

A Historical Analysis of Monasticism in Newar Buddhism^{**}

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1. Introduction

Newar Buddhism is to be classified in the tradition of Indian Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism deriving its lineages from *Siddha* tradition of Nalanda and Vikramashila monastic universities. However, it has developed its peculiar characteristics which are one of a kind in the Buddhist history. One should not forget that Newar Buddhism possesses quite a number of indigenous elements, which are not to be found in Indian Mahayana Buddhism. Now that Mahayana Buddhism has disappeared from India, Newar Buddhism found in Kathmandu valley represents one of the few tradition in the world which has retained features inherited directly from India. At one time all forms of Buddhism were believed to have been found in the Buddhism of Nepal.

At present, there are no longer any celibate monks among Newar Buddhist *Sangha*. The members of community live in Vihara and have retained its designation (*Sangha*).

There are two status within caste community namely *Vajracharya* (Literally: Master of the Thunderbolt) and *Shakyabhikshu*. The *Vajracharya* were the masters of Tantric Buddhism and ritual specialists whereas the *Shakyabhikshu* were Buddhist monks. The *Vajracharya* played a higher role than Shakyas because they were given additional initiation (*Achaluyegu*) on Buddhist tantras. Only the male members of this community after having undergone through the rite of monastic ordination (*skt: Cudakarma*) belong to the *Sangha*. Shakya and *Vajracharya* boys normally undergo this monastic ordination at the age of five, seven or nine. The rule is that they should be under twelve years of age.

Elders of the monastery addressed as *Sthavira Aju* will give them *Pravrajyavrata* or monastic initiation. He stays in the monastery for 4,10,16,20,25 years for Buddhist studies. After finishing his studies he disrobes himself for his lay Bodhisttva life. To facilitate his spiritual career, he goes through marriage ceremony. When the couple receive instructions on Buddhist practices, they would be given *Vajracharya Abhiseka* or *Acharya Abhiseka*.

It forms one of the series of life cycle ritual.¹ It should also be noted that Newar Buddhism has no place for higher ordination (*Upasampada*) by which a

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novice monk becomes a fully ordained Buddhist monk. The fact that Newar Buddhism has no place for monastic life upgrading except for the four-days observance seems to be a serious weakness² to the modern Buddhist and to the western educated persons.

This traditional Buddhism of Newar has recently become the subject of great interest and detail study on different aspects by Siegfried Lienhard, Joohn K. Locke, David Gellner, Michael Allen and others.³

The unique features of the Newar Buddhism and validity of its monasticism is analysed in this article. Newar Buddhists describe their structure of religion as integrative in the nature of Shravaka, Mahayana and Vijrayana traditions.

2. Shravakayana in Newar Buddhism

To explain Newar Buddhism and its integrative behaviour, it is befitting to give an account of monastic rite when young boys receive ordination (skt: *Cudakarma*). Before the neophyte's topknots are cut off, a ritualized exchange between the disciples and the preceptor is supposed to take place. It runs thus:⁴

^{1.} *Acarya Kriyasamucaya* mentions 10 life cycle rituals to be performed. They are as follows: (1) *Jatakarma* (2) *Namakarm*, (3) *Annaprasana* (4) *Cudakarma* (5) *Chudakarmavisarjana* (6) *Vajracaryabhisekha*, (7) *Svayambara*, (8) *Bibaha*, (9) *Dikshya* and (10) *Sthavira*.

The author of *Acharyakriya Samuccaya* is Mahamandalacharya Jagaddarpana. The *Brihat Suchipatra* mentions 3 copies of the text in the Bir Library in 1964.

- Purna Ratna Vajracharya, *Brihatsuchipatra*, Vol. 7 pt 1, Kathmandu: Bir Library, 2021 B.S., pp. 53-59.

^{2.} Heinz Bechert and Jens-Uwe Hartmann, "Observations on the Reform of Buddhism in Nepal", *Journal of the Nepal Research Centre*, Vol. VIII, 1988, pp. 2-6.

^{3.} Siegfried Lienhard, "Nepal: The Survival of Indian Buddhism in a Himalayan Kingdom",

- H. Bechert and Richard Gombrich (ed.), *The World of Buddhism*, London: Thames and Hudgson, 1984, pp. 108-114.

- John K. Locke, *Karunamaya: The Cult of Avalokitesvara Matsyendranath in the Valley of Nepal*, Kathmandu: Shahayogi/CNAS, 1980.

- John K. Locke, *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal*, Kathmandu: Sahayogi Press, 1985.

- Michael Allen, "Buddhism without Monks - The Vajrayana Religion of the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley", *South Asia*, 3 (1973), pp. 1-14.

- David Gellner, *Monk, House Holders and Tantric Priest: Newar Bhddhism and its Hierarchy of Ritual*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

- Stephen M. Greenwold, "The Role of the Priest in Newar Society" in James Fisher (ed.) *Himalayan Anthropology*, The Hague: Mouton, 1978, pp. 483-503.

^{4.} David N. Gellner, "Monastic Initiation in Newar Buddhism" in Richard Gombrich (ed.), *Indian Ritual and its Exegesis*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, Oxford University Papers on India, Vol. 2 Part I, 1988, p 53.

