

THE CONTRIBUTION OF GURU RIMPOCHE TO SIKKIM

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Today the world, our mother earth, is hanging on the threshold of a big threat for destruction. The deafening call of cold war, disease, famine, environmental degradation, social, economic and political upheavals have been pushing not only the human beings but all living beings to the horizons of complete annihilation, and extinction. The survival of this universe and its inmates is endangered so much so that it would be impossible to think of its continuance for a longer period. No one knows where this process of existence on the edge of the sword would lead to. Would it lead to the 'Tongpanyi', the 'Nihilism', commonly understood as the 'Shunyata'. 'Shunyata' as we often hear from the learned one's during our discourse with them, in the true sense, is the beginning of the realization of the truth beyond this physical existence. It is the most profound and fascinating enigma wrapped in a mystery, the rational realization of the life and living in a different mystic world.

The unique feature of the practice of Mahayana Buddhism is the systematic and logical development of the theory of 'Shunyata' and of 'Karuna' compassion, the universal affection of treating all living beings as one's own kith and kin, in a way that it is evolved into a philosophy controlling the mind and action of the followers and practitioners. Thus the Mahayana Buddhist scholars, such as Guru Padmasambhava, Atisha and Vasubandhu, had through rigorous meditation and practice transformed it into a method of metaphysics and direct experience in their life time. The realization of Shunyata and compassion is the visualization of the conscience that remains hidden within the individual. This leads to the revelation, impregnation and emergence of the real and ultimate truth from within the four noble truths propounded by Buddha that would unveil the path for the attainment of nirvana-the supreme liberation of all sentient being existing in this universe.

Padmasambhava is one of the staunch practitioner of Mahayana Buddhism, who emerged as the sole authority of this faith in the Northern India. Popularly known as 'Guru Rimpoche' was famous Indian Buddhist scholar and saint, born in swat valley, Udiyana Province (now in north west province of Pakistan). He is known by various names, mainly eight names such as, 1) Padmasambhava 2) Nima Hoijer, 3) Dorjee Droleh, 4) Singhi Dradok, 5) Loden Choksch, 6) Padma Gyalmo, 7) Shakya Singhi and 8) Padma Jungne. He is known to have introduced Buddhism in Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan and the northern India during the eighth century and is adorned as the Mahaguru, a great tantric saint of his time. Being a professor of Tantrism in Nalanda university he had the distinction of having conquered the evil spirits and finally established the great seat of Buddhist learning 'Samye' the first monastic university in Tibet which later on became the greatest centre of Mahayana Buddhism. This tradition of Mahayana Buddhism was spread throughout northern regions of India, Nepal and Bhutan.

Sikkim had the opportunity of being the meeting ground for different streams of religions of great significance. It was through this tiny Himalayan state that few of the learned scholars, including Padmasambhava happened to travel upholding and preaching the sacred message of truth, peace, non-violence and sanity enshrined in the Buddha Dharma, originated

from the land of the Aryas in India into Tibet, the land of Himalayan Plateau, and further to central Asia and China. The Mahayana Buddhism was introduced in Sikkim by Guru Rinpoche who had sojourned all the sacred places ordaining and initiating his followers and blessed them with his mystic power. Bonism used to be in vogue prior to the arrival of Padmasambhava, as a few of the local people were conversant with this practice. The greatest contribution of Padmasambhava had been the suppression of this age old tradition of bonism and transformation of this prevailing practice with Buddhism. Guru Rinpoche during sojourn happened to meet the Guardian deity, 'Khangchen Dzonga' who is worshipped in some of the monasteries, particularly, at Gangtok on the 15th day of the seventh month of Tibetan calendar in the form of offerings and dance called the warrior dance, 'Pang Tot' every year. At that moment there was one Lepcha leader known by the name of 'Tek-kong Salong' who was made in charge of the Dharma centre in Sikkim. In this effort of establishing Mahayana centre in Sikkim, Guru Rinpoche had to toil hard day and night to subjugate the evil spirits and thus change the outlook of the hill people particularly, the tribals in their religious beliefs and rituals. Eventually this is the reasons which indicate a conspicuous amalgamation of rites, traditions, belief and ritual with the practice of Buddhism in Sikkim and its surrounding areas. In fact, the revered saints and scholars from Tibet passed through our state to the prestigious centres of religion and learning in India in search of the ancient faith and philosophy. Having thus been fully sanctified and blessed by the holy Guru and his followers, Sikkim has abundantly discovered the sacred places of pilgrimages. These undoubtedly bear the evidence of the holy sojourn and blessing of the great Guru Rinpoche, the pioneering saint and teacher of the Mahayana faith, the saviour of all sentient being after Buddha.

