

Guru Padmasambhava and Jurisprudence in Bhutan: Golden Yoke and Silken Knot

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Contributions to Bhutan by Guru Padmasambhava

His Eminence Jamyang Khenste Rinpoche said that the greatest contribution of India to the World is Buddhism. Dr. Hira Paul Gangnegi¹ said:

The multifaceted personality who had transformed the primitive population of the largest area of Himalayas into a compassionate Buddhist community was known as the precious Guru Padmasambhava (750-800? ... The legend holds that the Buddha Shakyamuni himself had prophesied his birth as Padmasambhava. This master of Sri Nalanda Mahavihara was miraculously born on the 10th day of the 5th month in the year of Monkey in a lotus pond in Oddiyana, the land of Dakinis with major physical marks of the universal being... The seventh manifestation was the re-embodiment of the bodhisattava Vajrapani (*phyagnar dorje*) who has transmitted the esoteric teaching to the Guru. He was named Dorje Dolod (rdorje grolod). 'In the past he appeared in the human and non-human realm in the land of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka², Indonesia, Burma, Central Asia, Afghanistan, part of

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¹ Guru Padmasambhava and his contributions to the Himalayan Regions by Dr. Hira Paul Gangnegi, Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Delhi, Delhi-11007.

² He travelled to the land of 'Khachhaiyul' and resided in Sinhali. There, he studied and contemplated intensely, disciplining all the beings, and treated all the beings with great love akin to parents. Thus, prostrate and praise to Loden Chogsey!

China, Africa, the new unknown island of Damadu and the uncharted realm of Shambala. It is said he now manifests in the land of the Copper Mountain’.

Guru Padmasambhava had propagated Buddhism in Bhutan. He had bestowed in Bhutan the political, spiritual, social, cultural, intellectual and legal legacies:

a. Political: The fact that King Sindha³ had invited Guru Padmasambhava to visit Bhutan is of immense historical value.

b. Spiritual: Padmasambhava is said to have visited Bhutan three times in person. Guru Rinpoche visited Bhutan before his visits to Tibet. The first visit was from Nepal at the invitation of King Sindha of Bumthang, the second visit he came from Tibet to Bumthang, accompanied by Denma Tsemang, and the third visit –the last visit - also from Tibet, when he came together with Khikha Rathod, who was banished from Tibet to Khenpajong and when he visited Singye Dzong in Kurtoed, accompanied by Khandro Yeshe Tshogyal. The exact years of his visits to Bhutan are not known yet; and thus intensive research is needed to be carried out.

c. Social and health: The consumption of tobacco, nuisance and health hazard⁴ was seen as against the religion and therefore harmful to the state. Therefore, Zhabdrung Rinpoche said:

... this evil sustenance called *tha-ma-kha* (tobacco)

³ This is the story of the life of King Sindhu (*Sin-dha*) Raja! Deeply we bow in front of Pamajungna (Pad-ma-hbyung-gnas)!

⁴ Historically, Sir Walter Raleigh is credited with taking the first “Virginia” tobacco to Europe, referring to it as tobah as early as 1578. Stuart King James denounced tobacco use as “[a] custome lothsome to the eye, hatefull to the Nose, harmefull to the braine, dangerous to the Lungs, and in the blacke stinking fume thereof, nearest resembling the horrible Stigian smoke of the pit that bottomless.”

which is a cunning trick prepared by demons, is now being used continuously by all the people and the peasants, including the bodyguards and menials; not only does this pollute the body, speech and mind-supports but also it causes the gods above to decline, it disturbs the spirits of intermediate space and injures the nagas of the underworld. From this cause there continuously arises in the world the fate of diseases, wars and famines and so it conforms with many prophecies given by the great teacher Padma [sambhava]. If people in any of the districts should be found to be indulging in the trading and smoking of tobacco, this ruinous sustenance, and if this practice is not forcibly eliminated by the *rdzong-* [*dpon*], *mgron-* [*gnyer*], government representatives and officials, the village counsellors and messengers, then things will definitely fall on their own heads. The officials on the Indian frontier must prohibit [the import of tobacco] at the duars themselves. Control through these measures is important.

d. Calligraphy: Guru Rinpoche brought Denma Tsemang, who was one of his twenty-five chief disciples as a part of entourage to Bhutan. Denma Tsemang (Dan-ma rTse-mangs) wrote that:

