

Atish Dipankar Srijnan has been described by historians as the foremost among the luminaries of ancient Bangladesh. His sacred ashes have been brought to Bangladesh yesterday under an agreement with the Chinese government.

## Significant link

Ajit Kumar Barua

Atish Dipankar Srijnan, a great scholar, saint philosopher and preacher was born of royal parentage in Bajrajogini Bikrampur, in the district of Dacca, in 980 A.D. His father's name was Kalyansri and his mother's name was Probhabati. His nick name was Chandragona. At the age of 19, he was taken into Buddhist fold by Acharya Sila Rakshit, principal of famous Udantapuri Monastery of ancient time and was then named as Dipankar Srijnan. Twelve years later, he was ordained as a monk and then he left for Subarnabhumi where during his 12-year stay he acquired vast proficiency in Buddhist scriptures. From there he went to Tamradip, which is now modern Ceylon, and returned to his homeland whereupon he assumed the responsibility of 'Maha Acharya' i.e. vice-chancellor of Vikramsil-Mahabiharo, one of the great research centres of Buddhist philosophy in the subcontinent.

While he was living there, the then China invited Atish Dipankar Srijnan to preach religion there. His contemporary scholars and saints objected to his leaving for they said the subcontinent would be dark without Atish Dipankar for he virtually held key to many significant Buddhist institutions of this part. But the invitation continued to come and at last Atish Dipankar Srijnan left for China in 1036 and walked across the difficult snowy mountainous terrain of the Himalayas to reach there.

During his difficult journey, his party was twice attacked by dacoits as a result of which most of his companions were killed. But Atish Dipankar was undaunted and continued the hazardous journey with great risk till he reached the destination. He spent the rest of his life in China visiting many parts of

the country lecturing on Buddhist canonical literature and virtually establishing Buddhism in different parts of China. Atish Dipankar wrote 108 treatises on Buddhism and his 'Bodhipada Pradip' in Sanskrit is a remarkable landmark in the development of Buddhist literature. Most of his writings are included today in the Tripitaka.

His name and fame began to spread all over the subcontinent. Mahipala the king of Bangladesh invited him and offered him the post of high priest of the Vikram-sila monastery. Vikram-sila was at that time a great centre of Buddhist learning and was one of the greatest Buddhist University of the subcontinent. It attained the patronage of the Pala kings of the then Bengal and within a short period it reached to its highest peak of glory. The university had 108 teachers and eight thousands students from Kashmir, Gandhara, Turkey, Ujjain, Benares used to flock there. Logic, religion, metaphysics and sciences were taught there. Dipankara was the principal of that university. It achieved tremendous success during his time.

Modern historians after diligent research into the religious movements of ancient Bengal have described Atish Dipankar as the most remarkable saint scholar of ancient Bengal. He was vice-chancellor of Buddhist universities of Vikram-sila and Udantapuri, now in Bangladesh, and was closely connected with Somapuri and Pandita Vihara. While according to Chinese tradition he wrote 108 treatises, his original writings consisted of 175 volumes according to another tradition, most of which relates to Bajrajana, Mahajayana and Mahayana cults of Buddhism. He has been described by the historians as the significant link between the ancient sub-



ATISH DIPANKAR SRIJNAN

Courtesy: Sambodhi Society, Comilla.

continent and China. He is described as the foremost among the luminaries of ancient Bengal in respect of character, erudition, scholarship, philosophical depth and spiritual attainment.

Dipankara started moving from place to place province to province and preached Buddhism there. Broton the founder of the first hierarchy there, recognised him as his preceptor and became his disciple. Dipankara succeeded in reforming Buddhism there. He also succeeded in eliminating Tantric elements from Buddhism there.

Among his disciples Dom-Ton-Pa was the chief. He was his constant companion. He can be compared with Ananda the personal companion of Buddha. He was a scholar of the highest order.

Dipankara made glorious contribution to the literature. He wrote 83 books on Sanskrit of whom 22 were translated. It is to be mentioned that king Dharmapala of Subarnadipa wrote a long letter to Dipankara raising some difficult questions on religion. He answered those questions in a book titled "Bimal Ratna Lekhan".

Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen

wrote: "Dipankar achieved highest reputation in the world at that time. His memory is still cherished by the Buddhists of the world. Dipankara was a proud son of Bangladesh.

He exercised so much influence on the growth and development of Mahayana Buddhism in China that till today he is venerated as one of the incarnation of Lord Buddha and is worshipped in most of the Chinese monasteries. Atish Dipankar died in 1053 A.D. in China.

His sacred ashes are still enshrined in China. Recently, there has been an agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and Bangladesh to bring the ashes of Atish Dipankar back to Bangladesh, his original home. The delegation who went to China to bring back the ashes was led by Mr. Asafuddowlah, Director General of Shilpkala Academy and Ven. Visuddhananda Mahathero, President, Bangladesh Bouddha Kristi Prachar Sangha. The other four delegates are Ven. Sudhhananda Mahathero, Dr. Mohammad Shah Korashi, Mr. Ashoke Ranjan Barua and Prof. Ranadhir Barua.