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## **THE CONTRIBUTION OF EMPEROR ASHOKA AND EMPEROR HARSHAVARDHANA IN PROMOTING BUDDHISM IN REAL LIFE**

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### **Introduction:**

After receiving Sambodhi from Tathagata Lord Buddha, he propagated his teachings till the end of his life. Due to his divine personality, Buddhism spread far and wide in India. Many kings bowed down to Maharaja Tathagata. But we find that only a few emperors did the work of propagating Buddhism on a large scale. The name of Emperor Ashoka and Emperor Harshavardhana appears to be at the top. These emperors did not just accept the Dhamma for themselves. So we can see that he did the work of inculcating actual Buddhist Dhamma philosophy in the subjects of the whole empire till the end of his life. This is a small attempt to shed light on the entire life work of these great emperors so that the coming generation may know the work of these great emperors.

### **Emperor Ashoka:**

The Mauryan Empire was one of the greatest empires in India. Emperor Bimbisara was the grandson of Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of this empire. Ashok's mother's name was Subhadra (Dharma). Ashoka acted in the guise of a prince as the ruler of Ujjain and Takshshila. During his rule in Ujjain, he fell in love with the daughter of a merchant there. It is mentioned that her name was Devi or Vidisha Mahadevi. Ashok married with her. Sangamitra and Karuvaki were two more famous queens of Ashoka. Ashoka's reign is one of the brightest chapters in human history. After the death of Bindusara, his son Ashoka ascended the throne. At that time his step brother Susima opposed him. But Ashoka completely defeated Susima. Ashoka spent four years in this work. He finally usurped the throne of Magadha and became the emperor. At this time he styled himself as Devanampriya meaning King beloved of God.

### **Battle of Kalinga:**

After Ashoka took the reins of the Magadha Empire in his hands, his few days passed in bliss. He began to live in comfort and luxury. He inherited the Vishal Maurya Empire from his grandfather. But Kalinga region between the two rivers Godavari and Mahanadi was not included in Ashoka's empire. This Kalinga region was very prosperous. Ashoka always wanted this kingdom of Kalinga to come under his empire. That is why Ashoka rode on Kalinga to conquer that kingdom. There was a great battle. Ashoka was victorious in this battle. He annexed the territory of Kalinga to his empire. But Ashoka's mind was affected by this battle and he changed completely. He was deeply disappointed to see the human slaughter that took

place in this battle. He felt remorse for the murder. He shed tears there for those who died. Hence he decided never to fight again. Thus the battle of Kalinga became the first and last battle of Ashoka's life. After this he changed his foreign policy. He decided to conquer the world not by war but by love and non-violence. While, he was in a state of mind, the Buddhist monk Upagupta met him. He initiated Emperor Ashoka into Buddhism.

### **Spread of Buddhism:**

After Emperor Ashoka accepted the Buddhist Dhamma, he inscribed it on many stones, stones and pillars so that the people would know the principles of this Buddhist Dhamma. They are called Ashoka inscriptions. In order to spread the Buddhist Dhamma, he explained these principles to all the people in simple language. He made an earnest request that people should focus their lives on daily conduct rather than critical thinking. This was Ashoka's precept of virtue. It included things such as not killing animals, practicing non-violence, serving parents, respecting teachers, serving the elderly and disabled, respecting asceticism, treating servants with love, always giving charity, etc. Ashoka's teachings were the true form of Buddhism itself. Ashoka used to say that if a human uses these principles in life, he will be happy and feel peace. His words had an extraordinary effect on the people. The reason for this is Ashok's behavior. He stopped all his pleasures and luxuries. He began to live like an ascetic. To enforce non-violence, he stopped animal slaughter in the palace, built hospitals, Dharamshalas, built roads and planted trees at government expense. While spreading Buddhism in this way, Ashoka was striving for the welfare and happiness of the people. He gave strict orders to his officers that wherever I am, in whatever work, the grievances of my people must come to me.

Emperor Ashoka created a Dharma account to spread Buddhism. Many officers were appointed on it. The officials who spread the religion were called 'Dharma Mahayatra'. Women officers were called 'Stri Dharma Mahayatra'. He expected all these officers to strive for the material happiness of the people and spread the religion. Not only this, he also spread the message of Buddhist culture abroad. Ashoka sent his ambassadors to Greece, Egypt and Syria. He sent his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra to propagate Buddhism in Silin. Ashoka During this reign, many young men and women came forward, kicking their selfishness for the propagation of Dhamma. Due to this, Buddhism spread widely.

### **Emperor Ashoka's public welfare schemes:**

Emperor Ashoka used to say that all human beings are my children. So he implemented some schemes in his empire for the welfare of the entire subjects.

