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**Buddhism in the Himalaya,  
its Expansion and the Present Day Aspects**

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# **Buddhism in the Himalaya, Its Expansion and the Present Day Aspects**

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## **Introduction:**

Over the last few years, Buddhism in the Himalayan regions has been an object of much scholarly attention and some major studies. Yet the study as by contrast at a much earlier stage of development, compared to other discipline. The main reason is the difficulties of an access to most of people in the Himalayan regions. In this paper, I concentrate here, however, on outlining some historical traces for the growth of Buddhism in Himalayan regions and the contribution of some outstanding Buddhist masters from India and Nepal.

## **I. Buddhist Missionary in the Himalayan regions during Buddha's period:**

The earliest reference of Buddha's missionary activity can be seen in a statement made by Buddha to his sixty disciples after his enlightenment. The Buddha's enthusiastic zeal and infinite compassion for suffering humanity is evident from the following extracts from the Mahavagga.(1)

"Go, ye, now, O Bhikshus, and wander for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, out of compassion, for the world for the good, for the gain and for the welfare of gods and men. Let not two of you go the same way."

It is obvious that sixty disciples moved to the different directions. But we are not certain if some of them reached Himalayan regions too.

Although we have no archaeological and epigraphical data for the Buddha's visit in the Himalayan regions, the reference can be met in Divyavadana, in which Buddha is supposed to have visited Manasarovar/Anataptadaha where the Buddha delivered some of his discourses on the past lives of Sariputra and Maudagalyana.

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Textual sources provide affirmation that Buddhism was introduced in Nepal Valley during Buddha's period. The Mulasarvastivada Vinaya Samgraha compiled by Jinamitra and translated by I-sting in 700 A.D. mentions an episode relating to the transport of wool a group or Bhikkhus en route toward Nepal (Ni-po-lo) at the time the Buddha was residing at Shravasti.

In the same text, it is stated that Ananda, Buddha's cousin went to the Kathmandu Valley to meet his relatives. Ananda came back to S'ravasti with his toes bitten by frost. Seeing his condition, the Bhiksus enquired of the climatic condition of Nepal and cause of his frost bitten toes. Ananda replied that Nepal is the place surrounded by the tall big mountains covered with snow, many waterfalls and a lot of cold rivers. It was through those rivers and snowy mountains that he had to walk barefooted, thus his foot was frost bitten. The people of Nepal used to wear shoes to protect themselves from cold and frost. The Buddha later made vinaya to use shoes for the monk.

## **II. Episode of Gautama Buddha's visit to the Kathmandu Valley:**

There are three important sources in which the visit of Buddha Shakyamuni in the Nepal Valley is related. One important source is the Swayambhu Purana text published by Sri Hari Prasad Sastri, another one is the History of Nepal by Munshi Shew Shunkar Singh and Pandit Sri Gunananda edited by Daniel Wright (1877. Calcutta) 3. Goshring Vyakarana sutra.(2)

In Swayambhu Purana text Lord Shakyamuni appears on Gopuchchara Hill with 500 disciples along with his chief disciples such as Sariputra Maudgalyana, Mahakashyapa and Ananda. Lord Buddha came to Swayambhu area from Sravasti in his late seventies. He met a lady called chunda to whom he ordained in Swayambhu Hill. Shakyamuni Buddha declared that he came to pay homage to Swayambhu "the self born one" seven times in seven different births. Then he moved to western Hill and gave the discourse on the origin of Swayambhu at the request of Maitreya Bodhisattva. Similar events are described in the local Vamasavalis too.

In Mahavamsa, too, it is stated that Lord Buddha went thrice to Sri Lanka. In his first visit to Sri Lanka, Lord Buddha had his meal at Anotapta (Manasarovar Lake). In his !light to Sri Lankan Buddha had offerings of meal at Uttarakuru and had his meal at Manasarovar and reached in Sri Lanka at the month of Poush Purnima. If we accept this as true, then there is no harm and misgivings in accepting that Lord Buddha descended in the Kathmandu Valley since it was en route to Sri Lanka from Manasarovar Lake.

In Burmese Buddhist annals also, there is a tradition stating that Lord Buddha visited Burma too. Among these legends the possibility Buddha's visit to the Kathmandu valley is great. This is also still to be researched. Another source of Buddha's visit to the Kathmandu valley is on Mahayana sutra called "Gosringa Parvat Vyakarana Nama Mahayana Sutra." In that sutra, Buddha Shakyamuni with his vast retinue of disciples appears on the banks of the river Goma, which is near the Ri glang-ru (Ox horn mountain) is what is known as the Muni

Maharsi place, the stupa Goma salagandha. Buddha arriving in Li-yul on the glang-ru mountain looks west and sees the Goma Salangandha stupa. The Buddha, the Bodhisattvas and Arahats then bless the land of Li yul and pray for the establishment of a great many monasteries, a rich land, a religious people, etc., praying to be reborn there in the future to fulfil their own wishes.

