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A SURVEY OF TIBETAN PAPER CURRENCY
(1912-1959)

-Wolfgang Bertsch

Paper currency was introduced fairly late into Tibet, although this country for more than a thousand years was in close contact with China and India where paper money circulated centuries ago before it made its appearance in Tibet. Most Tibetans were both illiterate and conservative, preferred the barter trade and where this was impossible, used to pay for their goods obtained in large transactions with silver coin or ingots. These circumstances would have made no impossible the issuing of banknotes at an earlier date and it is not surprising that even after 1912 the introduction of banknotes in Tibet was watched with great suspicion by the majority of the Tibetan people.

Tibet's paper notes are possibly the most beautiful and artistic specimens known among the world's 20th century banknotes. They represent a unique blend of the printer's skill, who could draw from a printing tradition which is more than a thousand years old, and artistic genius inspired by an equally long tradition of painting in Tibet.

The woodblock printing technique which was used for the early banknotes is most probably foremost inspired by the printing of Tibetan paper charms, amulets and prayer-flags. Not only sacred texts were printed on these flags or paper amulets, but also images, mostly set into a frame, the most popular being the "wind horse" (lung rta) which is surrounded by the animals which guard the four quarters; it is possibly not mere coincidence that the latter animals appear on the backside of the multicoloured 50 Tam notes (plate V).

Before the first banknotes appeared, printing in Tibet was done uniquely using black ink. As far as I know, the production of the banknotes represents the first attempt in colour printing in Tibet. This technique was perfected with the introduction of the multicoloured 50 Tam note in 1926, when the use of different printing blocks, one for each colour became necessary.

1. This article has been extracted from my manuscript entitled "A Study of Tibetan Paper Currency" which I hope to publish as a small volume in the near future.

2. Two paper notes of the Yuan dynasty were found in 1959 in Sakya monastery and a Chinese authority takes this as evidence that Chinese paper notes circulated in Tibet in the context of the close financial relations which supposedly existed between China and Tibet during the Yuan Dynasty (13th century). I believe however that this singular find is not sufficient evidence to support this theory. Taking into account the great respect which Tibetan show for everything praised, one could expect that more than just two Yuan dynasty notes should have survived. If these notes actually did circulate in Tibet, cf. Anonymous (Committee for the Administration of Tibetan Cultural Relics), Xi/Zhang Xiaojin ST FH Shian De Yuan Dai Zhi (The Paper Notes of the Yuan Dynasty Found in the Sakya Temple). In: Wen Wu, 1957, pp. 12-14.

3. Cf. Douglas, NK: "Tibetan Tantric Charms and Amulets." New York 1978. An example of the four guardian animals is given on plate 51, an illustration of the windhorse, surrounded by the four guardian animals, can be found on plate 52.
The main subjects represent the Tibetan banknotes are religious and in this way the notes reflect Tibetan culture in an admirable way. However the design of the face of all the banknotes are inspired by a deep nationalistic feeling. The snow lions, or a pair of these animals, stand for Tibet and probably existed already as part of the design of Tibet's national flag before they made their appearance on the banknotes, coins and post stamps of this country.

Mention should be made of some Chinese notes with both Tibetan and Chinese legends which were issued by the Provincial Bank of Xikang in Kangding. Also known are notes of the Central Bank of China and of the Farmers Bank with overprints in Tibetan language. These notes were issued in the 1930s for the Tibetan speaking population in Western Sichuan and in Xikang, a province which was formed by China by incorporating former Tibetan territory which was annexed by China in the beginning of this century. However these notes never circulated in Tibet proper and are therefore outside the scope of this brief study.

1. The Tam Issues
(plate I-V)

The first banknotes issued by the Tibetan Government had the denomination "tang" (this unit is better known as "tanga" or "tanga"; three tangkas were equal to 1 Indian Rupee in 1912), are dated T.E. (Tibetan Era) 1658 and it is now generally assumed that they were issued in the year 1912. However there are some reasons to believe that these notes were not released before January 1913. The year 1912 saw a lot of fighting and political upheaval in Lhasa while the Tibetans were trying to drive out the Chinese who found themselves in a weak position after the fall of the Manchu Dynasty. It is unlikely that the ambitious programme of introducing paper currency was initiated at this time. The Dalai Lama had left his indian exile in mid 1912, but delayed his arrival in Lhasa to January 1913, waiting till the last Chinese troops had left the Tibetan capital on January 6th. Reportedly the red seal of the

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4. cf. Braun Martin: Heinrich Harrer Impressum aus Tibet. Innsbruck and Praspirt a.M. 1974, p. 112. According to Braun the couple of snow lions as illustrated on the face of the 100 Sang notes represents the political and religious power of Tibet. In this case the precious objects, since these objects are related to the perfect religious ruler, I think it more likely that the lions and the bowl mainly represent the political power (Tib. "srig"), while the religious power (Tib. "cho"), is represented by the mostly buddhist motifs on the backside of the notes.


first banknotes in Tam denomination was applied in the presence of the Dalai Lama. While some of the banknotes may have been printed already in 1912, the presence of the Dalai Lama being necessary for their issue, they were most probably not sealed and released before the second half of January 1913. Since the T.E. year 1658 starts in February 1912 according to the first notes still corresponds to the year of their first release. The first notes to be issued had the value of 5 Tam (green or blue) and 10 Tam (plate I). In the following year notes of 15 Tam (violet); plate II), 25 Tam (brown or yellow; plate III) and 50 Tam (blue; plate IV) followed; these notes bear the date 1659. Frequent counterfeiting of the note with the highest value, the blue 50 Tam, obliged the Tibetan Government to release a new, multi-coloured 50 Tam note in 1926 (T.E. 1672). This note was printed with yearly changing T.E. dates until 1941 (T.E. 1689; plate V).

On the face of all Tam notes the following legend is printed in black ink:

ganzs lnga ba ho rgyal khabchen bai lugs zung chags
srid dba kyi lo shig stong drug lugs lha gcig nga rgyud (or: dgu/; or other dates on the multi-coloured 50 tam notes)
gnas thogs sde zhi dpal mdag ral bzhag bcdi spnyor nor
chos zin gnyis Idan gyi rab byung bcis lha ba shig thugs

The following translation has been suggested for this legend:

1658 years from the founding of the religious-secular form of government in the great country of Tibet, the land of snows, paper money of the 5th cycle (rab byung) of the government of religion and politics (chos zin gnyis Idan) the universal Jewel of benefit and bliss, endowed with the four types of auspiciousness.

The date 1658 which is mentioned in the second line of the legend, was not altered on the 5 Tam notes which were issued after the year. However it was altered to 1659 on the rest 10 Tam notes some time after serial number 3600. So far the notes of 15, 25 and 50 Tam (monochrome first issue) are only known with the date 1659, but I believe that some notes of these denominations must have existed with the date T.E. 1658. There is evidence that all the known 10 and 15 and most of the 25 and early 50 Tam notes dated T.E. 1659 were printed with blocks on which the original date 1658 was altered to 1559, since several notes exist, where a gap between the Tibetan word for 1659 and the final vertical stroke (Tib. "shad") at the end of the second line of the legend remains (plate I-IV). This is due to the fact that the Tibetan word "eight" (byang) three spaces are necessary, while the Tibetan word "nine" (degs) occupies only two spaces and hence there remained a gap when the pair of the block

8. Surkhung WC: letter to Hugh Richardson of 19.07.1946. I thank Mr. Richardson for sending this letter available to us.

9. This translation has been suggested by the staff of the Museum of "Tibetan Works and Archives" in Phnomhla. A somewhat different translation of the last two lines is given in: Catalogue of the Tibetan Collection and other Lament Monuments the Newmark Museum, vol. 3, Newmark 1971. p. 31: "Paper money of the 15th cycle which is endowed with religious and governmental, being the crest jewel (sphyo nor) of the fourfold perfection, namely power, glory, welfare and happiness."

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with the "by trading" had been cut out and replaced by a small slab bearing the word "dua". Notes of 2, 5, and 10 Tuan (monochrome) with higher serial number are known without this gap after the word for "nine" and were obviously printed from new blocks. The lowest known serial number of the 15 Tuan note is 482; this note is printed with the gap after the word "nine" (plate II); this means that only very few notes of this denomination, if any at all, can have been printed with the date 1658. This confirms our assumption that the first 5 and 10, and possibly a few 15, 25, and 50 (monochrome) notes were printed towards the end of T.E. 1658 (i.e. January 1913) and that in that year there was not enough time to issue large quantities of notes with this date.

The 13th Dalai Lama certainly had opportunities during his exile in China and India to acquire himself with paper currency and decided to introduce it into Tibet as part of his scheme for modernization of his country. During his Indian exile he was in close contact with Charles Bell who acted as his interpreter while dealing with the British. One of his officials or the Dalai Lama himself may have approached Bell regarding the introduction of paper currency into Tibet. Bell notes in April 1922: "The Government hopes also to issue Currency notes and to make money; I pointed out to Pulhese some of the difficulties and requirement of a note currency, and he said Shatra (Sharon Lönchen) was ignorant of these." It is likely that one of these requirements was that Bell pointed out of the Tibetan was the necessity of gold backing for the paper currency. It seems however that measures towards such a backing with gold were not taken until about 1925 at the instigation of Tserung Shulpe who was in charge of the mint. Supposedly from the year onwards 300 gold ingots weighting 27 tala each had been imported from India, were stored away in the Potara. Before this time, the paper currency was avoided by strictly limiting the number of notes issued. In 1923 a bank (the "Finance Department" is probably more appropriate for this institution) was also established in Lhassa whose first manager was Phuntsog Kung and later Tserung joined as head of this establishment.

