

Giuseppe Tucci's Contribution on Sanskrit Literature: A Study

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Professor Giuseppe Tucci is the doyen of modern scientific studies of art, history and literature. He was born on 5th June 1894 at Macerata in Central Italy. As an Italian scholar he became a great Tibetologist as well as an Indologist with remarkable achievements. He learnt various classical languages like Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Tibetan, Chinese and Bengali, etc. So, one can easily realize the vastness of his knowledge. Professor Tucci was a professor of religions and philosophy of India for many years, and also the professor of the Far East at the University of Rome. Even the foundation of the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente. Widely known as IsMEO, was established in 1933 by this great Tibetologist which is an indelible mark in the domain of oriental studies. He made several visits for many times to India, Tibet and Nepal.

As a result, he collected huge historical, artistic, and literary materials through these travels. He collected many manuscripts of Sanskrit works. Among them some were original; some he made copies and took photos. The most important discoveries had been made in the monasteries of Sakya, Ngor and Zhvalu. Because, at those places he had found seven thousand manuscripts pages of Indian works those were considered lost. In other words, he also discovered the Sanskrit original on palm leaves. Most of them were the important philosophical and religious works of India. Not only that, he also edited and translated many books. Even his famous works on Tibetan studies are – Tibetan Painted Scrolls, Secrets of Tibet, Indo-Tibetica, Minor Buddhist Text, Nepal: The Discovery of Mallas, The Religions of Tibet, etc.

During his travels in those countries, he was very much attracted by the Indian studies in general and Buddhist studies in particular. He started his journey through India. Professor Tucci first came to India on November 1925, and his contact with India started with his coming to Santiniketan, where he was sent by the Italian Government to teach the Italian Language. He took the advantage of his stay in Santiniketan and had the rare fortune of receiving lessons in Bengali from Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. With Gurudev he read some poems, and mainly Lipika, which impressed him very much. His interest in Sanskrit studies had increased while he was in Santiniketan.

He spent six years in India, from 1925 to 1930, to teach Italian, Chinese, and Tibetan at Santiniketan, Calcutta University and sometime at Dacca University. During that period he worked on some Buddhist texts, with collaboration with Vidhushekhar Bhattacharya and other colleagues and researchers.

In this way his next expedition to Tibet began in 1929 and continued till 1948. During these journeys in the unexplored cultural and western regions he collected an enormous number of document, literary materials and art objects.

The most important result of the exploration conducted in Western Tibet in the year 1933 and 1935 were the historical and artistic study of the principal monasteries of the area. Tabo, Nako, Tsaparang and other sites were the ones he studied and published in the third volume of Indo-Tibetica Series.

Later, in the year 1937, Tucci turned his attention to Central Tibet. In this expedition his first project was to visit Tashi Lhunpo, but the Tibetan Government rejected his request for a reason².

In the previous travel Tucci obtained a pass to travel to the trade mart of Gyantse (Wyl. rgyal rtse) from the Indian Government³. Therefore, he was able to explore only the sites along the Hindusthan-Tibet trade route: Iwang, Samada, Gyantse.

The expedition of the year 1939 to central Tibet was out of the trade route which connected India to Tibet. Therefore, Tucci had to apply the Tibetan Government for regular visa. This time his request was fulfilled. So, he started his journey with a new companion Felice Boffa Ballram. The Tibetan passport allowed them only to visit Sakya. Tucci and Felice Boffa Ballram spent 25 days in Sakya, upon studying in the libraries and working on art. During those days Tucci was also able to obtain the permission to journey to Zhigatse and return to India via Gyantse. Moreover, he made a photographic album with 1088 illustration documenting throughout the whole journey. On the other side the scientific results of this expedition had been extremely important, because Felice Boffa Ballram photographed thousands of pages in the libraries of all the monasteries including many Sanskrit works, and also collected the scroll paintings (thankas). On the other hand Tucci was able to write a general history on the province of Tsang, and to study the history of arts in Central Tibet for the first time.

On the other side, in 1940, when Italy declared war against the United Kingdom, that time Tucci was forced to stop his relationship with India, and Tibet. As a result his travel was stopped for the time being, but again in the year 1946 he wrote the British Government to get a permission to travel again across Central Tibet. Finally, he obtained the visa submitting his application directly to the Tibetan Government through his friend Richardson.

His last expedition to Tibet in 1948 had a worrisome beginning because when he started to visit to the Forbidden City with his three Italian companions⁴ and arrived at the Sikkim-Tibet border, at that time, the team came to know that the Tibetan authorities granted a visa only for Tucci. Thus, Tucci was forced to leave his companions in Yatung, and he proceeded alone to Lhasa where he met a Sikkimese photographer

² As the British official reported, that was not the right moment because that time Chinese and Tibetan Government were discussing the return of the Tashi lama to his Tibetan seat after thirteen years residence in China, and the moment was so delicate that nobody would have allowed a foreigner to entry Tashi Lhunpo.

