

Ajanta Caves

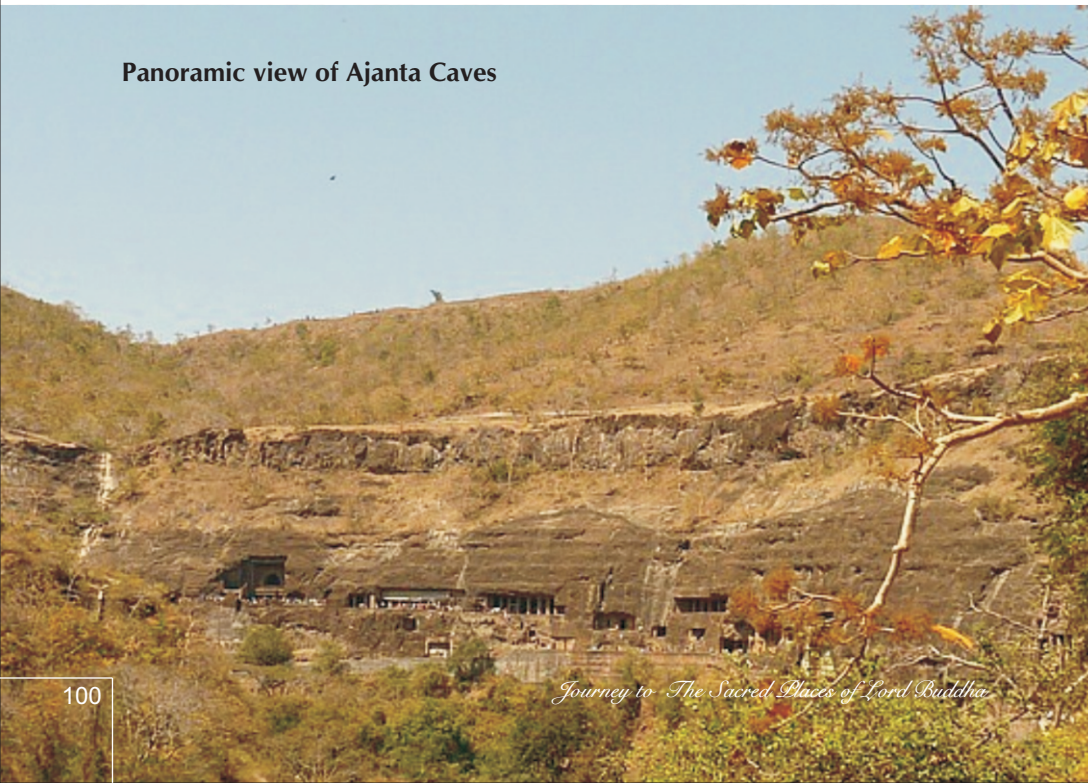
(Aurangabad-Maharashtra)

The famous Ajanta caves are situated about 99-kms away from Aurangabad district in the state of Maharashtra. These caves are regarded as a world heritage site and were carved out from the 2nd century BC to 6th century AD. They are placed in a horseshoe shape about 3.5 km away from the village. The river Wagura, a mountain stream flows along the bottom of the ravine.

This river falls from a height of 200 ft, thus making a series of waterfalls. The sound of the waterfalls can be heard in the caves also. The intriguing Ajanta Caves are carved out of large rocks and are 30 in number. These caves are dedicated to Lord Buddha. The buddhist monks resided here to study this religion. They have decorated these caves with the help of their excellent architectural skills and artistic paintings out of faith and for meditation.

The incredible caves of Ajanta are dedicated exclusively to Buddhism. There are around 30 caves here and are divided into 'Chaitya-Grihas' (stupa halls) and 'Viharas' (dwelling halls). Around five of these caves (9, 10, 19, 26 and 29) are 'Chaitya-Grihas'. The rest of the caves are 'Sangharamas' or Viharas (monasteries). The caves 1, 2, 16 and 17 are important also from the art point of view.

Panoramic view of Ajanta Caves



Closer view Ajanta Caves



Closer view Ajanta Caves

Facade Cave 19, Ajanta



Ellora Caves:

The famous Ellora caves are located in the lap of the Chamadari hills. These historical caves are regarded as world heritage site by UNESCO and are situated 18 miles northwest of Aurangabad. At first sight, the Ellora appears to the visitors as an asymmetrical ridge of rock, emerging vertically from the ground

A wonderful example of cave temple architecture, the world heritage Ellora caves own elaborate facades and intricately carved interiors. These carved structures on the inner walls of the caves reflect the three faiths of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. These exotic caves were carved during 350 AD to 700 AD period. The Chalukya - Rashtrakuta rulers (7th - 10th century) were the main patrons of the cave temples of Ellora. Many kings and Merchants donated huge sums of money for the construction of these cave temples. Some religious beliefs and ethical codes forced the rulers to encourage the building of these temples. Building of these temples was supposed to give liberation and religious excellence to the kings.

At Ellora, there are in total 34 famous temples carved out of stone. The cave temples of Ellora can be divided into three groups, mostly belonging to three periods: Buddhist, Hindu and Jain. Out of 34 cave temples 12 of the temples belong to the Buddhist period.

How to reach Ajanta

By Air:

The nearest airport from Ajanta caves is the Aurangabad domestic airport (99 kms). Aurangabad is directly linked to Delhi, Udaipur, Jaipur, and Mumbai.

