CHAPTER TWO

King Aśoka, Aśoka’s Dhamma and Buddhism

In the previous chapter we have presented a survey of political ideas as indicated in early Buddhist literary sources and discussed in detail concepts such as those of the Cakkavatti, Dhammiko Dhammarāja and Dhamma concepts. In this section, we shall examine the extent to which these concepts were functional and hence adopted by early rulers.

In Indian history, the Mauryan empire was perhaps the first adopt Buddhist concepts in its political structure. Emperor Aśoka has been described both as a conqueror and a pious king in Indian history, since king Aśoka, was a firm believer in Dhammavijaya. The concept of conquering the world by righteousness without use of weapons but by his personal actions was a perfect example of the Buddhist ideal Cakkavattin, a universal monarch No figure in Indian history has been evaluated for his place in history with as much intensity and by as many diverse interest-groups as Emperor Aśoka.¹

1. Asoka and Buddhism

2.1.1 Epigraphical and literary and evidence of Buddhism in the Mauryan period

Both literary and archaeological sources provide information on Asoka's history and his relation with Buddhism. Of these, the inscriptions provide contemporary data, while the literary sources date to a later period. The literary sources can be divided into two; indigenous and foreign and contain information on the legend of Asoka and his predecessors in various languages, such as Pali and Sanskrit. The text and commentaries throw light on diverse aspects of Asokan life, his religious activities, ideas and system of administration.

1 Evidence from Asokan inscriptions

The thirty-four lithic records of Asoka, the major edicts and inscriptions in multiple copies located thousands of kilometres apart provide substantial information on the virtues which he upheld and wished to propagate among his subjects, his tolerant attitude to different religious sects and the administrative machinery which he had utilized to spread his message of Dhamma. Some facts, which are included in these inscriptions indicate the religious attitude of Asoka and his character.

That king Asoka had embraced Buddhism between his consecration and its twelfth, if not its tenth anniversary is no longer debated. MRE I and III, RE VIII and MPE 1-11 leave no doubt at all that he professed Buddhism as his personal religion with a devotion that was exemplary and a commitment that was total.

MRE III, which is an unique document found so far only in one version, is addressed to the Buddhist Sangha and laity and contains an unequivocal expression of the
emperor’s respect (gālave) and his faith (prasada) in the tree jewels (Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha). The Deotek rock edict states “king Piyadasi, king of Magadha, salutes the Sangha and enquires about its well being. He expresses his high esteem for the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.” Further, Aśoka makes the affirmation that whatever is preached by the Buddha is well spoken. He recommends the study of these Dhamma texts (Dhammapāliyāni) as a way of ensuring that Dhamma would last for a long time. Furthermore, his belief in the other world and in heaven is not contrary to Buddhist tenets. The Buddha himself said that a pious householder will be born as a god in one of the heavens, and the Vimānavatthu, contains a description of the bliss that is reserved for a virtuous man in the other world. In the Bairat edict, Aśoka paid honour to the Sangha and declared that he recommends to the Sangha and the laity seven texts of the Buddhist Canon for them to study and reflect on.

The selection of the texts testifies to a thorough knowledge of the Buddhist cannon by the emperor himself. The name of the following seven texts are given below:

1. Vinaya-samukase (the superior teaching of the Vinaya, Vinaya Vol. I p. 7ff)

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5 “Hamiyāye diseyā hevam sadhamme chila-dhi[lit]ike hotiti,” Ibid.
6 RE (Rock Edict) VI, IX XI, XIII, PE (Pillar Edict) I, IV, VII, Ibid.
4 Muni-gāthā (verse on recluses or fears about future happening, Suttanipāta, V. 217-221)

5 Moneya-sute (sutra on the practice of silence or song of the hermit, Suttanipāta, V. 679-723)

6 Upatīsa-pasina (question of Upatissa, Suttanipāta, V. 95-975)

7 Lāghuloviīda (the exhortation to Rāhula, Majjhima Nikāya Vol. II, p. 101)³

In his lithic records we have the emperor's own assertion that

1. he became a lay follower of the Buddha.

2. after a period of uncommitted adherence, he developed closer association with the Sangha and began to exert in practising and propagating the teachings of the Buddha.

3. he identified his own favourite texts which he recommended to the clergy as well as to the laity; and he played a leading role, through the exercise of his imperial powers, to prevent a schism in the Buddhist Sangha.

The version of the same MRE at Ahraurā seems to refer to Aśoka's installation of the worship of the relics of the Buddha, two hundred and fifty six days before the date of this particular document "this declaration has been made while being absent for two hundred and fifty six nights since the relics of the Buddha ascended the platform (am marine budasa salile ālodhe)." ⁹

The terminology of the Āśokan edicts has been he subject of considerable

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discussion among scholars for several years. It is a matter of regret that perfect unanimity has not been attained regarding the interpretation of certain words and phrases which are crucial to the topic under consideration e.g. *Upāsaka, Upayīte*.\(^{10}\) The term occurs in the same form in the Brahmagiri and Siddhāpur versions of minor rock edicts while Rupanāth Maski, Gāvimath, Bairāt and Gujarra edicts use the synonyms *Upete, Upagate, Upeti, Upayīte* and *Yāte* respectively.\(^{11}\)

According to interpretation of Bühler, Aśoka had actually entered (*Upayīte*) the Sangha, and had become a Buddhist monk. While holding a similar opinion, Smith says, on the basis of this term that Aśoka was a Buddhist monk and monarch at the same time.\(^{12}\) Senart is of the opinion that the passage refers to the state visit of the Maurya emperor to the Sangha in the course of which he publicly proclaimed his profession of Buddhism.\(^{13}\) Bhandarkar has taken this term *Upayīte* in the sense of ‘approaching’ or ‘associated with’ rather than ‘entering’ or ‘joining,’ and suggested that Aśoka was not a full-fledged monk but a *Bhikṣu gatika*.\(^{14}\) Mookerji, likewise, believes that the passage refers to Aśoka’s visit to the Sangha rather than the permanent monkhood of the emperor.\(^{15}\) Raychaudhuri and Basak have interpreted the passage to mean that Aśoka joined the Buddhist order and became a monk.\(^{16}\) Hultzsch assumed that he paid a visit to (*Upayīte*) the Sangha.\(^{17}\) Rao states that *Samgha Upayīte* is used for describing Aśoka’s

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., pp. 166, 172; EI, Vol. XXX, p. 209
\(^{13}\) IA, Vol. XX, 1891 pp. 233-234.
\(^{14}\) Bhandarkar, *op. cit.*, 1969, (re print), p. 79.
connection with the Sangha. Romila Thaper says that If king Aśoka was never more than a lay-follower, then his approaching the Sangha might be for instruction or aid in religious matters and not necessarily as a temporary monk. In 1994, she interpreted the term to mean “close to the Sangha.” This term has been translated by Sircar as king Aśoka ‘attached to the Sangha.’ Bongard Levin, Sharma and Mishra have translated this word as ‘visit to the Sangha.’ Guruge suggested that the meaning of this term is “the Sangha has been intimately associated with me (samghe upayite).” Gombrich states that he “went to” the Sangha and made a lot of progress. We cannot be sure just what he meant by “going to” the Sangha—the Buddhist tradition. That it meant going and living with monks may be an exaggeration, but in any case it clearly involved getting to know more about. It is clear that the root of this term ‘gam’ or ‘yā’, and consequently the passage, containing this expression, seems to refer to Aśoka’s visit to the Sangha. It is significant that there is a relation between Aśoka’s visit to the Sangha and its effect upon him as an Upāsaka.

In MRE I, found hitherto in seventeen versions, agreeing in essential details but with minor modifications, Aśoka claims that his devotion toward Buddhism increased progressively over a short period because of a close association with the Sangha. Aśoka

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says that "for more than two and a half year, I have been a lay devotee (Upāsaka)\textsuperscript{25} and I did not exert myself thoroughly. For over a year, however, I have visited the Sangha (samghe upayite) and I have exerted thoroughly."\textsuperscript{26}

In the Sri Lankan chronicles, the term Upāsaka is used to indicate that Aśoka had become a lay disciple of Buddhism.\textsuperscript{27} No one can deny that the term 'Upāsaka' used in the second Bairāt rock inscription and the Sārnāth minor pillar inscription also means a Buddhist lay worshipper. An identical expression has been used with reference to Aśoka in his first minor rock edict discovered at Sahasrām, Bairāt, Brahmagiri and Siddhāpur etc., and it must be construed to convey the same sense. Moreover, even the words Śākya and Buddha-Śākya, used in this connection in the Rupanāth and Maski versions, find an apt parallel in the Buddhist chronicles wherein Aśoka is said to have declared, "I have avowed myself a lay pupil of the doctrine of the Śākyamuni.\textsuperscript{28} According to this interpretation it is clear that Aśoka honoured the three Jewels, and he was a follower of Buddhism.

Further, Aśoka visited sacred Buddhist places as a pious devotee. RE VIII dates his pilgrimage (Dhammayātā) to Sambodhi, that is the sacred Bodhi tree in Gayā, ten years after his consecration.\textsuperscript{29} With it commences his Dhamma tour of pilgrimages, during which, among other things he worked for the promotion of Dhamma and

\textsuperscript{25} Bairāt, Erragudi, Gāvimath, Nittur, Pangerāria, Rajula-Mandagiri, Sahasrām and Siddhāpur visions have clearly “ya hakam (sumi or hake) upasaka” while Brahmagiri has the last two syllables. Maski version has “Am sumi Budha sake” and has been interpreted by Hultzsch to mean a “a Buddha Śākya” meaning a Buddhist. Kautilya is used in Arthasastra (Ch. III. 20. 23) “Śakyājivakādin” to mean Buddhist, Ājīvakas and others. It supports this interpretation. Rupanāth version read “ya sumi pakasa sake (since I openly a Śākya).


\textsuperscript{27} “Bahu Buddhassa savakā,” Dipavamsa, Ch. VI, V. 55.

\textsuperscript{28} See foot not 26.

conducted instruction and discussion sessions (dhammanus[ā]ti Dhamma-paripruchcā).³⁰

King Aśoka visited Lumbini, twenty years after he was anointed, to worship (this spot), because the Buddha Śākyamuni was born here.³¹ He rebuilt the stūpa of Buddha Konāgamana fourteen years after he was anointed and he visited, Nigali-sāgar, to worship and caused a stone pillar to be set up.³² Further, recent archaeological surveys in the Indian sub-continent have helped in the identification of several vestiges of Aśokan constructions. For example Percy Brown sees the “relics of a typical Aśokan character” in the stūpa hall of Bairāṭ in Rajasthan and stūpa No. 4 and temple No. 40 of Sāñchi.³³

Some inscriptions which were erected by king Aśoka were addressed specifically to the Buddhist Sangha and nuns about their discipline. Warnings against schisms were included in the three Minor pillar inscriptions at Allahābād, Sārnāth and Sāñchi (MPE III) generally called the “schism edict”. All these edicts warned against schisms in the order and declared that any monk or nun who tried to cause a schism, should be asked to take up abode in a place other than a monastery.³⁴ Thus, this order should be made known to monks, nuns and lay devotees.³⁵ Further, the order of monks and nuns has been united, and this unity should last for as long as my sons and great grandsons, and the moon and the sun.³⁶ According to these schism inscriptions we can assume that king Aśoka

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³⁰ Ibid.
³² “Budasa Konikamanasa thube dutiyam vadhite... Atana āgācha mahiyite,” Ibid., p. 165.
³⁴ See, p. 102.
appreciated the unity of the Buddhist Sangha and he wanted to protect the Buddhist Sangha.

II Evidence from literary sources

Literary sources such as the Divyāvadāna, Avadāna, Mañjusri Mūlakalpa and Pūranas contain references to Aśoka and his religious policy. The main sources for the cycle of Aśoka legends in the Divyāvadāna, consist of Pāmsupradānāvadāna, Kunālāvadāna, Vītasokāvadāna and Aśokāvadāna. The Divyāvadāna, in Buddhist Sanskrit prose interspersed with verse, contains older parts datable as early as the first century A.D. though one part of it could be as late as the fourth century. According to the northern Indian Buddhist literature, king Aśoka was converted to Buddhism by Thera Samudra. Enshrining the bodily relics of the Buddha, Aśoka constructed 84,000 stūpas, which were called Dhammarājikā and he performed a special religious ceremony every five years. 37 Guided by Thera Upagupta of Mathurā, king Aśoka undertook a pilgrimage to all holy places connected with the life of the Buddha including shrines in honour of important disciples. 38 Thus these sources mention that Aśoka converted to Buddhism after his coronation and helped in the expansion of Buddhism.

The most fertile source of historical information on Aśoka is the Pāli literature of Sri Lanka which has recorded the Theravāda tradition on the introduction of Buddhism to the island. Sri Lankan Pāli literary works have a special place among the sources on the life and career of Aśoka. The main source of the Theravāda tradition on Aśoka is an

37 Divyāvadāna, p. 429.
38 Ibid., p. 389.
ancient commentary in Sinhala, \(^{39}\) which is no longer extant but is widely quoted in later works: the two major Sri Lankan chronicles the *Dīpavamsa*, *Mahāvamsa* as well as the Commentaries, the *Samantapāśādīkā* and the *Vamsatthapakāśini* and a great number of Chronicles dealing with the history of relics, stupa and the Bodhi tree.\(^{40}\) According to the Sri Lankan Pāli sources, Aśoka embraced Buddhism in the third \(^{41}\) or fourth \(^{42}\) year from his coronation, though the Sanskrit Buddhist sources are not so specific.

The *Dīpavamsa*, dated to the fourth century A.D., is the oldest Pāli chronicle of Sri Lanka.\(^{43}\) In the *Dīpavamsa*, king Aśoka is referred to by several names such as Piyaḍassana,\(^{44}\) Piyaḍassi,\(^{45}\) Aśoka,\(^{46}\) Dharmāsoka.\(^{47}\) Further, it gives details about the life of the king before and after consecration as a king of Pātaliputra, the story of conversion as a Buddhist king, patronage of the third Buddhist council and missionary activities for expansion of Buddhism within the subcontinent and in neighbouring countries, as well as contribution to Buddhist monasteries in various places of Jambudīpa.\(^{48}\)

The great Chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa*, has paid special attention to Aśoka’s life before and after his coronation, conversion as Buddhist king, his pious activities, like the


\(^{41}\) "Abhisitto tīnī vassāni pasanno buddha sāsane," *Dīpavamsa*, Ch. VI, V. 19.

\(^{42}\) *Mahāvamsa*, Ch. V, V.22, 74.

\(^{43}\) See introduction of the *Dīpavamsa*.

\(^{44}\) *Dīpavamsa*, Ch. VI, V. 1-2; Ch. XV, V. 88-89.


\(^{46}\) *Ibid.*, Ch. VI, V. 12, 24.


\(^{48}\) *Ibid.*, Ch. VI, V. 15-85; V. 86-100; Ch. VII, V. 7-59; Ch. VIII, XI, XIII, XVI.
third Buddhist council and his missionary activities, which established Buddhism in India and Sri Lanka under the patronage of king Aśoka.49

The Vinaya Commentary, the Samantapāsādikā, makes reference to Aśoka in several places. The Samantapāsādikā gives details of the conversion of Aśoka as a Buddhist king. Further, it has preserved information about Aśoka’s religious policy like the third Buddhist council, and missionary activities of king Aśoka, erection of Vihāras at each of the 84,000 towns of Jambudīpa and establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.50

The Vamsatthappakāsini is a commentary of the Mahāvamsa. The importance of the Vamsatthappakāsini as a source on Aśoka is that it contains materials, which does not occur elsewhere. It gives information about the number of sons of Bindusāra, Aśoka’s accession to the throne, meeting of Thera Moggaliputta Tissa with king Aśoka, medicines sent by Aśoka, the members of the mission to the Himalayas (Majjhima, Kassapagotta, Mulakadeva, Dundubissara, and Sahadeva), Arahanta Mahinda’s mission, Aśoka’s days at Ujjeni and the last days of Aśoka.51

All Sri Lankan Pāli literary sources state that Aśoka converted to Buddhism after listening to the sermon from Arahanta Nīgrodha at the palace of Pātaliputra and after he patronized Buddhism. Barua argues that “this individual representative according to the Pāli account, was a gifted novice called Nīgrodha, and venerable Samudra.” 52

Sri Lankan sources of a later period, are unique in the sense that they preserve the narratives of Aśoka’s life and activities. Many of these narratives find mention in the Aśokan edicts, but are not discussed in other contemporary sources. So an attempt would

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49 Mahāvamsa, Ch. V, XII, XIII, XVIII.
50 Samantapāsādikā, pp. 12-38.
52 B. M. Barua, Asoka and his Inscriptions, New Delhi: New Age Publisher (re print) 1968, pp. 20 ff, 30 ff.
be made to reconstruct this narrative on the basis of the Sri Lankan chronicles to evaluate its authenticity vis-a-vis the archaeological data. For example,

1. the identification of 'Piyadasi' in the rock edicts and pillar inscriptions with Aśoka whose full name was preserved in Sri Lankan records only.\(^{53}\)

2. the evidence of the \textit{Mahāvamsa} and \textit{Samantapāśādikā} on the cleansing in the community and restoring its unity \((\text{samgho samaggo hutvāna})\)\(^{54}\) or \((\text{samaggo samge})\)\(^{55}\) is exactly similar to the data of the schism edicts of Allahabad-Kosam( \([\text{sa}]\text{ma}[\text{ge ka}][\text{e}]\) and Sāñchi \((\text{sa}ma[\text{ge ka}][\text{e}])\).\(^{56}\)

3. after the third council, more than sixty thousand shameless monks were eliminated from community and splendour restored to the (true) faith.\(^{57}\)

The Schism edict of Aśoka mentions that whosoever, monk or nun, breaks up the Sangha, after being clothed in white garments, shall take up abode in a place other than a monastery.\(^{58}\)

4. the assessment of the role and achievements of Moggaliputta Tissa who had merited such special veneration in Aśokan times as to have had his relics enshrined with the utmost honour in stūpa No 2 of Sāñchi in a relic casket bearing the inscription "\textit{Sapurisa Mogaliputasa}".\(^{59}\)

\(^{53}\) \textit{Dīpavamsa}, Ch. VI, V. 1-2, 12, 14, 24; Ch. XV, V. 88-89.

