

PEOPLE'S ABANDON OF SPONTANEITY MARK PRIME MINISTER'S  
VISIT TO SIKKIM

P. M. INAUGURATES THE SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS  
OF

SIKKIM RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY

*by*

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The abandon of spontaneity of the people of Sikkim was to be seen to be believed on 29th and 30th July, 1983. For on these two historic days, Smt. Indira Gandhi, India's beloved Prime Minister and national leader was gracious enough to visit Sikkim after a lapse of eight years at the invitation of the Governor to inaugurate the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology and combine other engagements in fulfilment of the ardent wish of the people of the State.

*Avalanche of Affection*

The tumultuous ovation she received everywhere was like an avalanche of affection and admiration for her. Colorful arches, banners, buntings, lined all the roads in Gangtok from Libing Helipad to Raj Bhavan and other places.

Thousands upon thousands of peoples turned up from all over the State to greet the Prime Minister on the roads up from the buildings, at the various functions, just everywhere.

The weather gods smiled too and bestowed on Sikkim bright sun shine for the duration of her stay. If any proof was needed of the popularity of the beloved idol of the country, it was this, it was this, it was this !

### *SRIT's Red-Letter Day*

Nothing could deter her from her visit and nothing could deter the crowds from turning up in their thousands to welcome their beloved national leader.

For the S. R. I. T., the visit was particularly auspicious for on this day, 29th July, the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Institute were inaugurated by the Prime Minister.

It was in October, 1958, that the Institute was opened by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who had an abiding interest in Buddhism.

With his blessings, interest and encouragement, the Institute has grown up the years into perhaps the biggest Institute of its kind in Tibetology and Other Buddhist Studies in any part of the world.

It has certainly become the most renowned. Scholars depend on it for the prosecution of their further studies and advancement of their knowledge of Buddhism.

Buddhism was born in India. Its great creator, Lord Buddha, gave up his princely life to become a pauper in the service of humanity.

Mahatma Gandhi, the contemporary saint and Buddha of ancient times had a great deal in common in their teachings. Both gave up a comfortable life to work for suffering humanity. Both believed in the weapons of non-violence and persuasion. Both exhorted their disciples never to try to convert people by force or pressure. Both said to their followers, "If I cannot convince you, I must never convict you".

In her enlightened inaugural speech on the great occasion in the colourfully decorated, overcrowded pandal on the grounds of the S.R.I.T. the Prime Minister referred to the fact of how much mutuality it had with other religions of India and how it spread to all parts of the subcontinent and thereafter much beyond to other parts of the world.

### *Ceremonial Lama Welcome*

Earlier, the Prime Minister was ceremoniously received by hundreds of Lamas in their colourful religious attire. They greeted her with the ritual music of the lavas (trumpets). Thousands of other visitors thronged the occasion.

The Prime Minister arrived at the Institute on that bright Friday morning after she received an unprecedented reception from the massive crowds at the helipad and along the route up to the Raj Bhavan. Within a few minutes of her arrival at Raj Bhavan she left for the SRIT where thousands were awaiting her arrival.

The programme began with the Prime Minister planting a tree in the compound of the Institute. The tree is today thriving. Thereafter she unveiled the plaque on the wall in the entrance of the Institute to formally inaugurate the Silver Jubilee Celebrations. She was then taken to inspect the exhibits in the Institute on its two floors.

### *P. M.'s Keen Interest*

She took the keenest interest in the various idols, images and icons that were shown to her.

She listened attentively to the story of the invention of the Tibetan alphabet out of Brahmi and the creation of the Tibetan book on the model of the palm leaf. The Prime Minister noticed the Tibetan translation of "Letters From a Father to a Daughter".

Among the icons which interested her the most were several which had been taken from the Monasteries of Eastern India to Tibet in the 9th and 10th centuries. The President informed her that the Institute had the largest number of volumes in the world for any one Institute of Tibetology and other forms of Buddhism.

The Prime Minister asked a number of questions about what was shown. She laid a scarf (Khada) on the image of Manjusri on the ground floor and on the image of Padma Sambhava on the first floor.

She met the Lama scholars who were doing research work in the Institute. She saw some of them engaged on the arduous task of cataloguing the precious manuscripts. She complimented them on the work that they were so assiduously doing to promote one of the great cultures and religions of India which had spread far and wide around the world.

*P. M. 's. Appreciation*

After nearly an hour's inspection of the Institute, the Prime Minister wrote in the Special Visitors' Volume where she said :

"It is a pleasure to visit this Institute after many years, and to see the expansion of its work and the opportunities for research it can provide in such a serene and beautiful atmosphere.

The Buddha's message is timeless.

May it inspire the scholars here. And may the blessings of the Triple Gem give us strength to face the many challenges with which we are confronted.

With good wishes to all those working in the Institute and those connected with it."

Indira Gandhi  
29.7.83

Her message has become an inspiration for one and all of us. (It is now projected in a frame in the entrance hall of the Institute).

