

UNVEILING KING ASOKA'S LEGACY: CRITICAL STUDY ON THE CONTENTS, LANGUAGES AND OBJECTIVES OF ASOKA'S INSCRIPTIONS

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Abstract

This research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding on the Asoka's inscriptions, examining the contents, languages and objectives of the inscriptions. This research is a qualitative research carried out with library approach, in which the data are gathered from sources like books, journals, articles and relevant researches by scholars. The Buddhist literatures including Sri Lankan chronicles are also used to provide the information about the figure of King Asoka and his contributions to Buddhism. This research proves that the King Asoka was a significant figure in the Indian history, who was recognized for his impactful reign and advocacy for Buddhism. The archaeological discoveries, including inscriptions scattered across India, offer substantial historical insights into Asoka's reign and his endeavors. In his reign, the king utilized inscriptions as a means to disseminate his message of peace and harmony. The purpose of those inscriptions was to establish the Dhamma or righteousness teachings to the society. The Asoka's inscriptions are dispersed across various locations in India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, with notable findings in places like Kalsi, Sopara, Mount Girnar, Yerragudi, Dhauri, and Jaugada, composed in languages like Prakrit, Greek, and Aramaic, are preserved in various scripts such as Brāhmī, Kharosthi, Greek, Aramaic, and bilingual Greek-Aramaic.

Keywords: Asoka, Inscriptions, Objectives, Languages

INTRODUCTION

King Asoka is often regarded as one of most influential kings in Indian history due to his great work disseminating Buddhism across Asia. He was the powerful king who supported the holding of third Buddhist council at Pataliputta and at the end of the council, helped missionaries monks to propagate the Buddha's teaching to various countries (Medhacitto, 2023: 3). King Asoka's reign is considered by many scholars and historians as an age of radical change both on the political and spiritual dimensions. H. G. Wells regarded Asoka as one of the Six Greatest Men of history (Sen, 1956: i). Archeological findings and some literary texts prove the existence of the King Asoka. The exact date where the King Asoka lived is disputing point which has not been solved since each scholar suggests different opinion. Eggermont proposes 268-239 B.C (Gombrich, 1994: 2). Venerable S. Dhammika says that the king was born in about 304 B.C. (Dhammika, 1993: 3). Ananda W.P. Guruge predicts it was about 273-236 B.C (Guruge, 1994: 182). However, generally it is accepted that the King Asoka lived during the 3rd century B.C.

Asoka was the king of Magadha. He was the son of Bindusāra. His grandson was Chandragupta, the founder of the Maurya Dynasty. He was named as Asoka for not having caused any pain to his mother at childbirth (Malalasekera, 1998: 179). Literally "Asoka" means "painless, without sorrow". The legends on Asoka have been preserved in many texts. Buddhist texts, especially Sri Lankan chronicles, the commentary of Canonical texts, and later literary works provide some details about the King Asoka and relationship with Buddhism. The legend of the King Asoka can be referred from Sri Lankan chronicles such as *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvāṃsa*. *Samantapāsādikā*, the commentary of Vinaya *Pitaka* give an account on the situation in the 3rd century B. C. including the account on the King Asoka who supported the holding of the Third Buddhist Council and sending Buddhist missionaries to several countries to propagate Buddhism. Other sources are the *Divyāvadāna* passim, and the *Avadānasataka* (Malalasekera, 2003: 216). *Mahāvāṃsa* reports short story on Asoka before his conversion into Buddhism. It is said that Asoka was very cruel and had been known as Caṇḍāsoka (Ferocious Asoka) on account of evil he did (Mhv. 189). He became a king after killing his ninety-nine brothers born of different mothers (Mhv. V. 20). Wishing to expand his territory, King Asoka fought with other countries

in order to conquer the lands. In the Kalinga war, 100.000 of people were slain and 150.000 taken prisoners. Having seen many corpses had been killed by him, he was feeling guilty and unhappy. He saw small novice monk name Sāmaṇera Nigrodha was walking across the royal garden. Having pleased with the calmness of that novice, he ordered his servant to invite that novice to the royal palace. This meeting and small conversation about Buddhism made the king converted to Buddhism. It is said that Sāmaṇera Nigrodha taught the *Appamādavagga* of *Dhammapada*.

