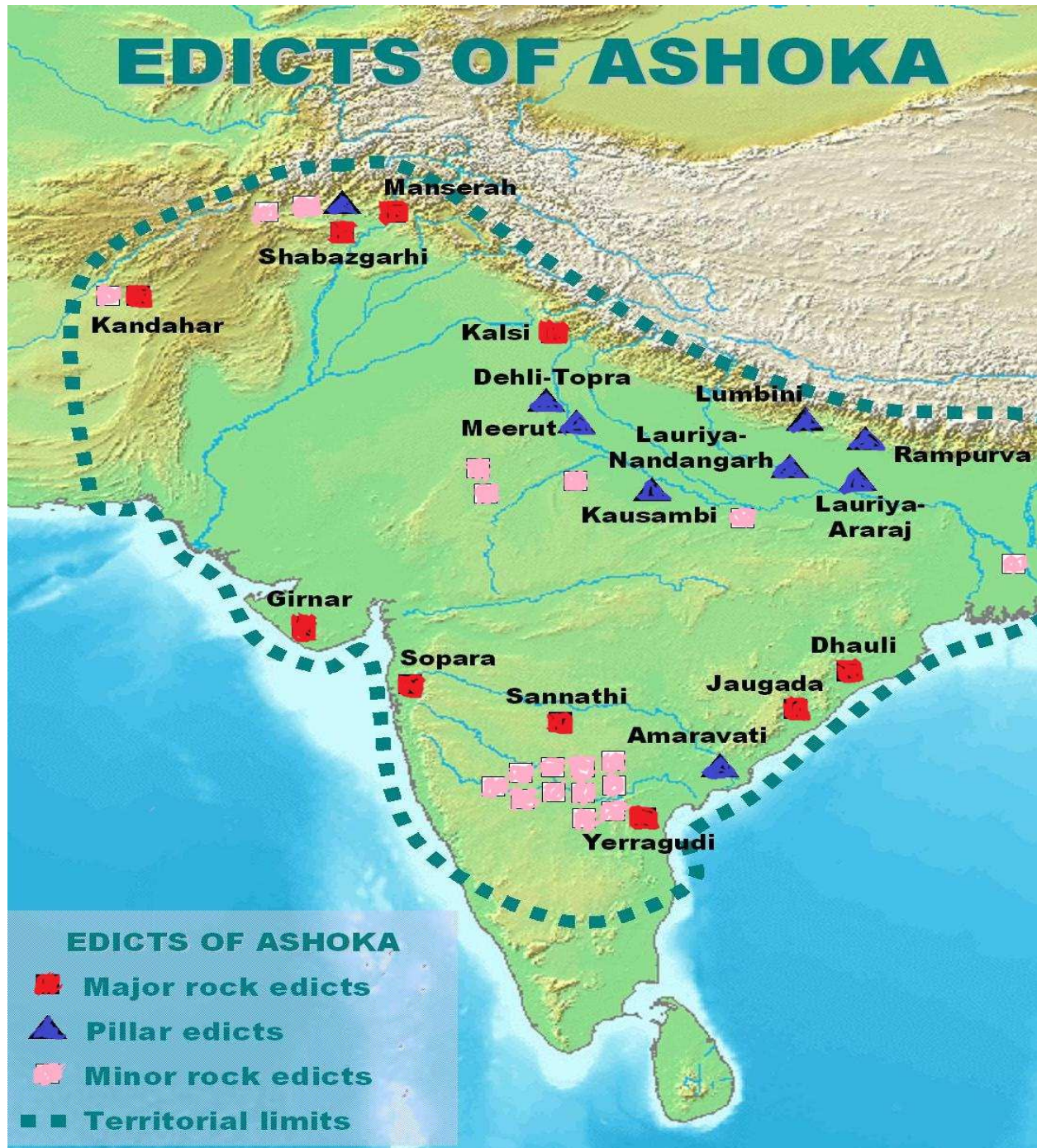


Asoka Maurya- His attitudes towards reformist sects of Jainas, Ajjvikas and Buddhist as reflected in his Dhamma Edicts?

By: Bipin Shah





Introduction:

There is a large volume of Buddhist literature that describes Asoka's good deeds in his later life after his conversion to Buddhism. In other ward, Buddhist embraced him in spite of his past deeds. However, judging from the events that took place after the death of Great Asoka and disintegration of Mauryan Dynasty, one can conclude that what Buddhists achieved during Asoka's later year was wiped out by the Brahminical revolt led by Hindu commander Pushya Mitra sunga. Bridhrath, the last Mauryan emperor was assassinated by Pushyamitra himself and Brahmanism was reinstited. Pushya Mithra's action did break-up the mighty Mauryan Empire that Chanakya (Canaka) and Chandragupta Maurya ("Sandrocottus" of the Greek) had crafted and Bindusara and Asoka had expanded.

For the purpose of necessary clarity, it is relevant to declare here with certainty that all Mauryan kings were the followers of non-Brahminical reformist sects of India. Chandra Gupta, Chanakya, Kunala and Samparati were the followers of Jainism or order of Tirthankara Mahavira while Bindusara was the follower of Ajivikas and Great Asoka, his son Mahinda, daughter Sangha Mitra were all followers of Buddhism. It is quite understandable that Jainas and Ajivikas perhaps frowned on Asoka's deviation and his past deeds of the violence.

Satvahana and Chedi dynasty who were tributary to Mauryan but followers of Jainism, Ajivikas and Shaivism of south India proclaimed their independence from Maurya during Shunga period and Jaina king Kharvela took this as an opportunity to retrieve the Jaina Tirthankaras's idol Rishabhdeva from Magadha that was taken by force during Nanda dynasty.

Some years later, Yueh-Chinh (Kushan) hordes that were roaming around in central Asia and Bactria took the opportunity and usurped the Shunga dynasty. Within 50 years the great

Indian empire of Maurya vanished and lost the control of Bactria, Afghanistan and Northwest Provinces bordering Persia where once Vedic religion prevailed as a dominant faith.

The influence of Buddhism still remained strong in central Asia but it started its slow retreat from heartland of India and gradually migrated through trade routes by sea to Southeast Asia (Sri-Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia) and also through the Silk Road from east to west stretching from Asia Minor to China. Jainism survived because it maintained the consistent “low profile” and did not patronize the Royals to the extent Buddhist did in early India. They adopted the strategy of silence for disapproval of others actions.

As far as the inter relationship among the non-brahminical reformist traditions, it is not clearly well defined. There is ample evidence of them sharing their dwelling and monasteries with each other at a time. We also know that senior Ajivikas leader Gosala influenced Mahavira and Buddha in their early ascetic life. We also know that both Mahavira and Gautama’s family followed the tradition of Parsvanatha described as 23rd Tirthankara (ford maker) of Jaina. The main differences between their sects were related to monastic tradition, diet restriction, clothing, alms gathering and theology.

We can speculate but not entirely sure why Asoka abandoned his ancestor’s preferences of the religion and selected Buddhism? Asoka’s blinded son Kunala (also known as Dashratha in Indian literature), Grandfather Chandra Gupta and Grandson Samprati were Jaina followers, and the father Bindusara was the Ajivikas follower. There was certain thing about Asoka’s personalities that the historians cannot put their arms around it.

The elevation of Buddhism as a state religion by Asoka posed a direct threat to Brahmins than “naked” Jaina and Ajivikas ascetics who were considered heretics and their “nakedness” must have bothered some people in upper caste as indicated by an incidence noted in Jaina text that described the reaction of a Maitraka’s princess who refused to see a naked Jaina ascetic. It is quite understandable that Brahmins never took them seriously as a real threat and probably treated as nuisance to be ignored due to its reclusiveness and the rather insignificant numbers.

