

**SIR TASHI NAMGYAL
MEMORIAL LECTURES**

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BUDDHA AS A MAHAPURUSHA

By

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PREFACE

This booklet is composed of the three Sir Tashi Namgyal Memorial Lectures delivered under the auspices of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok on the 26th, 27th and 28th October 1972. It was most gracious of the Chogyal and Gyalmo to have been present on the occasion. It was equally kind of the Political Officer, Sri K. S. Bajpai and Mrs Bajpai to have come to listen. I cannot adequately express my gratefulness to Dr. A. M. D' Rozario, not only for having invited me to deliver these lectures on behalf of the Namgyal Institute, but also for all the kindness that he showered on me during my stay at Gangtok. To him and Mrs Rozario I convey my grateful thanks. As desired by Dr. D' Rozario the lectures have been got ready with proper textual documentation and suitable illustrations to be released as a book issued by the Institute.

Buddha who was a world personality had outstanding qualities that made him the most distinguished among the great Masters of thought in Ancient India. His teachings have offered solace to innumerable nations in the world. The followers of Buddhism comprise a great chunk of the world population. This in itself is an indication of the extraordinary arresting power of Buddha's great qualities that have made him a great Mahapurusha. The subject of this book is a recounting of these qualities, pointedly drawing attention to them, with suitable illustrations. I am grateful to the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology for bringing out a handsome book like this.

C. Sivaramamurti

Salutation to the Chogyal and Gyalmo of Sikkim, the Political Officer and Mrs. Bajpai and distinguished friends :

It is my first and pleasant duty to thank the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and to you, Sir, for providing me this opportunity to deliver The Sir Tashi Namgyal Memorial Lectures. The late Denjong Chogyal Chempo Tashi Namgyal was a great personality with a rare insight, catholicity, nobility of spirit and aesthetic vision. It was one of the great rare qualities in ancient rulers that they excelled in their knowledge of literature and art, not to parade their prodigious learning but to appreciate and reward poets and painters : *Vidushām satkṛitaye bahuśrutam*. If the late Chogyal Tashi Namgyal could be a distinguished painter, a patron of learning and an able ruler, he has only followed a great tradition of rulers as painters and poets, as patrons of learning and faith, as votaries at the altar of knowledge, and as administrators. I, therefore, personally feel it is a great good fortune that these lectures are associated with his memory that is perpetuated in this Institute that fosters Buddhist learning and Art.

Philosophic speculations had so sharpened the intellect of the seers in ancient India that the *darśanas* were evolved and developed. These systems of philosophy constitute a treasure-house of thought. The *Upanishads* contain valuable germs of speculative thought which were variously interpreted by successive philosophers in the land. When Ajātaśatru, on a moonlit night, evinced a desire to meet the greatest men of thought and intellectual speculation, called his council of ministers and wise men to consult who was the greatest master he could visit that very night, he was told of a number of saintly persons of great intellectual calibre, but of them all, he chose the Gautama Buddha, whom his half brother Jivaka suggested as worthy of visit in his Mango grove where he was staying at the moment. Disciples like Jivaka, Amrapālī and Anāthapiṇḍaka vied one with the other, in presenting Buddha and his order with groves provided with monasteries. Jetavana was the greatest pleausance of them all, purchased at an enormous cost by the richest merchant in the land from prince Jeta, by spreading gold coins on the entire surface, in which a large monastery for monks, with the *gandhakūṭī* for Buddha, was erected to make it a penance grove. Ajātaśatru, a parricide, deeply repented his grievous crime and desired to expiate his wicked act. He had asked how he could free himself from such heinous sin. But none could absolve him of it. When he approached Buddha, the stillness in the grove, where a large congregation was listening to the Master in pindrop silence, impressed him very much, nay even frightened him. With reverence he approached the Master and laid his problem before him. Buddha asked him whether he truly repented

for his unfilial action. "Aye" he said. Instantly came forth the answer from the Master, "If you truly repent you are absolved of the sin." It is well known that sin is *prāyaḥ* and its extermination *chitta*, extermination of sin is *prāyśchitta*, but it had never occurred to all the other wise men whom Ajātaśatru had met that sincere repentance rid one of a sin, however heinous it may be. It was left to Buddha to demonstrate it.

Ajātaśatru became such a great devotee of Buddha thereafter that when the Master passed away, and the news was to be conveyed to him, it was done very gently, so that he could not lose his composure and faint away or probably even die of a shock. These two incidents were considered so important that representations of these episodes in art have immortalised them. The visit of Ajātaśatru both at Bhārhut and at Amarāvati illustrates how he approached the Master with a large retinue, including his harem, all on elephants, stopped at the entrance of the grove, so that the Master was approached on foot reverentially. Jīvaka's suggestion to Ajātaśatru that he should meet the Master on that beautiful moonlit night is an additional theme in this context chosen to be illustrated at Amarāvati. The label at Bhārhut makes it very clear that it is Ajātaśatru's visit that is portrayed here. The episode of unfolding the news of Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* at Kuśinagara in the region of the Mallas is seen in one of the most interesting paintings from Kizil in Central Asia. Here is depicted a large painted scroll unrolled for Ajātaśatru to see the principal events in Buddha's life, his birth, his enlightenment, his turning the wheel of the law and his death, *parinirvāṇa*. It was slowly in this context of one scene following the other that the last revealed to the king that the Master was no more, and, to an extent, minimised the shock that he could no more see the physical form of his beloved Master any more.

Buddha taught the eightfold path of a righteous code of conduct ; and made it clear that it is escape from the three fold miseries in this world, as the Sāṅkhya system always put it, that would lead on to *parinirvāṇa*. His famous couplet, very often inscribed on Buddhist sculptures, and usually styled the Buddhist formula, explains in a nutshell the great teachings of Buddha : *ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetum teshām tathāgato hyavabat/teshām cha yo nirodhaḥ evam vādī mahāśramaṇaḥ* : 'The causes of the *dharmas* arising as consequences of their causes were narrated by Tathāgata, as also the means to overcome them. Thus elucidated the great monk Buddha.' The Sāṅkhya philosophy in its very first *kārikā* gives exactly the same : *dukkhatrayābhighātāt jijñāsā tadapaghātake hetau* : 'as the whole world is overwhelmed by the threefold miseries, there is consequently the desire to know the means to overcome them.'

According to the *Lalitavistara*, it is known that prince Siddhartha was educated with the greatest care by his father. Both in intellectual

and physical prowess the prince proved himself the best. He learnt as many as sixtyfour scripts, a large variety indeed. It is this great intellectual superiority that gave him an objective view of life, and made him try the various experiences towards the goal of supreme knowledge. In physical prowess, he was not any the less behind the rest of the youth of his day. In fact, it was only he who could, like Rama, by a single arrow strike seven Sāla trees. He was the greatest bow-man of his day. The care that Śuddhodhana took for schooling Siddhārtha is often chosen as a theme for depiction in sculpture. The child was sent in a small cart drawn by four rams, a quaint one, that could amuse the child as was the wont in those days. He carried the board on which the alphabets could be drawn, a board that has survived till today in the Punjab. And this is a sculpture from the Gandhara region beyond the frontiers of the Punjab. From Srughna, not far from Chaṇḍīgrah in the Punjab, has been recovered a very important terracotta plaque to illustrate a child learning the alphabet, how the letters first written by the teacher, were repeated by the child in the same manner, so that there was a fine settled hand. Calligraphy was greatly valued, and the princes that could write, read and speak so well were also good calligraphers. In fact the learned man was called *kṛitākshara*, one who had practised letters. It is through the letters that the ocean of literature was covered. As Kālidāsa would have it : *liper yathāvad grahaṇena/vāṇmayam nadīmukheneva samudram āviśat* : 'The prince entered the ocean of literature, as through a river, by proper comprehension of letters'. In Indonesia, the stress on the physical prowess of Sidhārtha has been laid in splendid panels showing him as a bow-man.

At Amarāvati, the way Śuddhodana acted, being very much concerned about his son Siddhārtha, of whom the sooth-sayers had predicted a dual possibility, that he would either be a universal monarch or the supremely enlightened one, is graphically portrayed in a very suggestive manner. He was almost imprisoned in the interior apartments of the palace, in the company of moon-faced damsels, without ever an idea of the several miseries that existed in the world around, so that the thought of renunciation could never arise. The prince is seated in the harem holding three cords in his hand, the cords that bound him down to a life of pleasure from which there was no escape. There were palaces constructed according to the text of Buddha's Life for him to enjoy every season to its utmost so that never could he know the ills of life.

At Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, the sculptor has gone a step further. He has shown him not only in the harem amidst pleasures, but by an ingenuous device a stream is shown in the foreground, in which an extremely charming damsel swims along, holding a swan, suggesting her gait as that of a swan,

as she glides even while swimming, with the grace of a Swan on the surface of water ; and according to the line of the *Mṛichchhakatika* the beautiful damsels are pleasure-boats on the placid surface of the stream of love, which the sculptor has specially kept in mind, as also the decoration of the prow of the boat, with the motif of the swan, the most graceful of aquatic birds.

In Fundukistan, early terracotta figurines sometimes representing the Buddha, are bejewelled. In Pāla art, which follows this tradition, the bejewelled Buddha is shown crowned. He is in all attitudes of the Buddha, in *dhyāna*, in *bhūnisparśa*, in *dharmachakravartana* and so forth, but always wearing a crown, earrings, necklace, armlets, bracelets and other jewellery. This is as much as to express the prediction of the sooth-sayers to Śuddhodhana that the prince would be a universal monarch or a monk. It is therefore a combination of both these possibilities in the same sculpture. As the inspiration for the sculptures of Nepal was mainly from Pāla, this peculiar mode of representing Buddha bejewelled is found here also.

Though according to the story of the life of Buddha, Ajātaśatru got the exact likeness of the Master created for him in *gośirsha* wood, there is not a single representation in human form of the Buddha till the first century A. D. All the early representations of the Master illustrating various incidents from his life have been symbolic, and the way the symbols have been manipulated to emphasise the grandeur of the Buddha, and the importance of each individual incident, is indeed very interesting. The main symbols of the major incidents in Buddha's life are very simple and are of frequent occurrence. These are the *pūrṇaghata* to suggest his birth, the Bodhi tree for his enlightenment, the wheel flanked by deer for his *dharmachakrapravartana*, his turning the wheel of law at Sārnāth (Mṛgadāvā), and the *stūpa* for his *parinirvāṇa* or passing away. These are the four principal ones. The other symbols associated with Buddha, but not representing Buddha himself, are the lion, proclaiming him the lion among the Śākyas, the lion here meaning the foremost, the elephant suggesting not only the dream of Māyā but also glorifying him as the foremost of the Śākyas, as the term *kuñjara* also meant the most precious, and he was the most precious of the Śākya line. It was as the white elephant that Bodhisattva entered the womb of Māyā. This is also thereby suggested. The bull is a symbol of not only the best and the most precious of the kind, as Buddha obviously was among the Śākyas, but also the taurine zodiacal sign in which he was born. Buddha was born in *vṛishabha lagna*. The horse is a symbol of the great renunciation, the prince that could give up an empire to seek supreme knowledge, the enlightenment, which he had during his several previous births aspired to

attain, and had consequently qualified himself by his great qualities of self-control and sacrifice, and so richly deserved.

The symbolic form of Buddha particularly at Amarāvati, Nāgārjuna-koṇḍa, and in the Kṛishṇā valley in general, took a special shape as a flaming pillar, topped by a wheel with a *triratna*, the three-pronged symbol for it, with the foot on lotus at its base. This shows that even in the concept of the symbol of Buddha, the followers that had reached the stage of Mahāyāna in the first century A.D. had come to realise a greater glory in Buddha than the former Sthaviras or the Theravādins, who would necessarily place *dharma* above Buddha and *saṅgha*. Here was Buddha represented in the three-pronged symbol as the central one of *triratna* flanked by *dharma* and *saṅgha* on top of the rest of the symbols, which represented from bottom to top all the principal deities of the Brahmanical pantheon, which with the zeal of a new and fast-growing creed, they glorified beyond the most venerated deities of glory. Thus, the *triratna* was far beyond the lotus symbolising Brahmā, the lotus-born, the feet suggesting Trivikrama Viṣṇu, whose three foot paces measured the universe, beyond Sthāṇu-Rudra and Agni, the post symbolising Śiva and the flames Rudra, combining attributes of Saspiñjara, Tvishīmat, Babhrūṣa, Kapardī of tawny locks, etc. of Rudra with Agni, and the coming together of both in the birth of the most effulgent celestials, Skanda, who is also Agnibhū, beyond the wheel representing the solar disc, Sūrya himself, who according to tradition is the embodiment of the trinity, *virīchinārāyaṇaśankarātmane* and the three *Vedas* blazing forth in that form, *trayyeva vidyā tapati ya esho' ntarādītye hiraṇmayah puru-shah*.

