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Historical Account of the Introduction of Buddhism among the Monpas and Sherdukpens

By

N. Sarkar,

Asstt. Director of Research (Culture),
Arunachal Pradesh,
Shillong.

Synopsis

Indian civilization, as acknowledged the world over, is a multifaceted splendour. Buddhism is one of these facets. It was from this facet of Indian civilization that the Tibetans, like many others, got the lamp of their own civilization kindled. In this great endeavour, they earnestly sought and generously received the help of the Indian masters from the seventh to the eleventh centuries in establishing as well as sustaining the message of Buddhism in Tibet, which is, in fact, the matrix of Tibetan civilization.

The legends of the Monpas and Sherdukpens, two tribal communities of the westernmost district of Kameng in Arunachal Pradesh, claim that the message of Buddhism was brought into their locality in the eighth century by their compatriot named Padmasambhava, the same Indian monk from the Nalanda monastic University, who helped the Tibetans in establishing Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century. This lead by Padmasambhava was followed by various Tibetan masters who helped the local people to establish Buddhism in this remote corner of India while the light of Buddhism became dim in the heart-land of the very land of its origin. It gained a sizeable following in the Tawang area, then known as Tsoksum, by at least the twelfth century as shown in this paper. The same joint endeavour, but this time between the Tibetan masters and the Indians, re-established and sustained the light of Buddhism in this part of the land of its origin.

In this paper, the history of the advent of Buddhism and its spread among these two tribes is detailed by relating the local traditions to the known history of Buddhism.

hills from the plains. Greater mobility and more frequent and closer contacts are widening the horizon and spheres of activity of the common villagers. Inducted labour, and welfare organizations operating in the interior have demolished the psychological walls that used to keep groups apart. Modern medicine is a successful rival of the traditional medicine-man. Along with the idea of growing more food to eat more, the idea of cash crops for more money and so for better living is growing space. With money as the objective the pattern of occupation is also no longer the same as before. Employment in services unknown before is a common feature and a new salaried class has already come into being. With growing business, urban dwellers are increasing. Marriage customs and rites are undergoing rapid changes. Boys and girls have started rebelling against social customs which do not fit in with their new ideas. Change has also invaded the social structure and function. For instance, modern education and the knowledge of the status of woman in other societies have generated a tendency to discard polygamy and child marriage. New agricultural methods are forcing women more and more out of productive activities. Educated sons and daughters are assuming greater authority in domestic life at the expense of the elders. The dormitories and disappearing and with them organized labour corps of the village communities. With them away in schools and farm fields and community undertakings, village councils are losing their effectiveness: They are becoming deliberative bodies without means of execution. Thus, the concept of self-contained villages is no longer tenable. New industries are coming up as whole time professions while old universal skills in some crafts are vanishing. Leadership is shifting from seniors well versed in tribal law to juniors with modern education. Traditional acquisitions are losing their value whereas modern gadgets are growing in popularity. Indigenous dresses and food habits have already largely disappeared among the educated and those in contact with the townships. Traditional patterns are losing their significance and importance. House styles are changing to include modern amenities and to secure individual privacy of family members. Money is already a force both in the social and economic sphere.

All these and others are introducing social changes which affect the people directly in their personal life and have to be solved by themselves. As yet there is no sign of coordinated efforts for social adjustments and reforms but cases of individual revolts against traditional laws and customs are considerable in number. In most cases these are overlooked or accepted with silent disapproval.

With the modern outlook introduced by various agencies, the complacency of ecological balance has disappeared yielding place to a painful consciousness of deficiency and insufficiency. This in its turn has created a powerful urge to bridge in one jump what took others centuries to trudge to the advanced level which they have reached. A dynamism has set in after a pause of centuries at one level of culture, a phenomenon which is common to the tribal societies of today. In Arunachal the static period was one of aloofness and the dynamic period which has followed it is characterized by a movement from localism towards nationalism and from seclusion to communion. This change is shaking off the dust and rust of ages for a bright and efficient future. The people of Arunachal are adding a chapter of advance in the cultural history of India.

The Monpas and Sherdukpens, two tribes inhabiting the Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, are Buddhists. Their religion is essentially and in its details that of the Mahayana School of Buddhism which was transplanted from India to Tibet by Indian Buddhist monks between the seventh and eleventh centuries A. D. In this paper, the history of the advent of Buddhism and its spread among these two tribes is detailed by relating the local traditions to the known history of Buddhism.

