



**KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY**  
Only IAS Academy by Grandson of "Per. Arundhati Varadarajan"

# Ashoka

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## Why is in news?

In the heart of South Delhi, near Kalkaji temple in East of Kailash, one can find a piece of history that pre-dates the Chahamanas, Lodhis, and Khiljis, by several centuries.

The rock edict, one among several scattered in different parts of the country, narrates emperor Ashoka's policy of Dhamma, which he began to disseminate after embracing Buddhism and ahimsa (non-violence) following his conquest in the bloody battle for Kalinga.

## Ashoka:

He was the **son of Mauryan Emperor Bindusara and Chandragupta Maurya's grandson.**

Other names: **Devanampiya** (Sanskrit Devanampriya, which means Beloved of the Gods) and **Piyadasi.**

He was **born in 304 BC.** His reign lasted from 268 BC until 232 BC, when he died.

As a young prince, Ashoka was a skilled commander who put down revolts in Ujjain and Takshashila.

As Emperor, he was ambitious and aggressive, re-establishing the Empire's power in southern and western India. But it was his conquest of Kalinga (262–261 BCE) that proved to be the defining event of his life.

The Dhamma is the subject of the bulk of Ashoka's inscriptions (the Prakrit word for dharma).

People of various faiths were drawn to the concept of Dhamma. There were **no laws or restrictions in Dhamma.**

## Kalinga War:

The battle was fought **between Ashoka and the state of Kalinga**, an independent feudal kingdom.

It was sourced from Ashoka's **Rock Edict XIII.**

Ashoka himself describes, "A hundred and fifty thousand were killed, and many times that number perished". It was the **only major war fought by Ashoka.**

The inscription of Kalinga highlights the immense scale of the manslaughter, deportation, and capture that happened in the Kalinga war.

However, this war proved to be a pivotal event in the King's life.

He was moved to such guilt by the hardships caused to the defeated people by the war that he discarded armed conquests.

## Impact of the Kalinga War:

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The War brought great suffering to the Brahmana priests and Buddhist monks.

Ashoka abandoned the policy of physical occupation in favour of a policy of cultural conquest: In other words, **Bherighosha was replaced with Dhammaghosha.**

Under the **influence of Buddhist monk Upagupta**, Ashoka embraced Buddhism.

The subjects were asked to obey the king as their father and to repose confidence in him. Principles of Dhamma were enforced.

Attributed through, **Ambassadors of peace were sent to the Greek kingdoms** in West Asia and Greece. Missionaries for spreading Buddhism were sent to Sri Lanka, Burma and Central Asia.

### **Ashoka and Buddhism:**

Ashoka **embraced Buddhism as a result of the Kalinga War.** His conversion was gradual.

**Dhamma Mahamatras:** Ashoka appointed special officers to speed up the progress of Dhamma.

Ashoka visited the birthplace of Buddha in 241 BC. He also visited holy places of Buddhism like Sarnath, Sravasti and Kusinagara.

Ashoka **sent a mission to Sri Lanka** under his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra, who planted the branch of the Bodhi tree.

**Third Buddhist Council** (250 BC): Convened by Ashoka to strengthen the Sangha. It was **presided over by Moggaliputta Tissa.**

There was a **compilation of Abhidhamma Pitaka.** An attempt was made in this Council to free the Buddhist order from dissidents and innovations.

### **Ashoka's Policy of Dhamma:**

Dhamma was **not any particular religious faith.** It was also not an arbitrarily formulated royal policy.

Dhamma is **related to norms of social behaviour** and activities in a very general sense.

In his Dhamma, Ashoka attempted a very careful synthesis of various current norms.

Primary attributes of Dhamma included **compassion (daya), charity (dana), truthfulness, purity and gentleness.**

The principles of Dhamma were clearly stated in his inscriptions, which are generally **written in Brahmi script and Prakrit language.**

### **Concept of Ashoka's Dhamma:**

Ashoka Dhamma has no formal definition, but as a concept, it is described as a righteous way of living. After converting to Buddhism, Ashoka started propagating dhamma throughout his empire after issuing his 14 Edicts. Ashoka's dhamma is **based on the 10 principles of Lord Buddha**, which are shared below:

To be truthful and uphold total integrity.

To be gentle and kind.

To be liberal while avoiding egoism.

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To be willing to put one's own pleasure aside for the subjects' well-being.

To develop patience.

To live a humble life to inspire the subjects.

To be free of all forms of hatred.

To uphold a high moral standard.

Respect for the public's viewpoint to create peace and concord.

To practice non-violence.

### **Important rock edicts:**

**Major Rock Edict I** - Animal sacrifices and festival gatherings are prohibited.

**Major Rock Edict II** - Describes the Cholas', Pandyas', Satyaputras', Kerala Putras', Ceylon's, and Antiochus' worldwide medical missions for men and animals. Therapeutic plants and trees are planted along the roadways, and wells are dug.

**Major Rock Edict III** - Yuktas (subordinate officials), Rajukas (rural administrators), and Pradesikas (district chiefs) were directed to tour every five years and propagate Dhamma after 12 years after his consecration.

Being obedient to one's mother and father, friends, and relatives, as well as being charitable to Brahmans and sramanas, are all part of it.

**Major Rock Edict IV** - The sound of the drum has changed into the sound of Dhamma, revealing to the people the divine form.

**Major Rock Edict V** - In his fourteenth year of rule, Buddha describes the institution of the dhamma-mahamatras, or Dhamma officials.