This symbol is prominently shown in many episodes, usually where it is the standing Buddha, and where his great glory is to be specially stressed. It is interesting that this symbol which exclusively occurs only in the Kṛishṇā valley has travelled as far away as to reach even Central Asia. In one of the murals from Balawaste in Central Asia this occurs with several other symbols on the bare body of Buddha. Incidentally this is the only example of a representation of Buddha where the torso appears without a monk's cloak covering it. It is generally believed that only the Jaina Tirthankaras have the *śrīvatsa* mark on the chest, but as it is only a *mahāpurusha lakshana* it should also occur in the case of Buddha. *Śrīvatsa*, as is well known, is a special mark of Viṣṇu who is *purushottama* or the exalted among *purushas*. All *mahāpurushas* have this *lakshana* or symbol. Since the Tirthankaras or Jinas are always nude and bare bodied, the symbol is clearly seen on their chest, but there rarely occurs a scene from Buddha's life where he is without the *sanghāṭī* on his body. In this particular picture, the interesting feature is that a

number of symbols are brought together to emphasise his greatness. On the arms, this *Sthānurudra* symbol is repeated to suggest his exaltation. The thunderbolt is to suggest that he could have been the supreme emperor like Māndhātā, that he once was as a Bodhisattva, for all his great merits in his previous birth, entitled even to one half of the throne of Indra himself. The idea of the ideal king or an emperor on earth as an equal of Indra is so ubiquitous in literature that Nahapana, the great king of the Kshatrapa dynasty, imprinted the thunderbolt and the arrow on his coin to show that the bow-man he was on earth, was equal to the thunderbolt wielder Indra in heaven.

The galloping celestial horse Uchchaisaravas, Chintāmaṇi and other symbols are to suggest the super-celestial nature of Buddha. The *amṛitakalasa*, with the snake entwined around its neck, is to suggest the churning of the ocean for ambrosia (*amṛita*) with Vāsuki as the churning stick for the mount Meru, and the crescent moon above it is also an indication of the ambrosial nature of Buddha's mind and its celestial qualities. In fact, Buddha's teaching was to go into an eternal state in *parinirvāṇa* and escape the miseries of life. True knowledge was the ambrosia that was the remedy for the three fold pain on earth.

The importance of this *jvālāstambha* as symbol of Buddha is seen in the fact that this is used by the Amarāvati sculptor most effectively, where some of his greatest achievements are involved, not otherwise. We can take instances.

Buddha's subjugation of Nalagiri is counted among the eight great incidents in his life and so represented in medieval panels in miniatures, that encircle the main figure of Buddha either in *bhūmiśparśa* or the *dharmaśakrapravartana* attitude, both from Sārnāth and from Nālandā. The medallion from Amarāvati, to be counted among very best aesthetic creations of the Sātavāhana sculptor, adopts a synoptic method of representation of successive moments of action, a device that is continued both in Ikshvaku sculpture from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and in Vākāṭaka painting from Ajantā. Both at Amarāvati and at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa it is the flaming pillar that represents Buddha. The fury of the stately elephant, rushing along in the streets of Rājagṛiha, creating panic everywhere among the people running helter skelter for dear life, with people less agitated but more with a tender feeling for the monk they loved and revered in the balcony above, is a contrast to the repeated moment of the elephant's docile demeanour, kneeling at the feet of the Master, whom, even as an animal, he could discern as superhuman, with a calm and composed troop of monks behind him, the spectators from the balcony this time suffused with an overwhelming reverential attitude for the Master who could subdue even the fiercest brute.

Another incident is that of Aṅgulimāla, who was a terror to one and all. He was so feared and dreaded by even the king's guards, that none dared approach him, and he was free to collect, by his unassailed cruelty, a garland of human fingers to be brought as a fee to his teacher, who hoped to get rid of him by putting him on a task, that meant sure capital punishment for him at the hands of the king. But none could oppose him or fight him face to face. Aṅgulimāla was the terror of the land. The culminating point of this fiendishness was his lack of feeling even for his mother, who, as she approached to stop him from such untold cruelty, was about to be killed by her own son just for her finger, a son for whom the mother's heart overflowed with affection. The merciful Buddha in his *prañidhāna* or mental eye saw what was happening and was there miraculously the next moment. The sight of the Master overpowered all action even in the human monster, completely changed his mind, made him realise the presence of a superhuman seer. He fell at his feet and was converted by the Master who suffused him with love. Here in this episode the Master is represented at Amarāvātī by the flaming pillar. The mother is still there as Aṅgulimāla approaches with a sword ; and in the presence of standing Buddha represented by the flaming pillar symbol, this strange aberration of the human species kneels in all humility. It is again a synoptic representation of two scenes in panel—one closely following the other.

A third incident in Buddha's conversion of Yaśa and his friends. Some fashionable young men of Vaiśālī chose to amuse themselves by enjoying a holiday, and each one, accompanied by a young damsel, regaled himself. There was a beautiful courtesan whom Yaśa had brought along but she escaped from his company and disappeared. In search of her, he ran along and, instead of her, found the great Master, who counselled him not to run after an ephemeral thing, but to think of a nobler goal in life. Thus he was immediately converted and his companions who came along were also similarly initiated. It is this that is represented in a sculpture on one of the uprights of the rail around the *stūpa* at Amarāvātī. Buddha here is again depicted as a flaming pillar.

Even while seated, Buddha is occasionally shown shooting up behind the framework of the back of his throne as the flaming pillar, the feet alone being separated for depiction on the footstool at the foot of the throne. This is also on certain chosen special occasions. An instance is the salutation of the Śākya on the Master's arrival in Kapilavastu. A beautiful medallion, now in the Museum at Amarāvātī, shows the Master enthroned. The physical form of Buddha is absent, the flaming pillar shoots up behind the empty throne, the foot occurring on the footstool. All the Śākya, young and old, men and women, princes and princesses, are in the act of

adoration. This is one of the great incidents, and naturally this device is again resorted to.

But when, as prince Siddhārtha, he performed the greatest act in his life, the great renunciation, threw away his royal turban and disengaged all his jewels from his body, it is a pair of Devas fluttering above his head holding a crown, as in the sculpture from Amarāvātī, now in the British Museum, that signifies this noble incident. Since he was not yet the Supremely Enlightened, and was yet the beloved Śākya prince, it is a royal crown, a crown of triumph and victory, that is held above his head, to praise a great act, an act of supreme sacrifice.

In his great compassion, the Bodhisattva, the essence of knowledge, descended from the Tushita heaven and came to the earth, not so much to be born to become the Supremely Enlightened, but more to help the millions of suffering by imparting the truth of the highest knowledge he was to attain. This is the Bodhi, composed of such great qualities like *maitrī*, *karuṇā*, etc. Buddha's concept of approach to the world was the utmost friendliness, compassion, sympathy, affection and love. Even to the worst, like Aṅgulimāla, Buddha could give only his love and affection. No wonder, he could win back to saintly life the worst hardened criminal. Both at Amarāvātī and at Barabudur, the descent of the Buddha or the Bodhisattva is magnificently portrayed, his decision to be born on earth, his announcement that gladdens the gods, his assuming the form of a white elephant, his descent as queen Māyā dreams of it. The elephant is not an elephant in rut. It is the elephant, the noblest of animals, of the highest stature, self-sacrificing, full of affection and the very embodiment of wisdom and auspiciousness. This *avatāra* or descending to the earth to be born is not as an *aṃśāvatāra* or a partial energy set foot on earth, as of Vishnu, when he was born as Rāma or Kṛishṇa, but the Bodhisattva completely removing himself from the Tushita heaven on to the earth. This was a great celebration for the gods. Even the spirit of the gods is elevated when, without the selfish thought about their missing Buddha who was ever with them, they would gladly allow his company for the terrestrials.

For Buddha, heaven itself was nothing so wonderful that there should be a special sanctity attached to it. It was like some neighbouring village for him, and if the Master proceeded to heaven, it was mainly to give the benefit of his true knowledge to his mother Māyā who was in heaven, and that purpose done, he came back to the world by the triple jewelled ladder with Śakra and Mahābrahma attending on him, one holding up the umbrella and the other waving the *chaurī* for him. As early as in the second century B. C. itself, the triple ladder is shown signifying the triad that used it. As usual in symbolic representation, the central ladder shows a foot at the top and a foot at the bottom, starting in heaven and ending

upon earth. Just as Buddha is not shown in physical form, even Śakra and Brahmā, consistently with this, are made invisible. But the tradition of deifying Buddha to the extent that highest gods attended on him, is much older than the third century B. C. as, after all, the panel at Bhārhut records visually, only an earlier tradition. In Kushāna sculpture from Mathurā, the triple ladder occurs among the earliest sculptures.

The descent of Buddha at Saṅkisa was considered so important that a great ruler awaited him on earth, Prasenajit of Kosala. The ladder slowly came to be a *sopānapaṅkti* or a flight of steps in Pāla sculpture. The earlier Vakataka painting at Ajantā gives one of the most impressive incidents from Buddha's life, showing a large congregation awaiting the descent of the lord as he came down the jewelled ladder. Princes, noblemen, monks, a large host on either side of the ladder, throng for a vision of the Master, who appeared so miraculous. This favourite theme in Pāla sculpture would just indicate the Master flanked by Brahmā, fourfaced and Śakra. A Masterpiece of metal sculpture in the Patna Museum is probably a unique one to represent this theme in this medium.

But in Thailand, the sculptor thought of different device for representing Buddha's descent. Very often in Thailand and Cambodia, Brahmā has a single face, though the four faces are not completely ruled out. The preference is always for a single face. At any rate in representing him as flanking Buddha, he has a single face. Probably even multiplicity of heads that Buddha lacked, was considered a superiority that could be avoided. The triple ladder was substituted by another device to indicate the descent, and this is the most interesting. It is an eagle shaped like Garuḍa. Garuḍa is the mount of Vishṇu—*vishṇupada*. The word *vishṇupada* itself in Sanskrit means *ākāśa* or the sky, *viyad vishṇupadam vā tu* as *Amarakośa* would have it. So by a pun on the word *vishṇupada*, the vehicle of Vishṇu styled *vishṇupada*, that soars in the sky is taken for the sky itself which is also *vishṇupada*, whence Buddha came down through the sky on the earth from heaven. Thus the meaning is complete. On the wings of the bird rest Śakra and Brahmā, while on the body it is Buddha, the important central figure. This is a wonderful device, a device followed specially in Cambodian art, a speciality in Khmer art.

At Bhārhut, there is a double lined triangle indicating the *chaṅkrama-patha* of Buddha. The label itself mentions it as the *chaṅkrama*, the walk. Buddha maintained his health by a regular exercise of a definite stroll every day. It was this which was called the *chaṅkrama*. Only in the symbolic representation, at a very early date as this, has this been specially shown with a stress in India. But later, in the medieval period, at any rate, there is no sculpture to indicate Buddha walking. In Gandhāra sculpture, on the other hand, instead of the formal *samabhaṅga* in which

Buddha is so shown standing in all other Indian sculptures, there are lovely stuccos, indicating the movement of the Master's legs. It is, however, only in Thailand and in Cambodia that a fullfledged walking Buddha became a favourite. It shows Buddha with one leg forward and the other bent, with only the toes resting on the ground, and the heel upraised, that indicate the walking Buddha. Almost like Śiva, striding (*vikrānta*) as Tripurāntaka, Buddha in Thailand is shown moving along.