By Rail:

Aurangabad is directly linked to Mumbai and Pune by rail. Jalgaon, a railhead on the Central Railways line, is 59 kilometres from Ajanta. Two trains Tapovan Express and Devgiri Express depart daily from Mumbai to Aurangabad.

By Road :

Ajanta Caves are connected to a network of excellent roadways with Mumbai, Pune, Ahmednagar, Jalgaon, Shirdi, Nasik, Dhule, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Indore, Bijapur, and Aurangabad. One can easily get a bus ply for Ajanta from Aurangabad.



How to reach Ellora Caves

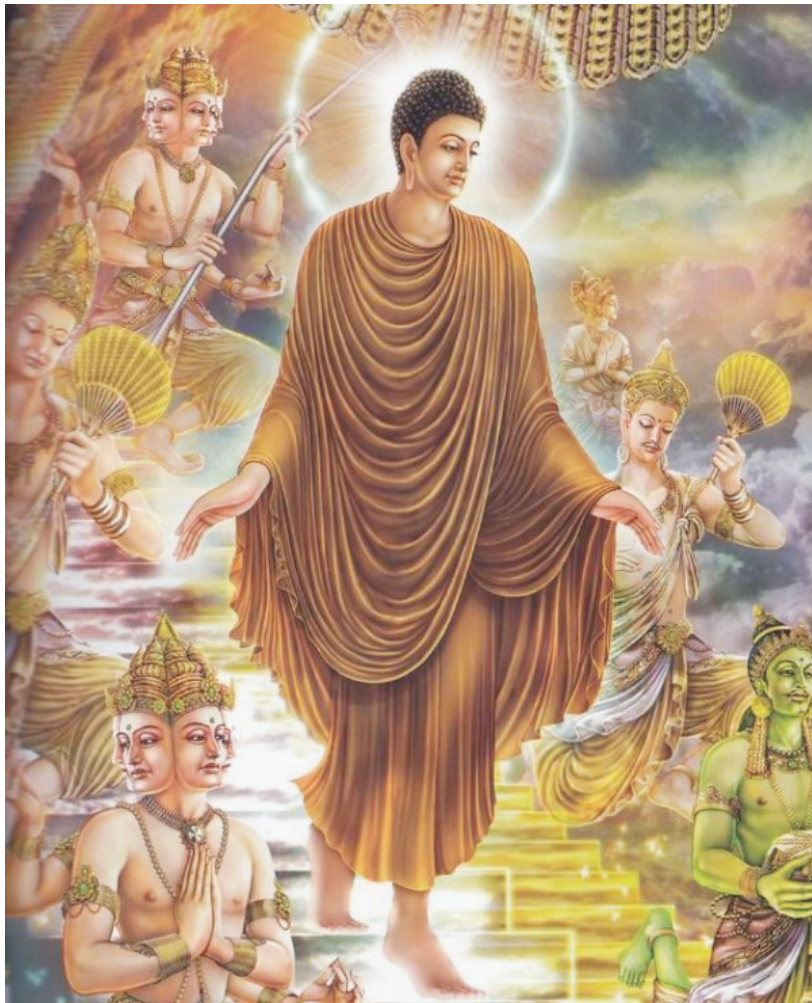
By Air:

The nearest airport (from these caves is situated) is Aurangabad (15 kms).

By Rail : Aurangabad is the nearest railway station on South Central Railway Line. Mumbai - Aurangabad via Manmad is 388-km and via Pune it is 400-km.

By Road:

Aurangabad is a major city of Maharashtra; it is well connected by road. To reach Ellora Caves tourists should take a taxi from Aurangabad. State buses run from Mumbai, Pune, Ahmednagar, Jalgaon, Shirdi, Nasik, Dhule, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Indore and Bijapur to Aurangabad.



Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha



Buddhist festivals

- Buddha purnima called Buddha Jayanti(Buddha day)
- Magha Puja Day or ("Fourfold Assembly ")
- Dhammacakkapavattana Day ("Dhamma Day") called Asalha Puja day
- Robe offering ceremony (Pavarana Day) called Sangha Day

Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha

Buddha Day

(Buddha Jayanti)

The most significant celebration happens in the month of May every year ie. on the Vesakha full moon; this celebration is called Vesak being the name of the month in the Indian calendar. Buddhist all over the world celebrate the day which commemorates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha over 2,555 years ago. It has become to be known as Buddha Day. On a festival day, lay people will go the local Viharas or monastery and offer food to the monks and take the Five Precepts and listen to a Dhamma talk. In the afternoon, they distribute food to the poor to make merit and in the evening join perhaps in a ceremony of circumambulation a stupa three times as a sign of respect to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. The day will conclude with evening chanting of Prayer in the form of suttas and ghattas (the Buddha's teachings) and meditation.

Fourfold Assembly

(Magha Puja Day)

Magha Puja Day takes places on the full moon day of the third lunar month (March). This holy day is observed to commemorate an important event in the life of the Buddha. This event occurred early in the Buddha's teaching life.

