

The Kargyupa Sect

Dr. Anukul Chandra Banerjee

A hundred years after Buddha's Mahaparinirvana dissension arose among the monks in regard to the actual words of the master and their interpretations which ultimately led to the origin of sects in Indian Buddhism, all aiming to have preserved his original teachings. And within a few hundred years after the demise of the Great Teacher as many as twenty sects or more came into existence—although a few of them disappeared shortly after their appearance. But in regard to the origin of Buddhist sects in Tibet, the case has been quite different and about ten sects came into being there in course of time. The Tibetan sects came into existence with a view to preserving the purity of the Buddhist teachings and doing away with the degrading practices, superstitions, beliefs and the like then prevalent prior to the Buddhist doctrines. Waddell¹ writes that the sects "arose in revolt against the depraved Lamaism then prevalent, which was little else than a priestly mixture of demonolatriy and witchcraft. Abandoning the grosser charlatanism the new sects returned to celibacy and many of the purer "Mahayana rules". "Buddhist Religion" observes S.C. Das² "progressed more and more, so as to branch out into numerous different sects as a result of the extraordinary growth. These, like the eighteen divisions of the Vaibhasika school of ancient India were designated after the names of respective teachers and places of origin. Some of the Tibetan Lamas who had derived their religious knowledge from Indian Pandits; feeling great veneration for the theories themselves, named their respective sects after them. They did not follow the Indian patriarchs in their nomenclature, for all the Indian Buddhist Schools were designated after the general sense of their philosophies". Inded, it was through the efforts of these sects, Buddhism was widely spread and occupied the position it did in Tibet.

-
1. The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism, pp. 74,75
 2. JASB, part II p. 5

There were no sects in Tibet prior to the eleventh century A.D. Buddhism as already observed, suffered a violent setback for the time-being because of the King Glang-dar-ma's ruthless persecution. No sect prior to 11th century A. D. Thus came the great disaster to Buddhism. It was virtually annihilated in Tibe. According to the Tibetan historians "the doctrine was rooted out". The period which followed the year of the persecution of the doctrine is one of the darkest in the whole history of Tibet".

In the 11th century A.D. King Ye-ses-hod who was one of the pious kings of Tibet and to whom Buddhist renaissance owed much invited Atisa (Dipankara Srijnana) to come to Tibet Invitation to Atisa from India to propagate Buddhism there. Since Atisa came to Tibet he corrected, rectified and systematised the Buddhist teachings then prevalant. He reformed the Sangha in Tibet and brought a great renaissance in the religion.

With his reformation originated the Kadam -pa sect, the first sect of Tibetan Buddhism as against the unreformed type of Buddhism called Ning-ma-pa "the old ones" founded by Padmasambbhava, better known as Guru Rinpoche. T.W. Kadampa sect Shakabpa¹ writes that "the teachings of Atisa were subjected to a reformation movement by Drom and, as a result, a new school of Buddhism came into being in Tibet. To distinguish themselves from the unreformed followers of Padmasambhava, the followers of Atisa and Drom were called Ka-dam-pa (one of the doctrine) while the unreformed monks were called Nying-ma-pa (one of the old)." Thus Tibetan Buddhism developed into various sects from the time of Atisa. In other words Tibetan sects traced their heritage to the great Acarya Dipankara Srijnana late sometime in the latter part of the 11th century A.D. "All contemporaneous and later sects without exception were influenced by the teachings of the Bkah-dam-pa sect." "No sects" observed Waddell, "appear to have existed prior to Lan-Darma's persecution, nor till more than a century and a half later. The sectarian movement seems to date from the reformation started by the Indian Buddhist monk Atisha".

1. Tibet : A Political History, pp. 59,60

2. The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism, p. 54

Tibetan Buddhism, as we have seen, developed into various sects later on. Most of them are now extant. Only few of them still survive. We have, however, few details about them.

Of the sects extant the Kargyud-pa (bKah-rgud-pa) is one of the important sects in Tibet. In Tibetan, bKah-rGyud means "the transmission of teachings". In other words, it means the tradition of instructions orally transmitted through a continual series of teachers and disciples. It is that is why it is called "school of successive order". It may also be called "Oral Traditionalism". Its followers believe in the succession of precepts handed down through the galaxy of teachers. It traces its origin to Marpa (11th century A. D.), a native of Lho-brag, who visited India and Tibet and studied extensively the Tantric texts with a number of eminent teachers there. On his return to Tibet he founded this sect on the basis of the teachings of his teacher Naropa, the great Indian Siddhacarya (master of mysticism).

