

Some Observations on Aśokan Inscriptions

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The most important source for the study of the history of Aśoka are his inscriptions. A fairly large number of them, in different condition of preservation, have seen the light of the day, one after the other, an unknown number is still awaiting discovery. The edicts were meant to be read by, or read to, maximum number of people, so that the message of Aśoka for the material and moral welfare of the people could reach to as many people as possible. With this end in view, they were recorded on sites, which were either located on important routes or were centres of trade, pilgrimage or administration.

Scripts used

The inscriptions have been written variously in Brāhmī, Kharoṣṭī, Aramaic and Greek scripts, and an inscription from Kandahar is biscriptual and bilingual (Greek and Aramaic). The Aramaic inscriptions have been found at Taxila and on some sites along the Khyber and Kandahar; while the Greek inscriptions, few in number, are confined to the area around Kandahar. Of the two Kharoṣṭī inscriptions of Aśoka so far known, one has been found in Hazara district, and another in Peshawar district, both in Pakistan. In the rest of his vast empire, at different places only Brāhmī inscriptions have been found, in fairly large number.

Classification of inscriptions

The inscriptions have been found engraved on rocks, pillars, stone-slab and caves. The rock inscriptions are of two types- a set of (generally) Fourteen Rock Edicts and a number of Minor Rock Edicts, most of the latter confined to his southern borders in region around Mysore. Besides these, there are two Separate Rock Edicts found at Dhauli in Puri district and Jaugada in Ganjam district, both in Orissa (at both these places, Rock Edicts XI-XIII have been found), and also at Sannati (Gulabarga district), discovered in 1989, where fragments of Rock Edicts XII and XIV too have been found. The Seven Pillar Edicts are a set of edicts, seven on Delhi-Topra pillar, and six in pillars at other sites. There are also some Minor Pillar Edicts, which include (i) Schism Edict, of which three copies have been found on the pillars at Sarnath, Sanchi and Allahabad (the last one originally located at Kosam) in which the king threatens to punish those

monks and nuns who attempted to create schism in the *saṅgha*, (ii) the Commemorative Edicts, one commemorating Aśoka's visit to the *stūpas* of Buddha Konāgamana in Nepal *terai*, and another commemorating his visit of Lumbinī, the birth-place of the Buddha, and (iii) the Queen's Edict relating to the donations made by his second queen. The cave inscriptions mention the grant of cave dwellings to the *Ājīvikas* in the Barabar hills in Gaya district. Only one edict, viz., the Bhabru edict has been found on a stone slab.

The Contents of the inscriptions and their importance

The find spots of the inscriptions from Peshawar district in the north west to Mysore in the south, and from Sopara in the Thana District (Gujarat) in the west to Dhauri and Jaugada in the south east, and the mention of different regions and people in them throw light on the extent of his empire. They give us an idea about his administrative system, and administrative reforms. He created a new class of the *mahāmātras*, the *dharmamahāmātras* (Rock Edict V) who had multifarious duties related with the material and spiritual welfare of the people, inspiring people, particularly members of royal household for making pious gifts, and maintaining harmonious relationship between various sects. He gave full powers to the *rājūkas* in awarding reward and punishment (Pillar Edict IV) and his instructions to high officials to conduct administrative tours (Rock Edict III and Separate Rock Edict I). He exhorted his officers to impart instruction in *dhamma* along with their administrative duties.

The inscriptions inform us about his acts of public welfare such as planting of trees on roadside, digging of wells, provision of watersheds and rest-houses (Rock Edict II and Pillar Edict VII), and medical aid for both men and animals (Rock Edict II) - the last-mentioned one not only within his kingdom but also in the domains of other kings. They acquaint us with his *dhamma* that he prescribes for people to follow, and which comprises such noble qualities as kindness (*dayā*), making gifts (*dāna*), truthfulness (*sace*), purity (*socaye*) etc. (Pillar Edict II), which form part of all the higher religions, and thus reflect his liberal and cosmopolitan approach in religious matters. He laid great emphasis on self-purification. His religious policy was based not on neutrality, but on active patronage to all religions. Though himself a Buddhist, he showed reverence to all sects (Pillar Edict VI), and declared that the followers of all sects were free to dwell anywhere within his domain (Pillar Edict VII). He was very keen that there should be religious harmony amongst the followers of different

sects. In Rock Edict XII, he tells people to honour other's religions, listen to their tenets, be tolerant to other sects and observe restraint of speech with reference to them. He emphasizes on the development of concord between different religious sects, and on the growth of their essentials. He tells that by honouring other's sects one honours his own sect, and by condemning them, harms both.

