

## Chapter 7

### The 'Crown' of Buddhism: Tibet

#### Tibet Before Buddhism

Buddhism was slow in reaching Tibet, mainly for geographical reasons, the principal problem being the virtual impassibility of the Himalayas, together with a climate to which Indian teachers were quite unaccustomed. Tibet is often described as the Land of Snows'; it is highly mountainous, being between 13000 and 16400 feet above sea level, and in the same season of the year, temperatures can vary between minus 40 degrees Celsius (-40°C) at night and 27 degrees Celsius (+ 27°C) during the day. When Buddhist teachers finally penetrated Tibetan territory, they discovered that the Tibetans already had their own religions, and it took several centuries for Buddhism to percolate through and to adapt itself. In order to establish itself thoroughly, Buddhism had to undergo a vast transformation and absorb much of the culture and religion that already existed in the country.

Before the advent of Buddhism, the religion practised in Tibet was a form of 'shamanism'. A shaman is an officially appointed priest who is believed to have special powers to communicate with the spirit worlds. By these powers he is able to provide access for mortals to the upper realms of the heavens or the lower realms of the hells. These boundaries could only be linked by the shaman priest who performed special rites, especially at funerals, to close the doors of the tombs by his special powers, and to open up the gates of the celestial abodes. The shaman was not merely a religious figure. In Tibet he also held political power, and together with the king and the chief minister formed a trio with power to govern the region. The king himself was believed to be descended from the upper regions of the heavens and was often regarded as all-knowing and all-wise.

Many features of Tibetan shamanism were absorbed into Buddhism, especially the popular deities. Instead of insisting that the shamanists gave up belief in their deities, skilful Buddhist teachers with supernatural powers performed acts of exorcism, and subdued these gods for the purposes of Buddhism. The role of such deities was, of course, somewhat limited. Tibetans would pray to them for earthly benefits rather than religious ones: as we have seen, Buddhists regard gods as useful for improving affairs in this world but not for enabling men and women to make any kind of spiritual progress.

There were other ways, too, in which traditional Buddhism combined with shamanism. The importance of special funeral rites, for example, finds expression in Tibetan Buddhism in works like *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Buddhism reformed many of the ancient Tibetan practices too, particularly by prohibiting animal and human sacrifices.

#### *The 'Crown' of Buddhism*

It is not surprising that it was Mahayana Buddhism rather than 'Hinayana' which entered this country. The 'Hinayana' teachers insisted on the importance of sticking very closely to the teachings of the Buddha and the rules of the monastic order. This apparent rigidity made its spread quite impossible in Tibet. In order to sell itself to those of a different persuasion, adaptation was essential. To give one fairly trivial example, 'Hinayana' monks who observed their monastic rules strictly were unable to survive the climate when they only permitted themselves one single robe made of cotton.

Tibetan Buddhism developed a very rich and complicated set of teachings and practices. Often these can only truly be understood by its followers. Even then, they are likely to be familiar only within their own particular form of Tibetan Buddhism, of which there are many. The rituals are very elaborate and highly symbolic. Much use is made of mantras (sacred

sounds), mandalas (special sacred geometric diagrams), and mudras (rather beautiful hand gestures which are used in the course of a meditation). The combination of bodily movement, sound and sight is designed to ensure that in a meditation one's body, speech and mind are all involved: body, speech and mind are the three things which, according to Tibetan thought, make up a person.

Even Buddhists themselves have failed to understand all the complex imagery and symbolism, and have sometimes disparaged Tibetan Buddhism as a debased form of the Buddhist faith, superstitious and obsessed with magic. It is true that disciples will sometimes claim that their teacher has supernatural powers, such as an ability to levitate, or to part the clouds and control the weather. But few accredited teachers make such claims on their own behalf, and any remarkable powers should not distract followers from the true goal of making spiritual progress towards full buddha-hood.

Tibetans would certainly not agree that they had reduced the Buddhist religion into a debased form of magic. On the contrary, their form of Buddhism is said to be its 'crown' or the 'flower'. This form of Buddhism is often called the Vajrayana, meaning 'Diamond Vehicle'. Some teachers even describe it as 'complete Buddhism'.

