CHAPTER I

AVALOKITÉŚVARA IN INDIA

Bodhisattva Avalokitēśvara's Sanskrit name has given rise to controversy in both the Indian and the Chinese languages. There are three forms of the Sanskrit name namely Avalokita, Avalokita-śvara and Avalokiteśvara. The name Avalokita means to see everywhere. Avalokita-śvara means the hearer of voices of the suffering beings and the third Avalokiteśvara means the Lord of all he sees or observes.

The Tibetan name sPyan-ras-gzigs is the translation of Avalokita. The earliest mention of Avalokiteśvara is in the larger Sukhāvatī-vyuha (Fo shuo dacheng wuliang shou zhuangyan jing), which was written around 100 AD. The name Avalokita-śvara had been mentioned five times in a fragment of the 24th chapter of the Saddharmapundarīka Sūtra (Miaofa lianhua jing) from Count Otani's expedition. A mistake could not have been committed five times but another manuscript of the same sūtra from Kashgar used the name Avalokiteśvara and this name had come to stay.

In the Sukhāvatī-vyūha, Avalokiteśvara is referred to as Buddha-son.¹ "There rises the Buddha-son, glorious, he indeed the mighty Avalokiteśvara....". At another place in the same sūtra, a reference is made to him in

¹ F.Max Muller Ed. The Sacred Books of the East, Motilal Banarasidass, New Delhi, Vol. 49, New Delhi, P.48, Reprint 1990)
the company of Mahāsthāmaprāpta- "(Dashizhi)...and those who are Bodhisattvas are possessed of the light of a hundred thousand kotis or yojanas barring always the two Bodhisattvas, by whose light the world is everywhere shining with eternal splendour." These two Bodhisattvas are identified as Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta.2

It is interesting to note that in this exposition Buddha is in meditation and plays only a passive role. The very occurrence of Avalokiteśvara's name in the Sukhāvatī-Vyūha3 shows that he was known much earlier (about 100 AD.) than what is commonly supposed.

In the Amitāyur-dhyāna Sūtra4 (Guan wuliang shou jing) after the Ninth Meditation on the forms and bodies of the Buddha, the hearer is advised to meditate on Avalokiteśvara too. A major portion of Guṇakāraṇḍa-vyūha is again devoted to Avalokiteśvara. The metrical version which most likely belonged to the fourth century said that Avalokiteśvara who arose out of the spirit of Ādinātha also takes part in the work of creation, creating gods out of his own body", thus taking the role of Brahma of the Hindu pantheon.

The ultimate teaching and the most eminent of the Mahāyāna Sūtra is said to be the Saddharmapundarīka.5 An

2Ibid p.52


5 Ibid. P.85.
indication of its importance can be seen from an extract of the Sūtra which says

"At the end, then and only then, to them
He preaches this Dharma Blossom,
As the King, separating from his top-knot
The bright pearl, gives it away,
This scripture is venerable,
Supreme among the multitude of scriptures."

It is no surprise that this Sutra became the most popular of the Sutras in China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia. Several commentaries have been written on this sutra in China and Japan. A Japanese historian has gone to the extent of saying that the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka "has played in Japanese history a role nearly akin to that of the Bible in English literature."

In this sūtra, Avalokiteśvara is made out to be far superior to the other great Bodhisattvas with the exception of Mañjuśrī (Wenshu) who is probably his equal. He is the "saviour" and praying to him would be more effective than to do honour to the multitude of Buddhas. He uses the skilfull means by assuming the form the devotee has in mind and thus performs his task of salvation. It is this assumption of various forms of salvic nature that some say, had given rise to numerous iconic representations of Avalokiteśvara.