Like the *saulabhya* of Rāma, the *saulabhya* of Buddha is proverbial. Rāma is styled *pūrvabhāshī*, *smitabhāshī* and *smita pūrvabhāshī*. The first to speak, speaking with a smile and the one who speaks prefacing his speech with a smile. The great prince that Rāma was, looked at with awe by the people, who would almost be dumbfounded in his presence, always reassured them and made them feel perfectly at home in his presence, as he was the first to lovingly address them, prefacing his speech with a smile, all the more to help them know that he was in a happy mood, and would give them every opportunity to freely express their weals and woes, their difficulties if any, and request any remedy that lay in his hands. Buddha was similarly available. Always gracious, Buddha pitied the humblest, and gave everyone a chance to elevate oneself. Even Āmrāpālī, the fabulously wealthy courtesan was almost redeemed by Buddha. Out of compassion, he would present himself at an opportune moment, to teach people to leave a better life. There is a telling story of how Buddha appeased before a fabulously wealthy merchant to teach him to be unselfish. Buddha sitting in his *gandhakuṭī* knew what was happening. The rich merchant was pining because of an unfulfilled longing, and was getting pale and emaciated. On being questioned by his wife, the reason for his sudden deterioration in health, he confessed that it was his intense desire to eat specially prepared cakes, which he had noted being eaten by someone else. For him who could afford easily anything, there was no difficulty in having the cakes prepared at home, but so great a miser was he, that the apprehension of the large quantity that would have to be prepared at great expense to feed all his family and retinue, including his wife, prevented him from satisfying his palate. His wife smilingly reassured him that she herself would cook it for him in the topmost terrace of their mansion, unobserved by others, also assuring him that she would not partake of any of the preparation. The greedy merchant was overjoyed but as he was enjoying in perfect secrecy, as he imagined, lo and behold! Buddha came floating in the air, and entered the balcony on the terrace. Even the parsimony of the merchant could not override his reverence for the Master, to whom at once he offered first the preparations for which his mouth had been watering. A sermon from Buddha was enough to

remove this veil of ignorance in the merchant, and established him in a generous way of life. Buddha's talk with a ploughman and the parable of the ploughman that he had given in one of his discourses is very well known. He spoke to everyone convincingly and approached individuals with affection and goodwill. His accessibility to all, his compassion and sympathy distinguished him, and made him distinctive as the highest born, who chose to live among the humblest, and carry his message to the least of them all.

Yet even to the celestials like the *devas*, *nāgas*, *yakshas* nay even to the Lord of the Celestials, Śakra himself, he was an object of not only veneration but even of awe. Śakra could not approach him without knowing his pleasure. The visit of Śakra to Buddha in the Indraśailaguhā is a significant illustration to the point. The Lord of the Celestials took care to take along with him *Pañchasikha*, the great celestial musician, who played the harp at the entrance of the cave, to create a pleasant mood in the Master, conducive for his joyous reception of Śakra, awaiting at his door to have his audience. This is as much as to say, that Buddha, though easily accessible to all, whom he himself approached, individually, fully conscious of the necessity of each, was yet the highest, even beyond the celestials, and who could only be approached by the right effort in the direction by those who sought him.

It does remind us to the several hymns of the Śaiva saints from South India who have addressed Siva, expressing their inability to thank the Lord, who came so near to them, the humblest of the humble, though his nature and grandeur was a mystery little understood even by the highest celestials like Vishṇu and Brahmā, who were closest to him. That is why he is styled *Bhaktavatsala*. This compassion towards the devotees is again a great characteristic of Buddha.

The lord of Vaikuṅṭha abandoned celestial glory in a trice, and even as the Goddess of Prosperity, even by his side was questioning the reason for his haste, without waiting for his mount Garuḍa or even for his weapons like the wheel and the club or the bow, suddenly rushed to the succour of the elephant in distress, caught by a powerful crocodile in the lake, where he had gone for a plunge. This noble beast, lord of the herd, was piteously calling for help, and the help did come at last, when his physical strength was of no avail, and the Lord's grace could alone save him. One of the special iconographic forms of Vishṇu is Karivarada, or just Varada, as he is known, one who granted the boon of mercy to the elephant in distress. A parallel in Buddha's life is seen not only in his subjugation of Nalagiri, but also in the incident where he chose to live with the wild animals of the forest, to teach his quarreling disciples a lesson. As Buddha always wanted amity and love amongst all, he could

not tolerate pettiness and quarrelsome tendency amongst his disciples. When staying in the Ghositārāma monastery, he found some young monks prone to quarrel among themselves on petty things, he decided to move away for a while to the interior of the neighbouring Parileyyaka forest, where even the animals that knew his great worth and distinction, approached him with reverence. In this forest, the elephants would bring a fresh twig for him every morning to brush his teeth, another a fresh garment for him to wear, while a third prepared his seat to help him sit and meditate, as a fourth gently waved tender shoots of leaves to make him comfortable. This was the care that animals bestowed on him in return for the abundant affection that he had for even the humblest of creatures.

Like Rama who was served by Hanuman or Sugrīva, with utmost devotion and affection, there is a story of how at Vaiśālī, Buddha was offered a bowl of honey by a monkey, most reverently. After all, the animal could procure only honey from a hive in the forest and this being the sweetest and the best he could offer, he gave it to the Master, who graciously accepted it.

The quality of *dākshīnya* is very great in Buddha. In Sanskrit rhetoric, a *dakṣhiṇa nāyaka*, one equally attached to each individual consort in a harem, was considered the noblest. *Dākshīnya* is an abundance of uniform courtesy, which is denied to none, and equally offered to all. It is very difficult indeed to oblige one and all, but one who is endowed with the quality of *dākshīnya* would strive to be friendly and obliging to the utmost to one individual as to another. Buddha, who was abundantly endowed with this quality, could not disappoint the four *lokapālas*, who each individually brought a begging bowl, for him, in which to partake of the food that Sujātā had brought to offer him. He accepted all the four bowls, and by pressing them one on the other, made them a single one.

This great quality is again seen in his equal concern and affection for the Lichchhavis and the Koliyas, who, though closely related, were determined to fight it out between themselves over a petty quarrel about their mutual share of water for irrigation from the river Rohiṇī and destiny, one race, the other, each hoping for oneself a victory. Buddha appeared on the scene, as in his mental eye, this battle between the two clans stood forth clearly as in a mirror. The presence of the Master, and the sermon from him, were enough to destroy all wicked thoughts of destruction, and a catastrophe was averted. Both the great clans returned home to live in peace. It is thus very clear that Buddha had not only the feeling of *maitrī* in abundance, but also he practised those tenets that by precept conveyed to one and all. His compassion was equally overwhelming.

The compassion of Buddha led him to act quickly, and in a manner he alone could do, to relieve suffering ; and then he would necessarily perform

a miracle and achieve his object. A favourite theme in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa is the subjugation of the Nāga king Apalāla. This story from the *Divyāvadāna*, is narrated again by Hieun Tsang, in his account of Udyana in the Gandhāra region, the modern Swat valley. The Nāga king, who had his abode at the source of the Swat river, caused such misery to the entire region, destroying all the food products by contaminating the stream, that Buddha, who could mentally visualise the situation here, and moved by compassion for the people of this area, arrived at the mountainous abode of the Nāga, accompanied by Vajrapāṇi, who struck the mountain with his thunderbolt and broke it asunder. The agitated Nāga prince came out in terrible fright and bowed to the Buddha, who not only graciously admonished and converted him, but also prevailed on him to refrain from his unkind acts to the people of the neighbourhood, whose crops he devastated.

The theme is repeated in sculpture from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, where, in a beautiful palace, within the interior of the mountain, is seated on his golden throne, the Nāgarāja, in all his glory, along with his queens and attendants of the harem. Buddha with his supernatural glory, indicated by the circular halo around his head and the pair of lotuses under his feet, as a suggestion that as he walked a lotus spring up every time his foot moved forward, is shown arrived at the spot. A lion in his lair, though the king of the beasts, looks agitated, and a herd of deer, frightened at the thunderous sound of the cracked rock, is shown galloping fast to save its life. With a defiant look, almost like Mara in such an attitude, Vajrapāṇi is shown smiting the mountain with his thunderbolt. The Nāgarāja in the interior of the mountain is wonderstruck. The queens and attendants are in great dismay. This is one of the best examples of illustration of the story of Apalāla. The great importance of this incident in Buddha's life is that, out of his great compassion for all those in distress, he swiftly acted in this manner, to relieve suffering,

This act of Buddha had, indeed, such a deep impression on his disciples, that there are incidents to show how they acted exactly like their Master, and relieved similar suffering by acting exactly as Buddha did. One of these is the act of Sagata, a disciple of Buddha, who possessed extraordinary powers, and subdued the Nāga of the Mango ferry. When Buddha was once journeying from Śrāvastī to a place known as Bhadravāṭikā, the simple folk of the region like the cowherds, goatherds, cultivators and others warned him of a deadly snake in that region. Buddha who knew his purpose, proceeded undaunted towards a grove near Bhadravāṭikā. It is here that Sagata proceeded to encounter the Naga, and by his superior power overcame the Naga king, and converted him to the faith of the Buddha. There is a rare representation of this

from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. On a large casing slab, the lower panel illustrates Buddha proceeding towards Bhadravāṭikā, where the simple folk approach him with a tale of their woe and warn him of the Nāga infesting the region. Buddha is next shown seated, with Vajrapāṇi attending on him, and the disciple Sagata begging him to permit him to act and subdue the Nāga. The panel above shows Sagata defying the Nāgarāja, who is repeated twice, first in the company of his queens in his palace, and next, facing the young monk with a weapon in his hand in an attitude of fierce attack ; but immediately above, with his hands clasped in adoration, admitting his folly, and reverently explaining his willingness to follow the faith of the Master.

Buddha's compassion is again evident in another very important incident in his life, when he proceeded towards the dwelling of the Yaksha Ālavaka, not only to convert him, but also to save the small child that a selfish king was offering to the Yaksha to save his own life. The story goes that Ālavaka once went a hunting, and in the forest, was overpowered by a mighty Yaksha, also known as Ālavaka. As the Yaksha was a cannibal, the king, to save his life, promised to send him regularly every day a man with a large bowl of rice. He thus depleted his kingdom, first of all the criminals condemned to live in imprisonment, next of the aged folk, and ultimately of even the juvenile population. In twelve years, all his resources were exhausted, and it was the turn for his son, a child, to be offered to the ogre. The day prior to the offering of the prince to Ālavaka, Buddha noticed in his mental vision this tragedy, and immediately proceeded to the dwelling of the Yaksha Ālavaka, when he sat on the throne, as the womenfolk received him with honour and paid obeisance. The Yaksha himself was away in the Himālaya, where he was informed by his doorkeeper *Gandrabha* of the arrival of the Master. Furious at the thought that a human had dared to approach and take a seat in his palace, the Yaksha quickly returned and showered on Buddha deadly weapons, prefaced by reproachful contumely, but neither could approach Buddha, as his weapons were impotent against the power of the Master. He was amazed, and taking a chance, asked Buddha to go away. Buddha, knowing that love and affection would ultimately win, obeyed. Equally amazed at this attitude of the monk, he asked him to come back. Again, the Master obeyed. But when he repeated this, in the hope that he could tire the Master by constantly going out and coming back, he was mistaken, as the Master would not move again. The Yaksha then put impossible questions, hoping thereby, that if the Master could not answer any of them, he could devour him, but Buddha not only answered all his questions, but so admonished him, that he repented his wicked acts, was at once converted to the faith and bowed before the

Master. It was just then, at that time of day-break, that the infant prince was brought in, with a large bowl of rice, as food for the monster. The Yaksha, ashamed, placed the child at the feet of the Buddha, who gave it back to the nurses, to be brought up, ultimately to become his disciple. The story is illustrated in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, where Ālavaka is shown rushing towards Buddha, seated calmly. Disregarding even his queens, the wicked monster is shown pointing his spear defiantly, as if to pierce the Master and kill him in a trice. He is again shown, this time, seated with his queens at the feet of the Master in deep adoration. Here is a small panel within a panel, almost an idea conjured up, to explain the attitude of Buddha. It is the old story of how a man clings to a rope, with the imminent danger of falling into a deep pit, infested by poisonous reptiles and scorpions. Nibbling at the top and almost cutting the rope, suspended from the bough of a tree, is a rat. This is an allegorical sculpture of time nibbling at the life of man, who clings to life, holding on to the rope, apprehending any moment his fall into the dangerous pit, the abyss of ignorance, sustaining himself, however, only on a few drops of honey falling from above, the taste of which lures him to cling on. It is to save mankind in general, particularly here Ālavaka, who, by his wickedness, is on the brink of falling into the deep chasm of his own cruelty and ignorance, that Buddha arrived even before the rope of life is completely nibbled, and to give him a draught of bliss through his sermon.

