

# An Encyclopaedia in Spatio-Temporal Dimensions



# An Encyclopaedia in Spatio-Temporal Dimensions:

*Biography, Culture, and Religion*

By

Patit Paban Mishra

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An Encyclopaedia in Spatio-Temporal Dimensions:  
Biography, Culture, and Religion

By Patit Paban Mishra

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**Dedicated**

**To My Mother, Vinodini Devi (01-11-1936 – 18-04-2023),  
wife of the late Professor (Dr) Artatrana Mishra.**

**She is no more.**



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## PREFACE

The most populous nation and the seventh largest in land area in the world, India (Bharat) encompasses 3,287,590 square kilometres, stretching from the Bay of Bengal in the east to the Arabian Sea in the west. It shares borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar (Burma), the People's Republic of China, Nepal, and Pakistan. The very idea of India has existed since early times. It has occupied an important place with its history, tradition, culture, and philosophy. Its spatial dimensions kept changing until it became independent on 15 August 1947. Although the concept of India as a nation-state emerged after British colonial rule, the idea of Bharata has been present from time immemorial. Deriving from geography, history, and culture, a sense of unity has been present throughout its history. Despite the presence of diverse elements, a unifying force is evident in India's literature, music, dance, art, behavioural patterns, and societal norms. The concept of Bharatavarsa (the idea of Bharata as a territorial entity) is a part of Indians' common psyche.

A nation of considerable ethnic and religious diversity, India has twenty-two officially recognised languages and about sixteen hundred dialects. It is a secular country, with the majority Hindus forming about 83.5 percent of the total population. India has the third-largest number of Muslims after Indonesia and Bangladesh, constituting approximately 13 percent of the population. Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and Parsis (Zoroastrians) make up the rest of the population. Human activity began in India about half a million years ago. Archaeological excavations have brought to light the urban civilisation commonly referred to as the Indus Valley civilisation, concentrated in India and modern-day Pakistan, during the period between 2700 and 1500 BCE. The Vedic civilisation preceded the rise of cities in India. The invasion of Alexander of Macedon (356-323 BCE) in 326 BCE was followed by the Maurya Empire (c. 324-200 BCE), the first unified empire to cover most of present-day India and Pakistan. Ashoka was the greatest of the Mauryan emperors. A period of chaos and foreign invasions by the Scythians, Parthians, Huns, and others followed until political stability was achieved under the Gupta dynasty (320-500 CE). In south India, the Pallavas and Chalukyas emerged as powerful kingdoms during the seventh century. Harsha (606-647), Sasanka (606-637), and Pulakeshin II (609-642) carved out kingdoms in north India, Bengal, and south India,

respectively, in the seventh century. In the early medieval period, spanning the eighth to fourteenth centuries, north India witnessed the coming of Islam from the northwest. Muhammad bin Qasim (who invaded Sind in 712), Mahmud of Ghazni (who raided India from 1000-1025), and Muhammad of Ghur (who reigned from 1192-1206) brought the north Indian subcontinent under their domain, and it was the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate (1192-1526) that resulted in the consolidation of Muslim power. India's Muslim conquerors were drawn to the subcontinent by the desire for territorial conquest, the lure of wealth, and religious zeal. Powerful regional kingdoms such as the Palas, Senas, Ahoms, Gangas, and Cholas rose and fell in different parts of India. The Gajapati Empire of Odisha and the Vijayanagar Empire of the south survived until the 1560s. The Mughals (1526-1857) brought almost all of north India under their control, and Akbar (1542-1605) was one of India's greatest monarchs.

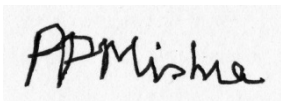
From the eighteenth century onward, the Mughal Empire began to crumble. The Marathas, under the intrepid leader Shivaji (1630-1680), had already encroached on Mughal power. The arrival of the Europeans as traders and later as seekers of political power sounded the final death knell. The British East India Company became the master of the subcontinent. By adroit diplomacy, warfare, and political conspiracy, the British subjugated the subcontinent. The Indian Mutiny, or the First War of Independence (1857), gave a serious jolt to the colonial power, and the administration was transferred from the East India Company to the British throne. Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi (1869-1948) used nonviolence and mass movements to shatter the foundation of Britain's Indian empire. A tenacious struggle for freedom by people of all classes, led by nationalists such as Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945), and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950), resulted in India's independence on 15 August 1947. However, the subcontinent was partitioned at that time between India and Pakistan. After independence, India faced problems arising from the partition of the British Empire into India and Pakistan, the merger of princely states, the influx of refugees from Pakistan, communal riots, and the Indo-Pakistan War of 1947-1948.

Eradicating poverty, maintaining steady economic growth, curbing inflation, and fighting overpopulation have remained some of India's major challenges. With an HDI ranking of 134 and 11.5 percent of people (official figure) living below the poverty line, India has to do much more to alleviate the condition of its people as a whole. India would shine on the international stage if policymakers increased the pace of reforms, took steps to curb corruption, and provided its citizens with basic amenities.

