
Transcending Feminism in Tibetan Buddhism: Situating the Dakini Energy from the Tales of Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal and Padmasambhava.

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ABSTRACT

Tibetan Buddhism is a universe of interest for scholars with a strong taste on culture, tradition, folklores, myths and deep rooted faith in scientific philosophy in the everyday living as the law of the land. Prior to Buddhism entering the land, the nomad lifestyle followed the animist religion of the shamans also known as the Bon faith. It was the tantric master Padmasambhava that united Tibet and Tibetans by introducing a common faith of worship through Buddhism. This statement is backed by historical evidences, political structures and the general social norms where the status of women were no different from the other medieval civilizations. However, the point that attracts the attention of the modern day scholars is the explanation of quantum power dynamics by Padmasambhava back in those days where people were still barbaric and the view of equality beyond gender discrimination that he carried throughout. This paper tries to analyze feminism in Tibetan Buddhism represented by the journey of Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal from an ordinary girl to an enlightened Dakini Energy in the light of the then prevailing socio political structure in Tibet.

Padmasambhava and his lady Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal are not only revered theologically in Tibetan Buddhism as mystic and magical masters from the spiritual perspective, but also as the pioneer of modern day quantum physics and astro scientific dynamics in terms of the whole debate of the rainbow body, energy resonance, yogic science and the like that has been attracting the scientists of both far and

near in the present modern age. The basic principle that makes Buddhism scientific is the non-theistic core that crudely believes in cause and effect, commonly understood as what you reap is directly dependent on what you sow, thereby challenging the very idea of a top down approach where a supreme being by the name of God dictates happiness and pain upon the people at his spree. This brings the Buddhist philosophy and practices under the lenses of close scientific researches and observations which in itself is very much rational as the generation in which we are surviving demands proven facts, history backed up evidence and solid reasoning. Therefore, the very idea of merely discussing about this magnificent master and his biography carries different dimensions, contexts and narrations.

For people with Buddhist background particularly the Mahayana and Vajrayana line of worship, Padmasambhava or in common parlance **Guru Rinpoche** (Precious Master) occupies the father figure of not only the prayer shrines but the one that leads through life examples through His Eight Manifestations namely **Guru Sakya Senge** (Lion of the Sakya Clan), **Guru Pema Gyalpo** (Lotus King), **Guru Nyima Odzer** (Rays of the Sun), **Guru Dorje Drolu** (Vajra Comforter of Beings), **Guru Senge Dradog** (Roaring Lion), **Guru Loden Chokse** (Guru possessing highest wisdom) and **Pema Jungne/Guru Padmasambhava** (Lotus Born), **Guru Tsokye Dorjee** (Lake born/Vajra Birth). These mighty eight manifestations are not merely mythical narrations to attract the human minds but have a subtle and indeed a deeper connotation of symbolism, energy resonance, perseverance and the trident mandala present in the individual level and the universe at large. The mastery that Guru Rinpoche gained over the different elements represented by the rainbow body by recognizing it, channelizing it and controlling it through the philosophy of emptiness or shunyata has now been accepted by the scientists from all walks of life.

In this regard Guru Rinpoche was the first spiritual master that recognized and gave due cognizance to the Feminine Energy- what we generally refer to as the Dakini Force in the Buddhist terminology. Hence a landmark to be noted here is that the concept of gender equality and transcending spirituality beyond gender duality was advocated by no other than Guru Padmasambhava himself. In the ordinary parlance due to the patriarchal social structure, we generally refer to the female partner of such tantric masters as consorts. However, at a deeper level of understanding we realize that so called consorts veiled in feminine forms are not merely female partners to the masters but indeed are well established enlightened beings all by themselves. The sexual union of enlightened beings is one such symbolic reminder to the ordinary eyes that enlightenment is achieved only through the union of wisdom (represented by the female energy looking inside) and skillful methods (represented by the male energy

looking outside). Here in no way can we undermine the importance of either of the two energies as lesser than the other through our dualistic understandings.

The narration of Guru Padmasambhava would be incomplete if we fail to shed some light on His feminine spiritual consorts with the union of whom he mastered his various spiritual accomplishments. There are five principal consorts of Guru Padmasambhava namely **Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal** (Princess of Kharchen/ Tibet), **Khandro Mandarava** (Princess of Zahor/ India), **Khandro Sakyadevi** (Princess/ daughter of king Punyedhara of Nepal), **Khandro Kalasiddhi** (Nepal), and **Khandro Tashi Khyidren** (Princess of Mon/ Bhutan). Each consort has a special role in the spiritual practice of Guru Padmasambhava yet the emanation of all is recognized in the form of Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal as the primary consort of Guru Padmasambhava. The trident that Guru Padmasambhava carries in his left hand with three skulls is also said to symbolize his accomplishment over time of past, present and future in union with Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal.

