Songs of a Wandering Yogi:
mgur as a distinctly Tibetan genre in the verse of Godrakpa

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Abstract

This thesis examines the expression of religious experience through the *mgur*, or songs of spiritual realization, of the Tibetan yogi Godrakpa during the later transmission of Buddhism from India. Through analysis of both form and content, this thesis reveals two ways in which Godrakpa participated in the formation of a distinctly Tibetan genre through which to voice the newly arriving Indian teachings. In the first half of the study detailed examination of the metre, stanza patterns and poetic figures reveals that the form of Godrakpa's *mgur* aligns more with the pre-existing and potent folksong tradition in Tibet than with the tantric songs and poetic conventions from India, thereby rendering the teachings in a familiar and memorable format. The second half of the study focuses on the content of the songs, demonstrating how Godrakpa's flowing verse describes personal and emotional accounts of his spiritual awakening and subsequent spiritual realizations. By utilizing an autobiographical voice, Godrakpa expresses the Indian esoteric teachings through the lived experience of a Tibetan wandering yogi, thereby grounding the teachings in the Tibetan landscape. In both form and content, Godrakpa's songs show a creative method of blending Indian esoteric Buddhism with the powerful and long-standing tradition of Tibetan song and verse to create a truly Tibetan style of transmission.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine l'expression de l'expérience religieuse à travers le *mgur*, ou chansons de réalisation spirituelle, par le yogi tibétain Godrakpa au cours de la deuxième transmission du bouddhisme de l'Inde. Par l'analyse de la forme et du contenu, cette thèse révèle deux manières par lesquelles Godrakpa a participé à la formation d'un genre distinctement tibétain pour exprimer les enseignements indiens nouvellement arrivés. Dans la première moitié de l'étude, un examen du mètre, des modèles de strophe et des figures de style révèle que la forme du *mgur* de Godrakpa s'aligne davantage sur la puissante tradition de la chanson folklorique préexistante au Tibet que sur les chansons tantriques et l'usage poétique de l'Inde, façonnant ainsi les enseignements dans un format familier et mémorable. La deuxième moitié de l'étude fait le point sur le contenu des chansons et démontre comment le vers coulant de Godrakpa décrit les histoires personnelles et émotionnelles de son réveil spirituel ainsi que ses réalisations spirituelles subséquentes. En utilisant la voix autobiographique, Godrakpa exprime les enseignements ésotériques de l'Inde par l'expérience vécue d'un yogi tibétain errant, ancrant ainsi les enseignements dans le paysage tibétain. À la fois dans la forme et le contenu, les chansons de Godrakpa démontrent une méthode créative de mélanger le bouddhisme ésotérique indien avec la puissante tradition de longue date de chansons et vers tibétains pour créer un style de transmission véritablement tibétain.

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Note on Transliteration

Throughout this thesis, both the phonetic rendition and the Tibetan Wylie transliteration is provided the first time a Tibetan term, location or name is referenced. Subsequent uses of Tibetan words are given in the phonetic rendition alone according to the *Tibetan and Himalayan Library (THL) Simplified Phonetic Transcription of Standard Tibetan* system. An exception to this is made for the personal name "Godrakpa"; while the THL system would render it as "Kodrakpa", I will continue to write it as "Godrakpa" as it has been rendered by Cyrus Stearns in his translation of Godrakpa's *Collected Songs*. Similarly, the personal name "Shabkar" will be rendered in the form popularized by Matthieu Ricard in his translation of Shabkar's autobiography rather than as THL phonetic system would render it ("Zhapkar"). Titles of Tibetan texts remain in Wylie transliteration, as do quotations from Godrakpa's songs.

Introduction

Spanning over thirteen centuries, Tibet's rich literary tradition contains a variety of versified works. Literally thousands of examples of poetry and song are found within the corpus of Tibetan literature, such as spiritual verse within Buddhist ritual texts, the autobiographies, biographies, and collected teachings of great Buddhist teachers, collections of songs and poems of wandering yogis, as well as non-religious verse, such as that found in early Tibetan political and administrative records.[1] The extensive use of verse indicates how prominent it was in various genres of early Tibetan literature, yet as a number of scholars have noted, poetry and poetics is one of the least studied aspects of Tibetan culture.[2] This thesis aims to address the almost complete exclusion of the early form of a specific genre of Tibetan verse in current western scholarship: the *gur* (*mgur*), or 'songs of realization', that developed in Tibet during the 'later transmission' (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism from India (approximately 950 – 1250 C.E.). In order to do so, I will examine the spiritual songs of a once-famous yogi-saint that history has all but forgotten: Godrakpa (*ko brag pa)*[3] (1170-1249)[4], the 'hermit of Go cliffs'.

Thesis Objectives

My approach to this study involves two components. First, I will look at the form of the songs within Godrakpa's *Collection,* or *gurbum (mgur 'bum),* to assess how his songs show a myriad of composition styles. In terms of metre, stanza structure and use of poetic figures, Godrakpa's songs show the influence of the long existing tradition of Tibetan folksong, as well as provide small glimpses into the form of what would have been the newly emerging translations of Indian esoteric songs of his period. Second, I will look to the content of

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[1] These records, dating to the 8th and 9th centuries, were recovered in the 20th century excavation of Dunhuang Caves. The Caves, located in present-day China, contain a huge amount of Tibetan writing giving modern scholars insight in the life, politics and culture of early Tibet (Stein, *Tibetan Civilization,* 24; Ellingson, "Maṇḍala," 66).

[2] Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs,* 2; van der Kuijp, "Tibetan Belle-Lettres," 394; Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 369; Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 11.

[3] While the traditional spelling of his name is *Ko brag pa*, in some places it is listed as *Ko rag pa*. This alternate spelling is found on the title page of his *Collected Songs* but is considered incorrect.

[4] *The Blue Annals* lists Godrakpa's life as 1182-1261 (Roerich, *Blue Annals, 91-92*), however, Stearns builds a convincing argument for the dates that he has used and I have quoted, which are also found in the one known biography of Godrakpa. Because Godrakpa's main disciple, Yangönpa, died in 1258, and stories indicate that Godrakpa called for him prior to his death and Yangönpa is recorded as presiding over his funeral, his death must be before 1258, giving credibility to the dates as 1170 – 1249 (Stearns, *Hermit*, 21).

Godrakpa's *gur* in order to address where he derives influence, and on what topics he places emphasis. We will find that although he refers to the influence of the esoteric and didactic tantric yogi songs from India as key to his own songs, in terms of content, he departs from these songs in a number of ways. Most notably, his songs employ simple and straightforward language and lengthy, flowing verse to express his experiences on the Buddhist path, conveying detailed personal and emotional accounts of his spiritual awakening and subsequent realizations. This aligns with the emergence of a literary trend unique to Tibet during his time – the use of an autobiographical mode of narration, which arguably made the Buddhist teachings imported from India more appealing and relevant to their Tibetan audience. Further to this point, although in his songs he identifies as a practitioner of the highest yoga tantras of Buddhism, the directives he offers draw on basic logic and general life experience (such as that related to suffering, the impermanent nature of all phenomena, and the certainty of death) to highlight his Buddhist teachings, again making his teachings more palatable to a wide audience of listeners. Labeled by some scholars as the 'renaissance' of Tibet,[5] the period during which Godrakpa lived saw great growth in Tibetan expression of religion and culture in all literary realms, and my hope in exploring the content of Godrakpa's songs is to show how his compositions reflect the religious and cultural influences in his particular period.

With these two parts combined, this thesis aims to use *gur* to examine the intersection of religious experience and expression in 13th century Tibet. It is curious that a genre that retained such great importance through the centuries would receive so little scholarly attention with regards to its formative years, as it is this period that is said to have witnessed a "great flowering" of a "truly Tibetan" phenomenon of poetry.[6] By analyzing the form and content of Godrakpa's songs, I hope to contribute insight into how Godrakpa participated in the formation of this Tibetan voice by 1) introducing Indian esoteric Buddhism through the medium of Tibetan folksong, thereby cutting across social, cultural and class distinctions, and 2) using an autobiographical style of narration to ground Indian tantric teachings in the Tibetan landscape. In both aspects, we find a blending of Indian Buddhism with the Tibetan tradition of song and verse

[5] This term appears in the scholarship of Ronald Davidson, Matthew Kapstein, and Hildegard Diemberger, though their discussion of the concept varies slightly. See: Diemberger, *When a Woman*, 7 and 103; Davidson, *Renaissance,* 19; Kapstein, *The Tibetans,* 95. Davidson, in particular, writes of this period as an "extraordinary time" for Tibet, in which the resurgence and revival of Tibetan Buddhism, based on the import of Indian Buddhist teachings, facilitated the integration of Tibetan civilization into the larger Asian context (Davidson, *Renaissance,* 1-21).
[6] Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs,* 8-9.

to create a truly Tibetan transmission style for these foreign teachings. In order to understand how this occurred, the remainder of this introduction will present background information pertinent to my study. I will first provide a review of the scholarly literature that has framed my study. Following this, I will give a brief overview of the author's life and the text to be studied, and then provide context for this study by examining the history and formation of the *gur* genre of song. I will conclude the introduction by laying out the general structure of the thesis.

Literature Review

Secondary Literature on Godrakpa

Despite the fact that Godrakpa is touted as having had great fame, it is difficult to find material on him and the information I have gathered is from only a handful of sources: first and foremost, I have relied on the work of Cyrus Stearns, who both translated Godrakpa's *gurbum* into English as well as summarized a short biography about him. The biography was written by Sherab Gönpo (*shes rab mgon po)*[7] at an unspecified place and on an unspecified date,[8] though likely in the mid-13th century, during or soon after Godrakpa's life.[9] Leonard van der Kuijp writes that Sherab Gönpo was a disciple of Godrakpa,[10] while G. Roerich's translation of the *Blue Annals* (*deb ther sngon po*) states that Sherab Gönpo studied within the lineage of Yangönpa (*yan dgon pa rgyal mtshan dpal bsang po,* 1213 – 1258), the principal disciple of Godrakpa.[11] I have also gained information on Godrakpa from the *Blue Annals,* which contains a short sketch of his life, as well as entries in the following encyclopaedias: *The Figures in the History of the Land of Snow (gnags ljongs lo rgyus thog gi grags can mi sna)* and *The Ocean of Treasure of Tibetan Letters (bod yig tshig gter rgya mtsho).*[12] Finally, an article by van der Kuijp provides a short description of his biography and briefly notes the highlights of his life.[13]

Following Stearns' translation of Godrakpa's *gurbum,* I have also found mentions of him in three pieces of recent scholarship. Victoria Sujata includes a translation of one of his songs as

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[7] I would like to thank Cyrus Stearns for generously sharing with me his copy of Godrakpa's biography. Any understanding that I have of this biography, however, is not due to my own translation; rather, Stearns' book is the my first point of reference for both Godrakpa's songs and biography.
[8] Van der Kuijp, "Apropos,"185.
[9] Stearns, *Hermit,* 6.
[10] Van der Kuijp, "Apropos,"185.
[11] Roerich states that Sherab Gön composed life-stories of Kagyu teachers, "as well as several useful books." (Roerich, *Blue Annals,* 695-696).
[12] Thank you to Tashi Tsering for pointing me to these texts.
[13] Van der Kuijp, "Apropos,"185.

an example of parallelism in her discussion of indigenous Tibetan poetic figures in *Tibetan Songs of Realization: Echoes from a 17th Century Scholar and Siddha* to be discussed below.[14] Stefan Larsson mentions him as a yogi who "used colloquial expressions and a minimum of technical vocabulary in his songs" in his book on the 15th century 'madman' Tsangnyön Heruka (*gtsang smyon he ru ka*, 1452-1507).[15] The third mention, in David DiValerio's dissertation about the rhetoric of 'madness' in 15th and 16th century Tibet, is the most extensive. DiValerio refers to Godrakpa and Milarepa (*mi la ras pa,* 1040-1123) as early poet-saints who started the use of 'madness' as a metaphor for enlightenment, which would later become a defining feature of the 'madman' or 'crazy wisdom' phenomenon in Tibet.[16] He states that Godrakpa was an "early Tibetan anchorite and poet" who became famous because of his asceticism and realizations, and who also helped shape the connection between madness and enlightenment through his songs and activities, citing an example from Godrakpa's biography where he ate the brain of a corpse of a leper woman in order to overcome ideas of filth and cleanliness.[17] DiValerio also quotes one of Godrakpa's songs where he, like Mila before him, toys with the idea of madness (*smyon pa)*: "Some people say, 'He's insane – insane!'/ I wonder whether this beggar has gone insane" and concludes that what others judge to be insanity (his severe asceticism) is really an indication of his enlightened mind.[18] DiValerio's states Godrakpa to be "comparable to Milarepa in many ways",[19] and specifically in his use of the theme of madness and in his role in giving enlightened qualities to the term 'mad', yet notes that unlike Mila, Godrakpa is not considered an example of a 'holy madman'.[20]

Secondary Literature on Gur

[14] Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 218.
[15] Larsson, *Crazy,* 39.
[16] DiValerio, "Subversive Sainthood," 226.
[17] DiValerio, "Subversive Sainthood," 636.
[18] DiValerio, "Subversive Sainthood," 637. This song is found in Stearns, *Hermit,* 46-51. Both DiValerio and Stearns translate *smyon pa* in this song as "insane", though a more common translation is "mad". This song incorporates entire verses from Mila's song, making them very similar; to compare the songs in translation see also Chang, *The Hundred Thousand,* 610-611.
[19] DiValerio, "Subversive Sainthood," 637.
[20] DiValerio, "Subversive Sainthood," 640.

As I stated at the outset of this introduction, of all aspects of Tibetan culture, poetry is one of the least studied, understood or documented.[21] Furthermore, most discussion of Tibetan verse refers to that of later poet-saints, who were arguably influenced by the 13th century translation of the *Kāvyādarśa,* and therefore cannot offer with certainty insight into the truly Tibetan elements of the verse. The little Western scholarship that pertains specifically to pre-*kāvya gur* has typically been a part of larger studies glossing *gur* over the centuries and references the songs of Milarepa alone, with little detail of their literary qualities, the form, style, or poetic figures in his songs. This is not to say that scholarship has ignored the importance of Mila's songs in shaping the Tibetan *gur* tradition; in fact nearly all scholarship on *gur* immediately states Mila as the greatest and earliest example of 'religious' *gur*,[22] however, I have not found in-depth examinations of the literary aspects of his songs.

While there is a notable lack of study regarding the prosodic and literary elements of any period of *gur,* a number of recent studies have started to fill this gap. First, the "Translators' Introduction" by Thupten Jinpa and Jaś Elsner in *Songs of Spiritual Experience: Tibetan Buddhist Poems of Insight and Awakening* (2000) gives insight into the metrical standards of both 'conventional Tibetan verse' and the variations that exist in the post-*kāvya gur* genre (which they term *nyamgur (nyams mgur)*),[23] as well as highlights the various ways that the translation of the *Kāvyādarśa* changed the poetic form and style that Milarepa had initiated. This book includes translations of several *gur* dating from the turn of the millennium to the 20th century.

Second, Sujata's book on the *gurbum* of 17th century yogi and poet-saint Kalden Gyatso (*skal ldan rgya mtsho,* 1607-77) systematically explores Kalden Gyatso's songs in terms of both form and content, analyzing the metric patterns, stanza patterns, and both the *kāvya* and indigenous Tibetan poetic figures in his verse, as well as examining the autobiographical and biographical material contained within. Her study approaches his *gurbum* as both a work of literature and a historical document, gleaning new information about the literary stylings of *gur,* as well as specific information about the life and times of Kalden Gyatso. Sujata's study is not only the first of its kind, but also the first study of the verses of Kalden Gyatso.

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[21] Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs*, 2; van der Kuijp, "Tibetan Belle-Lettres," 394; Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 369; Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 11.
[22] For example: Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 14; Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 372; Stein, *Tibetan Civilization,* 260; Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs,* 8; and, Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 84, among others.
[23] Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs,* 13.

Third, Rachel Pang's dissertation builds on Sujata's exploration of Tibetan verse through her detailed examination of the song-poems contained in the autobiography of the 18th century yogi and poet saint Shabkar (*zhabs dkar,* 1781-1851). While her study principally focuses on how Shabkar's autobiography functioned as a piece of literature in his socio-cultural context, she includes an extensive chapter specifically on the *gur* scattered within his autobiography. By addressing both the content and the form of his verse she provides another detailed example of the characteristic features of later *gur*. Both Sujata and Pang refer to the work of Tibetan scholar Döndrup Gyel (*don grub rgyal,* 1953-1985), who composed a study of the key features of *gur* in *History and Features of Gur* (1985). Though this work is not available in English, the passages they have translated[24] lead me to believe that Döndrup Gyel's study, or at least the portions circulating in Western scholarship, is primarily concerned with *gur* written after the translation of the *Kāvyādarśa,* and so though a useful point of reference, is apt to identify features concerned more with the later period than the earlier.[25]

There are also two earlier studies of the *gur* of the 17th century 6th Dalai Lama, who is infamous for his personal and emotional 'lovesongs': the studies of Per K. Sorenson (1990) and L. S. Savitsky (1978). These two studies give insight into the specifics of the style and content of the lovesongs, with attention given to poetic figures of repetition (Savitsky looks at the percentage of songs that contain both anaphora and epiphora), and simile and metaphor (Sorenson examines the content for poetic figures as they pertain to the specific symbolic world of Tibetans). Sorenson's study provides us with a summary of the different types of folksongs found in Tibet in order to link his study of *gur* with pre-existing forms of song, and in doing so, examines song structure stretching back to the dynastic period in Tibet (approximately 7th-9th centuries). Sorenson's book also submits some evidence that the Tibetan yogis were inspired by Indian tantric adepts (Sanskrit: *siddhas*) in the act and content of their compositions, comparing Tibetan *gur* to the *dohā* and *caryā* songs of the *siddhas*. Similarly, in "Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism: the Dohā Tradition in Tibet", John Ardussi provides an early exploration (1977) of some of the ways that the influence of the Indian *siddhas' dohās* can be seen in the content of spiritual songs of the early Tibetan yogis, particularly as it pertains to imbibing specific substances.

[24] See Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 185-246 and Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 75 and 105-107.
[25] Please see my discussion in Chapter One, pages 48-49.

More recently (2011), in her article on the *gur* of the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje (*rang 'byung rdo rje*, 1284-1339), Ruth Gamble uses a term from contemporary literary studies, "pyschogeography," to explore the metaphorical landscape created within his songs. Gamble argues that the content of Rangjung Dorje's *gur* acts as a "catalyst for seeing the enlightened 'view,'"[26] transforming relative truths into enlightened experiences by interrupting the audience's habitual viewing patterns of their environment through the use of metaphor. Gamble also explores Rangjung Dorje's desire for mountainous solitude, indicating that by his time (slightly later than Godrakpa), "the mountain dweller" (*ri khrod pa*), or hermit, had reached a "critical mass" in Tibet,[27] with *gur* being a principle means for a mountain hermit to express personal and spiritual experience.

Secondary Literature on the Influences of Gur: Indian Tantric Verses

Several studies on the verses of the Indian tantric adepts have been accessed in order to better understand points of similarity and departure between the songs of the Indian tantric adepts and the Tibetan yogis. These studies include: *Tantric Treasures,* by Roger Jackson, who translates the collections of *dohās* of three well-known Indian *siddhas,* as well as details common themes among the collections; "Dohā, Vajragīti and Caryā Songs" by David Templeman, which provides several examples of each type of song in English translation; and Per Kværne's *An Anthology of Buddhist Tantric Songs: a Study of the Caryāgīti*.

Wedemeyer's 2013 book *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism* provides insight into both modern and traditional discourses on the origins and historical development of Indian tantric Buddhism. Wedemeyer's discussion of the practises of the Indian *siddhas* informs parts of this thesis, as well as provides a general understanding of the Indian *siddhas* and surrounding scholarship and lore. Ronald Davidson's *Indian Esoteric Buddhism* was consulted as a source of information about the *siddhas,* their lives and their traditions in India. Lara Braitstein's dissertation, "Saraha's Adamantine Songs", provides a nuanced examination of the importance of and influence of the Indian *siddhas* and their tradition of singing in the Tibetan context, as well as provides a translation of Saraha's diamond songs (*vajragīti)*. *Dreaming the Great Brahmin* by Kurtis Schaeffer details how the Indian *siddha* Saraha became a figure of "richness

[26] Gamble, "'Looking Over at the Mountains,'" 1.
[27] Gamble, "'Looking Over at the Mountains,'" 10.

and complexity"[28] in Tibetan religious writing, and provides this thesis with additional examples of Saraha's songs in translation.

Secondary Literature on Tibetan Prosody and Verse in General

In terms of more general scholarship on Tibetan verse, J. Vekerdi's 1952 article "Some Remarks On Tibetan Prosody" attempts to rectify that "few scholars have paid attention to Tibetan versification,"[29] and as such remarks at length on syllable use, stress placement, and metrical construction in Tibetan verse, drawing on earlier scholarship of H. Beckh (1908), A. H. Francke (1929) and W.Y. Evans-Wentz (1948) in his analysis. Stephen Beyer continues this study of Tibetan metrics and also makes several notes on Tibetan figures of speech in his 1992 book *The Classical Tibetan Language*. In doing so, Beyer provides one of the first comprehensive studies on poetic figures and metrics, using many examples, some from Mila's songs, to map the vast array of metrical styles found in Tibetan verse. However, despite being greatly detailed, his study includes examples from various time-periods, thereby limiting an in-depth understanding of early Tibetan poetics. Both Vekerdi and Beyer will be referenced in greater detail in Chapter One.

With regards to Tibetan folksong, there are two often cited studies that touch on the prosodic qualities (in addition to the overview given by Sorenson as noted above): H. Francke, who examines and translates various forms of Ladakhi (Tibetan) poetry and song, noting the use of certain poetic figures and characteristics of various types of these folksongs; and Giuseppe Tucci, who examines and translates several folksongs from Gyantse and Western Tibet (1966). These studies serve as foundational documents for further studies of *gur,* as they outline several features of the form and melody of the influential Tibetan folksong. Further information about the characteristics and prosody of Tibetan folksong was gathered from the 1961 publication of Marion Duncan, *Love Songs and Proverbs of Tibet,* who collected, translated and categorized hundreds of Tibetan folksongs from eastern Tibet between 1921 and 1936. More recently, Tiley Chodag provides a broad overview of the history and development of Tibetan folksong in his 1988 publication, *Tibet: the Land and the People*, giving several examples of Tibetan folksongs from various regions to highlight common themes, expressions and folksong metre. Finally,

[28] Schaeffer, *Dreaming,* 7.
[29] Vekerdi, "Some Remarks," 221.

Wendolyn Craun's MA thesis provides an exceptionally detailed ethnomusicological study of Amdo Tibetan folksongs: "Nomadic Amdo Tibetan Glu Folk Songs within the Settings of Tibetan Culture, History, Theory and Current Usage" (2011). While she focuses on the musical elements and form that define Amdo folksong, her thesis also includes discussion of the history and influences of Amdo Tibetan folksong, as well as the thematic content of the songs and their general social significance. She concludes her study with a transcription of both the music and lyrics of 27 Amdo folksongs, which complement the recordings she made of these songs during her fieldwork.

Important scholarship that contextualizes and categorizes all types of Tibetan verse includes Roger Jackson's 1996 chapter "'Poetry' in Tibet: *Glu, mGur, sNyan ngag* and 'Songs of Experience'" on genres of Tibetan verse: highlighting the influences, development, and features of *lu (glu)*, *gur,* and *nyengak (snyan ngag)*. This was one of the first studies to approach Tibetan poetry strictly for its qualities as literature rather than as historical documentation.[30] Earlier (1979), Terry Jay Ellingson offered an exceptionally detailed study of the history of various genres of Tibetan songs in his dissertation "The Maṇḍala of Sound: Concepts and Structures in Tibetan Ritual Music," investigating various types of songs from the early transmission period in Tibet, elements of Indian Buddhist verse that influenced Tibet, and finally religious and monastic ritual songs from Tibet. R. A. Stein also provides a general overview of the history of different literary forms in Tibet, granting insight into the new poetic form that Mila's songs brought, as well as discussing the roles that such poets may have held in society (1972). Providing historical context for the transmission of Indian literature and literary identity, Matthew Kapstein's "The Indian Literary Identity in Tibet", also grants us greater understanding of the historical milieu in which early *gur* developed. Finally, adding to our understanding of the historical context, Ronald Davidson offers an examination of the various cultural developments specific to this time period in *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture*.

With a focus on more recent poetic compositions, Pema Bhum contributes insight into the history, development and significance of song and poem in the Tibetan literary tradition. Two of Bhum's articles were published in the 2008 book, *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change*. Edited by Lauren Hartley and Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani, this book contains a

[30] A trend that has taken off through the scholarship on *gur* noted above, as well as found in the studies on Tibetan autobiography of Janice Willis (1995) and Janet Gyatso (1998), to be discussed below.

systematic and detailed overview of Tibetan literature of the last 35 years; the introduction also provides a sweeping overview of the tradition of Tibetan poetry and poetics, reaching back to the literature found during the excavations at Dunhuang, as well as discussing the impact of the translation of the *Kāvyādarśa* in the 13th century. With regards to *kāvya* poetics, Leonard van der Kuijp's "Tibetan Belles-Lettres: the Influence of Daṇḍin and Kṣemendra" and John Eppling's "A Calculus of Creative Expression: the Central Chapter of Daṇḍin's Kāvyādarśa" each offer insight into the prosodic elements of *kāvya* that came to be very popular in Tibet during and directly after Godrakpa's life, providing a point of comparison to Godrakpa's very non-*kāvya* influenced *gur*.

Secondary Literature on Tibetan Biography and Autobiography

Outside of scholarship focused on poetry, song and poetics, two sources that this thesis draws heavily from are the studies of Janet Gyatso (1998) and Janis Willis (1995), both of whom explore the Tibetan tradition of biographical and autobiographical life-writing, *namtar* (*rnam thar)*. In her 1995 book *Enlightened Beings,* Willis builds on her article published in 1985, which examined six Gelukpa (*dge lugs pa*) *namtars* for their religious function. Her argument – that through the description of the life of an enlightened master, *namtars* impart "esoteric and exoteric practice descriptions and instructions… providing inspirational models"[31] for other to develop their own spiritual practices – provides a theoretical backing for my discussion of Godrakpa's songs in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. Gyatso's study of the *namtar* of a the 18th century Tibetan 'poet-visionary', Jigme Lingpa (*'jigs med gling pa,* 1729-1798) is unique within scholarship on *namtar* as it explores the concept of subjectivity and Tibetan life-writing in conversation with modern European and American autobiographical theory. Gyatso also outlines the historical significance of autobiography in Tibet, positing several reasons why the use of autobiographical voice became popular around the turn of the millennium. Her arguments are examined more in Chapter Three.

In addition to the dissertation of Pang noted above, the dissertation of Michelle Bessenger has been consulted for the insight it offers into the standard practice of alternating prose and song in the life-writing genre. Bessenger's dissertation focuses on the *namtar* and 'historical legacy' of the 14th century female Tibetan saint, Sonam Peldren (*bsod nams dpal 'dren,* 1328-1372),

[31] Willis, *Enlightened Beings*, 5.

examining the text through both a literary and historical lens. Bessenger notes that throughout the biography most of Sonam Peldren's spiritual teachings are presented in the form of song,[32] with prose being used to set the context or provide more mundane or 'factual' details. Bessenger's study provides substantial discussion on the unique nature of Tibetan life-writing, wherein multiple authors contribute to the book while maintaining the first person voice of the life being written about.

This study also draws on the discussions provided by Donald Lopez and Andrew Quintman in the introductions to Quintman's translation of *The Life of Milarepa*, as well as that of Matthieu Ricard, who translated, along with others, the first part of *The Life of Shabkar*. Each introduction provides general insight into the unique and important role of life-writing, including both song and prose texts, within the realm of Tibetan literature.[33]

The Author

Sönam Gyalsten (*bsod nams rgyal mtshan*), known as Godrakpa, or the 'Hermit of Go Cliffs', is written of as a great yogi from the Tingri (*ding ri)* region of central Tibet who founded the Godrak (*ko drak*) monastery in Upper Nyang (*nyang*) in the Tsang (*gtsang*) province. He is most known for his teachings on the 'Zhama method' of the Path with the Result (*lamdré (lam 'bras*) – the highest teaching of the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism). Developed by Lady Machik Zhama (*ma gcig zha ma,* 1062-1149)[34], this was the preferred method of *lamdré* until the 15th century, when it was eclipsed by the method of Sakya Paṇḍita (*sa skya paṇ ḍi ta*, 1182-1251), a contemporary of Godrakpa.[35] However, Godrakpa's teachings are documented as being transmitted until the middle of the 17th century, indicating the longevity of his influence.[36] Godrakpa was also an instrumental figure in bringing a particular lineage of the Six-branch Yoga

[32] Bessenger, "Echoes," 133.
[33] Andrew Quintman's recently published book, *The Yogin and the Madman,* explores the development of Tibet's (auto)biographical tradition through the life-writing surrounding Milarepa, including the development of song/poem life-writing genres. In doing so, this book presents an analysis of early, rare and previously unstudied sources that provide insight into earlier versions of Mila's songs; unfortunately, it was published too late to be included in this thesis.
[34] Lady Machik Zhama, a Tibetan yoginī, was a disciple within the lineage of Drokmi Lotsawa (*brog mi lo tsā ba*, the first Tibetan teacher of the Path with the Result, as well as a student of the Indian master Padampa Sangyé. She developed the 'female transmission' of the Zhama Path with the Result (Stearns, *Hermit,* 22; Davidson, *Renaissance,* 291-293).
[35] Davidson, *Renaissance*, 292-293; Stearns, *Hermit,* 4.
[36] Stearns, *Hermit,* 22.

of Kālacakra to Tibet,[37] a tantric system that held great interest in the 12th century.[38] His biography states that after bringing the Indian adept Vibhūticandra to Tibet to give this teaching, Godrakpa cured Vibhūticandra of illness, and also gave him transmission on *lamdré*, a rare exchange where a Tibetan gave teachings to an Indian master.[39]

Godrakpa authored several instructional and doctrinal texts on the two systems above, in some cases combining them in tantric practice, as well as writing texts on unknown techniques that were revealed to him in meditation;[40] however few of his texts survive today.[41] In addition to instructional and doctrinal texts, he is said to have composed an "infinite"[42] number of songs that arose as "self-emergent, free compositions,"[43] among which 44 were selected to be edited and published as a *gurbum,* or collection of 'songs of realization' (*gur),* the focus of this thesis. Godrakpa tells us early in the *Collection* of his interest in Buddhism: "from when I was first a small child, I had no thought to do anything but Dharma."[44] As evidence of this, when mentioned in Tibetan history books, the life of Godrakpa is consistently recorded as an example of a great spiritual adept, who spent much time in solitary retreat or wandering in Tibet's vast mountain ranges while practicing rigorous yogic meditation techniques.

