

## NOTES & TOPICS

### BUDDHASASANA IN TIBET

The term *Buddhasāsana* as description for polity or ecclesiastical polity, as known in Theravada countries like Burma, is not known in Buddhist Sanskrit usage and in Tibetan language. A system of polity in which the presiding abbots or incarnates wielded temporal authority was however known in Tibet for eight hundred years till the middle of the twentieth century. The Sakya Lamas, the Karmapa Lamas and the Dalai Lamas have ruled Tibet, it is said, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Atisa (c982-1054) who propagated the Sacred Doctrine there between c1042-1054. Atisa is known to have made a specific prophecy about the advent of Avalokitesvara in his spiritual lineage.

Atisa had visited the Suvarnavdipa (identified with Burma-Malaya-Java) before he visited Tibet. Did the political concepts of Buddhasasana and Sangharaja travel with Atisa northward into Tibet and later Mongolia? The article 'Buddhist religion in Burma, before and after 1885' is thus relevant to this field of study.

NIRMAL C. SINHA

### INVENTION OF TIBETAN ALPHABET

The date of invention of "Ali" and "Kali" in Tibet has so far not been settled to the satisfaction of modern scholars. Tibetans simply affirm that King Song-tsen Gampo's minister Thonmi Sambhota went to India—possibly Kashmir and Nepal, studied the prevalent Brahmi scripts and returned with a set of alphabet and a form of script sometime around 630/635 A.D. Tibetans apotheosised the minister and called him incarnation of Manjusri. Good translations of Indian Buddhist texts are dated from 650-660 A.D.

Formulation of the alphabet, coining of the script and good translation—all these are in Tibetan imagination achievements of one generation. Modern scholars cannot accept this and find evidence from the Tung Huang records that the Tibetan scholars and nobles were in deep contact with literature and science both from China and India for long. The contacts began evidently before Song-tsen Gampo's time; for alphabet and script, grammar and compositions flowing from Ali and Kali could not but be the outcome of hard and systematic work spread over more than one generation. In Tibetan legends, the need for alphabet arose only when King Song-tsen Gampo had imported Buddhism from India and Buddhist texts had to be made available in Tibetan language. Modern scholars agree that Tibetan nobles and scholars had good acquaintance with Chinese pictograph and had rejected the Chinese alphabet because of sentimental attachment to the language of the Land of Enlightenment.

Tibetans merely say since the Dharma was from India, Aksara, which had to record the Teachings, was also from India. This however, cannot

satisfy the modern scholars. They say "The Tibetans were not so 'stupid' and 'barbarous' as their tradition points them. They were both worthy and intelligent" (R.A. Stein). In an article entitled "India and Tibet—Historical Considerations" in this issue of the *Bulletin*, N. C. Sinha supports the same view that the Tibetans were worthy and intelligent and propounds the thesis that the rejection of Chinese script and the adoption of Indian script were political acts. The new Dharma and the new Aksara demarcated the culture and identity of the Bod-pa from those of the Han.

In this view adoption of 'Buddhism from India' was a cool calculated act. Scholars and nobles of Tibet had come into contact with Buddhism in China for decades before Song-tsen Gampo. But when the King's conversion was effected it was not at the instance of Chinese Buddhism; the monks and scholars from the south were invited to convert Tibet into Buddhism. The expulsion of Hashang after the Lhasa debate as this author points out was a political act and could not be justified on grounds of theology. This political act was affirmed and confirmed by ban on Buddhist scholars and monks of China.

The veneration for phonetic alphabet vis-a-vis Chinese pictograph became an article of faith for Tibet. In Tibetan opera depicting the story of Song-tsen Gampo, the first act (or scene) is that of introduction of Ali and Kali by Thonmi Sambhota; the later acts narrate the marriage of the king to the Buddhist princesses—one from China and other from Nepal—and the advent of the monks from India and propagation of Dharma by these monks riding the Snow Lion. The precedence for alphabet, in Tibetan drama, gives support to modern scholars' contention that the Aksara was migrating to Tibet quite before the rise of Song-tsen Gampo. In orthodox Tibetan view the act (or scene) depicting the story of Thonmi Sambhota would be like the *mangalā-carana* of Indian drama. What could be a better subject of the *mangalā-carana* than obeisance to Manjusri who was incarnate in the minister Thonmi Sambhota? Thonmi in his grammatical work makes salutations first to the Buddha then to Manjusri, Sadasiva (rtag-ziva) and gurus. Sadasiva as the primordial revealer of the imperishable sound was as much venerated in Buddhist Tibet as the Buddha. Situ Rinpoche's commentary is quite explicit on this point.

Whether invention of phonetic alphabet from India was made before the introduction of Buddhism as the logic of history demands, or it was made after the introduction of Buddhism as the Tibetan legends affirm, the fact can not be denied that choice of phonetic alphabet from India determined the course of history in Tibet.

