

Drikung Kagyu Buddhism in Purview of Dard Aryans of Ladakh

Dr. Richa Kamboj

HOD & Associate Professor

Dept. of Drawing & Painting

M.K.P. (P.G.) College, Dehradun

Email: r.k.kamboj@hotmail.com

Abstract

The Dard Aryans, inhabiting Dha, Hanu, Bhima in the district of Leh and Dakchik, Garkhon villages in Kargil district in the state of Jammu & Kashmir, are the descendants of pure Aryan race. They had their own rites and rituals and a distinct culture which had drawn worldwide attention from the point of view of research and study but due to socio- historical factors, the Dard Aryans got converted to Buddhism or Muslim religion, consequently losing the essence of their original roots, more specifically in the villages which adopted Muslim religion. The villages like Dah, Hanu, Darchik and Garkhon, which adopted Buddhism approximately one hundred sixty five years back, could retain their original Aryan customs which they practice till date.

Keywords

Aryan, descendants, rites and rituals, spiritual education, monastery, philosophy, tantric, transcendental wisdom, enlightenment

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Dr. Richa Kamboj

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The Dard Aryans, inhabiting Dha, Hanu, Bhima in the district of Leh and Darchik, Garkhon villages in Kargil district in the state of Jammu & Kashmir, are the descendants of pure Aryan race. They had their own rites and rituals and a distinct culture which had drawn worldwide attention from the point of view of research and study but due to socio- historical factors, the Dard Aryans got converted to Buddhism or Muslim religion, consequently losing the essence of their original roots, more specifically in the villages which adopted Muslim religion. The villages like Dah, Hanu, Dakchik and Garkhon, which adopted Buddhism approximately one hundred sixty five years back, could retain their original Aryan customs which they practice till date.

Buddhism found following in Aryan villages in Ladakh after the arrival of the monk Tene Lama in the region. Another galvanizing factor was the monk from Achinathang, Konchok Wangpo Fomsapa, who propagated Drikung Kagyu Buddhism amongst the Dard Aryans in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the sect found incessant following in the region.

The Dard Aryans strictly follow an idiosyncratic tradition of sending one child from each family to become a Buddhist monk/ nun in the monasteries – at Lamayuru, Phyang or Drikung Kagyu Institute- Jangchubling Monastery in exile of the Drikung Kagyu Buddhism in Dehra Dun, to pursue their formal education, training and spiritual advancement. Drikung Kagyu Buddhism has a strong lineage in Ladakh. Phyang, Lamayuru and Sharchukhul are the main monasteries besides fifty others of the order in the region .

The Dard Aryans are the followers of Drikung Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism which was founded by the Great Lord Drikungpa, Jigten Sumgon, who after attaining tenth level of Bodhisatva, became the successor of Phagmodrupa. In his previous lives he propagated Buddha's teachings and was known as Tathagata Lurik Dronma, Bodhisatva Kunsar Wankur Gyalpo, as the potter Garyoung during Buddha Shakyamuni's time and also took rebirth as Acharya Nagarjuna. His rebirth in Tibet at a place called Drikung- the source of Dharma, was predicted in various *sutras*- Yeshe Yongsu Gyepa *sutra*, Gongdu *sutra* and in Gyalpo Kaithang. He was born in Tibet in the Kyura clan and was called Tsunpa Kyab and later as Dorje Pal. Jigten Sumgon travelled to central Tibet to become chief disciple of the glorious Phagmodrupa. After Phagmodrupa's *parinirvana*, Jigten Sumgon became his successor. It is believed that at the time of Phagmodrupa's *parinirvana* a five pronged *vajra* emerged from the center of his heart and got absorbed into the heart center of Jigten Sumon, legitimating his succession to Phagmodrupa. It is the lineage of the Great Lord Jigten Sumgon and Drikung Kagyu school which

has found following at Garkhun, Darchik, Dha, Hanu Gomgma, Hanu Yokma, amongst the Dard Aryans of Ladakh.