The author's life in brief

According to his biography, Godrakpa's birth followed the prophecy of a yoginī who said he would bring great benefit to many beings.[45] It is written that while very young Godrakpa developed certainty that the appearances of daily life were not a true reflection of the ultimate nature of reality, and that at the age of 15, he had a vision of all phenomena as part of a divine maṇḍala. Shortly following this, he studied the Buddhist sutras, learned of the qualities of

[37] Stearns, *Hermit,* 3.
[38] Davidson, *Renaissance*, 282
[39] Stearns, *Hermit,* 12. This exchange is also recorded in *The Blue Annals* (Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 797).
[40] Stearns, *Hermit,* 26.
[41] I would like to thank Tashi Tsering for pointing me to the Catalogue of Rare Books at Drebung Monastery *('bras dgon du bshugs su gsol b'i dpe rnying dkar chag*) in which two surviving texts attributed to Godrakpa are listed*: dmigs 'bum bzhugs so* and *ko brag pa'i gegs sel ha'i gdams pa bzhugs so*. The latter – *Instructions of the Syllable HA for the Removal of Impediments* – possibly being a version of the text that Stearns writes of as Godrakpa's most famous, though he speculated it to have not survived (Stearns, Hermit, 4 and 22). Stearns also notes one text still extant explaining the practice of the Path with the Result (Stearns, Hermit, 25 and 199).
[42] This is written in the homage, presumably by the editor of the 16th century edition of the collected songs, Lhatsun Rinchen Namgyel. See Stearns, *Hermit,* 31.
[43] This was written in the colophon by Lhatsun Rinchen Namgyel. See Stearns, *Hermit,* 175.
[44] Stearns, *Hermit,* 33.
[45] Stearns, *Hermit,* 6.

bodhisattvas, took the initial vows of a Buddhist lay person, and departed for his first mountain retreat.[46] Of these early years in the mountains, Godrakpa said:

> I didn't chase after food and drink, nor experience delight in distracting spectacles. I practiced austerities and devoted myself to virtuous actions… I received little assistance and was afraid of even being noticed by people. Other than thinking that I must practice and apply the meaning to my mindstream, I never imagined that I would have to teach others.[47]

These early retreats are recorded as occurring on Mt. Shrī (*shrī ri)*, the hermitage of Gyamring (*rgyaṃ ring)*, the cave of Milarepa in Labchi (*la phyi*), and the Langkor (*glang bskor*) area.[48]

The meditative realizations of these years further convinced Godrakpa of his practice and after taking full ordination as a Buddhist monk at the age of 28, he spent long periods in retreat, including five years in seclusion on Mt. Tise (*ti se gangs ri*), followed by retreats in Semik (*se mig*), on Mt. Shrī, and at the cave of Godrak, where he is said to have lived for 24 years.[49] Alternating periods of extended retreat with travel and teaching, he gained much respect and many disciples: *The Figures in the History of the Land of Snow* states: "all the best practitioners and scholars became his disciples",[50] and the Gelukpa historian Tukwan Chögyi Nyima (*thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma*) wrote in the 18th century: "there were no learned and realized Tibetans during that time who did not touch his feet, his enlightened activities were very vast. He had many fine disciples and grand-disciples."[51] However, the legacy of Godrakpa is not placed within any of the major sects of Tibetan Buddhism and the entry about him in the *Blue Annals,* a chapter in and of itself, concludes: "I wrote about him separately, because I do not know whether this great man belonged to any particular Lineage."[52]

Living as a renunciate, Godrakpa maintained a life of solitude and travel, and though he was ordained as a monk, he was not closely associated with any of the major monastic institutions. During these years Godrakpa is said to have had visionary meetings with great Indian spiritual adepts such as the Lord of Yogins, Virūpa; the Great Brahmin, Saraha; the female adept Lady Lakṣmīnkarā, as well as several ḍākinīs. All sources indicate that he gave

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[46] Stearns, *Hermit,* 6-7.
[47] The original citation is Shes rab mgon, *Chos*, 3a. I have used the version translated by Stearns: Stearns, *Hermit,* 8.
[48] We find these locations listed both at the outset of several songs, some of which are specifically linked to his early years, as well as in his biography: Stearns, *Hermit,* 8-9.
[49] Stearns, *Hermit,* 10.
[50] *Gangs ljongs lo rgyus thog gi grags can mi sna*, s.v. ko brag pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan, 285.
[51] Translated and quoted by Stearns, *Hermit,* 3.
[52] Roerich, *Blue Annals,* 727.

teachings to a vast number of disciples based on the understandings he received through these visions, from oral transmissions of living masters, and as a result of the visualizations he had during meditation. He is also credited with building and renovating several temples, and turning back the threat of a Mongol invasion, likely in 1240.[53] Godrakpa died in 1249 at the age of 80 at Langkor,[54] with his final words recorded as: "Do everything according to the Dharma. Make meditation practice the main thing. Do whatever you can to benefit the Doctrine and living beings."[55]

The Text

Godrakpa's *gurbum* first appeared in western scholarship in 2004 after being translated from Tibetan into English by Cyrus Stearns. A collection of 44 songs, the *gurbum* is 17 folios in length. Stearns compiled the two extant incomplete versions of the 16th century text into one complete manuscript, published for the first time in nearly 500 years.[56] For my study, I have accessed the *gurbum* in three forms: Stearns' translation; Stearns' reproduction of the 16th century Tibetan text, published alongside his English translations; and a copy of the 16th century Tibetan text.[57]

Entitled *The Collected of Songs of the Adept Godrakpa Who is Peerless in the Three Realms (khams gsum 'dran bral grub thob ko rag pa'I mgur 'bum),* the only two extant copies of the text have been dated to the 16th century, with the editing and publication attributed to Lhatsun Rinchen Namgyel (*lha btsun rin chen rnam rgyal,* 1473-1557) at Tragar Daso (*brag dkar rta so*).[58] Both copies contain many of the distinctive features of Tragar Daso texts: a particular frame for the front title, subsequent folios printed with 7 lines each, the use of *uchen (dbu can)* script with a particular type of outline, specific orthographic peculiarities, to be discussed below, and an illustration of Godrakpa that follows the style and beauty that Tragar Daso is renowned for.[59]

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[53] Roerich, *Blue Annals,* 679. The life-story of *'jam dbyans mgon po*, a disciple of *lo ras,* records Godrakpa as requesting twenty-three *kalyāṇa-mitras* to turn back the Mongol troops.
[54] Stearns, *Hermit,* 13.
[55] Stearns, *Hermit,* 13.
[56] Stearns, *Hermit,* xii.
[57] I wish to thank Cyrus Stearns for generously sharing with me his copy of Godrakpa's *gurbum*.
[58] Stearns translated the colophon, written by Lhatsun Rin Nam: Stearns, *Hermit,* 175.
[59] These five characteristics are noted by Clemente, who completed a study of eight texts from Tragar Daso. Godrakpa's text was not part of his study, but contains these unique features. See Clemente, "Colophons," 126.

A disciple of the infamous 'madman of Tsang' – Tsangnyön Heruka – Lhatsun Rin Nam founded Tragar Daso, once a famous retreat site of Milarepa, as a monastery and printing house to further his teacher's project of making the works of great Kagyu (*bka' brgyud*) masters widely available. According to Michela Clemente, the aim of Tsangnyön Heruka's project was to "provide lay people with a holy life style to emulate, and to glorify the lineage he belonged to."[60] As such, Tsangnyön's school is credited with publishing some of the most famous biographies and collections of song-poems in Tibetan Buddhist history, including those of: Vajradhara (Tib: *rdo rje 'chang* – the divine source of the Kagyu sect); Saraha (perhaps the most famous Indian *siddha)*; Marpa (*mar pa,* 1012-1097, the Tibetan who traveled to India to get esoteric Buddhist teachings); Milarepa and Mila's famous disciples Rechungpa (*ras chung pa,* 1083-1161); and Gampopa (*sgam* po pa, 1079-1159), among others.[61] Although Godrakpa is not classified as part of the Kagyu lineage, it is in Tragar Daso that his *gurbum* as we know it today was compiled and printed via a wood-block carving press for dissemination, placing his songs among some of the most famous Tibetan *gur* compositions.

Unique feature of editing at Tragar Daso

How were works edited and prepared for publication at Tragar Daso? While it is outside the scope of this thesis to fully investigate the editing style employed at Tragar Daso, one particularly relevant feature to note is the characteristic orthographic irregularities that arise in the texts produced there. According to Stearns, while renowned for creating distinctive and beautifully carved texts and images, Tragar Daso is equally notorious for orthographic peculiarities.[62] Thus, one of the difficulties in reading the Tibetan edition of Godrakpa's *gurbum* has been deciphering the meaning of many words, either misspelt or unknown to modern dictionaries. Stearns notes that this is due to the frequent occurrence of local idioms and colloquial spellings in the text, as well as heavy use of archaic terms, none of which were standardized or corrected by Lhatsun Rin Nam. This relatively 'loose' editing style implies that the woodblocks may have been carved as an exact replication of an earlier manuscript, rather than being first modified according to a standardized method. As a result, two observations can be made of Godrakpa's *gurbum*. First, words often are written merely as phonetic rendering of

[60] Clemente, "Colophons," 123.
[61] For a more detailed list see DiValerio, "Subversive Sainthood," 490.
[62] Stearns, *Hermit,* xii.

sounds, in which case a homophone may replace the word intended. Examples include using *rlung* instead of *klung, phyags* instead of *chags, grub* instead of *brub*, etc. The multiple examples of homophone replacements in Godrakpa's songs, the result of the vast abundance of homophones in Tibetan language, often carry the ability to change the meaning of the verse significantly – for example *phyags* means to sweep up or polish, while *chags* denotes having desire or attachment. Even the word 'Tragar' itself, describing Tragar Daso as the location of Song 36, is found in the text as the homophone *brag mkhar* (mansion or fort) rather than the correct location name: *brag dkar*.[63] Second, there is also confusion between letters that may have appeared similar when scribed by hand, such as *s, l,* and *m,* resulting in letters inserted incorrectly into words.[64] While these two problems are not unique to texts from Tragar Daso, it does indicate that Godrakpa's songs were fairly 'un-edited', and most likely carved into the woodblocks in the same form as they were first scribed. However, to state this raises several questions about the original method of recording, compiling and 'storing' the songs, none of which I am able to answer.

Methodological issues pertaining to the study of the text

Undertaking the study of a text that was first compiled approximately 250 years after the death of its author is bound to contain several points of uncertainty. For example, as mentioned above, I have been unable to find any information regarding how or in what form Lhatsun Rin Nam received the original manuscript of the *gurbum,*[65] I have no point of reference to indicate what resemblance the songs published in the 16th century would bear to their 'original' oral composition, and I have been unable to uncover any indication of how the songs were originally recorded or scribed during Godrakpa's life. (Did he write them himself? Was there a scribe present at 'performances'? Did his disciples later write them? What about the songs sung in isolation, did he scribe them at the time they arose, or did someone else do so later if/when they were repeated for a public audience?)[66] Such uncertainties lead to one of the most obvious

[63] Stearns, *Hermit,* 152.
[64] Stearns points to both of these in his overview of publication at Tragar Daso: Stearns, *Hermit,* xii.
[65] Information on this topic may exist in the biography of Lhatsun Rin Nam, which Clemente has noted to be part of the Tucci Tibetan Fund at IsIAO Library in Rome (Clemente, "Colophons," 122). To my knowledge, it has not been translated into English and unfortunately fell outside the scope of my study.
[66] There certainly is evidence that he was literate: the *Ocean of Treasure of Tibetan Letters* states that "when he was little, he learned reading and writing and so on without any difficulty," (*bod yig tshig gter rgya mtsho*, 46), and similarly, *The Historic Figures in the Land of Snow* states: "He learned to read and write effortlessly" (*gnags ljongs*

methodological issues inherent to a study of this kind: there is no actual evidence that these songs, compiled and attributed to Godrakpa approximately 250 years after his death, were actually composed by Godrakpa. Given the similar style used among the songs within the *gurbum*, one might argue that the songs are at least likely to have written by the same person; however, in a tradition where history, events, and even the compositions and 'life-writing'[67] of great masters are passed down orally, we might conclude that it is likely in the 250 years that spanned Godrakpa's death and the publication of his *gurbum*, many other people contributed to the songs.[68] Similar conclusions have been noted of the *gurbum* of Milarepa, which was compiled more than three centuries after his death.[69]

Another problematic issue pertaining to the study of the *gurbum* as a "collection" of songs is that even if history has correctly attributed the songs to Godrakpa, there is no evidence that Godrakpa intended his songs to be compiled in this manner, much less to have these specific songs compiled together. Following the homage preceding the collection of songs, Lhatsun Rin Nam writes: "The songs that emerged from the speech of the one known by the name 'Lord Godrakpa, Master of Yogins' were infinite, and so just an approximate collection will be presented here."[70] While Lhatsun Rin Nam is clear that there were many songs belonging to the repertoire of Godrakpa, he does not indicate if it was he who had selected these specific songs for the *gurbum*, or if they had been previously selected to form a collection by an editor of an earlier manuscript. In either case, there is no indication that Godrakpa established a *gurbum* of these specific songs. Neither of these issues are, of course, unique to the study of Godrakpa's

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lo rgyus thog gi grags can mi sna, 284). However, I have not found information regarding this collection of songs, nor his other texts, that would indicate if he personally scribed his compositions, or if they were recorded by others. In the Tibetan tradition it is common that even when written in the first-person voice, stories surrounding great masters are authored by others (Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 39). With collections of songs, it is generally believed within the tradition that they would have been remembered orally by others exactly as sung in order to capture the 'flavour' of the spontaneously arisen spiritual realization, and later recorded in small manuscripts (Dr. Tenzin Monlam Chok, personal communication, Jan. 2013).

[67] By 'life-writing', I am referring to the collections of highly personal, spiritual songs, such as the *gur* of this collection, to be discussed throughout this entire thesis, as well as to the biographies and autobiographies that surround the lives of great spiritual masters, which fall under the heading of *namtar* in Tibetan and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

[68] Cabezón made a similar argument concerning various 15/16th century Tibetan Buddhist texts. He stated that in the Tibetan literary field, what is written is seldom the work of an individual (in his case, scholar), but rather a collective process in which there is a division of labour, i.e. note-taker, scribe, editor, proof-reader, etc. and in which the initial act of literary composition is usually oral rather than written (Cabezón, "Authorship", 237). On a similar note, one of the key aims of Bessenger's dissertation was to explore the implications of multiple authorship in Tibetan life-writing: Bessenger, "Echoes," 75-110.

[69] Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 81.

[70] Stearns, *Hermit,* 31.

text, and so it is with these caveats in mind that I will embark on the study of Godrakpa's *gurbum* throughout this thesis. Before doing so, however, I will turn to present information about the genre as a whole.

The *gur* Genre

Definitions and Overview of the Term

During the Tibetan dynastic period (7th-9th centuries) when the first transmission of Buddhism (*snga dar*) occurred, *gur* denoted a subcategory of the song genre, *lu*. *Lu* is typically considered the oldest form of song in Tibet, with written examples dating as far back as the 8th century.[71] In general, songs from the early *lu* category were political in nature, and thematically emphasized the power that Tibet had during this period. According to Ellingson, *gur* was one of the two subcategories of the *lu* genre and focused on "positive personal experience" as it pertained to overcoming political obstacles and celebrating victories of oneself or friends, with the other called *chi (mchid),* concerned with provoking or disputing with one's rivals.[72] These political songs reflected activities within the kingdom and among adversaries, and as such, Ellingson states that they were fundamental to communications within the kingdom, lending us insight into the importance that song has held within Tibet.[73]

The second type of *gur* holds a religious connotation, and is the type that I am referring to in this thesis. This *gur* emerged in the post-dynastic period during the later transmission of Buddhism from India to Tibet and denotes songs that also relay 'positive personal experience', but specifically in religious, rather than political, terms. In this context, *gur* translates into English as "songs of spiritual experience", or "songs of realization", and expresses the spiritual experiences and high realizations of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners.[74] Jackson notes that though

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[71] Examples of *lu* were found in the 20th century excavations of the Dunhuang Caves, located in present-day China but occupied by Tibet in the 8th and 9th centuries. The caves revealed many documents including 8-10th century political and administrative manuscripts, many of which were written in verse form (Ellingson, "Maṇḍala," 67-68).
[72] Ellingson, "Maṇḍala," 66.
[73] Ellingson, "Maṇḍala," 69-70.
[74] Jackson refers to *nyamgur* as a subcategory of *gur* that specifically denotes 'songs of spiritual experience' (Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet,"377). Jinpa and Elsner also use the term *nyamgur* for 'experiential songs', but they qualify the term as pertaining to a specific set of rhythms that developed after the 13th century shift in poetic theory in Tibet, a shift that will discussed in the upcoming pages (Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs,* 13). Other scholars write of *gur* as a short form of *nyamgur*, and as denoting 'songs of experience', or 'songs of realization' itself: for example, Sujata, calls Kalden Gyatso's *gur* 'songs of realization' (Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* Chapter 5) and Pang states: "[*gur*] serves as an abbreviation for 'songs of spiritual realization' (*nyams mgur*)" (Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 68). Sorenson also uses the term *gur (mgur ma*) in his discussion of the genre*:* "A large number of adepts and

this category contains the smallest selection of verse from Tibet, it has been composed by the most well-known and well-loved of the Tibetan yogi-saints,[75] such as the famous wandering yogi, Milarepa, and the 'wild' yogi, Drukpa Künlek (*'brug pa kun legs,* 1455-1570). Jinpa and Elsner state that the continuing popularity of 'songs of spiritual experience' is due to both their highly personal content and the form of their presentation – melodies that are less monotonous than standardized monastic poetry, and rhythm that closely resembles folksongs in flow and cadence.[76]

History and Context of Later Transmission gur

As with the earlier transmission (*snga dar) gur*, the *gur* genre that emerged in the later transmission period (*phyi dar*) continued to reflect the preoccupations of Tibetan society, with the shift towards religious experiences indicating the prominent position that Buddhism took in Tibet at this time. The century-long gap between the earlier and later transmissions has traditionally been thought of as a 'dark period' in Tibet – with the 9th century viewed as a time of political confusion and revolt that resulted in the general repression of Buddhist practice, when temples were forced to close, religious books burned, and monks and teachers fled from central Tibet.[77] While more recent scholarship has called into question the extent of this 'dark period' and the repression of Buddhism,[78] it is certain that starting in the middle of the 10th century Buddhism in Tibet experienced rapid change and growth and from the late 10th century onward, Tibetan scholars, translators and pilgrims traveled to India and Nepal, searching for teachers and scriptures that could help to reshape Buddhism in Tibet.[79] As the Tibetan scholars began to return to Tibet and new Indian Buddhist teachers arrived, this period became known as the 'later transmission' of Buddhism, which, as noted earlier, is now referred to by some western scholars as the 'Tibetan renaissance'.[80] Not only did many new forms literature emerge during this period,

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renowned mystics, but also traditional monk-scholars took recourse to express their religious joy and praise, their devotion and their realization and raptures in similar *mgur ma"* (Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 16). Since the term *nyamgur* is not fund within the writing of Godrakpa, I will follow Sorenson, Sujata and Pang in using the term *gur* to denote 'songs of realization'.

[75] Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 383.

[76] Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs*, 14.

[77] For a brief, concise summary of this period, see Thurman, *Essential Tibetan Buddhism*, 20, and for more detailed information, see Davidson, *Renaissance*, 62-72.

[78] Kapstein, *Tibetan Assimilation*, 10-12; Quintman, *Life of Milarepa*, xxi.

[79] Kapstein, *Tibetan Assimilation*, xviii.

[80] Diemberger, *When a Woman,* (7; 103); Davidson, *Renaissance,* 19; Kapstein, *The Tibetans,* 95.

each reflecting the growing interest in Indian Buddhist teachings,[81] but also a number of Indian spiritual adepts visited Tibet with the intent to reintroduce the tantric teachings, bringing with them the wandering yogi culture and the tradition of singing songs of spiritual experience.

Influences of Later Transmission gur: the Indian siddhas and Tibetan folksong

Reflecting the pervasive transmission of Indian Buddhism, the *gur* of this period exemplify the merging of the tantric songs of the Indian spiritual adepts, the *siddhas,* with the tradition of music and song already in existence in Tibetan folk culture. *Siddhas* (short for *mahāsiddha*, 'great perfected') were tantric adepts living in India as early as the 8th century who held great influence in Tibet during the later transmission period. These tantric yogis lived on the fringes of society, engaged in socially unconventional activities, and were known for the tantric songs they composed of their spiritual experiences:[82] the *dohās* – pithy rhyming couplets of Buddhist instruction and spiritual realization, the *caryāgīti* – ritual songs performed at tantric gatherings, and *vajragīti,* the 'diamond songs' – songs of spiritual realization sung during tantric 'feasts' (*gaṇacakra)*. Of the three, the *dohās,* which are said to have been "adaptations from folk songs popular in form… aimed at instructing and pleasing the general audience,"[83] are the songs most often associated with *gur*.[84] While these songs contained spiritual lessons, they were not strictly systematic teachings, but rather spontaneous vocalizations of esoteric, tantric experiences. Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche notes in reference to the songs of Saraha, perhaps the most famous Indian *siddha* and most influential in Tibet:

> The spiritual songs are not systematic and sequential, as they are usually sung when a *mahāsiddha* develops realization and spontaneously expresses that realization through the

[81] Kapstein, "Indian Literary," 769.
[82] Dates regarding the emergence and growth of the *siddhas'* traditions and songs differ slightly, with Davidson stating the Buddhist *siddha* tradition to begin in the 8th century (Davidson, *Indian Esoteric*, 170), Schaeffer dating the tradition of singing *dohās* as in the 7th century (Schaeffer, *Dreaming,* 5), and Jackson approximating the lifetimes of three of the greatest *siddhas* to be around 1000 CE (Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 4). Kvaerne states that the majority of the *siddha* songs that he studies (*caryāgīti*) were likely produced in the 11th century (Kvaerne, *Anthology,* 7).
[83] Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 79.
[84] For example, see Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 42: "In Tibet, the *dohās* inspired the development of the most personal and spiritually profound of poetic forms, the 'song of experience', *nyams mgur*."; Ardussi, "Brewing," 115: "Tibet inherited a wide variety of commentarial and didactic literary forms characteristic of the late Buddhism sprung from the soil of India. Of these, the songs of spiritual realization (*dohā;* Tib. *mgur)* came to be of particular significance…"; Stein, *Tibetan Civilization,* 260: "Milarepa took the pattern for his prosody and the religious subjects of his songs from Tibetan translations of the mystical songs (*dohā)* from the Indian Tantrists." And, Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 92: "These features place them in the continuing tradition of the *caryāgīti* and the *dohā* sung by tantric Indian siddhas and their subsequent development as *mgur* in Tibet."

> bliss of the realization itself. Spiritual songs are more an expression of personal realization than a systematic presentation of the path.[85]

It was the appearance of these spontaneously composed, highly realized tantric songs translated into Tibetan that is said to have inspired Tibetan yogis to express religious experience, meditative realizations, and provide esoteric instructions in new ways.[86]

According to Schaeffer, although there is no concrete evidence that the 11th century Tibetan master Marpa translated any of Saraha's *Treasury of Dohā Verses* into Tibetan, he has been traditionally held responsible for "importing the ethos of Saraha's poetic instructions, an ethos that was to blossom into a truly Tibetan tradition under his disciple Milarepa,"[87] and it is in the songs of Marpa's student, Milarepa, that scholars first note the influence of the *dohās* take hold. The use of folk melodies was an important feature of the *dohās,* allowing the songs, Templeman writes, "to travel into many cultural areas among unlettered people whose most practical way of gaining the message might well have been listening to such songs."[88] Similarly, Milarepa began composing spontaneous songs of spiritual experience and realization set to folksong melodies that would be recognizable and memorable to a spectrum of people. Stein states the most distinguishing feature of Milarepa's songs to be "the fact that he annexed and

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[85] Thrangu Rinpoche, *A Song*, 14.

[86] Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 373; Ardussi, "Brewing," 115-116; Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 15; Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 260; Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 78-79. Though footnote 84 gave several examples of scholarship linking the *gur* tradition specifically to the Indian *dohā,* the *siddhas'* 'diamond songs' (*vajragīti*), are also a source of influence. *Vajragīti* are known for profound, even if somewhat veiled, expressions of spiritual realization (Templeman, "Dohā," 26-28) and several scholars write of the *siddhas' vajragīti* in reference to Tibetan *gur*. Ellingson writes that Marpa produced a "new Tibetan tradition of 'Diamond Songs'… widely known as *mgur*…" (Ellingson, "Maṇḍala," 243-244), indicating that although the *siddha* songs can be separated into two distinct categories of *dohā* and *vajragīti,* the Tibetan genre of *gur* includes both. Likewise, while Sorenson links the tradition of songs that developed in Tibet to the Indian *siddhas' dohā* and *caryā* songs, he also writes that *gur* is a translation of the Sanskrit *vajragīti* (Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 15). To further complicate the matter of determining sources of influence, some scholars have written of the *dohā* as a subcategory of *vajragīti*. For example, Jackson's analysis of the genres of Tibetan poetry states *nyamgur* to be "the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit term *dohā,* a particular form of *vajragīti"* (Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 388). Sujata also writes of the Indian *dohā* as being a form of *vajragīti*, influencing the development of Tibet's *gur* (Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 78). However, other Tibetan-focused scholarship clearly writes of Indian *dohā* and *vajragīti* as influencing separate types of songs in Tibetan literature: Clemente writes of a specific collection of "Adamantine" or "vajra" songs attributed to Mila as separate from his *gur* (Clemente, "Colophons," 137) and Templeman writes that the Tibetan Padma Karpo has a collection of songs distinguished as *vajragīti (rdo rje'i glu) (*Templeman, "Dohā," 29). Overall, this rather confusing system of labeling Tibetan songs and attributing sources of influence requires further questioning – for example, what qualities are present in *rdo rje'i glu* compared to *gur* in Tibetan songs? Why do Tibetan scholars sometimes place the Indian *dohā* as a subcategory of *vajragīti*, or state *vajragīti* as the prime source of influence of *gur?* While such questions are outside the scope of my thesis, a more in-depth study of early *gur* in general and existing systems of labeling Tibetan songs might iron out such details.

[87] Schaeffer, *Dreaming,* 68.

[88] Templeman, "Dohā," 17.

adapted this foreign model to the indigenous songs of his country… with the idea of popularizing Buddhist thought and making it more familiar by putting it into folksongs."[89] While the suggestion of such intentional usage does contradict the traditional belief of these songs as spontaneous exclamations of spiritual realization, Stein does aptly point to how the use of such melodies created a unique avenue for the successful and widespread transmission of the Indian esoteric teachings.

The use of folksong melodies to promulgate the second transmission of Buddhist teachings by these early yogis was possible and functional because it drew on Tibet's long tradition of using folk music, song, and dance as a key mode of communication. This has already been mentioned in our earlier discussion of *lu*, wherein song was used to convey political messages and record dynastic history. The research of scholars such as Tucci and Sorenson furthers our understanding of the vast use of folksong in social, cultural and political contexts, indicating that more than simple aesthetic ornamentation, songs relayed necessary information during an array of community events and festivals.[90] Songs also surrounded the activities of individuals, and often described or conveyed roles within personal relationships and romance, or pertaining to specific types of work: laying manure, sowing or harvesting crops, constructing buildings, doing washing, etc. Given the widespread use of song, it is easy to see why Tibetan yogis would find folksong melodies to be an ideal medium for the transmission of new esoteric teachings. As Davidson writes, in combining the *siddhas'* thematic focus on spiritual realization with existing Tibetan poetic forms and folk tunes, the early Tibetan yogis made their Buddhist teachings as accessible, and attractive, "to the broad populace in Tibet as their predecessors' stanzas had been in India."[91] Furthermore, by using folksong melodies, these Tibetan yogis effectively crossed class and institutional boundaries, thereby facilitating the widespread of these esoteric teachings.

