



## Scholastic Tradition and Perpetuation of Knowledge in Buddhism of Medieval Kathmandu Valley

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### **Abstract**

*Buddhist manuscripts are the literary heritage and source of Buddhist spirituality extant in Pālī, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan languages. Nepal has marked extraordinary development of Buddhist scholarship during the medieval times. Nepali Pandits became famous far and wide. Development of Buddhist scholarship largely contributed in Buddhist intellectuality and manuscript culture. Newār Buddhists enormously contributed in Sanskrit manuscript writing that turned Kathmandu valley into an abode of Sanskrit Mss. They are the only extant original textual sources of Sanskrit Buddhism. In modern century, scholars and monks arrived in Nepal to procure manuscripts. It later developed modern scholarship in Mahāyāna Buddhism. It also helped to create manuscripts repositories in India, Tibet China, Japan, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, and so on. The scholarly tradition gradually came to an end. Manuscript culture remained in sets of performing book rituals. Manuscripts remained only as ritual objects in Nepal.*

**Keywords:** Abhiṣeka, Mahāvihāra, Manuscript, Scholarship, Tradition, Wisdom,

### **Books of the Buddha and Ancient Wisdom**

Buddhist manuscripts are 'Books of the Buddha' that contain profound wisdom. The elements of wisdom emanate from those sacred leaves of manuscripts. This entire system of manuscriptology leads to the higher wisdom making oneself to be able to attain or understand the true nature of reality. The 'Yathābhūta Jñāna' or the knowledge of truth is enlightenment. Śākyamūnī Buddha attained the quality of seeing things as they are. Then

after, he had poured knowledge for the benefit of sentient beings. This very knowledge is codified in the folios of Sanskrit texts in the Mahāyāna tradition.

Nepal has extraordinary position in the history of Mahāyāna literary history. She has preserved them intact since the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Those sacred texts in hand written format is the only available original literary sources of Mahāyāna Buddhism. That makes Nepal the unique and scared place of knowledge of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Due to the importance of Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts of Nepal in the study of Mahāyāna/Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition, a survey of various repositories of Nepalese Buddhist manuscripts in Nepal and other countries is of greater significance. Therefore, information on manuscript collections and an overview of published and unpublished catalogues certainly facilitates those who are interested and concerned with Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts. Thus, I have also worked out on manuscript catalogues. It gives a detail account on catalogues of Nepal's Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts, which were published in Nepal and abroad. Archives and libraries in Nepal, India, Japan, U. K. and Germany have already published various catalogues, which give detail information on Buddhist manuscripts preserved so far. Those manuscripts were originally collected from Nepal. Although the catalogues cover enormous volumes of Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts, Nepalese catalogues do not mention manuscripts that are in the individual possession. In fact, there are no catalogues prepared so far those deals with the manuscripts hold by individual Buddhist families. The number of such manuscripts could be in thousands. There has been the tradition in Nepal that each Buddhist family possesses at least a copy of Buddhist manuscript due to religious significance. Nepal's Buddhist manuscript s has been well preserved in this way mainly due to their religious significance. Unfortunately, no authentic data is available on private collections of Buddhist manuscript. Regarding the information on existing repositories of Nepal's Buddhist manuscripts, an authentic list of published and unpublished catalogues will be most relevant, and no doubt, facilitate interested Buddhist scholars to undertake further work more conveniently.

The tradition of copying manuscripts and also worshipping them became very popular among the Buddhists in Nepal throughout the medieval times. It has been regarded as an act of merit. It led to create a large repository of Hindu and Buddhist manuscripts in Nepal. Bīr Library played significant role in the preservation of such manuscripts. The exposure of Premier Bīr Shamsher, who was educated in Devton College in Calcutta, to the western society during his college years created an interest in Sanskrit language as well as Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> He was interested to preserve Buddhists manuscripts in

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1. Cecil Bendall, *Journey of Literary and Archaeological Research in Nepal and Northern India*

Nepal. He is credited for the present collection of Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts in Nepal. Later, Bīr Library handed over entire manuscript collection to the National archives of Nepal.

Not only the government of Nepal collected and preserved manuscripts, local individual Buddhists also showed up to work in this field. As the effort of some local people, a private manuscript library was set up in Kathmandu in December 1987. This center contains 7000 plus manuscripts, which are mainly donated by individuals. Mr. Dharma Ratna Vajrācārya, for an instance, has donated 608 copies of manuscripts from his collection to Āśā Saphū Kuthī.<sup>2</sup> It has established itself as a manuscripts library in Nepal serving to those who pursue research on medieval Buddhist and Hindu manuscripts.

The Nepal German Manuscripts Preservation Project (NGMPP) supported by 'the German Oriental Society', has microfilmed the manuscripts, which are kept in the National Archives of Nepal and other private collections. The heritage of written documents in the form of manuscripts in Nepal has been characterized by diversity, rarity and age of individual texts. Their transmission has been favored by the temperate climate and insured by a living tradition. The Germans took keen interest in Nepalese manuscripts and constituted a manuscripts copying project - the Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) in 1970, whose objective was to preserve a part of Nepal's historical, literary and religious heritage by microfilming manuscripts and thereby making them available for examination and analysis to the general public. It has microfilmed more than one hundred seventy five thousand manuscripts in Sanskrit and Tibetan from different collections in Nepal. All the microfilm titles have been entered in a catalogue.<sup>3</sup>

Several volumes of catalogues as well as articles dealing with the Nepalese manuscripts have been published which provide valuable information on Nepal's Buddhist and Hindu manuscripts. The archives and libraries in Nepal and abroad have published catalogues on their collections of Nepalese manuscripts. Many scholars have studied Nepalese manuscripts and published books and research articles. The pioneer work in this area is that of Rajendra Lal Mitra, who wrote about the manuscripts kept in the Asiatic Society of Bengal.<sup>4</sup> His book entitled – *Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, published in 1882, has been recognized as

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*during the Winter of 1884-85*, New Delhi: Asian Education Series, 1991, p. 6.

2. Charles M. Novak, *Catalogue of Selected Buddhist Manuscripts in Āśā Saphū Kuthī*, Kathmandu: Āśā Saphū Kuthī, 1986, pp. 1-36.
3. Horst Brinkhaus, 'The NGMPP on the Threshold of Its Five Years Phase', *Abhilekh*, Year 3, No. 3, Kathmandu, 2042 V.S. p. 33.
4. Rajendra Lal Mitra, *Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, Calcutta : Sanskrit Book Depot, 1972, pp. 1-313.

a masterpiece of Buddhist studies. In addition to this, Rahul Saikrityayan,<sup>5</sup> Pt. Hara Prasad Shastri<sup>6</sup>, E. B. Cowell and J. Eggeling<sup>7</sup> also wrote on Buddhist manuscripts of Nepal. In addition to such activities, scholars like Cecil Bendall,<sup>8</sup> D. E. Boeck,<sup>9</sup> Junjiro Takakusu,<sup>10</sup> Ven. Ekai Kawaguchi,<sup>11</sup> Benoytosh Bhattacharya<sup>12</sup> and others collected and studied Sanskrit manuscripts of Nepal. Beside religious usage, Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts are extensively employed for academic purposes. However, thousands of volumes of Buddhist manuscripts in Nepal are still untouched. It is worth mentioning that Nepal's manuscript collection was first studied by two Sanskrit scholars Prof. Cecil Bendall and Pt. Hara Prasad Shastri with the permission of the Nepalese Premier. Hara Prasad Shastri (1853-1931) has rendered invaluable contribution in the study of Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts of Nepal. In search of ancient Bengali manuscripts, he visited Nepal several times from 1897 to 1922. He edited Dohākośa, and Dākārṇava along with Caryācaryaviniścaya. The latter, which Hara Prasad had discovered and edited, was his greatest contribution in the field of research in Bāṅglā language and literature. However, those manuscripts were exposed to the outside world by Brian H. Hodgson during his stay in Kathmandu at the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The world learned about Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts of Nepal through him. Prof. Cecil Bendall and Pt. Hara Prasad Shastri went through with the collection of the Bīr Library and copied some of the manuscripts that were of his interest. Both the scholars visited Kathmandu together in 1898. During that time, the Nepalese Premier permitted them to consult Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts at the Bīr Library. Later, according to the request of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, ten bound copies of *The Notices of Sanskrit Manuscripts* (Extra No.