When I was five years old, I was in the retinue of Urgyan. When I was nine years old, I had the knowledge of about three hundred scripts. With ten years, I came to the Land of Mon..’ In the Land of Incense (*mKhan-pa-Lung*, an ancient name of Bumthang)... Thus, I have written down everything, which Urgyan Rimpoche has said. Hail to all the Protective Deities and Patrons!⁵

He composed the Bhutanese cursive writing called *Jogyig* (mgyogsyig) and he wrote the *Gyalpoi Thangyig* (rgyalpo’ Ithangyig) and the second part of the *Kathang De-ngag* (bka’

⁵ The Sindhu Raja book called “The Clear Mirror of Mysticism”. Translated with Geshe Th. Wangyal.

thangsde Inga), where he is mentioned as Tsemang Dag (rtsemangbdag) from Denma (ldhan ma), a district in Kham (Eastern Tibet). The writing introduced by Denma Tsemang is also called as *Lho-yig* or southern calligraphy. It is evident from the title of a page of *Prajna Paramita* Sutra text written as *Lho-yig* found in the 12th century among the antique documents of *Tun-Hong* in the British Museum in London.

e. Architect and engineering: The Kingdom of Sindhu with its centre in Bumthang was built by King Sindhu. The residence of Sindhu Raja was the recorded as 'Iron Castle', *Cak-Khar* (Icags-mkhar), situated in the plain of Bumthang, West? (may be North East?) of the present *Bjakar Dzong* (*Bya-dkar Dzong*); it was erected on a ridge on the South bank of the Bumthang river. It was carefully described by Claude White:

The site of the Sindhu Raja's house, now in ruins, is situated on the edge of a high cliff overhanging the river. It appears to have been a square of sixty to seventy feet, and the wall apartments could not have been very wide, as there seems to have been an open space in the centre, unless this again was covered by a floor above, in which case the building would have been an exact counterpart of the central towers we now find in every Dzong. Surrounding the sides, on a level, was a well-defined ditch, with a continuation on the outside leading to the river, and also a well-defined path. Tradition states there was also a gate at the opposite corner to the south ... On a low hill across the plain the spot was pointed out where the Raja's son was killed fighting against the Naoche Raja, who lived in the Duars, below Wangdiphodang (dBang-sdus-pho-brangr Dzong), and also seems to have reigned in or near the plain ...

Further, Padmasambhava also gained a great reputation in Bumthang by rebuilding the *Jampa Lhakhang* (Byams-pa Lha-khang). It affirms that the Buddhism existed before the

visit of Guru Rinpoche.

f. Spiritual values and public morality: Spiritual values and philosophies are well known as Guru Rinpoche had proclaimed during his visit to Bhutan:

Thou must not, with pleasure, indulge in sinful doings
but thou must follow the true religion!
Thou shalt not be greedy,
but thou shalt give nourishment and
wealth as alms!
Thou shalt not fight (and make war),
but thou shalt let the beings live happily!

g. Doctrine of legitimacy: The arrival of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and his rule in Bhutan was mentioned in prophecies that are being attributed to Padmasambhava. The following prophecy is evident of the destiny of Zhabdrung to this country:

Seek out repose in the Southern Valleys,
On the border, through the Southern Door;
If you do thus
you will gain almost as much success
in seven days of meditations
in seven years in the land of Tibet⁶

Similarly, Guru Padmasambhava prophesied the emergence for the Monarchy of Bhutan:

On a cliff, in the land of Mon,
lies my body in print,
There, in Bumthang,
where the Wheel has turned,
Shall arrive a Dhama King,
my incarnation!

⁶ *LNDRR Nga:8.b. Lho rong lho sgo bas mthar bsti gnas tshol // de ltar byas na bod yul mi lo bdun // bsgom bsgrub byas las gnas der zhag bdun sgrub thag nye // (citing a gter-ma text called Gsang ba nor bu'i thig le'i rgyud.)*

Law

Buddhism is not only a religion and philosophy but it also includes enlightened laws. It is progressive and modern. It is not restrained by ages, nor constrained by geography nor restricted by races (racial feelings - *jati-vitakka*, national feelings - *janapada-vitakka* and egotism or personal and national pride - *avannatti*). The first word of Buddha was:

Law is for correcting those who have gone wrong-
(*Durmangana pudgala nigrahaya*)⁷

Rational for law: Buddha gave Ten Reasons for promulgating laws responding to different situations. He said:

I am enacting rules of training (*sikkhapada*, precepts) for the monks:

- i) for the wellbeing of the Community,
- ii) for the convenience of the Community,
- iii) in order to curb miscreants,
- iv) for the ease of well-behaved monks,
- v) in order to restrain misbehaviour in the present,
- vi) in order to check future misbehavior,
- vii) in order that those who have no faith (in this religion) may acquire faith,
- viii) in order that those who have faith may be further strengthened in their faith,
- ix) in order that the good Doctrine (*Dhamma*) may last long, and
- x) for the promotion of discipline.

