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Introduction of *Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya* Tradition in Tibet: A Glimpse

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Over a long period of time Tibetan Buddhism or Buddhist tradition that disseminated in Tibet is derogatively known as Lamaism due to certain misunderstanding. His Holiness the Dalai Lama rightly said, “I think that those who, noticing the slight differences with Indian Buddhism due to locality, time, or external conditions, identify Tibetan Buddhism as ‘Lamaism’ specially in the sense of its being a transformation of Buddhism are completely wrong”. In fact, if one thoroughly does the fine analysis over a long period of time with regard to Tibetan Buddhist culture, one will certainly realize that the practice of Tibetan Buddhist tradition is nothing but the legacy of ancient Indian culture especially that of lost treasures of ancient Nalanda University which is still extant to this day.

One of the main goals of writing this paper is to argue that the Buddhism that spread in Tibet and Indian Himalayan regions is not the modified religion as many thought and interpreted. Moreover, the notion and the statement that Tibetan Buddhist monk can marry is absolutely fabricated and misinterpretation made by the scholars who are not well-versed in Tibetan Buddhist culture and history. Hence, attempt has been made here to highlight the *Vinaya* tradition that introduced, developed and preserved in Tibet and Indian Himalayan regions throughout the centuries.

As a result of long period of Indo-Tibetan cultural contact since 7th century AD till 13th century, the voluminous Tibetan Buddhist canonical literature known as *Kangyur* (lit. the translation of the word of Buddha from Sanskrit into Tibetan) and *Tangyur* (refer to the translation of treatises by Indian Pandits from Sanskrit into Tibetan) came into existence. These two collections of vast literature form the corpus of ancient Indian thoughts and culture. In these two canonical collections known as *Kangyur* and *Tangyur*, there are about three hundred volumes consisting of approximately five thousand texts mostly translated from Sanskrit and few of them has been translated from Chinese. Among them, there are seventeen minor and major *Vinaya* texts in *Kangyur* and forty two minor and major *Vinaya* texts incorporated in *Tangyur*. Apart from the *Vinaya* texts in *Kangyur* and *Tangyur*, there are more than two hundred seventy *Vinaya* texts written by Tibetan monk scholars.

Vinaya sūtra of Acarya Gunaprabha is mainly taught in the Tibetan monastic colleges.

In the Tibetan monastic curriculum, the *Vinaya* texts is also one of the thirteen (in case of Nyingmapa sect) or eighteen (in case of Sakyapa sect) or five (in case of Gelugpa sect) major texts that includes in the syllabus for the pursuit of highest academic degree like Lupon, Rabjampa or Geshe.

It was the King Songtsan Gampo (Wylie: *Srong btsan sgam po*, 617-650 AD) the 33rd in the line of Tibetan royal lineage who gave the royal support to Buddhist Religion and embraced Buddhism as the state religion of Tibet in the 7th century AD. But during his reign, the system of *Bhikṣu* ordination was not yet introduced. It was during the reign of 38th King Trisong Detsen (Wylie: *Khri srong lde btsan*, 742-797) that the *Vinaya* tradition of *Mūlasarvāstivādin* was introduced by Acārya Śāntarakṣita (725-788) followed by the construction of Samye monastery which was modelled on the Odantapuri Mahāvihāra of ancient India. The great yogi Padmasambhava played a vital role in the construction of Samye monastery. Hence, the King Trisong Detsen, Acārya Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava are collectively known as *mkhan slob chos gsum*¹ in the history of Tibetan Buddhism.

The existence of Buddha's teaching depends on whether the existence of *Sangha* who holds the practice of *Vinaya piṭaka* which is the foundation of all the Buddha's teaching (*Buddha Śasana*). In other words, if there is an existence of *Bhikṣu* or *Bhikṣuni* who are engaging in the practice of observing the *Pratimokṣa* vow, then this would prove the existence of Buddha's teaching or Buddha's *Śasana*.