In describing itself as the 'Diamond Vehicle', Tibetan Buddhism does not separate itself off from the two traditional vehicles of the Theravada and Mahayana. It claims to combine the ideas of the Hinayana and the Mahayana, and at the same time to add even more, bringing into fruition the religious teachings and practices of these two important forms of Buddhism. From the Hinayana form it derives its basic teachings about morality and the nature of the self: like all other Buddhists, Tibetans acknowledge the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, as well as the monastic precepts (see chapter 4). From the Mahayana tradition come the profound teachings of many of their scholars and also some of the devotional practices. From the Mahayana they acknowledge the ideal of the bodhisattva and, as we have seen, both Tibetan art and ritual make copious use of various buddha and bodhisattva images.

These images of these buddhas can be presented in a variety of ways: sometimes they are peaceful and serene, like the figures of the Buddha which we see more often in the West, but at other times the buddhas appear extremely fierce, even terrifying in their aspect. This is to demonstrate that a buddha is not someone who meditates passively and makes no difference to the world in which we live; buddhas are very active and fiercely opposed to evil. As well as presenting the buddhas in both their benign and wrathful forms, buddhas and bodhisattvas are portrayed variously as male and female. The female represents wisdom, and the male compassion. (This contrasts with our western sex-role stereotyping.) In Buddhist art, male and female bodhisattvas are often portrayed in very intimate inter-relationships, to symbolise the close union between wisdom and compassion

— the goal which buddhas have attained and to which all should aspire.

### *Temples and Shrines*

Because of the complex symbolism of Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan temples and shrines are highly complex. Outside a temple in the Tibetan tradition it is common to find prayer wheels (sometimes called prayer mills). A prayer wheel is a wooden cylinder on which prayers are written both inside and outside: a Tibetan Buddhist will rotate the wheel and its prayers as an act of piety. These wheels take the form of large heavy cylinders; but many Tibetans also possess their own personal prayer wheels which are much smaller and are rotated by waving the handle. Prayer wheels are made of wood, gem-studded metal or bone.

Outside the main door of the shrine-room hangs the famous Tibetan Buddhist picture of the 'Wheel of Life'. The Wheel depicts the six realms of existence: humans, animals, gods, asuras, hungry ghosts, and hell-beings. The horrors of the hells are usually portrayed in some detail, since it is important to see how one's karma may work itself out. The Wheel of Life is

placed very prominently, since it should be used as a kind of mirror in which one looks at oneself: its position provides a constant reminder that everyone will be reborn in one or other of these realms in one's next rebirth.

The meditation hall is usually large and elaborate inside, with many images of buddhas and bodhisattvas. However, Gautama the Buddha is seldom the central figure. Tibetans of the Nyingmapa (the oldest) tradition, frequently display the image of Padmasanibhava, the religious leader who established Buddhism in Tibet, a rather severe figure with a slightly disapproving look! In the Gelugpa (the 'reformed' and established) tradition one might find the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (called Chenrezig in Tibet) depicted on a large painted cloth (thanka), or a similar portrayal of Manjushri, often regarded as the chief of the bodhisattvas. Other images might include various buddhas (including Gautama), bodhisattvas and well-known scholars from Tibetan religious history. It is a common practice to 'dress' these images. A muslin cloth can be placed around the shoulders of a buddha-image, or a yellow hat on a scholar's head; the scholar can even be provided with a complete set of robes.

Shoes are removed on the threshold and, on entering the meditation hall, worshippers prostrate themselves three times, once for the Buddha, once for the Dharma and once for the Sangha. They then sit in silence on the floor: chairs are used only if a worshipper has some physical disability. If lamas are leading the devotion, they process in, as the members of the congregation stand and bow respectfully to them.

There are many ceremonies for various traditions, occasions and times of the month. I shall describe one which I attended, which gives something of the flavour of Tibetan worship. It was called Manjushri puja (the ceremony of devotion to Manjushri), and, after calling on the name of Manjushri, devotees underwent the 'taking of refuge'. This meant affirming their dedication to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and asking that any merit they obtained through the act of devotion might be channelled towards the benefit of all beings who are caught up in the cycle of birth and rebirth. The ceremony lasted for about 45 minutes, alternating between chanting and silence. At one point mudras — the rather beautiful hand movements — were used, and various mantras were chanted in unison.

Throughout the ceremony, worshippers each used their own small photograph-size picture of Man jushri. These pictures were used for 'visualisation' (see chapter 2). By allowing the image to penetrate the mind, the worshipper aims to become one with Manjushri acquiring the spiritual virtues which are associated with him.

