

The rock pillar edicts: the emperor ashoka

[History](#)



History and Political Science February 5, Topic: The Rock Pillar Edicts: The Emperor Ashoka

What is Buddhism?

Buddhism is derived from the word 'buddhi' which means to awaken. The founder of this religion is Siddhartha Gotama, later known as Buddha. He experienced awakening at the age of thirty-five. In the strict sense of the term Buddhism is not a religion but a 'way of life'. The Buddhist path can be summarized thus: (1) To follow the path of morality (2) Keep proper watch on thoughts and actions (3) To cultivate wisdom and understanding. Buddhism details the purpose of life, explains the prevailing injustice and inequality in the world around us, and highlights the way of life which leads to true happiness. Buddhism has appropriate answer for the materialistic tendencies. It details the working of the human mind well. Buddha taught a path of enlightenment as per his inner experiences. He was not God, nor did he claim that position. Buddhists do not engage in idol worship but pay respect to the images/statues of Buddha. Though there are different types of Buddhisms, their fundamental essence is the same—the Dhamma or truth. Buddhism is a scientific way of life and the core of Buddhism has universal appeal. Duiker and Spielvogel argue, "He (Buddha) accepted the concept of reincarnation and the role of karma as a means of influencing the movement of individual souls up and down in the scale of life." (52) The concepts of Buddhism can be summed up through the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

Definition of dharma:

The simple yet profound definition of dharma is "Dharayati iti dharma," meaning 'that which holds together'. Dharma is eternal, without the

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beginning or the end. The definitions of dharma according to Hinduism and Buddhism are more or less identical, dharma is the law or principal that orders and governs the universe; an individual's conduct needs to be in conformity with the eternal principles and one should act as per one's true nature. The word Dharma is derived from " Dhri" root. " Dhaaranaad dharmam iti aahuhu", meaning that which is adopted (which upholds supports and maintains) is known as Dharma.

The Rock Pillar Edicts: The Emperor Asoka:

The Edicts of Asoka engraved in stone have an all-time great moral and spiritual value. The edicts are not law now, but they have left a great impact for the 21st century legislation. The legislators of the world have now realized the importance of spiritual values for the humankind impacted by industrial and internet revolutions. The edicts are not only the legacy of the past, but also the guidelines for future governance. To ask for separation of religion from the state, is the misguided notion. The need of the hour is not to politicalise spirituality but spiritualisation of politics. Nikam and McKeon argue, " Some of the edicts have been inscribed again and again because of the charm of the teachings [and the hope that] men may follow their precepts after hearing them repeatedly." (26) Asoka (reigned ca. 273-232 B. C.) is the third emperor of the Maurya dynasty. In the history of Buddhism, his story refers to his transformation from a ruthless dictator to a staunch follower of Buddha. This development takes place after the Kalinga war in which more than 100, 000 people were killed and about 150, 000 were taken as captives. The cruelties of the war shocked the conscience of the King, he expressed his profound sorrow and the edicts relate to his passion to propagate the tenets of dharma, the Buddhist laws of piety.

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Renunciation and participation in action:

Duiker and Spielvogel wrote, “ Arjuna was a warrior, and according to Aryan tribal tradition, he was obliged to follow the code of his class. There is more joy in doing one’s own duty.”(38) Renunciation in spiritual terms has a profound meaning. Actions done without the motivated desires, without attachment to the fruits, are part of renunciation. Lord Krishna in Bhagavad-Gita advises Arjuna to act on and fight. Andrea and Overfield argue, “ It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice.”(393)To mitigate the confusion of Arjuna, Lord Krishna after a marathon question and answer session, reveals in categorical terms, “ Tayostu karma sanyasthatat karmayogo vishishyate,” meaning thereby, instead of renunciation of action participation in action is supreme.

Conclusion:

The Realised souls like Lord Krishna, Lord Buddha and the like have transcended the mind-level and they reveal from the spiritual level. The truth propounded by them is one without the second and absolute. The problems arise when the mind-level pundits, preachers and monks interpret their teachings and differences of opinions crop up. Religion means practical experience God. Those with narrow thinking and small mind opine that spirituality needs to be secular. Spirituality and dharma are two sides of the same coin; it is impossible to separate them. Secularism is part of spirituality; to separate it means to give room for negativities in the society.

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