

The death of Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche

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Twelve years have passed since Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche was killed in a car accident. Since that time, a great many details surrounding the tragic event have come to be known. Today, it is important that information surrounding Jamgon Rinpoche's death be reviewed in light of all the known facts.

Mick Brown, in his recently released book *The Dance of Seventeen Lives* by Bloomsbury, and Lea Terhune, in *Karmapa The Politics of Reincarnation* by Wisdom Publications, have both written inaccurate and biased stories about the recognition of the 17th Karmapa. Neither author gives a truthful account of the subject nor explores opposing sides to the story. Lea Terhune wrote her volume under Situ Rinpoche's direct supervision. In fact, Lea Terhune was Situ Rinpoche's personal secretary and student for many years. Mick Brown wrote his book after Mr. Tashi Wangdu, a minister within the Tibetan Government in Exile, approached Bloomsbury Publishing to take on the project. Both authors base their case on longstanding misinformation perpetuated by both Situ Rinpoche and Gyaltsab Rinpoche. Each book acts in an undisguised fashion as a vehicle to slander and defame Shamar Rinpoche and Topga Rinpoche, both nephews of His Holiness the late 16th Karmapa.

The allegations put forth in these books come twelve years after the fact. The entire story involves a complex Tibetan political intrigue that has been largely ignored by the American press. Both authors rely on the Western person's naiveté in the matter and steer the reader solely towards one side of the story.

In his book, Brown spins the story about Jamgon Rinpoche's death. On page 143, he writes, "*Indeed, so shocking- so inconceivable- was Jamgon's death that it was hard to believe that it was an accident. What possible forces of karma could have made it so? Rumours quickly began to multiply. Photographs showed that the engine had been found some thirty yards away from the crashed car, suggesting that the*

engine had been catapulted from the car, as if by an explosion. The soles of Jamgon's feet were said to be scorched. On the day before the accident, the car had been serviced by mechanics who had been summoned from Delhi. Clearly, they had planted a bomb. Or they had tampered with the brakes. No, the mechanics actually came from Bhutan, organised by Topga.” Brown continues, “*But who stood to gain from Jamgon Kongtrul's death? He had been on his way to Tibet to fulfil the instructions of the prediction letter presented by Tai Situ. Only someone who wished to prevent that would benefit. The names of Topga and Shamar Rinpoche were whispered in corners.”*

In *Karmapa the Politics of Reincarnation*, Terhune angles the story in a similar fashion. On page 176, she states, “*The obituary in the Sikkim Observer, however, which called Kongtrul ‘perhaps the main pillar of Rumtek monastery,’ also noted, ‘While no one has so far openly questioned the manner in which the ‘accident’ took place, many people are now quite doubtful and suspicious about what has been described by many as a ‘mysterious’ death.’*” Here, Terhune clearly tries to insinuate that Jamgon Kongtrul's death was no accident. As the tone of her rhetoric unfolds, little is left to the imagination in noting that the villains alluded to are none other than Shamar Rinpoche and Topga Rinpoche.

In both books, it is insinuated that both Shamar Rinpoche and Topga Rinpoche arranged the death of Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, who was killed in a car accident on April 26th, 1992. However, in the following pages, it will be shown that these conclusions raise glaring suspicions. Situ Rinpoche and his team have a long established pattern of covering their tracks by accusing others of the very crimes they themselves committed. The following events review some of Situ Rinpoche and Gyaltsab Rinpoche's recent activity and its connection to the death of Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche.

The strange patterns around the accident

A. The accident occurred in Siliguri, in the foothills of the Himalayas in Northern India, at a remote location, removed from any telephone, and before cell phones were available. However, news of the accident managed to reach the leader of Situ Rinpoche's organisation, *the Joint Action Committee*, in Gangtok literally ten

minutes after the tragedy. That person was phoning Rumtek about the accident immediately after it occurred. The news reached Situ Rinpoche soon after. How was that possible?

