

THE TAMANG LAMA: तामाङ लामा

As Gorkhali and Nepali are considered to be synonymous terms, so are Tamang and Lama. The term Gorkha became famous since the Anglo-Gorkha war (1814-16). In order to pursue vigorously an expansionist policy and to perpetuate British hegemony on Asia, the British adopted a policy of recruiting the Gorkhas in the British Army, acknowledging the fighting qualities of the Gorkhas.

It is presumed that the British recruitment policy was dictated by religious and communal considerations. As the Buddhists are the followers of the Lord Buddha, who had preached that 'Non-violence is a great Dharma,' the British considered the "psychosis" of Buddhist community and adopted a policy not to recruit the Tamang Buddhists in the British Army.

During the last century, the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal was perpetually under-developed; the economy was in a tottering condition and the people were illiterate and naturally superstitious. The poverty of the people of Nepal was the opportunity for the British, who needed first class soldiers at lowest pay roll. Since Tamang community was an integral part of Gorkhali population, they began to appear in the British Gorkha Army as Lamas, and not as Tamangs. The British recruiting officer was satisfied that the caste name Lama was not in the banned group. The recruit was satisfied that he did not disown his Lamaist faith.

A study reveals that the Tamang community occupies a unique position in the social structure in Nepal, Darjeeling District and Sikkim, Tamangs are Buddhists by religion, yet they are equally at ease with some social customs of the Nepali Hindus including the observance of festivals like Dasai (Durga Puja) and Tihar (Bhai Tika). While performing the obsequies and religious ceremonies the Tamangs are guided by Buddhist Lamaistic rites and rituals, they follow Nepali Hindu pattern in social customs including the marriage ceremony.

Tamang scholars might be able to tell us about the connotation of the word 'Tamang'. According to one school, Tamang is a corruption of the Tibetan word 'Ta-mangpo, i. e. many horses. This theory holds that groups of horsemen migrated from Tibet and settled down in Eastern Nepal and managed to take wives unto themselves. The offspring were the Tamangs. According to another school, the word 'Tamang' is the corrupt form of the Tibetan word 'Ta-marpo', meaning thereby a herdsman looking after a herd of red horse in the Himalayan

pasture. This Ta-marpo tribe crossed over the Himalayas and began to settle in Nepal. In the process of settlement, they married Gorkha women. The children born out of such marriages began to follow the religious practices of their fathers as well as the social customs of their mothers.

In Tamang sociological pattern, the Buddhist religious practices and Hindu social system co-existed and thrived which would explain the obvious paradox of Tamang society. The theory of mixed origin has been supported by Risley when he says, "The physical characteristics and the fact that their exogamous divisions bear Tibetan names seem to lend support to the opinion that they are descended from a Tibetan stock, modified more or less by admixture with Nepalese."

The Tamang community has its own dialect and folk songs. The Damphu is a dance peculiar to Sunwars and Tamangs. The Tamang folk songs sung in harmony with the beating of Damphu (tambourine) are composed either in Tamang dialect or in Nepali language. In my primary school days I often heard my Tamang class friends singing :

‘Bara Tamang Athara Jat
Goru ko Tauko Dhana ko Bhat.’

In simple language the song explains the Tamang tribe-cum-caste structure. The last line explains the food habit of Tamangs when it says that rice will go well with beef. Here again the Tamang scholars may throw light on Bara Tamang (twelve Tamangs) and Athara Jat (eighteen castes) in near future.

It is an interesting fact that Tamangs either write Lama or kindred names such as Moktan, Ghising, Bal, Yonjan etc, after their names. According to some, the custom of using titles, such as Subba or Pradhan, or kindred names such as Moktan, originated in Darjeeling schools. The leading personalities of Tamang community in Sikkim write Lama after their names such as the late Mr. Dakman Lama, Mr. Setey Lama, Mr. N. D. Lama, Mr. Sanman Lama, Mr. Ramu Lama, Mr. Dilbir Lama, Mr. Karmadhan Lama and so on and so forth. Besides the Lamas of Sikkim's monasteries, some members of the Bhutia-Lepcha community write Lama after their names, as the title Lama carries prestige and status. In 1920s however the word Lama as surname was not much current. Ralph Turner, the famous Indologist, does not enter Lama as a surname in his encyclopaedic work ; *A Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of the Nepali Language* (London 1931).

C. D. RAI

JO ATISA

Professor B. R. Chatterji with his characteristic modesty confines his article (supra pp. 23-6) to the two sites of which he has on-the-spot knowledge. A few observations, for the non-specialist reader of this *Bulletin*, may be made here.

