

## CHOS: THE UNIQUE DHARMA OF TIBET

It is usual to describe Tibetan religion as Buddhism, or more specifically Tantric Buddhism. The Tibetans themselves call their religion mere **CHos** (religion, **dharma**), even as the Hindus call theirs **dharma**. There is no doubt that Buddhist influences are both unmistakable and predominant, but it would not be correct to brand this religion as Buddhism. Moreover, the Buddhist influences that came to colour this religion so significantly were by no means native to the soil; they were not indigeneous developments. In fact, Buddhism had to undergo a total transformation before it came to be accepted in Tibet and Mongolia.

The religion that prevailed in Tibet before Buddhist influences made their impact is known as **Bon**; indeed this primitive religion persisted in its appeal and influence even when Buddhist influences became firmly established. It has been suggested that the word "Bon" (murmuring spells) and the word "Bot" (**bhota**, viz., Tibet) are derived from a common source. It is not true to say that Buddhist influences supplanted **Bon**. If the contemporary phase of **Bon** is found to have adopted numerous Buddhist practices and ideas, Buddhism at the time of its advent in this country had to adopt not only **Bon** practices but its ideas also. **Bon** has never really been shaken off. So much was it in the air throughout Tibet's entire history that **Bon CHos** (or Buddhist influences grafted upon the native **Bon**) may be the appropriate designation for Tibetan religion.

What was this **Bon** like? No one today seriously disputes that religious beliefs of a country are to an extent conditioned by its predominant geographical factors. Located in the dizzy Himalayan heights, oppressed by the fearful vagaries of weather, battered almost continuously by terrific storms, Tibet offers to her people little by way of security or sustenance. Conditions of life are so exacting and so impossible to contend against, that man there almost naturally regards the world as peopled by hostile spirits. He is subject not only to the visible and normally manageable factors of nature but also to unseen forces. Utterly and

inexorably isolated from the rest of mankind, the early Tibetans, sprinkled rather sparsely over an expansive plateau, had to fight against real and conjured fears all by themselves. It is natural, therefore, that they developed a religion which was essentially shamanistic. Religion everywhere may be said to have evolved from the same source; but in Tibet, the challenge of an uncertain, capricious and inimical environment produced a shamanism of an extreme kind, and made it survive until the twentieth century.

The word **Bon** (pronounced **Pon**) means "to mutter magical spells," "to mumble secret formulae". Cunningham and Rockhill may be correct in their extraction of the Tibetan word from the Indian **punya** (merit) in the extended sense of merit or power acquired by magical incantation. Mystical utterances no doubt constitute an essential part of **Bon** religion. Indeed one of the expressions for their wizard-sorcerer was **Ah Mes** (Hail ancient) which became **Amaye**. **Ah** is a mystical ejaculation, well known in the Indian Tantric tradition; it also occurs as the first part of **Aum**. And "ancient" connoted an undying essence. It was no accident that in **Bon** the mountain-God was also called **Ah Mes** i.e., the mysterious and mystifying snow-capped mountains, unconquered in their uncanny grandeur. The **Ah Mes** were powerful presences for the Tibetans—from which they could not escape and which offered no comfort whatever. They were sinister, malignant and could be disastrous unless propitiated. The legend of the flying mountains whose wings were clipped by the benevolent but powerful Indra with his "diamond-weapon" (**vajra**) is not the special property of India. Mountains may instill rapture in a poet, but provoked fear in the primitive; his most urgent concern was to subdue them. The sorcerer was the person who claimed to do this and his weapon consisted of incantations and spells which were substitutes for the diamond weapon of Indra. Mystic mumblings would make him invincible, and powerful enough to perform miracles. And miracles had to be performed every day of the year in that country in order even to survive. We can already discern here the predisposition to the **vajra-yana** that found a welcome home there.

