



Countering The Early Buddhist Painting In Sikkim

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Abstract: This research paper aims to understand the beginning of Buddhist paintings in Sikkim, referencing the establishment and construction of early monasteries from the mid-seventeenth century to the early eighteenth century. This article has been segmented into two general categories, mural and Thangka². The existence of mural paintings completely relies on the structural condition or durability of the monastery, and the thangkas can be found scattered over Sikkim and neighbouring countries in due course of time. In this article, an attempt has been made to locate their historical date as per the available paintings. Lastly, this paper aims to present the factors behind the confusion in locating historical dates for existing early Buddhist paintings of Sikkim

Keywords: Buddhist painting, monastery, thangka, mural, Chogyal, Sikkim

INTRODUCTION: In the mid-seventeenth century, the early monasteries of Sikkim were founded by three Tibetan Lamas: Lhatun Namkha Jigme, Nadak Phuntshuk Ringzing, and Karthok Kuntu Zangpo. The early monasteries took the form of shrines and their structures were small. Such a type of monastery was prevalent during the reign of the first Chogyal Phuntshok Namgyal (Dolma T. N., 1908, p. 21). Dubdi, Pemayangtshi, Sanga Chelling, Lhakhang Marpo (Tashiding), and Karthog monastery, were those early monasteries which were reconstructed into large structures by the successive Chogyals, particularly from the time of the third Chogyal; Chagdor Namgyal and the fourth Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal. Thereafter, several other monasteries also came into existence. Earlier monasteries belonged to Ningmapa however, other sects like Kargyupa and Gelugpa sects of Tibetan Buddhism were also established from the eighteenth century onwards.

The entire eighteenth century marked the renovation and construction of various new monasteries within the territories of Sikkim. Initially, the construction was only made in west Sikkim, but then gradually spread to the North, South and East respectively. It can also be noticed that the pattern of shifting the Capital Palace from West to North and thereby East followed the construction of the monasteries as well. In such case, Capital Palace acted as a 'core', around the periphery of which monasteries were constructed. In this connection, D.P. Boot mentions that seven monasteries were constructed around the first capital, Yuksum-Rabdanse in West Sikkim. The capital was then shifted from Rabdanse to Tumlong (North Sikkim) in 1814, where numerous monasteries were set up. Finally, the capital was shifted from Tumlong to Gangtok (East Sikkim) in 1889, where many new monasteries were constructed (Boot, 2008, p. 163). In this way, till the end of the Namgyal regime (1975), there were more than a hundred monasteries including Mani-Lhakhang (Prayer house for women or Buddhist nuns) in and around Sikkim.

As per the Tibetan Buddhist tradition the monastery possesses the Ku, thangka and mural (in Tibetan Dhibri) of Buddhist Pantheons along with the sacred symbols. These images have dynamic purposes; first of all, they are meant to create and maintain positive vibrations inside the monastery. These images are consecrated by

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² Thangka is a scroll painting, usually painted on cotton or silk cloths, hung on the shrines or walls.

the superior Lamas or monks. In addition to that, they are sacred which is used for ritual purposes. Furthermore, it is also useful to visualize the particular deity during meditation. Thus, these monastic buildings both Mani-Lhakhang and proper monastery (having Dukhang or prayer hall, library, residence for monks and surrounded with stupas), possessed Buddhist paintings in Sikkim. Now, these paintings, at present which are available in Sikkim, are studied under two separate subheadings namely, mural and thangka.

MURALS: According to The Royal History of Sikkim, the date of establishment of Dubdi, Sanga Choiling, Pemayangtshi, Guru Lhakhang (Tashiding monastery) and Silnon, were the early monasteries of Sikkim belonging to the seventeenth century. Therefore, murals from these monasteries were the early specimen and beginning of Buddhist paintings in Sikkim. However, literary sources like the *History of Sikkim*³ and the *Gazetteers of Sikkim*, throw some light on the Buddhist paintings that existed in the monasteries that belonged to the eighteenth century. Before the eighteenth century, no historical data or supporting shreds of evidence were found that mention the Buddhist paintings existed in Sikkim.