When Asoka officially patronized Buddhism using state institutions, the Brahmins of India felt a crushing blow. The Brahmins made their living out of Vedic rituals and sacrifices. Their age old hereditary profession was economically disfranchised. Asoka’s Dhamma doctrines meant that people need not employ the Brahmins to perform minor ceremonies like birthday, wedding, Raksha-Bandhan and many other trivial occasions that occurred in day to day life.

The Chanakya’s episode with Nanda king serves as a good illustration. As per the legend, the Nanda king instead of issuing a land grant or granting customary gift to Chanakya threw him

out of the his royal court that Chanakya took as personal insult. We can definitely conclude now that this turned out to be a bad decision for Nanda king to earn the hostility of Chanakya who went out to seek revenge that ultimately usurped Nanda dynasty.

The decline of Brahmanism during Maurya and their predecessor's kings who are not portrayed in a favorable light by Purana scribes speaks for itself the degree of economic disfranchisement Brahmins might have felt. As a matter of fact, the sanghas both Buddhist and Jaina swelled in number due to large defection from Brahmanism during Mauryan's rule. It is interesting to note that the Brahmins were the one who as the learned intellectuals of India wrote most of the religious canonical texts of Jainism and Buddhism and contributed greatly in developing the religious theologies.

However, the edicts written and sanctioned by Asoka undoubtedly prove that Asoka adopted Buddhism but he had his own version of "Dhamma" (Dharma) which was a hybrid philosophy that combined the elements of all reformist sects to a certain extent. To what extent is a can remain a matter of debate when all the edicts are analyzed. There is no Buddhist or Jaina theologies involved. He did spend some time at Buddhist monastery, probably long enough to earn the status of monk but he did not practice that as he had to run his empire and to be initiated as Buddhist monk but he never abandoned his throne. He chooses Buddhism after some initial hesitation as one of his edict implies. According to the edict, he says that he adopted Buddhism two to three years after the conclusion of kalinga war. So, these are the revelations that must be understood in proper context to understand Asoka.

It is important to note that Jaina Texts never mentions Buddhism as its competitors but Ajivikas were frequently mentioned as their key competitors. At that time, both Jainism and Ajivikas followed Digambara tradition but had different theologies. This is a strange but perplexing question for historians dealing with religion.

After Acharya Mahagiri and during the Papacy of Acharya Suhastin and Samprati's emperorship, the Svetambra sect of Jainism emerged and initially spread from Avanti, (Ujjiyani) western India. Ajivikas remained as a separate sect until about 1000 AD as mentioned by Rajtarangni. During the later period, it merged with Digambara tradition of Mahavira that was retreated to South India. There are still some smaller enclaves of Digambara Jainism in North but it was migrated back to north during the later centuries. The only exception to this is the Agarwal community of Punjab and North India who originated in ancient Agroha in Haryana district and appears to be residing there for many centuries. Buddhism similarly saw the split into various sects.

South India was always the bedrock of Shramanic traditions like Ajivikas, Shiva and other allied non-Vedic faiths, so it is natural that when Brahmanism rose again in North west, the heretics naturally found safe heavens in south and western coast of India.

Foreign Historians:

Greek historians reports that the kings before and after Sandrocottus (Chandra Gupta) as Xandramas and Sandrocyptus. Indian genealogy report that king before was Nanda. Strabo (II, I, 9) identifies both Sandrocottus and his son Bindusara (Amitraghata; Slayer of Enemies), and connects them to the third-century BC ambassadors Megasthenes and Deimakos sent to their courts. "Both of these men were sent as ambassadors to Palimbothra (Patliputra)".



Asoka pillar in Buddhist Thailand Chandragiri in Karnataka where Chandragupta supposed have died

Plutarch (62-3) connects Chandra Gupta to Alexander but calls him Androcottus and provides the information on the Nanda king as of low birth, wicked and despised by his subjects. However Greeks are silent on Chanakya, Asoka and Buddhist monks but instead refers them as "Shramana" that can be construed to include Jaina and Ajivikas. As a matter of fact, the shrine erected in Athens Greece for one Shramana is more suggestive of the monk who committed "Samsara" rites, a typical of Jaina and or Ajivikas tradition.

Origin of Maurya:

Although most accept the notions that Chandra Gupta Maurya was of Indian origin and came from Pipalivahana of Sakya colonies in ancient state of (Bihar) Magadha. However, the alternative theory exists that equates Chandra Gupta to “Sisicottos” of the Paropamisadae (Hindu Kush), a Sakya ruler who worked for Persian satrap (Bessus of Bactria) against Alexander, later co-operated with the Alexander for hunting down Bessus who killed Darius and helped Alexander in the Sogdiana campaigns. Arrian refers to “Sisicottos” as the governor of Assakenoi or (Kambojas) of Indians. However, it is not very clear if the Sisicottos was the same as Sandrocottus and why both Greek sources assign different names to the same person? Or they are two different people having similar Indian meaning of names?

Greek Ambassador’s Observation of Indian Life in 3rd Century BC

Seleucus' ambassador to the court of Chandragupta, whose name was Megasthenes, wrote a detailed account of India, fragments of which have survived from the ashes of Alexandria's library. They give a fascinating picture of early life in the city of Patliputra (Palimbothra). The capital city and associated urban area of Magadha probably covered eighteen square miles, (just like modern city of Mumbai or Calcutta) and may be the largest settlement of its kind in the ancient world. The city had the massive wooden walls with deep trenches for defensive purpose and observation towers. The trench also carried the disposal of sewage. Each provinces, city and villages had a headman appointed by the Chanakya's administrative unity primarily to collect the taxes and also to enforce the laws and orders with an extensive spy network who reported on everything to central spy bureau run by Chanakya. The old customary law, preserved and administered by the local “Panchayat” run by Brahmin priesthood, was superseded by an extensive legal code that provided for royal interference in all matters. A series of courts ranging from the village court presided over by the headman to the emperor's imperial court administered the law. So busy was Chandragupta with the details of his surprisingly modern administration that, according to Megasthenes, he had to hear court cases during his daily massage routine.



Inscription fragments of Indica by Megasthenes

According to Megasthenes, the professional army consisted anywhere from 300,000 to 700,000, if all allies were ordered to participate with almost close to 8,000 to 9,000 elephants with half of them were war elephants and almost over 10,000 chariots cavalry that made up the total army. Two other agencies were very important in holding the empire together. The spy network branded "Gupti" formed a separate class in the society as Chanakya and Chandra Gupta feared the conspiracies. Chanakya aka Kautiliya aka Vishnu Gupta who composed the treatise on material gain called as Arathshastra was the prime minister of the empire and he was responsible for the maintenance of the economic and political stability of the empire. Chanakya can be compared to Machiavelli, an author on statecraft that deployed every trick in his book including deception and unscrupulous method to attain the desired objectives. If it was not for this brilliant man, it is doubtful if the Mauryan Empire would have survived as long as it did.

Magadha Army Depiction below:





Magadha's Army

Asoka-Grandson of Chandragupta Maurya (269-232 BC):

Asoka was known in his edict as **“Devanpriya” (one who is loved by Deva or God)** very typical honorarium for a ruler. According to Jaina text, his Grandfather Chandra Gupa was known as **“Priyadarshi”**. **Priyadarshi means one who looks at others with love, compassion and piety.** These are two different words with two different meanings.

Some of the Asoka's edicts are using the both titles so it raises the confusion among scholars if some of the edicts were done by his predecessor or some by his successors? We do not know for sure that he was able to accomplish all of them during his life time. Some of the edicts include both the titles that make the matters even more confusing.

