



**The fivefold eye of the Buddha in Pāli Canon and Commentaries**

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**Article Info**

Article History:

Received 02 August 2020

Accepted 21 November  
2020

Issue Published Online  
01 January 2021

**Key Words:**

Theravāda Buddhism  
fivefold-eye  
Critical  
spiritual insight  
wisdom

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Journal homepage:

<http://journals.sjp.ac.lk/index.php/vjhss>

<http://doi.org/10.31357/fhss/vjhss.v06i01.03>

VJHSS (2021), Vol. 06  
(01), pp. 29-42

ISSN 1391-1937

ISSN 2651-0367 (Online)

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**ABSTRACT**

*In the early strata of Buddhist literature, the Buddha is depicted as the man perfected, who is sometimes referred to as 'one who endowed with eye' (cakkhumanta). (Suttanipāta verses 160, 405 & 540; Dīghanikāya II 123, 166, 167 & 256; Dhammapāda verse 273). 'Endowed with eyes' could be interpreted as 'spiritual insight' or 'wisdom'. In the later Pāli literature, this concept was allegorically referred to as 'fivefold'. However, the epithet has not always been associated with the Buddha, and other mendicants were often referred to as cakkumanta (Dīghanikāya II 254; Dhammapāda verse 273). For example, in the Mahāsamaya sutta of Dīghanikāya, it had been used to describe monks in general. In the modern field of the Theravāda Buddhism, less attention has been given to the concept of the fivefold eye of the Buddha. An extensive search for scholarly works in this area will startle a serious researcher by its glaring omission. A brief mention is found in Toshiichi Endo's book on 'Buddha in Theravāda Buddhism: A Study of the Concept of Buddha in the Pāli Commentaries' (2002). He touched on the concept as explained in the Pāli commentaries, skipping over the issue of origins and development of the concept. Therefore, my primary goal here is (i) to explore the concept of the fivefold eye of the Buddha in the Pāli commentaries, and (ii) to attempt to trace its origins and development. I argue that the fivefold eyes of the Buddha developed in the process of apotheosis of the Buddha, which was prompted by emerging challenges of different religious and social challenges, particularly devotionalism of Brahmanism. It is a textual study. The main source of this study is Pāli canon and commentaries. It also referred to the Mahāvastu-Avādāna in order to show a historical development and a comparative analysis of the fivefold eyes of the Buddha.*

## 1. Introduction

Both the Pāli and Sanskrit Buddhist literature, such as the *Mahāniddeśa* (hereafter referred only as *Niddeśa*) and the *Mahāvastu-Avadāna* (hereafter referred as *Mahāvastu*) respectively, are unanimous on the point that the fivefold eye are unique (*asādhāraṇa*) to the perfectly enlightened Buddhas, not shared by individually enlightened Buddhas (*pratyekabuddha*), *Arhats* and spiritually immature worldlings. (Mahāvastu I 159: *pañca cakṣuṇi samyaksambuddhānāṃ bhavanti asādhāraṇāni pratyekabuddhebhyaḥ arhantebhyaḥ śaikṣebhyaḥ sarvabālaprthagjanebhya iti*). In Pāli literature, two different lists of the fivefold eye of the Buddha are found: (1) In the *Niddeśa*, the list is - (a) physical-eye (*maṃsa-cakkhu*), (b) divine-eye (*dibba-cakkhu*), (c) wisdom-eye (*pañña-cakkhu*), (d) Buddha-eye (*buddha-cakkhu*) and (e) all seeing-eye (*samanta-cakkhu*) (Mahāniddeśa 354). (2) In all the Pāli commentarial literature, the list is (a) Buddha-eye (*buddha-cakkhu*), (b) all-seeing-eye (*samanta-cakkhu*), (c) knowledge-eye (*ñāṇa-cakkhu*), (d) divine-eye (*dibba-cakkhu*) and (e) *dhamma*-eye (*dhamma-cakkhu*) (Dhammasaṅgani Aṭṭhakathā (Dhs-A) 306, Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā (Paṭis-A) I 77; Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā (It-A) I 99; Saṃyuttanikāya Aṭṭhakathā (SN-A) II 354: *tesu buddhacakkhu samantacakkhu ñāṇacakkhu dibbacakkhu dhammacakkhū ti pañvidhaṃ paññacakkhu*). The second one becomes the standard list. The *Mahāvastu* enumerates the list as (a) physical-eye (*mānsa-cakṣuḥ*), (b) divine-eye (*divya-cakṣuḥ*), (c) wisdom-eye (*prajñā-cakṣuḥ*), (d) *dharma*-eye (*dharma-cakṣuḥ*) and (e) Buddha-eye (*buddha-cakṣuḥ*) (Mahāvastu-Avadāna I 159).

## 2. Materials and Methods

This investigative articles explores the concept of the fivefold eye of the Buddha in the Pāli commentaries and attempts to trace the origins and development of the concept.