The Kargyud-pa (bKa-brgyud-pa) has two main schools: the Shangs-pa bKa'-brgyud- (Shangpa-Kargyud-) and Dvags-po-bKa'-brgyud- Dagpo-Kargyud-pa).

(1) The Shangpa Kargyud—was established by the great Yogi and Siddha Khyung-po-rNal-a'Byor (978-1079 A. D.). He spent fifty years in studying Sutra and Tantra texts in India, Nepal and Tibet. Among his teachers were Nigu (the consort of Mahasiddha Naropa), Sukhasiddha and Rahualgupta. He built about a hundred monasteries including his own principal monastery Zhang-Zhong in Shangpa Kargyud Shangs valley and that is also known as Shangpa Kargyud. He taught for about thirty years and had eighty thousand disciples. His teachings were based on the five Tantras, viz., Samvara, Hevajra, Mahamaya, Guhyasamaja and Vajrabhairava. He also taught the teachings of Nigu and Sukhasiddha as also the doctrine of Mahamudra. This system is not at present wide-spread as a school.

(11) The Dag-po-bkah-brgyud- [Dagpo Kargyud]— it means the transmission of the order of Dag-po, which is the name of a great scholar-ascetic who lived in the Dagpo valley. It spread widely and is one of the four major schools of Tibet. It may be pertinent to note here that now Dagpo Kargyud is the only Kargyud (bKah-rgyud), since Shangpa Kargyud

the first one is not well-known— it is now almost

Dagpo Kargyud extinct. (Marpa - Lo-tsa - wa'), Chos - kyi - Blo-gros (Chokyi Lodro), is the founder of this school in the 11th century A. D. He studied first with a'Brog-mi-lo-tsa-ba (Drogmi-Lotsawa) and then visited India thrice and Nepal four times, He received the teachings of Tantras from the renowned teachers such as Naropa and Maitripa. Specially he obtained the absolute realization of Mahamudra mysticism from the teaching of Maitripa. In Tibet, he transmitted the teachings of Samvara, Guhyasamaja, Hevajra, Mahamaya and other Tantras to his disciples, so called four pillars, viz., rNgog, Chhos-SkurDo-rJe (Ngogton - Choku - Dorje), mTshur - ston - dBang - Ngo (Tshurton-Wang-Ngo), Mes-sTon Tshon-po (Meton - Tshonpo) and Mi-la-Ras-pa (Milarepa), the great hermit-poet of Tibet. This esoteric doctrine was thereafter orally transmitted to Bu-ston, the eminent scholar and authoritative historian of Tibet and Tson-Kha-pa, the great Tibetan reformer 'in whose hands this tradition gained extensive prevalence and unbroken continuity down to the present time !

From this Dagpo Kargyud arose four major sub-sects and eight minor sub-sects from one of its sub-sects latter on. The four major sub-sects are: Karma Kargyud (Kamtshang Kargyud), Kargtru Kargyud, Tshalpa Kargyud and Barompa Kargyud.

(a) **Karma Kargyud** was founded in the middle of the 12th century A. D. by Karmapa Dus-gSum-mKhyan-pa (Du-sum-khyenpa). He studied the various doctrines with Dagpo-Lhaje and Rechungpa. He built monasteries at Karma Lha-Iding and in Tshur-phu (Tshu-phu) for the great benefit of the people. He died at the age of eighty.

Since Karmapa Dusum Khyanpa the heads of

Karma Kargyud this sub-sect have been the uninterrupted rein-

carnation of him till the present time. His

next reincarnation was Karma Pakshi. Thence, after Pakshi, this

sect was also called the "Black Cap Sect" (Shwa-nag-can)". The XVIth Karmapa Rigpai Dorje (Rig-pa'i Rdo-rje) who used to live at Rumtek, Sikkim, passed away on 6.11.81 in Chicago, USA.

He visited several countries abroad. He established more than two hundred meditation centres in the various parts of the world. His principal monastery in Tibet was the mTshur-phu in Central Tibet. It should be pointed out here that the Karmapa 'seems to be nearly identical with the Karmapa sect of Nepal'.

