Praises to Mandāravā
By Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo

Translated and edited by Adele Tomlin
Introduction

Here is the first English translation of *Praises to Mandāravā* composed by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. The idea to translate this text came a couple of days ago, from a female Dharma friend who felt there was not so much available in English about Mandāravā. So, having recently received the entire transmission of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo’s works, I searched online and found two short compositions by Khyentse Wangpo offering praises to her. Before discussing the textual sources, first a little background about Mandāravā herself.

Mandāravā – mahasiddha demon-tamer who achieved immortality and rainbow body

Mandāravā was one of the great 8th century mahasiddhas and one of the main consorts of Guru Rinpoche. Before meeting Padmasambhava, she was born into royalty and abandoned her life of privilege to become a nun and accomplished practitioner. There is a complete biography called *The Lives and Liberation of Princess Mandāravā* (see Bibliography below), a translation of the biography of her life given by Padmasambhava that was hidden as a treasure and later revealed by Samten Lingpa (for more on that see below). There is also shorter account of her life by scholar, Sarah Jacoby on the Treasury of Lives site.

Not just a ‘romance’ and pretty face

Interestingly, many of the online accounts (and general impression) of Mandāravā’s life, focus on her youth and physical beauty and being a consort of a great master, like a modern-day tale of a pretty woman who had some ‘romance’ and ‘union’ practice. Yet this does not do justice to her incredible spiritual accomplishments, will-power and courage. This was a woman who faced the wrath of her family and community, whom people tried to murder for her relationship with Guru Rinpoche and who demons attacked and so on.

As Lama Ngawang Zangpo points out in *Guru Rinpoche: His Life and Times*, it was not her status as consort that mattered but rather that she and Yeshe Tsogyal "were the best among Guru Rinpoche's disciples, men or women; their inclusion in countless paintings and sculptures of the master is a tribute to their personal enlightenment during an era of social enlightenment."¹

Let us also not forget that Guru Rinpoche, himself was considered to be incredibly handsome physically (yet no so much is made of that in the online biographies of his life). An exception to this,

¹ For more examples of biographies that speak about Mandarava see the Shambhala Publications reading guide here: https://www.shambhala.com/mandarava/.
is in *Crazy Wisdom*, included in *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa, Volume 5*. Trungpa Rinpoche describes the scene when Mandāravā met Guru Rinpoche:

“One day he visited a nunnery. At this particular nunnery lived a princess called Mandāravā, who had just recently become a nun and had completely turned away from worldly pleasure. She lived in seclusion, guarded by five hundred women, whose task was to make sure that she maintained her monastic discipline. When Padmasambhava arrived at the monastery, everyone was quite impressed with him-naturally. He had the innocence of one born from a lotus and a pure and ideal physique. He was very beautiful. He converted all the women in the nunnery: they all became his students.”

Both of the English-language biographies about Mandāravā were translated and composed by female scholar/translators. Reading the English language literature that is available, it is clear that there is a lot more to the life and character of Mandāravā than being a ‘pretty-faced’ consort doing union with Padmasambhava.

*Immortality and the Maratika Cave*

Mandāravā is strongly associated with the Maratika cave and immortality practice. In *The Lives and Liberation of Princess Mandāravā* (Ch. 30), there is a chapter about when and how Mandāravā and Padmasambhava met and practised longevity in the Maratika Cave. When she first arrived at the cave alone she became scared and lonely and when Padmasambhava arrived, he admonishes her for lacking courage and that difficult environments and situations are the best for practice. Then:

