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The Maha Bodhi Society of India a Unique Treasury of Buddhist Materials on the Life of Buddha:

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Resurrection of Indian Buddhism and Maha Bodhi Society of India:

At present Buddhist expounds a third of modern world and there is no doubt it is not a small achievement of Buddhism. India was the central point of it. Unfortunately Buddhism had been fluctuating from time to time in the seed land of India specially after demolishing the Nalanda Mahavihara ancient Indian Monastic University. Indian Renaissance have been come down by the great Sociologist Raja Ram Mohan Roy who was the first person selected to visit England as an Indian representative. India opens a new chapter of its own culture, education spirituality etc. In the same line Buddhism again wake up by the intellectual persons specially the great archeologist Rajendra Lal Mitra who was a pioneer scholar of oriental studies and the renounce Sanskrit Scholar, archivist, historian of Bengal Haraprasad Shastri who innovated *charjapada*.¹ After discovering the *Ashokia Lipi* by James Prinsep a British antiquary and colonial administrator,² Rajendra Lal Mitra had deeply moved in Buddhism and presented many valuable works like as *Bibliotheca Indica*, *Buddha Gaya: The Great Buddhist Temple*, *the Hermitage of Sakya Muni*, *Lalitavistar Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal etc.* Ashok inscriptions are the first legible evidence of Buddhism.

The Maha Bodhi Society of India was established in May 1891 C. E. for restoring the ancient Buddhist sites of Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar etc after their demolition. Its head quarter is in Calcutta for better administrative necessity in the then Calcutta under the British Rule.¹ Prior to that, a section of erudite scholars in Calcutta had been aware of eminence of the Buddha. *The Light of Asia* by Edwin Arnold was published in 1879 and the English knowing erudite persons in Calcutta became aware of Buddhism.³ The great Bengali dramatist Girish Chandra Ghosh formed a drama by name 'Buddhadeva Carita' to translate the text *The Light of Asia* in 1887 A.D. During that time Buddha and his compassion had been reflected deeply on the people's mind by this drama.

¹. The founder of Brāhma-samāj Raja Ram Mohan Roy's date of birth is 22th May 1772 and died 27th September 1833 A. D.; Rajendra Lal Mitra's date of birth is 16th February 1822 and died 26th July 1891 A. D.; Haraprasad Shastri's date of birth is 6th December 1853 and died 17th November 1931 A. D.

². James Prinsep (20th August 1799- 22th April 1840) was the founding editor of the journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

³. The East World as well as Asian countries is influenced by the light of the Gautama the Buddha's teachings and his philosophy.

About the Buddha awareness the great archeologist Dr. Ramdas Sen (1845-1887) at Baharampur in Murshidabad, deserve attention as a Bengali scholar interested in Sanskrit and Pali literatures like *Lalitavistar*, *Mahāvamsa* and other original Buddhist scriptures. Regarding his scholarship may read thus: “Ramdas Sen, Whose essays on some of the principal poets of India have excited great interest among Sanskrit scholars, has just published a second volume; called Historical essays (*Aitihāsika Rahasya*) 2 an English translation of the essays or a selection from them, would be welcomed by all friends of oriental literature.”⁴ He wrote the Life of Buddha and his Religious teachings “*Buddhadeva: tāhār jiban o dharmaniti*” in Bengali, 1892. In this text he gave a brief account of *Shākya Vamsha* with textual reference for understanding the Buddhist scholar and common people as well.

In nineteenth century had a great land mark to resurrect Buddhism and two massive pillars of this century were Kripasarana Mahasthavir and Anagarika Dharmapala. The two historical Buddhist institutions the Maha Bodhi Society of India⁵ and Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha (Bengal Buddhist Association) were founded by these two great personalities.

Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) took an important measure to publish Journal of the Maha Bodhi Society in order to draw attention of Buddhists in Europe, China, Japan and South East Asia where Buddhism had been prevailed thoroughly and also that in respect to the then English knowing Indians and in the West.⁶ As a result of that several publications in English had been collected in the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta either by purchase or by exchange. As an ancillary section its Library was set up. The Maha Bodhi library took therefore preserved the olden works of the East and the West on Buddhism and those may be regarded as rear collections in India. For the last 125 years the Maha Bodhi Society Library attracts the Buddhist scholars and international thinkers with no distinction. That may be regarded probably the oldest library in preserving the books on the Buddhist and Buddhism in the then Calcutta.

