

When the Gods Drank Urine

A Tibetan myth may help solve the riddle of soma, sacred drug of ancient India

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The Aryans

About 3,500 years ago, a migratory, cattle-herding people crossed over the high passes from what is now Afghanistan and discovered the rich plains of the Indian subcontinent. They came from the same stock as most of the present-day Europeans and originated, it is thought, on the steppes between the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea. Their name for themselves was Arya, which means "noble" or "hospitable". We know little of them before this point in their history but when they reached India they began to write. They wrote down their sacred songs, about the Gods and about *soma*: the celestial drink which conferred immortality upon the Gods and by means of which mere mortals become Gods.

They were not alone in India, however. An advanced indigenous culture, possibly related to that of Sumeria in Mesopotamia, flourished in the Indus Valley, producing the magnificent cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro (c. 2,800 BCE to c. 1,500 BCE). It has been remarked that these cities not only resemble Sumer's Ur and Babylon but that they seem to have taken the Sumerian cities as models and improved upon them. The people who inhabited these cities are thought to have been Dravidian. That is, members of an ethnic group now found mostly in the southern parts of the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka, the members of which have very dark complexions and speak one of a number of related languages including Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam.

The most ancient texts of the Hindu religion are the four books known as the Vedas and among these the collection of hymns known as the Rig Veda is said to be the earliest. This could make it the world's oldest religious text still in regular use. It is believed to have existed for many centuries as an unwritten oral tradition and thus it is difficult to date precisely but estimates of its age range from 2,500 to 1,500 B.C.E. It was during this period that the Aryan, cattle-herding invaders conquered and settled Northern India bringing with them their religion, their mythology and their culture.

The drug

Much of the Rig Veda (and all of the Sama Veda) is concerned with the ritual consumption of a psychoactive drug called *soma*. Despite its extensive hymns of praise to this drug (all of the 114 verses of the 9th chapter and several verses elsewhere), the Rigveda alludes to it only obliquely with much use of word-play and

elaborate poetic tropes. Though the texts provide no explicit descriptions, certain elements of the methods of preparation and use of *soma* may be inferred. Unfortunately, the most vital detail - the identity of the drug - is the most obscure.

What is apparent is that *soma* was a plant and that its consumption produced an ecstatic mental state but this information hardly narrows the field of candidates as there are thousands of psychoactive plants with psychedelic, intoxicant, narcotic or deliriant effects. The Vedas also indicate that the plant was found on mountain-sides and gathered by moonlight and that it was consumed in the form of a liquid which was expressed from the plant and then mixed with milk and/or butter. It seems to have been used only as part of a fire-ritual. A golden liquid was expressed from the plant material with "*soma*-stones", filtered through wool and collected in a large bowl or "vat". In the course of this ritual a portion of the *soma* potion was used as a libation and was "sacrificed" to the flames. The remainder of the *soma*-liquid was apportioned among the celebrants who received it in individual bowls.

Occasionally in the Vedas, and frequently in post-Vedic literature such as the story of the "churning of the ocean", the *soma*-liquid is known as *amrita*. This is especially so in the literature of Buddhism where the name *soma* is almost unknown. *Soma* is also the name of a god, considered by Hindus to be the divine personification both of the *soma*-drug and of the moon. The moon was thought to be the receptacle of *soma* from which it is consumed (presumably over a monthly period) by the gods and ancestors.

Compared to the Brahmanic rituals of later eras this fire-ritual was a very simple affair which has more in common with shamanic practices than the elaborate structures of organized religion. There are three main gods invoked in the Rigveda: Agni (god of fire), Soma (moon-god and personification of the *soma* drug), and Indra (sky-god and king of the gods). As the Rigveda states that (a) Indra enjoys the effects of *soma* and that (b) he who consumes the *soma* potion becomes god-like, perhaps it would not be straining the symbolism too far to say that in these three gods we have the three basic elements of the ritual, Agni (the sacrificial flames), Soma (the sacrificial offering) and Indra (the celebrant, rendered "divine" by the consumption of *soma*).

That the ritual is of Aryan origin rather than an indigenous Indian one is attested to by the existence of the similar *haoma* fire ritual in ancient Persia and in the Zoroastrian (Parsi) religion. The Indian fire-ritual was, in later times, taken up by Tantric Buddhists and, as a part of Vajrayana Buddhism, was carried into Tibet, Mongolia, China and even as far as Japan where it is known as *goma*.

Readers familiar with Hindu mythology will know the popular legend of "the churning of the ocean". This tale explains how *soma* came into being and versions of it are to be found in the Vishnu Purana, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. The three sources differ in their details but, briefly, the story is as follows: The gods had been defeated by the *asuras* and appealed to Vishnu for advice. He counselled them that they should unite with their enemies and together they should churn the ocean which, at that time, was composed of milk. First they scattered various herbs in the ocean, then, taking Mt. Mandara as a churning-stick they wound the *naga-king* Vasuki around it as a churning-rope. The gods and *asuras* took opposite ends of the great serpent and heaved back and forth. Many wonderful treasures then came forth

from the ocean, the first of which being *amrita* (in Hindu texts this is often used as a synonym for *soma*). All versions of the story also feature a virulent poison (variously called *kalakuta*, *khalakuta* or *visha*), in some it is said that it is another product of churning the ocean, others say that the strain on Vasuki caused him to vomit it up. However, Shiva saves the day by drinking the poison and retaining it in his throat, which turns blue as a result. Thus Shiva acquires the epithet Nilakanta ("blue-throat"). [[Dowson](#), p. 167]

The Problem

Somehow, no one knows quite why, the *soma*-drug mysteriously fell into disuse subsequent to the Vedic period. Instead, the brahmin priests concentrated on the punctilious observation of ritual performance of the fire-ritual. Punctilious, that is, in every respect except the magical ingredient alluded to repeatedly in the Vedas. For some reason, *soma* became merely a philosophical concept rather than a living reality. The word was often used to mean any burnt offering - that which was fed to the flames of the ritual fire and, by extension, *soma* also meant the contents of the material world, which are all eventually consumed, as if by fire. Yet again, the word *soma* was used to mean a "life-force" which was thought to sustain all plant-life.

