

Research Article

Tibetan Pilgrimage Guides to Bhaktapur: An Image of Dīpaṃkara Buddha Manifesting as Speaking Tārā

In memoriam Hubert Decleer (1940–2021)

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Abstract

This paper explores the phenomenon of a single devotional image identified with multiple deities by drawing from both premodern and modern Tibetan guidebook literature and ethnographic work. It engages the Tibetan-Newar Buddhist interface in the Kathmandu Valley with a focus on the Mūl Dīpaṃkara Buddha of Bhaktapur (alias Speaking Tārā, Sgrol ma gsung byon). The essay provides the first chronology of relevant literature and traces what has historically been of interest to Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims in Bhaktapur. The contemporary Dīpaṃkara/Speaking Tārā identification appears to supervene an older conflation occurring until the 18th century, when Tibetan pilgrims identified the Hindu Tantric goddess Taleju, the tutelary deity of the Malla kings who resides in Bhaktapur's Royal Palace, as Speaking Tārā. The paper offers a preliminary investigation of this development and reflects on spatialized shifts in Tibetan pilgrimage practices.

Keywords

Buddhism; Kathmandu Valley; Newar; shrine image; deity

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Introduction

It is not unusual for a single devotional image to be identified with multiple deities in South Asia. Related discussions often orbit around an attempt to capture a structural relationship between Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions (Buddhism and Hinduism).¹ In addition to this kind of inter-religious encounter, there are also intra-religious examples of stakeholders from different faiths converging on particular sites. The Kathmandu Valley is one of these sites. It encompasses a geographical area where Tibetan and Newar Buddhists have been interacting over centuries.²

Tibetan names given to Newar Buddhist deity images are usually a direct translation of a deity's Sanskrit or local name.³ So why do Tibetan Buddhists commonly identify the chief Dīpaṃkara Buddha of Bhaktapur as Speaking Tārā (Sgrol ma gsung byon) and not as Mar me mdzad, which is the Tibetan translation of Dīpaṃkara?⁴ That Dīpaṃkara is not referred to by his Tibetan name but is instead considered to be Tārā (Sgrol ma), with whom he shares neither gender⁵ nor any other obvious attributes, is unexpected and prompts one to seek the reason behind this peculiar identification. This is particularly relevant given that the chief Dīpaṃkara is the key, if not the only, pilgrimage site for Tibetan Buddhists in Bhaktapur today. In the Newar community, the same deity image is known as Mūl Dīpaṃkara and is revered as the oldest and most important of five Dīpaṃkara Buddhas dispersed throughout the city (Gutschow 2016: 372, Locke 1985: 444).

The contemporary Dīpaṃkara/Speaking Tārā identification is also of interest because it seems to supervene an older conflation occurring until the 18th century when Tibetan pilgrims identified the Hindu Tantric goddess Taleju - the tutelary deity of the Malla kings - who resides in Bhaktapur's Royal Palace, as Speaking Tārā. Why did the Speaking Tārā become associated with the chief Dīpaṃkara Buddha of Bhaktapur, whose shrine is difficult to find and has to be sought out with the help of guides? Why not with one of the other four Dīpaṃkaras,

for instance, one located very close to the Royal Palace (and therefore the most logical and easiest for pilgrims to reach)?

This paper cannot solve these conundrums, but it lays out available evidence to help clarify the situation. Furthermore, it offers a preliminary exploration of the Dīpaṃkara/Speaking Tārā phenomenon by combining Tibetan sources with ethnography. I draw from my own fieldwork in Bhaktapur (2016 and 2018) and information from Tibetan guidebook literature made available to me by Hubert Decler, to whom I dedicate this article. Hubert was a wonderful mentor who passed away on August 25, 2021, as this essay went into peer review.⁶ The guidebook passages below were kindly selected, provided, and, unless stated otherwise, also translated by him; I merely assembled and chronologically ordered these references and added notes.

Contextualizing the Local: Dīpaṃkara, Divine Identities, and Spatialized Practices

Dīpaṃkara is a Buddha said to have lived on earth eons ago. His name appears in the *Buddhavaṃsa* as the first of 24 Buddhas who preceded Śākyamuni Buddha. There is a legend that describes how Dīpaṃkara assured ("predicted") the Śākyamuni Buddha's future enlightenment in one of the latter's previous lives.⁷ The most important scripture related to Dīpaṃkara in Nepal is the *Kapiśāvadāna*, which revolves around giving alms (Gellner 1992: 184).⁸ He is commonly identified as the principal Buddha connected to the virtue of *dāna* (Skt. generosity) in Newar Buddhism.⁹ In Tibetan Buddhism, he is known as the "Buddha of the Past," conceptually grouped with Śākyamuni, "the Buddha of the Present" and Maitreya, "the Buddha of the Future" (Frédéric 2003: 129).¹⁰

In Nepal, Dīpaṃkara alone figures at the center of an important Buddhist worship practice that has developed and flourished since the Malla period (Michaels 2013: 317). An abundance of Dīpaṃkara images in the Kathmandu Valley attests to his popularity, as do the festivals devoted

to him, such as Samyak or Pañcadān (e.g., Bāsukalā Rañjītkār 2007, Brown 2014, Gellner 1992). He plays a crucial role in the city of Bhaktapur, where “just as Padmapāṇi Lokeśvara can be regarded as the patron of Lalitpur (and, to a lesser extent, of Kathmandu) so Dīpaṅkara [sic] might be considered the patron of Bhaktapur” (Sharkey 2001: 238). The city is famous for its five iconic, larger-than-life-sized Dīpaṅkara images, which are revered as living deities existing in a hierarchical order by virtue of seniority (Wollein 2019: 134).

