

The Female Wisdom. The Female Aspect in Buddhism

Intention of this article is illustration of that which is in Buddhist terminology called 'female aspect', a feature that manifests in every sentient being regardless of gender or religious views. The article is based on the teaching of one of the well-known masters of Tibetan Buddhism Machig Labdron (1055–1145), the founder of a unique transmission lineage known as The Chod of Mahāmudrā. According to her teaching, female principle manifests on three levels. The article is structured with three respective subtitles that elaborate on the three levels of the main concern in more detail. The article does not only try to present the female aspect in itself, but also in its relation to the whole.

Images of traditional religious views founded various assumptions about our identities. However, the message of this article is not another concept about a gender role influenced by a religious view. The intention here is to illustrate that which in Buddhist terminology is called female aspect. The feature that manifests in every sentient being regardless of gender or religious views.

When society of antique India was limited by feudalism, caste system, and patriarchy, the Buddha's teaching¹ (Skt. *dharma*, Tib. *chos*) was like fresh air, breaking through constraining conventions. Some of the Buddhist practitioners, male and female wandering yogis who flourished in northern India between the eighth and twelfth centuries deeply influenced Tantric Buddhism, which then spread into Tibet. They were students of high capacity from a wide range of social backgrounds. These accomplishers (Tib. *rnal 'byor pa* [male], *rnal 'byor ma* [female], Skt. *yogin* [male], *yoginī* [female])², lived often with several partners, outside great monastic institutions and social standards of the period. Their unique perspective of social relationship was devoid of any hierarchical structures. One of the first places where we can meet the tantric yogis and yoginis is in the biographies of the eighty-four Mahasiddhas (*grub chen thob pa*). Hostile areas such as woods, caves, or charnel grounds provided for these yogis and yoginis perfect conditions to use the means

¹ The Buddha, within 45 years of travelling and teachings in North India, passed different kinds of teachings (in total, according to Tibetan sources, 84 000 teachings) depending on students and their abilities and needs. Therefore Buddha's teachings (Skt. *dharma*) can be summarised in three divisions or levels. The outer – Small Way (Pal. *theravāda*, Skt. *sthaviravāda*), the inner – Great Way (Skt. *mahāyāna*), and the secret – Diamond Way (Skt. *vajrayāna*). This is an exclusively Tibetan categorisation.

² In Asia, there are three types of practising Buddhists: monks, lay practitioners, or yogis. Today, due to the good general education in the West, the lifestyles and views of lay practitioners and of yogis have become more intermingled.

of Diamond Way teachings³ (Tib. *rdo rje theg pa*, Skt. *vajrayāna*). Through these methods, they have gained full access to the nature of mind⁴.

The advanced level of the Buddha's teachings emphasizes the union of two inter-related features that intertwine with every experience of mind. These are **penetrating insight** (Skt. *prajñā*, Tib. *shes rab*) and **skilful means** (Skt. *upāya*, Tib. *thab*).

Penetrating insight is a subtle and sharp intelligence, sometimes called openness of mind or empty⁵ aspect of mind, which enables mind to perceive and to know. This sensitivity is recognised as feminine.

The skilful means, also called radiance or lucidity of mind, is a radiant power that allows all phenomena to manifest in the open space. This playfulness is recognised as masculine. The true nature of mind, spontaneously manifests five female wisdoms and four male activities⁶.

From the ultimate point of view, maleness and femaleness is a pair of concepts that are defined in terms of each other and they are not innate attributes of essences. These aspects are imputed onto phenomena by mind. Hence, every phenomenon which derives its meaning only in relation to its opposite is empty in itself. Male and female can make sense only in relation to each other. And here, both the female and the male aspect are not determined by biology.

