

8. India during Mauryan period

- 8.1 Rise of Magadha Empire
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In lesson six, we studied the history of the sixteen mahajanapadas that existed in India. Among these mahajanapadas, the power of Magadha became strong during the struggle of the four mahajanapadas namely, Kasi, Kosala, Avanti and Magadha and the empire of Magadha came to a rise.

During this period, the first Indian empire emerged. The kingdom of Magadha acquired the form of an Empire. The administrative system of this empire was well established and its work was carried out through various departments. Several factors are essential for the emergence of an empire. For example, dominance over an expanded region, an administrative system having the revenue gathered in the form of taxes, king is the sovereign ruler of the state and army actively enforces king's authority.

The king's position was strengthened through ritual performances. The power and related rights are concentrated in the hands of the ruling family.

8.1 Rise of Magadha Empire

Magadha was an important kingdom among the mahajanapadas that existed in ancient India. Fertile and rich land, perennial rivers, excellent facilities of navigation, availability of commercial markets etc. were the reasons for the rise of Magadha as empire.

In the 6th century BCE, the Haryanka

You would like to know : The concept of 'Chakravarti' occurs in the literature on ancient Indian polity. The sovereign ruler whose chariot could roll in all four directions without any obstruction, was known as Chakravarti. It was expected that his rule should be ethical and for the welfare of the State. During his tenure the wheel of 'Ruta' remains intact. His rule is on an extended territory. Chandragupta Maurya was the first Chakravarti Emperor.

dynasty ruled over Magadha.

The Haryanka dynasty is mentioned in the Mahabharata. Bimbisara was the first well-known king. His father Mahapadma built the fort at Girivraja and established the first capital of Magadha. After ascending the throne, Bimbisara started building the foundation of Magadha Empire. He attacked the neighbouring kingdom of Anga and conquered it. This victory increased the power of Magadha. Bimbisara established matrimonial relations with many royal houses such as Kosala, Lichchhavi, Videh, Madra to support his expansionist policy. At the foot of the fort of Girivraja, he established the new capital of Rajgriha.

After killing Bimbisara, his son Ajatashatru became the king. He adopted the expansionist policy of his father. He expanded the Magadha kingdom up to the foot of Vindhya ranges. Ajatashatru built a small fort on the bank of Ganga at Pataligrama. It became a centre of trade of local commodities. In the later period, Pataligrama came to be known as Pataliputra. It became the capital of the Mauryan Empire.

Later the people deposed Ajatashatru

and selected his minister Shishunaga as the king. The Shishunaga dynasty ruled between 430 B.C.E. to 364 B.C.E. and then Mahapadmananda usurped the throne and established the Nanda dynasty.

By the way : Pataliputra was an important city in ancient India. The city of Pataliputra was the capital of ruling dynasties like Shishunaga, Nanda, Maurya, Gupta and Pala. 'Patali' is a species of rice grown in this region. Hence, the city might have acquired the name. In his book Indica, Megasthenes has mentioned the city of Pataliputra as Palibothara.

Political stability as well as other factors were responsible in the strengthening of Magadha as an empire. Magadha had control over all the prominent regions in the Ganga Valley. By conquering the kingdom of Anga, the regions of the east coast came under their control and Magadha succeeded in increasing the trade with the distant regions. Magadha was blessed with natural resources. Its land was fertile, especially for rice cultivation. There was rise in revenue due to the expansion of the kingdom. The abundance of sources for timber, ivory, iron and copper gave a momentum to the local industries. The political ambitions of the rulers, combined with wealth and prospering trade were the reasons for the development of Magadha rule and establishment of a huge empire.