³ At that time, the Gyantse district was occupied by the British Government.

⁴ The companions are i) Regolo Moise (1901-1982) a physician specialized in tropical medicine with a long service in the Horn of Africa, ii) Pietro Francesco Mele, a Photographer, iii) Fosco Maraini (1912-2004) a Photographer.

named Prophan. He remained in Lhasa for quite a long time and got an opportunity to meet young Dalai Lama, and made journey to the three monasteries, namely Drepung, Sera and Ganden.

The expedition of 1948 marks the end of Tucci's travels to Tibet. Because the political situation of Tibet, since 1950 prevented him to plan any further travel in that country. According to Tenzing Norgay⁵ Tucci wished to continue eastward until the Chinese border, but he gave up because of the unstable political situation.

Similarly, Professor Tucci extended his activity to Nepal in the period from 1950 to 1954. He realized the importance of better knowledge of the cultural and political history of Nepal in order to investigate and study the evolution of Tibetan culture. He undertook five journeys to Nepal. In 1952, he made a journey to Goarkha, Pokhra, the valley of the Kali Gandaki up to Mustang and the Nepal-Tibet border. Then he made his another journey in 1954, this time his aim being to visit the valley near Jumla. His route this time was from Pokhra to Tukucha. After crossing some high passes he went to Charkabhotgaon and Tarapgaon. Investigating these villages he came back to Barbung Khola- Thuli Bheri and through Tibrikot he reached Jumla. From there he proceeded to Chilka, then to Dullu and finally, through Surkhet he reached India at Nishangara.

In course of these trips he collected innumerable important materials which he wrote down in the form of a preliminary report on two scientific expeditions in Nepal. These journeys and the subsequent report is of vital importance for the reconstruction of Nepal's history and culture, and his itinerary up to Jumla is also relevant for the materials revealed for the study of Bon and Tibetan Buddhism.

His Contribution on Sanskrit Literature:

Professor Giuseppe Tucci has contributed himself in multi-dimensional fields. His main contribution was to discover specially the wonderful treasures of Buddhist Literature, which were unavailable to the orient scholars of India. Since those were preserved in Tibetan and Chinese translation.

During his scientific expeditions to India, Tibet and Nepal in the thirties and forties Prof. Tucci had an opportunity to photograph and in some cases to ask someone to copy many important Buddhist works. Those manuscripts he had photographed became a part of the collections in India and Nepal libraries, but unfortunately others were lost.

While Prof. Tucci stayed in India at that time he was very much impressed by the Indian studies, even particularly in Visva-Bharati he got an impetus in associating with Pandit Vidhushekhar Bhattacharya (Shastri Mahasaya) and other colleagues and researchers on Indology, who were assembled there. By whom Tucci got an enthusiasm to the reconstruction of the Sanskrit Buddhist texts, which were lost in original. He also joined with them. After getting generated with that team, Prof. Tucci edited Madhyānta-

⁵ The first mountaineer who was reached the summit of the Mount Everest with Edmund Hillary on 29 May, 1953

Vibhāṅga-Sūtra and Madhyānta-Vibhāṅga-Sūtra-Bhāṣya-Tīkā in collaboration with Pandit Shastri. Not only that he also worked on Epic and Purāṇas in his interest in Indian studies.

During his eight expeditions to the Tibetan speaking district of India as well as western and Central Tibet, a number of works were brought by Tucci from different places of Himalayan area, and Western and Central Tibet. In the Ngor monastery he founded a small palm-leaf manuscript of Nepalese origin and script only three page. Among these three pages the second and the third page, especially the second page had been eaten up by the worms on the right side, therefore the contents of the book were fragmentary. The booklet ends with the following colophon: Trisatikāyāḥ Prajñāpāramitāyāḥ Kārikā saptatiḥ Samāptā Kṛtiriyam Āryāsaṅga padanam iti.

He also edited the minor commentaries on the Prajñāpāramitā. In Tibet, he founded a commentary on the Vajracchedikā, which is ascribed in the colophon to Vasubandhu.⁶

In such way in the Ngor monastery he also got the same fragmentary palm-leaf manuscript which containing the Mahāyāna-Viṃśikā, a work in which the colophon is said to be Catuḥstava Samāsārtha. The Tibetan and Chinese translations of the Mahāyāna-Viṃśikā imposed to Nāgārjuna along with an English version were first edited by S.Yamaguchi in the eastern Buddhist, and later re-edited by Vidhushekhar Bhattacharya, who tried to restoration into Sanskrit from the Tibetan and the Chinese versions.⁷

From Tucci's early works we know that he had returned from Nepal with 90 manuscripts, those were more precisely modern copies written in Devanagiri script on Nepalese paper.