After the first Rains Retreat (Vassa) at the Deer Park at Sarnath, the Buddha went to Rajagaha city where 1250 Arahats, (Enlightened saints) who were the Buddha's disciples, without prior appointment, returned from their wanderings to pay respect to the Buddha. They assembled in the Venuvana Monastery with the two chief disciples of the Buddha, Ven. Sariputta and Ven. Moggallana. The assembly is called the Fourfold Assembly because it consisted of four factors: (1) All 1250 were Arahats; (2) All of them were ordained by the Buddha himself; (3) They assembled by themselves without any prior call; (4) It was the full moon day of Magha month (March).

Dhamma Day

(Asalha Puja Day)

Asalha Puja means to pay homage to the Buddha on the full moon day of the 8th lunar month (approximately July). It commemorates the Buddha's First Teaching: Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dhamma (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta) to the five ascetics at the Deer Park (Sarnath) near Benares city, India. Where Kondanna, the senior ascetic attained the first level of enlightenment (the Sotapanna level of mind purity)

Pavarana Day or Sangha Day

(Robe offering ceremony)

This day marks the conclusion of the Rains retreat (vassa). In the month of July the kathina ceremony called Robes offering ceremony is being held, during which the laity gather to make formal offerings of robe cloth and other requisites to the Sangha and it is also held on any convenient date within one month of the conclusion of the Vassa Retreat, which is the three month rains retreat season (Vassa) for the monastic order. It is the time of the year when new robes and other requisites may be offered by the laity to the monks.



The Buddhist Flag

A much more sacred symbol is the Buddhist flag. It was designed in 1880 by Colonel Henry Steel Olcott an American journalist founder of Theosophical Society. It was first hoisted in 1885 in Sri Lanka and is a symbol of faith and peace, and is now used throughout the world to represent the Buddhism.

The five colours of the flag represent the colours of the aura that emanated from the body of the Buddha when he attained Enlightenment. The meaning of the colours are as under.

Mental Purification / Universal infinite compassion

Concentration

Power of virtue and Truth

Morality / Moral Purification

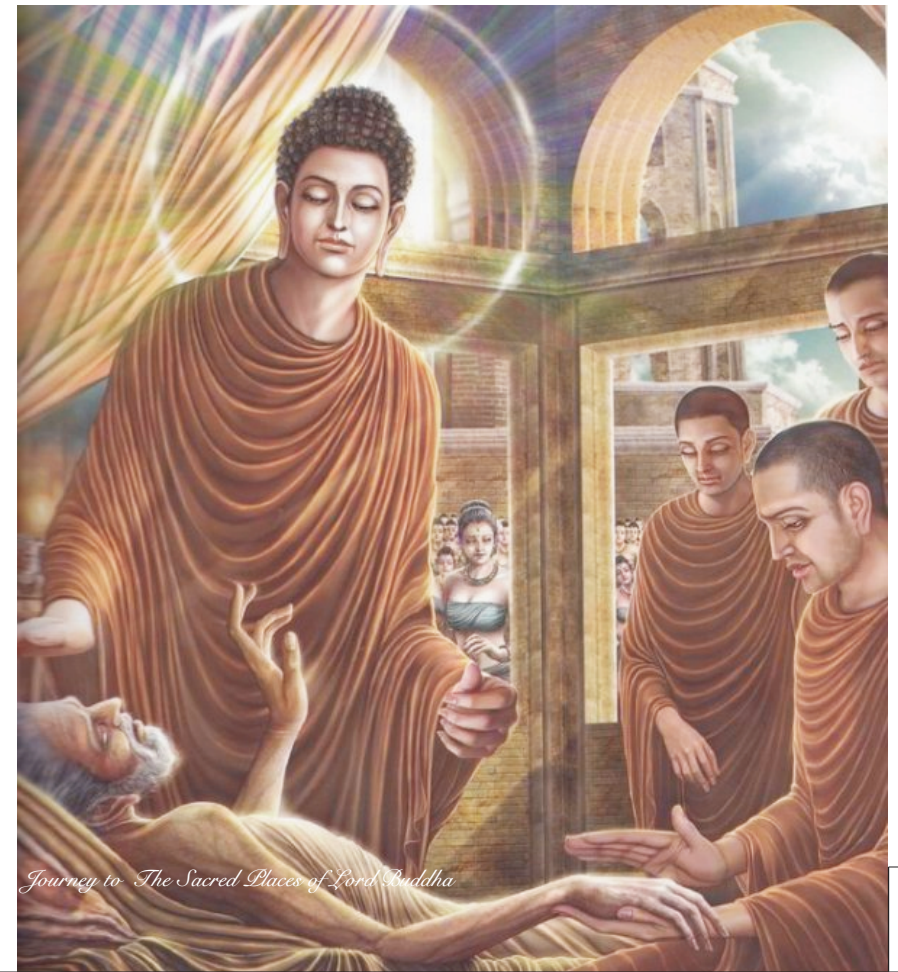
The desirelessness



Henry Steel Olcott



Henry Steel Olcott was born on August 2, 1832, in Orange, New Jersey, America. He was an American military officer, journalist, lawyer and the co-founder and first President of the Theosophical Society. Olcott was the first well-known person of European ancestry to make a formal conversion to Buddhism. His subsequent actions as president of the Theosophical Society helped create a renaissance in the study of Buddhism. Olcott is considered a Buddhist modernist for his efforts in interpreting Buddhism through a Westernized lens. Olcott is especially noted for his work among the Buddhists of Sri Lanka, Burma, and Japan. He died in Adyar, Madras, on February 17, 1907.