In the Kāraṇḍa-vyūha (Foshuo dacheng zhuangyan

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Avalokiteśvara stands out even amongst the Buddhas. His form is so luminous that even the Buddhas have difficulty in looking at him, with each pore of his body containing thousands of Buddhas, saints of all kinds and entire worlds. All the attributes of Brahma and Isvara are bestowed on him. Avalokiteśvara emanates Mahesvara from his forehead, Brahma from his shoulder, the sun and the moon out of his eyes and most of the minor gods from his glorious body. In short he is the father and mother of all. Avalokiteśvara is described as "beautiful man... wearing a diadem on his matted hair, his mind filled with the highest friendliness, and looking like a disc of gold". Matted hair is a typical attribute of Śiva and thus the iconographical connection of Avalokiteśvara with Śiva can be inferred.

The first stage of evolution of Avalokiteśvara was that of an attendant to the Buddha. Then followed depictions where he was ranked equal to the Buddha and later as assimilation of various Lokeśvara or Lokanātha.

Avalokiteśvara is the embodiment of Hindu gods, the trinity of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara. Brahma was born of the lotus while Avalokiteśvara holds a lotus in his hand. Brahma carries the kamandala, Avalokiteśvara has the vase. Brahma is in possession of the mantras and so does Avalokiteśvara. Just as Brahma is recognized as the creator of the universe, so too is Avalokiteśvara as the creator of the fourth world.

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The fusion with Saivism is seen in the name Avalokiteśvara. Sometimes he is represented with the sacred thread, antelope skin and the hair arranged in a jatāmukuta like Śiva. The Eleven heads of Avalokiteśvara are similar to the Ekādāsa Rudrās. Like Śiva he is also called Nilakanta Lokeśvara, Nilakanta being an epithet of Siva.

He is also Viṣṇu, for like him he is the preserver of the universe. As the "saviour from perils" he performs the functions of Viṣṇu. In the thousand-armed form he resembles the Visvarupa of Viṣṇu. Besides these, he also absorbed the characteristics of gods like Hayagrīva (Matou Guanyin)- the Horse-headed One which later on became the fierce form of Avalokiteśvara.

It is well known that from the early days of Buddhism an aniconic period continued till the first century AD. Buddha was not depicted in human form but by symbols such as footprints, the wheel, the Bo tree or a stupa. With the introduction and development of various concepts of Mahayāna tradition, the first images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas appeared. While Buddha is depicted in a monk's robe, the Bodhisattvas appeared with a princely attire and a full array of ornaments. Without delving into the controversy as to which appeared first, it can be safely said that through the third century A.D., there developed three schools of Buddhist art in

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India, the Gandhara of present day northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan, the Mathura of north-central India and the Andhra in the sites along the Krishna river particularly the ones at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. Later in the Gupta period (350 to 500 AD), a variation of Mathura school emerged in Sarnath.

All the three schools produced their own versions of Buddha and Bodhisattvas in accordance with their unique traditions, representing some stylistic variations of local deities and folklore.

The images that were produced were in response to the deep devotion and the religious thought of the people. The power of the visual medium as a vigorous and lively supplement to the oral traditions that were then prevalent in Buddhist religion as in the Hindu religion was understood and thus the images came to reflect the nature of the deities, the sacred meanings and traditions embodied in such images.

In early representations, Avalokiteśvara was seen holding a lotus flower with a long stem in his left hand, thus deriving the name Padmapāṇi ("Lotus in Hand"). Padmapāṇi became a popular deity both in Nepal and Tibet and innumerable bronzes have been noticed in these two places. Buddhism inherited the symbol of Lotus from Hinduism. The lotus or *padma* is a symbol of self creation and so every Buddha and Bodhisattva is supported by a lotus to indicate the divine birth. As the symbol of self generation the lotus was adopted by the most important Buddhist sect in China, the Śvabhāvika, as
their special emblem, the trisula symbolising the Tri-ratna issuing from its centre.9

The lotus also symbolizes the feminine principle. The Satapatha Brahmana referred to lotus leaf as the womb and in the mantra om mani padme, hum, the padma represents the material and the mani the spiritual elements. The Śrīsukta-Khila called Śrī-Lakshmi, the Lotus Goddess as the "mother of created beings". As the symbol of self creation, Brahmā was shown seated on a lotus coming out of the navel of Viṣṇu.