After practicing for three months, they received a clear vision of the Buddha of Long Life, Amitayus, and accomplished the state of an immortal pure awareness holder. The guru proclaimed that she was a fortunate upholder of pure awareness and that in order to eliminate any obstacles to their accomplishment, they both should practice the deity Hayagriva. They practiced the Hayagriva Mechar cycle from the tantra known as the Great Play of the Quintessential Lotus and the Treasury of One Thousand Essential Instructions, a tantra on the union of Hayagriva and Vajravarahi. Following this, both guru and consort had clear visions of Hayagriva, whose neighing and sounding of hum could be clearly heard around them thereafter. At this point, all possible demonic and obstructing forces had been banished. Mandāravā compiled a treasury of more than a thousand extensive and concise longevity methods, including essential pointing-out instructions. Both guru and consort became free from the process of birth, old age, sickness, and death, until the end of this age of ongoing existence. They appeared in the embodiment of rapture, from which they went on to accomplish the secret practice of union. When the vajra master manifested himself in the form of the slightly wrathful guru of the Buddha family, the princess followed accordingly. By engaging in the perfectly pure mandala of primordial wisdom, they discovered the primordial awareness of stainless miraculous display. They gained the ability to transcend the ordinary
elements, with powers that included leaving impressions on solid matter, rainbow light displays, and so forth. Their enlightened union naturally caused flowers to descend from the sky and captivated and summoned those who were oath-bound guardians of the secret doctrine. These guardians were then given the task of ensuring that the lineage of accomplishing longevity was secure. Even the gods, nagas, and the gods among humans and their assemblies offered the essence of their life without hesitation. The vajra master became known as the Immortal Padmasambhava, and Mandāravā as the ḍākinī pure awareness holder of immortality Dungmen Karmo, Maiden of the White Conch.

Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, who is one of the main contemporary Buddhist teachers and practitioners to translate and publish literature on the tsalung practice of Mandāravā, gives an account of his experiences at Maratika Cave in *Dream Yoga and the Practice of Natural Light* relating his dreams of Mandāravā before discovering a gongter, or earth treasure, there.

Demon-taming in the charnel grounds

Mandāravā also displayed many feats in relation to demon-taming after she had attained immortality in the Maratika Cave. Practising in the charnel grounds with Padmasambhava, she was then told by him to start taming demons and so she went to the cave in the charnel ground known as Hematsal, while there, the demons:

…let loose an uproarious din, and some of the cruelest demon leaders began dragging the ḍākinī ‘s body here and there. Some of them began to beat her, some to rape her, and some to stretch open her secret place. Others were busy lighting fires, carrying water, and displaying their own inconceivable powers. During this time, the ḍākinī remained in the meditative absorption upon compassion without wavering.

Then, entering into wrathful meditative absorption, she arose as a blazing, fierce female of wrath. She transformed the demons’ rain, hail, and thunderbolts into coal and pieces of burnt wood. She cried, “Hum bhyoh! I am the consort of the buddhas of the three times! All of you and your attendants are subservient to me! I am the blazing, fierce female of wrath! I am the executioner of all elemental demons who cannot be tamed through loving-kindness! I shall make you surrender your life essence, and you will promise to take the oath!” Immediately the demons were overwhelmed. Some lost consciousness, while others, in their fear, tried to flee. Some were rendered crazy, yet all were unable to escape her command. By the light rays of the ḍākinī ‘s body, each one of them swore loyalty and awoke to the path of virtue. Then the ḍākinī bestowed secret empowerment upon them, and her secret name became Kalaraksha Marajita. She gave each of them a Dharma name and water that conferred the words of honor. She herself continued to send forth many manifestations, all of which continued to liberate the demons through secret means, thus exclusively revealing the secret mantra doctrine. They all accomplished the secret mantra, and so she further entrusted them with the essential secrets and conferred upon them the cycle of accomplishment called Wrathful Demon Tamer, including all
pointing-out instructions and supplementary practices. She then commanded them to pass the entrustments on to future incarnate teachers in the land of Tibet, and further predicted that all of the elementals would eventually achieve Buddhahood.

_Biography and Praises by Padmasambhava_

The biographical account of Mandarava’s life was recited by Padmasambhava and revealed later as a treasure by Samten Lingpa. Yeshe Tshogyel also makes a request to Padmasambhava to give a more concise version of the life and deeds of Mandarava.

We express our gratitude to you for giving us the complete teaching on the Lives and Liberation of the Principal Đākinī Mandarava! Please—for the benefit of those of us who are gathered here, as well as for future generations—I implore you to bestow upon us a concise version of her enlightened deeds that is simple to read and inspires faith. Please speak a few profound words for our welfare, so that we might cleanse the two obscurations and receive blessings and spiritual attainments. I implore you now to speak to us again out of your great kindness and compassion!"

Padmasambhava sings a song of praises to her, the last two verses of which:

Together with nine hundred pure awareness holder disciples,
After dissolving into a rainbow body,
she manifested herself once again for the benefit of others.
Mandarava emanated unceasingly,
manifesting herself as a đākinī to tame the minds of beings in every essential way.
To the feet of Mandarava, I supplicate!

