



The Ashoka Pillar at Kamla Nehru Ridge, Delhi: Historical, Archaeological, and Cultural Study

Mohd. Asif

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Buddhist Studies,
Arts Faculty, University of Delhi, Delhi-110007
masif.phd@buddhist.du.ac.in / mohdasifcp7@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Ashoka Pillar, which is situated in Delhi on the Kamala Nehru Ridge. The policy of Ashoka 268-232 BC, the spread of Buddhism, and the dissemination of Dhamma teachings are all attested to by this pillar. This research paper offers a thorough and critical analysis of this pillar, covering its architectural characteristics, historical background, inscription, interpretation and cultural value. Primary and secondary sources, such as Archaeological Survey of India papers, form the basis of the research process. Historical writings, epigraphic study and academic research paper examination. Understanding how this pillar was relocated in Delhi, its structural and artistic significance and the historical and philosophical relevance of the texts engraved by Ashoka are the primary goals of this study. The research paper is broken up into various sections that examine the pillar's origin, architectural style, inscription content and linguistic characteristics in detail. Furthermore, this study clarifies the pillar's movement during the British era, conservation initiatives and its historical and cultural relevance from a modern standpoint. This research will contribute to a better understanding of Indian cultural heritage and the preservation of ancient sites.

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Introduction

Among the several pillars built by the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka 268-232 BCE, the Ashoka pillar at Kamla Nehru Ridge Contributes to the unique architectural legacy of his rule. Ashoka's dedication to Buddhism and the Dhamma he promoted are expressed in the inscriptions on these pillars, which have achieved great fame. This pillar which is situated in Delhi's northern region hold a unique position in Indian history and culture. In order to gain a comprehensive grasp of this pillar's multifarious significance, this research paper aims to gain to analyze its historical context, archeological aspects and cultural value.¹ One of the most well known and powerful monarchs of the Mauryan Empire, King Ashoka was instrumental in the spread of Buddhism over the Indian subcontinent. He adopted Buddhism and changed his rule into a moral Dhamma based government as a result of his intense introspection following the Kailnga War. To disseminate his policies and religious teachings to the general public, Ashoka constructed a number of inscriptions and pillars. To ensure that his teaching could be widely shared, these pillars were placed on important commerce routes, places of worship, and administrative hubs.²



Figure 1: Ashoka Pillar at Kamla Nehru Ridge, Delhi

¹ Romila Thapar, *Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 45.

² *Ibid.*, 67.



Origin and Shifting of Delhi Pillar

The Ashoka Pillar at Kamla Nehru Ridge was originally installed in Meerut during the reign of Emperor Ashoka 268-232 BCE. Later in the 14th century it was moved to Delhi by Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq of the Delhi Sultanate. Firoz Shah Tughlaq who had a special interest in the preservation of Ancient monuments, installed the pillar at his hunting lodge, currently known as Kamla Nehru Ridge. This Shift not only reflects the interest of the then rulers in historical monuments, but also highlights the continuing significance of the pillar across different historical periods.³

This pillar is made of polished sandstone and is about 13 metres high. Fine and intricate carvings can be seen on its surface. Particularly noteworthy is that unlike other Ashoka pillars, this one does not have the traditional Lion Capital, making it unique. The Ashoka pillar at Kamla Nehru Ridge is an excellent example of Mauryan architecture. The pillar is about 13 meters high and is made of polished sandstone, displaying the sophisticated techniques of Mauryan architecture. Its main features include the bell shaped capital top portion, which is decorated with fine and intricate carvings. Like other Ashokan pillars this was also associated with the iconic Lion Capital but its absence at present makes it distinct from other pillars.⁴ Pillar bears inscriptions in Brahmi script which was widely used during the Mauryan period. These inscriptions describe the principles of Dhamma propagated by Emperor Ashoka, which emphasized non-violence, tolerance and respect for all living beings. The language of these inscriptions is Prakrit which was the main language spoken by the common people of that time and was also part of the official communication system of the Mauryan administration.⁵

Comparison with other Ashoka pillars in term of object construction and craftsmanship, the Ashoka pillar in Delhi is an example of excellent Mauryan craftsmanship like other famous pillars such as those at Sarnath and Sanchi. However, its subsequent shift and present location makes it different from other pillars. This pillar not only demonstrates the robustness of Mauryan architecture but its inscriptions and structural features also provide important reference material for the study of Mauryan art and

³ Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the stone Age to the 12th Century* (New Delhi: Pearson Education, 2008), 123.

⁴ Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *Archaeological Geography of the Ganga Plain: The Lower and the Middle Ganga* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 78.

