

ANANDA W. P. GURUGE

WHO WERE UPAGUPTA AND HIS AŚOKA?

1. Introduction

The oldest record so far to name Upagupta as a prominent Buddhist monk of India is the Sanskrit Buddhist work Divyāvadāna – a collection of 38 typical Avadānas based on pious deeds or sanctified lives. Four of these Avadānas are connected with a king named Aśoka and it is in Avadāna 26 that the life of Upagupta is dealt with. The prevailing consensus among scholars is that Divyāvadāna could be dated between 200 and 350 A.D. Whether the hypothetically proffered Aśokarājasūtra or Aśokarājāvadāna as possible Sanskrit originals for the Chinese Ayu-wang-chin and Ayu-wang-chuan were earlier or later than the Avadānas of Divyāvadāna remains a moot point with no evidence for either argument¹. But whatever texts, taken to China and translated as Ayu-wang-chuan by An-Fa-King in Loyang between 281 and 306 A.D. and as Ayu-wang-chin by Sanghabhata or Sanghabhara

1. Jean Przyluski's hypothesis was that the two Chinese works were translations or adaptations of two Sanskrit works. But no evidence of such works has not yet been found, What Sujitkumar Mukhopadhyaya presented as *Aśokāvadāna* (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi 1963) and John S. Strong translated into English as *Legend of King Asoka* (Princeton Library of Asian Translation, Princeton University Press, Princeton N.J. 1989) are the four Avadānas occurring as Chapters 26, 27, 28, and 29 of Divyāvadāna. (Ed. P.L. Vaidya, Buddhist Sanskrit texts, No. 20, Bihar Mithila Institute, 1959).

of Funan in 512 A.D., retain the information as in the Divyāvadāna with only minor variations².

This information has been subjected to scrutiny by several Asokan scholars who had reached different conclusions³. It appears necessary, however, to examine the same data more closely as the question of who exactly were Upagupta and his Aśoka remains unsolved. Its resolution has important implications for both the history of India, in general, and the history of Buddhism, in particular.

So far the life and career of Upagupta has been studied with an overt or covert assumption that Aśoka connected with him was the third Maurya Emperor Aśoka – more specifically named in Buddhist literature as Aśoka the Righteous, Beloved of Gods, king of Magadha (*Devanapiya Piyadasi Aśoka Magadharāja* of Brahmi inscriptions). How far is this assumption correct and acceptable? If not, what caused this assumption to be made and when and where? These are the questions for which answers need to be found.

This analysis of data begins with the identification of Upagupta as far as all available data would permit. It has to be noted at the very outset that no record of a monk of any sort by the name of Upagupta is hitherto found in the Pali Canonical, commentarial or sub-commentar-

2. Jean Przyluski: *La Légende de l'empereur Aśoka*, Paris (1923) (Tr. Dilip Kumar Biswas – *The Legend of Emperor Aśoka in Indian and Chinese Texts*, Brahm Mission Press, Calcutta 1967) and Sujitkumar Mukhopadhyaya, *op. cit.*, are still the main works for the study of these texts. Taisho No. 2042 – A-yu-wang-chin is translated by Li Rongxi as “*The Biographical Scripture of King Aśoka*,” BDK English Tripitaka 76-11, Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, Berkeley, California 1993.

3. L. Augustine Waddell and Vincent A. Smith, who preceded Jean Przyluski, depended on the records of Chinese Pilgrims Fa-xian and Xuan-Zhang to compare with data in the Divyāvadāna. Waddell called Upagupta “the High Priest of Aśoka” and Smith referred to him as “Aśoka’s Father Confessor.” Despite discrepancies, almost all earlier Aśokan scholars associated Upagupta with Maurya Emperor Asoka. A. K. Warder explained the problem as follows: “There is considerable confusion in the records of the Sarvastivāda and Mahāyāna writers, especially in that they have generally identified Aśoka the Just [Maurya Aśoka] with Asoka the Black [Kālāśoka], when compiling accounts from earlier sources... Thus all the events from the Vaiśālī Affair in the time of Aśoka the Black down to those of the reign of Aśoka the Just have been condensed into a single reign.” p. 273).

ial literature. So all available data come from Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan and Japanese⁴ sources only.

2. *Upagupta – the Disciple of Śānakavāsi*

The first mention of Upagupta is in a prophecy ascribed to the Buddha in *Pāṃsupradānāvadāna* (No. 26). The Buddha is said to have told Ānanda at Mathurā that

1. a hundred years after the Buddha's demise, there would be a perfume merchant at Mathurā by the name of Gupta; and
2. his son, Upagupta, would be a Buddha without marks (alākṣaṇako Buddhō- i.e. a Buddha without the thirty-two signs of a Great Person) and a hundred years after the Buddha's demise would perform the function of a Buddha (Buddhakāryaṃ). (Vaidya. P.L. p. 216).

The Avadāna, in faith-evoking details, spells out how the prophecy came to be fulfilled. The important historical detail in this episode is that Upagupta becomes a disciple of Śānakavāsi (the wearer of a hempen or jute robe) who resided in a monastery named Naṭabhaṭṭika in Ūrumuṇḍa or Rūrumuṇḍa (both readings being indiscriminately used by Vaidya). (Ibid. p. 222)

Śānakavāsi is a name or more precisely an epithet equally well-known as that of a monk of significant stature in the Buddhist literature of all traditions. In fact, of all the leading figures in the monastic history of Buddhism, Śānakavāsi has the distinction of being recorded in the annals of Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna traditions. In addition, all sources agree that he was a disciple of Ānanda, the closest disciple of Buddha and lived a hundred years after the death of the Buddha. In the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition he is revered as the third patriarch follow-

4. Ayu-wang-chuan has two chapters among chapters 6-10 which refer to Upagupta. Chapter 6 – Avadāna of Upagupta and Chapter 8 – Avadāna of Disciples of Upagupta. But none of these occurs in Divyavadāna.

ing Mahākāśyapa and Ānanda⁵. Thus Śānakavāsi occupies in Buddhist chronology the single most important fixed point on which all traditions agree. That an event of utmost significance to all Buddhist traditions took place with a pivotal role played by him a hundred years after the death of the Buddha is undeniable. But what was it?