According to Buddhist sources, if the numbers are to be believed, Asoka spent huge fortune constructing countless monasteries, stupas and edicts practically bankrupting the State treasuries. So, it is unthinkable that he could have successfully completed all of them during his life time and at least delegated to his heirs some tasks. He may have planned them but expected them to be completed by others. We also do not know if there are more edicts are out there yet to be discovered and what do those edicts have to say.

We know from Jaina sources that Chandra Gupta abdicated his throne and went with a Jaina monk Bhadrabahu (There is no certainty that this Bhadrabahu was the same person as described in Kalpasutra as a fifth head of the Jaina church after Sudharma (The first Keval

Guyani). However, the folklore suggests that the place of last abode for the Chandra Gupta is well marked in the state of Karnataka at a hill called Chandragiri but the historicity and dating has never been proven. Some claim that the monument as shown above was built around 10th century AD when Shravan Belgola was erected.

Chandragupta with his alliance with Seleucus Nicator-1 ended up with matrimonial relationship with the Greeks and it is suspected that Asoka was part Greek in his origin. His wife Kuruviki and or Tisyaraakshita exercised a great influence on him that probably made him to choose Buddhism over his predecessor's religion. The details are lacking. Since most of the Macedonian commander took Persian wife on the order of Alexander, a supposition can be made that Mauryan Kings were Indo-Sakya-Greek origin, The Mauryan's royal household were "Sanskritised" and "Indianized" with the help of Brahmin priests. John strong describes various wives of Asoka as follows:

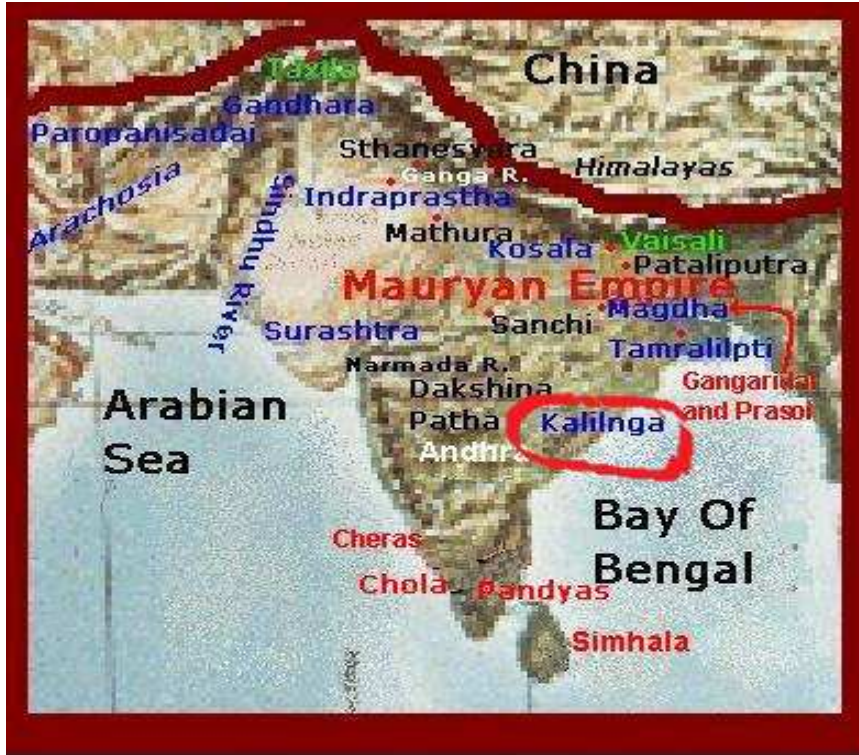
Asoka's wives and Family:

1. Kuruviki (or kaluviki) - Mother of Tittivala, also mentioned in one of the Asoka's edict.
2. Vedisa Devi- She may be from Malla Republic who may be also came from Sakya clans.
3. Padmavati- Mother of Kunala (blinded son) and Grand Mother of Emperor Samparati. She was from south India.
4. Asandhimithra- Mother of Mahinda and Sangha Mitra, both of them the followers of Buddhism and sent to Sri-Lanka for propagating Buddhism.
5. Tisyaraakshita-most likely of Northern origin, a dancer and expert in court intrigue and responsible for Kunala blinded and ultimately punished to death by Asoka upon discovery. Some experts equate her to Kuruviki but the details are lacking. In other words, she can be the same person as Kuruvaki. The number 1 and 5 are suspected to be of Persian-Greek ancestry and supporters of Buddhism.

Padmavati was from south India and they were the early followers of Ajivikas-Shramanism. Kunala was ordained as a singer Jaina monk and Emperor Samparati was a Jaina follower and installed many Tirthankara statues in many Jaina temples of West India. The large numbers of them were Parshavanath, Mahavira and Shantinath as per Acharya Hemachandra.

There are considerable disagreements as to who was running the show in last days of Asoka when he was ailing and breathing his last, while practically out of monies with his charitable activities. In his edict he also mentions his son Kunala and queen Kuruvaki were involved in construction and erection of some of the edicts. Some edicts that involves non-violence and

not eating of the meat has definite Jaina flavors and can be construed as those being completed by Jaina queen, Jaina son and Jaina Grandson. The Buddhism never preached against not eating meat and Buddha always ate meat. This may be one of the reasons why Buddha did not join Mahavira's sect and started his own sect.



Mauryan Empire

Ashoka's Mauryan Empire, 3rd Century BC. The first unifying empire of India stretching from Myanmar to Afganistan and maybe beyond with subordinate kingdoms.

**Mauryan Empire
4th- 2nd Century BC**

**The greatest Empire
of India.**

**The Empire rose
from Magadha and
conquered most of
India. They
defeated the mighty
Kalingas and
conquered South
India.**

**Probably the
Cholas, Pandyas
and Cheras were
independent in
the South. On the
East Gangaridai
and Prasoi were
independent.**

• Cities
— Border

We could have learned much more from Megasthenes Indica however few fragments were survived when Great Constantine and Islamic hoards burned the library at Alexandria of Egypt that housed many historical documents concerning Alexander's campaign in Asia. The most of the ancient history that was in written form was lost as a secondary source of materials and eye witness account of India.

Strabo, Greek geographer wrote: "The Indians occupy [in part] some of the countries situated along the Indus, which formerly belonged to the Persians: Alexander deprived the

Ariani of them, and established there settlements of his own. But Seleucus Nicanor-I gave them to "Sandrocottus", Chandra Gupta in consequence of a marriage contract, and received in return five hundred elephants."

It is not very difficult to imagine in present geographical context that the Persians and Indians were the nearly the same people, Indians resided on east of Sindhu and spoke Sanskrit-Prakrit version of languages while Persians to the west side of upper Sindhu spoke Old Avestan or Persian language. The boundaries fluctuated depending on the course of the mighty river Indus (Sindhu) and the strength of expanders.

Some ancient geographer and historians labeled the territory north of Punjab and Kashmir all the way up to Samarkand (Sogdiana) as "White India" and south India past the Vindhya Mountain as "Native India" or "Anarya India" and mostly habited by non-Vedic tribes and Dravidian people. These people spoke Tamil and other dialogues. Some early Greek historians described this as "Non-white India", infusing the skin color element. It is very hard to ascertain from Indian sources if this was the fact. But, the shades of complexion exist in India from North to south.

