

## **Development of Five Great Buddhist learning with special reference to Phodong Monastery, North Sikkim**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Historically, Sikkim is the twenty second state of Indian Union surrounded by beautiful mountains in the four corners. The area is covered under seven thousand ninety six thousand kilometers. It has its own distinct culture, tradition and linguistic identity. It is also known as a hidden valley of rice. As the rice is the main crop of the region and there are several other food grains and fruits grown in the land. And, the characteristics of this land are quite wide thus it is called Baeyul Demozong.

It is believed that the land was blessed by Maha Guru Padma Sambhava in eight century, for the benefit of sentient being of future generations. The place popular known as Drakar Tashiding is blessed as a central sacred place. And in Sikkim several caves and hermitages were blessed and sanctified.

We the Sikkimese people considered Mount Khangchendzonga not only as guardian deity but also as a sacred place of treasure. The name refers to sacred treasure said to have concealed by Guru Rinpoche. It has further occupied an honourable place in the History of Dharma.

The Dharma which was brought and flourished in the land of Demozong was from the precious seed that was sown by Shakyamuni Buddha. He discovered the holy doctrine some 2558 years back which is today known as Buddhism throughout the world. It has also given birth to different schools of thoughts and philosophical concepts within India and in neighboring countries including Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma etc. Later, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century the same dharma started to flourish in Tibet for which Indian scholars and Panditas played significant role. In this way, it became the religion of land of snow. It has also given birth to different sects and sub-sects which were later developed and flourished in the entire Himalayan regions as well. This was the form of Buddhism flourished in Sikkim.

In fact, the Five Major Buddhist Learning is blessed gift of Buddhism to Tibet and its regions (Sikkim). It has been said by Gyaltsap Mapham pa that without the study of Five Major Buddhist Fields of learning, even the exalted beings cannot attain the enlightenment. Therefore, in order to eliminate the ignorance and lead other beings and to become enlightened, one has to diligently study the five Major Sciences. Similarly, Acharya Nagarjuna said, “Without depending on the terms, one cannot perceive the complete meaning of ultimate truth and without perceiving the ultimate truth one may not attain the perfect enlightenment.”

The Five Major Buddhist Fields of Learning have significant role in terms of both temporal and spiritual attainment. It has been developed with the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and it successfully influenced Sikkim in 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The learning of Arts and Crafts, learning of Healing Art, Learning of language, learning of logic and Learning of philosophy unite the entire teaching of Buddhism based on each particular subject; and each subject is vast and wide to deal with. It has been correctly said by the Sakya Pandita (1182-1251) that “If we do not learn the various sciences, then enlightenment is as far as the end of sky. Therefore, considering this fact by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, let’s learn all areas of sciences”<sup>1</sup>.

The development of Five Major Buddhist Learning in Sikkim can be classified in two different periods i.e. the early-spread and later- spread of Buddhism in Sikkim. Buddhism was initially founded in 8<sup>th</sup> century. The first Sikkim ruler was founded in 16<sup>th</sup> century by its ruler Phuntsok Namgyal. The first monasteries established in Sikkim are Yoksum Dupde Monastery by the first ruler of Demozong.

The first ruler of Demozong Phuntsok Namgyal was brought to Demozong (Sikkim) good number of statue as an object of veneration and worship were built.

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<sup>1</sup> She-ja-Kunkhyap, Barcha, Mirik Publusing House-1982.

**1.The Science of Arts and Crafts:** According to Buddhism, the Science of Arts and Crafts can be classified into three categories such as Arts and Crafts of Body, Speech and Mind. In fact, according to the Buddhist belief, one can accumulate enormous merit through the means of Arts and Crafts. When we talk about arts and crafts in Sikkim, it is difficult to mention the correct period of its inception. Obviously, we can believe that the traditional arts and crafts were in existence since the land was inhabited by people. The earliest record of arts and crafts found in Sikkim was in the form of monasteries which was set up as institutions to promote

Buddhism and these monasteries remained as centres of learning and culture as well where monks guided the production of sublimely beautiful sacred arts inspired by the greatest artistic tradition of Tibetan Buddhism culture, Indian Universities of Nalanda and Vikramashila. Although, it has been influenced by the artistic aspects of neighboring countries in its process of development, it holds a peculiar identity. Generally speaking, the arts and crafts of Sikkim may have greater implications in the area of both painting and sculpture. The arts developed in Sikkim gradually molded itself in line with religious development in that respective country.

