

## HISTORY OF BUDDHISM: ITS ADVENT AND SPREAD IN DARJEELING HILLS

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### *Abstract*

*The religious blending of North Bengal and the Himalayan countries held themselves together from the seventh century. In Tibet Buddhism developed into a state religion after the days of Guru Padmasambhava's visit. From then onwards Tibetan Buddhism spread to Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Bhutan, Subsequently after the decline of the Palas and the Senas, the Buddhism disappeared from Bengal and the main land of India but Tibet preserved and developed Buddhism. It spreads towards Himalayan states of Sikkim and Darjeeling areas.*

*Keywords: Himalayan region, Buddhism, Lamaism, Darjeeling, Viharas or Gompas, Tibetan Buddhism*

It was from the earlier days of the Palas, the Buddhist gurus from the universities of Nalanda and Vikramshila visited Tibet. The Historians also acknowledged and the people of Sikkim and Bhutan claim it that the great Buddhist Guru Padmasambhava entered Bhutan and Sikkim from Tibet. In the Himalayan region Guru Padmasambhava is more recognized and worshipped by the name of Guru Rimpoche meaning 'the most precious preceptor'. It is accepted that Guru Padmasambhava

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went to the Himalayan states in the seventh century A.D. From the seventh century Buddhist link started in the Himalayan region and the masses steadily developed a faith towards it. During the Pala period North Bengal became an important hub for Buddhist. The Pala kings Dharma Pala and Dev Pala supported and were patron of Buddhism. The spiritual union between North Bengal and the Himalayan countries held themselves together from the seventh century. In Tibet Buddhism developed into a state religion after the days of Guru Padmasambhava visit. From then onwards Tibetan Buddhism spread to Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Bhutan. Subsequently after the decline of the Palas and the Senas Buddhism disappeared from Bengal and the main land of India but Tibet preserved and developed Buddhism. It developed towards Himalayan states of Sikkim and its areas.<sup>1</sup>

### **SPREAD OF BUDDHISM IN HIMALAYAN REGION AND THE ROLE OF LHATSUN CHENBO**

The Buddhist followers of Sikkim and Tibet believe that Guru *Padma – Sambhava* (Guru Rinpoche) was the founder of Lamaism. As L.A Waddell describes “St.Padma Sambhava visited Sikkim during his journeying in Tibet and its western borderlands and although he left no converts and erected no buildings. However, with the legendry accounts of his visit, it is alleged by Sikkhimate Lamas that their Lord Guru Padma entered the country by the “Lordly pass” *Jo-la* and on the east side of the pass is pointed out a rock on which he sat down called *Zu’ti*, or throne. And he is said to have returned to Tibet by way of the *Jelep* pass, resting en-route on the *ku-phu* and creating the *Tuko la* by clearing up the rock to crush on obnoxious demon.<sup>2</sup> It is believed that when Guru Padmasambhava visited Tibet he on the way passed through Sikkim and Buddhism spread with his visit. But the introduction of

Buddhism in Sikkim dates firmly from the seventeenth century with the arrival of *Lhatsun* from Tibet.

In Sikkim Lamaism was introduced about the middle of the seventeenth century from the time of *Lhatsun's* arrival. In Tibet during that period Lamaism had become a most powerful order and was actively extending its creed among the Himalayan and Central Asian tribes. With these the three generations of Tibetan from the bordering Chumbi valley had settled on the eastern border of Sikkhite-Tibetan, and from them only was elected the king of Sikkim by *Lhatsun Chembo*. *Lhatsun* introduced the Sakya sect in the region and even now it is believed that his spirit incarnate in the body of the present Sakhya Lama. He firmly established the faith with a Buddhist state.<sup>3</sup>

*Lhatsun Chembo* was a native of *Kongbo* in the lower valley of the *Tsangpo*, which has a climate and physical appearance very similar to Sikkim. His name means "The great victorious Essence of Goodness". He is also known by the title of *Lhatsun namkha Jig-med* or "The Reversed God who fears not the sky," with reference to his alleged power of flying.<sup>4</sup>