Before the advent of Buddhism, the Monpas and Sherdukpens, who inhabit the Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh, believed in the existence of numerous spirits all around them. These were held to personify the powers and forces of their wild highland landscape and were responsible for all the calamities threatening their welfare. So they propitiated these spirits by performing rites in which the sacrifice of animals formed an important part. Buddhism stopped these rites.

Three Buddhist sects¹—Nyingmapa, Kargyupa and Gelugpa—operated here. Only one of the sub-sects of the Kargyupa, called the Karmapa, came into this region. Among all these sects the Gelugpa was the last to come. With the establishment of the Tawang monastery this sect gradually but steadily gained supremacy and the other sects lost their hold. The Karmapa completely disappeared, only the Nyingmapa lingers and that too mostly among the village priests.

The lamas and the laity firmly believe that the Lupon Rimpoche visited the Monpa as well as Sherdukpen areas and planted the germ of Buddhism there. There are places hallowed by his visit. (Lupon Rimpoche is the local name of the famous Indian monk Padmasambhava who arrived in Tibet in 747 A. D. in response to an invitation of the Tibetan King, Thisrong Detsen and finally established Buddhism there. These legends, therefore, place the visit of the great Indian preacher, if not the advent of Buddhism itself, in the eighth century).

There are seven such places in the Monpa area. One is in Pangchen area, the north-western part of the district. The Great Master is said to have visited Taktsang and passed some time there in meditation. The walls of the cave of his retreat are adorned with stone images. These images are believed to have been divinely created and not made by man. There are marks on the floor which are said to be foot-prints of the Master and of his horse as well as holes where he planted his staff. A tiger is said to have accompanied him. That is why this place came to be called Taktsang [tak — tiger; tsang — place]. A temple was later constructed at this site and it is known as the Taktsang Gonpa [gonpa — temple or monastery].

¹ During the development of Buddhism in Tibet, four sects arose with the passage of time. The one, which played no part here, is the Sakyapa. The Sakyapa, Kargyupa and Nyingmapa gave rise to various sub-sects under them.

Kamtzang

subsect
of
Name of
Lama
or
Karma
Kargyupa

Sagrong

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Zag Tsang

The second site is known as Jiktsang [*jik*—leopard; *tsang*—place] as the Great Master was attended by a leopard here. This place is two days' march to the east of Tawang. There also is a temple called Sarong Gonpa. The Master had rested there on a rock with holy scriptures in front. When he got up, he pressed his hands on the rock. And still there are impressions said to be those of his hands and back and of books on the rock as if hollowed out in sand.

The third place hallowed by his visit is Baggajang. To reach it one has to walk two days to the south-east of Tawang. There is a lake there, in which may be seen sometimes reflections as of burning lamps. There too are signs of his visit, but the details could not be gathered. It has also the usual temple built much later and called Baggajang Gonpa. A monk from the Tawang monastery comes every summer to too conduct services in it. Snowfall is too heavy in winter for him to stay there permanent y.

The fourth site is Kimne, on a hill near the village of Jang, a day's march to the east of Tawang. The Master stayed here to meditate. Rang-ch'ung Dorje [1109—1192]¹, founder of the *Karmapa sub-sect*, visited this site later and built the temple here. The Kimne Gonpa is now under the charge of the Gelugpa. He is 3rd Karmapa 1284-1339.

Terma Bumgan in the village of Poidar, about four miles south of Tawang, is the fifth place. The Master has left his foot-prints and impressions of his hat, hands and skull-bowl on the rock. A temple, Terma Bumgan Gonpa, as usual commemorates the sacred site.

The sixth site, Bigha, about two miles south of Tawang also claims similar holy marks of his feet, hands, knees, hat, staff and skull-bowl imprinted on rock. Impressions like those of a horse's hoofs may also be seen. A narrow tunnel through a hill is believed to have been cut by the Master. The temple here is called the Bigha Gonpa.

The seventh site, Komefuk, is on the right bank of the Tawangchu river and about seven miles south of Tawang. There is a big cave which is not readily visible from outside. The opening is so small and narrow that one has to crawl to enter. It was another retreat of meditation of the Master. It is said that once as he sat in meditation, a large serpent crawled into the cave. The Master to avoid it lifted himself up as he sat. His head struck the roof of the cave and cut a hole in it. It is the only opening through which a faint light enters the cave. The Master killed the snake. An impression like that of the track of the snake is still there on the floor of the cave. There are also impressions on the rock where the Master is said to have sat.

