

Buddhism in Russia and its Linkage with Nepal

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Abstract

Although Buddhism in Russia represents only 1% of the population, it has a rich history intertwined with the country's cultural landscape. Introduced in the 17th century through Kalmyk tribes and Mongolian influence in Buryatia, Buddhism uniquely developed in Russia. Buddhism has also connected Russia's cultural relations with Nepal. Officially recognized in 1741, Buddhism became integral to the Russian heritage. Tsarist policies varied across regions such as Kalmykia, pre-Baikal, and Transbaikalia, and the government cautiously supported Buddhism in border areas to prevent unrest. Spearheaded by Agvan Dorzhiev, the construction of a Buddhist temple in St. Petersburg in 1915 marked a significant step in Buddhism's spread. However, the anti-religious campaigns of the 1930s led to the closure of temples and the arrest of many lamas, effectively halting the religion's growth. Only after the Second World War, few of the Datsans in Buryatia had reopened. Despite setbacks, Buddhism persevered through figures such as Bidiya Dandaron, who attempted to revive the tantric tradition and developed the concept of Neo-Buddhism. The late 1980s witnessed the restoration of Buddhist institutions, including temple construction, literature translation, and the establishment of connections with international Buddhist centers. Today, Buddhism is recognized as one of Russia's traditional religions, and diverse communities each have their own vision for the future of Buddhism in the country. From the 19th century onwards, the Russian scholars, such as Ivan Minaev started to take great interest in the knowledge and practice of Buddhism in Nepal even when it faced great setbacks in India. This led to further development of Buddhist linkage between two countries. Recently, Russian Buddhists have realized even more importance of linking with Nepal, as evident in their decision to build a replica of St. Petersburg Buddhist temple in Lumbini.

Keywords: *Buddhism, Russia, Revival, Mahayana, Buryatia, Kalmykia, Tuva, Linkage, Nepal.*

Introduction

Russia's unique geographic and spiritual position as a bridge between East and West is crucial for understanding how Buddhism was introduced and developed within the country. As the world's largest country, Russia spans both Asia and Europe, with a land area exceeding that of the entire European continent. With the ninth largest population globally, Russia is a multinational society that constitutionally provides religious freedom. The Russian government recognizes Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism as traditional religions. The 1997 Law on Religion acknowledges Buddhism as an integral part of Russia's historical heritage.

The earliest evidence of Buddhism in what is now Russia dates back to the 8th century AD with the state of Bohai, located in the areas of modern Primorye (Primorsky Krai) and the Amur region. Mahayana Buddhism became the state religion in Bohai due to its extensive ties with China, Korea and Japan. (Leonteva 213) Buddhism was then introduced in the European region of Russia first by a travelling group of so-called Oirat tribal people, and also called Kalmyks when they came to Volga region via Siberia and settled there in the 17th century. (215) Meanwhile, the Buryatia region also saw the gradual influence of Buddhism starting from the 17th century (217). The spread of Buddhism there was further accelerated when 150 Buddhist monks arrived there from Mongolia in 1712, who had escaped from the turbulence in Mongolia. (Lkhagvasuren & Yanjisure 183). The practice of Buddhism in Russia was formally recognized by a decree of Empress Elizabeth Petrovna in 1741 and it became one of the state religions of Russia since then. (217) As Tuva was the last of the regions to join the former Soviet Union, it became the latest region with a majority of people practicing Buddhism (Singh 01). The majority of Buddhists in Russia follow the Mahayana sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The Theravada sect of Buddhism seems to be a latter phenomenon in Russia. However, a blend of Buddhism with Shamanism had been a practice long followed in various Siberian regions.

Buddhism, though a minority religion in Russia, boasts a rich history and has left a notable imprint on Russian culture. Far from being a recent import, it has been woven into the fabric of the country for centuries, navigating periods of imperial patronage, religious repression, and ultimately, resurgence. Its story in Russia is one of resilience, adaptation, and a fascinating interplay of cultural, political, and spiritual forces.

Although Buddha was born in Nepal and Buddhism was prevalent here for more than two millenniums, its direct connection with the world's largest country actually started in the 19th century only when Ivan Minaev visited Nepal to study Buddhism. From the Nepal side, Bhikkhu Amritananda was the first to have visited Russia with a Buddhist mission in 1959. Since the Mahayana Buddhism in Russia has deep connection with Tibetan Buddhism, where the whole Buddhist doctrine was introduced from Nepal in the 7th century, the spiritual connection between Russia and Nepal may go back for several centuries.

