NOTES & TOPICS

IN MEMORIAM

Ven Rigzin Lharam whose exquisite workmanship decorates the premises of the Sākṣim Research Institute of Tibetology passed away in April last. Mr. Motichand Pradhan, a Founder Member of this Institute, passed away in May last. Obituary notices will be published in the next number of this Bulletin.

Professor Nalinaksha Dutt passed away in November 1973. It is regretted that no notice of this was made in the Bulletin. A notice is made now.

PROFESSOR NALINAKSHA DUTT

Born on 4 December 1893 Nalinaksha Dutt passed away on 27 November 1973, that is, a week prior to his 80th birth anniversary. He had a life full of years and full of honours.

As an undergraduate student (Chittagong College and Presidency College: Bengal) young Nalinaksha Dutt had changed his interest from Mathematics and Physics to Pali and Sanskrit and when he graduated M.A. with a First Class First his talents were noticed by educationists like Sir Autosh Mukherjee and specialist scholars like Mahamahopadhyaya Sastri Chandra Vidyabhushan. Nalinaksha Dutt had taken a post in Jadavpur College, Rangoon for teaching Pali and Sanskrit there. Autosh Mukherjee persuaded him to return to Calcutta University and ordered relaxation of the Lecturer’s routine to enable Dutt to pursue his studies in Buddhism. Dutt, now introduced to Sastri Chandra Das and Kazi Dawa Sandup, delved deeper into Sanskrit Buddhism since most of the Sanskrit Buddhist literature could be read in Tibetan translation only.

In appreciation of Dutt’s researches in both the Schools of Buddhism, Calcutta University awarded him the Frenchsch Roychand Scholarship and the Doctor’s degree. When Dutt sought admission to London School of Oriental Studies for D. Litt.—without the preliminary Ph.D.—he was readily admitted. The strict and honest British Orientalists also admitted that at the moment there was no British scholar equally wellread in both Pali and Sanskrit Buddhism and nominated the Belgian scholar Professor Louis de La Ville Ponsin to be Dutt’s guide. Dutt had to reside in Brussels for a good part of his time to sit with La Ville Ponsin. A major part of Dutt’s dissertation for D. Litt. (London) came out in 1930 as Aspect of Mahayana Buddhism and its relation to Hinayana. This was a monumental work in the sense that the book set right the record of split in Buddhism—in both historical and philosophical sequence.

28
In preparing this book, Aspects of Mahayana Buddhism, Dutt had to
defend his own readings and conclusions before a good number of Western
scholars: R. L. Turner, L. D. Barnett, E. D. Ross, E. J. Thomas, Max Walleser,
La Vallee Poussin and Th. Sechterbatsky. The last two, the greatest Western
Buddhist scholars of the day, unreservedly admitted that Nalinaksha Dutt
had rectified many of the Western notions about Eastern concepts and that they
had profited from the debates with Dutt.

Nalinaksha Dutt, long before he held the Professorship at Calcutta
University, was known as the leading Indian scholar in Buddhism. Among
Dutt’s later publications were The Gilgit Manuscripts (1939-99), Palaivastra
PrajnaPramita (1938) and Saddharma Pundarika (1952). The value of these
works is well-known to students and scholars of Buddhism. A note about
The Gilgit Manuscripts may be made here. When Western scholars recom-
mented by Sir Aurel Stein were pressing on the Kashmir Darbar for decpher-
ing and editing the Manuscripts, the Dewan of Kashmir (Sir Gopalaswamy
Aiyangar) located Nalinaksha Dutt as the most competent for the assignment.

Dutt held many offices with distinction. He was a Fellow of the Asiatic
Society, was its Vice-President for several terms and was its President for a
term. He was Senior Vice-President of the Mahabodhi Society for many
years. He was Vice-President of this Institute from 1919 till 1973.

The Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology owes much to Professor
Nalinaksha Dutt. He was not only the principal adviser and guide about
our publications, he was an active contributor to Bulletin of Tibetology. While
he was in MP (Baha Sabhar) he most warmly lent his support to our applica-
tions to the Government of India for grants. He is known to have spoken to
the then Prime Minister (Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru) and the then Education
Minister (Professor Hrushyuv Kabi) recommending our research and pub-
lication programmes.

I had known him first while a student at Calcutta University and later
more intimately when I took up studies on Inner Asia and Northern Buddhism.
It was indeed a proud privilege to sit at the feet of Professor Nalinaksha Dutt
and read the story of Dharma in India and abroad.

NIRMAL C. SINHA

29