

Notes & Topics

OBITUARY: PRINCESS PEMA CHOKI

PRINCESS PEMA CHOKI passed away in Calcutta on the 12th of January 1969; the remains were brought to Gangtok on the 14th of January and cremated in the Royal Crematorium on the 17th of January according to Mahayana rites.

The second daughter of the late Chogyal Tashi Namgyal, the Princess was born on the 25th of December 1925, and educated at St. Joseph's Convent, Kalimpong. She was married in April 1950 to Sey Kushoe Rinchen Tsenden Namgyal Yapshi-Yuthok, of the dynasty in which the tenth Dalai Lama was born. Of this marriage two sons and a daughter were born. In 1967 the Princess was remarried to Mr Prithvi Raj Iyer who comes of an eminent South Indian family.

In her studies at school the Princess attained highest grades in the convent she attended, and in Bengal she came seventh in the all state Cambridge Examinations.

The Princess, despite her inclination and talent for higher studies, decided after finishing school, to become a teacher in the Gangtok Girls' School. Her students remember her with much affection and respect. Aside from her perceptive and sparkling teaching, the students remember their teacher-Princess for her kindness and thoughtfulness. One student remembers how the girls used to imitate the Princess trying to copy her elaborate and beautiful hairstyles until the Princess realizing their difficulties begun to wear her hair very simply, relieving the girls of the hard work of imitating her !

Princess Pema Choki was exquisitely beautiful; her beauty reminding many of fragile jade and exotic brocade. Aside from being beautiful she was a woman of strong wit and intellect. While working in Sikkim, and later after her marriage into Yuthok house when she became a resident of Lhasa, the Princess pursued her scholarship in Tibetan secular and religious literature.

When in 1955-56 the Crown Prince of Sikkim (now the Chogyal) programmed a project for Tibetology, his sister was an enthusiastic collaborator. She was a founder member of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and was until her death an active member of its General Council. For several years she served also as a Member of its Executive

Board. Her services to the Institute were shown particularly in the procurement of icons, xylographs and rare manuscripts. The image of Jamyang (Manjughosha) which dominates the ground floor of the Institute is a gift from the Princess and Yuthok Sey.

In the summer of 1959 the Princess made a tour of Buddhist shrines and centres of Mahayana study in Japan, and the Institute's contacts with Japanese scholars date therefrom. In the autumn of 1960 she accompanied the president of the Institute to the Moscow session of the International Oriental Congress and made extensive contacts with scholarly groups in Moscow and Leningrad.

For the last two years the Princess was in poor health but her interest in the Institute and other scholarly institutions did not abate.

A week before her death the Princess sent to us a letter inquiring whether some scholars in Sikkim would be interested in joining the Historical Society in Calcutta. Enclosed were some forms that she requested to be distributed among people who might be responsive. This letter was written not only during a period of grave illness but also in a period of deep bereavement because of the recent death of Yapshi-Yuthok Sey Kushoe. This is only one example of the enduring spirit and gallant intellectual concern of the late Princess. The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and Sikkim mourn an irreparable loss.

HOPE NAMGYAL