



**Review Article**

**SAMRAT ASHOKA'S INSCRIPTIONS AND AYURVEDA: A REVIEW**

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**ABSTRACT**

Samrat Ashoka was the grandson of Chandragupta and he founded the Mauryan dynasty empire about 324 B.C. Ashoka built a large number of inscriptions on rocks and pillars to propagate Buddhist message of loving kindness. He was the follower of Buddhist thought after Kalinga war. He had dug wells and planted trees and medicinal plants along the roads for human beings as well as animals. The fundamental principles of Ayurveda have been based on Indian philosophical sciences such as *Aastika* and *Nastika Darshan*. Ancient Indian history has been written mainly based on texts/literatures but there was some role of coins and inscriptions also. The total number of inscriptions inscribed on rocks, pillars, caves by Samrat Ashoka has reached 42 but in this article only two (Girnar's second and Dhauri's first Shilalekh) which is related to Ayurveda has been reviewed.

**KEYWORDS:** Inscriptions, *Pashu-Chikitsa*, *Ashw-Ayurveda*, *Sadvritta*, *Atharva-veda*.

**INTRODUCTION**

It is impossible to understand any religious movement unless we approach it in a spirit of humility and reverence, which is the hallmark of all great scholars and pioneers of learning.<sup>[1]</sup>

Ayurveda is a *Darshan shashtra* (Philosophy) as well as clinical science having the goal of *Moksha*. Every *Darshan shashtra* has its goal to achieve the *Moksha*. *Aastika* and *Nastika Darshan shastras* have their influence on Ayurveda. We should give importance to the *Darshan shastras* for better understanding of Ayurveda. It is said that the knowledge of history of Indian culture is incomplete without the knowledge of *Pali* literature.

The earliest inscriptions in India are the Edicts of Ashoka. Thus, Ashoka was called as the father of inscription. The most authentic source of Mauryan history is the edicts of Ashoka. Most of his inscriptions were engraved on rocks, boulders, cave walls and pillars of stone. Their language is Pali with provincial modifications.<sup>[2]</sup>

The number of inscriptions inscribed on rocks, pillars, caves by Emperor Ashoka has reached 42. Of these, 36 are in India, 2 in Nepal, 2 in Pakistan and 2 in Afghanistan. The inscriptions found in Afghanistan are in the 'Kharoshthi' script. All these inscriptions were engraved at such places where more and more people could get their attention. Scholars have categorized the records as follows: Shila inscription (Girnar, Kalsi, Mansehra, Dhauri, Jogad etc.)- Miniature inscription (Rupnath, Sahasram, Bairath, Brahmagiri, etc.)- Pillar inscription (Topra, Dehli-Meerut, Kausambi, etc.) -

Minstambha inscription (Sanchi, Sarnath, Rummindei etc.)- Guha inscription (equivalent)- Inscriptions inscribed on the stones, pillars, etc of Emperor Ashoka, mostly 'Brahmi' lipi, the mother of the *Devanagari* script which is in vogue these days. Their language is mainly '*Pali*' which was the colloquial language in North India at that time.<sup>[3]</sup>

**Importance of Ashokas inscriptions**

Ancient history has so far been composed mainly on the basis of native or foreign literary sources. There has been some role of coins and inscriptions, but more importance has been given to the texts. The records are certainly more reliable than the mythological followers.<sup>[4]</sup> Regarding propagation of Ayurveda, it is said that religious persons also played major role in propagating Ayurveda in foreign countries. Especially Buddhist religious persons had carried Ayurveda to the Asian countries particularly East Asian countries like Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Japan, Singapore, Korea and Tibet.<sup>[5]</sup>

He was impressed by the concepts of non-violence and love in Buddhism. He visited important Buddhist sites and erected commemorative pillars with inscriptions that described the significance of the places.

