

## The Story of the King Candraprabha in the ‘Sa skya legs bshad’ Commentary

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### Introduction

‘Legs par bshad pa rin po che’i gter shes bya ba’i bstan bcos,’ known also as ‘Sa skya legs bshad’ is one of the most popular books in Tibet. The actual text consists of 457 stanzas with a number of stanzas found in the colophon of this work. The main theme of the commentary is on how to live a wholesome life. Since ‘Sa skya legs bshad’ is written in stanza, it is not easy for less educated people to understand it and fully appreciate it. One of Sa skya Pandita’s disciples Dmar ston chos rgyal (13th century) selected 50 stanzas and matched them with Indian stories which in due course came to be known as the commentary of Sa skya legs bshad<sup>1)</sup> (Legs par bshad pa rin po che’i gter shes bya ba’i ‘grel).

### I Authorship of the ‘Sa skya legs bshad’ Commentary

There is some confusion among scholars regarding the real authorship of the ‘Sa skya legs bshad’ commentary. Two names Rin chen dpal and Dmar ston chos rgyal, both disciples of Sa skya Pandita, are involved in this controversy. Let me clarify the facts regarding the authorship of the commentary. We shall begin by looking at the colophon<sup>2)</sup> to this text wherein we read

This ‘Sa skya legs bshad’ commentary which deals with a limited number of ancient stories referred to by Sa skya Pandita is his work ‘Legs par bshad pa rin po che’i gter shes bya ba’i bstan bcos’ has a specific purpose, because Rin chen dpal deals in this commentary while trying to explain a small part of the work of the noble one, the chief of bodhisattvas, the real master (Sa skya Pandita), of the correct meaning of the āgama and logic, and it is he who can remove the doubts of the intelligent ones by all means. But this commentary is not clear, many stories are wrong and many facts are missing. To rectify them, [this] was written later by Dmar ston chos rgyal from Central Tibet in the presence

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of Sa skya Pandita. He wrote it clearly and in accordance with Sa skya Pandita's words. One reason for questioning Dmar ston chos rgyal as the commentary's author lies in that the colophon is not composed in the generally established Tibetan style where purpose, or circumstance, place, date, and name of author are normally written. The wording and style suggest that it could be, a third person who undertook the publishing task and made this addition to highlight the real author. It is very likely that two commentaries existed during the 13th century, one that Rin chen dpal wrote and one by Dmar ston chos rgyal. But unfortunately, Rin chen dpal's commentary is not available today. The reason for this is probably due to its shortcomings that made Sa skya authorities reject it, or perhaps by Sa skya Pandita himself. For whatever reason, Dmar ston chos rgyal<sup>3)</sup> in consultation with Sa skya Pandita wrote a commentary of 'Sa skya legs bshad' with the specific purpose, according to the colophon, to rectify the shortcomings of a previous commentary by Rin chen dpal.

## II. The 113th stanza of the 'Sa skya legs bshad'

The 113th<sup>4)</sup> stanza in Tibetan reads

che la gnod byed grogs su `gyur //  
 dman la gnod byed gnod par `gyur //  
 nags mc rlung gis sbor mod kyı //  
 de yis sgron mc chung ngu gsod //

This stanza rendered into English would read as

In infliction of harm to noble beings become beneficial,  
 while infliction of harm to ignoble ones becomes harmful,  
 [such as] wind that helps a forest fire to burn  
 but, it extinguishes a lamp

Which means that harm caused to a noble man becomes beneficial to him, like a forest fire becomes stronger with the help of wind. But harm inflicted on an ignoble man only harms him in the same way as wind will only be detrimental to the light of a small lamp.

## III. The Story Following the 113th stanza.

The story which Dmar ston chos rgyal narrates following the 113th stanza in his

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version of the 'Sa skya legs bshad' commentary<sup>5)</sup> closely resembles the story of King Candraprabha who ruled Jambūdvīpa and who decided to give away all his belongings. At last, he even gave away his own head.

