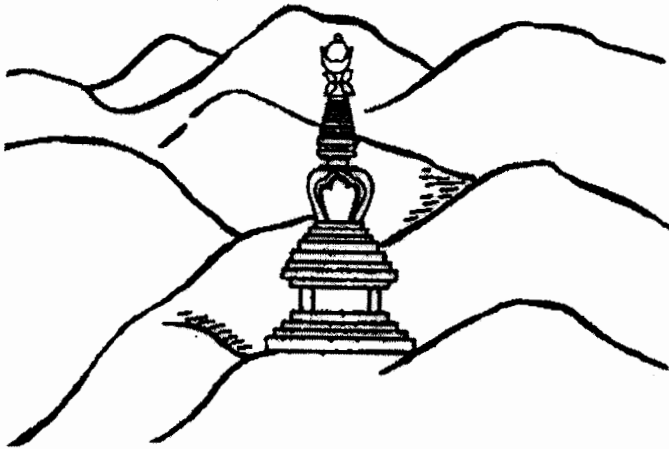


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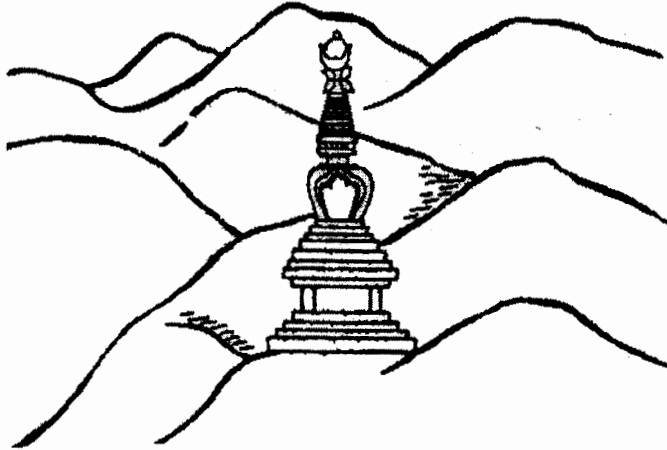
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THE PARAMITA's

- Prof. P. G. Yogi

Thus have I heard. at one time the lord Buddha was sojourning in the shravasti, staying in the jetavana grove which Anathapindika had given to the Brotherhood, and with him were assembled twelve hundred and fifty experienced Bhikshus. As the hour drew near for the morning meal, the lord Buddha and his disciples put on their robes and moved on street carrying their food from door to door. After they had returned to the jeta Grove, they laid aside their street garments, bathed their feet, Partook of the morning meal, put away their begging bowls for another day, and afterward seated themselves about the lord Buddha.

The venerable Subhuti rose from his seat in the midst of the assembly, arranged his robes so the right shoulder was exposed, Kneeled upon his right knees, pressed the Palms of his hands together and, bowing respectfully to the lord Buddha, said :- "Tathagata, Honored of the worlds, our beloved lord; May thy mercy be upon us to take good care of us and to give us good instruction. The lord Buddha replied to subhuti, saying :- "Indeed, I will take good care of every Bodhisattva-Mahasattva and give them the best of instruction.

Subhuti replied :- "Honored of the worlds; We are very glad to listen to thy blessed instruction. Tell us what we shall say when good pious men and women come to us enquiring how they should begin the practice of seeking to attain Highest Perfect wisdom (Anuttara Samyak-sambodhi). What shall we tell them? How are they to quiet their drifting minds and subdue their craving thoughts?" The lord Buddha relied to subhuti, saying- "You have made a good request, subhuti. Listen carefully and I will answer your question so that all the Brotherhood will understand. As good and pious men and women come to you wishing to begin the practice of seeking to attain highest perfect wisdom, they will simply have to follow what I am about to say to you, and very soon they will be able to subdue their discriminative thoughts and craving desires, and will be able to attain perfect tranquillity of mind.

THE PRACTICE OF CHARITY, THE DANA PARAMITA

Then the lord Buddha addressed the assembly. Every one in the

world, beginning with the highest BodhiMahasattvas, should follow what I am going to teach you, for this teaching will bring deliverance to everyone whether hatched from an egg, or formed in a womb, or evolved from spawn, or produced by metamorphosis, with or without form, possessing mental faculties or devoid of mental faculties, or both devoid and not devoid, or neither devoid or not devoid and lead them toward perfect Nirvana. Though the sentient beings thus to be delivered by me are innumerable and without limit yet, in reality, there are no sentient beings to be delivered. And why, Subhuti? Because should there exist in the minds of Bodhisattva - Mahasattvas such arbitrary conceptions of phenomena as the existence of one 's own ego-selfness, the ego-selfness of another, self-ness as divided into an infinite number of living and dying beings, or selfness as unified into one universal self existing eternally, they would be unworthy to be called Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas.

Moreover, subhuti, the Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas, in teaching the Dharma to others, should first be free themselves from all the craving thoughts awakened by beautiful sights, pleasant sounds, sweet tastes, fragrance, soft tangibles, and seductive thoughts. In their practice of charity, they should not be influenced by any of these seductive phenomena. And why? Because, if in their practice of charity they are influenced by such things they will realize a blessing and merit that is inestimable and inconceivable. What do you think subhuti? Is it possible to estimate the distance of space in the eastern heavens? No, Blessed one. It is impossible to estimate the distance of space in the eastern heavens. Subhuti, is it possible to estimate the limits of space in the northern, southern and western heaven? Or to any of the four corners of the universe, or above or below? No Honored of the worlds;

Subhuti, it is equally impossible to estimate the blessing and merit that will come to the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva who practices charity uninfluenced by any of these arbitrary conceptions. This truth should be taught in the beginning and to every body. The lord Buddha continued. What do you think, subhuti? If a disciple should bestow as alms and abundance of the seven treasures sufficient to fill the three thousand great worlds, would he thereby acquire a considerable blessing and merit? Subhuti replied :- Honored of the worlds; such a disciple would acquire a very considerable blessing. The lord Buddha said:- "Subhuti, if such a blessing and merit had any substantiality, if it was anything other than a mere expression, the Tathagata would not have used the words, 'blessing and merit'. What do you think, subhuti? Are the atoms of dust that comprise the three thousand great universe very numerous? Very numerous indeed Blessed lord; Subhuti, when the Tathagata speaks of 'atoms

of dust', it does not mean that he has in mind any definite or arbitrary conception. He merely uses the words as a figure of speech. It is just the same with the words, 'the great universe'. They do not assert any definite or idea. He merely uses the words as words. Subhuti, if any good and pious disciple, man or woman, for the sake of charity has been sacrificing his or her life for generation after generation as many as the grains of sand in three thousand great universes, and another disciple has been simply studying and observing even one stanza of this scripture and explaining it to others, his blessing and merit will be far greater. What do you think, Subhuti? Is a disciple bestowed in charity and abundance of the seven treasures sufficient to fill the three thousand great universes, would there acquire to that person a considerable blessing and merit? Subhuti replied :- "A very considerable blessing and merit. And why? Because what the lord has referred to as 'blessing and merit' does not refer to any objective value or quantity : he only refers to them in a relative sense." The lord Buddha continued :- If there is another disciple who, after studying and observing even a single stanza of this scripture, explains its meaning to others, his blessing and merit will be much greater. And why because from these explanations Buddhas have attained Anuttara - samyak - sambodhi and their teaching are based upon this sacred scripture. But, Subhuti, as soon as I have spoken of these Buddhas and their dharmas, I must recall the words, for there are no Buddhas and no dharmas. The lord Buddha then continued:- When a Bodhisattva-Mahasattva begins the practice of attaining Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, he must give up, also, all clinging to arbitrary conceptions about phenomena. The mind is disturbed by these discriminations of sense concepts and the following arbitrary conceptions about them and, as the mind becomes disturbed, it falls into false imaginations as to one's self and its relation to other selves. It is for that reason that the Tathagata has constantly urged the Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas in their practise of charity not to be influenced by any arbitrary conceptions of phenomena such as sights, sounds, etc. The Bodhisattva-Mahasattva should also bestow alms, uninfluenced by any preconceived, thoughts as to self and other selves and for the sole purpose of benefiting sentient beings, always remembering that both the phenomena and sentient beings are to be considered as mere expressions. Nevertheless, Subhuti, the teaching of the Tathagata are all true, credible, immutable :- they are neither extravagant nor chimerical. The same is true of the attainments of the Tathagatas- they should be considered as neither realities nor as unrealities.

