

FUNCTIONS AND ACTIVITIES OF SRIT

The Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology at Gangtok, which has attained a unique position as an important Centre of Learning in the Buddhist world, was formally inaugurated on the 1st October, 1958 by the then Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Earlier, on the 10th February, 1957, His Holiness the Dalai Lama laid the Foundation Stone of the Institute Building and conferred blessings. By the Charter promulgated on the 28th October, 1958, the Institute was incorporated into an autonomous academic body. The establishment of such a purely academic and cultural organization in Sikkim, which provides a suitable place and a tranquil atmosphere congenial to serious study and research in the vast fields of Mahayana Buddhism and Tibetology, should be considered as the most glorious in her history.

The word Tibetology, as defined in the Charter, means the study of 'Chhos' or "Dharma" in Sanskrit ('Chhos' is generally used in a special sense to mean the Doctrine of the Buddha) and the culture and all arts and sciences associated with 'Chhos'. Thus the main object of establishing such an Institute has been to acquire and preserve the precious wealth of knowledge, to conduct study and research and work ceaselessly for the development and dissemination of the knowledge of "Chhos" and its associated subjects like art and iconography, logic, linguistics, history, medicine, astrology, geography etc.

The principal authorities of the Institute are the General Council and the Executive Board. The Governor of Sikkim, who is the Head of the State, is the President of the Institute and presides over all the Meetings of the two Governing Bodies. For its maintenance, the Institute receives Annual Grants from both the Central and the State Governments.

The Institute is renowned for its large collection of Buddhist literature, both Tibetan and non-Tibetan. The Tibetan library on the

first floor consists of books and treatises exceeding 30,000 in number- both canonical and non-canonical- in various forms, such as, xylographs, manuscripts and printed works. The imposing Image of Mahaguru Padma Sambhava together with figures of other Tantric deities adorn the high pedestal and the entire Library Hall is embellished with several rare and precious icons and exquisite thangkas (religious scrolls). Among the rare, precious and encyclopaedic works, mention may be made of "Kahgyur"¹ and "Tengyur",¹ "Rinchen Terdzod", "Mipham Soongbum", "Jamyang Khentse Soongbum", "Nyangter Kagyed Duspa", "Nyingma Gyudbum", "Dzoddun", "Jigling - Soongbum", "Lamrim Chenpo", "Je Yabsey Soongbum", "Marme Dhaksum", "Kongtrul Soongbum", "Jetsun Soongbum", "Buton Soongbum", "Panchen Sakya Chogden Soongbum", "Sakya Kabum" etc. It is worth mentioning here that the vast wealth of literature pertaining to all the sects and schools of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism is stored in one single repository like the one of which is perhaps non-existent in any establishment of its kind in the world. Lamas and scholars belonging to different sects of Mahayana Buddhism work together in an atmosphere of friendliness and harmony under one roof and speak from the same platform. Scholars and academicians who visit the Institute in quest of knowledge have the advantage of faithful collaboration and assistance from the learned Lamas and scholars of different sects. During 1980 and first half of 1981, over two hundred rare and precious Tibetan books on Mahayana religion and philosophy were purchased and added to the Library. These were in addition to the set of Kah-gyur volumes and other valuable treatises and tracts received as gifts from His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa. The General Library in the ground floor hall dominated by the majestic silver Image of "Manjushri" in dazzling brilliance, contains about 3,000 non-Tibetan books and periodicals on Buddhism and Central Asia including Prajna Paramita Sutra in Chinese and Tripitaka in Pali language. The entire collections in the General Library are classified according to Dewey Decimal System ; and the correct location of books on the shelves is much facilitated by the Index Cards arranged in alphabetical order.

1. "Kahgyur" (Teachings and sermons of the revered Lord Buddha) and "Tengyur" (shastras).

The Museum Section contains a representative collection of precious icons, ritual objects, traditional art objects, rare thangkas, ancient manuscripts in Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese and Lepcha languages. The casket containing the relics of the two Asokan missionaries, Kashyapa and Madhyamagotra, displayed in the show case is one of the several priceless antique objects. Five sandalwood Images, which constitute specimens of indigenous art, and some new objects of traditional art were acquired and added to the collection during 1980-81.

The Microfilm Unit contains, besides essential equipments, the exposed film rolls of several rare and precious Buddhist scriptures, such as, 'Kahgyur', and "Tengyur", "Rinchen Terdzod", "Nyingma Gyud-Bum", "Kong Trul Soongbum" etc.-all preserved in excellent condition. The Unit provides facilities for exchanging of valuable literary materials for their equivalents in other educational Institutions and Universities.