*Lhatsun* is acknowledged as real founder of Lamaism in Sikkim. He was born in the fire bird year of the tenth of the sixty year cycles, corresponding to 1595 A.D. in the district of *Kongbu* in south eastern Tibet. He spent many years in different monasteries and in visiting allover Tibet and Sikkim, in the year 1648 arrived in Lhasa and obtained a great status by his scholarship and attracted the favorable notice of *Nay-wan*, the greatest of the Grand Lamas who became the first Dalai Lama in Tibet.<sup>5</sup> Around that period there was a search for a way to Sikkim "*Lhatsun* guided the lamas through different ways to reach the land from the Western gate and

the Southern gate by way of Darjeeling and Namchi. Two other Nyingma pa lamas also arrived with *Lhatsun* and the place where these three lamas met was called by the Lepchas *Yok-sum* which means “the three superior ones or noble men” a literal translation of “the three lamas”.<sup>6</sup>

The Tibetan Lamaism came to Sikkim with a view to converting the country to their faith. These Lamas had come from north, west and south. Then going towards the extreme east near Gangtok they met a man named *Phuntshong*, who was coronated as the first king of Sikkim with the title ‘*cho*’ which mean the ruler who rules according to the Buddhist righteous law. *Phuntshong Namgye* was aged 38years at that time, which is said to have been 1641 A.D.

“The Dalai Lama recognized Phuntsog Namgye as the ruler of the southern slopes of the Himalayas (Sikkim) and is also credited to have sent ceremonial presents such as silken scarf bearing Dalai Lama’s seal, the Mitre\* of the Guru Rimpoche, phurpa\* and the most precious sand image of the Guru. Consequently the newly established Bhutia principality of Namgyal dynasty was tied to Tibetan theocracy. Since then upto 19<sup>th</sup> century the Bhutia rulers of Sikkim looked up to Tibet for protection against their political foes”.<sup>7</sup> Lhatsun Chenpo then spent the greater part of the rest of his life in Sikkim exploring its caves and mountains recesses for making temples and monasteries. He first of all built a hut at Dubde which afterwards became the monastery. It is believed that he built crude shrines at Tashiding, Pemiongchi and Sangna Choling. Lhatsun died in the latter end of the seventeenth century and with his effort Lamaism or Buddhism had steadily progressed in Sikkim. As Buddhism was declared as the state religion of Sikkim and Darjeeling used to be the part of the independent Buddhist kingdom prior to 1835. Darjeeling also flourished in Buddhism with many monasteries and Viharas.

### **SPREAD OF BUDDHISM IN DARJEELING**

The district of Darjeeling used to be a part of the independent Buddhist kingdom who ruled the territory from “Thangla near Phari in Tibet in the North to Tagangla near Puro in Bhutan in the East from Titaliya or Keshenganj in Bihar in the south to Tomar river in Nepal was bigger than what it is today.”<sup>8</sup> Much of the area what comprises the present day Darjeeling district was handed over by the seventh Chogyal of Sikkim, Tenzing Namgyal on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1835 to the British East India Company.

“The Governor General having expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, for the purpose of enabling the servants of his Government, suffering from sickness, to avail themselves of its advantages I, Sikkimputtee Rajah out of friendship for the said Governor General, hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Company, that is, all the land south of the Great Rangeet river, east of the Balasar, Kahail and Little Rangeet rivers, and west of the Rangpo and Mahanadi rivers”.<sup>9</sup> This land was regarded as worthless and uninhabited and the number of people was also few who believed in Buddhist culture that prevailed in the Himalayan Buddhist Kingdoms (Sikkim and Bhutan).

In Darjeeling “on the summit of the observatory hill and worshipped by the Hindus as well as the Buddhists and as a matter of fact, paid homage to by many nationalities was in the beginning inside the cave. Orisons had been offered by Hindu priests ever since 1815, if not earlier, that is to say, at least two decades prior to the year 1835, when the district was gifted by the Maharaja of Sikkim to the East India Company. Dorje Lama who is accredited with all that is antiquarian about this hill station and to whose name is ascribed the philological origin of the word Darjeeling appeared on the scene.”<sup>10</sup> The description of the high level lama or

Dorjeling pa lama came from Bunthang (Sikkim) and in their short stay. They happened to build the monastery in the observatory hill and from then it is known as Darjeeling. It has been described as “that by Mr. Paul that Darjeeling properly Dorjeling may owe its name to the terton Dorje-lingpa, who visited the Kartokpa Doling (properly Dorjeling) monastery in Sikkim, of which the Darjeeling monastery was the branch.”<sup>11</sup> “In 1765 or 156 years ago, as a branch of the Phodong Monastery of Sikkim. It was looted and sacked by the Nepalese in 1815, leaving only a small shrine called Mahakal on the site which marked its location.”<sup>12</sup> The longchuk is believed to be remaining of the monastery which is worshipped by both the Buddhist and the Hindu community till now. Buddhist belief and practices started with the introduction of Buddhism in the Himalayan territory and Darjeeling as a part is studded with Buddha Viharas or gompas.