Despite various odds, India has maintained a democratic system. The country is showing signs of development with steady economic growth, and the level of poverty is being reduced. India is also striving for a permanent seat on the Security Council. The largest democracy in the world has a bright future in the coming years. It aspires to achieve the status of a developed nation in 2047, the hundredth year of Indian independence.

Knowing about India is not only fascinating but also knowledge-enhancing. Volumes have been written about India with all its complexities. In this age of AI, information about anything in this world can be available in a jiffy. Therefore, what is the need for another book with temporal dimensions from early times to the contemporary period? Encyclopaedias still hold importance for several reasons: structured information on a vast range of subjects, accuracy, and reliability. They can be used as a starting point for future research. The references and bibliography make readers aware of innumerable source materials for further consultation. On the whole, an encyclopaedia on India serves as comprehensive resource material.

The author is grateful to his family members for their unstinted support, encouragement, and care. My special thanks go to Adam Rummens, Alison Duffy and Amanda Millar from Cambridge Scholars Publishing Ltd, England, for all his help.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Patit Paban Mishra'.

Patit Paban Mishra,

01.11.2024.

Professor Patit Paban Mishra, Previous Professor Sambalpur University and Northern University of Malaysia. Senior Academic Fellow of ICHR. Senior Academic Consultant of OSOU Sambalpur.

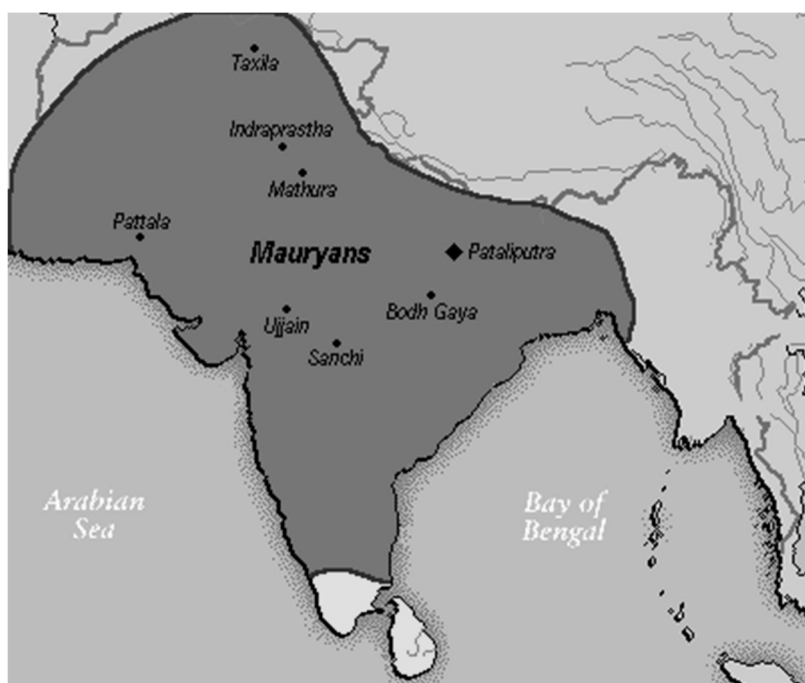


Figure 1. Mauryan Empire.

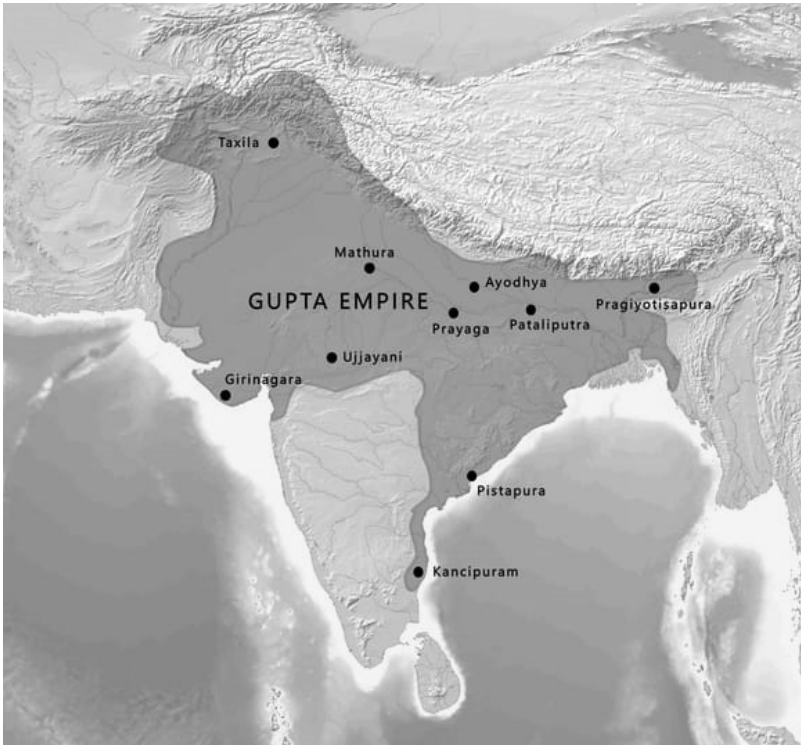


Figure 2. Gupta Empire.



