

Trans - Himalayan Aid Society

Fall Newsletter

September 2000

Mrs. Richen Dolma Taring 1909 - 2000



We have lost one of the greatest Tibetans of our time. Mrs. Taring died on July 29 at Dehra Dun, near Rajpur in northern India, where she and her late husband had lived since 1976. We at TRAS are losing in her a most respected and trustworthy partner, who had cooperated with our Society from the very beginning. Our longtime members will be familiar with her name from the many reports and newsletters over the decades which have described her projects. The last one she told TRAS about was highlighted in the December 1999 issue - *Mrs. Taring's Prayer Hall*.

Rinchen Dolma Taring was from a noble family in Lhasa and was educated in English in India, where she met her



future husband, Jigme Taring, from Sikkim royal lineage. Jigme became an official of the young 14th Dalai Lama. The Tarings fled Tibet separately in 1959 and met up again in India many months later. Now destitute themselves, they committed to feed, clothe and educate the thousands of displaced Tibetan children arriving daily from their occupied country. Under the direction of His Holiness, they set up schools for the refugee children and Mrs. Taring founded the Tibetan Homes Foundation which has housed and nurtured thousands of Tibetan children over the past 40 years. Hugh Richardson writes, in the foreword to Mrs. Taring's book, "Daughter of Tibet", **that it was an inspiration to see the Tarings "harnessing their generous courage and ability to the service of the Dalai Lama and his people". This they did unstintingly until the end of their lives.**

George and Inge Woodcock were travelling in India in 1962 when by chance they were made aware of the plight of the Tibetan refugees who had been seeking safety there and in Nepal since 1959. It was suggested that the Woodcocks visit one of the schools and homes for the Tibetan children and this took them to Mussoorie, one of the old British hill stations in the foothills of the Himalayas at an elevation of 6000 feet. The Woodcocks were met by "a middle aged Tibetan woman with a sad, benevolent face—who introduced her-

self as Mrs. Taring, the wife of the principal". The School for Tibetans and the Tibetan Homes Foundation, of which Mrs. Taring was Secretary General for 12 years (her husband being Principal of the School) are located along a winding narrow road outside Mussoorie, on a very steep hillside. Although the Tarings' work and devotion impressed the visitors, George and Inge Woodcock were deeply concerned with the poor conditions under which this remarkable couple had to work to make even the smallest improvement in the children's care. *The Woodcocks decided to do something to help and upon their return to Vancouver founded the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society.* Almost 40 years later, the Society operates under the name "Trans Himalayan Aid Society", still closely connected with the Tibetans, but also working for their Indian and Nepalese neighbours. Mrs. Taring had helped the poor of her host country from the beginning. If any donated clothing could be spared, it went to poor Indian families, and Mr. Taring took some Indian

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Mrs. Taring *Continued*

children into the School.

In the course of time Mrs. Taring managed, with the help of aid organizations, to acquire several old buildings which were converted into children's homes, and with that her "family" grew to hundreds of children under her care. She was full of ideas for improvements. She arranged vocational training instruction for the school leavers in tailoring, weaving, thangka painting and other crafts. Many of the students were sponsored by TRAS members.

One problem was the presence of many old and infirm people who had no families to look after them, as would have been case in the past. Indeed, with one of our first donations, she converted delapidated old stables into living quarters for 10 old people. Some of them were able to earn a little money sorting wool for the carpet weaving, or helping in the kindergarten.

Keeping their Buddhist religion and traditions alive was of utmost importance to the Tarings. Every event on the Buddhist calendar was carefully observed and celebrated, with all the children and old people taking part.

Mrs. Taring never ceased to amaze us with the many diverse projects she presented to the board. Could we consider buying a cow for the Old People's Home? There was some wasteland for grazing and how wonderful it would be if not only the old people had milk for their Tibetan tea, but the kindergarten next door would have fresh milk daily. How could we refuse, and soon we received a lovely picture of a fine cow, looked after by an elderly Tibetan. She needed more room for more old people and at the edge of the temple courtyard one could dig into the hillside and build 8 rooms for 16 people. Building was her specialty and any minute she could spare she spent on the site inspecting and no doubt giving good advice,

whether it was wanted or not! She always came fully prepared for any building scheme - blueprints on hand, costs for materials and labour carefully detailed, local permissions received and full assurance that she would take responsibility. TRAS seldom refused her projects, as we knew we could trust her judgement as to the necessity of our help. Money was never wasted, and was always scrupulously accounted for.