The "Bon-religion" is described as shamanism, fetishism and demonolatry. A Tibetan authority (**Hos-Kyi-ni-ma**) distinguishes three stages in the growth of this religion. The first stage, which is described as "wild" (**rDo!-Bon**), emphasised witchcraft and sorcery to subdue or appease the fierce and wicked spirits that clustered around man. The second stage, known as "corrupted" or "erroneous" (**Khyar-Bon**), was preoccupied with the miracles and

heroic deeds of magician-shamans who came from outside (principally from Kashmir). When the Tibetan king Gri-gum-btsanS (mostly legendary) was murdered, the local priests, ignorant of how to handle the violently dispatched spirit, invited three foreign magicians from Kashmir, **Dusha** and **Shang-Shang** to help them. One of them could fly in the sky and discover mines by propitiating the divine eagle; he could also cut iron with a feather; another could divine future events and tell fortunes by using coloured strings; the third one was an expert in conducting the funerals of those who died violently. These priests were probably Indian Tantrics; and even the Tibetan authorities indicate that the influence of the **Saivites** and **Tirthikas** (heretical ascetics) was felt. But why was this stage described as "corrupt" or "erroneous"? We should recall that the classification of these stages represented the attitude of the votaries of the **CHos**, who had set themselves against **Bon**.

The third stage was termed "reformed" or "turned" (**bsGyur-Bon**). Here the **Bon** ideas and practices underwent a thorough transformation so as to become more or less acceptable to the more powerful religious group, the Buddhists. The adherents of **Bon** now became "within-ones" (**Nang Ba**), and their peaceful co-existence with the **CHos** folk was assured. This stage continued right up to our own time, when it has been reliably estimated that at least two thirds of the population of Tibet are "Believers in-Bon", despite the religious and political ascendancy of **CHos**.

This classification tells the story of **Bon's** struggle for survival against what has come to be called the religion (**CHos**). But this is a classification traceable to an eighteenth century historian whose sympathies were obviously with the **CHos**; his point is that **Bon** improved its credentials to the extent that it succumbed to Buddhist influences. Unfortunately we do not have a **Bon** historian giving a parallel point of view. Yet we shall see how Buddhism becomes acceptable to the Tibetans only when it adopts **Bon** ideas and practices. **Bon** was not only native to the soil; it seems to be fundamentally and foundationally the religion of Tibet.

**Bon** has been negatively described as unrelated to the idea of virtue, and as indifferent to the idea of spiritual growth according to the celebrated eight-fold way of the Buddhists. Man's career on earth is not to be viewed as directed towards a **summum bonum**; life is to be merely lived, and to talk of virtuous life is utterly meaningless. Man had no urgent need to improve him-

self, he has neither a mandate from above nor inspiration from within to that effect. He simply may live as naturally as an animal lives; and religion need not bother to disturb him.

But man did have to worry about good and evil, not in the personal or ethical sense, but in the sense the world was full of pleasant things and unpleasant things. There were gods (IHa), benevolent and protective; there were also goblins (nDre), malicious and mischievous. And there was a very real conflict between these two groups of spirits. Man cannot remain clear of such powerful contending forces: he can save himself only by coercing the former and propitiating the latter. To do this he needs the assistance of shamans, who claim to be "possessed" by these gods and who manifest divinity; they employ effective magic in various ways and help man overcome the goblins and secure the grace of the gods. Specialization also characterized the shaman. Some were wizards adept in manifesting magic; they, for instance, wove ropes between earth and heaven. Others divined the future, read the signs and forecast; they also healed the sick and controlled the elemental fury of the weather. Still others took charge of the dead, and guided the ghosts to safety. There were also shamans who only chanted spells and sang. The shaman-priests thus played an all-important role in that country, where the normal vocations of farming and hunting were largely ruled out. Magic became an all-absorbing interest.

The Bon-priests, having made themselves indispensable for life, claimed descent from a blue-robed **gShen Rabs**, the first part of the name meaning merely "shaman." He is described as the "first historical person, sure of his magic"; he contributed the "body of Bon." He was also a ruler, an archetype of the "shaman-ruler;" thus preparing Tibet for a theocratical system. The excellence of **gShen Rabs** is sung as follows:

He pronounced the nine-vehicle doctrine,  
To open the heavenly gate for those that live  
To pull down the gate of destruction for the dead  
And to lead life to the Svastika-path.

