THE TAMANG LAMA: तमाङ लामा

As Gorkha 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 "psycosias" 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 rotting 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 Gorkha 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 Lamasit 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 Dashai (Durga Puja) and Tihar (Bhai Tika). While performing the obscurities and religiousceremonies the Tamangs are guided by Buddhist Lamantic 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-margpo", i.e. many hares. This theory holds that groups of horsemen migrated from Tibet and settled down in Eastern Nepal and managed to take wives into themselves. The offsprings were the Tamangs. According to another school, the word "Tamang" is the corrupt form of the Tibetan word Ta-margpo, meaning thereby a headman looking after a herd of red horse in the Himalayan
pasture. This Tammaro 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 Newar." The Tamang community has its own dialect and folk songs. The Dampelu is a dance peculiar to Sunwars and Tamangs. The Tamang folk songs sung in harmony with the beating of Dampelu (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 Bhit.'

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. Karmaelhan 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 Lehna 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).
Professor B. R. Chatterji with his characteristic modesty confines his article (opra 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 1925). Mention may be made of N. R. Ray: Sankrit Buddhism in Burma (Calcutta 1936) and K. C. Majumdar: Inscriptions of Kanhuja (Calcutta 1953).

(ii) Tholing/Thotling is variously spelt and explained in Tibetan sources. Waddell: The Buddhism of Tibet (Cambridge 1934) on page 283 and Wyithe: The geography of Tibet according to the 'D-lam-rje-rgyal-mtshan' (Rome 1952) on page 126 record such data. Chatterji records the Hindu tradition that the main temple of Tholing was the Adi Badrinath.


(iv) Researches made after Shri Chandia Das have brought forth further information about Atisa as well as origins of Lama hierarchy. Vide Introduction to the reprint (Calcutta 1969) of Indian Poetics in the Land of Smo, Giuseppe Tucci covers Atisa in Indo-Tibetica (Rome 1932-41) and Tibetan Painted Scrolls (Rome 1949).

(v) A prized item in the non-Tibetan collection of the Nyingma Institute of Tibetology is a commentary on Pratimaranita by Ratnakassanti, 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 (A 1054). It was obtained from a Sakyu monastery in October 1958.

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LATE SHASHIRBHUSHAN 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 Angagribe Govinda. In Vol II, No. 2 wrote Mr. Marco Palla. One principal point discussed by all these eminent authorities related to the question of kinship between the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras. In his article Marco Palla referred to the views of late Dr. Shashirbhushan Dasgupta. Extracts from Dasgupta's Obscure Religious Cults (Calcutta 1912) are culled below. We express our thanks to Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay (6/1A Ranchoram 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 (sattra) is contained within the body. (ii) Both the Hindû 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 (paścittti) and positive (paścittti). (iii) The Hindu metaphysical principles of Siva-Sakti are as much manifested in the material world as the Buddhist metaphysical principles of Prajna-Upanyasa. (See Obscure Religious Cults Introduction and An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism, Calcutta University 1968, Introduction).

The excerpts from Obscure Religious Cults are given under heads (1), (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."

(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 Siva-kundalini Sakti of the Hindu Tantras we find the conception
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 Upanya have important ontological and cosmological bearing on the four schools of Nepalese Buddhism. (The four schools are:— (i) Svetabhikika, (ii) Alacerika, (iii) Karimika and (iv) Yatnika. The Svetabhikika 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 Pravritti and Nivrtti. action and rest, dynamic and static, concrete and abstract."

This Nivrtti is the Prajna and Pravrtti is the Upanya. We have seen that Prajna and Upanya are defined 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. (ग्याचः ज्ञात्माकाः । ग्याचः सैतीत्सर्वतः इवः कतः ज्ञात्मकाः \\] This Adi-Buddha or Adi-Prajna or Adi-devi are the original father and mother of the world. In the Sthupa-krama Prajna is described as the Sakti of Siva, as the mother of the three worlds, the void of the voids the mother of the Buddhists, the mother of all the gods."

we find a popular mixture of Purusa and Prakriti 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)
(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 counterpart 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."

(b) "This conception of the Supreme Lord and the consort, as
enounced in later Buddhism, developed itself into the idea of the Adi-
Buddha and Adi-Prajna in the Nipalese Buddhism. This Adi-Buddha or
the primordial Enlightened One is the self-created one (Svayambhu)
of the Svayambhu parama. He is described there as the Lord Supreme, who
is worshipped by all the gods, Yakas and Rakshas in the mountain of
Gowr-zenca in the country of Nepal. He is described as of the nature of
ultimate substance (dharma-satya). He is often conceived as Lord
Vishnu 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 Dhrmaraja. This Lord Supreme is
called both Svayambhu, (i.e. , the self-originated one, and Simha
(literally, the Lord of Welfare), which is the most common epithet
applied to Lord Siva; the name Siva also implies that the deity is wellfed
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
(tripramat).

(c) "In the Svayambhu-para Pratima is described as the Sakti
of Siva, as the mother of three worlds, the void of voids—the mother
of the Buddhists—the mother of all the gods."

It is clear from the original sources used by Dauquoy that Siva-
Sakti and Prajna-upsaya are inter-changeable expressions and corresponding
concepts.
Notes & Topics

RELIQS OF MADHYAMA AND KASYAPAGOTRA

In the last issue (Vol. III, No.2) of this Bulletin, Professor Nalini Kelkar Dutt in his article entitled "Buddhism in Nepal", referring to the two great Buddhist 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 stone 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 Kasyapagotta. 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 Kasyapagotta 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 memorials to the British discoverers. The Government of India, on short notice, had sent one in a Kashmir rose-wood casket. An Artistor of Tibet now settled in India, Yabshi Phunkhang, Gompo Tseling, the lexing 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.