Prajñā in *Vajraḍākinī sādhana-nṛtya*:

A Study of the Significance of Wisdom in the Himalayan Buddhist Ritual Dances Using a Buddhist Female Figure in the Kathmandu Valley

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to situate the view, that is, the significance of *prajñā* (wisdom) for *sādhana-nṛtya* (ritual dance) practices in the Kathmandu Valley. In particular, it is to examine the way that the view of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s of the Vajrayāna tradition is embodied in the context of two specific *sādhana-nṛtya* of Himalayan Buddhism, namely, *caryānṛtya* (practice-dance) and *vajranṛtya* (*vajra*-dance), belonging to the Newar and Tibetan traditions respectively. As a case study, I investigate the ways in which this specific tantric view is first articulated, and then embodied as a female figure taking the form of a *Wrathful Red Vajrayoginī* in the Newar Buddhist tantric tradition and taking the form of a *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* in the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. The premise of this research is that these *vajraḍākinī sādhana-nṛtya* aid in developing and perfecting *prajñā*. This thesis brings the discussion of embodied wisdom to the foreground along with advancing a practice-based research model for future work in dance performance studies.

Preface

Sādhana-nṛtya is a term proposed in this thesis which refers to Himalayan Buddhist meditative ritual dances that incorporate body posture/movement practices inspired by the tradition of the *mahāsiddha*-s. The *sādhana*-s are essentially a method with a flexible structure to accomplish an intended goal and their associated dance practices share the same nature. As demonstrated in this thesis, *sādhana-nṛtya* is not limited to the ritual dance component of the elaborated *sādhana*-s such as the annual *sgrub chen* ceremonies in the Tibetan monasteries. In practice, *sādhana-nṛtya* incorporates a diverse range of movement practices (both form and formless) to explore various ways to develop and perfect *prajñā* through using a range of inner and outer postures. In the course of studying and training in a multidisciplinary topic such as *sādhana-nṛtya*, one's horizon of learning invariably includes both theoretical and experiential dimensions. Therefore, in this thesis work, I have made a sincere effort to combine both of these aspects to accurately reflect the multifaceted features of *sādhana-nṛtya* in an academic work. As much as my research on *sādhana-nṛtya* continues to be enriched by the reflections from my dance lessons in Newar and Tibetan traditions, my academic groundwork during the recent years has been equally beneficial in advancing my dance trainings. Hence, in this thesis, my query on how *prajñā* is developed and perfected in *sādhana-nṛtya* training does not strictly remain within a specific domain, as I explore creative ways to formulate a suitable practice-based research model for this type of scholar-practitioner engagement. It is much more productive to treat *sādhana-nṛtya* as a common ground for a diverse range of academic fields, such as Buddhist Studies, South Asian Studies, Dance and Performance Studies, and so forth. Such treatment reveals the aspects that were previously overlooked and that are still understudied. I hope that my examination on the role of *prajñā* in *caryānṛtya* and *vajranṛtya* practices along with a practice-based model for creative practitioner researchers will be a useful contribution to the academe.

List of Abbreviations

āmnāyānusāriṇī	*Bhagavatyāmnāyānusāriṇīnāmavyākhyā*
bṛhaṭṭīkā	*Śatasāhasrikāpañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāṣṭādaśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitābṛhaṭṭīkā*
DDV	*Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*
MSĀ	*Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*
PbR	Practice-based Research
Skt.	Sanskrit
Tib.	Tibetan
Pa.	Pali

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Note on Dictionaries, IAST, and Wylie

For the meanings of Sanskrit terms, an open-source dictionary program named GoldenDict is consulted, which incorporates a range of Sanskrit dictionaries such as Monier-Williams and Apte Sanskrit dictionaries, along with Edgerton Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit dictionary. With regard to the meanings for Tibetan terms, the Tibetan and Himalayan Library, along with Rangjung Yeshe and Sarat Chandra Das dictionaries are referred. Except proper nouns, all Sanskrit terms are written in the IAST form and all Tibetan terms are written in the Wylie form.

Chapter One: Introduction

"Song symbolizes *mantra*, dance symbolizes meditation, and so singing and dancing the *yogin* always acts."

—The *Hevajra Tantra*, translated by Snellgrove (1959, pt. I, Ch. 6, v. 13, p. 64).

South Asian traditional dances hold a distinct feature when practiced and offered in a Himalayan Buddhist tantric ritual context. These Vajrayāna tantric ritual dances, such as *caryānṛtya* (practice-dance) and *vajranṛtya* (*vajra*-dance) of the Newar and Tibetan traditions respectively, can be regarded as Himalayan Buddhist meditative ritual dances (Ahmed 2003; Khanna and Reddy 2020). The scope of this thesis work is limited to these two ritual dances, i.e. *sādhana-nṛtya*. As Vajrayāna practices, these ritual dances incorporate the body, speech, and mind of the practitioners through incorporating various postures while maintaining a view that is informed by their associated tradition. The most crucial aspect of these ritual dances is to maintain this view, which is termed as the philosophical posture in this thesis. Since it is the view that determines and orients all the associated postures and activities of these ritual dances as Vajrayāna practice, it can be said that the training of *sādhana-nṛtya* is essentially about developing and perfecting this view, i.e. the wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*) regarding the nature of reality. This thesis looks at the way one goes from conceptual understanding to actual embodiment beyond concept by examining one's training in *sādhana-nṛtya* through a practice-based research (hereafter PbR) approach. This training is summarized in three major phases (initial, pliancy, and liminal) in a proposed PbR model for creative practitioner researchers of *sādhana-nṛtya*.

Literature Review

The following concise presentation includes primarily the most significant textual materials consulted in this thesis. With regard to the textual materials pertaining to the aspect of

philosophical posture, Pettit's work (1999) is consulted for the doctrinal background of the rNying ma tradition, which also incorporates the bKa' brgyud tradition in certain aspects, as in the case of discussing the *anuttarayogatantra*. For an emic explanation in specific contexts, an English translation of Jigme Lingpa's (Tib. '*jigs med gling pa*, 1729-1798) work is referred (2013). In terms of academic scholarship relating to Yogācāra and *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, following works are considered. Westerhoff (2018) provides a background for Yogācāra thought in the thesis. Furthermore, Conze's overview of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature (1978), his discussion and translation on the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* (1973), i.e. the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, Brunnhölzl's study on the *gzhan stong* interpretation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature (2011), and his reflection and translation on the *Ornament of Clear Realization*, which is a commentary to the *Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-five Thousand Lines* (2010), i.e. *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* are consulted. As for the discussion relating to the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* (hereafter the DDV), a work by Mathes on Go Lotsawa Zhonnu Pel's (Tib. '*gos lo tsa ba gzhon nu dpal*, 1392-1481) interpretation of the DDV (2005) and a study by Prof. Denis on the structure of the DDV (Forthcoming) are also considered. With regard to the section on the relationship of between the mind and body, Harvey (1993) discusses this matter from the point of the view of Theravāda Buddhism, while Klein (2014) and Simmer-Brown (2001) bring a Vajrayāna perspective to the scenario. All of these works help in situating the philosophical posture of *sādhana-nṛtya* in the context of Vajrayāna philosophy.

In the discussion of the physical, verbal, and mental postures, Lerner's work (1983) on the treatment of the tantric ritual dances as a way to combine one's body (physical posture), speech (verbal posture), and mind (mental posture) is still an important resource, given the minimal exposure on this topic in academia to the present day. In the section on the combination

of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* (mental posture), studies by Kuan (2008) and Qing (2017), along with further contributions from Simmer-Brown (2001) and Harding (2002) are referenced. With respect to the discussion on the *ḍākinī* principle, Simmer-Brown's explanation is primarily consulted (2001), along with relevant contributions by English (2002), Bangdel (1999), Klein (1985), Harding (2013), and Cupchik (2015).[1]

As for the textual materials pertaining to the ritual dances and their *sādhana*-s, the following works are considered. While Harding's work on creation and completion stages provides a comprehensive overview of the *sādhana* from the point of the view of the Tibetan tradition (2002), a work by English (2002) offers a specific explanation of the Vajrayoginī *sādhana*. In the Newar context, Bangdel's dissertation (1999) on a Newar manuscript relating to the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *sādhana* sheds light on the *sādhana*-s associated with Vajrayoginī in the Newar tradition. As for the Tibetan context, Harding's study on the *gcod sādhana* (2013) gives a necessary background to the *sādhana* aspect of the *ḍākinī nṛtya* of the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* (Tib. *rdo rje phag mo khros ma nag mo*) in the Tibetan tradition. Furthermore, with respect to the *gcod sādhana*, Cupchik (2015) introduces an ethnomusicological perspective which is key in understanding how the components of creative arts and performance (playing musical instruments, singing songs, dancing, and so forth) are incorporated in the practice, as it directly relates to *sādhana-nṛtya* training.

[1] Additionally, the notion of the five Buddha families in the *anuttarayogatantra* practices is a topic of future research. In this regard, Callahan's translation work called *The Profound Inner Principles*, which is a commentary by the third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (Tib. *rang byung rdo rje*, 1284-1339), provides an explanation of the essential aspects of the *anuttarayogatantra* practices that includes a detailed presentation of the subtle body (Skt. *sūkṣma śarīra*), the process of purification, and the stages of the *sādhana*, especially the creation stage (Skt. *utpattikrama*, Tib. *bskyed rim*) practices (2014).

In the case of *caryānṛtya*, for its historical and doctrinal background, the works of Kvaerne (1977), Widdess (1997; 2004), Kitada (2012), and Braitstein (2014) are consulted. However, other than a work by Ahmed (2003) which discusses *caryānṛtya* in the context of its philosophical background, this topic is still minimally studied in academia, especially in bringing the perspective of the *sādhana-nṛtya* practitioners. For an emic explanation of *caryānṛtya*, a documentary called *Bajrayani Charya* is consulted (Padam 2018), along with explanations by Ratnakāji Vajrācārya (1986). As for *vajranṛtya*, de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1976) presents a background of ritual dances in the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, which is still considered a crucial resource in academia. For an emic perspective on the classification of *vajranṛtya* in Tibetan Buddhism, Jamgön Kongtrül's (Tib. '*jam mgon kong sprul*, 1813-1899) presentation (2013) is referred since he focuses on the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions. Among the recent academic scholarship on *vajranṛtya*, works of Samuel and David (2016), along with Khanna and Reddy (2020) are notable. Both of these studies acknowledge the need for further research on this topic, in particular, its philosophical aspect requires an in-depth analysis to better understand how the dancers apply Vajrayāna teachings to their ritual dance practice. Lastly, with regard to the aspect of PbR approach in this thesis, the works of Edmonds and Candy (2010a; 2010b) are primarily consulted. Since Sargent-Wishart's work (2012) is at the nexus of PbR and Vajrayāna Buddhism, her work is acknowledged. While there are various trajectories to a range of research frameworks that are based on PbR, this method is flexible enough to allow for the creativity and individuality of the creative practitioner researchers in designing their own research models. Hence, in this thesis, utilizing this advantage of the PbR approach, a specific model is proposed which is particularly applicable to *sādhana-nṛtya* practices.

Methods

In this thesis, three principal methods are employed: hermeneutics (textual interpretation), content analysis (textual analysis), and practice-based research approach (specific method for creative practitioner researchers). In terms of textual interpretation and analysis, while dealing with the doctrinal and lyrical literature[2] relating to Vajrayāna philosophy and *sādhana-nṛtya*, the methods of hermeneutics and content analysis are applied.[3] With regard to the former, it is much more fundamental to research work than a specific method since as a "philosophy of interpretation" every method necessitates a "hermeneutic reflection" (Gilhus 2011, 276). In fact, this hermeneutic reflection pervades the entire research process of this thesis that continuously challenges the previously held assumptions prior to examining the textual materials and facilitates in developing a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter. As for the latter, it is primarily applied to "draw specific inferences to particular contexts," (Nelson and Woods, Jr. 2011, 112), i.e. in this case, to the context of *sādhana-nṛtya* and utilize its advantage of allowing for "triangulation with other research methods" (Nelson and Woods, Jr. 2011, 111) by incorporating it in the PbR approach.

The PbR approach is employed to situate the study of *sādhana-nṛtya* at the broader context of dance and performance studies. This approach is particularly appropriate for creative practitioner researchers in the fields of creative arts and performance to conduct specific academic research on their topic of expertise.[4] The research process of the PbR model of this thesis can generally relate to that of any creative practitioner focusing on dance and performance

[2] The textual categories such as prescriptive, lyrical, and doctrinal literature are done in reference to Prof. Emmrich's work on Newar Buddhist manuscript culture (Emmrich 2009, 140–41).
[3] For explanations on hermeneutics and content analysis refer to the *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religions* (Stausberg and Engler 2011, 109–21, 275–84).
[4] The PbR method is discussed in detail in chapter five. For background information about this approach, refer to the works by Edmonds and Candy (2010a; 2010b).

studies. However, the three major phases identified in the model is subjected to variation since the PbR approach is meant for creative practitioner researchers with specific goals and interests. This method is still a newly emerging approach in academia and its diverse range of research process and outputs (academic and creative) continue to evolve as more and more creative practitioner researchers are considering this method.

The discussion on the subject matter of this thesis is structured in four subsequent chapters. Chapter two explains the major postures associated with *sādhana–nṛtya* practice with a particular emphasis on the philosophical posture. Since both *caryānṛtya* and *vajranṛtya* are Vajrayāna practices, in particular, belonging to the *anuttarayogatantra*-s focusing on *vajraḍākinī*-s (Vajrayāna female deities), chapter three provides a background for this class of *tantra* along with an overview of its *sādhana*-s (a type of method that incorporates meditation and rituals) that are based on *vajraḍākinī*-s. Chapter four discusses the case studies of this thesis, i.e. *caryānṛtya* and *vajranṛtya*. Chapter five presents a PbR model that is particularly designed for the *sādhana-nṛtya* training. The model identifies three major phases of the training, i.e. initial, pliancy, and liminal. The overall discussion of these chapters underscores the role of the philosophical posture, i.e. the significance of developing *prajñā* during *sādhana-nṛtya* training in achieving the specific goals and the ultimate aim.

Chapter Two: The View and Postures

This chapter is arranged in three major segments: i. the philosophical posture; ii. the physical, verbal, and mental postures; and iii. the symbolic posture. These segments are further divided into smaller sections to explain the significance of these postures in the Himalayan Buddhist meditative ritual dances that employ Buddhist female figures, i.e. *vajraḍākinī sādhana-nṛtya* practices.[5] The first segment on the philosophical posture is concerned with the importance of the view for the practice of ritual dances belonging to the *anuttarayogatantra*[6] practices. The second segment dealing with physical, verbal, and mental postures discusses the synchronization of the body, speech, and mind as one trains in these ritual dances. The third segment on the symbolic posture explains the *ḍākinī* principle and how it is applied specifically to the *caryā-nṛtya* of (wrathful red) Vajrayoginī and the *ḍākinī-nṛtya* of the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* of Newar and Tibetan traditions respectively. This chapter shows that the Himalayan Buddhist meditative ritual dances using the Buddhist anthropomorphic figures pertain to *prajñā* (wisdom)

[5] The term "*vajraḍākinī*" refers to the concepts and symbols pertaining to *ḍākinī/yoginī* in Vajrayāna Buddhism (English 2002, 44), it is translated here as "Buddhist female figures." The term *sādhana* is translated as "meditative ritual," note that in certain discussions its yogic aspect is emphasized. In one of her works, English defines *sādhana* as a "progressive sequence of meditative and ritual procedures that focus upon a particular deity or set of deities" (English 2002, 24–25). It is important to note that the meditation aspect includes both visualization (creation stage) and inner yogic practices (completion stage) of the *sādhana*-s (English 2002, 173). Ratnakāji Vajrācārya, a prominent Newar scholar and *caryānṛtya* master, translates *sādhana* as a "yogic meditation" practice (R. Vajrācārya 1986, 5). Lastly, the term "*nṛtya*" refers to dance practice.

[6] According to Pettit's reflection on the classification of the *tantra*-s (Pettit 1999, 63), the *anuttarayogatantra* (unexcelled union *tantra*) is primarily a classification of the new traditions (Tib. *gsar lugs*), which corresponds to the inner *tantra*-s (Tib. *nang rgyud*) of the old tradition or rNying ma school. However, the *anuttarayogatantra*-s and the inner *tantra*-s are not strictly delineated as new and old tradition schools. For example, Dudjom Rinpoche refers to the rNying ma *tantra*-s in terms of the four classes of the new traditions and regards the inner *tantra*-s (*maha*-, *anu*-, *ati*- *yoga tantra*-s) as the *anuttarayogatantra*-s. A significant aspect of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s is gaining a firm conviction that one *is* the deity. In the Newar tradition, Vajrayāna practices regarding visualizing oneself as the deity are noted as corresponding to the *anuttarayogatantra*-s (Bangdel 1999, 895; Padam 2018). For the sake of uniformity, the term *anuttarayogatantra* is used in this thesis work to indicate all of these Vajrayāna deity practices. In general, the term *tantra* (Tib. *rgyud*) is understood in Buddhism as the "natural continuum or unbroken stream flowing from fundamental ignorance to enlightenment." It also refers to the uninterrupted continuity of the ground, path, and fruition during the course of the training of a practitioner to become fully enlightened. Furthermore, *tantra* also refers to the collection of texts relating to the six classes of *tantra* in Vajrayāna (Tibetan and Himalayan Library).

in a three-fold manner—a. through the use of an operative philosophical view; b. through synchronizing the body, speech, and mind; and c. through the use here of the *ḍākinī* principle of the Vajrayāna tradition.

I. The role of *prajñā* in *sādhana-nṛtya*—a philosophical posture (the view)

In the Himalayan Buddhist meditative ritual dance (*sādhana-nṛtya*), a philosophical posture, i.e. the view, is first and foremost since by orienting the practice (Skt. *yoga*, Tib. *sbyor ba*), it serves as the ground. The idea of practice here relates to the term *yoga* which deserves particular attention. Its Sanskrit verb root √*yuj* means "to yoke, harness," "to apply," "to turn or direct towards," "to join, unite, bring together," "to prepare, arrange, equip," and so forth. The corresponding Tibetan term *sbyor ba* indicates a similar meaning: "to apply (oneself) to," "to be united with," "preparation," and so forth.[7] These yogic practices are understood in this manner with an implication of being the right way, authentic, accurate or just (Skt. *samyak*, Tib. *yang dag*). From the point of the view of the associated tradition, it indicates that this posture is completely, absolutely, and perfectly in accord with the fact that the nature of all that appears (Skt. *dharmatā*) is empty and naturally luminous, as expounded in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.[8] The realization of this ultimate truth is regarded as the perfection of wisdom (Skt.

[7] The meanings are obtained from Sanskrit and Tibetan dictionaries. Detailed information about the sources for the dictionaries are noted on page iv.

[8] Kapstein writes to this effect that the nature of all that appears is empty and luminous in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature is primarily a *gzhan stong* view. For example, Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen (Tib. *dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan*, 1292-1361), a prominent proponent of the doctrine of extrinsic emptiness (Tib. *gzhan stong*) explains the true nature of all phenomena in the light of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*-s as being empty, naturally luminous (Skt. *prakṛtiprakāśa*, Tib. *rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba*), and hence good (Skt. *kuśala*, Tib. *dge ba*) or conducive to liberation (Kapstein 2001, 304). This *gzhan stong* view is further reflected as Dolpopa and Tāranātha (1575-1634) interpret *Prajñāpāramitā* as the direct and pure (i.e. nondual) cognition that realizes emptiness not as emptiness itself (Kapstein 2001, 305–6). The *gzhan stong* position can also be traced in early Indian texts such as *Śatasāhasrikāpañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāṣṭādaśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitābṛhaṭṭīkā* (hereafter the *bṛhaṭṭīkā*), which is a commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*-s by Vasubandhu (authorship disputed) and *Bhagavatyāmnāyānusāriṇīnāmavyākhyā* (hereafter the *āmnāyānusāriṇī*) by Jagaddalanivāsin, which is a commentary on the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*. Both of these texts explain the perfect nature (ultimate reality, natural luminosity, *dharmadhātu*, *śūnyatā*) as being empty of something other (imaginary nature and dependent nature), but not of itself (Brunnhölzl 2011, 63, 195–96). For a chronological survey of the

prajñāpāramitā, Tib. *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa*). Thus, with regard to the philosophical posture, from a general Buddhist perspective, the perfection of wisdom refers to the experience of seeing suchness (Skt. *tathatā*, Tib. *de bzhin nyid*) just as it is, transcending all conceptual constructs and elaborations (Conze 2001, xix, 117).

More specifically, in the rNying ma tradition, this suchness is understood as the coalescence (Skt. *yuganaddha*, Tib. *zung 'jug*) of appearance (also seen as great purity) and emptiness (also viewed as great equality),[9] which in terms of luminous emptiness (Tib. *gsal stong*), is understood as being devoid of all conceptual constructs yet full of supreme attributes (Pettit 1999, 62–68). In other words, the nature of all that is apprehended and experienced, i.e. appearances and afflictions, is devoid of a substantial existence and in essence these are the abodes (Skt. *maṇḍala*) for the bodies (Skt. *kāya*) and wisdoms (Skt. *jñāna*) of Buddhahood,[10] which are the supreme qualities of enlightenment.[11] The heart of the practices of the rNying ma tradition lies on the fundamental premise that the boundless enlightened qualities are already

Prajñāpāramitāsūtra-s along with the commentarial literature (Nāgārjuna, Yogācāra, *Abhisamayālaṃkara*) and tantric influence, refer to Conze (1978). For *gzhan stong* position in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, refer to Brunnhölzl (2011).

[9] In the *anuttarayogatantra*-s, which correspond to the inner *tantra*-s of the rNying ma tradition, the great purity is the aspect of appearance and the great equality is the aspect of emptiness. These two aspects are seen as inseparable. These two aspects are explained in details in *The View Expounded in the Guhyagarbha, the Root Tantra of the Māyājāla Cycle*, translated by Padmakara Translation Group (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:341–50). Furthermore, the works of Rongzom and Mipham (who was influenced by the former to a certain extent) regarding the notions of great purity and equality are noteworthy: Rongzom's *Establishing Appearance as Divine* (Köppl and Chözang 2008) and Mipham's *Beacon of Certainty* (Pettit 1999), specifically the fifth and sixth topic in the case of the latter.

[10] In the appendix materials of the *Treasury of Precious Qualities*, a commentary by Kongtrül on the *View Expounded in the Guhyagarbha, the Root Tantra of the Māyājāla Cycle* is included (appendix 3). The text states that: "all appearances are pure in being deities" and "all defilements are pure in being primordial wisdom" (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Kongtrül 2013, 342). This means that everything is seen as pure by treating emptiness as all-pervasive and endowed with supreme qualities. All appearances and defilements are equal in terms of lacking a substantial existence (emptiness or great equality), yet in essence these are luminous in nature as they possess the supreme attributes of Buddhahood, such as the *kāya*-s and wisdoms (appearance or great purity).

[11] Pettit points out that that in the *anuttarayogatantra*-s, emptiness is treated as being indivisible from the "infinite pure phenomena of enlightenment" or the "innate wisdom of luminosity" (1999, 65), manifesting as Buddha bodies and wisdoms.

immanent in all beings and aims to uncover the source of these qualities, i.e. the "innate gnosis (Skt. *sahajajñāna*, Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*)" (see Pettit 1999, 65) or the primordial wisdom nature of the mind. This also applies to most if not all bKa' brgyud tantric practices.

In the *sādhana-nṛtya* practices (meditative ritual dances), unveiling this primordial wisdom nature of the mind can be done by first holding a philosophical posture (the view). This view is in accord with suchness (Skt. *tathatā*), where one trains to perceive without conceptually elaborating anything. The habit of fabricating is therefore confronted and brought to light. To do this, one first needs to gain a conviction by understanding that the true essence of everything (Skt. *dharmatā*) is the unity of appearance (luminosity) and emptiness (openness without reference). From this point of view, all concepts, emotions, images, movement are in essence suchness (Skt. *tathatā*), in other words, the inexpressible and inconceivable ultimate reality.

This view of the unity of appearance and emptiness is constantly brought to one's mind in the *sādhana-nṛtya* practices in the manner of attuning oneself to develop pure perception (Tib. *dag snang*), which is beyond the dualistic apprehension of an ordinary mind. Kongtrül maintains that according to the *anuttarayogatantra*-s and in particular the inner *tantra*-s of the rNying ma tradition, this conceptual elaboration by the ordinary mind is regarded as impure since it does not accurately apprehend the reality, while the primordial wisdom (Skt. *jñāna*, Tib. *ye shes*), which is the true nature of the mind, sees everything in the right way (Skt. *samyak*, Tib. *yang dag*) that is in perfect accord with the nature of reality (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Kongtrül 2013, 342–45). This correct way of seeing does not superimpose, denigrate, or conceptualize in any other way. Rather, this unmediated way of seeing directly recognizes the empty yet luminous essence of all appearances and afflictions, which is understood as pure perception.

A *sādhana-nṛtya* practitioner strives to see everything just as it is by breaking the usual pattern of the ordinary dualistic mind. This is done by first holding a philosophical posture that allows one to see everything nakedly and directly, without any elaborations and denigrations whatsoever. From a PbR perspective,[12] maintaining this view is already a great challenge to the habitual way of being and in fact, it may actually be the most difficult part of the practice itself. When applied in a *sādhana-nṛtya* context, practice (Skt. *yoga*) is an integral aspect of the entire process of the dance training that is relentlessly rehearsed to embody and to maintain the philosophical, psychophysical, and symbolic postures.[13] However, as noted earlier, the aspect of the philosophical posture is the first and most demanding step of the training. At first, through study, reflection, and meditation, one clearly discerns the view and gradually develops a certainty that the view is in accord with the nature of the reality. According to Lingpa's interpretation of the rNying ma tradition, the usual mode of operating in the world is that of the ordinary deluded mind, which apprehends everything in an erroneous way, while the authentic way of engaging in this very *saṃsāra* is by realizing the inseparability of the great purity and great equality of all phenomena.[14] In general, through holding a philosophical posture, one trains

[12] PbR is a multidisciplinary approach where a "creative artifact," such as interactive digital art, music, dance, creative cognition, and so forth, serves as a foundation to generate new knowledge that can be shared, contextualized, evaluated, and challenged. The method and outcome for this approach are accomplished through practicing various forms of creative arts. This approach employs creative ways to design and execute research models across the disciplines of arts and humanities (Edmonds and Candy 2010b, 122–30; Candy 2006, 1–3). Chapter five of this thesis introduces a PbR model for the Himalayan Buddhist ritual dances.

[13] Practice is regarded as the core component of a PbR approach as it facilitates in attaining new knowledge (Candy 2006, 1) and bringing "tangible outcomes" (Edmonds and Candy 2010b, 130) such as exhibitions, performances, and so forth. In the context of the *sādhana-nṛtya*, the component of practice can be understood as *yoga*, which incorporates the philosophical, psychophysical, and symbolic postures that are in correct alignment with the nature of the reality.

[14] While discussing the *View Expounded in the Guhyagarbha*, Blankleder and Wulstan note that "the deluded perceptions of *saṃsāra* are the natural display of the ordinary mind," while "pure appearances, by contrast, are the natural display of primordial wisdom" (Blankleder and Fletcher 2010, 2:476). In terms of the "uncommon view" of the *Guhyagarbha*, according to Kongtrül, all Buddhist views are subsumed into the superior relative truth of great purity and superior ultimate truth of great equality which are seen as inseparable in the view of the self-cognizing awareness (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Kongtrül 2013, 341).

in bringing this realization to one's everyday lived experience. In the context of *sādhana-nṛtya*, holding a philosophical posture aims at transforming an already existing intellectual understanding of luminous emptiness into the domain of an embodied experience of a dancer and eventually to all activities at all times.

Such transformation can be achieved with the aid of incorporating various ways of practices such as movements, postures, recitations, visualizations, and so forth that cultivate the multifaceted dimensions of one's experiential and creative domains, such as psycho-physical, somatic, "energetic," "intentional," "attentional," "aesthetic," and so forth (Klein 2014, 572). In this context, wisdom is understood as an experiential and embodied awareness, that reveals the luminous and non-dual nature of the body, speech, and mind of a practitioner. In terms of the philosophical posture in the *sādhana*-s, the practice of holding and maintaining the view of the unity of appearance and emptiness "dissolves"[15] (Klein 2014, 580) the habitual way of the ordinary mind that grasps to a self. This process of dissolving happens in a "viscerally" (Klein 2014, 580) experiential way that directly challenges one's habitual tendency to dualistically apprehend and constantly reify everything. The *sādhana-nṛtya* practices, being the components of the larger cycles of the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s, cultivate the view in the same manner. In essence, this view is in accord with the true nature of all phenomena (Skt. *dharmatā*) and developed by striving to maintain a pure perception (inner *yoga* or inner dance of the mind).

To clearly articulate the philosophical posture of the *sādhana-nṛtya*, these two crucial aspects, i.e. pure perception and *dharmatā*, are discussed in detail in the next two sections. While

[15] With regard to the process of dissolving the grasping to a self, Klein brings particular attention to the verbs associating with holding or grasping. In Tibetan, it is '*dzin*, which is translated from a Sanskrit verb called *grah*, indicating the action of holding or grasping. In practice, it is not just the idea or notion of a self that is being deconstructed, rather the very act of grasping or holding one's mind-body complex as a self gradually dissolves during the Vajrayāna *sādhana* practices (Klein 2014, 579–80).

it is the mind that holds the philosophical posture in these meditative ritual dances, what is the role of the body in this context? How are the mind and body incorporated in these yogic dance practices? To understand this aspect, in the third section, a brief account of the progression of the Buddhist thought regarding the relationship between the mind and body is presented. Finally, this segment on the philosophical posture concludes with a discussion on its application to the *vajraḍākinī sādhana-nṛtya*.

The notion of pure perception and the influence of Yogācāra thought

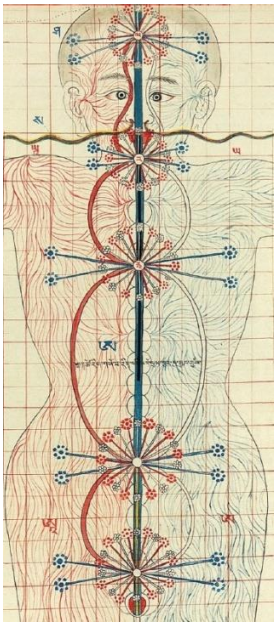
One of the key features of the *anuttarayogatantra* practices is to visualize oneself as a meditational deity (Skt. *iṣṭadevatā*, Tib. *yi dam lha*), until the qualities of the deity are internalized to the extent that one discovers that one is indeed the deity. To do so, at first, one holds a philosophical posture based on the notion of pure perception (Tib. *dag snang*) to see everything as a coalescence of appearance and emptiness. The *anuttarayogatantra* practices are done in two major phases: creation stage (Skt. *utpattikrama*, Tib. *bskyed rim*) and completion stage (Skt. *sampannakrama*, Tib. *rdzogs rim*). The *anuttarayogatantra* tradition explains the progress of the creation and completion stages in the following manner. In the creation stage, a practitioner develops a pure perception in seeing appearances as deities, sound as *mantra*, and thoughts as wisdom.[16] The body is described as being subtly made of channels (a notion similar to Meridien in Chinese medicine) and wind (associated with the movement of the breath or energy) so that in the subsequent stage of completion, through the mastery over one's subtle body (Skt. *sūkṣma śarīra*),[17] one directs the wind (Skt. *prāṇa*, Tib. *rlung*) into the central channel

[16] Pure perception is a Vajrayāna principle employed in the *sādhana*-s where one treats "all sounds as *mantra*, all beings as Buddha and the entire universe as *nirvāṇa*" (Blofeld 1970, 199). Maintaining pure perception is an essential component of deity practice in Vajrayāna *sādhana*-s, where the deities are the "enlightened form" which "already exists within the true nature of mind" (Harding 2002, 10).