There are several arts and crafts of body, speech and mind which were in existence before the modernity invaded the world. The arts of body can be classified into two different categories including painting and sculpture. The painting was believed to have developed earlier whereas the sculpture was developed later. Before the development of Buddhism in India, it is said that the various skills of arts and crafts had already developed in India.

The murals of Yuksum monastery considered to be the first painting of Sikkim. During the reign of King Phuntsok Namgyal (1642AD), the tradition of painting on clothes (Thanka) was developed. The first sculpture developed in Sikkim was said to be wooden and clay-made. Subsequently, stone engraving was duly developed thereafter Tashiding and Pema Yangtse monastery.

Nevertheless, the various aspects of vertical and horizontal lines of the statues or Thanka<sup>2</sup> have to be carried out according to its description as mentioned in the holy texts, which needs to be strictly followed by the craftsmen. The measurement varies according to the different Tantric deities and Dharma protectors based on their particular form, mudra, sitting position, adornments and implements.

The arts of speech include both manuscripts and print. It has its own techniques to write such scripts as elaborately described in the texts. The arts of mind refer to the stupa. Though several stupas of different shapes and sizes can be found in different countries including Bhutan, Nepali and Tibet where Buddhism propagated, yet, the eight types of stupa or Tathagata stupa is common in Tibet and other Himalayan regions. Apart from that there are thirty skills of arts and crafts described in the sacred scriptures.<sup>3</sup>

**2. The Science of Healing Art** The Science of Healing Art plays an important role in human society. The Traditional Tibetan Buddhism Healing Art has a rich heritage and is currently practiced not only in Tibet but also in the Sikkim. Further, many believers of other religions other than Buddhism are also the followers of this approach of treatment by the traditional system, because of its good reputation in India and abroad.

The tradition of Tibetan Buddhism healing art believed to have developed from the time of Lha-Tho-Tho-Ri- Nyentsen, the first king of Tibet. People used various plants, herbs, mines and minerals and even some organs of animals to cure the diseases. It is also said that during the reign of Songtsen Gampo, the traditional healing art developed a lot under his patronage owing to the arrival of two wives of the king, who said to have brought large number of medical texts from China to Tibet. Later, the same are practicing in Sikkim.

The ancient Indian Ayurveda system has had most profound influence on the Tibetan medicine. Tibetan Healing Art was originated after having been inspired by the Indian Ayurveda system. The legend of Tibetan Healing Art traces back to the dates of the famous Tibetan physician Yuthok Yonten Gampo (708-833 AD). It is said that Yuthok studied medicine since an early age and was duly exposed to Buddhism during his teen age.

It is recorded that he made three trips to India and studied under the great masters of Buddhism and Ayurvedic medicine there. He did great contribution to the Tibetan medicine and successfully propagated it in Tibet. Yuthok is today viewed as the father of Tibetan Healing Art.

It is believed that there are some diseases said to have resulted from our precious karmic cause and condition which needs to be religiously cured and spiritually treated. Since it believes the law of cause and condition and its consequences, the idea of karmic disease is a distinguishing feature of Tibetan Buddhist medicine.

The Tantric form of religion and medicine believed to have been propagated by Guru Padmasambhava.

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<sup>2</sup>Painted scroll of Buddhas and Bodhisatavas.

<sup>3</sup> Dungkar Tibetological Great Dictionary, (Tibetan Language) 2002, Beijing.

He is considered to be a master in healing art. In his Tantric form of medicine Buddha, he is called the Ugyen Menla since he was able to heal mental depression and psychological problems. It is also to be noted that the Buddhist form of medicine reached Tibet in around 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Sikkim is very rich in medicinal plants. Conservation of these plants has ensured the survival of one of the ancient systems of medicine. Attempts have been made to revive the traditional medicines and new possibilities in this sector have opened. The regional people have a thorough knowledge of the abundant flora of their locale and since long period they have been conscious of the use of these plants in curing diseases. It is also notable to know that Sikkim people practice traditional medicinal practices simultaneously with the modern system at Tibetology, Gangtok in Sikkim.

