

## Ashoka, the Great

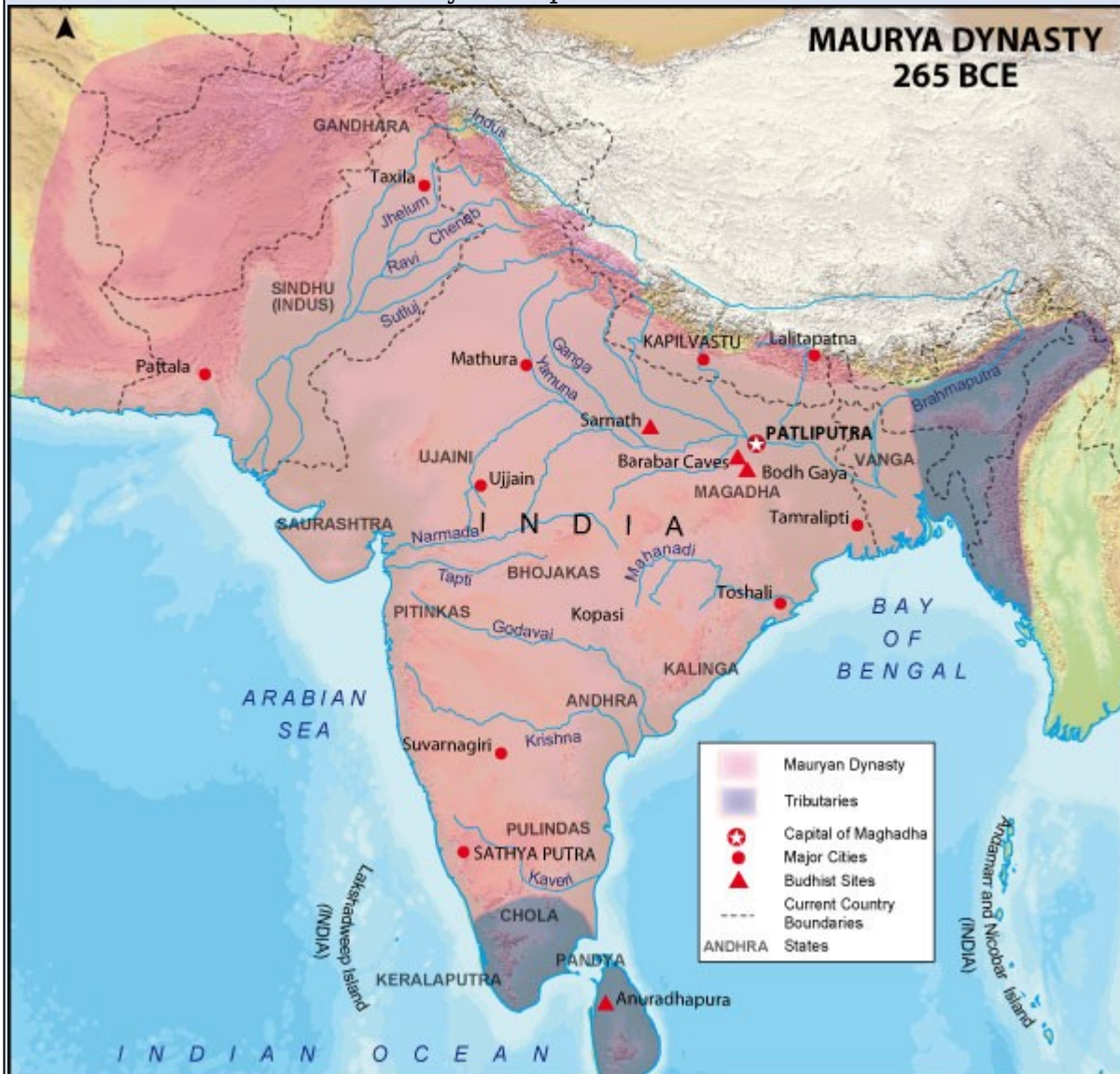
### Why in news?

Three Ashokan era edicts were recently found in Delhi.

### Who is Ashoka, the Great?

- **Parents-** Mauryan King Bindusara and Devi Dhamma.
- **Year-** 273 BC - 232 BC
- In the initial phase of his life, Ashoka was a cruel and ruthless king. He applied brutal ideas to expand his kingdom.
- **Patron of Buddhism-** In 265 BC, he won the battle of Kalinga and after seeing the bloodsheds he had a change of heart. He started to follow the path of non-violence and Buddhism.
- He also made *Buddhism as State religion* around 260 BC.
- **3<sup>rd</sup> Buddhist Council-** It was held at *Pataliputra (250 BC)* under the patronage of King Ashoka and Chairman is *Moggaliputta Tissa*.
- Compilation of *Abhidhamma Pitaka* took place at this council.
- **Edicts -** Ashoka started to preach dhamma and wrote his philosophy through 14 edicts that spread throughout the empire. These were known as Ashokan edicts.
- *Great Sanchi Stupa* was inscribed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1989.
- **Sarnath Pillar-** The Ashokan Pillar at Sarnath has a four-lion capital, which was later adopted as the *national emblem* of the Indian republic post independence.

