Chapter VI

Sarasvati in Buddhist Pantheon

(A) In India:

In foregoing chapters we have emphasised on the fact that Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, had a universal appeal on the followers of all the major religious systems in India. The Buddhists appear to have borrowed this Hindu goddess and modified her form in various ways. Her worship is widely prevalent among them owing to the belief that like Mañjusri and Prajñāpāramitā, she bestows knowledge, intelligence and memory. According to Sādhanaś dedicated to her, she is also believed to confer wisdom and learning on her worshippers.

1. Mañjusri: - Mañjusri is the Buddhist God of Transcendental wisdom. He is endowed with six arms; in the three right hands he holds the sword, varada-mudrā and the arrow, and in the three left hands shows the Prajñāpāramitā book, the blue lotus and the bow. Mañjusri is important in the Buddhist pantheon as the God of learning. He destroys ignorance with the sword and preaches knowledge with the book of transcendental wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā). The Buddhists believe that the worship of Mañjusri can confer upon them wisdom, retentive memory, intelligence and eloquence and enables them to master over sacred scriptures.

2. Prajñāpāramitā: - Prajñāpāramitā is the embodiment of the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra and as such she is considered to be the goddess of transcendental knowledge which the sutra stands for. As many as nine sādhanaś (Nos.151-159) in the Sādhanaśālā bear description of the goddess, besides a hymn (No.150) devoted to her praise. These descriptions lead to a classification of the representations of the goddess into two principal categories; white and yellow. She may be two handed or four-handed. She is described to be seated in Vairaparyanka having red lotus, Prajñāpāramitā-nustaka, Vyākhya or dharmaçakra and abhava-mudrā in her hands. She bestows knowledge, wisdom and eloquence.
I. Textual information:

Sarasvati has at least four different forms in Buddhist iconography, viz., Vajrasarasvati, Vajraśīrāsarasvati, Vajraśārabhadra and Mahāsarasvati. Besides these four varieties, there is also another form of the goddess, namely Āryaśīrāsarasvati. The iconographic features of these forms of Sarasvati are clearly marked out in the Sādhanaśālā, and an analysis of the information obtained from it will enable us to appraise their individual characteristics.

(a) Four Forms of Sarasvati:

1. Vajrasarasvati: Vajrasarasvati possesses three faces and six arms. She is red-complexioned, but her hairs are brown and raised upwards. She stands in the pratyāśīdha attitude on the red lotus. She is red in colour, but the colour of her right and left faces are blue and white, respectively. She carries in her three right hands the lotus (padma) on which is the Prajñā-paramitā Book, the sword (asi) and the cutter (karttā). In the three left hands she holds the kanāla or Brahmā (Brahmakanāla), the jewel (ratna) and the click (oakra). Instead of the book on lotus and Brahmakanāla, she may also hold the lotus and the kanāla only. Three Sādhanas (No. 161, 163 & 167) of the Sādhanaśālā are devoted to her.

2. Vajraśīrāsarasvati: Vajraśīrāsarasvati is white in complexion and shows a serene and benign appearance. She is decked with various ornaments and plays on a vīṇā by her two hands. She may be represented as accompanied by four divinities like Prajñā, Medhā, Smṛiti and Mati. She is believed to confer wisdom, memory and intelligence on her worshippers.
A Sādhana (No. 165) in the Sādhanamālā is assigned to her worship.

3. Vajrārāda: According to a Sādhana (No. 166) in the Sādhanamālā, Vajrārāda rests upon a pure white lotus, while a crescent decorates her crown. She is three-eyed and two-armed. She carries a book in the left hand and her right hand holds a lotus. She may also be accompanied by the four attendants like Prajñā, Medhā, Smṛti and Māti. The Sādhana being silent about the āsana (posture), she may have any one of the attitudes.

