The Kargyupa Sect

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A century after Buddha's Mahaparinivāna dissemination arose among the monks in regard to the sexual words of the master and their interpretations which ultimately led to the origin of sects in Indian Buddhism, all aiming to preserve his original teachings. And within a few centuries after the demise of the Great Teacher as many as twenty sects or more came into existence—although a few of them disappeared shortly after their appearance. But in regard to the origin of Buddhist sects in Tibet, the case has been quite different and about ten sects came into being there in course of time. The Tibetan sects came into existence with a view to preserving the purity of the Buddhist teachings and doing away with the degrading practices, superstitions, beliefs and the like then prevalent prior to the Buddhist doctrines. Waddell writes that the sects "arose in revolt against the depraved Lamasim then prevalent, which was little else than a pricey mixture of demonology and witchcraft. Abandoning the grosser charlatanism the new sects returned to celibacy and many of the purer "Mahāyāna parts", "Buddhist Religion" reserves S.C. Dutt "progressed more and more, so as to branch out into numerous different sects as a result of the extraordinary growth. These, like the eighteen divisions of the Vaiśhānika school of ancient India were designated after the names of respective teachers and places of origin. Some of the Tibetan Lamas who had derived their religious knowledge from Indian Pandits; feeling great veneration for the theorems themselves, named their respective sects after them. They did not follow the Indian patriarchs in their nomenclature, for all the Indian Buddhist Schools were designated after the general sense of their philosophies". Indeed, it was through the efforts of these sects, Buddhism was widely spread and occupied the position it did in Tibet.

1. The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism, pp. 74,75
2. JASS, part II p. 5
There were no sects in Tibet prior to the eleventh century A.D. Buddhism as already observed, suffered a violent setback for the time-being because of the King Chang-thang-nya’s ruthless persecution. No sect prior to 11th century A.D. was virtually annihilated in Tibet. According to the Tibetan historians the doctrine was rooted out. The period which followed the year of the persecution of the doctrine is one of the darkest in the whole history of Tibet.

In the 11th century A.D. King Yeshe-bod who was one of the piou-

kings of Tibet and to whom Buddhist renaissance owed much much 
Amita (Dipankara Srijuna) to come to Tibet 

Invitation to Amita from India to propagate Buddhism there. Since 
Amita came to Tibet he corrected, rectified and systemati-

zed the Buddhist teachings then prevalent. He reformed the Sangha in 
Tibet and brought a great renaissance in the religion.

With his reformation he initiated the Kadampa sect, the first sect of 
Tibetan Buddhism as against the unfounded type of Buddhism called 
Nyingma-pa “the old sect” founded by Padmasambhava, the followers of Amita and Drom were called Kadampa sect (one of the doctrine) while the unfounded monks were called Nyingma-pa (one of the old). Thus Tibetan Buddhism developed into various sects from the time of Amita. In other words Tibetan kings traced their heritage to the great Acarya Dipankara Srijuna late sometime in the latter part of the 11th century A.D. All contemporaneous and later sects without exception were influenced by the teachings of the Dka-dam-pa sect.” “No sects” observed Waddell, “appear to have existed prior to Lao-Darma’s persecution, nor did any more than a century and a half later. The sectarian movement seems to date from the reformation started by the Indian Buddhist monk Atisha.”

1. Tibet : A Political History, pp. 59-60
2. The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaiton, p. 54
Tibetan Buddhism, as we have seen, developed into various sects later on. Most of them are now extinct. Only few of them still survive. We have, however, few details about them.

Of the sects extinct the Kargyud-pa (bKah-rgyud-pa) is one of the important sects in Tibet. In Tibetan, bKah-rgyud means “the transmission of teachings”. In other words, it means the tradition of instructions orally transmitted through a continual series of teachers and disciples. It is that is why it is called “school of successive order”. It may also be called “Oral Traditionalism”. Its followers believe in the succession of preceptors handed down through the galaxy of teachers. It traces its origin to Marpa (11th century A.D.), a native of Lho-lang, who visited India and Tibet and studied extensively the Tantric texts with a number of eminent teachers there. On his return to Tibet he founded this sect on the basis of the teachings of his teacher Naropa, the great Indian Siddhārṇava (master of mysticism).

