

MAGADHA EMPIRE (SIXTH CENTURY TO FOURTH CENTURY BC)

By the end of the sixth century BC, the north-western part of India had been included into the **Persian Achaemenid** Empire and had been made one of its satrapies. It led to the beginning of administrative association between Central Asia and India. Magadha, which was situated on fertile alluvial soil and near mineral deposits, particularly iron, was the centre of flourishing commerce and trade.

Extent of the Empire

Magadha transformed from a small kingdom into a major power in North India, covering the districts of Patna and Gaya in Bihar. It had its capital at Pataliputra.

Features

Trade in Magadha flourished because of its favourable location and fertile soil of the lower Ganga region. It had several rivers such as the Ganges, Pun-Pun, Son and Gandhak. These rivers facilitated the expansion of its trade routes as well as provided military access to many far off regions. Utrpath, the route alongside the Ganga upto the foothills of Himalayas was controlled by the Magadha rulers. Farmers in Magadha could make better agricultural implements using the iron deposits available in the region which enabled them to produce surplus amount of crops and consequently provide more weapons for the army.

Notable Rulers of Magadha

The first noteworthy king of Magadha was **Bimbisara** (542-493 BC). He transformed the Magadha Kingdom into an empire. He conquered Anga and controlled the trade routes in the Ganges Delta. He married thrice and his matrimonial alliances helped him expand his kingdom. He either conquered other important rulers of his time or got into desired treaties from them. His wives, Kosala Devi (sister of Prasanajit, ruler of the Kashi Kingdom), Chellana

(daughter of the ruler of the Chetaka Kingdom) and Madraka (daughter of the King of Punjab) fetched him large dowries. Using his newly obtained wealth, he established a new capital Rajagriha (near Patna).

Ajatashatru (493-461 BC) was the son of Bimbisara. He assassinated his father and became the ruler. He extended the boundaries of his kingdom by annexing Vaishali and Kosala.

Factors for the Rise of Magadha ★

- (a) Nearness and control over rich deposits of copper and iron ores.
- (b) Favourable geographical location helped in taking control over the whole lower Gangetic plain.
- (c) Fertile alluvial soil provided a strong agricultural base. The peasants could produce surplus amount of crops which the rulers collected in the form of taxes.
- (d) The thick forests supplied timber for construction of houses and elephant, for the army. Magadha was the first to use elephants on large scale in wars.
- (e) The capitals of Magadha, Rajgriha and Pataliputra were situated strategically. Rajgriha was surrounded by five hills and it was considered impregnable. Pataliputra was situated at the confluence of Ganges, Gandak and Son.

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