4. Mahāsarasvatī: Mahāsarasvatī is white-complexioned and two-armed, showing the varadāmudrā in the right hand and a white lotus in the left. The dhyāna (S.M. No. 162) describes her form in the following terms. The worshipper should conceive of the goddess Mahāsarasvatī, as resplendent like the autumn moon, resting on the moon over the white lotus with its stalk. She has a smiling countenance, is extremely compassionate, and wears garments decorated with white sandal flowers. Her bosom is decorated with the pearl necklace and she is decked in various other ornaments. She appears a maiden of twelve years, and her bosom is uneven with half-developed breasts like flower-buds. She illumines the three worlds with the immeasurable light that radiates from her body.

The distinctive features of the goddess Mahāsarasvatī may be marked as showing the varadāmudrā in the right hand and the lotus in the left, and as being always surrounded by four deities identical in form with herself. Prajñā is in front of her, Medhā to her right, Smṛti to her left and Māti in the west. These four divinities may also accompany other varieties of
Sarasvatī. As the Sādhanā is silent about her particular asana, she may be represented in any attitude, sitting or standing.

(b) Ārya Sarasvatī:

Besides the above varieties, there is also Ārya-sarasvatī which seems to be the common name of Sarasvatī of the Vajrayānists. She appears to be a maiden of sixteen and is in the prime of youth. She is white complexioned and wears white clothes. She carries in the left hand the stalk of a lotus on which rests the Prajñāpāramitā book. As the Sādhanās (Nos. 164 & 168) are silent about the symbol carried in the right hand, this hand may or may not remain empty. The asana is not mentioned.

In this connection we may further note that under Vajrayāna influence Sarasvatī was incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon and naturally became the saktī of Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, the Buddhist God of Transcendental wisdom. With the association of wisdom (prajñā) and compassion (karunā), she also became a companion of Avalokiteśvara. An example of sculptural representation of such association may be seen at Ellora.

(c) Mahāmayūrī, Vāgīśvarī and Ārya Jānguli:

In the Buddhist iconography, the images of Mahāmayūrī, Vāgīśvarī and Ārya Jānguli are also sometimes associated with Sarasvatī in consideration to their special

1. A reference may be made to the eight-handed Mahāsarasvatī of the Hindus. She holds conch (sankha) plough (hala) trident (sūla) and bell (chantā) in her four....(next page
symbols, qualities and attributes. The sādhanā of Mahāmayūrī describes her two forms. In one form she has a green complexion, six arms, and the three faces, each endowed with three eyes. Her right and left faces are of blue and white complexion, respectively. She holds in her three right hands the peacock's feather, the arrow and the varadamudrā, and in the three left hands the jewel, the bow and the water-vessel on the lap. In another form she possesses one face, two arms holding peacock's feather in the right and displaying varadamudrā in the left. She sits on a peacock. In popular mind peacock (mayūra) being closely related with Sarasvatī, it is therefore, natural that Mahāmayūrī may sometimes be confused with Sarasvatī. It is for this reason that a few sculpture of Mahāmayūrī in the caves of Ellora were previously identified as Sarasvatī. The confusion arose because of the presence of the peacock (mayūra) as her vāhana and the peacock-feather (mayūrapiccha) in her hands. But none of the Buddhist sādhanas devoted to Sarasvatī associates her with mayūra or mayūrapiccha and as such Mahāmayūrī has no traditional association with Sarasvatī.

The description of Vāgīśvari, another variety of Buddhist Sarasvatī does not find mention in any known text of the Buddhist iconography. On the evidence of an inscribed

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right hands, and mace (musala), discus (cakra), bow (dhanu) and arrow (sāyaka) in the four left hands. She sits on a lotus. Although, she bestows knowledge, the Hindu Mahāsarvasvatī is known to be a vaṇī of the goddess Durgā or Bhadrakāli - Mahābhārata: Bhisvaparvan, Adhyāya, XXIII.
image from Bodhgaya of the year one of the reign of Gopala II, we may identify the images of Vāgīśvarī to be of definitely Buddhist association. Again, Ārya Jānguli is white in complexion, four-armed, one-faced, and wears a jātāmukuta and a white scarf. She is decked in white ornaments of gems and white serpents and rests on an animal. She plays on the vīnā with two principal hands, carries white snake in the second left and exhibits the abhov or varadamudrā with the second right, and is radiant like the moon. Her white dress and appearance, the vīnā and the abhov or varadamudrā with the second right, and is radiant like the moon. Her white dress and appearance, the vīnā and the abhov or varadamudrā in the right hands closely associates her with Sarasvatī. Both these deities, Vāgīśvarī and Ārya Jānguli, have been treated, therefore, in the course of discussion on the actual images having bearing of the Buddhist version of Sarasvatī.

