



Hanna Havnevik

**THE LIFE OF JETSUN LOCHEN RINPOCHE (1865-1951)
AS TOLD IN HER AUTOBIOGRAPHY
VOL. I**



University of Oslo 1999



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ISSN 0806-3222

Cover:

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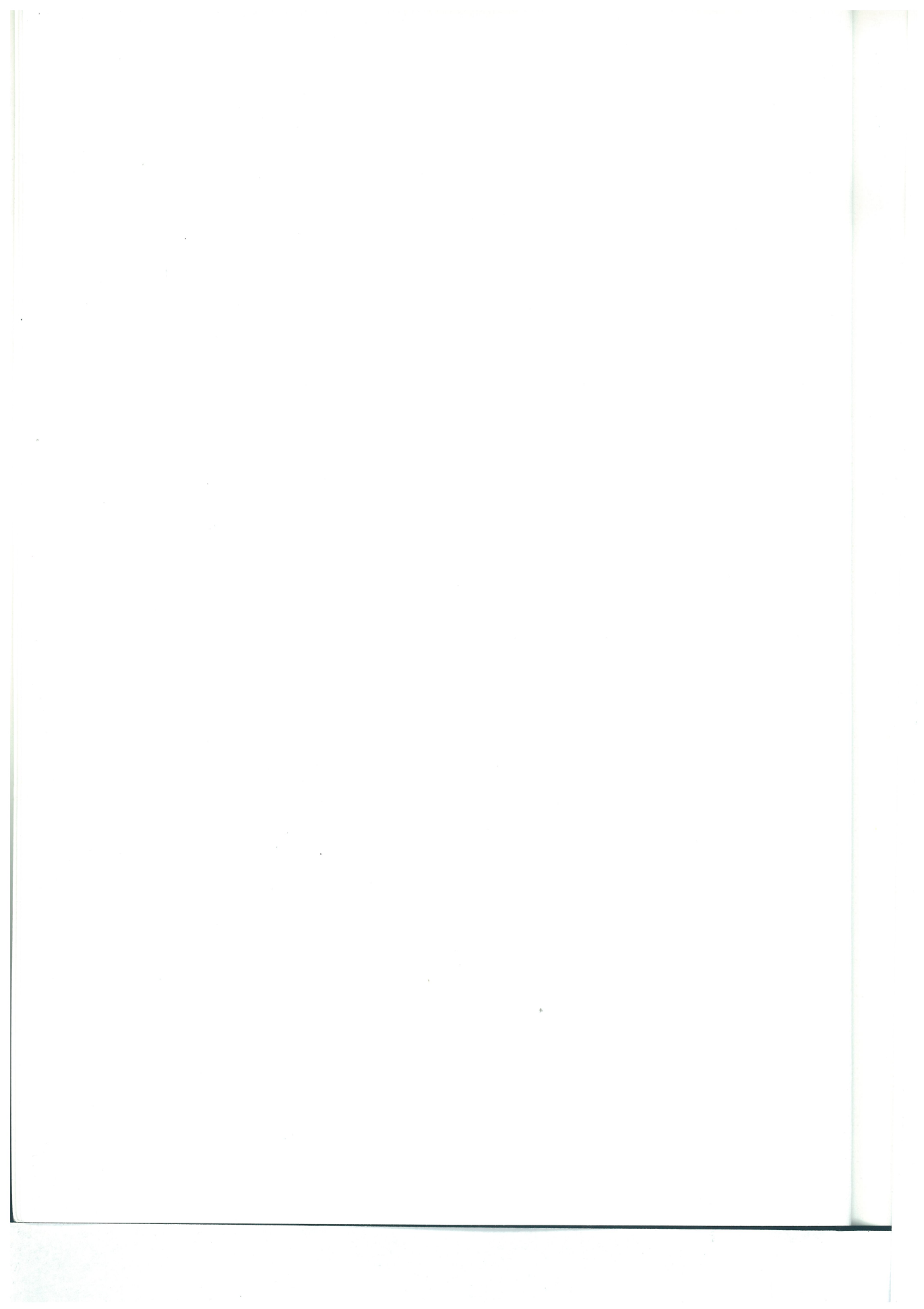
Series of dissertations submitted to the Faculty of Arts,
University of Oslo
No. 50

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Printed in Norway:
GCS Multicommunication AS, Oslo

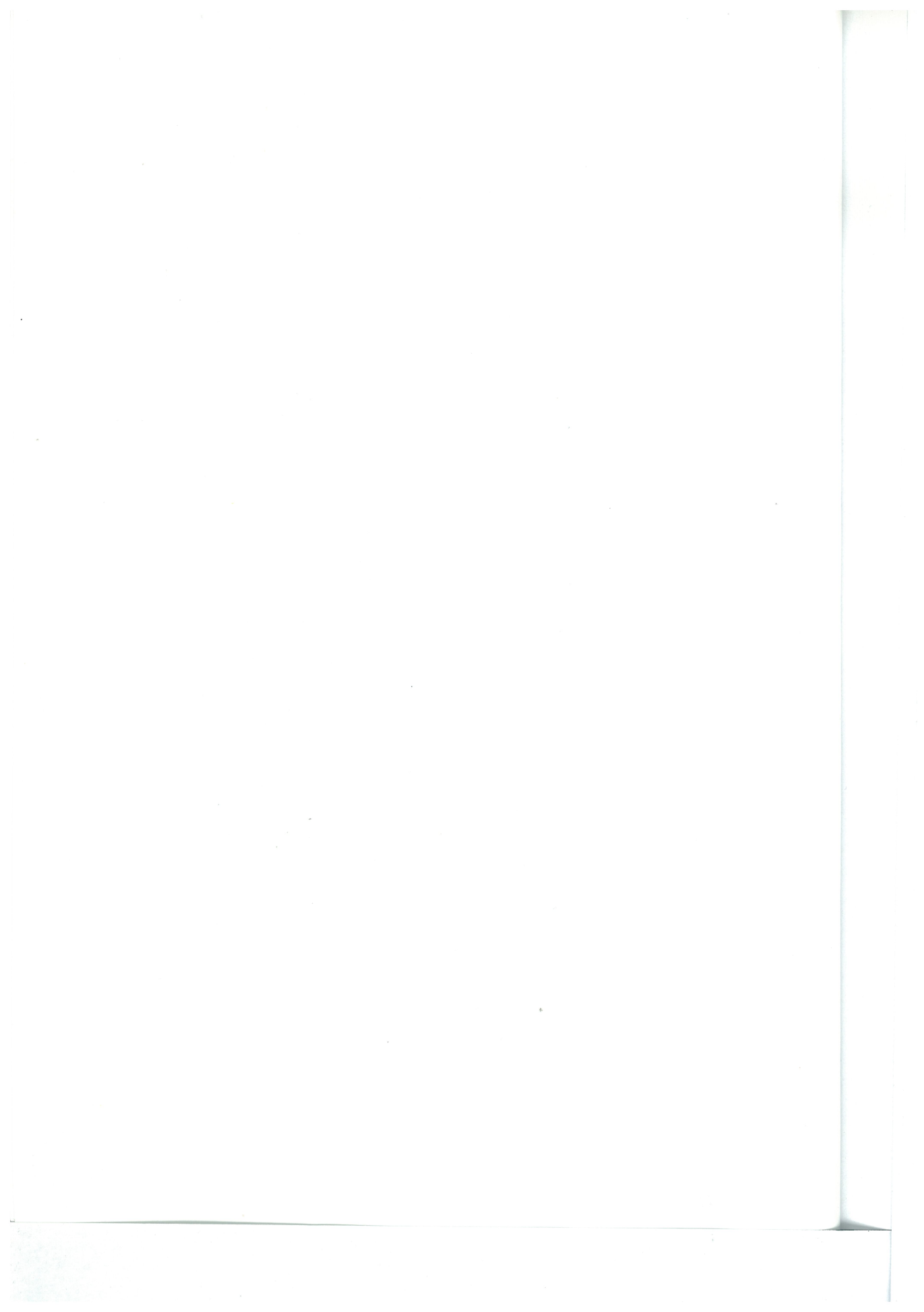
Publisher:
Unipub, Akademika AS, Oslo 1999

**For Rolf,
Vegard, Kari and Knut**





Jetsun Lochen Rinpoche,
1865 - 1951.



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Contents

Abbreviations	4
Acknowledgements	7
Transliteration	10
1 INTRODUCTION	12
1.1. The Study	12
1.1.1. The Autobiography and Other Sources	19
1.1.2. Dating	23
1.2. Tibetan Biographies and Autobiographies	27
1.2.1. Gender and Oral Biographies	33
1.2.2. Reasons for Writing Biographies in Tibet	36
1.2.3. Jetsun Lochen's Autobiography	38
1.2.4. Biographical Models	40
1.2.5. The Conception of Self	43
1.2.6. Jetsun Lochen's Autobiography as a Sacred and Historical Document ..	48
1.3. Jetsun Lochen Rinpoche's Life-stages	54
1.3.1. Childhood, 1865-1877	54
1.3.2. With her Root-lama Pema Gyatsho, 1877-1889	64
1.3.3. Meditation Retreats, Ordination and Pilgrimages, 1889-1904	73
1.3.4. First Phase at Shugseb and Togden Semnyi, 1904-1922	87

1.3.5.	Jetsun Lochen Becomes the Main Master at Shugseb, 1922-1936	103
1.3.6.	Lochen's Last Years at Shugseb and Dawa Dorje Rinpoche, 1936-1951 ..	107
1.4.	Gender as Reflected in the Autobiography	111
1.5.	Summary	117
2	TRANSLATION	125
2.1.	Table of Contents	125
2.2.	Translation	134
	Index of Persons	681
	Index of Places	735
	Bibliographies	772

Abbreviations

rJe btsun rnam thar

Garis śug ma ṇi lo chen rig 'dzin chos nid (sic) *bzan mo'i rnam par thar pa rnam mkhyen bde ster*. *The autobiographical reminiscences of the famed religious master and reembodiment of Kloñ-chen-pa Śug-gseb Rje-btsun Rig-'dzin-chos-ñid-bzan-* (sic) *mo*. Reproduced from a tracing of a print from the Central Tibetan blocks by Sonam Topgay Kazi. The Ngagyur Nyingmay Sungrab Series vol. 22, Gangtok, Sikkim, 1975. (281 folios)

rJe btsun sku zhabs rnam thar

Gangs shug ma ṇi lo chen rig 'dzin chos nyid bzang mo'i rnam par thar pa rnam mkhyen bde ster zhes bya ba bzhugs so. Lhasa: Tibetan People's Publishing House, 1997.

KaSi

Kah thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *An Account of a pilgrimage to Central Tibet during the years 1918 to 1920 being the text of Gangs ljongs dbus gtsang gnas bskor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do*. Photographically reproduced from the original Tibetan xylograph by Khams sprul Don brgyud nyi ma. Tashijong, Palampur, 1972.

BA

George N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*. ('Gos lo lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal (1392-1481), *Deb ther sngon po*). 1949; Delhi Motilal Banarsidass, 1979.

DoKa

Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*. 2. vols. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991.

Dictionaries and Guides:

Tshig mdzod

Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo, 3 vols.
Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 1985.

Jä

H. A. Jäschke, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary: With Special Reference to the Prevailing Dialects*. 1881;
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987.

Gold-1

Melvyn C. Goldstein, *Tibetan-English Dictionary of Modern Tibetan*. 1975; Bibliotheca Himalayica, series ii, vol. 7. Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1983.

Gold-2

Melvyn C. Goldstein with Ngawang-thondup Narkyid, *English-Tibetan Dictionary of Modern Tibetan*. 1984;
Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1986.

Tsepak

Rigzin Tsepak, *Tibetan-English Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology*. Revised and Enlarged Edition.
Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1993.

- Das* Sarat Chandra Das, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*. 1902;
Compact Edition. Kyoto: Rinsen Book Company, 1983.
- Toh*. *A Complete Catalogue of The Tibetan Buddhist Canons*.
- APA Guide* Manjulika Dubey and Toby Sinclair, *West-Himalaya; Kaschmir-Ladakh-Zaskar*. APA Guides.
Berlin: Reise- und Verkehrsverlag, 1992.
- Maps:
- LTWA map* Map published by the Library of Tibetan Works and
Archives, Dharamsala. (n.d.)
- AMI map* *Amnye Machen Institute, Map and Index of Lhasa City*,
1995. Dharamsala
- Three maps:
- Taring/C-Lhasa* Zask J. Taring, *Map of Lhasa*. Chie Nakane (ed.).
Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1984.
- Taring/Kyichu*
- Taring/Lhasa*

Acknowledgements

First among those to be thanked is Professor Per Kværne, University of Oslo. He not only enthusiastically supported my initial and hesitant suggestion to study Ani Lochen's autobiography, but also followed my work closely from beginning to end. We have read parts of the autobiography together and he has generously shared his great knowledge of Tibetan religion, history, literature and language with me. Apart from his academic interest in Tibetan culture and history, he has also a deep concern for the suffering of the Tibetan people for whom he has worked incessantly since the early 1960s. A friendship has developed over the years which I greatly appreciate.

Lobsang Shastri, Head of the Manuscript Section at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, spent two months in Norway in 1994. Together we read the narrative sections of Ani Lochen's biography and he helped me with reference materials at the Library of Works and Archives in 1995. Gyatsho Tsering, the director of the Tibetan Library, generously allowed me to use the facilities there. I also wish to thank Tashi Tsering, senior researcher at Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, who has always shared his encyclopedic knowledge of Tibetan history with Western academics, and who brought Ani Lochen's autobiography to my attention already in 1984.

At a later stage of my work, Professor Per Sørensen, University of Leipzig, offered to read the manuscript of the translation. His detailed corrections and numerous suggestions have proved invaluable. I greatly appreciate his many hours of help given at a critical phase in my research.

Associate Professor Tseyang Changngoba, Lhasa University, stayed in Oslo for six months in 1996 as part of an international research team supervised by Professor Per Kværne at the Center for Advanced Studies, The Norwegian Academy of Science. Changngoba's knowledge of the culture and history of Lhasa and Central Tibet is unique, as is also her generosity. A warm friendship developed during these months.

I also wish to thank numerous other friends and colleagues, some of whom have contributed significantly to my work. Professor Samten Karmay kindly solved several

problems in Ani Lochen's autobiography. Yael Bentor, Dan Martin, Toni Huber, Charles Ramble, Katia Buffetrille, Elizabeth Stuchbury, Robert Barnett, Tsering Shakya, André Alexander, Professor Matthew Kapstein and Professor Michael Aris have all offered suggestions on ethnography, history or language. Gene E. Smith offered valuable bibliographical suggestions and copied a number of articles for me. I thank Professor Janet Gyatso for sending me her manuscript to *Apparitions of the Self* (1998), a work from which I have greatly profited. Professor Phuntsok Tsering, the former President of the Academy of Social Science in Lhasa, kindly gave me a *dpe cha* version of Jetsun Lochen's autobiography. I have also consulted Rakra Tethong Rinpoche, Tsering from the Academy of Social Science in Lhasa and Thupten Kunga, University of Warsaw, on a number of problems in the text.

Research into the Nyingma tradition poses its own particular problems and Bhikshuni Ngawang Chodron (Marilyn Silverstone) read the translation of the autobiography and helped me identify Nyingma religious masters, texts and ritual practices. Khetsun Sangpo Rinpoche, Minyak Thubten Nyima Rinpoche and Khenpo Karma Phuntsho shared their rich knowledge of the Nyingmapa tradition as well. Nyichang Rinpoche, a personal disciple of Jetsun Lochen, has made useful comments on the indices.

I have had the opportunity to meet Jigme Dorje Rinpoche, the present lama at Shugseb twice, in Tibet in 1994 and in Kathmandu in 1996. He was taught by Lochen Rinpoche for eighteen years and knows her tradition very well. I have also interviewed three women who were nuns at Shugseb during the latter part of Jetsun Lochen's life, Yudonla and Ngawang Pemo, who both stay in Kathmandu and Ani Rigdzin Chosang who lives in Dharamsala. I also wish to thank Chime Thonden who on several occasions assisted me in Kathmandu.

In addition to helpful scholars of Himalayan societies and key individuals from Tibet, there are others, among family and friends, who have offered their support and encouragement during difficult phases of work and life. My husband Rolf Sanne has shared with me not only the joys and sorrows of daily life, but also the care for our three children. Without his support this work could not have been completed. Others I want to thank are Rita Østensen, Lorinn Coburn, Wera Sæther, Berit Thorbjørnsrud, Gunnhild Røthe, my mother Rigmor Havnevik and my brother Kjell J. Havnevik.

I also wish to thank a number of other colleagues at the University of Oslo. Professor Saphinaz-Amal Naguib has inspired me through broad and deep scholarship. Professor Sigurd Hjelde and Kari Elisabeth Børresen, too, have offered kind words of encouragement. The head of the Network for University Co-operation Tibet-Norway, Professor Jens Braarvig, has made academic exchange between Tibet and Norway possible. Vivi Hals helped me with references to Indological works in the Library, Kirsten Berrum and Torill Sand drew maps and Arthur Sand kindly copied photos for me. Hans Munch has solved my computer problems.

Without economic support this research could not have been carried out. I thank the University of Oslo for the doctorate scholarship as well as for travel grants to India, Nepal and Tibet. During these years I have also received travel grants from the Institute of Comparative Research in Human Culture, the Nansen Fund and the Benneche Foundation. I thank Paddy Booz for correcting the English language in an early version of the translation.

Ani Lochen's autobiography was not only her own product, but the result of her collaboration with scribes and editors. In this book, too, numerous suggestions from experts on Tibetan society and culture have been integrated. Even though signed by me, this study represents multiple voices; the mistakes are, however, due to my own shortcomings.

Transliteration

There are numerous systems of transcribing Tibetan into Roman script and the system used here is that of Turrell V. Wylie,¹ which has no diacritical marks. Internal capitalization of the first composite syllable in titles and proper names is applied. Names of persons, deities and places are given phonetically with transliteration in parentheses the first time the proper name occurs in the introduction and in the translation. The phonetic rendering has been kept close to Tibetan pronunciation, without deviating too much from the Tibetan spelling.

ka	kha	ga	nga
ca	cha	ja	nya
ta	tha	da	na
pa	pha	ba	ma
tsa	tsha	dza	wa
zha	za	'a	ya
ra	la	sha	ya
ha	a		

Technical terms are generally translated and given in transliteration in parentheses to enable the specialists to recognize them; wherever possible, the Sanskrit equivalent is given. In the translation (chapter two), the names and titles of religious teachings and texts, which have not been translated, are found in their context in Romanized transliteration, with additional information in the footnotes. Since relatively extensive footnotes are given in the translation (chapter two), whenever these titles or technical terms occur in the introduction (chapter one), I will refer the reader to chapter two so as to avoid repetition. I give the page number² of the text itself (*rJe btsun rnam thar*), which is marked in the left corner on the top of each page, and leave it to the reader to find the relevant footnote on the bottom of the given page. Titles

¹ Wylie 1959:261-267.

² I give the Western page numbers as indicated in *rJe btsun rnam thar* and not the Tibetan folio numbers.

of Tibetan works are rendered in full in the notes, since abbreviations make identification difficult. In the notes, I generally only give the transliterated form of Tibetan terms.

The titles of persons are for the most part not translated and indexes of persons and places that occur in the text are given in the back. In the indexes, the introduction (chapter one) and the translation (chapter two) are treated as separate parts, page numbers in italics refer to the introduction.

Page by page, the Tibetan text, in orthographic transliteration, is followed by the English translation. This is done in order for the reader with knowledge of Tibetan to be able to make cross-references. I have tried to keep the translation as close to the Tibetan original as possible at the cost of occasional distortions of the English syntax.

Periodization

In an attempt to systematize and analyze her written self-account I have divided Jetsun Lochen's life into stages. This periodization is problematic in several ways as the phases are delineated by the researcher and not according to how Lochen herself perceived the 'flow of thoughts and events' of her life. It represents yet another 'transformation' of her life. The first was her own ordering of her experiences through her retrospective oral account to her disciples and to a scribe. The second was the fixing and editing of the oral account in writing by several editors. And the final transformation or selection is the systematization performed here. In due respect to Jetsun Lochen's memory and her contemporaries who may conceive of her life differently, this is but an attempt to delineate and focus some of the multiple stories of the self-narrative. In this life-stage presentation I have integrated information given by key individuals who had stayed at Shugseb or met Lochen Rinpoche.

In order to help the reader grasp the temporal unfolding of Lochen Rinpoche's 'life,' I have attempted to date significant episodes. Lochen was not, and nor are ex-nuns from Shugseb, particularly concerned with fixing events in time. The dating I give is therefore very approximate and mainly based on the chronology of the autobiography.

Introduction

1.1. The Study

Since the time of the Buddha, women have followed the Buddhist path as laywomen and nuns. In spite of the vast literature produced in Buddhist societies, we know relatively little about the life of Buddhist women. From the whole of traditional Buddhist civilization we have only very few literary works produced by nuns, and even for the most famous of these texts, the *Therīgāthā*,³ dating from the early Buddhist era, authorship is debated. Also in Tibetan traditional religious literature, only a limited number of texts are authored by women. As far as I know, there are only two autobiographies of female religious adepts. One of these, the autobiography of Rigdzin Chonyi Sangmo (Rig 'dzin chos nyid bzang mo, 1865-1951), is the focus of this work.⁴

Rigdzin Chonyi Sangmo was one of the very few famous female religious masters in traditional Tibet.⁵ Among her various religious roles were those of pilgrim, religious singer (*ma ni pa*), healer (*gcod pa*),⁶ visitor to the realms of the dead (*'das log*),⁷ *yoginī*, nun, lineage-holder, visionary, performer of miracles (*siddhā*),⁸ reincarnation,⁹ revealer of sacred texts (*dgongs gter ma*),¹⁰ head of a convent and religious teacher. In short, she had all the signs, charisma and roles of a holy person. Together with Togden Semnyi Rinpoche (rTog ldan Sems nyid Rin po che) and other religious companions, she established a nunnery for as

³ Oldenberg and Pischel 1966 and Kloppenborg 1995.

⁴ According to Tashi Tsering (*IATS Munich 1985*, unpublished paper) there existed twenty-seven literary works by sMin gling rJe btsun Mi 'gyur dpal sgron (1699-1769), but only two have survived. There were also works by sMin gling rJe btsun 'Gyur med phrin las chos sgron (early nineteenth century), bSam sdng rDo rje phag mo Chos dbyings bde chen mtsho mo (?-1853), rGya gar ri rDo rje phag mo bDe skyong ye shes dbang mo (fl.1886-1909), mKha' 'gro bDe chen dbang mo (1868-?) of the Bon tradition, mKha' spyod bde ldan dbang mo (n.d.) and Se ra mKha' 'gro kun bzang dbe skyong dbang mo (1892-?). These writings are mainly prayers, spiritual invocations and ritual descriptions. There is also an autobiography by Se ra mKha' 'gro which is not available at present.

⁵ See Taring (1970) 1983, Havnevik 1989, Ricard 1994.

⁶ A non-sectarian religious practice established by Ma gcig lab sgron, 1055-1149. See e.g. Gyatso *PIATS Columbia 1985* and Kollmar-Paulenz 1993, 1998 and Edou 1996. Cf. *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 137, 138, 139.

⁷ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 279, 285ff., 391, 435.

⁸ There are several references to Lo chen's magical powers, e.g. she made water come out from a cliff (*ibid.*: 280), she walked on water (*ibid.*: 280) etc.

⁹ Of Ma gcig lab sgron.

¹⁰ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 144, 368. For the difference between *sa gter*, *dgongs gter* and *dag snang*, see Smith 1969:2n. 3 and Ricard 1994: 555.

many as three hundred nuns at Shugseb (Shug gseb) in Central Tibet. She was popularly known as Ani or Jetsun Lochen (A ne or rJe btsun Lo chen).

The existence in Tibet of biographies and autobiographies of female religious masters, although few in number, is a welcome addition to a body of scarce literature. It gives us the opportunity to fill out our picture of female religiosity in Buddhism in general and in Tibet in particular.¹¹ The life stories of female religious masters, both the mytho-historical ones from the early phase of Buddhism in Tibet, and later oral and written autobiographical accounts, have been an enormous inspiration for Tibetan women past and present. The texts are significant for the self-conception and identity of women as religious specialists and as laywomen.

Through Jetsun Lochen's autobiography, we learn about a remarkable woman who lived for nearly a century. In addition to being a sacred text outlining the ideal life of a holy person for the disciples to follow, the biography contains abundant information on Tibetan culture from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, and thus gives a picture of religious life in Tibet up to the great changes brought about by the Chinese occupation from 1950 onwards.

The fact that an extensive autobiography was written about Ani Lochen reflects her importance. The autobiography was considered to be sufficiently valuable to be rescued during the Cultural Revolution. It was hidden in Tibet and also taken into exile. The text may be seen as part of the institutionalization of this female saint. It supports her cult and has served to maintain her memory. As Reynolds and Capps (1976) maintain, biographies both recount the process through which religious ideals are established and at the same time participate in that process.¹²

It is extraordinary that the life of a woman like Jetsun Lochen was written down. This happened only because she managed, in spite of extreme poverty, physical and psychological abuse, ethnic, social and gender discrimination, to become a religious master in her own right.

¹¹ Articles on female religious specialists in Tibet only started to be published in the second half of the 1980s, but since then academic interest has increased, and lately more encompassing works on Tibetan religious women have been published by Pommaret 1989, Havnevik 1989, 1995, Kollmar-Paulenz 1993, Chayet 1993, Gross 1993, Shaw 1994, Klein 1995, and Campbell 1996.

¹² Reynolds and Capps 1976:3.

The study of Ani Lochen's life is of particular interest, because it is told from the perspective of a woman belonging to the poor and dispossessed social strata of the traditional society. Thus this self-narrative gives a voice to uneducated and traditionally 'silent' individuals and groups in Tibetan religious and social history.

From a marginalized position, born as an illegitimate child of a mixed ethnic liaison, Jetsun Lochen came to achieve the most treasured status of Tibetan culture, that of the saint. From being a regular *ani* or nun at the bottom of the religious hierarchy, she gradually came to be revered as a Rinpoche (Rin po che), a title reserved only for higher lamas and only exceptionally used to address female masters. As Ani Lochen's tradition was abruptly broken off by large-scale politics and the occupation of Tibet in 1950, it is an open question whether her example would have had any long-term influence on the local or regional socio-economic conditions of nuns or the overall evaluation of female religious specialists.

This work aims to make available, systematize, and analyze information provided by a Tibetan female religious specialist herself. At present Lochen Rinpoche's autobiography exists only in Tibetan. The annotated translation into English, based on extensive use of secondary sources as well as data from key contemporaries of Ani Lochen, helps to situate her life in time and place. The songs, presumably inserted into the autobiography, have not been translated or studied. They were almost certainly composed by a different author and the thematic focus is general Mahāyāna concepts and not the life history of Ani Lochen.

I am interested in the 'process of sanctification', i.e. how the sacred accumulated over time in this remarkable woman and made her a saint in her own right. Along with focusing on Jetsun Lochen's life and how it was possible for her to reach eminence, it is equally important to ask why she was the only woman in her group of fellow female devotees, and maybe of her generation, to obtain such a prominent position. My aim is not to diminish Jetsun Lochen's importance, but to see her life in a wider socio-cultural context and possibly to isolate factors that may explain her life.

In the text we find much information about normative expectations of female religious specialists as reflected in Buddhist doctrines and interpreted by male lamas, lay people and the nuns themselves. But we also learn how Jetsun Lochen and her companions relate to

these expectations, which alternative choices were open to them and how they actually manoeuvred between the restrictions and possibilities set by the normative tradition.

Several recent books deal with the construction of gender in Indo-Tibetan religion primarily through the study of religious texts.¹³ In some of these works, the positive evaluation of women and the feminine in Tantric Buddhist ideology is emphasized, while the social position of Tibetan nuns and other female religious specialists is largely ignored.¹⁴ Only exceptionally is the interrelation between normative and social dimensions investigated.¹⁵ At times, Tibetan Buddhism is presented as an elevated system of belief 'contaminated' by Tibetan patriarchal culture and society.¹⁶ We need to keep in mind that Buddhism, too, is a cultural construction, whatever else it may be. As such it is continuously reformulated by social actors and it is hardly possible to study Tibetan religion without considering the socio-cultural processes with which it interacts.

For years, religion has been Tibet's main attraction for Westerners. Since fieldwork has been almost impossible, the academic field has been dominated by philological-historical oriented research. Tibetan studies have suffered from absence of data and terminology generated by sociologically oriented analyses. Geoffrey Samuel (1992) has justly criticized Tibetan studies for being static and inward-looking.¹⁷ There is thus an increasing awareness that Tibetan Buddhism is not a static entity, not a sacred culture 'set apart', but a system of constructed meaning closely interwoven with social praxis.

Analyses restricted to the normative system of symbols tend to conclude that gender construction in Tantric Buddhism gives equal value to the female and the male. But it would be a serious mistake to deduce from the normative/ideological level and apply the pattern to the social and institutional. As Caroline Bynum (1986) and others have pointed out, gender symbolism is multivalent and the interrelation between the ideological and the social is

¹³ Gross 1993, Shaw 1994, Klein 1995.

¹⁴ Gross 1993, Shaw 1994.

¹⁵ Klein (1985) notes the incongruence between positive female symbols and social reality and attempts to relate the symbolic and the actual situation of Tibetan women. See also Havnevik 1989.

¹⁶ Gross 1993. This was also frequently mentioned by the Western nuns in the Tibetan tradition interviewed by Hersvik 1996.

¹⁷ He suggests defining Tibet as part of Highland Southeast Asia in order to open Tibetan studies for terminology and theoretical frameworks developed in this larger academic field, Samuel *PIATS Fagernes* 1992. In his analysis of recent political movements in Tibet, Schwartz (1994) draws important parallels between an emerging Tibetan nationalism and similar political processes elsewhere in Asia.

extremely complex; gender symbols may refer to gender in ways that affirm or reverse it, support or question it.¹⁸

The search for prominent women in Tibetan religious history may easily make research unbalanced. The same fabulous stories of female mythologized lives tend to be repeated, while the cultural disparagement and the debased social and economic conditions of thousands of female religious practitioners are ignored. For years stereotypes like 'the high status' of Tibetan women, 'the numerous realized Tibetan female lamas' and 'the equal religious status' of Tibetan men and women have uncritically been repeated in books on Tibet.

Talking about the overall 'status' of either gender is at best a simplification that obscures more than it explains. Women and men may have high status in some domains, while low in others. We need to look at both formal and informal aspects of women and men's status and role and to consider their relative control over significant resources. Significant resources in the Tibetan religious context are: access to prestigious positions within the lay and ecclesiastic hierarchies, access to formal religious education, access to esoteric religious instruction transferred orally from teacher to disciple, access to ritual knowledge and control over material means that enable the religious specialist to maintain his or her position.¹⁹

Tibetan Buddhism has had great missionary success in the West and many Western academic women have embraced Buddhism. There has been a certain amount of frustration because Tibetan religious ideology with its prominent female symbolism and soteriological inclusiveness give rise to expectations of gender equality. Western women have, however, become painfully aware that in the traditional Tibetan context (i.e. pre-1950), female religious specialists were relatively few in number, even fewer of them were famous, they were not included in important religious institutions, they were not in demand by laypeople and they were poor.²⁰

¹⁸ Bynum 1986:2.

¹⁹ See Havnevik 1989:127.

²⁰ A few Western academic women have been included in traditional Tibetan monastic educational institutions and have been respectfully treated and taught by Tibetan masters.

The encounter between East and West and the introspective trend in Western scholarship have also brought focus on Western women's experiences as adherents of Tibetan Buddhism and how this form of Buddhism can meet the spiritual needs of Westerners.²¹ One study has the feminist reconstruction of Buddhism as an explicit aim.²² The wish to establish gender equality within institutions of Buddhism is a timely and valid feminist, political project. The present study will not, however, take up this debate but rather focus on the social and economic conditions under which Tibetan female religious specialists lived, how they were evaluated by ecclesiastics as well as by the larger society and how they perceived their own lives.

In this study, gender will be used as a basic analytic category for understanding Tibetan culture and society in general and Ani Lochen's life and her socio-cultural context in particular. Gender is important in the construction of both personal and group identity and structures of power in every society. More specifically, we need to see all relationships as 'gendered', irrespective of the gender of the subjects.²³ Focus will be on how history, culture, politics and economic factors are combined in the construction of gender.²⁴

Clifford Geertz (1973) defines culture, including religion, as a system of meaning and symbols which functions as a model for and of social action. There has been a tendency, however, to see culture as a public and integrated system of meaning and symbols. We need to ask for whom the symbols are meaningful and in which ways. Some symbols are public and shared, but many are not. It is important to focus on the degree to which 'a cultural system' is shared, on how cultural knowledge is distributed and controlled. Questions of gender, age, class and ethnicity are essential. Cultural symbols are differently constructed and differently read by men and women, young and old, experts and non-experts.²⁵

Tibetan culture covers vast geographical areas inhabited by various ethnic groups who speak different dialects often incomprehensible to one another. Moreover, Tibet was socially

²¹ Klein 1995, Hersvik 1996, Tsomo 1995, Campbell 1996.

²² Gross 1993.

²³ Broch-Due and Rudie 1989:2.

²⁴ Morgen 1993:8. Ardener (1975) draws attention to the fact that Bakweri women at times use male models, at other times define themselves differently from men. He notes that these gender models exist both side by side and in opposition. Bynum (1986:13) contends that men and women create, understand and appropriate symbols differently, women having a tendency towards integration, men towards opposition.

²⁵ Keesing 1987.

and economically highly stratified. In Tibet, women have as a rule been excluded from formal lay and ecclesiastic authority. Nonetheless, women have had and still have considerable informal religious, political and economic power.²⁶ One would expect the status and roles of women to vary according to the geographical region, to the means of subsistence, social level, income level and ethnic identity, but we still lack substantial information on Tibetan women's lives in general.²⁷

For some areas of traditional Tibet, e.g. Amdo and Kham, our knowledge is scarce and Central Tibet is often seen as representing the entire Tibetan cultural area. Klein (1995) gives a short overview of the socio-cultural position of women in Tibet based partly on material from Kham and Amdo,²⁸ but her sweeping generalizations are hardly useful for those interested in comparative research. Makley (1997) calls for studies of Tibetan women's lives in local contexts and it is hoped that her fieldwork in Amdo and Kham will provide data for comparative analyses. Among female scholars in Tibetan studies there is still a strong interest in the lives of Tibetan nuns. The percentage of nuns is, however, very small and more research is needed on local contexts of Tibetan laywomen in order to increase our understanding not only of why women become nuns, but also of other religious and secular aspects of Tibetan women's lives.

²⁶ Rogers 1975.

²⁷ Gutschow (1997 and forthcoming) has carried out extensive field-work among nuns in Zangskar. Gutschow draws a grim picture of the social reality of nuns in Zangskar, not very different from that portrayed of the lives of nuns in Ladakh by Grimshaw (1992). While these studies may only be representative for the situation of nuns in the Western Himalayan areas, many of their conclusions correspond to my own results from historical research on nuns in Tibet and from fieldwork in a Tibetan nunnery in exile (Havnevik 1989, 1995).

²⁸ She does not, however, document her sources.

1.1.1. The Autobiography and Other Sources

The main textual source for Jetsun Lochen Rinpoche's life is her autobiography, *Gangs shug ma ni lo chen rig 'dzin chos nid* (sic) *bzang mo'i rnam par thar pa rnam mkhyen bde ster*. *The autobiographical reminiscences of the famed religious master and reinbodiment of Klong chen pa Shug gseb Rje btsun Rig 'dzin chos nyid bzang* (sic) *mo*, hereafter abbreviated *rJe btsun rnam thar*. In the preface to the edition published by Sonam T. Kazi in Gangtok in 1975, it is stated that the biography was completed in 1949 and presumably ready for printing in 1951. The Gangtok edition has been reproduced from a print of the Central Tibetan blocks and is published in the *Ngagyur Nyingmay Sungrab* series.