This sutra is concerned mainly with the Buddha's predication of vicissitudes of the Dharma in Li-yul, its rise and fall, the importance of Goma Salangandha Stupa and the Kashyapa stupa. Now the question arises where is Li-yul of the sutra? Modern scholars are of opinion that this place definitely refers to Khotan of Chinese Turkestan. But Li-yul is identified with Nepal by the translators of Kangyur. S.C. Das opines that the ancient name of Nepal in Tibetan was Liyul. The Great Hungarian tibetologist Alexander Csoma de Koros identifies Li-yul with S.E. Mongolia. A.H. Franck says, "This name "Li" has always been wrongly translated. The land li is either a country near Nepal or Turkestan" Frank feels convinced that it means here Turkestan. As such the exact location of Li-yul is doubtful. As Jaschke says "Li-yul means according to Wassiljew Buddhist countries in Northern Tibet, especially Khotan according to others in Northern India or Nepal, "Until recently it is not unanimously accepted. It has yet to be researched and investigated further. But traditional belief of Tibetans concerning Ri-glang ru identifies Nagarjuna Hill of Kathmandu Valley.

According to our Newar Buddhist tradition, Shakyamuni Buddha sat and taught at Parvatsthan west of Swayambhu Stupa, but the geography of Li-yul was such that Shakyamuni sat on Gosringa Parvat and contemplated the stupa Gomasalagandha from a distance. According to Swayambhu Purana, Buddha Vipashvi foresaw that in the Dvaparayuga, the hill of Swayambhu would be called Go-sringa Parvat (Ri-gLang ru\*), The ox horn Mountain.

### **III. Ashoka and the expansion of Buddhism in the Himalaya regions:**

Although legends of the Great King Ashoka appear in all the Buddhist traditions throughout Asia, much is known concerning his activities through rock edicts and pillars that he had placed throughout the land.

Ashoka, being a faithful follower of Buddhism is now unquestioned because of his evidence in a rock inscription at Maski.(3)

#### ***According to Rock Edict VIII,***

"In times past, kings used to go out on pleasure tours. In these, hunting and similar other amusements took place. Now the beloved of the gods, King Priyadarshani when he was crowned ten years, went to Sambodhi, thereby it became a Dharma Tour". It seems that he, from the tenth year of his reign 258 BC practiced Buddhism with great zeal and efforts to propagate the Dharma throughout his empire.(4)

In the chronicle of Ceylon, called *Sasanavamsa* it is mentioned that during the Ashoka's reign, his preceptor Modgalliputta Tissa Thera sent out nine missions of elder Bhikshus to propagate the Dharma. The Text relates thus:

"At the conclusion of the Third council, the Ven. Elder Tissa, son of Moggali, sent the Elder Majjhima to the Cina country, saying "you go to this country and establish the religion there." Thus the elder Majjhima along with Kassapagotra, elder Alakadeva, the elder Duddhiya and the Ven. elder Revata went to the five Cina countries in the Himalayan regions and converted that region by teaching Dhamma Chakrapravartana Sutra. These five elders also converted five countries of Himalayan regions.(5) Each of them initiated one thousand, We are not sure what are these five countries of the Himalayan region. From the historical records, we know that even before the advent of Ashoka, the great Emperor, the eighteenth sects of Buddhism had already appeared. Among them the "Himavata" is one of them. The very name suggests that the Himavata School was originally located in the Himalayan regions. According to Vasumitra, The *Haimavatas* are the inheritors of the Sthaviravadins whereas Bhavya and Vinita Deva ascribe a branch of the Mahasanghikas to this school.

#### **IV. Emperor Ashoka's Visit to Kathmandu Valley:**

It is definite that Emperor Ashoka visited Lumbini and Kapilavastu and erected a pillar stating that here Buddha was born. He visited all the places relating to Buddha's birth, his early career, marriage, renunciation, enlightenment and the place where he passed away according to the principal events of his life. But there seems to be no traces of evidence of his visit in the Kathmandu Valley. But according to Nepalese chronicle, emperor Ashoka visited the Kathmandu Valley with his royal preceptor Bhikshu Upagupta. He paid homage to Swayambhu Stupa, Guhyeshvari, and eight Vitaragas. It is stated that he erected many Chaityas and offered his daughter Charumati to a local prince Devapala, Later Charumati erected a Vihara on her own name and spent rest of her life as a Bhikshuni. The Vihara established by queen Charumati exists still today and is now called Chabahil. But it is difficult to confirm that Charumati ever visited Kathmandu because in the entire Ashokan inscriptions, there is no mention of his daughter by this name. Even if we equate Charumati with Sanghamitra there is no source to prove that event. In Patan, there are four great stupas in four cardinal directions and one in Pimbahal near Patan Gate. Nepalese tradition asserts that they were erected by Ashoka himself. The structure of these stupas while comparing ancient stupas erected by Ashoka resembles much in appearance. Due to lack of scientific excavation, it is difficult to ascertain accurately. Unless further evidence proves the contrary, it is difficult to reject the existing tradition.

