

A study on Ashoka's inscriptions with the special focus on Maski Rock edict

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ABSTRACT : *In the modern world there is a big challenge to know our past. While analyzing the Indian history, Ashoka stands first for his social, religious as well as his inscription works through which he spread his Dharma to whole world. Same time most of the part of India historian have been found numerous inscriptions of Ashoka with the name of Devanampriya and priyadarshi. Every inscriptions used tells us about most of religious and welfare measures of Ashoka. For the first time the Maski rock edicts clarified that Devananpriya is none other than Ashoka the great. By studying about this paper we can understand that why Ashoka place first in history by following non-violence after kalinga war.*

KEYWORDS – *Devanampriya, engraved, inscription, rock edict,Priyadarshi*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ashoka was the most famous Mauryan ruler. He was the first ruler who tried to take his message to the people through inscriptions. He came to the throne in 273 B.C. When his father Bindusara died he was the viceroy of Ujjain. He was crowned 4 years after. His achievements are described in a number of his edicts. Edicts are Ashoka's orders carved on rocks and pillars discovered in different parts of India.



Fig .1. King Ashoka

Ashoka was the only one king in history who gave up war in favour of peace and tolerance. Ashoka reigned over most parts of present-day India. After a number of military conquests, his empire stretched from present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan in the west to the present-day Bangladesh and Assam in the east and as far as northern Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. Ashoka conquered the kingdom named **Kalinga**, which none of his ancestors could have done.

In 261 B.C. Ashoka made war on Kalinga. 150000 soldiers were captured in the battle. 1, 00,000 people died during the battle. Seeing death and suffering the battle had caused, Emperor Ashoka was depressed. He was saddened by the realization that innumerable, innocent people who had been in perfect harmony with their fellow- human beings and were leading simple, virtuous lives, had either died or been wounded and separated from their loved ones. This was the reason that after conquering Kalinga, Ashoka experienced deep regret and, inspired by 'Dhamm', advocated peace. He called himself '**Devanampriya**' (beloved of the Gods) and '**Priyadarshi**' (of happy vision) and followed the principle of conquest by love instead of conquest by force.

II. ASHOKA'S INSCRIPTIONS

The earliest inscriptions in India are the Edicts of Ashoka. Thus, Ashoka was called as the father of inscription. The most authentic source of Mauryan history is the edicts of Ashoka. Most of his inscriptions were engraved on rocks, boulders, cave walls and pillars of stone. Their language is Pali with provincial modifications. The script used is Brahmi except in the north-west where Kharoshti is used. The inscriptions of Ashoka are of two kinds. The smaller group consists of declaration of the king as a lay Buddhist, to his church.

These describe his own acceptance of Buddhism and his relationship with Sangha. The second groups of important inscription consist of major and minor rock Edicts and pillar Edicts. They describe his famous policy of 'Dhamma'. These inscriptions were installed in prominent places, either near towns, or on important trade and travel routes, or in the proximity of religious centers and places of religious importance. The inscriptions of Ashoka may be grouped as follows in accordance with their subject matter and order of chronology which they seem to imply. Some important Ashoka's inscriptions are listed below:

1. **Fourteen Major Rock Edicts**

A series of 14 major Rock Edicts of Ashoka inscribed on large boulders were discovered at the following eight places:- Girnar (Gujrat), Kalsi(Dehradun), Yerragundi(Andhra Pradesh), Mansehra(Pakistan), Sapara(Maharashtra), Shahpazgarhi(Pakistan), Jaugada(Orrisa) and Dhauli(Orrisa)

2. **Minor Rock Edicts** : These minor Rock Edicts and inscriptions have been found Siddapura, Jatinga-Rameshwara, Bairat, Brahmagiri, Maski, Sahasaram, Rupnath, Govinath and Palaigunda.

Northern Edicts Of the two northern Edicts, the one found at Taxila is written in Aramaic script and the other found at Kandhar is bilingual, being inscribed in Greek and Aramaic.

3. **Bhabru Edict** : It is inscribed on a boulder, now in Calcutta, which was removed from the top of a hill at Bairat.

4. **Seven Pillar Edicts** : Seven pillar Edicts exists at Allahabad- Kosam, Delhi-Topara, Delhi –Meerut, Rampurva, Lauriya- Araraja, Lauriya – Nandangarh and Nigali – Sagar. These edicts contain administrative instructions to governors, subject of Dhamma and enumerate the regulations regarding the promotion of Ahimsa.