In this paper, the attempt has been made to highlight the development of *Vinaya* practice in Tibet with special focus on the history of three distinct traditions of *Bhikṣu* ordination namely

1) sMad 'dul (Lower *Vinaya* Tradition), 2) Kha che'i lugs (Kashmiri tradition) and 3) sTod 'dul (Upper *Vinaya* Tradition).

The Tibetan King Trisong Detsen learnt that Acārya Śāntarakṣita who was the *Bhikṣu* belong to *Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya* tradition; the lord of *Tripitaka* and the entire teachings of the Buddha was residing in Nepal. The King therefore sent one of his chief ministers Ba-sal-nang (Wylie: *sBa gsal snang*) to Nepal to offer a royal invitation to Acārya Śāntarakṣita. The King also sent his ministers to invite twelve *Bhikṣu* belongs to *Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya* from India.

At that time the seven young men were initially² chosen for train as a full ordained monk as a trial. Hence, they were known as *sad mi mi bdun* in Tibetan which literally means seven trial men or seven chosen men.³ The preceptor lineage from which Acārya Śāntarakṣita has received the full-fledged ordination were Śāriputra (Tib. *Shā ri bu*), Rāhula (Tib. *sGra can 'dzin*), Nāgārjuna (Tib. *Klu sgrub*),

¹ *mkhan slob chos gsum*: "mkhan" is the short form of "mkhan po" meaning abbot. Here refer to Śāntarakṣita. "Slob" is the abbreviation of "slob dpon" meaning Acārya and here refer to Padmasambhava. "Chos" is the abbreviation of "Chos rgyal" meaning Dharma king and here refer to King Trisong Detsen.

² Unlike most of the Tibetan historical accounts, *Shes bya kun khyab mdzod* (The All-encompassing Treasury of Knowledge, p. 437) of Kongtrul Yonten Gyamtso, maintained that initially for a trial, the King Trisong Detsen commissioned one of his ministers called Ba Trisig (Wylie: *sBa khri gziqs*) to take a full fledge ordination vow from Acārya Śāntarakṣita. After he proved to be successful in observing the precepts of full fledge ordination, and later on the six other young men were also ordained under the great abbot Śāntarakṣita. Hence forth, they were collectively known as *sad mi mi bdun* (the seven trial men or the seven chosen ones). See further details in *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet* by Bu-Ston, p. 190.

³ Some theories maintain six young men instead of seven. However, there is variation in the names of the seven young men according to different Tibetan historical sources. The seven young men according to *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (Clear Mirror History, pp. 233) are 1) Ratna, son of Ba Sangshi, 2) Shakya Drawa, son of Chim Anu, 3) Vairocana, son of Pagor Ratna, 4) Ngenlam Gyalwa Chogyang 5) Ma Acharya Rinchen Chog, 6) Khon Lui Wangpo Sungpa and 7) Tsang Legdrub. However in *rBa bzhed zhabs btags ma*, only six names are mentioned excluding Khon Lui Wangposung.

Bhāvaviveka (Tib. *Legs ldan 'byed*), Sri Gupta (Tib. *dPal sbas*), Jñāna Garbha (Tib. *Ye shes snying po*). The portraits of these masters were painted on the wall⁴ of Samye monastery.⁵

After seeing the seven trial men successfully carrying out the precept of monk's ordination, the king was so impressed. He gained confidence in them and realized that they can have the ability and courage to observe the vows of *Bhikṣu*. So for the first time in the history of Tibetan *Vinaya* tradition, the *Bhikṣu Sangha* in Tibet was established by Acārya Śāntarakṣita in the eighth century AD with the royal patronage of King Trisong Detsen (742-797) soon after the completion of construction of Samye monastery which is regarded as the first monastery in Tibet. This monastery was constructed on the model of Odantapuri Mahāvihāra (located near present Bihar Sharif).