Having converted to Buddhism, the king Asoka totally changed his behavior and became righteous king. He followed the Buddha's teaching and supported the Sangha. Since he devoted himself to the Dhamma by supporting the Sasana, he known as Dhammāsoka (Mhv. V. 190). He supported Buddhism and the Sangha by building thousands of temple and stupas. It is said that the king built vihāra for each one of eighty-four thousand sections of Dhamma (Mhv. V. 78). The king supported the holding of the third Buddhist council in order to purify the Sasana from the heretic monks. As result of this, 60.000 heretical monks were disrobed and given the job by the king (Mhv. V. 270). Remaining 6.000.000 monks who called as *Vibhajjavādins*. Among them, 1.000 monks who are learned in Tipiṭaka, possessed analytical insight and threefold knowledge, held the Third Council (Vin.A. I. 61). Then *Kathāvatthu Pakaraṇa* was composed by Ven. Moggaliputtatissa in order to reject the heretical views (Medhacitto, 2023: 4). Finally, king send Buddhist missionaries to nine countries in order to propagate Buddhism. *Mahavamsa* gives details about the name of monks and the nine places, as follows: 1) Kashmir led by Ven. Majjhantika Thera; 2) Mahisamandala led by Mahādeva Thera; 3) Vanavasi led by Rakkhita Thera; 4) Aparantaka led by Yona-Dhammarakkhita Thera; 5) Maharattha led by Dhammarakkhita Thera; 6) Yonaloka led by Maharakkhita Thera; 7) Himavanta led by Majjhima Thera; 8) Suvannabhūmi led by Sona and Uttara Thera; 9) Thambapanni Sīhala Dīpa led by Mahinda Thera with 4 monks, 1 samanera, and 1 laypeople. (Itthiya Thera, Uttiya Thera, Sambala Thera, Bhaddasala Thera, Sumana Samanera, and Bhanduka upasaka (Geiger, 20114: 1-8).

In addition to his great contribution for the dissemination of Buddhism, the King Asoka is also considered as one of the most influential rulers in Indian history for his great impact on dissemination of humanitarian values through his inscriptions. Those inscriptions are well-known as Asoka inscriptions found in many places scattered in India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The present paper aims to provide a critical discussion of King Asoka's legacy, with special attention on the contents, languages and objectives of Asoka's Inscriptions.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology utilized in this research is qualitative research methodology conducted with library approach. It is called library research since it focuses on the documentary analysis taken from literature, books, journal, or article. The library research is understood as a series of activities relating to methods of collecting data, reading, taking notes and processing research materials (Zed, 2014: 3). Library research is classified as qualitative research, but in the context of library research, data is taken from exploration of library materials which are studied holistically, then analyzed based on a particular framework of thought or theory/philosophical paradigm that underlies it, then uses a certain approach in accordance with the research objectives achieved (Hamzah, 2019: 25). By this method, the researcher collects the information relevant to the topic as much as possible from the library or literature. The sources must be relevant and academically justifiable in term of their validity and authenticity as scholarly sources such as books, journals, magazines, monographs, research reports, encyclopedias and other credible sources from online (Zaluchu: 2021: 255). In this study, by using qualitative approach, the researcher collects the documents and information from the sources like books, journal and articles dealing with the history of King Asoka and his inscriptions. The collected data is analyzed by using data analysis based on Miles and Huberman model, including data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction is the process of selecting the data to get data that is important for research. Data presentation is the step of presenting the research data either in the form of text or tables to clarify the research results. Finally, the research presents the conclusion based on data found in those sources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Asoka's Inscriptions

Besides he supported Buddhism by sending Buddhist missionaries throughout India and abroad, Asoka too spread his message through inscriptions. Today those inscriptions are called as Asoka's Inscriptions. Some of those inscriptions are still available this day, found scattered in more than thirty places throughout India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Places of India where Asoka's inscriptions were found are – Kalsi, Uttarakhand; Sopara, Maharashtra; Mount Girnar, Gujarat; Yerragudi, Andhra Pradesh; Dhauli, Odisha; Jaugada, Odisha.

Though those inscriptions were discovered, but some of them were unreadable. The scripts and language used in those inscriptions had been forgotten in India. It was because of James Prinsep, an English scholar, those inscriptions were readable and known what the messages engraved on those inscriptions. In 1838, James Prinsep, was enabled to read the scripts of Asoka's Inscriptions, in Brahmi character, with the help of bilingual coins of the Indo-Greek rulers of North West India giving their names in both Greek and Brahmi characters (Sen, 1956: ii).

