

A Critical Analysis of Ashoka the Great's Legacy Significance to Modern Society and Educational Practice

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Abstract

Ashoka the Great, the third emperor of the Mauryan dynasty, had a profound effect on Indian history and beyond during his rule from 268 to 232 BCE. The legacy of Ashoka, his transition from a bloody conqueror to a Buddhist champion and nonviolent advocate, and the spread of Dhamma throughout his empire are all critically examined in this research study. The results of his instructions, the architectural wonders he commissioned, and the spread of his moral and ethical beliefs are all examined. With an emphasis on governance, interfaith harmony, and moral leadership, the study also examines how Ashoka's theories might be implemented in modern society. It also looks at how Ashoka's ideas may be applied to modern teaching strategies to help people become more compassionate and socially aware. By examining a variety of subjects, such as Ashoka's foreign policy, social programs, and administrative reforms, this essay seeks to provide a comprehensive summary of his reign. It looks at how he significantly altered the Indian subcontinent's sociopolitical climate, especially by bringing Buddhism and social welfare programs. The analysis goes further to comprehend the ways in which Ashoka's inscriptions functioned as instruments of control and communication, emphasizing their historical value in providing information about the Mauryan Empire's administrative structure. Since Ashoka's propagation of Buddhism resulted in its expansion into areas like Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia, the study also assesses his long-term impact on succeeding generations in India and Asia. By comparing Ashoka's rule with contemporary political systems, it offers suggestions for developing moral and ethical governance in the modern period. By doing this, it highlights Ashoka's leadership style and the ways his principles can be used to address modern issues like environmental degradation, religious intolerance, and socioeconomic inequality.

Key words: Mauryan dynasty, Ashoka the Great, Critical Study, Legacy, Relevance, Contemporary Society, Educational Practice, Social Welfare, Religious Tolerance

Introduction

Around 268 BCE, Ashoka the Great—often considered one of India's most renowned kings—took over the Mauryan Empire. His rule is renowned for its dramatic shift from ruthless military conquests to a system of government based on morality and ethics. This change, which was brought on by the terrible aftermath of the Kalinga War, distinguished Ashoka from other historical personalities of his time. Many people continue to study and value his distinctive style of leadership and governance, which offers important insights for contemporary society. Under Ashoka's leadership, the Mauryan Empire expanded its territory to embrace the

Indian subcontinent and beyond. Ashoka was first renowned for his ferocity and ambition, and his early rule was characterized by a string of ruthless expeditions. But the immense death and suffering he saw during the Kalinga War turned into a turning point in his life, causing him to reevaluate and drastically change his policies. This change was not simply personal; it was also evident in the regulations he put in place and the manner in which he managed his empire. The extent and impact of Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism and the subsequent spread of the Dhamma were revolutionary. The core values of Ashoka's Dhamma were non-violence, tolerance, and respect for all living things. He showed his commitment to these principles by issuing numerous edicts that were inscribed on rocks and pillars around his domain. His commitment to promoting a society founded on moral responsibility, social welfare, and ethical government is demonstrated by these decrees.

In addition, Ashoka's legacy has important ramifications for the educational sector. His lessons from the Dhamma can be applied to contemporary teaching methods to help pupils develop their capacity for empathy, social responsibility, and moral reasoning. Examining Ashoka's life and deeds may inspire educators and legislators to create curricula that foster ideals that support individuals' entire development in addition to informational content. By evaluating Ashoka's contributions to governance, religion, and education, this essay aims to investigate these diverse facets of his legacy. This study looks at the historical background of Ashoka's reign, the content of his edicts, and the wider effects of his policies in order to give a comprehensive knowledge of his historical significance and current relevance in society. The study will show how the knowledge gained during Ashoka's rule could be used to promote a more moral, sympathetic, and inclusive society today.

