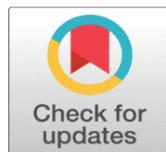


## A GLANCE AT THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF GURU PADMASAMBHAVA

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### ABSTRACT

Popularly known as Guru Rinpoche, or the "Second Buddha", Guru Padmasambhava was a well-revered tantric Buddhist master from medieval India, and he taught Vajrayana in Tibet circa the 8th – 9th century and helped construct the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet (Samye Monastery). He played a significant role in the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet and in the Himalayas which is considered most remarkable, and likewise, he has also been regarded as one of the main architects of the Guru Padmasambhava mythos simply because of his activities that had tamed the Tibetan spirits and demigods. The modern Tibetans consider him a Buddha as Buddha Shakyamuni foretold it, and the Guru Padmasambhava narrative emerged during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, among narratives on others, resulting in the projection of him as one of the most influential legends with reference to the Buddhist tradition in Tibet. Different stories are associated with the birth of Guru Padmasambhava and all of them have their own logic and interpretations, and as the versions of these stories are not contradictory to themselves, they depict the perfect understanding of the sentiment or belief that "everything is flexible, anything is possible. Enlightened beings can appear in any way they want or need to." Similarly, Guru Padmasambhava has eight manifestations and all of them have both philosophical appeal and epistemological content. His attributes are highly philosophical and relevant in the modern context, and this interdisciplinary reading of those attributes offers new insights into the existential necessities of his thoughts for the present generation. Taking the statement of Guru Padmasambhava that "My father is wisdom and my mother is voidness / My country is the country of Dharma / I am of no caste and no creed / I am sustained by perplexity; and I am here to destroy lust, anger and sloth", as the first step, this paper attempts to unravel the philosophical underpinnings of his life and legacy.

**Keywords:** Enlightenment, Duality, Manifestations, Compassion, Knowledge, Wisdom

**Received** 15 March 2025

**Accepted** 13 April 2025

**Published** 08 May 2025

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#### DOI

[10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i4.2025.6132](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i4.2025.6132)

**Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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What makes an action good or bad?

Not how it looks, nor whether it is big or small,

But the good or evil motivation behind it. (Patrul Rinpoche 1998: 8)

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Everything is circumstantial

And depends entirely on one's aspiration. (Patrul Rinpoche 1998: 8)

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Do not take lightly small good deeds,

Believing they can hardly help:

For drops of water one by one

In time can fill a giant pot. (Patrul Rinpoche 1998: 124)

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Do not take lightly small misdeeds,

Believing they can do no harm:

Even a tiny spark of fire

Can set alight a mountain of hay. (Patrul Rinpoche 1998: 124)

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As the sick man relies on his doctor,

The traveller on his escort,

The frightened man on his companion,

Merchants on their captain,

And passengers on their ferryman-

If birth, death and negative emotions are the enemies you fear,

Entrust yourself to a teacher. (Patrul Rinpoche 1998: 144)

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I have shown you the methods

That lead to liberation.

But you should know

That liberation depends upon yourself. (Patrul Rinpoche 1998: 11-12)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Our present life, whether filled with sorrow or lust, has not been an insulated entity that is free from the possibility of any alteration from its content for moving on the path of achieving enlightenment, and the crux of the issue has already been highlighted in the doctrine of Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition which had shown the appropriate method and supreme effort through oral instructions in this regard. However, the wisdom tradition being practised in Tibet continues to draw attention, and emerges as a universal model, as it focuses on the teacher-student bond and its social responsibility by displaying the necessity for training the mind of students with every scripture and meditation until they are being internalized to guide and shape individuals' personal experience. As it is clearly demonstrated and visible from the Tibetan spiritual word *nyamlen* which literally means 'taking into experience', the moral responsibility and epistemological status of a teacher who claims to be a lineage holder rests on the actual attainment of realization of their true qualification as a teacher by internalization and experiencing. This we learn from the Buddhist tradition in the Himalayas in Tibet that has been greatly inherited from Guru Padmasambhava who belonged to the Nyingmapa school which prescribed both Kahma or oral lineage and Terma, the miraculous direct lineage – kept hidden in the 8th century by Guru Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tshongyal, his divine female disciple, to be discovered at the appropriate moment in future. Unlike other countries, Tibet and the Himalayas have been seen as fortunate for having the influence of the Vajrayāna tradition of Buddhism, and it is continued to be practised through teachings, transmissions and preservation of all three traditions. Over the centuries, many strands of Buddha's teachings have been transmitted to students of different lineages broadly come from four schools of Buddhism in Tibetan tradition such as Nyingma school (known for following traditions introduced in the 8th century by Sātaraksita and Padmasambhava), the Kagyupa, Sakyapa and Gelugpa.

An enormous amount of sacred literature can be found that they have preserved the teachings of the lineages of Buddhism in Tibetan tradition, and these teachings are basically summarized into four Noble Truths – expounded by the Buddha briefly after his enlightenment. The philosophical underpinnings of these lessons make them universal and relevant for contemporary society, and the gist of these truths are as follows: 1. Our conditioned life that is always unsatisfactory is not free from suffering and happiness appears as temporary which is preceded by suffering; 2. The reason for suffering is that any action leads to a result that one has to face it either in this life or future life – that is, rebirth is the result of one's action, therefore, one has to experience or cannot escape from it, as it has cause and effect as its principle, and interestingly, negative emotions are considered as driving forces of our actions, and as there is no end to our action then there is no end of rebirth; 3. The cycle will be broken when we stop action through ignorance, that is, it unfolds the possibility of 'cessation of suffering and freedom from conditional existence'; and 4. The way and means to achieve is to accumulate positive actions – venerating and making offerings to the Buddha and his teachings ("Dharma"), and the community of practitioners ("Sangha") and practising the great six perfections (Paramitas), etc., on the one hand, and on the other hand, the practice of meditation to dispel the root of ignorance -the cause of our suffering. A practitioner with motivation for his own liberation may give up their negative emotions (and become an "Arhat") and needs to have motivation for all others to attain the Buddhahood, and therefore, the Bodhisattvas who follow the path of the great vehicle based on compassion, and through the practice and teachings of the Vajrayāna will attain enlightenment shortly. (Insights drawn from "A Brief Historical Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism" in Patrul Rinpoche 1998: xl-xliv) The chaos created by longings for the materialist life can find their reliefs and solutions from the doctrines of the Buddha offered to the world two thousand and five hundred years ago, and the flexibility and adaptability have already attracted the attentions of people from across the globe. Particularly, as pointed out by Guru Padmasambhava, of the Buddha' teachings, the Vajrayāna could be treated as powerful and effective for individuals who are filled with strong emotions. Being a central figure in the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet, by overcoming all the hurdles and also by taming the demons, evil forces, etc., Guru Padmasambhava has been seen as and linked to the great perfection in higher order. His visit to Tibet is linked to the people's strong belief, and it coincided with the instances that the local deities or gods were angry such as earthquakes, and lightning struck the royal palace which made the royal people invite him to protect them. However, being a historical figure, it is traditionally said that there have been nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine biographies of him and all of them have been classified into three ways: Dharmakaya Buddhahood, Sambhogakaya nature and Nirmanakaya activities. Palden Sherab Rinpoche (1992). This paper, however, focuses on the contemporary relevance of life and legacy of the Buddha of Vajrayāna, Guru Padmasambhava, by highlighting the philosophical significance of his attributes as well as drawing insights from his manifestations and landscapes and iconography associated with him.