Figure (1) Pemayangtshi & (2) Sanga Choiling, monasteries, West Sikkim, Source- *The Royal History of Sikkim*.

In 1711-12, the third Chogyal Chagdor Namgyal financed a large grant to Pemayangtshi (Figure-1) for its external and internal ornamentations⁴ Again, in 1714, Sanga Choiling (Figure-2) was rebuilt and enriched with images and books. In the year 1715, Guru Lhakhang (figure-3) at Tashiding was built and filled with various Buddhist texts, stupas or chorten and furnished with images. Again, Jigmed Pawo took responsibility for renovating images of the Dubdi monastery (figure-4) during the time of the fourth Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal. (Namgyal, 1908, p. 30) Hence, these arguments from the *History of Sikkim* made clear that the Buddhist paintings from these monasteries existed at the beginning of the eighteenth century



³ English translation work of Kazi Dausandup of *Denzong rGylrab*, compiled by Thuthob Namgyal and Yeshe Dolma.

⁴ In the text, the word 'Ornamentation' perhaps indicates the decoration of the monastery with murals (images of Buddhist Deities and symbolic drawings).

Figure (3) Guru Lhakhang, Tashiding & (4) Dubdi monastery, West Sikkim, source- *The Royal History of Sikkim*.

In addition to that, there is a reference to a mural of a female figure mostly associated with Pande Wangmo (figure-5), a consort of Lama Ngadagpa Rinchengon, who erected a temple at Silnon monastery (figure-6) as penance for breaking his monastic vows. (John A. Ardussi, 2021, p. 119) Furthermore, The Gazetteers of Sikkim also throws light on the existence of murals in the Pemayangtshi monastery. (Risley, 1989, p. 260)



Figure (5) mural painting of Pande Wangmo from the old Silnon monastery, photographs taken before reconstruction in 1980s) & (6) Silnon monastery, West Sikkim, source- *The Royal History of Sikkim*.

Once again talking about the Dubdi, the first monastery of Sikkim, was renovated into a large structure during the time of the eleventh Chogyal Tashi Namgyal in 1942. The monastery was fully decorated with murals, painted by Sikkimese artist Rinzing Lharipa in 1945. (Denjongpa, 2013, p. 69) From then murals survived more than seven decades, till the unbearable strike of earthquake (M 6.9 hit) on 18th September 2011. (Durgesh C. Rai, 2016, p. 1947) The cracks and joints that appeared on the walls were renovated which overlapped the major portions of the murals (figure 7). No photographs of earlier than the present murals from this monastery have been acquired. So these are the only surviving murals encountered from the first monastery of Sikkim.



Figure (7) mural paintings of *Wheel of Life*, from the Dubdi & (8) *Rizing sdup*, Pemayangtshi, West Sikkim, Photographs- author, 2017

According to The Royal History of Sikkim, Sanga Choiling was rebuilt in 1714-15 by Jigmed Pawo, and in the same monastery, murals were commissioned by the Royal authority at that time. Later in 1788-92, Gurkha invaded Sikkim and ran thoroughly the monasteries of West Sikkim for looting. During that time, most of the valuable objects from monasteries were looted such as *ku*⁵, scriptures (inscribed with gold dust), and other ritual objects.⁶ The structure of Sanga Choiling was also partly dismantled by the Gorkha invaders. However, the monastery was revived by the then-head Lama of Sanga Choiling monastery, named Lama Unak rhi Bhen Poi, who collected necessary things for the monastery, including religious texts, ritual objects etc. after the Gurkha invasion. The more progress was made by Rhu bhen Lama Gau Gay who collected 108 sets of Kangyur text for the monastery. (Denzong Nang Gunghey Khak Chik Ghe Chakrap Hikcha tShok, 2008, p. 56) The structural renovation was made by Bu Shor Lama Tenzing Gyaltscho, who focused on particular construction of the two Lhakhang; (i) the main prayer hall or Dokhang and (ii) Kagyur Lhakhang. During this renovation, the walls and the wooden panels between the two Lhakhangs were decorated with mural paintings (Denzong Nang Gunghey Khak Chik Ghe Chakrap Hikcha tShok, 2008, p. 57) Furthermore, once again the monastery was damaged, it caught fire and burnt down in 1950. However, in 1960, the monastery was rebuilt, (Temple and Monastery of Sikkim, 2016, p. 216) and the murals were executed by Ringzing Bhutia Lharipa, which was repainted in 1997.