It seems that the early Tibetan paper notes were not received with great enthusiasm by the Tibet population and during the first years of their issue were hardly used outside the few city of central Tibet. Even 10 years after they were first released the banknotes were, according to A. David-Neel, regarded as curiosity and traders did not accept them in the Lhassa area. For Chamdo and Batsang in Eastern Tibet it is however reported for 1922, that

Tibetan silver money and banknotes from Lhasa were circulating and had driven out Chinese copper coins. The first series of Tibetan banknotes was issued between 1913 and 1914, the year when the notes were withdrawn from circulation. As mentioned above, the issue on the new, multicoloured 50 Tum note was altered every year while the notes in the first set were printed with the date 1654 (5 Tum note) 1658 or 1659 (15 Tum note), 1659 (15, 25 and blue 50 Tum note) at least till the 1900s. This means that the date of the note had been changed from 1658 to 1659. These fixed dates are sometimes referred to as "dreaded dates" in numismatic literature.

The early notes were printed by hand from woodblocks at the Mint Grva brtis glog 'khris lugs (Tib. brtis lugs glog 'khris) which had been closed temporarily by the Chinese in 1910 and was reopened by the "Tibetans in 1913." The multicoloured 50 Tum note was the first Tibetan note which was printed with metal blocks or metal sheets mounted on wood blocks. It was printed between 1926 and 1932 in the Dobe Mint which had been established in 1904 in the province of the same name in the northeast of Sera. It is reported that some multicoloured 50 Tum notes were also printed in the Lho Dui mint (Chinese transcription: mint is better known as "gser'khang" mint) near the North Lingka before 1931. From 1932 onwards, they were printed in Trabshi Lekhang (Grva brtis las glog 'khris) which had been established in late 1931 as the only Tibetan Government Mint at a place north of Lhasa where a mint of this name existed already. This new institution incorporated the different mints which had existed earlier on. It is not known if the early 5, 10, 15, 25 and blue 50 Tum notes were printed after 1926. If it was the case, we can assume that they continued to be printed with woodblocks and by hand, since the surviving notes of this series do not show any evidence of a change in the printing technique.

The ink for printing the notes is imported from India. It seems that with each new batch different colour shades were produced unintentionally on the notes. However, the notes with similar colour shades do not form blocks of serial numbers as one could expect. Therefore one has to take into account that the colour on the notes probably changed as well after printing due to exposure to the elements and due to long use in everyday transactions. This may be

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17. N. H. Huang, Xinjiang Difeng Huihui (The History of Tibetan Money), Beijing 1987, Chapter 5.
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19. During the stay in Lhasa in October 1995 I was told that the Mint Trabshi Lekhang was located at a place which is now occupied by the Xinjiang Printing Press, at the halfway between the centre of Lhasa and the Jowo Monastery. It seems that most of the old Mint building has survived.
20. N. Wilson, Colin (ed.): Tibetan Paper Money: in purs., different colour shades have been recorded for the 5, 10, 25 and early 50 Tum notes. Most of the known shades were recorded by Shrestha Bhupendra Narayan Tibetan Paper Currencies, St. Albans 1987, p. 24.

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the case particularly with the five Tam notes which show numerous varieties of colours, there exist also some specimens on which the colour has faded almost completely, as to make it impossible to recognize the design.

The notes were printed on paper which was made in Tibet where paper making has a tradition which goes back many centuries. Authorities on Tibet however do not agree on the ingredients which were used for the production of the paper for the early banknotes. Chinese sources report that banknote paper was produced with the root of a sponge plant in Sigmom Stor (Kang Dong district). A Tibetan source mentions the bark of a tree called Shog-Pching and the place of production is given as Kadsong district in the province of Dzakpo. At any rate, it is clear that for the early banknotes, a special paper, different from the one used for books, was developed. This paper had to be very durable, resistant to insects (we have indeed not encountered any notes had eaten by insects or with wormholes) and difficult to imitate. The paper for the early notes is generally thicker than the one used for the multicoloured 50 Tam note. Most probably the obverse and the reverse of the early notes were printed on separate sheets and then these were pasted together after a third smaller sheet had been inserted in the middle on which was printed a security legend which shows like a water mark when the notes are held against the light.

After the printing, the paper notes numbered by hand by specially trained calligraphers, both for controlling the number of notes issued as well as protecting the notes from possible forgers. These calligraphers were called E-ba, were trained from childhood in the art of calligraphy and those who numbered the notes worked in a special office called "Chgag par yon bron" (could be translated as "money quality supervision"). Supposedly this office was also responsible for detecting forged banknotes. Another name for the calligraphers was...

21. Xiao Huarwan, op. cit. chapter 5. I was unable to identify Sigmom Stor on available maps.
24. However at least for the multicoloured 50 Tam note the three papers have indeed been pasted together before printing, since there exists a note in Shertha's collection which shows part of the design of the backside on the face of the note on a portion of paper which had bled up car. Shertha, op. cit. p. 2-3. There is no doubt that the Sang notes were pasted together before printing; since numerous Sang notes exist showing what is generally called "kirsupu", i.e. the paper had creased during printing and when carefully drawn apart reveals white stripes on both sides of the note. Had the parts been glued together only after printing then white stripes would show only on one side of the note or - more likely - not at all.
25. Roder, N.C, op. cit. Roder gives the name "Currency office" for the place where banknotes were numbered. Xiao Huarwan, op. cit. chapter 5. 8
was t-tug-pa.\textsuperscript{25} It seems that the calligraphy of the number on the banknote is nearly perfect and not easy to copy which makes forgering very difficult.\textsuperscript{26}

The last and most important step for the production of the paper notes was the application of two seals, one on the left and one black on the right side of the obverse of the banknotes. The red seal is generally taken as the one which represents the authority of the Dalai Lama and it is reported that it was at least in the case of the early paper notes - used only in the presence of the Dalai Lama. The red seal does not show any script, it is purely ornamental and its design is called "yig man" (without script) in Tibetan.\textsuperscript{27} The central part of the black seal of the early notes is filled with two columns of "phugs-pa" characters whose transliteration is "gshing dgra khang." This can be translated as "government treasury" or "government bank" and most probably refers to the financial institution (most referred to as "bank") which according to some Chinese sources was founded already in 1913 or, as mentioned above, in 1925.

2. The Strang Issues

(plates VI-IX)

After the thirteenth Dalai Lama had died in December 1933, Tibet entered a period of political instability. The first Tibetan banknotes had been issued in strictly controlled number and - as we have seen - to a certain extent had a gold backing. It seems that both these precautions were already largely abandoned after the opening of the Trabsh Ldelling Mint whose operation started in 1932. Banknotes were issued in ever larger number to cover government deficits and inflation became ever bigger, particularly after the 100 Strang notes were released in 1937. By 1939 the price for barley, the main Tibetan staple, was twenty times that of 1936.\textsuperscript{28}

While the early notes in Tamm were monochrome with the exception of the second 50 Tami issue, each of the notes in "Strang" (1 Strang = 6 2/3 tami or tsagka) was printed with more than one colour which made it necessary to use more than one block for printing of each side of the notes. Apart from the already mentioned 100 Strang note which was printed until 1959 (plate IX) the following issues were released:

1. 10 Strang (1941-1948; plate VI)
2. 5 Strang (1942-1946; plate VII)
3. 2.5 Strang (1949-1955; plate VIII)

\textsuperscript{25} Goldstein, Melvin C.: A History of Modern Tibet, Indian edition. New Delhi 1983 (US edition 1980), p. 150, note 3. According to Goldstein the strug-pa were also employed as carriers of woodblocks, copied official reports and (for and kept the diary) of the Dalai Lama. However we don't know if they were also employed to carve the woodblocks for the banknote series.


\textsuperscript{27} Lurkhang, Will: Letter to H. Fischbacher dated August 9 1966.

\textsuperscript{28} Xio Haixiu, op. cit., chapter 6.

The first 50,000 notes of 106 Srang were in the denominations "tam srong" and had the same red seal printed on them as the earlier "tam" notes. Subsequent Srang notes however bear a newly created, smaller red seal, on which the Tibetan character "cha" can be seen together with other indecipherable characters (plate IX). While the black seals printed on the 5 Srang and 10 Srang notes (plates VI and VII) has the same inscription as "phugs-pa" as the one found on the earlier "tam" notes, but is of smaller size, a new black seal was created for the 25 and 100 Srang notes (plates VIII and IX). Its inscription is also in phugs-pa letters which read: "srid zhi dpal 'bar" which has been translated as "may every form of being increase the good." While Chinese authors, basing their view on Tibetan documents, believe that this seal refers to the most Trabsho Lehnhung, other authorities relate it to the Council of Ministers (the gshags). A

Only in 1947 it was decided to send a trade mission abroad whose main task should be the purchase of silver and gold for backing of the paper currency as requested by Tsarong Dzasa, Tranyelchammo Gtechnang and Tsepun Shadapba who jointly headed the Trabsho ammonia at that time. In May, 1949 the trade mission of Tibet actually bought $425,000 worth of gold from the United States. We cannot be sure however if this gold was actually used to back Tibet's paper currency, anyhow, the amount of gold would have been insufficient to back the ever increasing numbers of notes which were issued from 1945 onwards: According to statistics of Trabsho Lehnhung between 1951 and 1959 banknotes to the total value of 97,000,000 Srang were issued. Between 1953 and 1958 the total value of the banknotes issued was 71,150,000 Srang. Some or all of the gold purchases were stored in a treasury, called Langsai according to a Chinese source which reports that 30 ingots of gold and 100 silver ingots each weighing about 100 Chinese Liang (= ca. 37 kg) were taken to India in 1959.

