

#### <sup>4</sup>Guru Padmasambhava and Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism

##### Abstract

Guru Padmasambhava is so far the most prominent among all the Nyingma<sup>1</sup> teachers known to Tibetan Buddhism who is also known as “Guru Rinpoche”. Guru Rinpoche who perhaps lived during the 8<sup>th</sup> century has received his teachings from Jamphel She Nyen and Garap Dorje and his missionary works spread the lineage into Tibet. In Tibetan Buddhism he is considered as an emanation of the Buddha Amitabha by Nyingma school whose fastidious objective was to ease the propagation of Buddhism in the early period. The biography written by his disciple Yeshe Tsogyal states that many aspects of his early life closely similar to the life of the Buddha Shakyamuni. He took an extraordinary birth in a small north Indian kingdom. The popular legends embrace that he was born in the country of Oddiyana from the bud of a large and multicolored ‘Lotus’. The literal meaning of the name Padmasambhava means ‘born from a lotus’. The king of Indrabodhi was not having any son, so he adopted Padmasambhava as his son. The Padmasambhava also grew up in a palace like Buddha Shakyamuni and learned the arts and sciences suitable to princes. Although the king Indrabodhi wanted him to follow his footsteps as a king and take care of the kingdom. But Padmasambhava realized that being a king he would not be able to benefit others as much as he can through spreading the Buddha Dharma.



Guru Padmasambhava

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Nyingma<sup>1</sup>: It is the oldest school of Buddhism in Tibet. It was established during the reign of king Trisong detsen by inviting Shantirakshita and Guru Padmasambhava from Nalanda around 8<sup>th</sup> century



Fig: Thangka of Guru Padmasambhava, 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Lhasa, Central Tibet

## Introduction

When Padmasambhava started to broaden the scope of his missionary activities in the neighboring countries he visited China, Turkistan, Shanshung and Tibet to introduce the doctrine of Buddhism. The history depicts that his journey to spread Buddhism in Tibet was seen as a victorious mission over the demonic forces which were trying to keep Buddhism out of the country.<sup>5</sup>

The first Buddhism missionary master from India Santarakshita advised the second religious king of Tibet, Trisong Detsen to invite Padmasambhava to subdue the demons and oppositions of pre-Buddhist indigenous religion Bon in Tibet. The on-follower threw bolts of lightning at Marpori hill and destroyed the harvest. Hence the king listens to Santarakshita's advice to invite Padmasambhava to subdue all these demonic forces and he did so at the end. At the end the king,

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<sup>2</sup>Santarakshita: He was master and Abbot of Nalanda who played a vital role in the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet during the 8<sup>th</sup> century

his ministers and common people were all astonished that a single individual diminished all the supernatural forces. Hence the king announced that from now onward Buddhism could be the religion of Tibet and he requested Padmasambhava to do whatever is needed to facilitate the propagation of the Buddha Dharma in Tibet. The guru Padmasambhava advised the king to invite Santaraksita once again and he agreed to do so for the welfare of people. When Santaraksita came for the second time in Tibet, the first monastery known as 'Samye' was built in Tibet. The king Trisong Detsen (second religious king of Tibet) also realized that the scripture translations are very much needed in order to propagate Buddhism and to sustain it for many more years to come. Therefore he sponsored the translation from Sanskrit to Tibetan. For this he also started to spend Tibetan scholars to learn from Indian scholars so that they can do the translations. Because of Guru Padmasambhava the Nyingma tradition was started in Tibet and accordingly the later three schools of Tibetan Buddhism came into existences which are Sakya, Kagyu, and Geluk School. The Buchen tradition are also the core followers of Nyingma tradition and they undergo Nyingma tantra teachings in order to become a meme Buchen. The Buchen call them a great son of Thang sTong rGyalpo who initially founded Buchen tradition in Tibet by performing the first stone breaking ceremony in Tibet during the time of illness and obstacles. Hence I have devoted this whole chapter on Nyingma through which Buchen tradition can be well understood.