The Kargyud-pa (bKah-rgyud-pa) has two main schools: the Shangpa (bKa’-rgyud-pa) and Dvapa-po-bKa’- . (Shangpa-Kargyud) and Dvapa-po-bKa’- . (Dvapa-Kargyud-pa).

(1) The Shangpa Kargyud—was established by the great Yogi and Siddha Khyung-po-Nal-bByor (976-1075 A.D.). He spent fifty years in studying sutras and Tantra texts in India, Nepal and Tibet. Among his teachers were Niguo (the emir of Mahāśīla Naṣapa), Sukhasiddha and Rahulasūtra. He built about a hundred monasteries including his own principal monastery Zhang Zhong in Shangpa Kargyud Shange valley and that is also known as Shangpa Kargyud. He taught for about thirty years and had eighty thousand disciples. His teachings were based on the five Tantras, viz., Sarvārtha, Hvaṭra, Mahamantra, Mahasamāja and Vajrāhāra. He also taught the teachings of Niguo and Sukhasiddha as also the doctrine of Mahayana. This system is not at present wide-spread as a school.
(11) The Dgag-po-bshad-pa-gyu's (Dagpo Kargyud)— it means the transmission of the order of Dgag-po, which is the name of a great scholar-aesthetic who lived in the Dgag-po valley. It spread widely and is one of the four major schools of Tibet. It may be pertinent to note here that now Dagpo Kargyud is the only Kargyud (bKah-kyi-khrod), since Shangpa Kargyud the first one is not well-known—it is now almost Dagpo Kargyud extinct. (Marpa - Lo-tsa - wa), Chor - kyi - Ro-gros (Chokyi Lodro), is the founder of the school in the 11th century A. D. He studied first with a Ben-mi-lo-sa-sa-ba (Drognor Longwa) and then visited India thrice and Nepal four times. He received the teachings of Tantras from the renowned teachers such as Naropa and Marpa. Specially he obtained the absolute realization of Mahamudra meditation from the teaching of Marpa. In Tibet, he transmitted the teachings of Samvara, Guhyasamaja, Heruka, Mahamaya and other Tantras to his disciples, so called four pillars, viz., rTGONG Chor-kyi-brul: Do-nDe (Ngagten Chok Choyden),, roBzr - rgya-mo - Dbang - rgya (Pehrton, Wang-Rgya), Los-Ton Dpal-po (Meton - Dpalpo) and Mi-lod-Ras-pa (Mikyupa), the great Buddhist sect of Tibet. This esoteric doctrine was thereafter orally transmitted to Ralston, the eminent scholar and authoritative historian of Tibet and Tson-Kha-pa, the great Tibetan reformer in whose hands this tradition gained extensive prevalence and unbroken continuity down to the present time.

From this Dagpo Kargyud arose four major subsects and eight minor subsects from one of its subsects latter on. The four major subsects are: Karsha Kargyud (Kumbhang Kargyud), Karsha Kargyud, Tshalpa Kargyud and Saropa Kargyud.

(a) Kruma Kargyud was founded in the middle of the 12th century A. D. by Karsha Gsum-mi-lod-khyung-pan (Dsum-mi-lod-khyung). He studied the various doctrines with Dagpo-Lhasa and Redzongpa. He built monasteries as Kruma Lha-ling and in Tsar-phu (Tshar-phu) for the great benefit of the people. He died at the age of eighty.

Since Kruma Gsum-mi-khyung the heads of phrebsa Kargyud this subsect have been the uninterrupted reincarnation of him till the present time. His next reincarnation was Kruma Pakshi. Thence, after Pakshi this
sect was also called the “Black Cap Sect” (Shwa-mag-can). The XVth Karmapa Rügpa Dorje (Rig-pa'i Red-je) who used to live at Rumtek, Sikkim, passed away on 6.11.81 in Chicago, USA.

He visited several countries abroad. He established more than two hundred meditation centers in the various parts of the world. His principal monastery in Tibet was the mTshur-pa in Central Tibet. It should be pointed out here that the Karmapa “seems to be nearly identical with the Karmapa sect of Nepal”.

