

THE YOGIN TRADITION IN ZANGSKAR

INTRODUCTION¹

In the summers of 1977, 1980 and 1981 three expeditions from Bristol University undertook to examine the ways in which the lives of Zanskari people were adapted to the severity of their environment. Although our work was insufficient to construct a fully detailed model of the socio-ecological system, a consistent pattern of mutually related adaptations was revealed through overlapping studies of geomorphology, agriculture, animal husbandry, demography, social organisation, the polyandrous tendency in marriage, monasticism and cultural values. It became apparent that the system of values underlying traditional polyandry and monasticism had played a major historical role in limiting the population to a size that could accommodate itself to severe ecological constraints (Crook and Osmaston, 1994).

I thus became interested in the way in which Buddhist values were maintained and a degree of charisma attributed to monks who were themselves in almost all cases close relatives (sons, nephews) of the farming families.

My initial impressions of the monks of Zanskar, and indeed of Ladakh generally, had not been especially favourable. Few had any depth of understanding of Buddhist ideas and their practices appeared perfunctory in the extreme and imbedded in pre-buddhistic superstitions the importance of which in Ladakhi culture I had not at first appreciated.² Although the monks were goodly men whose company was both relaxing and pleasurable, there was little discipline of the sort found in Theravada countries or in Ch'an/Zen and both knowledge and personal practice appeared undeveloped. Yet, as we saw more of these men and as I took to living in their ramshackle old monasteries together with colleagues Tashi Rabgyas (bKra-shis Rab-rgyas) and Tsering Shakya (Tshe-ring Sa-skya), the reasons why the villagers held them in esteem gradually became apparent and especially so in the case of the yogins.

All major sects of Tibetan Buddhism possess *gonpas* in Ladakh but only two are represented in Zanskar — the dGe-lugs-pa and the 'Brug-pa bKa'-brgyud. In Zanskar the Gelug monasteries are well maintained, there is an annual cycle of ceremonies that are well supported and the emphasis is on a simple ethical life supported by the knowledge that these practices lie within a great tradition of scholarship and meditation. Owing to the Dogra wars and the recent severing of contacts with the traditional monastic universities in Lhasa, the tide of education among these monks has fallen in this century to a low ebb. Only recently have young monks of the valley been selected by Geshe Chos-'phel dByangs-can of Phuktal Gonpa for training in the new monastic schools established by the Tibetan refugee community in India. It was noticeable how the monks responded positively to the teachings of HH the Dalai Lama when he taught from the Lam Rim text *Yon-tan-gzhi 'Gyur-ma* and gave empowerments near Padum in 1980. There is a great need for higher teachings which the return of young monks with their doctorates (*dge-bshes*) will eventually provide. In the meantime it is the ethical morality of these

monks and the remembrance of the depth of the great tradition that maintains esteem in Zanskar. And this of course is based upon their effective maintenance of annual rituals in both monastery and household (see Crook, 1994 a).

The 'Brug-pa bKa'-brgyud maintain a rather different profile. At first sight they appear to be an ignorant lot, jovially chanting their way through poorly understood ceremonies assisted by a liberal swilling of beer. Yet it is this sect that is primarily responsible for the reputation of Zanskar as a country of religious practice (*chos-yul*) and which has indeed supported a remarkable series of great meditators whose influence still radiates today from their little *gonpa* of Dzongkhul (rDzong-khul). The most famous of these great men, Nawang Tsering, was a relative of an important family still extant in Karsha. The bKa'-brgyud stress they are a sect that focuses on personal practice rather than the teaching role of the Gelukpas.

One morning in the summer of 1980 soon after HH the Dalai Lama had begun his teachings at Padum, I noticed two unusual figures descending the mountain near our camp. They had the rolling gait of those who travel far on foot, their long hair blew in the wind and they had something about them that attracted my attention. Invited to stop by the tents for tea, we learnt they were yogins of the 'Brug-pa order based in Stagrimo Gonpa but who lived in cave houses in the hills. They had studied all major forms of mental yoga and particularly Mahâmudra following the methods of Nârôpa. These men had a remarkable presence — they seemed to be the possessors of a species of inner freedom I had not seen in other monks. Enquiries disclosed that although most hermitages of solitary yogins are now empty in Zanskar there were still a few yogins in the valley loosely affiliated to the *gonpas* of Stagrimo and Bardan. These men were held in high esteem by the villagers. It seemed that their presence in the mountains, even though few in number, fulfilled some important social need. The yogin represents the nirvanic tradition of the quest for enlightenment in this lifetime rather than the path of accumulating merit. Although the villager sees such a path as beyond his attainment, the existence of such trainees in the hills confirms the reality of the religion for the more lowly participant and perhaps provides inspiration and a hope for that otherness which in some way allows a transcendence of worldly existence.

Two quotations from Milarepa (Mi-la Ras-pa) illustrate the inspirational relationship of the villager and his yogin relative:

"In solitary stony fastnesses among the mountains there is a strange market where you can barter the vortex of life for boundless bliss"

"The yogin living in the upper valley and the villager below will gain enlightenment together. The essence of their relationship is dedication."³

Of course it is not only the yogin who has those "intimations of immortality" that constitute boundless bliss — but it is he

who assiduously cultivates them and reports their significance to successive generations.