The King then commissioned many of his ministers and followers to take the full ordination of *Bhikṣu*. As a result, the total number of about three hundred sons of the queens, ministers, and common folk were ordained. Among them some of the intelligent monks were sent to India for the pursuit of learning Sanskrit grammar and the training of translation methodology.⁶

Later on about hundreds of *lotsawa*⁷ such as great Lotsawa Kawa Paltseg (Wylie: *sKa ba dpal brtsegs*) and so forth has received the monk's ordination from the *seven trial men* or *sad mi mi bdun*. And from them about thousands of junior *lotsawa* such as Cogro Lu'i Gyaltsen (Wylie: *Cog ro klu'i rgyal mtshan*) had received the ordination of *Bhikṣu*.

This golden period was followed by the destruction of Buddha's teachings in Central Tibet by the 42nd King Langdarma (died 842) in 841.⁸

The three monks Yo Gejung (Wylie: *gYo dge 'byung*), Tsang Rabsel (Wylie: *gTsang rab gsal*), Mar Shakyamuni (Wylie: *dMar shākya mu ni*) has escaped from Central Tibet with a sack full of *Vinaya* texts and went to Gar log and Hor yul (Central Asia) with the aim of disseminating Buddha's teaching there but no success in this mission. So they left for Kham province in the eastern part of Tibet.

After that the three monks namely Ka Hoe Chogdrappa (Wylie: *Ka 'od mchog grags pa*), Rongton Senge Gyaltsen (Wylie: *Rong ston seng ge rgyal mtshan*), and Lhalung Palgyi Dorjay (Wylie: *Lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje*) also escaped one after another.

The first disciple that they came across in Kham was Ma-sa-sel (Wylie: *sMa za gsal*), the son of a Bonpo family. Ma-sa-sel met the three monks who had arrived from Chuwori while he was leading cattle for grazing in the pasture. Due to the previous karmic imprints, the faith arose in him towards the three monks and he received the precept of *prabjya* as he made a request. Subsequently he was given the name Shakya Gewa Rab Sel (Wylie: *Shākya dge ba rab gsal*). He became a well versed in *Tripitaka*

⁴ In the English translation of Bu-Ston's work known as *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet*, the translator mistranslated as Northern Wall against the equivalent of "gyang ris". Probably the translator misunderstood "gyang ris" as "byang ris" which literally means the portrait of north. In fact, the "gyang ris" refer to mural or wall painting.

⁵ *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet* by Bu-Ston, p. 190.

⁶ Sakyapa Sonam Gyaltsen, *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, P. 205

⁷ Lotsawa is a corrupted form of Sanskrit term *Lok cakṣu* meaning "the eye of universe" here refer to the Tibetan translator who were well versed in both Sanskrit and Tibetan and who had contributed to the translation of Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan since 7th century till 13th century AD.

⁸ He was also known by various names as *'u dum btsan po*, *dar ma 'u dum btsan po*, *lha sras dar ma*.

(refer to Tibetan version of canonical text viz., Kangyur and Tangyur) in the later part of his life. Followed by this, many monks' scholars appeared in Kham over the centuries. Some of the eminent name of the monks are Bel Dorjay Wangchuk (Wylie: *Bal rdo rje dbang phyug*), Nub Palgyi Jangchub (Wylie: *gNubs dpal gyi byang chub*), Yang Gong Yeshe Yuru (Wylie: *Yang gong ye shes g.yu ru*), Bar Richen (Wylie: *sBar rin chen*), Cang Yeshe Senge (Wylie: *lCang ye shes seng ge*), Coro Sherab Jangchub (Wylie: *Co ro shes rab byang chub*), Shoe Chungwa Sherab Drag (Wylie: *Shod chung ba shes rab grags*), Anbarwa Jangchub (Wylie: *An 'bar ba byang chub*), Drum Yeshe Gyaltsen (Wylie: *Grum ye shes rgyal mtshan*), Nub Palgyi Jangchub (Wylie: *gNubs dpal gyi byang chub*), Dro Manjushila (Wylie: *sGro mañju śīla*) and so forth. By this period, already sixty years has elapsed since the 42nd King Langdarma (died 842) has persecuted and destroyed the Buddha dharma in central Tibet.

