



The Journey of Emperor Ashoka from Battle to Peace

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Abstract: Emperor Asoka (sometimes spelt Aśoka) lived from 304 to 232 BCE and was the third ruler of the Indian Mauryan Empire, the largest ever in the Indian subcontinent and one of the world's largest empires at its time. He ruled from 268 BCE to 232 BCE and became a model of kingship in the Buddhist tradition. Under Ashoka India had an estimated population of 30 million, much higher than any of the contemporary Hellenistic kingdoms. After Ashoka's death, however, the Mauryan dynasty came to an end and its empire dissolved. War gives end but not life. It is the ultimate of the emperor Ashoka. Thus, Ashoka taught people to live and let live.

Key Words: kingship, Buddhist, Dhamma

Introduction

In the beginning, Ashoka ruled the empire like his grandfather did, in an efficient but cruel way. He used military strength in order to expand the empire and created sadistic rules against criminals. A Chinese traveller named Xuanzang (Hsüan-tsang) who visited India for several years during the 7th century CE, reports that even during his time, about 900 years after the time of Ashoka, Hindu tradition still remembered the prison Ashoka had established in the north of the capital as "Ashoka's hell". Ashoka ordered that prisoners should be subject to all imagined and unimagined tortures and nobody should ever leave the prison alive.

During the expansion of the Mauryan Empire, Ashoka led

a war against a feudal state named Kalinga (present day Orissa) with the goal of annexing its territory, something that his grandfather had already attempted to do. The conflict took place around 261 BCE and it is considered one of the most brutal and bloodiest wars in world history. The people from Kalinga defended themselves stubbornly, keeping their honour but losing the war: Ashoka's military strength was far beyond Kalinga's. The disaster in Kalinga was supreme: with around 300,000 casualties, the city devastated and thousands of surviving men, women and children deported. In the Kalinga battle, more than a lakh people died, many more were taken as prisoners and a large number of people were badly affected. Ashoka was shocked at that incident. The large scale bloodshed changed



Ashoka's heart. He took a pledge of not waging a single war in the future.

After the War of Kalinga : What happened after this war has been subject to numerous stories and it is not easy to make a sharp distinction between facts and fiction. What is actually supported by historical evidence is that Ashoka issued an edict expressing his regret for the suffering inflicted in Kalinga and assuring that he would renounce war and embrace the propagation of *dharma*. What Ashoka meant by *dharma* is not entirely clear: some believe that he was referring to the teachings of the Buddha and, therefore, he was expressing his conversion to Buddhism. But the word *dharma*, in the context of Ashoka, had also other meanings not necessarily linked to Buddhism. It is true, however, that in subsequent inscriptions Ashoka specifically mentions Buddhist sites and Buddhist texts, but what he meant by the word *dharma* seems to be more related to morals, social concerns and religious tolerance rather than Buddhism.

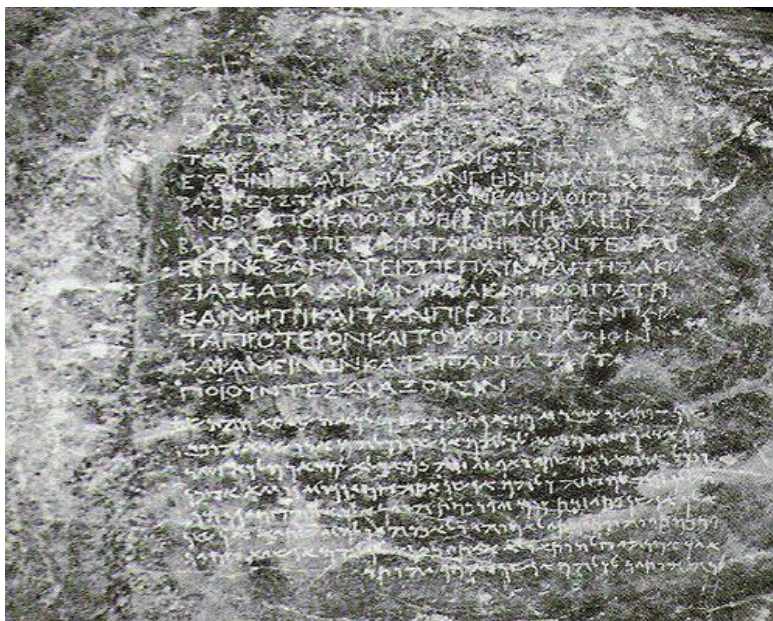
The Edicts of Ashoka: After the war of Kalinga, Ashoka controlled the entire Indian subcontinent except for the extreme southern part and he could have easily controlled that remaining part as well, but he decided not to. Some versions say that Ashoka was sickened by the slaughter of the war and refused to

keep on fighting. Whatever his reasons were, Ashoka stopped his expansion policy and India turned into a prosperous and peaceful place for the years to come.

Ashoka began to issue one of the most famous edicts in the history of government and instructed his officials to carve them on rocks and pillars, in line with the local dialects and in a very simple fashion. In the rock edicts, Ashoka talks about religious freedom and religious tolerance, he instructs his officials to help the poor and the elderly, establishes medical facilities for humans and animals, commands obedience to parents, respect for elders, generosity for all priests and ascetic orders no matter their creed, orders fruit and shade trees to be planted and also wells to be dug along the roads so travellers can benefit from them.

