
THE MAURYAN EMPIRE (321-289 BC)

In 322 BC, Chandragupta Maurya, the ruler of Magadha, began to assert its authority over the neighbouring kingdoms. Chandragupta (320-300 BC), was the builder of the first Indian imperial power, the Mauryan Empire. He had his capital at Pataliputra, near Patna, in Bihar.

CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA (320-300 BC)

Chandragupta Maurya was the founder of the Mauryan Empire. He founded the dynasty by overthrowing the Nandas around 320 BC. There is no clear account available about his early life. He was born in Pataliputra, but was raised in the forest in the company of herdsmen and hunters. It was Chanakya who spotted him and he was struck by his personality. Chanakya trained and transformed him into one of the most powerful rulers of that era. Chanakya trained him in arts, sciences, logic, administration and warfare at the Taxila University. Chanakya had decided a task for Chandragupta-to free India from Greek dominance. Some smaller kingdoms in Punjab and Sindh helped Chandragupta. Soon Chandragupta defeated the Greeks and freed Punjab. Sindh and its north-west regions of India. He then defeated the Nanda rulers in Pataliputra and captured the throne of Magadha. Chandragupta Maurya's army included over 6,00,000 infantry, 50,000 cavalry, 10,000 elephants and 7,000 chariots.

Importance of Chandragupta's Rule

Chandragupta was the first Indian ruler whom we can call a national ruler in real senses he established such a system of

**Coming of Chandragupta Maurya**

Macedonian ruler Alexander's invasion of north-western India, and the increasing unpopularity of Nanda rulers, resulted into their decline. With the help of Chanakya, Chandragupta overthrew the Nandas and assumed the throne. After invading

Seleucus, Alexander's successor in Persia, he underwent a treaty liberating the empire from Greco-Persian authority. It also assured him a respectful place in later Greek and Roman histories. He used the administrative system established by the Nandas to his full advantage, and established close and friendly relations with Babylon and the lands farther west. He was acknowledged as a brilliant general having an army of well over half a million soldiers. He was also a brilliant king, who united India, restricting himself in not going beyond the subcontinent. Pataliputra became a cosmopolitan city of such a large proportion that Chandragupta had to create a special section of municipal officials to look after its welfare, and special courts were established to meet its judicial needs.

administration which was autocratic in nature and centrally based, assisted by a council of ministers. He also created a functional espionage system to keep his enemies within his watch. It is widely believed that his advisor Chanakya contributed considerably towards the success of Chandragupta. He established a highly centralised and hierarchical system of governance with the help of a large staff, with systematic tax collection; trade and commerce, industrial arts; mining; vital statistics; welfare of foreigners; maintenance of public places, including markets and temples and welfare of prostitutes.

**Extent of Chandragupta's Empire**

Chandragupta freed Punjab and Sindh from foreign control and brought these areas under his rule. The whole of northern region of India (from Pataliputra to the Hindukush mountains in the north-west) and to Narmada in the south came into his direct control. His empire included the regions of Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Baluchistan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Gujarat and Kathiawar. In 305 BC, his fruitful treaties with the ruler of Babylon gave

him control over a large area of Afghanistan, Baluchistan, Kabul and Kandahar. Records do not provide any clear information about his conquests in South India. However, there is little doubt about the fact that he ruled over a vast empire. Megasthenes and Kutilyid have mentioned: about the vastness of his empire in their texts. He spent his life's last ten years at Chandragiri hills of Sharvanabebgola) in a temple built by him. The temple was known as 'Chandragupta Basadi' where he led his life as a disciple of a Jain, saint, Bhadrabahu, who guided him to maksha by observing Sallekhana Vrata (which leads to death by slow starvation, as per Jain tradition). It is estimated that he died at the age of 45 years in 296 BC.

Kautilya and the Arthashastra

Kautilya, who was also known as Chanakya, was a minister in Chandragupta Maurya's court. There is little information about the life of Kautilya. He got his education at Taxila, which was also the capital of Gandhara. He is known to have helped Chandragupta overthrow the Nanda Dynasty. Some historians believed that he was a wily planner who could adopt any method to execute the plans of the king. He is best known for his work, the Arthashastra, the first and most important Indian text on how a king should wield political and economic powers.

