

OBITUARY: RELON ATHING SONAM DADUL

Born on 13 November 1885 Relon Athing Sonam Dadul passed away on 10 November 1965. Relon Athing was a Founder Member of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and was an active collaborator of the Gyalshe Rimpoche (now The Denjong Chogyal) in building up this Institute.

Relon Athing had a long record of public service under four Chogyals in various capacities as Commander of the Guards, Private Secretary, Judicial Secretary and General Secretary. His distinguished services covering half a century and more account for much of Sikkim's annals. Till a few years ago, when a motor-car accident severely injured him and affected his memory somewhat, he was the living archives of Sikkim and the neighbouring countries, and the most indispensable reference medium for a student of history. Many investigators of modern history of these regions laid under contribution experiences and recollections of Relon Athing.

The panorama of past in which—besides the Denjong Chogyals—the figures were Dalai Lama XIII, Francis Young-husband, Charles Bell, Raja Dorji, Williamson and Basil Gould, would open up before the inquisitive visitor and the episodes of history would reveal as if on a television screen. On this screen one leading role in the drama was however conspicuously absent and that was Relon Athing himself. Here was a narrator of history who would efface his own role as an actor. He was a maker of history who, in consonance with the highest teachings of The Buddha, had altogether liquidated the "I". To take only two of the many delicate tasks which Relon Athing had to discharge, the boundary dispute with Bhutan and the visit to Lhasa after the Expulsion of the Manchu, his reminiscences would be the envy of the highest standard of modern civil servant.

I write under a sense of personal loss and seek to record my humble tribute as a student of history to a great scholar who was even greater as a man.

NIRMAL C. SINHA