The Bon folk believed in a heaven (**gNam**), they adored it and aspired to reach it. But they did not consider virtue or merit, penance or piety the means to reach heaven; they did not even long for the grace of the gods as a means to heaven. In fact, the gods of the heavenly realm (IHa) were not as powerful as those of the earth (**Sa bDag**) who could be furious and fierce; the men, therefore, chose their personal or tutelary gods only

from this group. Heaven was reached by a very simple process: by seizing the rope of the sky which the shaman had thrown across. Reaching Heaven meant the attainment of a body there, which would be happy ever afterwards. The Bon people were very much concerned about Heaven, and aspired to find a "sudden passage" to that realm. The preoccupation of the later Buddhists with the "short path" had a foundation in this desire for "sudden transformation."

The Bon priests employed the Svastika sign (**gYung Drung**); a magic tool of great power; it was probably an early prototype of the adamantite weapon, **vajra (rDo rJe)**. But the Svastika of the Bon is described as "left-handed" while the Buddhist Svastika is "right-handed." This habit of reversal in the Bon of the normal Buddhist practices is thought an aspect of antagonism. The Bon folk, for instance, circumambulate the sacred objects leftward while the Buddhist (and Indian) practice is the other way round. So also prayer-wheels are rolled by them leftward. The celebrated magic spell that the CHOs employ, "**Om-Mani-Padme-Hum**" is used by the Bon in its reversed form, "**MuH-em-pad-ni-mo**." These are described as Bon versions of Buddhist practices. But actually, reversed conduct is an accepted Tantric practice as will be explained later. **Svastika**, in the Bon context, stands for something everlasting and unchanging; in its extended sense, perfect well-being, health and success are understood. It is significant that the **Svastika** is "a path" for the Bon.

Bon religion knows a vast pantheon indeed. S.C. Das noticed that goddesses were greater in number than gods; they were more powerful too. Among the numerous specific divinities of great interest is the Blue Sky god (**gNam**), described as "Sky eternal" (**gNam rTag Pa**). There seems to have been a notion that the blue sky was central, and that in the sky was located the Bon heaven, which every man aspired to reach. The image of the sky is a common symbol in the Tantric cults wedded to the doctrine of emptiness (**Sunyata, Kha-sama**), similar to the **Vajrayana** which developed in Tibet. It is not without interest to note that the most meritorious disposal of the dead body is what is described in Tibet as "Sky burial." This is a sort of return of the body to the Sky. The cult of mother-goddesses was not an unnatural product in the primitively matriarchial society of early Tibet. In keep

1. Sometimes **Om Ma-tri-sa-le-mu-ye-adu** is substituted; the meaning of this spell is not clear.

ing with the divine population, women were not only eligible to become shamans, but could become more potent shamans than their male counterparts. The surviving goddesses like **dPal-Idan-LHa-Mo** (Kali), **aGrol-Ma** (Tara) and the **mKHaa-aGro-Ma** (Dakinis) are all from the **Bon** background.

Finally, **Bon** worship was filled with rituals, spells and dances. The special dance sequences, styled **aCHam**, where the actors impersonate gods and goblins wearing appropriate masks, and mimic mystery action, continued even during the religious transformation which took place under Buddhist influence. It is not without some justice that these dances have been described by Western scholars as "devil dances". For the chief purposes of these dance-dramas, even when performed in puritanical and enlightened urbane monasteries are to exorcize evil spirits and secure blessings. Symbolically, bad luck is driven out and good luck ushered in. Drama, in this context, is a part of the ritual. Popular all over the Lamaist Himalayas, **aCHam** (**Mani-Rimdu** as it is styled in Khumbu in Nepal) is essentially a "Bon" heritage.

Luther G. Jerstad has made an excellent study of **Man-Rimdu** (**Sherpa Dance-Drama**), pointing out clearly the "Bon" influences in the present-day Buddhistic shows in Nepal. Derived from the Tibetan (**aCHam**, this dance-drama commences with the Life consecration rite, when the life-spirit in the form of liquid (**tshe-chang**) and pills (**tshe-ril**) is distributed to those present. In the words of Luther Jerstad, "The ceremony deals with a detachable life and the nourishment of this supernatural life (**bla-tashe**)." This is a typically **Bon** belief (1-103). The expression **bla** stands for "soul", associated not only with human individuals but with some mountain peaks also. In Khumbu area, the 19,000 foot high peak Khumbila is regarded as possessing a **bla**, which when destroyed threatens the destruction of the people around it. It was to guard against such calamity that ritual dances were performed by Lamas in the monastery precincts.