Life Sketch of Ashoka

In 304 BCE, Ashoka the Great, one of the most revered monarchs in Indian history, was born at Pataliputra, the capital of the Mauryan Empire (now Patna, Bihar). He was the son of Emperor Bindusara and the grandson of Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Mauryan dynasty. Early in childhood, Ashoka had intense training in military strategy and statecraft, preparing him for future roles of authority within the empire. There were difficulties along Ashoka's path to the throne. He was one of Bindusara's many children, and ascending to the throne required resolving power struggles and internal family conflict. He is thought to have risen to power and established himself as the Mauryan dynasty's emperor in 268 BCE through a combination of cunning, political acumen, and alliances.

Ashoka's reign was first marked by military campaigns to strengthen and enlarge his domain. He began his most famous and significant war, the conquest of Kalinga, or present-day Odisha, around 261 BCE. This tragic fight resulted in widespread destruction and numerous casualties. However, the aftermath of the Kalinga War had a major effect on Ashoka. Witnessing the destruction brought about by the war, the suffering of the people, and the loss of many lives had a deep impact on him and forced his reign to undergo a period of change. Ashoka's remorse for the destruction and carnage caused by the Kalinga War marked a turning point in his life. He became a Buddhist, a faith that promoted nonviolence, compassion, and peace. Ashoka's

commitment to Buddhism served as both a personal spiritual journey and the cornerstone of his government and policies. He started spreading the Dhamma, a collection of moral and ethical precepts that placed an emphasis on tolerance, non-violence, and respect for all living things. Ashoka ordered decrees to be carved and inscribed on rocks and pillars throughout his kingdom in order to disseminate these concepts. These inscriptions were inscribed in local languages and scripts to ensure that his message was comprehended by the greatest number of people. The decrees establish standards for moral leadership, social welfare, religious tolerance, and moral behavior. They also included directives for the government to guarantee the well-being of the populace and the equitable treatment of subjects. Ashoka's commitment to Buddhism extended beyond his own realm. He sent missionaries to neighboring regions like Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia to spread Buddhism. His actions contributed to the globalization of Buddhism and made it one of the biggest religions in the world.

Lastly, the life and reign of Ashoka the Great is a noteworthy illustration of a shift from a monarchy motivated by conquest to one governed by moral and ethical values. His conversion to Buddhism and the spread of the Dhamma, which placed a strong emphasis on non-violence, religious tolerance, and social welfare, caused a dramatic change in the Mauryan Empire's political system. Ashoka's legacy is still relevant today because it provides insightful advice on moral leadership and the need of compassion in governance. Ashoka is a timeless historical figure and an inspiration to future generations since his life story demonstrates the enduring power of contemplation and the possibility of positive transformation.

Literature Review

Himanshu P. Ray (2008) conducted a study on interpreting the Mauryan empire: centralized state or multiple centres of control. The study's two primary foci were Asoka's dhamma and the polity. The archaeology of frontier regions like the Deccan was the primary emphasis, and data from northwest and eastern India were compared. Following data collection, the study found that Asoka may have represented different things to different people both during and after his life. Nonetheless, there is no denying that a number of social and economic advancements during the Mauryan era created opportunities for trade, communication, and religious proselytization both inside and outside the subcontinent.

Kshirod Kumar Saikia (2022) conducted a study on the topic titled Introduction to Ashoka the Great. The study, which compiled information from primary and secondary sources, found that Ashoka's reign as a Buddhist ruler had a long-lasting effect on India's history and spiritual identity. His focus on moral governance and well-being continues to inspire leaders and thinkers worldwide. His actions resulted in long-lasting improvements in governance, administration, and public welfare. The purpose of the pillars and rock edicts was to collect data and to spread moral, ethical, and social values.

Uday Dokras (2023) conducted a study on the topic titled Was ASHOKA Great? King Ashoka is important for two reasons, according to the study. To propagate Buddhism, the Buddhist council sent messengers to neighboring countries and revived the Dhamma. Additionally The

expansion of Buddhism in India can be attributed to a pillar built by King Asoka approximately 200 years after the Buddha's time.