Guru Padmasambhava was a legendary Indian Buddhist who is credited for introducing Tantric Buddhism in the Himalayas and also for the establishment of the first monastery there in the eighth century CE. Born in Udayana (also known as Udiana, Uḍḍiyāna, Uḍḍāyāna, Udyāna or 'Oḍḍiyāna') [Loewenthal \(1864\)](#), a place that had been known for magicians, as a Tantrist and being associated with the Yogacara tradition, Guru Padmasambhava had the great opportunity to teach at Nalanda, the well-known ancient Buddhist study centre in India. As per the earliest chronicle sources, the Testament of Ba (c. 9th –12th centuries), he was invited to

Tibet in 747 by King Trisong Detsen to establish the Samye (Bsan-ya) Monastery [Doney \(2015\)](#) and also to perform exorcism to drive away demons that were disturbing the construction of a Buddhist monastery by causing earthquakes, lightning and flooding. Guru Padmasambhava, who had been accompanied by another Indian teacher Sāntaraksita (725–788), an influential Indian Buddhist philosopher of the Madhyamaka school, studied at Nalanda under the supervision of Acarya Jñānagarbha. His philosophical approach was known as Yogācāra-Svatantrika-Mādhyamika in Buddhist tradition in Tibet and it was the result of the combination of Madhyamaka, Yogācāra and the logico-epistemology of Dharmakīrti. Unlike others within this school, he was known for accepting cittamātra (mind-only) and svasamvedana (self-reflective awareness) on the level of conventional truth [Blumenthal \(2004\)](#), the monastery was built in 749 under his supervision. As per the available literature, it is well-known that Rnying-ma-pa, the Old Order Buddhist tradition in Tibet, and also the second largest Buddhist tradition in Tibet, follows closely the teachings of Guru Padmasambhava, and therefore, it has been associated with tantric ritual, Guru devotion, and yoga. Interestingly, the basic texts of the tradition had been kept hidden by him to be revealed later around 1125, and on the other side, he had translated many tantric texts from original Sanskrit into Tibetan. Rnying-ma-pa considered the second largest Buddhist tradition in Tibet, is dedicated to the transmission of the original teachings of the celebrated Indian Vajrayana master and this tradition is widely known for using shamanistic practices and local divinities borrowed from the indigenous pre-Buddhist Bon religion, which does not insist on celibacy for monks. (Encyclopaedia of Britannica).

The birth and appearance of Guru Padmasambhava have not been seen as ordinary, and therefore there are many stories about his birth. Some of them point out that “he instantly appeared on the peak of Meteorite Mountain, in Sri Lanka” (Palden Sherab Rinpoche 1992). His extraordinary appearance, that is, the Buddha Shakyamuni’s prophecy about the emanation of Guru Padmasambhava in this world, is well founded in the Tantra texts, for example, from a Sutra called “Myang-hDas-mDo”: “Oh my Ashusman disciple Ananda and Others! After my passing away, that is twelve years later, a person far superior to me who would be the Lord of Mass, named Guru Padmasambhava will be emanated. Like a gem from the sea like Ushnisha Vijaya among medicinal divinities like sun and moon among the clusters of stars like a lion among the beasts and like a gauda (king of birds) among the birds.” (Ecclesiastical Department). The same is presented as “Twelve years after my mahaparinirvana, a remarkable being with the name Padmasambhava will appear in the centre of a lotus and reveal the highest teaching concerning the ultimate state of the true nature, bringing great benefit to all sentient beings.” [Indian Buddhist Forum \(2022\)](#) The best of the best and the dominant among the dominant - a highly metaphorical speculation has been made on him, and it is an interesting point to note how the figure of speech is effectively employed in the portrayal. According to the same document, it is believed that Buddha Amitabha is committed to take the incarnation in the form of Padmasambhava for the welfare of sentient beings in the Jambu Dwipa (the spiritual country of Buddha Shakyamuni). Another best thing the Buddha Amitabhava has chosen is King Indra Bhuti of Urgen country he was not an ordinary person but was Chakravarti Raja with the embodied knowledge of civil and religious laws, and further he had never been untouched by denigration of his nature and character. (Ecclesiastical Department). Guru Padmasambhava had a miraculous birth from the Lotus, and the King on his way back after meeting the Serpent Queen, found about eight-year-old boy was sitting inside a multi-coloured lotus. Amazed at his mature talk, the King asked him to be his heir and brought him to the palace. His growing was an insightful one, and

fearing that he could not give mass spiritual benefits to humankind if he became a king, he deserted the kingly possession and gained spiritual knowledge to disseminate Esoteric Doctrine. He acquired intensive knowledge of Yoga tantra and earned eight different names in different deeds as 'Guru-Tsen-Gyad.' He specialized in the teachings of Ka-gyad Dershek Dupa and he obtained eight Sadhana teachings from Indian Buddhist Masters or Vidhyadharas. (There is another version of story of his birth that is found in his biography entitled 'The Lotus Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava' recorded by Yeshe Tsogyal, one of his consorts, mentions that "Padmasambhava was the son of the King Mahusita of Uddiyana and given the name Danarakshita who later took the ordination and given the name Sakya Senge." [Indian Buddhist Forum \(2022\)](#)). Despite having various stories, that are not contradictory in nature, the justification is that when Guru Padmasambhava like realized beings having equanimity with perfect understanding can do anything, that is, as Nyingma scholar Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche "Everything is flexible, anything is possible. Enlightened beings can appear in any way they want or need to." [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(1992\)](#)

He had also encountered resistance which he could overcome through the magnificent deeds in Himachal Pradesh and one such example is when the King tried to burn him alive with piles of Sandalwood with large amount of mustard oil, but he surprised everyone by coming out unaffectedly. Not only that he converted the mustard oil into a lake and he himself seated on the lotus and floated on the lake. It impressed the King who later embraced Buddhism. Moreover, after his heroic deeds in Tibet, subjugating all the evils under his domain and succeeding in completing the Samye Monastery, he propagated Buddha's doctrine with the help of Shanta Rakshita fulfilled the wishes of King Thisrong Deotsen. After the completion of his spiritual mission in Tibet, he identified four major and minor hidden lands around Tibet and he visited with his twenty-five disciples to prepare spiritual resorts for the Dharma practitioners to take refuge in future fearing the declining of Dharma due to the approaching degenerate age (sNyigs-ma lNga) in Tibet. He concealed many religious treasures, "Termas" or hidden teachings, in the major places of worship to be found by future spiritual followers, "Tertons" or the enlightened minds who had been destined to find them. It was about 1372 A.D. Rigdzin Goedem, a treasure revealer lama made a visit and found many texts by which Guru's precious teachings were restored, and he also gave hints about the location of the sacred places to be revealed later. Chronologically, in 1642 there arrived three Noble Saints from Tibet 1.) Gyalwa Lhatsun Chenpo, 2) Ngadag Sempa Rigzin Phuntshog and (3) Kathog Kuntu Zangpo with the mission to introduce Buddhism in Sikkim. And they found the fourth Saint called "Phuntshog" and these "Four Yogi Brothers" or "rNal-hByor-mChed-bZhi." According to the sources quoted here, "The stone thrones of the four Yogi Brothers still stand at Norbugang at Yuksam as a milestone in the history of Sikkim." (Ecclesiastical Department). Over a period, the lamas and devotees built many sub-monasteries and religious monuments many other sub monasteries and religious monuments were built by the lamas and Devotees, and as a result, the images/idols of Guru Padmasambhava can be seen enshrined as the main worshipping objects in all the monasteries in Sikkim. The Guru Tsechu puja, performed on the tenth day of every Tibetan month, marks as his birth anniversary and people pray for peace and prosperity. (Ecclesiastical Department). Similarly, Guru Rinpoche, the Precious Master, played a significant role and was instrumental in establishing Vajrayāna Buddhism in Bhutan, and he visited on the invitation of King Sindhu Raja of Bumthang where he had also the task of subduing the unruly elements and forces that were the obstacles for the spread of Buddhism. While Ladakh commemorates the birth anniversary of Guru Rinpoche



