



THE FIRST ZEN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

113 East 30th Street New York, NY 10016 212-686-2520 www.firstzen.org

會協禪一第國美

Film Series

Aśoka

A Santosh Sivan Picture

SHAH RUKH KHAN

KAREENA KAPOOR

Distributed by First Look Studios

Friday, February 12, 2010 7:30 PM
113 East 30th Street New York, NY 10016

Aśoka was the first Buddhist King of India, an Emperor of the Mauryan empire. As a boy, Aśoka was brought up as a sword-fighter and a warrior. Well liked and highly intelligent, his older half-brothers became wary of him as a possible successor to the throne. As the commander of several Mauryan army regiments, he successfully quelled an uprising in Taxshila, a city in the Punjab. His half-brothers, wary of his growing popularity, persuaded his father, King Bindusara, to send him into exile. While in exile in Kalinga, and living incognito, he fell in love with a fisherwoman named Kaurwaki (a princess of Kalinga in the movie), who historically became his second or third queen. He was called out of exile by his father to quell a violent uprising in Ujjain. Wounded in battle, he was nursed back to health by Buddhist monks and nuns, and fell in love with his personal nurse, a woman named Devi, who he married upon recovering from his injuries. After his father's death, his older half-brother sent assassins to murder his wife and child, but the assassins killed his mother instead. Aśoka retaliated against them, seized the throne and expanded the borders of his empire to the point where – in some places – they exceeded those of present day India. In one particularly bloody conquest, he conquered and destroyed the state of Kalinga, killing 100,000 people in the process. It was after this conquest that he underwent a change of heart and became a follower of the Buddha's teachings.

The movie is a loose rendition of the story of the historical Asoka, complete with cavalry charges, beautiful dancing girls and battle elephants. It includes several song-and-dance numbers which – although well executed – appear to be designed for less-sophisticated Indian audiences. This is not the *History Channel*, but is nevertheless, a fun, interesting, entertaining film.

Admission is free.



Pillar of Asoka, from the Sarnath Museum