In the region of Phanpo in central Tibet at the locality of Zhol, a minor boy by the name of Muzapen (Wylie: *rMu za 'phan*), the son of a Bonpo called Musal Shenbar (Wylie: *rMu gsal gshen 'bar*) entered inside the temple of Nangsel (Wylie: *sNang gsal*) where he saw the murals depicted the monks listening to dharma teaching and giving dharma teaching. To his surprise, he enquired about the murals to the old lady to which the lady responded that these are Buddhist monks engaging in religious activities. The faith grew in the small boy and while tears rolling down his face due to the previous karma, he asked the old lady if any such monks were still exists. "Yes there were monks when I was a young girl", said the old lady, "but when the King Langdarma suppressed and destroyed Buddha dharma, the monks were forced to disrobe, some of them were killed while others died. So there are no monks now appear in U-tsang province of Tibet. But at present, there are large number of monks still exist in Kham in eastern Tibet who fled from Chuwori, Yerpa and other regions in Central Tibet". Having heard this, the young boy was overjoyed and immediately left for Kham in search of those monks there without fearing a risk of his life on the hazardous way. He met Lhalung Palgyi Dorjay in Kham and requested him for bestow of monk's ordination but Lhalung Palgyi Dorjay refused to give an ordination by saying that "I have transgressed my vows because I have assassinated the king Langdarma". But "I will assist you" said Lhalung Palgyi Dorjay. The young boy then had the opportunity to meet those monks who fled from Central Tibet and received ordination from them. He was given the ordained name Lachen Gongpa Rabsel (Wylie: *bLa chen dgongs pa rab gsal*). So the teachings of the Buddha were flourishing in Kham province at that time while in Central Tibet, the Buddha's teachings were completely disappeared. It was then the eighty years has passed since the king Langdarma has suppressed the Buddha dharma in Central Tibet. During that time, there was a lord of Samye known as Tsana Yeshe Gyaltsen initially patronized and morally support seven young men from Central Tibet to receive vows in Kham province. They are namely 1) Lume Sherab Tsultrim, 2) Dri Yeshe Yonten, 3) Tsong-ge Sherab Senge, 4) Loton Dorjay Wangchuk, 5) Sumpa Yeshe Lodoe, 6) Gya Lodoe Sherab, 7) Zhon Phan Choechog. They have taken their vows from Drum Yeshe Gyaltsen and Coro Sherab Jangchub. These seven are collectively known as *U-Tsang gi mi bdun* which literally means the Seven Men of U-Tsang (Central Tibet).

After them, the five more monks travelled to Kham in order to receive the full ordination vows. They are namely 1) Thashi Gyalphag, 2) Ragshi Tsultrim Jungney, 3) Batsun Lodoe Wangchug, 4) Kyeleg Nyangdren Choekyab, 5) Drumshing Sherab Monlam.

When the Seven Men of U-Tsang and the Five Men returned from Kham to Central Tibet, the Samye lord Tsana Yeshe Gyaltzen was already passed away by that time and his son Tsepo Tripa was in the power. So, under his patronization and financial support, Lume Sherab Tsultrim and other monks constructed a large number of temples in the regions of U and Tsang province and thereby established the Sangha. Hence, once again the Buddha's teachings were restored and flourished in Central Tibet and gradually the strength of monks community grew into very large number and this is termed in the history of Tibetan Buddhism as the *bstan pa'i me ro smad nas gso ba* which literally means the teachings of Buddha has restored from the lower (referring to eastern side of Tibet i.e. Kham province). So this lineage is known as *smad 'dul* (literally *vinaya* tradition restored from lower region).

