
ASHOKA THE GREAT: REPRESENTING THE ACME OF INDIAN CULTURE

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Abstract: Ashoka occupies a unique place in the history of India. Ashoka was a true humanist. His policies were oriented towards the welfare of his people. His *dhamma* was based on social responsibility. Ashoka was the son of Bindusara. He is considered among the greatest rulers of all times. He was the first ruler who tried to maintain direct contact with his subjects. He ruled for nearly 40 years. Most of the information about the life of Ashoka can be had from the 50 edicts he placed throughout India. The most important of these edicts is the Rock Edict XIII (257-256 BC). It offers account of the eight years of the Kalinga War. The destruction and the sorrow that he witnessed in the war transformed Ashoka from a warrior to a peace loving ruler. He started propagating Buddhism. The impact of Ashoka's moral conquest can be seen not only within India but also in the far off Empires like Syria, Egypt and Macedonia and Epirus. Significantly, Ashoka has been referred to with names of Devanumpriya or Priyadarshini throughout the edicts. In this paper an attempt is made to explore the Ashoka policies of universal peace, non-violence and religious harmony find no parallel in the monarchs of the world.

Keywords: Damma, Humanist, Greatest Ruler, Edicts, Peace.

Introduction: Ashoka was the third ruler of the illustrious Maurya dynasty and was one of the most powerful kings of the Indian subcontinent in ancient times. His reign between 273 BC and 232 B.C. was one of the most prosperous periods in the history of India. Ashoka's empire consisted most of India, South Asia and beyond, stretching from present day Afghanistan and parts of Persia in the west, to Bengal and Assam in the east, and Mysore in the south. Buddhist literature documents Ashoka as a cruel and ruthless monarch who underwent a change of heart after experiencing a particularly gruesome war, the Battle of Kalinga. After the war, he embraced Buddhism and dedicated his life towards dissemination of the tenets of the religion. He became a benevolent king, driving his administration to make a just and bountiful environment for his subjects. Owing to his benevolent nature as a ruler, he was given the title 'Devanampriya Priyadarshi'. Ashoka and his glorious rule is associated with one of the most prosperous time in the history of India and as a tribute to his non-partisan philosophies, the Dharma Chakra adorning the Ashok stambh has been made a part of the Indian National Flag. The emblem of the Republic of India has been adapted from the Lion Capital of Ashoka.

Ashoka was one of India's most illustrious rulers. Ashoka's inscriptions carved on rocks and stone pillars consulate the second set of dated historical records. Some of the inscriptions state that in the aftermath of the destruction resulting from the war against the powerful kingdom of Kalinga (Orissa), Ashoka renounced bloodshed and started following a policy of nonviolence or Ahimsa. His sense of toleration for different religious beliefs reflected the realities of India's regional pluralism, although he personally followed Buddhism. Early Buddhist texts

state that he convened a Buddhist council at his capital, regularly undertook tours within his realm and sent Buddhist, missionary ambassadors to Sri Lanka. India's north-west retained many Persian cultural elements, which might explain Ashoka's rock inscriptions—such inscriptions were commonly associated with the Persian rulers. Ashoka's Greek and Aramaic inscriptions discovered in Kandhar in Afghanistan may also reveal his inclination to maintain contacts with people outside India.

Ashoka occupies a unique place in the history of India. His policies of universal peace, non-violence and religious harmony find no parallel in the monarchs of the world. Ashoka stands out as a monarch who combined successful kingship with idealism and philosophy. Like other rulers, Ashoka too began his reign with war - the conquest of Kalinga. However, the mindless destruction of life and property in this war shattered him so greatly that he vowed never to wage any war again. Instead he adopted the policy of *Dhamma Vijaya* that is conquest through *dhamma*. In his thirteenth major Rock Edict, Asoka states that true conquest is by piety and virtue. Such a decision taken by a king, who lived in an era where military might was the measure of power, earned him a unique place in history.

Ashoka was a true humanist. His policies were oriented towards the welfare of his people. His *dhamma* was based on social responsibility. Besides giving importance to respecting brahmins, and servants, obedience to elders, abstention from killing living beings, *dhamma* also asked people to live in religious harmony. It combined in itself the good points of all sects. Ashoka proved to be a tolerant monarch who, although himself a Buddhist, never sought to impose his personal religion on his subjects. In his twelfth major Rock Edict, he states

that in honouring of other sects lies the honour of one's own sect.

