

***Thangka* and Mural Paintings in Sikkim since the 18th Century**

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To

Sikkim University



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Degree of Master of Philosophy**

By

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I, **Nirnay Tamang**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or, to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/Institute. This is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Philosophy in the Department of History, School of Social Science.

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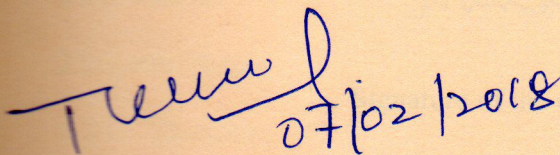
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled "*Thangka and Mural Paintings in Sikkim since the 18th Century*" submitted to Sikkim University in partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Philosophy in the Department of History, embodies the result of bonafide research work carried out by Mr. Nirnay Tamang under my guidance and supervision. No part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other Degree, Diploma, Association, and fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by him.

I recommend this dissertation to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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“Thangka and Mural Paintings in Sikkim since the 18th Century”

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CONTENT

	Page NO.
Acknowledgement	11
List of Figures	22
List of Plates	33-
List of Tables	44
CHAPTER- 1 Introduction	
1.1: Statements of Thesis	
1.2: Review of Literature	
1.3: Objective of the study	
1.4: Research methodology	
1.5: Chapterization	
CHAPTER- 2 Beginning of <i>Thangka</i> and Mural Painting in Sikkim	
2.1: <i>Thangka</i> and mural paintings in Sikkim	
2.2.1: Early Phase	
2.2.2: <i>Thangkas</i>	
2.2.3: Murals	
2.2: Later Phase	
2.2.1: <i>Thangkas</i>	
2.2.2: Murals	
CHAPTER-3 Methods and Techniques	
3.1: Methods and Techniques in <i>Thangkas</i>	
3.1.1: Preliminary Methods	
3.1.2: Proper paintings	
3.1.3: Mounting	

3.1.4: Consecrating

3.2: Methods and Techniques in Murals

3.3: Styles in paintings

CHAPTER-4 Themes and Representation

4.1: Symbols

4.1.1: Colours

4.1.2: Tantric and Non-Tantric Symbols

4.2: Themes

4.2.1: Religious Themes

4.2.1.1: Wheel of Life

4.2.1.2L Sixteen *Arhats*

4.2.2: Secular Themes

CHAPTER-5 Conclusion

Appendix I: Mudras (Symbolic Hand Poses)

II: Mudras (Symbolic Hand Poses)

III: Symbols

IV: Symbols

V: Symbols

VI: Symbols

VII: Symbols

VIII: Symbols

IX: Symbols

X: Symbols

Bibliography

LIST OF ILLUSTRATION

- Plate -1: *White Tara*, Traditional Art School, Gangtok, 1960s.
- Plate- 2: *Jatsun Ningpo*, private collection, Gangtok, 1940s.
- Plate- 3: *White Tara*, private collection, Gangtok, 1940s.
- Plate -4: *Guru Padmasambhava*, Dbdi Monastery, West Sikkim, 18th century.
- Plate-5: *Tshong-shing*, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 1825.
- Plate-6: Unknown title, Dubdi Monastery, West Sikkim, 1950s.
- Plate-7: Unknown title, Pemiongchi Monastery, West Sikkim, 1950s.
- Plate-8: Unknown title, Ralang Monastery, South Sikkim, 1940s.
- Plate-9: *Three images of Trikaya*, Peling Gonpa, Sittong II, Darjeeling, 1830s.
- Plate-10: *Guru Padmasambhava*, Peling Gonpa, Sittong II, Darjeeling, 1930s.
- Plate-11: *Image of Trikaya*, Peling Gonpa, Sittong II, Darjeeling, 1930s.
- Plate-12: Unknown title, Peling Gonpa, Sittong II, Darjeeling, 1930s.
- Plate-13: *Sixteen Arhats*, D. H. H., Gangtok, 1960s.
- Plate-14: Series 1. *Se-tho*, Linthem Monastery, North Sikkim, 1970s.
- Plate-15: Series 2. *Se-tho*, Linthem Monastery, North Sikkim, 1970s.
- Plate-16: Series 3. *Se-tho*, Linthem Monastery, North Sikkim, 1970s.
- Plate-17: Series 4: *Se-tho*, Linthem Monastery, North Sikkim, 1970s.
- Plate-18: Series 5. *Se-tho*, Linthem Monastery, North Sikkim, 1970s.
- Plate-19: *Lhatchung Chembo*, Pemiongchi Monastery, West Sikkim, 1968.
- Plate-20: *Wheel of Life*, Dubdi Monastery, West Sikkim, 1945.
- Plate-21: *Ajanta Hall*, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 1960s.
- Plate-22: *Portrait of Buddha*, Traditional Art School, Gangtok.
- Plate-23: *Portrait of Padmasambhava*, Traditional Art School. Gangtok.

Plate-24: Unknown title, Pemiongchi Monastery, West Sikkim, 1968.

Plate-25: *Wheel of Life*, Dharmachakra Monastery, Rumtek, 1960s.

Plate-26: *Wheel of Life*, Old Rumtek monastery, Rumtek.

Plate-27: *Wheel of Life*, Pemiongchi Monastery, West Sikkim, 1968.

Plate-28: Series 1. *Sixteen Arhats*, D. H. H., Gangtok.

Plate-29: Series 2. *Sixteen Arhats*, D. H. H., Gangtok.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure No. 1: Sachiling Gonpa, Sittong II, Darjeeling, 1839.

Figure No. 2: Three images of *Trikaya*, Sachiling Gonpa, Sittong II, Darjeeling, 1839.

Figure No. 3: Wooden Pillars of Old Sachiling Gonpa, removed during its renovation in 2011.

Figure No. 4: Peling Gonpa, Sittong II, Darjeeling, 1930s.

LIST OF TABLES

Table No. 01: List of Monasteries.

Table No. 02: *Trikaya* system.

Table No. 03: List of Symbols.

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Painting is one of the medium to express the socio- economic, cultural, religious and political life of society. In Sikkim mainly there are two types of paintings viz, *thangka* and mural, both of them were produced by Buddhist religion particularly *Ningma Pa* sect. The word '*thangka*' is derived from Tibetan language which means "annals" or "recorded Message".¹The word *Dhibri* used by painters in Tibetan language means "Wall paintings" to denote murals which painted in the wall and ceiling of the monastery. The history of *thangka* and Mural paintings of Sikkim has its roots and relationship with the migration of Tibetans from Tibet to Sikkim since thirteenth century onwards (especially with the establishment of Namgyal Dynasty in 1642.²When they came into the Sikkim they also brought their Buddhist tradition and culture as well as *thangkas* (which are considered as sacred by Tibetan Buddhism) with them and continued their tradition. But in Sikkim, practically *thangka* and Mural paintings had come into existence only when they began to establish monasteries. Hence, *thangka* and Mural paintings also had its connection with the monasteries so it is vital to study the patronage of paintings by the monasteries in order to locate the history of *thangka* and the mural paintings in Sikkim.

Thangka as a separate style of painting originated and evolved in Tibet. With the passage of time, cultural emigration of Tibetans can be seen in Sikkim, which is clearly displayed in the art of *thangka* painting. Hence, Sikkim tradition of *thangka* and wall paintings was started much later i.e., with the coming of Tibetans from Tibet into Sikkim probably thirteen century onwards. The importance of *thangka* and mural paintings in Sikkim had been realized and became more valuable when the Buddhism became a state religion in Sikkim. These paintings basically depict themes of the Ningma Pa sect of Buddhism (originated in Tibet and proliferated into Sikkim).Sakyamuni Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Ningma Pa Buddhist deities, landscape, birds and animals are common

¹ Ann Shaftel, "Notes on the technique of Tibetan Thangkas", *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1986, p. 97

² J. R Subba, *History, Culture and Customs of Sikkim*, Gyan Publication House, New Delhi, 2008, p. 22

themes of both *thangkas* and mural paintings. In Sikkim, there are *thangkas* which probably belonged to more than two century old and are available in some monasteries, for instance, the *thangka* of Guru Padmasambhava from the Dubdi monastery was not produced by painter from Sikkim, rather it was directly brought from Tibet or painted by Tibetan painter who was invited by the king of Sikkim during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. So, this shows that during that point of time patronization of artists from Tibet were seen and it was because of the cultural closeness of Sikkim with Tibet. Champa Tashi Lharipa U Chenmo, a court artist of the Panchen Lama was one who worked in Sikkim during the last decade of nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.³ At present some of his works i.e. *thangka* and mural paintings are available in Palace Gonpa of Sikkim.⁴ He was known as *Chimola* (in Bhutia language it means teacher) of Rinzing Lharipa who was the first artist from Sikkim. Rig zing Lharipa painted many *thangkas* as well as murals in the wall of monasteries of Sikkim during the first half of the twentieth century. During his lifetime, he had painted number of *thangkas* and murals which are still found in some private collection as well as in some Institutions and monasteries (Plate 1). After the death of Rig Zing Lhadripa, one of his students Ganden Lharipa carried and continued the tradition of *thangka* and mural paintings in Sikkim in the second half of the twentieth century

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, in Sikkim, the art of *thangka* painting was mostly predominant by the Tibetan painters but with the coming of twentieth century the visibility of the Tibetan painters was dwindled and the rise of local painters can be visible distinctly. At present availability of *thangkas* and murals can be classified into two phase for the convenience of the study. The first two centuries could be seen as the predominance of Tibetan artists who were probably brought into Sikkim to produce *thangkas* and murals by that time. Most of these skilled painters from Tibet were patronized by monasteries and the king of Sikkim. This phase was started with the construction of Buddhist temples in Sikkim until the times of Champa Tashi Lharipa U Chenmo, the last Tibetan *thangka* painter and a teacher of Rinzing Lharipa. The second

³Anna Balikci Denjongoa, "Ringzinglharipa Lama (1917-1977) and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology's Ajanta Hall", *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 49, No.2, ,2013, p.68.

⁴ Old murals and *Thangkas* of the palace monastery in Gangtok are still seen and preserved by the Government of Sikkim.

phase begins with the works of Rinzing Lharipa who was the first *thangka* painter from Sikkim belonged to the first half of the twentieth century. During his times he painted murals in more than a dozen monasteries which are still found in some monasteries of Sikkim. The second half of the same century witness the major works of local artists like Ganden Lharipa one of the students of former painter. During this phase, the style and techniques are distinctly visible with the development of the skills of the local artist in their works.

Apart from *thangkas*, mural paintings were also prominent in Sikkim and depicted on the walls and ceilings of every monastery, with the similar themes and iconography like landscape, animals, birds, mythological characters etc. as depicted in *thangkas*. The arrangement of mural paintings in monastery was determined by the structure, shape and size or architectural design and location of the monastery. Tradition of mural paintings in monasteries of Sikkim like *thangka* paintings was also derived from Tibet. When the king of Sikkim with the help of Lachen Chempo established the first monastery in West Sikkim in 1701 A.D, the existence of mural paintings can also be seen from that point of time.

The retrieval of perfect mural painting is a difficult task so most of them are severely damaged in many monasteries because of various reasons hence repaint and coloring over the old paintings of the wall and ceiling had been done many times. There are some old monasteries such as Enchey Gonpa, Dharma Chakra Gonpa, Karma Thuje Choling Gonpa in East Sikkim, Dubdi Gonpa, Pemyongchi Gonpa in West Sikkim, Phodong Gonpa in North Sikkim and Tashi Palding Gonpa, Ngadag Gonpa in South Sikkim which still bears the witness of old murals in Sikkim.

Regarding styles and techniques of *thangka* and mural paintings in Sikkim mainly the artists had been followed the new sMen-ri style which was predominantly Tibetan one. The materials used in paintings such as mud colors, cloths, gold ornamentation in paintings, dyes etc. were also followed to its predecessor. Observation on the materials used by Indigenous painters from the twentieth century onwards it revealed that they had been using cotton cloths, mud colours and brushers available from the adjacent markets, which were most probably of Indian production. Though, there were many similarities in

the works of both the Tibetan artists and the artists from Sikkim who produced *thangkas* and murals from eighteenth century to twentieth century in Sikkim.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many art historian and scholars have already worked on the history of *thangka* and Mural paintings of Tibet but as far as regarding the history of *thangka* and mural painting in Sikkim, particularly socio-religious as well as aesthetic aspects of it, no such work has found so far. Here, are some books and articles which talks about many aspects of *thangka* that I have reviewed.

Suguna Sarma, in her book *The Tibetan Thangka*, has mentioned many aspects of Tibetan *thangka* such as techniques, theme of paintings, depiction of mandalas or ritual diagrams, figures of Buddha and Bodhisattvas and so on. She also shortly described about Lamaism that practices in Tibet as well as mentioned the different sects of Tibetan Buddhism (Ningma pa, Sakya pa, Gheluk pa, and Kargu pa), and gives list of some Buddhist monasteries that established in different times in different places of Tibet. In short, she tried to describe *thangkas*, mentioned in that book, such as figure, position and gesture, arrangement of themes etc. However, she did not mentioned about the culture and aesthetic aspects of *thangka* of Sikkim or even of Tibet, which those *thangka* would have reflected.

Nirmal C. Sinha, in his book *Tales the Thankas Tell*, describes *thangka* is a religious art form which is considered as sacred by believers. He has mentioned about the colors, particularly five colors that used in *thangka* and its importance in Tibetan Buddhism. He has described about Guru Padmasambhava and his preaching of Dharma in Tibet. Though, he did not talked neither about cultural nor aesthetic aspects of *thangka*. It only gives glimpse of religious aspect though, which lacked to carry the significance of religion on the culture and its influence to the people of Sikkim.

Ann Shaftel, in her article *Notes on Thangkas*, talks lot of things regarding *thangka*. Major part of this article discuss of all about techniques that requires while preparing

thangka, for instance, support and ground, measurement and layout of canvas, charcoal sketch and so on, which is very essential to know to understand the *thangka*. In short, she says that it is strongly regional in character, and both style and technique are determined by the place of origin. However, this article does not talk anything about the culture and aesthetic aspects of the *thangka*.

Sjoerd De Vries, in his article *The Development of the Prabhamandala in Early Tibetan Art*, talks about the development and changes in the Prabhamandala, the back support of the throne on which the deity of define person is seated or standing, together with the triumphal arch on top of it. In this article, he only focused on the stylistic development of the complicated composition, not profound symbolism. Moreover, he talks the influences in art of Tibet that comes from India (Pala art style) and Nepal (Newari art style) in Prabhamandala for which he gives the example of the famous *thangka* of the Green Tara (at present in the Cleveland Museum), where the mixture of two style appeared in the Prabhamandala, and inner decoration are in Pala style and outer decoration are of Newari Style. He says that classical Indian types of Prabhamandala served as prototype of Tibetan one. Later on, slight changes and modification in Prabhamandala could be noticed in Tibetan one. Therefore, this article did not talked anything about the art and aesthetic as well as socio-religious aspect of *thangka* of Sikkim.

Isabelle Onians, in her article *Tantric Buddhism and Aesthetic: Art and Morality*, says that it is very essential to know about the aesthetic values and principal in order to understand Tantric Buddhism. She talks Rasa theory of Indian dramaturgical text *Natyasastra* found in the practice of Tantric Buddhism, giving the example of two things, Secret (*guhyabhiseka*) and Wisdom (*prajnanajanabhiseka*) and both of which involve sexual intercourse. Moreover, she applies the aesthetic theories, Indian as well as Western, to understand the Tantric Buddhism through the study of iconography and symbolism that reflected in the *thangka* and mural in Tibet. However, this article did not talk anything about *thangka* and mural paintings of Sikkim.

Nirmal C. Sinha, in his book *Sangs- Rgyas Stong*, tried to gives general idea about Tibetan Buddhism for which he illustrate important key words used in Buddhism. Most of the key words are translated from Sanskrit (Indian term) into Tibetan and explained in

English as well. Author gives short list of dates and events related to Buddhist religion. In this book, author described symbols (*Pratika*) used in Buddhism which is essential in order to understand Buddhism that followed in Tibet. Here he also described form of Buddha (Buddha *Rupa*) with the help of various literary works produced in Indian sub-continent in ancient and medieval times. He talks about the Buddha and his philosophical teachings that expounded by various Buddhist teachers in various points of times. In addition, he describes Buddha as enlightenment and has much form one of them was Sakyamuni Buddha or mundane Buddha. Here he illustrated picture of many Bodhisattvas and Buddhas as well as of Tara with little description on her (poetry dedicated to Tara in Tibetan and translation in English). Author also tried to explain about the idea of *Tantra* absolute vogue in Tantrism in the Tibetan Buddhism.