The paper for the Srang issues and that of the later 50 Tam issues was not produced any more in provinces southeast of Thasa, but near Lhasa in a special paper factory, called Jing-Dong which was established in 1932 in a former cartridge factory. It was only operated...
during three months each year and manned by forced labour which was recruited from five large estates. The paper produced there was only used for banknotes and its sale to private persons forbidden. The monthly paper production is estimated at 3000 bales each containing between 500 and 1000 sheets of paper. Most probably this paper was produced from different raw material than the paper used for the first banknote series. In general one can observe that the paper used for the Srang notes is much thinner than that used for the early Tam notes and it tends to become thinner yet during the later years of issue, obviously in order to make the same amount of raw material last for a larger number of banknotes.

The Srang notes show the same legend in two lines printed in between the two sheets which are glued together, except for the 5 Srang note which has a one line legend as "watermark". However the method of producing this "watermark" was not the same as the one in the case of the Tam notes. Examples of late 100 and 25 Srang notes which were examined recently, have shown that the interior legend was not printed on a separate piece of paper but directly on reversed scrips on the backside of the sheet of the face or in normal script on the backside of the back sheet of the notes. This new method may have been initiated already in the course of the printing of the multicoloured 50 Tam notes.

The colours for printing the banknotes continued to be imported from India and for the Srang issue the colour varieties during the many years of issue are not as great as was in the case of early Tam notes. They are particularly noticeable among the 100 Srang notes which are spread over the largest period of issue.

The Tibetan banknotes were dezencouraged together with the Tibetan coinage in August 1959; this date marks the end of Tibet's short history of paper currency. The official exchange rate was fixed by the Chinese at 50 Srang in paper currency equals one Yuan Renminbi.

35. Spencer Chapman visited Tashilhunpo in late 1936 or early 1937 and writes: "I had heard that owing to the fact that the paint on the paper notes will dry out during the three months of summer, the Tibetans are saved from the dangers of inflation. But this story, attractive as it is, is not true." Memorials of a Mountaineer. London 1945 (first published as "Lhasa: the Holy City". London 1938), p. 375. Chapman's informant most probably confused the bark paper production with the printing of the notes.


38. Bowker Peter, op. cit., locum

39. One of the suppliers of colours to Tibet was John Dickson & Co. Ltd. of Calcutta. An invoice of this company, dated 11. 5. 1930 and addressed to Tengai Shakabpa (sic for Shakabpa who was Tibetan Government agent in Calcutta at that time) mentions the following colours: silver red, bright green, brilliant blue, prussian chrome, azure blue. Some of these colours were possible also used for printing post stamps which were produced in Tashilhunpo at the same time as the banknotes (my thanks to Jigme Shakabpa for kindly leaving me a copy of the Dickson invoice).
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At that time the Chinese silver dollar was exchanged for 1.566 Yuan Renminbi or 3 Rupees. According to these exchange values the rate of the Rupee in paper Srang was 26.1 and the value of the Silver dollar 78.3 Srang.10 Twelve years earlier (in 1947) 50 Srang were worth 3.33 Mexican silver dollars in Saga.11 Taking the Mexican Dollar as being at par with the Chinese Dollar we can calculate that in 1959 the Tibetan paper Srang (in relation to the silver dollar) was 5.22 times worth less than in 1947.

Despite the fact that after 1935 the paper currency lost more and more of its value, it was accepted by the population and it is reported for 1949 that in Lhasa it was even preferred to Tibetan coins. However, it had to compete with Indian paper currency which was also used in Lhasa at that time.12

In Western literature it is mentioned that notes of 100, 150 and 500 Tangkas were issued.13 If such notes ever existed, it would be surprising that none of them has survived. Chinese authors who had access to Tibetan government documents do not mention such notes of high denomination in Tangka.

It is however probable that the Tibetan government was preparing the issue of new banknotes, possibly some of higher denominations, as late as 1959. In March 1959 the Chinese Army closed down Trabshi Lekhang and confiscated printing blocks and unused banknotes.14 Among the confiscated printing blocks there were probably some destined for new issues. In the collection of the author there is a printing block of the middle part of an unused note of unknown denomination:15 the central design shows two snow lions standing on either side of a double dorje (vajra). The design is engraved on a thin metal sheet which is mounted on a woodblock. Possibly this block was produced for the planned issue of new notes (plate X).

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10. Xiao Hainian, op. cit., Chapter 7
14. Xiao Hainian, op. cit., chapter 7
Plate I
(Rama mosaic. Serial No. 17674. Date: T.I. 1659/15th cycle)
Plate IV
50 Tum (blue), Serial No. 25299. Date: T.E. 1659 (15th cycle)

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Plate VI
10 Srang (blue/red), Serial Nr. ga 020014. Date: T.E. 1693 (16th cycle)
Plate VII
5xrang (blue/ red). Serial No. ka 000122. No. T.E. Date: (16th cycle)
Plate VIII
25 Srang (red/yellow/blue), Serial No. 19509388.
Neither T.E. date nor cycle are indicated on this note.
Plate IX

108. Scang (red/yellow/green/blue), Serial No. 779, no. 84776
Neither J.E. date nor cycle are indicated on this note.
Plate X
Middle part of face side of unissued note of unknown date and denomination,
Late 1950ies.
Ladakh, which is aptly known as western Tibet, is situated between 77°15'E to 75°5'E longitude and 32°15'N to 36°N latitude in the Trans-Himalayan region. It is strategically located at junction of four or five important regions: Afghanistan-Turkestan on the North and North-West, China-Tibet on the North, Pakistan (since 1947) on the West, and India on the South. At 12000 feet, Ladakh with its capital Leh, is one of the highest inhabited plateaus in the world. owing to its location, it served as an overland trade centre between Central Asian regions like Yarkand, Kashgar, Khotan, Tibet as well as the Indian regions of Punjab and Naggar in the bygone days. During the summer months ranging between July and October, caravans from all these regions arrived here after negotiating various mountain passes and the place would suddenly be turned into a veritable market for exchanging goods and commodities through the barter system. The lowest of the passes is Zagin which once comprised the boundary between Kashmir and Ladakh, and the highest ones are Notag-la (19060 feet) and Kharakoram (18062 feet). Besides being the only routes for transporting merchandise, these passes were veritable highways for cultural exchanges, linking people representing diverse cultural groups and thus helped in furthering mutual assimilation and acculturation of thoughts. These again were the routes through which invaders and plunderers galore made inroads into the mainland of India ever since the time of Alexander. Portuguese and Jesuit Fathers also trodged their way to Central Asia, Tibet and the adjoining regions through these routes.

Ladakh, hailed as one of the principal bastions of Tibetan Buddhism, was annexed to the State of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947 A.D. by the Dogra ruler Gulab Singh with the tacit approval of British. The aforementioned routes are less frequented now more on account of political reasons and consequent blockades rather than any natural hazard or physical barrier. The pristine virility and vigour with respect to the practice and dissemination of Buddhism has been adversely affected though the Buddhist creed still thrives miraculously amongst the devout ones. But the fact remains that the association of Ladakh with the state of Jammu and Kashmir is not only incongruous from socio-religion stance, but equally self-defeating. The influx of tourists from all over the world and the resultant process of acculturation may very soon obliterate the culture and religion that once shaped the history of Ladakh. Despite their incessant and impassioned appeals to be granted an autonomous status, the people of Ladakh are agorised at the Union government's stonc refusal and the more palliative means adopted. Persistent opportunities by the people to be recognised also as a Union Territory has ultimately resulted in the formation of the Ladakh Autonomous Council which was inaugurated by a representative of the Indian government in the month of September, 1995.

BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

It has been rightly assumed that the broader dissemination of Buddhism began with the second Buddhist council which was held in 237 B.C. during the reign of emperor Ashoka.
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(Some Scholars attribute this to the 9th council considering a convention held at Varshali under the reign of the king Yalagsho to be the second council). Priyadarshi Ashoka sent his Buddhist emissaries, scholar, and teachers to farflung countries like China, Korea etc. However, it was after the fourth council held during the reign of the Saka king Kammika at Kashmir that the states of Kashmir and Kathiawar as well as the old trade routes became once again active with Buddhist Pandit and Lamas traversing through them. Fa Hien, Huen-Tsang and such other travelers from China came through these inaccessible routes. Kashmir remained as an important centre of Buddhist learning for ages long receiving zealous patronage from the kings, a fact corroborated by Kalhana's Rajatarangini.

In the history of Tibet, the first great who introduced the Buddhist creed as the State religion was the accomplished ruler Songtsen Gampo who was a contemporary of King Harshavardhana Shridivya of Kanyak, Prophet Muhammad of Mecca, Huen-tsaing and the Chinese emperor named T'ai-jung. It was he who directed his minister Tsho Samphota to devise a script and grammar for the Tibetan language thereafter presiding over the garabum task of translating canonical and non-canonical works into Tibetan from their original Sanskrit and Pali.

