

# THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

Class- 9



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## THE MAURYAS

The Mauryan empire was founded in the 4th century BC by Chandragupta Maurya. He organised a powerful army and laid the foundation of a vast empire. He overthrew the Nandas from Magadha and the Greek Satraps from the North-West Frontier and unified a large part of the Indian subcontinent under his centralised government. His successor Bindusara kept the Mauryan Empire intact and further extended its boundaries.

## SOURCES

### LITERARY SOURCES

**(i) Arthashastra of Kautilya:** The most important source is the Arthashastra, written by Kautilya, also known as Vishnugupta and Chanakya. He was the advisor and Prime Minister of Chandragupta. Arthashastra is written in Sanskrit.

**(ii) Indika:** Megasthenes was the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandragupta Maurya. He had been sent to the court by Seleucus, the Greek ruler. He wrote a book named Indika which contains his impressions of what he heard and saw during his stay in India.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES

**(i) Edicts of Ashoka:** An edict is a decree issued by a Sovereign. The edicts of Ashoka form the most important source of Mauryan history. They are the oldest, best preserved and precisely dated records of India. These edicts are inscribed on rocks and pillars throughout the country and include **14 major** rock edicts, seven pillar edicts and a number of minor rock edicts.

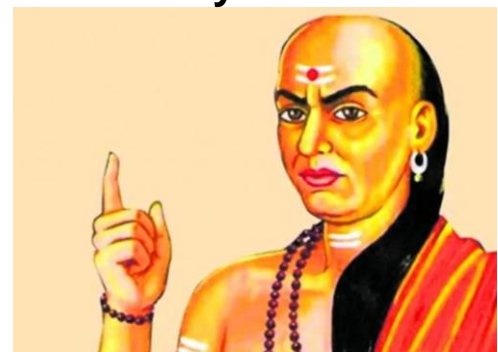
Ashoka prohibited killing of animals for sacrifices; advocated restraint in the number that had to be killed for consumption; protected some of the animals, and in general condemned cruel acts against animals.

**(ii) Sanchi Stupa:** The stupa is a semi-spherical solid dome-like structure made of unburnt bricks and stones. The Buddhist stupa has special significance. It represents the spiritual body of Buddha containing his relics such as hair, teeth or bones. A casket containing these relics is placed at the base of the dome. The foundation of the Sanchi Stupa was laid by Ashoka at Sanchi about 45 km from Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. There are four gateways in four directions. They have carved panels depicting events from the life of Buddha and some tales from Jataka stories.

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### CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA

Chandragupta Maurya was the founder of the Mauryan Empire. Not much is known about his childhood. According to a legend he had been dismissed from the service of Nandas who ruled before him. He met Kautilya at Takshila. Kautilya, who later became famous as Chanakya, was the son of a Brahmin. Kautilya too was wronged by the Nandas. He, therefore, joined hands with Chandragupta to destroy the Nanda dynasty.



### BINDUSARA

Bindusara succeeded his father, Chandragupta Maurya. The Greek historian Athenacus calls him a 'slayer of foes'. He conquered many parts of South India after defeating sixteen rulers. During his rule he faced a revolt in Takshila. It was quelled by his second son Ashoka, who was the governor there.

## ASHOKA

Ashoka succeeded to the throne after his father Bindusara's death. On ascending the throne, Ashoka took the title of 'Devanamapriya' (The Beloved of the Gods) and 'Priyadarshi' (The Beautiful One) .

## Kalinga War

After ascending the throne, Ashoka fought the famous Kalinga War. According to Megasthenes, the Greek historian at the court of Chandragupta Maurya, the ruler of Kalinga had a powerful army comprising infantry, cavalry and elephants Ashoka faced tough resistance. According to the Rock Edict-XIII, both sides suffered losses, but people of Kalinga suffered the most.

## Consequences of Kalinga War

The Kalinga war had a profound effect on the policies and personality of Ashoka.