"Oh *Guru*, in accordance with your instruction, from this day, and until I have attained enlightenment I shall go Lord Buddha, blessing. "Thus the guru is requested, supplicated by him.

The *Guru* says, "I of such and such name go for refuge to the Buddha. I go for refuge to the Dharma. I go refuge to the *Sangha*. While this Mandala remains, give up desire (skt: *trnsa*). (You, as pupil should say) Oh Lord ! Oh *Guru*, greatly compassionate. For the rest of my life, Ten *Akusala Karma* must be given up, and other sins, various words-now I shall save beings and so forth."

The pupil says, hearing this instruction, "O Lord, O *Guru* (as you are here) killing and so on I despicably as you say, Oh lord, *Guru*, you have graciously spoken I must go".

The Sanskrit version of ritual handbook runs as follows:

The *Guru* says, "Now son of good family, are you capable of or not of taking up the observance of Going forth as you should.

The pupil says: Oh ! My preceptor I wish to undertake the observance of going forth, please be compassionate. I of such and such name, shall for the rest of my life go for refuge to the Lord Buddha who is greatly compassionate, all knowing, all seeing, beyond the danger of all enemies, great man, of indivisible body of the ultimate body, the Dharmakaya, foremost in all religious groups.

The *Guru* says, "Well done, well done, son of good family swear three times that you are capable of abandoning the insignia of a householder and taking up the insignia of the Going forth". The pupil says, "Oh preceptor and taking up the capable of the observance of going forth, three times" I declare it is true.

The *Guru* says" Now I the greatly delighting one shall explain-listen dear one: the five precepts followed in this observance are laid down with explanations".

Now the neophyte's topknot (Nep: *Tupi*) is cut off with a gold plated razor along with this *mantra*:

"*Om sarva jana avarana chedaya chedaya hum phat*"

(Cut cut all obstacles to understanding)

The absence of topknot is perhaps the most crucial marker of the distinction between Shakya, *Vajracharya* (Buddhists) and the rest of other castes in the Kathmandu valley. After consecration by holy water from white counc shell, the boys are given a new name and three robes. They are given begging bowl and a staff (*Silaku*), which has an effigy of the Buddha (or of a *Stupa*) at the top. He is permitted to enter into main shrine of Vihara and pay homage to *Kwapadya* and make offerings. Newar Buddhists are very much attached to this four days observance of monastic ideal to maintain one's Buddhist identity rather than renouncing the world by desires and become a Buddhist monk.

Duties of a Sakyabhikshu

The Shakya Bhikshu, who observe four days of going forth as part of Vajrayana ritual in the Nepalese style are required to observe some specific duties as as the prescribed rules:

- For the four days the Shakyabhikshu must beg his food daily,
- Must live the life of a Buddhist monk though they continue to live at home.
- They have to observe the regulations of diet of the monk
- Avoid contact with unclean (association with dogs and shoes), and
- Keep ten precepts.

The neophyte receives his first alms from the senior ten elders (*Dasaparamita Sthavira Aju*) of the monastery and his family Buddhist priest. During the tenure of his monkhood he had to visit the main shrine and pay homage to *Kwapadya* (main deity) and make offerings.

On the fourth day the neophyte returns to the lay life. The boy then hand over the begging bowl and staff, and takes off his robes. Since the topknot is never maintained by *Sakyabhikshu* even after disrobing ceremony they are given the status of *Sakyabhikshu*. Since then the absence of topknot is perhaps the insignia of a Buddhist monk or *Sakyabhikshu*. Disrobing ceremony does not signify the abandonment of monastic vows but transition from Sravaka to Mahayana practice. They remain as Budhisattva.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact time as when the system of celibate monasticism disappeared in Nepal. We are certain that celibate monks existed even during the seventh century. Chinese pilgrim Xuan Xang (Hsuan-tsang) had mentioned in his travel diary that the number of Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhist monks were more than two thousands.

An inscription of Amshuvarma has also confirmed a conspicuous presence of *Bhikshuni Sangha* belonging to the *Mahasanghika* sect⁵ as well as *Mahasanghika Bhikshu Sangha*.⁶ The inscription mentions:

"tad prayojane ca caturvimsa mahayana pratipanna
aryabhikshunisamgha paribhauga akhayanivi"

Now the question arises as to what was the Vinaya lineage of Newar Buddhist Tradition. At present, we come across difficulty in finding parallel reference in the *Chudakarmavidhi* tradition with *Mahasanghika* or

^{5.} Ramji Tewari et. al. (eds.), *Abhilekh Sangraha (A Collection of Inscriptions)*, Part V, Kathmandu: Samsodhan Mandal, 2020 B.S., p. 8.

^{6.} Hari Ram Joshi, *Nepalko Prachin Abhilekh (Ancient Inscriptions of Nepal)*, Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 2030 B.S., p. 523.

Mulasarvastivada tradition. A newly discovered inscription in Bhaktapur also suggests a presence of *Mahasanghika Bhikshuni* lineage.⁷

Duties of Buddhist Sangha in Newar Buddhist Vihara

The duties of elders are to oversee the daily, monthly, and annual Buddhist functions and festivals. They also organize initiation into *Bhikshu Sangha* i.e. (performance of *Chudakarma*, *Achaluyegu* ceremony of initiated members' offsprings) as well as regulating the discipline of the *Sangha* and social rules.

