

PROLEGOMENA TO LAMAIST POLITY

BY

NIRMAL CHANDRA SINHA

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NIRMA K. L. MUKHOPADHYAY
CALCUTTA 12 INDIA

1969

In Tibet Buddhist monks had the same rights as the laymen to be appointed state officials, both military and civil.

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Foreword

BY

HUGH RICHARDSON

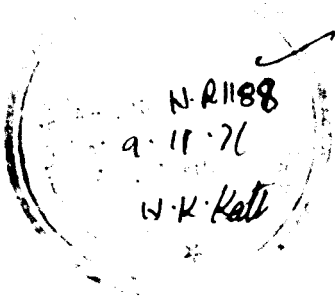
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FOREWORD

The Tibetan mind cannot fail to be permeated by consciousness of the debt it owes to India as the home of the Buddha and the fountain-head of his teachings. One of the most remarkable expressions of Tibetan civilization and intellectual powers is the adaptation of the Tibetan language to a precise and generally lucid translation from Sanskrit of the canonical works of Buddhism. The surprising volume of such translations is evidence of Tibetan devotion and industry.

Although the early propagation of the faith in Tibet during the seventh to ninth centuries saw something of a doctrinal tug-of-war between Indian and Chinese teachers, the glories of the Holy Land—'Phags Yul — which had already produced such famous figures as Padmasambhava, Santarakshita and Kamasila, rose, not much later, beyond all challenge through the influence of the famous Buddhist universities of North India such as Nalanda and Vikramasila and were crowned by the visit to Tibet in the middle of the eleventh century, of the great Indian pandit Atisa.

Much more recently, when Tibet became known to the western world, Church and State were seen to be almost one and the same thing. The administration was effectively controlled by monks; and political affairs were viewed first and foremost in the light of their bearing on the well-being of religion. That state of affairs was not perfected by the Tibetan hierarchy until the seventeenth century but the right to such

a consummation was long implicit in religious terminology and in popular axioms; and there was authority for it in the translations by Tibetan scholars of Indian works relating to the religious aspects of statecraft.

It is that philosophical — and popular — theoretical foundation for the view of the Church's right to rule also in worldly affairs with which Mr. Nirmal Sinha deals principally in this short study. His examination, in this light, of the chain of thought from the formula of Refuge, through the active role of the Protective Bodhisattva, to the conjunction of religious and political functions in the union of Chhos and Srid is illustrated and substantiated by a wealth of references to Sanskrit and Tibetan canonical texts and to Mongolian and Chinese usage as well.

Mr. Sinha is eminently qualified to expound the interrelation, and also the differences, between Indian and Tibetan thinking. He is deeply read in Indian history and in the classics of both Hinduism and Buddhism. In addition, he has for some years been surrounded in his daily life, his thought and his work by the living practice of Tibetan Buddhism in Sikkim and he has had the opportunity of discussion with learned Lamas now in exile in India. He also saw the world of Tibetan religion in its homeland not, it is true, in its happiest times but in times far happier than the desolation that now afflicts it. With friendly generosity he has given me the privilege of introducing his "Prolegomena" which I welcome in the certainty that the stimulating ideas to be found there will make his readers hope for the presentation before too long of his examination in detail of the ways in which theory was put into practice in the Lama Polity.

HUGH RICHARDSON

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Eleven years ago the Founder-President of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology appointed me to this programme in Sikkim. For me these eleven years have been a happy period of employment as well as education. A portion of the knowledge thus acquired goes into this book and my first acknowledgements are to the Founder-President, Miwang Palden Thondup Namgyal, Chogyal of Sikkim.

Three officials of the Government of India; Mr. Apa B. Pant, Mr. Triloki Nath Kaul and Dr. A.M.D'Rozario have been most kind in providing facilities of study in a field not much appreciated in India. I am indeed grateful to them.

My acknowledgements for this book are due to my colleagues Khenpo Lhodo Zangpo and Mynak Rikhu Tulku Rimpoche who fagged with me for the Tibetan literary data. Mr. S. G. Raghu, Hony. Secretary, Institute of Asian Studies: Hyderabad, read the manuscript and suggested several improvements in the style of a book which treads over two distinct disciplines, religion and political science.

Mr. Tamding Tsewang Bhutia rendered all advice and aid in the layout and production of a book which runs in three scripts; its prompt production owes also to Mr. P. T. Gyamtso. My colleague Mr. Bhaja Govinda Ghosh read the proofs and checked all Sanskrit and Pali references.