B. On the day Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche died, Situ Rinpoche was in Taipei, far removed from the roadside accident. However, from his distant vantage point, Situ Rinpoche immediately began to blame Shamar Rinpoche and Topga Rinpoche for having caused the tragedy. Accusations that Shamar and Topga Rinpoches had arranged the murder of Jamgon Rinpoche began to fly literally minutes after the accident. The utter speed and manner of blame that ensued following the crash appeared to be prearranged propaganda. A network was clearly in place to spread the news almost at light speed. Indeed, Situ Rinpoche did not waste a single minute before broadcasting his allegation far and wide. The very day of the accident, news reached every place within Situ's Rinpoche's world-wide sphere of influence. In Lhasa, Tibet, Akong Tulku and Bu Chung Chung, a well-known smuggler of rare antelope skins, spread the scandal regarding Shamar Rinpoche's alleged involvement. In Taipei, Chen Lu An, a close confidant of Situ Rinpoche's, spread the word. In America, Bardo Tulku and Tenzin Chonyi and Bokar Ngodrub from Woodstock told of Situ Rinpoche's certainty regarding who had arranged the accident, and in the United Kingdom, the task went to members of the Samye Ling Center and its sub branches.

The first people who came to see Jamgon Kongtrul's body were his parents. Kongtrul's chief of staff, Tenzin Dorje, survived the crash. That same day, it fell to Jamgon Kongtrul's family to follow through with the accident investigation. In fact, the wrecked BMW car was later kept at the family home in Kalimpong. On that day, among those close to the accident, no one, including any member of Jamgon Rinpoche's family, raised the slightest suspicion that someone had murdered him. However, back in Taiwan, Situ Rinpoche proclaimed he had just this conviction and was broadcasting it to one and all. The question was why? The idea that Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche could have been murdered never even entered the minds of most people, yet Situ Rinpoche thought of it without hesitation and blamed the accident on both Shamar Rinpoche and Topga Rinpoche.

C. There were in fact, good reasons for Situ Rinpoche's manner of thinking. Situ Rinpoche had already organised the Joint Action Committee in Gangtok, Sikkim, India, and infused his organisation with enormous sums of money. The Joint Action Committee consisted of a group of politicians in Sikkim who have strong indirect influence over the government. The head of the Joint Action Committee was Mr. Tashi of the Mathang family. Mr. Tashi lived at Sikkim House in New Delhi and held the position of Commissioner of the Sikkim Government. *Prior to the accident in Siliguri, Mr. Tashi had personally made all the arrangements for a mechanic to be sent from Delhi to work on Jamgon Rinpoche's car. The mechanic told Jamgon Rinpoche that he had worked on the brand new 5 series BMW the entire previous day and not finished before the evening. He gave express instructions to Jamgon Rinpoche that the car should be driven very fast on one occasion to test for any mechanical fault. It was during the speed test on the following morning that the crash occurred.* It should be noted that the person who arranged the mechanic to work on Jamgon Rinpoche's car was not Topga Rinpoche as alleged in Brown's book, it was Mr. Tashi of the Mathang family.

On August 2nd, 1993, individuals closely allied to Situ Rinpoche attacked Rumtek Monastery. On that day the entire Mathang family was there in force to help spearhead the take-over. In fact, the Mathangs have acted hand in hand with Situ Rinpoche from the beginning to the present.

D. It worked out to be especially convenient for Situ Rinpoche that Jamgon Kongtrul died just when he did. Only two months previously on March 4th, 1992, Situ Rinpoche had suddenly produced what he claimed was the “prediction” letter of the 16th Karmapa. Both Shamar Rinpoche and Topga Rinpoche had cried foul, saying that the penmanship on the document in no way resembled the 16th Karmapa's handwriting. The 16th Karmapa was in fact Shamar Rinpoche and Topga Rinpoche's uncle, so both nephews were intimately familiar with the his writing. On top of this, Shamar Rinpoche had studied alongside Situ Rinpoche for eight years in Rumtek Monastery and was very well acquainted with his handwriting style. It appeared that someone had attempted to replicate the 16th Karmapa's handwriting. According to Shamar Rinpoche, there was no disguising the author's penmanship; it was Situ Rinpoche's. Raising further suspicion, the signature had been well smudged. Situ Rinpoche claimed this was due to having sweated onto the document over the years while keeping it next to his body. Again, here was a contradiction