As a king, Ashoka set a very high ideal for himself. He saw himself as a father and the subjects as his children. He communicated his thoughts and philosophy to his people by inscribing them on stone pillars and rock surfaces. These edicts are remarkable examples of Mauryan architecture and also of engineering skills. They are the living monuments of his times. Ashoka attempted to educate his subjects by pointing out the wastefulness of expensive rituals. He asked people to practice *ahimsa*. He himself gave up the practices of the royal hunt and pleasure tours and instead began *Dhamma Yattas* tours for the furtherance of *Dhamma*. By giving his empire a common *Dhamma*, a common language, and practically one script (Brahmi) he brought further political unification. India has been a secular country since the Buddhist age. Though he himself became a Buddhist he did not impose it on the others but followed a tolerant religious policy. He made gifts and grants to non Buddhist as well as anti-Buddhist.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyze the Ashoka the Great as Representing the acme of Indian Culture
2. To describe the nature of the Mauryan administration
3. To discuss the Art and Architecture Monuments belonging to Mauryan period.
4. To examine the ideas of Ashoka on Dhamma

Methodology: The research is based on secondary data. It's an exploratory and descriptive in nature given the nature of the present study, it was required to collect information from the secondary sources. Secondary information was collected from research studies, books, journals, newspapers, ongoing academic working papers.

Ashoka's fame also rests on the measures that he took to spread the message of peace amongst the different regions of the world. He sent ambassadors to the Greek kingdoms and the West. Indian culture spread to far-away lands. According to a Buddhist tradition, Asoka sent Buddhist missions to regions such as Sri Lanka and Central Asia. Buddhism spread to different parts of the world and although it is no longer a major force in India today, yet it continues to be popular in Sri Lanka and the Far Eastern countries.

The Varna system popularly known as the caste system which had arisen in the Vedic Age now became well established and gradually became the dominant form of social organization throughout India. Along with the new religions and philosophy the growth of cities, crafts and trade furthered the process of cultural unity in our country. Asoka unified the entire country under one empire and

renounced the use of war as state policy. On the other hand he says that he strives to discharge the debt he owes to all living creatures.

Art and Architecture: The Mauryan contribution to art and architecture was significant. Ashoka is known to have built 84,000 stupas to commemorate various events of Buddha's life. According to Megasthenes, Pataliputra's grandeur matched that of the cities of Persia.

Ashokan edicts were inscribed on stone pillars that were made of single columns of polished sandstone and had capitals on their top. The best preserved of all Ashokan edicts stands at Lauriya Nandangarh (Bihar). This thirty-two feet tall column has an almost fifty ton seated lion capital placed on its top, an engineering feat worth admiring. The bull capital from Rampura is also another fine example of Mauryan sculpture. The most famous capital is the one at Sarnath, which shows four lions and the *Dharmachakra*. You must be familiar with this as this has been adopted as the national emblem of the Republic of India.

Besides pillars, few Mauryan figures have also come to light. The most well known of these is the Yakshi from Didarganj. The beauty of these figures lies in the exactness of their workmanship and in the fact that they appear to be made from one single stone. Like the pillars, these figures are polished with a unique surface gloss (now called Mauryan polish). You will be amazed to know that despite all these centuries this gloss has not lost its shine. Besides the language that has been used in nearly all the inscriptions and Prakrit which appears to have become the lingua franca of the country and in the Brahmi script the earliest known Indian script.

Another noteworthy aspect of Mauryan architecture is the rock cut caves. The Lomash Rishi (with its impressive entrance) and the Sudama caves are examples of such architecture. These caves cut from solid rock were provided by Ashoka for non-Buddhist monks. These caves marked the beginning of the rock cut architecture which was patronised by later rulers too. His rock edicts were inscribed in the local language and the local script.