While the aim is not to reach an absolute conclusion of the origins of fivefold eye of the Buddha, it will endeavor to examine different lists of the fivefold eye in the Pāli literature as well as in *Mahāvastu*. In doing so, it is hoped that the outcome from revealing the specificity of the fivefold eye of the Buddha will clarify the history of apotheosis of the Buddha. It elucidates how the concept appears in the *Niddeśa*, and how the list was changed in the Pāli commentaries. In this article, I suggest that apotheosis of the Buddha developed partly as appropriate response to emerging challenges of different religious and social challenges in the later development history of Buddhism. Hence, the fivefold eye of the Buddha appeared in the process of the apotheosis of the Buddha.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. The Fivefold eye in the Pāli Tradition

In the *Niddeśa*, the physical-eye constitutes first of the fivefold eye of the Buddha. It is explained that the Buddha's physical eyes are similar to the eyes of other human beings. However, Buddha's physical eyes are distinctive in terms of their formation, pleasantness, and functioning. In the Pāli commentaries, the physical eyes further consist of two parts, namely, *sasambhāra-cakkhu* (compounded organ) and *pasāda-cakkhu* (sentient organ) (Dhs-A 306). These two terms refer to the totality of physical eyes with its sensitivity. According to the *Niddeśa*, the physical eyes of the Buddha have five colors: blue, yellow, red, black, and white (Niddeśa I 354-355 *maṃsacakkhumhipi bhagavato pañca vaṇṇā saṃvijjanti – nīlo ca vaṇṇo, pītako ca vaṇṇo, lohītako ca vaṇṇo, kaṇho ca vaṇṇo, odāto ca vaṇṇo*). His eyebrows were very blue (Niddeśa I 354-355: *akkhilomāni ca bhagavato yattha ca akkhilomāni patitṭhitāni taṃ nīlaṃ hoti sunīlaṃ*). The Buddha's eyes were pleasing (*pāsādikaṃ*) and pleasant (*dassaneyyaṃ*) like the *ummāra* (Skt: *udumbara*) flower (This is a kind of flower which is not known today).

Compared to others' eyes, his eyes were much more attractive, yellow and mesmerizing like the *kaṇikara* flowers. (This is a kind of yellow flower). They have been compared to the *osadhi* star (*osadhi-tāraka-samāna*). The *osadhi* star is said to be a morning star with its white brilliance (Pali-English Dictionary (PED) viz. *osadha*). Both bones of the eyes are red similar to *indagopaka*. (Indagopaka refers to a sort of insect that observed to come out of the ground after rain see PED viz. *indagopaka*).

It is mentioned that the Buddha obtained these eyes because of his past good *kamma*. Moreover, the Buddha could see with his eyes the things that exist within a *yojana* around him both during day time and night (*samantā yojanaṃ passati divā ceva rattiṇca*) (Niddesa I 355). And even in the event of fourfold darkness such as the darkness after the sunset (*sūriyo vā atthaṅgato hoti*), the fortnight darkness (*kālapakkho ca uposatho hoti*), the darkness that exists in a dense jungle (*tibbo ca vanasaṅḍo hoti*) and the darkness that arises due to large dark untimely rain clouds (*mahā ca akālamegho abbhūṭṭhito hoti*). Furthermore, his visual side is not obstructed by a wall (*kūṭo*), by a door (*kavātaṃ*), by a stone parapet wall (*pākāro*), by a mountain (*pabbato*) or by a thicket or a creeper (*latā*) (Niddesa 355). The brilliance of his eyesight is compared to a person, who is skillful at picking out a marked sesame seed placed in a cartload of sesame seeds: "having marked a single sesame seed and would place it in a cartload of sesame seeds, he would be able to pick out that sesame seed. Such is the fully purified natural physical eye of the Fortunate One" (Niddesa 355 *ekañce tilaphalaṃ nimittaṃ katvā tilavāhe pakkhipeyya. taññeva tilaphalaṃ uddhareyya. evaṃ parisuddhaṃ bhagavato pākatikaṃ maṃsacakkhu*). It is interesting to note here that the Pāli commentators do not uphold this view. Therefore, in the Pāli commentaries, we do not find this interpretation of the physical eye of the Buddha. Moreover, in the Pāli commentaries, as it has been already mentioned, the physical

eye of the Buddha is extracted from the list of the five eyes of the Buddha. A similar view is seen in the *Mahāvastu*, such as:

The physical eyes of the *Tathāgatas* were endowed with such brilliance, were endowed subtle vision and were endowed with a vision of reality. Such physical eyes do not exist in bodies of other sentient beings. When *Bodhisattva*-s have attained a vision of everything, their range of vision is unobstructed up to whatever extent of space they desire to see. What is the reason for this? It is because of the accumulation of huge of merit (Mahāvastu I 158: *tatra bho dhutadharmadhara mānsacakṣus tathāgatānāṃ // yāye prabhāye samanvāgataṃ yāye śūkṣmadarśanāye samanvāgataṃ yāye tattvadarśanāye samanvāgataṃ tan mānsacakṣu anyasya satvasya satvakāye nāsti //prāpte ca sarvadarśitve bodhisatvā yāvattakam avakāśam avalokayitum icchanti taṃ darśanaṃ tatra apratihataṃ pravartate // kiṃ kāraṇaṃ // vipulakuśalasamcitavāt*).

The close proximity in interpretation of the Buddha's physical eye in the *Niddesa* and the *Mahāvastu* suggests one influenced the other.

The divine eye (*dibba-cakkhu*) is the second in the list. The interpretation of the divine eye consists of two parts in the *Niddesa*. The first part is similar as it is explained in the *suttas*:

With the purified divine eye, which surpasses the human, the Buddha sees beings passing away and arising, inferior, superior, beautiful, not beautiful, in good destines and in bad destines according to their *kamma*, thus: "these beings who have engaged in physical misconduct, who have engaged in vocal misconduct, and who have engaged in mental misconduct, those who blame the noble ones, those who hold wrong views, and those who undertake professions based on wrong view, they, after death, would have been reborn in the plane of misery, in a bad destination, in the

lower world, in hell. But those beings who have engaged in physical good conduct, those who have engaged in vocal good conduct, and those who have engaged in mental good conduct, those who do not blame noble ones, those who hold a right view, and those undertake professions based on right views, with the breakup of the body, after death, they have been reborn in a good destination, in a heavenly world.” Thus with the purified divine eye, which surpasses the human, he sees beings passing away and arising, inferior and superior, beautiful and not beautiful, in good destinies and in bad destinies according to their *kamma* (Niddesa 356).