Later Influences of Gur

Godrakpa lived on the cusp of great literary change in Tibet, wherein his contemporary, Sakya Paṇḍita would forever change the form of Tibetan poetics by translating the hugely

[89] Stein, *Tibetan Civilization,* 260
[90] See Tucci, *Folk Songs,* 14-19 and Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 17-22.
[91] Davidson, *Renaissance,* 255.

influential text of Sanskrit poetic theory, Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa*.[92] In his seminal essay on poetic genres of Tibet, Roger Jackson notes that the translation of the *Kāvyādarśa* resulted in a third form of song/poem in Tibet – *nyengak*.[93] Translated literally, *nyengak* means "eloquent speech" or "words of melody"[94] and is applied to a genre of written Tibetan poetry that follows the strict aesthetic theories of the *Kāvyādarśa,* moving far from the rhapsodic, folky cadences of *gur*. *Nyengak* also marked a drastic move away from the highly personal expression of 'spiritual realization' in *gur,* and instead focused on an elite, monastic understanding of Buddhist doctrine. Yet despite the drastic differences in its form and style, the conventions of the *Kāvyādarśa* did seep into the *gur* genre following its translation.[95] Jinpa and Elsner write that following the introduction of such formal poetic forms, "the predominantly oral poetry of the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries was transformed into a fully fledged literary and scholarly tradition."[96]

While *kāvya* poetic theory gained great popularity and influence primarily after the 13th century translation of the *Kāvyādarśa*, examples of *kāvya* poetry had filtered into Tibet as early as the 9th century. However, though it existed in translated works, Jackson writes that in these early years, few Tibetans experimented with *kāvya* and even the songs of Milarepa do not contain examples of this complex Sanskrit theory.[97] For Godrakpa, living during the time of the *Kāvyādarśa's* translation, it is almost certain that he would have been aware of the theory that had been vaguely circulating for several hundred years, particularly since he was a learned monastic; however, there are few, if any, examples of *kāvya* theory in his songs. It is for this reason that if we were to separate the 'religious' *gur* into pre and post-*kāvya* influenced categories, I would place Godrakpa's songs as an example of the earlier form, that which developed stylistically under the guiding principles of Tibetan folksong rather than the Sanskrit poetic theory that would soon enter all aspects of Tibet's literary world. This is not to say that *gur* composed after the translation of the *Kāvyādarśa* are the song equivalents of written *nyengak,* but that the influence of *kāvya* can be seen to varying degrees in the *gur* of later poet-

[92] Daṇḍin, a late 7th century Indian scholar, lived in southern India but wrote in Sanskrit. He was a relatively late contributor to the *kāvya* tradition, but his threefold system of *kāvya* classification was the theory transmitted to Tibet in the 13th century (Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani, "Introduction," xviii-xix).
[93] Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 375.
[94] Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs,* 4.
[95] Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs,* 9-15.
[96] Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs,* 11.
[97] Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 374-375.

saints.[98] It is important to note, therefore, that my study focuses on *early gur* compared to the *gur* that emerged post-*kāvya* translation and unless otherwise stated, when I write of 'Indian' influence, I am referring to the *siddhas'* tantric songs discussed above, crucial in later transmission literature, and not the *kāvya* theory that was later imported from India.

Chapter Structure and Methodological Approach

This thesis seeks to contribute to the scholarly discussion on Tibetan poetics specifically pertaining to early *gur* by examining the pre-*kāvya gur* of the once-famous yogi Godrakpa. In order to do so, I will draw on the approach of Sujata, applying her method of examining the prosodic qualities of later *gur* to my own study of Godrakpa's verse and on that of Pang, who examined Shabkar's 'life-writing' in a great detail on three levels: literary form, context and content. With these two studies framing my own research, I have arranged my thesis in the manner outlined below.

Chapter One will identify the basic poetic form of Godrakpa's verse. I will first explore the use of metre in his songs, identifying the various combinations of metrical patterns that we see to characterize his songs. I will then examine the stanza configurations of his songs, concluding that although his songs are typically metrically 'irregular', the verses hold together in a melodic form due to the stanza configurations, which rely heavily on repetition of words and phrases to create cohesive units. The final section of this chapter will address the poetic figures found in the songs of Godrakpa, drawing from the studies of Sujata, Sorenson, and Savitsky who have all made notable contributions to identifying key indigenous Tibetan poetic figures. This chapter considers two potential sources of influence: Tibetan folksong and Tibetan translations of Indian spiritual songs, concluding that Godrakpa was drawing largely from Tibetan folksong form in the creation of his songs.

Chapters Two and Three deepen our understanding of Godrakpa's *gur* through close examination of the content of his songs. Chapter Two will focus on the decidedly 'spiritual' aspects of Godrakpa's songs, examining both the tradition of singing that he places his songs in,

[98] Examples of which can be found in the studies of Sujata and Pang on the *gur* of the later poet-saints Kalden Gyatso and Shabkar. While both determine that folksong largely influenced the respective collections, close reading reveals the influence of *kāvya* in the collections as well. See Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* Chapter 9, and Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 103-104 and 119-124.

as well as spiritual themes that he focuses on. This chapter will note the emphasis that Godrakpa places on understanding the foundation of Buddhist teachings, such as the suffering inherent to saṃsāra, as well as his straightforward approach in instructing others to initiate meditation practices that will lead them to understand the ultimate nature of reality. We will find that although Godrakpa states the Indian *siddhas* to be a significant source of influence in his life and songs, his songs diverge from the songs of the *siddhas* in a number of ways, exemplifying a truly 'Tibetan' form of expression of esoteric Buddhism, noted in the studies of Kapstein, Jinpa and Elsner, and Jackson as developing in this time period.[99]

One of the most obvious ways that the Tibetan voice emerged through the *gur* genre is that the genre came to encase the inner thoughts, feelings and experiences of Buddhist adepts, as well as to offer teachings through a contextualized narrative of their lives. Thus, the way that Godrakpa employs an autobiographical voice in the majority of his songs will be the focus of Chapter Three. This chapter will draw primarily from the research of Gyatso, who explores the reasons for the emergence of Buddhist autobiographical life-writing in Tibet in this period, and Willis, who explores the nature of Tibetan life-writing. In the songs of Godrakpa, we find highly personalized tales that are meant to both instruct and inspire others on the path. Godrakpa accomplishes these two tasks by tying his own spiritual attainments, influenced by the teachings of Indian tantrists, to the landscape in which he practices. Through the use of metaphor and personal experience, Godrakpa effectively grounds his spiritual awakening in the Tibetan mountains, thereby again contributing to a decidedly Tibetan version of these Indian teachings.

The conclusion will then synthesize the findings of the first three chapters, allowing us to consider various developments of the *gur* genre as exemplified by the writing of this 12th century yogi.

[99] Kapstein, "Indian Literary," 772; Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 372-373; Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs,* 8;

Chapter One

Song and Form:
Metre, Stanza and Figures in Godrakpa's *mgur*

Introduction

Lhatsun Rinchen Namgyel (1473-1557), the publisher of the 16th century Tibetan edition, described Godrakpa's collection as "casual, relaxed, self-emergent, free compositions." He states that in the songs "a single taste dawns in various words, [which are] marvellous, wonderful, and very profound", and for this reason had them printed.[100] The collection, perhaps one of the smallest of *gur* in Tibetan literature, was published by Lhatsun Rin Nam with spelling irregularities and grammatical colloquialisms intact, giving a feeling of a natural and immediate expression of a lived experience. The same has been said of the earlier editions of the songs of Milarepa (1040- 1123), Tibet's most famous poet-saint and yogi, whose songs became more polished and standardized in terms of spelling, grammar, and syntax in the 15th century when edited by Tsangnyön Heruka, the infamous "madman of Tsang" and teacher of Lhatsun Rin Nam. It is these polished and rigorously edited versions of Milarepa's songs that are typically referenced in modern scholarship, limiting the opportunity to explore the unique form that his songs may have taken at the time of composition.[101] For this reason, an in-depth study of the prosodic qualities of Godrakpa's comparatively un-edited songs[102] may lend scholars insight into the various forms of *gur* that existed during this early period. This chapter will therefore assess the structural elements of the collection in an effort to understand the type of composition that interested Godrakpa most, as well as to provide an example of the form of early Tibetan *gur,* a study that is lacking in modern Western scholarship.[103]

Stylistic Conventions: *gur* in the *Later Transmission period*

[100] Stearns, *Hermit*, 175.
[101] Earlier versions of Mila's songs do, however, exist; see Andrew Quintman's recently published book (2013) on the life-writing surrounding Milarepa for earlier versions of Mila's verses. Though outside the scope of this thesis, a study exploring the early versions of the songs of both Mila and Godrakpa may provide more insight into the defining features of early *gur,* as well as deepen our understanding of Mila's influence in Godrakpa's *gur*.
[102] For a more detailed discussion about the editing processes at Lhatsun Rin Nam's Tragar Daso, see Introduction.
[103] Both scholars in the West and those in Tibet note the dearth of literary studies surrounding early Tibetan *gur*. Pang notes that in order to fully understand the indigenous Tibetan form, scholars must undertake in-depth studies of pre-*kāvya gur* (Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 119). Similarly, Döndrup Gyel laments the lack of scholarship on indigenous *gur,* and argues that to create such a study would not be too difficult. See Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 118 for further discussion on Döndrup Gyel's viewpoint.

The stylistic qualities of *gur* in the 11th and 12th centuries marked a distinct departure from the earlier *lu* genre. While *lu* was principally characterized as dactylic in form,[104] with a quick, condensed rhythm composed mostly of six syllables per line, *gur* in the later transmission marked a shift into the use of trochaic metre,[105] as well as the arrival of complex verse lines containing anywhere between 4 and 37 syllables each,[106] both qualities that remained in Tibetan yogi songs for next 900 years. Milarepa became the first and most famous example of this new style of composition, expressing Buddhist teachings and his own meditative experiences, new themes in and of themselves, through an entirely new genre.

Rather than adhering to a strict and consistent poetic metre of early *lu*, Milarepa often composed songs with an unequal number of syllables per line, and aperiodic form, meaning that he did not necessarily form verse into regular stanzas, but rather his stanza developed according to the number of lines it took to express his thought. In the *gur* of Mila, and that which came to follow him in the yogi tradition, we find a looser and more fluid form of verse, one that arguably indicates a more natural form of expression and perhaps a more immediate voicing of spiritual experience. In the following pages, I will explore the prosodic qualities of this type of verse in more detail, first examining the metrical mappings of Godrakpa, then turning to his use of various stanza patterns, and finally exploring the use of poetic figures as devices to create rhythm within his songs. In each section, I will pause to examine various elements that are shared among the style of Godrakpa and that of earlier Indian and Tibetan yogis, earlier Tibetan folksongs, and in some cases, the compositions of his contemporary monastic elites.

Section 1: Metrics

Western Studies of Tibetan Metrics:

[104] A dactyl is a poetic foot comprised of three syllables. In English, a dactyl is defined as giving stress to the first syllable, with the subsequent two syllables being unstressed. This understanding varies in languages that do not distinguish between stressed and unstressed syllables and for that reason Vekerdi warns against applying such labels, arguing that instead of dactyl, scholars should use "trisyllable" (Vekerdi, "Some Remarks," 223).
[105] The trochaic form is made of two syllables, the first one stressed, and the second one unstressed. Beyer, and several others (Vekerdi, Francke, Sorenson, Poucha) note that each word in classical Tibetan has a single primary stress that falls on the first syllable, making it the 'strong' syllable with subsequent syllables of the word labeled 'weak' (Beyer, *Classical*, 408).
[106] Beyer quotes the 18-foot line of verse that begins the biography of Milarepa (Beyer, *Classical,* 412).

In Western prosody, metre, "the measure of sound patterning in verse, occurring when a rhythm is repeated,"[107] functions by creating a pattern of syllables, which are grouped together into measured rhythmic units called poetic feet. The grouping of poetic feet into lines, and then separating lines into stanzas, creates the rhythm of songs and poems. In Western scholarship, metre can be identified according to four different systems: pure accentual metre; pure syllabic metre; quantitative metre; and, accentual-syllabic metre. The first two systems measure metre based only on the placement of stressed/unstressed syllables in the case of pure accentual metre, and only on the number of syllables per line in pure syllabic metre, both of which have been dismissed by Western scholars[108] as inadequate methods of measuring Tibetan verse.[109] Quantitative metre is based on the time it takes to pronounce a syllable, assessing syllables as either 'long' or 'short'. While this is the principal method of measuring metre in Sanskrit, and therefore some forms of early Indian and Tibetan song and poem, it has been convincingly argued by Vekerdi to be irrelevant in the study of classical Tibetan, as no evidence exists that syllables of varying length occurred in Tibetan language, even in the older forms.[110] The fourth system is therefore of most interest to scholars of Tibetan verse.[111] Accentual-syllabic metre relies on the interplay and placement of both stressed/unstressed syllables, as well as number of syllables to create rhythm. Within this type of verse, a poetic foot typically consists of one stressed syllable, followed by one or two unstressed syllables. For a line to have even metre, therefore, it must contain the same number of feet with the same number of syllables and same points of stress as the other lines in the song or poem.

Tibetan Studies of Metrics:

It is unclear if Tibetan authors and scholars would have traditionally differentiated between stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of verse, or thought of syllabic stress as a

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[107] *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, s.v. metre, 872.
[108] Beyer, *Classical,* 408-423; Vekerdi, "Some Remarks," 221-224; Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 112-116.
[109] Though, as we will see shortly, pure syllabic metre has not been dismissed by Tibetan scholars.
[110] See Vekerdi, "Some Remarks," 222: "there is no doubt that the shortness or length of syllables cannot play any part in Tibetan versification… this is sufficiently indicated by Tibetan writing, which has no system of notation for vowels of different length." While Vekerdi forms a convincing argument, during fieldwork, I heard scholars argue that during this period syllable lengths may have varied, and therefore played a role in metrical patterns. Though beyond the scope of this paper, this area may need more study.
[111] See Vekerdi and Beyer. Also see the study of Sujata, who provides an in-depth breakdown of the metre of poet-saint Kalden Gyatso, stating metre to be the "backbone of Tibetan verse." Sujata analyzes his metre according to the syllabic groupings outlined by Beyer, and earlier Vekerdi, with the first syllable of each foot holding a 'strong' position, while the rest are considered 'weak'. See Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* Chapter 7: pages 112- 138.

device for creating rhythm.[112] There seem to be two thoughts on this. On the one hand, Western theorists, such as Vekerdi and Beyer, state that Tibetan words are typically made of two syllables, with the first one naturally carrying stress, and any subsequent syllables naturally being unstressed,[113] and thereby perhaps assume an awareness of stress based on the very construction of the language. On the other hand, Tibetan scholars that I have spoken with indicate that though Tibetan poetics recognize units of syllables grouped together as forming rhythm (i.e. 'feet' in Western terminology), whether stress is laid in one position is not of great concern to the author or reader.[114] This second view seems to coincide with the findings of Wendolyn Craun in her study of Amdo folksong. In her explorations of metre, she groups syllables according to their natural rhythmic unit, but does not differentiate among those that would be stressed, unstressed, or in a neutral position.[115] The metrical mapping style that Craun uses to indicate metrical patterns is the same that I was taught during my fieldwork in Dharamsala, using an 'x' to indicate a syllabic position without differentiating between stress and unstress. For example, in a song of 6 syllables, divided into 3 metrical units, the mapping would be as follows: xx xx xx. In comparison, Beyer would map the same songs as: 10 10 10[116], with 1 standing for stressed, and 0 standing for unstressed syllables.

In his early research put forth in "Some Remarks on Tibetan Prosody," Vekerdi recognizes that both systems exist in the study of classical Tibetan verse, concluding that the observations recorded by Beckh (1908), Francke (1929), and Poucha (1950), who argue that rhythm in Tibetan verse is based on the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, are superior to the conclusions of Evans-Wentz (1948), who regarded the number of syllables as the sole basis of rhythm. Though Vekerdi disagrees with Evans-Wentz, and places his own research in accordance with the first three, he does concede that Evans-Wentz's "retrogressive" view is "supported by eastern tradition."[117] It is therefore with the recognition that the application of

[112] One of the reasons this is unclear is because there is not very much written about prosody within Tibetan literature itself, with Döndrup Gyel's thesis an exception.
[113] See Vekerdi, "Some Remarks," 223; Beyer, *Classical*, 409.
[114] Tashi Tsering, personal communication, Jan. 2013, and Sangye Tandar, personal communication, Jan. 2013.
[115] Craun, "Amdo," 83-86.
[116] Beyer, *Classical*, 409.
[117] Vekerdi, "Some Remarks," 221. On this topic, Sujata quotes Tibetan scholar Döndrup Gyel's description of metrical divisions: "having construed and joined the three syllables at the beginning of the line of verse, having done likewise with the three syllables at the end of the line, and reading the middle two syllables as a pair" (quoted in Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 113). From this it seems that Döndrup Gyel recognized that on each line of verse,

western prosodic terminology may be slightly artificial or contrived, that I have chosen to continue with the system proposed by Vekerdi, and followed in more recent scholarship by Beyer, Sorenson, and others, of marking rhythm based on stressed and unstressed syllables. I choose to do so in order that my study of Godrakpa's songs may be placed into conversation with similar studies of the metre used in later *gur*, such as the 'love-songs' of the 6th Dalai Lama, and the songs of realization of poet-saints Kalden Gyatso and Shabkar.

Tibetan Metre in the Later Transmission period:

Western scholars identify Tibetan words as typically made of two syllables, lending well to a trochaic metrical pattern in which a foot is made of two syllables, with the first stressed and the second unstressed.[118] The trochee became the most common metrical pattern during the later transmission period, with poetic lines typically containing 7 or 9 syllables. This contrasts with the earlier *lu*, such as the political and administrative records found in the Dunhuang Cave excavations, as well as earlier folksongs, where poetic metre was made of 6 syllables, and followed a dactylic pattern of 3 syllables per foot, often using an expletive such as *ni* as 'filler' for the 3rd syllable of the first foot, and a neutral syllable in the 3rd position of the final foot. One of the reasons for this shift in metre was the large number of Indian religious works being translated into Tibetan. Traditionally, an Indian *pāda* would be translated into Tibetan as a 7 or 9 syllable line. The large number of works being translated, and the high regard that Tibetan culture held for Indian Buddhist philosophy, presumably led highly educated Tibetan monastic poets to begin to write in the same style that appeared in translations.[119] As Cabezón and Jackson note, India "served as the 'motherland' of those cultural elements that are seen by later-day

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syllables are placed in small units – similar in construct to Western feet – but he does not mention the role of stressed or unstressed syllables.

[118] Beyer's research found that each word in Tibetan has a single point of stress that falls on the first syllable, with subsequent syllables unstressed. Conjunctions, nominalizers, role particles, bound quantifiers are therefore unstressed, as is the *ni* expletive that was a common mid-verse caesura in the *lu* tradition of songs. Similarly, free quantifiers, numeral and determiners might also be in the unstressed position depending on their function in the verse. He found that the last syllable of every verse, whether normally stressed or unstressed, holds a neutral value in the verse, and therefore, for the sake of metrical symmetry the last syllable is calculated as unstressed (Beyer, *Classical*, 408). This basic breakdown of Tibetan metre has served as a foundational document for subsequent studies of Tibetan poetics, however, there is discrepancy among scholars regarding how to label syllables in Tibetan language. While Beyer uses the terms 'stressed' and 'unstressed', Sorensen refers to the syllables as 'strong'/'accented', or 'weak'/'unaccented' as it is difficult to assess to what extent a syllable may have been 'stressed' (Sorenson, *Divinity*, 13). Sujata follows Vekerdi's rationale and refers to feet as being disyllabic or trisyllabic in order to avoid the use of any of the labels above (Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 118).

[119] Cabezón and Jackson, "Editors' Introduction," 15.

Tibetans as giving unity and stature to their civilization…",[120] resulting in new types of writing based on Indian influence, both in monastic circles and within the growing movements of tantrism and yoga.

However, the transition from the 6-syllable dactylic line to the 7-syllable trochaic metre was not as straightforward as much of the scholarship on this period may suggest. Rather, the verses that appeared in the yogi tradition of Tibet straddled many forms and derived from various influences, both within Tibet and from without. While Milarepa was perhaps the most famous composer of versified works during the later transmission, by the 13th century, Sakya Paṇḍita (1182-1251), a monastic contemporary of Godrakpa, had tapped into growing interest in the complex Indian poetic theory of *kāvya* and facilitated its wide spread with his translation of the *Kāvyādarśa,* which outlined specific and strict rules of versified composition, and came to be the most widespread and highly used poetic text in Tibet.

Undoubtedly, the verses of Sakya Paṇḍita and those of Milarepa and other yogis would have appealed to different crowds, with the first addressing highly educated monastics, and the latter addressing lay communities as well as monastics and other yogis; however, it is useful to note the staggering influence they held in the realms of song and poetics in order to understand the milieu that Godrakpa was composing in. Following the yogi path, it is not surprising that Godrakpa's songs reveal that as with Milarepa, the 'flow' of his verse existed not due to consistent syllable use, strict metre, or uniform stanza patterns as in *kāvya* verse, but rather due to a natural rhythm of a spontaneous compositional style. However unsurprising it is, this point cannot be overstated, as he was composing during an era that saw great change in form for songs and poems, of which he would have undoubtedly been aware.

Metre: Editing and Speculating

As noted in the Introduction, the works published at Tragar Daso in the 15th and 16th centuries are notorious for orthographic peculiarities. As such, the songs of Godrakpa give the sense that they were published very close to their original form, maintaining spelling errors, grammatical inconsistencies, remnants of old language, and general irregularity of verse. These irregularities, and those found in other Tibetan verse, have proven a challenge to Western scholars when trying to categorize verse into specific genres or trying to determine definite metre

[120] Cabezón and Jackson, "Editors' Introduction," 15.

or rhythm. In some cases, particularly in the earlier scholarship looking at Tibetan literature, Western scholars might add syllables to the text where they were assumed to be missing, or might number syllables according to different understandings in order to reach the desired syllable count. Sorenson documents his manipulation of the manuscript containing the 'lovesongs' of the 6th Dalai Lama, describing how he divided stanzas of two 12-syllable lines into four 6-syllable lines to create the 'standard' quatrain, edited words to maintain modern spelling, and, on occasion, added syllable(s) as were "called for to meet the required number of syllables in a verse-line…"[121] All changes that he made are marked in square brackets and noted in the appendix of his book, but it is useful to note that changes were made on the assumption that regularity should have existed within the verse. Duncan also writes of a variable system for counting syllables in order that a verse may be seen as maintaining a specific form: "the genitive sign of 'i' attached to a Tibetan syllable may or may not count as a syllable, and the same is true of the 'u' vowel which may form part of the word…"[122]

While I have not added syllables into the songs of Godrakpa, this system of modifying verses to fall into standard categories has inspired me to make note of songs that *almost* adhere to a specific metre, but may fall outside of the requirements in one or two places. Rather than label them as having 'uneven metre', I have made special categories for their consideration and they will be labeled and discussed in the pages to come.

The Metrics of Godrakpa:

The first metrical feature that stands out to the reader of Godrakpa's songs is the irregular syllable count within his lines of verse. Pema Bhum notes that early *gur* composed within the yogi tradition are riddled with uneven syllable counts, uneven line length, and uneven metre,[123] and this is certainly true of Godrakpa's verse: in the entire collection of 44 songs, there is only one song, Song 20, that contains the same syllable count on each line, and this song happens to be the shortest in the collection, made of two lines in total. The rest are comprised of various syllables, ranging from 4 at the shortest to 14 at the longest, with both extremes found only in Song 33. The majority of the songs contain a mixture of 7 and 8 syllables, though not necessarily

[121] Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized*, 342-343.
[122] Duncan, *Love Songs*, 12.
[123] Bhum, "Heartbeat," 118.

in a repetitive or cyclical order. The following chart summarizes a basic breakdown of metrics within Godrakpa's *gurbum:*

Categories of metre and verse in Godrakpa's *gurbum:*

Songs with even metre	Songs with *almost* even metre:	Songs with uneven metre	Songs with uneven metre repeated cyclically	Songs with uneven metre almost repeated cyclically	Songs with uneven metre and refrain
1 (2.2%)	2 (4.5%)	34 (77.2%)	1 (2.2)%	3 (6.8%)	2 (4.5%)

Songs with even metre: songs with same number of syllables per line
Song with almost even metre: songs with the same number of syllables per line, except for 1-2 lines
Songs with uneven metre: songs with different numbers of syllables per line
Songs with uneven metre repeated cyclically: songs with a different number of syllables per line repeated uniformly in each stanza
Songs with uneven metre, almost repeated cyclically: an uneven metre that is repeated within the song, but may vary at 1-2 points
Songs with uneven metre and refrain: stanzas comprised of uneven metre that are followed by a refrain

As the chart above shows, 77% of the songs of Godrakpa fall into the category of purely uneven metre, in which lines and stanzas are made of various syllable counts. This is similar to the songs of Milarepa, who is known to have composed using a relatively free verse, with syllable counts and stanza patterns arranged according to ease of expression rather than constrictive form. This contrasts sharply with what later came to be known as *gur*, where it was more common to have the same number of syllables repeated in each line. For example, Pang's analysis of the songs of Shabkar show that only 5 of his 665 songs contain uneven metre,[124] and Sujata's analysis of Kalden Gyatso's songs show only 15 of his 253 songs contain uneven metre[125].

Further analysis of Godrakpa's *gur* show that the majority of the songs (61%) contain either *only* 7 and 8 syllables per line, or *mostly* 7 and 8 syllables per line. The following two charts indicate the various syllable combinations found in the songs. In Chart 1, we see the exact

[124] Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 108.
[125] Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 116.

breakdown of syllable range per song of Godrakpa's *gur*, and in Chart 2, we see what syllables *mostly* comprised the collection.[126]

Chart 1: Syllable range in each song-poem

Songs with only 7 and 8 syllables/line	Songs with only 7, 8 and 9 syllables/ line	Range of 7-10 syllables/ line	Range of 6-9 syllables/ line	Range of 6-10	Range of 6-12	12+
5 (11.4%)	8 (18.2%)	10 (22.7%)	9 (20.5%)	1 (2.3%)	9 (20.5%)	2 (4.5%)

Chart 2: Dominant syllable count of each song-poem:

Songs with only or *mostly* 7 and 8 syllables	Songs with only or *mostly* 7, 8, and 9 syllables	Songs with uniform syllabic count	Songs with mix of syllables (from 4-14 per song)
27 (61.4%)	8 (18.2%)	1 (2.3%)	8 (18.2%)

An interesting feature of songs that contain both 7 and 8 syllables, or any variation of odd and even numbered syllables (42 out of the 44 songs), is that they are unable to contain the same pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. For example, a common metre within Godrakpa's lines of 7 syllables is to create 2 feet of 2 syllables (1 stressed, 1 unstressed), followed by 1 foot of 3 syllables (1 stressed, 1 unstressed, and 1 neutral): 2+2+3. This metrical pattern, however, is not possible within lines of 8 syllables, which contain any of the 8-syllable line possibilities that Döndrup Gyel has documented to exist in Tibetan *gur:* 1+2+2+3; 3+2+3; 2+2+3; or, 2+2+2+2.[127]

Examples from each Category of Godrakpa's Songs:

Songs with Even Metre:

[126] To fall within the *mostly* category, songs could have up to 15% of the song lines fall outside of the range, requiring at least 85% of the song lines to fall inside the range. For example, Song 7 was categorized as "mostly 7 and 8 syllables" because 3 of the 25 lines contained 9 syllables (12%), while the majority (88%) were either 7 or 8 syllables. Small variations in otherwise similar song structures were discussed by Sorenson in his study of the 6th Dalai Lama's 'lovesongs': Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized*, 342-343.

[127] Döndrup Gyel documented the use of 33 different metres within his study of *gur*. His studies are summarized and charted in Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 105.

Only one song falls within the category of songs with regular metre: Song 20, in which each line of verse contains 11 syllables, each arranged with 4 di-syllabic feet, followed by one tri-syllabic foot (2+2+2+2+3).[128] The anomaly of this simply arranged song-poem is likely attributed to the fact that the song itself is only 2-lines long:

ig-gi snying-po chug-dang lto-go zan-kyis-bcod
sde-snod rnam-gsum shes-dang lag-len skyed-rdzogs-gnyis[129]

Another possible reason for the unusual uniformity is that Godrakpa attributes this song not to himself, but to "a beautiful woman" who appeared beside his bed, and whose words he repeated in the form of a song.[130] In his biography, this "beautiful woman" is recorded as the Indian adept Lady Lakṣmīṅkarā, which may account for why he would choose to deliver it in a style more closely related to the tradition of translating the words of Indian adepts into Tibetan. Generally, religious works that were translated from the original Indian text take form in Tibetan with odd syllable-numbers in each line, usually or 9, but sometime as many as 11 or 13. This is because each line of the traditional Sanskrit *śloka* (Tibetan: *sho lo ka*) renders most easily into Tibetan as an odd number of syllables.[131]

Songs with almost even metre:

The two songs that fall into the category of having an *almost* even metre each have less than 15% of the lines (1-3 lines) that fall outside of what otherwise would have been a consistent syllabic pattern. Song 25 is made of 8-syllable lines, except for two lines that have 9 syllables and one that has 7. The 8-syllable line structure follows a syllabic pattern identified by Döndrup Gyel, in which the feet are made of the following units: 1+2+2+3, meaning that two stressed syllables start each line. An example of the first stanza indicates the syllabic construction he was using:

phyi gzung-ba'I yul-kyang nam-mkha'-bzhin
nang 'dzin-pa'I sems-dang nam-mkha'-bzhin
don mtha'-dbus med-pa'I steng-shed-na
chos lta-ba'I thag-chod blo-re-bde[132]

[128] This happens to be the only metrical layout that Döndrup Gyel has listed for songs with 11 syllables.
[129] Stearns, *Hermit,* 110.
[130] Stearns, *Hermit*, 111.
[131] Tucci, *Folk Songs,* 15.
[132] Stearns, *Hermit,* 124.