The union of the penetrating insight and the skilful means unfolds the third aspect of mind, which is the actual ability to experience, sometimes called luminosity of mind. All three aspects: openness, clarity, and luminosity are the ultimate expression of mind. Here it is important to mention that although it is traditionally explained to better understand the mind, the actual experience of the mind's nature is inexpressible. Any label would only limit its full experience. The nature of mind is beyond any conceptual thinking, names, or reference point. According to the highest teachings of Buddha, all that exists is simply a single reality. There is no difference between relative and absolute truths. The highest joy of the intrinsically perfect present state is found only in instantaneous presence illuminated by the power of incomparable wisdom. Reality does not come from anywhere else.

³ Diamond Way, (Tib. *Dorje Thegpa*, Skt. *vajrayāna*) is also called *Tantrayāna* and *Mantrayāna*. This is, according to Tibetans, the highest level of the Buddha's teachings, encompassing body, speech, and mind with a goal of full enlightenment. In this practice the goal also becomes the path by using fast methods, which go deep. These teachings can only be used with the perspective of seeing everything as fundamentally pure.

⁴ Also called the Buddha nature – fully developed state of mind, which recognises its full potential. For more details, read Kalu Rinpoche (1997), 'Chapter 3 – 'The Nature of Mind', *Luminous Mind, The Way of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publications.

⁵ The term 'empty' in Buddhist terminology does not mean nothingness, but rather empty of **something** that could be pointed out as such.

⁶ The five wisdoms are: intuitive, mirror-like, discriminating, all-accomplishing, and equality. The four male activities are: calming, increasing, fascinating, and protecting.

The highly advanced tantric⁷ practices focus on the unification of the female and the male aspect⁸. According to Shaw (1994: 180), when the tantric Buddhism flourished in antique India, acknowledged authorities of these practices were especially women. Later on, their male partners and students recorded and passed their teachings on⁹. This could be one of the reasons why the records of tantric teachings by male teachers outlast in greater number those of the female ones.

One of the very few, well-known female masters of Tibetan Buddhism was Machig Labdron, who lived in Tibet in years 1055–1145 (contemporary of the yogi Milarepa)¹⁰. She was the founder of a unique transmission lineage known as The Chod of Mahāmudrā¹¹.

One of the most concise explanations of the female aspect can be found in a Machig Labdron's teaching addressed to her own son:

From an outer point of view, I am the Mother of the Buddhas – (Prajñāpāramitā).
From an inner point of view I am Tārā, and
From a secret point of view I am Vajrayoginī. (Edou 1996: 103)

According to Machig Labdron, female principle manifests on three levels: outer, inner, and secret. The following elaborates on these three levels in more detail. The origin of Prajñāpāramitā, Tārā, and Vajrayoginī can be understood in two ways. One explains their outer form as they appear in Buddhist iconography, and the other one explains their historical background in terms of culture and texts sources.

Prajñāpāramitā – The Great Mother principle

Before there had not been any Prajñāpāramitā's portray in the Buddhist iconography, or a description of her as a female bodhisattva. Her name was associated solely with

⁷ Tantra – (Tib. *rGyud*) teachings given by the Buddha to his most advanced disciples. The term '*tantra*' indicates the continuum of the wisdom-mind found in both ordinary beings and Buddhas, which itself makes possible the experience of enlightenment. The inherent wisdom-mind is thus the basis, the path, and the fruit of the *Vajrayāna* practice outlined in the tantras. Tantras are divided into *kriyā*, *caryā*, *yoga*, and *anuttara*. The *anuttarat Tantra* is further divided into the three classes of 'father', 'mother', and 'non-dual'.

⁸ Tantric union practice is designed to mutually liberate and transform both woman and man, who practice it together. A practitioner meditates on united forms of Buddha aspects to strengthen the inseparability of the different abilities of mind, which we are otherwise not able to experience due to our strong dualistic concepts. These kinds of practices are considered as one of the most skilful methods of the Buddha. Here the both partners are required to highly respect and venerate each other. Her male partner sees the woman as the embodiment of the highest wisdom and his consort perceives the man as the embodiment of the highest joy. Thus, from the impersonal level, mind is ready to step beyond its concepts and it is able to trust its direct experience of the Buddha nature (here the Buddha is mentioned not as a person, but as the ultimate state of mind).