Subhuti, it is a Bodhisattva-Mahasattva, in practising charity conceives within his mind any of these arbitrary conceptions discriminating himself from other selves, he will be like a man walking in darkness and seeing

nothing. But if the Bodhisattva - Mahasattva, in his practice of charity, has no arbitrary conceptions of the attainment of the blessing and merit which he will attain by such practice, he will be like a person with good eyes, seeing all things clearly as in the bright sunshine. Its in future ages there should be any good and pious disciple, either man or women, able to faithfully observe and study this scripture, his success and attainment of inestimable and illimitable blessing and merit will be instantly known and appreciated by the transcendental eye of the Tathagata.

THE PRACTICE OF SELFLESS KINDNESS SILA PARAMITA

Subhuti, when a disciple is moved to make objective gifts of charity, he should also practice the Sila Paramita of selfless kindness, that is, he should remember that there is no arbitrary distinction between one's own self and the selfhood of others and, therefore, he should practice, charity by giving, not objective gifts alone, but the selfless gifts of kindness and sympathy. If any disciple will simply practice kindness, he will soon attain Anuttara-Sambodhi. Subhuti, by what I have just said about kindness, the Tathagata does not mean that a disciple when making gifts should in his mind any arbitrary conceptions about kindness, for kindness after all is only a word and charity should be spontaneous and selfless.

The lord Buddha continued :- Subhuti, if any disciple helped together the seven treasures forming and elevation as high as Mount Sumeru and as many Mount Sumeru as there are in the three thousand great universes, and bestowed them in charity, his merit would be less than what would acquire to the disciple that simply observed and studies this scripture and in the kindness of his heart explained it to others. The latter disciple would accumulate greater blessing and merit in comparison of a hundred to one, yes, of a hundred thousand myriads to one. Nothing can be compared with it. The lord Buddha continued :- Do not think, Subhuti that the Tathagata would consider within himself :- I will deliver human beings, that would be a degrading thought. Why ? Because really there are no sentient beings to be delivered by the Tathagata, it would mean that the Tathagata was cherishing within his mind arbitrary conceptions of phenomena such as one's ownself, other selves, living being and an universal self. Even when the Tathagata refers to himself he is not holding in his mind any such arbitrary thought. Only cerrestrial human beings think of selfhood as being a personal possession. Subhuti even the expression

'terrestrial beings' as used by the Tathagata does not mean that there are any such beings. It is used only as a figure of speech. The lord Buddha continued :- Subhuti, if a disciples bestowed as alms and abundance of the seven treasures sufficient to fill as many worlds as there are grains of sand in the Ganges river, and if another disciple, having realized the principle of the egolessness of all things and thereby had attained perfect selflessness, the selfless discipline would have more blessing and merit than the one who merely practiced objective charity. And why ? Because Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas do not regard their blessing and merit as a private possession. Subhuti enquired of the lord Buddha :- what do the words 'Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas do not look upon their blessing and merit as a private possession mean ? The lord Buddha replied :- As those blessing and merit have never been sought in any covetous spirit by Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas, so by that same spirit they do not look upon them as a private possession, but as the common possession of all animate beings.

THE PRACTICE OF HUMILITY AND PATIENCE THE KSHANTI PARAMITA

What do you think, Subhuti ? Supposing a disciple, who has attained the degree of Crotapanna (entered the stream), could he make any such arbitrary assertion as, 'I have entered the stream'? Subhuti replied :- No honored of the worlds; Because, while, by that measure of attainment, it means that he has entered the Holy stream, yet, speaking truly, he has not entered anything, nor has his mind entertained any such arbitrary conception as form, sound, taste, odour touch and discrimination. It is because of that degree of attainment that he is entitled to be called a crotapanna. What do you think, subhuti ? Suppose a disciple has attained the degree of Sakradagamin (one more returner), could he make any such arbitrary assertion, as, 'I have attained the degree of Sakradaagamin' ? No Honored of the worlds ; Because by the degree of Sadradagamin, it is meant that he is to be reborn but only once yes speaking truly, there will be no rebirth either in this world or in any other world. It is because he knows this that he is to be called a Sakradagamin. What do you think, subhuti? Suppose a disciples has attained the degree of Anaagamin (never to return), could he hold within his mind any such arbitrary conception as 'I have attained the degree of Anagamin' ? No, Honored of the worlds ; Because by the degree of Anagamin it means that he is never to return, Yet speaking truly, one who has attained that degree never cherishes any such arbitrary conception and for that reason, he is entitled to be called an Anagamin. What do you think, subhuti ? Suppose a disciple has attained the

degree of Arahant (fully enlightened), could he entertain within his mind any such arbitrary conception as, 'I have become an Arahant'? No, Honored of the worlds; Because speaking truly, there is no such thing as a fully enlightened one. Should a disciple who has attained such a degree of enlightenment, cherish within his mind such an arbitrary conception as, 'I have become an Arahant', he would soon be grasping after such things as his own selfhood, otherselves, living beings and a universal self, O Blessed lord; Thou hast said that I have attained the samadhi of non-assertion and, therefore, have reached the climax of human attainment and because of it, I am an Arahant. If I had cherished within my mind the thought, 'I am an Arahant free from all desire'; My lord could not have declared that Subhuti delights himself in the practice of silence and tranquillity. But, speaking truly, I have cherished no such arbitrary thought, so my lord could truly say, - 'Subhuti delights himself in the practice of silence, and tranquillity? What do you think, subhuti? When the Tathagata in a previous life was with Dipankara Buddha, did I receive any definite teaching or attain any definite degree of discipline because of which I later became a Buddha? No, Honored of the worlds; When Tathagata was a disciple of Buddha Dipankara, speaking truly, he received no definite teaching nor did he attain any definite excellence. What do you think, Subhuti? Do the Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas embellish the Buddha lands is merely a figure of speech? The lord Buddha continued :- For this reason, subhuti, the minds of all Bodhisattvas should be purified of all such conceptions as relate to seeing, hearing, tasting smelling, touching and discriminating. They should use the mental faculties spontaneously and naturally, but unconstrained by any preconceptions arising from the senses. Subhuti, supposing a man had a body as large as Mount sumeru. What do you think? Would his body be counted great? Exceedingly great, Honored of the worlds; Because what the lord Buddha really means by the expression, 'the greatness of the human body' is not limited by any arbitrary conception whatever, so it can rightly be called, 'great'. In what has been said in the foregoing passage about the Third paramita of patience, the Tathagata does not hold in his mind any arbitrary conceptions of the phenomena of patience. He merely refers to it as the third Paramita. And why? Because when, in a previous life, the prince of Kalinga severed the flesh from my limbs and my body, even then I was free from any such ideas as my own self, other selves, living beings, a universal self, because if, at the time of my suffering, had I cherished any of these arbitrary ideas, inevitably, I would have fallen into impatience and hatred.

Besides, Subhuti, I recall that during my five hundred previous lives, I had used life after life to practice patience and to look upon my life humbly as

though it was some saintly being called upon to suffer humility. Even then mind was free from any such arbitrary conceptions of phenomena as my own self, other selves, living beings, and a universal self. The Blessed one resumed :- Subhuti, should there be among the faithful disciples some who have not yet matured their Karma and who must first suffer the natural retribution of sins committed in some previous life by being degraded to a lower domain of existence and should they earnestly and faithfully observe and study this scripture and because of it be despised and persecuted by the people, their Karma will immediately mature and they will at once attain Anuttara samyak-ambodhi. Subhuti, I recall that long ago, numberless asamkhyas of kalpas before the advent of Dipankara Buddha, without any fault having been committed by me, I served and worshipped, with offerings and received spiritual instruction and discipline from eight hundred and four thousand myriads of Buddhas, yet in the far off ages of the last kalpa of this world, if a disciple shall faithfully observe, study and put into practice the teachings of this scripture, the blessing that he by so doing will gain, will far exceed that acquired by me during those long years of service and discipline under those many Buddhas. Yes, it will exceed my poor merit, in comparison as ten my raids to one. Yes even more as uncounted myriads to one. The lord Buddha continued :- Subhuti, in contrast to what I have said as to the inestimable blessing that will come to earnest disciples who observe and study and practice this scripture in that far off last kalpa, I must tell you, that probably there will be some disciples who upon hearing this scripture will become bewildered in their minds and will not believe it. Subhuti, you should remember that just as the Dharma of this scripture transcends human thought, so the effect and the final result of studying it and putting it into practice is also inscrutable.

