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In Praise of the Noble Lady Vajra Sarasvatī

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo



KHYENTSE VISION
PROJECT

'phags ma rdo rje dbyangs can ma la bstod pa

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Khyentse Vision Project: Translating the Works of
Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

This short praise offers highly poetic prayers to the deity Sarasvatī, the Goddess of Melody. In the broader Indic tradition, Sarasvatī is known as the goddess of literature, poetry, music, and wisdom. In Buddhism, she is depicted in many different forms but is most often red or white in color. She is also considered to be one of the Twenty-One Tārās. She figures in both Sūtra and Tantra teachings and has various peaceful and wrathful forms, sometimes appearing with her consort, Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of knowledge and insight.

This particular praise to Sarasvatī comes from the large collection of praises within the first volume of Khyentse Wangpo's Collected Works (Kabum). Here, Khyentse Wangpo has taken three existing verses of praise from ancient manuscripts on the secret practice of Red Sarasvatī and added four verses of supplication to fulfill particular spiritual aims. A final, additional verse is appended to this prayer.

རྩི་རྩེ་དབྱངས་ཅན་མ་ལ་བསྟོད་པ།

In Praise of Vajra Sarasvatī

In the Indian language: *Ārya Vajra Sarasvatī Stuti*.

In the Tibetan language: *Pagma Dorje Yangchenma La Töpa*.

Homage to the Blessed One, the Sovereign of Speech!

Goddess, when this praise is recited with true devotion,
You destroy in a single instant
The chains that bind to cyclic existence—
Mother of all victorious ones, I bow to you.

With your wisdom, the supreme wisdom, [117]
Swiftly, ever-swiftly, you sever
Ignorance born of ignorance—
Goddess of goddesses, I bow to you.

You grant all supreme forms of intellect
And bestow infinite types of intelligence,
Intellect perfected as Prajñāpāramitā—
Treasure of boundless intelligence, I bow to you.

Appended Verses:

Noble Lady, may the brilliant moonlight
Of this felicitous supplication
Dispel the darkness of all confusion,
And may the ocean of intellect swell!

In the wisdom mirror of the two accumulations,
Goddess of Melody, you fully appear.
Through the splendor of your display of deity, mantra, and samādhi,
May the two siddhis be achieved!

Glory of Speech, may a stream of nectar,
The blessing of your three secrets,
Fully purify the stains of the three obscurations,
And may I be restored in the nourishment of twofold knowledge!

In short, from now until awakening,
Noble Lady, may I be taken into your care,
And may I be delivered from the three realms
Into the basic space of the goddess of Prajñāpāramitā!

This praise comes from an older text on the secret practice of the Noble Lady Red Sarasvatī, to which were appended these verses of aspiration entreating the fulfillment of aspirations, written in accordance with the scriptures by Khyentse Wangpo, the servant who delights the guru Mañjughoṣa. Virtue!

An Additional Verse:

*Namaḥ Sarasvatyai!*¹

Lake-Born One² (Sarasvatī and the moon), lustrous³ white and red,⁴
You are adorned with a deer mark.⁵ [118]
Like the crescent bound in the topknot⁶ of the powerful one,⁷
You always enter places of isolation.

NOTES

1. “Homage to Sarasvatī!”
2. Sarasvatī is said to dwell in a jeweled palace on Lake Manasarovar (literally, “Mind Lake,” referring to Brahṃā’s ideation) on an island south of the axis mundi, that is, Mount Sumeru/Kailāsa, where Śiva is also believed to dwell. See Khyentse Wangpo, *bram ze phur bu’i lugs kyi dbyangs can ma dkar mo’i sgrub thabs ngag ’don snying por dril ba kun mkhyen dgyes pa’i lam srol*, 316.
3. The word for “lustrous” (*gnag pa*; as in Sanskrit *kṛṣṇavarṇa*) has a double meaning of black or dark blue, which may allude to the phase of the moon as well as the dark form of the goddess. Aside from the tradition of Red Sarasvatī (see, e.g., Khyentse Wangpo, *bram ze phur bu’i lugs kyi dbyangs can ma dkar mo’i sgrub thabs ngag ’don snying por dril ba kun mkhyen dgyes pa’i lam srol*) originating from the *Black Yamāntaka Tantra* (*Kṛṣṇayāmāritantra*; *gshin rje’i gshed dgra nag gi rgyud*), other dark forms include Nīlasarasvatī and Mātāṅgī in Hinduism and Durgottārīṇī Tārā in Buddhism. In particular, the *Brhannīlatantra* bears mention in relation to the moon (see below). The giant fish avatar Matsyāvatāra explains that she gained her blue color after being poisoned: “The great goddess Umā is blue, and her consort is Nīlakaṇṭha; Indra the king of the devas is blue, the life-giving clouds are blue; the limitless sky is blue, the blemish that adds beauty to the moon is also blue. I am myself blue though I am verily the abode of sattvaḡuṇa. Do not grieve and from today, you will be known as ‘Nīlasarasvatī’ and will grant mokṣa to the deserving...” In the Tamil tradition, the name Nīlasarasvatī is connected to the word *nilavu*, “to shine” (in a gentle way, compared to the brightness of the sun); see Rangaswamy, *The Religion and Philosophy of Tevaram*, chapter 2.4.
4. The Tibetan term “white and red” (*dkar dmar*), which is used in Tibetan aesthetics and tangka painting, not only describes the color of the subject’s complexion (white with a tinge of red) but also a sense of glowing. The moon also changes from white to a more ruddy hue. Khyentse Wangpo may be enjoying a bit of word play here, poetically alluding to the main two forms of the goddess in Tibet: white in the tradition of Brahmin Kīla (see Khyentse Wangpo, *dbyangs can ma dmar mo gsang sgrub kyi nyams su len tshul mdor bsdu pa blo gros ut+pal rgyas pa’i nyin byed*) and red in the tradition of the Kashmir paṇḍita Vikṣaparama, Śrī Sugataṛakṣita, Jayaka, and Prabhākara.