In the **Bon** background, such rituals and dramas invariably involved animal, and sometimes, even human sacrifices. Such offerings in Tibet were known as **gTor-ma** (literally, "what is broken up or cut", an expression that survived the **Bon-CHos** rivalry, although the Lamaistic practice substituted effigy cones made of dough and butter for animals actually slain in **Bon**. But the important detail of ceremonially breaking the effigy or cone into bits and throwing them about in various directions is a tell-tale reminder of this unappealing, **Bon** practice.

### SUPERIMPOSITION

The introduction of Buddhist influence into Tibet is romantically ascribed to two women, one from Nepal and the other from China, who married the Tibetan monarch **Srong-bTsan-sGam-Po** (569-650 A.D.). The two queens, described as incarnations of the goddess **Tārā**, (the monarch himself being regarded as an incarnation of **Avalokitesvara**, the great **Mahāyāna** god) were pious Buddhists, and thus the sympathetic monarch took a keen interest in the new religion and strove to spread it in Tibet. Buddhism was not, however, entirely unknown in Tibet. At least a century earlier, when **IHa-THo-THo-Ri** ruled the land, a golden casket containing a golden relic-vase (**stupa**, **mChod-rTen**) and two Buddhist texts were said to have fallen from the sky; yet no one then was capable of reading the texts or of knowing what the relic-vase meant. Of the many things that the monarch, did to promote Buddhism in Tibet, the most important was sending the talented Tibetan **THom-Mi-Sambhota** to India in order to bring the art of writing. Along with the **Kutila** variety of the Magadhan alphabet, "the wise Tibetan" (**Sam-bhota**) brought several **Mahayana** texts (like **Karanda-vyuha-Sutra** and **Ratnamegha-Sutra**) to Tibet and translated them. As a result of this circumstance, "religious-speech" (**CHos-sKad**) was artificially developed as a species of language in Tibet. Being distinct from folk-speech, Sanskrit provided both the model and the stimulus for such "religious speech".

The introduction of Buddhist influence into Tibet was neither sudden nor violent; it was rather both gradual and gentle. In fact, several stages can easily be identified. It is significant that legend makes Buddhism descend from no source other than the blue sky, the highest of the **Bon gods**. Historically, however, Buddhism was borrowed from India, India of the seventh century. **Sambhota's** teachers were **Acharya Devavitsimha** and **Brahmin Li-byin**. Who and where they were, cannot be ascertained. On his return to Tibet, as evidence of his mastery of the new script, **Sambhota** is said to have composed a **sloka** praising **Avalokitesvara**, the **Mahayana** god who was to become the central divinity in the Tibetan pantheon.

We do not know how people received this new creed which thus appeared in their midst; nor do we know precisely what measures the monarch took to spread this creed among his people. Not until the days of his grandson, **KHri-Srong-lDeu-**

of bTsan, (705-755 A.D.) do we hear of Buddhist impact on Tibet. This King, one of the greatest Tibet has ever produced, imported the celebrated Indian wizard-saint Padmasambhava to Tibet, built the first Buddhist monastery (bSam Yas) and promoted Buddhism. But the first Indian Pandita invited by this king was Santarakshita (known in Tibet as Acarya Bodhisattva) of Nālanda, the celebrated author of the monumental Tattva-Saṅgraha and also of a Tantric work, Tattvasiddhi. From Nepal, he travelled to Tibet and preached Buddhism in its Indian Mahayana form. The King most probably admired his discourses and a small section of the nobility were undoubtedly impressed by him; but he does not seem to have reached the people at large. Tibetan accounts relate that the Tibetan gods and goddesses became angry, not so much with Santarakshita himself as with the King who encouraged him. For, lightning struck one of the palaces, floods carried away another, the harvest was damaged, epidemics broke out, and misery overtook the kingdom. The calamity was promptly ascribed to the new religion that was being overemphasized, so the king was compelled to send the celebrated Indian teacher back to Nepal.

