

Three Epithets of the Goddess Tārā

D.C. Bhattacharyya

Almost all Buddhist female divinities are deemed as the manifestations of the Supreme Goddess Tārā.¹ However, a few exceptions are there, for instance the goddess Hārītī who originally being a demoness converted by the Buddha to normal human senses later was accepted as a goddess but never of the mainstream.² An important form of Tārā is Mārīcī who is the Buddhist adaptation of the Sun God, but in a female form. This goddess Mārīcī has a number of manifestations bearing different epithets and having various iconographic specifications. These forms have been described in the *Sādhanamālā* and in the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*.³ Also in a later composition of Abhāyākara Gupta some more details of rare forms of Mārīcī are included.⁴ Of these forms of Mārīcī two stand apart because of their unusual and interesting epithets. In one the same is prefixed and in the other it appears as a suffix. These are the Oḍḍiyāna Mārīcī and Mārīcī Pichuvā. Surprisingly, however, scholars have not yet given any satisfactory explanations for these epithets.

Oḍḍiyāna has been interpreted sometimes as a place-name, sometimes as a fierce form and even as a type of *mudrā* (hand-gesture) shown by the form of the goddess.⁵ Similarly, 'pichuvā' has not also been properly explained as an epithet of the goddess Mārīcī. It has been taken just as an epithet without as if, any significance.⁶ In one publication 'pichuvā' has been explained as the *neem* (margosa) tree without establishing the relationship between the goddess and this tree.⁷

A deeper investigation, however, reveals interesting insights of these epithets in the context of the solar goddess of the Buddhists. The word *oḍḍiyāna*, which occasionally appears in the texts also as *uḍḍiyāna*, has confused the scholars because they have mostly taken it as a single word. Actually, the epithet is a combination of the two words *oḍḍi* and *yāna* or *yāne*. *Oḍḍi* means something which is flying or is in the flight. The word *yāna* or *yāne* means the carriage or chariot or in the carriage or chariot. The word *yāna* can also mean a system, a state of being or status, as in the cases of Mahāyāna or Tantrayāna and

Vajrayāna. That way Oḍḍiyāna Mārīcī will mean the conception of the solar goddess Mārīcī as being in the sky, and because of the movement of the Sun, she has been conceived as if in a flight of movement. This conception of the solar divinity is very old, and can be traced back to Vedic conception of the Sun as Garutmān or Arora.⁸

Interestingly, in the Buddhist tradition of later phases the Sun-god (Bhāskara) has been conceived in triple aspects, namely, *abhiyāna* (rising Sun), *odiyāna* (the sun in the flight), and *pr̥sthayāna*.⁹ In fact these three refer to the morning sun, mid day sun and the evening sun. The concept of *trīsandhyā* or three joints of the day is well-known not only in the Brahmanical tradition, but also in that of Buddhism.¹⁰ It is pertinent to suggest that Oḍḍiyāna Mārīcī is the Buddhist conception of the Sun god in a female form during the mid day when he appears to be in a flying chariot in the sky.

Before we come to the explanation for the epithet 'pichuvā' in relation to Mārīcī we should refer here that a very well-known form of Buddhist God Khasarpaṇa Lokeśwara, the epithet meaning one who moves in the sky. Also, there are the names of eight major Bodhisattavas (Mahābodhisattavas) as Gaganaganja and Ākāśagarbha,¹¹ both ostensibly referring to the solar god traversing and embedded respectively in the sky.

'Pichuvā' seems to be a word transformed in the Vernacular dialect of Nepalese Buddhist tradition from its original *Pr̥sthayāna*, mentioned above. *Pr̥stha* has become *piccha* or *puccha* (backside and tail end respectively). In the Newari script there are instances of confusion in the writing of *Vargīya - Va* and *Antya - Va* (pronounced otherwise as *ba*). It seems that the scribe while writing *picchuwa* (in the local dialect) did write *picchuvā*, and this has been carried out in subsequent compilations. Moreover, *chu* has become *cu* in the variations of pronunciation. Thus, perhaps, the epithet 'pichuvā' for Mārīcī originated. On all intense and purposes the epithet is likely to be a corrupt form of *Pr̥sthayāna*, meaning Mārīcī or the Sun goddess representing the Sun set when the hind view (*pr̥stha*, *piccha*, *pichā*, *picchā*, *pichu* etc.) of the chariot of the goddess is only visible.

In the Nepalese tradition the concept of the rising (*abhiyāna*) Solar god with full iconographic details is also there.¹² To conclude this issue of the meanings of the epithets 'oḍḍiyāna' and 'pichuvā', I would like to mention that Oḍḍiyāna Mārīcī and Mārīcī Pichuvā refer respectively to the concept of the mid-day view of the Buddhist Solar goddess and the evening view of the same.

