

2. Shanker Thapa Ph.D., *Buddhist Sanskrit Literature of Nepal*, Seoul: Minjoksa Publishing Company 2005, 194 pp. Appendices, Bibliography, Index, Soft cover, Price. US \$ 15.

Buddhism is very rich for its numerous literatures. Mahayana/Vajrayana literature is written in Sanskrit. Later on, these texts have been translated into Tibetan and Chinese languages also. But, compared to the Hindu texts, Buddhist literature is not so much exposed to the general readers. Only few of them have come in print, and the huge portion of it still exists in the form of manuscripts. Among the numerous Buddhist literature, Nepal is the abode of Sanskrit literature, and in the words of Dr. Rajendra Ram, Nepal is the 'Custodian of the Buddhist scriptures.' Shanker Thapa's book on this important aspect of Nepalese Buddhism gives us a descriptive and analytical view of the Buddhist Sanskrit literature in Nepal.

The author, a Ph.D. agrarian history of Nepal has published two books relevant to his research, but after that he switched on to Buddhism and published four books on Nepalese Buddhism within few months in 2005, perhaps a record for a Nepalese scholar. Among them, two are on Newar Buddhism, one on an old Buddhist monastery, ratnakar Mahavihara and the last one is on Buddhist Sanskrit literature of Nepal, which is going to be reviewed here.

Divided into five chapters, the book gives us the historical context of Buddhist Sanskrit literature of Nepal and their nature, contributions of different scholars mainly foreign in disseminating these manuscripts in different countries, notably England, and an overview of the catalogues of manuscripts in Nepal and abroad.

The author argues that 'the tradition of writing manuscripts existed in Nepal even before the tenth century' and gives us the example of two earliest manuscripts dated N.S. 19 and N.S. 40 i.e. 899 A.D. and 1920 A.D. respectively. Most of these manuscripts were prepared by the Nepalese scholars who went to Nalanda and Vikramsila Buddhist universities for the study of Buddhism. After the

Muslim invasion in India during the 13th century, thousands of India Buddhists fled to Nepal with valuable manuscripts, and thus Nepal became the storehouse of Buddhists manuscripts. Those manuscripts are of great importance not only for the study of Buddhism or Buddhist history but also a wide variety of historical information derived from it. He aptly writes that the manuscripts 'helped historians to reconstruct medieval history of Nepal'. The colophons of Buddhist manuscripts provide ample historical information, which played significant role in documenting the rules of the Malla kings (p.11). Apart from that, these manuscripts were also used as an element in the continuity of religious tradition, to be recited during Buddhist rituals, as gifts, and as an interesting subject for study (p. 18). However, after 13th century, Buddhist scholarship slowly declined in Nepal, with the Nepalese Buddhist scholars concentrating more on ritual aspects.

Dr. Thapa is correct to say that the outside world know nothing about the existence of thousands of Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts in Nepal until the first half of the 19th century. It was B.H. Hodgson, who stayed in Nepal for more than two decades, exposed them to the outside world by collecting these manuscripts in Nepal and donating them to the academic institutions of India, England, and France. The author has given a detailed list of those manuscripts donated by Hodgson to Royal Asiatic Society, London; India Office Library, London; Asiatic Society of Paris; Bodleian Library, Asiatic society of Bengal and the College of Fort William (pp. 135-57). Two other scholars to collect Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts from Nepal were Denial Wright and Cecil Bendall, followed by A.F.R. Hoernle and Ven. Ekai Kawaguchi.

The author has given a detailed introduction to the catalogues of Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts of Nepal in the fourth chapter covering more than fifty pages. He has divided these catalogues into two parts-manuscripts which are still preserved in different archives and libraries of Nepal, and manuscripts which are now parts of other

archives, museums, and libraries throughout Europe and Asia. The chief academic centers of Nepal that still preserve Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts are National Archive, National Library, Tribhuvan University Library, Keshar Library, and Asha Saplu Kuthi, whereas numerous such manuscripts of Nepal are now preserved in the educational centers of England, Japan, France, Germany, Russia, Tibet, India and U.S.A. Dr. Thapa has also given a list of fifty-two compiled catalogues prepared by Hara Prasad Shastri, Rajendra Lal Mitra, and Cecil Bendal among foreign writers, and Janak Lal Vaidya, Prem Bahadur Kansakar, Devi Prasad Lamsal, Buddhi Sagar Sharma, Purna Ratna Vajracharya and Raja Shakya among the Nepalese scholars, on the Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts preserved in the archives and libraries of Nepal and other parts of the world.

In the conclusion chapter, the author has analyzed the position of Buddhism in Nepal during the Lichchhavi period and Malla period, and the role of Nepalese Buddhist scholars in contributing to the development of Buddhism in Nepal. But the author has not been able to make his critical comments on the limitations of the Buddhist Sanskrit literature of Nepal, nor could he evaluate those manuscripts in the context of the history of Buddhism in Nepal.

The author should seriously consider at least a few points in connection with the Buddhist Sanskrit literature of Nepal. First, writing a manuscript and copying it from another manuscript are two different things. The author should, as far as possible, identify the original contribution of Nepalese Buddhist scholars in the preparation of these manuscripts. Secondly, as mentioned by A.C. Burnell, some manuscripts are merely copies with the date of the originals. The author should test this hypothesis in connection with the Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts of Nepal. And lastly, there are numerous repetitions in the title of manuscripts in the list given by the author in appendices. He should try to classify them on the basis of subject matter, and make a comparative study of the manuscripts with the same title.

Despite these minor drawbacks, the book is a rare piece of research, and it serves as a source book to the scholars intending to study the different aspects of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism in Nepal. The Korean printing is fine and the cover design is also attractive. The bibliography and index have been prepared in a satisfactory manner under a standard format, and the transliteration of Nepali/Sanskrit words has added the value of the book especially for the foreign readers.

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