Lotus symbolized fertility and prosperity. The flower which opens at sunrise and closes at sunset is said to absorb the heavenly powers of sun in the night. In spite of being an offspring of mud and water and yet being no part of these, lotus is also said to be the rasa of the waters, being the sustainer of not only the animal and the vegetable world, but also of its imposing omnipresence on earth.

Lotus symbolized purity of soul and the moral efforts of the human beings. Every human being could overcome the passions and material attachments to the world and strive towards the life-giving-sun, untainted by the worldly dharmas.10 In another sense the lotus while unfolding in the morning is said to draw the "all penetrating Dharma" and as the day progresses for the

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10Michael Fuss, Buddha Vacana and Dei Verbum., E.J.Brill, 1991, p.27.
flower, the process of self realization increases by external energy for human beings in obeying religious and ethical laws.  

In the Buddhist context, lotus was the ultimate symbolic expression of universal wisdom. The eight petals of the padma symbolized the Eight-Fold path of the Buddha. Buddha when he was born was supposed to have taken seven steps and lotus flowers sprang from below the steps. It is not surprising therefore that lotus occupied the pre-eminent position as the most popular attribute of many Buddhist deities. Avalokiteśvara was no exception. The lotus in the hand of Avalokiteśvara denotes the creative power of the Bodhisattva. In Nepal and Tibet it is a full blown lotus held by the deity while in China and Japan it is often a bud. If the padma is in the vase it represents the union of the spiritual and the material. In Mañjuśrī's hand the flower represents the teachings of the Buddha in lieu of the book which is the usual symbol; when Tārā holds the lotus it implies purity. The full blown pink lotus with the centre visible is the special symbol of Padmapāni and of white Tārā.

Part II.
Avalokiteśvara Images in India and Nepal

Two of the earliest extant appearances of Avalokiteśvara are those from Loriyan Tangai, Pakistan

Ibid., p.35.
(now in Indian Museum, Calcutta) and Ahicchattra, Uttar Pradesh (in National Museum, New Delhi) both belonging to the Kanishka era.

The image from Loriyan Tangai (Pl.1) holds the characteristic lotus drooping from the left hand. The figure is attired in princely garments and sports a turban on the head and a moustache. As a royal personnage he wears sandals. The figure is typical of the Gāndharan school. An interesting feature of this image is the sitting posture denoting "royal ease" with the right leg folded and placed over the left knee. The bodhisattva seems to be in a pensive mood which is different from the meditating pose where the legs are placed in padmāsana. (Pl.2) belongs to the Greco-buddhist art preserved in the Field Museum of Chicago. The plate shows the face with the left side damaged and the turban carrying the image of the Buddha. The ears are damaged. It resembles the visage of a prince, the forehead shows the round āṭṭa, the falling short moustache and tightly closed eyes without vision. The turban is ornamented and is decorated with gold pearls and diamonds.

The other example (Pl.3) is of the Mathura school in which Avalokiteśvara Padmapāni is seen as an attending bodhisattva. Here the central figure is the Buddha sitting on simhāsanā with feet in the vajraparyānkāsana, the right hand in abhaya mudrā and the other resting on the left knee. The two attendant bodhisattvas are Vajrapāni to the right of the Buddha and Padmapāni to the left, recognised by the vajra and padma in their hands
respectively. While Vajrapāṇi is in ascetic attire, Padmapāṇi is elaborately jewelled and turbaned. The association of Vajrapāṇi and Padmapāṇi with Buddha is interpreted as two aspects of Buddhahood with Vajrapāṇi being the personification of wisdom and Padmapāṇi being that of karuna. The symbols themselves are said to represent a combination of the male and female elements to attain final realization.

Another appearance (Pl. 4) of the bodhisattva is from Goli, Andhra Pradesh in the Satavahana period, second century AD, now in Madras Government Museum. The relief shows a scantily dressed bodhisattva standing with feet apart and flanked by two dwarf attendants. The bodhisattva holds a lotus in his raised right hand by virtue of which he could be recognized as Padmapāṇi.