CONTEMPORARY 'BRUG-PA PRACTITIONERS OF ZANSKAR AND GOTSHANG GONPA

The great age of the Tibetan exploration of Indian Buddhism culminated in the travels of monks to receive initiations in the depth psychology of Mahayana meditation. Marpa (Mar-pa), the spiritual founder of the Kargyu sect, received initiations in the Mahâmudra system from Nâropa in India (Guenther, 1963) and in turn handed them on to Milarepa. The latter's successors founded no less than twelve schools differing not in doctrine but in their tutelary deities and lineages of teachers. Of these the 'Brug-pa lineage was founded by gLing-ras-pa. (1128-1188). The sect emphasised the awakening to truth through meditation, often in solitary abode, and produced great yogins among whom rGod-tshang-pa meditated in a cave in Ladakh which was eventually to become an important teaching hermitage near Hemis, known by his title. In Zanskar the order flourished, being supported by the royal house of Padum.

Zanskaris affirm legends that assert periods of residence of both Nâropa (at Dzongkhul; rDzong-khul and Sani; Sa-ni) and Marpa (Tongde; sTong-sde) in the valley. As these teachers were great travellers the possibility that these legends are true remains open — although assertions regarding the significance of the lineages of holy sites are often exaggerated. What is certain, however, is that four great meditators were continuing the tradition at Dzongkhul in the late 18th century and on into the 19th, when a text written by Kun-dga Chos-legs, the last of this group, was given to Csoma de Kôrös (Bethlenfalvy, 1958). Among the pupils of these lamas was Sans-rgyas Phun-tshogs the learned monk who instructed Csoma de Kôrös in Tibetan through the medium of Persian between 1823 and 1827; thereby contributing to the foundation of European research on Tibetan culture (Terjek, 1984). The first and greatest of these mahasiddhas (great meditators) was Nawang Tsering (Ngag-dbang Tshe-ring) who defined the goal and culmination of the yogin path in these words:

"Mind itself, luminous and void, is the realm of the absolute; Compassion and wisdom are as means intrinsically one. The yogin continually abiding at this level of realisation has accomplished the essence of meditation. Unperturbed and persevering he experiences without interruption the clear light in the oneness of emptiness and compassion... For his samadhi is omnipresent like the sky free from clouds... Emptiness itself, unimpeded, melodiously reverberates in all directions." (After Nawang Tsering 1979. p. 44-45 who gives many details of the Mahasiddhas of rDzong-khul.)

In 1980, together with Tashi Rabgyas, I visited Nawang Norbu, a yogin in the Mahâmudra tradition (*phyag(s)-chen*), in his cave house on the mountainside above the village of Shila in Zanskar (for additional details see Crook 1994b, Crook and Low 1997). His home is called "the cave of meditation" (*sgom-phug*). It opened onto a small terrace equipped with prayer flag and small *mane* (*ma-ni*) wall. We were entertained on a wooden platform high up under the roof of the

cave protected from wind and sun by a brushwood facade. The interview was instructive and took a form which was often repeated in our encounters with other yogins. To my first rather hesitant and academic questions, Nawang Norbu replied by emphasising how little he knew, telling us where we could find his original teachers, and saying that such matters could not truly be discussed with the uninitiated. When I described my own experiences and difficulties in meditation practice (the Zen tradition — which has certain similarities to Mahâmudra), the atmosphere relaxed and Nawang Norbu began to share his life with us.

He had trained in all six yogas of Nâropa with the teacher Awo Rinpoche (A-pho Rin-po-che) in Lahul. By 1980 he had realised that of these practices Mahâmudra was the basis and this remained his prime practice. His account of Mahâmudra was exceptionally clear and carefully expressed. Our experiences, he said, are coloured by our own egoism. Our contact with the world is qualified by our attitudes which arise from the presence of the subtle ego of the mind which seeks self preservation and enhancement. The presence of the subtle ego is disclosed by the difficulties one experiences in life which are the results of engrained patterns of past experience (i.e. Karma). These difficulties also arise in the practice of religion (*chos*) and for this reason one needs a teacher (*guru*; *bla-ma*). Yet, if one lacks a skilled instructor, one can begin by oneself:

"Take a pebble and place it before you. Let the gaze rest upon it without strain or intending to do anything particular. Just hold the attention steadily upon the pebble being alertly aware of it. In time clarity will arise as the mind falls still."

"With practice one can replace the pebble by the image of the Buddha or a visualisation of the tibetan letter Ah. Later the mind simply observes a visualised circle and eventually nothing at all."

"You have to go through the boredom of repetition until an energy arises of itself. Since this is blissful you will find yourself entirely free of wanting anything else. It is as if you have given up worldly life and the need for a sense of time and place. There is a feeling of a timeless nothing in particular of no importance which like a river simply flows along going nowhere except as it must."