This perhaps suggests how the first challenge to the time-honoured Bon was met. The teeming divinities, ever ready to be infuriated and send vengeance on the offenders, were obviously the Bon pantheon; and those who agitated the pious king were Bon priests. Santarakshita's brief acquaintance with Tibet convinced him that the country needed a different type of a teacher, a teacher who was not only an expert in occult lore but sufficiently powerful and aggressive to deal with the "wild" Bon priests. As he was returning to Nepal, he suggested to the King that the Tantric instructor at Nālanda, Padmasambhava, possessed these characteristics. Thus Padmasambhava arrived in Tibet in 747 A.D.

He actually did perform the miracle of firmly establishing the Buddhist influence in Tibet. But it was a minor miracle, for the religion that he brought into Tibet was not very different from the religion that the Tibetans had known from their origins. No doubt it was called Buddhism, or, at any rate, by a name different from Bon, and Padmasambhava was not a Tibetan. These were the only counts on which his mission was resisted by the Bon priests. But he appears to have come into the country, spectacularly fascinating the people and shaking the earth and sky, the Tibetans have never ceased admiring him for over a thousand years. He is still the Guru Rimpoché, great pre-

vious Master. What he actually did and how he won over the Bon priests are not at all clear. But legends tell of his miraculous feats, his weird fights with demons, his relentless combat with hundreds of gods and spirits—holding only the diamond sceptre (vajra) as his weapon. He is said to have succeeded in subjugating all the gods and goddesses of the land. He did not destroy them, though he won many of them over as "guardians of the new religion" (Chos sKyong).

The secret of Padmasambhava's success was that he was more a Tantric than Buddhist. Tradition records that Padmasambhava bestowed on the admiring Tibetan monarch the Tantric initiations (abhisheka) of Vajrakila and Hayagriva. He then established the first Buddhist monastic centre in Tibet around 749 A.D., on the model of the Odantapura Monastic College in India where he may have taught before going to Nālanda. It was called, significantly enough, "Imponderable Retreat" (ancintya-vihara, in Tibetan bSam Yas). Then Padmasambhava wisely persuaded the quiet ascetic Santarakshita to return to Tibet to preside over this new establishment. The latter acquiesced in Tibet for thirteen years until his death in 762 A.D.

It proved a curious but fruitful combination of dissimilar personalities this linkage of Padmasambhava and Santarakshita in Tibet. One could argue, coerce, thunder and threaten; the other could instruct, explain, expound and convince. One was meant for the masses, the other for the few. One emphasized magic, rituals and success; the other insisted on virtue, contemplation and wisdom. Padmasambhava stood for powerful action; Santarakshita symbolised gentle being. The two together determined the later Tibetan mentality. If Tibetans are gentle souls worshipping fierce divinities, if they have accommodated the thunderbolt (vajra) with the abiding peace of vacuity (Sūnyata), the credit must go to these two enterprising Indian monks, each working in his own way for the welfare of the people.

It is important to recognize that they were not "missionaries" in the sense we are accustomed to use the expression. They were, in fact, invited by the Tibetan King to effect a desirable transformation among his people. Their advent into Tibet, or their achievements there, do not include the story of conversion. The indigeneous Bon had fallen into a stage of corruption, and the shaman-priests had become intolerably aggressive; the economic, social and political problems of the community had been helplessly left to their mercy. The king, who was both enlightened and desirous of a change found in Padmasambhava an able