2) Kha Che'i lugs/ Kashmiri Tradition

Kashmiri tradition emerged from Kashmiri Pandit Śākyaśri Bhadra (1127-1225) who was at that time one of the foremost among all the *Vianayadharas* (Tib. *'Dul ba 'dzin pa*) in India. Hence, it was widely spread that if anyone offer him *piṇḍa pāt* (Tib. *bSod snyoms*, offering of alms) just once, one will certainly reborn in the *Tushita* heaven⁹.

Some of the eminent Tibetan *lotsawa* namely Cal Lotsawa Choekyi Sangpo (Wylie: *dPyal lo tsa ba chos kyi bzang po* or *dharma bhadra*), Chag Dracom (Wylie: *Chag dgra bcom*) and others travelled to India to receive the vow of full fledge ordination from Kashmiri Pandit Śākyaśri Bhadra. When Kashmiri Pandit was seventy seven years old, he was invited to Tibet by Trophu Lotsawa Jampa Pal (Wylie: *Khro phu lo tsa ba byams pa dpal*) where Kashmiri Pandita contributed immensely in the propagation of Buddha dharma specially in giving the ordination to many young Tibetan. At the monastery of Chushul Sogma (Wylie: *Chu shul srog ma*), he ordained eleven men in just a single day. Among the eleven ordained monks, Droshul Khergey Jangchub Pal (Wylie: *Gro shul kher gad byang chub dpal*) and Tsangpa Dorjay Pal (Wylie: *Tsang pa rdo rje dpal*) became the chief disciples. Droshul Khergey Jangchub Pal has established the monastic institution called Gedun Gang (Wylie: *dGe 'dun sgang*) and Tsangpa Dorjay Pal (Wylie: *gTsang pa rdo rje dpal*) has established the Nyemo Tshal Mig (Wylie: *sNye mo tshal mig*) institution. Two disciples of them known as 1) Umzay Sonam (Wylie: *dBu mdzad bsod nams*) and 2) Konchok Gyaltzen (Wylie: *dKon mchog rgyal mtshan*) as well as 3) Choelung (Wylie: *Chos lung*) and 4) Jezing (Wylie: *Bye rdzing*) has established the four monastic institutions which is collectively known as Tshog De Shi (Wylie: *Tshogs sde bzhi*) i.e. 'Four Institutions'.

At Nyangtoe Gyangong temple (Wylie: *Nyang stod rgyan gong gtsug lag khang*), Sakya Pandita (Wylie: *Sa skya paṇḍita*, 1182-1251) received the full ordination from Kashmiri Pandit Śākyaśri Bhadra from whom this tradition has spread far and wide in the different regions of Tibet. Moreover the vow's

⁹ Kongtrul Yonten Gyamtso, *Shes bya kun khyab mdzod*, Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, Vols. I, p. 440

lineage of Droshul Khergey Jangcub Pal (Wylie: *Gro shul kher gad byang chub dpal*) as mentioned above has received by the series of respective Karmapa incarnations whereas Ngorchen Dorjay Chang Kunga Sangpo (Wylie: *Ngor chen rdo rje 'chang kun dga' bzang po* 1382-1456) has received his lineage of Bikshu ordination from Tsangpa Dorjay Pal (Wylie: *gTsang pa rdo rje dpal*) as mentioned above. Since then the tradition of *Sa lugs pa* (literally Sakya tradition) and *Kar lugs pa* (Kagyue tradition) has emerged which is still extant to this day. Later on the lineage of Sakya Pandita ordination was disseminated largely by the efforts of great fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (Wylie: *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho* 1617-1682). The lineages of *Vinaya* vows of Choelung pa (Wylie: *Chos lung pa*) and Jezing pa (Wylie: *Bye rdzing pa*) does not exist anymore now.