Sujata discusses this pattern of subdivisions –1+2+2+3 – as representing the majority of Kalden Gyatso's songs, and as an indication of his strong affiliation with Amdo folksong traditions, which were commonly composed in this metre.[133] Beyer, referring to this metre as a common example of catalexis (the first foot has a 'stressed' syllable, but no 'unstressed' syllable follows), states it was "a particularly popular metre for *gur* 'mystic song', both periodically and aperiodically,… a four-foot metre with catalexis in the first foot and synalepha in the last" and cites Milarepa as regularly using the same metric pattern.[134]

The second example of songs that contain a nearly uniform syllable count is Song 32, which has 12 lines, all with 7 syllables, except for the first line of 8 syllables. The syllable pattern is divided within each line as 2+2+3 syllables per foot. The final 3-syllable foot is identified by Beyer as synalepha, the tying of two unstressed syllables to one stressed syllable, a common metrical convention used within religious songs, and a standard metre of Milarepa.[135] Also, as noted above, this type of syllabic construction – 7 syllables per line in 2+2+3 form – was typically used to translate the Sanskrit *śloka* into Tibetan and was the most common pattern used within the emerging monastic Tibetan verse. Stein points to Sakya Paṇḍita and his "collection of moral precepts" (*sa skya legs bshad*) in which this was the only metre used.[136] Finally, Samuel marks a similar metrical style in the 56 songs of the *rta rgyugs* episode of the *Gesar Epic*. In this example, a 7-syllable verse is used throughout, but frequently an extra syllable is added to the first line of a section of verse, resulting in 8 syllables to start, with lines of 7 syllables to follow.[137] Here is an example of Godrakpa's use of this metre in the first 4 lines of Song 32, with line 1 showing 8 syllables:

nged da-nang chos-kyi dbyings-nas-'ongs
do-nub chos-kyi dbyings-su-'gro
skyo-rogs bla-ma'I gdams-ngag-yod
stan-du bde-ba chen-po-'dings[138]

While the three songs above are a very small percentage of his collected works, they are important examples of Godrakpa's ability to write in set metrical form, and might be used to argue that he was familiar with compositions of metrical regularity, such as that which would

[133] Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 129-130.
[134] Beyer, *Classical*, 414.
[135] Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 125; Samuel, "Gesar Epic," 362.
[136] Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 268.
[137] Samuel, "Gesar Epic," 362.
[138] Stearns, *Hermit,* 142.

have been composed by monastic elites. Given his high monastic training, we have no reason to doubt that he would have been aware of the poetic forms gaining popularity in educated Buddhist realms, whether based on translation theory or emerging *kāvya* theory.[139] One might question then why he chose to compose songs in the various forms he did. It has been posited by scholars writing of both the early Tibetan yogis and later poet-saints that this tendency towards free-verse was an intentional choice that enabled one, first, to relate to lay communities that might not have understood verse composed with complex poetic theory, and second, to express experiences spontaneously and completely.[140] On this topic, Döndrup Gyel writes, "since *gur* is an eloquent and easily understood [form of] literature, if [one] composes poetic figures that are very tight-lipped and difficult [to comprehend], the composition of *gur* and the ability to do [it] will decline."[141] Still, too much emphasis cannot be given to such a small portion of Godrakpa's songs without first investigating that which makes up the majority of his *gurbum*.

Songs with uneven metre:

Perhaps conveying the immediacy of the mode of composition, 77% of Godrakpa's songs were composed in uneven metre, with the majority of the compositions containing various combinations of 7 and 8 syllable lines. In some cases different syllable counts are arranged in uniformly alternating lines, while in others there is no regularity to their placement. Beyer gives several examples of both types of form found in the Tibetan yogi tradition,[142] noting that in some cases a unique syllable count will be used to bring attention to lines of greater importance or to lines that relay the main theme or topic of the song-poem.[143] Beyer also gives examples from the folksong tradition of the "loosely organized system" of metre in which there is no regularity to

[139]Though this chapter finds that Godrakpa's compositional style is strongly influenced by the pre-existing folksong tradition in Tibet, we do see evidence of his high scholarly and monastic training in the songs; one clear example is the use of the Sanskrit particle *iti* (meaning "the end") at the conclusion of each song, a language used in Tibet at this time primarily by monastic elites. Similarly 41 of the 44 songs start with the Sanskrit homage *namo guru*, with only four songs including an homage in Tibetan (Song 6, 8, 16, 23; Stearns, *Hermit,* 58, 68, 100, 118), again indicating Godrakpa's familiarity of this monastic, elite language.
[140] Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 109-110; Stein, *Tibetan Civilization,* 260; Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs,* 14-15.
[141] This quotation is from Sujata, who translated parts of his thesis on *gur:* Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 187.
[142] A number of Milarepa's songs are also identified as using this simple yet strict system of alternation. His songs show many examples of various aperiodical arrangements, including: regular lines alternating with regular lines, catalexis in the first line followed by several lines of non-catalectic metre, regular lines alternating with lines of varied syllable counts, or stanzas alternating metre with other stanzas. See Beyer, *Classical,* 415-419.
[143] Beyer, *Classical*, 416.

the syllable placement.[144] In Godrakpa's collection, the majority is made of non-recurrent syllable patterns.

It is difficult to provide comprehensive examples of this 'purely' uneven metre from Godrakpa's songs, as they are highly variable; however, I will offer 2 stanzas from Song 34 and 2 stanzas from Song 2, each showing different metrical mappings:

nye-'brel phyugs-rang bzhin-du skyong-skyong-nas
tshong-'dus 'gron-po bzhin-du 'gyes-'gyes-'dra
bdag-gnyen-la chags-zhen ma-skyes-pas
'brel-pa gong-du gcod-pa de-tsug-lags-so (9+9+8+10)

zas-nor khong-khrag bzhin-du sring-sring-nas
snabs-lud bzhin-du 'dor-'dor-'dra
bdag-nor-la chags-zhen ma-skyes-pas
rdzas-tshogs-su btang-ba de-ltar-lags-so (9+7+8+9)[145]

This type of uneven syllable count is recognized equally within songs with even stanza divisions, such as that cited above, and those without, as seen in Song 2:

nga 'di-lta-bu-ru longs-pa-las
rgyud tha-mal-du bsdad-du ma-khom-nas
mi-rtag-pas blo-sna nang-du-bstungs
'khor-ba'I chos-la skyo-ba-skyes
snang-ba rmi-lam sgyu-mar-mthong
brtson-'grus lus-sems-la gzan-par-byung (8+8+8+7+7+8)

rig-pa bzhur-nas bsgoms-lags-pas
khams-'dus-pa nyams-kyi snang-ba-la
ngo-mtshar 'char-lugs ci-yang-byung (7+8+7)[146]

While the highest percentage of his poetic form can be categorized along the same lines as the two examples cited above (77%), with various syllables arranged in various ways, uneven metre is also used in two other ways: there are four songs (Song 5, 7, 13, and 18)[147] that have a cyclically uneven metre, and 2 songs (Song 23 and 44) in which a fixed refrain is tacked onto the end of a stanza of varied patterns. The examples of these other two forms are given below to help us to further understand Godrakpa's skill and ability in utilizing more complex poetic forms.

[144] He uses these examples to show how catalexis or synalepha are found dispersed among various lines (Beyer, *Classical*, 417).
[145] Stearns, *Hermit,* 146.
[146] Stearns, *Hermit,* 38.
[147] There is only one example of strict recurrent syllable patterns (Song 13), with 3 other looser examples (Song 5, 7, and 18).

***Songs with uneven metre repeated cyclically*:**

Songs with uneven metre repeated cyclically contain an array of syllable counts per line, but in a repetitive pattern. In the case shown below (Song 13), the same metric pattern is repeated throughout the entire song of 10 stanzas, each with four lines, and each line containing 6, 6, 12, and 10 syllables respectively:

bka'-rgyud rtsod-pa med-par
phyogs-med yongs-su grags-nas
kun-gyi spyi-bor khur-ba'I rgyud-pa 'di-nyams re-dga'
grub-thob rgyun-chad med-pa 'di-dang re-spro

mtshan-nyid kun-dang 'thun-par
don-gnyis phun-sum tshogs-nas
yid-bzhin nor-bu lta-bu'I bla-ma 'di-nyams re-dga'
dgos-'dod thams-chad 'byung-ba 'di-dang re-spro [148]

This type of simple metrical alternation is referred to by Beyer as being common in folksongs, and he gives examples of Milarepa using similar alternation styles.[149] Tucci also discusses this form as a common example of the 6-syllable lines found in the folk tradition, which are known to develop into 8, 10, or 12 syllables when the lines lengthen.[150] Tucci, and many others, found that in this era, lines of odd numbers of syllables were almost solely used for religious themes, while lines with even numbers of syllables were used for popular music.[151] Godrakpa's use of only even numbered syllables, and the repetitive system he presents the song in, may therefore been seen to mark strong similarities with the folk tradition, despite the fact that thematically, the content reveals the influence of the Indian *siddhas,* the translation of the Indian *dohās,* and the compositions of Milarepa.

Songs 5, 7, and 18 also reveal varied syllable counts used in repetition, however they each contain a small number of lines that fall outside the expected pattern. A main difference

[148] Stearns, *Hermit,* 90.
[149] Beyer, *Classical*, 415.
[150] Tucci, *Folk Song,* 16.
[151] Tucci, *Folk Song,* 15. On the form and composition of 'folksong' lines, specifically in the *la shay* category of *lu,* Tucci writes, "as to the verses themselves, there is very little to be said; but this much must be noted, that, as a rule, they differ from the verses used in the religious compositions, as regards the number of syllables." He goes on to state that with very few exceptions, the syllables forming religious songs are odd in number, while those in popular song are even. Sujata supports this with her own study, as well as cites the study of Kvaerne who studied the translation of 47 *dohās* into Tibetan and found that nearly all of them were adapted to have an odd number of syllables per line. See Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 136.

between Song 13 and the latter three is that each of these three songs combines odd and even numbered syllables. Mixing odd and even numbered syllables is also found more commonly in folksongs than religious songs, though Milarepa did this as well.

Songs with Uneven metre and refrain:

In the case of the cyclical pattern appearing as a refrain, both Song 23 and Song 44 alternate stanzas of non-patterned syllable counts with stanzas of uniform syllable patterns, which act as a refrain. In song 23, the refrain is three lines with 7-7-8 syllables respectively, again showing Godrakpa's characteristic mix of odd and even numbered syllables. Song 44 has a refrain of 2 lines, provided below with the refrain in bold:

blta-ba snang-srid-kyi gzhi-bzhengs 'di-la
blta-ba log-gis dogs-pa'I du-kha bgyis-pas
sgom-pa thams-cad 'ching-bar gda'-bas

skal-ldan-kun sems-sgom-pas ma-'ching yan-par thong-la
don-yan-pa'I steng-nas gzigs-mo-mdzod

bsgom-pa mtshan-ma rang-grol-'di
bsgom-gol-gyis dogs-pa'I du-kha dgyis-pas
sgom-pa thams-cad 'ching-bar gda'-bas

skal-ldan-kun sems-sgom-pas ma-'ching yan-par thong-la
don-yan-pa'I steng-nas gzigs-mo-mdzod [152]

The recurring refrain is also found in *siddha* songs, and Schaeffer provides an example from one of Saraha's 'Diamond Songs' in which he ties a short repetitive refrain onto the end of each stanza.[153] The English translation shows how recurring lines create uniformity between stanzas:

Intertwined are the natures of emptiness and compassion
Indivisible, unceasing, emptiness exists.
I see the empty ḍākinī,

[152] Stearns, *Hermit,* 170.
[153] Diamond songs arrived in Tibet during the same period as the *dohās,* and, as discussed in the Introduction, hold the same level of influence within Tibetan literature but are different from the *dohās* in a number of ways. Schaeffer writes that they can be shorter than the *dohā*; they create the feeling of an emotional song, where teachings lie within the "evocation of a certain feeling" rather than explanation of a certain doctrine; and finally, they are said to "strive for a poetic beauty far exceeding that of the more prosaic *dohā* materials" (Schaeffer, *Dreaming*, 81). Braitstein furthers this description in her dissertation on Saraha's adamantine, or diamond, songs, stating that rather than simply evoking a feeling within the listener, the language used is capable of actually having a transformative effect on practitioners hearing the songs, constituting an initiation of sorts into Buddhist practices (Braitstein, "Saraha's Adamantine Songs," 136-137).

Milking, milking, and drinking the sky.

She churns the sky in sky unseen,
Upon the earth, bound by saṃsāra she does not dwell.
I see the empty ḍākinī,
Milking, milking, and drinking the sky.[154]

Something similar to this is also found in the *gur* of the Kagyu lineage attributed to three anonymous disciples of Gampopa (1079-1151), who were composing slightly earlier than Godrakpa. In an example given by Beyer, a uniform 5-line chorus is alternated with 3-line stanzas of varied metical counts.[155] The similarity in style may indicate it to have been a form with which the Buddhist poet-saints were experimenting. With these methods of repetition and refrain, we again see the influence of the folk traditions, as well as that of the songs of the Indian *siddhas*.

Section 2: Stanza

As the preceding exploration of syllable use shows, Godrakpa's metre varied not only among his songs, but also within them. For this reason, I propose that other methods were used to create form and rhythm within his songs, such as stanza patterns, to be discussed here, and poetic figures, to be discussed in section three of this chapter.

In his studies of *gur*, Döndrup Gyel makes frequent reference to stanzas (*sho lo ka*), indicating that a notion of this poetic device would have existed within Tibetan literature.[156] However, stanza divisions are not immediately apparent within the written form of Tibetan verse, as Tibetan writing does not separate lines of verse on the page, but rather one follows after the other, with a grammatical marking for the end of line, but not necessarily the end of a stanza. In discussing stanza, Chodag writes that for Tibetan ballads, which he likens to Milarepa's "poetical songs" and other "Buddhist ritual songs", the end of every stanza would be marked by a regular vocal style with a regular rhythmic beat.[157] This definitive marker indicating the end of

[154] Schaeffer, *Dreaming,* 83.
[155] Beyer, *Classical,* 419. In the example we find in Beyer's book, the *gur* he quotes alternates a repetitive chorus with *aperiodical* stanzas that replicate each other in syllable counts.
[156] Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 139. However, as Döndrup Gyel was using the Tibetanized Sanskrit word for 'stanza', it is unclear to me what these divisions would have been labeled prior to the introduction of Sanskrit poetic theory.
[157] Chodag, *Tibet: The Land,* 289-290. Chodag writes that the ballad form of Tibetan folksong is the earliest form, recorded as early as the 8th century, and that Mila's songs and other Buddhist ritual songs like his are "very ballad-

a stanza would have been useful for those who heard the songs, but for those who read the songs on paper, stanzas are determined only according to a subjective interpretation of how the content should be grouped together.[158]

Similar to metre, stanza divisions give shape and rhythm to versified writing by creating a natural grouping for lyrics or lines based on theme or content, allowing one to pause for effect or timing when reciting, singing, or reading. With most of Godrakpa's songs, I have followed the stanza divisions provided by Cyrus Stearns in his translation of the songs; however, in a small number of songs, I found reason to separate the lines in slightly different ways. The references I make below to the stanza divisions of Godrakpa's songs are based on my own interpretation, rather than those of Stearns.

Stanza in the later transmission period:

The quatrain, stanzas of four lines, has received the most attention within Western scholarship on Tibetan verse. "It is common knowledge," Sorenson writes, "that in almost all treatises and works translated into canonical Tibetan from Sanskrit and Chinese, the four-lined (*tshig rkaṅ bźi*), iso-syllabic stanza or strophe (the Tibetan *śloka)* became the fixed norm in versification."[159] Although Godrakpa did not translate Sanskrit or Chinese into Tibetan, given his educational background and monastic training, it is extremely likely that he was familiar with common methods of translation and aware that most of the Buddhist verse of his time was translated according to 4-line stanzas, a style that was mimicked by verses composed in Tibetan monastic institutions. It is perhaps because of this influence that the majority of Godrakpa's songs fall into a 4-line stanza division. The chart below outlines the various stanza divisions found in his *gurbum:*

Songs with even stanza lengths	Songs with alternating stanzas of even length	Songs with uneven stanzas	Songs with no stanza divisions
28	4	8	4

like in structure", characterized by their relatively free form, with three to ten lines per stanza, and a fixed number of syllables per line, ranging form six to eleven (Chodag, *Tibet: The Land*, 288-290).

[158] Dr. Chok, personal communication, January 2013.

[159] Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized*, 13. See also, Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 268; Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 139.

Within songs that have stanzas of patterned length, the breakdown is as follows:

2 lines	3 lines	4 lines	Stanzas of alternating lines
7	9	12	4 (2/3; 5/3; 2/4)

From the charts above, it is evident that Godrakpa had an inclination to use strict stanza patterns in the composition of his songs, and was further inclined to compose in 4-lined stanzas more often than in others. As noted above, the 4-line stanza is common in works translated from Indian texts; however, it is also extremely common in the Tibetan folk tradition,[160] and later emerged as the dominant form of composition within Tibetan religious writing as the tradition developed past the 13th century.[161]

Four-line stanza:

One of the key features of Godrakpa's songs of 4-lines is the tendency he had for repetition among lines and from stanza to stanza. While repetition is a device that can be found throughout his entire collection, it is particularly apparent among his songs of 4-lined stanzas, with each of these 12 songs showing some degree of repetition, and with the repetition reinforcing the 4-line stanza as cohesive units. Again, I will use song 25 as an example of the type of repetition that Godrakpa uses, with bold type indicating the repeated areas, this time also providing the English translation to further exemplify the repetition:

> ***phyi gzung ba'I yul*** *kyang nam mkha'* ***bzhin***
> ***nang 'dzin pa'I sems dang*** *nam mkha'* ***bzhin***
> *don mtha' dbus med pa'I* ***steng shed na***
> ***chos*** *lta ba'I* ***thag chod blo re bde***
>
> ***phyi gzung ba'I yul*** *dang nyi zla* ***bzhin***
> ***nang 'dzin pa'I sems dang*** *nyi zla* ***bzhin***
> *don gsal 'grib med pa'I* ***steng shed na***
> ***chos*** *sgom pa'I* ***thag chod blo re bde***
>
> **External apprehended objects like** the sky.
> **Internal apprehending mind also like** the sky.
> **In a state of** truth without limit or centre,

[160] Sujata links this 4-line stanza pattern to earlier Tibetan 'popular' folksongs including the *la zhé (la gzhas)* (Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 145-146). Sorenson also discusses this type of stanza division as characteristic of the various folksongs he analysed; see Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 18.
[161] For more on this, see Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 146.

I'm so content in the resolution of the view of Dharma

External apprehended objects like the sun and moon.
Internal apprehending objects also like the sun and moon.
In a state of radiant and unobscured truth,
I'm so content in the resolution of the meditation of Dharma.[162]

While the structure of Song 25 is further reinforced through the predominantly 8-syllable metric pattern, the 4-line stanza is found also with songs that have varied syllables per line, giving them a high degree of rhythm, through the use of repetition despite the irregular metric patterns. For example, Song 31 would be categorized as having a mixed number of syllables per line, ranging from 7-12, but is organized in repetitive 4-line stanza structure:

gyog 'khor du 'dzom pa'I sde dpon ***la***
gzhan phyogs med du 'khrog pa'I kha drag ***gda' te***
des dmyal ba'I bsrungs ma mi zlogs par ***gda'***
'u rang *phan sems bskyed pa'I* ***lha chos la gshegs sam***

nor rdzas sog 'jog la mkhas pa'I phyug po tsho ***la***
da lta spyad na bde ba'I zas nor ***gda' ste***
des yid dgas kyi bkres skom mi skyobs par ***gda' ste***
'u rang *rdzas tshogs su btongs pa'I* ***lha chos la gshegs sam***

For rulers with servants gathered as a retinue,
there's aimless barking at others with harsh speech.
But that won't turn back the guardians of hell.
Have you come to our divine Dharma of developing beneficial intentions?

For the rich who are skilled at gathering and hoarding valuables,
there's food and wealth that's pleasant if used now.
But that won't save you from the hunger and thirst of the hungry ghosts.
Have you come to our divine Dharma of giving things away to the assembly?[163]

As the translation of this song shows, repetition is used to create a mould for the delivery of teachings to specific people in the audience. The song continues to address 'high lords of hereditary lines', 'great teachers endowed with intellectual knowledge', and 'prosperous spiritual friends'. For each stanza, line 1 addresses a specific stratum of society, line 2 identifies a key characteristic associated with that social group, line 3 indicates that their behaviour will result in

[162] Stearns, *Hermit,* 124-125.
[163] Stearns, *Hermit,* 138-139.

a lower rebirth, and line 4 suggests through somewhat sarcastic or teasing delivery how their behaviour might be reformed. This system of delivery mirrors what Francke finds to be a popular device in Tibetan folksongs from the Ladakh region of India, which he has terms "parallelism" or "rhyme of sentence." This method creates a series of 'parallel' lines in which "two or more sentences are constructed accordingly, and in the corresponding places different words are inserted."[164] Sujata, noting a similar structure in the verses of Kalden Gyatso**,** suggests that when songs are organized this way, the differences between the stanzas seem more dramatic because the similarities create a sense of expectation in the listener or reader.[165] Godrakpa concludes his list of parallels with a final stanza indicating the main message of his song:

> *gnas chu shing 'dzom pa'I dgon pa* ***na***
> *'thun rkyen dang ldan pa'I so song* ***gda' ste***
> *yun rings su bsdad long mi* ***gda'*** *yi*
> ***'u rang*** *ri khrod 'grims pa'I* ***lha chos la gshegs sam***
>
> [**For** in] a secluded site of clustered plantain trees,
> [**there** are][166] favourable conditions hoarded.
> **But they** won't last long.
> **Have you come to our divine Dharma** of wandering in the mountain ranges?[167]

In this stanza, we find the teaching that Godrakpa is leading up to with the preceding verses. The plantain tree, being hollow inside, is used as a simile to relay to the audience how empty worldly pursuits and possessions are, concluding that if one intends to practice the dharma, wandering in the mountains is more beneficial than collecting the possessions he lists above.[168] Stein notes a

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[164] Francke, *Ladakhi Songs,* 2. The origin of the songs that Francke references is unclear. He states that scholars wrongly assume these Ladakhi songs to be only a few hundred years old, and that likely they have been repeated with modifications for many hundreds of years: "such songs can only be explained as having been handed down from ancient times…" (Francke, *Ladakhi Songs,* 4).

[165] Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 143.

[166] The words in brackets indicate a diversion from the translation provided by Stearns, and instead, I have used my own translations. Although far from perfect, and lacking the poetic flow and style that Stearns presents, my translation is meant to emphasize where repetition would exist.

[167] Stearns, *Hermit,* 138-141.

[168] *Lu sha* (*glu shags),* a sub-genre of the earlier *lu* category of songs, also had 4-line stanzas and are described as "sarcastic songs aimed at teasing (*glu sags rgyag pa)* a counterpart with words, often traded in regular songs competition on wits" (Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 18). I questioned whether Godrakpa's tendency towards the 4-line stanza was a result of new influences of his time, and the increasing use of the 4-line stanza in Buddhist poetic expression that was to come, or of older folksongs. Although the *Kāvyādarśa* had not yet been translated during Godrakpa's life, *kāvya* theory would have been well known among monastic communities at that time, and it is highly likely that Godrakpa was aware of and experimented with this new form (Tashi Tsering, personal communication, March 2013). However, given the element of social critique, and the somewhat teasing or sarcastic

similar pattern in his exploration of poetry found in the Dunhuang Caves: "the principle of parallelism is so strong that the same sentence is uttered twice, once with a descriptive expression, once with a corresponding proper name."[169] In the examples from Godrakpa's compositions above, in terms of form, we find stanza divisions that build drama in the content, and in terms of content, we find stanzas that not only contain similes and metaphors, but also act as metaphors for the teaching he presents in the final verse.[170]

Three-line stanza:

The second most prominent stanza pattern that Godrakpa uses is the 3-line stanza, which also exemplifies repetition as an organizing principle, again developing rhythm based on parallel lines. In some cases, various parts of each line are repeated, while in others much less repetition occurs, such as only one word per stanza. Song 27 provides an example of this:

mi ***nga dang*** *ka la dha ka* ***gnyis***
dgun ***gsum*** *nags kyi khrod* ***na bde***
gcan zan ***med de shin du bde***

nga dang *lcog chung kyur mo* ***gnyis***
dpyid ***gsum*** *na ma'I 'dram* ***na bde***
so nam ***med de shin du bde***

Both the nightingale **and I**
are happy in the midst of the forest **for the three months** of winter,
So very happy where there are no beasts of prey.

Both the swallow **and I**
are happy at the edge of a marsh **for the three months** of spring,
So very happy where there's no cultivation.[171]

Two-line Stanzas:

We find similar examples of repetition within his songs of 2 lines per stanza; however, to demonstrate this stanza pattern, I will show another system of repetition that is found within a number of his songs, though not as frequently as the consistent repetition demonstrated above. In

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nature of the last line of each stanza, this song seems more closely aligned with the folksong tradition, or the Indian *siddha* tradition than with *kāvya*.

[169] Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 253.

[170] Parallelism is a device that Godrakpa uses in a number of his songs, and therefore will be explored in greater detail in the following section on poetic figures.

[171] Stearns, *Hermit,* 128-129.

Song 38, a word is repeated as a line ending for only part of the song, and then the place is filled in with another word that is repeated for the remainder of the song. With this particular song, stanzas 5 and 6 mark the transition of the last word on line 2 of each stanza (*lags* is used as the last word of each stanza in the first half of the poem, and then appearing in one stanza near the end, while *yin* in that position for the last half of the poem):

> *lo ma dang nyung ma ri rngad* ***gsum***
> *'di gsum kho po'I mtsho rgyags* ***lags***
>
> *ri gay' ri dang gngas ri rdza ri* ***gsum***
> *de sprang po bdag gi dgon gnas* ***yin***
>
> Leaves, turnips, and mountain grass,
> these **three** were my provisions.
>
> Slate mountains, glacial mountains, and clay mountains
> these **three** were this beggar's secluded places.[172]

Songs with irregular or no stanzas:

Within songs that do not have regular stanza divisions, repetition can also be found, but at varying intervals, and in most cases for a only portion of the song rather than throughout. Such uses will be discussed within section three of this chapter where we look at poetic figures and repetition of sounds and words in more depth.

Thematically, songs with irregular or no stanza divisions tend to be more biographical in nature (as opposed to songs of advice, experience, or instruction), i.e. describing teachings received, places visited, or challenges faced. Songs 1, 2, and 4 are examples of this latter type, containing stanzas of varied length (for example, Song 1 has stanzas ranging from 2 lines to 13 lines), with patterns of repetition scattered within but inconsistent throughout. Four songs within the collection also have no stanza divisions at all: one is a short announcement of a new temple that has been built (Song 40) and the other three relay more esoteric expressions of realizations that Godrakpa arrived at through meditation (Song 20, 32, and 39).

Section 3: Poetic Figures

[172] Stearns, *Hermit,* 156-157.

Building on our hypothesis that Godrakpa used repetition within stanzas to create cohesive poetic units, this section will explore in more detail the various ways that he uses repetition (an area that Sujata states to be far understudied[173]), as well as other poetic figures that he has weaved into his songs.[174]

Poetic Figures as explained by Döndrup Gyel:

Gyan (rgyan), the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit term *alaṃkāra*, 'adornment' or 'poetic figure,' is used by Döndrup Gyel in his seminal study of Tibetan *gur* to describe a wide variety of poetic figures that he identifies as characterizing the genre. His definition of *gyan* includes both figures discussed by both Daṇḍin in the *Kāvyādarśa*,[175] and those that were found in traditional indigenous Tibetan song. For the purpose of my study, Döndrup Gyel's work confirms that standardized poetic figures were, and continue to be, important elements of Tibetan verse; however I have chosen not to base my exploration of Godrakpa's poetic figures on his study. The reason for this is twofold: first, on a practical level, since Döndrup Gyel's thesis on *gur* has not been translated into English, my understanding of his study is limited. Second, the *gur* that Döndrup Gyel seems to be referencing in his study is that which was produced after the translation of the *Kāvyādarśa* in Tibet, and therefore the reference points he has for poetic figures used in Tibetan poetry blends those found in traditional indigenous song with the figures outlined by Daṇḍin in the *Kāvyādarśa*. Döndrup Gyel is emphatic that poetry did exist in Tibet prior to the emergence and utilization of *kāvya* theory, arguing that to see it as otherwise, "is narrow-minded… [that] there was supposedly no poetry in Tibet… is a very inappropriate position."[176] However, there are nine figures that Döndrup Gyel insists must be present in *gur,* all of which derive from the *Kāvyādarśa*.[177] For this reason, I believe that the section of his study

[173] "The importance of repetition of syllables in the same positions within stanzas in Tibetan verse seems to have been overlooked by almost all other Western writers" (Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 143).
[174] The study of poetic figures (*rgyan*) in Tibetan song-poems has been presented as a slightly artificial and contrived study by Pang, who notes that there has never been an intellectual tradition in Tibet that studies the Tibetan folksongs or *gur* through a modern academic perspective.
[175] Although the poetry that emerged after the 13th century based on the guidelines of the *Kāvyādarśa* was categorized not as *gur* but as *nyengak*, or "ornate poetry", the influence of *kāvya* form became very evident in *gur* also, with songs of experience showing traits of this category. For further information on the blending of *kāvya* and *gur*, refer to the studies of Sujata and Pang.
[176] Translated and quoted in Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 186.
[177] This list includes poetic figures that are found in the second chapter of the *Kāvyādarśa*, all which deal with semantic relationships. The figures are outlined in Sujata's study: Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 186. Sujata also

that I have access to in translation[178] presents a thorough understanding of *gur* as it existed only after the spread of *kāvya,* while the songs central to my thesis were written before. This point is further substantiated by his use of the term *gyan* as meaning 'poetic figure', as this is a direct translation of the Sanskrit term *alaṃkāra* that would be found in Daṇḍin's text.