5. **Minor Pillar Edicts** : They are three in number. They lay down the punishment for schismatics, so that the Sangha may be united and long duration. The minor Pillar Edicts have been found at Sanchi, Saranath and Kaushambhi. The fourth minor Pillar Edict is known as the Queen's Edict.

6. **Two Kalinga Rock Edicts** : Two Kalinga Edicts are special supplements to the series of fourteen Rock Edicts. These Edicts are found at Dhauli and Jaugada. These two Kalinga Edicts laid down the principles on which the newly conquered province of Kalinga was to be governed.

7. **Two Commemorative Pillar Inscriptions** : They have been found at Rumminei(Lumbini) and at Nigliva, in the Nepalese Tarai. These inscriptions definitely prove that Ashoka went on a pilgrimage of the holy places connected with the life of Buddha.

8. **Cave Inscriptions**: Three cave inscriptions of Ashoka have been found in the Barbara Hills near Gaya in Bihar. The cave inscriptions were engraved between 257 and 250 B.C. These inscriptions tell us that these caves were dedicated by Ashoka to the monks of Ajivikas sect

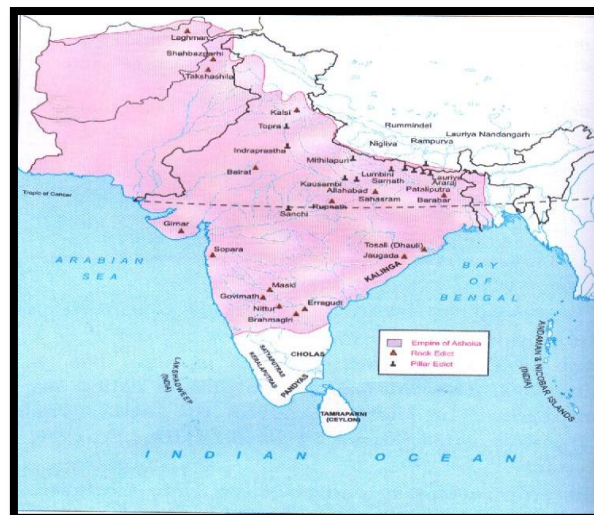


Fig.2. Ashok's Empire and inscriptions

III. MASKI INSCRIPTION –CASE STUDY

1.LOCATION: Maski is a village and an archaeological site in the Lingasugur taluk of Raichur district of the state of Karnataka, India. It lies on the bank of the Maski river which is a tributary of the Tungabhadra. Maski derives its name from Mahasangha or Masangi. The site came into prominence with the discovery of a minor rock edict of Emperor Ashoka by C. Beadon in 1915. It was the first edict of Emperor Ashoka that contained the name Ashoka in it instead of the earlier edicts that referred him as *Devanampriya*, *Priyadarshi* This edict was important to conclude that many edicts found earlier in the Indian sub-continent in the name of

Devanampriya, *Priyadarshi*, all belonged to Emperor Ashoka. The edict is engraved on a rock-face of Durgada-gudda.

Maski is also the place on the Raichur Doab which was also under the hegemony of the imperial Chola empire and it was here that Rajendra Chola I defeated Jayasimha II, the Western Chalukya ruler in battle in 1019-1020 AD.

2.EXAVATION : Maski was studied initially by Robert Bruce Foote in 1870 and 1888. In 1915, C. Beadon, a mining engineer, discovered Ashoka's rock edict here. In 1935-37, the archaeological department of Hyderabad state explored this region and in 1954, Amalananda Ghosh excavated this place on behalf of the Archaeological Survey of India.

3.HOW TO REACH THIS SITE: Maski is well connected by road. It lies on Bangalore-Gulbarga road. Maski is around 430 km from Bangalore, 80 km from Raichur and 22 km from Sindhanoor. Maski can be reached by Government buses from all Major towns and cities in Karnataka. Raichur Junction, 80 km away, is the nearest railway station.