[17] Prof. Braitstein uses the Sanskrit term *sūkṣma śarīra* to refer to subtle body (2014, 33), which is closer to the literal meaning of the term subtle, in comparison to *māyādeha*, as employed by Simmer-Brown (2001, 168).

(Skt. *avadhūtī*, Tib. *rtsa dbu ma*), which is the locus for the wisdom energy (Tib. *ye shes kyi rlung*).

Figure 2.1
The three major channels of the subtle body as illustrated in Tibetan medicine[18]



During the stage of completion, as the wind flows uninhibitedly into the central channel, all the afflictions and obscurations are cleared away, inducing the recognition of the innate luminosity (Skt. *prakṛtiprabhāsvara*, Tib. *rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal* or *gnyug ma'i 'od gsal*) as the nature of the enlightened mind (Skt. *bodhicitta*, Tib. *byang chub sems*).[19] As this experience of

Simmer-Brown uses the terms subtle and illusory interchangeably, which warrants caution in terms of translation as these two terms can refer to quite different experiences or principles. In this context, subtle is better understood by the term *sūkṣma* rather than *māyā*. Prof. Braitstein does not provide any corresponding Tibetan term for subtle body, perhaps due to the fact that the commonly used Tibetan term for subtle body, i.e. *sgyu lus* (which Simmer-Brown also uses), means illusory body, which is a closer meaning to *māyādeha* than *sūkṣma śarīra*.

[18] The image illustrates the three main channels of the subtle body in a male figure, i.e. the central channel (Skt. *avadhūtī*, Tib. *rtsa dbu ma*), the white channel (Skt. *lalanā*, Tib. *rkyang ma*), and the red channel (Skt. *rasanā*, Tib. *ro ma*). The placements of *lalanā* and *rasanā* are reversed in men and women. As shown in the figure, the white and red channels are wrapped around the central channel at five major *cakra*-s (wheels or energy centers). The *anuttarayogatantra*-based completion stage practices focus on releasing these knots so that the wind (Skt. *prāṇa*, Tib. *rlung*) can uninterruptedly flow through the central channel (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 237–38, 1150, 1711–12). The image is from the *Tibetan Medical Paintings: Illustrations to the Blue Beryl Treatise of sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705) Plates and Text*, Plate: 12, detail. Reproduced in the *Being Human in a Buddhist World* (Gyatso 2015, 273).

[19] Terms such as wisdom energy, innate luminosity, enlightened mind have specific application when these are associated with the subtle body yogic practices during the completion stage. For specific explanations of the

luminosity intensifies with an increasing clarity, the practitioner no longer needs to exert in practicing pure perception. Rather, it becomes an effortless direct perception of seeing all that appears as the "spontaneous manifestation of reality" (Skt. *dharmatā*, Tib. *chos nyid*), i.e. suchness (Pettit 1999, 64). This is also often phrased as seeing appearances as divine or pure, which means to directly see their empty yet luminous nature. The aspect of all that appears to an ordinary mind encompasses all that is experienced as well, which are the afflictions or defilements. These are also seen as pure since the true nature of all afflictions is primordial wisdom.[20] Thus, from the perspective of pure perception, the essence of all that is seen and experienced by the mind is regarded as pure, i.e. empty yet luminous.

The main purpose for developing pure perception is to train oneself in seeing everything as being "equally empty and apparent" (Köppl and Chözang 2008, 53). While training in this way, one gradually becomes confident about the unity of appearance and emptiness in everything, which enables one to release oneself from the rigidity of the dualistic constructions and conceptual elaborations (Pettit 1999, 171). This approach of pure perception is based on a fundamental premise that everything that appears is mind-only (Skt. *cittamātra*), which is a distinguishing feature of the Yogācāra thought (Westerhoff 2018, 168–69). This implies that for this tradition, the external objects are not substantially existent and whatever one perceives, depends on the apprehending subject, i.e. the mind.

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completion stage practices in the context of the six *yoga*-s of Nāropa, refer to the work by Kemp (2015). As for the Great Perfection practices, in this regard, Baker has produced several works (2017; 2018). To understand tantric alchemy and subtle body in a broader context of the medieval Siddha and Hindu traditions, White's *The Alchemical Body* is noteworthy (1996).

[20] As noted earlier in footnote 10, the aspect of purity includes both appearances and afflictions. For detailed explanation, refer to Blankleder, Fletcher, Kongtrül, and Lingpa's interpretation of the *View Expounded in the Guhyagarbha, the Root Tantra of the Māyājāla Cycle* (2013, 2:341–50).

From a mind-only view, while all the external objects are the products of the mind, this perceiving subject involves a reflexive awareness (Skt. *svasaṃvedana*), which is a nondual cognition (Skt. *advayajñāna*) in nature (Westerhoff 2018, 174–75). When one discovers that the usual approach of the mind to conceptualize and fabricate does not accurately represent the reality, one gradually begins to *undo* this habitual tendency (conditioning), which allows for seeing the true nature of reality just it is (suchness). If one's environment is considered essentially a mental phenomenon, then one can shift one's *seemingly* default *saṃsāra*-oriented experience into a *nirvāṇa*-oriented one. Because everything is regarded as a mental phenomenon and since the mind has a reflexive awareness of having a nondual cognition, such nirvāṇic orientation becomes possible. This radical shift in one's experience allows one to realize the true nature of reality. In the meditative practices, it is said that through non-conceptual meditative cognitions, one is able to see the reality in a "non-erroneous manner (Skt. *abhrānta*)" (Westerhoff 2018, 196).[21] This has a crucial implication in the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana* practices.

In the meditative practices of the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s, one develops pure perception by visualizing oneself and others as deities and their environment as a *maṇḍala* (pure abode of the deities) because of the very fact that in essence both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* have the same nature of emptiness. Furthermore, since everything is mental in nature, the mind-only view serves as a "natural theoretical underpinning" for the Vajrayāna *sādhana* practices (Westerhoff 2018, 199). In this context, emptiness is understood in a *gzhan stong* manner, i.e. being

[21] The Yogācārins put a special emphasis on meditative practices and maintain that meditative cognitions as epistemic instruments are non-conceptual (Skt. *nirvikalpa*, Tib. *rnam par mi rtog pa*) that facilitate in directly accessing the reality without any superimpositions or conceptual constructs (Westerhoff 2018, 196–97).

inseparable with luminosity.[22] This treatment of qualified emptiness allows for visualizing and recognizing oneself as a deity which is devoid of a substantial existence (Skt. *svabhāva*) yet endowed with supreme qualities.

Pure perception is a significant aspect in the philosophical posture of the meditative ritual dances as it directs the practitioners to go against the usual tendency to elaborate, while maintaining an implicative negation regarding emptiness. In other words, through habituation of maintaining a pure perception-based philosophical posture which is operative in nature, one undergoes a training to see that all that appears is devoid of an intrinsic substantial existence (Skt. *svabhāva-śūnya*) yet luminous in its essence (Skt. *prakṛtiprabhāsvaratā*). This nature of being empty yet luminous can be further understood by looking at the notion of *dharmatā* in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.

The notion of *dharmatā* and the influence of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature

The notion of *dharmatā* is invariably connected with the term *dharma*. Etymologically, the word *dharma* is based on a Sanskrit verb root √*dhṛ*, which means "to hold" or "to maintain." One of the meanings of *dharma* is a "quality" or "characteristic" (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 623–24). Thus, in the *Abhidharma* literature, a *dharma* can be understood as that which holds or maintains its own quality or characteristic (Westerhoff 2018, 71). However, the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature maintains that when thoroughly investigated, nothing whatsoever holds any inherent characteristic. In other words, all phenomena, including the mind that apprehends them, have the

[22] According to the *gzhan stong* view, emptiness is in unity with luminosity (qualified emptiness), which affirms the spontaneous presence of the supreme attributes. In this regard, Prof. Braitstein notes that emptiness is also understood as *vajra*, the nature of the reality, which is "sealed" (2014, 53) with these positive attributes such as "bliss" and also "indestructibility, inherent purity, clarity of emptiness," (2014, 52) and so forth. This implicative negation of emptiness and other essential features of the *gzhan stong* view in light of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature are discussed in detail by Brunnhölzl (2011).

nature of emptiness (Brunnhölzl 2010, 1:27). The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, i.e. the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, refers to this treatment of all phenomena as "the non-appropriation of all *dharma*-s," which is the correct way to train in *prajñāpāramitā* (Conze 1973, 85). The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*[23] explains the nature of such training that one should meditate in a non-referential manner so that one does not cling to any characteristic of anything at all, including one's own subjective mind (Brunnhölzl 2010, 1:55). In this regard, a key teaching of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature is that just as all phenomena lack an inherent quality, the mind apprehending them is equally empty (Brunnhölzl 2010, 1:122–23). In addition to being empty, the mind is also regarded as luminous in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Conze 1973, chap. I, p. 84). The *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā*[24] explains natural luminosity as a state when the mind does not erroneously impute anymore. In other words, the mind no longer constructs that which does not exist in a dualistic manner, which is, in a Yogācāra term, called false imagination or imputed nature[25] (Brunnhölzl 2010, 1:83). In the same vein, from a Yogācāra perspective where everything is a mental phenomenon, appearances, i.e. the *dharma*-s are treated as mere representations (Skt. *vijñāptimātra*) or representational forms (Skt. *ākāra*) appearing as mental images in one's mind.[26] The *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* (hereafter the DDV) emphasizes this

[23] The *Abhisamayālaṃkara*, i.e. the *Ornament of Clear Realization*, is primarily a commentary to the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, i.e. the *Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-five Thousand Lines* (Brunnhölzl 2010, 1:59).

[24] The *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā* is a commentary to the *Abhisamayālaṃkara* by Haribhadra, an eighth century Indian Buddhist scholar.

[25] One of the key Yogācāra concepts is the theory of the three natures (Skt. *trisvabhāva*). The three natures are the imputed nature or false imagination (Skt. *parikalpita-svabhāva*), the dependent nature (Skt. *paratantra-svabhāva*), and the perfectly present or thoroughly established nature (Skt. *pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*). The imputed nature is the mistaken engagement of the mind that leads to illusions, such as seeing a mirage in a desert. The dependent nature refers to the interdependent factors underneath the illusions, in this case, air, temperature, light, and so forth. The perfected nature is suchness, in this case, the fact that there is no water in the interdependent factors in the mirage example (Westerhoff 2018, 182). It is due the erroneous engagement by the mind that one experiences an illusion of a mirage.

[26] The positions of *Satyākāravādins* and *Alīkākārāvādins* are noteworthy regarding the status of representational forms (Skt. *ākāra*) within the theory of the three natures. For the former, *ākāra*-s are the basis of mistaken

aspect where a *dharma* is that which appears along with its expressions (words, meanings, and so forth) due to the mistaken engagement of the ordinary mind, i.e. engaging in a dualistic manner of apprehending a perceiving subject and perceived objects (Mathes 2005, 6, 8–11). When this mistaken engagement is rectified, the luminous nature of all phenomena (Skt. *dharmatā*) is recognized, which is also an aspect of the nature of the mind.[27]

In the DDV, *dharmatā* as natural luminosity (Skt. *prakṛtiprabhāsvaratā*) is associated with the continuum of the "stainless true nature of one's mind" (Mathes 2005, 3), which exists as naturally pure and self-cognizant, even during the occurrence of defilements (Skt. *kleśa*).[28] Due to one's habitual tendency to conceptualize and elaborate, one dualistically apprehends, preventing the nature of reality (Skt. *dharmatā*) to be seen. In this context, the notion of support in the DDV can further illuminate the situation. At this stage, one operates on a dualistic basis, treats it as the primary support for the saṃsāric experience, and remains bound within this mode of operation. However, as soon as one begins to see that all the disturbances or afflictions that arise due to this erroneous engagement are merely adventitious stains and that going beyond duality is indeed doable, one learns to familiarize in taking suchness or the nature of reality (Skt. *dharmatā*) as the main support of operation. Due to this shift in one's basis (Skt. *āśrayaparivṛtti*, Tib. *gnas gyur*),[29] one realizes the nature of defilements, which is the absence of duality, i.e.

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appearances and they see them as dependent nature. For the latter, *ākāra*-s are totally non-existent although they appear erroneously and they treat them as imaginary nature (Westerhoff 2018, 173–75).

[27] Mahājana's *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdayārthaparijñāna* explains in a Yogācāra manner that emptiness entails "eliminating the extremes of undue superimpositions of existence onto phenomena such as form and undue denials of the ultimate existence of the *dharmadhātu*. In addition, all phenomena are said to have the character of mind's luminous nature" (Brunnhölzl 2011, 127).

[28] The notion of *dharmatā* as a stainless continuation of the pure nature of the mind within the continuum of all defilements is an interpretation of Go Lotsawa Zhonnu Pel (Tib. '*gos lo tsa ba gzhon nu dpal*, 1392-1481) in explaining the DDV (Mathes 2005, 3–4).

[29] Prof. Denis points out that in the DDV, the shift in one's basis from duality, i.e. *dharma* to suchness, i.e. *dharmatā* relates to non-referentiality. In this context, shifting one's basis (Skt. *āśrayaparivṛtti*, Tib. *gnas gyur*) is the perfection of wisdom (Skt. *prajñāpāramitā*) that takes the "fundamental non-conceptual intelligence (Skt. *nirvikalpajñāna*)" as the primary support, which relates to suchness (Denis Forthcoming, 22–23). In other words, as

dharmatā or *nirvāṇa* (Denis Forthcoming, 15–25). As a result, the natural luminosity of the mind shines forth.[30] This is analogous to the sky and clouds, where the sky represents the nature of reality (Skt. *dharmatā*, *tathatā*) and the clouds are likened to the adventitious stains (Skt. *kleśa*). Just as the essence of the sky remains unchanged whether it is temporarily covered by the clouds or not, similarly, the nature of reality remains naturally pure regardless of being obscured by adventitious stains or not.[31]

According to a common interpretation of the *gzhan stong* view, when the mind engages in an erroneous way and conceptually elaborates, it is a "mistakenness," and on the contrary, when the mind directly recognizes its own stainless, lucid nature, it is an "unmistaken nondual wisdom"[32] (Brunnhölzl 2011, 145). Once all the obscurations are gradually removed, the nature of all phenomena (i.e. luminosity) is realized. The role of the "nondual lucid self-awareness" (Brunnhölzl 2011, 157) of the mind is noteworthy since it is the "supreme form of valid cognition" (Brunnhölzl 2011, 138) through which the mind directly sees suchness, i.e. the luminosity of all phenomena (Brunnhölzl 2011, 145–48).[33] In other words, all appearances are the luminous aspect of the mind, while its unmediated way of seeing suchness just as it is, is its

discussed earlier, it is about the "non-appropriation of all *dharma*-s" as mentioned the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. In essence, by not imputing any inherent characteristics or grasping anything as a point of reference or basis enables one to "dwell" in the perfection of wisdom and non-abiding *nirvāṇa*.

[30] Brunnhölzl indicates that the nature of the mind never being a part of the *kleśa*-s is a *gzhan stong* view. Furthermore, it is also a *gzhan stong* position that the perfect nature (mind's natural luminosity, *dharmatā*-form) is what remains once the obscurations (imaginary and dependent natures) are cleared away. These explanations are based on the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā* and *Āmnāyānusāriṇī* (Brunnhölzl 2011, 32–37, 40–43).

[31] The analogy of sky/clouds with suchness/adventitious stains is a common example found in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, the DDV, and so forth. The *Āmnāyānusāriṇī* discusses this analogy by equating the perfect nature as *prajñāpāramitā* and is identified as being "naturally profound because it is naturally pure and naturally devoid of all obscurations" (Brunnhölzl 2011, 83).

[32] Ratnākaraśānti (970-1045 approx.) explains that when the mind engages in a mistaken way, it fabricates. But when it recognizes its own true nature, it discovers its self-aware, lucid nature (Brunnhölzl 2011, 145).

[33] Although Ratnākaraśānti does not agree with all the positions of the *gzhan stong pa*-s, he accords with the *gzhan stong* view in terms of emphasizing the significance of lucid, self-awareness nature of the mind when it comes to realization. For him, this very self-awareness or lucidity of the mind is the "nature of the experiential quality of realizing the ultimate" (Brunnhölzl 2011, 147). Because once all the obscurations are eliminated, all that remains is the "self-aware luminosity" (Brunnhölzl 2011, 157).

aspect of natural clarity or lucidity. In the meditative practices of the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s, one develops a pure perception-based philosophical posture that functions in an operative manner by stripping away all the unnecessary conceptual elaborations of the mind, while not denigrating its luminous essence. Through maintaining an outlook of this qualitative emptiness, one is trained to be one with the deity by recognizing the true nature of reality (Skt. *dharmatā*) as the natural luminosity of the mind.[34] For it is precisely due to the virtue of the *dharmatā* that the essence of the mind is luminosity.[35] The view of luminous emptiness facilities in embodying the empty yet luminous deity in the *sādhana*-s.

While this pure perception-based philosophical posture is held by the mind, how does *sādhana-nṛtya* utilizes the body? How does one integrate the philosophical posture into the domain of the physical postures? In other words, how are the mind and body incorporated in the meditative ritual dance practices? To understand the interplay of the mind and body in the *anuttarayogatantra* practices, a brief account of the progression of the treatment of the mind and body in the Buddhist thought is in order.

The relationship of the mind and body as neither same nor different

To understand how the early Buddhist thought addresses the issues relating to the mind and body, it is prudent to consider the Indian philosophical schools that were in conversation with the newly emerging Buddhist ones.[36] In particular, the Brāhmanical thought merits special

[34] The direct experience of the natural luminosity of the mind during deity yoga can also be termed as the "subjectless subjectivity," which goes beyond dualistic subjectivity and transforms afflictions into co-emergent wisdom (Simmer-Brown 2001, 151, 149–53).
[35] The *Āmnāyānusāriṇī* while commenting on the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* (Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines), indicates *dharmatā* as the reason for the luminous nature of the mind (Brunnhölzl 2011, 80–81).
[36] Collins discusses the Brāhmanical belief system of *saṃsāra-karma-mokṣa* (the round of rebirth, action, and liberation). Although the early Buddhist thought adopts its general framework, there are specific Buddhist treatments to the key concepts such as (not-) self, liberation, and so forth (Collins 1982, 71–84). Kapstein discusses the issue regarding (not-)self in the early Buddhist thought against the background of the Indian classical

attention which maintains that there is a distinction between the psycho-physical components (body, sense-faculties, intellect, and so forth) that are made out of *prakṛti* (forms of the material world) and the real person (Skt. *puruṣa*), which is an actual self as a personification of the *ātman* (Collins 1982, 81; Kapstein 2001, 39). This *ātman*, which is in "absolute opposition" to the *prakṛti*, is regarded as being permanent and all-pervasive (Kapstein 2001, 39),[37] which is the ultimate agent behind all the seeing, thinking, and feeling (Collins 1982, 80). This is in stark contrast to the core teachings of the Buddhist thought, for example, the doctrines of not-self (Skt. *anattā*), dependent origination (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*), theory of momentariness, and so forth.

In the early Buddhist context, the denial of self, along with the significance of karmic causality and interdependence—neither allow for such a distinction between the mind and body nor for the autonomy of the mind as the principal agent. To emphasize the aspects of being amongst others, composite, interdependent, impermanent, and not-self, the Abhidharma literature defines the mind and body as the components of the five aggregates (Skt. *skandha*, Tib. *phung po*).[38] Among the five aggregates, the coarse body relates to the aggregate of form that is physical or material (Skt. *rūpa*), while the rest are mental in nature (collectively termed as *nāma*), including the aggregate of consciousness (Skt. *vijñāna*) that relates to the mind (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 1395, 2024). In the Pāli canon, the relationship between the *nāma-rūpa* (name and form), i.e. the mind and body, is regarded as being neither same nor different since they

philosophies, in particular, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas and the Upaniṣads (2001, 29–76). For a broader perspective on the interactions between the Brāhmanical and Buddhist ideas, refer to Bronkhorst (2011).

[37] With regard to the view of the self, the Sāṃkhya school maintains that it is endowed with awareness, while its rival schools, i.e. the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, hold an opposing view, asserting that the self is not conscious, but in suitable conditions, it can conjoin with consciousness (Kapstein 2001, 40).

[38] In early Buddhist thought, the collection of physical and psychological components are regarded as "bundle-continuum (Skt. *skandha-santāna*), which is devoid of a Brāhmanical notion of self (Kapstein 2001, 116). Later, Nāgārjuna, in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, indicates that, in addition to being causally interdependent, these bundles are also dependently designated to nominally define a person on the basis of the five *skandha*-s (Williams 2005, 4:28).

mutually support each other in an interdependent manner both in terms of sustaining the mind-body complex and carrying out meditative practices (Harvey 1993, 39–40).

The *Visuddhimagga*[39] identifies a series of conditions where the *nāma* and *rūpa* are inter-related in bringing about and sustaining the mind-body complex (Harvey 1993, 32–33). The physical support for the mental is termed as the "heart-basis (Pa. *hadaya-vatthu*)" by the later Theravādins (Harvey 1993, 34). As for the mind's support for the physical, it is identified in two significant aspects in the Theravāda *Abhidharma* which are termed as "vocal intimation (Pa. *vācī-viññatti*) and bodily intimation (Pa. *kāya-viññatti*)" that regulate the physical and verbal actions (Harvey 1993, 34).[40] In terms of practice, the Pāli canon maintains that both the mind and body support each other in advancing through the stages of meditation, such as accomplishing certain states of the *jhāna*-s (Harvey 1993, 29).[41] In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the four bases of mindfulness with regard to the body, feelings, mind, and mind-objects in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10, 145) is a key method for meditational practices.[42] Furthermore, the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* (MN 36, 332) emphasizes that both the mind and body are to be developed, without prioritizing one over the other.[43] The Theravāda Buddhism maintains that training the mind and body as prescribed in the Pāli canon sharpens one's insight (Pa. *vipassanā*) to "penetrate into the

[39] The *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification) is a commentary on the Theravādin *Abhidharma* and early Buddhist practices by Buddhaghosa in the 5th century.
[40] The relationship between the body and mind is understood as interactions both within (physical-physical and mental-mental) and across (physical-mental) the physical and mental processes that belong to a larger system of interacting networks (Harvey 1993, 40).
[41] The power of meditation in advanced stages has the ability to shift the usual mind-body interactions to an unusual or "non-normal configurations," such as the cases of mind-made body (Skt. *mano-maya-kāya*), formless rebirths, and states of cessation (Harvey 1993, 36–41).
[42] In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the four bases of mindfulness are said to be the "direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of Nibbāna" (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, 145).
[43] The development of the body and mind in the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* is explained in the following manner: "Anyone in whom, in this double manner, arisen pleasant feeling does not invade his mind and remain because body is developed, and arisen painful feeling does not invade his mind because mind is developed, is thus developed in body and developed in mind" (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, 334).

unconditioned *nibbāna*" (Bodhi 2012, 44), which eventually severs one's bond with *saṃsāra*[44] (Collins 1982, 83), thereby attaining liberation.

This interactive and interdependent relationship between the mind and the body can be further understood through the "lens of energetic sensibility" (Klein 2014, 578), where the mind-complex as a collection aggregates is treated as an energy system. In the meditation practices, when one trains in cultivating attention toward one's body, emotions, mind, or mental-objects, one is essentially being aware of the continuous fluctuations of the energies within one's mind-body system. Through developing one-pointed awareness while maintaining the correct postures that facilitate an uninterrupted and harmonious flow of energies within one's system, both the mind and body become pliable or workable (Skt. *praśrabdhi*, Tib. *shin sbyangs*) for awakening (Klein 2014, 576–78). This approach of seeing the mind-body complex as a dynamic network of energies is further developed in the later phases of the Buddhist thought where the interactive relationship between the components of one's aggregates and the elements of the surrounding nature is emphasized by their common shared feature of having a "life vitality (Tib. *bla*)" (Klein 2014, 576). This has a significant implication in the *sādhana* practices that are based on the Buddhist tantric literature. For example, in the *sādhana* practices relating to the *Kālacakra Tantra* and *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*, the mastering over one's inner landscape, i.e. the mind-body complex containing the subtle energies (microcosm), entails attuning to the larger landscape of

[44] The type of *nibbāna* that completely severs the bond with *saṃsāra* is called *nibbāna* without substrate (Skt. *an-upādi-sesa*), because the fuel (Skt. *upādāna*) that sustains one's cyclic existence is exhausted (Collins 1982, 83). Harvey brings an intriguing aspect of *nibbāna* that when the consciousness manages to "break free" from the interactions of *nāma-rūpa*, it becomes without any objects. The process then becomes an unconditioned *nibbāna* since it is the "timeless experience of a 'consciousness' which had transcended itself by dropping all objects" (Harvey 1993, 40–41).

the surrounding environment (macrocosm), where both the landscapes are treated as being "intimate analogues" to each other (Klein 2014, 576; Bangdel 1999, 778).

In the *anuttarayogatantra*-s, the energy centers (Skt. *cakra*) of one's subtle body (Skt. *sūkṣma śarīra*) is seen as a microcosm of the twenty-four sacred sites of the Himalayan and Indian regions (Simmer-Brown 2001, 173–75; Bangdel 1999, 778–86). Mastering over one's subtle body though yogic practices requires synchronizing and magnetizing these landscapes to induce an experience of great bliss (Skt. *mahāsukha*, Tib. *bde ba chen po*), which has both physical and mental aspects. The *Hevajra Tantra*, as translated by Snellgrove, states:

> Without bodily form how should there be bliss? Of bliss one could not speak. The world is pervaded by bliss, which pervades and is itself pervaded. Just as the perfume of a flower depends upon the flower, and without the flower becomes impossible, likewise, without form and so on, bliss would not be perceived (1959, chap. II, p. 92).

In the *anuttarayogatantra* practices, the visualizations and subtle-body yogic practices in the creation and completion stages are regarded as the "interpenetrating display of synchronized body and mind" (Simmer-Brown 2001, 164). In the creation stage, the visualizations (mental) facilitate in treating all forms, including one's own body (physical), as manifestations of the vast and luminous mind. In the completion stage, the inner yogic practices utilize the subtle-body,[45] which serves as a link between the outer coarse body and the inner subtle mind. Inconceivable and in constant flux, this subtle body is experienced by a practitioner in the completion stage that induces the direct and naked experience of the great bliss, which is the very essence of the nature

[45] Interestingly, the Pāli canon mentions the "mind-made body (Skt./Pa. *mano-maya-kāya*)," which is a type of "subtle-body," by means of which the consciousness can "leave the physical body" during a meditative state. This subtle body, which is invisible to the ordinary eye, acts as a support for the psychic power-based activities, i.e. *iddhis* in Pāli term (Harvey 1993, 36).

of the mind (Simmer-Brown 2001, 166–72). In this way, in the Vajrayāna practices, the mind and body are understood in a manner of being not two, not one, i.e. neither different nor same.

Application in *vajraḍākinī sādhana-nṛtya*

The two case-studies of this thesis work correspond to the larger categories of the *ḍākinī-nṛtya* of the Tibetan tradition and the Vajrayoginī-*nṛtya* of the Newar tradition. In particular, both of the case-studies employ *vajraḍākinī*-s (Vajrayāna female deities) as principal meditational deities. In the Tibetan tradition, one of the types of *ḍākinī-nṛtya* relates to the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* (Tib. *rdo rje phag mo khros ma nag mo*) in the rNying ma tradition.[46] This dance practice belongs to a *sādhana* called "Offering and Giving of the Body," which is based on the *Heart Essence Practice Manual of Oral Instructions* (Tib. *thugs sgrub zhal gdams snying byang*), belonging to the root *tantra* of the *Guru's Heart Practice that Dispels all Obstacles* (Tib. *thugs sgrub bar chad kun sel*).[47] In general, this practice is referred to as *gcod*, which is common to both rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions (English 2002, xxvi; Harding 2013, 13, 49). As for the Newar tradition, the Vajravārāhī and Vajrayoginī *sādhana*-s relate to the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *sādhana* cycle (Bangdel 1999, 799, 912; English 2002, 27) and the *caryānṛtya* associated with them are based on the *caryāgīti* dedicated to Vajrayoginī/Vajravārāhī (R. Vajrācārya 1986, 28–29).

[46] In the *sādhana* manual and commentaries, *khros ma nag mo* is usually translated as the "Black Wrathful One" (Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 118). She is the wrathful form of Vajrayoginī in black, who is related to the g*cod* practice of the rNying ma tradition (English 2002, xxvi). Harding translates *khros ma nag mo* as "Wrathful Black Mother" (Harding 2013, 28). A detailed account of the practice and her associated *sādhana* is presented in the next chapter.

[47] The *Guru's Heart Practice that Dispels all Obstacles* is a cycle of teachings in the rNying ma tradition. The English titles along with their Tibetan names for the names of the *sādhana*, practice manual, and teaching cycle are obtained from Rangjung Yeshe dictionary. For an English translation of the *sādhana* along with its commentary and background information, refer to *Ḍākinī Activity: The Dynamic Play of Awakening* (Kunsang and Schmidt 2018).