THE PRACTICE OF ZEAL AND PERSEVERANCE THE VIRYA PARAMITA

What do you think, Subhuti? If there are as many Ganges rivers as there are grains of sand in the river Ganges, will these rivers be very numerous? Exceedingly numerous, my lord. Supposing there were these innumerable rivers, how immeasurable would be their grains of sand. And yet, Subhuti, if a good and pious disciple, either man or woman, should bestow as alms an amount of the seven treasures equal to those grains of sand, would the merit that would acquire to him be a considerable blessing and merit? A very considerable merit, my lord. Subhuti, if another disciple after studying and observing

even one stanza of this scripture, should explain it to others his blessing and merit would be greater. Moreover subhuti, if any disciple in any place should teach even one stanza of this scripture, that place would become sacred ground and would be held in reverence, and would be enriched by offerings from gods, devas and spirits, as though it was a sacred pagoda or temple. How much more sacred would the place become if a disciple studied and observed the whole of this scripture. Be assured, Subhuti, that such a disciple will succeed in the attainment of Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, and the place where this scripture is revered will be like an altar consecrated to Buddha, or to one of his honored disciples. The lord Buddha-continued -Subhuti, should there be any good pious disciples, man or woman, who in his zeal to practice charity is willing to sacrifice his life in the morning, or at non-tide, or in the evening, on as many occasions as there are grains of sand in the river Ganges, even if these occasions recur for a hundred thousand myriad kalpas, would his blessing and merit be great? It would be great, indeed, lord Buddha. Supposing, subhuti, another disciple should observe and study this scripture in pure faith, his blessing and merit would be greater. And if still another disciple, besides observing and studying this scripture, should zealously explain it to it and circulate it, his blessing and merit would be far greater.

In another words, subhuti, this scripture is invested with a virtue and power that is inestimable, illimitable and ineffable. The Tathagata lucidities this scripture only to those disciples who are earnestly and perseveringly seeking the perfect realization of Anuttara-Sambodhi and attaining the Bothisattva stages of compassion that characterize the Mahayana. As disciples become able to zealously and faithfully observe and study this scripture, explain it to others and circulate it widely, the Tathagata will recognize and support them until they shall succeed in the attainment of its inestimable, illimitable and wonderful virtues. Such disciples will share with the Tathagata its burden of compassion and its reward of Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. And why Subhuti, is this promise limited to the Mahayana disciples. It is because the Hinayana disciples have not yet been able to free themselves from such arbitrary conceptions of phenomena as one's own selfhood, other personalities, Living beings and a universal self and, therefore are not yet able to faithfully and earnestly observe and study and explain this scripture to others. Listen Subhuti, wherever this scripture shall be observed, and studied and explained that place will become sacred ground to which countless devas and angels will bring offerings. Such places, however humble they may be will be revered, as though they were famous temples and pagodas, to which countless pilgrims will come to offer worship and incense. And over them the devas and angels will hover like a cloud and will sprinkle upon them an offering of celestial flowers.

THE PRACTICE OF TRANQUILLITY THE DHYANA PARAMITA

Then subhuti enquired of the lord Buddha, saying:- Supposing a good pious disciple, either man or woman, having begun the practice of attaining Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi (should still find his mind disturbed), how is he to keep his mind tranquil, how is he to wholly subdue his wandering thoughts and craving desires? The lord Buddha replied :- Subhuti, any good pious disciple who undertakes the practice of concentrating his mind in an effort to realize Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, should cherish only one thought, namely, when I attain this highest perfect wisdom, I will deliver all sentient being into the internal peace of Nirvana. If this purpose and vow is sincere, these sentient beings are already delivered. And Yet, Subhuti, if the full truth is realized, one would know that not a single sentient being has ever been delivered. And why, Subhuti? Because if the Bodhisattva-mahassattvas have kept in mind any such arbitrary conceptions as one's ownself, other selves, living beings, or a universal self, they could not be called Bodhisattva-Mahastvas. And what does this mean, Subhuti? It means that there are no sentient beings to be delivered and there is no selfhood that can begin the practice of seeking to attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. What do you think, Subhuti? When the Tathagata was with Buddha Dipankara, did he have any such arbitrary conception of the Dharma as would warrant him in seeking to attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi intuitively? No, Blessed lord; As I understand what thought said to us, when the lord Buddha was with Buddha Dipankara, he had no such arbitrary conception of the Dharma as would warrant him in seeking to attain Anuttara-samyak sambodhi intuitively.

The lord Buddha was much pleased with this and said;- You are right, Subhuti. Speaking truly there is no such arbitrary conception of the Dharma as that. If there had been, Dipankara Buddha would not have foretold that in some future life, I would attain Buddhahood under the name of Shakyamun. What does this mean, Subhuti? It means that what I attained is not something limited and arbitrary that can be called, 'Anuttara Samyak-Sambodhi, 'but is Buddhahood whose essence is identical with the essence of all things and is what it is universal, inconceivable inscrutable. Supposing, Subhuti, there should still be a disciple who asserts that the Tathagata had some ideas about the Dharma that warranted him in seeking to attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi. Be it understood, subhuti, that the Tathagata truly had no ideas of the Dharma that warranted him in seeking to attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.

The lord Buddha emphasized this by saying;- subhuti, the Buddhahood to which the Tathagata attained is both the same as Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi

and not the same. This is only another way of saying that the phenomena of all things is of one 'such-ness' with Buddhahood and Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, and that it is neither reality nor unreality but abides together with all phenomena in emptiness and silence, inconceivable and inscrutable. Subhuti, that is why I say that the Dharma of all things can never be embraced within any arbitrary conception of phenomena however universal that conception may be. That is why it is called the Dharma and why there is no such thing as the Dharma. Subhuti, suppose I should speak of the largeness of the human body, what would you understand by it? Honored of the world; I should understand that the lord Buddha was not speaking of the largeness of human body as an arbitrary conception of its phenomenality.

I should understand that the words carried only an imaginary meaning. Subhuti, it is just the same when Bodhisattvas speak of delivering numberless sentient beings. If they have in mind any arbitrary conception of sentient being or of definite numbers, they are unworthy to be called Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas. And why, subhuti? Because the very reason why they are called Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas is because they have abandoned all such arbitrary conceptions. And what is true of one arbitrary conception is true of all conceptions.

The Tathagata's teachings are entirely free from all such arbitrary conceptions as one's own self, other selves, living beings or a universal self. To make this teaching more emphatic, the lord Buddha continued;- If a Bodhisattva-Mahasattva was to speak like this;- I will add embellishments to the Buddhalands, he would be unworthy to be called a Bodhisattva-Mahasattva. And why? Because the Tathagata has explicitly thought that when a Bodhisattva-Mahasattva uses such words, they must not hold in mind any arbitrary conception of phenomena: they are to use such expressions merely as so many words. Subhuti, it is only those disciples whose understanding can penetrate deeply enough into the meaning of the Tathagata's teachings concerning the egolessness of both things and living beings, and who can clearly understand their significance, that are worthy to be called Bodhisattva-Mahasattva. The lord Buddha then enquired of subhuti saying:- What do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a physical eye? Subhuti replied:-surely, Blessed lord; he possesses a physical eye. Does the Tathagata possess the eye of transcendental intelligence? Yes, Blessed Lord; the Tathagata possesses the eye of transcendental intelligence. Does the Tathagata possess the eye of spiritual intuition? Yes, Blessed Lord; the Tathagata possesses the eye of spiritual intuition. Does the Tathagata possess the eye of a Buddha's love and Compassion for all sentient life, Subhuti? Subhuti assented and said:- Blessed lord; thou lovest all sentient life. What do you think, Subhuti? When referred to the grains of sand in the river Ganges, did I assert that they were truly grains of sand? No, Blessed lord; you only spoke of

