BODONG PHYOG LAS RNAM RGYAL

—J.K. Rechung

Even before the institute of Tibetology was established, His Holiness The Dalai Lama presented Buddhist Texts printed from the blocks housed in Shol-Parkhang, the printing house below Potala, Lhasa. The books presented were that of the Lhasa Edition, such as BKA’I-NGUV, the works of BU STON, TSONGKHAPA, RGYALTSHAB RJE and MKHAS DRUP RJE, the lives and works of the thirteen Dalai Lamas, etc. Recently His Holiness The Dalai Lama has presented the Institute of Tibetology with a set of complete works of BODONG which is rightly described in English as Encyclopaedia Tibetica, through the Ven. Dobsom Rinpoche, Director, Tibet House, New Delhi. It is a mammoth collection consisting of 137 volumes.

The author of the Encyclopaedia was BODONG PHYOGLAS RNAM RGYAL, who was also known as' RGYUG ME DRAGS PA. BODONG PHYOGLAS RNAM RGYAL was born in the Wood Horse year of the Tibetan Calendar corresponding to 1772 of the Western Calendar, near a place called mount Lakpa Kang in the north of Mount Parpa in Western Tibet. His father was a lama, a skilled craftsman and a great poet known as CHIKHS GGYING RGYAL MTSHAN. His mother DBYANG CHUB SDRON was a pious and learned lady.

According to legends, miracles and extra-ordinary phenomena characterized BODONG'S life from the moment of conception. When he was in the womb, the mother had strange dream of four suspicious signs. First, she saw a fell moon much brighter than any full moon. Secondly, rainbow colours emanated from her body. Thirdly, she heard unusual melodious sounds and fourthly, she got the smell of the scent of the best sandalwood.

At the age of three, while his governor was taking him around, he suddenly disappeared from the sight. The governor searched in vain all over, and suddenly found him on the other side of the river. To get him across the river, the governor had to engage some sturdy men. There were many cooks, some felt they had seen a child swim across the river like a swan, others felt they saw him flying across, and there were still others, who felt they saw him walk on the water while crossing the river. These visions signalled that in his previous life he had crossed the ocean of Samsara and attained enlightenment.

During childhood, the author was indeed unlike other children of his age. He would perch himself on a high stone, or anything
high and gather the other children around and pole to preach religion. When he reached the age of five, he could assume contemplation in different ways due to his propensities in former life. Once he disappeared, and was found meditating in the seven perfect meditation postures, in a discolored house. He thus disguised himself in many religious practices even at this early age.

Once, when his teacher in BSAM STAN GLING Monastery asked him what he was looking at, in reply to the teacher's query he said, that he could see the letter 'AH' written in white in the middle of his forehead. From this letter 'AH', condensed numerous other letters filling the whole sky, and then all the letters assembled back into the white 'AH' again. At the age of five he took ordination to be a perfect monk from his uncle, Panchen Dorje Rgyal Mtshe, and he was named RGYAL MTSHAN SENGE GYI. Later, he went to CHHOS LING Monastery to take the vow of Pravrajya (DGe Tshul) from his teacher DRAG PA RGYA' MTSHEN. At such a young age he received the teachings on THBD MA (Pratima) and had full knowledge of the subject. While studying the Pratima he had a bright clear vision of Lord Buddha surrounded by SHODARA MAHASTAVIRA, the Sixteen Arhats.

At the age of thirteen, he made up his mind to write Commentaries on all the Sutras and Tantras. While contemplating over the master, Vajrasattva and Vajra Yugi, appeared to him in Real Form and told him to write Commentaries on Tattvavangala of Sukazakha. Once he saw Lotsava Drakpa Gyaltsen in his dream telling him to correct the text of Swam 'byed rgya mtsho in which Lotsava Drakpa Rgyalshes felt that he had made some mistakes. BO'DONG was asked not only to correct mistakes and also to write a commentary on the subject.

At the age of sixteen he went to Sakya to have discourses on Pratima Vartika Kriika (TSHAD MA XNAM 5'GRE) with some great scholars. The scholars were impressed with him. Although having not studied Poetry, he composed a Poem in praise of Lord Buddha's Twelve Deeds. He even wrote sonnets on some defects. He became a renowned poet like Pandita Anamaya. He studied subjects like Prapannamita, Madhyamaka etc; and did the Oral Test on all the subjects with his Teacher Rakuupa Chooving.

Young BO'DONG wishing to obtain advanced knowledge of such subjects as Tanimaya and Satayana went to CHHOS DRI'YANG Monastery to propitiate DRI'YANGS CHEN MA (Goddess Sarawati). He went back twice, and not before long Goddess Sarawati appeared

25
to him holding a SGRA NYAN (stringed instrument) from which emanated melodious sounds of DHARMA. From then onwards the Goddess often appeared to him and gave him guidance. He composed a poem in praise of Goddess Saraswati. The title of the poem is BING BA'I GLU EBHYANG (Songs of the Bees) and records the com-poser’s name as Dbyen Chen Ugyen Paljor, meaning the Pandita who adores Goddess Saraswati.

BODON OR was well versed in the Three Courses that lead to the perfection of the Author of Shatra. The first course is a thorough knowledge of the subject as preached by the great teachers, ranging from Lord Buddha himself down to the author’s own Guru. The second course is complete mastery over the five sciences, namely, the science of Grammar, the science of Medicine, the science of Logic and the knowledge of the symbolic meaning of the Tripitaka. The third and the last course is the author being blessed by a vision of his tutelary deity and being told to write a Shatra.