All the male members who are initiated in a Mahavihara constitute the *Sangha*. *Mahavihara* has *Guthi* including all the initiated members. The senior-most member of the *Guthi* of the Vihara is addressed as *Mahasthavira*, and the *Chakresvara* and other elder are addressed as *Sthavira Aju*.

The Buddhist Vihara of the Kathmandu valley has also a daily *Puja* dedicated to the main image, (the *Kwapadya*) enshrined in the Vihara. At one time the Vihara of Kathmandu Valley too had a complete schedule of rituals for the whole day. This is no longer in practice except at a few places like Janabaha in Kathmandu and Kwabaha in Patan.⁸

Among these practices the recitation of *Namasangiti*, *Danagatha*, *Aparimita Dharani*, *Saptavidanottara Puja Strotra*, *Dasaparamita Strotra*, and *Buddha trailokya Stortras* are the most prominent ones.

Besides, the recitation of *Astahasrikaprajnaparamita*, *Pancharakshya* and *Nava Sutra* are the scriptural bases of the Newar Buddhism. One thing is sure that meditation on *Samatha* and *Vipassana* is definitely lacking. Those *Vajracharya* and Shakya who had received the initiation on Cakrasamvara or *Achaluyegu*, however, meditate for some time on deity yoga and some recitation only. Nowadays a *Vajracharya* or Shakya perform the retreats for intensive practice very rarely.

Duties of a Bhikshu Sangha in a Theravada Monastery

The Buddhist monastic or the ordained *Sangha* has played a crucial role in keeping alive and passing on the lineage of the teachings and practice since the time of Buddha himself. Every Buddhist monastic community has some common religious and devotional exercises each day. It is brief and simple in Theravada monasteries, for example: *Buddhapuja*, and *Paritrana*, as well as *Mangal Sutra* recitation in ceremonial and *Kathinotsava* occasions. *In regular occasions, the Theravada monks* give the instructions on the practice of *Samatha* and *Vipassana* meditation for the *Upasaka* and *Upasika* (lay followers).

^{7.} *Pasuka*, Vol II, No. 11, N.S. 1118.

^{8.} For the list of practices see John K. Locke, "The Unique Features of Newar Buddhism", in T.Skorupski (ed.), *The Buddhist Heritage*(Buddhica Britannica I), Tring : The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1989, pp.84 -85.

Duties of *Bhikshu Sangha* in The Tibetan Monastery

In most of the Tibetan monasteries, at about 4 a.m. the monks usually gather together with the morning bell. They clean up the floor and offer prostration to the main deity of the monastery and some begin to offer water bowls and decorate the altar with butter lamps. Monks gather to perform first *torma* (ritual cake) offering by ceremonial tea. Then they recite texts on *Guru Yoga*, *Vajrasattva*, *Tara Puja* and Long Life Buddha.

The form of *Guru Yoga* (Padmasambhava and his lineage in case of Nyingma tradition) may vary in each tradition but the plan is however similar in nature. After formal group recital some silently sit in meditation until 7 to 8 a.m. If the sponsors have some specific *Puja* they continue it until its completion. Sometimes they go out to the sponsors' residence and personal practices in their own apartments or rooms. In some monasteries, small novice children (*thaba*) usually read and write Tibetan grammar and English in the afternoon. They recite by hearing small ritual texts.

In the afternoon around 5-7 p.m., the monk assemble for performing *Puja* of protective deities like Mahakala and so forth. Sometime monks have to perform *Puja* on the founder's birthday or Drubchen ceremonies. The ceremonial rituals may continue sometime even for two months at most and week at least. For Skyapa the tutelary deity ceremony of Hevajra (a Highest yoga tantra deity) last for ten days.

In most of the Gelugpa monasteries especially Kopan Monastery where facilities are available for the resident monks, the full time study programme includes Buddhist philosophy, debate, English, Tibetan, Nepali language and Thangka painting. Monks are trained to become teachers, Meditation Masters and translators.

In some great Kagyu and Nyingma monasteries namely Kanying and Sechen monasteries where there are facilities, the resident monks and novices do have an opportunity for higher philosophical studies such as *Bodhicaryavatara* of Shanti Dev and *Pramanavarttika* of Dharamakirti. Most of the monasteries are run by the support and donations from individual benefactors and sponsors. The Abbot of the each monastery hold responsibility for the function of the monastery. In some monasteries income comes through the rent from accommodation and visitor's donations.

It should be noted that Tibetan Buddhist monasticism is also based on Mahayana and Vajrayana. It has two types of Buddhist monks: celibate Buddhist monks and Tantric Buddhist Master with consort (Ngakpa Lama). Both of them wear maroon coloured robes in ceremonial *puja*.

To become a Tantric Buddhist Master one should thoroughly go for training under a Competent Buddhist Master and go for retreats for at least three years and should have some degree of realization. When his realization is authenticated by his lineage *Guru*, he is authorized to act as the Vajra Master.

Because of high degree of realization of the tantric master in profound doctrines of Buddhism, they are given higher status than the celibate monk scholars. This tradition is valid and substantiated by the Buddhist *Sutras* and *Tantras*.