This article will discuss various aspects of Buddhism in Russia and also examine the linkage between two countries brought by the practices of Buddhism.

Buddhism as it developed in Russia with unique features

Since Russia is a vast country, people sometimes may forget about certain areas of her far eastern region such as Amur and Primorye region. Due to its proximity with China and Korea, the region was historically inhabited by the Buddhists as early as 8th century AD. The region used to be called Bohai then and was a powerful state with highly developed Buddhist culture. Over the period, the region went through major changes in terms of spirituality. Due to various social and political changes that the region went through, there are only few remaining Buddhist sites there.

The next wave of introduction of Buddhism in the Russian Empire began in the 17th century. The first to embrace Russian citizenship were Kalmyk tribes, followers of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. The nomadic tribe who called themselves Oirats moved to the Volga region via Siberia. The region became known as Kalmykia and it became part of the Russian Empire in 1609. The role of Kalmykia in the development of Buddhism has historical significance as it was not only the first full-fledged Buddhist region of Russia but it also became the only Buddhist dominated settlement in the entire Europe since the 17th century.

However, the real center of Buddhist activity would take root in Buryatia, where Buddhism entered from Mongolia. Initially, religious practices took place in prayer tents. By the 18th century, the first permanent monasteries, such as Tsongolsky and Gusinoozersky, were established, marking a significant step in institutionalizing the faith. It is notable that these early Buryat temples were constructed with the assistance of Russian carpenters, which led to architectural features that resembled Christian churches, demonstrating the cross-cultural influences at play.

The spread of Buddhism in Russia took on a distinctive character, partly learning from the Buddhist traditions in Tibetan and other Buddhist regions, partly influenced by the political context. This led to the appointment of a key figure, the khambo lama, who was seen as easier to control than numerous, potentially rival abbots. This centralized approach highlights the complex relationship between the Russian state and religious institutions, where the state's desire for control shaped the development of the Buddhist sangha.

As in the regions of Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddhists in Buryatia also view a single human lifetime as simply one stage in a much longer complex project, which involves endlessly taking new forms. The ultimate goal of the Buddhists here is to achieve the state of *Nirvana*, which will liberate one from the cycle of birth and death.

It is quite noteworthy that a Russian scholar from the Oriental Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences remarked Buddhism as the only religion without gods. She also noted that despite Buddhism being the oldest of three major religions of the world, Buddha did not intend to introduce a dogma and impose it on everyone. She further points out that Buddhism is the most non-religious of the world religions. (Leonteva 13)

Another unique aspect of Buddhism in Russia was its coexistence with Christianity. On the basis of Nerchinski Peace Treaty between China and Russia in 1689, Transbaikalia was annexed to Russia. The Buryats who were following Buddhism were given Russian citizenship without forcing them to convert to Russian Orthodox Christianity. (Ostrovskaya 39) Similarly, on the advice of Agvan Dorzhiev, Tsar Nicholas II permitted the Buddhists to build their temple in St. Petersburg at the advent of 20th century. However, the Russian Orthodox Church went against the establishment of the Buddhist Datsan in the then capital of Russia. (39) However, Nicholas overruled the opposition and on the 300th year anniversary of the Romanov dynasty, the first service was held in the datsan on 21 February 1913. (39) It is also said that during the British invasion of Tibet in 1904-1909, the 13th Dalai Lama had to flee to Mongolia. The Datsan was to be built as a would be residence for the Tibetan theocratic leader. So, the Russian empire's geo-political interest on this also had to be noted.

Governmental policies towards Buddhists varied across regions. While in Kalmykia and the pre-Baikal area, these policies were comparatively harsher, in Transbaikalia, the Tsarist government showed greater caution due to the region's

border status, where any unrest was deemed undesirable. To maintain stability, the authorities even extended support to the Buddhist sangha, sometimes to the chagrin of Russian Orthodox Church missionaries, who sought the conversion of the Buryats.