The representation of Avalokiteśvara with lotus in hand possibly originated from the story that when Avalokiteśvara returned from his pilgrimage to Sukhāvatī, he offered lotuses to Śākyamuni as gift of homage from Amitābha. Another theory is that the conception of the Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi was suggested by the existence of Padmapāṇi Yaksas. A parallel case is that of the Yaksa Vajrapāṇi, originally the Buddha's faithful attendant, later the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi.12

Padmapāṇi is often depicted as a graceful youth in princely attire. On his crown is the image of his

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spiritual father Amitābha which is his identification mark. In his earliest form, the special symbol was the lotus indicated by his name and later on, the vase was added as an attribute. His colour is white and the mudra is either vitarka or vara.

The Maṇi Kumbham says that when he emanated from the right eye of Amitabha as a white ray of light, the Bodhisattva brought forth the prayer "Om, maṇi padme, hum" which means "Oh! the jewel (of creation) is in the Lotus!" (Beal). According to this mantra he should carry a jewel the cintāmaṇi which is an attribute of the tantra forms of Avalokiteśvara.

The most famous figure of Padmapāṇi Avalokiteśvara (Plate 5) is seen in Cave No.1 in Ajañṭā (600-642 AD). This is the fresco to the left of the main shrine. His representation in the fresco fits the description in the Mahāyāna texts, for he is shown as a tall and broad shouldered youth, large meditative eyes, firm lips and an elegant nose. There is a spiritual quality to the countenance and the body is full of latent vigour. He appears to be a noble prince with a graceful bearing and "filled with an ineffable sentiment of detachment among the joyful figures of life". The serene compassionate face is full of renunciation, yet gentle in its expression "without scorn or disgust for the sweetness of life". The Bodhisattva is surrounded by devoted beings. He is seen against a background full of action.

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13Taken from Alice Getty, The Gods of Northern Buddhism, Oxford, 1928, p.57
Landscape, animals, birds, human beings and non-human beings are portrayed in this fresco. The figure is so beautiful that one could easily take it to be a princess or a goddess subtly indicating that he is beyond the sexes. He holds the lotus in his right hand that suggests his name and as an emblem of perfection. This beautiful figure combines all the sweetness, tenderness and sensitivity attained in the art of the Gupta period through the ages.

Another painting of the Bodhisattva (Pl.6) seen in the same cave is also of a colossal size as described in the Buddhist texts. His features are likened to objects such as bow, petals and his whole body to that of a lion. The artists had succeeded in translating the textual descriptions into visual forms.

In the Lamaist temple pictures, Padmapani is white and the Nepalese paintings portray him in red without the image of Amitabha in the crown. Another form of Padmapani seldom seen except in temple paintings is called "Defender of the Eight Dreads". Here he is shown without the lotus and is white in colour.

Avalokitesvara as the Saviour from perils is usually represented with eight small panels, four on each side, showing him rescuing devotees from perils of life. Avalokitesvara as Saviour from perils is seen in Cave No. 90, Kanheri, probably towards the end of the sixth century AD (Pl.7). As the Saviour from the ten dangers including the Eight Great Perils, he is seen standing—holding a lotus in his left hand. On either side are the
two goddesses perhaps in the early stage of their appearances. There are miniature figures of Avalokitesvara rushing to the aid of devotees who are praying to him to rescue them from the eight dangers. Later on, this function was delegated to Tārā who goes by the name of Ashtamahābhaya-Tārā with the result that only images of Tārā discharging this function and not of Avalokitesvara were met with from seventh century onwards in India.

Among the tantra forms of Avalokitesvara, the earliest and the only extant\(^\text{14}\) example of the Eleven-headed One in India is the relief in Cave LXVI in Kanheri (Plate 8) from the sixth century.\(^\text{15}\) The inspiration for the Eleven-faced One might have been taken from the eleven violent gods of the vedic age, the Ekadaśa-rudra of Brahanism.

