

Guru Padmasambhava of Odiyana (Odisha): The Founder of Lamaism in Tibet

Bimalendu Mohanty and Varish Panigrahi*

Introduction

Guru Padmasambhava of Odiyana went to Tibet along with his wife Mandarva in 747 CE at the invitation of the King Trisong Detsen (755 CE to 797 CE) of Tibet and established a Buddhist order that was based upon Vajrayana practice developed in Odisha. He brought a synthesis among the Bon religion, which existed in Tibet along with Sahajagyana, and established Lamaism. From the biographical sketches available from the existing documents, it is known that Padmasambhava was the adopted son of King Indrabhuti, the King of Sambala in Odiyana. The second wife of Guru Padmasambhava, Dakini Yeshe Tsogyal, had written a biography titled *The Lotus Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava* where the Guru has been described as the son of King Indrabhuti of Odiyana.

It is believed that before reaching Tibet, he had visited Bhutan along with his wife, to settle disputes among warring neighbouring countries and to bring peace in the region. He also spent some time in Sikkim and Nepal while en-route to Tibet.

Indrabhuti was a Tantric Sidhacharya and author of many Tantric works including *Jnanasidhi*, *Kurukulla Sadhana*, etc. Indrabhuti was a disciple of Kambalapada (683 CE) and Anangavajra (705 CE). He had to undergo various troubles and sufferings in his early life. His only son died a premature death and his territory was devastated by drought and famine. He and his subjects prayed to Lord Buddha for his grace. As a result Sakyamuni appeared as a boy resembling the Buddha at the centre of a lotus blossom on Lake Dhanakosha. In

* Former Vice Chancellor of Utkal University of Culture and Vice President of Maha Bodhi Society of India.

the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, it has been clearly mentioned that in Tibetan traditions, Padmasambhava is known as a native of Udiyana and he is the verily discovered son of King Indravodhi (Indrabhuti). A large literature developed around Padmasambhava but the *Padma Than Yig* (The Padma Scrolls) and the *Bka Than Sde Ina* (fivefold set of scrolls), both compiled in the 14th century CE, are considered as the principal works relating to events of his life and times.

Acharya Indrabhuti was succeeded in the spiritual leadership by his sister, Lakshminkara, who is credited to be a preacher of Sahajagyana. According to tradition and Puranic texts, Padmasambhava was incarnated as an eight year child appearing in a lotus blossom floating on the Lake Dhanakosha Sambal the Kingdom of Odiyana which was ruled by King Indrabhuti. It may be noted that the ancient Lake Dhanakosha is now within the submergence area of the Hirakud Reservoir. However the actual location of Odiyana in medieval India has been open to question. The Dictionary of Buddhism from Oxford University Press says: "Oddiyana is a small country in the early medieval India associated with the rise of Tantric Buddhism." Its actual location is open.

The Web based dictionary Wikipedia says "Odiyana, a small country in the early medieval India is ascribed importance in the development and dissemination of Vajrayana Buddhism." It is conveniently placed in Pakistan's Swat valley although the case can also be made for its location in the Indian State of Odisha.

A few researchers from India and abroad have placed Odiyana in the Swat Valley of present day Pakistan. More recent research and analysis by Nr. N.K.Sahu, Prof. Karunakar Kar, Pandit Hara Prasad Shastri and Prof Binoytosh Bhattacharya have shown that Guru Padmasambhava's Odiyana really refers to the present day Odisha.

This paper will derive a conclusion by doing a comparative analysis of the three areas from different perspectives:

historical, archaeological and linguistic.

Section I

We will first analyse from the historical perspective. From the days of Hiuen Tsang's travel in the 7th century CE, we learn that the north-western territories of medieval India, particularly Nagarkot, Gandhara, Udyana and Takshashila were mostly non-Buddhist and had most of the monasteries in ruins. At the time, Buddhism was not in an active state in Udyana (Swat Valley). Mahayana Buddhism and its offshoot Vajrayana sect was minimally present there.

Contrast this with the fact that the Bhaumakara Dynasty has established their rule from 614 CE to 750 CE in the entire Odisha or Odrisa, covering the areas of Utkal, Kalinga, Toshali, and Koshala. The rulers of this dynasty were Buddhists and strongly supported the Buddhist sects. No wonder that the area surrounding Viraja (present day Jajpur), the capital of the Bhaumkaras, had a number of Buddhist monasteries that spearheaded the Mahayana Vajrayana sect at the time.

Hiuen Tsang's travels specifically mention about the Puspagiri Vihar near Viraja. We also know that there were other large monasteries, such as Ratnagiri, Langudi, Lalitagiri and Udayagiri, which flourished widely during the 7th and 8th century CE.

Udiyana, according to the author of *Pag-Sam-Jon-Sang* (of Tibet) is the place where tantric Buddhism first developed. It is well known through tantric literature that Odiyana (Odisha) was the place where tantricism had first developed and gained popularity; therefore, we can safely presume that it was from Odisha that tantric Buddhism had spread elsewhere, including Tibet.

Odisha was a centre of tantricism from the 4th century to the 11th century CE. The occasion of Odiyana in the Hindu tantric texts such as Kalika Purana and Kularnaral Tantra is supposed to be in Odisha. Padmasabhava was a well-known scholar in

Buddhist tantricism which he pursued.

