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CONTENTS

I. ARTICLES

1. The Female Renunciants of Sri Lanka:
the *Dasasilamattawa*, by Lowell W. Bloss 7
2. Les Réponses des Pudgalavādin aux Critiques
des Écoles Bouddhiques, by Thich Thien Chau 33
3. Tsong kha pa's Understanding of Prāsaṅgika Thought,
by Lobsang Dargyay 55
4. Who Gets to Ride in the Great Vehicle? Self-Image
and Identity Among the Followers of
the Early Mahāyāna, by Paul Harrison 67
5. Shingon Mikkyō's Twofold *Maṇḍala*: Paradoxes
and Integration, by Minoru Kiyota 91
6. Yung-ming's Syncretism of Pure Land and Ch'an,
by Heng-ching Shih 117
7. Pre-Buddhist Elements in Himalayan Buddhism: The
Institution of Oracles, by Ramesh Chandra Tewari 135

II. BOOK REVIEWS

1. *Essays in Gupta Culture*, ed. Bardwell Smith
(Holly Baker Reynolds) 157
2. *Nāgārjunas Filosofiske Vaerker and Miscellanea Buddhica*,
by Chr. Lindtner
(Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti) 161
3. *Tantric Concept of Bodhicitta: A Buddhist Experiential
Philosophy*, by Minoru Kiyota
(Dale Todaro) 164
4. *Zen and Western Thought*, by Masao Abe
(Paul J. Griffiths) 168

II. REVIEWS

Essays in Gupta Culture, edited by Bardwell L. Smith. Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1983. xvii + 360 pp.; 72 black and white plates. N.p.

India's Golden Age is the Gupta period, lasting about 200 years from the fourth to the sixth centuries C.E., a time when political peace secured by the Gupta dynasty, centered in the Gangetic basin, produced an unparalleled urbanity in which art, literature, religion, learning, and science flourished and reached "classical" perfection. The ten essays comprising this interdisciplinary volume address certain aspects of Gupta culture, and were first presented at a 1977 symposium sponsored by Carleton College, Northfield, MN. The essays are grouped into three overlapping thematic categories: political power and its legitimation (Narain, Asher, Stein); religious pluralism (Basham, O'Flaherty, Gokhale); and literary and artistic expressions (Miller, Ramanujan and Cutler, Williams, Spink). Framing the essays are a general introduction written by A.L. Basham and two bibliographic essays by B. Smith and E. Zelliot. A brief summary of each essay will serve to introduce the volume's reach and range.

The Gupta period has often been heralded as an age of religious toleration and the Gupta kings extolled as generous patrons of a variety of religious sects. Using numismatic and other hard data, A.K. Narain surveys religious pluralism under each of the Gupta kings and argues that phenomena of religious liberty and tolerance, rather than being "bound up with the religious system and political theories of ancient India," were "the results of a consciously followed policy by the king or the state" to legitimate their authority and to maintain social order. Concluding that toleration was not an essential part of the king's religious practice or of his *rājadharma*, Narain urges scholars to give credit to individual kings who were in fact tolerant when they need not have been.

F.M. Asher proposes that one factor motivating royal patronage of certain lithic images was an awareness that religious art could serve as political and historical allegory and hence could enhance, by means of analogy, particular people or events. He gives as examples of possible correlation: 1) Viṣṇu as the Boar rescuing the earth, at Udayagiri, and Candragupta II's consoli-

dation of the empire; 2) Viṣṇu as the Dwarf traversing the world in three strides and subduing the demon Bali, at Lajampat in Kathmandu, and Mānadeva's temporal conquests; and 3) the Descent of the Ganges relief at Mamallapuram and the Pallava king's control over water and irrigation. Asher admits that the evidence is circumstantial, and yet, his interpretations appear both apt and tenable.