For centuries the actual identity of the physical *soma* plant sung of in the Vedas held little interest for Sanskrit scholars. Even the Brahmin pandits who sang these Vedic texts showed scant interest in the topic. Those who did feel inclined to comment on the subject suggested non-psychoactive plants (such as rhubarb) or averred that *soma* was simply alcohol. In recent years, as western scholars have realized the widespread (one might almost say ubiquitous) use of psychoactive drugs in the spiritual practices of traditional cultures, the identity of *soma* has become the subject of lively debate. Among others plants, it has been suggested that it was the mushroom *Amanita muscaria* (sometimes called the Fly Agaric mushroom) [[Wasson et al.](#)], or *Peganum harmala* (Syrian Rue) [[Flattery and Schwartz](#)] or a species of *Stropharia* mushroom [[McKenna](#), p. 166].

So why did the original *soma* disappear from the fire ritual? Wasson suggests that as the Aryans migrated south into the Indus Valley, they left behind the prime habitats for *Amanita muscaria*. This mushroom grows in woodland, forming a symbiotic or "mycorrhizal" relationship with a tree such as birch or pine and birch trees are seldom, if ever, seen on the hot Indian plains. Those birch groves which are to be found in India are at fairly high elevations. This high country was, at least in the initial period of Aryan occupation, controlled predominantly by Dravidian hill-tribes.

This raises an intriguing possibility regarding the legend of the "Churning of the Ocean". Does it, then, represent a mythologised treatment of a political reality? Was war between Aryan and Dravidian resolved by cooperation in the trade of the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom?

A suggested solution

In 1957, an article in Life magazine featured a lengthy article on a New York banker and amateur mycologist called [R. Gordon Wasson](#). This article revealed that Wasson and his wife [Valentina](#) had been introduced to a cult using psychedelic mushrooms in Oaxaca, Mexico by a Mazatec *curandera* called [Maria Sabina](#). Although the use of psychoactive mushrooms was reported by Father Sahagun in the 16th century, the existence of such a cult was previously unsuspected. Sahagun's account had been disregarded by modern scholars until the Wassons' account.

Their discovery spurred the Wassons to inquire into the possibility of other mushroom-based religious cults in other parts of the world, culminating in his seminal work "[SOMA: The Divine Mushroom of Immortality](#)" in 1966. This work was the first to identify *soma* with the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom.

Wasson presented several arguments [[Wasson et al.](#)] for *Amanita muscaria* being the *soma*-plant, the chief of which are:

1. Soma is clearly a plant yet no leaves, roots or branches are mentioned in the Vedas.
2. Vedic synonyms for soma include terms which suggest a mushroom.
3. The Rig Veda describes the *soma*-plant as "tawny"
4. The Rig Veda mentions urine in connection with soma.

Addressing each of these points in turn:

1. Soma is clearly a plant yet no leaves, roots or branches are mentioned in the Vedas.

This is, on the face of it, a fairly weak argument. Yet, given the Vedas' extensive use of poetic trope, if *soma* were a vascular plant one would expect it to be addressed as "many-leaved", "slender-branched", "stout-stemmed" or something of that nature.

2. Vedic synonyms for soma include terms which suggest a mushroom.

The term *aja ekapad* ("not-born, one-foot") suggests a mushroom which, springing up mysteriously without visible seed, could be said to be "not-born". Likewise, if thought of anthropomorphically, its stipe (stem) could be conceived of as "one-foot".

Conversely, as the word *aja* ("not-born") is the same as *aja* meaning "goat", the term *aja ekapad* could be translated as "one-legged goat". Surprising as it may seem, this is the conventional translation even though it makes far less sense than

Wasson's suggestion.

3. The Rig Veda describes the *soma*-plant as "tawny"

The Sanskrit color-word in question is *hari*. This rather vague term is asserted by Wasson to encompass a range of colors from bright red to tawny-brown. While these are not colors normally associated with vascular plants they quite accurately describe the colors of *A. muscaria* both when fresh (bright red) and dried (tawny-brown).

Wasson's critics have suggested that *hari* might have indicated a much wider range of colors, however, including green.

4. The Rig Veda mentions urine in connection with soma.

The significance of this last point is obscure and relies on a peculiar property of *Amanita muscaria*: the urine of someone who has eaten this mushroom is itself intoxicating. Wasson saw this as a crucial and specific indicator of this mushroom. His assertions regarding Vedic references to urine and *soma* were considered unconvincing by many of his critics who said that simply *soma* + urine is not enough to suggest *A. muscaria*. What they required was *soma* + urine + drinking, and it is to this subject of urine-drinking in connection with *soma* that we now turn.

Urine drinking

Among the various Siberian peoples who use *Amanita muscaria* as a cultural norm, there exists a curious practice whereby the urine of one who has consumed the mushroom is drunk by another who consequently becomes inebriated. The urine of this person may then be drunk by another and so on, the procedure being repeated up to five or six times. The reason for this practice is that *A. muscaria* contains ibotenic acid which, when the carboxyl radical is removed from the molecule, yields the psychoactive molecule muscimole [Ott, p. 327]. The metabolic process of decarboxylation which effects this transformation within the user's liver is very inefficient. In fact, it is so inefficient that approximately 85% of the ibotenic acid ingested (more than enough to inebriate further users) passes through the body unchanged and is excreted in the urine [Ott, p. 328]. To put it another way, the urine contains more than five times as much of the drug as the body can assimilate.

This unsavory yet economical practice is well-documented among certain Siberian tribes where *A. muscaria* is widely used in both shamanic and ludibund contexts [von Bibra, p. 75]. Of all known traditions of drug use this practice of recycling the urine is unique to *A. muscaria* consumption and should be considered a highly significant indicator of this mushroom.

The Rig Veda contains one passage in which urine and *soma* are mentioned together. Wasson seized upon this to support his hypothesis:

Acting in concert, those charged with the office, richly gifted, do full homage to Soma. The swollen men piss the flowing (*soma*). [O'Flaherty, p. 123]

Vedic urine, Buddhist soma

While many of Wasson's arguments seemed persuasive, some scholars expressed reservations, particularly in regard to urine-drinking. In particular, though the phrase "the swollen men piss the flowing" may refer to *soma*, it is not mentioned explicitly. Furthermore, it merely refers to urination, not urine-drinking. If we were to consider modern, literary accounts of beer-drinking we would undoubtedly find many references to urination. We might even, in the British literature, find many references to embarking on a drinking bout as "going on the piss". The connection between beer and urination, is therefore valid and incontrovertible yet who would be so foolish as to infer that this represents a tradition of urine-quaffing among British beer-drinkers?