In the inscription, Asoka called himself as "The Priyadarsin" or "Beloved of Gods." The inscription is called "*Dhammalipi*" or "the Dhamma text." Though, it is mentioned as "Dhamma," but it doesn't mean Buddhism. King Asoka's idea was greatly influenced by the Buddha's teaching, but his message was not Buddhism, but his own understanding on the Dhamma and take relevant teachings to establish peaceful and harmony in the country he ruled.

As mentioned by Piplayan (2005: 88-89), Asoka's inscriptions are inscribed on the rocks and stone pillars scattered many areas throughout India. Several remarkable rock inscriptions, belong to major inscriptions, have been found at; Shahabaz Garhi (Peshawar – Pakistan), Manasehara (Hazara – Pakistan), Kalasi (Dehradun – Uttaranchal), Girnar (Junagarh – Gujarat), Dholi (Puri – Orissa), Jogarha (Ganjam – Orissa), Erangudi (Karnoor – Andhra Pradesh) and Sopara (Thana – Maharashtra). In addition to that, there are more minor inscriptions found at Rupanatha (Jabalpur of Madhya Pradesh), Gujjara (Datiya of Madhya Pradesh), Sahsarama (Bihar), Bhavru (Jaipur of Rajasthan), Maski (Raichur of Karnataka), Brahmagiri (Chittaladurga of Karnataka), Siddhapura (Chittaladurga of Karnataka), Erangudi (Kurnula of Andhra Pradesh), Gowimatha (Mysore of Karnataka), Ahrora (Mirzapur of Uttar Pradesh).

The Contents of Asoka's Inscriptions

The Asoka's inscriptions have been divided into several divisions. There are Major Rock Edicts which include fourteen edicts. There are also two separate edicts found at sites in Kalinga. There are Minor Rock Inscriptions consist of The Minor Rock Edicts, the Queen's Edict, the Barabar Cave Inscriptions and the Kandahar bilingual Inscriptions. Furthermore, there are Seven Pillar Edicts and two more Pillar Inscriptions, namely: Rummindei and Nigalisagar Pillar Inscriptions.

Major Rock Edicts

First Major Rock Edict

This edict conveys the instruction given by the king not to kill animal. It is stated that, "Here, in my dominion, no living beings are to be killed or offered in sacrifice (*idha na kimci jīvaṃ ārabhitpā prajūhitavyam*).” And the festivals which contain much evil are not allowed to be held. The king himself also reported that in his palace, formerly hundred thousand of animals were killed, but now, only three animals – two peacocks and one deer - are to be killed. But he wished even these animals are not to be killed anymore in the future.

Second Major Rock Edict

The king instructed to provide two medical services included the medical treatment for men and animals to everywhere in his lands, even in the lands on its frontiers, those of the Colas, Pandyas, Satyaputras, Keralaputras, and as far as Ceylon, and of the Greek king named Antiochus and of those kings who are neighbors of that Antiochus. Medicinal roots and fruits are to be planted, wells are to be dug and trees are to be planted along the road for the use of men and animals (*pamthesū kūpā ca khānāpitā, vrachā ca ropāpitā, paribhogāya pasumanusānam*).

Third Major Rock Edict

The king instructed the Yuktas, Rajjukas and Pradesikas to go on tour (*anusamyānam*) every five years for the Dharma instructions and also other work (*imāya dhammānusastīya, yathā aññāya pi kamāmāya*). This inscription also contains message respecting mother and father (*sadhu mātari ca pitari ca susrūsā*); giving gift to friends, acquaintances, relatives, to Brahmins and ascetics (*mitrasamstutaññātīnam*).

bāmhāṇasamaṇānaṃ sadhu dānaṃ); refraining from killing animals (*prāṇānaṃ sadhu anāraṃbho*); moderation on spending and owning possessions (*apavyayatā apabhādatā sadhu*).

Fourth Major Rock Edict

It conveys practical advice of non-killing of animals, no-hurting of living beings, proper behavior towards relatives, proper behavior toward Brahmins and ascetics, respectfulness towards mother, father and aged people. The king hoped to promote this practice of the Dharma.

Fifth Major Rock Edict

This inscription reports the king's understanding of the Dharma that good deeds are difficult to perform (*kayāne dukale*), but sin is quite easy to commit (*pāpe hi nāmā supadālaye*). It is also mentioned the appointment of the Dharmamahāmātras occupied among all sects for the establishment of the Dharma and for the promotion of the Dharma, or for the welfare and happiness of those who are devoted to Dharma.

