

# Tibetology Contra Nepalese ?

—NIRMAL C SINHA

**N**ari Kaikhosru Rustomji, better known as Nari Rustomji, was a brilliant member of the Indian Civil Service and is now widely recognized as an authority on the Eastern Himalayas. Mr. Rustomji's scholarship is founded on his lifelong contact with the races and tribes all over the Himalayas east of Nepal, his mastery of the languages and dialects of the peoples concerned, his on-the-ground experience as an administrator all over the eastern regions and his access to archives and records while in service. I have known Nari Rustomji for thirty years now and respect him as an elder in the field of Himalayan Studies though he is eight years younger than me.

I am however constrained to question a recent statement of Nari Rustomji which runs thus: "The late Chogyal made strenuous efforts to revive Sikkim's ancient traditions. As a counter to Nepalese dominance the support of the Government of India and of the Dalai Lama was enlisted to establish an Institute to Tibetology". This was in his paper read on 10 March this year before the Centre for Himalayan Studies, University of North Bengal and is circulating in mimeograph currently. His latest book **Sikkim : A Himalayan Tragedy** out two months earlier, i.e. January 1987 while dealing with "Nepalese-influx" and "Nepalese influence" has quite intriguing matter. I quote: "The Institute was set up as a focus for Tibetan based research and was eventually inaugurated under the joint auspices of His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet and India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. There could have been no firmer assurance for Sikkim's minorities of India's rejection of the traditional policy of seeking for a guarantee against a revival of Tibetan influence". (pp. 43-44)

The British rulers had discovered "the surest guarantee against a revival of Tibetan influence in Sikkim" in the increasing immigration of Nepalese "the hereditary enemies of Tibet". The Lepchas and Bhutias being followers of Tibetan Buddhism are—in view of Claude White, Herbert Risley and Nari Rustomji—*ipso facto* anti-Hindu and therefore anti-Nepalese. The Institute of Tibetology in Sikkim therefore in such logic would be anti-Nepalese.

In his first publication, **Enchanted Frontiers** (Oxford University Press 1971) Nari Rustomji no doubt says much about Nepalese majority and Bhutia-Lepcha minority in Sikkim. He however says nothing on Tibetology contra Nepalese in describing the Sikkim Maharajkumar's project. I quote in extenso.

"There should be, according to his idea, a centre for research into Tibetan literature and Mahayana Buddhism, where scholars and lamas of Sikkim would give and receive guidance in their avocations. The centre should include a library of Tibetan books, religious and secular, which could be availed of for study

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at the centre itself and mimeographed for the use of research scholars in other parts of the world. There was apprehension that, with the growing tide of Chinese infiltration into Tibet, the ancient books and historical records in the monasteries might be pillaged or destroyed. The idea thus emerged of establishing an institute which would serve as a refuge and repository of Tibetan culture where the old values could be kept alive." (p. 230)

"Nehru was infected by the Prince's enthusiasm and unhesitatingly pledged his support. The Dalai Lama too gave his blessing to the venture and promised to assist with books and to encourage learned scholars and lamas to give the benefit of their scholarship to the centre. The corner stone of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, as the centre was named, was laid by the Dalai Lama during his return from India through Sikkim and we invited Jawaharlal Nehru to perform the formal opening during the following year, by when we hoped to complete the main central building. The Institute was the Prince's own, beloved brain-child." (p. 230)

## II

I was present at the North Bengal University Centre for Himalayan Studies (10 March 1987) when Mr. Rustomji read his paper and I did protest about any anti-Nepalese objective of the Institute of Tibetology. Now that the Paper (in mimeograph) and the book SIKKIM (Allied Publishers) are on circulation I am urged by my friends who count as many Tibetans as Nepalese all over India as also Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese in Sikkim to record in print the facts about the foundation and objectives of this Institute of Tibetology in Sikkim. My credentials are clear to my friends in Sikkim as in other states of India and also abroad in the Universities or centres specializing in studies relating to Himalayas or Buddhism in Himalayas and Trans-Himalayas. Readers other than such friends are not expected to know an obscure specialist like me. I thus submit first my biodata relevant to this matter.

