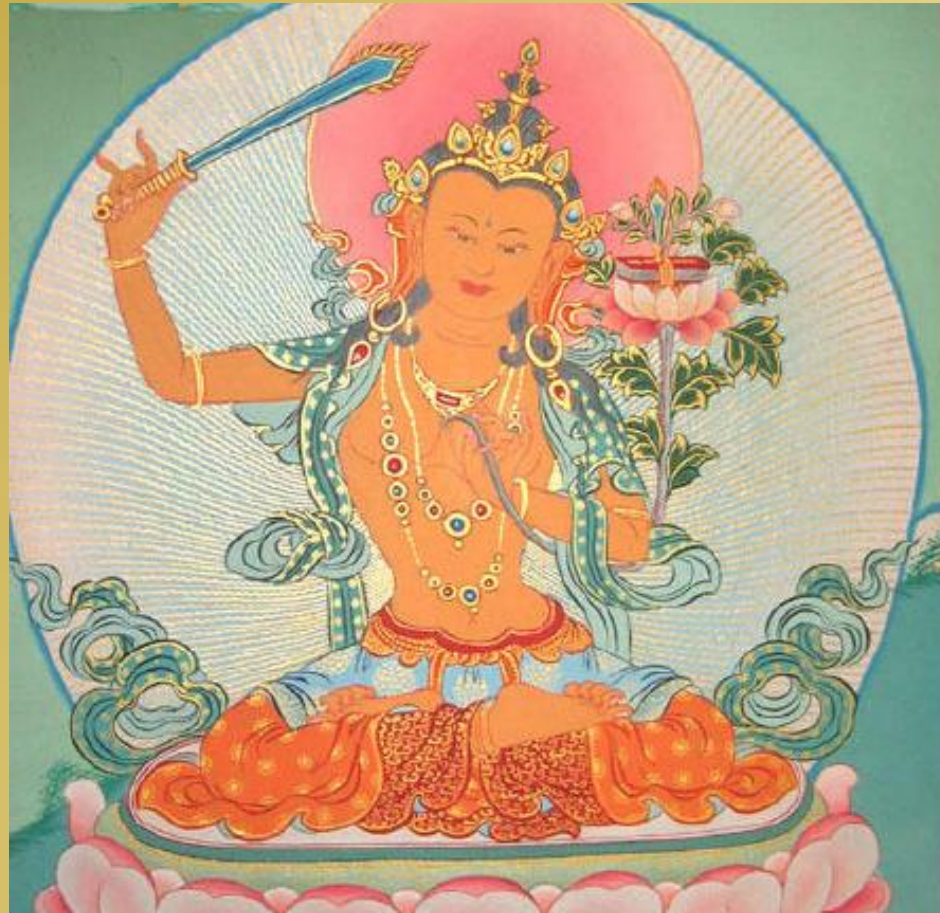


Buddhism and Literature in South Asia

Week 5: Buddhist Inspirational poetry



You asked for drama:

- Shakuntala bee dance!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXcLjsXmNfI>

Overview of Syllabus

~~Week 1: Introduction to Buddhist Literature, Jāataka Tales~~

~~Week 2: Indian Buddhist Sūtra Literature~~

~~Week 3: Life story of the Buddha in Indian poetry~~

~~Week 4: Indian Buddhist Drama~~

Week 5: Buddhist Inspirational poetry

Week 6: Buddhist Biography and Hagiography in Tibet

Week 7: Modern Buddhist Biographies: the 14th Dalai Lama's Autobiography

Week 8: Buddhist-inspired fiction in the 20th century

**Recap of formal poetry (*kāvya*) and
drama...**

‘*Rasa*’, or how Literature Creates Emotion

- For Sanskrit plays, emotional efficacy is measured formally (by poetic theorists) by how well the play adheres to the very precise guidelines known as *rasa* theory
- *Rasa* is not the same as the emotion a reader (or listener) experiences from simply watching or listening to a play. It is a formal classification based on specific features found in the poem.

The history of ‘*Rasa*’ theory

- The foundational work on emotion and its use and evocation in poetry is in *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata (written 3rd-4th century CE, but revised up until 9th).
- The author, Bharata promoted theory of literary representation that reduced human emotions to set of 8 “waves”
- These 8 aesthetic emotions are called “tastes” (*rasas*). This analogy based on the idea of taste—meaning that there is a physical component (what we feel) and blending of complex tastes and aesthetic moods evince.

How do you evoke '*rasa*'?