Buddha was not only a great Master who taught by precept the right path, but he also showed by practice how the noblest and the best could act as a beacon light to the less evolved and unsteady. An excellent illustration is found in Buddha's own life. Objective in testing every process of elevation, and unafraid of death, he determined to starve himself. He plunged himself into meditation, unconcerned with nourishment for the body, and went up to the point of dropping down almost dead, completely emaciated and reduced to skin and bone. Śuddhodana, his father, had such trust in the words of his soothsayers that even though he was told that Buddha, who had reduced himself to this state, was no more, he would not believe it, and persisted in asserting that his son would finally become the supremely Enlightened One. All those whom he sent to get first-hand news of the condition of his son, being suffused by the grandeur of Buddha and initiated by him into the highest realm of the Truth, which, by the time they arrived, he had already realised and started disseminating to the world, never returned.

When Buddha visited Kapilavastu again, as the Enlightened One, he showed a rare strength of control over the mind, unknown even to the

greatest *rishis*, whose legends we know from the epics and other Purāṇic literature. Though, as a prince, he had loved Yaśodharā more than his life itself, and was hesitant to leave her, and took a last look at the newborn child Rāhula, whom he loved so much, even as he thought of renouncing the world, like the great monk that he was, Buddha was absolutely unconcerned about his consort that once was. Still, after waiting long enough to see whether she was among the numerous kinsfolk that came to kneel at his feet, he understood that Yaśodharā would not approach Buddha, because she felt that if at all he had any consideration for her, he would surely pay a visit to her in the palace itself. It was a great moment in Buddha's life to go into the harem unperturbed and establish his triumph as a monk by treating his once beloved wife as a mere lay devotee. With due consideration for her as a great princess, Buddha approached her absolutely as a stranger, but with the highest consideration for one whom he would willingly bless as devotee. This great respect for human feelings in Buddha, and his complete control of his senses, that would never make him waver in his asceticism, is indeed a great lesson from his life.

More than that was a culminating point, a great test even for Buddha himself, probably even more difficult than the overcoming of the lure of Māra before his enlightenment. His only son, the child on whom he once doted, the only hope for his line as the heir to the throne, after his own father Śuddhodana, Rāhula, sent by his mother to ask for his patrimony, hoping thereby that the great monk would be so moved as to come back to the life of a householder, was given the highest patrimony, as Buddha himself felt. He made the little child a monk, and taught him the supreme wisdom that dawned on him under the Bodhi tree. Buddha was not unaware that this act of his would exterminate his direct line of succession to the throne. Śuddhodana was so shocked and grieved at this act of Buddha that he at once took a solemn promise before the Master that he would no more initiate anyone into his order of monks except with the explicit consent of the guardians of the adolescent.

Buddha was so conscious of human frailty that when his wife Yaśodharā, along with his own foster mother, Mahāprajāpati Gautamī, came to his home with a request for being admitted as members of his order as nuns, would not agree to the proposal, though he was fully conscious of what he owed to Mahāprajāpati Gautamī, who brought him up almost from within a few days of his birth, when his mother, her elder sister, had passed away. He was firm in his determination, not because he wanted to be unkind to them, but because of other reasons. The importunities of Ānanda, whom he could refuse nothing, at last and finally, made the Master agree to what he considered would be a disaster

for his order. He expressly revealed to Ānanda his opinion that the life of his order of monks would be reduced by a half by the admission of nuns. Buddha had an extraordinary foresight into the future, and whatever he did, he did with a great circumspection. When he originally disapproved the idea of an order of nuns, it was purely because of his anxiety to prolong the life of his order ; but finally he bowed to the inevitable and allowed it.

At every stage, however, Buddha taught the world that it was beauty, particularly feminine charm, that lured man ; and when he converted Nanda, the newly wedded charming prince, with the very personification of beauty in a damsel as his wife, it was purely to elevate him by and to assure him the supreme *bodhi*. One of the most touching scenes in Buddha's life is his conversion of Nanda against his will. The prince was lovingly helping his consort Sundarī at her toilet. Though there were numerous *prasādhikās* to help her at her toilet, he himself lovingly dressed her braid with flowers. It was just at that moment that Buddha stood at his door. Torn between his passion for Sundarī and his affection and reverence for the Master, Nanda yielded to the latter, and ran to the door to receive the bowl of the monk to offer him food, but Buddha turned around and made for the monastery. Nanda had to follow him, almost hypnotised. Arrived at the monastery, Nanda, whose mind was entirely with his beloved Sundarī, was made a monk, much against his will, as he could not deny the master even the most impossible wish of his. As a few days passed, without the mental state of Nanda reforming, Buddha decided to give him a suitable lesson. He took him along to the garden of the celestials, floating through the clouds in the sky. On the way, Buddha pointed out an old decrepit, one-eyed monkey and asked him how he compared its beauty with that of Sundarī, also known as Janapadakalyāṇī, the fairest lady of the land. Nanda, of course, expressed that there was no comparison as both were the extreme limits of beauty and ugliness. Arrived in heaven, Buddha pointed to the most alluring pink-footed damsels under celestial trees, *kalpavṛikshas*. Nanda was dazed at their beauty. This time, came forth the question from the Master, asking him how he compared them with Sundarī. In truth, Nanda had to confess, that in the presence of the pink-footed celestial damsels, Sundarī was almost in the position of the monkey to her. Buddha promised the pink-footed damsels to Nanda, if he concentrated his mind on the supreme knowledge that he taught him. Nanda succeeded in this great concentration, but when the supreme knowledge dawned on him, it also gave him the highest concept of how shallow and skin-deep was the concept of beauty. When Buddha smilingly asked him whether he would still have the pink-footed damsels, Nanda smiled back, and confessed to the Master

that physical beauty and charm were no more of any consequence to him. This is the way that the Master taught his disciples how to overcome most of the trials and tribulations in life. This is a favourite theme in sculpture, both from Amarāvati and Nāgārjunakoṇḍā, a charming though touching episode lovingly portrayed. A Gāndhāra sculpture in the National Museum shows the toilet of Sundarī, the Master at the door of the palace, and Nanda receiving the bowl. In Amarāvati, a sculpture continues the story from where he was helping his consort in the dressing of her coiffure, by making him follow the Master to his monastery; the cutting of his locks and giving him the attire of a monk is there, but as he follows the Buddha, his face is turned back to have a last glimpse at the beautiful tear-eyed princess, gazing at him from the balcony in despair. The panel from Nāgārjunakoṇḍā depicts Buddha floating in the air with Nanda, the monkey on a tree stump and, beyond, in the celestial garden, the pink-footed damsels, the very perfection of physical form.

The highest strength of character singles out Buddha as one of the greatest *yogis*. He was in fact Sakyamuni, the sage par excellence. As he lay on his death-bed his life ebbing away, Ānanda, who loved him dearly, was in tears. He expressed his great sorrow and prayed to Buddha to continue to live longer, which was easily within his power, but Buddha would not do so. Like king Arthur who spoke to his beloved knight Sir Bedevere, 'the old order changeth yielding place to new', Buddha in his magnificent *parinibbāna sutta*, gave him a true picture of the evanescence of the world and the inevitable nature of death, the surviving factor being only *dharma*, in which all his beloved monks were to take refuge. He himself was inevitable to disappear from this mortal existence. This was again a great message. Just as, fully determined, he overcame Māra during the Māradharshaṇa, even at the point of death, Buddha wished not to live a day more, as he fully realised it was essential to allow natural laws to have their way.

Buddha was human in his outlook and even behaviour. Though he was adorned by the celestials and could control even their lord, Śakra himself, yet he submitted himself to the attention of a physician to overcome his physical ailments. When Devadatta arranged for injuring Buddha by engaging ruffians, and a splinter hurt the heel of the Master, Jīvaka was called in, to dress up the heel and heal the wound.

He similarly allowed himself to be protected by the Nāga Muchilinda, when there was a storm, soon after his enlightenment. The great reptile wound himself around the Master, and held up his large hoods over him, as he sat in contemplation for a whole week, till the storm abated.

Possessed of super-natural powers, Buddha used them to the minimum, and completely forbade his disciples from performing miracles. He was so

human in his outlook that in the company of the terrestrials, he would not have the celestials come in and disturb the composure of the former. When a certain Nāga, in his great desire to listen to the Master, came along and joined a great assemblage of listeners, as the Master expounded his doctrine, Buddha, finding that his presence frightened the humans, advised him to be away from the spot. The Muchilinda incident, a great favourite in the Kṛishṇā valley found great favour with the sculptor in Thailand and Cambodia. There are several examples of the Buddha protected by Muchilinda Nāga in this area. At Amarāvati and Nāgārjunakoṇḍā, the snake itself, for the great act of his sheltering the Master for a week, was so venerated, that there are several carved *stūpa* slabs with this theme, which was often repeated. Erapatra's visit to Buddha has a special graphic representation at Bhārhut with labels in Brāhmī explaining the incident. Similarly in Gāndhāra sculpture the scene has its depiction.

But Buddha did use his miraculous powers occasionally, when there was a real need for it. The Jaṭilas were the most stubborn in their faith, and would not be converted. Buddha was warned by the Jaṭilas not to spend a night in their sacrificial pavilion, where there was the most virulent Nāga, of which everyone was afraid. But Buddha not only stayed there, but got the huge Nāga subdued, and so transformed, that he could come into his bowl. This amazed the Jaṭilas. All the more amazed were they, when there was intermittent rain, a large sheet of water all over, and as the Jaṭilas looked on almost helpless, while Uruvela Kaśyapa, from among them, came in a boat to help out Buddha, the Master walked on the waters and reached the other side. The conversion of the Jaṭilas is a great incident in Buddha's life.

But his normal mode of conversion was by his sermons and parables, and a straight approach to convince the people that his path of knowledge was the right one. Several of his greatest disciples were thus converted, Śāliputra, Maudgalyāyana and others.

There are two sculptures, one, a frieze on an architrave from Mathurā, and another, an upright from the Amarāvati rail, now in the British Museum, that suggestively point to the greatness of Buddha, that was known even to the birds and trees, not to talk of the humans. The very way in which nature responded to the greatness of Buddha, brings out, in the most effective manner, his pre-eminence as the Enlightened One, that brought a new message of deliverance to the world.

The sculpture in the British Museum is an exceedingly interesting one. Buddha is here represented symbolically, as trying to cross the river Nerañjarā, the foot-prints across the stream suggesting his wading through the waters. There is a flight of swans on the wing, moving clockwise, to

suggest their respectful salutation to the Master, whom they were perambulating in adoration. A tree, on the other side of the bank, bending forward, is just indicative of its stretching forward to help the Master to hold its bough, as he got on to the shore. The carving on the architrave from Mathurā, now in the National Museum, also represents the adoration of Buddha by a flight of swans, again on the wing, moving clockwise. Buddha is not shown in physical form, but only symbolically.

In India, a very important belief is that developing of a super-natural light, in terms of pre-eminence in qualities, intelligence, piety and so forth, is on account of the grace of luminous objects like the sun and the fire : *yatte agne tejas tenāham tajasvī bhūyāsam yatte agne bhrājas tenāham bhrājasvī bhūyāsam*. This is *varchas*, *tejas*, *bhrājas*, and *ojas*, bright hue, splendour, luminosity and power, so often mentioned in the vedas, were sought from *brahmacharya* onwards, from Agni. The word *deva* itself means one that shines. A circle of light was also conceived, The sun blazing in the sky has been conceived as the three *Vedas* blazing as a halo of light : *ādityo vā esha etanmaṇḍalam tapati tatra tā ṛichas sa ṛichā maṇḍalam sa ṛichām loko'tha ya esha etanmaṇḍale' richir dīpyate tāni sāmāni sa sāmnam loko'tha ya esha etasmin mandale' rchishi purushas tāni yajūmshi sa yajushā maṇḍalam sa yajushām lokas saishā traīyyeva vidyā tapati ya esho' antarāditye hiraṇmayah purushah*. The sun is a blazing orb, composed of the hymns of the *Rigveda*, in which, the flames shooting up, compose the hymns of the *Sāmaveda*, and the golden anthropomorphic form in it is the hymns of the *Yajurveda*, and this golden form itself is the personified triad or the three *Vedas* blazing forth.