ally. And Padmasambhava, despite his magical skill and fierce temperament, only furthered many **Bon** attitudes and ideas; local gods and goddesses were all preserved intact; all the rituals were upheld but redirected. The type of change that Padmasambhava effected may best be illustrated by the **gTor-ma (bali)** offering. A typically **Bon** practice, it became important even in Lamaistic worship. While in **Bon** animals were slaughtered, cut to pieces and thrown in all directions to feed the hungry gods and demons, in the reformed religion animal effigies were made out of dough and butter, painted red (to mimic blood), and scattered about or buried or burnt for the same purpose. Padmasambhava only prohibited killing, but the ritual as such and the gods were allowed to thrive. Although the entire **Bon** pantheon continued, they were now all subordinated to the concept of human progress, which was altogether absent in the original **Bon**. The religion that Padmasambhava planted in Tibet was by no means the religion that he found practised in India, nor was it the religion he himself had matured in. Rather, it was largely the religion that was native to Tibetan soil, with necessary but minimal changes taken from **Mahayana** Buddhist sources. If Tibetan religion after Padmasambhava can be called **Vajrayana** (the Path of the Thunderbolt), it was in a very real sense the creation of Padmasambhava: the materials and attitudes were all indigeneous, the ultimate direction was an Indian union grafted onto them. Thus, Padmasambhava must be viewed as a genius of synthesis.

After Padmasambhava, however, a missionary zeal seems to have arisen among the Buddhists in Tibet. It led to the persecution of **Bon** priests. The Tibetan king Ral-pa-can-gTsan was so fanatically devoted to the Buddhist creed and so feverishly sought to make it exclusively the Tibetan religion that the **Bon** folk deposed and murdered him, putting his brother gLang-Dar-Ma on the throne in his place in 836 A.D. It made gLang-Dar-Ma grateful to the **Bon** folk for his unexpected fortune; he swung to the other side of the scale and began persecuting the Buddhists vigorously. But the joy of the **Bon** folk was **shortlived** for gLang-Dar-Ma was murdered by a disguised Buddhist. Following the episode, religion in Tibet was thrown into utter disarray. Religious leadership completely disappeared; gLang-Dar-Ma's successors for three generations wisely refrained from religious involvements. During this dark period, the indigeneous **Bon** and the Indian Tantra interacted and arrived at numerous unplanned approximations, thus bringing into existence a most peculiar religious complex. gLang-Dar-Ma's descendent, YeS-Ses Od,

retained royal interest in the Indian religion and not only invited several Indian Pandits to Tibet, but sent young, intelligent Tibetans to India to learn the religion at its source. His biggest achievement, however, was to bring the eminent Dipanikara-Srijñāna to Tibet around the year 1042 A.D.

If the Padmasambhava-Sāntarakshita team gave Tibetans a taste of Buddhist excellence, it was Dipanikara-Srijñāna (known in Tibet as Atisa and worshipped there as an incarnation of Manjusri) who firmly entrenched Buddhist influence in Tibet. A prince from Bengal, this hero studied at Odantapura and Nālanda, dabbled in Tantric initiations, obtained the wisdom-initiation from a Malayan master, and had become a professor at Somapura and Vikramasila Universities. He was president of the latter university when the two Tibetan Scholars sent by Yes-Ses-Od arrived to invite him to Tibet. Unwilling at first, he finally consented and reached mNa-ris in Western Tibet in 1042. He was 60 when he arrived in Tibet and he lived in Tibet for thirteen years, honoured and adored throughout the land. He was already renowned in India for his erudition, expositional skill and piety; not only was he a tireless translator, he was also a creative and original author. Tibet welcomed him; it called him in hushed reverence 'the noble lord' (**Jo-Bo-rJe**). Yet he was more like Santarakshita than Padmasambhava. This was exactly what the people of Tibet needed at that moment.

Dipankara had pursued a Tantric career, and was well-versed in the Tantric lore. Yet he was not impressed by **Tantra** as a religious way of life. Although he did not openly condemn this Tibetan Tantric preoccupation, he subtly suggested that "meditation on vacuity" was more important and more productive. His numerous writings emphasize virtue as indispensable for religious progress: **Vinaya** should go with **Tantra**, he pleaded, and **Tantra** with **Vinaya**. In short, he set out to reform the religion that prevailed in Tibet. As could be expected, he met with resistance, but religion then was in such a state of confusion that even this resistance was not organized. As a matter of fact, Dipankara had little difficulty in developing an austere religion, dominated by the influence of the contemplative and virtue-oriented Buddhist sects of India. Moreover he was fortunate in securing an extremely capable and austere Tibetan disciple and successor in Brom (rGyal-Ba'i-Byung-gNas, in Sanskrit Jayakara). Brom worked under Dipankara for ten years, and carried on his master's mission for another ten years following the master's accidental death in 1054.

