

What does Vajira-like (Vajirūpama) refer to?

In the context of interpreting commentaries of Theravāda

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1. Objectives

This paper considers the specific context in which the phrase ‘vajira-like mind (vajirūpama-citta)’ or ‘mind like a vajira’ is used in the Pāli Literature through an examination of the term vajira (skt: vajra). This phrase is considered to be the origin of the later phrase ‘vajra-like concentration (vajropama-samādhi)’ or ‘concentration like a vajra’, which has a significant meaning in Mahāyāna and Sarvāstivāda Buddhism¹⁾. Although they are referred to in different times and places, the two phrases share the same meaning, both referring to the event in which a monk becomes an Arahat as a result of destroying all defilements (pāli: kilesa, skt: kleśa)²⁾.

There are two main dictionary definitions for vajira (skt: vajra), the term that anchors both phrases: ‘thunderbolt’ and ‘diamond’. Having examined a wide range of materials, Shogo Watanabe observes the following:

1. There is little reference to the term vajira (skt: vajra) with the meaning of ‘diamond’ in Early Buddhist Scriptures³⁾, Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma literature⁴⁾ or Mahāyāna Scriptures⁵⁾.
2. The Vedas refer to the term vajira in the context of a natural phenomenon, such as a thunderbolt⁶⁾.

3. This thunderbolt is considered to be Indra's weapon⁷⁾.
4. The term vajira, because of its reference to the weapon's deadly power, came to be adopted in Buddhism as meaning something that destroys worldly passions and desires⁸⁾.

These Watanabe's observations suggests that the phrase vajirūpama-citta (or -samādhī) can refer to a mind (or concentration) that destroys defilements as with a thunderbolt.

The series of studies by Watanabe deals with a wide range of materials such as Greek literature and the Mahāyāna Scriptures, but the commentaries of Theravāda are not included. This paper reviews the understanding of the phrase vajirūpama-citta in the context of examining the commentaries of Theravāda.

2. Examples in Pāli literature

Early Buddhist Scriptures describe vajirūpama-citta as follows¹⁾:

AN iii, 25 (Vol. I p. 124.20-27):

And what is the person whose mind like a vajira? Here, with the destruction of taints, some person realizes for himself with direct knowledge, in this very life, the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, and having entered upon it, dwells in it. Just as there is nothing that a vajira cannot cut, whether gem or stone, so too, with the destruction of the taints, some person realizes for himself with direct knowledge... the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, and... dwells in it. This person is said to have a mind like a vajira.⁹⁾ (“Katamo ca, bhikkhave, vajirūpamacitto

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puggalo? Idha, bhikkhave, ekacco puggalo āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ diṭṭhe 'va dhamme sayamaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati. Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, vajirassa n' atthi kiñci abhejjaṃ maṇi vā pāsāṇo vā; evam eva¹⁰ kho, bhikkhave, idh' ekacco puggalo āsavānaṃ khayā...pe... upasampajja viharati. Ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, vajirūpamacitto puggalo.)

Here, 'mind like a vajira' refers to the Arahāt's mind at the moment of the destruction of its defilements. Commentary from the 5th century explains the above teaching as follows:

ANA iii, 25 (Vol. II p. 196.10-17):

It is understood that the wisdom of the Arahātship path is just like vajira. Various defilements to be destroyed on the Arahātship path can be compared to a bundle of jewels and stones. Just as there are no jewels or stones which vajira cannot penetrate, there is no defilement which cannot be destroyed by the Arahātship path. Defilements once destroyed by the Arahātship path will never return, just as jewels and stones once penetrated by vajira cannot be put back together. (vajiraṃ viya hi arahattamaggañāṇaṃ daṭṭhabbaṃ, maṇigaṇṭhipāsāṇagaṇṭhi viya arahattamaggavajjhā kilesā, vajireṇa¹¹ maṇigaṇṭhim pi vā pāsāṇagaṇṭhim pi vā vinivijjhitvā agamanabhāvassa natthitā viya arahattamaggañāṇena acchejjānaṃ kilesānaṃ natthibhāvo, vajirena nibbidhavedhassa puna apatipūraṇaṃ¹² viya arahattamaggena chinnānaṃ kilesānaṃ puna anuppādo daṭṭhabbo ti.)