Accustomed to this familiar idea of a golden blazing form in the halo, it is no wonder that Sujātā felt she saw a blazing golden figure under the Bodhi tree as Buddha sat there just before his enlightenment. He was shining in all his glory, and to the eyes of Sujātā, he appeared a celestial. It is then she approached him reverently, and offered the special food she had prepared of the essence of the milk of a whole herd, as the offering to the sprite of the tree. This vision of glory of Buddha's effulgence, making him look almost a circle of light, is here to emphasise not only his great qualities, his pre-eminence among mortals and almost a celestial glory, but also to proclaim the importance of the blazing Supreme knowledge *sambodhi* that he was to attain under the very tree.

The Lord of the highest wisdom, according to Brahmanical lore, is Śiva as Dakṣiṇāmūrti, the great Teacher seated under the banyan tree. The Bhāgavata counterpart of this is Nara-Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu (Nārāyaṇa) as the supreme ascetic, *Yoganārāyaṇa* as he is known, under the banyan tree. These two ascetic forms are specially associated with the tree, the Bodhi tree, the tree of supreme knowledge. The Buddhas that preceded

Gautama, had, each one, his own tree, and even the Tīrthaṅkaras of the Jaina faith have individually a tree.

The spreading shade of the tree is symbolic of the Master's supreme knowledge which brings relief to the millions that are exposed to the blaze, rigour and fatigue of a long and endless distance of ignorance running through a cycle of births and deaths, the escape or relief from which is possible only under the cool shade of the tree of knowledge as Samara- puṅgava Dikshita would put it in describing the form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, *vinetum ārtim viśhayādhyajanyām vaṭadrumādho-vasatim prapadye*; and the hand in the attitude of delivering the sermon for enlightening the disciples is suggestive of the transmission of the supreme knowledge. In the case of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, whose thumb and first finger come together, to suggest the *prabodhamudrā* or the fingers in enlightenment, the connotation is conveyed in the line, *prabodhavijñānavikāśahetoḥ prabodhamudrā- bharaṇam prapadye*. It is this simple *prabodha* in an enlarged form, where both the hands are brought together, to compose the *dharmachakra pravartanamudrā* of Buddha, that indicate his first sermon.

Even his *bodhi* knowledge itself has been wonderfully interpreted by the sculptor, who evolved, as the centuries passed, a special mode of delineation, normally, from the early centuries of the Christian era, both in Kushāna and Sātavāhana, Gāndhāra and Gupta sculpture. It is bump of the *ushṇīsha* that has meant a spurting of the brain of Buddha into something abnormal, raising him above even the most gifted of the humans. This was the *ushṇīsha*. The most prominent of *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇas*. This *ushṇīsha* is taken for granted even in the case of *Chakravartī mahārājas* whose brilliance is beyond all praise. Jimūtavāhana, for example, the great prince, Bodhisattva himself so born for demonstrating the highest form of sacrifice, that offered his own body to save another, has the *ushṇīsha* on his head, *ushṇīshas sphuṭa eśha mūrdhani vibhātyūrṇeyam antar bhruvoḥ*, The bump on the head and the *ūrṇā* or the single curl of hair between the eyebrows indicate his greatness as a *Mahāpuruṣa*. The same is always characteristic of Buddha. The *ūrṇā* between the eyebrows is only an indication of the *yogic* character of the Master who concentrates through his eyes on the tip of his nose. The eyebrows that shoot up converge towards the central curl that they touch, like the parallel contour of the eye lashes down below that converge on the tip of the nose.

The sculptor was not quite satisfied with a mere bump for indicating supreme knowledge. He wanted something more than that and more significant. That is why a small flame came to be introduced in South Indian representations of the Buddha, towards the end of the Pallava period, which developed into a fiercer flame in the Chola regime. The Choḷas being a maritime folk, that maintained the largest navy that

India ever had, particularly under Rājendra, the idea of the flame on the bump spread further to Ceylon, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia, where there is a whole series of bronzes and sculptures of Buddha all over South-East Asia with a prominent flame on the *ushnīsha*, to represent the blaze of light on Buddha's head, indicating his supreme knowledge. Earlier, however, the idea of the circle of light so appealed, that it started as a simple halo in Gāndhāra sculpture, changed into a halo decorated with a scalloped edge in Kushāṇa sculpture, and finally ended in a much more elaborated large halo, almost beyond the proportions of the body of the Master himself, but yet most pleasing, and with a border tastefully decorated with the design of the *kalpavalli*, wish-fulfilling creeper, with birds and blooming flowers intertwined. In some of the bronzes from the Gāndhāra region, however, the simple Kushāṇa halo was changed into a peculiar circle of light, shooting forth arrows in the form of the rays of the sun, of which some fine examples in metal are now found in a couple of museums in the United States of America. This is to emphasise a greater blaze, illustrative of the solar shine, rather than a softer and more mellowed though large-proportioned light of the moon, even if it were that of the full moon. It may here be recalled that the crescent moon on Śīva's head, as he subdues the monster of ignorance under his foot as Naṭarāja or Dakṣiṇāmūrti, in both forms as a teacher par excellence, signifies the destruction of the evil of ignorance, which is the starting point of the birth of knowledge as a crescent moon, to develop and culminate as knowledge in its entirety, the full moon.

In the case of Rāma, it is said that he never uttered a thing twice *Rāmo dvir nābhībhāshate*. Once said, it is said in its entirety and in all its significance. His mind, thought, word and deed all went together in one string of truth, *yat taduktam na tan mithyā*. If Rāma said a thing, it could never go in vain. It should resolve into truth. In other words there could be nothing uttered by Rāma except what would be the absolute truth. It is the same in the case of Buddha. When Buddha said a thing, it was always an utterance of the utmost truth. To illustrate this, there is a very interesting incident from his life. At Rājagṛiha, Buddha once blessed the wife of a Jaina, Subhadra, with a noble son, and when she was big with child, the Nirgranthas or the Jainas who were jealous of Buddha, got her husband to give her a drug that killed the pregnant woman, and hurriedly carried the corpse to the funeral pyre, so that it could be burnt, and Buddha's word proved false, but this was not to happen. Even at that stage, Buddha said the child would be born, and when the Master approached the flaming funeral pyre, out from the dead corpse came out the little child as the time was ripe for him to be born; and as he was born amidst flames, he was named Jyotishka. Jyotishka later proved to be

a great intellectual. Buddha's word was thus demonstrated to be the truth. There are representations of this important incident in Gāndhāra sculpture. This is particularly interesting in highlighting one of the great qualities of Buddha as a *mahāpurusha*. Like Rāma, he was, *satyavādī madhuravāk*.

Rāma was not only endowed with the highest qualities but was also the most beautiful prince on earth. That is why Vālmīki has said, 'he who had not had a look at Rāma and on whom the glances of Rāma had not fallen, was to be deplored. His own inner self would condemn him as hapless': *yastu rāmam na paśyettu yam cha rāmo na paśyati ninditas sa vaselloke svātmāpyenam vigarhate*. Buddha was not any the less beautiful. Even as a monk, his beautiful form was alluring. Like Śurpaṅkhā, who approached Rāma, enraptured by his charm, there was a highborn damsel, Māgandiyā, herself a paragon of beauty, desperately in love with the alluring form of Buddha, who, naturally, put her off, but this so quite enraged her, that when, by her beauty, she fascinated Udayana, the charming king of Kausambī, and married him, she tried in many ways to harm Buddha, who would not so much as even look at her, but summarily dismissed her away. The story of how Māgandiyā tried to harm the good-natured Sāmavātī, her co-wife, for no other reason except that she had the highest reverence for Buddha as a master and a saint, and the discomfiture of Māgandiyā in her wicked attempts to harm Sāmavātī, are narrated in a striking sculptural panel from Amarāvātī. Buddha had not only great divine qualities, but also the greatest personal charm, as he was born the most beautiful prince of his day. It is this that has immortalised the charming form of Buddha as the accepted portrait of his, in the mould of perfection of beauty, whether in Greek-inspired sculpture from Gāndhāra or in the purely Indian mode, in Kushāṇa, Sātavāhana and Gupta sculpture. If the highest personal charm and beauty of masculine figure is to be seen in the face of Śiva in the Ekamukhalinga from Khoh in the Allāhabād Museum, it is almost its replica that is seen in the face of Buddha in the *dharmachakrapravartana* attitude from Sārnāth. The Apollo type from Gāndhāra is too very well known to be specially described.

While Buddha was at first strictly against the order of nuns, he had finally to yield to the importunity of Ānanda, and that is how Mahāp-rajāpati Gautamī led an order of Buddhist nuns, *therīs*. However, Buddha had no prudity in such matters, and it cannot be forgotten that Buddha allowed Āmrapālī to come into the fold. He accepted the magnificent monastery that she constructed for the Buddhist order with her immense wealth. When she renounced both her untold wealth and ravishing beauty to become an orange-robed nun, shorn of physical elegance and material comfort, it was Buddha who readily welcomed her to the simple life. The grove presented by her to Buddha is famous in Buddhist legend.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma had always considered himself a human, a son of Daśaratha. He never thought of himself as an immortal, descended on the earth for fulfilling a mission, and he completely acted in the most human way, though as the perfection of man. Kṛishṇa, all the time conscious that he was the highest celestial born on earth, for the fulfilment of a mission, acted like a human being, occasionally prone to perform miracles, just when there was a necessity for them. Buddha, like Kṛishṇa, was absolutely conscious of his superiority over even the *devas* like Śakra and Mahābrahma. He knew of his earlier births, and the various stages of his evolution as a Bodhisattva, ultimately to become the Supremely Enlightened. Still, he had no ego or pride in him, and did not live differently from an ordinary man. The most wonderful tribute to Buddha in this, the human way of life that he chose to live, is to be observed in several incidents, where Devadatta, his wicked cousin, attempted on his life. When there was a wound on his heel through one of such mishaps, Jivaka, the half-brother of Ajātaśatru, the greatest physician of the day and a devoted disciple of Buddha, was always called in to attend on the Master, administered medicines and relieved him of pain. This was Buddha at whose gate in the Indraśailaguhā stood Śakra himself seeking audience.

Yet Buddha knew the past, present and future. In defining Bhagavān, it has been said that it is only the one who knows the origin of beings, their annihilation, their coming into being and departure from the world, true knowledge leading to bliss and ignorance that causes sorrow and suffering, that is to be known as Bhagavān: *utpattim pralayam chaiva bhūtānām āgatim gatim veti vidyām avidyām cha sa vāchyo bhagavān iti*. According to this definition, it can easily be seen that Buddha was *bhagavān*. An incident from his life clearly illustrates this. As Buddha was walking along, with his train of monks following him, as also his devotees, there was a dog on a mound near a house furiously barking at the approach of the people. Buddha explained to an amazed audience that this dog was in his previous birth a miser who without enjoying the vast wealth he possessed, buried it deep in a spot known only to him and zealously guarded it. After his death, he was born a dog and his intense attachment towards his wealth, put him exactly on the spot, where lay his buried treasure, which, even in that form of an animal, he was zealously guarding. His bark was to scare people away. When at the instance of the Master, there was a trial dig, the vast wealth was revealed. There is an excellent representation of this scene in a Gāndhāra sculpture, now in the Lahore Museum.

