

Guru Padmasambhava and his five main Consorts

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Abstract

This work is based on the selected biographies of Guru Padmasambhava, a well known Indian Tantric master who played a very important role in spreading Buddhism in Tibet and the Himalayan regions. He is regarded as a Second Buddha in the Himalayan region, especially in Tibet. He was the one who revealed Vajrayana teachings to the world. Apart from this, the paper will also discuss about his five major consorts, who helped him in his sadhana to attain higher realization.

Keywords: Padmasambhava, Tibetan Buddhism, Dakini, Consorts, Sadhana, Tantric Buddhism.

Introduction

Guru Padmasambhava (Lotus Born) is also known as Guru Rinpoche in Tibetan, which means 'Precious Master'. Guru Padmasambhava was fully awakened one. He did not become enlightened gradually or practicing on the teachings of Buddha. He incarnated as a highly enlightened one. In Mahaparinirvana Sutra, Buddha announced his Parinirvana and he had also predicted the incarnation of Guru Padmasambhava.

Buddha presented most of the teachings in Hinayana and Mahayana Sutra while Guru Padmasambhava taught Vajrayana. Both revealed the perfect path to enlightenment to help the sentient beings. Buddha gave Vajrayana teachings just to the chosen groups of disciples because these teachings are beyond common understanding. And after his Mahaparinirvana, these teachings were preserved by wisdom dakinis. When Guru Padmasambhava appeared in this samsara, he revealed the Vajrayana teachings to the world. That is why he is known as Buddha in the Vajrayana tradition. He was a well known Tantric master and he had subdued countless dakinis during his lifetime. Although he had countless dakinis, among those dakinis, five were prominent, namely Yeshe Tsogyal, Mandarava, Shakyadevi, Kalasidhi, and Tashi Khyidren. Yeshe Tsogyal and Mandarava were two main consorts of Guru Padmasambhava.

A brief biography of Guru Padmasambhava

According to the Terma teachings, Padmasambhava miraculously appeared as an eight-year-old boy sitting on a lotus flower, holding a vajra and lotus, in lake Danakosha, in the kingdom of Oddiyana in ancient India, now days known as Swat Valley Pakistan. As per the tradition Buddha Amitabha sent out from his heart a golden vajra marked with the letter 'HRIH' into this lotus, which later transformed into this eight-year-old boy. At the time the sightless king of Oddiyana, Indrabhuti, had no sons, and had already, emptied his treasure by giving dhana to poor and needy people of his country. So he set on a voyage accompanied by his minister Krishnadhara (Trigunadhara) to find a wish-fulfilling jewel. While coming back, having obtained the jewel and having restored his eyesight by the power of the jewel, first Krishnadhara and later Indrabhuti encountered this miraculous boy. The king and his minister approached the boy and requested him to come with them. The boy accepted their invitation and joined them. Indrabhuti took him to the kingdom. Afterward, Guru Padmasambhava was raised by the king Indrabhuti and he was crowned as a prince. As he grew up he mastered in all the studies, disciplines and athletic games.

Time went by and Padmasambhava grew up to a young man and eventually married to beautiful princes Prabhadhari (Bhasadhara) and served the kingdom according to the dharma. Eventually, he realised if he becomes the king he would not be able to serve other human beings and bring them to spiritual benefit. So he took permission to leave but was refused by the king Indrabhuti. He thought he'll find the way to renounce the kingdom and he thought about the necessary action. In order to renounce the kingdom, he summoned all the ministers and performed a mystical dance on the roof of the palace. At that time, Guru Padmasambhava was

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completely naked, wearing except six fold bone necklace, and he was holding a vajra, bell and the three-pointed khathvanga (trident) in his hands. Then he pretended that khathvanga had fallen from his hand, which killed the son of a wicked minister. He was then expelled to a charnel ground Silwa Tsal (Chilly Grove). By the time he practised esoteric sadhana and spent his life eating the offering to the dead and wearing the remaining clothes of the deceased. He roamed in the charnel grounds and performed esoteric sadhana. There he received the empowerment and blessing from two dakinis 'Tamer of Mara' and 'Sustainer of bliss'. After subduing all the dakinis of the charnel grounds he was known as 'Shantarakshita' (Preserver of Peace).

