

In Bhutan, Looking Down on India: My Visit to a Buddhist Temple in Bhutan

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Bhutan is a small country with a big Buddhist heritage.

I visited Bhutan first in 1977 and then again in 1980. Both times I visited Buddhist temples, in Samchi in 1977 and beside the road leading from Phuntsholing to Thimphu in 1980.

Phuntsholing is a border town, situated right on the Indian border. A road winds up the Himalayas from Phuntsholing to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. Bhutan is overwhelmingly Buddhist.

Entering Bhutan at Phuntsholing, and having spent some time there, we went up the Himalayas along the winding road straddling the mountains with high peaks on one side and deep falls below on the other side. Needless to say, the road was very well maintained and had much to offer in terms of scenic beauty. After travelling some distance, we arrived at the Buddhist temple which was situated right on the side of the road. The temple was beautiful and had a superb garden. From the very well-tended garden, the Indian plains below could be clearly seen. Flowing restlessly was the Torsa river below. The Torsa river is a tributary of the Teesta river which in turn is a tributary of the Brahmaputra river.

We were in the country of Bhutan and all of the Himalayan mountains that we could see were in Bhutan. However, the plains that we could see down below from that wonderful vantage point were in India.

Lord Buddha lived and preached in northern India, in the Gangetic plain. He was born in Lumbini in Nepal but obtained Enlightenment in Buddha Gaya at the age of thirty-five. From that time, till His Parinirvana at the age of eighty, He was tireless in preaching the Saddharma. There were early schools, like the Theravadins, the Sarvastivadins, the Pudgalavadins, the Mahasanghikas, etc. and their subsects. Out of these early schools, only the Theravadins exist today. One subsect of the Mahasanghikas, the Lokottaravadins are widely regarded as the precursor of the Mahayanists.

It is a matter of great regret that Tantra entered later Mahayana from Hinduism which right

from the beginning had a culture having all the hallmarks of the Tantras. Vajrayana is a result of the influx of Hindu Tantric ideas into Mahayana.

At this point, let me flashback and revisit my childhood.

When I was a little boy, I was accustomed to visiting the Buddhist temple nearest to my house every morning. Located on Lake Road, it is crowned by a Stupa. Indeed, in my daily walks in the wilderness of the lakes just prior to my breakfast, I got habituated to seeing Buddhist monks walking on the lake shore with gongs. I must have been in the temple, a stone's throw from my home umpteen times and the serenity appealed to me greatly. I also remember that I often visited the Stupa at the top of the temple.

In 1971, when I was four years old, my father took me to Gariahat Road the evening before the celebration of Kali Puja by the Hindus. Since I had already formed an adverse opinion about Kali and considered her to be very macabre, I asked my father 'Why is Kali so dreadful? Why do Hindus call her mother?'

My father resorted to an allegory. 'Now son, suppose someone takes a photograph of your mother when she is beating you for being naughty, your mother will look fierce in that photograph, will she not?'

I was a studious and quiet boy and was therefore beaten by my mother extremely rarely, invariably when my mother was agitated about something else and vented out her emotions on her own son. 'But why on earth would anyone want to photograph my mother when she is beating me? I much rather prefer my mother when she is affectionate and gentle towards me. So I am not convinced by your answer.'

At this, my father was silent. He did not know what to say. I had made my point.

Years later, after having read the scriptures and after having written and published several articles on religion myself, I know the truth. Now I know the answer to my own question of 1971. Kali is Shunya, emptiness and meaningless. Those who worship Kali are indulging in a Shunya, empty, ritual which is Shunya, empty, of any meaning and in gross idolatry.

I am uncompromisingly opposed to the Tantras which are nothing but vulgarities in the name of religion and idolatry of the grossest order. They are to be opposed and eradicated by anyone who follows the Saddharma.

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