In the *Niddesa*, it is further explained that the Buddha has ability to see the different world systems through divine eye if he so wishes: “If the Fortunate One wishes, he would see one world system; ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, a hundred world systems; a thousand-fold minor world system, a two thousand middle world system, a three thousand world system and a great thousand world systems. He is capable of seeing as much as he wants to see.” (Niddesa 356). The author of *Niddesa* may have been influenced by the passage in the *Aṅguttaranikāya* (AN), which mentions the Buddha’s ability to hear the voices of different world systems. The discourses mention that the ability of the Buddha in conveying his voice to different world systems surpasses the ability of his disciples: “Ānanda the Tathāgata can convey his voice as far as he wants in a thousand-to-the-third-power great world system.” (AN I 228: *ākāṅkhamāno Ānanda tathāgato ti-sahassī mahāsahassī-lokadhātum sarena viññāpeyy yāvatā pana ākāṅkheyyā’ti*). The commentary to the AN which highlights this point, as pointed out by Bhikkhu Bodhi, further states that “the Tathāgata-s, having fulfilled the ten perfections and the attained omniscience, are immeasurable. The domain, range, and power of a disciple is one thing; the range of the Buddhas is quite different” (Bodhi, 2012, p. 1661, footnote 511). This passage in the AN

suggests exaltation of the Buddha that has started quite early in an unorganized and scattered manner. In the *Mahāvastu*, the divine eye (*divya-cakṣuḥ*) of the Buddha is explained superior, wide ranging, and extensive than the eyes of deities of the earth, *yaksa*, *raksasa*, and deities of the sensual realm and form realm (The Mahāvastu I 159: *yena cakṣuṣā bhaumyā devās ca yakṣās ca rākṣasās ca kāmāvacarās ca rūpāvacarās ca devāḥ viśiṣṭataram ākāṅkhamāno Ānanda tathāgato ti-sahassī mahāsahassī-lokadhātum sarena viññāpeyy yāvatā pana ākāṅkheyyā’ti*).

The wisdom eye (*paññā-cakkhu*) refers to the wisdom of the Buddha. It appears in the early Buddhist discourses as one of the three eyes: “monks, there are three eyes. What are three? Physical eye, divine eye and wisdom eye” (DN III 231& Itivuttaka (It) 55: *tīṇimāni, bhikkhave, cakkhūni. katamāni tīṇi? maṃsacakkhu, dibbacakkhu, paññacakkhu*). In the Pāli *Nikāya*-s, wisdom eye literally refers to the comprehension of Buddhist teachings. In the *Samyuttanikāya* (SN) it is said “oh householder! it is gain for you, who has the penetration of wisdom eye in those profound words of the Buddha” (SN IV 292: *lābhāte gahapati suladdha te gahapati yassa te gambhīra buddhavacane paññacakkhu kamati*). Moreover, in the AN it is said that one who has excessive greed (*rāgavepullattam*), excessive hatred (*dosavepullattam*) and excessive delusion (*mohavepullattam*) does not thoroughly penetrate in the profound (*dhamma*) through wisdom eye (AN II 14: *gambhīresu kho panassa ṭhānāṭhānesu paññacakkhu na kamati*). Although a systematic manner of differentiating wisdom of the Buddha from the disciples of his disciples is not found in the early Buddhist discourses, nevertheless there are numerous passages in early Buddhist discourses that explicitly show that wisdom of the Buddha surpasses the wisdom of his disciples. In the *Niddesa*, attempts were made to show a superiority of Buddha’s wisdom:

The Fortunate One is of great wisdom, of extensive wisdom, of joyous wisdom, of swift wisdom, of sharp wisdom and of penetrating wisdom. He was skilled in making distinctions, one with analytical knowledge, one who has attained the analytical knowledge, one who has attained the fourfold of self-confidence, who possesses the ten powers, a bull-like man (strong man), a manly lion, a manly elephant, a manly thoroughbred, a manly draft animal, one of boundless knowledge, boundless power, boundless glory. ... The Blessed One is one who has developed the path which not arisen before, one who has created the path which was not created before, one who has taught the path which was not taught before. He is the knower of the path, the finder of the path, the one skilled in the path. His disciples presently live following the path and acquire it afterward. (Niddesa I 356: *bhagavā mahāpañño puthupañño hāsapañño javanapañño tikkhapañño nibbedhikapañño paññappabhedakusalo pabhinnañāṇo adhigatapaṭisambhido catuvesārajjappatto dasaladhārī purisāsabho purisīho purisanāgo purisajāṇño purisadhoreyho anantañāṇo anantatejo anantayao aḍḍho mahaddhano dhanavā netā vinetā anunetā saññāpeta nijjhāpetā pekkhetā pasādetā. So hi bhagavā anuppanassa maggassa uppādetā asañjātassa maggassa sañjānetā anakkhātassa maggassa akkhātā, maggaññū maggakovidū . maggānugā ca pana etarahi sāvakā viharanti pacchā samannāgato).*

It further says that there is nothing unknown to the Buddha (*añātamaṃ*), unseen (*adiṭṭhamaṃ*), not experienced (*aviditamaṃ*), not realized (*asacchikatamaṃ*), untouched (*aphusitamaṃ*) through wisdom (*paññāya*). All *dhammas* of past, present, and future in every mood appear under the score of knowledge of the Buddha (Niddesa I 357: *atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ upādāya sabbe dhammā sabbākārena buddhassa bhagavato*

*ñānamukkhe āpātham āgacchanti*). The Buddha has infallible knowledge with regard to the past, infallible knowledge with regard to the future and infallible knowledge with regard to the present. All physical, vocal and, mental acts are based preceded by knowledge. To whatever extent to be known, his knowledge is to that extent.