Sixth Major Rock Edict

It reports the king's desire to get informed about the condition of the people. The affairs of the people had to be informed to king for the king disposed of the all affairs of the people. This inscription shows the care of the king to all the people. King considered the welfare of all the people as his duty. There is no better work than the welfare of all the people (*nāsti hi me toso uṣṭānamhi athasamṭiraṇāya va*). Whatever the king is doing, is the effort to make people happy both in this life and the life after.

Seventh Major Rock Edict

This inscription conveys the message of Asoka's impartiality towards all religious sects. In this inscription, the king desired that all sects should reside everywhere for all of them wish to acquire self-control and purity of the mind.

Eighth Major Rock Edict

It describes how the king changed his habit of traveling to pleasure-tours, hunting and other amusements, to become good habit, i.e. visiting the Buddhists sites. It reports the king's Dharma tour to Sambodhi.

Ninth Major Rock Edict

The king criticized the popular auspicious ceremonies, such as during illnesses, at the marriage of sons and daughters, at the birth of son or when setting out on a journey for it brings little fruit. The king encouraged to perform auspicious ceremony that brings much fruits, i.e. auspicious ceremony of Dharma which are comprised proper behavior towards slaves and servants; deference towards elders, gentleness towards animals; gifts to Brahmins and ascetics and other similar virtues.

Tenth Major Rock Edict

It reports that the king doesn't consider glory or fame to be productive of any great value (*kīti va na mahāthāvahā*). The king praised the respectfulness towards the Dhamma and its followers.

Eleventh Major Rock Edict

It contains the message given by the king on the importance of gift of Dhamma (Dhammadāna). It is said that there is no gift comparable to the gift of Dhamma, the praise of Dhamma, the sharing of Dhamma, fellowship in Dhamma (*nāsti etārisaṃ dānaṃ yārisaṃ dhammadānaṃ, dhammasamstavo vā, dhammasamvibhāgo vā, dhammasambandho va*). The gift of Dhamma produces great merit in this world and life after.

Twelfth Major Rock Edict

This inscription conveys tolerance principle to other religions. It is said that one should honor the other sects for by doing so one increases the influence of one's own sect and benefits the other sects; while by doing otherwise one diminishes the influence of one's own sect and harms the other sects (*evaṃ karuṃ ātpapāsaṃḍaṃ ca vadhayati, parapāsaṃḍasa ca upakaroti; tadamñathā karoto ātpapāsaṃḍaṃ ca chaṇati, parapāsaṃḍasa ca pi apakaroti*). It is not right to praise one's own religion by blaming other religions. The king said that whosoever honors his own sect or disparages that of another man, wholly out of devotion to his own, with a view to showing it in a favorable light, harms his own sect even more seriously (*yo hi koci ātpapāsaṃḍaṃ pūjayati, parapāsaṃḍaṃ va garahati - savaṃ ātpapāsaṃḍabhatiyā kiṃti ātpapāsaṃḍaṃ dīpayema iti. So ca puna tatha karoto ātpapāsaṃḍaṃ bāḍhataraṃ upahanāti*).

Thirteenth Major Rock Edict

It gives an account on Kalinga war, where a hundred and fifty thousand people were deported, a hundred thousand were killed and many times that number perished. Seeing many dead bodies and much sufferings caused by that war, the king was remorseful. Since that, the king changed his way and conquered by the Dharma. It is said that the Beloved of gods wishes all beings non-injury, restraint and

impartiality, even in a case of offensive conduct (*ichati hi devampriyo savrabhutana akṣati saṃyamam samacariyam rabhasiye*). With the Dhamma, the king ruled the country based on non-violence, humanity and tolerance. The conquest by the Dhamma is considered by the king as the best conquest (*ayi ca mukhamuta vijaye devānaṃpiyaṣā ye dhammavijaye*).

Fourteenth Major Rock Edict

It says about rescripts written in brief (*saṃkhitena*), in medium length (*majhamena*) or elaborately (*vistatena*), but have not been written everywhere since the empire is large. There is considerable repetition because of the beauty of certain topics, and in order that the people may conform to them (*asti ca eta kaṃ puna puna vutaṃ, tasa tasa athasa mādhūratāya kiṃti jano tathā paṭipajetha*). In some places it may be inaccurately engraved, whether by the omission of a passage or by lack of attention, or by the error of the engraver.