Indo-Tibetan School of Art and Architecture in the Western Himalayas, is an article written by Marialaura Di Mattia, is a comparative stylistic study of western Himalayas art and architecture. In this article, scholar tried to project influence of different cultures from surrounding western Himalayas region, particularly of Indian sub- continent into its art and architecture. He says that religion and political background of Western Himalayas region was obscure before the second diffusion of Buddhism (*Bstan pa phyidar*). Again he says that diffusion of Buddhism is evidence by literary sources, are dated second half of the Tenth century or early eleventh century. He says that Western Himalayas had no trace to define 'Buddhism' before Second Diffusion and cultural atmosphere would have been mainly animistic with some scattered pocket of syncretistic cult. From the geographical point of view, it is situated in such a manner that through which pilgrimage (Hindu, Bon Po, Buddhist) moves to Mount Kailash, led to synthesis of cultures with its local. Historically Western Himalayan territories loosely controlled by Bon Chen Po, the Great Tibetan kingdom, had been in contact with India since Kushana period. He argued that these factors gradually shaped cultural background for further development of Buddhist culture over this land. He says Guge kingdom in third region flourished philosophical debate, riding school of translation and communicator, school of painters, sculptors and architects, hence became centre of attraction for artist, scholars, pilgrimage from Greater Tibet and north India. Therefore, due to cultural mingle among Tibetan

world and Indian Buddhism led to formulation of Indo-Tibetan style, associating all the temples of the Second Diffusion.

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the beginning and the development of *thangka* and mural paintings in Sikkim.
- To scrutinize the techniques and methods used in *thangka* and mural paintings of Sikkim.
- To study the subject matter of the paintings, which includes themes, figures, and iconography, landscape scenes, which were depicted in the *thangka* and mural paintings of Sikkim of that particular times.

METHODOLOGY

For the present research work, visual observation and examination of paintings on the basis of Art-based historical research methodology have applied. To study and locate the history of paintings of Sikkim it is necessary to pursue the historical context related to it and for which the collection of primary and secondary sources, like images of paintings, inscriptions, article and books are used for concern work. Regarding the collection of primary sources like images of paintings, visiting to some institutions, monasteries, individuals and artist, the possible enquiry have thoroughly been done in order to make reliable output of the research within the duration of the present research work Moreover, application of both primary and secondary sources in the work through the interpretation as well as cross checking of the sources have done enormously with the perspective of visual narrative research during the writing research work.

CHAPTERIZATION

In the first chapter basically, it cover the introduction and justification of the research topic ‘*thangka* and mural paintings of Sikkim since Eighteen century’ which consist the Statement of the Problem, Review of literature, Objectives of the study, methodology and

Chapterization. Attempt has been made to clarify the meaning of the term “*thangka*” and to trace the origin of this tradition of painting before it appeared in Sikkim.

The second chapter dealing with how and when the tradition of *thangka* and mural paintings had came into existence in Sikkim. In this chapter, attempt has been made to highlight the connection and the influence of Tibetan Buddhism in the paintings with establishing the fact that the relation between Tibet and Sikkim had been going well since the establishment of the Namgyal Dynasty in Sikkim. The chapter also discuss about the painters who were commissioned to produce *thangka* and murals in the monasteries of Sikkim during that particular times.

In chapter three, the application of methods, techniques, skills and other artistic works are discussed in detailed with separately for both *thangka* and mural paintings. This chapter also talks about the materials used by painters that from where they obtained them during that particular times. In this chapter, basically discuss that what kind of techniques and methods had been using by artists to produce *thangka* and mural paintings during that times. In this chapter, attempt has been made to show the connection and influence of Tibetan art styles which were replicated in the previous works of the indigenous painters and later on they shown their own style in this tradition of painting.

In chapter four, though it deals with the themes and representation in the paintings it also shows certain clues that make the sense having connection with the former chapter. In fact, this tradition of paintings has been working as a medium of expression to expose the ideas and philosophy of Vajrayana Buddhism since earlier times and here attempt has been made to show that how Buddhism and this tradition of paintings became identical for each other in the course of times. The chapter also consist with the description of symbols, representation and themes of the paintings as well.

The chapter five is consisted with the main ideas and output of the present research work as conclusion. It is the summary of all chapters with highlighting their specific features and generalizing the concept and theory of the present research work.



Plate- 1: White Tara (thangka), Traditional Art School, Gangtok, 1940s

BEGINNING OF *THANGKA* AND MURAL PAINTINGS IN SIKKIM

The history of *thangka* and mural paintings of Sikkim began with the advent of the Tibetan Buddhism in Sikkim. When the King, *Chogyal Phuntsuk Namgyal* declare Tibetan Buddhism as a national religion of Sikkim¹ it spread rapidly among the native communities like Bhutias and Lepchas. Popularity of the Tibetan Buddhism in Sikkim could be notice from the beginning of the eighteen century that many Buddhist monasteries had been established in different parts of the Sikkim. Dubdi, Pemiongchi, Ralang, Rinchinpong, Lachung, Entchi, Tashiding and many other monasteries were established during the eighteenth century. Each of these monasteries had been possesses some set of *thangkas* and mural paintings on the interior walls. It should be noted here that it was a tradition of the Tibetan Buddhism to have such paintings in each of every monasteries (depicted of Buddhist Deities). Images of Deities in such paintings were not created purely for the aesthetic delectation; its primary function was to serve as an icon to be worshipped and as a visual aid to devote in his mediation². Thus the existence of these monasteries witnesses the presence of *thangka* and mural paintings in Sikkim since eighteen century. However, most of these monasteries do not have those old murals at present due to the disaster of frequent earthquakes in Sikkim.

PAINTINGS IN SIKKIM

So far there are no written records available to show the exact date of the beginning of *thangka* and mural paintings in Sikkim. Again none of these paintings bears the name of artist as well as the date. There were two main reasons why the artist does not mentioned their names in *thangkas* or in this type of paintings. First, it is a religious object in the form of a scroll, which is generally used as a teaching device or as an aid to various religious practices.³ *Thangkas* are hung in monasteries, alter at home, and carried in religious procession and so on. Therefore, artist could not mention their personal names in *thangkas* since it is considered as sacred or pure. Secondly, the art of *thangka* painting

¹H.H. Risley, *Gazetteers of Sikkim*, Sikkim Nature Conservation Foundation, Gangtok, 1989, p. 241

²Suguna Sarma, *The Tibetan Thangka*, Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 2002, p. 40

³ Ann Shaftel, *Notes on the Technique of Tibetan Thangkas*, Journal of the American Institute for Conservation, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1986, p. 97

had been carried through inheritance from *thangka* master to his student from very beginning. In fact, most of the *thangka* paintings were replication of earlier work of *thangka* masters, hence there were several copies of the same *thangka* painting produced by new artists in order to learn and preserve this tradition of art. Other than the replication the old *thangkas* there were also new themes and a portrait of the historical figures which could be considered as additional to those old *thangkas*. Depiction of *Chogyal* and his wife in front of the common folks in the mural of Pemiongchi monastery could be considered a new theme in the history of this traditional painting (see Plate-24). Most of the themes in *thangka* paintings were derived from the religious scriptures by *thangka* master in order to make visual form of Deities. Hence, these were the case that why artist did not mentioned their names in *thangkas*.

Framing the time period of paintings available at present in Sikkim begins with the old *thangkas* which had been brought from Tibet. There was no local artist having knowledge of the tradition of making *thangka* for the monasteries of Sikkim. It was only with the first half of the twentieth century the local artists were seen working to produce *thangkas* for the monasteries of Sikkim. Thus, for the convenience of the study, the old *thangkas* and murals brought and produced by Tibetan artists are dominated in the early phase. The later works were produced by indigenous artist that could be considered as later phase.

There are some institutions like Directorate of Handloom and Handcraft (DHH), Traditional Art School (TAR), and Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT), also has old *thangkas* and these paintings are the primary sources that revealed the existence of paintings of their own times. The DHH and the TAR has collection of those *thangkas*, belonged to first half of the twentieth century, and certainly produced by indigenous painters but the NIT has more than fifty *thangkas* and most of them are belong to eighteen- nineteenth century, produced by Tibetan painters. There is some private collection of old *thangkas* which belonged more than eighty years old, for instance, (Plates-2, and 3) are preserved and collected by one of the residence from Gangtok, named Tinlay Ongmu Tashi.

2. 1: EARLY PHASE

During this phase, all the *thangka* and mural paintings works had been done by Tibetan artists. From the time of advent of Buddhism and the establishment of old monasteries in Sikkim to the strengthening the concentration of the Buddhism in different parts of its territory were the main area include during this phase. Hence, the time period of two centuries i.e. eighteenth and nineteenth centuries predominant the works of Tibetan painters are discussed here in this phase.

2. 1.1: THANGKAS

With the close observation among the old *thangkas* available in Sikkim, the portrait of Guru Padmasambhava, one of the prominent expounders of the yogacara school of Tantrism in Tibet⁴ is the oldest one, based on the available paintings at present, which is preserved in the Dubdi monastery of West Sikkim (plate-4). Since it is very old, its physical condition is in very bad shape. Being very old its line drawing or outline of the figure hardly visible with little spot of faded away colours in the painting. It was done on cotton cloth, which is decaying and torn in the top of the right side of the *thangka*. This painting is as old as the monastery itself. The Dubdi monastery in West Sikkim was established under the guidance of Lhatsun Chhenbo, who introduced the Lamaism in Sikkim,⁵ with the help of *Chogyal* Phuntsuk Namgyal, the first monarch of Sikkim, in the year 1701 A.D. During this period the newly established monastery had required *thangkas* to keep in the prayer hall for the religious ceremony and various other purposes.

Now the point is that in order to make available *thangkas* in the monastery at that time the authority of the monastery probably would have brought *thangka* painter either from Tibet to produce *thangka* or brought readily made *thangkas* from Tibet. Again, the question is that was that the *thangka* of Dubdi monastery brought from Tibet at that time? The answer is not clear. With the paucity of documentary, evidence it is not clear whether it was the first and the only *thangka* brought from Tibet for the Dubdi monastery in Sikkim or it was made by the Tibetan painter brought from Tibet to the monastery.

⁴SugunaSarma, Op. cit, p.22

⁵H.H. Risley, *op.cit*, p. 248.

However, at present, it is the only *thangka* which is very old and available in Dubdi. Hence, if it is not brought exactly at that very time then it would have been brought around the same times with difference of some decade at least. So, the *thangka* must belong to the eighteenth century. With the motive of preservation, this *thangka* in the monastery has been kept rolled up and placed in the box of the top floor of the monastery. However, the condition of the *thangka* is so delicate that without the proper scientific preservation and restoration of this old painting will decay very soon and will leave no evidence to witness of its existence.

Namgyal Institute of Tibetology was established by the Royal Charter, during the reign of *Chogyal Tashi Namgyal*, in the year 1958,⁶ with the objective of making a hub of studies on Buddhist teachings and Sikkim centered. The institution has more than fifty old *thangkas* which belonged roughly two hundred years old i.e., nineteenth century A.D. There are some *thangkas* which were directly received from the king *Chogyal Tashi Namgyal* during the establishment time of the Institution.⁷ There are also no records available in order to prove the exact time period of these *thangkas* that whether they belong to two hundred years old or not. However, the distinctive features like the styles and techniques of these *thangkas* which differentiate from the later works of twentieth century. This indicates that these paintings belonged to the nineteenth century or even before. Nevertheless, almost all of these paintings seem very old with its appearance.

There is an old *thangka* (plate-5) titled, *Tsong-kha-pa and the Assembly of the Gelugpa deities*, which seems very old among the other *thangkas* in the gallery of the institution.⁸ This *thangka* itself seems very old and its texture of the background cotton cloth looks extremely old which indicate it belonged back to more than two centuries old. However the pigment in the painting is still so attractive that after approximately two centuries later it still seems good despite some faded in the intensity of its brightness or its dullness. Regarding the historical time period of the painting, it has some limitation

⁶Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, *Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1958-2008*, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 2010, p. 7

⁷ Ibid,

⁸. This *thangka* is preserved in Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and dated the first quarter of 19th century. See. Nirmal C. Sinha, *Tales The Thangkas Tell*, Sikkim Research institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 2004, p.44.

that the material has not been tested through scientific process i.e., chemical testing of the cotton and pigments as well as the historical value of the painting that who painted it and when did it paint. One thing is sure that the detail miniature works with strong and thick application of pigments, its extraordinary style, and old cotton cloth as medium with its silk brocades itself revealed that this work must be produced by a Tibetan master painter of two hundred years back.

Despite this painting many other old *thangkas* are also displayed in the gallery which are made by Tibetans or brought from Tibet to Sikkim are also very old paintings. There are still no evidences discovered to point out that how these paintings had come to the Sikkim in the nineteenth century. The only fact is that according to the information of Namgyal Institute of Tibetology a number of *thangkas* was gifted to the institution by a mother of a young English merchant, John Pierce who had collected them before he died in 1961.⁹ However, there has not been maintained the records of those particular *thangkas* which were given by Royal family. There is a register in the N.I.T which has been maintaining records since very late dated from 1992; where it has mentioned the names of art objects including *thangkas*. However, there has not mentioned the name of artists, place or institution from where the N.I.T had collected these *thangkas*.

Since the institution has been claimed that most of the *thangkas* are old and produced by Tibetan artist, which are displaying in the gallery are as follows;

- 1) *GuruTshengay* (Eight manifestation of Guru Rimpochey)
- 2) *bSam pa Lhan grub* (thirteen manifestation of Guru Padmasambhava), set of seven *thangkas*,
- 3) *SmanLha* (Buddha of Medicine) set of five *thangkas*.
- 4) *Pan chenhrungsRabs* (Life story of Panchen Lama), set of eighteen *thangkas*.
- 5) *Phag pa gnasrtenbcu-drug* (Sixteen Arhats) set of seven *thangkas*.
- 6) *Tshong- Shing* (Assembly of Mahayana Deities)

⁹ Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1958-2008, Op. cit, p. 69

- 7) Gunaprabha and Sakyaprabha.
- 8) Sakyamuni Buddha and so on.
- 9) *SGrol ma* (Tara), two *thangkas*.
- 10) *Jrgs pa rGyad-skyob-ma* (Eight different form of Tara), eight *thangkas*.
- 11) *ston- pa sangsrGyal* (Lord Buddha), two *thangkas*.
- 12) *stonpa 'Itshem-drubkyi*.
- 13) *Tshong-shing*.
- 14) *Ltung-bshags* (thousand Buddha).
- 15) *Zhikhro*.
- 16) *bDechenzhingsGrub* (Amitabha).
- 17) *Sridpa 'Iikhor lo* (wheel of life).
- 18) Three pieces of Chinese brocades *thangkas*.
- 19) *Green Tara*.
- 20) *Ancient eight Indian masters*.
- 21) *Rig izdintshogs shing*.

As already said that there has not been found records of these *thangkas* in N.I.T to locate historical date exactly, however, with the close observation and the study of the styles and composition of these *thangkas* it is seen that these paintings has quite different in its existence from the *thangkas* produced by indigenous artists in the first half of the twentieth century. Though, most of these old *thangkas* that preserved in the gallery of the N.I.T were produced by Tibetan artist, these paintings stands with different styles among themselves. It shows that the painters whoever produced these *thangkas* were belonged two or three different group of styles of their own times.

Despite these above *thangkas*, there are some other *thangkas* which are not much old than that of above mentioned *thangkas*. Among them the *thangka* which was painted by the indigenous painter RizingLharipa is of *Chogyal* of Sikkim in the painting,¹⁰ that probably belong to mid of the twentieth century which will be discussed here in the later phase of the same chapter.