Furthermore, he met eight Vidyadharas when he arrived in India and received the eight Heruka teachings from them. The famous master Gomadevi daughter of King Jah was one of his human teachers who introduced him to the Mahayoga tantra also known as the eighteen great tantras. The first human Dzogchen master, Garab Dorje was Guru Padmasambhava's source for Atiyoga teachings. To complete his study he went to the famous master Manjushrimitra, who was a direct disciple of Garab Dorje. After requesting instructions, Manjushrimitra told that he could not teach him and instead sent him to the scary charnel ground, where he encountered the great dakini known as Lagyi Wangmo, the dakini of deeds who was the wisdom Dakini Guhya Jnana. Guru Padmasambhava asked for empowerment and she transformed his body into letter 'HUNG' which she then swallowed. Inside her body, he was bestowed with all empowerments. According to one biography of Guru Padmasambhava, it is said that for seven days, she kept him inside her body. He also received Dzogchen teaching known as the Great Perfection and Khandro Nyingthig (The Heart Essence of the Dakinis) from Master Sri Singh. He trained in it for three years and attained the Pho Ba Chenpo (Rainbow body of Great Transmission). In this way, he learnt and studied all the sutras, tantras and science etc. He became expert by learning topics at once and without even practising he had a clear vision of all the deities.

Mandarava: Consort from India

Mandarava was born as a princess in the land of Zahor (Sahor) to a quite wealthy king. Although the king had many queens, he had no sons or daughters and Mandarava was his only child. She was not an ordinary being and she intentionally took birth in the samsara in order to liberate the sentient beings. She was a dakini of knowledge. It is said that her birth was full of mysterious signs. Gradually she grew up and turned out to be exceptionally beautiful and well behaved. Thus she had started receiving a marriage proposal from the neighbouring kings. When they approached her she turned them down by saying that she will not enter into the samsaric world but instead follow the Dharma path. One day she escaped the palace by a secret door and went to a place several miles away from the palace. Then she started practicing the Dharma with the five hundred serving women appointed by the king to accompany her. They all lived like nuns, practicing dharma in solitude. While meditating at Vulture Peak (Rajgir) Guru Padmasambhava had a vision of Zahor and he also saw a wisdom dakini named Mandarava. By the power of foreknowledge, he saw that it was the right time to meet her and he also realized that with her help they could both achieve immortality. For this very reason, he miraculously appeared in the land of Zahor. Because of the esoteric practice, his relationship with princess Mandarava was misunderstood. People started gossiping and this made King very angry. He ordered his men to check out the truth behind the rumours and if it was true then kill the culprit and punish whoever was involved.

King's delegation arrived at the nunnery and tied a rope around Guru Padmasambhava's neck and they dragged him to the town. A large amount of wood was collected from the local households and soaked with the sesame oil. They tied Guru Padmasambhava in the middle of the pyre and burned him alive. While Mandarava was thrown into a pit of thrones. Instead of being burned, he transformed the fire into the water and soon it became a beautiful lake and in the middle of the lake, there was a lotus flower. Next day Guru Padmasambhava was seen seated as an eight-year-old boy on the lotus in the middle of the lake. The lake is now believed to be the Rewalsar Lake in Mandi in Himachal Pradesh.

Very soon king realized that he did a huge mistake, he asked for the forgiveness and invited him to his palace for Dharma teachings. Guru Padmasambhava accepted his invitation and went to the king's palace. After this Guru Padmasambhava along with Mandarava went to the Martika cave in Eastern Nepal. This very cave is known as the cave of immortality. There they practiced for the three months on Buddha Amitayus and perform the sadhana of long life. After three months Buddha Amitayus appeared before them and blessed the empowerment of longevity. In this way, they attained the state of immortality. They defeated the Mara demon of the death. Although, they were already enlightened one, on the outer level they came to this attainment in

Martika cave.

After returning from the Martika cave they went to Oddiyana. Along with Mandarava, he remained almost for thirteen years in Oddiyana. There he gave teachings and turned the wheel of Dharma, letting the entire kingdom on the path of Dharma. The king and many fortunate beings attained the higher realization. They travelled to many places spreading the Dharma. While Guru Padmasambhava went to Tibet, Mandarava remained in India benefiting the others. It is said she also visited Tibet by her miraculous power.

Shakyadevi: Consort from Nepal

Little is known about the life of Shakyadevi, she was born as a princess to a Nepalese king named Punyadhara. According to the legends, her mother passed away while giving birth to her. Shakyadevi was taken along with the corpse of her mother to the charnel ground and was abandoned there. However, she survived by the monkeys who nurtured her. When she grew up she became Yogini and resided near Parphing Mountains outside Kathmandu. It is said that when Padmasambhava met her he noticed that her hands and feet were webbed like a goose. Seeing these signs he realized she was enlightened one and he took her as his consort for the sadhana. She received teachings from him and she became the spiritual support of Guru Padmasambhava. They practiced on the mandala of nine deities of Vishuddha Heruka. And after practicing for a long time, they had a pure vision of Vishuddha and the Vajrakilya deities.

