

## **Lhasa preserves tales of two 20th century scholars - Indian and Tibetan**

09/07/2015 17:01 by admin

**Lhasa:** Even eight decades later, one of the most widely-travelled Indian writers, Rahul Sankrityayan, is close to the heart of the Chinese people.

His memory is preserved in a memorial to renowned Tibetan scholar, poet and thinker Gedun Chopel, who was his fellow traveller, in this capital town, known for the famed Potala Palace, the seat of the Dalai Lama.

Located on the popular Barkhor Street in the vicinity of the Jokhang Temple, the important cultural relics in the heart of old Lhasa, the Gedun Chopel Memorial was opened in his last residence to the public after renovation on November 11, 2013.

The exhibits throw light on Chopel's 24 years of stay in Amdo, seven years in Lhasa, 12 years in South Asia and the last few years of his life again in Lhasa.

Also preserved is the friendship of the two scholars and travel writers who came together for several years.

Rahul Sankrityayan(or Rahula as mentioned in memorial archives) came to Tibet in 1934 to trace the lost Sanskrit texts, says the memorial.

And Geshe Sherab Gyatso introduced Sankrityayan to his student Chopel, who was studying in Drepung Monastery in Lhasa.

The memorial depicts the bust of Chopel at the entrance. Chopel was born on April 20, 1903, and died at the age of 49 in 1951.

It also showcases a black-and-white portrait of Sankrityayan, who was dubbed as 'mahapandit' in India, and a Tibetan personal letter written by Chopel in 1934 to him in which he expressed his desire to learn about western ideas from him.

Chopel's letter to Sankrityayan reads: "I came to know that you visited Japan and Russia. I wanted to learn some western ideas from you."

The memorial says in 1934 Chopel went to India with Sankrityayan and started his 12-year study.

Sankrityayan was called father of Hindi travel literature who spent 45 years of his life on travels away from his home. He became a Buddhist monk and eventually took up Marxist Socialism. He entered Tibet as a monk.

He was also an Indian nationalist, having been arrested and jailed for three years for his anti-British writings and speeches. Among the many languages he mastered was the Tibetan language. He wrote several books in five languages. He died in 1963 at the age of 70 in Darjeeling.

"Chopel spent most of his time studying Sanskrit and English and translating in Kalimpong and in Darjeeling. He lived poor during his 12 years in south India," says an inscription.

"At last, Chopel became a cultural envoy between India and Tibet. "

Most of Chophel's writings were published in 'Maha Bodhi', an English journal of the Maha Bodhi Society, an international Buddhist missionary organisation in India.

He also wrote in 'The Tibet Mirror', the only newspaper for Tibetan-speaking produced from Kalimpong.

In 1938, Chophel went to Tibet for an expedition from India with Sankrityayan's group.

Notably, Chophel also came in contact with Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

"Rabindranath Tagore asked Chophel to be a Tibetan language teacher at his international university on favorable conditions but Chophel later politely refused," says another inscription in the memorial.

- IANS