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5. Rahul Sankrityayan, 'Sanskrit Palm-leaves in Tibet ' *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Vol. 21, 1935, pp. 21-45; *JBORS*, Vols. 23, 1937, pp. 4-57.
  6. Hara Prasad Shastri, 'Notes on Palm-leaf manuscripts in the Library of H.E. Maharaja of Nepal', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1897, Calcutta, pp. 310-316; Hara Prasad Shastri, 'On a Manuscript of Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Written in Nalanda and Discovered in Nepal', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1899, Calcutta, pp. 39-40.
  7. 'Catalogue of Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Possession of the Royal Asiatic Society ', *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, London, 1876, pp. 1-52.
  8. Cecil Bendall, 'Notes on a Collection of Manuscripts Obtained by Dr. Gimlette at Kathmandu', *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, 1888, pp. 549-551.
  9. Percival Landon, *Nepal*, Vol. II, Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1976, p. 300.
  10. Matsunami Seiren (comp.), *Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Tokyo University Library*, Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1965, pp. IV-VI.
  11. *Ibid*,
  12. Raghavan Nambiyar Shiromani (comp.), *An Alphabetical List of Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute Baroda* Vol. II, Gaekwad Oriental Series CXIV, Baroda: 1998.

of 1905) containing a *Catalogue of Palm-leaf and Selected Paper Manuscripts Belonging to the Durbar Library, Nepal* were presented to the Nepal Durbar in return for the good will gesture of the Nepalese Premier to Prof. Cecil Bendall and Pt. Hara Prasad Shastri during their visit to Nepal in 1898 for the purpose of compiling the catalogue of Bīr Library collection.

These are, of course, priceless heritage of ancient Indian knowledge system, thus, are extremely important. In spite of significance of Sanskrit manuscripts, the government of Nepal and academic institutions inside the country are neither serious nor aware to study and utilize them. Approximately, 4000 publications have already been made on Nepalese manuscripts throughout the world. But works done by Nepalese scholars inside Nepal is insignificant. This is a very wretched situation of Buddhist scholarship. Even the Nepalese have forgotten the fully blown scholarly tradition and intellectual history of medieval times (12-16<sup>th</sup> century) which contributed in the development of scholastic tradition in Tibet, to some extent in China and also development of literary tradition in Nepal including preservation of ancient Indian Buddhist literary heritage.

## **Development of the Scholastic Tradition**

Newār Buddhism' has become a popular terminology in recent times. It denotes to the Vajrayāna tradition based on India's Tantric Buddhism and Buddhist Sanskrit scholarship. It has prevailed in Nepal since the ancient times as traced out from the Licchavī inscription recovered in Gokarna in suburb Kathmandu. Because it has been the religion of the Newārs in which indigenous feature have been imbedded, thus called Newār Buddhism.<sup>13</sup>

Nepal has secured a prominent place in the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Nepalese Buddhist scholars, both monks and laity, have done considerable work in the making of Buddhist history. They also contributed in maintaining historical continuity and development of Buddhist literature. Nepal's role is not limited to it; she has rendered valuable services in the development of Tibetan Buddhist tradition as well. At the same time, Nepal remained a melting pot from where accelerated the expansion of Buddhism in northern countries.

Since the ancient times, Nepal's Hindu rulers have patronized Buddhism as a national religion. Their positive tendency has played vital role in the development of Buddhism in Nepal and beyond. Since that time, the rulers of Nepal remained very positive towards Buddhism and made lavish donations to the Buddhist monasteries. Similarly, Buddhist

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13. Yoshizaki Kazumi, *The Kathmandu Valley as a Water Pot – Abstract of Research Papers on Newār Buddhism in Nepal*, Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2012, pp. 131-132.

monks also deserved a prestigious and modest life in the society.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, Buddhism had favourable climate in Nepal to get flourished. It had positive impact on the development of Buddhist scholastic tradition in Nepal. As a matter of fact, Nepal has produced highly reputed and famous Newār Buddhist scholars. They were the Masters of logic, philosophy, Tantra, Sūtra, rituals and so on. For this reason, Nepal had become a famous destination for learners from Tibet and China to initiate higher learning of Buddhism. This tradition tended to continue until the medieval period. Although Nepal lost its popularity as the center of Buddhist learning in late period, she continued to be the most sacred place for expatriate Buddhists. However, Nepal's abundant Buddhist Sanskrit literature still has given a new status as the place to search for authentic Buddhism. Newār Buddhist scholars such as Bhāro, Kanaka Śrī, Mahākaruṇā, Vāgisvarakīrti, Ratnākaraśānti, Ravindra and others attracted Tibetan enthusiasts of higher Buddhist learning. Interesting stories about their deeds, skills in higher tantric practices and miraculous power became popular in Tibet. Great Tibetan scholars such as Chāg Lotsābā (Dharmasvāmī) and Rvā Lotsābā were the disciples of Newār Buddhist Masters. In addition, a number of other Tibetan Buddhist Masters were also the disciples of the Newār Gurus. Tibetan students who came to Nepal to study Buddhism had to offer gold for tuition to the Guru. Marpā, a great Tibetan scholar, also learnt tantric practices at Ratnākar Mahāvihāra in Patan from a Newār Guru. For this purpose, Patan (Tib: Ye-rāng) was the popular destination for the Tibetans. Nepalese scholars contributed a lot in the development of Tibetan Buddhism, which are recorded in Tibetan historical sources.<sup>15</sup> Several volumes of Sanskrit Buddhist texts were also translated into Tibetan by Nepalese scholars. Not only limited to Tibet, Nepalese Buddhist scholars for instance, Bhikṣu Jīna Śrī and Buddhahadra became very famous in China for their scholarly services.

The Turkish invasion of India in the 13<sup>th</sup> century finally resulted in the destruction of great ancient Buddhist universities of Nālandā and Vikramśīla. The Buddhist monks living in those monasteries fled to Nepal to escape Muslim persecution. They carried Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts with them. Those manuscripts were written by the great Buddhist scholars of that time. Even some of the colophons of Buddhist manuscripts mention that those documents were started to write in Nālandā and completed in Kathmandu. Nepal has provided favorable environment for fugitive Buddhists, and proved to be a safe homeland for them. They were protected from Muslim invasion. Thus, Nepal remained a favorable destination for them for many centuries to come. The arrival of Indian Buddhist scholars certainly provided an

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14. Dhanavajra Vajrācārya, *Licchavikālkā Abhilekh*, Kathmandu: CNAS, 2030 V.S., p. 320.