In the early 70s we went to Mussoorie for the first time and met the Tarings. They were wonderful hosts. Mr. Taring was an avid gardener, and he and the children planted flowers and shrubs wherever there was a little space on the hillside, adding splashes of colour amongst the homes and the stands of huge deodars. Daily we visited every home, the school, kindergarten, vocational training centre, dispensary and old people's homes. Although everything was spartan by our standards, there was such a happy atmosphere and when Mrs. Taring appeared, the children would come running, shouting "Amala, Amala" - mother in Tibetan. She truly was a mother to all. She knew their names, showed sincere concern for all the little troubles they conveyed to her, hugged them and made each one feel special. She had that gift and the incredible energy to be there for all. No wonder the Tibetans in Vancouver, who had grown up at the Homes, showered her with love when she visited two years ago, and were overcome when she remembered their names. The Dalai Lama himself, grateful for her wisdom and counsel, called her "Amala", and always showed enormous consideration for her.

When the Tarings retired from their respective positions, the word retirement of course did not apply; indeed having been relieved of the work of running a large school and the children's homes, they now could devote all their time and energy to the needs they saw around them



in the Tibetan and Indian communities. Mrs. Taring met many challenges as President of the Tibetan Women's Centre, founding a home for old and handicapped Tibetans in Rajpur, creating accommodations for three Indian families out of what was practically a ruin, and building a new prayer hall for the old people. When we stayed with the Tarings, we witnessed an endless stream of Tibetans calling every day for advice and help. All were dealt with most courteously, giving them hope that someone really cared. Dinnertime saw a small United Nations gathered at their table, and many guests, impressed with the energy and deep interest of these elderly Tibetans in their fellow countrymen, gladly donated to their many projects.

The last work Mrs. Taring undertook was very close to her heart - the translation into Tibetan of her book "Daughter of Tibet". It was sent to Dharamsala for printing one month before her death. Mrs. Taring will be remembered by thousands of her people with deep gratitude. She and Mr. Taring personified the high ideals of Buddhism and were an example to all who had the great privilege and honour to have known them. Rinchen Dolma Taring was a true Amala, surely a fitting accolade for a very special woman.

-Dorothea Leach

Project Report

At this time of year, we look over the work of the Society to see what has been accomplished. Below is a list of projects, *completed, ongoing and in the works*, for the current year. There have been set backs - CIDA was months behind in its payments to approved projects for the first half of the year, causing many difficulties. Stringent budgeting means that fewer projects are approved. TRAS has had the unusual experience this year of having projects rejected by CIDA - not because the projects, in our mind, are any less worthy, but because restraints placed on CIDA have made the numbers of projects which can be accepted even smaller than usual. Projects jointly sponsored by TRAS and the Canadian International Development Agency are marked (TRAS/CIDA).

COMPLETED PROJECTS:

Tibetan Delek Hospital: Community Health Workers Training, Dharamsala, India. TRAS/CIDA \$24,273.

King Mahendra Trust - Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) 3 year integrated rural development to assist remote villages balance needs of local people, environmental protection and tourist invasion. This has been a most successful project, and we are hoping to continue it. (TRAS/CIDA) \$381,802.

Himalayan Education Project for Young Canadians, ACAP. Sikles, Nepal. \$38,179 (TRAS/CIDA)

Overseas development education studies for Grade 11 students, trekking to the ACAP villages. Each student committed to giving 6 lectures in Canada upon return. The first phase of this project has been featured fully in previous newsletters. The students con-

tinue to give talks, educating many Canadians about overseas development and the work of TRAS. The second group of students returned from Nepal in March 2000. They are as enthusiastic and committed as the first group, and TRAS is excited to work with them and impressed at the calibre of young people who have taken part in this project. The 2000 year participants are in the process of giving talks and setting up development groups in their schools. **If any members in the Greater Vancouver, Victoria or Nanaimo areas would like them to give a talk to a local audience, please phone the TRAS office.** (TRAS/CIDA) \$38,179.

Bir Youth Centre. The conversion of an old warehouse to a youth centre is now complete (see story on Page). \$3,560.

Mang-Yul Society, Leh, Ladakh. Teaching aids, library furnishings and administration. \$2,000.

Institute of Buddhist Dialectics asked for funds to purchase an IBM pentium computer and scanner, having discovered that many of their students were returning to offices equipped with IBM rather than Macintosh (with which they had equipped the classroom). TRAS agreed to pay for these, so that the training could give the students what they needed. \$4,320.