When the hill tract of 138 square miles which was the nucleus of Darjeeling District was acquired by the East India company from the Raja of Sikkim in 1835 it was ‘almost entirely under forest and practically uninhabited.’ The development began in 1841 when the first tea plantation was established here and the industry was organized in 1856. In the wake of this accelerated development programme, a large number of people settled there for good. The Darjeeling, Kalimpong area, therefore is now inhabited by diverse mountain people and majority of them are Buddhists.”<sup>13</sup>

### **THE DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES THAT FOLLOW BUDDHISM**

Darjeeling hills are inhabited by the different racial groups due to the migration from the neighboring states and countries during the colonial period and the post-colonial period. And most of the people in the hills are of Mongolian Origin belonging chiefly to various Nepalese castes, but also including large number of Lepchas,

Bhutias and Tibetans.<sup>14</sup> The two major groups of people to practice Buddhism are the Bhutias and Lepchas who are the aboriginal inhabitants of the region.

Lepchas are the aboriginal inhabitant of the country who call themselves Rong i.e; the squatters and their country the land of cows. The word Lepcha as it should be spelt Lepcha or Lapche means the people of vile speech and a contemptuous appellation given to them by the Nepalese. Formerly they possessed all the hill country of Darjeeling and Sikkim but about 250 years ago the Tibetans occupied their country and drove them into the lower valley and gorges and in 1706 the tract east of Tista which is now included in Kalimpong was conquered and taken from them by the Bhutanese. They are born naturalists and have separate names for nearly every bird, plant, orchid and butterfly. With the introduction of settled cultivation and the reservation of the forest, they have had to give up their old nomadic cultivation and have lost much of their jungle craft. There was a cultural shift and they now have learnt in its places how to make terraces for rice fields and the methods of agriculture practiced by the Nepalese.<sup>15</sup>

They are primarily people of the forests and have tended also to move away from the neighborhood of Darjeeling as it became more developed. In Sir James Hooker's account of them (1854) they appear as having become Buddhist only in relatively recent time. Dr A Campbell's note of 1840 reflects to the effect that "the Lepchas are Buddhists", and that some of their lamas "are educated at home" while others "go for their education to the great monastic establishments beyond the snows( i.e; Tibet)," and that they have also some Tibetan lamas. J.A.H. Louis who travelled in North Bengal and Sikkim in the 1890's described the Lepcha as partially converted to Buddhism but still clinging to old superstitions and old forms of fetishism or demonolatry. He adds that many of the ceremonies of Sikkim Buddhism for the

propitiation or subjugation of evil spirits is no doubt of Lepcha origin, and other writers of the same period would describe Burmese Buddhism as a gross degeneration from the pure Buddhism of the Pali texts.<sup>16</sup>

The Bhutias of Darjeeling consists of four classes, the Sikkimese Bhutias, who are a mixed race of Tibetans and Lepcha being the descendants of Tibetans. They were settled in Sikkim few centuries ago and intermarried with Lepchas, Sherpa. Bhotias who came from the east of Nepal, the word share merely meaning east, the Drukpa or Dharma Bhotias from Bhutan and Tibet. The great majorities of the first class are found in and around Darjeeling of the second to the west of the district, while the third class is practically confined to Kalimpong where they are the descendents of the Bhutanese who were settle on the land at the time of the annexation. There they have been re-entered in forests by the immigration of Tibetans from the Chumbi valley and its neighborhood, who have been attracted by more fertile country and more regular form of Government than that of Tibet.<sup>17</sup> The Bhutias are a community in a cultural and religious sense; they have been described as Mongoloid population of Buddhist faith and Tibetan speech. The term Bhutia, or Tibetan people can thus mean either those who are of Tibetan religion and culture, Buddhist belief and practices may have been introduced to the Bhutias as early as the eight century when Guru Padma Sambhava as the founder of Buddhism in their country, but its establishment there in the form in which it is now known as a powerful hierarchical institution dates only from the mid- seventeenth century when it was introduced from Tibet.