Avalokitesvara is seen as a door-keeper in Cave No. 2 in Ellora (580-642 AD), (Pl.9). The statue is fourteen feet high and is on the left of north side of the entrance. Simply dressed with the head-dress of plaited hair worn by ascetics and an image of Buddha at the crest, the right hand holds a rosary while showing the "fear not" or abhaya mudrā and the left holds a lotus.

\(^{14}\)However, in the Dazu and Dunhuang Caves of China, the Eleven-headed Avalokitesvara is very common.

\(^{15}\)Ananda K. Coomarawamy, History of Indian and Indonesian Art, New York, 1927, p.85, as cited by Sherman Lee and Wai Kam Ho in A Colossal Eleven faced Kuan Yin of the Tang Dynasty, Artibus Asiae, vol.22, No.1-4. However, Susan Huntington in her book, The Art of Ancient India, gives the cave number as 41.
This is one of the Padmapāṇi forms of the Bodhisattva.

A colossal Avalokiteśvara statue holding a lotus belongs to Nalanda from the eighth or ninth century (Pl.10). It is in the north western corner of Vihāra No.3 and is from the Pāla period. The oval shaped halo shows the images of the three Buddhas. He carries the image of his spiritual father on his head, holds a full blown lotus in his left hand, with the right making the vara mudrā. A smile adds to the beauty of the kind face. His upper body is bare while the lower portion is covered by diaphanous material. He wears a necklace, armlets, bracelets and the brahmanical cord. There is a slight curve to his body and he is flanked here by the figures of Tārā and Bhṛikuṭī who are dwarfed by the gigantic statue.

Nalanda’s Main Temple houses a statue of Potalaka-Lokanātha with Tārā and Bhṛikuṭī. Lokanātha is seated in the vajra-paryāṅkāsana on a lotus with his hands (damaged) in the dharma-cakra mudrā. From the crook of his left arm rises the stalk of a flower (missing). The jatāmukuta contains the figure of the Dhyāni Buddha Amitābha. Tārā who is to the Bodhisattva’s right does the añjali mudrā and from her left armpit rises a stalk of blue lotus. Bhṛikuṭī who is to the left also sits with hands in the añjali mudrā, but she does not have any other attribute. She is bereft of ornaments and her upper body is uncovered. She looks a tapaśvini.

From Bihar (Pl.11) is a standing Avalokiteśvara statue flanked by Tārā and Bhṛikuṭī. At present this
statue is in the National Museum, New Delhi and is ascribable to the ninth-tenth century AD. He is represented with six arms and is well adorned. On his crown is the father figure of Buddha. The three right hands show the rosary, vara mudrā and the vitarka mudrā, the left hands hold the lotus which is full blown, vitarka mudrā and the vase. Tārā stands to his right side, her hands in the āṇjali mudrā and Bhṛikūṭī stands to the left with four arms. The principal hands are in the āṇjali mudra and the second pair of hands hold the rosary and vase. This statue resembles Viśṇu with his consorts Śridevi and Bhoodevi. While Viśṇu holds the mace in his left hand, Avalokiteśvara here holds the lotus.

An interesting statue of Avalokiteśvara and Tara with Buddha above from Kurkihar is now in Patna Museum. The image may be dated to the ninth-tenth century AD. (Pl.12) Avalokiteśvara and Tārā are seen sitting side by side on a lotus each in the paryaṅkāsana. Both Avalokiteśvara and Tārā have their hands in the same manner i.e. the right hand showing the vara mudrā and the left resting on the knee. The Buddha above does the bhūmiśparsa mudra. It can be noticed from this picture that Avalokiteśvara sits to the right of the Buddha signifying that he emanated from the Buddha's right eye as a white ray of light. Tārā sits to the left indicating that she emanated from the Buddha's left eye as a blue ray of light. Their seated positions show that neither is superior to the other and are of equal
importance to the Buddha. Just as the "ardhanārīśvara" form of Uma and Śiva is a fusion of the male and female, I would view this image as an antithesis of the "ardhanārīśvara" form.