The Nine Divisions of Nyingma vehicles:

In Nyingma tradition, Buddhist teachings have been categorized into nine different vehicles. The first three are as follows:

1. The hearer vehicle
2. The solitary realize vehicle
3. Bodhisattva vehicle

The next three are associated with the outer tantras which are as follows:

1. The action tantra
2. The performance tantra
3. The yoga tantra

The final or last three vehicles are the inner tantras which are as follows:

1. The great yoga
2. The subsequent yoga
3. The great perfection (Dzogchen, Tib: rdzogs chen)<sup>34 6</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Zangpo, Ngawng. "Guru Rinpoche: His Life and Times (Tsadra Book 2)". (2002)

The hidden Treasures (Terma in Tibetan):

Generally the destiny and growth of the ‘New Orders’ (later three schools of Tibetan Buddhism) are closely associated with political and social factors. But in contrast to the above, Nyingma School succeeded in remaining detached from the political plotting. The early teachers of the lineage had foreseen this difficulty and they formed the institutions of hiding texts which are important to be preserved. These “hidden treasures” are said to be concealed throughout the land of Tibet and they are protected from being found before the appropriate time and people only.

Tertons:

The ‘Tertons’, according to Nyingma tradition are often mind stream emanations of the 25 main disciples of Guru Padmasambhava. The gigantic system of transmission lineages developed through the ages. Nyingma scriptures were updated when the time was suitable. The Terma teachings guided many Buddhist practitioners to the path of realization and enlightenment.

The rediscovering of terma began with the first terton, Sangye Lama (1000–1080). The Tertons of exceptional significance were Nyangral Nyima Oser (1124-1192), Guru Chowang (1212-1270), Rigdzin Godem (1307-1408), Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), Migyur Dorje (1645-1667), Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-1892) and Orgyen Chokgyur Lingpa (1829-1870.).

Later in the nineteenth century some of the most famous were the Khen Kong Chok Sum who are as follows:

- a. Jamyang Khentse
- b. Jamgon Kongtrul
- c. Chokgyur Kongtrul

Dzogchen:

The great perfection or Dzogchen deals mainly with the meditation in Nyingma tradition. The key practice of Dzogchen is ‘cutting through’ (Tib: khregs chod) wherein the yogis or mediators

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see through appearances to recognize the primordially pure mind. The mediators here eradicate destructive thoughts so that primordial awareness can shine through. Through such a practice they are able to perceive truth from the viewpoint of profound awareness of awakened mind. The secret instruction class teachings are considered by the Nyingma practitioners as the most insightful in all the teachings of Buddhism. These secret teachings are divided into two categories as following:

1. The hearing lineage (Tib: snyan brgyud)
2. The explanatory lineage (Tib: bshad brgyud)

### Objectives:

My prime objective of studying Padmasambhava and his relation to Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism is that Nyingma school has the longest well-known history of transformation among all the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism. This is seen to be reflected in the name ‘Nyingma, (rNyingma)’ which literally means “Old Order”. Accordingly the later three of schools of Tibetan Buddhism Sakya, Kagyu and Geluk are collectively called ‘Sarma’ (Tib: gSar ma) or the “New Orders”. Because they all depend on the Tibetan translations of Indian Buddhist texts prepared during the second diffusion of Buddhism into Tibet. In contrast to the three other schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Nyingma mainly relies on the old translations, predominantly of tantric texts and its Tibetan origins are traced to Buddhist pioneers of the king Tri Song Detsen’s time. Therefore it is also known as the “Old Translation Order” (Tib: sNga gyur).<sup>31</sup> Although the later or newer translations are more technically refined, the early translations of Nyingma were prepared by realized masters whose own spiritual attainment guided their works. Hence these old texts are believed to be more strongly captured the spirit of the Indian texts than the later three schools which are not that reliable as they were more concerned with technical accuracy than the awakened experience of the Indian masters who composed the texts. According to the lineages history of Nyingma, the original teacher of the doctrines that came to be connected with the ‘nyingma order’ was Samantabhadra (Guntu Sangpo) who is the “primordial Buddha”. Nyingma tradition also states Vajradhara (an emanation of Samantabhadra) and the Buddhas of the five Buddha families as the original founder of many of its teachings and practices.

In addition to these glorious figures, Nyingma lineage also has a succession of notable human teachers, the most significant of whom is Padmasambhava. He was the north Indian tantric yogi who according to traditional histories was instrumental in the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet. Because of the Gurus like Padmasambhava and teachers like Vimalamitra, Vairocana and Santasaksita, the Nyingmapas think that their lineage represents the most genuine and complete teachings of the early masters who brought Buddhism to the land of Tibet. Nyingma tradition traces the commencement of their translation lineages to ‘Samye’ which is the first monastery being established in Tibet. The traditional histories states over one hundred scholars and translators assembled there to translate the ‘Sutras and Tantras’. The Nyingma tradition consists

of a multifaceted array of intersecting lineages such as transmission of Vinaya teachings and practices, sutras, tantras, hidden treasures (terma), and so on. The “teaching” (Tib: bka ma) tradition is of vital importance for Nyingma masters and it begins with Samantabhadra and consists of doctrines, practices, texts, rituals and realizations that have been passed on from masters to disciples in an uninterrupted chain.