Jestun Lochen was repeatedly requested by her disciples to tell her life-story. It was only in the Fire-Ox Year (*me glang*, 1937), when she was requested by Drubchen Dawa Dorje Rinpoche (Grub chen Zla ba rdo rje rin po che), whom she recognized as the reincarnation of her root-lama Pema Gyatsho (Padma rgya mtsho, 1829-1889),²⁹ that she consented. Although she started to tell her life-story in 1937, she abandoned the project and apparently did not take it up again until about twelve years later, on the fifth day of the second month of the Earth-Ox Year (*sa glang*, 1949), when she was requested again by Dawa Dorje and four named disciples.³⁰ Lochen told the story of her life up to the twenty-fifth day of the eleventh month of the Earth-Ox Year (1949). The nun Gen Thinley Chodron (rGan 'Phrin las chos sgron, b. late 1920s) wrote the draft and it was edited and completed by Dawa Dorje Rinpoche.

The Gangtok edition of Lochen's *rnam thar* would appear to consist of 271 folios. The Tibetan numbering of the folios is, however, mixed up so that the folio following folio forty-two is numbered thirty-three; thus ten folios are counted twice, making a total of 281 folios.³¹ Making a large autobiography in traditional Tibet was an arduous and expensive process. Ani Lochen names altogether twenty-three persons who were involved as donors, copyists and carvers.³²

²⁹ His dates are tentative.

³⁰ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 8 and 561.

³¹ When referring to pages in *rJe btsun rnam thar*, I refer to Western page nos. given in the Gangtok edition.

³² *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 561.

Jetsun Lochen's text is not divided into chapters, but sections of prose are followed by visionary songs, advice, prayers and poems that constitute about one half of the text. The ninety-four songs³³ in the biography vary from a few lines in length up to fifteen pages.³⁴ In Tibetan literary tradition, folk-inspired religious songs (*mgur*)³⁵ may be published in separate volumes, but may also be included in (auto)biographies, as is the case here. This interchange between narrative and poetical sections make Tibetan autobiographies resemble the Indian *gāthā*, the biographical songs of the Buddha's early disciples³⁶ and the *caryāgīti*, the songs of the *siddhas* of late Indian Buddhism.³⁷

The Shugseb lama, Jigme Dorje states that Dawa Dorje Rinpoche (b. 1929), an important lama in the latter part of Jetsun Lochen's life, inserted religious songs composed by himself into her autobiography.³⁸ It is also likely that Dawa Dorje collected stories about Lochen Rinpoche's life from her contemporaries and inserted these, in first person, in the text. Thus the biography may be seen as a co-production between Ani Lochen, the most prominent nun teacher at Shugseb, the scribe Gen Thinley, and a male lama. *rJe btsun rnam thar* is therefore predominantly a self-narrative, i.e. an autobiography, while parts of it, although written in the first person, are biographical.

The multiple authorship of Ani Lochen's life-story becomes evident when reading the text, because the language of the prose parts is oral, with a simple syntax and presumably close to the colloquial language of Central Tibet, making frequent use of local terms and idioms.³⁹ The songs are written in a poetic and often learned style; the language is stilted and important Buddhist concepts are written in Sanskrit. In a few of the songs the verses are ordered alphabetically (*ka bshad lka rtsom*).⁴⁰ The songs are interpolated after Lochen's

³³ This is an approximate number, depending on how a song is defined.

³⁴ Song no. 12, *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 68-83.

³⁵ For a discussion of Tibetan religious songs (*mgur*), see Sørensen 1990:14-17.

³⁶ See Gyatso 1998:104.

³⁷ See Kværne (1977) 1986 and Sørensen 1990:15.

³⁸ Lo chen composed poetical songs herself and I copied one such song from an ex-Shug gseb nun, g.Yu sgron lags, in Kathmandu in 1995. Is possible that some of the songs in *rJe btsun rnam thar* are composed by herself, but we do not know which ones.

³⁹ Lo chen's mother was born in Yol mo, Nepal, and did not know Tibetan well (ibid.:28, 6.), and we assume that Lo chen picked up local dialects on her extensive travels in the Himalayan border areas. Although *rJe btsun rnam thar* was put into writing by a nun from Central Tibet, it was edited by a lama from Kham.

⁴⁰ *Ka bshad* or *kar mtshom* (or *ka kha*) poetic style where each line begins with a different letter in alphabetical order. *Gold-1*:32. A poetic genre of Tibetan literature. Cf. *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 101, 438.

strong emotional states such as compassion for living beings (often animals), the feeling of joy, her own and others' suffering, fear and grief at deaths.

Some of the songs in Ani Lochen's autobiography are poetic repetitions of the prose, some contain the repertoire of the *ma ni pa* and have a didactic purpose. Others are answers to requests offered by lamas and disciples, while some verses describe Lochen's thoughts, visions and miracles. Long poetic repetitions of sections of the prose, for instance her birth story,⁴¹ are almost word by word identical with the prose. In the poetic verses we are introduced to general Mahāyāna and tantric Buddhist doctrines and standard descriptions of Buddhist cosmology and iconography.

A new edition of Lochen Rinpoche's autobiography (abbr. *rJe btsun sku zhabs kyi rnam thar*) was published in 1997 by the Tibetan People's Publishing House in Lhasa. It is said to have been written by Gen Thinley and others.⁴² Thus Dawa Dorje's important role in editing the self-narrative is not acknowledged. Jigme Dorje Rinpoche informed me in 1996 that he is preparing a new edition of the *rJe btsun rnam thar* in cooperation with Lochen Rinpoche's contemporaries as well as her reincarnation, Dorje Rabden (rDo rje rab brtan, b. 1953).

In addition to the long autobiography, a biographical sketch is provided by Khetsun Sangpo in *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism* (LTWA 1973, vol. 4, pp. 528-530). A short biography has also been published by Sonam Pelbar Horkhang (bSod nams dpal 'bar Hor khang) in *Bod ljongs zhib 'jug*, no.1 1989:124-133. Horkhang does not mention *rJe btsun rnam thar* as a source, but only states that his short biography is based on material collected when Jetsun Lochen was alive.⁴³ By and large the main lines of Horkhang's short biography are in accordance with *rJe btsun rnam thar*, but as it is short, it leaves out much information. It is interesting to note that Ani Lochen's mother, who has a prominent role in the autobiography, is only briefly mentioned by Horkhang, and he makes no mention of an important lama in Lochen's life, Semnyi Rinpoche. Horkhang concentrates on the Central Tibetan scene and leaves out numerous religious teachers from Kham and Amdo.

⁴¹ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 23-28.

⁴² *rJe btsun sku zhabs rnam thar*, 321.

⁴³ Hor khang 1989:133.

Furthermore, he supplies dates that are not found in the text and includes information about Jetsun Lochen's death.

There is a three-page biographical summary of Jetsun Lochen's life compiled by Dondor (Dṇ rdor) and Tendzin Chodrag (bsTan 'dzin chos grags) in *Gangs ljongs lo rgyus thog gi grags can mi sna* (1993:949-52). In Jamyang Dorje Nyoshul Khenpo's ('Jam dbyangs rdo rje Nyo shul mkhan po) *rDogs pa chen po gsang ba snying thig gi chos 'byung rig 'dzin brgyud pa'i rnam thar ngo mtshar u dum wa ra'i phreng ba* (1995:59-76) an abbreviated eighteen-page (nine folio)⁴⁴ biographical account of Jetsun Lochen is included.

Two biographical accounts of Jetsun Lochen's life have been published in English. Kim Yeshi and Acharya Tashi Tsering give a summary of *rJe btsun rnam thar* in *Chö Yang* 1991. This abbreviated biography is unfortunately inaccurate when it comes to dates and names of persons and places. In 1996, Tulku Thondup published an excellent biographical summary of Jetsun Lochen, likewise based on *rJe btsun rnam thar*.⁴⁵ There are also short references to Lochen Rinpoche in the works of Rinchen Drolma Taring [(1970)1983], Lobsang Lhalungpa (1978, 1983),⁴⁶ Janice Willis (1984), Hanna Havnevik (1989), Rita Gross (1993), Matthieu Ricard (1994)⁴⁷ and Jérôme Edou (1996).⁴⁸

Oral Sources

Anthropological fieldwork has been virtually impossible in Tibet. It can be carried out at present, but it is closely watched and controlled by the authorities. As nuns are among the most anti-Chinese social groups and are politically active, both in Lhasa and in the surrounding areas, research in nunneries is prohibited. In 1994, assisted by a 'translator' from the Tibet Academy of Social Science, I was granted a two-hour stay in Jetsun Lochen's Shugseb Nunnery, south of Lhasa. I asked the authorities for permission to visit other nunneries in and near Lhasa, but my request was ignored. I was told that the only way to do research on Lochen Rinpoche's tradition was by bringing nuns from Shugseb to Lhasa (half a

⁴⁴ Western page nos. 59-76, Tib. folio nos. 30-38.

⁴⁵ Thondup 1996: 251-256.

⁴⁶ For references, see Willis 1984:22.

⁴⁷ Ricard 1994:574, 576n. 26, 578, 592.

⁴⁸ There is also one page about Lo chen in *Daily Pocket Calendar 1998*, published by the Tibetan Nuns Project, 1997.

day's travel) and interview them there. Nuns with knowledge of Ani Lochen's life are in their seventies and eighties and cannot undertake such a strenuous journey. Additional information about Lochen's life have, instead, been obtained from interviews with ex-nuns and Lochen's contemporaries in exile during field-trips to India and Nepal (1983-84, 1995, 1996).

1.1.2. Dating

When it comes to dating Jetsun Lochen's life, there is considerable confusion. The most common assumption is that she lived to be approximately one hundred years old. This is supported by Khetsun Sangpo (1973),⁴⁹ Horkhang (1989), Kim Yeshi and Acharya Tashi Tsering (1991), and it is stated at least three times in the *rnam thar*.⁵⁰ Lhalungpa writes that she lived to be 113 or 115,⁵¹ while Rinchen Dolma Taring and the present lama at Shugseb, Jigme Dorje Rinpoche, maintain that she was over 130 years old.⁵² Lochen herself seems to have contributed greatly to the uncertainty about her age; when asked, she gave either elusive or inconsistent replies. When the regent Reting (Rva sgreng rin po che sTag brag ngag dbang gsung rab, 1912-47) visited her at Shugseb in the late 1930s⁵³ and inquired about her age she merely said,

When I first came, my mouth was full of teeth and my head (i.e. hair) was also black.

Now there are no teeth in my mouth and my head has also become white.

rJe btsun rnam thar, 450-51

Jigme Dorje Rinpoche, who was taught by Jetsun Lochen for eighteen years, told me that when she was asked about her age she could give answers that varied by thirty years,

⁴⁹ Khetsun Sangpo (pers. communication, Oct. 1995) stated that Tibetans think Lo chen lived to be more than one hundred years, but that he personally believes that she died in her early eighties.

⁵⁰ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 21, 462, 557.

⁵¹ Lhalungpa 1983:178.

⁵² 'Jigs med rdo rje also stated that Lo chen lived until the age of 132, that she was born in the Year of the Pig and that she died in the Iron Year 1951. This can hardly be correct. If she lived to be 132 years she must have been born either in 1818 or 1819 (depending on whether the year of conception is counted), but neither of these are pig years, but Earth-Tiger and Earth-Hare. If she was born in a pig year this gives us the following possibilities: 1827 (*me mo phag*), 1839 (*sa mo phag*), 1851 (*lcags mo'phag*) and 1863 (*chu mo phag*). R. D. Taring [(1970) 1983: facing p. 225 and 165], too, writes that Lo chen lived to be over 130 years old and that she was born c. 1820.

⁵³ In 1934 according to Hor khang (1989), but based on the chronology of *rJe btsun rnam thar* I would suggest 1938/1939. Yeshe and Tsering (1991:142) write 1938.

sometimes saying she was fifty and sometimes eighty. Both traditional Tibetan as well as Indian literature and historiography show little interest in accurate dating. It was common that people in Tibet ignored or simply forgot their birth-dates. Apparently Jetsun Lochen did not know the exact date of her birth. An ex-nun from Shugseb, Ngawang Pemo (Ngag dbang dpal mo, b. c. 1922) informed me that once when she sat with Jetsun Lochen, she was asked to count the years her master had lived. The reckoning was based on Ani Lochen's travels and her periods of meditation. Ngawang Pemo counted on her rosary and when she came to 111 years there were no more beads.

Year of Birth

Concerning the dates of Lochen's birth there are various suggestions. Khetsun Sangpo writes that she was born in the fourteenth *rab byung*, on the fifteenth day of the fourth month of the Iron-Ox Year (*lcags mo glang*), i.e. 1841.⁵⁴ Of my sources, Khetsun Sangpo is the only one to give the year of birth 1841.⁵⁵ His rendering of the day and the month of her birth is, however, consistent with that given in the autobiography. Kim Yeshi and Tashi Tsering write that Ani Lochen was born in 1852, and here also, the day and the month of her birth is the same as that of the autobiography.⁵⁶ The text does not say that she was born in 1852, however, only that she was conceived in the fourth month of that year.⁵⁷

When we turn to the autobiography, there are several passages referring to her birth, and we are given two alternatives, either 1853 or 1865. In the text (*rJe btsun rnam thar*, 21,4) it says that she entered her mother's womb on the fifth day in the fourth month of the Water-Rat Year (*chu byi*), i.e. 1852. Thus she should have been born in the first month of the Water-Ox Year (*chu glang*), i.e. 1853. An event occurring ten days before her birth is mentioned, however (ibid.:22,3), and the date given is the fifth day of the first month of the

⁵⁴ Khetsun Sangpo 1973: 528 (vol. iv).

⁵⁵ Khetsun Sangpo suggests this year because he went to Shug gseb with his teacher dGe bshes bSod rgyal before the Chinese had come to Shug gseb and he says that Lo chen had expired long before this (pers. communication 1995). According to ex-Shug gseb nuns, however, it took some years until the Chinese arrived at Shug gseb.

⁵⁶ Ricard (1994:576), too, gives the dates 1852-1953 for Lo chen.

⁵⁷ Yeshi and Tsering (1991:131) seem to be confused by inconsistent information in *rJe btsun rnam thar*, and write, «On the fifteenth day of the first month of the wood-ox year (1852) Pemba Dolma gave birth in mTsho Padma to a female child». The Wood-Ox Year is, however, 1865.

Wood-Ox Year (*shing glang*), i.e. 1865. On the same page (ibid.: 22,5-6) it is stated that Lochen was born in the morning of the fifteenth day, implying the same month and year.

A few pages further on, (ibid.:26,4) in a song that repeats the prose (from pages 21-22), it says that she entered her mother's womb on the fifth day of the fourth month of the Wood-Rat Year (*shing byi*), i.e.1864. Then several months passed (ibid.:26,5) and when the time of giving birth approached, the same event as that related in the prose is repeated, and the child is born on the fifteenth day (ibid.:27,3). 1852 as the year of conception is mentioned only once in the prose, 1864 as the year of conception is mentioned once in a song (ibid.:26,4) and 1865 as the year of birth is stated once in the prose (ibid.:22,3) and alluded to once in a song (ibid.:27,3).

When we take a closer look at the text, where Lochen is said to have been conceived in the Water-Rat Year (*chu byi*), i.e. 1852 (ibid.:21,4), it appears that it has undergone some editing.⁵⁸ The first syllable of the name of the year visibly appears to have been changed: *chu* may have been inserted (making it *chu byi*) instead of *shing byi*, which is the year of conception found twice (ibid.:22 and 26). In a *dpe cha* copy of Lochen's *rnam thar* given to me by Phuntsok Tsering in 1996, the year of conception given is *chu byi* (folio 12a, 3) and there has been no editing. The year of the birth given (folio 12r, 3) is *shing glang*, 1865. Thus the same inconsistencies are found in both editions. In *rJe btsun sku zhabs rnam thar* (p. 9), the date of conception given is the fifth day of the fourth month of the Wood-Rat Year (*shing byi*), i.e. 1864, and the date of birth given is the fifteenth day of the first month in the Wood-Ox Year (*shing glang*), i.e. 1865.⁵⁹ Thus in spite of inconsistencies and because the years of conception and birth 1864/1865 are found several times in *rJe btsun rnam thar* as well as in *rJe btsun sku zhabs rnam thar* we may settle for 1865 as the year of birth. I thus agree with Tashi Tsering (LTWA) and Tulku Thondup who suggests, 1865 as Lochen's year of birth.

Jigme Dorje Rinpoche also informed me that they usually counted Lochen's age from the fact that she was about fifty years old when the Imperial forces invaded Tibet. This must refer to February 1910 when some two thousand Chinese troops arrived in Lhasa. If Lochen was about fifty years old in 1910-12, she would have been born in the early 1860s. Hence it

⁵⁸ Suggested by Tashi Tsering, *IATS Munich 1985*, unpublished paper.

⁵⁹ See *rJe btsun sku zhabs rnam thar*, 9.

is not unlikely that the year 1865 given in the autobiography is correct. Horkhang writes, however, that Lochen was fifty-one years old when the Younghusband forces invaded Tibet in 1904 (in the Tree-Dragon Year, *shing 'brug*) and that she was sixty years when the Manchu soldiers came in the Water-Rat Year (*chu byi*), 1912 .

I suspect that the year of conception has been changed in our text (ibid.: 21), because Lochen, during her illness at the end of her life gained confidence that she was the reincarnation of Machig Labdron (Ma cig lab sgron, c. 1055-1149), and she promised her disciples that,

In the past I stayed as Machig for a hundred years, and therefore, disguised as her reincarnation I must promise to stay for a hundred years. *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 462.

At the end of her self-narrative, Jetsun Lochen's intention to live to the age of hundred is repeated. She says,

The short biography is about this (my life) up to the twenty-fifth day of the eleventh month of the Earth-Ox Year (1949). Still the biography up to (my) hundredth year can be continued. *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 557

When Lochen died in 1951 the editors may have made up for the inconsistency and therefore changed the year of birth (ibid.:21). We are left, however, with the question why the year of conception/birth 1864/1865 given a few pages further down was not changed. This may be due to a multiple author- or editorship or else the incongruity may simply have been overlooked. In the preface to the Gangtok edition of the text, the publishers state that Lochen was born either in 1853 or in 1865, favoring neither year. Horkhang counts her age from 1853, so does Dondor 1993: 949, while the new edition *rJe btsun sku zhabs rnam thar* (1997:9) settles for 1865.

Year of Death

As to the exact dating of Lochen's death, we are left with no information from the Gangtok edition of the autobiography, as it ends in 1949. Khetsun Sangpo writes that she died on the thirteenth day of the third month of the Iron-Dragon Year (*lcags 'brug*), which is 1940. Horkhang contends that she died on the thirteenth day of the third month of the Iron-Hare

Year (*lcags yos*), which is 1951. These two authors thus agree on the date and month, but give different Iron years. Dondor (1993: 952) states that Lochen died on the thirteenth day of the third month in the Iron-Ox Year (*lcags stag*), which is 1950. In *rJe btsun sku zhab rnam rnam thar* (1997:310) the year of Lochen Rinpoche's death is not explicitly stated, only that she died in the evening on the thirteenth day of the third month, but from the context, the year must be the Iron-Hare Year (*lcags yos*), i.e. 1951.⁶⁰ Jigme Dorje informed me (1996) that she died in the Iron Year 1951. As Jigme Dorje stayed with Lochen Rinpoche at Shugseb and his information coincides with that given by Horkhang, who had easy access to Lochen's contemporaries, we can be reasonably sure that this is correct. Tashi Tsering, too, agrees with 1951 as the year of death.⁶¹ Others also state that she died in the early 1950s. R. D. Taring writes that she died in 1950,⁶² while K. Yeshe/Acharya T. Tsering and Tulku Thondup give the year 1953.

Based on the available material I regard it as a reasonable assumption that Lochen was born on the fifteenth day of the first month of 1865 and that she died on the thirteenth day of the third month of 1951, at the age of eighty-six years (or eighty-seven by Tibetan reckoning).

1.2. TIBETAN BIOGRAPHIES AND AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Biographies of famous *yogins* and lamas have been written in Tibet since the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. Khetsun Sangpo maintains that the beginning of biographical writing in Tibet goes as far back as the time of Thrisong Detsen (Khri Srong lde brtsan, d. c. 800), while it is generally recognized that the genre dates back to Karma Pakshi (Karma Pak shi, 1204-83). Janet Gyatso writes that Tibetans have been recollecting their lives in order to narrate them since close to the eighth century and that there are several examples of early autobiographical writing from the twelfth century.⁶³

⁶⁰ An event occurring in the ninth month in the *lcags stags* year, i.e. 1950 is mentioned (*rJe btsun sku zhab rnam rnam thar*, 303) and a little further on in the text it is stated that Lo chen died on the thirteenth day of the third month.

⁶¹ *IATS Munich 1985*, unpublished paper.

⁶² R. D. Taring (1970) 1983, p. facing p. 225.

⁶³ Khetsun Sangpo in *Biography* 1992, 17,1:29-30 and Gyatso 1998:101.

Holy biographies have played, and continue to play, a dynamic role in Tibetan culture. They not only function as models for religious practice, but Tibetan identity and regional loyalties are connected to such biographies. The life stories of great religious heroes such as Milarepa (Mi la ras pa, 1040-1123 or 1052-1135) and Drugpa Kunleg ('Brug pa kun legs, 1455-1529) embody important values in the Tibetan worldview and ethos, and they are known by every Tibetan.⁶⁴ Religious biographies are still the most popular religious literature in Tibet.⁶⁵

When a culture and way of life are threatened, as the case has been in Tibet for almost fifty years, the past becomes a vital symbolic asset. Even though Tibetan society and culture have radically changed since the Chinese invasion in 1950, the past and its construction and evaluation are still very much part of daily life. Faced with political liberalization in the early 1980s, young Tibetan men and women started to use religious and monastic symbols actively to gain political power. We witnessed a period of cultural revitalization, cultural invention and emerging nationalism.⁶⁶ Monastic values, such as compassion and non-violence, were re-emphasized and politicized. Also nuns from Lochen Rinpoche's nunnery have taken part in this process.⁶⁷ Religious autobiographies acquire considerable importance in this process and the most prominent example is the three-volume 'outer'⁶⁸ autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-82). He was one of the most powerful political and religious figures in the history of Tibet,⁶⁹ and there is considerable interest in making his 'life' relevant in the present political situation in Tibet.

⁶⁴ See Stein 1972, Dowman and Paljor 1980 and Kretschmar 1981. A number of male biographies have been translated into Western languages, that of Mi la ras pa [Evans-Wentz 1951, Lhalungpa 1985, Bacot (1925) 1971], Mar pa (Bacot 1937), Bu ston (Ruegg 1966), Tsong kha pa (Kaschewsky 1971), 'Brug pa kun legs (Stein 1972), those of four Dol po lamas (Snellgrove 1967), Padma gLing pa and the Sixth Dalai Lama (Aris 1988), the Fifth Dalai Lama (Karmay 1988), Zhabs dkar (Ricard 1994) and 'Jigs med gLing pa (Gyatso 1998). For the translations of biographies of women, see below.

⁶⁵ See Stutchbury (1994b) who maintains that biographical narratives play a vital part in maintaining not only dKar sha pas' ways of thinking and behaving, but also the continuity of 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud Buddhism.

⁶⁶ Schwartz 1994, Havnevik 1995.

⁶⁷ Schwartz, *ibid.*, Havnevik, *ibid.* The Chinese reacted to the cultural revitalization and the demonstrations with harsh suppression.

⁶⁸ See below.

⁶⁹ The political and symbolic value of the present Dalai Lama is significant and the recent strife between the atheist Chinese regime and the Tibetans over the selection of the second religious hierarch in Tibet, the Paṅ chen lama, is a symbolic power struggle of great importance.

The structural changes in Tibet brought about by the Chinese occupation, ideas sifting back to Tibet from an exile population exposed to Western ideas, Western tourism, new economic opportunities and the creation of a new political monasticism may lead to increased female participation in religious institutions that will eventually bring about a reevaluation of female religious specialists. In this process Jetsun Lochen's example and autobiography will perhaps acquire considerable significance. Her memory has been kept alive by her disciples in labor camps and prisons. Today there is a growing interest in her life story, both in Tibet,⁷⁰ among Tibetans in exile and among Westerners.

The writing of autobiographies was widespread in Tibet and Gyatso maintains that the extent and popularity of this genre is unique to Tibet compared to other Asian countries. At present about one hundred and fifty book-length Tibetan autobiographies have been published, but she suggests that the number may be as high as three hundred.⁷¹ As stated above, among the large number of Tibetan written autobiographies, we only know of two that come from the mouths of female religious masters, and only the autobiography of Jetsun Lochen has been published.⁷²

We do have some narratives from women that may be considered a sub-genre of the autobiography, as in the case of the stories of the '*das log*', i.e. persons who visit the realms of the dead and return with messages to the living. Many of the '*das log*' were women and Ani Lochen herself traveled to the abodes of the dead several times. Françoise Pommaret has studied textual and oral biographies of such women and some of this material is autobiographical.⁷³ The main focus of these narratives is, however, the '*das log*' experience and not the narration of 'a life' from birth to death.

Religious, sacred or holy biography as a genre encompasses both oral and written literature and has its own structure and conventions. It is a genre which mixes secular biography and myth. The protagonist of sacred biography is believed to have lived, but the 'life' is often heavily mythologized. Reynolds and Capps (1976:4) deal with two categories of holy biographies: biographies of founders of a new faith, on the one hand, and biographies

⁷⁰ E.g. the publication in Lhasa in 1997 of *rJe btsun sku zhabs rnam thar*.

⁷¹ Gyatso *PIATS Narita* 1989 and 1998:186.

⁷² Tashi Tsering *IATS Munich* 1985 (unpublished paper).

⁷³ Pommaret 1989.

of saints on the other. This latter category is termed hagiography and narrates how already established religious ideals are realized. We need, however, to be critical of Reynolds' and Capps' twofold division. Thus, holy persons credited in the West as founders of religions may in the East be conceived as confirmers of traditions. From the Buddhist perspective, the historical Buddha is perceived as only one in a series of buddhas who preach an eternal Doctrine. I will largely avoid the term hagiography because of its Christian connotations⁷⁴ and use the more general terms religious, holy or sacred biography along with Tibetan terms, i.e. *nam thar* and *rang gi nam thar*. For my purposes, there is no need to distinguish between biographies of founders and of saints.

There are many similarities, but also important differences between Tibetan biographies and autobiographies, and it is significant that the tradition itself distinguishes between the two categories. The Tibetan term for holy biography is *nam (par) thar (pa)* which means 'full liberation (story)', while *rang (gi) nam (thar)* refers to 'own full liberation story'.⁷⁵ In general use, however, the term *nam thar* is used for any life-story of important religious specialists, whether or not they are believed to have reached the ultimate goal. The text dealt with in this study refers to itself as *nam thar*, but is basically a *rang gi nam thar*, a life told by the protagonist. Khetsun Sangpo gives the religious tradition's own evaluation of the two categories when he states,

Of these, the most reliable or trustworthy one is the saint's own autobiography. The ones written by the followers are written according to their own perception. They may exaggerate or assert the existence of some special quality where none exists; and where the saint may have inconceivable excellent qualities, the biographer can't comprehend something so inconceivable. *Biography* 1992 17,1:22.

A sacred biography generally contains a substantial amount of biographical convention and the master in question is usually elevated and mythologized; sometimes the biographic image takes precedence over the biographical facts. The larger the distance in time between the life of the subject and the composition, the more mythologized a biography seems to be. Subsequent generations will add to the oral and written versions of a sacred life story, and

⁷⁴ See also Willis 1985:307.

⁷⁵ See Gyatso *PIATS Narita* 1989.

possibly write their own version. Through retelling, meaning is constantly renewed and created and this process of transformation occurs in dialogue with other texts, with oral and local traditions and with iconography.⁷⁶ As the result of this 'biographical process', some 'lives' become very stereotype containing little specific information about the person in question. Giuseppe Tucci maintains the following about Tibetan *nam thar*,

As a whole, we cannot say that the *nam t'*ar communicate a lifelike impression of the personality they deal with. In almost every case, personality recedes before a type, it is overruled by some given pattern: the saint scholar or ascetic are seen in the abstract, not as this or that saint, scholar or ascetic. It is a monastic and edifying (sic) literature, the light of human passion hardly ever shined upon it. (1947)1980:152

We have a relatively small number of highly mythologized accounts of Tibetan women of the past. Some of these biographical texts and narratives have been translated into Western languages, e.g. by Tarthang Tulku, *Mother of Knowledge: The Enlightenment of Ye shes mtsho rgyal* (1983), Keith Dowman, *The Secret Life and Songs of the Lady Yeshe Tsogyel* (1984) and in *Women of Wisdom* (1984) Tsultrim Allione presents the biographies of six female religious masters.⁷⁷ The historicity of several of these women is questionable and they are portrayed more as deities than human beings. Machig Labdron and the religious tradition originating with her, *gcod*, have been studied by Janet Gyatso (1985), Giacomella Orofino (1987), Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz (1993, 1998), Erberto Lo Bue (1994) and by Jérôme Edou (1996). Both Yeshe Tshogyal (Ye shes mtsho rgyal, eighth century) and Machig Labdron are considered the 'fore-mothers' of Jetsun Lochén. Machig Labdron, in particular, looms large in Lochén's self-narrative. All these life-stories functioned as powerful, idealized role models for Tibetan women.

While a holy biography is written by the disciples of the master, in many cases long after the master's death, or even centuries later, an autobiography is either written by the master or dictated by the protagonist to a scribe. These two categories of life-stories are continuous and overlapping and differences between them are often blurred. Thus there are

⁷⁶ See e.g. Naguib's (1994) discussion of intertextuality and 'dialogized text' in the Coptic and Copto-Arabic hagiographic tradition.

⁷⁷ One of the six biographies, i.e. that of A yu mkha' 'gro, is an oral autobiography. There are two other translations of a short biography of the female discoverer Jo mo sman mo, see Dargyay 1977:119-123 and *DoKa*:805-809.

several cases of multiple authorship where disciples have a hand in editing and adding to the autobiography. This may be done either in cooperation with the narrator or after his or her death.⁷⁸

Gyatso (1992, 1998) has dealt at length with Western definitions of autobiography and compared the Western and Tibetan autobiographical genres. In the West, the individualism and self-reflection constructed in self-narratives of modern times are considered the hallmarks of autobiography by scholars of literature. Thus non-Western traditional autobiographies have been excluded from the genre.⁷⁹ Gyatso concludes that Western literary scholars know surprisingly little about Asian autobiography, and that Tibetan autobiographies have striking structural similarities with Western autobiographies.

I will not undertake an analysis of Western and Asian autobiographical genres, as this has been done brilliantly by Gyatso (1998), but only state that Jetsun Lochen's life story conforms in several respects to the main structural prerequisites of autobiography set forth by literary scholars and discussed by Gyatso.⁸⁰ It is told from the mouth of the subject and written down by a scribe. Ani Lochen's intention was to tell the truth about her life, an important criterion defining autobiographies. It is retrospective and developmental; it tells a 'life' from birth to near death. In the introduction and at the end of the autobiography Jetsun Lochen states that she has told whatever she remembered from her life up to the time of recording, i.e. the twenty-fifth day of the eleventh month of the Earth-Ox Year (1949).⁸¹ Only occasionally is the chronology broken by retrospective glances.⁸² Khetsun Sangpo Rinpoche states the following about Tibetan traditional biography,

The predominant intention of the namtar is to show how the life of a great master progresses, from training the mind at a young age, to everything he thought and did throughout his lifetime, or generation. *Biography* 1992 17,1:27

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the blurring of genres, see Gyatso *PIATS Narita* 1989:465-479. Dunaway (1992:44) also raises the question of the influence of the audience on autobiographical narration.

⁷⁹ Maintained by Georges Gusdorf (1956) 1980 and discussed by Gyatso 1998:101-102. See also Gunn 1987: 100-11.

⁸⁰ For criteria defining the autobiographical genre, see e.g. Gyatso 1998:106-109.

⁸¹ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 8, 557 and 561.

⁸² *Ibid.*: 558.

I agree with Gyatso in her criticism of literary scholars for their lack of interest in other autobiographical traditions than the Western. It is, however, pertinent to point out that all traditional sacred autobiographies, not only those written in Asia, have been excluded from the Western autobiographical canon. Although Tibetan traditional autobiographies resemble secular Western autobiographies in several ways, the differences are, as is also stressed by Gyatso, numerous. The predominant focus of both holy biographies and autobiographies is the sacred. As such, their content and function have much in common cross-culturally. In the Christian tradition there are for example several examples of early female religious autobiographies and these may reveal striking parallels with their Tibetan counterparts.⁸³ Substantial research on these autobiographies and hagiographies has been carried out and a useful survey, with an extensive bibliography, has been made by Kari E. Børresen (1993).

1.2.1. Gender and Oral Biographies

It is maintained by some feminist scholars that religious literature may be seen as joint products of men and women, even though signed by men.⁸⁴ In her autobiography, Doris Lessing (1994) maintains that creative and often 'half-mad' persons and women who initiate historical events are easily forgotten or their influence minimized by 'sensible people' who were inspired by them. Thus the decisive roles of innovators and women are often left out in published works.⁸⁵ It may be the case that female *tāntrikas* had significant influence on the content of some tantric texts, but the majority of Tibetan religious literature was produced by men in monastic settings where women were simply excluded.⁸⁶ Generally, the lamas were the lineage-holders who controlled the esoteric and oral religious traditions. Only people belonging to the aristocracy and monastics, primarily men, were educated. Moreover, only the literary production of famous male clerics was considered sufficiently prestigious to merit the arduous process of traditional xylographic printing.⁸⁷

⁸³ Gyatso (1998:6) also notes that Tibetan *nam thar* resemble certain Catholic confessional writings as well as seventeenth-century English spiritual biography.

⁸⁴ Shaw 1994:12 and Brenner and Van Dijk-Hemmes 1993.

⁸⁵ Lessing 1994:20-26.

⁸⁶ See also Klein 1995:50.

⁸⁷ Tashi Tsering *IATS Munich* 1985, unpublished paper.

There is a prevalent contention among Tibetans, Western Buddhists and some Western scholars, that female saints were numerous in Tibet, albeit unacknowledged.⁸⁸ We do, however, lack historical evidence to support this claim, and my data suggests the opposite.⁸⁹ Lochen Rinpoche lived almost a century and among the around 160 religious masters named in her autobiography, only about a handful are women. Jetsun Lochen even questions the legitimacy of one of these 'saintly' women.⁹⁰

The Tibetan auto- and biographical tradition is thus, like that of the West, androcentric. For the most part it was only the lives of great men that were considered important enough to record. That women have internalized a picture of themselves that precludes the kind of self-attention that would generate autobiography as recognized by the canon seems to be a universal. In Tibet, women seldom conceived themselves, or were perceived by others, as saints and either did not write their 'lives' or the self-narratives they wrote were ignored. In the West, what has been seen as a meaningful life, and what has determined the defining characteristics of the autobiographical genre, has been the linear progress and power of the 'Great White Man'. The conception of the self, self-creation and self-consciousness are intimately connected to worldview and may, however, be profoundly different for women, minorities, and many non-western peoples.⁹¹

Although it is important to search for traces of women in Tibetan male narratives, it is easier to get access to female voices when we look at oral traditions. In Tibet, orality and literacy functioned side by side, but the oral orientation was strong. Even though an enormous corpus of religious texts was produced, there was a parallel tradition of transferring, with or without the help of written texts, religious teachings orally from master to disciple. Thus in addition to the biographies committed to paper, there was a living and flourishing oral tradition narrating 'the lives' of sacred men and women. These stories may have circulated as widely, or even more, than those that were written down.⁹² Khetsun Sangpo states,

⁸⁸ Shaw 1994 and Gross 1993.

