

A study on Ashoka's Inscriptions with special reference to Karnataka

Dr. B.Suresha

Associate Professor Of History
Govt.Arts College (Autonomous),
Chitradurga, Karnataka– 577501

Abstract: *Ashoka was the most famous king in the Ancient India. No figure in Ancient Indian history is so familiar to us and no one leaves such an impression of a great personality as Ashoka. This is because he was the first monarch to declare war as an evil. He was the third ruler of the Maurya Dynasty. He lived from 302 to 232 BCE . He was the ruler who tried to take his message to the people through Inscriptions.*

Key Words: *Ashoka, Ancient Indian history, Inscriptions, Kalinga Buddhist, Bramhagiri Gavimath, Jatingameshwara, Maski Nittur, Palkigundu, Siddapura, Karnataka*

Ashoka was the most famous king in the Ancient India. No figure in Ancient Indian history is so familiar to us and no one leaves such an impression of a great personality as Ashoka. This is because he was the first monarch to declare war as an evil. He was the third ruler of the Maurya Dynasty. He lived from 302 to 232 BCE . He was the ruler who tried to take his message to the people through Inscriptions. He issued number of inscriptions for the first time. Thus, he was called as ' The father of Inscriptions'. He struggled hard for the welfare of the people.



Bramhagiri Edit of Ashoka, at Bramhagiri, Molakalmuru-Tq, Chitradurga-Dist.

Ashokan edicts do not tell us anything about his early life. According to Buddhist texts, he was the grandson of the Chandragupta Maurya, founder emperor of the Maurya dynasty. He was born to Bindusara and his queen Devi Dharma in 302 B.C. He was very brilliant at the level of his childhood. So, his father appointed him as the Governor of the Avanthi. Laterly he was appointed as Viceroy of Ujjaini and Taxila. Here he met and married Mahadevi (Devi). He had two children Mahendra and Sanghamitra.

Ashoka's accession was obviously not smooth. It took him four years to silence his step-brothers in the struggle for throne. It is very difficult to settle the controversy regarding the first four years of the reign of him. Ashoka ascended the throne in 273 B.C. but his coronation took place after four years in 269 B.C. The above accounts show that, at the beginning he was a cruel man later on changed himself. The Ceylonese Buddhist monks exaggerate that Ashoka came to the throne after the massacre of his ninety-nine step-brothers. But, his inscriptions prove that, his brothers and sisters were alive during his reign. His coronation took place around 269 B.C. After securing his position, he look forward to expansion the Mauryan kingdom. Ashoka led a war against Kalinga, a feudal state in about 261 B.C. Kalinga and its adjoining regions in the south, which had been parts of the Maurya empire under Chandragupta. probably became independent. In the eighth year of his reign, he conquered Kalinga. An account of his war and its

effects is given by Ashoka himself in rock edict XIII. The conquest materialized at a great cost of life and untold misery of the people. So alarming and shocking was the damage that Ashoka decided to do away with war. He slowly turned to Buddhism for solace, hence Ashoka's period is known as the golden era of Buddhism.

Ashokan Edicts :

After the *kalinga* war, he published edicts all over his empire to publicize his policies. These were engraved on boulders, stone pillars, stone slabs and cave walls. They are of great value for the historian to know about Ashoka as well as Mauryan period. These edicts were dispersed throughout the area of Modern India (except the extreme southern parts of South India), Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Ashoka issued more than thirty three inscriptions. These were divided in to four categories according to their subject matter, medium and Their chronology .

Minor Rock edicts – These were inscribed at the beginning of his reign.

Minor pillar edicts – These (5) were inscribed on pillars of Ashoka.

Major Rock edicts – These (14) were containing Principles and ethics.

Major pillar edicts – These (7) were inscribed at the end of his reign.

Minor Rock Edicts: These were inscribed at the beginning of his reign. Major rock edicts of Ashoka inscribed on large boulders. They are situated in Kandahar of Afghanistan, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andrapradesh, Karnataka, Beirut temple, Barabar caves and etc. frontier areas of his empire.

