

Summary of Reports of Dagri Rinpoche Sexual Assault Allegations

November 9, 2020

In a report submitted to the FPMT nearly two months ago by independent investigators from Faith Trust Institute, multiple women described being sexually molested by Dagri Rinpoche, a 65-year old senior Tibetan monk and authorized teacher within the FPMT. The assaults they recounted took place over a period of more than ten years, and considerable evidence was provided to investigators documenting that senior FPMT staff, teachers and officials, including its CEO, had first been notified by nuns that Dagri Rinpoche had sexually molested them nearly a decade ago.

One nun reported an incident of sexual assault to FPMT officials and senior staff in 2010. That was followed soon thereafter by another woman subjected to unwanted sexual contact who also informed the FPMT of this, via emails and other documents that were provided to the investigation. However, the FPMT failed to investigate, and instead continued to invite and arrange teaching tours for Dagri Rinpoche until he was arrested in India on criminal charges for sexual assault in May 2019.

During the decade in which this Buddhist monk accused of sexually predatory behavior was given free rein to molest other women, more women indeed had their trust in the teacher and the FPMT profoundly violated, according to statements submitted to independent investigators.

After Dagri Rinpoche was arrested in India for sexual molestation in May 2019, other women began speaking out, some publicly, others confidentially, saying that they, too, had experienced sexual harassment or abuse by Dagri Rinpoche. Several of those women were themselves nuns holding vows of celibacy. For months, senior nuns called on the FPMT to conduct an independent investigation of the charges, collecting thousands of signatures on a petition and writing letters to the FPMT board that mostly went unanswered.

In September 2019, several of the women contacted a lawyer who approached the board on their behalf. The lawyer and other advocates for the women presented enough details of the misconduct to make it clear that the FPMT could face legal consequences for negligence, and they gave the board one month to voluntarily commission an independent investigation. Within a month, the FPMT had engaged Faith Trust Institute, a US-based non-profit that specializes in addressing sexual abuse in religious organizations.

Faith Trust spent nearly twelve months interviewing women and corroborating their accounts, and had summaries of the accusations translated into Tibetan so that Dagri Rinpoche had the opportunity to address the charges. During this time, the FPMT board displayed a willingness to cover the therapy costs of women harmed by Dagri Rinpoche and by the failure of the organization to protect them. However, no funds were ever delivered. The women traumatized by the events received no other support of any kind from the FPMT.

Details of Sexual Incidents and FPMT's Failure to Intervene

The following are details of some (though far from all) of the incidents of unwanted sexual contact that women have reported having experienced at the hands of Dagri Rinpoche. None of the three women whose reports are related here have spoken out publicly in the past. (One other woman's disclosure is reported here.) Many took place at FPMT centers, at events organized by the FPMT or during teaching trips at the FPMT's behest. The behavior described here spanned a full decade, with the most recent incident as late as 2019. Details have been extracted from fuller statements without specifying time and location, in order to respect the women's request for anonymity.

These are some of the allegations that were presented to the FaithTrust investigators:

A nun who was part of a team serving Dagri Rinpoche at an FPMT facility entered his room to serve him refreshments. She was standing while he was seated, and he reached out his hand and began to touch her genitals through her robe. He did that for 10 or more minutes until his assistant approached. Dagri Rinpoche gestured to her to remain silent. She did so, as she was in shock.

On a subsequent occasion, the same nun was attending Dagri Rinpoche again. She showed a student who was visiting him out of his room. She went into the room to retrieve the cups of tea and he again pulled her to him. She was so distressed and overwhelmed that she has no memory of what happened next. When she regained consciousness, she was wearing only undergarments and he was on top of her. This too took place at an FPMT facility.

Another nun was alone with Dagri Rinpoche, seated cross-legged on the ground, when he stood up, walked over to her and abruptly put his hand down the front of her upper robe to touch her breasts. She immediately pulled his hand out, shocked. He sat back down, but a few minutes later, he stood up and did it again, this time putting his hand through her garment's wide opening at the armpit. She again threw his hand out, thinking, "he's a pure-perfect guru and a monk. What on earth?!" She didn't say anything about it, nor did he.

