

## **Asoman Thoughts Oncology and environment.**

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**Abstract:** In this article, I confine myself only to the important aspects in the context of the society, man and environment and sustainable development and the role of the great Mauryan ruler Asoka. The Beloved of the Gods, Piyadasi the king, Asoka did something in the third century BC that we, the people of the twenty first century and the policy makers can learn from. For the last few years we found that the people of New Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and the adjacent region air pollution is highly risk to the life. In this context, it is very much relevant to follow to the great Mauryan talented military ruler and also an extraordinary statesman Asoka wanted to protect and provide clearly constitutional check against environment degradation and animal cruelty. The post Kalinga war era (261 BC) he adopted AHIMSA or nonviolence policy and gave up the predatory foreign policy that had characterised the Mauryan empire up till then. From this time, Asoka became a benevolent, noble minded and philanthropic administrator as well as he also became an enthusiastic supporter of forest conservation and preservation. Asoka believed that the state had a responsibility not just to protect and promote the welfare of its people but also its forests, environment and wildlife.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

According to Rabindra Nath Tagore (“DĀO FIRE SE ARONNO, LĀO E NA GAR”) “Let us return to the age of jungle, let us lean this urban life.” Environmental awareness is growing day to day. In 1869 Ernest Haeckel for the first-time coined the term “Ecology.” (GK. Oikos = home, logos = study). From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century ecological awareness or awareness on environment was in the rudimentary and immature form. “Environment” a term so casually once uttered has of recent become a matter of international concern. Indeed, third world countries are victims of environmental apartheid and the interests of developed countries find true colour. Post West Phalian (1648) era, Europe began to develop technologically particularly in England, France, Germany had to Industrial Revolution in Europe is the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. As the inevitable result of Industrial Revolution, in Europe that was the emergence of massive urbanisation and industrialization and unprecedented exploitation of ecology which led to environmental pollution and ecological dis-balance. This dis-balance had injurious on human body and mind. Human life became nasty, hellish and short under the impact of environmental pollution. As a reaction to the trend of uncontrolled pollution there was the thought of “bring back the golden age.” The culture of environment is recognised as a means of life for the people living in a geographical area by the influence of material and non-material influence of environment and it can be the best understood by tracing the history of human civilization. The earliest civilizations of the world i.e. Egyptian civilization, Indus civilization, Mesopotamian civilization, Greek and Roman civilization, the Aztec and the Inca civilizations etc. left lasting impression their environment.

### **II. SOURCES FOR UNDERSTANDING AND INFORMATION**

[1] The great Mauryan emperor Devanampiya that is Beloved of the Gods and Piyadasi that is one who looks to the welfare of his subjects, Asoka (c. 273 or 272-232 B.C.) was the third emperor of the Maurya dynasty of a vast Indian empire over which he ruled for about forty years from the Maurya capital, Pataliputra in Magadha, modern South Bihar. The distribution of the hitherto known several inscriptions of his best guide for forming an idea of the extent of Asokan empire. It may be said that his empire lay within the limits of modern Afghanistan in the North-west to Orissa in the South-east, and again from the Himālayas in the north to Mysore in the South of India. By the excavation of the various sites in Indian sub-continent there were discovered 14 Major Rock Edicts, 7 Pillar Edicts, 2 Separate Rock Inscriptions of Kalinga discovered at Dhauri in Puri district and Jaugada in Ganjam district of Orissa, 4 Minor Rock Edicts in Northern Version and 8 Minor Rock Edict in Southern Version, 1 Cave Inscription, Barabar Hill Cave (Dedicative) Gorathagiri, some miles to the north of Gayā in South Bihar, 4 Minor Pillar Edicts, 2 Commemorative Minor Pillar Edicts. These inscriptions that Asoka left behind him constitute unique monuments important for a number of reasons among which it is hardly possible to give precedence to one over another. To date, there is no acceptable example of writing in India, if

we overlook the undeciphered ideograms of the Indus Civilization . Aśokan inscriptions are written in as many as three absolutely different languages , viz. Prakrit, Indo-Aramaic and Greek , and in four scripts , viz. Brāhmī, Kharoṣṭhī, Aramaic and Greek . Aśokan Brāhmī is the ancestor to the various scripts in which Hindi and most other Indian languages including the Dravidian languages are written today.

It appears from the above mentioned inscriptional records that Aśoka was the first Indian ruler who eagerly wanted to preserve ecological bio diversity in the Indian subcontinent. During his reign the focus was on clean environment and several orders and decrees were issued in favour of the protection of environment and as well as against the burning of the husk and chaff after the harvest. Aśoka had not only introduced forest protection laws, but he also ordered that all kinds of animals should to be protected from being slaughtered. In this regard the most important Major Rock Edict of Aśoka is Girnar.

### **III. MAJOR ROCK EDICT - I**

[2] (GIRNAR HILL, INSCRIBED ON NORTH EASTERN FACE OF A ROCK NEAR THE ANCIENT TOWN OF JUNAGADH, IN THE PENINSULA OF KATHIAWAR, SAURASTRA.)

