THE LIFE OF SUM-PA MKHAN-PO (1704-1788),
THE CELEBRATED AUTHOR OF
DPAG-BSAM LJON-BZAN
(Translated from Deb-ther rgya-mtsho')
— Dr. Sanjit Kumar Sadhukhan

Sum-pa mkhan-po ye-ses dpal-byor was the nephew of Tsan-dzin chos-rgyal. In the account of Eti-mthah'i-tshang-pa skyabs (of Kekhor), Sum-pa was born in the Wood Monkey year (A.D. 1704) of the 12th Rab-byeh cycle.

Sum-pa read Eti-mthah'i-tshang and learned the rules of the religious practice. When he was admitted into the monastery Thar-sui chos-sknyoh rgya-mtsho yofe-dzin was appointed his teacher. Sum-pa acted according to his teacher's instruction and (later) became a very kind lama. He was ordained under an initiator lama (of the Thar-sul monastery) in the Iron Tiger year (A.D. 1710). He was admitted into the school of philosophy of the dGon-lu monastery in the Water-Serpent Year (A.D. 1713) and studied well. At the age of 20 years in the Water-Hare year (A.D. 1723) he heard rdor-phren under dpaw-rim Nag-dban bkra-shis. He went to dbus. Staying in the sGo-ma-pa school of philosophy he heard brtsed-bshag from dperv-slob Lama nmam-mkhan, the first among the eight sGo-bzes-lu of Chunggar. In the winter he began his study on Phar-phyuin (Prajnaparamita) in the stream of religion klu-bum-pa Mog-kya 'jam-dbyangs rgya-mtsho became his teacher. At that time, rta-rtshag ri mthu, Thordro sgo-man spis-sku, mtha'-ris spis-sku and bsam-po No-myon came to the school of philosophy (i.e. they joined the school as teachers). In the Fire-Horse year (A.D. 1726) he obtained the degree of glin-bres dbku-bo.

In dbus-spuhs dge-phel he heard the explanation of the doctrine from Bo-skya mtham-bshag-pa, mkhar-dor bzmi-pa rgya-mtsho, Skogs Don-yod mkhas-grub, Chum-mig-lu-pa bsa-ma 'jam-dbyangs-pa, and others. Earlier and later he heard a vast number of things from Khri Nam-mkha'-bsam, Khri Nag-dban mchos-lidan, Koe-pa bka'-gyur-pa Chos-rin-chen, Skya-dmar pa washab rgya-mtsho, Sen-gid dam-chos who was the teacher of sgo-man school, and others. He practised all those. He learned sābā-sāstra (grammatic, composition of verse, etc.) under mdba-ro mkhar-pa sMon-lam thun-grub, the disciple of Pradu dge-bses, Sum-bcu-pa (of Thon-mi) under bsam-blo-mi-thu of skyu 'bum monastery and various arts of writing (dbu-can, dbu-med, etc.) and geometrical measurement under btsan-po mi-tshang-pa Tsugs-rgags thun-grub. He practised two varieties of astrological calculation, one for human benefits and the other for bringing harm.
to the human beings, from Lha-dbaṅ-pa, who was the district officer of skyor-mo-luṅ and also the personal disciple of the regent (of Tibet), and Soṅ-ram-pa Nag-dbaṅ rgya-mtsho who was the disciple of Lug-mgo bia-nkhyen Nag-dbaṅ, and who used to teach Baidunya dkar-po (an astrological text of sDe-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho).

While out on a pilgrimage in the Fire-Horse year (A.D. 1726)7 he visited Tsa-ni and 'Dab,’bre-la’rtsa-’mchog gron in Tsa-ni bab-skor. In the southern side, in rGya-rin-rgb he visited a very high mountain which was called Sa-mi-svar by the sCa-yas and rGya-gar seh-ge by the Tibetans.

In the Iron-Pig year (A.D. 1731) he came back to his own country. He got the initiation of Dus-’khor (Kālacakra deity) from the great scholar dGe-dun don-grub. He received religious instructions from Khrī-chen sprul-skru, dKa’-chen sman-lam-pa, Tshis-kas-s'i-fixag-rim-pa, etc. in Lo-mo bdechen monastery. He inquired upon the religious advice on 3man-hag, etc. which successively came down to Gro-tshab brag sprul-pa’i-skru from Kun-mkhyen goñ-ma (Jam-dbyangs bshad-pa Nag-dbaṅ brtsan-’grus). He gave dRten-p'nyen initiaion in dGa’-ldan bsdad-sgrub glin (a monastery) in the Dragon year (A.D. 1736).