Minor pillar Edicts : These (5) were inscribed on pillars of Ashoka. Minor pillar edicts may have been chronologically made parallel with the Major Rock edicts of Ashoka. The Minor pillar edicts have been found at Saranatha and Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh), Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh), Rummindei, Nigali Sagar (Nepal) and etc.

Major Rock Edicts : Ashoka issued a set of fourteen major Rock edicts which are founded in various parts such as Shahbazgarhi (Pakistan), Girnar (Gujarath), Sopara (Maharashtra), Erragudi (Andrapradesh), Dhauli (Odisha), Sannathi (Karnataka) and etc. These were inscribed on large rocks. These inscriptions were concerned with practical instructions in running the kingdom such as the design of irrigation systems and descriptions of Ashoka's beliefs in peaceful moral behavior.

Major pillar Edicts : Ashoka issued a set of seven major pillar edicts which are founded in various parts such as Meerut, Delhi and Kousambi (Uttar Pradesh), Lauria Nandanghar, Lauria-Araraj and Rampurva (Bihar), Ranigat (Pakistan), Kandahar and Pul-i-Darunteh (Afghanistan). These were exclusively engraved on pillars of Ashoka.

Ashokan Edicts in Karnataka : Karnataka is one of the state which considered as heartland in the historic point of view. About 25000 inscriptions were found here belonging to various dynasties which are ruled over Karnataka. Some of them belonging to Mauryan period. Until now, Nine sites which are belonging to Ashokan edicts were found in Karnataka. They are as follows,

Bramhagiri - Chitradurga district.

Gavimath - Koppal district.

Jattingarameshwara - Chitradurga district.

Maski - Raichur district.

Nittur - Bellary district.

Palkigundu - Koppal district.

Sannati - Gulbarga district.

Siddapura - Raichur district.

Udegolam- Bellary district.

All of the above sites which are having inscriptions of Ashoka are geographically situated in middle and northern part of Karnataka.

Brahmagiri Edict: The sites of Brahmagiri, Siddapura and Jatinga-Rameswara are situated on the left and right banks of the JangiHalla or ChinnaHaggari River where it crosses the Molkamuru Taluka of the Chitaldrurga District of Karnataka. They are all in the neighbourhood of Siddapura. Both MRE I and II are found inscribed, in all three places. The inscription of Brahmagiri is better preserved and is incised on a block of gneiss at the northeast base of the hill of that name. Brahmagiri is a granite outcrop rising some about 600 feet above the plane and measures around 500 m East-West and 100m North-South. It is well known for the large number of megalithic monuments that have been found here. A couple of minor rock edicts of Asoka dating back 250 B.C. were found here as early as 1891. This discovery was made by B.L.Rice. These rock edicts indicated that the locality was termed as Isila and denoted the southernmost extent of the Mauryan empire. The Brahmagiri edict consisted of 13 lines which is in Brahmi script of Pali language. The inscription was written by Chapada in Kharosthi characters. A word in the edict is written in Kharosthi. The inscription is issued from Suvamagiri at the word of the prince (Aryaputra) to the mahamatras (Officers) at Isila. This place is identified as Isila in this edict.

Jatingaramesvara Edict. The third inscription is on the western side of the Jatinga-Rameswara Hill about three miles (4.83 km.) to the northwest of Brahmagiri. The inscription is cut on the floor of the steps leading to the entrance of the Jatinga-Rameswara Temple. Interestingly, the figures of elephant is engraved on the Ashoka edict at Jatingaramesvara. It is engraved one, besides, the footprints of Buddha are also engraved at the place. In the first part of edict, even though, after two and half years was in the fold of Buddhist principles but he involved himself in sangha and devotedly worked out well in the propagation of Buddhism in the whole of Jambudvipa (India). Even he wished in making to his neighbours to understand the principles of Buddhism and code of conduct. This he ordained after 256 days of his journey for the propagation.