B. GHOSH

#### STUPID BARBARIAN

Stupid Barbarian was the customary designation for a non-Han (e.g. Tibetan, Mongol or Manchu) in the language of the Middle Kingdom. The expression 'barbarian' had gone so deep that even the Conquering Emperors used it about their own Majesties. In the proclamations of the Conquering Emperors such expressions like "I being a barbarian I am free to follow a barbarian religion like that of Buddha" occurred. A Han Emperor is said to have remarked (c 477) "Foreign potentates cannot be compared even with

Chinese underlings : the T'ang-chang king, although he counts among frontier potentates, is not equal even to a Chinese clerk". Chi'en Lung's description of Lord McCartney as "The Red Barbarian from the King of the Small Islands" (1793) was in same style.

The Tibetans, who carried raids into the central plains of the Middle Kingdom in the seventh and eighth centuries, however, adopted the expressions 'stupid' and 'barbarian' with great advantage in their diplomatic correspondence with the Chinese. The Tibetan protestations of 'innocence' and 'stupidity' served them well in diplomatic encounters with the seasoned Confucian literati. In a previous number of the *Bulletin* (Vol VII, No 1) Hugh Richardson wrote about the 'honour' of Fish Bag which the 'stupid barbarian' declined. The article in this number (A Scandal at Tashilhunpo) cites an instance of Tibetan "shrewdness concealed under an air of simplicity".

NCS

### ANIMAL SYMBOLS IN BUDDHIST ART

In a previous number (1977: 2) we had an article on 'Animal Symbols in Maurya Art' from Niharranjan Ray. Illustrations (copyright : Archaeological Survey) are repeated in this number. An article on the same symbols as in Tibetan tradition will be published in the next number.

NCS

### SRI MOTICHAND PRADHAN

Born on 30 July 1893 at Haridas Hatta, Darjeeling, Motichand Pradhan died on 7 May 1977 at his Kalimpong residence. He was the first son of Lambodar Pradhan, the wellknown citizen of Turuk in Sikkim. He had while quite an infant read in Turuk Mission Primary School and when nine was admitted into Darjeeling Government School from where he passed the Matriculation Examination (Calcutta University) in the first division and with Hindi as vernacular. He then joined the Scottish Churches College, Calcutta and passed the Intermediate in Arts and Bachelor of Arts examinations (Calcutta University) with credit. He was the first Nepali—"from India, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim" in the words of Sir Charles Bell—to be a graduate of a modern university.

In 1916 Motichand Pradhan was selected for the Bengal Provincial Civil Service and was first appointed Sub-Deputy Collector. He had his training at Darjeeling, Comilla and Malda. In 1920 he was second officer in Kalimpong, and was in charge of Kalimpong Khas Mahal. Later he worked in Murshidabad for special training in land revenue settlement work. His proficiency in revenue administration in Rajshahi (1931) and Rangpore (1934) was much appreciated. As Deputy Magistrate cum Deputy Collector he was often requisitioned for the training of probationers in the Indian Civil Service. As Treasury Officer in Darjeeling (1938) and later Sub-Divisional Officer at Kurseong and Kalimpong (1948) he was much sought after by his Senior (ICS) Officers for his knowledge and experience. When he retired in 1952 as SDO : Darjeeling, Motichand was a figure highly respected for his integrity and rectitude; he was as much dreaded by corrupt elements in society.

Wellknown for his honesty and his vast experience, Motichand was called back a year later from retirement by the government of his home state, Sikkim. For about a decade he worked as Chief Magistrate and Chief Executive Officer and for quite sometime as Transport Manager. After he retired from Sikkim Government service, he was on several occasions asked to advise on administrative problems in Sikkim.

Motichand Pradhan was an embodiment of our ancient adage—“plain living and high thinking”. Well versed in Nepali and Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindi he was given to deep and wide readings particularly on Religion and Philosophy. His knowledge of Vivekananda, Gandhi and Aurobindo was astounding, and though a staunch follower of Krishnamurthi he was ever open to different schools of thought. He was a master of Yoga practices and lived an ascetic’s life after retirement.

Motichand Pradhan was an active patron of arts and letters. He was for long President of Nepali Sahitya Sammelan, Darjeeling and President, since inception, of Nepali Sahitya Adhyayan Samiti, Kalimpong; he was a member of Himalayan Kala Mandir, Darjeeling.

With his interest in Buddhism and his knowledge of Sanskrit and Tibetan, he was an enthusiastic Founder Member of the Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology. He was a member of the General Council and of the Executive Board of this Institute for successive terms. Founder Director of the Institute, Professor Nirmal Sinha, tells the writer that late Sri Motichand Pradhan’s material and moral support was indispensable in building up this Institute.

M. P. PRADHAN

The obituary on Ven Rigzing Lharipa could not be published in this number as the photographs illustrating some of his works were not available till this number was going into print.

NCS