To cite few examples, in the seventh century Chandrakirti revered Master Chandragomin for his proficiency and dexterity in Namasangiti doctrine. Gampopa revered *Guru* Milarepa as his root *Guru* for realization of Mahamudra. Venerable Rwa-Lotsawa (Rwa lo-tsa-ba Dorje-grags) revered Nepalese *Vajracharya* Bhara for his realization of Vajrabhairava doctrine. He also revered his *Guru* Mahakaruna (Ye Rang ba) of Patan who mastered in *tantra* under his guidance.⁹ He mastered in Sambhara *tantra*, *Samputatantra*, *Chakrasambara Heruka abhyudayanama*, *Vajrabhairva Tantra* and several other *tantras*.¹⁰ The Vinaya lineage of this Tibetan tradition is Mulasarvastivada tradition.

3. Mahayana / Vajrayana

The Newar Buddhists, like Buddhists everywhere, take refuge in the Buddha, the *Dharma* and the *Sangha*. In the Mahayana and Vajrayana context, the Buddha is of course, Sakyamuni Buddha. But in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, the Five *Tathagatas* (Panch Buddhas, Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha and Amoghasiddhi) are well known is ritual than the historical Buddha.

The *Dharma* is realization of *Prajnopaya* namely unity of wisdom and skilful means. The texts are *Vaipulay sutras: Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita, Gandavyuha Dasabhumikasutra, Saddharmapundarika, Suvarnaprabhasa, Lankavatara, Samadhiraja, Lalitavistara* and *Tathagataguhyaka Sutra*. These texts are recognized as the official texts. They are recited at various times, and the books are worshipped. Infact, worship is favoured than scholarly study.

The *Sangha* is of course the *Bodhistva Sangha*. Much of the devotional life of the people revolve around the worship of eight Bodhisattva,¹¹ especially Avalokiteshvara and Manjushree. Avalokiteshvara is recognized as the head of eight Bodhisattvas. He is the representative of *Sangha* of Bodhisattvas. Just as in Theravada Buddhist tradition the Bodhisattva *Sangha* is excluded, similarly in Newar Buddhist tradition *Shravaka Sangha* is excluded. Since the emphasis is laid on Mahayana/Vajrayana tradition of Buddhist *Sangha* it would be unwise to expect buddhist *Sangha* of Newar Buddhists in Theravada context.

⁹. George. N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986, pp. 374-375. Also see Min B. Shakya, *A Short History of Buddhism in Nepal*, Kathmandu: Young Buddhist Publication, 1986, pp. 33-34. Mahakaruna's Tibetan name is Thugs-rje-chen-po.

¹⁰. Roerich, f.n.no. 9. p. 375

¹¹. The eight Bodhistvas are-Manjusri, Vajrapani, Ksitigarbha, Khagarbha, Samantabhadra, Gaganganja, Sarvanivarna Viskambhi and Maitreya.

In Newar Buddhist tradition, there seemed to be no harm giving Shakyaputta, the status of lay Buddhist monk provided that they maintain refuge and Bodhisttva vows or even tantric samaya.

The rationale behind the abandonment of Shravaka practice is given in disrobing ceremony of *Chudakarma* (Ne: *Barechoegu*). As part of ritual there is always a dialogue between the *Guru* and the disciple. It thus goes-"Oh, Lord *Guru* ! By your grace I have undertaken the vow of going forth first, given the ten unproductive sins in accordance with the five precepts and eight precepts and carried out the disciple's path. Now I shall take up the path of Mahayana".

The *Guru* says: Very good, lay disciple, take up the path of Mahayana. Take up the practice of the great lord of liberation, the *Guru* Vajrasattva, lord of mystic circle.¹² What is the practice of the Mahayana like ?

Listen and I will tell you the most fundamental of religious practices which is comprised by the Mahayana can never be fulfilled without a consort. Nor can the Mahayana or its observance be complete without tantric initiation. How much more tantric initiation is necessary for liberation. Therefore, you, knowing the ultimate god and goddesses who as skill-in means and wisdom (*Prajnopaya*), take up the practice of Mahayana and abandon that of the Shravaka."

In these versions, entering the Mahayana under the instruction of the *Guru* can make up the fault of abandoning the monastic vow. Taking consort for Buddhist practice has been a general theme for Tantric Buddhist practitioner. The idea of *Swayamvara* and Marriage has been a life cycle ritual as described in *Kriyasamcucaya* of Jagaddarpana Acharya (Mahamandalacharya).

Exploring Celibacy in Bhikshu Sangha of Newar Buddhist Tradition

The Buddha often placed *Dhamma* first and then the *Vinaya* in relevance to his teachings. According to the Buddha, *Vinaya* is the most important of the *Tripitaka* (three baskets) for the survival of the *Sasana*. *Vinaya* rules are used for regulating outward conduct of the individual and the collective practice of the *Sangha*. *Dhamma* is for inward development and the attainment of a good life.

Celibacy is considered as holy and good in most of the religions of the world, especially within the Buddhist *Sangha* of Theravada and Mahayana tradition. As Buddhism is spread in Western countries, the practice of celibacy is being critically questioned for the first time. In those places, many people consider the voluntary abstention from sexual activity which is strange or unnatural. If celibacy is a Buddhist religious ideal, then what about the student of Buddhism to think of those Japanese and High Tibetan Lamas whose marriages are accepted by their cultures? Are they all subject, by their religious principle, to ostracism as sinners then ?