On the other hand, he founded two manuscripts of the Durbar library in Kathmandu, which was a small metrical treaty on the Prajñāpāramitā, and it was also attributed by the colophon to Kamalambārapada. In the manuscript the title of the work was.....āryāśataśaḥśrīkāyāḥ prajñāpāramitāyāḥ piṇḍārthāḥ. In the bstan 'gyur, Sher phyin section, vol MA, a translation of the same booklet is preserved, its title in Sanskrit is: bhagavatī-prajñāpāramitā-ṇaśloka piṇḍārtha, and Its Tibetan title being: bcom ldan 'das ma shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa don bsdus pa'i tshigs su bcaḍ pa dgu pa. The translations were made by the two authors named...Śraddhakāra Varman and Rinchen Zangpo. There is also a commentary with this small treatise. The commentary is very short and rather elementary in which nothing of any importance from the philosophical point of view that can be gathered. This commentary is included in the bstan 'gyur as separate work, which attributed to the same author, its title being: Bhagavatī-Prajñāpāramitā-ṇaśloka-Piṇḍārtha-tīkā. In Tibetan it is called: bcom ldan adas ma shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pai dom pa bsdus pai tshigs sub cad dgu pai rgya cher bshed pa. But in Narthang edition there are two other translations of the same work: tshigs su bcaḍ dgu pa (missing in Derge ed.) translated by Sumaṅśrī (Sumanahśrī) and Rin chen grub.

⁶ Tohoku Catalogue, No. 3816

⁷ One Chinese version translated by Shihu and there are two Tibetan translations, one was translated by the Indian pandit Chandrakumara, and the Tibetan Lotsava was Sakya Od, and the second was translated by the Kashmirian pandit Ananda and the Lotsava Dragjor Sherab (Wyl. grags 'byor shes rab).

Besides these above works Prof. Giuseppe Tucci has also edited Vajrachedikā Sūtrabhāṣya of Asaṅga in Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan and translated with a seven-page tabular summery. He edited the Sanskrit text and the Tibetan version of the Prajñāpāramitā-Piṇḍārtha-Saṃgraha of Dignaga, with English version. Even Bhāvanākrama of Kamalaśīla⁸ was edited with Tibetan version by Prof. Tucci. He also worked on Hetutattvopadeśa by Jetari. It is based upon a palm-leaf manuscript.⁹

Prof. Giuseppe Tucci's best and lasting contributions to Buddhist studies have been editions of unedited and restorations of fragmentary Sanskrit texts, translations of important Sanskrit texts that have lost their originals but preserved in Tibetan and Chinese translations, and translations of texts on Chinese history and philosophy, all shedding illuminating light on different aspects of Buddhism. Professor Tucci's writings have added a new dimension to the study of Buddhism and has enriched the study of Indian logic in general but Buddhist logic in particular. His important work of Pre-Dignaga text on logic by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu from Chinese sources brought light in the field of logic. Tucci was the person, who put Dignaga as the father of mediaeval Indian Logic. Likewise his comparative study of the Chinese and Sanskrit versions of the first two chapters of the Laṅkāvatāra is a pioneering work of this type. His contributions on Nāgārjuna and Prajñāpāramitās have seen his deep knowledge of the two most important branches of Mahāyāna Buddhism. He emphasized the study of meditational Buddhism by a critical edition of the three Bhāvanākramas of Kamalaśīla. The Satastra of Aryadeva was translated by Tucci from Sanskrit and Chinese both sources with commentary. The Vādāvidhī and a Sketch of Indian Materialism are two works to understand the Indian school of materialism. He was not confined only in Logic, philosophy, history and religion. Moreover he had much interest in literary creation that is clear evident from his writing on Asvaghosh, Kalidāsa, Purāṇa-pañcalakṣana, Avadāna, Jātaka, literature of Tibet, translation of Karpuramañjarī, and so on. Even he had shown his awareness with Śrī Caitanya and Ramakrishna through the writings.

All the collections were originally part of his private library, but in the year 1959 he donated most of his texts to IsMEO. So it is clear that how Prof. Giuseppe Tucci contributed himself in this field, and how we are benefited by his works.

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⁸ Kamalaśīla, disciple of Sāntarākṣita, who has regarded great compassion as the fundamental virtue in this text.

⁹ Tohoku Catalogue, No. 4261.

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