

## THE MAHĀSIDDHA LŪIPĀ THE FISH-GUT EATER

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*A wild dog with honey rubbed on its nose  
Madly devours whatever it sees;  
Give the Lama's secret to a worldly fool  
And his mind and the lineage burn out.  
For a responsive man with knowledge of unborn reality  
A mere glimpse of the Lama's vision of pure light-form  
Destroys mental fiction like an elephant berserk  
Rampaging through hostile ranks with a sword  
lashed to its trunk.*

**L**ong ago, in the island kingdom of Śrī Laṅkā, a young prince ascended the throne of his fabulously wealthy father. The court astrologers had calculated that the kingdom must be given to the deceased king's second son if it was to remain strong and its people content. In his palace, where the walls were plated with gold and silver and studded with pearls and precious stones, the young king ruled his two brothers and all the people of Śrī Laṅkā. However, possessing nothing but contempt for wealth and power, his only desire was to escape his situation. When he first attempted to escape, his brothers and courtiers caught him and bound him in golden chains, but finally he succeeded in bribing his guards with gold and silver, and at night, disguised in rags, he escaped with a single attendant. He rewarded his faithful accomplice generously before leaving his island kingdom for Rāmeśvaram, where King Rāma reigned, and there he exchanged his golden throne for a simple deer-skin and his couch of silks and satin for a bed of ashes. Thus he became a yogin.

The king-turned-yogin was handsome and charming, and he had

no difficulty in begging his daily needs. Wandering the length of India, eventually he arrived in Vajrāsana, where the Buddha Śākyamuni had achieved enlightenment, and there he attached himself to hospitable Ḍākinīs, who transmitted to him their feminine insight. From Vajrāsana he travelled to Paṭaliputra, the king's capital on the River Ganges, where he subsisted on the alms he begged and slept in a cremation ground. Begging in the bazaar one market day, he paused at a house of pleasure, and his karma effected this fateful encounter with a courtesan, who was an incarnate, worldly Ḍākinī. Gazing through him at the nature of his mind, the Ḍākinī said, "Your four psychic centers and their energies are quite pure, but there is a pea-sized obscuration of royal pride in your heart." And with that she poured some putrid food into his clay bowl and told him to be on his way. He threw the inedible slop into the gutter, whereupon the Ḍākinī, who had been watching him go, shouted after him angrily, "How can you attain nirvāṇa if you're still concerned about the purity of your food?"

The yogin was mortified. He realized that his critical and judgemental mind was still subtly active; he still perceived some things as intrinsically more desirable than others. He also understood that this propensity was the chief obstacle in his progress to Buddhahood. With this realization he went down to the River Ganges and began a twelve year sādhana to destroy his discursive thought-patterns and his prejudices and preconceptions. His practice was to eat the entrails of the fish that the fishermen disemboweled, to transform the fish-guts into the nectar of pure awareness by insight into the nature of things as emptiness.

The fisherwomen gave him his name, Lūipa, which means Eater of Fish-guts. The practice which gave him his name also brought him power and realization. Lūipa became a renowned Guru, and in the legends of Dārikapa and Deṅgipa there is further mention of him.

### *Sādhana*

It is appropriate that the first of the eighty-four legends should repeat the elements of the story of the first Buddha, Śākyamuni, in a tantric guise. Lūipa is a king who renounces his throne for the sake of enlightenment. Like Śākyamuni he escaped in the night with a single attendant to become a yogin, and Śākyamuni, too, probably

employed a deer-skin (*kṛṣṇasara*) as a mat, a throne, and a shawl. Deer-skins indicate renunciate status; the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara wears one around his torso. But Lūipa was born into the *kalīyuga* when it was no longer possible to practice the fierce discipline and simple practices that Śākyamuni taught. In order to eradicate the subtle defilement that the Ḍākinī indicated and to resolve the dualistic mental constructs that are the root cause of saṃsāra, to attain freedom from saṃsāra in this lifetime a radical short-cut method was required, and in Lūipa's case, as with many of the siddhas, a Ḍākinī was at hand to provide it.

Lūipa was a master of the mother-tantra, and his Gurus were Ḍākinī Gurus, mundane Ḍākinīs, embodiments of the female principle of awareness.<sup>1</sup> The Ḍākinī who indicated his sādhana was a publican and whore-mistress, for liquor shops doubled as brothels. The "royal pride" she discerned in his heart can be rendered more precisely as "racial, caste and social discrimination,"<sup>2</sup> and with her putrid food she pointed at a method which can best be described as the path of dung eating. Cultivate what is most foul and abhorrent, and consciousness is thereby stimulated to the point of transcendence; familiarize yourself with what is most disgusting and eventually it tastes no different from bread and butter. The result of this method is attainment of the awareness of sameness<sup>3</sup> that is at the heart of all pride, all discrimination and prejudice, and transmutes these moral qualities, that are the mental equivalent of fish-guts, into emptiness. To elaborate the Ḍākinī's parting sally: so long as you fail to perceive the inherent reality of emptiness in every sensual stimulus, every state of mind, and every thought, you will remain in dualistic saṃsāra, judging, criticizing and discriminating. To attain the non-duality of nirvāṇa find the awareness of sameness in what is most revolting, and realize the one taste of all,<sup>4</sup> which is pure pleasure.

More light is shed on Lūipa's practice by considering what fish meant in his society. First, fish is the flesh of a sentient being and therefore anathema to the orthodox brahmin; but left-over fish-guts is fit only for dogs, the lowest life-form on the totem pole. Such a practice, if indeed Lūipa performed a literal interpretation, would have made him unclean in the eyes of his former peers, untouchable and unapproachable. Self-abasement and humiliation is the corollary of "dung eating;" destroy every vestige of those associations

with former birth, privilege and wealth, and in an existential pit discover what there is in human being that can inspire real pride, divine pride, that is inherent in all sentient beings. Second, fish is a symbol of spirituality and sense control, and Lūipa's Saṃvara sādhana, which is not described here, involves transformation of his universe into that of a god in his paradise, and attainment of control of his energies (*prāṇa*) and thus of his senses.