- The Maurya Empire (322 - 185 B.C.E.), ruled by the Mauryan dynasty, was a geographically extensive and powerful political and military empire in ancient India.
- Chandragupta Maurya founded 322 BCE after overthrowing the Nanda Dynasty.
- Chanakya (also known as Kautilya and Vishnugupta) who wrote Arthashastra was the political mentor of Chandragupta Maurya
- Ashoka is the 3<sup>rd</sup> ruler of Mauryan Empire.

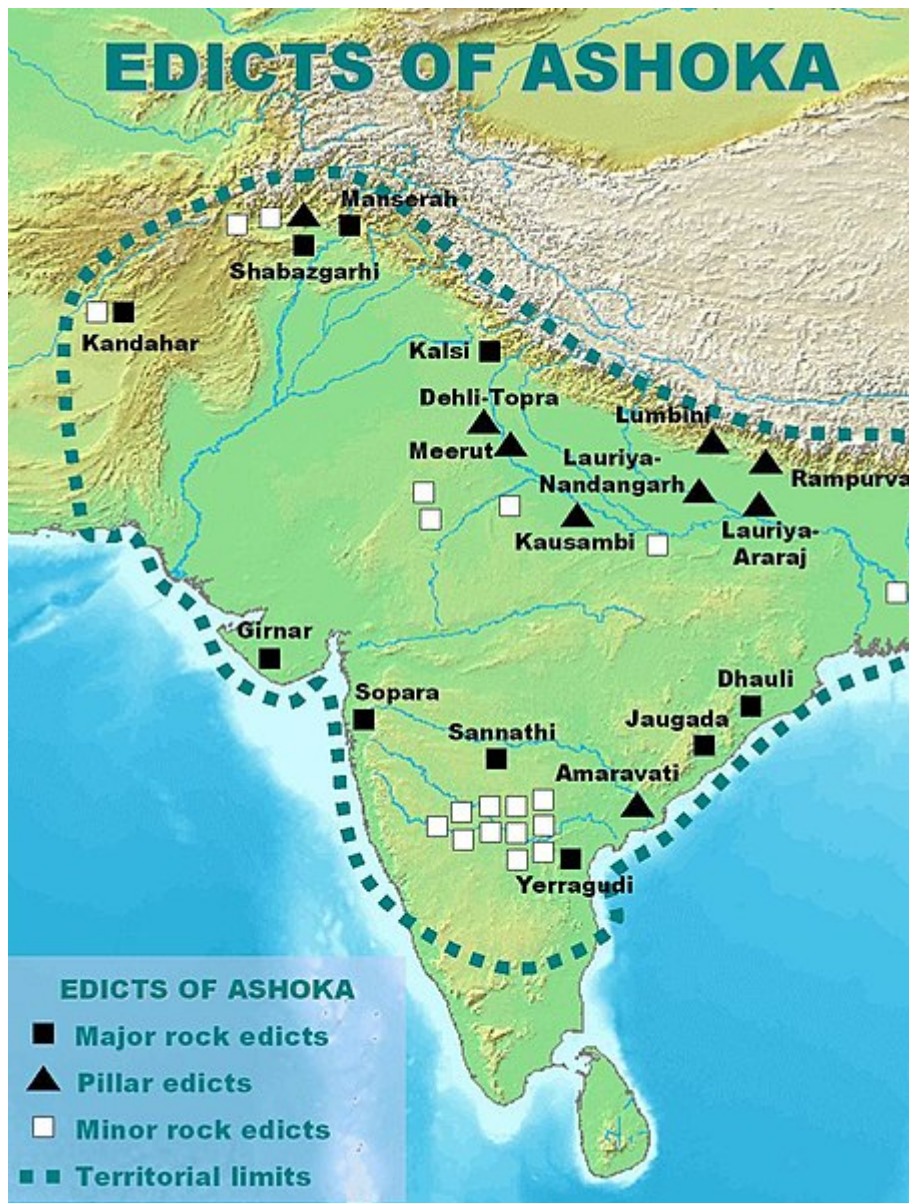


## What are the edicts and inscriptions of Ashoka?

*All rock edicts are inscriptions but all inscriptions are not rock edicts*

- **Edicts-** It is a decree or announcement of law, which can be under any official authority. It can be issued in any number of physical forms
  - Major and Minor Pillar Edicts
  - Major Rock Edicts- 14 edicts (termed 1st to 14th) and two separate ones found in Odisha.
  - Minor Rock Edicts

- **Inscriptions-** It is a text produced by carving the letters into solid surface like stones, coins, buildings and rocks.
  - Major Rock Inscriptions
  - Barabar cave inscriptions and
  - Kandahar bilingual inscription.



