



Ashoka

Dhamma and Contributions

Ashoka, the third Mauryan ruler, is famed for his ethical governance, Dhamma, and Buddhist contributions, overshadowing his vast conquests.

Historical Rediscovery of Ashoka

- ◆ In 1837, James Prinsep deciphered a Brahmi script inscription referring to a king named Devanampiya Piyadasi ("Beloved of the Gods").
- ◆ A 1915 inscription identified "Devanampiya Ashoka," confirming that Piyadasi and Ashoka were the same, thereby solidifying Ashoka's identity as a transformative figure in Indian history.

The Kalinga War (261 BCE)

- ◆ The Kalinga War, fought near the Dhauli hills and Daya River in Odisha, was Ashoka's only major battle.
- ◆ Rock Edict XIII vividly describes the war's devastation, with countless lives lost.
- ◆ Witnessing the suffering, Ashoka renounced violent conquests.

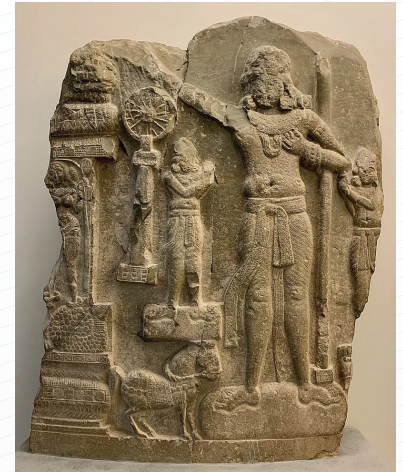


Ethical Code and Social Responsibility

Ashoka's Dhamma was a broad ethical code designed to foster social responsibility and harmony among his subjects. It reflected his duty as an emperor to remain impartial and promote the welfare of all.

Key Features of Asoka's Dhamma

- ◆ **Tolerance and Respect:** Harmony among sects, respect for elders, and humane treatment of servants and animals.
- ◆ **Non-Violence (Ahimsa):** Discouraged animal sacrifices, cruelty, and meaningless rituals.
- ◆ **Moral Conduct:** Advocated compassion, ethical behavior, and truthfulness.
- ◆ **Welfare Measures:** Promoted public works like planting trees, digging wells, and constructing rest houses.
- ◆ **Religious Inclusivity:** Respected all faiths and appointed Dhamma Mahamattas to spread these values.
- ◆ **Dhamma Ghosa vs. Bheri Ghosa:** symbolizing peace and conquest through moral principles rather than war.
- ◆ **Simplification of Rituals:** He disapproved of extravagant rituals, particularly those observed by women, and discouraged frivolous social gatherings.



Goals of Asoka's Teachings

- ◆ Strengthen familial and social structures.
- ◆ Encourage moral behavior to attain heaven, distinct from the Buddhist goal of Nirvana.
- ◆ Promote tolerance and unity while maintaining the social order.

Propagation of Dhamma

Mediums of Communication

- ◆ **Edicts:**
 - The Edicts of Ashoka are a collection of over thirty inscriptions, found on rocks, pillars, and caves across the empire.
 - **Language:** Primarily Prakrit, with Aramaic and Greek in northwestern region.
 - **Script:** Brahmi was the main script; Kharoshthi was used in the northwest.
 - **Materials:** Pillars were made from buff-colored hard sandstone from Chunar and spotted red and white sandstone from Mathura.



◆ **Dhamma Yatras:**

- Tours by Ashoka and officials to interact directly with the populace, spreading the principles of Dhamma.

Types of Edicts

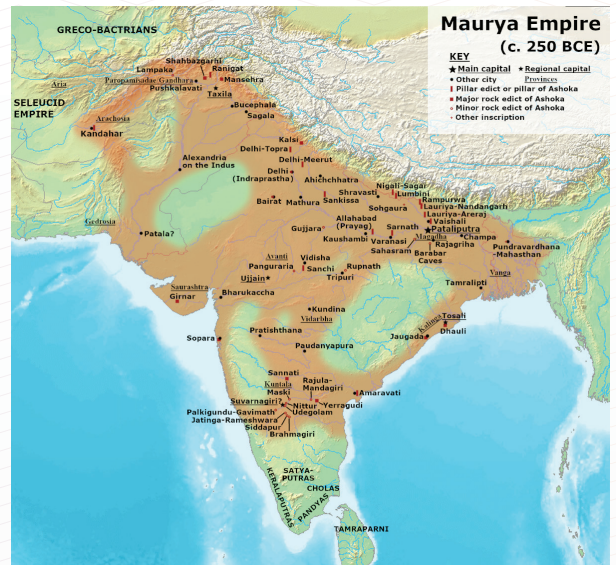
Major Rock Edicts

These inscriptions are usually carved on large rocks and boulders.



