

**Welcome Note by Dasho Karma Ura at the South
Asian Conference and Celebration on the Birth
Anniversary of Guru Rinpoche, 14-15 June, 2016 in
Paro**

Rinpoches and Swamijis, Lamas and Lyonpos, Padma Shri Geshe Samten, Padmashri Dr Dinesh Singh, Professors, Dashos and Aums, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

With the privilege I have of speaking a word of welcome, I would like to begin by pointing out that the Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP), Delhi is the main sponsor of the conference. CEP is represented by the presence of Dr Dinesh Singh, an esteemed intellectual who was the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University. The main figure from CEP who has been, so to speak, spinning the fast-wheel of this two-day conference has been Dr Arun Kapoor, an inspired and inspiring educationist who is heading the Royal Academy at Pangbesa in Paro. Since we incepted the conference exactly one month ago in Delhi, Arun committed his organization to it. Both CEP and CBS feel deeply fortunate in complementing Guru's birth anniversary celebration with a major conference.

The Centre for Bhutan Studies's simple role has been that of a local guide and facilitator, with myself as the humble chief local guide among the many able local guides of the Centre. On behalf of Arun and the local guides, who are actually researchers, I would like to welcome all of you, from near and far, to the conference. From those who have come from abroad, as local guides we would be very happy to receive any complaints, requests and queries that can make your stay better within our humble means. I mean it very sincerely. All local guides secretly wish for complaints and queries to make them feel more relevant.

This two-days meeting is primarily to meet Guru Rinpoche during his brilliant birth anniversary, when he is said to manifest in our liminal mind. Arun and all the local guides are thoroughly pleased that within the last two weeks after we

first intimated you could decide to be here in Paro. When Guru Rinpoche set foot in the 8th century into Paro valley, it must have been far more placid and serene with waving golden rice fields in the floor of the valley and swaying wheat fields on the slopes of the mountains. Since the 1990s, tourist hotels, cars and aviation have begun to surge in the valley. Travelling and mobility is indeed the biggest maker of change.

But even in this era of global tourism, we may not be able to comprehend fully the audacious extent of Guru Rinpoche's journeys in the 8th century. Guru's terma hagiography in pulsating poetry by Ugyen Lingpa, which I happened to read thoroughly in 2002 during a long stay in hospital bed in Bangkok, traces his journeys in Kashmir, Pakistan, Xinjiang, Tajikistan, Zhangzhung, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet and many parts of India. The hagiography mentions Guru's journey further afield into China, Mongolia and Lanka and Cannibal Lands, though I was unable to make out whether it was physical or metaphysical. True to the scope of the Guru's magnificent footprints, literally and figuratively, all over the region, there are distinguished participants from Swat in Pakistan; Dolkar in central Tibet; Tawang, Odhisha, and Sikkim in India, and Dolpo and Kathmandu in Nepal, and from all parts of Bhutan. It is a landmark gathering in Paro not only for its representational extent, but for the coming together of participants with enormous achievements in their respective life. The chairs of the sessions will later provide a glimpse of the extraordinary and versatile contribution each speaker has made in their respective field. They are had huge gravity in their own fields, and have earned reputations of gurus in their own rights, which means in Sanskrit 'heaviness' that attracts bodies around them.

I would hazard my assessment that Guru Rinpoche was the biggest cultural export and explorer from the classical Indian civilization, with him going across borders of languages, ethnicities, races, politics, geography and climates. A skeptic might ask what was the purpose of Guru's ceaseless and incredible journeys. What invisible things did he take with

him from the White Multitude, the Land of the Exalted Ones, which is how India is addressed out of respect in classical literature? It was called Land of the Exalted Ones, a far serious title than Incredible India or Shining India. The Buddhists coined the title because ancient Indian culture fostered Buddha and Boddhisattvas, philosophers of mind and ethics, physicians and pharmacists, sculptors and architects, poets and playwrights, cosmologists and astrologists. The 7th and 8th century period, the era of Guru, was exceptionally creative, tolerant and exuberant in India. We need only recall the reign of Harsha a who gave patronage to many geniuses in various fields from maths to plays in the first half of the 7th century, besides adding 4000 seats to Nalanda.

Although ancient India in Guru's era was reaching a kind of epoch, Guru travelled outwards not to disseminate arts or architecture, maths or medicine from India. Yet Guru's beneficial activities in the early transmission of sutras and tantras by Guru reflected no doubt Indic worldview. Ugyen Lingpa's hagiography is particular in listing about 250 texts of sutra and tantras translated in Samye by Guru, with help of 108 or so translators he sent for language training in Kashmir, probably under Karkota dynasty then. The wild and high trails between Samye and Kashmir valley must have crackled for a long time with the toing and froing of 108 selected language trainees including a Uighur. Perhaps these great translators and scholars understood both Sanskrit-Prakrit cultures, and choskad culture to be wonderfully interlocutory between the two. Through these and other textual revolutions in the 8th century, which were continued in burst in later transmission period, Guru provided a broad cultural and spiritual orientation in the region that has had lasting influence.

That then was the main effect of Guru's travels throughout the multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi- linguistic worlds he crisscrossed? But what could have been the main purpose? Let me leave aside the experience of deeper phenomenology of Buddha nature, timeless and primordial awareness that lies at the heart of his teachings, which Yeshey Tshogyal and other

disciples perpetuated and disseminated. Let me just interpret, with an eye to the jargons of international relations and an eye to the human, social and psychological dysfunction that afflict us as it did during Buddha's times of mega-urbanization in India, that Guru Rinpoche's journeys were concerned with fostering external and internal peace. The introduction of Buddhism into Tibet brought major peace not only to Tibet but to the neighbouring states including India, China, Nepal and Bhutan. Even in Bhutan's case, Guru first came, before he went to Tibet, as a peace-maker between the King of Bumthang and a neighbouring King of India. This peace deal was concluded by installation of the 'Immortal Stone Pillar of Peace' which stands intact in the tranquil temple of Nabji, where the two warring kings took an oath of peace and friendship between the two nations. How moving that this blessed stone pillar touched and consecrated by Guru Rinpoche and the two kings still stood testimony to peace in this country for the last 1200 year plus.

But all external peace rest on the internal peace within the population. The cultivation of inner peace begins with methods of assailing humdrum stress and awakening our consciousness towards something extraordinary to be grasped but yet possible. It is a modest aim of this conference and celebration to recollect the immeasurable impact on our region. May the conference lead to fostering deepening peace and happiness.

On a personal note, I would like to say that today – Guru-birthday, the double 10th of May in Lunar calendar - happens to be 3rd anniversary of the dissolution of Arun's mother into primordial consciousness. May the merit of our supplication to Guru Rinpoche be dedicated to his late mother.

Thank you for your kind and long attention, to my long welcome note.