According to the Mahawamsa he sent missionaries to Kashmir and Gandhara, Mahisa Mandala (Mysore) Yavana (Greek settlements in North Western frontier province, Vanavasa (North Kanara), Aparantaka (Alor, Broach and Sopara), Maharattha (Maharashtra), Himavanta (Himalayan

country), Tambapanni (Sri Lanka), Suvarnabhumi (Burma and Thailand). The reliquaries unearthed at Bhilsa Topes bear the names of some of the missionaries. According to the inscriptions, he sent his Dharma Mahamatras to Antiochus, King of Syria, and the kingdoms of four other kings i.e., Ptolamy (Turamaya) of Egypt, Antigonus (Antakini) of Macedonea, Alexander (Alikasudara) of Epirus (in Northern Greece), and Magas of Cyrene (in North Africa). He also mentions of the names of Yavanas, Kambojas, Pandyanas, Cholas, Andhras, Pulindas, Tambapannis.<sup>[6]</sup>

**Writes B. M. Barua:** The Maurya Emperor welcomed the lofty teachings of the Buddha and openly accepted the Saddharma as his religion as a matter of choice, out of his profound conviction as to its intrinsic merit, rather because its underlying spirit was found accidentally to be in harmony with his own perception as to the nature of human good and his original vision as to the nature and course of human progress. He raised Buddhism from the position of a local faith to the status of a world religion.<sup>[7]</sup>

### The Inscriptions

#### Girnar Shilalekh (Inscription): Dwitiya (Second) Abhilekh<sup>[8]</sup>

1. Sarvata vijitamhi devānampriyasa piyadasino rājo evamapi pracamtesu yathā | coḍā pādā satiyapūto ketalaputo ā tambañī amtiyako yonarājā ye vā pi | tasa amtiyakasa sāmīpaṃ rājāno sarvatra devānampriyasa priyadasino rājo dve cikīcha | katā Manusacikīchā ca Pasucikīchā ca
2. Osūḍhāni ca yāni Manusopagāni ca Pasopagāni ca yata yata nāsti sarvatrā hārāpitāni ca ropāpitāni ca
3. Mūlāni ca Phalāni ca yata yatra nāsti sarvata hārāpitāni ca ropāpitāni ca
4. Paṃthesū kūpā ca khānāpitā vrachā ca ropāpitā paribhogāya pasumanusānaṃ

#### Its translation into English is as follows

1. Devnapriya Priyadarshi Raja's kingdom is everywhere and similarly in the neighboring states adjacent to the border - like Chod, Pandya, Satyaputra, Keralaputra, Tamraparni, also Yavanaraja Antiyoka and whoever is the nearest king of that Antiyoka - everywhere Devavanpriya Priyadarshi king (towards from) Medicine for humans and medicine for animals - Two (types) of medicines (*Pashu* and *Manushya chikitsa*) were done.
2. And medicines which are useful for humans and animals have been ordered and given at all places where they are not.

3. *Kandamul* and fruits have been ordered and given to all the places where they are not.
4. And wells have been dug and trees have been planted on the roads for the abundant use of animals and humans.

#### Dhauri Shilalekh (Inscription): First Abhilekh<sup>[9]</sup>

1. Kecha va ekapulise.... nāti etaṃ se pi desaṃ no savam
2. Dekhata hi tuphe etaṃ suvihitā pi
3. Nitiyaṃ ekapulise pi athi ye baṃdhanam vā palikilesam vā pāpanāti
4. Tata hoti akasmā tena badhanaṃtika aṃne ca... hu jane daviye dakhīyati
5. Tata ichitaviye tuphehi kiṃti majham paṭipādayemā ti
6. Imehi cu jātehi no saṃpaṭipajati isāya āsulopena niṭhaliyena tūlanāya anāvūtiya ālasiyena kilamathena
7. Se ichitaviye kitiṃ ete jātā no huvevu mamā ti
8. Etasa ca savasa mūle anāsulope atūlanā ca
9. Nitiyaṃ e kilamte siyā na te ugacha saṃcalitaviye tu vaṭitaviye etaviye vā
10. Hevameva e dakheya tuphāka tena vataviye ānaṃne dekhata hevaṃ ca hevaṃ ca devānaṃpiyasa anusathi
11. Se mahāphale e tasa saṃpaṭipāda mahāapāye asaṃpaṭipati |
12. Vipāṭipādayamīne hi etaṃ nathi svagasa āladhi no lājāladhi
13. Duāhale hi imasa kaṃmasa me kute manoatileke
14. Saṃpaṭipajamīne cu etaṃ svagaṃ ālādhayisatha mama ca ānaniyaṃ ehatha
15. Iyaṃ ca lipi tisanakhatena sotaviyā