Another great landmark in the annals of Tibet was during the reign of King Khri-srong-lde-btsan when at the behest of the royal preceptor Pandit Santarakshita (Shi-ba-btshe), the great Master of esotericism Guru Padmapanahava arrived at Tibet and firmly established the Buddhist religion after taming and exercising the Bon-po priests and its votaries. In the year c. 634 A.D., Ral-Pa-Chen sat on the throne of Tibet. He was the younger son of King Khri-srong-lde-btsan who in turn was the second son of King Khri-srong-lde-btsan. Ral-Pa-Chen was a paragon of human excellence, a veritable blend of administrative skill, military valour, and devotion to the Dharma. While his expansionist ventures extended the territory of his kingdom far beyond the frontiers that he had initially inherited, he also patronised the Buddha Dharma with such zeal that its reverberation could be felt throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom. All these took sudden turn when one day, he was assassinated by his elder brother named Glan-darma who had been nurturing a deep-rooted hate for the king who had been by dint of his merit, their father's choice as the successor superseding his claims as the eldest son. The ascent of Glan-darma to the throne unfolded in an age of total anarchy. At his behest, monasteries were closed, religious ceremonies banned and monk's were forced to give up their views of renunciation and celibacy and instead live the lives of ordinary laity. His well garnered hate for the popular spread of Dharma which he took to be the elementary factor behind his brother's successes turned to be his achilles' heel till at last, he was killed by a monk named Lha-lang-dPal-Gyi who masquerading as a dancer attired in black, in the year 841 A.D. Thus ended a saga of ruthless religious persecution. It took decades for the wounds inflicted by this apostate king to heal and much longer for the scars to disappear. Chaotic conditions prevailed all over the country with the Bon priests once again returning back with vehement resurgence. The successors of Glan-darma proved to be weaklings and could not consolidate their authority over the kingdom. They lost their hold over the mighty empire this had been built by the valiant Khri-srong-lde-btsan. dPal-Khor-btsan (696-723 A.D.) was the last king in this line who left Lhasa and migrated to western Tibet where he is famed to have brought the
three districts-Ladakh, sParag and Guge*-under his suzerain control and later let his three sons rule over them. These kings and their descendants were custodians of the Buddhist faith and caused the translation of many Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan. They also sent regular emissaries to Kashmir and the adjoining lands. Among these luminaries, the name of Jnasu-ravpa (Ye-shes-hod also known as Lha-bshama) shines exclusively for being instrumental in bringing the famed master Atisha Dipankar to Tibet. He relinquished his throne in favour of his nephew so that he could devote his time to religious matters. With the noble intention to introduce religious reformation in his country, this great prince in-sted Atisha Dipankar Sirijana who hailed from the Vikepamalsa Tshar. Till his death in 1054 A.D., the Acharya travelled to many places and instilled discipline and faith among the monks encouraging them to live a spartan life and dwelling more on practice and rigorous study. During the course of his journey in Tibet, he also met the great translator Rin-chen-Zaipo or Ratnaprabha. The latter is believed to have been spiritually inspired by the Acharya and is famed for the establishment of 104 monasteries which was accomplished with manifest help from the royalty. Acarya Dipankar's multitudinous activities gave a fresh fillip to the dwindling spirit of the Buddhist faith in Tibet which gained universal acceptance and popularity. Based on the teachings of Asanga and Maireya, he established a new order called Bka-gtams-pa which received further impetus under the able stewardship of his principal disciple named Brem-sTor-pa and other successive teachers and lineage holders. Atisha enjoined strict discipline among the monks and forbade the people from indulging in occult practices. Many siddhas and teachers flourished and fed the flame of Atisha's reformation tradition which never allowed the creed to be muddled by impurities of precept and practice.

Reformers and teachers galore appeared on the horizon fired by the example set by Atisha, to purge the faith and its doctrine from vulgar dilution. Among the teachers who belong to the earlier period of transmission, the names of Marpa and Mila-respa stand out distinctly. Marpa Lo-Tawa or Marpa the translator who was a disciple of Naro-pa of Magadha ushered in a new era of doctrinal dissemination based on the direct teaching of the Buddha. This new school was known as Bka-gyud-pa and its doctrine was widely taught by his chief disciple Mila-respa. This school further developed into four major and eight minor school in the 11th and 12th centuries A.D. The 13th century saw the beginning of Sakya hegemony over Tibet when the young abbot of Sakya went to China on invitation by the Chinese emperor to become the latter's preceptor and returned to Tibet to be installed as the ruler of the country. The Mongol emperor or China Kublai Khan was in fact initiated into the Buddhist faith by Phags-pa, the Sakya hierarch who was allowed to rule Tibet as a theocracy. Thus a new school of the Buddhist esoteric tradition called Sakya-pa was introduced whose doctrines were widely disseminated throughout Tibet. The rise of king Byang-chub-rgyal-chen in the 14th century eclipsed the power of the Sakya and ushered in a new dynasty which ruled for around three centuries till its overthrow by the king of Tsang in 1635 A.D. The latter was in turn vanquished by the Mongol king Gushi Khan who offered the spiritual and temporal sovereignty of Tibet to the great fifth Dalai Lama in year 1642 A. D. Meanwhile, dwelling

*The three regions of western Tibet collectively known as MGnas-Bts-sKor-GShun consisted of (1) sDo-Rang, Mang-Yul and Zang-Also (2) Zhang-Zhung, Khrul Ye sTod-sNad (3) Ytsha Moin Li, Brn-sha, sTal 11. Ref: Bod gIgra Thug Medland Dlam-Mo
on the fourth important Buddhist school of Tibet, the great reformer Tsong-Kha-pa who was born in 1357 A.D. was much inspired by the tradition established earlier by Atsara Atisha Dipamkara. He reorganised the monastic order and streamlined the curriculum of the monks laying great emphasis on learning based on logic, discipline and academic tradition. He founded the dGe-lugs-pa school in the year 1408 A.D. and established the order known as dGe-lugs-Pa School. The third hierarchy of this order was Chos-Karma, a school which later became famous as the dGe-lugs-Pa School. The third hierarchy of this order named ston-Nams gTsar-mChi, who lived in the 16th century was conferred the title of the Third LAMA by the Mongol emperor Altan Khan which he used the Mongolian language most of the time as the Tibetans and gTsar-mChos-ru Ocean. The first hierarchy was to be recognised in retrospect as the first LAMA and the subsequent successors were known as the Avatars or re- incarnations of the Lamas, a term which came to pronounced as Dalai Lama in the subsequent years.

The fate of Ladakh is west of Tibet was more linked with Turkestan and central Asia during the early 13th century although Lhasa retained the religious pilgrimage centre and sanctum sanctorum. In 1207 A.D. during the reign of bkra-shis gTsan-don, the Mongol terror Jenghiz Khan overran this region during his victory march and the king was compelled to surrender. Not much is known about the genealogy of the succession of kings following bkra-shis dGon. One of the later rulers who ruled in the year 1533 A.D. had his capital in Ladakh. He established a monastery and installed there in a huge statue of Maitreya Buddha and another of Avalokiteshvara. His palace is in ruins although the monastery stands till this day. He seems to have been adept in warfare and annexed Baltistan, Gure and as well as some regions in the west. He is also reputed to have thwarted the invasion by Mirza Haidar in 1549 A.D. In 1675 A.D., the next king Jampayang NamgJuel was captured by the Bali ruler Ali Mir and was forced to embrace the Islamic faith. Ali Mir gave his daughter in marriage to the oval caprine and eventually allowed him conditional freedom. His Tibetan wife bore him a son named Senge Nyams-gTshul-mKhris-mChen who shifted the capital to Bango. He was a powerful king and a patron of learning. Many Sanskrit texts were translated during his time and some books were printed in letters of silver and gold. He amassed a fortune through his conquests and even made an abortive attempt to conquer Lhasa. His son Delug too was a mighty king who quelled innumerable rebellions. The famous Senge monastery was built by him. He died a massacre in the year 1645 A.D. This king died as a Muslim princeley since he was forced to accept the Islamic faith after his defeat at the hands of the Mughals. He even built a mosque in Ladakh and remained the rest of his life in Kashmir. His son and successor NamgJuel established peace and once again paved the way for progress in various fields like art, literature and small industries like publication of manuscripts and calligraphy and even setting up a paper making factory. He also built memorials in the form of chaityas or mchod-men and monasteries in Zanskar, Rupshu and Nubra districts. NamgJuel ga’s brother ascended the throne in the year 1705 A.D. and died in 1714 A.D. bringing to a close these memorable decades of progress, peace and prosperity. Following his death, there were regular invasions by the Mughals from Turkestan and Tibet. Ladakh lost huge tracts of pastureland and gold fields which scientifically jeopardised as overland trade and commerce. Heavy war indemnities and taxes exacted by the conquerors further impoverished and desolated the inhabitants of Ladakh. Despite all such reverses, the Ladakhis staunchly held on to their faith, wofelse Dharma with patience and devotion. The downfall of the Mughal empire gave Ladakh some moments of
Despite but the sanguinary designs of the Dogra chief Zora Singh for the conquest of Tibet once again blew the clouds of war over its sky. The Dogra ruler had to pay dearly with his life while clashing his sword with the Tibetan army.

In the year 1843, Gulab Singh, the Dogra ruler of Kashmir annexed Ladakh with Lahul-Spiti with the concurrence given by the British. In the wake of this, many of the monasteries of Ladakh were plundered and the king of Ladakh who was also the head of Hemis monastery was banished to Sirk. In due course of time, the British took back Lahul and Spiti from Sirdar Githa Singh in exchange for some other areas with a view to enhance their inland trade with Tibet and Central Asia. Eric Shipon was the last political agent in Kashmir up to 1947.