\(^{54}\) \textit{Mahāvamsa}, Ch. V, V. 274.

\(^{55}\) \textit{Samantapāśādikā}, p. 19.


\(^{57}\) \textit{Dīpavamsa}, Ch. VII, V. 40; \textit{Mahāvamsa}, Ch. V. 270-280; "\textit{Imeti āvatā vesam setakāni vatthāni datvā Uppabba jesa}, " \textit{Samantapāśādikā}, p. 16.


5. the epithet "Sapurisa(sa) Kasapagotasa Hemavatāchariyasa", "Sapurisa (sa) Majhimasa", "dudabhissara dāyādam," "Sapurisa (sa) Alabagirasa," occurring on the relic caskets of Sāñchi, Sonāri and Åndre stūpas containing remains of Kassapagotta, Majjhima, and Dundubhissara, Ålakadeva who, in a comprehensive list of missionaries sent out after the third council, according to Sri Lankan Pāli sources, were assigned the conversion of the Himalayan reign.61

6. two Brāhmi inscriptions have been found from Sri Lanka, dated second-first century B.C., at Rajagala (eastern province of Sri Lanka) and Mihintale (north central province of Sri Lanka). The Rajagala Brāhmi inscription mentions the name of Thera Mahinda and Thera Uttiya.62 The Mihintale rock inscription refers to elder Mahinda, Uttiya and Iittiya.63 According to the Chronicles all these monks arrived in Sri Lanka as missionaries of Aśoka.64

When the Chinese pilgrims, Fa-Hien, Hiuen-Tsang and I-tsing toured various parts of India, they visited shrines still believed to be constructed by Aśoka (A-Yo), they saw pillars with inscriptions still attributed to him and collected many legends which were

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61 "Kassapagotto ca yo thero majjhimo durabhissaro sahadevo Mulakadevo Himavante Yakkaganam pas dayum," Dipavamsa, Ch. VIII, V. 10; Mahāvamsa, Ch. XII, V. 6, "Majhimatthero pana Kassapogottherena Alakadevatherena dundubhissartherena Mahādevatherena ca sadhim himavanta padsabhabagam Gantvā.,” Samantapāsādikā, p. 21; Vamsatihappakāsini, Vol. I, p. 317.
64 Dipavamsa, Ch. VIII, V. 12; Mahāvamsa, Ch. XII, V. 7.
prevalent among the Buddhists. The Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hien has added a few pieces of information:

1. Aśoka destroyed seven stūpas so as to build eighty-four thousand and the first among them was located three li to the south of Pātaliputra and a vihāra was built by the king in front of the footprint of the Buddha.

2. Aśoka had set up stone pillars with inscriptions at a number of places. One of them is said to have recorded that Aśoka presented the whole of Jambudīpa to the Sangha three times and redeemed it with money on every occasion. 65

Hiuen-Tsang refers to some of the incidents in the episodes of the Divyāvadāna and, more importantly, lists a large number of Sanghārāma and stūpas which had been shown to him as constructed by Aśoka. 66

2.1.2 Location of Aśokan inscriptions and relationship with ancient Buddhist sites.

From the twelfth year of his reign until the twenty-seventh year, king Aśoka emphasised the spread of his idea as he understood it by carving a large number of stone inscriptions. More than one hundred and fifty inscriptions were engraved and erected by Aśoka in various prominent places of his empire to give moral advice to subjects, officers and neighbours.

Likewise, the rock edicts are generally concerned with the content of Dhamma. They generally have long texts and are the most representative of the edicts. While the

major rock edicts contain chronological references ranging from the eighth to the thirteenth years after the *Abhiṣeka*, pillar edicts I, II, V and VI state that they were inscribed twenty-six years, and pillar edict VII twenty-seven years, after the consecration. The Greek Aramic Minor rock edict found at two places near Kandahar in Afghanistan is dated ten years after the coronation. As for the inscriptions in the Karna Chaupar cave and Barabar hills are these dated nineteen and twelve years after the *Abhiṣeka*. The Nigali-sāgar and Rummindei pillar inscriptions refer to events that occurred fourteen and twenty years respectively after the consecration of king Aśoka. 67

The inscriptions carved on rocks and pillars, in caves and on stone slabs, constitute the most solid and best-dated material for the use of writing at that time. 68 Many of these have been discovered. Some, carved on polished stone slabs, are known as rock edicts, while others, carved on large standing stone pillars, are called pillar edicts. Both Major and Minor pillar edicts have survived at six or seven places. Major pillar edicts have been discovered at six sites, primarily in central India. The Minor pillar edicts were usually situated at Buddhist pilgrimage sites such as Sārnāth, Sāñchi, Lumbini and Nigali-sāgar.

There are two types of rock edicts. Fourteen Major rock edicts have been discovered at seven places along the borders of the territory that Aśoka controlled, including Girnar. Minor rock edicts have been discovered at seven places in central and southern India. The priority of the Major rock edicts over the pillar edicts is clear from the chronological references in the inscriptions

In 1925, Bhandarkar discussed the issue and stated that the peculiarity of Aśoka's rock edicts is that they are found on or along the frontiers of his dominions. There is, however, only one difference, that is the fourteen rock edicts seem to be engraved in the capital of the outlying provinces, and the Minor rock edicts are mostly found at places which separate his territory from that of his independent or semi independent neighbours.69

Mookerji explained that the extent of Aśoka's empire may be inferred from the geographical distribution of his rock and pillar edicts.70 Though, both these scholars referred to the territory of the Mauryan dynasty, they did not provide any reasons, which may have led to the erection of Aśokan inscriptions.

Romila Thapar has presented a critical analysis of the reasons for the location of the Aśokan inscriptions. She says that these inscriptions were engraved in prominent places either near towns, or on important trade routes or travel routes, and places of religious importance. The purpose was to make public the edicts to as large a group of people as possible.71 In 1987, she explained this idea and stated that the location of Mauryan inscriptions found so far is suggestive of a pattern which follows the known routes and skirts around what might be called the peripheral reigns of this period.72 According to this, she tried to emphasise the influence of trade and trade routes in the erection of Aśokan inscriptions.

In 1994, Thapar suggests that existing stone pillars would certainly have been associated with a site and probably a site of religious importance. Were the rocks also in

the vicinity of sacred sites or populated centres? Not all these inscriptions are located at important Buddhist monastic centres and some seem to have been located close to megalithic settlements. The later imposition of Buddhist centres at certain megalithic sites (such as Amaravati) suggests an association, which may have been evolving at this time. However, the presupposition of a sacred site is not necessary for the location of these inscriptions since the text itself makes it clear that the prime purpose was to reach large numbers of people. 73

This issue has been, further discussed by Gerard Fussman. 74 He explains that the distribution pattern of the minor rock edicts (dated in the twelfth years of Aśoka’s coronation) shows that the copies of these Minor rock edicts have been found only near three large towns: Kandahar, Delhi and Erragudi (Suvannagiri). In contrast, the distribution pattern of the rock edicts (twelfth and thirteenth years of Aśoka’s consecration) is quite different. The preserved versions are all posted near road junctions and important sites of the empire even beyond the frontier. For example; Kālsi rock edicts are all engraved at the confluence of the Yamuna and Tons rivers, that is, at the crossing of routes, which allow access to the Himalayan countries. Mansherā is situated quite high up on the mountain; from there the road starts which leads up to the high Indus valley (Gilgit) on the one hand and Kashmir on the other. The other pillar edicts were engraved neither close to large towns (except Kandahar) nor to busy roads or to places which travellers were bound to pass through. When one analyses the reason for


there presence at a particular place, it is the religious nature of the site that becomes significant. The pillar of Lauriyā Nandangarh marks the site of a famous Buddhist monument the “stūpas of charcoal.” 75 The argument of Fussman seems to be more logical than the previous opinion, but he does not prove his argument through archaeological evidence.

Further, most of the Aśokan inscriptions are in Prākrit, written in Brāhmi script, except for those in the north-west. These letters are either in Prākrit, written in Kharoshti, a script derived from Aramaic script, adopted for writing an Indian language; or translated directly into Aramaic, the language of the Achaemenid administrative class; or into Greek at Kandahar. This was no doubt a result of the establishment of a Greek colony there by Alexander, and where there still lived a substantial Greek population. 76 The Brāhmi script was generally employed in other parts of India.

Thus the question remains: what was the link between Buddhist sites and Aśokan inscriptions? Were the Buddhist monks resident in the Buddhist monasteries involved in the writing of the rock or pillar inscriptions? Were the Aśokan inscriptions, which were written in the Prākrit language and Brāhmi script understood by the local populace without mediation by an intermediary? If we the study location of the Aśokan inscriptions, we can highlight the relationship between Aśoka and Buddhism. This will be considered under the following three categories viz.

1. Location of Aśokan inscriptions near Buddhist sites.
2. Non-Buddhist sites with Aśokan inscriptions.
3. Aśokan inscriptions and places associated with the Buddha.

75 Ibid., p. 70.
I Location of Buddhist sites and Aśokan inscriptions.

Many of the Aśokan inscriptions have been found in the vicinity of Buddhist sites or a few kilometres from the Buddhist sites. For example: the Delhi Toprā pillar edict, was originally located in the village of Toprā or Tobra in the District of Sālaura and Kihizrabad, north west of Delhi. Sultan Firoz-shah carried it to Delhi and erected it on the top of his palace at Firozabad. According to the descriptions of Hiuen-Tsang, archaeological evidence and Cunningham’s survey, there was a large Vihāra (monastery) and stūpa located at the site in Aśoka’s time. These contained relics of the Buddha, besides other stūpas of Arahanta Sāriputta and Moggallāna and other holy Buddhist monks. Large number of bricks (size 13” X 8” X”7”) which are related to the Buddhist monuments, dated to the Mauryan period, (3rd century B.C.) have been found from this area. PL. I Delhi-Toprā pillar edict

Further, other Buddhist and Brāhmanical monuments have been found two or three kilometres from the Toprā site on the western bank of the Yamuna river.

The Delhi Meerut pillar edict, was earlier located in the vicinity of Meerut. This pillar was situated on the so called ridge to the north west of modern Delhi.

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77 See Maps No.1-2-3
79 ASI (AR), 1936-37, pp. 53-54.
ancient structures and monuments were identified by Cunningham around the Meerut pillar inscription. According to the archaeological evidence, Cunningham has identified temples dated to third century B.C. to the post Mauryan period. On the basis of the structures and quality of bricks, he assumed that some of the Buddhist ruins belonged to the Mauryan period.  

Lauriyā Ararāj Aśokan pillar inscription is located in the northern Bihar village of Ararāj, while Lauriyā Nandangarth is in the Champaran District. The Lauriyā Ararāj pillar was erected near an ancient Buddhist site. Further, twenty stūpa mounds were discovered by archaeologists in the southern part of the site of the Nandangarth pillar edicts. In 1905, Bloch excavated four of these mounds. He suggested that this site and some mounds represented ancient burial sites and Prayogas associated with ancient Indian rituals of the pre-Mauryan period. Likewise, he refused to accept that the ancient Vedic sepulchral sites, such as those at Kasaria and Sagadia contain Buddhist relic, though gold leaf was found in one of the stūpas bearing a female figure.  

In 1935-36, N. G. Majumdar re-examined four mounds with important results. He identified all of them with earthen burial memorials with burnt brick revetments, two being faced with a brick lining in a double tier. Thus there is no justification in regarding these and the gold leaves found by Bloch, which had their exact replica in the stūpa at Pipārahwa as Vedic burial sites. Likewise, many Buddhist monuments have been found

82 ASI (AR), 1931-32, pp. 10-11.  
84 Ibid., p. 126.  
85 Ibid., p. 31.  
86 Ibid.  
87 ASI (AR), 1935-36, p 55, 1936-37, p. 44.  
88 Ibid., 1936-37, p. 47.
in the vicinity of Lauriya Araraj and Lauriya Nandangarh. Kesuria, Piprāhwa and Kapilavastu are also other important Buddhist places which have been found near Lauriya Araraj and Lauriya Nandangarh. 89 A few Buddhist archaeological ruins have been discovered from Bethia, twenty or twenty-five kilometre from Lauriya Nandangarh and Lauriya Araraj. 90

The Rāmpurvā pillar edicts are located at a distance of thirty-four kilometres north of Bettiah in the Champaran District of northern Bihar. Buddhist ruins were discovered by archaeologists near Rāmpurvā pillar edicts. Some bricks, which were used for buildings and pottery were assumed to have belonged to the Mauryan period. 91

The Sopārā major rock inscription is located near an ancient town in the Bassein Tāluka of the Thane District of Bombay. This city contained some notable Brāhmanical and Buddhist edifices. According to archaeological observations, some of the Buddhist monuments and ruins belong to the Mauryan period and others to the post-Mauryan period. 92 The report of archaeological Surveys indicates that most of the ruins are associated with Buddhism. While some structures belong to the Sātavāhana period, a few Buddhist ruins have been found below these Sātavāhana structures. 93

The Sāñchi schism edict is situated near Bhopāl, ten kilometre from the Bhilsā Buddhist sites, in the Central Province. Sāñchi is the one place, where NBP ware has also been noticed. 94 The Sāñchi monuments are the most imposing and the best preserved

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90 Ibid., p. 65.
91 ASI (AR), 1907-08, p. 182.
92 JASBO, Vol. IV, 1835, p. 325.
94 IA, No. 9, 1953, p. 160.
of all the monuments that early Buddhism has bequeathed to India. Apart from Sānchi, none of the neighbouring hills of Vedisā contain any remains belonging to the Mauryan age. On the basis of archaeological evidence, scholars believe that the history of Sānchi began with the reign of Aśoka in the third century B.C. The Mauryan bricks 16” X 10” X 3” were found from under the present structure of the great stupa which was built in the Sunga period. 95

The stupa of Aśoka suffered damage, before the middle of the second century B.C., when it underwent complete reconstruction, consisting of a stone encasing, a terrace with a double flight of steps, balustrades, a paved processional path, crowing members comprising a harmikā in the form of a stupa-shaped stone relic-coffer. 96 Agrawala assumed that the stone umbrella or the harmikā of polished Chunar sandstone of stupa I belonged to the Mauryan period. 97 Further, temple No 40 contains the remains of three different periods, the earliest, going back to the Mauryan age, being in all probability contemporaneous with the stupa of Aśoka. Built on a high rectangular stone PL II. Aśokan pillar edict at Sanchi platform, 26.52X14X3.35m, and provided with two stepped approaches on its eastern and western sides, the original structure, probably of timber, was an apsidal hall, as the stone

96 Debala Mitra, Sanchi, New Delhi, ASI, 1992, p. 23.
foundation of the hall, with indications of an apsidal circumambulatory passage, was noticed in the core of the platform. 98

In 1851, Cunningham and Maisy excavated stūpa No 2 and No 3 and discovered relics, belonging monks of the involved in missionary activities in the Himavanta area, 99 from there. In addition a large number of Buddhist monuments and ruins were discovered at the site. 100

Likewise, the setting of the pillar on the Sāñchi hill by Aśoka with an edict on it, warning the Buddhist monks and nuns against their destructive activities marks out the degenerating trends in the Buddhist monastic establishment there. And this fact also indicates that Buddhist monks and nuns were staying here and a period of peace and unity in the Sangha had preceded the royal effort there.

The Sahasrām Minor rock edict is located in the Sahabad District of Bihar not far from the river Son, twenty-two kilometres south-west of Patna. Sahasrām would thus be an important town on the northern edge of the plateau; the out post of Magadha before the rather uncertain journey across the plateau. Few remains of pre-Mauryan Buddhist monasteries have been found around the Sahasrām site. Some Buddhist monuments, which have been discovered two or three kilometre from Sahasrām, belong to the Mauryan period. 101

The Bairāṭ Minor rock edict is situated in the District of Jaipur in Rajasthan. Cunningham considered Bairāṭ to be the capital of the Matsya Janapada, which existed in

99 See page. 12.
101 ASI (AR), 1907-1908, p. 27.
The 6th century B.C. The Buddhist remains are located on two terraces on the Bijak-kiphari, the upper terrace with a brick monastery and the lower one with a brick sanctuary, both excavated by Sahni.

According to Sahni’s observations, although, most of the Buddhist ruins belong to a later period, but some bricks and pottery, found among the monastery site, can be traced to the third century B.C. Several bricks inscribed with one or two Aksaras were found built in the rectangular enclosure wall around the temple. This Aksaras are similar to Brāhmi letters of Aśoka's edicts. Further, a pillar of Aśoka in Chunar sandstone and a polished stone umbrella of Mauryan craftsmanship were found in the debris. The importance of thirty-six silver coins found in the east wall of the monastery on the upper terrace in dating of the monuments has been noticed above. Sahni assumes some silver coins belong to the time of Aśoka.

