NOTES & TOPICS

DHARAMRAJA AŚOKA

- Nirmal C. Sinha

A propos my article "Making of Dharmaja" in Bulletin of Tibetology 1992, No. 1, a question is raised whether Aśoka deviated from Buddha's ideal of Great Elect (Maha Sammata) when the former asserted thus: "All men are my children". Reference is made to some scholars who consider Aśoka's assertion as an assertion of paternal despotism. I am aware of such a finding about Aśoka but do not accept the same. I make my submission below.

"All men are my children" is an expression special to Kalinga Edicts (Dhulii Separate Edicts 1 & 2 and Jassada Separate Edicts 1 & 2). As is well known Aśoka had inscribed these Separate Edicts for Kalinga to soothe the wounds of war and conquest in the minds of Kalinga people. Aśoka expressed his kinship with people of all regions and all religions in the Fourteen Rock Edicts all over. Aśoka chose the ancient and traditionally current idiom of filial affection for the Kalinga people suffering from the wounds of war and conquest.

Aśoka in Kalirga Edicts spoke thus: "All men are my children. As on behalf of my own children I desire that they may be provided by me with complete welfare and happiness in this world and the other world, even so is my desire on behalf of all men" (Eng. Trans. Hultsch). In Kalinga Edicts, as in Rock Edicts, Aśoka made clear that in all his services for material and moral well-being of his people he was discharging the debt he owed to the people. That was indeed the king's duty in return for the tax received from the people. The Aganna Suttanta prescribed for the king the duty of protection and security for the community. Aśoka added the provision of material and moral well-being and called this a filial duty as in Kalinga Edicts. I do not read any paternal despotism in any Aśoka inscription.