

Tara

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Three religious systems of India, namely Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism are known to have developed their respective groups of pantheons from an early time. As a result of free and frequent exchanges of ideas, it becomes difficult to determine to which of them a particular image should be assigned. It is only with the publication of the *Sadhanamala* the task of identifying images of Buddhist pantheon has become easier. The numerous Tantric texts like *Hevajra Tantra*, *Heruka Tantra*, *Vajravahni Tantra*, *Yoginijala Tantra* and others also supply us plenty of information.

The concept of five Dhyani Buddhas and their association with their female counterparts are for the first time met with in the *Guhya-samaja Tantra*. They are Vairocana, Aksobhya, Ratna Sambhava, Amitabha and Amoghosiddhi. Later on Vajrasatva was added. In Nepal Vajrasatva is considered as the priest of the five Dhyani Buddhas.

The Dhyani Buddhas are each assigned with a special symbol and a colour. The most popular Buddhist Goddess is Tara who should not be confused for her name sake with the *Sakti* of Amoghasiddhi.

Taras are generally grouped into five classes according to colour of their body which they derive from their parental Dhyani Buddha.

Tara occupies the supreme position in the hierarchy of Vajrayana pantheon. In early Aryan worship the male gods alone had importance. In Mahayana worship there was a period in Buddhism when the male principle was adored. In the 4th century A.D. a change took place in Mahayana worship. It was Asanga who initiated the philosophy of tantrism and the adoration of female principle was introduced in Buddhism in the form of the goddess Tara. In the beginning Tara appears to have been closely associated with Avalokitesvra where as later, she came to be described as one of the consorts of Tathagata Amoghosiddhi. Tara is the common name applied to a large number of feminine divinities in the Buddhist pantheon.

In the *Sadhanamala* only seven deities are stated to bear the image of the Dhyani Buddha, 'Amogha siddhi' on the crown.

According to Hirananda Sastri the cult of Tara originated in Tibet. She is a saviour goddess. She is the Sakti of Avolikesvara as Uma is that of Mahesvara. Tara is referred in Hindu literature as a sea goddess. Tara the mother, who can control as chief of those saktis and guide the boats and have dark complexion. In Buddhist *tantras* Taras are of green, white, yellow, blue and red colours. According to Professor Poucher the classification of Tara is done according to her

colour and to whom the mantra *Om Tara Tuit Re Ture svaha* is assigned.

Om Tara tuit re Ture svaha is meant *Om* for the eastern one, *ta* for the southern one, *ra* for the western one, *tu* for the Northern one, *it* for the southeastern one, *re* for the western one, *Tu* for the northwestern one and *Re* for the northeastern one. Bhattacharya has classified the various description of Tara according to their colours and thereby identifying their respective families presided over by the five Tathagatas, five Dhyani Buddhas accordingly.

Five Dhyani Buddhas are

1. Vairocana, 2. Ratna Sambhava, 3. Amitabha
4. Amogha Siddhi, 5. Aksobhya,

Taras associated with five Dhyani Buddhas

(A) Green Tara

1. Khadiravani Tara, 2. Vasya Tara, 3. Arya Tara,
4. Mahattari Tara, 5. Varada Tara,
6. Durgaltarini Tara, 7. Dhanada Tara,
8. Janguli Tara, 9. Parna Savari Tara,

(B) White Tara

1. Astamahabhaya Tara, 2. Mrtyu Vancana Tara,
3. Chatur-Bhuja-Sita Tara, 4. Sada-Bhuja-Sita-Tara,
5. Visvamata, 6. Kurukulla, 7. Janguli

(C) Yellow Tara

1. Vajra Tara, 2. Janguli, 3. Parna Savari,
4. Bhrukuti

(D) Blue Tara

1. Ekagata, 2. Maha-Cina Tara

(E) Red Tara

1. Kurukulla.

This classification of Tara is hardly applicable for the identification with stone or metal images where colour is absent. Therefore,

according to B. Bhattacharya special attention should be given to the particular pose of the goddess and to the companion deities, and the number of hands of the deity.

The White Tara and Green Tara are two important goddesses. The symbol of White Tara is the full blown lotus while of the other is the *Utpala* (White Lily) with the petals closed. White Tara represents the day and the Green Tara the night.

The White Tara is regarded as the consort of Avolokitesvara. Her right hand is in the boon giving pose and the left holds the stalk of a full bloom lotus. When Tara appears as the Sakti of Amogha-siddhi she is depicted as seated in the *paryankasana* with her right hand in the boon giving pose and the left hand holding a Visva-Vajra over a lotus.