The Followers of Buddhism



Emperor Asoka the great

The sculpture of
The Emperor Asoka the great



Emperor Asoka the Great (BCE 273-232)

Asoka, the third Emperor of the Mauryan Empire, reigned from 273-232 BCE and his exemplary story remains popular in folk plays and legends across southern Asia. The Emperor ruled a vast territory that stretched from the Bay of Bengal to Kandahar and from the North-West Frontier of Pakistan to below the Krishna River in southern India. The year 261 BCE marks a turning point in Asoka's reign when, in part to increase access to the Ganges River, he conquered the east coast kingdom of Kalinga.

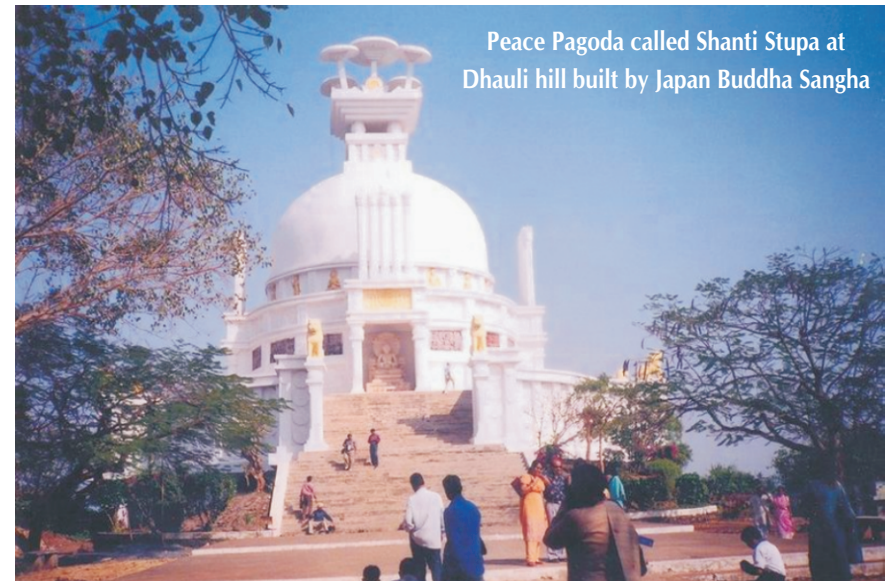
By Asoka's account, more than 250,000 people were killed, made captive or later died of starvation. Feeling remorseful about this massive suffering and loss, the Emperor Asoka renounced war & embraced Buddhism at Dhauili near Bhubaneswar now, the capital city of Odisha State and made Dhamma the central foundation of his personal and political life.

Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha

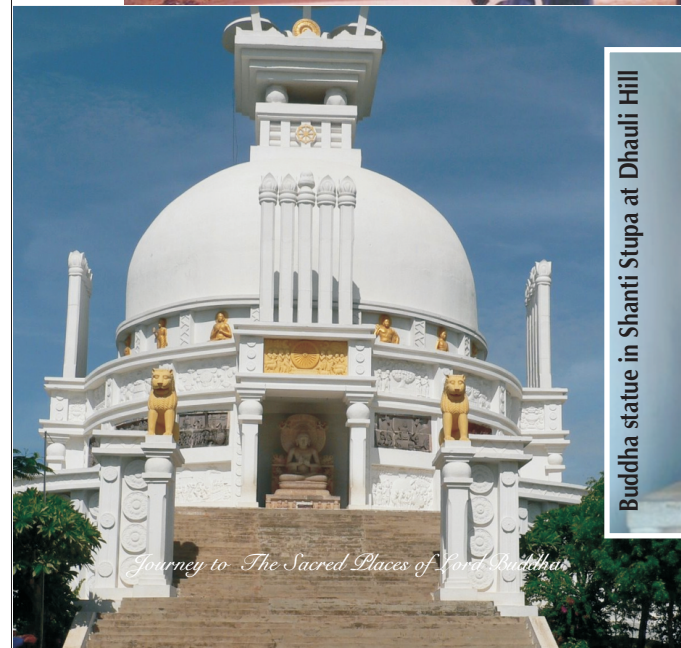
Dhauili Hill

The Peace pagoda:

Dhauili hill is presumed to be the area where the Historic Kalinga War was fought in 261 BCE. The historically important Dhauili hills are located on the banks of River Daya, i.e., 8 km South of Bhubaneswar in Odisha State. Dhauili hill, with a vast open space adjoining it, has major Edicts of Asoka engraved on a mass of rock by the side of the road leading to the summit of the



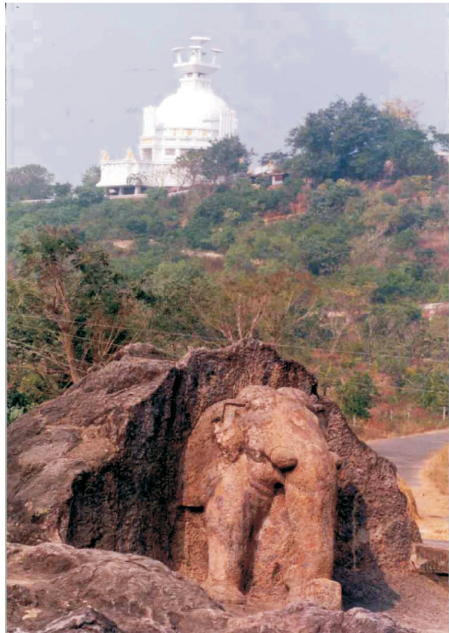
Peace Pagoda called Shanti Stupa at
Dhauili hill built by Japan Buddha Sangha