- The basic ingredient for *rasa* is a “stable” or primary emotion (*sthāyi-bhāva*) to which what are called [1] “underlying factors” (*ālambana-vibhāva*) such as moonlight or swinging earrings, [2] “transitory feelings” (*vyabhicāri-bhāva*) such as longing, worry, shame, and [3] “physical reactions” (*anubhāva*) such as perspiring or weeping are added.
- A “stable” emotion, when fully developed or matured by these factors turns into a *rasa*!
- Such transformations were originally thought to come about in the *main character* of poem or drama. However, on the contrary, *rasa* theory arose to enable literary analysis to grasp how poetry fixes emotions and makes them more permanently more perceptible.

The 8 ‘moods’ of drama and poetry

The 8 stable ‘emotions’ (<i>bhāva</i>)	Corresponding 8 ‘moods’ (<i>rasa</i>)
Desire (<i>rati</i>):	Erotic rasa (<i>śṛṅgāra</i>)
Humor (<i>hāsa</i>):	comic rasa (<i>hāsyā</i>)
Grief (<i>śoka</i>):	Sorrowful rasa (<i>karuṇa-rasa</i>)
Anger (<i>krodha</i>)	Furious rasa (<i>raudrasya</i>)
Energy (<i>utsāha</i>)	heroic rasa (<i>vīra</i>)
Fear (<i>bhaya</i>):	Fearsome rasa (<i>bhāyanaka</i>)
Revulsion (<i>jugupsā</i>):	Disgusting rasa (<i>bībhatsa</i>)
Wonder (<i>vismaya</i>)	Amazing rasa (<i>ādbhuta rasa</i>)

Buddhist ‘inspirational’ poetry?

How does this differ from the formal poetry (*kāvya*) we’ve read about?

1. Written in verse, but not necessarily *meter*.
2. While this poetry may contain some of the formal features of *kāvya* such as meter and ‘moods’, etc., these formal aspects are not required.
3. Purpose: Poetry as a vehicle to express on the personal experiences and/or reflections of Buddhist monks and lay tantric practitioners

Different 'genres' of Buddhist inspirational poetry

- Based in India: *dohā*
- Based in Tibet: *gur* (*mgur*)

Both originate from practitioners in lay tantric (non-monastic) Buddhist movements, called *siddha*-s

***Siddha-s* or “Accomplished person”**

- By the 11th century in India we see a rise in lay (male) tantric Buddhist practitioners which came to be called *siddha-s* or *mahasiddha-s*
- Saraha, Kanha, and Tilopa are the most famous among the 11th century Buddhist tantric masters.
- Through the songs they composed, the instructions they left, and the stories that have been told about them they have deeply influenced the shape of religious and literary culture in a number of Asian countries, especially India, Nepal, and Tibet.

The ‘songs’ of these *siddha*-s

- These inspirational songs circulated throughout India, Nepal, and Tibet through the 13th century, taking on new life in Nepal and Tibet
- In Nepal, Saraha, Kanha and Tilopa served as models, and sometimes as deities, for the Buddhist “*tantra experts*” among the Newars of the Kathmandu valley, who to this day perform rituals and sing songs that tradition traces to them
- In Tibet (and culturally related areas such as Mongolia, Ladakh, Sikkim, and Bhutan), they were seen as charismatic, powerful, wise, and compassionate exemplars of the tantric Buddhist approach to life
- At the same time, these songs became models for genres of oral and written poetry that have been immensely popular and influential throughout Tibetan cultural areas through the present day

What is *tantra* anyway?

To understand the role of *tantra* in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, it can be helpful to remember that Buddhism distinguishes between 2 kinds of meditation:

- *Samatha* (Pali) / *Shamatha* (Sanskrit)
“Calm” or “Calm-abiding”
- *Vipassana* (Pali) / *Vipashyana* (Sanskrit)
“Insight”

“Calm-abiding” meditation

- Mindfulness of breath, body
- Resting the mind on an ‘object’ of meditation in order to attain a sense of deep calming meditative ‘absorption’ (*jhana/dhyana*)

Common Buddhist Objects for calm-abiding meditation

- Various forms of Counting
- **Following the breath through the body**
- **Locations on the body, such as the nostrils, chakra-s or channels,**
- ‘elements’ of the body (earth, water, fire, and air/wind)
- Light sources (candles, offering lamps)
- **Statues or other depictions of the Buddha or of Bodhisattvas**