#### Its translation into English is as follows

1. Perhaps even if some person understands this, then he is also a little, not complete.
2. Now you should pay attention to it, as you also have the convenience.
3. In pursuance of the policy, there may be someone who has been punished with imprisonment or torture.
4. There, he suddenly dies in that bond and others (many people grieve for a long time).
5. So, you should (think) how to follow the middle path.
6. But these instincts cannot lead to proper conduct like- jealousy, heedlessness, ruthlessness, rash (haste), inattention (no practice), laziness and fatigue.
7. Therefore, you should try that these tendencies should not be mine.
8. And at the bottom of all this are Avadhānta (awareness) and A-Tvara (lack of haste, parity).
9. Those who are tired all the time cannot progress. So must walk, move, move.

10. One who understands it in this way should say to the people - "You (with your debt to the king) pay attention to the loan- such- this is the recommendation of the deity.
11. It is very fruitful to render it properly, while not rendering it is very destructive.
12. Because (those) who are unable to render neither to heaven. There is no attainment, nor the grace of the king.
13. The reason why I think so much about this is that this work produces two fruits.
14. By rendering it right, you will get heaven and will be borrowed from my debt.
15. And this handwriting should be heard (by everyone) in the *Tishya nakshatra*.

### Samrat Ashoka's inscriptions according to Ayurveda perspective

Vedas are considered as the basic texts of Indian culture and there are four *Veda* and four *Upveda* as follows.

S. No.	Veda	Upveda
1	<i>Rugveda</i>	<i>Dhanurveda</i>
2	<i>Yajurveda</i>	<i>Sthapatya Veda</i>
3	<i>Samaveda</i>	<i>Gandharvaveda</i>
4	<i>Atharvaveda</i>	<i>Ayurveda</i>

In the second inscription of Girnar, it is mentioned that medicine may be divided into two groups:

1. Medicines Human beings
2. Medicines for Animals

And also mentioned about *Kandmula* and *Phalvarga* drugs.

Ayurveda is the Traditional System of Indian Medicine which is mainly for treatment of diseases of human beings and there are some references of Veterinary Ayurveda in Veda and Purana as mentioned below.

'May we escape poverty by means of cattle' (Rig.10.4.2-10)

A wild boar knows the herb which will cure it as does the mongoose'. Atharvaveda (IV, 9.2)

Atharvaveda (Section IV): relates to Pashu Ayurveda

**Garuda Puran:** Mentions number of Ayurvedic medicines used to cure animal ailments

**Shalihotra Samhita:** contains 1600 Slokas in 120 chapters and 8 parts on equine medicine

**Agnipurana:** Treatment of cattle and horses.

**Matsyapurana:** Treatment of Aqua animals<sup>[10]</sup>

There had been evidence on the existence of literature on veterinary science in Rigveda (2000-4000 B.C.), when the physician attended upon humans and animals indiscriminately. The medical and surgical skill of these doctors must have been most primitive. The Yajurvedic people considered

elephant as a valuable sacrifice to some of their deities (Yajurveda XXIV 29&30).