Guru Rinpoche's Law

The negotiation of peace between King Sindha and *Naoche* by Guru Rinpoche can be considered as the part of mediation. Guru Rinpoche arranged friendship between the two enemy kings. They all met at the Nabikorphu Lhakhang (mNah-sbis-dkor-phug Lhakhang). Guru Rinpoche indeed united the two kings in friendship and they erected a stone pillar (*rDo-ring*) at

⁷ *bka'-gyursutra, rapa*, p. 57 (back page).

the place of their famous meeting.

King Thrisong Detsen, the 38th King of the Yarlung dynasty and the first Emperor of Tibet (742–797), requested Guru Rinpoche to promulgate laws. Responding to the King’s request, Guru Rinpoche promulgated laws of **four** elements⁸ of Fire, Wind, Water and Iron together with the laws of wood, earth and space making **seven laws** in total.

The spiritual and temporal law

The constitutional doctrine of the spiritual and temporal laws has been established by Guru Rinpoche. He expounded:

The spiritual law resembles a silken knot that fastens tight; and The secular law resembles Golden Yoke that is firm and heavy

The spiritual laws was said to resemble a Silken Knot (*dargye duephue*) that is easy and light at first but gradually tightens, while temporal laws were compared to a Golden Yoke (*sergyi nyashing*) that grows heavier and heavier with the degree of the crimes.

Classification of law

Laws may broadly be divided into natural law (*jus naturale*) and positive laws (*jus positivum*), criminal and civil laws, substantive and procedural laws, public and private international laws, etc. However, Buddha promulgated physical laws (*utu-niyama*), biological laws (*bijaniyama*), psychological laws (*citta-nyama*), moral (*kamma-niyama*) and spiritual (*dhamma-niyama*)

⁸ Empedocles established the theory of the four elements, Heraclites (“All is fire”, all is chaotic and transitory). He was born in 492 BCE and he advocated a plurality of substances — i. e. the four elements, earth, water, air, and fire. Of these the world is built up, by the agency of two ideal principles as motive forces — namely, love as the cause of union, strife as the cause of separation. Thales of Miletus, who was active around 585 BCE and left us the opaque dictum, “All is water.” His most noted students were Anaximenes of Miletus and Anaximander said, “All is air”.

laws. These laws were similar to the Stoic conception of the *koinos nomos* or “universal law”. Accordingly, Guru Rinpoche counselled to:

Codify and enact mother laws, statutes and by-laws;
and
A law can be categorized into secular, spiritual and
Thangthrim.

Rule of Law

Buddha asked his followers to treat the Dhamma (doctrine of righteousness) and Vinaya⁹ (the Constitution and the code of laws) as their teacher when Buddha would not be living. In a Buddhist democracy, the rule of law requires not only consistency in the expression of the law but also in its application. Good law conforms to moral righteousness.

In Dicey’s treatise, “Law of the Constitution”, he had identified three principles which together establish the rule of law:¹⁰

- (a) The absolute supremacy or predominance of regular law as opposed to the influence of arbitrary power;
- (b) Equality before the law or the equal subjection of all classes to the ordinary law of the land administered by the ordinary courts; and
- (c) The law of the constitution as a consequence of the rights of individuals as defined and enforced by the courts.

Guru Rinpoche encapsulated the Rule of Law, when he said

⁹ *The Vinaya Laws* - Of all the monastic laws, the Vinaya laws are most extensive as well as intricate and reveal the legal aptitude as also the common sense on the part of the Buddhists. They are obviously vivid and run into minutest details, so that even a partial knowledge of them gives us a fair idea of the monastic life of the early Buddhists. They are systematically and scientifically arranged, though their classification may fall short of the modern methods. The principle underlying the classification is the motive and magnitude of the offence.

