

LIBRARY OF TIBETAN WORKS AND ARCHIVES, DHARAMSALA.

SNABAD KAPUR* & G. S. THAKUR*

Abstract

Describes the genesis, development and organization of museum and library which serves as an epitome of reservoir of Tibetan culture with its multidimensional perspectives, enumerating the multiple activities comprising of a variety of programmes, projects, publications for the transmission and propagation of cultural heritage and the documentation services rendered by their premier institutions.

Introduction

Tibet, a remote land in South-Central Asia is often referred to as the "roof of the world". It occupies about 1, 221, 700 square kilometers of plateaus and mountains of Central Asia including the world's highest known peak, Mt. Everest.¹

Tibetan civilization uprooted since 1959 is striving to exist, preserve and scatter its profound culture and deep philosophy amidst conflicting and constant changes. Tibet is traditionally a religious kingdom. Bon is considered to be the first known religion in Tibet. It is the only country in the world which has preserved, disseminated and brought in continuation the unique Buddhist philosophy and culture. These characteristics have resulted in the establishment and functioning of the *Library of Tibetan Works and Archives*. It is situated in the little hill resort of Dharamsala in the district of Kangra of Northern India. A colourful large building depicts the blend of modern and traditional styles in architecture. The cultural remnants of a civilization, which were

on the verge of extinction due to ideological encroachments and exile are housed in this building.

It was conceived and founded by His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama of Tibet. The corner stone was laid on 11 June 1970. It officially started functioning on 1 November 1971. It is registered with Societies Registration Act of 1860. The library is an autonomous body functioning under the direct supervision of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.

Knowledge is useful only if it is noticed and imbibed by the coming generations. Mere reading is insufficient. One has to learn, cultivate and gain experiences from the past experiences and learned scholars Dharmasala, with its cool and pleasant climate, records to have many highly experienced Tibetan Scholars. Library of Tibetan works and Archives provides the nucleus of the preservation of culture. One being earnest in his pursuit can obtain help and

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guidance from these well informed and learned scholars.

Aims and Objectives:—

The chief aim to plan the establishment of the library is to enable one to obtain fullest knowledge and intellect of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and culture. The library serves as a reminder and reservoir of a rich past with a view to retard the regression of culture and philosophy. In addition to this other objectives are as under.²

1. To possess and preserve the Tibetan books and manuscripts.
2. To make available the reading material on the premises of the library for study and consultation.
3. To provide comprehensive reference service.
4. To work as a reference centre for enquiries on the Tibetan source material.
5. To make ready and publish bibliographies and documentation lists.
6. To make available, print and supply photo-copies of documents from its stock and
7. To compile and publish union catalogues of the Tibetan reading materials available anywhere in the world.

Reference Section:

Students and scholars of Tibetan Buddhism and tibetology have access to make use of reference facilities. The reference section holdings comprise of books and journals on (1) Buddhism in general and relation to Tibetan Buddhism (2) Research papers on

Tibet and Tibetans (3) Himalayan civilization (4) Other systems of philosophies and (5) Central Asia.

During the year 1981, a total of 189 books were added to the reference section out of which the purchase of 39 titles were made at the cost of Rs. 2037. About 120 titles were received on gratis. The total collection of this section is now 1787, which comprises of books and journals on Tibet and Tibetans, in English and other major European languages. These are very useful for research scholars and serious students. Students have to fill a prescribed form to get the admission card issued.

Reference section at present receive nearly 60 different journals, magazines, and other periodicals including news magazines. Some of the journals are subscribed ones while a large number of them received on exchange with the "The Tibet Journal".

Besides the journals and books, Reference Section has vertical files containing news-clippings, which cover a wide range of almost every subject about Tibet and Tibetans. These files on related subjects have proved very useful to the scholars, writers and journalists. These files dating back to 1959 provide comprehensive information on varying subjects such as:

1. Religious Ceremonies, 2. Tibet News
3. Tibet in the UN, China in the UN,
4. Visits of Lamas to the West, 5. The tours and statements of His Holiness the

Dhalai Lama, 6. Tibets Bhutanese and Sino-Soviet relations, and 7. Book reviews.

Many scholars including Tibetans have made use of the reference facilities. Rules and regulations do not allow issuance of reference materials outside the library premises. Only special arrangements have to be made for the Tibetan administration. Reference materials are classified and catalogued according to Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme; with certain local variations.

Students from different countries also have access to these facilities and opportunities and avail research and guidance facilities provided by the library scholars of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetology. Photocopying machine and microfilm reader have been extensively used by the researchers. Qualified Lamas give guidance on any aspect of Tibetan history, culture, philosophy and religion. These intelligent and knowledgeable Tibetans attract research students to visit Dharmasala.

Besides these the reference section also strives for the following functions:

1. To assist Tibetans to protect, preserve and coordinate their culture and to promote cultural educational and social advancement.
2. To provide means for research, translation and instruction on Tibetan culture, literature, philosophy, traditions, religion and language.
3. To print or reprint works on Tibetan history, literature, philosophy, system of thought, traditional scientist etc.