8.2 Nanda and Mauryan Empire

Nanda Dynasty: The Nanda dynasty is mentioned in the Puranas. The Magadhan empire established by Ajatashatru was further expanded by Mahapadma Nanda. According to some scholars, the Nanda rule had spread upto Nanded in the South, whereas some scholars think that it was extended upto Mysore. On this basis it can be said that Mahapadma Nanda was the first great emperor of India. Dhanananda was the last

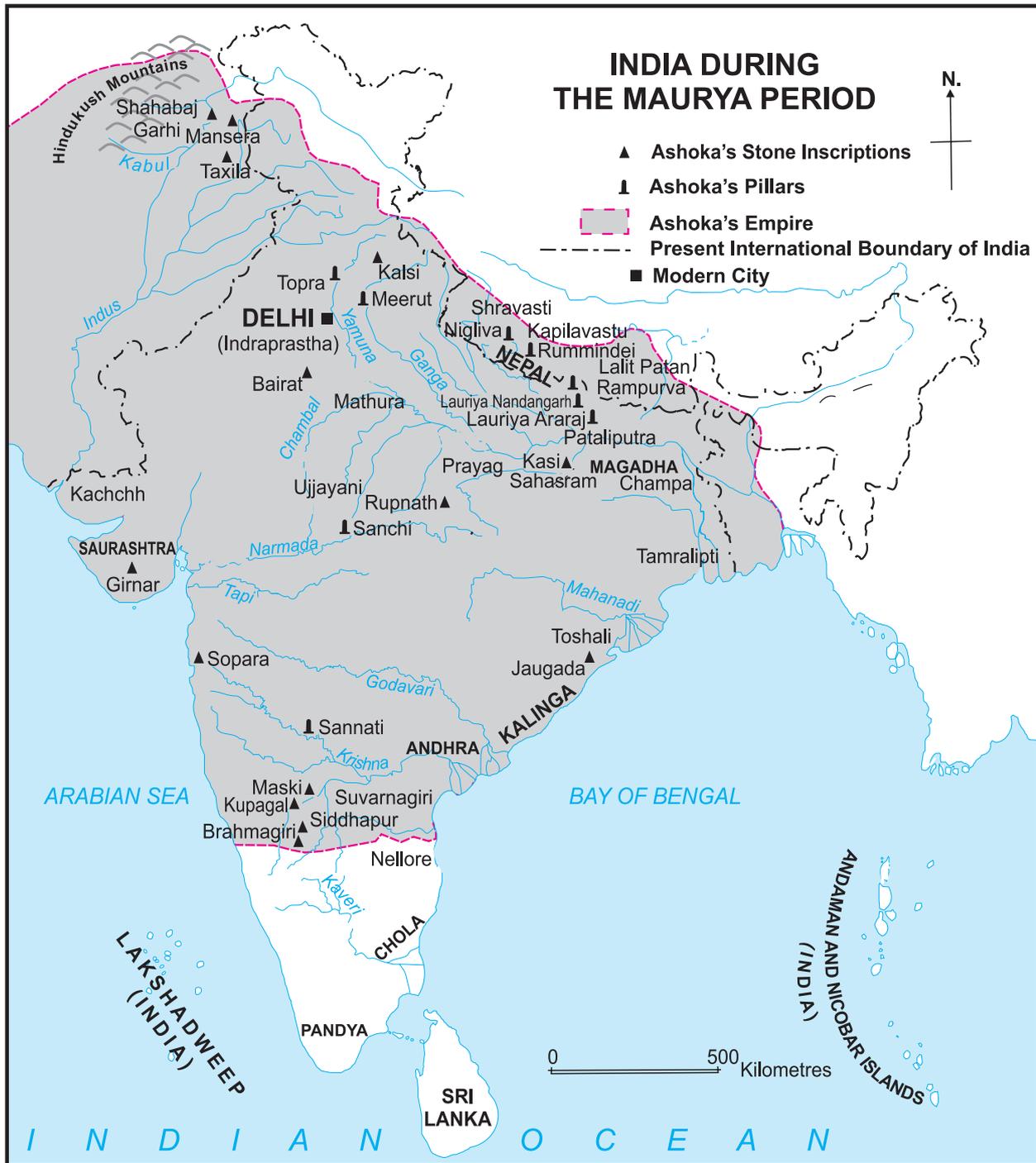
ruler of the Nanda dynasty. During his period, the state treasury was enormously rich. His military was also very huge. It consisted of 2,00,000 infantry, 60,000 cavalry, 6000 elephants and 2000 chariots.

