

CHAPTER 1

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh

The seed of Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh was sown in the 8th Century, by Padmasambhava [Sarkar: 1980, ix], who was responsible for preaching the teachings of Buddha and invoking the tenets of Buddhism in the state. However, with the advent of other religions and the subsequent fragmentation of the traditional Arunachali society into various tribal and religious groups, Buddhism, with the passage of time, has been largely confined to the districts of Tawang, East Kameng, West Kameng, Upper Siang, Dibang Valley, Lohit and Changlang. Arunachal Pradesh as per the census of 2001, has the total number of Buddhist population is 1,43,028 which are 13.03% among its total population [Arunachal Pradesh: 2001] of 10,98,000.

Arunachal Pradesh is fortunate enough to have a rich Buddhist cultural heritage [Dutta: 2008, 1]. Here Buddhism is a living religion. The migration of Khamtis brought the religion to the eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh. The Singphos and Tai Tikhaks sub-tribes of Tangsas later adopted Buddhism.

The remains of a pagoda at Miao, at Vijaynagar in Changlang district and findings of a number of Buddhist monasteries in the length and breadth of eastern part of Arunachal testify to the fact. The Buddhist tribes of eastern Arunachal Profess *Therāvad* Buddhism which, they said to have brought from Myanmar. With the coming of the Monpas, Sherdukpens, Membas, Khambas and other *Mahayana* tribes to the western and central

part of Arunachal, *Mahāyan* Buddhism was introduced in this area. It can be attested by dozens of *Mahāyan Vajrayan* Buddhist art and architecture in the western part of Arunachal betraying the influence from Tibet. The famous Tawang Monastery is the best product of *Mahāyan* Buddhist art and architecture of the state. In Arunachal Pradesh, both forms of Buddhism are in practice. The Khamtis, Singphos and the Tikhaks sub-tribe of Tangsas living in eastern part of the state profess *Therāvad* Buddhism. The Monpas, Sherdukpens, Membas, Khambas, Meyor and Zhakring believe in *Mahāyan* Buddhism.

The glory of Buddhism is that wherever it prevailed, artistic pagodas, monasteries, handmade paper manuscripts and beautiful stupas came into existence. The popularity of Buddhism and its impact is noticed in the socio-cultural heritage, monasteries, stupas, dances, festivals, arts and craft of Buddhist tribes in Arunachal Pradesh. The famous monastery of Tawang, beautiful thangkhas, wall paintings and numerous manuscripts in the *Gonpās* and *Vihāras* depict the impact of Buddhism. Even prior to the advent of modern education, the Buddhist monasteries played an important role in imparting knowledge and basic social wisdom. The monasteries used to play an active role in social, economic, religious life of the people. It also looked after the local administration. Infact monastery acted as guide and philosopher for the Buddhist people. One of the most important aspects of monastery was to provide total education to become perfect human beings. The impact of Buddhism can be seen in the textiles, ornaments, art, architecture, dances, festivals and behaviour of the people. Buddhism has also contributed a great extent in maintaining social harmony and peace among all sections of the society.

Buddhism is a living force in Arunachal Pradesh and playing a very vital role in the flourishing of pan Arunachali culture.

1.2 Buddhist Manuscripts

Buddhist manuscripts are preserved in a number of *Mahāyan-Vajrāyan* as well as *Therāvada* monasteries. Some collections are also noticed in private possession in Tawang, Bomdilla, Dirang, Kalktang, Chowkham and Namsai area. A majority of the *Mahāyan* Buddhist manuscripts are confined to the districts of Tawang, West Kameng and Upper Siang. *Therāvada* Buddhist manuscripts are noticed only in districts Lohit and Changlang. Primarily due to their geographical proximity to Tibet and China, the spread of Buddhism in these districts got a major boost in the post-1959 period after the Dalai Lama exiled to India, and for a brief period stationed at Tawang in this context it can be mentioned that a number of Buddhist manuscripts of Tibet were brought to Arunachal by exiled Tibetan monks.

The Tawang monastery is one of the major hubs of the Buddhist manuscripts in the state. These manuscripts are written in *Bodic* script and have similarity with those of medieval Buddhist manuscripts of Tibet. Because of large number of manuscripts, scattered in different parts of Arunachal, our study area has been limited to only western part of Arunachal in general and to those manuscripts preserved in the monasteries of Tawang area in particular. It is widely perceived that some of the earliest Buddhist manuscripts have landed in the state during the period of Padmasambhava. The preaching's of Lord Buddha and a host of others were later recorded by the local Buddhist *Achāryas* or *Rimpoche*, who were the devout disciples of Padmasambhava. Most of these manuscripts

are hand-written on the paper that was also hand-made from the bark of a tree called 'sheng'. [Motebennur: 2006, 177-191] This is evident from the word "shugu-shang", the dialectical equivalent to the word 'manuscript', in which "shugu" and "sheng" are the meaning of 'paper' and 'tree' respectively.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study present condition of the manuscripts, including those preserved scientifically as against those which are still under individual possession.
2. Possibility, viability and feasibility of utilisation, restoring the same and the modus operandi to be followed.
3. Problems involving collection of manuscripts from diverse sources.
4. To document the Buddhist manuscripts in Arunachal Pradesh.
5. To suggest the ways and means of restoration.
6. To suggest a plan for digitisation of manuscripts available in Arunachal Pradesh.