The Pali Canon is specific that Śānakavāsi played such a role in regard to the Second Buddhist Council held in Vaiśālī as a result of ten points of disagreement regarding monastic discipline.

The account of the Second Buddhist Council occurs in Chapter XII of the Cullavagga of the Vinaya Piṭaka. It was Yasa, the son of Kākaṇḍakā, who on a tour of the Vaiśālī region came across the Vajji monks engaged in collecting money. His objection resulted in disciplinary action taken by Vajji monks against him. Yasa then decides to campaign against the ten points such as taking salt in a horn to season food, eating a little later than mid-day, drinking unfermented toddy and receiving gold and silver, which the Vajji monks considered allowable contrary to orthodox view of Vinaya. Having sent messengers to Pāvā and Avanti to mobilize support for his campaign, Yasa goes personally to Ahogaṅgā mountain slope to enlist the support of Śānakavāsi, whose real name was Sambhūta. He was known as Śānakavāsi, which meant the wearer of a coarse hempen or jute robe, because he wore such a robe⁶. It was to Ahogaṅgā mountain slope that sixty monks from Pāvā and eighty-eight monks from Avanti came to plan their strategy to counter the ten points. Though Cullavagga is

5. Chinese works *Fo-tsu-t'ung-ki* and *San-kiau-yi-su*, which refer to Upagupta as the fourth patriarch attribute to him many miracles. As the gāthā by which Upagupta transmitted Dhamma to the fifth Indian patriarch, Lu K'uan Yu (Charles Luk) quotes,

Mind is the primal mind
Which is devoid of Dharma
If Dharma and Primal mind exist
Both mind and primal Dharma will be false.

Ch'an and Zen Teaching (Series Two), Rider and Company, London, 1961 p. 34. Probably on the basis of Japanese sources, Jean-Paul Bertrand says that Upagupta was the fifth out of 24 successors to the Buddha and calls Shānavāsa the fourth successor – *Dictionnaire du Bouddhisme*, Editions du Rocher, Tokyo 1983, p. 497.

6. While Divyāvadāna refers to him as Śānakavāsi as his only name, the Pali sources call him by his personal name **Sambhūta** and describes him using **Sānavāsi** as an epithet, meaning “wearer of a hempen or jute robe.” Xuan-Zhan apparently heard his name as Sambhoga.

silent on why Sambhūta alias Śānakavāsi happened to be the first consulted or why the first meeting took place in his place, it is evident that Śānakavāsi was at this time a monk of significant influence to be the rallying point for Yasa and the one hundred and fifty-eight agitators against Vinaya violations.

It was Śānakavāsi who advocated the enlistment of Revata as the best-qualified expert on Vinaya to argue the case against the ten points. At Revata's bidding, Śānakavāsi goes ahead to see Sabbakāmi, the eldest monk of the Saṅgha (*Saṅghatthera*) whose leadership was essential for the legal issues of discipline to be resolved. Again, it was Śānakavāsi who presented the issues for Sabbakāmi to determine. When after prolonged discussion, a council of arbitration with eight monks was chosen, Śānakavāsi was one of the four monks from Pāvā. Though not specifically stated, he could have been one of the seven hundred participating monks in the Second Buddhist Council. (Cullavagga Chapters XII, pp. 407-430).

Sambhūta Śānakavāsi's importance might have resulted from the fact that he was disciple of Ānanda. Sambhūta, further, has the distinction of having a poem of his included in the Canonical Theragāthā. (Theragāthā vv. 291-4) Despite all this, the early Buddhist tradition, which does not have a line of recognized patriarchs as the Mahāyāna and Zen traditions do, has not mentioned him as Saṅghatthera (the elder of the Saṅgha) – a title, which had been used for Mahākassapa and Sabbakāmi. Nor is it anywhere mentioned in early Buddhist records that he had a disciple by the name of Upagupta.

Divyāvadāna episode has Śānakavāsi as preparing himself for the coming of Upagupta to fulfill the Buddha's prophecy. He establishes a monastery on the mountain of Ūrumuṇḍa near Mathurā and eventually befriends Gupta, the perfume-merchant. Every time a son was born to Gupta, Śānakavāsi approached him with the request that the son be given to the Saṅgha. It was his fourth son, Upagupta, who was finally promised. But Upagupta's decision to be a monk had to await his own conviction on the futility of life and luxury and this happens through the fate of a courtesan named Vāsavadattā. Upagupta's discourse to Vāsavadattā is described as resulting in his attaining the perfection of Anāgāmi (non-returner) and her that of Sotāpanna (stream-entry). At this point, Śānakavāsi ordains Upagupta and took him to Naṭabhaṭika

forest hermitage, where he attained Arhatship.

Divyāvadāna digresses to narrate a miraculous encounter with Māra, which made Upagupta's fame soar to a point that through him "the rain waters of the true Dharma fell on hundreds of thousands of beings who had previously sown seeds of merit in most excellent Buddha fields, and the sprouts of liberation grew in them, there on Mount Ūrumuṇḍa" (Strong 1989 p. 198).

