

**A HISTORICAL GUIDANCE TO BUILD AN EXCELLENCE  
WELFARE STATE: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EMPEROR  
ASOKA'S PHILOSOPHY**

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**Introduction:**

A Welfare State is a concept of government in which the state plays a key role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of its citizens. It is based on the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life. Before analyzes of the modern scholars in European continent, the concept of the welfare state was in eastern continent. The Archeological and literary evidences emphasized that welfare state and wellbeing concepts originated and promulgated in India 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. The inscriptions of Emperor Asoka are important from political, economic and religious points of view.

Ashoka the Great was an Indian emperor of the Maurya Dynasty who ruled almost the entire Indian subcontinent from 269 BC to 232 BC. He embraced Buddhism from the prevalent Vedic tradition after witnessing the mass deaths of the war of Kalinga (modern Orissa state), which he himself had waged out of a desire for conquest. After this transformation, Ashoka came to be known as Dhammashoka (Sanskrit), meaning Ashoka, the follower of Dharma. Asoka promulgated the main ethical teachings of the Buddha, expressed in what Asoka referred to as the Dharma. He set his philosophy carved into stone pillars and cliff faces. Ashoka defined the main principles of dharma (*dhamma*) such as; nonviolence, obedience to parents, liberality towards friends, human treatment of servants, tolerance of all sects and opinions, respect for the Brahmins and other religious teachers and priests and generosity towards all which could help for a welfare state. These

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principles suggest a general ethic of behaviour to which no religious or social group could object. What we know of Asoka's life comes from the stone edicts, which contain his own words, and from legends that were initially handed down orally. But later were set down in manuscripts. Most of the legends appear to be the words of monks anxious to impress the laity with stories of the miraculous. But there is also an account of a third Buddhist council convened by Asoka, where an attempt was made to reconcile the practices of the many different Buddhist sects emerging over three centuries.

### **Materials and Methods:**

This study was conducted using an exploratory approach using a literary survey. Primary and secondary data which reveal the historical evidence on King Asoka's philosophy were the materials that used in this study.

### **Results:**

Several findings were emerged through this study as results. Ashoka repeatedly declared that he understood dharma to be the energetic practice of the sociomoral virtues of honesty, truthfulness, compassion, mercifulness, benevolence, nonviolence, considerate behavior toward all, "little sin and many good deeds," non-extravagance, non-acquisitiveness, and non-injury to animals. Toward all religious sects he adopted a policy of respect and guaranteed them full freedom to live according to their own principles, but he also urged them to exert themselves for the "increase of their inner worthiness."

The interpretations of Asoka gave the teachings of the Buddha can only be inferred from the inscriptions that remain. These inscriptions; the rock edicts and pillar edicts mostly dated in various years of his reign contain statements regarding his thoughts and actions and provide information on his life and acts. His utterances rang of frankness and sincerity. He makes no mention of the Four Noble Truths or the Eightfold path, but emphasizes the everyday, practical parts of the latter. In general, Asoka appears to have interpreted the Dharma as law, duty, and righteousness, elaborating it as a prohibition of the killing of men or animals, a social policy of welfare, and as



admonitions to observe ethical behavior and religious tolerance. According to the edicts, Ashoka took great care of the welfare of his subjects. Among his works of public utility were the founding of hospitals for men and animals and the supplying of medicines, and the planting of roadside trees and groves, digging of wells, and construction of watering sheds and rest houses. Orders were also issued for curbing public laxities and preventing cruelty to animals. With the death of Ashoka, the Mauryan Empire disintegrated and his work was discontinued. To practice the dharma keenly, Ashoka went out on periodic tours preaching the dharma to the rural people and relieving their sufferings.

### **Conclusion**

It can be concluded that Emperor Ashoka, a great ruler who promulgate welfare concept to the world as well as to future leaders and the whole society. The welfare states of affluent democracies are now in a position of political discussions and social conflicts. The welfare state involves a transfer of funds from the state, to the services provided (e.g. healthcare, education) as well as directly to individuals (benefits).

**Keywords:** Welfare State, King Asoka, Buddhism

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