I was the first Director of the Sikkim Institute of Tibetology serving from 1958 to 1971 was Director again from 1976 to 1978 and was called in 1983 to organize the Silver Jubilee and shall stay at this post till next summer. All these years have been for me happy years, years of education and not years of employment only.

My association with this project goes back to the Buddha Jayanti Year (1956). I was then Cultural Attache with the India Mission for Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet. The Sikkim Maharajkumar (later Chogyal) had programmed for collection, preservation and Study of Tibetan texts of all sects in one centre and sought support from the Prime Minister of India currently celebrating 2500 years of Buddhism. Maharajkumar chose the right year and the right man. For Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's veneration for Gautama Buddha was as high as his reverence for Mahayana philosophy which can be recovered fully from Tibetan translations of lost Sanskrit originals.

Besides the Head of our Mission, Apasaheb Balasaheb Pant, better known as Apa Pant, notwithstanding Oxford Modern Greats and London Inns of Court,

was a great enthusiast about Oriental Learning and would openly affirm his faith in transcendental values and mystic lore. Apa Pant loved me and esteemed me despite my purely academic leanings to Yoga and Prajnaparamita. He lent all his weight to Maharajkumar in this task of securing Prime Minister's official support and made me handle all papers and correspondence re: Sikkim Project of Tibetology. The Maharajkumar came to like me from the first day we met and when promise of Pandit Nehru's official support was received, Maharajkumar entrusted me with drafting a Charter for incorporation of an Institute of Tibetology.

This Draft was ready in February 1958, when I was negotiating for a Readership in History with emphasis on Inner Asia in a Central University. Maharajkumar threw a surprise on Government of India by asking for my services to be the Director of this Institute. I pleaded my poor knowledge of the Language (Tibetan) and the Religion (Buddhism) and was keen to be back to purely academic pursuits. Even Apa Pant could not persuade me. My good friend Jagat Singh Mehta, then Deputy Secretary and later Foreign Secretary, told me on spot (South Block) that after Nari Rustomji I was the first from Government of India to be asked for by name by the Sikkim Darbar and that even the Prime Minister had heard this and approved Maharajkumar's choice. Jagat Mehta warned me against negotiating with the Central University. I had to forget the calls from any University and joined as Director of this Institute on 1 July 1958, three months prior to its opening by the Prime Minister of India. I joined with all warmth, and have never regretted this.

### III

I state the above details to say that I was not ignorant of any controversies that could arise and would begin my rejoinder by saying that I had never known any anti-Nepalese posture of Jawaharlal Nehru or Apa Pant in my task. I mention Apa Pant because he was instrumental in obtaining Prime Minister's official support. Nehru's individual moral support was there from the beginning but his official support, that is, support of the Prime Minister of that of the Government of India was much else.

Nehru's advisers in South Block had objections, not related to ethno-linguistic philosophy of Nari Rustomji. One objection was that Government of India's support would annoy the Chinese authorities. Gangtok reply was that Communist China was also celebrating Buddha Jayanti in many ways and had offered to bring to India the skull of the great Mahayana pilgrim scholar Hiuen Tsang. Another was that an Institute of Tibetology in Sikkim would attract all sorts of Western visitors and special visa for Sikkim was a growing problem. Gangtok reply was that the foreigners' quest for butterflies and rhododendrons of Sikkim would be there as long as Tourism authorities' quest for foreign exchange was there. And about Maharajkumar being anti-Communist and anti-Chinese, Gangtok drew the Prime Minister's notice to the lavish hospitality and generous travel facilities extended by the Chinese to Maharajkumar on his Tibet pilgrimage previous year.

Enjoying the confidence of both Apa Pant and Maharajkumar I was witness to all talks and was the keeper of all records re: Sikkim Project. I never came across any ethno-linguistic considerations like checkmating "Nepalese dominance" or "revival of Tibetan influence" in Sikkim weighing in the minds of the makers of the Institute.