#### **V. Contributions of Great Buddhists in the expansion of Buddhism in Himalayas**

*Vasubandhu (400-480 A.D.)*

Knowledge about the development and diffusion of the early-Buddhist communities is largely based upon modern archaeological findings, remains of ancient inscriptions, entries in court chronologies (Vamasavalis) and accounts of Chinese pilgrims such as Fa-hiem (399-414), Hsuan Tsang (629-645) and I-tsing (671-695). According to the chronological data found by the historian Boston and Lama Taranatha a vivid picture of Acarya Vasubandhu and his disciples visit to the Kathmandu Valley can be found.

The Great Master Vasubandhu was born in Purusapura, Peshawor, India. Vasubandhu composed a masterpiece of work called Adhidharmakosha.<sup>6</sup> He became master debator on the Vaibhasika doctrine of Hinayana tradition. Later he was converted into Mahayana fold by his elder brother Asanga. Vasubandhu's conversion to the Mahayana inspired five hundred scholars to follow his example. He learned all the Mahayana Sutras and proceeded to compose commentaries on Dasabhumika, Saddharmapundarik, five works of Maitreya and a lot of others. Concerning the visit of Vasubandhu in Nepal Valley, Bus-ton writes in his history thus:

"After hearing that his teacher Sanghbhadra composed a treatise containing his objection (with the work of Vasubandhu), Vasubandhu thought: "The teacher Sanghbhadra is profoundly versed in the doctrine of Vaibhasikas. It is therefore difficult to refute him and, moreover, it is unsuitable that I should vanquish him. I had better go to Nepal, having declared that I go to see the self-originated sanctuary (Swayambhu). He departed accordingly to Nepal. The teacher Vasubandhu, while he was residing in Nepal once came to see a monk called Handu who, though bearing the outward attributes of a monk and carried (on his shoulder) a pot of wine. Alas! The doctrine will undergo ruin", said Vasubandhu, full of grief and recited the Usnisha Vijaya dharani in the reverse order and died,<sup>(7)</sup> A monument was erected at that place, which exists till the present day." Our next source *is* the account of Lama Taranatha<sup>(8)</sup> about the visit of teacher Vasubandhu in Nepal Valley.

It seems that during the latter part of the Vasubandhu's life he saw the doctrine declining in Nepal. But it also indicates that previous to his arrival, Buddhism was nourishing. Nepalese sources have a vague indication of the development of Buddhism in early licchavi period. But it is certain that there have been many Buddhist Viharas during 5-6th centuries as it has been confirmed by the several lists of names mentioned in Amshuvarman inscription of Harigaon.

### **Vasubandhu: as a transmitter of Mahayana Sutras in Nepal**

It is very difficult to ascertain when the Mahayana Sutras were introduced into Nepal. When the Mahayana Sutras were introduced into China by the missionaries of India and Central Asia, it was already regarded as the authentic word of Lord Buddha. As the Sutras were translated in Chinese, The first of which appeared in 68 A.D., they profoundly awakened the Chinese and then Japanese mind, stirring their religious consciousness to its very depth.

Same is the case of Nepalese Buddhists who preserved these Sutra from generation to generation and preserved and safeguarded their Mahayanic ideal as the basis of their culture. Among the manuscripts discovered by Mr. Brian Hodgson in 1824 A.D. in the Kathmandu Valley, there were hundreds of "Nine Vaipulya Sutras" or Navakhanda. These Nine Sutras are recited very often by the pious devotees of Nepal, These Nine sutras are as follows:

1. Lalitavistara
2. Lankavatara
3. Suvarnaprabhas
4. Gandavyuha
5. Saddharmapundarika
6. Dasabhumika
7. Tathagataguhyaka Sutra
8. Samadhiraja
9. Astasahasika Prajnaparamita

We are not certain as to when and by whom were these sutras introduced in the Kathmandu Valley. But, from the extant evidence, it is obvious that sutras like Saddharmapundarika and others were already in existence in the sixth century A.D. In an inscription of King Amshuvanna found at Tyagal Tole, Patan, the mention is made of Amitabha, Akshohya, Sakyamuni, Samanta Kusum, Mahasthamprapta and Manjushree, clearly reflecting the presence of recitation of Sutras like Saddharmapundarika, Amitabha Vyuha, etc.

Of course, these Mahayana sutras might have been brought to the Kathmandu Valley by Acharya Vasubandhu and his entourage because Acharya Vasubandhu had written several commentaries on these Mahayana sutras. Among them, the commentaries on Saddharmapundarika and Dasabhumika were most popular. After the death of Acharya Vasubandhu, his followers must have stayed in the Kathmandu Valley and diffused Buddhism widely.

Buddhism in the Amshuvanna period (576-620 A.D.) seems to have flourished widely by the efforts of these migrating Indian monks. This is also supported by the accounts of Hsuang Tsang.(10)

In addition to that, in Sankhu inscription, the mention of "Mahasanghika bhikshu Sangha", clearly indicates that there were early Buddhist Bhikshu missionaries belonging to the sect of Mahasanghika in Sankhu area (Ins. No. 136, Dhanvajra).