them as grains of sand. Subhuti, if there were as many Ganges rivers as there are grains of sand in the river Ganges and if there were as many Buddha lands, as there are grains of sand in all of these innumerable rivers, would these Buddha-lands be considered, as very numerous. Very numerous, indeed, Lord Buddha. Listen, Subhuti. Within these innumerable Buddha lands there are every form of sentient beings with all their various mentalities and conceptions, all of which are fully known to the Tathagata, but not one of them is held in the Tathagata's mind as an arbitrary conception of phenomena. They are merely thought of. Not one of this vast accumulation of conceptions from beginningless time, through the present and into the never ending future, not one of them is graspable. The lord Buddha resumed-Subhuti, if any good and pious disciple, either man or woman, were to take the three thousand great universes and grind them into impalpable powder and blow it away into spaces, what do you think, subhuti? Do you think this powder would have any individual existence? Subhuti replied:- yes, Blessed lord; As impalpable powder infinitely dissipated, it might be said to have a relative existence, but as the Blessed one uses the words, it has no existence:- the words have only a figurative meaning. Otherwise the words would imply a belief in the existence of matter as an independent and self-existent entity, which it is not. Moreover, when the Tathagata refers to the 'three thousand great universes' he could only do so as a figure of speech. And why? Because if the three thousand, great universes really existed, their only reality would consist in their cosmic unity. Whether as impalpable powder or as great universes, what matters it? It is only in the sense of the cosmic unity of ultimate essence that the tathagata can rightfully refer to it. The lord Buddha was much pleased with this reply and said:- subhuti, although terrestrial human beings have always grasped after the arbitrary conception of matter and great universes, the conception has no true basis-it is an illusion of mortal mind. Even when it is referred to as 'Cosmic unity' it is something inscrutable. The lord Buddha continued-If any disciple were to say that the Tathagata, in his teachings, has constantly referred to himself, otherselves, living beings, an universal self, what do you think, Subhuti? Would that disciple have understood the meaning of what I have been teaching? Subhuti replied:- No Blessed lord; That disciple would not have understood the meaning of the lord's teachings. For when the lord has referred to them he has only used the words as figures and symbols. It is only in that sense that they can be used, for conceptions, and ideas, and limited truths, and Dharmas have no more reality than have matter and phenomena. Then the lord made this more emphatic by saying:- Subhuti,

when disciples begin their practice of seeking to attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, they ought thus to see, to perceive, to know, to understand, and to realize that all things and all Dharmas are nothings, and therefore they ought not to conceive within their minds any arbitrary conception whatever.

The lord Buddha continued:- Subhuti, if any disciple bestowed upon the Tathagata as alms an abundance of the seven treasures sufficient to fill the innumerable and illimitable worlds and if another disciple, a good and pious man or woman, in his practice of seeking to attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi should earnestly and faithfully observe and study a single stanza of this scripture and explain it to others, the accumulated blessing and merit of that latter disciple would be relatively greater. Subhuti, how is it possible to explain this scripture to others without holding in mind any arbitrary conception of things and phenomena and Dharmas? It can only be done, Subhuti, by keeping the mind in perfect tranquillity and in selfless oneness with the "suchness" that is Tathagatahood. And why? Because all the minds arbitrary conceptions of matter phenomena, and of all conditioning factors and all conceptions and ideas relating thereto are like a dream, a phantasm, a bubble, a shadow, the evanescent dew, the lightning's flash. Every true disciple should thus look upon all phenomena and upon all the activities of the mind, and keep his mind empty and selfless and tranquil.

The Practice of Wisdom : The Prajna Paramita

What do you think, Subhuti? Has the Tathagata attained anything that can be described as Anuttara-Samyak-sambodhi? Has he ever given you any such teaching? Subhuti replied:-As I understand the teaching of the Lord Buddha, there is no such thing as Anuttarasamyak-sambodhi nor is it possible for the Tathagata to teach any fixed dharma, And why? Because the things taught by the Tathagata are, in their essential nature, inconceivable and inscrutable: they are neither existent, nor nonexistent; they are neither phenomena nor nomina. What is meant by this? It means that Buddhas and Bodhistwas are not enlightened by fixed teachings but by an intuitive process that is spontaneous and natural. Then the lord Buddha enquired Subhuti:- What do you think, subhuti? Is it possible to recognize the Tathagata by the thirty-two marks of physical excellence? Subhuti replied:- Yes, Honored of the worlds, the Tathagata may be thus recognized. Subhuti, if that is so then chakravartin, the legendry king of the world (who also had the thirty-two marks of excellence) would be classed among the Tathagata. Then Subhuti, realizing his error, said:- Honored of the worlds; Now I realize that the Tathagata cannot be recognized merely by his

thirty-two marks of physical excellence. The lord Buddha then said:- Should anyone looking at an image or a likeness of the Tathagata, claim to know the Tathagata and should offer worshipping and prayer to him, you should consider such a person a heretic who does not know the true Tathagata. What do you think, Subhuti? Is it possible even to see the Tathagata in the phenomena of physical appearance? No, Honored of the worlds. It is impossible even to see the Tathagata in the phenomena of his physical appearance. And why? Because the phenomena of his physical appearance is not the same as the essential Tathagata. You are right, Subhuti. The phenomena of the physical appearance is wholly illusion. It is not until a disciple understands this that he can realize the true Tathagata. What do you think, Subhuti? Can one grasp the Tathagata's personality and his thirty-two marks of physical excellence? No, Blessed one; we cannot grasp the Tathagata's wonderful personality by his thirty-two marks of excellence. And why? Because what the Tathagata has expressed as 'thirty two marks of physical excellence' does not convey definite or arbitrary assertions as to the qualities of a Buddha. The words are used merely as a figure of speech. The Lord said:- Subhuti, if any disciple were to say that the Tathagata is now coming or now going, or is now sitting up or is now lying down, he would not have understood the principle that I have been teaching. And why? Because while the word, Tathagata, means 'He who has thus come' and 'He who has thus gone', the true Tathagata is never coming from anywhere, nor is he going anywhere. The name, Tathagata, is merely a word. Again the lord Buddha enquired of Subhuti, saying:- can the Tathagata be fully known through any manifestation in form (of either body or idea) ? No, Honored of the worlds; The Tathagata cannot be fully known by manifestation in form. And why? Because the phenomena of form is inadequate to incarnate Buddhahood. It can only serve as a mere expression, a hint of that which is inconceivable. What do you think, Subhuti? Can the Tathagata be fully known by any or all of his transcendental transformations?.

No, Honored of the worlds; The Tathagata cannot be fully known by even all of his transcendental transformations. And why? Because what the Tathagata has just referred to as 'transcendental transformations' is merely a figure of speech. Even the highest Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas are unable to fully realize even by intuition that which is essentially inscrutable. The lord Buddha continued :-Subhuti, do not think the opposite either that when the Tathagata attained Anjittara Samyak-Sambodhi it was not by means of his possession of the thirty-two marks of physical excellence. Do not think that. Should you think that, then when you begin the practice of seeking to attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi

you would think that all systems of phenomena are to be cut off and rejected. Do not think that. And why? Because when a disciple practices seeking to attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, he should neither grasp after such arbitrary conceptions of phenomena nor reject them. The lord Buddha then warned subhuti, saying:- Subhuti, do not think that the Tathagata ever considers within his own mind:-I ought to enunciate a system of teaching for the elucidation of the Dharma. You should never cherish such an unworthy thought. And why because if any disciple should harbor such a thought, he would not only be misunderstanding the teaching of the Tathagata but he would be slandering him as well. Moreover, what has just been referred to as 'a system of teaching' has no meaning, as Truth cannot be cut up into pieces and arranged into a system. The word can only be used as a figure of speech. Thereupon the venerable Subhuti, because of his enlightened and transcendental intelligence, addressed the Lord Buddha, saying:- Blessed Lord ; In ages to come when any sentient beings shall happen by chance to hear this scripture, will they awaken within their mind the essential elements of faith? The Lord Buddha said:- Subhuti, why do you still hold within your mind such arbitrary conceptions? There are no such things as sentient beings, neither are there any non-sentient beings. And why, Subhuti?. Because what you have in mind as sentient beings are unreal and nonexistent. When the Tathagata has used such words in his teachings, he has merely used them as figures of speech. Your question, therefore, is irrelevant. Subhuti, again enquired:- Blessed Lord, when thou didst attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi didst thou feel within thy mind that nothing had been acquired? The lord Buddha replied:- that is it precisely, Subhuti when I attained Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, I did not feel, as grasped within my mind, any arbitrary conception of Dharma, not even the slightest. Even the words Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi are merely words. Moreover, Subhuti, what I have attained in Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi is the same as what all others have attained. It is something that is undifferentiated, neither to be regarded as a high state, nor is it to be regarded as a low state. It is wholly independent of any definitive or arbitrary conceptions of an individual self, other selves, living beings or an universal self.