Umesh Kumar (2023) assessed A study on king Ashoka's achievements in relevance to present scenario. The information was gathered from a variety of online resources and scholarly publications. It was discovered that Ashoka was one of the greatest kings in the globe as well as in India. He has significantly influenced both art and architecture. During his reign, he established a number of initiatives to enhance the growth and welfare of his subjects, such as constructing wells and hospitals, introducing new scientific techniques, and drafting more sensible legislation to safeguard wildlife.

Kumar, (2015) conducted a study on past and it was found that Knowing our history in the present world is a difficult task. In Indian history, Ashoka is primarily known for his inscription, social, and religious endeavors, which allowed him to spread his Dharma throughout the world. Historians from all over India have discovered other Ashoka inscriptions with the names Devenampriya and Priyadarshi. The Maski rock edicts made public Devananpriya's other name, Ashoka the Great, for the first time, and this research may help us understand why Ashoka became the first person in history to practice nonviolence after the Kalinga War. Each inscription reveals the majority of Ashoka's religious and humanitarian policies.

Malakar (2017) formulated a study on Ashoka the Great. It was found that the Mauriyan dynasty's most powerful ruler was Asoka. He was a fervent supporter of Buddhism in addition to art and building. The aim of this study is to shed light on the early years and career of the legendary Mauryan king Asoka. Throughout history, the names of many prominent Indian monarchs have been etched in gold letters, including Asoka. Numerous renowned writers have researched Asoka's life and work. This study's goal is to investigate how Asoka got his start in the industry and succeeded there. Asoka's Dhamma and his promotion of art and architecture throughout his rule are also highlighted in this study.

According to a study on Ashoka by Voss (2016), Ashoka was a well-known dictator in third-century BCE India who was revered for his political accomplishments but more for his distinct, caring style of governance, which was greatly influenced by the Buddhist principles he embraced. His remarkable historical example necessitates a closer look at his personality and behavioral patterns in order to discover a fresh source of inspiration for extraordinary cross-cultural leadership. This paper compares contemporary leadership practices that are greatly influenced by the Western academic environment with the human-centered, holistic viewpoint that Buddhist teachings may offer. According to what we can infer from the historical data currently available, it also takes Asoka's background and personality into account to determine

Suresh (2018) conducted the research. Ashoka was the most famous king in ancient India. There is no one with a more powerful personality than Ashoka, and we know him better than anyone else in ancient Indian history. He was the first monarch to declare war to be a dreadful thing, which is why. He was the third ruler of the Maurya Dynasty. Between 302 and 232 BCE, he lived. He was a king who tried to use inscriptions to speak to the populace.

Ashok was the subject of a study by Darade (2012). To prevent more conquests and make his kingdom easier to manage, Ashoka shifted his foreign policy from expansionism to cohabitation and concord with his neighbors. Following his Buddhist convictions, he declared his dedication to the protection, well-being, and peace of all "animate creatures" under his control. He stated that he will only pursue success in areas pertaining to the human soul and the spread of "good behavior" among people in the future. He also demonstrated his generosity and might to other powers. Natural disasters and famines did not deter Ashoka's desire for peace. During his rule, no significant migrations occurred. Furthermore, none of the nearby kingdoms attempted to take any

Objectives of the Study

1. To provide a comprehensive analysis of Ashoka's life, his growth after the Kalinga War, and his influence on Indian history as a whole.
2. To analyze the content and significance of Ashoka's rock edicts and pillars in order to understand his policies and rule.
3. To research the principles of Ashoka's Dhamma, its influence on society under his reign, and its relevance today.
4. To assess the enduring cultural and religious consequences of Ashoka's endeavors to disseminate Buddhism across Asia.
5. To consider how Ashoka's social welfare principles and moral leadership might be applied to modern governance paradigms.