History shows that the practice of celibacy is as old as asceticism in India, much older than the historical Buddha himself. Buddha was born, there were

¹². Gellner, f.n. no. 4, p. 61.

ascetics who practiced celibacy as a spiritual discipline conducive to the attainment of enlightenment. Although celibacy was quite common, the practice may not have been very strict since some *rishi* (ascetics) took their wives with them to practice asceticism in solitary places of and in India. When Buddha taught celibacy as important commitment or his disciples, celibacy came to be held in highest regard for its own sake as well as for the pleasing impression it created in pious lay people. Once the strict practice of celibacy had become a strong norm, its transgression came to be seen as a sinful thing.

In his first sermon the Buddha mentioned sexual intercourse as a base or low act performed by common people as opposed to monks. He said that addiction to attractive sensual pleasures and addiction to self torture are both extreme practices. Since, as extremes, they are inconsistent with the middle path leads to *nirvana*.¹³ In Theravada tradition, Buddha had to prohibit every kind of sexual behaviour by member of the *Sangha* community as unfit acts and had to punish through formal meeting of the *Sangha*.

Only the willing celibate is a proper candidate for ordination, but others may seek it. The monks' unmarried life is individually free. A monk can devote all his time and energy to spiritual development. But if he is not active in spiritual practices there is nothing special about his monkhood. It is both waste of time and painful restraint on his freedom in terms of sexual activity, especially when he longs for it.

According to *Parajika* rules of *Vinaya*, the ordained monk who has violated the normal code of celibacy loses his monkhood. Such a monk cannot attain liberation or *Nirvana*. It should be noted that the ultimate aim of the practice of celibacy is to eradicate the mental defilement-greed, hatred, and delusion. The fulfillment of celibacy is said to be the attainment of *Nirvana*.

In Newar Buddhist tradition, *Bahi* are said to be the repositories of celibate monastic tradition. When celibate communities existed, if celibate monks decided to become householder monks, they left their monastery and joined a *bahi*¹⁴ According to Locke's hypothesis, two institutions namely celibate and non-celibate existed side by side from the earliest days. Gradually, and as a result of the dominant tradition of and becoming married "celibate monks (*brahmacharya bhishu*)¹⁵. If more accurate information on the Licchavi and Thakuri period is ever made available, he is confident to say that the celibate communities were always in minority.

Since the Buddha advocated the path of restraint or renunciation in *Shravakayana* practices, the ultimate aim is the attainment of abiding *Nirvana* (*Skt. pratisthita Nirvana*). But in Mahayana/Vajrayana form of Buddhism, the

¹³. I.B.Horner(tr.), *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya Pitaka)*, Vol. IV, London : Luzac & Company Ltd., 1962, p. 15.

¹⁴. Locke, f.n. no. 8, p. 104.

¹⁵. *Ibid*, p. 105.

Buddha advocated the path of transformation for his advanced bodhisattva disciples. He taught the doctrine of Great Bliss and Emptiness to attain the state of Buddhahood (Skt: *apratisthita Nirvana* i.e. Non-abiding *Nirvana*). In this form of teaching Buddha *Vajradhara* made use of lust or even sexual bliss in the path to enlightenment. From the point of view of Theravada tradition this view can be merely a joke. On the other hand Tantric Buddhists regard their practice as authentic in view, meditation, practice and function and blameless in ideal as the Middle path of the Buddha.

Newar Buddhism as a Lay Bodhisattva Practice

It seems that there had been a provision for lay Buddhist monkhood which became very popular in the valley of Kathmandu. The validity of this tradition was also corroborated by the text "*Sikhsasamuccaya*" of Acharya Shanti Deva.

It runs thus:

*Punara aparma kulaputra bhavisyanti anagata
adhavani grahstha pravajita adikarmika bodhisattva.*

The meaning of the text is as follows:

"Again, oh, Sons of the family, there will be the householder beginner (Skt: *adikarmika*) and ordained bodhisattvas in the future".

Concerning *Adikarmika Bodhisattva* Acharya Anupamavajra stands prominent. His work had a great influence on Nepalese Buddhist tradition. It is surprising and interesting to note that *Adikarmapradipa* which was composed in 1098 A.D. by Anupamavajra had profound impact on the daily practice of Newar Buddhist society even till today. In this context it is befitting to cite the verses of *Adikarmapradipa*.¹⁶

