

Dhauli

Rebirth of a noble king

By SOMEN SENGUPTA

The wide highway that leaves Bhubaneswar city 9 km behind suddenly takes a bend near a bridge over an emaciated river. The unimpressive river silently flows next to a small green hill. More than 2000 years ago here on the bank of this river and at the foot of this small hill named Dhauli a fatal war was fought. Kalinga as the place was then known was attacked by king of Magadha, a super power of our ancient history. The conquest of Kalinga was achieved at the expense of unimaginable loss of lives. The dance of death caused such devastation on nature that the water of the river turned red with human blood.

This made the super power king broken from inside and soon changed him from his core. The countless lives lost and distorted in this war of 261 BC forced a man to give up the sword and take up the doctrine of welfare to the common people. The first king of the world emerged and avowed that all subjects of his domain were his own children. Under the shadow of Buddha, the king - Ashoka stepped into history with an amazing mission.

To spread his objective of peace Ashoka carved his mission statement in a unique way. Across his kingdom which ran from Gandhar to Amaravati he carved edicts on rock and pillars. Here on the bank of the river of blood, he picked a rock near the battle ground and carved a declaration on the rock - making the place immortal. A new journey of a new born king started from there.

His work was soon lost to the world. As soon as the wave of Buddhism died down in India, from 6th century Hinduism overpowered its influence on it. Then came Islamic invaders from west and under the shadow of their sword all other religion in India oppressed for next many centuries. Soon Ashoka and all his great achievements banished into oblivion.

It all changed when some Europeans with their extraordinary passion for oriental history and archaeology came to this shore from early 19th century as employees of East India Company. James Prinsep was such a man who was head of Asiatic Society of Bengal in that era. A master in the study of Indian pre-colonial history, James was aware of one Andrew Stirling who heard of a rock edict in jungle of Dhauli near the city of Cuttack.

In 1837 James Prinsep contacted a young member of coal committee named Lieutenant Markham Kittoe whose job was to explore new coal field in Orissa for East India Company. Markham Kittoe was also an antiquarian and for him it was an opportunity to ignite his passion. He took no time to explore the hill of Dhauli then known as Asvathama hill and soon faced a strong retaliation from local people. He was finally helped by a man from Benaras who with a burning torch took him to a rock full of mysterious edicts in excellent condition.

Kittoe rushed to the spot next morning only to be attacked by a bear and her two cubs who made the place their nest. To escape from the bear, Kittoe climbed the rock above, to his surprise discovered an excellent stone elephant sculpted in stone. This was a bonus for him.

The targeted rock full of edict was on a massive stone of 15 ft long and 10 ft height. It was written in Magadhi Prakrit language in Bramhi script which was still an uncoded language to scholars across the world. As soon as James Prinsep got the copy of the edict, he with his year-long hard-work arrived at a conclusive end of a long research. James Prinsep marked the rock as Dhauli rock edict and he decoded the language of Maghadhi Prakrit as the first person of the world.

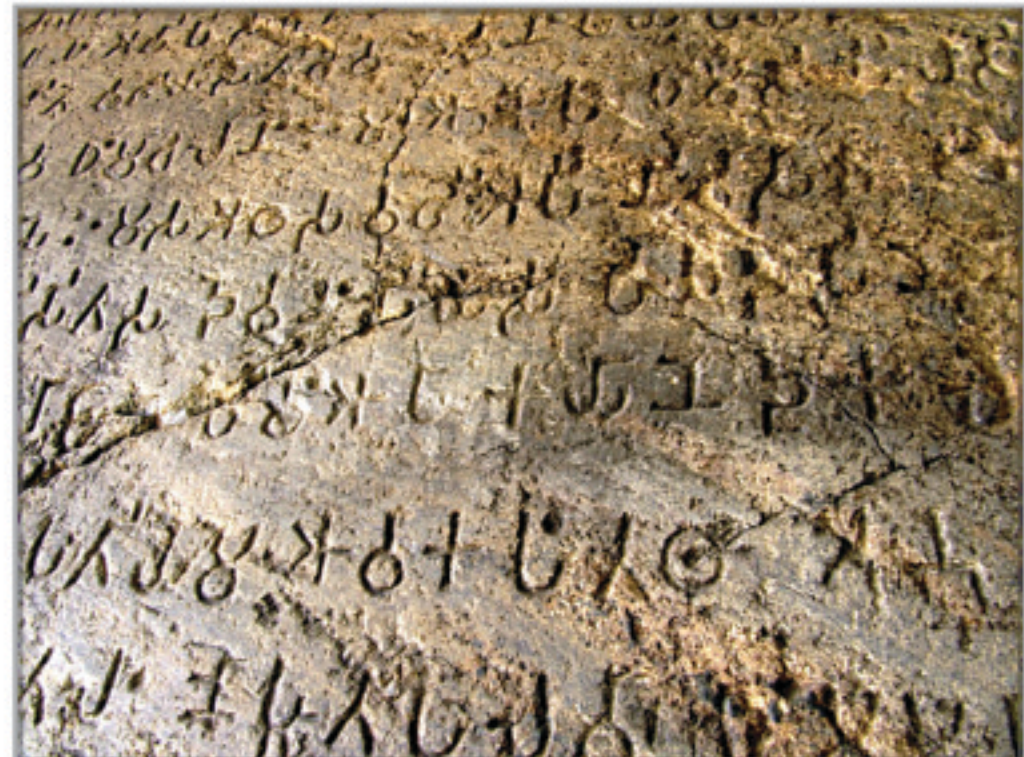
With his extraordinary achievement the mystery about a great Indian king named Ashoka whose name till then was directly and indirectly getting traced in Srilanka, Nepal and travelogue of a Chinese traveler named Xuanzang finally had a stamp of validation.