3. Sought by a king Aśoka as Spiritual Guide for life or a Single Pilgrim

One such person to benefit from Upagupta's benevolence, according to the legend, was a King Aśoka who, in a previous life, has presented a gift of dirt to the Buddha and wished for sovereignty over earth. Again, Divyāvadāna attributes to the Buddha a prophecy that the boy who gave him a gift of earth would be reborn as Aśoka in Pāṭaliputra a hundred years after the Buddha's demise. If Divyāvadāna is the first literary work to deal with this episode (and so it might be, as nothing anterior to it has yet been found) this is the point where the identity of Upagupta's Aśoka first arises.

By attributing to the prophecy the mention of Pāṭaliputra as the capital, the identification of Aśoka becomes ambiguous. In Indian history of the pre-Christian era, two Aśokas ruled from Pāṭaliputra: namely

- 1) Aśoka the Black (crow-colored)⁷ or Kālāsoka of the Śiśunāga Dynasty who actually shifted the capital of the Magadha Kingdom to Pāṭaliputra: the hundredth anniversary of the Buddha's demise coincided with his tenth regnal years; and

7. Purāṇas record *Kākavarṇin* as successor of Śiśunāga, thus agreeing with the Sri Lankan Pali sources which call him more formally as Kālāsoka – Asoka the Black. Divyāvadāna in its convoluted lineage mentions *Kākavarṇin* though without mentioning Śiśunāga. Sri Lankan Chronicles used nick-names descriptive of kings to distinguish them from others having identical personal names: e.g. Kākavaṇṇa Tissa (Crow-coloured Tissa) Vankanāsika Tissa (Tissa with a crooked nose); Puṭakaṇṇa Tissa (Tissa whose ears were like winnowing fans) and Thūlathana (he with fat breasts).

- 2) Aśoka the Righteous of the Maurya Dynasty who, too, reigned in Pāṭaliputra but more than a century later⁸.

Which one was it who was destined to be guided by Upagupta? The historical inexactitude of Divyāvadāna – a feature common in general to Northern Buddhist literature of India in Sanskrit and inherent in its Chinese and Tibetan translations – is further exemplified when it gives the genealogy of this Asoka as follows:



8. That the Maurya Dynasty ruled from Pāṭaliputra is attested to by the eye-witness account of Palibothra, found in extracts of *Indika*, written by Megasthenes, the Ambassador of Greek ruler Seleukas Nikator to the court of the founding emperor of the Dynasty, Candragupta.

Very little scrutiny is needed to establish the fallacies of this genealogy in the light of more reliable information from not only Pali sources preserved in Sri Lanka but also the Purāṇas of India. Dynastic changes and multiplicity of kings in each dynasty are overlooked and most glaringly Candragupta, the founder of the Maurya Dynasty, the ouster of the last of nine Nandas and grandfather of Aśoka is conspicuous by his absence in the list⁹.

Equally historically unfounded is the account of Aśoka's accession to the throne, and his incredible cruel acts of violence in court, culminating in a torture-house for wonton murder of innocents, which Divyāvadāna elaborates with an unimaginable flair to paint Aśoka as a specimen of the blackest inhuman nature¹⁰. Aśoka's conversion to Buddhism is ascribed to the miraculous escape of Samudra from torture. It is by this monk that Aśoka is informed of the prophecy of the Buddha and told of his mission for the promotion of Buddhism. Aśoka declares his resolve in a verse:

Because of my faith in the Blessed One,
Because of his venerability,
I resolve today to adorn the earth with the chief of Jina's caityas
That are as white as the conch, the moon, and the crane. (Strong 1989 p. 218)

Of course, the piety thus expressed did not prevent him from seeing that the keeper of the torture-house was burned to death¹¹.

9. For a discussion on the difference as regards literary genre between Avadānas and Vaṃsas, see John S. Strong: *The Legend of King Asoka* pp. 22-23. For an analysis of the problem of historical sense as it affected Indian historiography adversely, see my *Mahāvamsa – the Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka* pp. 77-80.

10. Divyavadāna and the Avadāna literature in general as well as the Chinese and Tibetan works dependent on them point Aśoka as having had an extremely cruel disposition and even portray him as a fanatic using violence even after conversion to Buddhism. (e.g. the story about a pogrom against Jain monks for having desecrated a Buddha statue). For a detailed discussion, see my *Asoka the Righteous – A Definitive Biography*, Central Cultural Fund, Colombo 1993, pp. 78-87.

11. This incident and the story of the pogrom against Jain monks contradict Rock Edict XIII where Aśoka expresses deep remorse on Kāliṅga War. While he eschewed military action after this war, evidence exists that he neither disbanded the army nor abolished the death penalty. To his sons and grandsons his advice is to be forbearing and mild in punishment in the case of military action. See my "The

What follows in Divyāvadāna is an account of how relics were obtained by the king from seven of the eight original stūpas in which the Buddha's bodily relics were enshrined, how they were distributed to various communities, how 84,000 stūpas called Dharmarājikas were constructed, how Yaśas¹² of Kukkuṭārāma ensured miraculously that all stūpas were completed on the same day at the same time, and how Aśoka the Wicked thus came to be known as Aśoka the Righteous and how a quinquennial festival was celebrated with lavish gifts to the Sangha. In this account are quoted two verses in which the king is referred to as Maurya (Vaidya pp. 241, 260).

It is after several more episodes on the King's display of piety that he is apprised by monk Yaśas of Upagupta, destined to be "the best of preachers, a Buddha without marks, who will carry on the work of a Buddha" (Strong 1989 p. 238). The king wished to go to Urumuṇḍa to meet Upagupta and the latter, realizing the inconvenience of catering for a royal entourage, decided to come to the capital with eighteen thousand Arhats. The king requests Upagupta to take him on a pilgrimage to holy places connected with the Buddha's life and Upagupta obliges. After the pilgrimage the king takes leave of Upagupta.

This is all – a brief encounter restricted to a pilgrimage – that Divyāvadāna records about Upagupta and his king Aśoka. That is all the information that Chinese A-yu-wang-chuan and A-yu-wang-chin have preserved being faithful translations of the Sanskrit sources.