15. Shanker Thapa, 'Newār Scholars and Tibetan Buddhists: Contribution in the Development of Scholastic Buddhism in Tibet' *Journal of Daesoon Thought*, Vol. 19, 2005, Daejin University, Korea, pp. 81-89.



opportunity for Newār Buddhists to enhance scholarship and contribute in the development of Buddhist Sanskrit literature. It further helped them to develop a systematic literary history and consequently turned Nepal into the land of higher Buddhist learning. The interaction between Newār Buddhists and the fugitive Indian scholars gave us further opportunities to increase knowledge of Buddhism. As a result, Nepal has produced prominent and highly reputed Buddhist scholars. It is a matter of pride that some of the Newār monk-scholars even taught at the great monastic universities in India such as Nālandā and Vikramśīla. On the other hand, many prominent Ācāryas taught Tibetans who later became great scholars. One of the famous Gurus was Mahākaruṇā, a disciple of another great Nepalese Buddhist scholar named Kanaka Śrī.<sup>16</sup>

Nepal became very famous as the center of Buddhist learning from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Indian Buddhist scholars also had certain role in developing Buddhist scholarship in Nepal. Many Indian Paṇḍits also permanently lived in Nepal, where Nepalese society welcomed them with due respect. In turn, they trained Newār Buddhists in different branches of knowledge. It is said that Vanaratna, a noted Bengālī scholar and a devout Buddhist practitioner of that time was the last Indian scholar to reside permanently in Nepal. He was popularly known by the name of Thama Paṇḍit or the last Paṇḍit in Tibet. He studied Bodhicittotpāda under Śīlasāgara, a known Newār Buddhist scholar. He also visited Tibet on several occasions, He translated Pratipattisārasataka and its commentary, which was written by Heruka Deva in Tibetan, and also met Mahāsiddha Lui-pā. He also wrote a commentary on Vasantatilakā of Śrīkṛṣṇācārya entitled Rahasyadīpikā. He practiced profound meditation at Gopicandra Vihāra in Patan. He taught Buddhist doctrine to Nepalese disciples who have been regarded as very fortunate to receive teachings from a Guru like him by the Buddhist community. While describing the miracles that occurred during his funeral service, ‘Deb ther Snon po’ (the Blue Annals) mentions that, even the Nepalese were seemed to share the highest form of emancipation.

The context that Nepal remained a meeting place for Indian, Tibetan and Nepalese scholars provided opportunity for development of Buddhist scholars hip in this country. Such a development was saturated from 11<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Buddhism became popular in Nepal in the Licchavī period. Dhanavajra Vajrācārya, an eminent Nepalese historian remarks that Buddhist Newārs used to go to Nālandā and Vikramśīla for higher Buddhist studies. During the Malla period, Tibetans used to come to Nepal and studied Tantra, logic, Mādhyamika, philosophy and so on. Similarly, many Newār Buddhist scholars were also invited to Tibet from time to time to deliver teachings to

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16. G. N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, New Delhi: Motilal Bandarsi Dass, 1971, pp. 355-382.

Tibetans in different Tibetan monasteries. Consequently, eminent Newār Buddhist scholars who gained popularity as Buddhist Masters frequently visited Tibet for the purpose.

The contribution of Newār scholars in the development of Buddhist scholarship as well as Buddhist Sanskrit literature is very significant. Ratnakīrti, a famous Newār Buddhist logician became very reputed as a Buddhist scholar in India.<sup>17</sup> It is also said that Jina Śrī Bhikṣu was a Nepalese who rendered valuable services to the cause of Buddhism in China. Obviously, a large number of Nepalese Buddhist scholars mastered different branches of Buddhism and earned good reputations as Buddhist Masters. Many of them became famous in Tibet and China. In Nepal, their houses were turned into schools where Buddhism was taught. Newār Buddhist scholars found better opportunities to impart knowledge to the Tibetan mass through their local disciples. Some of them are even the tantric lineage holders in Tibetan tantric tradition. Vāgisvarakīrti and Puṇyākārbhadra were the lineage holders of Cakrasamvara and Vajravārāhī Tantra in Tibet. Newār scholars taught Buddhist doctrine as well as translated Buddhist texts into Tibetan. Not only this, they also produced vast amount of indigenous Buddhist Sanskrit texts. Some of them also copied various Buddhist texts while living in different Vihāras in the Kathmandu Valley.<sup>18</sup> This kind of activity finally made Nepal a storehouse of Buddhist Sanskrit literature and a repository of vast amount of Buddhist manuscripts. Since Nepal possessed abundance of Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts, various archives and libraries within Nepal and abroad at present possess Nepalese manuscripts. The activities of the Shakyas and Vajrācāryas, the core group of local Buddhist Newārs, also gave Nepal an opportunity to contribute in the literary history of Sanskrit Buddhism. Nepal's contribution in the development of Buddhist Sanskrit literature has been highly appraised by the modern Buddhist scholars and has been regarded as very significant.<sup>19</sup> The ancient Buddhist centers such as Nālandā, Vikramśīla, Odāntapurī and others, produced both philosophical texts and other Buddhist texts. Scholars like Atīśa Dipaṅkara Śrī Jñāna,<sup>20</sup> Naropā, and Ratnakīrti were affiliated to Nālandā Mahāvihāra. Some of the Newār Buddhist scholars had taught in this Vihāra. Unfortunately, the Turkish invasion turned Buddhism flat in northern India. During that time, Mahāpaṇḍita Śākya Śrībhadra of Kashmir was the Chief Abbot of Nālandā. He had witnessed atrocities of the Turkish invader. The destruction was

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17. Kamal Prakash Malla, 'Newār Boudha Vidvatā', *Pāsukā*, Year 2, No. 1, Bhaktapur: 2054 VS, pp. 10-11.

18. Puṇa Ratna Vajrācārya, *Bṛhat Sucī Patraṃ*, Vol. VII, Pt. 1, 2, 3, Kathmandu: Bīr Pustakālaya, 2021 VS.

19. Rajendra Ram, *History of Buddhism in Nepal 704-1396*, Patna: Jana Bhāratī, 1977, p. 160.

20. Alkā Caṭṭopādhyāya, *Atīśa and Tibet - Life and Works of Atīśa Dipaṅkara Śrī Jñāna*, Delhi: Motilal Benarasi Dass, 1981, pp. 100, 109 and 302.



so devastating that he had rightly predicted about possible disappearance of Buddhism from India.<sup>21</sup>

When the invaders had attacked Buddhist establishments, the monks and other lay Buddhist scholars felt insecure to live in India. Nepal, due to its proximity and receptive attitude of the rulers towards Buddhism, finally became a popular destination for the fugitive Buddhists. The Nālandā monks were able to save a considerable portion of Buddhist texts before destruction, which they carried to Nepal.

A large amount of Buddhist manuscripts were also burned and destroyed during invasion. This was the reason that Buddhist scriptures were not left in India. When Buddhist scholars searched Buddhist Sanskrit texts there in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only a copy of Mañjuśrī mūlakalpa was recovered.<sup>22</sup> Nepal, on contrary, housed a vast amount of Buddhist Sanskrit literature, which has been preserved intact. The tradition of copying manuscripts for religious purposes of the Buddhist Newārs side by side contributed in preserving Buddhist texts. The religious sentiment of Nepalese people has played greater role in the proliferation of Buddhist texts. The desire of individuals to procure certain Buddhist texts and maintain in their collections for due to religious and protective motives helped in the continuity of the tradition of copying the manuscripts. The texts such as Pañcarakṣā, Nāmasaṅgīti etc. have been the most popular texts among the Newār Buddhists. Even at present, the Newārs keep Buddhist manuscripts in their houses for personal benefit. In fact, keeping such texts has been an act of merit and intended protection from evil spirits. The scribes who copied Buddhist manuscripts were mainly the Shakyas and the Vajrācāryas. However, Brahmins and Hindu Newārs also copied religious texts.<sup>23</sup> The government of Nepal also collected manuscripts and preserved them under its supervision. Bīr (Durbār) Library was once a famous place for the preservation of Buddhist and Hindu manuscripts. Now, they are deposited in the National Archives.