NEARLY COMPLETED: The following projects will be completed before the end of 2000:

Department of Education Vocational Training. The pre-primary teacher training was completed earlier, with all 38 graduates now employed as full time teachers. The second part of the project, to train 19 teachers to teach a full curriculum in Tibetan, is nearing completion. The students are doing very

well and all are guaranteed jobs. The training for 50 unemployed youth portion went off track, in that the first 24 students selected were school graduates instead of the school dropouts for whom the project was designed. This was a straight lack of communication between one section of the Department and another (Projects and Scholarships). As soon as TRAS realised that the vocational trainings selected didn't sound like the original list, questions were asked, apologies arrived and the next group of students were selected from the school dropouts. 4 of them are girls, studying TV repair work. So far, all who have graduated are employed (see December 1999 newsletter for a description of the first 12 graduates). (TRAS/CIDA) \$114,815.

Computer Training, Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, India: Purchase of computers for training courses in computer literacy. Several classes have now graduated, a staff of five full time employees is in place, they can hardly keep up with the publishing, and they are busy printing the full works of the late Director of the Institute. A new proposal has been received to increase the size and scope of this most successful project. \$17,600.

SHARE: Kulu Valley, India: Construction of toilets, Phase 2. Construction of 250 basic toilets in steep terrain, to improve personal hygiene and health and the cleanliness of water supply. Health education provided to the villagers. This project was delayed by the disastrous landslide which hit the area in 1998, but is now going well. It should be completed by December 2000. (TRAS/CIDA) \$40,312.

Incarnation Convent, Mysore, India. The only project TRAS undertakes
Continued on page 4

Project Report (Continued)

in south India, in partnership with our trusted friend, Sister Victorine. Nurses' training for 12 girls: \$14,095. Teacher training: \$7,000. Final reports due this month.

CONTINUING PROJECTS:

Little Flowers Creche, Dharamsala, India. \$1,500 per year, reviewed annually. This amount supports a creche for 45 toddlers, the children of the Tibetan Government-In-Exile workers. The Centre, in the Government compound, allows mothers to work and be self-supporting.

English language School, Lhasa, Tibet. \$4,830 1 year English course for 15 young people x 3 years. Without knowledge of English, many job opportunities are denied the Tibetans. This course is going well, and the students are very hardworking, picking up a good command of English in a short time.

The Lhasa school added on a kindergarten, with great success. TRAS is supporting a 3 year program. \$4,452.

CHIRAG Mother and Child project, Sitla, India. It was hoped to have this very successful project self supporting by now, but that was an unrealistic dream. TRAS will support it and a health component, along with an all-important review process of the operation of CHIRAG. It is a truly wonderful venture, founded by an altruistic Indian who retired to this area to help the local villagers. It has done wonders - but what will happen when he retires from this second "career"? TRAS and CIVA (Canada India Village Aid, also founded by George and Inge Woodcock) are jointly helping CHIRAG work out a management plan so that the good work will continue in an efficient, well controlled way. \$100,474 (TRAS/CIVA/

CIDA) TRAS' share is \$16,140.

Department of Education, Tibetan Government in Exile - training for 5 nurses and 7 thanka painters, for 3 years and 5 years, \$6,909 and \$14,000 respectively.

Buddha Memorial Home, Kathmandu, vocational training project: tailoring(\$16,334), carpentry(\$12,680) and electrical(\$9,496) trainings for 52 students, to be completed in 2001.

Rinchen Zangpo Society, Kangra, India: Housemother training to look after boarders at this school in a remote valley in northern India, where TRAS previously trained 5 teachers. 18 month course and practicum. \$6,676.

Incarnation Convent, Mysore, South India. Sister Victorine's vocational training for Youth. Training in a variety of useful skills over three years. \$9,600.

PROJECTS UNDER REVIEW BY CIDA:

ACAP has proposed a further three year rural integrated development project. CIDA has asked for the proposal to be rewritten for its October meeting. (TRAS/CIDA) \$442,750.

Institute of Buddhist Dialectics has asked for funds to run a two year teacher training course (in Tibetan) for 25 teachers from extremely remote schools in northern India/Ladakh. This is an area traditionally populated by Tibetan peoples, who were always supported from Tibet. The Dalai Lama is anxious to address their plea for help to preserve their language and customs in an increasingly multi-cultural society. TRAS Vice President Marion Tipple is trekking in the area at present, and will visit some of the schools to ascertain whether this

is a viable project for TRAS to undertake. (TRAS/CIDA) \$43,320.

