

SOURCES

The 13th Major rock edict of Asoka

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • February 28, 2017 • Updated March 21, 2024 • 6 min read



The 13th Major Edict of Ashoka marks a pivotal moment in the history of ancient India and the Mauryan Empire. This edict, issued after the devastating Kalinga War, reflects Emperor Ashoka's profound transformation from a conqueror to a ruler dedicated to peace and dharma. It is in this edict that Ashoka, filled with remorse for the suffering caused by his military campaigns, publicly embraces Buddhism and commits to governing by its principles of non-violence and compassion. The edict not only offers a glimpse into the personal change of Ashoka but also signifies a shift in state policy, promoting welfare and moral conduct over conquest and expansion.

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13th Major rock Edict (Shahabazgarhi Version)

When king Devanampriya Priyadarshi had been anointed eight years, the country of the Kalingas was conquered by him. One Hundred and fifty thousand in number were the men who were deported thence; One hundred and thousand in numbers were those who were slain there; and many times as many those who died.

After that, now that the country of the Kalingas has been taken, Devanampriya is devoted to the pursuit of Dhamma, the love of Dhamma, and to instructing the people in Dhamma. This is the repentance of Devanampriya an account of his conquest of the country of the Kalingas. For the slaughter, death, and deportation of people that take place in the course of conquering an unconquered country is considered very painful and deplorable by Devanampriya.

But the following is considered even more deplorable than this by Devanampriya- that Brahmanas and Shramanas, members of other sects or householders who are living there, and who practice obedience and firm devotion to superior persons, obedience to mother and father, obedience to elderd, proper courtesy to friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives, to slave and servants-all these suffer injury or slaughter or deportation of their loved ones. And if misfortune befalls the friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives of persons who are full of devotion towards them, even though they themselves be well provided for, this misfortune too becomes an injury to their own selves. This is shared by all and is considered deplorable be Devanampriya.

there is no place where men are not indeed attached to some sect. therefore, even the hundredth part or the thousands part of all those people who were slain, who died, and who were deported at that time in Kalinga, would now be considered very deplorable by Devanampriya. And Devanampriya thinks that even to one who should wrong him, what can

be forgiven is to be forgiven. And even the inhabitants of the forests which are included in the dominion of Devanampriya, even those he pacifies and conciliates. And they are told to the power to punish them which Devanampriya possesses in spite of his repentance, in order that they may be ashamed of their crimes and may not be killed. For Devanampriya desires towards all beings abstention from hurting, self control and impartiality in case of violence. And this conquest is considered the greatest one by Devanampriya- the conquest by Dhamma.

Source: *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol-I, Inscriptions of Asoka by E Hultzsch 1969*

13th Major rock Edict (Kalsi version)

When king Devanampriya Priyadarsin had been anointed eight years, (the country of) the Kalingas was conquered by (him). One hundred and fifty thousand in number were the men who were deported thence, one hundred thousand in number were those who were slain there, and many times as many those who died.

After that, now that (the country of) the Kalingyas has been taken, Devanampriya (is devoted) to a zealous study of morality, to the love of morality, and to the instruction (of people) in morality. This is the repentance of Devanampriya on account of his conquest of (the country of) the Kalingyas. For, this is considered very painful and deplorable by Devanampriya, that, while one is conquering an unconquered (country), slaughter, death, and deportation of people (are taking place) there,

But the following is considered even more deplorable than this by Devanampriya. (To) the Brahmanas or Sramanas, or other sects or householders/ who are living there, (and) among whom the following are practised: obedience to those who receive high pay, obedience to mother and father, obedience to elders, proper courtesy to friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives, to slaves and servants, (and) firm devotion, to these then happen injury or slaughter or deportation of (their) beloved ones. Or if there are then incurring misfortune the friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives of those whose

affection (for the latter) is undiminished, although they are (themselves) well provided for, this (misfortune) as well becomes an injury to those (persons) themselves.

This is shared by all men and is considered deplorable by Devanampriya.

There is no country where these (two) classes, (viz.) the Brahmanas and the Sramanas, do not exist, except among the Yona; and there is no (place) in any country where men are not indeed attached to some sect.

Therefore even the hundredth part or the thousandth part of all those people who were slain, who died, and who were deported at that time when (the country of) the Kalingas was taken, (would) now be considered very deplorable by Devanampriya.

.....desires towards all beings self-control, impartiality, (and) kindness.

But this by Devanampriya, viz, the conquest by morality.

And this (conquest) has been won repeatedly by Devanampriya both [here] and among all (his) borderers, even as far as at (the distance of) six hundred yojanas where the Yona king named Antiyoga (is ruling), and beyond this Antiyoga, (where) four kings (are ruling), (viz, the king) named Tulamaya, (the king) named Antekina, (the king) named Maka, (and the king) named Alikyashudala, (and) likewise towards the south, (where) the Chodas and Pandyas (are ruling), as far as Tamraparni.

Likewise here in the king's territory, among the Greeks (Yonas) and Kambojas, among the Nabhakas and Nabhapanktis, among the Bhojas and Pitinikyas, among the Andhras and Paladas, everywhere (people) are conforming to Devanampriya's instruction in morality.

Even those to whom the envoys of Devanampriya do not go, having heard of the duties of morality, the ordinances, (and) the instruction in morality of Devanampriya, are conforming to morality and will conform to (it).

This conquest, which has been won by this everywhere; causes the feeling of satisfaction. Firm becomes this satisfaction, (viz.) the satisfaction at the conquest by morality.

But this satisfaction is indeed of little (consequence). Devanampriya thinks that only the fruits in the other (world) are of great (value).

And for the following purpose has this rescript on morality been written, (viz,) in order that the sons (and) great-grandsons (who) may be (born) to me, should not think that a fresh conquest ought to be made; (that), if a conquest does please them, they should take pleasure in mercy and light punishments; and (that) they should regard the conquest by morality as the only (true) conquest.

This (conquest bears fruit) in this world (and) in the other world. And let all (their) pleasure be the pleasure in exertion. For this (bears fruit) in this world (and) in the other world.

Source: *Translation by E. Hultzsch (1857-1927). Published in India in 1925. Inscriptions of Asoka p.43*

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