Next, in 1965, the Pemayangtshi monastery from the west Sikkim was renovated from the top to bottom with three stories. The *Dukhang* (assembly hall) on the ground floor have statues of Trikaya Buddhas installed on the altar. The first or middle floor has three separate rooms; one small room called *Kangso Lhakhang* (God's house) is for daily ritual puja offerings and the two large halls are for the Library and Assembly Hall or *Dukhang*. The wall of both the ground and first floor was covered with murals (figure-8) painted by Ringzing Lharipa around 1967-68. (Denjongpa, 2013, p. 69) The second or top floor is specially dedicated to the heavenly realm (wooden structure) of Guru Padmasambhava. Again the surrounding walls in this hall are recently covered with freshly painted murals.

Description of the murals of Pemayangtshi can be found in The Gazetteers of Sikkim where some of the instances are described in the following words; "At Pemayangtshi the balcony doors contain painted representations of the seven precious things of a universal emperor (*Chakravarta raja*), such as Shakyas was to have been had to be not become Buddha; viz, (1) the precious wheel; (2) the precious white elephant; (3) the precious flying horse; (4) the precious gem; (5) the precious general; (6) the precious minister; and (7) the precious wife. These objects are frequently figured in the base of images and pictures of Buddha." (Risley, 1989, p. 260)

On the other hand, the Tashiding monastery, which is located east of the Pemayangtshi, is considered the holiest and sacred for Tibetan Buddhism in Sikkim. The structure of the monastery is constructed with stone slabs plastered with sand and cement. The main *Dukhang* at the ground is covered with beautiful murals, probably belonging to the same period as Pemayangtshi. The interesting part is that these murals, though in the same hall, have slight differences in some characteristics, for instance, the petals of Lotus flowers, facial features, shapes of figures and use of colours. However, because of the restriction, photographs of the murals are not allowed to be taken. Apart from the main monastery, the two *Lhakhangs* on each side are located. But, one of them has freshly painted murals and the other does not possess any murals. In addition to that, there are several old *Chortens* (stupas) and *mendang*⁷ in the eastern part of the monastery. The stone slabs of *mendang* are carved with detailed figures of Buddhist deities, monks (figure 9), sacred mantras and mandalas. On top of that, stone slabs used in *Chortens* are also carved of Buddhist deities. These engraved figures seem repeatedly painted from time to time.

⁵ *Ku* is a Tibetan word, means 'statue' made of clay, gilt copper, bronze, silver and wood.

⁶ However, *The History of Sikkim*, mentioned that on the eve of invasion, many valuable things, ritual Objects, *thangka* and texts were transferred to Tholung monastery in North Sikkim.

⁷ A square or rectangular shaped walls constructed with stones, on which engraved Buddhist mantras and figures of deities etc.