It also examines the humane treatment of servants by masters and the treatment of captives by government authorities.

**Major Rock Edict VI** - It explains the monarch's connection with his subjects via the Mahamattas, and the Mahamattas are now expected to report to the king at any time and from any location.

**Major Rock Edict VII** - It promotes religious tolerance throughout the board.

**Major Rock Edict VIII** - In the tenth year of his reign, Asoka made a visit to Bodh-Gaya to view the Bodhi-tree.

**Major Rock Edict IX** - Other rites are pointless save for Dhamma, which entails respect for others, including slaves and servants, as well as presents to sramanas and Brahmans.

**Major Rock Edict X** - It condemns fame and glory and reaffirms the benefits of adhering to Dhamma's philosophy.

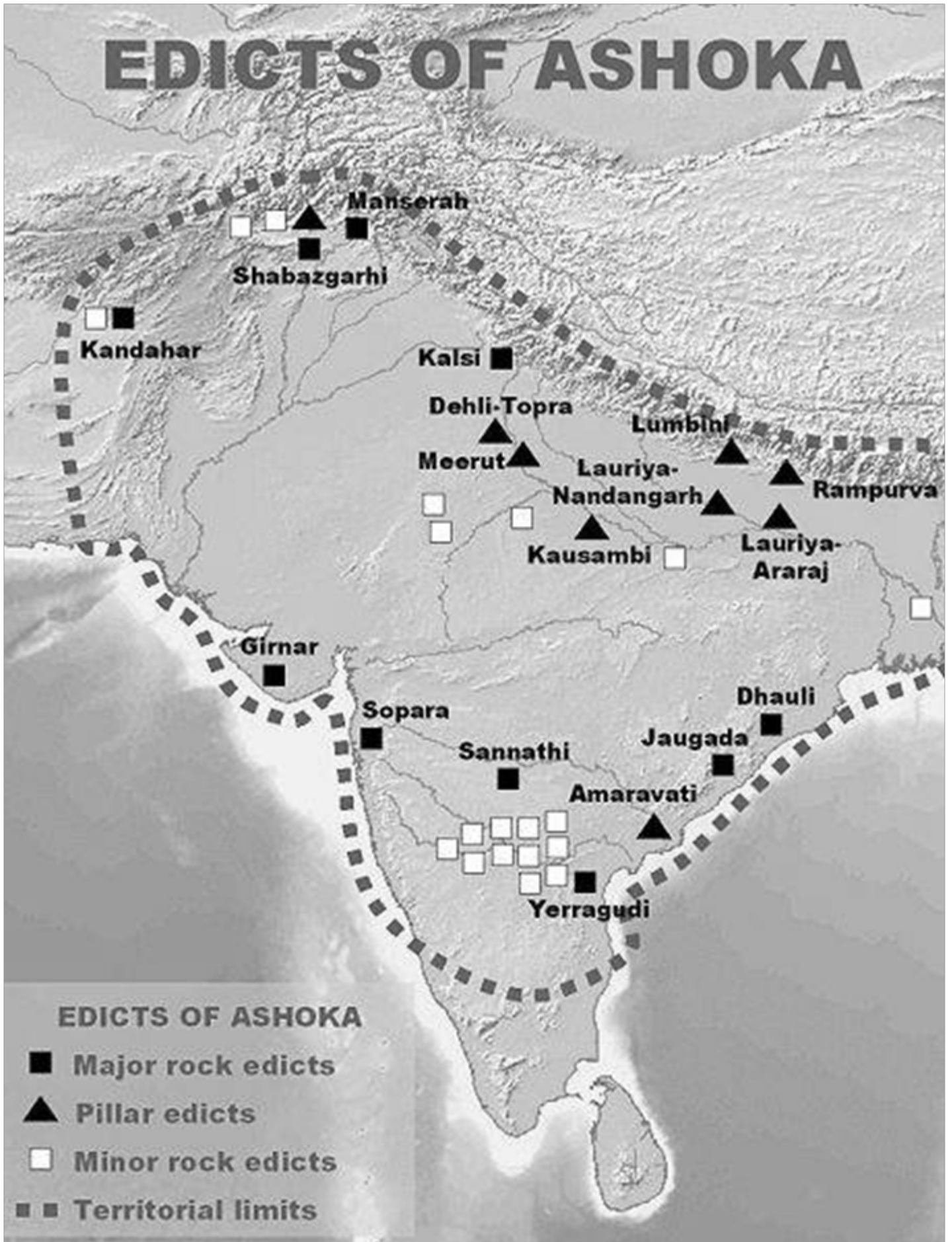
**Major Rock Edict XI** - It is a further clarification of Dhamma policy. It emphasises respect for elders, refraining from harming animals, and being generous to friends.

**Major Rock Edict XII** - It is again another call to sectarianism. This proclamation reveals the king's worry over sectarian warfare and includes his call for concord.

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# EDICTS OF ASHOKA



## Conclusion:

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The great Ashoka was a beloved Maurya Dynasty monarch. The Mauryan Empire lasted 50 years after Ashoka's death before disintegrating.

Brhadrata, the final Mauryan emperor, was assassinated in 185 BCE by one of his generals, Pusyamitra Sunga.

Although his dynasty did not rule for long after his death, the Vedas and his directives, which may still be seen today on Ashok pillars and Ashoka's Palace, carried on Ashoka's ideals and examples.

In addition, Ashoka is the only emperor to surrender after winning a battle. He made this decision after seeing the horror of the Kalinga conflict.