⁸⁹ Havnevik 1989, 1995, see also Klein 1995:50.

⁹⁰ I.e. the nun who 'claims' to be the reincarnation of Mi pham rin po che, see *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 333.

⁹¹ Several scholars contend that other forms of biography have been marginalized or excluded from the canon, like working-class autobiographies and autobiographies from seemingly vocationless women; see Okely 1992:1-28.

⁹² See e.g. Stutchbury 1994:61-62.

... there are many more who don't have written biographies than who do. This is because they are exclusively and truly yogis; such true yogis live in caves and mountains and eat little ... And they don't have disciples or servants or anything. They really possess the signs of accomplishment and have all the qualities of full realization, with total renunciation of worldly life, just living like deer in the mountains, but there aren't any biographies about them ... And if we count all the inconceivable yogis ... who have sprung up in Tibet, there are also many nuns.

Biography 1992 17,1:23-24.

Research on oral biographies will help incorporate perspectives of non-literate groups, to which the majority of Tibetans, and women in particular, belonged into the wider corpus of life stories.⁹³ There has been increasing awareness that oral stories of outstanding women need to be collected. A few such oral autobiographies have in fact been written down, e.g. that of Ayu Khandro (A yu mkha' 'gro), a female master from Eastern Tibet whose life story has been recorded by Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche and published by Tsultrim Allione (1984) and the biography of Gomchen Yeshe Drolma (sGom chen Ye shes sgrol ma, b. 1908) recorded by myself (Havnevik 1989).⁹⁴

Gyatso (1998) discusses the misconception among scholars of literature, that when autobiographies are produced in other cultures, this is because of Western influence.⁹⁵ It is interesting to note that the self-narrative Gomchen Yeshe Drolma told me in 1984 closely follows the Tibetan autobiographical genre. The content was not elicited by the recorder. When I interviewed her, I expected a life-story according to the Western secular tradition and in fact attempted to make her include more self-reflection and also tell about 'secular' aspects of her life. This attempt was futile because Ani Gomchen knew the religious autobiographical genre so well and automatically framed her life-story after it.

⁹³ See also Dunaway 1992:40.

⁹⁴ See also *Chö Yang* no. 6, 1994:83-87.

⁹⁵ See Gyatso 1998:102.



Ani Gomchen Yeshe Drolma, b. 1908.
Photo: H. Hannevik, Dharamsala 1995.





1.2.2. Reasons for Writing Biographies in Tibet

As the Tibetan emic term for biography indicates, the purpose of telling a 'life' is intimately connected with Buddhist soteriology; it is a story of a person believed to have reached Awakening. The explicit purpose of telling a 'realized life' is pragmatic, to help others understand the ultimate and non-dual nature of existence.⁹⁶ Tibetan lamas are conceived as bodhisattvas, who because of compassion choose to be reborn in human form to help sentient beings towards *nirvāṇa*. Through autobiographical writing they manifest skillful means, *upāya*, the most highly cherished virtue in Mahāyāna Buddhism, for the benefit of sentient beings. Sonam Logros (1456-1521), the abbot of Margom (dMar sgom) Monastery in Dolpo, says the following in his autobiography,

For the sake of their converts buddhas and would-be buddhas take the forms of tigers, lions, hares, boats, bridges, and are said to work thus on behalf of sentient beings, but especially they take the form of lamas and teachers⁹⁷ and so do great things for others. Snellgrove 1967:82.

The main purpose of a holy autobiography is thus didactic and it is written to edify the readers. As such, the focus of Jetsun Lochén's life-story is on the actions and thoughts that highlight important Buddhist doctrines and ethical ideals. Ani Lochén's autobiography abounds in descriptions of virtuous behavior like visiting holy sites and lamas, prayers and meditations, religious teachings received and offered, visions and miracles, the building of religious monuments, the printing of sacred texts. In short, it focuses on behavior connecting the protagonist to sacred things and investing her with sacrality. The narrator's intention is to make her self-narrative serve as a model for the disciples and we expect the audience's expectations to influence autobiographical content and style. Tibetan autobiographies may in

⁹⁶ See e.g. Smith 1969:2.

⁹⁷ When Tibetans are asked why the bodhisattvas invariably incarnate as men, we are often told that they do so because there are fewer obstacles for men in transmitting the Buddhist teaching. As they have higher social status, they are more readily listened to, they can travel where they want and they are not burdened with the impurities and sufferings of women, i.e. menstruation and childbirth. (Havnevik 1989).

an extended sense be understood as joint productions of the lamas and their disciples.⁹⁸ As Lila Abu-Lughod states,

A story is always situated; it has both a teller and an audience. Its perspective is partial (in both senses of the word) and its telling is motivated. 1993:15.

Janice Willis (1985) argues that Tibetan secret *rnam thar* have a specific function apart from edifying and inspiring disciples; they also give, albeit in a highly symbolic language, detailed descriptions of and instructions for religious practice. In Willis' opinion Tibetan secret *rnam thar* may be read as tantric texts and as such they should be distinguished from general holy biographies.⁹⁹

It may well be that some secret *rnam thar* were used as instructional manuals, but I doubt that *rJe btsun rnam thar* was used in this way. We know that Ani Lochen associated with Nyingmapa itinerant *yogins* and 'crazy lamas' who practiced the highest tantric teachings, but although she hints at esoteric experiences several times, she or the editors leave out explicit descriptions of such significant episodes from the text.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, it is my impression that nuns in general did not read or study Ani Lochen's autobiography. Apart from Shugseb nuns, none of my nun informants who had met Jetsun Lochen in Tibet knew that a *rnam thar* existed.¹⁰¹ This may partly be due to the abrupt change brought about by the Chinese occupation, but is also due to the fact that although nuns were literate, they largely relied on oral traditions.

Although there are important ideal reasons for writing an autobiography, there are numerous mundane factors at play as well, such as sectarian competition, the ambition for secular and religious power, control over land and other material resources. Gyatso (1998) argues that the new cultural identity brought about when Buddhism was introduced to Tibet

⁹⁸ Gyatso *PIATS Narita* 1989 and 1998.

⁹⁹ Willis 1985:304-319. I have not studied the allusions to secret practices in *rJe btsun rnam thar* in detail, as this would require cooperation with a tantric master.

¹⁰⁰ Campbell (1996: 97-124), herself a secret consort for many years to a high lama in the bKa' 'brgyud pa tradition, has discussed how the lama outwardly presented himself as a monk, while secretly, he had relationships with consorts. Secrecy was imposed on the women involved. The case is somewhat different in the rNying ma tradition, as women's role as partners in Vajrayāna rituals is more openly acknowledged here.

¹⁰¹ In 1983-84 I interviewed several old and prominent nuns belonging both to the dGe lugs pa and the bKa' brgyud pa traditions who had met Lo chen, but they had not read the *rnam thar*. Stutchbury (1994:60-62) writes that people in dKar zha mainly rely on oral tradition about the life of rGod tshang pa mGon po rDo rje, 1189-1258) and not his *rnam thar*.

between the seventh and the eleventh centuries and the need to legitimize power were the main reasons why the autobiographical genre came to have such importance in Tibet. In Tibet, genealogy was, in addition to military power, the most important way of establishing authority. Professional singers or religious bards invested kings, local chieftains and religious masters with legitimacy through the recitation of genealogy, thus establishing their connection with the mytho-historical past. As Tibet became literate, the genealogies were fixed in writing and this is also one of the purposes of traditional (auto)biographies.¹⁰²

The question of authority and legitimization also becomes paramount when the religious master is a woman. Female masters were atypical in Tibet and Lochen Rinpoche was a self-made *siddhā* with hardly any institutional backing. We know that Dawa Dorje Rinpoche, who was responsible for the final editing of Lochen's autobiography, interpolated poetic verses dealing with general Buddhist doctrines. Dawa Dorje may have attempted to make the text conform to the 'model biography', i.e. the male biography, in order to make this relatively uneducated woman appear learned and thus invest her tradition with authority.¹⁰³

1.2.3. Jetsun Lochen's Autobiography

Although Jetsun Lochen's text is an autobiography and thus more individualistic and particularized than many other biographies written in Tibet, her life-story nevertheless contains a common stock of *topoi* which are elaborated in both Buddhist and Christian hagiography.¹⁰⁴ There were miraculous signs at Ani Lochen's birth, she grew faster than ordinary children,¹⁰⁵ she was drawn towards religion at an exceptionally early age, she had supernatural abilities in learning¹⁰⁶ and she could communicate with wild animals and pacify them.¹⁰⁷ Early events,

¹⁰² See Gyatso 1998:116-122.

¹⁰³ The question of 'male' editing of female stories has also been raised by Børresen (1993:42-55) in her discussion of Christian hagiography.

¹⁰⁴ See Weinstein and Bell 1982.

¹⁰⁵ The *topos* of Tibetan holy children's extraordinary growth is also mentioned in other biographies. In that of Zhabs dkar (Ricard 1994:16) we read the following, «Causing my mother little pain, I was born in the year called Pharwa, the Female Iron Ox. Just after birth, I opened my eyes and thereafter grew faster than most infants». Likewise in the biography of sNang sa 'od 'bum (Allione 1984:68), it is said, «Every month she grew as much as a normal baby grows in a year».

¹⁰⁶ Lo chen knew religious texts, Sanskrit and other languages without having studied them (*rJe btsun rnam thar*, 282).

like the story of her birth, were episodes recounted to her and mythologized by others, e.g. her parents.

Recollecting a life gives rise to a number of theoretical questions about memory, the change of perspectives, autobiographical 'truth' and the perception of time. Some types of information are more likely to be forgotten than others. Perspectives change with the level of introspection and maturity, implying that the 'interpretation of a life' will look very different when the protagonist is forty from when she is in her mid-eighties, as is the case with Jetsun Rinpoche. Justification may be at play and recollection is blended with the narrator's analysis. As David K. Dunaway points out,

narrating one's life is a process of configuring actual events into a symbolic representation of personal mythology, set in a text. 1992:43

The conception of time changes as one grows older. 'Childhood time' tends to last longer than 'adult time' and the memory of childhood years is often more vivid than later experiences. Particularly when Ani Jetsun Rinpoche talks about her suffering due to her father's difficult nature, about her love for animals, her mother and her first root-lama, this autobiography is unique. Memories and emotions due to physical abuse and psychological harassment tend to be ingrained in body and mind all through life. In Ani Jetsun Rinpoche's life-story, frightening events and suffering in youth, as well as 'experiences of the sacred', made strong imprints. Although the story of Jetsun Rinpoche's early years contains 'saintly' conventions, we get closest to 'real life' in this part of the autobiography. We find surprising details, due to selective memory of 'high-points' and to the fact that several events are seen through the eyes of a child, even though related at the end of Jetsun Rinpoche's life.

In mid-life, Jetsun Rinpoche lost several of the most significant persons in her life and she openly talks about her grief and despair. We closely follow the process where she takes some of the most important decisions in her life, e.g. which lamas to trust, where to live and how to spend her adult life. Gradually Jetsun Rinpoche took upon her shoulders the responsibility of the spiritual growth of about three hundred nuns and numerous disciples. These active years in mid-life, when she, together with Semnyi Rinpoche, was in charge of

¹⁰⁷ For this theme in the biography of a Theravadin saint, see Tambiah 1984:88.

restoring Shugseb Nunnery and making it into a well-functioning religious institution, were vividly remembered by Lochen.

In the last part of the autobiography, when Ani Lochen is established as a religious master, the *rnam thar* contains more of biographical convention and conforms more to that of other religious masters. This section of the text is to a large extent a summary of important religious masters met and teachings received and given. Here the *rnam thar* closely resembles another genre of Tibetan literature, namely the *thob yig* or *gsan yig*, i.e. lists of lineages, a record keeping or diary of the highlights of meditative teachings received.¹⁰⁸

1.2.4. Biographical Models

A mythical or actual 'first' autobiography often becomes a paradigmatic model also for later autobiographies.¹⁰⁹ Both Tibetan autobiographies and biographies have their models in the past, thus the 'outer' autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama became the prototype for all subsequent autobiographical writing in Tibet.¹¹⁰ We can in some cases identify these models and the normative behavior they inspire.¹¹¹ Examples of such intertextuality or dialogue abound in *rJe btsun rnam thar*. From an early age Ani Lochen learned to recite biographies, some of them by heart, of holy men and women of the past, e.g. those of Nangsa Obum (sNang sa 'od 'bum),¹¹² Karma Wangdzin (Karma dBang 'dzin),¹¹³ Gelongma Palmo (dGe slong ma dPal mo),¹¹⁴ Khampa Adrung (Khams pa A khrung, d. 1508), Gyalpo Yulha Legpa Dondrub (rGal po g.yu lha legs pa'i don grub) and others.¹¹⁵ Her main interest were stories of religious singers, i.e. *ma ṇi pas*, and narratives of persons traveling to the realms of the dead ('*das log*). Ani Lochen became a professional reciter of biographies and internalized their models by becoming herself a professional *ma ṇi pa* and '*das log*.

¹⁰⁸ See Gyatso 1997 and 1998:188.

¹⁰⁹ See Naguib 1994.

¹¹⁰ Gyatso 1998:101-102.

¹¹¹ See e.g. Børtnes 1988:25.

¹¹² *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 38. Lo chen here says she also learned other biographies.

¹¹³ A '*das log*, see Khetsun Sangpo 1973:528-530, vol. iv.

¹¹⁴ It is not stated explicitly that Lo chen recited the biography of dGe slong ma dPal mo, but I assume that she did. In mNga' ris she was close friend with the daughter of a *ma ṇi pa*, and this girl sang the story of dGe slong ma dPal mo, see *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 57.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.:45.

The narration, writing and printing of Tibetan *rnam thar* were considered important also among nuns. In order to raise money for printing the biography of one of her root-lamas, Dharma Senge (Dharma Seng ge),¹¹⁶ Ani Lochen read the *Prajñāpāramitā* in eight thousand verses until she knew it by heart for the noble Lhalu (lHa klu) family in Lhasa. The full bucket of grain she received as a daily fee was Ani Lochen's contribution to cover the printing expenses.¹¹⁷ Other *rnam thar* that we explicitly know Ani Lochen read are those of Shabkar Tshogdrug Rangdrol (Zhabdkar Tshogs 'drug rang grol, 1781-1851), Gotshangpa (rGod tshangs pa, 1189-1258) and Jatshon Nyingpo ('Ja' tshon snying po, 1585-1656).¹¹⁸ Lochen also says she read biographical narratives about the deity and protectress Dorje Yudron's (rDo rje g.yu sgron)¹¹⁹ way of entering the human body.

One of the autobiographies that came to have a decisive influence on Ani Lochen was that of Shabkar, which may be considered the most immediate model for Jetsun Lochen's own biography. She never met this lama, who lived two generations before her, but she received all his religious teachings from Shabkar's immediate disciples as well as from his reincarnation, Thegchog Tenpe Gyaltshen (Theg mchog bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan).

It is often assumed that a biographer or a self-narrator retrospectively structures 'others' or their own 'life' to fit a model, but it may as well be that the individual forms the actual life after such models; this is what is called 'enacted biography'.¹²⁰ Actors communicate with significant others as well as with texts. Jetsun Lochen interpreted her own life in the light of Shabkar's autobiography. No matter how unorthodox, she dressed like Shabkar in monastic robes, but kept her hair long. While on pilgrimage, she followed in his footsteps. Ani Lochen read and recited Shabkar's autobiography on several occasions and even had it copied for printing.¹²¹ This autobiography was popular; we know that there were at least two editions, because Lochen tells us that she read the new edition (*par gsar*) for the nobles of Kreshong (bKras gshong) in Nyemo (sNye mo). When dealing with a

¹¹⁶ Ibid.:186.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.:186. This biography has not come to light, Smith (pers. communication).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.:442.

¹¹⁹ An ancient Tibetan female deity belonging to a subdivision of the Tshe ring mched lnga, the five 'Long Life Sisters', called bsTan ma goddesses or bsTan srung ma. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956) 1975: 190, Chandra 1996:216-17 and Gyatso 1998:88. See also R. D. Taring (1970) 1983:124.

¹²⁰ See e.g. Reynolds and Capps 1976:18-19 and Børtnes 1988:40

¹²¹ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 335, 427, 428.

particularized self-narrative, as the case is with Lochen's autobiography, we get close to this textual dialogue and models of the past can be identified, both in 'life as enacted' and in the retrospective structuring of it.

Dialogue with the biographical tradition of the past is, however, only one of the factors at work in forming 'a life'. A person cannot model an entire life on a model. As noted by several scholars, there is considerable variation within the Tibetan autobiographical genre and Gyatso writes,

...few Tibetan autobiographies have even been read by modern scholars...even when Tibetan autobiographical literature has been catalogued and studied, generalizations will prove elusive, for not only are there many kinds of autobiographical writing in Tibet, but individual examples of each subgenre display significant differences. Such differences reflect the autobiographer's social class, level of education, sectarian background, attitudes toward academic study, attitudes toward meditative practice, artistry as a writer, and so on. 1997:203

I would add gender to Gyatso's list of variables. Women generally did not write or narrate their lives in traditional Tibet, but a comparative study of gender in Tibetan oral and written autobiographical tradition would, I believe, show significant variations. Ani Lochen's story differs from male autobiographies mainly because her life-experiences as a woman were different from those of men. As there were few immediate models to follow, Ani Lochen had to create her own role as a female religious master. Furthermore, Ani Lochen's self-narrative is told from the mouth of a person outside the scholastic milieu. I believe that a *rnam thar* written in a learned environment would be subjected to revision and to a higher degree of standardization. Since this text gives the story of the life of a woman, it does not tell of sanctity already achieved in former lives, an aspect typical of most Tibetan (i.e. male) biographies according to Giuseppe Tucci (1949) 1980.¹²² Women in the Tibetan tradition were hardly acknowledged as incarnations of highly 'realized' beings. Being born as a woman has in Buddhism in general, and also in Tibet, been conceived as an 'inferior birth' (*skyed dman*). Because of her educational background and her extended contact with

¹²² Tucci (1949) 1980, vol. i:152.

ordinary people of both genders, Jetsun Lochen's autobiography has an oral and straightforward style.

1.2.5. The Conception of Self

The writing of autobiography is intimately connected with the perception of the 'person' and the 'self', and these conceptions vary from culture to culture.¹²³ Secular Western autobiography is seen as an expression of the individualism of modern civilization and is characterized by a high degree of self-reflection. According to Geertz, the Western understanding of 'person' is a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action.¹²⁴ This definition has been criticized by feminists, who contend that the autonomous, bounded Western 'self' is predominantly a male norm while women define themselves in relational terms.¹²⁵

In traditional Tibet, ecology, material conditions, social organization and religion led to constructions of the self that differed from the modern Western self in several ways. People were closely interconnected with their social and physical environment. Hierarchy came to be strongly marked both in ecclesiastic and social structures as well as reflected in language. A person's place in society was dictated by family, lineage, village and clan and individual choice was restricted. Although both subsistence in high altitudes as well as Tibetan Buddhism encourage independent life-styles, the expectations of 'significant others' like lamas, relatives and peers were seldom opposed. For the majority of children, marriages were arranged, while some were sent off to monasteries. Options for girls who strongly opposed marriage or were mistreated by their in-laws were to join itinerant pilgrims or enter nunneries.¹²⁶

To present a story of the self is a paradox in Buddhist thinking, as Buddhist metaphysics postulates the emptiness of all phenomena, including the person. Thus all

¹²³ Geertz 1983:55-73.

¹²⁴ Geertz 1983b:59. See also Hubbeling 1990 and Kuiper 1990.

¹²⁵ Klein 1995.

¹²⁶ Havnevik 1989.

'selves' are ultimately empty of inherent existence and in this sense they are identical.¹²⁷ Neither does Buddhism ascribe human creation to a divine being, but believes sentient beings to be created through action, *karma*. In Mahāyāna metaphysics, existence is perceived as having various degrees of subtlety.¹²⁸ Madhyamaka philosophy emphasizes two levels of truth: the conventional (Skt. *paramārthasatya*) and the ultimate (Skt. *saṃvṛtisatya*). This view is further systematized in the Yogācāra doctrine of *trikāya*. Human existence, *nirmāṇakāya*, the paradisaic realms of deities and high level bodhisattvas, *sambhogakāya*, and the 'Absolute' termed *dharmakāya*. Humans, too, are classified in three motivational categories: those who aim at a better rebirth, those who want rebirth in paradisaic realms and those aiming at buddhahood.¹²⁹

Tibetan autobiographies thus emphasize different levels of discourse adapted to the audience's understanding and they operate on at least three levels; the outer (*spyi*), the inner (*nang*) and the secret (*gsang*).¹³⁰ The outer biography describes the mundane events of life, 'the inner', the religious teachings received and given and 'the secret' or esoteric is exemplified by religious visions, dreams and revelations. About the *Sealed and Secret Biography* (*gSang ba'i rnam thar rgya can*) of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Samten Karmay writes,

The Dalai Lama therefore did not write this work for the general reader, for it is about paranormal, spiritual and visionary experiences, and orthodox Buddhists generally do not approve of such claims. Consequently the volume of the *rGya can* is never included among his collected works and is left out altogether even from inventories of his writings... the *rGya can* has always remained in this manuscript form and was read by a small and exclusive circle. 1988:13-14

¹²⁷ Buddhist metaphysics concerning the person mainly become evident in normative and rhetoric sections of Lo chen's autobiography.

¹²⁸ A grading of macro- and microcosmos is not the invention of Mahāyāna, but may go back as far as to the Vedic cosmogonic hymns and the *Upaniṣads*. A three-fold division was developed in Sāṃkhya with its view of *prakṛti* consisting of three *guṇas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, see Brockington, 1981:83, 84, 101, 114.

¹²⁹ Klein 1995.

¹³⁰ The emic division into different discursive levels have been noted also by Western scholars, Willis 1985:312, Petech (Introd. to Ferrari 1958), Ruegg 1966:44-45, and Gyatso 1998: 6, 103. Sometimes two more levels are described: the very secret (*yang gsang*) and that of 'thusness' (*de kho na nyid*) concerned with the 'pristine consciousness of the ultimate meaning', see Gyatso 1998:103 and 283n. 21.

Although emphasizing one aspect, most autobiographies contain several levels of discourse¹³¹ and it is hard at times, particularly for an outsider, to distinguish between them. The secret nature of Vajrayāna Buddhism is thus one of the factors dictating inclusion and exclusion of (auto-) biographical content. Jetsun Lochen's autobiography balances between the 'outer' life-story and her 'inner' visions, but there are also recurring references to secret spiritual experiences.

On the conventional level of truth, Tibetan Buddhists perceive the cosmos to consist of six spheres of rebirth which are inhabited by a hierarchy of gods and supernatural beings. Communication between or with beings in these spheres is possible and occurs frequently. Accordingly, there is no sharp distinction between demons, spirits, animals, humans, deities, bodhisattvas and buddhas. This densely 'populated' cosmos is conceptually integrated, by those who are philosophically sophisticated, into the more general three-fold division of existence (*trikāya*).

Tibetan cosmology thus leads to a construction of the self, the body and the physical landscape very different from what we find in the West. In Tibet, space is sacred, too. Deities reside in mountains and lakes are abodes of underground spirits (*klu*). At every site of pilgrimage a saint has left a footprint, a handprint, a tooth or another marker of sacred power. Ani Lochen was socialized into this worldview with its 'unbounded' conception of self and the cosmos.

Although Jetsun Lochen learned that deities as well as demons are empty of inherent existence, she 'participated'¹³² in a very concrete way in non-human spheres from early childhood onwards. She had numerous visions and communicated with and interacted with deities and spirits. Examples are many. Ani Lochen remembers important persons she met while on pilgrimage in southern Tibet, but finds no reason to distinguish sharply between them, on the one hand, and spirits and various deities on the other.¹³³ Towards the end of her

¹³¹ Also in the autobiography of Ngag dbang dpal bzang, late abbot of Kah thog Monastery, the three levels are interwoven, see Smith:1969:2.

¹³² The term 'participation' is borrowed from Lévy-Bruhl, without adhering to his categories 'prelogical' and 'primitive mentality' etc. Evans-Pritchard (1972:86), in his assessment of Lévy-Bruhl writes, «Lévy-Bruhl's discussion of the law of mystical participation is perhaps the most valuable, as well as being a highly original, part of his thesis. He was one of the first, if not the first, to emphasize that primitive ideas...are meaningful when seen as parts of patterns of ideas and behaviour, each part having an intelligible relationship to the others».

¹³³ *rJe btsun niam thar*, 190.

life, because of her partial deafness, she could not hear the religious teachings of her student Gen Thinley, but says that a white woman made of light appeared on her left shoulder and recited the words in a loud and sweet voice.¹³⁴ Jetsun Lochen also tells us about a personal protector (*dam can*) who had constantly served her. He became visible to her only in her latter days. He was red or black and Lochen ordered him to fetch *tsampa* (*tsam pa*) and butter for her.¹³⁵

Spirit possession is a religious vocation for both men and women in Tibet. Benevolent deities and malevolent spirits are believed to enter the veins (*rtsa*) of human bodies through the fingers or toes.¹³⁶ It is not clear whether Ani Lochen was a medium herself. She did, however, visualize, invoke and communicate with powerful spirits and deities, such as Tsiumar (Tsi'u dmar), various *dākinīs* (*mkha' 'gro ma*) and protectors. On several occasions local protectors gave her material objects, such as ink and bark in order for her to write down ritual texts revealed to her.¹³⁷ In adult life, Lochen's paranormal experiences increased, she was repeatedly 'near-death' and 'traveled' to the realms of the dead four times.

The Tibetan belief in reincarnation, too, was important in forming Ani Lochen's identity. From her very conception onwards, the mother was convinced that her daughter was a reincarnation of a holy being, probably a lama. Signs on the body of the newborn baby confirmed these assumptions and the parents actively participated in building the girl's self-image as the re embodiment of a saint. Thus from an early age, Ani Lochen's life was directed towards realizing what was perceived as her great spiritual potential. In her childhood descriptions, she tells us about her wonderful voice, about her radiant and strong body and that people gathered from all directions to hear her sing *ma nis*.¹³⁸

All through her self-narrative, there are references to great religious women of the past and Jetsun Lochen and her disciples repeatedly asked high lamas about her identity as an important reincarnation. The lamas gave evidence, through clairvoyance or prophecy, that Ani Lochen was either a re embodiment of Yeshe Tshogyal or Machig Labdron. Not until old

¹³⁴ Ibid.:482, 483.

¹³⁵ Ibid.:554, 555. *tsam pa* is flour from parched barley, the staple Tibetan food.

¹³⁶ Berglie 1983:14.

¹³⁷ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 144, 250.

¹³⁸ Ibid.:64, 283.

age, however, was she ascertained of her eminence as a realized being. The autobiography reaches a climax when Lochen was finally assured that she was an emanation of Machig Labdron. Her self-identity, feeling of affinity and oneness with this great woman of the past became so strong that Lochen 'made' her life last as long as that of her previous 'human' form. She acquired a 'fused identity', that of her former reincarnation combined with her present one.

Gyatso deals at length with the ambiguous self-portrayal found in Tibetan autobiographies. This ambiguity, varying between self-elevation and self-abasement, is intimately connected with Buddhist metaphysics on the one hand, and cultural norms on the other.¹³⁹ The lamas are bodhisattvas, and as gurus they are identical with all other gurus who have a deep understanding of 'existential truths'. Visualizing oneself as one's lama and/or as various deities is considered to help the disciple realize her own divine nature or spiritual potentials. Accordingly, a lama's self-glorification may be understood as *upāya*, an efficient means to teach the disciples. Effacement of the self is dictated by Tibetan cultural norms and serves to elevate the master.¹⁴⁰

For Tibetan women, the situation is somewhat different. To an even greater extent than is the case for Tibetan men, self-effacement is an integral part of their identity and self-presentation. It is conditioned by misogynist views maintained by socio-cultural norms, indigenous as well as those transplanted to Tibet through Buddhist scriptures and monastic culture. Although not maintained by the main Buddhist doctrines, gender discrimination has been an integral part of Buddhist culture and in Tibet such attitudes were quite common both among the laity and monastics. The majority of women, too, internalized these norms. Even if a woman were to become a religious teacher, the use of self-glorification as a means to teach religion was problematic because of the strong cultural inhibitions against seeing a woman as a realized being.

In her youth Ani Lochen was accordingly punished for her self-confidence. Jealous male companions could not stand her popularity and her first root-lama punished her in order to break her pride. In adult life Ani Lochen's self-confidence seemed to falter. Her recurrent

¹³⁹ Gyatso *PIATS Narita* 1989 and 1998.

¹⁴⁰ Most often the self is played down in Tibetan autobiography, see e.g. the statements by the abbot of Margom in Dolpo when his disciples request him to tell his life-story, in Snellgrove (1967)1992:128-9.

statements of her insignificance as a religious practitioner¹⁴¹ and her difficulties in accepting her role as a religious teacher were deeply ingrained and not exclusively due to pious convention.

1.2.6. Jetsun Lochen's Autobiography as a Sacred and a Historical Document

For the believer, a holy biography is a sacred object. It contains and represents the speech aspect of the Buddha and is therefore venerated in itself. When a Tibetan receives a religious text, e.g. an autobiography, it is lifted to the forehead so that the sacred power contained in the holy words may be transferred to the person. In a home, a religious text will be kept in a high place, preferably on or above the altar. Calligraphy is an art in Tibet, and certain syllables, e.g. the root-letters or *mantras* of deities, are considered to have innate religious power. Writing is itself a sacred act and is piously performed. Carving the root-syllables of deities on rocks is considered auspicious and such stone slabs are made into heaps or large walls to be circumambulated by the believers. Reading a religious text, even though the meaning is not understood, is a holy act that generates favorable *karma*. Monks, and in some cases nuns, are employed and paid by laypeople to read holy texts in their houses. Reciting religious biographies is also a religious vocation and specialists, like Ani Lochen, learn them by heart and explain their contents to audiences.

Tibetans cherish miracles and firmly believe in them. When important lamas die, Tibetans see rainbows in the sky and flowers rain from heaven. Such miracles point to the sacred and make a saint a saint. Jetsun Lochen, too, manifested *siddhis*; she made water emerge from cliffs, spoke various languages without having studied them, moved miraculously in space, was clairvoyant and so on. As Stanley Tambiah and others have pointed out, saints are expected not only to provide models of exemplary and pious living, but also the gift of transcendental powers.¹⁴² Supernatural abilities are interpreted in Buddhism as side-effects of deep spiritual insight gained through the practice of advanced yoga. Lingering

¹⁴¹ e.g. she is very hesitant to tell her life-story, *ibid.*: 560, 561 and reproaches her disciples for believing in her greatness, *ibid.*:472.

¹⁴² Tambiah 1984.

in them is, however, seen as diverting the practitioner from the ultimate goal of final liberation.

For the historian of religions, it is irrelevant whether these things happened in real life or not; what is of interest is the fact that people believe them to have happened. As such they are part of Tibetan worldview and mentality and as important as the 'facts' of history. Cryptic passages in secret *dākinī* script¹⁴³ no doubt cause despair to historians and the use of symbolic language, frequent reference to miracles and a predominant focus on the sacred are among the reasons why Western scholars have been reluctant to use Tibetan *rnam thar* as historical sources.¹⁴⁴ The main points of Gene Smith's assessment of the autobiography of one of the abbots of Kathog (Kah thog), Ngawang Pelzang (mKhan po Ngag dbang dpal bzang, 1879-1941) alias Khenpo Ngagchung (mKhan po Ngag chung), holds true for many Tibetan autobiographies, Jetsun Lochen's included. Smith writes,

For the pure historian, the autobiography of Mkhan-po Ngag-dga' will prove a disappointment. Some prominent events are mentioned usually without details. Chronology is sketchy and few dates appear ... While this work is not especially interesting as history, it provides us with numerous insights into the customs of the Khampa villagers and herders ... It is, however, as a treasury of authentic instructions on the essentials of Buddhism and Rdzogs-chen meditation that this work has its greatest significance. 1969:15

Even if the explicit purpose for writing the autobiography of a saint is religious, the text is also a historical product, written at a specific time by 'actual' persons. A Tibetan autobiography mainly deals with religious specialists, their adherents and supporters. The characters described in Lochen's *rnam thar* are predominantly historical figures, even though only certain aspects of their identity and lives are considered important. The lives of persons perceived as holy, particularly the lamas, are ideally described, e.g. when her lama physically abuses her, Jetsun Lochen interprets his action as skillful means (*upāya*), as his way of teaching her fundamental religious truths.

¹⁴³ See e.g. *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 373.

¹⁴⁴ Tucci (1949)1980:150-51 and Snellgrove 1957:85.

Likewise non-virtuous behavior among Ani Lochen's religious companions is played down. Much attention is directed towards wealthy donors to Jetsun Lochen's monastery, while adherents of modest means, although mentioned when exceptional, recede to the background.¹⁴⁵ We also find detailed and favorable information about the scribes of the autobiography, in this case Gen Thinley and Drubchen Dawa Dorje. The Nyingma and *ris med* traditions, which Jetsun Lochen followed, are unambiguously positively and apologetically described. When we occasionally come across incidents described as trivial disagreements, we may suspect major conflicts. Examples are thefts by fellow nuns, attempts at exclusion, harassments by teachers, corporal punishment and conflicts between non-celibate and monastic religious practitioners. Some of these conflicts may reflect major, unresolved ambiguities in Tibetan culture.

Substantial information about socio-economic circumstances can be extracted from the text. The wandering life-style was well established in Tibet and we learn how these professional religious vagabonds survived. When hunger was imminent they lent a hand to farmers and nomads, at harvest time they went to the villages to beg (*gso sbyong*) and they wandered far and wide to sites where gold was extracted in hope of large profits. Tea was unknown to Ani Lochen and her mother until the 1880s, meat was a rare treat and bananas were considered a treasured fruit suitable as a gift for a lama. Hunger was perceived to be a more imminent threat to Ani Lochen than the harsh Himalayan climate.

Information about Jetsun Lochen's family does not provide enough data to allow one to generalize, but it is interesting to note that while roaming the Himalayas in Lochen's childhood, it was the mother who did manual labor in the fields and tended sheep and goats in order to support the family. The father's economic strategy was to make his daughter a professional religious singer in order to support them. It is likely that this gender difference reflects the social background of Lochen's parents, the mother coming from 'ordinary people' while the father was an aristocrat.

We also know from other sources that women and nuns engaged in manual work for men and monks who were considered above them in the spiritual hierarchy. When traveling

¹⁴⁵ Adepts may as well express negative sentiments towards the wealthy and 'Jigs med gling pa was openly critical of his own patrons, see Gyatso 1998:139.

with her lama Pema Gyatsho in Central Tibet in the late 1880s, Lochen was considered the lama's beast of burden. This may be interpreted as a sign of her faith and humbleness, which are important Buddhist virtues both for men and women. Ethnographic data give additional information. Kim Gutschow cites a statement by a well-educated monk from Zangskar, «women are like donkeys and should serve as beasts of burden».¹⁴⁶ Likewise, Anna Grimshaw (1992:64) writes about the nuns from Julichang in Ladakh, «Their lives were dominated by unremitting physical labor for the monastery. The next stage in the journey towards nirvana was their rebirth as a monk».

In Himalayan Buddhist societies there is a popular conception that being born in a male body is more favorable than being born as a woman.¹⁴⁷ Nuns are subjected to double discrimination that justify exploiting them as manual labor; they have female bodies and as they can only aspire to the novitiate, they are not full-fledged monastics. Above all, the labor of nuns is available as they do not have primary obligations of raising children and serving husbands. Gutschow documents that nuns in Zangskar are expected to work both for their native extended families and for the monastery.¹⁴⁸

In Jetsun Lochen's youth, when mother and daughter attached themselves to a group of wandering mountain hermits, we get first-hand information about their life style: how they were dressed, what they ate, how they lived as well as gender differences between male and female tantrics. When Lochen became a religious specialist in her own right, she describes her patrons and their donations, and from this we can deduce something about her status compared to male lamas. I suspect that a male master of Jetsun Lochen's qualities and experience would more readily obtain offerings from lay people and in larger quantities. When disciples flock around Lochen, we learn about their socio-economic background. The relative importance of female religious specialists can be read from their functions in the lay community.

