

# A Comparative Study of Bhavacakra Painting

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## Abstract

*The Bhavacakra is a symbolic representation of Samsara, a powerful mirror for spiritual aspirants and it is often painted to the left of Tibetan monastery doors. Bhavacakra, 'wheel of life' consists of two Sanskrit words 'Bhava' and 'Cakra'. The word bhava means birth, origin, existing etc and cakra means wheel, circle, round, etc. There are some textual materials which suggest that the Bhavacakra painting began during the Buddha lifetime. Bhavacakra is very famous for wall and cloth painting. It is believed to represent the knowledge of release from suffering gained by Gautama Buddha in the course of his meditation. This symbolic representation of Bhavacakra serves as a wonderful summary of what Buddhism is, and also reminds that every action has consequences. It can be also understood by the illiterate persons not needing high education and it shows the path of enlightenment out of suffering in samsara. Mahayana Buddhism is very popular in Asian countries like northern Nepal, India, Bhutan, China, Korean, Japan and Mongolia. So in these countries every Mahayana monastery there is wall painting and Thānkā painting of Bhavacakra. But in these countries there are various designs of Bhavacakra due to artist, culture and nation.*

**Key words:** *Bhavacakra, wheel of life, Mandala, Karma, Samsāra, Sukhāvati bhuvan, Thānkā*

## Introduction

In Buddhism, art has been one of the best tools to understand the Buddha teaching. The wheel of life is very famous for walls and cloth painting. This classical image from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition depicts the psychological states, or realm of existence, associated with an unenlightened state. A powerful mirror for spiritual aspirants, the wheel of deluded existence is often painted to the left of Tibetan monastery doors; it offers an opportunity for monks and pilgrims alike to look deeply into their essential beings. The wheel of life painting graphically illustrates the Buddha's teaching on impermanence, suffering, *karma*, death, and rebirth into one of the six realms of cyclic existence, and the twelve links of dependent origination.

## Statement of Problems

*Bhavacakra* is compulsorily depicted in every Tibetan monastery wall for religious activities and depicted in *Thānkā* paintings for meditation. Both of them have been illustrated from ancient times till now. The *Bhavacakra* is painted in different countries their compositions are different from each other. In *Bhavacakra* painting, different icons are depicted but there are no reason why different icons are depicted. In different countries, icons of *Bhavacakra* are painted but nobody has studied comparative ways.

## Objective of Study

The general objective of the study is to explain the wheel of life paintings. The specific objectives are: to trace the oldest painting of *Bhavacakra* and to reveal the philosophical aspects of *Bhavacakra* painting, to describe the components of *Bhavacakra* painting and compares different types of *Bhavacakra* painting.

## Research Methodology

This research paper is based on a descriptive and comparative research design. The researcher has observed the *Bhavacakra* painting, which is depicted on the wall of Nyingma monastery. The researcher has taken personal interviews with monks, Buddhist scholars, and artists through an unstructured questionnaire. The researcher has knowledge and experience of depicting *Bhavacakra* painting on cloth. The secondary sources have been collected through published books, articles, journals, magazines and websites, etc.

## Background

In Buddhism painting is one of the easy methods to teach philosophy. Mahayana Buddhism is popular in Asia countries like northern Nepal, India, Tibet, China, Japan, Mongolia, etc. So in every country's monastery, there is wall painting and *Thānkā* painting of *Bhavacakra*. But due to the culture and nation finds the various designs of *Bhavacakra* painting. The paper was chosen from Ajanta cave, China, Tibet, Mongolia, Japan, and Nepal which are explained below.