In the case of the Tibetan tradition, the *gcod sādhana* is embraced with the view of the *prajñāpāramitā*[48] (Harding 2013, 16; Cupchik 2015, 34) and the main part of the practice focuses on developing wisdom (Harding 2013, 50). At the beginning of the main segment of the *sādhana*, the formless nondual Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā* (Tib. *yum chen mo*)[49] is evoked as an extremely wrathful form of Vajrayoginī in black color (Tib. *rdo rje phag mo khros ma nag mo*), representing the nature of the mind of the practitioner[50] (Harding 2013, 50–52; Cupchik 2015, 49; Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 121). With regard to the Vajrayoginī *sādhana* in the Newar tradition, Vajrayoginī as a meditational deity is invoked from her primordial essence Guḥyeśvarī, who, as the *ādi śakti* of the Kathmandu valley,[51] is regarded as the *dharmatā*, *dharmakāya*,[52] primordial *prajñā*, *buddhamātṛ*,[53] *prajñāpāramitā*, and so forth (Bangdel 1999, 887, 901, 920, 938–40). In short, in these *vajraḍākinī sādhana-nṛtya* practices, the philosophical view (Skt. *darśana*) which is formless and nondual in nature, is symbolized as the Great Mother

[48] In general, the essence of the perfection of wisdom (Skt. *prajñāpāramitā*) lies in dissolving the duality between the subject ("agent of knowing") and object ("that which is known"), thereby realizing the nondual nature of the ultimate reality. The nonduality of the subject and object is understood in light of *śūnyatā* or emptiness, i.e. "as a lack of any true or singular, permanent, inherent existence," which is the underlying nature of the mind and all phenomena (Harding 2013, 26). In particular, the practice of *gcod* is said to be the "tantric embodiment" of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra-s* (Cupchik 2015, 34), thus combining both the *sūtra* and *tantra* (Harding 2013, 46).
[49] The *Prajñāpāramitā* is depicted as the mother of the *tathāgata*-s and the essence and source of all phenomena in the *Prajñāpāramitā-ratnaguṇasamuccayagāthā*, which is, according to Conze, one the earliest versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature (Conze 1973, chap. VII and XII). This understanding of emptiness is also referred to as the "pregnant void" (Harding 2013, 26), signifying that because the very nature of everything is emptiness, it is possible for everything to arise. Furthermore, she is identified as the "Great Mother *dharmakāya*" (Harding 2013, 25) of all the buddha-s and as the "basic space of transcendent wisdom" (Harding 2013, 28), she is the mother of various wisdoms, in particular the five wisdom *ḍākinī*-s (Harding 2013, 25–30).
[50] The visualization of '*pho ba*, i.e. "transference or ejection of consciousness" (Harding 2013, 50) during the main segment of the *gcod sādhana* is noteworthy. This specific form of '*pho ba* is termed as "Opening the Door to the Sky (Tib. *nam mkha*' *sgo* '*byed*)" (Harding 2013, 50), where the separated or ejected consciousness of the practitioner is visualized as a form of a *ḍākinī* (usually as the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī*), who performs the severing and offering of the body. This visualization method is said to directly target the deepest attachment to one's own body as the self and aids in severing the subtlest dualistic clinging (Harding 2013, 51–52).
[51] The *ādi śakti* is the "primordial creative energy and generative source," which is *Guḥyeśvarī* as the primordial goddess of the Kathmandu Valley (Bangdel 1999, 920).
[52] The *dharmakāya* is the "absolute reality, the formless (Skt. *nirākāra*), selfless (Skt. *nairātmā*) state of the void (Skt. *śūnyatā*)" (Bangdel 1999, 920).
[53] *Buddhamātṛ* means the mother of the buddha-s (Bangdel 1999, 887).

Prajñāpāramitā, who is evoked through the *mantra*-s in a form of a meditational deity—either as *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* in the *gcod ḍākinī-nṛtya* or (red wrathful) Vajrayoginī in the Vajrayoginī *caryā-nṛtya*.

As mentioned, the view or philosophical posture that is held and maintained during these dance practices is informed by the nature of reality (Skt. *dharmatā*), which is luminous emptiness. By holding a philosophical posture that deliberately goes against the usual tendency of the dualistic fixation of an ordinary mind, a practitioner is gradually oriented toward a perception that does not elaborate at all. The crucial function of the view during the dance practices of the *vajraḍākinī*-s is operative in nature as it is a constant awareness that reminds a dancer that nothing whatsoever has any intrinsic existence (Skt. *svabhāva*), yet it appears. For a practitioner, maintaining such view trains one's mind not to superimpose or denigrate while embodying the deity. This entails that one does not dualistically apprehend the subject and object, for example, separating oneself from the deity. This has a significant implication in the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s where the visualized deities are internalized as being inseparable with the practitioner (Cupchik 2015, 50). In terms of the view, this signifies that the essence of the mundane and supramundane share the same nature of emptiness and luminosity, which is the outlook of pure perception. Ratnakāji Vajrācārya, a prominent *caryānṛtya* master and Newar scholar, points out that the main purpose of *sādhana-nṛtya* is to go beyond the dualistic boundaries, i.e. not to regard oneself and the deity as separate entities (R. Vajrācārya 1986, 5). Blofeld explains this pure perception-based philosophical posture further, which can be applicable both in Tibetan and Newar dance practices:

> The peaceful and wrathful deities invoked during a *sādhana* correspond to components of the adept's own being… He must behold the universe as a vast expanse of spotless purity, as the "container" or "field" inhabited by "deities," whose very nature he recognizes as pure void and whose immense power is the

> creative power of void manifested in its non-void emanation. Similarly, the adept's reactions throughout the day to objects of the senses and the objects themselves must be recognized as 'deities enjoying deities and the void enjoying void' (Blofeld 1970, 199).

In other words, the true purpose of the dance practices of the *vajraḍākinī*-s is to go beyond the habitual tendency of dualistic apprehension and any form of clinging. To do so, one holds an operative philosophical view that is a perspective which is in accordance with the nondual nature of the ultimate reality where everything is seen as the unity of luminosity and emptiness. Eventually, the philosophical posture fully becomes a moment-to-moment lived experience without mental elaboration and one's experience, the deity and their *maṇḍala*-s merge, dissolving any sense of separation, distinction, as well as all referent.

II. The role of *prajñā* in *sādhana-nṛtya*—a coordination of physical, verbal, and mental postures

The practice of *anuttarayogatantra sādhana-nṛtya* is, in Lerner's terms, a "perfect tantric vehicle," since it "transforms" the practitioner's mundane body, speech, and mind into the *vajra*[54] body, speech, and mind of the deity (Lerner 1983, 51). The aspects of the body, speech, and mind correspond to the physical, verbal, and mental postures of these meditative ritual dance practices. First, the physical aspects, i.e. hand gestures (Skt. *mudrā*) and body postures (Skt. *sthānaka*) relate to the physical postures. Second, the recitation of the *mantra*-s and singing of the songs based on *vajragīti* and *caryāgīti* relate to the verbal postures. Third, the philosophical posture (Skt. *darśana*) that is held and visualizations that are carried out with meditative concentration (Skt. *dhyāna*) relate to the mental postures. The unified method of *śamatha* (calm abiding) and *vipaśyanā* (clear insight) is carried out through the physical, verbal, and mental

[54] In this case, the term *vajra* (Tib. *rdo rje*) is the quintessential symbol for Vajrayāna that represents the adamantine nature of the ultimate reality (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:87).

postures of the Vajrayāna meditative ritual dance practices. While mastering the *mudrā*-s, *sthānaka*-s, *mantra*-s, *vajragīti/caryāgīti*, and *dhyāna*-s demands the mind to be steady and serene (Skt. *śamatha*), all of these components, whether mental visualizations or physical enactments, are carried out by holding a philosophical posture, which is associated with *vipaśyanā*, as it cultivates wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*). The following section explains the combined approach of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*.

The trainings of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* in action

In general, the term *śamatha* means "tranquility."[55] Derived from the Sanskrit root *śam* (Kuan 2008, 57), in the context of Buddhist meditative practices, it refers to "calm abiding" or "serenity" (Skt. *śamatha*, Tib. *zhi gnas*) meditation, where the mind is trained to settle in order to one-pointedly focus or concentrate (Qing 2017, 181; Kuan 2008, 57). The practice of *śamatha* is often paired with the meditation of *vipaśyanā*. The term *vipaśyanā* is derived from the Sanskrit verb root √*paś* (Pa. √*pass*)[56] which means "to see" and as a meditation practice it means "correct insight," "clear seeing," "panoramic awareness," and so forth.[57] Its prefix *vi* is an intensifier in this case which also denotes "analytical separation" and this meaning of "analytical and intensified seeing," is conveyed by referring to it as "insight" (Skt. *vipaśyanā*, Tib. *lhag mthong*) (Qing 2017, 181).

The aim of *śamatha* is to settle or calm one's mind (with or without the support of a meditational object), while the aim of *vipaśyanā* is to develop an experiential insight with regard

[55] This meaning of *śamatha* is from Edgerton (Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit dictionary).
[56] The Pāli verb root for *paś* is from Duroiselle's work called *A Practical Grammar of the Pāli Language* (Duroiselle 1906, 235).
[57] The meanings of *vipaśyanā* along with its Tibetan term are from Edgerton dictionary, Tibetan and Himalayan Library, and Sarat Chandra Das dictionary. Other alternative meanings for *vipaśyanā* are "profound, deeper, higher, penetrating, surpassing insight," "wider vision or perspective," and so forth.

to the true nature of reality. The final result, which is the perfect and complete awakening to Buddhahood, is best achieved through the skillful unity of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*.[58] In the Pāli canon, the combined practice of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* (although not always termed this way) is encouraged since both the qualities of serenity and clear insight are integral to actualizing realization. While the *sutta*-s emphasize the specific functions of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* as antidotes for passion (Pa. *rāga*) and ignorance (Pa. *avijjā*) respectively (Kuan 2008, 39–40; Qing 2017, 182), both of these are also said to be instrumental to knowledge (Pa. *vijjābhāgiya*) or gnosis (Kuan 2008, 57; Qing 2017, 182), which brings about the fruition of the final goal, i.e. "taintless liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom" (Kuan 2008, 39).[59] Furthermore, the unity of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* is a standard method that is applied across the early Buddhist, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna practices to dispel all afflictions and obscurations (Qing 2017, 180).

In Vajrayāna, more specifically to *anuttarayogatantra sādhana* practices, both *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* are incorporated in the following manner. During the visualizations, the mind is focused one-pointedly on the object of meditation,[60] i.e. the deities and their *maṇḍala*-s, to improve the clarity and intensity of the concentration. At a subtle level, the essence of *śamatha* practice is to train the mind to attentively "ride" the subtle wind (Skt. *vāyu*, Tib. *rlung*) so that

[58] The unity of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* can also be understood as "ultimate *bodhicitta*," "*prajñāpāramitā*," "self-existing wakefulness," and so forth (Rangjung Yeshe dictionary).
[59] The "taintless liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom" indicates the stage of "optimal emotional state and cognitive capability" (Kuan 2008, 39). In other words, *śamatha* often relates to meditative concentration (Skt. *samādhi*) while *vipaśyanā* is primarily associated with wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*). The "taintless liberation of mind" is the fruition of *śamatha* where the mind is free from emotional afflictions. The *śamatha* meditation is an antidote for passion (Skt. *rāga*) that relates to the craving (Skt. *taṇhā*) aspect in the twelve links of dependent origination, which in turn is conditioned by feeling (Skt. *vedanā*). The "liberation by wisdom" is the fruition of *vipaśyanā*, i.e. the perfection of knowledge (Skt. *prajñāpāramitā*) that dispels ignorance (Skt. *avijjā*), which is the first link of the dependent origination. The combination of the fruitions of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* leads to liberation or awakening (Kuan 2008, 39–40).
[60] One of the aspects of *śamatha* (with support) meditation is its *nimitta*-s that refer to the objects of meditation. The *nimitta*-s are regarded as causes or signs with regard to the development of concentration during *śamatha* practice (Qing 2017, 181).

the mind can rest naturally in an undisturbed manner.[61] The *śamatha* practice is done in this way so that once one has naturally settled with an undisturbed mind (Tib. *mi 'khrugs sems*), awareness or realization spontaneously manifests. At psycho-physical-subtle levels, the wind energy flows into the central energy channel (Skt. *avadhūtī*, Tib. *rtsa dbu ma*) and coupled with one's power of realization, all the afflictions and obscurations are said to be eventually dispelled (Simmer-Brown 2001, 168–70; Harding 2002, 18–19). The aspect of awareness or realization dawning after one's mind has settled relates to *vipaśyanā*. Whether visualizations or subtle-body *yoga*, one conducts these practices by holding a philosophical posture, i.e. the view, which is associated with *vipaśyanā* since it aids in bringing about clear seeing or insight. Thus, both *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* intricately weave into the practices of the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s to induce full awakening.

Application in *vajraḍākinī sādhana-nṛtya*

In general, the Himalayan Buddhist meditative ritual dance practices incorporate the aspects of the body, speech, and mind of a practitioner. In the Tibetan tradition, to bring about the experiential realization of the perfection of wisdom (Skt. *prajñāpāramitā*), there are four levels of the *gcod sādhana*[62] that incorporate the physical, verbal, and mental engagements (Cupchik 2015, 36–37, 54–55). When performed as a *sādhana-nṛtya*, the direct engagement of the physical (hand gestures, dance postures), verbal (reciting *mantra*-s, singing songs based on *vajragīti*),[63] and mental (holding a view, visualizations) postures shifts one's orientation from

[61] The subtle level practice is *śamatha* without support, which is often a preceding training for Mahāmudrā (Tib. *phyag rgya chen po*) and Mahāsandhi (Tib. *rdzogs pa chen po*) practices (Tibetan and Himalayan Library).
[62] In the *gcod* practice, there are outer (Tib. *phyi*), inner (Tib. *nang*), secret (Tib. *gsang*), and suchness (Tib. *de kho na nyid*) levels of the *sādhana* (Cupchik 2015, 36).
[63] The melodies and songs related to *gcod sādhana* are associated with the *mgur* (songs of meditative experience) genre of Tibetan poetry and *dohā* or *vajragīti* tradition of the *mahāsiddha*-s (Cupchik 2015, 35–36).

being "performance-based" to "practice-based"[64] (Cupchik 2015, 38), thereby transforming the practitioner into becoming the deity, i.e. being the embodiment of transcendental wisdom themselves (Cupchik 2015, 49, 54–55).[65]

In a similar manner, the faculties of the body, speech, and mind (Skt. *kāya-vak-citta*) are employed as physical, verbal, and mental postures in Vajrayoginī *caryānṛtya*. While the mental postures, such as holding a view, visualizations with meditative concentration, and so forth are the inner or mental aspect of the dance, it is aided by the outer expressions of the physical and verbal postures, such as hand gestures, body postures, chanting *mantra*-s, and singing *caryāgīti*-s (R. Vajrācārya 1986, 5–6). In the Newar tradition, the *sādhana*-s of the meditational deities in the form of *caryāgīti*-s are exoterically and esoterically performed and practiced through *caryānṛtya* by incorporating the physical, verbal, and mental postures in the aforementioned manner.

III. The role of *prajñā* in *sādhana-nṛtya*—a symbolic posture

This section discusses the role of *prajñā* as a symbolic posture in the Himalayan Buddhist meditative ritual dances. At first, a brief overview of the Vajrayāna framework is presented in terms of *prajñā* being a symbolic posture. Since this treatment of *prajñā* is intricately connected to the feminine principle of the *ḍākinī* and is primarily employed in the *anuttarayogatantra*-based *sādhana* practices, a brief explanation of the *ḍākinī* principle is presented, followed by its application in Tibetan and Newar *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s. The discussion concludes with

[64] The "performance-based" orientation is the beginners' approach, when one is primarily focused on performing the outer aspects, i.e. playing the instruments, singing the songs, and so forth. As one advances in the training, one's orientation gradually shifts to being "practice-based," when one incorporates the inner aspects, i.e. internalizing the profound meaning and intent of the *sādhana,* which is actualizing the realization of the perfection of wisdom (Cupchik 2015, 38).

[65] Cupchik's work focuses on the aspect of ritual music in *gcod* practice that aids in bringing about realization, which is an understudied area in academia (Cupchik 2015, 32). Similarly, *gcod* practice as a *sādhana-nṛtya* is still a minimally explored territory in academia.

the application of the *ḍākinī* principle in the *ḍākinī-nṛtya* of *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* in Tibetan Buddhism and *caryā-nṛtya* of a wrathful form of red Vajrayoginī in Newar Buddhism.

The Vajrayāna framework

One of the significant aspects shared by both Tibetan and Newar traditions of Vajrayāna Buddhism is the symbolic association of the feminine with wisdom (Slusser 1982, 307–49; Bangdel 1999, 881–939; Simmer-Brown 2001, 43–79; English 2002, 35–49). This is particularly important in the *sādhana* practices that are based on the *yoginītantra*-s, which are incorporated in the later classification of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s[66] (Bangdel 1999, 793–823; Simmer-Brown 2001, 96–98; English 2002, 24–33). A *sādhana* practice, which entails meditation techniques and ritual procedures, is a way to gain certain attainments leading to realization through transforming the mundane into the supramundane (English 2002, 30). In Vajrayāna practices, the main purpose of employing symbols is to point to the ultimate nature, i.e. abiding mode, which is inseparable with the mundane, i.e. appearing mode (Simmer-Brown 2001, 98–100). In Vajrayāna *sādhana* practices, the ultimate nature takes a symbolic posture as the "ultimate feminine principle"[67] (Simmer-Brown 2001, 91), which is identified as the symbolic Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā*[68] (Simmer-Brown 2001, 89; Bangdel 1999, 901). Klein explains the specific

[66] The *yoginītantra*-s begun to emerge around 9th century, serving as a foundation for the evolution of Vajrayāna female tantric deities such as the cult of Vajrayoginī as principal *maṇḍala* deities. In Tibetan Buddhism, this class of *tantra* was later subsumed into the *anuttarayogatantra*-s (English 2002, 3–7, 12–13; Gray 2007, 5). English notes that the term *anuttarayogatantra* does not occur in the Indic Sanskrit sources, rather it is a translation from a Tibetan classification of *tantra* called *rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i rgyud* (English 2002, 6). In Newar scholarship, *sādhana*-s related to esoteric *tantric* female deities such as *Vajravārāhī* are noted as corresponding to the *anuttara yoga* practices (Bangdel 1999, 895). Details about proto-*yoginītantra*-s and *yoginītantra*-s, along with their association with the *ḍākinī*/*yoginī* concept can be found in the works by White, Sanderson, Törzsök, and Hatley (White 2003; Sanderson 2009; Törzsök 2014; Hatley 2016).

[67] Simmer-Brown explains the ultimate feminine principle as the "inseparable space-wakefulness," which is a "direct experience of primordial vastness," as a source of all experiences (Simmer-Brown 2001, 90).

[68] Simmer-Brown's explanation of *Prajñāpāramitā* symbolically as the great, non-dual mother primarily reflects the feminine principle in late Indian and Tibetan traditions. The Newar tradition has a similar approach and designates the mother *Prajñāpāramitā* as Guḥyeśvarī. In addition to being the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā* and mother of buddha-s that is common to Tibetan Buddhism, according to the *Svayambhū Purāṇa*, Guḥyeśvarī has a distinctive

treatment of symbols in Vajrayāna practices, along with its association with the feminine principle in the following manner:

> All visualized symbols, whatever other significance they hold, are thus also understood as embodiments of the empty essence or primordial purity that is considered their true nature. Engagement with these symbols is aimed primarily at gaining access to this reality, which the practitioner learns to recognize as the actual substance of all symbols. This reality is classified as feminine (1985, 124–25).

The *anuttarayogatantra sādhana* practices begin with symbolically evoking the formless, nondual awareness (Skt. *jñāna*) as Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā* through the seed syllable A (Tib. *A*),[69] out of which the visualizations unfold by subsequently evoking the feminine (Skt. *prajñā*) and masculine (Skt. *upāya-kauśalya*) aspects. The imaginary pure visualization of the sacred *maṇḍala* commences by first evoking the feminine aspect (Skt. *prajñā*) through the seed syllable E (Tib. *E*), followed by inviting the masculine aspect (Skt. *upāya-kauśalya*) through the seed syllable VAṂ (Tib. *VAM*). The dynamic interconnectivity of the feminine and masculine through the combined seed syllables of EVAṂ (Tib. *E VAM*) gradually unfolds the rest of the *sādhana*.[70] This entire practice of the *sādhana* can be formulated through the *ḍākinī* principle, which is explained in the following section.

Newar identity as the root source of *Svayambhū Mahācaitya* and *Cakrasaṃvara* teachings in the Kathmandu valley (Bangdel 1999, 901).

[69] Tibetan transliterations of the seed syllables are done in accordance to a chart provided in Rigpa Wiki.

[70] Simmer-Brown notes that the ultimate feminine principle is *jñāna* (Tib. *ye shes*), i.e. non-dual wisdom or gnosis, which is formless and non-conceptual. During *sādhana* practices, at first, *jñāna* is evoked to unfold the visualizations through invoking the *prajñā* (female aspect) and *upāya-kauśalya* (male aspect) components (Simmer-Brown 2001, 104). In other words, the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā* is the ultimate feminine principle as inseparable space-wakefulness, which is unconditioned, nondual, and formless. This is the primordial ground out of which all forms and experiences manifest. In the *sādhana* practices, at first, a practitioner invokes this unconditioned nondual awareness. Based on this symbolic ground, the visualization of deities unfolds by integrating the feminine (Skt. *prajñā*) and masculine (Skt. *upāya-kauśalya*) aspects.

The *ḍākinī* principle

Etymologically, the term *ḍākinī* derives from the Sanskrit verb root √*ḍī* ("to fly"), with a corresponding Tibetan term *mkha*' '*gro ma* ("sky-goer")[71] (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 541; Hatley 2016, 4). Synonymous to *yoginī*, the concept of *ḍākinī* has early precedence in Śaiva and Śākta traditions. As the *yoginītantra*-s in the Buddhist tantric corpus emerged, the *ḍākinī* evolved into a distinct Vajrayāna identity (Simmer-Brown 2001, 43–79; English 2002, 35–49; Hatley 2016). In Vajrayāna Buddhism, as mentioned earlier, the most essential nature of the *ḍākinī* is the "formless wisdom nature of the mind" (Simmer-Brown 2001, 9), which has the "subtlest quality" of the unity of the unconditioned pure space and radiant nondual wisdom of the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā* (Simmer-Brown 2001, 73).

In the *anuttarayogatantra*-s, the meaning of the *ḍākinī* is four-fold (Simmer-Brown 2001, 8–9). On a secret level, she is the inseparable space-wakefulness, symbolized as the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā*.[72] On an inner or ritual level, her association is two-fold. As a *yi dam* deity at a ritual level, she represents the unity of feminine and masculine, such as Vajrayoginī in her independent *sādhana*-s (English 2002, 150). Her essence as inner *ḍākinī* is co-emergent wisdom (Skt. *sahajajñāna*). She is also the feminine aspect paired with skillful means to initiate the visualizations. On an outer or subtle body level, she is the essence of the subtle body, which is a network of energy channels (Skt. *nāḍī*, Tib. *tsa*) and winds (Skt. *prāṇa*, Tib. *rlung*), and she also represents the power of realization from the associated subtle body yogic practices. On an outer-outer level, she can be a living female guru, female *sādhakī* (female tantric adept or

[71] Willis points out the associations of *ḍākinī* with the "supreme embodiment of the highest wisdom" and the "symbolic concretization of the direct, unmediated, and non-conceptual experience of voidness (Skt. *śūnyatā*, Tib. *stong pa nyid*)" (Willis 1987, 58). Since the ordinary beings do not have direct experience of this highest wisdom, the *ḍākinī* can also be understood as everything that one is lacking to be awakened (Willis 1987, 73).
[72] The secret *ḍākinī* is also synonymous with Mahāmudrā (Willis 1987, 75).

practitioner), or any practitioner (regardless of gender) having a *ḍākinī yi dam* or doing any *sādhana* of *yab-yum* (*heruka-ḍākinī* in union) practice, such as Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī. In short, this four-fold aspect of the *ḍākinī* can be defined as the *ḍākinī* principle.

Application of the *ḍākinī* principle in the *sādhana*-s

In Tibetan tradition, the *ḍākinī* principle can be applied to the *sādhana* practices of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s (Simmer-Brown 2001, 72–75). The secret aspect of the *ḍākinī* is the self-cognizant wisdom (Skt. *svasaṃvitti jñāna*, Tib. *rang rig ye shes*),[73] which is the vast and limitless primordial ground as the source of all experiences. At the very beginning of the *sādhana*, this nondual wakefulness as the secret *ḍākinī* is evoked through the seed syllable A (Tib. *A*). The inner aspect of the *ḍākinī* corresponds to the creation stage where the co-emergent *ḍākinī* is the *yi dam* deity, for example, Vajrayoginī. The outer aspect of the *ḍākinī* relates to the emanations of the inner *ḍākinī* and inner yogic practices involving the subtle body.[74] Lastly, the outer-outer aspect of the *ḍākinī* is a *mantra*-born *ḍākinī*, i.e. the tantric practitioners practicing the *sādhana*.

[73] The English translation for *rang rig ye shes* is from Tibetan and Himalayan Library and the corresponding Sanskrit term is suggested based on Pettit's translations of *rang rig* and *so sor rang rig ye shes* (Pettit 1999, 5, 59).
[74] The outer aspect of the *ḍākinī* relating to the subtle body yogic practices can be explained in four major aspects. First, the subtle body is an energetic network of channels and winds corresponding to the twenty-four sacred places in the outer landscape that are ruled and protected by the *ḍākinī*-s. Second, in the context of the inner landscape of the subtle body, the *ḍākinī*-s guard the inner yogic practices by protecting the seed syllables for the ritual and bestowing success to only the deserving practitioners. Third, the outer *ḍākinī* represents the feminine component in the subtle body composition, for example, the right channel (Skt. *rasanā*, Tib. *tsa ro ma*). Fourth, the subtle body yogic practice of inner heat (Skt. *caṇḍālī*, Tib. *gtum mo*) is an aspect of the *ḍākinī* as her seed syllable A is the source of heat experienced in the practice. Once the subtle breaths gather at the central channel (Skt. *avadhūtī*, Tib. *rtsa dbu ma*) to generate great bliss (Skt. *mahāsukha*), this channel is often indicated by the *ḍākinī avadhūtī*. Overall, the entire process of the subtle body yogic practices is an aspect of the *ḍākinī* since it allows one to realize the nature of the mind, the secret *ḍākinī* (Simmer-Brown 2001, 161–81).

In the Newar tradition, the *ḍākinī* principle can be applied to the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī s*ādhana* practice.[75] In this Newar *sādhana*, the creation stage focuses on the Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala*, while the completion stage is centered around the *mahāmaṇḍala* of Vajravārāhī (Bangdel 1999, 912). In terms of the *ḍākinī* principle, Guḥyeśvarī in her primordial form as the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā* (Bangdel 1999, 901) is the secret *ḍākinī*. When she is the central deity, such as Vajravārāhī in the *mahāmaṇḍala*, she can be referred to as the inner *ḍākinī*. The *yoginī*-s in the inner concentric circle of the *maṇḍala* can be regarded as the outer *ḍākinī*-s, which are the direct emanations of Vajravārāhī. They are regarded as *vidyādharī* and *siddhidātṛ*, since they uphold and provide wisdom, while bestowing *siddhi*-s or tantric accomplishments (Bangdel 1999, 786). The *aṣṭamātṛkā*-s (eight mother goddesses) at the outer concentric circle[76] of the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *maṇḍala* can be regarded as the outer *ḍākinī*-s as well. The three circles of the *aṣṭamātṛkā*-s are associated with the twenty-four *mātṛkā pīṭha*-s (power places belonging to the goddesses) of the Kathmandu Valley that also correspond to the inner landscape of the subtle body[77] (Bangdel 1999, 778–86). As the outer *ḍākinī*-s, they are the supramundane deities guarding the outer and inner landscapes and bestowing *siddhi*-s to the qualified practitioners. Lastly, regardless of their gender, the practitioners performing the *sādhana* of Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *maṇḍala* can be regarded as outer-outer *ḍākinī*-s.[78]

[75] The application of the *ḍākinī* principle to a Newar *sādhana* is done in a theoretical manner. An iconographical analysis and description of the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *sādhana* ritual is explained by Bangdel (1999). Additional works on the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* are done by Naresh Man Bajracharya (1997) and Gray (2007).

[76] Early narratives about the conversion of non-Buddhist worldly *ḍākinī*-s such as the *aṣṭamātṛkā*-s into protector deities in the Buddhist *tantra* can be found in the *Tattvasaṃgraha*. For details about their Vajrayānic conversion, refer to the works by Hatley (2012; 2016).

[77] The three circles of *aṣṭamātṛkā*-s are associated with the *mātṛkā pīṭha*-s of the Nepal *maṇḍala*. The three circles of the *aṣṭamātṛkā*-s also correspond to the body, speech, and mind *cakra*-s which are to be purified as a preliminary ritual of the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *sādhana* (Bangdel 1999, 783–84).

[78] The fourth category of human *ḍākinī*-s as outer-outer *ḍākinī*-s includes the practitioners, whether male or female, who commit to the practice of a *ḍākinī yi dam* such as Vajravārāhī/Vajrayoginī or the *sādhana*-s relating to the *heruka* and *ḍākinī* in union (Tib. *yab-yum*) such as Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī practice (Simmer-Brown 2001, 188, 202–4).

Application in *vajraḍākinī sādhana-nṛtya*

The *ḍākinī-nṛtya* relating to the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* (Tib. *rdo rje phag mo khros ma nag mo*) is a practice belonging the *anuttarayogatantra* of the Tibetan tradition and the explanation of the *ḍākinī* principle relating to the Tibetan *sādhana* practices can be applied in this case.[79] In addition to intense visualizations, the *gcod sādhana* incorporates ritual songs and music (Harding 2013, 13; Cupchik 2015, 32–33), along with an esoteric form of a meditative ritual dance in some cases.[80] In the *sādhana*, the practitioner takes the self-cognizant wisdom symbolically as the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā* (secret *ḍākinī*) and through specific *mantra*-s invoke her in the form of a *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* (inner *ḍākinī* or *yi dam* deity). The *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* along with her retinue (outer *ḍākinī*-s) perform the severing and offering of the body as visualized by the practitioner (outer-outer *ḍākinī*). The function of symbolism here is neither a mere metaphor nor an indication of something separate. Instead, it is a way to directly engage with the *immanent* reality (suchness) which is temporarily concealed to the ordinary mind (Harding 2013, 29). Throughout the *sādhana*, as one carries out a series of visualizations of—separating one's own consciousness from his or her body (Tib. '*pho ba*), symbolizing it as the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī*, offering one's body to wrathful and peaceful guests, and re-emerging as Avalokiteśvara or Tārā—one performs an intense Vajrayānic method to experientially realize the perfection of wisdom. For the symbolic encounter with death and giving away one's own body bring the philosophical understanding of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*-s to an experiential enactment to severe the clinging to one's notion of self (Harding 2013, 55–56).

[79] In the *gcod sādhana*, the *ḍākinī* principle can be applied in the following way: the secret *ḍākinī* is the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā*, the inner *ḍākinī* is the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī*, the outer *ḍākinī*-s are her retinue, and the outer-outer *ḍākinī*-s are the *sādhana* practitioners themselves.
[80] The dance aspect is confirmed through personal communication with *btsun ma* Dekyi Chödrön at Nagi Gompa, Kathmandu, March 7, 2021.

In other words, it is an experiential realization of the perfection of wisdom through the symbolic enactment of cutting through the clinging to one's own aggregates by severing and offering one's own body.