In the inscriptions, he exhorts people, again and again, to show proper behaviour towards parents, teachers, old people, friends, relations, slaves, servants, poor and orphans, and brahmanical and non-brahmanical monks, and do good to them. He showed concern for living beings in general, and put restriction on slaughter of animals in royal kitchen (Rock Edict I), prohibition of killing certain species of animals and restriction on the killing of others on certain auspicious days (Pillar Edict V). He wanted people to give up useless rituals and instead do such acts as are conducive to the good of the society (Rock Edict IX). He himself gave up pleasure tours and instead undertook tours for the welfare of the people (Rock Edict VIII). Following the paternal ideal of kingship he calls his subjects as his children whose welfare was his utmost concern (Pillar Edict IV; Separate Rock Edicts I and II). For being acquainted with the problems of the people, he made himself available to the reporters at all times and places (Rock Edict VII).

But for the inscriptions we would have never known about his conquest of Kalinga, which resulted in the large-scale slaughter, death and deportation of men, so vividly described in his Rock Edict XIII. It filled him with great remorse and made him give up conquest by force forever, and turn Buddhist. The same Edict provides us most important and authentic evidence for the date of Aśoka, by mentioning the five Greek kings, namely, Antiyoga, Tulamaya, Amtekina, Maka and Alikasudala who have been identified with Antiochus Theus of Syria (260-246 BC), Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt (285-247 BC), Antigonus Gonatas of Macedon (276-239 BC), Magas of Cyrene (258-250 BC), Alexander of either Epirus (272-255 BC), or of Corinth (252-244 BC). If by Alexander, the homonym king of Epirus was meant, then all the Greek kings were alive only in 255 BC, and that should be the date of the Rock Edict XIII.

A fragmentary Aramaic inscription from Taxila with letters *Priya* (ie *Priyadarśī*) and a word meaning 'viceroy' may belong to that phase of Aśoka's career, when according to the literary sources, he was deputed to that place to quell a revolt when his elder brother failed to do so, and was successful in doing so.

Aśoka's inscriptions are in his own words

The official records of kings in ancient India are generally *praśastis*, composed by poets (eg, Ravikīrti, the composer of the Aihole inscription of Pulakeśin),¹ or high officials (eg, Hariṣeṇa, the composer of the Allahabad pillar inscription).² They are in Sanskrit, the language of the elite with much literary flavour. Such *praśastis*, at times, ascribe to patron kings such achievements as they never attained, and such qualities as they did not possess. Aśokan inscriptions are also official records. But in contrast to the other ancient royal records, they are not composed by some professional *praśasti* writer or high official, but are, in all probability, in his own words. According to V A Smith : 'he speaks to us in his own words'.³ R C Majumdar considers his inscriptions as 'personal narrative of the emperor'.⁴ Most of his inscriptions are in simple and straightforward Pāli language, without any artificiality, and easily understandable even by common man.

Dialectic variants in Aśokan edicts

The inscriptions of Aśoka show regional differences in their dialects. It appears that the drafts of the inscriptions were prepared at Pāṭaliputra in the Māgadhī, the dialect with its origin in Magadha, where it was common, and may be taken as the official language of the Mauryas. In majority of cases, copies of the text of the inscription were sent to different places to be engraved on rocks and pillars, with instructions to the local officials to make suitable changes in the text in accordance with the dialects prevalent in the regions where they were to be recorded, without making changes in their contents.