- ◆ **There are 14 Edicts** (termed 1st to 14th) and **two separate ones** found in Odisha.

- ◆ **Languages:** Primarily in Prakrit (Brahmi script) with some inscriptions in Greek and Aramaic.
- ◆ **Key Sites:** Dhauili, Jaugada, Girnar, Sopara, Erragudi, and Kandahar.



Edict	Key Points
I	◦ Prohibits animal slaughter and festive killings; Ashoka stops his own hunting practices.
II	◦ Medical care for humans/animals; mentions Chola, Pandya, Satyaputra, and Keralaputra, and Greek ruler Antiochus II.
III	◦ Issued 12 years after coronation; promotes generosity to Brahmins; instructs Yuktas (subordinate officers), Pradesikas (district heads), and Rajukas (rural officers) to spread Dhamma.
IV	◦ Advocates Dhammaghosa (sound of righteousness) over Bherighosa (sound of war); emphasizes moral and ethical governance; promotes peace and righteous conduct in society.
V	◦ Declares "Every human is my child"; appoints Dhamma Mahamatras; addresses slavery.
VI	◦ Emphasizes welfare and administration; Ashoka's communication with subjects.
VII	◦ Encourages tolerance and respect among religions/sects.
VIII	◦ Ashoka's first Dhamma Yatra to Bodhgaya.
IX	◦ Condemns extravagant ceremonies, emphasizes simple rituals aligned with Dhamma.
X	◦ Criticizes pursuit of fame and glory; prioritizes Dhamma over materialism.
XI	◦ Declares Dhamma as primary policy, emphasizes respect for elders, kindness to servants/slaves, and ethical conduct.
XII	◦ Promotes tolerance among religions; highlights Mahamatras for women's welfare; inscribed in Kandahar Greek Edict.
XIII	◦ Largest and most detailed inscription; expresses remorse after Kalinga War, mentions Ashoka's Dhamma diplomacy with Greek rulers (Antiochus II, Ptolemy II, Magas, Antigonus, Alexander of Epirus) and South Indian dynasties (Pandyas, Cheras, and Cholas).
XIV	◦ Mentions the dissemination of inscriptions across the empire.

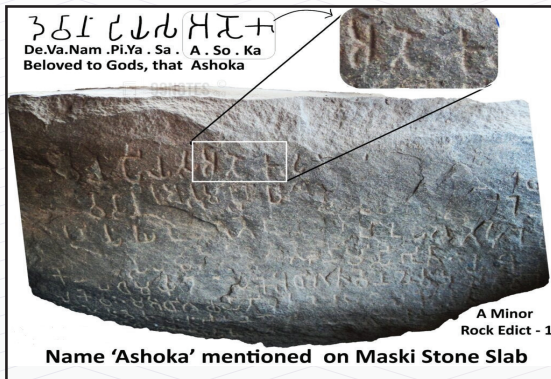
Minor Rock Edicts

These inscriptions are found at 15 smaller and less prominent locations. They often convey messages similar to the major rock edicts but in a more condensed form.

◆ Languages and Scripts:

- **Eastern Regions:** Magadhi Prakrit in Brahmi script.
- **Northwest Regions:** Prakrit in Kharoshti script, with some inscriptions in Greek and Aramaic.

◆ Ashoka uses his name "Devanampiya" (Beloved of the Gods) only in four of these places namely: **Maski, Brahmagiri (Karnataka), Gujjara (MP), and Nettur (AP).**



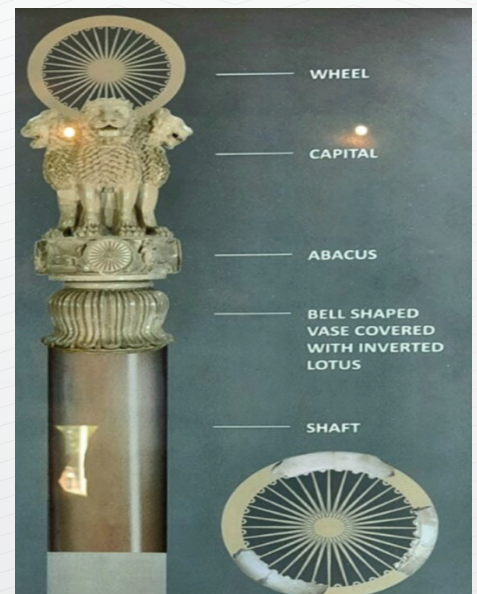
◆ These early edicts highlight his **personal commitment to Dhamma** and moral governance.

Pillar Edicts

◆ Ashoka's pillar inscriptions are carved on monolithic pillars, often topped with the iconic **Lion Capital of Ashoka**. These inscriptions are concise and emphasize Ashoka's adoption of **Buddhism** and promotion of **Dhamma**.

