PROMOTION OF SANSKRIT STUDIES IN SIKKIM

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A hill tract in the lap of lachhapathra happens to be topographically strategic. A small state is contiguous connected with TAP (Tibet Autonomous Region of China) which was traditionally called Bed yum (Bhotadesa). A sizeable number of bowls from Bhotadesa who are usually named Bhouta or Bhotia entered by the 16th century in the Tista and the Raxat Valleys in search of better livelihood. Prior to them, the Lecha of different ethnic group had entered from the eastern part of the lower Himalayas by the 13th century A.D. The advent of Wa with the Thong (Magar or Mon) who had been the dwellers of lower slopes about the foothills of Sikkim. Thus the ethnic diversity of Sikkim is popularly described as Tsong-Rong-Bod or revivably Bod-Kung-Mon.

The Sanskrit culture which spread in the Gangs Brahmaputra valley had the least scope to be in Sikkim directly. Moreover, the traders who used to carry the culture traits from one country to other had had less communication in the earlier days. The Bhoutas traders of Sikkim preferred to cross the Nathula and Jaldapara with their handicraft for exchange with their Bod or Tibetan counterpart. Instead of coming down to the foothills up to the Tista locality. The Lecha or Bod group have been rice-dependent and usually move in the local markets. Similal in the case with the Magar and other local groups. Vedicism transferred through the Puranic and the Smarta traditions could not move up to the hill tracts of Sikkim. The Nepalese however accepted Bajia, and Sikkis cult together with Buddhism. The inhabitants of eastern most Himalayas traditionally are said to have associated with the Krishna and Parashurama legends and episodes.

However, Nirmal Chandra Sinha has already pointed out in his article on the impact of Sanskrit with Tibet. He rightly observed that Sanskrit and Tibetan are supplementary to one another in understanding the ancient Indian traditions.

Since the advent of the Bhoutas from Bhotadesa (Tibet), they carried the legacy of the Buddhist Culture, which had entered into Bed yum through Sikkim used by the Buddhist of Bhutan. Buddhism had spread up to Gangzhar, Tibet during the lifetime of Aksa (2nd cent. B.C.). As a result of that the Buddhist literature in Sanskrit did not always follow the language norms as prescribed by Panini (circa 400 B.C.). That leaves a room to presume that Sanskrit had been a spoken language of the northern Tibetan in spite of systematization by paninian formule.
by Panini. The Buddhist texts like Lalitavistara, Manjusrimulakalpa, Gaudavya etc. preserve the specimens of the Sanskrit speech which had been in vogue probably up the beginning of the Christian era.

Again, the Buddhists in Tibet endeavoured vigorously to preserve Buddhavacana or the Holy Buddhist literature kanjur (bka’-gyur) in Tibetan translation from the original sources which had been carried to Tibet by the Buddhist monks since the 7th cent. A.D. The Indian pandits collaborated the Tibetan lo tubas in translating the Sanskrit Buddhist texts and thereby Sanskrit Studies developed indirectly with an impact on chos skad in Tibet.

Actually speaking, chos skad or the Buddhist scriptural language which had been formulated during the Early Spread of Buddhism (5th – 7th cent. A.D.) was Sanskritic in structure. Semblance of Sanskrit and Tibetan in the morphology and the syntax are traced in many aspects of the two languages. The Sanskritisation of Tibetan in chos skad opens a new approach of the Tibetan linguistics and that requires a separate treatment elsewhere.

However, a learner of chos skad endeavours to learn Sanskrit language and literature, especially Buddhist for in-depth study of the Kanjur (bka’-gyur, Buddhavacana) and the Tanjur (bstan-‘gyur shrastra). A few Sanskrit scholars among the Tibetan erudite like Sakyapa Panchen, Gyal wa nga ba have been honoured by the Tibetans for their access to the inner significance of chos. Especially, in the monasteries preserved of the rgyud snags and drungas the Tibetan experts experience their inaccessibility in absence of their Sanskrit learning.