A third woman, also a nun, also assigned to serve Dagri Rinpoche during an FPMT-sponsored event, went to his room with a cup of tea. He invited her to sit on the floor. After a bit, he began to stroke her arm. He was using her arm to stroke his arm. He stroked her head and her shoulders. She was very uncomfortable with his behavior. She stood up, then he stood up and blocked the doorway. He embraced her aggressively and would not release her when she struggled to pull away. She could feel he had an erection. Then he pulled her in tighter, and she forcefully pushed him away. She

crossed her arms over her chest but he tried to kiss her on the lips. He put his head against hers. She was in shock but she pushed him away and managed to run out of the room. Later, he came to her bedroom and entered the room without knocking.

One of the women reports having been groped by Dagri Rinpoche in the public space of an FPMT center.

One woman reported that many times, he commanded her to lift up her skirt or take off her robes, sometimes with the excuse to offer her a healing massage, and he laid on top of her or asked her to lay on top of him. He sometimes had the smell of inner offering [alcohol] on his breath, and a couple of times gave her a sip of it before embracing her.

One of the women provided emails and texts showing that she reported her experiences to the executive president and CEO of the FPMT, and that he asked for details and later told her that he believed her when she told him. Yet the organization continued to invite Dagri Rinpoche to teach at its centers, assigning young nuns and women to serve him and presenting him as a pure monk and an exceptionally holy being.

One woman described a pattern of sexual coercion in which Dagri Rinpoche insisted that she come to his place at night, putting her safety at risk, by going out on the road alone in the dark. He pleaded with her, promising that nothing bad would happen, and although anxious and worried, she sometimes obliged him. And then immediately after the satisfaction from laying together, she said he'd exhibit nervousness, become very serious and instruct her to leave quickly.

Another of the women says she was alone in a room with Dagri Rinpoche and he again assaulted her, putting his hands under her shirt and groping her. She said he told her that what had happened to her was nothing more than a holy experience and that he was blessing her.

One woman, a nun holding vows of celibacy, insisted to Dagri Rinpoche that she did not wish to be alone with him without a third person present. Indeed, the vows of a fully ordained monk forbid him to remain alone with a woman. However, she reported that Dagri Rinpoche repeatedly disregarded her comments, reminding her that he was the guru, i.e. she must follow his lead. He often told her there was no harm in what they were doing, calling it, "union of bliss and emptiness."

The above represent a partial selection of incidents reported by a subset of the women who reported harm by Dagri Rinpoche. However, already a clear pattern

of recurring behavior can be identified. Collectively, these incidents demonstrate a pattern of sexual predation in which Dagri Rinpoche used his position of power over women and especially nuns for his own sexual gratification. These reports show that Dagri Rinpoche also displayed a penchant for risk-taking behavior such as accosting women in public places, and on occasion couched the sexual contact as a blessing or healing. Women who reported the behavior were urged to re-frame the sexual harassment in spiritual terms and accept it because it come from a high Tibetan lama.

Throughout all this time, Dagri Rinpoche has presented himself as a celibate monk and was presented as such by the FPMT. After a decade in which he experienced no apparent adverse consequences from such treatment of women, even when authorities in the FPMT and the Private Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama had been made aware of it, he was arrested for groping a woman on an airplane en route to Dharamsala. Such escalating risk-taking is consistent with the pattern that emerges in the sexual misconduct reported by women to the independent investigators, Faith Trust.

FPMT's Failure to Act

By 2011, two women had reported their experiences of sexual assault separately to FPMT officials. Both were nuns at the time that they reported being molested by Dagri Rinpoche. One of the two filed a signed declaration with the local police and sent copies of it to the FPMT and the Private Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She later shared copies of the declaration on social media and made her allegations public in a YouTube video that has since been taken down.

A second woman reported a separate incident of sexual assault by Dagri Rinpoche during an event organized by the FPMT in 2010. The second woman has not made her experiences public, but did report them immediately to multiple senior members of the FPMT, and has communicated with FPMT repeatedly over the years to express her concern that women continued to be at risk as Dagri Rinpoche continued to teach. She was urged to have a pure view of the guru and received a letter encouraging her to apologize to Dagri Rinpoche.

In August of 2011, the head of the FPMT's international office wrote to the organization's regional and national coordinator acknowledging, minimizing and discrediting the accusations. She wrote: "There have been allegations of sexual harassment made against Dagri Rinpoche. However these have been investigated and resolved by the Private Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and the person bringing the allegations has dropped them. Dagri Rinpoche understood the seriousness of the allegations and has committed to avoid situations, which could give rise to similar allegations in the future. Therefore His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Lama Zopa Rinpoche are still confident in Dagri Rinpoche as a teacher."