Buddha statue in Shanti Stupa at Dhauili Hill



Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha



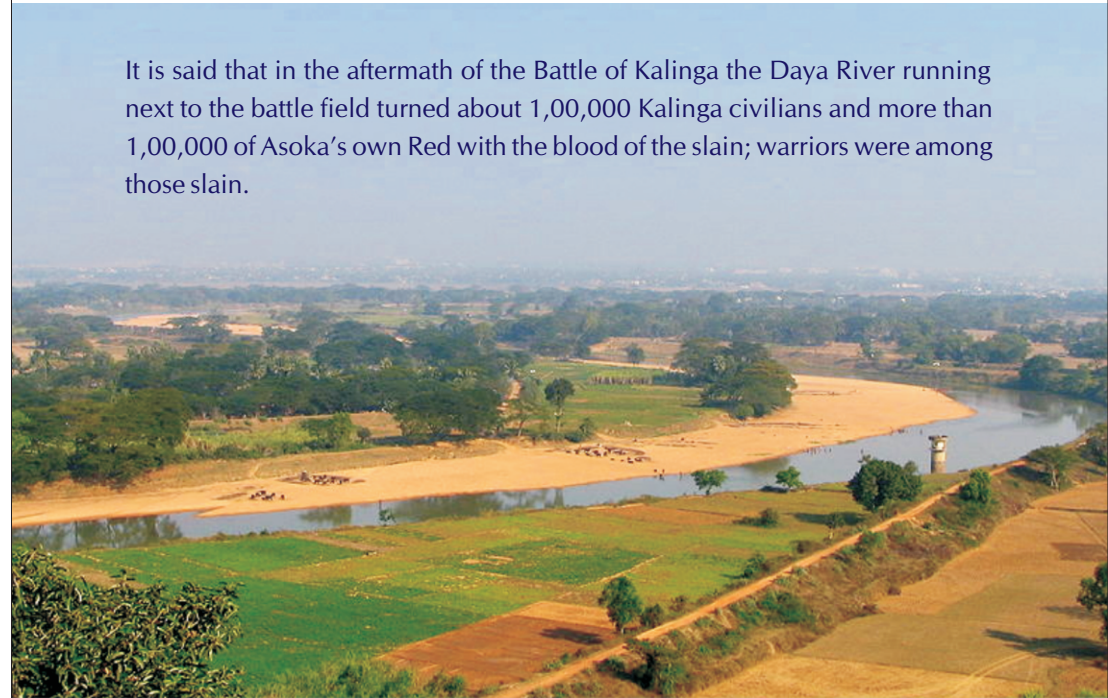
View of Peace Pagoda at Dhauili hill



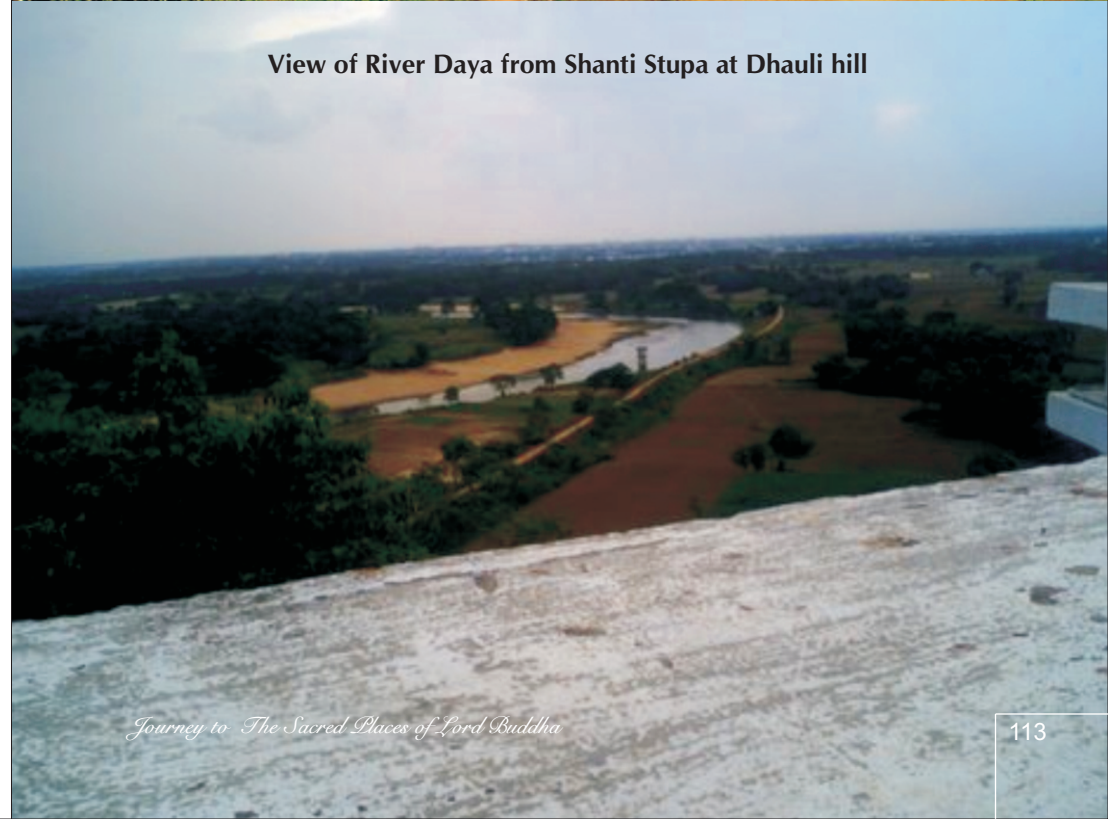
The War memorial near Peace Pagoda at Dhauili Hill built by Japan Buddha Sangha
(Writing depicts as "Peace comes from within. Do not seek it out" – Buddha)