Apart from being superlatively described as a Buddha without marks and doing the Buddha's function a hundred years after his demise, Upagupta does not figure in Divyāvadāna and related Chinese versions as anyone of the stature of a patriarch succeeding in such a

Evolution of Emperor Aśoka's Humanitarian Policy: Was Capital Punishment Abolished?" in *Recent Researches in Buddhist Studies – Essays in Honor of Professor Y. Karunadasa* (Ed. Kuala Lumpur Dhammajoti et al). Hong Kong 1997.

12. Yasa or Yaśas, if at all, merits the description as "the high priest of Aśoka", until Moggaliputta-tissa enters the scene with his joint initiatives with Aśoka pertaining to the purge of the Saṅgha, the Third Buddhist Council and the nine missions to outlying regions. Upagupta in various texts in Chinese plays the roles assigned elsewhere to Samudra, Yasa and Moggaliputta-tissa. Upagupta, as his personality evolved in a process of hagiography in the Mahāsāṅghika, Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna traditions is a subject which I commend strongly for closer investigation (See Conclusion).

leadership position as Mahakāśyapa, Ananda and Śānakavāsi. King Aśoka of his acquaintance had not conferred on him any such rank and the history of the Buddhism recorded in Pali sources has no place for – not even a casual mention of – Upagupta. How could this be? Is it because Divyāvadāna was a work of early Buddhists prior to the advent of Mahāyāna?¹³

4. Upagupta in Later Buddhist Literature

As Buddhism evolved and Mahāyāna trends developed, the encounter between Upagupta and Aśoka had become a motif for presentation of discussions whether religious in content or purely literary. Thus *Vratāvadānamāla* (Garland of Avadānas on festivals or rites) takes the form of dialogues between them and *Bhadra-Kalpāvadāna* comprises 34 legends which Upagupta is said to have narrated to Aśoka. (Hajime Nakamura pp. 138-139). The same is done in other Avadānas in verse such as *Kalpadrūmāvadānamālā*, *Aśokāvadānamālā*, and *Dvāvimṣtyavadāna* as well as *Avadānakalpalatā* of Kṣemendra. (Guruge 1993 p. 344).

How and when Upagupta rose in stature to be the fourth patriarch is not revealed by any literary records in India. Fa-xian in the fifth century A.D. has made no reference to him pertaining to any sites he visited, which included Mathurā.

Xuan-Zhang in the seventh century, however, had been told of Saṅghārāmas constructed by Upagupta on a mountain about 5 or 6 li east of the city of Mathurā. (Beal I, pp. 181-82). At Pāṭaliputra, he had heard a version of the Divyāvadāna account in which Upagupta is mentioned as an Arhat whom Aśoka met after destroying the torture-

13. Divyavadāna reflects Buddhism in its early stage when the ideal of Arhatship was the goal of spiritual pursuit. Upagupta is not only described as an Arhat but he is said to have helped so many others to become Arhats. (Cf the story of filling a large cave with chips of wood, each representing a person he had let to Arhatship.) (Vaidya p. 222) It has since been worked on by Mahāsāṅghika, Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna “editors.” The reference to Upagupta as a Buddha without marks of a Great Person recalls the question in Vajracchedika or Diamond Sūtra: Can the Tathagata be seen by his thirty-two marks or not?” (Hsing Yun 2000, p. 24).

house. The revelation of the Buddha's prophecy on building numerous (number not given) stūpas and the miracle of covering the sun to enable stūpas to be completed simultaneously – attributed to Samudra and Yaśa in Divyāvadāna – are in this version ascribed to Upagupta. (Beal II pp. 87-90). Here, too, Aśoka was said to have been a hundred years after the Buddha's demise. To the Southwest of the old palace of Pāṭaliputra, Xuan-Zhang had also been shown a mountain valley “with several tens of dwellings which Aśoka-rāja made for Upagupta and other Arhats” (Beal II p. 93). Once more, Xuan-Zhang had been told of “Upagupta as a great Arhat who sojourned frequently” in the kingdom (of Sindh) preaching the Dharma. “The places where he stopped and the traces he left are all commemorated by the building of Sanghāramas or erection of stūpas. These buildings are seen everywhere”. (Beal I pp. 272-273). An important point is that these monuments are not ascribed to Aśoka, whereas in the same area Aśoka is said to have erected several tens of stūpas in places where the sacred traces of the Buddha's presence were found. (Ibid).

What emerges from these few and brief references to Upagupta in Xuan-Zhang's writings is that in Indian tradition Upagupta was still an Arhat associated with a king Aśoka a hundred years after the Buddha's death and not at all *a* or *the* patriarch of Sārvāstivāda, Mahāyāna or Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism. This evidence is of the utmost importance because Xuan-Zhang was deeply involved with Mahāyāna Buddhist institutions of India over a period of two decades and had acquired a profound knowledge of its traditions.

Thus, Upagupta of Indian records is an enigmatic figure of whom the only information we could glean is the following:

- 1) He was born in Mathurā and lived around a hundred years after the Buddha's demise.
- 2) He was a disciple of Śānakavāsi, who was prominent enough to play a major role in activities leading to the Second Buddhist Council of Vaiśālī which was held a hundred years from the Buddha's demise.

- 3) He was reputed as an Arhat (i.e. strictly in accordance with the early Buddhist tradition), the best of the preachers of the Dhamma of his time and so esteemed as a Buddha without the thirty-two marks of a Great Man (Mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa).
- 4) His fame prompted a king by the name of Aśoka who was already converted to Buddhism to visit him in his forest monastery in Ūrumuṇḍa near Mathurā; but to avoid the inconvenience of hosting a royal entourage he decided to go to the King's capital.
- 5) What he actually said or did with the king is differently remembered and even confused with roles of two other monks and the only activity he was involved in was guiding the king on a pilgrimage to places connected with the Buddha's life.
- 6) All he did with the king seemed to have lasted a few months at the most.