Siddhapur Edict: The Siddhapur edict was known as “Emmi Timmanagundu Edict. It is in Brahmi script of 22 lines of which the last lines are in Kharosthi reads as “Ekathataviye cha-pada.” The name of several places including suvamagiri, Isila etc are mentioned. In his rock edict II the independent border kingdoms, the cholas, pandyas in plural, satiayputa, mostly Atiyaman of the Kongu region and Keralaputa with whom, the Mauiyan king maintained good relationship.

All the three inscriptions open with the words *Suvamagirite Ayaputasa Mahamatanam cavacana Isilasi Mahamata arogiyam vataviya / hevam cavataviya / (Devanampiyeanapayati) (Devanampiyehavam aha).*

In a free translation this will read as follows: ‘As desired by the prince and mahamatras at Suvamagiri, we wish the mahamatras of Isila good health and address them as follows (thus ordains Priyadarsi / thus says Priyadarsi)’. Thus the edicts reveal the existence of the seat of a prince and his councilors (mahamata) at a place called Suvamagiri and the existence of an administrative division called Isila within which the sites of the inscriptions lie.

Maski Edict : Maski is also one of the important Archaeological site in Karnataka. It is situated in Raichur district. It lies on the bank of the Maski river, a tributary of Tungabhadra. The edict of Maski is discovered 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 **Devanampiyepiyadasi**. This edict was important to conclude that many edicts found earlier in the Indian sub-continent in the name of Devanampiyepiyadasi, all belonged to Ashoka.

In the Maski edict, Ashoka says that after two and half years also he was an upasaka, then afterwards started to show interest and started the propagation. Even the laymen can attain the Buddha hood, according to him, he acts on it hence, one more interesting feature of this edict is through this edict, the real name came to be noticed as the Devanampriya Priyadarshi Raja Asoka.

Nittur Edict : The Nittur inscriptions-I and II are situated 1½ kms south of village Nittur, Shirguppa Taluq in Bellary district. These two inscriptions were noticed by E. Visvanatha, a junior engineer, Office of the Senior Geologist at Bellary. Later, these inscriptions were studied by the D.C. Sircar. The edicts are situated at the base of a rocky hillock. Edict-I has seven lines covering an area measuring 4' high x 18½' long. Letters are 3½" to 8" high. The inscription is in Brahmi script and language is Sanskrit.

Palkigundu and Gavimath Edicts : Palkigundu and Gavimath are the two adjacent sites, lies in Koppal district of Karnataka. The distance between these two is just 3.5 kms. Gavimath or Gavisiddheshwara Matha is on the important Math in Koppal district. It is situated in just behind the hooded hillock sits outskirts of Koppal Town. These two edicts are in Prakrit, written in Brahmi script. Palkigundu edict talk about Ashoka becoming closer to the Sangha and becoming more ardent. Further it says any person, small or big, can achieve something if they put the effort.

Sannati Edict : Maski is one of the Prominent Archaeological site in Karnataka. It is situated in Gulbarga district. It lies on the banks of the Bhimariver. It is famous for the Kali and Chandralapameswari temples. In 1986, when the roof of the Kali temple was collapsed. However, it revealed four Ashoka edict in the temple. These edicts were written in the Brahmi script of prakrit language.

Udegolam Edict: Udegolam is situated in Tekkalakot taluk of Bellary district. The inscriptions of Udegolam belonging to Ashoka are found seven months after the discovery of Nittur inscriptions. Here also two inscriptions were noticed, called Edict-I and Edict-II. These edicts are also in Brahmi script and the language is Sanskrit. Edict-I is in six lines, inscription is damaged and most parts are not legible. Edict-II is in seven lines and in fairly good condition. These edicts, also depicts the name of Ashoka

Message of the Edicts :

Ashoka published many inscriptions throughout his reign. He gave a message to us through his inscriptions. " More than 2½ years have passed since I am an upasaka. A year or more back (I was not very zealous). I am devotedly attached to Buddhist clergy. I am after visiting the Sangha. In that period (formally in Jambudhipa those Gods did not mingle with people with people are mingling now. It can be achieved by the low born also if they are very much associated with dharma. Gods are not connected only to the (uda) high class people but also can be achieved by (khudake) poor man. cavataviya - it is told that both. If you follow my proclamation both can achieve the goal. If you follow this it is going to go on increasing and become everlasting".