II. Actual images:

The actual images of Sarasvatī of the Buddhist version are very few in number. Perhaps the earliest representation of the goddess with Buddhist association is the one discovered from Ghaṁtasalā, a Buddhist site of the Andhra State. The image (Fig.2) has been treated by us along with the images of Sarasvatī discovered from Bharhut (Fig.1) and Kānkālīțilā, Mathura (Fig.3). Standing in samabhānga pose, the Ghaṁtasalā Sarasvatī holds a lotus bud and a noose in her two upper hands; the right lower hand is on the head of swan, her vehicle, while the left lower hand is hanging softly.
She wears an ear-ring, a necklace, a karandabukuta on her head and a diaphanous sādi tied to her girdle. The image is assignable to the 2nd Century B.C. Although the image comes from a Buddhist site, from her iconographical features she appears to be a Sarasvatī of the Brahmanical tradition. It is apparent from the literary as well as archaeological evidences, or rather lack of evidences, that Sarasvati made her advent in the pantheon of the Buddhists in a late date, when Mahayana Buddhism turned to be dominated by the followers of the Tantric systems. Thus we meet Buddhist Sarasvatī only from the early mediaeval age.

A stone image of Sarasvatī (Fig.54) of the 9th Century A.D. preserved at the site museum of Nalanda, is possibly the earliest Buddhist version of the deity. The goddess with two legs crossed sits on a lotus supported on a ghata. Her right hand is in the varadamudrā, while the left one has been broken away. The hair is in the form of a neat chignon clasped by a pearl tiara and with a crescent moon on right side. She wears tasteful ornaments principally made of pearls. Her face bears a calm and serene expression. Four male companions, two on each side, sit on lotuses. Three of them bear a manuscript in the left hand, while the right hands are either broken away or with indistinct emblem. The hands of the figure at the left upper are, however, missing.

The identification of the goddess presents certain problems. Previously, she has been identified as Kotiśrī, a name of Durgā; but there is hardly any justification for such identification, except for the crescent moon on the
crest. Her identification with Vajrasāradā, hesitatingly proposed by B. Bhattacharyya, is also to be considered as more or less tentative. According to the sādhana (No.162), a goddess holding varadamudrā in the right hand, and a white lily by stalk in the left, and accompanied by four goddesses like Prajñā, Medhā, Smṛti and Mati is to be identified as Mahāsarasvatī. The Sādhana further mentions that the goddess is to be adorned with a pearl necklace (muktaharopasobhita) and this is seen to be the most distinctive adornment of the goddess in the present image. Though we are not certain regarding the attribute of the left hand which is broken in the case of Nalanda image, in consideration of other characteristics we may propose to identify the image as of Mahāsarasvatī.

A statuette, discovered from Sarnath and stylistically dated in the 6th Century A.D., is now preserved in the Sarnath Site Museum (Fig.55). It is made of chunar sandstone and undoubtedly represents the goddess of learning and music. Sitting in lalitāsana, she plays on a vīṇā by her two hands. Above her head is a foliage of a tree and to her proper right is shown a jar upside down. This Sarasvatī shows no iconographical difference from the usual Brahmanical representations of the deity, but as the image comes from a renowned Buddhist site, and bear one of/te most characteristics attributes of her viz., vīṇā, she may be recognised as a Buddhist version of Sarasvatī. But there is equal possibility that it is a Brahmanical image which had somehow entered into a Buddhist monastery.