He then along with Shakyadevi performed combined sadhana of Vishuddha and Vajrakilya and achieved the Mahamudra. It is said that Shakyadevi attained the rainbow body as a realised female practitioner. According to the traditions it was Shakyadevi who first inspired Guru Padmasambhava in the tradition of concealing the teachings as Terma. With the help of Shakyadevi Guru Padmasambhava manifested many forms in order to help the sentient beings and he became known by twenty different representing his miraculous power. It is said that many years later when Yeshe Tsogyal visited Yanglasho, Shakyadevi the former consort of Guru Padmasambhava was still practicing as a Yogini.

Yeshe Tsogyal: Consort from Tibet

Yeshe Tsogyal was the chief disciple and consort of Guru Padmasambhava. She was born in Kharchen clan to the chieftain of Kharchen. She was Vajravarahi (Dorje Phagmo) born in human form. Like princess Mandarava she was already awakened one and intentionally took birth to benefit the human beings. It is said that in order to assist Trisong Detsen, she took birth in Tibet. When her mother conceived, for the whole nine months the sound of 'Hrih' and the secret mantra was heard clearly. Her mother gave birth without any pain. And even at the time of her birth, a spring of fresh water burst from the ground and formed a large lake next to her house. She grew much faster than other kids. When she was only one month she had the appearance of an eight-year-old child. And even more, she knew how to read without being taught. She was very compassionate and had all the quality of a Bodhisattva. Most of her time, she used to spend in meditation and used to pray for the happiness of the sentient beings. It is said whenever she used to play with the children she would leave her handprints and footprints on the solid rocks.

She was inhumanly beautiful and often drew unwanted extra attention. And very soon she started receiving marriage proposals. She was only thirteen when she first became the consort of the king Trisong Detsen. It is said that later King Trisong Detsen offered her to Guru Padmasambhava as a mandala offering before receiving empowerments and she became Guru Padmasambhava's consort. She was sixteen years old when Padmasambhava took her as a consort. Although she was already enlightened one, she practiced in thousand of retreats in order to bless them and remove the obstacles for the future practitioners. She also attained the siddhi of remembering whatever Padmasambhava taught without writing it down. As she had an unforgotten memory, through the power of her memory she collected all the teachings given by Guru in Tibet and at the command of Guru himself she hid all the teachings in various places as Terma as to be revealed in the future for the benefit of the followers. These hidden texts (Terma) were encoded with the secret dakini language.

As per Guru Padmasambhava's instructions, she went to Nepal to free Atsara Sale, a seventeen-year-old Indian boy, who was a daka. After finding him they went back to Tibet and met Guru Padmasambhava. He gave them all the tantric instructions. They practiced and gradually attained enlightenment. Then Guru Padmasambhava left for Lhodrak and Yeshe Tsogyal and Atsara Sale went to the secret caves and started

practicing there. They meditated for seven months and gradually she attained mastery over all phenomena as her body was no longer the subject of aging, illness, and decline and together they discovered the four bliss.

Apart from this, she nearly had a death experience thrice while she was practicing. For the first time, it happened when she was practicing on inner heat (tummy), wearing nothing but only one cotton robe. At first, heat did not arise and the cold and frost were hard to bear. For the second time, during the one year practice, depending on only rock and water as a food and drink and wearing nothing but bone ornaments. At that time she nearly escaped the death. The third incident took place during another one year practice living on the wind only, while completely naked. Her fourth death experience happened at Paro Taktsang in the highlands of Bhutan, while she was practicing on Amitayus and Sunyata, relying on the herbs as food. At that time her companions Atsara Sale, Acharya Pelyang and the Mon boy became mentally and physically ill. She herself became very ill and her throat was filled with puss and blood. She was only one step away from death. After completion of her seven-month long practice, they witnessed the pure vision of Amitayus and attained the blessing of the long life.

Being a woman she had many consorts. Later she took a fourteen year old Tibetan boy named Dudul Pawo as a second consort. This rare reversal gender role in tantric practice indicates that Yeshe Tsogyal as a female role model of a different sort. Guru Padmasambhava himself said, "Male, or Female there is no great difference. But when the aspiration for enlightenment is developed, the women are superior." Yeshe Tsogyal remained in Tibet for many years after Guru Padmasambhava left Tibet. She reconcealed all the text in different places.