We also get an impression of how ideas spread in a traditional society where there were few roads, where people, depending on social level, moved about on foot or on horses and donkeys. Letters were sent with professional messengers, but above all, Tibetan *yogins*

¹⁴⁶ From «Women who Refuse to be Exchanged», forthcoming.

¹⁴⁷ Havnevik 1989.

¹⁴⁸ Gutschow, «The Women who Refuse...», forthcoming.

and *yoginīs* frequently traveled themselves and pilgrimage was undertaken both by lay and ecclesiastics. Although Ani Lochen herself never went to eastern Tibet, the main religious ideas she was inspired by originated in Amdo and around Derge in Kham.

We also get information concerning the economic and institutional significance of female monastic institutions, the evaluation of monasticism versus non-celibate religious practice in the Nyingma tradition and the hierarchical relationship of religious specialist relative to gender. From other studies, we know that nunneries were of small size, insignificant, poor and with no organized curriculum.¹⁴⁹ We find that this was also the case in Shugseb, even though this nunnery was one of the most prominent religious institutions for women in traditional Tibet. We learn about Ani Lochen's problems in obtaining authorization to settle in a deserted and run-down monastery. We also hear of the struggles with poverty. After she had settled at Shugseb, at a time when she was quite famous, Lochen and her fellow female hermits were so poor that they had to eat the sacred offering-cakes and beg for the butter in other peoples' tea.¹⁵⁰

The text gives us an insight into the daily life of religious women, their hardships, their aspirations and successes, and how they were received in society and by the religious establishment. We also learn how a female monastic institution was created, who the initiators were and who supported the project. Obstacles were many. These were partly, I will argue, due to the fact that female hermits took over a monastic institution formerly held by men. The fact that they were women seems to have been considered a stronger impediment than their belonging to a competing religious order. From the Gelugpa Beser (Be ser) Monastery, the institution in charge of the dilapidated Shugseb Monastery, they were told that only the male lama and his attendant were allowed to stay.

Jetsun Lochen had several audiences with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (Thub bstan rgya mtsho, 1876-1933), and the father of the present Dalai Lama came to Shugseb to receive religious teachings from her. She mentions major historical events like the invasion of the British forces in Tibet in 1904 and the Chinese invasion in Lhasa in 1910, but gives no details.

¹⁴⁹ Havnevik 1989.

¹⁵⁰ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 363,3.

In the 1930s Jetsun Lochen became indirectly involved in major political struggles in Lhasa. The regent of Tibet, Reting Rinpoche, came for an audience in the late 1930s. During their meeting Lochen uttered an incomprehensible statement, interpreted by herself as an indication of Reting's future political problems, his fall in 1941 and his assassination in 1947. When he resigned, Reting Rinpoche instructed the Kashag (*bka' shag*, the cabinet) that he had been foretold in dreams that his life was in danger unless he resigned and entered meditation retreat.¹⁵¹ We know that Reting Rinpoche frequently consulted lamas and oracles before taking major decisions and Lochen Rinpoche was one of the religious masters who warned him.

Another of Reting's close associates, Sera Khardo Tulku (*Se ra mKha' rdo sprul sku*), was recommended by her to enter a three-year meditation retreat in order to avoid what Lochen called 'very large obstacles.' She comments that he could have escaped punishment (by the government) if he had followed her advice.¹⁵² One of the wealthiest families in Tibet, the Pangda Tshang (*sPang mda' tshang*), also supporters of Reting,¹⁵³ were likewise disciples and patrons of Lochen Rinpoche.¹⁵⁴ They were in political trouble in the 1930s because of their close association with the regent and also because one of their sons arranged an armed revolt in Kham in 1935 against the central government.¹⁵⁵

Likewise, the noble Dorje Dradul Chogdre (*rDo rje dgra 'dul lCog bkras*) and his wife, Lady Namgyal Drolkar (*rNam rgyal sgrol dkar*), who according to rumors was the lover of the regent,¹⁵⁶ came to Lochen in 1939 and pleaded to become her disciples.¹⁵⁷ In the same year, Chogdre had been appointed by Reting to head the Laja treasury. His predecessor, Sonam Wangdu (*bSod nams dbang 'dus*) of the Kheme (*Khe smad*) Family, had been removed because he refused to open the Laja treasury to Reting's private needs. These circumstances greatly embittered government officials and work conditions must have been difficult for the newly appointed Chogdre. After some hesitation, Lochen Rinpoche agreed to be the

¹⁵¹ Goldstein 1989:354.

¹⁵² *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 492.

¹⁵³ Goldstein 1989:351.

¹⁵⁴ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 400, 423, 427.

¹⁵⁵ Goldstein 1989: 117-185.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*:340.

¹⁵⁷ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 471.

Chogdres' lama. Dorje Dradul resigned from his office in the ninth Tibetan month of 1942,¹⁵⁸ according to Lochen, for religious reasons.

Thus, instead of dismissing Tibetan autobiographies because the focus is religious and the indigenous concept of history is different from ours, we ought to accept the ambiguity of the genre. James Robinson identifies three levels of reading *siddha* biographies, the historical, the hagiographical and the mythical.¹⁵⁹ As religious autobiographies are often the only sources we have to the Tibetan past, they are frequently scrutinized for historical information. Samten Karmay writes the following about the 'outer' autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama,

His autobiography is used as one of the best sources for the social, religious and political history of the seventeenth century in Tibet by both Tibetan and Western scholars. 1988:14

1.3. Jetsun Lochen Rinpoche's Life-stages

1.3.1. Childhood, 1865-1877

There is a crucial difference between a childhood described from an adult perspective and a lived childhood. Childhood experiences are continuously reinterpreted and the difference between the self who 'writes' and the self who was is at the greatest when people narrate their early years.¹⁶⁰ We need also to be aware that the Western concept of childhood as a separate life-stage may not exist in other cultures nor in other historical periods. It seems, however, that Tibetans reckon childhood to be equivalent with the first twelve-year cycle (*skag*), thus the Tibetan childhood ends at thirteen (age is counted from conception).¹⁶¹ When discussing Lochen's childhood I shall try not to be influenced by our modern Western construction of childhood as set apart. We tend to see the child as having a special nature, as being associated with nature, as innocent and therefore vulnerably dependent. Furthermore, the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.: 473.

¹⁵⁹ Robinson 1997:61.

¹⁶⁰ Gullestad 1996:18.

¹⁶¹ See Ramble 1982:343.

modern child has an obligation to be happy.¹⁶² When Lochen recounts her childhood, she adapts it to biographical conventions about 'the holy child.'

Birth

Jetsun Lochen was born at Tshopema (Rewalsar) in North India presumably in 1865. Before her birth, her Sherpa mother, Tshentshar (mTshan mtshar) or Penpa Dronma (sPen pa sgron ma), had a vision of her deceased husband, the Lama Khaliwa (Bla ma Kha li ba), telling her to wander without direction through the kingdoms (*rgyal khams*). Tshentshar was apprehensive as she only knew her native language, but decided to exchange her household-life for that of an itinerant pilgrim. For the Sherpa mother, important places of pilgrimage were the holy mountain Kailash in Western Tibet, Chumig Gyatsa (Chu mig brgya rtsa, i.e. Muktinath) in Mustang (Glo), the holy lake Tshopema near Mandi and Gasha Khandroling (Ga sha mkha' 'gro'i gling). Thongleg Tashi (mThong legs bkra shis), a young man of noble family from Central Tibet,¹⁶³ joined her on her pilgrimage. He was to become Jetsun Lochen's father.

It is interesting to note that Tshentshar carried stones on her back to or around Tang Phagpa (Tang 'Phags pa) and Gasha Phagpa (Ga sha 'Phags pa), statues of Avalokiteśvara in Lahoul, in order to become pregnant with a son. The stones carried on her back are referred to as *bu rdo*, 'boy stones' or 'son stones.'¹⁶⁴ Thereupon Tshentshar had various visions and dreams, miraculous things happened and she was certain that she would give birth to a lama-*tulku* or a fine boy (*bu legs pa*).

A daughter was, however, born at Tshopema in 1865. This holy lake and nearby mountains are connected with Guru Rinpoche and Mandāravā and the area is described by Lochen in Buddhist cosmological terms,

That mountain was filled with (medicinal) fruit such as the three: *a*, *bar*, *skyur*¹⁶⁵ and so on. At its foot, in the direction of the place where Ogyen Rinpoche's (O rgyan rin

¹⁶² Gullestad 1996:15-16.

¹⁶³ See *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 17-19.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.: 20.

¹⁶⁵ Medicinal fruit, *a bar skyur* is an abbreviation for *a ru ra*, *ba ru ra* and *skyu ru ra* (*Tshig mdzod* vol. 3:3122). *a bar* or *a ru ra*, 'myrobalan', 'universal medicine'. Syn. for the fruit as well as the tree of *Myrobalan*

po che) treasury *tsha tsha* (*gter tshva*) was, it was as if there were seven golden mountains and seven enchanting lakes. *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 22

We learn that many Gyagar Khampas¹⁶⁶ were there and they and Lochen's father went to circumambulate the holy mountain(s). We do not know whether they were joined by women, but both genders certainly circumambulate the lake. Lochen says that all the women stayed at a great plain connected with Mandāravā, and when the birth took place the lords of the lake (*mtsho bdag*), or the *nāgas* (*klu*), presented offering gifts. We sense gender distinctions here, mountain and men versus plains, waters, underground, birth and women.¹⁶⁷

Pilgrimages With her Parents

During the first forty years of her life, Ani Lochen was constantly on pilgrimage throughout the Western and Central Himalayas. In the Buddhist Himalayan cultures pilgrimage has been a salient feature for centuries. Tibetan pilgrimage is an inclusive religious activity where lay and clerics, women and men, young and old participate, although gender differences are often sharply marked. In spite of the fact that a large proportion of pilgrims in the Himalayas are female, their participation has received little attention in the scholarly literature until recently.¹⁶⁸

Ani Lochen summarily mentions places of pilgrimage by name in the *rnam thar*, but seldom describes the sites, e.g. which buildings they consist of, which statues they contain etc. She is not at all concerned with giving a guide to pilgrimage-sites and apparently assumes this to be known by her followers and the readers of her autobiography. Ani Lochen's interest is rather in the sanctity of places and people and how her own nature communicates with what she conceives as sacred.

arjuna (Das : 1346) *ba ru ra* is a species of myrobalan (the plant *Terminalia belerica*) (ibid.: 860). *sKyu ru ra* (*Emblica officinalis*) is the name of a sour fruit said to cure the diseases of phlegm, bile and blood (ibid.: 103).

¹⁶⁶ A study of the language of the rGya gar Khams pas has recently been completed by Astri Gosh, *Khampa Hindi: A Sociolinguistic Study of a New Variety of Hindi*. M. A. thesis, University of Oslo 1997.

¹⁶⁷ Women have a role in worshipping the *klu*, e.g. in rainmaking ceremonies. While the lamas pray for rain, women carry the *bKa* 'gyur and *bsTan* 'gyur on their backs circumambulating monasteries and fields, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956) 1975 :478.

¹⁶⁸ With the exception of recent work by anthropologists e.g. Huber *PIATS Fagernes* 1992 and Buffetrille, Ph.D. diss.

As her descriptions of holy places are scant and as most pilgrimage routes and sites in the Himalayas have been dealt with in detail by others, I will restrict myself here to giving a very general overview of the places visited by Lochen and give tentative dates. The emphasis will be more on contextualizing Ani Lochen's travels by focusing on social and economic factors, e.g. who Lochen travelled with, their number, their clothing, how they made a living, how they were regarded and their religious focus and functions.

Sometimes it is hard to identify places from the spelling in the text and there is frequent use of abbreviations. We also come across very general geographical references like «the snow mountain» (*gangs ri*), «the valley-areas» (*rong mtshams*), «the market place(s)» (*khrom (sa)/tshong(s) sa*) etc. Ani Lochen also visited a number of small, local sanctuaries, such as nunneries, and these are poorly described both in Tibetan and Western works. Further difficulties arise when local sites of pilgrimage are known under several names.

For several years Lochen and her family stayed at Tshopema during winter and at the Kanika (Ka ni ka) Stūpa in Sani Monastery in Zangskar during summer. If the family had a home in Ani Lochen's childhood, it would be Tshopema where Lochen tells us that people were helpful and friendly, and there was lots of fruit. Lochen's family roamed the valleys of Zangskar, Lahoul, Spiti, Kulu and Rampur. They went to places named Shaog (Sha 'og), Changlau (Byang la'u) and Tshongsarong (Tshong sa rong) where Lochen says that the *dharma* did not flourish. Possibly these are places in the Garhwal area of Uttar Pradesh. They went to Ladakh and Peldug (dPal 'gdugs)¹⁶⁹ to see religious dance ('*cham*) and made pilgrimages to the Vairocana murals of Alchi (Ab ji), Mangyu (Mang rgyud) and Sungda (gSung rda).

They also went to Tibet proper, to Guge (Gu ge), which is described as a place where Buddhism thrived, to Barga Tasam (Bar ga rta zam) to recite *ma ṇi* and to pay homage to the Avalokiteśvara statues in Khorchag ('Khor chags) south of Taklakot.¹⁷⁰ Tshentshar also brought her daughter to her birthplace Yolmo (Helambu) north of Kathmandu. They proceeded through Chumig Gyatsa and Kyirong (sKyid grong) visiting sites of pilgrimage on their way. The only sacred site mentioned in the Kathmandu valley is the Tagmoluchin Stūpa

¹⁶⁹ Probably Spituk (dPe thub) Monastery.

¹⁷⁰ *rJe btsun nam thar*, 62.

(sTag mo lus sbyin) near Dhulikhel, east of Kathmandu. After Helambu they visited the pilgrimage sites on their way down to Kyirong to find the girl's root-lama.

From her birth Ani Lochen was carried on the backs of her parents, later she rode a goat, occasionally a donkey, but mostly she moved about on foot. In her childhood she walked bare-foot, sometimes with bark from the Somaratsa tree tied around her sore feet. Steep cliffs, narrow paths, shaky bridges and violent streams were the main physical obstacles during her childhood travels. Lochen almost slipped into abysses more than once and nearly drowned three times.¹⁷¹ Each time she says that miracles saved her. Throughout the biography, Lochen does not mention the icy winds and the low temperatures during winter and how terribly cold she must have been sleeping in tents, grass-huts and caves along their many pilgrimage-routes.

The Religious Milieu

Most likely in Spiti, Ani Lochen met Lochen Hangdra (Lo chen Hang sgra)¹⁷² alias Lochen Gokar (Lo chen mGo dkar), the nephew of the *ma ñi pa* master Dungkar Drugdra (Dung dkar 'brug sgra). He told her that Avalokiteśvara was the mightiest among gods and that Lochen herself was Drolma or Machig. Lochen Hangdra praised Lochen's voice and said that her melody could be traced back to the *ma ñi pa*s of the past, especially to Ratnabhadra.¹⁷³ He also recognized that Lochen sang his own tune and encouraged her to recite Avalokiteśvara's *mantra*. Subsequently, the girl learned several biographies by heart, among them *sNang sa'i rnam thar*.¹⁷⁴ While in Ladakh, the father brought her to Tashi Namgyal, the head lama of 'the king of Ladakh,' with whom she studied writing and stories of persons who had traveled to and returned from the realms of the dead (*'das log*). Here Ani Lochen was given a religious painting (*thang ka*) and a book (*dpe cha*), part of the ritual paraphernalia of a *ma ñi pa*.

We also hear that the family proceeded to Western Tibet, to a site for gold-digging (*gser kha*) called Kelsang Drog (sKal bzang khrogs) situated in the area Shungpa Matshen

¹⁷¹ Ibid.:32-33, 117-118, 191-192.

¹⁷² It is possible that Hang could be a spelling mistake for *hūm*.

¹⁷³ For references to the cult of Avalokiteśvara and the *ma ñi pa* tradition, see *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 37, 38.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.: 38.

(gZhung pa ma mtshan) and to an old gold-mine called Tramalung (Grva ma lung). Among the gold-diggers were several pilgrims and *ma ni pas*. The young Lochen spent time with the three daughters of the *ma ni pa* Darpo (Lo chen Dar po) and his wife. Their younger daughter explained the story of Gelongma Palmo and Lochen was happy to meet a friend who recited holy biographies (*nam thar*) like herself. Lochen mentions a Mimi¹⁷⁵ Serpon (Mi mi gSer dpon), the head of the gold-diggers.¹⁷⁶ Apparently *gser dpons* were appointed by the Tibetan government to administer taxes on gold-digging.

All through her childhood pilgrimages, from the age of six, Lochen encouraged others to perform the recitation of *ma nis* in a beautiful voice. In Ladakh people were in awe because the *dharma* was preached by a child still sucking milk from her mother. Everyone is said to have wept from compassion.¹⁷⁷ Once, presumably in Spiti, Ani Lochen tells us that a crowd of about one thousand people gathered to listen. Her most prominent lay patron, Khampa Tashi (Kham pa bkra shis) erected a throne for her in front of which he offered a *maṇḍala*.¹⁷⁸ In Rampur, Ani Lochen was invited by the king who had heard of her fame.¹⁷⁹ She was placed on a high throne and requested to encourage a large crowd to recite *ma ni*. Because Lochen was so small and not visible in the crowd, she had to carry a long cane (*mkhar ba*) in her hand. She also recited *ma ni* for 'the Ladakhi king' and became his favorite.

Lochen conceives of her childhood activities as consisting in propagating the Doctrine and spreading the worship of Avalokiteśvara. She says that she planted the seeds of liberation in the minds of all the people she met, heard, remembered and touched in the valleys (*rong mtshams*), i.e. in Lahoul, Spiti, Kulu and Rampur.

Wherever she sang *ma nis*, Lochen was offered gifts in abundance, such as food, woollen and cotton cloth and sometimes silver. In nomad areas she was occasionally given sheep and goats and these were brought along on their pilgrimages. We get acquainted with the 'intelligent' goat Rama Lakhen (Ra ma La mkhan) which Lochen rode when small. All her life, Ani Lochen prayed for this goat.

¹⁷⁵ Old men are called by the honorific *mi mi* in Western Tibet and Ladakh and *mé mé* ('grandfather') in Bhutan.

¹⁷⁶ For these episodes, see *rJe btsun nam thar*, 56-8.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.: 46.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.: 38.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid: 41-42.

Animals brought on pilgrimage accumulate merit, too, perfectly consistent with the Buddhist conception of existence. Ransomed sheep are called *tshe lug* in Central Tibet, and there are other observations of *tshe lug* with bells around their necks belonging to 'the entourage' of *ma ṇi pas*. Compassion for animals is a recurrent theme in Lochen's self-narrative. In mid-life, she was even able to calm down and 'communicate' with a leopard and a dog that came rushing into her meditation-cave. The animals settled at her feet and she conferred blessings and religious teachings on them.¹⁸⁰

The *ma ṇi pas* thus were professional reciters whose repertoire not only contained the *mantra* of Avalokiteśvara, but also autobiographies of saints and particularly of 'das log. They also taught basic religious doctrines and led itinerant lives. Jetsun Lochen informs us that her title 'Lochen' has nothing to do with the great 'lotsavas' of the past, but is rather the title for humble 'ma ṇi-beggars' in Western Tibetan dialects.¹⁸¹ It is also clear that *ma ṇi pas* and reciters of 'das log belong to both genders, although it seems that women predominate. Lochen Hangdra who taught Lochen the skills of the *ma ṇi pa*, described himself as 'nothing but a beggar-child' (*sprang phrug*).¹⁸² This is also Lochen's self-conception and how she is described by others.¹⁸³

Mother Tshentshar

The one closest to Ani Lochen for about forty-five years was her mother, Tshentshar or Penpa Dronma. Mother and daughter remained inseparable until death took the mother away around

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.: 205-6.

¹⁸¹ A ni Lo chen says that 'Lo chen' in the western dialects means 'ma ṇi-beggar' (*rJe btsun rnam thar*, 472). It is possible the honorary title Lo chen goes back to lotsāba/lo (-chen) Rin chen bzang po (958-1055) and other great translators in western Tibet during the second diffusion of Buddhism, and that the title has later come to mean 'ma ṇi-beggar' in western Tibetan dialects. Note that certain *ma ṇi pas* tell 'das log stories and Lo chen was both a *ma ṇi pa* and a 'das log. Khetsun Sangpo writes that she learned the *rnam thar* of the famous 'das log Karma dbang 'dzin by heart (1973, vol. 4:528), but this is not mentioned in *rJe btsun rnam thar*. Here it only says that she learned the *rnam thar* of sNang sa and that of others (ibid.:38,4). For *ma ṇi pas*, see also Waddell 1895:542, Roerich 1932:30 (1), Stein 1956:352 (Pl. i), p. 402n. 14, Montmollin *PIATS Narita* 1992:605-615 (vol. ii). For photos of *ma ṇi pa* see e.g., A.W. Macdonald 1990 I, facing p. 164, *Voyages dans les Marches Tibétaines*, Musée de l'Homme, 1989:51, Pommaret-Imaeda 1983:32, Pommaret 1989:20, Jest 1975:333 and Montmollin 1992. The *ma ṇi pa* tradition still exists in Tibet.

¹⁸² *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 38.

¹⁸³ Ibid.:60, 100, 136, 472.

1909.¹⁸⁴ In every culture, and also in Tibet, the role of the mother is important. There are several touching descriptions of mothers in Tibetan literature and that of the present Dalai Lama is one of them. Even though his mother must have been exhausted by agricultural labor and by giving birth to sixteen children of whom only seven survived, her son describes her as a warm, supportive and strong woman.¹⁸⁵ The relationship between Ani Lochen and her mother, too, was exceptionally close. When Lochen was a child, the mother carried her on her back; when the mother was old, the daughter carried the mother. Jetsun Lochen even broke the command of her root-guru, Thrulshig Rinpoche ('Khrul zhig rin po che), in order to take care of her old mother.

When Tshentshar's first childless marriage ended with the death of her lama husband, she gave up household life for that of a pilgrim. Then she spent about fifteen years as the mistress of the nobleman Thongleg Tashi from Central Tibet. During the years with him, psychological and physical abuse were part of daily life. Tshentshar's strong faith was her solace. When she finally gave birth to a long-wished-for child, all her energy was directed towards supporting her daughter and turning her mind towards the *dharma*. As Tshentshar was frequently beaten up, she was not always capable of protecting the little girl from the aggressive father. Eventually Thongleg left them. From being a childless widow, through a period as a battered mistress, Tshentshar ended up being a single parent.

Tshentshar did not perform anything spectacular, except being a mother. She is, though, the heroine in her daughter's life-story. Without any material security or a place to live, wandering in the harsh Himalayan climate, Tshentshar supported her daughter by selling her turquoises, collecting roots and berries, shepherding animals and tending fields. She found shelter in caves and gave up her bedding for the daughter to make her yoga clothing. Tshentshar practiced the compassion Buddhism speaks so much about, with meager resources, but to the best of her abilities. She was also able to give Ani Lochen the best education in religious practice that traditional Tibet had to offer. Together they visited all the main sites of pilgrimage in the Western and Central Himalayas and sought out important

¹⁸⁴ If the year is correct, and if mTshan tshar became ninety-nine years old as her daughter says, mTshan tshar was born c. 1811. This implies that she was around fifty-four years old when she gave birth to Lo chen in 1865. Fertility at this age is unlikely.

¹⁸⁵ *My Land and My People*, 1962. Note also that Chögyam Trungpa (1966) dedicates his autobiography to his Mother and motherland.

lamas. During meditation retreats, mother and daughter alternately functioned as servants for each other.

Lochen's mother was no doubt a very compassionate woman, also towards animals. There is a moving passage in the narrative, when daughter and mother return to Tibet from a pilgrimage to Nepal. They were searching for the two donkeys they had left behind in Kyirong. The mother spotted the animals and called them by their names. Ani Lochen says that she herself, her mother, and the donkeys cried from happiness at being reunited.¹⁸⁶

Tshentshar's aim was to make her daughter a lama. From a Western perspective, we could ask whether criss-crossing the Himalayas on foot as beggars to receive 'power' from pilgrimage-sites and high lamas really satisfied the basic needs of a small child. We could also be critical of the mother's decision to refuse her teenage daughter a settled lay life and children of her own when a man in the hills of Nepal wanted to marry her.¹⁸⁷

According to Buddhist worldview, however, Tshentshar's choices on behalf of her daughter can easily be justified. The aim was final liberation from temporal affairs, even though the path itself involved much suffering. In Buddhism as well as in other religions, the renouncement of worldly comfort is believed to enhance the chances for final liberation. Jetsun Lochen never openly regrets the hardships of her life; she rather interprets them as ordeals that give spiritual insight. When adult, Lochen continued to live on the fringe of lay society. She never married, or had any children and was thus relatively free to choose her life. Her choice was a religious career.

Father Thongleg Tashi

Thongleg Tashi openly denounced his daughter when she was born. He beat both mother and daughter and had a weakness for alcohol and women. On two occasions, he sold Lochen to strangers in return for beer. When Ani Lochen looks at her childhood in retrospect, the beatings, the anxiety, and the shame are burnt into her mind and body. These are events which preoccupy her memory. For a child, and particularly for a female child, a father's

¹⁸⁶ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 558.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*:66.

maltreatment of her mother causes suffering and involves, in part or completely, the emotional loss of the father.

Ani Lochen's self-narrative would easily lead us to the conclusion that the mother and the daughter were entirely good, while the father was the opposite. Real persons do not fit into such clear-cut categories, although we easily understand that Lochen's childhood experiences made her describe her family this way. It is plausible that the problematic relationship between Lochen's parents made the mother monopolize her daughter's love and influence her assessment of her father. But also people at Tshopema, Lochen's place of birth, described father and daughter thus:

The father is like a demon, the daughter is like a god; how can this be?

rJe btsun rnam thar, 51

No doubt, Thongleg Tashi had a strong emotional nature, one that he could not always control, particularly when affected by alcohol. Several times he did, however, apologize in deep remorse for his behavior. Thongleg also took a solemn oath never to be violent again, but he kept slipping back to old habits. Tshentshar, with her kind and self-effacing ways was, perhaps, not the right match for a man of his temperament.

But there must have been days of happiness, too, when the father was sober and predictable, when he carried his daughter on the top of his load, when they arrived at sites of pilgrimage after long, strenuous walks and when they found gold which relieved their poverty. When they found water after thirsting in the desert in Ngari (mNga' ris), Lochen says her father was happy.¹⁸⁸

Thongleg Tashi was, like the mother, very pious. Since his youth, he had associated with and served several lamas. He had left the Yamdrog (Yar 'drog) area because of all the sinful ways there. One of the lamas he worked for praised him, telling him that great luck followed in his footsteps. When his infant daughter was sick, both parents prayed to their protective deities. The father seems to have been as eager as the mother to visit the sacred sites and the lamas. It was the father who brought the child to the house-teacher of 'the king of Ladakh' in order for her to learn the alphabet and the skills of a *ma ni pa*. It must have

¹⁸⁸ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 56.

made Thongleg proud to listen to his daughter sing *ma nis* in a beautiful voice; a voice she apparently shared with him. We know that the father could sing, too. Once, when they lost all their belongings in a river, father and daughter performed together; he sang and the girl danced for food and clothes.

Thongleg Tashi's emotional intensity also had other sides; women easily fell in love with him. We know of three. Lochen, too, must have loved him as a child. When people punished him for his uncontrollable behavior while drunk, the daughter was out of her mind and pleaded with police-officers, local kings and others to leave him alone. Once, near Mandi, when people decided to dismember her father, Lochen's tears and despair made them give up their plan. The father left the family around 1875-76, when Lochen was eleven or twelve years old, not to reappear in his daughter's life until twenty years later.

1.3.2. With her Root-lama Pema Gyatsho, 1877-1890

Tibetans, and particularly religious specialists, perceive meeting their root-guru as one of the most decisive moments in their lives. When Ani Lochen was thirteen years old (c. 1877), a nun from Amdo prophesied that Pema Gyatsho, was Lochen's root-lama in the present life, as well as in former existences.¹⁸⁹ The time spent with him sets the next stage for Ani Lochen's pilgrimages and her religious vocation.

Pema Gyatsho alias Chime Dorje ('Chi med rdo rje), probably born in Amdo in 1829, was a personal disciple of the famous Shabkar Tsogdrug Rangdrol. Shabkar was in the teaching lineage of great masters such as Kunzang Dechen Gyalpo (Kun bzang bde chen rgyal po, b. 1736) and Chogyal Ngaggi Wangpo (Chos rgyal ngag gi dbang po, 1736-1807).¹⁹⁰ Although Shabkar was firmly based in the Nyingma tradition, he was strongly influenced by the eclectic *ris med* movement.¹⁹¹ Ricard refers to Pema Gyatsho as Shabkar's 'heart son,' but he is not mentioned in the latter's autobiography.¹⁹² It is possible that Pema Gyatsho met the great master in Amdo after Shabkar returned there from Central Tibet in 1828.¹⁹³ Pema

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.:83, 84.

¹⁹⁰ Ricard 1994: 570.

¹⁹¹ Ehrhard 1990a and Ricard 1994. For the *ris med* movement, see Smith 1969, 1970 and Thondup 1996.

¹⁹² Ricard 1994: 576n. 26.

¹⁹³ Ibid.: 485.

Gyatsho was, furthermore, a disciple of Alag Pema Rangdrol (A lags Padma rang grol, d. 1837) and of Drubwang Chatral/Thatral Dorje (Grub dbang Bya bral rdo rje)¹⁹⁴ alias Gon Lhakha (dGon Lha kha) of Rekong (Re bkong).

Kyirong

Ani Lochen met her lama in Kyirong around 1877, where he stayed near Okar Drag (O dkar brag) with his disciples. Here the mother and daughter settled in one of the numerous caves nearby. Other holy places visited by Lochen and her companions while staying in the Kyirong area were the Third Karmapa's place of birth,¹⁹⁵ three monasteries situated on Riwo Pelbar (Ri bo dPal 'bar), the Milarepa cave Ragmachangchub Dzong (Rag ma byang chub rdzong), Milarepa's most important hermitage in the latter part of his life, Dragkar Taso (Brag dkar rta so), his birth-place Kyangatsa (sKya rnga rtsa) and the Milarepa cave Zaog Phug (Za 'og phug). Significant people met during this stay were Langdrang Gomchen (Glang 'phrang sgom chen), two nuns who had been the personal disciples of Shabkar, Tsumla Lama (Tsum la bla ma) and a lama called Mimi Pema Namgyal (Mi mi Padma rNam rgyal).¹⁹⁶

Nubri

We do not know how long Ani Lochen stayed in Kyirong, but from the context it seems to have been about a year. From Kyirong the group proceeded to the He or Heri (He ri) hermitage in Nubri (Nub ri). Lochen states that at Heri there is a hidden valley (*sbas yul*) blessed by Guru Rinpoche which resembles Tsari (Tsa ri). In this hermitage, which was situated on the face of a mountain, she remained in sealed meditation retreat for three years (tentatively 1878-1880). One of the religious practices she focused on was a *guru sādhana* of Milarepa.

The hidden valley mentioned by Ani Lochen could have been the one called Kyimolung (sKyid mo lung) situated in a side-valley in Kutang. According to Michael

¹⁹⁴ Thondup (1996:337) writes Thatral and my guess is that his name is Chatral (Bya bral).

¹⁹⁵ In rKo, a day's walk from sKyid grong.

¹⁹⁶ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 98-101.

Aris,¹⁹⁷ Milarepa was the first historical figure associated with this *sbas yul*, and its reputation was spread by the Garwang (Gar dbang) incarnations at Dragkar Taso. Dragkar Taso was one of the last sites visited by Lochen and her company before proceeding to Nubri and Kutang. When Lochen was sixteen years old (c. 1881), Pema Gyatsho and his group stayed for some time near Tradun Tse (Pra dun rtse) in the Saga (Sa dga') district in Ngari, while Lochen returned to Nubri where she nearly died from food poisoning in a small nunnery in Nubri Kog (Nub ri lkog).

Mustang and Thag

Pema Gyatsho and his followers went to Thag (Thag), and due to various incidents here, Pema Gyatsho found Lochen to be conceited and punished her by branding the word 'dog' (*khyi*) with a hot iron on her forehead.¹⁹⁸ Then Lochen was banished from the group and sent to Pokhara. The lama stayed in Tshoro Monastery (mTsho ro),¹⁹⁹ and he was invited there a second time in 1881. During their time in Mustang and Thag the entourage of Pema Gyatsho went on pilgrimage to the seat of To Ngari Panchen Pema Wanggi Gyalpo (sTod mnga' ris Pan chen Padma dbang gi rgyal po, 1487-1542), to Chongshi Rangchon (Cong zhi rang byon) and to Kutshab Ternga (sKu tshab gter/sde lnga). They stopped at Tilri Nunnery (Til/Ti ri a ne dgon pa) and also stayed in an empty monastery in Chumig Gyatsa.²⁰⁰

Mount Kailash

Then Pema Gyatsho received a message from Khamnyon Dharma Senge (Kham smyon Dharma Senge)²⁰¹ in Lhasa that Shabkar's reincarnation, Thegchog Tenpe Gyaltshen was planning to travel to Central Tibet and Kailash. Pema Gyatsho was told to go to Mt. Kailash to meet him, and the lama and his group went there via Khorchag and Purang (Pu rang / sPu

¹⁹⁷ Aris 1975, 1979a:3.

¹⁹⁸ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 112.

¹⁹⁹ Possibly Tshe rog, near Thag.

²⁰⁰ These episodes are described *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 136-7.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*:139.

hreng).²⁰² While the lama stayed alone meditating by the shore of Manasarovar (mTsho ma pham), the disciples circumambulated the lake. They went Thruugo (Khrus sgo) and resided for some time at Gonzur (dGon zur) Monastery which used to be the residence of Shabkar's disciple Chinpa Norbu (sByin pa nor bu).

Thereupon, many of the students started a meditation retreat in Dzutrul Phug (rDzu 'phrul phug) situated on the circumambulation path around Kailash. Here they practiced yogic breathing, ate nettles to survive so that their urine turned blue and tasted tea for the first time. Apparently Shabkar's reincarnation never turned up, and Pema Gyatsho and his group went once more down into Nubri by way of Pretapuri (Pre ta pu ri) and Gyanyima (rGya nyi ma) and stayed for some years at Nagtshel Monastery (Nags tshal dgon pa).

The Kathmandu Valley, Lapchi and Dingri

In the Bird Year (1885), when Lochen was about twenty years old, the hermit group went to the Kathmandu valley where they whitewashed the three *stūpas*, Bodhnāth, Swayambunāth and Tagmoluchin (sTag mo lus sbyin). They also printed the guide-books (*dkar chag*) of the *stūpas*.²⁰³ Then they proceeded towards Dingri, and stopped for some months at one of the famous Milarepa retreats, Potinyima Dzong (Po ti nyi ma rdzong) at Dragmar (Brag dmar). They also visited a number of other sites connected with Milarepa in this area. To Ani Lochen's surprise, they found many statues of Shabkar and his disciples in this district. Pema Gyatsho stayed with a personal disciple of Shabkar known as Nangdze Dorje (sNang mdzad rdo rje),²⁰⁴ while the disciples were sent on pilgrimage to Lapchi (La phyi).²⁰⁵

Lochen herself did not go to Lapchi, but headed towards Dingri Langkor (Ding ri glang 'khor), the residence of Phadampa Sangye (Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, d.1117), Lato Gyal gyi Shri (La stod rgyal gyi shri) or Tsibri (rTsib ri), Dramtsho (Gram mtsho) and Lho Dechen Phug (lHo bde chen phug). Then the group gathered again and gradually came to the Island of Phuma Bartsho (Phu ma bar mtsho'i do) where they remained for a few months in the care

²⁰² The most auspicious time for performing pilgrimage to Kailash is during *sa ga zla ba* in the Horse Year (i.e. every twelfth year), it is thus possible that Padma rGya mtsho and his retinue went there in a Horse year, probably 1882 (*chu rta*), when Lochen was in her seventeenth (or eighteenth) year.