2. ARASI, 1904-5, p.86.
There is an image of Sarasvatī, (Fig.56) belonging to the Pala period, in the Mahar collection, Calcutta. The goddess sits on a full-bloomed lotus-seat and plays on a vīṇā by her two hands. The hair is neat chignon with a tiara. She wears ear-rings, necklace, armlets and bracelets. She has a calm and serene expression. The presence of a stūpa at the upper right side of otherwise plain stela identifies the goddess with Sarasvatī of the Buddhist association.

A two-handed unfinished stone image of Sarasvatī (Fig.57) sitting in lalitāsana and having her left leg on a lotus has been discovered from Nalanda. The goddess plays on a vina by her two hands. She wears ear-rings, beaded necklace, armlets, waistband and anklets. A decorated crown, showing the hairs on rolls and having beaded tiara around it is on her head. The unfinished stela shows a beaded border. From the stylistic consideration the image appears to belong to the 9th Century A.D.

An unidentified image (Fig.58) belonging to the 11th Century A.D., is in the possession of the Balurghat College Museum, Balurghat, West Bengal. The goddess holds the attributes in her four hands in the following manner: right upper-rosary (aksamāla), right lower-varadāmudrā, left upper-pustaka, and left lower-abhya pose. She sits in padmāsana on a double petalled lotus seat. She is richly adorned with a decorated crown, ear-rings, double pearl necklace, armlets, bracelets, waistband and anklets. Around the stela there are images of Ganesā, dhyāni Buddha, Amitabha, Kapila etc. The
The Nāga couple with folded hands are found seated on the decorated pedestal. This is possibly an image of Sarasvatī of the Buddhist version. Peculiarity of the deity may be noted in his abhaya pose shown by the left hand instead of right. But from the presence of pustaka and rosary she seems to be a rare variety of Sarasvatī. It is, therefore, difficult to identify her name for the absence of any sādhanā corroborating her characteristics. The Amitabha on the stela and the nāga-couple on the pedestal lead us to believe that the image represents a Tantric Buddhist deity.

Images of Sarasvatī having lion as the vehicle of the goddess have been discovered from different places of India. The images of this variety are known as Vāgīśvarī or the sakti of Mañjuśrī and undoubtedly belong to the Buddhist pantheon. A headless image of Vāgīśvarī seated on the back of lion and playing on a vīnā by her two hands has been discovered from Gāndhara and is at present preserved in the Lahore Museum.

An interesting image of Vāgīśvarī has been discovered from Sobhanath hill, situated at a distance of about fifteen miles from Bodhgaya. The goddess sits in lahitāsana on a full-bloomed lotus having her left leg on another lotus placed on the back of the lion. She plays on a vīnā by her two front hands and holds a rosary and a book by her remaining two hands. She is adorned with ornaments of different varieties. A male figure, possibly the worshipper, with folded hands kneels at

1. Vidyabhusan, A.C. *Sarasvati*, PL XV(b), p.82.
2. Ibid. PL XV(a), p.82.
at the left corner of the pedestal. The inscription at the right corner of the pedestal describes the image as the Vāgīśvarī.

Another image of Vāgīśvarī from Nalanda, carved in the first year of Gopala II, had been discovered by Cunningham and is now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The goddess (Fig. 59), sits in lalitāsana on a lotus placed on the lion's back. She holds a mace (gada) and an axe (paraśu) by her two upper hands and draws out by her two lower hands the tongues of two persons who had possibly committed sins by uttering false words, with a pair of tongs. She wears a crown on her head and is decked with ornaments like ear-rings, double necklace, armlets, bracelets, decorated girdles and anklets. Flying Vidyādhāras are seen by her two sides. The semi-circular stela is bordered with the plain motifs.

