

TIBETAN BUDDHISM.

The history of Buddhism in Tibet is closely interwoven with the country's secular history, and it is impossible to discuss one without the other. The first half of the seventh century A.D. witnessed the beginning of a gradual conquest of the Tibetan uplands by Buddhism which penetrated into the Land of Snows from the south through Nepal and the river valleys of the Western Himalayas, from the west through Kashmir, from the north through Khotan in Central Asia, and from the east through China. The seventh century and especially the eighth saw the beginning of a truly remarkable transformation in the national outlook of Tibet, when warlike and often turbulent nomad and semi-nomad tribes which time and again raided the territories of neighbouring states, retreated into the fastnesses of their mountains to threaten never again the borders of their neighbours. Within less than two centuries the spiritual and cultural revolution which spread throughout Tibet, succeeded in curbing the warlike impulse of the Tibetans. This transformation was not only spiritual, but also cultural, for the old Central Asian nomadic culture prevalent in Tibet at that time, had to give way to a new type of culture. The history of Tibetan Buddhism can be conveniently divided into three main periods, a) the early period, c. 632-1042 A.D. which corresponds to the Imperial Period of the Tibetan History, the temporary eclipse of Buddhism after 841 A.D. and the gradual spread of the Doctrine towards the end of the X-th century A.D. b) the second period, 1042-1409 A.D. - the period of reformation, the period of Abisha and Tsong-kha-pa. c) the last period, from 1409 A.D. till the modern times, which saw the predominance of the Ge-luk-pa sect, or the Yellow Hat sect.

Our knowledge of the early history of Tibet is very scant. Many of the important sources remain untranslated and largely inaccessible to scholars. According to the historical annals, the beginning of the Tibetan State dates from the end of the

VI-th century A.D. and the beginning of the VII-th century A.D. Prior to that the country was divided into twelve principalities which waged constant wars between themselves. The establishment of a unified state with a central authority facilitated the spread of Buddhism. The movement for political unification of the country started in the South-East. In about 607 A.D. Namri-songtsen, the feudal chief of Chyingwa-taktse in the Yalung valley of South-Eastern Tibet, laid the foundation of the Tibetan State. He conquered the neighbouring principalities, the valley of Phen-yul in the north of Lhasa, the Tsang province and Takpe in South Tibet. His son the famous Songtsen-gampo succeeded his father in about 629 A.D. He was destined to complete the unification of Tibet and introduce Indian Buddhism into the country. The king and some of the landed gentry favoured Buddhism which brought in its wake a higher form of culture. The centralized state which had succeeded in uniting the twelve principalities was becoming aware of the necessity of building up its political power. No doubt the breaking up of the power of the landed gentry allied to the ancient shamanistic Ben, the ancient religion of Tibet, was of paramount importance to the king and his councillors who strove to consolidate the established power. The royal favours showered on Buddhism were a direct challenge to the ancient Ben and the old order of things. The advent of Buddhism was thus a progressive development, and challenged the forces of feudal reaction. A long and bitter struggle ensued until the middle of the IX-th century A.D. when reaction set in, which brought with itself the collapse of the authority of the king and with it a new parcellation of the country. To consolidate his position king Songtsen-gampo concluded matrimonial alliances with China and Nepal. We are told that both the royal princesses were fervent Buddhists and did much to introduce Buddhism into the country, though at the beginning their missionary activity was by necessity limited to the court circles. The mass of the people and the gentry remained attached to the ancient faith. A vague tradition mentioned by Tibetan historians speaks of the appearance of Buddhist texts in the time of the legendary king Lha