Figure (9) Padmasambhava (centre) along with other Tibetan Lamas, on the stone wall, Tashiding monastery, photo- author, 2023

According to the report published as Mapping Cultural Resources, by the Government of Sikkim, most of the monasteries from all the districts were damaged severally by the earthquake in 2011. The monasteries built with RCC (introduced particularly post-1975) such as Lachung Singring Gonpa, Tholung Gonpa, Chungthang Gonpa, Lachung Gonpa, Phensang Gonpa, Old Rumtek Gonpa, Ralang Gonpa and Jorthang Gonpa are also dismantled by the earthquake in 2011. (Shresta, 2011) In such a way, murals from other monasteries of Sikkim are also damaged severely. The majority of the damaged murals are not older than a century, which belonged to the mid-twentieth century. For instance, the mural in the Tsuklhakhang monastery (built in the late 1920s) in Gangtok was executed by Tibetan master painter Kesang Wangdi, the court artist of the Panchen Lama, who was assisted by Rinzing Lharipa. (figure-10) (Dhondup, p. 90) In due course of time, the mural was covered with soot (butter lamp) and became obscure to recognise. In 2010, Hope Leezum, daughter of Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal invited Andre Alexander an art preserver who restored the murals in the monastery with his assistants (Sorensen, 2011, p. 110)



Figure (10) Emblem of Manjushree, mural painting, Tshuklakha, Royal Chapel or monastery, Gangtok, photo-author, 2019

Among the surviving old structures of monasteries, Melli Gonpa is one which possessed old murals (Figure 11). The structure of the monastery is constructed with locally available materials like stones for walls and floors, wood for panels doors and windows, and mud plastering the outer layer of the walls. Interestingly, the interior is decorated with murals from the vegetation source colors. Like other monasteries, this too was affected by the earthquake; the consequence of which was structural damage to the murals.



Figure (11) Vairochana, a mural from Melli monastery, South Sikkim, photo- Sikkim State Archive, 2017

For the historicity of these murals, so far no axillary shreds of evidence come up in the hand to trace its exact time. However, the appearance of the mural as well as the architecture of the monastery seems more than a century old. Again, another old monastery of Sikkim, located in Nezi Village of the present Darjeeling District of West Bengal (which before 1835, used to be a part of Sikkim and known as Karmi estate). The name of the monastery is Pemalingpa, but, popularly known as Nezi Monastery. (figure-12) taken after the name of the place. The monastery belongs to the period of Rabten Sharpa who was deputed from Tibet as regent in Sikkim during the 1740s. The *Royal History of Sikkim* mentioned that the Lhakhang and the chorten at Nezi, within the Karmi estate of old Sikkim, were established by the regent Rabten Sharpa. (John A. Ardussi, 2021, p. 174)

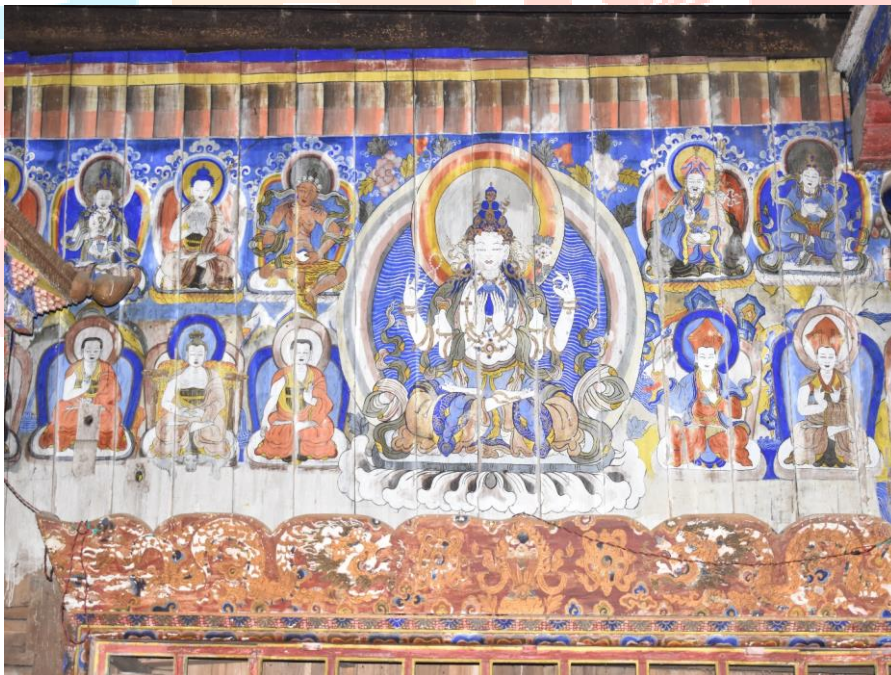


Figure (12) Avaloketswara, mural from Nezi monastery, Darjeeling, West Bengal, photo- author, 2023