If, therefore, we could find references to actual urine-drinking in the context of *soma*-use then Wasson's hypothesis would gain considerably in credibility. It is just such evidence which I will present below, although the word *soma* is not used explicitly, rather the Tibetan translation of its synonym, *amrita*.

The *vajrayana* ("thunderbolt-" or "diamond-vehicle") movement of Buddhism developed as an outgrowth of Mahayana Buddhism. While accepting the *mahayana*'s radical philosophy of voidness the *vajrayana* rejected its timescale. According to the *mahayana*, one attains enlightenment by accumulating good *karma*, especially in regard to the "two wings of enlightenment" - compassion and wisdom. This process of accumulation is not easily achieved as it is believed to take many thousands, even millions, of lifetimes. By contrast, the *vajrayana*'s claim that it offered enlightenment in this very lifetime was an attractive alternative. It took a pragmatic approach to practice, adopting anything that worked, especially delighting in shock tactics and the deliberate shattering of cultural taboos. Its teachers were often charismatic *yogins* who lived in cemeteries and smeared their near-naked bodies with ashes from funeral pyres, though we also read of gurus who were craftsmen, housewives, scholars, courtesans and kings.

A large number of *tantras* (arcane and obscurely symbolic scriptures, all of which are completely unknown to other Buddhist sects) are revered by the Vajrayana yet the essential points of its teachings were transmitted, in conditions of great secrecy, in an oral lineage from teacher to student.

The *tantras* use scandalous images and terminology as symbols to convey the most sublime philosophy. Even their name is an impertinent pun on the word *sutra*, the name given to the Buddha's lectures. Whereas the word *sutra* literally means "thread", *tantra* means "weave" thus implying a further dimension to its teachings.

It has recently become apparent that *Amanita muscaria* was in use among at least some of the *siddhas* (adepts) of Vajrayana Buddhism in mediaeval India [[Hajicek-Dobberstein](#)]. During this period (approximately 500 - 1000 CE), Buddhism was introduced to Tibet, becoming its state religion, with Vajrayana as the prevalent form. During the subsequent decline of Buddhism in India, most of Sanskrit originals of the Buddhist literature were lost. But as countless texts were brought from India and translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan, Tibet has preserved much of the Indian Buddhist tradition, even those parts which no longer have any use or meaning. It is not surprising, therefore, that we should find evidence of lost Indian traditions in Tibetan sources.

Despite Buddhism's numerous exhortations to sobriety and its general repudiation of the use of drugs, one occasionally finds references to psychoactive substances as a means to enlightenment:

You can obtain Buddhahood: by taking a medicine pill which will make you immortal like the sun and moon.... [[Stewart](#), p. 53]

This is a rare reference to the little-known Vajrayana tradition of *rasayana* (Skt: "alchemy"). Perhaps one of the most closely-guarded secrets of the Tibetan lamas, very little on this subject has been made available to Western scholars.

It is worth note that the enlightenment resulting from medicines is here equated to immortality. This accords both with the literal meaning of *amrita* ("deathlessness") and with the legendary properties of *soma*. This appears to be either a symbol for, or equivalent to, enlightenment as it has also been stated that the intention of this tradition was

...the ingestion of drugs to strengthen the *yogin* and procure the *siddhi* for him, as well as bringing him to the final goal. [[Walter](#), p. 319]

There are two separate lineages of *rasayana* preserved in Tibet, one being founded by Guru Rinpoche (also known as Padmasambhava) and the other by his contemporary, Vimalamitra. A few works on the subject, purportedly by Guru Rinpoche and Vimalamitra themselves, survive. If these attributions are correct then these writings would date from the 8th century CE. Neither of these two masters was Tibetan but they had a profound effect on Tibetan Buddhism. So much so, in fact, that Guru Rinpoche is still revered there as a second Buddha.

Vajrapani drinks urine

A curious legend which tells of the origins of both *amrita* and of the wrathful aspect of the Bodhisattva Vajrapani is told in "Buddhism in Tibet" [[Schlagintweit](#), pp. 114-117]. The legend is drawn from the *Dri Med Zhel Phreng* (Tibetan: "The Immaculate Crystal Garland") a Tibetan work which, presumably, is itself a translation of a Sanskrit original. Here is Schlagintweit's translation:

The legend about Chakdor

Once upon a time the Buddhas all met together on the top of Mount Meru, to deliberate upon the means of procuring the water of life, *Dutsi*, which lies concealed at the bottom of the deep ocean. In their benevolence, they intended, as soon as they obtained the water of life, to distribute it amongst the human race as a powerful antidote against the strong poison *Hala*, which the evil demons, at this period, had been using with such mischievous effect against mankind.

In order to procure the antidote they determined to churn the ocean with the mountain Meru, and so cause the water of life to rise to the surface of the sea. This they did, and delivered the water of life to Vajrapani, with orders to secure it safely until a future meeting, when they would impart it to living beings. But the monster Rahu, a *Lhamayin*, happened to hear of this precious discovery, and having carefully watched Vajrapani's movements, seized an opportunity, in the absence of the latter, to drink the water of life; not satisfied with this act, he even voided his water deliberately into the vessel. He then hurried away as fast as possible, and had already proceeded a great distance, when Vajrapani came home, and having perceived the theft, instantly set out in pursuit of the culprit.

In the course of his flight Rahu had passed the sun and moon, whom he menaced with vengeance, should they venture to betray him to Vajrapani. His searches proving fruitless, Vajrapani betook himself to the sun, and asked him about Rahu. But the sun replied evasively, saying that he had certainly seen somebody passing a long time ago, but had paid no particular attention as to who it was. The moon, on the other hand, returned a candid answer, only requesting that Vajrapani would not repeat it before Rahu. Upon this information Rahu was shortly afterwards overtaken, when he got such a terrible blow from Vajrapani's scepter [*i.e. vajra*] that, besides receiving many wounds, his body was split in two parts, the lower part of the body with the legs being entirely blown off.

The Buddhas once more held a meeting, in which they deliberated upon the best means of disposing of Rahu's urine. To pour it out would have been most dangerous to human beings, as it contained a large quantity of the poison Hala hala; they therefore determined that Vajrapani should drink it, in just punishment for the carelessness through which the water of life was lost. Accordingly he was forced to do so, when his fair, yellow complexion was changed by the effects of this potion into a dark one. Vajrapani conceived, from his transfiguration, a most violent rage against all evil demons, and in particular against Rahu, who, notwithstanding his deadly wounds, was prevented from dying by the water of life. This powerful water, however, dropped from his wounds and fell all over the world, numerous medicinal herbs springing up on the spots where it touched the soil.