In the *Niddesa*, three new aspects of Buddha's wisdom are mentioned: (a) attainment of the analytical knowledge (*adhigatapaṭisambhido*), (b) attainment of four types of self-confidence (*catuvesārajjappatto*), and (c) attainment of the ten powers (*dasabaladhārī*). These have been introduced to distinguish the Buddha's wisdom from the wisdom of his disciples. We do not find this presentation either in the Pāli commentaries, or in the *Mahāvastu*. In the commentary to the *It*, it is mentioned that among these eyes, it is the eye of wisdom which is supreme because a noble one who has wisdom eye is liberated and is fully perfectly liberated (Niddesa I 357).

The Buddha-eye (*buddha-cakkhu*) is explained as the eye of the Buddha through which the Buddha surveys the world into the nature of other beings. It was developed in the later stratum of the Pāli *Nikāya*-s. For instance, in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* of the DN, it is mentioned that the Buddha surveys the world with Buddha-eye to see different types of human beings in the world:

Oh monks! When Fortunate One, the Worthy one, the perfectly Enlightened Buddha Vipassi surveying the world with the Buddha-eye, he perceived beings with little dust and beings with much dust, beings with sharp faculties and being with dull faculties, beings with good qualities and beings with bad qualities, beings who are easy to teach and beings who are hard to teach, and some who were dwelling seeing fear and blame in the other world (DN II 38: *addasā kho bhikkhave vipassī bhagaā arahaṃ sammāsambuddha buddhocakkhunā lokam volokento, satte*

*apparajakkhe mahārajakkhe tikkhindriye mudindriye svākāre dvākāre suviññāpaye duviññāpaye appekacce paroloka-vejja-dassāvino viharante.* Similar statements are found in MN I 169; SN I 138 & Vinaya Piṭaka I 6).

Upali Karunaratane, in his article in the Encyclopedia of Buddhism, comments that the concept of Buddha-eye was in the early Buddhist discourse denoting a special knowledge of the Buddha. However, when monks started to study the knowledge of the Buddha, the term was treated in a scholastic manner. Moreover, in the *Niddesa* for the first time, the Buddha-eye is defined as one of the five eyes of the Buddha (Encyclopaedia of Buddhism Vol III 388, viz. *buddhacakkhu*). In the *Niddesa*, it is further mentioned that the Buddha can perceive characteristics and temperaments of people such as “*this person has a lustful temperament*” (*ayaṃ puggalo rāgacarito*), “*this person has a hateful temperament*” (*ayaṃ puggalo dosacarito*), “*this person has a deluded temperament*” (*ayaṃ puggalo mohacarito*), “*this person has discursive temperament*” (*ayaṃ puggalo vitakkacarito*), “*this person has a faithful temperament*” (*ayaṃ puggalo saddhācarito*), and “*this person has an intelligent temperament*” (*ayaṃ puggalo ñāṇacarito*) (Niddesa 359-360). Moreover, the Buddha teaches *dhamma* in accordance with the characteristics and temperament of audiences, which helped audiences to comprehend and apply the *dhamma* effectively (Niddesa 360). In the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* the Buddha’s eye is equated with knowledge of the Buddha (*yaṃ buddhacakkhu taṃ buddhañāṇaṃ, yaṃ buddhañāṇaṃ taṃ buddhacakkhu*) (Paṭisambhidāmagga II 32). In the Pāli commentaries, the term *buddhacakkhu* further defined into two, viz. (*indriyaparopariyattañāṇa*) and (*āsayānusayañāṇa*) (Buddhavaṃsa Aṭṭhakathā (Bv-A) 34; Paṭis-A I 195 & Udāna Aṭṭhathakathā (Ud-A) 206: *buddhacakkhunāti*

*indriyaparopariyattañāṇena ca āsayānusayañāṇena ca. imesaṃ dvinnam ñāṇaṃ buddhacakkhūti nāmaṃ*). The *indriyaparopariyattañāṇa* refers to the Buddha’s knowledge of understanding as higher than the level of the faculties of other human beings (Bv-A 34: *katamaṃ tathāgatassa indriyaparopariyatta ñāṇaṃ? idha tathāgato satte passati apparajakkhe mahārajakkhe tikkhindriye mudindriye svākāre dvākāre suviññāpaye duviññāpaye appekacce paralokavajjabhayadassāvino appekacce na paralokavajjabhayadassāvino*) and the *āsayānusayañāṇa* refers to knowledge of understanding of diverse inclinations and dispositions of other human beings (Bv-A 34: *katamaṃ tathāgatassa sattānaṃ āsayānusaye ñāṇaṃ? idha tathāgato sattānaṃ āsayam jānāti, anusayam jānāti, caritaṃ jānāti, adhimuttiṃ jānāti, bhābhābhabbe satte pajānāti*). These two are unique to the Buddhas because they are not shared by disciples (Paṭis-A I 56: *ñāṇāni asādhāraṇāni sāvakehi*). The above-cited discussion shows that in the early discourses, the concept of the Buddha’s eye was employed denoting wisdom of the Buddha. Subsequently, in the post-canonical and commentaries, many other interpretations are assigned to the term. All different interpretations are aimed at distinguishing the Buddha from others viz. the *paccekabuddha*-s and the *arahant*-s.