Department of Education Pre-primary teacher training: There is still a great need for qualified pre-primary teachers in the Tibetan schools, to give the children a good start. The first project was successful, and TRAS is confident this will be a good project. 25 teachers to receive a two year training based on Montessori method and Tibetan language. (TRAS/CIDA) \$64,305.

PROJECTS TO BE COMPLETED BY TRAS:

There are always more requests! Projects which the Directors are looking at include:

- Department of Education Nurses Training for 13 women (\$24,792 over two years).
- Department of Education Thangka Painting for 14 students (\$34,944 over five years)
- Institute of Buddhist Dialectics - further computer equipment for larger classroom (\$13,430)
- SHARE, Manali, vocational training in computer literacy (an old request, reworked to be more viable) and hotel management training. (Manali is a popular tourist destination, with an explosion in the number of hotels). (\$58,000 over three years)
- Gu-Chu-Sum Movement of Tibet - tailor training for 10 women, ex-political prisoners (\$24,048 over 2 years)
- Save the Children Fund, Ladakh - help with a health advocacy and education project. TRAS is interested in pursuing some part of this project. Marion Tipple is visiting the office in Leh to evaluate the usefulness of the project.

DIDI LA'S STORY - Part II

This is the continuation of the story of one Tibetan refugee who has finally found a new life in Canada. Her story is representative of thousands about the Tibetans who fled their country in 1959. We tell it, to remind ourselves of our goal to give a helping hand to those in need. (See the March 2000 Newsletter for the first instalment)

Going back to the escape in 1959, the family had gone so far together when they came to the point where her mother decided to follow one route and her father another. On that last night together, Didi and her oldest brother slept outside with their father, under a brilliant starry sky. For hours he talked about the stars to them, telling them the names of the constellations. Finally they fell asleep. When Didi awoke, her father had gone. When she met her father years later, she told him that every night she had sent her love to the stars, as the memory of that night was the nearest thing to

her father that she had - and he told her that he had done the same thing! Her father and oldest brother walked with some of his region's people towards China, by mistake, and were captured by a group of Chinese. The Chinese asked the people to denounce their lord, but he had always been a just ruler, and they refused to do so again and again. Finally someone whispered to the Chinese that their lord had six fingers on one hand, and they were able to identify him. The Chinese took him away and put him in a labour camp until 1978.

Didi's great uncle (her mother's uncle) who was the Tibetan doctor, ended up in the same camp, as did many lamas and noble Tibetans. There were also many educated Chinese prisoners (from the Cultural Revolution) who were treated as badly as the Tibetans. The so-called guilty ones had to wear black. They all existed on one bowl of rice and one cup of tea a day for 10 years. Each morning they were loaded into a truck and had to take buckets of raw sewage

labour camp, living with a family and working on a farm. He eventually returned to the family land, and has married and has 5 children. He raises animals, in the family tradition. When their father grew older, he went to live with his son, and was happy leading a simple life, spinning wool and playing with his grandchildren - but he would never touch rice! He told Didi that he was grateful to the Chinese because thanks to them he had learned about poverty, as well as knowing

wealth and power as a lord. This knowledge had brought him back to Buddhism, which he was practising.

The doctor uncle was asked to help many sick people in the labour camp. He had nothing with him, but through the power of suggestion, he seems to have helped many of them. Even years later, when Didi visited Tibet, people were coming to give him clothing and food, gifts to thank him for helping them or their relatives when they were sick. *What did he do,*

with no medications? He would have the patient sit in front of him, and he would describe the large cloth bag in which he kept his medicines. He then described the many tiny bags of medicines, each with a wooden tag to identify what it held, and had the patient visualise him taking a pinch of this herb and a pinch of another. Then he would mime rolling the herbs into a pill, describe how it smelt, and ask the patient to imagine swallowing it. He would explain how the medicine would work - and invariably his patients' health improved!

