

HACHA FOR LHASA

The records of the East India Company contain a good number of letters in Bengali addressed by the kings and chiefs of Eastern Himalayas to the British authorities in Bengal. Several letters are from Bhutan. The Deb Raja's letter dated Vaisakh : Royal Year 303, corresponding to April 1812, refers to the journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa. In this letter, however, the destination of Manning is described as HACHA. While editing the Bengali letters from the Company's records (*Prachin Bangala Patra Samkalan*, University of Calcutta, 1942), Surendra Nath Sen sought to identify Hacha as Lhasa (Ibid, Part I page 239; Part II, page 85). A well-known historian and archivist, Sen was also a competent and careful scholar of early Bengali literary forms. He had deciphered the letter correctly but would not dogmatically assert that Hacha was identical with Lhasa. He only suggested this.

In Bhutanese language Lhasa is known as Lhasa and the usage Hacha in the letter was no doubt in conformity with the then Bengali style. The letter for instance, begins thus—7 Sri Sri Hareramah Saranam.

If Hacha is identical with Lhasa we have to attribute the change to acclimatization and corruption in the course of migration of the word from north to south. Besides in different Bengali dialects 'sa,' 'sha', 'cha' are often pronounced with local accent. So Lhasa becoming Lhacha is not strange. But one has to account for Laa (Hla) turning into simple He.

In the Shol (*zhoj*) inscription on the south there is a reference to the Tibetan conquest of Ha-Sha (*ha-zha*) from the Chinese. This territory of Ha-Sha, according to Hugh Richardson, "may have extended from the Lop country to the Koko Nor" (*Ancient Historical Edicts at Lhasa*, London, Royal Asiatic Society, 1952 page 23). It is not certain whether this Ha-Sha (*ha-zha*) can be called Ha-Sag (*ha-sag*), that is, the country of barbarians (*kla-klo*). For the Central Tibetans of the time of Shol edict (764 A. D.) the entire region from the Lop Nor to the Koko Nor could have been the land of barbarians.

At the time of British exploration across the East Himalayas (1770s) the Indian merchants, Hindus and Muslims, had extensive contacts with Central Tibet from where goods of Indian origin were transmitted farther north (up to Mongolia). It is not unlikely that these merchants knew the destination of their goods as Ha-Sa or Ha-Cha for Lhasa and beyond.

Hacha / হাচা

This is however a conjecture and this point is submitted to provoke a discussion on this matter.

Shabbi-La, an Indian (aged 71) settled in Sikkim and doyen of Indian merchants trading between Kalimpong and Lhasa, tells me that in his boyhood he had known Indians failing to pronounce Hla-Sa and saying instead Ha-Sa. Shabbi-La would not confine this habit to Bengal or eastern India and affirms that this was not unknown even in his home, Kashmir.

'Sa' or 'Sha' is often pronounced 'Cha' in eastern most India. Hasa could have easily become Hacha in Dooars (Assam and Bengal).

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