Prior to the introduction of Vedic religion, it can be hypothesized that early religion of those "Native Indians" was Shaivism and Shramanic tradition along with tribal gods and goddesses. These non-Vedic people presumed to have settled prior to Vedic people. The various religious traditions of India were merged with original Vedic Gods and Goddesses creating a religious smorgasbord that we call the modern version of Hinduism with uniformity o culture but deeply divided by castes.

The Yogi seal found at Indus valley civilization supports some of this assumption. Both Jainism and Buddhism evolved from Shramanic tradition as the reformist religion or heretics' tradition of India and ultimately it influenced Vedic Brahmanism to morph into present Hinduism. It is interesting to note that Jaina interchangeably calls their first Tirthankara "Rishabha" as "Adinath", the first lord; the same title is applied to Hindu God Shiva.

Seleucus' desire to cement the relationship with Maurya was driven by the two factors:

1. Size of Magadha army and war elephants that were the ancient tanks.
2. Seleucus desire was to acquire the entire Alexander's empire but Ptolemy of Egypt and Alexander satrap of Syria were in his way. He felt it was necessary to secure the Southern and eastern flank with Maurya prior to proceeding to acquire western part using Mauryan's elephants.

Strabo and Arrian further explain: “From this, it seems that Seleucus surrendered the easternmost provinces of Arachosia, Gedrosia, Paropamisadae and also Aria. Seleucus’s Persian wife, Apama, may have helped him implement his rule in Bactria and Sogdiana.”

Please note Apama can be called as Anupama in Indian version.

Some modern scholars suggests that Seleucus gave away more than what he received and that is indeed a true fact as his ambition was fixated on Europe and middle east and the threat posed by Ptolemy.

Asoka’s early Life (304–232 BC):

A.L. Basham correctly point out that H.G. Wells was the first one who introduced Asoka to the west and probably to India as a great king, who otherwise was buried in many Puranic genealogies with his unnoticed inscription that no Indians had any interest during the colonial period or interested in deciphering. When British arrived and took a serious notice, the Islam and Huna hordes have destroyed various Buddhist monasteries and they were in complete ruins. Indians have assigned a lower priority to their own history until now as compared to western and other civilization.

H. G. Well’s outline of the history was a compulsory reading for teen agers in England. In fact, when all said and done, we know very little about Asoka’s personality and motives. What has been known to us that are in bits and pieces and revealed to us in incremental basis through archeological discoveries. What we know for the fact and in our hand is the public image he portrayed in his edicts. The Asoka’s edicts should be viewed as emperor’s directives, ethics, commands, advice to the public of his “Dhamma” (Dharma), and it can be viewed as public propaganda partly driven by the sense of guilt due to killing and mayhem that was brought about by his violent campaign of conquest of surrounding states and territories during his early years of rules. On the other hand, he serves as a singular example of admitting, penancing and preaching to his subjects while expressing regrets. He differentiates the good vs. evils, the need for human equality and dignity and respect for others while advocating non-violence against all beings. For this acts and erection of his edicts, he deserves the full credits.

Our secondary source of information about him is found in Theravada tradition preserved in Sri-Lanka where we find references of his early life. Yet, another source is again, a Buddhist creation called Aśokāvadāna (“Narrative of Asoka”) and Divyāvadāna (“Divine narrative“),

and then in Sri Lankan text Mahavamsa (“Great Chronicle”). “Aśokāvadāna” and “Divyāvadāna” were preserved in Buddhist monastery of Kukuturma in or near Patliputra. Other record from Chinese traveler’s account and Rajtarangni are limited and adds to the creditability of his fame but does not attest to his accuracy since they were written long after his death. What best we extract out of these various sources is given below:



Asoka’s Stella, his famous Chakra- coronation, conversion to Buddhism and ruined Buddhist monastery

Asoka’s Sins and other Asoka’s of the history:

Asoka was the son of Bindusara and he conquered much of India and ruled from 269 BCE to 232 BC. Asoka is said to have seized the throne after the death of his father Bindusara after fighting a fratricidal war with his ninety-nine brothers, the most prominent being the eldest brother Sushima who was favored by his father. His earlier life seems to have been one of extreme ruthlessness, typical of an imperialist ruler. But it was the cataclysmic war against Kalinga which is said to have transformed him from the cruel individual to a pacifist and benevolent person. During 260 BC, the kalinga war caused so much destruction and devastation, that consequential famine caused many deaths due to starvation. The ancient Kalinga is generally equated by most experts as the present “State of Orissa”.

Some historian disputes this story that how a ruler who is so noble and religious minded as depicted in his edicts emperor can commit such a cruelty? Could there be another person responsible for these heinous acts? The existence of more than one Asoka in Indian history is partly a contributing factor for this confusion. “Kalkaska” was the last ruler of Shishunaga dynasty of Ajatshatru lineage and the struggle with kalinga and Magadha were going on as blood feud since subsequent rulers to Shishunaga dynasty invaded kalinga. Another Asoka

mentioned in Rajtarangni seems to be a regional ruler who founded the city of Srinagar in Kashmir. All these references were cited long after Asoka lived, so the authenticity or connection among them cannot be affirmatively established.

Kalinga War:

Asoka took the throne by killing all his brothers numbered around 99. He was ill tempered man so his father chose his elder brother as an heir apparent. He did not hesitate to blind his own son without conducting sufficient inquiries and then he felt remorse and killed all the conspirators including one of the wives who were involved in conspiracy. This does not portray him as a judicious ruler. His major sin was his military aggression against Kalinga where it became the killing field of the history.

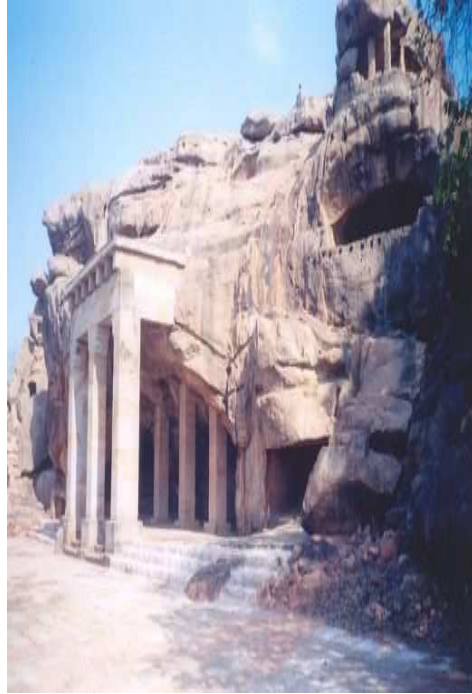
Once Magadha emerged as a Maha Janapadas and annexed many smaller states (Janapadas) there has been a friction between Kalinga (Orissa) and Magadha. Chedi Kings of Kalinga fought war with Nanda kings several times. The custody of the idols of Jain Tirthankara Rishabha became the issue between the warring states. Rishabha was the patron Deity (Tirthankara) of Kalinga State. King Kharvela, a Jain king was able to recapture that after the collapse of Mauryan dynasty in 1st century AD. The Hathigampa inscription serves as testimonials and Kharvela Empire was succeeded by Kalachuri Empire and Acharya Kalkachuri originated from Kalinga region. The Chedi were known as Rathika Kshatriya during Mahabharata's time and the Story of Shisupal and Lord Krishna was well documented in Mahabharata. There is no question that Chedi were related tribes of Vedic Aryans and participated in Mahabharata war according to Purana. The ancient rulers believe that the theft of a worshipping god of the enemy would deprive him of all the power.

The state of Kalinga was always the ground for contention between Northern states' ambitious domination from Patliputra since Mahabharata times. What is important to bring out is the reference of Jainism contained in Padma Purana, where in describing the deeds of Vrihaspati and his detractor Indra, Jainism (Shramana) is freely admitted as contemporaneous existence with the great God of the Brahma and designated as "heretics".