¹ L.A. Waddel, *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism* [Cambridge, 1969], page-67].

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1110-1193

The Sherdukpens cherish nine places hallowed by association with the Master. One is Jambring about two miles to the east of the village of Rupa. A rock, on which he sat for some time bears the impress of his body. As he rested on it, it is said, a few men of the neighboring Aka community came and offered him some flour of the pith of *nik* [a species of palm]. Before partaking of it, he dropped a little on the ground as an offering to the divinities. It fell on a rock on the opposite bank of the stream that flowed by and grew into a thick clump of *nik* plants.

Another is Khang Gisih, about three miles to the east of Rupa. There is a big stone on which, it is said a smaller one once lay. This is no longer there. The stone is said to have looked like a Sherdukpen shoe and legend says that it was actually the petrified shoe of the Master.

Flujima, about one mile to the west of Rupa, prides itself on a rock with the pug-marks of a dog and imprints of a shod foot on it. Here the Master came with a dog.

Machulu about three miles to the west of Rupa, also holds the foot-prints of the Master and the pug-marks of his dog besides a hole in which he planted the stave of his bow.

In Chupit, about three miles from Rupa and near the foot-track between Rupa and the village of Jigaon, there is an impress of a hand on a rock about six feet above the ground. It is believed that the Master pressed that rock with his hand when passing that way.

In Jakhung, in the foothills on the boundary with Assam, there used to be a stone shaped like a Sherdukpen shoe. This, too as in Khang Gisih, is believed to have been the Master's. It is also missing now.

Pemaloso is in the foothills at the place where the stream Dojibuti flows out from the hills to meet the Gavrung river in the plains. There is a lotus carved on stone on a small hill. It is said to have appeared miraculously when the Master came there.

The Master passed some time at Urgyanpemagom in meditation. This spot is at Chaksung, about half a mile from Rupa towards Jigaon.

About three miles to the south of Rupa, there is a place called Shra-ha-noma meaning wild goat-blood-line. Here an evil spirit opposed the Master in the form of a wild goat [*shra*] as he was passing that way. The Master hit him on the head with a pellet from his sling and the blood [*ha*] flowed from the wound in a line [*noma*].

In the context of these legends about the visit of Padmasambhava, it is of special interest to learn that he had among his five earthly Dakinis ¹ or spiritual consorts '.....a woman from the Himalayan district [Mon] named 'Kra-shis khye-dren.....', ². This name in Monpa is pronounced Tashi Khyeden. This fact that the master had a woman of the Mon ³ area as one of his five Dakinis, lends credibility to the legendary visit of the Master to the Monpa and Sherdukpen areas.

The historicity of these legends is difficult to assess. But they at least indicate that the Nyingmapa preceded the Karmapa and Gelugpa in this region. Tradition also has it that it was the *Lupon Rimpoche* who predicted the construction of the three earliest Buddhist temples here. As if to fulfil it, a Nyingmapa monk from Tibet *Urgyan Sangpo* by name, came to Tawang and built the three Nyingmapa temples of Urganling, Sangeling and (Tsorgeling). Nobody has any idea when that was. But it was before the establishment of the Karmapa temple of Kimne in the twelfth century. It is also possible to deduce by linking a chain of events that these temples, particularly the Urganling Gonpa, were already there by the middle of the twelfth century. According to the history of Tibet, Tsangyang Gyatso [1683-1706], the sixth Dalai Lama, was born in an area south of Tibet. My investigation at Tawang revealed that he was born as the son of a Nyingmapa Lama in his house adjoining the Urganling Gonpa. The Lama was Tashi Ten—dzin and his wife was Tsewang Lhamo of the nearby hamlet of Berkhar. Hoffmann, in his account of the discovery of the sixth Dalai Lama states '... the new Dalai Lama was discovered in the bosom of a family traditionally attached to the beliefs of the Red sect. This was the house of Padma gling-pa, the rNying-ma 'treasure-finder'...'. ⁴. In addition to this, we also know that in most of the rNyingmapa religious establishments, the succession is by heredity from father to son. This is the rule in this region also with the sole exception of the Thechpu or Khingiangme Gonpa, where the succession is by a series of incarnations of Thechpu Rimpoche, the founder of this temple. So this makes it plausible that Tashi Ten-dzin was a descendant of Padma gling-pa and the latter of Urgyan Sangyo, founder of the temples of Urganling, Sangeling and Tsorgeling. Hoffmann in a foot-note to the above quotation from his

¹ Helmut Hoffmann in *The Religions of Tibet* [London, 1961], pp.53—54, states '..... The Dakinis are initiation goddesses transmitting the teachings of transcendent knowledge or the magic lessons of the Tantras'. In their human form they are called yoginis, who act as the feminine partners of the yogins.