The cause behind the arrival of Rabten Sharpa was the death of the fourth *Chogyal* of Sikkim, who had no official heir as the successor to the throne. Hence till the enthronement of the fifth *Chogyal* of Sikkim, he acted as the regent to look after the political matters of Sikkim. During his time, he built two *Dzongs* (district), one was north of the river at Mangsher whereas another one was built to the south of the same river at Karmi. According to the present Lama Rabden Lepcha and his family have been taking care of the monastery hereditary since the sixth generation. He says, his Great-Great Grandfather, named Ogen Tenzing Randal Lepcha, whose father was the first priest and the head of this monastery however, he doesn't remember his name. Then Ogen Tenzing Randal's grandson Jorden Lepcha Lama, who was Grandfather of the present Lama, became the head Lama. After the death of Jorden Lepcha Lama his son Khedup Lepcha became the head lama, who ran the monastery till 2001. (Lepcha, 2022) From then onwards, Rabden Lepcha Lama has

been looking after this monastery to date. In this genealogical list, he missed out on remembering his great-grandfather's name, who was also the head lama of this monastery.⁸ This monastery has preserved its old murals without much intervention or restoration. Even, today the monastery witnesses the richness of natural vegetation colors, old traditional art styles, and depiction of Buddhist pantheons, saints and symbols.



Figure (13) Jambhala, mural from Pelling monastery, Sittong, Darjeeling, West Bengal, photo-author, 2016

