

TASHI T. TOPDEN, IAS (1948-2009)
DIRECTOR NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY 1995-2002

ANNA BALIKCI-DENJONGPA
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Mr Tashi Topden passed away on 6 April 2009 in a tragic car accident along with his wife Cherry, his sister Chukie and his cousin Tshering Wangchuk Barfungpa.

Tashi Topden served Sikkim as a senior bureaucrat retiring as Advisor to the Government of Sikkim in 2008. He was Director of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology from 1995 to 2002. In spite of his responsibilities in the Finance Dept., he succeeded in expanding the research wing of the Institute.

The Libing family descends from a family of Tibetan Ngagpas called Wooja Lingpa. Their ancestor known as Akhoola came to Sikkim some two and half centuries ago and served the Chogyal. The famous Trokhang Dronyer Namgyal, better known as Dewan Namgyal or Pagla Dewan, was the younger brother of Tashi Topden's great grandfather Labrang Dewan Rinzing or Nyim Tenzin. Dewan Namgyal became the Chief Minister of the 7th Chogyal Tsugphud Namgyal in 1847. Despite his exile to Tibet imposed by the Treaty of Tumlong in 1861, Dewan Namgyal remained very influential in Sikkimese affairs until his death in 1888.

Tashi Topden's father Rai Bahadur Sonam Topden chose modern English schooling and entered the British service in 1925. In 1947, he opted for the service of India and retired in 1959 as an honoured member of the Indian Foreign Service.

In line with his father's preferences, Tashi Topden was educated at St-Joseph's school in Darjeeling. He graduated in 1969 with a BA (Hon) in History from St-Stephen's College, Delhi University, and received his L.L.B. from Bombay University in 1971. He then went on for IAS training at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussorie.

He started his career in the Govt of Sikkim as Deputy District Officer-cum-Planning Officer, South District at Namchi in Sept 1974. He then took charge of the office of the District Collector West Sikkim in 1976 and eventually of the East District in 1978 with the additional charges of District Magistrate and Administrator of the Gangtok

Municipal Corporation in 1981. He was promoted to the Finance Dept. as Joint Secretary in 1983 and then joined the Establishment Dept. as Joint Secretary in 1986. He was promoted to Secretary Industries and Secretary Education and Cultural Affairs in 1986, and then onto Commissioner-cum-Secretary Dept. of Food and Civil Supplies in 1991. He was transferred to the Finance Dept. in 1993 where he was promoted to Principal Secretary Finance in 1999. He was again promoted to Additional Chief Secretary and Secretary Health and Family Welfare in 2001 and transferred in 2002 to Additional Chief Secretary and Secretary Land Revenue Dept. Eventually promoted to Advisor to the Government in 2003, he retired from government service in 2008.

Tashi Topden was also deeply interested in the study of Sikkim's social history and culture. He had recently established the Denzong Lhomen Kyiduk (Sikkimese Culture and Heritage Foundation) with the hope of promoting all aspects of Sikkimese religion and culture. As stated in an obituary published in the Foundation's first book (P.T Gyamtso *Denjong Sunглу*, 2009), Tashi Topden

spend many long hours talking to Sikkimese people in all walks of life, trying to gain an insight into the religious rituals and local Sikkimese customs. While serving with the Government of Sikkim he used his considerable abilities to renovate and restore many Sikkimese monasteries as a way of promoting Sikkimese culture.

He also derived much pleasure and knowledge as an amateur historian and from his association with the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok. There he met many local and foreign scholars from whom he increased his knowledge and deepened his insight into Sikkimese Culture.

Tashi Topden is survived by a son Tashi Norbu and a daughter Chimey Zangmo.