In the Fire-Serpent year (A.D. 1737) he went to China and praised the Emperor. In the Earth-Horse year (A.D. 1738), while staying near the river called San-li behind lTsho-bdon temple, he saw that the rJe-rtsun lham-pa’i sprul-skru who was the son of Hap ha don-grub lhaṅ was driven away by the army of Cun-gar.

In the Earth-Sheep year (A.D. 1739) he came back to Tibet. In the Iron- Monkey year (A.D. 1740) he got dGon-luṅ ri-khrod (a cave monastery), congregation halls of two dBe-skhyid sgrub-sde-s of Zva-khrog and dGon-luṅ dGa’-ldan lha-rtses built. He got Sri-gnon ’bum-pa chen-po and Sum-pa’i zin-yon temple along with dMar-gtsas temple repaired. He got the huge statue of the Maitreya Buddha, built in the big temple of dGon-luṅ. He got small temples and 3 other statues, built at the left and right sides of that temple of Maitreya. He got the great shrines built on the low land just in front of the monastery. In the Water-Dog year (A.D. 1742) he went to Pe-chi (the capital of China) and came back in Pig year (A.D. 1743). After five years he got a temple with images etc. built in Bo-sog-thu monastery of Po-khrog. He became abbot of this monastery in the Fire-Tiger year (A.D. 1746). With this term and two more terms before and later it he became abbot for three times in total. In the Iron-Horse year (A.D. 1750) he went to Ri-bo rtses-lha. He also became abbot of the following monasteries: bKrás-’jie chos-glin, Ser-lun, Brug-lun, Dul-ba dgon, dGa’-ldan rin-chan glin, Pho-rod pra-sde’i dgon, etc.

He composed many works, including a history of the doctrine called dPag-bsam ljon-bzhan among the rTsis literature his dGe-ldan rTsiś gser’s is very famous.

13
It is the previous story that when Pan-chen thams-cad mkhyen-pa stayed in sKu-bum monastery, Sum-pa approached him in an auspicious moment and heard many things on medicine, tantra, the properties and various natures of the king, minister and army of the barbarians. At times he heard the nature of birds and animals like tiger etc.

He assembled many disciples as Thu'u-bkvanrin-po-che d'i. When Sum-pa was paying homage to the tomb of rje Nam-dbyan chos-kyi rgya-mtsho, a small piece of thread like thumb in size fell inside the tomb. It is said that Sum-pa took that piece of thread into his mouth and as a result of this he got a long life and also became a very rich man. He died at the age of 85 years in the Earth-Monkey year (A.D. 1784). Kun-mhyen Bar-ma worshipped the shrine of his tomb.

Sum-pa had his autobiography. There Sum-pa is generally found to be famous among the names of the eighteen great castles of Tibet. This very Sum-pa also prepared 100 sets of 100-volume Kanjur written in gold by the order of the mother of the King of Lhan-llo of Chims. At his request to the King the temples were built in a large number in the Amdo country and the zones with their fixed worship placés were settled.

Notes:

1. I have used the printed edition of this work entitled Histoire Du Bouddhisme Dans L'Amdo Published by Imprimé Pour L'école Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris.

2. In the text the year is clearly mentioned as Water-Monkey i.e. A.D. 1752 but it is absurd. It will be Water-Serpent i.e. A.D. 1713. Sum-pa in his autobiography mentions the 9th year of his age as the year of his admission into dGon-lun.

3. Though in the text the year is clearly mentioned as Earth-Serpent i.e. A.D. 1749 but from the fact that he returned in the Iron-Pig year i.e. A.D. 1731 can by no means justify the former year of his pilgrimage. It should be the Fire-Horse Year i.e. A.D. 1726 and also it is justified by the statement in Sum-pa's autobiography, “at the age of 22nd year”.

4. Full title of this oft-quoted work is "Phags-yul rgya-nag chen-po bod dan sog-yul du dam-pa'i chos-byun-islul dpag-bsam ljon-bzan. It is written in 1748 and contains 317 folios of large format. It comprises the first volume of the Complete Works of the author. From the Indian historical point of view it is an extremely important work yet to be fully deciphered. It recounts the history of Buddhism in India (tols. 41a-95a6). It records a detailed history of Tibet (tols. 14
5. Full title of this work is *Rṣis-kyi bstan-bcos kun-gshade-longs-rgyal-gshuṅ : zla bṣi lṅags-bzhag dge-ltan rṣis-gsar*. It is included in the seventh volume of the Complete Works of the author and consists of 96 folios. The work contains numerous mathematical charts and diagrams.

6. This is the second Panchen Lama Pan-chen bLo-bzaṅ ye-ses (1663-1737).