B. Stein's essay, "Mahānavamī: Medieval and Modern Kingly Ritual in South India," moves beyond the Gupta period to note some of the continuities and discontinuities of Gupta conceptions of kingship in post-classical times among the Vijayanagar kings and their successors. In the Gupta period, Stein says, *dharmasāstra* writers desacralized the king and prohibited the great Vedic sacrifices where kings acquired and displayed their kingly attributes. But whatever divine qualities were lost to the individual king accrued, eventually, to the institution of kingship: sacred kingship replaced the sacred king. In medieval South India, public kingly rituals, such as the "Great Nine Day" festival, were reinstated. However, in the medieval period, the differences between gods and kings did not dissolve in ritual as in the pre-Gupta period, but rather gods and kings complemented each other and together ritually established and maintained "the sacred condition." This essay, whose thesis Stein has established in greater detail in some of his other writings, appears somewhat out of place in this collection.

Eschewing the Sarnath Buddhas, the Boar incarnation at Udayagiri, the Ajanta murals, and Kālidāsa's poems and plays, A.L. Basham declares that the "finest" and "most typical" relic of the Gupta period is the Mandasor inscription of the silk-weavers, composed by a "hack-poet," telling how a no longer extant Sūrya temple came to be built. Basham concludes that this Sanskrit courtly poem "reflects not only religious faith, but also love of the good things of this world," and that in it, "we can see the best qualities of the period—loyalty, fellowship, local patriotism, and honest pride in what one has achieved." Written with wit, grace, and unobtrusive erudition, Basham's essay shows how a small artifact encapsulates the ethos of an era; it is the central gem of this collection, and one of the best examples of exciting cultural-historical writing I have encountered.

In her article, "The Image of the Heretic in the Gupta *Purāṇas*," W. O'Flaherty, like A.K. Narain, sounds a note of realism, albeit a different one, about the Guptas' alleged tolerance. She argues that in the Gupta period, Hindu attitudes to-

wards heretics and atheists became embittered. The Guptas, with their "need to maintain superficial political unity," were driven, she says, "to play an uneasy game of impartial patronage." Thus, even though the Gupta kings did patronize Buddhists, the Gupta *purāṇas*, at the same time, "excoriated" Buddhists, especially in the myth of Viṣṇu's incarnation as the Buddha. In this "anti-Buddhist" myth, Viṣṇu becomes the Buddha in order to delude the wicked into forsaking the Vedas and hence to insure their eventual extermination. Similar to Asher, O'Flaherty also sees in the Gupta-era *purāṇas* a political allegorical thrust: the writers' hope that the Gupta kings would destroy historical heretics of various stripes just as Viṣṇu-Kalki does in myth.

B.G. Gokhale presents an overview of the condition and state of Buddhism in the Gupta period. From his examination of votive inscriptions, reports from Chinese travellers, art works, and Buddhist texts, Gokhale indicates that while older Buddhist centers were in decay, newer centers, such as Nalanda, flourished and enjoyed royal patronage, though monastic centers increasingly came to have no organic relationship to the surrounding lay population as they became part of the emerging "feudal" economy of the Gupta state. Although Buddhism maintained its philosophical vigor, producing *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* among others, Gokhale says that as a "religion," it was on the "defensive, increasingly overshadowed by emerging Tantric cults." During the Gupta age, Buddhist religion, in Gokhale's opinion, "seems to have been well past its original social purpose."

Focusing on dramaturgy, B.S. Miller notes that in an age usually described in terms of social harmony, the five major Sanskrit dramas of the Gupta period explore and display, to a remarkable degree, conflicting social values: stylized love dramas pit the demands of social duty against passionate love, while dramas of politics focus on the conflicting demands of statecraft and social duty. Conflicts are not left to stand, however, for one of the basic characteristics of Sanskrit drama, in contrast to Greek drama, is the attempt to reconcile "life's multiple possibilities."

A.K. Ramanujan and N. Cutler in "From Classicism to Bhakti" show how the saints of the Tamil devotional tradition were heirs to two classicisms: Vedic bardic poetry and Tamil Sangam erotic and heroic poetry, which interweave to form a distinctly Tamil devotional poetry. Focusing more on the heroic than the erotic and on Vaiṣṇava saints, they trace the evolution of the *pātāṇ*—the elegy or praise poem of heroes and kings—in

Sangam poetry into the devotional hymns of praise in Nammālvār's poetry. Progressively the king "slot" in the Tamil classical poems becomes filled by the deity, the hero's deeds become the deity's mythic exploits, and the hero's ancestors appear as the deity's *avatāras*. The elements that formerly signified heroism (or eroticism) are transposed into the new key of devotional love.