Nawang Norbu added that this river-like-flowing is itself direct insight into the law of dependent origination; the idea that everything and all experience is the expression of interdependent processes of causation operating in mutual support:

"The things we see stand in for a reality of processes which are themselves empty of substantiality as discrete things. To let go of oneself into this emptiness is to let go of attachments to things as objects."

This is the way to freedom.

Nawang Norbu lived with a delightful lady yogini who showed a deeply reassuring calm in all she did. In the small nunnery below Stagrimo Gonpa there are one or two other nuns who have trained as yoginis and practiced preliminary meditations (*sngon-'gro*). These lady hermits are few in number

but seem to be at ease with themselves and on a level with men in a style very different from the rather bawdy joking manner of many young Ladakhi village women.⁴

We visited other yogins in Ladakh and became particularly interested in a group of thirteen in training at Gotshang Gonpa in the high valley behind Hemis. We were drawn there because it represented the only 'Brug-pa training centre in Ladakh following the Mahāmudra methods described to us first by Nawang Norbu. All the 'Brug-pa yogins in Zanskar and Ladakh generally stem from the same teaching tradition and I wanted to discover exactly what this was. Our meetings with other yogins of the 'Bri-gung-pa sect at Lamayuru and with the *rdzog-chen* teacher Stag-lung Rin-po-che at Taktak Gonpa (Brag-thog) elsewhere in Ladakh are described in further publications (Crook, 1994b; Crook and Low 1997). Here we will focus especially on the 'Brug-pa yogin tradition still extant in Ladakh today and to which the tradition of Dzongkhul (*rDzong-khul*) belongs.

Gotshang Gonpa is closely affiliated to Hemis and is situated at a high altitude in a valley above Hemis. All thirteen yogins in training there at the time of our visit had begun as monks at Hemis later choosing to do intensive yogin training at Gotshang (*rGod-tshang*) or its sister house at Kepung (Kha-spang). The monks alternate between these two small retreat centres every six years. All were originally villagers from families that sponsor Hemis gonpa. In the last 20 years the compliment of yogins at Gotshang has risen from 4 to 13 (see Crook, 1994b). The present yogins form a training group of roughly the same age and stage of advancement and who belong to the same "class" in training. They were mostly between 30-40 years old and, since they do not wear their hair long (as do the Lamayuru yogins), they are not distinguishable in appearance from other monks.

The training in Mahāmudra and the six yogas of Nāropa begins with extensive preliminary training. We did not get precise details of this at Gotshang but a yogin at Lamayuru listed for us the preliminaries practiced in their training centre. The two sects are probably very similar with respect to preliminary practices (Table 1).

The entire training may take some three years as a minimum but is likely to extend to five or six. It is important to realise that these trainings are vigorous and often physically demanding; so much so that only young and fit men and women could attempt them at the level of intensity of a training centre. The yogin is totally consecrated to the aim of personal liberation within one lifetime and no holds are barred in his struggle with the self.

The preliminaries may in fact be repeated several times before a trainee is allowed to advance to Mahāmudra and the six yogas. The latter furthermore are not usually begun before a 3 year, 3 month solitary retreat focussing on the earlier trainings has been completed in a special cell or small house set aside for the purpose.

The Nāropa exercises produce powerful alterations in conscious awareness with physiological side effects. The first and foremost, *spiritual heat (gtu-mo)*, utilises special breathing techniques and the visualisation of fire originating in the navel cakra and rising through the body (Evans-Wentz 1969; Muses 1961, part 2; Kelsang Gyatso, 1982) with the conco-

mitant experience of clarity and emptiness of mind. The second (*illusory body*) consists in experiencing the body as an energy state rather than as a physical object and in a condition not separate from the rest of the universe. An image of a deity is then visualised and superimposed upon the experience of energy so that an illusory body, as if one were actually the deity, is experienced. The third (*dream*) consists in a practice of generating the dream state while yet awake (*i.e.* lucid dreaming) so that the dream-like state of even the normal mind is seen as only an illusory reality. In the fourth practice deep meditation generates the "*clear light*" of emptiness and bliss; a condition of the mind in its basic, natural or "unborn" state which lacks discriminative thought and the experience of subject-object dualism. The fifth yoga concerns the practice of generating the "*intermediate state*" (*bar-do*) eventually to be experienced between death and the next life. The last and most mysterious concerns the *transference of consciousness* by throwing awareness out of the top of the head. Of these practices, the first four are primarily concerned with the generation of the wisdom of non-duality which is the basis of enlightenment, while the last two concern practices that anticipate death. All the yogins we met emphasised that the heart of these practices is the realisation of the original or "unborn" consciousness of the mind in its condition of non-duality prior to the appearance of subject-object discrimination. This realisation is the key to "going beyond the everyday mind" (*i.e.* nirvāna) and the rest of the practices are essentially supports to this fundamental training. The significance of this practice to the villagers and yogins alike lies in the intimation that some direct experience of universal reality is possible, a contact which allows the transcendence of the troubles and tensions of farming life (see Crook, 1994a).