For the extracts quoted in extenso from Rhys Davids: *The Dialogues of the Buddha*, Rhys Davids: *The Questions of*

King Milinda and Narada Mahathera: *Dhammapada*, I have the respective permission from: Madam I.B. Horner, President, Pali Text Society; the Secretary to the Delegates, Clarendon Press; and Ven. Mahathera Jinaratna, General Secretary, Mahabodhi Society of India. I am deeply indebted to them. I have also to acknowledge that a substantial portion of this book was first published in *Bulletin of Tibetology* (Gangtok) and *Man in India* (Ranchi).

Mr. Hugh Edward Richardson has honoured the book with a Foreword. I approached this scholar not simply because he is the leading English-speaking specialist on Tibet. Besides being an epigraphist and a historian of Tibet, Mr. Richardson has the rare distinction of possessing a deep on-the-spot knowledge of the traditions and customs of Tibet and of her neighbours: India and China. Speaking several languages, he has lived for twenty years over places in India, Tibet and China. I prize his opinion because he does not speak from a bookish knowledge only.

My sons — Ajoy, Atish and Alok — overcome my laziness and diffidence about reducing my notes into print and thus materially contribute to my work. Professor Nalinaksha Dutt, the leading authority on Buddhism, Professor Franz Michael, the well-known Sincologist and Athing Libing Sonam Tobden, whose sudden demise last month has removed an esteemed friend, have been all through patient with my explorations into the mundane aspects of Northern Buddhism. I am also grateful to Mr. Dorji Dahdul, Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim and Mr. Sherab Gyaltshen, Establishment & Ecclesiastical Secretary, Government of Sikkim for the care and interest they have consistently evinced in my work.

I have remarked above on the indifference in India to Inner Asian studies. It is thus fair to mention several exceptions in my notice. Mr. Satyendra Narayan Agrawal, Treasurer: Bhagalpur University, Mr. Mriganka Mauli Basu, Vice-President: Asiatic Society, Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, the anthropologist and Professor Narendra Krishna Sinha, the historian have ever urged me to write amply on the subject

of Inner Asia. My scanty writing is no doubt a testimony to my abilities and is no measure of the subject. Two Elder Statesmen, Hon. Sri Prakasa and Hon. Mohan Singh Mehta, with their appreciation of my previous publication, have given me much encouragement. My respects to them.

None of the persons mentioned here is in any way responsible for the facts and views presented in the book. The two Lamas and Professor Dutt have in fact not been able to approve much of my unorthodox reading of Buddhism. The several officials included in these acknowledgements have approved my programme of research but have declined to comment on my findings.

Thanksgiving (Thugs-rje-chhe) is the core of Tibetan way of life. I inscribe Thugs-rje-chhe with this tract for all who have helped me, and many I have not mentioned.

Namgyal Institute of Tibetology
Gangtok, Sikkim
28 June 1968

NIRMAL C. SINHA



THE SUBJECT

Scholars on Tibet and Tibetan speaking countries have generally concerned themselves with Chhos (religion) and a good number have specialized in linguistics. Only a few like Luciano Petech and Hugh Richardson have made contributions to the political history of Tibet. But no historical study of the doctrine of government in traditional Tibet has so far been made. A couple of sociological works sponsored in the universities of U.S.A. have sought to interpret Lamaism on analytical method. These works however ignore altogether the ideological background of Lamaist Polity. Presentation of the theory or theories behind Lamaist government thus remains a desideratum.

This author has no claims to be called a Tibetologist. As a student of Inner Asian history, he has ventured to enquire into (i) the basis of political obligation, and (ii) the title to reign, in the Lamaist State. He has avoided the straight-jacket of modern analysis which ignores the elements of time and place and thus goes against the canons of objective history. The author has no interest in the exaltation of Lamaism or in its denigration and is conscious that while much of what he writes may displease the believers, much may disappoint the critics of Lamaism. Nor would he claim exhaustiveness or finality for what he presents here. While he flatters himself that this study is the first such attempt, he submits the validity of his findings to the judgement of specialist scholars and interested critics.

KEY WORDS

This select list is intended for a reader not conversant with Buddhist terminology and does not include all Sanskrit/Tibetan terms in the book. Entries are in Sanskrit. Tibetan equivalents are at the end; transcription as well as pronunciation being shown thus Bla-ma/Lama.