(b) Phagru Kargyud (Phag-gru-bka-ha-kagyu) — it was founded by Phagmo-Trapa Dorje, Gyatpo (Phag-mo-Gya-pa-Rdo-rje - rGyal-po) who was born in the southern part of Kham in 1110 A.D. He studied the various teachings under different teachers. Afterwards he learnt the Mahamudra (doctrine of the great symbol) from Dargsa Lhaqe at Sgam-po monastery. He constructed a monastery at a place called Pha-mo-gru in South Tibet (now known as Derge-Thil-gDan-sa-mThil) to propagate the doctrine and was hence called Phagmo-Trapa. He died at the age of sixty-one in 1170 A.D. He had a large number of disciples which formed many sub-sects later on.

(c) Tshalpa Kargyud (Tshal-ba-kagyu) — the founder of this sub-sect was Zhang-Da-matrog (Zhang Darma Grag) who was born in 1122 A.D. His main preceptor was Wongom Tshultrim (dBon-los-Gom Tshul-khrims Gnyen-pa) who was a disciple of Dago. Later on he founded the Gzing-thang monastery to popularize the doctrine and Tshalpa Kargyud to convert the people. He died at the age of seventy-one in 1193 A.D.

(d) Barompa-Kargyud (Barom Kga-ha-kagyu) — Darma Wangchug (Dar-ma-Wang-chub-phyug) was a disciple of Dago. He studied all the doctrines both exoteric andoteric, under him and Barom Kargyud attained all excellent virtues. He built the Barom monastery in the North and hence his tradition was known as the Barom Kargyud.

1. To pay his homage to the IXth Gyalwa Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje, Gyurm-wod Nangyal, the ruler of Sikkim constructed the first Karmapa monastery at Kaling in Sikkim in about 1730 A.D.,
We have seen before that the eight minor subsects issued from the Dage Kargyudpa. But rightly speaking, they originated with the Phagru Kargyud. In other words, they traced their heritage to the disciples of Phagmo Trupa. They are:

(1) Driung Kargyud (a’BrjU-gsum bKa’-brgyud) — it was founded by Kyuru Rinpoche (Slyu-Ru-Rin-po-che). He received the teachings of the Kargyud from Phagmo Drupa and became an eminent scholar and a famous monk. His religious discourses Driung Kargyud were usually attended by a number of his disciples including many monks. He built a monastery in Driung valley in Central Tibet and hence his tradition was known as Driungapa. In Ludhah, there are a large number of Driung Kargyud followers and many monasteries.

(2) Taglung Kargyud (rTag-lung bKa’-brgyud) — it was founded by Taglung Thaipa Trashipal (rTag-lung-Thang-pa bkra-shis-dpal), who was born in 1242 A.D. He became an attendant of Phamo Trupa who taught him all his doctrines. Taglung Kargyud He built a monastery at Taglung (rTag-lung) valley for propagation of Buddhism and to his tradition became known after it.

(3) Yarwang Kargyud (gYa’-zla-bzang bKa’-brgyud) — it was founded by Ye-She-Sang (Ye-She-Sang), a disciple of Phagmo Trupa and a native of Mum-har. He got the highest realization just at the sight of his guru (preceptor). His foremost disciple was Yarwang Kargyud Yarwang (gYa’-zla-bzang-pa) who built the Yarwang monastery there. He trained many disciples. Their tradition was named Yarwang Kargyudpa.

(4) Tsorpu Kargyud (Khro-bu-ba’-bKa’-brgyud) — originated with two brothers¹, Rinpoche Gyal-uba and Kuchen Ruppo, disciples of

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1. According to some nephew and uncle.
The former built the Throbus monastery. Their nephew was Throbus Lota Sawa who was ordained as a monk by his uncle and learnt almost all the teachings from them. He invited many Indian teachers including the great Pandita Sakvani of Kahun. He built a temple at Throbus monastery and installed a big image of Maitreya Buddha therein. He also wrote a number of books. Their tradition was thus known as Throbus Kargyud.

(5) Shungseb Kargyud (Shun-she-ba-Ka’-kargyud) — originated with Chokyi Senge (Chos-kyi-senge), a disciple of Phagmo Trupa. He built Nye Phu Shungseb (Nye-phu-Shug-gyi) monastery and gave religious discourses to the people. His tradition was known as Shungseb Kargyud.