Our informant at Gotshang Gonpa told us that when the yogins were practising the whole upland valley in which the gonpa lies is closed. *gtu-mo* is practiced in midwinter and the other yogas mostly in summer. There are cycles of *gtu-mo* (spiritual heat) practice (exercises involving special pranayama or breathing yoga) at dawn, early morning, dusk and early night. Cycles are not performed in the middle of either day or night. Good food, preferably including meat and beer, is important as much energy is needed. The effect of *gtu-mo*, we were informed, is a steady level of maintained body warmth rather than a rise and fall but much training is needed to establish this. The villagers huddling round fires in winter were said to be less comfortable than the practicing yogins in their unheated cells at a higher altitude. One winter is spent practicing indoors and in the next, wearing cotton cloth only, they practice out of doors at night. However, the competitive drying of sheets as a form of examination reported by Alexandra David Neel (1965) is not done at Gotshang.

The current group of 13 have established themselves relatively recently (1981). Twenty years previously there were only four yogins at Gotshang and two had died around 1960. Two of the four had been Zanskaris — one from Tongde (*sTong-sde*) and one from Kumik. They had been Gelugpa monks at Tongde Gonpa who became dissatisfied with the ritualism of monkish life and took up training with a famous teacher from Kham, Shakyashri (See Crook and Low 1997).

TABLE 1. List of preliminary practices (*sNon.'Gro*) and the course of meditation training followed by yogins of the 'Bri.gung.pa sect at Lamayuru. (See further Crook, 1994 b, Crook and Low 1997).

The yogins assemble and constitute themselves as a class. Each yogin works separately in his cell through a series of meditations following authorised texts.

1. The ordinary preliminaries.

- i The precious opportunity of human life.
- ii The fact of impermanence.
- iii Karma.
- iv The meaninglessness of samsaric life and the vow to become Buddha.
(21 days on each topic. After testing the trainee proceeds).

2 Special preliminaries.

- i 111125 grand prostrations each with a taking refuge recitation. (2-3 months of diligent work).
- ii Vajrasattva visualisation with 100 syllable mantra for same number of times.
- iii Mandala offering (same number).
- iv Guru visualisation (same number).
(Altogether these may take 8-12 months).

3 The Main training.

- i
 - a. Contemplative meditation on love.
 - b Contemplative meditation on Compassion.
 - c. Meditation on the Bodhisattva Vow.
- ii Contemplative evocation of the visualised personal protector (tutelary deity-yidam). This lot takes about 6 months.
- iii Contemplation of the Guru as Emptiness (dharmakaya) (3 months).
- iv Mahamudra
Concentrated practice leading to the non-conceptual experience of emptiness (1 month).
- v The six practices of Naropa.
Spiritual heat, The Illusory body, Dream, Clear light. Intermediate state and Transference of consciousness. (One cycle takes 6 months).

4 Final dedication.

Later in the summer of 1981 I travelled with Tashi Rabgyas and Tsering Shakya to visit Kham Tag (Kham-brag) Rinpoche, a lama based in Hemis but who had established a residence near a famous cave dedicated to Guru Rinpoche not far from Kargil (See Crook, 1994b, Crook and Low 1997, Dollfus, 1999). Kham Tag Rinpoche was a practitioner of Mahāmudra and the yogas of Nāropa. Like Nawang Norbu he had completed his training with Awo Rinpoche. He had been with him in Tibet and had travelled to India with him receiving a bullet wound when the Chinese had fired on the party during their escape. He had wandered much in the mountains and laboured in road gangs before staying for a long time in the Zanskar monasteries and in Lahul where Awo Rinpoche had settled.

There was something deeply impressive about the presence of Kham Tag that drew us to him. Behind his calm demeanour there was a touch of wildness, he drank excessively without drunkenness, he wandered alone or with one companion in the hills, he was deeply loved by his sponsors and considered not a little mad by city people in Leh. But he knew the yogas and practiced *gtu-mo*. He taught us by his presence — only occasionally did he make sudden illuminating remarks, leaning towards us over a table for example, to say emphatically:

“The task is to know the natural, the unborn mind. You must observe all activity whether good or bad, easy or difficult without any judgement at all. Just to see it exact-

ly as it is, is the main point. And this leads to perceiving the mind as the three Kayas. Do it and you will find out!»
«At every moment it depends on where the mind is. Whatever you are looking for — Chag-chen, 'Dzog-chen, in Ladakh or in Europe — you should know in that very moment where your mind is.”

“As to meditation — if you wish to meditate choose a good place — as remote as possible, peaceful with clean water and wild nature.”

AN AUTHENTIC TRADITION MAINTAINED

We were quite satisfied that the Mahāmudra practitioners we met were all men deeply versed in their training. They were strikingly energetic individuals, friendly yet often guarded in their discussion of yoga. This is not surprising for a number of reasons. They understand the avid interest of Westerners in the more sensational aspects of their training and rightly conclude that, since such an attitude misses the point, discussion easily becomes invalid and possibly harmful. And indeed, although they have received empowerments to practice, none, other than Kham Tag Rinpoche, has permission to teach. They are therefore reticent, sometimes to an extreme, until the genuine nature of a personal enquiry is established.