One of the Aśoka's edicts is located at Taxila. Though there are several references to Taxila and its history in the literary sources from south Asia, but no trace of any building of Aśoka’s time has yet been discovered, save a few fragments of a Mauryan pillar and an Aramaic inscription of the same period. The name “Dhammarājikā” itself, being the name of the main stūpa at Taxila, may suggest Aśoka’s association with the site. Marhsall had assumed the existence of an Aśokan pillar by the side of the

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102 ASI (R), Vol. VI, 1873, p. 75.
104 Ibid., p. 31; See PL. No. III
105 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
106 Ibid.
Locations of Asokan Inscriptions in Peninsular India

Map. 3

- Minor Rock Edict
- Major Rock Edict
- Minor Pillar Edict
- Modern Town
- Megalithic Sites
Dhammarājikā "stūpa from the finds of some mullers of Chunar sandstone and fragments of the same stone in Bhir mound. Sarker suggested that the 'Mahāchetiya' (Dhammarājikā) remained all along the principle monument within a monastic complex from the time of Aśoka down to the fifth century A.D.

The Maski Minor rock edicts are located in the Raichur District of Karnataka other sites may also be mentioned because of their association with Aśokan inscription, such as Kopbal and Brahmagiri. Though, Buddhist monuments or Buddhist ruins have not yet been discovered inside the Maski site, but a few Buddhist and Hindu monuments were found in and around the Maski site. Further some bricks and potteries, which have been found belong to the Mauryan period. Hence, archaeologists assumed that some of the Buddhist monuments belong to this period. Twenty-five kilometres from Maski, is the site of Sannathi.

The Brahmagiri rock edict is located in Chitaldrug district at the northern extremity of Mysore. The largest number of stone objects are visible on the surface of Isila (near Brahmagiri). Some of these were granite pieces of slabs, polished on one side. A granite pestle of the same kind well polished, was also recovered. These remind us of the polish of the Mauryan pillars and other objects. Further, hingestone for doorways and a wheel stone of reddish sandstone were some objects which may well belong to the Mauryan time.

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108 Ibid., p. 237.
110 CII, Vol. I, p. xxvi; See, Map No. 3.
111 Ancient India, 1953, No. 9, pp. 60-64; Alchin, op.cit., 1995, p. 140.
113 Annual Report of the Mysore Archaeological Department for Year, 1940-1941, p. 70.
A few Buddhist monuments and ruins have been found near the Brahmagiri inscription site. The bricks of the stūpa at Brahmagiri, are located to the south-east of the boulder containing the minor rock edict of Aśoka. The date of this apsidal structure has not been determined though the size of bricks (9" x 3" x 3½") indicates a fairly early date (may be 3rd century B.C). 114

The Sannathi rock edict is situated in the Gulbarga district of Karnataka. 115 According to archaeological evidence, the first stūpa identified at Sannathi lies close to the river bank approximately 1.5 km downstream from the city site. The circular foundation of the stūpa, which is all that survives today, indicates that the structure had a solid dome faced in ashlar block, and an overall diameter of approximately 2.5 km. 116

On the river bank upstream from the city is another group of buildings on a low mound known as Benagutti. This literally means (mound of stone) though it seems more likely that the name derives from Benakapgutti, relating to the Chalukyan period. Some of these building structures have been identified by archaeologists as Buddhist monuments. 117 A. P. Sagar discovered a granite stone bearing Mauryan polish and the size of bricks, 54X27X9 cm, 47X24X6 cm, were found from the fortified area, which might have belonged to the Mauryan period. 118 But most of the Buddhist building structures belong to the Sātavāhana period. Further, some archaeologists have suggested that some Buddhist ruins belong to the Mauryan period. 119

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117 Ibid, p. 29.
There is a debate over the purpose of the sculptures from the site. They have been thought to be of Buddhist origin, with the riderless horse scene being interpreted as the great departure of the Lord Buddha. Evidence for a Buddhist presence at Sannathi is the ‘Buddha Pāda’ sculpture set up in front of the Chandralamba temple and the interpretation of the mound as a stūpa. A single punch marked coin supports the evidence of the Asokan edicts that there may be an earlier Mauryan phase at the site. The presence of the Asokan pillar at Sannathi would indicate a monument of the same type as that of Nagarjunakonda and Amarāvati.

The Amarāvati edict is located in Guntur District of Andhara. It is stated to have been a surface find and was traced in the house of an inhabitant of the area near the great stūpa at Amarāvati. The paleography, language style and content of this inscription suggested that it might be possible that Aśoka was responsible for the construction of the original stūpa.

The present inscription seems to suggest that the Amarāvati stūpa was built by Aśoka about the middle of the third century B.C. Both tradition and archaeological

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121 Howell op.cit., 1995, p. 28.
evidence show that the Amaravati Buddhist site was flourishing in the southern part of India, since the Mauryan period.

Another cluster of sites in the southern part of India with inscriptions include those at Gāvimath, Siddhāpur, Errāgudi, Nittur, Jatinga-Rāmeśvar, Pālikigundu and Udagam. Aśokan rock and minor rock edicts have been found a few km (less than 10-35 km) from Brahmagiri and Maski as well as Sannathi sites. Unfortunately, these sites have not yet been examined properly. But according to archaeological evidence,\textsuperscript{126} which has been found around these sites, we can assume that Buddhist sites or Buddhist monasteries existed in this area since the Mauryan period.\textsuperscript{127}

The Dhauli rock edicts are engraved in the village of the Khurdha sub-division of Puri District of Orissa about 10 km south of Bhubaneshwar.\textsuperscript{128} The edicts are addressed to the general public as well as to the king’s officers and must have been inscribed close to a big town or near a public highway. This town was presumably Tosāli, to the officers in-charge of which the special edicts are addressed. No traces of this town have yet been discovered, but it may possibly have been situated between the Dhauli hills and the junction of the Koyākhari, Ganguā and Dayah streams on the highway from Kandagiri to Bhubaneswar.\textsuperscript{129}

Prinsep says that there are many broken caves in the rocks adjoining the Aswastana and there is evidence of foundations of many buildings; one in particular,

\textsuperscript{124} Indian Archaeology 1959-1960, Review, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{125} EI, Vol. XXXV, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{127} See Maps 1,3.
\textsuperscript{128} CH, Vol. I, p. xiii.
immediately above the inscriptions, which may have been a *Caitya* or a stūpa.\textsuperscript{130}

Rajendralal Mitra also mentions that many foundations of ancient buildings are in the Dhauli area.\textsuperscript{131} Beglar corroborates Rajendralal Mitra's find in his report. He refers to the remains of a stūpa on the flat terrace of hill (Dhauli) near the elephant and also one facing it on the opposite ridge, but they have long ago been dug into.\textsuperscript{132} The flat terrace, noted by Beglar, measures 16 feet in length and 14 feet in breadth on the top of the boulder containing the Aśokan edicts, and a careful observer can trace even at present the remains of some structural monuments on its surface. Further Hultzsch has suggested that the presence of the elephant figure, close to the Aśokan edicts, is not usual and the purpose of it was the symbolic representation of the Buddha by the site of the Dhammalipi.\textsuperscript{133}

Some monuments which are related to the Aśokan period, have also been found from Bhubaneswar.\textsuperscript{134}

The Gimar rock edict is situated one and half km east of Junagadh in Kathiawar.\textsuperscript{135} In the eastern part of the city of Junagadh, there are ancient temples, whose peculiar form, with something approaching Dahgop occupying the whole space in their centre would lead to the conclusion that they are of Buddhist origin.\textsuperscript{136}

Many small shrines and sacred places are on the summit of Gimar. According to the observation of Lieut Poster: "the origin of which would seem to be of high antiquity.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., p. 437.
\textsuperscript{131} AO, Vol. II, 1963 (re-print), p. 84.
\textsuperscript{132} ASI (R), Vol. XII, 1874-75, p. 96.
\textsuperscript{133} Barua, *op. cit.*, part II, 1968, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{134} Rajendralal Mitra and B. M. Barua have proposed that the huge Lingam enshrined in the Bhaskaresvara temple at Bhubanesvar represents the monolithic pillar of Aśoka in Tosāli. (Barua, *op. cit.*, part II, 1968, p. 3.) K. C. Panigrahi has observed clear traces of Brāhmi letters on the Lingam thus corroborating the suggestion of Mitra (*JASB*, Vol. XVIII, 1865, p. 68.)
\textsuperscript{135} CII, Vol. I, p. ix.
That the present system of worship is a graft of the ancient Buddhist faith, which obtains here, there can be no doubt. In the neighbourhood Ghāt above the mountain, and interspersed through a space of three or four hundred meters in extent, are some excavations, which have the appearance of a Buddhist Vihāra (monasteries). They consist of a long low and narrow entrance from which a short flight of steps descends to a small apartment. From this proceeds a gallery leading to another chamber; a succession of three or four chambers and galleries closes the excavation. Poster supports his view, that these were originally Vihāras belonging to the Buddhist establishment in the vicinity, with the find of a Buddhist statue near this site. He assumed that the origin of this Buddhist site belongs to Mauryan period. Further, there were numerous large monasteries in early times at Junagadh and on mount Girnar. The ruins of two brick built stūpas were found at Intwa on a hill about three km away from the Aśokan edicts.

Another Aśokan rock edict is located at Shahbāzgarhi, thirteen kilometres from Mardan, the headquarter of the Yusufzai sub-division of Peshawar District of North-West Frontier Province. At the foot of the Shahbāzgarhi hill and only a few paces from the north inscribed rock, is a huge upright block of compact amygdaloid trap-rock, which attracts attention by its dimensions and isolation from the rest of the hill. It was found to have been artificially excavated into an irregular dome-shaped cavity, capacious enough to hold four or five men seated. Bellow explained that it may have been a hermit’s cell.

138 Ibid., p. 869.
According to the survey of Cunningham, the monasteries of Khore Gundai and Butsahri mounds stand just outside the east gate of the old city (near Shabhazgarhi rock edict).\textsuperscript{141} Further, many Buddhist sites such as Takat-J- Bati, (15 km) Jamāl-Garh (12 km) etc. are located a few km from Shabhazgarhi site. Cunningham assumed that some Buddhist sites as well as monuments might have belonged to the Mauryan period\textsuperscript{142}

One of the Minor edicts of Aśoka was discovered at the village of Pāngūrāria (Pangudādia) in the Budhni Tahasil of Sehore District, Madhya Pradesh. It was found in a rock shelter on a slope at the southern side of the Vindyan range.\textsuperscript{143} The rock shelter stands at a height of 2.1 m. from the ground at the foot of the hill, which is about 304 m. above the sea level and slopes gradually down to the Narmada. The hill side is studded with the remains of about thirty monasteries constructed on platforms made of dressed stone, the remains of a big stūpa (about 65 m. in diameter) lying below the bottom of the hill. There are also similar remains of a number of monastic cells and other constructions. The said rock shelter is on a platform which is the second from below and has some stūpas in front of it. It has an over hanging rock and a vertical uneven back wall which is horizontally broken into two parts due to weathering.\textsuperscript{144}

The Deotek rock edict is located in the District of Candrapur, about 80 km southeast of Nagpur. It was has been suggested that the find spot must have been a Buddhist centre of consequence.\textsuperscript{145} Though, this place is not excavated yet, but at Pauni, a few km from this site, two Buddhist stūpas of very large size have been identified and are

\textsuperscript{141} \textit{ASI (R)}, Vol. I, 1861-62, pp. 23, 46... Vol.XIX, 1881-82, pp119-123.
\textsuperscript{142} Mitra, \textit{op. cit.}, 1971. pp. 118-120.
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{EI}, Vol. XXXIX, pp. 1-2.
\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 2-3.
\textsuperscript{145} Shastri, \textit{op. cit.}, 1987-88, p. 57.
said to have been built during the Maurya period. At Adam in the Nagpur District also evidences of a Buddhist establishment have been noticed during recent excavation.

The Ahraura rock edict, is located in Mirzapur District of Uttar Pradesh, and the Delhi rock edict, is located in the ancient city of Indraprastha near Delhi. The Satipatthāna Sutta in the Dīgha Nikāya mentions that the Buddha delivered that sermon in this place. Though the site of Indraprastha has already been excavated, but archaeological excavations have not yet been done in Ahraura site. The Ahraura inscription mentions the relics of the Buddha. According to this information, we can assume that some Buddhist stūpas or monasteries may be located in this place.

The Nigali-sāgar Minor pillar edict is also located fifteen km from the Rummindei pillar edict, within Nepal territory. Two pieces of mutilated pillars, one with the edict have been found on the banks of Nigali-sāgar. This pillar edict, situated near the stūpa of Buddha Konakamana to records the enlargement of the stūpa and later Aśoka’s visit to the site. Hiuen-Tsang mentions that he saw the pillar at the site of the Konakamana stūpa

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147 Dr. Amarendra Nath, the excavator of this site provided some information to Ajay Mitra Shastri. He mentions that information in his article, see Shastri, op. cit, 1987-88, p. 57.
150 CHI, Vol. I, p. xxv.
six km from Kapilavastu, and that the pillar was
surmounted by a lion. Several stūpas and
Buddhist monuments were discovered by Führer
near the Nigali-sāgar pillar edict. Further, many
Buddhist sites such as, Tilaurakot, Rāmagāma,
Kudan, Saina, Sisaniya, Sijuwa, Dohini, are
located near the Nigali-sāgar pillar site. The
pillar found in Gotihawa, five or six km from the
Nigali-sāgar pillar in Nepal, is believed to be
dedicated to Karakacchunda Buddha (Kakusanda).

It is positioned adjacent to a sixty-eight feet diameter stūpa about nine feet high. Smith also mentions another large stūpa at this site. Further, many Buddhist ruins can be seen around this place.

**II Non-Buddhist monuments and Ashoka inscriptions.**

Although many Ashoka inscriptions are located near Buddhist sites, some inscriptions have been discovered at non-Buddhist sites or sites far from Buddhist centres. For example, the fourteen Ashoka rock edicts are engraved near Kālsi, a town in the Chakrā Tāhasil of Dehra-dun District of Uttar Pradesh. Cunningham, who

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156 I visited this place and observed the monuments in this place. Chief Archaeologist, Bhasanta Bidary explained me the Buddhist monuments here. The main stūpa the spread of to is being excavated under the supervision of Archaeology Department of Nepal. They believe that the main stūpa is related to the Kakusanda Buddha.
examined the archaeological sites of this area explained that the district of Kālsi can be identified with a part of the ancient kingdom of Srughna, as described by Hiuen-Tsang.\textsuperscript{158} Recent examination of this has revealed a brick altar inscribed with Sanskrit verses placed almost opposite the rock inscriptions. The altar marked the site of the fourth *Aśvamedha* of king Silavarman during the third century A.D.\textsuperscript{159}

Cunningham states that between Kālsi and Yamuna the land on the western bank of the river formed two successive ledges or level steps, each about 100 feet in height. Near the foot of the upper step stands the large quartz bulder which has preserved the edict of Aśoka for upwards of two thousand years.\textsuperscript{160}

The Mansehrā Kharoshti rock edicts were engraved by Aśoka and are located at the headquarter of the Tahsil in the Hazara District of the north-western frontier province ten to twelve kilometre from the Shahbazgarhi edict. In this area of the Mansehrā rock edicts, no Buddhist monuments or other Buddhist archaeological ruins have so far been discovered.\textsuperscript{161} According to the location of Mansehrā, McPhail suggests that this site lay on an important pilgrimage route, which connected to other religious centres of eastern or north-eastern part of India.\textsuperscript{162} Romila Thapar proposes that this place was on the main road running from the north-western frontier to Pātaliputra and beyond. It was probably also chosen because of its proximity to the northern border.\textsuperscript{163}

The Jaugada rock edicts are situated on the northern bank of the Rishikulya river in the Ganjam District of Orissa.\textsuperscript{164} Romila Thapar argued that the area covered by the

\textsuperscript{159} *IA*, No. 9, 1953, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{160} *ASI (R)*, Vol. 1, 1861-1862, p. 245.
\textsuperscript{161} *IA*, Vol. XIX, 1908, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{162} McPhail, *op.cit.*, 1951, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{163} Romila Thapar, *op.cit.*, 1997, p. 233.
\textsuperscript{164} *CHI*, Vol. I, p. XIV.
ruins would suggest that the town must have been a fairly large one and the presence of the fort might point to it having been a military centre as well as its proximity to trade and maritime activities.\textsuperscript{165} According to the observations of Allchin, the earliest period contained some structures here. The second period produced shards of typical Hellenistic type of ceramics, with bowls with central Omphalos.\textsuperscript{166} Bricks used to build houses, and stone were reported in 1925, The site was excavated and some bricks and potteries which belonged an earlier period, were found.\textsuperscript{167} But Buddhist or Brāhmanical monuments or ruins have not yet been discovered near the site of the Jaugada inscription.

The Rupanāth minor rock edict is located in an out of the way place in central India, on the Kaimur hill near Saleemabad in Madhya Pradesh.\textsuperscript{168} This site is also an esteemed holy placed and an annual fair was formerly held at Rupanāth.\textsuperscript{169} Rupanāth, in those days, must have formed the suburb of the township of Kakrehta. Rupanāth was probably along the important highway that passed from Pātaliputra up the Son valley, across the plateau to Rupanāth and then down the Narmada valley to Bhrigu-Kachchha and passed via Rupanāth following the Kaimur hill range.\textsuperscript{170} Though, archaeologists have excavated near this place recently, they could not find any Buddhist ruins here.\textsuperscript{171} The famous Buddhist site of Bhārhat is located fourteen km far from Rupanāth.