²⁰³ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 145.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.:167-68.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.:145-172.

of a great benefactor of Shabkar. Lochen says that everywhere in this district, Shabkar's image protruded ('bur) on the *stūpas* and even the *man thang*²⁰⁶ were full (of his image).

Central Tibet

Thereupon Pema Gyatsho and his group walked towards Lhasa, via Sakya (Sa skya), Tashilhunpo (bKra shis lhun po) and Gyantse (rGyal rtse). They visited the Tārā temple (sGrol ma lha khang) in Nyethang (sNye thang) and on the twenty-second day of the ninth month, possibly in 1887, the day of Buddha's descent from the gods, they reached Lhasa. Soon after, they had an audience with the young Thirteenth Dalai Lama.

Pema Gyatsho stayed in Drib Tshechogling (Grib Tshe (m)chog gling) with his lama Dharma Senge, while most of the disciples went on pilgrimage to southern Tibet. Ani Lochen went to Phenpo (north-east of Lhasa) to beg, to the seat of Potowa (Po to ba), to Tagchen Shawa Bumpa (rTag spyan sha ba 'bum pa) and then to Ganden (dGa' ldan) and other sites. She went to see the Monlam Tshogcho (sMon lam tshogs mchod)²⁰⁷ in Lhasa and had another audience with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. While her companions were on pilgrimage in To (sTod), Lochen was left behind because of a bad ankle. She was, however, able to attend the Curd Festival at Drepung ('Bras spung zho ston), which was celebrated on the thirtieth day of the sixth month (presumably 1888).²⁰⁸

After arriving in Lhasa, Pema Gyatsho wished to find a permanent residence for his group and sent Ani Lochen and a friend off to search for it. The Padmasambhava cave Zangyag Drag (Zangs yag brag) on Riwo Tsenga (Ri bo rtse nga), Tibet's Wutaishan, sacred to Mañjuśrī, attracted their attention. The lama settled there for long meditation retreats. Also Gangri Thokar (Gangs ri Thod dkar) was considered suitable for a permanent hermitage.

²⁰⁶ *man thang* appears to be the same as 'ma ṇi-wall.' See *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 172-73.

²⁰⁷ Celebrated in the second lunar month, see Richardson 1993:60-61 and *Tshig mdzod*:2290.

²⁰⁸ The Zho ston was celebrated on the eighth day of the seventh month at 'Bras spungs, while it was celebrated during the first to the fifth day in the No gling pho brang in Lhasa, see Richardson 1993:103-107, cf. Chan 1994:149, 1053. These events are described *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 179-187.

Woka and Loyul

While Pema Gyatsho was in retreat at Zangyang Drag, Ani Lochen wandered around alone, on pilgrimage and to beg, as far east as Wokha ('Ol kha) and Loyul. She also went south of the Tsangpo, to Eyul (E yul), to the Shagjang (bShag byang) estate. Lochen made pilgrimage to the numerous cliff-caves at Samling Hermitage (bSam gling ri khrod), whereupon she returned to Zangyang Drag. From here, she frequently made short excursions to Lhasa.²⁰⁹

Shabkar Rinpoche's reincarnation, Thegchog Tenpe Gyaltshen arrived in Lhasa (c.1888-1889). He was invited to Zangyang Drag where he stayed some months with Pema Gyatsho and his group. From him, Lochen received empowerment and oral transmission of *rTa phag yid bzhi nor bu* and the complete volumes of Shabkar's writings,²¹⁰ and Ani Lochen was given the name Rigdzin Chonyi Sangmo. The religious teachings she now received were to become crucial for her later religious practice and her status as a Nyingma master. Shabkar's reincarnation seems to have returned to Amdo. Although Pema Gyatsho's disciples had great faith in him, there is no more mention of him in Lochen's self-narrative.

The Group

The group of disciples who gathered around Pema Gyatsho in Kyirong are referred to by Ani Lochen as religious companions (*mched grogs*). She seems both to refer to the immediate group of fellow disciples, but also to a larger group of adherents of Shabkar. It is difficult to estimate their number, but Lochen speaks of them as many. She names about twenty, but the group must have been considerably larger. There were both men and women, but the majority were female.²¹¹

Lochen's description of Pema Gyatsho fits very well with what we know about lamas in the Nyingmapa tradition. He is described as humble and clad in ragged sheep-skin. Although not explicitly mentioned, we may assume he kept his hair long, as did his master

²⁰⁹ Pilgrimages described *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 189-91.

²¹⁰ *rTa phag yid bzhi nor bu*, 'Wish-fulfilling gem, Hayagrīva and Vajravārāhī' revealed by Kun bzang bde chen rgyal po, see Ricard 1994: xxii, xxiii, 44, 50, 125, 211, 569, 577-589.

²¹¹ Lo chen names c. twelve female companions and six to eight male.



Drib Tshechoqling Monastery
Photo: T. Changqoba 1997



Dawa Dorje's son Tsipala
Photo: T. Changqoba 1997

Shabkar and several of his own disciples. When he stayed in Kyirong in the late 1870s he had a consort. She is mentioned twice, but never by name.²¹²

Rather than in monasteries and institutions of learning, the lama stayed with his entourage in caves and pilgrim-sites mainly associated with Padmasambhava, Milarepa and Shabkar. He emphasized meditation and retreat for his students and kept strict discipline. We never hear of lavish contributions to the lama, as in the case of Shabkar, although large crowds gathered when he taught. Jetsun Lochen tells us, with pious exaggeration, that once, when he offered empowerment on *the Seven chapters of the Guru (Le'u bdun ma)* in Nubri, around one hundred thousand people attended.²¹³ Pema Gyatsho's entourage moved about as a group, occasionally, however, splitting up into smaller units to perform meditational retreats, pilgrimages or to beg (*gso sbyong*).

Motives for Traveling

The sites of pilgrimage Ani Lochen paid homage to with her lama were mainly those connected to Padmasambhava (He nang, Zangs yag brag), Milarepa (Mt. Kailash, sKy'i grong, La phyi), Machig Labdron (Zangs ri mKhar dmar, E yul, Ding ri), Phadampa Sangye (Ding ri), Longchen Rabjam (Klong chen rab 'byams pa, 1308-63, Gangs ri Thod dkar) and other saints of the Nyingmapa school. They also visited great 'national' monasteries and monuments like the Great Temple at Sakya (Sa skya lha khang chen mo), the Great Stūpa at Gyantse (rGyal rtse sku 'bum), Tashilhunpo, Sera (Se ra), Ganden, Drepung, the Potala Palace (Pho brang ri bo gru 'dzin) and the Jokhang (Jo khang) temple. On their pilgrimages to Mt. Kailash, Mustang, Kyirong, the Kathmandu Valley, Lapchi, Dingri and Lhasa, they followed in Shabkar's footsteps. With the exception of Nubri, Shabkar had made the same tour of pilgrimage a generation earlier.²¹⁴

The main purpose of Pema Gyatsho's and his retinue's travels was to make connection with places sanctified by great religious masters in the past and to perform prolonged meditation at such 'powerful' sites. When Lochen was about fourteen years old

²¹² *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 100, 101.

²¹³ *Ibid.*: 110.

²¹⁴ See Ricard 1994.

she started a three-year retreat (c. 1878-1880) in Nubri.²¹⁵ Afterwards she performed meditations lasting for several months at a time, some of which were 'sealed'. The lama gave religious instructions to his group and to the general public. Lochen, too, taught and sang *manis*. They practiced *gcod* at charnel ground and fearful places (*gnyan sa*) to 'turn back' obstacles such as illness, epidemics and to discard dead bodies. This was their explicit purpose for going both to Nubri and Mustang.²¹⁶

Once in Nubri, we hear that an illness said to have been caused by black magic nearly wiped out the group of devotees. Lochen says that even the dogs turned mad. As they were *gcod pas* mingling with the sick and dying, we are not surprised that they were infected. In fact illness was conceived as a major threat and we hear of unidentified diseases, fevers and small-pox. Food poisoning caused her lama's death and nearly took Ani Lochen's and Pema Gyatsho's consort's lives.²¹⁷ All through the *rnam thar*, long-life rituals (*zhabs brtan*), rituals to ward off obstacles (*bsun bzlog*)²¹⁸ and *gcod* were performed to control sickness believed to be caused by disorder of the elements, inauspicious times and black magic. Unfavorable *karma* is seldom referred to in the autobiography as the cause of illness.

Ani Lochen's Religious Status in Her Youth

When she met her lama, Ani Lochen was clad as a beggar. After receiving instruction on yoga and breathing techniques in Thag in the late 1870s, her standard outfit became a 'single piece of cotton'. Lochen made her yoga outfit, meditation 'skirt' (*ang rag*)²¹⁹ and sash (*bsgom thag*) from her mother's bedding. She dyed these in the appropriate color and bought a cotton shawl (*gzan*) for six *paise* to make the outfit complete. While in Nubri and Thag word spread rapidly of her qualifications and people were puzzled that one who was so famous looked like an undernourished beggar.²²⁰

²¹⁵ Lo chen's next three year retreat was performed after her lama's death at Zangs yag brag around 1890-1892.

²¹⁶ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 137.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 100, 107, 195.

²¹⁸ 'Warding off' rituals in order to drive back obstacles, particularly *dākinīs* who have come to take the person to their land.

²¹⁹ A tutu, a kind of short skirt used for meditation.

²²⁰ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 136.

Ani Lochen had been regarded as a saint ever since her birth. She was, however, harassed during the first phase of her stay with Pema Gyatsho. His intention was to break the self-confidence and pride of this child-*ma ni pa*. We know that Lochen 'invested' much in her relationship with her root-guru and endured both physical and mental hardship. At the age of thirteen, she took an oath promising to follow his advice even at the risk of her own death.²²¹ Lochen's father had left her around 1876, a year or so before she met her lama. The father's departure may not have been perceived as such a great loss, maybe even as a relief and we may assume that the root-lama became a father-substitute for the young girl.

Despite being physically abused and ostracized by her lama, the young girl stubbornly continued her religious practices. As their relationship developed, Ani Lochen became Pema Gyatsho's closest disciple and followed him everywhere as his servant. When traveling with him in Central Tibet in the late 1880s she was called 'the Tantric Lama's donkey.' Lochen's physical condition in her youth must have been remarkable. She states,

Without fear and embarrassment, I carried a load comprising the Lama's *tsampa*, five *khal* of barley (c. 68 kg),²²² as well as Mother's and my own luggage to Lhasa and other places, near and far, day and night, wherever we went.

rJe btsun rnam thar, 193

At another occasion, Lochen again talks about her strength and says that she could carry seven sheep-loads (*lug rgyab*).²²³ In the mid-1890s, when her mother became sick on a pilgrimage to Yarlung (Yar lung) and Chongye ('Phyong rgyas), Lochen and her nun friend alternately carried her on their backs. No wonder that Lochen's legs failed her after numerous slips on narrow paths with enormous loads on her back.

As time went by, Ani Lochen acquired a prominent position among her fellow disciples, and we hear that she sent them here and there. Once at Tshechogling Monastery in Lhasa, when she requested religious teachings from Pema Gyatsho, she was placed at the center of the room, while her companions sat around her in a circle. In Lhasa, Ani Lochen was also asked to read the eight thousand verse *Prajñāpāramitā* for the Lhalu family. For this

²²¹ Ibid.: 94, 100, 109-10, 112, 132, 187.

²²² The exact weight of a *khal* and a *lug rgyab* is uncertain. If one *khal* is c. 30 lb/13,6 kg (*Das*:143) this means that Lo chen says that she could carry c. 68 kg.

²²³ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 110.

she received a full bucket of grain as fee per day. She also functioned as house-lama (*mchod gnas*) for the Lady Shagjang when on pilgrimage in Eyul in the late 1880s.²²⁴

When the group arrived in Lhasa around 1887, Jetsun Lochen still wore her cotton cloth and had to buy a felt *chuba* from a friend to be allowed an audience with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.²²⁵ During a pilgrimage to Ganden she tells us,

Because I was wearing only a piece of cotton, it was said that I was an *a tsar mo*²²⁶ and many people gathered to watch.²²⁷

It seems that this group of mountain-dwelling hermits was a relatively rare sight around Lhasa and the nearby Gelugpa establishments. We also hear of unconventional behavior by some of the members of the group. Ani Lochen's friend Ani Tshulthrim (A ni Tshul khriims) made prostrations for the preliminary religious practice naked. Later, in the late 1890s, Yamdrog Thrulshig Rinpoche, another of Lochen's main lamas, told her to tie her hair on top of her head and circumambulate the Barkor naked.²²⁸ Ani Lochen was, however, stopped by her religious companions from carrying out the lama's command. Apparently Pema Gyatsho's disciples were not ordained as we know that the *Vinaya* contains minute regulations for covering the body, particularly the female.

1.3.3. Meditation Retreats, Ordination and Pilgrimages, 1889-1904

Around 1889, on his way to Lhasa from Zangyag Drag, Pema Gyatsho became ill. He died in Lhasa on the seventeenth of the second month. This was Ani Lochen's second loss of a significant male figure in her life and she was heart-broken. Not only did her main guru die, but also another of their main lamas, Khamnyon Dharma Senge, passed away on the seventeenth day of the following month.²²⁹

²²⁴ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 190.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*: 210.

²²⁶ An *a tsar mo* is a female ascetic (from Skt. *Ācārya*).

²²⁷ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 182.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*: 97, 330. There are a few other references to female religious specialists and nakedness, see Hanna 1994:7-8 and the improbable story about A lag Gung ri mKha' 'gro by Forman 1936:172-186.

²²⁹ The year of his death is tentative.

Pema Gyatsho left no institutional structure behind and no spiritual heir had been appointed. Neither was there any organized attempt to find his reincarnation. The non-institutional character of ascetic groups in the Nyingma tradition easily leads to their disintegration after the deaths of charismatic leaders. Disciples disperse to pledge allegiance to other masters and religious institutions, to meditate in solitary caves or to return to their native areas. This seems also to have happened with the hermits with whom Lochen had spent the last twelve years.

The majority of Pema Gyatsho's disciples were female, and Jetsun Lochen was considered, or considered herself, his closest disciple. Her gender and young age may have been the reasons why she was not appointed as the lama's successor. Neither are there any indications that she had such pretensions. More than thirty years were still to pass before Lochen became the main lama for her fellow companions and disciples.

Until Shugseb became their convent during the first decade of the new century, a core of Pema Gyatsho's female disciples continued to stay together. In between their various excursions to visit lamas and holy sites, the Padmasambhava cave Zangyag Drag and the nearby Zangyag Nunnery²³⁰ on Riwo Tsenga became their temporary refuge.

The Father's Family

Ani Lochen was in her early twenties when she arrived in Lhasa in the late 1880s. During her short stays in the capital, there seems to have been little contact between her and her father's relatives, the House of Kunzang Tse (Kun bzang rtse). The head of the family at the time was Rinchen Wangyal (Rin chen dbang rgyal, 1874-1927). He was a scholar of history and literature and served as a minister (*bka' blon*) from 1914-1921.²³¹ In Tibet, illegitimate children were often welcomed into the families of either parent. Since Lochen had been on pilgrimage to distant regions all her life, little contact had been established with her kinsfolk. The unstable relationship between Lochen and her father, as well as her mother's Sherpa or possibly Tamang ethnicity and 'low birth', may be reasons why the daughter was not immediately embraced by her father's aristocratic relatives.

²³⁰ Ibid.:188. Zangs yag Nunnery had c. twelve nuns.

²³¹ Petech 1973:93 and Goldstein 1989:102-103. Khe smad is another name of the Kun bzang rTse Family.

Gyagari Dorje Phagmo

Thus, Ani Lochen found herself in Lhasa, clad in a ragged cotton dress, without any material resources, with no place to live, without a network of relatives and without a root-lama. She was, therefore, desperately in need of new focal points in her life. Depressed and unhappy she continued the search for a permanent residence. Only a month after Pema Gyatsho's death, Lochen sought out the female hermit Gyagari Dorje Phagmo Dekyong Yeshe Wangmo (rGya gar ri rdo rje phag mo bDe skyong ye shes dbang mo, fl. 1886-1909) at Gangri Thokar and humbly requested to be allowed to stay as her disciple. To Ani Lochen's despair, Dorje Phagmo turned down the request. We don't know why, but it was not uncommon for mountain hermits to choose complete solitude. Gyagari Dorje Phagmo also told Lochen not to settle in the nearby Shugseb Monastery, since it belonged to the Gelugpa school.

Thus it was a female religious specialist who broke Ani Lochen's aspirations for a permanent refuge when she most needed it. Utterly discouraged, Lochen promised herself not to turn away those in need.²³² She seems to have kept this oath. Disciples from Shugseb say that unless Jetsun Rinpoche was in strict retreat, they were always welcome at her door, even during the night, with their problems, their thoughts, their needs and their requests for advice and religious teachings.

Turned away at Gangtho, Jetsun Lochen went to Zangyag Drag instead, to stay with her group of fellow devotees. On the forty-ninth day after Pema Gyatsho's death, i.e. early in the fourth month of 1889, she performed a memorial (*sku tshig*) for him there. Thereupon she started a three-year retreat that was to last until the middle or the end of 1892.²³³

Ris med Teachers and Religious Impulses from Kham

During her stay at Zangyag Drag, Jetsun Lochen met several lamas who transmitted to her impulses from Derge (sDe dge) and Nyarong (Nyang rong), both important important centers of the religious revitalization in nineteenth century Tibet, the eclectic *ris med* movement.

²³² Ibid.:200.

²³³ Approximately from the fifth month of 1889 to the fifth or eight month of 1892.

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This important intellectual development emphasized religious tolerance, synthesis and learning.

Around 1889, Tertön Rangrig Dorje (gTer ston Rang rig rdo rje, 1847-1903) alias Kusung Lingpa (sKu gsungs gling pa) from Nyarong came to Zangyag Drag. He was a disciple of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo ('Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, 1820-1892) from Derge, one of the reincarnations of Jigme Lingpa ('Jigs med gling pa, 1730-98).²³⁴ Jamyang Khyentse was a propagator of Nyingma, Sakya and Kagyu teachings and thus a prominent representative of the *ris med* movement. Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's main religious practice was the *Klong chen snying thig*²³⁵ and Rangrig Dorje was a recipient and perhaps also a transmitter of this religious cycle.²³⁶

While Ani Lochen was in retreat at Zangyag Drag during the early 1890s, another of Jamyang Khyentse's disciples, the Fifth Dzogchen Tulku, Thubten Chokyi Dorje (Thub bstan chos kyi rdo rje, 1872-1935) from Chamdo (Chab mdo) came here. He is famous for having made Dzogchen Monastery in Derge an important seat of learning.²³⁷ Thubten Chokyi Dorje was also a disciple of Dza Peltrul Ogyen Jigme Chokyi Wangpo (Dza dPal sprul O rgyan 'Jigs med chos kyi dbang po, 1808-87), as was also his companion, Kham Lama Sangye Tendzin (Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin). In a letter, they promised Ani Lochen that they would confer the teaching of *Bla ma yang tig*,²³⁸ a group of *rdzogs chen* texts by Longchen Rabjam, on her.

Later Sangye Tendzin gave Ani Lochen the oral empowerment of *Bla ma yang tig* at the mansion of the Ragshag (Rag shag) family in Lhasa.²³⁹ Thereupon Lochen took an oath in front of the Buddha in the Jokhang that she would generate the mind of Enlightenment.²⁴⁰

²³⁴ See Gyatso 1998.

²³⁵ A work by 'Jigs med gling pa, *rDzogs pa chen po kun tu bzang po ye shes klong gi rgyud*, *Klong chen snying thig*, Derge ed. vol.ii, ff. 96a-98b. See Karmay 1988a:213-15, 228 and Gyatso 1998. Cf. *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 104, 338, 339, 378, 390, 483, 493. There are several different *snying thig*, e.g. *Klong chen snying thig*, *rJe btsun snying thig*, *sNying thig yab zhi*, *g.Yu thog snying thig*.

²³⁶ See Thondup 1996: 215-221.

²³⁷ Ibid.:256-7.

²³⁸ See Gyatso 1998: 301n. 69.

²³⁹ Note the connection between followers of the rNying ma and the bKa' brgyud schools. The Rag shags were patrons of the Tag lung bKa' brgyud Monastery of lJang, see *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 203.

²⁴⁰ The bodhisattva vow. Three kinds of vows are reckoned in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the *Vinaya* vows of the Prātimokṣa, the bodhisattva vows of the Mahāyāna and the tantric vows of Vajrayāna.

From Lama Sangye Tendzin she also received a number of other religious teachings²⁴¹ and he advised her to take formal ordination as a novice.

These Khampa masters were heavily influenced by Dza Peltrul Rinpoche, who looms large in the history of the Nyingma school and was one of their greatest scholars and adepts. He was recognized as the speech incarnation of Jigme Lingpa, the main figure of the Nyingmapa renaissance of the eighteenth century.²⁴² Dza Peltrul was, together with figures such as Kongtrul Yonten Gyatsho (Kong sprul yon tan rgya mtsho, 1813-1899) and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo among the main figures of the *ris med* movement of the nineteenth century.²⁴³

Peltrul Rinpoche's writings are compiled in six volumes and deal with *rdzogs chen*, tantra, sūtra, poetry and drama. His best known works are *Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*,²⁴⁴ an elaborate instruction on the preliminary practice of Jigme Lingpa's *Klong chen snying thig*, and the *Tshig gsum gnad rdeg*,²⁴⁵ which is considered the quintessence of the *rdzogs chen* teaching. According to Tulku Thondup, Dza Peltrul Rinpoche and his disciples worked towards making Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*²⁴⁶ a regular religious practice among monastics, the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*²⁴⁷ the foundation of the Nyingma tantric tradition and the *rdzogs chen* not only a textual tradition, but a meditative practice.²⁴⁸ Peltrul Rinpoche's works are thus important to all Nyingma practitioners, and were also taught to Ani Lochen by her first root-lama, Pema Gyatsho.

In order to practice all the religious teachings she had received from Lama Sangye Tendzin, Ani Lochen returned to Zangyang Drag to meditate during the winter (c. 1893). In the summer she continued her meditation in various caves at Gangri Thokar. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* became dear to Jetsun Lochen and she says she preached and explained the complete text a hundred times to demons, gods and humans. Thereupon she went to Lhasa where she met Taglung Matrul Rinpoche (sTag lung Ma sprul Rin po che), had her third

²⁴¹ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 204.

²⁴² See Smith 1970:22 and Gyatso 1998.

²⁴³ Smith 1970, Thondup 1996.

²⁴⁴ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 98.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.: 423.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.:204.

²⁴⁷ *sGyu 'phrul gsang ba snying po*, see *ibid.*:414.

²⁴⁸ See Thondup 1996: 201-210.

audience with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama Thubten Gyatsho²⁴⁹ and was ordained a novice by Khen Ngawang Tenpe Nyima (Ngag dbang bstan pa'i nyi ma). Lochen's novice ordination seems to have been a turning-point in her career and was a first step towards a more institutionalized practice of Buddhism. The ordination also triggered spiritual realizations. Not only did Ani Lochen claim to have obtained the *siddhi* of clairvoyance, but she also says she was able to move in space without hindrances.

Pilgrimages in Lhokha, 1894-1904

Around 1894, Ani Lochen set out on a long pilgrimage to Lhokha (Lho kha).²⁵⁰ This trip was to last several years. She stopped at the Nyingmapa monastery Dorje Drag (rDo rje brag) and worshipped at the shrines there. She crossed the Tsangpo to Dophung Chokhor (rDo phung chos 'khor) with its talking Tārā (sGrol ma gsung byon ma). Then she went north of the Tsangpo, to pilgrimage sites in Dragyul connected with Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tshogyal, Dragda Tshogyal Latsho (sGrag mda' mtsho rgyal bla mtsho), Dragyang Dzong (sGrags yang rdzong), Ngadra (rNga sgra) Monastery and Dzong Kumbum (rDzong sku 'bum).

Jetsun Lochen went slowly, begging along the way. She arrived at Samye Chimphu (bSam yas 'chims phu), Samye Zangri (bSam yas zangs ri) and Machig Labdron's residence Zangri Kharmar (Zangs ri mkhar dmar). She was invited to Shagjang, southeast of Lhagyari (lHa rGya ri) in Eyul, and made pilgrimage to Zangmo Ri and Ogyen Phug (O rgyan phug) on the way. At Zangri Kharmar, she performed a six month *rdzogs chen* meditation retreat, built a large *ma ni*-wall around the temple.

In the mid-1890s, about twenty years after he had abandoned mother and daughter, Thongleg Tashi reappeared in his daughter's life. He came to Zangri Kharmar with food for Ani Lochen who was in meditation retreat. Thongleg had another 'wife' now. We do not know if this is Ama Droltsho, the woman with whom Thongleg initiated an intimate relationship in Purang in the early 1870s.²⁵¹ When they arrived at Zangyag Drag, Lochen

²⁴⁹ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 210.

²⁵⁰ These years are described *ibid.*: 245-278.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 62.

says that she knew, through clairvoyance, all the derogatory remarks Thongleg made about her on the way. When she revealed this to him, his faith in her and the *dharma* became strong. He also came to Zangyag Drag to see his daughter around 1902-3, but after that there is no further mention of him in his daughter's autobiography.²⁵²

Around 1896,²⁵³ together with the Lady of Shagjang, Lochen planned a pilgrimage to Tsari, but they changed their minds and went on an extended tour in Lhokha. These pious female pilgrims proceeded to Thradrug (Khra 'brug) in the Yarlung valley, to Jigme Lingpa's residence Tshering Jong (Tshe ring ljongs), to Chongye Pelri Monastery (dPal ri dGon) and as far as Yarlha Shampo (Yar lha sham po). Then they visited Dargye Choling (Dar rgyas chos gling) or old Mindroling (sMing grol gling) and Chasa Lhakhang (Bya sa lha khang), before their return to Zangri and to Langlung (Glang lung) in E. Here Lochen performed rituals together with many nuns from the House of Lhagyari. Thereupon Ani Lochen went to Samye, then to the top of Hepori (Has po ri), to Chimphu and Yamalung (g.Ya' ma lung), before she again arrived in Lhasa around 1897-98.

Taglung Matrul Rinpoche

During the years after her root-lama Pema Gyatsho's death, it was Taglung Matrul Rinpoche who took the dispirited Ani Lochen under his wing. The Taglung Matrul Rinpoche we meet in Lochen's self-narrative is possibly the twenty-seventh abbot at Taglung, whose full name was Matrul Thegchog Jigme Pawo (Theg mchog 'Jigs med dpa' bo). Like Pema Gyatsho, Matrul Rinpoche associated with Khamnyon Dharma Senge and he was a disciple of the *ris med* master Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. Matrul Rinpoche was also one of the few lamas to take part in the memorial rituals for Pema Gyatsho. This was of great significance to Lochen and from the 1890s onwards, she approached Matrul Rinpoche for advice and religious guidance. He became her new root-lama.²⁵⁴

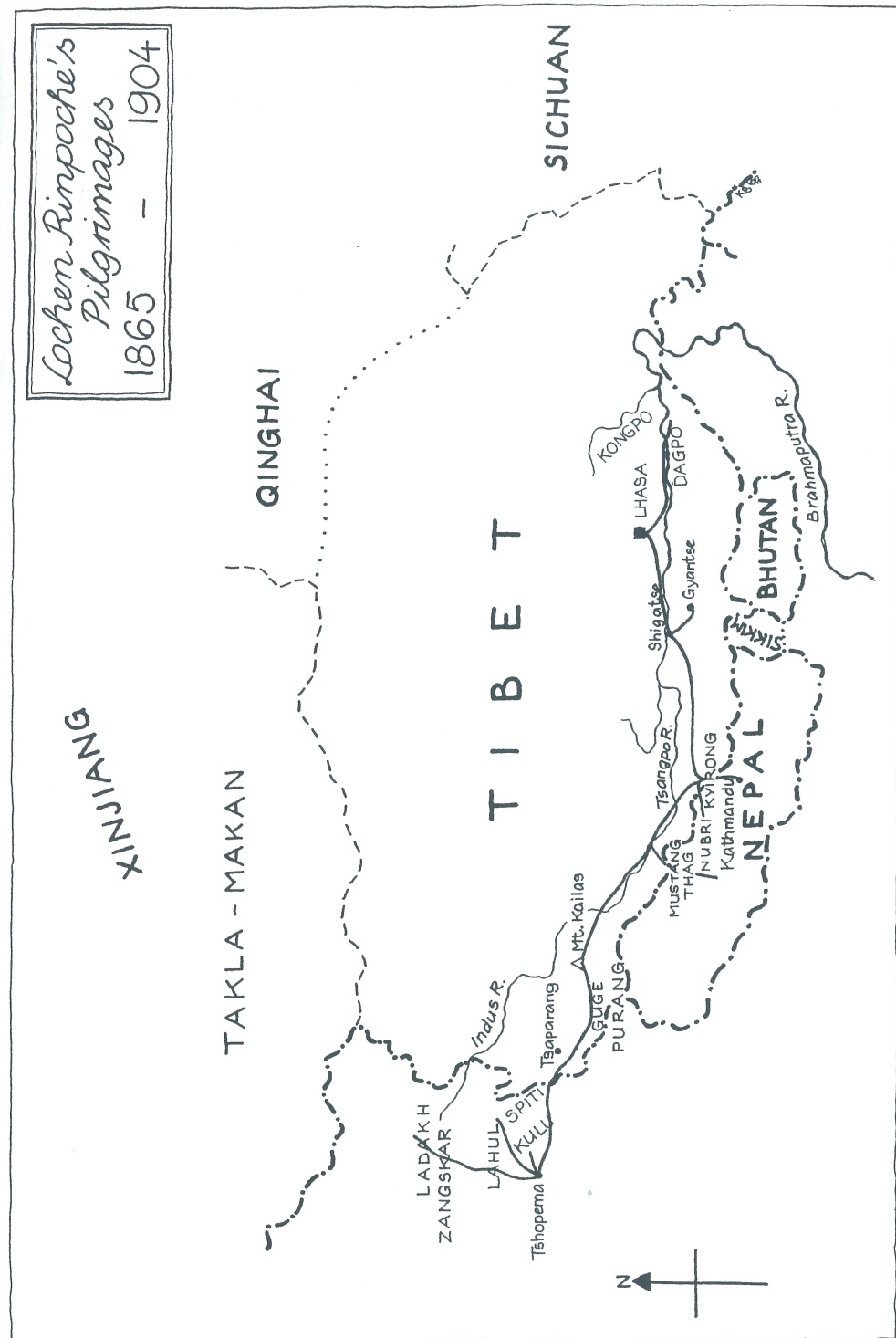
Taglung Matrul stayed at the famous Taglung Monastery, situated in Jang (Byang), north of Lhasa. The monastery was founded in 1180 by Taglung Thangpa Tashipel (sTag lung

²⁵² Informants say that he eventually settled with a younger woman at Shug gseb to be near his lama-daughter.

²⁵³ Every twelfth year (the year of the monkey) is considered auspicious for pilgrimage to Tsa ri, thus the year is probably 1896.

²⁵⁴ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 282.

*Lochen Rinpoche's
Pilgrimages
1865 - 1904*



*Places visited
by Ani Lochen
in Central Tibet.*



NYENCHEN
THANGAL A RANGE

● Reting
● Yangpachen ● Taglung
Dechen Dzong ●

● Garden
Tshurphu ● Sera ● Drepung ● Lhasa ●

OSANGPHU
● Shugseb
● Gyigangri
● DEAGMAR
● Chimphe
● Samye
● Densathil
● OZANGRI

NYEMO Chushul
Opungpo Riwoche

NYANG ● Gyantse

Shigatse ●
Tashilhunpo ●

Sakya ●
Tsibri ● ● Shelkar

Chedeshöl
Mindroling ●
Yamdrag Lake

Thradrug
Tsering Jong ● Lhagyari
Chongye ● Pelti
YARLUNG
EYUL

TSARI

Kyirong

DINGRI

Kathmandu

SIKKIM

BHUTAN

NEPAL

KONGPO

Brahmaputra River

Thang pa bkra shis dpal, 1142-1210)²⁵⁵ and became the seat of the Taglung Kagyu school.²⁵⁶ There were three incarnate abbots at Taglung, Zhabdrung Rinpoche (Zhab drung Rin po che), Matrul Rinpoche and Tsetrul Rinpoche (rTse sprul Rin po che).²⁵⁷ Sons of the feudal lords (*sde dpon*) of Taglung who became monks filled available abbacies.²⁵⁸ The noble family of Taglung, said to descend from the ancient royal dynasty, was closely involved in the affairs of the Taglung Monastery. The glory of the monastery ended in the sixteenth century, however, when most of its land was confiscated by the Gelugpa school.²⁵⁹ The main centers of Taglung Kagyu thereafter became Riwoche Monastery (Ri bo che) in Amdo and Lho Taglung near Yamdrog Lake. The Taglung family built a house in Lhasa near the Jokhang temple which carries the name Ragshag or Dokhar (mDo mkhar).

Matrul Rinpoche was considered a 'powerful' lama who had the ability to communicate with powerful deities.²⁶⁰ He was repeatedly approached by disciples for prognostications and prophecies. In the early 1890s, when Lochen pondered whether to take the novice ordination, she asked Matrul Rinpoche who was then in Lhasa, for advice. It was debated whether a hermit needed to follow the *Vinaya*. Matrul sent her to another lama, Jogpo Tulku (Jog po sprul sku), for his opinion. He told Lochen that since she was a mountain recluse, it was not necessary for her to be ordained.

A prophecy performed by Matrul Rinpoche in the Jokhang finally settled the matter. Matrul put on his *Vinaya* robe in front of the Jowo and rolled up paper-strips with prophecies in a begging bowl which he swirled around. The paper-strip chosen said,

Whether you cut your hair or not, it is the same as before (it doesn't matter). If you get ordained, it will be good! *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 211

Thus, in her late twenties, after spending all her life as an itinerant *yoginī*, Ani Lochen formally joined the Order. As numerous lamas as well as the great Shabkar had done before

²⁵⁵ See Ferrari 1958:82.

²⁵⁶ sTag lung bKa' rgyud is one of the four main bKa' rgyud schools, see Dowman 1988:89-90.

²⁵⁷ All three were invited to the home sGom chen A ni Ye shes sgrol ma (b. 1908) and her family of the nomad tribe of Su rug in gSang gzhang Shog, north of Lhasa, see Havnevik 1989:239-241.

²⁵⁸ Petech 1973:70-9.

²⁵⁹ Dowman 1988:89-90.

²⁶⁰ Deities belonging to the 'jig rten pa'i srung ma group of deities, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956) 1975: 3-4.

her,²⁶¹ she expressed her double allegiance to the tantric and the monastic paths by keeping her hair long while wearing the monastic robe.

Being a beggar hermit, Lochen did not have the material means for the religious offerings, nor the monastic outfit required for her ordination. She was generously helped out by two Jetsunmas from the Ragshag family in Lhasa. They offered her a complete set of monastic robes and the ordination itself was performed by Ngawang Tenpe Nyima on the terrace of the Ragshag house. Ani Lochen was given the religious name Ngawang Dragpa Namgyal (Ngag dbang grags pa nnam rgyal).²⁶² We know very little about these two pious noblewomen; they seem to have been ordained nuns and Matrul Rinpoche was their root lama. When Matrul Rinpoche was dying, one of the Ragshag Jetsunmas stayed with him at Taglung. Thus a close connection between the Ragshag family and the Taglung Monastery was maintained in Lochen's days.