A stone image of Vāgīśvarī (Fig. 60), of the 10th century A.D., is preserved at the Museum of Varendra Research Society, Rajshahi, Bangladesh. The goddess sits on lalitāsana with right leg supported on a lotus placed on the hind part of a lion shown on the pedestal. It is a four-handed image having varadamudrā and sword (missing) in the right hands. With her

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1. Pratapaditya Pal identifies this image as Parvati. This identification is obviously wrong. From the inscription on the pedestal of the image it is definitely known to be an image of Vāgīśvarī, a Buddhist goddess. See Pal, P., The Arts of Nepal, Fig. No. 221.
left lower hand she is drawing out by a pair of tongs, the
tongue of a figure shown on the pedestal, and by the upper
left she holds a mirror (darpāṇa). It is notable that darpāṇa
has been mentioned as one of the attributes of Sarasvatī in
the Brahmanical texts. The head of the goddess is surrounded
by a halo with lotus-petal borders. She is found to be flanked
by two female figures, each of their right hand bearing a
flywhisk and left hanging down.

Another six-handed damaged image of Vāgīśvarī (fig.61),
belonging to the 10th Century A.D., has been recently dis­
covered from Nalanda and yet to be published. The goddess sits
in lalitāsana on a double petalled lotus throne, her right leg
being on a full-bloomed lotus. One of her right hands is in
the varadamudrā, while she holds a sword and a rosary by her
other two right hands. The left front and the middle hands
hold a water-vessel signifying knowledge and mace (gadā),
respectively. The back left is in the śīnha-karna-mudrā
and holds a looking glass (darpāṇa). The goddess is bejewell­
eď with ear-rings, a long necklace with a pendent, armlets,
bracelets, decorated girdles and anklets. The face of the
goddess is severely damaged but her hairs are arranged in a
big chignon. There is a three-tiered chaṭrāvalī, a Buddhist
sign, over the head of the goddess. The stela is decorated
with beaded borders, having a diversion in the lotus motif
carved on each side of the border. The lion, her vehicle,
sits in the left side of the pedestal.
It is to be noted that no dhyāna of Vāgīśvarī of the above description finds mention in any known texts of Buddhist iconography. Our identification of the goddess as Vāgīśvarī is based on the evidence of the inscribed image from Bodhgaya of the 1st year of the reign of Gopala II. From the Buddhist creed inscribed on the image, she is known to be a Buddhist goddess.

In the Buddhist iconography Sarasvatī is sometimes identified with Ārya Jāṅgulī, meaning literally, the goddess of the wilds. She plays on the lyre (vīnā) by her normal hands, bestows boon by the extra right hand and holds a white-snake in the left. Her colour is milk white and thus known to be a form of white Tara, while her association with snakes pushes the tradition further back. Though it is difficult to find out the exact period when the conception of Jāṅgulī found place in a system of religious worship, it can be said that she appears to have been a divinity of the aboriginal tribes of India, and was given a shape and admitted into the Buddhist pantheon in a fairly early period. In a passage of the Atharvaveda Sarasvatī herself is spoken of as a destroyer of poison, and she is found to be invoked in that capacity. In this aspect Sarasvatī was a girl of the Savaras, and thus possibly could not develop in the Brahmanical pantheon. But the Mahayāna Buddhists in their liberal approach to the aborigines accepted this snake-goddess and called her Jāṅgulī, and did not forget connection with the Savaras. The Brahmanical anti-

venom Sarasvatī, the source of Jāngulī seems to have retreated to the background for centuries. However, an image of Manasā, now in the Indian Museum (Fig. 62) and datable in the 11th Century A.D., throws fresh light on the problem. The goddess is shown in meditative pose, sitting with legs crossed. A hood of seven serpents is over her head. The upper left hand holds book and the lower left a pitcher of nectar. The right upper carries a rosary while the right lower is in varadamudrā. The attributes of the goddess are those of Sarasvatī, if the serpent over the head of the goddess and the pitcher below her seat emitting two serpents were absent. The carved representations on the stela of a Linga and a Ganesā on the two sides of the deity clearly associate this Manasā with the Brahmanical system. But it is further interesting to note that an image of a two-handed female deity playing on a vīnā and having behind a seven hooded snake has been discovered from Khiching in Orissa, and datable in the 9th-10th Century A.D. It is possible that a conceptual trend representing Sarasvatī associated with snake, as old as the Atharvaveda, continued all through, though somewhat in the background, and was usually worshipped by the jungle people. In course of time, she came to be known as Jāngulī among the Buddhists and Manasā among the Hindus.