(6) Marthang Kargyud (Mar-thang) — This tradition was started by Marpa Rinchen Lodro (Mar-pa-Rin-chen-Lodro). Marthang Kargyud

(7) Yelpa (Yelpa) Kargyud — this tradition was established by Yelpa Yeshe Tsekh (Yel-ba-ye-shes-btshe-ga). He built Shar Dorje Dong (Shar-Dorje-rDo-rtsang). Lho-Yel-phug (Lho-yel-phug) and Chang Tsas (Byang-Tsas) monasteries for propagation of his teachings.

(8) Drukpa Kargyud (Drung-pa-Ka’kargyud) — this tradition was established by Phagmo Trupa’s disciple Tsangpa Drukpa Kargyud (Phagmo-Trupa-Gyu-ra). Later it divided itself into three sub-schools viz., the middle Drukpa, Lower Drukpa and Upper Drukpa.

(a) The Par-Druk (Middle Drukpa Kargyud) (Par-drug) — Ling-repa Padma Dr (-Dorje). Ling-repa Padma Dr (-Dorje) was a highly enlightened disciple of Phagmo Trupa. He built a monastery at Nagpurs (Nag-phur). Among his disciples, Tsangpa Gyure (Phagmo-Trupa-Gyur-Ra) was a famous teacher. He built Lingkhor (Rin-khor) and Ralung (Ralung) monasteries.
Then he went to a place called Namnyi-phu (gSam-Gyi-phyo) to build a monastery. Along with his party when he Pe'-Druk reached there they saw Notre Druk (a'Brug—Dragon) flying into the sky with roars. He took it to be a good omen. And he called the name of the monastery as Druk(a'Brug) and Druk Sewa Chagdub Gon as also Namdruk (gNam-a'Brug). For that is why this tradition was known as Druk and his followers as Drukpa. There is a Tibetan proverb which means as follows:—

“Half of the people are Drupka Kagyu-dpas, half of the beggars are Drub-thob-ba (Siddhas)”

Later on, in this tradition appeared many disciples. Among them there was Padma Karpo (Padma dKar-po), also known as Kun Khyen (Kun-mKhyen-Sar-vi-ga), who founded the Sang Ngag Choling (gSang-sNgags Chos-ling) monastery near the border of Astam (in Tibet) and it became the seat of the Druk-chheni incarnations. Tibet apart, this sub-school is very popular in Bhutan. It is because of this Bhutan is called Druk (a'Brug). (b) Med-Druk (Snag-a'Brug - lower Druk)—Lorapa Darma Wogchuk (Lor-ba-ba-Dar-Mad-dbang-chos-rgyug) was a disciple of Tawapa Gyare and others. He led a very humble and disciplined life. He built Wuri (dBu-Ri) monastery and then made Sang-Ri as his seat Med Druk (residence). His tradition was known as Med-Druk. (c) Tod-Druk (Od-a’brug—Upper Druk). Gompo Dpo-Dje (gO-Ma-ba-Thang-po) was a distinguished disciple of Tawapa Gyare. He had many disciples. Later in this tradition Barab Gyagshen Paldang (ba-Re-ga-Gyal) Tod Druk mThonpa (dPal-lha-ring) wrote numerous works. Oynerpa K'chugspa who was a disciple of Oldhappha was a great Sthupa and visited Bodh-Gaya, Ladhakara, Odisha-Ujja and China. Among his disciples were Karmapa Kangchung Dpo-Dje (Rasg-Byung-ba-Rdo-rje), Khaechupa (mKha'-Chos-ba-pho) and Togden Dzang (Togs-Den-Zla-rig).

At present among all the Kagyu-dpas sub-schools Karmapa Kagyud (Darma Kanungpa) is the most widely spread sub-school and comes first, the Drukpa Kagyu comes second and Drikung Kagyu coming third.

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Lastly, the Kargyu-pa generally follows the tradition of Kadampa on doctrinal matters. But they further practise the Four Tantras, viz., Kriyatantra, Caryatantra, Yogatantra and Ajuttavatarastra of the New Translation Tantras. Its special teachings are Narro-Chodrubhā of Mahasiddhā Naropa and the Mahamudra teachings of Mahasiddha Maitripa.

1. The six aspects of instructions of Naropa are: Tumo (Heart-Yoga), Gyulu (Maya-body), Milam (Dream), Oshel (Radiant Clarity), Pardo-Bardo (Intermediate stage between death and birth) and Phowa (Transference.)