2.1.2: MURALS

Though, mural paintings were the decorative paintings on the walls and ceilings of the monasteries of Sikkim it also represent the Buddhist deities and philosophical iconography related to the Buddhist teachings. Most of the mural paintings on the wall of the monasteries, which at present found in fragmented condition, were also belong at least more than two centuries back. However, themes, representation, materials and the style of paintings were very similar to that of *thangka* paintings. In fact, the same painter could produce both *thangka* as well as murals for the monastery. There are many old monasteries which were established around the second half of the seventeenth century to nineteenth century in Sikkim. However, none of them have mural paintings as old as more than two centuries. In fact, most of these monasteries itself has no original form due to the damages caused by earthquakes. Most of the murals were repainted and reconstructed on the walls of the monasteries.¹¹ They were renovated with new materials like bricks and cements which replaced all the original beauty of the mural paintings. Therefore, witness of those old mural paintings that belonged to the early phase was available only in some of the old monasteries of the Sikkim which were in very pathetic condition. Sikkim has more than a hundred and forties' monasteries in entire Sikkim that includes old and recently constructed monasteries. But only those old monasteries are accountable here to discuss in order to see whether these monasteries had mural paintings or not.

¹⁰The painting is preserved and displayed in the gallery of N.I.T. Gangtok.

¹¹For more detail see- Chetan Raj Shrestha, 'Sikkim's Monastic, Heritage after the Earthquake,' *Bulletin of Tibetology*, vol. 47, No. 1 & 2, 2011, pp. 39-56.

The establishment of the monasteries in Sikkim by the then King was started with the construction of the Dubdi monastery in West Sikkim.¹² So the existence of mural paintings in Sikkim must be started from the construction of the Dubdi monastery as it was the old and the first monastery of the Sikkim which was constructed during the reign of the third *Chogyal Chyakdor Namgyal* of the Sikkim.

Sikkim's first *gonpa* Dubdi is situated in the hill top above Yuksom in West Sikkim.¹³ The witness of the mural paintings from this monastery could be seen the only painted by Rinzing Lharipa in the mid of Twentieth century which still survived in a fragmented condition at present (plate-6). However, the Gonpa was constructed in the year 1701 and since then the wall of the Gonpa possibly would not left blank or without painting of the Deities because it is a tradition of a Buddhist monasteries to have mural painting on the wall of it. Again, it was the first monastery of the Sikkim as well as guided by the Royal authority to construct it. Therefore, there must be mural painting on the wall which probably were ruined in times and hence needed repaint on it which Rinzing Lharipa did in the mid of the Twentieth century.

In this way, there are many old monasteries that they had mural paintings at their own times to witness the existence of mural which at present has no original form due to the damages caused by the earthquake (plate-7). Some of them still have murals at least a century old, with cracks and breaks on the walls (plate-8). These are the old monasteries of Sikkim with their date of establishment:

Table No. 01: List of Monastery.

Sl. No.	Name of monasteries	Year of establishment
1	Sanga Chelling	1697
2	Dubdi	1701
3	Pemiongchi	1705

¹²Gary Chopel, 'Historic Evolution of the Sikkimese Monastery', *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 47, No. 1 & 2, 2011, p. 58.

¹³*Ibid*, p. 58

4	Gantok	1716
5	Tashiding	1716
6	Senan	1716
7	Rinchinpong	1730
8	Ralong	1730
9	Mali	1740
10	Ram thek	1740
11	Cheungtong	1788
12	Lachung	1788
13	Talung	1789
14	Entchi	1840
15	Phensung	1840
16	Kartok	1840
17	Dalling	1840
18	Yangong	1841
19	Labrong	1844
20	Lintse	1850
21	Sinik	1850
22	Ringim	1852
23	Lingthem	1855
24	Lachen	1858
25	Giatong	1860
26	Lingqui	1860
27	Fadie	1862
28	Nabling	1875
29	Namchi	1836
30	Pabia	1875
31	Singtam	1884

Source: H.H. Risley, *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*, Sikkim Natural Conservation Foundation, Gangtok, 1989, pp.256-257.

According to the date of establishment of Gumpa mentioned in *Gazetteer of Sikkim*, Sanga Chelling is four years older than the Dubdi. On the basis of this fact, the first mural paintings in Sikkim were painted in Sanga Cholling. But the tradition believes that during his life time Latchung Chembo had been stayed in the Dubdi monastery from where he managed to supervise the construction of Sanga Chelling monastery. According to oral information, Dubdi monastery is pious and considered as the first monastery of Sikkim from where he conducted all religious performances during his life time.¹⁴ Now if it is considered that the Dubdi was the first monastery which according to Gary Chopel was also considered so¹⁵ then the first mural painting in Sikkim must be considered from the time of the establishment of Dubdi monastery in the year 1701. The Gazetteer itself has mentioned that "...The oldest monastery in Sikkim is Dub-de, founded by the pioneer lama Lhatsun Chhembo."¹⁶ Therefore, all of these evidences proved that the first mural paintings in Sikkim were painted in Dubdi monastery of West Sikkim. However, due to the extreme disasters of the earthquake, the monasteries of Sikkim including Dubdi had been damaged severely which was the responsible of wiping out all old murals of these monasteries.

Sachiling Gonpa, established in 1829, is another old monastery which is located in the village called *Gonpa Goan*, Kurseong Sub-division of District Darjeeling of West Bengal, which was happened to be the part of Sikkim before 1835¹⁷. The beauty of this old monastery (constructed out of mud and stones) was completely collapsed by the destruction of earthquake in 2011 and rebuilt with bricks and cement recently (plates-9, 10, & 11). The monastery had been taken care of by Lepcha monks hereditarily from Great Grant- father to Grant -Father, and their son since the time of its foundation. At present Chogel Lepcha is a monk taking care of this monastery who narrates the story behind the destruction of the beauty of the old monastery by earthquake in 2011.

¹⁴The information is collected in the interview of Pasang Tshring Bhutia, a Monastic Teacher of Dubdi at present, date: 22-03-2017, 3:00 pm.

¹⁵ Gary Chopel, Op. cit., p. 58

¹⁶ H.H. Risley, *op.cit.*, p. 258

¹⁷ Bal Krishna Shrestha, *Sikkimko Aitihāsik Adhyān*, Nirman Prakashan, Namchi South Sikkim, 2010, p. 45

According to oral information, during the time of Lama Tak Tshring Lepcha, the monastery was established with the help of another monk named Sunpathi Lama.¹⁸ On the basis of the information, the monastery had been taking care hereditarily from Tak Tshring Lepcha Lama (Great Grand Father) down to Chogyal Lepcha lama (present monk of the monastery). The witness of the old murals on the mud-wall of this monastery was also wiped out for forever with the disaster of the earthquake in 2011.

Peling Gonpa is another one among the oldest monasteries of Sikkim (at present in Darjeeling District of West Bengal) which has a live witness of the old mural painting of the Sikkim (plates-12, 13, 14, &15). It is situated in the village called *Tham*, Sittong II, eastern part of the Kurseong sub-division of Darjeeling District. The monastery (plate-16) is also popularly known as lepcha Gonpa as this monastery was established by Lepcha Lamas and had been looking after by Lepcha monks since the time of its foundation.

Mural paintings on the mud-wall of the Pelling monastery are still there in the original form with slightly over painted on it in the later times. With the close observation and the examination on the mud-wall of the monastery it came to know that on the right side wall of the main sanctum or the alter, the three Buddhist Deities (Historical Buddha in the centre, Aryaloketsvara on the right side and Guru Padmasambhava on the left side) was painted on the cotton cloth and had been pasted on the wall. Some patch of cotton cloth as the carrier of the painting that pasted on the wall has torn out and could be easily observe it. This painting (looks like mural?), was painted with vegetation pigments on cotton cloth. On the left side wall of the main alters, is also covers with mural paintings (three figures of the Buddhist deities) which is directly painted on the mud-wall with vegetation pigments. The cracks over the mud-walls tended to be break down in near future which will lead the collapse of this historical mural painting too. Moreover, paintings on the four sides of the walls are seems very strange and immature works especially line drawings on the figures which are very rough and unskilled one. It is true that these paintings belonged more than a century old but still could not get exact time period of these paintings.

¹⁸ The information is collected in the interview of Chogyal Lepcha Lama, a monastic monk of Sachiling Gonpa, date, 28-09-2017, 2:30 pm

2. 2: LATER PHASE

As per framing of the time period the later phase covers the works of indigenous artist and which starts from the time of Ringzing Lharipa (1912-1977).¹⁹ It was the mark of beginning and the mile stone in the history of *thangka* and mural painting of Sikkim that the indigenous artist were involve to work for the monasteries of their own land. However the first half of the twentieth century there were still seen Tibetan artist working for the Sikkim's monasteries but at the same time, local artist also engaged to work with them as well as they learned to produce *thangka* and mural painting. It is not appropriate to say that the emergence of local artist and the absence of Tibetan artist had a certain point and hence were the later phase began. Instead of that, it would be appropriate to say that during the first half of the twentieth century involvement of local artist had been started working hand to hand with Tibetan artist who were expert in making *thangka* and mural painting. It is found, based on available evidence that Champa Tashi Lharipa U Champa was the last Tibetan painter who worked in Sikkim in the third decades of the twentieth century.

2. 2. 1: THANGKAS

Thangka paintings available from the first half of the twentieth century in Sikkim were the works of indigenous painters. Production of *thangka* paintings during the first half of the twentieth century had very less in numbers. It might be because till the first half of the twentieth century Ringzing Lharipa was the only one indigenous painter who had to worked for all the monasteries of the Sikkim during that times. Hence, a single painter could not produce many *thangkas* during his life time in Sikkim. However, there were some paintings that he produced during those particular times.

Indigenous Painters

Ringzing Lharipa was the first indigenous artist became popular during the later phase, had learned to paint *thangka* and mural from the Panchen Lama's court artist Champa Tashi Lharipa U Chenmo, arrived in Sikkim from Tashilhumpo of Tibet on his way to

¹⁹Anna Balikci- Denjongpa, "Ringzing Lhadripa (1912-1977) and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology's Ajanta Hall", *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2013, p. 67

Kalimpong.²⁰ He produced large number of *thangkas* and murals in various themes, sizes and his style that he had been following during his life time. There are some *thangkas* painted by Rinzing Lharipa are as follows;

- 1) *White Tara* (in T.A.S.)
- 2) *Jatsun Ningpu*, (private collection)
- 3) *White Tara* (private collection)
- 4) *Nyrwn Chudeup* (*gNasbrtanbcu drug*)
- 5) *Dorje Phurbatsokshing* (*rDorjephur pa tshogzhing*)
- 6) *Gylrab* (*rGyalrab*)
- 7) *Kagyü Sertheng* (*bka' brgyudgserphreng*)²¹

Despite these above mentioned there were so many *thangkas* produced by him which according to his student, Tenzing Norbu Bhutia (assistant teacher in T.A.S) might have private collection with many individuals including members of the Royal family. Hence, a few number of *thangkas* of him which are available in Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, T.A.S and couple of *thangkas* with Tinlay OngmuTashi (private collection) only recognized at present.

From 1941 onwards on the basis of the advice given by *Chogyal* of Sikkim, Rinzing Lharipa started to teach the art of *Thangka* painting to students from six major monasteries of the Sikkim.²² Among the students, Ganden Lharipa and Karma Thinley became prominent painters during and after the life time of their master.

Ganden Lharipa was one of the prominent student of his master who carried out the style and tradition of making *thangka* in Sikkim from his teacher. He continuously worked as an assistant to Rinzing Lharipa during his time and also had helped his master to paint mural in Dubdi in the mid of the twentieth century. He also acted as a head teacher in the technical section of Directorate of Handloom and Handcraft till first decade

²⁰*Ibid*, p.68.

²¹Among the list of *thangkas* mentioned here the last four to seven *thangkas* are taken from Anna Balicka-Denzongpa's article published in *Bulletion of Tibetology*, Vol. 49, No. 2.

²²*Ibid*, p.68

of the present century. The D.H.H. has preserved and displayed his *thangka* 'Sixteen *Arhats*' (plate 17) and other in the gallery which could be seen from 1970s to till date.

Karma Tinzing Lharipa was another prominent student of Rinzing Lharipa from Ralang monastery. He was also acted as an assistant to his master with great interest which resulted progress in his art work. Linthem Monastery in North Sikkim has witness of his artistic skilledwork where five *thangkas*, including one *Guru Chasum* and four *Seto thangkas*. These paintings were produced by him around 70s of the last century (plates-18, 19, 20, 21 & 22).

2. 2. 2: MURALS

According to Anna Balikci-Denjonpa, Rinzing Lharipa's first formal assignment as the lead assistant to his master Champa Tashi U Chenmo was to paint the mural of Tsug lakhang, Sikkim Royal Chapel in the year 1930, commissioned by Royal family.²³ Anna Balikci-Denjonpa has written an article "Ringzing Lharipa Lama (1912-1977) and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology's Ajanta Hall" where she has talks a number of mural works done by Rinzing Lharipa. She suggests the list of mural works done by artist in various monasteries with approximately date and time period are as follows;

1942-Tashiding Monastery, West Sikkim

1945- Dubde Monastery, West Sikkim

1947- Phodong Monastery, North Sikkim

1949-50- Enchey Monastery, Gangtok, East Sikkim

1950- Luktso Monastery, Darjeeling

1957- Ship Monastery, Dzongu, north Sikkim

1959- Phodong Monastery, North Sikkim

1959- Guru Lhakang, Deorali, Gangtok, East Sikkim

²³*Ibid*, p.68

1960- Phensang Monastery, North Sikkim

1960- Lachung Monastery, North Sikkim

1964-64- Institute of Tibetology, Ajanta Hall, Gangtok, East Sikkim

1967-68 Pemayangtse Monastery, West Sikkim

1976-77- Karmapa's Centre in Copenhag.²⁴

In most of the old monasteries, Rinzing Lharipa had painted murals which are survived in fragmented condition due to the destruction of earthquake and climatic condition of Sikkim. Mural in Pemiongtsé (plate-23), Lachung monastery, and in Dubdi (plate-24) are the evidence of his works.²⁵ In 1964-65, Rinzing Lharipa contributed murals (plate-25) to newly constructed Namgyal Institute of Tibetology²⁶, which was different style than that of making *thangkas* in traditional style.

Conclusion

Moreover, Tibetan Buddhist art or tradition of *Thangka* and mural painting in Sikkim began from eighteenth century onwards with the establishment of Dubdi monastery as a mark of starting point. The *thangka* of Guru Padmasambhava and the establishment of the Dubdi in 1701, as well as the residence of Latshung Chempo, provides the direction that the beginning of both *thangka* and mural painting had happened from here only. Again, those *thangkas* and mural paintings which were produced by Tibetan artist during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' shows in other way a political-religious connection between Sikkim and Tibet that is how all artists from Tibet were welcomed in Sikkim during that time. In the second half of the Twentieth century or the later phase of the study, the rise of indigenous artist were seen on the one hand and the same time absence of Tibetan artist happened on the other hand which proves the difference in the political relations between Sikkim and the Tibet. It was the time when Chinese government

²⁴Further detail see *Bulletin of Tibetology*, vol. 49, No. 2, pp. 67-72

²⁵*Ibid*, p.70

²⁶*Ibid*, p. 68

imposed her regime in Tibet²⁷ and the relation between Indo-China had been bitterly went on. Sikkim was an independent Nation during that time under the reign of Namgyal Dynasty until it was merged with India as a federal part in the year 1975. The international political relations particularly Indo-China and Tibet during that particular time had greatly influence even in the art of *thangka* an mural paintings in Sikkim. From this time onwards the immature and newly emerging art style of Sikkim had to develop without further help of its predecessor. Hence the mature and the composite artistic works and styles that found in Tibetan *thangka* and murals of early phase were not seen in the *thangka* and mural paintings of the later phase. However, the observation over these *thangka* and murals and the same time comparison among them together brings the conclusion that the art work of later phase became distinctive from earlier one and emerged separately as new style or the style of Sikkim. It was Rinzing Lharipa laid the foundation for newly emerged style of painting in Sikkim.

²⁷V. SugunaSarma, *op.cit.*, p.15



Plate-2: Jatsun Ning-pu, Private collection, Gangtok, 1930s



Plate- 3: White Tara, Private collection, Gangtok, 1930s



Plate- 04: GuruPadmasambhava, Dubdi Monastery, West Sikkim, 18th century.



Plate-05: Tshong-shing, (Thangka), Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 1825.



Plate-06: Fragments of mural in Dubdi monastery, West Sikkim (1945)



Plate-7: Mural Painting, Pemiongchi monastery, West Sikkim, 1960s.



Plate- 8: Mural painting, Ralang Monastery, South Sikkim, 1960s.



Fig. 1: :Sachiling Gonpa 1839.