Theme of the Edicts : In many of his edicts, Ashoka's preaching the religion of Ahimsa or non-violence, which he followed throughout his life. He was always interested to see that, his subjects should be law-abiding as well as virtuous, under his personal care and observations, his subjects were always dutiful to their parents, offered gifts to the poor and deserving persons and practiced non-injury which led a pious life. He was always anxious for the welfare of his subjects. He played a great role in the religious history of the country and devoted a greater part of his time and energy to the welfare of the religion, but he never neglected his royal duties and his primary task of governing his kingdom. As a prince, even before the Kalinga war, he showed his great ability as a soldier and a statesman. He not only showed himself as a religious person but he also proved himself how capable he was as an administrator. It is analysed that the intensity of Ashoka's devotion to matters spiritual is better understood when it is remembered, the kind of men his father loved to gather round himself. It is said in the seventh 16 pillar edict that kings in times past

also desired that “men might be made to progress by the promotion of Dhamma, Bindusara might well claimed a place among these past rulers. From him and some of the brilliant men, who graced his court, Ashoka may well have imbibed ideas in later times, when he came into close touch with the Buddhist Sangha. The reign of Bindusara may with plausibility be regarded as prelude to that of his great son. Ashoka’s edicts show that although he accepted Buddhism as his religion and sacrificed everything for its purpose, he tolerated other religions also, under the shade of his umbrella, almost all the prevailing religions flourished.

The Extent of the Empire in the South :From the study of the Ashokan edicts which are found in Karnataka shows that, Chitradurga district was the boundry of the Mauryan empire during his time in the South. Ashokan edict-II quoted that, Cholas, pandyas and Keralaputras were ruling beyond the kingdom of Ashoka. Of these the Cholas, pandyas and Keralaputras were ruled in Tamilnadu and Kerala. Thus Ashoka’s empire stretched right to the borders of Tamilnadu and Kerala. The location of his edicts in Chitradurga district in Karnataka proves the inclusion of Southern parts of this state in his empire

Conclusion :Ashoka is one of the most remarkable personalities in the history of India. He 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. By studying these inscription we can clearly understand about Ashoka’s ideas and personality and greatness.

Important Edicts

Brahmagiri Edict :

Transliteration

- 1 (A) [S]uv[a]mnagiriteayaputasamahamatanam cha vachan[e]naIsilasimahamataarogiyamvataviyahevam cha vataviya (B) Devanampiyeanapayati
- 2 (C) adhikaniadhatiyani v[a]saniyahakam....sa[ke] (D) no tukhobadhamprakamtehusamekamsavachharam (E) satireketukhosamvachharem
- 3 yam mayasamgheupayitebadham cha me pakamte (F) iminachukalenaamisasamanamunisaJambudipasi
- 4 mi[s]a devehi (G) pakamasa hi iyamphale (H) no hiyamsakyamahatpenevapapotavekamamtukhokhudakena pi
- 5 paka[m]i ... nenavipulesvagesakyearadhetave (I) e[t]ayathayaiyamsavanesavapite
- 6 mahat[p]a cha imam pakame[yu]tji amta cha maijaneyuchirathitike cha iyam
- 7 [paka](J) iyam cha athevadhisitivipulam pi cha vadhisitiavaradhiyadiyadiyam
- 8 [vadh]isiti (K) iyam cha savan[e] sav[a]p[i]tevyuthena (L) 200 50 6 (M) se hevamDevanampiyee
- 9 aha (N) mata-pitusususus[i]taviyehemevagaru[su] pranesudrahyitavyamsacham
- 10 vataviyam se imedhamma-gunapavatitaviya (O) hemevaamtevasina
- 11 achariyeapachayitaviyenatikesu cha [ka]m ya..rahampavatitaviye