Is Ajanta part of Gupta art? This question animates J. Williams' study, "Vākāṭaka Art and the Gupta Mainstream," a reconsideration and ultimate rejection of the label "Vākāṭaka-Gupta" for the fifth century style of North and Central Indian art. From certain peculiarities in Ajanta style as contrasted with the Gupta mainstream and as compared to works in the Vidarbha region of northern Maharashtra under the Vākāṭakas, Williams boldly hypothesizes that the Vidarbha Vākāṭaka "idiom" is a "principal counterforce to the Gupta 'mainstream' if at times related"; it explains "much of what is peculiar to Ajanta" and some of the non-Gupta elements in the Western Deccan and in the early medieval period of Central India.

Turning his attention to the cave art at Elephanta, W.M. Spink contends that the Great Cave is earlier than generally recognized and is connected with the artistic tradition of the Gupta period. Specifically, he argues that it is not a seventh or eighth century work, but rather a circa 535-550 C.E. monument, a royal benefaction of King Kriṣṇarāja of the early Kalacuri dynasty. He sees links between the Mahāyāna caves at Ajanta and the Śaivite caves at Elephanta; both are products of one genealogical line: Hariṣeṇa, the patron of the Ajanta caves, is the great-great-grandfather of Kriṣṇarāja, the patron of Elephanta. Spink uses detailed art historical, epigraphic, and numismatic evidence, supplemented by the seventh century tale of princes, *Daśakumāracarita* by Daṇḍin, in support of his complex historical reconstruction, dating, and interpretation.

Following the ten essays are two lengthy bibliographic essays, one on religion and art by B.L. Smith and the other on history and literature by E. Zelliot. Both are especially helpful, providing a reasonably comprehensive selection of English language books and articles of varying levels of difficulty and from a variety of scholarly perspectives. Particularly important, the number of entries neither overwhelms the newcomer nor shortchanges the more advanced student. The bibliographic essays are one of the major strengths of this volume, making it a book that teaches and guides at the same time as it challenges more standard works and conventional wisdom, knowledge of which the volume assumes.

Written by leading scholars in South Asian Studies, this is a strong collection of essays which increases in many different ways understanding of the Gupta age and its influence. One would be hard pressed to find anywhere else a better advanced introduction not only to Gupta culture, but also to the interdisciplinary study of Indian civilization.

Holly Baker Reynolds

Nāgārjunas Filosofiske Vaerker, oversat og indledet af Chr. Lindtner, Indiske Studier II, København: Akademisk Forlag, 1982. 263 pages; *Miscellanea Buddhica*, edited by Chr. Lindtner, Indiske Studier V, Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1985. 221 pages.

These two books belong to the same series (*Indiske Studier*) in which Professor Chr. Lindtner published his valuable *Nagarjuniana, Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, as the fourth volume. This last book has been reviewed by us in this same Journal (Vol. 8, No. 1, 1985, pp. 115-117).

Nagarjunas Filosofiske Vaerker contains an Introduction in Danish in which Lindtner gives a succinct exposition of Buddhism and Nāgārjuna's system, and also special information about the *Bodhicittavivarāṇa*, *Catuḥstava*, (*Lokatīstava* and *Acintyastava*), *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, *Sūnyatāsaptati* and *Vigrahavyāvartanī*. The principal part of the book is the Danish translation of the mentioned treatises. The Tibetan text, with Sanskrit fragments of *Bodhicittavivarāṇa* and *Sūnyatāsaptati*, the Sanskrit text of *Catuḥstava* (both hymns) and the Sanskrit text and Tibetan text of *Vigrahavyāvartanī* has been edited by Lindtner in *Nagarjuniana*. The Sanskrit text of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* constitutes the first Appendix of this book. The second Appendix is the Tibetan text of the *Sūnyatāsaptativṛtti* and the third Appendix is the Danish translation of the Chinese version of the *Pú tí zǐ liáng lūn Bodhisahhāra(ka)?*.

Miscellanea Buddhica is a collection of four articles edited by Lindtner, who is also the author of one of them. These articles are:

- a. J.W. de Jong: Le Gaṇḍavy ūha et La loi de la naissance et de la mort.