The Prime Minister was led to the dais in the shamiana in the compound adjoining the Institute.

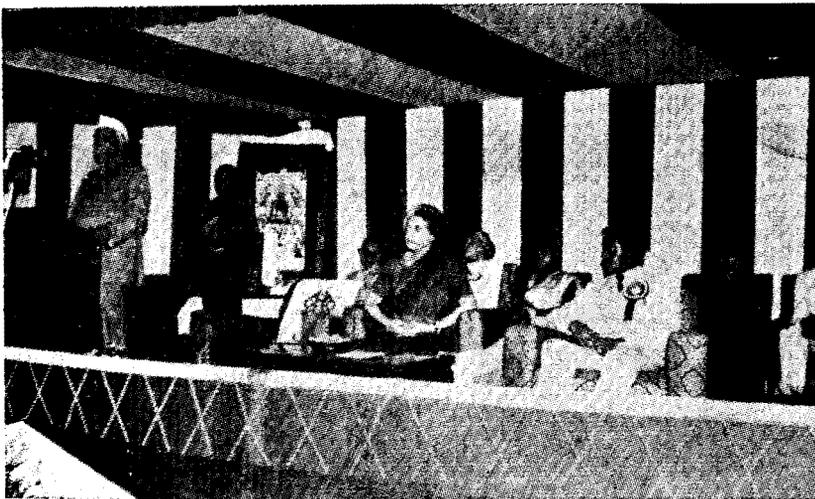
The shamiana was crowded to capacity with invitees who included members of the Cabinet, MLAs, high officials and leading gentry in addition to the numerous learned Lamas from all over the State from its different monasteries.

*President's Welcome*

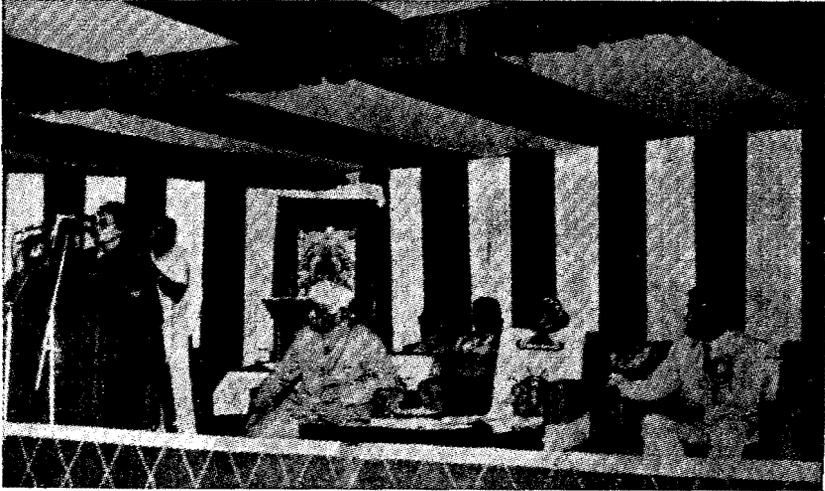
The programme began with an invocation.



Prime Minister being taken in procession by lamas in traditional colourful costumes and music of trumpet to the shamiana for the main function.



Governor welcoming the Prime Minister.



Prime Minister addressing the huge gathering in the tastefully decorated pandal during the celebrations.



The Governor presenting the bronze image of Guru Padma Sambhava to the Prime Minister. Shri N. B. Bhandari, Chief Minister of Sikkim is looking on.

The President of the Institute welcomed the Prime Minister expressing his profound gratitude to her for the kind consideration in accepting his invitation in spite of her overwhelming preoccupations and for the love she has always manifested for the simple and innocent hill people.

He said that like her illustrious father the Prime Minister was second to none in her interest for the promotion of Buddhism of which Sikkim is the bastion. Sikkim was indeed very fortunate that 25 years later his equally renowned daughter, our beloved Prime Minister, should have consented to come for the Silver Jubilee.

#### *Wish Fulfilled*

After briefly narrating the activities and the functions of the Institute, the President made a reference to the legendary Lake Kechuperi in West Sikkim where he had gone a few months earlier to make a wish that the Prime Minister should visit Sikkim.

He knew the wish has been granted because the waters of the normally placid lake had come rippling towards him inviting him to make his fondest wish.

It was fulfilled on this day. As he said so, the Prime Minister graciously smiled in acknowledgement of the truth of the legend and the Governor said he would be going to Kechuperi, shortly for thanksgiving.

#### *P.M. Extols Virtues of Buddhism*

In her speech, the Prime Minister extolled the virtues of Buddhism as one of the great religions of India and with the remarkable knowledge of the various facets of Buddhism, she outlined its great contribution to the history of religions of the world.

She referred to the religion of unity and the integration among the millions of our people who belong to different faiths and communities and speaking different languages and still had the awareness of oneness.

