

MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES OF EMPEROR ASOKA ACCORDING TO 'THE THUPAVAMSA'

Dr Nandita Chatterjee
C/O Ananda Prakash Chatterjee
Bidhan Pally, P.O + P.S. Madhyamgram

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ABSTRACT

The preaching of Buddhism in India and Cylon began at the end of 4th cent B.C. Asoka after taking Buddhism became Dhammasoka from 'Chandasoka'. Eighty-four monasteries were built and the relics were brought.

Keywords: Mahaparinibbana, Suman, 'Samantapasadika', 'Mahavamsa, Nagas, Thupas'

Introduction :

After the 'Mahaparinibbana' of Buddha the preaching of Buddhism was on spread. The foundation of a great religious movement was started by the great famous emperors. After the death of Bindusara the coronation celebration of Asoka was observed after five years at 269 B.C. and he had three names. They are Suman (suseem), Asoka (Asoke) and Dissa/Tissa. In 'Asokavadana' (Buddhist Sanskrit work) it is related that just after the birth of Asoka, his mother told that she was bereft of "Shoka" so he was named "Asoka". It is said in the Mahavamsa that after his father's death, he murdered all his brothers except Tissa. 'Samantapasadika' states that Asoka began to rule four years before ascending the throne. According to the 'Mahavamsa' Asoka became king of Magadha after two hundred eighteen years of Buddha's 'Mahaparinibbana'.⁶ Asoka's name has been written in golden letters not only in the history of Buddhist religion, but also in the religious history of the world.

When the depositing of relics was accomplished, an Elder who had lived the full span of his life, passed away entirely. The king, too, went away according to his deed, and the people (of his time) also died. Subsequently, the prince piyadasa, unfolding the royal canopy, became a righteous king, Asoka by name and he took those relics and placed them in eighty-four thousand shrines in Jambu Island.

Once the ministers informed the king 'Lord that the eighty-four thousand monasteries are finished. Then the king approached the order of monks, and asked: 'Revered sirs, eighty-four thousand monasteries have been built by me, where shall I get the relics from' 'your majesty' there was indeed a depositing of relics, but in what place is not known. The king, having had the shrine in Rajagaha broken and not finding the relics, had it restored, and with the four retinues of monks and nuns and male and female lay devotees he went to vesali. Not getting them even there he went to Ramagama. In Ramagama the Nagas did not allow the shrine to be broken. Spades thrown on the shrine were broken to pieces. Thus not getting them even there, he broke into the shrines every where, as at Allakappa, Pava and kusnara, but not getting the relics he had restored them and then he went to Rajagaha, and having convened the four retinues, he asked 'Has anybody previously heard in what place there was the depositing of relics'. There an Elder one hundred and twenty years old, said: 'I do not know where the depositing of relics took place, but when I was seven years old, my father a great Elder, made me take a garland and a casket, and said "come recluse, there is a tope of stone within such and a bush, Let us go there." After going there and honouring it, he said, "you should reflect upon these kinds of activity, recluse." This much I know, your majesty, 'it is this very place; said the king, and when he had had the bush removed and the tope of stone as well as the dust taken out, he saw the surface of plaster below. When he had the plaster and bricks removed from it, and had gradually got down to a mansion, he saw sand for the seven kinds of jewels eighty cubits long, and wooden figures rolling about at the edges. He sent for a temple slave and even caused an offering to be made, and yet finding neither the beginning nor the end of it, he while paying homage to the devatas said 'Taking these relics will I deposit them in the eighty four thousand monasteries and pay them reverence? Let not the devatas create an obstacle'. Sakka, the king of devas, while wandering about saw this, and addressing Vissakamma said: 'Dear' Asoka the righteous king has got down to a mansion thinking, I will bring out the relics. Go and fetch a wooden image'. He came in the appearance of a village boy with five locks of hair on the crown of his head, and stood in front of the mark with a bow in his hands and said: 'Let me fetch it, your majesty. Fetch it dear'. He pierced it with an arrow exactly at the joint and everything was scattered about.¹⁰

Conclusion :

The 'Thupavamsa' is a text composed in Pali and gives a beautiful account of propagation of Buddhism Ceylon. The 'Thupas' for peace are universal in nature. Thupavamsa also gives a detailed account of the Buddhas who appeared in this earth for the salvation of the mankind. As a Preacher Ashoka's place is remarkable in the Buddhist history. His religion is spreaded in India and in the foreign countries. He became the best preacher of Buddhism. He used to spend five lakhs money everyday for the religious works. He built eighty four 'Stupas' and monasteries offered the monks.

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