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The Dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī

Parṇaśavarīdhāraṇī

འཕགས་མ་རི་ཁྲོད་ལོ་མ་གྱོན་མ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་གཟུངས།

'phags ma ri khrod lo ma gyon ma zhes bya ba'i gzungs

The Noble Dhāraṇī of Parṇasavarī

Āryaparṇasavarīnāmadhāraṇī



Toh 736
Degé Kangyur, vol. 94 (rgyud 'bum, tsha), folios 228.b–229.a

Translated by Ryan Damron and Wiesiek Mical under the patronage and supervision of
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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 *The Dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī* is a short dhāraṇī dedicated to the piśācī Parṇaśavarī, who is renowned in Buddhist lore for her power to cure disease, avert epidemics, pacify strife, and otherwise protect those who recite her dhāraṇī from any obstacles they may face.

ac.

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ac.1 Translated by Ryan Damron and Wiesiek Mical under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

The Dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī is a short dhāraṇī dedicated to the piśācī Parṇaśavarī, who is renowned in Buddhist lore for her power to cure disease, avert epidemics, pacify conflicts, and otherwise protect those who recite her dhāraṇī from hardships beyond their control. Her name can be translated as the “Leaf-Clad Mountain Woman” and points to her status as a piśācī, a class of wild and often dangerous supernatural beings that haunt the untamed forests and mountains of the South Asian and Himalayan landscape. The dhāraṇī translated here is among the oldest extant works dedicated to her and represents one of the earliest known rites used to invoke her assistance. The later Indian and Tibetan traditions recognize Parṇaśavarī as a manifestation of the goddess Tārā, and popularized recitation of her dhāraṇīs and mantras as a specifically effective means for countering epidemics. Parṇaśavarī appears in rites or maṇḍalas associated with the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, *Hevajra Tantra*, *Samputa Tantra*, and *Caṇḍamahā-roṣaṇa Tantra* and remains popular in Nepalese Buddhism, where her dhāraṇī has been incorporated into the “Seven Days” (*Saptavāra*) practice of reciting one dhāraṇī per day of the week.¹ She is also widely practiced in the Tibetan tradition, as is clear from the large body of indigenous Tibetan literature dedicated to her rituals and practices.

i.2

In the dhāraṇī translated here, Parṇaśavarī is described only briefly as a piśācī with two arms, one holding a noose and the other an axe. Her form evolved in the later Indo-Tibetan tradition, however, and a three-faced, six-armed form has become widely popular. In this depiction her body is described as yellow or green in color, with a matching center face, a white face to the right, and a red face to the left. Her six arms wield a vajra, axe, and arrow on the right while making the gesture of threat and holding a noose, bow, and bundle of leaves on the left.² Her relationship to wild and untamed

spaces is made particularly explicit by the description of leaves clinging to her body and her matted locks, tiara of woven flowers, tiger-skin sash, and so forth.³

i.3 Though included in the Kangyur, *The Dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī* lacks many of the expected features of canonical Buddhist scripture. The dhāraṇī does not begin with the standard introductory formula (*nidāna*) that establishes the setting for the scripture, nor is it framed as a discourse of the Buddha Śākyamuni or another member of the Buddhist pantheon. The text begins with a general homage to the Three Jewels followed by a more specific homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the lotus family—Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta—that serves to categorize Parṇaśavarī and her practice as belonging to that family of deities and rites. Following this homage the dhāraṇī continues with a plea for Parṇaśavarī’s intercession, via her dhāraṇī, in matters of disease, disaster, and strife. After this plea comes the dhāraṇī itself, which is rendered in a mixture of phonetic Sanskrit and Tibetan translation. Like the passage that precedes it, the dhāraṇī consists of a vigorous exhortation to Parṇaśavarī to pacify an array of threats that are generally beyond the supplicant’s personal control, including disease, epidemics, physical danger, and astrological influences. The text then ends abruptly with the completion of the dhāraṇī.

i.4 *The Dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī* represents one of three ritual manuals dedicated to Parṇaśavarī included in the Tibetan canon, manuals which in turn serve as the basis for seven different but closely related texts, two in the Kangyur and five in the Tengyur. Those in the Kangyur seem to have been brought to Tibet some two centuries earlier than those in the Tengyur.