#### **1) Public Works:**

He constructed, repaired and maintained national highways and other important roads, planted roadside trees and constructed wells. Rules for the width of different types of roads have been prescribed. In them, the width of animal paths and footpaths was 1 to 2 meters, 10 meters for chariots and other wheeled vehicles and 20 meters for the main road. There were stone blocks on important roads. The village road was unpaved. Milestones or name strips should be installed on sub-roads to indicate the location and distance. Dharamshalas and resting

places were built at important places. Food for humans and animals were arranged there at reasonable prices. Traders, travelers, government employees, security personnel could avail these facilities. Schools, colleges, temples, bridges, dams, market places, trading centers, rest places etc. were built by the state.

## 2) Census:

Census was a permanent department during Emperor Ashoka's reign. Every birth and death was duly registered in the birth and death registers. This is probably the first instance of birth-death registration in the world. By keeping such detailed information about the people, it was convenient to levy taxes and keep the legal system in order. It was easy to keep the information of farmers, cow guardians, traders, number of different caste-religion etc. and income information. Entry and exit of foreign travelers, traders, and students were kept. A list of persons of dubious character was kept. These graphs are designed to get a very reliable indication of the standard of living and development of the people.

## 3) Public Health:

Dispensaries for humans and animals were opened at all important places. Doctors, surgical nurses with surgical equipment, midwives, and poison detection doctors were appointed in Hospitals. Treatment was free of charge in public. Foreign travelers should be cared for with utmost care when they fall ill. The treatment was done in the spirit of service. When a foreign traveler dies, he should be cremated with dignity. In suspicious cases post-mortem examination was conducted to ascertain the cause of death. A special type of oil was used to preserve the dead body for some time. Adultery was a serious crime at that time. Convict people were sentenced to death. The roads were kept clear and clean. There were different places for garbage and dead animals.

## 4) Judiciary:

The king was the head of justice and the supreme judge was the original source of law. A case of serious crime should be decided only by him. There were special courts in towns and villages. Which will be presided over by the Regional 'Mahayatra'. Courts were of two types.

a) **Dharamstheya:** In which civil cases are decided.

b) **Kantakshodhan:** It involves deciding the criminal case.

At least one court and one police headquarters were established in all important cities. In rural areas, small cases should be decided by elders in their panchayats. A civil case may be judged by law or by a code of laws. The testimony of a dignitary was believed. Punishment included mutilation and eighteen types of physical torture. In it seven types of crimes were flogged. There was a system of prisons for different types of criminals. There were extensive regulations for prisoners and prison superintendents.

## Merit of Ashok:

There have been many kings in the history of the world. But Emperor Ashoka's place

in Indian history is important. Ashoka was a Buddhist king and his reign is known in history as the Buddhist reign. He is also known as 'Rajshree' as he strives round the clock for the welfare of the people. Although Ashoka was indeed an emperor, he was a hermit. He spread the message of Buddhism far and wide in India and outside India. Ashoka has to be credited with creating respect for India in other countries. Foreign historians also named Ashoka as the king of kings after seeing his greatness. Ashoka's mission was to create peace. This is the goal of modern India. Hence, India has adopted Ashoka Chakra as its national symbol. This makes Emperor Ashoka a shining diamond in the history of India. His mere name makes our necks rise in reverence and our chests fill with pride.

### **Rise of Vardhan family:**

During the reign of the Gupta dynasty, the Vardhana dynasty emerged at Thaneshwar, west of Kanauj. This family was founded by a Shiva devotee named Pushyabhuti. A ruler named Narvardhan was born in this clan. He gave himself the title Maharaj. Around BC 583 Adityavardhan's son Prabhakarvardhan ascended the throne. His career was significant in all respects. He established his army by defeating the Huns, Punjab, Gandhara, Gujarat and Malwa and gave himself the title of 'Maharajadhiraj'. He was married to Yashvati, daughter of King Yashodharman of Malwa. He had two sons Rajvardhan and Harshavardhan and a daughter named Rajashree. He arranged the marriage of Rajashri with King Grihavarman of Kanauj.

### **Emperor Harshvardhan:**

Rajavardhan and Harshavardhan were sent to settle the Huns' cavalry. But in his absence, Prabhakarvardhan fell ill. He died during that illness. On hearing the news of his father's death, Rajavardhan returned from the Huns and took over the kingdom of Thaneshwar. At the same time, King Devagupta of East Malwa and King Shashanka of Gauda country attacked the King of Kanauj. King Griha Varman was killed there. His queen Rajashree was imprisoned. Rajavardhan decided to take revenge and attacked Devagupta. But at the same time Shashank, the king of Gaud country, caught Rajavardhana unawares and killed him by speaking very sweetly. So Harshvardhan took the help of Thaneshwar and Kanauj. After ascending to the throne, Harshavardhana had to face countless difficulties. Rajashri, widow of Grihavarman and sister of Harshavardhana, was still in Devagupta's captivity. She had to be rescued. Similarly, Shashank who killed Rajvardhan wanted to be punished. As soon as he learned that Rajashri had escaped from Devagupta's captivity and fled to the Vindhya Mountains, Harshavardhana immediately began the task of searching for Rajashri. After many days of searching, Harshvardhan met a Buddhist monk named Divakar. With his help, Rajashree was searched for.

