

PROMOTION OF SANSKRIT STUDIES IN SIKKIM

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A hill tract in the lap of Kanchanjanga happens to be topographically strategic. A small state is contiguously connected with TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region of China) which was traditionally called Bod Yul (Bhotadesa). A sizeable number of Bod pa from Bhotadesa who are usually named Bhotia or Bhutia entered by the 16th century in the Tista and the Rangit Valleys in search of better livelihood. Prior to them, the Lepcha of different ethnic group had entered from the eastern part of the lower Himalayas by the 13th century A.D. The advent did meet with the Tsong (Magar or Mon) who had been the dwellers of lower slopes about the foothills of Sikkim. Thus the ethnic diversity of Sikkim is popularly described as Tsong-Rong-Bod or reversely Bod-Rong-Mon.

The Sanskrit culture which spread in the Ganga Brahmaputra valley had the least scope to be in Sikkim directly. Moreover, the traders who used to carry the culture traits from one country to other had, had less communication in the olden days. The Bhotia traders of Sikkim preferred to cross the Nathula and Jalep la with their merchandise for exchange with their Bod pa or Tibetan counterpart in stead of coming down to the foothills up to the Tista locality. The Lepcha or Rong group have been agro-dependent and usually move in the local markets. Similar is the case with the Magar and other local groups. Vedicism transformed through the Puranic and the Smarta traditions could not move up to the hill tracts of Sikkim. The Nepalese however accepted Saiva, and Sakta cults together with Buddhism. The inhabitants of eastern most Himalayas traditionally are said to have associated with the Krishna and Parasurama legends and episodes.

However, Nirmal Chandra Sinha has already pointed out in his article on the impact of Sanskrit with Tibetan. He rightly observed that Sanskrit and Tibetan are supplementary to one another in understanding the ancient Indian traditions.

Since the advent of the Bhotia from Bhotadesa (Tibet), they carried the legacy of the Buddhist Culture, which had entered into Bod Yul through Sanskrit used by the Buddhists of Bharatavarsa. Buddhism had spread up to Gandhara, Khotan during the lifetime of Asoka (2nd cent. B.C.). As a result of that the Buddhist literature in Sanskrit did not always follow the language norms as prescribed by Panini (circa 400 B.C.). That leaves a room to presume that Sanskrit had been a spoken language of the north-western Himalayas in spite of systematisation by grammatic formulae

by Panini. The Buddhist texts like Lalitavistara, Manjusrimulakalpa, Gandavyuha etc. preserve the specimens of the Sanskrit speech which had been in vogue probably up the beginning of the Christian era.

Again, the Buddhists in Tibet endeavoured vigorously to preserve Buddhavacana or the Holy Buddhist literature kanjur (bka' 'gyur) in Tibetan translation from the original sources which had been carried to Tibet by the Buddhist monks since the 7th cent. A.D. The Indian pandits collaborated the Tibetan lo tsabas in translating the Sanskrit Buddhist texts and thereby Sanskrit Studies developed indirectly with an impact on chos skad in Tibetan.

Actually speaking, chos skad or the Buddhist scriptural language which had been formulated during the Early Spread of Buddhism (sn dar) in Tibet (cent. 7-10 A.D.) was Sanskritic in structure. Semblance of Sanskrit and Tibetan in the morphology and the syntax are traced in many aspects of the two languages. The Sanskritisation of Tibetan in Chos skad opens a new approach of the Tibetan Linguistics and that requires a separate treatment elsewhere.

However, a learner of Chos skad endeavours to learn Sanskrit language and literature, especially Buddhistic for in-depth study of the Kanjur (bka' 'gyur, Buddhavacana) and the Tanjur (bstan 'gyur shastra). A few Sanskrit scholars among the Tibetan erudite like Sakya Panchen, Gyal wa nga ba have been honoured by the Tibetans for their access to the inner significance of Chos. Especially, in the mantras preserved of the Rgyud sngags and dzungs the Tibetan experts experience their inaccessibility in absence of their Sanskrit learning.

Keeping the above in view, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, which is reverted to its original name Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology (SRIT) in Gangtok resolved to acknowledge Sanskrit Studies essential for developing higher researches in the field of Tibetology. Since 1960 SRIT avowedly follows the said procedure to interrelate Tibetan researches with reference to Sanskrit as and where required. Sanskrit Studies add a new focus in Tibetological quests based on Katan deno gsum (bka' 'gyur bstan 'gyur sde snad gsum). Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok was pioneer to introduce regular Sanskrit classes — a five year course for stipendiary Monk Student since 1960. The classes were discontinued in 1973-74.