In the Realm of Great Bliss, she is known as
the secret wisdom consort Pandaravasini;
In the realm of Khechari, as Natyendri;
And in Zahor, as Dungmen Karmo.
To the feet of Mandarava, I supplicate!

He then gives an explanation of the benefits of reading the longer biographical account of her life and reciting his praises to her early in the morning:

Have no doubt that the mother Mandarava will guide one to the future place of rebirth in the Realm of Great Bliss. Accordingly, for all beings, including the fortunate disciples of Tibet, whoever writes or reads this account of Mandarava’s lives and liberation and makes prostrations, offerings, and supplications with faith and devotion will experience the result of the spontaneous accomplishment of all wishes. Whoever simply reads this account with pure faith will be free from the threat of contagious disease, war, misfortune, and drought; black magic, curses, and detrimental threats will be pacified. The threat of untimely death and obstacles to one’s life will be reversed if one reads this account a hundred times. If one reads this text, the illnesses that four-legged beasts endure, as well as those of
impovertied beggars, will be pacified, and good fortune and prosperity will abound. If one desires offspring, one’s family line will increase by reading this text. Whoever owns this text about her lives and liberation will accomplish all desires without obstacle. Wherever a copy of this account is found—within any monastery, country, city, or family home—the spirits, demonic forces, and elementals will be kept back at a distance, unable to approach any closer than a mile. If this account is recited a hundred times in order to obtain a better future rebirth, there will be liberation from the fear of the lower realms, and the consciousness will travel to the realm of Khechari. “The actual benefits of this account are so remarkable that they simply cannot be expressed. If it is worn on the body, the effects of obscuration will not occur. There will be no fear of weapons, and poison will lose its potency. Contagious diseases, open, festering sores, and leprosy will all be pacified. Illness, demonic-force possession, obstructing forces, and all such harm will be stripped of strength. If this account is read prior to embarking upon a journey, all mishaps and harm, such as ambush, robbery, and treacherous passageways, will be pacified. If one maintains this text as an object of veneration, making regular prostrations, circumambulations, and offerings, it is certain that rebirth will occur in the Realm of Great Bliss. Therefore, sentient beings of the future generations, persevere accordingly!”

Texts by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo

The first translation here is Prases to Mandāravā by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, found in his Collected Works and is the first section of a longer sadhana text 2. There are also two short texts to Mandāravā by another famed Nyingma master called, Kunzang Dechen Dorje3. These will be translated and published shortly.

The second translation here is also from the first part of a sadhana from a mind treasure of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo4 called the Profoun Cycle of Teachings of Immortal Vajra Đākinī Mandāravā from the Heart Essence of Life (Tshokye Nyingthig)5 cycle which can be found in the Rinchen Terdzø

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3 1) d+hAki man+d+hA ra wa yi/_bstod cing prhin las bcol ba/ gsung ’bum/_kun bzang ’gro ’dul bde chen rdo rje/Volume 6 Pages 31 – 3; 2) "ye shes d+hAki man+d+hA ra wa’i tshe ’gugs zab mol.” 6: 33 - 34. [mer chen?]: [mer chen dgon pa]. [2006].
4 There are two editions of this text online: 1) ’jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po’i dgongs gter mtsho skyes snying thig gi yum bka’ mkha’ ’gro ’chi med man+dA raHba’ichos skor zab mo by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo) revealed by (Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo) in cycle (’chi med ’ja’ lus rdo rje’i srog sgrub) parent cycle ལྷེ་རྒྱུ་བཞི་ལྷེ་(’chi med mtsho skyes snying tig) Volume 49, Pages 163-166 / Folios 1a1 to 2b6. https://rtz.tsadra.org/index.php/Terdzo-DZI-015-1
Chenmo in which there is also another Mandāravā sadhana text from that cycle. I plan to make these two sadhanas available in the English language soon.

On commencing this translation, I had an auspicious dream of Namkhai Norbu telling me that ‘love and compassion are essential for Dharma practice’ and without them it is empty and useless. As I have never had a dream with Namkhai Norbu in it, I took this as an extremely auspicious sign to do this translation and make available more of Mandāravā’s sadhanas in the future too.

May it be of benefit and may all beings maintain the rainbow body, immortality and see Mandāravā’s shining face in this very lifetime!