The story of Guru Padmasambhava and Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal has different subtle layers of interpretations out of which the compassionate teacher student relationship and the harsh commands of the master carried out by a disciple in the womanly veil with utter determination, commitment and devotion is an inspiration to the practitioners all over the globe.

For the ordinary understanding let us throw some light on the birth and life story of Guru Padmasambhava which in itself carries different symbolic connotations as suited to different levels of mind frames.

The word *Padma* in Sanskrit refers to the *flower lotus* and *Sambhava* means to be *born from*. The Sanskrit term *Padmakara* is also interchangeably used to refer to the *Lotus Born* master *Padmasambhava* which in Tibetan is loosely translated as *Pema Jugney* meaning *originated from a lotus*. It has been said that when Padmakara was born from a lotus flower and when King Indrabhuti led him back, wherever he was led back, a spontaneous lotus was seen to spring up from the place. When the king exclaimed in joy for the child to be truly a lotus born, henceforth He came to be renowned as the Lotus Born. The ordination name of Padmakara was Shakya Senge and later in life when Padmakara accomplished wisdom and presided as the head of five hundred great panditas, he came to be hailed as *Padmasambhava- The Lotus Born*. This form of taking birth is regarded to be instantaneous birth which is one of the forms of taking birth from amongst the four modes namely womb birth, egg birth, moisture birth and instantaneous birth. The reason for this mode of birth being the lotus flower from which he

was born in the middle of Lake Dhanakosha had been fused with the combined light rays of compassion of Buddha Amitabha and all the Buddhas of ten directions. Moreover, it has been documented well that Buddha Shakyamuni had foretold in many Sutras and Tantras about the future birth of Padmakara.

For those category of limited minds that could not digest the miraculous birth from a lotus, Padmasambhava showed himself taking birth through a womb as the son of King Mahusita of Uddiyana by the name Dhanarakshita. On gradually maturing he wanted to practice the Dharma but due to his parents disagreement he had no option but to be banished from the kingdom in the charge of killing one of the king's children. It was here that he took ordination and was named Shakya Senge by his teacher Pandita Shakyabodhi.

Going through different volumes about the birth of the great master it has been clearly understood that he was a no ordinary being. But more important than the narration about his super human birth and origin is the symbolic message that his birth carries to the mankind that with practice no matter how difficult and ugly the situation may be, the essence of Guru Padmasambhava shall always bloom like a lotus in every practitioners heart.

In his one hundred and twenty years of stay in Tibet we get to understand the different manifestations, narrations, stories and interpretations that all funnel down to one important aspect called the essence of what he was trying to teach his followers about taming one's minds to enlightenment and the rest being all projections of one's understandings. To make it easier for the people to relate to Padmasambhava's mind, he undertook studies on language, healing, logic craftsmanship in order to instill confidence in his followers -not to forget that everything was a spontaneous act for him. In the cave of Sahor, he took to ordination from the preceptor Sakyabodhi commonly referred to as master Prabhahasti who gave him the name Shakya Senge. The symbolic indication behind Guru Padmasambhava becoming a monk was to prevent the people from having wrong thoughts and perceptions. He later received empowerments, tantric explanations and oral instructions on Yoga Tantra from Master Prabhahasti, the Three Inner Tantra of secret mantra from Garab Dorjee, Manjushrimitra, Sri Singha and Dakini Leykyi Wangmo, clearly teaching his subjects about the significance of a genuine master, devotion towards his teachings and the accomplishments one can achieve through commitment and persistence in one's practice.

It must be noted here that the life story of Guru Padmasambhava should not be confined to academic debates and discourses, mental stimulation and ecstatic, nor as a story of a super hero that had a super origin and a super lifestyle. On the other hand, the wealth that we draw after understanding His life and

accomplishments is that the quantum energy that is present in every human being possessing Buddha nature can be tamed towards the path of enlightenment through earnest commitment. Like a supreme master He has shown the path for his followers to practice and that too depending upon the individual capacity he devised different levels of practices that which may suit oneself best rather than a single path like the theistic methodology of One God One Rule theory. On the contrary Guru Padmasambhava opens a basket of choices and opportunities for his followers alongside the end result which makes man the dictator of his own destiny.

King Trisong Deutsen of Tibet who at the age of seventeen gave rise to the thoughts of Dharma had invited Pandita Shantarakshita to lay the foundation for a temple. Due to the constant interruptions from the hostile Gods and Demons in the construction of the building, Shantarakshita suggested the king to invite Guru Padmassambhava to tame the untamed beings. The king on following his advice did so and Padmasmbhava arrived Tibet in the later year of the Tiger, tamed the building site. In the Year of the Rabbit, the foundation of the building site was established and the construction was completed in five years. This marks to lay the foundation of Tibetan Buddhism under the auspicious mastery of Guru Padmasambhava.

