

The Expansion of Buddhism from India to Nepal Himalaya and Beyond

Authors : Umesh Regmi

Abstract : This paper explores the expansion of Buddhism from India geographically to the Himalayan region of Nepal, Tibet, India, and Bhutan in chronological historical sequence. The Buddhism practiced in Tibet is the spread of the Mahayana-Vajrayana form appropriately designed by Indian Mahasiddhas, who were the practitioners of the highest form of tantra and meditation. Vajrayana Buddhism roots in the esoteric practices incorporating the teachings of Buddha, mantras, dharanis, rituals, and sadhana for attaining enlightenment. This form of Buddhism spread from India to Nepal after the 5th Century AD and Tibet after the 7th century AD and made a return journey to the Himalayan region of Nepal, India, and Bhutan after the 8th century. The first diffusion of this form of Buddhism from India to Nepal and Tibet is partially proven through Buddhist texts and the archaeological existence of monasteries historically and at times relied on mythological traditions. The second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet was institutionalized through the textual translations and interpretations of Indian Buddhist masters and their Tibetan disciples and the establishment of different monasteries in various parts of Tibet, later resulting in different schools and their traditions: Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, Gelug, and their sub-schools. The first return journey of Buddhism from Tibet to the Himalayan region of Nepal, India, and Bhutan in the 8th century is mythologically recorded in local legends of the arrival of Padmasambhava, and the second journey in the 11th century and afterward flourished by many Indian masters who practiced continuously till date. This return journey of Tibetan Buddhism has been intensified after 1959 with the Chinese occupation of Tibet, resulting in the Tibetan Buddhist masters living in exile in major locations like Kathmandu, Dharmasala, Dehradun, Sikkim, Kalimpong, and beyond. The historic-cultural-critical methodology for the recognition of the qualities of cultural expressions analysis presents the Buddhist practices of the Himalayan region, explaining the concepts of Ri (mountain as spiritual symbols), yul-lha (village deities), dhar-lha (spiritual concept of mountain passes), dharchhog-lungdhar (prayer flags), rig-sum gonpo (small stupas), Chenresig, asura (demi gods), etc. Tibetan Buddhist history has preserved important textual and practical aspects of Vajrayana from Buddhism historically in the form of arrival, advent, and development, including rising and fall. Currently, Tibetan Buddhism has influenced a great deal in the contemporary Buddhist practices of the world. The exploratory findings conducted over seven years of field visits and research in the Himalayan regions of Nepal, India, and Bhutan have demonstrated the fact that Buddhism in the Himalayan region is a return journey from Tibet and lately been popularized globally after 1959 by major monasteries and their Buddhist masters, lamas, nuns and other professionals, who have contributed in different periods of time.

Keywords : Buddhism, expansion, Himalayan region, India, Nepal, Bhutan, return, Tibet, Vajrayana Buddhism

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