Within a short while he had full knowledge of the texts on Vinaya, Abhidharma, Prasangika, Prasangika and Madhyamika composed by Nagavaju, Maitreya, Asanga, Vatsyabandhu, Dipagaga, Dharmakirti, Chandrakirti and Guanrocheba. He read these texts in original (Sanskrit) and translation (Tibetan). He was able to learn the texts by heart by going through the texts only thrice. He went to Central Tibet to have discussions with great scholars. The scholars, after debating with the young scholar, were amazed and pleased with his knowledge. He received initiation and expositions of Chatur Vidya Tantra from Lotsawa Drakpa Rgyal Mthshn and especially on the subject Yoga Tantra, Lotsawa Drakpa Rgyal Mthshn gave him teachings on Gyuksamaj (Gagpa-ba-bdups), the Six Doctrines of Naropa (Nye Blo-bsdus), the Chakra Samvara and Lam. He also received teachings from different learned scholars on different subjects. He had acquired perfect knowledge of the subjects that were taught to him.

Once while studying in a place called Sman Grong near Kyidung, he ritualized a remains Dbyung Snang (GSHONG STON RDO RJE RGYAL MTSHAN) worn in the robe of a Pandita, with religious texts tucked on several Elephants. The Lama seated on the throne read all the texts to the author one by one, and told him that he had imparted all the knowledge of Buddhism to him, and that the author should realize all meanings in order to be able to propagate Buddhism. He was blessed and consecrated by the Lama. From the time of this vision the author could write on all aspects of Buddhism. Learned Lamas like GTAG TIG PA and RONG TIG PA were defeated in debate by the author. On receiving an invitation from the
SITU RAB BISTAN PA of GTSHANG district, he went to RGTAL TSE preaching religion all along his way. On the way suddenly a rain of flowers showered from the sky. The flowers were of white, red and blue in colour, and could be seen and touched by the people, who were amused. Likewise several miracles occurred on several occasions.

BODONG had many simple and learned disciples. When above seventy, he had the mind to leave the world, so he proceeded to his disciples according to their individual aspirations. During his stay at Shela (SHEL BSHAR), a place in Western Tibet he told his disciple BODONG DURVA (BODONG SGRUB PA) that the time had come for him to go to Dolpa Kuchor (Dag Pa mRga' sbyod), Heaven of Vajrasattva. He also stated that he was going to leave for Choang Monastery, which was established by him, in order to complete his incompletely works, before leaving for the heaven of HOG MIN.

In Choang Monastery he engaged thirty scribes to help him complete his incomplete works. With his blessings each could complete thirty pages a day even though many of the scribes were not very competent. Before his PARINIRVANA he was able to do all the corrections and even add notes for all the works he started.

At the age of seventy-seven on the 19th day of the second month of the Fire-Sheep year of the Tibetan Calendar (1461 of Western Calendar), he left for, heaven (DAG 7A mRga' sbyod) lying on his right side with his eyes focused on the sky.

Before he left the world he told his disciples that they were not to mourn for him on his parting. He went on to say that due to his meditations, propitiations of deities and other practices of religion, during his countless lives, those that met, heard and had any connections with him, would not be born as beasts, hungry ghosts or go to hell. It is recorded in oral and written sources that some of the disciples had visions of the author, being escorted to heaven by goddesses with offerings and songs. On the day of his cremation, there were many spectacular phenomena and wonderful signs.

In the history of Buddhist saints and scholars, in Tibet and in India, BODONG PHYO GS LAS RNAM RGTAL is the singular figure who composed as many as 172 volumes covering all aspects of Buddhism and even medicine, sciences and crafts.

While legends and miracles are for believers, the undisputed fact is on firm record that BODONG PHYO GS LAS RNAM RGTAL was an encyclopaedic scholar of the East born in 1223, who attained the
peak of his scholarly career in his twenties, when he began his writing on not only DHARMA but also on subjects like science and technol-
ogy. A brief survey of the contents of the GSUNG HBUM is made here.

A look at this rather sketchy outline of the contents will ins-
pire all modern readers about Buddhism or Tibetan sources to go
deeper into this monumental work from Tibet's past. Modern scholars
will have reason to be grateful to His Holiness The Dalai Lama for
advising and organising this authentic reproduction of BCDONG
GSUNG HBUM.

CONTENTS OF GSUNG BUM

The works of Bo-dong Phyo-ge-las Rnam-Rgyal consist of over
955 texts included in 117 volumes. Apart from his immense contri-
bution on Dharma, both Hinayana and Mahayana, BODONG also com-
posed works on technical subjects, such as, History of Buddhism,
Biography, Poetry, Kalapa Grammar, Lexicon, Medicine, Astronomy,
Mathematical Calculation, Astrology, Art, Religious paintings, etc.

Hereunder are mentioned some of the important works
subject wise:

Hinayana

Hinayana Account of the Buddhism, Ordination Ritual—Vinaya,
Sramanera ordination etc.

Mahayana

Prajnaparamita Sutras, Abhidharmakosa, Abhidharma Samu-
caya etc.

History

Bu-ston-Rinchen-grub's History of Kalachakra tantra.

Biography

Sixteen biographies including Bo-dong Phyo-ge-las Rnam-Rgyal,

Logic

Four works on Hindu and Buddhist logic

Philosophy

Including Jaina, Nirvamsa, Sankhya, Vaiseshika and Vedanta

Technical subjects

Kosa (Avamakosa), Grammar (Kalapa), Sanskrit Poetics
(Kavyadarsa), Nitisastra, Ayurveda (Aryangubhedapamhita), Astrology,
Astronomy.