It is very clear on an in-depth analysis of all evidence that there exists no justification at all for the conclusion of John S. Strong that Upagupta was "a Buddhist monk who eventually comes to play a major role in Aśoka's career" (Strong 1989 p. 16).

What Xuan-Zhang heard of Upagupta in Sindh, however, is noteworthy. The statements that Saṅghārāmas and stūpas had marked places where Arhat Upagupta sojourned is perhaps the only indication that either Upagupta the disciple of Śānakavāsi or another by the same name had achieved spiritual eminence to be commemorated with monuments in an area where especially the Sarvastivada tradition became predominant. Could it be that from here the fame of Upagupta traveled to China via the Silk Route to become recognized as the fourth patriarch?

For Upagupta, the disciple of Śānakavāsi, to be an eminent Mahāyana figure, one may hypothesize a scenario with the caveat that it can be nothing more than a guess. The Second Buddhist Council where Śānakavāsi figured prominently marked the first major schism of the Buddhist Sangha and with it came into existence the Mahā-sāṅghika School. Could it be that Upagupta, with his distinction as a disciple of Śānakavāsi, became a leader of the Mahā-sāṅghika School

and was recognized as the progenitor of the new tradition? Such a situation could explain how he was considered a direct successor to Śānakavāsi but in the new movement. As the Mahāsāṅghika School evolved with other traditions as Sarvastivada and Mahayana, especially in the Western Region of the Indian sub-continent (mainly, Kashmir, Gandhara and possibly neighboring Sindh), Upagupta's recognition in that role could have solidified. This matter, however, needs to be pursued in greater depth utilizing whatever evidence available in the historical records of Central and East Asia.

5. Aśoka the Possible Contemporary of Upagupta

All Buddhist records – Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan – agree that Śānakavāsi lived a hundred years after the demise of the Buddha and his disciple Upagupta, likewise, belonged to the same time. According to the Pali records, especially the Mahāvamsa of the early Aṭṭhakathās in Sinhala, preserved in Sri Lanka, the Second Buddhist Council was held in the tenth regnal years of Kālāsoka, which coincided with the hundredth anniversary of the Buddha's demise. (Cullavagga Chapter XII; Mahāvamsa IV, vv. 5-8). The Sri Lankan Chronicle Mahāvamsa is rightly described by John S. Strong to be a *vamsa* (chronicle) “naturally concerned with history and lineage” (Strong 1989 p. 22) and “primarily interested in Aśoka as an important link in the chain of legitimacy connecting the Buddhism of Sri Lanka (and in particular the kings of that island) with Buddhism of ancient India, and ultimately with the Buddha himself” (Ibid. p. 23). It gives a precise chronological list of dynasties from the demise of the Buddha to the Second Buddhist Council as follows:

Buddha's demise – in the 8th year of Ajātasattu's reign.

Śrenika Dynasty

Since then Ajātasattu reigned	24 years
Udayabhadda reigned	16 years
Anuruddha and Munda reigned	8 years
Nāgadāsa reigned	16 years

Śīsunāga Dynasty

Susunāga reigned 32 years
 Up to the Second Buddhist Council Kālāsoka reigned 10 years

The reigns total to 106 years and that is explainable as due to fractions of years being counted as full years¹⁴.

The second Buddhist council at Vaiśāli was known to Fa-xian and he records in Fo-Kwo-Ki:

One hundred years after the Nirvāṇa of the Buddha, these were at Vaiśāli certain bhikshus who broke the rules of the Vinaya in ten particulars, saying that Buddha had said it was so, at which time Arhats and orthodox bhikshus, making an assembly of 700 ecclesiastics, compared and collated the Vinaya Piṭaka afresh. Afterwards men erected a tower on this spot (Vaiśāli), which still exists (Beal p. liv).

Xuang Xang, two centuries later came to the same spot and recoded the following:

Going south-east from the city 14 or 15 li, we come to a great stūpa. It was here the convocation of the seven hundred sages and saints was held. One hundred and ten years after the Nirvāṇa of Buddha there were in Vaiśāli some Bhikshus who broke the laws of Buddha and perverted the rules of discipline. At this time Yaśada (Ye-she-t'o) Āyushmat was stopping in the country of Kōsala (Kiao-so-lo); Sambōgha (Sun-pu-kia) Āyushmat was dwelling in the country of Mathurā; Rêvata (Li-po-to) Āyushmat was stopping in the country of Han-jo (Kanyākubja?); Sāla (Sha-lo) Āyushmat was stopping in the country of Vaiśāli; Pujasumira (Fu-she-su-mi-lo=Kujjasōbhita?) Āyushmat was stopping in the country of Sha-lo-li-fo (Salarībhu?): all these were great Arhats, possessed of independent power, faithful to the three piṭakas, possessed of the three enlightenments (vidyās), of great renown, knowing all that should be known, all of them disciples of Ānanda.

At this time Yaśada sent a message to summon the sages and saints to a convocation at the city of Vaiśāli. There was only wanting one to make

14. Cf. Mahāvamsa XX, 1-6. Tikā (Vamsatthappakasini) explains the dates given for various events in Aśoka's life as adding up to 41 years whereas the figure should be 37 years as fractions of years are added as full years. (Guruge 1989 p. 858).

up the 700, when Fu-she-su-mi-lo by the use of his divine sight saw the saints and sages assembled and deliberating about religious matters. By his miraculous power he appeared in the assembly. Then Sambôgha in the midst of the assembly, baring his right breast and prostrating himself, (arose) and exclaimed with a loud voice, "Let the congregation be silent, respectfully thoughtful! In former days the great and holy king of the Law, after an illustrious career, entered Nirvâṇa. Although years and months have elapsed since then, his words and teaching still survive. But now the Bhikshus of Vaiśālī have become negligent and pervert the commandments. There are ten points in which they disobey the words of the Buddha (the ten-power-daśabāla). Now then, learned sirs, you know well the points of error; you are well acquainted with the teaching of the highly virtuous (*bhadanta*) Ānanda: in deep affection to Buddha let us again declare his holy will."

