ANTIOQITY OF THE WORD BLA-MA

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Western and Japanese scholars generally hold that the usage BLA-MA is not as ancient as the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet (c. 7th century A.C.), and that the word became current long after the assassination of Glang-dar-ma (c. 842 A.C.) and long after the final victory of Buddhism. The earliest chronicles which did not undergo my revision, p Bedford, and interpolations in later times as the contemporary inscriptions of the Chos-rgal period do not use the word BLA-MA. The words used are Ban-de, Slob-dpon, Rab-byung, Mkhon-po or Rin po-che.

In an article in the Bulletin, Vol. V, No. 2, p. 41, I wrote “Now epigraphic or contemporary evidence is available so far to vouch for the usage Lama (bla ma) in the seventh century and even in the eighth”, several epigraphists and linguists have enquired whether I have any evidence for the usage in the ninth century. I do not read the ancient documents, literary or epigraphic and thus submit my affirmative answer on corroborative but unimpeachable data.

The word Bla-ma occurs in several different contexts in the Mahavyutpaiti, a word admitted to have been completed in the reign of Ral-pa-can, that is, first quarter of the ninth century. The diverse contexts make clear that like its Sanskrit prototype (Guru) the Tibetan form (Bla-ma) was an omenous word not unknown to scholar and translators of the time. A careful notice of these (given below) rules out interpolations in later time.

उत्तर: मुनि
उत्तर-नाम: मुनि
उत्तर-नस्त्र: मुनि
उत्तर-मनुष्य-भर्म-प्रशान: कर्मकालिक महात्मा
उत्तर-मनुष्य-धर्म-मुख्योत्तर: कर्मकालिक महात्मा
उत्तर-मनुष्य-धर्म-प्रशान: कर्मकालिक महात्मा
उत्तर-मनुष्य-धर्म-मुख्योत्तर: कर्मकालिक महात्मा

गुरु-नाम: मुनि
If the word Bla-ma is not derived from Sanskrit Brahmay Brahma and is of indigenous origin (1) there is more reason to believe that the Indian Pandita and the Tibetan Lo-tsa-va agreed to have a current (indigenous) term for Brahman/Brahmā in the sense of Guru with the well-known permissive 'Y' for 'R'. For tracing the history of the word Bla-ma the etymology of Brahma/Brahmana has to be studied as much as that of Bla-ma. In Buddhism, notwithstanding its opinion about Brahmana as a caste, the word Brahmana was an honorific usage. Brahmana was the holy man or the teacher and even Buddha called himself a Brahmana (2). In Saka-Khotanese languages words cognate with Brahmana were used to denote Buddha (3), this is not surprising in view of the wide circulation in Central Asia of Sanskrit dharmasūtra (trāntascaya) the earliest Buddhist treatise in eulogy of brahmana the holy man (4). I am inclined to accept the usage of Bla-ma for Buddha, Brahmana or Guru sometime after the ordination of the first Lamas by Santarakshita and Padmasambhava towards the end of the eighth century. Indian Buddhist diction has an important example of change of spelling and change of meaning in Dipa/Dvipa, Tibetan Buddhist diction is not free from mystic forms.

If Buddha and Brahmana Sangs-dgri and Bla-ma, are synonymous, the occurrence of the word Bla-ma descriptive of the ordained monk may be dated sometime after the Ordination. Once an equivalent of Guru/Uttara was found the word was handy for the different contexts as in Mahāyānapari.

When Tibet's own ordained monk expounded the teachings of Buddha, Buddha was no longer an unknown stranger, झान्छोधि ज्ञान्वित एकां हृदस्तिः श्रीमानसि

I am not a specialist in linguistics but as a reader of history I trace the origin of the saying 'When there was no Lama the name of Buddha was not known even' to the intervening period between the Ordination (c. 780 A.C.) and the succession of Rol-pa-chen (c. 815 A.C.) in supersession of the claims of the anti-Buddhist idar Glang-dar-ma. The historical significance of the historic text, as I have submitted here, cannot be overlooked in tracing the antiquity of the word Bla-ma.
1. For a recent discussion see Richard Keith Sprigg in *Tibetan Review* (Darjeeling), May 1969, P. 12.

2. *Prolegomena to Lamaist Policy* (Calcutta 1969) may be seen.


4. Standard editions (and translations) are those of P. Steinthal (London 1886), D.M. Strong (London 1902), K. Seidenstucker (Berlin 1920) and N.P. Chakravarti (Paris 1930) besides notices in journals by B.C. Mazumder, Pischel, Sylvain Levi and La Vallée Poussin. Tibetan translation of *Udāna-nārāyaṇa* is incorporated both in Kanjur (Mdo-ṣod) and Tanjur (Mgon-pa'i). The Tibetan *Udāna-nārāyaṇa* was translated into English by W.W. Rockhill (1883) and the Khotanese *Dhammapada* by A.W. Bailey (1945).