◆ Major Pillar Edicts:

- There are **7 major pillar edicts**, inscribed in **Prakrit** towards the end of Ashoka's reign.
- Located at places such as **Delhi (Topra and Meerut), Lauriya-Arera, Lauriya-Nandangarh, Prayag, and Rampurva**.



Major Pillar Edicts of Ashoka

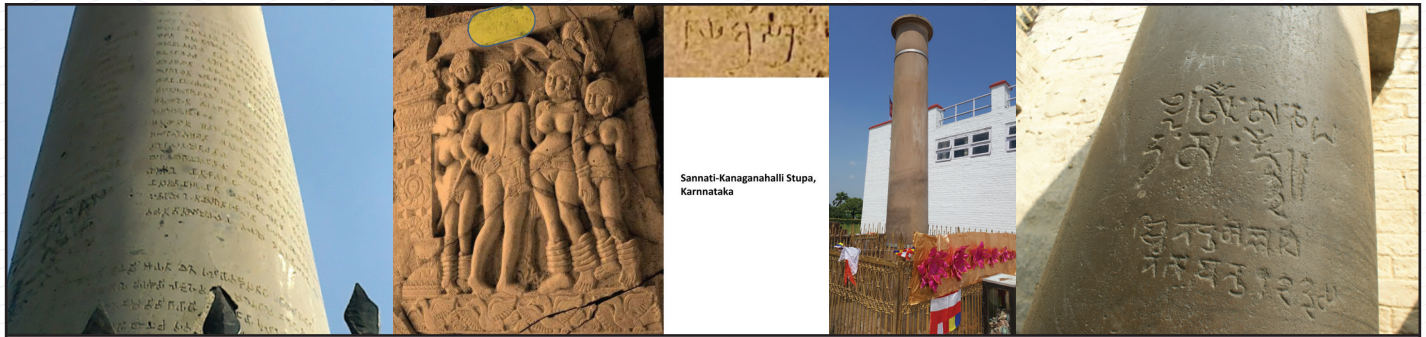
Edict Number	Description
Pillar Edict: I	◦ Emphasizes Ashoka's principle of protecting his people.
Pillar Edict: II	◦ Defines Dhamma as minimal sin, many virtues, compassion, liberality, truthfulness, and purity.
Pillar Edict: III	◦ Encourages avoiding cruelty, sin, harshness, pride, and anger among subjects.
Pillar Edict: IV	◦ Outlines the duties of Rajukas (officers), who visit all regions every five years to spread Dhamma.
Pillar Edict: V	◦ Lists animals and birds that should not be killed on specific days, alongside those never to be killed. Also describes the release of 25 prisoners.
Pillar Edict: VI	◦ Explains the Dhamma policy of the State, focusing on the welfare of the people.
Pillar Edict: VII	◦ Highlights Ashoka's works for promoting Dhamma. States that all sects should practice self-control and purity of mind. This edict is inscribed only on the Delhi-Topra Pillar.

Rock-Carved Cave Inscriptions

- ◆ Found in caves such as the **Barabar Caves** in Bihar. Records the gifting of caves to the Ajivika sect.



Important Edicts and Inscriptions of Ashoka



Edict/Inscription	Details
Allahabad/Queen's Edicts	◦ Mentions Queen Karuvaki, Ashoka's second queen. Reflects Ashoka's commitment to Buddhism and Dharma. Includes Samudragupta's inscription.
Kandahar Bilingual Inscription	◦ Found in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Written in Greek and Aramaic, praising Ashoka's Dharma policies.
Kanganahalli Inscription	◦ Found on a stupa in Karnataka. Identifies Ashoka as "Ranyo Asoka" (King Ashoka).
Kalinga Edicts (Dhuli & Jaugada)	◦ Found in Odisha. Contains Ashoka's declaration: "All men are my children."
Sannati Inscription	◦ Located in Karnataka. Only site with all 14 Major Rock Edicts and unique Kalinga Edicts.
Rummindei Pillar (Lumbini)	◦ Found in Nepal, Buddha's birthplace. Mentions tax exemptions (exemption of Bali) and payment of only one-eighth of Bhaga (share of produce).
Sarnath Inscription	◦ Found in Uttar Pradesh. Praises Ashoka's promotion of Dhamma and Buddhist institutions.
Nigalisagar Pillar (Nepal)	◦ Found in Nepal, Mentions Ashoka doubling the height of the stupa of Buddha Kanakamuni and his devotion to Buddhism.
Girnar Rock Inscription	◦ Mentions construction of Sudarshan Lake by Pushyagupta, a Mauryan governor.
Minor Rock Edict 1	◦ Describes Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism after 2.5 years as emperor.
Minor Rock Edict 3	◦ Ashoka greets the Sangha and recommends six Buddhist texts.
Shahbazgarhi & Mansehra	◦ Inscriptions in Kharosthi script, found in modern Pakistan.

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