“Insight” meditation

- Mindfulness of breath, body
- The mind is either directed towards
- Cultivating the mind, training it towards the process of “insight”. Which can be done in several ways.
- For some practices, the meditator is instructed to simply be mindful of the breath and both label and deconstruct thoughts as they arise.
- In other practices, the mind is encouraged to go through an analytical kind of process on various topics

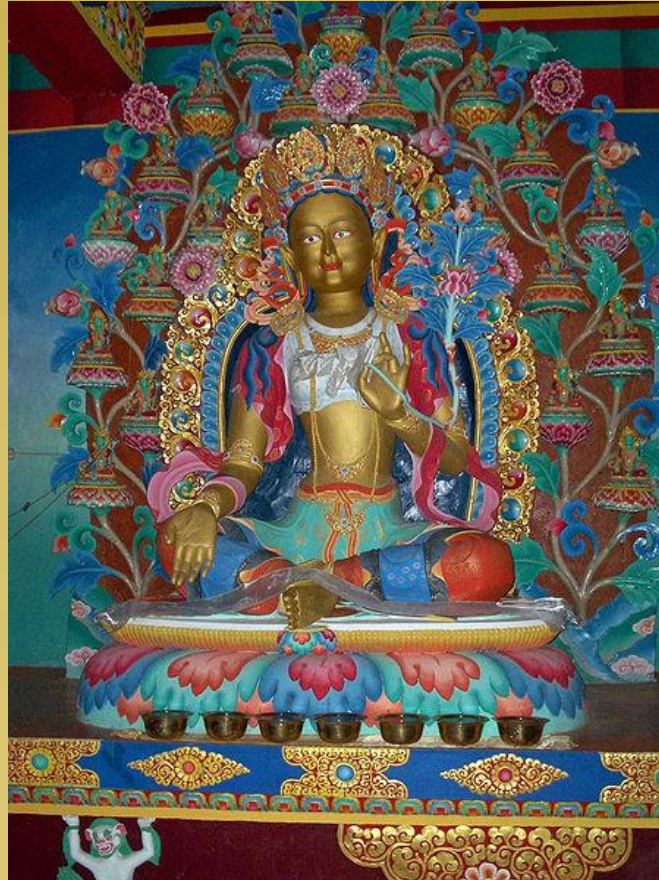
Common Buddhist “Insight” meditation practices

- Meditating on the **nature of the self; deconstructing the ‘self’ or other similar phenomena** (i.e. **emptiness**, dependent origination, 5 aggregates etc.)
- Loving-kindness practices (or the other “Diving abidings” including compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity)
- **Reciting prayers, mantras**

What is involved in a 'tantric' practice?

- Typically the practitioner will visualize his/herself in front of a deity (and sometimes within a *mandala*) and then *as the deity* his/herself
- For some practices, an 'initiation' by a teacher may be required. For some, ordination (being a monk/nun) may be required, but many are lay traditions
- So how does this work?

A sample tantric practice: White Tara *sadhana*:



A common White Tara Sadhana practice practiced today (in English translation): http://www.fpmt-osel.org/meditate/white_tara.htm

How does *tantra* fit in with other Buddhist movements and practices in India, Tibet, and Nepal?

The easiest way to approach this is to look at what we know from recent ethnographies on Tibetan Buddhism...

Orientations of Buddhism in Tibet

- ***Bodhi orientation***: the aspect of Tibetan Buddhism related to personal and/or collective salvation outside of ordinary social life
 - For Theravāda Buddhists: done by virtuosi alone;
 - For Tibetan Buddhists: there is a social/altruistic component, but generally accomplished via tantric performance
- Compare to ***karma orientation***: the relation between action and wealth and leadership, more prevalent in other Buddhist countries.
 - Theravāda Buddhists: merit making, done primarily by laity;
 - For Tibetan Buddhists: this is the primary realm for clerical, but also done extensively by laity.

See Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 5-7, 31-2

Dharma wars:

Clerical and Shamanic Buddhism in Tibet

Samuel distinguishes between 2 modalities of Buddhism:
Shamanic and *Clerical* Buddhism

- ***Shamanic***: “regulation and transformation of human life and human society through use (or purported use) of alternate states of consciousness by means of which specialist practitioners are held to communicate with a mode of reality alternative to, and more fundamental than, the world of everyday experience.”
- **Clerical** = monastic
- A Tibetan lama asked to define Vajrayana will typically talk in terms of *Bodhi orientation*--Spiritual empowerment is merely a byproduct.

Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 7-9

- In a sense, Buddhist *tantra* can be thought of as a collection of meditative practices designed to liberate the mind quickly (vajrayana)
- Some of these practices are open to lay practitioners (though initiation may be required); some of may be restricted to use within monastic institutions

Kanha's collection of *doha*-s

What are some themes and ideas that emerge in these couplets?

- *Bodhicitta* as a goal/aspiration
- The body and its role in meditative experiences (*chakras* and *channels*)
- *Mandala*-s and the five elements (earth, water, air, fire, and space) as objects of meditation
- Reflections on the nature of 'emptiness'

Bodhi-citta, or “The spirit of Awakening”

- Within Mahayana (and Vajrayana) Buddhism you find an emphasis on what is called the Bodhisattva ideal: that one should strive to attain enlightenment—not for oneself—but for others.
- This compassionate motivation is sometimes called *bodhi-citta* (“spirit of awakening”).

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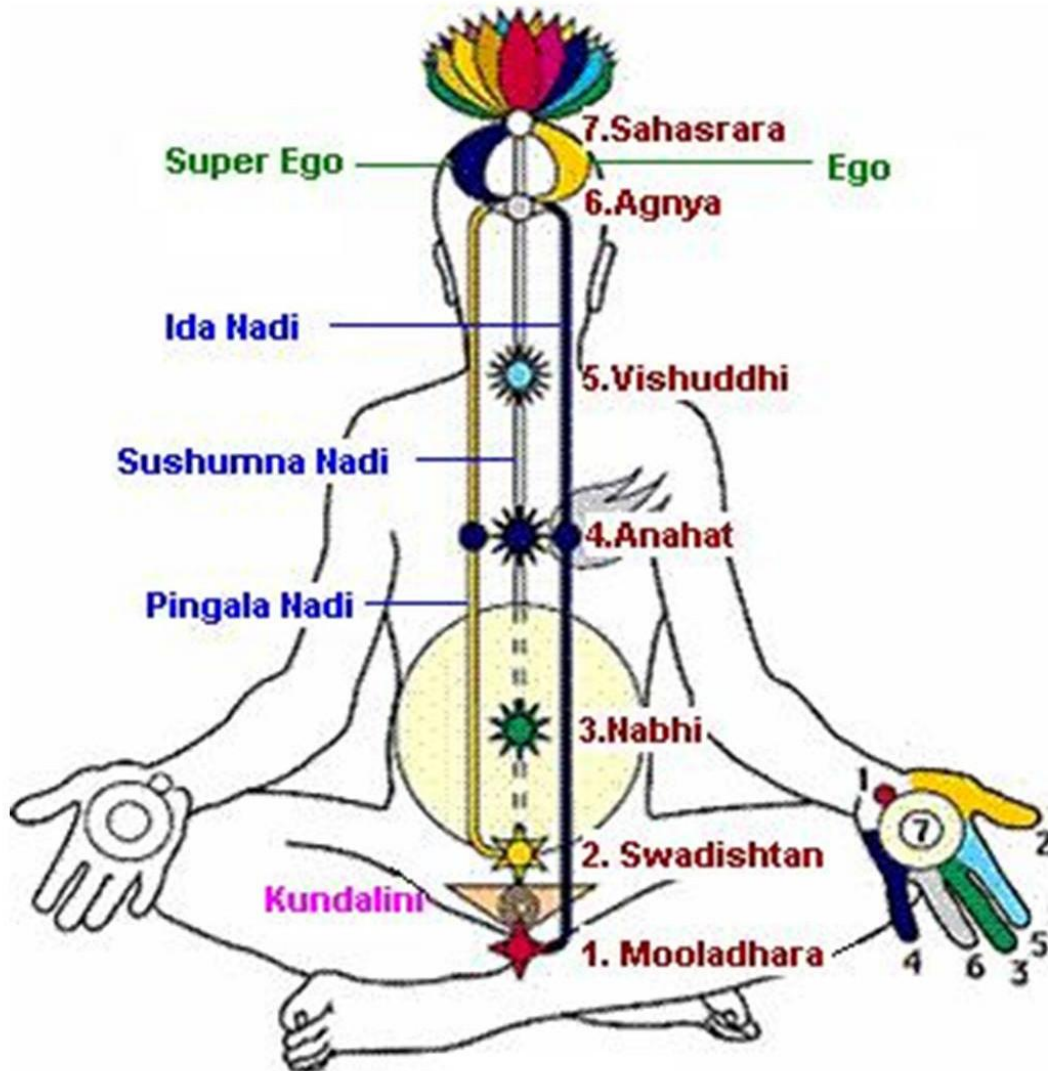
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The 7 chakra-s in Tantric yogic systems



1. The Crown Chakra (Sahasrara)
2. The Third Eye Chakra (Ajna)
3. The Throat Chakra (Vishuddha)
4. The Heart Chakra (Anahata)
5. The Solar Plexus Chakra (Manipura)
6. The Sacral Chakra (Svadhishthana)
7. The Base/Root Chakra (Muladhara)

The primary yogic *Nadis* or channels



Sushumna Nadi connects the base chakra to the crown chakra.

