

Giuseppe Tucci's Travel to Tibet from 1928 to 1948 C.E.

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Abstract: Prof. Giuseppe Tucci, an outstanding scholar of global reputation was born at Macerata in Central Italy on 5th June 1894. He is not only a scholar of extra ordinary versatility, proficient in the history of Tibet, India and China and Tibetan tantric literature and religious activities, and also proficient in Hindu and Buddhist Art.

Apart from his academic achievement he played a vital role in building a bridge of culture between the east and west (IsMEO). The contribution of Tucci to oriental studies, particularly to the history of Buddhism, Tibet and Nepal are enormous.

In my paper I am trying to focus on his expeditions to Tibet.

Keywords: Buddhism, IsMEO, Tibetan Studies, Tucci, Tibetan Tantric Literature,

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I. Introduction

Giuseppe Tucci one of the excellent exponents of the Tibetan religion and culture, he expressed his ideas on Tibetan Buddhism on the basis of his experience, exploration and other contemporary records. His writing on the history of Buddhism in Tibet is still considered as a classical one. Tucci, besides Rahul Sankritayana explored the land of snow and skillfully described the condition and position of this faith in the tiny surrounding of trans-Himalayan range. Most of his writings on Buddhism or its allied subjects are the presentation of the history and peculiarities of Tibetan Buddhism which reflects more or less the history and evolution of Mahayana Buddhism with little modifications for indigenous needs.

He was born at Macerata in central Italy on 5th June 1894. His father was Oscar and mother was Ermenegilda Firmain who had emigrated to Marches from Puglia. He learnt himself Hebrew, Chinese, Sanskrit, Bengali and Pali. His early studies were in Sanpolo dei cavalieri. At the age of 17, in 1911, he published his first article "A Collection of Latin epigraphs" in the prestigious review of the Germanic Archeological Institute. Already at that time he felt the attraction of oriental thought. He completed his studies at the University of Rome in 1919. At once Tucci showed himself to be quite at home in such widely different fields as Avestic, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan. His main interest subjects connected with philosophy and religion. Although later he developed a penchant for historical studies of Tibet.

He taught primarily at the University of Rome and was also a visiting scholar at different institutions through Europe and Asia. After graduating he travelled to India and settled down at Visva-Bharati where he studied Buddhism and Bengali, and also taught Italian, Chinese and Tibetan. He also studied and taught at Dhaka University, Banaras Hindu University (B.H.U.) and Calcutta University.

Then in 1931 he returned to Italy. After that in the year 1933 Tucci promoted the foundation named "The Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (IsMEO)"¹ based in Rome. IsMEO was established as a "Moral Body" directly depended on Mussolini until 1954. Its first president was Prof. Giovanni Gentile². With the strong support of Giovanni Gentile Tucci was appointed as the executive Vice-president of IsMEO. In 1947, under the chairmanship of Tucci the institute was finally able to mainly focus its interest on research activities. In 1950, the institute published monographic serial titled 'Series Orientale Rome' (Rome Oriental Series) and quarterly series 'East and West' which took a new shape from 1958 with publication exclusively in English. He retired from IsMEO in the year 1978 from the post of president.

Before the establishment of IsMEO, he started a number of long and repeated expeditions to India, Tibet, Nepal etc., which started in 1925.

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¹ It was founded for developing oriental studies and to collect various types of source materials.

² A famous Hegelian philosopher and was the minister of Culture in the fascist government.

From 1925 to 1930 were the memorable years in his life, because that time he arrived at Santiniketan together with Carlo Formichi³ by the invitation⁴ of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore to teach Italian, Chinese, and Tibetan in the University of Visva-bharati.⁵

In Visva-Bharati he was popularly known as 'Tucci Saheb'. Where he taught Chinese and studied religious texts. Not only that, he also mastered in Bengali language. At Santiniketan, Tucci with his life of scholarship, immensity of linguistic knowledge and of his comprehension impressed everybody and admiration brought him close to the poet. In February 1925, Gurudev was invited by the University of Dhaka to deliver lecture that. At time Gurudev also asked Formichi and Tucci to accompany him who also were agreed to go with him for delivering lectures. After that they came back to Calcutta, where Tucci delivered five lectures in the University of Calcutta.

