

HISTORY: CLASS-6: SUMMARY

CHAPTER 5 - The Mauryan Empire

Points of Discussion

- Mauryan Empire
- Important rulers of Mauryan Empire (Chandragupta Maurya, Bindusara, Ashoka)
- Mauryan administration, society and culture
- Relations of Mauryan Empire with neighbours
- End of the Mauryan Empire

A. THE MAURYA KINGS

- Magadha was ruled by **the Nanda kings** who had collected a vast amount of wealth in taxes and kept a huge army. But they were not efficient rulers and were unpopular. A brahman minister called **Chanakya, also known as Kautilya**, trained a young prince - Chandragupta of the Maurya family.

- **Chandragupta organised his own army and overthrew the Nanda king.**

1. Alexander

- After Magadh, Chandragupta turned his attention northwards to **Punjab**.
- Punjab had been invaded by **the Greek king Alexander in 326 B.C.**
- Alexander had invaded India because some of the northern areas were included in the **great Persian empire of the Achaemenid rulers**.
- Alexander had overthrown the Persian emperor and conquered his empire.
- Alexander himself died in 323 B.C., and Punjab was now being ruled by **Greek governors** left behind by him.

2. Chandragupta Maurya –

- He conquered the whole of Punjab. Some of the land in the extreme north was held by the **Greek general Seleucus Nicator**. Chandragupta fought long and defeated him in 303 B.C. He acquired the territory across **the Indus in part of what is now modern Afghanistan**. He conquered central India. **Entire north India was under his control**.
- He became a **Jain** ascetic later.

3. Bindusara

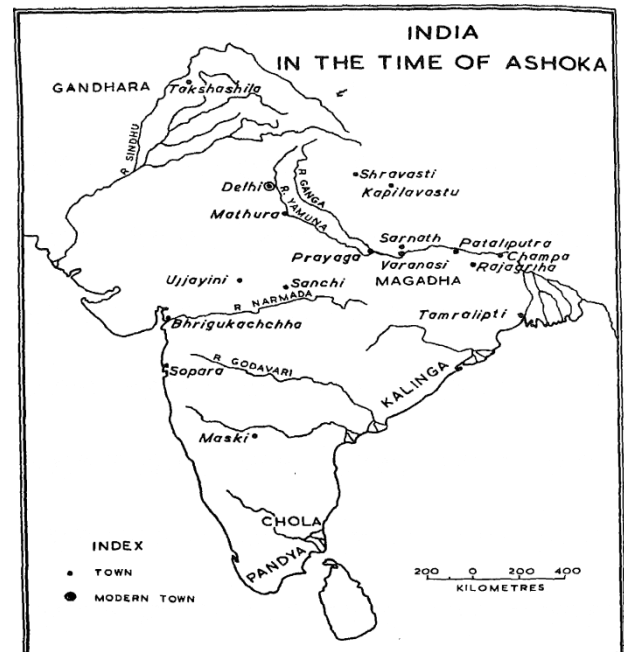
- Bindusara took the Mauryan armies to the south and conquered the Deccan Plateau as far as Mysore.
- Empire now included almost the whole of India.
- Only the region of **Kalinga (Orissa) and the kingdoms of the extreme south** were not in the empire.

4. Ashoka

- He was the most famous of the Mauryan kings and one of the greatest rulers that India has ever had.
- He conquered **Kalinga** and included it within his empire.
- Both the armies suffered heavy losses. Ashoka was saddened to see the wounded and the dying soldiers and the unhappiness that war had caused to the women and

children. He decided not to fight any wars. Instead, he would try and persuade people to live in peace.

