



The Eight Prominence Mudrā Styles

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Abstract

Mudrā is a kind of Kāyaviññatti explores what the meaning and characteristics of the nature of thing by showing different ways of hand gesture. The word ‘Mudrā’ in Sanskrit language and “mudda” in Pāli is the most fundamental key in studying the image, statue and relief. Moreover, mudrā denotes very fundamental and delicate innate meaning. Some mudras depict what the meaning of the nature of thing with one hand, two hands, four, five or ten hands. The aims are to realize why the mudra styles are placed there and to keep the works of arts. This is because the mudra styles show a part of the history of belief, religion and civilization. The eight prominence mudrā styles are explored from different points of view such as Buddhist Art & Architecture. This paper hopes to be useful as a part for maintaining the Buddhist Art & Architecture. Not only the mind –set to treasure and to maintain the cultural heritage of our country; but also to learn, to promote the Buddhist Art & Architecture sectors in different times. In this research, the data were collected by using library research and field research. Historical and descriptive methods were used to get data.

Key words: eight mudra, hand gesture.

Introduction

When studying the images and statues of ancient Pagan, Pyi, Hanlingyi, and Tagaung period fingers and toes of these images and statues are found to arrange with the same size exactly as that of human. According to the Professor *Poduvāl* statement, mudra can be divided into three, namely, mudra relating to astrological treatises, (108) of kinds of mudra relating to *tantarāyāna* and (64) kinds of mudra relating to worldly arts. Of these kinds of mudra the most distinct and used most are (45) kinds. And there are basically about (50) kinds of *mudrā* relating to Myanmar traditional Buddha images and statues.

Buddha images and statues built and revered by king and people during the period of Pagan can be found in the *cetiya*, stupas, cave and temple in Pagan up today. The most distinct facts for venerating the images and statues of Pagan period as these images and statues were built with the characters; well-proportioned, graceful, and grand in making different styles of hand gesture, ‘*mudrā*.’

In some mudrā even the hand gesture are different according to the

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following conditions; base of the hand, arm-pit, elbow, shoulder, wrist, palm together with condition of fingers such high or low, inner or outer, facing upward or facing downward and united or apart and it leads to show the different meanings. Through the studying of images and statues built in Pagan period when *Theravāda* Buddhism started to flourish and decorating things used for adoration to these images and statues cultural history, tradition and custom, social and philosophical ideas (*Abhidhamma*) of people of Pagan then can be estimated. Among this *mudrā*, here the ten popular *mudrā* are selected to explore.

(a) *Abhaya Mudrā*

The gesture of protecting from any danger and gesture showing void of harming is called *Santida Mudrā*, *Abhayahattha*. One hand is slightly bent and elevated with the palm facing outward and fingers are rising up and spread. This kind of hand gesture is called *Abhayamudrā*, void of harming. One seeing this image can see the palm. Sometime lines and configuration of palm are showing. The elevated palm should be the same level with the breast of the image. The other hand is likely to be placed on the lap either facing upward or downward. Sometime both hands show in the gesture of *Abhaya Mudrā*.

Taking refuge in *Abhaya Mudrā* the following blessings (*maṅgalā*) will be obtained. Not to be shaken by confronting with vicissitudes of the world, free from sorrow, devoid of darkness of defilements (*kilesā*), free from all dangers and harms, free from stress and depression. *Abhaya Mudrā* can be found in the four standing Buddha images in the precinct of the Shwezigone Pagoda existing in Nyaung Oo, Shwe San Taw Pagoda and the enshrined room of the *Myazedi* Pagoda at the entrance of Myinkabar village as well.

(b) *Jhāna Mudrā*

In this *jhāna Mudrā* both hands are placing on the lap with both palms facing upward with the right palm on the left palm and in the relaxing style with no stress. It is a kind of entering in the *jhāna* absorption. It means to show the *jhāna dhamma* of the *bodhipakkhiya dhamma*, the factors of enlightenment. It, indeed, is depicting the conduct of calm meditation practice (*samatha*).

Jhāna Mudrā style can be seen in the image standing in the middle of the Shwe San Taw Pagoda precinct south to the old Pagan city and twenty eight

Buddha images existing in the precinct of Nagarum Pagoda south to the Myinkabar Village.

By venerating the images and statues showing the *Jhāna Mudrā* mental illness can be cured, free from sorrow and lamentation, mind will be calm and serene, development of wisdom, easy to realize the true *dhamma*, easy to emancipation, accomplishing of ten kinds of siddhi and extinguishing of all the effect of evil can be obtained.

(c) *Dāna Mudrā*

This kind of *Mudrā* is just like the gesture of doing charity, giving blessing, and rewarding. The right hand is placing downward to the earth and palm is facing outward. Fingers are spreading and depicting something is about to give. Its desired meaning is that this kind of *Mudrā* urges those come to venerate should accept what the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Samgha* give.

One who builds and venerates these *Dāna Mudrā* Buddha image or statue will be the topmost in economy such as to get the abundant in gain, gold, silver, jewels, elephant and horse etc. and easy to get back the debt.

(d) *Dhammacakka Mudrā*

In this kind of *Mudrā* the Buddha is delivering the first sermon (turning the wheel of the *Dhamma*). It is taking the gesture of about to set the wheel in which the right thumb and forefinger are touching with left thumb and forefinger and the right hand is going to turn the wheel.