Though the Arthashastra includes many sections written many centuries after Kautilya, it is attributed to him because of his legendary political wisdom. Most part of the text are associated with theoretical situations but some parts represent real conditions and the strategy present at the time of the Mauryas. The book informs about a centralised administrative system which also had provincial governors levels of bureaucrats, the tax system and a royal army. It also mentions about the methods by which peasants can be encouraged to increase agricultural productivity.

The Arthashastra also presents a model on foreign affairs called the circle of states. As per the model, all states are surrounded by natural

adversaries. A ruler who desires to be a conqueror is always surrounded by enemies, so are his enemies' A sensible ruler relies on the power of his enemies' enemies along with his own power. The book describes various strategies for making and breaking alliances using military force or treaties, and engaging spies or propaganda to weaken opponents and take advantage of the situation.

Political Administration

Chandragupta maintained a large standing army and a well-organised espionage system. He divided his empire into provinces, districts and villages. All the administrative units were governed by centrally appointed local officials who performed the functions as directed by the central administration. The capital city had magnificent palaces, temples, a university, a library, gardens and parks.

Military Might of Chandragupta

Chandragupta Maurya's army included over 6,00,000 infantry, 50,000 cavalry, 10,000 elephants and 7,000 chariots. There were six boards of five members each four of which supervised the four divisions of the army, and the remaining two looked after the admiralty and transport cum commissariat.

Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum

It is an epigraphical publication of the Archeological Survey of India and has been brought out as a multi-volume series of collections of inscriptions bearing on the history of Maurya, post Maurya and Gupta times.

BINDUSARA (296-273 BC)

Bindusara, Chandragupta's son (296-273 BC), succeeded him and conquered the south and annexed the regions up to Mysore into his empire. He was a very wise and brave warrior. He successfully maintained the administration of the vast empire he inherited from his father. Ashoka, who was then the governor of Ujjain, assisted him very well. Bindusara had to face two major revolts at Taxila, which he suppressed without much difficulty. According to some

Buddhist texts, Bindusara married sixteen times and had more than 100 sons. He made his eldest son, the crown prince Susheema, the governor of Taxila and his second son, Ashoka, the governor of Ujjain. However, he rejected his eldest son after two revolts at Taxila and decided to give the throne to Ashoka. Ashoka was to succeed as the king after the death of Bindusara in 273 BC. However, Ashoka could become a ruler only in 269 BC, four years after Bindusara's death. Possibly, his elder brother might not have allowed the throne to be easily passed on to Ashoka. There is no account of these four years in any Mauryan texts.

ASHOKA THE GREAT (269-232 BC)

Ashoka was the son of Bindusara. He is considered among the greatest rulers of all times. He was the first ruler who tried to maintain direct contact with his subjects. He ruled for nearly 40 years. Most of the information about the life of Ashoka can be had from the 50 edicts he placed throughout India. The most important of these edicts is the Rock Edict XIII (257-256 BC). It offers account of the eight years of the Kalinga War. The destruction and the sorrow that he witnessed in the war transformed Ashoka from a warrior to a peace loving ruler. He started propagating Buddhism. The impact of Ashoka's moral conquest can be seen not only within India but also in the far off Empires like Syria, Egypt and Macedonia and Epirus. Significantly, Ashoka has been referred to with names of Devanumpriya or Priyadarshini throughout the edicts.

Ashoka's Pillar Edict I ★

Emperor Priyadarshini says, 'I commanded this edict on Dharma to be engraved 26 years after my coronation. It is difficult to achieve happiness, either in this world or in the next, except by intense love of Dharma, intense self-examination, intense obedience, intense fear of evil and intense enthusiasm. Yet, as a result of my instruction, regard for Dharma and the love of Dharma have increased day by day and will continue to increase. My official of all ranks high, low and intermediate act in accordance with the precepts of my