Conclusion:- Subhuti respectfully enquired of the lord Buddha:- Honored of the worlds; In future days, if a disciple hears this teaching or a part of it:- a section or a sentence-will it awaken true faith in his mind? Subhuti, do not doubt it. Even at the remote period five hundred years after the nirvana of the Tathagata there will be those who, practicing charity and keeping the precept, will believe in sections and sentences of this scripture and will awaken within their minds a true pure faith. You should know, however, that such disciples, long ago, have planted roots of goodness, not simply before one Buddha shrine, or two, or five, but before the shrines of a hundred thousand

myriad asamkayas of Buddhas, so that when they hear sentences and sections of this scripture there will instantly awaken in their minds a pure true faith. Subhuti, the Tathagata know that the sentient beings who awaken faith after hearing sentences and sections of this scripture will accumulate blessing and merit that are inestimable. How do I know this? Because these sentient beings must have already discarded such arbitrary conceptions of phenomena as one's own self, otherselves, living beings and universal self. If they had not, their minds would inevitably grasp after such things and then they would not be able to practice charity nor keep the precepts. Moreover, sentient beings must have also discarded all arbitrary ideas relating to the conceptions of a personal self other personalities, living beings and a universal self, because if they had not, their minds would inevitably grasp after such relative ideas. Further, this sentient beings must have already discarded all arbitrary ideas relating to the conception of the nonexistence of a personal self, other personalities, living beings and a universal self. If they had not, their minds would still be grasping after such ideas. Therefore, every disciple who is seeking Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi should discard, not conceptions of one's own selfhood, theirselves, living beings and a universal selfhood, but should discard, also, all ideas about the nonexistence of such conceptions.

While the Thathagata, in his teaching constantly makes use of conceptions and ideas about them, disciples should keep in mind the unreality of all such conceptions and ideas.

They should recall that the Tathagata, in making use of them in explaining the Dhamma always uses them in resemblance of a raft that is of use only to cross a river. As the raft is of no further use after the river is crossed, it should be discarded. So these arbitrary conceptions of things and about things should be wholly given as one attains enlightenment. Wow much more & should be given up conceptions of nonexistent things (and everything is nonexistent). As subhuti listened intently to the words of the lord Buddha, the teaching of the scripture penetrated into the depths of his understanding and he fully realized that it was the true path to enlightenment. The tears come to his eyes as he realized this and he said blessed Lord; I have never before realized this profound scriptures. Thou hast opened my eyes to its Transcendental wisdom. Honored of the worlds; What has been taught us concerning the true significance of Phenomena carries no arbitrary or limited meaning. The teaching is, as you say, a raft that will carry us to the other shore.

Noble Lord; When as at present, I have the chance of hearing this scripture, it is not difficult for me to concentrate my mind upon it and to clearly understand its significance, and it awakens within my mind a pure faith. In

future time after five centuries-if there be any ready to hear it and ready to attain enlightenment, able to concentrate their minds upon it, able to realize a clear understanding of it, such a disciple will hereby become a wonderful and prominent disciple. And if there is such a disciple the reason he will be able to awaken a pure faith will be because he has ceased to cherish any arbitrary conceptions as to his own selfness, the selfhood of others, of living beings, of an universal self. Why is this so? It is because, if he is cherishing any arbitrary conception as to his own selfhood, he will be cherishing something that is nonexistent. It is the same as to all arbitrary conceptions of other personalities, living beings, or an universal self. They are all expressions of things that are nonexistent. If a disciple is able to discard all arbitrary conceptions of phenomena, he will immediately become a Buddha. The lord Buddha was much pleased with this reply, saying:- True indeed; If a disciple having heard this scripture is not surprised, nor frightened, nor does not shrink from it, you should know that he is worthy to be regarded as a truly wonderful disciple. Subhuti said to the Blessed one:-By what name shall this scripture be known, so that it will be understood and honored and studied?

The lord Buddha replied:- this scripture shall be known as the Vajracchedika Prajna Paramita, By this name it shall be revered, studied and observed. What is meant by this name? It means that when the lord Buddha named it Prajna Paramita, he did not have in mind any definite or arbitrary conception and so he thus named it. It is the scripture that is hard and sharp like a diamond that will cut away all arbitrary conception and bring one to the other shore of enlightenment.

“Gate Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, bodhi Svaha” ;

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THE MONASTERY ARTS AND CRAFTS OF SIKKIM

-Kamal Bikash Choudhury
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Perhaps it will not be an outward and downward brink statement that most of the Mahayayana Buddhist Lamas are artisans by birth or become artisans following highest degree of practice with vehement devotion and steadfastness under strict guidance of Omzes or senior priests of the monasteries.

During mid 17th century AD an eminent Tibetan lama Riwochhe Lha-Tsum Chem-po introduced Lamaism in this celestial Himalayan ambience along with Lama Kartok Kuntu Zangpo and Rigd-sin Ngadagzempa Chenpo Phuntshog Rigzin. By his ascendancy Lha-tsum-chempo searched a man named Phuntsog as per guidelines of Guru Rimbochhe or the wizard priest Padma Sambhava and enthroned Phuntsog Namgye as Chho-gyal (Dharma-raj) of Sikkim Amid large number of sects and sub-sects in Lamaism, only Nyingma-pa (Primitive and unreformed style of Lamaism) and Kargyu-pa (represented by Karma-pa) sect gained prominence in Sikkim Both the sects have numerous gompas and lhakhangs throughout the length and breadth of Sikkim. At present there are more than one hundred and thirty gompas or monasteries in Sikkim. Some of them are centuries old while some others are recently built. Old or new, Nyingma-pa or Kargyu-pa, all the monasteries of Sikkim exhibit certain exquisite works of art and craft. The resident lamas of each and every monastery are trained in some particular form of art of which tormas sculpture, thanka and mural painting and drawing of mandala are most preponderous. Besides, the artisan lamas also practice ceremonial mask making and carving of religious artifacts in wood.

Torma Sculpture

Use of tormas is typical of lamaistic Buddhist culture as prevalent in

Sikkim. Torma is an object of offering made to the deities and demons. Torma is sculpted with great skill and expertise by the artisan lamas. The sanctum sanctorum of a monastery looks incomplete without these decorative offerings.

Generally the tormas are offered to propitiate the malevolent spirits who are believed to exercise evil influence on human life and mind. Apart from appeasing the enraged demons and dakinis (Khando), they are also used to usher in the blessings of peaceful guardian deities and goddesses (Lhamo). Torma offering is as necessary as the offering made by means of butter-lamp, incense, water and food (tshok) during every puja.

The art of making torma is not every lama's cup of tea. Only those with deft hands and a very sound knowledge of religious scriptures are hand-picked by the omze. Before being allowed to sculpt torma, the artisan lama must learn the procedure as written in Guru Rigzin Jigme Ling-pa's book *Jigling-Sumboom*. The book was written sometimes in the 17th century and it is still as relevant and revered. The book contains detail geometric description of the form and structure of torma and its usages. Every torma sculptor has to follow the rule of torma making word by word. It is needless to say that the tormas are sculpted under the strict supervision of the omze. Quite often the omze himself sets the basic structure so that the intended form gets the right shape. He sits throughout during the work of other artisan lamas and gives the finishing touch. Torma sculpture requires deft hands as well as a lot of patience. Every artisan lama must pass the test of patience to be able to sculpt a full-fledged torma single-handed. For trainee lamas, a dice of torma (torpay) is kept in every monastery but a skilled lama hardly uses the torpay. By the time a lama attains the status of omze, he learns the process by heart and produces them without consulting the book.

Tormas are of different shape, size, colour and medium. The shape of torma depends upon the requirements of a particular puja. Sometimes they look like a miniature chorten (stupa), sometimes they resemble some deity and quite often they look like a decorated candle or cake. The size too varies from a few centimeters to a meter according to the puja specifications. As for colour, there are two basic colours used on the body of torma, namely, red and white. While white colour signifies an offering made to evil spirits, the red colour symbolizes offerings of guardian deities. Any other primary colour, especially blue and yellow can also be used to decorate a torma. The most interesting aspect of torma sculpture, however, is the medium used. It carries a lot of significance for the worshippers.