The other example of *vajraḍākinī sādhana-nṛtya* is the *caryānṛtya* relating to the Newar tradition, which has exoteric and esoteric aspects (Padam 2018). The *ḍākinī* principle can be applied in this case in the following way. At an exoteric level of performing *caryānṛtya*, the *nāma śloka* (verse of homage) invokes the deity, in this case the inner *ḍākinī* Vajrayoginī, symbolizing co-emergent wisdom. In her primordial essence, she is the secret *ḍākinī* Guḥyeśvarī, representing self-cognizant wisdom. The main part of the *gīti* (song), which is enacted through the *nṛtya* (dance), expresses the inner *ḍākinī* Vajrayoginī. She can be in a singular form or along with her emanations (outer *ḍākinī*). The dancer who is performing the *caryānṛtya* can be regarded as a *mantra*-born *ḍākinī* (outer-outer *ḍākinī*). When performed at an esoteric level, the four-fold *ḍākinī* principle can be applied in a similar manner as it is previously explained in the case of the *mahāmaṇḍala* of Vajravārāhī. In essence, the manifold aspects of the *sādhana* come down to actualizing, stabilizing, strengthening, and magnetizing the realization of the view with regard to the nature of the mind, i.e. the ultimate *ḍākinī*—the *prajñāpāramitā*.[81]

In light of all the aforementioned information, it can be said that the role of philosophical posture (the view) in these dance practices is multifaceted and deeply rooted within the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and ideas. The view also acts as a postural bridge between a common

[81] The *sādhana*-s relating to the *ḍākinī*-s are regarded as magnetizing practices, which are said to essentially magnetize one's realization of the view. In general, the practices of the *anuttarayogatantra* can be subsumed into the three roots practice, i.e. *la ma*, *yi dam*, and *ḍākinī*, which are the sources for the blessings, accomplishments, and activities, respectively. As magnetizing practices, the *ḍākinī sādhana*-s aim to bring the inner and outer elements under one's control and utilize them in accelerating one's realization. (Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 7–12, 63–76, back cover). In this regard, Willis points out that each of these three roots contains the other two roots and therefore, the *ḍākinī* is both the *la ma* and the *yi dam*, i.e. encompassing all the three roots (Willis 1987, 74).

understanding of the phenomenal world and a direct *seeing* of the nature of this very phenomenal world, which is much more subtle and extremely difficult to fathom. When one is first introduced to the teachings of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, initially, it seems almost impossible to get a glimpse of such direct, naked seeing. While studying and reflecting on the teachings, one frequently reaches "intellectual dead-ends" where one is yet to reveal the essence of these profound teachings. Once meditation is incorporated in the training, one gradually discovers the spacious nature of the mind that is not limited to the domain of intellectuality. Note that meditation can be undertaken in many ways and *sādhana-nṛtya* is one of such diverse methods.

To understand how *sādhana-nṛtya* is carried out both in Newar and Tibetan traditions, it is crucial to contextualize it with regard to its broader *sādhana* practice. In general, since the *vajraḍākinī sādhana-nṛtya* practices belong to the Vajrayoginī *sādhana*-s of the *anuttarayogatantra*,[82] the next chapter has specific segments concerning the *anuttarayogatantra* and its *sādhana*-s relating to Vajrayoginī. The first segment provides a detailed explanation of the *anuttarayogatantra*, its *sādhana*-s relating to the *vajraḍākinī*-s, and the essential components of the *sādhana*-s, i.e. the creation and completion stages. The second segment is dedicated to the Vajrayoginī *sādhana*-s in the Newar and Tibetan traditions. With regard to the Newar tradition, the Vajravārāhī *sādhana* is based on a Newar manuscript on the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *sādhana*. As for the Tibetan tradition, the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* (Tib. *rdo rje phag mo khros ma nag mo*) *sādhana* is based on a rNying ma text called the *Heart Essence Practice Manual of Oral Instructions* (Tib. *thugs sgrub zhal gdams snying byang*).

[82] The two case studies of this thesis are Vajrayoginī related *caryānṛtya* and *vajranṛtya* in the Newar and Tibetan traditions respectively. In the Newar tradition, the *caryānṛtya* of Vajrayoginī that is discussed here as a case study is a general description of Vajrayoginī. The esoteric form of this dance relates to the *Cakrasaṃvara*/*Vajravārāhī Tantra*-based *sādhana*-s. As for the Tibetan tradition, the *vajranṛtya* of *Wrathful Black* Vajrayoginī belongs to the *gcod sādhana*, which is practiced both in rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions.

Chapter Three: The *Anuttarayogatantra* and *Sādhana* Context

The purpose of this chapter is to provide necessary background information about the *anuttarayogatantra*-s, its essential components, and its *sādhana*-s that are here focused on the Vajrayāna tantric female deities (Skt. *vajraḍākinī*-s). There are two major segments in this chapter. The first segment provides an overview of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s, its *vajraḍākinī*-based *sādhana*-s, and an explanation of the significant phases of the *sādhana*-s: creation (Skt. *utpattikrama*, Tib. *bskyed rim*) and completion (Skt. *sampannakrama*, Tib. *rdogs rim*) stages. The second segment is centered around the Vajrayoginī *sādhana*-s. The segment begins with outlining the main features of the *sādhana*-s, followed by specific Vajrayoginī practices in the Newar and Tibetan traditions. The *caryānṛtya* of the Vajrayoginī-s and *vajranṛtya* of the *ḍākinī*-s are associated more specifically here with the Vajrayoginī *sādhana*-s in Newar and Tibetan contexts respectively.

The *anuttarayogatantra*

The Vajrayāna tradition primarily focuses on "liberative techniques (Skt. *upāya*)" or specific skillful means[83] (Pettit 1999, 60) that are based on the teachings of "Buddhist esoterism or *tantra*" (Pettit 1999, 41), to gain a direct experience of the adamantine (Skt. *vajra*) nature of the reality. Vajrayāna is also termed as "*Tantrayāna* (Tib. *rgyud kyi theg pa*)," "*Mantrayāna* (Tib. *sngags kyi theg pa*),"[84] "Fruitional Vehicle (Skt. *phalayāna*, Tib. *'bras bu'i theg pa*)," and so forth (Pettit 1999, 60). In this context, the three major categories of *mantra* are noteworthy:

[83] A vast range of skillful means is employed in Vajrayāna practices. In the context of the *anuttarayogatantra*, the skillful means are specifically aimed at gaining mastery over one's subtle body (Skt. *sūkṣma śarīra*). The Father *Tantra* (Tib. *pha rgyud*) or *mahāyoga* and Mother *Tantra* (Tib. *ma rgyud*) or *anuyoga* of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s use skillful means relating to the wind (Skt. *prāṇa*, Tib. *rlung*) and essence-drops (Skt. *bindu*, Tib. *thig le)* of the subtle body (Skt. *sūkṣma śarīra*) respectively (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:154).

[84] Vajrayāna is also called *Mantranaya*, which means the way (Skt. *naya*) of the secret *mantra* (English 2002, 1; Harding 2002, 5).

the "*mantra*-s of retention (Skt. *dhāraṇī,* Tib. *gzungs*)," "gnostic *mantra*-s (Skt. *vidyāmantra*, Tib. *rig sngags*)," and "secret *mantra* (Skt. *guḥyamantra*, Tib. *gsang sngags*)."[85] In particular, the secret *mantra* relates to the "inner *tantra*-s (Tib. *nang rgyud*)," i.e. the *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga*, and *atiyoga* classes of the *tantra*-s, which correspond to the "unexcelled union *tantra*" (Skt. *anuttarayogatantra*, Tib. *rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i rgyud*) of Vajrayāna (Pettit 1999, 63).[86] One of the distinguishing methods of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s is to engender great bliss (Skt. *mahāsukha*, Tib. *bde da chen po*) which is endowed with innate luminosity (Skt. *prakṛtiprabhāsvara*, Tib. *rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal*) with the aid of the *sādhana* practices (Pettit 1999, 66).

The *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s of the *vajraḍākinī*-s

A *sādhana* practice is a combination of meditation techniques and ritual activities that are centered upon specific Vajrayāna tantric deity or a group of deities (English 2002, 24–25). In particular, the *sādhana*-s that are focused on the Vajrayāna female tantric deities, i.e. the ones that emphasize the *yoginī*/*ḍākinī* figures, are based on the *yoginī* class of the *tantra*-s, i.e. the *yoginītantra*, which later subsumed into the class of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s[87] (English 2002,

[85] The term *mantra* (Tib. *sngags*) has several meanings in different contexts. Among the three classifications of the *mantra*-s, the *dhāraṇī*-s are based on the *sūtra*-s to aid in "discriminative awareness," the *vidyāmantra*-s relate to the outer class *tantra*-s (*kriyā*-, *upa*-, and *yoga*-*tantra*), and the *guḥyamantra*-s belong to the inner class of *tantra*-s, especially for the creation or generation stage of the *sādhana* (Rangjung Yeshe dictionary). The literal meaning of the term *mantra* is protecting (Skt. *tra*) the mind (Skt. *man*). In Vajrayāna practices, specific seed syllables are associated with certain deities that are chanted and visualized during the *sādhana*-s to dissolve any dualistic distinction between the ordinary environment of the practitioner and the visualized abodes (Skt. *maṇḍala*, Tib. *dkyil 'khor*) of the deities (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 1308–9). Often times, the *mantra*-s are repeatedly recited during the *sādhana*-s for purification purpose. In this context, the process of purification refers to letting go of all sorts clinging to *saṃsāra* as something substantially existent (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:135). In the *sādhana*-s, the repeated recitation of the *mantra* is referred to as the "nail of *mantra* (Tib. *snying po sngags kyi gzer*)," which is the "essence of the deity" (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:151). For this reason, *mantra* is also the binding force for *sādhana* practices. For example, during *sgrub chen* retreats, which are intense group *sādhana*-s that usually last for seven to nine days, the *mantra*-s are uninterruptedly recited during the entire time period.

[86] An explanation of the *anuttarayogatantra* is provided in chapter two (see footnote 6).

[87] For an overview of the categorization of the Buddhist *tantra*-s, such as the five-fold or seven-fold classifications and the emergence of the *yoginītantra*-s, refer to English, who draws on earlier works by Sanderson, Isaacson, and others (2002, 1–9).

5–6). In general, the *yoginītantra*-s are centered on wrathful deities (Heruka class deities such as Hevajra and Cakrasaṃvara)[88] and they are associated with the cremation grounds (Skt. *kapalika*). In the earlier *yoginītantra*-s these wrathful deities were seen with their female consorts. In the later phases, the female figures gradually evolved to be depicted as principal *maṇḍala* deities[89] (English 2002, 4). One of the crucial aspects of these *sādhana*-s is to fully dissolve any dualistic distinction or separation from the visualized deity (Pettit 1999, 63). In the Newar tradition, such *sādhana*-s are also said to be in correspondence with the *anuttarayogatantra*-s (Bangdel 1999, 895; Padam 2018). A standard, mature *sādhana*[90] practice includes two stages: the creation or generation stage, followed by the completion or perfection stage (English 2002, 25). As a method for accomplishment, these *sādhana*-s contain instructions to achieve the ultimate aim of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s, i.e. the realization of the inseparability of emptiness and luminosity, also seen here as the philosophical posture (the view) leading to a merging of all other postures[91] dissolving into an inexpressible experience of the ultimate.

[88] In a Newar manuscript on the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *maṇḍala*, in addition to Cakrasaṃvara, a separate iconographic section is dedicated to the *mahāmaṇḍala* of Guḥyeśvarī/Vajravārāhī, where she is depicted as a Heruka class deity in a *yoginī* dominated *maṇḍala* (Bangdel 1999, 899). It is noteworthy that, the principal deity of the *maṇḍala*, whether a male or female figure, represents the unity of *prajñā* and *upāya*. In the iconographies often times the consort is symbolized by a *khaṭvāṅga* or "skull staff" (English 2002, 157).

[89] In this context, the term *maṇḍala* (Tib. *dkyil* '*khor*) refers to a symbolic representation of the principal meditational deity (Skt. *iṣṭadevatā*, Tib. *yi dam*) at the center (Tib. *dkyil*), along with the surrounding (Tib. '*khor*) environment of the deity. The *maṇḍala*-s are specific to particular *sādhana*-s during which a practitioner visualizes oneself as the deity inhabiting in that *maṇḍala*. Often times, the central deity is visualized along with a retinue of other deities. To aid the visualizations, various iconographic diagrams of the *maṇḍala*-s are found in the instruction manual texts (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 1294–95). For details about the emergence of the Vajrayāna female tantric deities as central *maṇḍala* figures, refer to the works by Hatley (2016) and Törzsök (2014).

[90] The evolution of the Vajrayāna *sādhana* is discussed by English (2002, 24–33). The distinct emergence of the completion stage is a unique feature of the *yoginītantra*-s, that later incorporated into the *anuttarayogatantra*-s (English 2002, 25; Pettit 1999, 63).

[91] In a *sādhana* practice, one employs *mudrā*-s or hand gestures (physical posture), *mantra* recitation (verbal posture), visualizations and meditative concentrations (mental posture), which are sealed by the view (philosophical posture). The visualizations during the practice unfold from the limitless, nondual, and luminous expanse of the primordial ground (Skt. *dharmadhātu*). At the very beginning of the *sādhana*, the inexpressible, non-conceptual, and formless state of this symbolic ground is evoked as the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā* (symbolic posture) to unfold the rest of the *sādhana*.

Essential components

The *anuttarayogatantra*-s employ two significant components in their practices: the creation (Skt. *utpattikrama*, Tib. *bskyed rim*) and completion (Skt. *sampannakrama*, Tib. *rdogs rim*) stages. There are three aspects of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s: the Father *Tantra* (Tib. *pha rgyud*) that focuses on method (Skt. *upāya*), the Mother *Tantra* (Tib. *ma rgyud*) that emphasizes on wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*), and the Nondual *Tantra* (Tib. *gnyis med rgyud*) directing toward the unity of *upāya* and *prajñā*, i.e. bliss and emptiness.[92] The main purpose of the creation stage is to actualize the "inner potential" (Guenther 1987, xii) of the practitioner by focusing on the skillful means aspect of the unity of *prajñā-upāya*. This is associated with the Father *Tantra*, which is also referred to as *mahāyoga*. This leads to the subsequent stage of completion, which emphasizes the wisdom aspect of *prajñā-upāya* union that relates to the Mother *Tantra* or *anuyoga*. The result of these two stages is the realization of the inseparability of *upāya* and *prajñā*, which is the essence of *atiyoga* or *rdzogs pa chen po* (Guenther 1987, xii; Braitstein 2014, 32).

In order to engage in these advanced level practices, one needs to have a firm basis on the core teachings and practices of the Buddhist tradition. In terms of the teachings, one way to systematize the key Buddhist concepts is to categorize them with respect to the three turnings of the wheel of the Dharma. These three turnings can be used as a framework for the preliminary

[92] In the *anuttarayogatantra*, the ultimate realization is understood as the unity of bliss and emptiness. Based on the explanation of Khedrub Je (Tib. *mkhas grup rje*, 1385-1438), Prof. Braitstein discusses the aspects of skillful means (Skt. *upāya*) and wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*) in this context. The skillful means (Skt. *upāya*) is understood as the knowledge that is co-emergently born (Skt. *sahaja*) with great bliss (Skt. *mahāsukha)* and wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*) is understood as the knowledge that completely fathoms the lack of an intrinsic nature (Skt. *niḥsvabhāva*) of everything. The Father *Tantra* focuses on the aspect of skillful means and Mother *Tantra* emphasizes on the wisdom aspect of the unity of bliss and emptiness respectively. The Father *Tantra* is also known as *Yogi Tantra* and *Ḍāka Tantra*, while the Mother *Tantra* is also referred to as *Yoginī Tantra* and *Ḍākinī Tantra* (Braitstein 2014, 31–32). Information about the three aspects of the *anuttarayogatantra* is from the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 173–74, 1322, 1588).

trainings to prepare for the main practices of the creation and completion stages. In terms of practice sessions, the essential practices of early Buddhist (renunciation and refuge), Mahāyāna (generation of *bodhicitta*), and Vajrayāna (*guru yoga*),[93] are combined together in the *sādhana* practices.[94]

To understand the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana* practices in a traditional setting, Harding's work is key with regard to her explanation of the creation and completion stages. Her sources are traditional, in other words, she presents the point of the view of the tradition. One of the traditional approaches is to ensure a sound basis for the main practice of the *sādhana* is to follow a three-fold technique[95] of "rejection, transformation, and recognition (Tib. *spang bsgyur shes gsum*)" (Harding 2002, 7), which corresponds to the core teachings of the three turnings of the wheel of the Dharma.[96] The main purpose of the preliminaries and main practices is to eliminate all the afflictive and cognitive obscurations. It is said that when these obscurations are dispelled, one realizes that everything, i.e. all phenomena including one's own mind, not only lacks an intrinsic existence, but that its nature is luminosity. This experience or realization is termed as "clear light or radiance (Tib. '*od gsal*)," or "compassion," which is indivisible with emptiness (Harding 2002, 8). This luminous nature indicates the presence of an intrinsically

[93] *Guru yoga* (Tib. *bla ma'i rnal 'byor*) is a Vajrayāna practice where one meditates and supplicates one's root master (Tib. *rtsa ba'i bla ma*) to receive the blessings from the root master and the associated lineage (Tibetan and Himalayan library).
[94] One example of this comprehensive approach can be seen in the preliminaries for the Vajrayoginī *sādhana* (English 2002, 114–20).
[95] The three-fold technique is prescribed by Kongtrül as a way to treat afflictive emotions, which paves the way to prepare oneself for the creation and completion stage practices (Harding 2002, 7).
[96] In the three-fold technique, the beginning stage is to reject the afflictive emotions in order to intensify one's weariness and renunciation for *saṃsāra*, which is associated with the first turning. The next stage entails turning adversity (afflictions and obstacles) into favorable situations by training in emptiness and compassion, which relates to the second turning. The final stage involves re-awakening to one's original and pure essence (Buddha nature), which is a teaching of the third turning as employed on the path of the secret *mantra*. The main purpose is to experience the "radiance-awareness" (Harding 2002, 8), i.e. realizing emptiness which is inseparable with luminosity.

pure, stainless quality in all phenomena at all times. In the Vajrayāna tradition, in order to re-connect with the original pure nature, different methods are employed, one of these important methods consist of visualizing the deities along with their *maṇḍala*-s as expressions of this pure and luminous nature. This is a skillful way to rectify the tendency of mistakenly holding the "emptiness nature of mind" as the "self" and its luminous or "radiant aspect" as the "external world of others" (Harding 2002, 8).

In the pursuit of dissolving all the dualistic boundaries with the visualized deity to realize the empty yet luminous nature of everything, holding one's physical body as something solid and separating it from the mind would be counter-productive. As discussed in chapter two,[97] the tradition understands the mind-body complex as a collection of interdependent aggregates which is essentially a system of interactive energy networks. This treatment of the body as being fluid and always in-flux is even more pronounced in the Vajrayāna context, where the subtle constituents of the body is said to be consisting of a network of channels (Skt. *nāḍī*, Tib. *rtsa*), winds (Skt. *prāṇa*, Tib. *rlung*), and essence-drops (Skt. *bindu*, Tib. *thig le*). In fact, this subtle body is considered to be the "locus" of all the main practices that ultimately leads to perfect and complete awakening (Braitstein 2014, 33). As one visualizes the deities with their *maṇḍala*-s, one cannot possibly become one with them unless one realizes that one is an "integral aspect of the overall scheme of reality" (Guenther 1987, xiii). In other words, one's entire experience of being, from the coarsest to the subtlest aspects (microcosm), is intricately connected to the vast expanse of surrounding environment (macrocosm). In practice, it is through developing a better understanding of the interdependent nature of everything (including oneself) that one begins to

[97] Refer to the section called "The relationship of the mind and body as neither same nor different" that begins on page 21.

gain a deeper insight into the nature of reality (the view). As one advances through the creation and completion stages of the *sādhana* training, one cultivates this wisdom further and begins to recognize that what one has previously considered as mundane, i.e. treating oneself and the surrounding environment as ordinary, in fact, shares the *very* nondual and luminous nature of the visualized supramundane deities with their extraordinary *maṇḍala*-s. In short, deity practice is employed as a method to cultivate and maintain a pure perception-based philosophical posture (the view) that equates the mundane and supramundane on the ground of emptiness which is also endowed with luminosity.

Creation Stage

During the creation or generation stage, a process of purification (Tib. *sbyong ba*) occurs in a sequence of visualizations through meditative concentrations on emptiness or suchness, compassion, and cause or seed syllable (Harding 2002, 14–15; Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:135–36, 147–48). These meditations focus upon and purify the aspects of death in one's previous lifetimes, intermediate stage (Tib. *bar do*), rebirth, and subsequent development. The path of the secret *mantra* maintains that if creation stage practices are done in accordance with the three concentrations together with the application of necessary antidotes, one is said to purify the three doors of engagements (body, speech, and mind) and the karmic dispositions that are responsible for the repeated rebirths within *saṃsāra*. In this context, purification is understood as releasing oneself from grasping to a true, substantial existence. Furthermore, by meditating on the deities, one strives on perfecting the result, i.e. the wisdoms and *kāya*-s of the deity that are already immanent in one's Buddha nature. These two methods of the creation stage, i.e. purification and perfection, prepare one for the completion stage practice (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:135–36).

There are three aspects of the creation stage, i.e. "clarity, recollecting purity, and pride" (Harding 2002, 15), that aid in the visualization process of a practitioner. The clarity aspect is aimed toward a clear and precise visualization of the deity, which should be cultivated with a steady, one-pointed, and relaxed mind. Recollecting purity focuses on the details of the deity such as the significance of their specific postures.[98] Cultivating pride entails a firm conviction that one *is* the deity, in all pure and perfect aspects. It is about recognizing the deity as one's radiant awareness and maintaining a self-assurance of being the deity throughout the practice.

Completion Stage

The completion or perfection stage practices are mainly categorized in two kinds: completion with characteristics (Tib. *mtshan bcas rdogs rim*) and completion without characteristics (Tib. *mtshan med rdogs rim*) practices (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:405). The completion stage practices of the Father *Tantra* (Skt. *mahāyoga*) and Mother *Tantra* (Skt. *anuyoga*) that involve the winds (Skt. *prāṇa*, Tib. *rlung*) and essence-drops (Skt. *bindu*, Tib. *thig le*) of the subtle body (Skt. *sūkṣma śarīra*) respectively, belong the former kind. The Nondual *Tantra* entails a practice called the "luminosity devoid of form (Tib. *snang med* '*od gsal*)" in the completion stage (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:154, 405), where the mind naturally relaxes with "intrinsic awareness" in an uncontrived manner (Harding 2002, 18), corresponding to the latter kind.

As mentioned, the subtle body yogic practices belong to the type of completion stage with characteristics. These practices such as "mystic heat (Tib. *gtum mo*)," "ejection of consciousness (Tib. '*pho ba*)," "dream yoga (Tib. *rmi lam*)" and so forth (Harding 2002, 18), aim

[98] Kongtrül advises not to "clutter the mind" by obsessing over the details, rather to maintain a constant awareness that the essence of the deity is empty yet radiant in nature, out of which all these attributes arise (Harding 2002, 16).

to gain mastery over the winds (Skt. *prāṇa*, Tib. *rlung*), channels (Skt. *nāḍī*, Tib. *rtsa*), and essence drops (Skt. *bindu*, Tib. *thig le*) of the subtle body (Skt. *sūkṣma śarīra*)[99] (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:164, 179). The completion stage without characteristics is a direct way to access the nature of the mind. These are in fact regarded as two applications of the completion stage.[100] In practice, one utilizes both of these approaches since they share the same goal and are complementary in nature by the virtue of being form and formless practices. One such example is a subtle body yogic practice called the *rtsa rlung* '*khrul* '*khor*. In the rNying ma tradition, this practice incorporates both *anuyoga* and *atiyoga* methods (Baker 2018, 358–59).

Figure 3.1
A depiction of *rtsa rlung* movements relating to *thod rgyal* practice of *rdzogs chen*[101]

[99] These are the results of gaining mastery over the subtle body: "Bliss arises on the basis of the essence-drops; clarity occurs on the basis of the winds; and the compounded state of thought-free wisdom and the uncompounded, co-emergent primordial wisdom arise on the basis of the channels" (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:179).
[100] Both of these approaches, i.e. with and without characteristics, can be referred to as the paths of "method (Tib. *thabs lam*)" and "liberation (Tib. '*grol lam*)" respectively (Harding 2002, 19).
[101] A sequence of *rtsa rlung* '*khrul* '*khor* movements revealed by Urgyen Pema Lingpa (Tib. *o rgyan pad ma gling pa*, 1445-1521) in a treasure text called the *Compendium of All-Embracing Great Perfection* (Tib. *rdzogs chen kun bzang dgongs* '*dus*). This illustration is reproduced in the *Yoga in Transformation: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Baker 2018, 360).

The Vajrayoginī *sādhana*

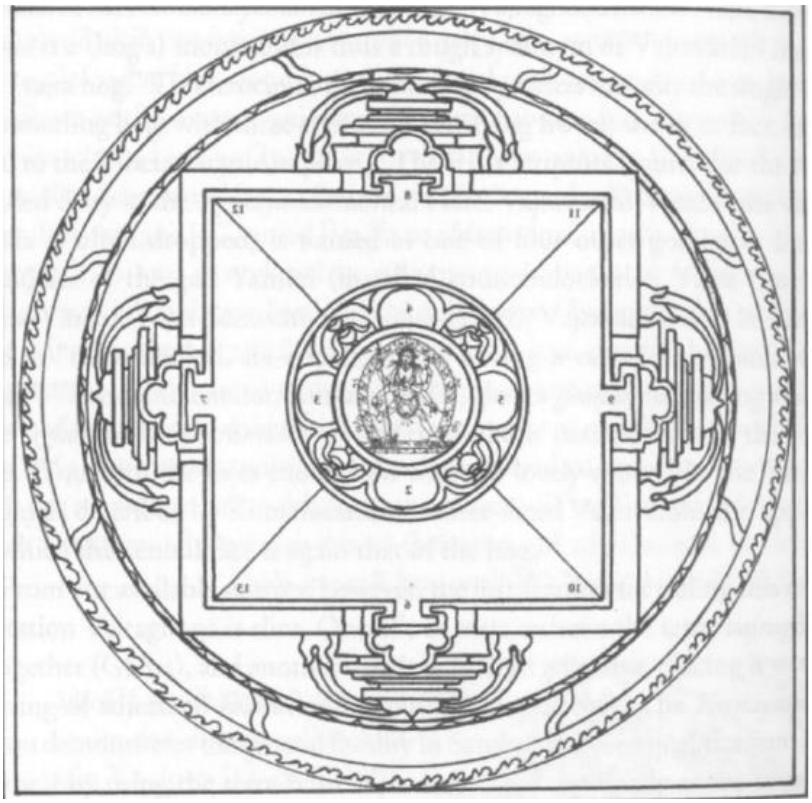
As mentioned earlier, the *sādhana*-s are instruction manuals that serve as a method to gain certain accomplishments on the Vajrayāna path. The *sādhana*-s that are dedicated to the Vajrayoginī do not have their own scriptural source but abstracts from the corpus related to the Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala* (English 2002, 26–27). As a range of diverse forms of Vajrayoginī evolves as principal deities in the *maṇḍala*-s dominated by the *yoginī/ḍākinī* figures, various specialized *sādhana*-s began to emerge by focusing on her particular forms, such as the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* (Tib. *rdo rje phag mo khros ma nag mo*) in the rNying ma tradition, which is considered to be an extremely secret and powerful practice (English 2002, xxv–xxvii). In this segment, two specific examples of the Vajrayoginī *sādhana*-s are considered: a Newar manuscript on Guḥyeśvarī/Vajravārāhī *sādhana* which is based on the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī (Newar) *maṇḍala* and a rNying ma *gcod sādhana* on *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* (Tib. *rdo rje phag mo khros ma nag mo*). These *sādhana*-s serve as a contextual basis for this study on the *caryānṛtya* of the Vajrayoginī-s and *vajranṛtya* of the *ḍākinī*-s in the Newar and Tibetan traditions respectively.

Before delving into specific discussions on the aforementioned *sādhana*-s in the Newar and Tibetan traditions, a brief outline of a Vajrayoginī *sādhana* will be helpful to understand the practice as a whole.[102] Although the contents of the *sādhana*-s vary from tradition to tradition, a Vajrayoginī *sādhana* by Umapatideva[103] from the *Guḥyasamayasādhanamālā* is used here as an example in order to sketch a framework for a *sādhana* dedicated to Vajrayoginī (English 2002, 109–223). This Vajrayoginī *sādhana* has four major meditation stages. These meditations

[102] This description is primarily based on English's work called *Vajrayoginī: Her Visualizations, Rituals, and Forms* (English 2002).
[103] Umapatideva was an author during early twelfth century in northeastern India, who composed the Vajrayoginī *sādhana*, which is included in the *Guḥyasamayasādhanamālā* (English 2002, xx).

progressively unfold the five-fold, thirteen-fold, and finally the full thirty-seven fold *maṇḍala*[104] of Vajrayoginī. The first meditation stage is a *sādhana* recited in its entirety while the other three stages explain the visualizations of the increasingly expanding *maṇḍala*. A complete *sādhana* includes opening and closing verses, preliminaries, instructions about creation and completion stages, and concludes with repeating the *mantra* of the deity (English 2002, 109–10).

Figure 3.2
An illustration of a thirteen-fold *maṇḍala* of Vajravārāhī[105]



[104] The five, thirteen, and thirty-seven fold refers to the expanse of the *maṇḍala*. For example, in a five-fold *maṇḍala*, the principal deity is placed at the center, surrounded by a retinue of the four emanations. In thirteen and thirty-seven folds, the sizes of the retinue expand to their respective numbers. Figure 3.2 depicts a thirteen-fold *maṇḍala* of Vajravārāhī.

[105] In this thirteen-fold *maṇḍala* of Vajravārāhī, she is placed at the center of the *maṇḍala*. The numbers written on the cardinal petals (2-5), outer *maṇḍala* gates (6-9) and corners (10-13) indicate the locations of her retinue deities. Illustration from *Vajrayoginī: Her Visualizations, Rituals, and Forms* (English 2002, 65). A full-fold of thirty-seven deity *maṇḍala* of Vajrayoginī can be accessed at the *Himalayan Art Resources*: https://www.himalayanart.org/items/23376.

The meditation and yogic practices relating to the creation and completion stages in this regard deserve particular attention. As mentioned earlier, in the creation stage, a practitioner undergoes a process of purification through a sequence of meditative concentrations. In the Vajrayoginī *sādhana* an accumulation of wisdom is gained by meditating on emptiness with the aid of specific *mantra*-s. In accordance with the view exposed in Chapter Two, the first one is a *mantra* of purity[106] that states that the essence of all phenomena and the practitioner is empty and pure. At first the practitioner meditates on the idea that all phenomena are empty by nature in a sense that these are mere imputations and do not have substantial existence, i.e. the philosophical posture. By the virtue of being empty and nondual (*vajra*), their essence is pure. Next, the practitioner applies the same principle on himself or herself, that the subjective mind projecting these phenomena is also empty and pure by nature. The repetition of this *mantra* facilitates the practitioner to go beyond the subject-object dualistic mode of conceptual elaboration. The second *mantra* that is also repeated several times is a *mantra* of nonduality[107] where the practitioner is said to be of the same essence as that of the "nondual (*vajra*) knowledge of emptiness"[108] (English 2002, 126). With the aid of specific visualizations, the *mantra* facilitates a meditative concentration on the *vajra* nature of emptiness that dissolves the dualistic boundaries among the surroundings, visualized *maṇḍala*, and the practitioner.