Section II

We will now compare the two cases from the archaeological points of view. The Nyingma Tibetan sect started by Guru Padmasambhava includes tantra, mandalas, deities (both peaceful and wrathful) and Dharanis.

As far as the archaeological findings from the Swat Valley area are concerned, they are few and limited relating to the Vajrayana practice.

In contrast to Udyana, Odisha presents a rich variety of mandals and Buddhist pantheon. Five types of Mandals are found:

1. The stupa mandala with four Dhyani Buddhas flanked by two Bodhisattvas each.
2. The sculptural mandals of eight Bodhisattvas around a Buddha on a single stone slab
3. Four x four Bodhisattvas surrounding by four Dhyani Buddhas with the fifth one at the centre
4. Free standing Bodhisattvas forming a mandala
5. Mandala diagram on the back of image.

It is worth mentioning here that the mandala form of worship, which Padmasambhava learnt from Lady Kumango in Bihar, finds earliest representation in the Buddhist stupas and cultural mandals of Ratnagiri, Udayagiri and Lalitgiri as mentioned by T.E.Donaldson, 2001.

In the Udayagiri monastery, not far as the crow flies from the Viraja Khestra, a large inscription of twenty five lines is found on the back of a standing Bodhisattva. The inscription states that a “ Tathagatadhistitha dhatugarba Stupa (a stupa with a relic inside and dwelt in by the Tathagata or Buddha).” The Stupa is believed to have contained the relics of Padmasambhava, and the ruins of it are seen at the spot.

The variety of Buddhist pantheon found in Odisha reflects the attempts to involve the people in the worship and rituals:

1. Twelve different forms of Tata at 178 places
2. Fifteen different forms of Avalokitesvara at 130 places
3. Ten different forms of Manjushri at 88 places
4. Nine different Boddhistravvas (Samantabhadra, Maitreya, Lokeswara, Ksittigarbha, Vajrapani, Alasagarba, Manjushri, Chandraprabha etc.)

In addition, there are many different emanations of Aksobhaya, Amoghasidhi, Kurukulla, Viaroohana found in Odisha.

In the Jambai Shiva Temple of South Arcot District of Tamil Nadu, an inscription was discovered in which Odisha has been referred to as Odiyana.

During the reign of Salua Narsingha Dev in South India, an inscription has been engraved in which Odisha and Odiyana are one and the same has been clarified.

Many works of South India, belonging to the 15th century CE mention Odiyana as Odisha. One of them engraved during the reign of King Birupakshya refers to Odisha as Odiyana.

Section III

We will finally note the facts from the linguistic perspective

1. *Srang Sten Gampo*, the powerful and intelligent King of Tibet in early 7th century CE had led emphasis on developing a script for Tibet. His desire was that if a script was made, than Buddhist literature can be written for posterity. He had sent a brilliant Sambhota and 16 other curious seekers along with him to India. The brilliant Sambhota, not only created a Tibetan script but also wrote eight Buddhist classical texts. The Sambhota adopted a script similar to early Odia script rather than the script of Kafiristan or Kashmir.

2. Sahajiya Buddhist Sidhas had composed songs in proto Odia language in the 8th and 10th CE and these songs were popular amongst the Tibetan Buddhists.
3. It is now unmistakably recognized that Odia is a classical language known from the earliest times and the people of Odisha were known as Odiyas or Odiyans and also Udiyas or Udiyans.
4. In his famous work *Jnanasidhi*, King Indrabhuti, a deity intimately associated with Odisha and with no other area of India.

All the above few arguments from the historical, archeological and linguistic viewpoints confirm the fact that Odiyana, the homeland of Guru Padmasambhava, really refers to present day Odisha rather than Udyana (Swat Valley). Researchers have now shown that Indrabhuti was the King of Sambala, the present day Sambalpur area and that his sister Lakshminikara was married to the King of Lankapuri, the present day Sonapur or Subarnapur. Guru Padmasambhava was trained by both his adopted father King Indrabhuti and Princess Lakshminikara. Guru Padmasambhava married princess Mandarva, the daughter of the King of Johae, the present day Keonjhar area and Santarakshita was the brother of Princess Mandarva.

He attained perfection in Sahajajoga in Viraja Khestra (present Jajpur in Odisha). He was helped by his consort Mandarva to attain this siddhi. There is mention in many Buddhist manuscripts of Nepal, in which Gautama Buddha had stated that he would be reborn after 12 centuries in Udiyana as Padmasambhava and obtain perfection at Viraja Khestra.

C.I. Beekwith, in his book *History of Tibet*, has mentioned that King Trisong Detsen (755 CE to 797 CE) established Mahayana Buddhism as the official religion and invited Padmasambhava to his court. Prior to that he had invited Santarakshita to his court and that was corroborated by Lama Taranath in his book. The 2nd century Greek geographer Ptolemy had mentioned the ports of Nanigaina (Puri), Katikardama (Kataka) and Kannagara

(Konarak). The Mananda (Mahandi) was navigable, and Ptolemy had sailed upstream till Sambal.

Therefore, it can be safely concluded that Guru Padmasambhava was a native of Odisha from where he went to the holy land of Tibet and established Lamaism.