

## The Great Emperor Asoka's Rock Edict In Delhi

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### Introduction

It's a great pride for India, the Great Emperor Asoka was born here who had propagated and expanded Buddhism almost throughout Asian Subcontinent and the people of the human world remember him with great respect. He was credited and honoured for raising Buddhism to the principal religion of the world. The famous writer of Britain H.G.Wells is considered "The Great Emperor (Cakerverty Samarat) Asoka (c 273BCE -232 BCE)" as one of the six greatest personalities -Tathāgata Buddha, Socrates, Aristotle, Roger Bacon, and Abraham Lincoln and The Cakerverty Samarat Asoka<sup>i</sup> of the world in the history since the time immemorial. The human world including India did not know anything about him before 1837 C.E. when the English scholar and Assay Master, James Prinsep (1799 CE-1840CE) was enabled to decipher the script of inscriptions with the help of bilingual coins of the Indo-Greek rulers of North-West Jambudvīpa and outcrop the truth over the myths spread through out of India about these inscriptions. Cakerverty Samarat Asoka was the legendary personality of Jambudvīpa who ruled over the country for about thirty eight years with rule of Dhamma; the righteousness. He was well established Buddhism which he propagated as Dhamma in the history of Asian Subcontinent. He was a spontaneous, ardent and patron of Buddhism who had left behind thousands of inscriptions; those are spreading teachings of Dhamma in his entire empire; Jambudvīpa for the benevolence of all sentient beings and also among the neighbouring countries. Eighty four thousand monuments in the form of edifices, monasteries, inscriptions, *stupas*, *catyas*, caves etc. were formed during his kingdom through the length and breadth of Jambudvīpa. Out of these inscriptions 36 are found in India, two in Nepal, two in Pakistan and two in Afghanistan so far. Majority of these inscriptions are written in *Dhamma lipi* or *Asokan lipi* in Pāli language and some of them are in Kharosthi, Aramaic and Greek scripts; also some of them are in bilingual inscriptions. The Greek, Kharosthi and Aramaic scripts inscriptions are found in central Asia particularly present Pakistan and Afghanistan.

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<sup>i</sup> Sen, Amulyachandra; 1956, The Indian Publicity Society; Calcutta

The authentic and principal source of ancient history is found in these inscriptions, engraved on rocks, pillars and walls of the caves which were engraved by the efforts of the Great Emperor Aśoka those are known as edicts. These inscriptions are proclamations, sermons and exhortations of Buddha. The Great Emperor of Jambudvip Aśoka is the one and only one emperor in the world who established direct dialogue to his subjects through these inscriptions in the ancient period. These inscriptions could not be changed, altered, subtracted from or added to through the ages as in the way of oral tradition can be done easily.

These inscriptions may be classified according to the language used; contents, extent and the surface used upon which they are engraved. But they are popularly classified according to surface used upon which they are engraved mostly as under:-

(A) Rock or Stone Edicts:-

Rock or Stone Edicts are further classified as Minor Rock Edicts (MRE) Such as at Brahmagiri, Chitradurga District of Karnataka state. The minor rock edicts are particularly refer to Aśoka's personal life, his spontaneously involvement in Buddhism and essence of Dhamma and (Major) Rock Edicts (RE) such as Dhauri in Odisha. Major Rock Edicts are refer to main policies regarding to administration and religious contents.

Two Separate Kalinga Rock Edicts (SKRE); The Dhauri Rock Edict existed in Odisha and Bairāt Buddhist Text Edict (BBTE) and also usually called the Bairāt Edict existed near Jaipur, Rajasthan.

(B) Pillar Inscriptions (PI):-

Inscriptions engraved on Pillars made of Chunār Stone are known as Pillar Inscriptions (PI). Pillar Inscriptions are found in Delhi, Rummidei (Nepal), Nigalisagar, Rampurva etc. Theses inscriptions are particularly refer to propagation and spread of Dhamma teachings of the Tathāgata Buddha.