After the partition in 1947, Ladakh became a part of the Indian Union along with Jammu and Kashmir. The western part of Gilgit and Baltistan came under the domain of the Republic of Pakistan in 1948 and a portion of the eastern part of Aksai Chin was annexed by China in 1962. All these developments left their impact on the geo-political stance and enhanced the strategic importance of Ladakh which had to face the brunt of Pakistan's belligerence during the Indo-Pakistan war. Despite all such vagaries of events, the theistic fervor of the people of Ladakh remained wholehearted and firm. Ladakh still remains a stronghold of the Buddhist faith. Monks as well as the laymen still throng the precincts of the monasteries during festive occasions to absorb the lilting melody of the ritual symphonies, blending with the rich baritone of the chanting monks... which is proof of the fact that the Enlightened one still lives in the hearts of the people of Ladakh and His doctrine continues to pervade all the quarters of Ladakh.
GOMPAS ON THE WAY FROM SRINAGAR TO LEH

PART II

-Mrs. Kamala Mukherjee

GOMPAS OF LADAKH

Main cultural and religious centres of Ladakhi Buddhists are the Gompas (Gon-Pa) the solitary place of meditation.

There are sixteen big and expensive gompas in Ladakh of the sects of Mahayana Buddhism. Besides, each village has its own Gonpa with many walls, chortens, monadok and stones carved with Om Mani Padme Hum everywhere. Ladakh or Western Tibet is thus carrying the tradition of Buddhism from 10th century A.D. - when this religion suffered in the Capital Lhasa. From the Srinagar-Leh bus route which followed the former caravan route at the ancient travellers route-ancient ruins of gompas or chortens can be seen after crossing the Zo-zila (11,570) which was once the boundary of Kashmir and Tibet. After the partition—Kargil the capital of Baltistan inhabited by Muslims of Sunni and Shia sects was annexed to Ladakh thus changing the environment.

After crossing Zo-zila—there is a halting place in Dras—which is the second coldest place in the world. Two ruined statues known as Avalokiteswara and his companion can be seen with nearly obliterated rock carvings. North of this place reside Dards and Baltits converted now to Islam. Then comes Kargil—now second city of Ladakh inhabited mainly by Muslim people of high and important position. After this comes the first Gompa—Zi-insen, a spot on the road.

(1) Namely Shargola—Particularly from here the Buddhist region begins. It is a cave temple on a high hill, mainly of black stone except the front which is painted white. It means morning star (as it faces east). On the bank of Waka river built by a Tibetan lama of Drakpa sect who named it as Ma-Khang (House of the mother) now it belongs to Gelugpa order or Yellow Hat Sect.

(2) The road then leads to a flat land-Mulbek pronounced Mulbek—where a twenty feet high Maitreya (designated as a future Buddha) statue carved on rock in Indian style with knee length sacred thread. The dress is simply with a crown on top the head, with anklets in both hands reminding one of Vishnou. In the four hands there are prayer wheel and Abhay Mudra and beads (Rosary Wheel) and lotus on the left hand.

It was built by the famous lotsewa (translator) Rinchen Pzang-Po during the reign of Saint Khri Gye Ye-Shrul-Lod in 1054. In a cold climate it still exists after 1000 years, the face of the statue in fully wrought with contemplative air.

Below the altar, there is a small underground gompa with a beautiful reclining figure of Avalokiteswara with eleven hands on each side and nine hands. In a cave nearby there are stone and metal statue of Sakayamuni, Padmasambhava and Tara as well as of Kugik, Rakuila, Tashi Lamp and Dalai Lama, with a small library. It belongs to the red hat Drakpa sect built by an unknown lama.

After passing Naika-la (flying Pillars) 12220'- is Bodhi Kharbu with statue of Avalokiteswara now in ruins. This was once the capital of King Delden (1620-48) but defeated by the Muslim invaders. Then came Khaltse (means snowy mountain) with some
status of different Buddhist pantheon and some rock carvings of the Dards both is Brahmi and Kharosti scripts with figures of ibex and fighting scenes with bow and arrow. In this area mostly Durs and Muns live- now embraced Islam.

From Khaltse one has to cross another 15470 Fath La pass again to descend 2000 ft. to Lamayuru the oldest of the gompas built by Naropa in 12th century. It belongs to Brigumpa sect and is now under the Tobdan Ikusa of Bhutan (described later) it was built on a lake dried up by the divine power of Naropa.

East of Khaltse is Basgo-capital of Ladakh during the reign of Songya Namgyal. Apart from the ruins of old palace there was a beautiful statue of maqeya Buddha-now broken. Next comes the village of Saspol where the ruins of the old monastic spread in a wide area. It was built 400 years ago. It was destroyed by the Balti invaders during the reign of Deleg Namgyal (1640-1680).

From Saspol one has to reach the famous Atshi Gompa on the other side of the Indus river. It was also built by Rinchen Zangpo-1000 years ago with a huge statue of Avalokitesvara, manuscripts with a historical chronicle of Ladakhi kings. Rinchen Zangpo appointed some of Kashmiri artists to prove his beauty on the wooden arch (Details later).

Next comes another famous gompa Likir of the Geygspa Sect on the way side hill on the road from Saspol to Nymo. Then comes Panyang means External forces which is situated 25 Km from the road to Leh. It belongs to Brigumpa Sect also. There is a statue of Buddha of exquisite beauty with long ears (one of the signs of greatness in Buddhist belief). There is a good library also besides other statues (later described in detail) near the airport on a hill. It belongs to Yellow Hat Sect-founded by the great teacher Tsongkapa-whose big statue draws the attention of visitors and worth seeing. There is a huge statue of Mahakala covered with tunkers.

REPORT ON THE MAIN GOMPAS OF LADAKH

Report on some main gompas of Ladakh are given here so that the life-style and history of Ladakhi can be learnt. The root word of Gompas is Gon-pa (concluded place), by verbal utterance it is transformed to Gompa. Most of gompas are situated on roadside of the wide route, the merchants used to take shelter here. The Gompas in brief are named as follows;

1. Lamayuru: Of all the gompas this is the oldest in Ladakh. At present this is the monastery of the Brigumpa community. The chief of this community lives in the monastery of Brignan-teachings and appointments are done from here. It is said and written in old books too that here was a lake in the past. According to the legend, the illustrious Siddhārṣya Naropa meditated in this cave during his life. The whole valley was a lake which Naropa is said to have dried by spell of mantra before founding this monastery in 990 A.D. On one side in the low land there is a loess of yellow earth indicating existence of lake in the past. By the side of Hongbo river in China such yellowish sandy earth loess of this type are renowned. Sang-gang is the oldest of the temples of this place, built somewhat in a style which resembles Tabo of Spiti - this again is thought to be built imitating Ajanta. Below this old temple exists Yong-Drang temple of Bon (Yumdrung/Swisatika) - though the frescos are now illegible and spoilt. The sign of Swisatika is well-known token of welfare among the followers of
BulPrint religion and Mongolians.

This gompa is situated on the edge of a 12000 ft. high mountain below two thousand feet from the pass. The height of the temple is 30-31 ft., the roof is a square and plain. On the roof exist six flags and one Trishul on which fly-whisk and horn of sheep are tied. Two big Mani-chakras and various images are there in several rooms. Statues of Padmasambhava, Kusha (guru-preceptor) Atish Dipankar. Saky Thupa are there, a big image of Avalokitesvara is there, besides, image of Tara etc. goddesses with gold and silver plates.

Apart from this, there are, i.e., pictures on wall or silk of Buddha on ten postures, six types of movements, the king 'Yama, the preceptor Lama, heaven and hell. On the other side wrapped in silk, Buddhist canonical works Kanjur and Tanjur are preserved. Water in small bowls and lamps of female yak butter ('Bri-Ma') are placed in front of each image. Ritual worship is held four times a day by lamas under an aged lama. On the other side, in small caves of a high mountain, lamas used to live when in 1925 A.D. Roerich came here, they used these caves. From yore, the lamas live in a mendicant life take lessons and impart doctrinal teachings to novice.

In the eleventh century the king of Ladakh brought the famous translator Rinchen Zangpo (Ratna bhadra) in Ladakh and built 108 monasteries in the whole country. Amongst these, Lamayuru was the central gompa. The temples around are tottering condition hence Lama do not reside here. At that time this area was under the influence of Kadam community initiated by Atisha Dipankara. About the end of the sixteenth century, leprosy of king Jamyang Namgyal was cured by a lama of Brigumpa community named Namko-Dhan-Mah Sang. In exchange, the king gave him this place and monastery in charity. About one and quarter kilometre of this place of all four sides are considered as holy place. A revenue free village was endowed to meet the expenditure of this monastery. The gompas of the village below also belong to this community. Festivities with dance are held for three in March. The chief of this place is called Kushab Tobling. Brigumpa community have two gompas in Ladakh-Phiyang and Bodrikharbote.