Dipankara and Brom were uncompromisingly puritanical. The former's celebrated treatise "Light on the Path of Enlightenment" (**Bodhipathapradipa**), one of the most highly honoured books in Tibet, was a clear call for reform in favour of virtuous pursuit of emancipation (vacuity, **Sunyata**). Although the call remained unheeded, and the attempts of Brom's successors to reform were rather feeble, sweeping reforms within the **CHos** religion (religion with Buddhist influences) eventually materialised during the life-time of **TSong-KHa-Pa** (1378-1441), an earnest and energetic monk who was inspired by Dipankara's **Bodhipathapradipa**.

The **CHos** at that time was sharply divided into two camps: one was heavily oriented to Tantric ideas and practices, and swore by Padmasambhava; the other inclined to Dipankara's ascetical teachings. In other words, the first group was a direct continuation of the **Bon** religion with such modifications as were introduced by Padmasambhava; red mitre was their distinguishing mark as the red colour had obvious and peculiar associations with Tantric cults everywhere. The other group, however, sought to free religion from such ecstatic and occult orientations; they wore yellow mitres during religious service, as yellow is the colour of purity. The monks of the latter group were celibates and practised all virtues with meticulous care, while those of the former rejected celibacy as but an optional requirement of a monk; Tantric practices of certain kinds insisted on the company of women-initiates, and therefore laxity and corruption could not be avoided. Married and wine-imbibing Lamas indulging in fantastic abracadabra but swearing by Sakyamuni-Buddha were certainly inconsistent with traditional Buddhist teachings and quite naturally seemed an eye-sore to the more puritanical monks.

**TSong-KHa-Pa** effected a successful reform in Tibet. He wrote many treatises including the **Lamp of the Way**, to preach the value of virtuous living and meditation. He built his own monastery at **Gah-Dan** (**Gelden**) about thirty miles from Lhasa, and organized a band of puritanical monks who took the vows of celibacy and mendicancy. To distinguish themselves from other monks, they adopted the tall, conical and long-tailed caps of yellow colour (which the Pandits at **Nālanda** used to wear). Hence the expression "Yellow Caps". Other sects like the ancient **Nying-Ma-Pa**, **Kah-Dam-Pa** and **bKa-bRgyud-Pa** used red coloured hats during religious ceremonies; thus they became known as "Red Caps". Red, as was pointed out earlier, is the typical Tantric colour; and these sects were no doubt Tantric in their fundamen-

tal and general orientation, and hold **Padmasambhava** in the highest esteem; they honour him as a second Buddha. The reformed sect, following **TSong-KHa-Pa**, came to be known as **dGe-Lugs-Pa** ("merit-system-ones" or those who adhered to the virtuous way), and in course of time became the most powerful of the religious groups in Tibet. One of **TSong-KHa-Pa**'s disciples, **Gen-Du-Nub** (1391-1474), became the first Dalai Lama (**rGyal-Ba Rin-Po-Che**, "the great precious victor"). Regarded as an incarnation of **Avalokitesvara**, he began to rule the country from **Potala** on the Red Hills of Lhasa. **TSong-KHa-Pa** is credited with the institution of "emanating Lamas" (**sPrui-sKu**) as recurrent mysterious manifestations. He also organized the monks and nuns in a definite hierarchy with Dalai Lama at the head of their Organization. **TSong-KHa-Pa**'s arrangement gave the country a strange but effective theocracy, which came to a violent end only in 1959 when Tibet was occupied by the Chinese.

The political ascendancy of the **dGe-Lugs-Pa** sect does not mean that other sects languished or disappeared. The **Nying-Ma-Pa**, the ancient Red Cap Sect, still swear by **Padmasambhava** and disregard everything that happened after him. They have obviously great affinity with the **Bon** sect. Another Red Cap sect, **bKa-bRgyud-Pa**, was founded in 1042 by **Mes-Po-Lho-brag Mar-pa lo-Tsa-ba** (**Marpa the Translator of Hlobrak**); his pupil **Mid-La-Ras-Pa** (**Milarepa**, born 1040) is generally regarded as the greatest poet-saint of Tibet. This sect had its foundation in Indian Tantra, although it also had special developments. In fact, the thought and practice of this sect constitutes the core of the Tibetan Tantric tradition. One of **Mid-La-Ras-Pa**'s disciples, **Rang-CHung rDorJe**, founded a subsect, the **Karma-Pa**, in 1159 by adapting some of the **Nying-Ma-Pa** ideas. This sect and this subsect became important not only in Tibet but also in Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim.