in the form of the Hemis annual festival, the annual Tseshu festival of Bhutan is celebrated to honour him. [Indian Buddhist Forum \(2022\)](#). According to [Buffettrille \(2012\)](#), Padmasambhava along with Mandarava travelled to 'the Maratika Cave in eastern Nepal to practice long life rituals of Amitāyus' where both of them achieved the blessing of immortality from the Buddha of long life. Finally, after a long penance in the Pharping cave in Nepal with the combined practices of Yangdak Heruka and Vajrakilaya, he attained the ultimate Mahāmudrā, or "great imprint" that referred to the fact that "all phenomena inevitably are stamped by the fact of wisdom and emptiness inseparable" [Duff \(2008\)](#). This brief bio-sketch of Guru Padmasambhava, not required in this paper as its objectives do not warrant it, is given for two reasons: as an opportunity for new readers to get some glimpses of his life and legacy on the one hand and on the other hand, it proffers an ideal foundation on which the significance of his philosophy and its contemporary relevance can be well-founded. Therefore, the following parts of this paper simply focus on the three things: His manifestations, iconography and his attributes.

## **2. GURU PADMASAMBHAVA AND HIS EIGHT MANIFESTATIONS**

As an enlightened being, Guru Rinpoche, or "the Precious Master", and not an ordinary monk or teacher, had eight manifestations to reflect and signify different aspects of his enlightened mind, which resulted in the production of a vast amount of literature and art delineating the aesthetics, visual representation and colour symbolism associating varieties meanings to each one. These manifestations have engulfed both the literary and art traditions in Tibet and Bhutan, and therefore, plenty of poems, stories, biographies, and folklore materials as part of the literary traditions are available on the one hand and on the other hand the art traditions are filled with attractive and colourful Thangka paintings, splendid statues, spectacular murals and architecture marvels. Particularly, Himalayan Buddhist culture is filled with the potent symbols of the eight manifestations of Guru Padmasambhava and the philosophical, spiritual and ethical principles of these manifestations have been embedded in the cultural practices which the Himalayans uphold them with intense spirit. These manifestations as they are associated with the concepts and perspectives give different identities by inspiring universal concepts like compassion, wisdom and enlightenment. [The Bhutan Live \(2023\)](#). However, these eight manifestations being a highlight of the biography of Guru Padmasambhava have been thought of covering a long span of 1500 years and symbolizing the moods and emotions, that is, the different states of mind, and for Rigpa Shedra, these eight principal forms were the different points in the life of Guru Rinpoche. These manifestations cannot be seen as purposeless and they cannot be considered so because they happen as a human being and thus, a special purpose and a definite goal are set that promises to dissolve the non-dualistic attachment conceptions and also with an implication for destroying neurotic fixations since he appeared on the earth as human being [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(1992\)](#). Carefully crafted and projected with so much aesthetics and religious appeal, the manifestations of Guru Rinpoche belong to the tradition of Terma, the 'revealed treasures' and they are presented in a way that can be accepted by the mass on the one hand and on the other hand to give differentiation to each manifestation with a clear motive of making these manifestations understandable and miraculous. The manifestations adorned with different colours are not meant to be mere shades of colour but the reflection of different human emotions implicating the state of mind. Similarly, the same reading is applied in the case of material culture associated with the

manifestations because they also become something special due to their symbolism. Through these manifestations, the essence of the precious master or a totally enlightened being or a fully awakened being, is perfectly reflected, as his appearance was an incarnation of a fully enlightened being, these manifestations are warranted and purpose of his existence for the benefit of all sentient beings is profoundly communicated through these manifestations. When there are infinite world systems, then there are also infinite sentient beings that require for their awakening an infinite number of emanations of enlightened beings. Although there are thirty-six worlds, both Buddha Shakyamuni and Guru Padmasambhava had taken emanations, in the world in the east where there was no existence of the concept of poverty, to give their Sutra and Vajrayāna teachings, by which people in that world could learn about poverty and imbalances. It is the influence of the teachings of Guru Padmasambhava on the people who tend to think that the similar world could have been here for practising generosity and serving others. When the world is divided into six realms of gods, asuras, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and hell realms, and to liberate the sentient beings from all these realms of the world, Guru Padmasambhava as a special Buddha with eight manifestations in each of those realms had been realized. The unique qualities associated with each of the emanations depend on the nature of the subjects to be served and these qualities are visible and thus cannot be recognized by their outer signs. However, the emanations that Guru Padmasambhava displayed in the human realm had promised beneficial activities for all beings. The 'eight' in the emanations does not point out its accidental existence or a matter of chance, rather it is associated with, or reflects, the system of belief inherent to Buddhism. It means that the number eight is not ordinary to be treated with other numerals, especially in the context of understanding the manifestations of Guru Padmasambhava in each human realm. The number 'eight' carries meanings and some of them are abstract, symbolic and philosophical orientations, and for instance, it refers to the eight directions by meaning the fact of Guru Padmasambhava's assistance to all the sentient beings in the eight directions, to go by abhidharma there are eight original and subtle atoms constitute the external universe and internal dimensions of sentient beings, the aggregation of these eight can be seen as the constituents of the finest particles, known four atoms - atoms of fire, water, earth and wind and another four are associated with the aspects of shapes, smell, the past and the present - being very small they hold together to create atoms and molecules that have not been either created or ordered by anyone or ordered to be like this (as naturally formed along with the formation of the world) - there are eight consciousness (in the inner world - five associated with the sense organs, six with the mind consciousness, seventh with emotional consciousness, and eight with the subconscious or ground consciousness), externally eight great charnel grounds ('eight cemeteries, eight trees, eight stupas eight bodies of water, eight nagas and eights gods' - all in elaborate mandalas, and eight is associated with the Vajrayāna mandala space as to mark the number of completion. [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(2011\)](#)).