## Description of the *Bhavacakra* Painting

The wheel of life is a real picture of Dharma taught by Buddha. The wheel of life represent the first two Noble truths of suffering and cause: the figure outside the wheel represented the final two truths: the cessation of suffering and the path of spiritual development leading to this cessation.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Surendra Kumar Lama (Tamang). *The Wheel of Life (Bhavacakra) A Study on Buddhist Philosophical*

## **The Hub of the Wheel: The Three Poisons: The Second Nobel Truth: The Truth of Cause of Suffering**

In the hub of the wheel there are three animals a pig, a pigeon, and a snake which symbolized the three poisons craving, aversion, and delusion- are inextricably interlinked. These animals represent the “Second Nobel Truth: The Truth of Cause of Suffering.” These animals are the main cause of suffering in samsara and keep the wheel in the motions. Each bites tightly the tail of the one in front- greedy, hateful, and blind.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Second Innermost Circle**

In the painting, there is a circle that is half white and black which represented the rebirth in samsara with good and bad *karma*. The white and dark half-circle just outside the hub indicate virtuous and non-virtuous action which is motivated by the triad of ignorance, desire, and hatred.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Third Circle: The Six Realms of *Samsāra*: The First Nobel Truth: The Truth of Suffering**

The third circle the six realms represent the First Nobel Truth: the truth of suffering. It is said that samsara is a circle because we turn round and round, taking rebirth in one after another of the six realms as a result of our action which, whether positive or negative, are tainted by clinging.<sup>4</sup> Each of six worlds into which one can be incarnated and each of which symbolizes a specific vice resulting from lack of insight, is depicted in one of the six sections formed by the six spokes of the wheel. These are; the world of gods (pride) - top; the world of semi-gods (envy) upper right; the human world (desire and passions) - upper left; the realm of beasts (ignorance)- lower left; the world of *Pretas* or hungry spirits (avarice) – lower right; and the world of hell (hatred)- bottom.<sup>5</sup> All of these sectors represent the level of suffering in terms of birth.<sup>6</sup>

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*Art as Practiced in Pokhari Narayansthan VDC, Kavrepalanchok District, (Unpublished Dissertation).*

Kirtipur: Tribhuvan University, Central Department of Buddhist Studies. 2017. P. 31.

2 Kulananda, *The wheel of life*. Varanasi: Pilgrims Publishing. 2008. P. 11.

3 Dalai Lama (Trans. & Edit. Jeffrey Hopkins), *The Wheel of Life Buddhist Perspectives on Cause and Effect*. USA: Wisdom Publication. 2000. P. 5.

4 Patrul Rinpoche. *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. New Delhi: SAGA Publication. 2017. P. 62.

5 Lydia Aryan. *The Art of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Sahayogi Prakashana. 1978. P. 174.

6 Lama. *op. cit.* no. 3. P. 42.

## **The Outer Layer: The Rim of the Wheel Twelve Links of Dependent Arising**

The 12 segments in the outer circle of the wheel of life illustrated in sequence the links in this chain of cause and effect.

Cause and effect start from ignorance, the first link in the chain. Ignorance is represented by a blind old man holding the stick

A man is making the pottery by the mud. A potter at his wheel follows the blind man as the second links in the chain. The potter represents the individual shaping his life by ignorance by his actions.

A monkey in a tree represented the imprints of action taken in ignorance on the consciousness part of which survives death and carries them into a future life.

Travelers in a boat symbolize the consciousness 'name' that enters the embryo in the womb of the individual's future mother. The boat represented the body 'form' that the embryo will become.

An empty house with a window and door represented the six senses to develop senses of the embryo.

A couple holding each other represented contact. The six senses of the growing infant develop to the stage where communication becomes possible.

A man shot in the eye is the image that symbolizes the ability of the embryos maturing senses to transmit pain and pleasure. Through these feelings, individuals experience karma directly by responding to the effect of their past actions both good and bad. In the middle of sixth and seventh links, there is triangular with fire inside there is a man in downward joining hand it is also a way to out from the samsara.

Women giving the alcohol to a man that symbolizes the feeling of desire caused by attachment.

A man snatching fruits out of trees represent grasping the response to attachment. This ninth link symbolizes the delusion of a strong attachment to the self.

The pregnant woman is a symbol of new life. Grasping and attachment strength at death and ripen in the mind into seeds of karma which are carried into the next existence.

