

## FROM THE EDITOR

### THE LATEST IN VANDALISM

This issue carries a travelogue-like feature on Bali. Needless to say, importance of Bali from the point of Indian culture abroad is too great to be covered by any single article. The entire Indonesian archipelago is full of ruins testifying to its unique relationship with India in the past.

A great monument to have resurrected from a long era of oblivion is Borobudur in Java, lately and most unexpectedly the target of an anarchist attack.

Way back in 1956, one summer evening, the wonder that is Borobudur had blossomed before my eyes. Indeed, it blossomed more than figuratively, for Borobudur, the world's largest Buddhist monument, was designed to look like a lotus—the biggest lotus man's creative genius could have visualised.

Nostalgia led me to this marvelous signature of spirit on matter a year ago. I wished to see how it had emerged from a 25-million-dollar international project for its renovation, sponsored by the UNESCO. India had contributed to the fund and, in Japan, where a Buddha idol from Borobudur was temporarily on display, the fund-raising campaign became a festival.

About thirty kilometres off the erstwhile Indonesian capital, Jogjakarta, is spread the magnificent Borobudur amidst a vast expanse of lush fields and groves, overlooking volcano-studded horizons. The name Borobudur is derived from either Vihara Buddha or Bhumisambharabhadra ("the accumulation of virtue on the ten stages of Bodhisattva), as an inscription in Sanskrit found nearby indicates.

Borobudur, built in the A.D. eighth century, was the highest cultural achievement of the Sailendra Dynasty. In its original form, it was a gigantic stupa with a dazzling jewel on its crown, a three-tiered parasol with golden discs, circular terraces with 33 dagobas, and below them, 1,500 coloured panels portraying incidents from the Buddha's life, and 500 gilded images of the Buddha.

After dominating the religious life of Java for about two centuries, Borobudur faded into oblivion, almost total, as Central Java lost its political importance. Repeated volcanic eruptions obliged the people living around and taking care of the shrine to abandon their hamlets. Quakes damaged the monuments too. Much of Borobudur lay buried under earth, volcanic ashes and shrubs. Private builders found in it an easy and excellent quarry for their needs for choice stones. One or two local feudal lords are known to have exported generous gifts of the idols to their friends abroad.

Rediscovery of the buried marvel in the eighteenth century, primarily at the instance of Sir Stamford Raffles, was followed by haphazard repairs from time, until UNESCO decided to renovate it thoroughly.

Practically every slab from the affected parts of the shrine had to be removed and treated and then adjusted back to its pristine position. It looked elegant even to the eye of a layman, but what is important, the process of decay had been arrested.

And then a series of explosions shook the silent valley. Stones were tossed up and magnificent limbs of the idols rolled down to the ground. A large section of the monument lay shattered. As the American News-week puts it, "It withstood more than 1,000 years of monsoon rains, survived countless volcanic eruptions and still looked much better than its age would suggest. Then last week, nine explosions ripped through the Borobudur temple ... devastating in minutes what nature had failed to destroy in a millennium."

The destruction of a part of Borobudur seems to symbolise the destruction of a part of man's greatness, the greatness that once enabled him to embrace ideas that were lofty, irrespective of the direction from which they came, the greatness that made him transcend his geographical or cultural limitations, the greatness that brought minds and nations together.

They were "fanatics who have no sense of national pride," says President Suharto. That is obvious. But they were definitely worse. Borobudur cannot be identified with any bone of contention that is current. It symbolised nothing except the magnificence of man's spiritual aspiration that defies time and creed. Those who destroyed it were people possessed by the worst hostile propensity to demolish the beautiful, the innocent.

The sight of Borobudur, unlike most modern monuments, filled one with peace and serenity. To be able to resist its impact and draw a plan for its destruction and then plant bombs amidst those numerous meditative statues, must have needed super-demoniac capacity. Incidents like the shooting at the picture of Mona. Lisa can be explained in terms of individual perversion. But a collective action against an inoffensive work of beauty defies explanation per known laws of abnormalcy.

Like new physical diseases (such as AIDS), is humanity developing new psychological syndromes?

The violence on Borobudar is more than a criminal phenomenon. Investigation, of course, will proceed along the usual lines, but psychologists and sociologists should not let the process end with meeting its legal goal alone.