Keeping the above in view, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, which is reorted to its original name Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology (SRIT) in Gangtok resolved to acknowledge Sanskrit Studies essential for developing higher researches in the field of Tibetology. Since 1960 SRIT avowedly follows the said procedure to integrate Tibetan researches with reference to Sanskrit as and where required. Sanskrit Studies add a new focus in Tibetological quests based on Kahan deno gsum (bka’-gyur bstan-‘gyur snad gsum). Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok was pioneer to introduce regular Sanskrit classes—a five year course for stipendary Monk Student since 1960. The classes were discontinued in 1973-74.

Buddhist works contributed by Nagarjuna Asvakasana, Vasumitra, Asanga Vasubandhu Dinnaga, Dharakirti, Carhidrakirti, Ratnakarasami, Jnankirti in Sankhis Sanskrit had been carried to Tibet. A large number of eminent 7th century Sikkimese scholars participated to elucidate the thoughts of the Indian Buddhists with new approaches which took shape in separate traditional lineages like, Nyingma, Kargyu, Sakyas, and Gelug in Tibet. The Buddhist monastic units in Sikkim inherit these traditional lineages through centuries. Several Sikkimese scholars with yellow robes flocked to Tibet for acquisition of the Indian teaching from the Tibetan erudite as those had been lost in India since the 12th cent. A.D. After completion of their
learning in Tibetan monastic academic centres like Sera, Gadar, Tashilhunpo, the Sikkimese teachers have been associated with the monasteries in various parts of Sikkim. But their aspiration to learn the original source materials of the Indian erudite personalities remain unfulfilled in spite of their best endeavour to learn Sanskrit at the individual level.

On the other hand, several Nepali authors and eminent poets beginning from Acarya Bhanu Bhatka, Kavi Raghmam Upadhyaya, adopted their inspiration from the Sanskrit literature. Even the Nepali drama writers of the Raghvavasanda Nataka, Haragauri Nataka, Pandavavijaya nataka, Harischandra nityam of medieval period of Nepal were conversant in Sanskrit Nayanastra and other texts. Acarya Bhanu Bhatka did not hesitate to follow the Sanskrit metre in his composition like Indravaya, Upajati, Vasantisthaka, Malini, Tonka, Sardulaviridita etc. It may be added that earlier Carava (goetha) type like Bharatavarma v Nepal had been acquainted with Sanskritic traditions. Similar instances may be referred to the contributions of Nepali poets like Indrana, Patanjali, Vasanta Bhatta, Vidya Varma Karani, who had followed the Sanskrit kavya style (riti) with aesthetic exquisiteness (navalanka).

The Sikkimese Nepali speakers, though not always conversant with Sanskrit as an academician claims, have got the traditional aesthetic approach with its Sanskritic environment. Measures for promoting Sanskrit Studies do not always refer to Buddhist feed back but also to cultural enlightenment in general.

A few Sanskrit Pathasala for teaching Sanskrit in a traditional manner have been established since the mid-sixties of our century in Sikkim centres are of two types. Namely:

i) registered under the Ministry of Education Sikkim National Government with financial aids annually;

ii) non-registered with the local initiative. The distribution of those Pathasala as enumerated below.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Registered</th>
<th>Non-Registered</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Sikkim</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Sikkim</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Sikkim</td>
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<td>1</td>
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These Sanskrit Pathasala traditional Sanskrit learning are affiliated to Varanasiya Sansprunawananda Sanskrit Vaish Vishyalaya. The courses and syllabi are also followed accordingly to conduct their examinations after completion of study. It takes five consecutive years from Pathasha to Acarya. A person awarded with the title of Acarya is recognised as an equivalent to the Master degree in Sanskrit of a recognised University. In that respect the standard of education is up to the mark as per with the other Universities. This is a plus point in respect of the
learners who qualify for entrance into in-depth study programmes to explore a new vista of Tibetan Studies. With reference to Sanskrit sources and Sanskrit Studies. With reference to their Tibetan materials, the Pathashala project has succeeded to a great extent to emanate awareness to a great extent.

Sikkim Government has taken steps to promote studies in Sanskrit vigorously. Shri Ullaya Chandra Vashista has been engaged in the capacity of Officer on Special Duty for the purpose. Two important programmes are in the course of implementation.

1) Establishment of Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya by the State Government at Gyalzing (rgyal zhing).