² Helmut Hoffman, op. cit., pp.55—56.

³ '..... a whole zone of different peoples in the south assigned by Tibetans the blanket term *Mon*, who are to be regarded as aboriginal in some areas.....' [G.Tucci, *Tibet: Land of Snows*, trans. by J.E. Stapleton Driver [Calcutta, 1967], p. 20.

⁴ Helmut Hoffmann, op. cit., p. 178.

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book states about Padma gling-pa that 'this probably refers to that O-rgyan Padma gling-pa who according to Tucci in his *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, p. 259, was born in 1490'. But he must have been born earlier, because Padma gling-pa was one of the discoverers of the *terma*¹ or hidden gospels of Guru Padmasamebhava and the revelation of Padma gling-pa is the code of demoniacal worship of the Lho-brag-lha-lun-pa sub-sect of Nyingmapa and Di-kung-pa and Dug-pa sub-sects of Kargyupa. Waddell, at page 69 of his book² on the chapter on sects, mentions that the Di-kung-pa arose around 1177 A. D. adopting the *terma*, discovered by Padma gling-pa as their code of demoniacal worship. So the birth of Padma gling-pa and the construction of these three temples inherited by him, must have been earlier than 1177 A. D. The Urgyanling Gonpa is situated about one mile to the south of the Tawang township. The Sangeling and Tsorgeling Gonpas are about half a mile to the west and about two miles to the south-west of the Urgyanling Gonpa respectively.

A Mongol King, locally known as Sokpo Jomkhar, later came from the north and destroyed these three Nyingmapa temples. He is said to have destroyed many Nyingmapa establishments in Tibet also. The Gelugpa here believe him to be an embodiment of the deity, Damchir Choige. He took birth on this earth to destroy Nyingmapa establishments as the Nyingmapa had strayed from the right path of the Lopon Rimpoche and preached and practised a wrong faith. His mission was to re-establish the true religion of the Buddha. The Mongol prince, Gusri Khan, invaded Tibet in 1640 at the request of the fifth Dalai Lama, Nag-wang Lobsang Gyatso, and established the supremacy of the Gelugpa over the other sects there. This Mongol invasion reached areas beyond the southern borders of Tibet and we find that '..... Bhutan also was attacked by a Mongol-Tibetan combination With the avowed object of the invasion as stated above, it was only natural for Gusri Khan to help the Gelugpa in this region meet the combined threat of the Nyingmapa and the Dukpa and Karmapa sub-sects of the Kargyupa referred later at page 33. This Mongol invasion affected Tawang also. The Monpas refer to the Mongols as Sokpo, and Jomkhar was probably Gusri Khan himself or one of his commanders. The Nyingmapa rebuilt the Urgyanling and Sangeling Gonpas afterwards. After the birth of the sixth

¹ The *terma* treatises are codes of demoniacal worship, believed to have been written by Guru Padmasambhava and hidden away by him in caves and elsewhere for posterity. About thirty of these revelations have been discovered by several Nyingmapa lamas and many of the sub-sects arose adopting one or the other of these as the code of demoniacal worship.

² L.A. Waddell, op. cit.

³ Sir Charles Bell, *The Religion of Tibet* [Oxford Univ. Press, London 1968], p. 125.

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Dalai Lama at the Urgyanling Gonpa, the Gelugpa took it over. The Tsorgeling Gonpa is still in ruins as the Mongols left it.