According to Tibetan legend there was a story regarding the miraculous birth of Tara which make her character merciful. Tibetan legend was that a drop of tear fell from the eye of the god misericordia Avolokiteswara and falling in the valley it formed a lake. From the water of the lake arose a lotus flower which by opening its petals, displayed the pure goddess Tara. White and green colour classification of Tara is associated with its day and night symbolism though both of them were born from the tears shed by Avalokiteswara.

In the beginning Tara was associated with Avolokiteswara but later she came to be described as the consort of Tathagata Amoghasiddhi.

However the concept of Tara is mysterious and the present paper is an humble attempt to bring to light some Tara images now housed in the Orissa State Museum.

Besides we have traces of Tara images in different districts of Orissa and different parts

of India also. They are found at places like Bada Tara (Cuttack), Kendrapara, Dharmasala (Jaipur), Bhubaneswar, Lalitagiri, Ratnagiri, Balasore, Baneswaranasi, Ranibandha, Vajragiri (Cuttack), Madhupur, Boudh etc.

An image of Tara, originally, collected from Ratnagiri in Cuttack district displays her saviour aspect. A beautiful Tara image belonging to Circa 11th century has been recovered from Jajpur, and now in the Orissa State Museum. It presents the goddess as seated in *Rajalilasana* showing *Vyakhyana mudra* in right hand and lotus stalk in the left. The Banapur hoard contains bronze images of Tara in *lalitasana* carrying lotus in left hand and exhibiting *Varadamudra* in the right.

A good number of sculptural representations testifying to the popularity of the Buddhist goddess Tara are found in and outside Orissa also, i.e. in the caves of Elora, Sirpur (in Chhattishgarh) and Nasik. In the subsequent history of Buddhism this goddess assumed numerous forms and some of the varieties occur in sculptures, in stone and bronze conforming to the *dhyanas*, at Nalanda, Budhagaya, Bengal and Orissa.

In the 7th century according to Huien Tsang there were many images of Tara in Southern India and her popularity equalled that of any god in the Mahayanic Pantheon. Many temples and colleges were dedicated to her and her worship extended to all over India. Orissa State Museum has preserved many Tara images which are under display in the Archaeological Gallery. They are given below :

Tara Images of Tara in the Orissa State Museum

AY/46, Find Spot - Bhubaneswar, Measurement - 5' 5" / 3'0"/1'8", Circa 8th Century A.D.

It is one of the life size sculptures displayed in the Archaeology Gallery of the museum. The image is made of sand stone and seated in *lalita* pose on a double-petalled lotus pedestal. All the four arms from the elbow are broken and missing except the fingers and the portion of the wrist of one arm holding some object, which is seen to be placed on the left thigh. Facial appearance is also not clear, as it is badly mutilated. The heavy hair and earrings are quite befitting to the figure. Necklace fitted with a triangular central locket, armlets, wrist band and anklets are the ornaments worn by the deity. A beaded chain with several strands encircles her body. Below the pedestal on either side are found two attendant figures. Another bald headed devotee wearing sacred thread is also depicted in kneeled down position and folded hands. The figure of the lion is shown on the extreme right side of the image. The image is carved out on two blocks of red sandstones which are joined together. Because of the sand stone the carvings, especially the ornaments and other decorative elements are devoid of true aesthetic merits.

AY/68, Find Spot - Nimapara (Puri), Measurement - 4'3" / 2'2" / 1'2", Circa 10th Century A.D.

This image of Tara carved out of sand stone, was originally lying buried under a tree in the Nimapara area of Puri district. The museum authorities acquired the image which is now on display in the Sculpture Gallery. It is the only specimen in which we notice the characteristics of a Buddhist Goddess. The two armed image of Tara is seated in *Padmasana* on a double petalled lotus throne. But unfortunately the hands from the elbow are broken portion and nose, lips and cheeks are slightly rubbed. Below the pedestal on the right side are shown two female devotees in kneeled down position and folded hands. The