The Maha Bodhi Journals of India had an aim to spread widely in the Buddhist world, since the last decade in the nineteenth century. The Indians therefore became aware of the Gautama Buddha as a master teacher among the Indians saints. The Maha Bodhi library took therefore preserved the olden works of the East and the West on Buddhism and those may be regarded as rear collections in India. For the last 125 years the Maha Bodhi Society Library attracts the Buddhist scholars and international thinkers with no distinction.

Evidently the Maha Bodhi Journal preserved multiple records of Bengal since its publication with reference to Buddhism. At the same time the Maha Bodhi Library in Calcutta flourished with numerous important records of those

⁴ . Published in The Academy (London) Feb. 24.1877. It is quoted from the author’s text.

⁵ . in the history of modern Buddhism, no other Society has accomplished grater results within the short periods of two years since its origination, than the Maha Bodhi Society. The first memorable event in its progressive career is the holding of the international Conference at Buddha Gaya on October 31. 1891, almost simultaneously with the preliminary conference of the World’s Parliament of Religious in Chicago.” *The Maha Bodhi Centenary Volume: 1891-1991*. p- 73.

⁶ . Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala a Srilankan Buddhist took measures to reclaim the Maha Bodhi Temple. Prior to that, its surroundings with the initiative of Rajendra Lal Mitra since 1822 were reclaimed. In this respect Bajido the ruler of Myanmar British Burma along with the Second Saṅgharāj of Chattagram, Acarya Purnyacara Candramohan Mahāsthavir took efforts to developed inspite of the authority of Shivagiri (1822-1884) a Brahman *Mahanta*.

Again 1874 Midan the Burma ruler had sent a group of representative for renovation of Mahabodhi Temple. The British India Government requested to Rajendra Lal Mitra to visit and report. He reported that Buddha *mūrti* (icon) was not identical to the olden one. The Government of India entrusted General Cunningham and Rajendrelal Mitra to reinstate the original Buddha image accordingly. (*Dhammacakkam*; 2451 B. E. Buddhapūrnimā Mahotsav Smārak, 2007 Ed. by Bhisku Satyapal, Buddha Tri-Ratna Mission, New Delhi.).

days. Those speak about the revival of Buddhism in India and abroad as well. It may be regarded as store house in preservation of Buddhism flourished since the nineteenth century C.E.

In this regard a friend of Anagarika Dharmapala, Babu Neel Comal Mukherji may deserve mention. In this respect Rai Bahadur Sarat Candra Das, an author of *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow* published the Journal of the Buddhist Text Society in 189, after his return from Tibet. Also by then Rajendralal Mitra and Haraprashad Shastri collected Buddhist manuscripts from Nepal and catalogued them in the Asiatic Society.⁷ In 24th May 1924 mention an article was published in the Maha Bodhi Society Journal a memoriam of Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee. He was attached to Maha Bodhi Society since beginning and he was the First President of the Maha Bodhi Society. After its registration according to the Society Act under the British rule in 1915-16 he was honored by the then Buddhists a title *Samasambuddha Gana Chakravarti*.

Besides that the Asiatic Society Calcutta and the Maha Bodhi Society of India may claim the olden libraries for preservation of Buddhist literature and history in English and in Pali. The nucleus of Maha Bodhi Society Library had come forth earlier with a reading room. It also preserves a full set of Tibetan Kanjur *bka' gyur* (Lhasa Zhol Edition, xylograph at the base settlement of Potala donated by H. H. Dalai Lama XIV).

Entrance of Buddhist records in Europe:

Thomas William Rhys Davids (1843 to 1922 A. D.) and Mrs. C. A. F. Rhys Davids endeavored to bring forth the Pali Tripitakas.⁸ Some Buddhists of Ceylon (Srilanka) being inspired by Reverend Atramulle Shree Dhamma Rama, T. W. Rhys Davids was inspired in Buddhism c. 1865 C. E. He thereafter came in touch of Venerable Sumangal Nayaka and Thera Subhati Nayaka Thera. There after he could manage to collect the *Tripataka* in Singhalese script in order to carry them to London and established the Pali Text Society, London with the assistance of Max Muller and others Pali knowing crudités there. In this respect Mrs. Rhys Davids (1857-1942) venture a new approach to publish the Buddhist *Tripitaka* with English translation. Thereby Buddhist literature had been progressively developed all over the world. Its impact spread reciprocally among the learned in Calcutta. Even, a section among Indians holds that Gautama the Buddha had been an imaginary