In other words, the first *mantra* aids the practitioner through sound and breath to focus one pointedly and therefore, let go of any mundane and dualistic associations, such as holding onto one's own aggregates as a self or separating between self and others. Through the *death* of

[106] The *mantra* of purity is "*oṃ svabhāvaśuddhaḥ sarvadharmaḥ oṃ svabhāvaśuddho 'haṃ*," which means "all existents are pure by nature; I am pure by nature" (English 2002, 125).
[107] The *mantra* of nonduality is "*oṃ śūnyatājñānavajrasvabhāvātmako 'haṃ*," which means "I am identical with the essence of the nondual knowledge of emptiness" (English 2002, 126).
[108] The meditation on nondual emptiness is also associated with the experience of "clear light," "radiance/manifestation," "innate bliss," or "fusion of emptiness and radiance" (English 2002, 128).

one's notion of self, i.e. dissolution of one's mundane, ordinary self into the *dharmakāya*,[109] the practitioner becomes fully receptive to assume the divine pride of the deity, which is a self-assurance that one is indeed the deity themselves. The second *mantra* induces a nondual yet blissful experience of luminous emptiness. Driven by the *bodhisattva* vow which was an aspect of the preliminaries at the beginning of the *sādhana*, the practitioner then re-emerges from the meditative absorption of the *dharmadhātu* and performs the rest of the activities (English 2002, 125–31). The culmination of the creation stage practice is the accomplishment of self-visualization as the deity through the five awakenings that correspond to the five wisdoms. The deity that emerges out of the five awakenings is the *saṃbhogakāya* of Vajravārāhī, who is the "*yogin*-as-goddess" (English 2002, 30), i.e. the practitioner becoming the deity, i.e. Vajravārāhī (English 2002, 149–55). In the completion stage, all the visualizations from the creation stage are dissolved back into the source, i.e. the basic ground of *dharmadhātu*.[110] What remains is the nondual experience of emptiness without any conceptual elaborations whatsoever, i.e. completion without characteristics.

In this outline of the Vajrayoginī *sādhana*, all the postures are synchronized together to bring about one's direct experience of luminous emptiness. The philosophical posture assumes the foremost role since it sets out the *sādhana* with the Vajrayāna view. This philosophical posture implies that all that is visualized is in perfect accord with the unity of appearance and

[109] There are many ways to enumerate buddha bodies (Skt. *buddha kāya*) and there are many ways to categorize the *kāya*-s of which is three-fold manner. In general, the *dharmakāya* is the *dharma* body or truth body of the buddha as the ultimate reality (mind), the *saṃbhogakāya* is the enjoyment or reward body that is the perfect manifestation of the unity of appearance and emptiness (speech), and the *nirmāṇakāya* or emanation body is a physical manifestation (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 633, 1834–35, 1446, 2253). For detailed explanation about *buddha kāya*-s refer to the works by Nagao and Hirano (1973) and Makransky (2003).

[110] In the context of the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*, *dharmadhātu* refers to the primordial ground out of which all visualizations arise and dissolve back. As explained in chapter two (p. 35), at the beginning of the *sādhana*, the non-conceptual, non-dual, and formless state of this ultimate, i.e. the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā*, is evoked through the seed syllable A. This primordial ground is the source for all subsequent visualizations of the deities and their *maṇḍala*-s during the *sādhana*.

emptiness, and the practitioner is no exception to that abiding mode of reality. Based on the mental postures of the visualizations and meditative concentrations, one incorporates the verbal posture of chanting the *mantra*-s. In various stages, certain seed syllables of specific *mantra*-s are also visualized (mental posture). The *mantra* is the binding force of the *sādhana* since it is regarded as the very essence of the meditational deity (see footnote 85). So, the significance of *mantra* encompasses the entirety of the body, speech, and mind of the practitioner.

A specific *mantra* is chanted (verbal posture), along with particular hand gestures (physical posture), while also being visualized (mental posture). Furthermore, the *mantra* recitation aids in achieving the purification and perfection purposes of the *sādhana*. In terms of purification, by meditating and reciting the *mantra* of purity, one recognizes that everything is empty yet luminous, thereby letting go of grasping anything as being substantially existent. As for attaining perfection, the *mantra* of nonduality repeatedly emphasizes the nondual nature of both the deity and the practitioner that eventually leads to dissolving any dualistic separation. The *sādhana* culminates to the final stage when no such dualistic distinctions remain whatsoever. At this point, one's philosophical posture that started out with a firm conviction becomes a direct experience. The entire training employs all other postures along the way to actualize this realization of the inexpressible, inconceivable, nondual ultimate.

Newar context: Vajravārāhī *sādhana* based on Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *maṇḍala*

Since Vajrayoginī practices are based on the Cakrasaṃvara corpus (English 2002, 27), let us look at a Newar manuscript on the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *sādhana* to discuss Vajravārāhī/Vajrayoginī practices in the Newar tradition. The manuscript is arranged in five segments: depiction of the sixty-four forms of Cakrasaṃvara, the esoteric forms of the *Jina* Buddha-s, Guḥyeśvarī as the central piece of the manuscript, depiction of the nine *yoginī*-s along

with Vajravārāhī, and representation of the eight mother goddesses, i.e. the *aṣṭamātṛkā*-s (Bangdel 1999, 896).

In the *sādhana* practice, the creation stage *maṇḍala* is dedicated to Cakrasaṃvara as the central deity who is surrounded by the four Vajrayoginī-s relating to the Kathmandu valley and the completion stage *maṇḍala* illustrates the *mahāmaṇḍala* of Vajravārāhī where she is situated at the center of the six *yoginī*-s (Bangdel 1999, 911–12). This Newar manuscript on the *sādhana* of the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *maṇḍala* is essentially a *yoginī maṇḍala* which corresponds to the *anuttarayogatantra*-s. The *sādhana* includes the creation stage of Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala* focusing on the method (Skt. *upāya*) aspect, i.e. *mahāyoga*, the completion stage of Guḥyeśvarī/Vajravārāhī *maṇḍala* emphasizing on the wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*) aspect, i.e. *anuyoga,* and concluding with the union of both the stages. At the end of the *sādhana*, the practitioner fully dissolves any distinctions with Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī (Bangdel 1999, 799–801). In fact, this final outcome is the result of carrying out all the stages of the *sādhana* by visualizing oneself as the *maṇḍala* deity with a view based on pure perception (philosophical posture). Throughout the course of the *sādhana*, one incorporates the rest of the postures by engaging one's body, speech, and mind to eventually become one with the deity, i.e. culminating to the final stage of fully actualizing the philosophical posture.

Figure 3.3
Guḥyeśvarī as a Heruka-class deity in a nineteenth century Newar ritual manuscript[111]

In the iconographic depiction of Guḥyeśvarī/Vajravārāhī *maṇḍala*, Guḥyeśvarī is placed at the center of the manuscript as a Heruka-class deity (in blue) since she regarded as the primordial goddess (Skt. *ādi śakti*) for the *Svayambhū Mahācaitya*, mother of the buddha-s (Skt. *buddhamātṛ*), embodiment of transcendental wisdom (Skt. *prajñāpāramitā*), and the source for the Cakrasaṃvara teachings in Nepal. In the *mahāmaṇḍala* of Vajravārāhī for the completion stage practice, Vajravārāhī (as an emanation of Guḥyeśvarī) is the principal deity of the *maṇḍala*, along with her retinue in the inner concentric circle and the *aṣṭamātṛkā*-s in the outer concentric

[111] Figure 3.3 shows an iconography of Guḥyeśvarī, who is placed at the center of a nineteenth-century Newar ritual manuscript on Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *sādhana*. She is depicted in the *ardha paryaṅka* posture, where her left leg is deeply flexed and the right leg is bent toward her left thigh. English associates this posture as one of the wrathful (Skt. *tāṇḍava*) dancing poses of Vajravārāhī/Vajrayoginī (English 2002, 50). Image reproduced in the *Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art* (Huntington and Bangdel 2003, 273).

circles. The *yoginī*-s at the inner concentric circle are regarded as the direct emanations of Vajravārāhī, who are the holders of knowledge (Skt. *vidyādharī*) and bestower of tantric accomplishments (Skt. *siddhidātṛ*). The *aṣṭamātṛkā*-s at the outer concentric circles are associated with the power places of the Kathmandu valley (outer landscape) that relate to the subtle body of the practitioner (inner landscape), aiding in the purification of the body, speech, and mind. Since the *sādhana* procedure "strongly reflects" the phases of the meditations of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s (Bangdel 1999, 801), it can be implied that the visualizations and meditative concentrations would be in accord with the general framework of the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s which has been discussed earlier in this chapter.

Tibetan context: *khros ma nag mo sādhana* based on *thugs sgrub zhal gdams snying byang*

In the rNying ma tradition, one of the most prominent Vajrayoginī practices relates to the *gcod sādhana*. Its scriptural basis is a thirteenth century rediscovered treasure text (Tib. *yang gter*) named the *Union of All Secret Ḍākinī-s* (Tib. *mkha' 'gro gsang ba kun 'dus kyi chos skor*) revealed by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (Tib. *'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po*, 1820-1892). The original treasure text (Tib. *gter ma*) is attributed to Jo Mo Man Mo (Tib. *jo mo sman mo*, 1248-1283), who was a renowned female treasure revealer (Tib. *gter ston*). This text is about the *gcod* tradition of Machig Labdrön (Tib. *ma gcig lab sgron*, 1031-1129). In the *gcod sādhana*, the principal deity is an extremely wrathful form of Vajrayoginī in black color (Tib. *rdo rje phag mo khros ma nag mo*). The tradition warns that the *sādhana* of the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* is considered as highly esoteric and very powerful; if practiced, it should be taken with utmost caution (English 2002, xxvi–xxvii). One form of *ḍākinī-nṛtya* that is associated with the *gcod sādhana* is based on a text called the *Heart Essence Practice Manual of Oral Instructions* (Tib. *thugs sgrub zhal gdams snying byang*). This practice manual belongs to the root *tantra* of the

Guru's Heart Practice that Dispels all Obstacles (Tib. *thugs sgrub bar chad kun sel*) in the rNying ma tradition.[112]

Figure 3.4
An illustration of *mchog gling gter gsar gcod sādhana* visualization[113]

The main purpose of this *sādhana* is to cut through (Tib. *gcod*) ignorance and clinging to one's own aggregates (Harding 2013, 43–44; Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 121, 123). This *sādhana* is a combined approach of both the *Sūtra* and *Tantra* and its philosophical view is

[112] Information about the practice manual is obtained from an English translation of the *sādhana* which is published in a book called the *Ḍākinī Activity: The Dynamic Play of Awakening* (Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 117–29). Information about the root text is obtained from Rangjung Yeshe dictionary.
[113] The *gcod sādhana* of *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* (Tib. *rdo rje phag mo khros ma nag mo*), as visualized in the *mchog gling gter gsar*, which is a collection of *dharma* treasures (Tib. *gter ma*) revealed by Chokgyur Dechen Lingpa (Tib. *chog gyur bde chen zhing po gling pa*, 1829-1870) that includes the *thugs sgrub bar chad kun sel* teaching cycle. Image reproduced in the *Ḍākinī Activity: The Dynamic Display of Awakening* (Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 115).

rooted within the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature (Harding 2013, 46; Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 128). In the *sādhana*, the three meditative concentrations on emptiness, compassion, and seed-syllables relating to the creation stage (Harding 2002, 14–15) are applied as the "three *vajra* methods"[114] (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:141). The main section of the *gcod sādhana* begins with recalling the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā*, who is also the mother of all the buddha-s and the embodiment of space-awareness. By uttering *phaṭ*, the practitioner cuts through the grasping to one's own psycho-physical aggregates and commences the *samādhi* on emptiness or suchness. Within the state of the meditative concentration on suchness, the nature of one's mind is revealed as the *dharmakāya*, which takes the form of the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* and ejects out of the physical body through the crown of one's head. This is called the visualization of '*pho ba* or ejection of consciousness (Harding 2013, 50).

In the subsequent stages of the practice, the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī*, along with her retinue, sever the departed body, purifies and transforms it into an ocean of wisdom nectar, and offers it to peaceful and wrathful guests. The process of purification is visualized with a pure (i.e. nondual) outlook which is beyond the conceptualization of the three spheres (subject, object, and action). The practitioner visualizes the nature of the mind in the form of the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* who leaves the physical body, cuts off the head, and chops the rest of the physical

[114] The three *vajra* methods that employ meditation (Tib. *rdo rje*'*i cho ga gsum*) are the three *samādhi*-s pertaining to the creation stage practices (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Lingpa 2013, 2:141). The first *samādhi* is the *samādhi* on suchness or "*samādhi*-of-as-it-is (Tib. *de bzhin nyid kyi ting nge 'dzin*)," where one meditates on suchness. The second *samādhi* is the *samādhi* on compassion or the "*samādhi* of universal manifestation (Tib. *kun tu snang ba*'*i ting nge* '*dzin*)," where one meditates on all-perceiving, universal compassion. This is also known as all-illuminating *samādhi*. The third *samādhi* is the *samādhi* on seed syllables or "causal *samādhi* (Tib. *rgyu*'*i ting nge* '*dzin*)," which is the combination of the prior two *samādhi*-s. The first *samādhi* is aimed toward realizing ultimate *bodhicitta*, out of which relative *bodhicitta* arises in the subsequent *samādhi*. The third *samādhi* combines both where one eventually realizes the *vajra* nature of everything (Rigpa Wiki entry on the three *samādhi*-s). In other words, in the third *samādhi*, one eventually realizes that all appearances are deities, all sound is *mantra*, and all thoughts are the display of *prajñā*.

body into smaller pieces with a *karti* (*vajra* cleaver or crescent-shaped knife).[115] The choice of weapon and the process of chopping signify cutting through the subtlest clinging to one's own body, along with all the defilements, i.e. dualistic fixations. The visualization of offering the body without conceptualizing subject, object, and the action of giving serves as a method for letting go of grasping to oneself. The *sādhana* targets one's own body, which is the object of one's deeply rooted clinging that is extremely difficult to let go.

The offering of the body results in accumulating both merit and wisdom since it is done with the Vajrayāna view. This underscores the role of *prajñā*, which makes any action a *pāramitā*. The offering of one's own body itself is an act of giving (Skt. *dāna*) and generates merit, but when offered with the view of *prajñā* (philosophical posture), this giving attains perfection (Skt. *pāramitā*) in a sense that it transcends all the worldly motivations and dualistic fixations, thereby accumulating wisdom in the process. This act of giving is also embraced with compassion, especially when given to the six classes of beings. Once one has recognized the nature of the mind (*samādhi* on suchness), one also realizes the radiance or compassion aspect of emptiness (*samādhi* on compassion or courageous journey). Furthermore, by visualizing that the beings are given anything that they wish for, one engages in the *samādhi* on seed-syllable.[116] The main *sādhana* concludes with recalling the essence of the practice, which is recognizing the original, nondual, uncontrived state of the mind. At the end, the practitioner emerges out of this nondual state of awareness as Avalokiteśvara or Tārā in order to carry out beneficial activities out of great compassion. In short, the essence of *gcod sādhana* is to actualize the realization of

[115] An image and iconographic description of a *karti* is given by English in *Vajrayoginī*: *Her Visualizations, Rituals, and Forms* (2002, 72).
[116] In this presentation, the *samādhi* of seed-syllable is also referred to as "magic-like *samādhi*" (Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 128). However, in a general presentation, "magic-like *samādhi*" is said to be corresponding to the second *samādhi*, i.e. *samādhi* on compassion (Rangjung Yeshe dictionary). Since different presentations employ different terms, further examination in this regard is necessary.

the perfection of wisdom by completely severing any grasping to one's own psycho-physical aggregates (Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 123–28; Harding 2013, 49–56).

The *sādhana* of Guḥyeśvarī/Vajravārāhī/Vajrayoginī in the Newar tradition and the *gcod sādhana* of the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* in the rNying ma tradition follow the standard framework of a mature *anuttarayogatantra sādhana* of creation and completion stages. Since the formulation of the *sādhana*-s is flexible in nature to serve the purpose of the practice (English 2002, 26), often times shorter *sādhana*-s are composed by focusing on the meditational deities that function as manuals for the dance practices (R. Vajrācārya 1986, 6). Both the Newar and Tibetan traditions have dance practices relating to the Vajrayoginī *sādhana*-s.

Considering all this information, it is evident that the symbolic postures found in the tantric world are anthropomorphic ways to develop the view of emptiness as proposed by the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. Although it seems contradictory, the esoteric approach uses habitual tendencies toward the human form to move toward what is formless to the point where form (appearance) and formlessness (emptiness) are experientially recognized as inseparable. In Vajrayoginī *sādhana*-s, the habitual tendency toward anthropomorphic forms is used to visualize the deity. By emphasizing that the deity *is* the very nature of emptiness and so is the practitioner, one targets all the dualistic boundaries since the beginning stage of practice. Through repeated visualizations and rehearsals, one imagines and dances *as though* one is Vajrayoginī and slowly builds up the confidence to enter the uncharted ground of the dynamic play of form and formlessness. The next chapter details the dance practices relating to Vajrayoginī in two specific segments: the dance practice of the (red) Vajrayoginī in the Newar tradition (Vajrayoginī-*nṛtya*) and the dance practice of the (black) Vajrayoginī in the Tibetan tradition (*gcod ḍākinī-nṛtya*).

Chapter Four: The Diversity of Ritual Dance Practices in Nepal

Dance has been an integral part of the socio-cultural environment of South Asian and Himalayan regions (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976, 1; Lerner 1983, 50; Khanna and Reddy 2020, 178), where the Himalayan Buddhist traditions have emerged over millennia and continue to evolve till the present day. Through the course of the centuries, various forms of South Asian and Himalayan dances have been incorporated into the practices of Himalayan Buddhist traditions, thereby giving rise to a multi-dimensional nexus between ritual activities and performing arts (Toffin 2013, 5; Cupchik 2015, 31–33). One such example is *sādhana-nṛtya* or ritual dances. One of the Himalayan Buddhist practices is called a *sādhana*, which incorporates a sequence of meditation stages and ritual activities (English 2002, 27). Often times, a *sādhana* can involve various forms of dance movement as well (Lerner 1983, 50; Ahmed 2003, 159–60; Khanna and Reddy 2020, 175–78).

As discussed in chapter two, the practice of *sādhana-nṛtya* employs a range of postures (philosophical, psychophysical, and symbolic) by incorporating the body, speech, and mind of a practitioner. Keeping the etymological meaning of *sādhana* in mind,[117] with regard to the goal of these dance practices, Lerner identifies two major aspects: "meditational" and "goal oriented" (Lerner 1983, 51). The meditational aspect relates to the phases of the meditative absorptions of the practitioner during the *sādhana*-s, while the goal-oriented aspect relates to its surrounding community and environment, such as subjugating and dispelling negative powers, protecting and increasing conducive circumstances, inducing "liberation through seeing (Tib. *mthong grol*)" among the audience, and so forth. In other words, *sādhana-nṛtya* can be seen as a means to serve

[117] The etymological meaning of the term *sādhana* is "means of attainment" (English 2002, 27).

both at individual and collective levels.[118] At an individual level, the state of the meditative absorption of the *sādhana-nṛtya* practitioner is a combination of philosophical and mental postures as the meditation is sealed by the view. Even when the collective level is concerned, the subtlety of the development of *prajñā* that relates to the philosophical posture is what renders the dance efficient. The goal-oriented functions are performed not only out of the form (for example, viewed by an audience), but through a profound understanding of the nature of reality within the mind of the *sādhana-nṛtya* practitioner (formless).

In the Kathmandu Valley, two specific *sādhana-nṛtya* practices, i.e. *caryānṛtya* (practice-dance)[119] and *vajranṛtya* (*vajra*-dance),[120] are prominent in Newar and Tibetan traditions respectively. While there are existing scholarships on the ritual and folk dances of the Newar tradition (R. Vajrācārya 1986; Shakya 1994; Ahmed 2003; Widdess 2004; Toffin 2014) and that of the Tibetan tradition (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976; Kohn 2001; Samuel and David 2016), studies on the Newar and Tibetan Vajrayāna dance forms in light of their philosophical background (Y. P. Vajrācārya 1998; Ahmed 2003, 169–79; Khanna and Reddy 2020, 181–85) is still an understudied topic.[121] Furthermore, the contemporary practices of the *caryānṛtya* and *vajranṛtya* in these traditions deserve a thorough examination. Although providing such comprehensive analysis is beyond the scope of this work, by looking at the aspect of wisdom

[118] The multi-dimensional purpose of *sādhana-nṛtya* is discussed at a greater length in the next chapter.
[119] The literal translation of the term *caryānṛtya* is practice-dance. Newar scholars and practitioners explain *caryānṛtya* in English as "Dance As a Spiritual Discipline" (Ahmed 2003, 161), in other words, dance as a Vajrayāna practice.
[120] The literal translation of the term *vajranṛtya* is *vajra*-dance. Its corresponding Tibetan terms *rdo rje gar stabs* indicates that the dance postures or movements are taken as Vajrayāna practice to aid one's realization. These postures or movements are associated with *rdo rje skyil krung* (*vajra* lotus posture), *rdo rje mgur* (*vajra* songs), '*khrul* '*khor* (yogic movement practices as illustrated in Figure 3.1), *gar mkhan* or *bro mkhan* (dancer or performer). The meanings are from Tibetan and Himalayan Library. In explaining *bro mkhan*, Sarat Chandra Das dictionary notes: "even a Buddha or any saint dances when displaying miracles" (Das 1902, 216).
[121] While there are scholarships on textual analyses of *vajragīti*, *caryāgīti* along with their doctrinal background (Kvaerne 1977; Kitada 2012; Braitstein 2014), studies on *caryānṛtya* (Ahmed 2003, 169–79) and *vajranṛtya* (Khanna and Reddy 2020, 181–85) in their philosophical context is still sparse.

(Skt. *prajñā*) and its relation to the female figures (Skt. *yoginī* or *ḍākinī*), this thesis considers the dance practice of the *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* in the Tibetan tradition and that of the Vajrayoginī in a wrathful form of red color in the Newar tradition as case studies. The following sections provide brief overviews of these dance traditions and specific explanations of the dance practices relating to Vajrayoginī in Newar and Tibetan Buddhism. In particular, the fact that these ritual dances are now practiced by the female dancers and practitioners, are emphasized, since the emergence of women in this specific context is unprecedented in both of these traditions.

The *caryānṛtya* of Newar tradition

Caryānṛtya or dance as Vajrayāna practice, is a form of a Himalayan ritual dance of the Kathmandu Valley, which is accompanied by *caryā* or *cacā* songs of the Newar tradition (Widdess 2004, 7–10; Kitada 2012, 194). The *caryā* songs (Skt. *caryāgīti*, Tib. *spyod pa'i glu*) are inspired by the *dohā*-s and *vajra* songs (Skt. *vajragīti*, Tib. *rdo rje'i glu*)[122] of the renowned *mahāsiddha*-s.[123] For example, in a collection of the oral tradition of *cacā* songs, there is a yogic song consisting of five couplets composed in a *dohā* meter (attributed to Saraha), which is

[122] Prof. Braitstein refers to *dohā*-s, *caryāgīti*-s, and *vajragīti*-s as the "yogic songs" of the *mahāsiddha*-s (2014, 47). The *dohā*-s are short poems (usually in two lines), which are spontaneously composed by the *mahāsiddha*-s. Considering its Sanskrit verb root √*duh* ("to milk"), the purpose of the *dohā*-s is extracting or milking the essence of the original wakefulness in a way that it can be directly pointed out by a master to a student. Perhaps the Tibetan term *bcud len* can further illuminate the meaning of this purpose, which means to extract an essence or nutrient. In other words, these short poems contain the pith instructions of the masters, which, upon initiation, the students can receive, reveal, and employ in their practice. In a similar manner, the *vajragīti*-s are also meant to point to the *vajra* nature of the reality (through a *gzhan stong* view), although they do not follow a particular meter, aesthetic mood (Skt. *rasa*), or genre. While the spontaneous compositions of the *dohā*-s and *vajragīti*-s by the *mahāsiddha*-s may have been the initial inspiration of the *caryāgīti*-s, in the later stages, the *caryā* songs underwent various modifications to be suitable for practice and performance (Braitstein 2014, 47–53). This can be observed in the aforementioned Saraha's *dohā* in the collection of *cacā* songs, where the *caryā* dance component was added by the Newar *Vajrācārya* masters. Whether it is a *dohā*, *vajragīti*, or *caryāgīti*, it is esoteric, symbolic, and necessitates specific instructions from the master to realize the meaning (Kitada 2012, 204–6).

[123] Originating from a Sanskrit verb root √*sidh*, which means accomplished or perfected (Braitstein 2014, 22), the *mahāsiddha*-s (Tib. *grub thob chen po*) are the eighty-four Great Adepts or Great Perfected Ones such as Lūipā, Sarahapā, Tilopā, and so forth (Rigpa Wiki).

performed along with a *caryā* dance of the four *yoginī*-s (Kitada 2012, 204–6). Many of these yogic songs are compiled in the lyrical literature such as *Dohākoṣa, Caryāgītikoṣa, Caryāsaṃgrahaḥ, Cacā munā,* and so forth (Śāstrī 1916; Kvaerne 1977; Sen 1977; R. Vajrācārya 1996; Upādhyāya and De 2012). The *caryāgīti* corpus is linguistically heterogeneous as it combines vernacular and literary Sanskrit, *Apabhraṃśa,*[124] and *Nepāl bhāṣā*[125] (Sen 1977, chaps. 2–3; Kitada 2012, 93–94; Braitstein 2014, 6–8). The Newar *cacā* songs usually dedicate a verse to the composer (Skt. *bhaṇitā*), indicating several of the *mahāsiddha*-s as the original composers such as "Sarahapā, Kaṇhapā, Nāropā, Tilopā, Jālandharapā, Dārikapā, Nāgārjunapā, Guḍḍaripā," and others (Kitada 2012, 195). These compositions by the *mahāsiddha*-s reflect their innate or natural (Skt. *sahaja*, Tib. *lhan cig skye pa*) awakening[126] (Braitstein 2014, 27) and the language of their songs are written in *sandhyābhāṣā*, which is symbolic, paradoxical, and esoteric in nature in order to point to the inexpressible and inconceivable ultimate reality (Kvaerne 1977, 37–60).

These yogic songs of the *mahāsiddha*-s belong to the *anuttarayogatantra*-s, especially the *yoginī* or *ḍākinī tantra*-s (Braitstein 2014, 31–33). Several forms of *caryāgīti* can be found in the Buddhist tantric corpus along with the exegetical works such as those associated with the *Hevajra Tantra* (Kitada 2012, 194; R. Vajrācārya 1993; Padam 2018). The *caryā* songs and

[124] For details about *Apabhraṃśa* literary corpus along with its historical syntax, refer to a study by Bubenik (1998).
[125] Various editions of the *Dohākoṣa* (attributed to Saraha) have been translated in Tibetan and archived in the *bstan 'gyur*. The Tibetan versions mention that the original text is written in an Indian language, without specifically indicating the nature and type of the language (Braitstein 2014, 8).
[126] The etymological meaning of the Sanskrit term *sahaja* is "being born (*-ja*) together with (*saha-*)" (Kvaerne 1977, 61), which has a connotation of being "easy," "natural," "co-emergent," "simultaneously-arisen (Bliss, Gnosis, etc.)," and so forth (Kvaerne 1977, 62). In the context of the teachings of the *mahāsiddha*-s and their yogic songs, *sahaja* is also synonymous with great bliss (Skt. *mahāsukha*) and the great seal (Skt. *mahāmudrā*). It is about realizing the one taste (Skt. *samarasa*, Tib. *ro gcic*/*ro snyoms*) of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* that appear to be in contradictory modes at a relative level. Often referred to as *sahajānanda*, this realization is the culmination of *mahāmudrā* and the four blisses. In other words, *sahaja* is the ultimate realization of the unity of bliss and emptiness (Braitstein 2014, 30–37; Kvaerne 1977, 61–64).

dances are accompanied in Newar tantric practices such as those associated with the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *sādhana*-s[127] (Bangdel 1999, 807–8, 812–13) and performed in ritual ceremonies such as *gaṇacakra pūjā*, *chatrisaṃvara pūjā*, *ahoratra pūjā, cakra pūjā*, *tāhā sinhaḥ pūjā*, and so forth (R. Vajrācārya 1993; Ahmed 2003, 165). Although previously restricted to being performed as an esoteric tantric practice by the Newar Vajrācārya-s, the *caryā* dance tradition begun its journey as a performing art with the rise of the *Kalāmaṇḍapa* (the Pavilion of Art) movement in the late twentieth century (Kitada 2012, 195). The movement was an initiative taken by Newar luminary figures such as Ratnakāji Vajrācārya, to make this dance tradition more inclusive and accessible to the public[128] (Kitada 2012, 195–96; Widdess 1997, 14–19). However, Vajrācārya masters warrant caution that *caryānṛtya* as a performing art should not include any of its esoteric components in order to maintain the tantric secrecy of the Newar tradition[129] (Padam 2018).

It is important to distinguish the various dimensions within the publicly performed aspect of *caryānṛtya*. Widdess identifies three major phases in the evolution of *caryānṛtya* and labels the current period as a phase where primarily the "non-ritual art-form" (Widdess 2004, 8) of *caryānṛtya* is being popularized (Widdess 2004, 13–14). While it is true that there is indeed a tendency to promote *caryānṛtya* as an indigenous art and cultural heritage of Nepal, there is a

[127] The Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *sādhana*-s are based on the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*, which is an eighth century Buddhist tantric scripture and was likely influenced by the *mahāsiddha*-s (Gray 2006, 299).
[128] As a consequence of the *Kalāmaṇḍapa* movement, in addition to religious concerns, the evolution of *caryānṛtya* also encompasses social, cultural, and political aspects of the Newar society, such as the aspect of folklorization and the *Janajati* movement, thereby invariably impacting cultural rights, national and ethnic politics, along with tourism and creative industries of Nepal (Gellner 2001; Widdess 2004). There is a documentary called *Bajrayani Charya* on a recent initiative in Lalitpur to teach *caryānṛtya* to the young generation of the female dancers for the first time in this tradition (Padam 2018).
[129] It should be noted that it is in the publicly performed aspect of *caryānṛtya* that the female dancers are emerging; male Newar *Vajrācārya*-s remain the lineage holders and ritual priests of this tradition. Some of them, such as Ratnakāji Vajrācārya, played a key role in reviving this dance tradition during the *Kalāmaṇḍapa* movement. Several of the renowned *Vajrācārya caryānṛtya* masters, such as Padma Raj Bajracharya, are currently training contemporary female dancers.

gradation within the aspect of publicly performed *caryānṛtya*. At the most exoteric end of this spectrum, *caryānṛtya* is publicly performed both locally and globally, which impacts (directly or indirectly) Nepal's tourism industry, cultural pride, ethnic representations, and (Newar) religiosity.