Nittur Edict - I

Transliteration

1. (I) Deva[nam]piyo he[vam] aha (/*) (II) adhvi(dhi)kaniadhatiyani [va]sani yam..
2. [u]pasake [no cu] kho b[a]dhampakamtehusamekam [sa]mvacharam (/*) (III) satireketukhosamvachare yam mayasanghe u
3. puyi[te].. ca me pakam[t]e (/*) (IV) imi[n]a kalenaamisa....munisaJambudipasimi[sa] [deve]-
4. [hi] (/*) (V) pakamasa hi [iya]m pha[le] (/*) (VI) [no] hi iyam [mahapten=eva] sake papotave (/*) (VII) kama[m] [khuda]ken=api paka9ma0mi[ne]ua vi[pule] [svage]
5. sake aradhayitave (/*) (VIII) [sa] [e]tayaiyam a[tha]ya [savane] savapiteyatha [khu]dakaca ma[ha]pa ca imam pakameyvu am[t]a pi ca me [jane]y[vu] ti (/*)

6. (IX) cira-thitike [ca] i[ya]m pake(ka)mehoti (/*) (X) imam ca v[ip]u[le] vadh[isiti] [badha]m cavadhistiavaradhiyadiyadh[i]yam [vadhisi]jiti (/*) (XI) iyamcasavapite[ne]
7. [sa]vapite v[yu]thena [200 50 6] (/*) (XII) [sava-pa]thaviyamca viva[s]iteti (/*) (XIII) yathara[j]a Asoka aha tatha(tha) ti (/*)

Nittur Edict – II

Transliteration

1. (I) [r]ajaAsokohevam aha (/*) (II) tupheanapayathaRajuke (/*) (III) [se] [a]napayisati j[a]napadamcajanamRathikanica (/*) (IV) mata-pitusususita [v]iyati (/*) (V) [h]evamagarusu (/*)
2. (VI) panesucadayitaviye[e] ti (/*) (VII) ime dharm-gunapavatitaviya [t]i (/*) (VIII) .. [tu]pheRajukaanapayatha (/*) (IX) se dan[i] Devanampiyasavaca[ne][na] [a]na[pay]i[sa]t[i] (/*) (X) se hemavaana[pa]yatha (/*) (XI) he[meva] [ca]
3. Bamhananica hath-arohanacakaranakinicayug-a[cariyani] ca (/*) (XII).....[yadisi] [po]ranapakit[i]..(/*) (XIII)..[ana][pa]y[i]sati (/*) (XIV) ..sususitaviyati (/*) (XV) iyamapacayitaviyeti (/*) (XVI) acaliyeapacayi-
4. taviyacususitaviyaca (/*) (XVII) ye acaliti (/*) (XVIII) [i]yam [ya]tharaham [pa]vatita[v]iy[e] ti y[a]d[i]siporanapaki[t]i (/*) (XIX) yatha.
5. hisatirekheveyatathapavitav[i]ye [ti] (/*)

Gavimath Edict -

Transcription :

1. Devānaṃpiyeāhasātirekāṇiadhātiyāṇivasāṇiyamsumiupā-
2. sake no cu khobāḍhampakañtesamvacharesātirekeyam me saṅheupetibāḍham
3. came pakante se i māyamvelāyamjambudipasiamisādevāsamānā
4. mānuse hi se dānimisākaṭāpakamasaesaphaleṇo hi eyam mahateṇevaca
5. kiyepāpotavekhuḍakenapipakamaminēnavipulepicakiye swage ārādhayitave e-
6. tāyacaathāyaeyamsāvaṇekhuḍhakācaudārācapakamaṃtutiamtā pica jāṇantuciraṭhi-
7. tike capakamehotueyamcaathevadhisitivipula (le) cavaḍhisitidiya
8. ḍhiyam pica vaḍhisitīti