The woman in question vigorously and publicly denied ever "dropping" her allegations. Rather, she (and a third party who reportedly accompanied her to a meeting with Dagri Rinpoche brokered by the Private Office) says she accepted

the apology offered to her by Dagri Rinpoche without in any way retracting her allegations.

Nearly a decade after those first allegations, Dagri Rinpoche is facing criminal charges for sexual harassment. After his arrest, the FPMT temporarily suspended Dagri Rinpoche, citing the ongoing police investigation, adding that “FPMT teacher suspension does not indicate an assumption of guilt.” The organization continued to post updates and advice to students on the FPMT website, encouraging them to view Dagri Rinpoche as a holy being whose conduct was therefore beyond reproach.

After the criminal charges led more women to speak about their experiences, senior nuns wrote to the FPMT board on June 16, 2019, informing them that they had collectively been approached by or been made aware of five women each describing unwanted sexual contact initiated by Dagri Rinpoche.

[This paragraph was updated on November 13, 2020] Even now, although the FPMT has acknowledged that women were indeed harmed and even though it has in its possession the summary report by the Faith Trust investigators that it had committed to make public, it has yet to do so, or to fully address its own role in enabling such harm.

Pressure to Retract Statements

In the meantime, during the long period that elapsed between the women being interviewed by investigators and the finalization of the report, at least one of the women Dagri Rinpoche molested was contacted by an attendant of Dagri Rinpoche, even though contact with the women was strictly forbidden as part of the investigation process. In what amounts to witness tampering, this representative pressed them to retract their statements with emotional blackmail, a financial offer and descriptions of the harm they would cause if they reported these incidents.

Withholding Information from Public

On September 19, 2020, Faith Trust presented its final report to the FPMT board. Nearly nine months earlier, on January 5, 2019 the FPMT Board had entered into an agreement with the lawyer advocating for the women that a summary report would be released to the FPMT community. This agreement was sought precisely to ensure that what was uncovered by the investigation would not be withheld from the public—as is now happening.

After 30 days came and went, with no public disclosure of the results of the investigation, the lawyer and an advocate representing some of the women wrote the board on two separate occasions. They received no formal reply from the board, even when writing simply to ask for acknowledgment of receipt of the e-mail. At long last, the women received word that the FPMT would be initiating the process of public disclosure on November 6, beginning with formally communicating to the complainant the conclusion as to whether their allegations

had been found to be substantiated. However, in the early hours of November 6, they reversed course and opted to withhold the planned communication. Nor has there since been any information communicated on when the summary report might be released. No explanation was given, nor any concern expressed as to the impact of such a decision on the women who had been waiting and asking for accountability.

[Update as of November 13: Between November 6 and November 12, five of the eight members of the FPMT board resigned. On November 13, an update was sent to the FPPMT community and posted on its website fully acknowledging Dagri Rinpoche's culpability and partially alluding to its own. In that update, the FPMT committed to sharing a summary report of the investigation and it will be important to ensure that the report that is published is a complete and unedited version of the Faith Trust investigation's conclusions.]

Ongoing Criminal Case

Dagri Rinpoche continues to face criminal charges in India, where he stands accused of sexually molesting a woman in May 2019 under Indian penal code 354A. This allegation is being adjudicated in the Indian courts.

Progress in this case is a matter of public record and can be followed here - https://services.ecourts.gov.in/ecourtindia_v6_by by entering the case number [HPKA120015502019](https://services.ecourts.gov.in/ecourtindia_v6_by)

Advocacy Team

For your information, the Advocacy Team supporting the women harmed can be contacted at protecting.truth.in.the.dharma@gmail.com. The team is in the process of adding new members but is currently comprised of:

Roshi Joan Halifax

Zen teacher, Founder and Abbott, Upaya Zen Center

Dr. Janet Gyatso

Harvard University, Hershey Professor of Buddhist Studies and the Associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs at Harvard Divinity School

Venerable Lhundup Damcho (Diana Finnegan), PhD

Co-founder Dharmadatta Community, Authorized FPMT teacher

Lawyer and investigator

Carol Merchasin

Adviser, former partner in a large law firm, experienced investigator into sexual abuse.

And a number of other team members who are currently working behind the scenes.