(b) **Outside India - Nepal and Tibet, Japan and Java:**

Hinduism and Buddhism flourished side by side in India from a very early date and some of the Brahmanical gods and goddesses became so popular with the Buddhists that they could
not help incorporating them in their own religion. As a result, along with the important personalities and philosophical concept of their own faith, the Buddhists defied a number of Hindu gods and goddesses like Ganesa, Sarasvati and so on. Subsequently when the Tantric mode of Buddhism came into vogue, they busied themselves in producing images of such gods and goddesses to meet the popular demand. In this period of Tantric domination innumerable Buddhist texts and icons were transmitted through the Himalayan passes to Nepal, Tibet, China and possibly thence to Japan. A large section of population in those countries, susceptible to magic and sorcery, became readily converted to the faith of the master as followed by the then Tantric Buddhists.

(i) Nepal: Buddhism was preached in Nepal by Buddha himself. It is, therefore, natural that the introduction of image worship in Buddhism would influence the Nepalese in the same way as it had influenced the Indian Buddhists. There is reason to believe that Sarasvati was worshipped in Nepal along with other gods and goddesses, but her images are very scarce in that country. However, in the Boston Museum, there is a charming bronze image of Sarasvati hailing from Nepal. The four-handed goddess (Fig.63) sits in lalitasana on a lotus seat holding a lotus (pačma) and a manuscript (pustaka) in lower and upper left hands respectively. The attributes in her upper right hand is unrecognisable, while her lower right hand is placed on the right thigh. The goddess is bejewelled with a crown, pearl necklace, armlets, bracelets and waistband. It is, however, the baroque exuberance of her intri-
cate aureole that dominates the entire composition of the image. The goddess appears interesting because of her grotesque form, once again a contribution of Tantric imagery. A beautiful image of Sarasvati of the 16th Century A.D. has been preserved in the Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim (Fig. 64). The goddess sits in Virāsana on a double petalled lotus seat supported by a pair of swans. In her left hand she holds a budding lotus, while her right hand is in the varadāmudrā. She wears a pearl necklace, Kundalas and a pair of bangles. The hair is in the form of a neat chiguon clasped by a pearl tiara. A blooming lotus decorates on the top of the chiguon. A scarf covers a part of her upper body. The stylised folds of the scarf and the lower garment augments the beauty of the image. She expresses deep concentration of mind in her eyes, while her forehead is marked with a circular tilaka. A female figure stands on each side of her with sudhābhānda. Musical instruments are played by female figures on her sides while the other two offer oblations to her. The circular aureole behind is edged with fire motifs and delicate in execution, the pedestal is unique in design having animal motifs.

(ii) Tibet: In Tibet there are different Sarasvatī images having varieties of mudrās and attributes. A.K. Gordon refers to a rare specimen of Sarasvatī image (Fig. 65) discovered from the plateau. The goddess sits in ardhaparyanka pose of a double petalled lotus-seat and plays on a lyre (vīnā).

by her two hands. Inside the decorated stela, there are seven figures, two of which in the left side are beyond recognition. Another image (Fig. 66) of Sarasvatī, holding and playing on a Vīnā of the same type, sits in the pratyālipida pose. She wears a beaded ratna-nukuta, ear-rings, double-necklace, armlets and bracelets. The image seems to be an example of serene and tranquil calm and represents the typical art of Tibet. Other images of Sarasvatī holding and playing on Vīnā by her two hands, but sitting in ardhanarīvahakaṃśa have also been found in Tibet (Fig. 67). A good number of Sarasvatī images, seated or standing, but holding lotus (padma) in the left hand and showing varadamudrā in the right, are also found in the country. Besides, there are specimens of the two or four-handed seated images of Sarasvatī holding vairā instead of vīnā and padma and pustaka at shoulder level.