Thothori-nyentsen who had his residence in Yalung in South-East Tibet. The south-western part of the country which later formed the Guge kingdom was from ancient times under the strong influence of adjoining India and local feudal chiefs, to judge by their names, must have been of mixt descent. It was towards the West, to Kashmir that went Thonmi Sambhota to study Sanskrit. Of the thirteen young Tibetans sent by king Sengtsen-gam-po to India in about 632 A.D., he was the only one who returned to his native country. The other perished in the hot and humid climate of the Indian plains. After his return from India in about 647 A.D. Thonmi Sambhota presented to the king the new Tibetan alphabet created by him with the help of the pandita Devavimsin, and which probably evolved from the Central Indian script of the sixth-seventh centuries A.D. Thonmi Sambhota is said to have translated into Tibetan the Karandavyuha-sutra and the Ratnamegha-sutra. The fact that Thonmi Sambhota and his assistants were able to translate into Tibetan Buddhist texts, shows that besides inventing the new Tibetan script, they must have performed a great deal of work, fashioning the rough speech of the nomads into a literary idiom. It is of course possible that some form of a literary dialect used by the courts of feudal chiefs existed even before the language reform ascribed to Thonmi Sambhota, and this could have facilitated the translation of Buddhist sacred texts. It is interesting to note that from the very outset the work of translating Buddhist texts into Tibetan was carried out by an international group of Buddhist scholars. Thus we are told that Thonmi Sambhota was assisted by an Indian brahmin Shankara, by a Nepalese teacher Silamanju, and by a Chinese monk Mahadeva Tshe. No doubt these teachers arrived in Tibet in the retinue of the Nepalese and Chinese princesses whom king Sengtsen-gam-po married. The Nepalese princess, the daughter of king Amshuvarman of Nepal, brought with herself Buddhist sacred images, and in 653 A.D., some four years after the king's death, she built the famous Jo-khang temple of Lhasa.

The building of the temple was carried out by Nepalese master-builders. The Chinese princess who arrived in 641 A.D. brought with herself a famous image of Buddha which was believed to have been brought to China from India through Central Asia. The Chinese princess was instrumental in introducing into Tibet the Chinese Buddhist culture of the T'ang epoch. The princess is said to have erected the temple of Rameche in Lhasa which for a long time has been the residence of Chinese monks, followers of the Ch'an meditative school of Buddhism (ch'an, dhyana). Under the successors of king Songtsen-gampo, Tibetan power expanded far beyond the geographical borders of Tibet. In fact in the VIII-th century, Tibet became one of the major powers on the Asian continent. In 763 A.D. Tibetan cavalry raided the capital of the T'ang Empire - the city of Ch'ang-an. The westward spread of Tibetan power into the upper reaches of the Oxus river and the Pamirs, forced the Abbasside caliph Harun ar-Rashid to send in 798 A.D. an envoy to the Chinese court to negotiate a treaty of joint military action against the turbulent Tibetans in Central Asia. In the south, king Tisang-detsen forced the Pala kings of Bengal to pay tribute. The prolonged occupation of large tracts of Central Asia by Tibetan troops brought Tibet into direct contact with Buddhist countries in Central Asia. As a result of this contact, Buddhist monks from Khetan arrived in Tibet in the reign of Tide-tsuktzen Me-aktzen (705-755) and were well received by the king. However, their propagation of Buddhism met with considerable opposition from the masses of the people. Political upheavals in Central Asia adversely affected the Buddhist communities there, and we are told that numerous monks fled to Tibet and established monasteries there. They remained in the country till about 740/1 A.D. when a virulent epidemic of small-pox and the death of the queen from it, caused the expulsion of foreign monks from the country who fled to Gandhara and India. However the influence of Central Asian Buddhism did not disappear after the forced departure of monks and much of it remained and