(i) Confrontation and coalescence of Buddhism (Mahayana) and Brahmanism (Saiva) in South-east Asia form an important chapter in the history of Indian religions. B. R. Chatterji himself collected much data. Vide his *India and Java* (Calcutta 1933) and *Indian Cultural Influence in Cambodia* (Calcutta 1928). Mention may be made of N. R. Ray : *Sanskrit Buddhism in Burma* (Calcutta 1936) and R. C. Majumdar : *Inscriptions of Kambuja* (Calcutta 1953).

(ii) Tholing/Thotling is variously spelt and explained in Tibetan sources. Waddell : *The Buddhism of Tibet* (Cambridge 1934) on page 283 and Wylie : *The geography of Tibet according to the 'Dzam-gling-rgyas-bshad* (Rome 1962) on page 125 record such data. Chatterji records the Hindu tradition that the main temple of Tholing was the Adi Badrinath.

(iii) David Snellgrove : *Buddhist Himalaya* (Oxford 1957) on pages 193-98 traces a part of Atisa's journey to Tibet Through Nepal.

(iv) Researches made after Sarat Chandra Das have brought forth further information about Atisa as well as origins of Lama hierarchy. Vide Introduction to the reprint (Calcutta 1965) of *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow*. Giuseppe Tucci covers Atisa in *Indo-Tibetica* (Rome 1932-41) and *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Rome 1949).

(v) A prized item in the non-Tibeten collection of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology is a commentary on Prajnaparamita by Ratnakarasanti, the teacher of Atisa. This is a palm-leaf manuscript in Newari script and on paleographical grounds is dated to the eleventh century after Christ. It is therefore nearly contemporaneous with Atisa (d 1054). It was obtained from a Sakya monastery in October 1958.

NCS

LATE SHASHIBHUSHAN DASGUPTA
ON THE TANTRA

In Vol I, No. 2 of this *Bulletin* we started a symposium on the Tantra with an article by Professor Nalinaksha Dutt. In Vol II, No. 1 we had an article from Lama Anagarika Govinda. In Vol II, No. 2 wrote Mr. Marco Pallis. One principal point discussed by all these eminent authorities related to the question of kinship between the Hindu and Buddhist Tantra. In his article Marco Pallis referred to the views of late Dr. Shashibhushan Dasgupta. Extracts from Dasgupta's *Obscure Religious Cults* (Calcutta 1962) are culled below. We express our thanks to Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay (6/1A Banchharam Akur Lane, Calcutta 12), publishers of this book, for their kind permission for the excerpts in extenso.

Dasgupta found that the different systems could be apprehended from three points, (i) One of the fundamental tenets of all the esoteric schools is to hold that the human body is the epitome of the universe; all truth (*tattva*) is contained within the body. (ii) Both the Hindu and the Buddhist Tantras have another fundamental feature common to them—a theological principle of duality in non-duality. Both Tantras hold that ultimate reality has two aspects negative (*nivrtti*) and positive (*pravrtti*). and (iii) The Hindu metaphysical principles of *Siva-Sakti* are as much manifested in the material world as the Buddhist metaphysical principles of *Prajna-Upaya*. (See *Obscure Religious Cults* Introduction and *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism*, Calcutta University 1958, Introduction).

The excerpts from *Obscure Religious Cults* are given under heads (i), (ii) & (iii).

(i)

(a) "The principles of the Siva and Sakti or Upaya and Prajna are represented by man and woman, and it is, therefore that when through the process of Sadhana man and woman can realise their pure nature as Siva and Sakti, or Upaya and Prajna, the supreme bliss arising out of the Union of the two becomes the highest state whereby one can realise the ultimate nature of the absolute reality".

(p.121)

(b) "..... we have seen that the union of the Sakti with the Siva is what is meant by perfection in Tantric Yoga. Corresponding to this Kula-kundalini Sakti of the Hindu Tantras we find the conception

(iii)

(a) "The point to be emphasised here is that in the Buddhist Tantras a tendency was manifest always to conceive the Supreme Lord in the image of Siva and the female counter-part of the Lord in the image of Sakti, and these Lord and Lady of the Buddhists were in still later times identified completely with the Siva and Sakti of the Hindus"

(p 281)

(b) "This conception of the Supreme Lord and the consort, as expounded in later Buddhism, developed itself into the idea of the Adi-Buddha and Adi-Prajna in the Nepalese Buddhism. This Adi-Buddha or the primordial Enlightened One is the self-created one (*Svayambhu*) of the *Svayambhu-purana*. He is described there as the Lord Supreme, who is worshipped by all the gods, Yaksas and Raksas in the mountain of Gouri-srngga in the country of Nepal. He is described as of the nature of ultimate substance (*dharmadhatu*). He is often conceived as Lord Vairocana with the other four Tathagatas placed in the four quarters round him. Again, the Lord is often said to be Sakyamuni, who is called both Jagannatha as well as Dharmaraja. This Lord Supreme is called both Svayambhu (i e., the self-originated one) and Sambhu (literally, the Lord of Welfare), which is the most common epithet applied to Lord Siva ; the name Siva also implies that the deity is welfare itself. The Adi-Buddha, who is the Svayambhu and who is called the Dharmaraja is sometimes described as of the nature of the three jewels (*tri-ratna*).