Separate Edicts

First Separate Edict (Dhauḷi and Jaugada)

In this inscription, king considered all people as his own sons. Therefore, the king wanted to provide them welfare and happiness. It is said thus, “All men are my children. As for my own children, I desire that they may be provided with all the welfare and happiness of this world and of the next world, so do I desire for all men as well (*save munise pajā mama, athā pajāye ichāmi hakaṃ kiṃti savena hitasukhena hidalokikapālalokikena yūjevū ti, tathā savamunisesu pi ichāmi hakaṃ*).

Second Separate Edict

It contains the same desire of the king to provide welfare and happiness of the people as his own sons. The king wished all people be without fear in respect of him, may people have confidence in him, and they may obtain happiness from him, not sorrow. It is to be known that the king will forgive those who can be forgiven. The king hoped that the people may be inducted by him to practice Dhamma, and they may attain happiness of this world and of the next world.

Minor Rock Inscriptions

Minor Rock Edict

The Minor Rock Edict in the Gavimaṭṭh version describes the fruit of zeal in practicing Dharma. The king related his own experience that more than two and half year being a lay disciple (*upāsaka*), but he had not been very zealous. But now, somewhat more than one year he joined in the Saṅgha, he has been very zealous. He said that the gods who were unmingled with men in Jambudvīpa, have now been made mingled. This is the fruit of zeal. The king further said that the heaven is capable of being attained by not only the great man, but even small person who is greatly zealous.

Allahabad Pillar Queen’s Gifts Edict

It gives account on the registration of the second queen’s gifts bestowed by the king, such as mango groves, parks, alms houses, or anything else that is registered as a gift of that queen.

Barābar Cave Inscription

There are three Barābar Cave Inscriptions. The first Barābar Cave Inscription reports the Banyan-cave (*nigohakubhā*) that was given to Ājīvaka by king Priyadasi. The second Barābar Cave Inscription, reports the cave in the Khalatika hill (*Khalatikapavatasi*) that was given to Ājīvaka by king Priyadasi. Barābar Cave Inscription reports the same news that the cave in the Khalatika hill was given to Ājīvaka for the sake of shelter from the approach of the roar of waters.

Kandahar Bilingual Rock Inscription

It is bilingual edict in Greek and Aramaic. It contains Asoka’s instruction on practical moral he has established to people he ruled. It is said that he has made people more pious and everything thrives throughout the whole world. The king abstains from killing living beings. The huntsmen and fishermen have been desisted from hunting. The king gave instruction on obedient to the father and mother, as well as the elders.

The Pillar Edicts

First Pillar Edict

It contains the message of the king Asoka on the exhortation on the practice of Dharma. King said that happiness in this world and in the next world is difficult to secure without a great desire for the Dharma, great circumspection, great respectfulness, great fear of sin and great energy (*hidatapālate dusamptāpādaye amnata agāyā dhammakāmatāyā, agāya palīkhāyā, agāya susūsāyā, agena bhayenā, agena usāhenā*). That is why, the king intended to promote Dharma for the benefit of many people. His officers too followed his instruction and inspired others. The king's instructions are to protect according to the Dharma (*dhammena pālanā*), to dispose according to the Dharma (*dhammena vidhāne*), to make others happy according to the Dharma (*dhammena sukhiyanā*) and to guard others according to the Dharma (*dhammena gotī ti*).

Second Pillar Edict

It contains the message to practice the Dharma. Here, the Dharma is described as little sin (*apāsīnave*), many good deeds (*bahukayāne*), mercifulness (*dayā*), charity (*dāne*), truthfulness (*sace*) and purity (*socaye*). It reports that the king has performed many good deeds. By writing this inscription, king wished people could follow his way.

Third Pillar Edict

It is mentioned that people regard their virtuous deeds only – ‘this virtuous deed has been performed by me’, but they do not regard their evils deeds – ‘this evil deed has been performed by me’. The king listed the ways to sin such as fierceness (*caṃḍiye*), cruelty (*niṭhūliye*), anger (*kodhe*), pride (*māne*) and envy (*iṣyā*). One should not be ruined by those causes. And there are deeds to be more specially regarded, thinking ‘this conduces to my happiness here in this world, whereas this conduces to my happiness in the next world’ (*esa bādha dekhiye - iyaṃ me hidatikāye, iyaṃ mana me pālatikāye*).