This edict of the law of piety has been caused to be written or inscribed by king priyadarśi , the Beloved of the Gods. Not a single animal should be here sacrificed by slaughtering . Nor should any convivial assemblage or gathering or party be held. For, king Priyadarśi, the Beloved of the Gods, sees many defects or offences in such a social gathering. There are, however, certain such social parties which are regarded as good by king Priyadarśi , the Beloved of the Gods . Formerly in the kitchen of the king Priyadarśi , the Beloved of the Gods, many (hundred) thousands of lives were daily slaughtered for making curries. So, when this edict of the law of piety is being caused to be written, then only three lives are slaughtered for making curries, two peacocks and one antelope. The antelope, however, is not killed invariably or surely. Even these lives shall not be slaughtered in future.

### **IV. MAJOR ROCK EDICT – II**

[3]. (KALSİ ROCK EDICT OF AŚOKA, IN OR BEFORE 185 -12)

Kalsi which was discovered at Dehra Dun in UP, Presently Uttaranchal, light us enough to the benevolent works of Aśoka. Here I would like to mention to contents of the original text that was very much enlightened us in the context of the sustainable development of the eco-friendly biodiversity in Indian sub-continent and how much importance Aśoka had attached to environment back in the third century BC. “Everywhere in the domain of king priyadarśi, the beloved of the God and also with regard to all (his) bordering or neighbouring regions (and princes), such as the Cholas, the Pandyas, The Satyaputra (king), the Keralaputra (prince), (ruling) as far as the Tāmraparṇī (river), the Ionian (Greek) King Antiochos and also those (other) kings who are neighbours (or feudatories) of that Antiochos – everywhere two kinds of medical attendance were made (or instituted) by King Priyadarśī, the beloved of the Gods – (namely) medical attendance to men and medical attendance to beasts. Medical herbs useful for men and those for beasts, wherever they do not exist, have been caused to be imported and planted. Likewise roots and fruits (fruit trees), wherever they do not exist, were caused to be imported and planted everywhere. On the roads trees were caused to be planted and wells were caused to be dug for the enjoyment of beasts and of men.” The word “CIKĪCHA” used in the Girnar Inscription (Junagarh, Katiawar); “CIKISA” in the Shahbazgarhi Inscription (Peshwar, N. W. F. P. of Pakistan); and Manehra Inscription (Hazara, N. W. F. P. of Pakistan); and “CIKISĀ” Jaugada Inscription (Ganjam, Orissa) means medical attendance that is, medical arrangements for treating diseases of men and beasts and not necessarily a hospital, which is a place where patients are treated.

[4]. By the careful study of the Rock Edicts depicts that Aśoka wanted to promote tolerance for all religious sects as well as development of the environment. Above mentioned Rock Edict of Aśoka certainly relates to measures of social welfare which are included in the policy of Dhamma that was also laid stress on non-violence. Aśoka pleaded for tolerance of different religious sects attempt to create a sense of harmony. Kalsi Rock Edict mentions medical treatment for men and animals, construction of roads, wells, tree planting. As the measure of the public welfare everywhere king Devānāmpiyapīyadasi has had arrangements made for two kinds of medical treatments (CIKISĀ): medical treatment for human beings and medical treatment for cattle (PAŚU). Medical herbs (OSADHĀNI), good for human beings and good for cattle, have been caused to be supplied and planted wherever they are not found. Similarly, medicinal roots and fruits, have been caused to be supplied and planted wherever they are not found. On the roads (MAGA), trees have been caused to be planted and wells (UDUPĀNĀNI OR KŪPA) have been caused to be dug for the comfort of cattle and human beings.



SANCHI STUPA OF AŚOKAN MINOR EDICTS.

#### **V. PILLAR EDICT - V:**

(MADHIA: LAURIA NANDANGARH ON THE ROAD FROM BETTIA TO NEPAL, IN CHAMPARAN DISTRICT, NORTH BIHAR)

[5] Thus the king Priyadarśī, the beloved of the Gods: having been consecrated twenty six years I made the following creatures exempt from slaughter – namely parrots, starlings that is one kind of black birds, redbreasts storks or robins or cranes, ruddy geese, swans, nandimukhas that is one kind of water birds , gelātas that is a kind of water fowls , bats, ants (Ambā-kapīlika/ Skt. pipilikā) living in mango trees , small tortoises , boneless fish, gaṅgāpuṭakas that is Gangetic cocks, skatefish, tortoises and frogs and porcupines, hares or rabbits living in the boughs of trees that is squirrels those are swift running, deer, bulls, animals, seeking for their foods in houses that is monkeys, mice, cats, etc. that is vermins, rhinoceroses, grey pigeons, village doves and all other four footed animals which do not come into any use, nor are eaten. Those she goats, ewes and sows which are pregnant or are in milk are not also subject to slaughter, as well as their offsprings which have not attained six months of age. Cocks are not to be made caponed. Husk or chaff should not fire along with living creatures in the same. Forests should not be also set fire to, for the purpose of any mischief or any injury to life. No living being is to be nourished by another living being. No fish is to be killed or sold on three seasonal full moon days and at the full moon day of the month Tisyām that is Pauṣa , for three days, namely fourteenth and fifteenth days and the next first day, (of the second fortnight) as also constantly on every fast day (Upaṣitaṁ). On the very same days, elephant-forests (Nāgabanasi) and fish-preserves of the fishermen, other varieties of animals also are not to be killed. On the eighth day (Athamīkhāye/ Skt. Aṣṭamīthi) of the fortnight, the fourteenth and fifteenth days also, on the Tisyām or Pauṣa and Punarvasu days, on the three seasonal full moon days (in the three groups of four months in each year : the full-moons of the months of Āsārḍa , Kārtika, and Phālguna) and all auspicious days, no bull is to be castrated , nor may any he -goats, rams, and boars and others animals which are liable to castration, be castrated. No branding of horses and oxen should be made on the Tisyām or Pauṣa and Punarvasu days, on the three seasonal full moon days and throughout the days of the fortnight of the seasonal full moons. Up till now, having been consecrated twenty-six years I have ordered for twenty-five jail deliveries that is granting of freedom from imprisonment.