The eight manifestations of Guru Padmasambhava and their significance are given here:

- 1) **Guru Pema Gyalpo:** Considered the first in the order of emanations, it is the lotus king whose manifestation has been well predicted by the Buddha. This manifestation is seen as important and gains significance as Guru Padmasambhava originally appeared in our world. The colour configuration of the Guru Pema Gyalpo is well detailed and it is shown with a reddish pink complexion and semi-wrathful in the state of mind. In addition, he has been depicted as seated on a lotus and wearing yellow-

orange robes, a small damaru in his right hand and a mirror and hook in his left hand, with a top-knot wrapped in white and streaming with red silk. He is shown with a long hair and it is pulled up into a knot which is wrapped in a white cloth that has the gathering of red materials arranged from top. Behind his head, the same red silk is flowing in a gentle breeze, and tiara of five jewels is also worn by him. While the mirror in his hand symbolizes wisdom, for being free from clinging and attachment to materialist life, the hook symbolizes great compassion, a tool to rescue all the sentient beings who are trapped in the experience of samsara. Interestingly, his appearance is directly associated with Buddha Amitabha (represents dharmakaya) – the Buddha of the western direction, and to the Avalokitesvara (the sambhogakaya), the Buddha of compassion. All of them (Amitabha, Avalokitesvara and Guru Padmasambhava) are known encompassing the potentialities for all the possible manifestations of the Trikaya. These three Buddhas of the Padma family are symbolized to represent each one as an aspect of primordial wisdom. The lotus family appears to the common perception, as a matter of its mundane or explicit nature, but its esoteric value draws our attention by meaning our karmic winds and the speech centre. Palden Sherab Rinpoche writes "The radiation of love and compassion coursing through the channels by the arising of wisdom winds is the inner action of this family." Palden Sherab Rinpoche (2011:13). Though for Buddha Shakyamuni speech is the most powerful tool, with which he grants knowledge of antidotes for rescuing the sentient beings to be an enlightened condition by freeing themselves from samsara, he lets the sentient beings encounter their own karmas. Here, the lotus family emerges as the symbol of the power of speech in the 'spirit of love and compassion for everyone.' [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(2011\)](#). Further, this lotus birth of Guru Padmasambhava seems to be interesting because despite Guru Rinpoche having human appearance, it has gone beyond the dualistic conceptions and regimented views by having his birth in the middle of lotus, negating the biological birth. Therefore, through this lotus birth, he is devoid of both attachment and anger, which signifies that he is not associated with any negative emotions on the one hand and on the other hand he subdues and transforms both anger and attachment into their respective wisdoms which is now symbolized by the lotus. Guru Pema Gyalpo's birth in the lotus gives a panoramic view of the ambience, and the kindness and compassionate character of King Indrabhuti who was open-minded and practised dharma in serving his subjects. When he married life with Orchima, who radiates lights, he had to leave Oddiyana for the benefit of sentient beings at the request of Buddha Vajrasattva, and his journeys had never been ordinary and on his way, he had to subdue eight classes of spirits and directed them to the path towards the unified state of loving-kindness, compassion and wisdom. Finally, the lotus that grows in muddy water never gets distracted from its qualities, and thus comparing it with bodhicitta and the bodhisattvas whose nobleness have had their birth in samsara, the same way, the mud never affects the beauty of the lotus, the lovely one. In the Vajrayāna tradition, red is used to represent loving-kindness, or love beyond attachment, or in other words, love leads to great detachment. Finally, the calm state of mind, or equanimity, in the display of the difference between truth and illusion, at least in our perception, there are no ups and downs, or true or untrue, or dream or non-dream are the same.



- 2) **Guru Nyima Ozer:** Considered the second manifestation, and seen as the Ray of Sun, the Sunray Yogi, is semi-wrathful, it is associated with crazy wisdom activities. Crazy wisdom, wandering yogi, and illuminates the darkness of the mind. Here, Guru Nyima Ozer is shown seated on a lotus with left leg bent and with a golden-red complexion, semi-wrathful with slightly bulging eyes, long hair with bone ornaments, moustache and beard, bare-chested with a tiger-skin skirt, right-hand holds a khatvanga and left hand is in a mudra, interacting with the Sun. Guru Nyima Ozer, known for his miraculous activities, and thus beyond conditional limitations, is a special Buddha who emanated for creating awareness of the great emptiness-bliss. Being the master of a great and ecstatic state of awareness, he is for the purpose of serving the sentient beings in different guises. Though the thanka painting portrays one commonly known manifestation, there are many emanations of Guru Nyima Ozer – a powerful master of meditation, sometimes with weak-looking beggars, and various animal forms for the welfare of the sentient beings. There is an anecdote for the reason why he got the name ‘Ray of Sun’, and it is a clear example of his crazy activity. In an incident with Vanesseca in Varanasi over beer drinking, he proved one thing that he could stop the sun and from the incident she became his great yogini and as a result the Vanesseca lineage has started. Guru Nyima Ozer transmits a message that he has a good understanding of the structure of the psycho-physical constitution, and he has been associated with the mystical experience and spiritual realization. The relationship or there is a correspondence between internal energies and the external world, and for example, whatever we see of earth, water, sun, clouds and wind, fires is considered as the reflection of our own inner structure. Another example is that sound and echo are the reflections of the movements of wind – indicating the infinite reality of primordial wisdom – form and appearance depend on the needs of individuals. Blissfulness is given high priority and which must be part of the inherent quality of primordial truth. To conclude, we can say that everything can be transformed into great blissfulness – a suitable way to practice Guru Nyima Ozer.
- 3) **Guru Loden Chokse:** He is the “supreme knowledge holder” and appears as peaceful. He is the ground for all knowledge, and intelligent youth, and he is the one who gathers the knowledge of all worlds. Guru Loden Chokse, as the emanation of Guru Rinpoche who is associated with the ‘removal of ignorance and accumulation of wisdom through contemplation,’ is shown seated on a lotus, white complexion, wearing a white scarf with ribbons wrapped around his head, and a blue-green lotus decorating his hair, holding a damaru in the right hand and a lotus bowl in the left hand. His status as awakened Buddha had been involved in the demonstration of ways for approaching profound knowledge that is achievable through study and practice keeping in mind the conditions of the sentient beings. Like Guru Nyima Ozer, he also wandered extensively throughout India after leaving the palace, stayed in cemeteries, ate whatever was given to the dead as offerings, and wore any available clothes. He appeared simultaneously in all cemeteries at once. It is learnt through the available literature that these eight cemeteries functioned as the primary power spots that facilitated us to get enlightened status by waking up. He is known to have studied esoteric astrology (in China) and art, and he received ordination and instruction in the Vinaya, sutra and Abhidharma from Ananda. And he is also known for

receiving thirteen Anuyoga teachings from Buddha Vajradhara. [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(2011\)](#). He had an encounter with a water-carrying girl while searching for a great dakini, Laygyi Wangmo, who was semi-wrathful being and she kept him for a week in each of her five chakras. Though he is known for his perfect realization, his emanation as Guru Loden Chokse demonstrates the gathering of knowledge and wisdom teachings.

