



Bakula Rinpoche's family

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BAKULA RINPOCHE'S FAMILY

In the middle of the 18th century there was only a single heiress in the royal family of Zangla. Her name was Ladzes Wangmo (zla-mdzes dbang-mo) (Francke [1926] 1982: 165). She had to bring a *makpa* (*mag-pa*) i.e. to marry uxorilocally. According to N.T. Shakspo (2010: 147) her husband was Gyapo Tupchung (rgyal-po thub-chung ?) and according to Riaboff (1989: 205) he was Dubtse Wang Dpalde (grub-tse dbang dpal lde) from the royal family of Heniskut (or Henasku).

She delivered at least three children: a daughter, Tsering Wangmo (tshe-ring dbang-mo), about whom I will speak later; a son, Lobzang Namgyal (blo-bzang nam-rgyal), heir to the crown of Zangla; and the 18th Bakula Rinpoche, Lobzang Yeshe Stanpa Gyaltsen (blo-bzang ye-shes bstan-pa rgyal-tshan) (Riaboff 1989: 205).

Before continuing on to the 19th Bakula Rinpoche, I must introduce the Matho royal family.

The last king to actually ruled Ladakh was Tsespal Tondup Namgyal (tshe-dpal don-grub nam-rgyal), the builder of the palace of Stok. Born in 1790, he ruled from 1820 till 1834. After the Dogra conquest he was dismissed and replaced by his Prime Minister Ngorub Standzin (ngos-grub bstan-'dzin), the Banka Kalhon or *kalthon* (*bka'-blon*, a kind of duke or marquis) of the Chimre-Sakti area. Then the Dogra general Zorawar Singh, suspecting that the Banka Kalhon was betraying him, dismissed him and put back Tsespal Tondup on the throne from 1839 to 1840 (Cunningham [1874] 1977: 258 and 343-344). Both the king and the Banka Kalhon died from smallpox in 1840 (Datta 1972: 127).

The crown prince was Tsewang Rabstan (tshe-dbang rab-brtan). He had three wives (cf Jamyang Gyaltsen).

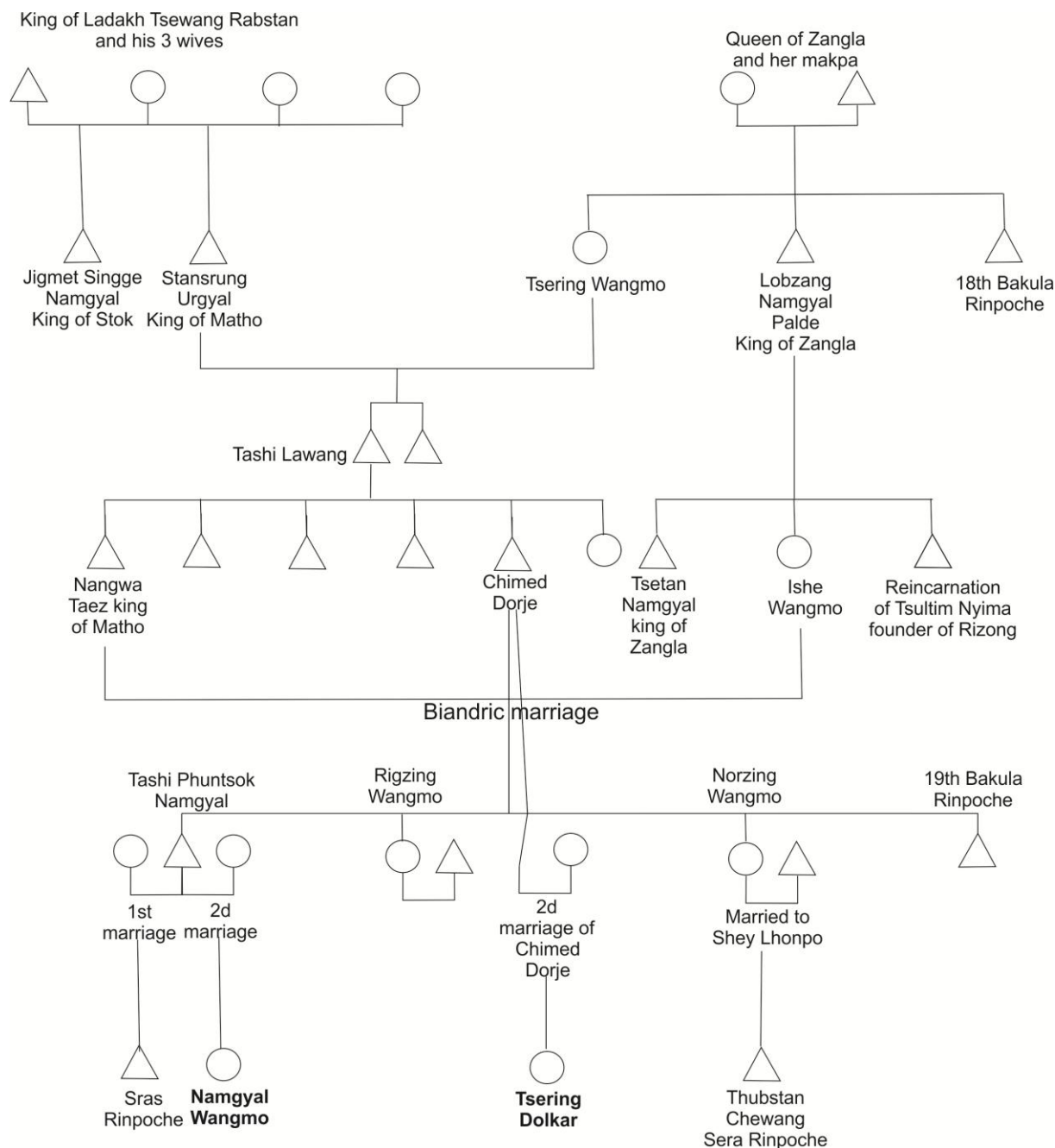
- The first was Skalzang Dolma (bskal-bzang sgrol-ma), daughter of Tsewang Tondup (tshe-dbang don-grub), the powerful *kalthon* of Bazgo, and a minister of the king Tsespal Tondup Namgyal. According to Cunningham (p. 334-336), he was almost as powerful as the Banka Kalhon. Skalzang Dolma had a son, Jigmet Singge Namgyal (full name: 'jigs-med chos-kyi sengge kun-ga' nam-rgyal).
- The second was Sonam Palkit (bsod-nams dpal-skyid). She was the daughter of the Banka Kalhon. She also delivered a son, Stansrung Urgyal (bstan-srung g.yul-rgyal).
- The third was Zara Khatun, a Muslim and the daughter of the "prince" (*cho*, spelling *jo*) of Pashkyum, near Kargil. She had no issue.