A Sanskrit word has multiple and varied content; so is Tibetan. Only those senses are given as are called for here. But no new meaning is coined. No meaning goes against accepted usage as will be found in standard works; Monier-Williams, Radhakanta Deb, Macdonell, Apte and Edgerton for Sanskrit and *Mahavyutpatti*, *Prajna*, Jaschke, Saratchandra Das and Geshe Choda for Tibetan.

- Avalokiteśvara** a deity whose Compassion is Refuge of all in distress. (Spyan-ras-gzigs/Chen-re-sik)
- Buddha** wise; awakened; enlightened; Gautama Siddhartha, the founder of Buddhism; an Enlightened Being (historical or legendary). (Sangs-rgyas/Sang-gye)
- Bodhisattva** person striving or destined for enlightenment; person postponing his own emancipation to aid others to the same goal; such person often recognized as the incarnation of an Enlightened Being (historical or or legendary); saviour. (Byang-chhub-sems-dpah/Chang-chhub-sem-pa)

THE REFUGE: INDIA, TIBET & MONGOLIA

I

I take refuge in the Buddha

I take refuge in the Dharma

I take refuge in the Sangha

The Triratna constitutes the Bauddha Dharma (1). One who takes refuge in the Three Jewels is a Bauddha: one who does not is not a Bauddha.

Authentic autographic evidence of Asoka being a Buddhist—in denominational sense—is borne by the single reference to the Three Jewels in Bairat Edict (Asiatic Society, Calcutta) and not from the multiple epigraphs recording Asoka's exhortation for observance of the Dharma. Asoka affirms thus to the Sangha "You know, Sirs, how deep is my veneration for and faith in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha" (2).

Before its final victory in Tibet towards the end of the 8th century Buddhism had several encounters with Bon. Firm evidence of Buddhism as state religion in Tibet can be traced from about 820 for the good reason that the Three Jewels were invoked as witnesses in the famous treaty (821/822) between Tibet and China (3). The Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicon *Mahavyutpatti*, a work of the 9th century, shows full familiarity with the concepts of Three Jewels and Refuge.

NOTES

1. Hermann Oldenberg's celebrated work *Buddha* (Berlin 1881/1922) had the subtitle 'His Life, His Doctrine and His Community'. Bhikshu Sangharakshita's 'introduction to Buddhism' has the title *The Three Jewels* (London 1967). All later developments of Buddhism stuck to the concept of Triratna. The Tantra was based on Ratna; vide Lama Anagarika Govinda: *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (London 1959), Part Two entitled Mani. Even the Zen (variously described as scientific Buddhism, free Buddhism etc.) affirms refuge in the Three Jewels; vide Philip Kapleau: *The Three Pillars of Zen* (Tokyo 1965), pp. 198, 347-8.

2. For the original text see Note 18 infra.

3. དཀོན་མཆོག་གསུམ་དང་། འཕགས་པའི་རྣམས་དང་གཉི་ལྷོ་
གཟ་སྐར་ལ་ཡང་དཔང་དུ་གསོལ་དེ། །

The document as read by Hugh Richardson is reproduced in *Ancient Historical Edicts at Lhasa* (Royal Asiatic Society London 1952), pp. 66-69.

The Samye pillar-inscription, which Giuseppe Tucci accepts as that of Khri-srong-lde-btsan himself, speaks of དཀོན་མཆོག་གསུམ་གྱི་དེན་བཅུགས་པ་དང་། སངས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཚེས།

The Tombs of the Tibetan Kings (Rome 1950), p.94. The Kar-chung inscription, attributed to Khri-lde-srong-btsan, descri-

THE SKYABS-MGON

I

The incarnation of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is universally known as Dalai Lama.

The title Daki (tale) is of Mongol origin meaning "vast as the ocean". The Manchu Emperor used this form; the Western envoys to the Manchu court got this usage from the Chinese while the Russians got this direct from the Mongols, Buriats and Kalmuks.

In Tibet (and Tibetan speaking countries) the Dalai Lama is variously called Gyalwa Rimpoche (rgyal-ba rin-poche, that is, jinaratna or precious conqueror), Kundun (kun-hdus, that is, omnipresence), Gong-sa (one on the highest Bhumi, that is, sovereign), Kyamgon Rimpoche (skyabs-mgon rin-poche, that is, precious lord of refuge) or Kyamgon Buk (skyabs-mgon sbug or inmost lord of refuge). The last, that is, Kyamgon appears to be the official designation or lawful title used in State-papers; other titles could be added in official correspondence and other formal occasions.