Figure 3. Moghul Empire.

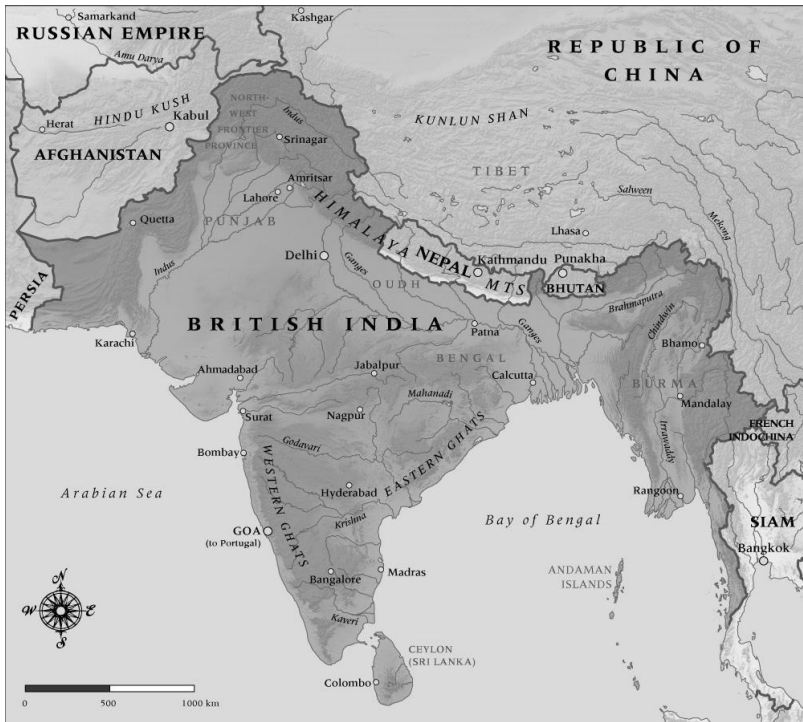


Figure 4. British India.

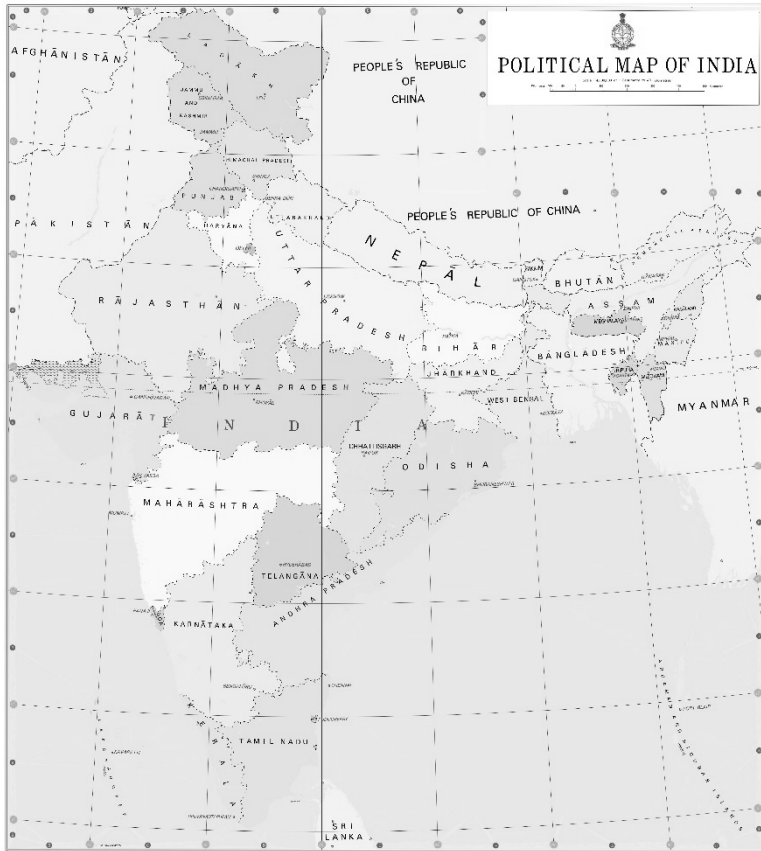


Figure 5. Political Map of Contemporary India.