We were able to establish some details of the lineage of teaching that these contemporary yogins follow. At Gotshang our informant reported that the prime texts were two works by

Padma Karpo (Padma dKar-po). This was an exciting revelation because we had with us Evans-Wentz' (1969; original 1935) translation of key texts by this author and were thus able to learn that two works — *Phyag-chen-gyi zin-bris bzhugs* (=The epitome of Mahāmudra) and *Chos drug bsdus-pa-'i zin-bras bzhugs-so* (Epitome of the brief description of the six doctrines) — were precisely the training manuals in use at Gotshang. We had therefore a direct access in English to the training system.

This discovery was of great interest because the colophons of these works reveal that a king of Padum in Zanskar was primarily responsible for the writing down of these ancient oral traditions. We were thus again able to confirm the importance of Zanskar in the dissemination of these practical manuals in mental yoga. The colophon of the first work reads in translation:

“The King of Zanskar, named Zhanphun Zangpo (gZanphan bZang-po), having desired that the text of this treatise on Mahāmudra and also that on the six doctrines be put into standardised compilations, presented more than twenty measures of saffron (to me the compiler, who was his guru, named Padma Karpo).”

Evans-Wentz (*loc. cit.*, p. 112) remarked that his own colleague, the late Lama Kazi-Dawa Samdup of Sikkim had held the opinion that some account of the line of teaching subsequently established by this king might be found in documents at Hemis. And indeed we found these very texts in use there. There are almost certainly other records of historical interest in this monastery and at Gotshang.

The text *Epitome of Mahāmudra*, translated by Lama Kazi-Dawa Samdup and Evans-Wentz, had in fact been extremely rare in Bhutan, the country in which Lama Kazi had trained with a teacher known as the Hermit Guru Norbu (Evans-Wentz, p. 105). Lama Kazi had received these teachings from him with appropriate initiation and guidance. Two copies of this text were then lost and only the last of three survived to form the basis of the translation. The Hermit Guru, shortly before his death (1916), had authorised the translation saying “There are few among the growing generation of our own people who... care to strive earnestly for spiritual development. Therefore it seems to me that these sublime truths will make more appeal to truth seekers in Europe and America.” The presence of these texts in Bhutan was in itself not surprising since Padma Karpo had been instrumental in establishing the ‘Brug-pa sect there.

The history of the lineage in Ladakh has formed the subject of some research by Dieter Schuh (1983) whose dating I follow in the synoptic tabulation (Table 2) of key names in the ‘Brug-pa lineage important in Zanskar. Following the founding of the sect by gLing-ras-pa Padma rDo-rje. in the mid 12th century the central monastery was built at Ralung in Tibet by gTsang-pa Gya-ras and numerous other hermitages and *gonpas* were created during the extensive travels of the great yogin rGod-tshang-pa and others. Padma Karpo besides compiling the major Mahāmudra texts at the request of the king of Padum (1525-1561) also established the predominance of the order in Bhutan.

The datings of Schuh suggest that the formation of the first ‘Brug-pa monastery on the hill above the present building at Bardan in Zanskar was the work of the Zhanphan Zangpo's Queen in the mid sixteenth century (named Jo-mo rNam-rgyal mJos or ‘Od-lags). The autobiography of Padma Karpo states the king to have suffered from dropsy and died in Tibet. This site, called Thar-la, was presumably established in the mid 16th century probably before the growing influence of the ‘Brug-pa in the Indus valley led to the establishment of Stakna (Stag-na) Gonpa around 1500.

A dispute over a reincarnation of Padma Karpo led to a splitting of the ‘Brug-pa into southern and northern schools (Aris, 1979, pp. 172-181). In Ladakh, Stakna and the Zanskar gonpas of Bardan, Sani, Stagrimo and Dzongkhul remained loyal to the original school, the southern branch; while Hemis Gonpa, founded by sTag-tshang Ras-pa about 1630, was affiliated through its founder to the northern school. Hemis also incorporated the earlier meditation cave of Gotshang in the near by hills where a later incarnation of sTag was to found the actual Gotshang monastery some years later. In spite of the dominant influence of the Northern School in Ladakh, the Royal house decreed that the land holdings of Stakna and the other southern gonpas be confirmed (Schuh, *loc. cit.*). Today the two branches co-exist in Ladakh without friction.

So far as Zanskar is concerned, the work of Schuh (*loc. cit.*) shows that the ‘Brug-pa were established there very early as a result of the King of Padum's allegiance to Padma Karpo; an event that predates the main growth period of the order in the Indus valley. Both the original meditation cave at Gotshang and the Zanskar foundations belong to the period before the schism leading to the foundation of the separate Northern and Southern schools.