It is stated in the *Upanishads*, that sacrifice alone brings on immortality. Neither by worldly action nor by offspring nor by accumulation of wealth is immortality attained, but only by renouncing the seemingly alluring

pleasures of life and complete sacrifice. This is what the seers have felt. The monks, who have renounced, enter the heaven that is in the inner cavern of the mind in which there is a light ablaze. By accepting monkhood, and with a mind determined and resolute by deep contemplation on the highest philosophic thought of the Vedanta, and pure of heart, towards the end of their life, in the land of bliss they attain immortality, by a release from all bonds : *na karmaṇā na prajayā dhanena tyāgenaike amṛitatvam ānaśuḥ pareṇa nākam nihitam guhāyām bibhrājate tadyatayo viśanti vedāntaviññānasuniśchitārthās sanyāsayogād yatayas śuddhasattvāḥ te brahmaloke tu parāntakāle parāmṛiāt parimuchyanti sarve.*

In the story of Buddha, it is well known that it is after witnessing scenes of distress, physical infirmity, illness, suffering and death, and particularly after noticing the serene blissful attitude of a monk, who had realised the absolute truth by renouncing all the phantasy of life, that made the prince make up his mind to follow suit, by renouncing even his kingdom, for attaining that beatific state of the monk. In sculptural representations of Prince Siddhārtha leaving his home on Kaṇṭaka, as in Sātavāhana, Ikshvāku, Gandhāra sculpture and so forth, Devas are shown holding up the hoofs of the horse, as it trod the ground, within the precincts of the palace and beyond the gates of the city of Kapilavastu, at midnight. This was to muffle the sound of the hoofs, which would awaken the sentry in the palace, the guards within the city, and the general folk outside, all over, in the town. The celestials were anxious that Siddhārtha should renounce the world, to become, ultimately, the greatest monk, to give an unprecedented message of *dhamma* to the world. It is this stage of immortality, the highest to be attained by a monk, that the Devas themselves were anxious should be made known to the world. When Buddha made his son a monk, he gave him, as he considered, the highest heritage, particularly coming from him, the paternal heritage, the heritage of immortality and bliss. It may be recalled that the Devas rejoiced when Bodhisattva in Tushita heaven resolved to come down to the earth as Siddhārtha, who was ultimately to become the Buddha. The celestials knew this great happening to be, and hence this their special rejoicing and celebration of the event. Again, as the prince renounced the world and fled on his horse Kaṇṭaka, it is the celestials that helped him go unnoticed. This is the glory of the bliss of immortality through supreme knowledge, which, not only the entire mortal world, but also the celestial sphere itself, highly prized.

Buddha was not totally cut off from the past. He had great respect for all that was good and great in the traditions to which he was born. To take an instance, there is the story of how Svastika offered a handful of grass to Siddhārtha, just after his renunciation, as he was to take his

seat under the Bodhi tree. This is to be seated on a pure seat of *kuśa* grass. *Kuśāsana*, or a seat composed of *Kuśa* grass, has always been considered in India as the purest. When the body was purified after a bath in the river Nerañjarā, this grass, symbolic of purity, purified him all the more, as he sat on it. It is for this purification, that in all ceremonies, *kuśāsana* or the *dārbhāsana* is used, and on the ring finger of the right hand, a *kuśapavitra* is worn. In the *Mahābhāshya* of Patañjali, there is a wonderful pen picture given, of how Pānini, sat facing east on *kuśa* grass, wearing a *kuśapavitra* on his finger, with the pious resolve to write out his great book of grammatical aphorisms. It is in the same manner, with the resolve to attain enlightenment that Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree, specially on *kuśa* grass. This indicates the great regard Buddha had for the traditions of sanctity that could alone assure success to an undertaking.

Buddha was absolutely conscious of every stage of development of himself as a Bodhisattva. The *Jātakas* are not empty fables as a pastime for children. They represent the highest ideals of restraint, sacrifice, love for the entire universe. When Buddha, with his hand in *bhūmisparśamudrā*, called upon the earth as a witness to all his great deeds of sacrifice in his immediately previous birth, as prince Viśvantara, we go into a story of a prince, who was the very embodiment of sacrifice, who gave away everything that he possessed, and which was coveted by another. It is no wonder that he gave away the miraculous elephant that was responsible for the prosperity of this realm, though he may have felt that it would cost him dear. But what is more important and astounding is that he did not shrink before the thought of giving away even his own little children, a boy and a girl, brought up in the utmost luxury, affection and love, and knew not what it was to how down to or wait in attendance on another, and even his below wife. This was Viśvantara, The *Mahākapi Jātaka* illustrates the Bodhisattva that, even as an animal and leader of the herd, gave up his own life to save a troop of monkeys, by filling the gap of the temporary bridge of bamboo over the river with his own body. In the *Chhaddanta Jātaka*, it is the six-tusked elephant, in which form, again the Bodhisattva, who could have just crushed the wicked hunter, rather on the other hand, magnanimously, with his own trunk, even as he was dying, cut his tusks to help him to have them. That was the spirit of sacrifice in this noble animal. In the *Nigrodhamiga Jātaka* the Bodhisattva, as a stag and the leader of a whole herd, offered himself in the place of a pregnant doe, for being killed and utilised in the royal kitchen. This so touched the king, that after listening to a sermon from this adorable animal, he made this spot a haven for the deer to freely roam about without let or hindrance and any apprehension of a shot from a hunting bow. It is this place Mṛigadāva, in the vicinity of Banaras, sanctified in

one of his previous births, that Buddha chose for his first sermon, *dharmacakrapravartana*, the initial turning of the wheel of the Law, and it is this that accounts also for the deer flanking the wheel, which became a symbol of Buddha's first sermon.

The compassion of Buddha is proverbial, and this compassion has been a thread that ran through all the different births of the Bodhisattva before he ultimately was born the Siddhārtha. As king Śibi, he could give away flesh from his own body, cut by himself on refusal of such a ghastly crime by any of his courtiers, who loved him dearly, and when the miraculous weight of the bird so required it, he put his whole weight, and sat in one of the scales offering his body to the hunter, or to the hawk, as given in another version of the story. The same attitude is seen in another birth of the Bodhisattva as the emperor of the Vidyādhara, Prince Jimūtavāhana, who offered himself in the place of the Nāga Śaṅkhapāla to help the Garuḍa have his feed on a promised offering of a Nāga everyday.

The spirit of renunciation in Buddha is again a steadfast factor that has survived through his different births. As king Mahājanaka he was unattracted by all the pleasures of royal life, and all the efforts of the queen Sivalī proved futile in turning his heart away from his life of renunciation. The paintings at Ajantā give an elaborate narration of the queen's attempt to lure Mahājanaka by dance and song and the pleasures of life in a palace. But in a panel from Bhārhut it is the story of what led to Mahājanaka's spirit of renunciation. A look at the arrow-maker concentrating on straightening an arrow by a look at it with one eye with the other closed that made him realise how only alone and single one could attain concentration on the absolute Truth. The sculpture from Bhārhut is very telling indeed. The *Matsya Jātaka* is a touching story of the monster fish that offered itself as food when there was a big drought, which assured annihilation of thousands of living being by an utter scarcity of food. The *Śāśa Jātaka*, similarly, shows how even the little hare could offer its own body roasted up in the fire, into which it fell willingly, to provide food for a hungry hunter, and, in appreciation of which great act of sacrifice, we are told, the hare adorns the orb of the moon, where it was transported by Śakra himself. The *Valahassa Jātaka*, of which an early representation is on an upright of the kushāṇa period, but the most impressive one, in Cambodia not far from Angkor Vat, narrates how a large hearted horse, the Bodhisattva himself so born, saved a number of ship-wrecked merchants by carrying them away from the island of ogresses, where their doom was certain. These and other acts of sacrifice, compassion and universal love, bring out the great traits that make for ethical and spiritual advancement, ultimately to produce the Supremely Enlightened One. Great truths have thus been made manifest in the *Jātaka* which, as we know,

were stories narrated by Buddha, to recall how in his previous births as an animal or a bird, he had tried to build himself up spiritually and ethically, ultimately to become the Enlightened One.

One of the most oft-repeated scenes from Buddha's life is the miracle of Śrāvastī. In fact, Buddha himself, who had forbidden his disciples performing miracles unnecessarily, just showed this miracle as a necessity, to demonstrate the futility of the attempts of the heretics who denounced him and his teachings, as he could alone perform a miracle which could not be approached even by the heretics. The story in the *Dhammapada Atthakathā* narrates how Buddha rebuked Pindola Bharaddāja for flying in the air, a miracle that the heretics were unable to perform. Buddha forbade monks from exercising their super-natural powers. The heretics immediately imagined that Buddha had completely forbidden miracles, and he would not also perform miracles any more. They were now brave enough to say that they had miraculous powers which they would exhibit only after Buddha performed miracles. King Bimbisāra enquired of Buddha whether the statement of the heretics was true that they could perform miracles, but that Buddha would not. Buddha, however, immediately told him that his prohibition of miracles applied only to his disciples and not to himself, even as restrictions imposed on the entry of others in the royal pleasure garden did not apply to the king. Buddha now announced he would perform a miracle, four months hence, at the foot of a mango tree. No sooner the heretics came to know of this, than they tore up all the mango trees, even saplings, in and around Śrāvastī, where Buddha was to perform the miracle. They were now confident that there being no mango tree, Buddha's word could never come true.

However, Buddha entered the city on the appointed day, where the king's gardener that very day found a ripe mango, rich in flavour, which he was carrying to the king. On sighting the Master, he reverently offered it to him. Ānanda crushed the ripe fruit and gave the juice to Buddha, who accepted it, and instructed the gardener Danda to plant the seed there. A huge mango tree immediately sprang up on the spot, and all the people of the neighbourhood rushed to see this wonderful tree. The king ordered guards to protect the tree, the ripe fruit of which was so delicious and so abundant, that one and all partook of it, and abused the heretics for destroying a wealth of mango trees in the city. Buddha now performed the promised miracle. Flames of fire shot up from the upper part of his body, while streams of water flowed down from the lower part. The front part of his body gave up flames, and streams of water came down from the back. Taking three strides, he rose up to reach the world of the Thirty-three, to expand his *dhamma* to his mother. This was the miracle performed out of a necessity, and

probably the greatest miracle of all.

Another great miracle was performed by the Master to help the gardener Sumana, who had such great reverence and faith in him that as he was carrying five measures of jasmine flowers for the king, he conceived of a great desire to worship the Master with the flowers, though he knew that using the flowers for any other purpose than giving them to the king for whom they were intended, could even cost him his life or banishment. But he braved it, and as he threw handfuls of flowers as the Buddha approached with his retinue of monks, they remained suspended in the air like a canopy over his head. As he threw a few more handfuls, they descended like a curtain of a pavilion, and when all the flowers had been used, it was a regular gate of flowers for the Master to enter the city of Rājagṛiha. The citizens were filled with great wonder and paid great honour to the Master.

The story is interesting, as the wife of the gardener, learning from his husband, a simpleton, as to what he had done, and fearing the consequences, ran to the king to confess and beg pardon, little knowing that the king himself was a devout devotee of Buddha, who welcomed this with joy, and proceeding to the Master, reverently took him to his palace, to partake of his hospitality. The flowers remained in position all the time, and the king honoured the gardener for his great devotion to the Master. The only representation of this wonderful scene is from Amarāvātī on a coping slab. This performance of a miracle was out of compassion for the gardener, who ran the risk of royal displeasure, through his immense devotion to the Buddha.

In this as well as in the earlier story, whether it was the mango that the gardener was taking to the king, or the flowers, as in the next story, there is an echo of Kubjā, the maid in the royal household of Kamsa, carrying musk-perfumed sandal paste for the king, making it available for Krishṇa and Balarāma, whom she adored more as celestials come to the earth, and was rewarded by the former by just pulling her straight, ridding her of the crooked twist in the body, converting her into the most beautiful damsel on earth.

It is generally said that the future is revealed in the present. What one would be when grown up is easily observed in the propensities of the child itself. Judged from this also Buddha, as we know from incidents in his life, was not merely to become the Supremely Enlightened One, according to the assurance of the sooth-sayers, but also there were clear indications that he would become one of the greatest prophets the world had ever seen, possessing miraculous powers. As Kalidasa would put it *bhavo hi lokābhyudayaṃ tādṛṣām* or, as in the *Therīgāthā* itself, *bahūnam bata attāya māyā janayi gotamam* (*Therīgāthā* 162).

The moment he was born, the child was so determined, that he walked

seven steps forward, announced that this was his last birth on earth, and he would become the Supremely Enlightened. As he walked, lotuses sprang up to receive his feet at every stride. Two Nāgarājas brought heavenly water to bathe him.

There is a *saṁskāra* called *nishkramaṇa*, when a child is taken to the temple of the family deity after the third month. When Siddhārtha was so taken to the temple of the family deity of the Śākya, the deity bowed to the child to indicate the greatness of the future Buddha,

Like the wise men of the east that came to see the child Christ, the wisest of the old sages, Asita, bent with age, and with beard trailing, his matted locks tied up on his head, came to king Suddhodana to see his new-born baby. He took the child in his arms, and wept at the idea that being advanced in age, he would not live to listen to the words of wisdom of this child, when he would deliver the first sermon after his enlightenment in the Deer Park, near Banaras.