⁷. a. Rajendralal Mitra (1822-91) was an eminent scholar well verse in Sanskrit, Persian, Urdu and Hindi. He was the liberian of the Asiatic Society since 1846. Thus he could publish a large number of articles and important books like *Buddhist Sanskrit Literature of Nepal*. Rabindranath Tagor was inspired by his said work and presented several ideas in verses from his Buddhistic vision. His contributions could add fuel in the awaking of Buddhist literary of since the middle of the nineteenth century. Regarding Rajendra Lal Mitra Poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote accordingly in his *Jibansmṛti*, Memoirs of Life. (Rabindra Racanavali, Vol-9. P-496. 1396, B. S. Popular Edition).

b. Mahamahapadhyaya Haraprashad Sastri (1853-1931) had been inspired as and when he was entrusted to catalogue of hues number of Buddhist manuscript belonging to the Asiatic Society of Calcutta and Gaekwad Oriental Institute, Borada. There by contribution of Mm. Haraprashad Sastri in academic pursued could encourage the learners to know what Buddhism was. He therefore may be regarded as a pioneer in generating Buddhist awareness among the Indian in the first twentieth century. In this respect a letter assessment about Mm. Haraprashad Sastri is traceable in volume published by the Calcutta University edited by Prof. Bela Bhattacharyaya, *Haraprasād Smaraṇe*. He could established the intellectual appreciate of the Buddhist literature in Sanskrit with a new perspective.

⁸. *Gautama The Man* by Mrs. C. A. F. Rhys Davids had been the first attempt to depict Gautama Siddhartha Buddha as a human being all over the world. Alike other masters of the ancient India Gautama Siddhartha had been regarded as an incarnation of *Viṣṇu*. Among the Jesuit Christians of Europe, Buddha had been known as '*But*' or '*Bud*'. He was an apostle of the God, like Jesus Christ and Hazarat Mohammad. Mrs. Davids had taken a challenge to ascertain that Gautama Siddhartha was a human being. By dint of his esoteric practices he was the Awakened *Buddha* (tib. *sangs rgya*) from his slumber-like ignorance what leads human beings to suffer.

figure not a historical person. With such challenges she ventures to establish Gautama Siddhartha of the Sakya family liable to be born and to face death.

The Asiatic Society of Calcutta was established in 1784 C. E. by Sir William Jones. There after Jones Princep (1799-1839 C. E.) discovered the Ashokan inscriptions in *Brāhmī* scripts. That opened a new vista in Buddhist Studies all over the globe with enthusiasm. Maha Bodhi Society Library also preserved its legacy since its inception. Then the European scholars took interest in learning Buddhism through multiple out looks in order for negotiation with the Orient.

Samual Beal, Bunyiu Nanjio, Maurice Winternitz, E. J. Thomas etc took interest in spreading the Buddhist teaching in Europe from Chinese and Japanese resources. The Maha Bodhi Society of India, particularly its journal could add a new chapter since its beginning.

Traditional resources on the Gautama Buddha's life:⁹

The Buddhist *Tipitaka* in Pali preserve some references what Gautama Buddha had narrated among his disciples in the *Ariyapariyesena Sutta* dealing with reference his personal life. He mentioned about his earlier colleagues like Assvaji, Kondinna and others as mentioned in the *Vinaya Pitaka Mahāvagga*. He pronounced his first sermon *dhamma cakka pavatana* at Saranath. Also in the *Mahāparinibbāna Suttanta* of *Dighanikaya* preserves some the account of his personal life.

Again the Buddhist Sanskrit literatures like *Mahāvastu Avadāna* and *Lalitavistāra* refer to his life account with excellence, in order to make him a superior person *maha-purasa*. In course of time Gautama the Buddha became a superior personality above the average as the *Lokottaravādin* Buddhists claimed later on. In *Nidāna Kathā*, a preface to Pali *Jātakatthakathā* by Buddhaghosa (c. 4th cent. C. E.) narrated some life account as Shakyaputra Gautama with reference to his previous lives.

Resultantly the European scholars ventured to compose the biography out of those legends. E. J. Thomas in his *Legends of the Buddha* endeavored to narrate the Gautama Buddha's life with no historicity. However Mrs. Rhys Davids attempted to depict *Gautama Buddha as a Man* in eighteen chapters with reference to Pali *Tipitaka* texts for authentication in the twentieth century. W. W.

Rockhill from the Tibetan sources also depicted the life of Buddha with reference to the Shakya clan belonged to the lower Himalayan *Tarāi* region.