### **Princess Bhrikuti Devi and her Contribution (617-650 A.D.)**

The birth of Nepalese princess Bhrikuti Devi (11) is one of the most controversial aspects of Nepalese history. Princess Bhrikuti also known as "Belmoza" Khri-btsun who was instrumental in civilizing Tibetans in the aspects of Buddhist culture and arts, was a highly

revered princess of Tibetans. Due to her compassionate deeds of diffusing Buddhist culture hence civilizing Tibetans, she was canonized as the "White Tara, (12) a Saviouress of the Tibetan People.

Before the advent of Princess Bhrikuti in Tibet, the people of Tibet were still barbarious in character, having no art and architecture. They didn't possess any script to communicate with the other countries. Moreover, people were warlike in nature. They had no moral values. This is echoed in the words of Srong btsans Gampo when he was asking the hands of the Nepalese Princess Bhrikuti:

"You, the king of Southern Nepal, have the laws of moral values of virtues, although I, the king of Tibet, have no laws, and you, the king, are interested in the field of laws then if you speak of giving Lha gLig Khii-btsun, within one day, by manifesting five thousand bodies, will establish all the people in Tibet Simillar statements are found abundantly in Tibetan historical literature such as Mani Ka'-"bum, rGyal rabs gsal bai, Melong and others. At the same time, Tibetan historians themselves are extremely eager to say how under the influence of both the Chinese and Nepalese wives, Srong btsan sGampo became a convert to Buddhism. The King's conversion to Buddhist faith is unquestionable because of the presence of so many legends and works ascribed to him. Some modern scholars question the character of his personality as being Buddhist. This is open to scholars for the further investigation. However, Tibetan historical literature assumes his being a true Buddhist because of his alleged work for Buddhism and reformation brought in Tibet, he is considered as an incarnation of Avalokiteshvara.

Srong btsan sGampo married Bhrikuti around 633/34 A.D. She brought with her precious images of Akshobhya Buddha, Sandalwood Tara, Maitreya and Avalokiteshvara. In the capacity of senior queen, she built Jokhang, Potala palace, Thang Dul, Rangdul and Runon temples across Tibet and Bhutan. Two temples viz. sKyer-chu Lha Khang of Paro and Byams pa'i Lha Khang at Bumthang of Bhutan are said to be the earliest Buddhist temples of Bhutan. Of course, she was assisted by Chinese queen Wengchen in the construction of temple based on Geomantic principles of Chinese tradition. We are told that Srong btsan sGampo commissioned the translation of the Karanda vyuha sutra, 100 precepts, the Ratna Megha sutra and other into Tibetan. At that time the Indian teacher Kusala, the Brahman Shankar, the Nepalese teacher Silamanju, the translator Thon-mi Sambhota, his pupil Dharmakosha translated and edited a certain number of canonical texts.

## **VI. Visit of Santarakshita: (705-762 A.D.)**

Santarakshita was born in a royal family of Sahor, Bhagalpur, Bihar, in 705 A.D. He was the Mahasthavira of Nalanda Monastery. He was a famous logician of the period. In his Tattvasamgraha he refutes views of many philosophical system of the past and of his own day both Buddhist and non-Buddhist.



On an invitation from Tibetan King Thri-song Duetshan, he went to Tibet in the year 743 A.D. via Nepal. He remained in Lhasa for four months and preached the doctrines of Dasa Shila (ten precepts), Astadasadhatu and Pratitya-Samutpada (Dependent Origination). This led Bon followers to agitate against the Buddhist. He thus was compelled to leave Tibet. Santarakshita, having left Tibet, came to Nepal to stay there six years (743-749 A.D.)(13). During his sojourn in Nepal, he had ample time to propagate his Vijnanavada doctrine to Nepalese Buddhist scholars and laymen. It is very likely that Sivadeva II, Being a lover of intellectual pursuits could have given him the chance to propagate the logical aspect of Buddhism. Due to the dominance of Bon religionist minister in Tibet, Shantarakshita recommended Padmasamhhava to restore and reinstate Buddhism there. Shantarakshita spent the rest of his life in Tibet up to 762 A.D. after having demoniac forces of Tibet subdued by Padmasambhava with magical powers.