- 4) **Guru Padmasambhava:** it is the lotus essence, a symbol of spiritual perfection, peaceful, manifests and teaches Mandarava, transforming negative energies into compassionate and peaceful forms. It is also associated with the developing power and it is the expression of the inner energy of Guru Padmasambhava. Here, as far as Guru Padmasambhava is concerned there is no trace of suppression and repression. However, he is shown with a rich white complexion, is very peaceful, and wears a red monk's hat, and sits on a lotus with his right hand in a mudra and left hand holding a skull-cup filled with amrita or long-life nectar. The sector symbolises a pearl of wisdom which has the quality of purifying negative emotions, mental obscurations, diseases, external obstacles, etc. According to his biographies, he had four occasions in which people attempted to burn him alive but he transformed all the negative energies into more peaceful and loving forms. Both Guru Padmasambhava and wisdom dakini Madarava realized immortality in Martika Cavern, renowned as the Cave of Immortality, by practising three months on the Buddha Amitayus who later appeared and initiated them into deathlessness. As he appeared in the world enlightened, as a direct emanation of Buddha Amitabha and the reincarnation of Buddha Shakyamuni, is emerged as a special being free from emotional and mental obscurations - naturally transcending death and mortality in Matrika Cave. Though he appeared and disappeared in the eighth century, he never failed to guide directly or indirectly the great masters of all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and his living and presence are always seen as his true immortality. When Guru Padmasambhava came to Tibet in the eighth century he was young and enlightened, but it is our limitations of ordinary conceptions we couldn't fathom many stories associated with him of that period. But the gross elements he transformed when he became immortal, turned into their subtle wisdom forms free from decay, decline and change. Due to this liberation, he attained flexibility and openness to perform activities, which are incomprehensible to us, that break through the rigidity of dualistic conceptions and conventions which make him beyond all worldly limits and traditions, and also to go beyond mundane approaches. Being an embodiment of bodhicitta, he takes different forms to communicate and guide us to the vastness of equanimity. Guru Padmasambhava symbolizes the practice of bodhicitta which reflects all time love and compassion and is available to every sentient being, and everyone never fails to appreciate its essence or identity known as Sambhava. Therefore, by practising bodhicitta, one can revitalize life force, and by reciting the Vajra Guru Mantra, visualizing Guru Padmasambhava, heart and mind will be opened up full of love, compassion and wisdom. [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(2011\)](#). Thus, Guru Padmasambhava enhances our understanding of the way of practicing meditation that "Meditate for awhile in that non-dual disposition and then dedicate the merit to all sentient beings." [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(2011\)](#)
- 5) **Guru Shakya Senge**, the fifth emanation and known as the "Lion of the Sakyas", is peaceful, manifests as Ananda's student and brings King Ashoka

to the Dharma, Lion of the Sakyas, embodies patience and detachment, learns all Buddhist canons and Tantric practices of the eight Vidyadharas). Guru Shakyasenge is shown similar to Buddha Shakyamuni but with golden skin in red monk's robes, a unishaka, a begging bowl in the left hand and a five-pointed vajra in the right hand – they all together embody the principle of realization, particularly through the monastic path. There are differences in the portrayal of Guru Shakyasenge, on thangkas, he looks like Buddha Shakyamuni as described here. In Tibetan, the tupa has a dark blue concentration of wisdom, skin in golden colour with red ropes. He has begging bowl on his left hand while sitting on the lotus with the sun and moon as its discs. He symbolizes and demonstrates the means of awakening through discipline and detachment, a simple approach and a gradual way of enlightenment. He was ordained by Venerable Ananda on a small island in the Ganges River, and he studied with Ananda and stayed for years in Bodhgaya where he practised and taught the Vinaya, sutra and Abhidharma. He had the opportunity to meditate on the Prajnaparamita Sutras at Rajagrhya or Vulture Peak, an important place in the world of Buddhism. In Nepal, he practised Vajrakilaya, which included some teachings that were secret transmissions of the tantric sadhanas. As a highly realized person, Guru Shakyasenge appeared simple but skilful in ordinary form, and he represented authentic spiritual development. Guru Shakyasenge had a great influence on King Ashoka, the powerful monarch in Indian history, who was even predicted by Buddha Shakyamuni, and there is an anecdote on the prediction of the emergence of a great king after two hundred and fifty years after Buddha's mahaparinirvana for spreading his Dharma and supporting the sangha. When Guru Rinpoche was about to be boiled and fried by the executioners of King Ashoka, in the midst of the fire, Guru Shakyasenge appeared sitting cross-legged. Later he performed his teachings by doing four activities sitting, standing, lying down and walking in space. He told Ashoka "This is not the Dharma, which is a positive path. Stop all this violence. Since the king is unwilling to give his own life in this ceremony, how can he take the lives of others? You have been told about the evils of killing, so you should not take the lives of others anymore." [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(2011\)](#). And further the monk warned that "By taking advantage of your power and using it for selfish ends, you will end up suffering far more than your victims." [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(2011\)](#). The inner meaning of Guru Shakyasenge presents something noteworthy as the expansion of infinite love and immeasurable compassion is co-emergent with wisdom, then the latter matures both to make them pure and true. Though they are inherent and do not externally exist, they (loving-kindness and compassion) are there to be discovered and felt as supreme among the primordial qualities. When cultivating genuine loving-kindness and compassion happens, then one may feel great joy, peace and happiness, by naturally giving away the ego-clinging obstructions. Here, detachment and simplicity become a way to understand Guru Shakyasenge, or in other words, following a middle path between asceticism and luxury is paramount, and it is artistically represented by him. [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(2011\)](#). Finally, Guru Shakyasenge promises different things and for instance, by practising him, one gets moral strength, discipline and perfect conduct that may yield deeper concentration and contemplation. Further, the choosing a middle path (between asceticism and luxury) one is assured of great equanimity and a profound realization of the true nature.

- 6) Guru Senge Dradrok, the sixth emanation of Padmasambhava, is otherwise known as "Lion's Roar", and it is wrathful, and it is emanated for subduing and pacifying negative influences from black magic, curses and other obstacles like people give trouble without no good reason. As a wrathful deity who emanated at Nalanda, and the Lion of Debate, or the promulgator of the Dharma throughout the six realms of sentient beings, he managed to stop ceremonial sacrifices of many animals. There is an anecdote to prove he is the lion of debate. Once at Nalanda, a group of five hundred non-Buddhist scholars came for debate followed by a contest of magic they were black magicians, and the inhabitants of Nalanda were fine scholars but not skilled in magic. A defeat could convert them, and therefore they wanted a win. Here Guru Rinpoche appeared as Padmavarja and agreed to help them. During the second part of the contest, there was a host of frightful omens such as violent winds and thunder, and Guru Rinpoche appeared as wrathful Senge Dradok to display subjugation mudra to throw the thunder back at them, and showed his extraordinary actions in taming irrational energies that protected Nalanda and its meditative and contemplative activities. Here wrath is used for destroying the negative energies like jealousy and greed, and appeared here without attachment and clinging, it was a situation of nothing to win or lose. Many of the wrathful deities found in Vajrayāna are neither angry nor emotionally negative., that is, according to Vajrakilaya tantra, "the vajra wrath of bodhicitta cuts through and destroys anger." [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(2011\)](#), and it elevates the status of wrathful Guru Senge Dradrok to symbolize him for love and compassion by transcending jealousy and greed. Guru Senge Dradrok is shown as dark blue and surrounded by flames above the lotus, with fangs and three glaring eyes, crown of skulls and long hair, standing on a demon, holding a flaming vajra in the right hand, left hand in a subjugation mudra. Therefore, meditation in the name of Guru Senge Dradrok lights up one's wisdom by dissolving all negativities.
- 7) Guru Pema Jungne is the seventh manifestation and he is known as "Born from a Lotus." He manifested before his arrival in Tibet, that is, it happened on the borders of Tibet. After arriving in Tibet on foot, Guru Pema Jungne approached the castle where he was given elaborate reception. As a young monarch, the king appeared arrogant and proud, as he was already spoiled by Shantarakshita, he had the expectation that the Guru Padmasambhava must greet him first. Reading the king's mind, the Guru Rinpoche sang a song which had been the first religious song in Tibet, that revealed the power and immortal state of the Guru. Trisrong Deutsen and his whole entourage fell to the ground and began doing prostrations. Later Guru Pema Jungne prepared a design or ground plan for Samye Monastery and had the first religious dance in Tibet, and his song subdued the negative spirits. During the construction of the Samye human beings gave their labour in the daytime and the local deities worked at night, therefore, all the buildings of the monastery were constructed in five years time. The King with the help of Guru Pema Jungne and Khenpo Shantarakshita selected 108 young Tibetans from ages eight to seventeen to learn Sanskrit and other languages to become adept translators for rendering texts into Tibetan. Guru Rinpoche travelled across Tibet and hid many sacred literatures to be revealed to future generations at the appropriate moment. Guru Pema Jungne has been associated with the mediation, and with this tantras, both creation stage and completion stages are interlinked, and they are also