The *Mahāvastu* defines the Buddha-eye as one of the unique eighteen attributes of the Buddha (*aṣṭādaśāveṇikā buddhadharmāḥ*):

Therein what is the Buddha’s eye? Eighteen unique attributions of the Buddha, namely, the Buddha has infallible knowledge and vision with regard to the past. The Buddha has infallible knowledge and vision with regard to the future. The Buddha has infallible knowledge and vision with regard to the present. All physical acts are based on knowledge and preceded by knowledge. All vocal acts are based on knowledge and preceded by knowledge. All mental acts are based on knowledge and

preceded by knowledge. There is no decrease of resolution; there is no decrease of effort, there is no decrease of mindfulness, there is no decrease of concentration, there is no decrease of wisdom, there is a decrease of liberation. There is no faltering; there is no impetuosity, there is no absence of mindfulness, there is no concentrated mind ....The knowledge with regard to these eighteen unique factors is called Buddha-eye (Mahāvastu I 159: *tatra katamaṃ buddhacakṣuḥ // aṣṭādaśāveṇikā buddhadharmāḥ // tadyathā atīte aṃśe tathāgatasya apratihataṃ jñānadarśanaṃ / anāgate aṃśe apratihataṃ jñānadarśanaṃ / pratyutpanne aṃśe apratihataṃ jñānadarśanaṃ / sarvaṃ kāyakarma jñānapūrvaṃgamaṃ jñānānuparivartī / sarvaṃ vācākarma jñānapūrvaṃgamaṃ jñānānuparivartī / sarvaṃ manokarma jñānapūrvaṃgamaṃ jñānānuparivartī / nāsti chandasya hāniḥ / nāsti vīryasya hāniḥ / nāsti smṛtiye hāniḥ / nāsti samādhiye hāniḥ / nāsti prajñāye hāniḥ / nāsti vimuktiye hāniḥ / nāsti khalitaṃ / nāsti ravitaṃ / nāsti muṣitasmṛtitā / nāsti asamāhitaṃ cittaṃ / nāsti apratisaṃkhyāya upekṣā / nāsti nānātvasaṃjñā // yaṃ imeṣu aṣṭādaśasvāveṇikeṣu buddhadharmeṣu jñānam idam ucyate buddhacakṣur iti //*).

A similar explanation is found in the *Niddesa* with regard to wisdom-eye, but it does not mention anything about the eighteen unique qualities of the Buddha. Reference to the eighteen qualities of the Buddha in this context shows how the *Mahāvastu* differs from the *Niddesa* when it explains the Buddha-eye. The attribution of these eighteen qualities, as we see later, is aimed at distinguishing the Buddha from the other human beings.

The All Seeing Eye (*samanta-cakkhu*) is explained as the omniscience of the Buddha (*samantacakkhu vuccati sabbaññutaññaṃ*) (Niddesa I 360). It further mentions:

The Fortunate is endowed, completely endowed with, has attained, and perfectly attained all knowledge of omniscience. He has nothing unseen, unrecognized, and unknown. He has directly known everything whatever is possible to know. Therefore, the Buddha is endowed with all-seeing eye (Niddesa 360: *bhagavā sabbaññutaññaṇena upeto samupeto upagato samupagato upapanna samupapanno samannāgato, na tassa adiṭṭhamidhatthi kiñci, atho aviññātamaññitabbaṃ sabbaṃ abhiññāsi yadatthi neyyaṃ, tathāgato ta samantacakkhū*).

The other Pāli commentarial passages do not add anything more, other than to repeat the same (Dhs-A 306; Paṭis-A I 77; It-A I 99). The concept of omniscience is a later attribution assigned to the historical Buddha. The early Buddhist discourses show that the Buddha refuted the concept of omniscience as claimed by his contemporary religious teachers such as Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta, and Purāna Kassapa. According to the *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* (MN), the Buddha had met some followers of Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta. They informed the Buddha that their teacher, the Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta, is omniscient and all-seeing and claims to have complete knowledge and vision which are always present whether walking or standing or sleeping or awake, and that the said knowledge and vision are continuously and uninterruptedly presented to him (MN I 519: *nigaṇṭho, āvuso, nāthaputto sabbaññū sabbadassāvī aparisesaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ paṭijānāti “carato ca me tiṭṭhato ca suttassa ca jāgarassa ca satataṃ samitaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ paccupaṭṭhitam* ). In the *Sandaka Sutta* of the MN, the Buddha rejected such claims and rather humorously said:

Here, Sandaka, some teachers claim to be omniscient and all-seeing, to have complete knowledge and vision whether walking or standing or sleeping or awake yet with such knowledge and vision, they inadvertently

enter empty houses and fail to alms food, are bitten by dogs, meet with wild elephants, wild horses, wild bulls, ask name and clan of women or men, ask name of villages or towns, and ask ways to villages and towns (MN I 519).

In another instance, a wanderer named Vacchagotta informed that he has heard from others that the Buddha has also claimed the omniscient knowledge: “The recluse Gotama claims to be omniscient and all-seeing, to have complete knowledge and vision quoting thus: Whether I am walking or standing or sleeping or awake, knowledge and vision are continuously and uninterrupted present to me” (MN I 412: *sutaṃ metaṃ, bhante ‘samaṇo gotamo sabbaññū sabbadassāvī, aparisesaṃ ñānadassanaṃ paṭijānāti, carato ca me tiṭṭhato ca suttassa ca jāgarassa ca satataṃ samitaṃ ñānadassanaṃ paccupaṭṭhitanti*). And he inquired from the Buddha whether such claims are true. The Buddha replied: “Vaccha! those who say thus do not say what has been said by me, but misrepresent me with what is untrue and contrary to fact” (MN I 412). And the Buddha stated that he has three knowledge (*tevijjo samaṇo gotamo*). In the *Kaṇṇakathala Sutta* of the MN, the Buddha said: “there is no situation where a recluse or a Brahmin who knows all, who sees all, simultaneously” (MN II 127: *na’tthi samaṇo vā brāhmaṇo vā yo sakideva sabbaññassati sabbaṃ dakkhīti, n’etaṃ ṭhānaṃ vijjati*). The commentary to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* mentions that omniscience arises based on adverting of mind to any object that the Buddha wishes to know (*āvajjanappaṭibaddhattā sabbadhammāṇaṃ*) (Paṭis-A II 429). The *Milindapañha* also records a similar statement. Venerable Nāgasena explains knowledge of knowing all is not always and continually present in the Buddha because the omniscience of the Buddha means he knows when he pays attention to what he wants to know (*Milindapañha* 102: *bhagavā sabbaññū, na ca bhagavato satataṃ samitaṃ ñānadassanaṃ paccupaṭṭhitam, āvajjanappaṭibaddham bhagavato*

