Notes & Topics

OBITUARY: SATING LIBING

Sating Sonam Toden of Lhading passed away on 12 May 1969 in Gangtok, he was a Founder Member of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology; he was a member of the General Council since November 1962.

Sonam Toden was born 73 years ago at Lhading (near Gangtok) to an ancient family who had migrated from Tsang to Demchog nearly two and a half centuries ago. The family held an esteemed place in the history of Sikkim. The famous Takhang Dongy Namgyel, known as Paga Dawa, was the younger brother of Sonam Toden’s grand-father. “Eng. Iahem” who met him (Paga Dawa) on the whole did not take to him, though they acknowledged his unsoubute qualities. He was certainly the most able and forceful figure in Sikkim Politics, and until his death in 1888 even though he was permanently exiled to Tibet in 1881, his influence in Sikkim remained strong. (Alastair Lamb)

Hooker’s Himalayan Journals record the reasons for British antipathy to Paga Dawa’s family, who however continued in Denying Sonam Toden’s modern English schooling and worked as an officer in Sikkim Government between 1923 and 1928. Meanwhile Sir Charles Bell had noticed his abilities in speaking English as well as different dialects of Sikkim. Bhutan and Tibet and had urged upon the highest authorities in British Government for Sonam Toden’s appointment as Translator-Interpreter notwithstanding the ban on the family. It is said that Sonam Toden was entered in the British service on his own condition that he could not provide any intelligence on Sikkim to them. Sonam Toden joined as a junior non-gazetted hands in 1925 and retired in 1950 as an honorary member of the Indian Foreign Service, in 1947 he opted into the service of India. It is said that in serving the several government he never transgressed from the path of loyalty to either. His death was mourned by friends both in Sikkim and India.

The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology was closed for the day. His services to this Institute in both administrative and academic spheres are known in connected circles. Considerably before the establishment of this Institute (1955), Sonam Toden was known for his mastery of diverse Tibetan dialects, his on-the-spot knowledge of Tibet (Central Western, South-Eastern), Bhutan and Nepal besides his own Sikkim, and his encyclopaedic information about the monasteries and ancient families of Central Tibet. Sir Basil Gould and Mr. Hugh Richardson found him indispensable.
in compiling the famous Tibetan-English Wordbook. The Tibetan Government found him a good guide about modern knowledge and modern world and honoured him with the title of Depon (1942).

I add my personal tribute. I had known him intimately for more than thirteen years and had enjoyed his affection and esteem. All through these years the Athing was patient and kind in sharing with me his knowledge, learning and wisdom in my efforts to read the history of Tibet and Tibetan-speaking countries.

Nirmal C. Sinha,

SINO-TIBETAN INROADS INTO NORTH INDIA

This number of the Bulletin carries two articles covering the subject of inroads into north India from the Trans-Himalayas. The two articles reached us in a chronological sequence and were booked for printing accordingly. If the two articles contradict or corroborate each other on any point, this is entirely a matter concerning the contributors and the editors of the Bulletin have no opinion on this.

For a non-specialist of the Bulletin, I add my individual opinion about the veracity and authenticity of Chinese annals. The Han notions of (i) China as the centre of the world and (ii) non-Han peoples as barbarians will be found in a precise form in C. P. Fitzgerald: _The Chinese View of their Place in the World_ (Chatham House Essay 1915). Regarding the Chinese usage "tribute" for any presents or communications from any non-Han visitors like the merchants of Tarabkent, the Lamas of Tibet or the ambassador of United Kingdom, J. K. Fairbank and S. Y Teng: "On the Chinese Tribute System" in _Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies_ (1941) may be seen. The references to "tribute bearers" and "barbarian ambassador" in Chinese annals are not admitted in modern terms by the Sinologists today.

Nirmal C. Sinha,