

Tārā in Karmamudrā: The assimilated sustaining thought of Indic religion

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Abstract:

With the evolution and displacement of religious obscurity, and the secluded religico treasure, bore numerous pragmatics in Indic religico culture. Emergence of Vajrayāna was a major upheaval in the religious culture in the sub-continental peninsula. In the early period or during the foundation of Vajrayāna denied and criticized almost all the concept of Hindu deities. When Vajrayānists shows hatred towards Hindu gods, then why did they again adapted the Śakti deity Tārā in the Buddhist pantheon? Philosophy and craftsmanship of making images also changed upon the newly generated philosophies of Buddhism.

The later phase of Buddhism, depending upon Tāntrik School penetrates in the contemporary beliefs and practices. This is the reason that a goddess like Tārā appears with a great impact in Tāntrik Buddhism as well as pragmatic Brāhmanism. The loci of this article emphasize the Tāntrik obscurity and the activity of the goddess and her position in the Buddhist pragmatics.

Keywords: Tantra, Pantheon-gods, Rituals, Tārā, Mudrā.

INTRODUCTION :

With the evolution and displacement of religious obscurity, and the secluded religico treasure, bore numerous pragmatics in Indic religico culture. Etymological meaning of Dharma (religion) isolated by the social bigotry.

The most ancient scripture Ṛigveda praises Ādi Śakti first, and then praises the other gods. But, gradually the scenario changed the concept of Ādi Śakti or female divine power became subordinate.

With the development and outspread of tāntric culture the formula of divinity sanskritized. Occidental idea of pantheon god idolized the concept of divinity in various form.

The later development of Buddhist schools, like Vajrayāna, Śrāvakayāna, Pratyeka-buddha yāna; the concept of 'Dhamma as a natural phenomena', hid under the clad of pragmatics and shaped as 'Dharma' the religion.

Emergence of Vajrayāna was a major upheaval in the religious culture in the sub-continental peninsula. In the early period or during the foundation of Vajrayāna denied and criticized almost all the concept of Hindu deities. Often it is to be noticed that the Brāhmanic god Indra has been depicted as the image of pride and he has been thrashed by the Buddhist deities. Again, beheaded Brahmā is carried by numerous gods, who has been acclaimed as Buddhist gods. Perhaps, there are lots of spiritual and logical views behind these idolatries, but; these ideas have come out of hatred.

The deity of Trailokyavijaya proves the hatred towards Śiva and Śakti concept of Hindus; as the deity crushes the head and chest of Śiva and Śakti. After such kind of humiliation of Hindu gods or the concept of god, it can be noticed that Vajrayānists also accepting the concept of Śakti. Buddhists showed Śakti as Prajñā and the way to obtain emancipation as a result of acquiring of Śakti or Prajñā through Yoga and Samādhi.

Most notable part is, when Vajrayānists shows hatred towards Hindu gods, then why did they again adapted the Śakti deity Tārā in the Buddhist pantheon?

Tārā is broadly known as Sgrol-ma, in Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism is the most dependable source for information. Due to some linguistic confusion the term had been changed, but, other Saṅskṛt sources coined Rje-sgrol-ma as goddess Tārā.

Vajrācāryas of Nepal are the generators, who emerged Tārā in the religious pragmatics. The popular point of debate often comes, that who was the actual inceptor of the concept Tārā? Due to Lokācāra tradition, people find Tārā as the goddess of Buddhist tradition. It is noteworthy, that most ancient manuscripts of *Kubjikāmātam* and *Śaktimātam* from circa 5th century A.D. conform the term 'Tārini' much before the Buddhist Tārā.

Emergence of Tārā in Tibetan Buddhist pantheon:

Tārā the one among the ten Mahāvidyā of Śāktism; emerged in Tibetan Buddhism as female Bodhisattva. Various Tārā deities, which have been found from different archaeological sites, are the idolatry of Śakti cult. These deities cannot be isolated by any particular 'ism'. Because, before 10th century, all the monastic and religious places were developed under a cross-cultural negotiations, where mixed religious motifs can be noticed. Like, Ellora in Maharashtra, Udayagiri and Khandagiri cave temples in Orissa, Ratnagiri and Lalitgiri sites of Orissa, etc. *Kathāsaritsāgar* of Somadeva Bhatta is the first hand scriptural evidence of this sociological assimilation.

Deity of Tārā was initially used as the meditational deity or a subordinate deity for devotion. During the Pāla Empire the scenario changed with the development of metal craftsmanship. The

experimental utility factor developed with the metal images, which can be perceived in contemporary Tibetan Buddhism also.

Here an argument may come, that Buddhism spread in Tibet on circa 7th century A.D. and the queens of emperor Srong-stan-gampo, brought the Buddha images in Tibet; then how could be the Pāla Empire becoming a crucial factor?