Fig. 2: Three images of *Trikaya*, Sachiling Gonpa.



Fig. 3: Wooden Pillars of Old Sachiling Gonpa, removed during its renovation in 2011.



Plate-09: Mural painting, Peling Gonpa, Sittong II, Darjeeling, 1930s.



Plate-10: Guru Padmasambhava, Peling Gonpa, Sittong II, Darjeeling, 1830s.



Plate-11: Images of *Trikaya*., Peling Gonpa, Sittong II, Darjeeling, 1830s.



Plate-12: Unknown title (mural), Peling Gonpa, Sittong II, Darjeeling, 1830s.



(Fig, 04) Peling Gonpa, Sittong II, Darjeeling, 1830s.



Plate-13: Sixteen Arhats, Directorate of Handloom and Handicraft, gangtok, 1960s.



Plate-14: Series 1, *Se-tho*, Linthem Gonpa, North Sikkim, 1970s.



Plate-15: series 2, *Se-tho*, Linthem monastery, North Sikkim, 1970s.



Plate-16: series 3, *Se-tho*, Linthem monastery, North Sikkim, 1970s.



Plate- 17: series 4, *Se-tho*, Linthem monastery, North Sikkim, 1970s.



Plate-18: series 5, *Se-tho*, Linthem monastery, North Sikkim, 1970s.



Plate-19: Portrait of Lhatchung Chembo, Pemiongchi monastery, West Sikkim, 1960s.



Plate-20: Wheel of Life, Dubdi monastery, West Sikkim, 1945.



Plate-21: Ajanta Hall (The 9th of the Twelve Deeds of the Buddha: 'Defeating a host of devils'), Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 1960s.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The world has witnessed many schools of art and paintings and their developmental stages in various times and places. In this way, the art and paintings from Asian countries also had its own beauty and existence since long back ago. There are different types of art and paintings in Asian countries that origin and developed in its own times. Most of them are of universal characteristic nature of arts such as sculpture, painting, drawing, textile art work, carving, and so on. Painting is a dynamic and living art tradition that originated from the cave paintings of pre historic times and yet still it is in the process of development in its various forms at present world. Painting is an umbrella term which covers various types and forms of paintings such as, Miniature, Mural, *Thangka* and even different types of modern paintings. Each of these paintings differentiates with each other in the respect of their particular shape and size, style, methods, and some other nature that associate with one particular type of painting. Therefore it is vital to know the method and techniques used in particular type of painting to recognize each properly. However, in this chapter, the discussion covers only the methods and techniques that used in *Thangka* and Mural paintings of Sikkim.

3. 1: METHODS AND TECHNIQUE IN *THANGKA*

The *thangka* is one of the different types of paintings from Asian countries that originated in India as the form of *Pata-chitra* and fully developed in distinctive style and form of painting in Tibet¹. *Thangka* as a form of paintings produced not only in Tibet but also in Nepal, Bhutan, Japan, China and India as well since long back. In Sikkim, the tradition of art of making *thangkas* had been there since eighteenth century or even little before. Since Tibet had been acting as the guardian of Sikkim in the matter of religion, the art of making *thangka* had also been following the Tibetan style in Sikkim from the very beginning. It is because *thangka* has been associated close relation with Buddhism since very long back. In other words, *thangka* became a part of Tibetan Buddhism since it was considered sacred by believers. However, methods and technique used to produce

¹Ann Shaftel, "Notes on the Technique of Tibetan *thangkas*", *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, Vol. 25. No. 2, 1986. Pp. 97-103, p. 97

thangkas has nothing to do with the philosophy of religion rather it is an artistic work. Hence, these artistic skills and works were vigorously used by Tibetan Buddhism to produce the images of Buddhist Deities in the form of *thangkas* in order to use it in various religious purposes.

There are different steps which are strictly followed by all *thangka* painters in the process of making them. These methods and techniques can be studied in two groups, (i) Methods in preliminary or prior to painting and (ii) method in Proper painting. However, there is no compulsion or restriction to the artist that to follow these all steps in making *thangkas*. It is also true that it depends upon the will and efficiency of an artist to follow such steps in accordance to the division of the techniques to work with. Some painter did not like to follow these all steps, especially preparation of grounds, using pencils for line drawing etc. Generally, painters produce those images which they see in around the world and use as a symbols to represent the ideas or intangibles things, for instance, Buddhist teachings from the text, in order to make sense to the viewer in the form of pictures. Hence, painter does follow certain steps during the preparation and process of making *thangkas* which are discussed below here;

3. 1.1: PREILIMINARY METHOD

Before completing actual painting on a canvas those all preparations for painting which is very much important are considered as preliminary methods. In this section those methods are described as follows:

Support

A piece of white cotton cloth is commonly used as the support of *thangka* painting. In Tibet cotton cloths used as a support of *thangka* paintings were imported from India or China.²and even *thangka* painters from Sikkim also used cotton cloths made in India The texture of the cotton cloths as support of *thangka* painting is mostly plain and smooth to hold the fabric of the colours on it and that produce good effect of the pigments in the painting. Sometimes some artists prefer coarse texture of cotton cloths as support to paint

²*Ibid*, p 98

on it as it depended on the choice of artists.³ However, in the case of woven *thangkas* threads in different colours together works as support as well as colours while producing *thangkas*. But generally cotton has been using as a support of *thangka* painting by artists.

Traditionally, Tibetan master painters often did not prepare their own support. They had assistants, who specialized in stretching support and preparing the ground or *thangka* painting. The two most common methods of stretching the support are to lace it to a strainer or to wrap it on dowels which are laced to the strainer.⁴ However, at present in Sikkim, generally, artists prepare the support by themselves for which they easily get cotton cloths from nearby market. New *thangka* painters, who still learning skills and techniques of making *thangkas* sometimes, prepare the ground for their master, but it was also considered as a part of learning skills during the specific training period. Though, *thangka* painter should have knowledge of all those steps including preparation of the materials as well as process of making paintings whether one has been following the preliminary steps or not while making *thangka*.

Frame

To hold the support or cotton cloth it needs a frame of bamboo sticks in square shape to tie up. In fact, bamboo stick frame worked as the inner frame on which the support (cotton cloth) tied up and again this frame also tied up with the wooden frame which worked as the main and outer frame. The use of this frame is to stretch the cotton cloth as support and to hold it till the last touch of the colour and the brushes while painting.

Preparation of Pigments

In the olden days the work of painters was not just to paint rather they must had to know the nature of pigments and their sources too. Artists should have knowledge to identify the nature of pigments and their sources properly, before using them. It is because the pigment, which easily dissolve and mixed with water, cannot mix with those pigments which are procured from chemical. So mixing two pigments derived from different sources may dull the hue of pigments and spoil painting. Since the pigments are drawn

³ *Ibid*, p. 98

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 98

from metal, chemical and vegetation, the pigments procured from vegetation are mostly preferred to use in *thangka* painting. At present most of the *thangka* painters use readymade pigments, sometimes call it as mud colours, easily available at nearby market in Sikkim. Hence preparation of pigments in old days was also a task of artist himself and was very important as well.

Glue

Pigments obtained from vegetation sources are dissolved in glue that extracted from animal hide.⁵It is a long process to extract glue from animal hide. The hide of animal (domestic animal like cow, Oxen, Yak) boiled in water and collects the outcome which floats on the surface of the water. Again it needs to spread in open space for sometimes to cool down. After it becomes a solid or a powder then it is ready to mix with those pigments which dissolve in water to use for painting.⁶

Background

Traditionally Yak-hide glue was most frequently used to prepare the ground of a painting.⁷Lime and chalk are the two most commonly used ground in *thangka* painting. The ground is applied directly to the support with no preliminary sizing. For instance, preparing a ground mixture of lime, hide glue and water mixed together in a bowl or container. A cotton cloth or natural sponge is allowed to soak in the ground mixture, which has the consistency of buttermilk. Then the mixture is rubbed onto both sides of the support by hand repeatedly and the support is then placed in the sun light to dry. Many coats of ground may be applied in this manner. Finally, the ground is polished with a stone or shell, and water is sometimes added with a damp cloth to smooth the surface.⁸However, with the availability of readymade pigments like white distemper at market the use of chalk and lime in traditional way has no scope at all. In fact, it also depends on the taste of artist that which medium he prefers to use as ground in *thangka* painting.

⁵Information collected from Tenzing Bhutia, *thangka* painter and head of The Traditional Art School, 5th mile Gangtok.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ann Shaftel, *Op.cit.*, p. 98

⁸Ibid, p. 98

3. 1. 2: PROPER PAINTING

After finishing the preparation in preliminary stage the remaining task has to done painting on the prepared ground. The proper painting section also has many steps such as graph, line drawing, colouring, out line, ornamentation etc. Separately, all these steps are describes as following:

Graph

All the figures of the Buddhist deities are drawn in certain proportion with measurement in scale for which an artist need to draw graphs on the ground with pencil. The gesture and rhythm of the body of deities are also need to draw exactly as the master painter does and which a novice artist copies same from his master's work. So to produce exact proportion and gesture of the body of deities drawing graphs on the ground became very much significance.

Ann Shaftel describes the traditional way of drawing measurement and layout of canvas by Tibetan *Thangka* master, "...The first steps are *thigtse*, the measurement and layout of the figure and composition. A *thigku*, or thread, is covered with colored chalk and strung onto the strainer at measured intervals. With the end held tightly, it is snapped against the canvas to make line that established the proportion of the painting: the figures, their location on the field, the border of the painted area, and the sections of the background."⁹

Drawing graphs for the figure on the ground is not easy task which needed long practice for novice artists. They have a standardized method in preparing drawing. Every artist has to follow it. Accordingly, the length and breadth for the portrait of Budha's painting should be in the ratio of 70 and 48 measurements. It is important to note here that this ratio of measurements should be either in inches or in feet which could be drawn on the basis of the width and size of the canvas. On the basis of this standardized measurements, the breadth in horizontal of the canvas is divided into two halves i.e. twenty four by twenty four making a total of 48. Each half on the ground of canvas

⁹*Ibid*, p. 99

should be divided by lines into three parts from the edge of the canvas. These three parts measurements should be 6, 6 and 12 and its total is 24 (half of the total breadth).

Further in the vertical length of the canvas, it is divided into 12 parts in different sizes making a total of 70. Coming from the top of the canvas, the measurements goes as follows:

- 2 were for the top of the hair of the figure
- 4 for the middle of the hair
- 4 for the main hair of the head
- 12 for the face (forehead to the chin)
- 4 for the neck
- 8 for the upper chest
- 4 for the lower chest
- 12 for the abdomen
- 4 for the part around navel
- 8 for waist
- 4 upper folded legs
- 4 for lower folded legs
- 70 Total of the above measurements for the length of the painting. (See Plate-22)

Sketch with pencil or charcoal

Once the graphs were completely drawn on ground or canvas, painters has drawn an outline of the figures by pencil. All the lines are sketch by pencil guided by the graphs with one go. Charcoal had also been used by artists to draw all outlines of the figures on ground but in twentieth century, mostly carbon pencil was used because it was easy to rub and correct the lines. When all outlines of the figures were completed by drawing sketch with pencil or charcoal, once again the painters need to retouch the same lines with pointed brush and black ink. When the ink soaked and dry in ground the dust of

pencil lines are erased by eraser so the lines drawn by brush and ink could be visible clear.¹⁰

Regarding the traditional way of drawing sketch on ground by Tibetan *Thangka* master, Ann Shaftel mentioned:

Next, the *Kya ri*, a rough charcoal sketch, is drawn on the ground. Guided by the *thigtse* marks, the master artist sketches the major outlines of the main figures; the entourage and background are often drawn with a bare minimum of measures. Then the sketch is examined and corrections may be made. Indigo or carbon ink is then used over the charcoal sketch to delineate the areas for painting. Another method commonly used by artist today is to trace woodblock, or *shing par* onto the prepared ground to outline standard iconographies.¹¹

In the case of Sikkim, none of the indigenous artists had been following the method and technique of woodblock print on the ground. They had been using charcoal and carbon pencil to draw figures and whole composition since very beginning. In fact, since first half of the twentieth century indigenous artists had been following to copy the outline of the figures exactly on the ground from the master copy made on the sheet of paper or cloths by their master (See Plate-23).¹²

Colouring

Application of colours in *thangkas* are the most serious work which has several stages: First, the composition are painted with flat colours, starts with sky, then background, grass, trees and mountains.¹³ The figure of Deities painted according to the colours associated with Deities and the background colours painted in accordance with the figure. It is important to understand that the five colours, red, blue, yellow, green and white are

¹⁰Information from Tenzing Norbu Bhutia *op. Cit.*

¹¹. Ann Shaftel, *Op. cit* p.99

¹², T.A.S *Op.cit*

¹³. Ann Shaftel, *Op. cit*, p. 99

very sacred in Tibetan Buddhism and that represented as the symbol of Five *Dhyani* Buddhas. After colouring the figure of Deity the cloths of the figure are usually painted.

Once complete the flat colouring in the composition the line drawing over the edge of the figure has to done. This is usually done with pointed brush and two main organic dye colours, indigo and brownish red lac.¹⁴ While drawing outline very careful detail works has to do so that the brush strokes could not see in any case. Outline drawing in figure and composition was one of the features of *thangka* painting which differentiate it with other type of painting.

Line drawing is followed by shading which is done in two ways, wet and dry. Dry pigments apply directly without mixing a drop of water or glue with brush over the flat colours to give tone and dimensional effect on it. It takes very little amount of pigments at a time to apply so it consumed more times. It is a challenging work to artist for which he needed lot of patience to complete the task. Whereas in the wet shading process pigments are mixed with a little amount of water or glue and blended with another pigment while shading over the flat colour.

Once all the above steps were completed, the remaining task is the ornamentation of Deities with Gold dust. The pure gold dust is mixed up with glue to apply it with brush over the flat yellow colour in ornament of the figures.¹⁵

3. 1. 3: MOUNTING

Patches of cloth stitch from the four sides of the painting or carrier are often known as mounting. Mostly Silks imported from China, Japan and India was used for mounting in Tibetan *Thangkas*.¹⁶ Mounting in *Thangka* painting traditionally made sewing with cotton thread and it was purely hand work. However, mounting in *thangka* nowadays, stitches in sewing machine which became easy task than that of earlier. Stitching work of mounting of *thangka* done in monastery where some monks are exported and engaged in such work. Generally the mounting in *thangka* need certain measurements such as, the

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 99

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 100

¹⁶*Ibid.*,

size of the cloth on the top of the *thangka* should be half of the size at the bottom of *thangka* and the size of the cloths of both side, (left and right) of *thangka* should be half of the size of the top side of the *thangka*.

3. 1. 4: CONSECRATION

This is a religious ceremony that involves writing some *mantras* on the back side of the *thangka* which in other words known as ‘opening of the eye’.¹⁷ *Thangka* by the believers, considered as living form and a symbol of the God to which monks pray in the monastery or in alter of their own residence. Actually, without consecration ceremony of *thangka*, it did not considered as pure and worthy to worship therefore it is one of the very important part of making *thangka*. There are also ready-made *thangkas* available at market which would be produce for the commercial purpose. In this case, such *thangkas* would not have any *mantras* written on the back sides of the painting nor were those paintings consecrated by any monks. But, *thangka* whichever found in the monasteries were all consecrated one by the monks to use as an aid for many religious purposes.

3. 2: METHODS AND TECHNIQUES IN MURAL

Murals are worldwide known form of art which we found in various medium with different style and its aesthetic beauty all over the world. In Sikkim, mural paintings were appeared very late, in the form of religious paintings that found in the walls of monasteries. Needless to say that those painters who worked to produce these murals in the monasteries were came from the Tibet because Sikkim and the Tibet had good connection regarding the religious matter. The styles and methods applied by those painters to produce murals in Sikkim could find in two different ways. Murals which belonged more than two centuries old are painted on the mud plaster walls of the monasteries. The wall of the monasteries was constructed with stones available around Sikkim. Hence, artist had executed the suitable materials and methods based on the nature of the walls of monasteries. Monasteries which were constructed with burnt bricks and cements were not more than a century old and hence the artists had used the methods and materials in accordance with the nature of the cemented walls of the monasteries.

¹⁷*Ibid*, p. 101.