Our conversations with contemporary yogins in Zanskar and at Gotshang and with Kham Tag Rinpoche showed that they all shared a recent common origin in the teaching of Awo Rinpoche. The immediate lineage of our contemporary yogins could thus be traced (Table 3).⁵

The first fact that strikes me about this lineage is its essentially non-sectarian orientation. Although we find it operative today within ‘Brug-pa foundations, the account we received confirms an intertwining of ‘Brug-pa (specifically Karma-pa) teachings and rNying-ma-pa. influences during the remarkable renaissance of Kargyu teaching and practice in Eastern Tibet (Kham) beginning in the late 18th century. The great names of that period include Jamyang Khentse, reputed to have studied in no less than seven schools, and Jumipham the founder of the deliberately non-sectarian viewpoint — the *ris-med* (=impartial, see Jäschke 1977, p. 531, or possibly *rigs-med* = no family?) tradition.

This tradition passed through Shakyashri to Tipun Padma Chogyal, the teacher of Awo Rinpoche. Tipun (Khid-dpon) was a Ladakhi from near Gser-khri in the Indus valley and presumably originally a ‘Brug-pa monk in Hemis. He was a solitary practitioner training in several disciplines among the hermitages of the Himalayan range where the great siddhas of earlier times had practiced. He came to Dingri (in Tibet; north of Everest) and after some years in solitude he responded to requests by building a teaching centre. Aziz (1978) describes

TABLE 2 KEY NAMES IN THE 'BRUG.PA. LINEAGE OF ZANSKARI YOGINS.

1. The originators of the Kargyu tradition of Mahamudra (Tilopa, Nâropa, Marpa, Milarepa).
2. sGam-po-pa. (Chief disciple of Milarepa - whose followers created several separate lineages).
3. Phag-mo-gru rDo-rje rGyal-po. (1110-1170) Guru of gLing-ras-pa
4. gLing-ras-pa Padma rDo-rje. (1128-88). Founder of the 'Brug.pa
5. gTsan-pa gya-ras Ye-shes rDo-rje (1161-211) Founded the main 'Brug. monastery at Ralung near Lhasa.
6. mGon-po dPal rdo-rje (i.e. rGod-tshang-pa). 1189-1258. Founder of hermitages, meditation cave at Gotsang above Hemis etc.
7. Padma dKar-po (1526-1592). Chief philosopher and scholar of the 'Brug.pa.
- 8: gZhan-phan bZang-po. King of Padum (1525-1561) whose Queen founded the earliest gompa of 'Brug.pa near Bardan and who paid Padma Karpo for certain of his key compilations.
9. Sma-rJins-pa. Founder of Stakna Gonpa in the Indus valley. Around 1580
10. Southern School. Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal founder of lho-'brug of Bhutan
Northern School dPag-bsam dBang-po
11. Southern School Ngag-dBang Tshe-ring. 1736-1794 and the yogins of rDzong-khul into mid 19th century.
12. Northern School Stag-tshang Ras-pa Founder of Hemis. 1630

how he established a network of small hermitages, 8 for monks and 3 for nuns none of which, as at Gotshang today, had more than 13 inmates. In spite of his asceticism, Tipun put together a remarkable library which is being reassembled by E.G. Smith. Tipun died at his retreat in the Tzib-ri mountains in 1958 just before the onset of the Chinese holocaust in Tibet. His followers settled for a while in Solu in Nepal and became largely dispersed after the death of their leader.

Tipun has reincarnated as the son of Awo Rinpoche and the boy, in his early 20s in 1981, lives near Manali in training with a senior yogin known as Khentze Rinpoche. Awo Rinpoche himself was the teacher of the Zanskar practitioners we met, of the Gotshang group and of Kham Tag Rinpoche. Aziz (1978) provides photographs of Tipun (the only one in existence) and a charming one of Awo Rinpoche and his son, the young Tipun Tulku, as a boy (see further Crook and Low 1997, also photos therein).

Tipun was not only heir to the *ris-med* teachings but also a practitioner of the teachings of Padampa Sangya, a contemporary of Milarepa and Yang-gong-pa, a student of Gotshangpa, who were the prime founders of religious activity at Dingri. Padampa formulated the tradition of the *chod* rite originally made famous in the west (like *gtu-mo*) through Alexandra David Neel's first description (For a text in English see Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, 1983).

Kham Tag Rinpoche gave Tashi Rabgyas and me permission to make a photographic copy of an exercise book containing the text of Tipun's meditation notebook written neatly in Kham Tag's hand. This document is a summary of Tipun's accumulated yogic wisdom. Kham Tag Rinpoche asked us to copy and translate this work, of which only two other copies exist, into English and we have now done so (Crook and Low 1997). I conclude this section with some lines from this work in Tashi Rabgyas' preliminary translation:

The cause of tranquility is pure ethics. The wisdom of learning and thought gives rise to clarity. The action of tranquility is to free a person from bondage to material things. Clarity frees a person from the bondage of assuming an inferior state of existence.

The obstacle in the way of tranquillity is cherishing the physical body and goods that may be consumed. The obstacle to clarity is not achieving satisfaction from the teachings of Arhats and Buddhas. Wasting time in entertainment and discontent with frugality are obstacles to both. To think that a mind-made view is ultimate is a deviation from the path. It is a deviation to think that an experience of thoughtless bliss is spiritual space. High conduct without confidence in the ultimate is a deviation. To consider a man of lust working for others as a Bodhisattva is a deviation. But if it is understood that both thought and material things lack intrinsic self-existence and are devoid of ego and if one becomes free of materialistic concepts, then you do not find even the name of deviation. So it is said.