#### IV

I take the Dalai Lama first, as His Holiness would consider any notice of such controversy beneath his dignity. I would only say that why the Dalai Lama should at all be interested in a statecraft to counter both "Nepalese dominance" and "revival of Tibetan influence" in Sikkim. About Jawaharlal Nehru I would reiterate that such considerations did not inspire him to support Sikkim Project. About Apa Pant, I say that his pro-Nepalese as well as pro-Tibetan sentiments are well-known and he would never be party to such strange statecraft as propounded in Nari Rustomji's latest book (SIKKIM pp. 41-44). I consider last Maharajkumar Palden Thondup Namgyal, "author of Sikkim Project for Tibetology" in Nehru's words if my memory does not fail.

**I would not claim the degree of closeness to Maharajkumar (later Chogyal) as Mr. Rustomji can rightly claim. I only affirm that I had enjoyed his affection, love and confidence from the very beginning till I asked for release (1970) to respond to offer of Professorship from my Alma Mater (Calcutta University). I too knew the mind of Maharajkumar (Chogyal) and I cannot deny that his one constant concern was about the Nepalese majority and Lapcha-Bhutia minority. To the best of my knowledge, Maharajkumar had never brought the ethno-linguistic politics to the planning and building up the Institute of Tibetology. Maharajkumar's stakes were much high as he wanted to tell the wide world that "small Sikkim could build a repository for preservation of learning associated with Chhos (Dharma) and this Institute was the first such" (Maharajkumar's words to me again and again). In this endeavour Maharajkumar counted as much on Nepalese as on Tibetan co-operation.**

In summer 1962 when Maharajkumar returned from New Delhi after releasing our well-known art-book dedicated to Jawaharlal Nehru he told me: "Panditji and your Professor (Humayun Kabir) say that Maharajkumar's Tibetology has already put Sikkim on the map of academic world. I say you have put Sikkim on the map". With humility and pride I received these words. I did not feel that all my good efforts had the ulterior objective of countering "Nepalese dominance" and "Tibetan influence" and do not feel that way even after I read Nari Rustomji's latest book. I have silently swallowed remarks like "Nehru fooled by Liaquat Ali Khan" or "Nehru fooled by Chou-En-Lai". I shall not accept any remark like "Nehru fooled by Sikkim Maharajkumar". Such denigration covers both, Jawaharlal Nehru and Palden Thondup Namgyal.

I write later on the role of Nepalese in building up this Institute. I refer meanwhile to an incident in the General Council (Institute's Governing Body)

meeting in 1970. A VIP lady as member of the General Council demanded to know why the Director of this Institute had so far made no programme about Lepcha culture or literature; further why should this Institute not work mainly, if not solely, for study of Sikkim history and culture. I had replied that this was never earlier required from this Institute and that for any change in emphasis from Tibetology the Charter of Incorporation should be amended. The Chogyal as President agreed with me. I understood that our objectives as laid down in the Charter were to remain the same. It is not necessary here to name the VIP. It is necessary to point out that Mr. Rustomji, though a Founder Member of this Institute, is reconstructing the history of this Institute.

Though I am the last in the list of Founder Members I can say that in rewriting the history of this Institute, Nari Rustomji is unwittingly guilty to character assassination of a dead friend, Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal.

The list of Founder Members (Annexure I of the Charter, reproduced in Sikkim Act IV of 1976) includes these Nepalese: Gomchen Pema Tamang Lama, Shri Motichand Pradhan, Shri Maniharsha Jyoti and Shri Bhim Bahadur Pradhan. Gomchen was abbot of Namchi monastery. Motichand Pradhan, retired Chief Magistrate of Sikkim, was as good in Tibetan as in his own language and an ardent collector of Sanskrit and Tibetan works about the Pandits in the Land of Snow. Maniharsha Jyoti—of the famous industrialist house Jyoti Brothers spread over Kathmandu, Lhasa, Calcutta, Singapore and Bonn—is a patron of Nepali Vajracharyas and Tibetan Lamas and was useful in Maharajkumar's procurement of xylographs and manuscripts in Tibet. Bhim Bahadur Pradhan, retired Forest Manager, famous as an authority on Himalayan flora, was close to the Lepcha as well as Tamang temples and monasteries. I may add that Maharajkumar had very much in mind the names of Tenzing Norgay, the famous mountaineer and Ganju Lama, the famous soldier and due to some slip in papers moving between different authorities concerned these names were not in the Annexure when the Charter was promulgated on 28 October 1958.