\textsuperscript{165} Romila Thapar, \textit{op.cit.}, 1997 p. 221.
\textsuperscript{166} Allchin, \textit{op.cit.}, 1995. p. 146.
\textsuperscript{167} \textit{ASI (AR)}, 1923-1924, p. 24; 1926-1927, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{168} \textit{CII}, Vol. I, p. xxiii.
\textsuperscript{169} Cunningham, \textit{op.cit.}, 1961, pp. 21-22
\textsuperscript{170} R. K. Sharma and S. N. Mishra, \textit{Excavation at Kakrehta (Rupanāth)}, Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1992, p. 2
\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 4-5.
Another Aśokan minor rock edict was found at Gujarra near Jhansi in Datia District.\textsuperscript{172} It appears to have been one of the most important routes from the Gujarra valley to the coast possibly via Ujjain to Broach. No archaeological evidence has been discovered around the Gujarra site. Two Aśokan inscriptions written in the Greek languages were found at Kandahar in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{173} Near Kandahar, Buddhist monuments have also been found but most of the Buddhist monuments belong to the Kushān period or later Kushān period.\textsuperscript{174}

### III Aśokan inscriptions and places associated with the Buddha

Some of the inscriptions have been erected at sites associated with the Buddha’s life. Likewise, according to insciptional evidence, king Aśoka visited some places himself to honour the Buddha. For example, the Rummindei (Lumbini) minor pillar edict was erected by Aśoka to commemorate the birth place of Buddha, the Lumbini grove. This pillar stands near the shrine of Rummindei about twenty km to the north of the village of Praviga just within the border of Nepal.\textsuperscript{175} Rummindei is represented by a collection of broken sculpture and antiquities which were kept in the ancient shrine. The

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\textsuperscript{172} \textit{EI}, Vol. XXXI, p. 209.  
\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Ibid.}.  
\textsuperscript{175} \textit{CII}, Vol. 1, p. vviv.
Buddhist ruins are found near the pillar inscription. Recent excavations at Lumbini, have found a ‘marker stone’ near the Buddha’s birth place. The size of the ‘marker stone’ is 70X40X10 cm. It was put on top of seven courses of steps said to have been taken immediately after birth by the Buddha. Large bricks of size 40X40X6 cm which is one of the largest Mauryan period bricks were found in the temple complex. The second phase of construction was possibly made with Mauryan bricks.

Further, some Buddhist sculptures, monuments and ruins, which belonged to different periods have been discovered around this site. Buddhist pilgrims are known to have visited this place since earliest time. Hiuen-Tsang arrived in this place to honour Buddha’s birth place. Sārnāth is also one of the famous Buddhist pilgrimage centres since ancient times and is located about ten km to the north of Vārānasi. It is believed to be the site of the memorable event of the Buddha in which he preached his first sermon to the five disciples (Paññavaggi Bhikkhu). This pillar, erected by Asoka, is situated in a place of eminence and importance to the Buddhists since it is at Sārnāth.

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that Buddha preached his first sermon. The inscription on it is termed the schism edict threatening dissentient monks with expulsion from the community of monks.

The centre known in late historical time as Saddharma Cakra Maha Vihāra or Dhamma Cakka Vihāra is one of the richest in Buddhist antiquities ranging in date from the time of Aśoka down to the twelfth century. Dhammarājikā stūpa was built by king Aśoka to enshrine the relics of the Buddha. Originally it was a small stūpa of 13.45 m in diameter. Further many Buddhist ruins can be seen this place. The monuments of the same epoch include the monolithic railing which was discovered in 1904-1905 under the floor of the south chapel of the main shrine.

Sārnāth has yielded not less than 476 pieces of Buddhist sculptures and 41 inscriptions. They date from the Mauryan period onwards. The monasteries of Sārnāth were built and rebuilt in successive periods. PL IX Aśokan pillar at Sarnath

A few images of Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna pantheon have been discovered here.
The pillar and minor pillar edicts are located in Kausambi, Allahabad district in Uttar Pradesh. The Allahabad pillar is now situated inside the fort of Allahabad. Some archaeologists believe that the pillar edict was brought from Kausambi.

The importance of Allahabad, the old Prayaga was largely due to its being a pilgrimage centre since earliest time. Kausambi is known as the capital of Vatsa, Vatsa being one of the sixteen Mahājanapada of India on the eve of the birth of the Buddha. According to Buddhist literature the merchant Ghoshita built a monastery (Ghoshitārāma) at the site and it was gifted to the Buddha who lived here for several years and preached. According to archaeological data, the second occupation starts practically with the NBP ware in about the sixth century B.C. Uninterrupted strata of occupation, with a unique mass of datable objects, continue right through the period from the Mauryan to the Gupta.

Further, one of the most important discoveries at Kausambi confirmed by inscriptive evidence is that of the Ghoshitārāma monasteries. Kausambi having been a place of religious importance in Buddha’s time may well have attracted pilgrims from various parts of the country. Romila Thapar suggested that this place would have been an excellent site for the edict.

Asoka is credited by Hiuen-Tsang with the construction of a stūpa inside the Ghoshitārāma and cells in the neighbourhood of Kausambi (Kiau-Shang-Mi). The

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187 Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, VIII.14; Gopatha Brāhmaṇa, iIV.1; KausitakiUpanisad, 1.2.9.
189 AI, No. 9, 1953, p. 146.
monastery was of the usual quadrangular type with a central courtyard, a pillared verandah, cells and two pylons flanking the entrance to the monastery.\textsuperscript{192} There is evidence for the dedication of a slab with footprint evidently of the Buddha.\textsuperscript{193} Further, around Kausambi city, many Buddhist monuments, structures of Buddhist monasteries, ruins of a stūpa were discovered by archaeologists.\textsuperscript{194} According to G. R. Sharma's observation Kausambi had its origin in circa 350 B.C. and after being reconsolidated and re-laid again, continued to circa 300 A.D.\textsuperscript{195}

Vislisāli, the capital of the Lichchavi clan, was one of the largest cities at the time of Buddha, who visited it several times and stayed at some of its shrines and \textit{Caityas} like Bahuputra Caitya, Chāpā Caitya and Mahāna Kutagāra Sālā.\textsuperscript{196} The second Buddhist Council under king Kālāsoka took place at Vaisali, a century after the death of the Buddha.\textsuperscript{197} The earliest Buddhist stūpas were low earthen funeral mounds, made of layers of piled-up mud.\textsuperscript{198} The layers in the Vaisāli stūpa were separated from one another by thin layers of \textit{Kankar} and cloddy clay. Originally 25' in diameter, this stūpa has projections at four cardinal directions which serve as predecessors of the \textit{āyaka} platforms of the stūpa at Amarāvati, Nāgarjunakonda, etc.\textsuperscript{199} There was no drum (\textit{medhi}) around the Vaisali stupa. It was enlarged four times. The first enlargement made of bricks

\textsuperscript{192} Beal, \textit{op.cit.}, 1969, pp. 235-237.
\textsuperscript{193} \textit{ASI (AR)}, 1921-22, p. 12, 1937-38, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{195} \textit{Memorial of Archaeological Survey of India}, 1949-50, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Dīnapamaka}, Ch. III, V 54-68;\textit{Mahāvamsa}, Ch. IV, V.7-66.
\textsuperscript{198} \textit{ASI (AR)}, 1937-38, p. 30.
measuring 15"X9"X2" contained pieces of Chunar sandstone and has been ascribed to the period of Aśoka.\textsuperscript{200}

\textbf{List of sites of Aśokan inscriptions and their Chronology}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of inscription</th>
<th>Nature the site</th>
<th>Chronology of remains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahraura</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allahābad Kausam pillar</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allahābad queen edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amrāvati edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bairāt edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barābar hill edict</td>
<td>Not Buddhist site</td>
<td>No date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmagiri edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi Meerut pillar edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi Topra pillar edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deotek edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhauli rock edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girnar rock edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gāvimath edict</td>
<td>May be Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jatinga Rameshvar edict</td>
<td>May be Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaugada rock edict</td>
<td>Non Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kālsi rock edict</td>
<td>Non Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandahar</td>
<td>Non Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauriyā Arārāj pillar edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauriyā Nandangrh</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumbini pillar edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mānsnerā</td>
<td>Not Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maski edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigali-sāgar edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nittur edict</td>
<td>May be Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pālkigundu edict</td>
<td>May be Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pangurāria edict</td>
<td>Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajula Mandagiri</td>
<td>May be Buddhist site</td>
<td>3rd century B.C.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{200} Mitra, op.cit, 1971, p. 23.
According to the archaeological evidence and Table 1, it is clear that most of Aśokan inscriptions and pillars are located near or inside the Buddhist sites in India.

### 2.2 Aśoka’s Dhamma and Dhamma concept of Buddhism

King Aśoka was the first ruler who used the Dhamma concept practically and attempted to reach the people. For Aśoka, Dhamma was the most vital concept and it is the all-pervasive force in his edicts. The edicts of Aśoka engraved on rocks and pillars, have been discovered at forty-two places in South Asia (India 36, Nepal 2, Pakistan 2 and Afghanistan 2). He uses the term Dhamma\(^{201}\) as many as one hundred and twenty five times in all his inscriptions and exhorts one and all to inculcate the practice of Dhamma.

Asoka's edicts and use of the term Dhamma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asokan edicts</th>
<th>Number of times Dhamma occurs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rock Edict</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillar edict</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other edict</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Gombrich remarks that almost all Asokan inscriptions deal with Dhamma. By this he did not mean specifically Buddhism, but righteousness as he understood it and it clearly reveals that his understanding was greatly influenced by Buddhism. The best traditions of both Buddhism and Indian kingship coincided in Asoka's declared support for all religions. Gen'ichi Yamazaki states that Asoka's Dhamma is close to the Buddhist Dhamma and constitutes a set of political ideas supported by Buddhist social ethics. Therefore, Yamazaki assumes that Asoka placed Buddhism side by side with Brähmanism Jainism and Ājivikas in his edicts in an attempt to persuade people that his Dhamma was not the doctrine of one religion but was acceptable universally.

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202 Gombrich, op. cit., 1994, p. 3
The events relating to Asoka’s conversion to Buddhism and his involvement in the promotion of Dhamma have been differently discussed and dated in the literary sources and inscriptions. Based on the epigraphical and Pāli literature, the religious activities done by king Aśoka in his life can be categorised as follows:

**Righteous activities of Aśoka according to Pāli literature and inscriptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year after coronation</th>
<th>Information from Sri Lankan Pāli sources</th>
<th>Information from Aśokan Inscriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fourth year</td>
<td>Conversion by Nigrodha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Year</td>
<td>Construction of 84,000 Vihāras in various places of India.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth year</td>
<td>Mahinda became a monk under Moggaliputtatissa and Sangamittā became a nun; Aśoka’s interventions in the suspension of ecclesiastic actions of the Sangha</td>
<td>Kālinga war followed by remorse and repentance (RE XIII)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth year</td>
<td>Lay follower of the Buddha but without much exertion (MRE I); Pilgrimage to sacred Bodhi tree and discussion with religious leaders. (RE VIII) Beginning of teaching the Dhamma to the people (Greek/Aramaic versions of MRE IV); Providing in the bordering territories with medical treatment for human beings and animals; growing medical herbs there; digging wells and planting trees along the road (RE IV)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth and tenth Years</td>
<td>Close association with the Sangha (MRE I) tour of the empire lasting 256 day (MRE I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenth and eleventh years</td>
<td>Beginning of the practice of inscribing edicts for the propagation of Dharma. Orders Lajukās and Prādesikās to set out on circuits every five years both for inspection and for the special purpose of preaching the Dhamma, (RE II) erected the PE VI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelfth year</td>
<td>Created the post of Dhammamahāmātra for spreading Dhamma (RE V)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fourteenth year</td>
<td>Enlargement of the Stupa of former Buddha, Konakamana (PE.Nigali Sāgar)</td>
<td>The schism edict of Sāmāñ̄ha, Sāñchi Allahabad kausambi might have been erected this year. There is no mention about year of erection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventeenth year</td>
<td>Gets concerned over indiscipline and laxity in the Sangha; commences the purification of the Sangha, which results in the Third Buddhist council at Pātaliputra under the presidency of Moggaliputta Tissa.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighteenth year</td>
<td>Sends mission to propagate Buddhism: Mahinda to Sri Lanka, Majjhima to Kashmir and Gandhāra, Mahadeva to Mahisamandala, Rakkhita to Vanavāsa, Yonaka Dhammarakkhita to Aparantaka, Maha Dhammarakkhita to Maharashtra, Maharākkhita to the Greek country, Majjhima to the Himalaya, Sona and Uttara to Suvannabhumi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nineteenth year</td>
<td>Sanghamitta sent to Sri Lanka with a sapling of sacred Bodhi tree to found the order of nuns.</td>
<td>Donated the Khalatika Cave to ascetics to enable them to live above the flood level during rainy season (Barabar Cave ins.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twentieth year</td>
<td>Pilgrimage to Lumbini, the place where the Buddha was born and reduces the tax (Lumbini PE) and again visits the stūpa of Kanakamuni stūpa and (Nigali Sāgar PE) wrote PE. VI.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty sixth year</td>
<td>Death of Moggaliputta Tissa Thera</td>
<td>Writing the PE I, IV, V and P ins. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty seven year</td>
<td>Writing of PE. IV (the last of his dated inscriptions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirtieth year</td>
<td>Death of Asoka</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

According to references in Asokan inscriptions, it is clear that the edicts of Asoka were not meant to commemorate the military triumph over Kālinga or any other secular achievements, but exhort the people to virtuous conduct. After Kālinga war, he strove for the welfare of the people, where he treated them as his dominion and beyond it. King Asoka says:
"In this war in Kālinga, men and animals numbering one hundred and fifty thousand were carried away captive from that country, as many as one hundred thousands were killed there in action, and many times that number perished. After that, now that the country of the Kālingas has been conquered, the Beloved of the gods is devoted to an intense practice of the duties relating to Dhamma, to a longing for Dhamma and to the inculcation of Dhamma among the people."\(^{205}\)

Further king Aśoka explains that whatever conquest is achieved in this way, verily that conquest creates an atmosphere of satisfaction everywhere both among the victors and the vanquished. In the conquest through Dhamma, both the parties derive satisfaction. But that satisfaction is indeed of little consequence. Only happiness of the people in the next world is what regarded by me as a great thing resulting from such a conquest.\(^{206}\).

It has been pointed out that switch of individual and state policy from Digvijaya to Dhammavijaya (conquest by Dhamma or righteousness) was as much dictated by prudent down to earth pragmatism as by religious altruism.

Aśoka spread his views on Dhamma in two ways, through regulations...
concerning the Dhamma (*Dharma niyama*) and quiet contemplation of the Dhamma (*dhamma nijhatiya*). The purpose of the edicts, which are sometime called sermons in stone, was explained by Aśoka himself like this:

1. The record has been caused to be written for the following purpose viz. that the promotion of Dhamma should be adhered to and that no decrease of it should be countenanced. (PE VII)

2. It is my duty to procure by my interaction, the good of the public, and in incessant activity and the proper administration of justice lies the root of public good, and nothing is more efficacious than this. All my endeavours have thus one object, may they obtain happiness thereafter in heaven: it is with this object that I caused this edict to be engraved, may it endure long. (PE VII)

3. When I had been consecrated for twelve years I had an inscription of Dhamma engraved for the welfare and happiness of the world. Whoever follows it should obtain progress in Dhamma in various ways. (PE IV)

4. Set up pillars bearing records relating to Dhamma for promoting Dhamma among the people. (PE VII)

The Dhamma of Aśoka was thus a practical code of socio-religious ethics and had little to do with religious theology as such. Aśoka’s ‘manifold Dhamma instructions’ consisted of the virtues of: kindness (*daya*), generosity (*dama*), truthfulness (*sace*), inner and outer purity (*sochaye*) saintliness (*sadhuta*), self control (*sanyama*), purity of heart

\[\text{[cha]. CII, Vol. I, p. 133.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., RE IV, pp. 6-7.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., PE VII, p. 132.}\]
(bhava suddhi), moderation in spending and saving (apa-vyayatā, apa bhandatā), firm devotion (dadha bhatika) attachment to morality (katamnata), gentleness (madavam), high energy (usahena), careful examination (paikhāya), conduct (sila), obedience (susaya), fear to sin (bhayena), well known in doctrine (bahusuta kalunagane), harmlessness toward all of life (avihisa bhutām), liberality (dānam), gift of Dhamma (damadāna), gratitude (kaijñutā), purity of heart (bhāvasuddhi), firm devotion (drdhabaktīta), attachment to morality (Dammarati), non injury (aksati) and equal treatment (samācaranam) etc. 210

From the Aśokan inscriptions it is clear that he attempted to establish a welfare kingdom based on the Dhamma concept. Aśoka played the double role of an emperor and a moral preacher, which marked his sovereignty, that is, sovereignty of the state. The berighosa turned into a sense of dhammaghosa and he tried to instill morality as the governing principle of an individual’s life. He aimed at spiritualising politics and indeed, all human activities for the first time. A sense of justice and humanity was introduced in political administration of the country through the Dhamma concept of the king. Aśoka attempted to secure the welfare of the people by dispensing even handed justice and by ministering to their material needs in various ways.211

Likewise, Aśoka made his point clear that the establishment of human relationship between the royalty and the people was not possible on the basis of fear or dread. He built a bridge to strengthen the foundation of inter-relation of society according

210 See Table, No. 4.
to Dhamma concept. Aśoka explained in his inscriptions the duties of the subjects towards parents, elders, teachers, Śramana, Brāhmaṇa, households servants and slaves.\(^{212}\)

### 2.2.1 Dhammavijaya policy of Aśoka

Dhammavijaya was an important aspect of Aśoka’s activities. Dhammavijaya is conquest by piety in place of the earlier conquest by military might. Weapons other than these are implied by the term, ‘Dhamma’ and can well be comprehended by the antithetic term ‘Adharmma’. The word ‘Adharmma’ symbolises the violent method with all its strategic means of conciliating, bribing and causing dissension. It is to be particularly noted that the element of violence or of bloody conflict is not totally absent in Aśoka’s conception of Dhammavijaya. In defining ‘Dhammavijaya’ he clearly says that even if there is conflict or violence, he wishes all living beings non injury, self control and impartiality which implies that if violence were indispensable, it must not be unmitigated. Furthermore, Dhamma stands for peaceful methods with all their friendly acts. Thus, Dhammavijaya is a moral concept, which implies human consideration and mental discipline, which conforms to the law of approved human conduct. It insists on the expression of goodwill and assurance of territorial integrity, benevolent acts of public utility and the advancement of the cause of humanity through piety.\(^{213}\)

Accordingly, Aśoka highlights the advantages of conquest by righteousness (Dhammavijaya). He emphasises a few points:


1. such a conquest as the flavour of delight or happiness or satisfaction (*pritriraso*),

2. this delight, happiness or satisfaction is shared by all involved (i.e. by inference, the winner and the vanquished)

3. more important than this sense of delight, happiness or satisfaction are the immense benefits accruing to the life hereafter (*paratrikam eva mahaphala*),

4. the highest form of *Vijaya*, that which is called Dhammavijaya.

   the conquest by morality is the only true conquest. This conquest bears fruits in this world and in the other world.