A few important features of the language used in the different regional versions, as noted by scholars⁵, may very briefly be stated. The typical Māgadhī form of Prakrit is to be seen in the pillar edicts. In them, there is no cerebral *ṇ*, no palatal *ṅ*; it is the dental *n*, which has been invariably used. The initial *y* is elided (eg, in *athā* instead of *yathā*), and *l* is substituted for *r* (eg, *lājā* for *rājā*). Nominative singular ends in *e* (as in *samāje*, instead of *samājo*). The conjoint constant with *a* uninitial *y* is not assimilated and instead an *i* is inserted (as in *avadhiyāni* for *avadhyāni*). An uninitial *r* is elided (as in *piya* for *priya*). The Dhauli and Jaugada Rock Edicts fully, and Kalsi Edicts considerably exhibit the features of the Pillar Edicts. Like them, they show change from *r* to *l*, and *o* to *e*. But unlike Māgadhī, they do not use palatal *ś* for dental *s*. The

dialect of the Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra in the north-west, and Girnar in western India show more difference from the Māgadhī dialect. They have dental *n*, palatal *ñ*, and lingual *ṇ*. The nominative masculine ends in *o* and not in *e*, and *l* is not substituted for *r*. There is some similarity and also some difference between the dialect of the Girnar inscription on the one hand, and that of the Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra inscriptions on the other. The locative singular of both sometimes end in *e*, but in the case of former also in *mhi*, and in the latter in *si*, as in the Māgadhī. While the Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra inscriptions have all the three sibilants- *ś*, *ṣ* and *s*, in the Girnar inscriptions only *s* is met with. The Girnar version retains diphthong *ai*. In the Girnar inscriptions, the original *r* of the conjoint consonant is retained, but in Kalsi it is dropped (eg, *sarvatra* in Girnar, and *savata* in Kalsi). In Girnar we have the form *hasti*, and in Kalsi, as *hathi*.

Sets and copies of the inscriptions unique to Aśokan epigraphs

The Brāhmī and the Kharoṣṭī inscription in the form of the Fourteen Rock Edicts, the Minor Rock Edicts, Pillar Edicts and Minor Pillar Edicts are each in the form of a set and, with some variations in dialect, have been inscribed at different places within Aśokan empire. The Schism Edict has been found on the pillars at Sanchi, Sarnath and Allahabad. The Brāhmī inscriptions in the form of commemorative Minor Pillar Edicts at Nigalisagar and Lumbinī, the Queen's Edict, and the Bhabru Stone Slab inscription have each been found at a single place only.⁶ Each of the inscriptions in Greek or Aramaic script on pillars or rocks too is found at one place only.

In the whole range of ancient Indian epigraphs, there is hardly any example of a king other than Aśoka of making a set of some inscriptions and recording them in that sequence, and also preparing copies of such sets for recording at different places, though they too must have been keen that maximum number of people should be acquainted with their *praśastis* recording their conquests and other achievements. One would expect that copies of an inscription like the Allahabad pillar inscription, which throws light on Samudragutpa as a great warrior and conqueror, a skilled planner, a shrewd and pragmatic politician, a poet, a musician and a great donor, and which is composed in *kāvya* style of very high order, would have been placed at several places. But that is not the case. Further, Samudragupta did not get his own pillar erected for recording his *praśasti*, in which is proudly mentioned his completely uprooting a number of kings, and instead got it inscribed on the pillar raised by Aśoka,⁷ who, experiencing

great sorrow at the loss of men in the one and the only victory achieved by him, vowed not to conquer any territory by force.

The use of explanatory method

In order to make the contents of his inscriptions to be easily understandable even by a common man, Aśoka uses explanatory style. He raises questions and then answers them. To give an instance, in the Pillar Edict II he first makes the statement-*dhamma* is good (*dhamme sādhu*), then puts the question-what is *dhamma* (*kiyaṃ chu dhammeti*). Thereafter he answers himself that it means freedom from sin (*apāsinave*) and much good (*bahu-kayāne*). Then he mentions good acts as kindness (*dayā*), pious gift (*dāne*), truthfulness (*sace*) and purity (*socaye*). In the Pillar Edict III, he mentions the acts which lead to sin, viz., violence (*caṃḍiye*), cruelty (*niṭhuliye*), anger (*kodhe*), conceit (*māne*) and envy (*issā*). He tells (Pillar Edict VII) that he was keen for the material and moral welfare of the people. He pondered deeply to find ways and means to achieve it. He arrived at a conclusion, and put that idea into action sincerely, meticulously and zealously and, as he claims, achieved much success in his mission.