It is divided into three major groups as follows:

1. sGyu (Apparitional): it consist of the eighteen tantric cycles of great yoga (Tib: rnalbyor chen po). The basic texts for this group is the ‘Secret Basic Essence Tantra’.
2. mDo (Sutra): It includes the succeeding yoga (Tib: rJes su rnal byor, Sanskrit: Anuyoga) practices and realizations. The basic primary text for this group is the ‘Collection Sutra’.
3. Sems (Mind): It consists of the teachings of the great perfection.

All of the above systems originate with Samantabhadra.

#### Literature Review:

Guru Padmasambhava held a special significance to the Buddhism. In Tibet Guru Padmasambhava is generally referred to as Guru Rinpoche which means ‘precious master’ Guru Rinpoche is considered to be completely enlightened being and fully awakened like Buddha Shakyamuni.

Guru Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche is known all over the Himalayan region as the Sage of Himalayas. He lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and he is ascribed with having spread the message of Lord Buddha to the countries and regions located in the Himalayan belt, including Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh in India and in Nepal and Bhutan and Tibet to the north. He is a most admired and iconic figure in the Buddhist world even today and to many Buddhist, he is the Second Buddha also. This research paper seems to explore the life and legacy of Guru Padmasambhava in various aspects. More importantly, I would like to focus on the present-day relevance of his teachings and the diverse and rich tradition related with him.

Most interesting facts about Guru Padmasambhavato be explored and known are as follows

1. His education at the famous Nalanda University of India
2. His mastery of Tantric rituals and practices, which became part of Vajrayana Buddhism
3. His great contribution to the dissemination of Buddhism to Tibet from India
4. His close association with the Lotus symbol
5. His association with one of the greatest Nalanda master Shantarakshita

6. His association with the king Trisong Detsen of Tibet with whom he managed to establish Buddhism in Tibet

The Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism was founded by Guru Rinpoche and it is a major religious tradition even today. The genius of this brilliant teacher and philosopher lay in his ability to weave together the many strands of culture ranging from Tantric practices, and Yogic and meditation techniques, dance and musical forms, magics and above all his religious teachings. The sheer versatility that defines the Guru Padmasambhava tradition is breath-taking in scope.

Guru Rinpoche's great legacy of being called the Second Buddha is very evident through the manifest in manuscripts, relics, painting and monuments.

Guru Padmasambhava undergone many travels across Tibet, Nepal and explained by scholars who have intimate familiarity with the tradition. Some of the sources which explained Gur Padmasambhava are rare Thankas, paintings, sculptures and photographs which could be found in the Buddhist Monasteries and Libraries of different Universities.

My research plan is to study through sources like monastic records, oral and visual sources of monastic Lamas, government records and so on over the centuries to arrive at holistic and reliable understanding of Guru Padmasambhava and Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism founded by him.

My sources are as follows:

- a. Government records and statistics
- b. Oral and visual sources from the libraries and Gurus of Nyingma school
- c. Textual sources in the Monasteries (specifically Nyingma Monasteries)
- d. The sacred sites associated with the Guru Padmasambhava and his teachings
- e. The commentaries and texts related to the sage and his teachings and their various interpretations

Bhutan and the various other Himalayan states of India carries the imprints of Guru Padmasambhava tradition in the form of monuments, relics and folklore associated with his spiritual and religious activities. What is of particular interest is that these various markers of tradition display a rich diversity, whether in terms of the legends and mythology associated with him or the architectural and monumental relics that are still used to pay homage to him. This demonstrates the ability of the sage himself to contextualize and localize his message, taking into account the particularities of place and sensibilities of the people.

While striving to spread the core tenets of Buddhism, he moulded his teachings in the local idiom and culture, making assimilation of the faith much easier. In retracing his life and times, we hope to gain insights into his approach to handling diverse cultures and religious traditions, using local symbols and even rituals as vehicles to transmit the sublime message of Lord Buddha.

Through these different strands across the many segments of the Himalayan world, is nevertheless a common and identifiable Guru Padmasambhava tradition which is living legacy of our time. These will be another aspects exploration.

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