Since Puranas were written later than the events of the past, this willing admission of Brahminical sources serves as acknowledgement that Jainism was a prehistoric religion of India along with Shaivism. King Kharvela' Hathigampa inscription testifies to his faith as a Jainism and the assault on Kalinga can be viewed in different light if Brahmins were dominating the scene in Magadha during Asoka's rule. This was not the case and there are no evidence pointing towards that.



King Kharvela



Hathigampa Jain temple Cave



Hathigampa Inscription

Panchtantra, another Sanskrit text (equated to ESOPs' Fables), has preserved so many ancient stories of India and how ancient Indians lived. It also retains ordinary homespun folklores and traditions of those early times now thrown into the dustbin of history. The many stories describe the various dominant positions of power held by Jaina followers. All these stories are transcribed in Sanskrit that was the exclusive turf of the Indian Brahmins scribes.

One story describes the chief of Jaina convent, expressing vocally,

“Now, my son, what do you say, are we Brahmana to be on a call? No, No, at this hour we go forth to gather alms from those rich donors who approve Jaina faith?”

Asoka's thirteenth rock edicts mentions the war of kalinga and his conversion to Buddhism by expressing a public remorse but Theravada tradition and other sources do not mention anything about kalinga war. It is interesting to note that Asokavadana who can be associated with Mahayana tradition should have known but chooses to ignore the existence of kalinga war. Asokavadana implies that **“Asoka was converted from his evil ways and not by the horror of the wars but by the patience of Buddhist monk who was tortured by Asoka.”** A Buddhist scribe could have easily described the evil war and blamed that on supernatural

dreams and evils that influenced Asoka and he realized his mistake and adopted Buddhism. This kind of divine mythology is the Brahmin way or Puranic way to sanitize the horrific deeds. This pretty much sums it up the Buddhist picture of Asoka and Asoka we know from his edicts.

The Theravada tradition describes Asoka's conversion to seven year old Shramana called "Nigoha". A non-Buddhist in Pundravardhana drew a picture showing the Buddha bowing at the feet of Nirgrantha Jnatriputra (identified as Mahavira by Herman Jacobi). On complaint from a Buddhist devotee, Asoka issued an order to arrest him, and subsequently, another order to kill all the Ajivikas in Pundravardhana. Around 18,000 followers of the Ajivika sect were executed as a result of this order. Sometime later, another Nirgrantha follower in Patliputra drew a similar picture and Asoka burnt him and his entire family alive in their house. He also announced an award of one dinar (silver coin) to anyone who brought him the head of a Nirgrantha heretic. According to Asokavadana, as a result of this order, his own brother was mistaken for a heretic and killed by a cowherd. These and similar sources need secondary sources verification prior to jumping to the conclusion and we do not believe they are creditable.

But one thing is sure, that Asoka was not as great as portrayed by colonial historians and Buddhist texts. His deeds during his early life including kalinga war cannot be expunged from his record.

Devdatta and Buddhism:

Devdatta, who was the brother in law of Siddhartha Gautama and also a brother of Ananda, (a principal student of the Buddha) parted company with Gautama Buddha. Mahvira experienced a similar experience with his son-in-law Jamali who also defected. Devdatta took with him 500 Buddhist monks of Gautama's order, most of who are said to have been Shakya clan relatives of both Devdatta and Siddhartha. Faxian and other Chinese pilgrims who travelled to India in the early centuries of the Common Era recorded the continued existence of "Gotamaka" or Buddhists, followers of Devdatta. "Gotamaka" are also referred to us in Pali texts of the second and fifth centuries AD as the followers of Devdatta and who have honored all the Buddha previous to Śākyamuni, but not the Śākyamuni himself. The identical numbers of Jaina Tirthankaras 24 with 24 Buddha add to the mystery and confusion. Is this part of sacred numerology that everyone adheres to or there are historical facts?

If we were to use Theravada account of Devdatta, he taught his Sangha to adopt five tapas (literally, hard austerities) throughout their lives very similar to Mahavira:

1. The monks should dwell all their lives in the forest like early Jaina.
2. They should accept no invitations to meals, but live entirely on alms obtained by begging, very similar to Mahavira's monastic edicts.
3. That they should wear only robes made of discarded rags and accept no robes from the Laity, Mahavira preached nudity like Ajivikas Gosala. This vow is different.
4. They should dwell at the foot of a tree and not under a roof. The tree served as caitya and was covered with leaves and tree branches. Many Jaina monks coexisted with the Buddhist monks under Caitya, Stupa or caves.
5. They should abstain completely from fish and flesh, similar to Jainism.

With the exception of practicing "Nirgrantha" or nudity, all other principles of Devdatta were in agreement with Mahavira.

Unlike Devdatta and Mahavira, Buddha imposed no hard ascetic requirements and allowed garment to be worn, meat to be eaten and housing to be provided. That was the main reason for Buddhhas to part companies with the others. There is not sufficient research or inquiries done on Devdatta who was revered more than Shakyamuni in earlier phase of Buddhism. We can say with some confidence that all these reformist traditions had common origin in ancient Shramanic tradition with minor differences in monastic tradition and theology. They indirectly influenced each other and defections were very common among the disciples due to ascetic requirements or theological differences.

Mr. Edward Thomas wrote the book and also published an article in Royal Asiatic society in London that escaped many scholars' attention but it is still available in e-book form that really zeroes on one important thing "**Was early faith of Asoka was Jainism before he became Buddhist?**" He cites several reasons for his conclusion. Now, remember, at that time , Nirgrantha (Digambara) form of early Jainism was present and was lumped together with Ajivikas -shamanic sect of India who practiced identical monastic tradition. It is true that Mahavira had a disciple name Gautama. Since Gautama was called Brahmin by Jaina and Gautama Buddha was called Saka Kshatriya, it is questionable from these references if they

were the same people. However, Jaina record cites that the first head of the church was Sudharma who was the junior disciple. Gautama, Mahavira's chief disciple Gautama received Nirvana only short time later after Mahavira. We also hear through various Jataka and Jaina stories that the disciple changed the sect quite frequently between Buddhism and Jainism. So, we do not know for sure the real identity of the Gautama who was with Mahvira. The textual references suggest that he was great speaker like Gautama Buddha. The details are lacking in Jaina texts since they were transcribed almost 900 years later after the great teacher's death.

So, having learned the knowledge of the sect switching, we should not find it unusual this alternative hypothesis, however, unlikely it may appear. **Our contemporary politicians constantly switch the parties. It is ingrained in Indian psyche. "The flow of the power is more important than principles."**

Mikhail Gosala, the Ajivikas leader was senior to Mahavira and Gautama and once was the leader of the peck that many historians ignore. Both Mahavira and Buddha's parent followed the tradition of Parsvanatha. We know the debate between Kesi Gandhara of Parsvanath tradition and Gautama of Mahvira tradition took place to reconcile the difference between five vows and four vows.

Dr. Stevenson and Colebrook conclusion was almost identical in examining the signage of Buddha and Tirthankaras and he concluded that Buddhism got its inspiration from Jainism and Jainism got its information from Ajivikas and Ajivikas got its inspiration from ancient Shramanic tradition of Indus-saraswati region. Basically, there are more indications that various sects division and formation were rooted in the Indian culture; they were strictly **"Teacher Driven"**. One who felt alienation due to lack of authority or recognition made a quick defection to start their own sect. This religious division of sects can be considered more **"egocentric"** but for variety of trivial disagreement they were able to justify their division.

