

NOTES & TOPICS

RELICS OF ASOKAN MONKS

In 1860-70 Alexander Cunningham and a team of British engineers found the relics of ten Arhats in four steatite caskets within a big casket of white sandstone beneath a Stupa in which the relics of Sariputra and Maudgalyayana were found. The names of the ten Arhats inscribed on the caskets included those of Madhyama and Kasyapagotra, while the *Memoirs and Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India* preserve the details of the discovery and identification of the relics the general reader will find a good account in Valisinha: *Buddhist Shrines in India* (Calcutta 1948-).

These relics were later taken to London and kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The relics of Sariputra and Maudgalyayana were returned to India a few years after India became independent and are now enshrined in Sanchi. The relics of Madhyama and Kasyapagotra were returned in 1958. There were many applicants for custody of the relics. *Pandit* Jawaharlal Nehru accepted our argument that since the two Asokan missionaries had preached the Dharma in the Himalayas their relics should be entrusted to the custody of a Himalayan institution devoted to preservation

of literary texts and other records of the Dharma. (The presentation of these relics is referred to in the article TEN PRICELESS IMAGES in this issue of the Bulletin.)

NATIVITY OF MANUSHI BUDDHA

While believers and admirers of the Buddhas in human form consider the saints as belonging to all mankind antiquarians and historians do often find investigation about the race or language of a Manushi Buddha an important issue.

In the previous issue (1984 : 2) of this Bulletin a writer contended that whether Dipankara Atisa (c. 982-1054) was a Bengali or not was of little importance in the story of Dharma in the Trans-Himalayas. This has not pleased many readers from eastern India. The writer does not find any reason to reconsider his contention.

Nagarjuna's greatness has nothing to do with the place he was born or with the language he spoke. Nagarjuna was known to be a Vidarbha Brahmin who built his famous seat of learning in what is today Guntur Distt, Andhra Pradesh. It would be wild and useless speculation to discuss whether a saint scholar flourishing in first century Deccan was a Maratha or a Telugu scholar. What is important about Nagarjuna is that nearly two thousand years before Hegel, Kant or Bradley a Brahmin of South India spoke with a fearless

logic which Hegel, Kant or Bradley have not excelled.

Speculations about nativity of a saint may sometimes raise unnecessary controversies. Buddha Sakyamuni, the greatest of Manushi Buddhas, was from Jambudvipa. Quite harmful polemics are now set to prove or disprove whether Buddha was from Nepal or India!

Tibetan legends and literary texts follow the nomenclature Phagyul, that is, Aryabhumi, for the entire Indic sub-continent : from the Karakorum in the north to the Kanya Kumari in the south ; from the Indus in the west to the Brahmaputra in the east. The Tibetan tradition holds Buddha as Arya par excellence and would refuse to indulge in any research on ethno-linguistic affiliations of any Manushi Buddha.

JKR : NCS