### **Great Guru Padma Sambhava**

Among the Great Buddhist Masters who visited Nepal and Tibet, the name of Padma Samhhava stands prominent in the religious histories of Himalayan regions. Concerning this Great Guru's Life, many legends are obtained. According to the rNyingmapa texts, it is impossible to tell all of the heroic deeds of the Master, nevertheless Padmasambhava is said to have revealed ten thousand nine hundred stories from his life which his five wives supposedly recorded in writing and hid for the benefit of future generations. At present, we know of at least fifty biographies of Padmasambhava. His biographies are loaded with legends full of esoteric significance. Modern scholars such as E.Krishnama Acharya and A.S. Altekar assign his date of birth to be 717 A.D. When he was thirteen years of age he sat on the throne. This lotus king established a new legal code based upon ten precepts. He studied all the science and philosophies of the period. He married the princess Bhasadhara along with her 499 attendants. He enjoyed and experiences worldly happiness for the five years and renounced his kingdom and family. He searched for many Vajrayana Gurus. He learnt the teachings on Paramita and Yoga from Guru Prahahasti. He got his intellectual and spiritual training under two Buddhist monk scholars viz. Guru Budhajanapada and Anangavajra. E.D. Krishnamachara states that he went to Tibet on invitation from a Tibetan King. He came to Nepal en route Tibet when he was twenty six years old and stayed in Nepal four years (743-747 A.D.).<sup>14</sup> In his sojourn in Nepal, he meditated in various places of the Kathmandu Valley. In Nepal, he performed the following act: In Pharping, he performed the sadhana of Vajrakila for subduing evil forces. He disseminated Vajrayanic doctrines widely in the Kathmandu Valley. In his biography, it is mentioned that he took two Nepalese dakinis or yoginis namely Kalasiddhi and Sakya Devi for his Atiyoga sadhana, In Nepal Vajracharyas still wear "Odiacharya Hat" in Vajrayanic rituals. Padmasambhava is renowned in Nepal as Odiacharya and this testifies to his popularity in Nepal. According to Dr. H. Hoffmann, the Bodhanatha Stupa was built to his credit. Padmasambhava's role as a tantric buddhist Master is not limited to the Kathmandu Valley only, for he toured extensively in the northern parts of Nepal as well. His legacy is evident in that the people of the entire Himalayan range of Nepal follow Tibetan Buddhism.

At present, the form of Buddhism initiated by Padmasambhava is known as rNyingma-pa sect. There is a vast literature dealing with rNying-ma-pa sect. These tantras were translated into Tibetan from Sanskrit in the eight century by Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, and Vairochan. It is said in Tibetan chronicles that there are many Terma treasures (sacred scriptures) hidden by Padmasambhava for the benefit of future generations. There are many such hidden treasure spots in the Kathmandu Valley. One such place is called "Karunchok" near the northern stupa of Ashoka in Patan.

Padmasambhava visited Tibet and established first Buddhist monastery "Samye" in Tibet after subduing many Bonpo followers. His major 25 disciples worked for the diffusion of Nyingma doctrines widely in Tibet and neighbouring Himalayan regions of Nepal. The Nyingmapa monasteries are scattered throughout northern belt such as Humla, Mugu, Dolpo, Mustang, Manang, Gorkha, Rasuwa, Dolakha, Solukhumbu, Sankhuwasabha and Taplejung.

The western Nepal like the Kathmandu Valley was the centre of Buddhist activities and its kings were staunch supporters of Buddhism. This fact is supported by the inscription found in Lumbini and Niglihawa pillar. In that inscription the mention is made of King Ripu Malia (1312 A.D.) who visited Lumbini and Kapilavastu for pilgrimage.

#### **Atisha Dipamkara (1041 A.D.)**

After the persecution of Buddhism by Landorma in Tibet, the Nyingmapa sect suffered heavily. The Buddhist monks under the garb of tantric Masters began to practice sexo-yogic rituals. They followed only the literal meaning of the tantras. They ceased to follow the rules of Vinaya and practice of meditation under the name of tantras. So seeing the debased and deteriorating condition of Buddhism, Tibetan king Bodhiprabha invited Great Master Dipamkarshli Jnana of Vikramashila University to Tibet for the sake of reforming Buddhism.

In Nepal, the condition of Buddhism was no better than it was in Tibet. It was in 1041 A.D. that Dipankarasrijnana came to the Kathmandu Valley with a party of twenty eight attendants and many belongings including numerous Sanskrit Buddhist Manuscripts.

At that time, Atisha conducted a religious meeting in order to clear away spiritual problems and doubts concerning doctrines of Buddha. He demonstrated his erudite scholarship in the course of his religious discourse and greatly enhanced the cause of Nepalese Buddhism. The sight of Swayambhu Chaitya impressed Atisha deeply. He quite often gazed at it for a long time. He also presented an elephant to the king of Nepal for the purpose of carrying sacred objects, manuscripts and images, Atisha, in return asked the king to build a Vihara to be called Tham Vihara.<sup>(15)</sup> The King constructed this Vihara accordingly and permitted his son Padmabhadra to be ordained as a monk pupil on the great Atisha. The Venerable lord accepted the proposal and ordained the son of the king, a Bhikshu. Atisha deposited many provisions for supporting Buddhist monks who were living there. During his sojourn in Nepal Atisha composed a very important Buddhist text called *Chmya Samgraha Pradeepa* <sup>16</sup> for the benefit of Nepalese Buddhists. He exposed the evil aspects of Buddhism rampant in Nepalese society and greatly emphasized the Paramita tradition and aspects of Bodhicitta. In 1041 A.D. on occasion of formal coronation of King Nayapala of Bengal, he

had written a letter of good will. This letter is known as *Vimala Ratan Lekha Nama*. (17) This letter was sent to the king of Bengal from Nepal. From Kathmandu, Atisha and his party proceeded to a place called Holkha of Palpa to meet a friend of Atisha, a Buddhist sage. Atisha spent one month there, during that time, he gave a complete discourse on the Paramitas and Bodhicitta for six full days.