# **ANCIENT INDIA**

# PART 1. ANCIENT INDIA (GENERAL)

## Ajatasatru

Ajatashatru (r. 493-462 BCE) was the son of the Magadhan Emperor Bimbisara (558-491 BCE) and the Lichchhavi princess Chellanadevi of Vaishali. He was previously the governor of the province of Anga. A highly ambitious person, he imprisoned Bimbisara. A sense of guilt prevailed over him, and when he was going to set his father free, Bimbisara committed suicide out of fear. This narration from Jaina sources differs from the Buddhist ones, which claim that Ajatashatru was a patricide. The new emperor followed a policy of military expansion. He faced the wrath of his maternal uncle Prasenjit, the King of Kosala, who wanted to avenge the murder of his brother-in-law Bimbisara. The protracted war ended after Prasenjit returned to Kashi and gave his daughter Vajira in marriage to Ajatashatru. In eastern India, the powerful confederacy of Vriji, comprising 36 republican states and two kingdoms, posed a challenge to Magadhan supremacy. The long conflict of sixteen years (484-468 BCE) ended with the defeat of the confederacy. Ajatashatru made his empire safe from Avanti rule under Chanda Pradyot by massive fortification and buttressing the defence of the capital city, Rajagriha.

Most probably, the emperor was a Jain but later converted to Buddhism. The Samaññaphala Sutta mentions the king's meeting with Lord Buddha to seek solace. Ajatashatru convened the first Buddhist council on the hills of Rajagriha. One of the Bharhut sculptures contains the label "Ajatashatru bows to the Lord." The emperor was succeeded by Udayabhadra. Buddhist sources blame Udayabhadra for killing Ajatashatru.

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## **Archaeological Survey of India**

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was established by the colonial government of British India. Alexander Cunningham (1814-1893) corresponded with Viceroy Lord Canning (1812-1862) in November 1861, which resulted in its founding. In independent India, its headquarters were shifted from Shimla to New Delhi. Placed under the Culture Department of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, its basic tasks include the exploration and excavation of archaeological sites, as well as the preservation and conservation of monuments. The ASI was empowered by various acts of the colonial and Indian governments, such as Act XX of 1863, the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act 1904, the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958, and the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act 1972. Any person or institution must obtain a licence from ASI to excavate.

India has been divided into 24 Circles for the exploration, preservation, and protection of archaeological sites and monuments. Without conforming to provincial boundaries, the Circles were created for better academic input and administrative management. The large task force of ASI consists of archaeologists, conservators, numismatists, epigraphists, and scientists. Supervising about 3,636 monuments is a stupendous task for it. The ASI has published numerous works in the form of reports, journals, and books, which have become valuable source materials for researchers. Young persons taking up archaeology as a career are trained at the Institute of Archaeology. The ASI possesses an excellent photo gallery and 41 site museums.

Since its inception, the ASI has launched excavation work in the South Asian subcontinent. Cunningham was the first Director General (DG) from 1871 to 1885. The ASI worked on the Bharhut stupa (reliquary) located in the Satna district of Madhya Pradesh and also discovered the ancient city of Mahasthan in Bengal. It undertook extensive excavation work in the subcontinent when Mortimer Wheeler (1890-1976) was DG from 1944 to 1948. The excavation of Dholavira, Gujarat, since 1990 has produced important facts relating to the Harappan period. Underwater excavation was undertaken in 2005 relating to the seventh-century CE port city of Mahabalipuram. Material culture from the Kushan period onwards has been established after the excavation in Harsha-ka-Tila, Haryana.

In 2001, the ASI set up the Underwater Archaeology Wing (UAW). The cultural heritage of the nation buried deep beneath the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal was brought to light. The UAW collaborated with the Indian Navy to undertake its projects. The ASI is also involved in the restoration and preservation of some famous temples such as Konark and Jagannath in Odisha. The ASI's assistance was sought to establish claims that Hindu temples were demolished to construct mosques in Ayodhya, Mathura, and Varanasi.

The ASI has expanded its tasks abroad, producing excellent results. The conservation of monuments in Myanmar, the restoration of Hindu temples in the southern part of Vietnam (ancient Kingdom of Champa), the study of the Borobudur complex of Indonesia, and Angkor Wat of Cambodia are some of the outstanding works of the ASI in Southeast Asia. The ASI has taken up projects in Egypt, Nepal, Bahrain, and the Maldives. It has done admirable work in the mural preservation of monasteries in Bhutan. Restoration of the Bamiyan Buddha, Khwaja Parsa Mosque of Balkh, Kafir Qila, and Qila Faridan were its projects in Afghanistan.

The ASI has done immense service towards archaeological and historical research for the last one hundred and fifty years, preserving priceless treasures of South Asia.