Today, this art has been kept alive by large number of practitioners both laymen and monks the act of which has undoubtedly benefitted the masses in all respects. It has also gained worldwide recognition as a result of its effectiveness and holy approach.

**3. The Science of language:** Sanskrit being the classical as well as mother language of many other languages held a reputed position in the ancient times. In due course of time, Buddhism was propagated in the Himalayan kingdoms of Ladakh, Bhutan and Sikkim. Simultaneously, it became the state religion of these kingdoms. The Language and script of Tibetan also duly emerged, spread and got promoted in the form of Tibetan texts.

Thonmi Sambota after studying for a number of years at the feet of renowned Indian scholars in the various fields of studies, returned to Tibet. He not only invented the letters of the Tibetan alphabet, but also translated the Karandavusutra and Sachhipurnamudra into Tibetan. In addition to that, he in the collaboration with other Indian scholars is reputed to have translated 21 Sutras from Sanskrit into Tibetan language. It was considered to be the first Sutras to be translated into Tibetan from Sanskrit. Thereafter, the translation work kept continued and a host of Indian and Tibetan scholars started translating various Sutras and Trantras brought from India and Nepal. The Kangyur consisting over 108 bulky volumes and Tengyur consisting of over 225 volumes were both translated during that period.

In fact, there are different regions and provinces located on this earth. And, in due course of time, different races of people got developed in all spheres of earth. Each and every region has its own distinct linguistic, cultural and traditional identities. These traditions are sustained on the firm basis of their particular languages. Gradually, the people interacted between each other through their languages and developed their rich culture, language and tradition. Nevertheless, we cannot survive without language and it became peculiar quality of human beings that differs us from other worldly creatures. Language is the only means through which we can communicate with each other and understand feelings as well. It can also perceive the extremely obscured meaning. Buddhist ground and path system of enlightenment can only be understood through reasoning and logic which needs to be realized through various linguistic skills. But, there are certain phenomena which manifest directly to us that may not need to be spoken. In some cases, one can understand the feelings of others through his or her expressions. Therefore, language plays critical role in understanding both knowledge of external world and the world beyond i.e. transcendent knowledge. The Grammar is the basis of the language that makes us aware of proper usage of prefix, suffix, gender difference, tense, voice, narration, person, preposition, case and etc.

There are several other texts composed by Tibetan scholars in this respect. It is said that if we miss out the exact pronunciation of a particular term then that would certainly lead us to the wrong notion of understanding the correct content which eventually makes illusion of the sacred practices. Today, Acharya Thonmi Sambota is revered as the father of Tibetan language and script; and, these rare and valuable texts are available in monasteries and libraries. These texts also feature in the teaching and learning process of language and literature in all the Monastic Universities and learning centres as a core Subject.

**4. The Science of Buddhist Logic:** The Science of Buddhist Logic is one of the vast and profound subjects of Buddhism. This logic is truly a blessed gift of ancient Acharyas. There have been several developments of logical studies which had been thoroughly studied in the ancient prestigious Universities like Nalanda, Takshishila and Vikramashila. The continuation of learning Buddhist logic is still kept alive in present Buddhist Monastic Universities in India. The Buddhist Science of logic directly refers to the valid cognition of the elimination of the wrong concept of individuality further strengthening the authority of Buddha and his teachings by the means of logical arguments. Therefore, the logical study is found important in order to have a firm conviction on Buddha's teaching and its path. It can also help in proving the hidden meaning of phenomenon through reasoning as well. In this way, the Buddhist concept of Birth and Rebirth, Cause and Condition and Interdependency could well be understood through the Buddhist logical arguments by any devoted follower. There are a number of philosophical theories and thoughts of logic depending on various schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Thereafter, logic was introduced by Chapa Choeki Sengi. He was born in 1109 corresponding to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rabjung cycle earth Ox year. He showed signs of becoming great scholar from his teen age. At the age of forty, he came to the seat of the Sangpu monastery as a fourth successor and selflessly served there. He composed several logical texts including “Duda (the collected topics) as a gist of Pramanapratika. Likewise, the disciple of Acharya Vasubandhu named Acharya Diknaga composed several logical treatises. In the same way, Acharya Dharmakriti also composed the seven treatises on valid cognition which are also known as seven works of Dharmakriti on the study of valid cognition.