⁹. About the Buddha's biography texts are mainly 1. Mahāvastu of the *Mahāsaṅgikas* (*Lokottaravādin*), 2. *Lalitavistāra* of *Sarvāstivādin* in mixed Sanskrit 3. The *Buddhacarita* of Ashvaghosa in pure Sanskrit in the high flown *kāvya* style. 4. The *Nidānakathā* in pure Pali forming the introductory part of the *Jātakas*. 5. The *Abhiniṣkramaṇ Sūtra* of Dharmagupta probably written in mixed Sanskrit but now extends only in a Chinese translation and rendered into English by Beal under the title *The Romantic Legend of Sākya Buddha*.

Life of Buddha as depicted by Hajime Nakamura:

Hajime Nakamura,¹⁰ Japanese erudite also depicted the life of Buddha from the Asian resources particularly Pali resources comparing with Chinese and Japanese. It is to mention that some Pali treatises from *Tipitaka* had been translated in Tibetan and Chinese. In our days Japanese translation of Pali *Tipitaka* has opened a new vista in Buddha's biographical data. Those had been published in series in the famous Buddhist Journal *Dharma World*. Fortunately those are preserved in the Maha Bodhi Society of India Library, Calcutta.

Hajime Nakamura (1912-1999) had been an eminent scholar from Asia in Buddhism with international reputation.ⁱⁱ He had been the professor of Tokyo University and roomed all over the globe for his scholarship an excellence in collaboration the Buddhist teaching as well his doctrine teaching. He may be regarded as one of the elucidator of the Buddhist saying preserved in the multiple literature of Asia like, Japanese, Chinese, Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan etc.

H. Nakamura did not follow the traditional method of writing a biography of a person. He begins with the life of Siddhartha after his renunciation from the Shaky royal palace. The ascetic life of Gotama (Gautama) could become a step towards his Enlightenment. The personality of Gautama the Buddha as depicted by Mrs. Rhys Davids goes in different line than that begins in the biographical sketch narrated by H. Nakamura. In both cases the Pali recourses have been followed. Despite that, their narrative contents vary. Series published by *Dharma World* H. Nakamura depicts the Buddha as the organizer of his monastic origination and its spread in the Middle Country *Majjima Desa* in Rajagraha, Patliputra of Magadha kingdom and Vaishali of the Licchavi Republic of the Ancient India in the 6th century B. C. H. Nakamura could not escape the down fall of Shaky as and in his learned article *The Massacare of the Sakya Clan* in order to provide a socio political picturesque of the Northern lower Himalayan republic. Evidentially H. Nakamura has provided a biography of Gautama the Buddha with the socio political scenario of ancient India by the middle of first millennium B. C. E. In conclusion attention may be invited to his *Early Buddhism Grows despite Many Trials* in which he remarks "as the Buddhist community grew in popularity, Gotama and his ordinate followers became the subject of rumors about their conduct with women. One account relates that others sects, finding their profits and reputations falling, conspired to bring about the Buddha's ruin" (*Dharma World*, September/October 2000.).

In this regard attention may be invited to Hajime Nakamura's contribution published in series in the old Buddhist journal like *Dharma World* etc. He had been a contributor of the Maha Bodhi journal referring to the multiple

¹⁰. Hajime Nakamura needs no introduction as an eminent Japanese Buddhist scholar of the international scholars. He is regarded as an authority on Indian Philosophy and is the president of the Eastern Institute. About two hundred research paper and articles in European are accredited. He has also large number contributors in Japanese in order to generate Buddha awareness among human.⁷

Among his books the following titles deserve are mentioning.

- *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan*, University of Hawaii Press, 1964.
- *A History of Early Vedanta Philosophy. Part One*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1989.
- *A History of Early Vedanta Philosophy. Part Two*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2004.
- *Indian Buddhism: A Survey With Bibliographical Notes*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1980.
- *A Comparative History Of Ideas*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1992.
- *Gotama Buddha: a biography based on the most reliable texts*, Kosei, 2000.

aspects of Buddhism. Gautama the Buddha contributed for the human kind. Those have been authenticity preserved by Hajime Nakamura in the series of articles published in the Dharma World journal. Fortunately those are preserved as rear collections in the Maha Bodhi library in Calcutta. The paper deals from such rear journals of the Maha Bodhi Society Journal.

About two scores of elegant articles had been composed and published by Hajime Nakamura as shown in the Appendix. Those papers speak about a systematic narration regarding the life account of Gautama the Buddha in a lucid manner. That speaks the excellence of the author, how to communicate doctrinal phases of Gautama the Buddha with their relevant of personal life. Those may claim the erudition of H. Nakamura in a popular style. Broadly speaking, H. Nakamura depicted the Buddha's life story in the series distributed in the following Chapters.

