

BODONG PHYOGLAS RNAM RGYAL

—J. K. Rechung

Even before the Institute of Tibetology was established, His Holiness The Dalai Lama presented many Buddhist Texts printed from the blocks housed in Shol-Parkhang, the printing house below Potala, Lhasa. The books presented were that of the Lhasa Edition, such as BKAH-HGYUR, the works of BU STON, TSONGKHAPA, RGYALTSHAB RJE and MKHAS DRUB RJE, the lives and works of the thirteen Dalai Lamas, etc. Recently His Holiness The Dalai Lama has presented the Institute of Tibetology with a set of complete works of BODONG which is rightly described in English as Encyclopaedia Tibetica through the Ven. Doobom Rimpoche, Director, Tibet House, New Delhi. It is a mammoth collection consistng of 137 volumes.

The author of the Encyclopaedia was BODONG PHYOGLAS RNAM RGYAL, who was also known as 'JIGSMED DRAGS PA. BODONG PHYOGLAS RNAM RGYAL was born in the Wood Hare year of the Tibetan Calender corresponding to 1375 of the Western Calender, near a place called mount Lakpakang in the north of Mount Parpata in Western Tibet. His father was a holyman, a skilled craftsman and a great poet known as CHHOS DBYING RGYAL MTSHAN. His mother DBYANG CHUB SDRON was a pious and learned lady.

According to legends, miracles and extra-ordinary phenomena characterized BODONG'S life from the moment of conception. When he was in the womb, the mother had strange dream of four auspicious signs. First, she saw a full moon much brighter than any full moon. Secondly, rainbow colours emanated from her body. Thirdly, she heard unusual melodious sounds and fourthly, she got the smell of the scent of the best sandalwood.

At the age of three, while his governess was taking him around, he suddenly disappeared from the sight. The governess searched in vain

all over, and suddenly found him on the other side of the river. To get him across the river, the governess had to engage some sturdy men. There were many onlookers, some felt they had seen a child swim across the river like a swan, others felt they saw him flying across, and there were still others, who felt they saw him walk on the water while crossing the river. These visions, signified that in his previous life he had crossed the ocean of Samsara and attained enlightenment.

During childhood, the author was indeed unlike other children of his age. He would perch himself on a high stone, or anything high and gather the other children around and pose to preach religion. When he reached the age of five, he could attain contemplation in different ways due to his propensities in former life. Once he disappeared, and was found meditating in the seven perfect meditation postures, in a dilapidated house. He thus engrossed himself in many religious practices even at this early age.

Once when his teacher in BSAM STAN GLING Monastery asked him what he was looking at; in reply to the teacher's query, he said, that he could see the letter 'AH', written in white in the middle of his fore-head. From this letter 'AH', emanated numerous other letters filling the whole sky, and then all the letters assimilated back into the white 'AH' again. At the age of five he took ordination to be a perfect monk. from his uncle, Panchen Dragpa Rgyal Mtshen, and he was named RGYAL MTSHAN SENGE GE. Later, he went to CHHOS DBYING Monastery to take the vow of Pravrajya (DGE TSHUL) from his teacher DRAG PA RGYAL MTSHEN. At such a young age he received the teachings on TSHAD MA (Pramana) and had full knowledge of the subject. While studying the Pramana he had a bright clear vision of Lord Buddha surrounded by SHODASA MAHASTHAVIRA, the Sixteen Arhats.

At the age of thirteen, he made up his mind to write Commentaries on all the Sutras and Tantras. While contemplating over the matter,

Vajrasattva and Vajra Yogini, appeared to him in Real Form and told him to write Commentaries on Tattvasamgraha of Santarakshita. Once he saw Lotsava Drakpa Gyaltsen in his dream telling him to correct the text of Rnam 'byed rgya mtsho in which Lotsava Drakpa Rgyal-tshen felt that had made some mistakes BODONG was asked not only to correct mistakes and also to write a commentary on the subject.