i.5 The two Parṇaśavarī texts in the Kangyur must have been derived from the same basic text. The difference between the version translated here, *The Dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī*, and the other, *The Parṇaśavarī Sūtra*, is that in the latter the original text is rendered entirely in transliterated Sanskrit, and is then followed by a series of verses in Tibetan emphasizing the sūtra’s efficacy in a number of different contexts, with a specific emphasis on veterinary applications; the verses are unique to that version. In those Kangyurs that have an added Compendium of Dhāraṇīs, like the Degé Kangyur, these two Parṇaśavarī texts are each duplicated therein; thus in the Degé Kangyur *The Dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī* appears once in the Tantra section as Toh 736, and again in the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs as Toh 995,⁴ while *The Parṇaśavarī Sūtra* appears as Toh 735 in the Tantra section and Toh 994 in the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs. In the Tengyur, two texts almost identical to the

one translated here are each included in two different anthologies of sādhanas. One has the title *The Dhāraṇī Mantra of Parṇaśavarī* (Toh 3361), and the other *The Dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī* (Toh 3540).

i.6 None of the instances of the text in the Kangyur include a translators colophon, but in the Tengyur the colophon to Toh 3361 identifies it as having been translated by the paṇḍita Amoghavajra and Khampa Lotsāwa Bari Chödrak (ca. eleventh century), and the Tengyur catalog lists it among the collection of sādhanas compiled by this pair;⁵ while Toh 3540 is listed among the sādhanas compiled by Jetsün Drakpa Gyaltsen (1147–1216), third of the five great Sakya forefathers.⁶ However, the version of *The Dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī* found in the Kangyur almost certainly predates these collections significantly, since its inclusion in the Denkarma catalog indicates that it had been translated into Tibetan by the early ninth century.⁷ The dhāraṇī was translated into Chinese twice, once by Amoghavajra (705–74)⁸ and again by Faxian (ca. tenth century).⁹ From Amoghavajra’s Chinese translation we can be confident that the dhāraṇī was circulating in India at least as early as the eighth century.

i.7 Parallel to all six of these Tibetan versions, and in addition to their transliterated content, a purely Sanskrit witness has been preserved in the *Sādhnamālā* under the title *Āryapaṇaśavarītārādhāraṇī, The Noble Dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī-Tārā*.¹⁰ The title itself is unique for its identification of Parṇaśavarī as a form of the goddess Tārā, which is not specified in any of the canonical works dedicated to Parṇaśavarī translation but accords with the later Indo-Tibetan tradition. However, since none of the many manuscripts of the *Sādhnamālā* can be dated to earlier than the twelfth century CE, the inclusion of Tārā in the title (which is not even a feature of all the manuscripts)¹¹ cannot be taken as evidence for that identification with Tārā going back as far as the earlier Tibetan witnesses. Apart from this difference in the title, the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts are the same except for some minor variations.

i.8 The *Sādhnamālā* contains two additional texts on Parṇaśavarī, and it is these two texts that are the surviving Sanskrit parallels to the remaining three Tibetan translations in the Tengyur. *Sādhnamālā* no. 148¹² entitled *The Sādhana of Parṇaśavarī*, is, as the title suggests, a sādhana and so does not include the long dhāraṇī found in the present translation. Instead, it includes the much shorter mantra similar to the one popularly associated with Parṇaśavarī in the later Indo-Tibetan tradition: *oṃ piśāci parṇaśavari sarvāmāripraśamani svāha*, “Oṃ Hail to the Piśācī Parṇaśavarī who pacifies every pestilence!” This sādhana was translated and included in the Tibetan canon as Toh 3360, a translation prepared by Amoghavajra and Bari Chödrak,¹³ and as Toh 3538, a work compiled by Drakpa Gyaltsen. Finally, *Sādhnamālā* no. 149,¹⁴ also entitled *The Sādhana of Parṇaśavarī*, consists of a

much shorter sādhanā that was included in Drakpa Gyaltzen's collection (Toh 3539).¹⁵ This sādhanā differs from the preceding one in describing Parṇaśavarī's right and left faces as being black and white instead of white and red, and includes a slightly longer variant of the deity's mantra: *oṃ piśāci parṇaśavari sarvāmāripraśamani hūṃ phaṭ svāhā*.

