

BUDDHISM AND BUDDHIST LITERATURE IN CENTRAL ASIA

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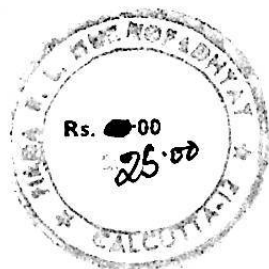
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FOREWORD

It gives me much pleasure to write a few words in appreciation of the excellent work done by Dr. Miss Kshanika Saha who has dealt with a subject, in which spade-work was done by the late savant Dr. P. C. Bagchi in course of his preparation of the "Le Canon Bouddhique en Chine".

In the early century of Christian era Central Asia (including Eastern Turkestan), though a desert had a few oases where grew up Buddhist monasteries, in which resided not only the local tribal monks but also Indian monks hailing mostly from Gandhara and Kashmir along with a few monks of Western India. The cultural colonisation of Central Asia took place during the reign of the Kushanas. Emperor Kaniška was the most enlightened ruler. He espoused the cause of Buddhism and helped the propagation of the religion in Gandhara, of which Taxila was the most important centre, where were built several monasteries for the residence of the Buddhist monks. The remains of temples and monasteries have been described in detail by Sir John Marshall in his book on Taxila. It was at Kaniška's instance that Buddhism was propagated and popularised in Gandhara, Kashmir and as far as Central Asia. What Emperor Aśoka did for establishing Buddhism all over India and in Ceylon, Emperor Kaniška did the same for the countries extending from Gandhara to Central Asia.

It was from Central Asia that Buddhism was carried by the Indian monks on one side to China, wherefrom it passed on to Korea, Japan, and the other side to Tibet and Mongolia including the Buriats and Kalmuks of the Russian empire. Hence Buddhism became one day an all East Asiatic religion and this was effected not by military power but by love of culture and firm faith in the teachings of Bhagavan Buddha.

By far the best contribution, I should state that Dr. Saha's exhaustive accounts of the Buddhist literature discovered in Central Asia (including Eastern Turkestan) written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Kuchean, Khotanese and other dialects. She has also laid under contribution the documents discovered at Niya, Endere and Loulan.

Nalinaksha Dutt

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