The Dates in Aśokan Epigraphs

Some of the epigraphs of Aśoka give the date of the events of his reign. The dates are not related to any era, but are counted from his coronation. The view that the figure 256 in the Minor Rock Edict refers to *nirvāṇa* era⁸ has not found favour with scholars who take it as referring to 256 days of his tour.⁹ The statement in the Srilankan chronicles that there was gap of four years between his accession and coronation, though accepted by some scholars¹⁰ who explain it as a result of disputed succession, may not be correct.¹¹ It may be stated that like Aśoka, his grandson, Daśaratha, as evidenced by his Barabar Hill Cave inscriptions, dates his inscriptions from his coronation (*abhiṣeka*). Later Khāravela, king of Kalinga (c. first century BC), mentions events of each of his thirteen years, one by one, with reference to his coronation.¹² It seems more likely that the date of the accession of Aśoka was also the date of his coronation.

There is difference of opinion whether the years mentioned in the Aśokan inscriptions are current years or expired ones. In Rock Edict V he says 25 jail deliveries were spread over 25 years. This would suggest that current year was meant.¹³ But in the Kandahar bilingual inscription it is stated: 'Ten years completed, king *Priyadarśin* showed piety to men',¹⁴ which shows the date is in expired years.¹⁵ The possibility of

the use of current regnal year in some inscriptions, and lapsed ones in others, cannot be ruled out.

The mention in the inscription that it was issued on certain date does not necessarily mean that the engraving of it and its copies in different places, was also done on the same date. In certain cases, the inscription engraved below gives an earlier date than the one engraved above it. Thus Rock Edict V refers to appointment of the *dharmamahāmātras* in the 13th year from coronation, Rock Edict VII, to his visit Bodhagaya in the 10th year, and Rock Edict XIII, to his conquest of Kalinga in the eighth year.

Chronological sequence of the Events Gleaned from Epigraphs

The acts or events of the reign of Aśoka mentioned in the inscriptions with reference to his coronation may be given in chronological order as below: in the eight year he conquered Kalinga (Rock Edict XIII), in the ninth year he was converted to Buddhism after the Kalinga war, though some scholars, basing on the evidence of Srilankan chronicles, believe he had become Buddhist before that event. The Minor Rock Edict I tells two and a half years had passed from the time of his conversion to Buddhism, which probably took place as a sequel to the great remorse he felt due to large-scale loss of human life in Kalinga war, in the eighth year from his coronation. The Minor Rock Edict would have been drafted in the tenth year from his coronation. In the tenth year he visited Sambodhi (i.e. Bodhagaya, Rock Edict VIII). When he had completed tenth regnal year, as per evidence of the Kandahar bilingual (Greek and Aramaic) inscription, he claims that as a result of his righteous policy, hunters and fishermen gave up hunting and fishing. Relatively more acts are known for the twelfth year of his reign. In that year he issued Edicts of Piety (*Dhamma-lipi*, Pillar Edict VI), exhibited divine spectacles (*divyāni rūpāni*, Rock Edict IV), granted two caves to the *Ājīvikas* (Barabar Hill cave inscriptions) and ordered his officers to go on administrative tours (*anusamyāna*, Rock Edict III). In the thirteenth regnal year he appointed a new class of *mahāmātras*- the *dharmamahā-mātras* (Rock Edict V). In the fourteenth regnal year he got enlarged the *stūpa* of Konāgamana Buddha to double its original size (Nigalisagar Pillar Inscription) and in the nineteenth year he granted a cave (a third one, two caves had been granted by him in his twelfth regnal year) to the *Ājīvikas* (Barabar Hill Cave inscription). In the twentieth year he paid a visit to Lumbini (Rummindei Pillar inscription) and to the *stūpa* of Buddha Konāgamana (Nigalisagar