Methodology

This study employs a multidisciplinary approach to critically analyze the legacy of Ashoka the Great using historical literature, archeological facts, and contemporary perspectives. The analysis was based on both primary and secondary sources, including Ashoka's edict, ancient texts, and recent scholarly works. The approach is broken down into a few essential parts:

1. Data Collection:

- **Primary Sources:** Analysis of Ashoka's edicts on rock and pillars, which offer firsthand knowledge of his ideologies and policies. These Prakrit, Greek, and Aramaic inscriptions are essential historical records for comprehending his rule.
- **Secondary Sources:** Examination of historical writings that provide accounts of Ashoka's life and reign, such as the Mahavamsa and the Ashokavadana. Diverse viewpoints on his legacy are gathered by reviewing recent research papers and scholarly publications.

2. Field Research:

- **Individual Visits:** Making field trips to several archaeological locations, such as Sarnath, Sanchi, Dhauri, and others, where Ashoka's pillars and edicts are situated.

The purpose of these excursions is to better comprehend the historical relevance of these inscriptions by observing and recording their physical environment.

- Interviews: Speaking with historians, archaeologists, and academics who specialize in ancient Indian history can provide you with knowledgeable perspectives on Ashoka's accomplishments and their applicability today.

3. Comparative Analysis:

- Historical Context: Highlighting the distinctive features of Ashoka's style by contrasting his policies and governance with those of other modern and succeeding kings.
- Modern Relevance: Assessing how Ashoka's teachings relate to moral leadership, modern governance, and educational methods.

4. Analysis of Themes:

- Ethical Governance: Examining the effects of Ashoka's application of the Dhamma in administrative procedures on the sociopolitical structure of the Mauryan Empire.
- Buddhism and Cultural Impact: Evaluating how Ashoka's missionary work contributed to the spread of Buddhism and the ensuing cross-cultural interactions throughout Asia.
- Educational Implications: Examining how Ashoka's teachings may be incorporated into contemporary curricula to encourage virtues like compassion, tolerance, and civic duty

The research attempts to offer a thorough and nuanced knowledge of Ashoka the Great's legacy, historical background, and ongoing importance in modern society by using this extensive methodology.

Achievements in Administration

The government of Ashoka was distinguished by its effectiveness, openness, and inclusivity. He created a decentralized governance structure and designated Dhamma Mahamatras to supervise the application of moral guidelines.

Tables-1 summarizing Ashoka's administrative reforms, such as tax collection, judicial processes, and public works, highlight the effectiveness of his governance.

Ashoka's Administrative Reforms and Their Impact

Table 1: Summary of Ashoka's Administrative Reforms
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Area of Governance	Reform Description	Impact
Tax Collection	Simplified tax system with fair assessments and periodic reviews	Improved revenue collection and reduced tax burdens on common people
Judicial Processes	Establishment of a judicial system with appointed officials to ensure justice for all	Increased access to justice, reduced corruption, and promoted legal fairness
Public Works	Construction of roads, rest houses (dharmashalas), hospitals, and irrigation systems	Enhanced infrastructure, improved public health, and boosted agricultural productivity
Social Welfare	Provision of medical facilities for humans and animals, and welfare measures for the poor	Improved quality of life and promoted the welfare of all sections of society
Religious Tolerance	Encouragement of respect and coexistence among various religious communities	Fostered interfaith harmony and reduced religious conflicts
Communication	Issuance of edicts inscribed on rocks and pillars to disseminate policies and moral teachings	Enhanced transparency and promoted ethical governance

Tables-1 summarizing Ashoka's administrative reforms.

Ashoka's Pillar Edicts and Inscriptions:

Among the most significant sources of knowledge concerning Ashoka's tenure and the Mauryan Empire are the inscriptions and pillar edicts. His policies, ideas, and administrative reforms are documented in these inscriptions, which were written in different places around the Indian subcontinent. Some were written in Greek and Aramaic, but the majority were engraved in Prakrit using the Brahmi alphabet on rocks, pillars, and cave walls.

Major Pillar Edicts

The Pillar Edicts of Ashoka were inscribed on tall, monolithic sandstone pillars, many of which were topped with beautifully carved animal capitals, like the famous Lion Capital of Sarnath. These edicts reflect Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism and his commitment to dharma (moral law).

