

IN MEMORIAM



Smt. Indira Gandhi is no more. Born on 19 November 1917 at Allahabad she passed away on 31 October 1984 at New Delhi.

Indira Priyadarshini had as a child imbibed from her father Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru a deep reverence for Buddha Sakyamuni and his Teachings. Later as a pupil of Gurudev Tagore she developed an abiding interest in the spread of Dharma in India and abroad.

In 1958 (1 October) Smt. Indira Gandhi was present at the opening of the Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology by Pandit Jawaharlal' Nehru. Her interest in Mahayana and Tibetan studies was so deep that she had a sustained concern in the work of this Institute even when she was all too busy in the high office as Prime Minister of India. Whether in Gangtok, New Delhi or elsewhere, whenever she came across any scholar or officer connected with this Institute, Indira Gandhi would enquire about our progress or fund requirements.

In 1975 November she visited Gangtok for a stop of 24 hours and the official programme did not include a visit to the Institute. She noticed this omission while just sitting for a quiet dinner at Raj Bhavan, had the dinner cut short and visited the Institute in the cold evening; the date was 20 November.

In the midst of an extremely heavy routine in July 1983 Indira Gandhi agreed to be in Gangtok for 36 hours to inaugurate the Silver Jubilee of this Institute. In the morning of 29 July she left New Delhi at 7 for Bagdogra where she changed into a helicopter, arriving Gangtok some time after 10. She was at the Institute campus before 11.30, she exchanged greetings with the Lamas and authorities of the Institute, planted a sapling,

accepted the Triple Auspicious Objects from the Lamas, went round our collections of icons, art objects, manuscripts and xylographs evincing much interest in many items and later addressed the assembled Lamas, dignitaries, scholars and other invitees to the Silver Jubilee Inauguration. Indira Gandhi spoke extempore for nearly half an hour. The extempore speech, in our submission as in the opinion of the audience, was a rare combination of emotion and intellect. The speech was reproduced in extenso in this Bulletin No 1 (1984). A few extracts are made here.

"But in the journey towards fulfilment, we must be, we are, alone. We have to undertake this journey and we have to bear its hardships alone. Gurudev Tagore has said that if no one walks with us we must walk alone -- "EKLA CHOLORE". And the Buddha said it much earlier to Ananda, "Be a lamp unto yourself". So we have this light within ourselves, it is a question of being able to see it or being able to reveal it or being able to use its strength and energy for good.

"Nothing in the world is purely good or purely bad. It is what use you make of it. Whether it is science, whether it is knowledge, whether it is any tools that we have, we can use them for constructive purposes, we can use them for destructive purpose.

"Buddhism spread from India far and wide and it is influencing now a very large portion of the world's population. And although India at one stage seemed to have forgotten it in part as Buddhism, although many of its ideals and values were adapted and absorbed, we find now resurgence here and abroad.

"It is a light which can guide our path and can take the world away from the destructive, the greed, the looking towards the superficial rather than the deep which can be with us always.

"Dr. Radhakrishnan once said that 'to be an Indian doesn't merely mean to be born in India or to have the citizenship of India. It means allegiance to certain principles, certain ideals, certain values'. And these, of course, are found in full measure in the teaching of this Great Soul, Gautama Buddha".

A notice of the Silver Jubilee Inauguration by Smt. Indira Gandhi on 29 July 1983 appearing in the *Tibetan Review* (New Delhi) for September 1983, as appended here expresses the reverential esteem of the Lamas and scholars in the discipline designated Tibetology.

"The Prime Minister was welcomed at the entrance of the Institute by the Lamas of the Institute who had lined up outside with religious, musical instruments like rolmo, dhungchen, gyaling and nga. Monks, scholars and officials of the Institute offered ceremonial scarves to the Prime Minister. But the most respectful gesture of welcome was presentation to her of Tensum (Triple Object): the Buddha image, the scripture and the Stupa. The image represents the body of the Buddha, the scripture stands for his Word, and the stupa for his Mind. The presentation of the Tensum is the highest honour that Lamas can do to a high dignitary. It is a well-known custom in Mongolia and Tibet. In my opinion the presentation of Tensum to the Indian Prime Minister is the first instance of such honour bestowed on a non-Buddhist. She on her part viewed the icons and images of the Institute with interest worthy of a Buddhist devotee. She also expressed this interest later in an extempore address in the Institute.

"The three items of Tensum on this occasion were a small Buddha image in bronze; the writings of Nagarjuna and Atisa now lost in Sanskrit; and a Kadam stupa in bronze. The presentation was made by the Institute's Lamas, Khenpo Lodo, Sangpo

J. Ngawang Rinpoche, and Kunga Yonten Hochot-sang. The cost of the items was borne entirely by monks, scholars and other staff of the Institute from voluntary subscriptions. These items and other objects, manuscripts and xylographs were explained to the Prime Minister by the Institute's Director, Professor Nirmal Sinha, and the Deputy Director, Rechung Rinpoche. The Prime Minister wrote on the visitors' book a lengthy appreciation and concluded : "With good wishes to all those working in this Institute and those connected with it".

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*JKR : NCS*