Then the whole congregation were deeply affected; they summoned to the assembly the Bhikshus, and, according to the Vinaya, they charged them with transgression, bound afresh the rules that had been broken, and vindicated the holy law.

Details in this statement as regards leading monastics campaigning for orthodoxy strengthen the authenticity of the information: Yaśada and Revata, in particular, are easily identified and there is little doubt that Sambogha of Mathura stands for Sambhūta, the name of Śānakavāsi. It is apparently a similar account that the Tibetan historian Bu-ston included in his "History of Buddhism in India and Tibet" in the fourteenth century. Bu-tson's accounts include a final sentence to the effect that the almsgiver of monks of this council was the pious king Aśoka. (Guruge 1989 p. 1069).

Xuan-Zhang's references to Aśoka-rāja need to be scrutinized carefully to ascertain whether he had been told of one Aśoka or two or even more. One reference which could be dismissed easily is to an Aśoka-rāja of K'ie-p'an-to (apparently a central Asian kingdom) who on shifting his palace to a new site converted the old site to a Saṅghārāma for the use of Kumāralabdha of Takṣaśīla (Beal p. 302). Over a hundred references to Aśoka-rāja are in connection with an enormous number of saṅghārāmas and stūpas shown to Xuan-Zhang by the people as constructed by Aśoka. Here the memory recalled could be of Aśoka, the Maurya Emperor regarding whom all Buddhist

traditions have records on his taking the Buddha's relics from seven out of the eight original stūpas and constructing 84,000 stūpas all over the Indian sub-continent. Similarly all instances where stone pillars and inscriptions are mentioned, the reference is undoubtedly to the Maurya Emperor. What is significant to the present study is that Xuan-Zhang had been told of another Aśoka-rāja and that in connection with a well-established historical event: namely, the shifting of the capital of Magadha from Rājagṛha to Pāṭaliputra. (Malalasekera DPPN sv. Kālāśoka) On one page, the two Aśokas are mentioned by Xuan-Zhang using two names as noted by Samuel Beal:

- 1) To the north of the old palace of the king is a stone pillar several tens of feet high; this is the place where Aśoka (Wu-yau) rāja made "a hell".
- 2) In the hundredth year after the Nirvāṇa of the Tathāgata was a king called Aśoka (O-shu-kia), who was great-grandson of Bimbisāra-rāja. He changed the capital from Rājagṛha to Pāṭali – (Putra), and built an outside rampart to surround the city.
- 3) Since then many generations have passed and now there only remains the old foundation walls. (Beal II p. 85)

On the next page, where the tyrannies of Aśoka the Wicked are dealt with, he is referred to as Wu-yau. But this distinction in transliteration of name had not been maintained as seen from another reference to the transfer of the capital:

It is said Ajātaśatru first founded this city (Rājagṛha), and the heir-apparent of Ajātaśatru having come to the throne, he also appointed it to be the capital, and so it continued till the time of Aśokarāja, who changed the capital to Pāṭaliputra, and gave the city of the Rājagṛha to the Brahmans (Beal p. 167).

Here, the name appears as Wu-yau. It is the same translated form that is used when a prophecy is attributed to the Buddha on the transfer of the capital:

“A hundred years hence (says the Buddha) there shall be a king Aśoka, great-grandson of Ajātaśatru; he shall build here his capital and establish his court....” When Aśoka (Wu-yau) had ascended the throne, he changed his capital and built this town (Pāṭaliputra) (Beal II p. 90).

Thus although the two names are used indiscriminately, it is amply clear that Aśoka, who is mentioned in connection with the shifting of the capital to Pāṭaliputra is Kālāśoka. His being regarded a great-grandson of Ajātaśatru is, however, erroneous. If even a relationship to Śiśunāga Dynasty had been possible from maternal descent, Kālāśoka could have been the great-great-great-great-grandson of Ajātaśatru.

Xuan-Zhang was apparently unaware of the Sri Lankan Vinaya commentary translated into Chinese as Shan-jian-lu-piposha by Saṅghabhadra in 489 A.D.¹⁵ If he did, he would have recognized this Aśoka to be Kālāśoka, the son of Śiśunāga who is mentioned as having sided with Vajji Bhikkhus in the dispute leading to the Second Buddhist Council held a hundred years after the Buddha’s demise. (Bapat pp. 18-19). The statement that Kālāśoka sided with the Vajjis suggests that in such a relationship Upagupta, if he was on their side as we surmise, could have been associated with him. Shan-jian-lu-piposha, being based on a work of Sri Lanka, reflecting the Southern Buddhist tradition and its chronology, dates the accession of Aśoka the Maurya Emperor 218 years after the demise of the Buddha.

The conclusions derivable from this discussion are:

- 1) Upagupta as an immediate disciple of Śānakavāsi belongs to the time of the Second Buddhist Council which was held a hundred years after Buddha’s demise;

15. *Shan-jian-lu-piposha* has been hitherto regarded a translation of Buddhaghosa’s *Samantapasadika*, the Vinaya Commentary on the basis of a reference to what has been taken as Visuddhimagga. On a closer examination, it appears that the original could have been a Sinhala or Sanskrit version. Cf. My *Shan-jian-lu-piposha as an Authentic Source on the Early History of Buddhism and Asoka* in Dhammavihari Felicitation Volume, Colombo 2005.

