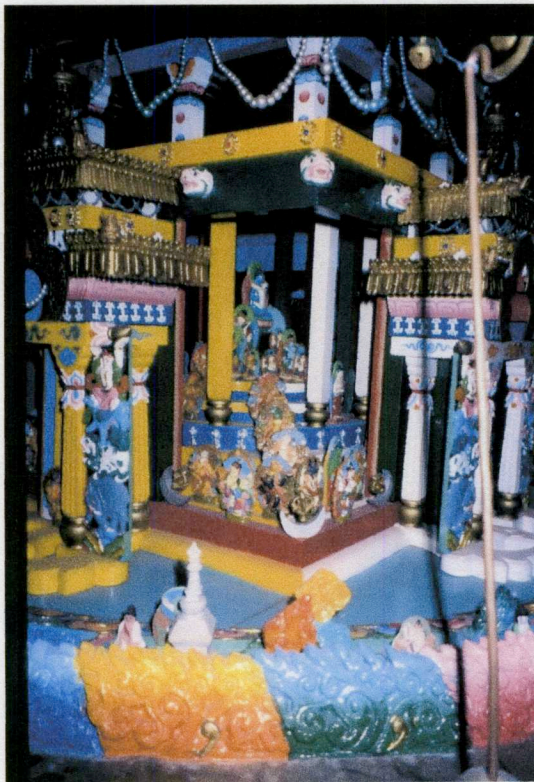


Fig. 6

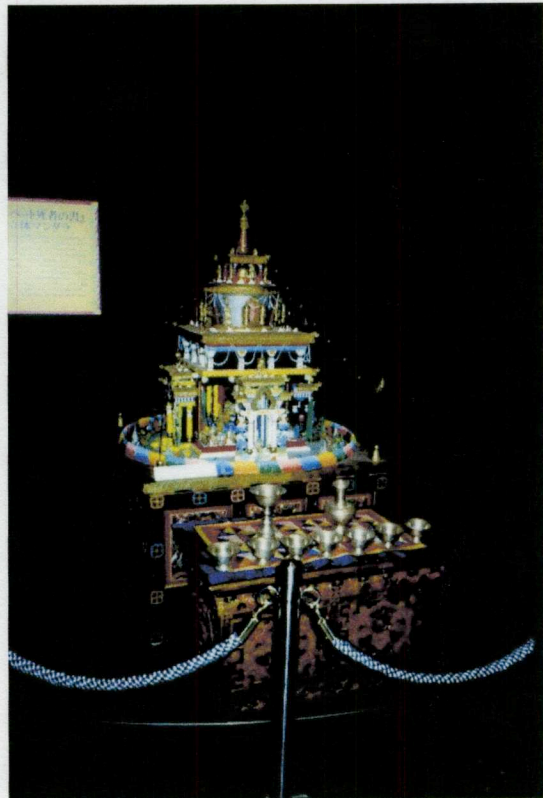


Fig.7

2.2. Two Ways of Depicting Mandalas

- (1) Two Dimensional Mandala ... Garbha-udbhava Mandala Fig.3~4
- (2) Three Dimensional Mandala ... The mandala explained in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* ,Fig.6~7, Fig.8, Fig.9, Fig.10