- i. The Austerities of Sakyaputra Gautama with ascetic practices.
- ii. His Enlightenment.
- iii. Gautama Buddha the Teacher.
- iv. Implication of his First Discourse.
- v. His leadership how to spread his attainment.
- vi. Environs how to spread his ideas and thoughts.
- vii. His entrance into *nirvana*.
- viii. Bodhgaya and its present status.

In fine, among several ventures to narrate the life account of Gautama the Buddha. H. Nakamura contribution may claim a unique modal. His assessment in respect to a person is known by the excellence of deeds as an individual performs. Generally a biography of an Indian since the olden days is not accurate with the date and his activities. H. Nakamura therefore carefully referred to what Gautama had performed. In that respect his venture to compose the life account of Siddhartha Gautama begins with the austerities of Sakyaputra Gautama with ascetic practices and that ends with his entrance in *Nibbāna (Nirbana)*.

It may be added that, such an important library what Maha Bodhi Society of India, Calcutta holds may claim its unique character. The Maha Bodhi Society of India actually revived the Buddha awareness among the Indians, and the Bengalese in particular since nineteenth century. Evidentially the collection of books, periodicals, including the national journals preserved in the Maha Bodhi Society of India Library, Calcutta requires a reformative approach with the latest measure of the library science for future decades. It may be added that Buddhist Studies all over India had been spreading widely. Thereby the Maha Bodhi Society of India have been become a pivot center for Buddhist studies being located of the heart of Calcutta for last 125 years.

Appendix:

Hajime Nakamura's articles:

1. Gautama's Austerities. *January/ February, 1997*
2. Gautama's Ascetic Practice. *March/April, 1997.*
3. Enlightenment Under the Bodhi-Tree. *May/June, 1997.*
4. The History of Bodhgaya. *July/August 1997.*
5. The Nature of Buddha's Enlightenment. *September/October, 1997.*
6. Other Traditions of the Buddha's Enlightenment. *November/ December, 1997.*
7. The Significance of Enlightenment. *Vol-25, Nos.1-2, 1998.*
8. Meditations after Enlightenment. *Vol-25, Nos.3-4, 1998.*
9. How to Teach. *Vol-25, Nos. 5-6, 1998.*
10. Deciding Whom to Teach. *Vol-25, Nos. 7-8, 1998.*
11. The First Discourse. *September/October,1998*
12. The Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma. *V-25, Nos. 11-12, 1998.*
13. The Site of the First Discourse Then and Now. *January/ February, 1999.*
14. Gautama's Ordains The Earliest Disciple. *March/April, 1999.*
15. The Ordination of Yasa's Friends. *May/June, 1999.*
16. Encouragement to Spread the Teaching. *July/August, 1999.*
17. Preaching the Truth. *September/October, 1999.*
18. The Conversion of King Bimbisara. *November/December, 1999.*
19. The Conversion of Sariputra and Moggallana. *Vol-27, Nos. 1-2, 2000.*
20. Gotama Revisits his Homeland. *Vol-27, Nos. 3-4, 2000.*
21. Gotama Ordains His Close relatives. *Vol-27, Nos. 5-6, 2000.*
22. The Conversion of Influential people. *July/August, 2000.*
23. Early Buddhism Grows Despite Many Trails. *September/October, 2000.*
24. Gotama's Influence Continues to Grow. *November/ December, 2000.*
25. The Massacre of the Sakya Clan. *January/February, 2001.*
26. The Last Journey. *March/April, 2001.*
27. Discourse to the Bhikkus on the Prosperity of the Sangha. *September/October, 2001.*
28. The Buddha Departs on his Last Journey. *November/December, 2001.*
29. Gotama's Influence of the Sakya Clan. *J.anuary/February, 2001*
30. The Rise and Fall of the City of Patliputra. *January/February, 2002.*
31. Gotama Crosses the Ganges. *March/April, 2002.*
32. Licchavi Nobles Visit Gotama. *July/August,2002.*
33. The Venerable One Converts the Courtesan. *September/ October, 2002.*
34. The Decision to Enter Nibbana. *January/February, 2003.*
35. The Four Great Instructions Taught at Bhoganagara. *May/June, 2003.*
36. Cunda's Offering. *July/August, 2003.*
37. Pukkusa's Acceptance of the Buddha's Teachings. *November/December, 2003.*

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