It is remarkable that during the current revival phase of *caryānṛtya*, under the guidance of several prominent Vajrācārya *caryānṛtya* masters, a generation of female *caryā* dancers are emerging who go through a consecration ceremony (Skt. *abhiṣeka*) and subsequent training. Once the dancers gain a certain degree of proficiency, the teacher decides for them to carefully choose specific occasions where it is appropriate to perform publicly for a specific audience.[130] It is important to note that *caryānṛtya* as a ritual activity is not strictly esoteric and there are certain kinds of the ritual form of *caryānṛtya* that are publicly performed during auspicious occasions. For example, *ṣoḍaśalāsya* (sixteen goddesses' offering) is a type of *caryānṛtya* that is performed both during private and public rituals.[131]

[130] The occasions can range from cultural performances to public rituals. As mentioned earlier, Vajrācārya masters emphasize that *caryānṛtya* as a performing art can only include its exoteric version during cultural performances, for example, a general depiction of a deity. In reality, the delineations between the non-ritual and ritual forms and the esoteric and exoteric versions are not strictly maintained as there are numerous dance groups and cultural organizations within and beyond Nepal. In this regard, it is crucial to be aware of which versions are suitable for which occasions, what level of competency is needed, and whether a particular initiation and/or consecration is required to perform a specific version. Such awareness can happen if Vajrācārya masters collaborate in local and global conferences and workshops. At an international level, Prajwal Ratna Vajrācārya is a notable figure, but more participation is needed by other masters to acknowledge their various opinions and standpoints regarding *caryānṛtya*, its growing popularity, and the issue of authenticity. A recent documentary called *Bajrayani Charya* (Padam 2018) includes brief interviews of Newar scholars, artists, and *caryānṛtya* masters. The documentary voices the concerns of the Vajrācārya masters about maintaining the distinction between the esoteric and exoteric aspects of *caryānṛtya*. If local initiatives (such as the aforementioned documentary) gain a better visibility at global platforms, it will create more opportunities for *caryānṛtya* masters, practitioners, scholars, and enthusiasts to engage in open and candid conversations.

[131] The *caryānṛtya* of *ṣoḍaśalāsya* relates to the offering part of a ritual. In addition to private rituals, it is also performed as part of the rituals that are held in public, for example, the bathing ritual ceremony of *Ādināth Lokeśvara* of Chobar, who is one of the four principal *lokeśvara*-s or *karuṇāmāyā*-s (Lords of Compassion) of the Kathmandu valley. For detailed information refer to Locke's work (1980). In the same book, he describes the ritual dance of *ṣoḍaśalāsya* as an aspect of major Newar rituals (1980, 89–90). In this regard, Birat Raj Bajracharya notes that there are also other types of *caryānṛtya* that are performed as ritual dances during major religious occasions such as *Buddha Pūrṇimā* and *Daśai*, for example, the *gaṇ pyākhaṇ* of Lalitpur (personal communication). To this end, Ishii indicates that *gaṇ pyākhaṇ* is a dance performed in group during the *Daśai* festival in Lalitpur (1991, 120).

Figure 4.1
Siddhiharṣa Vajrācārya demonstrates a *caryānṛtya mudrā* (Kathmandu, 1931)[132]

Caryānṛtya of Vajrayoginī-s

The *caryānṛtya* of the Vajrayoginī-s correspond to the *yoginītantra*-based Newar *sādhana*-s, such as the Cakrasaṃvara/Vajravārāhī *maṇḍala.* In a nineteenth century Newar ritual manuscript, this *maṇḍala* has several elaborated sections on Guḥyeśvarī and her emanations such as Vajravārāhī, Vajrayoginī, and other *yoginī*-s prominent to the Nepal *maṇḍala* (Huntington and Bangdel 2003, 272–75). While the esoteric forms of Vajrayoginī *caryānṛtya* corresponding to the Newar *sādhana*-s of Vajravārāhī and her manifold forms (such as Vajrayoginī) are kept secret, some of its associated *caryāgīti*-s describing Vajravārāhī, Vajrayoginī, and their retinue, along with the accompanying dances, are currently taught outside the exclusive circle of the Newar Vajrācārya-s. Since Vajrayoginī is an emanation of Vajravārāhī, their songs and *nāma śloka*-s (verses of homage) are often combined. For example, in a collection of *caryāgīti*-s by Ratnakāji

[132] A.A. Baké filmed Siddhiharṣa Vajrācārya (1879-1952) demonstrating *caryānṛtya* at the request of Sylvain Lévi in 1931, which is digitally archived at Salamandre, College de France. This could be the earliest footage of *caryānṛtya* and Newar Buddhism of the Kathmandu Valley. This image and its associated information can be accessed here: http://jinajik.net/2017/04/vajracarya-bake-1931-mudras/. Baké documented *cacā* songs and dances twice, in 1931 and 1956 (Widdess 2004, 8–10; 1997, 14–15). It is remarkable that he was able to film Siddhiharṣa in 1931 since it was much earlier than the revival phase or the *Kalāmaṇḍapa* movement. The first public performances of *caryānṛtya* is reported to be in 1957 within Nepal (R. Vajrācārya 1986) and in 1986 in Japan, i.e. outside of Nepal (Widdess 1997, 16).

Vajrācārya, the song for Vajrayoginī has its *nāma śloka* dedicated to Vajravārāhī (1986, 28–29; 1996, 1:53). However, there are also specific *nāma śloka*-s meant for Vajrayoginī herself.[133] While traditionally the tantric deities are embodied by the Vajrācārya masters both in the esoteric and exoteric forms of *caryānṛtya* (Ahmed 2003, 64–65), female *caryā* dancers are recently practicing this dance (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2
Vajrayoginī dance practice at a courtyard in Lalitpur by contemporary female dancers[134]

The entire process of the *sādhana* of the wrathful dance of Vajrayoginī aids the dancer in "becoming the character" (Ahmed 2003, 169). In other words, a dancer fully becomes one with the deity by dissolving all the conceptual boundaries through incorporating philosophical,

[133] Padma Raj Bajracharya, a prominent Newar Vajrācārya priest and *caryā* dance master, teaches the Vajrayoginī dance that has a slightly different *nāma śloka* (verse of homage) than Ratnakāji Vajrācārya's collection, by specifically dedicating it to Vajrayoginī. In addition to a translation by Ratnakāji Vajrācārya (1986, 28–29), Shaw has also translated this material (2015, 357), although there are some missing stanzas in her work when compared to the root text (R. Vajrācārya 1996, 1:53). Since the *caryāgīti* of Vajrayoginī in Ratnakāji Vajrācārya's collection differs from the version used by Padma Raj Bajracharya in his dance lessons, a complete English translation that is specific to the latter is required, along with a detailed examination on the historical background and hybrid nature of its language.

[134] Photo taken by Nani Hera Shakya, 2016. A video of a *caryānṛtya* of Vajrayoginī performed in Śrībahal (Lalitpur) can be accessed on YouTube here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESSJAJXBUF8&list=LL&index=40&t=91s.

physical, verbal, mental, and symbolic postures. This dissolution of boundaries occurs by combining both form (visualizing Vajrayoginī in an anthropomorphic figure) and formless (emptiness and luminosity as the essence of Vajrayoginī) aspects of the dance. There are other dimensions of the dance that are crucial as well, such as, the treatment of one's *rasa*-s, i.e. aesthetic experience. In this regard, it is important to examine how a range of *dharmic rasa*-s,[135] which are *sealed* by the view,[136] are embodied by the *caryānṛtya* practitioners.

The practice of *caryānṛtya* cannot possibly aim for any sort of aesthetic experience (Skt. *rasa*) that is mundane in nature (Ahmed 2003, 164), since the Vajrayāna deities that are embodied during *caryānṛtya* have transcended all the worldly emotions. However, at a supramundane level, the *Hevajra Tantra* speaks about nine types of *dharmic rasa*-s in the context of Vajrayāna Buddhism,[137] which is inspired by the *rasa* theory of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.[138] The dynamic display of these *dharmic rasa*-s can be observed in *caryānṛtya* practices, and in particular, in the dance of Vajrayoginī, the case in hand.[139] The most distinguished *dharmic rasa*

[135] In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, when an emotion (Skt. *bhava*, Tib. *nyams*) is "heightened and sustained," it becomes a *rasa*, which is *ro* in Tibetan (Gold 2007, 118). In performing arts, it is referred to as an "aesthetic experience" (Ahmed 2003, 164). Sakya Paṇḍita (Tib. *sa skya pan di ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan*, 1182-1251) formulated a *rasa* theory which is suitable for the Buddhist tradition and broadly categorizes *rasa* in terms of *dharmic rasa* and *loka rasa* in supramundane and mundane contexts respectively (Gold 2007, 121–23).

[136] In this context, the view is that of the *anuttarayogatantra*, i.e. the empty yet luminous nature of the mind and all that appears. In particular, in its Mother Tantra-s, i.e. the *yoginītantra*-s, which are associated with the yogic songs of the *mahāsiddha*-s that later evolved into *caryāgīti*-s, the ultimate realization is understood as the *mahāmudrā*, which also relates to *mahāsukha* and *sahaja* (Braitstein 2014, 33–34).

[137] In addition to the standard eight types of *rasa*-s in the Indian tradition of performing arts, the *Hevajra Tantra* adds a ninth one called tranquility (Skt. *śānta*, Tib. *zhi wa*), which is unique to the Buddhist *rasa* theory, which was further developed by Sakya Paṇḍita (Gold 2007, 121).

[138] The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is the earliest known Sanskrit compendium on Indian theater and performing arts, attributed to Bharata Muni.

[139] Ahmed does not engage in further discussion on the *rasa*-s in the context of *caryānṛtya* after stating that this dance is not meant for pursuing mundane aesthetic experience (Ahmed 2003, 164). Sakya Paṇḍita, while being a pioneer in proposing a Buddhist *rasa* theory, primarily limits himself in literary aesthetics (Gold 2007, 122). English briefly mentions that the dance of Vajrayoginī is endowed with the nine *rasa*-s but focuses on describing the dance postures as depicted in the iconographies (English 2002, 50). Since in the context of *caryānṛtya* the discussion of *rasa*-s is still a less explored area, the following discussion in this section deals with this aspect.

that a dancer embodies in a Vajrayoginī dance is called *hasita-krodha* (wrathful laugh)[140] that signifies her fierce persona.[141] But one has to keep in mind that her fierceness is a spontaneous expression of the ultimate realization of the one taste (Skt. *samarasa*) of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.[142] Considering the presentation of the *rasa*-s of the *Hevajra Tantra*, it can be interpreted that underneath her *dharmic rasa* of *hasita-krodha*, lies the ninth and ultimate *dharmic rasa* of *śānta*.[143] Whether visualizing or embodying her during the *sādhana*, one should take heed of this crucial aspect. Or else, one could easily be misguided by the descriptions of her forms, postures, and expressions.[144]

Embodying a tantric deity in a *sādhana* dance necessitates a clear conviction about the view (philosophical posture). Such outlook orients the rest of the postures. If one is doubtful or mistaken about the view, then everything that ensues, including the *rasa*-s displayed, will be a *saṃsāric* activity. When a *sādhana* dancer trains, they soon realize how immensely difficult it is to be reminded of the view at all times. One tends to become mesmerized or terrified by the facial expressions, hand gestures, and body postures of the deity. While trying to personify the non-referential pride of the deity, if one fails to distinguish between *dharmic* and *loka rasa*, one will end up boasting one's self-centered pride instead. The underlying issue of all these pitfalls

[140] Prof. Daniel McNamara, an Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies at the Rangjung Yeshe Institute (Kathmandu) notes that the term *hasita-krodha* can be better conveyed in English as "wrathful guffaw."
[141] Several epithets in the *caryāgīti* of Vajrayoginī indicate her fierce persona, such as *Māra viddhvaṃsini devī*, which means the goddess who destroys all the demons (both outer and inner). Her dance is indicated as a *tāṇḍava* or "violent dance of destruction" (Shaw 2015, 369). Furthermore, the second stanza of the Vajrayoginī *caryāgīti* is noteworthy, which says that not only she binds disaster and death, but also severs the three poisons.
[142] *Samarasa* as the ultimate experience often relates to *mahāsukha*. However, in this regard, Dasgupta's explanation of these terms as "unique emotion of all-pervading bliss" (Dasgupta 1946, 34) should be read with caution. Since these terms are indicating the ultimate, using of the word emotion could easily be misleading.
[143] Snellgrove's translation of the *Hevajra Tantra* lists the *dharmic rasa* of tranquility (Skt. *śānta*, Tib. *zhi ba*) as the ninth *rasa* of dance in part II, chapter v, verse 26 (1959, 111), which is said to be achieved after attaining the eighth *dharmic rasa* of wonderment (Skt. *abhuta*, Tib. *ngam*), which is also referred as "awesomeness" (Gold 2007, 123).
[144] Shaw's provocative explanation of Vajrayoginī is particularly notable. She describes her as "reveling the sheer pleasure of being" (2015, 386) or being "ever intoxicated by the dazzling perfection of reality" (2015, 386). These descriptions should be read in the context of *dharmic rasa*-s.

trace back to failing to correctly discern the view and maintaining it. In other words, all the postures and expressions should be *sealed* by the view.[145]

The *vajranṛtya* of Tibetan tradition

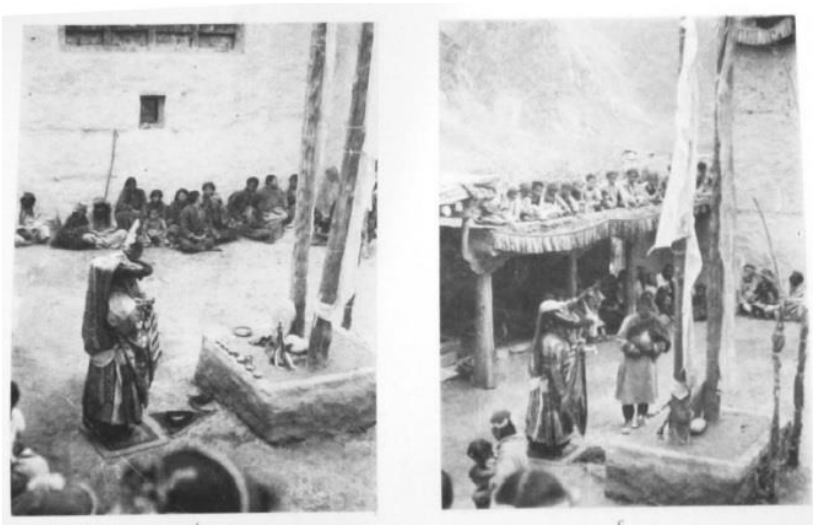
With regard to the Tibetan tradition, in this thesis, the Tibetan term *rdo rje gar stabs* is used to denote the ritual dances associated with the *sādhana*-s, along with the movement practices influenced by the *mahāsiddha*-s. Although there are significant number of scholarships written on the monastic ceremonial dance performances, i.e. '*cham*, since it is a highly esoteric Vajrayāna practice, its profound and secret aspects are still subjected to further examination in academia[146] (Kohn 2001, 55; Samuel and David 2016, 7; Khanna and Reddy 2020, 190). Furthermore, the movement practices that are incorporated within the category of *rdo rje gar stabs* or *vajranṛtya* are still understudied in academia. Although the origin of *vajranṛtya* practice is difficult to trace, the Tibetan indigenous traditions, i.e. such as Bon (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976, 1–4) and the early Indic tantric traditions (Khanna and Reddy 2020, 180–82) could

[145] In the Newar tradition, *caryāgīti* and *caryānṛtya* are employed in the *yogatantra* and *anuttarayogatantra* practices that requires the practitioners to gain competency in the Buddhist philosophical doctrines relating to the Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, prior to receiving the *yogatantra* and *anuttarayogatantra* related tantric initiations and empowerments (Y. P. Vajrācārya 1998; R. Vajrācārya 1993). In addition to the *Navagrantha* (pertaining to the Mahāyāna scriptures), Buddhist tantric literature corresponding to the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, *Hevajra Tantra*, *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, *Vajravārāhīmūlakapla, Ḍākinīvajrapañjara Tantra*, and so forth are significant in the Newar Buddhist literature (R. Vajrācārya 1993 and personal communication with Birat Raj Bajracharya). During *caryānṛtya* practice, Newar Vajrācārya masters (such as Padma Raj Bajracharya) repeatedly emphasize the view pertaining to the *anuttarayogatantra*, i.e. the deity, which is the unity of *prajñā* and *upāya*, being inseparable from practitioner (oral instruction from Padma Raj Bajracharya during his *caryānṛtya* training).

[146] Among the scholarships on the dance practices in the Tibetan tradition, the work by René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz is a remarkable one. Although the fieldwork was conducted during the 1950s and his incomplete work was posthumously published (1976) after his early death, this work remains a crucial material in understanding *vajranṛtya*. In his work, de Nebesky-Wojkowitz analyzes ritual dances performed in various regions of the Himalayas during 1950s when His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso (Tib. *bstan* '*dzin rgya mtsho*, 1935-) was still residing in Lhasa (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976, vi). He also translated a dance manual (Tib. '*chams yig*), which was primarily written by His Holiness the fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (Tib. *ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, 1617-1682), which was completed by the later masters in the span of two decades (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976, 85). His analysis and translation of '*chams yig* were later edited by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf and published in 1976. This work is an outstanding resource for the academia to the present day (Kohn 2001, 55; Samuel and David 2016, 7).

possibly be its early precedents (Kohn 2001, 55). One possible avenue to trace the remnants of its Indic precursors would be to investigate whether the *caryā* dance tradition of the Newar tradition served as a predecessor to *vajranṛtya*. Although Kohn generally remarks on their similarities, detailed investigation on this aspect is yet to be carried out.

Figure 4.3
'*cham* performed in '*gye mur* monastery in *khang gsar* (Lahul,1952)[147]



In terms of its monastic practices, among the major Tibetan Buddhist sects, the first to perform '*cham* is said to be the rNying ma pa-s, although later on it has been adopted by all the major sects[148] (Kohn 2001, 55–56). However, the practice of *vajranṛtya* is not limited to '*cham* and has socio-cultural dimensions that relate to the indigenous, social, cultural, and performing arts (such as Tibetan opera) aspects of Tibet (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976, 5–7; Khanna and Reddy 2020, 182; Samuel and David 2016, 7–8). The current discussion focuses on the rNying

[147] The '*gye mur* monastery is regulated under Hemis monastery of the bKa' brgyud tradition. The scenes depicted in these images are comparable to the instructions found in the '*chams yig*. Photographed by Dr. P.H. Pott in 1952 (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976, in between 24-25, plate II).
[148] Although the major part of the '*cham yig* was written by the leader of the dGe lugs pa, i.e. the fifth Dalai Lama, it is based on the rNying ma and Sa skya traditions (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976, 85) and it is said that the final version of '*cham yig* was ghost written by rNying ma master Gyurme Dorje (Tib. '*gyur med rdo rje*, 1646-1714), who was a teacher of the fifth Dalai Lama (Kohn 2001, 56).

ma and bKa' brgyud practices of *vajranṛtya* that include ritual dance performances during the annual *sgrub chen sādhana*-s[149] and the body posture and movement practices inspired by the *mahāsiddha*-s. In particular, the newly emerging female dancers, who are the nuns of these traditions are emphasized in the following paragraphs since this aspect has not been widely discussed in academia yet.

While it is common for the monks in the Buddhist monasteries of Nepal and Tibet to perform ritual dances during various religious festivals (Kohn 2001, 218), it is only recently that the Buddhist nuns are publicly performing these ritual dances ("Gatsal: Newsletter of the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery" 2013, 3–5, 6–7). Many forms of *vajranṛtya* are practiced and offered during various *sgrub chen sādhana*-s in the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud monasteries and nunneries. There are a wide range of *sgrub chen sādhana*-s, for example, *sngags gso*, *tshe dkar*, *rdo rje phur pa*, and so forth, which are meant for specific purposes, such as, purification, mending of pledges (Skt. *samaya*, Tib. *thug dam* or *dam tshig*), removal of obstacles, etc.[150] There are various levels of these *sādhana*-s, some of which are done in strict secrecy while other components are performed in public. In general, these *sādhana*-s, along with various forms of *vajranṛtya*, are practiced annually, around the time of the Tibetan new year[151] and the dance is publicly performed usually toward the end of the *sādhana*-s (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976, 11;

[149] The *sgrub chen* (Great Accomplishment) *sādhana*-s are intense group practices that are usually carried out uninterruptedly for seven days (Rangjung Yeshe dictionary). Some *sgrub chen*-s can run a bit longer, for example, the nine day *sngags gso sgrub chen* at Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling and other bKa' brgyud-rNying ma monasteries.
[150] General descriptions of the major *sgrub chen sādhana*-s by Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling, which is a rNying ma-bKa' brgyud monastery in Kathmandu, can be found on Samye Institute website (www.samyeinstitute.org). Some of the practice manuals are translated in English, but these are only meant to be used by the practitioners.
[151] There are many forms of ritual dances that are practiced around the year. For detailed accounts of the ritual dances that are practiced in the major sects of Tibetan Buddhism, refer to the *Tibetan Religious Dances* (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976, 11–43).

Cantwell 1995, 47). Traditionally, these ritual dances are practiced by the monks of the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries.[152]

Figure 4.4
Vajranṛtya performance at Druk Amitabha nunnery in 2020[153]

However, the nuns have recently begun performing *vajranṛtya* during extensive *sādhana* practices and auspicious occasions at their nunneries. For example, the role of Druk Amitabha nunnery[154] in the past two decades is noteworthy. Defying the norm of the tradition, the abbot of the nunnery, His Holiness the twelfth Gyalwang Drukpa Jigme Pema Wangchen (Tib. '*jigs med pad ma dbang chen*, 1963-), bestowed necessary empowerments to the nuns in order to carry out the *sgrub chen sādhana*-s and perform *vajranṛtya* (Greenspan 2021). These *sādhana*-s are intense practices involving extremely wrathful and powerful deities, who are usually the

[152] The contemporary practice of *vajranṛtya* that are performed by the Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling monks are reported by Samye Institute, which is supervised by Phakchok Rinpoche, the *vajra* master of Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling monastery in Kathmandu (Herdman 2016; 2017).
[153] The *vajranṛtya* performed by Druk Amitabha nuns is called *zor rdo rje gar stabs*, which is performed during the *Vajrakīlaya* (Tib. *rdo rje phur pa*) *sgrub chen sādhana* as one of the Tibetan new year ceremonies in February 2020. Photo courtesy by Druk Amitabha nunnery and published by Tricycle magazine. Full article can be accessed here: https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/kung-fu-nuns-dance/.
[154] The Druk Amitabha nunnery belongs to the '*brug pa bka' brgyud* order of Tibetan Buddhism, and is located at the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley.

dharmapāla-s (*Dharma* protectors). Over the past years, the nuns have learned to perform a range of *vajranṛtya*, including the famous Black Hat *vajra* dance (Tib. *zhva nag rdo rje gar stabs*),[155] which is only reserved for highly advanced practitioners (Greenspan 2020; Cantwell 1992, 12–13). They also perform *zor rdo rje gar stabs* during *Vajrakīlaya sādhana*.[156] These *sādhana*-s are aimed to "transform toxic forces into wholesome energy" (Greenspan 2021), thereby dispelling obstacles for the upcoming new year.

The *vajranṛtya* practice by the nuns is certainly not limited to performing during public rituals. In addition to following a specific structure, they also create their own version of this *sādhana-nṛtya*. In this context, the contribution of Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche (Tib. *mkhan po tshul khrims rgya mtsho rin po che*, 1934-)[157] merits special attention. Under his guidance, his nuns at Tek Chok Ling (Nepal) and Karma Drubdey (Bhutan) nunneries have been practicing various forms of *vajranṛtya*.[158] Their diverse range of *vajranṛtya* practice can be summarized by emphasizing three major types of this *sādhana-nṛtya*. First example is their training in the *ḍākinī nṛtya*,[159] which is influenced by the Newar tradition. Second example is their own choreography of the *vajranṛtya* of Tārā,[160] which is influenced by the Tibetan tradition. Third example is the improvisation of combining movements and songs that are influenced by

[155] It is said the Black Hat *vajra* dance relates to the first performance of *vajranṛtya*, which was done by Guru Rinpoche in order to subjugate the negative forces to establish the first Tibetan monastery, i.e. *bsam yas* around eight century (Cantwell 1992, 12; Khanna and Reddy 2020, 181).
[156] In the Sa skya tradition, on August 16, 2021, Jetsunma Kunga Trinley Palter, the eldest daughter of His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin, performed during their annual *Vajrakīlaya* '*cham*. The official social media platforms of His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin mentioned that this is the first time that a *rje btsun ma* performed *Vajrakīlaya* '*cham* in the thousand year history of the Sa skya tradition.
[157] Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche is a renowned bKa' brgyud master and scholar in the Tibetan tradition. Information about his teachings and nunneries can be found at his official website: http://www.ktgrinpoche.org/.
[158] The information about the *vajranṛtya* practices in Tek Chok Ling and Karma Drubdey nunneries is presented here based on correspondences with my M.A. advisor Prof. Diane Denis and personal communication during my training from *btsun ma* Tsering Youdon at Tek Chok Ling nunnery.
[159] The five wisdom *ḍākinī*-s are the main focus of the *ḍākinī nṛtya*.
[160] The song was possibly written by Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, although this information is yet to be confirmed.

the renowned masters of the *mahāsiddha* tradition, such as Jetsun Milarepa (Tib. *rje btsun mi la ras pa*, 1028/40-1111/23). These practices are done in the presence of the *guru* and are inspired by the yogic movements and songs of realization (Tib. *do ha*). These nuns also train weekly in movement exercises (Tib. *lus sbyong*) associated with mind training (Tib. *blo sbyong*).[161]

Figure 4.5
Vajranṛtya practice at Tek Chok Ling nunnery in 2010[162]

This diverse range of training in *vajranṛtya* is particularly remarkable because in addition to following a specific structure, Khenpo Rinpoche invites his nuns to improvise and to create

[161] I have taken a short training in this type of *vajranṛtya* from *btsun ma* Tsering Youdon at Tek Chok Ling nunnery in Kathmandu. The movement and singing are done simultaneously at the beginning of the practice, followed by a series of standing movement exercises to bring pliancy of the body for this monastic community which spends a lot of daily hours in sitting ritual practice. As for the state of the mind, at the beginning one starts with *śamatha* and as one progresses, *vipaśyanā* is also incorporated. Regardless of the stage of practice, one tries to maintain a view of the empty yet luminous nature of everything while keeping an open and relaxed state of mind. This key message is reflected in the songs, which are translated from Tibetan to English (which serves their multi-language training and their connection the greater *saṅgha*). The description of the *vajranṛtya* practices at Tek Chok Ling nunnery is based on my brief training taken there, along with personal communications with the nuns and correspondences with my M.A. advisor Prof. Denis. Their *vajranṛtya* trainings have not been reported in academia yet and these practices are subjected to further examination.

[162] An image of the monastic and lay practitioners at Tek Chok Ling nunnery practicing *vajranṛtya* in presence of the nunnery's abbot Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche. This image can be accessed from their official website: http://khenpo-rinpoche.blogspot.com/2010/.

their own choreographies. The *vajranṛtya* practices combine both form (focused on deities) and formless (focused on the view and spontaneous presence) aspects. Their improvisations aid in achieving natural spontaneity that relates to the notion of *sahaja* in the *mahāsiddha* tradition (as explained in footnote 125). These practices help in making daily activities insightful so much as there is no longer a distinction between meditation and non-meditation, which is the essence of the profound practices of the Great Seal (Skt. *mahāmudrā*, Tib. *phyag rgya chen po*) and the Great Perfection (Skt. *mahāsandhi*, Tib. *rdzogs chen*). Thus, *vajranṛtya* practices serve as a way to bring the highly advanced and esoteric teachings into one's immediate experience of the daily life.

Figure 4.6

Tārā dance offered by the nuns of Karma Drubdey nunnery, Bhutan in 2013[163]

***Vajranṛtya* of *Ḍākinī*-s**

Traditionally, the *vajranṛtya* of the *ḍākinī*-s are performed by the young monks, in particular, the youngest novices of the monastery (Kohn 2001, 218). In the recent decades, the

[163] A screenshot of the nuns of Karma Drubdey nunnery in Bhutan offering Tārā dance in 2013. This screenshot is taken from a video of the dance posted by Marpa Foundation on YouTube, which can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Jp7eOZz2O8.

nuns have also begun to learn this sacred ritual dance. As mentioned in the previous section, the nuns of Tek Chok Ling nunnery practices a form of *ḍākinī nṛtya* of the five wisdom *ḍākinī*-s.[164] Moreover, Druk Amitabha nunnery has been practicing *mkha*' '*gro rdo rje gar stabs* (Skt. *ḍākinī vajranṛtya*) for the past twenty years and in early 2013, they trained a group of nuns from Dongyu Gatsal Ling nunnery[165] ("Gatsal: Newsletter of the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery" 2013, 6–8). Few months after the training, Dongyu Gatsal Ling nunnery publicly performed *ḍākinī* dances for the first time at the auspicious occasion of the consecration ceremony of their temple.

Figure 4.7
Ḍākinī nṛtya performance at Dongyu Gatsal Ling nunnery in 2020[166]

There are various forms of *ḍākinī nṛtya*, for example, the dance of the five *ḍākinī*-s and sixteen *ḍākinī*-s ("Gatsal: Newsletter of the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery" 2013, 5). These are the public performances that are carried out during major religious festivals or auspicious

[164] The details about this form of *ḍākinī nṛtya* and background information about their practice require further research.
[165] Like Druk Amitabha nunnery, Dongyu Gatsal Ling nunnery also belongs to the '*brug pa bka*' *brgyud* order of Tibetan Buddhism. The nunnery is located in Palampur (northeast India).
[166] The nuns of Dongyu Gatsal Ling nunnery performed *ḍākinī* dances in November 2020 on the occasion of *lha las bab pa*'*i dus chen*. Their latest newsletter mentions that the performance and offering of a range of *ḍākinī* dances will be continued as an annual activity from now onwards ("Gatsal: Newsletter of the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery" 2021, 15–16).

occasions. There are other forms of *ḍākinī* dance that are esoteric components of the *sādhana*, such as, *gcod*, which are not shown to the public. At an interview, the nuns of Druk Amitabha shared that while it has now become a common sight within their lineage tradition for them to carry out these *sādhana*-s and *vajranṛtya* practices by themselves, they still receive criticism from outside of their lineage (Greenspan 2020).

Ḍākinī dance of *gcod sādhana*

The *vajranṛtya* of the *ḍākinī*-s relating to the *gcod sādhana* pertain to the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions. One of the Tibetan Buddhist nunneries in Nepal practicing *gcod sādhana* is called Tsungon Nangkyi Gompa (Nagi Gompa),[167] which follows the lineages of the Great Seal (Skt. *mahāmudrā*, Tib. *phyan rgya chen po*) and the Great Perfection (Skt. *mahāsandhi*, Tib. *rdzogs pa chen po*). The nunnery has a long tradition of practicing the *mchog gling gter gsar* teaching cycle[168] and different forms of *gcod sādhana*.[169] One such form is based on the *Heart Essence of the Ḍākinī*-s (Tib. *mkha' 'dro* snying *thig*)[170] that contains the teachings of Rigzin Jigme Lingpa (Tib. *rig* '*dzin* '*jigs med gling pa*, 1729-1798). This *sādhana* has a segment of

[167] The direction of Nagi Gompa was assigned to Kyabje Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche (Tib. *sprul sku o rgyan rin po che*, 1920-1996) in early 1960s by His Holiness the sixteenth Karmapa Rangjung Rikpe Dorje (Tib. *rang 'byung rig pa'i rdo rje*, 1924-1981). The nunnery is located at the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal ("Monastic Life: Monks and Nuns" 2018).