CONCLUSION

Our socio-ecological studies in Zanskar (Crook and Osmaston, 1994) have led us to affirm that the cultural system of values plays a vital role in maintaining the traditional marriage pattern (the monogamous principle with polyandry of Goldstein, 1976) and the sponsoring of monks and monasteries. One third of Zanskar males in our study villages were monks and contributed little or nothing to reproduction. The value system as a whole has accounted in large measure for the regulation of population below carrying capacity in these montane desert areas of low agricultural productivity.

The monastic value system has deep psychological roots which depend on meditational and ethical practices orienting the monk away from identification with village concerns and towards a direct transpersonal or "universal" experience. Success in this quest demands exceptional determination and only a few monks — the yogins undertake the task of "becoming a Buddha in one lifetime". In Zanskar we found that not only did these yogins attain valid transpersonal insights through their training but that their presence represented for the people an intimation of the deeper meaning of their religion for which the serious practitioner is attributed considerable charisma. The yogins thus play a pivotal role in the value system through being direct exemplars of the depth psychology which their renunciation allows. The mystery of their

TABLE 3. The lineage of contemporary 'Brug-pa yogins in Ladakh from late 18th Century .

Karmapa school

Si-tu Chos-kyi 'Byung-gnas

Nying.ma school

Rig-'dzin Tshe-dBang Nor-bu

'Jam-dByangs Mkhyen-brTse dBang-po
Kong-sPrul Yon-tan rGya-mTsho
'Ju-mi-pham. etc.

**The ris-med non-sectarian viewpoint.**

Shakyashri.



Khid-spon Padma chos-rGyal

See his **Meditation notebook translated in Crook and Low 1997**

A-pho rin-po-che



mKhyen-brtse Rin-po-che Kham-brag Rin-po-che and others.

The son of A-pho Rin-po-che, the reincarnation of

Khid-spon aged in 1984 about 20. Manali.

Communities of yogins based on Gotshang Gonpa, Hemis, Ladakh and those of the
Zangskar valley administered from Stakna gonpa .

For further details see Crook, J.H. and J. Low. 1997 *The Yogins of Ladakh*. Motilal Banarsidass. Delhi

activities stimulates reverence in villagers who participate in their endeavours through a sponsorship that forms part of the value system enabling the traditional socio-ecological adaptation of the people to be sustained.

It seems likely that the anxiety-resolving nature of the psychological practices of yogins has a place to play in modern society. At least some central aspects of this yogic system may be found of value in societies outside the remote confines of the Himalayan mountains.

Acknowledgements

Without the friendship and assistance of my two travelling companions, Tashi Rabgyas of the Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Leh and Tsering Shakya of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, the research reported here would not have been possible. I am deeply grateful to both of them. I hope this small study does not betray the trust and compassionate kindness of monks and yogins in Ladakh who helped us with discussion and information. Long may their profound tradition be sustained. Subsequently I travelled with James Low in these same mountains and developed these

studies further. To his companionship I owe the success of this venture.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARIS M. 1979. *Bhutan: the early history of a Himalayan Kingdom*. Aris and Phillips. Warminster.

AZIZ, B.N. 1978. *Tibetan Frontier Families*. Vikas. New Delhi.

BETHLENFALVY, 6.1980. Lama Bzad-pa and rDzong-Khul. *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*. Tomes 34. (1-3) 3-6.

CROOK, J.H. 1994a, "The social organisation and psychology of sTongde villagers." In Crook, J.H. and H. Osmaston (eds.), *loc. cit.*

CROOK, J.H. 1994b. "The Yogins of Ladakh". In: Crook J.H. and H. Osmaston (eds), *loc. cit.*

CROOK, J.H. and H.OSMASTON (eds) (1994) *Himalayan Buddhist Villages: a study of communities in Zangskar*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi and Bristol University.