A severe punishment was also inflicted upon Rahu by the Buddhas themselves; they made a horrible monster of him, replaced his legs by the tail of a dragon, formed nine different heads from his broken one, the principal wounds were made into an enormous throat, and the lesser ones into so many eyes. Rahu, who had ever distinguished himself from his fellow-beings by his wickedness - in their earliest youth even the other gods had to suffer from his malignity - became, after this transformation, more dreadful than he was before.

His rage was turned especially towards the sun and the moon, who had betrayed him. He is constantly trying to devour them, particularly the moon, who displayed the most hostile disposition towards him. He overshadows them whilst trying to devour them, and thus causes eclipses; but owing to Vajrapani's unceasing vigilance, he cannot succeed in destroying them.

The water of life

The "water of life, Dutsi" of Schlagintweit's translation is obviously the Tibetan *bDud.rTsi* phonetically rendered. This is the standard term used in Tibetan to translate the Sanskrit *amrita*. Thus,

bDud.rTsi (*piyusha, amrita, sudha*) 1. the food of the gods, nectar, the potion that confers immortality... [Das]

Also, the equivalence of *amrita* and *soma* is well understood:

AMRITA... The water of life. The term was known to the Vedas, and seems to have been applied to various things offered in sacrifice, but more especially to the Soma juice. [Dowson, p. 12]

An objection may be made that *amrita* (or, more precisely, *bDud.rTsi*) as understood by Tibetan Buddhism is not the same as the *amrita* of the Hindus, that it means simply medicine and is used purely as a symbol for enlightenment. This was certainly the case during the earliest phase of Buddhism. For instance, the celebrated conversation between the Hellenistic king "Milinda" and the monk Nagasena relates a parable in which the Buddha is alleged to have established shops of various kinds including a flower shop, a perfume shop, a fruit shop, a medicine shop, a herb shop, an "ambrosia" (i.e. *amrita*) shop, a jewellery shop and a general store. Each of these in turn is then described and interpreted symbolically. Here is the description of "The Ambrosia-shop of the Buddha":

"Reverend Nagasena, what is the Ambrosia-shop of the Exalted One, the Buddha?"

An Ambrosia, great king, has been proclaimed by the Exalted One, and with this Ambrosia that Exalted One sprinkles the world of men and the World of the Gods; and sprinkled with this Ambrosia, both gods and men have obtained deliverance from Birth, Old Age, Disease, Death, and from sorrow, lamentation, suffering, dejection, and despair. What is this Ambrosia? It is Meditation on the Body.

Moreover, great king, this has been said by the Exalted One, god over gods: "Ambrosia, O monks, do they enjoy who enjoy Meditation on the Body."

This, great king, is what is meant by the Ambrosia-shop of the Buddha. Afflicted with disease he saw mankind, and opened an Ambrosia-shop. "With Karma, monks, come, buy and eat Ambrosia. [Burlingame, p. 237]

Thus we clearly see that, at least for Nagasena, the only connection between ambrosia (*amrita*) and Buddhism was a symbolic one. The Buddhism of his period had no use for the actual substance, there were no initiation rituals and no yogic circles in which a substance called *amrita* was imbibed. This came much later, in the Vajrayana, Buddhism's tantric phase. On the other hand, it seems, from Nagasena's parable, that there actually were "ambrosia shops", places where something called "ambrosia" could be bought and, perhaps also, consumed.

Undoubtedly, the striking parallels between "[The legend about Chakdor](#)" and the Hindu legend of the origin of *soma* show that the Buddhist *amrita* and the Hindu *soma* were at one time understood to be identical. Moreover, the principal property of *amrita* is, to this day, perceived by Buddhists as being a species of inebriation, however symbolically this inebriation may be interpreted. Why else would beer (Tibetan *chhang*, "barley beer") be used by *yogins* as a symbolic substitute for *amrita* [[Ardussi](#)]? Conversely, why else would the term *bDud.rTsi* be used as a poetic synonym for [beer](#)?

Initiations

The late Chogyam Trungpa, a celebrated apologist for Tibetan Buddhism, explained the function which *amrita* plays in the initiation process:

amrita... is used in conferring the second *abhisheka*, the secret *abhisheka*. This transmission dissolves the student's mind into the mind of the teacher of the lineage. In general, *amrita* is the principle of intoxicating extreme beliefs, belief in ego, and dissolving the boundary between confusion and sanity so that coemergence can be realized. [[Trungpa](#), p. 236]

This passage underscores the fact that *amrita*, despite the innocuous composition of the modern formulation which goes by this name, is understood primarily as an inebriant. Moreover, the allusions to ego-loss and the "dissolving the boundary between confusion and sanity" imply that *amrita* was originally a powerfully psychedelic substance and was used as such in the context of Buddhist initiations.

The potion which is called *amrita* in modern Tibetan Buddhist initiations is a weak infusion of various medicinal and marginally psychoactive herbs. Curiously, it is usually colored with saffron. Considering the high price of saffron, one wonders why it is used. Could it be that it is there merely to give the *amrita* the appearance of urine?

Yakshas, nagas and asuras

"[The Legend About Chakdor](#)" assumes that we are familiar with the rivalry between the gods (*devas*) and the *asuras*. The Sanskrit word *asura* has several degrees of

meaning ranging from an autochthonous demon to a semi-divine, god-like being. It is this latter meaning which is most frequently implied in Buddhist texts. They are believed to be jealous enemies of the devas (Hindu gods which are recognized in the Buddhist cosmology) and may be considered as functionally equivalent to the Titans who, in Greek myth, oppose the Olympian gods. The *asuras* may well be remnants of a pre-Aryan class of deities. In this instance, as the status of Rahu seems to be demonic rather than semi-divine one might suppose that this legend preserves elements from an early period when the local, non-Aryan deities posed more of a threat. One (Hindu) account of the origin of the word *asura* is that the first wine (*sura*) was one of the products of churning the ocean. The gods (*sura*) partook of it but the anti-gods refused it, thus they are *a-sura* (literally, "no-wine"). [Danielou, p. 140] If we assume that the *asuras* indeed represent the indigenous gods of India, then this myth may reflect the differing drug-preferences of the invading Aryans and the indigenous (Dravidian) peoples.