- 2) It is dated in the more detailed and hence more reliable chronology of Buddhist history in Pali sources and repeated in Shan-jian-lu-piposha as taking place in the tenth year of Kālāśoka, the son of Śīsunāga;
- 3) Kālāśoka has sided with the faction opposing the orthodoxy of Śānakavāsi, Yasa, Sabbakāmi etc.
- 4) Upagupta, though not so recorded in any sources hitherto available, could have played a lead role in Mahāsāṅghika faction which eventually evolved into Mahāyana tradition, as evidenced first by the existence of saṅghārāmas and stūpas in Sindh in the Northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent and second by the recognition awarded to him as the fourth patriarch in Mahāyana and Zen schools; (Thomas 1933 p. 36) and
- 5) Upagupta's Asoka, therefore, was Kālāśoka of Śīsunāga dynasty and not Aśoka the Maurya Emperor as implied in Divyāvadāna and other Avadānas as well as in Chinese and Tibetan sources dependent on them.

6. Why Upagupta Cannot be Associated with the Maurya Emperor Aśoka

The Maurya Emperor Aśoka's date in the third century B.C. is about the firmest point in Indian chronology because of

- 1) the contemporaneity with as many as four Greek rulers mentioned in Rock Edicts II and XIII, whose dates are reliably established;
- 2) Greek records which makes Candragupta a contemporary of Alexander the Great; and
- 3) the overall acceptability of the lengths of the reigns of Aśoka's

grandfather and father (mutually corroborated by Pali Buddhist and Purāṇa data).

Similarly the fact that Kālāśoka, the contemporary of Śānakavāsi whose disciple Upagupta was, was anterior to Candragupta is clearly indicated by the historical information that not only Candragupta but also his predecessors, the Nanda Dynasty, had Pāṭaliputra as the capital. It is to Kālāśoka that all known records, including Xuan-Zhang, ascribe the credit for changing the capital from Rājagṛha to Pāṭaliputra. Simply, on these bits of information alone the contemporaneity of Maurya Emperor Aśoka and Upagupta remains completely disproved.

The only activity in which Upagupta is said to have contributed to Maurya Emperor Aśoka is the extended pilgrimage, which allegedly commenced from Lumbinī and followed a route determined by the chronology of events of the Buddha's life rather than geographical locations and distances. This account is also replete with chronological problems when compared with data in Aśokan inscriptions: viz.

- 1) Rock Edict VIII clearly states that Aśoka's first pilgrimage was to the Bodhi tree in the eleventh regnal years (10 years from consecration) and his pilgrims commenced with it (and not from a visit to Lumbinī);
- 2) The visit to Lumbinī and the nearby Nigali Sagar in Nepal Terai was in the 21st regnal year as dated in Pillar Inscriptions I and II, that is eleven years later than the first pilgrim to the Bodhi tree.
- 3) Only other tour to be mentioned is one on which he issued Minor Rock Edict II while being on tour for 256 days. The four copies with this notation are in far-flung locations like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka and record no information on the route or destination other than a mention of an obscure Upanithavihara in Manemadesa in one of the versions.

With these chronological contradictions relating to the possibility of a joint pilgrimage by Upagupta and the Maurya Emperor Aśoka, it

is timely to examine the theory proffered by early Aśokan scholars and willy-nilly copied from publication to publication without critical examination to the effect that Upagupta and Moggaliputta-tissa were one and the same person, but differently named in Northern and Southern Buddhist records. L.A. Waddell was perhaps the first scholar to adopt this line of argument in his pioneering article “Upagupta, the Fourth Buddhist Patriarch and High Priest of Aśoka,” published in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 66 (1897): Vincent A. Smith with his popular work on Aśoka in 1902 perpetuated the tendency to denigrate Pali sources. (Guruge 1993 pp. 346ff.).

Since 1897, more had been found out about Moggaliputta-tissa, who appears to have a higher or even the sole claim to the title of “High Priest of Aśoka, Maurya Aśoka.” Sri Lankan traditions which Waddell described as “relatively vague and less trustworthy” and Smith condemned as “a tissue of absurdities” and “silly fictions of mendacious monks” have been amply revalidated through archeological and epigraphical evidence. Moggaliputta-tissa, it had been established, was a historical personage, eminent in Buddhist circles for his ashes to be enshrined in Tope 2 of Sanchi in a relic casket on which his name was engraved in Aśokan Brahmi script as “*Sapurisasa Moggaliputasa*” (of the good or saintly man Moggaliputta).

That the purification of the Sangha by disrobing and expelling from monasteries the undesirables, which, according to Pali sources, Aśoka did along with Moggaliputta-tissa is attested to by the three Schism Edicts of Aśoka at Sāñchī, Sārnāth and Kauśāmbī (now at Allahabad).

While the Third Buddhist Council, presided over by Moggaliputta-tissa is not referred to in any Asokan inscriptions so far found, its historicity is established by the inclusion of his own book *Kathāvatthu* in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka of the Buddhist Canon which took shape at this Council.

Finally, the most far-reaching achievements of Moggaliputta-tissa, which has brought the greatest credit to Aśoka – the nine missions which transformed Buddhism from a regional monastic system to a world religion – is also established by the vindication of Sri Lankan Pali sources by (i) the reliquaries found in Tope No. 2 of Sonari group with names of Kassapagotta as Hemavatacariya, as well as Majjhima and

Dundubhissara and (ii) the Rassagala inscription in Sri Lanka with the names of Mahinda and Itthiya, marking a stupa enshrining their relics. Further, Majjhantika's mission to Kashmir is recorded by Xuan-Zhang.

With Moggaliputta-tissa's role being so convincingly established as the prime mover of activities associated with Maurya Emperor Aśoka, it is in no way possible to attribute the function of his "Chief High Priest" to Upagupta regarding whom evidence of equal validity had not yet been found.