From this promulgation in 1958 through the amendment as Sikkim Act IV of 1976 Nepalese association is continued. In the General Council after 1976 there have been scholars and scholarly Nepalese like Kashiraj Pradhan and C.D. Rai. At this moment of writing the Vice-President, elected from the General Council members, is a Nepalese Brahmin Hon'ble K. N. Upreti, Education Minister; and the prestige post of Financial Adviser cum Treasurer is held by late Bhim Bahadur Pradhan's son, K. C. Pradhan, Finance Secretary to the Government of Sikkim. Mr. Pradhan like his father is as much close to Sikkim monasteries as to Sikkim forests.

I would fail in acknowledging the Institute's indebtedness to "Nepalese majority" of Sikkim, if I do not record that a Nepalese dominated government with a Nepalese Chief Minister, Hon'ble N. B. Bhandari have evinced the same

interest and concern about this Institute as the previous government would. Annual Maintenance Grants come without complex audit conditions, and any Extra Grant needed is issued on application only. Facilities from all Government Departments are received irrespective of ethnolinguistic or religious or denominational affinities of the Ministers and Secretaries concerned.

## VI

The ethno-linguistic and communal mechanics of ruling India were devised by the British authorities in pre-1914 years and the same authorities had their first shock in 1919, the year Mr. Rustomji was born at Lahore. In Jalianwala Bagh Hindus, Muslims and Shiks faced solidiers commanded by a British General and the dead counted six hundred. In 1930 summer, when Mr. Rustomji was abroad in Bedford School, the famous Garhwali soldiers refused to fire on Pathans at Id prayers in Peshawar maidan. In 1940-42 when Mr. Rustomji was an ICS probationer, the British were recruiting Nepali Hindus, Nepali Buddhists and even Bhutias into the armed forces. 'Inter arma leges silent' and even the forbidden Buddhists in the Himalayas were welcome. The Two-Nation theory and the Partition of India came no doubt in the aftermath of war. In this aftermath the theory of "the hereditary enemies" of each other : Nepalese and Tibetan was dead mutton for British.

In his anxiety to propound the doctrine of countering "Nepalise dominance" and "revival of Tibetan influence" in one stroke, Nari Rustomji ignores and suppresses the great historic fact that Central Himalayas or Nepal have been the stop over in the journey of Buddhism (Mahayana) to Tibet and Mongolia. Padmasambhava, Santarakshita, Kamalashila and even Atisa Dipankara stopped and studied in Nepal on way to Tibet. Nepal gave asylum to Buddhist scholars from the plains. Nepal preserved the Buddhist scriptures and expositions, sent these to Tibet and Nepalese Pandits also joined in the translation of Sanskrit works into Tibetan. The iconography of Gautama Buddha and Mahayana deities was further developed in Nepal, and Nepali style was model for Tibet and Monogolia. The great king Song-tsen Gampo and his Nepali consort are equally adored in Tibet. Sites in Nepal are sacred for Tibetan and Mongol pilgrims. Nepali Hindu have apotheosized Gautama Buddha far more than other Hindus. I can not digress further here. I can tell the readers that three great pioneers Brian Hodgson, Rajendra Lala Mitra and Sylvain Levi had acquired their knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism by residence in Nepal and these three noticed the harmony between Hindus and Buddhists. Any picture of "hereditary enemies" was not for them.

I conclude my writing at length with two quotes from the Charter of Incorporation of this Institute:

"Chhos in Tibetan is equivalent to Dharma in Sanskrit but is generally used in all Tibetan speaking countries in a special sense as the Doctrine of the Buddha".

**“In our belief and in deference to the teachings of all Sangyas (Buddhas) and Changchub Sempas (Bodhisattvas), Chhos is eternal and all embracing. Study of the doctrines of other Sects and Schools such as Theravada, Jaina and Brahmana may enable us to see more clearly the historical development of Chhos. May the great catholicity of Chhos enlighten the quest of the Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology”.**