enriched Tibetan Buddhism. The golden age of Tibetan Buddhism began in the reign of king Tisong-detsen (c. 756 A.D.). During the reign of this king Buddhism began to spread among the masses of the Tibetan people. Buddhist monasteries were established under the patronage of the king. The propagation of the new faith continued to meet with a stubborn opposition from the nobility. One of the councillors of the king, the powerful minister Manghang who was a follower of the ancient Ben, stood at the head of an-anti-Buddhist movement, and even the king was unable to stop the persecution. Many monks were ordered to leave the country and several monasteries were closed. The image of the Buddha, the famous Jewel or Lord of the Jo-khang temple in Lhasa, was taken to Kyireng on the Nepal border, and Chinese monks who resided at the Rameche temple in Lhasa were forced to flee to China. But the adherents of the king and the new faith were not idle. They succeeded in deceiving the minister to a remote place in Telung where he was put to death. After the minister's death, the opposition of the feudal gentry, deprived of its head, was unable to interfere with the king's plans. Envoys were despatched to Nepal and India to invite learned men and preachers of Buddhism. In Nepal the king's envoys met the great scholar Shantarakshita who belonged to the great vihara of Nalanda, and invited him to Tibet. His influence on Tibetan Buddhism and especially his translations of Buddhist philosophical texts are stressed by Tibetan historians. His arrival again caused unrest among the people and the king was again forced to advise the pandita to return to Nepal. We are told that before leaving, Shantarakshita advised the Tibetan king to invite the Tantric yogin Padmasambhava. Guru Padmasambhava spent some nine months in Tibet and even bestowed a Tantric initiation on the king. But some of the king's councillors expressed doubt in the acarya, and he was escorted back to India.

The early period of the spread of Buddhism is characterised by certain definite traits - the absence of powerful religious sects and the restricted spread of monkhood. According to tradition one of the first Buddhist monasteries, that of Samye, was begun in 787 A.D. and consecrated in 799 A.D. The cornerstone ceremony was presided over by Guru Padmasambhava and the acarya Shantarakshita who visited Tibet a second time. This great monastery was built after the model of the great vihara of Odantapuri in Bihar. The main temple of the monastery had three storeys - the first was built in Indian style, the second in Tibetan and the third in the style of Khotan. This shows the composite character of Tibetan Buddhism, symbolizing the three main sources of Buddhist inspiration. For a long time this monastery had been one of the chief repositories of ancient Sanskrit manuscripts in Tibet, a fact already noticed by Atisha during his visit to the monastery, until the destruction of its library by fire some hundred and fifty years ago, after which the monastery was again rebuilt. Buddhist viharas of this period were not the large monastic colleges of the later period with thousand of students, but rather small hermitages. A vihara consisted of several monastic cells with a temple attached to them. the inmates of such hermitages were both monks and laymen who came to the hermitages to practice religion.

In the reign of king Tisong-detsen Chinese monks again returned to Tibet and resumed their preaching of meditative discipline. They disregarded all dogmatic teaching, and based their discipline on meditation. Their preaching evidently met with some success, for the king and the followers of the acarya Shantarakshita were faced with the necessity of combating the spread of the school. It is then that took place the famous debate between Kamalashila, the disciple of Shantarakshita and a follower of the Madhyamika doctrine, and the Chinese monks. The debate was won by Kamalashila. The king promulgated a royal decree that henceforth all Tibetans monks were to follow the monistic school of Arya-Nagarjuna, i.e. the Madhyamika doctrine, which from then onwards became the

philosophic background of most of the Tibetan schools. It is interesting to note that Chinese manuscript discovered in the hidden library of the Tun-huang cave-temples confirm the historicity of the debate.

Buddhism brought with itself the preaching of the equality of men, and during the brief reign of king Mune-tsen~~sen~~ the son of Tisong-detsen, a definite attempt was made to redistribute wealth in the country. The landed gentry reacted violently and having secured the dowager queen's assent, poisoned the young king. Buddhism stood for progress and the enhancement of the central authority. The landed gentry and the shamanistic Ben opposed these new trends and were anxious to preserve their feudal privileges. The conflict between the private interests of prominent feudal families (ger in Tibetan) and the central authority (shung) was always a source of weakness and constantly plagued the political development of the Tibetan State. The forces of feudal reaction were strong enough to reassert themselves. After the progressive reign of king Ralpacan characterized by a remarkable literary activity and the translation and codification of the Buddhist Canon, reaction set in. During the brief but eventful reign of king Langdarma Buddhism suffered an eclipse. Monasteries were closed and their inmates scattered. a violent struggle ensued during which the apostate king was murdered. The Imperial power did not survive the king and collapsed after his death in 842 A.D. To judge by the results, the reaction was chiefly aimed at the central power of the state, and in this respect its effect was lasting. The descendants of the Tibetan Imperial dynasty scattered and continued to rule as feudal chiefs in Western Tibet, in Kham and Tsang, but never again did there arise a power strong enough to unite the whole country. We now know that the eclipse of Buddhism was by no means total and that many Buddhist monks remained in the country after the persecution of 841 A.D. The revival came from North-east Tibet. About 978 A.D. a group of Buddhist monks which became known as the " Six Men of U and Tsang " came to Central Tibet and inaugurated the revival of the Buddhist