The definitive exposition of the Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, the sutra called the "[Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Verses](#)", contains the earliest reference to Vajrapani. He is described as a [yaksha](#) who protects those pious householders who follow the bodhisattva path. The *yakshas* are classed along with the *asuras* in Hindu legends as malign spirits and, like the *asuras*, are thought to represent a vestige of the earlier, Dravidian, religion. Incidentally, *nagas* are often considered to be another of the classes of *asura*. Thus, "[The Legend About Chakdor](#)" contains references to three classes of autochthonous entities: Vajrapani is a *yaksha* (albeit one who has converted to Buddhism), Rahu is an *asura* and his legs are replaced with the tail of a *naga*. All three are considered to be enemies of the gods and, curiously, all three are associated with *soma*.

The connection of *asuras*, *yakshas* and *nagas* to *soma/amrita* is not immediately obvious but it is of considerable antiquity. For instance, although the Rig Veda refers to *soma* as a god, it/he is also said to be an *asura*:

Soma, the generous asura, knows the world. [O'Flaherty, p. 123]

Furthermore, *asuras* are frequently associated with *amrita* in folklore and legend. Take, for example, this passage from the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali:

Perfections proceed from birth or from drugs or from spells or from self-castigation or from concentration. [Woods, p. 347]

This passage is fascinating in itself but, in the context of the *asura/amrita* connection, the traditional commentary by [Vyasa](#) is even more so:

He describes the perfection which proceeds from drugs. A human being, when for some cause or other he reaches the mansions of the demons (*asura*), and when he makes use of elixirs of life brought to him by the lovely damsels of the demons, attains to agelessness and to deathlessness and to other perfections. Or (this perfection may be had) by the use of an elixir-of-life in this very world. So for instance the sage Mandavya, who dwelt on the Vindhya and who made use of potions. [Woods, p. 347]

This ancient connection between *amrita* and the [world of the asuras](#) was so widely understood that even in 17th-century Tibet it could be taken for granted:

Also, there was a farmer who took Tara as his meditation deity. When he dug in the earth and cried "Phu! Phu!" the gate of [Patala](#) itself opened. Entering the place of the Nagas, he drank the *amrita* he found there. Thus, he became like a rainbow body. [[Taranatha](#), p. 37]

An similar example of the stereotypical correlation of *yakshas* to *amrita* occurs in the following. This is especially relevant to Vajrapani, given his *yaksha* origins.

Again, there was a *sadhaka* who practiced the *sadhana* of Tara. He sat beside the roots of a [bimba](#) tree and repeated mantras. On one occasion, in the early morning, he saw a narrow lane in front of him which had not been there previously. He entered this and followed along the way. By nightfall, he found himself in the midst of a delightful forest and here he saw a golden house. When he entered it, he encountered the Yakshini [Kali](#), who was the servant of the Yaksha [Natakubera](#). She was adorned with every kind of ornament and her body was of an indefinite color. She addressed him, "O *sadhaka*, since you have come here, you must eat of the elixir," and she placed in his hands a vessel filled with nectar. He remained for one month, drinking the elixir, and thereafter his body became free of death and rebirth. [[Taranatha](#), p. 38]

Rahu's Urine

At last we turn to the oddest, and yet most crucial, element of the Vajrapani myth: he drinks Rahu's urine and, as a result becomes terrifying, blue and adorned with snakes. Here we have our sought-for connection between *soma* (albeit under the synonym *bDud.rTsi*) and urine-drinking.

Despite the fact that urine-drinking is an integral part of Siberian *Amanita muscaria* consumption we should not take this practice, in itself, to indicate the use of *A. muscaria* without further substantiating factors. After all, many people in modern India drink their own urine purely for health reasons. However, it should be clearly understood that, of all known drugs in use worldwide, only *A. muscaria* has the practice of urine-drinking associated with it as a cultural norm. This practice has its basis in the fact that, due to the highly inefficient conversion of ibotenic acid into muscimole within the body, the urine of one who has ingested *A. muscaria* is almost as potent a drug as the mushroom itself. Moreover, ibotenic acid is found only in the *A. muscaria* mushroom and in a very similar species called *A. pantherina*. Among psychoactive mushrooms, this property is unique to *A. muscaria*. Thus, if one were to drink the urine of someone who has just ingested, say, a mushroom which contains psilocybin, its drug effect would not be passed on to the urine-drinker.

It should be borne in mind that, while psychoactive plants which share this property of passing useable amounts of its drug into the user's urine are relatively rare, they do exist. *Amanita muscaria* is not unique in this regard. There are, for instance, several species of cactus which contain mescaline. However, despite the fact that about 80%

of ingested mescaline is excreted with the urine, there have been no reports of urine-drinking associated with the peyote (*Anhalonium lewinii*) cults of North America nor with the San Pedro (*Trichocereus pachanoi*) cult of Peru. This is somewhat surprising as urine, even someone else's, is probably a lot more palatable than the intensely bitter peyote cactus. There are, of course, no Old World plants which contain mescaline.

So, given the context in which Vajrapani drinks the urine of one has just drunk a powerfully inebriating potion, we should strongly suspect that *Amanita muscaria* is implicated. In the light of Wasson's contention that *soma* was *A. muscaria*, the urine-drinking element of "[The Legend About Chakdor](#)" assumes considerable significance.

Vajrayana and Tibet

Until recently all research into the sacramental use of *Amanita muscaria* in India focused on Hinduism, in particular Vedic Hinduism. A recent paper [[Hajicek-Dobberstein](#)] argued persuasively that a tradition of its use also existed among the *siddhas* (yogic adepts) of Vajrayana Buddhism.

As we have already noted, a potion called *amrita* is, even to this day, an essential part of Vajrayana initiations and in the Vajrayana's central ritual, the *ganachakra*. In both contexts, its function is to remove the belief in the personal ego and to dissolve the boundary between the guru and the student undergoing the initiation. It would seem obvious from this description that a profoundly psychedelic substance is implied here. The modern concoction is mainly symbolic, however, and consists of a few [herbal pills](#) dissolved in water or alcohol. This may be because the initiation-lineages of the present day are exclusively monastic; even though the initiations may be given to lay-practitioners they were originally intended for monks and nuns. Very few texts have survived which relate to the tantric initiation of lay-practitioners and it is quite likely that these would have differed profoundly from the restrained rituals of monastic communities.