In order to develop the logical studies, he introduced several innovative ideas, debate system and argumentative methods which had undoubtedly benefited the teaching and learning process. He also had many disciples as equal as dust of the earth including the eight lions.

It is very fortunate to have number of treatises on Buddhist Logic composed by great Acharyas and duly translated by Tibetan translators. The commentaries of Tibetan scholars are also being irrespectively taught and introduced in the Buddhist monastic Universities in Tibet.

Today, this text is studied in all the Monastic Universities and Institutions of irrespectively lineages throughout the country as a part of their basic curriculum. In totality, the learning of Buddhist logic is a key point to understand the entire scriptures through logical arguments. It is also beneficial to comprehend the various fields of studies including physics, chemistry, medical science, mathematics, political studies and language without any confusion. In order to be well equipped and versed with the subjects mentioned above one need to have a clear intelligence which can only be increased by Buddhist logic only.

**5.The Science of Philosophy:** The science of Buddhist Philosophy is the main stream of Buddhism. After the Parinirvana of Buddha Shakyamuni, the entire teachings of Buddhism was preserved under the patronage of the then Maharajas of India. The compilation of teachings is known as the Tripitaka (three caskets).

The five treatises: Pragyaparamita, (perfection of knowledge) Madyamika, (middle way) Pramana, (valid cognition) Abidharma (treasure of knowledge) and Vinaya (monastic discipline) are the summary of the entire teachings. The Madyamika, Pramana and Abhi Dharma are the contents of Abidharma kosha. Pragyaparamita comprises the summary of Sutra and Vinaya comprises of the Vinayamul Sutra. The entire teachings of Buddhism can be classified as Mahayana and Hinayana. The Madhyamika and Pramana disclosed the viewpoint of Mahayana where as Pragyaparamita is based on the conduct of Mahayana. The Abhidharma shows the view point and conduct of Hinayana, whereas the Vinaya disclosed the universality of ethics of both Mahayana and Hinayana. In fact, there were number of Indian scholars but the six ornaments and Two Excellences were highly revered.

Moreover, these scholars were popularly known as the sun and the moon as the credit of Madyamika treatise goes to Acharya Nagajuna and his heart-son Acharya Aryadeva.

Similarly, the credit of the Abhidharma goes to Acharya Asanga and Acharya Diknaga and Dharmakriti had credit of Pramana treatise and the credit of Vinaya goes to Gunaprabha and Shakyaprabha.

The Vinaya was preached by Shakyamuni Buddha in India. He taught the “Sutra of individual Liberation” followed by several other Sutras. Later, the translations of Vinaya texts were carried out by the scholars from Indian languages into Tibetan.

The Vinaya tradition once disappeared in Tibet during the reign of Lang Darma, the anti religious king; who destroyed the monasteries and many other Buddhist centres and brought an end to the Buddha Dharma. But, the same tradition was later revived by the disciples of Tibetan scholars known as “Mar Yo Tsang Sum” the three renowned scholars of early-spread of Buddhism in Tibet. In this way, the Vinaya tradition regained its past glory in Tibet for which, the contribution of Tibetan Scholars are worth mentioning. From the 11<sup>th</sup> century till the middle of 15<sup>th</sup> century, the tradition of teaching and learning process of Vinaya was introduced as core subjects in the six main centres of Tibet. And, the same was gradually developed from the middle of 15<sup>th</sup> century in the monastic institutions irrespectively.

Thus, we can see that the growth and development of the Five Major Spheres of Buddhist learning is a significant phenomenon not only in the context of Himalayan regions but also in the context of Buddhism. This can be simplified by saying that the study of the aforementioned learning is concerned with one’s understanding of the Buddhist philosophy. Throughout the ages, eminent scholars and critics are persistently studying the relation of the said learning and humanity. Lord Buddha, the beacon in the sky of darkness and ignorance, sacrificed his life in understanding and preaching these valuables to the human kind. It has been correctly said by Acharya Shantideva that “There is no such thing which is not needed to be learnt by Bodhisattvas; there is no such deed of bodhisattvas which does not comprise merit”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>Bodhisattvacharya Avatar,p.149.CIBS,Leh Ladakh-1989.

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