

Legacy of Karmapa in Lamaism or Tibetan Buddhism

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Abstract

O Karmapa you who act

I am all that you have. And you are all that I have.

Buddhism establishes that its main goal is to guide through the journey of spiritual enlightenment to get rid of the worldly attachments which in all ways lead to sufferings.

The procedure of spiritual practices enables Karmapa to retain consciousness through the process of death and choose the next point of their birth. These procedures help the Karmapas to achieve their spiritual goals and accomplish the works for greater good and world peace.

The present paper talks about religious teachers who came into existence about nine hundred years ago in 1110 CE in the Eastern hills of Tibet .They affected all the living being with their kindness and compassion for their improvement of spirituality. This master of knowledge and epitome of compassion was named Karmapa.

Keywords: Compassion, Buddhism, Sects, Karmapa, Meditation, Spiritual, Monastic, Religious, Monastery

Introduction

Karmapas has attained such a mark of spirituality through constantly practicing Tantra and rituals that they indicated to their heart disciples the place where they would take birth in his next life. With a purpose that their disciples could care to reach for them and complete their spiritual obligation

This process was essentially required as only through such means Karmapa could continue his actions of compassion. They took interest in the scriptural studies and enriched their knowledge through intellectual debates of their followers. This approach resulted in the multifaceted development of knowledge and always added new dimensions in the previous accomplishments of Buddhist disciples.

Aim of the study:

Present study is both a scientific and spiritual truth . In order to gain a deep insight into the basic facts socio cultural legacy of karmapas, this research analysis throws light on esoteric teaching and their spiritual teachers as a significant aspect of Lamaism. These spiritual gurus called karmapas came from Tibet-region where many occultists were born. No substantial research work has been done on karmapas ,their practices ,association with lay people .Subsequently it will show that karmapas as socially beneficent agents which will enrich a new horizon in the studies of sociology of religion.

The first Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193)

Dusum khyenpa is one among the *Tibetan reincarnate Lama* some others, namely are his holiness the Dalai Lama and the Gyalwang Karmapa. The first fifteenth centuries of Buddhadharma no master employed this practice of spirituality to care for their disciples, the first among such was Dusum Khyenpa. Through his compassion it became possible to get connected to the reality of well being of his followers.

The second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (1206-1280)

Dusum khyenpa is believed to have reincarnated as Karma Paksh. He had mentioned his rebirth in the letter he gave to his pupil Drogon Renchen (1148- 1218). Pomdrapaka (1170-1240), a disciple of Drogon Renchen confirmed this possibility after numerous visions in his dreams which clearly indicated that Dusum khyenpa has reborn as none other than Karma Pakshi. It was expected by Karma Pakshi to exhibit extraordinary abilities in the above mentioned circumstances so that all misconceptions could be cleared regarding his holiness. Karma Pakshi is celebrated as the legendary master who possessed miraculous talents and

is placed with Padamsambhava accordingly. Karma Pakshi will always be remembered for his interactions with Mongke khan (1209-1259) which ultimately led to spiritual consciousness in the latter. Karma Pakshi had visited the court of Kublai khan but remained aloof and left his court as the political intentions displayed at that instance were not appealing to him. When Kublai khan ascended the throne he planned a conspiracy to have Karma Pakshi killed. Kublai khan was unsuccessful in his attempts and was deeply affected by the compassionate Karma Pakshi. His apologies to Karma Pakshi for his intriguing behaviour was followed by his request of attaining knowledge of Dharma. Pakshi means 'Great Teacher' in Mongolia.

The third Karmapa, Rangung Dorje (1284-1339)

The ideology of Dharma states that it can be categorised into two forms one which is preserved in the text form and another which is existing in thought of oriented persons. Rangung Dorje contributed in formation of religious texts and spiritual progress of his followers in attainment of siddhi which summed up to 80. He actively participated in compilation and editing of canonical collections. *Tengyur*, a canonical collection of Indian origin. This collection was written by hand in gold and silver under his personal guidance. It became famous as '*gold tengyur*', the first canonical edition to be written in gold and produced in Tibet.

The fourth Karmapa Rolpe Dorje (1340-1383)

The achievements of Rolpe Dorje are highlighted in golden letters in the history of Karmapas. He will always be remembered for his contribution in forming the Great Encampment of the Karmapas. He organised his followers in a community which was in many ways ahead in its accomplishments of meditation and religious studies. He always reached out to his disciples whenever it was necessary and blessed them with his presence in person across the land of Tibet which was a completely novel feature as earlier the disciples met the Karmapa at his abode. He witnessed the increasing conflicts between the orders of Drigung Kargyu and Sakya. He acted with courage as sole peacemaker in this conflict and resolved the issues to reach the higher spiritual attainments. He restored the resources of the Drigung monastery and revived it. The fourth Karmapa laid the foundation of the establishment of the great Gelug sect of Tibet when the je Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) repeated his lay disciple oath after him as a boy. On this occasion Rolpe Dorje foretold the greatness je Tsongkhapa would achieve in the pathway of Buddhism.

