

ASHOKA'S EDICTS: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY**Maya Saini**

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ABSTRACT

The Ashoka Edicts, which were written during the reign of Emperor Ashoka (c. 268–232 BCE), offer a significant window into the governance of ancient India and demonstrate a revolutionary style of leadership. Following the devastating Kalinga War, Ashoka became a Buddhist, which had a significant impact on his political theory and style of government. His dedication to the Dhamma's tenets—non-violence, compassion, and moral behavior—is shown in the edicts. The inscriptions were positioned thoughtfully throughout the Mauryan Empire to make them accessible to a wide range of people and to express Ashoka's ideal of a morally upright and just society. They demonstrate Ashoka's creative approach to statecraft by advancing ideals like social welfare, religious tolerance, and respect for all living things. Ashoka fostered a sense of duty for his followers by viewing his position as a moral leader rather than just a military commander, in contrast to past rulers. Ashoka's decrees promoted accountability and openness within the government in addition to moral and legal standards. He showed his dedication to a system that put the welfare of the people first by appointing Dhamma Mahamatras, officials entrusted with fostering moral government and guaranteeing adherence to Dhamma. Among his initiatives were the construction of veterinary clinics, hospitals, and infrastructure to enhance living standards. Ashoka's focus on cultural advancement and education further demonstrates his all-encompassing approach to administration, which incorporated moral and ethical values into daily life. His legacy is still relevant in today's debates over moral leadership and governance. All things considered, Ashoka's Edicts serve as a monument to the capacity of morally upright and compassionate administration, providing timeless guidance on the value of moral leadership in promoting social harmony and fairness.

Keywords: Ashoka, Edicts, Ancient, Indian Governance.**INTRODUCTION**

An important figure in ancient India, Emperor Ashoka ruled from roughly 268 to 232 BCE during the Maurya Dynasty. He was the son of Bindusara and the grandson of Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Mauryan Empire. At first, Ashoka carried on his family's legacy by extending the empire via military conquests, most notably the bloody Kalinga War in 261 BCE. His views underwent a significant shift as a result of the war's widespread human misery and loss. Following his observation of the devastation caused by the Kalinga conflict, Ashoka converted to Buddhism and gave up violence. His dedication to the Dhamma's core values, which emphasize compassion, non-violence, and social welfare began with this crucial shift. Ashoka aimed to rule not only with military might but also with moral leadership and ethical leadership. He promoted principles like religious tolerance, respect for all life, and the well-being of his subjects by writing a number of edicts on rocks and pillars around his realm.

Ashoka's commitment to public welfare is demonstrated by the hospitals, wells, and rest

houses he built. He also promoted environmental and animal protection, emphasizing his conviction that all living things are sacred. By dispatching missionaries to disseminate Buddhism in nearby areas, he helped the religion flourish even outside of his realm. Many people consider Ashoka's reign to be the heyday of Indian history, marked by a boom in trade, art, and culture. His decrees and regulations established the framework for a system of government predicated on morality and civic duty. As he passed away, Ashoka's impact continued to shape Indian history and motivate succeeding generations. His legacy, which embodies the principles of moral government and compassionate leadership, is still relevant today.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study explores the Ancient Indian Governance during reign of Ashoka,

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on secondary sources of data such as articles, books, journals, research papers, websites and other sources.

ASHOKA'S EDICTS: A SOURCE OF ANCIENT INDIAN GOVERNANCE

One of ancient India's most important emperors, Emperor Ashoka, ruled throughout a period of Indian history. Ashoka, the third Mauryan dynasty emperor, extended his empire to encompass almost the whole subcontinent of India. In addition to creating a vast empire, his reign created values that served as governance by means of moral management. Following the horrific Kalinga War, Ashoka underwent a metamorphosis that led him to give up violence and become a Buddhist, which helped to shape his ideology of governing. His decrees, written on pillars, rocks, and caverns throughout his dominion, offer important insights into the laws, moral the administrative procedures and guiding concepts of his authority. The edicts of Ashoka, written in languages such as Aramaic, Greek, and Prakrit are important historical sources that illuminate his principles of government, social welfare, and religious tolerance, as well as providing a thorough overview of ancient Indian statecraft. The Kalinga War, which took place in 261 BCE, had a significant influence on Ashoka's perspective. This conflict was terrible, killing thousands of soldiers and civilians. The extent of the devastation and agony prompted Ashoka to a deep self-examination, which ultimately led to his conversion to Buddhism. After he adopted Based on Buddhist ideals, Ashoka started advocating for societal peace, compassion, and non-violence as official state policies. His adherence to the "Dhamma" or "Dharma" theory served as the cornerstone of his rule. In contrast to the Ashoka's Dhamma was more of an ethical kingdom than a contemporary religious notion. This code of ethics was not just personal; it was ingrained in the administrative structure of the Mauryan state, acting as a manual for administration. By means of his decrees, Ashoka conveyed his values of justice, welfare, and tolerance to his subjects, making sure that the state apparatus ran on these ethical underpinnings.