Fourth Pillar Edict

It reports about the duties of Rajjukas. The Rajjukas are selected by the king to help the king's mission. Rajjukas are occupied among people. Rajjukas are expected to discharge their duties confidently and fearlessly, and may confer welfare and happiness on the rural people and benefit them. Rajjukas should devote themselves to the Dharma and should exhort the rural people, so that the rural people may attain happiness in this world and in the next world. Rajjukas are made responsible by the king for the welfare and happiness of the rural people (*hevaṃ mama lajūkā kaṭā jānapadasa hitasukhāye*).

Fifth Pillar Edict

It contains the instruction about prohibition of the killing of and infliction of pain on animals. List of animals are mentioned not to be killed. And there are some animals which are not allowed to be killed on the certain occasion.

Sixth Pillar Edict

This inscription contains the Asoka's objective of writing Dharma rescripts. It is said that, the Dharma rescripts are written for the welfare and happiness of the people, so that the people not transgress them, and they may attain progress in Dharma in respect of those various matters (*me dhammalipi likhāpitā lokasā hitasukhāye, se taṃ apahaṭā taṃ dhammavaḍhi pāpovā*). The king's attention is to all classes of people. The king himself said that he honored all religious sects with various kinds of honors (*savapāsamaḍā pi me pūjitā vividhāya pūjāyā*).

Seventh Pillar Edict

It is long inscription containing the review of the Asoka's Dharma activities during his life. It reports that the king desired people to progress by promotion of Dharma, but people did not progress by the adequate promotion of Dharma. Then an idea occurred to the king thus, “I shall cause the Dharma proclamations to be announced, and shall order Dharma instructions to be issued. Hearing these, people will follow the Dharma, will elevate themselves, and will progress considerably by the promotion of the Dharma.” Then the king did such way. Each Dharma rescript is to be engraved on the stone-pillars or stone-slabs so that it may long endure.

The Minor Pillar Edicts

Lumbini Pillar Edict

It gives account on Asoka's visit to the Buddha's birth place, Lumbini. The king visited the Lumbini and worshipped it because Lumbini is the place where the sage of the Sakyans, was born. The king erected a stone figure and a pillar in this place (*silāvigadabhīcā kālāpita, silāthabhe ca usapāpīte*). The king made Lumbini free of taxes (*ubalike kaṭe*), required to pay only one eighth of the produce (*aṭhabhāgiye ca*).

Nigalisagar Pillar Edict

It reports that the king enlarged the stupa of the Buddha Kanakamuni to double its former size when he crowned fourteen years. Six years after, when he crowned twenty years, he visited this place, worshipped and a stone pillar was erected.

Schism Pillar Edict

It is written in Allahabad Text. It contains the punishment for schism in the Buddhist Order. It is said that Mahāmātras at Kosambi are to be informed this message, “(Whoever splits the Sangha) which is now united, is not to be admitted into the Sangha. Whoever, whether monk or nun, splits the Sangha is to be made to wear white clothes and to reside somewhere other than in a monastery.”

Bairat Buddhist Texts Edict

This inscription relates the story of the king’s meeting to the community of monks. The king said that he had great reference for and faith in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The king further said that whatever has been spoken by the Blessed Buddha, all that is well spoken. The king wished the true Dharma endure for long duration. Therefore, he decided to mention the important Dharma texts in the pillar. Those Dharma texts (*Dhammapaliyāyāni*) are Vinaya-samukase, Aliya-vasāṇi, Anāgata-bhayāni, Muni-gāthā, Moneya-sūte, Upatisa-pasine and Lāghulovāde.

The Languages of Asoka’s Inscriptions

Asoka inscriptions are to be found throughout India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Available discoveries are more than thirty places. The inscriptions are engraved on rock and stone pillars. The inscriptions were not written in only one language, but three languages were used, such as Prakrit, Greek and Aramaic. The inscriptions were written in different scripts such as Brāhmī, Kharosthi, Greek, Aramaic and bilingual Greek-Aramaic as well. But, most of those inscriptions are written in Brāhmī script (Dhammika, 1993: 4). Prakrit inscriptions were written in Brāhmī and Kharosthi scripts. According to Suniti Kumar Chatterji, the Brahmi character was selected for it is the ultimate source of all different native scripts of India, and also of some countries outside India like Ceylon and Tibet, Ancient Central Asia and Burma, Cambodia and Siam, and of the various areas in Indonesia including the Philippines. While Kharosthi script is palpably of foreign origin, being modification of the Ancient Syrian writing as it was current in the Persian Empire (Sen, 1956: vii).