known as the visualization stage and perfection stage. Guru Pema Jungne helps us to get primordial wisdom by removing our ignorance, and as there is no difference between wisdom and the skilful means of its realization, that is, he emerges as the symbol of the union of wisdom and skilful means – the enlightenment can be achieved very quickly with technique. Guru Pema Jungne is seen as the embodiment of all the eight emanations and therefore has been associated with four practices of pacifying, increasing, magnetizing and subjugating. As the most depicted manifestation, Guru Pema Jungne is shown sitting on a lotus, dressed in three robes, under which he wears a blue shirt, pants and Tibetan shoes. He holds a vajra in his right hand and a skull bowl with a small vase in his left hand. A special trident called a khatvanga leans on the left shoulder representing Yeshe Tsogyal, and he wears a Nepalese cloth hat in the shape of a lotus flower. Thus he is represented as he must have appeared in Tibet. [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(2011\)](#).

- 8) Guru Dorje Drolo is considered another wrathful form and it is the eighth emanations of Guru Rinpoche and this crazy wrathful Buddha emanated due to the degenerated era right before Guru Rinpoche departed from Tibet. Guru Padmasambhava showed the eighth emanation of Guru Dorje Drolo to preserve the practice of Dharma in Tibet as well as secure protection across generations by local deities. This form reflects a dialogue and negotiation that Guru Padmasambhava had with the invisible beings. Before he left, he had delivered many prophecies and predictions for the future generations that were considered as accurate and clear, and also they had been observed by generations across the centuries. Just before Guru Rinpoche left Tibet, thirteen caves were renamed Taktsang (lit. “Tigers Nest”) and of thirteen Guru Dorje Drolo, each one was kept in each cave at the same time. Here, the number thirteen is seen, in Tibetan Buddhism, associated with the thirteen habitual obstacles which need to be subdued and pacified. The degeneration era is symbolized as and characterized by desire and anger – both are interrelated and complementary. The emanation of Guru Dorje Drolo is seen as related to the situations in which both of these emotions are so strong and deeper that they have already started disturbing people’s minds and people were upset due to their influence which resulted in more emotional problems. The purpose of emanation of Guru Dorje Drolo must be thus seen as a way to rescue and liberate the sentient beings from both anger and desire or attachment – both are qualities of mind and, thus, need to be disowned. The turbulence in Tibetan society is well predicted by Guru Rinpoche and the future society will be influenced by three demonic forces – Gyal-po (demonic force) may influence men; Sen-mo (demonic force) may influence women; and Ti-mug (evil spirit) may influence all the young people. The demonic forces are well-defined and they are presented as metaphors. While T-mug is understood as an unclear and confused mind that does not have the ability to focus, centre or direct attention, the other demonic forces refer to anger, jealousy and attachment, and the latter can arise even together. Considering the magnitude of the intensity of the degeneration of the society, Guru Rinpoche appeared as Guru Dorje Drolo in the wisdom form with rainbow body and without a solid or concrete object. His body is shown dark red, surrounded by flames, wearing robes and Tibetan shoes, conch earrings, a garland of heads, dancing on a tigress, symbolizing Tashi Kyeden, that is also dancing – to reflect the understanding that everything is in motion, that is, nothing is stand-still or



motionless. Therefore, the eighth emanation is seen as contemporary and its modern relevance is highly felt that our modern life is filled with restlessness, confusion, stress and emotional imbalances, as a solution and respite, we have to recite the Vajra guru Mantra and imagine Guru Dorje Drolo who with his blessings will destroy all the psychological problems.

These eight emanations of Guru Padmasambhava, appeared and received in different forms and shapes, and considered strange and incredible by the conventional minds; and felt as perfect and completely natural by those who have realized equanimity and understood the truths of Madhyamika, Mahamudra or Dzogchen, are associated with special meanings and significance which need to be dissolved and internationalized in our heart as they are the facilitators of meditation as well as the destroyer of all the negative forces through their love and compassion for all the sentient beings for achieving their enlightenment. Further, these manifestations that happened over a period of time continue to guide us in understanding bodhicitta that encompasses the essence of the purposes for which Guru Rinpoche had different emanations, it is one simple state, but through unification, it represents diversified activities for and through loving-kindness and compassion as the qualities of the mind, to give up ego and dissolve it into the expanse of primordial nature, for channelizing energy for its reappearance in wiser, more flexible and skilful forms. Finally, these emanated forms, by identifying and differentiating the negative energies, demonstrating the need of looking beyond mundane ideas and conception; insisting we open up our minds and realize equanimity; warning us not to be fixed in our minds and attitudes; helping to rid of us of habitual clinging to narrow categories of thought and feeling; aiding to realize the infinite nature by having more than one way of seeing things; assisting us realizing that any discriminatory notions and contradictions are mere abstractions held at conceptual level, but everything is free of such limitations in reality, that is, the unbounded openness or the state of great equanimity; and demonstrating that as there possibility of everything to appear and ceaselessly transform, thus no point in clinging to particular forms and dogmas, give us everything for developing love and compassion for all the sentient beings and achieving enlightenment by going beyond all the dualities. [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(2011\)](#).