For the systematic approach to the study of methods in mural paintings renounced scholar, Jayanta Chakrabarti has divided into separate group, i.e., Preliminary and methods for painting proper.¹⁸ Preliminary work consist with the preparation of support, ground and pigments before draw lines or sketch with charcoal or light colour with pointed brush for painting proper. The description of every steps regarding the preparation of materials before doing painting proper are as follows:

Carrier and Ground

The walls and ceilings of the monasteries were the common that served as the carrier for the mural painting in Sikkim. Generally, walls of the old monasteries were constructed with sedimentary rocks which available surrounding the location of the monasteries. Most of the monasteries constructed during the eighteenth centuries had roughly cutting edge stones on the walls which were the advantages for the plastering ground with mud. Some of the monasteries still have the old construction of the walls in worse condition due to the weak binding medium made out mixture of mud and sands in little amount of water. The monasteries which were renovated during the twentieth century also have stone walls but these walls are binding with cement and concrete hence looks modern type of architecture. Other than that, burnt bricks walls of the newly established monasteries also served as the carrier for the mural paintings in Sikkim.

Mostly available those old murals were painted over the surface of the mud-plastered walls of the monasteries. With the examination on the walls, it revealed that directly applied mixture of mud and sands over the walls as plaster to render plain surface on the wall was the existing techniques of that particular times. Hence application of the reddish-brown mud available in surrounding of the monasteries was the materials used in the process of plastering the walls. For the painting over these walls, first of all, artist had to prepare a fine grind mud which should be mixed with grind of sands in a little amount of water. Plastering with this prepared material on the walls should be twice or more than two times which results fine surface. Wherever breaks or cracks occurred or becomes undulating on the surface of the walls, once more time artist has to plaster with fine

¹⁸ Jayanta Chakrabarti, *Techniques in Indian Mural Painting*, K. P Bagchi & Company, Calcutta, 1980, p.18.

mixed mud-sands medium until it becomes plain. For the final preparation, now, artist has to rub over the surface of the walls either with smooth stones or conch shell to render plain and smooth surface where the painting proper would be done. Rubbing on the surface of the walls would be done till it becomes suitable to work on it for painting proper.¹⁹

If the bricks of wall serve as the carrier then once artist has to wash it with weak solution of hydrochloric acid then again wash with hot water and later with cool water.²⁰ After washing on the wall is over then the thin layer of the mixture of mud-sands material should be apply as the plaster which later on served as a ground. It is important to remember that in this traditional paintings artist mostly preferred vegetable pigments which basically did not affect on the mud walls and last for long times.²¹

Glue

Traditionally for the mural painting vegetable pigments were preferred by artist and for which binding medium was used made out of animal hide which easily dissolve into it without negative reaction²² For extracting glue from animal hide, mostly oxen and Yak, it needs to boil in water. After boiling it needs to let for cooling down in the open space in the sun light. The layer of byproduct which floats over the surface of the water should be collect which is the material used as the glue to mixed with mud-colours or vegetable pigments.²³

Proper Painting

Beginning of the proper painting starts with the sketching on the walls. However, before start sketching on the walls artist need to draw a graphs or lines over the walls which helps to make proper paintings on the wall. For the accurate proportion, rhythms, gesture, size, perspective, this graphs serves as the guiding line while drawing sketch. With the help of this graphs, light sketch of all the figures either with charcoal or light colours in a

¹⁹ This information was collected from the Thangka painter, Tenzing Norbu Bhutia, T.A.S

²⁰ Jayanta Chakrabarti, *op. cit.* p. 19.

²¹ Information from Tenzing Norbu Bhutia, *op. cit.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

pointed brush needs to draw on the wall. Once the light sketching is over then the guided lines or graphs should be removed by washing with light brown colours. There are very much similarities regarding the techniques that applied in making both *thangka* as well as in murals. Application of colour parts is not much different with that of *thangkas*. The process of line drawing with pointed brush, shading, application of dry pigments for tone and ornamentation process are the same as did with *thangkas*. Moreover, the techniques and method used in both paintings are not that much different including the style of paintings.

3. 3: STYLES IN PAINTINGS

In this style of paintings traditionally depicting Vajrayana Buddhist deities since long back in Tibet or even earlier times in India, hence the nature of this style of paintings tends to be Buddhist paintings. However, the works of many art historians in this style of paintings particularly related to Tibet considered Tibetan art style which was developed more mature and distinctly in the style since eleventh century onwards hence could be considered as Tibetan art style. Again with the passage of times gradually this style of paintings became popular in Sikkim particularly since Buddhism became the religion of the land. There was good relationship between Tibet and Sikkim till the early decades of the first half of the last century. The favorable political relations cultivated the favorable environment for the Tibetan artist to flourish even in the land of Sikkim. Tibetan artists were patronized by the Royal families, monasteries or head of the monks which pave the massive opportunity for the Tibetan artist to excel their talent in the Monasteries of Sikkim.

There is a reference in the *Gazetteers of Sikkim* that Pemiongchi Monastery of West Sikkim had its parental relationship with the Great Tashilhunpo Monastery of Tibet since the establishment of the monastery in Sikkim²⁴. The Pemoingchi Monastery had breeze between the monks of the Tashilhunpo Monastery of Tibet who had been guiding them since very beginning for their studies. In this way, the tradition of Buddhist paintings of Tashilhunpo Monastery also had lot of influence and connection with the former one. Now here is the question that what was the style of painting that had been

²⁴ H.H. Risley, *Gazetteer of Sikkim*, Sikkim Nature Conservation Foundation, Gangtok, p.251.

common between these two monasteries? The answer would be found with the enquiry of paintings or painters from the Tashilhunpo Monastery.²⁵

By the mid seventh century, one of the famous painters from gTsang province of Tibet named sprul-sku Chos-dbyings-rgyis-mtsho began to work with fresh stylistic trends within the sMan-ris tradition which came to known as new sMan-ris style. Before this style developed most of the painters were working in varieties of the style that later Tibetan scholars would have called the Old sman-ris.²⁶ Painters whoever came to work in the Pemiongchi Monastery of West Sikkim from the Tashilhunpo Monastery must had worked in this new sMan-ris style. However, the disaster of the frequent earthquakes ruined all original and old murals of the wall and ceilings of the monasteries of Sikkim. Renovation of the monastery created new spaces in the walls and ceilings of the monastery for fresh paintings which filled by the new talents in the mid of the twentieth century. Though, there are still several old *thangkas* preserved in the Pemiongchi Monastery which are produced by Tibetan painters in the eighteenth- nineteenth century. The Monastery did not display all those *thangkas* at present which might not be possible to arrange in the small space hall, and only some of the *thangkas* are seen in the main shrine of the monastery at present days. In the second floor of the monastery, there is a huge size of *thangka* which had been rolled up and keep hanging in the ceiling that only display during the special ceremonial occasion in the monastery. This *thangka* is one of the old paintings which were painted by Tibetan painter.

Regarding the styles of the *thangkas* (only five *thangkas*) that preserved in the gallery of Namgyal institute of Tibetology, some art historian considered them similar to sGar-bris.²⁷ According to a western scholar named David Jackson, it was a famous Tibetan painter Chos-dbying-rdo-rjes whose works seems very similar to that *thangkas* preserved in Sikkim. Though, he argues that this painter had followed three different style in his time viz. sMan-ris, s Gar-bris and strongly Chinese style. However, he says that it is the sGar-bris style of painting which the artist followed lot.²⁸

²⁵ For the detail information regarding the old and new sman-ris style of Tibetan painting, see, David Jackson, *A History of Tibetan painting*, Verlag Der Osterreichischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften Wien, Druk: Universitätsbuchdruckerei Styria, 1996

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 219.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 252.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 251.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Rinzing Lharipa became the prominent one who was also an indigenous painter. He was the student of a Tibetan master and a court artist of the Panchen Lama named Champa Tashi Lharipa U Chenmo who had visited Sikkim in the first half of the Twentieth century. In the beginning, Ringzing must have influenced with the style of his master's work but later on his work differentiated from the style of his master and initiated a different one which here would be suitable to be considered as the style of Sikkim. Mural paintings of the monasteries of Sikkim belonging to the mid twentieth century are the witness of this style. It is true that the influence and inspiration for those artists who have been following this style must have credit to the great master Champa Tashi Lharipa U Chinmo.



Plate-22: Line Drawing with Graph, (figure of Buddha), Traditional Art School.

Breadth: from left to Right side.

6	6	12	12	6	6
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Length: from top to down.

2	4	4	12	4	8	4	12	4	8	4	4
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Plate-23: Line drawing of (figure of Guru Padmasambhava), Traditional Art School, Gangtok.

THEME AND REPRESENTATION

Since the *Thangka* and mural paintings in Tibetan art styles of Sikkim belonged to the period of my study were Buddhist religious paintings it became important to know little about the Vajrayana Buddhism too. Depictions of subjects in these paintings were of Buddhist deities, iconography, symbols etc, which represents the whole ideas of the philosophy of Vajrayana Buddhism of Sikkim. In fact, most of the themes in the *Thangka* and mural paintings were the ideas extracted from Buddhist religious scriptures by the pioneer artists who were used to be a Buddhist monk having knowledge on it and several times made copy of those paintings by painters of the later times.

It is true that the *Thangka* and mural paintings of Sikkim were also a medium of expression like paintings from different schools and styles of other parts of India and the world, however, to make a sense of the themes that depicted in such paintings is quite different than that of other types of paintings. It was because such type of paintings mostly depicts themes from Buddhist scriptures only. *Lharipa* painted not only the main figure of any deities but also depicts symbols or icons this directly or indirectly associated with those particular deities. Hence, generally just seeing any such paintings becomes vague and meaningless to viewer until and unless the viewer become familiar with symbols and icons that depicted in the paintings. Understanding the symbols and icons that depicted in the paintings, therefore, become significant which help us to understand painting properly. Hence such types of paintings are mostly a symbolic painting.

4.1. SYMBOLS

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary “Symbol” means ‘something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance; especially: a visible sign of something invisible.’¹In case of

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com>

Thangka and mural paintings of Tibetan, Buddhism symbols are very much important in order to identify certain deities. Symbols are also becomes certain characteristic features through which one could recognized the deities, for instance, colour of a particular deity.

Moreover, symbols in this type of painting designated mainly in three bold categories such as colours, Tantric and non-Tantric.

Since Sikkim had been following Vajrayana Buddhism then it is important to throw some light on some of the philosophical aspects of it which helps to understand the symbolic form of the Buddhist deities in the paintings. According to a profound Indian Buddhist scholar, Benoytosh Bhattacharya, initially, Buddhism had no pantheon or many Godheads till the Tantrism was well established and which latter on adopted in Buddhism.²Hence with the mixture of Tantric Doctrine in Buddhism of Himalayan region (including Northern India and some South-East Asian countries), Buddhism has many Godheads including Hindu Deities, Tibetan Local Deities and some other regional Guardian Deities too.³ Before talking about many Pantheons in Buddhism, the concept of the Five *Dhyani* Buddhas or Primordial Buddhas are more important in order to get ideas more clear. It is because the Pantheons of Northern Buddhism are all comes under the Theory of Five *Dhyani* Buddhas.⁴ One of the ideas in Buddhist Philosophy is that the World is consisting of five eternal cosmic elements and are without a beginning or an end.⁵ These five eternal elements are *Rupa* (form), *Vedana* (sensation), *Samjana* (name) *Sanskara* (conformation) and *Vijnana* (consciousness). These elements represented as Five *Dhyani* Buddhas.⁶The names of the five dhyani Budhas are Vairochana, Aksobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha and Amoghasiddhi.⁷Later on, the ancient Budhist theorists made each Dhyani Budha is the head of onekula (family) and therefore there are five different *kulas* represented by each Dhyani Budha or *Kuleswara* (head of the

² Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Iconography*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 2013, p. 35.

³ Mahayana Buddhism had been flourished in the Northern India, Himalayan region, and other South East Asian countries since long ago, which Binoytosh Bhattacharyya termed as 'Northern Buddhism' in his Book *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*.

⁴ Binoytosh Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.* p. 49.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Nirmal C. Sinha, *Sanga-rgyas stong*, Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 1988, p. 44.

families).⁸ On the other hand, each dhyani Budha represents each of five worlds like yugas in Hinduism.⁹ They are First World, Second World, Third World, Present World, and Future World. All these Buddhas have their own colours as symbols which guide to identify them in the paintings (see further detail on the sub-heading of ‘Five Colours’, in this chapter).

The most important philosophical idea of Northern Buddhism is *Trikaya* System and which is represented in the paintings as symbolic expression. In fact, the abstract ideas and thoughts were not easy to convey in the form of visual expression without using symbols. Hence symbols are more important in order to understand the messages that depicted in any kind of paintings. Here, is the detailed picture of *Trikaya* System mentioned below:

Table No. 02: *TRIKAYA* SYSTEM

Sl. No		First World	Second World	Third World	Present World	Future World
1	<i>Dhyani Buddha</i>	Vairocana	Aksobhya	Ratnasambhava	Amitabha	Amoghasiddhi
2	<i>Dhyani bodhisattva</i>	Samantabhadra	Vajrapani	Ratnapani	Avalokitesvara	Visvapani
3	Manusi-buddha	Krakucchanda	Kanakamuni	Kasyapa	Sakyamuni	Maitreya
4	Location	Center	East	South	West	North
5	Colour	White	Blue	Yellow	Red	Green
6	Element	Matter	Air	Earth	Fire	Water
7	Sense	Sight	Sound	Smell	Taste	Touch
8	Vahana	Lion	Elephant	Horse	Peacock	Dwarf or

⁸ Binoytosh Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.* p. 49.

⁹ In Hinduism, there are four yugas viz, Kritha (Satya), Thretha, Dwapara, and Kali Yugas.

						Garuda
9	Symbol	Cekra	Vajra	Ratna	Patra	Visvavajra

Source: Gorden, Sntoinette K, *The Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publications, New Delhi, 1978, p. 31.

4.1.1: Five Colours

In Tibetan Buddhist painting all types of colors had been using by painters however the five colours (*pancha varna* in Sanskrit, which means Pure colours) are considered most important among other colours. These five colours are blue, white, red, green and yellow.¹⁰ Blue is associated with space which represents purity and healing and the Dhyani Buddha Akshobhya projects in this colour. White is associated with air and is a colour of learning and knowledge in Buddhism. The colour represents the Buddha Vairocana. Red is associated with fire and is related to life force and preservation. This colour represents the Buddha Amitabha. Green is associated with water and is the colour of balance and harmony. The colour represents the Buddha Amoghasiddhi. Yellow is associated with earth and symbolizes rootedness and renunciation. Buddha Ratnasambhava is associated with this colour.¹¹ In this connection, the above mentioned five colours are considered as pure or sacred in Northern Buddhism and were based on the *Trikaya* system.

Now, based on the Theory of *Trikaya* system one could easily make sense and identify the Buddhist deities depicted in any paintings based on their symbols. Even, not only the Five *Dhyani* Buddhas or Bodhisattvas but also other manifestation Deities including local Deities that who belonged in which respective *Kulas* (families) through tracing their symbols, colours, Vahanas etc.

In Mahayana Buddhism the concept of Three Bodies or *Trikaya* was developed from the earlier concept two Bodies i.e., Dharmakaya and a Rupakaya of Gautama Buddha.¹² Buddhas's real form for the Dharma stands for Dharmakaya

¹⁰<https://www.google.co.in/search?q=five+colour+in+Tibetan+buddhism+and+their+nature&oq=five+colour+in+Tibetan+buddhism+and+their+nature&aqs=chrome..69i57.22000j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Nirmal C. Sinha, *Sanga, Op. Cit*, p. 43.

whereas Buddha's mundane or transitory form stood for Rupakaya.¹³ Again, in Mahayana Buddhism Rupakaya designated as the Nirmanakaya as well as an intermediate Body designated as Sambhogakaya.¹⁴

The *Trikaya* are as follows:

Dharmakaya or it is a Cosmic Body which is totally absolute or Reality. The Five *Dhyani* Buddhas are the representation of Dharmakaya in Mahayana Buddhism. These are Vairokana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha and Amoghasiddhi.¹⁵

Sambhogakaya stood for Body of Bliss which is a personal manner blesses the believers. The emanations from the Five *Dhyani* Buddhas in their different forms are Sambhogakaya Further, Manjusri, Vajrapani, Avalokitesvara, Kshitigarbha, Sarvanivaranaviskambhi, Akasagarbha, and Samantabhadra were the Sambhogakaya Buddhas. However, there were number of Sambhogakaya Buddhas mentioned in various Buddhist literature belonged from 9th century to 11th century.¹⁶

Nirmanakaya represent the Mundane Body which appears on earth to teach Dharma.¹⁷ Gautama Sakyamuni was the one who became enlightenment and hence became Historical Buddha and icon of the Nirmanakaya.¹⁸

Further, in a monastery, if it has only Three images of Buddhist Deities, then the set should be of the Buddhas of Past, Present and Future, i.e., Dipankara, Sakyamuni and Maitreya. In other words these images are representation of Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya.¹⁹

4.1.2: Tantric and Non-Tantric Symbols

All together there were number of symbols in Tibetan Buddhism including Tantric and non-Tantric which had not been counted in certain numbers so far. With the influence of

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.44.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Yoga doctrines and Tantrism within India Buddhism had been changing drastically from simple to complicated one. In order to make it understandable to the believer's symbols were the best way through which it became possible to project ideas in the pictorial form, i.e. painting and sculpture. As the Buddhism became universal when it was extended towards neighboring countries like Tibet, Nepal, China and other Asian countries it also incorporated with the local deities of those countries in the main stream. Hence in the process, it became more complicated. In this way, symbols became significant in painting in order to give meaning of themes and it help to identify individual deities as well as their root of origin or family where they belong.²⁰ Following are the list of some Symbols including both Tantric and non-Tantric;

Table No. 03: List of Symbols.