Doctrine. From date onwards the position occupied by Buddhism remained unchallenged. But Buddhism was not able to preserve its purity and soon fell under the influence of heterogeneous influences. The famous letter of Lha lama (Royal monk) Chang-chup-o is a remarkable expression of an outcry against the abuses of all sorts of religious practitioners who appeared in Tibet, and under the cloak of religion exploited the credulity of the people. " Those who offer flesh, blood and urine to the Three Jewels are to be pitied for they are sure to be reborn among impure demons. If by such practices one is able to attain ^{the} Buddhahood, then the hunter, fisherman and the butcher would also be able to attain Enlightenment. Village exercists, forsake your claim of being followers of the Great Vehicle (Mahayana), and follow the pure Doctrine expounded in the Tripitaka! " The kings of Guge whose family ties with Nepal and India were strong, became patrons of Buddhism and sent batches of young Tibetans to India. One of them, Rinchen-sangpo (958-1055) became a prominent translator of Vajrayanic texts into Tibetan. In order to restore to Buddhism its purity, the Guge king sent emissaries in 1042 A.D. to invite Dipankara Srijnana or Atisha, a famous scholar of the Vikramashila vihara in Bihar. The coming of Atisha gave a powerful impulse to Buddhist influence. He laboured at the monasteries of Tholing in Guge, Samye and Nyethang, and died in 1054 A.D. at the last named place. The movement started by him became known as the Kadampas, or " followers of the Doctrine ". Atisha's work was continued by his disciple Dromton. The Kadampas became the forerunners of the Gelukpas. The period that followed Atisha's coming was characterized by the development of Buddhist sects and the growing power of important monasteries. The eclipse of the ancient Ben and the shift of power to large monasteries, forced the landed gentry to adopt new tactics in the struggle for power. We now see prominent feudal families allying themselves with important monasteries and supporting rival sects. In 1076 A.D. the revivalist movement culminated in a great Religious Council held at the monastery

of Tholing in the Upper Suttlej valley. A number of prominent teachers appeared in the course of the XII-th century. Foremost among them were Marpa Lotsawa (1012-1097), the founder of the important sect of the Kagyupas, and his disciple Milarepa (1040-1123), the St. Francis of Tibet and one of the most attaching figures of Tibetan religious history. In 1073 A.D. Khen Konchok-gyepo founded the important Sakya monastery, the seat of the powerful sect which exercised great political power in the Mongol period. The Kagyupas split into a number of sub-sects, such as the Karmapas, the Dikungpas, and the Taklungpas, some of them destined to play an important role in the history of the country. It has been an established tradition of Tibetan history to seek alliances with growing nomad empires in Central Asia. Such was the case with the Mongols in XIII-th century, the West Mongols in the XVII-th and the Manchus in the XVII-XVIII-th centuries. After the Mongol raids on the Tangut kingdom situated to the north-east of Tibet in 1205, 1207 and 1209, the Tibetan nobility became conscious of the new rising power in the steppe belt of Central Asia, and held a council which decided to send envoys to the Mongol court. In 1239 A.D. the Mongols sent a reconnoitering detachment under Derda to Tibet. The Mongols discovered that the political scene was dominated by rival sects struggling for power. Their choice fell on the Sakyapas. In 1247 A.D. the head of the sect the Sakya-panchen (mahapandita) proceeded to the headquarters of prince Godan, son of the great Khan Ugedai, and Mongol commander in the Sino-Tibetan borderland. He was preceded by his nephew Phagspa. Khubilai Khan bestowed on the latter the title of Imperial Preceptor and made him the Spiritual and Secular head of Tibet. In the civil administration of the country the Sakya hierarch was assisted by a penchen, or Great Official. This was the beginning of the special Patron-Chaplain (che-yen) relationship, a formula evolved to describe the feudal link established between the Mongol Imperial throne and the Spiritual Head of the Tibetan State, and which was again revived in the XVII-th century to last to the end of the Ch'ing dynasty. The government of Tibet was effected through a special