4.STORIES WRIT IN STONE : The Maski edict found nearly a century ago is important because it changed experts' understanding of Indian history. The edict revealed beyond doubt that *'Devanampriya'* was none other than the legendary Mauryan emperor, Ashoka the great, writes Srinivas Sirnoorkar

British gold mining engineer C Beadon did not, in his wildest dreams, think he would soon be creating history when he went for a stroll around the hillocks of Maski in Raichur district's Lingsugur taluk. Way back in 1915, on January 26, he chanced upon a minor edict on a boulder in a cavern. This triggered a debate on the use of the title *'Devanampriya'* found in a number of edicts across the country. Historians and scholars of India and abroad were thrilled over the discovery, because, for the first time, it revealed beyond doubt that *'Devanampriya'* was none other than legendary Mauryan emperor Ashoka, the great.

The Maski edict in Prakrit language, carved in Brahmi script and dated 256 BC, changed the very course of historians and experts' understanding of ancient Indian history. The pseudonym *'devanampirya'* found in a number of edicts had, till the British engineer found the Maski edit, remained a mystery. Research scholars struggled hard to unearth the mystery but met with no success. The Maski edict clearly told the world that it was Ashoka who had got the inscriptions carved under the name *'Devanampriya'*. The inscription has a mention of *'Devanampriya Asoka.'*

5.ABOUT INSCRIPTION: The inscription remains a dharma shasana, an edict exhorting people to follow the tenets of Buddhism. Though the inscription is dated around 256 BC, it took over 2,100 years for it to see the light of the modern world. For over two millennia, it has withstood the vagaries of weather and onslaughts of nature. It has become increasingly difficult to protect and preserve this rare edict. It is already reported that a number of prehistoric finds in the Maski hillocks have been vandalised by miscreants and treasure hunters.

Apart from associating the title *'Devanampriya'* with Ashoka, the inscription suggests the spread of Mauryan rule up to the Krishna valley of north-eastern Karnataka. Some historians believe that Ashoka must have attached some special significance to the region because he chose to reveal his name only in this inscription and nowhere else. It is also said that Ashoka had sent his emissaries including his kith and kin to Sri Lanka to spread Buddhism, apart from making a visit to Maski. The inscription also makes one believe that Prakrit was the widely spoken language and Brahmi was a well-understood script in ancient Karnataka. Above all, it suggests that Buddhism was an important religion of the time.

One may also surmise that the town was a major urban centre in the remote past as is evident from the traces of iron and gold workings covering large parts of the region. It is one of the most important prehistoric sites in India, and various kinds of Neolithic implements and artifacts, megalithic burials, graves containing funerary urns made of burn clay, vast traces of ancient metallurgy in the form of ash mounds, etc have been found. The abundant beads found here indicate that Maski was famous for its bead industry centuries before and was a major bead exporter to the West.

In spite of such a glorious past and the town's position on the historical and heritage map of India, Maski remains largely unknown because no efforts whatsoever have been made to preserve, protect and promote not only the inscription but also other prehistoric finds and artifacts. Experts feel there is a need to carry out more excavations and conduct extensive research in and around Maski to uncover some more fascinating aspects of ancient and prehistoric times.

6.THE MESSAGE: A reconstruction of the edict reads thus: "For two and a half years I am a lay worshipper of Buddha. (For more than)...I have gone to...the Sangha...I have gone to...Before in Jambudvipa...now they have become mixed...This purpose is even able to be attained by a lowly person who is joined with dharma. It is not only to be seen that a high person might attain this. It is to be said to a lowly person and a high person...Doing thus...Thus (it will be) long standing and will increase (up to) one and half." The edict is highly fragmented.



Fig.3.Maski Rock edicts

IV. CONCLUSION

Ashoka has been regarded as a great emperor. The greatness of Ashoka lay not only in the vastness of his empire and that of governing it well but more than that, in his character, and the principles and ideals which he tried to pursue as a ruler. Ashoka therefore, occupies a place not only amongst the great rulers of India but among those of the world. He treated his subjects as his own children and attempted not only for their material progress but also their moral and spiritual progress. Thus, Ashoka is the most brilliant figure in the history of ancient India. His reign marked a new epoch in political and cultural history of India. He proved a new tone to Indian life a tone which persist even till today. The historical value of the edicts is immeasurable. They indicate the extent of Ashok's Empire his personal religion, his dharama and policy of Toleration, his administration, his character, people's literacy growth of Mauryan Art and foreign relations. By studying these inscription we can clearly understand about Ashoka's ideas and personality and greatness.

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Field Visit to Maski