⁹ Shaw M. (1994: 180), *Passionate Enlightenment, Woman in Tantric Buddhism*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. This assumption is also discussed in chaps. 3 and 8.

¹⁰ There are other inspiring biographies of great Buddhist yoginies of India and Tibet, such as Yeshe Tsogyal, Mandarava, or Gelongma Palmo, which can be satisfactorily illustrative to our purpose.

¹¹ In this practice a practitioner is cutting off his attachment to the body and ego. Chod practice aims to free the mind from fear and to reach realisation of its nature, the primordially clear bliss and emptiness.

21 volumes of Sūtra teachings in Kangyur¹², and some of the Sūtras divisions in Tangyur¹³, from which *Heart Sūtra* is probably one of the most famous Buddhist texts. It is defined as the essence of all Prajñāpāramitā's teachings. The Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras¹⁴ of Indian Mahayana tradition date already from the second century B.C.E., which was long before her first portrayal appeared.

Prajñāpāramitā's earliest known image dates back to the seventh century and it is found at cave site of Ellora. The earliest literary descriptions of her are from about the same period. Here she is described as golden in colour, seated on a white lotus flower, with one hand in a teaching gesture and the other holding a Buddhist text¹⁵.

On Tibetan depictions Prajñāpāramitā appears golden, with one face and four arms. She sits in the full meditation position signifying that contemplation is the path to perfect wisdom. Her central pair of hands rests on her lap, supporting her meditation, or the hands are in a characteristic teaching gesture at her heart. Her right outer arm holds the Prajñāpāramitā text and her left outer arm holds a vajra (*rdo rje*), signifying indestructible emptiness of mind (*śūnyatā*).

As regards the meaning of her name, the Sanskrit noun „Prajñā” (Tib. *shes rab*) is composed of two words: *pra*, meaning ‘a better or the best kind’ and *jñā*, meaning ‘knowing or mind’. This refers to the cognitive, intelligent aspect of mind in Buddhism. *Prajñā* indicates the mental faculty of precise understanding. It is a basic tool of mind that discriminates the various aspects of the subject so that everything is known correctly for itself and in relation to the whole. It is used in the field of learning to investigate and to discriminate. Prajñāpāramitā is often depicted as an embodiment of the Buddha's teachings. She is a feminine principle, which conjoins the practitioner with the reality. *Prajñā* means wisdom, the key factors of the path to enlightenment, and because wisdom reaches beyond that which is perceived by our senses, it is said to be transcendent (*pāramita*), which is the second part of her name. *Pāramitā* literally means, ‘gone across to the other side’. For the reason that the Buddha is ‘travelling to the other side of the ocean’ of the cyclic existence (*samsāra*), it is often translated as ‘gone to the other shore’¹⁶.

¹² Kangyur is popularly considered as containing 84000 teachings of the Buddha. It consists of *Vinaya* section (21000 teachings = 13 volumes), *Sūtra* (21000 teachings = 66 volumes), *Abhidharma* (21000 teachings = 21 volumes), *Vajrayāna* (21000 teachings = 22 volumes).

¹³ Tangyur is similarly as Kangyur categorised into Sūtra (Tib. *mdo*), which consists of 136 volumes (of which first sixteen volumes consist of commentaries on the Prajñāpāramitā, the second division of the sevenfold classification of Kangyur), and Tantra (*rGyud*), which consists of 87 volumes. These are the commentaries written on Kangyur.

¹⁴ It includes 21 volumes of the second division of the sevenfold classification of Kangyur and some commentaries of 136 volumes of Sūtra division of Tangyur.

¹⁵ Her representations vary with regard to where she appears in iconography of different countries – Indian (with two arms and two Dharma texts), Nepalese (with four arms, mudra, text and mala), Chinese (standing position), or Tibetan (with four arms and vajra) iconography of Buddhist deities.