Early Buddhist Scriptures and their commentaries compare vajira's

active destructive function with the destruction of defilements by the Arahāt's wisdom¹³. It is not clear whether vajira in the document above refers to 'thunderbolt' or 'diamond'¹⁴. In the *Majjhimanikāya-Aṭṭhakathā* (MNA) however, vajira specifically means 'diamond'.

MNA. 140 (Vol. V p. 53.21-25):

(This context) can refer to the process in which a skilful craftsman pierces pearls with the needle¹⁵ of Vajira and drops them one after the other onto an animal skin, which is then picked up one after the other by his apprentice so that they can thread the pearls to make a plumb line or a net. ... (an omission). (yathā nāma chekena maṇikārācariyena vajirasūciyā¹⁶) vijjhivā cammakhaṇḍe pātetvā pātetvā dinnamuttaṃ antevāsiko gahetvā gahetvā suttagataṃ karonto muttolambakamuttajālādīni karoti. Evam evaṃ ...)

Here is a reference to the process in which a craftsman manipulates pearls using the idea of vajira. The description of vajira here corresponds with the *Aṅguttaranikāya-Aṭṭhakathā*'s (ANA) understanding of vajira as damaging to other jewels and stones. Buddhaghosa is the author of the ANA as well as of the MNA. While considering both understandings, it appears that in this context the term vajira or vajirūpama-citta means 'diamond'. In other words, it compares the craftsman's process of manipulating jewels using a tool with a diamond tip to a 'mind like a diamond (vajirūpama-citta)' destroying defilements¹⁷.

3. Examining non-Buddhist material

This chapter supports the conclusions of the previous chapter by examining material from outside the Buddhist tradition and from the

perspective of cultural history. The previous chapter examined the commentaries of Theravāda, which refers to vajira as meaning ‘diamond’; the destruction of passions and desires by the vajirūpama-citta is compared with the process in which a craftsman cuts a jewel using a diamond-edged tool. It is not unusual that the diamond here is described solely as a craftsman’s tool.

Before the diamond came into use as an ornament in the 15th century¹⁸⁾, it had been commonly used as a craftsman’s tool¹⁹⁾. This function of the diamond is found not only in the commentary of Theravāda as shown in the previous chapter, but also in the understanding of vajra (pāli: vajira) in the *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra*²⁰⁾.

Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra 2, 11, 40:

(A diamond (i. e. vajra) that is) big, heavy, capable of bearing blows, with symmetrical points, (capable of) scratching a vessel, revolving like a spindle and brilliantly shining is excellent.²¹⁾ (sthūlaṃ guru prahārasahaṃ samakoṭikaṃ bhājanalekhi tarkubhrāmi bhrājiṣṇu ca praśastam //)

This usage is shared in other ancient documents from outside India. The ancient Roman scholar Plinius describes the application of the diamond (adamas/adamant) in his ‘*Naturalis Historia*’, as follows²²⁾:

Naturalis Historia Vol. 37, 15:

When, by good fortune, this stone does happen to be broken, it divides into fragments so minute as to be almost imperceptible. These particles are held in great request by engravers, who enclose them in iron, and are enabled thereby, with the greatest facility, to

cut the very hardest substances known.²³⁾

The Old Testament refers to the diamond as comparable to ‘a pen of iron’ or a tool used for carving.

Yirməyāhū 17, 1:

“The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of their altars, ...²⁴⁾

Thus the diamond is referred to as a tool in a variety of documents.

4. Conclusions

So far, the term vajira (skt: vajra) as in a ‘vajira-like mind (vajirūpama-citta)’ or ‘mind like a vajira’ is considered to refer to a diamond. This in theory refers to the destruction of defilements by ‘the mind like a diamond’ in the same way that a skilful craftsman cuts a jewel using a diamond as a tool. The conclusion is drawn from the perspective of the study of literature as well as that of cultural history.