5. Both the goddess and the moon are associated with deer. In the Ṛgveda, the earliest known form of Sarasvatī gained her connection with the wild animal when escaping her lustful father, the lord of creation Brahmā/Prajāpati (see the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*); in connection with this, she is known under the name Rohinī. In Indian art, the moon is commonly marked with the shape of a deer or antelope (*mṛga*, while *mṛgāṅkaḥ* is a synonym for the moon), as opposed to the hare in the moon found in India and elsewhere in the world.
6. The goddess and the moon are both linked to the crescent in the dreadlocked topknot of Śiva because Sarasvatī also has a topknot with a crescent moon. However, she also played an important part in the origin story of the moon appearing in that god's hair. According to different traditions in India, including the *Matsya Purāṇa*, the creator Prajāpati Dakṣa gave his daughters to the moon god Candra with an admonition to share his affections equally between them. When Candra became completely enamored with Rohinī, even to the point that he ignored her sisters, Dakṣa cursed the moon to lose his brilliance until he wasted away and disappeared. Shrinking day by day, only after taking refuge in Śiva (literally, in his hair) was the moon able to survive; even though he waxes and wanes, he is thus regarded as indestructible (*mi phyed*). On this myth, see Rangaswamy, *The Religion and Philosophy of Tevaram*, chapter 2.1.
7. The term for “powerful one” (*che dgu*) is not uncommon in older Tibetan works. In the Gesar epic, it is found in connection with Mount Sumeru, which is described like the topknot of a “powerful one” (i.e., Śiva). Helffer, *Les chants dans l'épopée tibétaine de Ge-sar d'après le livre de La course de cheval*, 368–69.

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GLOSSARY

awakening

བྱང་ཆུབ། • *byang chub* • bodhi

The state of awakening; realization of the fundamental absolute truth attained by someone who has purified the twofold emotional and cognitive obscurations.

basic space

དབྱིངས། • *dbyings* • dhātu

Synonym for ultimate truth, the empty nature of the mind and of all phenomena.

cyclic existence

སྤྲིད་པ། • *srid pa* • bhava

This refers to all the possible kinds and places of karmic rebirth and is synonymous with saṃsāra.

Glory of Speech

ངག་གི་དཔལ་མོ། • *ngag gi dpal mo*

Epithet of Sarasvatī.

Goddess of Melody

སྒྲ་དབྱངས་ལྗ་མོ། • *sgra dbyangs lha mo*

Epithet of Sarasvatī.

guru Mañjughoṣa

འཇམ་དབྱངས་སྒྲ་མ། • *'jam dbyangs bla ma*

Literally, “sweet-voiced guru.” The bodhisattva of wisdom.

isolation

དབེན་པ། • *dben pa* • viveka

Synonymous with being devoid of and separate from disturbing objects, either physically (*kāyaviveka*), mentally (*cittaviveka*), or at the level of the substrate (*upadbhiviveka*).

victorious one

རྒྱལ་བ། • *rgyal ba* • jina

An enlightened being, particularly a buddha. One who has overcome the afflictive and cognitive obscurations.

wisdom

ཡེ་ཤེས། • *ye shes* • jñāna

A term usually reserved to describe the awakened understanding associated with buddhas and bodhisattvas; in tantra often classified as being of five types: (1) mirror-like wisdom; (2) wisdom of discernment; (3) wisdom of equality; (4) wisdom of accomplishment; and (5) wisdom of reality.