Only the chief among these five, known as the Mūl Dīpaṅkara,¹¹ is considered the Speaking Tārā by Tibetan Buddhists. Therefore, this situation demonstrates a localized instance of a dual Buddhist identification of a single image.¹² As already mentioned, such plural identification is nothing new or unusual. In “On why it is good to have many names:

the many identities of a Nepalese god,” Tuladhar-Douglas (2005) engages the case of the Buddhist/Hindu deity Buṃgadyaḥ (Karuṇāmaya)/Rāto Matsyendranāth and even states that the “profound error is to assume that any particular shrine image can only have one identity.” He further argues that the capacity of an image to “sustain several distinct identifications at the same time (...) is crucial for the patronage and public life of that shrine image” (2005: 56 f.). Taking these insights as a starting point, my paper explores the topic from a different angle. It looks at the possible development of a dual identification through a (shifting) spatialization produced by Tibetan pilgrimage practices. This essay attempts to historicize the emplacement of the Speaking Tārā through pilgrimage practice and literature. It contours how multiple identities are produced through emplacement rather than asking why they are produced or, indeed, what is produced.¹³



Figure 1: The Mūl Dīpaṅkara outside his shrine during the Pañcadān procession of 2016 (Author 2016).

Early Tibetan Pilgrimage Diaries: Blessings of the Speaking Tārā

Tibetan Buddhists have their own associations with Bhaktapur, known as Kho khom in Tibetan.¹⁴ In addition to the orally transmitted knowledge about the holy places of the Kathmandu Valley, there is a rich corpus of Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage guides (*gnas yig*). One of the most detailed pre-modern Tibetan accounts of the Kathmandu Valley known today was written by the Eighth Situ Rinpoche, known as Situ Panchen Rinpoche (Si tu pañ chen chos kyi 'byung gnas, 1699/1700–74), who visited the Valley at the end of the 18th century. He came to Nepal twice and stayed in Bhaktapur in 1748 CE at the then newly-completed Kuthu Bahī (Decleer 2000), one of the Newar Buddhist monasteries in Bhaktapur. He met the king in the Royal Palace and was granted a view of the actual image of Taleju, an exceedingly important goddess surrounded by a strictly secretive cult who plays a crucial role in Bhaktapur.¹⁵ Situ Panchen Rinpoche saw Taleju¹⁶ as identical to the famous Tārā, who had once spoken to a former king about Milarepa¹⁷ and who is the most important element in Tibetan guidebook literature when it comes to Bhaktapur.¹⁸

Two stories about the origin of the Tārā of Bhaktapur are found in a pilgrimage diary of the Sixth Zhwa dmar pa (1584–1630), Gar dbang chos kyi dbang phyug, entitled *Mālā Garland with Jewels Embellished* (*Bal yul du bgrod pa'i lam yig nor bu spel ma'i 'phreng ba zhes bya ba bzhus sho*),¹⁹ who describes her as “a golden image endowed with great blessings.” The legends detailing her origin differ. In one version, a previous king of Bhaktapur who wished to travel to India was being delayed by one of his ministers, and in order to be able to depart, he had this Tārā image made. However, there is a second, more popular, explanation, which appears in the same text:

According to the other version, a terrible epidemic once broke out in Nepal while Lord Mila [Milarepa] had been staying at a residence in Nyishang.²⁰ After the king had come to know about his fame as one having

attained realization, he wished to invite Lord Mila. Then this Tārā [image] spoke a prophecy: ‘Even if you invite Lord Mila, he will not come. Offer your prayers to him with an offering of arura and one kashika muslin cloth.’ The king of that period was one who had attained the [power of the] magic stares and glances, and by means of such a stare, he offered [and transferred] some arura and a roll of such cloth. From his side, the Majestic Lord, by his own magic sight, accepted these - thus, it is locally known (Gar dbang chos kyi dbang phyug n.d.: folios 27b-28a).

According to this legend, there are several references to the Speaking Tārā of Bhaktapur in Tibetan literature, and the story is relatively popular. It might be assumed that the Tārā image appearing in literature is consistently identical to Taleju, as explained to Situ Panchen Rinpoche, but since the Taleju image is beyond access and her color has been variously described by different sources, this cannot be known with certainty.