2. Likhap means Sarpanchand (Kha-dkyl) or Akashbed is on way to Ncema after Saspull (Saspal) proceeding a little West from roads, or the north of Sindhu river near the old trade route but crossing the small river one has to climb a few step. We followed the route for going to Khalsa from Basgo, the old route is a long round - about way. This was built at the time of La-chan Gzi-Port (1500-80 A.D.). It is learnt from the stone inscriptions that this is a gompa of the Gelugpa community. The prayer hall has provision of sixty-seventy square seats. There are images and wall pictures around the walls of the room. Crossing three gateways and climbing steps at a height of 14000 ft. we were very tired. The Lamas accorded us reception by uttering 'Jule Juley' (welcome) and showed us the hall. On one side of the altar we found a community emblem of the community of the present lama and a big board with a signature of the lama. The walls and wooden beams are full of decorative art works. All the pictures of .......... are of gods and goddesses of Mahayana Pantheon. There is statue of the first Dalai Lama Gedun-chod (Gyalwa Rinpoche). The facial expressions of the lama preceptor and gods and goddesses are calm and noble. At the middle are retained 'Mendoe' or memorial monuments (Stupa) with relics of dead and famous Lama e.g. nail, hair, teeth mixed with gold and silver. Images of gods and goddesses abound all around. A side road is some-
what dark, one has to use lamp even in day time. The manuscripts wrapped in cloth are retained in wooden shelves on one side apart from this there are big images of Sakyu tshupa, Mausjuri along with many small images. The facial expression of them are pleasant and compassionate. Outside are drawn pictures of 1 Lord Buddha and Puja la palace of Tseva (main residential place of Dala I amal). I was allowed to enter a small side-room, whatever I could, I saw from outside. I learnt earlier and it also appeared to my mind that this room probably contained weapons previously, maybe they are existing even now. In the past, if invasion of outside enemies occurred, these weapons were preserved for defence.

Next we were taken to roof by the lamas. Snow capped Karakoram mountain ranges were visible. The Kailash mountain peak was mentioned as Ti-Sir by the lamas. From here the panorama of around is well visible. On the west lied the river Sindhu or Sonam Khabab. The wealth, valuable and immovable properties and the member of this Gompa almost equal that of Hemis. There is good command of earthen pots and other objects made of earth of this place. The sun is visible for long hours at the altitude of this place is high.

3. Achi: To reach Achi one has to go from Nephok crossing the hanging bridge over the river Sindhu. This was constructed about thousand years ago by the chief priest of the king of Ladakh and famous translator Richen Zangpe. This is situated at seventy Kilometres distance from Ld. The influence of Kashmir style is explicit in its architecture. Six temples are here. At the time of Kiri-Son-Namgyal during 1596-1332 A.D. the temple at the middle was renovated. We saw very costly and rare shawl with various fine needle-work and wooden objects with artwork of decorative flowers and plants. The chief temple is small 3mx3m. On the three sides walls of the room are retained innumerable images on the right is a statue of Avalokiteshvara. There are three images of three storey height made of earth in a narrow lane. The images are painted in various hues. In 1985 A.D. the king of Ladakh brought Kashmir artisans for wall painting or frescos. This was once a centre for study of doctrine and cultural aspects of Buddhism. Here is preserved the hand-written manuscripts Ladakh Chronicles" (Ladakh Gyalrab) - the history of kings of Ladakh are narrated here. But now the condition of Alchi is not good-the wall pictures are fading-they were getting spoilt with water of molten snow percolated form roof. Their wealth is lesser and number of lamas too is small.

4. Pe-Thimb (Sputuk): The meaning is peak. This three storyd Gompa is situated at five miles distance from Leh-on the southern bank of the river Sindhu near the aerodrome. The Gompa is situated at height, it reach on it has to get on steps. Thodol one has been renovated, besides a new temple too has been constructed. The images are six hundred years old and are wrapped in cloth-the lamas uncovers them and showed to us. A large image of Mahaakala cover by cloth is retained in the old temple, the cover is removed and shown to devotees on festive days. Images of Tzunndu, Churunda Kali etc are there. Besides, there are few gilt images of Tara also. All the images are glittering - that means they are well looked after but Sangka-pa image is the chief one. At the time of King Crag-Bumral (1810-1640 A.D) the famous Nongka-pa sent two ambassadors. The incarnate Lamas of Kudak, Bakula or Gesupga community reside here. He is the religious head of all Gelupa monasteries and temple of Ladakh.
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5. Hemis: The meaning is thought of Wisdom (Bodhi-Chinta Chara). This Gompa is the principal and largest of all in Ladak. The distance is forty kilometres from Leh and has to cross the bridge on river Sindhu to reach the monastery. There is also a mountainous path but is not visible easily, after crossing the river on proceeding some distance shorten or white Chalayas are viewed, then one can presume the existence of this Gompa. All around is the Hemis village. In the beginning this belonged to Nyingmapa order, at present it is possessed by Karmapa sect. King Od Ladakh is the chief of this monastery. He went to Lhasa to acquire religious education in 1947-48 A.D., but did not come back. Later on, a child of five years among the refugees of Tibetan camp was found as his incarnation. He was consecrated as the abbot of the Gompa after being successful in various examinations and then he was taken inside the Hemis with his parents. Now he is aged twenty years only. As a chief he is seated on the throne to witness the great festival that displayed in Hemis in June. Above the Hemis mountain, there is another mountain Gosang (gateway to Heaven). There, he will have to stay for few years, and will be in the tutelage with both internal and external teachings before he is finally enthroned as religious chief of Gompa after he succeed in final examination.

Religious ceremonies and fairs are held in Hemis in June after considering the lunar day. Hence, very many people can participate and witness this festival. Other gompas of Ladakh hold their ceremonies in winter, hence, men from outside cannot witness them. There are some ceremonies which must be observed everywhere such as New Year (Losar), worship of books and defeat of evil power. We reached there just two days prior to witness the ceremonies. We were permitted to stay inside in a room of Lama for two days, so we got an opportunity to see good portion of the arrangements inside.

A good number of Gompas were located during the Dogra king Pratap Singh's reign. Then the chief of Hemis monastery of Ladakh arranged for shelter and provision for the Dogra soldiers, as a result the intruders left the monastery unharmed. It also achieved the favour of Dogra king. Many images are enshrined there, most of them are plated with gold and silver. Large images of Sakyamuni, gods and goddesses of Mahayana pantheon are placed on the altar. There is another statue, that of Mipamapa, consort of Padmasambhava. From the almost illegible fresco illustrations of Sissulchharya and their miraculous powers on the opposite of the main entrance dwelling, it may be guessed that this Gompa previously belonged to Druk-pa or Nyingmapa community. This Hemis gompa covers a land area is five bighas surrounded by mountains on all sides. The Gompa is five hundred years old, but the images belonged to the tenth or eleventh century. Images have been picked up from the locality of M...

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Namgyal (1599-1648), one of the Dirka community Molntan (Chief) Tag-Sangra prepared it for the Chinese. Construction of this gompa started in 1602 A.D. and completed in 1642 A.D. This community followed the Drupka community of Bhutan. But some images of tenth and eleventh centuries from the ruined of Mune or Mune gompa in Rupshu have been brought here. Hence, Mune is called "Mother of Hemis".

GOMPAS AROUND LEH

(1) TIKSE - situated on a hill 14 Km away from Leh. It has a huge statue of Buddha with 7 small temples with beautiful frescoes within.

(2) SHEY - situated at a distance of 16 Km, form Leh, on Leh Manali Road on hillock. A 7.5 m. high Buddha statue made of white copper from Zanskar with gold plating in the biggest statue of its kind built by Dechen Namgyal, son of Song Namgyal, in memory of his father who was imprisoned and forced to embrace Islam religion by his captors and banished in Kashmir by the Moghu rulers. A butter lamp burns throughout the year. It was built by a Nepalese sculptor with the help of three Ladakhi craftsmen. Five Kg. of gold was required for plating.

(3) STOK GOMPA - was built in a village across the Indus when the king of Ladakh was banished from Leh by the Dogra ruler. He was the head of Hemis Gompa upto his death.

(4) TSEMO-GOMPA - is on the top of a hill constructed in 1400 A.D. by the king Takapa Bumde. It’s statue of Maitreya Buddha resembles that of statue at Markheil. (13.7 m) with Manjusree on left and Avalokiteshvara on right. It was built by Mahayana Buddhists.

(5) SANEAR GOMPA - is 3 km. from Leh. It has many golden icons built 100 years back. Stories of Panchatantara are painted on the walls around. Kosok Bakula, M.P. (present) is the head of this one.

There are gompas as Deskit and Tagat in Rupshu by Celupga, Kariupa and Nyingmapa Sects also have some but most of them are only 100 years old.

(6) ZANSKAR - This district lay south of Leh, has many ancient gompas, namely: Mather, Taklat, Taklam, Karsha, Rangdol, Karha and Phatol. The last one is situated on a high hill-famous for the visit of a Hungarian and renowned scholar and Tibetologist Alexander Csoma de Körinis (1784-1842) during some months in 1823-1826. He travelled through Central Asia routes and Karakoram and was stopped at Leh. The adventurous travel D. Moorcroft requested him to stay at Yangja in Zanskar. During his stay for some months he prepared a Grammar and dictionary in Tibetan language before proceeded to Calcutta. His name is engraved in a piece of stone here. He started for Lhasa in 1842 and died on way at Darjeeling.