Central Government: The ascendancy of the Mauryas had resulted in the triumph of monarchy in India. Other systems like republics and oligarchies that were prevalent in the pre-Mauryan India had collapsed. Although Kautilya the foremost political theorist of ancient India supported the monarchical form of government, he did not stand for royal absolutism. He advocated that the king should take the advice of his ministry in running the administration. Therefore, a council of ministers called Mantriparishad assisted the king in administrative matters. It consisted of Purohita,

Mahamantri, Senapati and Yuvaraja. There were civil servants called Amatyas to look after the day-to-day administration. These officers were similar to the IAS officers of independent India. The method of selection of Amatyas was elaborately given by Kautilya. Asoka appointed Dhamma Mahamatras to supervise the spread of Dhamma. Thus the Mauryan state had a well organized civil service.

Revenue Department Samharta, the chief of the Revenue Department, was in charge of the collection of all revenues of the empire. The revenues came from land, irrigation, customs, shop tax, ferry tax, forests, mines and pastures, license fee from craftsmen, and fines collected in the law courts. The land revenue was normally fixed as one sixth of the produce. The main items of expenditure of the state related to king and his household, army, government servants, public works, poor relief, religion, etc.

Army: The Mauryan army was well organized and it was under the control of Senapati. The salaries were paid in cash. Kautilya refers to the salaries of different ranks of military officers. According to Greek author Pliny, the Mauryan army consisted of six lakh infantry, thirty thousand cavalry, nine thousand elephants and eight thousand chariots. In addition to these four wings, there were the Navy and Transport and Supply wings. Each wing was under the control of Adyakshas or Superintendents. Megasthenes mentions six boards of five members each to control the six wings of the military.

Department of Commerce and Industry: This department had controlled the retail and wholesale prices of goods and tried to ensure their steady supply through its officers called Adyakshas. It also controlled weights and measures, levied custom duties and regulated foreign trade. Judicial and Police Departments Kautilya mentions the existence of both civil and criminal courts. The chief justice of the Supreme Court at the capital was called Dharmathikarin. There were also subordinate courts at the provincial capitals and districts under Amatyas. Different kinds of punishment such as fines, imprisonment, mutilation and death were given to the offenders. Torture was employed to extract truth. Police stations were found in all principal centres. Both Kautilya and Asokan Edicts mention about jails and jail officials. The Dhamma Mahamatras were asked by Asoka to take steps against unjust imprisonment. Remission of sentences is also mentioned in Asoka's inscriptions.

Census: The taking of Census was regular during the Mauryan period. The village officials were to number the people along with other details like their caste and occupation. They were also to count the animals in each house. The census in the towns was taken by municipal officials to track the movement of

population both foreign and indigenous. The data collected were cross checked by the spies. The Census appears to be a permanent institution in the Mauryan administration.

Provincial and Local Administration: The Mauryan Empire was divided into four provinces with their capitals at Taxila, Ujjain, Suvarnagiri and Kalinga. The provincial governors were mostly appointed from the members of royal family. They were responsible the maintenance of law and order and collection of taxes for the empire. The district administration was under the charge of Rajukas, whose position and functions are similar to modern collectors. He was assisted by Yuktas or subordinate officials. Village administration was in the hands of Gramani and his official superior was called Gopa who was in charge of ten or fifteen villages. Both Kautilya and Megasthenes provided the system of Municipal administration. Arthashastra contains a full chapter on the role of Nagarika or city superintendent. His chief duty was to maintain law and order. Megasthenes refers to the six committees of five members each to look after the administration of Pataliputra. These committees looked after: 1. Industries 2. Foreigners 3. Registration of birth and deaths 4. Trade 5. Manufacture and sale of goods 6. Collection of sales tax.

Arthashastra: Kautilya was the Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya. Chandragupta found the Mauryan Empire with his help. Arthashastra was written by him. It is the most important source for writing the history of the Mauryas and is divided into 15 adhikarnas or sections and 180 Prakaranas or subdivisions. It has about 6,000 slokas. The book was discovered by Shamasastri in 1909 and ably translated by him. It is a treatise on statecraft and public administration. Despite the controversy over its date and authorship, its importance lies in the fact that it gives a clear and methodological analysis of economic and political conditions of the Mauryan period. The similarities between the administrative terms used in the Arthashastra and in the Asokan edicts certainly suggests that the Mauryan rulers were acquainted with this work. As such his Arthashastra provides useful and reliable information regarding the social and political conditions as well as the Mauryan administration. Kautilya who was also known as Chanakya was a friend, guide and philosopher to Chandra Gupta Maurya and played a significant role in ousting the Nandas and placing Chandragupta on the throne of Magdha. However, according to scholars like Winternitz and Keith, the work is of a much later period. Probably it was written in the early centuries of Christian era and that the author was a different person and not the Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya. The generally accepted