¹⁶ This term is used to design the six liberating actions of a bodhisattva, the six *paramitas* (Tib. *phar phyin drug*), or ‘six liberating actions’. These actions belong to the deeds of someone who has gone to the other shore rather than someone who is still in cyclic existence. Therefore, this has been translated as ‘transcending’ or ‘perfection of’. Sometimes these are joined together as the ‘transcending perfection of’. The six liberating actions are: generosity, good conduct, patience, joyful effort, meditation, and wisdom. Practice of the first five paramitas accumulates merits, which are indispensable for wisdom (sixth param-

Prajñāpāramitā (Tib. *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phin pa*) is sometimes also called 'The Wisdom Awareness' (Tib. *shes rab ye shes*), or 'The Great Mother' (Tib. *yum chen mo*), or 'The Mother of All Buddhas'. All phenomena are 'born' from emptiness (Shaw 2006: 167). Buddha's teachings explain that the real nature of all beings is Dharmadhātu¹⁷, the ultimate reality itself. From the recognition of this very nature all Buddhas are 'born'. It is said that Prajñāpāramitā gives birth to all Buddhas¹⁸, because she points beyond conceptual thinking, straight into the inexpressible reality. Her wisdom goes beyond that which we can learn from any book.

Prajñāpāramitā, The Great Mother is comfortable warm and tender space, offering the unconditioned refuge to everyone who is not frightened of the emptiness.

In naive beings, you engender fear –
To them, you appear just terrifying.
To the wise, you grant your comfort –
To them, you appear so mild and gentle. (Rahulabhadra 2007: 6)

Prajñāpāramitā is the Queen of Buddhist science. She is the one who reveals reality, the ultimate truth. Prajñāpāramitā's teachings elucidate that all phenomena are in their essence empty of their own essence. Everything is the summation of its components and conditions (dependent arising). There is no self-existing essence of phenomena¹⁹ since everything is void of self-essence. Emptiness, like space, is the ultimate nature of all phenomena, which allows everything to occur. It is all pervading, eternal, always, and everywhere. And it is from this recognition of empty nature of mind, that one becomes a Buddha, the awakened one.

Don't search somewhere else, she is right within you.
Connate²⁰ wisdom is the actuality
Of natural great luminosity
That is not established as any entity or characteristic. (Āryadeva 2007: 68)²¹

ita) to arise. Cf. Gampopa (1998: 183–231), *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. Translated by Khenpo Konchog Gyaltzen Rinpoche, USA.

¹⁷ The realm of phenomena – the suchness in which emptiness and dependent origination are inseparable. The nature of mind and phenomena that lies beyond arising, dwelling, and ceasing.

¹⁸ The Great Mother principle, giving birth to all phenomena has no beginning. It is a fundamental process of emptiness that goes on constantly. It is unborn, non-dwelling and unceasing.

¹⁹ Cf. 'Sunyatasaptatikarika of Nagarjuna', in Tola F. & C. Dragonetti (eds.) (2002), *On Voidness (A Study on Buddhist Nihilism)*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

²⁰ The Sanskrit *sahaja* (lit. 'born together') means 'innate, original, natural' but also 'always the same as in the very beginning'. There is no awareness apart from emptiness and no emptiness or awareness apart from lucidity. Mind is of fundamental nature with three aspects: emptiness, awareness, and lucidity. These are inseparable.

²¹ Āryadeva, *Great Stanzas on Prajñāpāramitā*, in Brunnholz K. (2007: 66–73).

Tārā - The Liberatrice

Taranatha's text 'Golden Mala' (Tib. *ser gyi phreng ba*), as well as contemporary commentaries, like the one of Bokar Tulku, say that in the time of one of the former worlds, there was a princess called 'Moon of Wisdom'. She was a student of the former Buddha Dundubhīśvara²². When she became a Bodhisattva, a monk advised her to better be reborn as a man in order to be able to easier reach full enlightenment.

To the monk's surprise, the princess answered him:

In this life there is no such distinction as 'male' and 'female,'
Neither of 'self identity,' a 'person' nor any perception (of such),
And therefore, attachment to ideas of 'male' and 'female' is quite
Worthless. Weak-minded world kings are always deluded by this.