It is here that we need to take due cognizance on the importance that he emphasizes on the coexistence and interdependence of feminine masculine energy and the transcendence to enlightenment through the union of wisdom and skillful method.

Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal (Yeshe meaning wisdom and Tsogyal meaning Sea of Victory) was born in Kharchen as a princess who lived for approximately ninety nine years becoming one of the most important spiritual figures of Tibetan Buddhism in general and Vajrayana path in particular. Not only is she the chief consort of Guru Padmasambhava who mastered the Karmamudra Yoga with the master also referred as the Karmamudra Consort of Guru Padmasambhava, but she has earned a prestigious position in the Vajrayana lineage as a great practitioner and a renowned master in her own rights.

The social structure during the time and age of Yeshe Tsogyal was such that women were never looked as a competent competitor in terms of male hierarchy. The life of Yeshe Tsogyal is a tale of super human achievements as a woman subjected to all forms of cruelty, disrespect and social subjugation. An example of exemplary courage, determination and strength transcending gender in the achievement of enlightenment. At a very young age of around eight where Yeshe Tsogyal showed signs of a Dharma practitioner with pristine thoughts and a sharp mind where her father constantly insisted on her marriage.

Just a month after her birth, baby Yeshe Tsogyal appeared to be like an eight year old girl. Sensing utter fear, her parents kept her hidden till the age of ten where she had grown to become a beautiful young woman. Her father, the Lord of Karchen and mother Getso decided to get her married to no one but the king because of her extraordinary beauty that would erupt communal disharmony if married to an ordinary suitor. Later, after a series of miraculous events that took place in his kingdom after the arrival of Guru Padmasambhava, King Trisong Detsen prostrated before the guru who had appeared in the form of Vajradhara, and offered Lady Tsogyal along with the five substances of Samaya. Guru Padmasambhava was pleased and took Lady Tsogyal as his consort to Chimpu Geu where he conferred her empowerments and practiced in secret.

The essence that she carried was of a rebellious daughter, extra ordinarily free and frank minded young woman not at all bothering about the social norms resulting in all the blame that she had to carry for so called destroying Kharchens reputation and the name of her family. Her frustrations in her early life and the difficulties she faced as a woman was fearlessly spoken to Guru Rinpoche in the following Sentences

‘.....For I am a timid woman and of scanty ability; of lowly condition, the butt of everyone. If I go for alms, I am set upon by dogs, if food and riches comes my way, I am the prey of thieves; since beautiful, I am the quarry of every lecherous knaves; if I am busy with much to do, the country folk accuse me; if I don’t do what they think I should, the people criticize; if I put a foot wrong, everyone detests me. I have to worry about everything I do. That is what it is like to be a woman! How can a woman possibly gain accomplishment in Dharma?.....’

The narration of Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal recognizes the odds faced by every woman in general and a woman practitioner in particular, something a male practitioner may never have to undergo. Engulfing these hardships, she achieved liberation which happens to be the core teachings of her life story. Due to her extra ordinary moral strength, perseverance and physical courage she stood victorious over male aggression, asterism and hunger, blame of witch hunting and sexual abuse. When she was on the verge of being raped by a group of bandits, due to the strength of her Bodhichitta and accomplishments, she utilized the occasion to carry her attackers on the path of the Dharma thereby transforming the ugly situation of aggression and violence into emptiness and enlightenment.

When Guru Rinpoche concealed his teachings, he hid them in the deepest minds of his realized disciples with the prophesy of the hidden texts to be brought front by the concerned disciples in the right hour

through rebirth from the depth of their awareness, it was Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal who concealed them not inside objects but within the essential nature of elements such as within deep rocks, stones, river, ocean water falls etc. Although guru Rinpoche was the sole authority on the Terma tradition (secret hidden treasure), Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal was given the sole responsibility to encode, write and conceal the treasures.

The holy places all over Sikkim and Northern Himalayas stand to be a testimony of time and truth. It is a constant reminder to every individual that with right motivation enlightenment is not a farfetched dream to achieve from the Buddhist perspective. These places with footprints on rocks can be considered to be the historical evidence of the above narrated incidents while to some it may be a myth capsuled in the form of religio centric faith amongst the Tibetan Buddhist practitioners of the East. The interpretation is left open a subject of understanding for the viewers but what can not be undermined is the fearless courage, strength and compassion witnessed in an ordinary girl that achieved enlightenment through her motivation, hard work and passion thereby needing no references of identity through dependence on a male figure in the Tibetan Buddhist history.

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