At the age of sixteen he went to Sakya to have discourses on Pramaṇa Vartika Karika (TSHAD MA RNAM 'GREL) with some great scholars. The scholars were impressed with him Although having not studied Poetry, he composed a Poem in praise of Lord Buddha's Twelve Deeds He even wrote sonnets on some deities. He became a renowned poet like Pandita Aryasura. He studied subjects like Prajnaparamita, Madhyamika etc; and did the Oral Test on all the subjects with his teacher Kashika Chosang.

Young BODONG wishing to obtain advanced knowledge of such subjects as Tantrayana and Sutranya went to CHHOS DBYING Monastery to propitiate DBYANGS CHEN MA (Goddess Saraswati). He went into retreat, and not before long Goddess Saraswati appeared to him holding a SGRA SNYAN (stringed instrument) from which emanated melodious sounds of DHARMA. From then onwards the Goddess often appeared to him and gave him guidance. He composed a poem in praise of Goddess Saraswati. The title of the poem is BUNG BAI GLU DBYANG (Songs of the Bees) and records the composers name as Dbyang Chen Dgah bai Pandita, meaning the Pandita who adores Goddess Saraswati.

BODONG was well versed in the Three Courses that lead to the perfection of the author of Sastra. The first course is a thorough knowledge of the subject as preached by the great teachers, ranging from Lord Buddha himself down to the author's own Guru. The second course is complete mastery over the five sciences, namely, the science of Grammar, the science of Medicine, the science of Logic and the knowledge of the symbolic meaning of the Tripitakas.

The third and the last course is the author being blessed by a vision of his tutelary deity and being told to write a Shastra.

Within a short while he had full knowledge of the texts on Vinaya, Abhidharma, Pramana, Prajnāparamita and Madhyamaka composed by Nagarjuna, Maitreya, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Dignaga, Dharmakirti, Chandrakirti and Gunaprabha. He read these texts in original (Sanskrit) and in translation (Tibetan). He was able to learn the texts by heart by going through the texts only thrice. He went to Central Tibet to have discussions with great scholars. The scholars, after debating with the young scholar were amazed and pleased with his knowledge. He received initiation and exposition of Chatur Vidha Tantra from Lotsava Drakpa Rgyal Mtshan and especially on the subject Yogatantra. Lotsava Drakpa Rgyal Mtshan gave him teachings on Guhyasamaja (Gsang-ba-hduspa), the Six Doctrines of Naropa (Naro Chhos Drug) the Chakra Samvara and Lam hbras. He also received teachings from different learned scholars on different subjects. He had acquired perfect knowledge of the subjects that were taught to him.

Once while studying in a place called SMAN GRONG near Kyidung, he visualized Lama Shondon Dorjee Gyaltsen (GSHONG STON RDO RJE RGYAL MTSHAN) adorned in the robe of a Pandita, with religious texts loaded on several Elephants. The Lama seated on the throne read all the texts to the author one by one, and told him that he had imparted all the knowledge of Buddhism to him, and that the author should realize all meanings in order to be able to propagate Buddhism. He was blessed and consecrated by the Lama. From the time of this vision the author could write on all aspects of Buddhism. Learned Lamas like GYAG TIG PA and RONG TIG PA were defeated in debate by the author. On receiving an invitation from the SITU RAB BSTAN PA of GTSHANG district, he went to RGYAL TSE preaching religion all along his way. On the way suddenly a rain of flowers showered from the sky, The flowers were of white, red and blue in colour, and could be seen and touched by

the people, who were amazed. Like wise several miracles occurred on several occasion.

BODONG had many saintly and learned disciples. When above seventy, he had the mind to leave the world, so he preached to his disciples according to their individual aspirations. During his stay at Sekar (SHEL DKAR) a place in Western Tibet he told his disciple BODONG DUPPA (BODONG SGRUB PA) that the time had come for him to go to Dakpa Khachoe (Dag Pa mKha' sPyod), Heaven of Vajrabarahi. He also stated that he was going to leave for Chosang Monastery, which was established by him, in order to complete his incompleated works, before leaving for the heaven of HOG MIN.