inscription). In the twenty-sixth year he issued Pillar Edicts I-VI, and in the twenty-seventh year, Pillar Edict VII. On the Allahabad pillar, below the Pillar Edicts has been inscribed the Schism Edict, and below the latter, the Queen's Edict. From their positions, it can be, and has been, inferred that they were engraved in that chronological sequence sometime after the twenty-seventh regnal year of the Maurya ruler, though the date of the issue of both of these is unknown. Thus the order of the issuing of different types of edicts may be: Minor Rock Edicts, the Fourteen Rock Edicts, the Rummendei and the Nigalisagar Pillar Edicts, Schism Edicts, and the Queen's Edict. Senart is of the view that all the Rock Edicts were engraved in the 14th year of his coronation. According to Bhandarkar,¹⁵ Rock Edict XIII, which refers to Aśoka's success in propagating *dhamma* in Greek territories should be placed after Pillar Edict VII, which in view of being a *resume* of Aśoka's activities relating to *dhamma*, should have referred to such a success if it had already been achieved by then. This view, based on the negative evidence, has not found favour with most scholars. Mookerji suggests that Pillar Edict VII as a resume only of his domestic activities related to *dhamma*, and as such need not be placed before Rock Edict XIII.

Known more as Devānāmpriya and Priyadarśī than Aśoka

Aśoka, in his inscriptions, has been referred to as *Devānāmpriya* and *Piyadasi*, mostly together, rarely singly. Some of his inscriptions begin with *Devānāmpriya piyadasi rājā hevaṃ āha* 'thus sayeth king *Priyadarśī* beloved of the gods'¹⁶ which, it has been pointed out by scholars, is in imitation of 'Thus sayeth Darius, king of kings' (*thātiy Dārayavaush khṣayāthiya*)¹⁷ met with in the inscriptions of that Achaemenian king, though addressing in third person is also known to Kauṭilya. *Devānāmpriya*, 'beloved of the gods', has also been used in the sense of 'king' in Rock Edict VIII, Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra versions, in which Aśoka's predecessors have been referred as *devānāmpriyas*, corresponding to *rājāno* and *lājāno* respectively of the Girnar and Dhauri versions of the same edict, and was also used for his grandson Daśaratha in the Barabar Cave inscriptions.

In earlier times, *devānāmpriya* was used with such auspicious words as *dīrghāyuṣ* and *āyuṣmat*, but later has been used in a derogatory sense by Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita in the *Siddhānta-Kaumudī* and by Hemachandra in *Abhidhāna-Cintāmaṇi*,¹⁸ in all probability due to their anti-Buddhist bias. May be by calling himself *devānāmpriya* he is linking himself to the divinity, though in a modest form when it is compared

with Samudragupta being referred to as equal to Dhanada (Kubera), Varuṇa and Antaka (Yama), and as god incarnate on earth (*loka-dhāmno devaḥ*) in his Allahabad Pillar Inscription.

Interestingly, *devānāmpīya* was also the title of the Srilankan king Tissa (and some other ancient kings of that island), and in the initial phase of the decipherment of Aśokan inscriptions, there was a suggestion, coming from no less an authority than James Prinsep, to identify Devānāmpīya of the inscriptions with him. Then it came to be known that *Piyadasana* has been mentioned for Aśoka, and *Piyadaṁsana* is prefixed to his grandfather Chandragupta Maurya, in the *Mudrārākṣasa*.^{18a} The reference to him as king of Magadha (the Bhabru Edict), the reference to his capital as Pāṭaliputra (Rock Edict V Girnar version) and the contemporaneity of the king with the five Greek kings (Rock Edict XIII) strongly favoured his identity with Aśoka, which was finally established by the occurrence of the name Aśoka in the Minor Rock Edict discovered at Maski in 1915 AD. Since then the name *Aśoka* has been found on the Minor Rock Edicts at Gujarrā in Datia district, Nittur and Udegolam in Bellary district. Since the name Aśoka occurs mostly in south versions, one could argue that since *Devānāmpīya* was also the title of Tissa, king of Srilanka, a contemporary of the Mauryan king and was well known to south Indians, it was deemed worthwhile to add the name *Aśoka* to the epithet *devānāmpīya*.