#### **VI. PILLAR EDICT - VII (RY- 27)**

[6] Thus, says King Priyadarsi, the Beloved of the Gods declares on the roads also have got planted banyan trees so that they may provide shade to beasts and men , have planted manga -orchards, (AMBĀVADIKĀ) have also got dug wells at every half a krosa or eight kilometres, have caused to be

constructed sale-stalls or raised seats , and have caused numerous watering -places (ĀPĀNĀNI) to be provided here and there for the use of beasts and men. But such use is a small or insignificant thing. By various means of giving happiness have former kings and I myself have blessed the people, so that people may conform to the course of the Law of piety. With such intent, have I done this.

[7] Horticulture seems to have been well established. Asoka speaks of his planting medicinal plants, roots and fruits where these were not to be obtained. He also refers to his planting mango- groves (ambāvāḍikā), and in the queen's edict (Allahabad Pillar), these appear as an important item of gifts the second queen had made. The Arthasāstra has a reference to the cultivation of grapes (MRIDVIKA), but apparently not to the mango, for which the Aśokan inscriptions seem to offer very early , firmly dated evidence. Wherever medical herbs suitable for humans or animals are not available, I have had them imported and grown. I have planted mango groves and I have had ponds dug up and shelters erected along the roads at every eight kilometres. I have had banyan trees planted on the roads to give shade to man and beasts. Everywhere, I have had wells dug for the benefit of men and beasts.

A very large part of the subcontinent of India was subjugated by the Mauryan rulers and the then India was undoubtedly covered by the forest. In the time of the Mauryan period wild animals were considered the property of the emperor. From the importance of economic as well as defence Asoka definitely realised the matter and that's why he banned the royal hunting and animal sacrifices at a time when these were the common principles. In the Pillar Edict V, Asoka forbids the burning of the forests without purpose or in order to destroy animals. The Edict seems to target practice of slash-and-burn cultivation, as well as of hunters burning down forests to smoke out wild animals. Under both practices, a process of forests clearance would continuously take place. That roads already ran through stretches of deforested country is shown by the need to plant banyan and other trees along them so as to provide shade to "cattle and men." Wild animals were the major economic product of the forests. The true breeding grounds of elephants lay in the forests, from where they caught and tamed to be used in battle and courtly display. The elephant forest nagavana or hastivana probably denoted not only a forest where elephants could be captured in large numbers, but also one where such capture was a royal monopoly. The idea may seem to us today that elephants were an important item of national wealth at the time. From this we can imagine how large the number of wild elephants themselves was and how extensive must have been the forests where the beasts had their habitat.

At this juncture, [8] wildlife conservation, particularly protection of elephants, in India dates back to 4<sup>th</sup> century BC during the time of Chandragupta Maurya and Kautilya and there was severe penalty for those found guilty of cruelty to animals, US-based environmental attorney and author Bruce Rich said on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016, Guwahati, The Indian Express. He said during Asoka's time, the focus was on a clean environment, and burning of farm chaff after harvest was banned. Asoka took the process one important step further in an act unmatched by even the most progressive twenty first century Asoka established free veterinary hospitals and dispensaries. The Chinese traveller Fa Hien who came to India during the Mauryan period had written about the veterinary hospitals in the capital city, Pataliputra, which was the most probably the first veterinary hospital in the world. The main mentor and minister of Chandragupta Maurya Kautilya wrote the book Science of Polity and defined a set of basic rules for protection and conservation of wild animals and also prescribed severe penalty provisions for those found guilty of cruelty to animals. As all the parts of a tree is important therefore there should be the fixed punishments based on the destruction and cut of specific parts of the tree. Asoka's rule is the foremost example of ecologically responsible statehood in India's ancient history.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Aśoka's rule is the foremost instance of ecologically responsible nationhood in India's ancient history. At a time, when the country needs a stronger political will and thought coordination to tackle and overcome the threat of environmental degradation, Asoka's green legacy and execution of rule over the subjects can act as an inspiring example.

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