During the period of Nandas, another factor that helped in strengthening the central power was the importance given to enhance the revenue collection. Along with the expansion of the empire came the economic prosperity of the State. The state treasury was always full. The Nandas built canals and made arrangement of irrigation facilities. These facilities led to the development of agriculture and trade. In 321 B.C.E. Chandragupta Maurya attacked Pataliputra and brought an end to the Nanda rule.

Mauryan Empire: Mauryan Empire was the first well organised and strongly controlled empire in the history of India. Religious texts and other literature, inscriptions, coins, sculptures etc. are the sources that help us to clearly understand the political, social, economic, and religious conditions of this period.

The Mauryan empire had spread on a large region of the Indian sub continent and was controlled by a central power. The Mauryan rule brought about consolidation of the political system.

Chandragupta Maurya defeated the Nandas and established the Mauryan dynasty. In the text of Mahavamsa, Chandragupta is referred as 'the emperor of Jambudvipa i.e. emperor of Bharatvarsh'. The Mauryas created a huge empire by conquering the big and small states in northwest, north and southern regions. The war between Chandragupta and the Greek king Seleucus was very important. As a consequence, the boundaries of Mauryan Empire extended to the Hindukush in the northwest. The Mauryan Empire extended from Hindukush to the Bay of Bengal in the east and Gujarat in the west, as well as Himalayas in the north to the Krishna river in the south.



Chandragupta Maurya died around 298 B.C.E. His son Bindusara became the king. During his tenure he sent his son Ashoka to subdue the revolt in Taxila. During the period of Bindusara the empire established by Chandragupta Maurya remained intact. Bindusara died in 273 B.C.E.

8.3 Emperor Ashoka

Ashoka became the emperor of Mauryan empire after the death of Bindusara. He got

himself coronated in 268 B.C.E. He called himself as 'Devanampiyō Piyadasi' (Beloved of the Gods) in many of his rock edicts and pillar inscriptions.

During the early period of his rule, Ashoka adopted his ancestors' policy of Digvijaya and expansion of kingdom. He attacked Kalinga and conquered it. Ashoka's victory at Kalinga proved to be a turning point in history as well as in the life of

For Additional Information : The rock edicts and Pillar inscriptions of Ashoka:

The rock edicts and Pillar inscriptions of Ashoka are found at many places in the regions of Afghanistan, Nepal and India. In 1750 C.E. Padre Tieffenthaler rediscovered Meerut pillar inscription of Ashoka. Ashoka's inscriptions are inscribed in Brahmi script. In 1837 C.E. James Prinsep deciphered the Brahmi script on the inscriptions. The inscriptions of Ashoka are very important sources of the history of his rule. The boundaries of Maurya Empire can be ensured on the basis of these inscriptions. The description of Ashoka's efforts for the spread of Buddhism can be obtained from these inscriptions. Even though Ashoka embraced Buddhism but he never tried to forcibly impose it on his subjects. The written evidence of the spread of Buddhism and Indian culture in distant countries through the Buddhist monks sent by Ashoka occurs in these inscriptions. It included Emperor Ashoka's son Mahendra (Mahinda) and daughter Sanghamitra (Sanghamitta).

Ashoka. There was a great human loss in this war. Ashoka became victorious. The destruction caused due to the Kalinga war brought about a great change in the mind of Ashoka. His mind got diverted towards the non-violent, peaceful Buddhist religion. The desire of digvijaya was replaced by Dharmavijay (Dhammavijay). His career proved to be important because of the religious ideals propagated by him and the creation of a mechanism to until it in people's life.