The Ashoka edicts were positioned in prominent places, like by important trade routes and close to population centers, in order to make them available to a large number of people. They were mentioned in local dialects and languages to serve the various linguistic communities that made up his kingdom. The selection of these sites demonstrates Ashoka's intention to communicate with his people directly, avoiding middlemen who could misunderstand or weaken his message. These inscriptions provide a rare window into Ashoka's inventive techniques. of

leadership and his wish to establish a rapport with his people. Ashoka addressed a number of issues in his inscriptions. social issues, ranging from moral behavior and interpersonal relationships to elder respect and animal care. The decrees demonstrate Ashoka's dedication to a paternalistic system of government in which the ruler's authority was extended beyond upholding law and order to fostering his people's moral and ethical well-being. This method was revolutionary, since it highlighted the role of the monarch as a moral leader, influencing not only the administrative the social and cultural climate of his dominion. Ashoka responded to the moral and ethical quandaries he saw in society by emphasizing Dhamma. The edicts describe his ideal society, one in which individuals live in harmony, exhibit tolerance, and respect empathy. Ashoka's Dhamma, in contrast to the idea of state religion, was an all-encompassing moral code that accepted principles from a variety of philosophical and theological traditions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, as well as regional beliefs. By embracing such an all-encompassing code of ethics, Ashoka made sure that his policies were in line with the various ethnic and religious communities throughout his dominion. Respecting all faith sects was something he wanted his subjects to do. exhibiting a degree of religious tolerance uncommon in his period. This religious tolerance policy was especially important in an empire with multiple religions and cultures, such as Ashoka's, where sectarian disputes might have caused the state to become unstable. His support for intercommunal harmony and his appeal for His forward-thinking approach to government is demonstrated by mutual respect, where the ruler's attention went beyond administrative effectiveness to foster social unity.

Ashoka's dedication to compassion and welfare also served as a basis for his administrative policies. In multiple decrees, he underlined that it was his duty to ensure his subjects' physical and spiritual welfare. He created a system of welfare facilities, such as wells, veterinary clinics, hospitals, and rest homes, demonstrating his all-encompassing approach to leadership. In addition to human individuals, this welfare system also included animals, since Ashoka held that all living things are sacred. His animal welfare principles, which include limitations ban the killing of animals and funding for veterinary care, demonstrate his commitment to compassion and non-violence. This

focus on social welfare marks a substantial shift from previous models of governance, which mostly concentrated on economic growth and military conquests. By putting his people's well-being first and animals, Ashoka established a model for a kind of government that aimed to address the material and His subjects' spiritual needs and a transcendent moral code boundary between sects. His attempts to spread these ideals throughout his enormous dominion are concretely demonstrated by his edicts. This code of ethics was not just personal; it was ingrained in the administrative structure of the Mauryan state, acting as a manual for administration. By means of his decrees, Ashoka conveyed his values of justice, welfare, and tolerance to his subjects, making sure that the state apparatus ran on these ethical underpinnings.

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initiatives instead of being used for war. Ashoka's dedication to He advocated for non-violence in the court system, among other facets of government. rehabilitation and leniency as opposed to severe penalties. His views on justice and the law were a reflection of his conviction that possibilities for moral change, as he urged his representatives to exercise restraint and empathy in their interactions with the general public. Accountability and transparency were also key components of Ashoka's governance approach. He established a framework of officers referred to as "Moral Officers" or "Dhamma Mahamatras," who were in charge of keeping an eye on the moral behavior of individuals and disseminating Dhamma principles. These officers were in charge of making sure at every level of society, Ashoka's moral laws were followed. The Mahamatras of Dhamma served as mediators that serve as a conduit for the public to voice their complaints between the monarch and the populace and requirements. Ashoka's dedication to moral government is demonstrated by this system of moral oversight, where Officials served as both administrators and stewards of moral principles. By designating these officials, Ashoka established his idea of a morally good society and made sure that the Dhamma's tenets were included.