Medium of torma sculpture: Torma can be sculpted with three different

mediums These are i) tsampa (roasted barley or rice flour), ii) vegetable oil and paraffin, and iii) clay and paper pulp. The medium used determines the longevity of a torma.

Torma may be made to last a day, a week, a year or several years. According to duration and purpose of puja, the tormas are termed as Then-tor, Drup-tor, Lo-tor, and Ten-tor.

i) **Then-tor and drup-tor:** Then-tor and Drup-tor are tormas made with tsampa. Then-tors are prepared for daily worship and are disposed of at the end of the day. The Drup-tors are made to last a week or so because some particular ceremonies continue for seven days or more. While the Then-tors are usually fed to birds and stray animals, the Drup-tors are often offered to the sacred fireplace.

ii) **Lo-tor:** The tormas that are made to last a year are called Lo-tor (Lo=year). Lo-tors are offered to the deities and demons to ensure overall well being of a monastery or a household, Lo-tors are sculpted from a mixture of vegetable-oil solids and paraffin. The advantages of this medium are many: firstly, in the cool climate of Sikkim, it solidifies almost readily, secondly, it lasts for a reasonably long period, and thirdly, it can easily be offered to the sacred fire after the culmination of puja.

iii) **Ten-tor:** Ten-tors are very long lasting. These are sculpted from a mixture of clay and paper pulp. Ten-tors can be preserved in gompas and household altars for several years. The clay used to make ten-tor is not available in Sikkim. The lamas procure this clay from abroad. The paper pulp however, is indigenously prepared from a particular type of handmade paper produced from the bark of orgali or anemone. Ten-tors are fine specimens of monastery art.

The art of Torma-making: Once the medium of torma is selected in accordance with the requirements of puja, the first task is to prepare the dough. It is quite simple and easy to prepare the dough of tsampa, but one requires great skill to get the dough of right consistency in case of the other two mediums. To make a torma of vegetable oil solids and paraffin, the ingredients need to be heated and mixed finely until the right consistency is achieved. For clay torma, it is very important to knead the clay with paper pulp. The pulp is derived painstakingly from orgali, a local handmade paper. The stickiness of clay and smoothness of the paper pulp are important determinants of the quality of the medium.

Plate. No.1. Omze of Chorten gompa preparing torma.

After the dough is prepared the tormas are shaped either with the help of dice or free hand. Before colouring and decoration, the tsampa and clay tormas are dried in sun. The vegetable oil-paraffin torma does not require sun, because it solidifies readily after cooling. The process of dyeing of this torma is also easier. Colour can be added to this medium directly during heating and different shades of a colour can be achieved simply by reducing or increasing the amount of colour to be mixed with the dough. There is hardly any use of brush in colouring this kind of torma.

The base colour of a torma may be white or red. White tormas are offered to the peaceful, benevolent deities while red tormas are offered to the demons or malevolent spirits. Both these colours are derived from natural ingredients. The white colour is derived from white earth or rocks like chalk, talc or lime stone. The red colour is extracted from the bark of a tree called mukche. The process to extract the colour is quite elaborate. First of all the bark of mukche is shredded into pieces. The pieces are then pounded with pestle till a fine batter is prepared. The batter when mixed and boiled over fire produces red dye.

Plate No. 2. Torma offering of Kargyu-pa sect

After the base colours are applied, the tormas are decorated with fine designs using other primary colours, namely blue and yellow. Once colouring is over, some other decorative accessories are added to the torma. Tiny hard-board cuttings in the shape of flower, leaf, moon, sun, fire, etc. are attached on the body of torma. In case of vegetable oil-paraffin torma, these fixtures are made of the same medium in different tints. These finishing touches are normally given by the omze.

In the gompas of the Nyingma-pa sect, the tormas are made to resemble the idol of the deity or demon for whom the offering is being made. The idol is usually made of vegetable oil. Such tormas are also decorated and wrapped with colourful silk scarves.

There is no doubt the art of torma making is esoteric and intricate. Unless a person is well versed in Tibetan religious readings, it is impossible

for him to know the intricacies of this apparently simple-looking art form.

THANKA PAINTING

Thanka is a painted scroll depicting religious deities, tutelary duties demons and the life stories of Avatars. These can be seen in every monastery and house of the Mahayana Buddhists. Buddhas and the lamas and their lay followers firmly believe that the thankas are equivalent to or even more effective than the idols of the deities in bringing happiness and blessing for a person, a family or an institution. Thankas are widely used for three basic purposes: i) to bring happiness for a departed soul, ii) to ward-off sickness or trouble, and iii) to ensure concentration during a particular religious practice.

A lama or a lay artist can paint a thanka. In most cases, lay followers commission a lama after a death in the family or at times of sickness and trouble. After a person's death, his relatives engage lama artist to name the appropriate deity from the astrological texts so that the departed soul can have blessings for a happy re-birth. The deity must be painted on a scroll within a period of 49 days after the death, because, the Mahayana Buddhists believe that this is the period of transition before the next incarnation occurs.

The lay people are also advised by the lama to keep 'good-sign' thankas at home to remove obstacles or ward-off sickness. It is commonly believed that the thanka-painting of Tara protects a family from unforeseen or impending obstacles while the portrayal of Amitayus ensures good health and long life. Other than these, a devotee may commission a lama to paint a thanka of his guardian deity or of any other theme of his choice to ensure overall well-being of the family and surroundings. It is considered as a good deed to commission a lama to create a work of sacred art and the deed adds to his merit.

The lamas also paint the thankas for their own use. The trainee lamas paint thankas for the purpose of education and religious practice. A thanka is a useful aid, especially for the trainee lamas, to bring concentration during meditation. They also practice their recitation of prayers in front of a thanka which acts as a focus. The lamas often paint them as a substitute of the images kept in the main prayer hall of the monastery and keep them in their living quarters to prepare their lessons and perform sundry religious duties under the watchful eyes of the deities. The thankas not only act as a source of inspiration or an object of worship, quite often they are used as reference

materials by the lamas engaged in higher religious studies.

Thankas are widely used due to some practical convenience; for a wandering lama, a traveler or a trader it is much easier to carry a scroll painting than to carry a tabernacle or an idol box. Quite often, the lamas and devotees commission the artists to paint special thankas for the purpose of worship during travel. For the lamas intending meditative retreat, a thanka of particular deity is indispensable.

Thankas are also used during religious processions and some other public ceremonies. During a religious procession, the senior lamas carry and display the thankas at the head of the procession. These are also carried along with marriage and funeral processions. Special ceremonial thankas kept in larger monasteries are unrolled during religious festivals and holy occasions.

The art of thanka-painting: In Sikkim two distinct traditions of thanka-painting are followed, they are:

- i) ***Karma Gardi:*** It is the finer form of thanka painting. According to this tradition, a light cloth and light colours are used to paint thanka; here the line drawings are always fine and thin while the colours used look more natural.
- ii) ***Mendi:*** The mendi tradition is exemplified by the brighter and thicker thanka paintings. The fabric of this type of thanka must be thick and slightly coarse. The colours used for this are derived from bright mineral pigments.

Plate. No. 4. Thangka painting of Kargyu-pa sect.

To paint a thanka, first of all the fabric is selected. A thanka may be painted on cotton, linen or silk. However, plain cotton cloths are most widely used to paint a thanka. Fineweave cotton or silk cloths are used by the followers of Karma Gardi tradition while slightly heavier cotton with coarse weave are recommended by the Mendi practitioners.