The word Sherpa “signifies men of the east” (shar-east pa-men of). Thus the Sherpas have quickly been able to acquire a personal identity since the name suggested by them for themselves has entered in common parlance. Lamaism is the religion

professed by the Sherpas. It is widely accepted nomenclature applied to Tibetan Buddhism. The Sherpas are quite well known all over the world for their virility as porters and guide in mountain expedition, they have a number of exogamous clans which can broadly be divided into two groups- khadev and khamedu, the former holding a higher status than the later. They are recognized as one of the scheduled tribes.<sup>18</sup>

The Nepalis of Darjeeling are predominantly Hindu, but among the non-Hindu tribes there are the Sherpas, the Yolmos, the Murmis or Tamang Newars and Gurung. Of these the Tamang are numerically the largest in Darjeeling district, they are referred to in some of the older literatures as murmis whereas some of the present inhabitants of Nepal are descended from Hindus who moved into the area at the time of Muslim expansion in north India. It is accepted that Buddhism entered their country from Tibet in the eighth century at the time of its conquest by the Tibetan king Svanson Gempo.<sup>19</sup> The Murmis are a Nomad and pastoral branch of the Bhotias, who always seemed to be more allied to the Nepalese. They are also known as Tamang Bhotias and Lamas.<sup>20</sup> They have settled in Darjeeling, Sikkim and Jalpaiguri district and constitute one of the largest Buddhist group and provide a centre of Buddhist solidarity for other smaller groups.

The Yolmos or kagatey are also a little known tribe. Their traditional occupation was paper making. They used to be treated as one of the Tamang groups but today they are subsumed under the Bhutia group and given the status of scheduled tribe. Though traditionally a Buddhist tribe, they believe to have migrated from Himalayas of Nepal and held closer social ties with the Nepalis than the Bhutias.<sup>21</sup>

Newars are also fairly numerous, they usually bear the title Pradhan. There is the dearth of information regarding the descendents of Newars Lichchavi epigraphs mention Mandri and Koli in connection with the royal lineage. The derivation of Newar is from Nepal itself. Baburam Acharya believes that Nepal is derived from Newars a people whom he holds to be early settlers of Austric origin. They are now traders and artisans, agriculturists and domestic servants and some still adhere to their old religion Buddhism.<sup>22</sup> The Newars who are in Darjeeling are known by the surname Pradhan and are divided religiously. Some are Buddhists others have become Hinduised, the former are known as Buddha margis but their original culture appears to have been Buddhists and it is possible that the newars have some claim to represent a surviving tradition of Indian Buddhism. Gurungs are also numerous in number and some of them follow the Buddhist religion.

The Tibetan refugees who have settled in Kalimpong and Darjeeling are also Buddhists. The political unrest had initiated the process of migration of Tibetans before the invasion of the Chinese around 1950. Some of them came to India as traders before the invasion and many more have come since as refugees. The Tibetan refugees are also the strong holder of the Buddhist faith in Darjeeling.

The tradition of respect to Hindu and Buddhist deities is continued even by the Nepalis in the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya. Besides the Buddhist Newars, the Tamang and Sherpas worship Hindu deities and celebrate Hindu festivals as much as other pure Hindu groups. And most Nepalis revere Buddha and respect the Buddhist monks. They also celebrate Buddhist festivals like Losar (new-year) and Buddha Purnima.<sup>23</sup>

## EARLY MONASTERIES AND ITS BACKGROUND IN AND AROUND DARJEELING TOWN

In Darjeeling Buddhism was introduced around seventeenth century as a part of Sikkim. According to the historical information, the first monastery of Sikkim was built in 1701 at Dubdi and since then monasteries have been constructed almost regularly. There are certain monasteries that are known as Tibetan while most of the monasteries are known by the name of the communities whose need they used to serve.<sup>24</sup>

In Darjeeling town two old monasteries founded under some first monasteries of Sikkim are **Bhutia Busty Monastery and Ging Monastery**. It is commonly known as Bhutia Monasteries. The monastery in Bhutia Busty is regarded as one of the oldest monastery. The monastery once stood on observatory Hill was built in 1765 or 156 years ago, as a branch of the Phodang Monastery of Sikkim. It was looted and sacked by the Nepalese in 1815, leaving only a small shrine called Mahakal on the site which once marked its location. What remained of it was transferred in 1860-61 to the flat to the north-east of St. Andrew's Church and in 1878-79 was finally removed to Bhutia Busty where it still exists.<sup>25</sup>



Monastery of Bhutia Busty Darjeeling (1878-1879)

Source: Collected by researcher on the month of November 2015.