The significance of all the symbolism is not immediately comprehensible. Understanding is something which, I am told, comes gradually, through serious and constant study, and through consistent spiritual practice. For anyone who wants to make spiritual progress, devotional practice and study are seen as completely intertwined. One cannot understand the practice without the necessary learning, nor can one learn without spiritual practice. When I was granted an audience with one of the lamas, I asked what reasons he could give me for accepting the doctrine of karma. I expected an intellectual exchange to commence at this point, but instead I was simply informed that if I engaged in the community's spiritual practices I would in time find that I would come to believe also.

Because learning is a gradual process, a Tibetan teacher will not disclose important teachings to a student until he or she is spiritually ready. The teachings are difficult and in the wrong hands they might be abused or misconstrued. It would therefore be inappropriate, even if it were possible, to present all of the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. Instead, what follows consists of folk tales about some of Tibet's religious heroes. These are traditions rather than literal historical accounts, but they are tales which are known and loved by most Tibetans.

### *Some Tibetan Religious Heroes*

### *(1) Padmasambhava*

Padmasambhava is the figure who is sometimes credited with giving Buddhism its first real impetus in Tibet in the eighth century CE. He is venerated by all Tibetan traditions, but particularly by the Nyingmapa sect (the 'Ancient Ones'), which is the oldest Tibetan school. Later traditions, however, have suggested that the folk legends about him have considerably exaggerated his achievements.

The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation is the principal text which describes the birth and subsequent life of Padmasambhava, and it reads like a gigantic fairy tale. Padmasambhava is said to have been ordained by Ananda (the Buddha's chief disciple) only twelve years after Gautama's death. The book tells us that the birth of Padmasambhava was predicted by Gautama the Buddha himself. As the Buddha lay dying he prophesied that, twelve years later, a lotus blossom would open up in a lake and that out of the flower would appear 'one who will be much wiser and more spiritually powerful than myself. He will be called Padmasambhava...'<sup>3</sup>

The Buddha Amitabha miraculously produced a stupa (a shrine) in the lake to which Gautama the Buddha had referred. The king walked around the stupa several times, a customary religious act in almost all forms of Buddhism. Suddenly, the predicted lotus blossom appeared in the lake and out of the flower appeared Padmasambhava, seated, in the form of a one-year old boy. The boy was brought to the palace, and Amitabha, Avalokiteshvara and ten guardian deities came to him, anointed him with holy water and crowned him as 'the Lotus King'.

As Padmasambhava grew older, he excelled at poetry, philosophy, wrestling, archery, swimming, athletics, astrology, medicine, jewellery, art, carpentry, masonry — indeed every skill one could imagine. But Padmasambhava did not continue to engage in all these worldly pursuits; he began to take up the religious life instead. Because of his religious devotion, he aroused strong opposition and he and his wife, Mandarava, were seized by some of the king's ministers and burned at the stake. The king was greatly distressed when he heard of this and went immediately to the site of the funeral pyre. Instead of seeing the ashen remains of Padmasambhava, however, the king beheld a lake with an enormous lotus blossom in the centre and there, sitting in the middle, were Padmasambhava and Mandarava, completely unscathed. On seeing this miracle, the king and the formerly hostile ministers joined the monastic community and dedicated their lives to Buddhism.

All this, of course, is myth: if it were true, then Padmasambhava would have been around 1200 years old on reaching Tibet, thus putting Methuselah well and truly in the shade with regard to longevity! But the myth serves to illustrate the high esteem with which Padmasambhava is regarded.

Padmasambhava's appearance in Tibetan history began when King Tritsong Detsen (756-797 C.E.), a king who advanced the cause of Buddhism, invited a scholar named Shantarakshita from India to spread the Dharma. His mission was initially unsuccessful, for a vast epidemic broke out, as a result of which the king's eldest son died, and there was a great famine. The supporters of shamanism claimed that their gods were angry at the introduction of this alien religion, Buddhism, and mounted a campaign to eliminate it. Because of the calamity which had befallen himself and the Tibetan people, King Tritsong Detsen stated that he had lost confidence in all religions and decreed that the religious leaders would be severely punished if these spirits and demons were not destroyed within seven days.

Although Shantarakshita was a brilliant teacher he was incapable of pacifying the unrest, coping with the calamities which had befallen Tibet and ensuring that the populace did not abandon the new religion. He therefore felt that a more powerful figure than himself was needed and advised the king to invite Padmasambhava. As we have seen, Padmasambhava had many more skills than Shantarakshita, being not only a scholar, but an accomplished

meditator, athlete, and even a magician. Padmasambhava successfully subdued the demons and, together with Shantarakshita, founded the first monastery in Tibet — the famous Samye Monastery — thus putting Buddhism firmly on the map.

