

# **Guru Padmasambhava: A Profile and His Teachings**

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## **Introduction**

After the great Kalinga War in 261 BCE, Mauryan Emperor Asoka observing the horrors of the War, out of profound remorse, gave up his ambition of military conquest (Digvijaya) in favour of spiritual conquest (Dharmavijaya). After this Great War, Asoka embraced Buddhism and with great zeal started propagating Buddhism in every corner of India and also in distant countries like Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the eastern archipelago and the Far East. It augured well for Odisha that a religious creed being nurtured by it rose to the stature of world religion having passed through its very portals. Emperor Asoka had constructed a monastery known as 'Bhajakagiri Vihara' where his brother Tissa resided. Hieun-Tsang, the famous Chinese traveller, who visited Odisha around 639 CE, had seen nearly eleven stupas erected by Emperor Asoka. During the reign of Asoka and subsequently Hinayana sects, particularly the Theravadins and the Mahamahisasakas, had their sway. Hinayana Buddhism continued to be in prominence till 7th century CE. Prof. N. Dutta, an eminent scholar of Buddhism, has stressed that Mahayana Buddhism had originated from Kalinga in the 1st century CE. Taranath, the Tibetan historian, gives Odivisa (Odisha) the credit of being the earliest centre of Mahayana Buddhism. King Subhakaradeva-I of Odra presented an autographed Buddhist manuscript to the Chinese emperor Te-tsong. The manuscript and a letter were entrusted to the learned monk Prajna, for a translation, who after wandering for eighteen years in various places including Nalanda settled in a monastery of Wu-ch'a (Odra) before going to China, which indicates the importance of Odishan monastic establishments.

Odisha is the cradle of many branches of Buddhism. The

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propagators of Vajrayana, Kalachakrayana and Sahajayana were Acharya Indrabhuti, Pitopada and Laxmikara and all of them were natives of Odisha. Also, eminent Buddhist Acharyas of Odisha have substantially contributed towards propagation, preaching and spread of Buddhism in other countries. Guru Padmasambhava who established the Tibetan system of Buddhism hailed from Odisha.

The cultural intercourse between India and Tibet is described sometimes as the Buddhist conquest of Tibet and sometimes as Tibetan repertory of Buddhism. Most of the Buddhist scriptures and commentaries are however lost. In India, even the titles like Prajnaparamita and other tantric literature would have been lost to the modern scholars. Biographies of Indian saints and scholars like Nagarjuna, Dignaga, Santideva, Padmasambhava were recovered from Tibetan literary treasures. Among them the name of Padmasambhava is the most venerated one in Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan.

Guru Padmasambhava belongs to Uddiyana, which is nowhere else but must be in Odisha. The purpose here is to have some insight on the related historical, archeological and epigraphical and literary works, and to collect and collate the facts to establish the issue. This needs to look into the subjects relating to that period and also before it both in Tibet, India and more specifically in Odisha, which could link and lead.

The related subjects are quite broad and the available resources for reference are also huge. The contents and references are mainly drawn from extensive historical and Buddhist literature.

### **Guru Padmasambhava and his religion in Tibet**

The King of Tibet *Khri-sron-lde-btsan* invited learned Santarakshita of Nalanda University to Tibet to spread the genuine teachings of Indian Buddhism among his people. The efforts of Santarakshita to preach Buddhism in Tibet, to establish the doctrines of Ten Virtues (Paramitas) and the Chain of Causal Phenomena (Protitya-samutpada) failed. He then recommended to the King to invite Pronouncements of

Padmasambhava. The rediscovered books were all credited also to Padmasambhava. Hence Padmasambhava was regarded as an emanation of the primary wisdom of all Buddhas, because these texts had been declared to have been written by him. In addition to transcendental legitimization, an historical legitimization was accomplished by declaring all famous *rDsogs-chen* masters as Padmasambhava's disciples.

The names of the large numbers of Indian scholars who taught different aspects of Buddhism around this time (750-850 CE) in Tibet have been preserved. Among them may be mentioned Dharmakirti, Vimalamitra, Buddhaguhya and Santigarbha. They taught tantric rituals and mysticism based on the Buddhist Tantricism. But the names of Santarakshita and Padmasambhava are held in special veneration. Padmasambhava was the greatest teacher of Tantric doctrines which spread all over the country. He became almost a legendary and mythical figure in Tibet.

At Padmasambhava's time all of Tibet prospered and was happy; their harvests were good and it was time without strife. All the provinces on the four frontiers were subdued. Both political and religious practices were firmly established. During the lifetime of the king *Khri-sron-lde-btsan* (755-797 CE) the Bon religion was suppressed and the holy religion was made to spread and flourish.