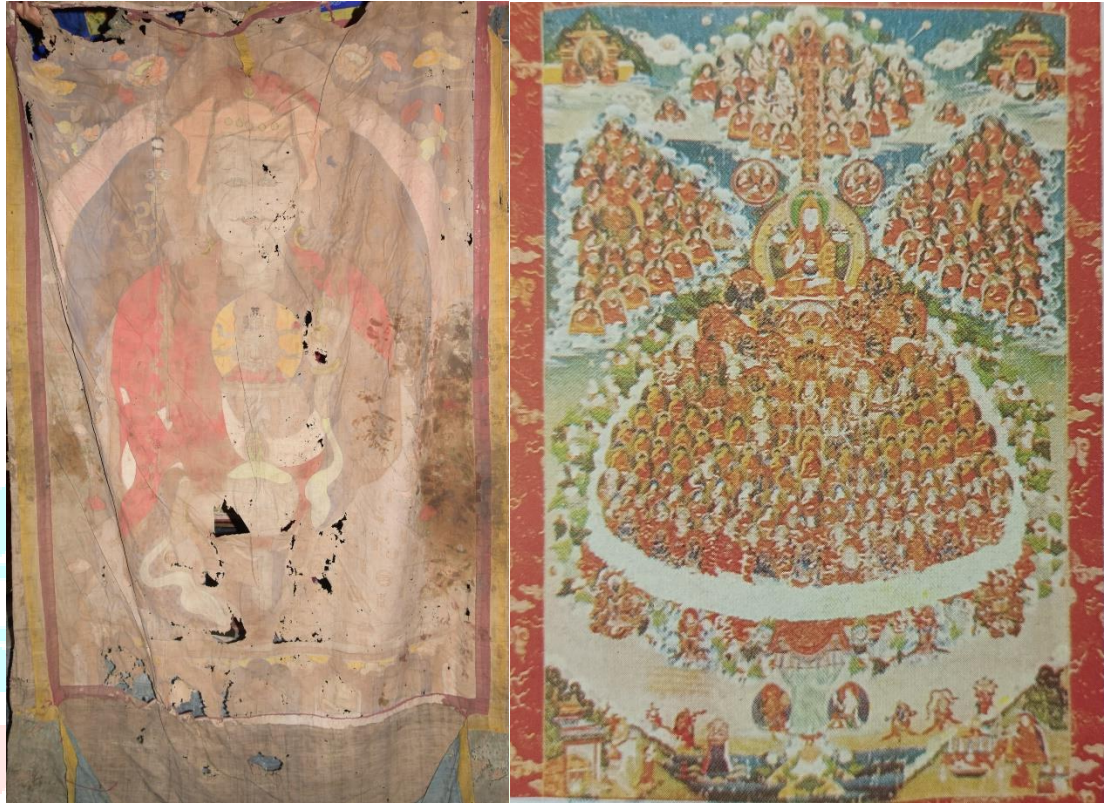
Again, another monastery named the Pelling Gonpa (figure-13) established around the 1830s at the village named Sittong of Kurseong sub-division in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal also belonged to the monarch of Sikkim. This monastery is popularly known as Lepcha Gonpa, because the monastery is managed by the Lepcha Buddhist monks and it also follows the hereditary line from the time of its foundation. The Murals of the monastery are extremely old and at present are in degrading condition. With close observation, it is clearly understood that murals are covered with paintings that are executed on cloth which exactly looks like murals. Such a unique technique was never seen in any other monasteries of Sikkim so far. Some patches of cotton cloth (the carrier of the painting) have toned out from the wall and hung a little from the bottom of the painting. The mural paintings must have been done with vegetation pigments which have survived in their original form, with slightly over-painted in some portions. Among them, the mural of the left side wall to the altar seems older than the rest, because, the carrier of the stone mud wall is not covered with paintings on a cloth. However, these murals were also affected by the hit of the earthquake in 2011.

Apart from the Pemalingpa and Pelling monasteries of Darjeeling as well as the Mell monastery of Sikkim, no murals that belong before the mid-twentieth century are existed today, due to continuous renovation and reconstruction of the structures. There were many reasons behind the renovation of the monastery, one of which was the damage caused by frequent earthquakes. For instance, in 1897, the great Assam earthquake affected Sikkim, due to which the capital shifted from Tumlong to Gangtok where the new monastery and Palace for Chogyal was built. Another inevitable reason behind the distorting murals was the surrounding cold and moist environment of the monasteries. Sikkim is located at the foothills of the Himalayas, where a humid and moist environment, mainly in the high hilly regions prevailed the most. In addition to that the earlier monasteries in Sikkim were built on the high hill tops. Hence, the monsoon rain and moist environment affected the murals of the stone-mud plastered walls, at least for its durability.

THANGKAS: In the beginning, there were no indigenous painters who could make thangkas. Thus, it was sure that either readily made thangkas were brought from Tibet or painted by Tibetan painters who were patronised by the monasteries and the Royal house of Sikkim. Among the old thangkas the portrait of Guru Padmasambhava found in Dubdi monastery (figure-14) is the one such. The support of thangka is of cotton cloth which is very delicate and torn on the top right side of the figure. The colors are fading away and the

⁸ The information is collected in the interview of Rabden Lepcha, present head Lama of Pemalingpa Gonpa of Nezi in 2022.

outline in the figures are hardly visible. The possible historical date for this *thangka* might be the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries as per the two historical events that appeared in between these two centuries. First, in the early eighteenth century, the images⁹ of Dubdi were repaired by Jigmed Pawo when he had been staying in Sanga Choiling and Pemayangtshi. (Dolma, 1908, pp. 34,35) Perhaps, during that time, he had commissioned *thangka* for Dubdi, among which this *thangka* would be the one that survived even post-Gorkha invasion. Second, in the nineteenth century, Unak Rhi Bhen Poi Lama restored the ritual objects and other necessary things of the Sanga Choiling monastery with the help of the Pemayangtshi monastery. (Denzong Nang Gunghey Khak Chik Ghe Chakrap Hikcha tShok, 2008) Perhaps, along with the ritual objects for Dubdi, this *thangka* would have been restored by him during the post-Gurkha invasion period.