Then she added:

Many wish to reach Enlightenment in male body and not as a female.
Therefore I will work for benefit of all sentient beings always in the female body
Until the end of dependent existence. (Beyer 1973: 64–65; Wilson 1986: 33–35)

When she met the Buddha Amoghasiddhi²³, she gave him a promise to protect all beings from danger and fear. Through the power of such a promise, she developed even more qualities and befits to be called 'Destroyer of Obstacles and Demons'. She destroyed millions of obscurations and problems and sometimes she was also called 'Heroine' or 'She Who Protects'.

In another world period called Asaṅga, Tārā reached full Enlightenment and realised the state of Prajñāpāramitā. Therefore, she is often associated with 'The Mother of All Buddhas'. Other Buddhist legend mentions that Bodhisattva Loving Eyes²⁴ (Tib. *spyān ras gzigs*, Skt. *Avalokiteśvara*) after liberating millions of beings realised that there are still countless of them suffering while being constantly reborn in lower realms of existence. Two tears dropped down from his eyes out of his compassion. One of them transformed into Green Tārā, and the other into White Tārā. Both Tārās promised to Loving Eyes that they would be helping all beings on the way to liberation.

According to another explanation, Tārā appeared as a ray of blue light sent by Buddha Limitless Light²⁵ (Skt. *Amitābha*, Tib. 'od dpag med) after he had promised to work for the benefit of all beings²⁶. According to Taranatha, in our times, in the moment when Buddha Śakyamuni was meditating in the shadow of the Bodhi tree, Tārā helped him to overcome disturbing energies²⁷.

²² Dundubhīśvara's name means 'The Light of Many Worlds' or 'Multicoloured Light'.

²³ He is the chief Buddha of so called 'action' family, the manifestation of wisdom of experience.

²⁴ Bodhisattva 'Loving Eyes' was one of the main students of Buddha Śakyamuni and the main Bodhisattvas in Tibetan Buddhist iconography. He is the embodiment of love and compassion of all Buddhas.

²⁵ The chief Buddha of the lotus (*padma*) family. The manifestation of discriminating wisdom.

²⁶ Cf. Shaw M. (2006), *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, Princeton.

²⁷ Cf. Taranatha J., *The Origin of the Tara Tantra*, Translated by Templeman D. (1981a.), Dharmasala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

The origin of the word Tārā (Tib. *sgrol ma*), is a Sanskrit verb that literally means, 'to swim'. However, her name has two other basic meanings. One of them is *Liberatrice*, 'She Who Liberates from the Cyclic Existence'. It is formulated in the Indian and Tibetan traditions by saying that Tārā frees beings from the eight (great) fears (of worldly existence). The other meaning, not so well known is: 'The Star Showing The Way'. The traditional name of Tārā in Tibet is *rje btsun ma 'phags sgrol ma*. The word *rje* can be translated as 'laudable' or 'gentlewoman' in the sense of being the highest refuge, which can be found within conditioned existence as well as after reaching liberation. The next syllable *btsun* means *The Precious One* and it shows that all her activities are perfect. The following word, *'phags*, (Skt. *ārya*) means 'glorious' and *ma* points to the female principle.

Tārā manifests on two levels. On relative level, she acts as quick activity, and fulfils all the most earnest needs of beings wherever it is needed. She helps in the cases of illness, danger, wars, conflicts, and/or when other personal problems appear. Tārā's wisdom is such as the sharpness of a knife.

On the absolute level, Tārā appears as *vidam*, the Buddha aspect that brings us to the liberation state, where mind recognises the ego as an illusion and thus becomes no longer a target of any personal problem. If there is no ego, there is no one to suffer. Only from this understanding, where one is no longer occupied with oneself, one is able to benefit others effectively.

The Green Tārā increases wisdom, dissolves fears and worries, and fulfils wishes. She is always ready to act in order to help beings. In this way she carries out the activity of all Buddhas. She is also known in nine other different emanations, and often depicted in her power-field of twenty peaceful and powerfully protective forms of her own kind.