Information on the Gelugpa is copious enough for a historical account of its advent and spread. It starts with Thang-ston Gyalpo, a Gelugpa monk from Tibet. He lived from 1385 to 1462¹. He was a fellow-disciple and associate of the first Dalai Lama, Gedun-drub [1391-1474] A. D. According to Waddell, 'One of the popular saints is the famous engineer, T'an-ton rGyal-po, whose image or picture is often found in Lamaist temples. He lived in the first half of the fifteenth century A. D., and is celebrated for having built eight iron-chain suspension-bridges over the great river of Central Tibet, the Yaru Tsan-po; and several of these bridges still survive.'² He came to a place called Chankhargor near the village of Kraling about seven miles to the south-east of Tawang and meditated in a cave there. Here also he constructed an iron-chain suspension-bridge called Chaksam bridge over the Tawang-chu river connecting the Mukto circle with the Kitpi area of Tawang, and this bridge still survives. There is a Monpa hamlet called Berkhar near Kraling. Berkhar Targe was a householder of this hamlet. Thang-ston Gyalpo gave his begging-bowl, full of liquor, to Berkhar Targe and told him that if he kept it carefully, seven intelligent and valiant sons would be born to him. Berkhar Targe had seven sons born to him and as they were intelligent and valiant, his household became popularly known as Poudun [*Pou*- intelligent and valiant; *dun*-seven] or the household having seven intelligent and valiant sons.³ His second and the seventh sons went to the Tashilhunpo monastery in Tibet for religious training. Their family-names are not remembered by local people, but the names they were given when they were ordained were Tanpei Dronme and Lopsang Khechun for the second and seventh brothers respectively. They had their training under Changton Hrolpei Dorje, a disciple of the first Dalai Lama.

Tanpei Dronme went to the Sera monastery for training, after which he met the second Dalai Lama and it was he who shaved his head, ordained him as the *gelong* or monk and gave him his monk-name of Tanpei Dronme. Tanpei Dronme again went to the Sera monastery for training in the *mDo* or Sutra section of Kanjur and Tanjur scriptures.⁴ He then went to Gi-drachang monastery at Lhasa for training in the *ngakpa* or mode of rituals. The second Dalai Lama asked him to take his fellow-

¹ D. Snellgrove and H. Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet* [London, 1968], p. 42.

² L. A. Waddell, op. cit. p 385.

³ This famed house is still there. It is a two-storied building of local architecture. Shri Tashi Khandu of this illustrious family is the present owner.

⁴ The scriptures are classified into two groups, Kanjur and Tanjur. The Kanjur is the canon containing the translation of the Buddha's precepts and the Tanjur contains the commentaries.

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Dra Tsang

disciple and brother, Lopsang Khechun, with him and proceed to Lho-Mon [*Lho*-south; *Mon* -lowland] or the lower country in the south inhabited by the Monpas, built temples and monasteries and establish the Gelugpa sect there. After that he was to go to Assam to meet and establish friendly relations with the king of Assam.

They came back to the Monpa area and built the small Brakar Gonpa, about two miles to north of the village of Hlau. This village is about eight miles to the east of Tawang on the Tawang-Bomdi La road. Tanpei Dronme wanted to build a bigger temple on an auspicious site there. He filled a *torchap*, a metallic plate used in rituals, with water; offered prayer to the divinities to help him to find an auspicious site and threw up the *torchap* in the air. It fell about half a mile away towards the village of Hlau at a place called Ariakdun. The *torchap* still held the water and it was a good omen. The temple that he built there is the Ariakdun Gonpa. It was bigger than the Brakar Gonpa. The people of Hlau began to avail themselves of his sacred services as well as to make regular contributions for the rituals and the maintenance of the temples. He then had another temple, the Langaten Gonpa, raised at a place about four miles to the east of Tawang. The surrounding villages of Berkhar, Samkhar, Shernup, Grangkhar, Khordung, Lhargang and Kibang paid regular *drufui* or contributions for its maintenance. Two more temples, Sanglamphe and Tadung Gompas, about two miles east of Tawang are attributed to him. The villages of Bomba and Bumteng bore the cost of maintaining them. In the same way came up the Taidung Gonpa near Thongleng, and Surchung Gonpa near Lumla on the *drufui* from these two villages. Tanpei Dronme's next temple was Tashi Tselling Gonpa at Sakteng in Bhutan. He visited many places in Bhutan and during this period he is said to have been blessed with a divine visit by the goddess, Pal-dan Lhamo.¹ She told him the places he should visit and the track he should follow on his way to Assam. The Talung Gonpa at the Monpa village of Sanglem in the south-western part of Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh was built by him during this journey. From there he went to Assam and met the King. The king received him cordially, promised him all help and donated him land in the plains of Odalguri and Amratola areas. Tanpei Dronme again went to Bhutan and continued building activities—the Dungsham Gonpa at Dungsham and the Gah-Idan Tseling Gonpa in the village of Mera are two of his last. He died at the age of 99 years in the Gah-Idan Tseling monastery.