### *Historiography*

Our legend is the only source to assert that Lūipa was born in Śrī Laṅkā, to which the text's Siṅghaladvīpa must refer. But there were several kingdoms in the sub-continent called Siṅghaladvīpa, one contiguous to Oḍḍiyāṇa which other sources give as Lūipa's birth-place. In Bu ston's account,<sup>5</sup> Lūipa was son of King Lalitacandra of Oḍḍiyāṇa. When the prince encountered Śavaripa, Saraha's disciple, he was immensely impressed by this siddha and begged him for instruction. He received initiation into the *Saṃvara-tantra*. The initial part of his sādhana was completed when he joined a circle of twenty-four Ḍākas and Ḍākinīs in a rite of offering in a cremation ground which climaxed in consumption of the corpse of a sage. With a final blessing from his Guru he left Oḍḍiyāṇa and began a mendicant sadhu existence. That period ended when, feeling the need for sustained one-pointed meditation practice, he sat down to meditate beside a pile of fish-guts by the banks of the River Ganges in Bengal (Baṅgala), where he remained until he had attained *mahāmudrā-siddhi*. His subsequent encounter with the king and minister who became Dārikapa and Ḍeṅgipa portray Lūipa as an outrageously honest and fearless exploiter of personal power, and also an adept wielder of the apt phrase bearing tantric truth. Consistent with this facility with words, the Sakya school's account of Lūipa's life<sup>6</sup> asserts that he was a scribe (*kayaśṭha*) at the court of the Mahārāja of Bharendra, Dharmapāla. Begging alms at Dharmapāla's palace Śavaripa recognized the scribe Lūipa as a suitable recipient of his Saṃvara lineage; his extraordinary talent was evident in the versified letters he wrote to the king's correspondents, a task requiring acute, one-pointed concentration. Tāranātha's account<sup>7</sup> differs significantly from Bu ston's in that Lūipa was a scribe to the King of Oḍḍiyāṇa, and was initiated into Vajra Vārāhī's maṅḍala.

The most significant piece of information in these legends is that Lūipa worked at the court of the Mahārāja of Bharendra, Dharmapāla. The only king who had the right to call himself Mahārāja of this kingdom was the great Pāla Emperor Dharmapāla, who gained it by right of conquest. Since the Sakya legends have been given the greatest historiographical credence of all the siddhas' legends, it is tempting to accept this crucial identification and place Lūipa as a younger contemporary of Dharmapāla (AD 770–810). If Lūipa was initiated in his youth at the end of the eighth century or the beginning of the ninth, his Guru Śavaripa's lifetime can be calculated, together with the dates of Dārikapa and Deṅgipa, and also Ḍombi Heruka (4) who Lūipa taught.<sup>8</sup> Kilapa (73) may also have been his disciple.<sup>9</sup> But if Lūipa was born in the eighth century he cannot be identified with Mīnapa/Macchendranāth, an identification that has been attempted due to several coincidences:<sup>10</sup> the stem of both their names means "fish;" they are both associated with Śrī Laṅkā and Bengal; they both conceived *yoginī-tantra* lineages (Lūipa—Saṃvara, Mīnapa—Yoginī-kaulā), and they are both known as *adi-guru*. Whereas Mīnapa was the originator of *nāth śaiva* lineages, from which he gained his *adi-guru* status, Lūipa has no Hindu associations, although his sādhana has a *śākta* ethos.

Lūipa's first place in the eighty-four legends could reflect the belief of the narrator, or the translator, that Lūipa was First Guru (*adi-guru*) of the Mahāmudrā-siddhas in either time or status. The other claimant to this title is Saraha.<sup>11</sup> Regarding time, Lūipa was born after Saraha, but although Lūipa's Guru was Saraha's disciple, their lifetimes probably overlapped. Regarding status and personal power, whereas Saraha's reputation lies to a large extent in his literary genius, Lūipa's name evokes a sense of the siddha's tremendous integrity and commitment, the *samaya* that creates the personal power demonstrated in his legends. Both Saraha and Lūipa were originators of *Saṃvara-tantra* lineages, but it was Lūipa who received the title of Guhyapati, Master of Secrets, to add to his status of *adi-guru* in the lineage that practiced the *Saṃvara-tantra* according to the method of Lūipa; he received direct transmission from the Ḍākinī Vajra Vārāhī.<sup>12</sup> If Lūipa obtained his original Saṃvara revelation in Oḍḍiyāṇa, the home of several of the mother-tantras, he would have been one of the siddhas responsible for propagating this tantra in Eastern India. But whatever the tantra's pro-

venance, Lūipa became the great exemplar of what Saraha preached, as confirmed in his own few *dohā* songs, and his sādhana became the inspiration and example for some of the greatest names amongst the mahāsiddhas: Kambala, Ghaṇṭāpa, Indrabhūti, Jālandhara, Kṛṣṇācārya, Tilopa and Nāropa were all initiates into the *Samvara-tantra* according to the method of Lūipa. Marpa Dopa transmitted the tantra to Tibet, where it has remained the principal yidam practice of the Kagyu school until today.

Although the Tibetan translator rendered “Lūipa” as The Fish-gut Eater (Nya lto zhabs), the root of the word is probably Old Bengali *lohita*, a type of fish, and Lūipa is thus synonymous with Mīnapa and Macchendra/Matsyendra. Lūhīpa, Lohīpa, Lūyīpa, Loyīpa, are variants of the name.