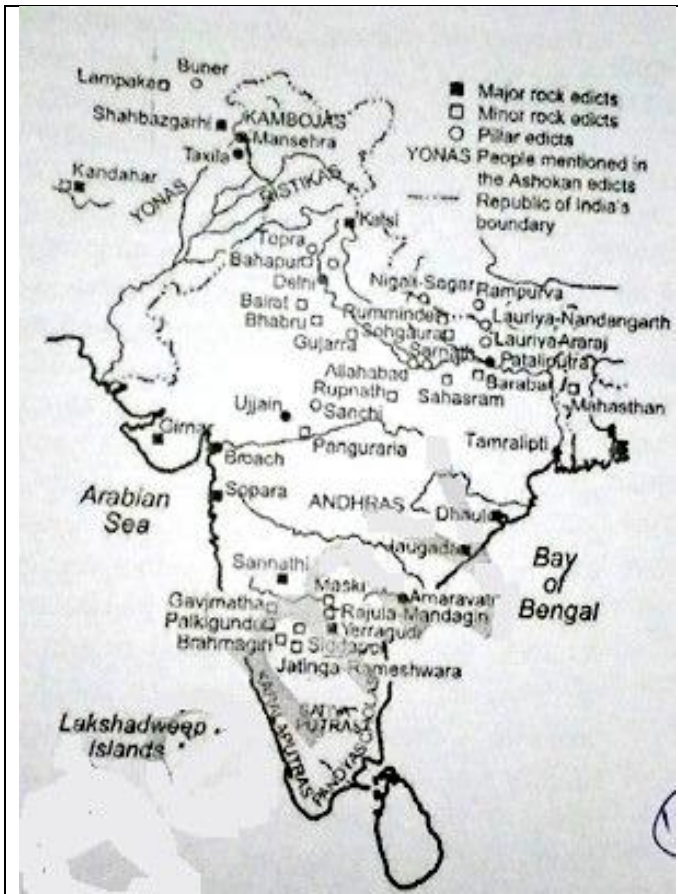
instruction, and by their example and influence they are able to recall fickle minded people to their duty. The officials of the border districts enforce my injunctions in the same way. For these are their rules: to govern according to Dharma, to administer justice according to Dharma, to advance the people's happiness according to Dharma and to protect them according to Dharma.

Ashoka as a Ruler

Ashoka was one of India's most illustrious rulers. Ashoka's inscriptions carved on rocks and stone pillars constitute the second set of dated historical records. Some of the inscriptions state that in the aftermath of the destruction resulting from the war against the powerful kingdom of Kalinga (Orissa), Ashoka renounced bloodshed and started following a policy of nonviolence or Ahimsa. His sense of toleration for different religious beliefs reflected the realities of India's regional pluralism, although he personally followed Buddhism. Early Buddhist texts state that he convened a Buddhist council at his capital, regularly undertook tours within his realm and sent Buddhist, missionary ambassadors to Sri Lanka. India's north-west retained many Persian cultural elements, which might explain Ashoka's rock inscriptions—such inscriptions were commonly associated with the Persian rulers. Ashoka's Greek and Aramaic inscriptions discovered in Kandhar in Afghanistan may also reveal his inclination to maintain contacts with people outside India.

Extent of the Empire

Ashoka's Empire covered the entire territory from Hindukush to Bengal and extended over Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the whole of India with the exception of a small area in the farthest south. Kashmir and the valleys of Nepal were also included. It was the biggest Indian empire and Ashoka was the first Indian king who ruled over almost the whole of India.



MAP 1.7 Edicts of Ashokan Empire

The Kalinga War

This was an important war during Ashoka's rule, which changed his attitude towards life. In 265 BC, Ashoka invaded Kalinga (Orissa) and occupied it after widespread destruction and bloodshed. Kalinga was an important empire as it controlled the land and the sea routes to South India. This led to Ashoka becoming a follower of Buddhism. His increased pre-occupation in the religion and emphasis on non-violence led to the weakening of his administration, which slowly led to the decline of the Mauryan Empire.