Buddhist works contributed by Nagarjuna Asvaghosa, Vasumitra, Asanga Vasubandhu, Dinnaga, Dharmakirti, Candrakirti, Ratnakarasanti, Jnanakirti in Paninian Sanskrit had been carried to Tibet. A large number of eminent erudite scholars participated to elucidate the thoughts of the Indian Buddhists with new approaches which took shape in separate traditional lineages like, Nyingma, Kargyu, Sakyas, and Gelug in Tibet. The Buddhist monastic units in Sikkim inherit these traditional lineages through centuries. Several Sikkimese scholars with yellow robes flocked to Tibet for acquisition of the Indian teaching from the Tibetan erudite as those had been lost in India since the 12th cent. A.D. After completion of their

learning in Tibetan monastic academic centres like Sera, Gadan, Tashilhunpo, the Sikkimese teachers have been associated with the monasteries in various parts of Sikkim. But their aspiration to learn the original source materials of the Indian erudite personalities remain unfulfilled in spite of their best endeavour to learn Sanskrit at the individual level.

On the other hand, several Nepali authors and eminent poets beginning from Acarya Bhanu Bhakta, Kavi Raghunath Upadhyaya, adopted their inspiration from the Sanskrit literature. Even the Nepali drama writers of the Raghavananda Nataka, Haragauri Nataka, Pandavavijaya nataka, Harischandra nrityam of mediaeval period of Nepal were conversant in Sanskrit Natyasastra and other texts. Acarya Bhanu Bhakta did not hesitate to follow the Sanskrit metres in his composition like indravajra, upajati, vasantatilaka, malini, totaka, sardulavikridita etc. It may be added that earlier Carana (soothsayer) like Bharatavarma in Nepal had been acquainted with Sanskritic traditions. Similar instances may be referred to the contributions of Nepali poets like Indirasa, Patanjali, Vasantasharma, Vidyaranya Kesari, who had followed the Sanskrit kavya style (riti) with aesthetic exquisiteness (rasalankara).

The Sikkimese Nepali Speakers, though not always conversant in Sanskrit as an academician claims, have got the traditional aesthetic approach with its Sanskritic environment. Measures for promoting Sanskrit Studies do not always refer to Buddhistic feed back but also to cultural enlightenment in general.

A few Sanskrita Pathashala for teaching Sanskrit in a traditional manner have been established since the mid-sixties of our century in Sikkim. centres are of two types. Namely:

- i) registered under the Ministry of Education Sikkim National Government with financial aids annually;
- ii) non-registered with the local initiative. The distribution of those Pathasala is enumerated below.

	Registered	Non-Registered		
East Sikkim	6	1	=	7
West Sikkim	1	1	=	2
South Sikkim	2	1	=	3

These Sanskrita Pathasala traditional Sanskrit learning are affiliated to Varanaseya Sampurnananda Sanskrita Visva Vidyalaya. The courses and syllabi are also followed accordingly to conduct their examination after completion of study. It takes five consecutive years from Prathama to Acarya. A person awarded with the title of Acarya is recognised as an equivalent to the Master degree in Sanskrit of a recognised University. In that respect the standard of education is up to the mark as par with the other Universities. That is a plus point in respect of the

learners who qualify for entrance into in-depth study programme to explore a new vista of Tibetan Studies. With reference to Sanskrit sources and Sanskrit Studies. With reference to their Tibetan materials, the Pathashala project has succeeded to a great extent to enrouse awareness to a great extent.

Sikkim Government has taken steps to promote studies in Sanskrit vigorously. Shri Udaya Chandra Vashistha has been engaged in the capacity of Officer on Special Duty for the purpose. Two important programmes are in the course of implementation.

1. Establishment of Sanskrita Mahavidyalaya by the State Government at Gyalzhing (rgyal zhing).

2. Popular motivation for promoting Sanskrit awareness to explore the cultural heritage of Sikkim.

The above programmes have a satisfactory response from the Sikkimese.

II

In this connection SRIT since its inception as Namgyal Institute of Tibetology has ventured to promote the cause for the last four decades. The following bilingual (Tibetan Sanskrit editions) of Tibetological source materials have come out.