In Bhutan: In the middle of 8th century CE, the Indian saint Padmasambhava converted Bhutan to the Buddhist faith.

The teachings of Padmasambhava - The Eight Pronouncements and the Concealed Treasures: The Vajrayana is arranged in three major parts, i.e. (i) Tantras dealing with the ritual acts, (ii) Tantras dealing with ritual acts and meditational practices equally, and (iii) Tantras for the spiritual transformation. The above third part (Tantras for the spiritual transformation) is again sub-divided into three parts, viz. (a) The Great Yoga of development, (b) The Anu-yoga of accomplished meditation, and (c) the Ati-yoga of the Great Perfection. Again, the first one

of the above sub-divided parts (a) The Great Yoga or Mahayoga of development is divided into two parts:

- Tantra Cycles
- Meditative Realization

The Tantra Cycles: This section contains eighteen Tantras in general.

Meditative Realization: It contains practical instructions for meditation and spiritual exercitium. These instructions are contained in the text group of *Eight Pronouncements*. They constitute the eight main doctrines of Padmasambhava.

The Tibetan tradition agrees that the doctrine of the Eight Pronouncements was brought by Padmasambhava to Tibet.

Padmasambhava taught these 'Eight Pronouncements' to the king *Khri-sron-Ide- btsan* and eight of his vassals in Samye, which was then a flourishing hermitage. The Master (Padmasambhava) gave these nine Tibetans the religious empowerments necessary for exoteric, esoteric, and secret *Mandala* of these .great meditation exercises. In addition, he gave them instructions in meditational realization of the divine powers, which had visualized in the empowerment ceremony, so that they themselves could perform the exercises and finally realize the divine powers in meditation.

These eight religious persons from the entourage of the king are included in the "twenty-five religious persons, i.e. the king and his twenty-four vassals". They are counted as the transmitters of these doctrines. Also part of this tradition are the twenty-five Great Mystics, the twenty five Persons Gifted with Knowledge, the one hundred and eight Yogis, who reached the Body of Light.

This tradition of the Section of Meditative Realization is certainly the one which Padmasambhava had brought to Tibet.

The names of Eight Pronouncements: The names of these secret doctrines transmitted by literature do not lend themselves to a meaningful and concise translation.

Concealed Treasures: The texts originally belonging to the tradition of the “bka-ma” were later handed down as Concealed Treasures - the cycle of the Eight Pronouncements (*bka-brgyad*) and the Cycle of *kLong-chen-snyingthig*. Both Cycles were brought to Tibet by Padmasambhava. He hid these texts and made them a Concealed Treasure and thus he became the Master of Concealed Treasures. In this way he became more and more central figure in the Tibetan Buddhism’s Old School (4th - 9th century CE period).

Acharya Padmasambhava and a few other persons who were full of the holy truth concealed for the benefit of future disciples many instructions concerning the most excellent spiritual potency and common spiritual potency in hiding places. They blessed these books that no harm would come to them and entrusted them to Protector of Concealed Treasures for safe keeping. They said a prayer so that only capable persons might find the books.

### **Indrabhuti and Lakshmikara**

Indrabhuti (about 687-717 CE) was a King of Uddiyana/Odivisha (Odisha). He was a king as well as a Tantrik Siddhacharya. He was the foster father of Padmasambhava, who introduced Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet.

Indrabhuti is the author of *Jnanasiddhi* and numerous other Tantric works. Indrabhuti, a Siddhacharya and a distinguished exponent of Vajrayana, argues in his *Jnanasiddhi* that the Truth or Reality has no objectivity, but, at the same time, it is non-existent like the horns of a hare, but such similes are also used by the expositors of Sunyata.

The Sadhanamala or Sadhana Samuccaya is of great importance from the point of view of Buddhist iconography. The authors mentioned in them belong to 7th – 11th centuries

CE and those authors also appear in other places as authors of Tantras and tantric literature. A Sadhana from Sadhanamala also is attributed to the great tantric teacher Indrabhuti.

In the account of 84 siddhacharyas, Kambala-pa is mentioned as belonging to Odivisha, as being a disciple of Vajarahanta and as being preceptor of the Siddha king Indrabhuti.

Taranatha (in his *History of Buddhism in India*) writes that at the time of Dharmakirti there were three Acharyas headed by Saraha and his disciple Luipada, and the four distinguished Tantrik Acharyas, viz. Kambala-pa, Lalitavajra, Padmavajra and Indrabhuti.