The fifth Karmapa Deshin Shegpa (1384-1415)

The fifth Karmapa in his early years of life was invited to China by the contemporary emperor of the Ming dynasty to impart religious instructions at the royal court and bless it with his presence. The emperor endowed on him abounded power and influence but he never employed these favours to propagate his sect and its teachings. After a while Yuan dynasty invaded Tibet to gain control with the consent of the religious teachers. Deshin Shegpa was advised to curb all other Tibetan sects and promote his Karma Kagyu sect but he denied it saying

that for the development of Tibetan culture all the sects are equally important. This piece of advice discouraged the Emperor for a military expedition against Tibet and the invasion was averted. It was due to farsightedness and compassion of fifth Karmapa that for centuries of Ming rule Tibet excelled in its religious beliefs and stayed safe from external threats of invasion.

The sixth Karmapa, Tongwa Donden (1416-1452)

The invitation of the emperor of China at the Imperial court was declined by the sixth Karmapa. He was the first one to do such act. The fifth Karmapa had accomplished almost impossible task of establishing peace between China and Tibet. It was expected according to the situations from the sixth Karmapa to accomplish the progress in field of religion and spiritual aspects by staying on the land of Tibet. Karmapa Tongwa Donden toured on all the parts throughout the land of Tibet in order to gain an insight of the development of the monasteries. His ultimate aim was to teach large assemblies through Great Encampment and maintenance of monasteries wherever needed.. To this day the basis of practice and learning being followed in the Karma Kagyu sect is the same which was developed by him. Composition of many ritual manuals and spiritual scriptures is accredited to him. When a Karma Kagyu reciter chants a ritual composition his name gets mentioned even to this day.

The seventh Karmapa, Chodrak Gyatso (1454-1452)

The seventh karmapa popularized the Great Encampment of the Karmapas and suitably achieved the title of "Cho- drak Gyatso of the Great Encampment". He was the first one to organise the massive prayer festivals of Buddhist on occasion of major holidays. This tradition proliferated in today's popular event Kagyu Monlam Chenpo. Chodrak Gyatso organised a formal study institute (shedra) during the Great Encampment. Similarly he organised a shedra at Tsurphu monastery. His writings on epistemology *Ocean of reasoning* exhibit his learning and understanding of the scriptures. His work *Abhisamayalankara, the lamp of three worlds* is considered important contribution to the Buddhist scriptures.

The eighth Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje (1507-1554)

Mikyo Dorje was the most accomplished scholar that Tibet has ever known. He was a master of all areas of Sanskrit and composed Sanskrit texts and commentaries. Scriptures on poetry and tantra are also included in his compositions. He compiled many volumes on commentaries which provide indepth knowledge of ancient Buddhist scriptures. As a follower of Karma kagyuu sect his writings provide a completely different aspect to the previous learning traditions followed by the disciples because of the theory of gaining knowledge through realisation of thought. The writings produced by him aim at release of a person from world's sufferings and attainment of the spiritual goals. His compositions highlight the importance of compassion and kindness in the journey of life. His contribution towards the publications of his insight and knowledge about the

religious scriptures is held as a reason for longevity of the Karma kagyü clan.

The ninth Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje (1556-1603)

The life of Wangchuk Dorje was devoted in making religious explorations and giving them a written form so that they could be a basis for achieving skills for the coming generations in practicing Tantra and rituals. Differing from the previous Karmapas, Wangchuk Dorje was primarily occupied in creation of texts on Mahamudra. Mahamudra is connected directly to the truth and this task is often considered difficult when it comes to explaining or describing it in words. For excelling in this field training under qualified master is desirable which can help in gaining the disciples an insight in thoughts of experiencing nature. The ninth Karmapa was dedicated in his efforts after accepting this cause since Mahamudra avoids concept formation in its explanation and simplification. His skills and understanding of Mahamudra resulted in compilation of three texts: *Ocean of definitive meaning, pointing out the Dharmakaya, Dispelling the darkness of Ignorance*. These writings are the framework on which the Karma Kagyu sect and its teachings are dependent presently. The later Karmapas explain the importance of these documents by stating that if these documents were not available, the Karma Kagyu sect would have experienced extensive lack of written texts which could explain the Mahamudra practice.