that Shamar Rinpoche was quick to point out. The letter had been kept inside an envelope that was also kept inside a silk pouch. *How*, Shamar Rinpoche posed the question, *could the signature have been smudged while the envelope that had carried the letter over the years show not the slightest stain?* While Shamar Rinpoche challenged the letter's authenticity, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche had excused himself and gone straight to his own home to collect two papers. One of these was a hand written letter sent to him by the 16th Karmapa, and the other was a letter sent to him from Situ Rinpoche himself. Both letters were immediately compared with Situ Rinpoche's "prediction" letter in order to determine if Shamar Rinpoche's suspicions of a forgery were correct. Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche had also brought from his home a small tape recorder to record the historical meeting. When he turned the machine on Situ Rinpoche became extremely agitated and angry and forced Jamgon Rinpoche to turn it off. Situ Rinpoche demanded that all four Rinpoches present at the meeting agree then and there to the letter's authenticity. Shamar Rinpoche stood his ground and insisted the document undergo a forensic examination before it be used to find the 17th Karmapa. Situ Rinpoche countered with the argument that such a test would take years to perform and cost too much money. As Shamar Rinpoche continued to demand that a forensic test be done, Situ Rinpoche yelled, *"I will not let this letter be checked by forensic science even if I die nine times to stop it."* All this occurred before Gyaltsab Rinpoche managed to examine the letter himself. From across the room, Gyaltsab Rinpoche pronounced that he could clearly see that the letter was in the 16th Karmapa's handwriting. At that point, Shamar Rinpoche challenged him, *"How can you know, you haven't even examined the letter yet?"* After that, Gyaltsab Rinpoche stayed very quiet.

Situ and Gyaltsab had brought nine jeep loads of people from Gangtok to the meeting. These people were members of the Joint Action Committee and they had begun to behave extremely aggressively. It became clear to both Shamar Rinpoche and Jamgon Rinpoche that in order to hold off the tidal force of support for Situ and his proposed candidate they would need to create a diversion. Jamgon Rinpoche made a proposal to postpone any decision for eight more months while he himself would travel into Tibet and locate the boy from the "prediction" letter. When found, Jamgon Rinpoche was to determine if the boy was the genuine Karmapa or not. All four Rinpoches agreed on this plan. It was the logical next step so no one could refuse to agree to it. In the face of these suddenly unfolding events, Shamar Rinpoche and Jamgon Rinpoche hoped to buy time.

In hindsight, it is not so strange that Situ Rinpoche and Gyaltsab Rinpoche went forward with their plan immediately after Jamgon

Kongtrul Rinpoche's death. Things were then able to proceed smoothly without Jamgon Rinpoche's interference. There would be no more active threat to the confirmation of Situ's candidate. The timing of Jamgon Rinpoche's death fit perfectly into Situ and Gyaltsab Rinpoche's strategy to enthrone the boy of their choosing at all costs.

E. Jamgon Rinpoche and Situ Rinpoche had been closely linked in the early 1980s. Then in the late 80s, they began to fall out. In fact, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche had clashed with Situ Rinpoche six months before his death. This happened when Jamgon Rinpoche was forced to challenge Situ Rinpoche's authority, after it became apparent that he was conducting unethical business at Rumtek. Situ Rinpoche had sent Akong Tulku and his secretary Lea Wyler to Rumtek in order to buy off members of the Rumtek community by giving away large sums of money. Their activity had raised Jamgon Rinpoche's suspicions and he wanted to know what all this money was paying for. When confronted, Akong Tulku and Lea replied that they were acting specifically on Situ Rinpoche's orders. Jamgon Kongtrul insisted that before any more funds be distributed the pair would first have to consult the General Secretary of Rumtek, Topga Rinpoche. Unable to locate Topga Rinpoche by phone, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche decided to take matters into his own hands. He insisted that Akong and Lea stop passing out money and asked both of them to leave Rumtek immediately. Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche's secretary, Mr. Trinley Ngodrub, his American wife Kunga and over five hundred members of the Rumtek community who kept their alliance with Shamar Rinpoche, witnessed these events.

Tenzin Chogyal

Read also the paper: www.tilogaard.dk/english/Two_Jamgon_Kongtruls.pdf.