It is noteworthy, that the queens were not native Tibetan. Bhrikuti Devi was the princess of Nepal and believed to be the incarnation of Green Tārā. And Princess Taiyen Cheng was from China, and she is also popular as the incarnation of White Tārā.

So, it is clear that they brought Buddha images from their own respective land. And it is evident from Tibetan chronicles that many temple, monasteries and deities were developed under their patron. Thus, it can be infer that the philosophy behind the craftsmanship also generated from China and Nepal.

Philosophy and craftsmanship of making images also changed upon the newly generated philosophies of Buddhism. Primarily, the goal of Vajrayāna was to attain 'nirvāṇa' through Vajra concept. Early Mahāyānic tradition of Pāramitānyaya and Mantranyaya showed the path to attain nirvāṇa through practicing Pāramitā. These two paths are mainly meditational process to emancipate.

Gradual emergence of Hevajra tantra, changed the idea of emancipation. Hedonistic idea evolved with the path of sādhanā, where concept of nirvāṇa became subordinate. 'Mahāsukha' or the idea of ultimate happiness promoted. Thus, the division under Tāntrik School came forward with their respective curriculum and analytical cohesion of psychology.

Śrīcakraśamvara tantra defined six sub sects under Vajrayāna and stratifies its practices under four categories: Kriyā tantra, Caryā tantra, Yoga tantra, Anuttara-yoga tantra. Worship, ceremonies of gods comes under Kriyā tantra and Caryā tantra; Yoga tantra and Anuttara-yoga tantra deals with yogic processes and these are higher level of tantra. These two segments are for the advanced Sādhaka to attain siddhi. (Wadell, 1991, p. 152)

With this changing module of sādhanā, the manufacturing and positions of deities also changed. For an example, the divine goddess Tārā which was meditational deity prior became unified in the yab-yum or sexual union. The foremost image of Tārā in sexual union is introduced with the Pañca Dhyānī Buddha as their consort, who is the Śakti or Prajñā of Dhyānī Buddhas.

Locomotion of the concept 'Tārā':

After criticizing the Hindu deities and nullified the Hindu concept of god, again Vajrayāna practitioners include goddess Tārā into Vajrayāna pantheon as the deity of 'yidam'. Emergence of Hevajratantra and its later phase Sahajayāna, popularized the involvement of women in sādhanā mārga. Yogic practices are the tool to achieve Sahaja-mahāsukha.

Bauddha Gāna O Dohā koṣa edited by Mm. Haraprasad Shastri; defined the liturgical meaning of letters, according to Sahajayāna. There ‘Tā’ means ‘tatra’ or there and also ‘her/his/that/so/then’. Again ‘Rā’ means ‘ratna’ or jewel.

The multifaceted meaning of ‘Tā’ confirms the Tibetan theo-grammatical connection of term ‘Tārā’. Firstly, ‘Tā’ defines the essence of ‘Tathatā’, the heart extract of *Prajñāpāramitā* and also defines as ‘male’ or ‘female’ particle which has no start or no end; that particle is innate or Sahajā in nature. The expression of ‘so’ and ‘then’ in the letter confirms its female nature. The expression of letter ‘Rā’, which meant ‘ratna’ or ‘jewel’ is heading towards that precious and exclusive ratna which has a glittering character. It also describes the ‘Ratna Kula’ and its nature is always ready for creation.

Ekākṣarakoṣa firmly explains the meaning of letters, from which it can be understand the reason behind attributing any name. Here, ‘Tā’ denotes ‘caura’, ‘kroḍa’ and ‘puccha’.

Ta kārah kathitaścauraha kroḍa pucche prakīrtitaha. (Rai, 2005, p. 35)

Ā-kāra, epresses ‘Pitāmaha’ and also consider as auspicious in worship. ‘Ra’ or ‘Rā’ means ‘dhanya’ in sense of ‘puṣṭi/vṛddhi’ or optimal growth/essential need.

Finally, according to *Ekākṣarakoṣa*, meaning of the word ‘Tārā’ defines that divine lap who conceives and produces optimal growth. Perhaps, for these etymological meanings goddess Tārā has several variations. Position of Tārā also can be noticed directly or indirectly, almost in five ‘kulas’ belonged to the Dhyānī Buddhas.

The most common Tārā japa mantra is ‘Om tāre tuttāre ture svāhā’. This mantra is a part of the Ādikarma of practitioner for daily homage. The frequent usage of word ‘Tārā’ with various pronunciations, describes the multidimensional aspects of Tārā’. Those are as follows: Om/auṃ, primarily accepted as ‘bīja’ but from other aspects it has a multidimensional meanings; such as Tārah, Trika, Ādibīja, Satya, Anādi, Pañcaraśmi.