Abbreviations

- AN *Āṅguttara-Nikāya*, PTS.
ANA *Āṅguttaranikāya-Aṭṭhakathā (Manorathapūraṇī)*, PTS.
Bv *Buddhavaṃsa*, PTS.
BvA *Buddhavaṃsa-Aṭṭhakathā*, PTS.
Dhp *Dhammapāda*, PTS.
Dhs *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, PTS.
DhsA *Dhammasaṅgaṇī-Aṭṭhakathā (Atthasālinī)*, PTS.
MNA *Majjhimanikāya-Aṭṭhakathā (Papañcasūdanī)*, PTS.
PTS Pāli Text Society.

- skt sanskrit.
UV Franz Bernhard (ed.), *Udānavarga*. Goettingen, 1965.
VRI Vipassana Research Institute.

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註

- 1) Muroji, Y. [2000]
- 2) Muroji, Y. [2000]
- 3) Watanabe, S. [2009: pp. 155.17-156.24] (= [2007a: pp. 102.15-105.19])
- 4) Watanabe, S. [2009: pp. 205.10-206.23]
- 5) Watanabe, S. [2009: p. 171.1-7, 172.10-12, 186.33] (= [2006b: p. 222.7-14, 224.6-8, 236.29-30])
- 6) Watanabe, S. [2005], [2009: pp. 136.1-144.10] (= [2006a])
- 7) Lamotte, É. [1966]; Lamotte, É. (Boin-Webb, S. tr.) [2003a] [2003b]; Watanabe, S. [2005], [2009: pp. 136.1-144.10] (= [2006a])
- 8) Watanabe, S. [2005], [2009: pp. 189-210]
- 9) English translation by Bodhi [2012: p. 220.17-26] has been partly modified.
- 10) PTS: eva, VRI: evaṃ
- 11) PTS: vajireṇa, VRI: vajirassa
- 12) PTS: appati-, VRI: apati-
- 13) Cf. Bv. 10, 4 (p. 47.8-9); BvA. 10, 4 (p. 184.29-30); Dhs. (pp. 225.35-226.2); DhsA. (p. 51.15-18)
- 14) The vajira’s hardness is emphasized in the *Dhammapada* (Dhp), although in the Dhp, vajira is referred to as an example of evil.

Dhp 161:

By the self alone is evil done; it is born of self, has its origin in self. It crushes the stupid one as diamond (vajira) crushes a jewel made of stone. (Cf. Norman K. R. [1997]) (Attanā hi kataṃ pāpaṃ, attajaṃ attasambhavaṃ; Abhimatthati dummedhaṃ, vajiraṃ v’ asmamayaṃ maṇiṃ.)

- 15) Considering that it is pearls that are being manipulated in this context, it would appear that the PTS notes are not correct and the VRI version is correct.
- 16) PTS: vajiraṃ sūciyā, VRI: vajirasūciyā
- 17) Cf. UV. 28, 12
- 18) The grinding and polishing techniques which are still used on diamonds in our time were established by Lodewijk van Berquem in Antwerp in the 15th century. Before this technique, because diamonds were excessively hard, it was impossible to efficiently process them.
- 19) Cf. Middleton, J. H. [1891: pp. 111.8-113.23]
- 20) In ancient times, India was the sole producer of diamonds. The best-known diamond from India is the Hope Diamond, which was purchased by the French trader Jean-Baptiste Tavernier in 1660 and sold to Louis XIV. Legend holds that the diamond is cursed, bringing misfortune to those who possess it. The diamond was offered to the Smithsonian Museum by Harry Winston, the last owner.
- 21) Cf. Kangle, R. P. [1972 ii: p. 100.10-12]
- 22) 'Adamas' does not necessarily refer to 'diamond' alone. However, the English translator in his footnote points out that 'adamas' does mean 'diamond' in this context based on the above understanding. Cf. Bostock, J. & Riley, H. T. [1855-1857 vi: p. 408 note16]: This is true with reference to the diamond, and, in a less degree, several other crystalline substances, emery and quartz, for example.
- 23) Cf. Bostock, J. & Riley, H. T. [1855-1857 vi: p. 408.7-11]
- 24) Cf. Revised Standard Version (RSV)

キーワード vajra vajira vajropama vajirūpama