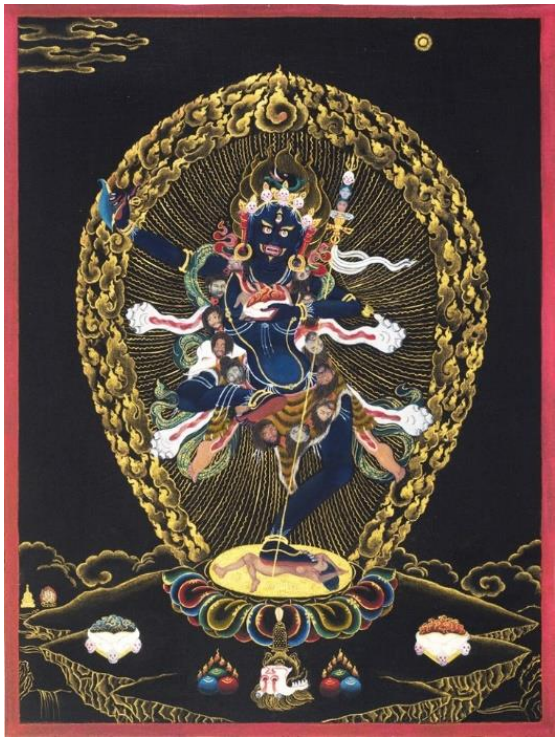
[168] The *mchog gling gter gsar* is a collection of the treasures revealed by Chokgyur Lingpa (Tib. *mchog gyur gling pa*, 1829-1870) and its commentaries, which are commonly practiced in the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions (Rangjung Yeshe dictionary). Kyabje Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche's grandmother, *ma yum* Konchog Paldron, was a daughter of Chokgyur Lingpa, who was renowned as a highly advanced *mchog gling gter gsar* practitioner, especially relating to Tārā ("Monastic Life: Monks and Nuns" 2018).

[169] Kyabje Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche's wife, *ma yum* Kunzang Dechen, was a highly accomplished *gcod* practitioner and trained the Nagi Gompa nuns. She learned *gcod sādhana* in Shukseb Nunnery in Tibet, which is a significant place for this practice as it is the seat of Jetsun Rigdzin Chonyi Zangmo ("Monastic Life: Monks and Nuns" 2018). She is the reincarnation of Machig Labdrön (Tib. *ma gcig lab kyi sgron ma*, 1031-1129), who established her own *gcod* lineage (Rangjung Yeshe dictionary).

[170] The *Heart Essence* (Tib. *snying thig*) teachings relate to the *Innermost Unexcelled Cycle of Heart Essence* (Tib. *yang gsang bla na med pa'i snying thig gi skor*) of the Great Perfection teachings by Śrī Singha, which were continued through his disciples Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra. These teachings were later continued through the third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, Jigme Linga, and others. The *Heart Essence of the Ḍākinī-s* (Tib. *mkha' 'dro snying thig*) is a collection of Great Perfection teachings which are based on the treasures revealed by Padma Ledreltsal that contain the teachings of Guru Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyal (Rangjung Yeshe dictionary).

vajranṛtya. The tradition maintains that the dance movements are revealed by the meditational deities (Tib. *yi dam*) and *ḍākinī*-s during the meditative experiences of the highly accomplished masters of their lineage ("Monastic Life: Monks and Nuns" 2018). Through the practice of these movements, along with ritual music, *vajra* songs, and *mantra* recitation, the practitioners undergo a "practice-centered performance"[171] (Cupchik 2015, 38) to cut through even the subtlest form of clinging.

Figure 4.8
Wrathful Black Vajravārāhī[172]



[171] In a "practice-centered performance," the music and dance aspects aid in realizing the profound meaning of the *sādhana*-s (Cupchik 2015, 38).
[172] The *Wrathful Black Vajravārāhī* (Tib. *rdo rje phag mo khros ma nag mo*) is the main meditational deity for *gcod*, who has a dark-blue or black colored body. According to the *gcod sādhana* tradition, this color signifies the unchanging nature of the *dharmakāya* or "changeless realm of reality" (Harding 2013, 74). The treatment of this color to symbolize the ultimate *dharmakāya* or absolute emptiness of space is common in depicting *vajraḍākinī*-s, such as Nairātmyā (Tib. *bdag med ma lha mo*), in both Tibetan and Newar traditions (Harding 2013, 377; R. Vajrācārya 1986, 24–25). Shaw interprets this color of *Wrathful Black Vajravārāhī* as representing her "wrathfulness and subjugation" powers, although she does not specify her source (2015, 375). The image can be accessed here: https://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php/khros_ma_nag_mo.

Figure 4.9
The *ḍākinī* dance of *gcod sādhana* at Nagi Gompa, Kathmandu[173]

Several masters of this tradition, such as Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche (Tib. *sprul sku o rgyan rin po che*, 1920-1996) and Urgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche (Tib. *o rgyan stobs rgyal*, 1951-) regard the *gcod sādhana* as a magnetizing[174] practice (Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 7–12, 63–76, 117–28), relating to the *ḍākinī* in the three roots practice.[175] The magnetizing practice means to bring the outer and inner elements under one's power in order to benefit all sentient beings. Its innermost aspect is gaining mastery over one's mind by realizing its true nature.[176] Since the

[173] The nuns of Nagi gompa practices the *ḍākinī nṛtya* of *gcod sādhana* at the courtyard of their nunnery. Image archived at monksandnuns.org.
[174] In the deity yoga, the four activities (pacifying, enriching, magnetizing, and subjugating) are included in the *anuttarayogatantra* practices (Rigpa Wiki). The magnetizing (Skt. *vaśīkaraṇa*, Tib. *dbang ba*/*dbang* '*dus*) practice is defined as to "naturally bring under control" (Tibetan and Himalayan Library) over the outer elements (earth, water, fire, air, space) to gain "perfect mastery" (Tibetan and Himalayan Library) over the inner elements (the *skandha*-s, *āyatana*-s, and so forth) in outer, inner, secret, and innermost ways (Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 11). The term "magnetizing practice" occurs frequently in the English translations of the practice manuals of the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s, such as those corresponding to *sngags gso sgrub chen*, *gcod* practice, and so forth.
[175] In the three roots practice of the *anuttarayogatantra*, the *guru* (Tib. *la ma*) is the source of blessings, the *deva* (Tib. *yi dam*) is the source of accomplishments, and the *ḍākinī* (Tib. *mkha*' '*dro*) is the source of activities (Rigpa Wiki). The *ḍākinī* is the root of all activities, including magnetizing. The other types are peaceful, increasing, subjugating, and supreme activities (Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 50). However, as indicated earlier, in the *anuttarayogatantra* practices, each of these three roots includes the other two roots as well, i.e. in this case, in the *ḍākinī* practice, she is both the *la ma* and *yi dam* (Willis 1987, 74).
[176] There are four levels of magnetizing practices. The outer way is to magnetize beings (form and formless). The inner way is to magnetize the outer elements and inner aggregates to transform the afflictions into wisdoms. The secret way is to magnetize the winds, channels, and essence drops of the subtle body to attain the *vajra* body, speech, and mind. The innermost way to magnetize is to tame one's mind by recognizing its true essence (Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 11).

ultimate purpose of *ḍākinī* practices is to magnetize the mind, it directly relates to the view, which is the most crucial aspect of the *gcod sādhana*. As discussed in the earlier chapters, the view in this context is that of the *anuttarayogatantra*, that points to the empty yet luminous nature of the mind and all that appears. The *gcod sādhana* directly targets any tendency of the mind to cling, fixate, or fabricate in any way. In the *gcod sādhana*, these tendencies of the mind are identified as the four levels of *Māra*.[177] These are brought to the immediate attention of a practitioner through the intense meditative practice of severing and offering one's own body. Since one mistakenly clings to one's aggregates as a self that does not exist, through dramatic visualization of decapitating and chopping one's own body and offering to peaceful and wrathful guests, a practitioner recognizes that nothing has any intrinsic existence whatsoever. Before the offering, the severed aggregates are visualized to be transformed into "an ocean of wisdom nectars" (Kunsang and Schmidt 2018, 125), which signifies their luminous nature. In this way, the *sādhana* aids in magnetizing one's mind and actualizing the view.

Considering all this information, one can assert that the *anuttarayogatantra* practices offer several ways to access the ultimate reality and goal through movement practices. Not only because there are diverse cultural and monastic traditions, but also within each community themselves. Although the view of all these Himalayan Buddhist traditions refer to the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, the forms and exercises they provide are varied. Over the recent

[177] According to Edgerton Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary, the term *māra* is translated as "the Evil One," "the adversary and tempter," and "the One who tries to thwart the Bodhisattva or Buddha and his followers." The *gcod sādhana* has its own categorization of the four levels of *Māra* and Harding translates these levels as "tangible devil," "intangible devil," "devil of exaltation," and "devil of inflation." The first one is an outer *Māra* relating to the tendency of the mind of perceiving the aggregates as a being. The second one is an inner *Māra* which refers to the afflictive emotions. The third one is a secret *Māra* which is the tendency of the mind to cling to positive and exciting experiences of the practice. The fourth one is a suchness *Māra* which is clinging to the existence of a self. The fourth one the subtlest and most difficult to uproot. It is this very clinging that is targeted to uproot in *gcod sādhana* (Harding 2013, 36–37).

decades, these traditions have begun more inclusive, such as opening to the female practitioners.[178] This is creating new ways of engagement for them not only as performers but also both for and as the audience. When advanced *sādhana-nṛtya* practitioners watch *sādhana-nṛtya* performances, as audience, they are likely to be more observant and receptive in terms of the effect of liberation through seeing (Tib. *mthong grol*). However, if one is a beginner, one will tend to focus more on the outer aspects performance as one is not yet proficient enough to fathom the profound, inner aspects. Perhaps as an audience, a *sādhana-nṛtya* practitioner who is a beginner, would find it rather more challenging to refrain from obsessing over the external details and watch *sādhana-nṛtya* with an open, relaxed, and receptive mind.

In essence, the training of all *sādhana-nṛtya*, whether *caryānṛtya* or *vajranṛtya*, is a journey that starts out as a "performance-centered practice" and gradually becomes a "practice-based performance"[179] (Cupchik 2015, 38). At the beginning of the training, it is expected that a

[178] In explaining women's participation in Buddhist practices across geographical borders, Haddad and Findly proposed an initial hypothesis that women have actively engaged during significant social and cultural movements in bringing about unprecedented ways of involving women practitioners (both monastic and lay) in the religious, social, political, and cultural aspects of the societies that are the living traditions of the diverse forms of Buddhism across the world (2000, 5). Their hypothesis received a mixed reaction since there are many other causes contributing to such participation that are specific to a particular culture and society. Their in-depth examinations on a wide range of case studies (Haddad and Findly 1985; Findly 2000) demonstrate that women have been playing a crucial role along with men (playing the roles of encouraging teachers and supportive fellow practitioners), as the reception of Buddhism continues to evolve throughout the world (Findly 2000, 5–6). In the case of *vajranṛtya* practices at Druk Amitabha and Tek Chok Ling nunneries, the guidance from their respective abbots are remarkable. As for Dongyu Gatsal Ling nunnery, the abbess Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo received significant encouragement and support from her root teacher the eighth Khamtrul Dongyu Nyima Rinpoche (Tib. *khams sprul don brgyud nyi ma rin po che*, 1931-1980) in her early years of practice. Later when she established her nunnery, the monastery in Tashi Jong that is associated with her root teacher's tradition, offered a major support (Mackenzie 1998). In the case of Nagi Gompa, the role of the founder, Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, along with crucial contributions from his grandmother *ma yum* Konchog Paldron and wife *ma yum* Kunzang Dechen resulted in establishing the tradition of *gcod* practice in the nunnery. In the case of the Newar tradition, as a result of the *Kalāmaṇḍapa* movement, once *caryānṛtya* practice became more inclusive, the Newar Vajrācārya masters have begun to train a diverse group of student body that includes women practitioners and dancers (both local and international). Hence, it is evident that both men and women play significant roles in creating avenues for women practitioners to undertake *vajranṛtya* and *caryānṛtya* practices. Identifying specific causes that led to such novel engagement by women practitioners and dancers in the Tibetan and Newar traditions requires further investigation.

[179] Cupchik defines "performance-centered practice" as the initial level of a practitioner when one is drawn toward the music and dance (performance) aspects and one is too overwhelmed to internalize the profundity of the *sādhana* (Cupchik 2015, 38).

practitioner would find it daunting to synchronize all the postures (philosophical, psychophysical, symbolic) in a *sādhana* that incorporates recitation, singing, dancing, and playing instruments. Moreover, if a practitioner happens to be a performer (musician or dancer), it is very likely that one would get carried away with the music and dance components. How does the journey progress from being performance-oriented to practice-oriented? How does one learn to maintain a fine balance during these multifaceted *sādhana*-s? These questions are addressed in the next chapter by discussing these *sādhana-nṛtya* in a practice-based research framework.

Chapter Five: A Practice-based Perspective on *Sādhana-nṛtya*

In this chapter, a practice-based research (PbR) approach is applied to the training of *sādhana-nṛtya*. The first section provides a brief overview of this method. The second section addresses the issue of classifying *sādhana-nṛtya* since it determines how a practitioner should treat this dance practice during the training. The third section presents a PbR model to illustrate the training process of *sādhana-nṛtya*. In this regard, the first sub-section deals with how the core elements of PbR are implemented during the research process and the second sub-section explains the model in detail. This proposed PbR model demonstrates how a *sādhana-nṛtya* practitioner advances from being performance-oriented to being practice-oriented by developing *prajñā* in a *sādhana-nṛtya* training.

Practice-based research approach

PbR is a multidisciplinary method which is primarily suitable for the creative practitioner researchers[180] who are exploring the ways in which they can incorporate their creative works in an academic research framework. The necessity of such assimilation is evident as sections of the research community are gradually becoming aware of the significance of creative practices across disciplines that contribute in generating new knowledge in academia[181] (Edmonds and Candy 2010b, 120–27; Biggs and Büchler 2007, 62–66). One of the most crucial aspects of PbR is the role of the artifacts. An artifact across the domain of creative arts can be wide-ranging and multidisciplinary, including interactive digital art, music, dance, creative cognition, and so forth. In this approach, the central focus is on the creative artifact, which can be notional or non-notional in nature. The PbR is based on the premise that the creative engagement with the artifact will result in new findings that can be shared and evaluated. The process of generating new knowledge is "fundamentally exploratory" and "innovative" (Edmonds and Candy 2010b, 126), which is accomplished through undertaking a creative practice and producing a creative output, which are subjected to "critical reflection" through a written documentation (Candy 2006, 2).

[180] Any artist or designer in the fields of creative and performing arts conducting academic research can be called a creative practitioner researcher. The creative practitioners are exploring innovative ways to incorporate their work in a research framework that is recognized by the academia (Edmonds and Candy 2010a, 470).

[181] A research is practice *based*, when a "creative artifact" (Candy 2006, 1) relating to "design practice" (Biggs and Büchler 2007, 62), i.e. pertaining to the fields of creative and performing arts, serves as a foundation for producing new knowledge. The production of new knowledge is attained with the aid of practicing a creative artifact (such as dance), along with its ensuing "creative outcome" (such as choreography and performance). While the process and outcome are explained in a written form (such as in an academic thesis), the work can only be fully understood through "direct reference to the outcomes" (Candy 2006, 1). In this context, the output is the new knowledge acquired through practicing any form of creative arts, along with its creative outcome. However, the inclusion of creative outcomes in a formal research framework in addition to the written component at an institutional level (such as in the doctoral programs) is still not a common scenario (Edmonds and Candy 2010b, 120–22). The PbR approach is different from a research that is practice *led*, where new insights are gained *about* the practice. The academic work is carried out by research experts who are not necessarily creative practitioners and the main focus is on gaining new understanding about the practice and ways to make it more efficient (Candy 2006, 1–3).

There are various ways of applying PbR across academic disciplines. With regard to the employment of PbR in dance/movement practice, Sargent-Wishart's work (Sargent-Wishart 2012) is noteworthy. She applies PbR method to a Body-Mind Centering® (BMC™) based contemplative dance/movement practice[182] and employs a traditional Vajrayāna Buddhist pedagogical approach that entails three stages of learning, i.e. the three *prajñā*-s (wisdom through listening, wisdom through reflection, and wisdom through meditation) in her research framework. Sargent-Wishart relates the three *prajñā*-s with the BMC™ sequence of visualization, i.e. using images of human anatomy to visualize and focus on a specific part of one's body, somatization, i.e. physical movements that follows after visualization, and embodiment, i.e. the last stage of the sequence where one goes beyond the prior two stages and becomes aware of one's mind and body at minute levels (Sargent-Wishart 2012, 132). In her studio research practice, Sargent-Wishart, along with a group of dancers or movement practitioners, improvised a sequence of contemplative movements to explore the five elements of nature (space, air, fire, water, and earth) as presented in Vajrayāna tradition. This series of creative movements incorporated the aforementioned Vajrayāna model of the three *prajñā*-s and the three-fold sequence of the BMC™. Her overall research framework aims to experientially explore the notions of emptiness and embodiment as understood in the Vajrayāna tradition (Sargent-Wishart 2012, 134–43).

[182] The Body-Mind Centering® (BMC™) is a type of contemplative dance/movement practice that focuses on refining the alignment of the body and mind through a range of Western and Eastern contemplative movement techniques. As one increasingly restores the connection between one's awareness and actions, one is introduced to new ways of knowing that incorporates both the mind and body (Cohen 2012, 1). In other words, the BMC™ utilizes the kinesthetic sensory fields of the body and employs techniques such as "visualization, somatization, and embodiment" (Sargent-Wishart 2012, 132) to refine and expand one's kinesthetic awareness—from the minutest cellular movements to the coarsest actions of the body—in order to directly and fully experience the synchronized movements of the mind and body (Cohen 2012, 1). By combining the way of knowing through "mindful kinesthetic awareness" or "direct kinesthetic experience" (Sargent-Wishart 2012, 126) with the "cognitive and experiential learning of the body systems" (Cohen 2012, 2), the BMC™ uses techniques such as the arts of dance and movement to ensure a holistic experience and initiate healing through restoring a harmony between the mind and body.

In this thesis, the PbR approach is applied to the training of Himalayan Buddhist meditative ritual dances, i.e. *sādhana-nṛtya*. The main purpose of employing the PbR approach in this thesis is to assimilate the practice of *sādhana-nṛtya* in the research process that results in generating creative and academic outputs. In terms of creative output, a non-figurative artwork has been produced that depicts the principal *mudrā*-s of Vajrayoginī *sādhana-nṛtya*. As an academic output, a PbR model is designed to outline the training of *sādhana-nṛtya* by a practitioner to examine the role of *prajñā* in such practice. The proposed model structures the training in three major stages: initial, pliancy, and liminal. This model demonstrates a shift in orientation as a *sādhana-nṛtya* practitioner progresses from being performance-based to being practice-based during the training. The model underscores the significance of developing *prajñā* as the shift occurs. In light of the discussions in the earlier chapters of this thesis, a *sādhana-nṛtya* can be seen as an act of synchronized postures that are carried out with *prajñā*. In other words, the practice of *sādhana-nṛtya*, in essence, can be regarded as the development of *prajñā*. During the training, a practitioner explores the experiences of what the embodiment of *prajñā* entails through a combination of various approaches—by imitating the fruition (Buddhahood) on the path (i.e. the training process), or one could say by exploring the result (Buddhahood) by relying on the cause (Buddha nature); or by exploring the result (*prajñāpāramitā*) by relying on the cause (the view), and so forth. This exploration relates to the shift in a practitioner's basis (Skt. *āśrayaparivṛtti*, Tib. *gnas gyur*) by taking *prajñāpāramitā*, *dharmatā* or *nirvāṇa* as their support, as discussed in chapter two (pp. 19-20). During the initial phase of the training, a practitioner primarily relies on the dualistic framework of the ordinary mind and takes it as the principal basis for experiencing everything. In the pliancy phase, such saṃsāric orientation shifts to a nirvāṇic one through the development of *prajñā* as a practitioner familiarizes in taking

prajñāpāramitā or *dharmatā* as the main support. Eventually, in the liminal phase, a practitioner goes beyond all the conceptual boundaries, thereby spontaneously carrying out *sādhana-nṛtya* as a natural display of their self-cognizant, lucid mind.

Prior to engaging in the main training of *sādhana-nṛtya*, it is important to determine how it should be treated during the course of the practice. In this regard, how does an emic classification system within the tradition categorize *sādhana-nṛtya*? To illuminate on this matter, the next section discusses how arts and crafts are generally classified by Vajrayāna tradition and how the case of *sādhana-nṛtya* overlaps the classification categories, given its philosophical, psychophysical, and symbolic postures.

Sādhana-nṛtya* as a training to develop *prajñā

The *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*[183] (hereafter MSĀ) mentions that among the five major sciences (Skt. *pañca-vidyāsthāna*)[184] that encompass the overall knowledge of a scholar (Skt. *paṇḍita*, Tib. *mkhas pa*), the purpose of the inner science (Skt. *adhyātmavdiyā*, Tib. *nang pa'i rig gnas*) is meant for benefitting oneself, while the rest of the four sciences are aimed for the sake of others[185] (Gold 2007, 15–17). In this classification, the science of fine arts and crafts (Skt. *śilpakarmasthānavidyā*, Tib. *bzo rig pa*) is regarded as a way to support or help others. In this

[183] The *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (Tib. *mdo sde'i rgyan*) is one of the five treatises of bodhisattva Maitreya (Tib. *byams pa*). According to the traditional account, Asaṅga (Tib. *thogs med*, 4th century) received these teachings from Maitreya in Tuṣita heaven and later transcribed them in the form of written texts (Rigpa Wiki).

[184] The five major sciences (Skt. *pañca-vidyāsthāna*) are linguistic science (Skt. *śabdavidyā*), logical science (Skt. *hetuvidyā*), medical science (Skt. *cikitsavidyā*), science of fine arts and crafts (Skt. *śilpakarmasthānavidyā*), and spiritual or inner science (Skt. *adhyātmavdiyā*). This classification of the five major sciences, along with their purposes (for oneself and others) is a presentation of the MSĀ, which is further interpreted by Sakya Paṇḍita (Tib. *sa skya paNDi ta*, 1182-1251) in his *Gateway to Learning* (Tib. *mkhas pa 'jug pa'i sgo*). Gold discusses Sakya Paṇḍita's interpretation in *The Dharma's Gatekeepers* (2007, 14–24).

[185] The MSĀ mentions that the inner science is mastered for the sake of oneself, while the rest of the major sciences are mastered for the sake of others. There are two aspects for the latter, i.e. refuting others through linguistic and logical sciences and supporting others through medical science and science of fine arts and crafts (Gold 2007, 15).

regard, the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* (Tib. *dvags po thar rgyan*)[186] further explains that the study of fine arts and crafts falls under the category of the "wisdom awareness of the mundane"[187] (Gampopa 1998, 235). In other words, the science of fine arts and crafts (and the rest three except the inner science) is considered as mundane since it aids in developing a common knowledge that primarily relates to worldly matters. In contrast, the wisdom of the inner science is supramundane as it is an uncommon knowledge that leads to the ultimate realization.

However, in the rNying ma tradition, the fine arts and crafts include both mundane and supramundane aspects[188] and this topic is explained in the *Treasury Encompassing All Knowledge* (Tib. *shes bya kun la khyab pa'i mdzod*) in terms of the three media, i.e. the arts of the body (Tib. *lus bzo*), the arts of the speech (Tib. *ngag bzo*), and the arts of the mind (Tib. *yid bzo*).[189] All forms of knowledge derived from the fine arts and crafts are said to be subsumed within the supreme and common arts of these three media (Kongtrül 2013, 6:281–83). From this perspective, any artistic work or craftsmanship, if undertaken with the purpose to cultivate the

[186] The author of the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* is Gampopa Sönam Rinchen (Tib. *sgam po pa bsod nams rin chen*, 1079-1153). Its seventeenth chapter is on the perfection of wisdom, where the five major sciences are discussed.

[187] Based on a commentary to the MSĀ, the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* explains the classification of wisdom in this manner: i. "wisdom awareness of the mundane" that includes the studies of medicine, logic, linguistic, and arts; ii. "wisdom awareness of lesser supramundane" that comprises the wisdom of the Foundational vehicle; and iii. "wisdom awareness of the greater supramundane" that comprises the wisdom of the Great vehicle (Gampopa 1998, 235–36).

[188] Kongtrül discusses the topic of fine arts and crafts in the *Treasury Encompassing All Knowledge* (Tib. *shes bya kun la khyab pa'i mdzod*), which is a volume of ten books that includes a comprehensive presentation of the traditions of *sūtra* and *mantra* primarily from rNying ma and bKa' brgyud perspectives. The sixth book (part one) of this volume discusses how wisdom is to be cultivated in light of the presentation of Indo-Tibetan classical learning that includes the five major sciences.

[189] The Tibetan term for fine arts and crafts is *bzo*, which means fabrication or to manufacture (Tibetan and Himalayan library). In other words, arts in general can be understood as creating a make-believe world. This look-alike construction aims to represent the *vajra* body, speech, and mind of the buddha-s. For example, artistic depictions of the deities and their *maṇḍala*-s (pure abodes of the buddha-s and bodhisattva-s) aid in the visualization stages of the *sādhana*-s. In this regard, Kongtrül provides a detailed description about the measurement and specifications of the iconographies of the deities and their *maṇḍala*-s according to the Buddhist tantric corpus, with a specific indication of the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud *tantra*-s (Kongtrül 2013, 6:284–371).

wisdom pertaining to the inner science and facilitate *dharmic* practices, can be considered as benefitting both oneself and others. In this presentation, the five major sciences as mentioned in the MSĀ still serve as an underlying basis for structuring the topics of Indo-Tibetan scholasticism, but the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions revise these further to directly apply to their *sādhana* practices. In this regard, the discussion of the sacred dances (*sādhana-nṛtya*) merits special attention. In this case, the physical, verbal, and mental aspects of these rNying ma and bKa' brgyud tantric dances are associated with the supreme arts of the body, speech, and mind.

In the presentation of the supreme arts of the body, the text provides a detailed explanation of the *sādhana-nṛtya* of the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions (Kongtrül 2013, 6:446–55), where it is evident that these tantric dances should be conducted while maintaining a profound state of meditation that is sealed by the ultimate *prajñā*[190] (Kongtrül 2013, 6:449). In other words, a *sādhana-nṛtya* practitioner "dwells" in *prajñāpāramitā* by treating everything just as it is, which, according to the *gzhan stong* treatment of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature (as

[190] The ultimate *prajñā* in the context of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s is the ultimate wisdom of realizing the unity of (great) bliss (Skt. *mahāsukha*) and emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*). Refer to chapter three (see footnote 92) for an explanation of bliss and emptiness, i.e. skillful means (Skt. *upāya*) and wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*) in the context of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s. According to the *ḍākinī* principle, the ultimate wisdom is referred to as the ultimate feminine principle, which is symbolized as the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā*, which is unconditioned, nondual, and beyond all conventional attributes including gender (Simmer-Brown 2001, 110–12). It is noteworthy that Shaw's interpretation of the Buddhist feminine principle in the *Passionate Enlightenment* has been rightly criticized as being "gynocentric" (Simmer-Brown 2001, 113). Shaw equates the "worship of women (Skt. *strīpūjā*)" in Hindu Śākta *tantra* with the "secret worship (Skt. *guḥyapūjā*)" in Buddhist *tantra* by misinterpreting that both of these traditions share the view that "femaleness" is "ontologically primary" and "maleness" is "derivative and dependent" (Shaw 1994, 32). She reasons that both of these traditions have a "theoretical basis" on the "belief that women are embodiments of goddesses and that worship of women is a form of devotion explicitly required by female deities" (Shaw 1994, 32). While an explanation about Hindu *tantra*-s in this matter is beyond the scope of this thesis, the position of the Buddhist *tantra*-s in this regard deserves clarification. As noted in the *ḍākinī* principle section of chapter two of this thesis, the essence of the *ḍākinī* is the true nature of the mind, which is formless, nondual, unconditioned, and luminous. In all dimensions, i.e. secret, inner, outer, and outer-outer levels, the *ḍākinī* has this nondual nature, which is, needless to say, beyond gender. Furthermore, chapter three points out (see footnote 88) that in the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s (i.e. Buddhist *tantra*), any central deity of the *maṇḍala*, whether depicted in a male or female form, embodies the unity of *prajñā* (associated with feminine) and *upāya* (associated with masculine). Simmer-Brown points out Shaw's "simplistic gynocentric bias" of "conflating women and the feminine symbolic" (2001, 114) that fails to properly represent the feminine principle of Vajrayāna Buddhism.

interpreted by Dolpopa), is empty yet luminous (Kapstein 2001, 303–6). Furthermore, Kongtrül maintains that these *sādhana-nṛtya* aid in the accumulation of merit and wisdom, accomplishment of the four activities, and the ultimate accomplishment of Buddhahood (2013, 6:453–54, 1260 endnote 675).

The fact that the meditative state of the mind while performing *sādhana-nṛtya* relates to the supreme arts of the mind (Kongtrül 2013, 6:466–67), it is evident that *sādhana-nṛtya* overlaps the categories of the supreme arts of the body and mind. Furthermore, at specific times, the tantric dancers also chant *mantra*-s that correspond to the supreme arts of the speech (Kongtrül 2013, 6:457–65). Therefore, the practice of *sādhana-nṛtya* assimilates the supreme arts of the body, speech, and mind. Given that these *sādhana-nṛtya* are practiced with *prajñā* that eventually awakens the practitioner, contrary to the assertion of the MSĀ, the purpose of the fine arts and crafts is aimed toward the welfare of both oneself and others, at least in the context of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s in general.[191]

In this regard, it is relevant to recall Lerner's indication of the two-fold purpose of *sādhana-nṛtya*, i.e. *sādhana*-based (meditational), which is for the sake of oneself and *pūjā*-based (specific goal-oriented), which is primarily for the sake of others (Lerner 1983, 51). In the case of the latter, in addition to performing specific goals such as pacifying harmful forces and increasing conducive circumstances (Lerner 1983, 51), *sādhana-nṛtya* also benefits others by creating necessary conditions to induce "liberation through seeing (Tib. *mthong grol*)" among

[191] Neither Sakya Paṇḍita nor Gold investigates this matter since the primary subject matter of the *Gateway to Learning* is concerned with the first two major sciences, i.e. linguistic and logical sciences (Gold 2007, 15). Gampopa's interpretation in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation* aligns with the original verse of the MSĀ that the wisdom arising from the study of fine arts and crafts is mundane in nature, which would imply that it cannot possibly benefit others in a *dharmic* manner. When these topics are applied to the *anuttarayogatantra* practices, the fine arts and crafts are regarded as beneficial to others in a sense that these bring those who are keen "into the fold" (Kongtrül 2013, 6:36). This implies that arts and crafts help others by bringing them to the path of the *dharma*.

the audience (Cantwell 1995, 48). The possibility of the viewers to be awakened upon seeing the performance of *sādhana-nṛtya* depends on the ability of the tantric dancers to fully embody the deity[192] and a mental state of complete openness or receptivity among the audience. Thus, with respect to its specific goals, *sādhana-nṛtya* can be seen as benefitting others for a *dharmic* purpose.