The Jatāmukuta Lokeśvara with Tārā and Bhṛikuṭī in Nalanda Museum, tenth century (Pl.13) has four arms and is in princely attire with a thick brahmanical cord. The right hands show the vara mudrā and the rosary while the left carry the lotus and the vase. There is a gentle smile on his face. At his shoulder level are two Dhyāni Buddhas. The Bodhisattva is flanked by Tārā and Bhṛikuṭī who are bedecked, their right hand making the vara mudrā. While Tārā's left hand carries a lotus that of Bhṛikuṭī's holds a vase. She is four-armed.

Along with Tārā and Bhṛikuṭī, Avalokiteśvara is seen with Sudhanakumāra and Hayagrīva in Nalanda Museum (Pl.14). The image is ascribable to the eleventh-twelfth century AD. The Bodhisattva is flanked by Tārā and Sudhanakumāra on the right side and by Bhṛikuṭī and Hayagrīva on the left. This is a exceedingly beautiful statue which shows the Bodhisattva standing on a lotus pedestal in the tribhanga stance. The jatāmukuta shows the figure of Amitābha Buddha. Exhibiting a benign look there is not much jewellery adorning him, the only item if it can be called a piece of ornament is the thick brahmanical cord. His chest is covered partially by a scarf. The right hand is damaged now but must have either been in the vara mudrā or held the lotus seen above his shoulder. The left hand carries the stalk of a
lotus. From the waist downwards his body is wrapped in a dhoti and because of the *tribhaṅga* (three bends) stance, his right leg is forward while his left is behind.

A relief of Simhanāda Avalokiteśvara (Pl.15) from Mahoba District, Bundelkhand, in north-eastern Central India, of eleventh century shows the Bodhisattva seated on a lion with its head turned towards the lord, opening its jaws as if about to roar. This denoted "Avalokiteśvara uttering the lion roar", which is to say, preaching the overpowering doctrine of enlightenment, which puts to silence the voice of every other teacher. According to an ancient legend, the roaring of a lion awakened still-born babies to life. The inspiration for the lion mount is probably from Durga of Hindu pantheon. Sitting in a relaxed manner similar to the "rājalīlā" (royal ease) pose, his right knee is raised supporting the right arm which is stretched out. The extended arm shows womanly grace and tenderness. For one who assumes various forms at will, there is a homogenous mixture of a youthful male form and feminine grace, a quality beyond any sexual distinction.

Harihariharivāhana Lokesvara is one of the hundred and eight forms of Avalokiteśvara found in Nepal. This statue shown in the photograph (Pl.16) belongs to Patan temple, Nepal (date not known). Approximately three feet in height the statue has the snake at the lowermost level, on top of the snake is the lion, above the lion is a Garuda, Viṣṇu atop the Garuda and on his shoulders sits Lokesvara. The Garuda's hands are stretched
sideways, with the four hands of Viṣṇu holding various attributes which are not clear. Lokeśvara has six arms but the attributes held in the hands are not clear. Garuda's hands are usually seen in the āñjali mudra, as also the principal hands of Viṣṇu, while the second pair of hands should hold the Cakra in the right and the Gada in the left. Lokeśvara's three right hands usually show the rosary, Cakra and the Vara mudra. The three left ones carry the trīdandita, pāsa (noose or lasso) and the utpala. These are not noticed in the photograph.

A rare image of Avalokiteśvara with all the thousand heads, thousand hands, thousand eyes and thousand feet displayed is seen in the Senkura Monastery, Ladakh. (Pl.17). The feet are "at ease" position. The right hand is held near the chest with the index and the little finger pointing out in karana mudra. The smiling face is elongated and the heads are arranged in a pyramidal fashion to accommodate all the thousand heads. There is an eye on the forehead much like the Hindu God Śiva.

Part III.