Poetic Figures as understood in Western Scholarship:

Sujata uses the thesis of Döndrup Gyel as a starting point for her own exploration of figures in the songs of Kalden Gyatso. She creates two categories that she argues to have inspired his use of poetic figures: those from the *Kāvyādarśa,* and 'indigenous Tibetan poetic figures.'[179] Her findings diverge from those of Döndrup Gyel with regards to the origin of the use of similes and metaphors. While Döndrup Gyel sees "simile" and "metaphor" as poetic devices from the *Kāvyādarśa,* Sujata argues that both simile and metaphor can be found first in indigenous Tibetan songs, and places them in her section on indigenous figures. From examples we find in Godrakpa's songs, I would argue, along the same lines as Sujata, that both simile and metaphor had a strong presence in early Tibetan song rather than being introduced with the spread of *kāvya* theory in the 13th century.

In order to explore the poetic figures found in Godrakpa's songs, I will follow the categories identified by Sujata in Chapter Ten of her study on *gur*: Simile, Metaphor, Parallelism and Antithesis, Continual repetition of a finite verb, and Interjections, noting where the songs of Godrakpa support her findings, and where they diverge. I will rely further on the studies of Sorenson and Savitsky, who also identify figures in *gur* tradition, particularly as they pertain to placement of repetitive sounds. My hope is that in providing a detailed analysis of the poetic figures present in Godrakpa's songs, which were definitely composed prior to the translation of the *Kāvyādarśa*,[180] the study might clarify which figures arrived with the spread of *kāvya*, and

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references the respective citations for the definitions of these nine poetic figures in the dissertation of Eppling on Daṇḍin's *kāvya*. See Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 187, footnote 5.

[178] Most of what I have access to has been translated by Sujata in her own exploration of poetic figures. Sujata, studying a 17th century Tibetan poet-saint, was interested in differentiating between *kāvya* figures and indigenous figures, and therefore used Döndrup Gyel's text as her principal point of reference for understanding the way poetic figures are presented in Tibetan verse. See Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* Chapter 9 and 10.

[179] Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* Chapter 9 and Chapter 10.

[180] Despite that the *Kāvyādarśa* had not been translated into Tibetan during Godrakpa's time, he was most likely aware of it. The influence of the *Kāvyādarśa* was seen in Tibet as early as 9th century in the form of translated Buddhist Sanskrit texts (Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 374) and therefore learned monastics, such as Godrakpa,

which were present before the its translation and widespread dissemination in the second half of the 13th century.

Similes:

Using similes and metaphors as explanatory devices is common within the *gur* genre, allowing the composer to create links between relatively inexplicable experiences or teachings, and more mundane, easily understood reference points. Many of Godrakpa's similes draw on the landscape of Tibet or other nature-based referents such as the weather, while some also make reference to Buddhist religious objects, Indian imagery, or particular societal roles. As Sorenson notes, the metaphors and similes found in *gur* drew from a "repository pertaining to the symbolic world of the Tibetan, and uses a number of images already well-known,"[181] enabling the listener to recognize almost instantly the point being made.

In order to create simile constructions, Godrakpa uses the following verbs throughout his songs: *'dra, bzhin,* and *lta bu,* each which loosely translates to 'like', 'similarly' or 'just as'. Due to the frequent use of similes within Godrakpa's songs (various similes are found in 19 of the 44 songs), I will simply note some of the types that are used, though this overview is far from comprehensive.

First, Godrakpa often uses similes when making reference to himself. Rather than directly stating his own qualities, he uses simile to create allusions that would allow the listener to understand the depth of his spiritual attainments and resulting gifts, without directly stating them. Song 5 provides an extensive example of this, with the first line of each of the 18 stanzas using a simile to describe an aspect of his nature, which is further explained in the following line. In this song we find examples of nature-based similes: "A yogi like a mountain, I have different hues due to circumstance"; similes built on social or family roles: "A yogi like an infant, I'm able to give without attachment"; similes built on Buddhist imagery: "A yogi like a vajra, I've realized the indestructible, inseparable truths"; and, similes that involve imagery transported from India: "A yogi like a rhinoceros, I don't depend on other companions."[182]

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would have been aware of the conventions it contained, as well as its popularity and influence in India, the country that these poet-saints looked as a key source of influence (Tashi Tsering, personal communication, Feb. 2013).

[181] Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized*, 28.

[182] Stearns, *Hermit,* 53-57.

Second, Godrakpa uses similes in his explanation of how he relates to the secret oral instructions associated with high tantric teachings, in two examples using the common Mahāyana comparison "like water poured into water" (Song 4 and Song 15) to describe his seamless proficiency in understanding the dharma. Other songs employ the simile construction to provide points of emphasis within instructional verses – "guard moral discipline like it's your eyeballs!" (Song 3) and lines encouraging the lifestyle of the dharma – "the conduct of the path is like the freedom of a fine horse!" (Song 10). While the majority of his similes are rooted in nature images, some also make reference to daily life, such as in Song 29, where meeting a spiritual master is said to be "like finding an escort in a dangerous place." He also uses similes to make reference to the ignorance and suffering of beings trapped in saṃsāra: "the aging of the body is like the shadow of a high mountain" (Song 14); and, "into married life in saṃsāra, which is like a bonfire, dharma practitioners fall like moths with distorted vision" (Song 18). Overall, throughout the collection, similes are used in abundance as tools to make reference to Godrakpa's own accomplishments, increase comprehension of complicated doctrinal teachings, and emphasize points of instruction.

Demonstrating how influential Indian imagery and symbolism were in Tibetan verse even before the spread of *kāvya* poetry, several of the similes used in Godrakpa's songs involve images from India. This was a common occurrence in songs of the later transmission period in which the same types of similes or imagery found in Indian *siddha* songs would be found in the songs of Tibetan masters, such as Sorenson found in the songs of Mila.[183] Kapstein explains that Tibetans increasingly identified with India in the 10th- 13th centuries, arguing that during this period, India was transformed in literary realms from "an exotic but remote land to an exotic land in which Tibetans found *their own* imaginal universe."[184] This occurred at a point when "India was… very much in vogue, [and] tokens of connections to the south were very much prized,"[185] and therefore might explain why Godrakpa's songs are replete with images of India such as similes referencing lions, the river Ganges, rhinoceros and elephants. Although Godrakpa also uses Tibetan nature imagery in abundance, singing of specific mountains and valleys and weather patterns, it seems that it is in the similes, of all poetic figures, that we find the greatest influence of the symbolic world of India.

[183] Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized*, 15.
[184] Kapstein, "Indian Literary," 775.
[185] Kapstein, "Indian Literary," 769.

Metaphors:

Like similes, metaphors are ubiquitous throughout the collection of songs and even more so than similes, they draw on points of comparison that would be easily understood by almost anyone. A close reading shows that metaphors appear in over half of the songs, so while their use is too wide to give varied examples, I will point to three songs that show the intentionality of Godrakpa's use of metaphor. In Song 30, a "song of four seasons" the first line of each stanza indicates a characteristic of a specific season (for example, stanza two: "Green grass withers during the three months of autumn"), with the second line providing a metaphor to draw meaning from ("This is a metaphor for the fading of youthful vitality"), followed by a teaching of Buddhist philosophy on the third line (in the case of the second stanza, encouraging one to leave the mundane state, where "years, months and days pass.")[186] In the second case, Song 39, Godrakpa forms two two-line stanzas: in each, the first line offers a statement about the sky, and the second relates the qualities of the sky to the nature of the mind.[187] In the final example, Song 20, Godrakpa presents a two-line song sung to him by Lady Lakṣmīṅkarā, which uses metaphor to emphasize the importance of practice over intellectual understanding – one of Godrakpa's key teachings – by comparing it to mundane necessities:

> Even though you are rich with gems, roasted barley dough is enough for food.
> Even though the three piṭakas are understood, the practice is both creation and perfection.[188]

While these examples show the predominance of nature-based metaphors, other songs use points of reference from daily life, comparing the trials of saṃsāra to tethering stakes, binding ropes, pretty lips, and long roads – all images that common people could relate to.

Parallelism and Anti-thesis

As was demonstrated in section two of this chapter, the figure of parallelism was frequently employed among stanzas of Godrakpa's songs to create repetition and uniformity within the song. Parallelism is a common trope within the Tibetan folk tradition, and as noted above, Francke found its use in the Ladakhi dance songs, estimated to originate before

[186] Stearns, *Hermit,* 137.
[187] Stearns, *Hermit,* 161.
[188] Stearns, *Hermit*, 111.

Godrakpa's time,[189] it is also noted by Stein in his overview of earlier songs from the Dunhuang Cave excavation,[190] Ardussi states it to be "the key" to the Tibetan spiritual song,[191] Sorenson finds it in his study of the 'lovesongs' of the 6th Dalai Lama,[192] Sujata finds it in a number of Kalden Gyatso's later songs,[193] and Pang also gives an example of parallelism in Shabkar's verse, arguing it to be an "integral component of Tibetan folk song."[194] Parallelism is in fact perhaps the most common principle of organization and rhythm that Godrakpa has used in his songs, enabling the stanzas to follow one after the other easily, presenting the material in a way that seems sequential, and for that reason, perhaps both more memorable and melodic.

Sujata's study of the songs of Kalden Gyatso revealed that he often wrote with a complex form of parallelism in which each stanza would replicate the same mould, presenting topics and themes that alluded to a central teaching of the song, which would be revealed only in the final stanza. We find this method also in the songs of Godrakpa, and I will quote Song 26 as an example:

> Watching – watching the Khawo glacier in the upper valley,
> the meltwater in the lower valley wasn't noticed.
> It's too late for cultivation
>
> Watching – watching the clay slopes of Rumbu,
> the daisies spread on the valley floor weren't noticed.
> It's too late to tend the herds.
> ….
>
> Striving – striving for the aims of this life,
> the aging and approaching death wasn't noticed.
> It's too late to practice the dharma.

Similar to the style of the later Kalden Gyatso, Godrakpa mirrors each stanza, echoing some words while offering new examples that act as metaphors for his actual teaching revealed in the final stanza – that one does not notice death's approach until it is too late to apply the teachings of the dharma. This complex form of parallelism, building up to a final teaching, is found in

[189] Francke, *Ladakhi Songs*, 4.
[190] Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 253.
[191] Ardussi, "Drinking," 117.
[192] Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 27.
[193] Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 217-223.
[194] Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 126.

eleven other songs, and a simpler form, where words and presentation are paralleled among stanzas without a cumulative lesson, is found in an additional twelve songs.

Anti-thesis, another form of parallelism, is found in two additional songs, where contiguous stanzas state two antithetical ideas. In this form of parallelism, opposing ideas are stated through paralleled words and structure. Song 9 is an example of placing opposing ideas in similarly structured stanzas:

> When there's no realization, these external appearances
> of the objects of the six groups are confusing appearances.
> Desire, hatred, and ignorance are produced.
>
> When there is realization, they're the Buddha body of reality.
> The dynamic appearances of primordial awareness expand.
> In the ultimate sense, there are no appearances and no attachment.
>
> When there's no realization, this intrinsic awareness observed
> when the mind is turned inward is a sentient being.
> It circles through the realms of the six living beings.
>
> When there is realization, it's a buddha.
> The three buddha bodies dawn in ourselves.
> In the ultimate sense, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are not two. [195]

Yet another method used to create parallelism is to start each line with sequential numbers. We find an example of this in Song 8 alone, where each stanza has three numbered points. Pang notes that this method was popular, as numerical sequencing aided memory and allowed for easy group singing.[196] Finally, also related to parallelism, refrains are used by Godrakpa to further the repetitive build-up of verse within his songs, examples of which were given in the section above on stanza formation. Throughout the collection, 25 of the songs show some type of parallelism, making it one of Godrakpa's most commonly used poetic devices.

Continual Repetition of a Finite Verb:

Another category that Sujata presents as a common indigenous Tibetan figure is repetition of a finite verb. This is found in varying degrees throughout Godrakpa's songs; while typically his songs do not repeat the same verb at the end of each line as Sujata's examples of

[195] Stearns, *Hermit,* 73.
[196] Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 127.

Kalden Gyatso's songs do,[197] frequently, verbs or syllables are repeated in the same position in subsequent stanzas. We see this in all examples of parallelism, including those built on anti-thesis and numerical sequences, and in the songs with refrains, as well as in others. For example, in 4 songs,[198] we see the end syllable of each line repeated in each stanza in the sequence ABCD ABCD, etc.:

*bla ma'I gdam ngag 'di bdud rtsi dang **'dra***	**A**
*don nyams su myong bar 'thung nus **na***	**B**
*nang dug lnag'I gcong nad zhi bar nges **kyis***	**C**
*rang nges shes skyed cig dad pa can **tso***	**D**
*chos lta ba 'di bya rgyal gyi rgod po dang **'dra***	**A**
*thabs shes rab kyi gshog rtsa ma chag **na***	**B**
*don chos nyid kyi dgung dang mjal bar nges **gyis***	**C**[199]
*zung 'jugg lam du slong cig dad pa can **tso…***[200]	**D**

Other songs show similar simple patterns: AB AB AB, etc.[201]

There are also examples of repetition both within and among each stanza such as ABB ABB etc. or XBB CD XBB CD etc.[202] Song 27 shows an example of the first case:

*mi nga dang ka la dha ka **gnyis***	**A**
*dgun gsum nags kyi khrod na **bde***	**B**
*gcan zan med de shin du **bde***	**B**
*nga dang lcog chung kyur mo **gnyis***	**A**
*dpyid gsum na ma'I 'dram na **bde***	**B**
*so nam med de shin du **bde…***[203]	**B**

[197] As an example of the common use of repetition of the finite verb, Sujata lists an example from the *gurbum* of both Kalden Gyatso and that of Milarepa, where the last syllable on each line throughout the song is the very *bde* – or 'to be happy'. See Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 224-225.
[198] Song 10, 14, 29, 34 – note that the first stanzas sometimes do not follow the exact pattern (Stearns, *Hermit,* 76, 94, 132, and 146).
[199] This example shows the 'spelling mistakes' that are inherent to the Tibetan version of this text. In this song, the third line of each stanza ends with the agentive particle, which changes spelling, though not meaning, based on the final letter of the preceding word. In both stanzas, the final letter of the preceding word is the same, as the words are the same: *nges*. Therefore, the agentive particle that follows should be the same in each case: *kyis*.
[200] Stearns, *Hermit,* 76.
[201] For example, Song 7 uses AB AB AB and Song 26, ABC ABC (Stearns, *Hermit*, 64-66 and 126).
[202] Song 27 uses ABB ABB, etc. while Song 25 uses AACD AACD, etc. (Stearns, *Hermit,* 130 and 124). Song 44 shows XBB CD XBB CD, etc. and Song 33: AXA AXA, etc. (Stearns, *Hermit,* 170 and 144*)*. In these cases X denotes a place that is changeable, with the final syllable on the others lines repeated.
[203] Stearns, *Hermit,* 128.

Overall, repetition of the last syllable of each line is used in varying patterns, with a total of 30 of his songs showing some degree of it.

Closer to Sujata's examples of Kalden Gyatso's songs noted above, there are also a few examples where the same verb is repeated at the end of each line within only one stanza. This is typically found in songs where the stanzas are of irregular length, and is used when Godrakpa is summarizing things of similar nature. Because he is summarizing similar items, semantically it makes sense to use the same verb repetitively, and so it is as likely that repetition was used for the sake of subject matter as for phonetic embellishment.[204]

In addition to repetition of the finite verb, we also see examples of repetition of the first syllable of each line among stanzas. This type of repetition is not explored by Sujata, but is noted by Sorenson and Savitsky as present in the 17th century 'lovesongs' of the 6th Dalai Lama.[205] While neither studies indicate the history of this form of repetition, Sorenson writes that the euphonic and semantic embellishments found in the lovesongs are part of 'traditional Tibetan poetry', "which to a large extent is a calque on Indian *kāvya*."[206] Whether first-syllable repetition existed in earlier, non-*kāvya* influenced Tibetan folksong is unclear to me; however, we do find it in Godrakpa's songs, and this alone may indicate it does have early Tibetan folk roots, as his songs generally appear to be based on folksong figures. In Song 25, for example, we find the first syllable of each line repeated in each stanza in the pattern ABCD ABCD etc. Song 25 also shows repetition at the end of each line throughout the song, so I have highlighted where both repetitions occur:

A	***phyi** gzung ba'I yul kyang nam mkha' **bzhin***	**(a)**
B	***nang** 'dzin pa'I sems dang nam mkha' **bzhin***	**(a)**
C	***don** mtha' dbus med pa'I steng shed **na***	**(b)**
D	***chos** lta ba'I thag chod blo re **bde***	**I**
A	***phyi** gzung pa'I yul dang nyi zla **bzhin***	**(a)**
B	***nang** 'dzin pa'I sems dang nyi zla **bzhin***	**(a)**
C	***don** gsal 'grib med pa'I steng shed **na***	**(b)**
D	***chos** sgom pa'I thag chod blo re **bde***[207]	**I**

[204] See Song 1, where he is listing teachings received, or Song 37 when he summarizes various actions of practitioners (Stearns, *Hermit,* 34 and 154)
[205] See Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 26-27 and Savitsky, "Secular Lyrical," 407-408.
[206] Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized*, 27.
[207] Stearns, *Hermit,* 124.

Related to this, there is one example where the first and last syllable of each line is repeated on each of the four lines within one stanza, though not in the others of the song. I will provide the last stanza of Song 37 to indicate how repetition is found at both the beginning and the end of each line within one stanza only of the song:

'ga' *zhig gzhon la dad pa skyes pa* ***gda'***
'ga' *zhig yod pa tshogs su btong gin* ***gda'***
'ga' *zhig sgrub pa snyugs su sring ba* ***gda'***
'ga' *zhig 'gro don phyogs med nus pa* ***gda'***[208]

My purpose in providing such detailed examples of the repetition within and among the stanzas of Godrakpa's songs is to show how melodic and rhythmical his songs may have been despite the irregularity of syllable distribution that was documented in section one of this chapter. These findings align well with those of Savitsky, who argues "if we look not for such final rhymes, but for the repetition of sounds including identity and similarity both at the end and the beginning of the lines, then such repetitions can be discovered,"[209] as well as Sorenson, who states "it has… been noted that the Tibetan poetic folksong tradition exhibits a tangible dearth of rhyme and alliteration. But this is valid only as far as regular rhyme and rhyming schemes are absent, while the lack of these euphonic qualities are fully compensated by a varied use of euphuistic devices such as anaphora, epistrophes, internal alliterative rhythm, antithesis, and assonance."[210]

A final note on the topic of repetitive sounds requires an investigation into a poetic figure typically associated with *kāyva* poetry: *yamaka* – meaning 'phonemic repetition'. Daṇḍin states that *yamaka* can involve repetition in "one of the four *pādas* [of the conventional *padya*, or 'stanza'] in all, or in any combination: in the beginning; middle; end; the middle and end; the middle and beginning; the beginning and end; and throughout."[211] We have already seen various examples of phonemic restriction by means of repetition of the first and/or final syllables of a line above, with the latter associated as much with indigenous Tibetan figures as with figures

[208] Stearns, *Hermit,* 154.
[209] Savitsky, "Secular Lyrical," 407. Savitsky made this statement as a critical response to Stein's claim that for Tibetan song, "in default of the customary devices of other poetic traditions – rhyme or alliteration – the whole beauty lies in rhythm and structure" (Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 252). Using analysis of Godrakpa's songs, I would argue both points to hold value, as the rhythm and structure was evidently important to Godrakpa in his frequent use of parallelism, anti-thesis and refrain.
[210] Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized*, 26
[211] Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 167.

found in *kāyva* poetry – however one type of *yamaka* that Sujata includes in her chapter entitled "Poetic Figures Influenced by the *Kāvyādarśa"* is also present within Godrakpa's songs: contiguous *yamaka* – or repetition of words within a line.

Sujata gives several examples of this type of repetition in Kalden Gyatso's verse, indicating that he repeated words in succession on a line when wanting to emphasize their qualities[212] and we find the same in Godrakpa's songs. In song 4, for example, Godrakpa uses this type of contiguous *yamaka* in specific stanzas to indicate qualities of his own character; stanza one reads, "*Mi la la* ***srang can srang can*** *zer"* (Some people say, "he's a **fraud – a fraud**!"), later stanza six introduces another personal attribute, "*Mi la la* ***smyon pa smyon*** *pa zer"* (Some people say, "he's **insane – insane!"),**[213] and finally, stanzas ten and seventeen use the same type of mid-line repetition to introduce further qualities of the poet.

Godrakpa also uses this mid-line repetition in Song 26, emphasizing his observation that people are reluctant to practice the dharma, which has already been quoted above (*phu kha bo'I gngas la* ***lta lta*** *nas* – **Watching – watching** the Khawo glacier…),[214] and also extensively in Song 34, where each stanza contains two lines with repetition, for example:

> *nye'brel phyugs rang bzhin du* ***skyong skyong*** *nas*
> *tshong 'dus 'gron po bzhin du* ***'gyes 'gyes*** *'dra*
> …
>
> after **caring – caring** for relatives as if they were cattle,
> you'll just be **split up – split up** like visitors in the marketplace[215]

In these examples, the repetition carries an emotion-inducing quality, indicating where Godrakpa wishes to place emphasis. We see this again in Song 41, where he laments the destructive nature of the Mongol invasion at the "sublime site" of Langkor:

> *Sprang bdag gis ring la* ***'bor 'bor*** *'dra* (… may be **lost –lost** …)[216]

The presence of this type of *yamaka* implies that either Godrakpa was experimenting with poetic figures associated with *kāvya* and circulating orally prior to the translation of the *Kāvyādarśa,* or

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[212] "This time the repetitions do not form recognized compounds themselves… instead, most are repetitions of single verb stems or of an adjective, done for the purpose of emphasizing the good quality of the actions taken." (Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 172). She lists several examples on pages 168-175.
[213] Stearns, *Hermit,* 46-51.
[214] Stearns, *Hermit,* 126-127.
[215] Stearns, *Hermit,* 146-147.
[216] Stearns, *Hermit,* 164-165.

that this type of repetition is an indigenous poetic figure as well as found in the *Kāvyādarśa*. While Sujata quotes Döndrup Gyel to note that yogis writing *gur* also used this figure, it is not clear if Döndrup Gyel was referring to pre- or post-*kāvya gur*.[217] More examination of other pre-*kāvya gur* may help to determine how extensively this figure was used in pre-*kāvya* song.

Interjections

Both Sujata and Pang include a section on interjections, as found in the songs of Kalden Gyatso and Shabkar respectively, arguing interjections to be "a mainstay" in the folksong tradition;[218] however, Godrakpa's collection does not include the characteristic use of interjections. In fact, we find only two examples of interjections in Godrakpa's songs: the exclamation of wonder '*e ma ho'*, at the conclusion of Song 1, and the shortened version '*e ma'* at the conclusion of Song 13. The relative absence of this poetic figure is a noteworthy anomaly, as typically interjections are found in abundance in various genres of Tibetan song and oral literature; for example, Sujata traces the use of interjections back to the Gesar Epic,[219] an early, yet undated text. Döndrup Gyel also classifies interjections as among common poetic figures of *gur;*[220] however, as we already noted, his study of *gur* generally referred to the later poet-saints.

Conclusions

Sections one and two of this chapter demonstrated that while most of Godrakpa's songs do not contain regular metric patterns, the vast majority of them are composed with regular stanza divisions, with stanzas outlined according to repetitive phrasing. Even the songs without regular stanza divisions often have elements of repetition, and thus, repeated words or phrases, most often at the start or end of a line, can be found in 35 of the 44 songs. Repetition frequently occurs in folksongs, and it is speculated that it is used as a device to enable songs to be easily memorized.[221] Therefore, one might argue that Godrakpa would have adopted this technique in order that Buddhist teachings were memorably conveyed. With regards to metre, we found that

[217] Sujata quotes Döndrup Gyel regarding this type of *yamaka:* "when [one] searches for examples from within the *gur* which emerged from the mastery of the intellects of forerunners, great lamas and yogis, they indeed can be found" (Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 170).
[218] Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 129 ("Amdo" folksong tradition), and Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 228-246.
[219] Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 237.
[220] Quoted in Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 228.
[221] Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 127.

the majority of his songs contained a combination of 7 and 8 syllable lines with no apparent pattern to their arrangement. Beyer's research reveals that this is not uncommon within early yogi songs. It also may be seen as indicating the spontaneity of composition, implying that conveying a specific message, or 'spiritual realization' was more important to the composer than perfecting poetic form. The rather loose metre of the majority of Godrakpa's songs is contrasted by a handful of songs that were shown to demonstrate strict metric patterns, showing his skill with a variety of forms of composition.

Section three continued our exploration of the form of Godrakpa's songs by attempting to note the various poetic figures used. While not an exhaustive list, I identified figures in his songs that Sujata had found in her study of Kalden Gyatso's *gur,* as well as found types of repetition identified by Savitsky and Sorenson in their separate studies of the 6th Dalai Lama's songs. Through this exploration, I found Godrakpa to use many of the devices that one would expect to see in this early *gur* – such as parallelism, anti-thesis, numerical sequencing, and repetitive sounds. Perhaps what stands out most after this examination of Godrakpa's poetic figures is the absence of interjections in his songs, a mainstay in most Tibetan yogi songs, and the inclusion of one form of *yamaka,* which Sujata and Döndrup Gyel had both associated with the *Kāvyādarśa* yet must have either been known to Godrakpa due to his study of Indian texts, or have had a place in Tibetan folksong as well.

Having discussed the vast array of influences found within the form of Godrakpa's verse, I will now turn to examine the content of the songs in the following chapters. My interest is in exploring not only the spiritual realizations that Godrakpa reveals in song, but also the way that the songs may have functioned in their cultural context. In order to do so, Chapter Two will focus on the spiritual elements of the songs, highlighting the teachings that Godrakpa wished to convey to his audience, and Chapter Three will examine how the autobiographical elements of his songs functioned to ground the Indian Buddhist teachings in Tibet, thereby effectively transforming Indian Buddhism into a Tibetan experience.

Chapter Two

'Songs of Realization':
Inspiration and Instruction for the Spiritual Path

Introduction

Chapter One demonstrated how the metre and form of Godrakpa's *gur* was heavily influenced by the existing tradition of Tibetan folksongs; however, in terms of content, Godrakpa's *gur* departed from the secular themes of the folksong tradition to provide teachings and advice on how to practice tantric Buddhism, as well as to offer insight into the life of a wandering yogi. In the following chapters, I will turn to examine the content of Godrakpa's songs, with Chapter Two addressing the 'spiritual' themes within his songs, and Chapter Three addressing the more 'worldly' aspects of his life as a spiritual teacher. As we will see in this chapter and the next, although the themes and moods of Godrakpa's songs vary widely, ranging from impersonal and didactic to intensely emotional and autobiographical, expounding spiritual teachings and realizations is almost always the focus of the songs.

Godrakpa was not alone in presenting spiritual experiences through the *gur* genre; rather the expression of spiritual realization came to define the genre shortly before Godrakpa's time period. Milarepa, who died approximately 50 years before Godrakpa's birth, was the first Tibetan to popularize this genre as a means of expression of religious experience. Though Jackson has found some examples of pre-Mila *gur* showing a "religious orientation", it was after the highly influential songs of Mila that songs defined as *gur* began to be primarily religious in nature.[222] Prior to this, most of the *gur* that existed in Tibet were political songs that provided a means through which one could express "positive personal experiences", said by Ellingson to have been crucial for the functioning of the Tibetan kingdom.[223] With the songs of Mila, the personal and experiential aspects of the earlier political *gur* continued to frame the genre, but with the added element of Buddhist teachings transmitted from India as the focal point. With the songs of Godrakpa, we find a second example of an early poet-saint who used the highly personal *gur* genre to promulgate tantric Buddhist teachings.

My aim with this chapter is to show how the songs of Godrakpa continue the tradition of singing that Mila started in Tibet – that is to show how Godrakpa uses the *gur* genre to express

[222] Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 372.
[223] Ellingson, "Maṇḍala," 67-70.

experiences and realizations of his spiritual quest and progress on the Buddhist path. I will do this by first exploring the religious and literary lineage that Godrakpa places himself and his songs in and specifically how he links his songs to India. I will then discuss the key spiritual themes found in his songs and how they typically serve to either instruct or inspire his audience. In the conclusion of this chapter, I will draw attention to how Godrakpa emphasises practices of renunciation and meditation through experience-based directives delivered in clear, straightforward and flowing language. In doing so, he effectively transforms the complex esoteric Buddhist teachings at the heart of his songs into a form that could have been easily understood by almost any audience. This aligns well with the conclusions of the previous chapter, where we found that Godrakpa's verse tends to show the influence of earlier folksong traditions, thereby creating melodies and rhythms that would have been both identifiable and memorable to a wide variety of people. Overall, we will find it congruent that in both form and content, Godrakpa's songs aim to express the experience of enlightenment in a manner that simultaneously assures the listener of the author's high spiritual awakening while also creating a simple path to awakening that others may be inspired to follow.