- **For the first time in Indian history, almost the whole country was under a single ruler.**
- Ashoka began issuing **edicts**. These were his ideas on religion, government, and the people's behaviour towards one another.
- These edicts were sent to all the provinces of his empire where they were engraved on rocks or pillars, in places where people gathered together and where they would be read.
- He believed in high ideals, which could lead men to be peaceful and virtuous. This he called **dhamma** (which is the Prakrit form of the Sanskrit word dharma). He explained his **dhamma in the edicts**.
- The edicts were written in the **Brahmi script**, but the language was **Prakrit**.
- All the different religious groups should live together in peace with tolerance and friendship.
- The younger people should **obey the older ones**, and children should obey their parents.
- He made a special plea that masters should be **kind and gentle to their servants**.
- He wanted to **stop the killing of men and animals**.
- He forbade the people to sacrifice animals for religious ceremonies. People should not eat meat.
- The important thing was not the **differences but the unity within the empire**.



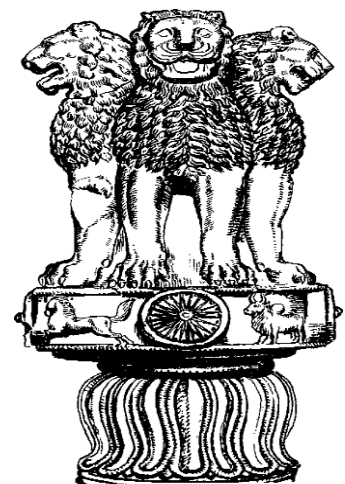
B. ADMINISTRATION, SOCIETY AND CULTURE

1. Mauryan Art

- The edicts of Ashoka were inscribed on rocks and on tall pillars made of **sandstone**.
- The pillars were polished in a way that looked like **golden pillars** when the sun shone on them.
- On the top of each pillar was carved an animal figure— an **elephant, bull, or a lion**.
- The **pillar at Sarnath** had four lions carved on the top. It is **the national emblem of India**.

2. Ashoka's Administration

- Ashoka's **ideas on government** are found in his edicts.
- He believed that a king should treat his subjects as a father treats his children. He often writes in his edicts, **"All men are my children,"**



The four-lion capital from Ashoka's pillar at Sarnath

- He built good roads linking the towns, so that, the people could travel easily and quickly.
- Planted shady trees along roads to keep away the hot sun, wells dug for water, and rest-houses built for travellers.
- Ashoka ruled from the capital city of **Pataliputra (Patna)**.
- **Rummindei Pillar Inscription** mentions the **king Piyadassi**, birth of Shakyamuni, born in Lumbini; Ashoka **exempted it from taxes** and fixed its contribution (i.e., of grain) at one eighth.
- There was a council of ministers to advise him and a number of officers who carried out his orders, look after administration in districts, collect taxes, become judges.
- The empire was divided into four big **provinces** and each province was ruled by a **viceroys** who was under the king.
- The provinces were divided into **districts** which were made up of **groups of villages**.
- The work of administration was divided into a number of departments; each had its own chief or superintendent at Pataliputra.
- Ashoka started a special group of officers whom he called the **dharma-mahamatras**.
- **They** travelled around the country inspecting the local work, listening to the people and hearing their complaints, and trying to persuade the people to follow the dharma and live at peace
- The city was administered by a **council and six boards**, which had charge of different departments.

3. Relations with Neighbouring Countries

- Ashoka sent out a number of missions to the courts of the kings in western Asia.
- He sent his son **Mahendra to Ceylon**. Later, the king of Ceylon became a Buddhist.
- Literary source - **Arthashastra, written by Kautilya**; It explains how a good government should be organised.
- The other source is written by **Megasthenes in Greek**. **Megasthenes was the ambassador of Seleucus Nicator**.

4. Society

- Megasthenes writes that most of the people were **farmers**. Trade flourished and merchants took their merchandise to every part of the country.
- The **brahmins, Buddhist and Jaina monks**, were few as compared to the farmers, artisans and soldiers but **did not pay any taxes to the king**.

5. The End of the Mauryan Empire

- Rulers after Ashoka were weak and could not control the empire properly.
- Various regions of the empire were cut off from one another by great distances and this made administration and communication difficult.
- It was also very expensive to keep a large army and a large administration.
- Mauryan king was overthrown by **Pushyamitra Shunga**, who started the Shunga dynasty in Magadha.