Atisha's visit to Tibet was a landmark in the history of Buddhism in Tibet. His name stands foremost among the Indian Buddhist scholars who worked selflessly for the cause of Buddhism. At Thoding Vihara, he composed a famous treatise called "*Bodhipathapradeepa*" and diffused widely all throughout Tibet, thus eliminating their false views on the concept of Sutras and Tantras. He emphasized on the value of monasticism and the practice of mind training lineage and transmitted it through his disciples later on, Dromtonpa established Kadampa sect at Radren Monastery and his lineage continued for three hundred years until the advent of Great Tsong Khapa who established Gelugpa sect in 14<sup>th</sup> century. Gelugpa sect could not exert its influence on people of Northern Himalayan region of Nepal. Except some recently built monasteries in the Kathmandu valley, there were virtually no Gelug monasteries whatsoever in the Himalayan districts off Nepal.

Why Gelugpa cannot exert its influence on the people of Himalayan regions is itself a quite interesting subject. People in the Himalayan regions mostly believe in nature worship and they were lover or fond of mantra rituals. Gelugpas stress its emphasis on gradual path of Sutra and Tantra. They feel it difficult to assimilate Sutra teachings. Whereas in Nyingmapa and other sects was given an ample scope for mantra rituals and exorcism of demoniac principles. They were easily converted.

### **Milarepa (1052-1123)**

Milarepa was born in the year 1040 A. D. in Kyang-Tsa in the province of Gungthang in Tibet, a few miles of the Kiron pass or Nepal. His early life was spent in a luxurious way. Due to the sudden death of his father, there was a tremendous change in his life. His uncle usurped his belongings and property. This incident led him to learn some evil tantras. He destroyed his enemies with his evil magic. Later, he repented deeply his sin and searched for constructive Buddhist tantras. He became a sincere disciple of Marpa, the translator (1023-1097 A. D.). To move the sin of Milarepa, Marpa put a number of hard tests to him for six years. Milarepa, built a nine storied building single-handedly. Thus Milarepa became the disciple of Marpa at the age of thirty eight (1078 A.D.). While Milarepa was parting with Marpa, he directed Milarepa to lead a strict life and to be always vigilant. He passed his life in forlorn and solitary caves, and in the solitude of the wilderness. The names of the mountains in Nepal pointed out by Marpa were Gyal gyi-sri-la, Mount Kailash, Lapchikang, Riwo-palbar, and Yolmo Kangra. Chubai, Devikot and Tsari. Among these places Yolmo Kangra is said to have been situated at a point in Nepal, which is about forty miles north of Kathmandu. So Milarepa turned extensively into the interior areas of Nepal and he was able to influence a large number of people.

The name and fame of Milarepa reached the king of Bhaktapur who sent some religious offerings to him. The visit of Milarepa to Bhaktapur (tib. Khokhom) has been corroborated by Milarepa's life (18). His example was followed by many Tibetan Buddhist monks who visited Nepal for spiritual advancement. Nepal became the place of their primary pilgrimage.

The Kagyudpa sect by Guru Marpa was later diffused by his disciples of four major and 8 minor tradition holders who moved in the various parts of Himalayan regions, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century Ven. Sangye Lama of Drikung Monastery established Kagyupa monastery at Halali near Humla and in the surrounding areas. Furthermore, in the central part of Manang, Sakyapa and Kagyupas sects have dominant influence. In the districts of Gorkha, Rasuwa and Sindhupakhowk Drukpa Kagyupa sect have overwhelming presence.

### **Present aspects**

Buddhism found in the Kathmandu Valley may very well represent the oldest continuous forms of Buddhism in the world as discussed in the previous pages. Over the centuries, the forms that it took were the same as what was found in India. At one time all of the major form of Buddhism i.e. 18 sects were found there.

Presently, there are three district types of Buddhism in Nepal. These are the Theravada, Tibetan Vajrayana and Newar schools of Yajrayana Buddhism.

### **Theravada:**

In 1928, Ven. Mahaprajna became a Theravada monk in Kushinagar. After that, he and Ven. Amritananda preached the Dharma extensively in Nepal and were imprisoned under a non-conversion policy of Rana rulers, Ven. Amritananda later left for Burma to further his study and then to Sri Lanka. In 1942, several Buddhist monks returned to Kathmandu after completing their studies. In 1944 A.D. Dharma propagation activities were interrupted and the monks were expelled. Living in Sarnath, Ven. Amritananda formed Dharmodaya Sabha. In 1956, Dhannodaya Sabha organized its 4<sup>th</sup> General Conference of W.F.B. under the patronage of late king Mahendra. Since then, Buddhist monks of Theravada tradition established monasteries such as Anandakuti, Sumangala Vihara, Sakya Simha Vihara, Ganamaha vihara, Vishwa Santi Vihara, Nagarmandap vihar and in various districts of Nepal. Recently, some leading figures of Tharu communities proclaiming themselves as Buddhists are beginning to construct Theravada monasteries in Terai regions of Nepal.

