

JO ATISA IN SERLING AND THOLING

—B. R. CHATTERJI

In the latest edition (1964) of his *Histoire Ancienne d'Etats Hindouises d'Extreme Orient* Professor G. Coedes writes that King Chudamanivarmadeva was reigning in Srivijaya early in the 11th century A. D. It was in his reign that the Acharya Dharmakirti composed a commentary on the text *Abhisamayalankara*. In the sub-title of the Tibetan translation of this work, entitled *Durbodhaloka* which is attributed to Atisa, it is stated that it was composed in the reign of Chudamanivarmadeva of Srivijayapura at Malayagiri (Malaya? —now known as Jambi north of Palembang, the former capital Srivijaya) in Suvarnavipa (Sumatra). Professor Coedes quotes M. J. Nandou on this point.

Dharmakirti continued to reside in Suvarnavipa in the reign of the succeeding monarch Maravijayatungavarmadeva, for, according to the Tibetan Bu-ston, it was in the period 1011-1023 A. D. that Atisa was studying under Dharmakirti, the head of the Buddhist congregation in the isle of Suvarnavipa in the reign of King Dharmapala. This name Dharmapala does not appear among the royal names in Srivijaya annals. Probably it was the title 'Protector of the Law' of Maravijaya. This Dharmapala, King of Suvarnavipa, was also (according to M. J. Nandou quoted by Coedes) a teacher of Atisa and of Kamalaraksita and was the author of several works relating to Bodhicharyavatara. As further evidence of Atisa's stay in Suvarnavipa we find an early 11th century manuscript with miniatures in which the first miniature has the explanatory note—Dipankara (Atisa) in Yavadvipa, Yavadvipa often meant Sumatra as well as Java.

The text of the Tibetan Bu-ston, translated by Sarat Chandra Das, gives in greater detail the career of Atisa (Dipankara Srijnana). Dipankara (the future Atisa), born in the royal family of Gauda, was ordained in the highest order of Bhiksu at the age of 31. At last he resolved to go to Acharya Dharmakirti, the High Priest of Suvarnavipa. There is a country filled with precious minerals called Suvarnavipa (Sumatra). Though Acharya Dharmakirti (who belonged to the royal family of that country and had been instructed in the Dharma at Vajrasana—i. e. Buddhagaya) resided in Suvarnavipa, his name became known everywhere abroad. In the company of some merchants Dipankara embarked for Suvarnavipa. The voyage was long extending over several months. At this time Suvarnavipa was the head-quarters of Buddhism in the

East and its High Priest was considered to be the greatest scholar of his age. Dipankara resided in Suvarnadvipa for 12 years in order to master the pure teachings of the Buddha of which the key was possessed by Dharmakirti alone. He returned to India accompanied by some merchants in a vessel visiting Tamradvipa (Ceylon) on the way. After his return from Suvarnadvipa he resided at Vajrasana (Buddhagaya) and acquired the fame of being the foremost Buddhist scholar of India. Hearing of this fame King Mahipala invited him to Vikramasila. During his stay here Atisa (Dipankara was now known by this name) received three earnest invitations from King Ye-ses-od of Gu-ge (in W. Tibet). At the third appeal, Atisa left Vikramasila, in spite of the protests of the Pala King, in the company of the Tibetan monk Nag-tsho. It is the account given by this monk which is the primary source of information about Atisa's visit to Tibet.

Atisa passed through Nepal and reached the shore of Manasa Sarovara where he performed 'tarpana'. Then he was escorted by Tibetan generals to Tholing, the monastery of the king of Western Tibet, where his majesty King Ye-ses-od was waiting for him. At Tholing (the Totling of Sven Hedin) Atisa preached the Mahayana doctrine to the people of Nah-ri (W. Tibet). "In short he revived the practice of the pure Mahayana doctrine by showing the right way to the Lamas of Tibet who had become Tantrik". After a residence of 13 years in different parts of Tibet, Atisa died near Lhasa in 1053 A. D. He was the guru of Bromton, the founder of the first grand hierarchy of Tibet.

It may not be inappropriate in this context to relate how we found ourselves before the gates of the Tholing shrine on the evening of 14 August 1922. The intrepid mountaineer Professor Shiv Ram Kashyap of the Indian Educational Service had led a party of four lecturers (including myself) of the Khalsa College, Amritsar, across the Lipu Lekh pass to Manas Sarovara and Kailasa. After finishing our circumambulation of Kailasa, in stead of going back the way we came, we travelled in a westerly direction starting from the source of the Sutlej near Rakshas Tal (the sister lake of Manas Sarovara.) Passing through Gyanima, a well known mart of W. Tibet, Daba, and Mangnang with its artistic wall paintings, we reached Tholing after a fortnight's journey from the foot of Kailasa. The approach to this great monastery, situated in the deep gorge of the Sutlej, was through an intricate labyrinth of deep canyons. Both Sven Hedin and Tucci have described it as a night-mare landscape.

On 15 August (1922) we obtained permission to enter what Tucci

(the Italian Tibetologist) calls the White Temple at Tholing. Here is the entry in our diary (mine and my colleague S. Kashmira Singh's) on that date: "In the porch there were four huge figures—two on each side. Our companion, a Naga sanyasi, called them the four 'Yugas' (Satya, Treta, Dvapara and Kali). Inside the room there were two gigantic dvarapalas or doorkeepers. In the centre was something like an altar partitioned from the main room which contains a colossal image of the Buddha seated on a great lotus. The face had the sweet calm and repose of divine wisdom and the eyes seemed to be smiling with love. It certainly was the work of a great artist. On both sides of the Buddha were rows of life-size standing figures representing worshippers paying homage to the Lord Buddha. The lofty roof was supported by tall pillars of deodar trunks which must have been brought from a great distance as no large tree can grow in the cold desert of West Tibet. We then entered another room which had a 'murti' of a four-headed deity (Brahma? as our Naga sanyasi said) surrounded by figures of other gods. They were of clay but they showed artistic finish. This room had four other rooms on its four sides full of images. There was one perhaps of Sarasvati with a vina in her hands. On the walls were paintings which reminded us of the Ajanta murals. Outside the main building there was a 'parikrama' (for going round the shrine) on the other side of which there were cells full of brass and clay images. In some cells we found old manuscripts scattered about carelessly. In one cell we saw a great standing figure with a sun-flower in his hand (Surya ?)"

The final comment in this entry is: "Really the main temple of Tholing would well repay the careful study of a learned Orientalist". This wish of ours has been fulfilled for the great Italian savant Tucci has visited this shrine since then and has written a valuable book on Tholing.

At that time (1922) we had no idea of the great importance of Tholing in Tibetan history. We heard at that time only the tradition among Hindu sanyasis that this main temple of Tholing was the Adi Badrinath; when Sankaracharya visited this shrine he thought that it was too difficult for Indian pilgrims to reach this place across the Himalayas; so he established the present temple of Badrinath on the Indian side of the Himalayas.

(After a stay of five days there we left Tholing on 20th August. On 23rd August we reached the Mana Pass and after passing through

Himalayan scenery in its sublimest aspect we returned to India (north of Badrinath) on the same evening).

I shall just add that it was in 1925, while working on the early history of Southeast Asia and the spiritual conquests of Buddhist and Brahman sages that I found in *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow* by Sarat Chandra Das the true significance of Tholing.