A woman in childbirth symbolizes the ripening of the seeds of karma as an individual's elements are born.

The process of life growth development decay and death begins even at conception. In the final link on the wheel of life, the individual is represented by a person carrying a heavy bundle which symbolic of the burden of karma that the individual created during the past lives.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Demon Holding the Wheel: Impermanence**

The wheel in the center of the painting is in the grasp of a frightful monster. This signifies that the entire process of cyclic existence is caught within transience. Everything's in our type of life is characterized by impermanence. Whatever is built will fall, whatever and whoever comes together will separate.<sup>8</sup> The circle is usually held in the teeth and between the arms and legs of the demon, indicating that all lives must die and live and die again.<sup>9</sup> Yama, lord of death whose three eyes symbolize impermanence, harm, and non-self, grasps the wheel. His five skulls represent freedom from old age, sickness, death, decay, and rebirth.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Buddha Pointing the Moon: The Fourth Nobel Truth: The Truth of the Path Leading to the End of Suffering**

At the top right of the painting, the Buddha is standing with his left hand in a teaching pose and with the index finger of the right hand pointing to a moon on the other side at the top left. The moon symbolizes liberation. Buddha is pointing out that freedom from pain is possible.<sup>11</sup> This represented passing beyond suffering or liberation from cyclic existence, the truth of cessation (*nirodha-satya*, 'gog bden).

This truth is known as the Middle Path too because this path teaches to avoid two extremes of life.

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7 Harris Ian. *The Complete Illustrated Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. UAE: Anness Publishing Ltd. 2009. pp. 44-45.

8 Lama. *op. cit.*. no. 3. pp. 3-4.

9 Lydia. *op. cit.* no. 5. P. 174.

10 Harris. *op. cit.* no. 7. P. 41.

11 Lama, *op. cit.*. no. 3. P. 2.

## The Moon: The Third Nobel Truth: The Truth of the End of Suffering

In the top corner left or right depicted the moon which symbolizes the *nirvāna* the truth of the cessation of suffering. A hare in the moon also found in the right or left corner of the wheel of life painting. In the *jātaka* legend relates how Buddha was born as a hare in one of his previous lives, and to test his endurance Indra outlined this hare on the moon, where it has since remained.<sup>12</sup> The *Pāli* word *Nibbāna* (Sanskrit – *Nirvāna*) is composed of *Ni* and *Vāna*. *Ni* is a negative particle. *Vāna* means weaving or craving. This craving serves as a cord to connect one life with another. It is called *Nibbāna* in that it is a departure (*Ni*) from that craving which is called *Vāna*, lusting. *Nibbāna* is also explained as the extinction of the fire of lust (*lobha*), hatred (*dosha*), and delusion (*moha*).<sup>13</sup>

## Comparative study of different Bhavacakra paintings

*Bhavacakra* painting is a very famous painting in Buddhism and can be found in many countries. Buddhism spread in different countries in different periods of time. Due to different cultures and traditions in different countries *Bhavacakra* painting is also different in these countries like China, Mongolia, Tibet, India, Japan, and Nepal. So here, we can see a bit of a different icon in the *Bhavacakra* painting. There are eight pictures of *Bhavacakra* from different countries to compare with each other which are given below.

## The hub of the wheel: The three animals

In fig 1 we can't see the hub of the wheel and there are no three animals in the hub of the circle because it is destroyed. In fig 2 in the hub, there are three animals pig in black color, rooster in red color, and snake in green color. A pig is biting the rooster and the rooster is biting the snake. The background color is orange. In fig 3, there are three animals in the hub of the circle: a mouth of black pig comes a rooster and a snake and the background color is light black. In fig 4 in the hub of the circle, there are three animals: a pig is biting the snake and the snake is biting the rooster and the background color is light blue. In fig 5 hub of the circle there is Buddha in a meditation position and there are three animals: pig, snake, and the bird and they are not biting each other. The three animals are in front of Buddha and the background of color is yellow. In fig 6 in the hub of the circle, there are three animals from the mouth of the black pig come rooster in the red color and the snake in the green color. The background color is light green. In fig 7 in the hub of the circle, there are three animals: a pig in light blue color and biting the rooster which is mixed color red, white, blue, and

<sup>12</sup> Robert Beer. *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, London: Serindia Publication. P.120.