The tenth Karmapa, Choying Dorje (1604-1674)

The tenth Karmapa had to face difficult situations which ultimately resulted in drastic changes and approvals in the status of Karma Kagyu sect in Tibet. His judgement of these situations presents an example of kindness, compassion and standing strong in the adverse conditions. In seventeenth century Mongols directed their attention towards Tibetan region. The Great Encampment was completely destroyed in an invasion and the inhabitants at the camp were slaughtered. Choying Dorje experienced a narrow escape with his attendant. They found shelter in the region of Lijiang dynasty. The tenth Karmapa visited Kham and Amdo secretly to strengthen the position of his followers. He succeeded in bringing sixth Tai Situpa and other Karma Kagyu incarnations to Lijiang. He spent his adulthood by making a picture everyday.

The eleventh Karmapa, Yeshe Dorje (1676-1702)

It is established by tradition that from the time of Dusum khyenpa Karmapa usually reincarnated in the Kham region and initiate their interest in the Karma Kagyu monastery in eastern Tibet and then reached the Tsurphu monastery in central Tibet. In this way their influence was always distributed in the Tibetan region equally. Yeshe Dorje was not an exception to this tradition he soon got focused on the traditional approaches of attaining the spiritual goals just like the previous Karmapas. He participated in the black crown ceremony after his enthronement and received the guidelines of his lineage. He studied spiritual texts under the guidance of Nyingmapa and Karma Kagyu masters including Yongye Mingyur Rinpoche. Yeshe dorje survived in oppressive conditions which made it very difficult for

him to influence the world with his spiritual activities. His areas of action were reforming conditions of the monastery which was devastated after the Mongolian invasions. He took deep interest in taking care of his disciples and training the lamas for the monastic life. His span of life counted almost twenty seven years which was altogether minimal among the Karmapas. He put rigorous efforts to develop the legacy which he had received and was able to achieve success to large extent.

The twelfth Karmapa, Jangchub Dorje (1703-17032)

With great efforts he improved his relations with the lamas of Karma Kagyu lineage. He was successful in establishing peace and maintaining amicable relations with the order. Dudul Dorje accomplished this task not because of his political abilities but due to his spiritual excellence. It happened once that Kiyuchu River was heavily flooded and Lhasa was threatened of harm. Dudul Dorje's help was received to do away with this danger as once Padmasambhava had prophesied that taking guidance of a Karmapa is recommended in such situations. Accordingly, he placed a special letter on flooding river and invoked the blessings of Avlokiteshvara. As the issue was resolved the bitterness with the government minimised. It proved to be a better sign for improved relations of both the government and the Karmapas.

The fourteenth Karmapa, Thekchok Dorje (1798-1868)

Thekchok Dorje was primarily a practitioner of spiritual activities since his early years. His exemplary monastic discipline and asceticism was an inspiration to all. His disciples practiced rites and rituals with his inspiration. Most of his time was dedicated towards his passion of spiritual poetry. His contribution is noticed even in present times in Tsurphu and Rumtek monasteries. He introduced two forms of *cham* (rituals dancing) namely, Padamsambhava ritual dancing and Vajrakilaya rituals dancing. Until the exile of sixteenth Karmapa in 1959, these dancing forms were an inseparable part of traditional rituals. Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim practices both dance forms whereas Tsurphu monastery follows only Padamsambhava dancing practice. Thekchok Dorje contributed to *Rime*, the movement which got popular in eastern Tibet. He imparted spiritual guidance to *Rime* masters Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (1883-1899) and Chogyur Lingpa (1829-1870).

The fifteenth Karmapa, Khakhyab Dorje (1871-1922)

The fifteenth Karmapa, Khakhyab Dorje continued his work of developing *Rime* movement which was left unattended during his previous life incarnation as soon as his enthronement was performed. He was recognised by a group of monks which included Jamyang Khyetse Wangpo (1820-1892) and Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (1883-1899)

From an early age Khakhyab Dorje dedicated himself to gain knowledge of spiritual texts with the help of trained masters and attaining success in applying his knowledge through various channels. He gained Kagyu transmission from Jamgon Kongtrul

Lodro Thaye after traveling from Tsurphu monastery to Palpung monastery. He studied the collection namely 'five treasuries' of Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye. After this he visited Drukpa Kagyu, Shangpa Kagyu, Sakya, Nyingmapa and Karma Kagyu. He established that aim of Rime movement was to preserve the traditions that other lineages had ascertained. This movement certified the continuity of the lineages which were on the verge of extinction. The soul of the movement was to generate peace, compassion and universal brotherhood.

Conclusion

Therefore we can sum up that Karmapas were learned scholars of Buddhist philosophical treatises and commentaries. Along with these major contributions they were also active in guiding at works of public welfare such as bridge construction and monastic activities. The spiritual and tantric practices

reached new heights in monastic tradition under their holy guidance.

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