Sl.No	Objects	Symbolic relation with
1	Ankusa, elephant goad	Symbols of Tantric manifestations
2	Asoka flower with small jagged leaves	Symbols of Marici (yellow), Kurukuiia
3	Atapatra, parasol	Symbol of Usnisasita, Pancaraksa, and Sitatapatra
4	Caitya, Buddhist sanctuary or reliquary	Symbol of Maitreya, Kubera, Abheda and Nagarjuna
5	Cakra, Wheel of Disk	Symbol of Vairocana, Maitreya, Sitatapatra, Yama, Sang-dui and Tshans-pa (Brahma)
6	Camara, fly whisk	Symbol of Tantric manifestation; <i>Arhats</i> Vanavasi and Vajriputra
7	Campa, white flower with yellow centre	Symbol of Maitreya
8	Candra, Moon	Symbol of Sarvanivaranaviskambhin. Crescent; symbol of Simhanadavalokitesvara, Nilankantharyavalokitesvara and Samvara
9	Capa, bow(bow and arrow)	Symbol of Marici, Kurukulla, Raktalokesvara

²⁰ Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 2013,p.13

		and Mayajalakramaryavalokitesvara
10	Churi, knife	Symbol of Tantric manifestations
11	Cintamani, flaming pearl	Symbol of Ratnapani; Mahakala, Samantabhadra, Ksitigarbha and Ratnasambhava
12	Damaru, small drum, made of two skulls	Symbol of Tantric manifestations
13	Danda, staff, surmounted by a Vajra or topped by a skeleton	Symbol of Hayagriva, Yama and Ekajata
14	Dhvaja, banner of Victory	Symbol of Vaisravana
15	Gada, mace	Symbol of Tantric manifestations, Gur-gyi gom-po and Sridevi
16	Ghanta, bell with vajra handle	Symbol of Vajradhara, Vajrasattva, Trilokyavijaya and Yi-dam
17	Jambhara, lemon	Symbol of Jambala
18	Kalasa, vase for holding amrta (ambrosia)	Symbol of Maitreya, Man-la, Padmapani, Amitayus, Kubera, Usnisavijaya, Vasudhara and Cunda
19	Kapala, skull cup	Symbols of Tantric manifestations, Dharmapala, Yi-Dam,, some Buddhasaktis, Ekajata and Dakinis
20	Karttrka, chopper	Symbol of Tantric manifestations and also of Buddhasaktis, Dakinis and some Dharmapala
21	Khadga, sword	Dymbol of Manjusri, Karmadakini, Cunda, Avalokitesvara (Tantric), Mahasahasraparamardani and Mahamayuri
22	Khakkhara, alarm staff, a long wooden staff having a metal top with 4, 6, or 12 metal rings attached	Symbols of Ksitigarbha, Sariputra and Maudgalyana
23	Khatvanga, ritual wand, with vajra top,	Symbol of Dakinis and Padmasambhava

	skull, two heads and trisula above	
24	Lung-ta, airy horse, carrying the flaming pearl	Use on praise and luck flag
25	Mala, rosary made of beads, seeds, bones and sometimes of skulls	Symbols of Avalokitesvara, Yellow Tara, and Prajnaparamita. A skull rosary is used in demon worship
26	Mayurapiccha, peacock feathers	Symbols of Mahamayuri (yellow form), Mamaki, Sridevi, and Saraddevi
27	Myrobalam, fruit	Symbol of Man-la, the Medicine Buddha
28	Naga, serpent,	Symbol of Buddha (Liberator of the nagas), Nagarjuna, Aryajangulitara, Ugratara, Dharmapala and Vajrapani
29	Nakula, mongoose	Symbol of Kubera, jambhala, Visravana, and <i>Arhat</i> Bakula
30	Padma, lotus	Symbol of Padmapani, Manjusri, Sitara, Avalokitesvara, Pandara and Padmadakini
31	Parasu, axe	Symbol of Tantric manifestation and Dharmapala
32	Pasa, noose	Symbol of Amoghapasa, Marici, Yamantaka and Vajrapani
33	Patra, begging bowl	Symbol of Amitabha, Man-la, Gautama and Avalokitesvara
34	Phurbu, ceremonial dagger in form of a triangle	It is a form of Hayagriva
35	Pustaka, book, made of palm leaves, long and narrow, tied with string	Symbol of Manjusri, Avalokitesvara, Prajnaparamita and some <i>Arhats</i>
36	Ratna, jewel	Symbol of Cintamani
37	Sankha, conch shell, used as a trumper	Symbol of Vajratara and Ekajata
38	Sanmudras, six auspicious symbols or ornaments, usually made of human	Symbol of Ekajata, Yamari, and some Dakinis

	bones, carved with demons or symbols	
39	Sara, arrow	Symbol of Kurukulla (red), Vajratarā, Mahasahasrapramardani, Parnasabari, Mahamayuri (green), Cunda, (16 armed), and some forms of Avalokitesvara
40	Surya, sun	Symbol of Akasagarbha and Maraci
41	Svastika, swastika	Symbol of Gautama
42	Trikona, triangle (all Buddhas in dhyanasana form trikona)	Symbol of the triratna or three jewels, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha
43	Triratna, three jewels	Symbolizing Buddha, Dharma (law), and Sangha (the community)
44	Trisula, trident (three-forked flame above sun disk)	Symbol of Simhanadavalokitesvara, Yellow Tara, Jambhala and Mahakala
45	Utpala, blue lotus	Symbol of Pandara, Green Tara, and Prajnaparamita
46	Vajra, thunderbolt (literally, diamond) scepter	Symbol of Aksobhya, Vajrapani, Vajradhara, Vajrasattva and all Yi-dam
47	Vina, lute	Symbol of Sarasvati, Aryajangulitara and Dhrtarastra
48	Visvajra, double thunderbolt	Symbol of Amoghasiddhi, Visvapani, Tara, Visvadakini and Usnisavijiaya

Source: Antoinette K. Gordon, *The iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*, Munshirram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 12-19.

The above mentioned are the symbolic objects understanding of which helps to differentiate and identify certain deities and Buddhist Pantheons both Tantric and non-Tantric. There are also some other symbols which required to know before trying to understand any Buddhist paintings despite having knowledge of the symbols mentioned

above. Those other symbols are the *mudras* (Symbolic Hand pose), and *Asana* and *Vahanas*.²¹

4.2. Themes

Generally, themes in *Thangka* and mural paintings of Sikkim were the depiction of various aspects from Vajrayana Buddhism. *Mandalas*, *Dharmacakra*, *Se-tho*, *Yedams*, portrait of individual Deities, portrait in group of Deities, and some other common themes has depicted in such paintings. However, having religious aspects in this type of paintings were not solely features or themes of the paintings of Sikkim but the historical figures were also seen the subject of paintings. Depiction of the *Chogyal* Phuntsuk Namgyal with his Queen and son in her lap, and his subjects (Iepchas and Bhutias) in the mural painting from Pemiongchi Monastery witness the fact that despite the depiction of Buddhist deities or religious aspects the secular them had been painted in this type of painting found in rare case (see Plate-24). However, there were many historical figures depicted in Tibetan *Thangka* and mural of Tibet who were mostly religious teachers but in the case of *Thangka* and mural paintings of Sikkim, it is a special case.

Unlike other school of paintings, this type of paintings had been strictly following certain principles which had not been changed so far. The projection of Deities in certain gesture and pose, certain proportion, symbols associated with the Deities are traditionally keeping as it is since very long back. In fact, most of the themes of this type of paintings were also not changed so far despite little changes in the background scene and some other minute things which actually did not affect the themes. In fact, gradual changes in style of painting could be notice through the comparison of different paintings found during the period of my study. The close observation into the paintings of Sikkim during the eighteenth to the second half of the Twentieth century paved the way to study it into two broad categories based on its themes, i.e., religious and secular.

4.2.1: Religious Themes

²¹Mudras, and gesture are also symbols which has as much importance as the symbolic objects in order to understand the Buddhist art and paintings. For more information see, Antoinette K. Gordon, *The Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publications, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 12-26

Major number of *Thangka* and mural paintings are fall under this category of themes, however, here only some of the themes are highlighted which are found in the monasteries of Sikkim. In fact, *Thangka* had been considered as sacred by believers and religious painting by many scholars too, hence, there is no doubt that most of the subjects depicted in this kind of paintings are of religious theme. However, mural had been serving as a medium of expression to depict different ideas and areas despite religious subjects all over the world. But in Sikkim, murals were only found in Buddhist monasteries that depicted the iconographic figures and symbols of the Buddhist deities, with the similar painting style of *Thangkas*.

4.2.1.1: Wheel of Life

According to the tradition in every Buddhist Monasteries painting of ‘Wheel of life’ or ‘*Bhava Chakra*’ should be there in the left side of the main entrance of it. The purpose of depicting this painting meant for the believer or visitors who could see the cycle of life (birth and death) in limitless sphere of time. In the paintings of Plates 25, 26 and 27, the ‘wheel of life’ is holding by a Red-Brown colored wrathful figure with his hands and teeth. There are twelve compartments depicting them as the interlinked to each other in the outmost rim. The huge circle next to the rim has six divisions of the world of existence through which every living being passed through the circle of birth and death until and unless they attend Nirvana or emancipated. The third or next inner circle has two parts showing in two opposite colours, i.e., White and Black. Depiction of figures in white part represent that the living being moving from the lower world towards higher one and vice versa. In the core of the rim which is a centre of the wheel of Life, depicts figure of three animals; pig, snake, and cock. Each one is the symbol of ignorance, anger and lust respectively. These three animals symbolized the three main sins which keeps the ‘Wheel of Life’ turning.²²

The twelve interlinked causes or Karma are depicted in twelve different parts of the outmost rim. The depiction of these twelve interlinked in the rim of Wheel of life in the painting could be found well described in the book *Celestial Gallery*:

²² Nirmal C. Sinha, *Tales the Thankas Tell*, Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 1989, p. 41

The outer ring of the wheel illustrates the twelve stages of dependent arising, which propel us through our self-made heavens and hells. The first of the twelve links shows a blind man with a cane, signifying *ignorance* of our true nature. The second link is illustrated by a maker of clay pots. Just as the potter molds clay into diverse objects on a spinning wheel, *action* radiate outward, causing further karma. The third branch, *consciousness*, is symbolized by a monkey in a tree. The fourth branch, *name and form*, is traditionally depicted by people riding in a boat. Here we see a figure as the embodiment of the four mental aggregates of feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness. The fifth link, the *six sources of consciousness*, or the six sense organs- is designated by an empty house with windows. The next link, *contact*, is illustrated by an amorous couple. The meeting of object, sense power, and consciousness is the factor which distinguishes an object as pleasurable, painful, or neutral and which, in turn, generates a new “moment” of consciousness. The seventh branch, *feeling*, is the factor that actually experiences pleasure, pain, or indifference. It is symbolized vividly by a man with an arrow in his eye. The eighth link, *attachment*, is illustrated by a figure drinking wine. In the ninth link, a woman grasps for fruits in a tree. This entrenched *grasping* is the cause of future births, which are illustrated by the pregnant woman in the next link. The tenth branch, *existence*, lasts from the time of the fully potentized karma up to the beginning of the next lifetime. The eleventh link is the dependent arising of *birth*, and the twelfth, the dependent arising of *again and death*.²³

The ‘Wheel of life’ is the powerful and popular paintings amongst other Buddhist paintings in all sects of Tibetan Buddhism found in Sikkim. Whether in the Rumtek Dharma-chakra Monastery of Kargu-pa sects or in the Pemiongchi Monastery of Nyingma-pa sects this is the common painting that painted on the left side of the main entrance of the monasteries.

Despite the main ideas that projected very commonly in the paintings with this theme there are some differences having related with the style of paintings. Such differences related with the artistic works of painters to project the ideas in the painting. For instance, the figures of three animals, pig, cock, and snake in the core of the ‘wheel of life’ are painted with slightly differences by different painters. It is also distinctly seen difference in the walls of the twelve parts in the outer rim of the painting. The figures are also painted in differently. Though having the same theme in these paintings they slightly

²³ Ian, A. Baker, *Celestial Gallery*, Om Books International, New Delhi, 2011, p.33

differentiate to each other in the style of paintings. In fact, these paintings are painted by different painters in different times with their own painting style.

4.2.1.2: Sixteen Arhats

The sixteen Apostles of Buddha (*Nayten Chudrug*) were the Indian saints, who bears Indian name and held the responsible of spreading Dharma since *mahaparinirvana* of Sakyamuni Buddha.²⁴ The Sixteen *Arhats* is popular in Tibet, Mongolia, China and some other countries of South East Asia. Western scholar David Jackson believe that original theme of the painting was originated in China²⁵ and became popular in other countries where Buddhism had been flourished. Indian scholar Parthaditya Pal pointed out that the Chinese tradition recognized as many as five hundred *arhats*.²⁶ In the Tibetan tradition generally, *arhats* were considered in either group of sixteen or eighteen. However, it is found that the theme had been painted in two ways, viz, either individually portrayed in a series of eighteen *Thangkas* or in the group in pairs or three in each *Thangka* (sees Plate-28 and 29).²⁷

According to the Tibetan tradition, Chinese emperor (Tan Hui) sent Hvasanga to Maghada for inviting Sixteen *Arhats* to China. During their stay in China emperor and his ministers provided an artist to draw their images, hence became the first *Arhats* painting which later on became popular in this tradition of painting. The Tibetan devotees later on commissioned Tibetan artist to depict the Sixteen *Arhats* in the form of *Thangka* and hence became more popular this theme in *Thangka* paintings too.²⁸

Tradition believes that most of them were Indian and hence their names bear pro-Indian words. These Sixteen *Arhats* were as follows;

1. Angaja (Yanlangjung) holds incense pot and fly whisk fan (from yak taik)
2. Vakula (Bakula) carries a Mongoose

²⁴ Nirmal C. Sinha, *Tales*, op.cit, p.15

²⁵ David Jackson, *A History of Tibetan Painting; the Great Tibetan painters and their Traditions*, Osterreichischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften Wien, 1996, p. 75.

²⁶ Parthaditya Pal, *Tibetan Paintings; a study of Tibetan Thangkas, Eleventh to Nineteenth centuries*, Time Books International, new Delhi, 1988, p. 123

²⁷ Ibid, p. 123

²⁸ Nirmal. C. Sinha, *Tales*, op.cit, p. 25

3. Ajita (Miphampa) is shown in a mudra of meditation
4. Vanavasi (nagnane) holds in his left hand the Yak tail as fly whisk
5. Kalika (Dudan Dorje) displays golden ear-rings
6. Vajriputra (Dorje Mabu) holds yak tail as fly whisk
7. Bhadra (Zangpo) is shown as preaching with his right hand and meditating with his left hand
8. Kanaka Vatsa (Serbheu) carries a noose of jewels,
9. Kanaka Bhadradvaja has his hands in the mudra of perfect meditation
10. Rahula (Dratsenzin) holds a jewel crown
11. Chudapanthaka (Lamten Tsen) is in Dhyana Mudra
12. Pindola Bharadvaja (Bharadvaza Sonamlan) holds a book and a begging bowl
13. Panthaka (Lamten) holds a book in his left hand and with right hand blesses devotees
14. Nagasena (Luide) holds a vase and a staff
15. Gopaka holds a book
16. Abheda holds a stupa.²⁹

The two *Thangkas* preserved and displayed in the gallery of D.H.H. are actually the part of five *Thangkas* consisted a set in all together, painted by Sikkimese painter, Ganden Lharipa. Remaining other three *Thangkas* was not found, probably was donated to some individuals by artist himself. Moreover, this theme and representation of Indian monks in the paintings had been prevailing theme in the paintings of Sikkim too.