The rule of primogeniture was not implemented. The son of the first wife received the palace of Stok, and the son of the second wife received land in Matho. Later this new younger branch built a palace in Matho.

Why was the rule of primogeniture not implemented? Why was the royal property shared between the two sons? One of my informants, Dawa Tondup (zla-ba don-grub), thinks that the Dogras wanted to treat the Banka Kalhon gently because he had become as powerful as the king. Of course the Dogras were victorious but they needed help and collaboration of notables to pacify the country.

The name of this first king of Matho was Stansrung Urgyal (bstan-srung g.yul-rgyal). He married Tsering Wangmo, the daughter of the queen of Zangla mentioned earlier. Hence the royal families of Matho and Zangla became allied for the first time.

The couple had two sons. One became a monk in Hemis monastery and the other one, Tashi Lawang (bkra-shis lha-dbang), succeeded his father.



Let's come back to the Zangla royal family. The king, brother of the 18th Bakula rinpoche, had three children: Tsetan Namgyal (tshe-brtan mam-rgyal) who succeeded him as king of Zangla (Riaboff 1989: 205), Ishe Wangmo (ye-shes dbang-mo) about whom I will speak very soon, and Tsultim Nyima (tshul-khrims nyi-ma), the reincarnation of the founder of the monastery of Rizong (Kaplanian, 1981: 193-194). He is the second rinpoche in the royal family of Zangla.

Tashi Lawang had five sons and one daughter. Of chief interest here are the elder son, Nangwa Taz (snang-ba mtha'-yas), and the fifth son, Chimed Dorje ('chi-med rdo-rje). Both married Ishe Wangmo. Here is the second alliance between the royal families of Matho and Zangla. From this polyandric trio the 19th Bakula rinpoche was born. He was the fourth and last child of the trio.

Between the elder son and the 18th Bakula there were two sisters. The second sister Norzin Wangmo (nor-'dzin dbang-mo) married the *lhon-po* (*blon-po*) of Shey, one of the most powerful nobles of the country. She gave birth to Thubstan Tsewang (thub-bstan tshe-dbang),

also a rinpoche (Sera Rinpoche), who married a daughter of the royal family of Stok and is now (2017) member of the parliament in New Delhi.

The elder son, Tashi Phuntsok Namgyal (bkra-shis phun-tshogs rnam-rgyal), succeeded his father as a king of Matho. He was married twice. His first wife died while delivering a child who was recognised as the reincarnation of Sras Rinpoche, the son of Tsultim Nyima, founder of Rizong monastery (Kaplanian, 1981: 194).

Tashi Phuntsok Namgyal remarried and his second wife gave birth to a daughter, Namgyal Wangmo (rnam-rgyal dbang-mo). Till then things are simple: Namgyal Wangmo had to bring a *makpa* according to the rule given in the beginning of this article. But things became complicated because Chimed Dorje also remarried and also had a daughter, Tsering Dolkar (tshe-ring sgrol-dkar). Who was the legal heir, Namgyal Wangmo or Tsering Dolkar?

A long trial took place between Namgyal Wangmo and Tsering Dolkar. Unfortunately I could not get any details of this trial and the informants give contradictory versions.

Some say Namgyal Wangmo won the case. Some say she lost but Bakula Rinpoche reasoned with the Stok branch of the royal family (who was backing Tsering Dolkar) so that Tsering Dolkar renounced her claim and Matho was given to Namgyal Wangmo. They even say that that Bakula Rinpoche locked Tsering Dolkar as a nun in the Spituk Monastery for some years.

Reading this article one could think that rinpoches were always born in royal and noble families but it is not always the case. The 20th Bakula Rinpoche was born in a very simple family in Nubra valley.¹

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