Meanwhile a misunderstanding took place between Gurudev and Mussolini. Followed by it, the Italian Government gave order to Tucci to come back to Italy from Santiniketan. Accordingly Tucci left Santiniketan in December 1926 and moved to Dhaka. In the year 1928, he and his wife Giulia Nuvoloni organized a travel through Punjab and Kashmir to Ladakh. The reason to travel those areas was for searching monastic libraries and for collecting the primary sources on the history of Buddhism and also their Tibetan translations. In 1929, Tucci and his wife spent nearly four months in Kathmandu, Patna and Bhaktapur. Later in December 1929, they also visited Spiti, Gule etc.

After his expedition in India, his next expeditions to Tibet began in 1929 to 1948. During his stay in India he had already made two trips (1928 and 1930) to Ladakh, Rupshu and Lahul. The year 1931 was his third trip to Tibet. Likewise four missions to Tibet made by him for a regular biennial such as from 1933 and 1935 to western Tibet; and 1937 and 1939 to Central Tibet. In this way he came to be deeply interested in Tibetan Studies. Therefore, during his eight expeditions to the unexplored Central and Western regions he collected an enormous number of documentations and artistic materials.

The expedition of 1931 was important because after his re-entry in Italy he taught Chinese at the Oriental Institute in Naples. From that time, he resumed the idea to organize a large scale exploration of the Western Himalayas including Western Tibet. During that expedition Tucci realized the need of a photographer for travelling with him because he was not expert to work with the camera. Not only that, he also realized the fragile condition of the monuments and the cultural relics in the Indian Himalayan regions and Tibet.

On the other hand the expedition of 1933 and 1935 through Western Tibet served to complete the research program that Tucci had planned in 1929, but failed to carry out in 1931. Through these travels he collected text. The most important result of the exploration conducted in Western Tibet 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 reason⁶.

In the previous travel Tucci obtained a pass to travel to the trade mart of Gyantse (Wyl. rgyal rtse) from the Indian Government⁷. 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

³ Prof. Carlo Formichi, Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Rome.

⁴ Rabindranath Tagore realized the necessity of forming a brotherhood of Indologists of the oriental and western specialist specially when the concept of Visva-bharati loomed in his mind. Therefore, during his foreign tours he got opportunities of meeting them and invited them to accept visiting professor at his university. In 1920, Gurudev met Sylvian Levi at Paris and requested him to accept the first visiting professorship. After that in 1925, the Italian government sent two professors to Santiniketan with the gift of some books to teach Italian language, with the wish that this offering may always render more and more intense the culture relation between India and Italy.

⁵ Jash, Pranabananda (Ed.), *Indo-Tibetan Studies Series-II : Perspective of Buddhist Studies (Giuseppe Tucci Birth Centenary Volume)*, New Delhi: Kaveri Books, 2002, p. 11

⁶ 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.

⁷ At that time, the Gyantse district was occupied by the British Government.

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 companions⁸ 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 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 Norgay⁹ Tucci wished to continue eastward until the Chinese border, but he gave up because of the unstable political situation.

Tucci's interest was extended to Nepal. He led six expeditions to that country between 1950 to 1954. The knowledge gathered about Nepal helped him to throw new light on dark corner of Nepal's history.

In 1952, he made a journey to Goarkha, Pokhara, the valley of the Kali Gandaki up to Mustang and the Nepal-Tibet border. Then in 1954, he made another trip, this time his aim being to visit the valley near Jumla. His route this time was from Pokhara 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 upto Jumla is also relevant for the materials revealed for the study of Bon and Tibetan Buddhism.

His Contribution:

During his stay in India for about five years (1925-1930), Tucci got an impetus in Visva-Bharati in associating with Paṇḍit Vidhusekher Bhattacharya Shastri (Shastri mashaya) 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, and he also joined with them.

After getting generated with the team, Tucci edited *Madhyānta-Vibhaṅga-Sūtra* and *Madhyānta-Vibhaṅga-Sūtra-Bhāṣya-Ṭīkā* in collaboration with Paṇḍit Vidhusekher.