i.9 This English translation is based on the Tibetan text from the Degé Kangyur in consultation with the Tibetan translations found in the Stok Palace and Phukdrak Kangyurs and the Sanskrit witness from the *Sādhanamālā*. The main dhāraṇī follows the text recorded in the Tibetan translation but has been lightly emended based on the Sanskrit attested in the *Sādhanamālā*.

i.10 This text was translated during the coronavirus pandemic of 2019–2020 and is offered by 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha with the aspiration that all beings everywhere may find comfort and relief during this challenging time.

The Noble

Dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī

1.

The Translation

[F.228.b]

1.1

Homage to the noble Parṇaśavarī.

1.2

Homage to the Three Jewels.

Homage to the thus-gone, worthy, perfect buddha, the blessed Amitābha.

Homage to the bodhisattva great being, the deeply compassionate and noble
Avalokiteśvara.

Homage to the bodhisattva great being Mahāsthāmaprāpta.¹⁶

1.3

Homage to you, blessed Parṇaśavarī, dwarfish piśācī who wields an axe and
a noose.¹⁷

1.4

Whatever fears may arise, every plague, pestilence, and pandemic, all
calamities and conflicts, and all personal anxieties¹⁸ affect only the foolish,
not the wise.¹⁹

1.5

May truth, words of truth, and true speech send them away and dispel
them!²⁰ May these words of mantra empowered by the wise guard me and
all beings. May they protect us, keep us secure, defend us, and bring us
peace and good fortune. May they protect us from punishment and
weapons. May they neutralize all poisons. May they protect from the
dangers of fire and the dangers of water. May they cut down kākḥordas.
May they establish the protective boundary and bind the earth.

1.6

The dhāraṇī is:

*amṛte amṛte amṛtodbhave [F.229.a] amṛtasambhave āśvaste āśvastāṅge mā mara mā
mara mā sara mā sara.*²¹

Grant peace!²² Pacify every illness! Bring an end to all kinds of untimely
death! Pacify all evil influences from the planets and stars! Pacify all
venom! O Blessed Parṇaśavarī!²³

*tunna tunna vitunna vitunna tuṇa tuṇa tumule svāhā. oṃ gauri gāndhāri caṇḍāli
mātaṅgi pukkasi svāhā. oṃ aṅkure māṅkure kurare parṇaśavari svāhā. namas sarva-
śavarīṇāṃ mahāśavarīṇāṃ²⁴ bhagavati piśāci parṇaśavari piśāci svāhā. oṃ piśāci
parṇaśavari hrīḥ jaḥ hūṃ phaṭ piśāci svāhā.²⁵*

1.7 “The Noble Dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī” is complete.²⁶

n.

NOTES

- n.1 Hidas (2015), p. 134.
- n.2 *Sādhnamālā* no. 148, pp. 306–7.
- n.3 See, for example, the *Parṇaśavarīsādhana* (Toh 3360) and *bcom ldan 'das ma ri khrod lo ma gyon ma'i sgrub thabs* and *'joms stobs sgron ma* by Nüden Dorje (nus ldan rdo rje; ca. sixteenth century).
- n.4 Note that there is a discrepancy among various databases for cataloging the Toh 995 version of this text within vol. 101 or 102 of the Degé Kangyur. See Toh 995 note 4 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh995.html#end-note-UT22084-094-013-63>) for details.
- n.5 *dpe bsdur ma dkar chag*, p. 750. In fact, as Toh 3361 is entirely in transliterated Sanskrit, it can hardly be considered a translation.
- n.6 *dpe bsdur ma dkar chag*, pp. 787–88.
- n.7 The Denkarma catalog is dated to ca. 812 CE. See Denkarma, folio 300.a. See also Herrmann-Pfandt (2008), p. 233, no. 408.
- n.8 Taishō 1100; Lewis R. Lancaster, “[K 1305](http://www.acmuller.net/descriptive_catalogue/files/k1305.html) (http://www.acmuller.net/descriptive_catalogue/files/k1305.html),” *The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue*. Note that this is not the same Amoghavajra as the eleventh century figure mentioned earlier in this paragraph.
- n.9 Taishō 1384; Lewis R. Lancaster, “[K 1224e](http://www.acmuller.net/descriptive_catalogue/files/k1224e.html) (http://www.acmuller.net/descriptive_catalogue/files/k1224e.html),” *The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue*.
- n.10 *Sādhnamālā* no. 150, vol. 1, pp. 308–10.