Into his subjects' everyday life. This method of government, in which representatives were held responsible for both administrative effectiveness and moral rectitude, demonstrating Ashoka's creative endeavors to provide a fair and sympathetic condition. The decrees also demonstrate Ashoka's focus on fostering social peace and moral behavior within society. He advised his followers to exercise temperance, be kind to their family members, and respect their elders. In their private life. Ashoka aimed to inculcate a feeling of moral responsibility by advocating for these ideals. among his people, urging them to coexist peacefully with the environment and one another. His decrees include repeated allusions to qualities that he felt were important, like self-control, gratitude, and honesty, vital to the welfare of the community. Ashoka's emphasis on moral behavior was also evident in his officials, whom he expected to set an example. Ashoka sought to establish a civilization that prioritized moral principles in government. that was just and caring in addition to being affluent. His style of governance exhibits a paternalistic paradigm, in which the ruler's duties went beyond simple governance to include the moral and moral

growth of his subjects. Ashoka's policy of religious tolerance, which he promoted, was one of the noteworthy aspects of his rule. energetically by means of his decrees. He urged peaceful coexistence between individuals of various faiths, stressing that every religion should be respected, and no one should make fun of other people's beliefs. His decrees demonstrate his conviction that there is a universal ethical basis for all religions and that genuine spirituality is found in upholding a range of opinions. In addition to being a matter of official policy, Ashoka's policy of religious tolerance was based on his own belief that all religions help to improve society's moral standing. This rule of A practical strategy for ruling a multicultural empire where religious conflicts could arise was religious pluralism. have caused conflict. By promoting tolerance for all faiths, Ashoka sought to promote harmony and understanding between regard from his subjects. His strategy for religious tolerance is a noteworthy development in ancient Indian administration, since it established a culture of harmony and tolerance for differences. His edicts demonstrate Ashoka's dedication to social welfare, which he believed was a fundamental responsibility of the monarch. He implemented a number of initiatives to enhance his subjects' living conditions, such as building rest homes, wells, roads, and hospitals. He implemented social programs in both rural and urban regions, as he felt that it was the responsibility of the state to provide for all of its people, irrespective of their financial or social standing. His measures intended to improve the welfare of all societal segments and lessen socioeconomic inequalities. Ashoka's His focus on welfare reflects his view of government as a tool to serve the people, not as an instrument for self-promotion. His philosophy of wellbeing stemmed from his conviction that all living things are sacred, as demonstrated by his environmental conservation and animal welfare measures. By putting social welfare first, Ashoka exemplified a visionary style of government in which the ruler's responsibility was to guarantee the overall evolution of society. Ashoka's passion for justice and his attempts to advance equity in the legal system are also reflected in the edicts. He highlighted the need of compassion and forbearance in the administration of justice, urging his officials to Take into account the specifics of each situation and the significance of comprehending the human condition while meeting out justice. The foundation

of Ashoka's legal theory was the conviction that each person, regardless of their deeds, deserves respect and decency. He asked his authorities to prioritize rehabilitation over punishment, promoting a legal procedure that can encourage moral development and readmission into society. This strategy signaled a significant change from other modern empires' frequently punitive approach to justice, stressing a restorative rather than retributive justice model. The edicts regularly highlight the need of authorities acting morally and the requirement for honesty in the legal system. Ashoka thought that administrators and judges ought to live up to the Dhamma's precepts, establishing a model for the public. He sought to establish a legal system by fostering the virtues of justice and impartiality, structure that represented society's moral fabric in addition to upholding the law. This moral foundation for in ancient governance, the judicial system was innovative and established a standard for succeeding administrations. Ashoka's emphasis on officials' moral fiber served as a means of guaranteeing that the legal system was not only an instrument of tyranny but also a way to advance justice and social order.