7. Conclusion

Conclusions from this analysis are the following:

- Upagupta as the disciple of Śānakavāsi, a leading figure in the Second Buddhist Council held a hundred years after Buddha's demise, was definitely a contemporary of Kālāsoka, the son of Śīsunāga, as this Council was held in the tenth year of the reign of this king. That Śīsunāga's son is called Kākavarṇin (crow-colored) in the Purāṇas is significant as it is synonymous with Kāla (black).
- Upagupta, due to this chronological factor, which dates him over a century before Maurya Emperor Aśoka, cannot be equated with Moggaliputta-tissa for whose identity ample reliable evidence is available.
- The reason for Upagupta to be excluded from Pali records – in spite of the fact that he was a disciple of Śānakavāsi – could be that, in the dispute over the ten controversial points of discipline, he might have taken the side of the Vajji bhikkhus. Samanta-pāsādika as well as Shan-jian-lu-piposha records that Kālāsoka, too, took their side. Mahāvamsa records that he was persuaded by his sister to side with the orthodox monks. It is quite possible that he did so at the beginning and supported the Second Buddhist Council. Later after the schism, he might have taken the side of the Vajji faction and became associated with the Mahāsaṅghika movement.
- Upagupta in all likelihood had played a major role in the Mahāsaṅghika sect and what Northern Buddhist records recall

could be a close relationship that Upagupta had with Kālāśoka, whose “High Priest” he could have been.

- Upagupta’s guided tour of sites sacred to the life of the Buddha apart, Divyāvadāna account of Aśoka-rāja establishing stūpas in honor of the immediate disciples of the Buddha could reflect an activity in which Kālāśoka most likely was involved by Upagupta. Both Fa-xian and Xuan-Zhang had been shown stūpas in Mathurā – the seat of Upagupta – in honor Śāriputra, Mudgalaputra, Ānanda and Rāhula (Fa-hian’s list) and Śāriputra, Mudgalaputra, Pūrṇa-maitrāyaṇīputra, Upāli, Ānanda, Rāhula, Mañjuśrī and other Bodhisattvas (Xuan-Zhang’s list). (Beal pp. xxxviii – xxxix and I pp 180-181).
- Upagupta’s acquisition of eminence in the evolving Mahāyāna tradition, especially in Aparanta, the Northwestern Region of the Indian subcontinent, is attested by Xuan-Zhang who had been shown Saṅghārāmas and stūpas in Sindh (Zind), which commemorated Upagupta’s sojourn in the region. His association with Kashmir, as suggested in later Tibetan sources, is also very likely. It could be in this region that Upagupta acquired his eminence as the fourth patriarch of Mahāyāna Buddhism.
- With the principal conclusion that Upagupta’s Aśoka was Kālāśoka and Upagupta’s omission in Pali sources could be due his partiality to Mahāsāṅghikas resulting later in the eminence he gained in Mahāyāna tradition, a need for research is indicated on such issues as the following:
 - a) What evidence is available from Indian, Chinese and Tibetan sources hitherto not examined from this point of view?
 - b) What, if at all, was Kālāśoka’s role in the promotion of the Mahāsāṅghika School?
 - c) Is it possible that the Council which Tibetan sources date as taking place 110 years after the demise of the Buddha be a Mahāsāṅghika council held ten years after Śānakavāsi’s Second Council at Vaiśālī?
 - d) Is there any foundation for Xuan-Zhang’s account that a council was arranged by a king Aśoka to drown the attending monks?

- e) How did Upagupta get associated with Aparanta and Kashmir and what really won for him the lasting recognition to be commemorated with Saṅghārāmas and stūpas?
- f) When and where did Upagupta attain the status of the fourth patriarch of Mahāyāna Buddhism?

References

- Bapat, P. V. in collaboration with A. Hirakawa, *Chan-Chien-P'ip'osha*, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona 1970
- Beal, Samuel, *Si-yu-ki, Buddhist Records of the Western World*, (London 1884), Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1981.
- Guruge, Ananda W.P., *Mahāvamsa: The Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka – Chapters One to Thirty-seven – An Annotated Translation with Prolegomena*, Associated Newspapers of Ceylon, Colombo 1989; Revised new edition, Godage International Publishers, Colombo 2005.
- Guruge, Ananda W.P., *Asoka, The Righteous: A Definitive Biography*, Central Cultural Fund, Colombo 1993.
- Horner, I.B. (Tr), *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka) Vol. V* (Cullavagga) Pali Text Society, London 1975.
- Hsing Yun, *Describing the Indescribable – A Commentary on the Diamond Sutra*, Wisdom Publications, Somerville MA, 2000.
- Li Ronxi (Tr) *The Biographical Scripture of King Asoka*, Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, Berkeley, California 1993.
- Mukhopadhyaya, Sujitkumar, *The Asokāvandāna – Sanskrit Text compared with Chinese Versions*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1963.
- Nakamura, Hajime, *Indian Buddhism – A Survey with Bibliographical Notes*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1987.
- Przyluski, J., *La Légende de l'Empereur Aśoka dans les Textes Indiens et Chinois*, Annales du Musée Guimet, Paris 1923.

Strong, John S., *The Legend of King Asoka – A Study and Translation of Asokāvandāna*, Princeton Library of Asian Translations, Princeton, N.J. 1983.

Thomas Edward J., *The History of Buddhist Thought*, Kegan Paul, London 1933.

Vaidya, P.L., *Divyavadāna*, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, No. 20, Bihar Mithila Institute, Darbanga, 1959.

Warder, A.K., *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1970.

Yu, Lu K'uan (Charles Luke), *Ch'an and Zen Teaching*, Rider and Co., London 1961.