department called Hsuan-chen-yuan, headed by the Imperial Preceptor. The constant civil wars between sects strengthened the Mongol hold over Tibet. The Sakyapa power came to an end in 1359 A.D.. The middle of the XIV-th century witnessed the reassertion of the secular feudal power in Tibet. In 1349 A.D. Changchup-gyetshen of the powerful Phagmetru family, seized power in U and in 1354 made himself master of Tsang. The downfall of the Mongol dynasty in 1368 A.D. resulted in the strengthening of the secular power in the land. The Ming emperors (1368-1644) tried to follow the example of the Yuan dynasty, but failed to exercise effective control. The XIV and the XV centuries saw the rise of a new reformist sect that Gelukpas which continued the tradition of the Kadampas. Its founder was the great Tsongkhapa (1357-1419). A number of important monasteries were established in the early XV-th century which became the seats of the Gelukpa power. In 1409 Tsongkhapa himself founded the monastery of Ganden. In 1416 his disciple Jamyang-choje established the great monastery of Drepung near Lhasa, and in 1419 Chanchen-choje founded the monastery of Sera. In 1447 Genduntup founded the great monastery of Tashi-lhunpo, the future seat of the Panchen Lamas. This Genduntup is considered to have been the first hierarch in the line of the Dalai Lamas who originally were abbots of the Drepung monastery with their seat at the palace of Ganden. In the XV-th century the power of the Phagmetru family began to decline. In 1435 another feudal family, the Rinpungs captured the fort of Samtuptse (future Shigatse) and gradually established their power throughout the whole of the Tsang province. In 1565 one of their ministers rebelled and after conquering the Tsang province began the line of the so-called Tsangpa kings. Both Rinpung and Tsangpa patronized the Karmapas, and the Gelukpas suffered a temporary eclipse. Between 1498 and 1518 A.D. the Gelukpas were even excluded from participating in the Great Prayer or Monlam-champe held during the New Year festivities in Lhasa. No doubt this situation and the rise of the Karmapa power in Tsang prompted the abbots of the Drepung monastery to look for a patron, or

yonda (dānapati). As before in the Mongol epoch, the leaders of Tibet were ever ready to establish political alliances with the nomad power in the North. In 1577 Altan-khan of the Tumed Mongols who was in the region of the Kuku-nur, invited ~~Senam-jyantshe~~ (the third in the line of the Dalai Lamas) to his camp. Senam-jyantshe succeeded in establishing and political and religious alliance with the Mongol king. The place of their meeting in 1578 was consecrated by the building of a temple, and titles and presents were exchanged. Altan-khan bestowed on Senam-jyantshe the title of Vajradhara Dalai Lama, or " Vajradhara, the Great Lama " (Dalai in Mongol means " great, wide expanse, ocean ". The word is often found in royal titles, ex. Dalai-khan, the great khan), and the latter bestowed on the Mongol khan the title of dharmaraja. Emperor Wan-li of the Ming dynasty hastened to recognize the preeminence of the Tibetan hierarch who thus gained the support of powerful forces and was able to assert the authority of his sect. The next Dalai Lama (the fourth) came from the family of Altan-khan, a fact which shows the value placed by the sect on its ~~alliances~~ with the powerful Mongol clans. The Gelukpas were fortunate in producing a truly great leader in the person of the Fifth Dalai Lama Losang-jyantshe (1617-1682) who left a strong imprint on the spiritual and secular affairs of the country. The Great Fifth, as he is called by Tibetans, was ably supported by the Regent Sanggye-jyantshe. Their immediate political aim was the removal of the Tsangpa kings. In this they followed the example of the third Dalai Lama and addressed themselves to Gushi-khan, chief of the Khoshut Mongols who in 1641 A.D. invaded Tibet and defeated the Tsangpa king. The rise of the Manchu power was duly noted by the Tibetan leaders and the Fifth Dalai Lama sent in 1642 and 1644 greetings to the first two emperors of the Ch'ing dynasty. In 1642 they took a further step in this direction, and the Dalai Lama went personally to the Imperial