The monastery was completed in 787 C.E. and seven monks were ordained, with a further 300 novices shortly after. Thus the Tibetan Sangha had its beginning. The building was constructed in the shape of a mandala and with three storeys - one for each of the three traditional bodies of the Buddha.<sup>4</sup> The monastery was consecrated, and the king planned the arrival of many translators (it is said that there were 108 in all, 108 being a sacred number in Tibet) from India, Nepal, Kashmir and China.

Padmasambhava himself is said to have written many religious texts, and twenty-five siddhas (hermit teachers with supernatural powers) hid these in mountains, caves and crevasses: it was now safe to do this since Padmasambhava had subdued the demons who were believed to have inhabited those regions. The texts were to be discovered at a later time by people directed by Padmasambhava, when humankind was in a more spiritually advanced stage to receive these rather difficult teachings. It is believed that texts can lose their power through time and therefore new texts need to be discovered in order to 're-energize' the original teachings. These hidden texts are known as terma (terma means 'hidden treasure'), and from around 1125 C.E. onwards several of texts have been 'found'. Some terma are very old, but others were not written by Padmasambhava at all but are probably the work of later thinkers who wished their works to have Padmasambhava's seal of authority upon them. The Tibetan Book of the Dead is a terma dating from around the fourteenth century.

## *(2) Milarepa.*

'Another figure who is much revered is Milarepa (11th century C.E.). Milarepa illustrates how following the Buddhist path can rid oneself of a vast amount of evil karma within a single life-time. When Milarepa was a child, his father died and his aunt and uncle robbed him of his inheritance. In order to seek revenge, his mother persuaded him to learn black magic to work against the wicked aunt and uncle. Milarepa studied under a renowned black magician and, by working a spell, caused their house to collapse, killing his aunt and uncle, together with other relatives and house guests who had come to celebrate a wedding feast. Thirty-five people died in all. When villagers voiced their suspicions, Milarepa worked a second spell causing a severe hailstorm which destroyed their entire harvest.

Milarepa's fortunes were restored, but he was now a mass murderer and began to feel deep remorse. In repentance he sought out a well-known and uncompromising religious teacher called Marpa. Marpa wanted to test Milarepa's commitment before he would even begin to instruct him in the Dharma. The first task he was given was the construction of a tower in Marpa's grounds. Milarepa set to work and completed the task single-handed, whereupon Marpa informed him that he had changed his mind, and that the tower should be demolished and constructed somewhere else. Milarepa complied and once again Marpa pronounced the same verdict. This happened repeatedly until Marpa had assured himself that Milarepa would do precisely what his teacher instructed; only then did Marpa give him any spiritual training.

Milarepa too became an uncompromising religious character. He spent the greater part of his life meditating in the open air, amidst the snow. One of Milarepa's teachings was the 'Doctrine of the Inner Fire', and it is sometimes claimed that meditators like Milarepa were able to melt the snow around them with their inner spiritual energy. Milarepa wore nothing but a white cotton cloth which remained on his body until it fell off with age, after which he meditated naked. On one occasion his cooking pot broke, so instead of finding a replacement Milarepa simply did without one.

Neither Marpa nor Milarepa ever sought ordination as members of the Sangha. Nevertheless, Milarepa is acknowledged as Tibet's greatest yogi (meditator) and poet. His teacher, Marpa is the founder of the Kagyupa sect, one of the best-known Tibetan lineages.

### *(3) Atisha.*

Buddhism went through periods of success and periods of persecution. Three great Tibetan kings (sometimes called the three 'Dharma kings') had lent great support to the Buddhists, but there were constant under-currents of opposition, particularly by the supporters of Tibet's old religion. As a result of a conspiracy, the last of the three great kings was murdered, and his brother Langdarma (ruled 836-842 C.E.) occupied the throne. Buddhism almost disappeared: monasteries were destroyed, monks expelled and scriptures burned. Buddhism was only revived once more when the scholar Atisha was brought to Tibet in the eleventh century.

Langdarma was killed in 842C.E. by a Buddhist monk, and this event brought about so much rejoicing within the Sangha that it is still commemorated annually by Nyingmapa Buddhists in a special 'Black Hat Dance'. It may seem strange that Buddhists should appear to condone an action which seems so obviously contrary to their fundamental precepts. Nyingmapa Buddhists, however, will justify Langdarma's assassination on the grounds that this prevented him from committing even further misdeeds which would have cast him into the hells for many aeons. (This is an isolated example of killing being condoned; self-sacrifice to protect the Dharma became acceptable, especially in the Chinese Mahayana tradition. This was why Vietnamese monks burned themselves to death during the Vietnam War in the 1960s.)