The Gelugpa sect, thus introduced by Tanpei Dronme, was sustained, consolidated and extended in these areas by a series of his re-incarnations. The first incarnation was Lopsang Khechun, who appeared some where near the Tashilhunpo

¹ Pal-dan Lhamo [Sanskrit, Devi] is 'The Goddess or The queen of the warring weapon' and the patron deity of the Dalai Lamas.

monastery in Tibet. He had his religious training in that institution and later went to the Gah-Idan Tselling monastery, where he settled and died. According to custom, the incarnation comes to the property of his preceding birth.

Lopsang Tanpei W~~er~~ was the second incarnation. He was a Monpa born in the village of Ugyaling about two miles east of Tawang. He had his religious training at the Sera monastery and like his predecessor resided at the Gah-Idan Tselling monastery. Under him, the number of resident monks in that monastery grew to more than two hundred. On his invitation, Yontan Gyatso [1589-1616 A.D.], the fourth Dalai Lama paid a quiet visit to the monastery.

Lopsang Tanpei Gechan, the third incarnation, made his appearance in the village of Tsona Mondop, south of the Tsona monastery in southern Tibet. He also lived and died at the Gah-Idan Tselling monastery after a period of training in Sera.

The fourth incarnation ^{1 0 2 1 0} Lote Gyatso, was born in the household of *Poudun*, already hallowed by Tanpei Dronme. He was a descendant of one of the five brothers of that great ancestor who had continued in lay life. Lote Gyatso had his education at Tashilhunpo and then at Sera and Guime monasteries in Lhasa. A story current in these areas tells how one day, as sat in meditation in the Guime monastery, a miraculous voice directed him to go immediately to his own monastery as a great evil would overtake it. But his training was not yet done and he stayed on to complete it. Soon he learnt that the Nyingmapa and the Dukpa ¹ and Karmapa sub-sects of the Kargyupa had combined against the Gelugpa and directed their attack against his religious establishments. Not knowing what to do, he went to the fifth Dalai Lama, Nag-wang Lobjang Gyatso [1617-1682] and sought his advice. He placed before him a plan of constructing a new monastery as a centre of the Gelugpa. With the blessings of the Dalai Lama, he came ^{to} to the Gah-Idan Tselling monastery and stayed in it for some years. At this time he came to be popularly known as Mera/Lama from the name of the village of Mera where his monastery was situated. The Nyingmapa, Dukpa and Karmapa, however, had gained sufficient ascendancy to continue the harassment. They even tried to kill him. He, therefore, came to Tsokshum as Tawang was known in those days and made the Sanglamphe Gonpa his residence. There he planned for a Gelugpa monastery. At that time there was a Karmapa temple called the Gangardung Gonpa in this area. This temple still stands, about three miles east of Tawang, small in size though it is under the charge of the Gelugpa nowadays. At that time it was under the jurisdiction of the Drosangatsolling Gonpa, the Karmapa centre in Tibet. There was also the Khingiangme Gonpa, a Nyingmapa temple, at

¹ This sub-sect of Kargyupa prevails in Bhutan.

Gyume

Mera

Tso Sum

Tsokshum. It was established by a monk, Thecphu Rimpoche, who came from the Mindollin monastery in Tibet. This temple, about two miles to the north-east of Tawang is nowadays looked after by his incarnations. The Karmapa and Nyingmapa lamas contrived to foil the plan of Mera Lama. This opposition was consequent to their experience in Tibet, where the emergence of the Gelugpa sect had been at the cost of these sects. The people of Tsokshum also were then under the influence of these two sects. So Mera Lama could not achieve much. He returned to Lhasa disappointed and reported to the fifth Dalai Lama his failure and its causes and prayed for his help.