Om̐karo vartulastāro vamaśca hamsakāraṇam|

Mantrādyah praṇavaḥ satyaṃ binduśaktistrideivatam|| [1]

Sarvabījotpādakaśca pañcadevo dhruvastrikaḥ|

Sāvitrī viśikho brahma triguṇo guṇajīvakaḥ|| [2]

Ādibījam vedasāro vedavījamataḥ param|

Pañcaraśmistrīkute ca tri (tāram) bhavo bhavanāśanaḥ|| [3]

Gāyatrī-bījapañcāmśou mantravidyāprasuh prabhuh|

Akṣaram mātrkāsuścānādiradvaita-mokṣadou|| [4] (Rai, 2005, p. 9)

Descriptions of the letters ‘ta’, ‘ā’ and ‘ra’ has already been given before. Next the word ‘tuttāre’, defines the dual characteristic of Tārā from its etymology to divine pragmatics. Only the particles

like ‘u-kāra’ and ‘e-kāra’ graphing the spontaneity of the mātrkā, because, ‘u-kāra’ defines Śiva, Praṇava, Viṣṇu, Dakṣakarma, and Amareśa. Again, ‘e-kāra’ denotes Śakti, Bhaga, Padmanābha, Jhīṅṣā.

Assimilation of ‘u-kāra’ firmly showing the Śaiva influence, which has started its journey from *Śrīvidyāntara*. Again, by denoting the name of Viṣṇu shows the place in Brāhmanic tradition as well.

‘e-kāra’ giving lofty information about the emergence of Śakti cult, stratified from mother to daughter and finally the female warrior.

Henceforth, it can be said that the homage of Tārā giving a sense of ‘Advaya tantra’, which defines śūnya svabhāva of Bodhicitta by using the word ‘svāhā’. ‘Svāhā’ is the bīja of nyāsa or execution of rite.

Tārā in Karmamudrā:

Karmamudrā or seal of action executes by female consort. Karmamudrā or the sexo-yogic practice is the most intrinsic part of Vajrayāna practice. This process follows by imagining yab-yum within self. Even it can execute through consort. Karmamudrā is actually the upāya kauśalya to achieve great bliss or mahāsukha.

Mudrā or seal is the most notable part in studying iconography. Deities or images of gods are nothing but a graphical as well as tangible unit of meditation. Variation in gestures or mudrā represents these religious totems as a dynamic feature.

Mudrā, the symbolic gesture of ritual is not only symbolic but also it locates and connects all the channels of body with cosmos. Fulcrum of Vajrayāna practices are of two notions, in respect to mudrās— static, dynamic.

Static mudrās can be noticed in the single āsana of a deity, which are accepted only for meditational purposes; for an example, the varadā mudrā of Tārā, abhaya mudrā of Jāṅgulī (from Green Tārā kula). These styles of mudrās have been demonstrated in statically way where gods or goddesses are holding weapons or other elements, like, Khaṭvāṅga (magic wand) or kapāla (skull) in their hand.

Weapons or other belonging of hands represents the way of wisdom. As one’s wisdom or knowledge should be active like a Khvattāṅga or magic wand, which is ready to act without any hesitation or discrimination. And mudrā like, varadā mudrā, deciphers the idea of divine blessings or divine gift. These static mudrās work as ‘saṃskṛta lakṣaṇa’, because, at a time, one can be postured only in one mudrā. But, with Khaṭvāṅga it defines its continuous process, because, Khaṭvāṅga has its own working ability. Mudrā with other belongings of gods defines the idea of ‘asaṃskṛta lakṣaṇa’, which is both continuous process and inexpressible.

With the development of Hevajratāntra, the idea of nirvāṇa had changed. Nirvāṇa sublimed by bliss when the concept 'mahāsukha' emerged. The deities with static mudrās became the superficial as nirvāṇa became the subordinate phenomena.

Concept of deity or god changed and that previous idolatry change into the position of yab-yum or in sexual union. Supra-mundane concept of Bodhisattva and gradually came as a representative of human, who is also human like. Likewise, posture of yab-yum conceptualized into Dhyānī Buddha cult also. Among five Dhyānī Buddhas— Akṣobhya, Vairocana, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha and Amoghsiddhi; only Vairocana and Amoghsiddhi are paired with the two variation of Tārā, viz. White Tārā (Vajradhātīśvarī) and Green Tārā (Tāriṇī); respectively. Otherwise Akṣobhya pairs with Locanā, Ratnasambhava with Māmaki and Amitābha with Pāṇḍarā.

The text *Advayavajra Saṃgraha*, depicted the descriptions of five Dhyānī Buddhas and their consorts in the chapter *Pañcakārah*. There both Vajradhātīśvarī (White Tārā) and Tāriṇī (Green Tārā), are located in the candramanḍala. According to Mantrayāna candramanḍala is the representation of mind. Here the description of Tāriṇī has been given, that she belongs from candramanḍala, she is bright as gold and with greenish-black complexion; and holds a bluish-black lotus in her hand. Her kula is karma, and she is spontaneous as air. Her vīja mantra is "Om aḥ tām huṃ svāhā".