The nucleus of veterinary science (Pashu Ayurveda) existed in Atharvaveda, it is a repository of therapeutic hints and prescriptions to attain the longevity of man's life upto hundred years i.e. *Jigivisheth Shatum Samaha* (Yayurveveda, XL, 2). Atharvaveda consists of 20 sections (*Kands*). In this Veda 114 hymns are devoted to medical subjects. Section VI of Atharvaveda, which deals with the human medicine, also deals with veterinary science (Atharvaveda, VI, 59; 11, 26, 1, 11, 14). The earliest available works on elephantology were Hasti-Ayurveda and the Gajasastra. Both were attributed to sage Palkapya. In the post vedic literature came up Asva-Ayurveda - about horses; Hasti - Ayurveda- about elephants; Gau- Ayurveda- about cows and Shyenka- Ayurveda- about hawks. The greatest and most revered teacher of veterinary science was Salihotra, the father of veterinary science followed by Palkapya and Atreya. Salihotra, the oldest and the greatest veterinarians we ever had composed three texts in Sanskrit. Asva-Chikitsa and Nakul Samhita composed by Nakula also throw light on the husbandry and treatment of horses. Palkapya (700-400 BC) was the ultimate authority on elephants in India. He dealt with the anatomy, physiology, disease and management of elephants in detail. He is famous for his Hast-Ayurveda (sometimes called Gaj-Ayurveda or Mahapada).<sup>[11]</sup>

In the first *Shilalekh* of *Dhauri*, importance has been given to good conduct and said that jealousy, heedlessness, ruthlessness, rash (haste), inattention (no practice), laziness and fatigue should be avoided.

In Ayurveda also *Sadvritta*, the right ways of living i.e. following good mental, social, religious, personal and moral conduct is described in details.

The words "*Sadd*" means good and *Vritta* means behavior (*Acharan*). There are three major types of *Mansik bhav* (mind expression) in *Sadvritta*. They are *Rajsik*, *Tamasik* and *Satwik*. It is said that the *Satwik* is the powerful since it can help a person to achieve an eternal power. *Tamas* and *rajas* are not powerful as *Satvika* that make wrong judgment and result to various types of diseases. Mental health is as important as physical health.

Natural urges such as thirst and hunger are considered as the Vega, whereas *Adharniya* means non-suppressible, that should not be suppressed.

**Dharniya vega:** *Dharniya* means the one that is to be suppressed by human beings are described in Ayurveda<sup>[12,13]</sup> as follows

- *Lobha*- (greediness)
- *Shoka*- (depression)
- *Bhaya*- (cowardliness)

- *Krodh*- (anger)
- *Ahankar*- (ego)
- *Nirlajata*- (shamelessness)
- *Irshya*- (jealousy)

## DISCUSSION

There are similarities in Samrat Ashok's inscriptions and Ayurveda as mentioned above. Samrat Ashoka was propagating the teaching of Buddha. *Bauddha Darshan* is an Indian philosophical science which comes under *Nastika Darshan* and it is well known fact that there is influence of Indian philosophical sciences i.e., *Aastika* and *Nastika Darshan shastras* on Ayurveda.

The purpose of attainment of proper health is not the ultimate object of Ayurveda. Acharya Charak regards health is the supreme foundation of *Dharma* (virtuous act), *Artha* (acquirement of wealth), *Kama* (gratification of desire) and *Moksha* (final emancipation) as *Roga* (diseases) are destroyer of health, and are great obstacles to attainment of these goals. In Indian philosophy, besides the metaphysical reasons, there are some applied aspects as well, e.g. fundamental concept of structural, functional and pharmacological branches of Ayurveda are based on metaphysical doctrine of *Pancha-Mahabhutas* (five foundation blocks/proto elements of universe and life), and the psyche (soul/mind) concepts in Ayurveda are based on well-established *Darshnic* doctrine (philosophical principles) of *Trigunas* (three properties of nature-super power). Besides this, the *Pancha-Mahabhutas* are the consequent evolutes of *Trigunatmaka Prakriti* (supernatural power/constitution).<sup>[14]</sup>

The Buddha is known as the peerless physician (*Bhisakka*), and the supreme surgeon (*Sallakatto anuttaro*).<sup>[15]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The function of stone inscriptions is a valuable source of primary historical data and till dated it is an untapped source of information regarding Ayurveda. It is the need of time to look into the historical sources such as coins, stone inscriptions etc., for better understanding of traditional system of Indian medicine i.e., Ayurveda during ancient period.

The Ashoka inscriptions of South Asia constitute one of the galvanizing illustrations of writing as a transformative ancient political technology. The inscriptions are also significant for the learning of Buddhism, which is today a global religious tradition.

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