(b) **Phagtru Kargyud (Phag-gru-bkab-brgyud)**— it was founded by Phagmo- Trupa Dorje, Gyalpo (Phag-mo-Gru-pa-rDo-rJe - rGyal-po) who was born in the southern part of Kham in 1110 A.D. He studied the various teachings under different teachers. Afterwards he learnt the Mahamudra (doctrine of the great symbol) from Dagpo Lhaje at Sgam-po monastery. He constructed a monastery at a place called Pha-mo-gru in South Tibet (now known as Densa-Thil-gDan-sa-mThil) to propagate the doctrine and was hence called Phamo-Trupa. He died at the age of sixtyone in 1170 A.D. He had a large number of disciples which formed many sub-sects later on.

(c) **Tshalpa Kargyud (Tshal-ba-kagyud)**—the founder of this sub-sect was Zhang-Dar-matrog (Zhang Darma Grags) who was born in 1122 A.D. His main preceptor was Wongom Tshultrim (dBon-bsGom Tshul-khrims sNying-pa) who was a disciple of Dagpo. Later on he founded the Gung-thang monastery to popularise the doctrine and Tshalpa Kargyud to convert the people. He died at the age of seventyone in 1193 A.D.

(d) **Barompa-Kagyud (Sbab-Rom bKa-brgyud)** Darma Wangchug (Dar-Ma-dBang-phyug) was a disciple of Dagpo. He studied all the doctrines, both exoteric and esoteric, under him and attained all excellent virtues. He built the Barom monastery in the North and hence his tradition was known as the Barom Kargyud.

-
1. To pay his homage to the IXth Gyalwa Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje, Gyurmed Namgyal, the ruler of Sikkim constructed the first Karmapa monastery at Ralang in Sikkim in about 1730 A. D.

We have seen before that the eight minor sub-sects issued from the Dagpo Kargyudpa. But rightly speaking, they originated with the Phagtru Kargyud. In other words, they traced their heritage to the disciples of Phagmo Trupa. They are :—

(1) Drigung Kargyud (a'Bri-Gung bKa'-bagyud) — it was founded by Kyuru Rimpoche (Skyu-Ru-Rin-po-che). He received the teachings of the Kargyud from Phagmo Trupa and became an eminent scholar and a famous monk. His religious discourses were usually attended by a number of his disciples including many monks. He built a monastery in Drigung valley in Central Tibet and hence his tradition was known as Drikungpa. In Ladhak, there are a large number of Drikung Kargyud followers and many monasteries.

(2) Taglung Kargyud (sTag-Lung bKa'-brgyud-) — it was founded by Taglung Thangpa Trashipal (sTag-Lung-Thang-pa bkra-shi - dpal), who was born in 1142 A.D. He became an attendant of Phagmo Trupa who taught him all his doctrines. He built a monastery at Taglung (sTag-Lung) valley for propagation of Buddhism and to his tradition became known after it.

(3) Yamzang Kargyud (gYa'-bZang bKa'-brgyud) — it was founded by Ye-She-Sang (Ye-Shes-Sange), a disciple of Phagmo Trupa and a native of Mon-hgar. He got the highest realisation just at the sight of his guru (preceptor). His foremost disciple was Yamzang Kargyud Yamzang (gYa'-bZang-pa) who built the Yamzang monastery there. He trained many disciples. Their tradition was named Yamzang Kargyudpa.

(4) Throphu Kargyud (Khro-phu-bKa'-brgyud-) — originated with two brothers¹. Rinpoche Gyal-tsha and Kunden Rogpo, disciples of

1. According to some nephew and uncle.

The former built the Throphu monastery. Their nephew was Throphu Lotsawa who was ordained as a monk by Throphu Kargyud his uncle and learnt extensively all the teachings from them. He invited many Indian teachers including the great Pandita Sakyasri of Kashmir. He built a temple at Throphu monastery and installed a big image of Maitreya Buddha therein. He also wrote a number of books. Their tradition was thus known as Throphu Kargyud.

(5) Shungseb Kargyud (Shugs-Sgeb-bKa'-brgyud) — originated with Chokyi Senge (Chos-kyi-senge), a disciple of Phagmo Trupa. He built Nyephu Shugseb (sNye-phu-Shugs-gseb) monastery and gave religious discourses to the people. His tradition was known as Shugseb Kargyud.