B. Bhattacharya illustrated and described many variations of Green Tārā— Durgottāriṇī Tārā, Dhanada Tārā, Jāṅgulī, Parṇaśavarī; these are the activating variations of Green Tārā. (Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 2008 rpt., p. 137)

A. Wayman described Tārā as the consort of Amoghsiddhi, who is the lord of karma; Candālī or the sleeping goddess in his navel has the magical powers. (Wayman F. L., 1978, p. 188)

Vajradhātīśvarī has been described in the chapter *Pañcakāra* of *Advayavajra Saṃgraha*, as the manifested form of all the Dhyānī Buddhas. The goddess there is an innocent and young girl, age of sixteen. The beauty of the goddess is inexpressible, because, she has been estimated as Prajñāpāramitā and has been termed as 'Sakalajinagunādhārābhutā'; as, she owns all the perspectives of dhātus (nature) and indriyas (senses). Her presence with Vajrasattva defines sūnyatā. Her united form with Vajrasattva generates vowels, which is perceived by samaya (tathatā). She has sky like nature (jinaguna); she has been stated as 'Jñānaḍākini.

Vajradhātīśvarī has been identified with White Tārā. B. Bhattacharya has identified White Tārā in these emancipated forms. Those are— Caturbhūja Sītatārā, Ṣaḍabhūja Sītatārā, Viśvamātā, Kurukullā and Jāṅgulī. (Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 2008 rpt., pp. 137-138)

Vajrayāna especially, the secret rising of Sahajayāna introduces Śakti or Prajñā with the Dhyānī Buddhas. With the emergence of Catuspīṭhatantra, the pragmatics emerged into Sahajayāna. The concept of Sahajasundarī is identified as the Prajñā or Śakti of sādḥaka.

The iconographical representation of Dhyānī Buddhas have been depicted them as not only as the Bodhisattva idol, but also as the form of sādḥaka. With these references all the goddesses or the consorts of Pañcatathāgata have been illuminated as the form of Sahajasundarī, who has been compared with a young innocent girl, with an age of sixteen.

Buddhist metaphysical texts describes Prajñā as the momentary unit; whereas the interpretation of Sahajayāna corporate the idea of ‘advaya’. Female entity is to be perceived as Prajñā, only during her union with the sādḥaka. Prajñāpti of sādḥaka can be perished and executed by Karmamudrā.

Both White Tārā and Green Tārā have been categorized under Karmakula. Here, both of them are the Prajñā of external world, they are giving pleasure while embracing, acting as Kamalādevī; emancipated from nirmāna kāyā. (Wayman A. , 1973, p. 127)

It has been stated earlier that in the anuttarayoga tantra Karmamudrā is defined as the sexual union. Practice of Karmamudrā arise the four kinds of pleasures. Those are— Ānanda, Paramānanda, Sahajānanda and Virāmānanda. Sometimes Karmamudrā has been stated as the part of Haṭha yoga also, especially, when sādḥaka imagines the image of yab-yum.

The chapter *Caturmudrā* of *Advayavajra Saṁgraha* firmly describes the nature and scope of Karmamudrā. Yab-yum meditation of sādḥaka is bounded by Samayamudrā, which is as ‘tathatā’.

In the exposition of Karmamudrā there are two notions— in the first half; during the execution of Karmamudrā, accompanied by some characteristics from the nature of Prajñā to the siddhi of the sādḥaka, which are known as nimitta/signs and lakṣaṇa/characteristics and in conjugation known as parikalpita. (Dutta, 2008, p. 280) Nimitta and lakṣaṇa refers both the external and internal phenomena and those phenomena which are perceived by nimitta and the lakṣaṇa which is perceived as knowledge. This is the reason when Vajradhātīśvarī is in sexual union with Vajrasattva, chanting vowels as the vīja of knowledge. And these vowels are the symbolism of internal as well as external voidness.

In the second half; when sādḥaka meditates near the idol of yab-yum, which is a part of Paratantra and it refers the imaginary existence of all phenomena. It is partially the part of unreality, as things doesn’t happens in the same way as they appears or were originated in their source or beginning. (Dutta, 2008, p. 280) When sādḥaka chants vīja mantra, he perceives the voidness of existence and non-existence.

Thus, in Buddhist tradition Tārā who is the store-house of magical powers is actually pracandā in nature. The chanting mantra of Tārā defines the nature of voidness and catuṣkoṭibiniṛyoga of voidness. The last vīja of nyāsa ‘svāhā’ represents all the kula of Dhyānī Buddhas and their Buddha nature.

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