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21. Kunga Gyalchhen Pal Sangpo, *Thubbey Gongsal*, tr. by Khenpo Bāgindraśīl and Nārāyan Prasād Rijāl Buddhavajra, *Mūnimat Prakāś*, Lalitpur: Padma Ghaley, 2050 VS., p. 12.

22. Ācārya Narendra Dev, *Baudha Darśan Mimāṃsā*, New Delhi: Motilal Benarsidas, 1994, pp. 121-125 and 176-178; Maurice Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, New Delhi, Motilal Benarsi Dass, 1983, pp. 382 and 598; Shanker Thapa, *Buddhist Sanskrit Literature of Nepal*, Seoul: Minjoksa Publishing Co., 2005, pp. 1-30., Shanker Thapa, 'Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts of Nepal', *Rolamba* Vol. 24, No. 3 & 4, July-Dec. 2004, Lalitpur, pp. 15-24.

23. Janak Lal Vaidya and Prem Bahadur Kansakar, *Āśā Saphū Kuthī yā Abhilekh Granthayā Varṇanātmak Dhala*, Kathmandu: Āśā Saphū Kuthī, 1991, pp. 411-431.

The Indian fugitive Buddhists were comprised of monks and artisans. They not only carried Buddhist Sanskrit texts, but also various art designs while leaving India.<sup>24</sup> The medieval period has been regarded as the golden age of Newār Buddhist scholarship. However, in later periods, it gradually waned on and finally it completely disappeared. No effective attempts have been made to revive the glorious tradition of Newār Buddhist scholarship.

Newār Buddhists who immigrated to Tibet for trading purposes also copied various Buddhist texts and transferred them to Nepal. During medieval times, there were many enthusiasts of Buddhist manuscripts who interestingly took initiation in collecting manuscripts in order to preserve the tradition of knowledge. Evidences suggest that there were two persons named Śrī Kālidāsa and Hemanta Malla who were very famous manuscript collectors during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup>

The tradition of preserving and writing Buddhist texts is very old in Nepal. The colophons of the Buddhist manuscripts mention about the aims, place and date of writing, and also gives information about the reigning Kings. However, religious purposes and the continuity of the traditional heritage were the basic reasons for copying the manuscripts.<sup>26</sup> The individual scribes and the purchasers often donated manuscripts to the Kings, Vihāras, temples and the Brahmins to generate merit.

Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts marked a steady growth in 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The traditional practice of copying Buddhist texts was not limited to Nepal only. The monasteries in Tibet, China and Japan also have old manuscript collections produced by themselves. Tibetan monasteries also have manuscripts in their possession. Srasm Khar dgu Thon monastery in Tibet has a 406 years old Buddhist manuscript collection. Such an old collection helps us to understand prevailing religious culture of a particular place. The importance and value of such manuscripts lies in the fact that it typically reflects the development of a religious tradition.<sup>27</sup>

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24. Sukumar Dutta, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962, p. 32.

25. Janak Lāl Vaidya, 'Newārharuko Jñānako Bhaṇḍar', *Pasukā*, Year 2, No. 10, Bhaktapur: Aswin 2055 VS, pp. 10-11.

26. Janak Lal Vaidya, 'Raṣṭriya Abhilekhālaya Sthit Nepal Bhāṣā Newārī Abhilekh Grantha' (report), Kathmandu: FHSS- T.U., 2041 V.S., pp. 6-7.

27. Whang Wenhuan, 'An Analysis of Ancient Handwritten Copies of Buddhist Scriptures of Sranskar Dgu Thon Monastery', *Tibet Studies*, Dec. 1989, Lhasa : pp. 161-166.

Prof. Rajendra Ram, a renowned Buddhist historian, also mentions about correlation between the development of the Buddhist literary tradition and Newār Buddhist scholarship. This correlation reveals the importance of this tradition in the development of Buddhist scholarship, which in turn leads to accumulate Buddhist manuscripts. Nepal's Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts consist of: <sup>28</sup>

Corpus of texts composed by Newār scholars and monks. Garland and other indigenous Buddhist texts belong to this category.

Copied for religious purposes.

Copied by monks to keep in the Vihāra collections.

Patronized by individuals during religious ceremonies.

Copied or written by fugitive Indian monks.

Manuscripts brought by the fugitive monks and other Buddhists,

Carried by Tibetans to Nepal at different times.

Copied by Newār merchants while living in Tibet.

The overall context of scholarship and the literary activities of the Buddhist Newārs help to understand Buddhist culture of the Kathmandu valley prevailed from 11<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The historical understanding of Newār Buddhism makes one to appreciate the great contribution of Newār Buddhist scholars in creating the noble tradition of Buddhist scholarship. Buddhist Newārs have reposed faith on the Vajrayāna tradition since the early medieval period, whose contribution proved to be in the history of thought as well as Buddhist scholastic tradition. Thus, Newār Buddhist society has ample reasons to be proud of the creative predecessors; however, the tradition of scholarship does not exist now.

The tradition of procuring has been a part of religious history of the Buddhist Newārs. Nonetheless, present century has witnessed the waning phase of entire process of the historical continuity of Newār Buddhism. The tradition of Newār scholarship has become outdated. Not a single attempt has been made to revive it. This in turn, led to ritualization of Newār Buddhist practices. In fact, rituals have superseded the glorious tradition of studying and mastering Buddhism. There are not many Newār Buddhists who understand the true meaning of Buddhist texts as well as ritual practices. Nepal's Vajrayāna, thus, confined to a kind of ritual Buddhism. Consequently, Newār turned into the Buddhism without monks forming a unique characteristic. Entire Buddhist practices remained simply as a ritual form and symbolic practice. The scholastic tradition, which was once a significant feature of Newār Buddhism, was no more emphasized by the Buddhist Newārs. No Buddhists lay

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28. Rajendra Ram, *op cit.*, pp. 164-165.

emphasis on textual studies. The Kriyā Tantra practice has dominated all other forms of higher tantric practices. Newār Buddhists have an opportunity to become glorified as their ancestors once tended to be. They are proud of the history of the scholastic tradition, because it is due to the devotion and efforts of the Newārs that Nepal turned into the repository of Buddhist manuscripts.<sup>29</sup>

Early medieval Nepal has produced a large number of prominent monk scholars of excellence who were experts of Tantra and other aspects of Buddhism. Some of them were even recognized as the famous Masters at Buddhist universities in India. It is the sufficient proof of their qualifications. The Newār scholars even taught to the Indian and Tibetan Paṇḍits and wrote Buddhist texts. Their contribution constituted a vast corpus of Newār Buddhist texts. Indigenous Newār texts produced by the Vajrācāryas have enormous significance in the entire body of Sanskrit literature. Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha, Svayambhū Purāṇa and other garland texts availed in Nepal belong to this category. It had been a common practice among the Newār Buddhist Masters to teach Tibetans different aspects of Buddhism particularly Tantric practices. Many famous Tibetan Buddhist Masters were trained by the Newār Gurus in Pātan. The Newār scholars such as Saṃgha Śrī, Kanaśrī, Mahākaruṇā, Vāgīśvarakīrti, and Bhāro and others were highly renowned Buddhist scholars and the Masters of Tantra. There is a long list of eminent Newār Buddhist scholars, who were very famous as the Buddhist Masters in Tibet. Saṃghaśrī had taught the Kumārsambhava epic, Sarasvatikathālamkāra Catusaśrīka, Daṇḍiko Kāvya and Candraśāstra to the great Shākya Paṇḍit Kungā Gyālchen Sāngpo (Pt. Ānandadhoja Vajra ).<sup>30</sup> There were also a great number of other prominent scholars. Those Tibetans who studied Buddhism with the Newār Masters later became very famous as eminent scholars in Tibet.<sup>31</sup> Nepal's contribution in the development of Buddhist scholarship and literary activities has glorified not only the Newār Buddhists but Nepalese people as a whole. However, the great tradition has declined long ago. Newār Vajrayāna tradition on the other hand has become preoccupied with the ritual practices. Later, Newār Buddhism witnessed rapid changes and transformations. As a matter of fact, celibate monastic practice ceased to exist and the entire activities within the religion were ritualized. Higher knowledge of Buddhism and perfection in practice were not required for the consecrated Vajrācāryas in order to perfect the Pāramitās and attain Bodhisattva Bhūmī. A Vajrācāryas in Newār Vihāra Saṃgha becomes a Bodhisattva not by