During the 1890s Matrul Rinpoche also associated with and functioned as the master of the community of religious specialists at Zangri Kharmar, the residence of Machig Labdron. Zangri Kharmar was repeatedly visited both by Ani Lochen and her religious friends. Apparently her late lama Dharma Senge had a meditation cave there called Darseng Dragphug (Dar seng brag phug) after him. The Zangri Khenpo is described as a religious companion and may have been in the entourage of Pema Gyatsho.²⁶³

Matrul Rinpoche also turned up at the Padmasambhava cave Zangyag Drag and the Zangyag Nunnery and associated with the nuns there. Another famous lama, Kathog Situ Chokyi Gyatsho (Kah thog Si tu chos kyi rgya mtsho, 1880-1925), who came to Zangyag Drag around 1918, expressed his dissatisfaction with this site because of impurity accruing from the women (i.e. nuns) staying there.²⁶⁴ Neither were Ani Lochen, the Ragshag Jetsunmas and the Zangyag nuns the only female disciples of Matrul Rinpoche. The Drugpa Kagyu nun Gomchen Yeshe Drolma was given her religious name Yeshe Lhatso (Ye shes lha tsho) by Matrul Rinpoche.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Ricard 1994: 107-108.

²⁶² *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 212.

²⁶³ Ibid.: 246, 259.

²⁶⁴ *KaSi*:150.

²⁶⁵ Havnevik 1989:241.

Matrul Rinpoche was a Kagyupa and it is interesting to note the close association between adherents of the Kagyu and the Nyingma traditions. Matrul combined religious teachings from both schools, as did his disciples. From him, Lochen received a transmission of the complete *Klong chen snying thig* along with religious teachings of the Taglung Kagyu school.²⁶⁶ Thus Matrul Rinpoche, too, was a follower of the *ris med* tradition.

Even though Jetsun Lochen did not see Matrul Rinpoche during his last days, she firmly believed that they communicated through dreams and visions. The year Matrul died (around 1915), Ani Lochen dreamt that she arrived in Taglung and met her master there. Later, one of the Ragshag Jetsunmas told her that Matrul had had a vision as well, of Lochen having come to Taglung. The Jetsunma said that Lochen had even marked a 'treasure-door' at Taglung with the letter *Hri* written in red ink and that this 'treasure-door' was still visible.²⁶⁷

During the first phase of their relationship, Matrul Rinpoche did not think highly of his female disciple. When there were rumors that she was the reincarnation of the great Yeshe Tshogyal, he dryly commented that Ani Lochen was only the reincarnation of insects killed under Tsogyal's feet.²⁶⁸ Matrul gradually changed his opinion. When Lochen behaved oddly after her novice ordination, Matrul Rinpoche tried to make sense of the incomprehensible mutterings she uttered day and night. He wrote down Ani Lochen's words and realized that his disciple had spoken in Sanskrit. Her statements also seemed to contain prophecies for the future. Apparently Lochen had been 'possessed' by a deity of Indian origin.²⁶⁹ Later still, Matrul became convinced that Ani Lochen was the reincarnation of Machig Labdron.

The lama-disciple relationship between Matrul and Lochen lasted for at least twenty-five years. During this time, Ani Lochen did not take any major decisions without consulting him. While on pilgrimage in Lhokha, Matrul Rinpoche performed numerous religious favors for her. While staying in Lab in E, the native area of Machig Labdron, Lochen seemed to be mad (*smyo ba*). A lama from Kham prophesied that it would help if a trident (Skt.

²⁶⁶ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 211.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*:368.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*:364.

²⁶⁹ Berglie 1984:55-59.

khaṭvāṅga), one of the attributes of some of the 'protector deities' (*dharmapāla*), was put in her hand. Apparently Lochen was troubled by malignant spirits which the trident was believed to help suppress.²⁷⁰

The trident was, however, considered useless unless blessed by a powerful lama. Thus Jetsun Lochen sent it to Matrul in Taglung. Also when Jetsun Lochen wanted to build a *ma ṇi*-wall around Zangri Kharmar, she asked Matrul Rinpoche for a prognostication regarding the auspiciousness of the project. Again at Zangyag Drag, in what appears to have been a state of religious frenzy, Lochen behaved so strangely that Tshentshar was afraid her daughter had definitely become insane. Matrul was again asked for a prophecy and he told Lochen's mother and female companions not to worry,

What she does, she should be allowed to do, she will become one who is not like others! *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 282

Matrul Rinpoche was a 'crazy *siddha*' himself and thus had tolerance for queer behavior in his female disciple, too.²⁷¹ Madness is a recurrent theme in Lochen's narrative; she herself manifested such behavior a number of times, as did her disciples Tharchin Wangmo (mThar phyin dbang mo)²⁷² and Ani Lochen's relative Rigdzin Tamdrin Wangmo (Rig 'dzin rta mgrin dbang mo). Their apparent madness occurred when practicing yoga and breath control. Manipulating the wind (*rlung*) through the channels (*rtsa*) of the body is considered a dangerous practice, disharmony and dispersal of wind into minor channels may occur, which may lead to the practitioner's death.²⁷³ The ascetic Rigdzin Tamdrin Wangmo died prematurely at nineteen during such yogic practice. Per-Arne Berglie writes that madness is evident also in the initial stages of possession. Tibetans and Sherpas believe that if a medium has impure channels, they will burst when a deity enters and death will occur.²⁷⁴

Back to Lhasa and Zangyag Drag

²⁷⁰ Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956) 1975: 16 and Ricard 1994: 271n. 40.

²⁷¹ For a discussion of the unconventionality of Tibetan adepts, see Gyatso 1998: 207-8.

²⁷² She later became regularly possessed by the female deity rDo rje g. Yu sgron.

²⁷³ See Gyatso 1998:192.

²⁷⁴ Berglie 1983:18.

After her pilgrimage to Lhokha, Ani Lochen returned to Lhasa around 1898. Now some years followed when she stayed in meditation for months in Zangyag Drag, interrupted by shorter excursions to Lhasa and to Nechung Monastery. She also went on pilgrimage to Nyemo and returned to Zangyag Drag around 1902. Sometime during these years Ani Lochen appeared to be dead for three weeks while experiencing a journey to the realms of the dead.²⁷⁵ She continued to practice *gcod* at charnel grounds and to meditate in solitary caves. She now initiated a spiritual relationship with another lama, Thrulshig Rinpoche, and she also met great masters such as Dzatrul Ngawang Tendzin Norbu (rDza sprul Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu, c. 1867-1940) and Zhechen Rabjam Rinpoche (Zhe chen rab 'byams rin po che).²⁷⁶

Thrulshig Rinpoche

Thrulshig Rinpoche ('Khrul zhig rin po che, d. c. 1923) was yet another 'crazy *siddha*' (*grub smyon*)²⁷⁷ who eventually became Ani Lochen's root-lama after the death of Pema Gyatsho. As Pema Gyatsho had been, he was in the teaching-lineage of Shabkar. He combined Drugpa Kagyu and Nyingma practices. Lochen met him in the late 1890s and joined his entourage for a few years before she decided, around 1903-04, to live a settled life at Shugseb, meditating and teaching.

Thrulshig Rinpoche's seat was Zhade Dongag Ling (Zhva sde mDo sngags gling) Monastery near Yamdrog lake.²⁷⁸ This monastery appears to have belonged to the Drugpa Kagyu school, but later became a Nyingma institution. The Thrulshig we meet in Lochen's narrative, whose full name was Kunzang Thongdrol Dorje (Kun bzang mThong grol rdo rje), was the Tenth Thrulshig reincarnation.²⁷⁹ He was also called Thrulshig Donga Lingpa ('Khrul zhig mDo snga gling pa), Yamdrog Zhade'u Tulku (Yar 'brog Zhva de'u sprul sku) and Terchen Chokyi Gyalpo (gTer chen Chos kyi rgyal po).

The Tenth Thrulshig was known to be the reincarnation of Chingkar Donyo Dorje (Phying dkar Don yod rdo rje), a teacher and a disciple of Shabkar. Chingkar (the Ninth

²⁷⁵ *rJe btsun nam thar*, 279. See also *ibid.*: 285ff., 391, 435.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: 332, 332.

²⁷⁷ Lo chen's mother called Ma sprul rin po che and 'Khrul zhig 'the two *grub smyon*', see *ibid.*: 369.

²⁷⁸ Cf. *rJe btsun nam thar*, 493.

²⁷⁹ Samuel 1993: 314.

Thrulshig) was known by the name Guyang Lode Dechen Dongag Lingpa (Gu yangs blo bde bde chen mdo sngags gling pa). Chingkar started his career as a follower of the Gelug school and became a *dge bshes* of Sera Monastery. He gave up his robes, however, and became a beggar *yogin* and *terton* (*gter ston*) in the Nyingma tradition.

The Tenth Thrulshig was active propagating a religious cycle called the *Yang ti nag po* in Central Tibet around the turn of the century. The *Yang ti nag po gser gyi 'bru gcig*²⁸⁰ belongs to the most esoteric section of Ati Yoga or *rdzogs chen*. It focuses on the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities and the stages of *rdzogs chen* and includes instructions for meditation in complete darkness.²⁸¹ The *Yang ti nag po* is considered a treasure (*gter*), and the Eighth Thrulshig reincarnation, the second Dungshtsho Repa (Dung tsho ras pa),²⁸² is said to have discovered the Yidam (Yi dam) section,²⁸³ while the Ninth Thrulshig, Chinkar Donyo Dorje discovered the Lama (Bla ma) and the Khandro (mKha' 'gro) sections. The Tenth Thrulshig was also a *gter ston* and while in Nepal, he rediscovered treasures (*yang gter*) hidden by Chinkar Donyo Dorje.

The first time the Tenth Thrulshig is mentioned in Lochen's self-narrative is when he arrived at Zangyag Drag around 1898, where he told the female hermits to build a cell for dark meditation retreat (*mun khang*). He promised to come back to teach them, presumably on the *Yang ti nag po*. The nuns built the retreat cell, but for some reason, Lochen and her companions did not invite the lama.

Jetsun Lochen met Thrulshig again in Lhasa around 1899, where he maintained a close relation with several noble families. At the mansion of the Lhading (lHas lding) family arrangements for dark meditation had been made. At the time, the head of the family was Kelsang Nyima (bsKal bzang nyi ma) who was married to Namgyal Dorje (rNam rgyal rdo rje) of the Ngapho (Nga phod) family.²⁸⁴ In Lhasa, Thrulshig also functioned as a lama for the Zurkhang (Zur khang) family and he was invited to Powo Lingga (sPo bo gling ga), possibly

²⁸⁰ See Smith 1972.

²⁸¹ Dark retreat connected to *Yang ti nag po* was also performed by the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud nun, sGom chen Ye shes sgrol ma in her youth, see Havnevik 1989 (appendix).

²⁸² There seem to have been two Dungshtsho ras pa, see Smith 1972.

²⁸³ See Ricard 1994: 63n. 17 and *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 329.

²⁸⁴ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 198.

one of Zurkhang's mansions. Here, Jetsun Lochen received the complete *Yang ti nag po*, and she alternated between receiving instruction and meditating in the dark.

A large group of devotees gathered around and traveled with the eccentric Thrulshig Rinpoche. Ani Lochen, too, joined the group. At one occasion, Thrulshig and his entourage stayed at Draglha Lughug (Brag lha klu phug), a temple situated on the northeastern side of the Chagpori (lCags po ri). The temple is connected with Songtsen Gampo, Padmasambhava and Palden Lhamo (dPal ldan lha mo). A famous disciple of Thrulshig, Dzatrul Ngawang Tendzin Norbu,²⁸⁵ also arrived with a large group of servants. Dzatrul Ngawang Tendzin Norbu initiated the building of Dzarong (rDza rong) Monastery in Dingri and its several daughter-monasteries in Nepal, Thame, Rongphug (Rong phug), Tengboche (sTeng po che), Tagshingdu (Drag shing mdo) and Chiwong. He was the teacher of the present Thrulshig reincarnation, Ngawang Chokyi Lodro (Ngag dbang chos kyi blo gros, b.c. 1924), alias Kunzang Thinley Drodul Tsai (Kun bzang phrin las 'gro 'dul rtsal).

While the high Nyingma lamas stayed in or near the Draglha Lughug (Brag lha klu phug) Temple, Ani Lochen meditated in a wooden box at Thigsagang (Thig sa sgang), the charnel ground below Drepung Monastery. She also went to the charnel ground of Yuloko (g.Yul lo bkod) to practice *gcod*. Thrulshig's servants also stayed there and Jetsun Lochen comments on their odd clothing; they were wearing only their underwear (*chu ras*). Apparently Thrulshig's disciples were as unconventional as their master.

Ani Lochen also followed Thrulshig Rinpoche on a pilgrimage to Nyemo. When Thrulshig went to Tshurphu (mTshur phu), Lochen was left behind in a hermitage because she was sick. Thrulshig then went to Khareg Jomo Dro (mKha' reg jo mo gro), a holy site connected with Yeshe Tshogyal. He was also invited to Sholkhang Zhirab Ling (Zhol khang gzhis rab gling), an estate belonging to the noble Sholkhang family in Lhasa. On his way back to Yamdrog, Thrulshig stayed at Dechen Chokhor (bDe chen chos 'khor), a large Drugpa Kagyu Monastery near Gongkar (Gong dkar).²⁸⁶ Either exhausted by illness, or for other reasons, Ani Lochen decided to leave Thrulshig's group and returned to Zangyag Drag around 1903.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.: 243.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.: 336.

1.3.4. First Phase at Shugseb and Togden Semnyi, 1904-1922

When the British soldiers arrived in Central Tibet in 1903-4, the frightened Lochen collected her few belongings at Zangyag Drag to settle at Shugseb. The autobiography now changes character, from being a narrative of pilgrimages to a story of settled life in a combined hermitage and monastery. The main focus is now the religious practices, the long meditation retreats, visions and miracles, the teaching of disciples, high lamas visiting and religious teachings imparted. We also learn about wealthy aristocratic patrons of the nunnery. Events related in this part of the autobiography are difficult to date as the chronological structuring of the narrative is haphazard. Jetsun Lochen keeps jumping back and forth in her memory.

Shugseb Monastery

When Lochen and her companions, a core of Pema Gyatsho's female disciples, wanted to settle at the largely deserted Shugseb Monastery at Gangri Thokar, they had to ask permission from the Gelugpa Beser Monastery situated on the northern side of the Gangri Thokar ridge. At the time, some nuns, apparently Gelugpa, were staying at Shugseb. They strongly disliked the presence of the Nyingmapa ascetics and a complaint was sent to Beser. In the dispute, a local landlord of Tshelna (Tshal sna) mediated.

Uncertain how to proceed in this delicate conflict, Ani Lochen also asked Taglung Matrul for a prediction about her permanent residence. The choices were Zangri Kharmar, Zangyag Drag, Khareg Jomo Dro and Shugseb. In accordance with prognostication and the command of Matrul Rinpoche, she settled for Shugseb and was eventually allowed to stay.

Togden Semnyi Rinpoche

Apart from Matrul and Thrulshig, a third senior *yogin* became Lochen's root-lama during the first two decades of the new century. This was Togden Semnyi Rinpoche, whom Lochen met around the turn of the century. It was Lochen's father, Thongleg Tashi, who first brought Semnyi Togden to Zangyag Drag to meet his daughter. At the time, Lochen was in



Shugseb Nuns in Vinaya robes.



Longchen Rabjampa's cave at Gangri.
Photo: C. Eusel, 1993.



Shugseb Nunnery.
Photo: S. Karmay, 1987.



Nuns in the assembly-hall at Shugseb.
Photo: S. Karmay, 1987.

meditation retreat and could not receive them. Lochen met Semnyi again at Shugseb. He strongly supported Jetsun Lochen and her companions in their dispute with Beser Monastery. It is interesting to note that at first only Semnyi and his attendant were authorized to stay at Shugeb, but the lama argued to be allowed to settle as the lama of the nuns headed by Jetsun Lochen.²⁸⁷ It may not have been insignificant that Ani Lochen and her companions were able to offer a yearly donation to Beser of one hundred *khal* of barley. This grain was given to the Nyingmapa hermits by noble families in Lhasa, the House of Yuthog (g.Yu thog) and the House of Thonpa (Thon pa) or Labrang Nyingpa (Bla brang rnying pa).

Togden Semnyi moved into the lama-residence above the monastery's assembly hall, while Ani Lochen stayed in the room of the caretaker. Later she moved to a small meditation cell to the west of temple. Semnyi Rinpoche was, according to gender expectations in Tibetan culture, installed as the lama. Had Ani Lochen been a male, she might have acquired this position. Like Togden Semnyi, she was highly qualified, had met some of the most important masters of her time, had received their religious instruction, had practiced meditation retreats for years and was in demand by devotees. Jetsun Lochen seems to have been even more popular than Togden Semnyi. Locals sent for Lochen when sick, and high lamas and nobles alike came to her for religious instruction and guidance.

We do not know Togden Semnyi's birth date, but we assume that he was Lochen's senior, maybe by some twenty years. Neither do we know when he came to Central Tibet. It is possible that he stayed for some time at Tshering Jong, Jigme Lingpa's seat in the Yarlung Valley. Tshering Jong seems to have been a nunnery and Togden Semnyi explicitly told the nuns at Shugseb to send his silver reliquary *stūpa* there.

Semnyi Rinpoche came from the Dzachukha (rDza chu kha) Valley situated to the northwest of Derge in Kham. When young, he had stayed in Dzagyal Gon (rDza rgyal dgon),²⁸⁸ a monastery established around 1830 by the first Dodrubchen Jigme Thinley Woser (rDo grub chen 'Jigs med phrin las 'od zer, 1745-1821) and Jigme Gyalwe Nyugu ('Jigs med rgyal ba'i myu gu, 1765-1843).²⁸⁹ Dzagyal became a vigorous and influential monastery in

²⁸⁷ Ibid.:366.

²⁸⁸ The rDza lung Nunnery established by Rig 'dzin nus ldan rdo rje in the 'Brong pa smad area of Nang chen in Kham may be associated with rDza rgyal dgon. There were two famous nuns at rDza lung, dPal chung (d. 1960s) and Yag dge Kun bzang sgrol ma. These nuns followed the *Vinaya* strictly, see Havnevik 1989:73, 74-5.

²⁸⁹ Thondup 1996: 155, 171.

the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁹⁰ It is unlikely that Togden Semnyi met Gyalwe Nyugu at Dzagyal Monastery. He might, however, have met Gyalwe Nyugu's famous disciple, Dza Peltrul, who stayed near Dzagyal during the latter part of his life.²⁹¹

Among religious teachings offered by Semnyi to Lochen were several works composed by Jigme Lingpa, the *Klong chen snying thig* and the *Yon tan mdzod*. The *Yon tan mdzod* is his large work on the nine ways of the Nyingmapa school. First and foremost, Togden Semnyi was Jetsun Lochen's *Nying thig* master, as Pema Gyatsho had been earlier.

Semnyi Rinpoche followed the example of Jigme Lingpa and of Peltrul Rinpoche, who lived humble and simple lives. Peltrul Rinpoche is said to have had no possessions, not even books, and he taught that material wealth is a serious obstacle to spiritual progress.²⁹² Poverty had also been Jetsun Lochen's life-style since childhood, both through necessity and choice. Disciples say she gave away her few belongings. Semnyi Rinpoche advised Jetsun Lochen to follow the path of the 'hidden yogin' and the words of Dza Peltrul became a guide also for her,

Hide your body and stay alone on a desolate mountain! Hide your speech, do not talk, and cut your relations! Hide your mind, only see your own mistakes nakedly!

rJe btsun rnam thar, 366

Jetsun Lochen explicitly states that during the twenty years she knew Semnyi Rinpoche, she stayed mainly in solitary meditation.²⁹³ When lamas and disciples came to see her, they were sent away and Semnyi Rinpoche was accused of hiding her.²⁹⁴

Jetsun Lochen never questioned the authority of Semnyi Rinpoche. She refers to him as her Lama Rinpoche and says that until his death, she served him in every possible way.

²⁹⁰ Thubten Nyima maintains that it was a small, but influential monastery. We also know (Thondup 1996: 206, 207) that several famous lamas came here e.g. the Third rDo grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma (1865/7-1926) arrived here at the age of eight in 1872 and the Fifth rDzogs chen rin po che, Thub bstan Chos kyi rdo rje (1872-1935), came around 1885. Cf. *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 337.

²⁹¹ Thondup 1996: 205.

²⁹² Ibid.: 204, 209.

²⁹³ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 394. Lo chen mentions meditation retreats for at least six years, a winter retreat (c. 1904, *ibid.*:337), a three-year retreat around 1905-1907 (*ibid.*:338), and a *ma pi* retreat during the winter (c. 1908, *ibid.*:338). She says she was for some years in strict retreat (*ibid.*:378) at the time when Gang shar rin po che came to Shug gseb (c. 1913), started a one-year meditation teachings given by Ka thog Si tu in 1918-19 (*ibid.*:389) and a *phur pa* retreat for one year (c. 1920, *ibid.*:391).

²⁹⁴ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 397.

Through their daily contact, he became Jetsun Lochen's most trusted master until his death in the 1920s. But although Semnyi was the main lama, Lochen Rinpoche, too, functioned in this capacity. When young girls came to Shugseb to be ordained, both Semnyi and Lochen received them. Semnyi knew Lochen's abilities and seems to have supported her generously. They functioned as masters side by side, each acknowledging the other's qualifications. Both were unpretentious, 'hidden practitioners' and instead of working against each other, cooperated for their own mutual benefit and that of their disciples.

At the end of the first decade of the new century Tshentshar handed over the responsibility for her daughter's spiritual welfare to Semnyi Rinpoche. Thus Lochen was ranked and positioned herself second to Semnyi. All along, Jetsun Lochen kept a low profile and repeatedly sent her disciples to him.²⁹⁵ According to ex-nuns from Shugseb, Lochen Rinpoche's ability to make others more important than herself, a basic principle in mind-training (*blo sbyong*)²⁹⁶ along with her compassion, were the hallmarks of her qualities as a religious master.

Semnyi Togden referred to himself as a simple Khampa who knew nothing.²⁹⁷ He had no substantial institutional backing, apart from the hardly prestigious position as the lama of *yoginīs* and nuns. Semnyi Rinpoche was a *togden* (*rtogs ldan*), a religious practitioner who had gained spiritual insight through religious practice rather than through the study of philosophy and logic. The characteristic appearance of a *togden* is the coil of matted hair on top of the head symbolizing spiritual power as well as allegiance to the tantric path.²⁹⁸ Lochen describes Semnyi as a highly qualified secret *yogin* (*shas pa'i rnal 'byor*). To give evidence of his high level of religious realization, Lochen narrates that once, when she came to clean Semnyi's retreat cell, she could not find him, indicating that he had acquired the *siddhi* of invisibility.²⁹⁹

Semnyi was also a *terton* and one of his mind-treasures (*dgongs gter*) is named *Gu ru drag po rta khyung gi tshe sgrub rigs lnga bcud bsdus*. It was revealed at a time when

²⁹⁵ I.e. Gang shar rin po che and Rig 'dzin rta mgrin dbang mo, see *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 381 and 373.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.: 96, 279. For mind-training (*blo sbyong*), see Ricard 1994: 136, 298, 357, 415, 547 and Sweet 1996.

²⁹⁷ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 400.

²⁹⁸ See the photo of the Bon po tantric *yogin*, the back cover of Kværne 1995 and the bKa' brgyud pa *yogin* in Beyer (1973) 1978.

²⁹⁹ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 367.

Lochen had one of her experiences of traveling to the realms of the dead.³⁰⁰ When she returned to consciousness, Semnyi Rinpoche made a prediction and he revealed the mind-treasure. At the time Semnyi also made the prognostication that Lochen would live as long as Machig Drubpe Gyalmo (Ma cig grub pa'i rgyal mo), one of the deities of long life. Thus Jetsun Lochen was instrumental in his revelation of a mind treasure and this event may be interpreted as a symbolic enactment of the tantric union.³⁰¹

Mother Tshentshar's Death

When old, sick and approaching the end, Ani Lochen's mother moved to a cave below Shugseb so that her death would not bring defilement to the nunnery. Decomposing bodies are considered a source of pollution,³⁰² female bodies more than male bodies. When Tshentshar was dying, Semnyi Togden called the nuns back from their pilgrimage. The old woman blessed them all and advised them to trust her daughter as their lama. She died in the fourth month, possibly of 1909, not long before Chinese soldiers invaded Lhasa in 1910.

Tshentshar lived a long life, Lochen says she reached the age of ninety-nine. When she was still alive, her body became smaller and smaller as a sign of her spiritual accomplishment.³⁰³ Altogether, Tshentshar had recited several hundred million *mantras* to Amitābha, a religious practice advocated for laypeople by Dza Peltrul.³⁰⁴ Tibetans say that a new tooth (*dung so*) grows in the mouth of those who recite one hundred million seed-syllables to a deity.³⁰⁵ Tshentshar's death brought about another heavy depression for Jetsun Lochen and she desired to end her own life. She even sought for a location to carry out her desperate act. Through daily practice of yoga, however, Lochen gradually overcame her despair.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.: 391-92.

³⁰¹ See Havnevik 1989:74-75.

³⁰² Ramble 1982:354-55.

³⁰³ Havnevik 1989:72.

³⁰⁴ Thondup 1996: 210.

³⁰⁵ Havnevik 1989:73, 242.

Lamas and Disciples at Shugseb, 1904-1922

Numerous pilgrims came to Gangri Thokar to obtain a share of the 'power' associated with the cave where Longchen Rabjam had lived and produced some of the most famous Nyingmapa works. On their way there, they stopped at Shugseb and came to see Jetsun Lochen and Togden Semnyi Rinpoche. Minling Thrichen (sMin gling khri chen) arrived in about 1907-08, at the time when the female ascetics were restoring the monastery. He offered rituals to empower medicine and unveiled medicine *thangkas* in the assembly hall. During her years of illness (1910-12) the doctor Yuthog (g.Yu thog em rje) came from Lhasa to treat Jetsun Lochen. Thrulshig Rinpoche paid three visits (c. 1910, 1915 and 1922) and the young Gangshar Rinpoche (Gang shar rin po che), too, came several times. Kathog Situ Chokyi Gyatsho Rinpoche from Kham came to Gangtho around 1918-19 and described his meeting with Lochen Rinpoche briefly in his travelogue.³⁰⁶

Another visitor was Chubsang Rinpoche (Chu bzang) from Dorje Drag Monastery came, and around 1920 the well-known lama Dzogchen Khenpo Socho Rinpoche (rDzogs chen mkhan po bSod chos rin po che) arrived. Togden Semnyi was convinced that Socho Rinpoche was the reincarnation of the Indian master Vimalamitra. The Khenpo conferred religious teachings of Longchen Rabjampa, Jigme Lingpa and the Golog master Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje (mDo mKhyen brtse Ye shes rdo rje, 1800-1859) on Jetsun Lochen and the Shugseb hermits. Lochen was also visited by the famous Gyarong Namtrul Rinpoche (rGya rong rNam sprul Rin po che) who imparted his own teachings as well as those of his father Drada Karma (dGra zla Karma). During these years Tshagu Rinpoche (Tsha gu Rin po che) is mentioned several times. Two outstanding female practitioners asked for admittance at Shugseb during these years. The *yoginī* Ogyen Chodzom (O rgyan chos 'dzom, d. 1932) joined the community around 1917 and Thinley Chodron, the daughter of Sonam Wangdu (bSod nams dbang 'dus), the landlord (*sde pa*) at Tshelna (Tshal sna) and Drolma Wangden (sGrol ma dbang ldan), asked to be admitted around 1919.

During the first decades of the new century, Lochen thus lost some of the most significant persons in her life, her mother, three root-lamas and two close disciples. Her mother

³⁰⁶ *KaSi*: 145.

Tshentshar died around 1909 and two of Lochen's close disciples passed away not long after, the lay-disciple Tshewang Gyalpo from Sheldrong (Shel grong) and her relative Rigdzin Tamdrin Wangmo. Lochen herself became very ill and she perceived the years 1910, 1911 and 1912 as inauspicious. Rituals to turn back obstacles were performed (*bsun bzlog*) and on Semnyi Rinpoche's advice, Lochen started a strict meditation retreat for some years (c. 1912-15). Around 1915 Matrul Rinpoche died, Thrulshig Rinpoche passed away in the early 1920s and Semnyi died in the third month of 1922/23³⁰⁷ or possibly 1928 after being ill for three or four months.

Gradually, contact between Lochen and her father's family, the Kunzang Tse, seems to have been established on a regular basis. They became donors to her nunnery. During the first decades at Shugseb, there was so little food that the hermits had to make soup from the religious offerings. On one occasion the Kunzang Tse family offered much *tsampa* for making *tormas*, and Lochen says that these *tormas* were more delicious than any food offered later by noble families. Later on, a Jetsun of the Kunzang Tse family offered donations for the printing of Lochen's autobiography.³⁰⁸

Jetsun Lochen also got in touch with two 'brothers', Peljor (dPal 'byor) and Jigme ('Jigs med), who were monks in Nechung Monastery.³⁰⁹ At some point Peljor moved to Shugseb where he died sometime before 1959. Jigme remained at Nechung and passed away after 1959. We also hear about a female relative, Rigdzin Tamdrin Wangmo, who was Lochen's disciple and an ascetic at Shugseb.³¹⁰ Formerly Nechung was a Nyingmapa monastery, and Nechung's close connection with the Old School continued also in Lochen's time by frequent visits by Nechung monks to Shugseb and Shugseb nuns to Nechung. Today, exile nuns from Shugseb frequently visit the re-established Nechung Monastery in Dharamsala.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.: 408. I suggest 1922/23 based on the chronology of the *rnam thar*. Sems nyid's reincarnation, 'Jigs med rdo rje was, however, born in 1929. The ex-Shug gseb nun, g.Yu sgron says that Sems nyid had died before she entered Shug gseb around 1930.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.: 561.

³⁰⁹ They were called 'brothers' by informants, but were the sons of the brother of Lo chen's father.

³¹⁰ Ibid.: 366. The first part of her name, Rig 'dzin, is the same name as that of Lo chen (Rig 'dzin Chos snyid bzang mo). This indicates that Lo chen's young relative was perhaps ordained a novice, or at least given her religious name by Lo chen.

Thrulshig Rinpoche

After Jetsun Lochen had moved to Shugseb, Thrulshig kept in close touch with his female disciple and invited her repeatedly³¹¹ to his seat Dongag Ling at Yamdrog. Around 1907, he sent a Gyarong monk to Shugseb to escort her there. In spite of insistent requests from the monk, Lochen turned down the invitation. Her legs were bad and she wanted to take care of her old mother. Then, sometime before 1910, Thrulshig himself arrived at Shugseb with his entourage. Jetsun Lochen performed a large obstacle-averting ceremony (*bsun bzlog*) for him, and pleased by the rituals, Thrulshig sang many religious songs (*mgur*).

Later, around 1915, Thrulshig came once more to Shugseb together with Yongdzin Rinpoche (Yongs 'dzin rin po che). They stayed in Sheldrong, a village below Shugseb, as they did not want to undertake the strenuous two-hour hike up to the monastery. Instead, they asked Lochen Rinpoche to come down to meet them. Again, Jetsun Lochen refused, this time because she was in meditation retreat. Thrulshig responded to her refusal with the following message,

It is wonderful to do meditation retreat, but it is strange not to meet your Lama when he comes to your door!
rJe btsun rnam thar, 388

Thrulshig's last visit to Shugseb was around 1920 when he came with the explicit purpose of asking Lochen to come to Yamdrog. Jetsun Lochen was again hesitant. She accepted the invitation, but wanted to go only for a short time, about a fortnight. After Thrulshig left, she kept putting the journey off, and eventually sent a nun to Dongag Ling with presents. The nun returned with the message that the lama had died. We don't know the year of his death, but it is likely to have happened in the early 1920s as his reincarnation was born around 1924.

Thrulshig was known to be an impulsive and unpredictable master and once Ani Lochen tried to escape from his entourage. She was called back and was afraid that Thrulshig would punish her, conditioned as she was by scoldings and beatings by her father and her first root-lama Pema Gyatsho. We never hear that Thrulshig harassed Ani Lochen, on the contrary, their relationship became one of mutual affection. Thrulshig is described as one

³¹¹ C. 1907/08, 1910, 1915 and 1920.

who easily showed his emotions. When the news about Kongtrul Yonten Gyatsho's death in 1899 reached him, he could not stop crying. Lochen mildly reprimanded him and she was the only one among his disciples who dared do so.

In Tibet, the relationship between the guru and the disciple is a bond of strong commitment. Complete submission is demanded in return for religious guidance. Ani Lochen felt allegiance to several lamas and she was greatly troubled by conflicting loyalties. Breaking Thrulshig's command to come to Yamdrog left Lochen shattered when she learnt of his death. She repented by performing annual rituals and meditations to his memory.

Jetsun Lochen and the Crazy Siddhas

When Jetsun Lochen was in her mid-forties, she was an experienced religious practitioner who had spent years in meditation retreat. Still, she was given commands by crazy masters such as like Matrul and Thrulshig. At times, heavy psychological pressure was put on her to make her follow their commands; they asked her to end her meditation to confer religious teachings; to climb down Gangri Thokar when she was in strict retreat and to proceed to distant monasteries in Taglung and Yamdrog. It is an open question whether such pressure would have been exerted on a well-established, middle-aged, male religious specialist.

Delicate role-dilemmas inherent in the Tibetan religious tradition come to the surface here. How does a disciple proceed when several lamas give contradictory advice? When is a religious specialist considered competent enough to be a master in her own right? These role-dilemmas are particularly acute when the master in question is a woman as there are hardly any female role models or institutional precedents to follow. On the contrary, skepticism about the authority of a female master is strong in Tibetan culture, both among layfolk as well as among religious specialists.

Jetsun Lochen's solution was a gradual growth into the role of a lama. This she achieved through a sensitive adaptation and communication with significant others, clerics as well as lay, by modifying the male lama role to suit her own personality and aims as well as those of her disciples. When Lochen refused to follow the commands of the male *yogins*, she distanced herself, not only from the *siddha* path, but also from being told by others what to

do. I believe this marks a turning point in her religious career. The process was to take many years. It was delicately balanced, at times painfully, but gradually it made her a respected lama in her own right.

There were several reasons why Jetsun Lochen became hesitant to involve herself with the crazy *siddhas*. Their disparagement of social conventions and their unorthodox religious practices did not give the stability, the security and the focused attention Jetsun Lochen needed. Her mental condition was easily destabilized and those in daily contact with her, her mother and Semnyi Rinpoche, tried to protect her from the influence of the crazy lamas. Jetsun Lochen talks openly about deep depressions and mental problems. By the *siddhas* as well as by herself, these disorders were perceived as signs of great spiritual insight. From a Western viewpoint, however, Lochen's adult psychological problems may be understood as the result of emotional deprivations and maltreatment when she was a child.

One possible reason for Lochen's hesitance to meet the crazy lamas, was their practice of esoteric tantric rituals. In order to reach Enlightenment in one life and one body, the highest initiations of the Anuttarayoga tantras are considered essential. Both in the Nyingma and Kagyu schools these initiations imply, for a number of practitioners, sexual rituals performed with partners. Many of the lamas Jetsun Lochen associated with had consorts, e.g. Pema Gyatsho, Lhodrag Tulku Drime (Lho brag sPrul sku Dri med), Khyungtrul Rinpoche (Khyung sprul rin po che), Gyarong Namtrul,³¹² Yongdzin Rinpoche,³¹³ Khen Ngawang Norbu (mKhan Ngag dbang nor bu),³¹⁴ Gangshar Rinpoche, Geshe Sogyal Rinpoche (dGe bshes bSod rgyal),³¹⁵ Lama Gyurme Kundrol (Bla ma 'Gyur med kun grol)³¹⁶ and Drubchen Dawa Dorje.³¹⁷ Several of these lamas had female ascetics and nuns from Shugseb as their consorts. Lochen's own mother, Tshentshar, had been the consort of a local Yolmo lama.³¹⁸

The numerous invitations Jetsun Lochen received from crazy *siddhas* may have been invitations for her to take part in esoteric tantric rituals. Lochen Rinpoche was potentially an

³¹² The mother of gLing tshang Sras mo (interview with Thubten Nyima, 1997).