opinion amidst the controversies regarding the authorship and its date is that the kernel of the Arthashastra belongs to the Mauryan age and was written by Kautilya but it contains some later day additions and interpolations. The Arthashastra consists of fifteen sections and 180 sub sections. It has 6,000 slokas. The work was discovered by Shama Sastri in 1909. Its contents can be divided into three main parts:

1. The first part deals with the king, his council and the government;
2. The second with civil and criminal law and
3. With inter state law, diplomacy and war.

Thus its range is comprehensive and it contains detailed instructions and guidelines for the governance of a state. It can be called a 'Manual of Administration'. It shows an amazing understanding of the intricacies of administration, foreign policy and diplomacy. Indeed it is an outstanding work showing ancient Indian achievements in the field of political science.

Asoka and Dhamma: According to some scholars, his conversion to Buddhism was gradual and not immediate. About 261 B.C. Asoka became a Sakya Upasaka (lay disciple) and two and a half years later, a Bikshu (monk). Then he gave up hunting, visited Bodhi-Gaya, and organized missions. He appointed special officers called Dharma Mahamatras to speed up the progress of Dhamma. In 241 B.C., he visited the birth place of Buddha, the Lumbini Garden, near Kapilavastu. He also visited other holy places of Buddhism like Sarnath, Sravasti and Kusinagara. He sent a mission to Sri Lanka under his son Mahendra and daughter Sangamitra who planted there the branch of the original Bodhi tree. Asoka convened the Third Buddhist Council at Pataliputra in 240 B.C. in order to strengthen the Sangha. It was presided over by Moggaliputta Tissa. Although Asoka embraced Buddhism and took efforts to spread Buddhism, his policy of Dhamma was a still broader concept. It was a way of life, a code of conduct and a set of principles to be adopted and practiced by the people at large. His principles of Dhamma were clearly stated in his Edicts.

The Main Features of Asoka's Dhamma as Mentioned in His Various Edicts may be Summed as Follows:

1. Service to father and mother, practice of ahimsa, love of truth, reverence to teachers and good treatment of relatives.
2. Prohibition of animal sacrifices and festive gatherings and avoiding expensive and meaningless ceremonies and rituals.
3. Efficient organization of administration in the direction of social welfare and maintenance of

constant contact with people through the system of Dhammayatras.

4. Humane treatment of servants by masters and prisoners by government officials.
5. Consideration and non-violence to animals and courtesy to relations and liberality to Brahmins.
6. Tolerance among all the religious sects.
7. Conquest through Dhamma instead of through war. The concept of non-violence and other similar ideas of Asoka's Dhamma are identical with the teachings of Buddha. But he did not equate Dhamma with Buddhist teachings. Buddhism remained his personal belief. His Dhamma signifies a general code of conduct. Asoka wished that his Dhamma should spread through all social levels.

Gandhara-Mathura School: Architecture in association with sculpture enjoyed the liberal patronage of Kanishka. The style of this age is known as the Gandhara. The forms of Greek art were applied to Buddhist subjects with reasonable amount of success. Images of the Buddha appeared in the likeness of Apollo and Yaksha Kubera in the fashion of Zeus of the Greeks figures. The drapery follows the Hellenistic models. This particular style was later transmitted to the Far-East through Chinese Turkestan. The figure of the Buddha in China and Japan reveal distinct traces of the Hellenistic modes of vogue at the court of Kanishka. Excavations in the Khotan (Chinese Turkestan) prove that it was the meeting place of four civilizations - Greek, Indian, Iranian and Chinese.