Kalinga War Depiction



However, Professor Charles Drekmeier warns that some of the Buddhist legends intend to dramatize the change that Buddhism brought in him and therefore may exaggerate his misdeeds to prove the power of Buddhism was so great that any evil deeds can be sanitized.

“Rajdharmā” described the duties of the rulers, which was intrinsically intertwined with the concept of bravery and Dharma. The Kalinga War happened eight years after his coronation or 261 BC. Asoka’s 13th inscription describes the carnage of the war. The battle was major one ever fought in ancient time and caused the deaths of more than 110,000 soldiers and many civilians. Nearly twice that many were deported to slavery. According to Buddhist legend, he followed sorrows and converted to Buddhism. This is the historical narrative as given in “Asokavadana” and other Buddhist texts.

The adoption of Buddhism by Asoka did lead to the expansion of Buddhism in the Mauryan empire and other kingdoms during his rule. His son Mahinda (Greek version) of Indian Mahindra and daughter Sanghamitra ("friend of the Sangha") help him established Buddhism in today’s Sri Lanka. They both were children of his Buddhist wife Shakyakumari Asandhimithra suggesting she was Indo-saka origin.



Kalinga War Depiction

What does Asoka's Edicts tell about him:

Asoka left a huge number of inscriptions behind and these furnish a wealth of information to us. Most of his message engraved on rocks, monolithic monuments, and remarkably well-polished stone pillars. The details on them were mainly about his later life as a king, his own ideas about "Raj Dharma" or Dhamma as he calls it and his own thinking and it has nothing to do with Buddhism or its theologies.

Though his numerous edicts, Mr. H.G. Wells summarized "**Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, the name of Asoka shines, and shines almost alone, as a star.**" This cannot be disputed because he expressly conveyed his feelings and thoughts through his numerous edicts in different languages of his time. He made a huge effort to spread his message. His core belief that he calls Dhamma can be summarized in Pali language as a hybrid religious product of all reformist movements of India that was Jainism, Ajivikas, Buddhism and Vedic principles. It deals with how to live a decent, ethical, moral and honorable life. He sums it up and calls them collectively as "Dhamma". On a personal basis, he expresses sorrow and regrets of his past deeds and tells his subject he has changed. We do not know if he was able to convince them all or some but he made the efforts. This can be summarized in one Pali sentence:

"Dhamma sadhu, kiyam cu dhamme ti? Apasinave, bahu kayane, daya, dane, sace, socaye".

As translated in English by Ven S. Dhammika of Buddhist society, it means **"Dhamma is good, but what constitutes Dhamma? (It includes) little evil, much good, kindness, generosity, truthfulness and purity."**



Pillar Edict at Varanasi



Mauryan Trianka (Three Ratna) coins

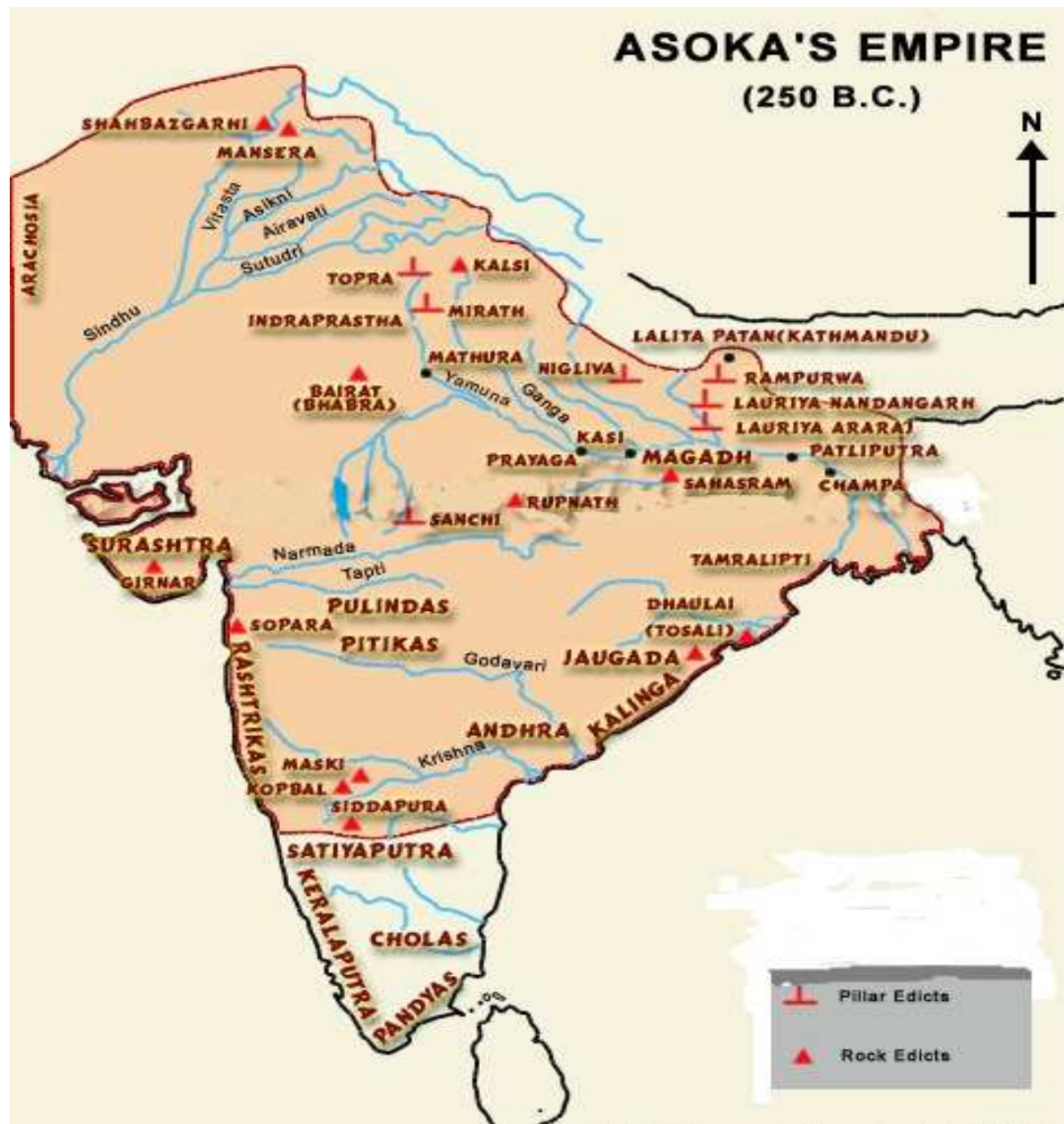
The scholars on edicts have different interpretations. According to Majumdar, Dhamma was not a single policy of belief of any heretic religious tradition of the his time but a system of cumulative beliefs extracted out of created out of different heretical reformist faiths of India during 5th century BC. Asoka's ban of killing of animals appeased all non-Buddhist reformist sects of India but hurt the profession of Brahmins which was solely dependent on sacrifice. So, propagation of Dhamma was intended to accomplish the reeducation of the public and messaging. We believe that Majumdar is more correct in his interpretation. Asoka placed his own touch of Dhamma not in line with Buddhism.

Romila Thapar believes that "Dhamma" pronouncement through edicts is a superb historical statement by a monarch of the mighty empire that renounced the violence in favor of humanity and universal brotherhood and may give direction to our current world."

To that extent, she is also correct in making the interpretation. It is hard to reconcile Asoka's personality and sudden change in his behavior. In some of his edicts, he seems to exercise the practicality of statecraft by advising native forest tribes that if he is forced to choose, he will not hesitate to use the force to enforce the dictates of Dhamma. These edicts are found in remote areas where non-Vedic tribes lived.