Translated, edited and compiled by Adele Tomlin (July 2020)

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From the extremely pure, primordial-awareness
Arises the appearance marked by the characteristic of union.
Bringing to mind, the bestower of long-life and supreme, primordial-awareness,
Immortal Mandāravā, I praise you!

To the stunning red lotus, that captivates minds, and
Smiling face, inseparable from ‘peace‘ and ‘becoming;’
Whose passionate, penetrating ‘eyes‘ of three emancipations?
Liberates all wanderers in samsara, I praise you!

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7 The three liberations (rnam thar gsum) are emptiness (stong pa nyid) without characteristics (mtshan ma med pa) and without hope (smon pa med pa).
In the right hand, a curved knife of great compassion that
Robs the four ‘demons’ from the heart.
In the left, a skull cup vase full of nectar that
Bestows the siddhis of accomplishment, I praise you!

Heruka, endowed with the five awarenesses and four kāyas
Method, māhamudrā seal of Pema Thotreng Tsel
Embracing a Khatvanga staff on the left,
Generating delightful union equipoise, I praise you!

Black shiny hair, half hanging down,
Excellently bound with Pundarīka crown;
Adorned with bone, jewels and silk,
Severing the cycle of concepts, I praise you!

Two legs, right bent, not abiding in ‘existence’,
Left stretched, not falling into the extreme of ‘peace’,
Pressing on the heart of the dualistic clinging corpse,
A union gone beyond suffering, I praise you!

By seeing your form, the two accomplishments are naturally achieved,
By hearing your secret speech, the great bliss of primordial awareness blazes,
Even remembering you, all obstacles to life are eliminated
Chief queen of dakini's, I praise you!

The environment and beings in the great mandala of profound, luminous, non-duality,
The perfect mantra sound invokes and invites from within
The meditative equipoise of the union of expanse and awareness,

When one-pointedly venerating at your feet

With a sigh of relief at the revelation of your delightful ‘face’

Appearing in mere dreams, visions and reality; and

By relying on the primordial-awareness of the ten powers\(^8\) of life, death and resources,

May we quickly accomplish the state of immortality!

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\(^8\) The ten powers (dbang bcu) are said to be power over life (tshe), deeds (las), necessities (yo byad), devotion (mos pa), aspiration (smon lam), miraculous abilities (rdzu ’phrul), birth (skye ba), doctrine (chos), mind (sems), and primordial awareness (ye shes).
Exquisite Clouds of Supplication

From The Profound Cycle of Immortal Mandāravā:
in Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo’s Mind-Treasure Heart Essence of the Lotus-Born

From the Accomplishment of the Life-Force of the Immortal Vajra Rainbow Body is the Exquisite Clouds of Supplication

Immortal, highest protector, Amitabha
Immortal, form of great bliss, Amitayus
Immortal, accomplished Vidyadhara, Lord Lotus-Born⁹
We supplicate, please bestow the immortal siddhi!

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⁹This is a reference to Padmasambhava, one of his names.
Immortal, primordial-awareness dakini, Mandāra,
Immortal, abiding reality, Venerable Trisong,
Immortal, vidyadhara root lineage lamas,
We supplicate, please bestow the immortal siddhi!

Like that, by the power of this heart-felt, devotional supplication, and
Invoking with recitation of the perfectly arisen mantra
The three roots long-life deities mandala of appearance-existence,
May the two siddhis be easily accomplished!

In particular, by the profound vajra-yoga seal of the
primordial-awareness element, channels, winds and drops;
At the essence drop, indivisible from the four kāyas,
May the ultimate, immortal dakini manifest!

By Garwang Osel Lingpa
Bibliography and Resources


*Mandāravā Tsalung Practices* by Namkhai Norbu (Shang Shung Institute, 2004)

In *Ḍākinī’s Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism*, Judith Simmer-Brown explores the importance and role of Mandāravā.

In *Feminine Ground*, Jan Willis also explores Mandāravā and what she represents, through a contemporary lens.

The Ṛṣṭākinī Niguma, the founder of the Shangpa Kagyu lineage and the sister of Naropa, is considered a reincarnation of Mandāravā.

TBRC Reference: [http://tbrc.org/#/rid=P00AG0428](http://tbrc.org/#/rid=P00AG0428)
Treasury of Lives Biography: [http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Mandāravā/9](http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Mandāravā/9)