Other Schools of Mauryan Period: Talking of other schools, Amravati school is the foremost. Its sculptures show a mastery of stone sculpture. The monuments at Jaggayyapeta, Nagarjuna konda and Amaravati are classes by themselves. The Andhra sculpture is generally known as Amaravati schools. The stupas at Amaravati were made of a distinctive white green marble probably it was begun about the time of Christ, and received its final carved faces and railings from about 150 A.D. to 200 A.D. The nature of art of Amaravati region is one of India's major and district styles. A great number of graceful and elongated figures on the reliefs imbue a sense of life and action that is unique in Indian art, not only that each figure is animated by an internal vitality, the quality of the surface further enhances the action of having a gliding quality reminding one of water-worn pebbles. One of the great stupa railing (probably of the 3rd century A.D.) shows the Buddha in human form subduing a maddened elephant which had been sent by his jealous cousin, Devadatta, to attack him. In the field of sculpture a round figure appears belonging to the 3rd century of A.D. It has a sure certain modulation of the flowing sculptural volume

and illusion of life, both hallmarks of the late Amaravati school.

All the railings of the Amaravati stupa are made out of marble while the dome itself is covered with slabs of the same material. Unfortunately, the entire stupa is in ruins. Fragments of its railings have been partly taken to the British Museum. The sculptures of the stupa are quite different in style from those of northern India. The figures of Amaravati have slim blithe features and they are represented in most difficult poses and curves. However, as the scenes are mostly over-crowded, the general effect is not very pleasing, indeed one characteristic and Amaravati is not disputed. The technical excellence of sculptures in carving plants and flowers, particularly the lotuses at Amaravati are most admirably represented in this school. The Buddha is mostly represented by symbols.

It is only recently excavations have revealed art works at Nagarjunakonda. Slabs of limestone illustrate scenes from the Buddha's life.

Although the period under review is not known for architecture, there came into existence beautiful temples and monasteries. The famous tower of Kanishka of Peshawar was one of the wonders of Asia. Unfortunately, no trace has been left behind.

There is only one class of buildings which merit some attention and they are the caves hewn out of solid rocks. The caves of the Ashokan period were plain chambers. But the caves of this period are adorned with pillars and sculptures. Some were used as Chaityas or halls of worship. There are many such chaitya caves at Nashik, Bhoja, Bedsa, and Karle. The last one if regarded as the finest specimen because of the beauty of the sculptures on the front wall. The chaitya of Karle is the most impressive specimen of massive rock architecture. Monasteries or Viharas were excavated near the chaityas. We have three viharas of this kind at Nasik.

Apart from these caves we know of several free standing pillars as the Garuda-dhavaja of Heliodorus. This period of times is really famous for independent for Buddhist structures. The most important of days monuments are the stupas distributed over an area of 125 kilometers all around Ellora. The most famous of them are at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda.

Mauryan Art and Architecture: Mauryan architecture can be divided into Court Art and Popular Art.

Mauryan Art

Court Art	Popular Art
PALACES	CAVES
PILLARS	POETRY
STUPAS	SCULPTURES

Mauryan Court Art: Implies architectural works (in the form of pillars, stupas and palaces) commissioned by Mauryan rulers for political as well as religious reasons.

Palaces: Greek historian, **Megasthenes**, described the palaces of the Mauryan empire as one of the greatest creations of mankind and Chinese traveler **Fa Hien** called Mauryan palaces as god gifted monuments.

Persian Influence: The palace of Chandragupta Maurya was inspired by the Achaemenid palaces at Persepolis in Iran.

Material Used: Wood was the principal building material used during the Mauryan Empire.

Examples: The Mauryan capital at **Pataliputra**, Ashoka's palace at **Kumrahar**, **Chandragupta Maurya's palace**.

Pillars: Ashoka pillars, (usually made of chunar sandstone), as a symbol of the state, assumed a great significance in the entire Mauryan Empire.

Objective: The main objective was to disseminate the Buddhist ideology and court orders in the entire Mauryan empire.

Language: While most Ashoka pillar edicts were in Pali and Prakrit language, few were written in **Greek or Aramaic** language also.

Architecture: Mauryan pillars mainly comprise of four parts:

Shaft: A long shaft formed the base and was made up of a single piece of stone or monolith.

Capital: On top of shaft lay the capital, which was either lotus-shaped or bell-shaped.

Abacus: Above the capital, there was a circular or rectangular base known as the abacus.

