

Ashoka's Conquest of Kalinga

From Ashoka's Rock Edict XIII, it appears that the conquest of Kalinga was the first and the last victory of his life. He accomplished this victory after eight years of his coronation that is in 262-261 B.C.

Factors Leading to the Conquest of Kalinga

1. In the beginning Ashoka was an ambitious and imperialist king. He wanted to integrate his empire politically by conquering Kalinga, located in modern Orissa state.
2. Kalinga was very important from strategic point of view. It controlled both the land and sea routes to Southern India. Thus, Ashoka wanted to control both the land and the sea routes to south India by conquering Kalinga.
3. Kalinga was a powerful state bordering the Magadhan empire. Its ever-increasing power could endanger the security of the Mauryan empire. Hence, Ashoka could not remain indifferent towards it.
4. Commercial relations with the countries of South-East Asia could be easily established via Kalinga. Kalinga was an important centre of cotton textile. Ashoka wanted to enhance the income of Mauryan empire by occupying it.

Being inspired by all these factors Ashoka, with a huge army invaded Kalinga. The soldiers of Kalinga fought very bravely but were defeated. Ashoka emerged victorious. The Ashokan Rock Edict XIII describes that one lakh people were killed in

Ashoka's Dhamma

The most significant achievement of Ashoka as a ruler was his Dhamma. Ashoka wanted to set a code of model conduct based on high moral values for his people. Thus, by compiling the high and appreciable tenets of all the faiths he established a Dhamma which was "the essence of all the religions". Ashoka, in the form of Dhamma, laid the foundation of such a universal religion as acceptable to all without any distinction of caste and creed. He showed respect to all faiths and creeds. He strongly believed in unity of ethical and moral values of all faiths and creeds. Thus, the Dhamma of Ashoka as is explained in his edicts, is not a religion or a religious system but a "Moral Law", a "Common Code of Conduct", or an "Ethical Order".

Main Principles of Dhamma

Following were the main principles of Ashoka's Dhamma:

1. Respect to Elders

Ashoka, in his Rock edicts stresses that everybody should respect elders and should obey them respectfully.

2. Love to Youngsters

Just as the youngsters should respect and obey the elders, so the elders should treat the youngsters kindly and affectionately. Rock Edict XI and XIII particularly emphasize to behave properly with slaves and servants.

3. Truthfulness

Minor Rock Edict II and VII refer to the principle of truthfulness. According to it truthfulness is the ideal

of moral life. Hence, a man should abstain from telling a lie.

4. Sinless Life

The Pillar Edict III stresses that a man should try to lead a sinless and pure life. He should abstain from anger, jealousy, pride and cruelty etc.

5. Ahimsa (Non-violence)

Ahimsa was a mainstay of Dhamma. It stresses that a man should abstain from killing of living beings and he should not do any kind of injury to any living creature.

6. Charity

Dhamma lays great emphasis on charity. One should give something as charity to scholars, hermits, the poor and the aged persons. Rock Edict XI stresses that Dharmdan i.e. to teach a person the principles of Dharma is the greatest charity.

7. True Ceremonials

Ashoka emphasized to give up the false ceremonials associated with birth, death, marriage, fasting, pilgrimage etc. and to adopt the true ceremonials like amity, charity, kindness etc.

8. Religious Tolerance

Religious tolerance was the basic tenet of Ashoka's Dhamma. Rock Edict XII mentions it clearly that one should honour one's own faith but should not condemn the other sects or religions.

9. Self-Appraisal

Rock Edict III emphasizes the principle of self-appraisal. It says that man should evaluate his good and bad deeds from time to time. Thus, Ashoka's Dhamma was a common code of conduct to lead a pure and high moral life. There was no stress on the subjects like God and Soul.

Measures to Spread Dhamma

Ashoka tried to spread Dhamma by the means like setting his personal example, organising pilgrimages, appointing the Dharma Mahamatras and by the Rock edicts etc. Particularly, his personal example and the pilgrimages organised by him contributed significantly in the propagation and spread of the Dhamma.

Significance of Dhamma

Undoubtedly, Dhamma was a great contribution of Ashoka to mankind. It proved to be a boon for society and the empire as well. Whereas it raised the

moral standard of the people by curtailing the social evils, it also helped generate the atmosphere of amity and brotherhood by bringing people of different castes and creeds closer to one another. Dhamma encouraged national integration and put forth a right solution to various social, religious and political problems.