- 1) 'Phags pa kun tu bzang po spyod pa'i smon lam (Samanta-bhadra-caryatika) ed. S.K. Pathak. 1961 'Phags pa Kuntubzang to spyod pa'i 'grel ba.
- 2) (Arya-samansabhadra caryatika) of Lean Śkyā Khutuktu Latetavajra's commentary in Tibetan, 1963.
- 3) Vijnptimatrasiddhi Vimsatika of Vasubandhu, with introduction, notes and index verbarum by N. Aiyaswami Sastri, 1964.
- 3a) Bhayartha-siddhih (Establishment of objective Reality) of Bhadanta Subhagupta (slob-dpon dGe-Srungs) an exponent of Buddhist Vaibhasika school (empirical/objective Reality by N. Aiyaswami Sastri, B.T. Vol. IV No. 2 1967).
- 4) Shes rab (Prajna), a Sanskrit Tibetan Bilingual lexicon compiled by Tenzin Gyaltshan of Kham (18th cent. A.D.)

Besides these bilingual works several Tibetan works having reference to the Sanskrit source materials have been brought to light. Such as:

- 5) Sangs rgyas stong (Sahasra Buddha) an introduction to Mahayana Iconography. Nirmal C. Sinha, 1988.

- 6) Tales the Thankas Tell, an introduction to Tibetan scroll portraits. Nirmal Sinha, 1989.
- 7) Aspects of Classical Tibetan Medicine (Special volume of Bulletin of Tibetology) 1993.

Moreover, the following articles published in Bulletins of Tibetology focus a new approach towards Sanskritic studies into the context of the Indo-Tibetan Cultural relationship since the 7th cent A.D.

On the Upanisads:

B. Ghosh : Upanisadic Terms in Buddhism (Bulletin of Tibetology (BT), 1969 No. 3, pp. 5-18.

On the Sanskrit Grammar:

R.K. Sprigg: Vyanjanabhakti and Irregularities in Tibetan verbs (BT. 1970 No. 2, pp. 5-20)

B. Ghosh : Study of Sanskrit Grammar in Tibet (BT. 1970 no. 2, pp. 21-42)

On the Nyaya and the naiyayikas:

Sanjit Kumar Sadhukhan : The conflict between the Buddhist and the Naiyayika Philosophers (BT. 1990 No. 1-3, pp. 39-54).

On the Tantra and Agama:

Biswanath Banerjee: Development of the Kalacauara Tantra in Later Buddhism (BT. 1985 No. pp. 9-23).

B. Ghosh: Emergence of Kalacaura Tantra (1995, No. 2, pp. 19-34) Buddhist Hymnal (BT. 1994, HS. 2, pp. 43-52)

Buddhist Hymnal (BT. 1996 N.S. No. 7).

S.K. Pathak: The Swadhisthana-krama of Sarahapa (-da) (NT. 1994 No. 1, pp. 26-34).

The few Nepali Priest families, whether they belong to Sivamargi or to Buddhamargi cult are equipped with Sanskrit as family tradition and they may possess Sanskrit manuscripts. The Government authorities may take up a national project at the state level to procure those manuscripts and other antique belonging to Rong-Mon-Bod with no discrimination. Those core materials will strengthen Sikkimese Culture towards consolidation and integration.

III

In the cultural heritage of Sikkim, Sanskritic studies are equally important on the following grounds:

1. Linguistic semblance between Tibetan and Sanskrit paves a historical base of the Buddhist culture in Sikkim.
2. Among the other languages akin to Nepali the Sanskrit language and literature hold an impact through centuries. the Pahari Kura which happens to be commonly spoken language in Sikkim, is a broken speech with its lien to Sanskrit and Magadhi Prakrit.
3. An regards the relation between the Rong (Lepcha) Language and Sanskrit a close study is required.

With this context a few instances are referred here for illustration, from comparative structural linguistic with morphological references.

1. The Prajna (SRIT edu. p. 49) enumerates five words belonging to T. (Tibetan) skya rens kyi ming group in the Amarakosa ('Chimed mdzod pa) manner.
 - i) T. rens for S. (Sanskrit) arunah suggests rejoicing to any literally. Here, T. rens is an alternative from of T. rangs with reference to T. nyin rangs pa in the sense of T. thos rangs (dawn break of day).
 - ii) T. brla med for S. anuruh (having no thigh).
 - iii) T. 'od srung rgyud for S. kasyapah; T. (b)rgyud means (belonging to) the lineage of the protector of light. Where as S. Kasyapa T. 'od srungs (Mahavyulpatti 3456, Sakaki edn.)
 - iv) T. Kyung sngon skyes for S. garudagrajah is appropriate in literal rendering.
 - v) T. nyi ma'i ka lo pa for S. surasutah disjoins the genitive compound denoting 'belongs to' or 'possessed with'. S. sura or sura translated into Tibetan as nyi ma. In the group of T. nyi ma'i ming, (Prajna, pp. 46 f.) several words like T. 'od 'gyed for S. suryah, T. snang byed for S. ahaskarah T. Char 'bibs for S. mitrah T. grags Idan for S. ravih or T. 'od zer gzugs for S. ravih are to note for connotative rendering of the above words cited above. The semblance of Sanskrit and Tibetan are also explicit in morphological grammar which requires a separate study.
2. Dayanand Srivastava in his Nepali Language, its Origin and Development (p. xv), Calcutta University 1962) remarks as given below.