¹⁰ A.V Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of Constitution*, Tenth Edition, (2003), pp. 202-203.

that “The powerful must know the limit of their power.”¹¹ He further elaborated:

Choesid (theocratic) and Ngagsid (vajrapanik), lyonsid (bureaucratic) has to be protected.

Be compassionate to those who are disabled and powerless;

The helpless must be aided through unity;

The bad deeds have to be repeatedly put to an end; and

If this can be done, the robbery and the evils in the village will disappear.

If you avoid 10 non-virtuous acts, the 10 virtuous acts will prevail by itself.

Relief of laws

Commutative justice or corrective or rectificatory justice as advocated by Aristotle not only includes payment for a service but also compensation for damage incurred and punishment for a crime. Guru Rinpoche propagated:

Afford sufficient debts to have-nots;

The have-nots must repay the debts with utmost gratitude;

And allow to pay half the debt by those who have no means to pay.

Compensation

And provide entitlements to the spouse whom one does not love.

Criminal Jurisprudence

Criminal justice is the system of practices and institutions to maintain social control, deter and mitigate crime either through religious belief, imposing penalties on perpetrators of crime, or through rehabilitation efforts. Generally, criminal justice has prominent role in all societies in the world. In Buddhism,

¹¹ *Pad ma bka'thang*, p. 150 verso.

there are ten virtuous act precepts, *Lhachos dge-ba bcu*, which include:

- Refraining from taking life – *pranatighatad virati*.
- Refraining from taking that which is not given – *adattadanad virati*.
- Refraining from engaging in sexual misconduct – *kamamithyacarad virati*.
- Refraining from lying – *mrsavadat prativirati*.
- Refraining from speaking harshly – *parusat prativirati*.
- Refraining from slandering – *paishunayatc prativirati*.
- Refraining from engaging in worthless chatter – *sambhinnapralapat prativirati*.
- Refraining from being covetous – *abhidhyayah prativirati*.
- Refraining from being malicious – *vyapadat prativirati*.
- Refraining from holding wrong views – *mithyadrsti prativirati*.

These ten virtuous acts can broadly be divided into three categories of non-virtuous actions to be avoided and they are:

- The three non-virtuous actions of body – *truni kayaduscaritani*.
- The four non-virtuous actions of speech – *catva vagduscaritani*.
- The three non-virtuous actions of mind – *trini manoduscaritani*.

Similarly, Guru Rinpoche in Pema Kathang promulgated:

Do not indulge in the acts that deride modesty and
bring shame and guilt;
Refrain from stealing, robbing, battering and killing;
Never resort to drinking alcoholic liquors and

consuming meat items and other adulterated foods.

Conclusion

Padmasambhava is the leading light in the spread of Tantric Buddhism in Bhutan. Bhutan was named as the Mon (Bumthang was then known as Mon) under Lhomon Khazhi.” Thus, Guru Rinpoche recorded political identity, national sovereignty, historical antiquity and bestowed national calligraphy. Concerning writing and education, Guru Rinpoche advised:

Educate every child writing and reading skills.

Guru Padmasambhava blessed Bhutan and taught Buddhism and bequeathed many historical evidences. He had introduced the Bhutanese scripts. Many of the spaces are important sites of pilgrimage associated with Padmasambhava. The most famous one is Paro Taktsang (Tiger’s Nest) housing the sacred statue of Guru Dorje Drolo.¹²

The social, cultural, architectural and scholastic legacies moulded the past and present Bhutan. His laws of **four elements** together with the laws of **wood**¹³, **earth**, and **space** making **seven laws** are profound and modern; and the hidden treasure of laws must be discovered to salvage the sinking moral values and eclipsing ethical values. Despite his services, he is not known to many, but this august convergence of the galaxy, is vindication of his right, and redeeming of his glory during this holy month and the hallowed year. Guru Padmasambhava travelled long distances and traversed high mountains to disseminate Buddhist laws as Buddha said:

The Law is that which leads to welfare and salvation.
It forms conduct and character distinguished by the
sense of equality among all beings.

¹² (Wylie: *guru rDo-rje gro-lod*, Skrt: *Guru Vajra* ?) the fierce manifestation of Vajrakilaya (wrathful Vajrasattva) known as “Diamond Guts”, the comforter of all, imprinting the elements with Wisdom-Treasure

¹³ Grow plant and offer water up to this point.