नमो बुद्धाय धर्माय च स्वयम्भुवे ॥
त्रि-रत्न-मूर्तये तस्मै आदि-बुद्ध स्वयम्भुवे ॥
श्री-स्वयम्भु मे शरणं रत्न-त्रय-स्वरूपिणम् ।
सर्व-प्रतिदिशा मेऽद्य स्वयम्भुवे कृताञ्जलि ॥

(p. 282)

(c) "In the *Svayambhu-purana* Prajna is described as the Sakti of Siva, as the mother of three worlds, the void of voids—the mother of the Buddhas,—the mother of all the gods".

(p. 341)

It is clear from the original sources used by Dasgupta that Siva-Sakti and Prajna-upaya are interchangeable expressions and corresponding concepts.

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of a fire-force of the Buddhists in the Nirmana-kaya and she is generally described as the Candali.....This Candali is the goddess Nairatma or Avadhutika or Prajna.....

(P.P. 99-100)

(ii)

(a) "These conceptions of Prajna and Upaya have important ontological and cosmological bearing on the four schools of Nepalese Buddhism. (The four schools are :— (i) Svabhavika, (ii) Aisvarika, (iii) Karmika and (iv) Yatnika. The Svabhavika school holds that there is no immaterial ultimate truth in the form of the soul substance; matter is the primordial substance, from which the world proceeds. This matter as the ultimate substance has two modes which are called *Pravrtti* and *Nivrtti*, action and rest, dynamic and static, concrete and abstract.....
.....This *Nivrtti* is the Prajna and *Pravrtti* is the Upaya. We have seen that Prajna and Upaya are deified as the Adi-Prajna and the Adi-Buddha, and the visible world is said to be created through their union. Buddha as the principle of active power first proceeds from *Nivrtti* or Adi-Prajna and then associates with her and from their union proceeds the actual visible world. The principle is symbolised as Prajna being first the mother and then the wife of Buddha.....In some of the Hindu Tantras also we find that the goddess has been given more prominence than Lord, the former being conceived as the first principle, In some places, it has been pointed out, the primordial lord is seen floating in water. What is this water? It is, according to some Tantras, Sakti, who is pervading the whole universe in the form of water, This belief influenced the Nepalese Buddhists also, who have often conceived of Adi-Prajna in the form of primordial water. (प्रज्ञा जजमयाकारा । प्रज्ञा स्त्री-लिंगत्वात् द्रवरूपा ततो जलाकारा ॥) This Adi-Buddha or Adi-Prajna or Adi-devi are the original father and mother of the world. In the *Svayambhu-putana* Prajna is described as the Sakti of Siva, as the mother of the three worlds, the void of the voids the mother of the Buddhas,-the mother of all the gods
..... we find a popular mixture of Purusa and Prakrti of the Samkhya system, of Siva and Sakti as we find Tantricism in general, and the Adi-Buddha and Adi-Prajna of the later Buddhism".

(pp. 340-341)

Notes & Topics

RELICS OF MADHYAMA AND KASYAPAGOTRA

In the last issue (Vol. III, No.2) of this *Bulletin*, Professor Nalinaksha Dutt in his article entitled 'Buddhism in Nepal', referring to the two great Asokan missionaries who preached in the Himalayan regions, wrote: "relics of both of whom have been discovered in a relic-urn at Sanchi." (P. 27).

Nearly a century ago Alexander Cunningham and a team of engineers found the relics of ten Arhats in four steatite caskets contained within a big casket of white sand-stone beneath a Stupa adjacent to the Stupa in which the relics of Sariputra and Maudgalyayana were found. The names of the ten Arhats, inscribed on the caskets, included those of Madhyama and Kasyapagotra. While the *Memoirs and Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India* preserve the details of discovery and identification of the relics, the general reader will find in Valisinha: *Buddhist Shrines in India* (Calcutta 1948 -) a good account.

These relics were, however, later taken to the United Kingdom and kept in the Victoria & Albert Museum, South Kensington. The relics of Sariputra and Maudgalyayana were returned to India, a few years after India became independent and are now enshrined in Sanchi. The relics of Madhyama and Kasyapagotra were returned in 1958 The Government of India, under the advice of the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, presented these relics to this Institute in Sikkim.

The caskets containing these relics were kept back in the United Kingdom as mementos to the British discoverer. The Government of India, on short notice, had stored these in a Kashmir rose-wood casket. An aristocrat of Tibet now settled in India, Yabshi Pheunkhang Gampo Tsering, the leading representative of the House of Dalai Lama XI, has presented to the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology a beautiful silver Stupa with carvings, gold mountings and gems for enshrinement of these relics.