   The idea of Dhammavijaya is found in the Brāhmanical as well as Buddhist way of thinking. The concept of Dhammavijaya, as preserved in the Buddhist tradition is altogether different from this. In Buddhism, Dhammavijaya is the victory won through righteousness (*Dhamma*) and truthfulness (*satya*) and without war, weapons, force or coercion. According to Aśoka’s inscriptive evidence, the Dhammavijaya achieved by him was of a superb character. This involved taking his ethical message not only to frontier and neighbouring territories but also far beyond. Besides, certain territories within India, such as those of the Kambojas, Bhojas, Āndras, Pulindas, Nabhaka, Nabhitras etc. have been specifically mentioned in his glowing account of the success connected with Dhammavijaya. This is what the choice of the designation Dhammavijaya suggests most poignantly.


216 The Brāhmanical tradition can be divided into two types which believes that (i) the victory attained by righteous means and in accordance with the prescribed code of Dhammavijaya. (ii) Dhammavijaya means mere acknowledgement of the overlordship of the victorious authority by compelling the defeated adversary to become his feudatory and pay him tributes. *Rgveda*, XIII, *Mahābhārata*, Vol. III, p. 81.

217 See chapter I, p. 35.

King Aśoka for the first time introduced a new post, that of Dhamma mahāmattā (Dhamma mahāmātā) to spread the Dhamma among his subjects and outside such as Yavanas, Kāmbojas and Gandhāras, the Ristikās and Petanikās and others along his western borders. Further, with the spread of moral concepts, king Aśoka established two kinds of medical treatment for the benefit of human beings and cattle as part of his Dhammavijaya conquest inside and in neighbouring countries, viz. Chola, Pāṇyās, the Sāttyaputras, the Ketālaputras and even Tāmbapanis, and in the territories of the Yavana king Antiyāka, and also the kings who were the neighbours of the said Antiyoka.

Dhamma mahāmattas were engaged in many kinds of activities (anugahikesu) viz.

1. The Dhamma mahāmattas were expected to explain Dhamma to the various people in whose welfare they were involved.

2. beneficial to both the clergy and the laity (pavajitanam eva gihīhānam).

3. they were occupied with all religious persuasions (savapāsandesu).

4. There were Dhamma mahāmattas assigned to the Buddhist Sangha, Brāhmaṇas, Ājivakas, Niganthas and other religious sects.

5. Each religious persuasion or sect had its own Dhamma mahāmattas separately (pativisitham pativisitham) designated.

The vast apparatus of the state was partly to propagate the ethic of righteousness and to see the implementation of policies, designed to make society more spiritual.

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221 GRE V, VI, XII, KRE V, VI, XII, SRE V, VI, XII, MRE V, VI, XII, DRE (Separate), JRE (Separate), DTP VII, LAP VII, LNP VII, PRP VII, *Ibid.*
The whole operation centrally conceived, directed and enforced, brought in a new type of unity to an otherwise heterogeneous aggregation of political and regional units.

These and other chief officers (ukhasā) were made responsible for the distribution of donations of Aśoka, his female householders everywhere, his sons and sons of other queens. Again, at the end of his list of public services, the emperor advances the rationale for all this action: "so that the noble seeds of Dhamma (dhammāpadānāthāye) and practice of Dhamma (dhammānupati-patiye) would be promoted in the world." 222 It is clearly stated that MRE I is proclaimed so that the great (mahatpa) and the small and noble (Khudaka ca Udala) and people of frontier regions would adhere to the Dhamma in perpetuity (cirathitike) and increase their effort by at least one and a half time. (avaradhiye diyadhiyam vadhisiti).223

King Aśoka ordered his officers like Yuktās, Lajukās, and Pradesikās staying at various places in his dominions, to set out on a complete tour every five years for this very purpose, viz. for following instructions in morality as well as for their business.224 The officer called Lajukā was appointed among hundred thousands people by king Aśoka to bestow welfare and happiness on the people of the country and to devote himself to morality 225 and to exhort and explain morality to the people with details.226 Not only officers but also the king himself moved like a preacher among the people and preached the Dhamma.

222 DTP VII, LAP VII, LNP VII, PRP VII, Ibid.
223 Brahmagiri, MRE, Rupanāth MRE, DRE (S) Ibid.
225 "Lajukā me bahauṣu pāṇa-sata- sahasesu janasi ayata ... Sukhiyanam dukhiyanam janisamti dhamma yutenā cha viyovadisamti," DTP IV, Ibid., p. 143.
Further, king Aśoka himself gave up the sport of hunting and embarked on a Dhamma tour (Dharmayātā) around the country.²²⁷ On these tours, he visited religious authorities and scholars, gave alms, held interviews with the common people, and taught and admonished the people about Dhamma.²²⁸ These tours constituted an excellent form of alms giving and resulted in friendships based on Dhamma. By preaching Dhamma to others, a person would receive rewards in this life, and countless merits would be produced for his later lives. Along with the emphasis on giving Dhamma (Dharmadāna) to others, Aśoka urged people to consume less and accumulate little, and thus control their desires.²²⁹ This inscriptional evidence clearly implies that king Aśoka was engaged in the activities of righteousness and non-violent morality get the favour of his subjects.

The series inscriptions culminates in a spiritual statement of Aśoka to the effect that he was not concerned with the welfare and happiness of only his kith and kin.²³⁰ He emphasises his interest in the good of all those near by as well as those in remote areas.²³¹ Apparently, the question he had been confronted with earlier as regards the application of his Dhammavijaya policy and programme to the rich and the poor alike had ceased to be raised.

²²⁸ "Janasa daspanam dhammnus[a]ṣṭi cha dhamma-paripuchha cha," Ibid.
²²⁹ Ibid.
²³⁰ DTP IV, VI, VII; LAP IV, VI, VII; LNP IV, VI, VII; RPP IV, VI, VII, Ibid.
²³¹ GRE II, KRE II, V; SRE II, V; MRE II, V; DRE II, V; JRE II, V; DRE (S), JRE (S), Ibid.
### Main Dhamma concepts of king Aśoka according to inscriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Injunction on Dhamma.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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In the series of records, there are texts written in a concise form, in a medium form, or in an elaborate form, and all the items of the series have not been put in all places. There are some topics which have been repeated over and over again owing to their sweetness, so that people may act accordingly.

**Dhauli Separate Edict I**

Gave advice to judicial officers for conducting judicial activities with impartiality. Āsoka considers all men as his children. Therefore he says that they must be provided with complete welfare and happiness for winning in this world and other world. Āsoka promises to send out rulers who are not harsh, not passionate, but gentle in their approach.

**Dhauli Separate edict II**

Assurance to the people of Kālinga and others of Āsoka’s goodwill towards them.

**MRE I**

The fruit of zeal in practicing Dhamma. Āsoka speaks of his increasing devotion to Dhamma.

**MRE II**

It is addressed to the Mahāmatras asking them to guide and instruct their juniors to make popular the Dhamma principles among the people.

**MRE III(Bairat)**

Āsoka emphasises importance of the true Dhamma and he commends seven Dhamma texts to be studied by the members of the Saṅgha as also by the lay men and women.

**MRE IV**

The practice of Dhamma brings happiness. The king abstains from killing living beings and hunters and fishers cease hunting.

**MPE Lumbini**

Āsoka visited the Buddha’s birth place and released taxes and paid only eighth share of the produce.

**MPE Nigali Śāgar**

Āsoka visited this place, enlarged the stūpa of Konakamana Buddha and worshiped the stūpa, and erected the pillar here.

**Kupanāth and Sānchi**

Punishment for schism in Bhikkhu Saṅgha or nuns. Whosoever, be it a monk or be it a nun, if they should break up the unity of the Saṅgha should be made to wear white robes and to reside in what is not fit for the residence of a recluse.

**MPE Kausambi**

Registration of queen Karuvaki’s gifts in state documents.

**PE. I**

Exhortation of the practice of Dhamma. Āsoka says that happiness in this world and the next is difficult to attain other than with the greatest love of the Dhamma, the great obedience to it, the greatest sense of responsibilities and the greatest energy. Ordered all officers and Mahāmatras who are living in border area to practice it. He says that this is to protect according to morality, dispose according to morality, cause pleasure according to morality, guard according to morality.

**PE II**

Morality is meritorious. What is the morality? It includes fear to sin, many virtuous deeds and compassion, liberality, truthfulness and purity. Āsoka has bestowed even the gift of eyesight in various ways to bipeds, quadrupeds as well as to birds and aquatic animals. He has done various kinds of favour even up to the grant of life. King Āsoka has also performed many other virtuous deeds.

**PE III**

Exhortation on vigilance against sin. People do not see easily the evil called Asinava, sin nevertheless, one should clearly look into the matter thus: these passions surely lead to sin, such as violence, cruelty, anger, vanity and jealousy.

**PE IV**

Āsoka advises Lajukas about their duties and responsibilities. He reminds them to identify happiness and suffering of the country and advises them to win both the worlds and be impartial in judicial proceedings and impartial in punishment. King grants a respite of three days to fettered persons in the prison. If they die he allowed their relations to do righteous deed for them. Further, various moral practices, self-control and the distributions of gifts are promoted among the people.

**PE V**

Prohibited the killing and giving pain to some birds and animals. It lists the species of animals not to be killed on sacred days. Husks containing living beings should not be burnt. Forests must not be burnt either uselessly or in order to destroy living beings. Ordered to release prisoners twenty-five times on his coronation days.

**PEVI.**

Āsoka’s object in writing the Dhamma rescripts, viz. for the welfare and happiness of the
people, so that, without violation thereof, they might attain the growth of Dhamma in various respects.

| PE VII | Aśoka reviews his past time and desire. How can the people progress through the promotion of Dhamma? He advises thus: my proclamation of Dhamma to be proclaimed and instruction in Dhamma to be imparted. Hearing this, the people will conform to them, will be elevated and will progress considerably through the promotion of Dhamma. Therefore he set up pillars bearing records relating the Dhamma Appointed the Mahāmātra to deal with the affairs connected with Dhamma and issued proclamation on Dhamma. Planted trees, dug wells and built rest houses for benefit of people and beasts. He desired to promote Dhamma concepts such as gentleness and goodness not only among the subjects but also among the royal members and royal officers. King in two ways has promoted the progress of Dhamma among men viz. by imposing restrictions in accordance with the principle of Dhamma and by exhortation. |

Table 4

2.2.2 Similarity of Aśoka’s Dhamma with Buddhism

Having analysed Aśoka’s Dhamma in table 4, the next is: to what extent can we identify it with the Buddhist Dhamma? Many Suttas of Buddhism explain the value and qualities of the Dhamma and results of practising it. Gombrich suggests that the Dhamma of Aśoka’s edicts is essentially a form of the Buddhist Upāsaka Dhamma, with emphasis on a set of societal ethics, modified marginally by the emperor to elicit a broader social appeal. 233 His understanding was greatly influenced by Buddhism. 234 But it is clear that most of this Dhamma concepts are related to general Buddhist religious values and disciplines, which not only monks and nuns but also all Buddhists (Bhikkhu, Bhikkhuni, Upāsaka, Upāsikā). For example the Dhammapada of the Khuddaka Nikāya explains the value of Dhamma thus “ by Dhamma of well faring let him fare: not that which is ill, farer, let him fare, happy the Dhamma, farer, lives both in this world and in the next,” 235 and “ the gift of Dhamma excels all gifts, every test of the Dhamma. Every

love of the Dhamma conquers warnings craving conquers every ill.\textsuperscript{236} The world will hold him dear, who is endowed with virtue and intelligence, who is established in Dhamma, who is truthful, and who performs his duty.\textsuperscript{237} The Parābhava Sutta in the \textit{Suttanipāta} describes Dhamma thus: “one who loves Dhamma is prosperous, one who hates Dhamma degenerates”.\textsuperscript{238} The Mangala Sutta in the \textit{Suttanipāta} mentions that living righteously and hearing the Dhamma are auspicious things of life.\textsuperscript{239}

One of the main tenets of Buddhism is non-violence. The Buddha taught his followers that they must always be compassionate to all living beings in the world and try to prevent all forms of violence. The Buddha says that all men shrink from the rod; all men fear death; making the self the type, let him not smite nor let him not cause another man to strike.\textsuperscript{240} Furthermore, whosoever injury with rod on creatures pain for happiness, when for the self hereafter he seeks happiness, not his, it may be happiness to win.\textsuperscript{241} The Ratana Sutta in the \textit{Suttanipāta} mentions that whatever living being these be feeble or strong, tall, short or medium, short, small or large without exception, seen or unseen those dwelling near, those who are born or who are to be born, may all beings, be happy.\textsuperscript{242} Thus, putting aside punishment towards all beings in the world, whether

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{236} “Sabbadānam Dhammadānam jinati sabbarasam dhamma rasam jinati sabbarati Dhammaratī jinati tanhakkhayo sabbadukkhham Jinati.”, \textit{Ibid.}, V. 334.
\item \textsuperscript{237} “Siladassanasampannam dhamunattam saccavedinam-attano kamma kubbānam tam jano kurute piyam, \textit{Ibid.}, V. 121.
\item \textsuperscript{238} “Dhammakamo bhavam hoti dhammadessi Parābhavo,” \textit{Suttanipāta}, p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{239} “Dhamma cariyaya etam mangala muttamam,” \textit{Suttanipāta}, V. 363.
\item \textsuperscript{240} “Kalena Dhamma savanam-etam mangala muttamam,” \textit{Ibid.}, V. 366.
\item \textsuperscript{241} “Sabbesanthisi Dandassaa-saabbe Bhāyanti maccuno Attānam upamam katvā – nananeyya na ghataye,” \textit{Dhammapada}, V. 129.
\item \textsuperscript{242} “Sukhakāmāni bhutani- yo dandena vihimsathī attano suham esano- pacchuno labhate sukham, \textit{Ibid.}, V 131.
\end{itemize}
movable or immovable, let him not destroy life, nor cause others to destroy life and also not approve of others killing. This emphasis on non-violence in the Buddhist Dhamma forms a prominent feature of the edicts of Aśoka.

Aśoka did not allow meaningless sacrifices and ceremonies in his edicts. He said that no festival meeting must be held, for Devanampiya Priyadasi sees manifold evil in festive gatherings. Likewise he says that on these other occasions men are practising various ceremonies. But in each woman are practising many and various vulgar and useless ceremonies.

The Buddha appreciated livelihood and right action. Useless sacrifices and ceremonies were deplored by the Buddha. In this connection the sermons on the meanings of sacrifices, ascribed to the Buddha, may be recalled. The Buddha rejected the costly as well as the cruel rites of sacrificing living beings, which he described as a ‘mean occupation’, and instead, urged people to strive for generosity, kind deeds, etc. The same principles were recorded in the edicts: They expressed a practical approach instead of religious observance, stressing not the ritualistic aspects, but man’s acts and deeds. Buddha says that if any man offered sacrifices, month after month for a hundred years, costing thousands and if he one moment were to pay homage to the man, who was perfect himself, this is better than the sacrifices of hundred years. Further, this mean practice of all is censured by the wise where such a practice is seen by people to blame the sacrificing priests.