The Dalai Lama issued a mandate to all the villages of the Tsokshum area to help Mera Lama in his project. He gave Mera Lama a ball of yarn and told him that the boundary lines of the site of his monastery should be of the same length as the yarn of the ball. Mera Lama was given the freedom of choice of the site in other respects. Mera Lama returned to Tsokshum and to the Sanglamphe Gonpa. He was greatly worried over the right choice of the site. One day he went to a hill called Bramdongchung, three miles north of Tawang where there was a cave. He went in leaving his horse outside and sat down to pray for divine light. When he came out after his prayers, he did not find his horse. This was strange, as the horse had never strayed away from its master. He followed the hoof-marks and came to a place known as Tana Mandekhang. There stood the palace of one of the Tawang kings called Gyalpo Kala Wangpo and his horse was there. He at once perceived that the divine help had come and that was the site for his monastery. In recognition of the part played by his horse which had led him to it, he called it Tawang [*ta*—horse; *wang*—chosen] or the place chosen by a horse.

Tanay
Mendrel
Sgeny

The people of Tawang gradually gathered round Mera Lama and were ready to help in the construction of the monastery. The area of the monastery was measured with the yarn of the ball given by the Dalai Lama. Each village constructed a part of the outer wall. Even today they maintain and repair their own parts when necessary. Similarly the villages constructed a building each for the resident monks and each still maintains and repairs that building it built. The villages of Tawang and Lumla areas constructed the lower part of the building housing the temple and are responsible for its maintenance. The part above this was constructed by Pangchin-Dingdruk or north-west Tawang and ~~Lebuchasta~~ areas. But the people of Lebuchasta area cannot come for maintenance work as they are in Tibet. The full name of this monastery is Tawang Gah-Idang Namgye Lhacheh [*Tawang*—site chosen by a horse; *Gah-Idan*—paradise; *Namgye*—for the good of all directions; *Lhacheh*—celestial] or the celestial paradise of the site chosen by horse and for the good of all residing in all directions of this universe. But it is referred to in short as Tawang Gompa

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win, power

Lebo Ts. zhe

Tawang gah dang Namgyal lhacheh

Mera Lama again went to Lhasa with a happy report of the success of his mission. He prayed that the Dalai Lama bestow a memento to be preserved in the monastery, lay down rules of conduct for the resident monks, grant resources for their board and appoint an abbot for the governance of the establishment. The Dalai Lama gave him a painting of Pal-dan Lhamo, his patron deity, to be kept in the monastery the manuals called *Chai* and *Chebamarna*, the latter a work by himself, that contained the rules to be followed by the resident monks, deputed a learned and pious monk as the abbot of the monastery and directed the *dzongpon* or governor of Tsona area in southern Tibet to supply it with provisions. Mera Lama would have the Dalai Lama to pay a visit to the Tawang monastery, but the latter regretted his inability to do so. A date and time, however, was fixed when Mera Lama would perform a rite at Tawang and the Dalai Lama would consecrate it from the roof of Potala his palace at Lhasa. It is said that wheat, thrown by the Dalai Lama during the consecration, fell in the Tawang monastery.

Mera Lama passed his last days in the monastery he had built.

^{Thabkhey}
Lopsang Thapke was the fifth incarnation. He was born of Khampa parents at a place called Tiu Khampa in the Kham province of Tibet. Educated in the Sera monastery, he visited Bhutan and Bodh Gaya before coming to the Tawang monastery. He enlarged the modest structures of the temple of the monastery to its present size. He also died in the monastery.

^{E Ihagyan}
Kechang Doyen Tanjing the sixth incarnation, was born at Ehlageri in Tibet. He too had his education in the Sera monastery when he came to the Tawang monastery. The Kharsodung, Lish and Phudung Gonpas in the villages of Dirang. Lish and Phudung were founded by him. He made the people of Lish and Phudung give up their old beliefs, prohibited animal sacrifice, had temples built in those two villages and won their people over to Buddhism. He also visited the Sherdukpen area, where he established Buddhism in place of the beliefs in spirits and spirit worship with animals sacrifices. The Gonpas in the villages of Rupa and Shergaon were built when the people took to the Buddhist faith. The Rupa Gonpa was constructed in 1742 A.D. Kechang Doyen Tanjing went back to Ehlageri where he died.

^{Kalsang Gyurmed}
The seventh incarnation revealed himself in Kejang Jurme at Ehlageri in Tibet. After training at Sera, he came to the Tawang monastery. He went on a pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya, Sanchi and other Buddhist centres of pilgrimage in India. While returning from this pilgrimage, he died at Dirang.

^{Lho drag} ^{Thupten}
Lhobra in Tibet was the place of manifestation of Thudan Kechang, eighth incarnation. He divided his stay between the Tawang monastery and the Tashi Tselling Gonpa

Chhoj or

35th Thagpa Dratsang

at Sakteng in Bhutan after the first years at the Takpo Drachang monastery in Tibet. He was popularly known as Guru Rimpoche. He took up his residence at Bomdila after the Chinese aggression in 1962 and died there in 1963.