Kalasiddhi: Consort from India

The story of Kalasiddhi is quite similar to the story of Shakyadevi. Both were abandoned to the charnel ground with the dead mother's body by their family as their mother died during childbirth. But there is a contradiction about the birthplace of Kalasiddhi. According to some sources she was born in Nepal and her parents were weavers. It is believed that Mandarava, in the form of tigress suckled the child and kept her alive. She grew up and earned living by spinning and weaving wools. When she was fourteen years old, Yeshe Tsogyal was on her second visit to Tibet and she discovered the young child. She took her to Tibet and named her Kalasiddhi. She accompanied Yeshe Tsogyal to Tibet and even visited the retreat centres of Guru Padmasambhava, where she met him. Guru Padmasambhava noticed her great potential as a partner in his practice to increase tantra in Tibet. Therefore he asked Yeshe Tsogyal to offer her to him for that purpose and took her as his consort. He gave her initiation into tantra. After the extensive practice, she gained siddhi. When Guru went to the southwest, Kalasiddhi was left under the care of Yeshe Tsogyal. And Yeshe Tsogyal gave her detailed instruction for her further practice.

And according to the book 'The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava,' it is mentioned that Kalasiddhi was born as a daughter of weavers in the region of Ngathupchen in India with all the signs of a dakini. It is believed she was an incarnation of Pandaravasini. Her mother died in childbirth, and her father thought that the child could not be fed without a mother so he abandoned her with her mother's body in the charnel ground. At that time princess, Mandarava was practicing in that charnel ground. When she found the child was sucking at the dead women's breast, she moved by compassion. She transformed herself into a tigress, fed her own breast milk and kept her alive. Mandarava kept the mother's corpse warm in order that the child should not stop to cling to her mother. In this way, she brought up. She grew up and managed to earn her living by spinning and weaving of cotton. When the right time had come, Guru Padmasambhava realized that she was capable of becoming his disciple. He manifested as a bhikshu called Saukhyadeva and gave her empowerments and teachings. They went to the forest and there together they practiced the training on the skilful means.

At the end of her life, Kalasiddhi attained the higher realization and went to the Zangdok Palri without leaving any trace of her mortal body.

Tashi Khyidren: the Himalayan Consort

It is very difficult to know actually which place Tashi Khyidren belonged. According to some sources she was born in Bhutan and some sources claim she was from Mon. Tulku Thondup (1996) mentions in his book 'Masters of Meditation and Miracles' Tashi Khyidren was born on Mon. From the childhood, she had faith in Dharma. Then one day a dakini came in her dream and gave her instructions. As per the instructions Tashi Khyidren went to Lhodrak in Southern Tibet and there she met Yeshe Tsogyal. She received empowerments from Yeshe Tsogyal. Later she met Guru Padmasambhava and he took her as his consort for further practice. By

extensive practice, she attained the higher realization. At Paro Taktsang (Bhutan), Guru Padmasambhava practiced the sadhana of Vajrakilya with her. He transformed himself as Dorje Drolo, she transformed herself into Tigress and became his ride. They subdued many powerful spirits in the region and she also helped him concealing many terma. Later she left the samsara and went to Zangdok Palri pure land of Guru Padmasambhava leaving behind her mortal body.

According to the Bhutanese folk stories, she was a gift from Bhutan to Guru Padmasambhava in his work of propagating the Buddhist tantra in Bhutan and Tibet. According to few Bhutanese sources, she was the daughter of the legendary Sindhu Raja, King of the Iron Place, who invited the great Guru to Bhutan to cure his disease. On the other hand, few sources confirm she was the daughter of King Ha-mar or Hamra. When she was thirteen years old she met Yeshe Tsogyal at the Nering Drak cave. Tsogyal was practicing sadhana to subdue the local spirits and demons of the region. Tashi Khyidren used to bring her milk and honey as she had a deep respect for Tsogyal. After Yeshe Tsogyal had succeeded in subduing the spirits, Khyidren's father came to pay her homage. Tsogyal asked him to give his daughter which he agreed and offered his daughter to her. Khyidren accompanied Tsogyal to Womphu Taktsang Tibet and met Guru Padmasambhava. He asked Tsogyal to give Khyidren to him as his mudra to perform sadhana of Dorje Phurba for the protection of Tibet. Tsogyal offered her to Guru and he took her as his spiritual consort. Khyidren played an important role as a secondary consort of the Guru. After the extensive practice, she attained higher realization and transformed herself into a tigress, which Guru Padmasambhava and Tsogyal rode as Phurba and consort. She remained Tsogyal's disciple.

Conclusion

Guru Padmasambhava the precious master said to have lived three thousand and six hundred years in India, benefiting the sentient beings and propagating the Buddha dharma. With kindness as deep as the sea he served not only human beings but the god, nagas, rakshasa etc. It is believed Guru Padmasambhava is still present in this samsara as a knowledge holder, residing in Zangdok Palri, a manifestation of his pure realm. And he will remain in this manifested pure land as long as it is beneficial to the sentient beings.

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