

TIBET

Development of Buddhism in Tibet

Tibet, the highest plateau, lies on the northern frontiers of India. Tibet is often called the Roof of the World. Because of its geographical location, and the dangerous passages across the Himalayas, Tibet had hardly any contact with the outside world till at least the seventh century AD. The early Tibetans followed the most primitive religion, known as Bon or Bon Chos. In essence, the Bon Religion was dominated by the demons and devils.

Buddhism reached Tibet in the Seventh Century AD during the reign of Srongtsan Gampo, who not satisfied with the small kingdom founded by his father, thought of establishing a great and enduring empire.

The most important even in Tibetan Buddhist history was the arrival of the great tantric mystic Padmasambhava in Tibet in 774 at the invitation of King Trisong Detsen. It was Padmasambhava (more commonly known in the region as Guru Rinpoche) who merged tantric Buddhism with the local Bon religion to form what we now recognise as Tibetan Buddhism. In addition to writing a number of important scriptures, Padmasambhava established the Nyingma School from which all schools of Tibetan Buddhism are derived.

Tibetan Buddhism exerted a strong influence from the 11th century AD among the peoples of Central Asia, especially in Mongolia and Manchuria. It was adopted as an official state religion by the Mongol Yuan dynasty and the Manchu Qing dynasty of China.

The Dhamma propagation work undertaken by Acharya Santrakshita and Padmasambhava, under the patronage of the Tibetan King, Thi-Srong-Detsan, gave a lot of impetus to Buddhism in Tibetan. This healthy trend was, however, slowed down later, though it did pick up a little during the reign of Detsan's grandson, Ral-pa-chen. Unfortunately, Ral-pa-chen was assassinated by his brother, Langdarma, who usurped the throne. Langdarma turned out to be a great enemy of Buddhism. Thus, Langdarma's cruel rule was short-lived, only three years (899-902). While dying, he is reported to have said, "Oh why was I not killed three years ago to save from committing so much sin, or three years hence, that I might have uprooted Buddhism out of the land. The King Khor-Re of the Guge

kingdom in western Tibet, who after became a Buddhist monk and adopted the name of Ye-She-Od (Prajna Prabha). he did his best to rehabilitate Buddhism in Tibet. He sent 21 students for religious studies in India. Only two of them survived the malaria fever, and vagaries of travel, and hot wether of India. The surviving two, Richen-bzang-po (Ratnabhadra) and Legspathi Sesrab, after their studies in Kashmir came to the Vikramasila Monatry in Ancient Magadh where they bearded of the fame of the greatest Buddhist savant of that time, Srijnana Dipankara, the head of the Vikarmasila Monastery. The Tibet king persisted and sent two more missions to bring the great Indian teacher to Tibet.

In 14th century, four major divisions of Tibetan Buddhism had come to be established. Besides the Nyingmapa (the old one), founded by Guru Padmasambhava, other sects where the Kadampa, Kargypa, and Sakyapa. All these sects, which because of the colour of the cap of the Lamas came to be known as 'Red Hat Sects' led to a lot of confusion in the minds of the people, and even degeneration of Buddhism in Tibet.

At such a critical juncture was born Tsongkha-pa(1357-1419) who turned out to be a great teacher, preacher and reformer” of Tibetan Buddhism. he was born in the village of Tson-kha in the province of Amdo in Northern Tibet. At age of seven he became a novice, and studies there till the age of fifteen. Then he came to central Tibet in 1372 in search better teachers. Tsong-Kha-pa had extra ordinary talent. By the age nineteen, he had completed study of Buddhist Philosophy and Vinaya. Tsong-Kha-pa set himself to teaching them the principles of religion and philosophy. Soon many existing monasteries joined the Gelugpa sect founded by him. In 1396, he established the University of Gnl. In 1405, he constructed an assembly hall at Lhasa as well as a monastery at Dgah-Idan (Ganden), a place little far off Lhasa. The great monastery of e-ping, Dhanyakataka, was establsihed by his disciple Jamdyans (1378-1444) in 1416. then, Sakya-ye-ses, his another disciple founded the great monastery of Sera in 1419. Same year, Tsong-kha-pa died at Ganden.

Buddhism did not root in Tibet all at once. Since scriptures wre introduce by different scholars-both Indian and Tibetan at different times, different groups grew into separate organizations, all having the same basic tents. Nyingma, Kagyud, Sakya and Gelug are the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Nyingma was founded by Padma Sambhava,

Kagyud by Marpa, Sakya by Anand Garbha and Gelug by Tsong-Kha-pa. Each of them adheres to all the teachings of the Theravada and Mahayana including Tantrayana. It is prominent aspect of Tibetan Buddhism not to differentiate between greater and smaller vehicles, but to treat them on par.

The origin and development of the four major divisions of Tibetan Buddhism has been described by His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama as follows.

‘In the Buddhadharma (or Buddhism), we have different divisions or classifications for example, in terms of way of life or practice, in terms of dealing with quality of the mind. One could also say one finds different divisions, for examples, that between Mahayana and Hinayana. likewise one finds various other vehicles or yantras; for example, those of the Sravaka or Hearer, the Pratyeka or Solitary Realizer, and the Bodhisattvayana (or Bodhisttava Vehicle). The philosophical systems such as Cittamatra, Madhyamika and so on all originated in India. Now one also has different spiritual so lines in Tibet; for example, the Nyingmapa, Kagyupa, Sakyapa and Gelukpa. They did not arise in India but gradually took form in Tibet as a result of growth in different places and different time or of different teachers coming at various times to preach in Tibet.

The Tibetan Buddhism is often called ‘Lamaism’.. The reason for this being the preponderance of the Lamas in Tibet till 1959 when the Chinese Communists super-imposed their authority over Tibet, the citadel of Lamas for over 1200 years. In Tibet, there is also a tradition of re-incarnated lamas. The re-incarnated lamas are known as Tulku lamas. The senior Tulku lamas are addressed as ‘Rimpoche’, or “The Precious One”. Sometimes, the chief abbots of monasteries or pious and learned lamas are also called ‘Rimpoche’ by way of courtesy.”

The institution of Dalai Lama is of great spiritual significance in Tibetan Buddhism. the Tibetans believe that the Dalai Lama is the divine embodiment(nirmanakaya) of Bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezi), the Lord of Compassion, who undertakes rebirths for the spiritual upliftment and well-being of fellow creatures. The first four Dalai Lama were only spiritual leaders. They did not exercise any secular power. Then came a turning point.

In 1618, the army ruler of Tsang (Central Tibet) massacred a large number of Gelukpa monks of Deeping Monastery while they were celebrating the new year festival. The fifth Dalai Lama thus became the first supreme spiritual and temporal head of Tibet.

Traditionally Tibetan Buddhism requires taking four refuge : the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sanga and the Guru. in Vajrayana, the Guru is the embodiment of all Three Jewels, it is very important to follow the Guru's instructions as the guidance in one's spiritual path.

Tibetan Buddhism is a Mahayana Buddhist tradition, meaning that the goal of all practice is to chive enlightenment (Buddhahood) in order to help all other sentient beings attain this state, as opposed to mere personal liberation. The motivation for Mahayana practice is Bodhicitta, the altruistic intention to become enlightened for sake of all sentient beings.