The focus on moral leadership was combined with the notion that the head of state should be personable and within his subjects' reach. Ashoka promoted a framework where people could air their complaints and look for compensation from their leaders. Direct communication between the ruled and the ruler was a novel idea for its time. Ashoka encouraged his subjects to participate and take responsibility for their actions by creating avenues for criticism and communication. His decrees encouraged citizens to interact with their local representatives and voice their issues, making the government more responsible and responsive. This collaborative method to Governance strengthened the legitimacy of the emperor by fostering a sense of trust between him and his subjects. Of his authority. Apart from advocating for fairness and moral leadership, Ashoka's decrees emphasized the significance of instruction and the sharing of knowledge. An informed populace, in his opinion, was essential to the wellbeing of the state. In keeping with his dedication to education, he promoted the founding of educational institutions and facilities for learning. These educational establishments sought to foster moral principles and intellectual development in young people. By

Ashoka placed a high value on education because he understood that knowledge was necessary to promote critical thinking and moral conduct in the community. His emphasis on education also mirrored his larger idea of an informed people who could participate in the governing process in a positive way. Additionally, Ashoka's decrees highlighted the interdependence of all living things, which served as the foundation for his stance on animal welfare and environmental responsibility. He understood how important nature was to maintaining life and the significance of honoring nature. Among his initiatives were tree plantings, the construction of animal sanctuaries and the outlawing of hunting and animal abuse. Ashoka's conception of ecological stewardship demonstrated his view of government as an all-encompassing undertaking, that included the wellbeing of the entire world in addition to that of people. This method of integration continues to be pertinent as modern nations struggle with environmental issues. The encouragement of the arts and cross-cultural interactions were also part of Ashoka's cultural legacy. By In order to create an atmosphere in which innovation and creativity could thrive, he promoted the growth of artistic expression, architecture, and literature. Ashoka's encouragement of the arts is demonstrated by the building of stupas, temples, and pillars that were both cultural landmarks and emblems of his rule demonstrating the depth of Indian culture. These monuments, which have elaborate engravings on them and inscriptions, developed into significant locations for pilgrimages and cross-cultural interactions, enriching the cultural fabric of the empire.

During Ashoka's rule, Buddhism's growth was also very important in forming the moral and ethical aspects of governance. His dedication to the Buddhist values of kindness, non-violence, and His policies were impacted by enlightenment, as was the broader cultural climate of the era. Ashoka's attempts to encourage Buddhism as a state-sponsored faith, which made it easier to build a network of monasteries and educational establishments that developed become hubs for ethical instruction and philosophical research. This incorporation of Religion and governance established a standard for governing bodies in the future, demonstrating how religious values might educate and direct political leadership. As a monarch who upheld Dhamma's principles,

Ashoka also understood the benefits of diplomacy and connections with other countries. His decrees promote polite behavior and a message of peace and harmony.

ties with states that are adjacent. He sent missionaries and envoys to other countries in an effort to spread the Dhamma's teachings and build respectful diplomatic relationships. This diplomatic policy not only strengthened Ashoka's standing as a kind monarch but also facilitated a time of relative stability and tranquility in the area. His decision to put diplomacy ahead of conflict showed a deep awareness of the necessity of cooperative connections and the interconnectedness of nations. Beyond his rule, Ashoka's edicts have left a lasting legacy that has shaped Indian history and governance for many centuries to come. The values outlined in these decrees are still relevant in current debates over moral governance and leadership. Ashoka's focus on ethical accountability, Religious tolerance and social welfare are still important today, motivating leaders and reformers who want to establish societies that are fair and caring. His belief that government should be used to advance everyone's well-being, acts as a timeless reminder of the ability of leaders to bring about constructive change in the the world. In the present day, Ashoka's decrees provide insightful guidance on the value of moral leadership and the the part that government plays in promoting social peace. They emphasize the need for an inclusive and caring method of government that puts the well-being of all citizens first. The Dhamma's precepts, which support promote social

responsibility, peace, and tolerance, and keep serving as a moral compass for modern society. negotiating the difficulties of governance in a world that is becoming more linked.

CONCLUSION

A turning point in the history of government, Ashoka's Edicts embodied values that cut across both temporal and cultural divides. By emphasizing Dhamma, which is based on compassion, non-violence, and social welfare, Ashoka changed the duty of the king from one of only enforcing the law to one of providing moral guidance and caring for his subjects. His ground-breaking strategy prioritized openness, responsibility, and moral behavior, opening the door for a governing paradigm that prioritized the general welfare of the populace. The edicts demonstrated Ashoka's dedication to social harmony and religious tolerance by not just meeting the people's urgent needs but also promoting a culture of respect for differing views. Discussions on contemporary governance are still influenced by this tradition of compassionate leadership, which highlights the significance of moral values in establishing just societies. Ashoka's vision lives on as a poignant reminder of the ability of leaders to bring about constructive change via social consciousness and moral responsibility. Ashoka is an important figure in both ancient and modern discourse on governance since his decrees are not only historical relics but also eternal teachings in the quest for a just and equitable society.

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