Godrakpa's Religious Literary Lineage

As we saw in Chapter One, the majority of Godrakpa's songs show the influence of the Tibetan folk tradition in terms of stanza formation and use of poetic figures such as repetition, parallelism, numerical sequencing and use of a refrain. In this section, I want to now turn to the content of Godrakpa's songs to evaluate where he states key sources of influence to come from. Various scholars have linked the songs of the Tibetan wandering yogis to the songs of the Indian siddha figures, noting that both figures sing spontaneous compositions of their highest spiritual realizations, and thus much scholarship places the *siddhas' dohās* as the principal source of influence of the Tibetan yogis.[224]

It is not only in scholarship that the verses of the Tibetan wandering yogis are linked so directly to these Indian *siddhas*: Tibetan yogis, Godrakpa included, trace the tradition of singing to these Indian tantric masters. An example of this is found in the songs of the 18th century Tibetan yogi-saint Shabkar, who links his "happy melodies" to the "glorious Saraha [who]

[224] For more about the way that *gur* has been identified as the Tibetan form of the *dohā,* see footnote 84 and Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 42; Ardussi, "Brewing," 115; Stein, *Tibetan Civilization,* 260; Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* 92.

composed diamond songs – great *dohā*."[225] Similarly, in Godrakpa's *gurbum* this link is made explicit in Song 6, where Godrakpa outlines what he refers to as 'the fine tradition of singing': "The singing of praise/ was the tradition of Śākyamuni…/ Then the singing of visions in song/ was the tradition of his spiritual sons, the bodhisattvas…/ Then the singing of offerings in song/ was the tradition of his retinue, the great śrāvakas…" He concludes the list with the following verses, which I will quote in full:

> The singing of realization in song
> was the tradition of the Great Brahmin,
> known by name as *The Dohā Trilogy*.
>
> The singing of experience in song
> was the tradition of former adepts,
> known by name as the way experience is born.
>
> The singing of understanding in song
> is the tradition upheld by me today,
> known by name as the experiential song of meditation.[226]

Here Godrakpa traces his tradition of singing to the songs at the root of the Buddhist dharma, composed by Buddha Śākyamuni himself, followed by several others types of highly realized spiritual people. In this way his song participates in a literary trend within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition that affirms teachings to be authentic and authoritative when their lineage can be traced back to a Buddha. Donald Lopez explains that being able to create an unbroken succession from teacher to student extending back to India and crossing centuries to end at the beginning, with Śākyamuni Buddha himself, is of central importance to Buddhist histories.[227]

Of particular interest in the lineage that Godrakpa creates is that of the various sources he refers to, only one aside from Śākyamuni is specifically named – the Great Brahmin, or Saraha, perhaps the most famous and influential of all the Indian *siddhas* in Tibet. Song 6 is not Godrakpa's first mention of Saraha or the *Dohā Trilogy,* which he also references in Song 1 as the text he requested to serve as teachings of 'view and meditation.'[228] And Saraha appears later

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[225] "Lamas and spiritual friends accomplished in both knowledge and practice – came to the banks of the Ganges in India…. They composed immeasurable diamond songs for the sake of those to be tamed. In particular, the glorious Saraha composed diamond songs – great *dohā*…. Although I – a bee - have little strength in comparison to the supreme Garuda who traverses the expansive skies, [I] hover in the sky and shout forth happy melodies." (Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 72).
[226] Stearns, *Hermit,* 59-61.
[227] Lopez, "Introduction: The Buddhism of Milarepa," xv.
[228] Stearns, *Hermit*, 35.

in the *gurbum* as well, in a dream meeting with Godrakpa recorded in Song 19. In this song, which is comprised of 3 stanzas of instruction, Saraha implores Godrakpa to "look at the truth of the way that things really are," and offers a series of metaphors to deepen Godrakpa's understanding. Godrakpa concludes the exchange with the prose explanation: "I dreamed he said that…. Emptiness and impermanence arose in my mind."[229] Such 'dream visions' – conversations or meetings between masters of the past and the current adept – are not uncommon in the Tibetan life-story tradition, and indicate the special relationship between realized masters, whether or not they knew each other in their current lives. They may also be used as a literary trope to indicate the special access that one has to teachers of the past, and in this case that Godrakpa had to the teachings and realizations of Saraha.[230] An interesting point to note is that although the later Tibetan yogi-poet Shabkar also traced his tradition of singing to Saraha, the 'dream visions' he records are conversations with earlier Tibetan yogis, such as Milarepa and Kalden Gyatso, while in the dreams of Godrakpa, visions are of the Indian adepts, such as Saraha, Lady Lakṣmīnkarā,[231] and Śavaripa,[232] two other of the 84 mahāsiddhas.[233] These dream meetings and the direct naming of the Indian *siddhas* perhaps indicates how closely Godrakpa links his teachings with the Indian *siddhas*.

Aside from explicitly stating Saraha to be a key source of influence in Song 6, how else do we see the influence of the Indian *siddhas* take hold? Perhaps the most obvious way is in Godrakpa's self-references. As was already discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, the *siddhas* were tantric adepts who lived on the edge of society and engaged in a number of rituals and practices deemed subversive at best, and disgusting at worst.[234] As a result of these practices, they claimed to have high levels of spiritual realization, which they transmitted to others in the form of song. These songs came to Tibet during the later transmission as revered spiritual

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[229] Stearns, *Hermit,* 109.
[230] Pang records several 'dream visions' in Shabkar's *namtar*, each revealing his "extraordinary access to Milarepa and his spiritual songs, as well as his special relationship with him" (Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 138-140).
[231] This dream vision conversation is recorded in Godrakpa's *gurbum* in Song 20 (Stearns, *Hermit*, 111).
[232] Śavaripa, an Indian adept, was the source of the special transmission of the six-branch yoga of Kālacakra that Godrakpa received. Song 43 records a dream that contains allusions to the story of Śavaripa as a hunter, and is composed as a conversation with the two consorts who accompanied Śavaripa on his hunting trips. Song 32 also contains lines from Śavaripa's songs and is framed as a conversation with women by the roadside (Stearns, *Hermit,* 143 and 169.)
[233] A list of 84 Indian *siddhas* is compiled in Abhaydatta's hagiography from the 12th century, and remains one of the most influential/common groupings of the Indian *siddhas* (Powers, *Tibetan Buddhism,* 256).
[234] Wedemeyer outlines several perspectives and positions that have been put forth in Western scholarship: Wedemeyer, *Making Sense,* 105-110.

expressions of an awakened mind, serving as a model for Tibetan yogis to emulate. Ardussi notes that the Tibetan yogis were not only influenced by the song tradition of the Indian *siddhas,* but also sought to create and maintain their lifestyle and religious approach as a living tradition in Tibet.[235] Thus, these Tibetan figures embodied certain characteristics of the ideal yogi prototype popularized by the Indian *siddhas* – one who wanders in the mountains, has abandoned all worldly possessions, devotes their existence to practicing the dharma through methods taught in the tantras and under the guidance of their guru, sings of their highest spiritual experiences and realizations, and both receives and transmits the highest yoga tantra teachings and practices.

How does Godrakpa fit into this prototype? While several self-descriptions are used throughout his *gurbum* – the most common being beggar (*spyan bo*) in ten places, yogi (*rnal 'byor pa*) in nine places, meditator (*sgom chen*) in two places, and spiritual friend or virtuous teacher *(dge bshes)* in two places – it is the term yogi that he discusses in the greatest detail, giving us insight into his life and character, as well as highlighting his qualities as a tantric adept. In this context 'yogi' is best understood to mean a 'practitioner of the yoga tantras',[236] the highest teachings within Vajrayana Buddhism, and according to the Rangjung Yeshe dictionary "holds the connotation of someone of who has already some level of realization of the natural state of mind."[237] Quintman furthers this definition by stating it is typically used in reference to one who engages in extensive meditation retreats, such as Tibet's most famous early yogi, Milarepa.[238] From the content of Godrakpa's songs, I add that Godrakpa uses the term in reference to one who engages in periods of wandering in solitude in the mountains, as we will see when we explore Godrakpa's life in greater detail in Chapter Three.

In the songs of Godrakpa we find multiple references to both the qualities and the actions of the yogi figure, with Godrakpa frequently likening his own character to this prototype. For example, Song 5 has eighteen stanzas, each with the first line starting with the personal pronoun "I" (*nga*) and then offering a simile to illuminate a quality of a yogi that Godrakpa identifies in himself. The second line then more clearly states the characteristic he is referencing in the simile, and the third line either offers advice to his audience or provides a celebratory statement of the quality. Stanza one and stanza ten offer an example of each:

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[235] Ardussi, "Brewing," 115.
[236] Here, "yoga tantras" is not used in reference to the class of tantras called "yoga tantras," but as a more general designation.
[237] *Rangjung Yeshe Dictionary*, s.v. '*rnal 'byor pa'*, accessed August 2013, http://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php/Yogi.
[238] Quintman, *The Life of Milarepa,* 262.

A yogi like the sky,
my characteristics are realized by none.
All you fortunate ones – don't let perverse views arise!

A yogi like a king,
I uphold activities while seated,
Happy to be honoured on the heads of all.[239]

Both of these examples use similes common in the Indian Buddhist tradition, a feature we have already examined in Godrakpa's songs in Chapter One and will review briefly here to explore how they might function as self-descriptions. In the first, Godrakpa likens his yogi qualities to the limitless nature of the sky, a common metaphor comparing the vastness of the sky to the empty nature of the ultimate reality at an objective level and the empty nature of the mind at a subjective level.[240] He then gives the instruction that others must also ensure that their minds give rise to the correct view, and thus understand the ultimate nature of reality. In the second example, he likens his qualities to those of a king, in a literal sense implying the noble and powerful nature of his qualities, while at a metaphorical level referencing the activities of a tantric Buddhist practitioner. This may be a reference to his role as a teacher within the tantric tradition, where during tantric meditations the practitioner visualizes their teacher as seated at the crown of their head, or, it may be a reference to his own spiritual awakening through the practice of deity yoga. In this practice, one visualizes oneself as a fully awakened deity, who dresses in royal garb, to the point where unity with the deity, and therefore awakening within oneself, is accomplished. This entire song is built on simile constructions, the majority of which can be traced to the Indian symbolic world, in which Godrakpa links his spiritual qualities and characteristics to the prototype of the yogi figure.

Godrakpa discusses the yogi figure not only in songs describing his own nature, but also in songs of instruction. For example, in Song 8, he sings of several three-step processes that one can engage in order to exemplify the qualities of a yogi:

First is deeply born faith as the ground.
Second is entering the gate of the excellent Dharma.
Third is forsaking the secular life.

If you have these three qualities, you're a yogi.
It's impossible for you to act against the Dharma.

[239] Stearns, *Hermit,* 53 and 55.
[240] Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 59.

First is being held by the master's kindness.
Second is forsaking a home.
Third is wandering in isolated mountain ranges.

If you have these three qualities, you're a yogi.
It's impossible for you to stay in a home.[241]

Here Godrakpa links the yogi figure to specific actions, such as "forsaking the secular life", "forsaking a home" and, "wandering in isolated mountain ranges." It is these 'actions', for which both Indian *siddhas* and the Tibetan yogi-saints are famous, that he sings most frequently of throughout the *gurbum*, indicating that the yogi title is most aptly applied to those who practice the dharma in the solitude of the mountains. For example, he concludes Song 17 with the following statement:

I wander in mountain-range solitude,
Or perform sealed retreat in a cave,
If you're in the midst of an assembly, you're no yogi.[242]

And likewise in Song 33:

No home to uphold;
Just roaming aimlessly through the land.
Now the yogi who has discovered the mind as a permanent home is so happy.[243]

It becomes clear through these descriptive and celebratory songs that Godrakpa finds great meaning and importance in identifying as a yogi. The *gurbum* concludes with the following two stanzas, which both assure his audience of his highly realized mind and also request their devotion, reminding those who hear him of the power of the highly realized yogi figure:

I'm a yogi like the sky.
You who don't understand, having not realized
the characteristic of the sky – don't condemn me!

I'm a yogi like a wish-fulfilling gem.
If you supplicate me, needs and desires will be fulfilled.
All you close disciples – have devotion![244]

[241] Stearns, *Hermit,* 69-71.
[242] Stearns, *Hermit,* 105.
[243] Stearns, *Hermit,* 145.
[244] Stearns, *Hermit,* 173.

It is of interest to note here that although Godrakpa would have been aware of the Tibetan yogis carving this image in Tibetan before him, and in fact incorporates lines from one of Mila's songs into his own,[245] the only other person that he names as a yogi in his *gurbum* is Saraha: "the radiant yogi,"[246] again indicating the inspiration he draws from this Indian figure.

From this section we see how Godrakpa carefully crafts his yogi image and explicitly places himself and his type of singing within a tradition of song popularized in India. Some of the reasons as to why he might have wanted to trace his songs, and therefore the teachings contained within them, to India, the words of the Buddha and to other realized saints will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three. For now, having presented how Godrakpa explains his literary and religious heritage, as well as how he identifies as a tantric adept, I would like to turn to the content of the songs themselves. As a yogi in Tibet, building on and referencing a tradition of singing from India, what exactly is he singing about?

Songs of Experience and Advice

Godrakpa's songs do not offer sequential or detailed instructions on how one might practice the dharma; rather each song provides a brief glimpse into a particular moment or an element of spiritual practice or experience that evoked a realization that was then crafted into a song. Thus, there is little continuity between the songs, which span an unknown time period and are often framed with short vignettes that include various bits of information, such as where they were composed, who was present, or what was happening when the song arose. The audiences were made up of various people, such as fellow yogis and monks, female disciples, lay practitioners, and people on the roadside, with his songs purportedly tailored to the needs and interests of those present. However, despite the different contexts in which the songs arose, several themes emerge in the collection that can be divided into two broad categories: explanation/insight into the basis of Buddhist teachings and instruction/experience regarding the stages of the Buddhist path, including mentions of tantric practice and expression of resultant realizations.

The Basis:

[245] See Stearns' discussion of Song 3, Song 4, and Song 38: Stearns, *Hermit,* 15. These can be compared to Milarepa's songs translated by Chang, *Hundred,* 100, 280-281 and 610-611.
[246] Stearns, *Hermit,* 109.

At the core of Godrakpa's teachings are realizations at the foundation of Buddhism: the suffering of saṃsāric existence, the impermanent and empty nature of all phenomena, the certainty of death, and the danger of wasting a human rebirth. We learn in Song 1 that since his early childhood, his interest has been to do nothing but study the dharma.[247] Why? In this song he notes the cause to be his weariness with saṃsāra, a weariness that he details and repeats throughout the *gurbum*, explaining that "in these degenerate times, there's no serenity"[248], there is illness and suffering,[249] there is no end to the desires of sentient beings,[250] and finally, that saṃsāra is exhausting simply because appearances are not representative of the true nature of existence:

> In saṃsāra, which is like a dream and illusion,
> Sentient beings roam like blind lunatics.
> Not realizing the truth that confused appearances have no essence,
> Those who cling to the false as true get so exhausted.[251]

He urges his audience to reach the same understanding, using metaphor, simile, direct statements and teasing tones to implore each person to recognize the true nature of saṃsāra, the impermanence of their existence ("After guarding – guarding your own body as if it were a living tree,/ It'll just be abandoned – abandoned like a rotten log"[252]), and the danger of being attached to the self ("to the serum of youth, which is like a flower,/ the young are attached like witless bees,/ not recognizing this is impermanent and fading…"[253]) or to worldly objects ("for those who are attached to their yaks at home,/ familiarity with confused afflicting emotion is easy…"[254]). Among these basic teachings, he draws the audience repeatedly back to one of his key points: the preciousness and usefulness of the human rebirth, believed to be the only rebirth through which one is capable of attaining liberation from saṃsāra:

> Difficult to gain through a thousand hardships,
> This human body is like a most precious object.
> Wouldn't it be right to make meaningful use of it?
>
> Alas! Think about it, faithful ones.

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[247] Stearns, *Hermit*, 33.
[248] Stearns, *Hermit,* 83.
[249] Stearns, *Hermit,* 75.
[250] Stearns, *Hermit,* 89.
[251] Stearns, *Hermit,* 107.
[252] Stearns, *Hermit,* 147.
[253] Stearns, *Hermit,* 107
[254] Stearns, *Hermit,* 89.

A human body is like a pea stuck to a wall.
Look at the number of sentient beings in the six realms![255]

Drawing on a traditional illustration, the rarity of a pea sticking to wall if thrown at it, Godrakpa reminds his listeners of the rare opportunity of the human rebirth. What does it mean to make meaningful use of it? Godrakpa sings candidly in multiple songs of the importance of practicing the dharma before one's inevitable death, as we find in Song 26:

Striving – striving for the aims of this life,
The aging body and approaching death wasn't noticed.
It's too late to practice the divine dharma.[256]

The Path:

While Godrakpa does not specify a systematic dharma practice that one must follow, there are several themes in his songs that when taken together outline the various stages that one might experience or commit to during their practice. Specifically, there are a number of songs following a four-line per stanza pattern that read as instructions on how to start on the path, reiterating the same key ideas: develop an understanding of impermanence, take refuge in the dharma, renounce worldly possessions and family, find and follow a spiritual teacher, go to a solitary place to practice meditation, realize the true nature of the mind, and act to be of benefit to others.[257] While some of these songs are written as clear directives, others recount the reasons and realizations that underlie the decisions Godrakpa made as a practitioner, using his own example to serve as a model that one may emulate, much as he emulates the masters of the past. This aligns well with Willis's research on the *namtar* or 'life-writing' genre found in Tibetan Buddhist literature. The *namtar* and its relation to my reading of Godrakpa's *gur* will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three; however, on this topic, one of the key similarities we find between the spiritual content in *gur* and *namtar* is the humble way in which the adept inserts his example as the lesson, rather than delivering impersonal or complex philosophical discourse or directives. In doing this in his songs, Godrakpa straddles the line between acting as a spiritual teacher and acting as a model of a spiritual life that one might emulate, and between providing doctrinal instruction and providing friendly advice. The following two stanzas, taken

[255] Stearns, *Hermit,* 101.
[256] Stearns, *Hermit,* 127.
[257] See songs Song 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 21, 29, 31, and 34 for examples of these types of 'initial instruction' songs. Each give an overview of some or all of the steps mentioned, and each follow a 4-line/stanza pattern, with various types of form and sound repetition within (Stearns, *Hermit,* 77-93; 101-103; 113-115; 133-135; 139-141; 147-149).

from different songs on the topic of renunciation demonstrate each of these styles. In the first we see Godrakpa provides a directive:

> A home is a tethering stake of saṃsāra.
> Look whether or not it has been extracted.
> If craving hasn't been totally severed,
> keep roaming aimlessly around the land.[258]

And in the second, Godrakpa shares his own experience:

> Forsaking a home
> and not holding to a basic point of reference,
> this solitude of aimlessly wandering the mountain ranges is so delightful!
> No need to protect a structure is so wonderful![259]

Willis finds that the personal voice of the adept serves to encourage, uplift and instruct others largely through the act of inspiring their commitment to the dharma: "It is only natural that it is inspirational, even joyously uplifting, to contemplate real persons who have traveled that path successfully."[260] Although Godrakpa does use an impersonal and didactic voice in twelve[261] of his songs, in the majority, by inserting expressions of his own experience into the songs, he becomes an example of a very human person attaining enlightenment, inspiring others to believe enlightenment is possible if they too follow similar steps.

It seems that for Godrakpa, the most obvious way to inspire or benefit others is to sing of his own process of awakening, encouraging others to similarly realize the true nature of their mind. At the heart of all Buddhist teachings is the understanding that all phenomena, the mind included, can be viewed from two separate perspectives or levels of reality: conventional and ultimate. While the conventional understanding implies that each appearance of a phenomenon exists in an independent and inherent way, as it would appear to an ordinary being, the ultimate level refers to the underlying true nature of phenomena, stating nothing, even one's own mind, to have an inherent or independent existence. Furthermore, at the ultimate level, there is no separation of understanding between the conventional and ultimate, thereby rendering the dualism of reality to be ultimately non-dual. Godrakpa sings of this understanding frequently, pointing to the differences of appearance for those that have attained ultimate realization and

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[258] Stearns, *Hermit,* 113-115.
[259] Stearns, *Hermit,* 91 (exclamation marks my own).
[260] Willis, *Enlightened Beings*, 16.
[261] See songs 3, 7, 10, 12, 18, 21, 22, 23, 31, 36, 39, and 42 (Stearns, *Hermit,* 45; 65-67; 77-79; 87-89; 107; 113-121; 139-141; 153; 161; 167).

those that have not,[262] urging his listeners to stop wasting their time and instead to practice diligently in order to experience reality from an ultimate perspective. For example, he sings:

> If the perfect truth isn't realized,
> no matter how often we wake from slumber,
> the sleep of ignorance will never be removed.
>
> So get up and watch the mind.
> Practice the lamplike yoga.
> Leave the mind in a radiant, unobscured state.[263]

And the refrain of Song 44 instructs:

> All who are fortunate, set yourselves free
> with the mind unbound by meditation,
> and observe reality from a state of freedom.[264]

While observing, or understanding, reality through the ultimate perspective is the result of Buddhist practice, in tantra, it is also the practice itself. The tantric path is said to be the fastest path to attain awakening due to the incorporation of special yogic techniques, methods and rituals that are not found in the sutras. The tantric texts, and the practices contained within them, are said to join one much more quickly with an experience of awakening because they require one to concentrate directly on the qualities of the ultimate, rather than conventional, level of reality. As Powers writes, tantric Buddhism is also referred to as the 'effect vehicle', "because it takes the final result of Buddhist practice – buddhahood – as the path and trains directly on the attributes of awakening."[265] In this way, the result of the practice is thoroughly integrated into the practice. Godrakpa sings of his own practice revealing the ultimate indivisibility of all levels of awareness of the mind by observing each level (external, internal, and the awareness that observes either), leading to an understanding of the Great Seal, in Song 6:

> Practicing without distraction,
> a ceaseless understanding was born.
>
> Looking out at the external objects of the six groups,
> I saw them to be the magical display of the birthless mind.
>
> Looking in at the internal, intrinsic awareness of mind,

[262] See, for example, Song 9, quoted in Chapter One, page 54.
[263] Stearns, *Hermit,* 119.
[264] Stearns, *Hermit,* 171-173.
[265] Powers, *Tibetan Buddhism*, 250.

there was the groundless, rootless nature of mind that is forever empty.

Examining the attentive, aware mind in-between,
incidental thoughts free themselves.

An inner understanding such as this,
is the view of the Great Seal.

The Tumbu man[266] continually sustaining this
is sure he'd have nothing to ask,
even if the great lord Vajradhara came.[267]

The Great Seal is a term primarily associated with the Kagyu tradition, which is premised on the teachings of Vajradhara,[268] the divine form of the buddha body of reality, considered in some traditions to be the ultimate source of the tantric teachings.[269] These teachings were brought to Tibet through the Tibetan translator, Marpa, who combined two lineages of transmission. In the first lineage, Vajradhara directly transmitted the Great Seal teachings to the Indian *siddha* Saraha, where they were passed to his disciple Nāgārjuna, from Nāgārjuna to Śavaripa, and from Śavaripa to Maitripa. Marpa received this transmission from Maitripa during his first trip to India.[270] In the second transmission lineage, Vajradhara directly transmitted the teachings to the Indian adept Tilopa, who eventually transmitted the Great Seal to his disciple Nāropa. Marpa then received these teachings from Nāropa on his third and final trip to India.[271] The term Great Seal refers to both a system of practice that leads to the recognition of the true nature of the mind and the final result or realization of the practice itself – recognition of one's own Buddhahood.[272] Lobsang Lhalungpa explains:

> [It] stands for the ultimate nature of mind and reality. Just as a royal seal wields unchallengeable authority, so the all-encompassing voidness of the ultimate reality prevails upon the cosmic phenomena. It also stands for the path of self-realization, which integrates authentic vision, contemplation and action into one perfect sight.[273]

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[266] According to Stearns, the term *Tumbo* (*dum 'bu*) is used to designate Godrakpa's "racial stock" (*mi'i rigs*) (Stearns, *Hermit,* 185).
[267] Stearns, *Hermit*, 61.
[268] Powers, *Tibetan Buddhism*, 399.
[269] Stearns, *Hermit,* 184.
[270] Braitstein, "Saraha's Adamantine Songs," 27-28.
[271] This lineage of transmission is outlined in Powers, *Tibetan Buddhism,* 399-401.
[272] Quintman, *The Life of Milarepa,* 253.
[273] Lhalungpa, "Translators' Introduction," xxvii.

In Godrakpa's song, we learn of the great confidence he has in realizing the nature of his own mind through these practices, so much so that even if Vajradhara, the source of the teachings were to arrive, he would have nothing to ask. Godrakpa repeats variations of this last stanza in two other songs in the *gurbum*,[274] again indicating the depth of his experiences. In Song 15, he concludes that his understanding of the Great Seal is so complete that there would be nothing to ask of Vajradhara, as Vajradhara himself would be inseparable from Godrakpa's own experience:

> I understood the meaning of the Great Seal.
> Even if great Vajradhara came,
> the Buddha body of form is just a mental emanation.
> I'd surely have nothing to ask about the meaning.[275]

Many of Godrakpa's songs incorporate lines that detail the results of his practice, such as those examples offered above. How exactly, however, one practices the yogic mediation techniques he employs is not clearly delineated in his songs; rather, Godrakpa is unsystematic and vague in his presentation of the yogic practice. Stearns notes that Godrakpa's songs are unpretentious in their presentation of the dharma, with only one song, Song 2, presupposing the listener to even have specific knowledge of a tantric practice.[276] This song is unique not only because it directly references the *lamdré* stages of the "gathering of constituents" – a specific yogic practice where the constituents of the vital winds and clear essences of the physical constituents are gathered in specific locations in the subtle body[277] – but also because there is no indication that he is singing to anyone other than himself; rather, it reads as a very sincere and heartfelt personal reflection on a period of great practice and realization.

In contrast, the other mentions of specific tantric techniques that we find in the songs are far less detailed, yet more instructive. For example, Song 8, composed of multiple stanzas with numerical sequencing to outline the qualities of a yogi, includes the explicit instruction to practice the two stages of the highest yoga tantra meditation: the stage of creation and stage of perfection – both key to anyone who aspires to attain ultimate realization of their own buddhanature:

> First is the body radiant as the divine Buddha body through the creation stage.

[274] See Song 4 and Song 15 (Stearns, *Hermit,* 47-51 and 99).
[275] Stearns, *Hermit,* 99.
[276] Stearns, *Hermit*, 15.
[277] Stearns, *Hermit,* 181 – 182.

> Second is understanding it as empty through the perfection stage of the vital winds.
> Third is no fluctuation in the radiant light of the mind.[278]

These instructions are repeated again in Song 20, albeit even more concisely:

> Even though the three piṭakas are understood,
> the practice is both creation and perfection.[279]

In the creation stage, the first of the two, the practitioner engages in visualization meditations that involve seeing oneself as a buddha-deity, and in the perfection stage, the practitioner works with the subtle body so as to actually transform oneself into a buddha. At this stage, as discussed in the previous examples, the 'conventional' mind and the 'enlightened' mind become indivisibly blended resulting in an experience of awakening. What is key to note here is the relatively sparse detail in the songs of instruction, particularly when compared to the songs detailing the results of his personal experience, which include lengthy reflections and celebrations of positive results, indicating the efficacy of the practice and perhaps inspiring his audience to similarly engage.

The somewhat vague or absent explanation of how one participates in these tantric practices should not be a surprise, however, as such high tantric teachings are typically not transmitted casually or in public settings, such as where the songs may have been sung, but rather through the words of one's guru in the context of a private and highly personalized relationship. Gyatso explains that the "fundamental prerequisite" for engaging with tantric practice is to receive initiation into the practice from a qualified teacher or guru:

> It is literally an unbreakable rule that tantric practice… must be preceded by permission and instruction from a teacher who has experience with those same practices and who has in turn received the appropriate transmission from a qualified teacher. With the exception of the initiated circle, the tantric teachings and practices are kept secret, because they are thought to be so powerful.[280]

The term 'guru' translates literally as 'heavy', 'weighted', or 'serious' and Jackson explains that in the Indian tradition, the guru holds the task of informing their disciples of "the weightier truths of life," as well as forming their student's spiritual path.[281] The centrality of this guru figure is stated with no ambivalence or equivocation in the songs of the Indian *siddhas,* and similarly we

[278] Stearns, *Hermit,* 71.
[279] Stearns, *Hermit,* 111.
[280] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 187.
[281] Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 38.

find the songs of Godrakpa to refer to his spiritual teacher often, indicating the absolute necessity of this relationship, his close and personal relationship with his guru, and his unwavering devotion to him. Of the highly personalized and emotional relationship with his guru, he sings:

> When I met the kind master
> he led me on the path like an only son.
> Concerned that the path could be mistaken
> he cared for me with a loving heart.[282]

And similarly, regarding his great devotion, he sings:

> Then, while bowing in the presence of the master,
> like finding an escort in a dangerous place,
> An experience of mental assurance dawned.
> That was the deep penetration of devotion.[283]

The reverence and devotion that a disciple holds for his guru is at least in part due to the understanding of the ultimate that the guru bestows through oral instructions. Although Godrakpa sings often of his experiences of profound realizations, he repeatedly sings of his teacher's oral instructions as key to his own process of awakening:

> In accord with all sūtra and tantra,
> the nature of the mind is established.
> This oral instruction that places buddhahood in the hand is so delightful!
> This immediate birth of certainty is so wonderful![284]

And, having had awakening experiences due to these profound instructions, he encourages others to also seek the same:

> With unceasing devotion,
> rely on a master without sadness and fatigue.
>
> With faith that doesn't fade,
> listen to the oral instructions without weariness.[285]

Throughout the songs, Godrakpa indicates the absolute necessity of a strong relationship with a spiritual teacher to progress on the tantric path, and undivided devotion on the part of the student, as it is only through this relationship that oral instructions can be received and that a realization of the ultimate truth can be attained.