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29. Jagannath Upadhyaya and Sukadev Sharma Gyawali, *Suci Patra Baudha Biṣayak Hastalikhit Granthaharuko*, Vol. 1, Kathmandu: National Archives, 2054 VS, pp. 1-114; Devi P. Lamsāl, *Suci Patra*, Vol. 4, Kathmandu: National Library, 2024 VS, pp. 1-93.

30. Khenpo Bagindrasil *et. al.*, p. 10.

31. Malla, *op cit.*, p. 10.

practicing Pāramitās but by performing rituals as well as by virtue of one's birth.<sup>32</sup> The ritual transformation of Newār Buddhism has ignored the tradition of Buddhist scholarship. One can not overlook its impact on Buddhist history.

The great emphasis placed on ritual performances, lack of interest in the textual studies, the degraded situation of Tantra practices and transformation of celibate monasticism have direct impact on entire Newār Buddhism in later centuries.<sup>33</sup> Since Nepalese Buddhism underwent such a phase of transformation, eventually the scholastic tradition doomed to disappear. The later medieval period marked decline in Newār Buddhism. The Buddhist practitioners deviated from original Buddhism, which even changed the popular understanding of orthodox Buddhism. At the present, the Vajrayāna tradition lacks celibate monastic practice. Each Vajrayāna Vihāra has a Saṃgha and also a group of consecrated Ācāryas known as the Vajrācāryas. The senior members in the Saṃgha are called Āju, and the oldest Āju is given the title of Cakreśvara. The Saṃgha members hold Pañcābhiṣeka (Fivefold consecration) that include Udakābhiṣeka, Mukutābhiṣeka, Ghaṇṭābhiṣeka, Nāmābhiṣeka, and Vajrābhiṣeka.<sup>34</sup> The Vajrācāryas laid emphasis not on Buddhist scholarship but merely on ritual practices. It is very amusing to note that in their brand of the religion, the Ājus are automatically promoted to the Bodhisattva Bhūmī without practicing it. Actually, the death of a senior Āju attributes automatic changes in the existing Bodhisattva Bhūmī. This type of exclusively ritualized tradition has created a new system of Bodhisattva practice, which has been based on formalization of rituals. Knowledge of philosophy etc. is not mandatory for the Newārs. A Saṃgha member requires following certain rules after conferring upon the Abhiṣeka.<sup>35</sup> All such changes in the Newār Vajrayāna tradition is the later development. Now, for the Newār Buddhists, Buddhist texts no longer remain the source of knowledge and scholarship but merely the ritual object.

Right since the beginning of the N.S. (Nepal Samvat) in 880 C.E., the tradition of copying Buddhist texts started among the Newārs. Many of the Vihāras mentioned in the manuscripts contributed in the development of Buddhist scholarship. Some of the prominent Vihāras include - Lhan Vihāra, Itum Bahāl, Vikramśīla Vihāra, Dharmacakra

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32. Har Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, Delhi: MLBD, 1975, pp. 1-318; Dalai Lama, *The Activating The Awakening Mind*, Nep. tr., Mīn Bahādur Śākya, Lalitpur, NIEM, 1999, pp. 1-52.

33. Michael Muhlich, 'The Newār Vajrācārya, Priest as Recipient of Dāna', *Journal of Nepal Research Center*, Vol. XI, 1999, Kathmandu: pp. 91-98.

34. Purna R. Vajrācārya, (ed.), *Brhat Suci Patra*, Kathmandu: Bīr Library, 2023, pp. 37-38.

35. Sūryamān Vajrācārya, *Ratnākar Mahāvihārayā Sankṣipta Paricaya*, Lalitpur: Dhusa Jyāsa, 2053 VS. pp. 21-22.

Vihāra, Ratnākar Mahāvihāra, Sikhāmu Vihāra and Kīrtipuṇya Mahāvihāra. The Vihāras also served as the center of Buddhist educational activities. Vikramśīla Vihāra, popularly known as Tham Bahī, was a famous Vihāra in Kathmandu. Atīśa Dipaṃkara also lived there for a year on the way to Tibet. This Vihāra is a famous pilgrimage site for Tibetan Buddhists. Even Tibetan historical sources mention that the way in which Buddhist studies were conducted at Tham Bahī was very good.<sup>36</sup> Atīśa copied Satasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā during his stay at this Vihāra, which is still preserved there.<sup>37</sup> It is also said that Paṇḍit Dharma śrī Mitra came from Vikramśīla monastery in India to see Bhikṣu Mañjuśrī at this Vihāra, intending to solve a puzzle of Dvādasākṣarī Mantra (the twelve syllable mantra).<sup>38</sup> The Blue Annals also mentions that Tibetan scholar Nag-tsho-Lotsaba has described the excellent system of imparting Buddhist knowledge at Tham Bahī (Vikramśīla Vihāra).<sup>39</sup> However, this marvelous tradition did not last long. Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā dated 285 N.S. mentions about Dakṣiṇa Vihāra and Dharmacakra Mahāvihāra.<sup>40</sup> A scholar named Kumāra Candra wrote Catuspīṭha Nibandhana in 135 NS.<sup>41</sup> All these are related to Newār Buddhist scholarship. Many other Vihāras also played vital role in the development of Buddhist scholarship in Nepal as well as proliferation of Buddhist Sanskrit literature. A large number of prominent Vihāras are referred in manuscript colophons as well. Some of the prominent Vihāras mentioned in the Buddhist manuscripts include – Dakṣiṇamaṇisaṅgha Vihāra, Samyegu Vihāra, Śrīmadcitra Vihāra, Hiraṇyavarṇa Mahāvihāra, Daśākṣarī Vihāra, Makhan Bahāl, Ratnaketu Vihāra, Dharmadhātu Vihāra, Tarumūla Vihāra, Rājākīrti Vihāra, Cakra Mahāvihāra, Śrīwaṅku Vihāra, Paśupati Vihāra and Śrī Nakha Vihāra.<sup>42</sup> In addition, a large number of other Vihāras are also mentioned in various Buddhist manuscripts copied in Nepal in different times. The historical development of Vihāras in Nepal shows that until the time of King Bhāṅkara Deva, Vihāras were developed as religious as well as educational centers. Some of them became very famous. Eminent Newār Buddhist scholars lived in

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36. Roerich, *op cit.*, p. 247.

37. Rukmiṇī Wanta, 'Vikramaśīl Mahāvihāra ', *Contribution to Nepalese Studies*, Vol. 12: No.2, Kathmandu: CNAS, 1985, pp. 103-116.