(C) Edicts On The walls of Caves:-

These inscriptions are particularly referred to inscriptions engraved on the walls of caves such as Barābara Cave Inscriptions (BCI) found in the Makhdumpur region of Jehanabad District, Bihar near Bodhagaya.

No doubt that these inscriptions or edicts of The Great Emperor Aśoka engraved on rocks, pillars and on the walls of the caves are occupy a very significant place in the Indian history and present sufficient and most authentic evidence of Aśokan reign. These inscriptions gave a complete picture of the administrative policies of the Great Emperor Aśoka and his conquests in wars he fought during his reign. They also depicted means and ways to spread and propagate Dhamma.

They also throw light on the extent of Aśoka's empire and also his Inscriptions are admirable specimen of art as well.

### **A Minor Rock Edict in New Delhi**

Delhi is not spare by admirable specimen of art of the Great Emperor. Out of these numerous illuminating Rock Edicts of The Great Emperor Aśoka, one is found on the Aravallis Hills in situ, engraved on a tilted Rock in Bāhāpur village<sup>ii</sup> (Coordinates-28.55856°N 77.25662°E) of South Delhi near Nehru Place in March 1966. A sensational and more elucidating for Delhi's past are the results of the recent excavation at Bāhāpur village in the vicinity of Purana Qilla. This is about half kilometre away from Jagatjyoti Buddha Vihara, Raja Dhir Sain Marg Delhi. Name of village Bāhāpur is no longer in used for this locality but now various colonies are developed in the vicinity of Bāhāpur Village including Amar Colony, Greater Kailash and Nehru Place etc.

This inscription is first noticed by Sardar Jung Bahadur Singh, a building contractor who informed The Archaeological Survey of India. Archaeologists M.C. Joshi and B.M. Pande of The Archaeological Survey of India visited and examined the found inscription on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1966 and were able to identify the same as "Minor Rock Edict of Aśoka" similar to the other 13 edicts in different parts of the country such as Kalasi in Dehradun, Uttrakhand, Bairat in Jaipur, Rajasthan etc. The edict

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<sup>ii</sup> M.C.Joshi and B.M.Pande; 1967, A Newly Discovered Inscription of Asoka at Bahapur, Delhi, The journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland.

is badly damaged in the middle of the inscribed portion during the process of just mentioned efforts to protect and improve the site. The said rock edict was recorded as the 14<sup>th</sup> epigraphic version.

This Rock Edict established glorious historical relation of ancient city with the Aśokan Era (c 273BCE -232BCE) and The Tathāgata Buddha. These inscriptions are written in Pāli, a language of conversation used by the people of Jambudvip since 900BCE. The edicts were intended to teach the people; the teachings of Buddha for the benevolence of all sentient beings.

This is the first rock edict in situ which was found in Delhi in 1966 CE and other two stone pillar inscriptions were brought from their original sites in Meerut, Uttar Pardesh and Topra, Ambala Region, Haryana by Firoz Shah Tuglaq (1351-1388 CE). This area of epigraphy overlooking the Yamuna and not so far from the ancient site of Purana Qila; this area is known for *Kuru as Kurupardesh*. The Tathāgata Buddha expounded *Kurus* people at *Kammāsdhamma Nigamo* with *Mahāsatipaṭṭānasuta*<sup>iii</sup> in *Kurupardesh*. This has clearly brought out the fact that this was not only an ancient developed city but also it was an important town of commercial and cultural activities. The other cities, commercial centres and important *Janpads* of *Jambudvipa* were linked through Grand Trunk Route for trade and culture.

This edict of Bāhāpur, Delhi is categorized as a “Minor Rock Edict-XIV” that was written in ‘*Dhammalipi*’ or ‘*Aśokanlipi*’. This edict was protected by an ugly iron grill and concrete shelter has been built around there by Archaeological Survey of India but now it is covered by glass cabinet and pathway was made for the people to visit closely this site and stone wall erected around this area to avoid entrance of animals and unwanted elements.