As popularly known as **Bhutia Busty monastery** its actual name is **Karma Kungyur Drupgya Choeling Monastery**. Its parent monastery is the Phodong monastery of Sikkim. The old Monastery was destroyed by an earthquake in 1930's and later it was built by Tashi Namgyal the Chogyal of Sikkim. In the main chamber the Buddha idol is worshipped and they follow the Kagyurpa seat. There are about 20 lamas attached to the monastery, ten are from Sikkim and others are the Gelongs Lamas who are married house holders and live elsewhere only on special occasions they gather at the monastery. The monastery receives a sum of 2,000 per annum from the Sikkim Government as aid. The Chham festival is organized every year. The monthly puja of the Padma Sambhava is also one of the important festivals. The Buddha Purnima is the biggest ceremony where processions are taken out. The

monks of this monastery also visits the temple in observatory hills (Mahakal temple) where the monastery was situated before and two lamas perform the daily rituals there and whatever they receive from the temple are used for the expenses of the monastery.

The description of the early historical foundation of the monastery is related with the observatory hill as Ronaldshay describes in his book 'Lands of the Thunder Bolt'[1923] "Darjeeling the name of the famous hill station which was the starting point of all the expeditions which form the subject matter is said to be a corruption of Dorjeling "the place of the thunderbolt" the name of the monastery which once stood on a well known eminence in the modern town now known as observatory hill, the word attributes the Dorje in the first half of Darjeeling to the name of a lama, Dorje-rinzing, who founded the monastery which once stood on observatory hill. The shrine was subsequently removed to the Bhutia Basti where it remains to these days, but the former site retained the name of "the place of Dorje lama".<sup>26</sup>

**The Ging monastery** the actual name is **Sanchhenthong Delling Gomba** was founded in 1818. The Ging monastery which is three miles to the north of the town is reached by the Rangeet road to the east of the Mall. It was originally situated below the village of Ging but was demolished under certain political differences. When these differences were settled in 1879, after the Sikkim trouble, by the late Sir Ashley Eden, a thatched structure was erected on the present site, which in 1896-98 was rebuilt in stone through the exertions of the present high priest, Lodio lama to which let it be added no contributions were received from the Pemionghi body.<sup>27</sup> J.D Hooker has also described about the Ging monastery as, "Below Lebong is the village Ging surrounded by steeps cultivated with maize, rice and millet. It is rendered very picturesque by a long row of tall poles, each bearing a narrow,

vertically elongated banner, covered with Buddhist inscriptions and surmounted by coronet like ornaments or spear heads, rudely cut out of wood or formed of basket work and adorned with cotton fringe. Ging is peopled by Bhotan emigrants and when one dies if his relations can afford to pay for them two additional poles and flags are setup by the lamas in honour of his memory and that of sanga, the third member of the Buddhist trinity”.<sup>28</sup> L.A Waddell in his book *Among the Himalayas* (1899 pg.73) has also described “*at the end of this spur is the little lamaist monastery of Ging. Its altar is covered with idols, objects that are worshipped as fetishes, and candles and sacrificial implements. Its wall is frescoed with atrocious daubs, representing many devils, deities and saints of Chinese design. The place however is worth visiting by those who have not seen the finer paintings in Tashiding and the larger temples of Sikkim.*”



Monastery of Ging Darjeeling (1818)

Source: Collected by researcher on the month of November 2015.

The monastery follows the Nyingmapa sect and the head lama is in charge of the monastery. The lamas were trained in Pemayangtse monastery. The main ceremony of the monastery used to hold after Losar (the Tibetan New Year) and some lamas from the parent monastery visit the place for the ceremony. For the income of the monastery, it used to get a grant of Rs. 2000 per annum from the Sikkim Government, this grant was the major source of income and the lamas are paid donations for performing the rituals. Now the head lama does not reside in the monastery and the grant from the government is also not regular. This monastery is in a wrecking stage.



Yiga Choeling Monastery (Ghoom) 1850

Source: Collected by researcher on the month of November 2015.