2. Popularity motivation for promoting Sanskrit awareness to explore the cultural heritage of Sikkim:

The above programmes have a satisfactory response from the Sikkimese.

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In this connection SRIT since its inception as Namgyal Institute of Tibetology has ventured to promote the cause for the last four decades. The following bilingual (Tibetan Sanskrit editions) of Tibetological source materials have come out.

1) 'Phags pa kun tu brang po spyod pa'i smon lam (Samanta-bhadracari-caryā pranidhāna) ed. S.K. Pathak. 1961 'Phags pa Kun tub bzang po spyod pa'i grol ba.

2) (Aṣṭasahasrabuddhacaryatikā) of Lean Śākya Khutuktu Latetavajra's commentary in Tibetan, 1961.

3) Vijnaptisatatsiddhi Vimukti of Vasubandhu, with introduction, notes and index verbatim by N. Aṣṭaṣaṃskāra Sastri, 1964.

3a) Bhāvanā-siddhi (Establishment of objective Reality) of Bhādanta Subhagaputra (slob dor po 6kte ston) an exponent of Buddhist Vaihāra school (empirical/objeuctive Reality by N. Aṣṭaṣaṃskāra Sastri, B.T. Vol. IV No. 2 1967).

4) Shes rab (Pratima), a Sanskrit Tibetan Bilingual lexicon compiled by Tenzin Gyaltshen of Kham (18th cent. A.D.)

Besides these bilingual works several Tibetan works having reference to the Sanskrit source materials have been brought to light. Such as:


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Moreover, the following articles published in Bulletins of Tibetology focus a new approach towards Sanskritic studies into the context of the Indo-Tibetan Cultural relationship since the 7th cent A.D.

On the Upanisads:

On the Sanskrit Grammar:
R.K. Srigg: Vyasanabhakti and Irregularities in Tibetan verbs (BT, 1970 No. 2, pp. 5-20)

On the Nyaya and the naiyayikas:
Sanju Kumar Sadhukhan: The conflict between the Buddhist and the Nayarika Philosophers (BT, 1990 No. 1-3, pp. 39-54)

On the Tantra and Agams:
Biswa Naray Banerjee: Development of the Kalacuara Tantra in Later Buddhism (BT, 1985 No pp. 9-23)
Buddhist Hymnal (BT, 1996 N.S. No. 7),

The few Nepali Priest families, whether they belong to Srimargi or to Buddhism or to Buddhism or cult are equipped with Sanskrit as family tradition and they may possess Sanskrit manuscripts. The Government authorities may take up a national project at the state level to procure those manuscripts and other antique belonging to Rong-Mo-Bod with no discrimination. Those core materials will strengthen Sincladese culture towards consolidation and integration.
In the cultural heritage of Sikkim, Sanskritic studies are equally important on the following grounds:

1. Linguistic semblance between Tibetan and Sanskrit paves a historical base of the Buddhist culture in Sikkim.

2. Among the other languages akin to Nepali the Sanskrit language and literature hold an impact through centuries. The Pahari Kritis which happen to be commonly spoken language in Sikkim, is a broken speech with its lien to Sanskrit and Magadhi Prakrit.

3. An regards the relation between the Kongs (Lepcha) Language and Sanskrit a close study is required.

With this context a few instances are referred here for illustration, from comparative structural linguistic with morphological references.

1. The (Tibetan) skya rengs kyi gsum group in the Amanakona ('Claimed territory') manner.
   i) T. rengs for S. (Sanskrit) upasah suggests rejoining to any literally. Here, T. rengs is an alternative from of T. rangs with reference to S. upasah pa in the sense of T. thon rangs (dawn break of day).
   ii) T. bta med for S. asurah (having no thigh).
   iii) S. 'od srungs rgyud for S. kanyaphi; T. (bipa) yud means (belonging to) the lineage of the protector of light. Where as S. Kanyapa T. 'od srungs (Mahayulpati 345, Sakaki edn.)
   iv) T. Kysung gsum gshegs for S. garadagdarjih is appropriate in literal rendering.
   v) T. nyi ma' ka lo pa for S. sarusah disjoints the genitive compound denoting 'belonging to', 'possession with'. S. sura or sara translated into Tibetan as nyi ma.' In the group of T. nyi ma' ming (Pratya, pp. 46 f) several words like T. 'od 'gyed for S. surah, T. snang byed for S. asurah khar T. char 'bib for S. mitraub T. grags ldam for S. ravib or T. 'od ter grags for S. ravib are to note for comparative rendering of the above words cited above. The semblance of Sanskrit and Tibetan are also explicit in morphological grammar which requires a separate study.