¹⁶. k|0fDo >Lu'?g\ eSTof lhfg -r_ ;;'tfg cy .
cf|bsd{k|bLkf]~od\ tbly{Eof| l|lwot} ...
lziof0ffd cfz'af]wfy{d\ lnVot} :kw{of g t' .
ctM zfGtb'MvfM ;j}{ lfGt'd cx|lGt dfd\ k|lt ..@..
tqfbf} b|]zt o] t' dGqfM k"hflbsd{;' .
cfs[io]sq ;|Dk08| lnVoGt| t] t' gfGoyf ..#..
d'vzf}rflbsd\ s[Tjf k|ftWof{g+ hk+ tyf .
gfd;+lultkf7\d r s'of{t\ k|lOfldw] r ..\$.
eb|roflbgf kZrfg\ gd:sf/+ k|s[To j} .
z'lr lgik|fOfsd\ tf]o+ hDenfo oyfljw ..%..
bb\ofb ci6f} ztfGo] k|]t|Eo]z r'n'sf+:tyf .
kZrfg\ d[Rr]Tosdf{l b a'4fbLgf+ r k'hgd\ ..^..
u'/f]d08ns+ s[Tjf :ji6b]j;o d08nd\ .
k|hfkf/ldtflLgf+ kf7+ s'of{b\ oy]lK;td\ ..&..
s[Tjf k|blf0ff+ t]Eof| k|lOflw+ r ljz]iftM .
af]lw;Taln+ bTjf zf;g:o rL/:yltd\ ..*..
cfz+;o]t\ k|x[it]g r]t;f ;';df]xtM .
jGbgfk"j{s kZrfb\ u'?a'4f+ lj;h{o]t\ ..(.

To state briefly, it deals with the following practices of Newar Buddhists.

1. Taking Refuge in Triple Gems
2. Reciting Namasangiti
3. To recite Bhadracarya Pranidhan
4. To offer Preta bali
5. To circumambulate Caitya, Buddha statues etc.
6. To perform *Gurumandala* rite
7. To meditate on tutelary deity
8. To recite Prajnaparamita and other Mahayana Sutras
9. To recite *danagatha* (stories of Dana)
10. To perform Bodhisattva practices joyfully
11. To study Buddhist scriptures
12. Offering food to Triple Gems and tutelary deity before eating
13. Offer fivefold prostration to Buddha of ten directions
14. Sleeping in a lion's posture after meditating on Deity Yoga

According to Newar Buddhist tradition, even after disrobing ceremony of *Cudakarma*, the Shakyas and *Vajracharyas* do not cease to be *bhikshu* or Buddhist monks, but passing from the state of celibate *bhikshu* to that of *grihasthi bhikshu*, a fact underlined by the term *Sakyabhikshu* used to refer to them down ages. In disrobing ceremony the following lines are met with about the status of *bhikshu*.

"You have gone through *Sravakayana* and now comes to *Mahayana*, the greatest of the Buddhist Yanas. You have participated in some *Vajrayana* rituals and after going through some higher ordinations you will know what *Chakrasamvara* is.¹⁷

The Impact of Master Atisha's Teaching on Newar Buddhism

Master Atisha who wrote *Bodhisattvakarmadimargavatara* also propounded the concept of the *Adikarmika Bodhisattva* practice. Since Atisha was

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 - See "Adikarmapridipa" in La Valley de Poussin (ed.), *Etude Et. Materiaux*, Memoiles de l' Academie de EBegique, pp. 186-187.

¹⁷. Allen, f.n. no. 3, pp. 1-10.

contemporary with Anupamavajra and Advavajra, both of them have borrowed the idea of lay Bodhisattva practice from him.

1. Atisha first emphasized the practice of refuge and generation of Bodhicitta on the basis of sevenfold practice (skt : *saptavidhanoltara puja*) Newar Buddhists are proficient in performing "*sattvapuja*" (verse 5 of Adikarma).
2. He also promulgated the theory of moderation of consuming food habits and food offerings to *Gurus* and three jewels (verse no. 10-11).
3. With a view to teach the whole sentient beings one should recite profound Mahayana sutras (like Prajnaparamita and so forth) (verse no. 7).
4. After completing one's morning duties one should practice the act of fivefold prostration to Triple Gems with a view to liberate all other sentient beings and should sleep in lion's posture (see *Caryasangraha pradeepa*) of Atisha after completing one's devotional exercise (verse no. 14).
5. One should practice the unity of *Samatha* and *Vipassana* and should realize the emptiness of all body and ephemeral nature of all phenomena. Whereas Anupamavajra mentioned only the necessity of practice of Deity yoga (verse no. 14).¹⁸
6. Offering one's food to tutelary deities and Dharmapala before eating meal is one fundamental daily practice of *Adikarma bodhisattva* (see *Caryasangraha pradeepa*) (verse no. 11).

By analyzing these references we can conclude that Atisha's teaching had great influence on Newar Buddhist tradition too. Atisha's reformation in Buddhist monasticism is well known in Tibet. He tried his best to uplift Buddhist monasticism during his sojourn in Nepal. He composed *Caryasangraha Predeepa*, and *Vimalratnalekha nama* to enhance the monastic ideal of Newar Buddhism. He even strongly prohibited the act of taking initiation of Highest Yoga Tantra for monastics. Because of short duration of his stay in Nepal he could not influence to higher degree and strengthen. Later Anupamavajra superseded Atisha's influence because of his tantric teachings.

Decline of Celibate Monastics

Now the question arises why Newar Buddhists prefer to be *Grihastha Bhikshu* rather than to be celibate monks. There has been a constant conviction among the historians or local Buddhists that celibate Buddhist monks existed in the Newar Buddhist tradition until the advent of King Jayasthitimalla in the 15th century.

¹⁸. Perhaps Acharya Anupamavajra preferred to this Deity yoga because of his tantric leaning.