### What does Ashokan edicts and inscriptions say about?

- **Themes of inscriptions**
  - Ashoka's conversion and his efforts to spread Buddhism,
  - Moral and religious precepts and
  - Social and animal welfare programmes
- In these inscriptions, Ashoka refers himself as "*Beloved Servant of the God*" (*Devanampiyadasi*).
- The identification of Devanampiyadasi with Ashoka was confirmed by an inscription at *Maski*, found in the eastern part of India were written in Magadhi Prakrit using the Brahmi script.
- **Edicts-** The Edicts of Ashoka are a collection of 33 inscriptions on the Pillars of Ashoka



as well as boulders and cave walls made by the Emperor Ashoka.

- These inscriptions were dispersed throughout the country and it *represents the first tangible evidence of Buddhism*. The edicts describe in detail the Ashoka's view about dhamma, to solve the severe problems faced by the complex society.
- It is mainly on social and moral precepts rather than specific religious practices or the philosophical dimension of Buddhism.

Major Rock Edict	About
I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prohibits animal slaughter</li> <li>• Bans festive gatherings</li> </ul>
II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentions the South Indian kingdoms such as Cholas, Pandya, Satyaputas and Keralaputras.</li> <li>• Deals with social welfare measures</li> </ul>
III	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liberty to Brahmanas Every five years Yukatas, Pradesikas along with Rajukas.</li> <li>• To visit all the areas of the kingdom to spread Dhamma.</li> </ul>
IV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preference of Dhammaghosa (Sound of peace) over Berighosa (Sound of wandrums).</li> <li>• Impact of Dhamma on society</li> </ul>
V	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humane treatment of slaves by their masters.</li> <li>• Mentions about the appointment of Dhamma Mahamatras.</li> </ul>
VI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deals with the welfare measures King's wish to know about the condition of the people</li> </ul>
VII	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tolerance towards all religions and sects</li> </ul>
VIII	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentions about Ashoka's visit to Bodh Gaya and Bodhi tree</li> <li>• Maintaining contact with rural people via Dhammayatras</li> </ul>
IX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stresses on the moral conduct of people.</li> <li>• Avoiding expensive ceremonies</li> </ul>
X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condemns the desire for fame and glory</li> </ul>
XI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elaborate explanation of Dhamma</li> </ul>
XII	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appeal for developing tolerance towards all religious sects</li> </ul>
XIII	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explains about Kalinga war and conquest through dhamma</li> </ul>
XIV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deals with the purpose of engraving inscriptions in various parts of the country</li> </ul>

Pillar Edict	About
I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ashoka's principle of protecting his people</li> </ul>
II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defines Dhamma as minimum of sins, many virtues, compassion, liberty, truthfulness and purity.</li> </ul>
III	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding practices of cruelty, sin, harshness, pride and anger among his subjects.</li> </ul>
IV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibilities of the Rajukas.</li> </ul>

V	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of animals and birds that should not be killed on certain days.</li> <li>• Another list mentions animals that should never be killed.</li> <li>• Describes release of 25 prisoners.</li> <li>• This pillar edict is also known as Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict.</li> </ul>
VI	Dhamma policy of the State (welfare of the people).
VII	Ashoka's work for fulfilling Dhamma. Tolerance for all sects. Also, about Dhamma Mahamatta

Inscription / Edict	About
Allahabad - Kosam/Queens Edict/Kausambi or Schism Edict	Ashoka asks the members of the Sangha to refrain from causing division in the ranks.
Kandahar Inscription	It is a famous bilingual edict in Greek and Aramaic.
Kalinga Edict	Mentions "all men are my children"

### What is Ashoka's policy of Dhamma?

- The word dhamma is the Pali form of the Sanskrit word *dharmā*.
- **Aim** - To create a harmonious atmosphere in the state where all people irrespective of their religious and cultural diversities, lived in peace and harmony.
- **Ahimsa**- Ban on animal sacrifices, it reduced killing of animals for food in the royal kitchen.
- **Good conduct**- It emphasised on good conduct and social responsibilities that were part of dhamma.
  - Proper courtesy to slaves and servants
  - Respectful behaviour towards elders
  - Restrain in one's dealing with all living beings.
- **Gift of dhamma**-
  - Obedience to mother and father
  - Liberality towards friends, relatives, acquaintances and relatives
- **Mutual respect**- Religious toleration
- **Dhamma as a king**-
  - To promote welfare of the people
  - Discharge the debt he owes to all beings
  - Ensure people's happiness in this world
  - Renunciation of warfare

### Reference

1. [Indian Express- 3 Ashokan era edicts in Delhi](#)



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