Before the painting process starts, the fabric is washed to avoid shrinking afterwards. The washed piece of cloth is then fixed to a wooden stretcher frame so that no crease or crack appears after painting. In fact two frames are used to stretch the cloth, one inner and the other outer. Thin sticks of bamboo or strips of wood are used to make the inner frame. The thin sticks are hemmed

with the edges of the cloth with widely spaced stitches. The outer frame or the stretcher is usually bigger and made of stronger stuff. It leaves a few centimeters between the inner frame and itself. A strong cord is used to tie the inner frame with the stretcher in winding loops passing through the gaps of stitches of the inner frame and over the frame of the stretcher. The painter takes utmost care to do this so that proper alignment and tension of cloth is maintained. Once the framing is completed, the painting surface or ground is prepared. For this, gesso, a fine mixture of chalk and resin is applied on the cloth surface. The cloth is sundried after coating with gesso. After drying, the surface is thoroughly rubbed with a piece of stone (gzi) to get a fine polish. The rubbing and polishing process is repeated till the painter is satisfied about the texture of the painting surface. It can be mentioned here that the artisan lamas never compromise with the quality of their works of art. To achieve the best results, they repeat the process for nth time. Their patience in this regard is remarkable.

After the canvas is prepared, the painter lama recalls specific directives given in the book of Buddhist iconography and also keeps by his side a standard sample of the theme to be depicted. Before starting to sketch, he divides the canvas into the required number of square or rectangular blocks for each figure to be drawn. If the standard example and the canvas to be painted are of same size, stencil can also be used to transfer the outline drawing. The dotted outline transferred from the stencil is developed into solid lines with Chinese ink. In absence of stencil, the artist sketches the figures one by one inside the assigned blocks. Then he adds the background features, namely sky, clouds, hills, trees, meadows, backdrop, etc.

While painting a thanka the colouring starts from the background. First of all the sky is coloured with shades of blue. Next step is to colour the landscape features such as the hills. The valleys, meadows, trees etc. in different shades of green. While using these two colours, all other features in the shades of blue or green are also covered; After completing the background features, the painter starts working on the figures in bright red, orange and yellow. After the primary features are covered; he concentrates on smaller and finer details for which he uses pink, brown, white and gold.

Plate. No. 5. Thangka painting of Nyingma-pa sect.

In olden times almost all colours were natural pigments derived

from different minerals. For example blue pigment to colour sky, water and other blue features was derived from azurite, while the green pigment to colour landscape features was derived from malachite. Native vermilion and cinnabar were used to colour orange and bright red. Yellow ochre, white chalk or calcium compounds and carbon blacks were used to colour the features in yellow, white or black. Black ink was derived from soot and glue. Finally, gold dust was used to colour gold.

Till date the red and white pigments are derived from nature while most of the other colours are substituted by synthetic paint. In rare cases, the central figure is still decorated with pure gold leaf or dust. However, use of pure gold depends upon the wish and financial capability of the patron.

A thanka painter may take three to ten days to complete a normal size scroll. However, depending upon the size and composition, he may take several weeks to produce an exquisite work of art. Since most of the painting work takes place in daylight, and the colouring process progresses step by step, it takes considerable time to finish a standard thanka.

After the colours dry, the painter has to scrape the whole painting to attain a smooth surface, the thick layers of paint are scraped with a sharp knife; however, scraping is not required for the Karma Gardi or fine and light thankas. After scraping the thanka is dusted thoroughly. A tsampa dough is rubbed on the scraped surface to remove the fine dusts of paint.

Finally, the painting is mounted on silk or Chinese brocade or a finely embroidered material and attached to the rolling rods at the top and bottom.

MANDALA

Mandala is an integral part of tantric Buddhism. None of the puja rituals of a gompa is complete without the mandala. Mandala or the 'Magic circle' represents the universe. It is a cosmic plan as well as a celestial palace where the deities reside. It is an endless circular space where the deities, yakshas, dak-dakinis are supposed to sit and respond to the call of the worshipper. Mandalas are one of the most intricate and awe-inspiring works of lamaistic art. They exemplify the talent and knowledge of the artisan lamas. The meticulousness with which a mandala is drawn clearly shows the perfectionism of the lama artists.

Mandalas are always drawn by the lamas. Other than monasteries, these can be seen in some houses of the lay followers or even on lands

acquired by followers to construct their houses. The artists perform the duty of creating mandala for them on special request.

The basic features of a typical mandala are protective circles comprising bands of fire, vajra, lotus petals etc. ; four portals of the celestial palace and the seat of the deity at the centre. Several figures are placed around the seat of the central deity. The size of a mandala depends upon the number of deities to be worshipped. A most remarkable feature of mandala worship is that here along with the guardian deities, scores of other gods, goddesses, dak-dakinis are invoked and each of them has his or her assigned seat. Unless and until a lama artist is well-versed in tantric worship rituals and is perfectly aware of the placement of the deities and demons inside the mandala, he is not allowed to create a mandala. The lama teachers firmly believe that the deities respond to the call of the worshipper only if they are fully satisfied in regards to their seat, the style of invocation and prayer.

A mandala is not only an object of puja. It also acts as a therapeutic tool and a medium of meditation by which a patient can be healed or a practitioner can reach the higher realms of self-revelation. The most classical mandala is represented by the Kalachakra. According to the lamas of Sikkim monasteries, the mandalas can be divided into four categories. These are: i) Redy,-Kilkhor, ii) Dwchen-Kilkhor; iii) Lolang-Kilkhor, iv) Samten-Kilkhor. Of these, the first two are more commonly practiced in Sikkim. These are briefly discussed below:

1. Making of Mandala: The 'ready' Kilkhor (ready made mandala) is a kind of ready made and portable mandala which can be used for daily ritual at gompa or home. The larger monasteries keep wooden blocks of mandalas for particular deities. Different colours, (but more commonly black) are applied on the block and a sheet of paper or fabric is evenly spread on it. A heavy, rounded roller is run on the paper or cloth once from top to bottom and again from bottom to top. The imprint of the mandala is thus readily transferred on the sheet. After drying, the mandala is ready. Quite often when a devotee buys a land for the construction of his house he intends to perform bhumi puja so that no evil spirit casts an evil eye on his land or homestead. For this purpose, along with the guardian deity, the dakinis (khando) too are invoked by means of mandala. The ready-kinkors are widely used for such puja.

2. Dwechen-Kilkhor: These are meant for long-drawn rituals or puja, e.g. the puja of Kalachakra. The creation of dwchen-kilkhor start much ahead of the time of puja. This type of mandala is extremely elaborate, fine and

complex. It requires years of training to be able to create a dwchen-Kilkhor. It also requires high degree of esoteric knowledge, extreme meticulousness, perseverance and a very neat hand.

Plate no. 6. Mandala of Kalachakra puja

The first and foremost task before the creation of this mandala is to select the place. The selected place is usually raised above the ground-level and purified; the purification process of land is called sna-dok. Purification is compulsory not only for the place but also for all the ingredients to be used, such as water, grains of rice, mustard, sand etc. Purification ensures the removal of all evil spirit. The process of purification is quite elaborate. It requires milk, butter, saliva an urine, curd and cow-dung from a pedegreed cow. The cow should be the progeny of such cows which provided all the above mentioned items for mandalas during their fife time and are declared sacred. The selected cow should be flawless in every respect. All its body parts and sense organs should be flawless in every respect. All its body parts and sense organs should be blemish-free. Moreover, the cow must be purely vegetarian in the strictest sense. It is believed to be found only in high Himalayan pastures. The aforementioned items of purification must be collected before they come in contact with earth. If any of them touches the ground, that will be rendered unfit for purification. The five items are to be mixed with sacred water and smeared on the place to be purified. This medium of purification is known as ba-chung-nga(nga=five). Owing to the scarcity of ba-chung-nga, most of the monasteries preserve this in the form of tablets which can be diluted in the sacred water for purification and render the process faster as well easier. Other ingredients used for smear are camphor, kesara, nutmeg, white and red sandal wood. These five items are purified and powdered to prepare Dri-sang (varieties of essence). The Dri-sang is wet-grinded and applied on the area identified for mandala. Once the area is dry, the creation of mandala starts.

Plate no.7. Decorated mandala of Kalachakra puja.

To sketch the mandala the such medium is used that can be erased if needed. The sketching always starts from the centre and proceeds from east to west or north to south. This instruction cannot be violated by the artists. There are two valid reasons for this.

i) The directives of mandala creation clearly states that the work will proceed from left to right or from top to bottom. The artist is bound to

follow the directives to the minutest detail.

ii) If the work starts from the bottom to the top, it causes some practical problem. The lower section may get spoiled while working on the upper.