Ashoka's Policy of Dhamma

The diverse nature of the vast empire under Ashoka was exposed to social tensions and sectarian conflicts. Ashoka devised the policy of dhamma, which later became famous, as it promoted a

harmonious relationship between the diverse elements of the empire. The supposed essence of dhamma seems to be the genesis of Ashoka's big idea. The word dhamma is a Prakrit spelling of the more familiar dharma, a concept difficult to translate but imbued with positives and idealised connotations in both orthodox Vedic literature and in the heterodox doctrines of Buddhists, Jain and Ajivikas. Invoking a natural order within which all manners of creation had its place and its role, it was something to which no one, whether Brahmin or Buddhist, emperor or slave, could reasonably take exception.

Dhamma had tolerance, as its basis as aiming to bring out a peace loving life within the family and society. Religious and cultural meetings and festivals were banned led functions were allowed. Dhamma also emphasised non-violence. Ashoka banned observance of useless rituals and ceremonies to cut down the influence of priests and religious leaders. He defined the code of duty based on practical ideas like daya (mercy), Dana (charity), sathya (truthfulness), namrata (gentleness) and souche (purity). These codes entered into internal politics as well as international relations too. Ashoka attempted no philosophical justification of dhamma, nor was he given to rationalising it. It was neither a belief system nor a developed ideology, just a set of behavioural exhortations. But, because behaviour and conduct was of such defining importance, any attempt to alter it was indeed revolutionary. Ashoka, therefore, needed good reason for introducing dhamma and it should perhaps be sought in the need to promote a more united and uniform society. Ashoka's Empire was divided into provinces, with a viceroy in each province. He established dharamsalas, hospitals and sarais throughout his kingdom. Dharma Mahapatras were appointed to preach the people. Buddhism was spread during his reign as a state religion and inscriptions of Buddhist principles were engraved on rocks. He organised a network of missionaries to preach the doctrine, both in his kingdom and beyond. Ashoka sent missionaries to Ceylon, Burma and other south-east Asian regions, notably Thailand to spread the doctrine of Buddhism.

Successors of Ashoka

After Ashoka's death in 232 BC, the empire gradually disintegrated, though the exact causes are not clear. A period of struggle for succession ensued between Ashoka's heirs; southern princes seceded, from the empire and foreign powers invaded. The empire contracted to the Ganges valley in northern India. The last king of the Mauryan Empire was **Brihadratha**, who was assassinated by his Senapati, **Pushyamitra Sunga**, in 184 BC. There were six kings who ruled between Ashoka and Brihadratha. Only **Dasratha**, Ashoka's immediate successor was of some significance.

The Mauryan Dynasty

Chandragupta Maurya (320-300 BC)
Bindusara (300-273 BC.)
Ashoka (269-232 BC)
Dasaratha Kunala (232-226 BC)
Samprati (226-215 BC)
Salishoka (215-202 BC)
Devavarma (202-195 BC)
Satdhanvan (195-191 BC)
Brihadratha (181-180 BC)

Languages and Scripts of Ashoka's Inscriptions

The earliest deciphered inscriptions in the subcontinent are the edicts issued by the Mauryan Ashoka, inscribed on rock surfaces and pillars, from the third century BC. The earlier script of third millennium BC—The Harappa script, associated with the Indus Valley Civilization—is generally believed to be pictographic and is found on seals, amulets and occasionally, as graffiti on pots. However, as these pictographs to be deciphered Ashoka's edicts are historically scripts available for study.

Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict

Thus said, His Sacted and Gracious Majesty the king: On the high roads, I caused banyan trees to be planted by me to shade cattle and men. I caused

mango gardens to be planted and wells to be dug at two-mile intervals, rest-houses were constructed, many watering stations were established here and there, for the comfort of cattle and men. Slight comfort, indeed, is this, People have been made happy through various kinds of facilities for comfort by previous kings as well as me. But this was done by me so that people might strictly follow the path laid down by Dharma.