Capital Figure: All the capital figures (usually animals like a bull, lion, elephant, etc) are vigorous and carved standing on a square or circular abacus.

Similarities with Persian (Achaemenian) Pillars Polished Stones and Motifs: Both Maurya and Achaemenian pillars, used polished stones and have certain common sculpture motifs such as the lotus.

Proclamations: Maurya's idea of inscribing proclamations (related to Buddhist teachings and court orders) on pillars has its origin in Persian pillars.

Third Person: Inscriptions of both empires begin in the third person and then move to the first person.

Differences with Persian (Achaemenian) Pillars The Capital Figure: It was absent in Mauryan pillars of the Kumrahar hall whereas pillars at Persepolis have the elaborate capital figures.

The Shape and Ornamentation: The shape of Mauryan lotus is different from the Persian pillar.

Pillar Surface: Most of the Persian pillars have a fluted/ ridged surface while the Mauryan pillars have a smooth surface.

Architectural Scheme: The Achaemenid pillars were generally part of some larger architectural scheme, and bit complex and complicated, while the Ashokan pillars were simple and independent freestanding monuments.

Shaft: Unlike Mauryan shafts which are built of monolith (single piece of stone), Persian/Achaemenian shafts were built of separate segments of stones (aggregated one above the other).

Stupa: Stupas were burial mounds prevalent in India from the vedic period.

Architecture: Stupas consist of a cylindrical drum with a circular anda and a harmika and a chhatra on the top.

Anda: Hemispherical mound symbolic of the mound of dirt used to cover Buddha's remains (in many stupas actual relics were used).

Harmika: Square railing on top of the mound.

Chhatra: Central pillar supporting a triple umbrella form.

Material Used: The core of the stupa was made of unburnt brick while the outer surface was made by using **burnt bricks**, which were then covered with a thick layer of plaster and medhi and the toran were decorated with wooden sculptures.

Sanchi Stupa in Madhya Pradesh is the most famous of the Ashokan stupas.

Piprahwa Stupa in Uttar Pradesh is the oldest one.

Stupas built after the death of Buddha: Rajagriha, Vaishali, Kapilavastu, Allakappa, Ramagrama, Vethapida, Pava, Kushinagar and Pippalivana.

Stupa at Bairat, Rajasthan: Grand stupa with a circular mound and a circumambulatory path.

Depiction of Buddha at Stupas

Symbols: In the early stages, Buddha was represented through symbols that represented the different events of Buddha's life like **footprints, lotus thrones, chakras, stupas, etc.**

Jataka Stories: Later on, Jataka stories (stories associated with the previous birth of Buddha) were portrayed on the railings and torans of the stupas.

The Jataka stories that find frequent depiction are Chhadanta Jataka, Sibi Jataka, Ruru Jataka, Vessantara Jataka, Vidur Jataka and Shama Jataka.

The chief events from Buddha's life which are narrated in the arts are birth, renunciation, enlightenment, the first sermon (dharmachakrapravartana) and mahaparinirvana (death).

Pillars: The court art of Ashoka is best seen in the white-grey sandstone columns erected by him all over his empire either to mark a sacred site associated with Buddha's life or to commemorate a great event. On many of these pillars are inscribed the famous edicts of Ashoka propagating the Dhamma ([Dharma or Laws of the Buddha) or the

imperial sermons of Ashoka to his people. Rising to an average height of about 40 feet, the pillars in their most developed state, are tall, tapering monoliths with sculptured capitals, incorporating a series of fluted petals in elongated shape, (which falling together take the form of a bell, commonly known as the Persepolitan Bell) surmounted by a circular abacus ornamented with animal and floral motifs in relief. There is a crowning animal sculpture on the round, which is usually the lion, bull or elephant, represented singly on the early capitals, and grouped on the later ones. In the bull capital from Rampurva (now in the National Museum at New Delhi) the bull is rendered naturalistically in a manner reminiscent of seal carving from the Indus civilisation, suggesting continuity in tradition. The lion capital once stood at Sarnath from where Buddha preached his first sermon. The animals around the drum of the capital—consecutively the bull, horse, lion and elephant between which are depictions of chakras (wheels)—almost appear to be pulling an invisible vehicle as if to perpetuate the wheel of Dhamma. The pillar in its original form had a gigantic stone wheel crowning the top of the lions. The crisp carving, smooth polish and high quality of craftsmanship have earned this work, particularly the capital, and a reputation as one of ancient India's greatest artistic achievements.