An uncommon specimen of a red-coloured Sarasvatī image (Fig. 68) with three heads and six arms appears to be of special interest. W.E. Clark has identified it as the Rakta-Sarasvatī. The goddess sits in pratyālipida pose, holding pustaka, khadga and karttaka in the three right hands, while the three left hands carries Brahmakapāla, mani and cakra. The Sādhana on the Rakta-Sarasvatī, as discussed above, fully agrees with this Tibetan example and thus corroborates the view of Clark. Her ornaments include ear-rings, double necklace, armlets, bracelets, waist-band and anklets. A specimen of Sañjñaja-Sarasvatī (Fig. 69), having one face and six arms, but poss-

essing the same attributes of Rakta-sarasvati has also been found in Tibet. The existence of different types of Sarasvati image in Tibet testify to the fact that the goddess of wisdom and culture was widely worshipped in this country of the Himalayan plateau.

(iii) Japan: Alice Getty maintains the view that the goddess Benten is looked upon as a manifestation of Sarasvati in Japan. Her full name is Dai-ben-Zai-ten or Great Divinity of Reasoning Faculty. She is manifestation of white snake, and thus possibly an aspect of Jāṅgulī Tārā. She is believed to be capable of conferring happiness, riches, long life, fame and reasoning powers. In regard to the goddess Benten there is an interesting legend in Japan. It is said that a monstrous dragon devoured all children of the neighbourhood of the cave where he dwelt. Then there a violent earthquake took place, and the goddess Benten appeared in the cloud. From the waters suddenly m emerged the island Enoshima and the goddess Benten, descending to the island, married the dragon and put an end to the ravages. The goddess Benten generally sits or stands on a dragon or a huge snake holding in her two arms a biwa or Japanese lyre.

Benten is closely connected with snakes and dragons and her shrines are always in caverns, on islands or near the sea. Although there are many legends of Benten connecting her with snakes, but there is nothing to explain the role of the snake in its association with Benten. It is not clear whether the snake and Benten are the same or the former is a vehicle of the latter. The goddess Benten has also a Tantric
representation in Japan. In that capacity she possesses eight arms holding sword, spear, axe, box, arrow, lasso, thunderbolt and a wheel of law. Benten is sometimes also believed to be a sister of Visnu or a feminine manifestation of Vairocana; but in her form with a lyre she is unquestionably a manifestation of Sarasvatī. If we take dragon as an alternative to snake there would be no difficulty in a broad manner to connect Benten with Janguli of the Indian Buddhist pantheon.

(iv) Java: The Tantric Buddhism which flourished in Eastern India, also travelled to south east Asia by the sea route. In fact, there is unquestionable archaeological evidence to show a regular connection between the Pālas of Eastern India and the Sailendras of Java and Sumatra. The Tantric Buddhist images, cast in bronze following the Mahābodhi examples, have been discovered from Java. It is natural, therefore, that Sarasvatī in her Buddhist version was also introduced to this island country. But in reality the image of Sarasvatī is very scarce in Java. Professor Krom describes her as riding on a peacock. She is two or four-armed, but her attributes, if present, are irrecongnisble. There are also figures of a goddess with a lute, which may be identified as the representations of Sarasvatī. An image of this type (Fig. 70) has been discovered from Java. The goddess sits on a full-bloomed lotus-seat, holding and playing on a vina by her two hands. She, however, shows no vehicles like swan or peacock. She wears a crown, necklace, ear-rings, armlets and bracelets. She seems to be in deep meditation and tranquil calm. Another image of a goddess (Fig. 71),
playing on a seven stringed vīna by her two hands, has also been found in Java. Here the goddess wears a karanda-mukuta over her head along with her usual ornaments. The peculiarity of the image is that her vīna is not of usual type, but a boat-shaped one. It is interesting to note that this type of lyre found to have been depicted in the ancient and early mediaeval relief sculptures of Bengal and Bihar. In the background of close relationship that existed between Java and Eastern India it would be logical to conclude that the Javanese Sarasvatī is a prototype of the Nalanda Sarasvatī. In this connection, it may be noted that the Leyden Museum of Java contains two Sarasvati bronzes having vīna in her two hands as an attribute.