For the implementation of dhammavijay, Ashoka introduced some new policies, for example, appointment of 'Dharmamahamatras', ban on intoxicating

You would like to know : During the period of 321 B.C.E. to 181 B.C.E., the expansion of Mauryan empire took place in Maharashtra. The Mauryas must have entered Sopara from Gujarat. Sopara is a well-known port in north konkan. Sopara and Chaul (Champavati) were prosperous trade centers and learning centers of Buddhism. Bhagvanlal Indraji excavated the Stupa at Sopara which is known as 'Baruda Rajacha kot'. In this excavation the fragments of rock edict of Ashoka were found. It is the 8th rock edict among the 14 edicts of Ashoka. Some of its remains are kept in the museum of Asiatic Society in Mumbai. The 9th rock edict was found in the Bhuigaon village. Its remains are kept in the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya in Mumbai.



Stupa of Nalasopara

drinks, guiding principles regarding code of conduct etc. Ashoka's policy of 'Dhamma' meant virtuous conduct based on moral values. He sent monks to various countries for the spread of Buddhism.

The first Buddhist council was held at Rajgriha after the mahaparnibban of Gautama Buddha. King Kalashoka organised the second council at Vaishali. Ashoka organized the third Buddhist council at the capital Pataliputra.

The kings who succeeded Ashoka were not efficient. This led to the decline of the Mauryan empire. Brihadratha was the last king of the Mauryan dynasty. He was killed by his General Pushyamitra who then came to power.

Important information : In the rock edicts of Ashoka there are references about the contemporary kings from the western world. The identification of Greek king Antiouchus and the four greek kings beyond the kingdom of Antiouchus namely, Turmaya, Amtekina, Maga and Alikasundara is done through a paragraph from one of the inscriptions. That is

Antiochus II Theos of Syria (260 B.C.E. -246 B.C.E.), Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt (285 B.C.E. - 247 B.C.E.), Antigonus Gonatus of Macedonia (276 B.C.E. -239 B.C.E.), Magas of Cyrene and Alexander of Epirus. This paragraph is an important link in the process of connecting the chronological sequence of ancient Indian history.

8.4 Administrative system, trade, literature, art and architecture, social life

Administrative system

The nature of administrative system during the Mauryan period is clearly understood with the help of Kautilya's Arthashastra, Megasthenes' Indica and the inscriptions of Ashoka. Chandragupta Maurya was a valiant king and an efficient administrator. He set up a defined mechanism of state administration, which suited the economic conditions and the needs of the Mauryan empire. The Mauryan emperors created a unified empire. At the same time, they devised a decentralised administrative system for efficient functioning of the vast empire. In the administrative system of the empire, there was a Mantri Parishad (council of ministers) made up of wise, experienced, virtuous and selfless ministers who gave advice to the king. There was a committee of some of these ministers, who were known as 'Mantrana' to look after the day to day affairs of the state. Mauryas had created a stable framework of administration by creating various departments of administration and appointing the experienced and expert officers over it. These officers were known as Amatya. Arthashastra mentions total 18 Amatyas such as Pradhan, Samaharta (revenue), Sannidhata (finance), Senapati, Yuvraj etc. Kautilya has given information about 30 administrative departments. The hierarchical order of the officers in the Mauryan empire started from the Samrat at

the head to the lowermost office of the Gramini. At the local level the people were given autonomous rights to a great extent in the internal matters. In this way the administration of Mauryan kingdom was decentralised. The most important feature of Mauryan administration was the effort made for the overall material and moral development of the people. The Mauryan administration is appreciated due to various factors such as keeping the civil and military areas separate from each other, creating an independent judicial system, implementing a specific salary system to the officers, control over the trade in the kingdom etc.