The existence of Ashoka became no more a matter of doubt. It was a sheer reality of past. It was proven that *Devanamapriya Piyadasi* was none other

than the great king of Magadha, who after his gory conquest of Kalinga was badly heartbroken by seeing the devastation of lives. Thus, he accepted the doctrine of welfare of common people considering all of his subject as his child under his newly embraced religion Buddhism.

The conquest of Dharma was avowed from this rock edict of Dhauli. It was an amazing discovery as it changed the history of mankind. The glory of Buddhism as a religion born in India and the glory of Indian as one of most civilized race before the birth of Christ were recognized beyond any considerable doubt.

The excavation in and around the Dhauli hill continued. Soon J D Beglar found a brick stupa in the hill but the same was badly vandalized long before of its discovery. In 1838 Kittoe found five more caves. In one



of the cave an inscription was found that narrates the construction of a Buddhist monastery named Arghyaka Varati by King Bhimata and his son Loyamaka of Viraja which is today's Jajpur. This clearly establishes that human inhabitation was there at Dhauli in 829 AD during the period of Bhumakara King Santikaradeva.

In 1949, ASI initiated another excavation project under K.C Panigrahi and it exposed a trench laid close to the rock edict and rubble of stone wall. Many terracotta artifacts were also found. The rock edict of Dhauli is addressed to the royal ministers of Toshali. The archaeological remains of Toshali was not found until the discovery of an ancient fort relics came up in a place named Shishupalgarh very near to Dhauli. This clearly concludes that this place was either under Shishupalgarh which was then known as Toshali.

Just 3 km from the hill, remains of a 2000 years old fort was unearthed by B B Lal of Archaeological Survey of India during 1948 to 1950.

A 2nd century BC old almost square structure made of laterite stone covering 1.5 km area with prominent evidence of human settlement was discovered. Since 2001 Deccan College of Pune and California University have jointly carried on small excavation and a set of thirteen pillars were excavated. These discoveries clearly indicate an existence of a fort town which was banished after an attack and it cements the fact that ancient Toshali was here indeed. Today Shishupalgarh archaeological site is also another attraction by its own merit.

The accidentally found rock elephant is a gem of Dhauli hill. The elephant is not complete in shape. It is a forepart of an elephant majestically coming out of a rocky wall. This unique sculptor signifies Buddha's birth out of his mother's womb. The figure is not as perfect as other Mauryan animal sculptor found at Sarnath, Vaishali or Rampurva. It is



little inferior in anatomical treatment. Many are of an opinion that it was done by local people.

However it is an exceptional stone figure of that era and has no match with any other rock sculptor found so far.

Thanks to Orissa tourism and ASI Dhauli hill is almost unexploited and very well preserved today. The rock edict is enshrined in a room with a glass wall. Above it the rock elephant sculptor stands like an old guard of time. The edict on the rock can be seen from a close distance but from the other side of the glass. The huge rock inscription is parted in four tablets and Magadhi Prakrit alphabets are still clearly legible.

What was actually written on the rock more than 2000 years ago with a strategy to immortalize it?

Vivid study by James found that it was addressed to noble souls of Toshali, the kingdom of Kalinga which was already under Ashoka.

This rock edict was exceptional compared to other rock edicts found across Indian subcontinent as it contained only 13 statements instead of 14 found in others. More to that edict 11, 12 & 13 were not included. The edict from 1 to 10 covers Ashoka's instruction of non killing of animal



even in the royal kitchen, medical care for both men and animal and establishment of morality or Dharma by his special royal representative among all of his subject. It also avows that on the 10th year of his anointment Ashoka, the beloved of the God visited Sambodhi that is Bodhgaya and spread the message of Dharma.

Last 2 edicts describe that morality is the only source of fame and glory. It also states that in his vast kingdom the

Travel Logistics :

Dhauli is just 9 km from Bhubaneswar city which is well connected by all big cities of India.

In 1971 Japan Govt had set up a Shanti stupa on the top of the Dhauli hill - many people come back only to see that stupa. This to be avoided.

Shishupalgarh is just 3 km from Dhauli hill - the site is marked by ASI board but help from local people is needed to locate it.

The rock edict can not be touched - it is inside of a glass room.

Photography is allowed.

own children. It contains a king's wish that all welfare and happiness of this world to his subject as he wishes for his own children. It instructs his royal officers to be free of anger and hurry so that nobody is punished without a trial. It also instructs his royal ministers of Toshali to spread the message to his unconquered territories.

So what is missing from Dhauli edicts?

The rock edict number 11, 12 & 13 which is found in every rock edict of Ashoka is missing from Dhauli. While purport of edict 11 & 12 are covered in other declaration the total omission of edict 13 is really interesting.

What does edict-13 contain?

It contains that painful history of Kalinga conquest at a cost of unimaginable loss of lives. This is really astonishing that even more than 2000 years ago a system was careful enough not to hurt the local sentiment of people by reminding them their most expensive defeat in the terms of lives and wealth. It is indeed surprising that another Ashoka edict found in Orissa near Beherampur also had this particular edict missing. Ashoka's greatness comes palpable even in his communication plan executed more than 2000 years ago.

PICS : SOMEN SENGUPTA