This story is available in two sūtras in the Tibetan Tripiṭaka, Peking Edition:

1 Mzangs blun shes bya ba'i mdo (Damamūko nāma sūtra)

22 Rgyal po zla 'od kyī mgo byin ba'i le'u ste nyis shu gnyis pa<sup>6)</sup>

2 Zla 'od kyī rtogs pa brjod pa<sup>7)</sup> (Candraprabha avadāna)

a. The story of the King Candraprabha in 'Mzangs blun shes bya ba'i mdo.'

I compared these two sūtras and discovered that the story narrated by Dmar ston chos rgyal in his 'Sa skya legs bshad' commentary is almost exactly the same to the one found in the first sūtra, the 'Mzangs blun shes bya ba'i mdo<sup>8)</sup>.' Let me prove this by comparing the outlines of the two stories.

In ancient times, a King named Candraprabha (Zla 'od) ruled over Jambūdvīpa ('Dzam bu'i gling) and lived in the palace called Shīlabhadra (Tshul khrims bzang po). He thought that due to the many virtues accumulated in my previous lives, I am now a King of Jambūdvīpa. This life-time is the most appropriate time for me to accumulate greater virtue so that I may get a better rebirth in the future. Therefore, he gave away whatever people wanted and asked for. Because of his extraordinary generosity his fame spread throughout the world.

In another kingdom there was a King named Bhīmasena (Bi ma se na) who heard of King Candraprabha's fame and became very jealous. In order to find a suitable means to kill King Candraprabha, he invited all the sages of his kingdom and offered them a great feast for three months. At the end, King Bhīmasena requested the sages to find a way to get rid of Candraprabha, but all the sages refused and left the palace.

Then King Bhīmasena announced throughout his Kingdom that whoever could take the head of King Candraprabha, he would receive half of his Kingdom and his daughter for marriage. On hearing this, a brahman named Kīrsha Paricchaida (Le'u du cha) took on the task. As soon as the brahman commenced his journey, many bad omens happened in the Kingdom of Candraprabha. His minister Mahācandra (Zla ba chen po) saw in his dream that a hungry ghost took away the King's crown.

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The brahman arrived at the town gate, but was refused entry by a guardian deity at the gate. The Suddhavāsakāyika (Gnas gtsang ma'i ris) deva warned King Candraprabha in his dream about the brahman at the gate. The King ordered the minister Mahācandra to let the brahman through the gates. When the brahman met the King, he requested from him his head. Candraprabha willingly agreed to give him what he asked for.

The minister Mahācandra offered to the brahman many crowns made of jewels instead of the King's head, but the brahman refused all offers and the minister died due to this reason. The Kings of many small Kingdoms, all his ministers, his queens, and many sentient beings requested Candraprabha not to give away his head to the brahman, but the King did not listen to their pleas. The King Candraprabha went with the brahman in a grove for the latter to cut off his head. When they arrived there, the wood goddess appeared and tried to save the King by pushing the brahman aside.

The King said to the goddess:

Please, don't try to stop me again. I have given my head 999 times under this tree and this time, it will be for one 1000 times that I try for the ultimate fulfilment to my charity. Through this I will attain enlightenment. You should not try to prevent me.

The goddess consented and the King Candraprabha gave his head to the brahman. While the brahman was on his way back with Candraprabha's head, King Bhīmasena got the news that King Candraprabha has achieved even great fame by reaching the perfection of giving. He suffered so much with the news that he had a heart-attack and died. The brahman heard that King Bhīmasena had passed away. This caused him to worry so much that he might not get his promised reward that his heart burst out and died.