*sabbaññutañāṇaṃ, āvajjitvā yadicchakaṃ jānātīti*). Thus the Pāli commentators skillfully attributed omniscience to the Buddha without contradicting the early Buddhist discourses. In the *Mahāvastu*, the *samantacakkhu* is not listed, rather it mentions the eye of *dharma* (*dharma-cakṣuḥ*).

The *dhamma*-eye (*dhamma-cakkhu*) is excluded in the *Niddesa* from the list of the fivefold eyes, but in other Pāli commentaries it is included instead of physical-eye. The concept frequently occurs in the Pāli canon often associating with the awakening of disciples. In fact, the Pāli commentaries also relate *dhamma-cakkhu* to the first three paths and the three fruits of stages of the theory of the four stages to *Arahantship* (*tayo maggo tīni ca phalāni dhammacakkhu nāma hoti*: Dhs-A 306; Paṭis-A I 77; It-A I 99; SN-A II 354 & Bv-A 33), or simply the lower three paths (*heṭṭhimāmaggattaya saṅkhatam dhammacakkhu nāma*: Dhs-A 306; DN-A I 183), or the four paths and the three fruits (*cattāro maggā cattāri ca phalāni dhammacakkhu ti*; Majjhimanikāya Aṭṭhakathā (MN-A V 99). The four stages are not usually explained in relation to the Buddha, rather they are always presented as a soteriological path of disciples. Here, the Pāli commentators are self-contradicting. On the one hand, the fivefold eye are not shared by disciples, but the list includes *dhamma*-eye which is exclusively related to the disciples in the Pāli *Nikāya*-s. The *Mahāvastu* includes the *dhamma*-eye with a distinction between the *dhamma*-eye of the Buddha and *dhamma*-eye of the disciples. According to the *Mahāvastu*, the *dhamma*-eye of the Buddha refers to the ten powers: “what is the *dharma*-eye of the Perfectly Enlightened Buddha? It is referred to mental possession of ten powers” (Mahāvastu I 160: *tatra katamaṃ samyaksambuddhānāṃ dharmacakṣuḥ. sa daśānāṃ balānāṃ manovibhutā*). The list of tenfold power of the Buddha also appears in the Pāli

commentaries, but is not linked with the concept of *dhamma*-eye.

### 3.2. The Origin of the Concept of the Fivefold eye of the Buddha

The term *vivaṭṭa-cakkhu* which means the 'unobstructed vision' or 'wide-eye' appears several times in Sn, as an adjectival term for the Buddha: "The one with unobstructed vision taught the Dhamma which he witnessed himself, the removal of obstacles. Speak about the practice, venerable one, the *pātimokkha* and, also concentration" (Suttanipāta (Sn) verse 921: *akittayī vivaṭṭacakkhu, sakkhidhammaṃ parissayavinayaṃ/ paṭipadaṃ vadehi bhaddante, pātimokkhaṃ athavāpi samādhim*). No details of the concept is explained either in Sn or any other Pāli canonical texts. In the *Niddesa*, the concept is explained as the fivefold eye of the Buddha (*vivaṭṭacakkhūti bhagavā pañcahi cakkhūhi vivaṭṭacakkhu*) (Niddesa I 354). *The Paramatthajotikā* (Sn-A), the commentary to Sn repeats the idea as found in the *Niddesa*. It also mentions "'*vivaṭṭacakkhu*' means 'endowed with fivefold unabstracted and unhindered eyes'" (Sn-A II 563: *vivaṭṭacakkhūti vivaṭṭehi anāvaraṇehi pañcahi cakkhūhi samannāgato*; Sn-A I 42: *cakkhumāti bhagavā pakatidibbapaññāsamantabuddhacakkhūhi pañcahi cakkhūhi cakkhumā*. See also Bv-A. 33; MN-A I 81: *cakkhumatāti pañcahi cakkhūhi cakkhumantena tathāgatenā*). According to the *Mahāvastu*, the Buddha after his enlightenment under the Bodhi-tree acquired the fivefold eye (Mahāvastu I 158: *bodhimūlam upagamyā cāprāptāyāṃ sarvākārajñatāyāṃ paṃcacakṣusamanvāgatā bhavanti*).