Figures (14) Padmasambhava, *thangka* from Dubdi, (2017) & (15) Shrong Shring, *thangka* from Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, photo- *Tales the Thangka Tell*, p. 44.

In such a way, there are many miniature *thangkas* on the top floor of the Pemayangtshi monastery, kept in the showcase covered with transparent glass cover for preservation. As per their physical appearance, most of them probably belonged to the eighteenth to nineteenth century. However, the exact historical dates for these paintings are not confirmed due to the paucity of supporting shreds of evidence. In addition to that, the monastery possessed several other *thangkas* including the huge one of Sakyamuni Buddha, however, those are not much older than the former one.

Apart from these, some government institutions of Sikkim also possess old *thangkas* for instance, the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT). During the reign of the 11th Chogyal Tashi Namgyal, the Royal Charter established this institute in 1958, intending to make the hub of studies on Buddhist teachings and Sikkim cantered. Since its foundation, the institute possessed more than fifty *thangkas*, some of which belonged roughly two hundred years back. Some *thangkas* have distinctive features and styles of composition which differs from the twentieth-century *thangkas* of Sikkim. Nevertheless, most of the *thangkas* in the institution seem much older from their exterior appearance and condition. *Thangka* “Refuge field of Gelug Lineage,” of Panchen Lama (figure-15) belonged to the style of U & Tsang province of Tibet back to the 19th century. The probable estimated date for this *thangka* by the researcher of the same Institution is 1825 AD. (Sinha, 1989) (Sinha, 1989) There are many replicas of this *thangka* produced during the nineteenth century in Tibet, for instance, one *thangka* on the same theme has been found on the website of “Himalayan Art Resources” established in 1997. Thus, comparing the styles of the composition as well as identifying the figures in both the *thangkas* concludes that they belonged to the same period and of the same origin of place. No doubt, the *thangka* seems not only very old, additionally the pigments in the painting remain attractive despite having

⁹ “Images” is a general term which may indicates either statues, murals or *thangka*.

some dullness, even after approximately two centuries. The detailed miniature works, strong and thick application of vegetation pigments, extraordinary styles of composition, and cotton cloth as medium with its silk brocades, revealed an example of excellent Tibetan *thangka* painting.

In addition, other old *thangkas* are also displayed in the gallery of the Institution. All those *thangkas* could be classified into two different categories, based on the style and medium, such as applied and embroidery. However, most of the *thangkas* fall under the applied medium whereas only the set of eighteen *thangkas* of “Panchen Khrungs Rabs” or “Life Story of Panchen Lama” were composed with embroidery. Some of the *thangkas* in the gallery are, (1) Guru Tshengay (Eight manifestation of Padmasambhava), (2) bSam-Pa Lhan grub (Thirteen manifestation of Padmasambhava), set of seven *thangkas*, (3) *Sman Lha* (Buddha of Medicine), set of five *thangkas*, (4) Panchen Khrung sRabs (Life story of Panchen Lama), set of eighteen *thangkas*, (5) *Phag pa gnas stenbcu- drug* (Sixteen Arhats), set of seven *thangkas*, (6) *Tshog- SHing* (Assembly of Mahayana Deities), (7) Gunaprabha and Sakyaprabha, (8) Sakya Muni Buddha and so on, (9) *sGrol ma* (Tara), two *thangkas*, (10) *Jragspa rGyad-skyobma* (Eight different form of Tara), set of eight *thangkas*, (11) *sTonpa Sangs rGyal* (Lord Buddha), two *thangkas*, (12) *Stonpa tshem drubkyi*, (13) *Tshog-Shing*, (14) *Ltung-bShing* (Thousand Buddha), (15) *zHikhro*, (16) *bDechen zHing sGrub* (Amitabha Buddha), (17) *Sridpa ikhorlo* (The Wheel of Life), (18) Three Chinese brocades *thangkas*, (19) Green Tara, (20) Ancient eight Indian Masters, and (21) *Rig- zding shogs shing*. As for now, the exact historical dates of those *thangkas* have not been confirmed so far.