Eight Groups of Ashoka's Edicts/Inscriptions

Ashoka's edicts/inscriptions may be arranged in eight groups chronological order:

- (i) Two minor rock edicts (258-257 BC)
- (ii) Babru edicts (257 BC)
- (iii) Fourteen rock edicts (257-256 BC)
- (iv) Kalinga inscriptions (256 BC)
- (v) Barabar rock edicts in caves near Gaya (250 BC)
- (vi) Tarai's two minor pillar edicts (249 BC)
- (vii) Seven pillar edicts (243 BC)
- (viii) Four minor pillar edicts (232 BC)

Ashoka as an Administrator

A devout Buddhist, Ashoka did not neglect public works or administration. Although he retained capital punishment for extreme offences, he devised a system of appeals to give every chance for a revised judgement that might replace execution with a fine. He reformed the tax system so that each region and village could appeal for relief when harvests and commerce had declined, reorganised bureaucracy and devised a new class of officials, the mahamatras, literally meaning great in measure'. They were established to monitor the operations of the government. Some were assigned to look after the welfare of the Sangha, and they even travelled outside the realm to do so. Others saw to the well-being of other religious sects. They reported directly to Ashoka, who took interest in the details of his empire. Ashoka established rest-houses, dug wells, planted trees and founded hospitals along major

roads. He promulgated rules for the protection of cows, forbade animal sacrifices and abolished hunting for sport. He replaced the royal hunt with the royal pilgrimage and visited Bodh Gaya and many other sacred sites.

The inscriptions mark the transition from the oral tradition to literacy, though the date of this transition remains uncertain. The scripts used for engraving the edicts are all phonetic and, therefore, mark a departure from the earlier pictographic script. Some scholars maintain that the Mauryas invented a script to facilitate administration and enable faster communication with distant places and frontier zones. But the invention of scripts is more often associated with the trading communities. The invention must have proceeded the reign of Ashoka because he used it extensively and presumably there were people who could read the edicts, though he did insist that his officers read them out to his subjects. The inscriptions were generally located in places likely to attract people.

Ashoka's inscriptions use three different languages and four scripts. The most important and the largest in number are composed in Prakrit, but Ashoka also had a few inscribed in Greek and Aramaic. The scripts used for the Prakrit inscriptions were Brahmi and Kharoshthi, and for the others, Greek and Aramaic. The Greek and Aramaic inscriptions are all close together near Kabul and Kandhar in Afghanistan. The script and language were in use before the reign of Ashoka as Greek and Aramaic speaking people had settled in this region. The province of Gandhara (present day Peshawar and its vicinity) was part of the Iranian Achaemenid Empire in the sixth century BC and, therefore, would have used Aramaic. It was included in the Mauryan Empire in the fourth century along with the adjoining territories in Afghanistan which were ceded by the Hellenistic King Seleucus Nicator—Alexander's successor in Iran—to the Mauryan king Chandragupta at the conclusion of a campaign; hence, the presence of the Greek speaking people. One Ashokan inscription is bilingual (Greek and Aramaic) and suggests that bilingualism in these languages was common in these parts.

The importance of the Greek and Aramaic inscriptions, apart from their locations, also lies in their providing translations of some of the significant terms used in the Prakrit inscriptions, the readings of which have been controversial. For example, the Prakrit term *dhumma* is the same as the Sanskrit *dharma* and has no exact equivalent in English. It has been variously rendered as piety, virtue, sacred duty or even as the *dharma* taught by Buddha. It is translated as *eusebeia* in the Greek inscriptions, suggesting a more general use because there is no reference to Buddha in the Greek and Aramaic versions.

The more important inscriptions, much larger in number and inscribed in various parts of the subcontinent, were composed in Prakrit and engraved in two different scripts—Brahmi and Kharoshthi. Inscriptions in Kharoshthi are all clustered in the north west, again suggestive of being read locally. Kharoshthi derives from Aramaic and is written from right to left. The letters, although conforming to the Prakrit alphabet, recall many Aramaic forms. Initially limited to the vicinity of Peshawar, in the post-Mauryan period, Kharoshthi travelled further afield and especially into central Asia.

The script with the maximum usage and historical potential was Brahmi, which was to become the standard script of the subcontinent in post-Mauryan times, although undergoing the usual evolution of a widely used script. It was written from left to right, consisted of carefully formed letters and was relatively easy to read. There has been a continuing debate as to its origin. Some support a source that permitted admixtures of letters from the Greek, or the Phoenician or Semitic scripts, and others argue in favour of an independent process of inventing letters in India. The resemblances of some letters to neighbouring scripts cannot be denied and it was probably an efficient working out as well as borrowing of forms, appropriate and accessible to those needing a script.