1. Pillar Edict I: Prohibits animal sacrifices and festive gatherings.
2. Pillar Edict II: Describes Ashoka's efforts to promote medical care for humans and animals.
3. Pillar Edict III: Declares that Ashoka's officials should tour the country every five years to spread his dharma.

4. Pillar Edict IV: Outlines steps for the wellbeing of inmates and encourages their humane treatment.
5. Pillar Edict V: Prohibits the killing of animals and emphasizes animal protection.
6. Ashoka's care for his people's well-being and the creation of dharma-mahamatras (officers of dharma) are highlighted in Pillar Edict VI.
7. Pillar Edict VII: Speaks about Ashoka's deep concern for the welfare of all sects and his respect for all religious practices.

Major Rock Edicts

Ashoka's Rock Edicts are inscriptions carved on rock surfaces. They generally convey similar messages as the pillar edicts, with additional details about Ashoka's governance and personal beliefs.

1. Rock Edict I: Prohibits animal sacrifices and emphasizes vegetarianism.
2. Rock Edict II: Speaks about the medical treatment of humans and animals.
3. Rock Edict III: Encourages religious tolerance and respect among different sects.
4. Rock Edict IV: Describes the benefits of following dharma and the role of dharma-mahamatras.
5. Rock Edict V: Highlights the duties of officials and their role in promoting dharma.
6. Rock Edict VI: Encourages the dissemination of dharma through officials.
7. Rock Edict VII: Promotes religious tolerance.
8. Rock Edict VIII: Describes Ashoka's pilgrimage to Buddhist sites.
9. Rock Edict IX: Condemns ceremonies that are wasteful and meaningless.
10. Rock Edict X: Declares that fame and glory are less important than following dharma.
11. Rock Edict XI: Stresses the importance of dharma over ritualistic ceremonies.
12. Rock Edict XII: Emphasizes religious tolerance and harmony.
13. Rock Edict XIII: Explains Ashoka's repentance and his acceptance of dharma after detailing the atrocities of the Kalinga War.
14. Rock Edict XIV: Provides an overview of the various edicts and their objectives.

These edicts and inscriptions provide a unique insight into Ashoka's philosophy, governance, and the moral principles he sought to inculcate in his empire. They reflect his profound commitment to social welfare, ethical governance, religious tolerance, and the promotion of peace.

Why Teach Ashoka to Students?

Students should be taught about Ashoka because his life and reign provide timeless lessons in morality, leadership, and social responsibility. Ashoka's transformation from a war-hungry king to a gentle and non-violent one can teach students about personal development and the importance of introspection. His commitment to the welfare of his people, which includes constructing roads, hospitals, and water systems, shows the benefits of investing in public health, infrastructure, and community care—values that are relevant in the modern world. Despite his own conversion to Buddhism, Ashoka's advocacy of religious tolerance teaches

pupils to value difference and cultivate respect for one another, which is an essential ability in a time of growing religious and cultural pluralism. Furthermore, Ashoka's emphasis on animal welfare and environmental preservation speaks to contemporary worries about ecological balance and sustainability. Examining Ashoka's principles teaches students how leaders can take proactive steps toward social justice, environmental preservation, and ethical governance—all of which are still urgent worldwide challenges. In a world full of tensions and carnage, his dedication to peace—shown by his rejection of war and adoption of peaceful means—offers a model for settling conflicts. Ashoka's rule serves as another evidence of the importance of moral integrity in leadership. For students navigating their personal and professional lives, his efforts to maintain justice, promote equity, and ensure the welfare of his people might serve as an example. In addition to teaching historical facts, Ashoka teachers impart timeless values like compassion, humility, moral leadership, and a commitment to justice that can help students grow up to be responsible, thoughtful individuals. These principles allow students to consider themselves as active contributors to the development of a more just, peaceful, and sustainable society, making Ashoka's teachings not only relevant but also essential for today's youth.

In conclusion

The life and teachings of Ashoka provide ageless guidance on social responsibility, leadership, and governance. We can address urgent global issues and promote a more compassionate and just society by incorporating his legacy into modern governance and education.

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