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Didi's uncles and aunt, at their home in Tibet.

and spread it on the rice fields. **However, there was a good side to the camp - it was like a university, due to the calibre of intellectuals in it!** When things eased up in 1978, the Tibetan prisoners were allowed to return to Tibet and, as ex-nomads, were actually given back some of their land, a few animals, tents and money to start them off. They went back to their herding tradition and lived without interference. In fact, the erstwhile lords were given small pensions. Didi's oldest brother was not imprisoned like his father, but was in a sort of open

Didi's mother had chosen to follow what she had been told of the pilgrim route to Nepal. With her travelled her mother, Didi, the little sister, a cousin and others. Didi's mother is remembered not only for her beauty but also for her bravery in snatching up the children and taking them and her mother towards safety, when soldiers followed them, at great risk to herself and her unborn child. When the baby died inside her and she became ill, the granny and children carried her to the border, and actually crossed it, but she died shortly after. They had crossed into Mustang, where her grandmother's older brother had arrived a few days before them. He was a very important lama, the Sapchu Rimpoche. The King of Mustang allowed him to stay in his castle near the border, and the family was given tents in the castle grounds. The Rimpoche said Didi should become a nun, and shaved her head. Early the next morning, Didi heard people talking, saying "Don't wake her, leave her in peace a little longer". She knew there was something wrong, but could not

tell what. She was taken to grandmother later that morning, and they went to a big tent where she could hear chanting. She remembers it vividly - the two rows of monks, about twenty of them, with her lama uncle sitting on a throne at the end of the tent. She was used to being with monks while they chanted and prayed, and they had always smiled at her and given her candies (shades of The Cup!), but on this morning there were no smiles, and several had tears in their eyes. In front of the throne she saw a large pile of mud, and suddenly realised

that her mother had died and was buried there. She ran from the tent out into the forest, where she wandered all day, crying and screaming to her mother to return. By evening, she had accepted that her mother would not come back, and that she herself must be strong to look after her little sister and her beloved grandmother.

In Tibet, the soul of the deceased is thought to stay in limbo for three days, then it goes into a state called "bardo", a kind of purgatory. If the soul can find its way, within 48 days it is reborn. During the bardo, the lamas and family call



The compound of Didi's family in eastern Tibet.

to the departed not to be afraid, but to follow the light. The lamas and family pray for 48 days to help the departed on her way to rebirth and they burn barley powder and butter. Didi used to go to these barley powder and butter fires to talk to her mother. It is therefore very important to have close family members present from the third day on, to help the departed.

Amazingly, Didi's grandfather turned up on the third day. He was a very powerful duke, a great soldier. In 1959, Grandfather had gone to Lhasa with his

troops to help plan the Dalai Lama's escape, and then had left the country himself, arriving in Assam. From there he had come to Mustang looking for the family, and although he was met with the tragic news of his daughter's death, nevertheless it was wonderful that he had arrived on the important third day. He promptly took over guardianship of the three children. He wanted to find the best teacher he could for Didi's brother, who was an 11 year old monk. He found such a teacher in Dalhousie, and by selling his wife's jewelry, in particular a wide silver belt with turquoise and coral ornaments, he managed to pay for the boy to go to this teacher. He stayed in Dalhousie, at the "British Cabin" with the teacher and other young monks for about 10 years. Didi's 4 year old sister was eventually adopted by her aunt and taken to live in Dehra Dun in northern India. Didi stayed with her grandparents.

They stayed in Mustang for a year. Grandfather bought a few donkeys, and, with a young man who had accompanied him from Tibet (one of the orphans whom he, as lord of the region, had taken in), a hired Gurkha, their horses and donkeys, Grandfather started a new career as a trader. He bought trinkets in Nepal and then went up into the mountains, selling his wares to the herdsmen and the villagers. He would return with wool and butter for the family. Didi stayed with her granny, who was very depressed after her daughter's death. She spent her time weeping and praying. Didi made a new friend, a Nepali girl, who suggested Didi go on a picnic with

SPONSORSHIP REPORT



We have several case histories of children who need to be sponsored at the Buddha Memorial Home in Khatmandu. Here is one of them.

Dawa Sonam Gurung, male, 10 years old. Dawa's parents are destitute peasants from Muktinath in Jomsom district. Having no land of their own, they work at other people's fields for their livelihood. The poor boy has two younger sisters and an older sister, none of whom are going to school. The parents wish to send at least their son to school if they obtain the opportunity. Under the support of the headman of Muktinath, the child was brought to this school by his aunt, all the way from there (in northern Nepal). Dawa has been to a small village government school up to class 2. He seems quite clever at his studies. Therefore we have taken him in and are looking for a sponsor.

Bir Youth Centre Completed



An unprepossessing, unused warehouse is now alive with action and laughter, thanks to the foresight of Pema Sither, the ex-Settlement Officer at Bir Tibetan Settlement. Like teenagers the world over who have nothing to do but get into trouble, the unemployed youth of Bir were causing problems, in the settlement and in the nearby communities. Now they are too busy playing table tennis, chess, carom, volleyball and badminton. They are learning to type and have a library with newspaper and magazine subscriptions. The whole community took part in repairing, painting and renovating the building, and everyone is very happy with the results. The Centre

will also be used as a gathering place during festive occasions. The new Settlement Officer, Tensin Woesser, writes that "they are all very grateful to TRAS for their help and generosity".