The Vajrayana Buddhist deities, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas were the main figures in the *Thangkas* and mural paintings tradition but later on, the artists had also been depicted the lama and *siddhas*, projecting them as pure and important in the Buddhist tradition. The depiction of Buddhist teachers or monks as the pure or in high profile in these traditional paintings was the consequence of the theory of incarnation. The depiction of Buddhist monk based on the theory of incarnation in these types of paintings found at first in Tibet and later on in Sikkim which was brought from Indian concept of

²⁹ Ibid, p. 26

Nirmankaya.³⁰ Songtsen Gampo, the founder of Buddhism in Tibet was considered as the incarnation of Chenrezi (Avalokitesvara), Thonmi Sambhota, the inventor of the script of Tibetan language was recognized as the incarnation of Jampalyang (manjusri) and many other were established as incarnate monks and influential personalities who had been the subject and the theme of the paintings of this tradition.³¹ In fact, there are diverse themes and representation in these traditional paintings which were in some point becomes tough to consider as the religious paintings or even a secular one. However, considering the ideas of incarnation and the religious philosophy of Vajrayana Buddhism, most of the paintings in this tradition could be study under the large banner of religious theme. Though, there are some paintings which would not be fitted to consider under this themes and such paintings need to see with the eye of secular view rather than former one.

4.2.2: Secular Themes

Thangka and mural paintings of Sikkim have been depicted the Buddhist religious aspects as the basic themes in the paintings from the beginning. In fact, Buddhism and this kind of traditional paintings had been going together in the course of their history and hence became complimentary of each other. Though, depiction of the historical figures like king and Queen of Sikkim, monk, culture, and common folks of Sikkim in *Thangka* and mural paintings could be observed in some paintings that produced by Sikkimese painters during the mid and second half of the twentieth century. This mural depicted *Chogyal* and his Queen in the Pemyongchi Monastery was painted by Ringzing *Lharipa* in the 1960s with the help of his students as for assistance to him.³² Historical date for the same mural could be found in 1967-68, mentioned by Anna Balikci-Denjongpa in her article published in the bulletin of Tibetology.³³

This mural painting is a good example for the depiction of the lively social, political and religious aspects of Sikkim during the reign of Namgyal Dynasty. The *Chogyal* or the ‘Religious King’ was the title conferred to the King of Sikkim who was

³⁰ Ibid, p. 31

³¹ Ibid, p. 32

³² This information is collected from one of the famous *Thangka* painter named Tenzing Norbu Lharipa, Principal of the Traditional Art School, Gangtok.

³³ Anna Balikci-Denjongpa, ‘Ringzing Lhadripa Lam,a (1912-1977) and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology’s Ajanta Hall’, *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 49. No. 2, 2013, p. 69

the guardian of the Dharma in the land of Sikkim.³⁴ Considering the fact that the King of Sikkim was regarded a religious head of the land, his place, therefore, became very important even in the religious matter which has shown in this mural, seated on the Throne in high position with his Queen and on his right side probably a Monk, wearing a ceremonial hat on his head, and common people wearing both Lepcha and Bhutia customs were offerings some fruits and vegetables carrying full of baskets on their back. In this scene, artist has shown a relation between the King and the common folks of Sikkim as authority or the Lord and the subordinate. In this painting artist also has painted some symbolic religious objects in front of the King, which generally found depicted in front of the Buddhist Deities either in *Thangka* or in murals of the Monasteries. Therefore, in this mural, King has been projected as 'religious figure' or *Chogyal* to whom his subject had been offering their kindness to the religious man.

It could be possible to interpret it as the political narration in the scene depicted in this mural painting where the King had been receiving fruits and vegetables from his subjects. Common people who were offering basket full of fruits and vegetables were slightly bowing towards the King symbolized the homage to the King. The projection of the body gesture and rhythms of common folks walking in a line shows calm and respect to their King. The painter is so successful to narrate the picture of political life of the Sikkim during the reign of the Namgyal Dynasty that the common people or the subjects could met their King directly in certain political or religious occasion(see Plate-24).

In this mural painting artist depicted the common folks of the Sikkim, wearing their traditional dress in their day to day life of those particular times. It is clearly indicate that the traditional dress wearing by the figures of common people and standing in a line of the same level on the ground that the Lepcha and the Bhutia were the major number in the society by that time. In other words, this was the depiction of some aspects of the social life of Sikkim of that particular time. The basket full of Fruits and vegetables offering to the King symbolized as offering the taxes by the subject to their authority. Actually, it is not possible to depict the entire social, political, or cultural aspects of the

³⁴H. H. Risley, *Gazetteers of Sikkim*, Sikkim Nature Conservation Foundation, Gangtok, 1989, p. 249

society in a single painting; hence, a viewer has to make a sense that an artist had been trying to depict some aspects or a particular event in this mural painting. However, one could make a sense after looking the painting that an artist has been successful to project the life of Sikkim at that particular point of times.

In this mural the background scene has depicted of natural landscape consisting mountains, hills, clouds Trees particularly. Depiction of mountains, hills clouds are very common in many *thangkas* as well as in murals paintings of Sikkim. In fact, such types of background scene could be observed in the works of Tibetan artist of earlier phase. With the close observation it found that these mountains, hills, trees, clouds are the areas where artist could express their stylistic expression. However, there might be a symbolic expression behind the depiction of this natural scene which nowhere found to be mentioned.

There are series of five *Thangkas* on the history of Sikkim painted by Ringzing *Lharipa* which was commissioned by the *Chogyal* in the 1960s and at present, it is preserved and displayed in the Gallery of Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.³⁵ These series of five *Thangkas* are the narrative paintings in which there are various events were projected in a single painting divided into seven to eight blocks separated by the wall or lines created by artist. Such type of narration in paintings could be found in miniature paintings of Mughal art school.³⁶ Further, one who has come across the History of Sikkim could make the sense(at least a bit of it) of events that depicted in these *thangkas*.³⁷

Moreover, It is not possible to highlight and discuss in detail about each and every themes that depicted in all *thangkas* and mural paintings of Sikkim especially within a very limited time period. However, some of the themes of both *thangkas* as well as murals were common themes which are highlighted above in this chapter. Again, some of the themes are depicted from outside the ideas and philosophy of the Buddhism, for instance, painting on the history of Sikkim, hence attempted made here to highlight the paintings.

³⁵, Anna Balikci-Denjongpa, Op. cit., p. 70

³⁶ Illustration of Hamjanama made by artist of Mughal period was the best example of such narrative paintings. Bishan Das, Mansur were the two eminent painters of the Mughal period.

³⁷ These five *thangkas* are available in the Gallery of Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.



Plate-25: Wheel of Life, Dharmachakra monastery, Rumtek, 1960s.



Platw-26: Wheel of Life, Old Rumtek monastery, 1940s.



Plate-27: Wheel of Life, Pemyongchi monastery, West Sikkim, 1960s.



Plate-28: Series 1. Sixteen *Arhats*, D.H.H, Gangtok, 1970s



Plate-29: Series 2. Sixteen *Arhats*, D.H.H, Gangtok, 1970s



Plate-24: Unknown title (Mural), Pemiongchi monastery, West Sikkim, 1960s

CONCLUSION

History of *Thangka* and mural paintings or Buddhist religious painting in Sikkim was begun when the Tibetan Buddhism became the religion of the State in Sikkim. It was from the times when Namgyal Dynasty consolidated their holds to rule the land of Sikkim through following the religious belief and diplomatic treaty with Lepchas that marks the foundation for the favorable condition to flourish the tradition of this kind of paintings in Sikkim.¹ Actually, it was not solely reason behind the flourishing of this tradition of paintings rather it was one of many factors behind the development of these kinds of paintings in Sikkim. However, the establishment of the Namgyal Dynasty in Sikkim was the first steps to open the gate for the tradition of Buddhist paintings as well as an opportunity to the Tibetan artists to flourish their artistic talents in the Land of Sikkim to witness the historical marks.

When the Buddhism was recognized as the religion of the state, it paves the way to establish several Buddhist monasteries in different parts of the Sikkim.² Hence, the Buddhist monasteries became the centre for the Buddhist teachings and various other religious ceremonies. In this way, all the followers of the religion began to visit monasteries frequently including *Chogyal* of the Land as well as common folks. Now, the monasteries held the moral guidance of the folks through the teachings of religious belief which had been followed by them in their day to day life. People visit monastery sometimes only for prayer to God, mainly statues of the Lord Buddha, Guru Padmasambhava, Avaloketswara and other deities which are placed in the altar of the main prayer hall. Beside these statues, the iconographic images of the entire Buddhist pantheon were also depicted in murals of the monasteries. However, most of these original murals were destroyed by the several strokes of the earthquakes that occurred many times in Sikkim. Naturally, Sikkim is located in high altitude of three hundred meters from the sea level and it is hilly region where always cold experience remains the

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²Chetan Raj Shrestha, "Sikkim Monastic Heritage After the Earthquake" in (ed) Anna Balikci-Denjongpa, *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 47, No. 1 & 2, 2011, p.40

most.³ Location of the monasteries was also in high altitude and caused the cold and moisture which hampered the paintings both *thangka* and mural, hence rendered one of the reasons to faded away its beautiful colours.⁴ Burning of Butter lamps and incense in front of the *thangkas* caused a thick layer of darkening soot which are extremely difficult to remove, hence, become a reasons of faded away of the original beautiful hue of the colours in paintings.⁵

The first half of the twentieth century witness the involvement of local artist and they continuously flourished entire the century. But the Tibetan artist had been vanished from the second half of the same century which was quite interesting to know the reason behind it. In fact, in the mid of the same century, there was a time when Tibet was occupied by china and some Tibetans including Dalai Lama came to India for their safety in the year 1958-59.⁶ In 1962 there was the bitter clash and Sino-Indian war occurred. By that time Sikkim was the Sovereign state up to 1975, but that particular time period the existence of Sikkim was in danger from outside especially from Chinese invasion. The occupation of Tibet by the China in 1959 was the clear indication of the Chinese imperialism which became threat for a small sovereign state like Sikkim. On the other hand, Sikkim had a good relation with India it was witness that from the presence of IndiraGandhi in one of the occasion of Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.⁷ In this connection, the political disturbances led the break down in the religious and cultural interaction between Tibet and Sikkim from that particular point of times which also closed the interaction and exchanges of artistic works of Tibetan painters in Sikkim. Hence, very less numbers but pure indigenous painters got full chances to flourish their talents in their own style to produce *thangkas* and murals for the monasteries of their own land. No doubt that earlier they had direct connection with the Tibetan painters from

³<https://www.google.co.in/search?q=HLOCATION+OF+sIKKIM+AND+ITS+ALTITUDE&aq=chrome..69i57.13894j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

⁴ Anna Balikci-Denjongpa, "Rinzing Lhadripa Lama (1912-1977) and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology's Ajanta Hall", in (ed) Anna Bamikci Denjongpa, *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2013, p. 70

⁵ Ann Shaftel, *Notes on the Techniques of Tibetan Thangkas*, ", *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1986, p. 103

⁶ V. Suguna Sarma, *The Tibetan Thangka*, Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 2002, p.13

⁷ Tenzin C. Tashi, *Namgyal Institute of Tibetology Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1958-2008*, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 2010, p. 67

whom one of the indigenous painters learned many things related to the skills of paintings in this tradition. But, after the political disturbances and disturbed in the connection with Tibetan painters the indigenous painters produced many *thangkas* as well as murals in many monasteries with resemblance of themes. In third chapter already has mentioned that a novice painter copies their master's work to replicate the same copies in various numbers. Thus, most of the paintings in the second half of the twentieth century were the replication of their master's work. Though, beside the exactly copying the iconographic representation of the deities from their master's work, there were a place for every new painters to show the romance of their artistic skills in the background scene of the paintings, for instance, motif of flowers, waters, hills, clouds, etc.

Application of techniques and methods were mostly followed to its predecessor in the earlier phase. It was because most of those painters were Tibetans, who were trained at their own land. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Tibetan artists were the responsible for the production of those old beautiful murals, who got commissioned by the then higher authority of the monasteries. Regarding *thangka* paintings, it is true that Tibetan painters only produced all of them. However, there were no written records or supporting evidences that how many *thangkas* were produced in Sikkim by them and when and how many *thangkas* were brought directly from Tibet. Still, there are lots of old and historically important *thangkas* in Sikkim which were available with many individuals and has not come yet in the light. Therefore, in the present research work, attempt has been made to bring the history of *thangka* and mural paintings of Sikkim into the light.

Though, Sikkim became the part of India from 1975 onwards, the cultural and religious aspects with artistic colours have not talked to show connection directly with India rather in many occasions referred to Tibet, it is because these tradition of paintings was directly brought from Tibet, not India. It was also true that some of the materials that needed in paintings were brought from nearby Indian market particularly second half of the twentieth century by the local artist, but then also in their works, it does not seen that influence of major Indian painting styles. Hence, in this present research attempts has been made to show the cultural and religious connection with Tibet in the earlier phase

and gradually maintained distance from the influence of the former in their works as well. So the work of indigenous painter in the later phase could be seen as separate style of paintings hence, named as the Rinzing's style or the style of Sikkim.

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TinlayOngmuTasi, Residence of Gangtok, at her residence, 30/05/2017, 10: 15 AM.

ThubtenBhutia, In-charge of Head in Dubdi Monastery, West Sikkim, 22/03/2017, 03: 00 PM.

Lama UrgenTenzing, Head of the TamangGonpa, Kalimpong, 27/10/2017, 03: 45 PM.

Karma Bhutia, Research Assistant, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 12/10/2017, 02: PM.

TsultsemGyatso Acharya, Research Assistant in Namgyal Institute of Tibetology,
24/10/2017, 02: 45 PM.