Fig.8



Fig.9

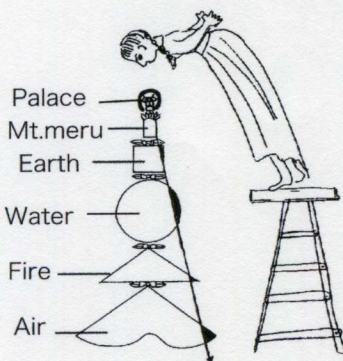


Fig.10

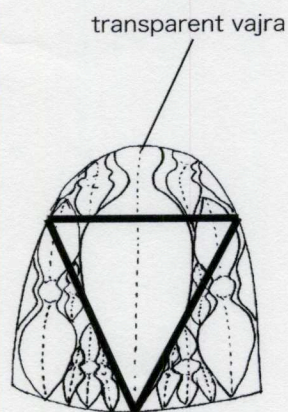


Fig11

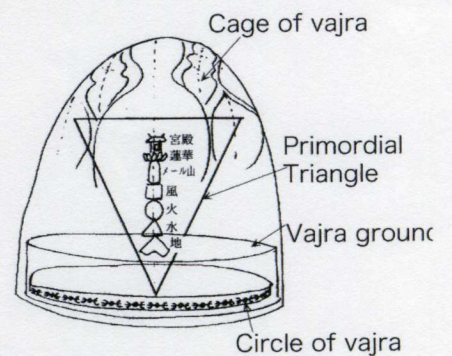


Fig12 Mandala Galaxy

2.3. Three Elements of Action

(1) Recognition of present conditions, (2) aim, and (3) means

(The mandala is a religious device to realize the first element. The mandala shows in what kind of world the practitioner is found.)

2.4. The Structure of the World depicted in the Mandala

(1) Vajra-cage covering the Mandala World, **Fig.11**

- (2) The Primordial Triangle (dharma-udaya) from which things are born, **Fig.11**
- (3) Basic Elements Supporting the Meru Mountain, on which the Palace is built, **Fig.12**
- (4) Deities are in the Palace
- (The two-dimensional mandala is a picture which is seen from above.)