38. Milan Śākya, 'Nepalmā Vihāraharuko Prācin Paramparā', *Paleswān*, No. 4, Lalitpur: Lotus Research Center, 1992, p. 35.

39. Roerich, *op cit.*, p. 247.

40. John K. Locke, *Buddhist Monasteries of Kathmandu Valley*, Kathmandu: Sahayogi Press, 1985, pp. 21-477.

41. Surya Bikram Gyawalī, *Nepal Upatyakāko Madhyakālin Itihās*, Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 2019 V.S., p. 284.

42. *Baudha Suci Patra* Vol. 4, Kathmandu: Nepal National Library, 2024 V.S., pp. 76-82, 85.



Vihāras and devoted time in studying Buddhism. The Vihāras in Pātan and Kathmandu produced prominent monk-scholars like Śrī Lunta Bhadra, Divākaracandra, Mānacandra and Harṣarāmacandra and others, who were associated to Kīrtipuṇya Mahāvihāra (Lagan Bahāl).<sup>43</sup> This glorious tradition did not continue during the later medieval period.

Newār scholars were the masters of Tantras, Sūtra, Vyākaraṇa, logic, and philosophy. Eminent Newār scholars Mahāpaṇḍita Sthavira Buddhaśrī, Ratnakīrti, Kanakaśrī and Vairocana were affiliated to Vikramśīla Vihāra in India and taught different aspects of Buddhism there.<sup>44</sup> After destruction of Nālandā Vihāra in 1193 CE and Vikramśīla in 1197 CE, Newār scholars who were affiliated to those monasteries returned back to Nepal. They also had very good relations with Tibetan Buddhists. Consequently, they had the opportunity to go to Tibet to deliver teachings at different monasteries.

Regarding the Newār scholars, no authentic list has been prepared so far. Different original sources mention the activities of Newār scholars. However, a tentative list has been prepared from different published and unpublished sources. Here is the list of Nepalese Buddhist scholars of different times who contributed in the development of Buddhist literature in this region.<sup>45</sup>

As already mentioned, a large number of Tibetan scholars were trained in Nepal by the Newār teaches. They had very good respect for them. It is said that while the Gurus stayed in Tibet as invited guests, their Tibetans disciples carried on the elderly scholars all the way from Kathmandu to different monasteries in Tibet. This was done to show respect for their scholastic ability. Ravindradeva, an eminent Buddhist tantric scholar, stayed at the Yadong monastery in Tibet and blessed Dharmasvāmin (Chag-Lotsaba), a famous Tibetan Buddhist scholar.<sup>46</sup> The latter studied Tantra from the Nepalese Paṇḍits and practiced under his guidance.

Besides delivering teachings and conferring Dekhā (Skt: Dikṣā), contribution of Newār Paṇḍits in the translation of Buddhist texts is a matter of greater importance in Tibetan Buddhism. Some Nepalese scholars translated volumes of Buddhist texts into Tibetan. Nepalese Paṇḍit Advayavajra comes first in this context.

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43. Ratnakāñī Vajrācārya and Vijaya Rāj Vajrācārya, *Nepādeyā Vihārayā Tacā*, Kathmandu: the authors, 1103 N. S., pp. 29-32, and 87-88.

44. Malla, *op cit.*, p. 10.

45. Shanker Thapa, *Newar Buddhism, History, Scholarship and Literature*, Kathmandu: Nagarjuna Publication, 2005, pp. 48-66.

46. Rajendra Ram, *op cit.*, p. 174.

In order to facilitate copying Buddhist texts, generous individuals donated lavishly. This has been a very popular practice in Nepal. It is the popular way to accumulate merit. This kind of feeling, which has been an integral part of cultural behaviour of Nepalese people contributed to make Nepal the repository of Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts. It has a long history. Some sources mention that the earliest copied Nepalese manuscript dates back to 293 NS. (1173 CE.), however, a copy of Pañcarakṣā Sūtra was found which was copied in N.S. 19.<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that the tradition of copying Buddhist manuscripts started prior to 1173 CE, the date considered as the starting point of Nepal's Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts.

Donations for the purpose of copying Buddhist texts helped its proliferation in Nepal, but also proliferate it. Various eminent Newār Buddhist scholars have also been engaged in copying works. However, not all the scribes were Buddhist scholars of great reputation. Their role in developing the Tengyur texts in Tibet is equally important. A large number of the existing texts in Kangyur and Tengyur were also translated by Indian and Tibetan Buddhist scholars.<sup>48</sup> The service rendered by Nepalese Buddhist Paṇḍits in the development of Tibetan Buddhist literature cannot be overlooked. The Newār Buddhists scholars who wrote very important texts including Vrata and other ritual books contributed to strengthen ritual Buddhism in Nepal.

### **End of the Glorious Tradition**

Historical evidence suggests that the tradition of studying Buddhist text was already in existent before the 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E. in Nepal. The popularity of Buddhabhadra, a prominent Nepalese scholar attests it.<sup>49</sup> The prevailing documentary evidence opines that some Nepalese

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47. Purṇa Ratna Vajrācārya,, *Suchi Patram*, Kathmandu: Nepal National Library, 2021 VS, pp. 86-88; Shanker Thapa 'Textual History of Pañcarakṣā Sūtra in Nepal', *Voice of History*, Vol. XV, no. 2, June 2000, pp. 21-38, and Daniel Wright, *History of Nepal Translated from Parbatīyā*, Calcutta : Sushil Gupta, 1959, p. 206.

48. Sarat Chandra Das, *Indian Paṇḍits in the Lands of Snow*, Calcutta : K. L. Mukhopādhyāya, 1965, pp. 51-52.

49. Shanker Thapa, 'Making of the History of Ch'an Buddhism: Contribution of Ven. Buddhabhadra [359-429] in Translating Sanskrit Texts and Popularizing 'Sarvastivada Meditation' in Fifth Century China', In: Nirmala Sharma (ed.), *Buddhism in Kashmir*, Sata-pitaka Series 639, New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2012, pp. 141-161; Shanker Thapa, 'Contribution of Buddhabhadra (Jue-xien) and Fa-hsien in the Literary Development of Sanskrit Buddhism in China', *ItihasPravah – Annual Journal of Nepalese Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2010, pp. 28-32; Vijay Kumar Manandhar, *Cultural and Political Aspects of Nepal-China Relations*, New Delhi: Adroit Publishers, 1999, pp. 1- 10;

of Licchavī origin became prominent scholars of Tibet. The growing aspects of scholarship helped to develop the tradition of writing Buddhist texts and copying Buddhist Mss. The 300 years period from 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries has been considered as the golden period of Buddhist scholarly activities. The Blue Annals discusses the activities of eminent Nepalese Buddhist scholars in Tibet as well as in Nepal including the visits of famous Tibetan scholarly monks to study Buddhism in Nepal.