Institutionalization and Cultural Impact

In 1853, the “Law on the Lama Clergy” was enacted, a legislative act to regulate the activities of Buddhists within the Russian Empire, further solidifying state involvement in religious affairs. This act marked the formal institutionalization of Buddhism within the legal framework of the empire (Sabirov 02). Beyond its religious significance, Buddhism also profoundly impacted Russian culture. It influenced prominent Russian scientists, philosophers, writers, and artists, including luminaries such as Vladimir Soloviev, Nikolai Berdyaev, Nikolay Lossky, Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Bunin, and Nicholas Roerich. Among them, Leo Tolstoy is most well-known for his advocacy of non-violence in his literary creations. Although he had his own critical assessment of some aspects of Buddhism, his deep impression of Buddhist practices had persisted throughout his literary works. There is an often quoted incident of Tolstoy’s very early life encounter (when he was only 19 years old) with a Buddhist lama from Buryatia in a hospital in Kazan. Both of them happened to be there for treatment and the monk told him the story of his life. During a sleigh ride in Siberia, he was attacked by bandits. When asked by Tolstoy what he did, then he answered, “I crossed my arms on my chest and I prayed to Buddha to forgive the lawbreakers”. (Milivojevic 75)

Tolstoy and other figures incorporated Buddhist concepts into their work, contributing to the assimilation of Buddhist teachings into Russian intellectual and artistic life. More importantly, there are quite a few Buddhologists, whose research in Buddhism is often referred to. Top among them is T.H. Stcherbatsky who was himself a pupil of Ivan Minaev, the famous researcher on Newar Buddhism. Stcherbatsky’s book on Buddhist Logic is considered the most comprehensive work on the subject. Minaev’s another pupil Sergey Oldenburg was instrumental in the compilation of authoritative Buddhist texts and publishing the same in the form of Bibliotheca Buddhica and he was also the builder of the Soviet Institute of Oriental Studies, which kept alive the tradition of Buddhist studies in the USSR.

A pivotal moment in the spread of Buddhism was the construction of a Buddhist temple in St. Petersburg in 1913. The project was initiated by Agvan Dorzhiev, a Buryat monk, public figure, diplomat, and a close spiritual colleague of the 13th Dalai

Lama. Dorzhiev's involvement not only solidified Buddhism's presence in the capital but also symbolized a connection to a broader international Buddhist world.

The Soviet Era: Repression and Resilience

The 1917 Revolution marked a turning point. Agvan Dorjiev became a leading figure in the Renovationist movement, which attempted to modernize the sangha. These reformers also sought to reconcile Buddhist teachings with Marxist ideology, in an effort to preserve Buddhism within the Soviet context. Another Buryat monk, Lubsan Sandan Tsydenov, sought to revive the tantric tradition.

However, this period of adaptation was short-lived. The 1930s witnessed the implementation of brutal anti-religious campaigns. Buddhist temples were closed, and many lamas were arrested, resulting in the destruction of much of the Buddhist infrastructure that had been established. There was even physical extermination of a large number of monks. Despite these repressions, Buddhism did not disappear entirely. (Badmatsyrenov et al 3)

By the end of the Great Patriotic War in 1945, some provisions of Soviet religious policy had been revised, and religious organizations and religious sites were permitted. In 1946, the Ivolginsky and Aginsky monasteries in Buryatia were reopened, which helped in projecting an image of religious freedom under the Soviet regime. These monasteries were still kept under strict state control and monitoring. Bidiya Dandaron, a follower of Tsydenov, emerged as a prominent figure. He attempted to revive the tantric tradition under atheistic rule and developed "Neo-Buddhism", seeking to merge Buddhist teachings with Western philosophy and science. He and his followers faced persecution, and Dandaron ultimately died in a prison camp. Yet his students would later play a critical role in reviving Buddhism in post-Soviet Russia. (Andreyev & Garri 61)

Particular note on repression of Buddhism in Kalmykia needs to be made. On the suspicion of collaboration of some monks with the Nazi occupation of the region, the then Soviet Government decided to dissolve the Kalmykia Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic on 27th December 1943. There was a mass deportation of ethnic Kalmyk people from the Republic to the Siberian regions of Altai, Krasnoyarsk, Omsk and other areas. Within just three days, more than 70,000 Kalmyks moved out of their homes, most of them Buddhists. It was only on 9 January 1957 that the Supreme Soviet decided to restore justice and reestablished the Kalmyk Oblast and arranged for the return of more than 72,000 Kalmyks to their homeland. The Oblast was later upgraded

to a full-fledged republic in July 1958. The author had the opportunity to interview one devout Buddhist called Ms. Nadezhda Mondrunovna Ubushaeva (79) in Elista, capital of Kalmykia on 21st February 2023. Her parents were one of such families who fled their homes at the end of 1943 and returned only in 1958. Ms. Ubushaeva was born in exile in Altai in May 1944. As a devout Buddhist, she only took it as her *Karma*. But those survivors are real witnesses of suffering by the Buddhists during those days and proves the resilience of the Russian Buddhists in the most difficult of periods.