- n.11 See *Sādhnamālā* vol. 1, p. 310, n6.
- n.12 *Sādhnamālā* vol. 1, pp. 306–7.
- n.13 This Amoghavajra, about whom little is known, is not the same person as the Amoghavajra who produced the Chinese translation mentioned above.
- n.14 *Sādhnamālā* vol. 1, p. 308.
- n.15 *dpe bsdur ma dkar chag*, p. 788.
- n.16 The Sanskrit text adds that he too is “deeply compassionate.”
- n.17 In the Sanskrit text, this line of homage is rendered in verse and differs slightly from the Tibetan version: “Dwarfish one! I pay homage to you! You, dwarfish one, are a blessed one. / I pay homage to the piśācī Parṇaśavari who holds a noose and an axe.”
- n.18 The translation “personal anxieties” is informed by the Sanskrit phrase *ādhyātmikā bhayāḥ*, which helps clarify the opaque Tibetan term *khong du gnod pa*.
- n.19 The Sanskrit text and the Tibetan translation in the Phukdrak Kangyur include the additional statement: “all misfortunes and everything related to them.”
- n.20 In place of “send them away and dispel them” (Tib. *song shig dengs shig*) the Sanskrit reads *jjahḥ jjahḥ jjahḥ jjahḥ*.
- n.21 “Deathless One! Deathless One! Arisen from the deathless, you are the fount of deathlessness. Giver of comfort! Giver of physical comfort! Do not kill! Do not kill! Do not spread [pestilence]! Do not spread!”
- n.22 Here the Sanskrit text includes the nearly synonymous term *upaśama*, which is included in the Phukdrak Kangyur translation as well.
- n.23 In the Tibetan text this passage has been translated into Tibetan, and so following that decision we have translated it into English here. It seems, however, that this passage is meant to be included in the dhāraṇī recitation, as was understood by the translators and editors of the Phukdrak Kangyur, who left it in Sanskrit. The Sanskrit for this section, as attested in *Sādhnamālā* no. 150, is: *praśama upaśama sarvavyādhiṅ upaśama sarvākālamṛtyūn upaśama sarva-nakṣatragrahaḍoṣān upaśama sarvadaṃṣṭrināṃ copaśama bhagavati parṇaśavari*.
- n.24 The Sanskrit text reads *sarvaśavarāṇāṃ mahāśavarāṇāṃ*.

- n.25 *“Tunna tunna vitunna vitunna tuṇa tuṇa tumule svāhā. Oṃ hail to Gaurī, Gāndhārī, Caṇḍālī, Mātaṅgī, and Pukkasī! Oṃ hail to Aṅkurā, Maṅkurā, Kurukurā, and Parṇasavarī! Homage to all śavarīs and great śavarīs! Hail to the blessed piśācī, Parṇasavarī the piśācī! Oṃ Parṇasavarī hṛīḥ jaḥ hūṃ phaḥ piśāci svāhā!”*
- n.26 The colophon to the Sanskrit text reads *āryaparṇasavarītārādhāraṇī samāptā*, *“The Noble Dhāraṇī of Parṇasavarī-Tārā is now complete.”*

b.

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- par+Na sha ba ri'i mdo (*Paṇṇaśavarīsūtra)*. Toh 735, Degé Kangyur vol. 94 (rgyud, tsha), folios 227.a–228.a.
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- 'phags ma ri khrod lo ma can gyi gzungs*. Toh 3540, Degé Tengyur vol. 76 (rgyud, mu), folio 180.a.