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## **Arthashastra**

The Arthashastra (the science of material gains), a Sanskrit text on law, administration, and statecraft, was authored by Chanakya (350 - 275 BCE), also known as Kautilya or Vishnugupta. A treatise on realism in politics, it has been compared to a somewhat similar work, *Il Principe* (The Prince) by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). A mentor, counsellor, and Prime Minister of the founder of the Mauryan dynasty Chandragupta (r. 322-298 BCE), Chanakya was educated at the University of Takshashila (Taxila) and later migrated to the capital city of Pataliputra due to repeated Greek invasions. He met Chandragupta, and they had a lifelong relationship. The *Arthashastra* was written during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya. Pragmatic and well-versed in the art of statecraft, Chanakya assisted the Mauryan Emperor in carving out an extensive empire with a well-organised administrative setup. He remained Prime Minister under the son of Chandragupta, Bindusara (r. 298-273 BCE). According to legends, he was burnt to death in 275 BCE by a jealous minister called Subandhu.

The *Arthashastra* was based on the text written by Chanakya, with later additions evident from linguistic variations and administrative terms relating to the post-Mauryan period. The *Arthashastra* consists of fifteen ashikarnas (books), subdivided into 150 chapters and 180 sections. The first five mention the administration of the state, the next eight deal with behaviour with neighbouring states, and the last two belong to the miscellaneous category. Chanakya described in detail the duties of the King, officers of the state, code of laws, different functions of persons according to caste, salaries of state officials, crime, elaborate spy networks, and punishment against rebels. He prescribed different kinds of laws governing marriage, inheritance, debt, ownership of property, and assault. The *Arthashastra* advocated harsh and cruel punishment for the guilty, including torture for eliciting confessions from criminals, and capital punishment was sometimes accompanied by torture. The chapter on war discussed its preparation, nature of troops, methods for defeating independent kingdoms, occupation of enemy capitals, encouragement to

one's own army, etc. The duties of a King and the education of a Prince were mentioned in great detail. A Prince was to observe celibacy until the age of sixteen, undergo training in military affairs, and keep company with learned persons. A King should abjure anger, lust, vanity, arrogance, greed, and excessive joy to achieve success and a disciplined way of life. The work cited examples of kings like Ravana and Duryodhana, who met their end because of their uncontrolled nature.

Chanakya was neither moral nor immoral in his prescriptions. His amoral approach and recourse to any means to achieve ends place him in the category of political thinkers who were not idealists but realists. In his scheme of the pursuit of power, there was no place for morality or religion. A King aimed to achieve the status of a Chakravarti (ruler of the world) and could use any means to justify this end. The King of the neighbouring kingdom was an enemy, and the enemy's enemy was an ally. He advised the King not to have three advisors. One counsellor would be powerful, two would plot against the King, and three would check each other! The *Arthashastra's* treatment of a powerful minister was harsh, bordering on devilish methods. If a minister became powerful, the King could incite his son to turn against the father and even kill him. Afterwards, the son would be punished for patricide. Alternatively, the minister would be told that the Queen was in love with him, and when he approached the Queen's residence, the minister would be put to death. In the harem, the safety of the King was to be the priority. The residential complex should be fireproof and have secret escape routes. Persons of unquestioned loyalty should be employed in the King's quarters. Female guards armed with bows were to ensure the King's safety. The mahanasika (chief cook) should supervise the daily meals of the King. Birds should be fed first to check for poisoned food. Physicians and knowledgeable persons should detect traces of poison in medicines and beverages. The King should emphasise Varta (agriculture, cattle breeding, and trade) to enrich the royal coffer. The accounting system in the *Arthashastra* was elaborate, computing various types of income in the context of price fluctuations and distinguishing between real and fictitious ones. Likewise, the book narrated different types of expenditures and fixed as well as variable costs.

The *Arthashastra* contained detailed information about minerals, metals, jewellery, the plant kingdom, the animal world, agriculture, and a host of various subjects. The Indians had sound knowledge of metals like arakuta (brass), vrattu (steel), kamsa (bronze), tala (bell metal), and tapu (an alloy of tin and copper). The job of akaradhyaksha (superintendent of Mines)

was to supervise the mines, which were to be a state enterprise alone. Chanakya talked of manidhatu (gem materials), different kinds of precious stones, and jewellery. Specific nomenclature existed for different types of jewellery; sirsaka (for the forehead), avaghatika (pearls on both sides of a centrally embedded bigger pearl), indracchanda (necklace with 1008 pearls), manavaka (string of 20 pearls), ratnavali (ornament of gold and gems), etc. There were also kachamani (artificial gems), which were imitated by colouring glass.

It has become fashionable to treat the *Arthashastra* as the foundation of the totalitarian Maurya state, similar to the Qin dynasty of China or Nazi Germany. Apart from the different nature of these regimes, the Mauryan state was a centralised one, and its kings were determined for the welfare of the subjects. The prescriptions enshrined in the *Arthashastra* mentioned the duties of an Emperor. The approach of this political treatise was realist, necessary for the survival of the state. It would be unfair to project contemporary notions onto a work written more than two thousand three hundred years ago.