4. To record in writing or tape the doctrinal wisdom and esoteric knowledge so far unwritten or unrecorded but treasured in the memories of the saintly Lamas.
5. To compile, print and publish either itself or elsewhere the exchange of ideas between native Tibetan scholars and non-Tibetan scholars and to award prizes of distinction for their outstanding individual or joint achievements.

Museum

The next attraction, museum is repository for numerous Tibetan objects of worship and art. It is situated on the first floor. His Holiness, the Dhalai Lama has donated over 500 sacred statues and Thangkas to it from his personal collection. These have been displayed for the benefit of visitors. In fact more than 1000 visitors happen to visit this library each year to see the object d'art, which date back to 12th and 15th centuries. The visitors are mostly educational groups sponsored by institutions and organisations of various pursuits.

On seeing the collections one can feel amazingly pleased with the work which his Holiness, The Dhalai Lama has done in exile for the preservation and continuation of the Tibetan religion and culture.

The draft cataloguing of 622 icons, 12 Thangka paintings and several other miscellaneous artefacts has been completed. A tremendous amount of researches and study of ethnographic literature has been done for the identification of the icons and Thangkas. Scholars and Lamas have devoted their precious time, wisdom, energy and experience

to identify the icons and Thangkas. English translation of the same has also been made. Govt. of India is also giving financial assistance for the cataloguing of Museum holdings.

Cash offerings by Tibetan devotees and visitors amounting to Rs. 5, 120, 50 are said to be spent on the museum collection. Construction of a large wood-carved altar embellished with the intricate traditional motif and ornate design has started.

Following few additions have also been made through donation to the museum.

1. An ornate, intricately designed brass water-kettle made by famed metal.
2. Six Tibetan silver butter lamps and
3. Four rare currency notes of the Government of Tibet

Collectoins Books and manuscripts.

The library has a rich treasure of about 5,000 Tibetan philosophical, psychological and cultural books. It also includes a great number of historical works in xylography, wood-block microfilm and microfische. 303 books and manuscripts have been added during the year 1981. This collection covers the different subjects on history, logic, grammar, poetry and other philosophical works. Books on Tantra have also been included. These collection of historical manuscripts and precious documents prove to be of immense importance to the research scholars.

The total number of collected Tibetan manuscripts have risen to about 22,000. In

the year 1981, a donation of about 206 books and manuscripts has also been made. Some of the important manuscripts include the following:-

1. A set each of handwritten and xylograph
2. Collection of Rinag Zimhag of Sikkim
3. Collection of His Holiness the XIV Dhalai Lama
4. Collected works of Tibet's great scholars
5. Rare collection of Rai Bahadur T. T. Denssepa
6. A Hundred and Fifty verses on Budha's Life.
7. Sadhanas on Guyasamaja Tantra etc.

Arrangements have been made to exchange the manuscripts with a few of the following institutions.

1. Institute for the Advanced Studies of World Religion, U. S. A.
2. Gorkv Scientific Library, Leningrad University, U. S. S. R.
3. International Academy of Indian Culture, New Delhi.
4. The Library of Hungarian Academy of Science
5. Sikkim Research Institute, Gangtok.

Numerous records of irretrievable value has been lost due to carelessness and indifference. Now a policy has been formed to acquire and preserve the material on any subject related to Tibet. These records are of immense value for researchers and serious students.

Photo Collections

The library is attempting to collect photographs, slides and movies on the past and

present life of Tibetans. Prominent individuals are making their collections available for the library. About 2,000 collection of photographs has so far been made. In the year 1981, 44 old photographs of Tibet and Tibetans from the collection of the Rai Bahadur Norbu Dhondup, donated by his wife, have been added. A dozen photographs of the officials of Tibetan government taken in the early forties were donated by Kalon Phuntsog Fashi Takla. Family photograph of his Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama has also been procured by the library. Efforts to procure and restore the old photographs of Tibet are still being made. A descriptive catalogue of these photographs is also proposed to be prepared. But its start and completion depends upon the financial assistance from any source.

A photo exhibition known as Tibet: Past and Present has been displayed as a regular feature of library activities. It shows the cultural pride and national consciousness of the Tibetans to the rest of the world. The exhibition also highlights the present Tibetan way of life in schools, camps, monasteries etc. The Tibet Society, Inc., of Indiana University, U.S.A. has decided to hold an exhibition of photographs of Tibet. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, U.S.A. is organising a major exhibition of photographs of Tibet entitled "The Face of Tibet".

The oral History Project is a further step in recording a number of spiritual and literary treasures with the help of tape recorders and video tapes. JDR 3rd Fund, New York

has donated a complete set of video-equipment to record the Tibetan culture which is stored in the memories of learned and experienced old Lama scholars. This recorded information will be helpful for the transmission of ideas to younger generation.