The extensive use of Prakrit in the subcontinent did not rigidly follow the original composition. The edicts were issued by the king from the capital or the royal camp, but were adapted to some forms of local usage when actually engraved. The language and the script had a pliancy that could reflect,

to a small degree, variations, influenced by local linguistic inflections. Certain sounds, such as 'l' or 'r' were interchanged, occasional spelling mistakes occurred as also slippages in either fitting a word into a space or inadvertently leaving out a letter, and there were minor variations in words or the use of a term that was more familiar locally. Inscriptions were composed by rulers and officials at the court, but the actual engraving was done by professional engravers, who were of low rank and whose literacy level may have been barely adequate. A group of Ashokan inscriptions from Karnataka in southern India carry the briefest of statements at the end of the royal edict, naming the engraver as Kapada. Interestingly, this little statement is in Kharoshthi whereas the rest of the edict is in Brahmi. It is unclear whether the engraver was brought from the north-west or whether he was demonstrating his knowledge of more than one script.

The edicts inscribed on rock surfaces in Karnataka were many, for it was a gold-bearing area that appears to have been worked by the Mauryan state. Curiously, this was a Dravidian-speaking area with no prior script, yet the edicts are all composed in Prakrit—at this time a North Indian Indo-Aryan language—and engraved in Brahmi. Officers were expected to read out the edicts and translate them to the local population. No attempt was made to render the edicts in the local language as was done in the north-west with Greek and Aramaic, perhaps because there was no local script. In the political assessment of the region, it was probably less important than the north-west, being an area of clans and chiefdoms rather than states and kingdoms. The intention may have been to make literacy a statement of power in an oral society and this is perhaps how the inscriptions were also viewed. This is also suggested by the earliest use of a script for engraving inscriptions in Tamil—the most widely used Dravidian language in South India. The script used was an adaptation from the Mauryan Brahmi script and current in the second century BC.

The edicts inscribed on rock surfaces are addressed to various categories of people—a few to Buddhist monks in various monasteries, some addressed specifically to the officers of the state and the majority addressed to the people at large. Those of the first category are concerned with matters relating to

Buddhist practice and monastic procedures. The remaining two categories relate to the welfare of his subjects, through what Ashoka perceived as better administration and even more so through a deliberate cultivation of social responsibility. The latter was deeply influenced by Buddhist ethics, but was not merely a call his subjects to follow the teachings of Buddha. Although personally a Buddhist, Ashoka was well aware of his role as a statesman ruling a multicultural empire.

The various categories of rock engraved edicts were issued in the earlier part of his reign. Towards the latter part, a special collection of edicts was scribed on pillars. Addressed to his subjects, he recapitulated his contribution to their welfare and further advised them of which behaviour. These pillar edicts, as they have been called, were engraved with finesse and care on specially cut, polished sandstone pillars and are located in various parts of the Ganges Valley. These make a dramatic contrast to the more rough-hewn rock surfaces of the earlier inscriptions and show a distinct improvement in the handling of the script.

The tone of the Ashokan edicts is conversational and could have been an attempt to link the oral tradition to literacy, and to 'speak to the subjects. This was again an unusual perception of the use of a script by a king who was attempting to establish an unusual relationship with his subjects.

★ Mauryan Empire

Five provinces comprising the Mauryan Empire with their respective capitals are:

1. **Uttarapatha:** (North): Taxila.
2. **Dakshinapatha:** (South): Suvarnagiri
3. **Avantopatha:** (West): Ujjain.
4. **Prachyapatha:** (East): Pataliputra (Kalinga).
5. **Central Province:** (Magadh): Pataliputra.