To colour the mandala a particular type of pen is used. There is no use of paint-brush in mandala. There is neither any use of ink or liquid paint to colour a mandala. The tube of the pen is filled with coloured powders derived from minerals or dried vegetable dye or pigments brought from market. In stead of a regular nib the pen has a pointed head with a small opening through which powdered colour is poured with a gentle stroke of hand. The artist masters the art of stroking with such perfection that only required amount of specific colour is poured onto the specified surface.

After the colouring business is over, the artist adorns the mandala with precious and semi-precious stones like ruby, coral, turquoise etc. The artisan lamas believe that unless the homes of the deities are richly furnished, they may not feel at ease. A finished mandala is always a luxurious and highly prized work of art. It may take several days or even weeks to finish a properly done mandala. Normally a group of lamas under the leadership of the omze or a senior lama work to create a dechen kilkor.

On the day of the ceremony or puja, the lamas of sangha assemble together and invoke the gods in the accompaniment of horns, drums and cymbals so that they appear and take their seats in side the mandala. Once the puja is over, the lamas thank the deities, request them to leave the mandala and after that destroy this fine work of art.

MURAL PAINTING

Mural painting on the walls, ceilings and frames of windows or doors inside a monastery is a regular feature. These are found especially on the walls of the shrine hall. The 16 great saints (Arhats) with whom Buddha Sakyamuni entrusted his doctrine are found to adorn the wall of shrines. Quite often the Jataka fables and many stories related to the gods, goddesses and saints are also depicted.

The mural paintings are not mere depictions of the images of gods, they are excellent manifestation of monastery art and are as valued as the thankas or scroll paintings. The images of the meditating saints, their disciples and the illustrated stories of their lives create an atmosphere

of silent reverence and evoke piousness in the mind of the beholder. The colourful illustrations also ease the sombre gloom of the dark chambers to a large extent.

Plate no. 8. Window decoration of Pema Yangtse monastery.

The artisan lamas require special training to paint a mural. Although the process is not much different from that of the *thanka*-painting, the enormity of scale may be disadvantageous for a regular *thanka* artist. A mural artist must learn the skill of enlargement and should be adept to work on a hard, static surface.

Before painting a mural, the working surfaces, i.e. the walls are coated with a layer of plaster of Paris or a mixture of lime and glue. The texture and stains on the wall are finely rubbed with sand-paper to make it blemish-free.

The painters usually follow a model drawing of the image or the scene to be painted. Square grids are drawn on the model to help maintaining proportion on the enlarged version. The working surface is also divided into equal number of grids. Sketching starts from top left corner grid, and proceeds towards right. After finishing a row from left to right, the artist takes up the next one below. For this he uses a flexible ladder or a fixed scaffolding if the working surface is very large and requires several hands. The bits of figures in the grids of the model are graphically enlarged and drawn on the wall with charcoal.

Plate no. 9. Artisan lama in front of a mural painted by him in Ralang monastery.

After the completion of sketching, the artist prepares the colours, colouring medium and paint brush. Most of the basic colours are derived from crushed mineral pigments. Herbal dyes are also used to paint murals. In Sikkim the red dye is almost always extracted from plants. The powdered pigments need to be mixed with glue and water. The colouring medium or the glue is derived from hide. In some cases, linseed oil is also used as a medium, but it is not very popular with the mural artists. They feel comfortable to work with pigments diluted in glue and water which has much similarity with the present-day distemper. Sometimes they apply thinner to create wash-effect. The pastel shades are achieved by mixing white with the four primary colours and re-mixing them. These days the mural artists of Sikkim liberally use the synthetic paints. However, they still use Tibetan

mineral pigment to paint the eyes of the deity, which they believe, cannot get life without this. Depending upon the size and nature of the mural, different types of paintbrushes are used. Most of these paint brushes have cat, goat, yak horse hair or rabbit.

Colouring too starts from top left to right and continues downwards. Like thanka-painting, here too, an order of colour is maintained. First of all, the colour blue is used to paint the sky and other blue features. Different shades of blue are used to show the gradation of sky from the zenith to the horizon. The higher areas are always coloured dark while the horizons are palest and often merge with the landscape shades. All other blue features are also painted simultaneously. After blue, it is the turn of green. Green colour is applied on the hills, meadows, forests, hedges, trees and the foreground represented by an empty field. The artists start working with the deepest green first and gradually move to the areas of lighter shades. Next come the turns of red, orange, yellow and so on and so forth.

The mural pictures are usually one-dimensional, but sometimes they are given three dimensional effect. For these, a thick medium of glue is used to make the paint thicker. If this is applied on a flat surface, the features look raised, and produce a three-dimensional effect if viewed from a distance. However, this must be done within the permissible limits as set by the old masters. The chief object must be painted in accordance with the instructions given by them so as to produce a true copy of the model given. It may take one to three years to complete a mural depending upon the intricacy of the sketch, size of the hall, availability of light and other working facilities.

Mask-making

Although masks are not used for everyday puja, they are no less important. Masks are used during every ceremonial dancing of the resident lamas of a monastery like Gutor Chaam, Losar, Dubchen and Tsechu puja. Masks are made for four guardian Amitabha Buddhas and all other lesser gods, goddesses, yakhas, dakinis, etc. Different masks are used for different ceremonies.

According to the artisan lamas of Sikkim monasteries, characteristically there are four kinds of masks :i) masks with serene expression (ziwa), ii) masks with mixed expression of serenity and anger (Sim-zimatrau), iii) masks with angry expression (Tro) (wrathful) and iv) masks with animal expression (Gonen-Tshog).

Unlike tormasculptors, thanka or mural painters, mask-makers are not found in every monastery. Because, all the monasteries may not have mask-dance ceremony. In Sikkim only a handful of monasteries arrange lame-dance where wearing of mask is necessary. Hence the art of mask-making is taught and practised only in those monasteries where the resident lamas have to take part in dance.

The art of mask-making: Masks are usually made of wood and clay mixed with the fibers of jute, cotton or handmade paper pulp. All the ingredients should be mixed in right proportion. The dough of this mix is cut into small pieces with the help of a chopper and again kneaded with hand. A locally available herbal glue (pin) is added to the dough to bind the ingredients. The dough is then flattened with a roller pin which is again pressed with a hot iron to tune it so that cracks can not develop afterwards. Next a sheet of wet handmade paper and a thin fabric is spread on the top and bottom of the flattened dough. This is again pressed with an iron. When the dough is partially dry, saw-dusts of red sandal wood mixed with pin is smeared on the dough so that the surface of the mask is textured.

After this, the lama either uses his hand or a dice to give the right shape of the mask. The masks are usually made larger than the standard size of human face so that they are fitted on any person during dance. Dancing masks should also contain lesser amount of clay so that they are not too heavy. Such masks have larger proportion of paper pulp or fibre. Once the image is transferred on the mask, it is sun-dried. Although sometimes they are dried on a charcoal oven, especially during the monsoons when the sun become a scarce commodity, it is not advisable because cracks may appear during oven-drying process. However, the artist checks the drying mask from time to time and mends the cracks before it is completely dry. On the other hand, drying under sun, though time consuming, ensures crack-free surface. Regarding colour, there is hardly any difference in the pigments or dyes used for tormas, mandala, thanka or mask. The masks are invariably painted with bright hues of red, green, blue, yellow and black. Masks may also be made to use for purposes other than lama dance, namely, for decorative purpose.

To conclude, it can be said that the arts and crafts of the Sikkim monasteries are not much different from those of Tibet, because the Mahayana Buddhism or more precisely, Vajrayana has its roots in Tibet. Quite often, the significance of the monastery art forms is not grasped by

the lay people and they fail to acknowledge the amount of skill and labour involved in creating these exquisite works of art. True, for an uninitiated torma, mandala, thanka or a ceremonial mask, do not bear much significance, but the aesthetic aspect of these exotic art forms cannot be overlooked or underestimated.

However, one limitation of the lama artists is the fact that they always have to follow the guidelines set by the old masters and there is absolutely no scope of using their own artistic imagination. This is the reason why most of these works look like exact replicas of each other. Although there is no dearth of (prescribed) variety, the artisan lamas and their patrons prefer to stick to some basic forms.

But one must admit that the strict discipline that is rigidly followed by the lama school of art makes it free from dilution. The distinctiveness of the tradition is religiously maintained to keep the purity of these art forms. They are exclusive and doubtlessly educative for those interested in religious studies.

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