

# Acarya Santaraksita

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Buddhism moulded the thought, ideals and literature of the entire South-East and North-East portion of Asia from the 3rd Century B. C. to the 12th Century A. D. Tibet also came into contact with India through Buddhism whose contribution to the cultural advancement of Tibet is highly noteworthy.

The Tibetan dPag-bSam-lJon-bZan of Sum-pa-mKhan-po-ye-shes-dpal-hbyor<sup>1</sup> and Kun-dga-rDo-rJe's Deb-thar dmar-po<sup>2</sup> give us a long list of Indian teachers who visited Tibet to propagate the sublime teachings of Buddha and participated in the Tibetan translation of the Buddhist works. Bu-sTon<sup>3</sup> also provides us with a list of teachers who visited Tibet. According to S.C, Das<sup>4</sup> not less than eighty-nine teachers were invited to preach Buddhism in Tibet. They were further employed with the co-operation of the Tibetan teachers to translate the Sanskrit texts into Tibetan. They were indeed the spiritual teachers of the Tibetan Buddhist world but our knowledge of their life and career is very scanty. We know practically nothing about them beyond that they visited Tibet and took part in the translation works. We have positive evidence of only very few eminent teachers. The most eminent of them was Santaraksita. Here is a brief account of this teacher :

Santaraksita was born in the royal family of Zahor<sup>5</sup>. In Tibetan he is called Zhi-ba-tsho (lit. Santi-jiva). He is also known in Tibetan as Santiraksita and

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1. P. 408.

2. PP. 18ff.

3. The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet by Bu-ston—translated from Tibetan into English by E. Obermiller, part II, pp. 215ff.

4. Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow, p.53.

5. In Bengal or near Lahore at some site not yet identified.

Acarya Bodhisattva.<sup>1</sup> He was born during the reign of Gopala (660-705 A. D.), the founder of the famous Pala dynasty of Bengal and died at the time of Dharmapala who ascended the throne in 765 A. D. The dPag-bSam-lJon-bZang<sup>2</sup> records that he must have lived between king Gopala and King Dharmapala. He was a distinguished teacher of The Yogacara school of Buddhist thought and the Professor of Nalanda University, the "Oxford of Buddhist India".

King Khri-Srong-lDe-bTsan (755-797 A.D.) was a staunch admirer of Buddhism and directed all his efforts to further the consolidation of Buddhism in Tibet. With this purpose he invited the famous Indian teacher Santaraksita to Tibet to spread the genuine teachings of Indian Buddhism among his people. Santaraksita came to Tibet and was warmly received by the people there "with all the honours due to his high position as the spiritual teacher of the king of Magadha".

Arriving in Tibet Santaraksita began to preach the fundamental teachings of Buddhism. He dwelt elaborately on the Buddhist code of morality consisting of the ten basic points of the virtuous life (Dasa Kusalani) and the chain of casual relation (Pratityasamutpada) explaining the misery of the mundane existence. S. C. Das<sup>3</sup> writes that "Santaraksita introduced the observance of the ten virtues<sup>4</sup> and Dharma which teaches the real state of the eighteen physical and corporeal regions with the eight prohibitions such as killing, the taking of what is not given, the commission of foul action, lying, drinking, dancing and singing and sitting on lofty seats".

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1. The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet by Bu-ston—translated from Tibetan into English by Obermiller, Part II, p. 187.

2. P.112.

3. J. A. S. B., 1882, p. 7.

4. i) not to commit murder, ii) nor to commit theft, iii) not to commit adultery, iv) not to utter lies, v) not to speak evil nor utter abusive language, vi) not to tell nonsense, vii) not to slander, viii) not to be convetuous, ix) not to think an injury, x) not to be averse to truth.

Santaraksita's eloquent sermons fell on deaf ears. His new code of moral conduct came in sharp conflict with the age-old theory and practices of the Bon religion. This enraged the malignant deities and devils of Tibet. The consequence had been that Tibet was visited by all kinds of bad calamities like storms, and epidemics raged furiously. "The great gods and demons of Tibet became wrathful. Lightning struck the palace of dMer-po-ri, and the royal palace of 'Phan-than' was carried away by water. Harvest was damaged and a great epidemic took place". "When", says, S. C. Das<sup>1</sup>, "the mighty local gods and genii who delight in sin found that men were proved to virtue they became enraged and one of the most wrathful among them named Nenchhen-Than hurled a thunder-bolt on the Marpori hall. Another frightful demi-god named Yar-Lha-Shan-po cast down the place of Phan-Lhan of Yar-Lung. The fierce female spirits called "Tanma" spread plagues and murrain all over the country". The adherents of Bon with the active support of the King's uncle incited the people by alleging that this calamity was due to the wrath of the gods at the introduction of this form of religion and also for the presence of this alien teacher in Tibet. Undoubtedly this accusation caused a serious set-back to the propagation of Buddhism.