Pingala is associated with solar energy. Pingala has a sunlike nature and male energy. Its temperature is heating.

Ida is associated with lunar energy. Idā has a moonlike nature and female energy with a cooling effect

Kanha's collection of *doha*-s

What are some themes and ideas that emerge in these couplets?

- The body and its role in meditative experiences (*chakras* and *channels*)
- ***Mandala*-s and the five elements (earth, water, air, fire, and space) as objects of meditation**
- Reflections on the nature of 'emptiness'

mandala of the 5 elements





Sometimes these “5-element” mandala-s feature deities as well such as this one: Mandala of Amitayus, Tibet, 19th century, Rubin Museum of Art

Kanha's collection of *doha*-s

What are some themes and ideas that emerge in these couplets?

- Reflections on the nature of 'emptiness'

Dependent Origination and 'Emptiness'

- In the Mahāyāna tradition, *pratītyasamutpāda* is said to complement the concept of *emptiness* (*sunyata*). It is said that because all things arise in dependence upon causes and conditions, they are *empty* of inherent existence.
- What this means is that because nothing that exists is independent of causes and conditions, nothing is **permanent**. 'Inherent existence' simply means that something could exist inherently (on its own by its own nature without the aid of some cause or condition

Gur, or “Songs of Experience”

- *Doha*-s enter Tibet as **gur** (*mgur*), so-called “songs of experience”
- Does the genre change in Tibet? Yes!

Poetry and Songs in Tibet

- *glu (lu)* – songs (pre-date influence of Buddhism)
- *snyan ngag (nyän ngak)* – ornate poetry, i.e.. *Kavya*
- *mgur (gur)* – songs of realization/poetical songs

Glu “songs”

- Most secular of the poetic genres
- Most musically oriented of the genres
 - generally performed (rather than read)
 - often accompanied by dance
- Two major subcategories
 - Royal songs (*rgyal po'i glu*)
 - Popular songs (*'bangs kyi glu*): love and marriage, planting and harvest, advice, riddle songs

*je nye ni je nye na
yar pa ni dgung dang nye
dgung skar ni si li li*

Nearer, ah, nearer yet
Yarpa, ah, near the sky
Sky-stars, ah, *si-li-li*.

*Je nye [ni] je nye na
gla skar ni brag dang nye
brag skar ni si li li*

Nearer, ah, nearer yet
Lakar, ah, near the stone
Stone-stars, ah, *si-li-li*.

*sdur ba ni chab dang nye
Gyur sram ni pyo la la'*

Durwa, ah, near the stream
Otter, ah, *pyo-la-la*.

*nyen kar ni dog dang nye
'bras drug ni si li li*

Nyenkar, ah, near the earth
Al fruits, ah, *si-li-li*.

*mal tro ni [klum] dang nye
syi bser ni spu ru ru*

Maltro, ah, near to Lum
Cold winds, ah, *pu-ru-ru!*

What is *nyän ngak* (*snyan ngag*)?

- Ornate poetry composed in Tibetan, but in imitation of Sanskrit poetry (*kāvya*)
- Follows the guidelines of Tibetan commentaries on Sanskrit poetician Dandin's *Mirror of Poetry*
- Content can be 'Buddhist' or 'secular'

Mgur and *Nyams gyur* “songs of realization”

- Originating from the Indian *siddha*’s *doha* tradition, *gur* came to denote a more Buddhistic type of song
- Buddhist in content
- sung poetry forms characteristic of the tantric movement
- Sometimes spontaneously composed verses by Tibetan lamas, such as Milarepa (whose biography we’ll read for next week!)

Loten Namling sings “Songs of Milarepa”
to His Holiness the Karmapa Lama

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEaaTZvMVko>

Songs of Spiritual Experience

- How do these songs (***gur***) differ from the couplets (**doha-s**) we read?
- What kinds of themes do we see reflected?
- What kinds of poetic devices do we see? Do we see poetic moods?
- What do we see in common with **doha-s**?

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Next Week: (Week 6) :

Buddhist Biography and Hagiography in Tibet