### 3. ICONOGRAPHY OF GURU PADMASAMBHAVA

The iconography of Guru Padmasambhava is worth mentioning as it is the spiritualist and artistic portrayal of a prominent historical figure worshipped as a powerful deity in Tibetan Buddhism. As a divine guru and the second Buddha, his representation is very careful with fine details that emanate different meanings and significance for his followers and particularly, his iconography is highly and precisely matched with his teachings to establish high divinity through this visual presentation. Portrayed with one face and two hands [Wangpo \(2022\)](#); [Drakpa \(2022\)](#), seated in a lotus posture with legs crossed position, Guru Padmasambhava's iconography reflects different meanings associated with various parts. In total, it is the project of the duality of emotion - both wrathful and smiling [Wangpo \(2022\)](#), that is, it is neither wrathfully smiling nor smilingly wrathful, and rather, a simultaneous expression of wrathful and smiling directing at no one but everyone. The meaning depends on the intention of a person who looks at the icon the divine supreme, Padmasambhava – it appears as a smiling, appealing and approaching figure with care and concern for those who are moral and ethical with good intentions, and otherwise for others who are with ill-will and evil force could

encounter the wrathfulness of Guru Padmasambhava. His eyes are wide open with a piercing gaze [Wangpo \(2022\)](#) that signifies a kind of curiosity and eagerness, and it is live and actively receiving without missing anything. The youthful appearance of an eight-year-old child [Drakpa \(2022\)](#) is an appearance that is more pleasing and everyone will be attracted to the child-faced Guru Padmasambhava. The charming child projection offers that it can be approached with love and affection and in return it gives comfort happiness and inner peace. Choosing the right age for the child is carefully calculated and it is the age that falls between newborn and teenage, that is, it is neither naughty as a child and nor playful as a teenager, as such as a child of eight years it is more curious on its external world for making a meaningful progress with responsibility and concern. The piercing gaze of this face is more symbolic and interpretative as it understands what is in the external world on the one hand and on the other hand has ability to equally see others' internal life or others' sorrowful inner world. In coordination with the wrathfulness and smiling, he appears in the complexion of white with a tinge of red [Drakpa \(2022\)](#), and the combination of white and red symbolizes a sort of non-violence in contemplation and expression. His garment is presented as it is flowing to the breeze of the wind making it live with its momentum towards the external, in other words, it draws a positive energy towards the direction of the wind. As he is born out of a red lotus, the lappets over the ears resemble a lotus leaving a strong continuity between his birth and the emergence of divinity through the positive vibrations, methods and techniques of contemplations and love and compassion towards all the sentient beings. His sitting posture is not an ignorable one, as it shows that he is displaying a royal posture [Drakpa \(2022\)](#), [Wangpo \(2022\)](#), [Patrul \(2022\)](#) by seated with his two feet. His royal look is adorned with wearing a five-petalled lotus hat [Wangpo \(2022\)](#), [Patrul \(2022\)](#) over his head. The three points available there symbolize the three kayas and the five colours appear to symbolize five kayas. However, the sun and moon can be understood as symbolizing the skilful means and wisdom. The vajra on the top symbolizes unshakable samathi. The highest view [Drakpa \(2022\)](#) of realization is represented through the presence of vulture's feather. Similarly, his white vajra undergarment with layers and in a red robe, a dark blue mantrayana tunic, a red monastic shawl decorated with a golden flower pattern, and a maroon cloak of silk brocade [Wangpo \(2022\)](#). More than that there are other garments with different colour prescriptions can also be noted. Guru Pandamasambhava holds a five-pronged vijra at his heart and his left-hand rests in the gesture of equanimity. In his left hand, he holds a skull cup brimming with nectar, containing the vase of longevity that is also filled with the nectar of deathless wisdom and ornamented on top by a wish-fulfilling tree. The iconography also has elements to symbolize the following: the three-pointed Khatvanga [Drakpa \(2022\)](#) trident to symbolize – essence, nature and compassionate energy. Three prongs are three severed heads, dry, fresh and rotten, symbolizing the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya [Wangpo \(2022\)](#), [Patrul \(2022\)](#). The nine yantras are represented through the presence of nine iron rings in the prongs [Drakpa \(2022\)](#), [Patrul \(2022\)](#), the five wisdoms are symbolized through five colour strips of silk [Drakpa \(2022\)](#), the khatvanga decorated with locks of hair from dead and living mamos and dakinis denotes the Maser's subjugation of Eight Great Charnel Grounds [Drakpa \(2022\)](#); [Patrul \(2022\)](#), and finally, he is surrounded by a lattice of five-coloured light, the eight vidhadharas (a group of supernatural beings in Indian religions known for having magical powers), the twenty-five disciples of Tibet, the deities of three roots, and an ocean of oath-bound protectors [Patrul \(2022\)](#). Likewise, the iconography of Padmasambhava invites multiple interpretations as each element in it carries a unique meaning and symbolism. Therefore, his iconography is very meticulous and

it is accurate and incredibly fine detailing. The iconographic representation delineates the status of Padmasambhava as an emanation of Amitabha and his divine exemplar. The Great Perfection of him is achieved through the surmounting eagle feather. [Dharmapala Thangka Centre. \(n.d.\)](#), [Enlightenment Thangka. \(n.d.\)](#), [Attributes of Guru Rinpoche. \(n.d.\)](#), Padmasambhava.

#### 4. ATTRIBUTES AND GURU PADMASAMBHAVA

Some of the attributes are impressive and they are thought-provoking even in the modern age. His attributes of father and mother gain significance as they are considered a powerful conceptualization of Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri – in a broader perspective. In continuation of it, one has to see his genderised notion on the enlightenment. First of all, let's note how he has assigned and perceived two separate entities, though they appear biologically different and unique, but intrinsically they are the same with different meaningful existences. When Guru Padmasambhava said: “My father is the intrinsic awareness, Samantabhadra and my mother is the ultimate sphere of reality, Samantabhadri” – he assigns the knowledge and wisdom to the former and through which human ordeal can be encountered. A life is in need of awareness that must be achieved through knowledge and wisdom. Further, wisdom that comes from external creates internal turbulence to rid of all the obscurities and irrationality. “My mother is the ultimate sphere of reality, Samantabhadri” – is another thought-provoking and insightful statement from Guru Padmasambhava and it relates mother to reality. Associating mother with the reality is a way to elevate her to the level of unobscured, live and what is being encountered in daily life. Understanding the reality and or becoming a reality is not seen as away from knowledge and wisdom, rather, it is an amalgamation of wisdom and awareness. Another translation these two statements will clarify the messages: “My father is wisdom and my mother is voidness.” (Palden Sherab Rinpoche 1992) Here, mother is elevated to the level of undefinedness or unpredictability of the reality which has to be encountered as it comes to us where wisdom and knowledge act as instruments in facing reality. When the mother is seen as reality, it is interpreted that there is an accommodative nature as well as inclusive of all plurality and multiplicity. More than that mother as a reality, it is always being associated with tolerance and reciprocity.

For a casual reading of the statement of Guru Padmasambhava appears as if it has denied the status of the father by confining her to voidness or reality, but to read his another statement on enlightenment for female seeker clarifies the above: “The basis for realizing enlightenment is a human body. Male or female, there is no great difference. But if she develops the mind bent on enlightenment, the woman’s body is better.” (Padmasambhava). Therefore, his statement on mother as reality or voidness must not be restricted to a narrow reading. Further, his statement about himself is noteworthy: “I belong to the caste of non-duality of the sphere of awareness. My name is the Glorious Lotus-Born. I am from the unborn sphere of all phenomena. I consume concepts of duality as my diet. I act in the way of the Buddhas of the three times.” His other translation of this statement reads as:

“My country is the country of Dharma.