2. Dayanand Srivastava in his Nepali Language, its Origin and Development (p. xv), Calcutta University 1962) remarks as given below.
"The early Nepali inscriptions and Tumarpuras confirm that Nepali, like the other NIA language, is in the direct line of development, from OIA through INA. Rani Pokhari Inscription suggests the 1641 A.D. was the end of a phase in linguistic history of Nepal and not the beginning as suggested by Sir George Grierson. Grierson noticed a close similarity between Rajasthani and Nepali. This led him to think that Nepali has originated from Rajasthani. Nepali owes its origin from OIA, this fact cannot be disputed, but its exact place among the Indo-Aryan languages is open for discussion."

He further establishes his arguments on the following grounds.

"The second person singular has ‘thou art’ and the third person singular ho ‘he is’ (earlier ahi, in the negative hoi-na) are derived from OIA bhavasti, bhavati MIA bhoj, hoi. The third person singular bo and third person plural hun go back to bhu, bhavanti, respectively. The present participle jado, goes back to OIA-ant. the past participle in –go goes back to OIA –ata. The masculine adjectival form in –o goes back to OIA masculine –a/kab, and the feminine –i goes back to OIA ika. The post-positive, the pronominals and the verbal forms presented in these pages, all have developed from OIA."

Prior to the Formative period 1776 to 1889 A.D. of the Nepali heavy literature a sizeable number of song had been in vogue among the Vajrayasa practitioners. Those were the earliest specimen of metrical composition in which Sanskrit and Nepali words had been inadvertently mixed in course of spontaneous outburst of inspiration of the deity. The tradition continued when the saras (court singers) used to praise the rulers in court. Gunami of Kumara (1790-1846) used to compose three feet of a stanza in Sanskrit and one feet in Nepali or in Khariboli (Hindi).

Moreover, a few Sanskrit texts were translated in Nepali; such as:

1. Gupkarastu (from the tenth chapter of Shraddha Bhagavata) Indraska (born 1827)
   i) Draupadi Sati (to Krishna in the instance of Vastrabhsaha) Vidyaranya Keshari (b. 1806)
   ii) Benugerta (translated from Sanskrit) Sanskrit teacher of Kathmandu

Free translation of Mahabharata Basanta Sharma (contemporary of Indraska)
Courapancaska Patanjali Gujurel (b. 1823)
Prasnottari (mala) Bhana bhakti (1814-1869)

Thematically Yadunath Pakharyal (b. 1833), the first east Terain Nepali poet, and
Raghuwath Elattin (b. 1811) thematically used Sanskrit materials in his Stutipayya and Svarhazakante respectively.

In this connection, the early drama works like Hatjakadastha, ascribed to Shatirballav Arya (trans. 1789); Madhavalkshana translated by Bhuvandita Pandey (trans. 18(3) deserve mention.

Thus the Nepali speakers in Sikkim have been aware of the importance of Sanskrit in their culture context.

7. Phani Bhushan Chakravarty, in his Parallelism between Indo-Iranian Soma-Haoma rituals and the Chidya rituals of the Lepchas of Sikkim opens a new vista in search of cultural affinity. In this regard the following observations are to noted.

"The customs and rituals of the Lepchas of Sikkim run parallel to the ancient Indo-Iranian customs. Among the southern Himalayan tribe, the Lepchas, according to M. Herrmann, are the only tribe having knowledge of plants and the art of preparing intoxicating drinks from them. The Tibetans call the drink of immortality "Dud-rtsi". It is nectar or ambrosia although literally it means the devil's drink." (Bulletin of Tibetanology, SRIT, Gangtok, 1994 No. 3).

The Cultural affinity between the Bhoutias the Lepchas and the Nepali speakers in Sikkim requires a separate Socio-linguistic study.
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