243 "Panam na hane na ca ghataye- na cā nujāhā hanatam paresam sabbesu bhutesu nidhiyā dandam- yethāvarā ye ca tasantu loke, ibid., V. 397.
244 "Asti jano uchāvacam mamgalam karote vā āvāha viharesu vā putra labhesuvā pravāsāṃhi vā etam hi cha aṁtha cha jano uchāvacam mamgalam karote, etu tu mahidā yoh bahukam cha bahuvitham cha ighamam cha mamgalem karote." GRE IX, KRE IX, SRE IX, MRE IX, CII, Vol. I.
245 "Māse māse sahassena yo yajetha satam samam-ekam ca bhāvitattānam muthampi puja; sā yeva pujanā seyyo yam ce vassasatam hūtam," Dhammapada, V. 45.
The *Suttanipiṭa* mentions that he who believes in ceremony, in omens, unusual events, as shooting stars, dreams and signs destroys; that the Bhikkhu or lay devotee who has abandoned the civil ceremonies leads and is righteous.  

The Karaniyametta Sutta in the *Suttanipiṭa* praises one who is contented easily, helpful with few duties, of right livelihood, controlled, discreet, not impudent, not greedy and attached to family.

Among virtuous deeds that most of the edicts mention is help and obedience to parents, elders, teachers, relations, friends and Śramana-Brahmanas. This also includes honouring all sects both ascetics and householders with gifts and honours of various kinds.

The Buddha also explains the values of help and obedience to mother, father, elders, teachers and Śramana-Brahmanas. The Mangala Sutta in the *Suttanipiṭa* has shown that support of father, mother and relatives is an auspicious fact of every life. In the Parābhava Sutta in the *Suttanipiṭa*, one who being in a prosperous condition, does not support parents who are weak and old, is degenerate. To see the Samana-Brahmanas, honouring those who are worthy of honour is an auspicious fact of every life. Let him go, at the right time to the presence of his teachers, and be obedient, casting away obstinacy, let him remember and practice what is good, righteousness, self-restraint and

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chastity.\textsuperscript{252} Let him to be one who honours the elders.\textsuperscript{253} The Sigāloviḍa Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya explains that one should help parents, teachers, friends, servants and Śramana-Brahmana.\textsuperscript{254}

The Buddha remarks that one must try to build up self-control. If one does not have self-control, one cannot reach other meritorious activities. Further, every person must attempt to do various deeds for their and others happiness and to win in this world and other world. Asoka also emphasised these facts through his edicts. He said that it is difficult to perform virtuous deeds and to accomplish something difficult.\textsuperscript{255} Anyone who practices great liberality but does not possess self-control, purity of mind, gratitude and firm devotion is very mean.\textsuperscript{256} Happiness in this world and in the other world, is difficult to secure without great love of morality, careful examination, great obedience, great fear (of sin) and great energy.\textsuperscript{257}

Buddhism also presents similar concept to build up self-control and to do virtuous deeds for happiness in this world and other. The Buddha explained that restraint in act is good, and restraint in speech, restraint in mind is good, good everywhere restrained everywhere, the monk or laity from every ill obtains release.\textsuperscript{258} In the Dhammapada,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{252} “Kālen hacche gurunam sakasam- thambham nirankatvā nivātavattam
\item attam dhamman saññānam brahmacariyam- anussare c’eva samā caicca,” \textit{Ibid.}, V. 326.
\item \textsuperscript{253} Vuddhāpacāyi anusuyyako, \textit{Ibid.}, V. 325.
\item \textsuperscript{254} \textit{Dīgha Nikāya}, Vol. III, pp. 123-131.
\item \textsuperscript{255} “Kanam dukarani yo adikaro kalanas dukarani karoti tu māyā bahu kalānam katam; yo tu eta desam pi āhāpasati so[du] katam kasati,” \textit{GRE IV, KRE IV, SRE IV, MRE IV, DRE IV, JRE IV, CII}, Vol. I.
\item \textsuperscript{256} “Save te sayamam cha bhāva sādhum cha ichhati ; vipule tūpi dāne yasa nāsti sayame bhāva sudhitāva katamīta ta va dadhabhatīta cha nichā bādhham,” \textit{GRE VII, KRE VII, SRE VII, MRE VII, DRE VII, Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{257} “Hidata palate dusampatipādaye annata agāye dhama kāmatāyā agāya palihāya agāya sususaya agena bhayena agena usahena,” \textit{DTP I, LAP I, LNP I, PRP I}, “Apāsinave bahukyāne dayā dāne sache socaye chakhu dāne pi me bahu vide dūne,” \textit{DTP II, LAP II, LNP II, PRP II}, “Kāyānammeva dehakat iyaṁ me kāyāne kateti, no mina pāpam dehakat iyaṁme pāpe kateti iyaṁ vā āsonava nāmāti,” \textit{DTP III, LAP III, LNP III, PRP III, Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{258} “Kāyena samvaro sādhu- sādhu vācyā samvaro
manasa samvaro sādhu-sādhu sabbta samvaro \textit{Samyutta Nikāya}, I, p. 73.
mind is the forerunner of (all good) states, mind is chief, mind made are they if one speaks or acts with pure mind, because of that, happiness follow one, even as one’s shadow that never leave. The conquest of one’s own-self is better than the conquest of all other people. Such a man is disciplined and he always practices self-control. It is good to tame the mind. The controlled mind brings happiness. Further, one should lead a virtuous life. The virtuous live happy, both in this world and in the next. Self, indeed, is the lord of self, self, indeed, is the refuge of self. Therefore, you should control yourself, as a merchant controls a good steed. Is a man strenuous, does he control righteous life the fame of him exceeding grows?

In the Suttanipāta giving alms living righteously, is also auspicious.

In this light, the following statement of the Minor rock edicts is noteworthy: “the god who at that time had not intermingled with men in Jambudīpa, are now intermingled (with men)” Interpretation of this passage is disputed. We believe that it reflects the anti-Brāhmānic bias of the Upāsaka king. It should be noted that in some versions the principle objects were men who earlier did not intermingle with gods and then did intermingle. The fact that the versions were not identical, shows that, to convey the meaning of the text ‘intermingling of gods with men’, it was immaterial who (gods or men) changed their former state. Personal zeal and pious behaviour were more important

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259 Manopubbangamā dhammā manosethāmanomayā-manasache passannena-bhasativā karoti vā-tatason sukhamanveti cāyāva anapatī "Dhammapada", V. 1.
260 "Attāh have jitam seyyo yā cāyam itarā paja- attadantassa posassa niccam saññatacārino," Ibid., V. 69.
261 "Cittassa damato sādhu; cittam dantam sukhaññham;" Ibid., V. 71.
262 "Dhamman care sucaritham- dhammacari sukhamseti asmim loke paramhica;" Ibid., V. 87.
263 "Attā hā attano nātho, attā hā attano gatti; tasām saññānam assam bhadram'va vānija;" Ibid., V. 112.
264 "Utvanavato satomato- sucitamnassa nisammakarino saññassaca dhammaññino-appamattassa yasobhi vaddhati," Ibid., V. 14.
265 "Dānam ca dhammacaryya ca -etam mangala muttamam ; Suttanipāta V. 363.
266 "Bādhī cha pakate yā [I]māya kālaya jambudipasi aamīsā devā huste dānī m[ll][a]katā;" CHI, Vol. 1, p. 166.
than sacrifices to propitiate the gods. Man's activity is more important than divine assistance. Buddha says that the self is the lord of self, who else could be the lord? By self-control a man finds a lord, who is difficult to find. Likewise, according to the Buddhist doctrine, man's welfare depends on his own actions. It is upon himself that he shall rely, for 'by oneself is evil done, by oneself is one purified. Purity and impurity depend on oneself. No one purifies another.' The Mahāparinibbāna Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya emphasises: 'do not ask others for protection, be your own protection.'

The early Buddhist sources contain descriptions of 'an ideal society', which the Buddha depicted in his sermons. While censuring the Brāhmanas for the violation of many ethical principles and noting the general decay of morals in the past as a result of base desires, he predicted the restoration of morality and justice through his teaching and appealed to people to abstain from lying and prodigality, to show respect for their elders, to refrain from violence, etc. For the lay Buddhists, similar rules in the inscriptions were evidently not merely standards of a pious life, but a reminder of the Buddhist tenets as well.

2.3 Comparative study of the king Cakkavatti and Aśoka

Aśoka clearly undergoes a deep spiritual metamorphosis which spills over to influence powerfully his policies as ruler peace, appeasement, pacification and the pursuit of compassion and tolerance, are declared ends of his policy. Righteousness becomes both a central tenet of belief and a programme of action. Yamazaki states that at the time, Aśoka abandoned his policy of territorial expansion by armed force, and adopted a new

policy of world conquest through Dhamma. This ideal is akin to the reign of Cakkavatti, the Buddhist ideal sovereign. Whether the notion of Cakkavatti was present in Aśoka’s Dhamma policy is not certain.\(^{270}\)

The strategy worked Aśoka’s change and the attendant policy sequels widely constructed not as a naive unrealistic and negation of power (hardly credible in an age of Indian real politic), but as demonstrating how effectively power could be tempered, much a feature of the Aśokan rock edicts. One discerns subtle hints about the possibilities that coercion could be brought into play if the various prescriptions of the state were not acquiesced in. The appointment of state paid Dhamma officials, whose business was to see the enforcement of the Dhamma, is best seen in this light. The subtle blending of an essentially pacific Dhamma with coercion was clearly paradoxical. It was also inevitable since power was a natural reflex of a secular ruler or universal monarch.

### 2.3.1 Cakkavatti policy and Aśokan Dhamma

Aśoka seems to have constantly looked for ways and means of involving his entire administrative machinery in his Dhammavijaya policy and programme. The Lakkana Sutta in the *Dīgha Nikāya* explains Dhammavijaya of king Cakkavatti. According to this Sutta, Cakkavatti, when conquered this earth to its ocean bounds, is established not by the scourge or sword, but by righteousness.\(^{271}\) Cakkavatti does not accept gift or tributes from his subordinate kings but he always advises them righteously,

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\(^{270}\) Yamazaki, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 22.

even gives to them their own kingdom.\textsuperscript{272} Even a pious and righteous universal monarch does not practice irresponsible sovereignty\textsuperscript{273} and likewise, the lord rules the people by right actions and protects them lawfully.\textsuperscript{274} The universal king provides the right watch, ward and protection for their own folk, for the army, for the nobles, for vassals, for Brahmans and householders, for town and country dwellers, for the religious world and for beasts and birds. Throughout his kingdom let no wrong doing prevail and whosoever in the kingdom is poor, to him let wealth be given.\textsuperscript{275} The Cakka (wheel) was the symbol of king Cakkavatti.\textsuperscript{276}

Aśoka’s moral law was independent from any caste or creed. He ordered his officers to provide protection and facilities not only to human beings but also to birds, animals and plants. In practical aspects, it comprised a comprehensive code of conduct like requests, obedience, homage, honour and obedience to parents (matari pitari), elders (thira), teacher (gulu), high caste (Agabuti)\textsuperscript{277} Pillar edict VII indicates that the king helped the aged, poor, distressed and even slaves and servants.\textsuperscript{278} Aśoka donated various gifts to the poor to promote their living condition. He says that some gold should be given to the elders when he was engaging Dhamma mahāmātta.\textsuperscript{279}

\textsuperscript{278} “Yani hi [k] ānici mamiyā sādhavāni katāni... Vayomahālakānam .kapanam-valkesu āva dāsa-bhataxesu sampatiyati,” DTP VII, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 16.
The king Cakkavatti was beloved and popular with layman like as a father who is near and dear to his own sons.  

Firstly in the separate rock edict Aśoka has said that “for you are occupied with many thousand of men, with the object of gaining the affection of men. All men are my children as on behalf of (my own) children, I desire that they may be provided with complete welfare, and happiness in the world and in the other world.”

Likewise, king Aśoka also paid special attention to bestow welfare and happiness to the people of town as well as country dwellers in his empire. The Lajukās were appointed by king Aśoka to look into the welfare and happiness of the country people to bestow welfare and happiness among them, confer benefits on them and to investigate the pain and sorrow of the people.

King Aśoka concerned himself personally with the public affairs and displayed extreme zeal in doing so. He says that at every moment, whether I am at table, in the women’s apartments, in my room, in the farm lands, in a vehicle, in the garden, anywhere informants must acquaint me with public affairs. The main things are to work and to bring affairs to a successful conclusion. Thus, Aśoka worked ceaselessly and vigorously at the affairs of the state to promote the welfare and happiness of the people. He exhorted his officers to discharge their duties as custodians of the welfare of the people.

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281 "Tuphe hi buhusu pāna sahasesum āyata panayam gachhena su munisānam save munise pajāmama, atha pajāyē ichāmi hakam kimti savana hita sukhenā hidalokikā palalokikā," JRE (S); "se hevam katu kamme chalitaviye avasa... chatānyma pāpunevu iti athā pitā atha Devanampiyē anukampati ape athā cha pajā hevam may[e]," DRE (S) II, CII, Vol. I.
282 "Hevam mamā lajkā katā janapadasa hitasukhaye... janas jānapadasa hita-sukham upadahayeva anuguhinevu cha... sukhiyana-dukkhiyanam jānisāmī...," DTP IV, Ibid., p. 123.
people and to look after the happiness of the people as a skilful nurse who would eagerly care for the child entrusted to her.284

In Kūtadanta Sutta, the great realm helped his subjects by providing their basic needs and developing their occupations.285 Cakkavatti Dalhanemi in the Cakkavattisāhanāda Sutta also helped his subjects to develop their agriculture and other personal occupations, distributing his wealth among them.286 Thus, medical treatment for man and beast (manusacikiccha ca pasucikiccha ca) have been instituted by Aśoka (i) in his own dominions (ii) in remote border territories i.e. Chola, Pāndya, Satyaputra, Keralaputra up to Tamrapanni (iii) in the dominions of the Greek Antiyoka and (iv) in those kingdoms adjacent to Antiyoka’s. Medicinal herb, beneficial to men and beneficial to animals were brought and planted wherever they were not found. Wherever they did not exist, roots and fruits were brought and planted.287 He dug wells and established numerous drinking places as well as reset houses and planted trees such as Banyan and Mango on both sides of the road for the benefit of people as well as animals, and built rest-houses at suitable places.288

A Cakkavatti does not identify himself with any of the religious movements. The paramount significance that the Suttas passage stresses is that of “right watch, ward and protection” (rakkhāvaranagutti), which is specifically extended to the recluses, Śramana and Brāhmans. (Samanabrīhmanesu).289 Aśoka personally honoured all sects both

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284 “Atha hi pajam viyatāye dhātiye nisijitu asvathe hoti viyata dhāti cha chaghati me pajam sukham palihata devam mamā lajukā katu jānapadasa hita sukhye,” DTP IV, Ibid., p. 123.
286 Ibid., Vol. III, p. 64.
287 GRE II, KRE II, SRE II, MRE II, DRE II, JRE II, Ibid.
ascetics and householders, by offering to them\textsuperscript{290} and by making gifts to the Brāhmans and Samanas. \textsuperscript{291} Further, the Dhamma mahāmāttas assisted the king in state affairs and work which would be beneficial to ascetics as well as to householders.\textsuperscript{292} Particularly significant is that the need to mention religious dignitaries as deserving respect could have arisen in all likelihood on account of their progressive involvement in the emperor's effort to promote Dhamma. In the order, in which they are referred to, the traditional primacy of Brāhmans has been recognized and they are mentioned first. Equally noteworthy is that, all other religious personnel of Buddhists, Jains, Ājivakas etc., are subsumed under the common appellation of Śramanas (samana). In spite of Aśoka's partiality to Buddhism, the Sangha has not been distinguished from the rest of the emperor's policy of religious tolerance and impartiality.\textsuperscript{293}

Hence, more emphatically he had to announce his impartiality vis a vis various religious persuasions. This issue seems to have persisted right through the period between the two series of Dhammalipi. Not only was the emperor honouring all religions, he had given priority to meeting personally the parishioners of these different religions. Thus the last Dhammalipi in the series on pillars reveals that inter-religious tolerance and cooperation had continued up to this time as a major concern of Aśoka.\textsuperscript{294}

In the kingdom of a Cakkavatti, there is no opportunity for wrongdoing\textsuperscript{295} as he always tried to promote meritorious activities among the subjects and prevailing upon them

\textsuperscript{290} "sava-nikāyesu pativekhami sava pāsamā pi me pujitā vividhāya pujāya,  
\textsuperscript{292} "Dhamma-mahāmātā pi me te bāhuvidhesu athesu ānuγahinesu viyāpatāse pavajītaṁ cheva gihitaṁnaṁ cha sava. [d]eṣu pi cha viyāpatisu.," PE VII, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 132.  
\textsuperscript{293} GRE XI, KRE XI, SRE XI, MRE XI; DTP VI, VII, LAP, VI, VII, LNP, VI, VII, RPP VI, VII, \textit{Ibid.}  
\textsuperscript{294} DTP VII, LAP VII, LNP, VII, RPP VII, \textit{Ibid.}  
from doing of wrong things. He has emphasised, positively defining it as consisting of
doing good to many i.e. compassion, liberality, truthfulness, purity, gentleness and
goodness, negatively as sin i.e. freedom from sin or evil deed.296 The incentives to sinful
are pointed out as rage or fury, cruelty, anger, pride and envy.297 He advises the people to
promote their character through the moral conduct. It can be assumed that the king may
have erected so many Dhammalipi to cultivate virtues among the subjects and expecting
to build up a right society. According to Aśoken inscriptions, these morals help to build
up the human discipline and are a necessary condition for good conduct. Aśoka urged
upon his people to examine the self and regarded it essential to spiritual progress.