During the ploughing festival of the Śākya, Siddhārtha, even as a child, placed under the cool shade of a *jambū* tree, to keep him in comfort, went into a state of bliss, and a miracle happened here. The shade of the tree moved not, irrespective of the time of the day and the movement of the sun. The Śākya wondered at this miracle. Like the miracle of baby Kṛishṇa narrated in the *Bhāgavata*, here is a story of occurrences in the early childhood of Siddhārtha that indicated his future eminence as the Supremely Enlightened One to be.

In medieval sculpture, particularly from Bihar, the sculptors have taken special care to indicate the greatness of Buddha in a telling fashion. Normally in sculpture, the birth of Siddhārtha is indicated by a pair of feet on a silken garment held by the four Lokapālas, while in Gandhāra sculpture, prominence is given to Śakra among the Lokapālas to receive the child on the silken garment, a special noteworthy feature here being the child indicated in anthropomorphic form, born not in the normal way but issuing from right side of queen Māyā as she stood under the Sala tree in the Lumbinī garden. This miraculous birth excels all the scenes of birth of other *avatāras*, like even Rāma and Kṛishṇa, except of Sītā, who was not physically born at all, but still came into existence, thereby justifying her name Ayonijā. In medieval sculpture from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, there is a peculiar representation of Brahmā and even Viṣṇu of the trinity represented, along with the Lokapālas, to witness, and hail the birth of the future Buddha. Similarly, in a *parinirvāṇa* scene from Sārnāth, the eight Dikpālas including Agni, Vāyu, Niṛṛiti and Īśāna, apart from the usual four, Indra, Yama, Varuṇa and Kubera, are all shown hurrying on their respective vehicles, accompanied by more celestials and even important ones like Gaṇeśa on his mouse, Kārtikeya on his peacock, Brahmā on his

swan, and so forth, all to have a last glimpse of Buddha before he passed away. This is a great tribute, as it were, paid by the Brahmanical gods to Buddha. It may be interpreted in two ways, both as a friendly gesture from all the gods of the Brahmanical pantheon, realising Buddha to be an incarnation of Vishṇu himself, as he was also by this time included in the Brahmanical pantheon as an *avatāra*, or it may be understood as the claim of the Buddhists that Buddha was superior to all other celestials ; but as there was already Buddha's presence among the ten incarnations of Vishṇu the former explanation cannot be ruled out.

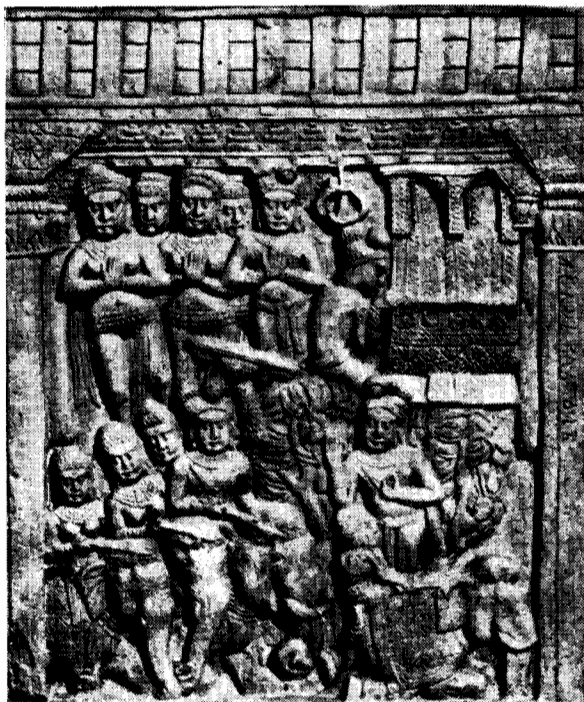
The most interesting is that Buddha was like an eternity. It was not only when he was alive that he could perform the highest miracle, the miracle of Śrāvastī but even after his *parinirvāṇa*, there was still the miracle of his showing his feet to Mahākāśyapa, one of his esteemed disciple. The story goes that after the death of Buddha, his body was wrapped in the finest cloth a hundred times and the entire body was covered to be put in a sarcophagus, filled with sweet scented oil and placed on a large funeral pyre of sandalwood, but even as they attempted to light the fire, it would not burn. Anuruddha, one of the wisest disciples wondered and perceived the cause to be the delay in the arrival of Mahākāśyapa, whom still the body of the Buddha awaited. When Mahākāśyapa at last arrived with a number of monks, went round the funeral pyre reverently, and wished he could see again the glorious feet of the Buddha, lo and behold, the feet appeared emerging from out of all that bound them, so that he could touch the feet with his head and do reverence. After this there was no difficulty in lighting the funeral pyre.

There were eight kings who claimed the corporeal relics of the Buddha, and threatened a battle, if each were not given a share of the precious relics of Buddha. At that moment, the Brahmin Droṇa mediated. He admonished the princes, and told them how unworthy it was of them to fight over the relics of one who had all his life taught patience, forbearance, affection and love. It was unworthy of them to receive the relics in the hands that held weapons to kill. Dividing the relics into eight portions, he gave them each a share. Satisfied and pleased, the kings reverently took the relics in golden caskets and carried them each to their own realm.

There are representations of the division of the relics in sculpture both from Amarāvātī and from Bhārhut. The most important factor here is that there was reiteration, after the passing away of the Master that the greatest lesson that the Buddha taught to the world was universal love and affection, forbearance and patience. The *Upanishads* always end a text with *om śāntiḥ śntiḥ śāntiḥ*. Similarly the end of Buddha and the quarrel over his corporeal relics re-established the doctrine of peace and affection, eternal peace, complete conquest of anger and the utmost forbearance.

The teaching of Buddha is almost epitomised as it were in a single short reply that he gave to Kāśī Bharadvāja from the village Ekanala in the vicinity of Rājagṛiha. When this Brahmin was engaging himself in a ploughing festival with a large number of ploughmen taking part in it, Buddha, who knew by his divine insight that he could convert Kāśī Bharadvāja to faith in the *dhamma*, at once presented himself on the spot. The Master's effulgence and personality made everyone rush to him to pay him obeisance. Kāśī Bharadvāja, however, was sceptical, and felt that this great monk was idling his time while, if only he worked, he could make the world so much the better by being at the top of it guide it like a king. He asked the Master why he did not plough, sow and reap and eat food, the fruit thereof, like himself and his companions, who were using the plough to the best advantage to enjoy the agricultural fruit of their labour. Buddha at once replied that he also ploughed, sowed and reaped. Kāśī Bharadvāja wondered how this could be true when Buddha had neither the plough nor a goad nor the bullocks. Buddha explained his position clearly that faith was the seed he sowed, devotion the rain, modesty the plowshare, the mind the tie of the yoke, mindfulness the goad, energy his team of bullocks, leading to safety to the place where there is no sorrow. This was a greater fruit and the plough here was of a greater consequence than in mere agricultural labour. Kāśī Bharadvāja was so impressed by this discourse that he immediately entered the order of the Buddha. The story is a telling one, as, even as prince Siddhārtha, Buddha had without mention of it to the Śākyas, make them understand, through the miracle under the *jambū* tree, that his mode of ploughing, sowing and reaping, the final fruit of the highest contemplation, was superior to their mere physical labour.

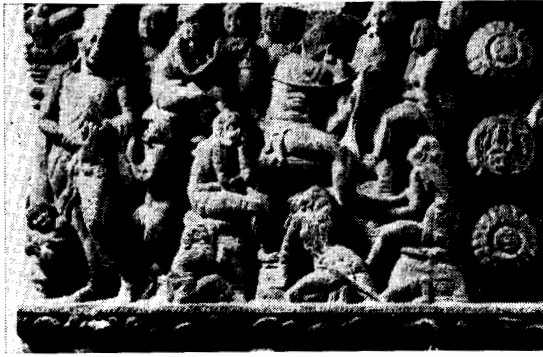
The teachings of Buddha in his every day talk to all those whom he met, apart from his regular discourses and the great *suttas* like the *parinibbānāsutta*, are gems of learning, conveyed in the simplest form, to the humblest and the highest, as his teachings were direct and appealing, easily understood and appealing to the heart, and consequently that brought the largest gathering of followers that any Master ever had. It is no wonder that Buddha's teachings of love and affection, selflessness, wisdom, overcoming of all modes of sorrow and suffering for the final realisation of a state of bliss, has found its way almost all over Asia. Buddha's personal conduct (*chāritra*) and immaculate example serve, more than his precept, to inspire his great followers to follow his footsteps, and tread a great path that he held out for all humanity. It is usually the *kalyāṇaguṇas* or the great qualities of *avatāras* like Rāma and Kṛishṇa, that are narrated with the utmost exuberance. It is these again that distinguish Buddha his *ananta kalyāṇaguṇas*, the never-ending noble qualities. It is these that made Buddha the greatest of *mahāpurushas* that he was. □



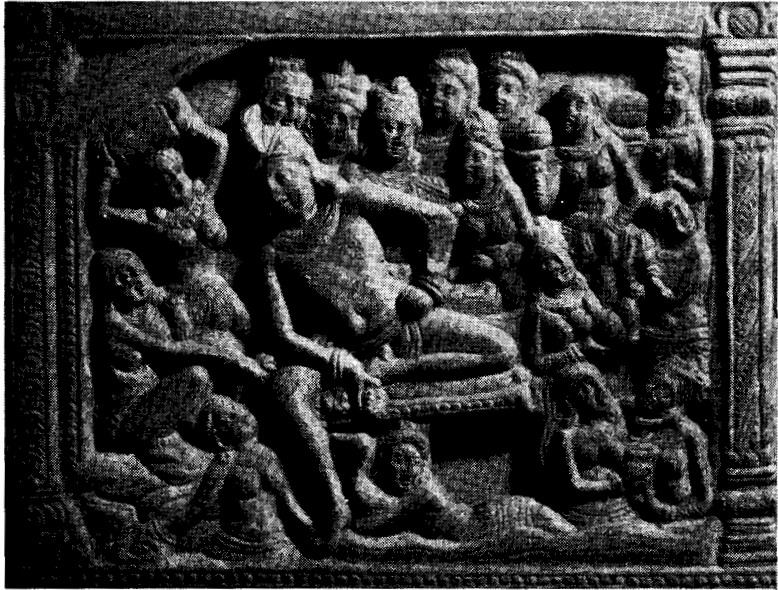
1. *Ajātaśatru's visit to Buddha, Śunga, 2nd century B.C., Bhārhut, Indian Museum, Calcutta.*



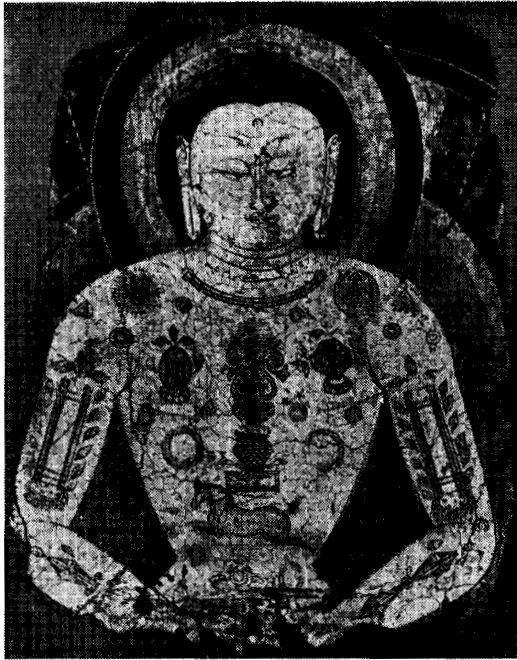
2. *The death of the master is revealed to Ajātaśatru through a scroll with the principal scenes of Buddha's life painted on it, 5th-6th century A.D., Qyzil, Central Asia.*



3. *Prince Siddhārtha in the harem holding to the three cords or bonds in life, Sātavāhana, 2nd century A.D., Amarāvati, Madras Museum, Madras.*



4. *Prince Siddhārtha in the harem amidst pleasures enjoying the stream of life, Ikshvāku, 2nd-3rd century A.D., Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, National Museum.*