### **Religion of Harshvardhan:**

After settling all the enemies that had risen against the empire and establishing peace in the empire, Harshavardhana converted to Buddhism as promised to Rajashri. Harshvardhan was originally a Shaivite. But in Dakshina Digvijaya he was met by Buddhist monk Diwakar. Being in his company, Harshavardhana became more attracted to the Buddhist Dhamma. After converting to Buddhism, Harshavardhana stopped animal slaughter in the empire. He built a large vihara on the banks of the Ganges for Buddhist monks. Harshavardhana held a religious

assembly at Prayag every five years. He used to do a lot of charity to people of all religions. He laid down a rule that Buddhist monks should stay in one place for at least 21 days and discuss Buddhist philosophy. All facilities were made for that. Harshavardhana got the tooth of the Buddha from the king of Kashmir and built a Vihara at Kanauj. During this period, the Chinese traveler Huyen Tsang came to India to study Buddhism. He was welcomed by Harshavardhan. He had divided his revenue into four parts. One part of it was reserved for the expenditure of the state, another part for charity, third part for helping learned people and fourth part for religious cause.

### **Education System:**

People of Harshvardhan's time were fans of education. Buddhist Vihara was considered to be a great center not only of Dhamma but also of education. The Buddhist Viharas of Kanauj, Gaya, Jalandhar and Munger were especially famous for enlightenment. During this period, large universities emerged in Jalandhar, Kanauj, Prayag and Gaya. Students from all over the world used to come to get education from these universities. Nalanda University was the most famous among all these universities. It was considered a great center of liberal education.

### **Nalanda University:**

Nalanda University was very famous in ancient India. Nalanda University was generously patronized by Harshavardhan. Harshavardhan did not let any kind of shortage of money to Nalanda University. Many students from all over the world used to come to get education in this Nalanda University. While giving admission to the university, students were subjected to strict screening and test exams. Once admitted, the student was provided with free food, hostel and education. Vedas, Dharma, Puranas, Mathematics, History, Logic etc. in this university.

Well, the knowledge of astronomy was taught to the students. Ten thousand students were studying in Nalanda University during Harshavardhan's time. For Teaching 1510 teachers were appointed. This university had Dharmapala, Shilabhadra, Subandhu as vice-chancellors. The students who graduated from this university are respected all over the world. Thousands of students from foreign countries like Iran, China, Tibet, Ceylon, India, Thailand, and Japan used to come to India every year to get admission in Nalanda University. Thus, in the history of ancient India, the fame of Nalanda University was spread all over the world.

### **Merit of Harshavardhan:**

Harshavardhan was responsible for ruling two small territories in the confusion that arose after the fall of the Gupta Empire. But soon Harshavardhan created a rift in people's minds about his son and brought a large part of northern India under his umbrella. He created an excellent polity in the state. He was religious. He used to give charity freely without discrimination. Harshavardhan was a great enthusiast of science and a scholar himself. He had sheltered many scholars. Harshavardhan himself wrote the plays 'Priyadarshika', 'Ratnavali' and 'Nagananda'. Harshavardhan's court was especially famous for philosophers, poets, dramatists and painters.

**Conclusion:**

- Emperor Ashoka's empire spread over most of today's India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar.
- It was during the reign of Ashoka that the third Buddhist council was held at Pataliputra. Which was presided over by Mowgliputra Tisya. It was in this *Parishad* that the Athidhammapittaka was composed. After that, Buddhist monks were sent to different countries to propagate the Dhamma. In it his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra were sent to Sri Lanka.
- Ashoka was world famous and unparalleled emperor for non-violence, peace and welfare schemes.
- According to Historian H. G. Wells, among the kings, emperors, priests, saints, etc. in the entire history of the world, Emperor Ashoka is the brightest and shining star in the sky.
- According to Radhakumud Mukherjee, There has never been a single king in the entire history. Who will be compared with Emperor Ashoka. Actually Ashoka was a great conqueror, skilled ruler, and organizer. But these qualities are also seen in other kings of the world. But the sense of public service, high humanity is seen only in an emperor like Ashoka. The fame that Emperor Ashoka earned for his love, mercy and benevolence lives on even today. Therefore, along with his name, the name of the country of India has also become immortal in the world.
- The great emperor Harshavardhana expanded his kingdom from B.C. 590 to 647. He ruled the rest of India except Punjab. He ruled for almost 41 years. Harshvardhan's major achievement in Indian history was that he created a monolithic empire in India after the fall of the Gupta Empire. Harshavardhana built stupas and viharas for the propagation of Buddhism. Organized Dhamma Parishad at Kanauj. He donated hundreded villages to Nalanda Vidyapitha. So that the work of the university runs smoothly. After every five years, Harshavardhan held a *Mahamoksha Parishad* at Allahabad (Prayag). A large amount of charity was given to people of all religions. Harshavardhana was not only a great ruler but also patron of art, literature, culture, generosity, secularism.

During the period of both the above rulers, we can see that Buddhist Dhamma was actually established in the people's life.

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