

D. B. 10/46-27

cf. Sept 11

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Extract of notes from the Education department file reg. Ash relics of Sariputra and Moggallaina - Return to the Buddist.

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In December 1938, the Buddha Society, Bombay, made a representation to the Govt. of India that the relics containing the ashes of two chief disciples of Lord Buddha- Sariputra and Moggallaina which were in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, should be brought to India and handed over to them. We approached the Museum authorities (through the Secy. of State for India) who agreed to transfer these relics to India. The Buddhist organisations of Burma and Ceylon also requested that the relics should be handed over to them but it was finally decided that these relics should be handed over to the Maha Bodhi Society, India, for enshrinment at the Buddhist temple in New Delhi. By the time this decision was reached, war had broken out and it was decided that the relics should not be brought to India under war conditions. In 1940, the Bhopal Govt. represented that if the relics were to be returned to India, they should be restored to them to be placed in the Museum at Sanchi from where they were taken away by General Cunningham when he visited Sanchi about 1851 and handed over to the British Museum. On a representation made by H.H. the Nawab of Bhopal and the Political Department, it was decided by Lord Linlithgow, the then Viceroy of India, that as the matter was mainly religious, it was impossible to disturb the arrangement already agreed upon but the Govt. of India would have no objection if the Bhopal Govt. could persuade the Maha Bodhi Society, India, to whose custody the relics were to be transferred, to agree to the ashes being enshrined at Sanchi instead of at New Delhi. With the end of the war, the Maha Bodhi Society of India, has renewed their request for bringing the relics to India via Ceylon where they will be exhibited to the Buddhists for their worship. The Society propose to enshrine the relics in a Vihara to be built near Sanchi Stupa on certain conditions and are carrying so far as the conditions laid down by the Society for the enshrinement of the relics at Sanchi are concerned, the Govt. of India is not much interested in the matter as it is for the Bhopal Govt. to arrive at an agreement with the Maha Bodhi Society for the enshrinement of relics at Sanchi. The

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The D.G.A.'s suggestion that a definite time limit should be imposed for building the Vihara is one for consideration of the Bhopal Govt. in consultation with the Society. We have to stick to our previous decision that the relics are to be handed over to the Maha Bodhi Society of India. The cost of sending the relics to India in the manner indicated in para,4 of the letter, dated the 29.8.45, from the General Secy. Maha Bodhi Society of India, will be considerable but the Society is prepared to bear all the expenses .

2. As regards the transfer of relics to India, one of the following three alternatives will have to be adopted:-

1. We may ask the Museum authorities in London, through the Secy. of State for India, to send the relics to the Govt. of Ceylon, who will hand them over to the representatives of the Maha Bodhi Society, for exhibition to the Buddhists in Ceylon, the Govt. of Ceylon ~~will~~ will send them direct to the Govt. of India or to the Maha Bodhi Society, India. Before asking the India Office to arrange for the transfer of relics to India via Ceylon, it will be necessary to enquire from the Govt. of Ceylon whether they would be willing to allow the relics to be brought through Ceylon and to take responsibility for securing their safety in Ceylon.
2. The Govt. of India may obtain the relics direct from England and present them to Maha Bodhi Society of India. The Society can send the relics to Ceylon if they think necessary.
3. We may enquire from the Maha Bodhi Society, India, the name of the Buddhist organisation in London, if any, which can take delivery of the relics and arrange for their despatch either direct to India or via Ceylon. In case there is no suitable Buddhist organisation in London, the Society may ~~ask~~ be asked to intimate the name of the person (in India or in Ceylon) to whom on behalf of the Maha Bodhi Society, India, the relics could be despatched direct from England.

The third alternative seems to be most suitable and may be adopted . In this connection attention is invited to notes on pp. 8-9 in F.No. 6-1/39 F.'L. For orders.

Intd.
23/10/45.

The Bhopal Govt. were interested in the relics containing the ashes of the two disciples of Lord Budha being enshrined at Sanchi, The place from which they were taken away by Lord Cumminham when he visited Sanchi in 1851 and made representations to the Political Department that instead of the relics being enshrined in the Budha temple at New Delhi as originally decided by the Govt. of India, the relics should be returned to them to be placed in the Museum at Sanchi.

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Govt. of India raised no objection to this provided the Bhopal Govt. could persuade the Maha Bodhi Society of India to whose custody the relics were to be transferred agreed. It is clear from the F.R. that the Society and the Bhopal Govt. are in correspondence in regard to the enshrinement of the relics in separate Vihara to be built by the Bhopal Govt. at Sanchi on certain conditions. Political Deptt. may however, first see u.o. and consult if necessary, the Bhopal Govt. through the Political Deptt. in regard to the conditions suggested by the Society and that suggested by the D.G.A. that some time limit should be laid down on the Bhopal Govt. for construction of a Vihara in which the relics will be enshrined.

2. Moreover before we can ask the authorities of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, through the India Office to arrange for the return of the relics, it is necessary to consult the Govt. of Ceylon on the question whether the relics need be brought to India via Ceylon and whether that Govt. will take the responsibility for their safety in Ceylon where these will be exhibited for the of the Buddhists in that Island and for their return to the D.G.A. in India who will present the relics to the Society in India with one ceremony.

sd. R. Lal
5/11

Secy.

1. We may enquire from the Bhopal Govt., through the Political Department as to how soon the proposed Vihara would be made ready for the reception of the sacred relics.

2. We may enquire from the Ceylon Govt. whether His Excellency the Governor of Ceylon will be prepared to receive the sacred relics when they are sent out from England and presented them to the Maha Bodhi Society there for temporary exhibition to the Buddhist devotees in Ceylon. (The letter perhaps may be written by Secretary personally either to the Chief Secy., Govt. of Ceylon or some other suitable officer.)

3. The Maha Bodhi Society in their letter of 29th August 1945 to the D.G.A. have suggested that, for the sake of safety, the relics should be sealed in a vacuum unbreakable glass casket designed after the original casket in which they were discovered in Sanchi.

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