It is hypothesized that King Jayasthitimalla alone could not have wiped out the celibate monastic tradition of Newar Buddhism. The decline of celibate monasticism in Nepal started long before his coming to power. He had to witness the total disappearance of celibate monastic tradition by activating so-called social reformation. We can guess that there were only a few celibate Buddhist monks even during Atisha's period. He established a pre-Kadampa monastic order. Atisha ordained a prince and named him as Padmaprabha. One of his monk friends due to growing influence of Buddhist tantrism, had asked Master Atisha for promulgation of non-tantric Mahayana Buddhist doctrine. Accepting his request Master Atisha had composed *Caryasamgrahapradipa*¹⁹ to comfort him.

There might have been two causes on the decline of celibate Buddhist monastic system of Newar Buddhist tradition. These are:

- (a) Lack of royal patronization, and
- (b) Impact of Vajrayana Buddhism

(a) Lack of royal patronization

If we research and analyze deeply the historical background of other Buddhist countries, it becomes clear that a strong patronage from a ruling circle is essential to maintain the celibate monastic community. While considering the events since Buddha's period, his monastic community was well and fully patronized by King Prasenjit, King Bimbisara, King Ajatasatru, and in later periods, Emperor Ashoka, King Kaniska, King Harsha Vardhana, and some other Pala and Sena Kings too had patronized the Buddhist Sangha.

When Islamic invasion took place in important monastic centres of Buddhism in India, they ransacked and thoroughly destroyed them. There being no supporters to monastic community, the *Sangha* could not thrive in India, thereby resulting in the total disappearance of Buddhist *Sangha*.

On the other hand, the Buddhist monastic *Sangha* thrived and flourished with the support of Kings and wealthy patrons in Tibet, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma and some other Southeast Asian countries. The decline in monastic community is clearly seen in the withdrawal of active support and patronage from the rulers. The same reason can be applied to Newar Buddhist monastic community too. Due to the lack of support from Hindu rulers of Kathmandu valley, the celibate monastic tradition could not survive, let alone flourish.

(b) Impact of Vajrayana Buddhism

To describe the presence of celibate Buddhist monks during the transition period from 880 to 1200 A.D. of Nepalese Buddhist history would be only speculative rather than factual event.

¹⁹. See *Atishavirachita Ekadasagranthah*, Ramesh Chandra Negi (tr., ed.), Saranath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1992, p. 99.

The emergence and flourishing of Vajrayana Buddhism and its associated cults were distinctly visible due to the activities of Mahasiddha tradition of Highest Yoga *Tantra* in Nepal and India. The rise of Vajrayana Buddhism paved the way for the growth on non-celibate monastic tradition in India, Nepal and Tibet till the advent of Atisha (982-1054). It is a fact that with the rise of Vajrayana, celibate Buddhist monastic traditions began to dwindle and then slowly disappeared in Nepal completely by the end of 15th century.

The transition period of Nepal witnessed the birth of several outstanding Buddhist Masters of Nepal who were well versed in Tantric Buddhism. Nepalese Buddhist Masters had constant touch with the Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Masters.

According to *Padma Kathang*, a treasure text among Nyingma tradition around the eighth century, Buddhist Master *Guru Padma Sambhava* is said to have visited Sankhu, Pharping and other places in Kathmandu valley and diffused Tantric Buddhist teachings. He took two female disciples called Sakyadevi and Kalasiddhi as his consorts for the practice of *Atiyoga sadhana*.²⁰

Guru Paindapa and *Chitherpa* were the famous and gifted disciples of *Naropa* (10th century). *Marpa* (11th century), the great translator of Tibet had stayed in Kathmandu valley for three years to study *Anuttarayoga Tantra* under *Paindapa* and *Chitherpa*. According to the biography of *Marpa*, he received teachings on *Catuhpith Tantra* and *Cakrasamvara Tantra* from these Nepalese Guru at *Ratnakara Mahavihara (Ha Baha)* of *Patan*.²¹

The study of Highest *Yoga Tantra* among these great Masters is a common curriculum of their tantric studies. It is generally thought that the practice of high-test *Yoga Tantra* is not fit for every body. For people who lack necessary qualifications, *Tantra* is said to be extremely dangerous. Such people can greatly harm themselves if they enter into tantric practice. Thus, the Dalai Lama cautions that *tantra* is not appropriate for the minds of many. If one's mental continuum has not been ripened by the practices common to both *sutra* and *Tantra* Mahayana-realisation of suffering, impermanence, refuge, love, compassion, altruistic mind generation, and emptiness of inherent existence-practice of the *Mantra* vehicle can be ruinous through one's assuming an advanced practice inappropriate to one's capacity. Therefore, its open dissemination is prohibited; practitioners must maintain secrecy from those who are not vessels of this path.²²

Those who are judged to be suitable receptacles for tantric initiations are sworn to secrecy. The initiates are required to take a series of vows (*Samaya*), one

²⁰. W. Y. Evans-Wentz (ed.), *The Tibetan Book of Great Liberation*, London: Oxford University Press, 1954, pp. 176-77.

²¹. See Tsang Nyon Heruka, *The Life of Marpa the Translator*, Boulder: Prajna Press, 1982, p. 130.