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GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for Sanskrit names and terms ·

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in the Sanskrit manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other Sanskrit manuscripts of the Kangyur or Tengyur.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionaries.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where Tibetan-Sanskrit relationship is attested in dictionaries or other manuscripts.
RP	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan phonetic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the term.
RS	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan semantic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the semantics of the Tibetan translation.
SU	<i>Source Unspecified</i> This term has been supplied from an unspecified source, which most often is a widely trusted dictionary.

g.1 Amitābha

'od dpag med

འོད་དཔག་མེད།

amitābha

The buddha residing in the western buddhafiield Sukhāvati.

g.2 Amoghavajra

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amoghavajra

705–74. A famous and prolific translator, he is particularly renowned for his Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist esoteric works. He is known to have sailed from South India to China via Sri Lanka between 741 and 746. Not to be confused with the eleventh century paṇḍita of the same name who translated texts into Tibetan.

g.3 Amoghavajra

don yod rdo rje

དོན་ཡོད་རྡོ་རྗེ།

amoghavajra

Ca. eleventh century; a paṇḍita who worked with Khampa Lotsāwa Bari Chödrak on a number of translations. Not to be confused with the eighth century translator of the same name who translated texts into Chinese.

g.4 Aṅkurā

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—

aṅkurā

Name invoked in the dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī.

g.5 Avalokiteśvara

spyan ras gzigs

སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས།

avalokiteśvara

One of the main bodhisattva disciples of the Buddha Śākyamuni, he is renowned for his compassion.

g.6 Caṇḍālī

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caṇḍālī

A frequently invoked divinity in esoteric Buddhist literature, her name references one of the lowest castes in Indian society.

g.7 Faxian

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A Chinese translator active in the tenth century.

g.8 Gāndhārī

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gāndhārī

A frequently invoked divinity in esoteric Buddhist literature.

g.9 Gaurī

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—

gaurī

A frequently invoked divinity in esoteric Buddhist literature, her name means “brilliantly white.”

g.10 Jetsün Drakpa Gyaltsen

rje btsun grags pa rgyal mtshan

རྗེ་བཙུན་གྲགས་པ་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

—

A Tibetan translator and scholar (1147–1216), the third of the five Sakya forefathers and teacher of Sakya Paṇḍita; he translated and compiled a collection of 245 sādhanas in the Tengyur under the title *Ocean of Sādhanas* (*sgrubs thabs rgya mtsho*).

g.11 kākhorta

byad stems

བྱད་སྟེ་མས།

kākhorta

A generally malevolent class of semidivine beings.

g.12 Khampa Lotsāwa Bari Chödrak

khams pa lo tsA wa ba ri chos grags

ཁམས་པ་ལོ་རྫོང་བ་རི་ཚོས་གྲགས།

—

1040–11; the Tibetan translator and second throne-holding Sakya heirarch, also known as Bari Lotsāwa or Rinchen Drak (*rin chen grags*) who, among many other texts, translated ninety-three sādhanas that are grouped together under his name in the Tibetan canon.

g.13 Kurukurā

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—

kurukurā

Name invoked in the dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī.

g.14 Mahāsthāmaprāpta

mthu chen thob pa

མཐུ་ཆེན་ཐོབ་པ།

mahāsthāmaprāpta

A bodhisattva who serves alongside Avalokiteśvara as Amitābha’s attendant in the buddhafiield of Sukhāvātī. As his name suggests, he is renowned for possessing great strength (Skt. *prāpta*; Tib. *thob pa*) and power (Skt. *mahāsthāma*; Tib. *mthu chen*).

g.15 Maṅkurā

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maṅkurā

Name invoked in the dhāraṇī of Parṇaśavarī.

g.16 Mātāṅgī

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—

mātāṅgī

A frequently invoked divinity in esoteric Buddhist literature, her name references one of the lowest castes in Indian society.

g.17 Parṇaśavarī

ri khrod lo ma gyon ma

རི་ཁྲོད་ལོ་མ་གྱོན་མ།

parṇaśavarī

A piśācī renowned for her ability to cure disease, avert epidemics, and pacify obstacles. She is often considered a form of Tārā.

g.18 Piśācī

sha za mo

ཤ་བཟོ།

piśācī

A female member of a class of semidivine beings traditionally associated with the wild, remote places of the earth. They are considered particularly violent and known to devour flesh.

g.19 Pukkasī

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pukkasī

A frequently invoked divinity in esoteric Buddhist literature.