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ASHOKA'S DHARMA: A TIMELESS PATH TO GLOBAL PEACE

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ABSTRACT
Ashoka the Great's transformation from a ruthless conqueror to a benevolent ruler is one of history's most profound moral shifts. His Dharma was not merely a religious doctrine but a broad ethical framework promoting social harmony, respect for all living beings, and the welfare of his people. To spread these ideals, Ashoka inscribed edicts on pillars and rocks across his empire, ensuring his message reached even the most remote regions. He also sent emissaries to foreign lands, including Sri Lanka and the Hellenistic kingdoms, to propagate Buddhist principles (Thapar, 2003; Falk, 2006). His policies focused on religious tolerance, the fair treatment of all communities, and the establishment of hospitals, rest houses, and infrastructure for public welfare (Kulke & Rothermund, 2004; Bechert, 1995). Despite his deep Buddhist convictions, Ashoka maintained a secular administration, ensuring that all religions coexisted peacefully. His governance laid the foundation for a compassionate state, influencing later rulers across Asia. His legacy endures in the symbols of India today, including the Ashoka Chakra, which adorns the national flag, serving as a reminder of his ideals of justice and righteousness (Singh, 2008; Harvey, 2013).

KEYWORDS: *Dharma, Buddhist, Ashoka Chakra, justice, moral philosophy, Kalinga War*

INTRODUCTION
Ashoka the Great, one of the most remarkable figures in ancient history, redefined governance and moral philosophy during his reign in the 3rd century BCE. As the ruler of the Mauryan Empire, he initially sought expansion through war, culminating in the devastating Kalinga War. The atrocities of the war profoundly affected him, leading to a spiritual transformation. Ashoka renounced violence and embraced the teachings of Buddhism, formulating his own ethical code called Dharma. This unique doctrine emphasized compassion, tolerance, justice, and non-violence, aiming to create harmony among his subjects (Strong, 1983; Robinson, 2006).

Today's society, plagued by violence, political instability, and social fragmentation, finds Ashoka's principles more relevant than ever. This article explores the transformative vision of Ashoka's Dharma and its potential to guide humanity toward global peace and harmony.

The Kalinga War and Ashoka's Transformation: The Kalinga War was the catalyst for Ashoka's adoption of a non-violent way of life. The massive casualties and destruction led him to renounce war entirely. He committed to non-violence not only in his personal life but also as a state policy. His administration actively promoted ethical governance and sought peaceful resolutions to conflicts. His realization that victory in war was futile inspired him to ensure that future generations avoided similar violence (Thapar, 2003; Sen, 1997)

Ashoka's Dharma: A Philosophy for All
Unlike a religion, Ashoka's Dharma was a universal code of ethics that transcended caste, creed, and ethnicity. Its core principles included:

1. **Ahimsa (Non-violence):** A fundamental tenet promoting peace and discouraging harm to any living being.
2. **Tolerance and Respect for Diversity:** Advocating harmony among different religious and cultural groups.
3. **Moral Leadership:** Emphasizing the ruler's role as a servant of the people.
4. **Environmental and Animal Welfare:** Encouraging kindness toward animals and sustainable practices (Singh, 2008; Gombrich, 1988).

Ashoka communicated these values through edicts inscribed on rocks and pillars across his empire, making his philosophy accessible to all, regardless of literacy or status. These edicts serve as historical evidence of a ruler who prioritized human welfare over conquest (Falk, 2006; Bechert, 1995).

Ashoka's Policies and Administrative Reforms
Ashoka implemented numerous policies that shaped his administration, reinforcing his commitment to ethical governance. Some of the significant reforms included:

- **Religious Tolerance:** Ashoka issued edicts emphasizing respect for all religions and promoting interfaith harmony. He discouraged sectarian conflicts and urged people to understand and appreciate other faiths (Harvey, 2013; Robinson, 2006).
- **Public Welfare Initiatives:** Hospitals for humans and animals, rest houses, and roads were constructed across

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the empire to ensure the well-being of his subjects (Bechert, 1995; Sen, 1997).

- **Legal Reforms:** Ashoka revised the judicial system, advocating for fair trials and compassionate treatment of prisoners (Kulke & Rothermund, 2004).
- **Promotion of Education:** Ashoka patronized learning centers and supported scholars, facilitating the spread of knowledge throughout his empire (Gombrich, 1988; Strong, 1983).

Ashoka's Relevance in Modern Society

The non-violent approach followed by Ashoka has become a necessity in today's modern society. Conflict between different nations threatens global stability, as world powers engage in wars over political, economic, and territorial dominance. Many world leaders could learn from Ashoka's example, abandoning divisive policies and prioritizing peace, cooperation, and human welfare. Failure to do so could lead to devastating consequences, including war, economic crises, and humanitarian disasters (Robinson, 2006; Harvey, 2013).

Ashoka's Diplomatic Efforts and Influence Beyond India

Ashoka's diplomatic outreach was unprecedented for his time. He sent emissaries to Sri Lanka, Egypt, Greece, and Southeast Asia, spreading Buddhist teachings and advocating for peaceful coexistence (Bechert, 1995; Singh, 2008). His influence led to the flourishing of Buddhism across Asia, laying the groundwork for cultural exchange and cooperation among nations. The Buddhist councils he convened contributed to the standardization and expansion of Buddhist thought (Harvey, 2013; Falk, 2006).

Ashoka's Influence on Modern Governance

Many principles of Ashoka's rule resonate with modern governance, particularly in democratic systems. His emphasis on moral leadership, social welfare, and religious tolerance aligns with contemporary concepts of human rights and good governance (Sen, 1997; Kulke & Rothermund, 2004). Ashoka's policies have inspired leaders in India and beyond, with figures like Mahatma Gandhi drawing from his philosophy of non-violence to promote independence and social justice.

CONCLUSION

If the global struggle for supremacy continues unchecked, human civilization faces the risk of devastation. The use of nuclear weapons or large-scale conflicts could lead to unprecedented destruction. To prevent such a fate, nations must adopt Ashoka's philosophy, emphasizing mutual respect, cooperation, and ethical leadership. World peace can only be achieved through a commitment to non-violence, tolerance, and humanitarian values. Ashoka's legacy serves as a guiding light for modern civilization, demonstrating that true strength lies in compassion and moral leadership rather than military might. His vision remains a crucial blueprint for a more peaceful and harmonious world.

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