At the advice of the king Santaraksita had to flee Nepal for the time-being to evade the Bonpo indignation. But subsequently the king invited him back to Tibet. Again the people began to offer opposition in his preachings of Buddhism. He then thought that a teacher possessed of super-natural powers and mystic charms would be able to move deeply the people of Tibet, steeped in sorcery, exorcism and the like. Accordingly, he advised the king to invite the celebrated Buddhist teacher Padmasambhava to come to Tibet and subdue the Tibetan devils and demi-gods.

On the advice of Acarya Santaraksita king Khri-Srong-lde-btsan

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1. J. A. S. B., 1882.

sent messengers to bring Padmasambhava to Tibet. He accepted the invitation of the king and escorted by messengers came to Tibet in 747 A. D. With his siddhi power he subdued all the local evil spirits of Tibet. This indeed contributed to the re-assertion of Buddhism in Tibet.

Invitation to  
Padmasambhava

The king built Sam-Ye monastery, the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet and Acarya Santaraksita was appointed the head of the monastery. Bus-ton<sup>1</sup> observes that Padmasambhava "subdued all the Tibetan demons. Thereafter the teacher (Santaraksita) was invited to Sam-Ye and established his residence there". With the construction of this monastery Buddhism made a steady progress in Tibet.

Construction of the  
Sam-Ye Monastery

Santaraksita delivered many religious discourses to the Tibetans and the king. The Blue-Annals<sup>2</sup> records that "many Tibetans took up ordination and propagated the doctrine of the Vinaya". He conferred the monk-vows first on the "Seven men on Trial" (Sad-mi-mi-dun). "The seven most distinguished and talented among the young Tibetans who were selected by king Khri-Srong-lde-btsan to be trained as monks by Acarya Santaraksita, were thoroughly instructed in religion and sacred sciences. The three elder ones among them were : Manjusri of dPa', Devendra of rTsans, Kumudika of Bran, while the three junior ones were : Nagendra of 'Khon, Vairocanarakasita of Pagor and acarya Rinchenchog of rMa and an intermediate one was Katana of gLan". Bu-ston<sup>3</sup> also tell us that "12 monks of the Sarvastivadins were invited and it was put to the test, whether the Tibetans could become monks or not. For this purpose seven men were selected and ordained as monks".

Discourses and  
Ordination

After this a few Indian teachers like Vimalamitra, Buddhaguhya, Santi-grabha and Visuddhasimha were brought to Tibet. They translated

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1. History of Buddhism in India and Tibet by Bu-ston, translated into English by Obermiller, pt. II, p. 189.
  2. p. 106.
  3. The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet, Bu-ston, Pt. II, p. 190.

the Buddhist works into Tibetan in co-operation with those initiated before. Thus in the time of Santaraksita there commenced the systematic translation of Buddhist works into Tibetan.

Visits of Indian Teachers

Santaraksita was the author of several philosophical and logical works. In the Tibetan Tanjur a number of works are attributed to him among which the *Vadanyayavrttivipancitartha* and *Tattvasamgraha* (*Tattvasamgrahakarika*) deserve special mention.

Contribution to Buddhism

The first work is a commentary on the *Vadanyaya* of Dharmakirti. The Sanskrit original of this work is lost but the Tibetan translation still exists. The second one contains memorial verses of a summary of the *Tattvas*. It criticises the moral and disciplinary part of the Buddhist and non-Buddhist systems. His other works are preserved in Tibetan translations, the Sanskrit originals of which are lost.

He worked hard for thirteen years in Tibet but then died suddenly of an accident "having been kicked by a horse, he went to his rest".

Death

Lastly, it may be observed that Santaraksita was a Buddhist teacher in the real sense of the term who worked assiduously to give a solid foundation for Buddhism in Tibet. His contribution to the cause of Buddhism is indeed unique and highly praise-worthy.