Lamayuru being close to these villages, most of the monks from here seek their formal and spiritual education at the monastery situated here belonging to Drikung Kagyu lineage. It is also known as Yungdrung Tharpaling and is situated approximately 127 kms to the west of Leh. During Buddha Shakyamuni's life span, the site was a huge lake and was abode of many *nagas*. Arahat Madhyantika is believed to have visited the lake and had extended water offerings with the grains of barley to the *nagas*, after which he struck the ground of the lake with his walking staff, thus piercing it and causing the water of the lake to pour out and prophesized the site to become a prominent center of Buddhist education. The site became sacred when Mahasiddha Naropa (1006-1100) visited it and dwelt in a cave here for a considerable long time. Rinchen Zangpo (958-1055) had built five temples at Lamayuru, out of these one is still intact. During the reign of King Tashi Namgyal, Denma Kunga Drakpa visited Ladhak and stayed at the King's palace at Lamayuru. When he saw that the grains of barley sown by Arhat Madhyantika had turned into the shape of *swastika*, he considered it to be an auspicious sign and established a monastery there called Yungdrung. Tharpling got added to Yungdrung due to the law made by the kings of Ladhak and Balti that a criminal would escape execution by sending a hat to Yungdrung. Buddha's teachings as well as the whispered lineage of Mahasiddha Tilope Naropa are taught at Lamayuru. It was invaded by the army of the King of Jammu- Gulab Singh. The monks were massacred and the monastery was ruined. Only a few monks managed to flee. It was rebuilt by the surviving monks of the monastery with the help of Kyabje Babula Rongdol Nyima Rinpoche. The Aryan villages Dha, Hanu Gomgma, Hanu Yokma, Garkhon, Darchik, are under Lamayuru monastery and these places have their own monasteries too.

Situated at a distance of twenty two kilometers to the west of Leh on the right bank of the river Indus, **Phyang** monastery dates to sixteenth century. It was built by the Lama Chosje Danma Kunga Dagspa under the patronage of the King Tashi Namgyal whom he had cured from laprosy. He had selected the place to build a monastery after the vision he had in meditation of Achi Choski Donma, the protectress of Drikung Kagyu order of Buddhism, astride on a horse on the blue mountain of Phyang – Gang-Ngon. The monastery houses many exquisite wall paintings and Gomkhang (Mahakal) temple dated to 16th CE.

Sharchukhul monastery also belongs to Drikung Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. It is believed to have been the first Drikung Kagyu monastery built in Ladakh by Lama Danma Kunga Dagspa.

The Aryan Buddhist monks also come to Dehra Dun to acquire education of Buddhism in the Drikung Kagyu Institute, Drikung Kagyu College, located at Kulhan, Sahastradhara Road, Dehra Dun. **Drikung Kagyu Institute** was established in 1984 by the great Drikung Chestang Rinpoche on a land acquired by him on the outskirts of Dehra Dun with the aim of establishing a monastery and education centre. The monastery was named as Drikung Kagyu **Jangchubling** monastery after the first monastery in Tibet, Jangchubling. It took five years to complete the construction here. Finally it was in November 1992 the inauguration ceremony of the Jangchubling monastery and Drikung Kagyu Institute was held in the presence of His Holiness Chungtsang Rinpoche and His Holiness Dalai Lama. Education upto tenth standard can be acquired at Drikung Kagyu Institute. There are around ten Dard Aryans from Hanu Gomgma at DKI as per information provided by the Aryan Lama Skalzang Tsering from Lastang, Ladakh, who has completed his nine years course of education at Drikung Kagyu College and two years education at DKI and presently he is working as meal manager at Jangchubling monastery. The present principal of the Institute is also a Dard Aryan from Lastang- Mr. Konchok Tander.