Consequently our land, Sikkim is honoured as the Bayul-Dremojong literally meaning the hidden valley of Rice, sanctified by 'Ugyan Rinpoche' who was no other than Padmasambhava himself, the second Buddha after the Parinirvana of the great Buddha. The pride of Sikkim has been her god fearing, peace loving, religious, humble and gentle people. Regularly worshipping and propitiating Guru Rinpoche all their life and aspiring for the external peace and happiness had been the endeavour of the Sikkimese people.

Among the other contribution of Guru Rinpoche are the four major caves namely, 1) Chang Lhari Ningphuk, 2) Sharchok Bayphuk, 3) Lho Khado Sangphuk and 4) Nub Dechen Phuk which we located in the four directions bordering Sikkim. 'Dakkar' Tashiding is regarded as the centre of the pilgrimages and religious place of worship blessed and consecrated by Guru. The stupa at Tashiding is specially honoured as the 'Thongwa Rangdol' meaning there by that one gets rid of his sins on seeing it and a large number of people from far and wide are found flocking there on the 15th Day of the first month. 'Dawa Dangpo', 'Khechopari' lake occupies a special place in the history of pious pilgrimage in this part of the lake occupies a special place in the history of pious pilgrimage in this part of the world. Similarly in Chungthang, a valley situated at a height of 1631 metres in the upper reaches of north Sikkim, there stands a unique rock on a piece of flat land on which once Guru Rinpoche happened to rest and ate his meal of rice. The peculiarity of this place is that rice grows and matures on this land. This wonder deed is the precious contribution of Guru Rinpoche. Besides the other places of pilgrimage and worship frequented by people from far and wide, the discovery of the spots of hot spring along the Teesta and Rangit valleys. Possessing medicinal and healing value are of special significance. The mission began by Guru Rinpoche

was later on pursued by other patrons. Prominent among them is the Lepcha Chief, "Thakong-Theg" and his fiancé "Nekong-Gnal" who were operating from Kabi, North Sikkim. Kabi was the centre of auspicious occasion leading to the visit of "Khe-Bumsa" the Tibetan governor of Sikkim deputed at the moment to rule Sikkim in the beginning of the 17th century. This process of King making was finally accomplished with the meeting of the "Nal Jor Choe Zhi" the four noble heads at Yuksom in 1642 and enthronement of the first chogyal Phuntsog Namgyal at Norbu gang. "Gyalwa Lhabtsun Chhenpo" Kathok Rinzin Chhenpo and "Nadak Sempa Chhenpo" were among the four noble heads present at the coronation and consecration of several Monasteries were commissioned as centres of learning of the Mahayana Buddhism. The most special feature of this state is that there is a monastery in every village, which forms the nucleus of the people's learning and action. In recognition of his contribution Guru Rimpoche is honoured in the Monastery where a superheat room is provided to house his golden statue for worship and performance of religious ceremonies. This is called "Guru Lhakhang" and it constitutes a permanent element in the monastery plan. Besides, it is a common feature to find the "Lhakhang" the altar of every house of a Buddhist in Sikkim decorated with a statue of Guru Rimpoche evidently signifying that he had graced the land during his life time.

Now to conclude it may be appropriate to pay a little tribute to the fore runner, venerable Guru Rimpoche, by uttering the Mantra "Om Ah Hung" Vajra Guru Padma siddhi Hung" and also the indepth realization of the fact that it was through his tireless effort that our eyes had been opened. In true sense we are fortunate enough to have been acquainted with the theory and practice of the Mahayana Buddhism for the liberation of our souls for attainment of Nirvana.

Reference

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