Inscriptions found in the eastern part of the sub-continent is a type of Magadhi. S. Dhammika assumed that probably the Magadhi was the official language of the Asoka’s court (Dhammika, 1993: 4). The language used in the edicts found in the western part of India is closer to Sanskrit although one bilingual edict in Afghanistan is written in Aramaic and Greek (Dhammika, 1993: 4). Suniti Kumar Chatterji, when he was giving preface of a book entitled “Asoka’s Edicts”, he said that the King Asoka had followed the great prescription of the Buddha, that people should be approached in the matter of spiritual truths in their own language (Sen, 1956: vi). The Asoka’s messages were also sent through various local dialect of North India. There are in the main four dialects of Middle Indo-Aryan or Prakrit which Asoka has used in his inscriptions: one of the North-West, One of the South-West, One of the Himalayan regions, one of the Gangetic Plains (Sen, 1956: vi).

Suniti Kumar Chatterji give more opinions that the language and style of the Asoka’s inscriptions is still a little halting and not yet fully developed. The simplicity of Asoka’s prose recalls the prose of the Upanishads and of the portions of the Mahabharata. There are certain Old Persian influences in the style, including the number of Old Persian words (Sen, 1956: viii).

The Objectives of the Inscriptions

Asoka’s inscriptions are the instructions given by the King Asoka to society. The purpose of those inscriptions was to establish the Dhamma or righteousness teachings to the society. The king appointed *Dhammamahamatras* to propagate Dhamma among various social groups. The king’s instructions are about moral principles which are practiced bring happiness of this life and of the next life, such abstinence from killing any living being; obedience to parents; proper behavior toward parents, relatives and elders; and respectfulness to Brahmins and ascetic.

In many inscriptions, the king said that the purpose of giving those instructions was for the sake of welfare and happiness of people in this life and life after. King considered the welfare of all the people as his own duty. As a king according to the Dharma, he had to provide welfare and happiness to many people. He said that there is no better work than the welfare of all the people (*nāsti hi me toso usṭānamhi*

athasam̐tīraṇāya va). Therefore, he devoted his life for the sake of welfare and happiness of many people.

Richard Gombrich says that almost all Asoka's inscriptions are about Dhamma. By this he did not mean specifically Buddhism, but righteousness as he understood it. His understanding was greatly influenced by Buddhism (Gombrich, 1994: 3). In the inscription, the king never discussed about the highest bliss of Nibbāna. His instructions were based on humanity and compassion which are accepted by all religious sects. Even he also respected and supported all religious sects. In the one of pillar edicts, he said that he honored all religious sects with various kinds of honors (*savapāsaṃdā pi me pūjitā vividhāya pūjāyā*).

CONCLUSION

King Asoka was great king lived in 3rd century B.C who have done great contribution to the society and to the propagation of Buddhism across the Asia. King Asoka's reign represents a very unique combination of political strategies and moral leadership. He propagated humanitarian teachings through his edicts, humane governance, and compassionate policy. He ruled the country basing on moral and ethical code, and also promoted his way to the people. Through his edicts scattered in many places, he wanted to give the people a sense of morality, compassion, and respect for life by following the principles of Dhamma, such as non-violence, filial piety, proper behavior towards elders and relatives, and respect towards Brahmins, ascetics, and all religious sects. It reflected his kindness and care for the well-being of his people. Several *Dhammamahamatras* were appointed by him to propagate Dhamma among various social groups. His instructions were engraved on the rocks and stone pillars so that it could be seen by many people and practiced. All those inscriptions are generally known as Asoka's Inscriptions or Asoka's Edicts. There are many inscriptions remain today scattered throughout India, Pakistan and Nepal. Those inscriptions were written in different characters and languages. The character or script of Brāhmī, Kharosthi, Greek, Aramaic and bilingual Greek-Aramaic were used to write the Asoka's instructions. Prakrit, Greek and Aramaic were used as the language of those inscriptions. The objective of making edicts was to spread Dhamma so that people could practice following the righteous teaching. Dhamma mentioned here does not specifically a Buddhist doctrine, but a universal moral law which the king believed was necessary for society. Righteous teaching promoted by the King Asoka comprised of compassions and concern for all living beings, irrespective of their religion. He wanted to rule his country ensuring people living harmoniously, practicing the best conduct, and following a moral path for the happiness of all in this world and the next.

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