Higher education in Buddhist philosophy is pursued at **Drikung Kagyu College**. The college aims to produce qualified monks. To meet this end candidates are selected from Drikung Kagyu monasteries located in India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. They are given the best education, training in various branches of Buddhist philosophy. It takes nine years for the monks to complete their education at the college. After successful completion of the courses/ training offered in Buddhist philosophy, training in practical aspects of the school, the monks become *Shastri* and *Acharya*, the latter being the highest designation to be given after completing nine years of education at the Drikung Kagyu College. Ten Dard Aryans are pursuing higher education at Drikung Kagyu College. Nearby the college is situated **Songtsen Library** which has good collection of books on the Himalaya, Tibet and Buddhist philosophy. One Dard Aryan lama is presently working at the library.

The Aryan Buddhist nuns stay here at **Samtenling Nunnery** at Challengaon road, Kulhan, Dehra Dun. As informed by a Dard Aryan Buddhist nun- Rinchen Chokyi, presently total four Dard Aryan Buddhist nuns are staying at the nunnery. It was started as a retreat centre in 1992. As the number of nuns increased additional structure was built and was inaugurated by His Holiness Kyabgon Chetsang Rinpoche in February 2001. The Mandala temple located at the nunnery was constructed in 1991. There are four Aryan nuns staying here as told by Rinchen Chokyi, an Aryan Buddhist nun from Hanu Gomgma who had been studying here for the last five years.

Thus the Dard Aryans of villages-Dha, Bima, Garkhon, Darchik, Hanu Gomgma, Hanu Yokma, could retain their tradition and culture, religious practices under the protecting umbrella of Drikung Kagyu Lineage. To preserve the rich culture heritage of Dard Aryan of Ladhak. the Himalayan Museum of Labdhak Culture was founded in Garkhun Village in Kargil district in 2017. It is an ancestral house of Mr.Tashi Landup who converted it to the museum for the noble cause. Among the other artifacts of great religio-cultural heritage of the Dard Aryans, six Thangkas dating back to early 20th CE are being discussed in the present paper. Thankha paintings constitute an important tool in imparting education to the monks, for religious propaganda, to be employed during festivals, worship, for carrying out rites and rituals, besides also as a token of offering in lieu of a wish fulfillment.

Thangka no 1 depicts Bhaisajyaguru also known as ‘Medicine Buddha’, holding in his left hand a gallipot filled with medicine prepared from arura plant with which he cures the world from diseases. The style is a synthesis of simplification and exquisite linear allegory.

Thangka no 2 depicts Padmasambhav, the lotus born also known as Guru Rinpoche, in the centre seated on a fully blossom lotus rising from the lake Dhanakosha below. He was an 8th CE Buddhist monk from India who had travelled to Tibet and had built a monastery there at Samye. He holds a goldenvajra in his right hand and in his left hand he holds a skull cup filled with nectar. He is depicted wearing red royal robes and a red folded hat.

On his left upper side is Manjushri holding a flaming sword in his right hand symbolizing transcendent wisdom whereas in his left hand is held a stem of lotus with *Prajnaparamita sutra* kept on the lotus which symbolizes his ultimate realization of transcendental wisdom. He is called Jamyang in the local dialect, a wisdom deity, according to Lama Konchok Tander. The figure on Padmasambhava’s upper left is probably Ratnachandraprabha who is depicted white same as Buddha, though the objects held in his hands are not clear. He usually holds a moon in his left hand placed in his lap and a fire emitting disc in his right hand raised to his chest. On the lower left is Durma identified by Lama Konchok Tander in the local dialect of Ladakh and Chakdur on the lower right side. He is depicted as a blue coloured fierce deity holding a vajra in his right hand and ears tiger’s skin around his waist and a snake around his neck standing on a sun disc. It is the representation of Vajrapani, a protective deity, who symbolizes Buddha’s power and energy and is amongst the three Bodhisattava who surround him. Besides, the thangka also includes the representation of small size Buddha in *bhumisparsh mudra* on the left side in the centre.

Thangka no 3 depicts Lord Jigten Sumgon and Bhaisajyaguru in the upper half and Manjushri and Vajrapani in the lower half.