1.4 Statement of the problem

Arunachal is the home of both *Therāvāda* as well as Tibetan form of Buddhism. The Buddhist cultural heritage of the state is reflected in monasteries, stupas, decorated gateways, mural paintings, sculptures in both stone and bronze displaying varied iconography, manuscripts, traditional Buddhist arts and crafts, rituals, monastic dances, festivals etc. These heritage provide an understanding of the philosophy, art and culture of the Buddhist religion. The Buddhist manuscripts are one of the little known Buddhist heritage of Arunachal Pradesh. The manuscripts written in *Tai* and *Āhom* languages some times with intricate paintings noticed in a number of *Therāvāda* Buddhist

monasteries are located in eastern frontier of the state. In the western and northern frontier region, almost all the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries (including the famous Tawang monastery) have preserved thousands of Buddhist manuscripts of medieval and late medieval period. These manuscripts not only throw light on religion but also reflect the social, economic, cultural, scientific aspects of Buddhism. Unfortunately, due to man made and natural problems, these manuscripts in Arunachal Pradesh were neglected as far as their curative preservation and conservation is concerned. It is pity that years after years, hundreds of manuscripts are damaged and most of them are in a dilapidated stage, which are invaluable source for the study of History and culture of the Buddhist tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. It also throws light on Arunachal Pradesh's relation with neighbouring countries like Myanmar and Tibet during medieval period.

Manuscripts are the veritable medium of cultural heritage and are valuable sources for the reconstruction of history. It helps in bridging the hiatus between the past and the present and provides a vital link to the historico-cultural sagacity of the aeons passed. However, these materials are, widely scattered and the need of the hour is to collect and preserve the same under a single roof for the benefit of the future generations. It is in this context the research work is under taken to provide an idea of the Buddhist manuscripts of the area and to suggest methods for the preservation and digitisation of the manuscripts of the area.

1.5 Sources

The sources utilised in the present study are both primary as well as secondary. For collection of Primary sources, the archives of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar and archives

of Assam, Guwahati were consulted. Some original Buddhist manuscripts preserved in monasteries of Tawang area were surveyed and consulted with the help of experts to understand Buddhism in right perspective. The location of Tawang is proximity to Tibet and Mahayana Buddhist population highly concentrated. The collections of manuscripts are in sizable number to study better. The conditions of these manuscripts are very critical, the right approach and appropriate technology can stop the manuscripts for further dickey. The most users of these manuscripts are monks, anes, experts, rempochies and abbots of the *Gonpās*. The secondary sources consulted includes books on Buddhism, history and culture of Arunachal Pradesh, research articles, journal articles, monographs etc. associated with Buddhism in general and Buddhist manuscripts in particular.

1.6 Research Methodology

The methodology for the research topic involves extensive field survey, along with a close scrutiny of the available manuscripts; surveying, photograph and video graph of the manuscripts. With the help of unstructured interviews more information were gathered about location and content of the manuscripts. Both macro and micro literature available on Buddhist manuscripts especially on Arunachal Pradesh are scanned.

Extensive survey of monasteries resources in the form of manuscripts in Arunachal Pradesh.

Un structured interview with experts, custodians of manuscripts and users of manuscripts.

1.7 Chapterisation

The study is presented in six chapters as

In the first chapter 'Introduction' it is discussed the subject, its significance with statement of problem, objectives of the study along with sources and research methodology adopted.

In the second chapter Survey of Literature was done from available primary and secondary sources such as Books on Arunachal Pradesh. Books on Buddhism in general and Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh in particular, research articles and books on manuscript conservation, preservation and digitisation etc.

Chapter three discusses about the origin and development of Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh such as *Mahāyan* Buddhism, *Therāvad* Buddhism.

Fourth chapter takes into account on preparations of manuscript techniques in *Mahāyan* Buddhist area of Arunachal Pradesh. *Mahāyan* Buddhist manuscripts scattered in different *Gonpās*, Monasteries and *Stupas*. It also highlights the *Therāvad* Buddhist manuscripts preserved in the *Therāvad* Viharas, Pagodas etc.

The fifth chapter documents the utilisation, restoration problems of conservation and preservation of Buddhist manuscripts and process of digitisation technique of the manuscripts.

The last and the sixth chapter provide summaries of all the above chapters and suggest various methods for conservation, preservation and digitisation of valuable Buddhist manuscripts. At the end Bibliography and references are given.