In the south he was on friendly terms with the Cholas and Pandyas and built matrimonial alliances. Sri Lanka became a close ally and propagator of his Dhamma religion. Thus, Asoka's appetite of war and conquest declined when his empire had reached its natural boundaries.

Through his edicts, one can come away with the impression that he is ruling a diverse nation with multiple faiths and multiple ethnicities and building a secular nation is a key to his success. This situation is true now for India. His Indian empire had the conglomerate of diverse groups; farmers, nomads and hunter-gatherers tribal people. These included Ionian Greeks, Sakya-Kambojas, and Aryan Bhojas and hundreds of forest dwellers, the early habitants of India with different worshipping traditions. In this situation, the religious tolerance for coexistence was needed. However, disfranchised forces of brahminical order that enjoyed the priorities in all phases of life during Vedic period cannot accept the changes brought by Asoka's "Dhamma" campaign. After Asoka's death, Brahmanism was revived. Then caste based society proliferated and His secular concepts were again reintroduced when India became independent after 1947.



Asoka's edicts, purpose and categorization:

Asoka's edicts although unique in its category and well intentioned can be best summarized as part propaganda, part expression of sorrow and guilt in hope of exoneration of his ugly deeds in the eyes of public, part rule making edicts and part promoting ethics in his kingdom. No one can say for any degree of certainty that his edict endorsed any particular reformist religious tradition of India and he specifically condemned the violence involved in ritual sacrifice. He further advocated universal brotherhood by naming major kings in central Asia

and acceptance of all the beliefs and tradition that are foreign and asked everyone to respect that. So, depending on edict's location, it can be described or understood in light of its intended purpose. For example, Kalinga edict is designed to convince his conquered people his regret and sorrow and tells them that he has changed and he was sorry for the carnage and he is going to treat them fairly and he will abide by his Dhamma. The edicts in his dominion is more look like propaganda as what he has done himself to be worthy of his subject's trust. The outlying on the border areas of his empire on North is to convey to rival and friendly kings that he is a "do-gooder" king, probably better than themselves. All of these edicts have been classified into three groups.

Pillar Edicts:

These pillar edicts averaged between 40 to 50 feet (12 to 15 m) in height, and weighing up to 50 tons each, the pillars were dragged, sometimes hundreds of miles, to where they were erected. It is believed that up to fifty tons each, all the pillars were quarried at Chunar, just south of Varanasi and dragged the hundreds of miles, to where they were erected. Each pillar was originally capped by a capital, sometimes a roaring lion, a noble bull or a spirited horse, and the few capitals that survive are widely recognized as masterpieces of Indian art with Gandhara art element. Both the pillars and the capitals exhibit a remarkable mirror-like polish that has survived despite centuries of exposure to the elements. The edicts on pillars are all to be found in very specific places in major cities urban areas. Asoka's style appears to be more explaining what he understand Dhamma is and why other people should follow that.

Seven pillar edicts out of nineteen are intact and constructed on a single pillar (Topra, presently displayed in Delhi). The rest were found in northern Bihar. They altogether number nineteen in total. The most important of these were found in the pillar engravings found at Rumindei (Nepal) that mention Asoka's visit to Lumbini. Most of the one in Bihar are written in Magadhi, the ancient language of India.

Two pillar edicts in Aramaic have been found at Taxila and Jalalabad (Afghanistan) that were part of international silk trade routes. A bilingual inscription written in Greek and Aramaic has been found on a rock at "Shar-i-Kuna" near Kandahar, Afghanistan. Four edicts (one in Kharoshthi script derived from Aramaic, which was used in Central Asia and Northern Persia along the Royal road to Persepolis).

The inscription found in the Western India are in Prakrit and Sanskrit with the rest of them scattered through India are in Brahmi, that have been found in Shalatak and Qargha region of Afghanistan, probably the center of early Buddhism.

There may have been more pillars edicts that may not have all survived due to Huna and Islamic vandalism but most of them in North West were the good propagation-“bill board” type mechanism to convey his message.

Fourteen Rock Edicts

They are found at various places, sometimes repetitious in nature but a proclamation of his conversion, adoption to Buddhism and pleading others to follow him. The Shahbazgarhi (the seventh edict to be engraved was on a bowl found at Peshawar in Pakistan and currently on display in the Prince of Wales Museum, Mumbai), Mansera (Hazara), Kalsi (Dehradun in Uttarakhand), Girnar (Junagadh in Gujarat), Sopara (Thana in Maharashtra), Dhuli and Jaugada (Orissa), and Yerragudi (Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh), Shahbazgarhi, Peshawar and along the Karakoram Route or highway. Asoka's Edict at Maski, Raichur district, Karnataka confirms also the name Asoka called himself as “Devanampiya”. The location of these rock edicts were governed by the availability of suitable rocks near population centers often delegated to governors and Mahamata.

The principles of Dhamma as enunciated in these edicts were formulated to be acceptable to people belonging to different communities that followed different religion. Asoka’s Dhamma therefore was secular emphasized tolerance of people following different faiths. In general, he showed and urged people to show empathy towards slaves and servants; there is stress on obedience to elders; generosity towards the needy who depended on the society like the Brahmans and Shramana.

Jaina Philosophy:

The most surprising part of some of the edicts were his stress on policy of nonviolence and forbidding, abandoning or even reducing meat consumption and eating and forbidding others to use the animal for sacrificial rituals. However, he cajoles the tribal when needed that he will not hesitate to enforce his rules by force if necessary. The fourteen Major Rock edicts is more likely influenced by Jaina philosophy and it is highly likely that Asoka in last days sickness cannot finish it and gave the control to his son Kunala and finally Samparati Who were Jaina followers.

It is interesting to note a similar passage cited by 11th century, Jaina Acharya Hemachandra in his work - the “life of Jaina elders” as translated by Faynes, the canto 11-sloka 65, and 83-94 describes his activity in advocating his Dhamma like his Grandfather Asoka. This sounds so similar to one of the Asoka’s edict advocating non-violence and makes you wonder could some of the edicts were completed by his successors who followed Jaina tradition.

“Abounding in splendors, unwavering in his faith, he, the emperor Samparati adorned the three parts of Bharata as far as Mount Vaidhya with Jaina Temples. Then the king summoned all his vassals and caused them to accept the truth about religion, ordering them. If you vassals respect me as your rightful overlord, then you will richly provide for Jains, lay people and Jaina monks. In their countries they held carriage procession in initiation of festivals that was held in Avanti, before the carriage, they rained flowers and worshipped the Jaina image of Tirthankaras. Since all vassals had become shravaka, the bordering kingdom became worthy of being habitated by Jaina monks. One night, Samparati thought that he will arrange for Jaina monks to travel to barbarian countries. So, he said to the barbarians, wherever you see my servants travelling, pay my taxes to them, then he sent his messengers dressed as Jaina monks to test it.”