(6) Martshang Kargyud (sMar-tshang) — This tradition was started by Marpa Rinchen Lodro (sMar-pa-Rin-chen-Blo Gros). Martshang Kargyud

(7) Yepa (Yelpa) Kargyud — this tradition was established by Yepa Yeshe Tseg (Yel-ba-ye-shes-brtsegs). He built Shar sDorje Dzong (Shar-rDo-rJe-rDzong). Lho-Yel-phug (Lho-yel-phug) and Chang Tans (Byang-rTa-rNa) monasteries for propagation of his teachings.

(8) Drukpa Kargyud (sDrun-pa-bKa'brgyud) — this Tradition was established by Phagmo Trupa's disciple Tsangpa Gyare (gTsang-par Gya-Ras). Later it divided itself into three sub-schools, viz., the middle Drukpa, Lower Drukpa and Upper Drukpa.

(a) The Par-Druk (Middle Drukpa Kargyud) (Bar-dBrug) — Ling-repa Padma rDo-rJe (Gling-Ras-pa-Padma - rDo-rJe) was a highly enlightened disciple of Phagmo Trupa. He built a monastery at Nagphur (sNa-phur). Among his disciples, Tsangpa-Gyare (gTsaug-pa-rGyur-Ras) was a famous teacher. He built Longdorl (Klong-rDol) and Balung (Ralung) monasteries.

Then he went to a place called Namkyi phu (gNam-Gyi-phu) to build a monastery. Along with his party when he reached there they saw nine Druks (a'Brug—Dragons) flying into the sky with roars. He took it to be a good omen. And he called the name of the monastery as Druk(a'Brug,) and Druk Sewa Chang chub Gon as also Namdruk (gNam-a'Brug). It is that is why this tradition was known as Druk and his followers as Drukpa. There is a Tibetan proverb which means as follows:—

“Half of the people are Drukpa Kagyudpas,
 Half of the Drukpa Kagyudpas are beggars,
 And half of the Beggars are Drubthobs (Siddhas)”

Later on, in this tradition appeared many disciples. Among them there was Padma Karpo (Padma dKar-po), also known as Kun Khyen (Kun-mKhyen—Sarvajna), who founded the Sang Ngag Choling (gSang-sNgas Chhos-gling) monastery near the border of Assam (in Tibet) and it became the seat of the Druk-chhen incarnations. Tibet apart, this sub-school is very popular in Bhutan. It is because of this Bhutan is called Druk (a'Brug).

(b) Med-Druk(Smad-a'Brug - lower Druk)—Lorepa Darma Wangchuk (Lo-Res-pa-Dar-Ma-dbang-phyug) was a disciple of Tsangpa Gyare and others. He led a very humble and disciplined life. He built Wuri (dBu-Ri) monastery and then made Sang-Ri as his seat

Med Druk (residence). His tradition was known a Med-Druk.

(c) Tod-Druk (sTod—a'brug -- Upper Druk), Godtshanpa Gompo Dorje (rGod--Tshang-pa mGon-po-rDo-rje) was a distinguished disciple of Tsangpa Gyare. He had many disciples. Later in this tradition

Baraba Gyaltsen Palzang (a'ba-Re - Ba-rGyal mTshan— dPal—bZang) wrote numerous works.

Ogyenpa Rinchenpal who was a disciple of Odshanpa was a great Siddha and visited Bodh-Gaya, Jalandhara, Ordiana (Ujjan) and China. Among his disciples were Karmapa Rangchung Dorje (Rang-Byung-rDo-rje), Kharchupa (mKhar-Chhu-pa) and Togden Dasegn (rTogs-Den-Zla-seng).

At present among all the Kargyudpa sub-schools Karma Kargyud (Darma Kamtshang) is the most widely spread sub-school and comes first, the Drukpa Kargyud comes second and Drikung Kargyud counting third.

Lastly, the Kargyudpa generally follows the tradition of Kadampa on doctrinal matters. But they further practise the four Tantras, viz., Kriyatantra, Caryatantra, Yogatantra and Anuttaratantra of the New Translation Tantras. Its special teachings are Naro-Chodruk¹ of Mahasiddha Naropa and the Mahamudra teachings of Mahasiddha Maitripa.

1. The six aspects of instructions of Naropa are: Tumo (Heart-Yoga), Gyulu (Maya-body), Milam (Dream), Odsel (Radiant Clarity), Pardo-Bardo (Intermediate stage between death and birth) and Phowa (Transference.)