Another teacher Vimalamitra, who learnt the Maya Cycle from Buddhaguhya and also composed an extensive commentary on the Prajna-hrdaya and a lot of other works, was staying in the court of king Indrabhuti. The Tibetan king *Khri-sron-lde-btsan* wanted him in Tibet and sent a team to king Indrabhuti for this purpose. Against the king's wish, the famous master went to Tibet.

Acharya Indrabhuti, who succeeded Anangavajra, was a king of Sambala, one of the two dominions into which Uddiyan was divided, the other being Lankapuri, which was ruled by Jalendra. Indrabhuti took to tantric practices even when he was ruling the kingdom. He received Acharya Lalitavajra with due veneration when the latter visited his kingdom, and learnt from him more of tantric sadhana.

## **Mahayana Buddhism in Odisha**

### ***Evolution of Mahayana Buddhism in India***

It is apparent that the history of Buddhism after Buddha's death was no longer a history of a single monastic organization, but quite a large number of growing independently of one another in different parts of India. There was no supreme head of the Buddhist Church either to coordinate the divergent views or to settle the rival claims. The session of the Fourth Council (held

under the inspiration and patronage of Kanishka in about 100 CE) synchronizes with the emergence of Mahayanism, which marks the first great split in the Buddhist Church and its fundamental doctrines. It did not assume any definite shape until about the beginning of the Christian era. Mahayana Buddhism spread all over the northern India in the first and second century CE to blossom into its full glory under the care of Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga and Vasubandhu. The growth of Mahayanism contributed to further development of Buddhism as a popular cult all over India and even far beyond its frontiers. The epigraphic evidences furnish the most eloquent testimony to its prevalence in different parts of India. The Mahayana Buddhism is divided into two systems of thought: The Madhyamika and the Yogachara.

### ***Emergence of Tantricism***

Tantricism was a natural growth among the Buddhists, because the circumstances were most favorable for this. The secret conclaves that grew on the ruins of monastic order developed in course of time into big organizations known as Guhyasamajas. Thus the Guhyasamaja Tantra was composed.

### ***Innovations by the Guhyasamaja Tantra***

The introduction of Sakti in tantrik worship, made in Guhyasamaja Tantra, is one of the most important events in the history of both Buddhism and Tantricism. The Buddhist Tantras were divided into four classes: Carya tantra, Kriya tantra, Yoga tantra and Anuttarayoga tantra. Another idea introduced is the theory of 'Dhyani Buddhas' presiding over the five *skandhas* or elements of which the universe is composed. The five *skandhas* are rupa (form), vedana (feeling), samjna (perception), samskara (impression) and vijnana (ego-consciousness) and these five are presided over by the five Dhyani Buddhas, viz. Vairocana, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, Amoghasiddhi, and Aksobhya respectively. This is a curious mixture of philosophy, mysticism and materialism, and thus as a logical system of philosophy, Tantra appears to be crude.

### **Attitude towards social restrictions**

The Guhyasamaja Tantra sanctions everything. It also asks its followers to disregard all social laws. It lays down: you should freely immolate animals, utter any number of falsehoods, take things which do not belong to you and even commit adultery. The Vajrayana: The lay followers were more interested towards these matters. It thus combined all forms of mysticism in its system and host of other rituals. This system thus developed into a form of Tantricism, which was named Vajrayana, because sunya came to be designated as Vajra. It is a product of 3rd century CE. It was only during the middle of 7th century, that Vajrayana and its doctrines got wide publicity. The Vajrayana even travelled to Nepal and Tibet. The Vajrayana also gave rise to several later Yanas (paths) such as Sahajyana and Kalachakrayana. All these later Yanas, however, may be considered to be mere off-shoots of the Vajrayana School, without differing materially from the original Yana of the Guhyasamaja.

### **Swat Valley is not Uddiyana**

It seems that some scholars have differed in identifying the location of Uddiyana in Odisha. Some identify Uddiyana to locate in Swat valley of the north-western region. Therefore, it is claimed by some that Padmasambhava belongs to Swat valley area called as Udyana.

Padmasambhava's birth and work relate to the 7th and 8th century period. It is obvious, that Padmasambhava belongs to an area which was flourishing with the Mahayana School of Buddhism and also its offshoot Vajrayana. It is also mentioned that many eminent Buddhist teachers (Acharyas) belong to Uddiyana during the 7th and 8th century period.

