CHAPTER XIV

HINDU-BUDDHIST UNIVERSALIST IDEALS
OF A WORLD STATE

Such universalistic visions of a world state were expressed in hymns chanted in 1853 at the coronation of Mindon of Burma: "... Great chief of Righteousness, may [thy] rule extend not only to the great Southern Island ... but also to all the four great and five hundred small islands: May it equal the stability of ... Myen-mo [Meru Mountain, the Centre of the Universe] ... When ... Buddha ascended the golden throne, all ... beings became his subjects and he overcame all enemies; so may kings by hundreds and by thousands do homage to the [King's] golden feet." ¹ Just as Burma's historiography derived the genealogy of its dynasties from Buddha's Sākya family (cf. p. 6), so the Sākyas have earlier been derived from rulers over all the Four Island Continents.² An alternative to Gautama's Buddhahood would have been universal emperorship.³ An association if not identification of Buddhahood with ideal universal rulership is expressed symbolically both in Gautama Buddha's imperial funeral and in the use of the term Cakkavatti for the Buddha as well as for the ideal universal emperor. Cakkavatti (Chakravartin) means "Roller of the Wheel of Sovereignty," the wheel symbolizing also the teachings of Buddha.⁴

When the subsequent Buddha, in a previous life, ruled as king in Benares (according to the Mahāsīlava-Jātaka), killers were brought before him and he inquired: "'My children, why have you killed my villagers?' 'Because we could not make a living,' said they. 'Then why did you not come to me? See that you do not do the like again,' and

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¹ H. Yule, Mission to the Court of Ava, Appendix C, p. 352.
⁴ Paul Mus, pp. 579, 582, 596; E. Abegg, Der Buddha Maitreya [Mitteilungen der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft der Freunde ostasiatischer Kultur, VII (St. Gallen, 1946)], p. 4, fn. 8.
he gave them presents and sent them away.” ¹ In a later life, the subsequent Buddha’s message induced the king, his father, with multitudes of his subjects to abandon the kingdom and become monks in the forest. Invaders, who overran the country to seize its treasures, joined the Buddha and his father in the renunciation of power and wealth. “This being that way, the treasuries, the gold, silver and rubies, were abandoned. Therefore, allowing them to be seized, taken and carried away, the Future Buddha deigned to scatter diffusely and to spread the jewels prolixly on the bare ground, in the sand, over the three Yadana wide hermitage.” ²

Similarly, at the time of the Future Buddha, the universal emperor, or Cakkavatti Saṁkha is to renounce his status and wealth to the poor, the homeless and the destitute, and is himself to wander into homelessness. He and his army, as well as gigantic crowds accompanying them, shall become monks.³ (The monastic community “is conceived to be the nearest possible approximation to the ideal society possible in time and space, which all men ought to approximate as nearly as possible in their social relations to each other.” ⁴) In this vision of the perfect Buddhist society of the future, the state is thus seen spontaneously dissolving itself into the monastic order with its community of property (cf. p. 25). In that ideal world community there is to be only one language, like in the utopian island continent Uttarakuru, “on the northern side of high Meru, the mountains’ king” (cf. p. 83), whose inhabitants “are equal and similar in everything.” ⁵ In that perfect future state, the divisions that split mankind through the urge of acquisition (cf. p. 12) are to be overcome – as rice shall grow without labor for a coming humanity unified under the ideal Buddhist Cakkavatti ruler.⁶ In his universal realm Wishing-Trees are to supply all material wants of man.⁷ These Wishing-Trees are called, in Burmese, Padęytha Pin: ⁸

⁴ Winston L. King, In the hope of Nibbana, Chapter VI, Section 3.
⁵ Saya U Tein: Han, Lei: cun: zaca ṃakhka-dein (Mandalay, 1320/1958), no pagination, third and fourth page.
⁷ E. Abegg, Der Buddha Maitreya, pp. 11f., 19.