(7) GILGIT - (1) Ladakh During 1993 a mass of brick bark an a few paper manuscripts were found in Naupara near Gilgit cantonment in a circular chamber 7 ft 91/2" diameter inside the dome of 1 stupa. These ascribes to 6th or 7th century A.D. These were published later in 7 volumes. They present Sanskrit texts - many of which are only known through their Chinese and Tibetan translations, now discovered first in Indian soil. These include a number

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of Sutras, PRAJNA-PARAMITA, SADHARMA-PUNDARIKA and the Sanskrit VINAYA PITA hydrophobic of MULA SARVASTI-VADINS. Apart from the manuscripts, the relic chamber yielded hundreds of small votive clay-stupas containing within the Buddhist creed and relieved plaques.

Concluding Remarks:

After 1959, when Tibet was occupied by the Chinese Government after the exile of Dalai Lama from Lhasa, Leading is considered as the main centre of Tibetan Buddhism by all the Tibetans in exile. Still some noteworthy ceremonies like Kala-Chakra have been conducted by the present Dalai Lama (1) in Leh (1986), (2) Bodhi Gaya in 1988, (3) Sarath in 1991-92. Thousands of lamas and devotees from here and abroad attended these in large number facing great natural hazards.
List of illustration of Gompas

1. SHERGOLA
2. MAITREYA BUDDHA (20 ft.) ROCK-CARVED STATUE at MUZAFARABAD.
3. AVAVALKITESWARA with 11 hands on each side of hands at Murbehi.
4. LAMAYURU - the oldest gompa.
5. PHYAMG - Statue of Buddha
6. LUKIR - Gompa
7. SPITUK - (Near Airport)
8-9. ALCHI - Wooden carvings of the gate and large statue of Avalokiteswara (standing) inside.
10. Way of Hemis Gompa
11. FRONT OF HEMIS
15. GOSANG cave above Hemis.
16. TRKSHE MONASTERY - Statue of Buddha.
17. Buddha statue in Sher Gompa.

Acknowledgement

1. Photographs 1-16 : Taken by Shri Sushanta Chattopadhyay of Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.
2. -Do- 17-18 : Were taken by Ms. Sunanda Banerjee.
3. 2 Decorated Covers from a newspaper.
SHER-GOLA
The 1st Buddhist Gompa of the East after Kargil.

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Towards Mulbek
Maitreya Buddha
Mulbek Rock carving

No - 3

Avalokiteswara
Lamayuru
The oldest gompa
No - 5
Phyang Gompa
Buddha Statue.

No - 6

(Phyang Gompa) It was later, drained by Stetapa to build the Temple.

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Af-chê Compà
Wood carving on gate.

Acchôkteswa in Af-Chê
Way to Hemis

Front of Hemis
No - 12

The famous Thanka - Shown every 11th year

No - 13

Figures of Beasts
No. 14
Gangqang (Door to Heaven)

No. 15
Gangqang Cave
No - 16
Tikse

No - 17
Shey Gompa
Buddha Statue

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Decorations on cover of some manuscripts found in Gilgit (West of Laos)

No. 20
NOTES AND TOPICS
Lama Choda was born at Namok Village to a humble farmers family. He had an interest in the Buddhist doctrine from his early childhood. When his family moved to North Sikkim he enrolled himself as a novice monk at Labrang Monastery. He spent most of his childhood as a monk learning to read and write the Buddhist Sutras. When he had mastered the basic sutras he came to Gangtok where he met the venerable Bermoik Rinpoche and under him he spent to learn the more advanced mantras and sutras. He spent a number of years under venerable Bermoik Rinpoche and mastered most of the advanced mantras and sutras. He then shifted to Ghumma and took to studying the tantras under the venerable Ugen Tenzing Rinpoche. Under Ugen Tenzing Rinpoche he learnt the secret tantric practices and got the empowerment to various tantric rituals. He also took lessons in advanced practices from venerable Khyung Thonka Rinpoche. To learn more of the advanced Zogden doctrine he went to Tibet and became the disciple of the famous tantric yogi Thodhbay Sakya Sari under whom he mastered the six outer and inner Yogas. He also received empowerment to the secret tantra of Rig-dzor-strog-grub-kyi-cho. After the death of Thodhbay Sakya Sari he continued his studies at Cho-ri under the chief disciple of Sakya Sari named Thiphay Rinpoche. He spent many years at Cho-ri and mastered the Dzogchen teachings. He then came to Tazi and got further teachings from venerable Khayab-gnas-dupchen Rinpoche. At Tazi he mas-
tered the art of generating psychic body heat which allowed him to meditate on snow covered mountain peaks naked without feeling cold. He also mastered the art of Tsultrim which allowed him to travel hundreds of miles per day without feeling tired. He went on a pilgrimage to all the holy sites in Tibet and then returned to Sikkim. After his arrival in Gangtok he went for meditation at Lachung for several months and then to Taktsang where he spent several years in meditation. He then went for a pilgrimage to Paring and met venerable Chodrak-tenpa Rimpoche who taught him some tantric practices. After his return from Paring he went for pilgrimage to Tibet and also to Bhutan where he visited the holy sites of Bhumhang, Kargay and Paro. From Bhutan he went to Khamp where he learnt the secret practice of Chod from the venerable Chamos Wangchey Rimpoche. After finishing his studies at Khamp he returned to Sikkim and spent some time learning from the venerable Yathang Rimpoche. He again retired to meditation in a cave above Chongga Lake for several months. From there he went to Yathang in Chumbi Valley and spent twenty years in meditation.

He then returned to Gangtok and went to Lingdum where he meditated for several months. He returned to Gangtok and spent some time receiving teachings from his Holiness Dzog-chen Rimpoche.

On the invitation of the venerable khampa Lama of Mongolia, Labrang Gomchen went there with some followers. He was received in Mongolia with the highest honours by the Lamas of Mongolia. In Mongolia he paid a special visit to the Apsaraland Hungtress Monasteries. He gave a number of sermons to the Buddhist community in Mongolia and also cured a large number of sick people by his blessing. Labrang Gomchen and Lama Khamba also discussed the effect of the Vietnam war on the Buddhist community and appealed to them to stop the war. On his return journey from Mongolia he stopped at Moscow where he visited a small Buddhist Monastery. In the following year he went to Thailand to represent Sikkim at the World Buddhist Conference and later to Malaysia for the same Conference.

Labrang Gomchen had many students from different monasteries in Sikkim most of his students rose to the high positions of Dorje Lopen in various monasteries. Labrang Gomchen was connected to most of the monasteries of Sikkim but he spent a major part of his life at the Kinchey Monastery in Gangtok. After spending most of his life in service of Buddhist doctrine he passed away to his heavenly abode in 1985 at the age of 95 years. Labrang Gomchen will be always remembered for his many miracles of curing men and animals possessed by evil spirits. He can be said of be one of the greatest tantric yogic to appear in the last few decades of Sikkim's history.
MONASTERIES IN SIKKIM*

-N. Dorjee

The hidden valley of rice called 'sBlas-yul-sBras-Mo-I-jongs' discovered by the Great samd
Heruka pa Lha-bSuns Nam-mkhas hRigs-med or popularly known as Gyalwa Lha-bTsuns Chienpo in the early 17th century was the land blessed and graced by Mah\'a Guru Padmashambhava or known as the second Buddha as a Paradise on earth or a heavenly shelter for the griefed ones in the cruel world of the future is the same that we now call 'Sikkim', the youngest state of the Indian Union. Gyalwa Lha-bTsuns Chienpo's entry into Himalayas from Tibet and his great discovery of Sikkim, as per the Mah\'a Guru Padmasambhava's prophecy, marks the beginning and spread of Mah\'aYoGa Buddhism, particularly known as 'bDags-Chren' rDogs-Chhen P\'Nyimga, in Sikkim and also the establishment of Buddhist monasteries in Sikkim.

Gyalwa Lha-bTsuns Chienpo, along with two other lamas, namely mNga-bDag Semsp-a Chienpo and K\'hayog R\'gyal Zins Chienpo, built many monasteries and lhakhangs (small shrines) in Sikkim after the consecration of the first Dharma king of Sikkim, Chogyal Phuntsew Namgay at Yaksam, by the above three lamas in 1604. The first monasteries established by rGyalwa-Lha-bTsuns Chienpo were the Erdrup monastery, gSang-sNgags Chhos-gling monastery and Padma Yang-rTse monastery in the West Sikkim. The monasteries first built by mNga-bDag pa and K\'hayog pa were bTra-Shi IDing monastery in the west and Kathog monastery in the east respectively. Further, in the course of time many more monasteries were added, including the monasteries of Karma Kagyu sect. Thus, now, one will see a monastery or a small shrine almost on every top of a hill, particularly in the western part of the state. The present number of monasteries and lhakhangs in Sikkim exceeds 160, besides an almost equal number of mandirs and a few other religious institutions. Among the oldest monasteries established by Gyalwa Lha-bTsuns Chienpo, Pedma Yang-rTse monastery was further developed and reconstructed during the reign of Chogyal Chhyak-Dor Namgay, the third Dharma king of Sikkim and skyabs-mGon hRigs-med-pGaw, the third reincarnation of the Great rGyalwa-Lha-bTsuns Chienpo and since then it has become the principle monastery of sikkim. Almost all the other rNyimga monasteries were once the branches of the monastery and the Head Lama of each subsidiary monastery departed from Padma Yang-rTse monastery.