5. *Buddha with symbols marked on his body as mahāpuruṣa lakṣhaṇas, 4th-5th century A.D., Central Asian mural, Balavaste, National Museum.*



6. *Subjugation of Nalagiri, Sītavāhana, 2nd century A.D., Amarāvati, Madras Government Museum, Madras.*



7. *Subjugation of Angulimāla, Sātavāhana, 2nd century A.D., Amarāvati, Madras Government Museum, Madras.*



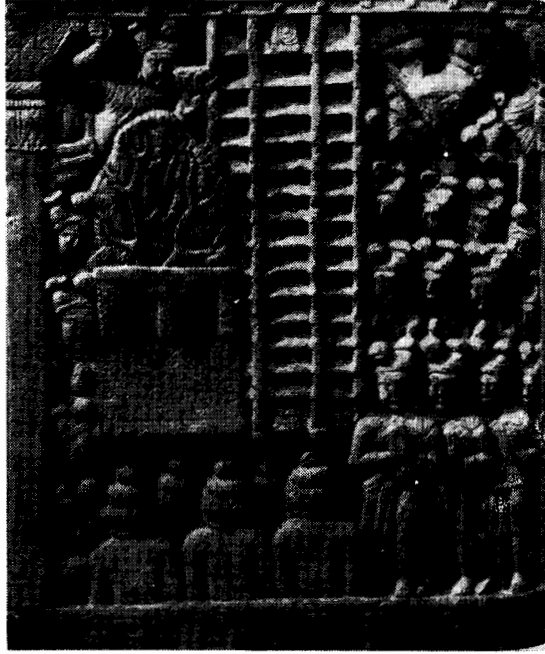
8. *Conversion of Yaśa and his friends, Sātavāhana, 2nd century A.D., Amarāvati, Madras Government Museum, Madras.*



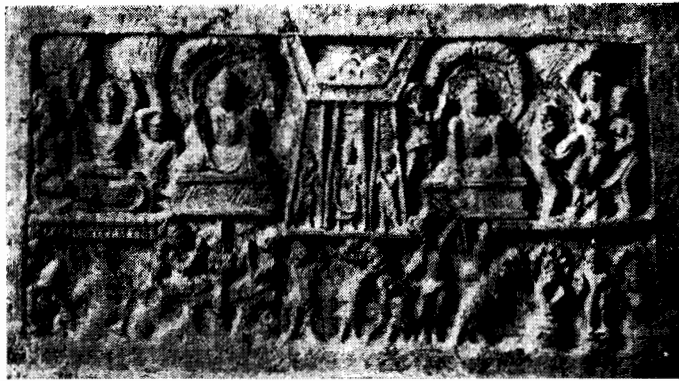
9. *Renunciation of Prince Siddhārtha, Sīlavāhana, 2nd century A.D., Amarāvati, British Museum.*



10. *Descent of Buddha, Ikshvāku, 2nd-3rd century A.D., Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Museum.*



11. *Descent of Buddha, Śūṅga, 2nd century B.C.,
Bhārhut, Indian Museum, Calcutta.*



12. *Descent of Buddha, Kushāṇa, 1st century A.D., Mathurā
Museum, Mathurā.*



13. *Descent of Buddha, 10th century A.D., Bangkok, Thailand.*



14. *Chankrama, Śuṅga, 2nd century B.C., Bhārhut, Indian Museum, Calcutta.*



15. *The walking Buddha, 12th century A.D., Bangkok, Thailand.*



16. *Indra's visit, Gandhāra, 2nd century A.D., Indian Museum, Calcutta.*



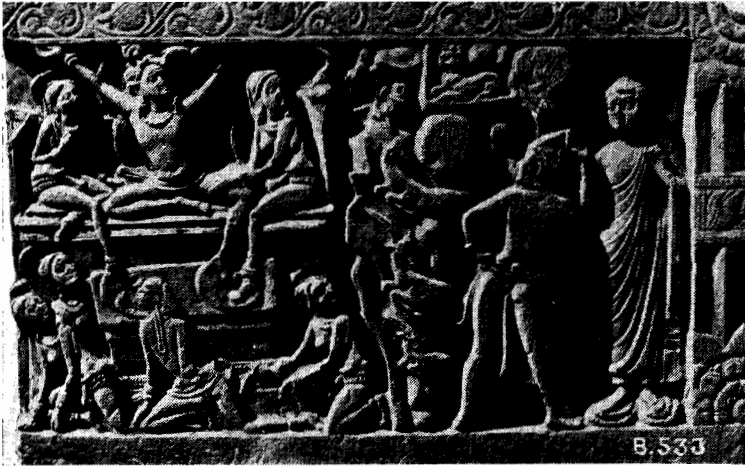
17. *Gajendramoksha, Gupta, 5th century A.D., Deogarh.*



18. *Elephant adoring Buddha, Śuṅga, 1st century B.C., Bodhgaya.*



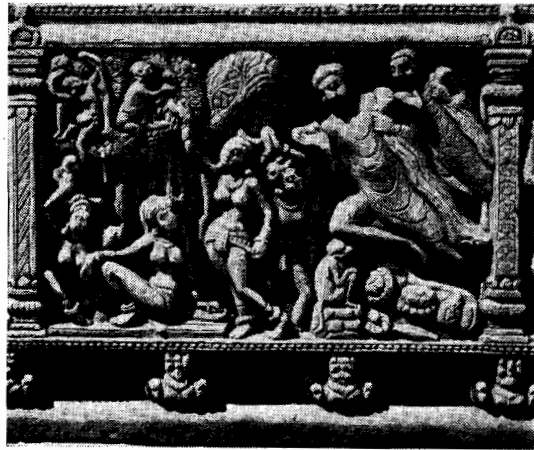
19. Honey offered by monkey at Vaisālī, Śuīnga,
2nd century B.C., Sāñchī.



20. Buddha subjugating Nāga Apalāla, Ikshvāku, 2nd-3rd
century A.D., Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Museum.



21. *Buddha's visit to Yaśodharā, Sālavāhana, 2nd century A.D., Amarāvālī, British Museum.*



22. *Conversion of Nanda, Ikshvāku, 2nd-3rd century A.D., Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Museum.*



23. *Conversion of Nanda, Gandhāra, 2nd century A.D., National Museum.*



24. *Parinirvāṇa of Buddha, Ananda standing beside him, Gall vihāra at Polonnāruwā, 12th century A.D., Ceylon.*



25. *Buddha protected by Nāga Muchilinda, Ikshvāku, Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Museum.*



26. *Buddha protected by Nāga Muchilinda, 12th century A.D., Bangkok, Thailand.*



27. *Conversion of the Jaṭilas, Śuṅga, 2nd century B.C., Sāñchī*



28. *Buddha crossing river Nairāñjan, Sāta-vāhana, 2nd century A.D., Amarāvotī, British Museum.*



29. *Swan circumambulating Buddha clockwise, Kushāṇa, 2nd century A.D., Mathurā, National Museum.*



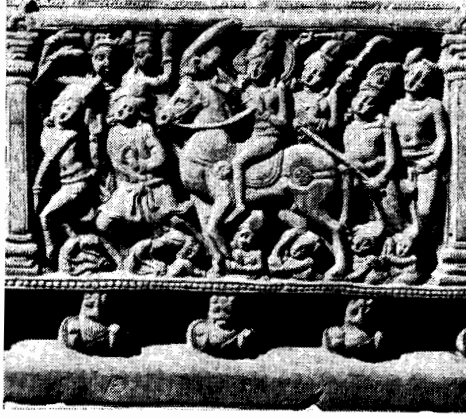
30. *Buddha with flame on ushṇisha, 12th century A.D., Bangkok, Thailand.*



31. *Buddha with elaborate halo, Gupta, 5th century A.D., National Museum.*



32. *Buddha and the barking dog, Gandhāra, 2nd century A.D., Indian Museum, Calcutta.*



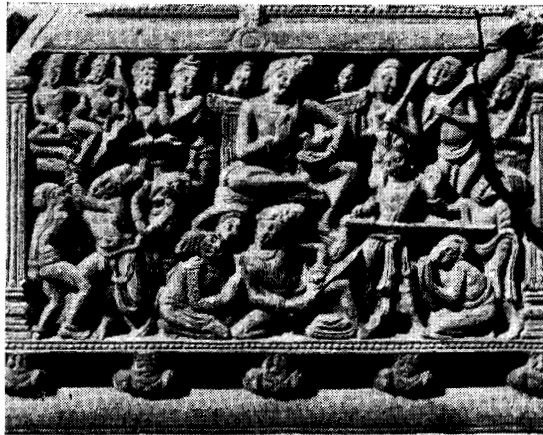
33. *Siddhārtha's nishkramaṇa, celestial holding the hoofs of Kaṇṭaka, Ikshvaku, 2nd-3rd century A.D., Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Museum.*



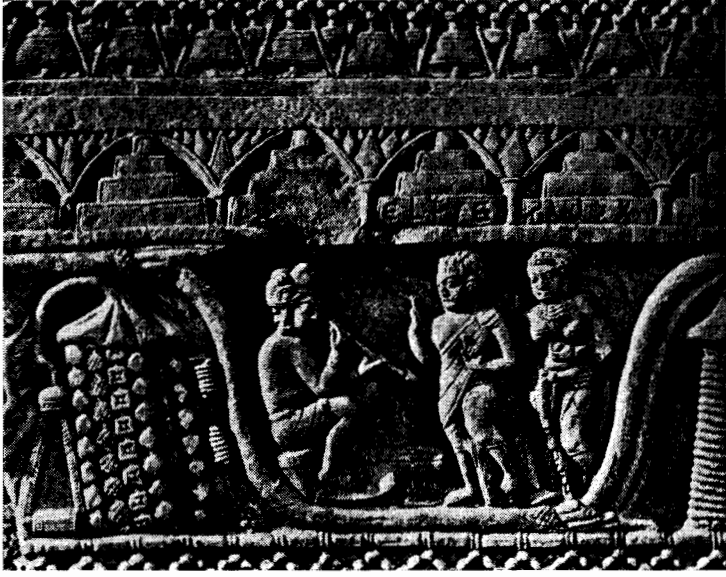
34. *The offering of Kuśa grass, Gandhāra, 3rd century A.D., Indian Museum, Calcutta.*



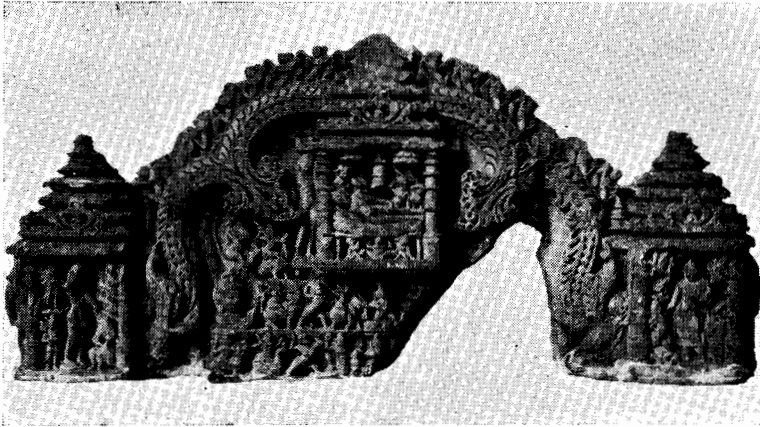
35. *Chhaddanta Jātaka, Sātavāhana, 2nd century A.D., Amarāvati, Madras Museum.*



36. *Śibi Jātaka, Ikshvāku, 2nd-3rd century A.D., Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Museum.*



37. *Mahājanaka jātaka*, Śuīnga, 2nd century A.D., Bhārhut, Indian Museum, Calcutta.



38. *The parinirvāṇa of Buddha witnessed by Gods*, Gurjara Pratihāra, 9th century A.D., Sārnāth, Sarnath Museum.



39. *Birth of Buddha witnessed by Gods, Pāla, 10th century A.D., Bihar, Indian Museum, Calcutta.*



40. *Division of the relics, Śūnga, 2nd century B.C., Bhārhut, National Museum.*



41. *Division of the relics, Sātavāhana, 2nd century A.D.
Amarāvati, Madras Museum.*



42. *Buddha and the ploughman, Śuṅga, 1st century*