Dhammiko Dhammarāja is the symbol of the Dhamma which is synonymous
with justice (nāya) and impartiality (sāma). The king continues to make further reforms
in judicial administration. King Aśoka ordered the Lajukās to bestow impartiality of
punishment and impartiality of justice in his empire.298 The benevolent Aśoka made the
legal system of justice less oppressive, and introduced a number of modifications in order
to provide relief to the concerned persons. Aśoka says that “I order even so far that a
respite of three days is granted by me to fettered persons in the prisons, who have been
convicted and condemned to death during that period, their relatives will plead for their
life to some officers” (Lajukās). This reprieve had a legal as well as a religious purpose.
Either the relatives could appeal against the sentence or else they could perform religious
observances on behalf of the prisoners.299

296 Apāsinave bahu kayane dayā dane sache sochaye, madava sādha[ve]... , DTP II, p. 120; DTP VII Ibid., p. 133.
297 Imāni āsinava- gāmanī nāma aha chamdiye nithulyie kode mānc isyā, DTP III, Ibid., p. 122.
299 "Bamdhana-badhananam munisānam ti[l]la-damdām patavadhānānam tinni divisā [n] me yote dinne
nātikā va kāni nihapayisārati jivitēy tānā nāsamātā va nihapayātā dānam dāhamti pālatikan upavsam va
kachhamti.,” PE IV, Ibid., p. 123.
Further, he advised his judicial officers to deal with all the cases impartially. Likewise, he says that they (judicial officers) may strive to do their duty at all times and that the people within their charges suffer neither from unnecessary imprisonment nor from unnecessary harassment. King Aśoka desired impartiality in judicial proceeding and impartiality in punishment. He even cautioned his officers that "an officer may fail to act impartially owing to the following disposition viz. jealousy, hastiness, want of perseverance, laziness and fatigue. Therefore, you should desire that these dispositions might not be yours. The root of the complete success of an officer lies in the absence of anger and avoidance of hastiness. Likewise, the Dhamma mahāmattas are similarly engaged with the fettered persons in the prisons for the distribution of money to those who are encumbered with progeny, for the unfettering of those who have committed crimes under the instigation of others, and for the release of those who are aged. In the Kūtadanta Sutta, Cakkavatti Vijitāvi had also given gifts or wealth to poor people to promote their living condition and reduce the crime and fears of a thief. According to the policy of the king Cakkavatti, the beasts and birds are consoled by giving them freedom to live. The Dhamma policy and sympathetic attitude of king Aśoka extended to human beings as well as to animals and other creatures as the

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301 "Ichhitaviye [h][I] est kimū voyohiša-samātā cha siya damda- sammatā chā," DTP IV, LAP IV, LNP IV, RPP IV, Ibid.
302 "Imeh[I][jāteh]I no sampati isāya āsulopena ni[thu]liyena tulana[y]a anāvutiyā ālasiyena k[i]lamathena se ichhitaviye kīṁ mēte jāta no huvevu ma[m]ā ti etasa cha sav[v][a] mule anāsulopa a[tu][a]n̄a ti ..., " DRES, Ibid., p. 94.
universal king. He had given advice to protect them and men should treat animals kindly and not inflict any pain on them. That whole hearted adherence of the doctrine of *Avihimsa* had derived several regulations for the prevention of cruelty to animals. The king had initially ordered for the slaughter of only three animals and these living beings too shall not be killed in future for his kitchen.306

Earlier kings used to go out on tours of pleasure. During such tours, hunting (animals) and other pastime used to be enjoyed by them. But king Aśoka gave up such enjoyment and he chose morality tour for his pleasure.307 Likewise, king Aśoka helped to suppress the royal hunt. He says that the progress of Dhamma among men has, indeed, been promoted by him considerably by exhortation in regard to the abstention from hunting any living being and abstraction from killing any animal.308 King Aśoka states that he had done various kinds of favour even up to the grant of life to the bipeds and quadrupeds, birds as well as aquatic animals.309 Aśoka’s policy of *Avihimsa* took its final shape into an elaborate code of regulations and restriction of slaughter of birds and animals.

The code of Aśoka begins with animals, which, among others, included some specific birds, and all the quadrupeds, which are neither useful nor edible. He banned the slaughter of she goats, ewes and sows. Further, the king ordered that cocks are not to be capone, husks containing living beings should not be burnt and the living beings must not be fed with other living beings. Thus, at the three *Chaturmasis* and the full-moon day of

the month of Tisya, for three days in each case, viz. the fourteenth and fifteenth of one
fortnight and the first of the next, and invariably on every fast day, fish was exempt from
slaughter and was not to be sold. And on the same days, not only these but also other
species of beings should not be killed in the elephant-forests and in the fishermen’s
preserves. On every auspicious day, bulls are not to be castrated and goats, rams, boars
and such other animals and horse and bulls should not be branded on such days.310

This code ends with a mention of the fact that Aśoka had ordered for the release
of twenty-five prisoners, at least once a year. Sometime he may have released prisoners
who had been sentenced to death by judicial order.311

2.3.2 Cakkavatti concept and Aśokan symbols

I Stūpa

Aśoka was a king who not only emphasised his concepts through inscriptions but
also presented some concepts through monuments and symbols. The stūpas were one of
the main monuments, which had been built by king Aśoka in various places of his
empire. Besides, these, there are rock cut caves and freestanding pillars and their
symbols, which owed much of their popularity to Aśoka.

The stūpa is one of the material symbolic monuments of the Buddha and
Cakkavatti king in early Buddhism. The Thupārāha Sutta in the Anguttara Nikāya says

310 “imāni Jatāni avadhīyāni katāni seyath suke sālikā alune chākāvāke hanse nāmmiṣukhe gelate jatukā
ambā-kapilikā dali anthika-machhe vedaveyake gari-puputake samkūja-machhe kapta[s] sayake pannasase simle samda ke okapinde palasate seta-kapote gāma kapote save chatupade ye patibhogam no eti na cha
khādihiyati. [e]lae chā sukali chā gabhini va pāyaminā va avadhīy p. ta[ke] pi chā kāni āsammāsike nadhi
kukute no kataviye tuse sajive no jhāpetaviye jivena jive no pusuṭaviye tisu chātmāṃsiṣu tisāyam
pumnāṣiyam tinmi divasāni chāvudasam pumnasasam patipadāye[d] dhuvāye chā anuposatham machhe
avadhiye no pi viketaviye etāni yeva divasāni nāga-vanasi kevata-bhogasi yāni amnāni pi jiva- nikāyani no
hamtaviyāni athami-pakhāye chāvudāṣaye pumñasāṣaye tisāye pumṇasunse tisu chātmāṃsiṣu sudiṃsāye
gone no nilahātaviye ajake edake sukale e va pi amne nilakhīyati no nilahātaviye tisya pumṇasunse
chatumṃasiye chatumṃasi-pakhāye avasa gonsa lahnane no kataviye,” Ibid., DTP V, p. 126.
311 Me etāye amtalikāye pannavisati bāṃdhana-mokhāni katāni,” DTP, Ibid., p. 126.
that two persons are worthy of monuments, they are Tathāgata (Buddha) and king Cakkavatti. The term stūpa (Pāli Thūpa) means a heap or mound. The stūpa was the first object of worship and veneration everywhere in India. The practice of raising stūpas in some form or the other must have been in vogue even before the birth of the Buddha; for burial mounds are mentioned even in Vedic literature. The Satapatha Brāhmana, distinguishes two type of burials mounds (Smaśāna), viz. rectangular and circular. This literary information is confirmed from the excavation of Lauriya Nandangarh mounds. Bloch mentions that the funeral mounds, which were found from Lauriya Nandangarh, go back to the pre-Mauryan period and they may be connected with the Vedic period. But the stūpa was popularized as one of the symbols of Buddhism during the Aśokan period.

In Buddhism, this term is generally applied to the monuments built over the relics of the Buddha, his disciples and other saints. According to literary sources, eighty-four thousand stūpas depositing Buddha’s relics had been built by king Aśoka to commemorate eighty-four parts of Dhamma in the far flung territories of his vast empire. The Aśokāvadāna also

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312 Anguttara Nikāya, Vol. I, p. 77
315 ASI (AR), 1906-1907, p. 126.
316 "Caturāṣṭi sahassāni āraṃ kārayāmaham-eke dhammakkhandassa ekekarāmam pujayam,"
Dīpavamsa, Ch. VI, V. 95, “puresu caturāṣṭi sahassesu mahitale-tatha tathe’va rājubhi vihairē arabhāpai,”
Mahāvamsa, Ch. V, V. 81-82.
mentions that king Aśoka built eighty-four thousand stūpas in various places of his kingdom. Chinese pilgrims Fa-Hien and Hiuen-Tsang have given some details about the stūpas associated with Aśoka at the time that they travelled through India in the 5th and 7th century respectively. Fa-Hien, the first Chinese pilgrim, says that when king Aśoka went into the world, he wished to destroy the eight-pagodas (Ramagāma) and build eighty-four thousand stūpas (one for each atom of Buddha’s body). Hiuen-Tsang in fact twice refers to the erection of eighty-four thousand stūpa by king Aśoka while describing the Aśokan stūpa of Pātaliputra. In Hiuen-Tsang’s records more than one hundred stūpas, which were said to have been built by king Aśoka may be identified. These were still standing though many of them were in ruins.

**Location of Aśokan stūpa as given by Hiuen-Tsang**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Stūpa Site</th>
<th>Description of the Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nagarharā(Jalalab ed)</td>
<td>Three li to the east of the city, there is a stūpa in height about 300 feet, which was built by Aśoka rāja.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pushkalavati</td>
<td>There is an old Sanghārāma in the north of the town. By the site of it is a stūpa, which was built by Aśoka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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318 Legge, op.cit, 1971, pp. 68-69
320 See Table 5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mountain</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Udayana Going west of the town of Mangali 50 li or so, and crossing the</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>great river, we come to a stūpa; it is about 50 feet high, and was</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>built by Aśoka rājā.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Taxila Going 30 li or so to the south-east of the Nāga tank we enter</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the range between two mountains, where there is a stūpa built by Aśoka</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rājā. It is about 100 feet in height. To the north of the city 12 or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 li is a stūpa built by Aśoka rājā. Outside to the south east of the</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>city, on the sandy side of a mountain, there is a stūpa 100 feet in</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>height or so. It was built by Aśoka rājā.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Simhaputra To the south-east of the city 40 or 50 li is a stone stūpa</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>which was built by Aśoka rājā; it is 200 feet or so in height. North of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the stone stūpa, there is a stūpa, which was built by Aśoka rājā.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Urasa To the south-west of the capital 4 or 5 li is a stūpa about 200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>feet or so in height, which was built by Aśoka rājā.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kashmir There are four stūpas built by Aśoka rājā.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sakala (Siyalkot) To the north-west of the Sanghārāma 5 or 6 li is a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stūpa about 200 feet in height, built by Aśoka rājā. There is a stūpa</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of stone about 200 feet in height, built by Aśoka rājā, about 10 li to</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the north-east of the new capital</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tamsavana There is a stūpa about 200 feet high, which was erected by</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aśoka rājā.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kuluta (Kulu) For commemorating the Tathāgata, king Aśoka built a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stūpa here.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Satadru To the south-east of the city 3 or 4 li is a stūpa about 200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>feet high, which was built by Aśoka rājā.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mathura There are three stūpas built by Aśoka rājā.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sthanesvara To the north-west of the city 4 or 5 li is a stūpa about</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>300 feet high, built by Aśoka rājā.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Srughna To the north-west of the capital and west of the river Yamuna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is a Sangharāma, outside the eastern gate of which is a stūpa built by</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aśoka rājā.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Govisana Beside the old chief town is an old Sanghārāma in which is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a stūpa built by Aśoka rājā. It is 200 feet high.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Kanauj To the north-west of the capital there is a stūpa built by</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aśoka rājā.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Navadevakula To the north-east of the great city 6 or 7 li, on the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>south side of the Ganges, is a stūpa about 200 feet in</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Ayodhya</td>
<td>There is a stūpa about 200 feet high, which was built by Aśoka rājā, north of the city 40 li by the side of the river Ganges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Hayamukha</td>
<td>Not far to the south-east of the city, close to the shore of the Ganges, is a stūpa built by Aśoka rājā, 200 feet high.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Prayaga</td>
<td>To the south-west of the capital, in a Champaka grove, is a stūpa which was built by Asoka rājā. Although the foundations are sunk in the ground, it is yet some 100 feet in height.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Kausambi</td>
<td>By the side of the Sanghārāma, is a stūpa built by Aśoka rājā, about 200 feet high.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Visakha(saketa)</td>
<td>There is a stūpa 200 feet high, which was built by Aśoka rājā inside of the Sangharāma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Jetavana(Sravasti)</td>
<td>Tathāgata when in the world drew water from this well for his personal use. By the side of it is a stūpa which was built by Aśoka rājā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Kapilavastu</td>
<td>To the north of the town are stūpas which contain relics of the body of Kasyapa Buddha and Kakusanda Buddha. Both of these were built by Aśoka rājā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Lumbini</td>
<td>There is a stūpa built by Aśoka rājā on the spot where the Buddha was born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Ramagama</td>
<td>There is a stūpa, built by Aśoka rājā. by the side of this stūpa, another stūpa can be seen. It was built by Anoka rājā (head shaving stūpa). To the south-east of the head-shaving stūpa, in the middle of a desert, is an old Sangharāma, nearby there is one large stūpa built by Aśoka rājā, although it is mostly in ruin, yet its height is still about 100 feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Kusinagara</td>
<td>By the side of the Vihāra here is a stūpa built by Aśoka rājā. Although in a ruinous state yet it is some 200 feet in height. Further, beside this place, where the Buddha was cremated, there is a stūpa built by Aśoka rājā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Sārnāth</td>
<td>There is a stūpa, built by Aśoka rājā in the north-east of the capital, on the western side of the river Varuna. To the south-west of the Vihara is a stone stūpa built by Aśoka rājā. There are still 100 feet or more of the wall remaining.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Mahasāla</td>
<td>A stūpa built by Aśoka rājā north-west of the capital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vaisali</strong></td>
<td>To the north-west is a stūpa built by Aśoka rāja. By the side of it is a stone-pillar about 50 or 60 feet high. 80 or 90 li from this palace another Aśokan stūpa can be seen. To the north-east from this spot about 100 li, there is a stūpa built by Aśoka rāja, in height about 100 feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pātaliputra</strong></td>
<td>To the south of the earth-prison is a stūpa. This was the first one of the 84,000 stūpas erected by Aśoka rāja. To the south-west of the mountain is a collection of five stūpas. Aśoka erected the Amalaka stūpa at Kukkutārāma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td><strong>Gayā</strong></td>
<td>To the south-west of the town 5 or 6 li, on the top of the Gayā mountain is a stūpa about 100 feet high, which was built by Aśoka rāja. Not far to the south of the Bodhi tree is a stūpa about 100 feet high, which was built by Aśoka rāja.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rājagriha</strong></td>
<td>To the east of Karandavanauvana is a stūpa which was built by Aśoka rāja. Going west from this point 20 li or so is a stūpa built by Aśoka rāja. To the north-west of the Karandahrada, at a distance of 2 or 3 li, is a stūpa which was built by Aśoka rāja. It is about 60 feet high.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>Nālandā</strong></td>
<td>There is a village called Kulika. In it is a stūpa built by Aśoka rāja south-east from the spot where Bimbisāra rāja met Buddha. At a distance of about 20 li the town of Kalpanika is located. In this town is a stūpa which was built by Aśoka rāja. The stūpa is to the east of Indrasāla Guha which was built by Aśoka rāja.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pundravarddhana</strong></td>
<td>To the west of the capital 20 li or so is the Sanghārāma. Not far from this is a stūpa built by Aśoka rāja.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
<td><strong>Samatata</strong></td>
<td>Not far out of the city a stūpa which was built by Aśoka rāja. In this place the Tathāgata preached the law for seven days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tamralipti</strong></td>
<td>By the side of the city is a stūpa which was built by Aśoka rāja.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>Karnasuvarna</strong></td>
<td>By the side of the Sanghārāma, and not far off, is a stūpa which was built by Aśoka rāja, Tathāgata preached the law here for seven days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td><strong>Orissa</strong></td>
<td>The stūpas, to the number of ten or so, point out the spot where the Buddha preached. They were all founded by Aśoka rāja.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>Kālinga</strong></td>
<td>Not far from the south of the capital there is a stūpa about 100 feet high; this was built by Aśoka rāja.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
171

41 Kosala  Not far to the south of the city is an old Sangharāma, by the side of which is a stūpa that was built by Aśoka rājā.

42 Andhra(Amarāvatī)  To the south-west of the Sanghārāma of the Arahant O-che-lo is a stūpa which was built by Aśoka rājā.

43 Chola  At a little distance south-east of the city is a stūpa built by Aśoka rājā.

44 Dravida-Kanchipuram  To the south of the city not a great way is a large Sangharāma. There is a stūpa 100 feet high which was built by Aśoka rājā.

45 Mahārastra  Within and without the capital are five stūpas to mark the spots where the four past Buddha walked and sat. They were built by Aśoka rājā.

46 Valabhi  Aśoka rājā raised a mountain here and built stūpa in places where the sacred traces of his presence were found.

47 Sindh  Aśoka rājā has founded several stūpas in places where the sacred traces of his presence were found.

48 Parvata  There are found stūpa built by Aśoka rājā.

49 Atyanabakela  The Buddha came to this area to preach the law and convert men. On this account Aśoka rājā built stūpas on the spots consecrated by the sacred traces, six in number.

50 Pitasila  To the north of the city 15 or 16 li in the middle of a great forest, is a stūpa several hundred feet high, built by Aśoka rājā.