Thanks to the Tibetans' exaggerated respect for Buddhism's Indian origins, that which has been preserved has been preserved very faithfully. The arguments put forward in monastic debate, for instance, are those which were propounded in India, as long ago as the 1st century C.E. The hollowness of the stalk of the banana plant is a common simile used by Tibetan lamas to explain the concept of "emptiness". Most Tibetans before the recent diaspora had never seen a banana plant, nevertheless the example was used because it was the one which had worked for the great teachers of the distant past in the holy land of India. It is this tendency to preserve even that which is incomprehensible which makes Tibetan Buddhism something of a museum. Thus in the Tibetan Buddhist traditions we may view, "through a glass, darkly", some of the practices of ancient India. Let us see if we cannot piece together some clues from the surviving histories.

Tibet's most illustrious *yogin* was Milarepa (Tib. *Mi.La.Ras.Pa*: "Mila the cotton-clad"). A hermit of the 11th century C.E., he lived in remote caves in the Himalayas

and was renowned for his mastery of the "inner heat" (Tib: *gTum.Mo*; Skt: *Chandali*). His guru was Marpa, a famous translator and patriarch of the Tibetan Kagyud lineage. Marpa had traveled to India and had studied with many of the great *yogins* of his day including Maitripa and Kukkuripa who was said to have lived on an island in a lake of poison. His main teacher, however, was the great Indian scholar and *yogin* Naropa who conferred upon him the initiation of Hevajra and taught him the celebrated "Six Yogas".

Here is a passage from Milarepa's biography:

Then Gambopa brewed the tea and brought it to the Jetsun [i.e. Milarepa], saying, "Please accept this offering, this symbol of my veneration for you".

Milarepa accepted it with delight. He said to Rechungpa, "We should offer this monk some tea in return. Now go and collect a little from every Repa here." Accordingly, Rechungpa [did so and] prepared the tea. Milarepa continued, "Now we need some seasoning." Saying this, he made water in the pot, making the tea extraordinarily delicious. [Chang, p. 475]

Having thus consumed Milarepa's urine Rechungpa was then given an initiation by him into the practice of the (red) goddess Vajravahri ("Thunderbolt sow") in the "mandala painted in cinnabar" (a red mineral). Although he had received other initiations from other gurus, Rechungpa considered this one the most profound and meaningful of all. Although there is no explicit mention of *Amanita muscaria* in this passage, it would provide a rationale for an otherwise inexplicable action. I find it difficult to believe that a guru's urine, no matter how enlightened the guru, would render tea "extraordinarily delicious". Could it be that the tea was used as a form of *amrita*, the drink which is an essential part of all Vajrayana initiations. This possibility seems more likely when we consider other initiations in which urine was explicitly substituted for *amrita*.

Let us consider the case of Kyungpo Naljor (Tib. *K'ying.Po rNal.'Byor*, "Garuda yogin"), another *yogin* of pivotal importance in the dissemination of the tantric *siddha* schools in Tibet. He was a Tibetan master roughly contemporaneous with Milarepa, who brought teachings back from India and founded the Shangpa Kagyud lineage. His guru was Niguma, the sister (and also, some say, the consort) of Naropa, thus his lineage is related to, but not identical with, that of Marpa and Milarepa. Like Rechungpa, his initiation was conferred after drinking urine:

The *siddha* Kyungpo Naljor realized the nature of empowerment when the dakini Niguma poured a skull cup of secret water and pointed a finger at his heart.

The *siddha* Orgyenpa realized the nature of empowerment when a yogini in the form of a courtesan gave him a bowl of soup.

There is also the story that the tertön Guru Chowang placed a piece of excrement on the top of the head of the Nepalese man, Baro Vihardhara, and poured urine into his mouth. Through this, Baro remained in undefiled coemergent wisdom for seven days and was liberated...

Dampa Gom-mon, who transmitted the [Pacifying Practice](#), gave Chupa Dartson a cup of tea and a large bag of tsampa [roast barley flour], saying "This is a substitute for the empowerment ritual," whereby Chupa Dartson received the blessings and attained realization equal to that of his master.

Countless such stories abound... [[Rangdrol](#), p. 38]

Each of these initiations entails drinking some kind of liquid. This is only to be expected, as the use of a potion called *amrita* is central to most Vajrayana initiations. Indeed, many lamas insist that without the ingestion of some kind of substance an initiation is not complete, the three essential components of an initiation being

- 1) the substance to be eaten or, more usually, drunk,
- 2) the visualization of the deity, and
- 3) the mantra of that deity.

Given the powerful effects which *amrita* is expected to elicit within the context of these initiations (see [Initiations](#) above), it is only reasonable to assume that, originally, these liquids contained a psychedelic substance. It is especially worthy of note that the "secret water" referred to by Rangdrol is glossed by his commentator as "urine" and, in the case of Baro Vihardhara it is explicitly stated that the initiatory liquid is urine. Guru Chowang may have placed "a piece of excrement on his head" (presumably substituting it for the *vajra* used in the normal version of the ritual) but it was urine (representing *amrita*) which he poured into his mouth.

Again, as in the case of Milarepa, *Amanita muscaria* is not explicitly mentioned in any of these descriptions but the conferral of initiation after drinking the guru's urine is so suggestive of its use that this theme demands further investigation.

Etymology

As we have seen, the "Dutsi" of "[The legend about Chakdor](#)" is a phonetic rendition of the Tibetan *bDud.rTsi*, the term which translates the Sanskrit *amrita*, an alternative term for *soma*. The Tibetan vocabulary which was used to translate Buddhist texts from Sanskrit was highly standardized. So much so, in fact, that the Tibetan translators even went as far as to invent linguistic devices for features of Sanskrit grammar (such as the "dual number") which were not present in Tibetan. Thus we can be certain that wherever we encounter *bDud.rTsi* in a Tibetan translation the original Sanskrit would have been *amrita*.

If we were to select a Tibetan word which would most accurately translate the Sanskrit *amrita* ("no death", "immortality") into Tibetan we should probably choose the word *Chi.Med* ("death-less"). This word is frequently found as a personal name for both men and women but it is seldom used in Buddhist texts as the translation of *amrita*, and then only as a component of proper names. Instead, the word which is invariably used to translate the Sanskrit *amrita* into Tibetan is *bDud.rTsi*. This breaks down into two syllables, the second of which (*rTsi*) is simply the common word for

"juice". The first syllable (*bDud*) is more problematic. If taken literally, this means "demon" and it is the word which normally translates the Sanskrit word *mara* ("evil").