In Chosang Monastery he engaged thirty scribes to help him complete his incomplete works. With his blessings, each could complete thirty pages a day even though many of the scribes were not very competent. Before his PARINIRVANA he was able to do all the corrections and even add notes for all the works he started.

At the age of seventy seven, on the 30th day of the second month of the Fire-Sheep year of the Tibetan Calender (1461 of Western Calender). he left for heaven (DAG PA MKHA' SPYOD) lying on his right side with his eyes focussed on the sky.

Before he left the world he told his disciples that they were not to mourn for him on his parting. He went on to say that due to his meditations, propitiations of deities and other practices of religion, during his countless lives, those that met, heard and had any connections with him, would not be born as beasts, hungry ghosts or go to hell. It is recorded in oral and written sources that some of the disciples had visions of the author, being escorted to heaven by goddesses with offerings and songs. On the day of his cremation, there were many spectacular phenomena and wonderful signs,

In the history of Buddhist saints and scholars, in Tibet and in

India, BODONG PHYOGS LAS RNAM RGYAL is the singular figure who composed as many as 137 volumes covering all aspects of Buddhism and even medicine, sciences and crafts.

While legends and miracles are for believers, the undisputed fact is on firm record that BODONG PHYOGS LAS RNAM RGYAL was an Encyclopaedist scholar of the East born in 1375, who attained the peak of his scholarly career in his twenties when he began his writings on not only DHARMA but also on subjects like science and technology. A brief survey of the contents of the GSUNG HBUM is made here.

A look at this rather sketchy outline of the contents will inspire all modern readers about Buddhism or Tibetan sources to go deeper into this monumental work from Tibet's past. Modern scholars will have reasons to be grateful to His Holiness The Dalai Lama for advising and organising this authentic reproduction of BODONG GSUNG HBUM.

CONTENTS OF GSUNG BUM

The works of Bo-dong Phyogs-las Rnam-Rgyal consist of over 955 texts included in 137 volumes. Apart from his immense contribution on Dharma, both Hinayana and Mahayana, BODONG also composed works on technical subjects, such as, History of Buddhism, Biography, Poetry, Kalapa Grammar, Lexicon, Medicine, Astronomy, Mathematical Calculation, Astrology, Art, Religious paintings, etc.

Here under are mentioned some of the important works subject wise :

Hinayana

Hinayana Account of the Buddhism, Ordination Ritual — Vinaya, Sramanera ordination etc.

Mahayana

Prajnaparamita Sutras, Abhidharmakosa, Abhidharma Samuccaya etc.

History

Bu-ston-Rin-chen-grub's History of Kalachakra tantra.

Biography

Sixteen biographies including Bo-dong Phyogs-las Rnam Rgyal.

Logic

Four works on Hindu and Buddhist logic

Philosophy

Including Jaina, Mimamsa, Sankhya, Vaisesika, and Vedanta

Technical subjects

Kosa (Amarakosa), Grammar (Kalapa), Sanskrit Poetics (Kavyadarsa), Nitisastra, Ayurveda (Astangahrdayasamhita), Astrology, Astronomy.

Tantra

Covering over seventy eight different systems, consisting of seven hundred and forty four texts (approx.). Mention may be made of principal tantric works by the author along with their numbers 1) Achala 13, (2) Usnisavijaya Abhisamaya etc. 5, (8) Dakarnava tantra 17, (4) Guhyasamaja 48, (5) Hevajra tantra 53, (6) Kalachakra tantra 33, (7) Manjusri Krodharaja Abhisamaya etc. 32, (8) Mahkala 15, (9) Marichi tantra 6, (10) Mayajala-guhyalankara 14, (11) Raktayamari 19, (12) Parisodhana tantra 11, (13) Samvara Dharani; Abhisamaya Mandalavidhi etc, 101, (14) Sripavamachya Abhisamaya etc 27; (15) Tatasamgraha tantra 12, (16) Vajradaka 9, (17) Vajrapani 15, (18) Vajrabhairava 8, (19) Vairochana 16, (20) Yamari 3, (21) Vasudhara 3, (22) Kalachakra (warfare) 1, (23) Kalachakra (weapons) 1, and so on.