British official reports about Tibet during the rule of Dalai Lama XIII speak of two titles, Kyamgon and Gyalwa Rimpoche (1). Charles Bell in enumerating the titles (2) gave priority to "The Precious Protector" (Kyamgon Rimpoche). The English text of the first Tibetan memorandum to the Simla Conference (10 October 1913) described the Dalai Lama



NOTES

o. It is necessary to mention several theories and controversies if only to affirm that these theories do not affect the historicity or sequence of the events as narrated in this paper.

The various dates for *Saddharmapundarika* (chs I-XX) are first century B.C., first century A.C. and second century A.C. The later chapters (XXI-XXVII) are dated fourth century to sixth century.

Karandavyuha was composed between fourth and seventh centuries.

Nagarjuna's dates range from 58 B.C. to 150 A.C. Asanga is dated between 350 and 450 A.C.; definitely after Nagarjuna as in Tibetan tradition also.

Thomi Sambhota was not the first to introduce Indic script into Tibet. It is even suggested (Roy Andrew Miller) that Thomi is a fictitious figure. (Fact remains that adaptation of Indic script was finalized in the seventh century and if Srong-btsan-sgam-po had a scholarly minister the latter was apotheosized as Manjusri).

No epigraphic or contemporary evidence is available so far to vouch for the use of the word Lamā (bla-ma) in the seventh century and even in the eighth. In the beginning the word used was Ban-de, Slob-dpon, Rab-byung or Mkhan-po. (The terminology does not affect the role and status of Guru).

CHHOS SRID GNYIS LDAN

A description of the traditional Tibetan government (1642-1951) was Chhos-srid-gnyis-ldan, that is, one which is possessed of both Dharma (Chhos) and Samsara (Srid). While in organizational sense Chhos-srid-gnyis-ldan meant a dyarchy of clerical and lay elements, in ideological sense it meant a synthesis. In this view Chhos-lug (the norm of Dharma) and hJig-rten-lugs (the norm of Samsara) are complementary components of the mundane norm. Was this concept in accordance with the traditions of Buddhism, Indian and Tibetan? For any discussion of this question, it is essential to underline that the word "religion" is only one and an inadequate rendering of the word Dharma, and that the Tibetan word Chhos expresses the multiple and varied content of the Sanskrit form Dharma.(1)

I

The Brahmanical (Hindu) goal of liberation (Moksha) is to be attained through a balanced pursuit of virtue (Dharma), wealth (Artha) and pleasure (Kama).(2) For the man in society there is no inconsistency between Dharma and Artha or between Dharma and Kama as material well-being is the means for moral endeavour.(3) In Vaiseshika view, material prosperity (Abhyudaya) as well as beatitude (Nihisreyasa) are realized through Dharma.(4) Right from the Vedic times there has been a quest for harmony between the spiritual and the temporal needs of existence. In time this became the dominant ethos of Brahmanical (Hindu) civilization and had its reflection on the State.

NOTES

1. I have discussed the translation of Dharma into Chhos in *Tibet: Considerations on Inner Asian History* (Calcutta 1967), pp.49-54.
2. धर्मायंक्तामाः सममेव सेव्याः यो हि एकसक्तः स जनो जघन्य ॥
3. शरीरम् आद्यम् खलु धर्मसाधनम् ।
4. यतोऽभ्युदयनिःश्रेयससिद्धिः सः धर्मः ।
5. The kingpin of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* Book of Genesis (Bk I, Ch IV) is the role Brahmana and Dharma

Macdonell : *Vedic Index*, entry on Purohita and Keith : *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* (Harvard Oriental Series), pp.223-230 & 289-99 describe the ascendancy of priestly houses. For Brahmana as the kingmaker see K.P. Jayaswal : *Hindu Polity* (Calcutta 1924/Bangalore 1943), Chs XXIII-XXV; A.K. Coomaraswamy : *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government* (New Haven 1942); and U.N. Ghoshal : *Studies in Indian History and Culture* (Calcutta 1965), pp.211-236.

6. For Brahmanical (Hindu) attitudes to political science and statecraft see U.N. Ghoshal : *A History of Indian Political Ideas* (Oxford 1959) and P.V. Kane : *History of Dharmasastra* (Poona 1930-62), Vol III, Chs I & X.

APPENDIX

The three excerpts from Pali literature contain several Pali words, Dhamma (for Dharma), Khattiya (for Kshatriya), Vessa (for Vaisya), Sudda (for Sudra), Jhana (for Dhyana), Ajjhaya (for Adhayaka). Being faithful literal translation several words stand for doctrinal matters.

The first excerpt establishes the superiority of the occupation which involves governance and defence and places the Kshatriya as the topmost caste.