A guide written later by Situ Panchen's companion and student, the Fourth Khams sprul bstan 'dzin chos kyi nyi ma (1734–1779)²¹ mentions only the Royal Palace as a site to be visited in Bhaktapur.²² But Brag dkar rta so sprul sku chos kyi dbang phyug's (1775–1837) subsequent guide, *The Infallible Mirror that Speaks the Truth—A history of Nepal's sacred places and sacred images* (*Bal yul gyi gnas dang rten gyi lo rgyus nges par brjod pa 'khrul spong nor bu'i me long*),²³ states:

Bhaktapur's Tārā who manifests as speech: It is the sacred image with great blessings endowed, that in a prophecy exhorted a previous king of this country to present the great Majestic Lord Mila with kashika cloth and with the vijaya arura. Although at one time it was possible to visit it, later on, the image was either destroyed or taken elsewhere - Tibetans are not sure, except for the

fact that, at present, there is no way to visit it, so they say (Brag dkar rta so sprul sku chos kyi dbang phyug n.d.: folio 27b).

The Speaking Tārā appears to have been the highlight of Bhaktapur for Tibetan visitors, and it seems that Situ Rinpoche was the last to report having seen her, assuming that she is identical to Taleju.²⁴

Modern Tibetan Pilgrimage Guides: Various Speaking Tārās and five Dīpaṃkaras

Although the premodern reports suggest that it was impossible to see the image of the Speaking Tārā, she continues to appear in modern guidebooks, demonstrating a fondness for informing the pilgrim about her greatness, power, whereabouts, and color. The reason for highlighting her importance seems to be that the related story refers to two connected masterpieces of Tibetan literature, the *Rje btsun mi la'i rnam thar* (the *Life Story of Milarepa*) and the *Mi la'i mgur 'bum* (100,000 *Songs of Milarepa*). An instructive entry about her features appears in the guidebook written by Rinchen Darlo, the former president of the Tibet Fund, who was the Dalai Lama's former representative in Nepal and North America. His well-known piece on Buddhist holy places, *Music of Amazing Tales - A descriptive guide to the sacred places [of the Kathmandu Valley]* (*Gnas bshad ngo mtshar gtam gyi rol mo*), outlines the pilgrimage foci in Bhaktapur as follows:

Kho khom sgrol ma gsung byon, The Speaking Tara of Bhaktapur: In the oral tradition of the local people, it is well known that there are various 'Speaking Taras,' but a detailed history of each of them does not exist; so, I will not write one here. Tibetans claim that the most sacred one is the highly respected, original Speaking Tara that now resides in the Taleju temple of the royal palace of Bhaktapur. The goddess' icon there is green.

However, at the great festival of Daśāi, i.e., the Newar New Year, on the day known as Navami, at a spot where there is the great [golden] gate in ancient style at the front of the Bhaktapur palace, there is a tradition of having the Tara icon reside there - which is the only time one may view it²⁵ (Gnya' nang bur sras pa rin chen dar lo 1984: 118).

Again, it is asserted here that the Speaking Tārā resides in the Taleju temple - implying that she is Taleju - and it is established that she is the original one, next to other Speaking Tārās, who are shrouded in mystery. Rinchen Darlo further mentions the five Dīpaṃkara Buddhas of Bhaktapur:

Kho khom sangs rgyas mar me mdzad,²⁶ the Dīpaṃkara Buddha of Bhaktapur: it is known that, within the city of Bhaktapur, there are five brother images of Dīpaṃkara Buddha. The one which Tibetans traditionally visit as the most famous among them is the foremost of the five. The temple where this sacred image resides is the one called Adi-Buddha Vihara, locally known as Kwathandau. As for this set of sacred Brother images, (1) the first one is the above-mentioned, (2) the second one is in Goli-nath tole, inside the temple called Mangaladvipa Maha-vihara (Jhaurnbhai), (3) the third one at Tadhunchen Bahal, alias Chaturvarna Maha-vihara, (4) the fourth in the quarter of Kothu Bahil, and (5) the fifth at Tatu Bahil, also known as Sayakirti Maha-vihara (Gnya' nang bur sras pa rin chen dar lo 1984: 117).

Darlo clearly points out the primary importance of the first Dīpaṃkara for Tibetan Buddhists and also presents him in the framework of a group. The order is slightly incorrect,²⁷ but Darlo acknowledges a hierarchy since he knows that the Mūl Dīpaṃkara of the Kwathandau area is the principal one.

Since the five Dīpaṃkara Buddhas are not mentioned in the older guides, it is unclear when they started to appear in guidebook literature. The bibliography of Dowman's 2007 booklet, *A Buddhist Guide to the Power Places of the Kathmandu Valley*, lists a variety of Tibetan sources that have been combined into his handy guidebook. One section features entries about Bhaktapur and begins with the Dīpaṃkaras of Bhaktapur but subsequently also mentions Bhaktapur's Speaking Tārā, Sgrol ma gsung byon (Nep. *bolne tārā*), the Śākyamuni Buddha housed in Jhaur Bahī and the Lokeśvara found at Itachhen. The main passage of concern is about the Dīpaṃkaras:

kho-khom sangs-rgyas mar-med-mdzad: Bhadga'um Dipamkara: in Bhaktapur, you will see many images of Dipamkara and the Five Buddha aspects (*rigs-lnga*) etc. (Dowman 2007: 70).