- (i) The death and destruction caused by the Kalinga war brought about a great change in the personal and political life of Ashoka. He abandoned the policy of 'conquest by force' (*Bherigoshā*) and ambition of victory in all directions' (*Digvijay*) and embraced the policy of religion (*Dhammagoshā*).
- (ii) Kalinga changed *Ashoka's personal life*. He stopped hunting and eating meat and abandoned the life of luxury.
- (iii) Ashoka declared Buddhism as *the state religion*.
- (iv) The prisoners of war were used for agricultural work. It resulted in an increase in production and brought about economic prosperity in his empire.

## Extent of Ashoka's Empire

After his victory at Kalinga, Ashoka's empire extended from Hindukush in the north-west to



river Pennar in the south. It also included some parts of Nepal in the north and Kabul, Herat and Kandahar provinces outside the present boundary of India.

## **MAURYAN ADMINISTRATION**

**Pan-Indian Character:** The Mauryan empire beginning with Chandragupta Maurya was vast, with an all-India character.

Seleucus, whom Chandragupta defeated in war, had handed him four provinces of Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Baluchistan.

The chief advantages of the Pan-Indian character of his empire were the following:

- (a) It marked the end of small states.
- (b) It helped in establishing trade links with foreign countries.
- (c) It made India strong and helped the Mauryan kings face foreign aggressions successfully.

## **Administration**

It was Chandragupta Maurya, under the guidance of Chanakya, who laid the foundations of an elaborate system of administration. Chanakya wrote a book 'Arthashastra' in which he describes the principles of politics and the art of administration. Chandragupta's son Bindusara retained the same system and Ashoka made some minor changes necessitated by the change of heart after the Kalinga war.

**Civil Administration:** The Civil administration had two main divisions-the Central Government and the Provincial Government.

**Central Government:** The Mauryan government was centralised and was managed by several officers of different ranks. The king was the supreme authority and his throne was hereditary.

At the central level, the king was assisted by the council of ministers (Mantri Parishad) headed by the Prime Minister. The council of ministers included the chief Pujari of the state called **Purohit**, Senapati, who advised the king

on matters related to war and peace; the head treasurer called **Sannidhata**; and **Samaharta**, the taxation expert.

**(ii) Provincial Government:** Head of the province was called Kumar or Aryaputra Only the princes were appointed to this position. During Ashoka's time the Kumar was assisted by the Governor (Mahamatra).

**(iii) District Administration:** The provinces were divided into districts called Janapadas. Their administration was looked after by Pradeshika, Rajuka and Yukta.

**(iv) Administration of Cities:** Important cities, the capitals of provinces as given earlier, had their own administrative system. The head of the city was called Nagaradhyaksha.

**(v) The Revenue System:** The land revenue was the chief source of income in the Mauryan empire. It was one-sixth to one-fourth of the produce. Two kinds of taxes, namely Bali and Bhaga are mentioned in the Edicts of Ashoka. Bhaga was levied on agricultural produce and the cattle at the rate of one-sixth.). Bali was a religious tribute.

**(vi) The Spy System:** Chandragupta Maurya had a wide network of spies in his empire. There were spies against the spies and on important matters more than one agent was asked to collect information.

**(vii) Military Administration:** Chandragupta Maurya maintained a huge army consisting of infantry, cavalry, elephants and chariots. According to Megasthenes the Mauryan Army consisted of 6,00,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry, and 9000 war-elephants. According to another source, the Mauryas maintained 8000 chariots.

## **Ashoka Dhamma**

It is common code of conduct. It is Moral Law not religious system.

## **Principles of Dhamma**

- (i)** Respect to elders and love to children
- (ii)** Ahimsa
- (iii)** Good Karma
- (iv)** Respect all religions
- (v)** Disapproved empty ritual.

## **IMPACT OF DHAMMA ON ASHOKA'S IMPERIAL POLICY**

- (i) Religious unity:** People belonging to different religions followed their emperor's policy of religious tolerance.

**(ii) Moral values: People under the influence of Dhamma started living a moral life.**

**(iii) End of crimes: The policy of Ahimsa did have a great moral impact on people. Thefts, crimes and other such activities almost came to an end.**

**(iv) Public welfare: With the policy of conquests and wars having come to an end, Ashoka's Dhamma helped officials to undertake public welfare and public work schemes.**

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