I am of no caste and no creed”

Guru Padmasambhava [Palden Sherab Rinpoche \(1992\)](#)

It is necessary to understand that: His admission that he belongs to the non-duality of the sphere of awareness clarifies that between purity and impurity, clarity and obscurity, rationality and irrationality, untouchables and touchables, poor and

rich, downtrodden and dominant, weaker and stronger, oppressed and oppressor, etc., he position breaks the duality to get into the sphere of awareness which dilutes the duality to achieve the equality. Thus, he was born pure and out of enlightenment, that is, on the source of knowledge and wisdom symbolized as lotus which makes him disown any disparity among any people or group. Further, his statement can be read from another translation “I am sustained by perplexity; and I am here to destroy lust, anger and sloth.” He is proudly clarifying that he can withstand any feeling of confusion and anxiety as he is clear about what is his purpose for being born on the lotus and as a Buddha. He admits that he is here to destroy lust, anger and sloth which are supposed to be human evils that cause all sufferings to them. It is as simple as to understand why they pray Guru Padmasambhava as:

“Hūṃ! In the north-west of the land of Oḍḍiyāna / In the heart of a lotus flower, / Endowed with the most marvellous attainments, / You are renowned as the ‘Lotus-born’,

Surrounded by many hosts of ḍākinīs / Following in your footsteps,  
I pray to you: Come, inspire me with your blessing! / guru padma siddhi hūṃ.”

(-“Seven Line Prayer” Lotsawa House)

Guru Padmasambhava’s teachings highlight philosophical and post-modern thoughts that must be read in the modern context, and this reading is a step in this direction. Because we agree with the processes of realization as described by him as: “ripening and deepening, in time, with study and with contemplation.” As Guru Loden Chokse demonstrated one must develop profound knowledge and awareness through study and practice.

## 5. GURU PADMASAMBHAVA AND THE SACRED LANDSCAPE:

This section of the paper is to present the contemporary aspect of the perception of people on their spiritual master or guru in their geographical settings, not merely as one of the tangible heritage sites, but rather as a living person residing in that material object to guide the people in their daily activities. Drawing a few examples from a few places as well as borrowing the notion of pareidolia, this part of the paper argues that due to the magnitude and intensity of the internalization of philosophical teachings of Guru Padmasambhava, people tend to see his images on the natural objects lying around them. by referring to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, we can understand the pareidolia is defined as “tendency to perceive a specific, often meaningful image in a random or ambiguous visual pattern [and] [...] the human ability to see shapes or make pictures out of randomness” (Pamela Ferdinand, M-W:2023) Or for Boffins, “our brains are wired to look for faces in objects, calling the phenomenon pareidolia” (The Sun 20120). Kalsang Wango et al write that “Pareidolia is an interesting concept that gives a wide scope for understanding the complex relationship between culture, society, and landscapes. It is not merely a perception of human images or objects on natural entities, rather it is an establishment of cultural relation or relatedness with the perceived objects through a “tendency to perceive a connection or meaningful pattern between two unrelated things” Robert (2017)” Kalsang et. al. (2023). The projection or in other words, perception can be seen as founded upon the “self-referential over-interpretations of actual sensory perceptions”, according to Robert (2017), the significance of this pareidolia can be understood since it shapes and conditions the

spiritual life of the people by transforming natural things into tangible heritage through the way of perception people have had on their deities as well as on the landscape with the imposition of esoteric values. The sacred landscapes relating to Buddhism can be seen from the following places: from Nepal - Khumbu, Mustang etc; from India - Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarkashi etc.; and from Bhutan - All around, Most famous Taktsang etc. This perception emerges as a prominent phenomenon as it produces dominant signifiers due to their magnificent and gigantic appearance to signify love and compassion, valour and harmony not only based on the philosophical tradition but also on the natural formation of the landscape and its intimacy with the eternal life of the people living there. Here, the signification of the visual signifier is happening in the Himalayas through the process of iconic existence which finds its validity through the comparison between the images of the deities with the landscape through the process of pareidolia which is a universal phenomenon in almost all the communities across the globe encounter, and this process is even very much supported by their philosophical texts. The iconic signifiers of all the landscape connected to the attributes of Guru Padmasambhava and his divinity appeared not just spontaneously but through the constant mediation between the philosophical tradition, personalities, landscape, and the people. However, as a historical person, he has become an icon to be celebrated for his contribution to Buddhism as well as for his contemplation of ultimate truth, and thus the iconic signifier is created through the personification of the concepts associated with the protector who has been perceived and experienced on their reflection on the natural objects or the natural objects appear as the protector in terms of pareidolia. Unlike anthropomorphism and personification, the pareidolia appearances, in all the examples from these places, are constant and permanent, and their permanence is conventional and symbolic which is realized through a mutual agreement among the members of the community who are of the traditional belief system. Interestingly, a lot of artistic and aesthetic elements of the local communities could be seen reflected in these perceptions which are also best-known examples of elegant craft culture associated with different genres of folklore including myths, stories, beliefs, customary practices, materials culture, etc., that together constitute the folklife in a particular environmental setting.

Communication at the interactive level is happening between the people and the self-evolved structures and the encoding of messages is executed passively but passionately by the landscapes that have the ambience that ensures peace, harmony and prosperity for the people, in return, people reciprocate with the impact and also through spiritual activities that maintain and preserve the serenity, peace and quietude of the landscape on the one hand and displaying prosperous life on the other hand. The landscape becomes a portrait or a painting not just because of its visual treat by having gigantic mountains and pastoral lands, but by incorporating the internal and external landscapes both reciprocally qualitative and supplementary to each other. While the internal landscape of the people is symbolized through the presence of peace, harmony and prosperity, the external landscape is contemplated in the portrait by having physical objects that are perpetually available for experience. [Kalsang et. al. \(2023\)](#)

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

With this brief description on the life and legacy of Guru Padmasambhava, this paper has just reflected a few points that are significant for contemporary society, and by highlighting few features associated with his biography, eight manifestations, iconography, attributes and sacred landscape, this paper has



unfolded the insightful contributions that Guru Rinpoche had left for the well-being of the sentient beings across the world. Apart from exploring the spiritual aspects of his contributions, this paper carefully delineated the interconnecting elements that are extraordinary in addressing the ordeals of human beings by giving ultimate solutions that are philosophical as well as practical which contemporary society cannot ignore. The metaphysical ideas associated with all elements found in the iconography of Guru Padmasambhava and their spiritual insights are neatly displayed in this paper. The sacred artistic expressions and spiritual symbolism found expressed in the eight manifestations with the underpinning universal concepts negating duality have been highlighted for driving home the point that love and compassion cannot be ignored by any sentient being having a thirst for overcoming the existential problems created internally by having negative forces. Being a symbol of the continuity of tradition and philosophy, his exhibition of formidable attributes to overcome obstacles and negative forces, as this paper highlights, has emphasized and necessitated the importance of indestructible love and compassion on the one hand and the integration of wisdom and skilful means on the other hand. As it is indicated, Guru Padmasambhava, undoubtedly, through his teaching and practising, stands as a luminous figure and his philosophy guides us through the visual representation of dominant symbols and metaphors that are non-dualistic, deeper in meaning and artistic in appealing.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

None.

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