This is a literal translation of a passage found in one of Dowman's sources, namely Turrell Wylie's *A Tibetan Religious Geography of Nepal* (1970). The matching Tibetan passage is in its Appendix A,²⁸ which in turn is a transliteration of a guidebook named *Bal yul gnas yig* - earlier thought to be from the 18th century. This particular work again dates from the 1950s and was authored by a Newar monk with the Tibetan name Ngawang Dorje, a tantric practitioner who had lived in Lhasa and later settled in the area of Kimḍol, where he then became known as the "Blue Lama" of Kimḍol.²⁹ However, as there are no further leads, it is unclear where the information about the five Dīpaṃkara Buddhas provided in this guide comes from. At present, it seems to be the "oldest" source mentioning several Dīpaṃkaras.

An Outlier? Speaking Tārā(s) and one Dīpaṃkara in the *Guide to Mustang*

A further source refers to only one Dīpaṃkara in Bhaktapur. The relevant piece of text appears in a *Guide to Mustang*, which consists of an anthology of writings about

monasteries and temples in that region of Nepal, compiled by the late Mkhān po bkris bstan 'dzin.³⁰ Despite its title, it turns out to be not only a guide to Mustang but also a guide to Bhaktapur:

At the king's palace in Bhaktapur | the main sacred icon is the Speaking Tārā. | At the time when Milarepa miraculously | assumed the role of the king's main Guru, | the king beheld her face. She revealed herself by speaking many a time [since]. | So, this amazing Tārā [image] resides there. ||

Furthermore, also in Bhaktapur, | this Newar [monk] Maha-karunika | who was the root Guru of Rwa Lotsawa [from Tibet] — | his [personal] sacred item was [his namesake,] the Great Compassionate one who abides here | as [an image of Buddha] Dīpaṃkara [who manifests as] Speaking Tārā || (mkhan po bkris bstan 'dzin 2004: 53, verses 56-69).

Interestingly, two instances of a Speaking Tārā are recognized here. It is the only source that does so, as all the older guides introduce only one image as a Speaking Tārā.³¹ While the Speaking Tārā housed in the palace is already known and requires no further discussion at this point, the acknowledgment of Speaking Tārā manifesting in the form of Dīpaṃkara seems to be a genuine novelty.

This passage is significant because it recognizes Dīpaṃkara and attributes a further identifying dimension to him, as well as establishing the image as a personal sacred item (*thugs dam*) of the monk Mahākaruṇika.³² The quote does not explicitly mention that the image concerned is the Mūl Dīpaṃkara, but there are strong reasons to believe that it is. The many Tibetan pilgrims I met during my research at the site commonly view him as Speaking Tārā and consider his shrine to be the key sacred place in Bhaktapur.

Living Practice: Tibetan Buddhist Pilgrims in Bhaktapur Today

It is unclear when Tibetan pilgrims started to view the Mūl Dīpaṃkara as Speaking Tārā. Whether or not the *Guide to Mustang* - or rather the recycled passage found in there - had any authoritative influence on the community viewing Dīpaṃkara as Speaking Tārā or instead only echoed changes of pilgrimage customs is uncertain.

Tibetan visitors, who arrived in groups of up to twenty people, asked the attending priest about the name of the image, and the answer given was that it was “Bolne Tārā” (Nepali for Speaking Tārā) or even “Drol ma sung jōn” (Sgrol ma gsung byon). Questions of identity were a non-issue; the priest readily accommodated Tibetan conceptions rather than imposing his own Newar Buddhist views on the pilgrims.³³



Figure 2: A Tibetan Buddhist monk offering butter lamps in front of the Speaking Tārā. The officiating priest is seen inside the shrine on the floor. He is one of the very few people who are allowed to enter this space (Author 2016).

I observed that Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims were, for the most part, not aware that this image is Dīpaṃkara Buddha from the Newar Buddhist point of view and, even if they were aware, continued to refer to it as Tārā or Sgrol ma and not Mar me mdzad. The officiating Newar Buddhist priests appeared to have no intention of informing the Tibetan pilgrims about the image’s Dīpaṃkara-identity. On the contrary, I was present on several occasions where

This seems to indicate that the information contained in the passage of the *Guide to Mustang* is probably not a part of popular knowledge. Nevertheless, since there are, except for the pilgrims’ embodied activities, no other sources that establish a relationship between the physicality of this Dīpaṃkara Buddha image and Speaking Tārā, the *Guide to Mustang* currently offers the only known (written) explanation for this identification.



Figure 3. Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims exiting the shrine of the Speaking Tārā (Author 2016).