The sad news is that we have received a letter from Pema Sither, whom members will remember was in a tragic car accident that killed two of his three children. He has managed to write the letter himself, although he says he is now a quadriplegic and is "learning to face this unknown new way of life- a first among the Tibetans in India." The Tibetan government is trying to find work for him, although this is something new to them too. He and his wife are extremely grateful to TRAS for the gift of \$500 to help educate his remaining child.

THE TRAS WEBSITE. We know some of you have been looking for it. It WILL be ready soon! PLEASE NOTE: The address has changed to www.tras.bc.ca

DIDI LA'S STORY

Continued

her. There would be hundreds of youngsters at the picnic, and Didi was given permission to go with her friend. They spent the day picking leaves and rolling them, Didi following her friend's example. Then some men arrived who paid money for the rolled leaves - Didi received 5 rupees - her first wage - for, of all things, marijuana!! When Grandfather discovered this, he tore up the 5 rupee note!

After a year in Mustang, the family moved down to Kathmandu. Didi would allow no-one but herself to lead her frail granny's horse, but even though she

went very carefully over the rocks and slippery ledges and across raging streams, Granny fell and broke her rib. The Rimpoche was offered a position at the monkey temple near Kathmandu, Grandfather set off trading again, and Didi and Granny moved into a little house near Kathmandu. At one point Didi remembers catching chicken pox and being desperately ill from it. She used to love to eat a Nepali "cake", like a little chappati, and fried, but Granny said it would be bad for her while she was ill. One day when Granny was out, a kind neighbour brought Didi one of the

cakes. Granny was cross when she found out, but Didi heard the neighbour say, "Let her have it if she likes it, she's not going to make it". Didi realised that they thought she was going to die - but she knew she couldn't die because of having to be strong for Granny and her little sister. So she willed herself to get better.

Then news came that the Indian Government was setting up wonderful settlements for the Tibetan refugees - and the next phase of Didi's life began. Look out for the story of Didi's life in India and, finally, Canada, in a future newsletter.

TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY

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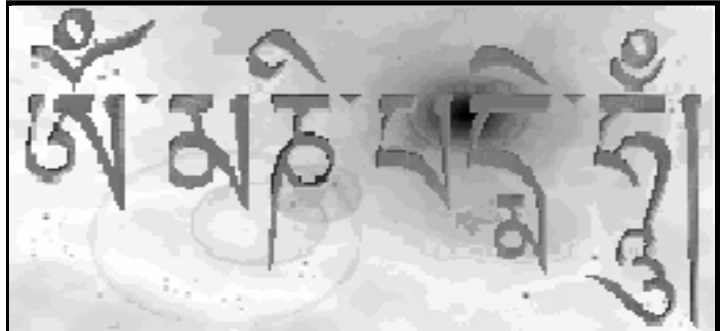
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Trans - Himalayan Newsletter
 (published quarterly)

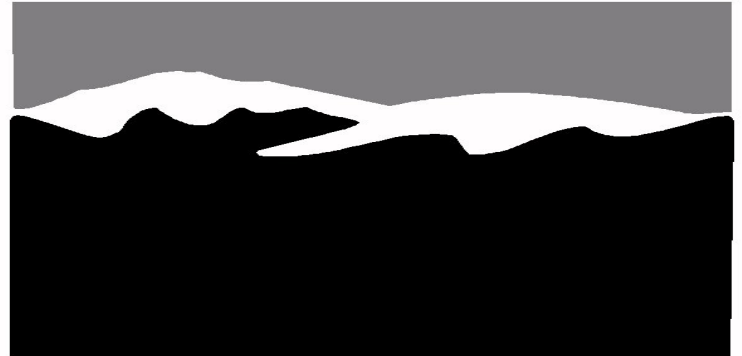
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Om Mani Padme Hum
Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus



Trans-Himalayan Aid Society (TRAS)

Yearly Membership donation (\$20) ----- \$ 20

Possible Additional Donations:

Monthly Donation of \$25 for the “Child Development and Education
 Project” at a residential school-----

Donation to the Old People’s Fund, which supports a “Self-Help Project”
 for the elderly and infirm -----

Donation to the general fund or other specific area of your choice -----

TOTAL \$ _____

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