The way *Piyadasi* has been mentioned in the Aśokan inscriptions, it was inferred by most of the scholars that it was used as his name. That the inference is correct which has been confirmed by the expression *Piyadasi-nāma-rājā* ('king named *Piyadasi*') occurring in the Panguraria Minor Rock Edict. It has been suggested that while Aśoka was a personal name, *Piyadasi* was an official name which he began to use after coronation.^{18b} Quite likely, Aśoka was given this name by his parents after his grandfather Chandragupta Maurya. Naming a child after grandfather was not an uncommon practice, and in the Imperial Gupta dynasty we have Chandargupta [II] and Kumāragupta [II], each named after his grandfather.

No epithet to indicate his personal religion

Aśoka was a Buddhist, but except in one inscription, the Bhabru edict, which is addressed to monks, and is not meant for people in general, he does not make any reference to his religious faith. We may compare this with the other kings of ancient India referred to variously as *bhāgavata* (Vaiṣṇava),¹⁹ *parama-bhāgavata* (most devout

Vaiṣṇava),²⁰ *parama-māheśvara* (most devout Śaiva)²¹ or *parama-saugata* (most devout Buddhist)²² along with royal titles. But even though he did not adopt any epithet referring to him as a devout Buddhist, in his zeal for the welfare of the Buddhist *saṅgha* and for maintaining its unity he did not hesitate in prescribing certain Buddhist texts for monks and nuns for study (the Bhabru edict), and in issuing warning to the monks and nuns that whosoever amongst them would create schism, he or she will be expelled from the *saṅgha* (the Schism Edict). In fact such matters come under the jurisdiction of the head of the *saṅgha*, rather than of the king. It is difficult to believe, as some scholars do, that Aśoka was both a king and a monk and wielded authority both in political and religious matters alike. But such acts of Aśoka do show that, whether or not *saṅgha* consenting, he wielded some authority over it.

No genealogy, and personal names rare

In official epigraphs of ancient India, the detailing of the genealogy of kings is quite common feature. In contrast, in no epigraph of Aśoka is his genealogy mentioned. This may be compared with the evidence of the Gupta epigraphs, particularly seal-inscriptions, a number of which trace the genealogy from the first ruler of the dynasty, *viz.* Gupta, who was a mere *mahārāja*, a title which in that period generally denoted a feudatory, to that of the ruling king.²³ The first Maurya king, Chandragupta, was a great conqueror and an able administrator, and also the founder of the Mauryan empire, and as such, Aśoka would have been proud of being his grandson. However, in his inscriptions he makes no mention of him, nor even of his own father, Bindusāra, who too was a great king.

He does not mention his chief queen in any inscription. The only queen mentioned in his inscriptions is his second queen Kāruvākī, mother of Tīvara, in the Queen's Edict, and both are not known from any other source. In the edict they are not mentioned with a view to showing their political or social status, but only by way of illustration that the gift of the second queen should be recorded in the following format: '[This is the] gift of second queen, Kāruvākī, mother of Tīvara'. It appears that amongst the female members of the royal household, she was the foremost in bestowing religious gifts and hence Aśoka chose her for citing an example. As mere mention of her rank (*viz.* second) as queen was not enough to make her identity clear, since the rank of queens could change according to circumstances, it was deemed proper to mention the

name of her son. Recording of charity in such a format was expected to motivate other women of the royal household to make gifts.

In Pillar Edict V, Aśoka refers to his brothers, sisters, and other relatives, who, the context shows, were then alive. Pillar Edict VII engraved in the twenty-seventh year of his coronation, refers to *devī-kumāras* i.e. sons of the queens of his father i.e. his stepbrothers. But none of them has been mentioned by name.