Mention should be made of the epithet of another form of the Buddhist goddess Tārā. One of the well-known forms of the goddess is known as Khadiravaṇī Tārā. The

epithet *Khadiravanī* has not been satisfactorily explained as yet. In most of the works dealing with this form of the goddess it is explained as the goddess *Tārā* of the forest (*vana*) of *Khadira* (the red substance Hindi *Katthā* used in the preparation of *pāna* on betel leaf along with lime or *cūnam* and *gua* or arecanut). But invariably in most of the publications dealing with this form of the goddess the spelling of the epithet for her is mentioned with *na* (the last letter of *ta - varga*) instead of the *ṇa* (the last letter of *ṭa - varga*).¹³ If the epithet implied any region or forest (*vana*), there is no reason,¹⁴ why the epithet will have a *ṇa*-ending. It should have rather a *na*-ending because the word *vana* needs to be spelt like that. However, if the entire word *khadiravana* is taken to be the name of a place having no reference to *vana* (forest), then also one needs to locate a place name with that type of spelling.

I am of the opinion that the epithet under discussion has no reference to a specific place name or to a forest of *khadira*. The latter seems to be a far fetched interpretation because the goddess *Tārā* is not known to have any relevance to this particular substance used for the making of a betel leaf preparation. Of course, one can perhaps stretch the imagination to suggest that this form of the goddess is a variant of *Śyāma Tārā*, and the word *Śyāma* may imply the colour of this form of the goddess is not actually green (*Śyāma*) but reddish green like that of *khadira*. But there is perhaps no necessity of going that far for the proper meaning of the epithet.

It is well-known that the goddess *Tārā* is the deified form of *tārā* or *tāraka* (star) of the distant sky. It is pertinent to mention that in a seminar on 'The Concept and Iconography of the Goddess *Tārā*' held in the Calcutta University under the auspices of its Centre of Advanced Study in the subject of Ancient Indian History and Culture Dr. S.R. Banerjee suggested that in several variance of the reading of the word *khadira* in the *Sādhanamālā* being *khadūra*, meaning the sky (*kha*) of the distant (*dūra*), the first part of the epithet concerned should be amended to *khadura*.¹⁵ Moreover, as has already been stated above, the spelling of the end part of the epithet being *vaṇī* instead of *vaṇi*. It should also be pointed out that in several readings of the epithet in the *Sādhanamālā* and elsewhere is referred to as *vaṇī*. Keeping these two in view, I am of the opinion that *Khadiravaṇī Tārā* should be in all possibility *Khadūravāṇī Tārā*. This will mean that the epithet concerned is for the goddess *Tārā* who was regarded by the navigators of the Sea as the divine voice (*vāṇī*), as if, of the distant (*dūra*) sky (*kha*) to guide them about the direction to which they have to move.¹⁶ Thus *Khadirvaṇī Tārā* actually is *Khadūravāṇī Tārā* which is the deified form the Pole Star (*Dhruva Tārā*).

References and Notes

1. D.C. Bhattacharyya, 'An Unknown Form of Tārā,' *The Śakti Cult and Tārā*, . D.C. Sircar (ed.), Calcutta, 1967, pp. 5, 11 ff.
2. D.C. Bhattacharyya, *Ānandvana of Indian Art* Dr. Ananda Krishna Felicitation Volume, Varanasi, 2004, p. 147 ff.
3. *Sādhnamālā*, ed. B. Bhattacharyya, Vols. I & II, Baroda, 1925 & 1928; *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, ed. B. Bhattacharyya, Baroda, 1949.
4. *Vajrāvalīnāma - maṇḍalopāyikā*, No. G. 3855, a manuscript preserved in the Asiatic Society Library, Calcutta. The citations being too many the folio numbers are not mentioned here.
5. Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, Oxford, 1928; S.K. Saraswati, *Tantrayāna Art an Album*, Calcutta, 1975, pp. LXXXIX - XC; G. Libert, *Iconographic Dictionary of the Indian Religions Hinduism - Buddhism - Jainism*, Leiden, 1976, p. 309.
6. *Ibid.*
7. K.L. Maity, *The Forms and Epithets of the Sun God*, Calcutta, 1985, p. 37.
8. J.N., Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, Calcutta, 1956; Getty, *op. cit.*
9. This concept is contained in the Nepalese Buddhist tradition compiled and collated by Amritananda in the 19th century, and exists in the form of Hodgson Papers. This particular point is there in the volume 26 of these papers. For a detailed information about these papers see D.C. Bhattacharyya 'Art-Historical importance of Hodgson Papers', *Kalā : The Journal of Indian Art History Congress*, Vol. IV, 1997-98, pp. 38-44.
10. The *Sādhnamālā* (*op. cit.*) starts with the *dhyānas* pertaining to the 3 *sandhyās* in its first volume. That shows that the Buddhist did give much importance to the 3 positions of the Sun from the dawn through the mid-day to the evening.
11. R. Banerjee, *Aṣṭamahābodhisattva : The Eight Great Bodhisattavas in Art and Literature*, Delhi, 1994.
12. It is given in the Hodgson Papers (reference given above).
13. Getty, *op.cit.*, p. 125; B.Bhattacharyya, *op.cit.* pp. 226, 307, 441; Leibert, *op.cit.*, p. 135.
14. Leibert, *op.cit.*, p. 135.
15. *The Śakti cult & Tārā*, D.C. Sircar (ed.), Calcutta, 1967, Introduction.
16. *Ibid.*