“The early Nepali inscriptions and Tamrapatras confirm that Nepali, like the other NIA language, is in the direct line of development, from OIA through NIA. Rani Pokhri Inscription suggests the 1641 A.D. was the end of a phase in linguistic history of Nepal and not the beginning as suggested by Sir George Grierson. Grierson noticed a close similarity between Rajasthani and Nepali. This led him to think that Nepali has originated from Rajasthani. Nepali owes its origin from OIA, this fact cannot be disputed, but its exact place among the Indo-Aryan languages is open for discussion.”

He further establishes his arguments on the following grounds.

“The second person singular hos ‘thou art’ and the third person singular ho ‘he is’ (earlier hoi, in the negative hoi-na) are derived from OIA bhavasi, bhavati MIA hosi, hoi. The third person singular ho and third person plural hun go back to bhu, bhavanti, respectively. The present participle jado, goes back to OIA –ant, the past participle in –yo goes back to OIA –ata. The masculine adjectival form in –o goes back to OIA masculine –akah, and the feminine –i goes back to OIA ika. The post-positive, the pronominals and the verbal forms presented in these pages, all have developed from OIA.”

Prior to the Formative period 1776 to 1889 A.D. of the Nepali heavy literature a sizeable number of song had been in vogue among the Vajrayana practitioners. Those were the earliest specimen of metrical composition in which Sanskrit and Nepali words had been inadvertently mixed in course of spontaneous outburst of in propitiation of the deity. The tradition continued when the carana (court singers) used to praise the rulers in court. Gumani of Kumaun (1790-1846) used to compose three feet of a stanza in Sanskrit and one feet in Nepali or in Khariboli (Hindi).

Moreover, a few Sanskrit texts were translated in Nepali; such as:

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| 1. | Gopikastuti (from the tenth chapter of Shrimadbhagvata) | Indirasa (born 1827) |
| i) | Draupodi Stuti (to Krishan in the instance of Vastraharana) | Vidyaranya Keshari (b. 1806) |
| ii) | Benugeeta (translated from Sanskrit). | (Sanskrit teacher of Kathmandu) |
| | Free translation of Mahabharata | Basanta Sharma.
(contemporary of Indirasa) |
| | Courapancasika | Patanjali Gujurel (b. 1823) |
| | Prasnottari (mala) | Bhanu bhakta (1814-1869) |

Thematically Yadunath Pakharyal (b. 1833), the first east Terain Nepali poet, and

Raghunath Bhatta (b. 1811 ?) thematically used Sanskrit materials in their Stutipadya and Sundarakanda respectively.

In this connection the early drama works like Hasyakadamba ascribed to Shaktiballav Aryal (trans. 1789); Mudrarakshasa translated by Bhovanidatta Pandey (trans. 1833) deserve mention.

Thus the Nepali speakers in Sikkim have been aware of the importance of Sanskrit in their culture context.

3. Phani Bhusan Chakravorty in his Parallellism between Indo-Iranian Soma-Haoma rituals and the Chidyo rituals of the Lepchas of Sikkim opens a new vista in search of cultural affinity. In this regard the following observations are to noted.

“The customs and rituals of the Lepchas of Sikkim run parallel to the ancient Indo-Iranian customs. Among the southern Himalayan tribe; the Lepchas, according to M. Hermanns, are the only tribe having knowledge of plants and the art of preparing intoxicating drinks from them. The Tibetans call the Drink of Immortality “Dud-rtzi”. It is nectar or ambrosia although literally it means the devil’s drink.” (Bulletin of Tibetology, SRIT, Gangtok, 1994 No. 2).

The Cultural affinity between the Bhotia the Lepcha and the Nepali speakers in Sikkim requires a separate Socio-linguistic study.

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