<sup>13</sup> Narada Mahathera. *The Buddha and His Teaching*. Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Education Foundation. 1998. P. 386.

brown. The rooster is biting the snake which is in green and biting the pig. The background is in red color. In fig 8 in the hub of the circle, there are three animals: a pig is light-dark and white in color biting the snake. A snake is in green color biting the rooster. A rooster is in yellow color and biting the pig. The background is in light blue. In fig 2, 4, 7, and 8 are the same where three animals are biting each other. In the fig 3 and 6 are the same where from pig mouth come the snake and rooster. Fig 1 and 5 is different from other figs.

In the hub of the wheel, there are three animals which are pig, snake, and rooster. These three animals are biting each other's tails and they have different colors. In some paintings from the pig mouth come the rooster and the snake as well as in some paintings these animals are not biting each other. Mostly in the painting pig is in black and snake in green and rooster in red color but some painting colors of these three animals are different. The background color of the hub is different and is not similar in different paintings.

### **Half circle around the hub**

In fig 1 there is no half circle around the hub. In fig 2 around the hub, the circle is divided into six parts with each man and *mantra*. The half-circle which is divided into three parts men are descending down toward the hell and the half-circle which are divided into three parts men are rising in the top toward heaven. In fig 3 the circle is divided into six parts in half white and half dark circle. In the dark half-circle, man is descending toward hell and the white half-circle man is rising toward heaven. In the fig 4 around the hub is divided into two half white and black circles. In the half-black circle, eight people are taken downward tight with rope by the three monsters and drag into the hell realm. In the white half-circle seven people, two monks, and the *Bodhisattva* in the front are going up in heaven. The people are happy dancing and playing the music. In fig 5 there is no half circle around the hub. In fig 6 around the hub is divided into black and white half-circle. In the half-black circle, the four naked people are tight with rope by two monsters from front and back and drag into hell realm and they are descending. In the white half-circle four peoples, two monks and the *bodhisattva* are arising in the heavenly realm. In fig 7 the circle is divided into two half-circle white and black. In the black circle, the two-man is naked tight with rope and dragged by the monster in yellow color in the hell realm. In the white circle, two men and one monk and *Bodhisattva* are going to heaven. In fig 8 the circle is divided into two parts white and black half-circle. In the black half-circle, a monster drags the three naked men tight with rope. They are descending in the hell realm. In the white half-circle, there is a cloud man, monk and the *Bodhisattva* is arising toward the heavenly realm.

In the half-circle around the hub mainly the circle is divided into two half-circles which are in black and white color. But in some paintings the half circle around the hub is divided into six parts divided by the line with different figures and *mantra*. In the half-black circle, the demon tight with rope and drag the naked people in the hell realms which are descending to downward. The demons are very wrathful faces which are very scary. The half body part is animal and human. The half white circle, the bodhisattva and the monk show the way to the people they are happy and peace to go in heavenly realms.

### The realms in the third circle

In the fig 1 can only see the three realms but it is not clear at all others were destroyed and cannot identify which realms is it. The realms are divided by the white line. In the middle of the circle is the heaven realm where god is sitting but it is very difficult to identify the figure. So on the left side of the circle is the human realm and the right side can be the demigod realms. But it is very difficult to identify these realms and the down part of the circle is totally destroyed and cannot identify the figures.