The discrepancy in the lists of the fivefold eye of the Buddha shows that either they were developed independently, or the list went through changes in later times. It is difficult to determine precisely how such discrepancy occurred in the development of Buddhist history. The lists in the *Niddesa* and the *Mahāvastu* are similar in terms of inclusion of

physical-eye of the Buddha but differ in terms of *dhamma*-eye. In the Pāli commentarial literature, physical-eye of the Buddha is removed from the list. No justification for the removal of the physical-eye of the Buddha is recorded in the Pāli commentaries. One possible reason would be the philosophical standpoint of Theravāda Buddhism. Theravāda Buddhism tries to exalt the Buddha's spiritual powers more than his physical aspects. Therefore, they may have thought including physical-eye as a special attribution of the Buddha would be unjustifiable. Once, the physical eye is removed, there is a gap in the list and they filled the gap by inserting *dhamma*-eye. On this Toshiichi Endo's observance is pertinent:

Therefore, it may be the case that the commentaries brought in *dhamma-cakkhu* in the list of the five eyes for the following reasons: First, the commentators were aware that there was a classification of the five eye of the Buddha or Buddhas which they found to be of miscellaneous nature. Then, an attempt was made to separate physical endowment of the Buddha from his spiritual attainments (Endo, 2002, p.99).

The reason for excluding *dhamma*-eye in the *Niddesa* might be due to the perception that *dhamma*-eye is generally associated with the awakening of the disciples. In a large number of passages arising of *dhamma*-eye is recognized as initial penetration of truth by a disciple. The early Buddhist discourses frequently demonstrate through conversations between the Buddha and his early disciples that lead to arising of the eye of *dhamma* in the interlocutors. The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* of the SN records the first such experience in the dispensation of the Buddha. Among the five earliest disciples, Kondañña was able to penetrate the doctrine taught by the Buddha. His penetration is marked as "*dustless and stainless vision by which the dhamma eye arose*" (*virajaṃ vitamalaṃ dhammacakkhum udapādi*) (SN V 467). Moreover, Buddhaghosa

has lined the *dhamma*-eye with the four paths (*magga*) and the four fruits (*phala*) that constitute the path of disciples. He defines the first three paths and the first three fruits as *dhamma*-eye (*tayo maggā tīnī ca phalāni dhammacakkhu nāma hoti*) (SN-A III 289; MN-A V 99). Therefore, the author of the *Niddesa* might not have included it in the list of unique attributions of the Buddha. However, other Pāli commentators have not considered this fact. This shows there were divergent opinions among Theravāda redactors and commentators regarding what are the fivefold eye of the Buddha, nevertheless they have accepted the concept of fivefold eye of the Buddha.

The three different lists of the fivefold eye of the Buddha viz. one in the *Niddesa*, one in the Pāli commentaries, and the other in the *Mahāvastu* is said to have been composed around the second century BCE to the fourth century CE. This development leads us to question which list is earlier. A precise answer to this question is, if not impossible, very difficult to determine given the nature of Buddhist texts. One would safely assume that the lists in the *Niddesa* and the *Mahāvastu-Avadāna* are earlier than the list in Pāli commentaries because both texts predate Pāli commentaries. Then the question is whether the fivefold eye of the Buddha originally developed in the *Mahāvastu-Avadāna* or in the *Niddesa*. Again a precise answer to the question is almost impossible. In order to find an answer to this question, one needs to ascertain the exact periods of the composition of the *Niddesa* and the *Mahāvastu-Avadāna*. The nature of the composition of the *Mahāvastu-Avadāna* entails difficulty to ascertaining the exact period of its composition. Many circumstances surrounding, for example, that it belonged to Lokottaravāda and was composed in Hybrid Sanskrit point to high antiquity. The contents of the text point to it as forerunner of Mahāyāna philosophy, yet many contents are common to early strata of the Pāli Canon. G. K. Nariman points out much

of the content of the *Mahāvastu* is closely related to Pāli *Nikāya*-s and in particular insofar the biography of the Buddha had been highlighted. To quote him:

Entirely in keeping with this doctrine, the biography of the Buddha, which forms the principle contents of the *Mahāvastu* is related as 'Avadana' or a miraculous history. It is clearly not thereby differentiated much from the texts of the Pali canon which are devoted to the life of the Buddha (Nariman, 1923, p.12)

Considering these circumstances Nariman concludes that 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE is as a reasonable date of the composition of the *Mahāvastu-Avadāna*, but it went through editorial process and development until the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. (Nariman, 1923, p. 18). J.J. Jones in the introduction to his translation of the *Mahāvastu-Avadāna* echoed a similar opinion. He says, "*The Mahāvastu-Avadāna is not the composition of a single author written in a well-defined period of time. Rather, it is a compilation which may have been begun in the second-century BCE. but which was not completed until the third or fourth century CE*" (Jones, 1949, p. xi). Nalinaksha Dutt, in his book *Aspects of Mahāyāna and Its Relation to Hīnayāna*, argues three stages of development of Buddhism. According to him, the first stage is pure *Hīnayāna*, and in this stage, the Buddha was a human being. Moreover, the goal of the spiritual practice was the attainment of *arahantship*. The second stage was mixed *Hīnayāna* in which the sectarian views started, the *Abhidharma*, *Jātaka*, and *Avadāna*-s were compiled, and the doctrine of *pāramitā*-s was added to Buddhological development. And this period is 350 B.C. to 100 B.C. and the final was Mahāyāna development. During this period, the doctrine of *prajñāpāramitā* was fully developed, and the doctrine of emptiness, suchness, and *dharmakāya* were added to Buddhist philosophy (Dutt, 1930, pp.34-35). If his calculation is right, the *Mahāvastu* belongs to the second stage of development.

The content of the *Mahāvastu* is a mixture of old and new materials.