River Daya

It is said that in the aftermath of the Battle of Kalinga the Daya River running next to the battle field turned about 1,00,000 Kalinga civilians and more than 1,00,000 of Asoka's own Red with the blood of the slain; warriors were among those slain.



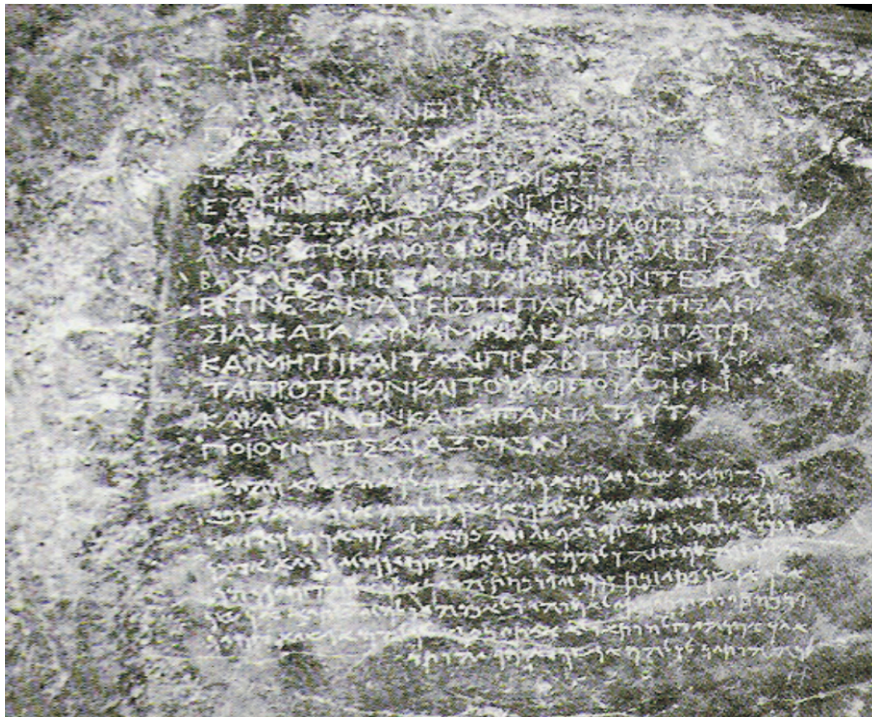
View of River Daya from Shanti Stupa at Dhauili hill



Edicts of Asoka

Asoka's response to the Kalinga War is recorded in the Edicts of Asoka. According to some of these (Rock Edict XIII and Minor Rock Edict I), the Kalinga War prompted Asoka, already a non-engaged Buddhist, to devote the rest of his life to Ahimsa (non-violence) and to Dhamma - Vijaya ie. Dhamma has won (victory through Dhamma). Following the conquest of Kalinga, Asoka ended the military expansion of the empire, and led the empire through more than 40 years of relative peace, harmony and prosperity

Asoka elaborates that he converted to Buddhism out of remorse for his conquest of the Kalingas around 261 BCE in eastern India (near the present-day state of Odissa).



The conquest by Dhamma has been won here, on the borders, and even six hundred yojanas (5,400–9,600 km) away, where the Greek king Antiochos rules, beyond there where the four kings named Ptolemy, Antigonos, Magas and Alexander rule, likewise in the south India among the Cholas, the Pandyas, and as far as Tamraparni (Ceylon).

– 13th Rock Edict, S. Dhammika

The Edict No.13 says as:

“Beloved – of – the - Gods, King Piyadasi (Priyadarsi), conquered the Kalinga eight years after his coronation. One hundred and fifty thousand were deported, one hundred thousand were killed and many more died (from other causes). After the Kalingas had been conquered, Beloved-of-the-Gods came to feel a strong inclination towards the Dhamma, a love for the Dhamma and for instruction in Dhamma. Now Beloved-of-the-Gods feels deep remorse for having conquered the Kalingas.” Rock Edict No.13

Also an Extract from Asokan Rock Edict:

“All men are my children. As I desire for my children that, they should enjoy peace and happiness in this world and in the other world, so also I desire for all my men.”

“The people of the unconquered territories beyond the borders might think: “What is the king’s intentions towards us?” My only intention is that they live without fear of me, that they may trust me and that I may give them happiness, not sorrow. Furthermore, they should understand that the king will forgive those who can be forgiven, and that he wishes to encourage them to practice Dhamma so that they may attain happiness in this world and the next. I am telling you this so that I may discharge the debts I owe, and that in instructing you, that you may know that my vow and my promise will not be broken. Therefore acting in this way, you should perform your duties and assure them (the people beyond the borders) that: “The king is like a father. He feels towards us as he feels towards himself. We are to him like his own children.”