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## **The Edicts of Ashoka**

The Rock and Pillar Edicts of the Mauryan ruler Asoka (r. 273-232 BCE) are inscriptions engraved on pillars, gigantic boulders, and caves. These are dotted around various places in the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan. One of the notable rulers of world history, Devanampiya (Beloved of the Gods) Piyadasi (one of amiable looks) Raja (King) Asoka, has left a blueprint of his ideas and ideals in the form of Edicts. Reflecting the benevolent attitude and activities of the Emperor, the Royal Proclamation in the edicts was issued after the fateful Kalinga war of 261 BCE. The large-scale devastation due to war moved Asoka greatly, leading him to relinquish war in favour of victory by dhamma (righteous path/piety). The concept of dharma (religion in Sanskrit) or dhamma (Prakrit version of dharma) of the Emperor denoted a path of self-righteousness based on moral and ethical principles, rather than religion. The Asokan Edicts dispersed throughout his empire were messengers of dhamma. These earliest records of epigraphy in India were living testimony to the greatness of the Emperor, who was very much concerned for the material and moral welfare of his subjects. He not only insisted on high ethical standards for his subjects but also set a high ideal for himself. Asoka declared, "All men are my children." The dhamma of Asoka, based on certain moral principles and civic responsibility, became the way of life for an individual. He initiated the policy of dhamma with the precise motive of unifying political units and people professing different faiths. This pragmatic approach resulted in gaining support from the rising merchant class and the general populace. Asoka's dhamma became a cementing force for the Empire. As a testimony to the Emperor, the Indian government adopted the four-lion capital of the Asokan pillar as its national emblem when the country became a Republic on January 26, 1950. The wheel of dhamma was placed at the centre of the Indian national flag.

Asoka was coronated in 269 BCE and looked after the various affairs of the state, expanding the territorial extent of the Empire. After eight years, the Emperor turned his attention towards the Kingdom of Kalinga, located on the eastern coast of India, corresponding roughly to modern Odisha and parts of northern Andhra Pradesh. Kalinga was a powerful and prosperous kingdom due to oceanic trade. The famous Kalinga battle was fought in



261 BCE, resulting in the victory of the Magadhan Emperor. Kalinga was incorporated into the Magadhan Empire with headquarters in Tosali. However, the killing of about one hundred thousand people, imprisoning one hundred and fifty thousand, deporting many persons, and the large-scale devastation due to war moved Asoka deeply. A remorseful Asoka had a change of heart. Although Buddhist traditions speak about Asoka's conversion to Buddhism by monk Upagupta after the Kalinga war, it is likely that the Emperor adopted the new religion after a great deal of thinking. It was a gradual process. Asoka, as a patron of Buddhism, changed the course of history not only in the Indian subcontinent but also in the Far East and Southeast Asia.

Asoka began to engrave his ideas on Rocks and Pillars after the Kalinga War. These inscriptions were the vehicles for circulating his agenda. Eschewing the earlier path of Brahminical faith, Asoka envisaged a new doctrine. It was quite different from the avowed principles of Buddhism; the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, transmigration of souls, and others. He propagated certain moral precepts, which were common to all Indian religions. Inspired by Buddhism to a large extent, he moved in a new direction of lofty ideals about ethics and morality. Asokan edicts engraved on Rocks and Pillars throughout his empire were messengers of dhamma.

The inscriptions of Asoka are distributed over an extensive area encompassing present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, and India. James Prinsep first translated the Asokan text into English in 1837, and the identification of Piyadassi with Asoka was confirmed in 1915 after the discovery of an inscription. About 42 inscriptions on rocks, pillars, and caves are presently known. These are written in three languages: Prakrit, Aramaic, and Greek. The four scripts used are Brahmi, Kharosthi, Aramaic, and Greek.

Asoka inherited from Bindusara an extensive Empire with a well-organised administrative setup. He looked after the various affairs of the state for eight years before turning his attention towards Kalinga. The large-scale destruction and deaths changed the heart of the Emperor, attracting him to Buddhism. Buddhist missionaries were dispatched all over the continent as well as abroad. Sona and Uttara were sent to the Burma (Myanmar)-Thailand region. The brother and sister team Mahinda and Sanghamitra went to Ceylon (Sri Lanka). India's cultural contact with Southeast Asia gained pace, having far-reaching repercussions in the form of cultural rapprochement between the two regions. The Emperor granted

religious endowments, built viharas (monasteries), constructed eighty-four thousand stupas (reliquary mounds), and erected commemorative pillars for the propagation of Buddhism. Asoka was one of the finest builders of ancient India. The monolithic stone columns of Asoka were architectural wonders. The Sarnath column was the most exquisite among the columns with its fine art of polishing, dressing, chiselling, and shaping of stone. The Sanchi stupa has remained a place of tourist attraction. A special class of officers called dhammahamattas (officers of righteousness) was appointed to propagate the dhamma. He also convened the Third Buddhist Council in 250 BCE to prevent rifts within Buddhism. It was decided in the Pataliputra conclave to compile Saddhammasamgaha (true Buddhist doctrine).