The White Tārā supports practitioners in advanced stages of meditation. Her special characteristic is her seven eyes. Apart from her two natural eyes, she has vertical eyes on her forehead, as well as two on her palms and two on the soles of both feet, which shows her highest sensitivity and awareness towards all suffering of the universe. She grants longevity and protects from sickness.

According to traditional Buddhist explanations, tantra of Tārā is included in teachings, which has been given by Buddha Śakyamuni himself and became more known since the third council in about 250 B.C.E. The practice of Tārā²⁸ belongs to Mother Tantra system, which puts stress on the wisdom aspect²⁹.

In general, Tārā is the female manifestation of compassion with peace-giving activity. In her essence, she is *prajñā* (the cognition of emptiness), but, in her activity, she is *upāya* (the skilful means). She works constantly for the liberation of beings from constraints of conditioned existence.

²⁸ There are three different traditions of Tārā practice regarding their transmission lineage. The first is the oldest tradition and it originates from Suryagupta. The second tradition is probably the best known and the most widespread and it comes from Nagarjuna and Atiśa. The last third tradition is from old line (Tib. *Ñingma*) of hidden texts.

²⁹ Cf. Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (2005), *Systems of Buddhist Tantra*. Transl. Guarisco, E. and I. McLeod, New York: Snow Lion.

Compassion and activity are qualities that are in Buddhism associated with the male aspect. Tārā, nonetheless, can be understood as the female expression of these qualities. When she acts, she acts in a more subtle way, quickly, precisely, and with fine sensitivity, contrary to male compassion and activity, which is rather more apparent, unswerving, and loyal.

Ḍākinī – The Sky-dancer

When Buddhism spread throughout India for the first time, the term ‘Ḍākinī’ had a rather negative meaning. It was understood as ‘a witch’, a frightening woman with special powers and abilities. The original meaning of the word shows destructive power. She was rather a ferocious, carnivorous and treacherous individual expelled from society. This wild woman of the low caste was later transformed into a wisdom holder. The Ḍākinī symbolises tantric transformation of emotions into wisdoms, of the impure into the pure. On the absolute level all phenomena are neither good nor bad. They are just ‘such’. However, conceptual thinking and labelling prevents from an experience of reality as it really is. From the basic ignorance of mind, when mind is aware of everything that is manifested, but not aware of itself, the distinction of object and subject appears. Out of that desire, anger, pride, and jealousy unfold. The five basic emotions are in their essence the five wisdoms. In the moment the mind recognises its own nature, ignorance is experienced as intuitive wisdom that knows everything. Desire is experienced as discriminating wisdom, which recognises each phenomenon as different from another and at the same time as a part of the totality. Anger is experienced as mirror like wisdom, when mind sees everything exactly as it is. Pride transforms into enriching wisdom, which recognises everything as inspiring for the sole reason that it can appear. Finally, jealousy becomes all-accomplishing wisdom, which recognises flows and motions of experiences.

Ḍākinī in Tibetan is translated as ‘*mkha gro ma*’ which literally means ‘She who travels in the sky’, or ‘sky-dancer’.

According to Tibetan commentaries, the first part of her name *mkhav* refers to space or sky, emptiness (*śūnyatā*, *stong pa nyid*) with no centre or limits. The second part of her name ‘*gro*’ refers to movements and spontaneity, and the feminine ending ‘*ma*’, suggests her female character. Her femaleness is central to her character.

In Tibetan colloquial language the term ‘Ḍākinī’ indicates the wife of a practitioner or yogin. In Buddhist tantric language, it is used to indicate a woman practitioner who has attained some realisation. Such yoginis are important in the tantric world because they actually carry the power of the Buddhist wisdom originating from recognising emptiness. Meeting this kind of woman can have a profound effect on the journey of a tantric practitioner, let alone an ordinary person.