We have seen above that Tīvara, a son of Aśoka, is not mentioned in his individual capacity but by way of introducing Kāruvākī as his mother. Some royal princes have been referred in Aśokan inscriptions. Three of them, mentioned in the Separate Rock Edict I, were variously governors of Ujjain with jurisdiction over Malwa and some adjoining region, Takṣaśilā the capital of the Gandhāra region, and Tosali, which seems to be headquarters of the newly conquered Kaliṅga. A fourth one is mentioned in a relatively recently (1976) discovered Minor Rock Edict I at Panguraria (Sehore district, MP). He is mentioned therein as in charge of Māṇemadeśa (not known from any other source). The names of the princes in the first three cases have not been mentioned. Only the name of the last mentioned prince is given as Saṁva.²⁴ The *āryaputra*, referred to in some copies of Minor Rock Edicts in the south India was either a son or brother or near relative of Aśoka, and according to Bhandarkar,²⁵ was not a mere governor but a vice-regent. He too is not mentioned by name. Thus Aśoka is not interested in mentioning the names of his brothers or queens, or sons or other relatives. We have also seen that even the king has not been mentioned by name, Aśoka, in most of his inscriptions, certainly not in his Fourteen Rock Edicts and Seven Pillar Edicts. From this it can be inferred that for Aśoka, system was more important than individuals, and so he has tried to refrain from mentioning individuals by name.

Curiously, Aśoka mentions five Greek kings by name, in Rock Edict XIII. In all probability hardly any man would have heard of these kings, much less the territories they ruled over or their reign periods., except people of the royal family, central officers, officers administering the capital city of Pāṭaliputra, the *anta-mahāmātras*, a few traders engaged in the trade with countries beyond the north-western frontiers of India, and a few missionaries deputed for dissemination of *dhamma* in Greek territories. It is because of this consideration that in the Rock Edict II, only one king, viz., Antiochus II [Theus] whose territories bordered on that of Aśoka and hence could have been relatively better known than any other Greek king, has alone been mentioned by name, and other Greek

kings are referred to as the ones whose territories are located near that king's. But in Rock Edict XIII wherein Aśoka claims success in disseminating *dhamma* to far off places beyond his territories, in the domains of Greek kings, with a view to making his statement appear more authentic, mentions the five Greek kings by name. He does not mention the name of the Srilankan king either in Rock Edict II or in Rock Edict XIII, for Srilanka had quite close cultural contact and cultural affinity with India from some centuries before his time, and there would be no doubt in the minds of the people regarding success in disseminating *dhamma* in that land, and hence mention of the name was not deemed necessary.

Inclusion, Deletion and Repetition of Matter was Intentional

In the Rock Edict XIV, it is stated that his edicts (recorded till then) have been intentionally written variously in abridged (*samkhitena*), medium (*majjhimena*) or expanded (*vistatana*) form and that certain things have been purposely left out in some case. In a somewhat apologetic tone, he tells that he has resorted to repetition (of words, phrases and ideas), but makes it clear that this too has been done intentionally, because of the 'sweetness' (*madhuratā*) of their contents. Some purpose can be seen in omitting of Rock Edict XIII, which gives a vivid description of the great loss of men in Kalinga War, from the set of Rock Edicts recorded at Dhauli and Jaugada, both in Kalinga. This he did as he knew that its inclusion would remind the people of Kalinga the havoc that his invasion wrecked on people there, and they would never forgive him for that act. Instead, two Separate Rock Edicts were added there. Except at these two places, the Separate Rock Edicts have been recorded only at Sannati in Gulbarga district, where fragments of Rock Edicts XII and XIV have also been found. Either the king had also conquered the region around Sannati and there too Rock Edict XIII dealing with conquest and its adverse effect have been narrated, was excluded, and the Separate Rock Edicts were added. Aśoka is conscious that some errors may have crept in because of the fault (carelessness or inefficiency) of the scribe.