I met and spoke to numerous pilgrims who self-identified as Tibetan nearly every day at the shrine throughout the summer of 2016. While on some days, only one or two pilgrims would come, on other days, groups of twenty or more arrived. They usually came for pilgrimage (*gnas mjal* or *gnas skor*), with this shrine being the only stop in Bhaktapur on their route. These groups often arrived with Nepalese guides, and pilgrims told me on several occasions that they would be unable to find the shrine by themselves. There were representatives of both lay and monastic Tibetan Buddhists, and they all tended to spend five to thirty minutes on site before proceeding to their next destination and leaving Bhaktapur behind. There were pilgrims belonging to the Tibetan diaspora (in Nepal, Canada, and the United States) and Tibetans coming from eastern Tibet (Kham). Their mode of worship consisted of standard traditional customs: prostrations (*phyag 'tshal*), offering ceremonial scarves (*kha btags*) and

butter lamps (*mar me*), and circumambulations (*skor ra*).

Regarding the image's capacity to speak, some pilgrims said they believe it can communicate with devotees in an inaudible way (i.e., speak with a divine, non-human voice), while others seemed to merely guess that the image had once spoken in the past. A few pilgrims who came with larger groups were similarly unaware of the deity's plural identities or related narratives before being instructed on-site.

Conclusion

The Tibetan view of Bhaktapur as a pilgrimage destination is well-established; however, it entails historical developments that cannot be fully appreciated due to a lack of research on this thinly studied topic. The original reason for a pilgrimage to Bhaktapur seems to have been a Speaking Tārā image that was probably viewed as identical to Taleju. What is known with

certainty from the written sources is that this image ceased to be accessible at some point during the 18th century. What we know for sure is that Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims today visit the Mūl Dīpaṃkara shrine, where they identify the present Dīpaṃkara image as Speaking Tārā. What we do not know, and where further research needs to be conducted, is why the original image became inaccessible. Could it be because there were increasing numbers of pilgrims? Or was the Speaking Tārā always inaccessible except for certain occasions? Was the inaccessibility related to wider socio-political developments in 18th-century Nepal?

In terms of the Tibetan pilgrimage to Bhaktapur, it appears as if the veneration of the Speaking Tārā underwent a spatial shift. Instead of visiting the Durbar Square Palace, where the Taleju image still resides, Tibetan pilgrims now worship her at the Mūl Dīpaṃkara shrine. This invites further questions. Were pilgrims purposely redirected at some point in the past? Did they proactively establish new modes of worship after Taleju became inaccessible? Did they perhaps once lose their way and accidentally establish a habitual confusion of Dīpaṃkara with Tārā? I have heard different stories about this from contemporary pilgrims. Likewise, views diverge on whether the Speaking Tārā in the form of Taleju is the same as the Speaking Tārā in the form of Dīpaṃkara; some say it is the same deity appearing in different forms; others believe they are two (among countless manifestations).

Regarding the site shift, the idea that it might have been an accident cannot be ruled out entirely. However, this possibility seems unlikely given the relative inaccessibility of the Mūl Dīpaṃkara shrine, half-hidden among myriad Bhaktapur temples.³⁴ With the hiddenness as a spatial quality of the shrine, its location far from the palace also needs to be considered. If we imagine for a moment the purposeful redirection of pilgrims, why were they redirected to this hard-to-find-shrine, about twenty minutes from the palace, given that

the Dīpaṃkara Buddha of Caturbrahma Mahāvihāra³⁵ would have been only a one-minute walking distance away from the Royal Palace?

Concerning the other Newar Buddhist deities residing in Bhaktapur, as listed by Dowman, it is evident from the previously discussed guidebooks and by observing current pilgrimage practices that they are only of secondary interest to Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims. The Speaking Tārā/Dīpaṃkara, in particular, appears in modern written sources within a set of five Dīpaṃkaras; however, it is unclear when they all started to be included in Tibetan guidebooks. While they are referred to as Mar me mdzad and presented as a group in contemporary guides, only one of them, the Mūl Dīpaṃkara, is identified as Speaking Tārā. The mention of the five Mar me mdzad in modern guides might reflect a growing familiarity of some Tibetans with their Newar surroundings.³⁶

Although the *Guide to Mustang* is a completely isolated source - the information appearing in this guide has not yet been found to be reproduced or derived from other works - it is revealing insofar as it seems to articulate the conceptual merging of old and new practices of pilgrimage within the genre of guidebook literature. It is unclear whether the guide is a product of current practices or details the practices that predate them. On the one hand, it could be bridging a knowledge gap in the sense that it might be indicative of a heretofore unknown source that accurately describes the situation of the Speaking Tārā/Dīpaṃkara. On the other hand, it could be a rather new entextualization that attests to how Tibetan pilgrimage practice has evolved as an oral tradition. The *Guide to Mustang* certainly points to a serious textual gap and a gap in the interrelation of text and practice. The Speaking Tārā/Dīpaṃkara phenomenon invites more ethnographic and textual work.