The second excerpt attributes the essence of the occupation of priests and teachers to the Kshatriya and entitles the Kshatriya to be Brahmana.

The third excerpt affirms that the occupation of Brhamana is not exclusive to the Brahmana by birth.



BUDDHIST BOOK OF GENESIS

—Origin of State & Caste—

(Digha Nikaya: Agganna Sutta, trans. Rhys Davids)

Then those beings, Vasettha, gathered themselves and bewailed this, saying: Evil customs, sirs, have appeared among men. For in the past, we were made of mind, we fed on rapture, self-luminous, we traversed the air in abiding loveliness; long long the period we so remained. For us sooner or later, after a long long while the savoury earth had arisen over the waters. Colour it had, and odour and taste. We set to work to make the earth into lumps, and feast on it. As we did so our self-luminance vanished away. When it was gone moon and sun became manifest, star-shapes and constellations, night and day, the months and half-months, the seasons and the years. We enjoying the savoury earth, feeding on it, nourished by it, continued so for a long long while. But since evil and immoral customs became rife among us, the savoury earth disappeared. When it had ceased outgrowth, of the soil became manifest, clothed with colour, odour and taste. Then we began to enjoy; and fed and nourished thereby, we continued so for a long long while. But when evil and immoral customs arose among us, these outgrowths disappeared. When they had vanished, creepers appeared

THE BRAHMANA KSHATRIYA DILEMMA

—King Milinda's Query to Sthavira Nagasena—
(Milindapanha : trans. Rhys Davids)

'Venerable Nagasena, this too was said by the Blessed One :

"A Brahman am I, O brethern, devoted to self-sacrifice".

'But on the other hand he declared :

"A king am I, Sela".

'If, Nagasena, the Blessed One were a Brahman, then he must have spoken falsely when he said he was a king. But if he were a king, then he must have spoken falsely when he said he was a Brahman. He must have been either a Khattiya or a Brahman. For he could not have belonged, in the same birth, to two castes. This too is a double-edged problem, now put to you, which you have to solve'.

'Both the quotations you have made, O king, are correct. But there is good reason why the Tathagata should have been both Brahman and also king'.

'Pray what, Nagasena, can be that reason?'

'Because all evil qualities, not productive of merit, are in the Tathagata suppressed, abandoned, put away, dispelled, rooted out, destroyed, come to an end, gone out, and ceased. therefore is it that the Tathagata is called a Brahman. A

WHO IS THE BRAHMANA

—The Buddha's definition—

(Dhammapada: Brahmana Vagga, trans. Narada Maha Thera)

14. I do not call him a Brahmana, merely because he is born of a womb or sprung from a Brahmana mother. He is merely a "Dear addresser", if he is with impediments. He who is free from impediments, free from clinging,— him I call a Brahmana.
15. He who has cut off all fetters, he who trembles not, he who has gone beyond toils, he who is unbound,— him I call a Brahmana.
16. He who has cut the strap (hatred), the thong (craving), and the rope (heresies), together with the appendages (latent tendencies), he who has thrown up the cross-bar (ignorance), he who is enlightened (Buddha),—him I call a Brahmana.
17. He who, without anger, endures reproach, flogging and punishments, he whose power, the potent army, is patience,— him I call a Brahmana.
18. He who is not hateful but is dutiful, virtuous, free from craving, controlled, and bears his final body,— him I call a Brahmana.
19. Like water on a lotus leaf, like a mustard on the point of a needle, he who clings not to sensual pleasures,— him I call a Brahmana.

For about three hundred years, down to the middle of this century, Tibet had a pattern of polity in which the monks exercised temporal authority and the hierarch as the incarnation of Avalokitesvara was the supreme religious and civil ruler of the country. This book, *Prolegomena to Lamaist Polity*, enquires into the sanction behind such monastic regime. The author has lived for more than a decade in Sikkim, has visited several other Buddhist countries including Tibet and has made an on-the-spot study of the two main traditions of Buddhism. For this book he draws as much on his own observations as on his readings in the Buddhist canon. What he writes is, in our knowledge, the first scientific account of Buddhist political thought, its beginnings in India and its development in Tibet.

In 1965 the author wrote an Introduction to our reprint of *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow* the classic work of Sarat Chandra Das. In 1967 we published a selection of the author's papers under the title *Tibet: Considerations on Inner Asian History*. The author is presently engaged in a work on Modern India's relations with Sino-Indian Asia, that is, the countries where Sinic and Indic traditions co-exist.

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