



Sourav Sengupta

Aśoka at Dhauli

Aśoka Devānaṃpiya, Beloved of the Gods,
Had subdued Greater India, surmounting many odds;
When the free state of Kaliga fell to a frenetic campaign
In the third and forty of his birth, the eighth year of his reign.

The final battle had been won; the rival chieftain slayed;
And a hundred thousand had been felled by fabled Mauryan blade.
His standards now on Dhauli's Top flew untrammelled and proud;

“*Cakravartin!*” hailed his soldiers, clashing sword to shield aloud.

Out strode he from the regal tent to breathe the morning air,
Deliberate with his generals, subsequent plans prepare
To consolidate this victory, make arrangements as required,
Ere marching back to Patna, for campaign had left him tired.

He stretched his battle-weary limbs and gazed out from the height
And Sun as though in reverent greet, threw forth His brightest light.
And in that light what happened next, that is now part of lore,
For the scene he saw from Dhauli’s crest – it seared him to his core.
As far as royal eyes could see, a deathly stillness filled the plain.
Carcasses of steeds, and giant beasts of war that had been slain,
And a hundred thousand men or more, lay scattered on the ground.
And Beloved of the Gods - he surveyed this from Dhauli’s Mound.

Smoke billowed from countless heaps where bodies they were
burning,
And rose to mingle with the clouds, a ghastly potion churning.
Then burst the skies in tears of rain to cleanse the earth of blood,
And *Dayā* - Stream of Mercy – overflowed in crimson flood.

Then came the stench of Death, from charring flesh on wetted fires
A feast for crows and carrion fowl that pounced upon the open
pyres.
Two jackals came to claim their share of this stupendous meal;
One made off with a severed limb, its mate a skull did steal.

The crackle of the dying flames, a buzzard’s plaintive call,

The mother's cry, a widow's wail, the hapless orphan's bawl,
Were the haunting sounds he heard that rent the stilly air.
They pierced his battle-hardened soul, and more he could not bear!

“Cakravartin I am called, Mover of the Cosmic Helm;
My writ runs unrestricted till distant reaches of this realm.
But can the dead I resurrect, can shattered lives I mend?
And will the Gods who so love me, to my commandment bend?

Nay, none of these can happen, and naught can I restore;
A felon of the vilest kind am I and nothing more.”
Such were the unforgiving thoughts that bore upon his mind
And he pondered what it meant to be the Sovereign of Mankind.

Returning to the royal tent, he paced with anxious tread;
And drops fell from his mortal eyes, drops of ruby red.
Thus Aśoka – The Griefless One – lay grieving and in pain,
On a dreary hill, in Kaliga, in the eighth year of his reign.

From that day forth he spurned his sword, his mail and robe of state,
The habit of a monk he took till the ending of his days.
And Aśoka *Piyadasi*, Gracious of Mien,
Beloved of the Gods, became beloved of all men.

Sourav Sengupta

Sourav Sengupta is an alumnus of Jadavpur University, Kolkata and Xavier Labour Relations Institute, Jamshedpur. An architect by training and a corporate human resource manager by profession, he lives and works in Kolkata, India.

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