Mural paintings of the *Apaeyatanā* cave temple south to the Myinkabar Village and in the precinct of the Nagarum Pagoda of Pagan and stone images of the Buddha are in the style of *Dhammacakka Mudrā*. One who builds and venerates the Buddha images showing the *Dhammacakka Mudrā* will be wise and achieve the true Dhamma, free of skeptical doubt, free from all the sufferings and obtain prosperity and happiness. Moreover, one will overcome all the dangers and harms and having wide spread influence.

(e) *Bhūmiphassa Mudrā*

In this *Mudrā*, the right hand is hanging down below the right knee and the palm is facing inward with all the fingers are spreading out and touching the earth.

The left hand is placing on the lap with the palm is facing upward. It is called the style of calling the earth as witness. Sometime either alms bowl or something is placing in the left hand.

The appearance of this kind of mudra is according to the ancient saying; it goes thus, when *Gotama* Buddha was staying on the throne of *Aparājita pallaṅga* after having enlightenment at the root of Bodhi tree the *Māra* came to fight against the Buddha. At that time the Buddha had victory over the army of *Māra* by calling the earth as witness. To illustrating this event of the Buddha's victory this *Mudrā* is showing. The great Buddha images of the Kabar Aye Pagoda in Yangon, in the museum of the world Buddhist University and Buddha images of the Kyauktawgyi Pagoda in *Amarapūra* are the *Bhūmiphassa Mudrā*.

One who builds and venerates the Buddha images showing *Bhūmiphassa Mudrā* can win over all the enemies, success in all law cases, win over wild elephant, horse and earth, being brave, powerful and glory.

(f) *Mahākaruṇā Mudrā*

This *Mudrā* depicting the fulfilling the perfection (*pāramī*) of the Buddha for many incalculable worlds because of his great compassion for all beings and making the solemn act of saying the truth by taking the earth as witness. It also depicts the perfection of wisdom (*paññāpāramī*), and perfection of truthfulness (*sacca pāramī*).

The Buddha images showing the *Mahākaruṇā Mudrā* with his right hand can be seen in the small notes in the external path way of the *Ānandā* Pagoda in the old Pagan city. One who builds and venerates the Buddha image with this *Mahākaruṇā Mudrā* can get those who can help and rescue him, having all the danger and problems will be extinguished, win in the law case, having many followers who admired him and appearance of those who can honor him.

(g) *Yoga Mudrā*

In this *Mudrā* the Buddha is sitting crossed legged and the right palm is placing on the left palm. Both hands are putting on the lap. It depicts the perfection of *jhāna* (*jhāna Pāramī*), the perfection of wisdom (*paññā pāramī*), the perfection of renunciation (*nekkhama pāramī*), the perfection of energy (*vīriya pāramī*) and the perfection of resolution (*adhiṭṭhāna pāramī*).

Mural paintings of the Gupyaugyi Pagoda that is near the Myaceti Pagoda at the entrance of Myinkabar Village out setting of the old Pagan city are the *Yoga Mudrā*. One who builds and venerates the Buddha image showing *Yoga Mudrā* can appease the incoming sorrow and lamentation, easy to realize true *Dhamma* by development of wisdom, easy to win the calm meditation, emancipating through accomplishing of ten kinds of siddhi and extinguishing of all the effect of evil.

(h) *Varada Mudrā*

In this *Mudrā*, the Buddha image has the right hand hanging down with the palm facing outward and spreading of all the fingers. The left hand is placing on the lap. It depicts the meaning of all the wishes would be fulfilled absolutely. Therefore, this kind of *Vara Mudrā* or *Varada Mudrā* can be found in the wish fulfilling Pagodas.

One who builds and venerates the Buddha images showing *Vara Mudrā* or *Varada Mudrā* achieves what he wish for, the answering of the wish for getting son, succeed in making resolution of truth, coming into contact with superior beings, get promotion, wealthy, getting more interest in trading and getting many followers.

Conclusion

When studying *Mudrā* the origin of *Mudrā*, the sects and view using the *Mudrā* at present, ceremonial usage and how to prepare for ceremony should be studied in depth. Moreover, the images and statues relating to the *Mudrā* and mural paintings should be studied in detail. In general the art of sculpture are showing the religious ceremonies.

The philosophical essence of the nature (*Abhidhamma*) of each *Mudrā* should be emphasized in studying leads to the more exact and impregnable answer. Therefore, while the study of images, statues, and relief and mural paintings or in other word Iconography their meanings and nature are explored in the followings. *Mudrā* is to be interested that let the author has to mention with the pen weapon as a blessing words.



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Figure-1, Abhaya Mudrā



Figure-2, Jhāna Mudrā



Figure-3, Dāna Mudrā



Figure-4, *Dhammacakka Mudrā*



Figure-5, Bhūmiphassa Mudrā



Figure-6, Mahākaruṇā Mudrā



Figure-7, Yoga Mudrā

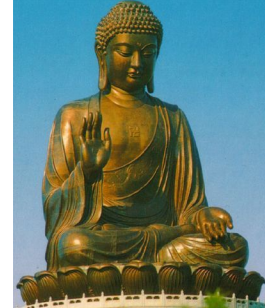


Figure-8, Vara Mudrā (or) Varada Mudrā

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