#### b. The Story of Candraprabha in 'Zla 'od kyī rtogs pa brjod pa.'

As cited before there are two versions of the same story and perhaps Dmar ston chos rgyal did not read this story in the 'Zla 'od kyī rtogs pa brjod pa' as he did not choose to use it the commentary of 'Sa skya legs bshad'. There is some slight difference between the story of 'Zla 'od kyī rtogs pa brjod pa' and the story narrated in the 'Mzangs blun shes bya ba'i mdo'. So I will provide an outline of the story of

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·Zla 'od kyī rtogs pa brjod pa<sup>9)</sup>·

In ancient times, in north India, there was a palace called Bhadrashilā (Rdo bzangs) where lived King Candraprabha. This King ruled over Jambūdvīpa ('Dzam bu'i gling) and pledged to give anything that anyone would ask him for. He had 1513 ministers and two chief ministers among them were Mahācandra (Zla ba chen po) and Gandhāra (Sa 'dzin)

One day, minister Mahācandra dreamt that a demon stole the King's crown. He thought that someone might ask for the King's head. He ordered to make many crowns made of jewel and he kept them in the treasure house.

One day minister Gandhāra also had a dream where he saw the king's head disintegrate in 100 pieces. At that time, in the mountain of Gandhmādana (spos ngad ldang), a brahman called Rudrākshā (Drag po'i mig) lived. He heard that King Candraprabha had pledged to give anything he was asked for. Thus the brahman decided to request from the King his head.

The brahman went to the King's palace but the Guardian goddess refused him entry. Candraprabha knowing this, he ordered the minister Mahācandra to bring in the brahman. The minister brought the brahman into the palace and offered him many crowns made of jewels instead of King Candraprabha's head. But the brahman refused these offerings.

The brahman went in front of King Candraprabha and asked the King to give him his head. The King Candraprabha promised to give his head to the brahman. His two ministers could not bear the sorrow of this and died from sadness. After that, King Candraprabha and the brahman went to the campaka Kāshta tree in the centre of the naniratna garbhaca (nor bu dang rin po che'i snying po) garden. The gods, goddesses, etc, were crying in that garden, but the King told them not to cry for in his previous life he has already sacrificed his head for 999 times and if he gives it one more time that will make it 1000. At that time, I will be able to attain enlightenment and guide all sentient beings to perfect enlightenment. So he asked them not to be sad.

Then King Candraprabha tied his hair to the campaka Kāshta tree and asked the brahman to cut his head. After that the King himself held his own head and offered it to the brahman.

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## Conclusion

To conclude I will discuss the relationship between this 113th stanza of 'Sa skya legs bshad' and the story of King Candraprabha who gave his head to the brahman and attained enlightenment in the 'Mzangs blun shes bya ba'i mdo'

Here the noble man is King Candraprabha and the ignoble man is King Bhīmasena. Cutting off Candraprabha's head is the act of harming the wise. As a result of sacrificing his life and giving his head to the brahman, King Candraprabha attained enlightenment. Therefore, the act of harming ultimately benefited King Candraprabha to achieve the highest perfection of giving and attain Buddhahood.

On the contrary, for King Bhīmasena, the ignoble man, the loss of King Candraprabha's head proved to be harmful, for upon hearing the news of King Candraprabha having achieved even greater fame through the perfection of generosity, his heart burst and he died like a lamp-light blown away by the wind.

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- 1) See my article published in Japanese, 'One commentary of Sa skya legs bshad, *The Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, vol 51, No 2 March 2003, pp 929-932
  - 2) See 'Sa skya legs bshad and its commentary, Tibet People's Publishing House, 1990, pp 207-208
  - 3) My view agrees with Gene Smith, see Jackson, D (1987) *The Entrance Gate for the Wise (Section III)* vol I, p 43, Wiener Studien Zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Wien
  - 4) The 113th stanza is taken from Tshul Khrims Kelsang, 'Sa skya legs bshad, July 1994 Buncido, Kyoto, Japan
  - 5) 'Sa skya legs bshad and its commentary,' Tibet People's Publishing House, 1990, pp 141-143
  - 6) The Tibetan Tripitaka Peking Edition, vol 40, pp 2 3 82
  - 7) Ibid , pp 3 5 265
  - 8) Ibid , pp 2 3 82 - pp 3 4 85
  - 9) Ibid , pp 3 5 265-pp 4 4 269

〈Key Words〉 King Candraprabha, Sa skya legs bshad, the commentary of Sa skya legs bshad, Dmar ston chos rgyal

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