objects hold in each hand by the devotees are distinct. One male figure is sitting in the kneeled down position and the other one is sitting crosslegged. To the extreme left side is shown another headless damaged figure sitting crosslegged. In between the devotees the objects of worship such as lamps and miniature stupas etc are carved. Below the lotus pedestal there are several sculptures which includes, from proper left to right, a lotus bud, a sword, two seated damsels, a horse and an elephant. The deity is flanked by two seated devotees. Dhyanī Buddhas numbering five are seated on lotus pedestal showing *Abhaya*, *Bhumisparsa* and *Dharmachakra Pravartana mudras*. The Dhyanī Buddha shown at the top of the *kirtimukha* is flanked by two slightly damaged flying *vidyadharas*. Again two female devotees are depicted just below the *vidyadharas* in either side. The notable ornaments worn by the deity are anklets, *valayas*, girdle, necklace, armlets, garland (or sacred thread), earrings and crowning *mukuta*. The image is very superbly carved as observed from the details of its ornamentation, which not only reveals the artistic merit of the sculpture but also enhance the feminine accomplishment of the image.

CI.No.113, Find Spot - Bhubaneswar, Measurement - 1'5" / 0' 10" / 0'6", Circa 9th Century A.D.

With completely broken and damaged face this image of Tara sits on a double petalled lotus pedestal. The knee portions are broken. Her left leg rests on the lotus pedestal, where as the right leg is hanging down and placed on the base of the pedestal indicating the *lalita* pose. Below the lotus to the left side is depicted a lion whose head is broken and missing. At the top of her head is shown a *kirtimukha*, below is seen the *makara* motif forming an arch over the head of

the deity. She is wearing beaded anklets, double strained *valayas*, three strained girdle fitted with a central locket and tussels covering portions of the lower garment. Other ornaments include bangles in her right hand, armlets fitted with jewels, seven strained beaded necklace the middle of which is damaged, a beaded garland or *upavita* encircling the body and circular earrings. The upper garment is covering the shoulder and the breast portion.

SK.No.117, Find spot - Bhubaneswar, Measurement - 1'2" / 0'11" / 0' 7", Circa 10th century A.D.

This image is seated on a double petalled lotus in *lalita* pose. A female devotee in folded hands is seen below the pedestal in the left side. Her right hand is shown in *Varada mudra* where as her left hand holds the lotus with the stalk coming upward from the pedestal on the left side. She is flanked at the top by two flying *vidyadharas* with wreaths in their hands. The upper portion of her body is covered with garment and after a gap the lower garment covering the waist hangs down up to the ankles. Thus the belly is left uncovered. She is wearing bangles, armlets fitted with central jewel, a beaded necklace, circular *kundalas* as well as other crowning ornaments. Her nose and a portion of the left eye is broken.

AY/36, Find spot-Bhubaneswar, Measurement - 2'2" / 2'10" / 0'10", Circa 8th Century A.D.

Among other sculptures displayed in the museum mention may be made of some unique Tara images collected from different localities. Prof. Poucher has classified Tara into different categories on the basis of colour. It is therefore difficult to identify the representation of Tara images, especially of stone, which are normally devoid of colour. So special attention should be

paid to the particular pose in which Tara sits as well as to her associates for correct identification. Moreover only those images should be designated as Tara to whom the Mantra *Om Tara Tuit Re Ture swaha* is attributed. There are seven different varieties of Tara carrying the lotus flower in left hand and exhibiting *varada* in the right.

This image is headless and is seated on a double petalled lotus pedestal. Out of the four hands the right two hands are totally broken and missing. The upper left hand is also damaged but the lower left hand holds an object which cannot be identified. A beaded girdle duly fitted with full bloom lotus petalled locket at the centre encircling the breast is a typical ornaments worn by the deity. Traces of wearing bangles and armlets are also visible. The image is carved in rough sand stone and therefore, the ornaments are devoid of artistic merit.

Sl.No.118, Find spot - Bhubaneswar, Measurement - 1'4" / 0'11" / 0'9", Circa 10th century A.D.

Sitting on a double petalled lotus pedestal with the left leg resting on it and the right leg hanging down in *lalita* pose, in her left hand she holds a lotus whose stalk originates from the pedestal and her right hand shows the *varada mudra*. Portions of her face, the left knee and the left breast are broken. Below the lotus pedestal there is a carving of the branches of a tree. She is putting on beaded *valayas*, armlets, necklace and ear-rings and a garland or the sacred thread encircling her body.

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Shri Rameswar Thakur, His Excellency the Governor of Orissa, felicitating Shri Nabakishore Routray, President and Sri Basanta Kumar Behera, General Secretary of Orissa Freedom Fighters' Welfare Association on the occasion of 59th Independence Day.