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[282] Stearns, *Hermit,* 51.
[283] Stearns, *Hermit,* 133.
[284] Stearns, *Hermit,* 91.
[285] Stearns, *Hermit,* 101.

Connecting the Content to the Context

This chapter opened with an exploration of how Godrakpa ties his songs to the tradition of singing songs of experience and realization that started in India. I then pointed to a number of ways that Godrakpa specifically links his songs to the tradition of the Indian *siddhas*, such as the naming of Saraha in the line of singers of spiritual songs, the dream sequences that involve transmissions from Saraha and other Indian *siddhas,* and the self-referential yogi image that is carefully defined and crafted throughout his *gur* to show how his lifestyle emulates some aspects of a tantric Indian adept, and in fact uses Indian-imagery as similes to substantiate this link. For this reason, at least at a basic level, he is explicit in drawing inspiration from the Indian *siddhas,* yet aside from being written in the first-person voice and the examination and expression of non-duality within the tantric context at the foundation of their songs, few other literary parallels exist between Godrakpa and his stated sources of influence. In Chapter One, we found that the songs of Godrakpa differ significantly from *dohās* in terms of form, and having now explored the spiritual content in Godrakpa's songs, I would like to conclude this chapter with a brief overview of how Godrakpa's songs diverge from the songs of the *siddhas* in two other specific ways: first in terms of the content itself and its general focus on basic and easily understood spiritual teachings, and second in terms of discursiveness and expressive style. My hope in this brief examination is to draw out the 'Tibetan' voice or aspects of Godrakpa's spiritual expression.

First, one of the key points of departure from the songs of the *siddhas* is the general simplicity of the spiritual teachings contained within Godrakpa's songs. While we know from his biography that Godrakpa purportedly engaged in antinomian acts, such as eating parts of the brain of a corpse in order to attain high realizations,[286] he does not sing of such actions. Rather the yogi image he presents in his songs is one that presumably anyone could, and might want to, become – a humble beggar who, through renunciation and the practice of meditation, attains realization and lives simply in the mountains of Tibet. Although Godrakpa's penchant for lonely and remote locations does resonate to a notable degree with lore surrounding the lives of the Indian *siddhas,* he does not describe himself, nor his actions, with the same extremism that is associated with the *siddhas*. Wedemeyer finds that the features most strongly associated with '*siddha* tantrism' are: sex, eerie places (charnel grounds, lonely forests, deep caves, etc.),

[286] Stearns, *Hermit*, 8; DiValerio, "Subversive Sainthood," 636.

eccentric dress, ecstatic behaviour, and in some cases, proscription of activities of the mainstream Indian religions such as recitation, meditation, worship, ritualized offerings, image devotion, etc.[287] With the songs of Saraha, we find seemingly contradictory statements about the efficacy of meditation and other practices, heavy criticism of other religious groups, and both direct and indirect references to yogic practices, including socially questionable sexual practices, all in order to attain realizations. Jackson notes that in addition to the influence of the *yoginī* tantras running through the songs, six common themes arise: a rhetoric of paradox; cultural critique; a focus on the innate; affirmation of the body, the senses and sexuality; the promotion of certain yogic techniques (including stopping/relaxing/seeing the mind, using mantras and mandalas, working in the subtle body, and practices involving ecstatic and sexual yoga); and, celebration of the guru.[288] Sorenson further describes the *dohās* as esoteric messages and advice coated and veiled in "allusive phrases and in an enigmatic language… rich in imagery and replete with double entendre and homonymous puns."[289] For example, listen to Saraha sing about meditation and understanding one's true nature: "He's in the house,/ but she asks outside;/ she sees her husband,/ but asks the neighbours./ Saraha says:/ Fool! Know your self-/ but don't meditate on it,/ don't recollect or recite it"[290]; or express his experience with yogic techniques: "When wind and fire/ and the mighty power have stopped,/ at the time when nectar flows,/ winds enter the mind./ When through four absorptions/ they enter a single abode,/ then utmost great bliss/ can't be contained by space."[291] While these short lines of verse give a sense of conveying a snapshot of a moment of realization, they read much less like a story being told and more as a puzzle that one might ponder, requiring varied levels of knowledge of tantric practices and vocabulary in order to grasp the meaning, which is often hidden within paradoxical and/or critical statements, and underpinned by references to the complex yogic teachings.

In contrast, as we saw in the section above, Godrakpa's verses would have been easily understood by the vast majority of those who heard his songs; he is straightforward in presenting his spiritual truths, and his songs require little to no background knowledge of tantric practices. Although he does blend together both Mahāyāna and tantric teachings that reflect his awakened experiences, evidenced through songs of visions and dream meetings with ḍākinīs and adepts of

[287] Wedemeyer, *Making Sense,* 138.
[288] Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 10-37.
[289] Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 15.
[290] Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 89.
[291] Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 75.

the past, in the majority of his songs, his focus is on the foundation of Buddhist teachings: the suffering of saṃsāra, the impermanent nature of all phenomenon, the necessity of renunciation and non-attachment, the certainty of death, and the preciousness of one's human rebirth – in essence things that all people could be spurred to think about and realize ring true with their own experiences, regardless of their status, class, education level, or degree of Buddhist knowledge. Lopez notes the same of Milarepa's songs: "despite all the references to the stage of generation and the stage of completion, and all of Milarepa's meditation on channels, winds and drops, as he approaches the achievement of Buddhahood his instructions to those he encounters continue to embody the most basic of Buddhist teachings."[292] For this reason, much more so than the songs of the *siddhas*, the teachings of the Tibetan yogis were palatable to the masses, advocating practices and singing of experiences that would have been easily understood by almost anyone in the audience, thereby creating content accessible to almost anyone.[293]

Related to this, a second point of departure exemplified in Godrakpa's verses is the personal and conversational tone that he employs. Due to the brevity of format of the *dohā*, the verses are typically terse, delivering sharp and pithy advice, creating what Jackson terms a vehicle for "self-contained aphorisms", exclamations of spiritual experience, and lines of spiritual instruction.[294] While seductive in their own right, and certainly leading to the widening of consciousness in their listeners, these verses contain less personal detail or context of the moment they capture, thereby requiring more effort from the audience to make sense of what is being said. In contrast to these rhapsodic lines, Godrakpa employs flowing language to express and contextualize his moments of realization, using the familiarity of the Tibetan folksong cadence to weave details of his life into lengthy lines of spiritual teachings. His songs, then, read as personalized stories of progress on the path rather than as snapshot descriptions of the resultant realization. Though in Saraha's songs we frequently find the tagline, "Saraha says…", there is little detail to contextualize his words; however, as Godrakpa's verses give the space to expand on the autobiographical voice, the audience is given very human glimpses of him as he relays the emotional and personal tales of his awakening. While this autobiographical voice will become the focus of Chapter Three, for now I wish to note that this general discursiveness is a

[292] Lopez, "Introduction: The Buddhism of Milarepa," xvii - xviii.
[293] It is worth recalling, however, that the *siddhas*' *dohās* were also set to folksong melodies to allow for wide circulation, and were expressed in a language that would have been understandable, at least on some level, to 'ordinary people' despite also containing esoteric tantric practices. See the Introduction, 20-22.
[294] Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 9-10.

marked departure from the songs of the *siddhas*. As Kapstein writes of the songs of the early Tibetan yogi Marpa:

> It has often been said that the yogic songs of the Kagyu masters were modeled upon the *dohās* of the *mahāsiddhas*, especially Saraha. But in comparing the extant Indian Buddhist *dohā* corpus with Marpa's poem… it is striking in its difference. For Saraha's songs are skeletally bare when it comes to establishing a context or setting for their own recitation or composition, while Marpa encases his poem within a double narrative frame that provides both… to contrast and situation the self in narration in this way is entirely characteristic of Tibetan oratory, and literary evidence of this stance can be found even in ancient historical chronicles from Dunhuang.[295]

In relaying his story of awakening in such personalized terms, Godrakpa is not only expanding on the first-person voice of the Indian *siddhas* but also arguably participating in the promulgation of a decidedly Tibetan style of composition to express spiritual teachings transported from India. By his doing so, the very explanatory nature of his songs would have allowed people unfamiliar with tantric Buddhism to understand the teachings he transmitted.

While stating that the content of Godrakpa's songs is typically straightforward and easy to understand may seem too obvious a point to mention, Pang makes a convincing argument that in fact this merits significant attention. In her analysis of the similar oratorical nature of Shabkar's verse, she reminds us that many forms of communication within Tibetan Buddhism, such as oral debate, written commentaries, and texts on philosophy can seem incomprehensible to non-specialists.[296] On the other hand, the verses of Tibetan yogis such as Godrakpa, Mila before him, and later Shabkar, are composed in a way that uses the substantial repetition, simple idiom, and lengthy explanation characteristic of traditional Tibetan *lu* and folksong, thereby creating content that is both accessible and memorable. Kapstein notes: "the yogic songs, whose connection with Indian literature was established through its constant references to the traditions of the *mahāsiddhas* and to symbols derived from the tantras, remained nevertheless a decidedly Tibetan genre, drawing freely upon well-establish conventions of oratory and bardic recitation."[297] The ease with which the audience can interact with Godrakpa's songs can be seen as an early example of what came to be the definitive 'Tibetan' element within the Tibetan songs of realization. Pang finds this element to remain through the centuries, as is apparent in Shabkar's songs:

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[295] Kapstein, "Indian Literary," 772.
[296] Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 149.
[297] Kapstein, "Indian Literary," 773.

> Saraha was an important forefather to Shabkar in terms of being the first singer of songs of spiritual realization on his list. However, although both the songs of Saraha and Shabkar arise from profound meditation experiences, there is little literary parallel between them. On the other hand, just a cursory glance at the songs of spiritual realization of the Tibetan figures form the Later Transmission reveal striking general continuities with Shabkar's work, despite that many of the songs were written up to six centuries before Shabkar.[298]

Thus, while Godrakpa has clearly linked his type of song to India's *siddhas,* and thematically expounds the Indian esoteric teachings that became the cultural and religious focal point of Tibet during the later transmission period, his style of singing shows him to be both participating in and laying the groundwork of what was becoming a uniquely Tibetan style of expression.

[298] Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 160.

Chapter Three

The Life and Voice of a Wandering Yogi: Embedding the Transcendent in the Tibetan Landscape

Introduction

Various scholars have already noted that *gur* typically stands out from other forms of Tibetan literature due to its sincere and detailed descriptions of personal thoughts and experiences as related to one's own spiritual path[299] and I have found the songs of Godrakpa to be no exception to this quality. Throughout the collection, his songs contain a wealth of details of his lived experiences, and often he sings of his life events, emotions and observations, whether celebratory or describing difficulties, in order that he may use his own experience as a foundation from which to offer spiritual teachings and advice to others. This aligns well with Savitsky's argument that after the 10th century, all Tibetan literature "became religious-didactic both in its content and objectives", yet departs from his subsequent statement that in this period of literature, "the inner world of man, his feelings and emotional experiences were not dealt with."[300] While the vast majority of Godrakpa's songs do contain spiritual teachings, as the previous chapter demonstrated, Godrakpa's songs also reveal his 'inner world' of thoughts, feelings and emotions. In fact, we find that it is through the highly emotional and personal tales, where alongside exclamations of great joy, we also hear laments of great sorrow, that Godrakpa offers his profound spiritual advice.

Chapter Three will continue to deepen our exploration of the features of Godrakpa's songs, drawing on the autobiographical details he includes in the songs to discuss what he reveals about his spiritual quest and to analyze how he grounds his spiritual quest and teachings in the landscape of Tibet. My hope in this chapter is to elucidate the strong autobiographical voice that Godrakpa uses, linking his Buddhist teachings to his personal experiences, and thereby providing a life-story that others may both learn from and be inspired to follow. In order to address how Godrakpa does this, I will first turn to scholarship that explores the literary milieu of Godrakpa's period, highlighting the unique emergence of the autobiographical genre in Tibet. I will then look to elements of Godrakpa's songs that explain his life and choices, in order to better understand the nature and purpose of his spiritual quest. With this information, I will

[299] See, for example, Sujata, *Songs of Realization,* xii, or Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 377-378.
[300] Savitsky, "Secular Lyrical," 403.

discuss how Godrakpa's 'autobiographical' songs successfully link the 'transcendent' nature of the spiritual teachings he expounds with his 'mundane' life, and in turn provides his followers with songs that connect the complex and transcendent nature of tantric teachings to worldly existence in Tibet at his time.

Setting the Scene: *Gur,* Autobiography and Life-writing in Tibet

I concluded the previous chapter with notes on elements that were 'truly Tibetan' in Godrakpa's *gur*. We have already established in Chapter One that the metre and form of Godrakpa's *gur* was heavily influenced by the existing folk tradition in Tibet, as well as the *gur* that had been developed in the early transmission period, accounting for his tendency to lengthen his verse lines beyond the standard, aphoristic verses of the *dohā* tradition. While this is an obvious departure from the Indian verses that are said to have inspired the development of the *gur* genre, it is a departure more in detail than in spirit, as the *siddhas* are also said to have used folksong idiom, albeit short and terse rather than lengthy and flowing, as the mode of expression for their spiritual songs, enabling the *dohās* to be understood and remembered by a variety of audience members. In Chapter Two, we found that although much like those of his Indian predecessors, Godrakpa's songs are rooted in the non-dual nature of esoteric Buddhism, that he diverges from the songs of the *siddhas* in two key ways. The first difference was related to the relative accessibility and simplicity of the teachings within his songs, which typically require little to no knowledge of Buddhism, tantra or esoteric practices. The second difference was the highly expressive and personal nature of the songs, with the vast majority of his songs expressing his spiritual realizations alongside explanations of life events, thus creating songs that give small glimpses of his life experiences. It is not only the songs of Godrakpa, but also the songs of other wandering yogis, that have this highly personal tone, and thus the genre is typically perceived as being autobiographical in nature, such that the voice of the author is the same as the life being narrated.

Autobiography as Unique to Tibet

Janet Gyatso writes that notwithstanding the Buddhist doctrine of 'no-self', autobiographical writing has a long and vast history in Tibetan literature. Her research reveals this to be true not only following the 15th century, which is said to be when autobiographical

writing started in full,[301] but also of the period surrounding Godrakpa's life. For example, she writes that full autobiographies have been attributed to Zhang Rinpoche (*zhang rin po che*, 1123-93), Tsangpa Gyare (*gtsang pa rgya ras,* 1161-1211), the second Karmapa, Karma Pakṣi (*karma pak shi,* 1204-1283), the sixth and seventh Shangs-pa patriarchs (12th and 13th centuries), and Guru Chowang (*guru chos dbang,* 1212-1270).[302] As of her 1998 book on the 'secret autobiographies' of Jigme Lingpa (1730-1798), Gyatso had found over 150 book-length Tibetan autobiographies to be in existence, a number that did not include the extensive collections she found of *gur,* which she calls "autobiographical… meditative songs,"[303] attesting to the popularity of the autobiographical voice even apart from *gur*.

Interestingly, however, her research reveals that similar autobiographical works were not in existence in Buddhist India, which is typically perceived to have been the source of influence for most forms of Tibetan Buddhist literature. While Gyatso notes that it is possible that more in-depth studies of Indian vernacular traditions will reveal autobiographical materials that have previously been unrecognized, the lack of obvious autobiographical writing sharply contrasts the vast corpus of such writing in the Tibetan literary sphere.[304] Similar to her conclusion that Tibetan autobiographical writing developed independently of Indian influence, Gyatso also writes that despite the fact that China had a relatively larger incidence of autobiographical writing than did India, "no evidence suggests that autobiographical writing in China has any effect on the development of the genre in Tibet."[305] So what led to the vast amount of autobiographical writing in Tibet? Gyatso notes two historical, cultural conditions in Tibet that may have contributed to the development of autobiographical writing: 1) Tibet, like China, but unlike India, had a long tradition of recording history.[306] We saw hints of this already in our earlier discussion of the *gur* and *lu* of the dynastic period[307], which often recorded dynastic events in verse, and is further evidenced in the multitude of manuscripts found in the Dunhuang Caves that detail the events of the royal courts; 2) Tibet has a long history of recording "narratives of

[301] The 15th century is noted by Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani, "Introduction," xviii, although perhaps it was more biographical rather than autobiographical writing that appeared at this time. Gyatso writes that it is specifically after 17th century that the genre "virtually exploded", with the autobiographical writing of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 101).
[302] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 101.
[303] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 101.
[304] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 114-115.
[305] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 115.
[306] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 116.
[307] See above, pages 17 to 18.

origin", or genealogies, for virtually anything in existence. For example, Gyatso writes that family genealogies were recorded as "bone repository" documents, which would have been both written and recited orally to children so that they would know their family history.[308] Stein writes that such records of origin were paramount to social functioning: "the correct recitation of legends of origin was a religious act, necessary for upholding the order of world and society."[309] In this system, being able to trace one's origins to a particular clan or ancestral line indicated one's rank, and therefore, power, in society.

These two factors are presented by Gyatso as possible historical/cultural causes that created a foundation for the development of Tibetan autobiographical writing; however, the strongest impetus, she argues, was the nature of the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet in the later transmission period.[310] After its arrival, Buddhism became all-pervasive in Tibet, and, with the exception of the Bonpo tradition, overrode the previous customs, traditions, and beliefs of the region by appropriating them into the Buddhist systems. Thus, the systems of indigenous cultural self-identification were gone, and Tibetans began to self-identify within the new Buddhist social conventions.[311] According to Gyatso, "the radical overthrowing of the past and the constructions of a new cultural identity that occurred with the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet was the principal factor that made for the development and flourishing of autobiography."[312] Gyatso effectively argues that the introduction of the all-encompassing Buddhist ideal to Tibet necessitated Tibetans to forge a new system of self-identification, and autobiographical writing seemed a natural fit given the Tibetan predisposition to detailed record keeping.

Autobiographical writing also served a more distinct function in establishing powerful lineages in the new Buddhist Tibet. Through the emerging autobiographical genres, Buddhist adepts recorded the history of the teachings that they received, practiced and transmitted, linking their specific systems of Buddhism to admired Indian adepts in order to add legitimacy to their claims to a higher level of truth. In doing so, much as previous clan-based genealogies provided legitimacy to one's claim to secular power, the genealogies surrounding the transmissions of

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[308] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 117.
[309] Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 195.
[310] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 116-123.
[311] Gyatso's argument is supported by Davidson, who also writes that following the collapse of the Tibetan empire in the mid-9th century, Tibet began looking to other systems to promote cultural stability and in the next centuries settled on Indian tantric Buddhism as their principal source, thereby re-organizing their social and religious systems around this new religious order (Davidson, *Renaissance,* ix).
[312] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 119.

doctrinal teachings added legitimacy to the content expounded, as well as the teacher's knowledge as an individual:

> Whether origin harkens back to a deity, as in the Bon rendition of the Tibetan royal genealogy, or to certain spirits in the "secret" rendition of the same, or to foreign humans such as Indians in the Buddhist version, the public demonstration of where a custom or a group or ultimately the autobiographical "I" comes from achieves something of powerful import in the Tibetan context. To present a thing's genealogy is tantamount to its assertion of its legitimacy.[313]

In this context, Gyatso argues that being able to recount the development of one's spiritual power and knowledge was necessary to inspire faith in those who heard it, something of critical importance in this early period of Buddhism where religious masters were competing to establish lineages, institutions, and power bases.[314]

Features of Autobiographical writing in Tibet

Literary pieces in Tibet that relay the life story of a Buddhist adept, whether written or transmitted orally, are categorized within the genre of *namtar,* meaning "[story of] complete liberation", and hold the connotation of being a story pertaining specifically to 'spiritual' liberation of an enlightened being. It is not immediately apparent if a work labelled *namtar* is biographical, autobiographical, or a combination of the two, as the label is typically applied to all forms of life-writing.[315] However, in any of the cases, literary works within the *namtar* genre are more than simple records of life-stories but rather contain a descriptive account of one's spiritual path to enlightenment, providing a narrative and a teaching from which others may emulate and/or learn. As Ricard writes:

> More than any other teachings in fact, a *namtar* leaves a deep impression on the reader's mind. Far from abstract considerations, it puts in our hands a chart to guide us on the journey, a testimony that the journey can be accomplished, and a power incentive to set out swiftly on the path.[316]

Thus, within Tibetan culture, the works in this genre are valued not only as compelling literary compositions with interesting narrative arcs and intriguing tales, frequently involving 'magical'

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[313] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 117.
[314] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 116.
[315] Pang notes that while there is a special term for religious autobiography –*rang gi rnam thar* – that many religious autobiographies are simply labeled *namtar*, with the content revealing if it is autobiographical, biographical or a combination of the two (Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 1).
[316] Ricard, *The Life,* xviii.

abilities, visions, and dream revelations, highlighting the successes, failures and tensions in the lives of spiritual adepts, but also, and perhaps even more so, for their ability to serve a specifically Buddhist function in society – to provide others with a life-story that illustrates how liberation from saṃsāra is possible, and perhaps even details a 'map' that one might follow if they too wish to become enlightened. As Tucci writes, often *namtar* outlines, "the long apprenticeship through which man becomes divine, [giving] lists of the texts upon which saints trained and disciplined their minds, for each lama they record the masters who opened his spirit to serene visions, or caused the ambrosia of supreme revelations to rain down upon him."[317] Such details may then be used as practical guidelines for another, who upon hearing of the great spiritual realizations of these masters also wishes to attain a similar realization. This function may be even more elevated within the autobiographical, compared to the biographical, form of *namtar*, wherein a Buddhist master reveals his or her personal, 'inner' world, with human emotions and events foregrounding the path of spiritual development, providing even more detail of how an 'ordinary' person may reach an enlightened state.[318] Therefore, while typically any sort of autobiographical work demands significant attention to the 'self', by serving this unique Buddhist function of being of benefit to others, autobiographical *namtar* is able to maintain a function aside from the author's own wish to tell his or her life-story: within the cultural understanding of *namtar*, the story details how one achieves what arguably everyone is striving for within a Buddhist society, complete liberation from saṃsāra.

Godrakpa's *Gur* and Autobiographical Content

Having now addressed the development of autobiographical genre in Tibet, as well as briefly reviewed how the life-writing surrounding spiritual masters is generally perceived to function as a model that inspires and instructs others on the spiritual path, I will turn back to our examination of Godrakpa's songs to investigate how his songs convey this specifically Tibetan Buddhist interest in autobiographical compositions. While my principal focus in this section will be on what Godrakpa reveals of his spiritual path – his penchant for solitary retreat – I would first like to note the broad span of autobiographical detail that we find in Godrakpa's songs: both the lyrics of the songs and the prose introductions and conclusions, attributed in some cases to

[317] Tucci, *Painted Scrolls,* 150.
[318] In contrast, the biographical form often depicts a spiritual master through the eyes of his or her disciples, creating emphasis on the more sublime, rather than mundane or 'human', characteristics of the master.

himself and in others to Lhatsun Rin Nam, provide a wealth of information about the context in which individual songs arose, details of Godrakpa's mundane life and the social and political context surrounding his life, and of course, the more transcendent nature of his spiritual realizations, as discussed in Chapter Two. In the prose statements of Godrakpa, for example, we learn about the general context of the songs, such as where a song was sung, who, if anyone, was present, and, who, if anyone, requested the teaching expounded. In some cases, we also learn more personal details, as in Song 8, which contains a three-paragraph prose introduction attributed to Godrakpa, outlining his experience with overcoming "an oppressive illness", which according to the descriptions he gives as well as information in his biography, was likely leprosy.[319] A number of prose introductions also attributed to Godrakpa record full conversations that he had with others before beginning to sing; one of particular interest precedes Song 10, in which Godrakpa recounts a dream to his friend where they had been reborn as women, the friend laments this dream, saying, "the two of us have such low births as women," and Godrakpa replies, "we have the excellent dharma to practice. There's no male or female enlightenment mind! So listen to this song of mine!" after which he begins to sing of the non-dual nature of ultimate reality.[320] There are also a number of introductions and conclusions that explain his songs to have arisen as a result of a dream: on two occasions dreams are detailed where he meets and has conversations with previous Indian adepts.[321] Overall, the prose introducing and concluding his songs provides the specific context of the songs, telling us if there were any specific factors that caused the songs to arise. In the collection twelve songs have opening and/or concluding remarks by Godrakpa.[322]

The lyrics of the songs add further elements of insight into both the mundane life and spiritual path of Godrakpa. In terms of his mundane existence, early in the collection, Godrakpa tells us in song of his educational background, teachings received, teachers sought, and his choice to become a monk. He also details his life as a renunciate, singing of his choice to leave

[319] Stearns, *Hermit,* 69.
[320] Stearns, *Hermit,* 77.
[321] See Chapter Two, page 64.
[322] An additional 26 songs have prose attributed to the editor of the Tibetan text, either Lhatsun Rin Nam, or an earlier editor of an earlier manuscript. I have chosen not to include these comments in our understanding of the songs, as I am primarily interested in the details that Godrakpa is said to have provided. However, the occurrence of the editorial comments alongside the voice of Godrakpa does show us the unique way that Tibetan 'autobiography' evolves over the centuries, where multiple authors contribute to the text as they work on it. For more information on the multiplicity of authorial voices in *namtar* writing, see Bessenger's dissertation on the life-writing and *gur* surrounding Sonam Peldren, a 14th century female Tibetan adept (Bessenger, "Echoes," 76-111).

his home and to refuse marriage. Further into the collection, he provides more details regarding his life as a wandering yogi, telling of us the clothing he wore, made of coarse wool, the simple provisions that he lived off of while in the mountains – leaves, turnips, mountain grass – and the frequency of his solitary retreats or retreats sealed with others in caves. Throughout the songs we learn that he is quite literally a 'beggar', living off of what he can find for sustenance and what others give him, and he sings frequently of giving away anything that he manages to accumulate, whether money, food, or clothing. We also learn of the varied mental and emotional states that result from his spiritual path. For example in Song 2, we learn of how fearful Godrakpa was during some periods of meditation:

> Earth and rocks were seen as human beings,
> trees were seen as weapons…
> sometimes I wondered if I were afflicted by depression,
> sometimes I wondered if I were going insane….
> In general I thought none suffered more than I.[323]

We also learn how, through meditative techniques, he turned periods of deep sadness, loneliness and darkness into periods of joy, particularly as he retreated further and further into the mountains:

> Recognizing the obstacle as Māra
> I became deeply troubled…
> Then in the morning I left,
> every day going higher, feeling more content,
> more at ease with every pass crossed.[324]

Overall, in both the prose surrounding the songs and in the songs themselves, we learn not only about the spiritual truths that Godrakpa realized, such as those discussed in Chapter Two, but also about the 'inner' world of Godrakpa, as well as how he related to the outer world. Further to this point, I would now like to look at two specific aspects of the autobiographical content of his songs: what he tells of about spiritual quest and some of his reasons for singing *gur*.

Godrakpa and Solitary Retreat

What does Godrakpa tell us about the nature of his spiritual quest? As was discussed in Chapter Two, he clearly states his identity to fit the prototype of a Tibetan yogi, in which

[323] Stearns, *Hermit,* 39.
[324] Stearns, *Hermit,* 41.

personal attributes align with a highly realized nature, and 'worldly' actions include the complete rejection of secular life in order to better practice the Dharma, either in solitude in the mountains or in sealed retreat.[325] His *gurbum* reveals that nearly half of his songs (19 of the 44) directly address his fervent interest in practicing in solitude, either expressing joy at the solitary life, singing of the realizations attained while in solitude, or encouraging others to wander in the mountains in the same way. Although there are no dates given in his songs,[326] from their content we learn that for extended periods of time his primary interest was in performing solitary retreat in locations such as Langkor, Drok Labchi, Mt. Tsi (*rtsi ri*), Mt. Tise and the Khenpa charnel grounds (*mkhan pa khrod*) in the Tingri region. These sites not only were important to Godrakpa, but also were famous sites within the Kagyu yogi lineage, with Milarepa spending much time in retreat at Drok Labchi, and the Gepa Sergyi Chagyib (*gad pa gser gyi bya skyibs*) cave complexes near Mt. Tise being used by followers of the Drukpa Kagyu (*'brug pa bka' brgyud*) lineage during Godrakpa's lifetime.[327] The Indian adept Phadampa Sangye (*pha dam pa sangs rgyas,* d. 1105), who transmitted the pacification method that Godrakpa is said to have taught, also used Langkor as his main residence, and was said to have kept a residence at the Khenpa charnel grounds between 1097 and 1105, where he met Milarepa.[328] Godrakpa's choice of hermitage sites may indicate not only his desire to practice in sacred meditation places, but also the affiliation he felt with these earlier masters and his wish to emulate the lives of those who had attained awakening before him. Sherab Gön states that Godrakpa first departed for the mountains shortly after taking Buddhist layman vows near the age of 18 and that following this first retreat, he performed many more retreats while intermittently seeking teachings, including living for several years at the cave of Godrak, and later for 24 years at a different cave in Upper Nyang.[329]

From his songs, we learn that Godrakpa found great joy in these retreats, where he was able to practice without distraction, living as a mendicant:

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[325] The editor's prose introducing his songs notes that he did not always perform sealed retreat in solitude. For example both Song 28 and Song 29 were reportedly sung while in sealed retreat with 49 others at Langkor (Stearns, *Hermit,* 133).
[326] Song 40 is the exception to this, stating: "now what year is the year this year?/ the year this year is the dragon year," with the rest of the song serving as an announcement (according to editorial notes) that Godrakpa had built a temple on the mountain peaks above the Khenpa charnel ground. Stearns states this date was likely 1244, when Godrakpa is said to have built a stūpa for his late mother (Stearns, *Hermit,* 163 and 195).
[327] Stearns, *Hermit,* 186.
[328] Stearns, *Hermit,* 186.
[329] Stearns, *Hermit,* 7-10.