In Ghoom another Tibetan monastery is situated nearly 5km away from the main town of Darjeeling. The **Yiga Choeling monastery or the Ghoom monastery** was

founded by a Mongolian monk Lama Sherpa Gyatsho in 1850 who had come to India in 1820s. It is not clear whether it was he who founded the monastery or it was handed over to him. The Ghoom monastery was founded in 1875 by lama Shherabgyatso, one of the Yellow – sect Geylukpa and at first it was used primarily as a place for meetings, later as a monastery. Previously it received a grant of Rs. 60 per annum from the government. It is managed by a committee and a secretary and has some monks who reside there. E.C Dozey wrote “on 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1918 this monastery was the centre of much interest for some, 5000 people visited it on that day to witness the unveiling and consecration of an image of Champa or Maitraya (the Coming Buddha) Buddha. This huge image, which is over 15 feet in height, was constructed under the personal supervisor of Trome Gishay Rimpoche an eminent Lama of Chumbi. The construction proceeded almost day and night until the image was completed in the course of a single month and cost some 25,000 rupees. The lower portion is made of clay within which are located 16 volumes of the sacred commandments of Buddha printed in Tibet from blocks. It is alleged that the interior of the image is full of precious stones, emblems and other costly articles, while the surface is made of a composition of clay and pounded gold and valuable stones”.<sup>29</sup> The monastery has also constructed an extension hall for nunaye (the prayer and meditation with fasting) which is held every year by the monastery.



Maitreya Buddha statue (Yiga Choeling monastery Ghoom).

Lama Anagarika Govinda came to Darjeeling as a delegate from Ceylon to take part in the international Buddhist Conference. In his book “The Way of The White Clouds” (1966 pg.14) also describe about the Yiga Choeling monastery where he resided for few days and changed his mind for an unforgettable journey into Tibet. He describes the monastery as “a *big square hall, presided over by the gigantic statue of Buddha Maitreya, whose head would have lost itself in darkness of the temple’s upper regions had it not received the daylight coming through an opening of the raised central part of the roof, which was supported by the tall red- lacquered pillars with richly carved and gilded brackets. During the night Maitreya’s golden face reflected the mellow light of the Eternal lamp, which stood in the centre of the hall before a marble table with offerings.*”



*Makdhog monastery Aloorbari (1914) source-collected by researcher on January 2016.*

The **Aloorbari monastery** of Darjeeling its formal name is **Makdhog**. The monastery was established by Lama Sangay who came from Nagpuchay in Nepal. In 1914 the construction of the monastery was started and was completed in 1919, as it symbolize the end of war (first world war) so the monastery was named “Makdhog” that is war ended. The sect which the monasteries follow is the Ningmapa. In its main chamber Guru Padma Sambhava’s idol is worshipped. The monastery functions under the Yolmo Buddhist Association. In 1934 the old monastery was damaged by earthquake and it was again constructed. Previously the monastery used to hold kangyur ceremony on October and now it is held on the month of April. From this monastery in Darjeeling the nunaye ritual was first started. Buddhapurnima is also celebrated every year and the processions are taken with colorful attire. Now seven monks with household are related with the monastery.



Phuntsog Nyabchooling Jorebunglow (source- collected by researcher on January 2016).

The **Phuntsog Nyabchooling** of Jorebunglow is also one of the oldest monasteries of Darjeeling. The monastery follows the Nyingma sect and has some branches in Kalimpong. The exact date is not confirmed or known but it was established in mid nineteenth century. Guru Padmasambhava's idol is worshipped in the centre of the chamber. They regard Zate Rimpoche as their spiritual guru. All the major festivals like Buddhapurnima, new-year ritual celebration is performed in the monastery. The monastery also runs a school for the monks. the local people have a great faith in this monastery.

Thus the advent of Buddhism in the Himalayan region after seventeenth century brought an important transformation with the establishment of the Chogyal rule. With the rule of an independent Buddhist ruler the indigenous people also started to follow the new religion. The growth of Buddhism led to the acceleration of the monasteries and its development which became one of the important religious and

cultural aspects of the region. Monasteries are the important center of the Buddhist community and are regarded as a holy place by the local peoples as the temples are. Local Hindu also visits the monasteries and the temple of Mahakal baba in Darjeeling stands as the Hindu Buddhist union, where the Hindu and the Buddhist priests sit side by side and bless the worshippers. The entire Himalayas forms the Buddhist zone though apparently the Buddhists may be in minority but most hill tops are studded with stupas and monasteries. Monastery building activities were more accelerated after the Tibetan immigration in the region. There is a peaceful coexistence of the Buddhists and Hindus and most of them regard the religion as one.

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- <sup>28</sup> Hooker J.D, (1969rep) Himalayan Journals vol.1, today and tomorrow's printers, p.134.
- <sup>29</sup> Dozey E.C, (2011rep) A Concise history of the Darjeeling District Since 1835 with a complete itinerary of tours in Sikkim and the district, N.L pub. p.76.