Trade

There was an increase in revenue due to well organised taxation system. 'Bali' was a tax to be given in the scale of the land under cultivation. 'Bhag' was a share from the tax on production. Agricultural land and the tax acquired from the agricultural production was the basic foundation of the administrative system. Industries gained momentum during this period. Cloth production was the most important industry. Apart from that metallurgy, carpentry, ivory art, spinning, weaving and many such professions began. The prosperous agriculture and flourishing industries led to a flourishing internal and foreign trade. Internal trade was carried through land route and water ways. Many royal ways were built on the trade routes during this period. Many roads such as Pataliputra to Takshashila, Pataliputra to Kashi-Ujjaini, Pataliputra to

Tamralipti came into existence.

The increasing use of iron and also the different types of iron implements, painted pottery and its distribution upto southern parts of India indicates expansion of trade. Bharuch, Roruk (Rodi), Sopara, Tamralipti and many such ports on the coastal region of India were famous for trade purpose. Exports were carried out on a large scale from India to countries like Greece, Rome, Egypt, Syria, Bactria, Sri Lanka etc. The commodities such as cotton and silk cloth, linen, jari clothes, spices, diamonds, ivory, perfumes etc. were exported from India to these countries. Glass articles, dyes etc. were imported. The government levied taxes on the production of goods as well as on its import and export. Vartani (transport tax) and shulk (octroi) are found to be mentioned in the contemporary sources. In return the government took up responsibility of security of the goods. For the protection of the trading community the government had appointed officers like Chorarajjuka and Seemaswami.

Literature

Literature reflects the thought process of the people and the political, social, economic and religious conditions. During the Mauryan period, along with the literature in Sanskrit language, the use of Pali and Ardhamagadhi literature in Prakrit language is also seen. For the spread of Jainism and Buddhism, literature was created in Prakrit language. The Prakrit languages mainly included Pali, Ardhamagadhi, Shourseni, Maharashtri etc. The world famous work of Panini's Ashtadhyayi was composed in this period. Bhasa was one of the great dramatists in Sanskrit literature. The thirteen dramas written by him includes 'Swapnavasavadattam'. The most important work of this period is Kautilya's Arthashastra. This text is divided into 15 sections including total 180 topics. The topics from King to Ganikas and politics to war strategies are found to be discussed in Arthashastra.

During the Mauryan period, along with Sanskrit literature, many texts were written in Prakrit language. Especially the orders of Ashoka are inscribed on the rocks and pillars in Prakrit language. The famous texts of Buddhist literature, Tipitaka, were edited during this period. Among the texts of Tipitakas, Abhidhammapitaka was composed after the third Buddhist council.

This period was very rich from the point of view of Jain literature. The texts like 'Dashavaikalika', 'Upasakadashanga', 'Acharanga Sutra', 'Bhagvati Sutra' etc. were composed during this period.

Art and architecture

After the establishment of Mauryan rule, there was happiness, peace, prosperity and good governance. Mauryan art is the beginning of ancient Indian architecture and the sculptural art.

It appears that, during the Mauryan period, the artists had acquired the skill of cutting and carving the stone. In both, the skill of a specific expression of art and the technique of mirror polish of the stone is seen. This is known as 'Mauryan Polish'. During this period stone statues of Yaksha and Yakshi are found. Especially the statues

of Yakshi are beautiful and finely carved. The famous Chauri bearer of Didarganj is supposed to be one of such statues. The Yaksha statues in Parkham and the female images at Besnagar and Patna of this period are exhibited in the Mathura museum.

The pillars erected by Emperor Ashoka and the sculptures on them are excellent examples of Mauryan sculpture.



Chauri bearer
of Didarganj

There is the lion capital of the pillar at Rampurva and Lauria Nandangarh. The Sankissa pillar has an elephant capital. At Sarnath the pillar capital has four lions carved on it. This sculpture of the four lions is the 'National emblem' of India.

The beginning of rock-cut caves is seen in the Mauryan architecture. The rock cut caves on Barabar and Nagarjuni hills are the first datable rock cut caves of India.

Do You Know?

During this period the concept of 'Vishti' is mentioned in context of craft production. 'Vishti' was a tax paid by the people in form of physical labour. Through vishti the artisans provided a stipulated amount of free labour to the state.