Despite Langdarma's murder, Buddhism was not immediately restored in Tibet. Too much damage had been done, particularly because the Tibetan empire had become so fragmented in the political upheaval which took place. We have no records of what took place in Tibet during the ensuing 150 years, but we know that the scriptures still existed, and this provided a base for the eventual restoration of Tibetan Buddhism.

Buddhism slowly began to revive a generation later under the guidance of King Yesheo of West Tibet. (By this time Tibet had been divided into various regions.) Yesheo abdicated in favour of his nephew in order to become a monk and wanted to bring the renowned scholar Atisha to Tibet. This was to be a costly process, and — so the story goes — Yesheo tried to collect gold, a commodity in which Tibet abounded. In the course of his collecting, Yesheo was captured by a neighbouring Muslim king. He was given a choice: either he could become a Muslim, or he could persuade his subjects to collect his own weight in gold to secure his release. The nephew managed to collect a weight of gold equivalent to that of the king's body, but not enough for the head. He sought an interview with his uncle in captivity to discuss what he ought to do. 'I am now old,' said Yesheo; 'I have done all I can do to further the teachings of the Buddha. Let me die here; use the gold instead to bring Atisha to Tibet.' Reluctantly, his nephew did so, and when the Muslims saw that the gold was not forthcoming, they beheaded Yesheo. The gold was used to bring Atisha.

Atisha (958-1054 C.E.) came to Tibet from India in 1042C.E. and did much to re-establish and reform the teachings which had been spread in Tibet during the first diffusion of Buddhism. Many of these had become confused and distorted in the course of the years and because of the political unrest. Shortly before Atisha's arrival, various magical teachers and particularly village abbots engaged in animal sacrifices, had ritual sexual relationships, and even performed magical rituals aimed at causing the death of human beings. No doubt the Buddhists who carried out such actions were vying with the pre-Buddhist shaman priests to show them that the Buddhists had superior magical powers, and because Buddhism was loosely organized, particularly in the villages, these practices had continued unchallenged.

When Yesheo was king he had severely suppressed these activities and Atisha strongly supported these reforms, enforcing the highest standards of morality within Buddhist monasteries. Atisha translated many Indian scriptures: over one hundred Indian texts were translated under his guidance. It was as a result of Atisha's tireless activity that Buddhism became firmly established in Tibet and the final victory over the former religion was secured through strict monastic practice and scholarship, rather than by magic.

#### *(4) Tsongkhapa.*

Another scholar who is greatly respected is the fourteenth century scholar-saint Tsongkhapa. Buddhists have sometimes said that his achievement was so great that he was like St Thomas Aquinas (the scholar) and St Benedict (saint and monastic reformer) rolled into one! Sometimes he is said to be an incarnation of the bodhisattva Manjushri, and in Tibetan art he is sometimes bears Manjushri's sword, lotus and book, together with a yellow hat.

The name 'Tsongkhapa' means 'man from Onion Valley', probably a reference to the region in which the scholar-saint was born (a place called Amdo, now within China). Tsongkhapa was an infant prodigy. His religious education began when he was three, he became a novice monk at age seven, and thereafter studied at Tibet's most important seats of learning.

Tsongkhapa founded the famous Ganden monastery near Lhasa, of which he became the first abbot. 'Ganden' means 'paradise'; it is exquisite, being made of marble, with a gilded roof and the most expensive images installed inside.

Tsongkhapa believed that reforms were needed in the monasteries' discipline. The monks had become lax, abandoning many of their precepts, particularly those relating to marriage, diet, and the observance of retreats; other members of the Sangha had preferred living as hermits to taking part in the monastic life. Tsongkhapa brought many of these hermits back to the monastic communities and not only insisted upon much stricter observance of the monastic precepts, but also emphasized the importance of serious study of Buddhist doctrines. Monks were particularly encouraged to learn logic and Tsongkhapa instituted great formal debates between monks. These were conducted in the presence of a learned and respected abbot, so that the monks would be able to reach conclusions which would be unassailable by the weightiest counter-argument. As a further means of encouraging serious study, Tsongkhapa devised a system of examinations and organized the monks into ranks according to their level of attainment. The highest rank, which still exists today, is the geshe (philosopher). Tsongkhapa also encouraged the highly symbolic Tibetan rituals which had developed within the Vajrayana, but many of these were only to be practised by those monks who had first mastered Buddhist doctrine at a sufficiently high level.