Thuptan Chhoizor, the ninth and the present incarnation was about seven years old in 1974 and born in the hamlet of Khamkhar in the Dirang area. He is now living with his parents. His father is Lobzang Raptan, originally from the village of Saling in Bhutan and now settled at Khamkhar for the last several years. He is a Nyingmapa priest of the hamlet. When Thuptan Chhoizor started speaking, he often told his parents and others that he had property at Sakteng and so he should go there. His father, wondering at his so speaking, consulted the abbot of the Tawang monastery. The abbot, on careful examination of the matter, considered it a case of appearance of an incarnation. He accordingly forwarded the history of the boy to the Dalai Lama who got it studied by a committee of senior monks constituted by him for authentication of the claim. The Committee went through it and finally decided that the boy was a true incarnation.

The arrival of Buddhism among the Monpas of the Dirang area in central Kamens was comparatively late. The people of this area had come to know, it is said, that where Buddhism had been accepted, the Buddhist lamas had subdued the spirits who plagued mankind and demanded costly and frequent sacrifices. The people in those areas, therefore had no more to suffer loss of their domestic animals and poultry. The Dirang people then also decided to accept the new faith. They sent an influential member of their village to the Panchen Rimpoche of the Tashilhunpo monastery in Tibet to request him to visit their village and rescue them from the tyranny of the evil spirits. The Panchen Rimpoche directed the messenger to Droang Rimpoche, a Tibetan lama of the Karmapa sub-sect, who would be able to do what they wanted. Droang Rimpoche consulted his books, consulted the omens and having satisfied himself that success would attend his adventure, came to Dirang. He subjugated the spirits, abolished the old rituals to propitiate them and established Buddhism. The legend does not say when this happened but it is held to have been after the construction of the Tawang monastery, which was during the reign of the fifth Dalai Lama, and before the arrival of Kechang Doyen Tanjing at Dirang some time around 1742, the year of construction of the Rupa Gonpa.

Droang Rimpoche?

Droang Rimpoche had to contend with a very malignant evil spirit in particular which was causing many deaths at that time. It had its haunts on a huge black rock inside the village. Droang Rimpoche killed it, severed its heart and made the rock sink under the earth and raised a temple in its place. So this would be the oldest temple in Dirang. The principal idol in this temple is that of Droang Rimpoche

himself. There is also a long piece of stone, about eight inches by four inches, preserved here. It is black and polished except on one side which is left rough and has a few notches on it. It is said to be the petrified heart of the evil spirit cut out by Droang Rimpoche from its body. The notches are said to be the cut-marks of sword and the rough surface is the place where the heart was severed from the body.

The same desire to be freed from the oppression of spirits brought in Buddhism among the Monpas of south-western and the Sherdukpens of southern Kameng. It was welcomed as it spread and sometimes even invited to come.

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These traditions linked to known history of Buddhism show that the conversion of the Monpas to Buddhism was probably started by Padmasambhava in the eighth century and the Nyingmapa must have had a good following among them even before the twelfth century to have made the establishment of the three Nyingmapa temples of Urgyanling, Sangeling and Tsoingeing at Tawang possible. It is not possible nowadays to know when the Karmapa was first introduced in this region. But this sub-sect had a sizable following among the Monpas by the twelfth century as evidenced by the establishment in this period of the Karmapa temple at Kinne, one of the sites hal-
lowed by the visit of the Master. The Karmapa was the first to be established among the Monpas of central Kameng, some time between 1682 and 1742. The advent of the Gelugpa among the Monpas of Kameng as well as in some places of Bhutan occurred some time during the lifetime of the second Dalai Lama, Gedun Gyatso (1475-1543 A.D.). The Gelugpa is the only sect which came during that same period among the Monpas of south-western Kameng.

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The legends about the eighth century visit of Padmasambhava to the Sherdukpen areas provide no clue as to the actual date of their conversion to Buddhism. Some manuscripts in the Tawang monastery mention that Meme Gyapten, whom the Sherdukpens honour as their "ancestor", came to this area as a lay associate of Tanpa Dronme some time between 1475 and 1543. The Gelugpa was the first organized sect to work among them some time around 1742.