After 14<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism of Nepal marked various changes. The changes as such were not friendly to its development. Originally, Nepal's Vajrayāna tradition preferred celibate monastic practice. After the conferring upon the Prabajyā samvara, the incumbent used to live in Vihāra as a Bhikṣu. Monks fully devoted themselves in the study and practice of Buddhism. They completely practiced celibacy and practiced chastity. Vajrayāna tradition of Nepal had celibate monks until the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Then after, the Saṅgha has been transformed into a caste community in which a member is admitted in the Buddhist Saṅgha only by the virtue of one's birth. These communities grew out of previous monastic orders.<sup>50</sup> The tradition of celibate monasticism has squeezed into one to four days ritual only. During this time, an incumbent is given the initiation of Prabajyāsamvara. It lasts as a ritual only for four days. The practice of celibate monasticism has completely died out. Monastic practice, which lasts only for a couple of days as a ritual form, is known as 'Barechoegu' in Newār Buddhism.<sup>51</sup>

The Vajrayāna tradition of the Newārs now lacks a living doctrinal tradition. The Vajrācāryas are the ritual specialists. Therefore, they are well-versed in general ritual texts to perform rituals. However, most of them do not hold knowledge in Buddhist teachings, philosophy or the Tantras. They are neither in the position to explain the meaning of ritual texts or the rituals itself. The western scholars have evaluated overall situation and concluded that the traditional Newār Buddhism has worked itself into a spiritual crisis. Until 14<sup>th</sup> century, Newār Buddhism greatly influenced Tibetan Buddhism. However, later on, the situation turned upside down. As a matter of fact, Newār Buddhists started to be influenced by the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. For Newārs who do not possess theoretical understanding

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50. Heinz Bechert and Jens-Uwe Hartman, 'Observations on the Reform of Buddhism in Nepal', *Journal of Nepal Research Center*, Vol. VIII, 1988, pp. 1-30.

51. See: Indra Kumārī Bajrācārya, 'Vihāra in Newār Buddhism', in Shanker Thapa (ed.), *Historical Context of Newār Buddhism – The Vajrayāna Tradition of Nepal*, Lalitpur: Nāgārjuna Publication, 2005, pp. 90–112; Indra Kumārī Bajrācārya, 'Nepalese Buddhist Monasteries: Aspects of Lakshmiī Kalyāṇa Varma Sanskṛita Ratanākar Mahāvihāra of Pāṭan', *Voice of History*, Vol. XV, No. 2, Dec 2000, Central Department of History, TU, pp. 7-14.

of Buddhist doctrine, it is impossible for them to recognize essentially familiar concepts of the doctrine in a Tibetan guise.

Since the Saṅgha transformed into a caste community, ritual performances are even discriminatory against the Shakyas of the same Saṅgha. The Shakyas are not authorized to be conferred upon the Ācāryābhiṣeka. The tantric rituals and ritual texts are made secret outside the community. The secrecy maintained throughout centuries has created several drawbacks. Especially on matters of Tantra, the Newār Buddhists became very secret and ethno-centric. Tantra including Kālacakra and Hevajra has already become open in Tibetan Buddhism. They have published Tantra texts for the outer world. Since the Tantra texts and their commentaries are made public in one way or another, the secrecy maintained by the Newār Buddhists has no meaning at all. It rather reproduced negative impact on the entire scholastic tradition.

The traditional Buddhist practice has completely ceased the tradition of studying doctrines. The Newār Buddhists could not maintain scholarly tradition in later centuries. The ritualization of Newār Buddhism had unfavourable impact on doctrinal and philosophical core of Buddhism. It also affected the scholastic tradition, which pushed it to the complete cessation. The Tibetan enthusiasts were very much discouraged and displeased with the growing ignorance on Buddhism among the Kathmandu Newārs. As a matter of fact, the Blue Annals even described Newār Buddhists as dull. Regarding the moment of cremating of Mahāpaṇḍita Vanaratna following situation has been described - <sup>52</sup>

... when people were conveying his remains for cremation at the Ram-do-li burial ground situated near the Svayambhū Caitya, the whole of the country of Nepal was enveloped by a great light, the prints of the flames of the funeral pyre became entwined with rainbows and hose towards the limitless sky, and numberless great miracles were observed. Even the dull Nepalese were filled with an undifferentiated faith and seemed to share in the highest form of emancipation.

Here the word 'the dull Nepalese' indicates to the degraded scholastic tradition of Nepal. The term as such further indicates that Nepalese people no more emphasized to study Buddhism and develop Buddhist expertise. This event is dated 1468 CE. Thus, until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the tradition of Nepal's Buddhist scholarship has already died out.

The Vajrayāna tradition of Nepal originally practiced celibate monasticism. Atīśa Dipaṅkara has written Bodhipathapradīpaḥ in which he has suggested that celibate monks might not practice the higher forms of Tantra. The practice of Guhyābhiṣeka and

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52. Roerich, *op. cit.*, p. 804.

Prajñābhiṣeka violate celibate vows of a practitioner. It, obviously leads one to the Vajra hell. For a celibate monk who receives this initiation, the violation of prohibitions leads to fall from the 'Tapa Samvara'. The person suffers from the great sin (Mahāpātaka) and certainly falls among the degraded. He would never attain perfection (Siddi). Verses 64 and 65 in the Bodhipathapradipaḥ mention that a Brahmācārī or celibate monk who receives Guhyābhiṣeka and Prajñābhiṣeka initiations, it is the violation of prohibitions, and hence, a fall from the Tapasamvara. Such a person would suffer from the great sin (Mahāpātaka) and certainly falls among the low born. He would never attain perfection (Siddi).<sup>53</sup> This text had profound impact on Newār Buddhist monasticism. However, it is also written in the book that one can obtain the initiation with the permission of the teacher for which he should first realize 'Sūnyatā'. It gradually motivated the Buddhist practitioners to introduce changes in the existing form of monastic practice, which ultimately affected Buddhist scholarship of Nepal as well. Gradually, the practical emphasis has affected the tradition of studying Buddhist texts. The Ādi Buddha Mahātantra also prohibits it. As is mentioned - A Brahmācārī cannot receive Guhyajñābhiṣeka for it is strongly prohibited in the Ādi Buddha Mahātantra.

From 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, some prominent Nepalese scholars contributed in Buddhist learning. Some Nepalese scholars studied Buddhism under Siddha Naropā and other great Buddhist scholars of India.<sup>54</sup> The Nepalese disciples of Naropā and other Tibetan scholars failed to institutionalize the tradition and perfectly hand over the knowledge to other Nepalese disciples. Rather they were interested to teach only to Tibetan disciples in Nepal or visit Tibet to teach them. In fact, it was more profitable because they paid the Guru in gold coins. In fact, the Tibetans paid large amount of golden coins as tuition. Tibetans were really great enthusiasts of Buddhist learning. It was beneficial for the Nepalese Gurus to teach Tibetans rather than the Nepalese disciples. The Tibetan lineage holders of the Indian Siddhas established lineages and institutionalized the 'Guru-Siṣya' tradition. However, the Newār scholars did not maintain the lineage at all. They neither could handover knowledge to local disciples. It has been the major drawback of cultural history of Newār Buddhists. Even at present, the dominance of Vajrācāryas priests in all spheres of religious and cultural activities and their leadership as religious Masters does not impact in the progress of Buddhism in this country. It has transformed theories and practices to different orientation.

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53. *Bodhipathapradipaḥ*: Verses 64 and 65. Also see: Lobsang Norbu Shastri (tr.), *Bodhipathapradipaḥ Ācārya Dipaṅkara Atīśa Śrījñāna Viracita*, Sarnath: CIHTS, 1984, pp. 65-66; and Alkā Caṭṭopādhyāya, *Atīśa and Tibet*, Delhi: MLBD, 1981, p. 535.