Moreover, since it is an *anuttarayogatantra sādhana* which is conducted with *prajñā*, it is said by the tradition that *sādhana-nṛtya* brings tremendous benefit to its practitioners in their own personal training to recognize the true nature of the mind. Therefore, *sādhana-nṛtya* has a crucial contribution to one's own benefit as well. In short, *sādhana-nṛtya* incorporates the supreme arts of the body, speech, and mind, and, according to the tradition, contributes to the *dharmic* benefit of both oneself (through experience) and others (through performance). At the heart of the practice of *sādhana-nṛtya* lies the philosophical posture of maintaining the ultimate *prajñā* that informs all of its multifaceted dimensions and functions. In other words, as a practitioner strives to develop *prajñā* during the training, they begin with gaining a clear insight about the nature of reality (the view) that orients the various postures and functions of this dance practice. By treating *sādhana-nṛtya* as a Vajrayāna practice that develops *prajñā* through incorporating the supreme arts of the body, speech, and mind, a practitioner undertakes the training. The following section presents a PbR model to provide an overview of such training.

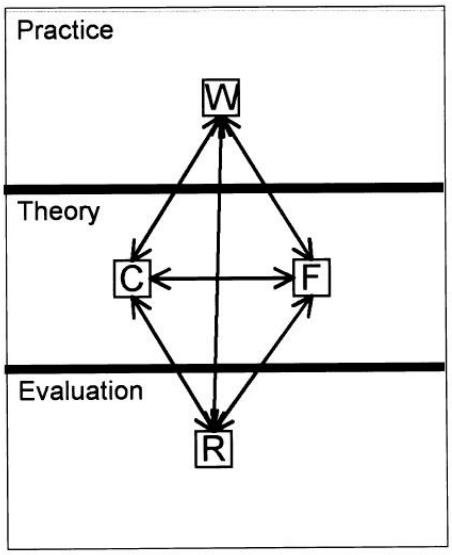
[192] In this regard, the embodiment of the deity is understood in the contexts of rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions (Kongtrül 2013, 6:1253, endnote 645). Kongtrül explains that a *sādhana-nṛtya* practitioner "engages" in this ritual dance by maintaining the "perspective of the indivisible truth" and within a state of "appropriate" meditative absorption, one accomplishes this practice by "securing all appearances and conduct with the seal of the deity" (Kongtrül 2013, 6:449). The "indivisible truth" refers to the inseparability of the great purity and great equality, according to Kongtrül's interpretation of the *anuttarayogatantra*-s (Blankleder, Fletcher, and Kongtrül 2013, 347). He maintains that during the training, one recognizes this indivisible truth as the essence of the meditational deity. Furthermore, one realizes that all appearances and activities have the very nature of this indivisible truth as well.

Sādhana-nṛtya training in a PbR model

In this section, a model to formulate the training process of *sādhana-nṛtya* is proposed on the basis of PbR approach. In the research process, particular attention is given to the core elements of PbR, i.e. practice, theory, and evaluation, as they interactively contribute in developing and improving the framework (Edmonds and Candy 2010a, 470). The creative artifact for the proposed model is *sādhana-nṛtya*. Both academic and creative engagements with *sādhana-nṛtya* over the course of the past three years led to designing this model that demonstrates the progress of one's training in *sādhana-nṛtya*. While it outlines the general features, variations are expected since PbR frameworks are driven by specific goals of the creative practitioner researchers in different scenarios.

Figure 5.1

A PbR trajectory model on the relationality among Practice, Theory, and Evaluation[193]



[193] In this trajectory model, Ernest Edmonds shows the relationship among the three core PbR components: Practice, Theory, and Evaluation. The outcome from practice is work (W), i.e. creative artifacts, compositions, performances, and so forth. The outcomes from theory are criteria or design strategies (C) and Frameworks (F). The outcome from evaluation is results (R). All of these components inform each other in the research process (Edmonds and Candy 2010a, 470)**.** In the PbR model proposed in this thesis, the component of practice is *sādhana-nṛtya*, the component of theory is the doctrinal literature relating to Vajrayāna philosophy, along with the cultural environment, and the component of evaluation is the overall process involved in producing academic and creative outcomes. The signifiance of *prajñā* pervades in all of the three components.

The component of practice constitutes my training that incorporates physical movements and singing of *vajragīti* guided by *btsun ma* Tsering Youdon at Tek Chok Ling nunnery in Boudha (Kathmandu), *caryānṛtya* training from a senior Newar Vajrācārya priest and *caryā* dance master named Padma Raj Bajracharya (Mahila Guruju) in Lalitpur, and creative practice sessions of Buddhist Art seminar taught by my M.A. advisor Prof. Diane Denis in Fall 2020 at the Rangjung Yeshe Institute in Kathmandu. The component of theory comprises relevant textual materials that are primarily on Vajrayāna philosophy and teachings received from the dance teachers in Newar and Tibetan traditions. The component of evaluation involves continuous analysis and assessment to test for suitability of the model, followed by its improvement to accurately demonstrate the training process. It is worthwhile to mention that the process is not a linear progression and all the research components interactively inform each other.

Trajectory of the creative practitioner framework for *sādhana-nṛtya* training

The common feature among the creative practitioner researchers' PbR frameworks is the interactive relationality among the core components of PbR, i.e. practice, theory, and evaluation (Fig. 5.1). While a range of diverse trajectories can be found among the frameworks developed by artists and designers across the disciplines, Edmonds and Candy formulated several trajectory models based on a collection of case studies on the research frameworks developed for interactive digital arts (Edmonds and Candy 2010a). In this case, four possible scenarios[194] are presented: theory driven, practice driven, "reflexive relationship between theory and practice" driven (Edmonds and Candy 2010a, 475), and a case where theory and practice are initially independent of each other but later merge together (Edmonds and Candy 2010a, 473–75). The

[194] The case studies of interactive digital arts demonstrate that the practice, theory, and evaluation inform each other, although they are treated as distinct components in the research process. When applied in *sādhana-nṛtya*, considering that it is a Buddhist practice, such delineation does not occur since the theory is practice in itself.

trajectory of the proposed framework in this thesis is distinct in nature with its own flow and sequence in the research process. Such a variation is expected in a PbR approach, given the specificity of the proposed framework which is particularly designed for *sādhana-nṛtya* training. During the research process of the proposed model, both the components of practice and theory contribute to develop an initial framework. Subsequently, the initial framework is assessed based on the existing outputs from practice and theory, i.e. the on-going training sessions and work-in-progress design strategies to develop the sequences of the model. The result from an initial evaluation required to re-visit both practice and theory components to better understand their interactive relationship. The initial framework is then further improved in light of this refined insight. The revised framework, in turn, then enriches both practice and theory.

The creative output, i.e. the goal of practice, results in an increased flexibility across the media of creative arts, such as translating the quintessential dance *mudrā*-s of Vajrayoginī into a non-figurative artwork (Fig. 5.2). In terms of the academic output, i.e. the goal of theory, it brings out the crucial aspects that were either understudied or not yet addressed by the research community. In the case of the proposed model, unlike the aforementioned fourth scenario, the practice and theory do not independently operate at an initial stage, but rather their relationality was less explored since the research design was at a nascent stage. As the process advances, an increasing familiarity with PbR components allows for a nuanced understanding of the dynamic relationship among them, which facilitates in improving the framework and generating the outputs. This increase in familiarity contributes in developing myself as an academic scholar during the research process that entails gaining a better understanding of Vajrayāna philosophy and practice with regard to *sādhana-nṛtya* and its communities of practitioners. Thus, this PbR

process facilitates me in embarking on the journey to finding and developing my own scholarly voice or posture that will continue beyond the completion of this thesis work.

Figure 5.2

A non-figurative artwork depicting the principal *mudrā*-s of Vajrayoginī *sādhana-nṛtya*[195]

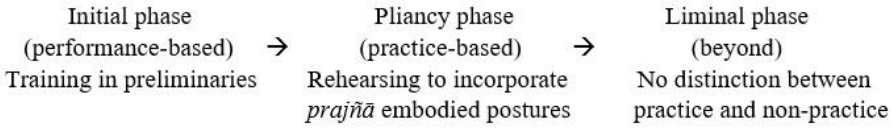
Initial, pliancy, and liminal phases of the PbR model for *sādhana-nṛtya* training

The training of *sādhana-nṛtya* can be structured in a three-stage sequence that progresses through an initial phase, a phase of pliancy, and finally culminating to a liminal phase (Fig. 5.3). At an initial phase, a practitioner focuses on carrying out the preliminaries to gain a firm basis on the core teachings relating to Buddhism in general and those pertaining to the *anuttarayogatantra*-s of Vajrayāna tradition in particular. Furthermore, once qualified, one

[195] Figure 5.2 is an image of an artwork in a charcoal medium, which is a creative output of the PbR approach in this thesis. The artwork illustrates two principal *mudrā*-s during a *sādhana-nṛtya* of Vajrayoginī. The strokes on the left demonstrates the posture of a *sādhana-nṛtya* practitioner's left hand holding a skull cup (Skt. *khaṭpara*) while the strokes on the right shows the repetitive swinging movement of the right hand holding a *vajra* knife (Skt. *karti*). Artwork by the author.

receives necessary permission, blessing, initiation, consecration, and empowerment from a relevant lineage master to practice the intended *sādhana-nṛtya*.[196]

Figure 5.3
A diagram illustrating a PbR approach to *sādhana-nṛtya* training[197]



Since at the beginning stage one is still navigating through a newly introduced practice, it is expected that one will experience difficulty in fully comprehending all the learning materials and teachings. If the practitioner is also an artist, there is a tendency to be drawn to the external aesthetic aspect of the *sādhana-nṛtya*, for example, the melody (Skt. *rāga*) of the song or the dynamic physical postures (Skt. *sthānaka*) of the dance. Not only in *sādhana-nṛtya*, in *sādhana* practices in general, one is more driven toward mastering the chanting, hand gesturing, singing, and playing the ritual related musical instruments. In other words, one's mind is turned to the outward aspects of the *sādhana*, a state which is termed as a "performance-centered practice" (Cupchik 2015, 38). Even if one is not an artist, when one starts out the training, one is bound to

[196] The specific requirements vary depending on the nature of the *sādhana-nṛtya*. However, both in Newar and Tibetan traditions, committing to the practice of *caryānṛtya* and *vajranṛtya* necessitates, at the very least, genuine *dharmic* motivation, clear understanding of the core Vajrayāna teachings, and direct guidance from a qualified master.

[197] The diagram in Figure 5.3 demonstrates three major phases during the training of *sādhana-nṛtya*. During the initial phase the preliminary steps are completed. At this stage, the practitioner is performance-oriented, i.e. focused on the external aspects of the training and have not gained enough expertise to internalize the underlying vast and profound aspects of the practice yet. The second phase is a stage of pliancy, where a practitioner trains in a specific *sādhana-nṛtya*. At this point, the main focus is to carry out all the postures with *prajñā*. This allows one's mind and body to become more flexible and suitable enough to shift the orientation from being performance-based to being practice-based. As the practitioner advances in the training, the aforementioned vast and profound aspects and ultimate aim of the training become an experiential understanding. Finally, at the liminal phase, the practitioner transcends the boundary between practice and non-practice, fully internalizes the essence of the training, and perfectly carries out *sādhana-nṛtya* with *prajñā*.

be overwhelmed with the outward postures (body movements, hand gestures, chanting, singing, playing instruments, and so forth) that makes it difficult to focus on the inner postures (philosophical, mental, and symbolic).

Once the studies, teachings, and practice sessions begin to permeate one's mind, one makes repeated attempts to conduct all the activities with correct motivation and right view. As one tries to assume the philosophical posture, all the learnings (intellectual, experiential, or otherwise), facilitate in cultivating the mind to be fully open, receptive, and pliable for the practice. This impacts all other postures that one tries to master. Progressing in this manner, one soon experiences the dynamic relationship between the mind and body, that supports and complement each other. At this stage, one attempts to attain mental and physical pliancy, so that both the mind and body are suitable enough for the practice. This stage is labeled as a phase of pliancy. Through continuous rehearsals that are informed by academic and practice related teachings, one gradually learns to experientially test one's intellectual learnings. One of the most challenging and significant aspects in this regard is to actually maintain a philosophical posture of pure perception where one does not conceptually fabricate. This is a crucial shift in one's orientation that allows one to translate the teachings into a moment-to-moment lived experience.

The traditions engaging in *anuttarayogatantra* practices maintain that until one learns to make *sādhana-nṛtya* a *dharma* practice, one inevitably ends up getting caught up with the external aesthetic experience of the dance. But one does not need to entirely abandon it; rather, one can make it *dharma*-oriented and turn it into a supramundane or *dharmic* aesthetic experience. For example, Dr. Vena Ramphal, who is a classical Indian dance artist and a scholar,

reformulates a famous verse from the *Abhinayadarpaṇa*[198] in the following manner to apply to her own *sādhana* practice: "As the hands go, so the eyes follow; as the eyes go, so the mind follows; as the mind goes, what becomes available is different inflations of being; where there are different inflations of being, there are *rasa*-s" (Ramphal 2021). The original verse explains that in a drama or dance performance, where the hand gestures go, the dancers' eyes follow (i.e. hand-eye co-ordination); where the eyes go, the mind follows; where the mind goes, an emersion (Skt. *bhava*)[199] arises; where there is an emersion, aesthetic experience (Skt. *rasa*) arises. Prajwal Ratna Vajrācārya,[200] who is an esteemed Newar Vajrācārya priest and *caryā* dance master, reflects on this verse further from the perspective of Newar Buddhist practice and points out that a *caryānṛtya* practitioner carries out the physical postures through the inner eye, i.e. the eye of wisdom (philosophical posture). Although *caryānṛtya* does not entail intensive hand-eye co-ordination techniques as prescribed by classical Indian treatises on dramaturgy and performing arts, the co-ordination is understood at a subtler level where all the postures are carried out with the eye of wisdom, i.e. *prajñā*. This applies to any *anuttarayogatantra*-based *sādhana-nṛtya*. The elements of the dance remain, including the *rasa*-s, but when done with *prajñā*, it becomes a supramundane or *dharmic* experience. At this stage, the training becomes a "practice-based performance" (Cupchik 2015, 38), where a practitioner internalizes the vast and profound aspects of the *sādhana* and conducts the *nṛtya* with *prajñā*.

[198] The *Abhinayadarpaṇa* (Mirror of Gesture) is an Indian treatise (Skt. *śāstra*) on classical Indian dramaturgy and performing arts, written by Nandikeśvara (between 5th and 2nd centuries BC). For more information about the author and the text, refer to this website: https://sreenivasaraos.com/tag/nandikeshvara/.
[199] Literally, the term *bhava* means a state of being. In the webinar presentation, Ramphal translates it as an emersion.
[200] For background information about Prajwal Ratna Vajrācārya, refer to his official website: https://www.dancemandal.com/.

The crucial shift from being performance-based to being practice-based, i.e. turning a practitioner's orientation from a dualistic-perception to a pure-perception, relates to the significant change in their main support, as discussed in chapter two (pp. 19-20). The shift begins to occur from the very moment when a practitioner no longer rigidly holds duality as the only mode of operation and starts to consider nonduality as a feasible option for their basis (Denis Forthcoming, 21). The study, reflection, and meditation in the prior stage regarding the nature of reality helps the practitioner to gain a firm conviction in treating nonduality, i.e. *dharmatā* or *nirvāṇa*, as their main basis. Although the practitioner has not directly experienced nonduality yet, since their view is in accord with the nature of the reality (Skt. *dharmatā*), this outlook can be understood as a conceptual mode of *prajñā*.[201] This conceptual mode of *prajñā* (the view) leads the practice in a way that it culminates in directly experiencing suchness, i.e. the nonconceptual mode of *prajñā*. It is evident that during the training these modes of *prajñā* are operative (Denis Forthcoming, 13) and mutually inclusive (Denis Forthcoming, 23) in nature. In other words, prior to the initial phase of *sādhana-nṛtya* training, a practitioner solely relies on their dualistic framework as the principal basis of operation. As the practitioner embarks on the training and goes through the initial stage, they are introduced to Buddhist teachings (Vajrayāna philosophy in particular) and gradually learn to let go of their long-standing reliance on duality. In the pliancy phase, they become more familiar with the teachings and gain confidence in the tradition's presentation on the nature of reality. In accordance with such presentation, the practitioner formulates the view, which is a conceptual aspect of *prajñā*. This view is further developed and strengthened along the way as they continue to study, reflect, and meditate. The conceptual aspect of *prajñā* informs the other postures of the practice that eventually leads to a

[201] Based on Bugault's work, Prof. Denis mentions two aspects of *prajñā* (conceptual and non-conceptual) in discussing the DDV (Denis Forthcoming, 12–14).

liminal phase that goes beyond the boundary of meditation and non-meditation, i.e. practice and non-practice. This is a stage where *sādhana-nṛtya* is carried out with nonconceptual *prajñā*, i.e. within the recognized state of the self-aware, luminous mind.

As mentioned, the training of *sādhana-nṛtya* culminates to a liminal stage where there is no distinction between practice and non-practice. In other words, a practitioner fully masters the philosophical posture and effortlessly carries out the rest of the postures. At the beginning, a practitioner masters the choreographed steps of *caryānṛtya* and *vajranṛtya*, which are based on the spontaneous yogic movements of the Great Adepts (Skt. *mahāsiddha*-s). At the liminal phase, a practitioner reaches a point that a prescribed choreography is no longer necessary. This is a stage where they are able to spontaneously perform *caryānṛtya* and *vajranṛtya* as the display of the empty yet radiant nature of the mind. In other words, the interplay of form (outward physical postures) and formless (inward posture, i.e. the view) becomes completely harmonious with the abiding nature (empty yet luminous) of everything.

The practices of *caryānṛtya* and *vajranṛtya* can also be understood in terms of Trungpa's interpretation of *dharma* art.[202] The journey of reaching to the stage of complete harmony and spontaneously performing *caryānṛtya* and *vajranṛtya* without any aggression (i.e. absence of neurosis) relates to the heaven, earth, and human principle by Trungpa, which embodies his treatment of *dharma* art (Trungpa 2008). Trungpa regards *dharma* art as a form of meditative action which is not driven by aggression or discursive thoughts of the ordinary mind (Trungpa 2008, 1–3). In other words, a *dharma* artist's mind is relaxed, one-pointed, and lucid, so that they

[202] Chögyam Trungpa (1939-1987) was one of the prominent Vajrayāna masters to explore various ways to explain the Buddhist teachings, such as incorporating certain terms from Western Psychology and experimenting diverse forms of meditation through arts and crafts. His principle of *dharma* art is applied here in the context of *sādhana-nṛtya* to shed light on the aspect of *sādhana-nṛtya* being both an artistic exploration and a dharmic activity.

can see everything just as it is without exaggerating, depreciating, or fabricating in any way. Within that wholesome state of the mind, one sees everything as an expression of the principle of heaven, i.e. "ground of manifestation," earth, i.e. "potential of manifestation," and human, i.e. "actual manifestation" (Trungpa 2008, 128). This principal can be applied to the *dharma* art of *sādhana-nṛtya* as well. The component of heaven or space is the ground of wakefulness, which is full of freedom and radiance, out of which the *dharma* art of *sādhana-nṛtya* arises. The component of earth allows for the possibility of such arising to happen with a mental state which is free of discursive thoughts, endowed with natural ease, and accompanied by diligent joy. The human component is the actual carrying out of *sādhana-nṛtya* in a wholesome way by being fully present at the current moment without getting carried away by one's trivial concerns. When practiced in this manner, it becomes a genuine *dharma* art that is in complete unison with the true nature of everything.

The crucial role of *prajñā* in practicing *sādhana-nṛtya* as a *dharma* art or activity cannot be overstated. It is the very embodiment of *prajñā* that makes any act wholesome and conducive to awakening. However, in practice, it is extremely difficult to embrace one's actions with *prajñā*. Because it is an absolute necessity yet very much daunting to do so, the tradition puts a special emphasis on this matter. At the outset of the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana-nṛtya* practices, the paramount importance of *prajñā* is underscored by the tradition, a point which is continuously brought to mind throughout the practice. For it is the repeated training of maintaining the view of *prajñā* at all times that eventually allows one to turn *sādhana-nṛtya* into a powerful *dharmic* practice to accelerate the perfect and complete awakening.

From a practice-based perspective, one can deduce here that living wisdom is not necessarily found in the forms, gestures or *mantra*-s, yet that these learned manifestations, as any

learned behavior, can become a gateway to insight into the nature of the reality, when these are carried out with *prajñā*. In other words, when the form and formless are correctly, justly, and absolutely (Skt. *samyak*) combined, one can finally get a glimpse of the direct, naked seeing. A practice-based approach allows one to face this immense challenge of embodying both form and formless since the very beginning of the training. The ultimate aim of *sādhana-nṛtya* is to realize the indivisibility of emptiness and luminosity, which is the essence of both the deity and the practitioner. There are myriad challenges and obstacles to gaining such realization. Letting go of the deeply rooted clinging to one's aggregates is definitely a major one, but there are other significant hurdles that are not quite readily evident. For example, doubting the efficacy of practice. Challenges such as not regarding oneself as being good enough for the practice are comparatively easier to overcome than questioning the effectiveness of the practice itself. From the traditional point of view, one of the root causes for such doubt lies in lacking one's own conviction in the practice.[203] As long as one is limited to mere study and superficial reflection on the teachings, one can only rely on borrowed wisdom, i.e. what others have said about the teachings and practice. But the purpose of the teachings is only fulfilled when one applies it in real life and verifies whether these are indeed true or not. This approach of personally investigating to check the validity of the teachings lies at the heart of developing and perfecting *prajñā*.

[203] One's conviction is developed in association with one's knowledge and experience. For a detailed discussion on the Buddhist understanding of knowledge and experience, refer to Kalupahana (1994, chap. III, pp. 30–52).

Conclusion

Both in *caryānṛtya* and *vajranṛtya* practices, discerning and gaining conviction in the nature of reality (philosophical posture), play the most crucial role that direct all the other postures, i.e. physical, verbal, mental, and symbolic. In essence, it is this philosophical posture that marks these *sādhana-nṛtya* as Vajrayāna practices. Otherwise, these dances would be no different than a performing art seeking external aesthetic experience, i.e. a saṃsāric activity. In the *sādhana-nṛtya* training, through assuming the symbolic posture of visualizing oneself as the meditational deity, a practitioner aims at transcending all the conventional boundaries, thereby gaining a naked experience of reality. The deity is seen as the unity of emptiness and luminosity, combining both the feminine (wisdom) and masculine (skillful means) aspects. This nondual outlook is termed as pure perception in Vajrayāna tradition, which is informed by the core Buddhist teachings, in particular, the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and its later development into Yogācāra thought.

In the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s, developing such pure perception requires a firm basis on the teachings and preliminaries that lead to advanced Vajrayāna practices. Therefore, during the initial phase, a practitioner focuses on gaining a clear understanding of the teachings. In this regard, they employ a Buddhist pedagogical approach of study, reflection, and meditation as a strategy to internalize the essence of the teachings.[204] The wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*) arising from this three-fold approach enables them to reconsider their default mode of conceptual framework as the only way to experience their life and engage with the surrounding environment. The three-

[204] The three-fold strategy of study, reflection, and meditation belongs to the overarching approach of the three trainings (Skt. *triśikṣā*) that impacts one's entire lifestyle. The three trainings encompass the noble eightfold path (Skt. *āryāṣṭāṅgamārga*). The training of *śīla* entails refraining from the unwholesome activities through one's body, speech, and mind, and engaging in the wholesome activities. The training of *samādhi* refers to the meditation practices while the training of *prajñā* is associated with all forms of wisdom arising from one's study, reflection, and meditation (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 2258).

fold insight, as a conceptual mode of *prajñā*, allows them to become less rigid, thereby gradually releasing their strong grasping to dualistic fixation. By thorough investigation and experiential training of cultivating both the mind and body, they increasingly become more flexible and advance to the phase of pliancy.

During the investigation, a practitioner experientially tests all the teachings to determine if, for example, everything is indeed interdependently arisen while lacking any substantial existence whatsoever. If all phenomena without exception are empty and interdependently arisen, a practitioner cannot possibly treat their mind and body as two separate entities. In other words, they can no longer regard their body as something solid, rigid, and independent from the mind. As a practitioner investigates the empty and composite nature of everything, they recognize that their mind and body are rather fluid and flexible in nature, that cannot be labeled in any dualistic relationship of being either same or different. In the traditional presentation of the mind and body, the mind takes precedence since the world (or the entire universe for that matter), is considered a mental phenomenon. A practitioner examines this notion by carefully checking if all that they apprehend and experience are in fact a product of their mind, which are said from the traditions' point of view as being equally empty just as all other phenomena. Moreover, this investigation is done through a *gzhan stong* view, where a practitioner not only treats everything as empty, they simultaneously regard them as luminous. This outlook of seeing all as empty yet luminous lies at the heart of the advanced practices of the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s. The entire process of investigation improves their familiarity with the teachings and they begin to gain a more nuanced understanding of the core philosophical doctrines. This in turn informs their view (philosophical posture) that serves as a bridge to naked experience. By thorough investigation of the teachings, a practitioner begins to develop certainty with regard to

the nature of reality and also builds up confidence about the efficacy of *sādhana-nṛtya* training that it will magnetize[205] the direct realization.

During the stage of pliancy, a firm philosophical posture leads to an increased awareness of the vast and profound aspects of Vajrayāna practices, which allows a practitioner to transition from being performance-based (i.e. primarily focused on external aspects of the practice) to being practice-based (i.e. competent enough to delve deeper into the practice). As they strive to train wholeheartedly and reach to a certain level where they begin to fathom the deeper levels of the practice, the practitioners not only become competent as a performer but also becomes more responsive as an audience during *sādhana-nṛtya* practices and offerings.

A *sādhana* is a method to accomplish specific goals, while not losing sight of the ultimate aim of recognizing the inseparability of emptiness and luminosity, that incorporates both wisdom (feminine aspect) and skillful means (masculine aspect). All the visualizations (mental posture) of the *sādhana* arise out of the unity of wisdom and skillful means, which in turn manifest from the primordial ground of space-wakefulness, the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā*, i.e. the ultimate *ḍākinī* (symbolic posture). Based on this non-conceptual, non-dual, formless *ḍākinī*, all the appearances and activities come forth and dissolve back. To directly experience the coalescence of emptiness and luminosity, during the *sādhana*, a practitioner treats all appearances, sound, and thoughts *as though* they are deities, *mantra*-s, and display of wisdom. In other words, one imitates the ultimate aim during the training and develops the conceptual aspect of *prajñā* until it becomes a non-conceptual, naked experience of the nature of reality, i.e. suchness (Skt. *tathatā*). Unless a practitioner directly *sees* everything just as it is, they primarily rely on the conceptual

[205] The aspect of magnetizing practice or activity in the context of the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s is explained in chapters two (see footnote 81) and four (see footnotes 174 and 176).

mode of their ordinary mind. However, they begin to turn toward nonduality as they explore what it means to "abide" in *prajñāpāramitā*, i.e. take *dharmatā* or *nirvāṇa* (nonduality) as one's main basis. In this process of exploration, they employ various activities that aid in getting a glimpse of such direct experience. In the case of *sādhana-nṛtya*, a practitioner applies a range of postures such as visualization and meditative concentration (mental posture), hand gestures and body postures (physical posture), along with *mantra* recitation and singing *vajragīti* and *caryāgīti* (verbal posture). To accomplish the specific and ultimate aims of *sādhana-nṛtya*, it is key that all of these postures are carried out while constantly keeping in mind the empty yet luminous nature of all phenomena (philosophical posture).

Just as the *sādhana*-s do not have a fixed pattern and can be designed according to a practitioner's specific purpose, the *sādhana-nṛtya*, in particular, the *vajranṛtya*, can be improvised to aid one's practice. This act of improvisation should be understood in a *dharmic* manner, as it is done with an aim of re-awakening a practitioner's natural spontaneity to reconnect with their *sahaja* nature. Grounded within the teachings of the *mahāsiddha* tradition, *sahaja* demonstrates the quintessential symbolic, enigmatic, and paradoxical nature of *sandhyābhāṣā*. While *sahaja* has connotations to being natural, easy, and co-emergent, it is also regarded as the ultimate realization of *mahāmudrā*, which is the culminating state of the most profound Vajrayāna practices. Since ordinary beings unnecessarily create layers of exaggeration and/or denigration due to the discursive thoughts of the conceptual mind, naturally seeing everything just as it is becomes almost an impossibility. The ultimate purpose of *sādhana-nṛtya* or any *anuttarayogatantra sādhana* for that matter, is to bring a practitioner back to the original wakefulness so that they realize the futility of constantly fabricating, thereby releasing themselves from the deeply rooted clinging to everything, especially their own aggregates, as

substantially existing. In the Tibetan tradition, the *gcod sādhana* of *Wrathful Black Vajrayoginī* is aimed at severing this strong attachment to the practitioner's aggregates as truly existent; as being a self. In the Newar tradition, the *caryānṛtya* of Vajrayoginī in a wrathful, red form constantly points out that as Vajrayoginī, who is, in essence, *śūnyatā* and *sahaja*, the practitioner completely uproots all the clinging and poisons. Although apparently paradoxical, the *anuttarayogatantra sādhana*-s utilize form (visualizing deities in anthropomorphic figures) to recognize formlessness (nature of the mind). Through repeated symbolic enactments and improvisations, the practitioner incorporates both the form and formless aspects, eventually dissolving all the dualistic boundaries that seemingly separate one from the deity.

Once a practitioner recognizes that they are indeed the deity, they effortlessly assume all the postures and carry out all the activities with non-conceptual *prajñā* (direct experience of suchness). This phase is marked as liminal since a practitioner transcends the boundaries of practice and non-practice. Furthermore, they naturally incorporate both the form (outer postures) and formless (inner postures) aspects of *sādhana-nṛtya*. Needless to say, they are no longer bound to any specific structure of *vajranṛtya* and/or *caryānṛtya*. At this stage, a practitioner's *sādhana-nṛtya* becomes an enlightened activity of their self-cognizant, luminous mind.

As underscored in this thesis, during the course of the *sādhana-nṛtya* training, the most challenging and crucial task is to assume the pure perception-based philosophical posture. A practitioner needs to constantly bring nonduality to their mind and continuously explore how they can actually hold a nondual view. This also applies to the deity practice where the meditational deity, regardless of their form (male or female depiction), is nondual in nature. This is an extremely difficult point to apply in practice. With regard to the case studies of this thesis where a *vajraḍākinī* (Vajrayoginī) is the *sādhana* deity, who is a manifestation of ultimate *ḍākinī*

(the Great Mother *Prajñāpāramitā*), there is a danger of conflating and limiting the *ḍākinī* with the female gender in a human form. To dispel such misrepresentation and any other confusion, the *anuttarayogatantra*-s particularly emphasize on the aspect of *prajñā*. In its non-conceptual aspect, it is the very suchness. In its conceptual mode, it is the manifold wisdom that arises throughout the training that informs one's view, which is yet another dimension of its conceptual aspect. In the context of the *sādhana* practice, as *dharmadhātu*, it is the nondual, nonconceptual primordial ground out of which all the visualizations arise and dissolve. During the *sādhana*, as a counter part of *upāya*, it is the female aspect, which, in unity with the former, unfolds the visualizations of the deities along with their *maṇḍala*-s. In *sādhana-nṛtya* training, one incorporates all of these multifaceted dimensions of *prajñā*. In essence, the entire training of *sādhana-nṛtya* is that of developing and perfecting *prajñā* that directs and orients the training in an accurate and authentic way (Skt. *samyak*) so that a practitioner can directly, perfectly, and completely experience suchness, thereby attaining perfect and complete awakening.

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