APPENDIX I

Mudras (Symbolic Hand Poses)



Abhaya



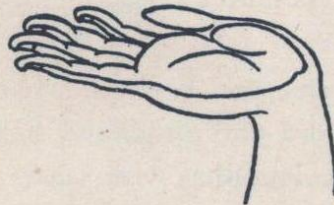
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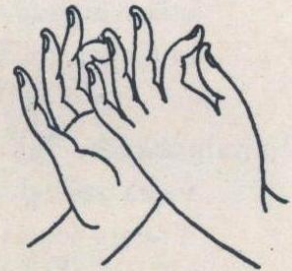
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Bhūtaḍāmara



Buddhasramaṇa



Dharmacakra



Dhyāna or Samādhi



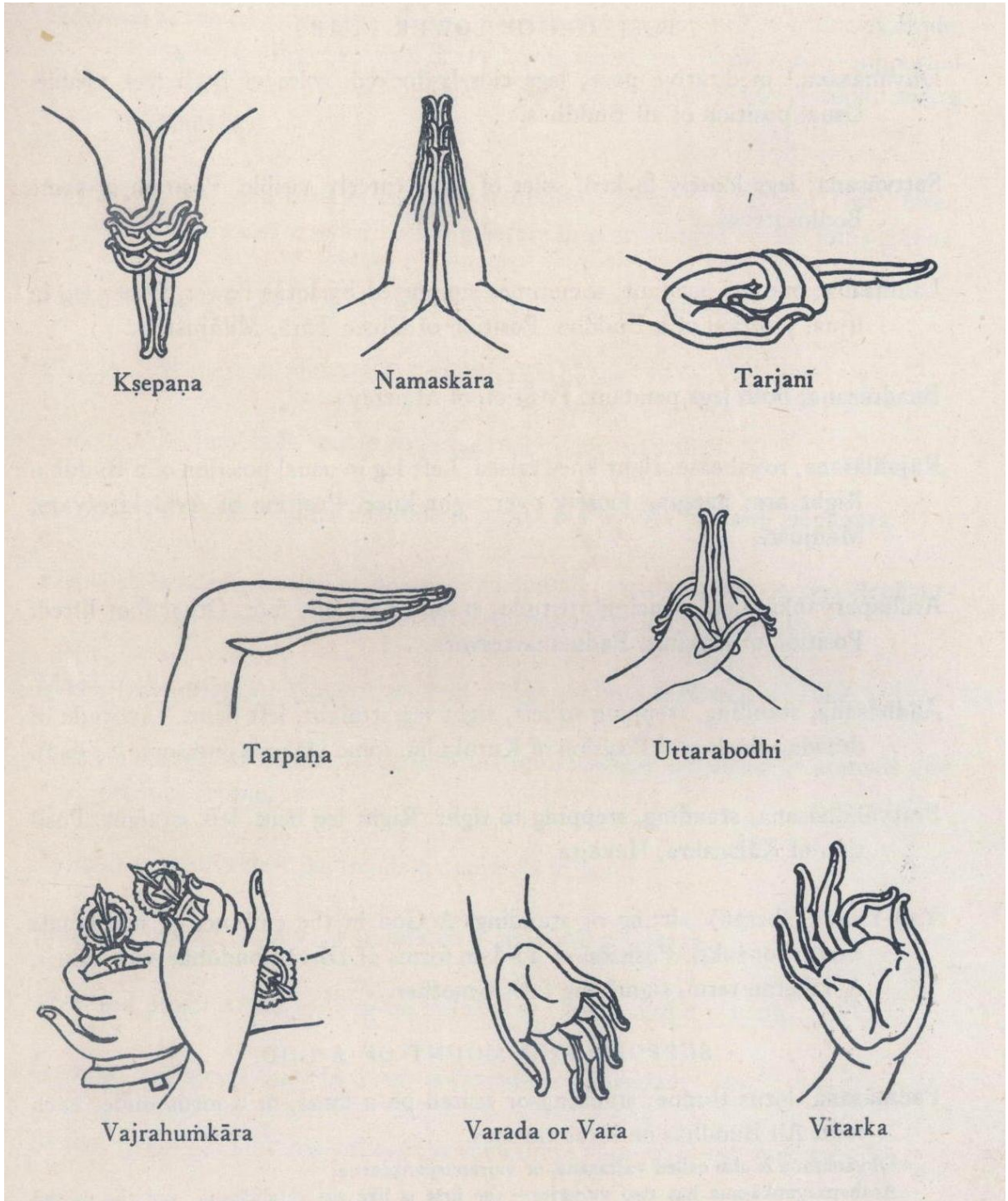
Karaṇa

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Appendix II

Mudras (Symbolic Hand Poses)

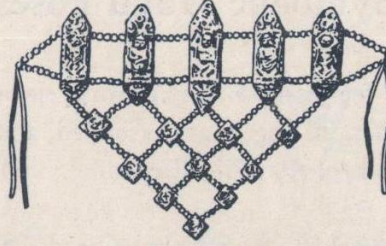


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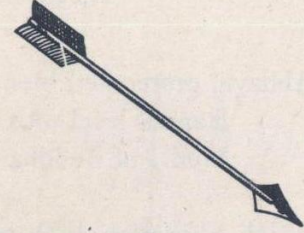
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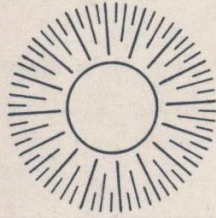
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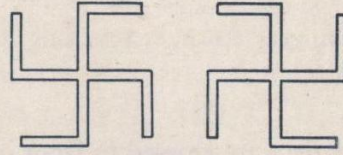
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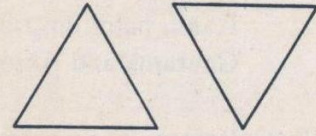
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Sūrya



Svastika



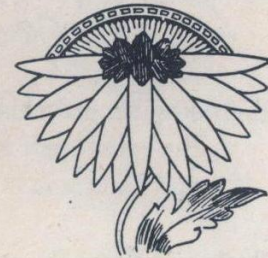
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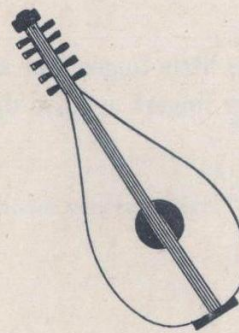
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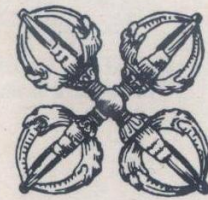
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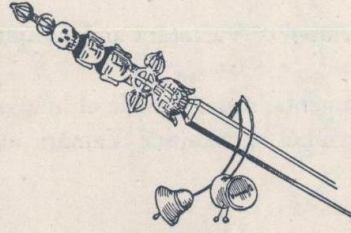
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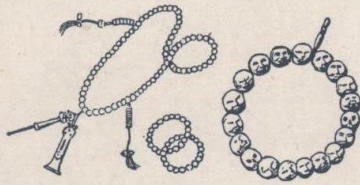
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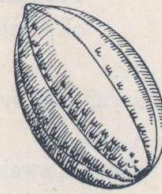
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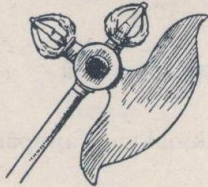
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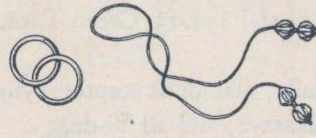
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Padma



Paraśu



Pāśa



Pātra



Phurbu



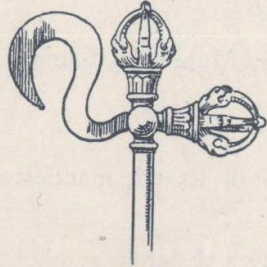
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Ratna

Appendix V

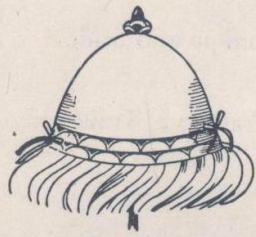
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Añkuśa



Aśoka



Ātapatra



Caitya



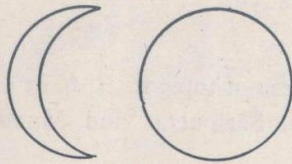
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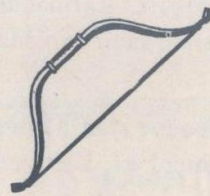
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Campa



Candra



Cāpa



Churī

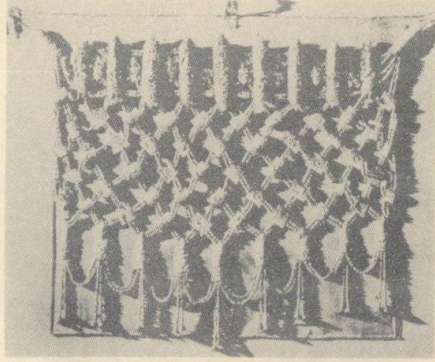
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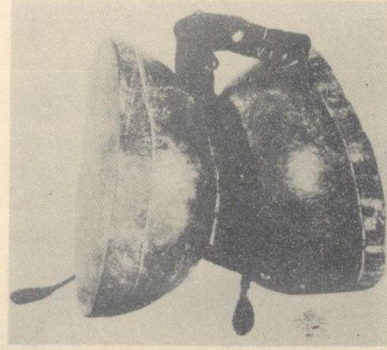


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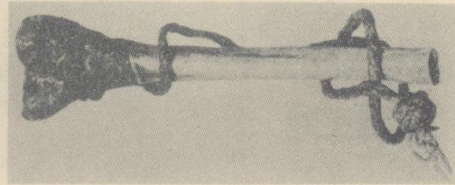
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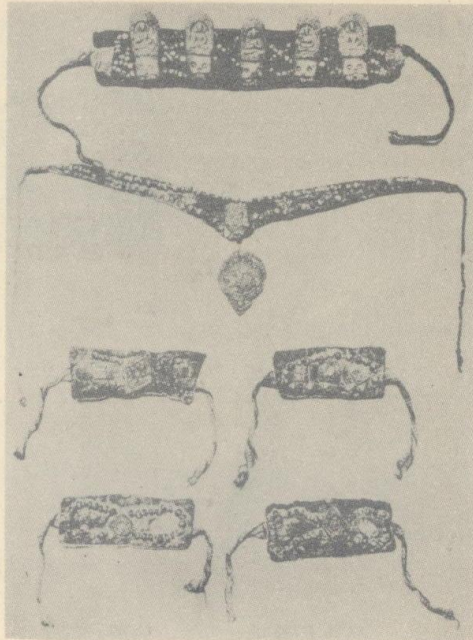
Apron of Carved Human Bones



Skull Drum



Human Thigh-Bone Trumpet



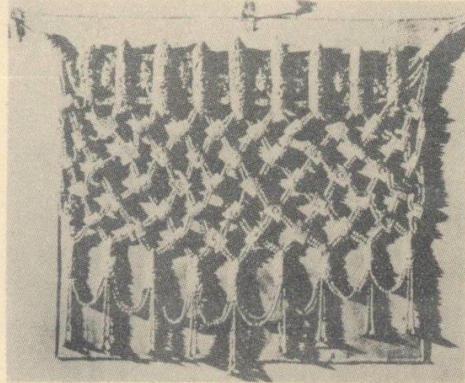
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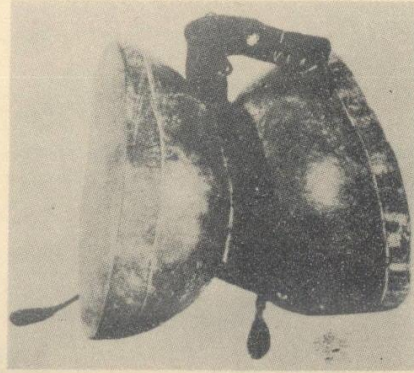
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Appendix VIII

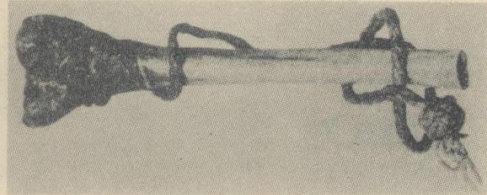
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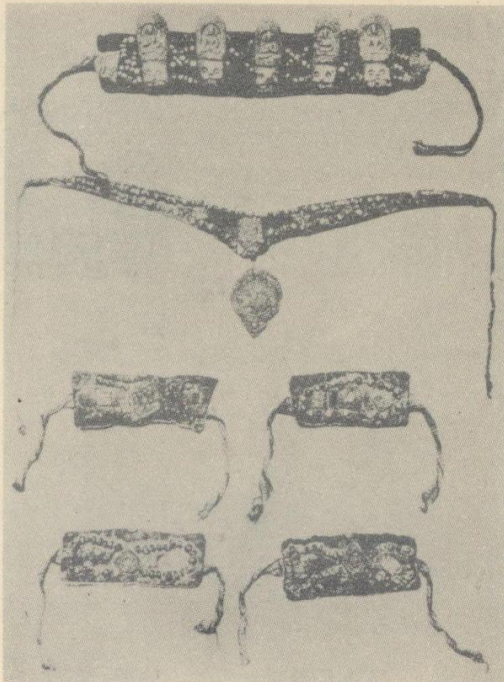
Apron of Carved Human Bones



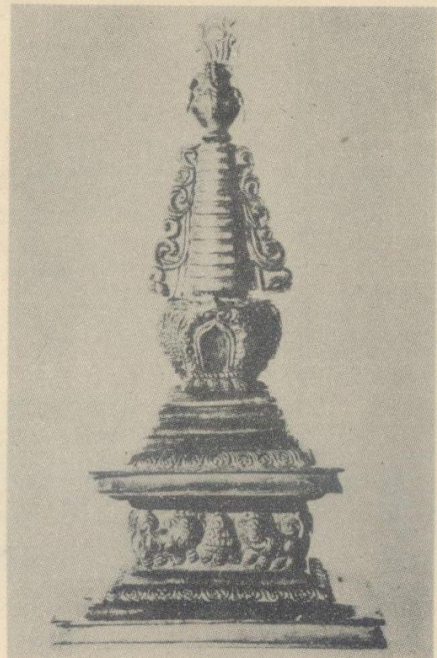
Skull Drum



Human Thigh-Bone Trumpet



Ornaments of Carved Human Bones



Reliquary

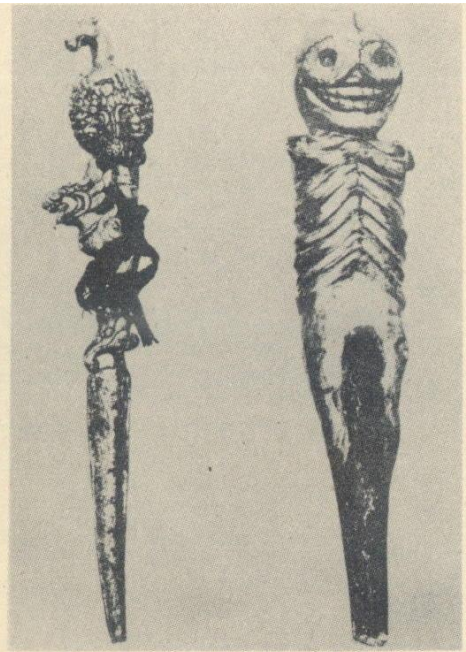
Appendix IX

Symbols



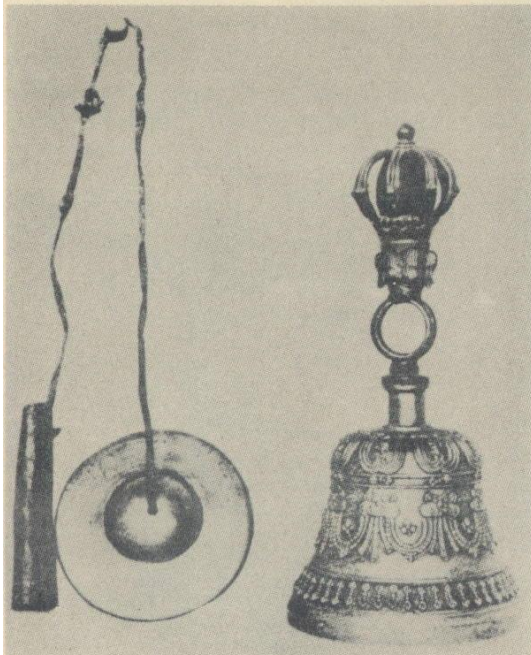
Rosary

Amulet Box



Ceremonial Dagger

Staff



Cymbals

Bell

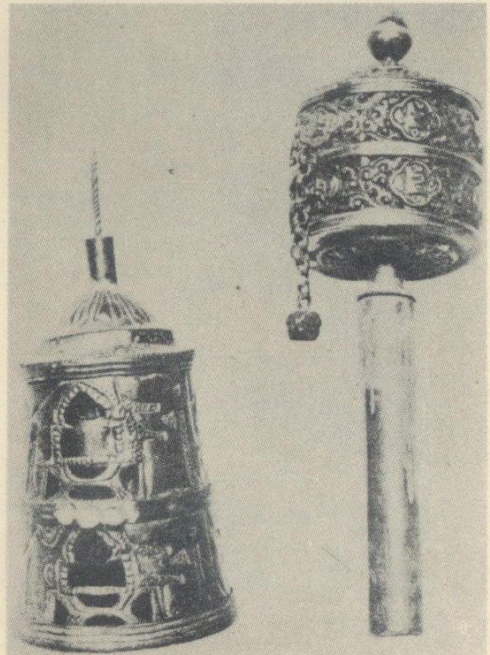


Table Prayer
Wheel

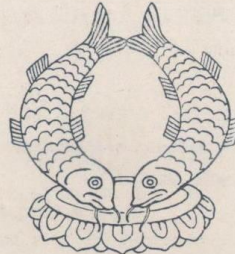
Hand Prayer
Wheel

Appendix X

Symbols



White Parasol



Two Fishes



Seashell



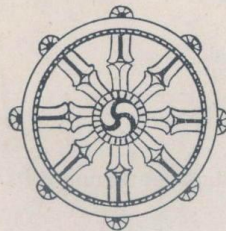
Lotus



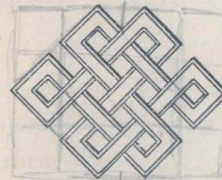
Standard



Vase



Wheel



Endless Knot