There was a huge palace of Chandragupta at Pataliputra. Megasthenes compares it with the Palace of Susa, the capital of Iran. The high brick fortification wall was built for the protection of the palace and inside the palace there were many buildings. These buildings were built of stone. Wood was also used in the buildings. One of the unique contribution in the field of art are the huge standing pillars erected during the period of Ashoka for the spread of religion. We know them as Ashokan Pillars. These pillars are erected at thirty places. They are erected at places related to important events in the life of Gautama Buddha and on important royal paths. During Ashoka's period, stupas were built on a large scale. It is said that during his rule, Ashoka built 84,000 stupas.



Capital of an Ashokan Pillar

Social Life

The remains found in the excavations reflect the rich lifestyle of the people. Megasthenes mentions the seven classes of Indian society based on their profession; Priest, Cultivators, Shepherds and Hunters, Traders and Labours, Soldiers, Spies and Government officials. The life of the people was prosperous and happy. The class of entertainers is mentioned which includes actors, dancers, singers, musicians etc. Chariot and horse racing, wrestling as well as dance and singing competition were the popular means of entertainment. Gambling was also in practice but the state had control over it.

The system of education during vedic period continued during the Mauryan period. The cities of Taxila, Kashi Ayodhya etc. became great centres of higher education and art during the Mauryan period.

Female education began to be neglected during this period. But according to Kautilya's Arthashastra, it seems that during Mauryan period women were given certain rights. Women had complete rights over the Stridhana. The Government took care of the orphan and disabled women. Many women spies were a part of the intelligence system.

The Mauryan period has multiple dimensions and hence it has obtained a historical significance. After the death of Ashoka, the centralised administration continued to grow weak and the empire disintegrated into small kingdoms. In the Post-Mauryan period Shunga, Kanva and Satavahana rulers rebuilt their empires. Vedic religion, varnashrama system, and vedic lifestyle once again gained importance. We are going to study about these dynasties in the next chapter.

Exercise

Q.1 (A) Choose the correct alternative and complete the sentence.

- (1) The first well-known king of the Haryank dynasty is
(a) Chandragupta Maurya
(b) Bimbisara (c) Ajatashatru
(d) Mahapadma
- (2) The Nanda dynasty was established by
(a) Dhanananda (b) Shishunaga
(c) Mahapadma Nanda
(d) Emperor Ashoka
- (3) The great drama in Sankrit literature, Swapnavasavadatta, was written by
(a) Kautilya (b) Bharat
(c) Kalidasa (d) Bhasa

(B) Find out the incorrect pair, correct it and rewrite.

- (1) Built the foundation of Magadha Empire – Bimbisara
- (2) Brought an end to Nanda rule – Chandragupta Maurya
- (3) Chinese traveler who visited India during the period of Chandragupta Maurya – Megasthenes
- (4) Changed his mind due to the destruction in Kalinga war – Emperor Ashoka

Q.2 Choose the correct reason and complete the sentence.

Emperor Ashoka erected many pillars.
Reason

- (a) Spread of Art
- (b) Spread of religion
- (c) Growth of trade
- (d) For recognition of his work

Q.3 Explain the following statements with reasons.

- (1) Ashoka's victory at Kalinga proved to be a turning point in history as well as the life of Ashoka.
- (2) The war between Chandragupta and the Greek king Seleucus was very important.
- (3) The Mauryan administration acquired a definite form.

Q.4 State your opinion.

- (1) Chandragupta Maurya is the first Chakravarti emperor in the history of India.
- (2) The rock edicts of Ashoka are important sources of history.
- (3) Various trade guilds developed during the Mauryan period.

Q.5 Observe the map on Page number 58 and answer the questions based on it.

- (1) Regions included in Ashoka's Empire
- (2) Locations of Ashoka's rock and pillars edicts.

Activity

Collect information about the Stupas during the period of Ashoka.