Source : THE EDICTS OF KING ASHOKA, An English rendering by Ven. S. Dhammika, The Wheel Publication No. 386/387, 1993, **BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY, KANDY, SRI LANKA**

Throughout his kingdom, the emperor inscribed laws and injunctions inspired by Dhamma on rocks and pillars, some of them crowned with elaborate sculptures. Many of these edicts begin “Thus speaks Piyadasi and counsel good behavior including decency, piety, honouring parents and teachers and protection of the environment and natural world. Guided by this principle”

Likewise in the propagation of Dhamma the Emperor Asoka the great brought Buddhism into Dravidian land (Tamil Nadu) during his reign in 3rd BCE and built many stupas at Nagapattinam, Kanchi and Kaveripumpattinam.

However, it was his son Mahinda who established Buddhism in Tamil Nadu. The earliest inscriptions in Tamil Nadu written in the Brahmi character / script derived from Aramaic of the time, on the walls of the natural caves in the Tamil districts of Madurai, Ramnad and Tirunelveli. It is learnt from these Brahmi inscriptions, which paleographically belong to the 3rd century BCE that Buddhism had come into Tamil Nadu then. Epigraphical evidence confirms this statement in his Rock - Edict No. 3, Asoka says that his Dhamma Vijaya prevailed in the border kingdoms of the Cholas, Pandians and at Tambapanni. But it was his son Mahinda (Mahendra) who was responsible for the establishment of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu and Ceylon. Mahinda is said to have erected seven viharas at Kaveripumpattinam with the help of Maha Aritta, a nephew of the Ceylon king Devanampiyatissa who might have lived in the natural caves of the village of Arittapatti in Madhurasuttapattana (Madurai) according to Dr. Shu Hikosake, Director and Professor of Buddhism, Institute of Asian Studies in Madras in his book 1989 Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: a New Perspective on his doctoral dissertation.

Dr. Hikosaka says that, Buddhism has gone to Ceylon from Tamil Nadu by sea-route, a route by which one can reach Ceylon easily contrary to the general impression.

According to Historians, Buddhism began to make an impact on Tamil Nadu only in the 3rd century CE. During the period from 3rd Century CE to 6th Century CE, Buddhism had spread widely in Tamil Nadu and won the patronage of the rulers. The remains of a Buddhist monastery excavated at Kaveripattinam which could be assigned to the fourth century are believed to be the earliest archaeological relics of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu. The major urban centers of Vanji, Kanchi, Kaveripattinam, Uraiyur, and Madurai were not only centers of Buddhism, but these were also important centers of Pali learning.

The Tamil Buddhist monks of South India used Pali languages in preference to Tamil in their writings. This is because the Buddha spoke in Magadi Prakrit (Pāli) which was considered to be the most sacred language. It was at this time that, the Dravidian land gave some of its greatest outstanding Buddhist monks and Pali scholars to the Buddhist world, who made remarkable contributions to Buddhist thought and learning. Some of the greatest monks of this period were Aravana Adigal, Nagaguttanar (Nagasena), Dinnaga (Dignaga), Buddhadatta Thera, Dhammapala, Bodhi Dharma, Dhammagiri, Bodhiruchi, Vajrabodhi and many more Buddhist acharyas were involved in expounding the doctrines and propagating the teaching of Buddha and establishment of Buddhist values and moral in Tamil kingdoms. The well known Tamil Buddhist epics, on the other hand, were Manimekalai and Kundalakesi belongs to Sangam period (600 BCE to 2 CE)

MANIMEKALAI A BUDDHIST NUN -

Dancer with Magic bowl - in brief (Second Century Close to 170CE):

Manimekalai – a damsel of exquisitely beautiful the daughter of Kovalan son of wealthy rich merchant of Kaveripattinam and Madhavi a courtesan.

Manimekalai the Celebrated great Tamil Buddhist epic have been composed by the most famous Tamil Buddhist poet / Monk - Sittalai Sattanar a grain merchant of Madura (Madurai) and lived in the second century CE. The epic have been composed with a view to propagating the Buddha Dhamma While narrating the story of Manimekalai, Sattanar shows the superiority of Buddhist doctrine evaluating it against the contemporary Vedic Hindu and Jaina thought.

In brief, Kovalan, who neglecting his wife, Kannaki, fell in love with Madhavi a courtesan (dancing girl - parathiyar) in the court hall of Chola king Karikalan. Later, having realized his folly, Kovalan returned back to his wife. Then both set out for Madurai where he wanted to start life afresh by pursuing trade. And when he went out to sell one of his wife's gold anklet, he was falsely accused of theft of queen's anklet, and was beheaded by the Pandya king Neduncheziyan without any investigation. After the death of Kovalan Madhavi renounced the dancing and became disgusted with the life, and sought solace in her - grief from Aravana Adigal, a Buddhist monk, who was head of a Buddhist monastery in Kaveripattinam (Pugar). On hearing the excellent Dhamma, Madhavi tonsured her head and became Buddhist nun. The young and pretty Manimekalai, who was already feeling disenchanted by the life of dance, music, and by the influence of her mother was immediately drawn in to the sublime teaching of the Buddha and decided to adopt the life of a Buddhist nun. Soon thereafter, she was carried and flown to an island called Manipallavam off Jaffna in the northern coast of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) by a deity Manimekala, where Buddha's footprint at the Nagadipa shrine, there Manimekalai worshiped the Buddha's footprint and realised her past life. Thereafter, the deity Manimekala gave her a miraculous bowl from which she could feed any number of people without the supply of food becoming exhausted. Subsequently Manimekalai also learnt from Aravana Adigal why she was named after goddess Manimekala, the goddess of the Ocean.