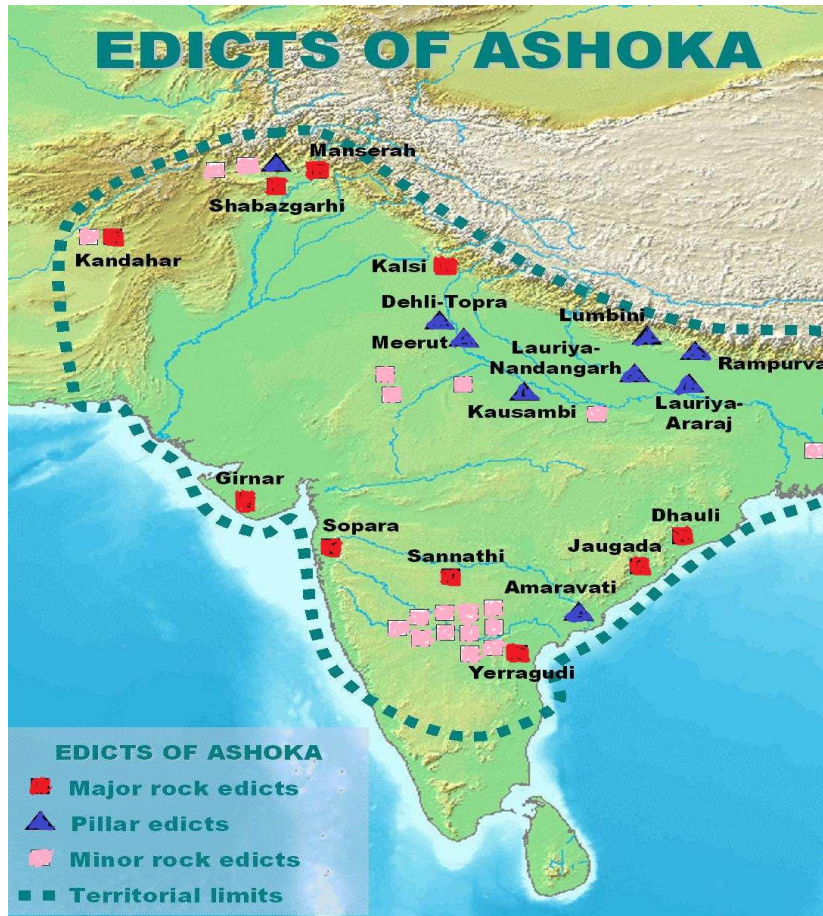
Northwest and central Asia:

The Greek and Babylonians considered the health care facility and public rest houses and roads as the priority in the public welfare. It appears that Asoka has borrowed some pages from there, if intentionally or for propaganda purpose to demonstrate that he is equal to them or exceeds them in public welfare coverage. He talks about Asclepion type Medical Centre facilities to cure diseases or provide relief therapy that were generally found in places in Greece and Anatolia like Pergamon in Turkey. The outermost edicts talks about similar public welfare measures, like building roads, guest houses and health facilities, planting of trees and digging of wells that were undertaken. So, we can categorize some of the rock edicts that gave various types of messages summarized in Appendix below for further study.

Minor Rock Edicts found in thirteen different places:

The minor rock edicts at Roopnath (M.P.), Bairat (Rajasthan), Sasaram (Bihar), Maski (Karnataka), Gavimath and Palkigundu (Mysore, Karnataka), Gujarra (Madhya Pradesh), Ahraura (Uttar Pradesh), Rajulamandagiri (Andhra Pradesh), and Yerragudi and three neighboring places in Mysore. Only thing of the values is what Asoka was and what he stood for either in public pronouncement or in private are stated through various edicts.

How and where he got the idea of installing the edicts is no one knows for sure but his Greek connection is suspected. The general conclusion is that his edicts more talk about “Raj Dharma” or how rulers must behave in rendering justice, equality and in law and nothing to with Buddhist theologies. This is his institutive understanding of what one should do.



Legacy:

Asoka the Great, as he is known, will not go down as a great conqueror but for his renunciation of violence and for laying the foundations of a welfare state which can serve as an example for centuries to come.

The reign of Asoka might have disappeared into the dust bin of history as the years passed by, had he not left behind records through his edicts. These fragmentary records of his later life are in the form of inscribed pillars and rocks. They tell us his desire for ethics, treatments for human beings, compassion, peace, universal brotherhood and his teachings he wished to be published under his name. In the process, Asoka left behind the first written language in India since the ancient civilization of Harappa that are signs but not the alphabets that can be deciphered. The language used for inscription was Prakrit, Brahmi, Sanskrit, Kharoshthi and Aramaic.

Modern India's national emblem is a gift from Asoka's heritage - the Dharma Chakra

'wheel' at the centre of the Indian flag, lion capital as marked in Government stationary and various currency bills of all the denomination.



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Appendix -1

Major Rock Edicts Summary

1. Major Rock Edict I prohibits of animal sacrifice and holidays of festive gathering.
2. Major Rock Edict II relates to measures of social welfare. It mentions medical treatment for men and animals, construction of roads, wells and tree planting.
3. Major Rock Edict III declares that liberality towards Brahmans and Shramana is a virtue, and that respecting one's parents is a good quality.
4. Major Rock Edict IV comments that because of the policy of Dhamma the lack of morality and disrespect towards Shramana and Brahmans, violence, unseemly behavior to friends, relatives and others, and evils of this kind have been checked. The killing of animals to a large extent was also stopped.
5. Major Rock Edict V refers to the appointment of Dhamma-Mahamata for the first time in the twelfth year of his reign. These special officers were appointed by the king to look after the interests of all sects and religions and spread the message of Dhamma.
6. Major Rock Edict VI is an instruction to Dhamma-Mahamata. They are told that they could

bring their reports to the king at any time. The second part of the Edict deals with speedy administration and the transaction of smooth business.

7. Major Rock Edict VII is a plea for tolerance amongst all sects. It appears from the edict that tensions among the sects were intense perhaps in open antagonism. The plea is a part of the overall strategy to maintain unity.

8 Major Rock Edict VIII states that Dhammayatras (tours) would be undertaken by the Emperor. The earlier practice of the emperor going out on hunting expeditions was given up. Dhammayatras enabled the emperor to come into contact with various sections of people in the empire.

9. Major Rock Edict IX attacks ceremonies performed after birth, illness, marriage and before going on a journey. A censure passed against ceremonies observed by wives and mothers. Asoka instead lays stress on practice of Dhamma and the uselessness of ceremonies.

10. Major Rock Edict X denounces fame and glory and reasserts the merits of following the policy of Dhamma.

12. Major Rock Edict XI is a further explanation of the policy of Dhamma. It emphasizes the respect of elders, abstaining from killing animals, and liberality towards friends.

13. Major Rock Edict XII is another appeal for tolerance among sects. This edict reflects the anxiety the king felt because of conflict between sects and carries his plea for harmony.

14. Major Rock Edict XIII is of paramount importance in understanding the main question raised in this brief article. "Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, have caused this Dhamma edict to be written. Here (in my domain) no living beings are to be slaughtered or offered in sacrifice. Nor should festivals be held, for Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, sees much to object to in such festivals, although there are some festivals that Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does approve of. Formerly, in the kitchen of Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, hundreds of thousands of animals were killed every day to make curry. But now with the writing of this Dhamma edict only three creatures, two peacocks and a deer are killed, and the deer not always. And in time, not even these three creatures will be killed. Everywhere within Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi's domain, and among the people beyond the borders, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Satiyaputras, the Keralaputras, as far as

Tamraparni and where the Greek king Antiochos rules, and among the kings who are neighbors of Antiochos, everywhere has Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, made provision for two types of medical treatment: medical treatment for humans and medical treatment for animals. Wherever medical herbs suitable for humans or animals are not available, I have had them imported and grown. Wherever medical roots or fruits are not available I have had them imported and grown. Along roads I have had wells dug and trees planted for the benefit of humans and animals. The Rock Edict pleads for conquest by Dhamma instead of war. This is logical culmination of the thought processes which began from the first Rock Edict, and by conquest what is perhaps meant is the adaptation of the policy of Dhamma by a country, rather than its territorial control. My dominions are wide, and much has been written, and i shall cause still no more to be written. And some of this has been stated again and again because of the charm of certain topics and in order that men should act accordingly.