Andrea Wollein is a PhD candidate at the Department for the Study of Religion (University of Toronto). Her dissertation explores Buddhist traditions in Nepal through the case study of Yampi Mahāvihāra (Ī Bahī) in Patan, a Newar Buddhist monastery (Skt. *vihāra*) known as E yi gtsug lag khang in Tibetan. This monastery currently features a unique combination of Newar Vajrayāna, Newar Theravāda as well as Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Based on ethnographic as well as textual research, her study uses material analysis as a lens to explore what this tripartite constellation reveals about the interfaces of these three traditions in Nepal.

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Endnotes

1. An in-depth discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is important to note the initial problem of Hinduism and Buddhism being etic terms with a history of their own, not to mention the problem of suggesting structures that supposedly capture their relationship. Different approaches have been proposed, for instance: inclusivism (Hacker 1983), borrowing (Sanderson 1995), identification

(Lienhard 1978), symbiosis (Ruegg 2008), multifocal polyphony (Owens 2000), or polynomasia (Tuladhar-Douglas 2005). The problematic term syncretism comes to mind as well; see Gellner 2001: 319 ff. or Sinclair 2015: 431 for critiques.

2. Tibet has been connected to India through trade routes that passed through the Kathmandu Valley (Tuladhar-Douglas 2006:9) and made Nepal an important point of cultural articulation. Richardson maintains that, as documented by the earliest available evidence of ancient Tibetan edicts, Nepal is cited as the immediate source of religious practice in Tibet (1998:89ff). For the history of interactions between Newars and Tibetans, see Lewis (1996, 1989), Lewis and Jampal (1988), and Lo Bue (e.g., 1997, 2002).

3. For example, Seto Tārā, the White Tārā image of Itumbāhāḥ in Kathmandu (Sgrol dkar), Pharping's Vajrayoginī (Rdo rje rnal 'byor ma) or the Śākyamuni Buddha in Patan's Hiraṇyavarṇa Mahāvihāra (Ye rang sha kya thub pa).

4. The Sanskrit name *Dīpaṃkara* literally means "light-maker." *Mar me mdzad* denotes the same in Tibetan. The name *Dīpaṃkara* appears variously spelled in published literature concerned with Newar Buddhism, for example, *Dīpaṅkara* (Michaels 2013) or *Dipaṃkara* (Bajrācārya et al. 2004). I spelled the name as *Dīpaṃkara* in this article based on tāhe recommendation of Christoph Emmrich.

5. In a recent correspondence, Gray Tuttle raised the interesting question of whether "they" pronouns (or perhaps "s/he") would better reflect the non-binary aspect of this image having both genders. Since this would almost add a third identity (based on an etic viewpoint) to the deity and necessitate theoretical discussions requiring more space than is available, I decided on the following for this paper: I use female pronouns when discussing the image as the Speaking Tārā and male pronouns when speaking about the image as *Dīpaṃkara*. I use "they" when discussing them simultaneously (i.e., Speaking Tārā/*Dīpaṃkara*). I made my choices of identity/gender based

on the material under discussion and how the deity was respectively conceived. If the deity appeared in guidebook literature or conversations as Tārā, the deity would be female, whereas if the deity appeared as Dīpaṅkara, the deity would be male. Since the deity is owned by Newar Buddhists, who conceive of it as male, the male identity appears privileged both in terms of chronology and by virtue of ownership. Future studies that engage with this subject more deeply and do not privilege chronology and ownership status would be a great addition to this preliminary study.

6. I am beyond grateful for Hubert Decler's generous help and for engaging with me and my research interests over several years. We have been in conversation about the topic of this article since I began working on my MA thesis (an ethnographic study of the Mūl Dīpaṅkara shrine in Bhaktapur) in 2016. As per his wish, his name does not appear as co-author since he insisted that his contribution was only minor.

7. For more information, see Ghosh (1987). For a comparison of some of the legends, see Matsumura (2012).

8. Another local story popular in Patan, Nepal, revolves around Dīpaṅkara accepting a few grains of rice from an old lady instead of receiving the king's gift first (for more see Gellner 1992:185).

9. Slusser states that he is also seen as a protector of merchants (1982: 292 f.) and travelers (1982: 359).

10. Collectively referred to as Buddhas of the Three Times, Dus gsum sangs rgyas, this triad is the primary form in which Dīpaṅkara Buddha appears in Tibetan Buddhism. The Buddhas of the Three Times are rarely depicted but appear, without their individual names being stated, in some prayers, e.g., the "Prayer to Guru Rinpoche for Removing Obstacles and Fulfilling Wishes" (see Chapter 5 in Doctor, 2005).

11. *mūla* is a Sanskrit term denoting root, origin, or base and is pronounced without an inherent *a* at the end in both Newar and Nepali (i.e., as *mūl*) where the term also connotes the primary and main meanings.

12. To my current knowledge, there are no other instances in the Valley of Kathmandu where the Tārā and Dīpaṅkara identities are connected.