Rock-cut Architecture: Ashoka's reign also saw the firm establishment of one of the most important and characteristic art traditions of South Asia—the rock-cut architecture. The series of rock-cut sanctuaries in the Barabar and Nagarjuni hills, near Gaya in Bihar, contain a number of inscriptions which show that they were donated for the habitation of certain Ajivika ascetics, perhaps followers of the Jain religion. Architecturally, their main interest lies in being the earliest known examples in India of the rock-cut method. Also they represent a contemporary type of structure that combined wood and thatch. Sudama and Lomas Rishi caves are the two notable hermitages, each consisting of a circular cell with a hemispherical domed roof attached to a barrelvauled anteroom with side entrances.

The Stupa: The stupa was not unknown in India before the time of Ashoka. It was originally a simple burial mound of earth and bricks erected by the Vedic Aryans. There is no evidence of veneration paid to relic-mounds in the pre-Maurya period. From the time Ashoka divided up the existing body relics of the Buddha and erected monuments to enshrine them, the stupas became objects of cult worship. Gradually, in Buddhist art and religion, the stupa came to be accepted as a sort of architectural body representing the Buddha himself. The core of the stupa was of unburnt brick, and the outer face of burnt brick,

covered with a thick layer of plaster. The stupa was crowned by an umbrella of wooden fence enclosing a path for pradakshina.

Human Figures: Several stone sculptures of human figures demonstrating characteristics of the Maurya period have been found. Of these, one is an extremely well-preserved statue of a female chowrie (fly whisk) bearer (now in the Patna Museum) which was found by villagers at Didarganj. The technique, surface refinement and high polish undoubtedly relate it to the Maurya period. The figure wears a hip-hugging garment over her lower body; its diaphanous folds are depicted by double-incised lines across her legs. Heavy ornaments, including a jewelled or beaded girdle, anklets, armbands, necklaces and earrings adorn the figure. This type of feminine attire will be seen throughout the development of Indian art with some variation, but essentially, the clinging lower garment, bare torso and abundant jewellery became the norm.

Some Famous Monuments Built By Mauryans are:

1. Dhamek Stupa. Opened: 500 AD. Location: Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, India. ...
2. Sanchi Stupa. It is 46 kilometres north-east of Bhopal, capital of Madhya Pradesh.
3. Ashoka Pillar. Built By- King Ashoka.
4. Barabar Caves. Grottoe of Lomas Rishi. 3rd century BCE.
5. Kesariya Stup

Conclusion: It seems that Ashoka was sincere when he proclaimed his belief in *ahimsa* (non-violence) and cooperation between religions ("contact between religions is good"). He never conquered the south of

India or Sri Lanka, which would have been logical, and instead sent out missionaries -as far away as Cyrenaica- to convert others to the same beliefs, and sent his brother to Sri Lanka. He erected several stupas, founded Buddhist monasteries, softened the harsh laws of Bindusara and Chandragupta, forbade the brutal slaughter of animals, and organized a large Buddhist council at Patna, which had to establish a new canon of sacred texts and repress heresies. The Maurya period saw the establishment of the first empire in the history of Indian subcontinent. Such a large empire required new strategies of governance. The complex system of administration set up under the Mauryas became the foundational basis of succeeding polities. Ashoka is known equally, if not more, for renouncing all military ambition and turning to his spiritual side. He decided to promote the cause of dhamma, inspired from his personal faith in the Buddha's teaching for the laity. Ashoka dictated the practice of Dharma that became the backbone of his philanthropic and tolerant administration. Dharma was neither a new religion nor a new political philosophy. It was a way of life, outlined in a code of conduct and a set of principles that he encouraged his subjects to adopt to lead a peaceful and prosperous life. He undertook the propagation of these philosophies through publication of 14 edicts that he spread out throughout his empire. The social and economic processes of agrarian expansion and urbanization of the preceding centuries continued under Maurya rule, and there was a further growth in cities, trade, and the money economy. However, after Ashoka, the empire saw a swift and rapid decline.

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