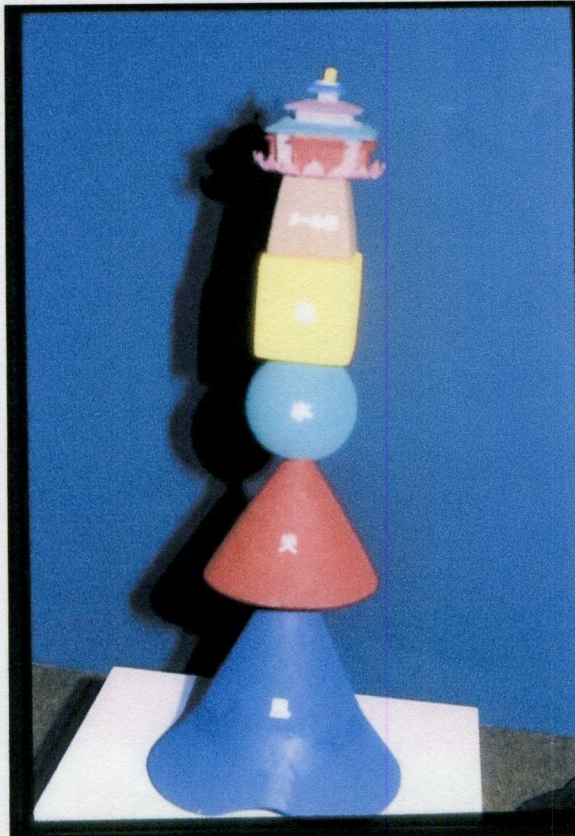


Fig.13

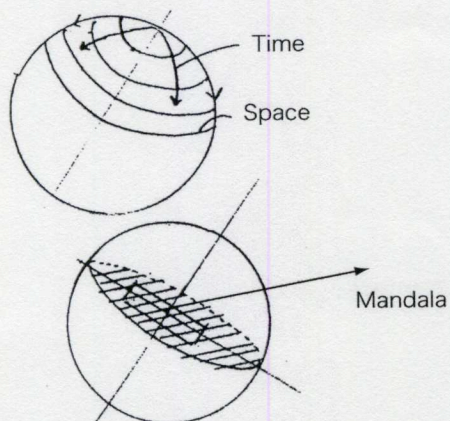


Fig.15 Formation of the Universe

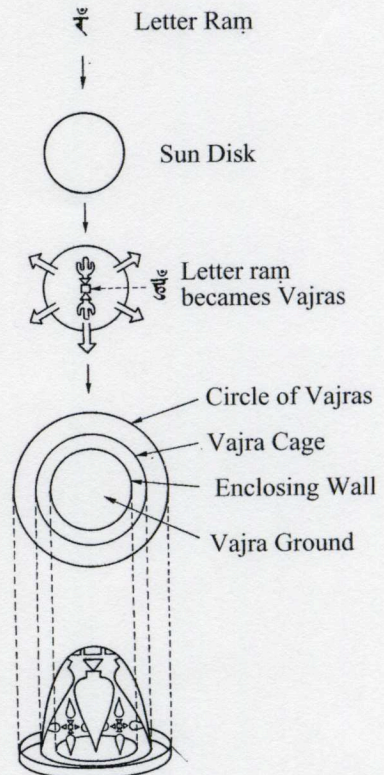


Fig.14 Process of Meditation

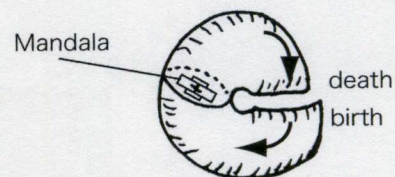
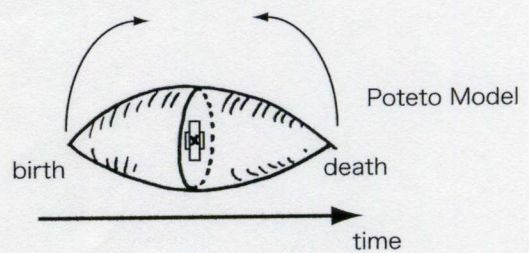


Fig.16 Symbolism of Rebirth

3.1. The three-leveled Symbolism of the Mandala

- (1) Level 1: Outer or External World (Universe)
- (2) Level 2: Icon or the picture depicting the complex of the denizens and the Palace
- (3) Level 3: Self or the Spacial Representation of the Mind of an Individual
(The Mandala picture or icon acts as the medium by which one can experience the identity of the universe with the Self.)

3.2. Process of Mandala Meditation ... Process of the Creation of the World

- (1) The Fomation (Mental Creation) of the World
Letters, Elements (Earth, Water, Fire, Air), Central Deity, Other Deities,
Palace, **Fig.13, Fig.14**, Mountain, Galaxy, **cf. Fig.11**
- (2) The Mandala visualized by Completed Yoga (nispanna-yoga)
(A practitioner meditates upon the process of rising, grwoing and perishing,
which is found in every living being. **Fig.15~16**)

3.3. The Cosmos Taking the Form of Buddha (Level 1)..(Organic Body)

Bodhnath Stupa, Kathmandu, **Fig.17**

3.4. Self-space (Psychic space of self) (Level 2)

... Model of the Cone of Ice Cream, **Fig.18~19**



Fig. 17

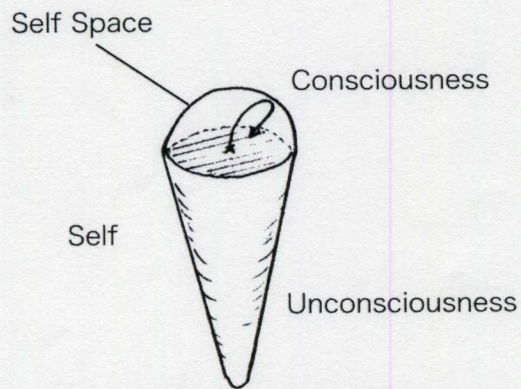


Fig.18 Model of Ice-cream Cone

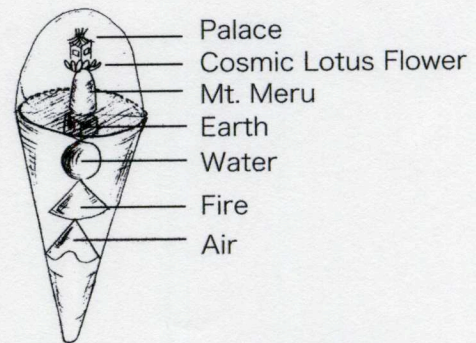


Fig.19 Homology between Self Space and Mandala

4. Process of CompletionYoga

(After the establishment of the Mandala , Yoga , starts)