The Ajanta Hall on the top floor contains two ancient sandstone Images of Buddha in Dharmachakra Mudra expounding the sublime Doctrine and Bodhisattva Avalokiteswara in a standing posture with lotus in left hand. These are the precious gifts from the Government of India. The walls depict faithful reproductions of some of the Ajanta paintings.

Among the several important publications of the Institute mention may be made of a very few of them, such as, "Prajna" (the Sanskrit-Tibetan Thesaurus-cum-Grammar), "Debther Marpo", (The Red Annals), "Zang-chod" (Bhadrachari) and its commentary, Five Volumes of "Rinchen Terdzod" (The Precious Collection of Hidden Treasures), "Kadam Phacho" (Life and Teachings of Atisa Dipankara-srijna), "Pranidhanaraja" (Sanskrit-Tibetan Prayer Book), Brochure containing colour illustrations of 'Gyendrug Chhog-nyis' (The six Illustrious and two Incomparables) with brief expositions on iconographical details and the lives and thoughts of these great Mahayana Masters. etc. Publication of other important books and translation works have been undertaken by the Institute in accordance with the

Programme. The Institute's Quarterly Journal, *Bulletin of Tibetology*, covers a wider range of subjects dealing with Tibetology, Central Asian and Indological Studies. illuminating articles and research works from the pen of specialists and eminent scholars have featured prominently in the pages of the Journal. Its popularity has gained prominence so much so that enquires and demands for the Journal have been constantly pouring in.

The Institute has been actively engaged in the preparation of Sect-wise Catalogues of its huge collections of Tibetan literature, a challenging task that has been undertaken, commencing from the middle of 1979. Despite inadequate staff and consequential handicaps, it has been successful in achieving steady progress; and it is hoped that Sect-wise Catalogues in an acceptable form can be published in due course.

The Institute has become the centre of attraction for many indigenous and foreign visitors who take great delight in going round and feasting their eyes on its valuable contents, particularly the collections of rare books, icons, thangkas, beautiful antique objects of Himalayan Buddhist art etc. which altogether constitute a rich cultural heritage.

The President of the Institute and the Governing Bodies have been taking keen interest in the over all activities of the Institute, Activities in the field of research and publications have been revitalised under the inspiring leadership and wise guidance of the President, His Excellency Sri Homi J. H. Taleyarkhan, Governor of Sikkim. The part III of Kadam Phacho (Life and Teachings of Atisa) has been brought out by the Institute. The photo-offset copies of the book are supplied to the interested readers at a reasonable price. Three Volumes of the *Bulletin of Tibetology* for 1980 and one volume for the first quarter of 1981 had been printed. The second quarterly *Bulletin* which is now being printed will be available in due course.

The Executive Board Meetings held on the 9th February, 1981 and 28th May, 1981 with the Governor of Sikkim, President of the

Institute, on the Chair, took many important decisions. Emphasis was laid on the need of regulating the publication of quarterly Journal, speeding up the cataloguing work which was being carried on by the scholars and the staff of the Institute and implementing the research programme in right earnest. Decision was also taken on the line proposed by the Acting Director to reorganize and tune up the official machinery and to improve its functioning. SRIT Membership Drive, the first of its kind in the annals of the Institute, which was launched in April, 1981 under the direction of the President—it was later confirmed by the Board—has been gathering momentum. The President and the members of the Executive Board have been enrolled as Members, SRIT. It is hoped that very soon the General Council Members and others who have evinced interest will be enrolled as Members. SRIT.

The most important event during the year has been the ceremonial presentation of a complete set of ‘Kahgyur’ (Derge Edition, 103 Volumes) and fiftyfive other valuable treatises and tracts by Kargyud Gurus for the Institute Library by His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa of the Dharma Chakra Centre, Rumtek on the 24th February, 1981. In the General Library Hall of the Institute, where the ceremony was performed on that auspicious day, the precious gifts were received by His Excellency the Governor of Sikkim, President of the Institute and the Hon’ble Chief Minister of Sikkim amidst a large gathering of distinguished guests, including the Hon’ble Speaker and the state Cabinet Ministers. Several incarnate Rinpoches had also attended the colourful function.

His Holiness blessed the Institute for its all-round progress and prosperity.

Acting Director