The Asokan inscriptions engraved on boulders, pillars, and cliffs have become milestones in the history of humankind. Radiating from the Indian subcontinent and reaching the Far East as well as the Middle East, their impact was tremendous in varied arenas. India's cultural contact with Southeast Asia gained pace, having far-reaching repercussions in the form of cultural rapprochement between the two regions. The Buddhist missionary activities enshrined in the Edicts made Buddhism popular in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Asoka's contact with the Hellenic world is evident from reading the inscription. The Edicts have had a considerable impact in framing a timeline for ancient Indian history. The multilingual inscriptions bequeathed by Asoka became the earliest deciphered writings, and the phonetic scripts used therein made pictographic script relics of history.

Asoka emerges from the Edicts as a ruler deeply concerned with the welfare of his subjects and impartial to any class. These edicts prove the greatness of the King, who was very much concerned with the material and moral welfare of his subjects. The inscriptions prove that Asoka had a deep commitment to healthcare, environmental protection, and animal welfare. His vision was far ahead of his time. His path of dhamma and ahimsa (non-violence) as enumerated in the Edicts is very much relevant in the contemporary world. The emphasis on state morality and duty for the protection of its subjects as prescribed in the inscriptions has significant bearing in the present day in the context of state terrorism in many parts of the world. There were many monarchs in ancient and medieval times of Indian history, but very few were like Asoka the Great. With unflagging zeal, Asoka accomplished his mission. The prescriptions, virtues, and ideals enumerated in the Edicts became a frame of reference for kings, rulers, and individuals.

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## Asoka (r. 273-226 BCE)

One of the greatest emperors in Indian history, Asoka (r. 273-232 BCE), has been immortalised in the minds of the Indians. As a testimony to the Emperor, the Indian government adopted the four-lion capital of the Asokan pillar as its national emblem when the country became a Republic on January 26, 1950. The wheel of *dhamma* (righteous path/piety) was placed at the centre of the Indian national flag.

Asoka was the son of Emperor Bindusara (r. 298-273 BCE) and Subhadraangi, who exclaimed at the time of his birth that she was without sorrow, or Asoka. According to Buddhist traditions, Asoka was a cruel person in the early part of his life. A transformation took place after he embraced Buddhism; he became Dharmasoka (righteous Asoka) from Chandasoka (cruel Asoka). However, most scholars regard this as mere

fiction, suggesting he was attracted to Buddhism later on. The Emperor had appointed Asoka as Viceroy of Ujjain province, and he was instrumental in suppressing a revolt in Taxila. He also married Vidisamahadevi, who bore two children, Mahinda and Sanghamitta. The actual coronation of Asoka took place in 269 BCE after a fierce contest for the throne between Asoka and his stepbrother Susima.

Asoka inherited an extensive empire with a well-organised administrative setup from Bindusara. He managed the various affairs of the state for six years and then turned his attention towards the Kingdom of Kalinga, located on the eastern coast of India, corresponding roughly to modern Odisha and parts of northern Andhra Pradesh. Kalinga was a powerful and prosperous kingdom due to oceanic trade. The famous Kalinga battle was fought in 261 BCE, resulting in the victory of the Magadhan Emperor. Kalinga was incorporated into the Magadhan Empire, with headquarters in Tosali. However, the killing of about one hundred thousand people, the imprisonment of one hundred and fifty thousand, the deportation of many persons, and the large-scale devastation due to war deeply affected Asoka. He greatly regretted the suffering and relinquished war in favour of victory by dhamma. Although Buddhist traditions speak of Asoka's conversion to Buddhism by monk Upagupta after the Kalinga war, it is likely that the Emperor adopted the new religion after much contemplation. It was a gradual process.

Asoka, as a patron of Buddhism, changed the course of history not only in the Indian subcontinent but also in the Far East and Southeast Asia. Buddhist missionaries were dispatched across the continent and abroad. Sona and Uttara were sent to the Burma (Myanmar)-Thailand region, while the brother and sister team, Mahinda and Sanghamitta, went to Ceylon (Sri Lanka). India's cultural contact with Southeast Asia gained pace, having far-reaching repercussions in the form of cultural rapprochement between the two regions. The Emperor granted religious endowments, built *viharas* (monasteries), constructed eighty-four thousand *stupas* (reliquary mounds), and erected commemorative pillars for the propagation of Buddhism. Asoka was one of the finest builders of ancient India. The monolithic stone columns of Asoka were architectural wonders. The Sarnath column was the most exquisite among the columns, with its fine art of polishing, dressing, chiselling, and shaping of stone. The Sanchi stupa in Bhopal has remained a place of tourist attraction. The Rock Edicts of Asoka, found in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, were another vehicle for circulating Asoka's ideas and philosophy. A special class of officers called *dhammahamattas* (officers of righteousness) was appointed to

propagate the dhamma. He also convened the Third Buddhist Council in 251 BCE to prevent a rift within Buddhism. It was decided in this Pataliputra conclave to compile the Saddhammasamgaha (true Buddhist doctrine).