According to some descriptions, she manifests as sixteen years old female form of energy and light. She appears naked because realisation of emptiness is free of any labels or concepts. Her terrifying, voluptuous and alluring body radiates with light into

the whole space. She has a single face, signifying the ultimate nature of all phenomena; her three blood-shot eyes gaze into the vastness of space seeing the past, present, and future. She has two arms signifying skilful means and wisdom of emptiness. She holds a skull bowl overflowing with blood and a sharp chopping knife, cutting through all dualistic clinging. She cradles a bone khaṭvāṅga³⁰, which symbolises her partner Heruka, because she never walks alone. Her five bone ornaments signify the five perfections (pāramitās), whereas her embodiment is of the sixth perfection, that of wisdom. She wears a necklace of fifty-one freshly severed human heads (because she overcame deluded states of mind) together with laments flowers (which show her understanding of the inherent purity of all phenomena). She assumes a dancing posture with the right leg up and the left leg stepping down, because she does not abide neither in saṃsāra nor in nirvāṇa and although she rests in deep meditation state (samādhi³¹), she is still active in this world. She is treading upon a burning sun disc, a male human corpse, and a lotus flower.

Ḍākinī manifests as wisdom energy, without physical form, or as a woman in physical form. In both cases, she carries protection, support, and inspiration, which comes just like her dance in a spontaneous movement. Always within right circumstances and in the right time, Ḍākinī is dynamic, inspiring principle of change, the play of energy, which is beyond the dualistic construct of subject and object, good and bad, or like and dislike.

She manifests in a variety of forms in frisky chaos, which is not governed by logic. Contact with her brings about a sense of freshness and magic, she is a guide and consort, who activates profound awareness. She can shake with our comfortable zones if we become too stiff or attached. Her breathtaking shove lets go of our clinging. There is nothing we can do about it. We can only accept it in order to become stronger and mature (Serab Gjalchen Rinpoche, 2009, pers. comm).

Prajñāpāramitā, Tārā and Ḍākinī are three manifestations of female aspects.

On the outer level this female aspect is The Great Mother – Prajñāpāramitā, the warm inviting and open space, the unlimited potential that permits everything to occur.

On the inner level, she carries peaceful and compassionate activity as the Tārā who helps where she is needed and liberates from obstacles such as fears and conflicts, and rounds things when they become too difficult.

On the secret level, she manifests as spontaneously dancing Ḍākinī, inspiring and unpredictable playful flow of changes.

Moreover, all three levels of the female aspect point to the emptiness.

Prajñāpāramitā's wisdom shows that all phenomena are empty of the essence.

³⁰ Khaṭvāṅga is Ḍākinī's tantric staff. It is made of bones. On the top are three severed human heads (one is fresh head, one is old, rotten head, and the one on the very top is skull without flesh. They are placed on the top of each other). It is graced with golden vajra and white silk ribbon knotted below the vajra. Khaṭvāṅga signifies her partner Heruka 'The Highest Bliss'.

³¹ *Samādhi*, or concentration of the mind (one-pointedness of mind, Pal. *cittassa-ekaggata*).

Tārā shows that compassion and emptiness are inseparable, hence only if we realised empty nature of all phenomena we can fully develop compassion. Compassion without the wisdom of emptiness has no impetus to work for the freedom of others.

Ḍākinī is a playful change, showing that because of that reason that everything is constantly in motion and changing, all is like an illusion and not absolute. The impermanence proves the empty aspect of all phenomena.

It is the deluded mind, which constantly tries to grasp, that which is non-graspable.

Look, look at your own mind.
 Mind itself does not exist anywhere.
 This non-existent mind is the great wonder of the variety of appearance.
 Mind is merely appearance.
 That mind of all sentient beings
 Is the wisdom of great bliss,
 Incomprehensible, complete non-thought,
 Appearing as the nature of luminosity.
 For sentient beings of diverse aspirations
 A variety of skilful means is shown.
 By the variety of illusory activities
 The warrior behaves like lion,
 Attaining the incomprehensible state.
 This is the blessing of the Vajrayoginī
 The succession of lineage teachers
 Is like a variety of jewels
 For the benefit of worthy ones. (Trungpa 1985: 65–66)

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