On return to Kaveripattinam, Manimekalai gave alms daily to the poor in a public hall. Also, we hear from the early Chola king Killivalavan (2nd century A.D.) offered and converted a prison-house into a charity house at the request of the Buddhist nun Manimekalai, and gifted it to Buddhists who utilised the

building for a palli (school) and a charity house where she imparted moral, meditation and Buddhist value. Later, Manimekalai went on a pilgrimage to Java. On return from the pilgrimage, she went to Vanchi, the Chera's capital, and further studied the Dhamma. Finally, she came to her preceptor Aravana Adigal at Kanchi and she lived the holy life of a Buddhist nun in a Vihara specifically built for her at Kanchi, and spent her life in meditation and service to humanity. The present day Darupadiamman kovil is said to be on the site of the Manimekalai Vihara.

Emperor Asoka abolished practices that caused unnecessary suffering to men and animals and advanced religious toleration. To further in the influence of Dhamma and on the advice of Arahant Moggaliputta Tissa, he sent missions of Theras to:

1. Kashmir and Gandhara
2. Mahisamandala – i.e. The State of Mysore
3. Vanavasa - i.e. The Northern Kanara State in South India
4. Aparante - i.e. the region of Gujarat and Kathiawar
5. Maharattha - i.e. Maharastra
6. Yonaka desa - i.e. the Greek States of North West India
7. Himavanta - i.e. the Himalaya Region
8. Suvannabhumi - i.e. the territories in Indo-China including Burma, Siam and Cambodia
9. Tambapanni Dipa - i.e. Sri Lanka

KARNATAKA

Similarly, Buddhism entered Karnataka before the time of the Emperor Asoka, and that it enjoyed its heyday between the 3rd century BCE and the 5th century CE, there is a conclusive historical evidence that Buddhism existed and played a vital role in the culture and civilization of northern, southern and coastal Karnataka, Excavations conducted in some parts of Karnataka, have strongly supported the fact that Buddhism existed in Kunthala, the old name for Karnataka.

During the archeological excavations at Sannati the discovery of Asoka inscription at Maski and Buddhist settlement were found out in Raichur District. Sannati is a small village, located on the banks of the river Bhima in Chitapur taluk of Gulbarga District of Northern Karnataka, many Buddhist stupas, dibbas or mounds of the Satavahana period of Pre-Christian era have been found. Sannati, which date back to the 1st to 3rd century AD is the oldest among the Karnataka Buddhist sites and monuments.



Map of the Satavahana Empire

Map of the Sunga Empire (180 BCE)



Map of the Sunga Empire based on
Oxford University Atlas

Another important ancient Buddhist Maha stupa was also discovered at Kanaganahalli which is as per the inscriptions referred to as Hama Chaitya and it was patronized by the Hinayana and Mahayana during 3rd-4th century A.D. The Amaravati School of Art made deep impact on the sculptural and architectural forms in Kanaganahalli region, indeed a period of great artistic efflorescence that gave the Maha Chaitya here the most impressive form unsurpassed in the history of stupa architecture in the south India.

Just like Sannati, the Buddhist Chaitya at Aihole, was built by pre western Chalukyas and indicates the influence of Mahayana. It was built around the 5th century CE and is of 25 feet high. Aihole's hillock, Meguti, the rock cut Buddhist shrine is the most important surviving Buddhist temple in Karnataka.

Badami, the erstwhile capital city of the western Chalukyas in the 6th century AD, is also associated with Buddhism and relics here have survived in the shape of a Buddhist cave. There is also a figure, identifiable as Padmapani, the Bodhisatva.

Banavasi also called Vanavasi was the capital city of Kadambas, and another important Buddhist cultural center. The epigraphic evidence shows that, the recent excavations of the site of Banavasi have got the remains of a Buddhist stupa. The large apsidal structure is what remains and it was planned like a Dharma chakra. Kadambas century was a prominent one for Buddhism in Karnataka.

Hieun Tsang the Chinese Buddhist monk pilgrim traveller, whose writings corroborates, that during the time of Pulakesi II 642 AD in Banavasi or Konkanpura, there were 400 Sangharamas and 10000 followers of Buddhism. Also the Emperor through his ambassadors and Dhammamahamatras had spread the Dhamma to:

1. Syria,
2. Egypt,
3. Macedonia,
4. Cyrene,
5. Epirus,
6. Central Asia,
7. Palestine
8. Alexandria.

To some historians, the edicts unified an extended empire, one that was organized into five parts governed by Asoka and four governors. After his reign, Asoka has become an enduring symbol of enlightened rule, non-violence, and religious tolerance.

In 1950, the Lion Capital of Asoka, a sandstone sculpture erected in 250 BCE, was adopted as India's official National Emblem.