In fig 2 the realms are divided into five realms. The realms are divided by the blue line. In the upper-middle part of the circle is the heaven realm where in the middle of heaven there is a *Bodhisattva* which is playing the lute and surrounded by the trees. In heaven, there are demigods and gods which always figure out fighting with an arrow and the bow. The gods in the top hitting with an arrow in the down to the demigod between them there is a wishful filling tree. On the right side of the upper circle is human realms and they are doing different kinds of activities. In these human realms, there is a white way to get out from the wheel which shows the way of the *Amitābha* heaven. In the down part, there is hell. At the bottom of the circle is hell where *Yama* the death of God is giving justice according to the karma. In the left part of hell is a hungry ghost where there is fire everywhere and they have a big belly and a thin neck. In the right part of hell are animal realms and there are different kinds of animals.

In fig 3 the realms are divided into five realms. The upper two parts is heaven and down three parts are hell realms. The five realms are divided by the orange line. In the middle and left part is heaven, where both gods and demigods are fighting with each other in between there, is a wishful filing tree. In the right part of heaven is a human realm where there are few houses and humans are sitting. In the lower middle part is hell where *Yama* the god of death is in the wrathful face and another monster is giving the punishment to bad people. In the left part of hell is animal's realms and the right part of hell is hungry ghost realms.

In fig 4, there are five realms and the realms are divided by the red line. In the middle of the circle are heaven realms with the demigod. In the middle of heaven, the bodhisattva is sitting with a music instrument playing between the clouds and a wishful filling tree the gods and demigods are fighting with each other. In the right part of heaven is human realms where humans are doing different activities and can see children, old people, sick, death, monks and the Buddha is giving the teaching to the human beings. In the down there are hell realms in the middle of the realm is hell where the death of God is a wrathful face in the semi half standing position and other monsters giving punishment in different ways like cooking in the vessel and chopping the body in the pieces. In the right part is a hungry ghost realm the ghosts are naked and from the mouth fire come and have a big belly and thin neck. In the left part is an animal's realm where different kinds of animals can be seen which live inland water and air.

In fig 5 the realms are divided into five realms: the upper part is heaven and the human realm and the down part is hell, animal, and hungry ghost. The realms are divided by the brown line. In the upper right part is heaven and human in the left. In the bottom of the middle is hell and the right part of hell is the animal realm and the left part is the hungry ghost realm.

In fig 6 the realms are divided into six sections the upper part is heaven and down part is hell. The realms section is divided by the red line. In the upper part of the middle realm in the center of heaven there is a palace around the ocean. In the palace, the god is sitting and another god is in fighting with a demigod in the left part of heaven. On the side of heaven, a Buddha in white color is playing the music in the standing position in the cloud. In the left part are the demigod realm and the army of a demigod in the line and hitting the arrow in the god realm. The wishful filling tree is between heaven and demigod, the root in the demigod realm and fruits in heaven. In the demigod realm, the green Buddha has a sword and book. In the right part of heaven is the human realm where the pregnant woman is giving birth to a child, the old man with a stick, sick people, and the monk is giving the teaching. In the human realm, there is a yellow Buddha holding the bowl in the hand. In the bottom middle of the circle is hell in the hell death of god is sitting in a chair holding a stick and mirror and guarded by the two monsters. The people are coming from the hill and across the bridge people became naked and dragged by a monster in front of the god of death. One monster is writing and one is measuring the good and bad karma in the scale measurement. There is hot and cold hell and in the big vessel two monsters cooking the people who have done bad karma. In the hell, a Buddha is holding the bowl in one hand and

throwing the water. In the right part of the hell is a hungry ghost realm and there are many naked ghosts with a thin neck and big belly fire coming from the mouth. In the hungry ghost realm, the Buddha appeared in the red color and threw the water in the fire. In the left part of hell is an animal's realm where the blue Buddha holds the book and there are different animals living in land, air, and water.