²². Dalai Lama and Tshongkhapa, *Tantra in Tibet*. English Translation by Joffrey Hopkins, New York: Snow Lion Publication, 1977, p. 47.

of which is not to reveal tantric teachings openly. The promised retributions for breaking the vows include painful suffering in "Vajra hells" reserved for those who transgress their tantric promises. It involves taking many types of initiations. Four of the most important are:

- (a) *Kalasa abhiseka* (Vase empowerment)
- (b) *Guhya abhiseka* (Secret empowerment)
- (c) *Prajna abhiseka* (Wisdom empowerment)
- (d) *Sabda abhiseka* (Word empowerment)

The first involves giving initiation using water in a vase and is found in all four *tantra* sets. The other three are used only in highest yoga *tantra*. It is taught that receiving vase initiation causes to attain the rank of *Nirmanakaya* Body of the Buddha.

The secret, knowledge and word initiation, sometimes involve practice with a *Karmamudra* (actual consorts) and ingestion of impure substances. The *Karmamudra* and substances may be either imagined or real in Tibetan tradition. But in Nepalese tradition use of real *Karmamudra* is stressed while taking *acharya abhiseka* too. The followers of these *tantras* use the desire in the path to enlightenment. They can transform energy of sexual desire into blissful wisdom consciousness. Through Deity Yoga, they enhance the experience of wisdom and compassion. The ultimate goal of these practitioners is the attainment of Buddhahood in one life time. Since these involve sexual practices, the celibacy of the monkhood is dangerously threatened. That is why Atisha in his *Bodhipatha pradeepa* strongly prohibited practicing Highest Yoga Tantra for it endangers their celibacy of monastic vows. According to Atisha Dipamkara, lay Bodhisattva life is much more favourable for the practice of Highest Yoga Tantra disciplines as stated in *Bodhipathapradipa*:

*"For attaining Bodhisambhara in a simple way it has been set forth in the Kriya Carya (action and practice) ways. If one is desirous of the practice of Guthyamantra by pleasing the Gurn, receive the complete Acharyabhiseka. Blessed thus, you will purify all the negativities and become suitable vessel to achieve realization. In Adi Buddha Maha tantra, it is strictly prohibited that secret wisdom initiation is not the privilege of the celibate monks. The ordained one who abides in the asceticism if receives that initiation, the vow of asceticism will degenerate due to the practices of restrictions. The practitioner will be defeated, downfall will arise, due to which he will fall among the lower realms never will there be realization."*²³

If this is so why the Newar Buddhists take risk in being a celibate monk and at the same time practice *Anuttara yoga tantra*. So, their preference to be a lay Bodhisttva practitioner is most likely one. Atisha also gives an option that those monastics who are highly advanced practitioners, and have perceived permission

²³. Atisha, *A Lamp for the Path and Commentary*. Tr. by Richard Sherburne, S.J., London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983, p. 12.

from the authentic Masters, for them there is no prohibition to receive these four initiations and practice. Later on, Tantric Masters began to give these initiations irrespective of students' qualification and the *Sangha* suffered a lot resulting in a swift decline of monastic Buddhism in Nepal's Vajrayana tradition.

Conclusion

We have just discussed the nature of Newar Buddhism as being faultless according to the textual tradition. But if they fail to practice and study, then it might become an absolute religion. The purpose of this paper is not to glorify the Newar Buddhism but present the existing situation. It is true that lay Bodhisattva practice is valid tradition authenticated by *Sikṣasamuccaya* of Shanti Deva. Thus the Newar Buddhism cannot be said to be corrupt form of Buddhism as some are tempted to allege. All forms of religious principles are followed by Newar Buddhists too.

Therefore, it is necessary that the Newar Buddhists should revive and receive the lost teachings of Tantric Vajrayana Buddhism from Tibetan Buddhist Masters to bridge the gap of lineage of practice that has been ignored and lost in a way.

If we could create some celibate Buddhist monks practicing Newar Vajrayana Buddhism then the structure of Newar Buddhism can be complete. In order to achieve this goal, a good relation and interaction with Theravada and Tibetan Buddhist monks should be established.

It is true that four days of observance of monastic vows are too symbolic in character. It lacks the foundation of monastic upgrading. So the Theravada monks who were trained in Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka even charged Newar Buddhist monasticism with having no ground at all. The basis of their charge is that Newar Vajracharya and Shakyas are lay Buddhists and they are not monks. As it is discussed, the sustenance of Buddhist monasticism is very difficult if not impossible without the support and cooperation from the government. Nepal has preserved Buddhist Sanskrit literature. Nepali scholars can contribute a lot concerning Sanskrit oriented Buddhism. There are yet many unexplored areas of Buddhist culture and practices among the Newar Buddhism. At last to conclude, the words of Suniti Kumar Chatterji, the famous Indian Buddhist Scholar is worth mentioning:

"One great service the people of Nepal did particularly the highly civilized Newars of the Nepal valley, was the preservation of all the manuscripts of Mahayana Buddhist literature in Sanskrit, it was the contribution of Sri Lanka to have preserved for human kind the entire mass of the Pali literature of Theravada Buddhism. This was also on to Burma, Cambodia and Siam. It was similarly the great achievement of people of Nepal to have preserved the equally valuable original Sanskrit texts of Mahayana Buddhism".