As a personal name, Mara is the name of the demon who tempted Shakyamuni Buddha immediately prior to his enlightenment. Thus, the words *mara* and *bDud* are frequently used to mean an obstacle to enlightenment. As names for a drink which confers eternal life, "demon juice" and "obstacle juice" are hardly, on the face of it, obvious choices. How may we account for its etymology?

It is possible that the early Tibetan translators attempted to preserve the linguistic connection between the words *mara* and *amrita* as these words share a common root: \sqrt{mi} , meaning "die", "death". These translators, however, tended to follow the contemporary Indian Buddhist usage and attempted rather more hermeneutic interpretations of Sanskrit technical terms. So, while it is possible that the early Tibetan translators used the term *bDud.rTsi* for etymological reasons, I think it most unlikely as it would be an exception to their standard practices.

Then again, one might consider *bDud* to be a corruption of '*Dud* (meaning "to press" or "to collect"), both words having an identical pronunciation. Thus *bDud.rTsi* would mean "expressed juice" or "collected juice". This etymology, although not borne out by the use of '*Dud* in other word formations, would seem rather apposite as the Sanskrit word *soma* itself derives from the root \sqrt{su} meaning "press" or "extract", reflecting the Vedic practices of expressing the juice of the *soma* plant.

In the light of The Legend About Chakdor, however, we cannot ignore the serious possibility that the term "demon juice" may allude to the episode when Vajrapani drank second-hand *bDud.rTsi*. In other words, it may be a polite way of saying "*asura*'s urine".

Some Reservations

Despite the evidence presented above that the *soma* which is spoken of in the Rig Veda and the *amrita* of the Vajrayana Buddhists was a decoction of the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom there is evidence that, in other contexts, other psychoactive plants may also have qualified for the title of *soma*. Many Vajrayana rituals call for the "five *amritas*". Could these have been five separate constituents of a psychoactive concoction?

In passing it may be worth mentioning that the Tibetan word for *Cannabis* and its drug products is *So.Ma.Ra.Dza*. This appears to be a direct borrowing from the Sanskrit *soma-rajā* (Eng.: "King *soma*", "Royal *soma*"). The term *soma-rajā* is glossed as "king *soma*, the moon" in [Monier-Williams'](#) Sanskrit dictionary although the Rig Veda, in its hymns of praise to the drug, refers to it frequently as "King *soma*" (8.48.8, 8.79.8 etc.) [[O'Flaherty](#), pp. 121, 135, *et passim*]. It would thus appear that either *Cannabis* was used as a *soma*-substitute or that the identification of *soma* with psychoactive plants in general was once recognized in India and that this tradition is preserved in Tibet.

One plant-derived drug which has not yet been suggested as a candidate for *soma* is camphor. Admittedly, camphor is a mild stimulant rather than an psychedelic but its consumption as a drug is explicitly mentioned several times in the Hevajra Tantra. This complex and arcane Buddhist work, like most tantras, concerns itself with the ecstatic, yogic and magical means to enlightenment. Thus:

These (i.e. the female participants in the rite) the *yogin* should honor with deep embraces and kisses. Then he should drink camphor and sprinkle the mandala with it. He should cause them to drink it and he should quickly gain siddhi. [Snellgrove, p. 113]

We must beware of making too much of any of the statements concerning camphor in the tantras for it was standard practice in these texts to employ an elaborate system of word-substitutions which could be interpreted only by the initiated. Thus, when the text appears to be speaking of a debauched sexual practice it is probably describing some rarified philosophical matter. Conversely, what might appear on the surface to be a purely philosophical discourse may well be instructions for achieving enlightenment through advanced sexual yoga. As a case in point, "camphor", in the secret tantric language, means semen while "semen" itself corresponds to *bodhicitta* ("the thought of enlightenment"). Yet again, camphor, semen and *bodhicitta* all correspond to the moon- (or male-) energy which is psychically manipulated in tantric yoga. This may be noteworthy in light of the mythological identification of *soma* with the moon. The very fact that camphor-consumption is mentioned at all should be considered sufficient cause for further investigation of drug use in the Vajrayana.

We have seen that *Amanita muscaria* is not the only plant-derived inebriant which is imperfectly metabolized by the liver and could thus be recycled by urine-drinking. It is conceivable that some plants present in the Indian subcontinent and which would have been available to the Aryan invaders could contain such intoxicants. However, only one plant is known to have a tradition of urine-drinking associated with it and that plant is *A. muscaria*.

David Flattery [Flattery and Schwartz] makes an interesting and original point when he argues that both the Vedic culture (in India) and the related Avestan culture (in Iran) made use of substitutes for a sacred potion. Flattery interprets this as indicating that the knowledge of original plant which was symbolically represented by *soma* (and, in Iran, *haoma*) had been lost long before the Aryans entered India. This very intriguing possibility has been largely ignored by other researchers.

Conclusion

We have seen that *amrita* is a synonym for *soma* and that a Buddhist legend, "The Legend About Chakdor", tells of the origin of *amrita*. That this legend is from a Tibetan source, and uses the Tibetan translation of *amrita*: Dutsi, need not detain us. The story is sufficiently similar to the Puranic legend of the origin of *soma* to assure us that both legends concern the same substance. The importance of the Buddhist version is that it provides the sought-for link between *soma* (in this case called Dutsi)

use and urine-drinking, thus lending weight to the contention that the *soma* plant was the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom.

It is also possible that "[The legend about Chakdor](#)" is the source of the word *bDud.rTsi*, the Tibetan translation of *amrita* as the literal meaning of *bDud.rTsi* ("demon juice") may be a euphemism for "*asura*'s (i.e. Rahu's) urine".

The consumption of a potion called *amrita* is central to Vajrayana Buddhist rituals, even today. This modern *amrita* is mostly colored water but, within the context of an initiation, it is imagined to be a potent psychoactive drug. This suggests that the modern version is merely a nominal acknowledgement of an original, truly potent, potion. There are several instances in the Tibetan tradition of initiations where urine was used in place of *amrita* and, while no explicit mention is made of *A. muscaria* in connection with these initiations, urine-drinking is highly suggestive of its use, particularly in light of the accumulating evidence of *A. muscaria* use by the Vajrayana *siddhas*.