Thangka no 4 depicts Dharampala or Choskyong , a wrathful deity who protects the Dharma, on the left upper corner and Vajrapani on the right upper side. On the lower left corner is depicted probably a black Manjushri or a form of Mahakala, a Gonpo. Black Manjushri is depicted as semi-peaceful and semi-wrathful blue-black figure and holds a blazing sword in his right hand and in his left hand he holds the stem of an utpala with one hundred thousand verse book placed on it. It is a wrathful healing form of Manjushri who heals from intense negative emotions, mental sufferings, fatal diseases and problems arising from negative astrological influences. On the right lower side is depicted Achi Chokyi Drolma, the protectress deity of the Drikung Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism. She is the grandmother of the lord Jigten Sumgon, the founder of the sect. Achi means grandmother and Chokyi Drolma means saviouress of the Dharma. She was a great tantric practitioner and is believed to have transformed a human corpse into a sacred offering. She is believed to have travelled to the Buddhist heaven, riding a blue horse after composing a verse to invoke herself as protector of Buddhism. She appears here also riding a blue horse against white clouds symbolizing Buddhist heaven.

Thangka no 5 depicts Vajrapani (Tib. Phyag-sna-rDorje/ Chakna Dorje) with a golden *vajra* in his right hand, a snake around his neck and tiger's skin around his waist as he stands on a Sun disc. The composition is marked by simplicity and stylization.

Thangka no 6 depicts representation of twenty one Taras inspired by the practice text Praises to the Twenty One Tara consisting of twenty one verses, each verse dedicated to a particular Tara. Goddess Tara is the embodiment of compassion as she was born from Avalokitesvara's tear. She is mother of the Buddha of the past, present and future. She is depicted holding lotuses in her both hands and seated with right left extended symbolizing her eagerness and her willingness to take swift movement and action to help all sentient beings. Her depiction in Tangkas may vary from that mentioned in the traditional commentaries. There are three main Tibetan iconographical tradition of twenty one Taras, viz. **1. Suryagupta School** – in which each Tara is attributed a distinct posture, gesture and colour. **2. Nagarjuna and Atisha tradition** in which postures are more or less same but colours, peaceful and wrathful expression vary and they hold a vessel in their left hand. Green Tara is not included in Atisha tradition. **3. Nyingma tradition-** in which twenty one Taras are depicted same as in Atisha or Nagarjuna tradition except the different emblems which are depicted on top of the lotuses which they

hold in their left hands. The manifestation of twenty one Taras in this Tangkha seems to be a localized version as their iconography does not match with any three of the Tibetan tradition mentioned above. In the Tangkha under discussion all the Taras share same posture and gesture as they hold lotuses in their both hands but they have different colours. It includes six green Taras, four white Taras, five maroon Taras, three golden yellow Taras and three black blue Taras. Each colour has its own symbology. Green symbolizes action and achievement, white symbolizes her willingness to overcome disease and hindrances in life, yellow is symbolic of positive qualities, peaceful life, happiness and success, red symbolizes power, black and blue symbolize forceful and wrathful steps or means to be adopted to attain enlightenment. One who worships Tara with twenty one Tara mantra or twenty one verses in praise of Tara gets detached from negativity, fear and can attain enlightenment. The style is elegant, lines are sublime, figures are slender. These Thangkas seem to be executed by the local artists in Ladakh.

Thus, it won't be an exaggeration to state that the rich cultural heritage of the Dard Aryans and the incessant flow of their mesmerizing traditions, the glimpses of which we have been able to witness today as a paradigm in this Arya Utsava, could have been viable due to the patronage the Aryan Valley and its ethnic group received from the Drikung Kagyu School of Buddhism. The impact of the sect in the Aryan Valley had been so impregnable that even some Muslims in the Aryan Valley invite Buddhist Lamas to perform prayers and rituals for their well being, to get rid from fatal diseases.