### **Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism:**

As we have discussed the entire Himalayan regions were influenced by Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism. Now all of the major forms of Tibetan Buddhist traditions can be found here in the Kathmandu Valley. Various ethnic groups of Himalaya regions viz Tamang, Gurung, Magar, Lepchas and other follow Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism and have their followers.

Tibetan Buddhist Masters, to speak few of them, like Marpa, Rwa Lotsava, Milarepa, Ras Chung Pa, Dharmasvami, XIII Karmapa, XVI Karmapa and several others visited Nepal Valley and some moved in Himalayan regions. However, the largest of Tibetans went to Kathmandu in 1960s. Many concentrated around Swayambhu and Bodhnath stupas. Many other famous Lamas known throughout the world have their centres in the area.

The Theravada and Tibetan forms of Buddhism are both doing well. The Tibetans have received considerable financial support from the west as well as Southeast Asia. However, the Newar form of Buddhism which is the last representative of Indian Buddhism is suffering acutely.

### **Newar Vajrayana Buddhism:**

Newar form of Buddhism may be the oldest living tradition of Buddhism in the world. Presently, due to a number of social and economic factors, fewer Buddhist Bajracharyas are following their forefathers. Slowly their tradition is becoming weak.

Buddhism as practiced by the Newar Buddhists of the Kathmandu Valley has some characteristic features not found in other Buddhist countries. It was the Buddhism of Shakyamuni as it manifested itself in the Himalaya region. Newar Buddhism is to be classified in with the tradition of Indian Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism deriving its lineages from Siddha tradition of Nalanda and Vikramashila Monastic University of India. Buddhism found in the Kathmandu Valley represents the oldest continuous form of Buddhism in the world. This traditional Buddhism of Newars has recently become the subject of great interest and detail study by Lienhard, Gellner, M. Allen, Bechert and others. Although some observers professed as early as the last century the fast disappearance of this form of Buddhism, it has proved to be remarkably durable, an important factor in its conservation and social structure.

Thinking about current situation of this traditional Buddhism, some observers have found it very much in a pitiful condition. Not being able to cope with the modern situation, here the Shakyas and Vajracharyas are taking little interest on their own traditional religion and culture. The Bajracharyas are beginning to neglect taking Acharya Diksa (Master Initiation) with a result that there is a conspicuous decline in the Buddhist priests. The patrons (Skt. Jajaman) too pay little respect to these Buddhist priests because of their ignorance of Buddhist doctrine.

These Bajracharyas get little remuneration in return for their services to their patrons in life cycle rituals. Thus, they are compelled to profess various secular professions. These are the obvious reasons for the decline of traditional Buddhism of the Kathmandu Valley. Furthermore, most of the Bahas and Bahis of three illustrious cities, owing to the lack of proper conservation, are in ruins and in a dreadful state of dilapidation. Nowadays, we see these Bahas and Bahis being replaced by the concrete building. Besides, the rare Buddhist manuscripts for which Nepal takes pride in the Buddhist world, are being sold in the common markets for the exorbitant price they are offered. We also see the ancient Buddhist sculptures, Thankas and idols being exported to the foreign markets. To sum up, for all these reasons,

scholars began to speculate about the fast disappearance of this traditional Buddhism at the end of this century.

The importance of Newars, in South Asian Buddhist history has been discussed at great length by Lienhard in his paper *Nepal. The Survival of Indian Buddhism in a Himalayan Kingdom...* Similarly in 1898, Prof. Sylvain Levi, who wrote "Le Nepal" discussed about the survival of Sanskrit Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley. He with the help of Pt. Kulaman Singh of Kvaabahal translated into French the Mahayana Sutralankara of Arya Maitreyanath.

Buddhism disappeared in India. The Theravada tradition flourished in Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand whereas Vajrayana/Mahayana tradition was kept alive in Tibet, China, Japan and Korea.

How Buddhism disappeared in India is yet the subject of great controversy. But how Newars kept Vajrayana Buddhism alive in the Kathmandu Valley is an interesting topic in itself.

## **Conclusion**

The preceding series of discussion are the general outline of Buddhist expansion in the Himalayan regions. Due to the lack of time, the detail researches and actual survey of the monasteries in these Himalaya regions could not be done. Much awaits a more detailed investigation.

From the available data, we have a vague indication about the true picture of Buddhist population distribution. Many erudite scholars have raised the question on the methodology or census data collection concerning Buddhist or Hindu or concerning the recognition or identification of Buddhist or other ethnic groups. It is regrettable to say that Buddhist population according to 1991 census data is only about nearly 7% only whereas in actuality it is not. It seems that the Kathmandu Valley and the entire Himalayan regions are the centres and habitats of Buddhist followers. But Buddhism was introduced into these places in different ways. The Kathmandu Valley has its nearest access to its sources in India whereas Himalaya regions with Tibet. In Himalaya regions, the role has been played by various non-Brahmanic ethnic groups such as Magar, Gurung, Sherpa, Limbus and Rais (Kiranti) whereas in the Kathmandu Valley, the Newars played an important and crucial role in the expansion of Buddhism. Whether these Himalayan People were previously Buddhist or not, is a separate topic of research in itself, yet we can be sure that the inhabitants of these Himalayan districts, being closely connected with the people of Tibet in business transaction and social habit, they must have been influenced by the development of Buddhism in Tibet.