13. There is insufficient space for a theoretical discussion. In brief, my approach is framed by viewing space/place/locality as process-oriented, with locality always understood as linked to time (in the sense of chronology) and to the wider world (e.g., Low 2017, Massey 2005). I consider the local frame of the Dīpaṅkara/Speaking Tārā as conditions for the phenomenon rather than looking at the dual identity of the image independently of its spatio-temporal context.

14. Khu khom and Khu khrom are alternative spellings (Roberts 2007: 147). The term(s) seem to derive from the Newar term Khvapa (see Wolle 2019: 110).

15. Regarding the spatio-religious context - Bhaktapur is framed by eight mother goddesses (*aṣṭamātrkā*) who protect the city's boundary and their respective quarters of residence. They are placed around Tripurasundarī, a ninth goddess, who constitutes the religious center of the town (Levy 1992). Her political complement is the goddess Taleju, also known as Taleju Bhavānī, whose temple is found inside the Royal Palace. Taleju is said to control the whole of Bhaktapur and, unlike other deities, never leaves her temple (Vergati 1995:159). Thus, she can only be seen by designated people under particular circumstances. While Tripurasundarī embodies the center of the *maṅḍala*, annual rituals demonstrate that Taleju is the sovereign deity of the town; hence, political power has primacy over the religious center (Vergati 1995: 27).

16. Taleju is said to have been brought in the 14th century by King Harisimha Deva when he fled India. She remained the lineage deity of the Malla kings, and Bhaktapur is considered the original site of Taleju in the Kathmandu Valley, as other Taleju temples were built in Kathmandu and Patan only in the 16th and 17th centuries. Prior to 1768, Taleju had been the tutelary divinity of all the three Valley towns and their separate kings; however, the Shah dynasty subsequently adopted Taleju as the tutelary

deity after the Gorkha conquest and the destruction of the Malla kingdoms (Vergati 1995: 85 ff). Taleju also continued to be the lineage deity of the Kathmandu court (Tuladhar-Douglas 2006: 10) and remains highly significant. Levy states that during the festival of Mohani, Taleju “possesses a maiden to become manifest in the form of Kumari” (1990: 241). Several living goddesses referred to as Kumārī (Skt. young girl, virgin) exist in the Newar cities. The girls must come from a Buddhist family, Vajrācārya or Śākya, and are selected for their role based upon certain criteria.

17. Situ Panchen mentions in his autobiography and diaries that he visited this Speaking Tārā image in the palace, where he was told that she is identical to the goddess Taleju Bhavānī. (Personal communication with Hubert Decler in August 2016.) According to Punya Parajuli, this Speaking Tārā is the Hindu Goddess Tārā, the first of the 10 *mahāvīdyās*, who in North-East India and the Himalayan foothill kingdoms was commonly the personal deity of Hindu rulers (email communication 2021). The list of the 10 *mahāvīdyās* is to be found, with a brief explanation about each, in Daniélou (1964).

18. According to Hubert Decler, this is why she became referred to as Speaking Tārā (personal conversation 2016).

19. For a critical study, edition, and translation, see Lamminger (2013).

20. Milarepa is known to have stayed in Nepal, where he gained a great reputation during his lifetime. The story about Milarepa that involves Tārā can be found in Chapter 27 of Tsangnyön Heruka’s *100,000 Songs of Milarepa*. For specific information about Milarepa’s retreats in Nepal, see Quintman (2014).

21. The title of the guide is *Nectar for Snow-Crusted Ears* [i.e., for the Ears of the Snowlanders]: *A guide to the sacred places of Nepal Valley’s ‘Great Land’ Upa-chandoha* (*Yul chen po nye ba tshandho ha bal po’i gnas kyi dkar chag gangs can rna ba’i bdud rtsi* composed by Bstan ’dzin chos kyi nyi ma). A first draft of the guide can be found in

his autobiography, the *Rang tshul lhug par smras pa ma bcos gnyug ma’ rang grol* (*My Life and Primordial Spontaneous Liberation, Freely Told, as it Happened*). See bibliography.

22. Although in a rare manuscript version of his autobiography, he notes, in 1755, that “it is said that previously, in the Bhaktapur king’s palace, there was a Speaking Tārā, and I felt some regret that there is no way to visit it” (Email correspondence with Andrew Quintman, September 2016).

23. The text has recently been published in English translation, with clear color photographs of the manuscript in Ehrhard (2020).

24. He, in fact, mentions meeting the king at the temple of “Tārāju” (Decler 2000: 40), which might be a hybrid form conflating Tārā and Taleju if it is not simply an honorific way of addressing Tārā.

25. Anne Vergati has pointed out that there is no precise plan of the courtyards where Taleju resides and that the entrance to the temple is extremely restricted even to Hindu Newars (1995: 93). According to local *karmācārya* interlocutors, Taleju is said to be moved twice a year from one room in the courtyard to another. At this time, people are allowed to see her and witness the movement, but since Taleju still is quite far away and heavily decorated, she can barely be seen underneath all her adornments. In general, it is said that only high Hindu Newar caste members of Bhaktapur (*rājopādhyāyas*, *karmācāryas* and *jośīs*) are allowed to come near her.

