

Tibetan schools of Buddhism

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Manifest pedagogy

The various sub-schools of the prominent religions of India have been regularly asked as questions in prelims the best examples being the Sarasvativadins (Buddhism) and Sthanakavasis (Jainism) in the last couple of years. As the current events are revolving around the political aspects of Tibet its cultural aspects surely gain prominence.

In news

- Kathok Getse Rinpoche, the seventh head of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, has died
- The speculations of conflict between Karmapa Lama and Dalai lama

Placing it in syllabus

- Indian Heritage and Culture

Dimensions

- Buddhism history
- Buddhist philosophy
- Various schools of Buddhism
- Sthaviravadins
- Mahasangikas
- Hinayana
- Mahayana
- Vajrayana
- Neo-Buddhists and Ambedkar.

Content

Tibetan schools of Buddhism

The Buddha didn't write any of his teachings down; consequently, up to 18 different "schools" sprang up over the years to transmit and explain their interpretation of his teachings. Some of these schools included;

Vajrayana (The thunderbolt vehicle)

- Is a yogic and magical school.
- Emphasis on realization of Sunyata (nothingness).
- Based on the need for an Enlightened Guru to show the path.
- Main deities were the Taras who were the female consorts of Bodhisattvas.
- Emphasis on Tantra- Mantra and Yantra (Magical symbol).
- The main mantra is OM-MANI-PADME-HUM.

Sarvastivada – school influenced the evolution of Vajrayana sect.

Buddhism first reached Tibet in the 7th century. By the 8th-century teachers such as Padmasambhava were traveling to Tibet to teach the dharma. The Tibetan schools of Buddhism were influenced by the prevailing medieval ethos of Tantricism, local tibetian beliefs and the teachings of Buddha. In time Tibetans developed their own perspectives and approaches to the Buddhist path.

There are several types in Tibetan schools of Buddhism they are;

1. Nyingmapa school

- Nyingmapa is the oldest school of Tibetan Buddhism.
- It claims as its founder Padmasambhava, also called Guru Rinpoche, "Beloved Master," which places its beginning in the late 8th century.

- Padmasambhava is credited with building Samye, the first monastery in Tibet, in about 779 CE.
- Along with tantric practices, Nyingmapa emphasizes revealed teachings attributed to Padmasambhava plus the “great perfection” or Dzogchen doctrines.
- Wear red hats.

2. The Kagyu school

- The Kagyu school emerged from the teachings of Marpa “The Translator” (1012-1099) and his student, Milarepa.
- Kagyu is **best known for its system of meditation and practice called Mahamudra**.
- Use the “new translation”.
- The head of the Kagyu school is called the Karmapa.

3. Sakya school (The “Gray Earth” “new school”)

- Sakya teachers converted the Mongol leaders Godan Khan and Kublai Khan to Buddhism.
- Over time, Sakyapa expanded to **two subsects called the Ngor lineage and the Tsar lineage**.
- Sakya, Ngor and Tsar constitute the three schools (Sa-Ngor-Tsar-gsum) of the Sakyapa tradition.
- **The central teaching and practice of Sakyapa is called *Lamdrey*(Lam-‘bras), or “the Path and Its Fruit.”**
- The headquarters of the Sakya sect today are at Rajpur in Uttar Pradesh, India.

4. The Gelugpa or Gelukpa school,

- The Gelugpa school sometimes called the “**yellow hat**” sect of Tibetan Buddhism, was **founded by Je Tsongkhapa** (1357-1419), one of Tibet’s greatest scholars.
- It is also a new school which has two kinds of leaders they are;

1. Ganden Tripa (spiritual head)
2. Dalai Lama (temporal leader)

- The first Gelug monastery, Ganden, was built by Tsongkhapa in 1409.
- The Dalai Lamas, who have been spiritual leaders of the Tibetan people since the 17th century, come from the Gelug school.
- The nominal head of Gelugpas the Ganden Tripa, an appointed official. The current Ganden Tripa is Thubten Nyima Lungtok Tenzin Norbu.
- The Gelug school places great emphasis on monastic discipline and sound scholarship.

5. Jonangpa school

- It was founded in the late 13th century. Jonangpa is distinguished chiefly by Kalachakra, its approach to Tantra yoga.
- In the 17th-century the 5th Dalai Lama forcibly converted the Jonangs into his school, Gelug. Jonangpa was thought to be extinct as an independent school. However, in time it was learned that a few Jonang monasteries had maintained independence from Gelug.
- Jonangpa is now officially recognized as an independent tradition once again.

6. Bonpo school

- When Buddhism arrived in Tibet it competed with indigenous traditions for the loyalty of Tibetans. These indigenous traditions combined elements of animism and shamanism.
- Some of the shaman priests of Tibet were called "bon," and in time "Bon" became the name of the non-Buddhist religious traditions that lingered in Tibetan culture.
- In time elements of Bon were absorbed into Buddhism. At the same time, Bon traditions absorbed elements of Buddhism, until Bonpo seemed more Buddhist than not. Many adherents of Bon consider their tradition to be separate from Buddhism. However, His Holiness the 14th

Dalai Lama has recognized Bonpo as a school of Tibetan Buddhism.

Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche, Lotus Born) 8th century

- From Swat Valley, Pakistan
- Brought Tantric Buddhism (Vajrayana) to Tibet & Bhutan;
father figure to Tibetan Buddhism
- **Founded the Nyingma school & Samye monastery**
- Convinced local Bon deities to serve the Dharma
- Created practice of Dzogchen
- Has 8 manifestations (plus others), for the 8 important things he did/stages of psychological preparation.

Test yourself: Mould your Thoughts:

“Buddhism lost its prominence in the country of its origin but has a great significance outside India.” Comment with respect to the impact of Buddhism outside India.