Inscriptions meant to be long lasting and also for future generations

Aśoka was interested in the welfare, not only of the people of his own age, but also of posterity. He states that he got the edicts, which we know contain message of love, goodwill, harmony, peace and proper social relationship between different social groups, engraved on such permanent materials as rocks and pillars so that they may

last long, as long as the sun and the moon last, even 'to the end of universal destruction' (Rock Edict IV), and that posterity may be benefited by following the message contained in them. Not only he was keen to put into practice his policy of peace and non-aggression against other states, but was eager that his sons and grandsons should also follow the same, and they should never harbour the desire to conquer new territories. How far were his wishes fulfilled? His inscriptions on rocks and pillars have survived for more than a quarter of a millennium years and could still remain there for centuries to come. His sons and grandsons are not known from any source, to have made any conquests; perhaps they did not do so because they were incapable of doing so, rather than being inspired by Aśoka's appeal to his progeny not to make any conquest. In fact by less than half a century after his death, his dynasty ended. As regards his desire that the people in posterity would be benefited by the teachings mentioned in his epigraphs, it may be stated that within a few centuries the Brāhmī script had undergone so much of change that the Chinese pilgrim, Fa-hien, who came to India in c. 400 A D when Chandragupta II of the Gupta dynasty was ruling, could not find people who could decipher Aśokan inscriptions. But with the decipherment of the script, several centuries afterwards in 1837 by James Prinsep, and with the efforts of several scholars, Indian and foreign, the contents of the edicts have become available in the form of articles and books, with photographs translations of the text and comments by different scholars. But the common man can neither read them in original script nor understand the deciphered version for lack of knowledge of Pāli language, which was common man's language in Aśoka's time. The inscriptions of that Maurya king have become confined to some select Indologists in India and abroad and a few students who study them as part of their syllabi. They have become more a part of academic discussions than being a medium for making people better citizens by inculcating moral, ethical and traditional social values, and developing liberal and cosmopolitan religious outlook, as had been envisaged by Aśoka.

References

1. *Epigraphia Indica*, VI, p. 6ff.
2. D.R.Bhandarkar, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, III, Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings, ed. by B.C.Chhabra and G.S.Gai, New Delhi, 1981, No. 1, pp. 203ff.
3. V.A.Smith, *Aśoka*, 2nd ed, (reprint, 1957), p. 105.
4. R.C.Majumdar, *Ancient India*, 5th ed, p. 112.

5. Eg, D.R.Bhandarkar, *Aśoka*, 3rd ed, Calcutta, 1955, pp. 173ff.
6. The text of the inscription states that copies of this edict were to be prepared.
7. The pillar bears Aśoka's three categories of inscriptions, viz., Rock Edicts, Schism Edict and Queen's Edict, in that sequence.
8. Eg, D.R.Bhandarkar, *Aśoka*, p. 332, and p. 334, n. 5.
9. For figure 256 as denoting nights spent on a tour, see E Hultzsch, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, I, Inscriptions of Aśoka, p. 169. The Ahraura Minor Rock Edict (found in 1961) shows that Aśoka began his tour with the installing of the Buddha's relics on a platform.
10. Eg, V.A.Smith, *Aśoka*, p. 20; R.K.Mookerji, *Aśoka*, London, 1928, p. 11.
11. D.R.Bhandarkar, *Aśoka*, p. 8-9.
12. See D.C.Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, I, 2nd ed, 1965, pp. 114ff.
13. See D.R.Bhandarkar, *Aśoka*, p. 9.
14. R Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Muryas*, revised ed, 1997, p. 260.
15. D.R.Bhandarkar, *Aśoka*, p. 45n. On this point, he agrees with Harit Krishna Deb.
16. Smith (*Aśoka*, p. 22) translates it as 'His Sacred and Gracious Majesty the King'.
17. D.C.Sircar, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
18. E Hultzsch, *op. cit.*, p. xxx.
- 18a. *Ibid.*
- 18b. R Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, p. 227.
19. Three copies of the Ghosundi inscription of King Sarvatāta have been found.
20. The title has been used for most of the kings of the Imperial Gupta dynasty.
23. Eg. D.R.Bhandarkar, *Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum*, III, Nos. 42, 44, 45, etc.
24. The reading Saṁva and the taking of it as a name has been doubted by some.
25. D.R.Bhandarkar, *Aśoka*, p. 50.