³¹³ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 387.

³¹⁴ O rgyan chos 'dzom and a woman from Lhokha.

³¹⁵ This was Sangs rgyas dbang mo (interview with Khetsun Sangpo, 1995).

³¹⁶ He took the Shug gseb nun 'Jam dbyangs dbang mo as his consort, *ibid.*:431.

³¹⁷ Information from ex-nuns at Shug gseb and Zla ba rdo rje's son. Several informants maintained that rGan 'phrin las was Zla ba rdo rje's consort.

³¹⁸ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 19.

ideal consort. Her deep spiritual insight was no doubt considered suitable for enhancing or nurturing that of a male partner. We know that she was instrumental in the revelation of mind treasures both to Togden Semnyi and Drubchen Dawa Dorje. Enactment of the tantric sexual union often precedes such revelations and we assume that Lochen Rinpoche was a symbolic consort for these lamas.

There has been an ongoing debate in recent feminist works whether male and female lamas are considered of equal religious importance and whether they may take consorts on equal terms. In Lochen's self-narrative there is no mention of any female religious practitioner taking a male consort for her own spiritual advancement. Some of the secret consorts mentioned in Jetsun Lochen's autobiography acquired their religious status first and foremost through their partnership with important lamas. They were either pious laywomen or 'ordinary' nuns and some of them are not even mentioned by name. But there were also others, women who had special spiritual qualities or skills, e.g. the mediums Sangye Wangmo (Sangs rgyas dbang mo) and Tharchin Wangmo or Ogyen Chodzom who was known to be a learned and skilled *yogini*.³¹⁹

Both through their own efforts in meditation and yoga and through living with realized lama-partners and by taking part in their 'spiritual power', several of the female consorts gained a spiritual status of their own. A contemporary example is Khandro Tshering Chodron (mKha' 'gro Tshe ring chos sgron, b. 1925), the consort of a spiritual mentor of Shugseb, Dzongsar Khyentse Chokyi Lodro (rDzong gsar mKhyen brtse chos kyi blo gros, 1893-1959). Khandro Tshering Chodron now lives in Sikkim.³²⁰

There is a marked difference in Tibetan Buddhism in how 'spiritual partnerships' are considered. If the lamas are spiritually advanced, their consorts are believed to be so, too. They are treated with respect and considered *ḍākinīs*. On the other hand, regular nuns and monks cohabiting are scorned as breakers of the monastic vows. This double standard is evident when Khen Ngawang Norbu advised all the female ascetics at Shugseb to take

³¹⁹ If it is correct that rGan 'Phrin las was Zla ba rdo rje's consort, she was another one among the highly skilled nuns chosen as *gsang yum*.

³²⁰ There are several other examples of famous consorts, thus Se ra mKha' 'gro kun bzang dbe skyong dbang mo (1892 or 1899-1952?) was the consort of Padma 'Gro 'dul gsang sngags gling pa (1881-1924), see Havnevik 1989. According to Thubten Nyima, she was also destined to be the consort of bDud 'joms Rin po che, but this was not accepted by his other wife.

ordination as novices, while he himself took the most highly skilled among them, Ogyen Chodzom, as his consort. It may not have been irrelevant that she was also a young and beautiful woman.

Children from such 'spiritual partnerships' were often considered reincarnations of lamas.³²¹ We may ask whether it is the father or the mother who determines the spiritual status of a 'holy child'. When Khen Ngawang Norbu's young consort, Ogyen Chodzom, died, she could not fulfill the prophecy to become the mother of the Sixth Dzogchen Rinpoche. Instead, Khen Ngawang Norbu took another consort, a woman from Lhokha, who became the mother of the Sixth Dzogchen Tulku. Thus in this case, it was the father's parenthood that determined the 'spiritual status' of the child.

We know that Jetsun Lochan was skeptical to the cohabitation of her female disciples with monks and lamas. She tried to prevent Ogyen Chodzom from becoming the consort of Khen Ngawang Norbu. At the same time she recognized the son of Lama Gyurme Kundrol and Ani Jamyang Wangmo as the reincarnation of Togden Semnyi Rinpoche. Drubchen Dawa Dorje took Gen Thinley as his secret consort, but Lochan scolded his son Tsipala Lobsang Gyaltsen (rTsi pa lag bLo bzang rgyal mtshan, b. 1930) when he took up cohabitation with one of her nuns.

Gangshar Rinpoche

The spiritual connection between Matrul Rinpoche and Lochan continued also through one of Matrul's main disciples, Gangshar Rinpoche and through Matrul's reincarnation, Ngawang Thubten Jigme (1916-76). Gangshar stayed at a branch monastery of Taglung called Tshewalung (Tshe ba lung).

Jetsun Lochan first met Gangshar Rinpoche in the presence of Matrul Rinpoche, when Gangshar was a small child. After Matrul's death (c. 1915), Gangshar Rinpoche came to Shugseb with a prophecy from Matrul in his hand. Through clairvoyance Matrul had seen that Jetsun Lochan had been Gangshar's mother in a previous life; Lochan had been the great

³²¹ There are rumors that the daughter of the consort of gGe bshes bSod rgyal was one and that the grand-daughter of the consort of Yongs 'dzin rin po che was a third. The daughter of the present lama at Shug gseb, 'Jigs med rdo rje, is considered a reincarnation of rGan 'phrin las, one of the most important nuns at Shug gseb.

Machig Labdron and Gangshar Rinpoche her son Thonyon Samdrup (Thod smyon bSam 'grub). Matrul's prophecy implied that the physical relationship of mother and son in the eleventh century called for a spiritual mother and son relationship in the present life. Thus Lochen was obliged to help the young Gangshar obtain Enlightenment in one body and one life.³²²

The relationship between Gangshar Rinpoche and Lochen lasted until her death and ex-nuns from Shugseb say he came there every year and stayed for several months. Gangshar also brought a consort there.³²³ Gangshar Rinpoche was particularly interested in the teachings of *gcod*.³²⁴ He was convinced, as Matrul Rinpoche had been, that Lochen was Machig Labdron's reincarnation. Lochen Rinpoche did, however, contradict the prophecy made by Matrul Rinpoche. She felt it was difficult to identify Gangshar's mind because in her opinion, there was no *karmic* connection between the two of them.³²⁵ On one occasion, Gangshar sent Lochen a treasured sacred object that had been in Matrul's possession. It was a bonnet said to have belonged to Labdul Dorje Dronma (Lab 'dul rDo rje sgron ma), another female lineage-holder of *gcod* who lived later than Machig Labdron.³²⁶

When Jetsun Lochen became old and sick, Gangshar Rinpoche came to Shugseb to perform rituals to turn back obstacles (*bsun bzlog*).³²⁷ He also made a prophecy saying that if her disciples installed a life-size statue of Machig Labdron at Shugseb, Lochen would live as long as and be of equal significance with Machig Labdron.³²⁸ The statue was brought from Lhasa and on its 'journey' down to Shugseb it is said to have been accompanied by numerous miracles. Lochen Rinpoche and her disciples had great confidence in Gangshar Rinpoche and when Lochen realized that Dawa Dorje Rinpoche was the reincarnation of her first root-lama Pema Gyatsho, she asked Gangshar to confirm her clairvoyance.³²⁹ Gangshar Rinpoche, too, had many female disciples and the nun sister of the Drigung Kagyu nun Gomchen Yeshe

³²² He says that he, too, had this aim.

³²³ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 427.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*:444.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*:382.

³²⁶ Interview with Thubten Nyima, 1997.

³²⁷ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 432.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*:457.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*:444.

Drolma and her friend were two of them. These nuns meditated in the cave Tongshong Phugpa (sTong gshong phug pa) near Phumdo (Phu mdo).³³⁰

Ambivalence Towards Teaching

Around 1920, Semnyi Rinpoche told Jetsun Lochan to end her retreats in order to teach. According to the *nam thar* she was sixty-one years old, but most likely in her mid-fifties, in any case an old woman by Tibetan standards, before she was formally asked to teach.³³¹ Jetsun Lochan was considered a lineage-holder of a number of religious teachings, among them *gcod*,³³² *Klong chen snying thig*, *rTa phag yid bzhin nor bu*³³³ and *Yang ti nag po*.³³⁴ These were religious cycles transferred to her by previous masters, such as Pema Gyatsho, Dharma Senge, Shabkar's reincarnation Thegchog Thenpa Gyaltshe, Thrulshig Rinpoche, Togden Semnyi Rinpoche and others.

A theme running through Jetsun Lochan's self-narrative is her ambivalence towards her own role as a teacher and as a religious master. She kept telling her disciples that she had no knowledge. When the Lhasa nobleman Chodre and his wife Lady Namgyal requested Lochan to be their root-lama, she said,

You miserable ones, who regard one like me with hopes. In the three realms I am called Ani Lochan, holding the name of *lotsa (lotsava)* who speaks both Indian and Tibetan languages, but I am not one who has accomplished renunciation and realization. The so-called 'Lochan' means '*ma ni* beggar' in the language of To (sTod), that is why your minds have become confused!

rJe btsun nam thar, 472

Also when the young Gangshar Rinpoche was sent to her with a prophecy from Matrul Rinpoche in his hand, Lochan insisted that he take religious teachings from Togden Semnyi.

³³⁰ Havnevik 1989:242.

³³¹ *rJe btsun nam thar*, 397.

³³² According to Khetsun Sangpo, Dharma Seng ge had the root-lineage of *gcod* which was passed on to Lochan who in turn passed it on to Khetsun Sangpo. This appears to be *gCod kyi nam shes*.

³³³ *rJe btsun nam thar*, 283, 420, 492.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*: 395-97.

The disappointed Gangshar Rinpoche would rather sit at the feet of Jetsun Lochén, and had to be persuaded to learn from the Khampa lama.³³⁵

Gangshar Rinpoche was particularly interested in receiving teachings on *gcod* from Lochén Rinpoche. *gCod* had been one of the main religious practices of Lochén since she met her first root-lama Pema Gyatsho in 1877.³³⁶ Since then the One Hundred Empowerments of *gcod*, both the extensive and the short versions, were practiced and taught by her.³³⁷ Lochén and her companions also performed *gcod tshogs* offerings and the main one was called *Tshogs las rin chen phreng ba* of which Jetsun Lochén was considered a main lineage-holder.³³⁸ They practiced *gcod* at charnel grounds (*dur khrod*), fearful places (*gnyan sa*) and mountains.³³⁹ *gCod 'cham* is mentioned in the self-narrative once.³⁴⁰ Ex-nuns from Shugseb informed me that the *gcod* dance was performed by four to ten nuns around dead bodies brought to Shugseb to be taken care of and brought to the charnel ground by the *gcod pa* nuns. Jetsun Lochén also performed *gcod* retreats and a number of fire (*me*) offerings connected to *gcod*.³⁴¹

Several lamas wrote commentaries or revealed treasures (*gter*) related to *gcod* and a number of these texts were important at Shugseb, e.g. an empowerment of *gcod* called *Nam mkha' sgo 'byed* originating with Thangtong Gyalpo (Thang stong rgyal po),³⁴² a mind treasure of Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje called *gCod 'dzin pa rang grol*,³⁴³ a teaching by Dharma Senge called *gCod kyi nram shes*,³⁴⁴ a preliminary teaching on *gcod* from a treasure of Minling Thrichen Gyurme Dorje (sMin gling khri chen 'Gyur med rdo rje, 1646-1714) called *Zab don snying po*³⁴⁵ and a *gcod* text by Minling Lochén Dharma Śrī (sMin gling Lo

³³⁵ Ibid.:381.

³³⁶ There are numerous *gcod* cycles, and *gcod* is practiced by all Tibetan schools apart perhaps from the Sa skya. Also the Bon religion has cycles of *gcod*. According to Gyatso (*PIATS Columbia 1982:338*) the rNying ma *gcod* cycles are classified as *gter ma* or *dag snang*.

³³⁷ *rJe btsun nram thar*, 98, 137, 185, 390, 395, 435, 443.

³³⁸ Ibid.:203.

³³⁹ Ibid.:182, 272, 334.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.:246.

³⁴¹ *rJe btsun nram thar*, 202. Gyatso (*PIATS Columbia 1982:321*) writes that *gcod* does not require meditation retreats, for *me gcod*, see *ibid.*: 135, 186, 262, 330, 460.

³⁴² *rJe btsun nram thar*, 381. See Gyatso 1981 (Ph.D. diss.) and *PIATS Columbia 1982*.

³⁴³ *rJe btsun nram thar*, 390.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.: 423, 487.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.: 493.

chen dharma śrī, 1654-1717).³⁴⁶ A mind treasure of Gyarong Namtrul called *gCod zab don sprin phung* became part of the regular religious repertoire performed at Shugseb on the eighteenth day of every month.³⁴⁷

Jetsun Lochen's persistent efforts in the practice of *gcod* made many lamas, her companions and disciples believe she was a reincarnation of Machig Labdron who had initiated the practice in the eleventh century.³⁴⁸ This was maintained by Taglung Matrul Rinpoche, by Gangshar Rinpoche³⁴⁹ and by Nedo Chopā (gNas mdo gcod pa), a specialist on *zhi byed*³⁵⁰ and *gcod*. Finally Lochen became confident that she was a reïmbodiment of Machig Labdron.³⁵¹ Other lamas, like Semnyi Rinpoche, the King of Lingtshang (gTer chen dBang chen bstan 'dzin) and the Sixteenth Karmapa (Rang byung Rig pa'i rdo rje, 1924-81) maintained that Jetsun Lochen was a reincarnation of Machig Drubpa Gyalmo.³⁵²

Jetsun Lochen was also a lineage-holder of Shabkar's main religious teaching *rTa phag yid bzhi nor bu*. This religious teaching seems to have been given to her for the first time in the late 1880s by Shabkar's reincarnation Thegchog Tenpe Gyaltshen. When Kham Khyungtrul Rinpoche asked Lochen to give him this teaching in 1929, Lochen had neither the text, nor did she know how to make the offering-cakes connected with the rituals.³⁵³ Due to his insistent requests, however, she offered the empowerment, oral transmission and instruction of *rTa phag yid bzhi nor bu*, apparently for the first time. Thus Jetsun Lochen was a lineage-holder for about forty years before she imparted this cycle to others. She soon became known in Lhasa as a spiritual heir of the great Shabkar, and around 1940 a well-known Gelugpa lama and collaborator of Reting Rinpoche, Sera Khardo Tulku, asked her for a transmission of Shabkar's teachings, including the *rTa Phag yid bzhi nor bu*.³⁵⁴

³⁴⁶ Ibid.: 443. According to Gyatso (*PIATS Columbia 1982:338*) the *gCod yul stan thog gcig ma* cycle of sMin grol gling seems to be the only *gcod* teaching included in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*.

³⁴⁷ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 402, 459, 556.

³⁴⁸ See Gyatso *PIATS Columbia 1982* and Kollmar-Paulenz 1993 and 1998.

³⁴⁹ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 378, 381, 394.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.: 262. *Zhi byed* was introduced to Tibet by Pha dam pa Sangs rgyas (eleventh-twelfth centuries) and *gcod* is considered a subsidiary of the larger *zhi byed* cycle which provides the philosophical and meditational basis, see Gyatso *PIATS Columbia 1982:327-28* and Chandra 1996:97-98.

³⁵¹ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 458.

³⁵² Ibid.:392, 459, 460, 491.

³⁵³ Ibid.:420.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.:492.

Likewise, the nun Donyo Drolma (Don yod sgrol ma) from Re Gon (Ras dgon) came to Shugseb in the mid- or late 1920s to request Lochen Rinpoche to give her empowerments and instruction of the *Yang ti nag po* and other religious teachings propagated by Thrulshig Rinpoche. The nun was a disciple of Lama Ure (dBu re) who had been a personal disciple of Thrulshig. Ani Donyo Drolma came with a written testament in her hand, saying that Jetsun Lochen was the only one among Thrulshig's direct disciples who could impart the *Yang ti nag po*. Lochen answered the nun that although Thrulshig Rinpoche had permitted her to transfer the *Yang ti*, she neither had the text nor the necessary miniature religious paintings (*tsak li*) to do so. Thereupon the text and the ritual implements were acquired and Lochen Rinpoche transmitted the *Yang ti*,³⁵⁵ twenty to thirty years after she had received it from Thrulshig Rinpoche. Dark, sealed-door meditation retreat connected to *Yang ti nag po* was also performed by the Drigung Kagyu nun Gomchen Yeshe Drolma at the hermitage Langdong Osel Ling (gLang gdong 'Od gsal gling) in 1950. The instruction was given by a lama called Ngawang Rigdzin (Ngag dbang rig 'dzin).³⁵⁶

Jetsun Lochen's hesitancy to teach and to announce herself as a lineage-holder and religious master reflects the general Tibetan ambivalence towards female talent. While men in the Kagyu and Nyingma orders are entitled lamas and authorized to teach early in their career, and often after their first three-year retreat, this does not happen in the case of women.³⁵⁷ Modesty is a virtue in Tibetan culture and an initial, polite, refusal to accept anything favorable to oneself, be it food, drink or an honored position, is part of highly routinized behavior. Lochen Rinpoche was no exception to this. I would, however, argue that an outstanding male practitioner would be encouraged and expected to become a religious teacher, while eminent women are seldom met by such anticipations.

1.3.5. Jetsun Lochen Becomes the Main Master at Shugseb, 1922-1936

Semnyi Rinpoche's death around 1922 brought about another personal crisis for Lochen and she secretly planned to leave for secluded meditation in a cave. Her elder companions

³⁵⁵ This episode is described, *ibid.*:412.

³⁵⁶ Havnevik 1989:245.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: ch. 3.

pleaded with her, however, to take over the responsibility of Shugseb and Lochen reluctantly gave in to their wishes. She therefore moved to the lama residence and was thus formally recognized as the head of the convent. By now there were about three hundred female ascetics and Lochen says there were many thousand disciples.

Female Disciples

The Yoginī Ogyen Chodzom

Ogyen Chodzom from Lhasa arrived in Shugseb around 1917. She asked to be accepted as Semnyi and Lochen's disciple, whereupon her hair was shaved and she received her religious name. She quickly learnt and practiced all the main Nyingma religious teachings and Lochen taught her the great treatises.³⁵⁸ Soon, Ogyen Chodzom became the head of the instruction (*khrid dpon*) of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (*sPyod 'jug*) and *Yon tan mdzod*³⁵⁹ and taught both the elder and the younger hermits and nuns at Shugseb.³⁶⁰ Semnyi Rinpoche hoped that she would become his heir or representative (*rgyal tshabs*) as the Shugseb lama. Her premature death did not make his wish come true. Thus Semnyi Rinpoche did not seem to have any second thoughts at leaving the responsibility of the convent in the hands of a woman. We wonder why Togden Semnyi did not consider appointing Jetsun Lochen for this position.

In a prophecy revealed to the Dzogchen Khenpo Ngawang Norbu, it was said that Ogyen Chodzom was the incarnation of Dorje Phagmo³⁶¹ and if he took her as his secret consort, he would reveal many treasures from Tsari. It was also predicted that the Fifth Dzogtrul Rinpoche Thubten Chokyi Dorje, who was around sixty years old at the time, would

³⁵⁸ *rJe btsun nam thar*, 388.

³⁵⁹ A large work about the nine ways of the rNying ma pa school written by 'Jigs med gLing pa (1730-98), *ibid.*:216.

³⁶⁰ She also taught the nuns the *Klong chen snying thig* (*ibid.*: 98), the *bShes sprin* (Skt. *Suhrillekha*, *ibid.*:204), the *Gang gi blo gros* (a prayer to Mañjuśrī recited before a religious teaching is given), *Byang chub sems mchog* (a one-verse prayer for arousing *bodhicitta*) and the *Tshig bdun gsol 'debs* (the seven-line prayer to Gu ru rin po che, *ibid.*: 443)

³⁶¹ We do not know whether O rgyan chos 'dzom was considered a reincarnation of rGya gar ri rDo rje phag mo bDe skyong ye shes dbang mo, fl. 1886-1909. If we assume that rGya*gar ri rDo rje phag mo died around 1909 and if O rgyan chos 'dzom was her reincarnation, she must have been born around 1910. If this was the case, she was only a child of seven when she arrived at Shug gseb and twenty-two years old when she died in 1932. Lo chen describes O rgyan chos 'dzom as a young girl with a beautiful body when she came to Shug gseb, *rJe btsun nam thar*, 388.

not die and that his reincarnation, i.e. the Sixth Dzogtrul, would be born. Apparently this meant that a reincarnation would be born before the fifth embodiment died.

When Ogyen Chodzom was requested to become the consort of the Khenpo Ngawang Norbu of Dzogchen, Lochen and the other nuns tried to persuade her to remain at the nunnery. We know that Ogyen Chodzom had recently been ordained a novice.³⁶² Again the ambiguity between the tantric and the monastic paths comes to the surface. Ogyen decided, however, to join the Khenpo in the Melong cave (Me long gzim phug) at Gangtho. She died there on the eleventh day of the last fifth month of 1932 and was not able to fulfill the prophecy to become the mother of a high lama.

Jetsun Lochen describes Ogyen Chodzom as the most outstanding female practitioner at Shugseb. When a boy was born to Ngagcho (Ngag chos), the daughter of the teacher Ogyenla (O rgyan lags) of the Kyire (sKyid ras) school in Lhasa,³⁶³ Lochen Rinpoche recognized him as the reincarnation of Ogyen Chodzom. She gave him the name Chowang Lhundrub (Chos dbang lhun grub). He appears to live in Central Tibet presently, but there is no contact between him and Shugseb Nunnery today.

Gen Thinley

Sometime before 1920, the estate owner of Tshelna, Sonam Wangdu and his wife Drolma Wangden came to Shugseb.³⁶⁴ This was the landlord who had mediated in the dispute between Lochen's group and Beser Monastery. The family built a temple (*lha khang*) at Shugseb and promised to make a statue of Avalokiteśvara inside. They also asked Lochen and Semnyi to accept their daughter as a disciple and requested them to teach her the skills of a *ma ni pa* and to make her a lama of fasting (*smyung gnas kyi bla ma*).³⁶⁵ Their daughter was to become one of the most highly respected nuns at Shugseb, after Jetsun Lochen and Ogyen Chodzom. When the vows of refuge and the hair-cutting ceremony were performed, Semnyi Rinpoche left it to Lochen to give the girl a name. Semnyi maintained it was due to Lochen's *karma* that the girl had come to Shugseb and Jetsun Lochen named her Thinley

³⁶² Ibid.:424.

³⁶³ Ibid.:431.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.:339, 393.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.:393.



Yudonla, ex-nun from Shuqseb.
Photo: H. Havnevik, Bodhnäth 1996.



The Shugseb nun Riadzün Chosang.
 Photo: H. Havnevik, Dharamsala 1995.





Nuns at Shugseb Nunnery.
Photo: C. Eusel, 1993.



Thangka-painters at Shugseb.
Photo: C. Eusel, 1993.



Jigme Dorje Rinpoche and Shugseb Nuns.
Photo: H. Havnevik, Shugseb 1994.



Nun cells at Shugseb.
Photo: H. Havnevik, Shugseb 1994.

Chodron.³⁶⁶ According to a former Shugseb nun, Lochen gave the lesser vows of the lay follower (Tib. *dge bsnyen ma*, Skt. *upāsakā*) taken by young girls when they first enter a convent, while the higher vows of the female novice (Tib. *dge btsul ma*, Skt. *śramaṇerikā*) were given by the male Rinpoche.

When Lochen became crippled and sick, she passed all her religious teachings to Thinley, who became her representative. Thinley Chodron quickly became the teacher of all the nuns. She mainly taught the *Klong chen snying thig*. Several ex-nuns from Shugseb believe her to be a *ḍākinī* (*mkha' 'gro ma*). She is repeatedly mentioned in Lochen's narrative and titles like *sku zhabs* and *rgan* are used to indicate her high status in the nunnery.³⁶⁷

Gen Thinley refused to give up her religious practice when the Chinese tried to force her even when subjected to *thamzing* sessions³⁶⁸ in Chushul Dzong. She was then taken to Drabchi (Grva gzhi) prison in Lhasa, where she stayed for many years.³⁶⁹ Gen Thinley died in prison and it is said that her body remained in meditation position (*thugs dam*) for two days. She came to embody the Tibetan faith and opposition to Chinese rule. It is believed that the daughter of the present lama at Shugseb, Jigme Dorje, is Gen Thinley's reincarnation. This girl, Osel Chodron ('Od gsal chos sgron), was born in 1973. In September 1996 she finished a three-year retreat in Yanglesho (Pharping) near Kathmandu together with eleven other young Shugseb nuns.

Other Lamas from Kham

Not yet sure of her position as the Shugseb Lama, Lochen asked Chonyi Seltong, (Chos nyid gsal stong), the reincarnation of Serta Monastery (Ser rta dgon) in Golog, an area on the border between Kham and Amdo, to stay as Semnyi (Sems snyid) Rinpoche's substitute (*sku tshabs*). He agreed to stay at Shugseb only for one winter. A number of other lamas from Kham arrived, too. Khyungtrul Rinpoche came several times. He later went to Kham with

³⁶⁶ Ibid.: 543.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.: 482, 490, 561.

³⁶⁸ Presumably during the Cultural Revolution. It is not clear when Shug gseb was destroyed.

³⁶⁹ According to one informant, ten to fifteen years.

one of the female practitioners at Shugseb.³⁷⁰ Lama Gyurme Kundrol from the same village and monastery as Semnyi Rinpoche, i.e. Dzagyäl in Dzachuka,³⁷¹ arrived as well. Gyurme Kundrol married a Shugseb nun, Jamyang Wangmo. They had several sons and one of them, Jigme Dorje, was recognized by Lochen Rinpoche as Terton Semnyi Rinpoche's reincarnation. Jigme Dorje was taken to Shugseb in 1933 and taught by Lochen for eighteen years.

In 1931 the Dzogchen Khenpo Ngawang Norbu arrived. He was the one who advised the female hermits at Shugseb to become novices. Thus in the early 1930s, after she had been formally a nun for almost forty years, Lochen Rinpoche made the female hermits at Shugseb become ordained as novices and the loose association of female ascetics turned into an institutionalized nunnery.

1.3.6. Lochen's Last Years at Shugseb and Dawa Dorje Rinpoche, 1936-1951

In 1936 a Shugseb nun had become mentally ill and Lochen Rinpoche could not help her. She felt the need for a powerful lama and was advised to invite Drubchen Dawa Dorje Rinpoche. The descriptions of Dawa Dorje in Lochen Rinpoche's self-narrative are very detailed, more than for other lamas. As Dawa Dorje edited the text, he used the opportunity to include autobiographical passages and to document details of his own religious career. He is thus a co-author of the Gangtok edition of Jetsun Lochen's self-narrative.

The Shugseb nuns were puzzled when Drubchen arrived at Shugseb in 1936, without a servant and in ragged clothes. They had previously observed him in Lhasa, on the Barkor, carrying a child. According to Dawa Dorje's son Tsipala, Jetsun Lochen always called his father 'saint' (*grub chen*). According to informants he was also a *terton*, a rediscoverer of sacred texts or objects.

³⁷⁰ This may be Nor 'dzin dbang mo's mother.

³⁷¹ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 337.

Lochen Rinpoche's faith in Drubchen Dawa Dorje's abilities gradually grew and until her death in 1951, he was often invited to Shugseb.³⁷² In 1937 Lochen Rinpoche recognized him as the reincarnation (*yang srid*) or the representative (*sku tshabs*) of her first root-lama Pema Gyatsho.³⁷³ She also thought him to be an emanation of Nāgārjuna (Klu sgrub).³⁷⁴

Dawa Dorje Rinpoche originally came from Nangchen in Kham, from Terchen Nyima Dragpa's (gTer chen Nyi ma grags pa) monastery Nyidrag (Nyi grags). Dawa Dorje was also known to be a follower of the *ris med* tradition. We do not know when he came to Central Tibet, only that he stayed in Lhasa. He was a layman and had three sons. Two of the sons, Tsipala Lobsang Gyaltsen and Lobsang Jamphel (Blo bzang 'jam dpal) used to be monks. Jamphel disrobed and has become influential in the Chinese-controlled Lhasa administration. Tsiphala, too, disrobed and married a nun from Shugseb. He lives near Drepung Monastery in Lhasa. The third son was recognized as the reincarnation of a lama in Nyidrag Monastery, but he died.

Although outwardly looking like a servant, Drubchen Dawa Dorje was an experienced teacher. The Shugseb nuns received a number of religious teachings from him originating from masters such as Vimalamitra (eighth century), the Nyingma and Bon Terton Gya Zhangtrom (rGya zhang khrom, b. 1016), the Kagyupa lama Gotshangpa, Rigdzin Godem (Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 'phru can, 1337-1408) of the Northern Treasure (*byang gter*) tradition, Rigdzin Jatshon Nyingpo (Rig 'dzin 'Ja' tshon snying po, 1585-1656), the Fifth Dalai Lama, the child Terton Tulku Mingyur Dorje (sPrul sku sMin 'gyur rDo rje, d. aged twenty-two in the seventeenth century), Minling Lochen Dharma Śri, Minling Thrichen Gyurme Dorje, Jigme Lingpa, Lelung Zhepa Dorje (sLe lung bZhad pa'i rdo rje, b. 1697), Nyagla Pema Dudul (Nyag bla padma bdud 'dul, 1816-1872), Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, Tshulthrim Zangpo (Tshul khriims bzang po, late nineteenth century), Mipham ('Ju mi pham rgya mtsho, 1846-1912) and Dza Peltrul.

Dawa Dorje is said to have offered religious teachings corresponding to the disciples' spiritual level, he tutored them individually, he answered their questions and he offered

³⁷² The years mentioned are, 1936, 1937, 1939, 1941, 1942. In 1937 Zla ba rdo rje arrived at Shug gseb together with the Lady of Ka shod, see *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 440, 441, 448, 460-61, 484, 489-90, 495, 545.

³⁷³ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 444.

³⁷⁴ Lo chen herself had visions of Zla ba rdo rje with a snake (*klu*) growing from his head, a manifestation of Nāgārjuna (Klu sgrub), see *ibid.*: 483.

advice when they had problems. Lochen Rinpoche found him so useful that when Garzur Ngedon Tendzin (sGar zur Nges don bsTan 'dzin) from Chang Namru (Byang gNam ru) asked for permission to invite him there, she was hesitant to let the master go.

Drubchen Dawa Dorje was believed to have the ability to communicate with terrifying deities and channel their powers in beneficial ways. According to Khetsun Sangpo, Dawa Dorje had close connections with a temple situated behind the Jokhang, the Meru Nyingba (rMe ru snying ba). The first building at the site is said to have been constructed by Songtsen Gampo (Srong brtsan sgam po) in the seventh century. Supposedly it is the place where Thonmi Sambhota (Thon mi sam bho ta) finished his work on the Tibetan script. In the seventeenth century Meru Nyingba became the seat of the Nechung oracle when he visited Lhasa. Images of Pehar (Pe har), Padmasambhava, five Nyingma protectors, Tsiumar (Tsi'u dmar)³⁷⁵ and Tamdrin (rTa mgrin, Skt. Hayagrīva) are kept there.³⁷⁶

When Dawa Dorje first arrived in Shugseb he diagnosed that harm was done there by a local deity and composed a prayer to pacify it. He also performed many long-life and obstacle-averting rituals (*bsun bzlog*). Several times he was called for when Lochen Rinpoche was sick. Once Jetsun Lochen called him back from Yamdrog. Drubchen came immediately and performed the appropriate rituals, whereupon Lochen Rinpoche manifested herself as the protectress Dorje Yudron. The lama kept the old woman in his lap. He nursed her with milk and medicine and Lochen recovered.³⁷⁷ Dawa Dorje also requested deities such as Yeshe Tshogyal to relieve Lochen Rinpoche from obstacles and the goddess is said to have assisted willingly. A particular ritual performed by Drubchen was said to be so powerful that rainbows appeared; the participants had visions and were inspired to dance all day and night.

Dawa Dorje composed religious texts on *rdzogs chen* and he wrote a commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Suhṛllekha*. He gave instruction on fasting practices according to the Nyingma tradition and taught yoga practices to the nuns. He was a religious poet and singer and according to Jigme Dorje Rinpoche, he composed the verses in Lochen Rinpoche's autobiography. He was also a *terton* and Lochen Rinpoche was instrumental in his

³⁷⁵ A terrifying god (*gnod sbyin*, Skt. *rākṣasa*), one of the old warrior deities of Tibet, the most important medium resides at bSam yas in the Tsi'u dmar lcog dbugs khang. See Chandra 1996:87.

³⁷⁶ Dowman 1988:48-49.

³⁷⁷ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 490.

uncovering of the mind treasure (*dgongs gter*) *Ma mkha' 'gro'i kha rlang thol le ba* or *rTsa gsum dakhi'i srog sgrub*.³⁷⁸

Although many disciples requested Lochen Rinpoche to tell the story of her life, it was to Drubchen Rinpoche that it was finally granted. The recording started in 1937 and ended in the eleventh (month) of the Earth-Ox Year (1949).

Jetsun Lochen's Religious Status

During the 1930s and 40s, Jetsun Lochen's status as a religious master was recognized by several influential clerics in Central Tibet as well as in Kham. Around 1940, the regent Reting Rinpoche arrived and so did a great treasure discoverer, the King of Lingtshang in Derge. Jetsun Lochen exchanged religious teachings with these two masters. Also the young incarnations of Taglung Matrul and Thrulshig Rinpoche came to renew religious teachings transmitted to Lochen Rinpoche by their own former reincarnations. During the 1940s, high lamas such as the Sixteenth Karmapa Rangchung Rigpe Dorje and Zhechen Rabjam Rinpoche from Kham Zhechen Monastery came to meet her.³⁷⁹ So did also the father of the Fourteenth Dalai lama.

Disciples who became very close to Lochen Rinpoche in her old days were Chogdre Dorje Dradul and his wife Lady Namgyal Drolkar. They came to Shugseb in 1939. At least seven members of Shigatse Deleg Rabden's (*bDe legs rab brtan*) family were disciples of Ani Lochen. One of the daughters of Deleg Rabden and his senior wife Norbu Yudron (*Nor bu g.Yu sgron*), Tshering Drolkar (*Tshe ring sGrol dkar*), was ordained a nun at Shugseb. She nursed Jetsun Lochen for many years. Noble Lhasa families supported various building projects at Shugseb as well as religious ceremonies. When the aristocracy, particularly the women, took Jetsun Lochen to their heart, this enhanced her popularity also among ordinary people.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.:545.

³⁷⁹ He was in his thirties when he came to Shug gseb.

1.4. Gender as Reflected in the Autobiography

The relation between gender symbolism and the position of women is very complex and needs to be investigated for each religious group we study. Elevated female symbols are not necessarily paired with high status for women.³⁸⁰ Variables like differentiation of labor, economy, formal secular/religious positions for women and channels of informal power have to be included in our analyses. To get access to gender specific experiences in the autobiography of Lochen Rinpoche, one has to understand the implicit meanings. Many such experiences are, however, also stated openly in the text.

