

He made the squats of Kentish Town and Camden Town his home as he began his quest for global fame.

It was the 1970s and there was great interest in Tibetan Buddhism in the UK when the Buddhist teacher Sogyal Rinpoche made his way to London.

Sogyal would make a huge impression on people hungry for his teachings.

However, beneath the seemingly benign exterior was a man who was alleged to have sexually and physically abused his followers who had helped him make his name.

Now a new book lifts the lid on the claims of abuse and misconduct by Sogyal, who died in August this year.

Sex and Violence in Tibetan Buddhism: The Rise and Fall of Sogyal Rinpoche, is written by journalist Mary Finnigan and the writer and researcher Rob Hogendoorn.

It was while Mary was taking time out from her job as a Fleet Street journalist in the late 1960s that she met an unknown musician called David Bowie. They had a relationship and he introduced her to Tibetan Buddhism.

Although her relationship with Bowie ended, Mary remains devoted to Tibetan Buddhism. In fact it was



IMAGES REPRODUCED COURTESY OF MARY FINNIGAN

Sogyal Rinpoche; and on his throne during an elaborate Tibetan Buddhist ceremony. Circled: Author Mary Finnigan, still devoted to Tibetan Buddhism

Depravity amid the enlightenment

Jane Clinton on the downfall of a holy man who began his rise to prominence in the squats of north London

this strength of feeling that prompted her to write the book with Hogendoorn.

Sogyal Lakar, better known as Sogyal Rinpoche, was born in 1947 in Tibet. He was believed by many to be the incarnation of Tertön Sogyal Lerab Lingpa, a teacher of the 13th Dalai Lama.

In 1973 Sogyal came to Cambridge to study and met Mary.

He asked her to help him establish himself in London. She agreed and against the backdrop of London's squatting scene, Sogyal put down roots. And so began his phenomenal rise to fame. Sogyal was the best-known Tibetan Buddhist teacher after the Dalai Lama.

Initially he made his home in a series of squats, among them premises in Prince of Wales Road, Malden Road as well as Princess Road in Kilburn.

While he was met with undisguised adulation, it was not long before Mary began to have doubts about Sogyal's character.

In the book Mary refers to the steady stream of young women who would go to his room.

There were reports of assault and question marks over how learned he really was.

But it would take several years before Sogyal's behaviour would be put under scrutiny.

In the meantime, his following grew and grew.

His book *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* was published in 1992 and was a hit (it has sold more than three million copies). He even appeared in Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha*, and established the charity Rigpa (which means "intelligence" or "awareness").

Rigpa has more than 100 centres in 30 countries around the world, including one in Caledonian Road, Islington. (Although since 2017 Sogyal was not

associated with the charity.)

In 1994 an American student went public and sued, claiming Sogyal had sexually and physically abused her.

The case was settled out of court for an undisclosed sum.

Then in July 2017 a letter from eight of Sogyal's students cataloguing allegations against him brought him to wider attention.

On 11 August 2017, Sogyal retired from Rigpa.

Rigpa ordered an independent inquiry by the UK law firm Lewis Silkin.

In his contribution to the inquiry Sogyal said: "I am truly sorry if anything I have said or done has caused anyone offence or harm and I ask in all humility for their forgiveness," he wrote.

The inquiry by the law firm found that "on the balance of probabilities" some students of Sogyal "have been subjected to serious physical, sexual

and emotional abuse by him".

It also found that "senior individuals within Rigpa who were aware of at least some of these issues and failed to address them, leaving others at risk".

The report's recommendations included that Sogyal should have no further association with Rigpa and its students.

Sogyal's once right-hand man, Patrick Gaffney, as well two other prominent figures in the organisation, stood down at the end of September 2018.

A statement from Rigpa on the findings said it was "committed to act on its recommendations".

The Charities Commission is conducting a statutory inquiry into Rigpa. It refers to "safeguarding" as of particular concern.

On the 13 June 2019 the Commission announced that it has disqualified Patrick Gaffney from acting as a

charity trustee for a period of eight years.

Following the revelations, the Dalai Lama referred to Sogyal as "disgraced".

Mary said that while she "sympathised" with those bereaved by his death she added: "In the 45 years since I first met him and helped him get established in London, I have watched a life of depravity and excess unfold in the name of enlightenment.

"Sogyal's death does not alter the facts of his life. Karma is inexorable so as a Buddhist I think his passage through the after-death state will be a rough ride."

● *Sex and Violence in Tibetan Buddhism: The Rise and Fall of Sogyal Rinpoche*. By Mary Finnigan and Rob Hogendoorn (Jorvik Press). It is available from Amazon or from Jorvik Press at <http://jorvikpress.com/books/sex-and-violence-in-tibetan-buddhism/> priced £15.95.

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For an initial, no-obligation consultation please contact

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