However attractive all this edicts might seem, the reality is that some sectors of Indian society were truly upset about them. Brahman priests saw in them a serious limitation to their ancient ceremonies involving animal sacrifices, since the taking of animal life was no longer an easy business and hunters along with fishermen were equally angry about this. Peasants were also affected by this and were upset when officials told them that "chaff must not be set on fire along with the living things in

it". Brutal or peaceful, it seems that no ruler can fully satisfy the people.



Ashoka's Dhamma

In the aftermath of the Kalinga war, Ashoka was inspired by the teachings of Buddha. Ashoka embraced a new Dhamma which was radical for his times. Ashoka's Dhamma did not involve worship of a god. It did not involve ritual or sacrifice. If we view it from modern perspective, Ashoka's religious ideologies were inclined towards secularism. Secularism treats all religions with equal respect. Ashoka used messages and inscriptions to communicate with his subject. He advised people to respect other religions.

He also advised them to desist from meaningless rituals.

Ashoka felt that a king should not lord over his subjects. He felt that it was his duty to serve people and solve their problems. He appointed dhamma mahamatta. The dharma mahamatta used to go to the people to teach them about the dhamma. Ashoka inscribed messages on stone pillars. This was done to ensure that people could read them. Officials were given instructions to read them for those who could not read. Messengers were sent to other countries to spread the message of his dhamma.



Ashoka did various works for the welfare of people. During his regime; roads and rest houses were built and wells were dug. Hospitals were made not only for humans but also for animals.

Most of the inscriptions were written in Prakrit language in the Brahmi script. At some places, inscriptions were also written in local languages. For example; Arabic was used for inscriptions at places which are in modern day Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Legacy of Ashoka

Ashoka had left a rich legacy. Many of his principles are still being followed. Many of our national symbols have been taken from his reign. The National Emblem has been taken from the

The Ashoka Chakra is the depiction of the "Dharmachakra"; represented with 24 spokes. Ashoka Chakra appears on a number of edicts of Ashoka, most prominent among which is the Lion Capital of Ashoka. The Ashok Chakra is visible in the Indian National flag, where it is rendered in a navy blue colour on a white background. The 24 spokes of the Ashok Chakra inspires every Indian to work tirelessly for 24 hours. Ashok Chakra is also called

Sarnath's Ashoka pillar. The wheel in the National Flag has also been taken from the wheel symbol used by Ashoka on different installations and even on coins.

Ashoka Chakra the destination to modern India

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the wheel of duty. These 24 spokes represent 24 qualities of a person. In other words they can also be said to be 24 religious paths made for humans. All the paths mentioned in the Ashok Chakra will lead any country on the path of progress. This is probably the reason that designers of our national flag removed the Charkha from it and put the Ashok Chakra in the middle of the flag.



The meaning of every spoke put in the Ashok Chakra:

1. **The first Spoke:-** Chastity (inspires to live a simple life)
2. **Second Spoke:-** Health (inspires to be healthy from body and mind)
3. **Third Spoke:-** Peace (To maintain peace & harmony throughout the country)
4. **Fourth Spoke:-** Sacrifice (To be ready for any sacrifice for the sake of the country and society)
5. **Fifth Spoke:-** Morality (To maintain high morality in the professional and personal life)
6. **Sixth Spoke:-** Service (Ready to serve country and society when needed)
7. **Seventh Spoke:-** Forgiveness (A feeling of forgiveness towards humans and other creatures)
8. **Eighth Spoke:-** Love (feeling of love towards country and all other creature of the God)
9. **Ninth Spoke:-** Friendship (To have cordial relation with all the citizens)
10. **Tenth Spoke:-** Fraternity (To develop a sense of brotherhood in the country)
11. **Eleventh Spoke:-** Organization (Strengthening the unity and integrity of the country)



- the nation)
- 12. Twelfth Spoke:-** Welfare (Participation in welfare activities related to
- 13. Thirteenth Spoke:-** country and society) Prosperity (Actively participate in the development of the country)
- 14. Fourteenth Spoke:-** Industry (To assist the country in its industrial progress)
- 15. Fifteen Spoke:-** Safety (To be always ready for the protection of the country)
- 16. Sixteenth Spoke:-** Awareness (To be aware about the truth and don't believe in rumours)
- 17. Seventeenth Spoke:-** Equality (Establishment of a society based on the equality)
- 18. Eighteenth Spoke:-** Artha (Optimum utilization of money)
- 19. Nineteenth Spoke:-** Policy (To have faith in country's policy)
- 20. Twentieth Spoke:-** Justice (Talking about justice for all)
- 21. Twenty-one Spoke:-** Co-operation (working together)
- 22. Twenty second Spoke:-** Duties (To obey your duties honestly)
- 23. Twenty-third Spoke:-** Rights (Do not abuse your rights)
- 24. Twenty-Fourth Spoke:-** Wisdom (To have knowledge beyond books)

So in this way you have read that every spoke given in the Ashok Chakra has its own meaning. All the spokes talk about the holistic development of the country. These spokes give clear message to all the countrymen about their rights and duties. These spokes are like 24 principles which should be followed by the citizens so that the differences of caste, religion, language and attire can be minimized.

Conclusion

War gives end but not life. It is the ultimate of the emperor Ashoka. Thus, Ashoka taught people to live and let live. He emphasized compassion towards animals and proper behaviour towards relatives. His teachings were meant to strengthen the institution of family and the existing social classes. He held that if the people behaved well they



would go to heaven, but never said that they would attain nirvana, which was the goal of Buddhist teachings. Ashoka's teachings were thus intended to maintain the existing social order on the basis of tolerance. He does not seem to have preached any sectarian faith.

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