CROOK, J.H. and J, LOW. 1997. *The Yogins of*

- Ladakh. Motilal Banarsidas. Delhi
- CROOK, J.H. and S.J. CROOK 1994. "Explaining Tibetan Polyandry: socio-cultural demographic and biological perspectives". In: Crook J.H. and H. Osmaston (eds), *loc. cit.*
- DAVID-NEEL, Alexandra. 1965. *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*. University Books. New York.
- DOLLFUS, P. 1999. "Phu-mkhar-rdzong, un lieu de pèlerinage au Ladakh". *Bulletin de l'école Française d'Extrême-Orient*. 86: 34-64
- EVANS-WENTZ, W.Y. 1969. *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*. Oxford.
- GOLDSTEIN, M. 1976. Fraternal polyandry and fertility in a high Himalayan valley in North West, Nepal. *Human Ecology*. 4. 3. 223-233.
- GUENTHER, H.V. 1963. *The Life and Teaching of Nâropa*. Oxford.
- JÄSCHKE, H.A. 1977, *A tibetan-English dictionary*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- KELSANG GYATSO, Geshe. 1982. *Clear Light of Bliss*. Wisdom. London.
- MUSES, C.A. 1982. *Esoteric teachings of the Tibetan Tantra*. Weiser. Maine.
- NALANDA TRANSLATION COMMITTEE. 1980. *The Rain of Wisdom*. Shambala. Boulder.
- NAWANG TSERING. 1979. *Buddhism in Ladakh*. Sterling: New Delhi.
- SCHUH, D. 1983. "Zu den Hintergründen der Parteinahme Ladakhs für Bhutan im Krieg gegen Lhasa". In Kantowski D. and R.Sander (eds) *Recent Research on Ladakh*. Weltforum Verlag. München.
- TERJEK, J. 1984. *Alexander Csoma de Körös 1784-1842. A short biography. Collected Works of Csoma de Körös*. Budapest Akademiai Kiado.
- THUBTEN ZOPA RINPOCHE. 1983. *Chod: Cutting off the Truly-Existent I*. Wisdom. London

NOTES

- 1 This paper formed the initial study for a later more complete work on the yogin tradition in Ladakh (Crook and Low 1997). The present text has been re-edited and partially updated for this publication.
- 2 The significance of shamanic culture in Ladakh is easily obscured in studies of Himalayan Buddhism but remains in many ways the bedrock of the culture. See: Crook, J.H 1997-98. "The Indigenous Psychiatry of Ladakh". Parts 1 and 2. *Anthropology and Medicine* 4, 3: 289-307 and 5,1: 23-42.
- 3 Quotations supplied by Tashi Rabgyas.
- 4 During our research in Zanskar we were unaware of the equally important Gelug nunnery on a hillside above Karsha which is affiliated with the main monastery there and where Kim Gutschow is making an important study.
- 5 The linkage between Zanskar *gonpas* and Bhutan through the Zhabdrung Rinpoche are discussed in Schuh 1983, Crook and Low 1997.

RESUMÉ : Cet article trace l'ascendance spirituelle de quelques yogis zanskari contemporains. Il s'appuie sur des entretiens lors de visites à des ermites et dans des centres de méditation. Les yogis 'Brug-pa pratiquent le système Mahâmudra qui fut explicité par Padma Karpo (Padma dKar-po). L'enseignement récent a été influencé par la philosophie *ris-med* (sans secte) qui prend son origine chez les maîtres khampa du 18ème siècle. Tous les yogis contemporains ont reçu une formation en philosophie, au Mahâmudra et aux six yogas de Nâropa de la part de A-pho Rinpoche (Awo Rinpoche) lui-même un élève du grand maître Tipun (Khid-dpon), originaire du Ladakh et qui enseigna à Dingri (Tibet) jusqu'en 1958.

Nous avons pu constater avec plaisir que les jeunes yogis demeurent aujourd'hui d'authentiques pratiquants de leur discipline, ce qui constitue une contribution essentielle du système de valeurs traditionnelles, celui des communautés agricoles et leur démographie.

SUMMARY: This paper traces the lineage of some contemporary Zanskari yogins based upon interviews conducted during visits to hermits and retreat centres in Ladakh. 'Brug-pa yogins practice the Mahâmudra system as formulated by Padma Karpo. Recent teaching has been influenced by the *ris-med* (no-sect) philosophy originating from the Kham masters of the late 18th century. All contemporary yogins received training in philosophy, Mahâmudra and the six yogas of Nâropa from Awo Rinpoche (A-pho rin-po-che) himself a pupil of the great teacher Tipun Padma Chogyal (Khid-dpun Padma Chos-rgyal) a native of Ladakh who taught in Dingri, Tibet, till 1958. We were satisfied that the young yogins of today remain authentic practitioners of their discipline which makes an essential contribution to the traditional value system and culture of Ladakhi agricultural communities.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Dieser Artikel, für den Einsiedler in ladakhischen Klausurzentren befragt wurden, geht der Lehrer-Schüler-Linie einiger zeitgenössischer Yoginis und Yogis aus Zanskar nach. Brug-pa-Anhänger praktizieren das von Padmakarpo fixierte Mahâmudra-System. Neuere Lehren sind vom Gedankengut der *ris-med*-Bewegung — wie im späten 18. Jahrhundert von den großen Lehrern aus Kham verbreitet — beeinflusst. Alle zeitgenössischen Yoginis und Yogis erhalten Unterricht in Philosophie, Mahâmudra und in den "Sechs Yogas des Nâropas" wie von Awo Rinpoche (A-pho rin-po-che) gelehrt. Dieser war ein Schüler des großen Tipun (Khid-dpon), ein geborener Ladakhi, der im tibetischen Dingri bis 1958 lehrte. Es stimmt zuversichtlich, dass die jungen Yoginis und Yogis von heute ihre Disziplin in authentischer Weise ausüben, denn dies ist ein wesentlicher Beitrag zum traditionellen Wertesystem der Agrargesellschaft Ladakhs und ihrer Demographie.