Religion in Tibet has assumed certain peculiar forms. The emphasis on "moving" or "going" is a natural one for the nomadic tribes that constituted Tibetan society. Man for them is "the best goer" (**aGro-mCHog**); their God **Avalokitesvara** is the "master of goers" (**aGro-mGon-Pa**). Arising out of this emphasis, such observances like pilgrimage, circumambulation and meditational walks became indispensable and predominant aspects of religious life in Tibet. Even spinning the **Mani-Wheel** (mistakenly well-known as prayer-wheel), setting into motion the wheel (**aKHor-Lo**) and conceiving time as a cycle (**aKHor-Ba**, **Kalacakra**) are derived from this emphasis on "moving". A similar disposition is found in **Bon**. For a country teeming with a singularly vast

pantheon and filled with hundreds of thousands of "god-houses" (**CHo-Khang**) and "worship-bases" (**CHos-rTen**), to be preoccupied with void as the original and Ultimate Reality may appear very strange. The hold of the "Blue Sky" over the **Bon** mind has never been completely shaken off; all Tibet seems to have inherited their perspective.

Mani-wheels (**Mani-CHos-KHor**) are peculiarly Tibetan. In fact the Tibetan religion was known to the Chinese only as "Mani-religion". The Mani-wheel is a mechanical device, by means of which the mystic formula "Om Mani-Padme Hum", written, etched, inscribed or embossed, is made to spin around, as an act of piety. Tibet has had millions of such wheels which have been spinning (moved by hand, water or wind) all over the country for century upon century. This wheel was clearly not of Indian origin, although Padmasambhava is reputed to have introduced it. The sacred formula "Om Mani-Padme Hum" ("Oh, Jewel in the Lotus, Amen"), is said to comprehend both tradition and doctrine. But its exact meaning is lost in obscurity. One view is that **Manipadme** is a vocative, addressed to the patron-god of Tibet, Avalokitesvara, and his incarnation in the Dalai Lama. Another view analyzes the six-syllabled spell as signifying six classes of sentient beings for whom the devotee must exhibit compassion. Still another view would see in the nominative **Mani** the male principle (**linga**) and in the locative **Padme** the female principle (**yonī**), the union of the two symbolising the familiar Tibetan 'yab-yum' (Father-Mother)—a typically Tantric idea.

Such a diverse history and such a complexity of elements and rituals narrate the real story of Tibet's understanding of **dharmā** and its adaptation to its unique **CHos**. Throughout this entire process, dimensions of the original **Bon** religion perdure, sometimes dominating, sometimes obscure, yet ever-present within this process of adaptation. This is main reason that Tibet may be said to have manifested a truly unique **CHos (dharmā)**.

#### SELECTED READINGS

1. Blofeld, J., *The Way of Power*, London: G. Allen, 1970.
2. Chattopadhyaya., *Alaka Atisa and Tibet*, Calcutta, 1970.
3. David Neel, A., *Initiations and Initials in Tibet*, London: Rider, 1930.

4. Evans-Wentz, W.Y., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, The Tibetan Book of the great Liberation, Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines, and Tibet's great Yogi Milarepa*. London: Oxford University, 1927.
5. Guenther, T., *Yugananddha, The Tantrik way of life*. Banaras: Chowkhamba, 1969.
6. Obermiller, E., *History of Buddhism* (2 parts). New York: A.A. Knopf, 1931.
7. Snellgrove, D., *Buddhist Himalaya*. Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1957.
8. Tucci, G., *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (2 vols). Rome, 1949.
9. Vostrikov, A.I., *Tibetan Historical Literature*. Calcutta, 1970
10. Waddell, L., *Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*. London, 1895.