Forsaking a home,
and not holding to a basic point of reference,
this solitude of aimlessly wandering the mountain ranges is so delightful!
No need to protect a structure is so wonderful!

Abandoning deceit and guile,
and with no effort in face-saving,
this life of a mendicant who is happy anywhere is so delightful!
No need to suffer from greed and so forth is so wonderful!

Renouncing mundane activities,
and forsaking the secular life,
this meditator living alone without companion is so delightful!
No need for snotty, diarrhetic children is so wonderful![330]

These three stanzas allow the listener to glimpse the 'delight' and 'wonder' that Godrakpa feels regarding his solitary life – in terms of both the absence of very mundane activities of the daily secular life such as taking care of a house and children and of the Buddhist aspiration to abandon afflictive emotional states, such as being jealous, deceitful, concerned with reputation, etc. He concludes this list by stating the high realizations he attained while living in solitude:

Dharma that's done is destroyed from without,
Dharma that happens dawns from within.
This result that brings phenomena to the point of cessation[331] is so delightful!
This dawning of the three Buddha bodies in ourselves is so wonderful![332]

The celebratory theme of this song is obvious, and likewise, we find it repeated in a number of other songs. For example, in Song 24 he sings:

Thinking of all this dharma, I'm so delighted.
Surely content living in solitude.
Surely I'll strike the gong tomorrow morning![333]

Why does Godrakpa find solitude so joyous? First, he clearly finds Tibet's landscape to be both beautiful and inspirational, conveying such themes in a number of songs. For example, he sings of the beauty of his hermitage sites in Song 41:

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[330] Stearns, *Hermit*, 91-93 (exclamation marks are my own).
[331] The phrase "brings phenomena to the point of cessation" is primarily from the Great Seal tradition. Godrakpa's disciple Yangönpa explains it as the place where all phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa eventually go. According to Stearns, the phrase references the unfabricated state of the mind, which is synonymous with the enlightened awareness of the buddhas (Stearns, *Hermit,* 188).
[332] Stearns, *Hermit*, 93.
[333] Stearns, *Hermit,* 123.

That spacious site of Tingri,
that marvellous site of Langkor.

Western mountains like a rampart;
eastern valley like a slope;
northern mountains like a cluster;
southern plain like a floor;
river constantly flooding in front.

Such a sublime site as that, where the nightingale lives...[334]

He sings as well of his joy with the simplicity of life in nature:

Both the nightingale and I
are happy in the midst of the forest for the three months of winter,
so very happy where there are no beasts of prey.

Both the swallow and I
are happy at the edge of a marsh for the three months of spring,
so very happy where there's no cultivation….

Completely happy with the knowledge that I'm practicing Dharma.[335]

And finally, as we saw in Chapter One, he uses features of the landscape surrounding his solitary retreats as metaphors to describe his spiritual realizations, indicating the inspiration that he draws from the landscape of Tibet by linking it to the processes of uncovering his awakened mind:

Meltwater floods from the glaciers during the three months of spring.
This is a metaphor for the result ripening form whichever cause was planted,
just like the ripening of whichever of the six grains was sown.[336]

What other reasons does he give for the joy he finds in solitude? As noted above, he sings of his solitary retreats as places where he is able to attain his highest understandings of the ultimate nature of being. An example of this is found in the preface to Song 9, where he states in prose: "When I was staying as a mendicant Buddhist monk eating knotweed leaves at Gepa Sergyi Chagyib northwest of Lake Mapham, one night my thoughts appeared in a different way than before, and I sang…".[337] The lyrics of this song continue to juxtapose how phenomena

[334] Stearns, *Hermit,* 165.
[335] Stearns, *Hermit,* 129.
[336] Stearns, *Hermit,* 137.
[337] Stearns, *Hermit,* 73.

appear "when there is no realization" and "when there is realization," singing that realizations of the ultimate nature of phenomena came to him while in retreat:

> When there's no realization, this empty stone cave
> on the mountain face is haunted.
> Fear and terror are produced.
>
> When there is realization, it's a celestial palace.
> An exceptional experience is produced in the mindstream.
> In the ultimate sense, anywhere is pleasant.[338]

It is perhaps attainment of such high levels of realization that draws Godrakpa into lengthy periods of solitude, wherein distractions are few and appearances are transformed into their 'ultimate sense'.

While many of the songs pertaining to the theme of solitude refer to his own experiences and the resultant spiritual realizations, he also uses these experiences as a platform from which to directly encourage others in their practice, teaching that isolation is necessary for spiritual development. For example, in one song he instructs: "I perfect the three dynamic states while living alone, you brave ones – live in the mountains!"[339] And, in another he sings of solitary wandering as an antidote to the afflictive emotions that a Buddhist practitioner aims to eliminate:

> Death is the mirror of mind.
> Look whether or not there is anything to die.
> As long as death is frightening,
> keep meditating alone in the mountains.
> …
>
> A home is a tethering stake of saṃsāra.
> Look whether or not it's been extracted.
> If craving hasn't been totally severed,
> keep roaming aimlessly around the land.[340]

One of the fundamental teachings of Buddhism is non-attachment to conditions, whether favourable or undesirable, that arise in one's life, and so Godrakpa's fervent teaching to live a life in solitude aligns well with the Buddhist ideal of remaining unattached to conventional objects. Godrakpa concludes this song with the following stanza:

> Transcendent knowledge is liberating.

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[338] Stearns, *Hermit,* 73.
[339] Stearns, *Hermit,* 53.
[340] Stearns, *Hermit*, 113-115.

Look whether everything has been understood to be empty.
For as long as there's grasping at things,
establish the intrinsic awareness of the grasper.[341]

As we find earlier in his song, for Godrakpa, the easiest method of establishing transcendent knowledge is to live a life alone in solitude. This is indicated again at the conclusion of Song 6, where he advises others to abandon secular life in order to understand their own ultimate nature – the "birthless mind":

This living alone in solitude
isn't a snub at secular life,
it's the practice of the birthless mind.

There's your advice;
be happy and act on it.[342]

While it is clear in the earlier quotes I provide that he finds great joy in the solitude of the Tibetan mountains, observing nature alongside his spiritual practices, these later comments indicate the source of his joy – he finds this solitude to be quintessential to spiritual practice and progression on the Buddhist path.

Songs in their Cultural Context: Function and Authorial Intention

However, it is not only joy and high spiritual realizations that Godrakpa sings of in regards to his time in solitude. In Song 2, he also makes explicit how difficult such practice can be:

Generally, when meditating alone as a beggar,
from leprosy and madness at the most
down to disturbed dreams at the least,
there wasn't a thing that didn't happen.[343]

From these lines, we see that although Godrakpa frequently expressed joy regarding his retreat periods, he did not see them as without challenges. Rather, he is frank in his speech regarding how difficult such diligent practice can be, particularly when paired with living alone in the mountains. Why does Godrakpa relay such honest and emotional accounts of the experiences related to his spiritual quest? What is his intention or hope for others who hear his songs of these

[341] Stearns, *Hermit*, 115
[342] Stearns, *Hermit,* 63.
[343] Stearns, *Hermit,* 43.

experiences? While such questions cannot be answered with certainty, I will now turn to Godrakpa's songs to explore what possible authorial intention can be gleaned from the content of his songs.

Within several songs, Godrakpa states that his intention is to give advice to others in order to benefit their spiritual development. For example, he starts Song 16 with the following verse before launching into a series of pithy couplets:

> I am this yogi whose mindstream
> has been refined with both love and compassion.
> I give advice with kind intentions,
> Please listen with a sympathetic mind.[344]

He repeats this sentiment in Song 24:

> The drought of my own desires has vanished.
> The cloud banks of helpful intentions have gathered.
> The drizzle of benefit to living beings is falling.[345]

As well as in Song 29:

> While working for the benefit of sentient beings,
> like a mother seeing an only child,
> an experience of tenderness dawned.
> That was the heartfelt birth of love and compassion.[346]

From these examples, we can see how Godrakpa states his intentions to adhere to the Mahāyāna norm of striving to act in a way that benefits others. Further to this point, Sujata notes that "the intention of any Buddhist instruction is to benefit oneself and others," and that this principle is a quality of Tibetan *gur,* including the *gur* of her own subject, the later poet-saint Kalden Gyatso.[347]

How is *gur* meant to benefit others? Within the cultural context, *gur* contains two elements that are said to inspire practitioners on their Buddhist path: first, it provides instruction through the teachings it contains, and second, through its autobiographical content, it provides a life-story that others may relate to or emulate. I will now turn to explore how each of these 'elements' function.

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[344] Stearns, *Hermit,* 101.
[345] Stearns, *Hermit,* 123.
[346] Stearns, *Hermit,* 133
[347] Sujata, *Songs of Realization*, 88.

First, Godrakpa expounds various doctrinal truths and esoteric realizations, promoting renunciation and meditation practices that he claimed are able to reveal the ultimate nature of reality, and in turn liberate sentient beings from saṃsāra. He situates his songs of realization as belonging within the "fine tradition of singing song," which he states to have started with Śākyamuni and continued with the bodhisattvas, the great śrāvakas, Saraha, and the former adepts, and finally to be "the tradition upheld by me today."[348] In doing so, he secures an element of authenticity to his teachings by demonstrating that his mode of expression, singing spiritual songs, can be traced back to Śākyamuni – a link that was required to 'authenticate' a type of Buddhist transmission, perhaps even more so when the content of the transmission draws from the somewhat unconventional tantric teachings. He also explicitly links his tradition of singing to Saraha, thereby further strengthening his image of being an authentic and highly realized teacher by reaffirming his relationship to India, the country that Tibetan Buddhists of the later transmission period looked to with great reverence as the home of the Buddhist teachings.[349] By tying his method of transmission to both of these figures, Godrakpa is able to infuse his songs with an air of certainty, lending credibility to the underlying claim that since he is gifted with the ability to spontaneously sing enlightened songs similar to the songs that arose in the minds of other enlightened beings, he too must have an 'enlightened mind' capable of expressing realizations of profound truth.

Second, by grounding his songs in mundane, worldly experiences, such as illness, emotional highs and lows, topics of food, shelter, wealth, etc. encountered on his spiritual path, he enables others to relate to him on a human level, despite the high yogic realizations he also expounds. Willis explains this idea further in regards to the life-writing (*namtar*) of Buddhist adepts, which I argue to apply equally to Godrakpa's *gur*:

> *Namtar* provides examples of human beings not very different from ourselves, who, owing to the guidance of a kind teacher and through their own efforts in practice, were able to transform themselves for the better. Were *namtar* solely tales of miraculous births and fantastic feats, their capacity to inspire would be lacking, as they would seem to place success out of the reach of ordinary human beings. In truth, only those examples that are capable of being replicated are also capable of inspiring.[350]

[348] Stearns, *Hermit*, 59-61.
[349] See, for example, Kapstein, "Indian Literary," 769 – 776. This is also discussed in more detail in Chapter One and Chapter Two of this thesis.
[350] Willis, *Enlightened Beings*, 16.

Thus, through the simple and humble ways that Godrakpa refers to himself ('beggar', 'mendicant', 'wandering yogi', etc.) and his life (his illnesses, emotions, decisions about marriage, home, wealth, etc.) others are able to relate to him. Furthermore, by vividly placing his life-story in the Tibetan landscape through his multiple mountain retreats, he provides points of reference and comparison for his teachings that others can recall simply. For example, one might be reminded of one of his songs, and therefore realizations, teachings and experiences, simply by looking at the mountains or observing a natural, seasonal change. As Gamble writes of *gur* in her study of the songs of Rangjung Dorje, "the yogis were able to interrupt their audience's habitual view of their environment, prompting, instead an alternate perspective that emphasized both the limited, relative truth of sensory perceptions and its metaphoric potential."[351] In essence, by combining his 'enlightened mind' with 'mundane' experiences and observations, Godrakpa's songs function to bridge the gap between the enlightened and mundane worlds that other types of Buddhist text may not.

Pang notes a similar conclusion in her study of Shabkar's *gur:* "a holistic analysis of Shabkar's song-poems, as a whole, reveal a paradoxical dialectic between the transcendent and the embedded, and between enlightened wisdom and the mundane existence of everyday life."[352] Explaining this further, Pang notes that the voice narrating the songs of Shabkar differs greatly from the mode of narration in standard Buddhist scripture or doctrinal teachings. While Shabkar's perspective would be considered a "post-liberation" voice, much the same as the truths expounded in Buddhist scripture, he teaches from an enlightened yet culturally embedded perspective, positioning his teachings in his current, mundane world to guide his audience to liberation.[353] To this end, Shabkar also creates a very 'human' image to which his audience can relate, discussing, as we saw in Godrakpa's songs, his emotional experiences along the path in vivid detail.

Sujata makes a similar point in her exploration of the genre, arguing that the songs develop with autobiographical truthfulness in order to create a life-story that others might both take teachings from and be able to emulate: "because [*gur*] show[s] not only the highest levels that a saint attains but also the low points, bawdy humour, and inner struggles along the path, they provide road maps for others to follow that make enlightenment seem attainable by anyone

[351] Gamble, "'Looking Over at the Mountains,'" 6.
[352] Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 88.
[353] Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 40.

who will renounce the world and do spiritual practices in solitude."[354] The idea that the songs create a 'road map' that others may follow is highly reminiscent of what Ricard said of spiritual autobiographies in general at the outset of this chapter, asserting that *namtar* function as "a chart to guide us on the journey, a testimony that the journey can be accomplished, and a powerful incentive to set out swiftly on the path."[355] Of course, however, the 'map' we might acquire from the songs of Godrakpa would be quite different from that gleaned from a prose autobiography, as prose autobiography follows a narrative arc to provide descriptions of the context of one's life events, replete with details of the thoughts, concerns, and feelings surrounding life decisions, the intricacies of human relationships, and vast amounts of social, cultural and historical information. In contrast, Godrakpa provides only short glimpses into the context from which his spiritual realizations arose, with much more emphasis seeming to be placed on expressing the content of the realization than its circumstance.

However, Godrakpa's 'map' would be useful nonetheless to those in his cultural context. Just as Shabkar's autobiographical writing can be seen as serving as a guide to his contemporaries, grounding the timeless 'transcendent' Buddhist truths in the mundane cultural context of Shabkar's period, so too did Godrakpa express his Buddhist realizations alongside one of the key concerns of his time – the revival of Buddhism as the new determinant of Tibetan cultural identity. As discussed earlier in this chapter, early in the later transmission period, Tibetans began experimenting with autobiographical writing as a way of expressing and confirming what was being created as a 'new' Tibetan identity under the rubric of Buddhist teachings.[356] Godrakpa, who clearly looked to India for his spiritual understandings, was arguably one of the 'pioneer' yogi-saints in Tibet, forging a path where the teachings of the Indian *siddhas* could best be assimilated into the Tibetan culture. Thus, by embedding the teachings he had taken from India in the Tibetan landscape, he can be seen as participating in an important trend of his time – turning Indian Buddhism into a Tibetan phenomenon. His emphasis on taking retreat in the quintessential Tibetan landscape – the vast mountain ranges and peaks – as key to his own spiritual attainments and awakening is perhaps the most important way that Godrakpa could embed the transcendental truths imported from India into the mundane lives of the Tibetans.

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[354] Sujata, *Songs of Shabkar,* xi.
[355] Ricard, *The Life,* xviii.
[356] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 118-119.

Conclusions

This chapter has shown how Godrakpa's use of an autobiographical voice successfully imported Indian Buddhist thought into a Tibetan context. At the outset of the chapter, I explored how autobiographical compositions became an important trend in Tibet during and after Godrakpa's life. According to Gyatso, autobiography evolved as a genre unique to Tibet because it tied together several Tibetan interests: the historical and cultural interests in record keeping and the creation of genealogies as key to social organizing, as well as the prime interest of the later transmission period – creating a new cultural identity based on the re-introduction of Buddhist teachings. I then looked to Godrakpa's songs to explore how his autobiographical voice appeared in his songs. We found it most present in the descriptions of his spiritual quest, which revealed his interest in presenting and demonstrating the life of a figure who wandered in the Tibetan mountains practicing Buddhist tantra. In fact, his songs tell us that wandering in the Tibetan mountains was not only a joyous event for him as an individual, but also necessary for attainment of spiritual realizations. Thus, by grounding his spiritual realizations in Tibetan geography, Godrakpa's songs effectively import Indian Buddhist thought onto Tibetan soil.

His autobiographical voice does more than simply import the realizations of Indian Buddhist truths to the Tibetan mountains however; it also serves a more 'human' role. By sharing his 'inner world' – the thoughts, observations, and emotions surrounding the realization of these high Buddhist teachings – Godrakpa creates a human, 'mundane' side to these transcendent and remarkable spiritual truths. In this way, his life-story – depicting an ordinary person who spent years meditating in the mountains, following the instructions of his guru as well as the teachings of earlier Indian adepts and thereafter attaining enlightenment – became something that others could also follow should they wish to attain realizations similar to those of which he sings. The autobiographical content of his songs therefore plays an important role: it both reveals for others the high spiritual realizations that one can achieve with diligent, though difficult, practice and also grounds such realizations in the Tibetan landscape, thereby creating a Tibetan Buddhist identity from Indian Buddhist teachings. The use of metaphor, simile and Tibetan nature imagery add a further 'Tibetan' dimension to his teachings, making Buddhist 'signs' out of the landscape that Tibetan people would have been familiar with, thereby strengthening the 'Tibetan' element of the teachings and personal spiritual realizations within his songs.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the intersection of the life of a Buddhist adept, the attainment of spiritual realizations, and literary expression in 12/13th century Tibet. As we saw in the introduction, this period has been regarded by scholars as a Tibetan 'renaissance'[357]: a time of resurgence and revival in which, according to Davidson, "the coalescence of culture in the late tenth to the thirteenth century was facilitated by the doctrines, rituals, and practices of Buddhism, primarily late esoteric Buddhism."[358] This form of Buddhism was transported to Tibet from India through Tibetans traveling to India to study with Indian masters and in Indian monastic institutions, as well as Indian adepts traveling to Tibet. In both cases a large number of esoteric texts and commentaries were translated into Tibetan, commentaries were written in Tibetan, and Tibetan masters developed their own forms of literary expression.

One such form of literary expression is the Tibetan genre of songs of spiritual experience: *gur*. As has been noted, several scholars find poetry and poetics to be the least studied topic of all Tibetan literature,[359] and I found there to be a particular dearth of analysis with regards to examination of pre-*kāvya* influenced *gur*. Thus, this thesis, being the first in-depth examination of the songs of the 12th century Tibetan yogi Godrakpa, also serves as one of the first concentrated examinations of a collection of *gur* that is said to have been composed prior to the translation of the *Kāvyadarśa*. This examination has involved three specific aspects of Godrakpa's songs, each of which reveals how his songs show the *gur* genre were an effective vehicle to transport Indian teachings onto Tibetan soil, thereby transforming Indian esoteric Buddhism into a Tibetan phenomenon.

In the first chapter, I deconstructed the prosodic qualities of the songs in order to understand the metre and stanza patterns as well as poetic figures that Godrakpa employed. We found that although there is indication that Godrakpa was aware of *kāvya* poetic theory and certain songs do show metrical similarity with songs that were translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan, for the most part, his songs closely align in terms of metre, stanza formation and patterns of repetition with various Tibetan folksong traditions. There are several implications

[357] Diemberger, *When a Woman,* (7; 103); Davidson, *Renaissance,* 19; Kapstein, *The Tibetans,* 95.
[358] Davidson, *Renaissance*, 21.
[359] Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs,* 2; van der Kuijp, "Tibetan Belle-Lettres," 394; Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet," 369; Sorenson, *Divinity Secularized,* 11.

involved in utilizing the folksong cadence in his songs: first, it draws on the tradition of singing songs of spiritual realization of the Indian *siddhas,* who also used folksong melodies to express their highest spiritual realizations; second, it carries on the Tibetan culture of poetic recitation and oratorical performance that was indicated in the early manuscripts found in the Dunhuang caves, transferring the personal/political focus of pre-millennium *gur* into the personal/spiritual realm in the later transmission period; and third, the use of the recognizable folksong cadence and patterns of repetition create memorable verses, thereby rendering these foreign teachings in a format familiar to diverse audiences, rather than only to monks or scholars, as many commentaries and translations of instruction manuals or doctrinal treatises would have done.

The second chapter closely examined two aspects of the content of Godrakpa's songs: first what he said about his tradition of spiritual singing, and second what exactly he was singing about. We found that although he stated his songs to continue the tradition of singing that came to Tibet in the songs of the Indian *siddhas*, and specifically Saraha's *dohās,* that his content and expressiveness diverged significantly from the pithy and somewhat veiled content of the *siddhas'* songs. Again attesting to the memorability and comprehensibility of Godrakpa's songs, his content is expressed in lengthy, flowing and straightforward verses. Furthermore, while we know from other sources that Godrakpa was a thoroughly 'tantric' figure, engaging in antinomian acts,[360] the yogi image he crafts within his songs is one that even non-tantric practitioners would be able to relate to, and possibly even emulate should they wish to enter solitary retreat. For example, although Godrakpa is known to have lived in the Khenpa charnel grounds for several years, he mentions it only in passing and only in four songs, with no details of his life or practices in the charnel grounds noted. Within the decidedly palatable songs, the spiritual teachings that he relays typically fit into one of two categories: first, discussion of Buddhism's basic philosophical tenets that reveals the inherent suffering of saṃsāra, voiced in a way that both states the foundational teachings and instructs others to find the truth of reality for themselves; and, second, discussion of his own spiritual attainments and realizations, garnering the confidence of his audience as to his status as a highly realized spiritual teacher and inspiring others to find ways to attain similar realizations. We find in the content of his songs that Godrakpa blends his credibility as a teacher and his knowledge of the Indian esoteric masters

[360] DiValerio, "Subversive Sainthood," 636-640.

with very simple and comprehensible Buddhist teachings, thereby again ensuring that his songs cut across class, education and religious stature in order to be accessible to the general public.

Chapter Three continued the examination of the content of Godrakpa's songs by looking at how he weaves details of his own life and decisions on the spiritual path into his songs through the employment of an autobiographical voice. According to Gyatso, autobiography flourished in Tibet in this time period not only as a continuation of Tibet's long history of genealogical record keeping and dynastic story telling, but also because autobiography became an avenue through which a new cultural identity could be forged that incorporated the re-introduction of Indian Buddhism.[361] By encasing Indian esoteric teachings in his own life stories, full of emotional highs and lows, decisions about social norms such as marriage and householding, and wanderings in the Tibetan mountains, Godrakpa participates in the early stages of a cultural movement that transported these foreign Buddhist teachings into the life stories of a Tibetans. Furthermore, while we saw in Chapter One that Godrakpa employs a variety of Indian-based similes and references in his self-descriptions, in Chapter Three we found that he often employs Tibetan-specific nature based similes to express his spiritual realizations. This is significant in that it provides unique Tibetan reference points for spiritual enlightenment, such as the valleys, mountains and streams that fill one's view of the landscape, thereby 'grounding' the Indian esoteric teachings in Tibetan soil. In this way, various social groups, regardless of education, class or religious status, may be reminded of Godrakpa's songs simply by observing the surrounding nature.

In sum, this thesis has explored the multiple ways that Godrakpa uses song as a method of linking the transcendent experience of spiritual adepts to the mundane world in which his audience lived and in which they could engage the teachings. As we saw in the Introduction, song was a large part of the daily lives of Tibetans, sung at the time of seasonal events such as ploughing and seeding, during work such as roofing or building, during community and personal celebrations such as weddings and births, and for flirting, story telling and basic interactions, and therefore, it seems fitting that spiritual teachings would also be introduced and communicated via song. Furthermore, by capturing the moment of realization in a melodic song, which could then be remembered and repeated, Godrakpa created a form of teaching that could been shared and circulated in his absence. In this way, songs about the lives of these adepts became not only a

[361] Gyatso, *Apparitions,* 119.

rendition of their life-stories, but also a form of oral scripture that delivered highly personal didactic passages to inspire and encourage others on their path.

As Jinpa and Elsner write:

> When read by others, such poems appear as if they were the voice of the reader's inner being, exhorting him or her to attain that deeper state… though ostensibly articulating the poet's own personal experiences, they are read as resonances of higher states of being, open to all. For readers who may have had such religious experiences, reciting these verses may attune their sensibility to a greater clarity and lucidity they may even recollect and reinforce the experience itself.[362]

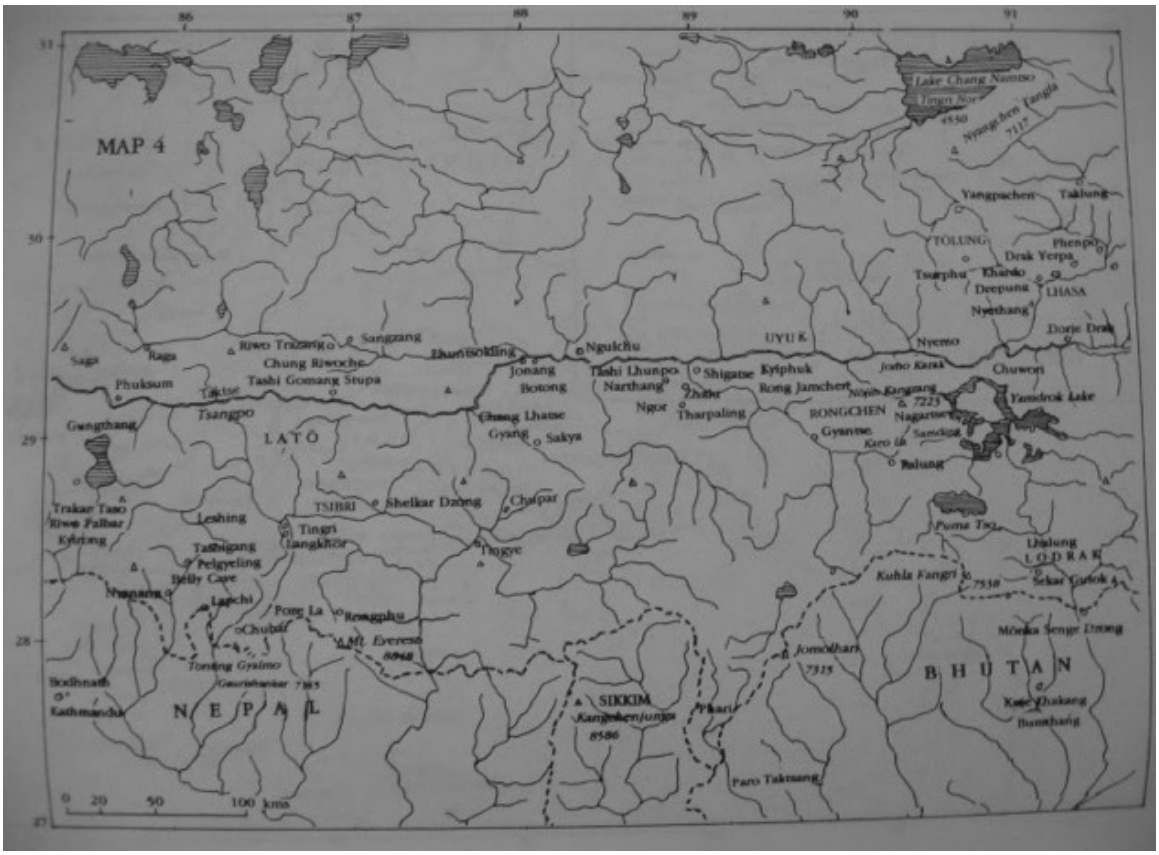
Godrakpa was, of course, not the first Tibetan figure to link life-writing and spiritual instruction together in the culturally potent vehicle of song; however, his *gurbum* is one of the few early examples currently translated into English and as such provides a unique glimpse into the formation of this genre. We see in his songs the unique blending of the influence of the Indian *siddhas* with the pre-existing tradition of folksong in Tibet, the combined expression of life-writing meant to inspire and spiritual didacticism meant to instruct, and the simultaneous references to the Indian symbolic world and the Tibetan landscape – in sum, a creative and effective method to pull together and put forth for the benefit of others the various aspects of the lived experiences, traditions and teachings of a Tibetan Buddhist adept. As the studies of Sujata and Pang and the remarks of Jinpa and Elsner referenced throughout this thesis indicate,[363] expression through such songs became the medium of choice for Tibetan yogis in the centuries that followed, and as such, my hope is that through the examination of his songs, this thesis may shed light on the roots of the *gur* genre, as well as on Godrakpa as an important historical figure in this tradition.

[362] Jinpa and Elsner, *Songs,* 3.

[363] For example, Pang completes her analysis of Shabkar's *gur* by noting that 600 years later, many similarities and parallels can be found between the *gur* of Shabkar and the *gur* produced by Tibetan yogis in the later transmission period (Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries," 162).

Appendix: Map of Tsang

The following map provides a general overview of the Tsang region, where many of Godrakpa's activities take place.



Reprinted from:
Matthieu Ricard, *The Life of Shabkar,* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2001) 622.

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