While speaking of Buddhism in Nepal, the Buddhist monasteries, stupas are found not only in the Kathmandu Valley but also distributed in the whole kingdom, stretching from Kailali from west to Dam in the east. Tibetans both monks and lay people in large numbers flocked to the Kathmandu Valley. Important Lamas of four traditions established Buddhist monasteries and centres in the Kathmandu Valley as well as in northern Himalaya regions.

Ven. Lama Yeshe and his Sherpa student Lama Zopa Rinpoche established Kopan monastery, a Gelugpa sect, near Bodhnath in 1972. In 1970, Yen, Ugyen Tulku Rinpoche established Ka-Nying Shedrupling Monastery at Bodhnath, besides, a number of other monasteries have been built by eminent Lamas at Bodhnath. Now Bodhnath Stupa and its surrounding area have been the Vatican of Tibetan Buddhism and Buddhism in Himalaya regions.

There is an urgency to take up this scholarly mission since this tradition is likely to disappear within a decade, as practiced by some Buddhist Scholars.

## Notes and References

1. See T.W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenburg, Vinaya Texts part I Sacred Book of the East, Vol. XIII ed. F. Max Muller

2. See Prof. Hakuju Ui and others (ed.) *A complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons*. Tohoku Imperial University, Sendai Japan 1934. Cat. No. 357, P. 65 - Arya-Gosring-Vyakarana-nama-Mahayana sutra.

3. Rock inscription at Maski. Ilyderabad (Deccan)

*"For more than two and a half years, I have been a lay disciple of the Buddha. More than a year ago, I visited the Sangha, and since then I have been energetic in my efforts",* quoted in "Light of Liberation" (Crystal Mirror VIII), Dharma publishing. P. UN.

4. See Amulyadumdra Sen's *Aswka's Edicts* published by the Institute of Indology, Calcutta, 1956, p. 84.

5. See B.C. Law (trans.): *The History of Buddha's Religion* published by Sri Satguru Publications. Delhi, 1986 p. 171.

6. See Prof. P Pradhan (ed.): *Abhidharmakosabhasyam of Vasubandhu* published by K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patan, 1975.

7. See E. Obermiller (trans.): *Tile History of Buddhism in India and Tibet* published by Sri sat guru Publications (reprint) 19R6. Delhi, p. 145.

8. Also in Lama Taranatha's *History of Buddhism in India* published by Indian Institute of advanced Study, Simla 1970, p. 174.

9. See Dhanavajra's *Licchavikaln Abhilekh* Inscription No. 98 published by CNAS, Tribhuvan University, 1973.

10. Hieung-Tsang in his travel records says:

*"Il y a parmi eux des heretiques et des vrais croyants. Les Couvents et les temples des Devas se touchent les uns des autres. On compte environ deux mille religieux qui etudient à la fois le grand et le petit vehicule..."*

(Memoires de Hiuen-Tsang L. VII 407)

Trans.

*"There are Buddhist followers and heretics mixed together. The Sangharama and Deva temples are closely joined. There are about 2000 monks who study both Mahayana and Hinayana..."*

(Siyuki p. 81)

11. For further details, see M.B. Sahkya "Life and Contribution of Nepalese Princess Bhrikuti Devi" Forthcoming, Book Faith, India.



12. Local Historians ascribe her as green Tara whereas in Mani bka – bum she is regarded as white Tara. Mani bKa –bum desnihes her in the following manner.

(fol. IIIa)

*'Then the king in order to accord with worldly convention thought of taking spouses for him and offered the prayer to the self-created image of the Great Compassionate One, the Arya Avalokiteshvara. Then two rays of light sprang forth from the heart of the image. One went to the country of Nepal and the other to the country of China. Following one which went in the direction of Nepal he of Nepal called 'od-zer go cha. She was or sixteen years of age endowed with auspicious signs and proportions. She was reddish white in colour and lively in appearance...'*

13. For this dating, see Rajendra Ram's *History of Buddhism in Nepal* Janabharati Prakasana, 1977, p. 35.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

15. Sarat Chandra Das's *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow*, firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya Calcutta 1965, p. 77.

16. *Atisa viracita Ekadasa grantha* edited, restored and translated from Tibetan by Rmnes Chandra ... Centre for Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, Varanasi 1992, p. 98- 100.

17. See English Translation of *Vimala Ratna lekha* by Ven. Doboomb Tulku and Glenn H. Mullin, Tibet House, New Delhi, 1983, p. 33-41.

18. See Evans Wentz's "Tibet" Great Yogi Milarepa", Oxford University Press (reprint), 1974.