On the other hand, it is also difficult to determine precisely the date of composition of the *Niddesa*. The *Saddhammapajjotikā* (Niddesa-A), the commentary to the *Niddesa* records that Sāriputta, the leading disciple of the Buddha, as the author of the *Niddesa*. A. P. Buddhadatta, the editor of the *Saddhammapajjotikā*, points out that this Sāriputta cannot be the leading disciple of the Buddha, but a later monk by named Sāriputta (Niddesa-A I vii). K. R. Norman in his book *A history of Pali Literature* argues that composition date of the *Niddesa* can be placed beginning of the third century BCE: "leaving aside the possibility of names or names of being inserted into an already existing list, the beginning of the third century B.C. would seem to be quite suitable as the date of its composition" (Norman, 1983, 86). Although there are some piecemeal antiquated passages in the *Niddesa*, many circumstances indicate that the composition of the *Niddesa* is relatively late text. Perhaps, both the *Niddesa* and the *Mahāvastu* were composed in parallel during a more or less similar period. This complicates any conclusive answer to the question, in which tradition the concept of fivefold eye of the Buddha first arose?

The spirit of the *Mahāvastu-Avadāna* is to glorify the historical Buddha in terms of his physical and spiritual attainments. The *Mahāvastu-Avadāna* has done it in an extraordinary manner. One has to remember that this text belongs to Lokottaravāda tradition, which believes in transcendental or supramundane Buddha. They came up with the theory that every aspect of the Buddha is supramundane. Therefore, they have not only glorified the Buddha's spiritual attainments but also glorified the Buddha's physical endowments in extraordinarily terms. It is possible to assume that development of the concept of fivefold eye of the Buddha came through Lokottaravāda

tradition, viz. in the *Mahāvastu*. The fivefold eye include not only spiritual insight but also his physical eyes. It is more likely the case that the portrayal of the Buddha's extraordinary spiritual and physical qualities may have influenced other Buddhist traditions too. The author of *Niddesa* might have been similarly influenced. For in the *Niddesa* also many physical endowments and spiritual insights were highlighted. For instance, it contains a fairly details account of the thirty-two marks of great man, the 'ten power of the Buddha, the fivefold eye of the Buddha, eighteen special qualities of the Buddha (*aṭṭhārasa-buddhadhammā*), and omniscience of the Buddha. In this respect, the spirit of *Niddesa* is similar to the *Mahāvastu-Avadāna*. However, in Pāli tradition, Buddha's spiritual attainments are given priority, therefore, in the Pāli commentaries, the physical eye is excluded from the list.

Another possibility is that both Pāli and Sanskrit traditions developed the concept of the fivefold eyes of the Buddha independently in the process of apotheosis of the Buddha in order to face external challenges. This period, viz. roughly the 2nd century BCE to the 4th century is the period of rising of devotionism (*bhakti*) in Brahmanism. As Surendranath Dasgupta, a well-known Sanskrit professor and Indologist shows, it is an important aspect of Brahmanic soteriology during the period of *Bhagavadgītā* devotionism. They came to hold the view that devotion to God is the only way to liberation (Dasgupta, 1961, pp. 345-54). The *bhakti* as a soteriological path may have started through the composition of *Bhagavadgītā*. Arvinda Sharma, an Indologist, is of the opinion that the *Bhagavadgītā* was composed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. (Sharma, 1986, 3). Jeaneane Fowler, in her commentary to the *Bhagavadgītā*, also considers second century BCE as the probable date of the composition of *Bhagavadgītā* (Flower, 2012, p. xxiv). Arthur Bhasham also agrees with the similar

date. He is of the opinion that the composition of *Bhagavadgītā* may have taken place around in or after 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE (Basham, 1991, pp. 95-96). Through devotionalism Brahmanism has tried to present itself as a universal religion. They started to reach all strata of society and regain its control that they lost to Buddhists. Therefore, different Buddhist traditions might have responded to *Brahmanic bhakti* movement through their own version of apotheosis of the Buddha. In that process, Buddhist traditions mutually influenced one another. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain which tradition first developed the concept of fivefold eye of the Buddha.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The investigative account detailing the concept of fivefold eye of the Buddha reveals that in the early Buddhist discourses the Buddha is often described as 'one who possesses eyes' (*cakkhumanta*). The term 'eye' signifies the Buddha's spiritual insight. The fivefold eye occurs in the early Buddhist discourses independently either with reference to the Buddha or with reference to his disciples. The concept of fivefold eye collectively did not occur in the early Buddhist discourses. And these eyes were not unique to the Buddha. The concept of fivefold eye as unique attribution of the Buddha first occurred in the *Niddesa* in the Pāli tradition and the *Mahāvastu-Avadāna* in Sanskrit Buddhism. Both texts were composed in around 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the concept of the fivefold eye of the Buddha developed during this period. It is challenging to determine precisely whether the Pāli tradition or Sanskrit tradition first initiated and then developed this concept. This paper has demonstrated the two possibilities (i) invented by Sanskrit tradition and the author of *Niddesa* borrowed the concept with slight modification, and further developed in the Pāli commentaries, (ii) both traditions have developed the concept simultaneously and in parallel during the process of apotheosis of the Buddha as a

response to external challenges such as the *Brāhmanic bhakti* movement.

#### Abbreviation

AN - Aṅguttaranikāya  
 AN-A - Aṅguttaranikāya Aṭṭhakathā  
 Bv-A - Buddhavaṃsa Aṭṭhakathā  
 Dhs-A - Dhammasaṅgīni Aṭṭhakathā  
 It - Itivuttaka  
 It-A - Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā  
 MN - Majjhimanikāya  
 MN-A - Majjhimanikāya Aṭṭhakathā  
 PED - Pali-English Dictionary  
 Paṭis - Paṭisambhidāmagga  
 Paṭis-A - Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā  
 SN - Saṃyuttanikāya  
 SN-A - Saṃyuttanikāya Aṭṭhakathā  
 Sn - Suttanipāta  
 Sn-A - Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā  
 Ud-A - Udāna Aṭṭhakathā

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