Wasson and other authors have suggested that original religion of the Indo-European people was a cult centered on the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom. This is a highly contentious area and I do not believe that the arguments which I present here lend weight to either side of that debate. I do, however, consider it now beyond doubt that *A. muscaria* was used sacramentally in India and also that this mushroom was known as *soma*. Whether it was the only drug to be used thus in Indian religions or whether other drugs were also called *soma* are matters for further research.

Notes

- abhisheka*** Literally "sprinkling" (cf. the above passage on "The Ambrosia shop of the Buddha"), it is the Sanskrit word used for a tantric initiation. The Tibetan word is "*dBang*" (pronounced "wang").
- ambrosia*** Skt. *amrita*.
- amrita*** Sanskrit for "elixir of immortality", it literally means "deathlessness". This has obvious parallels in "ambrosia" the name of the classical Greek "food of the gods" which means "no death".
- asuras*** A race of anti-gods, comparable to the Titans in classical Greek mythology.
- beer*** Tibetan *chhang* ("barley beer").
- bimba tree*** Probably *Momordica monadelpha*
- dutsi*** A phonetic rendering of the Tibetan *bDud.rTsi*, equivalent to Skt., *amrita*, *soma*, Eng. "ambrosia".
- eating ambrosia*** Considering that this ambrosia has been described as something which may be "sprinkled" we must suspect the accuracy of this

- translation.
- empowerment** A more literal translation of the Tibetan word *dBang* meaning "initiation".
- goma*** This appears to be Japanese pronunciation of "homa".
- hala hala*** (Sanskrit) Presumably a corrupt form of *kalakuta* or *khalakuta*, the equivalent terms in the Hindu myth. Like these terms neither its precise meaning nor its etymology is understood.
- haoma*** The Iranian equivalent of *soma*. The word is cognate with Skt. *homa*, "fire ritual", "sacrifice".
- herbal pills** T. J. Tsarong gives the composition only of *bDud.rTsi.Ril.dKar* ("the white nectar pill"), which is used medicinally, but not of *bDud.rTsi.Ril.dMar* ("the red nectar pill") which is used by yogins and for initiations. The "white nectar pill" contains "Ash of a fossilized stone (*Bya.rDo*), *Hedychium spicatum*, black salt, *Hippophae rhamnoides*, *Piper longum*".
- hevajra Tantra** The "Hevajra Tantra" is a complex and arcane Buddhist work which concerns itself with the ecstatic, yogic and magical means to enlightenment.
- homa*** Skt., "fire ritual", "sacrifice".
- Jetsun** A Tibetan honorific, in this case referring to Milarepa
- Kyungpo Naljor** Tib. *K'jung.Po rNal.'Byor* ("Garuda yogin")
- lhamayin*** The Tibetan word *Lha.Ma.Yin* (literally "Not a god") is a translation of the Sanskrit *asura*.
- Mandavya** I have, as yet, been unable to find any other reference to "the sage Mandavya, who dwelt on the Vindhya". The Vindhya are a range of mountains in the South of India inhabited by Dravidian people. In the Indian tradition mountains are considered to be repositories of medicinal herbs.
- Milarepa** Tib. *Mi.La.Ras.Pa* ("Mila the cotton-clad")
- naga-king*** *Nagas* are snake-spirits. They have the power to change their shape, their females (*nagini*) often assuming the guise of beautiful women. Although they inhabit the subterranean land of "Patala", they are connected with the water element and have the power to bring rain.
- Natakubera** The wealth deity Kubera (also written Kuvera, Sanskrit for "deformed") is considered the lord of the *yakshas* and is thus called *yaksharaja*. The name Natakubera literally means "the bent and misshapen one".
- pacifying practice** Tib. *gCod*
- Patala** The underworld realm of the *asuras*. Due to their common "anti-god" alignment, it is also said to house the *yakshas* and

the *nagas*. Patala should not be confused with either:
(a) Potala, the "pure land" of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara,
or
(b) the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet. This palace was the seat
of the Dalai Lamas from the 16th to the 20th centuries. It was
built by the "Great Fifth" Dalai Lama who named it after the
realm of Avalokiteshvara.

piyusha The words *piyusha*, *amrita*, *sudha* are modern Hindi synonyms
for soma. Das gives them in the Devanagari alphabet

Perfection of Wisdom *Ashtasahasrika Prajñāparamita Sutra* (Skt., "The Perfection of
Wisdom in 8,000 Verses"), a seminal Mahayana text, probably
composed in the 1st century C.E.

sadhaka One who practices a *sadhana*.

sadhana A tantric system of meditation, often involving the
visualization of a deity while reciting a mantra appropriate to
that deity.

secret water A note on "secret water" explains "Probably she poured urine
in the skull cup for him to drink."

siddha (Skt) "accomplished", "adept". One who has achieved
enlightenment by following the Vajrayana path. See *siddhi*.

siddhi (Skt) "accomplishment". In the Vajrayana tradition there is
only one accomplishment worth considering and that is
enlightenment. See *siddha*.

soma-rajā M. Monier-Williams, ("A Sanskrit-English Dictionary",
Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi 1993) interprets the closely-
related words *soma-rajika* and *soma-raji* as being the plant
Vernonia anthelminthica.

tail of a dragon Actually the tail of a *naga* or giant, supernatural snake.

three essentials The three essentials components of an initiation are (1) the
substance to be eaten or drunk, (2) the visualization of the deity
and (3) the mantra of that deity.

Vajrapani Skt. *Vajrapani*, "Thunderbolt-holder", becomes, in Tibetan,
P'yag.Na.rDo.rJe, "Thunderbolt-in-hand". This is frequently
abbreviated to *P'yag.rDor* (pronounced Chak-dor).

vajrayana Skt., "diamond/thunderbolt vehicle", also known as the
Guhyamantrayana, "secret mantra vehicle".

Vyasa Skt., "author"

world of the *asuras* see [Patala](#)

yaksha Originally a class of gigantic, goblin-like, chthonic demons in
Indian popular culture, sometimes said to bring disease. In
Buddhist literature, converted *Yakshas* are frequently cited as

protectors of Buddhism.

yakshini Kali *Yakshini* is the feminine form of *yaksha*. I think we may confidently assume that the *yakshini* in question is the Hindu goddess Kali in Buddhist guise. That she is said to be a mere *yakshini* and a servant of Kuvera (Kubera) is an example of the mutual denigration of deities which typified the inter-religious rivalry between Hindus and Buddhists.

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