Tārā

The Vajrayāna phase of Buddhism led to a multiplicity of gods and goddesses in the Buddhist pantheon. The Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism saw the development of two of the most significant female deities known to every practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism. They are the gentle and attractive Tārā and the much more esoteric, fierce and compelling Vajrayogini or
Vajravarahi. Since Tārā is considered to be the consort of Avalokiteśvara, the study of Tārā is of immediate relevance.

The origin of the term Tārā is ascribed to tar meaning "to cross" i.e. she who aids to cross the sea of mortality. Other meanings of the word Tārā are starry, piercing, the eye, the pupil. It is a term applied to certain female deities and has been adopted especially by Tibetan Buddhism for certain devis of the Tantric school.¹⁶

There are many legends about the origin of Tārā. One of them is that she was born from a blue ray which shone from the eye of Amitābha. (Alice Getty, p.120). This is similar to the emanation of Avalokiteśvara as a white ray of light from the right eye of Amitābha.

Another is that she is the saviouress who is said to be an advanced Bodhisattva as well as a Buddha. She was once upon a time an ordinary mortal who aroused the "thought of enlightenment" (bodhicitta) following all the rules as laid down in the Vinaya-piṭaka. According to Tāranātha, a Tibetan teacher, many kalpas (aeons) ago, a princess named Moon of Wisdom prayed to the Buddha of that kalpa and to his entourage for a very long time. Finally, for the first time bodhicitta arose in her. The monks present suggested "If you pray that your deeds accord with the teachings then indeed on that account you

will change your form to that of a man, as is befitting". In reply the princess told the monks "In this life there is no such distinction as male and female ... and therefore attachments to ideas of male and female are quite worthless. Weak-minded worldlings are always deluded by this." She then made a vow saying "there are many who wish to gain enlightenment in a man's form, and there are but a few who wish to work for the welfare of sentient beings in a female form. Therefore, may I, in a female body, work for the welfare of beings right until samsara has been emptied."¹⁷

Another version says that she was born from the tears of Avalokiteśvara, who wept while feeling that even after rescuing countless human beings, there still remained many more to be saved from samśara. She was born on a blue lotus (an attribute held by her) which grew in the water of his tears.

Tārā is said to have become popular more because of the meaning conveyed by her name. She was soon recognized as the feminine counterpart of Avalokiteśvara just as Sarāśvatī is the feminine expression of Mañjuśrī. She was so important that many other feminine divinities came to be regarded as her various forms. Thus she appeared as Bhrikūṭī when she showed her displeasure or as Usṇīsasitātapatrā ("lady of wisdom bump with a white parasol") to show her triumphant form appearing with a

thousand arms and thousand heads, arranged in paintings, to give the appearance of an elaborate headgear very similar to the eleven-headed, thousand-armed form of Avalokiteśvara.

Tārās can be identified from the blue lotus carried in the left hand while the right hand exhibits the vara mudra. They are broadly classified under five colours such as the Green, White, Yellow, Blue and Red Tārā and under each colour there is a group of Tārās. To the group of green Tārā belong Khadiravani Tārā, Vasyatārā, ĀryaTārā, Mahattārā Tārā, Varada Tārā, Durgottārini Tārā, Dhanada Tārā, Jāngulī, and Parṇāśabarī. Of them Jāngulī emanates from Akshobya and may have three different colours yellow, white and green. When green she has four arms and carries the trisula, the peacock feathers and a snake in three hands while the fourth shows the abhaya mudra. Parṇāśabarī can be seen in both the green and yellow forms. She emanates from Amoghasiddhi when green and from Akshobya when yellow in colour. She is generally three-faced and six-armed and sometimes she is four-armed. Such cases are rare. In the green colour all the three faces have an irritated smile (sakrodhahasitananam).