Revival and Modern Realities

The late 1980s brought about a period of restoration. Buddhist institutions began to be rebuilt, religious literature was translated, new monks were trained, and connections were re-established with Buddhist centers outside of Russia. Communities of lay Buddhists, including women's groups, began to flourish. The international relations of Russian Buddhists with Tibet, India, Nepal and other countries flourished again.

As a result of this revival, Buddhism is now recognized as one of Russia's traditional religions, alongside Orthodox Christianity and Islam. By 2024, there were 269 registered Buddhist organizations, mostly lay Buddhist centers. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and its centralized religious administration, Buddhism became increasingly divided along ethnic and national lines. The largest organization is the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia which is led by Khambo Lama Damba Ayushev. Similarly, the Central Spiritual Administration of Buddhists is led by Geshe Ionten Gelung, who is a monk from Kalmykia. In Tuva, there is the Union of Buddhists of Tuva. Although various schools of Buddhism and Buddhists in various regions are interpreting and practicing Buddhism in their own unique ways, they have a united aim of promoting Buddhism in Russia.

Buddhism in the Regions

Republic of Buryatia: (Area: 351,300sq Km, Pop: 971,900 Buryats: 32.46%)

The Buryat sangha, under the leadership of Khambo lama Damba Ayushev, expresses the belief that Buryat Buddhism is an independent branch of the religion, distinct from Tibetan Buddhism. The opening of the grave of the 12th Khambo Lama Itigelov in 2002, whose body was found to be remarkably preserved, became a national religious phenomenon and a focal point for Buryat Buddhists. The discovery of a face of the goddess Yanzhima (Skt: Saraswati) in 2005 was interpreted as a sign that the

center of spirituality was shifting northward and gave impetus to local interpretations of faith. The imperishable body of Itigelov, along with the appearance of Saraswati and other relics, have contributed to the creation of a new sacred geography and history, connecting Buryatia directly with ancient India and Nepal bypassing Tibet.

Here the author's own experience during a day-long exchange of ideas held on 1st October 2022 with reverend Khambo Lama Ayusheev is worth mentioning. After exchanging experiences of long Buddhist traditions among Newar Buddhists in Nepal, I also mentioned the recent revival of Theravada Buddhism in Nepal. After a deep thought, he noted that the Mongoloid Buddhists of Nepal, that is the Newar Buddhists and the Buryat Buddhists have a long blood relation. Throughout history, Buryat Buddhists have been taking Nepal as a holy land of Buddha and Lumbini, Swayambhu and Boudhanath (Jarung Kashor) as most sacred places for pilgrimage. Following the second international Buddhist Forum in August 2023, a cooperation agreement was signed between the Buryat State University and Lumbini Buddhist University. Similarly, the capital of Buryatia Ulan Ude had already established sister city relations with Lalitpur municipality of Nepal. All of these developments helped in fulfilling the wish of the Buddhists of Russia to establish direct relations with their fellow devotees Nepal.

Republic of Kalmykia: (Area: 74,700 Sq Km, Pop: 266,900, Kalmyks: 62.47%)

Kalmyks have historically maintained strong ties to Tibet. With only Buddhist majority entity in the entire Europe it had to go through many ups and downs during the Czar rule also. But the Soviet repression of ethnic Kalmyk people in 1943 was one of the worst attacks against Buddhism in Russian history. Even after the restoration of Kalmyk Republic in 1958, the open practice of Buddhism could be rarely seen being practiced here during the Soviet time. (unlike Buryatia, which was the only region where such practice was allowed). With the liberalisation in 1980s and establishment of Russian federation in 1990s, Buddhism developed quite fast in Kalmykia. There are more than 30 temples and monasteries (Khuruls) and the Golden Abode of Shakyamuni built in 2005 in capital Elista is the largest Buddhist temple in Europe and it represents the symbolic centre of Kalmyk Buddhist identity.

Republic of Tuva: (Area: 168,600 Sq Km, Pop: 337500, Tyvans: 88.66%)

Buddhism in Tuva coexisted with the local shamanistic tradition. The early 1920s saw the beginning of a period of violent persecution and destruction. As Tuva joined the Soviet Union only in 1944, the strong Shamanist link of Buddhism here

had given it a unique position. The Tuvan language spoken in the republic is linked to Turkic group of languages. From the Sinjiang Uighur autonomous region of China to all 5 central Asian countries, where Turkic language is spoken, almost all the former Buddhists had converted into Islam over the historical period. However, In Tuva, they have maintained the Buddhist tradition for centuries.