In fig 7 the circle is divided into six sections in the red line. The upper parts are heaven realms and the down part are hell realms. In the middle of the upper realm, it is heaven. The white color Buddha is sitting in a lotus flower and playing the lute and one god had an arrow and bow. In the left part is the demigod realm, the green Buddha with a sword in hand gesture sitting in the lotus flower. The demigod is hitting an arrow in heaven. In the right part is the human realm and the yellow color Buddha holds one bowl and one hand gesture is earth touching sitting in a lotus flower and surrounded by a human. The down part of the middle is hell the red color Buddha has fire in the left hand and sitting in the lotus flower. There is hot and cold hell on both sides of Buddha. In the right part of hell is a hungry ghost realm, the Buddha in red color holding the water vessel and sprinkling the water sitting in the lotus flower surrounded by the hungry ghost which is in naked, big belly and small neck. The left part of hell is an animal, the Buddha in blue color sitting in the lotus flower and holding one book in his hand surrounded by different animals.

In fig 8 the realm is divided by a black line into six realms. The middle upper part is heaven. The Buddha is standing and playing the lute and surrounds there is god in the palace. In the left part of heaven is the human realm the Buddha is standing surrounded by the house and the human. The right part is the demigod realm but in the painting the *Yama* the death of god covers the realm by his body. The middle of the down part is hell Buddha is standing and the monster is giving the punishment to bad karma people. In the right part of hell are animal's realms that can see the animals and it is also covered by the body of Yama. The left part of hell is a hungry ghost, the Buddha is standing and the hungry ghost mouth comes to the fire.

In the painting, the realms are divided into five or six realms which are divided into heaven and hell realms. In the upper realms, there are heaven realms where god, demigod, and human lives but in some painting, the god and demigod are made in one realm. In the down realms, there are hells, animal and hungry ghost realms. The realms are divided by different color lines like blue, orange, red-brown, black etc in painting. The god realm is made in the upper-middle part where different gods figure in different positions and in some paintings

the god and the demigods are fighting for the celestial's fruits which grow in the demigod realms. The human realm is made in the upper side of the god realm where different figures of humans are depicted like the birth of a child, old people, sick people, dead body, monks, etc. In the down part in the middle the hell realm is made where a monster is giving the punishment to the evil people. On the side of the hell realm, the hungry ghost is depicted where they have a big belly and small neck where fire comes from and the mouth has not enough food and water. The animal's realm is made in the side of hell realms where different animal figures are depicted. The animals have fear in their life where they kill each other for the food and have a lack of curiosity and wisdom.

### **The Outer Rim of the Circle Twelve Depending and Origin.**

In fig 1 the outer rim of the circle is divided in different but only eight can be seen but it is not clear and difficult to identify the figure. In the first figure a camel led by a man, in the second figure a man making a pot, in the third figure a monkey, in the fourth figure a man and women in a boat crossing through water, in the fifth figure a mask of the face a man, the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth figure was destroyed, in tenth figure a woman sitting on knees, in the eleventh image two persons sitting and in the twelfth figure a feeble, weak man, one hand on the knee.

In fig 2 the outer rim of the circle is divided into twelve links. The outer circle of the wheel depicts in a clockwise sequence twelve images of the twelve links of dependent origination. In the top of the circle, the image of a blind old man, a pottery making, a monkey, two men boat riding, an empty house with door and window, a couple is kissing or loving each other, a man blind by an arrow in one eye, a man is drinking alcohol, a man plucking the fruits from the tree, a pregnant woman, women giving birth and old man and a corpse being carried to a graveyard.

In fig 3 there are twelve links of dependent and origination which is the same as fig 2 starting a clockwise sequence from an old blind man to old age and death.

In fig 4, the twelve links of dependent origination start from the left downside which is the same as fig 2 and fig 3 start from the old blind man to the old age and death.

In fig 5 the link of dependent origination is the outside of the wheel starting from the clockwise a bodhisattva is standing with a stick one man is in front of him. An old man holding a stick with hand and one person in front of him looking at him. Two people were making the vessel in a sitting position. The four people are carrying something in their

shoulders and one person behind with the stick. Two people are sitting. In another image, one man is bowing his body toward another person. One man tries to hit a man with a stick. A man tries to climb a camel. A monster is dancing. A man rides a boat. A white monkey is standing. A man carries a dead body in his back. A wrathful face demigod is dancing two hands in up with a stick. A female is standing. A man is giving some food to the bird.