Under the White Tārā are the Asṭamahābhaya Tārā, Mṛtyuvañcana Tārā, Caturbhuja-Sitatārā, Sadbhuja-

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18 Mallar Ghosh, Development of Buddhist Iconography in Eastern India-A study of Tara, Prajñas of Five Tathāgatas and Bhrikuti, Munshiram Manoharlal. 1980. She says that the familiar form of Tārā has water lily in the left hand.
Sitatārā, Viśvamata, Kurukullā and Jāngulī. The Vajratārā, Jāngulī, Parnāsabarī and Bhṛikutī form the group of Yellow Tārās. The group of Blue Tārās consists of Ekajatā and Mahācīnā Tārā. She is called Mahācīnā Tārā because it was in Mahācīnā where she was originally worshipped. There are not many Red Tārās in the Śādhanamāla, Kurukullā being the only Red Tara. She has the image of Amitābha on the crown and takes the red colour from him. When she is of red colour she is either four, six or eight-armed.

A beautiful image of the Asṭamahābhaya-Tārā now found in Patna Museum is from Ratnagiri and may be placed around the tenth century (Pl. 18). Standing gracefully in tribhanga pose on a double petalled lotus, she has half closed eyes and noble bearing, holding an upala in her left hand, the damaged right hand must have been showing the vara mudrā. She is draped in a diaphanous material and a scarf worn in an upaviti (cloth worn across the left shoulder and under the right arm) fashion, and is richly ornamented. The eight great perils are depicted on either side of the main figure in two vertical rows. In each panel there is a figure of two-armed Tara rushing to the rescue of suffering beings, her right hand in abhaya mudrā and the left holding an upala. The five Dhyāni Buddhas are seen above the head of the main figure.

Sarnath Museum has a statue of Simhanāda-Tārā which is the counterpart of Simhanāda-Avalokitesvara (Pl.19). Like the Simhanāda-Avalokitesvara she too sits on a lion
mount. The differences in the two images are (1) the lion's head is on the left side. (2) Tara sits in lalitāsana while Avalokiteśvara sits in the "royal ease" pose. (3) while Avalokiteśvara can be said to be "nirbhūshana", Tara is moderately jewelled. (4) Avalokiteśvara has the image of Buddha on his crown whereas the image of Buddha is seen at Tara's head level. (5) mudrās are absent in the Avalokiteśvara image but in Tara's image we see her right hand in vara mudrā while the left holds a full blown lotus. There is no sādhanā mentioned in the published Sādhanaṃalā nor is there any mention made in the Nishpannyogāvalī for this form of Tara. The lion has not been associated with her.

The Indian Museum, Calcutta at present has an image of Khadiravani-Tara from Tetrawan (Pl.20) which may be said to be the counterpart of the Nalanda Museum statue of Avalokiteśvara with Tara, Sudhanakumāra on one side and Bṛhikuṭi and Hayagrīva on the other(Pl.14). The base of the image bears an inscription dated in the second year of King Ramapala of the Pala Dynasty. The goddess is heavily bejewelled and is flanked by Asokakāntā-Mārici on her right side and Ekajatā on her left. She is clad in a sari, with the scarf worn in upaviti fashion. The head holds an elaborate crown and the hair is gathered at the right shoulder. With half closed eyes, a slight smile, an oblong mark on her forehead and an inconspicuous halo behind her head, she stands in the tribhāṅga stance on a lotus base. The right hand is in the vara-mudrā and the left (damaged) holds the lotus.
The five Dhyāni Buddhas are seated above her head on the back slab. This form of Tārā became popular and was widely represented in the eleventh century.

Another image of Tārā assigned to the eighth-ninth century AD is also housed in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. She is seated in the vajra-paryaṅkāsana on a padma and holds an utpala (damaged) in her left hand while the right hand shows an auspicious mark on the palm and is in the vara mudrā. She is flanked by two seated female companions.

In the Indian images discussed so far, Avalokiteśvara rarely occupied the centre stage and was seen more as an attending Bodhisattva. The omnipresence of Tārā was another feature. But in the journey to China, Avalokiteśvara became the central figure, surpassing the popularity of even the Buddha and eventually absorbing the powers and attributes of Tārā resulting in the absence of the latter in the Chinese Buddhist pantheon.