On 28th April 2023, a new 56 metres tall Buddhist temple was inaugurated in the capital Kyzyl. It was given the name of Tubten Shedrub Ling (Klasanova 01). This monastery was assigned a chief protector in the form of Mahakala, as per the advice of high priests. The Mahakala deity was specially crafted in Nepal (Guzeva 05) and transported to Kyzyl for the consecration in the temple.

Republic of Altai (Area:92,900 Sq Km, Pop: 210,700, Altais: 37.01%)

This mountainous republic bordering China, Mongolia and Kazakhstan boasts of large tracts of nature reserves. The Altaian ethnic people also speak Turkic language and they had traditionally followed what they called Burkhanism, which combines aspects of Shamanism with Buddhism and Orthodox Christianity. (Terentyev 01) From 1980s onward Buddhism proper started reviving in the region. There are five religious organisations of the Gelug Tibetan Buddhism in the republic and together they have also system of Hambo Lama as with other Buddhist regions.

Lay Buddhist Communities

Beyond the historically established ethnic-based organizations, many lay Buddhist communities have emerged across Russia. There is an increasing trend of non-ethnic Russian disciples of Buddhism in recent times. These groups often gather around a specific teacher or temple and represent individuals who have consciously adopted Buddhism in adulthood. Many of the Buddhist Associations follow Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. Similarly, there are groups of *Karma* Kagyu tradition and other minor groups. More recently, theravada Buddhists have also come up in Russia.

These groups are actively involved in teaching Buddhist theory, practice, translation, publishing, and charitable works. These lay communities are considered the driving force of Buddhism in contemporary Russia, uniting educated, active, and motivated followers. It is through these lay communities that a lot of new literature is produced, and numerous events organized. In addition, there are Vajrayana Buddhism traditions, other Mahayana traditions, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese schools, as well as Theravada Buddhism, are also present in Russia,

reflecting a growing diversity in the Russian Buddhist landscape.

The federal government is found to have followed the multi-ethnic policy and allowed religious freedom. The visit of the then President Medvedev to Ivolginsky Datsan, Ulan Ude in 2009 and the visit of President Putin to Thubden Shedrub Ling monastery, Kyzyl in September 2024 have made further positive impact on the Buddhist tradition of Russia.

Linkages with Nepal

King Songtsen Gampo (618-649 CE) is traditionally credited with introducing Buddhism to Tibet. Since Buddhism was already widely practiced in Nepal during the period, it can be said that his marital relation with Nepali princess Bhrikuti played a role in bringing Buddhism from Nepal to Tibet. As mentioned earlier, Tibetan Buddhism was introduced to Russia much later. This linkage of Buddhism from Nepal to Tibet and from there to Mongolia and Russia leaves room for further exploration for the Buddhist linkage between Russia and Nepal. Although there are many stories of Buryat and Kalmyk Buddhists making pilgrimage to Tibet, it could not be established so far that any of them ever visited Nepal before 20th century. One of the reasons for such absence of direct exchange between two countries could be the closure of Nepal for foreigners during the Rana rule (1846-1950). Only exception to this was the visit of the famous Russian Orientalist Ivan P. Minaev (1840-1890) to Kathmandu Valley in 1875, as he had obtained a permit from none other than Prime minister Jung Bahadur Rana himself (Minaev 177). Minaev had also travelled to India and Sri Lanka during this period. For his field studies in South Asia, he visited the region several times afterwards but could not revisit Nepal again. That left his Nepalese Buddhist studies unfinished. The unfinished work was later continued by his two prominent pupils, Sergey Oldenburg (1863-1934) and Fyodor Stcherbatsky (1866-1942). Minaev had also published his detailed account of his Nepal travel (Minaev 165). Oldenburg had written about important Nepali Buddhist artwork of 9th and 11th centuries in his paper titled “some comments on Nepali miniature arts” (Shrestha 11). Stcherbatsky was famous for his seminal work on Buddhist logic, where he had made abundant use of Nepalese Buddhist texts collected by Minaev.