The concept of *dharmā* (religion in Sanskrit) or *dhamma* (Prakrit version of dharma) in Asoka's context denoted not a religion, but a path of self-righteousness based on moral and ethical principles. Eschewing the earlier path of Brahminical faith, Asoka set out a new doctrine, which was quite different from the avowed principles of Buddhism; the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, transmigration of souls, etc. He propagated certain moral precepts common to all Indian religions. Inspired by Buddhism to an extent, he moved in a new direction of lofty ideals about ethics and morality. Asokan edicts engraved on rocks and pillars throughout his empire were messengers of dhamma. These earliest records of epigraphy in India were living testimony to the greatness of the Emperor, who was concerned for the material and moral welfare of his subjects. He not only insisted on high ethical standards for his subjects but also set a high ideal for himself. Here was a king who said, "All men are my children." Assuming the title of *Devanampiya Piyadasi* (Beloved of the Gods, One of Amiable Looks), the Emperor propagated certain ethical principles governing the individual and his role in society. He laid stress on respect for father, mother, teachers, elders, brahmins, monks, friends, the poor, and others. Honesty, truthfulness, liberalism, and compassion should govern a person's life. An individual was advised to abandon cruelty, anger, pride, and jealousy. Asoka advocated ahimsa or non-violence, stressing the sanctity of life. A spirit of religious tolerance should prevail in society. The *dhamma* of Asoka, based on certain moral principles and civic responsibility, became the way of life for an individual. He initiated the policy of *dhamma* with the precise motive of unifying political units and people professing different faiths. This pragmatic approach resulted in gaining support from the rising merchant class and the general populace. Although he had moved away from orthodox Brahmanism, the Emperor did not oppose it. In this way, the position of Asoka was consolidated without any danger to his throne. His dhamma became a cementing force for the centralised Empire of Asoka. However, these motives did not detract from the credit due to the Emperor, who was also interested in the moral upliftment of people and the general good of society.

Asoka retained the general pattern of the Mauryan administration but incorporated features aimed at the welfare of his subjects. He inherited a vast empire and incorporated the Kingdom of Kalinga. The Emperor

mentioned in Rock Edict XIV that his dominion was vast, or *vijita*. A sound and well-knit administration with a centralised pattern was required to keep the Empire intact. The administration was centralised, with the King enjoying absolute power. His concern for his people was evident from his frequent tours to different places within the Empire. His paternal despotism was a benevolent one. The Deputy of the King was called *Uparaja*, and the Crown Prince was known as *Yuvaraja*. There was a *mantriparisad* (Council of Ministers) headed by a *mahamantri* (Prime Minister) to assist the Emperor. There were different Ministries in the central administration such as the Ministry of Morals under the Dhammamamatta, *Stri-Adhyaksha-Mahamatta* (Ministry in charge of Women's Affairs), *Vrajabhūmika* (Minister of Agriculture and Public Utility), and others. The *Nagalviyohalaka* was the head of city administration. Asoka appointed *Anta Mahamattas* in the border regions. In the edicts of Asoka, a variety of senior officers, including Ministers, were designated as *mahamattas*. The *mahamattas* of the cities were expected to exhibit proper behaviour and impart impartial judgments. Their counterparts in rural regions were designated as *Rajukas*, who were also revenue assessment officers. The *Rajukas*, as well as *Yuktas*, along with provincial governors, had to undertake *Anusamyana*, or tours, in their areas to inform the King about the condition of the people. In the provincial capitals of Taxila, Ujjain, Tosali, and Suvarnagiri, *Kumaras* or *Aryaputras* (Princes) were posted. The *Pradesika* was a Governor in the other provinces. Asoka undertook a massive public affairs programme by constructing canals, wells, roads, and parks. Special care was taken to protect forests from fire. The slaughter of animals was prohibited on certain days. The Emperor himself stopped pleasure trips and hunting expeditions, preferring pilgrimages and tours.

The greatness, glory, and glamour of the Maurya Empire ended after the passing of Asoka. It came to a definitive end when Pushyamitra Sunga (r. 187-151 BCE) assassinated the last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha (d. 187 BCE). Asoka was not responsible for the downfall, and views like a Brahmanical reaction or Asoka's policy of non-violence are no longer accepted. The Emperor kept the army intact, and it was neither demoralised nor reduced in number. The state was highly centralised, and the main plank of its stability was the efficiency and vision of the King. The successors were not like Asoka. The Emperor was a great conqueror and sound administrator. What added to his stature was his concern for the material and moral good of his subjects. Although a supporter of Buddhism, Asoka did not discriminate between his subjects on religious grounds. His promotion of Buddhism helped the religion spread to different parts of Asia. He will be remembered as a patron of Buddhism