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## Asoka's Humanitarian Work and Missionary Activities : A Popular Governance of Maurya Administration

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**Abstract:** *Emperor Asoka occupies a glorious place in world history. Historians have compared him with great monarchs like Constantine, Marcus Aurelius, Alexander, Alfred the Great, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Akbar and Napoleon, but Asoka's achievements often stand head and shoulders above others. Asoka was a benevolent ruler. He looked upon his subjects as his children and did everything possible to promote their material and spiritual welfare of his Governance as a good administrator. Thus he upheld a new paternal concept of kingship and introduced a popular Governances of his empire. His humanitarian activities crossed the boundaries of his kingdom as a popular Governance and spread to other nations as well.*

*Asoka also included certain benevolent activities within his policy of Dhamma. Asoka aimed at relieving the distress of living being and in this regard he made no distinction between man and animal. Charitable dispensaries were established both for human beings and beasts. Besides, trees were planted on both sides of the roads for the benefit of man and creatures alike. These humanitarian measures were not only confined to the territories of the Maurya empire. In one his Rock-Edicts Asoka claimed that the measures were even extended to foreign countries.*

Emperor Asoka occupies a glorious place in world history. Historians have compared him with great monarchs like Constantine, Marcus Aurelius, Alexander, Alfred the Great, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Akbar and Napoleon, but Asoka's achievements often stand head and shoulders above others. The Mauryan Centralized monarchy became a paternal despotism under Asoka. He defined his attitude towards his subjects in unmistakable terms: 'All men are my children; and just as I desire for my children that they may obtain every kind of Welfare and happiness both in this and the next world, so I desire for all men, 'In two separate Rock edicts Asoka boldly states: 'Whatsoever I perceive (as good), that

I wish, intending, I would fulfil (it) by action and achieved by definite means'. This could not have been the statement of a monarch if he was not conscious of his unfettered power.

Asoka took much interest in the exposition of the Buddhist Dharma or doctrine. The sight of misery & bloodshed in the Kalinga War (261 B.C.) turned the Emperor from the policy of military conquest (Digvijaya) to a policy of conquest of men's hearts by the law of piety (Dhamma Vijaya) Romila Thapar comments that Asoka equated Dhamma with social responsibility, and general humaneness in all actions.

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A few years after taking over the reins of his empire, Asoka conquered Kalinga which was situated between the Subarnarekha in Bengal and the Godavari and covered parts of Orissa and Andhra. The 13th Rock Edit of Asoka gives a vivid account of the conquest of Kalinga after terrible was in which 1,50,000 persons were captured, 1,00,000 were slain and many times that number perished.<sup>1</sup>

In one of his edicts, Asoka tells - I was the head of a vast empire but I longed to subjugate a small Kingdom and cause the death of thousands of soldiers. I widowed thousands of women and orphaned thousands of children. "With these oppressive thoughts in his mind he could not stay there any longer. He led his army back towards Pataliputra with a heavy heart."<sup>2</sup>

According to Dr. Radhakumud Mukherjee the Kalinga war brought about far-reaching changes not only in Asoka's personal life but also in the internal and external policies of Magadha. If tradition is to be believed, Asoka was converted to Buddhism by the venerable monk Upagupta shortly after the Kalinga war.<sup>3</sup>