As per the register in the gallery of the Institution (maintained very late dated from 1992 onwards), no specific records have been mentioned, like from whom and when they collected so far. Only some names of donors have recorded, who gifted items to the Institution. For instance, it claims that some *thangkas* were received from the Chogyal Tashi Namgyal by the time of its establishment. However, it isn't clear exactly which *thangkas* among the collections, were donated. Another instance is that some *thangkas* were also donated to the Institute by the mother of a young English merchant named John Pierce, who had collected them before he died in 1961. (Tashi, 2008)

The Directorate of Handloom and Handicraft (DHH), was established by the Royal authority in 1957 as a Technical Institute for training the traditional arts and crafts including *thangka*. (Dhondup) In this institution, Rinzing Lharipa was the first formal teacher who taught many students to create *thangka* paintings. The institute has a gallery, where Rinzing Lharipas and his student Ganden Lharipa's *thangka* paintings (figure-16) are preserved and displayed today.¹⁰

¹⁰ According to Tenzing Norbu Bhutia, a principal art instructor of TAS and a student of Ganden Lharipa, says that some old *thangkas* of late 19th century Tibetan Masters, are in the private collection, especially in the aristocrats' families of Sikkim. As for example, he named Tinley Ongmu Tashi from Namnam, and Denzong Residence Hotel beside the D. H. H.



Figure (16) Sixteen Arhats, *thangka* (1978), Directorate of Handloom and Handicrafts, Govt. of Sikkim, Gangtok, artist- Ganden Lharipa,. Photo-author, 2017.

In addition, several old *thangkas* with no historical dates, have been found in Sikkim. For instance, there were about eighteen old *thangkas* in the Raj Bhavan (the Governor House), possessed and preserved by the government of Sikkim. (Figure 17). Out of these eighteen, a set of ‘Sixteen Arhats’ (in separate sixteen *thangkas*) and the remaining two are of Sakyamuni Buddha and Guru Padmasambhava. There are also some private collections, some of which seem approximately more than a century old, for instance, (figures, 18 & 19)), are preserved and collected by the residents of Gangtok, named Tinley Ongmu Tashi from Namnam area, and Dr. Tsewang Tenduk Pulger from Kazi-road, respectively.



Figure (17) Amitayus (left), Amitabha (centre) not identified (right), *thangka*, the Raj Bhavan (Governor House), Govt. of Sikkim, photo- author, 2023

CONCLUSION: Moreover, the early monasteries established in the seventeenth century were reconstructed in the eighteenth century and frequently renovated later on. Several large and small monasteries established in the eighteenth century were renovated in due course of time. In addition to that the process of renovation also replaced early murals with new ones. Hence, it is very hard to consider the existing murals of early monasteries as the oldest or earlier paintings of Sikkim. At present, the oldest surviving murals are murals from the monasteries of Darjeeling District and belonged to Sikkim, which also needed to be restored and preserved for their historical witness. On the other hand, a much lesser number of old *thangkas* have been discovered so far in Sikkim, that are still needed to identify with their proper historical dates. There are references to old *thangkas* in private collections, however, so far not been discovered. Thus, the Buddhist painting in Sikkim remains the subject of discovery and historical investigation.



Figure (18) Jogtshen Ningpo, Tibetan monk, *thangka* (Private collection) photo-author, 2016.



Figure (19) Kunga Drolchog, *thangka* (private collection), Gangtok, photo author, 2019.

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