SannatiEdict - I

Transliteration

1. ...pa...lana...
2. ...aka [te] na he...
3. ...tam anta pasadaca cha...la pasa...
4. ...galahati save atapisada...kita a...
5. ...gaatapasadamsesamavayeva pa sa ma
6. ...savapasadabahusutacakiyaya [na] gama
7. cama nu ta athakitisalava
8. mahavatavacarajimikaanebini

SannatiEdict – II

Transliteration

1. eyamdhammalipidevanampiyena ...vasa...
2. nohisavate save ghata [te]...
3. tasatasa a [-] samadhuliyaye...[jane] tatha[...]
4. kalanamvaalochayatulipa [i] kalapa [la] dhavata

UdegolamEdict - I

Transliteration

1.yam hakamupasake (/*) [no] tukhobadhampa[kamte]....
2.[ba]dhamca me pakamte/imina cu k[a]lena / amisa....
3. ...[no] hi iyam ma[ha]pten=eva sake pa....
4.etyaiyam [a]
5.[cira-th]itikecaiyampakame....

6.[savane] savapite [vyu]....

UdegolamEdict - II

Transliteration

1. (I) raja AsokoDevanampiyohavamapa(ha) (/*) tupheanapayathaRajukam (/*) se anapayisiti j[a]napadam [ca] janamRathikani 2. ca (/*) mata-pitusususitaviyeti (/*) hevam=evagarusu (/*) panesuca [da]yitha(ta)[vi]ye ti (/*) imedhammagunapavatitaviyeti (/*) [he]
3. vamtupheRajukamanapayatha (/*)se ta(da)ni Deva[nam]piyasavacanenaanapayisatiti (/*) [ta] ta hemavaanapayathacati (/*) Bambhananica hath-aro[ha]
4. [ni] cakaranakanicayug-a[ca]riyanica (/*) [tu] phenivesayathaamt[eva]sisi(ni)yadisipora[napakiti] (/*) [se anapa]yisa[tica] (/*) [susu]sitaviyeti / iyam
5. caapacayitaviyeti / se acariyasaapaca[yi]va(ta)viyecasususitaviye (ca/*) ye pi caacariyasanatika / tasu pi yathalahampavatitaviyeti (/*)
6. hemeva [ca] pati[v]as[i]su pi yatha[la]ham pavatitaviye / ya[di]siporanapakiti (/*) yathaiyam [hi] sati[re]kehuveyatathapavativa(ta)viyeti (/*) hevamtupheanapayatha
7. nivesayathacaamtevasiniti (/*)

References :

1. **Fieldwork report**
2. **EpigraphiaIndica**, Vol No. XXXIV part I
3. **Epigraphiacarnatica**, VolNo.XI
4. Dikshitar, Ramachandra V. R. (1993) [1993]. *The Mauryan Polity*. MotilalBanarsidass Publications. ISBN 81-208-1023-6.
5. Hiremath R.C., (1993), *Buddhism In Karnataka*, New Delhi.
6. Hultsch, E.(1925), *Corpus InscriptionumIndicarum*, Vol. No.1 "Inscriptions of Ashoka", London.
7. Rangaswamy, C.V . (1994). *A Political & cultural History of India*(up to 1206 A.D) Vijaya Book Depot & Publication, Gadag
8. Smith, Vincent Arthur (1998) [1998]. *Aśoka: The Buddhist Emperor of India*. Asian Educational Services. ISBN 81-206-1303-1.
9. . Sharma I. K. and Varaprasadrao, (1993), *Early Brahmi Inscriptions from Sannati*. New Delhi.
10. Thapar, Romila (2012). *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780199088683
11. ShadakshariahR.M.and research student, Jayashree. B. Deshmanya. (2004), *A New Buddhist site Excavated*, Gulbarga.
12. Sundara A., (1999), *Buddhist Archaeological remains in Karnataka some recent finds*, Q. J. M. S. Vol-XC, Bangalaoe.