54. Roerich, *op cit.*, pp. 757-758.

Although the Vajrayāna tradition of Nepal and Tibet are identical, the former has no tradition of celibate monastic practice, which was ceased in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. As a matter of fact, the traditional education imparted in Vihāras also tended to collapse. On the other hand, monastic education is mandatory for all Tibetan novices. They undertake prescribed courses on Buddhism at the monastery schools after they join monasteries as novices. They study and obtain diplomas according to the rules of the particular Tibetan Buddhist sect they belong. For instance, the dGelugs obtain diploma as has high the *Gheshe*, which is equivalent to the modern doctorate degree. This kind of system has not yet been introduced among the Newār Buddhists. The study of Buddhism is no more a matter of prime importance among the Newār Buddhists in the present century. No formal education of Buddhism is conducted in Vajrayāna Vihāras of Nepal. It has direct impact on the present state of Newār Buddhist scholarship. Newār Buddhism has become ethno-centric. The other important factor to notice is that Sanskrit education has no attraction for the Buddhist families. In such a situation, number of people having skills of Sanskrit language and work with Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts has drastically been reduced. The view of Prof. Cecil Bendall that came out during the last decade of the 19th century is very important in the context of degradation of Newār Buddhist scholarship. Bendall himself was a Professor of Sanskrit at the British Museum and the Cambridge University in England. Once he visited Svayambhū Stūpa and met a senior Vajrācāryas who belonged to the local Saṃgha. He had expected that the Vajrācāryas should have possessed thorough knowledge of Sanskrit language. However, he was completely disappointed when the Vajrācāryas could not respond a very simple question in Sanskrit which Bendall posed to him. Then he thought if the Vajrācāryas could read and understand Buddhist texts, it could have maintained the tradition intact.<sup>55</sup> The decline of religion and learning in the country for last six hundred years has caused Buddhist literary works to be forgotten and unused.<sup>56</sup> All these events and situation further attest the degraded situation of Buddhist scholarship of Nepal. However, after the fourteenth century, a sporadic situation of Buddhist scholarship was existent in Nepal. Very few scholars came in the forefront in later years.

Since the last century, western scholars trained in Sanskrit, anthropology, Tibetan studies, Buddhism etc. started to pay attention on different branches of Buddhist studies. But within Nepal, no significant attempt has been made to revive or develop the old tradition of scholarship. However, some Buddhist Newārs translated and published classical texts.

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55. Cecil Bendall, *A Journey of Literary and Archaeological Research in Nepal and Northern India During the Winter of 1884-85*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Service, 1991, p. 5.

56. Cecil Bendall, *Catalogue of the Buddhist Manuscripts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. XVII.



Some of them in the present century including Ratna Bahādur Vajrācāryas, Niṣṭhānanda Vajrācāryas, Mīn Bahādur Shakya, Divya Vajra Vajrācāryas, Badri Ratna Vajrācāryas, Gajarāj Vajrācāryas, Hemraj Shakya, Herākāzī Vajrācārya and others contributed in translation and publication of Sanskrit texts in vernacular Newārī. However, it does not have any remarkable consequences to revive Buddhist scholarship. However, in general the credibility of accomplished works is rather questionable. Not all the attempts seem adequate to develop or authenticate Buddhist scholarship in the Newār Buddhist society so that it can inherit the glorious tradition of Newār scholarship and literary development of medieval Nepal.

### **Newār Intellectuality after Medieval Times**

The beginning ritual transformation of Newār Buddhism is the turning point in degeneration process of a number of institutions in Newār Buddhism. Historically, Atīśa is to be blamed as the main actor in the degeneration process. The Newār society knowingly or unknowingly accepted the process to shape the structure of traditional beliefs and practices of Buddhism in the Newār society. Atīśa's influence led to gradual decline in once flourished highly sophisticated scholarly tradition of the Newārs. The crowd of skillful scholars that existed during the Malla dynasty and Vajrācārya who were Masters of Tantras and other branches of Buddhism declined steadfastly not to get revived again. All such scholarly glories faded up and to say clearly ended. Tibetan for whom the scholarly Vajrācāryas were the greatest Masters from whom they always wished to learn Buddhism and Buddhist practices lost their trust in them. The overall situations developed in such a pattern that even the Tibetan had no reasons to trust them and rely for knowledge to them.

The ritual dominance in Newār Buddhism relaxed the Buddhists being careless towards the learning traditions. The ritual emphasis of Newār Vajrayāna Buddhism neither required them to focus on knowledge and scholarly tradition nor to revive or continue the tradition of study texts or tenets. In fact, it was not required. Priests became dominant over scholars. Patrons were converted to ritual performers and they remained satisfied with that because ritual performances were believed to bring wisdom for them. Thus, it was the easiest path to attain Nirvana. Newār Buddhist society reorganized in such a way that no one needed to attain mastery in knowledge, attain wisdom and perform Bodhisattva practices generating compassionate mind to become a Buddha. Let alone is authorized to attain the tenth Bhūmī and perfect tenth Pāramitā by virtue of one's being at the hierarchy in the Vihāra Saṅgha. That has been continuing since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. As a matter of fact, celibate monastic practice is no more required. Initiation, empowerment, Sādhanās, tantric practices which are all parts of Vajrayāna practices remained the matters of ritual practices. One became able to perfect them by virtue of rituals. Pujās, Vratas, rituals remained dominant among the Newārs. At

the same time, ordination to the Buddhist Saṅgha also changed to greater extent. Lineage did not remain as important as in Mahayana Buddhism or as the Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition. Its authenticity is in question. Ordination ceremony of the Newārs is presided by the Vajrācāryas of the Saṅgha seniors of each Vihāra Saṅgha. They are believed as the lineage holders however, this too is in question. The ordination is also ritualized and lasts from one to four days. The Shakyas and Vajrācāryas who undergoes this ceremony still claim themselves as the 'householder monks' even if they ritually abandon the life of a monks. This has been the feature of contemporary Newār Buddhism.

## **Conclusion**

Newār Buddhism marked revolutionary transformation in the traditional structure. It is a kind of deviation from the Vajrayāna practices and tradition that was developed and authorized in Northern India. Such a development visibly marked after 12/13<sup>th</sup> century has grave consequences in the intellectual tradition of the Newār Buddhist society as well. The scholarly tradition and system of study and teaching which was once highly developed ended. Virtue of ritual one is not required to gain knowledge through studies texts rather performing Pujā and rituals are sufficient to attain knowledge. Thus, the Newār Buddhists require worship and venerate religious books in shrine rooms rather than open them for study.

Within 700 years history of degradation, scholarly history turned upside down. Tibetan who once used to come to Nepal as learners and disciples of renowned Vajrācāryas then started to arrive as Buddhist scholars. Their devotion and intact preservation and practice of Buddhism have provided them to maintain the base of scholarly tradition. They still focus in practice and scholarly study of Buddhism and Buddhist texts both in Sanskrit and Tibetan translations. They have preserved and maintained essence of Vajrayāna practices. This context is not comparable between Newārs and the Tibetans. The degraded situation of Buddhism among the Newārs further led to grave consequences in scholarly tradition and intellectual history of the Newārs.

Rather than focusing on such aspects of Newār Vajrayāna Buddhism, their focus goes to other areas such as religious ethnicity. A kind of ethno-political matters came into the Newār Buddhists society to stand against the overwhelming Hindus both Newārs and the non-Newārs. Many leading Newār Buddhists have been indulging in distorted historical contexts such as the so called anti Buddhist policies of the rulers, accusation of destruction of Buddhist texts by the rulers, manipulation of religious census data etc which are all such references that demand corroboration with historical evidences. It has no doubt harmed to the Buddhist society itself. Modern Newār Buddhist scholarship is hazy and sparse. There

is nothing significant point of departure in the entire structure of Buddhism in modern times worthy of discussing within the aspects of intellectual history in modern times. The glory of intellectuality that the Newār scholars of Medieval Nepal under the Malla dynasty developed and preserved has ended long ago.

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*Journal of Buddhist Studies (T.U), Vol. 1, No. 1, May 2024*

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