### *Unity The Ultimate*

She emphasized the point that unless and until unity and national integration were prevalent in the country, its progress would be hampered. And if progress had been made in the country since the advent of Independence it was as a result of the spirit of the people guided by their spirituality to remain one, to remain by and large tied by the bonds of togetherness in our great country.

She deplored the fissiparous and separatist tendencies which were rearing their head here and there. But she looked forward to the prevalence of good sense in the nature of our people to keep our country closely knit by always being Indians first and Indians last.

The Prime Minister expressed her great pleasure to be able to be present on the occasion when in the midst of the monsoons, the Gods had bestowed an interval of bright weather for her visit for performing such an auspicious function. She held the work and worth of the Institute in the highest esteem and hoped that it would become a centre of Buddhist learning attracting scholars from all over the world.

### *New Building, New Volume, New Courses*

On the occasion, the Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of the new building for the Institute's Research and Development Wing for which the Government of India has contributed Rs. 2 lakhs which the President has earlier gratefully acknowledged. The work of construction will shortly begin.

She also released a volume on '*Aspects of Buddhism*' which contains some of the finest papers on the subject on its different aspects.

She also declared open the course of Ph. D. and M. Phil. recognized by the North Bengal University. Students and scholars are already evincing keen interest on taking these courses in the Institute.

The Governor said that till such time as the Central University of

Sikkim came into being these courses would be recognized by the North Bengal University.

The Prime Minister was presented with an outsize special Tankha painting made for her for the occasion depicting Lord Buddha as well as a bronze statue of Padma Sambhava in an elegant wooden carved case.

It may be recalled that it was the Indian Saint PadmaSambhava, as the disciple of Lord Buddha, who introduced Buddhism into Tibet after it was born in India and had spread to various parts of the world and first and foremost to Tibet.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister who was also invited said that the Institute was trying to preserve the various tenets of Buddhist faith and culture. He was followed by the Chief Justice who gave an erudite presentation of Buddhism and its various effects, impressions and interpretations.

The function concluded with a vote of thanks by the Director of the Institute, followed by the National Anthem and a Tibetan style lunch for the members of the S. R. I. T. Board at Raj Bhavan to have the honour of meeting the Prime Minister.

The full transcript of the Prime Minister's speech will be reproduced in a special volume with colour pictures which will shortly be released.

#### *Mammoth Public Meeting*

In addition to this principal function of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the S. R. I. T., the Prime Minister also addressed a mammoth meeting at the Paljor Stadium attended by nearly 40,000 people from all over the State.

As soon as she arrived at the stadium a great cheer went up and there was pin-drop silence while she spoke thereafter for forty

minutes inspiring the people in the various endeavours for development and for unity.

She assured the people of Sikkim that they will be assisted in every way by the Centre. She commended the fact that Sikkim already has a Radio station, colour television and would soon have a Central University.

The Prime Minister exhorted the people always to remain united and to cherish their characteristics of simplicity and innocence, of honesty and hard work and never to divert from that path of pristine purity of purpose.

(Nearly one and half months later when the Governor had acquainted her with the North Sikkim landslide tragedy on the night of 10-11th September, she promptly sent a cheque of Rs. 2 lakhs from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund for the sufferers.)

The next morning, 30th July the Prime Minister named the Gangtok-Nathu La Road as the Jawaharlal Nehru Road. It was Panditji who had provided funds from the Central Exchequer for the construction of the road. Later, she motored half the distance to Nathu La up to Chhangu Lake to greet 3,000 troops. She inspired them with her message and complimented them on their bravery, their sacrifices and their services for the nation and for safeguarding its hard-won freedom.

#### *Gangtok By-Pass Project*

The Prime Minister also inaugurated the major project of the by-pass in the Western sector from Amdogolai before her departure.

She also met many delegations on the first day of her visit and addressed the Sikkim Woman's Council on the same day at Raj Bhavan and appreciated the work the Council was doing for promotion of women and child welfare.

*P. M. In Happy Mood*

The Prime Minister was very keen to stay a day longer which was a Sunday so that she could have a little most well-earned relaxation and we could fly her over to North Sikkim which she was very keen on visiting.

Unfortunately, the Sri Lanka situation developed to crisis proportions on the second day as a result of which though she fulfilled her programmes, she could not extend her stay by a day longer and give us the privilege of spending the Sunday with us.

Throughout the Prime Minister was in the happiest mood and enjoyed her forty eight hours stay very much and on everyone she created the impression of good humour and as everywhere else, she won the hearts of one and all.

Indeed, 29th and 30th July will remain memorable in the history of Sikkim, which is so beautifully cradled in the lap of nature that we can recite the poet's brief Ode to Nature :

"Nature ! Great parent !  
Whose unceasing hand  
Rolls round the Season of the  
changeful year;  
How mighty, how majestic are  
thy works !  
With what a pleasing dread they  
Swell the Soul  
That Sees astonished ! And astonished Sings"





**PRIME MINISTER INAUGURATES THE SILVER JUBILEE**