51 Avadānda  To the north-east of the city, not a far distance, in the middle of a bamboo forest is a Sanghārāma mostly in ruins. By the side of it is a stūpa built by Aśoka rājā. To the south 800 paces or so, in a forest, is a stūpa which was built by Aśoka rājā.

Table 5

If these accounts are compared with archaeological evidence it can be said that Hiuen-Tsang's description is not complete. Some Buddhist sites cannot be traced to the Mauryan period for instance, Sindh, Ayodhya, Mathura, Kulutu etc. According to archaeological evidence, it is clear that they belonged to the post Mauryan epoch. A major omission we find in Hiuen-Tsang’s list is the well-known Sāñchi stūpa. It is clear
that the original stūpa of Sāñchi was built by King Aśoka. Apart from Sāñchi, Huien-Tsang missed the other great stūpas in Madhya Pradesh, the stūpa of Bhārhut, a large stūpa complex of Aśokan period at Sanghol in Panjab, Sannathi and Vanavāsi in Karnataka. Archaeological evidence has been found in various Buddhist sites such as Amārāvati, Taxila, Sārnāth, Sāñchi, Sannathi, dated to the mauryan period. By comparing the archaeological evidence with the literary sources, it is doubtful if eighty-four thousand stūpas were built by king Aśoka, though he no doubt patronised the construction of several Buddhist monuments.

II Monolithic pillars

The Monolithic pillars erected by king Aśoka, are other important symbolic monuments. Mookerji says that these pillars represent the high watermark of Mauryan achievements in the domain of fine arts.

The tradition of erecting pillars can be traced back to the Vedic period. It is likely that the pillar represents the world axis, seen in many ancient cultures as the instrument used to separate heaven and earth during the creation of the universe. The earliest record of such beliefs in ancient India, occurs in the Rgveda where it is revealed that the god Indra slew a demon, thus releasing the cosmic ocean and causing the separation of heaven and earth by “pushing them thunder, and propping” the sky. Huntington mentions that the pillar thus conceptually rises from the cosmic ocean, emerges from the navel of the earth, and reaches toward heaven where it is touched by the sun.

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322 See, pp. 115-116.
324 See pp. 115-116, 120-121.
325 Mookerji, op. cit., 1972, p. 89.
326 Rgveda, VII, 23. 3.
It is evident that king Aśoka did not innovate the practice of erecting pillars, although he may have been the first to place inscriptions on them and may have modified their form and added new symbols. His use of pillars instead represents the culmination of a period of pillar development, probably with its origin in a wooden tradition. Although the tradition of erecting pillars belongs to the pre-Mauryan period, it is clear that king Aśoka gave a new interpretation to the tradition and tried to highlight some Buddhist concepts such as Dhamma, Buddha, Cakkavatti, through the pillars and their symbols, Cakka, lion, lotus, and other figures of four animals.

Of the sixteen pillars which were erected by king Aśoka in various places in his empire, discovered so far, ten are inscribed and the remaining six are uninscribed. Chakravarti states that the principal pillar edicts are found in places related to important cities and towns in the interior. Romila Thapar assumes that the pillar may have commemorated events of some significance. Agrawala remarks that the spots for erecting the stone pillar appear to be part of a two-fold plan in the mind of the emperor. (I) at important Buddhist places, i.e Lumbini, Lauriyā Arāraīj, Lauriyā Nandangrh, Kosambi, Sārnāth, and related to the life of the Buddha. (II) include the pillars to mark

329 See Table No. 6.
the boundaries of Madhyadesa and the capital of its principals Janapada divisions. i.e. Sankasia (Pañcāla), Meerut (Kuru), Sāñchi (Chedi), Kausambi (Vatsa). Huntington suggests that the Aśokan pillars in general appeared along the ancient trade routes of Uttarāpatha. Because Aśokan pillars were one of the means of spreading the message of Aśoka, we can assume that the pillars may have been erected near important religious centres and commercial places where people often gathered.

**Aśokan pillars and their location**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Pillar Name</th>
<th>Site of Pillar</th>
<th>Inscribed or Uninscribed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bodhgayā pillar</td>
<td>Bakror, near Bodhgayā</td>
<td>Uninscribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Delhi-Toprā pillar</td>
<td>Toprā near Ambala</td>
<td>Inscribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Delhi-Meerut pillar</td>
<td>Meerut</td>
<td>Inscribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Gothiawar</td>
<td>Stands on the same place</td>
<td>Uninscribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kosambi pillar</td>
<td>Allahābad fort</td>
<td>Inscribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kausambi pillar</td>
<td>Stands on original place</td>
<td>Uninscribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lauriyā-Arārāja pillar</td>
<td>Stands on original site</td>
<td>Inscribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lauriyā-Nandangarh pillar</td>
<td>Stands on original site</td>
<td>Inscribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lumbini pillar</td>
<td>Stands on same place</td>
<td>Inscribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nigali-Sāgar pillar</td>
<td>Stands on same place</td>
<td>Inscribed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 6

The total length of the Asokan pillars ranges between 40 to 50 feet. The maximum diameter is about 50 inches at the base and about 38 ½ inches at the top. Cunningham estimated that the average weight of an Asokan pillar of a height up to 50 feet and circumference up to 50 inches would be about 50 tons. Further, the location of pillars as well as figures and symbols which included the capital, abacus and bell of pillars provide valuable information to identify the concepts of king Aśoka.

The figures of animals on the capitals of the Asokan pillars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar Name</th>
<th>Figure of Animal on the capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gothiawa</td>
<td>May be Lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauriya Arārāj</td>
<td>May be Lion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

334 *ASI (R)*, XXII, 1877, p. 36.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Animal(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lauriya Nandangarh</td>
<td>One Lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumbini</td>
<td>Horse (missing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigali-sāgar</td>
<td>May be Lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāmpurvā</td>
<td>One Lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāmpurvā</td>
<td>One Bull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sankisa</td>
<td>Elephant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sāñchi</td>
<td>Four Lions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sārnāth Pillar</td>
<td>Four Lions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaisali-Konkara</td>
<td>One Lion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

These elements of Aśokan pillars must have been conceived of as being connected to and in harmony with the message of the inscription. A singular beauty of these pillars is the animal figures on their top and around the capital. The animals patronized for these purposes are elephant, bull, horse and lion. The lion appears on the capitals of the Vaisāli, Lauriya Nandangarh, and one of the Rāmpurvā pillars. Quadruple lions are carved on the Sāñchi and Sārnāth capitals, and the bull on the second pillar found at Rāmpurvā. Mention may also be made of the elephant capital found at Sankisa. These animal figures are related not only to Buddhist sculptures but can also be identified with other Indian religious sculptures. Huntington remarks that the bull and elephant are deeply rooted in the symbolic reservoir of ancient India, the lion is not. Instead, it seems to have been imported into the Indian region as a royal symbol from western Asia, possibly, along with developing ideas of kingship. But according to Buddhist literature, it is clear that the idea of a lion figure began in India. Irwine suggests that the Mauryas

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337 See p. 177.
adopted the lion as the new symbol of their sovereignty.\textsuperscript{338} Foucher and Ahir suggest that these animals were patronised by king Aśoka because these are the symbols of Lord Buddha.\textsuperscript{339} According to Buddhist literature, all these animals were connected directly with the life of Buddha. The elephant is a reminder of the story of queen Māyā’s (Mother of the Buddha) dream that a white elephant entered the womb and an elephant called Pārileyya helped the Buddha during his life in the Pārileyya forest. The horse is Kantaka, who was born on the same day as Buddha and was ridden by the prince Siddhārtha on the occasion of his great renunciation, when he went in search of peace or \textit{Nirvāṇa}.\textsuperscript{340} The bull indicates Buddha’s birth as a human being as he is said to have been born when the Zodiacal sign of Taurus, i.e. the bull was dominant. According to Foucher, the bull represents the traditional date of the Buddha’s birth, the full moon day of Vaisāka.\textsuperscript{341} According to Ikshvāku inscriptions, the Buddha is also the Bull and the musk-elephant among the great spiritual leaders.\textsuperscript{342}

The lion is a reminder of the connection of the Buddha with the royal family of the Śakya clan and the Buddha has been introduced as Śākyasinha. The seated figure of a lion was probably intended as a symbol of Buddha, as the lion of the Śakya clan.\textsuperscript{343} The Buddha is often compared with the lion and preaching with Sihanāda or roar of lion in several early Buddhist texts.\textsuperscript{344} The Buddhist message of the capital is also probably

\textsuperscript{341} Foucher, \textit{op. cit.}, 1917, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{342} “Mahagami ushiba-gandhathisa...” \textit{EI}, Vol. XX, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{343} Rowland, \textit{op. cit.}, 1953, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{344} Pāli-English Dictionary, 1925, p. 173.
incorporated into the symbolism of semi-lions, united back to back. It is not only the lion
an appropriate early symbol of royalty, and thus a reference to Aśoka himself, but the
Buddha’s clan, the Śākya, had the lion as its totem, so the lions may refer to him as well.
The Buddha is often called a lion and his word is known as “the voice of the lion” or
"Sinhaghosha.” Huntington suggests that the four addorsed lions with their open mouths,
may have served as a dual metaphor, referring both to Aśoka, whose words were
inscribed on the pillar, and were to be spread through the land, and to Śākyamuni and
his teachings, some of which were first revealed at Sārnāth. Agrawala assumed that the
four lions above the abacus are an illustration of the royal power of a Cakkavatti emperor
like Aśoka himself. The Buddha also combined the two ideas, viz. Cakkavatti and
Buddha in himself and both of them are juxtaposed in the lion capital. Gupta suggests
that apart from being the lion of the Śākyas, the Buddha was also bull and the musk
elephant among great leaders, and a steed of men.

The four addorsed lions symbolise the might of a Cakkavatti king. It is the power
of the state known as Ksetra that is expressed through the lion symbolism as the king was
considered to be a tiger or lion in his kingdom and in the coronation ceremony was
made to sit on a lion seat (Sinhāsana). The four lions of the capital truly form a
Sinhāsana of the most perfect type, which supports the moral order of the kingdom.
The character of the Buddha and Cakkavatti are emphasised in the same category in
Buddhism and both deliver moral admonition to others. According to this view we can

348 Agrawala, op. cit., 1965, p. 100.
349 S. P. Gupta, The Root of Indian Arts, Delhi, 1980, p. 43.
348 See Chapter V.
349 Ibid., p. 103.
assume that four semi-united lions may highlight the figure of Buddha and king Cakkavatti and the open mouth of lions may symbolise the delivering of moral advice.

Other floral and faunal motifs that appears on the Aśokan abaci and capitals are the lion, bull, deer, elephant, horse, geese, the honey suckle/palmette. To these we may add the inverted lotus that supports the abacus and four animal figures and Cakka (wheel) in the abacus of the pillar at Sārnāth and Sāñchi. Scholars have already presented many arguments about these animals and Cakka of the abacus. Vincent Smith took them as symbolic of the four cardinal points.\(^{350}\) J. P. Vogel thought the four animals that appear on the abacus are merely ornamental motifs.\(^{351}\) J. Bloch conjectured that they represent the god Surya, Indra, Siva and goddess Durgā and indicate the subordination of these Brāhmanical deities to the Buddha and Dhamma.\(^{352}\) Daya Ram Sahni as well as Przyluski held that the drum with the four animals is meant to represent ‘Anotatta’ lake, one of the sacred lakes which is mentioned in Buddhist literature. It describes and illustrates the lake as having four mouths guarded by a horse, a dragon, a bull and an elephant.\(^{353}\) H. C. Raychaudhury assumed that the figure of horse and elephant pillar might represent the Hattiratana and Assaratana of the Cakkavatti. He, further, says that according to contemporary literary sources such as Megasthenes and Strabo horse, elephant, and bull were used as an engine for transport services and war activities. The lion undoubtedly typifies the might of a Cakkavatti. Agrawala states that frequent appearance of these animals individually and in groups is referred to in various contexts in Vedic, Purānic and

\(^{350}\) Vincent Smith, *History of fine Art In India and Ceylon*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1911, p. 59.

\(^{351}\) J. P. Vogel, *Buddhist Art in India*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1936, p. 46.


Buddhist literature. Gupta suggested that the lion may have represented the Sun and royalty, while the animals on the abacus may have been associated with the cardinal directions. Singh states that we would have to see the sculptural motifs, especially the crowning lions, as having a symbolism inspired by Buddhism. One could then see the appearance of the lion on these pillars as evidence of the Buddhist nature of the Dhamma that the edicts on these pillars speak of.

The Sarnath capital stands as a monument of this harmony between two opposing ideas. It blends into itself the story of the birth of a new religion (the first sermon, Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta was preached by the Buddha here) as well as that of the Dhammavijaya of a historical Buddhist Cakkavatti. Singh states that the Cakra of the Sarnath capital has generally been identified as a Buddhist symbol, representing either the Buddha or the first sermon. Rowland states that the Dhamma Cakra presents Dhamma or the law of the Buddha and the lion as the temporal power of an emperor. Agrawala says that the crowing Dhammacakka

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symbolised the policy of Dharmavijaya, the four seated lions representing the majesty and power of the emperor as the supreme ruler of the land. The next constituent comprising the decoration on the abacus falls in line with the ideal of surveying the masses through Dhamma. Therefore, the figures of animals represent divinity in the various orders of social organization and the Dhammacakkas illustrates its underlying unity as actually happened in the life of king Aśoka.\textsuperscript{361} Huntington remarks that the Cakras are probably accidentally placed directly beneath the feet of the four lions as if again referring to the wheel of the law (of Aśoka and Śākyamuni). The animals on the drum consecutively are the bull, horse, lion and elephant which almost appear to be pulling an invisible vehicle set into motion by the enormous Cakra as if to perpetuate the wheel of Dhamma (Dhammacakra).

According to the above observations most of the scholars accept that Cakra may have represented Dhamma, wheel or law. It is clear that the Cakra is one of the symbols of the Cakkavatti king. The first sermon of Buddha, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta was preached by the Buddha comparing it with the wheel. In Śela Sutta of the Suttanipāta, the Buddha says that “A king as I, Śela, the king supreme of righteousness, The royal chariot-wheel in righteousness do I set rolling on that wheel that no one can turn back again.”\textsuperscript{362} Cakka is also a symbol of Dhamma. Dhamma means right, righteous or righteousness, law, justice, condition causal, antecedent etc.\textsuperscript{363} References in Epics also show that the Cakra was the mark of universal sovereignty and apparently represented the wheel of the monarch’s chariot.\textsuperscript{364}

\textsuperscript{361} Agrawala, \textit{op. cit}, 1965, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{364} \textit{Yavad āvartate cakram tāvarti me vasundhārā}, \textit{Ramāyanaya} Ch. II, 10. 36.
But we can give a new interpretation to the Aśokan pillar and its symbols according to the Buddhist view. The stone pillar is unshakable even in the strongest winds. Thus, the Buddha and king Cakkavatti are also unshakable through any power in the world. This quality of the Buddha and the Cakkavatti king are represented symbolically by the pillar. Further, there are three parts on the top of the pillar, viz. lotus bell, abacus and capital. The lotus is represented as a symbol of purity. The Buddha and Chakkavatti king are the representation of purity both mentally and physically. We can assume that lotus may imply purity of the Buddha and Cakkavatti king. Four running animal figures and turning of four wheels can be seen in the abacus of the pillar. The four animals running around the abacus may be the symbol of the four varṇas (Brāhmaṇa Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Śūdra). The four Dhammacakkas are turning among the four animals. Dhammacakka is the symbol of the Buddha and Cakkavatti king and the Dhamma of them is common to every human being. The turning of Dhammacakka among the four animal figures and these animals depicted in the same line imply common compassion and sympathy to all beings in the world.

The four-seated semi, open mouth lions united back to back may have depicted the Buddha and Cakkavatti king and the spread of their Dhamma in the four directions of the world. According to this interpretation, we can assume that king Aśoka might have tried to highlight the figure of Buddha as well as the Cakkavatti figure also.

It was undoubtedly Buddhism which Aśoka embraced as his personal religion. He did acquire an in-depth grasp of the doctrines, including its Canonical sources, as a

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“Prayamchābhiprayatasasya chakram tasya mahātmanaḥ- Bhavishyayapratīhatam sataim chakravartimanaḥ, Mahābhārata,” Ch. II, 73. 30.
“Tasya tattathāta cakram pravartata mahatmanah-bhūsvaram divyamajitam lokasamāndanam mahat Sa rāja chakravarttyasat sarvabhuma pratāpavām- je cha bahubhir yajñhair yathā sakro manurpatih”, Mahābhārata, Ch. I, 74. 127. 129.
result of close association with Buddhist monks and monasteries himself. King Aśoka had shown righteous character through pious activities and his aspiration through his inscriptions and monuments. Therefore, king Aśoka not only adopted Buddhism but also tried to propagate its moral concepts. Because he believed that it is morality, which forms the nature of men, therefore, we can say that king Aśoka was the first teacher of morality and religion.

On the basis of the inscriptive and archaeological evidence, it is clear that Buddhist ethics and political concepts directly influenced king Aśoka and his activities. Further, the policy of Dhammavija of king Aśoka contributed to the spread of Dhamma and Cakkavatti concepts in neighbouring countries. As a result of it, Sri Lanka became not only the main Buddhist centre of Theravāda Buddhism but it also influenced the ruling circles of the island to promote their ethical background.

365 Especially in the Sārnāth pillar.