To underline the extent of his reforms, Tsongkhapa's followers were made to wear yellow hats on ceremonial occasions, in contrast to the red hats worn by certain other schools. Tsongkhapa's school of the 'yellow hats' became known as the 'Gelugpa', meaning 'virtuous ones'. His nephew, who was one of his pupils, became the first of the Dalai Lamas. Tsongkhapa remains one of the most revered figures within the Gelugpa tradition, and his image will almost always be found in a Gelugpa temple, sometimes even in the chief place.

#### *The Dalai Lama*

The best-known figure in the Tibetan tradition is, of course, the Dalai Lama. The western press sometimes refer to him as the 'god-king', but this is inaccurate. He is not a king: although the Potala, his 'palace' seems large and grandiose, he merely occupied a very small cell within it. The title 'Dalai Lama' literally means 'ocean teacher' since his wisdom is reckoned to be as vast and as deep as the ocean. However, in spite of his learning, it is not strictly true that he is the 'head' of the Tibetan Buddhists. Matters of doctrine and practice

have been determined more usually by the Abbot of Ganden, who is the spiritual leader and focus of the Gelugpa sect — the established school of Tibetan Buddhism before the Communist invasion in 1959. Until the Communist annexation of Tibet, the Dalai Lama was head of state, as well as head of his own monastery in the Potala Palace, the Namgyal Monastery. Although he belongs to the Gelugpa, all Tibetan Buddhists, and indeed most Buddhists throughout the world, respect him and listen to his teaching. He is not a god but is regarded as the incarnation of the bodhisattva Chenrezig (Avalokiteshvara).

The office of the Dalai Lama is often thought to be a very ancient tradition, but it only came into being in the sixteenth century CE. The present Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is the fourteenth. It is believed that Chenrezig incarnates again after the death of each successive Dalai Lama, and when a Dalai Lama dies extensive searches are made to find his successor. The dying Dalai Lama may give a prophecy which will help to find his new incarnation. Obviously the time of birth of potential candidates is crucial, and when a likely successor is found, various tests are carried out. The young child who may be destined for this role is required to recognize a certain number of the previous Dalai Lama's belongings, for example, and to have certain memories of his previous life. (A few mistakes are permitted: after all, we can all be mistaken about our memories and belongings in our single present life.) The new Dalai Lama will of course be merely a child and will not be ready to take over the role of leading the monastic community. Until he becomes of age, a regent acts on his behalf. The most famous Dalai Lama was the fifth, in whose period of office the construction of the great Potala began.

Could a mistake ever be made about the new candidate's identity? Some Buddhists have suggested that precisely such a mistake was made when the sixth Dalai Lama was appointed. He appeared to be very worldly-minded and often discarded his robes in favour of secular costume, visiting the hostleries of Lhasa and carousing with women. While some Tibetans have their doubts, others hold that the sixth Dalai Lama was using 'skilful means' in spreading the Dharma and was enormously successful in communicating with the people at their own level. He wrote some beautiful love poetry which is still cherished by Tibetans.

The present Dalai Lama lived in the Potala in Lhasa until 1959, when advancing Communist troops forced the inhabitants of most of the monasteries to flee for their lives. The Dalai Lama escaped, disguised as an ordinary monk, and now lives in Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh (North-West India), where he receives pilgrims and gives teachings. Recently the Chinese invited the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet, which is still annexed to China. He declined to do so, believing that a return might be construed as tacit approval of the present state of political affairs.

Whether there will be a fifteenth Dalai Lama is unclear. It will probably be a long time before the matter is finally decided, since, barring accidents, the Dalai Lama is likely to live for many years, having been born in 1935. Many Tibetans claim to have heard prophecies that the present Dalai Lama will be the last, and many Buddhists would question whether it would make sense to appoint a Dalai Lama outside the environment of Tibet. Incarnate lamas have been discovered outside Tibet, however. Recently the Dalai Lama identified a two-year old Spanish boy as the incarnation of a Tibetan monastery's founder. He was brought to the monastery to take his place as the head. Tibetans are certain that the Dalai Lama will incarnate again somewhere, as indeed he has promised. However, he will not necessarily be reborn as another Dalai Lama and certainly not in Chinese hands.