⁵ R.S. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 89.



architecture.⁶ Cultural significance symbol of Ashoka's Dhamma this pillar is a concrete symbol of Dhamma propagated by Emperor Ashoka, which reflects the concept of moral rule social harmony and equitable administration. The inscriptions engraved on it reflect Ashoka's deep commitment to Buddhism and underline his efforts to establish a just and compassionate society.⁷

Contribution to Indian nationalism the Ashoka pillar came to represent India's ancient splendor and rich cultural legacy during the time when India nationalists found inspiration in the pillar since it symbolized the time when India was a powerful, cohesive and thriving kingdom. Indian nationalists fought for independence and social harmony during the liberation movement motivated by Ashoka's Dhamma and his idea of just governance.⁸ The Ashoka pillar is still a significant representation of India's rich cultural and historical past. In addition to being a hub for academics, research and historians it also draws visitors and history buffs. Its existence acts as a continual reminder of India's illustrious past and enhances Delhi's cultural and educational environment.⁹

The Archaeology Survey of India has taken a number of significant steps to preserve the Ashokan pillar. To stop possible harm from environmental influences and human activity these involve routine maintenance, structural evaluation and the construction of protective barriers. By maintaining the pillar's historical and cultural significance, these initiatives are helping to ensure its long term viability.¹⁰ The Ashokan pillar still confronts significant obstacles like pollution, urbanization and vandalism in spite of conservation efforts. The long term preservation of Delhi is seriously threatened by its expanding population and quickening infrastructure development. The pillar's structure could be harmed by air pollution and environmental variables, which would raise the possibility that its inscription and architectural aspects would erode.¹¹

Public knowledge of the pillar's historical and cultural value is mostly increased by the involvement of the local community and educational organizations. To ensure that this historical legacy is preserved for future generations, coordinated and cooperative efforts by the government, academia and civil society

⁶ Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report on the Conservation of Monuments (New Delhi: Government of India, 2020), 12.

⁷ Thapar, Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas, 102.

⁸ Singh, A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India, 145.

⁹ Sharma, India's Ancient Past, 112.

¹⁰ Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report on the Conservation of Monuments, 15.

¹¹ Chakrabarti, Archaeological Geography of the Ganga Plain, 85.



are required for its sustainable protection.¹² One significant representation of India's ancient past and cultural legacy is the Ashoka pillar atop the Kamla Nehru Ridge. It is a great resource for learning about the Mauryan Empire and its legacy because of its historical background, superb architecture and cultural significance. Despite the admirable conservation efforts long term all encompassing activity is needed to guarantee the monument's preservation for coming generations. The pillar continues to serve as an inspiration for modern day India in addition to embodying Emperor Ashoka's principles of fairness, compassion and moral leadership.¹³

Conclusion

One significant example of India's rich historical, cultural and archeological legacy is the Ashoka pillar which is situated on Delhi's Kamla Nehru Ridge. The pillar's historical background, architectural characteristics, inscriptions and cultural relevance have all been highlighted in this paper's thorough analyzing primary and secondary materials, such as reports from the Archaeological Survey of India historical writings and academic research. The pillar's historical history stretches back to the time of Emperor Ashoka 268-232 BCE who was instrumental in the Mauryan Empire's Buddhist expansion. The fact that Firoz Shah Tughlaq relocated the pillar from Meerut to Delhi in the fourteenth century shows how significant it has remained throughout history. This move emphasizes the pillar's historical significance as well as the role played by succeeding monarchs in conserving and advancing India's rich past. The Ashoka pillar's architecture is a superb illustration of Mauryan artistry. The pillar which is composed of polished sandstone and has elaborate carvings on it is around 13 meters tall. This pillar's distinctiveness from other Ashokan pillars is its bell shaped capital, which is devoid of the recognizable lion capital. The pillar's inscriptions in Prakrit and Brahmi script contain Emperor Ashoka's teaching on the Dhamma which advocate for compassion, tolerance and non-violence toward all living things. In addition to serving as a valuable source of ethical and philosophical ideas, these inscription also capture Ashoka's vision of inclusive and just governance. Beyond its historical and architectural value the Ashokan pillar has cultural significance. Indian nationalists were motivated to fight for their country's independence by the pillar's representation of India's ancient splendor and cultural pride during the colonial era. The pillar continues to be a representation of India's rich historical legacy, drawing tourists and academics alike. Its existence in Delhi fosters a greater awareness of India's ancient heritage in addition to improving the city's cultural and educational environment. The Ashoka pillar continues to

¹² Sharma, India's Ancient Past, 120.

¹³ Thapar, Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas, 150.



encounter numerous obstacles in spite of its cultural and historical value. Vandalism, urbanization and pollution are among of the major threats to its long term survival. Delhi expanding population and infrastructural growth exacerbate this issue. Nonetheless the Archaeological Survey of India has taken admirable steps to save it including routine upkeep, structural evaluation and the erection of protective barriers. However the long term preservation of this historical legacy requires concerted efforts from the government, local communities and educational institutions. Thus it can be said that the Ashoka pillar which is located on the Kamla Nehru Ridge, is a crucial piece of India's ancient past and rich cultural legacy. In addition to serving as a tangible representation of Emperor Ashoka's fair and human style of government the pillar continues to serve as an inspiration for modern day India. We can guarantee that India's rich cultural legacy is valued and conserved for future generations if broad public awareness is raised on the preservation and promotion of archaeological sites like the Ashoka Pillar.

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