

SANSKRIT AND TIBETAN

[Maharajkumar Palden Thondup Namgyal, President of Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, while regretting his inability to attend the Puri Session of Sanskrit Vishva Parishad meeting under the presidentship of Rashtrapati Dr. Rajendra Prasad on April 3 and 4, has referred to Sanskritic associations of Tibetan language and literature. Following paras of Maharajkumar's letter, now released, will be of interest to all students of humanities.]

Our interest in the revival of Sanskritic studies is not less deep than of those who specialise in Sanskritic studies or who speak languages developing from or associated with Sanskrit.

Tibetan is perhaps the only non-Indian language which has most fundamental links with Sanskrit. Tibetan speaking peoples had a highly developed literature even before the introduction of Doctrine of the Buddha, But this literature was handed down from generation to generation orally. The translation of Buddhist scriptures called for a script. Thomi Sambhota, the leading Tibetan scholar came to India—the Land of Enlightenment, discussed the problem with Indian scholars and returned to Tibet with a phonetic system of script modelled on the current Devanagari characters. Then followed a period of 1000 years of translation of Buddhist literature mostly Sanskritic. This task of translation was as much a matter of scholarship as of faith. There is no other instance of translation on a national scale and rendered word for word. The translation was faithful but not slavish. The Tibetan syntax was strictly observed and fundamental notions of Tibetan literature or culture were not ruthlessly supplanted by exotic forms. The translation covered not only the sacred literature but also quite a number of secular works like Ashtadhyayi, Amarakosa, Meghaduta, Kavyadarsa, Ayurvedasara Samuchchaya, Nagananda and Pratimamanalaksana. Quite a large number of such secular works were incorporated in the sacred collection called Tanjur—a testimony to the esteem for the literature of the Land of Enlightenment. But for these translations some of the priceless treasures of Sanskrit literature would have been altogether forgotten and even the names of many of such works would have been lost for good. The period which witnessed the destruction of Sanskrit works in Northern India, thanks to foreign invasions and ravages of time, was the period of this monumental enterprise in rendering the genius and form of one language into another. Without good knowledge of such lost works, no study of Sanskrit literature can be complete. The Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology nurses the ambition of aiding this task of supplementing Sanskrit studies.

Revival of Sanskrit studies is called for, not merely by any narrow nationalistic interest. Under the impact of Western literature, Indian scholarship almost lost sight of the real genius of Sanskrit. Sanskrit culture, under such impact, was

supposed to represent ritual and dogma, superstition and obscurantism. Very few outside the advanced students of Sanskrit cared to know that Sanskrit literature was associated with most fearless freedom of thought.

The scholars of modern educational system turned to Comte, Kant, Hegel and Bradley while oblivious of the great contributions of the Land of Enlightenment. The intellectualism and dialectic, which started with the Buddha and the sages of the Upanishads and which reached efflorescence with sages like Nagarjuna, Asanga, Gaudapada and Sankara, were forgotten. Paradoxically enough, European scholars like Stcherbatsky had to reveal the truth about the monumental contributions of Sanskrit literature. Now the large bulk of this literature is not available in their original form. They are however available in Tibetan. History of Mankind presents instances of migration of languages, literatures and cultures. In the wake of Buddhism Sanskrit literature travelled from the river plains of North India to the Himalayas and Trans-Himalayas and stimulated the growth of a turn of mind evincing interest in collective welfare and fearless freedom of thought viz—Bodhisattvavada and Sunyavada. This was in the so-called middle ages. In the current century, which marks the terminus of cycle of 2500 years of Gautama Buddha, the discovery of the treasures of Sanskrit literature in Trans-Himalayas and their return to the Land of Enlightenment may very well usher in a much greater renaissance than that caused in Europe by transfer of seat of classical learning from Constantinople to Rome in the 15th century. The challenge to mankind today is that of gross materialism and dogma. The philosophy enshrined in Sanskrit literature can answer this challenge.

It is also interesting to note that the Sixth Session is meeting in Puri. In many ways, Orissa has been the focal point in India's history. It was a war fought in Kalinga that turned the mind of Maurya Emperor Asoka to the more substantial pursuit of the path of the Dharma, an event which led to the spread of Buddhism all over India and to all parts of Asia. Asoka lives in the history of Tibetan speaking peoples as much in the history of India as a symbol of power which has its roots in the Dharma. It was also in Orissa that Mahayana underwent much development. It is a moot point whether the temple of Jagannath began under Buddhist auspices. Evidences of congregational forms and democracy in the temple recall the noblest traditions of Buddhism.