

Tārā: From Attendant to Bodhisattva Changing Role of the Feminine

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Gender has always been one of the most curious, discussed issues among historians, yet, we are as far from solving this puzzle as the ancient theorists who focused on it. With these questions, this paper is trying to look at these early themes about gender and sexuality in the Tantric forms of Buddhism that became influential in India around the sixth century C.E. and later flourished in Tibetan Buddhism. The objective of the paper is to understand gender relations, within the Buddhist community, and this will be done based on the religious practices of Tantric Buddhists and by looking at the divine pantheon of Tantric Buddhism and the development of female fraction in the pantheon. The paper will focus on one particular goddess i.e. Tara *Devī*. The research will trace the transformation of her role in the Buddhist Pantheon, from her being one of the attendants of *Bodhisattva* Avlokiteśvara to her becoming a *Bodhisattva*. Moreover, she is the one and only female Bodhisattva, the highest divine status which can be achieved within Tantric Buddhism. It is this transformation which will be the centre of this research. This paper is working with the idea that changes in the mythological world reflects the changes which are taking place in the actual world and hence, the recognition of the feminine divine within religions reflects the change in the social perception of gender. Hence, at large this paper is trying to understand and trace the changes in the social perception of gender, from a historical perspective.

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