court where he was treated as an independent ruler. In his fight against the Tsangpa king the Fifth Dalai Lama allied himself with the influential abbot of the Tashi-lhunpo monastery Lesang Chekyi-gyeltshen who had been his Preceptor and who recognized as the first Panchen Lama of Tashi-lhunpo, a monastery which was destined to rival in importance those of Lhasa. In 1682 the Great Fifth died. His successor had a troubled career. In 1705 Lha-tsang Khan, the Khoshut chief, deposed him and attempted to put on the throne a candidate of his own choice. The Dalai Lama was accused of misconduct, but the main reason seems to have been political - the anti-Manchu activities of the Regent Sanggye-jyantshe who had established a close alliance with Gandan-bashektu, the West Mongol chief, and conspired with the latter to check the victorious advance of the Manchus into Eastern Mongolia. The young sixth Dalai Lama was taken to China, and according to one version died en route, according to another version escaped and spent the rest of his life as a pilgrim wandering throughout Eastern Tibet and even visiting Northern India. According to this second version he died in Alashan in Southern Mongolia where his body is preserved in a stupa in the Barun-khit monastery in the Alashan mountains. The sixth Dalai Lama is credited to have been the author of a collection of popular songs, but his authorship is still disputed. The disappearance of the sixth Dalai Lama caused considerable unrest, and various political groups attempted to place their own candidates on the pontifical throne in the Potala. The Western Mongols intervened in 1717, and sent an army to Tibet. Emperor K'ang-hsi was forced to despatch relief troops in 1717, but the troops were defeated near Nantshe. In 1718/20 the Manchus made a big effort to reestablish their influence in the Land of Snows, and large forces were sent from Kuku-nur and Szechuan. In 1720 a new Dalai Lama Kesang-jyantshe was proclaimed (the sixth according to the Manchus, the seventh

according to the Tibetans). The end of the XVIII-th century saw the appearance of a great personality in the person of the third Panchen Lama Palden Yeshe (1740-1780), a learned scholar who in 1780 journeyed to Peking where he died of smallpox. A brother of the Panchen Lama conspired with the Gurkhas and instigated the invasion of 1788. in 1791 the Gurkhas sacked Tashi-lhunpo. Emperor Ch'ien-lung despatched an army under Fu-kang-an who drove the invaders away and even crossed the Himalayas into the valley of Kathmandu. The thirteenth incarnation, Thupten-jyantshe, was no doubt one of the ablest in the line of Dalai Lamas, and is often likened to the Great Fifth. A forceful personality, he left a considerable imprint on his country. The new incarnation, Tendzin-jyantshe, was discovered in Ando and enthroned in 1940. On the 7th November, 1950 the young Dalai Lama assumed the spiritual and secular powers incumbent in his high office. The powerful support given by the Manchus to the Yellow Sect enabled the sect to gain an almost absolute control over the country. Many monasteries belonging to other sects were taken over by the Gelukpas. We have seen that this supremacy was not achieved without struggle, and in more recent times the Old Believers' sect, or nyingsha became again popular in Tsang and Kham. The Gelukpas reacted to this challenge. At the end of the XVIII-th century a reformatioanal movement appeared in the midst of the Yellow Hat sect. The founder of the new movement which claimed to uphold an orthodox interpretation of Tsongkhapa's teaching was a learned monk Serkhangpa Losang-tendzin. He called the sect " the Hermit sect ", or Ritredpa. In the second half of the XIX-th century the sect produced an outstanding teacher and preacher Shamarpa Gendun-tendzin-jyantshe who founded the Ditsha-gempa in Ando and whose influence is still felt throughout Tibet. The appearance of reformatioanal movements is a sign that Buddhism in Tibet is still a living force zealously guarding its precious heritage of Indian thought and culture.