26. Kho khom sangs rgyas mar me mdzad literally means Bhaktapur Buddha Dīpaṃkara.

27. The traditional order is: (1) Prasannaśīla Mahāvihāra (encompassing the Mūl Dīpaṃkara shrine), (2) Caturbrahma Mahāvihāra, (3) Jhaur Bahī (Maṅgaldharma Dvīpa Mahāvihāra), (4) Thathu Bahī (Jayakīrti Vihāra, also called Śukravārṇa Vihāra), and (5) Kuthu Bahī (Bauddha Saṃkṛta Vihāra) (Bajrācārya et al. 2004). This order corresponds to the order annually reaffirmed by the Buddhas during the Pañcadān procession. For a map that shows the location of these

vihāras see Wollein (2019).

28. The Dīpaṃkara section is: *kho khom sangs rgyas mar me mdzad bhad gha 'um di pam ka ra sangs rgyas mar me mdzad rigs lnga sogs mjal rgyu mang po yod* (Wylie 1970: Appendix A, page 40).

29. Ngawang Dorje's *Bal yul gnas yig* has in the past been erroneously assigned to the 18th century, while it is only from the 1950s (Decler 2006: 81 ff.; Ehrhard 2007: 105 f.).

30. Hubert Decler, who recently passed away, purchased a hard copy of this guide in Lo, which he used for this translation. I could not find any information about this book online. The guide to the sacred places of Mustang dates from around 2004 and was compiled by Mkhan po bkris bstan 'dzin who comes from the monastery Mkhar rdzong lcags ri gtsug lag khang in Glo bo smon thang gi yul ljongs. It partly consists of an anthology of the existing guides to Lo Manthang but also relies on local oral traditions. It is uncertain who the original authors of several passages found in the guide were. The full title of this guidebook is *A Lamp in the Dark, as a Reminder: a descriptive guide of various monastic complexes, by means of which the previous realized sages of both (the land of the) ārya superiors (i.e., India) and Tibet, as an act of love, through thousand lights of enlightened mind activity, diffused the institutions of learning* ('Phags bod mkhas grub gong mas bstan dgon khyab spel thugs kyi phrin las 'od stong 'phros pa'i bka' drin rjes bzahag dgon sde khag gi dkar chag dran bskul mun sgron composed by Mkhan po bkris bstan 'dzin).

31. Darlo, who states that there are several Tārās, is no exception. Not only is his guide rather new, but since no specific information about these several Tārās is included and the five Dīpaṃkaras are presented separately - without any relation to the Tārās - there seems to be no connection to the information found in the *Guide to Mustang*.

32. Mahākaruṇika was a Newar master who lived in the 11th century and who is identified with the lineage of Naropa. The name sometimes appears also as Mahākaruṇa (Thugs rje chen po) (Roerich 1996: 375 ff.).

Since he is thought to have been related to Patan, a connection to Bhaktapur seems surprising. At present, his name was entirely unknown to the community at the Mūl Dīpaṃkara shrine of Bhaktapur.

33. Tuladhar-Douglas describes this kind of accommodation as a “managed business” that points to a “process of non-confrontation and of implicit collaboration, orchestrated by the corporate body responsible for the management of the shrine image” (2005: 60).

34. The shrine is a part of the Prasannaśīl Mahāvihāra, which, like all Newar Buddhist monasteries, is not a freestanding, publicly visible building. Unlike Hindu temples, which are located at points of maximum exposure where they display their rich art, Newar Buddhist monasteries (*vihāras*) are always set back from the road. They cannot be easily seen from the outside, and it is necessary to pass through a door to get inside the monastery compound, which is built around a courtyard (Gellner 2001: 137). In the dense urban environment of Bhaktapur, one needs either to cross several private courtyards to get to Prasannaśīla Mahāvihāra and the Mūl Dīpaṃkara shrine or access the shrine via a narrow alley (New. *galli*). This arrangement not only guarantees privacy but offers no vista of the shrine at all.

35. Its name is sometimes spelled as Caturvarṇa Mahāvihāra; the place is also referred to as Tadhicheṃ Bāhāḥ, the only architecturally intact *vihāra* of Bhaktapur (Locke 1985: 447). It can be safely assumed that the Dīpaṃkara of Caturvarṇa Mahāvihāra had been present there long before Situ Panchen Rinpoche visited the Valley - given that an early reference to a gathering of seven Dīpaṃkaras in the 14th century testifies to the historical importance of Bhaktapur's Dīpaṃkaras (Manandhar 1974: 101). For more on the history of the five Dīpaṃkaras of Bhaktapur, see Bāsukalā Rañjītkār (2007).

36. After the Tibetan uprising in 1959 and the escape of the 14th Dalai Lama to India, the first wave of about 100,000 Tibetans fled Tibet. The majority settled in India, Nepal,

and Bhutan (Balakian 2008). One of the largest groups of Tibetans today can be found in the Kathmandu Valley.

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