In fact the library has recorded memoirs, history and geography of villages, teaching of learned Lamas, folk songs, legends, festivals etc. It is also concentrating to record the details of Tibetan science of healing and teachings of Tantric Buddhist traditions.

Tibetan Art School

The Library obtained ample financial aid from JDR to start a Tibetan Art School. The main object of this school is to train the Tibetan Thangka artists. Thangka painting which is disappearing reflects the skill and energy of Tibetan Scholars. It also depicts the most important part of traditional Tibetan culture. Though the quality of the Thangka painting has deteriorated considerably yet it has its aesthetic values and a powerful psychological effect on the viewer. In fact this rich traditional art is suffering neglect and extinction. Now there are only a few Tibetan Thangka artists dispersed among Tibetan refugees, whose paintings influences the mental energy which springs directly from serious contemplation. The Library also encourages the hand printing from wood blocks in traditional style. The subject matter of Tibetan Art is interpreting the different deities, preparing the canvas and composing the iconographic details. To give instructions in the history

and philosophy of Tibetan art a course for 5 years has been started. It was inaugurated in May 1977. Artisans are busy in constructing a three dimensional Mandala being housed in the museum. Due to shortage of funds, the training programme is being managed under great strain.

Lectures and seminars are also being organised to give incentive to advance and spread culture abroad. Distinguished scholars, psychologists, philosophers and saintly Lamas contribute to these thought provoking seminars, which are receiving praise and approval from the whole of the world. They also provide genuine and earliest interpretation of the Tibetan philosophy and civilization. Selected and approved papers, read in these seminars are then published in "The Tibet Journal"

Tibetan Language Instruction Course

A systematic course of Tibetan language instruction has been started by the library. It is useful for the scholars interested in obtaining a degree of proficiency in Tibetan language.

In the beginning of the session three levels of Tibetan language courses viz., Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced were introduced. Elementary course is for three months and the Advanced for six months. Students from more than fourteen countries have attended these courses. Special tutorial classes are conducted for a number of students requiring more help. Mostly research students need longer hours of study to specialise in colloquial Tibetan. Overall

attendance is being increased year by year. The students who have attended these courses are able to communicate in Tibetan language, which enables them to do research into different aspects of Tibetan culture and and philosophy. Mostly the students attending these courses are of three types; (1) Research Scholars (2) Linguists and (3) General serious students interested in Tibetan Buddhism.

Translation Bureau

The next important work of the library is the establishment of the Translation Bureau. In order to make the rest of the world familiar with the teachings and writings of intelligent Tibetan Lamas, the Bureau undertakes to translate religion, philosophy, culture, ethics and history work into English language. Translation is done by the team of English-speaking westerners, working under the guidance of learned and scholarly Lamas. This Bureau was established with requirements of translating Buddhist teachings from Sanskrit into Tibetan and from Tibetan into Mongolian. These English translations are also being published on "the Wisdom of Tibet Series". Some prominent works of Buddhist teachings including works on meditation history and culture have been printed in India too. These works are the English translations taken from the original Tibetan sources.

Library of Tibetan works and Archives has published the translated material for the following categories.

1. High quality materials from prominent authors and translators.

2. Materials offered to Library.
3. Materials offered to the Dhalai Lama.
4. Materials prepared by research scholars.
5. Materials prepared by Translation Bureau.

Some of the recent titles translated and published are given below.

1. Meditation of a Tantric About.
2. Chandrakirti's seven fold reasoning: meditation on the selflessness of persons.
3. Debate in Tibetan Buddhist education.
4. Mahayana Purification: The Sutra of Three Heaps etc.

Publications

The library has started a publication known as "The Tibet Journal". It includes articles written by Tibetans, Westerners, Indians, East Europeans, Russians and Mongolians. In fact, this journal is an international publication. The subjects covered are about Tibet and its neighbouring Himalayan civilization.³

Library has also published several books on Tibetan history, customs, folk legends, festivals, proverbs, biography, language and medicine. Biographical dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism has been published in seven volumes. It has also reprinted rare and ancient Tibetan manuscripts.

Some of the new published titles in the year 1981 are given below

- History: Symbolism and definition of Tibetan National Flag has been published in Tibetan and English Language.
- Biography: A biography by Rakra Tethong in Tibetan Language.
- Medicine: A journal entitled gSo-Rig (Tibetan Medicine) devoted to the research and analysis of Tibetan art of healing.
- Language: Modern Tibetan language by Lhasawa Losang Thonden.

The "Newsletter" of the Library of Tibetan works and Archives is being published annually. Its main purpose is to provide news and information on all activities related to the growth and development of library.

Library is rendering a yeoman's service in preserving, disseminating and continuing Tibetan philosophy and culture. It also strives to provide more facilities for research scholars who are in the pursuit of exploring new ideas. In future opportunities will be made available for the exchange of views from the Tibetan civilization with other countries in the world.

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