Throughout her life Lochen had a strong connection to saintly women of the past and highly qualified female religious specialists of the present. Jetsun Lochen's first encounter with a female spiritual master was the Amdowa nun Lobsang Drolma (bLo bzang sgrol ma) who became the head lama, and possibly the consort, of the king of Mandi because she was said to have provided the sonless king with an heir. It was Lobsang Drolma who, through her clairvoyance, prophesied about Lochen's spiritual connection with Pema Gyatsho and Shabkar.³⁸¹ Yeshe Drolma (Ye shes sgrol ma), Ani Lochen and her mother's travelling companion in the 1870s, left her friends to seek out another important master of the time, To Khyungpo Repa (sTod Khyung po ras pa). These young women showed a remarkable determination when they walked for months, even years, in the Himalayas searching for root-lamas who could teach them. One of the nuns in Pema Gyatsho's entourage, Ani Osel ('Od gsal), is described as everyone's teacher.³⁸² Ani Osel must have been highly qualified since nuns were hardly ever appointed as teachers.³⁸³ We assume that most of Pema Gyatsho's disciples were female, but even so, for a nun to become the teacher for the whole group is an honorable position. By her side there was also the male teacher Gen Chosang, whom Ani Lochen describes in derogatory terms.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ Bynum et.al. 1986. See also Klein 1995.

³⁸¹ *rJe btsun mam thar*, 83.

³⁸² *thams cad kyi dge rgan yin*, *ibid.*:95. Either she was the teacher of all of Padma rgya mtsho's disciples or only the women.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*: 88, 95.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*:89, 108-9, 144.

In the mid-1880s Ani Lochen met one of the Sakya Jetsunmas and was greatly impressed. Ani Lochen and the Sakya Jetsunma both had great faith in the 'non-sectarian' religious master Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo.³⁸⁵ In the 1890s Lochen had close contact with two Ragshag Jetsunmas in Lhasa, who, like Ani Lochen, were the disciples of Taglung Matrul Rinpoche. One of the Ragshag Jetsunmas was called Yeshela (Ye shes lags).³⁸⁶ There was another famous woman in the Ragshag family, the daughter of Tshewang Norbu (Tshe dbang nor bu, d. 1902) who retired from the office of minister (*bka' blon*) in 1896. She married the king of Derge in 1870.³⁸⁷ Around 1889-90, Jetsun Lochen went twice to meet Gyagari Dorje Phamo Dekyong Yeshe Wangmo (fl. 1886-1890) at Gangtho, likewise a follower of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, and received religious teachings from her. In the mid-1890s Ani Lochen spent time with a personal disciple of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, Lama Jamyang Rinpoche (Bla ma 'Jams dbyangs rin po che). Once they were the guests of the Master of Lhagyari, who sponsored transmissions of teachings *rdzogs chen* by Kongtrul Yonten Gyatsho. Ani Lochen says that many of the Jetsunmas of the House of Gyari were there, too. Apparently these Jetsunmas were nuns. At the time Ani Lochen gave instruction on yogic breathing (*rtsa lung*).³⁸⁸

During Jetsun Lochen's independent pilgrimages starting in the 1890s she increasingly played her own role as a female hermit nun and there were no male lamas to pull her their ways. She sought out pilgrimage sites connected to holy women and during her travels and stayed at nunneries and associated with nuns, e.g. in Lab in Eyul she stayed in a nunnery called Gongla Lama (dGongs bla bla med) which followed Shabkar's tradition.³⁸⁹ During the years in Lhokha in the 1890, Ani Lochen became the house-lama (*mchod gnas*) of the Lady Dawa Dronma (Zla ba sgron ma) of the noble Shagjang family in E.³⁹⁰

Many nuns and *yoginīs* are mentioned in the autobiography during the Shugseb years, the most outstanding being Ogyen Chodzom and Gen Thinley, but there were also others. Gen Changsem (rGan Byang sems) is described as a highly qualified nun who died before

³⁸⁵ Thondup (1996:220) states that three Sa skya *rje btsun mas* were disciples of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po.

³⁸⁶ In *rJe btsun sku zhabs kyi mam thar* 1997: 284.

³⁸⁷ See Smith 1970:34.

³⁸⁸ *rJe btsun mam thar*, 272.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.: 251.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.:190.

1959.³⁹¹ Ani Donyo Drolma from Re Monastery came to see Jetsun Lochen. Ani Donyo Drolma was a disciple of Lama Ure (dBu re), who again was a personal disciple of Thrulshig Rinpoche, who was also Jetsun Lochen's root-lama. Ani Donyo Drolma had special spiritual qualities, the entrance to her channels (*rtsa sgo*) was wide, or were easily opened,³⁹² making her a skilled *yoginī* and a potential medium. Tharchin Wangmo and Sangye Wangmo, both mediums of Dorje Yudron, and both consorts to lamas, also spent much time at Shugseb. Donden Yudron (Don Idan g.yu sgron) from Tsang Karag Phetse (gTsang kha rag dpal rtse) in Nyemo is described as another highly qualified nun. She died in the early 1990s in Tibet.³⁹³

Ani Lochen had 'an affinity' or 'connection with' female spiritual beings and deities. An interesting episode occurred while the group of fellow devotees stayed in Kyirong in 1877. When the lama Pema Gyatsho was forty-nine years old he became ill and at the time Lochen was thirteen year old. Both ages are considered inauspicious, as are all years that end with a nine as well as every twelfth year in a person's life cycle.³⁹⁴ The young girl was made to perform rituals for warding off obstacles (*bsun bzlog*) for the lama. She put on a flower bonnet which she offered and she was sent as the Lama's ransom-offering (*sku glud*)³⁹⁵ to Mangyul Champa Drin (Mang yul Byams pa sprin). The ransom-offering brings us back to pre-Buddhist religious practices. The ritual performed resembles *mkha'* 'gro *bsun bzlog* rituals performed to turn back *dākinīs* who come to take dying persons to their realm. We wonder if Lochen was dressed as a *dākinī* in order to pacify these female beings and this ancient temple possibly had some special connection with *dākinīs*.

Because she was herself a woman with great spiritual power, Jetsun Lochen was also approached in order to perform rituals to goddesses. When on pilgrimage to the talking Tārā at Dophung Chokhor, she was requested to recite Tārā prayers for a week and was offered about 165 kg of grain as payment. When on pilgrimage in Dragyul, she arrived at a place where a lama was making a statue of a female deity³⁹⁶ and Lochen's arrival was regarded as a good omen.

³⁹¹ Ibid.:561.

³⁹² Ibid.:413.

³⁹³ Ibid.:562.

³⁹⁴ See Nebesky-Woykowitz (1956) 1975: 518. Note that Tibetans count age from conception.

³⁹⁵ For ransom offering, see e.g. Richardson 1993:9, 61, 64, 66, 70.

³⁹⁶ A *mkha'* 'gro statue.

At Zangri Kharmar, Machig Labdron's residence in the latter part of her life, Lochen obviously had some special connection. She could move miraculously to a large rock in the middle of the Tsangpo river which had auspicious signs of being Machig's residence. She was inspired by visions and stayed in retreat during the day, but at night she practiced *gcod* at a charnel ground and danced *gcod 'cham* with a dog in the middle of a field.³⁹⁷

Because of her special «affinity» with Machig, she also started a major building project at Zangri Kharmar, a *ma ni*-wall around the temple. This seems to have been considered a meritorious activity, because gods, lamas and people in the Zangri area were said to have assisted willingly. The auspiciousness of the *ma ni*-building was so great that it produced rain in this very arid area. As Lochen's fame spread, she was also called to perform specialized religious rituals, e.g. she read *Bardo Thodrol* (*Bar do thos grol*)³⁹⁸ for the Khencho at Samye (*bSam yas mKhan chos*) when he was dying. At Zangri Kharmar she was called to perform a ritual that no one else there knew how to do. A master of *zhi byed*,³⁹⁹ Nedo Chopa, maintained that Lochen was the wisdom *ḍākinī* Machig Labdron and as such she became known to everyone present.

There are numerous references to female spiritual beings, *ḍākinīs* (*mkha' 'gro ma*), the so called 'sky-walkers' in Jetsun Lochen's autobiography. Female symbolism and *ḍākinīs* in tantric Buddhism have been studied extensively by Herrmann-Pfandt (1992) and Gyatso (1998). Such female beings manifest repeatedly in Jetsun Lochen's visions and dreams; they manifest themselves surrounded by light and sound. Ani Lochen describes their outward appearance, which may be wrathful, beautiful or elegant; their color is blue, red, white or 'made of light; their hair may be long, straight or turquoise; they may have only one eye or marked eyebrows. One *ḍākinī* is described with the thirty-two major and the eighty subsidiary marks of a buddha.⁴⁰⁰ They function as protectors of regions, they wear local costumes and reside in unnamed or named paradises, e.g. Zangdog Pelri (*Zangs mdog dpal ri*) and they belong to the five different buddha-families. They come to escort Lochen to their

³⁹⁷ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 246.

³⁹⁸ *Bar do thos grol*, 'liberation by hearing in the intermediate state', discovered by Karma gLing pa (1326-86), see Dargyay 1977:151-53. Known in the West in Evans-Wentz's translation (1927) as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Cf. *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 189, 273, 459, 461.

³⁹⁹ See Kollmar-Paulenz 1993, 1998.

⁴⁰⁰ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 293.

land, they rescue her while in danger, they guard and open treasures (*gter*), they confer health and long life.⁴⁰¹ Ani Lochen becomes their leader in a ritual and she sings their melodies.⁴⁰² Only once is the male counterpart of *dākinī*, the *dāka* (*dpa' bo*), mentioned in *rJe btsun rnam thar*.⁴⁰³ Semi-mythological women are called *dākinī*, too, primarily Yeshe Tshogyal and Machig Labdron, and Ani Lochen herself is named as their worldly manifestation.

Thus there seems to be a number of specific religious functions and roles to fill for a woman religious practitioner and we see that femaleness is considered an asset in certain situations. It appears that the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism has a greater scope and accepts female religious talent through their close association to what may be termed «folk-religion». Special roles for women, like the *ma ṇi pa*, the *'das log*, and the *sku glud* are integrated into the religious role-repertoire and women also have important roles as hermits and consorts.

Apart from the few female role-models Lochen Rinpoche was able to identify with, all the Rinpoches, lamas, *siddhas*, abbots and mediums she came across on her pilgrimages were men. We get a definite impression that Lochen's way to mastership was not an easy one. At times being a woman was a strong impediment. From the time the young girl approached her lama, she was met with skepticism and mistrust. Lochen was ridiculed because she did not understand the religious texts, harassed because of her 'big ego', she was the only one among the devotees who was refused instruction in *yogic* breathing techniques, she was ostracized from the group. The lama even accused her of theft and branded the word 'dog' with a red-hot iron on her forehead. When she manifested miraculous power she was ignored and when there were rumors that Lochen was the emanation of Yeshe Tshogyal, a high lama dryly commented that she was probably the incarnation of insects killed under the feet of Tsogyal.

Once, when Lochen had visions⁴⁰⁴ of ritual texts in Thag in the highlands of Nepal and a local deity supplied her with birch bark and ink so she could write it all down, the male teacher Chosang kicked her head, burnt her writings and told her that such compositions were not allowed to her.

⁴⁰¹ Various *dākinīs*, *ibid.*: 33, 110, 143, 144, 243, 245, 282, 287, 293.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*: 41, 118, 262, 331.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*: 289.

⁴⁰⁴ Presumably 'mind treasures', *dgongs gter*.

Another time in Lhasa, monks from Dreyul Kyetshel ('Bras yul sKyed tshal) Monastery were jealous because she functioned as the house-lama for the noble Lhalu family and therefore they tried to win over her in a debate. Crestfallen they had to admit that she was indeed learned; they prostrated at her feet and requested religious teachings from her.

Also when Dharma Senge was dying, his disciples did not permit her an audience, nor did they hand over to her the religious objects Dharma Senge had bequeathed her. When she wanted to offer gold for his statue, the physicians at Mentsekhong did not accept it saying that her gold was of an inferior quality.⁴⁰⁵

Ani Lochen was not concerned with issues like «the exclusion of women» and seems to have accepted this kind of treatment as an established fact, although she mentions it here and there. In several of the larger monasteries she visited, such as Tashilhunpo, Gyantse, Ganden and Tshechogling only her lama and his male companions were allowed to stay, while Lochen and her female friends had to find alternative housing. When at Zangri in the mid-1890s, Lochen went to the Zangri Tsenkhang (*btsan khang*),⁴⁰⁶ but was thrown out by the caretaker who told her that women were not allowed to enter. The question of exclusion of women in monasteries and at sites of pilgrimage needs more research, but there are numerous indications that women were considered inferior religious practitioners as they were thought to bring defilement to holy sites.

The famous Nyingma master Kathog Situ visited one of Lochen's and her companions' main site for meditation, Zangyag Drag in 1918-19. He describes the Padmasambhava caves, the statues and the surroundings in great detail, but concludes,

...there are all these wonderful and splendid sites, but due to nuns staying there, the area is not a happy place. *KaSi*, 150

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.: 202, 492.

⁴⁰⁶ The *btsan* is a class of ancient Tibetan demonical deities, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956) 1975 : 175, *passim*.

1.5. Summary

Through her forty years as a pilgrim Ani Lochen sought out the charismatic religious leaders of her time. She performed secluded meditations and visited holy sites, religious activities that invested her with sacred power and enhanced her religious status.⁴⁰⁷ Walking hungry and barefoot throughout the Central and Western Himalayas put Lochen in close contact with people of various ethnicities and social strata. The knowledge acquired in these early years was to become a great asset when disciples later came to seek her guidance. Ani Lochen was herself a product of mixed ethnicity and social background, which made her a heterogeneous individual with the capacity to understand and empathize with those who lived various kinds of lives. Saints represent the opposite of the layfolk as they have dissociated themselves from family ties and economic interests. As 'strangers' they become bearers of objectivity and can thus give advice and mediate in conflicts.⁴⁰⁸ Ani Lochen functioned in this capacity for people from all layers of society and in different regions. Lochen's life experiences made her sensitive to suffering as a fundamental aspect of human life and the key to her sacred status and popularity in all walks of society is to be found here.

Peter Brown calls the saint a mirror of the community⁴⁰⁹ and has elaborately demonstrated the interaction between saints and their social environment in the Near East in late antiquity. Which needs do saints satisfy? Why are people willing to support them and what do clients get in return? The traditional Tibetan universe was densely populated with non-human benevolent and malevolent spirits and there was a strong need among ordinary people for the intercession by the spiritually powerful. To the three hundred resident nuns and female hermits at Shugseb and the many thousand disciples,⁴¹⁰ Jetsun Lochen offered solace through religious teachings, blessings, and magic by ritually empowering talismans and charms. Through omens she read the future and helped her disciples make sensible

⁴⁰⁷ See Brown 1981.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.: 3.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.: 81.

⁴¹⁰ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 411. These thousands may not be disciples in a strict sense; Lo chen talks rather about those who had a religious connection (*chos 'brel*) with Shug gseb.

choices. During the 1959 revolt against the Chinese in Lhasa, Tibetan soldiers even used patches of her monastic robe to protect them from Chinese bullets.⁴¹¹

Sickness was a major concern in traditional Tibet and believed to be due to the disorder of the elements. The group of hermits with which Jetsun Lochen roamed in her youth were *gcod pas* who performed meditation in fearful places and charnel grounds. The *gcod pas* were believed to be immune to disease, they would mingle with beggars and lepers and were called upon to dispose of dead bodies and to stop epidemics.

On every other page of Jetsun Lochen's self-narrative we learn about rituals used to avert sickness, to prolong life, and spiritually to empower pills and remedies. Death was as threatening and disruptive in Tibet as elsewhere. Jetsun Lochen's prayers and rituals accompanied the dead in the intermediate stage in order to bring about favorable rebirths. Thus the intercession of Jetsun Lochen helped keep the demonic and chaotic at bay, it reduced anxiety and gave reassurance in a traditional society with other causal explanations than our own. Primarily, Ani Lochen's religious power was personal and acquired, not that of an impersonal institution as might have been the case of the medium. She maintained her own identity and dealt with her disciples and followers in a 'rational way', according to the Tibetan worldview.

When Ani Lochen met her first root-lama at the age of thirteen, her religious practices changed direction. From being a *ma ni pa* and reciter of '*das log*' stories, she came to profess a more defined Nyingma orientation. There was no conflict here. All through her life, Lochen continued her activities as a *ma ni pa*, but other religious practices were integrated in her repertoire. These were mainly those of the Nyingma school, its *terma* tradition and the primary importance put on the practice of *rdzogs chen*. The side-stream of *gcod* from Machig Labdron received special attention all along, as did also mind-training with its roots in the Kadam/Gelug tradition.

After she came to Central Tibet in the late 1880s, Lochen Rinpoche became the confidant and advisor of many of the aristocratic ladies in Lhasa and elsewhere, e.g. the Chogdre, Phala (Pha la), Ragshag, the Taring, the Lhalu, the Yuthog, the Kunzang Tse, the Ngapho, the Kapsho (Ka shod), the Drang To ('Brang stod), the Nedo (sNe do), the Pangda

⁴¹¹ Taring (1970) 1983.

Tshang, the Labrang Nyingpa, the Zhagpa (Zhag pa), the Derab (bDe rab), the Shagjang and the Lhagyari. In a theocratic state like Tibet, religion and politics were closely intertwined; and occasionally women were close to the centers of power. Lochen Rinpoche, too, through her close connection with some of the most wealthy and powerful families, potentially influenced major historical events in the decades prior to the Chinese occupation.

Although Jetsun Lochen never traveled further east than Dagpo, most of the lamas she associated with throughout her life originated from Amdo or Kham. Through Pema Gyatsho and Thegchog Tenpe Gyaltsen, she became acquainted with religious impulses and teachings from the great Amdowa masters such as Tertön Kunzang Dechen Gyalpo, Chogyal Ngagi Wangpo and Shabkar Tshogdrug Rangdrol.

Then a series of crazy *siddhas*, *yogins*, *tertöns* and lamas originating from Kham, or who had lived there for shorter or longer periods, became Jetsun Lochen's masters or close companions, e.g. Khamnyon Dharma Senge, the Fifth Dzogchen Tulku Thubten Chokyi Dorje, Kham Lama Sangye Tendzin, Semnyi Rinpoche, Lama Gyurme Kundrol, Dzogchen Khenpo Ngawang Norbu, Gangshar Rinpoche, Khyungtrul Rinpoche, Gyarong Namtrul, Chonyi Seltong, Drubchen Dawa Dorje and others. They had stayed in influential monasteries such as Dzogchen (rDzogs chen ru dam bsam gtan chos gling), Zhechen (Zhe chen bstan gnyis dar rgyas gling), Kathog (Kah tog rdo rje'i gdan), Dzagyal, Gemang (dGe mang), Dzongsar Tashi Lhatse (rDzong gsar bkra shis lha rtse) and Gyarong (rGya rong) Monastery. We do not know the birth-places of Matrul Rinpoche and Thrulshig Rinpoche, but both associated with and transmitted religious teachings from important lamas from the East.

In the religious orientation of these masters, *siddha* practices and transmissions of teachings originating from Padmasambhava, Longchen Rabjam, Jigme Lingpa, Dza Peltrul, Kongtrul Yonten Gyatsho, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and other great Nyingma and *ris med* teachers were emphasized. So were religious tolerance and synthesis. Several of Lochen's lamas had consorts and they recognized that women, too, could be highly realized masters. Others put primary importance on discipline and were influenced by the Nyingma monastic revival originating in Gemang Monastery in Dzachuka.⁴¹²

⁴¹² See Ricard 1994: 556n. 4.

Ani Lochen's itinerant life-style as a pilgrim involved crossing cultural and language boundaries and had a number of side-effects in addition to the accumulation of spiritual power. One was freedom from daily labor, another was freedom from the expectations and conventions maintained among pastoralists and farmers. Staying in one place with a bounded culture, would not, to the same degree, have given this freedom. Through her wanderings, Ani Lochen also acquired the distance that enabled her to reflect on her own culture. This may explain her strong attraction to unconventional and crazy masters, those who questioned traditional cultural values.

By pursuing the career of the ascetic, condensed in the ideal role-model of Milarepa, Ani Lochen embodied the most treasured values of Tibetan culture. When her itinerant life was over, she managed to integrate the ascetic ideal with that of the monastic. She established a religious institution, a cross-breed between a hermitage and a monastery, where both traditions could be maintained. Although Lochen Rinpoche was brought up in the *yogin* tradition, she entered the Buddhist Order, albeit hesitantly. Even after becoming a novice nun around 1893, she continued to attach herself to unorthodox masters of the Nyingma and Kagyu traditions. Thus the main trends of Tibetan Buddhism merge in her person. Through her religious practice, in her loyalties to gurus and in her advice to disciples, she combined both paths.

Lochen gave up the itinerant life-style partly because her legs failed her. Neither could her mother continue the long pilgrimages on foot. As time went on, Lochen's aging and sick mother needed her daughter's constant attention and care. After choosing Shugseb as her permanent residence there were many tasks to attend to. The buildings, the statues and ritual objects needed repair and upkeep. Although she was not formally the main lama at Shugseb, many religious companions and disciples depended on Lochen for advice and religious teachings. After she took on the main responsibility of running a convent housing three hundred practitioners in the 1920s, Jetsun Lochen seems gradually to have put more emphasis on the *Vinaya*.

Lochen Rinpoche's sacrality resulted from a number of meritorious religious acts and her prolonged periods of disassociation from 'ordinary life' through rituals of seclusion, religious practices that deepened her understanding of the Buddhist doctrines and eventually

gave her confidence as a religious master. Lochen Rinpoche reemerged from such 'rituals of passage' with renewed symbolic power. This, combined with the fact that she settled close to a significant pilgrimage site in Central Tibet, the residence of Longchen Rabjam, provided a solid basis for the enhancement, maintenance and institutionalization of Lochen Rinpoche's charisma.

In his cave at Gangri Thokar, Longchen Rabjam wrote most of his works on *rdzogs chen*.⁴¹³ The cave itself is guarded by protectors who reside in juniper trunks at its entrance and the female protector Dorje Yudron is said to reside in a nearby boulder.⁴¹⁴ Pilgrims and religious masters from all over Tibet came here to share the spiritual power associated with the site. An important dimension of charisma is, according to Clifford Geertz,

... the connection between the symbolic value individuals possess and their relation to the active centers of the social order. Such centers ... are essentially concentrated loci of serious acts; they consist in the point or points in a society where its leading ideas come together with its leading institutions to create an arena in which the events that most vitally affect its members' lives take place. It is involvement, even oppositional involvement, with such arenas and with the momentous events that occur in them that confers charisma. It is a sign, not of popular appeal or inventive craziness, but of being near the heart of things. 1983:122-23.

At Gangri Thokar, Lochen thus met some of the most important religious personalities of her day. The Shugseb Nunnery was situated half way up the mountain, ensuring the peace required for meditation and maintaining a balance between seclusion and institutional life. Jetsun Lochen managed to avoid the pitfalls many monastics, particularly Tibetan nuns, are so often accused of, viz. too much involvement in worldly affairs. It is also significant that Gangri Thokar and Shugseb are situated only half a day's travel from Lhasa, close enough to find the religious patronage on which a large group of ascetics depend.

But although famous among her disciples and held in high regard by the Lhasa aristocracy, Lochen Rinpoche remained a 'hidden practitioner,' both by choice and because there were hardly any other alternatives. There were no powerful institutional structures in

⁴¹³ Karmay 1988:212.

⁴¹⁴ See *DoKa*: photo section following p. 596 (vo. i), Karmay 1988 photo section following p. 257 and Dowman, 1988:144.

Tibet to support a female lama. Neither does it seem that Jetsun Lochen and the *tāntrikas* and nuns she associated with ever questioned the main gender assumptions embedded in the Tibetan socio-cultural system. Although Lochen herself reached eminence, her example may be seen more as a variation of a cultural theme rather than as an alternative path.

Jetsun Lochen recognized a male child, Jigme Dorje, as the reincarnation of the previous male master at Shugseb, Semnyi Rinpoche. In the vacuum that followed Semnyi Rinpoche's death, Lochen emphatically requested Chonyi Seltong from Serta in Kham to become the lama at Shugseb.⁴¹⁵ As he refused, Lochen herself had to be persuaded by the senior nuns to take on this responsibility. Jetsun Lochen also identified a boy in Lhasa as the reincarnation of one of the most prominent *tāntrikas* in Shugseb, Ogyen Chodzom.⁴¹⁶

For years, Lochen Rinpoche spent most of her time seated in a meditation-box. She slept very little and her meditation sessions (*thun*) started at three o'clock in the morning. Every day she did four such sessions. In the evening she recited *gcod*. During her last years Lochen Rinpoche was not able to see, hear or walk. Even so, Nechung Thubten Phuntshog says that through clairvoyance she knew people's thoughts and what was going on around her.

Ani Lochen died in the evening on the thirteenth day of the third month in 1951, about fifteen months after she completed telling her story.⁴¹⁷ The story of her death has not been added to the Gangtok edition of her autobiography. In *rJe btsun sku zhabs kyi rnam thar* (1997: 311) it is said that there were many auspicious signs at her death, such as rainbows, a white and brilliant A around her dead body, a white conch shell grew at her right eye, there were thirteen wrinkles on her forehead and various auspicious spots on her body. All these signs indicated to her followers that Lochen Rinpoche reached enlightenment or *nirvāṇa* within five days after her death. Before she died Jetsun Lochen told her followers that there was no need for an elaborate memorial ceremony; they should only keep her body for three days, but no one were to be allowed inside the room where the body was kept. Jetsun Lochen told the disciples to decide themselves whether to burn the body or throw it in the water, but she also said that it was possible that her body would become very small or disappear.

⁴¹⁵ *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 413.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*:432.

⁴¹⁷ Or after the completion of the draft.

There are in addition various oral stories about Jetsun Lochen's death, too. One of her disciples told me that her body stayed in meditation position (*thugs dam*) for one week. Jigme Dorje Rinpoche said that white and red drops came from the nostrils of the dead body, drops symbolic of the female and male aspects of existence. Also ivory, in the form of a conch shell, was said to have grown on the right side of her face.⁴¹⁸

Jigme Dorje Rinpoche informed me that Jetsun Lochen's body was embalmed, but because they could not get hold of salt for dehydration in 1951, they put it in sand instead. Even so, the body was in good condition after a year and he also said that Lochen's hair had grown. Generally only the bodies of high lamas are embalmed.⁴¹⁹ The *sku dung* or *mar dung* containing Lochen's body was kept in the assembly hall at Shugseb and according to one nun, the face was covered with gold-leaf. When the Chinese destroyed the monastery,⁴²⁰ Lochen's bodily remains were spread over the hillside and her disciples were not able to retrieve any of her relics.

Before she died Lochen Rinpoche indicated to her disciples that she might reincarnate in a boy. She told the Shugseb nuns to ask Dzongsar Khyentse Chokyi Lodro in Derge to find her new embodiment.⁴²¹ When the search group arrived in Derge in 1955, Dzongsar Khyentse told them that in the Water-Snake Year (*chu sbrul*, i.e. 1953) a boy had been born in one of the main patron families of Shugseb. The son of Dekyong Wangmo (bDe skyong dbang mo)⁴²² from the Taring family and Chime Dorje ('Chi med rdo rje) was recognized as Lochen Rinpoche's reincarnation. The boys' name was Dorje Rabden. Dekyong Wangmo was the daughter of Rinchen Dolma Taring's sister, Norbu Yudron and Shigatse Deleg Rabden. A letter was sent to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama who confirmed the choice. At the age of four Dorje Rabden came to Shugseb for the first time.

⁴¹⁸ See *rJe btsun sku zhabs kyi rnam thar*, 311.

⁴¹⁹ First-born sons who died in infancy were mummified in Lubra, but the practice seems to be dying out, see Ramble 1982:344-45.

⁴²⁰ According to one ex-nun informant the Chinese came to the sNye phu valley around 1959-60. Apparently Shug gseb was not destroyed until the early 1960s or during the Cultural Revolution. One old Shug gseb nun says that they were only six nuns remaining after the Chinese forced the nuns to disrobe and to work in labor camps.

⁴²¹ He was born near Kah thog Monastery in sDe dge, spent his young years in Kah thog Monastery, but moved to rDzong gsar Monastery, the seat of 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse'i dbang po when he was fifteen. He associated closely with masters at rDzogs chen and Zhe chen monasteries and looked after Kah thog Monastery. See Thondup 1996: 278-282.

⁴²² See *rJe btsun rnam thar*, 461.



Jigme Dorje Rinpoche, b. 1929.
Photo: C. Eusel, 1993.



Jigme Dorje and Dorje Rabden
Photo: C. Eusel, Shigatse 1993



Dorje Rabden, b. 1953

Photo: *Tibetan Culture*, 16, 4 1993

多札活佛 56 年在新德里

多札活佛 和休色寺

● 郝桂尧

Dorje Rabden was born in Shigatse as the youngest of six children. In 1981 he finished his degree at Lhasa University, then a training school for teachers. He was employed by the Tibetan radio unit in Lhasa and in 1992 worked for the section sending Tibetan radio programs abroad. Thus, after an interregnum of female leadership, Shugseb Nunnery was again back in male hands, those of Jigme Dorje Rinpoche and Dorje Rabden. Lochen Rinpoche herself was instrumental in this turn of affairs.

Shugseb was rebuilt in the early 1980s by nuns, disciples, locals and patron families, among them the Taring and the Kapsho. The location of the old Shugseb Monastery was at the very edge of a ledge on the Gangri Thokar hillside, while the new Shugseb Nunnery is situated a few meters back on the same shelf. The old ruins could still be seen in 1993.⁴²³ In 1994 there were more than two hundred and fifty nuns at Shugseb. It remains to be seen whether the convent will be allowed by the present regime to survive. One daughter nunnery in Dharamsala and one meditation retreat in Yanglesho near Kathmandu have been established. Here, young Shugseb nuns study and perform meditation retreats, keeping the cult of Lochen Rinpoche alive.

The Shugseb lama, Jigme Dorje Rinpoche, is around seventy years old (1998). Lochen's reincarnation, Dorje Rabden, leads a lay life in Lhasa and only occasionally visits Shugseb. It is therefore an open question whether he will head the convent after Jigme Dorje's death. Jigme Dorje's nun daughter, Osel Chodron, who is said to be a reincarnation of Gen Thinley and who has completed a three-year retreat in Pharping may be a suitable candidate. If this happens, Shugseb's line of female leadership will be continued.

⁴²³ See photo from 1987 by Samten Karmay and photo by Clara Eusel from 1993.

CHILDHOOD, 1865-1877

1865*	1866	1867	1868	1869	1870	1871	1872	1873	1874	1875	1876	1877*
Tshopema Zangskar- Lochen b. 15.01.	Tshopema Zangskar- Sani	Tsopema- Zangskar Sani	Spiti Rampur Garwal	Guge	Ladakh Spitok Alchi Leh Zangskar	Lahoul Rothang Mandi Kulu Tshopema	Kelsang Drog Tramalung Saga Purang Khorchag Mustang	Kyirong Kathmandu	Helambu	Tshopema Okar Drag Lende Riwo Pelbar Ragmachangchub Dragkar Taso Kyangatsa Saog phug Tsum		

Father leaves mother and child

Years marked* are given in the biography

WITH HER ROOT-LAMA PEMA GYATSHO, 1877-1889

1878	1879	1880	1881*	1882	1883	1884	1885*	1886	1887	1888*	1889
-----Nubri/He----- three-year retreat	Tradun tse Nubri/He Thag Pokhara Mustang/Thag Tshoro/Tsherog Congshi Rangchon Kutshab Tenga Ti(l)ri Muktinath Tshoro/Tsherog	Kailash Thrujo Gonzur Purang Khorchag Gyanyima Dzutrul Phug Pretapuri	Nubri Henang Nagtshel Gyaphul	Kathman. Peku Thang Potinyima Zurtsho Nelung (Labchi) Dingri L Tsbri Dramtsho Lho Dechen Phug Phuma Barlsho Sakya Tashilhunpo Shigatse Gyantse Sera Drubde Nyemo Drolma Lhakhang	Kyirong Peku Thang Potinyima Zurtsho Nelung (Labchi) Dingri L Tsbri Dramtsho Lho Dechen Phug Phuma Barlsho Sakya Tashilhunpo Shigatse Gyantse Sera Drubde Nyemo Drolma Lhakhang	Lhasa Tshechogling Phenpo Tagchen Shawa Bumpa Ganden Tsechogling Lhasa Tolung Lhasa Tsechogling Drepung Jatshon Chumig Zangyang Drag Gangri Thokar Woka Lhokha Samling Eyul Jang	Zangyang Gangtho Shabtrul Tagchen Shawa Bumpa Ganden Tsechogling Lhasa Tolung Lhasa Tsechogling Drepung Jatshon Chumig Zangyang Drag Gangri Thokar Woka Lhokha Samling Eyul Jang	Lhasa Pema Gyatso d. 17.2. Shabkar Tulku Dharma Senge d. 17.3.? Dorje Phagmo Three-year retreat			

Years marked * are given in the biography

1890 1891 1892 1893 1894 1895 1896 1897 1898 1899* 1900 1901 1902 1903 1904*
Three-year retreat
Pilgrimage to Lhoka-----
With Thrulshig Rinpoche
Younghusband

Lhasa

Sanave Tendzin

Bodhicitta vow
Zangyag
Shugseb
Gangtho
Sangye T.

5th Dzoqtrul

Zangyag, winter
Shugseb, summer
Gangtho

13th Dalai lama
ordained

Sangye/Samye
Gangtho
Khyungpo Tu
Zangvaq Dra

Nechung Oracle d.?

1895 1896
Pillarimage to Lhoka-----

Lhasa

Madrug, Yarlung
Guru Lhakhang
Tshering Jong
Pelri Rongkha
Yarha Shami
Dargye Cho

Rongkhang
Tilha Shampo
Targye Choling
Tradrug
Chasa Lhakpa
Okar Drug

angdog Pelri
hagjang
angmo Ri

Dagpo Namdzong
Gongla Lama
Zandri

Father to Zangri
Zangri Kharmar
Densathil
Terkiyl
Terchung

1898

With Thrulshig Rinpoche

Lhasa/Thigsa Gang
Zhechen Rinpoche
Zangyag Drag

Nyemo
Gonkar

'das log
Thrulshig in Lhasa
Zangyang
Lhasa
Ngawang Tendzin
Kongtrul d.

Lhasa
Ngawang Tenzin Norbu
Kongtrul d.
Zangyag Drag
Nechung

Hepori
Samye Chimphu
Yamalung

1903 1904*

Young husband

Zangyag Drag

Shugseb
Father
Semnyi

Years marked * are given in the biography

1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910*	1911*	1912*	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922
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Lochen invited to Taglung
Matrul Rinp. d.?

Years marked* are given in the biography

1936*	1935	1934	1933*	1932*	1931*	1930	1929*	1928	1927	1926	1925	1924	1923
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Years marked* are given in the text

LOCHEN'S LAST YEARS AT SHUGSEB AND DAWA DORJE RINPOCHE, 1936-1951

1937*	1938*	1939*	1940	1941*	1942*	1943*	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949*	1950	1951
Kapsho Lady Dawa Dorje Nechung Chogtrul D.D = Pema Gyatsho Gangshar Rinp.	Lotrul Drime Chubsang Rinp.	Dawa Dorje Reting Ringpoche King of Lingtsang Chogdre Taring Lady of Derab King of Lingtsang Chogdre Namgyal Drolkar	Dawa Dorje Nede Tubwo Lady Dekyong Derab Tsering Drolkar Deleg Rabden Trulshig Tulku Lochen sick Dawa Dorje Chogdre Deleg Rabden Thubten Woden	Chogdre leaves his office	Sixteenth Karmapa Drabchi Kyizur D.L.'s Father Sera Khardo Tulku Gyurme of Sandu	Lady of Drang To Bode Gomchen Zhechen Rabjam Dawa Dorje Lady Derab, junior Geshe Drime Lady of Ngapho						end of <i>mam thar</i> 25.11.49	Lochen d. 1 13.11.51	

Years marked* are given in the biography

