

“Sitting under the Bodhi Tree, Prince Siddhartha attained enlightenment and became the Buddha on the full moon day of the month of Vaisakha, and for seven weeks He kept on meditating on the bliss He had attained, spending one week at each of the seven places. The first week was passed under the Bodhi tree itself which was the central object of worship to the Buddhists at Buddhagaya. The present tree is situated to the west of the temple and is about 100 feet high. It is said that the original one under which the Lord attained Buddhahood sprang up on the day of His birth and stood there for centuries for the devotees to worship. Fa-Hien says, in his travels, that Emperor Asoka used to visit the Bodhi tree “habitually” to repent himself of his sins; to chastise himself and subject himself to the eight purifications. The king’s wife asked whether the king daily repaired to the promenade(?). The grandees replied that he always went to the tree Peito. The queen awaited the time when the king was not there, and sent people to cut and throw down the tree. When the king returned and beheld this, he was so troubled and afflicted that he fell to the earth. The nobles bathed his face with water, and after a long time he returned to his sense. He caused a brick wall to be built round the roots of the tree, and then to be watered with a hundred pitchers of cow’s milk. He cast himself upon the ground, and made an oath never to rise again unless the tree were reproduced. Scarcely had he made this oath than the tree began to sprout again from its roots, and from that time to the present it has become at least ten chang high.

“According to history, Sasanka, a Hindu King of Bengal, had the Bodhi tree cut down and destroyed but luckily another tree arose out of the same roots. When Cunningham started the repair work of the temple in 1870, the old tree fell down, so he had a sapling from it planted at the very spot for the exclusive worship of the Buddhists. At a distance of about 250 feet to the north of the temple, another tree was also planted for the use of the Hindus who come here to offer pinda in memory of their ancestors. Asoka is said to have enclosed the Bodhi tree with a stone railing of excellent workmanship. He also made a pilgrimage to the tree with a great retinue, the scene of which is illustrated on one of the Sanchi gateways. This scene shows a pillar by the side of the tree but no trace of it has been found up to now. Can it be the pillar recently brought from the Gaya town and set up at the entrance to the lake? Emperor Asoka’s daughter Sanghamitta conveyed a branch of the original tree to Ceylon and planted it in the sacred city of Anuradhapura where it is in excellent preservation even today after 2,000 years of continued existence, nourished by the pious Buddhists of the Island. It is thus the oldest historical tree in the world.”

You will be pleased to know that there are several fine specimens of the Bodhi tree in Southern California including one at the Arboretum. Looking at this specimen now brings back wonderful memories of our all too brief visit at Buddhagaya.

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An Orchid for the First Lady

PRAMILA PANDIT BAROOAH

No queen received greater public acclaim nor won the hearts and affections of so many people in so short a time as did America's First Lady on her trip to India. Mrs. John F. Kennedy, better known as "Jacqueline" by her adoring public, received tremendous news coverage on her visit with Prime Minister Nehru, on her trips to the Taj Mahal at Agra and to the Amber Palace at Jaipur, on her visits to the hospitals and welfare centers, and even on her shopping tours for sarees in the famous bazaars of Benares.

As is often true, the seldom-told, "behind-the-scene" stories are far more interesting. Such is the story I am about to tell.

It happened in Assam, a rather isolated State in the most eastern part of India, practically cut off from the rest of the country by East Pakistan. Assam is semi-tropical and has a rather wide variation in climate and rainfall. Trees of all types bloom in a riot of color. Wild orchids of many types and colors grow in profusion. Picking an orchid from a tree along a golf course in Assam would be no more unusual than picking an orange along the "Howie-in-the-Hill" golf course in Florida. But all plants in their natural habitat tend to follow seasonal patterns of flowering. The orchid is no exception, and because of this, we have a story to tell.

Located in the Khasi Hills, at an elevation of about 5,000 feet, is Shillong, capital of the state. Government officials and tea planters flock into these hills in the summer to escape the oppressive heat and high humidity of the valley. The only route to Shillong is from Gauhati, the largest city in Assam, over a 60-mile winding, hilly, one-way road. Car traffic is regulated by a series of gates



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