In fig 6 there are twelve images of dependent and origination same as fig 2, fig 3 and fig 4 start clockwise from an old blind man to old and dead body.

In fig 7 it the twelve links of dependent and origination same as above fig 6.

In fig 8 the outer rim of circle dependent and origination start clockwise from an old blind man but three images are covered by the *Yama* body and a pottery making, a monkey, and the two men in a boat and the other is similar as above fig 7.

The outer rim of the circle has twelve links of dependence and origination in every *Bhavacakra* painting. The twelve links are depicted in a clockwise sequence of twelve images. In some paintings, the twelve link image is made outside the wheel but mostly *Bhavacakra* painting the twelve links are made in the rim of the circle. The outer of the rim of the circle is divided into twelve parts in each part and has an image that symbolizes the meaning. The image starts in the clockwise sequence in the first image is a blind man holding the stick. In the second image a man is making the pottery with the clay. In the third image, a monkey is hanging in the tree. In the fourth image a two-man is riding the boat. In the fifth image is a house with doors and windows. In the sixth image a man and woman kissing with each other. In the seventh image a man has an arrow in one eye. In the eighth image, a man is drinking alcohol. In the ninth image, a man or monkey is plucking the fruits from the tree. In the tenth image, a pregnant woman is showing. In the eleventh image, a woman is giving birth to a child. In the twelfth, a man is carrying the bundled up corpse to the funeral pyre.

### **The Death of God *Yama***

In fig 1 there is no death of god holding the *Bhavacakra*. In fig 2 the wheel is held by *Yama* the death of god. In this painting, the *Yama* holds the wheel by two hands and two legs and also has two eyes and is in the position to swallow the wheel. There are no ornaments worn by the *Yama* in fig 2. The *Yama* has green hair, red nose, and body color is white with little black mixed color. In fig 3 *Yama* is holding the wheel by two hands and two legs which has a big nail and five fingers each. The *Yama* has three eyes and one in the forehead. The

hair color is green and wears the ornaments like earring in the ear and has a crown of five skulls. In fig 4 the *Yama* holds the wheel by hands and legs and has five fingers each with long nails. The wheel is biting by teeth. The *Yama* is in brown color and black hair. In this painting, *Yama* has three eyes, one in the forehead which is very scary and wears the crown of five skulls, earrings, bracelets, etc ornaments. The *Yama* wears the dress of tiger skin. In fig 5 the *Yama* holds the wheel by hands and legs which has three fingers in hands and legs each with long nails. The *Yama* has a muscular body wearing blue color cloth in the neck. The color of *Yama* is red. The *Yama* has four big teeth, two eyes and two horns in the head. In fig 6, *Yama* is holding the wheel by two hands and legs and biting his teeth. The *Yama* is in brown color with red eyes brows and a mustache. The *Yama* has three eyes; five skulls in the crown wear the green scarf and tiger skin. In fig 7 the *Yama* is in a red color body and green hair. The *Yama* is holding the wheel by two hands and the legs and biting my teeth. The *Yama* has three eyes one in the forehead and the eyebrows and mustache is in golden color. The *Yama* wear the crown of five skulls, ornaments and green scarf and tiger skin. In fig 8, the *Yama* is holding the wheel in one knee down semi part of the body and has covered the wheel a little bit. The *Yama* is in blue color holding the right-hand *vajra*. He is wearing the ornaments in his hands and legs. In these paintings only two eyes, one in the forehead and one ear can see. In the head have a crown of skulls there are only three skulls. At the top of the head is a snake with three heads in red color.