Then he started to visit Tibet in 1931 and accumulated plenty of research materials which came out in his monumental publication in seven volume of Indo-Tibetica from 1933 to 1941.

On the other side, Tucci also bend in the field of the Buddhist Logic. His writings have added a new dimension to the study of Buddhism and have enriched the study of Indian Logic in general and Buddhist Logic in particular. Because he brought to light a important article named "*Pre-Diñnāga Buddhist Texts on Logic*" through translating into English from Chinese sources. *The Nyāya-Mukha by Diñnāga* also has been edited by Tucci in 1930 under the title *The Nyāya Mukha of Diñnāga* being the oldest Buddhist text on Logic, after Chinese and Tibetan materials.

Another work on the logic was about the text "*Hetutattvopadeśa*"¹⁰ was published by Tucci in 1958, after finding its original manuscripts during his expedition to Tibet in the year 1948.

Tucci's idea about philosophy was expressed in various writings like the *Mahāyānavimsika* of Ācārya Nāgārjuna is a fundamental work on the Madhyamika Philosophy. This was also edited by him in 1956.

⁸ 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.

⁹ The first mountaineer who was reached the summit of the Mount Everest with Edmund Hillary on 29 May, 1953

¹⁰ The text *Hetutattvopadeśa* ascribed to Jetari which was reconstructed by Durga Charan Chattopadhyaya and published by Calcutta University in 1938.

Apart from the literary works in Tibetan the artistic contributions of the inhabitants of Tibet and those of the Buddhist Himalayas, he played a vital role which focus through his work "*Tibetan Painted Scrolls*", which was published in 1949. It is a real summa of the art, literature, religious and history of Tibet and also was a landmark in Tibetological studies.

Not only that, he also reached for the ethnic distinction and collected Tibetan folk songs from the district Gyantse and those appeared as the supplementary volume (Vol. VII) of *Artibus Asia* in 1949. In the Serie Orientale Rome, his work entitled "The Tombs of Tibetan Kings" was published with an appendix containing inscription edicts in Tibetan, and opened a new field of Tibetan studies in 1950.

He also brought to light several important chronicles through some literary works and texts on monastic history which is "The Ancient Civilization of Trans-Himalaya" published in 1973 is a mine of information on the culture and civilization of the area based on archeological findings.

His "Tibetan History of Buddhism in China" and "Discovery of the Mallas" are the informative treatments on China and Nepal. Another book "Religions of Tibet" published in 1970 in German, Italian, French and English. The book "Theory and Practice of the Maṇḍala" published in Italian, English and French in 1949.

Tucci's outstanding contribution in Tibetan studies was "The New Red Annal (Wyl. deb ther dmar po sar ma)", by Panchen Sonam Dragpa (Wyl. Pan chen bsod nams grags pa) published in 1971 with the original Tibetan text. In 1946, he published a popular work "To Lhasa and Beyond".

The contributions of Tucci to Oriental Studies, particularly to the history of Buddhism in Tibet and Nepal are enormous. With the hundreds of significant academic contributions that have appeared in various editions, and often different languages of diverse themes and subjects ranging from Sanskrit literature to Tibetan history, from Indian logic to Chinese philosophy, from Buddhism to Islamic culture and art history, from Brahmanic religion to the religion of Tibet and Buddhist mysticism, Giuseppe Tucci undoubtedly emerges as the greatest Oriental Scholar in 19th century. A peep into the bibliography of his writings numbering about 360¹¹, besides so many small reviews speeches and miscellaneous writings, covering a period of 73 years, from 1911 to 1983, will give us an idea about the vast range of his interest and field of activity. His academic pursuits always aimed at reaching higher goals either through the study and publication of original un-edited texts or through exploration of places unknown before. He always took pride in his nomadic life as a traveller and explorer.

In 1978, he realized advancing of old age; he retired from active work, relinquishing the presidency of the IsMEO. He died on the 5th April, 1984 at San Polo dei Cavalieri, in the hills north of Rome.

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¹¹ Jash, Pranabananda (Ed.), *Indo-Tibetan Studies Series-II : Perspective of Buddhist Studies (Giuseppe Tucci Birth Centenary Volume)*, New Delhi: Kaveri Books, 2002, p. 47