In the lineage of the four institutions as mentioned above, many great masters has appeared during the “Later Spread of Buddhism in Tibet”. Moreover in this very lineage, in the later parts of 12th century AD, the great master Bu-ston Rinchen Drub (Wylie: *Bu ston rin chen grub*, 1290-1364) and the founder of Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, the great master Tsongkhapa Lobsang Drakpa (Wylie: *Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa*, 1357-1419) and his disciples who has appeared in the 15th century widely disseminated the teachings and the practice of *Vinaya* throughout Tibet.

3) sTod 'dul/ Upper Vinaya Tradition

After the evil King Langdarma destroyed the Buddha dharma in Central Tibet as already mentioned above, the Tibetan kingdom split into many small principalities. Later on, the minor kingdom was made in *Stod mnga' ris* in western Tibet by the lineage of Dharma Kings who were the blood lineage of Langdarma.

It was the beginning of “Later Spread of Buddhism in Tibet” that the Ngari King of Tibet Lha Lama Yeshe Hoe (Wylie: *Lha bla ma ye shes 'od*) invited Pandita Dharmapala in Tibet. Dharmapala gave an ordination of *Bikshu* to large number of Tibetan masters. One among them was Shang Shung Gyalwai Sherab (Wylie: *Zhang zhung rgyal ba'i shes rab*) who received the ordination from Prajñāpāla. Shang Shung Gyalwai Sherab was trained in *Vinaya* under many Indian scholars. Moreover he has accomplished his complete training in *Vinaya* text under the *Vinayadhara* of Nepal known as Pritakala. He also received the teaching on the text of *Vinaya* that is to say a Commentary to *Pratimokṣa Sūtra* called *'Dul ba bsdu pa* of Lopen Khyepar She-nyen (Wylie: *Slob dpon khyad par bshes gnyen*) from Kashmiri Jyñānaśīla. From Kashmiri Śrī Sūbhutiśānt, he received the teaching on *Sum brgya pa rtsa 'grel*. Further he received the teachings on *Kā ri kā lnga bcu*, *Lo dri ba* and so forth from master Samanta Śrījñāna which he later edited and retranslated these *Vinaya* texts and widely disseminated these teachings.

Lotsawa Paljor, who was the disciple of Shang Shung Gyalwai Sherab, studied *dGe slong gi kā ri kā* (Skt. *Bhikṣu Kārikā*) from Nepali Pandit Jayakara and he also received the teaching on *dGe tshul gyi bslab pa'i gzhi'i mdo* (Skt. *Śramṇeraśikṣhapadsūtram*) from Kashmiri scholar Barahita and Mahājana.

In brief, this lineage of Pāla known as *sTod 'dul* (*Upper Vinaya tradition*) was spread in Tibet but not so widely as much as the other lineages. Nevertheless, the great scholar of Kagyue pa sect Gö lotsava Shonupal (Wylie: *'Gos lo tsa ba gzhon nu dpal*, the author of Blue Annals), Can-nga Chokyi Drakpa (Wylie: *sPyan snga chos kyi grags pa*) and so forth were ordained under this lineage of *sTod 'dul*.

Conclusion

All the above three traditions of *Vinaya* lineage that flourished in Tibet is none other than *Mūlasarvāstivādin* tradition. And the bottom line is that the Dharma king of Tibet commissioned that in the land of Tibet, the philosophical view should be accord with *Mādhyamika* and the code of conduct should be followed in accordance with the *Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya* tradition only. That is the reason why Atiśa Dīpaṅkara (982-1054) has not given any ordination of monks in Tibet as he belongs to the tradition of Mahāsāṃghikā¹⁰ (Tib. *Phal chen sde pa*).

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¹⁰ Gyamtso, Kongtrul Yonten, *Shes bya kun khyab mdzod* (The All-encompassing Treasury of Knowledge), Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, Vol. I, p. 442. The palm leaf manuscript of *Prātimokṣa Sūtra* of the *Mahāsāṃghikā* was found in Tibet and later on critically edited by W. Pachow & R. Mishra which was published in Allahabad in 1956.