This inscription is about 75 cm in length and 76 cm in breadth. It consisting ten lines of irregular letters. Some of the letters are not clearly visible and so cannot be deciphered till now.

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<sup>iii</sup> DN-22 and MN-10



Old Grill Protection of Edict



New Glass Protection of Edict

Asokan Inscription at Bāhāpur, Delhi (Minor Rock Edict XIV)

### Text of the said Edict

Text (From inked estampages at Bāhāpur, Delhi; collected by M.C. Joshi and B.M. Pande, Archaeologist; published in their paper.)

- “ 1. *devānāmpiye ahā sātilekāni aḍhātiyā(ni)*  
2. *vasāni yam haka upāsake na (no) ca bāḍham palakante (sā)tileke*  
3. *savachale amhamaye sangham upayā(te) bāḍham ca me*  
4. *palakante etena amtalena(Jam)būdipasi(a) misā devehi*  
5. *samita manūsā misā deve(hi) pa(la)kama.....na ha(hi)esa*  
6. *mahatveneva cake pāpotave khudake(na) palaka.....*  
7. *svage sakā ālādhetave imāye a(thā) yaiyam(sā) vane.....*  
8. *Khudakāca uḍālāca palakamaṁ(tu) (amtā) pi ca janaṁtu*  
9. *cilathitike palekame hota(tu) e(tha) ca athe vipula pi vadhisati.*  
10. *piyaḍhiyam pivaḍhisati”*

Translation:---

1. Beloved by the divine beings speaks as such
2. It has been a little more than two and a half year passed since I (Asoka) become a lay devotee (upāsaka) but until now I have not been exerted myself in the cause of Dhamma very zealously.

3. But now that I have joined the sangha for more than a year passed, I have been exert myself in the cause of Dhamma greatly become very zealous.
4. Now the subjects of Jambudvipa who have not associated with the divine beings united with them.
5. This is indeed the result of my zeal and it is not just the great who can do it.
6. Even the humble and great if they are zealous, they can attain arhathood.
7. And this proclamation has been made with this aim.
8. Let both humble and great be zealous last long has been proclaimed two and hundred and fifty six times by the Dhamma,
9. Then this zeal will increase, it will greatly increase, it will increase upto one and half times.
10. This message has been proclaimed two and half times the king while on tour.

### **Conclusion**

Rediscovery and translation of literature for ancient period of Jambudvipa by European scholars in the nineteenth century that had unearthed the truth about the legendary histories; particularly of The Great Emperor Aśoka and his contribution made towards Buddhism. It was not just the religion and philosophy of Buddhism that surface out from the dark phase but also its various legendary histories and biographies. Amongst this class of literature, one name that comes out to light was that of Aśoka, the Great Emperor of Jambudvipa who ruled the country for about thirty eight years and his Mauryan Dynasty rules the country ( from 322BCE to 185BCE) about 137 years in the ancient period. Aśoka embraced Buddhism and there after ruled the country with *Dhamma*; wisely and justly for welfare of not only human beings but also for sentient beings. He had engraved Dhamma rules on rocks and stone pillars to create direct dialogue to the subjects of his kingdom at various places where the people easily got in contact of such inscription and edicts. During his rule 84000 monuments in the form of edifices, pillar inscriptions, rock edicts, monasteries, viharas, stupas, caves etc. were built and developed. These inscriptions and edicts are remaining unread for thousands of years. But In 1937CE, James Prinsep, a British Army Master succeeded in

deciphering an ancient inscription on a large stone pillar in Delhi and thereafter other similar inscriptions had been read out for some time one after the other. This success created curiosity among the scholars to read out all the known inscriptions.

The Minor Rock Edict at New Delhi is the sufficient evidence to prove that Aśoka was a Buddhist in which he himself said that he was a lay disciple of Buddha for two and half years but not benefitted much more even than he joined the ordain (saṅgha) and become Monk for one year he achieved much more progress in Dhamma.

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