When the Institute of Oriental Studies was established in St. Petersburg in 1818, it had already focused on Buddhist studies. It was only natural that for an in-depth study of Buddhist studies, delving on the Nepalese Buddhist studies and practices become imperative, as this country stands out as only place where Buddhism survived

the fatal attacks by its enemies over the entire south Asia since the 13th century. It must be with this realisation that in 1875, prominent Sanskrit specialist Minaev visited Kathmandu valley mainly to study the people's religious life. (Rebecchini 1371) He learned the local language Nepal Bhasa and made conscientious notes on grammar of this language, as he was also preparing to compile a dictionary of Nepal Bhasa. (Shrestha 05). During this author's visit to the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg on 17 June 2023, he witnessed the preserved copies of very conscientious notes taken by Minaev in Nepal Bhasa. Also preserved among the manuscripts were 18th and 19th century Thyasafoo copies of Tantra Akhyana, Basundhara brata and Betalbansa Bimasati from the Kathmandu valley (Photos in the annex).

The next notable fact was the invitation sent by the Nepal government to the USSR in 1956 to participate in the Fourth Conference of World Buddhist Federation (WBF) in Nepal. They accepted it and decided that henceforth the USSR will affiliate with the WBF and a delegation participated in the conference held in Kathmandu in November 1956. (Andreyev & Garri 60). In the conference attended by Soviet delegates, Indian intellectual Dr. Ambedkar repeatedly referred to the USSR when he was giving a speech about comparative study of Buddhism and communism. He even made an ominous reference about the fate of communism in USSR. The participation of Soviet Union in the conference in Nepal seemed to indicate two specific developments. First, the Soviet government was seeking to mend its ways from the past mistake of persecution against Buddhists as in the case of Kalmykia and secondly, they wanted to revive the Buddhist linkage with Nepal along with the establishment of diplomatic relation between two countries on 20 July 1956. The Soviet delegation included the then Khambo Lama Sharabov Bandido of Buryatia (Amritananda 76).

In the course of the conference, the Soviets invited Nepal's prominent Bhikku Amritanda to visit the USSR. His visit to the USSR in November 1959, particularly the Buryatia visit, became a big event because of historical reasons. According to the memoirs of Amritanda, he was almost mobbed by the devotees during his visit to Buryatia, as there was an unprecedented turnout to welcome the Buddhist monk from the Buddha's birthplace. (78). The Buddhist activities in USSR increased after the liberalization since 1986 and it further developed after the establishment of the Russian Federation in 1991. Meanwhile, the exchange of Buddhist delegations between two countries continued till now. One of the most recent examples were the continuous participation of the Nepalese Buddhist delegations in the international Buddhist

Seminars held in Ulan Ude, the capital of Buryatia in 2023 and 2024. During the latest visit of Buddhist delegation to Russia in August 2024, the Lumbini Buddhist University signed cooperation agreement with Buryat State University, which opened more vistas for Buddhist academic cooperation between two countries.

Most Buddhist temples in Russia have on display Buddhist sutras such as Om Mani Padme Hum and Ha Chhe Ma La Wa Ra Yem in Nepal's national script the Ranjana script. Similarly, in Kizhinga Datsan of Buryatia, a 12 meter tall replica of Bouddha Nath can be seen (Klasanova 01). As per Tibetan tradition, it is called Jarung Khashor which is believed by the locals as the wish fulfilling Chaitya. More importantly, a replica of Gunzechoinei Datsan of St. Petersburg is currently being built in Lumbini. This magnificent Russian temple in Lumbini was started in 2023 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2025. Building of these sacred edifices and exchange of Buddhist art and artifacts together with the regular pilgrimage between the two countries have strengthened the Buddhist linkage between each other even further.

Conclusion

Buddhism in Russia is a complex phenomenon with deep historical roots. From its early beginnings in Buryatia and Kalmykia, it has navigated political and cultural complexities, enduring periods of state support and brutal repression. The resurgence of Buddhism in the 1950s and more significantly in the post-Soviet era has seen the establishment of new institutions and the flourishing of lay communities. While divided along ethnic and national lines, Russian Buddhism has demonstrated the capacity to adapt, innovate, and remain a vibrant spiritual force. The unique contexts of Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva offer a fascinating study into the different forms that Buddhism takes in Russia. The emergence of lay-led communities, engaging with both historical traditions and modern developments, show the resilience and continuing evolution of Buddhism in this part of the world. The scholarly interest shown by the Russian social scientists and Buddhist practitioners in learning from the Nepalese Buddhist traditional knowledge and practices had greatly helped in building the friendly cultural linkage between two countries much before the establishment of diplomatic relations. Although evidences could not be found about the Nepalese contact of people like Agvan Dorzhiev who had a protracted residence in Tibet, the presence of Nepalese Buddhist texts in various parts of Russia, showed the long standing Buddhist linkages between two countries.

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(Cited Regional Population data including ethnic compositions were taken from the Russian Official website of 2024 <https://council.gov.ru>)