The *Bhavacakra* is held by the lord of death called the *Yama*. The *Bhavacakra* is held by two hands and legs and bitten by the teeth which are ready to swallow the *Bhavacakra*. The *Yama* is in different colors like red, blue, etc. In some of *Bhavacakra* the *Yama* death of god doesn't wear the ornaments but mostly painting of *Bhavacakra* *Yama* wears the different kinds of ornaments. The *Yama* has three eyes, one eye in the forehead and the eyes are very big and scary. He wears the crown of five skulls, the cloth of tiger skin. The hands and legs of the nail are long. The body is muscular and has flame-like eyebrows and mustache.

### **Background of the Bhavacakra painting**

In fig 1, the background is surrounded by the image of human beings. In the background fig 2 in the top right there is *Amitābha* Buddha heaven where *Amitābha* Buddha is in meditation position. On the left side of the top Buddha is pointing the moon by one hand. In the right down part, the ghost is playing the dice and dancing. In the left down the human are playing dice and dancing and playing the musical instrument. In fig 3 the background there are hills and rivers can be seen. In both the right and left top side, there is a Buddha standing one in teaching gesture and another Buddha in protection gesture. In the down middle, there

is *Changrishi* with four hands sitting in the lotus flower. In the below of the painting, the mantra is written in gold color. In fig 4, the background is in blue color only. In fig 5, the background in white color and in the middle of the top is the moon, and both sides of the top write something in the Japanese language. In fig 6 the background is fire and Buddha is standing in the right top pointing to the left side top moon where the *mantra* is written in Tibetan language. In fig 7 the background of the Buddha is yellow color pointing to the moon on the left where *Changrishi* god is also sitting. In the fig 8 background, the Buddha is pointing from right toward the white standing *Bodhisattva*. The background color is light blue and the down part is with some flower food, music instrument, etc.

In the background of *Bhavacakra* painting, there is an image of Buddha pointing with one hand to the moon. In different *Bhavacakra* paintings, there is a different background where different kinds of landscape images are depicted. In the background can also see the *Amitābha* Buddha in heaven called the *sukhāwatibhuvana* and *Bodhisattva* of compassion Changrishi.

So the *Bhavacakra* painting of these countries is different in design with each other but the meaning and the philosophy are similar. Depicted images some are similar and some are different in shape, size, and color. Some paintings are painted in cloth and some are painted on the wall of the monastery. While studying and comparative these paintings found some differences due to the country, culture, and tradition.

## Conclusion

The *Bhavacakra* painting has popularity and significant in different countries and has great philosophical value which should teach to upcoming generations. It would be fruitful if the *Bhavacakra* teaching is applied in meditation. *Thānkā* artist should learn the iconography, philosophical and mediation of *Bhavacakra* which help to make *Bhavacakra* painting without any mistake.



Fig no: 1

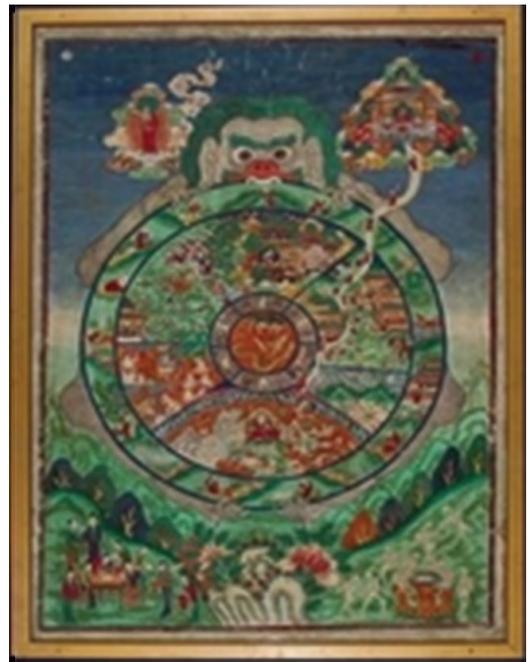


Fig no: 2



Fig no: 3



Fig no: 4



Fig no: 5



Fig no: 6



Fig no: 7



Fig no: 8

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