Uddiyana is Odisha - Not Swat Valley: But this does not affect in any way the idea of identifying Uddiyana with Odisha. The scholars who are inclined to place Uddiyana in the Swat Valley, seem to have depended greatly on Taranatha and the author of *Pag Sam Jon Zang* whose knowledge about the history



and geography of India is open to serious doubt. Much also is depended upon the records of the Chinese, particularly on those of Yuan Chwang. Dr. D.C. Sircar says "Hiuen-Tsang not only noticed the prevalence of Shakti worship in Gandhara, but has also left an account of the popularity of Tantric practices among the people of Uddiyana." But the record of the Yuan-Chwang do not point out definitely that the country of Wu-tch 'ang-na was the Tantric land of Uddiyana. The pilgrim describes the people of this territory as follows: "The people are soft and effeminate, and in disposition are somewhat sly and crafty. They love learning yet have no application. They practice the art of using charms (religious sentences as charms). Their clothing is white cotton and they wear little else. Their language, though different in some points, yet greatly resembles that of Mid-India. Their written characters and their rules of etiquette are also of a mixed character as before. They greatly reverence the law of Buddha and are believers in the Great Vehicle." The only important notice in the record is that the people of this territory practiced the art of using the religious sentences as charms, and it evidently refers to the use of Dharani by them, which was a common superstition, particularly observed by that time in India and in many countries of Asia. Thus, it is too much to conclude out of this evidence that the Wu-tch 'ang-na of the Chinese pilgrim was the Tantric land of Uddiyana.

Many of the Tantric Siddhas, like Saraha, Lui, Savaripa and others who are regarded by the Tibetan and other sources as belonging to Uddiyana, have composed large number of religious songs and *Dohas*, the language of which is claimed to be the parent stock of the modern Oriya, Bengali and Maithili tongues. We fail to understand as to why all these Siddhas, if they hailed from the Swat Valley would not write a single piece of song in the language then prevalent in the north-west of India and would express their religious and poetic sentiments in the dialects of eastern India. Evidently Uddiyana was situated in the east and not in the north west of India in the Swat Valley region.

The noteworthy fact in this connection is that no Tantric images

of any importance have yet been recovered from the Swat Valley, although images of much earlier times, belonging to the Gandhara School of arts, are coming to light in large number at various sites of it. It should be borne in mind that Uddiyana is intimately associated with the worship of the deities like Marichi, Kurukulla, Lokesvara, Urddhvapada-Vajravarahi etc. and as none of these deities are traceable in the Swat Valley, its identification with the Tantric land of Uddiyana cannot be maintained. In Odisha, on the other hand, all these deities are found in large number, alongwith such other images as of Dhyani Buddhas, Manjusri, Padmapani, Vajrapani, Trailokya Vijaya, Jambhala, Heruka, Bhairavi Chamunda, etc., carved out in grace and beauty with regard to the minute details prescribed in their Sadhanas. Images of Marichi, Tara and Lokesvara are found in many places e.g. Ratnagiri, Ayodhya, Khiching, Chaudwar, Banapura and Ganjam, while those of Kurukulla are recovered in the district of Cuttack in a small village known as Kurukura, which is probably so named after the Goddess. A few years back Mr. N. N. Basu declared to have discovered an image of Kurukulla at Ayodhya near Nilgiri, which was, however, afterwards considered to be a spurious one. But two of the images of this deity found in the village noted above, confirm closely in iconographic features to the dhyanas mentioned in their Sadhanas. It may be said that the Goddesses Kurukulla and Vajravarahi who are described in the Tantric literature as the presiding deities of Uddiyana, are found only in Odisha and nowhere else in India what to speak of the Swat Valley, and hence, in the light of it, Odisha may be identified with great amount of certainly with Uddiyana.

Some of the South Indian inscriptions belonging, to the 15th century CE refer to Odisha as Oddiyana. One of them engraved during the reign of King Virupaksha and dated in the Saka year 1385, the cyclic year Nandana, corresponding to 1473 CE, refers to the confusion caused by Oddiyana (Odisha) in the Deccan and the consequent cessation of festivals in the Siva temple at Jambala in the S. Arcot district for ten years. The "Oddiyana Galabai" (disturbance caused by Odisha) also finds mention in another inscription dated during the reign of

Saluva Narasimha, and so, epigraphical evidences also support the view that Oddiyana (Uddiyana) is no other land but Odisha.

Guru Padmasambhava was instrumental in organizing, strengthening, propagating, popularizing and establishing the strong base of tradition of the Tibetan Buddhism, which was the Vajrayana (Tantric) form of Mahayana Buddhism in India.

Guru Padmasambhava belongs to Uddiyana and was the son of Indrabhuti, the King of Sambhala or Koshala which was known as Uddiyana, who was also a great teacher of Vajrayana school. Acharya Indrabhuti's sister Laxmikara was his spiritual successor and also preacher of the Sahaja-yana, an off-shoot of Vajrayana. Acharya Indrabhuti ruled Sambhala and his sister Laxmikara married to the King of Lankapuri.