

MODULE-3

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TOPIC - ASOKAS DHAMMA

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- Dhamma- central theme of Asokan edicts
- Pillar edicts of Asoka reveals that Dhammalipi or inscriptions of Dhamma inscribed in different parts of empire after 12 years of his rule
- Asoka – propagated Dhamma till the end of his life
- Asoka –did not define Dhamma but his edicts reveals its features
- Important principle & feature of Dhamma- Non-violence
- Major Rock Edict 1 – ban on animal sacrifice- also reports on reduction in the killing of animals for food in the royal kitchen

- Pillar Edict 5- after 26 years of rule- prohibitions of festivities & rituals
- Another important principle- good conduct & social responsibilities
- Dhamma advocates respectful behaviour to teachers & elders, obedience to mother & father, generosity to sramanas & Brahmanas & kind of attitude to the weak, miserly, slaves & servants
- Pillar Edict 2- least amount of sin, performing many virtuous deeds, compassion, liberality, truthfulness, purity

- Another feature- mutual respect & concord among different sects
- Asoka was not promoting any particular sect including Buddhists
- Dhamma makes the spirit of accommodation & respect for plurality
- Also deals with duties of the king
- Welfare of the people & ensure their happiness in the world is Dhamma of the king
- King like be a father to his subjects

- Welfare to be done for the people as well as animals
- Asokan edicts present the king as representing Dhamma in his ideas & actions
- Most remarkable principle- renunciation of warfare & redefinition of righteous conquest or Dhammavijaya
- Asoka made elaborate arrangements for the oral propagation of his message
- Edicts were read out & that people listened to them on certain auspicious days
- Officials-kumaras, yuktas, rajukas & mahamatras

- Rajukas & Pradeshikas- go on tours of inspection every five years as part of their duties as well as preaching Dhamma
- Created special cadre of Dhammamahamatras to spread Dhamma
- Asoka conducted Dhamma tour or Dhammayatras visiting Brahmanas & Sramanas, people of countryside & aged folk
- Edicts in Prakrit language refer to the attainment of heaven as a result of following Dhamma- not mentioned in Greek & Aramaic inscriptions

- Historians hold different views about the nature of Dhamma of Asoka
- Regarded as universal religion. A form of rajadharma or the dharma of a king & Buddhas teaching for the laity
- Earlier scholars-R.G.Basak, H.C.Raychaudhari & K.A.Nilakantasatri- through the propagation of DhammaAsoka turned Buddhism into a state religion & his Dhamma was but a synonym of Buddhism
- Recent scholars examine the nature of Asokas Dhamma in the light of his edicts

- Romila Thapar- emphasised political rationale behind the propagation of Dhamma- minimises the Buddhist element in Asoka's Dhamma & argues that there may not be any connection b/w the personal beliefs of a king & his public proclamations
- Dhamma –an ideological tool used by Asoka to weld & consolidate a subcontinental society
- Asoka sought support of non-orthodox elements & saw the practical advantages of adopting & propagating Dhamma
- Asokan edicts are silent on the essential tenets associated with Buddha's teaching such as 4 Noble Truths, Eight Fold Path

- Never instructed his subjects to aspire for Nirvana, the highest goal of Buddhism
- But it contains a Buddhist core as is clear from the repeated emphasis on ahimsa
- Minor rock edict at Bhabru lists 6 Buddhist texts on Dhamma
- Asoka states in his edict that he started Dhamma tour after a pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya
- S.J. Tambiah- Asoka's dhamma was strongly embedded in Buddhist principle- criticised Romila Thapar's attempt at separating Asoka's personal faith in Buddhism from his public official policy of Dhamma

- Upinder Singh- Buddhist element in Asoka's dhamma is found in the sculptural motifs associated with the pillars
- Elephant at Girnar, Dhauri, Kalsi symbolise the Buddha as he entered his mother's womb in the form of a white elephant
- Buddhist remains found in the vicinity of Asokan pillars suggests that they are sites of stupas or monasteries established by the king & suggest a link b/w Dhamma of the edicts & Buddhism
- Debate on nature of Asoka's dhamma is very much informed by the recent study of Aramaic & Greek edicts

- Dhamma in Asokan Prakritis called Eusebia in Greek meaning piety
- Aramaic edicts mention Data & Qsyt as synonyms of Dhamma denoting law & truth respectively
- In the translation of the term dhamma in Aramaic & Greek , no association with Buddhism, his personal faith
- Asoka – Major Rock Edict 12 that he honours all sects & that people should respect one another's dhamma
- Dhamma- abroad based code of social & ethical conducts
- B.D.Chattopadhyaya- political dimensions of dhamma as a unifier

- Pillar Edict 1 Asoka declares the aim of the ideology of Dhamma as to maintain by dhamma, to rule, to make people happy & to protect according to dhamma
- We can conclude that Asoka's dhamma was inspired by the Buddhist dhamma but not identical to it