Besides, Padma Yang-rTse monastery, the other big and important monasteries of Sikkim are bTra-Shi-I Thing monastery in the west, Ralang monastery in the south, Rums-tegs monastery in the east, Pho-dang monastery and Phen-kZang monastery in the north. The present position of the above six monasteries may be described as below for the benefit of those interested:

Pemayangtse monastery is located on the hill top of Gyalshing town, the present west District Head Quarter, and near the recently built Tourist Lodge of Sikkim. The monastery has undergone various repairs and renovations from time to time and present building was

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thoroughly repaired and renovated during 1960-70. A special mention may be made of a heavenly structure called Zangdzok-dPal-rin, a wooden structure built and installed on the top floor of the monastery. It is a wonderful and artistic work worth seeing and is a masterpiece of Rev. Dzogzin Rinpoche of Pemayangtse who solely worked on it for a period of 5 years. The total strength of lamas in this monastery is 108 and the main ceremonial grand puja of the monastery is held in the last week of the 12th month, according to Tibetan calendar, with lama dances for two days every year.

Tra-Shi Thbring monastery is located in between the hills of Pemayangtse and Ralang. This place is believed to be the centre of Sikkim from the religious point of view. On this heart shaped wonderful hill top, there are two main buildings called Chogyal rGyurmed and Guru rGyalang. Chogyal rLakhang is the main monastery of Tashiding built originally in the 17th century. This is the monastery in which the famous 5th Dalai Lama was born in 1617. This monastery is also located at this holy place. The existing building of the monastery was recently dismantled and the Government has already started its reconstruction.

Rumtek monastery was originally built during the reign of Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal and follows the same set at that of Ralang monastery, Karma Kargyud. This monastery, situated just below the now famous Rumtek monastery 'Champa Chakra Centre' of H.H. the Gyaltsen Karmapa, the Supreme Head of Kagyu sect of Buddhism, was reconstructed a few years ago.

Phodung monastery is located in the North-District, about 40 Kms away from Gangtok as old as Ralang and Rumtek monasteries. This monastery also belongs to Kargyud sect of Buddhism. The present monastery building is in delapidated condition and is under the process of reconstruction.

Phensang monastery was originally built in 1721. This monastery is situated in the North District near Phodung monastery, about 30 Kms. away from Gangtok town. This monastery was gutted by fire in 1947 and the present building is a recently reconstructed one. This monastery follows red sect of Buddhism 'nyingma'.

To sum up, the monastic establishments in Sikkim have played, and to some extent still play, an important part in the welfare of the Sikkmese Buddhist people. Till the recent popularity of modern education in Sikkim the monasteries were the only institution imparting education and lamas the only teachers. At present, however, the monasteries fulfill the religious and spiritual needs of the people as modern education has taken over the function of vocational preparation. In future the monasteries in Sikkim might attract Buddhist scholars from outside and thus acquire a new significance.
Bkra-Shi-'Dings (TASHIDING)\textsuperscript{*}

-N. Dorjee

Bkra-Shi-'Dings (Tashiding), a heart shaped hill, situated in the midst of sloping mountains dominated by the Majestic Gongs-Chhekm\textsuperscript{3} Zo-d-\textsuperscript{3} Nga, the great snowy mountain of five treasures, in West Sikkim, is considered one of the holiest places in Sikkim. It is a small hill surrounded by two rivers called Rothok Chu and Ringpo Chu at its base, and is beautifully located in front of the Pemayangtse hill. Looking at the hill one cannot escape an impression that the hill must have majestically arisen on a specific divine command. According to Buddhist mythology, it is the very spot where Maha Guru Padmasambhava, along with his 25 disciples, blessed this land of Sikkim for future discovery by human inhabitants and is also believed as the centre of the sacred land of Sikkim. We find many references of this ancient scriptures describing this place as gNye-Ki-Tewa (Neyki Tewa) which means the centre of the place.

In the early 17th century, when Sikkim was formally discovered or opened for human habitation by three Lamas in accordance with Maha Guru Padmasambhava's blessing and prophecy, mNagd-bdag Sen-pa Chhenpo, one of the three Lamas, moved to Bkra-Shi-'Dings and began the propagation of his doctrine of Buddhist Dharma called mNagd-bdag-lugs with the founding of a small Gompa (monastery), which later on served as the nucleus of the present complex.

On this important place of the glorious past, we now find three important places for worship. They are (i) the famous tashiding monastery, which is one of the six principal monasteries in Sikkim, (ii) Chorten Thongpa Rangdrol, the oldest, holiest and one of the biggest chortens (Stupa) in Sikkim and (iii) 'Bram Chhu', the supernatural sacred Pot with Holy Water on Golden Alter in the main monastery building.

Among the buildings, the original or the main monastery building is called Chogyal Lhakang. Chogyal Lhakang was built during reign of the third king of Sikkim, Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal, in the form of extension and renovation of the original monastery built by the founder mNagd-bdag Sempa Chenpo. It has now become very old and is in dilapidated condition. A scheme is under way for renovation of reconstruction of this building by the Government.

This Monastery, about 190 Lamas is autonomous in all respects and meets its expenses out of the monastery's own revenue and public contributions, under the general control and supervision of the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs of Sikkim Government. It also receives substantial aid from the Government from time to time. The main function of the year to this monastery is the 'Bhamshinh' ceremony which is celebrated for all practical purposes, as a 'Mela', on the 15th day of the first Tibetan month every year.

Bumnu, the super-natural sacred pot with holy water is officially sealed for safety by the Government and kept in the main hall of monastery (Chogyal Lhakang). This super-natural pot is believed to have originally flowed from this place to an unknown


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direction and the holy water in it is more than 100 years old. This sacred object of worship is opened only once in a year on the occasion mentioned above for public audience and worship. While opening, a little quantity of holy water is taken out, duly refilling the same quantity with fresh water from Rethok river, on this occasion for, distribution to devotees every year. This occasion therefore is considered a very important one, and devotees even from far distance like Bhutan, Nepal, Ladakh etc. comes to Tashiding every year for this purpose. The 'Bhaxchu Mela' is observed for 3 days from the 13th to 15th morning of the first Tibetan month which usually corresponds to March. During the period of these 3 days, devotees go round the monastery building, and chortens (Stupas), especially Chorten Thong-wa Kangdrol, clock-wise, chanting prayers.

Among Chortens, Chorten Thong-wa Kangdrol is the most important one, and is located in the centre of all other Chortens. It was originally built by Gyalwa Lhutsun Chöegpo, the founder of Sikkim, in the 17th Century and it is therefore, as old as the original monastery at Bek-Shi-Dzings. In the recent years it was thoroughly repaired and renovated by the Government and H.E. Dingo Khentie Rinpoche of Bhutan performed the reh blessing ceremony on its completion in 1975. The importance of this Chorten is described by its name. It is called Thong-wa Kangdrol which means: the one which has power to get every one who sees it automatically freed from ignorance.

For tourists we may mention that this scenic beauty spot with its welcoming prayer flags in countless number can be clearly viewed from Krezang, near Rabangle Tea Estate 40 Km. from Singtam. But, the thought of trekking upto Bek-Shi Dzings (TASHIDING) would interest many tourists.
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   NYINGMAPA CATALOGUE SERIES
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2. RINCHEN TERZOD CATALOGUE
   NYINGMAPA CATALOGUE SERIES
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1. Bulletin of Tibetology 1996,
   New Series No. 1
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2. Bulletin of Tibetology 1996,
   New Series No. 2
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3. Bulletin of Tibetology 1996,
   New Series No. 3

4. Bulletin of Tibetology
   Symposium Volume Guru Dzechen,
   (Under Processing)
1. **Tales the Thankas Tell**: Rs. 300.00

   Subtitled *An Introduction to Tibetan Scroll Portraits*. The book has 64 pages (1 & half inches X 8 inches) and contains well produced eleven colour plates with Jacket depicting Buddha Sakyanuni and his two disciples. The book tells much about Mahayana Pantheon and particularly about the legends and myths around Buddhism as depicted through numerous Scroll Portraits forms. These colourful portraits speak about the contacts with the traditions of Far East, China, India, Iran and Byzantium, Pub. 1988

2. **Sangs Rgyas Stong**: Rs. 250.00

   Subtitled *An Introduction to Mahayana Iconography*. This book of 75 pages (11 and half inches X 8 inches) contains 4 colour plates and more than 80 line drawings (sketches); thick paper back with Jacket depicting 33 Buddhas. In ended for the lay reader, this introductory account is based on original sources in Pali, Sanskrit and Tibetan. The basic concept of thousand Buddhas is explained at length, while all the important symbols and images in their variant forms are presented from believer's point of view. Art critic or academicians will find the book worthy of perusal. (English Text:), Folio 76 Pub., 1988.
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PUBLICATION OF BOOKS

The following is a complete list of books published from 1961 to 1993. Full list of SRIT publications is available from SRIT office.

In view of price hike in the printing and stationery cost, the following revisions were made in the prices of Publication with effect from 1st May, 1993 subject to further revision in course of time.

Annual subscription rate of "Bulletin of Tibetology" has also been revised from Rs. 30/- to Rs. 50 within India, Bhutan and Nepal per annum plus extra postage charges. Subscrip-

3. Pujna (slokas:Mysticism), 1962
Silk Binding, Paper Binding
5. Aya Samaratrubhutri of Lama Khutuktu Lhasvaj's commentary in Tibet, 1963
7. 8 Tzaric Dzogchen according to Nyingmapa School of Tibetan Buddhism, 1976. Reprint 1993
10. THE ALAMAPANA PARISHA of A.C.arya Diganaga by Narawanshi Shastri. 1980
16. RICHARDSON PAPERS, by H. E. Richardson, 1990 Hard Bound
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