★ Ashoka as Dharmaraja

Whether Ashoka was transformed all at once, or whether the impact of his conquest affected him over time, it had two radical consequences. Spiritually, he became a follower of the Buddha

dharmā, the teachings of Buddha. Politically, he renounced war and conquest as acceptable methods for preserving the empire and sought to replace them with the inculcation of Dharma. He synthesised these: two commitments in a three-fold devotion to dharmapālana, dharmakarma and dharmanushishi (protection) of Dharma, action according to Dharma and instruction, in Dharma). Rather than follow in the footsteps of his grandfather and renounce the world, his understanding of Dharma held him responsible for the welfare of all his subjects, and he translated this general duty into an attempt to exemplify dharma-raja, the rule of Dharma. Long after his specific policies and works were forgotten, Buddhist tradition revered him as the first and ideal Dharmaraja- the Buddhist counterpart of the Hindu idea of the Chakravartin and bestowed upon him the name of Dharmashaka.

Mauryan Administration

The nature of the Mauryan administration was one of the most elaborate, effective and proper to preserve this great empire intact. The central government was mainly concerned with collecting taxes and administering justice. In each of these spheres, the emperor and his cabinet of ministers headed a hierarchy of officials, which reached down through divisional and district officers to toll collectors, the market overseer and the clerk who recorded measurements and assessments of fields. The entire apparatus was subject to regular checks by a staff of Inspectors who reported directly to the emperor, while a more sinister system of undercover informants provided a further check. All were appointed, directly or indirectly, by the emperor and had instant access to him. The Saptanga concept was the basis of the Mauryan administration. As explained by Kautilya, it is the theory of seven vital elements which constitute a central administrative body. The seven elements are: (i) Swami (the King), (ii) Amatya (the bureaucrats, officials of the throne and the cabinet of ministers); (iii) Janapada (the masses; territory and population), (iv) Durga (the fort or premises holding the seat of power), (v) Kasha (the central treasury), (vi)

Bala (the army or power) and (vii) Mitra (the friends and the allies). All these organs were equally important and Kautilya said that the king was one of the wheels of a chariot and the rest of the elements constituted the second wheel. As it is difficult to run a chariot with one wheel similarly it is difficult to run a nation without two wheels—the king and the rest of the organs of the Saptanga.

The whole empire was divided into provinces. We know about five provinces during the reign of Ashoka with capitals at Taxila, Ujjain, Tosali, Suvarnagiri and Pataliputra. The provinces were subdivided into vishyas or ahars. The vishyas consisted of a number of villages. Besides, those territories were under direct rule whereas, other territories were vassal states. Towns and villages were well organised. The Gramika was the head of the village administration. State revenue was collected from land taxes, excise, tolls, forest, water rates, mines, etc., a major share of which was spent on the army, other official charity works and public works. An important work undertaken during the Mauryan rule was the taking of census, recording data regarding caste, occupation, slaves, freemen, young and old men, and women.

Thus, the Mauryan administration was highly centralised and contributed greatly to the development of the empire. The state maintained a huge standing army and brought new lands under cultivation and developed irrigation facilities. The famous Sudarshana Lake was built. Under the Mauryans, the entire sub-continent was crisscrossed with roads. A royal highway connecting Taxila and Pataliputra was built—it is the one which survives to this day as the Grand Trunk Road.

SWAMI—KING, THE PREMIER

The king was the supreme, head of the state. He was the epicentre of all the seven elements. The powers of the king were extensive. We have from the authority of Megasthenes that the king took part in war and the administration of justice. Appointments to the most important offices were made by the ruler himself: he also most laid down the broad lines of policy and issued rescripts and codes of regulations for the guidance of his officers, and the people. However,

the king could not be termed a monarch or an absolute ruler as he depended upon the extensive administrative system to effectively rule the empire.

MANTRI PAFUSHAD—THE CABINET OF, MINISTERS

The king employed ministers' for carrying out the administration of

Dharmarajya and Ashoka ★

Dharmaraja, as Ashoka understood it, permitted him to be devoted to Buddha's teaching, but to revere and support the Sangha, it required him as a monarch to nature and support all religious traditions in his realm. To this end, he inscribed edicts throughout the empire, exhorting the people to practise Dharma, but kept the explicit content of that concept sufficiently universal to include Hindu, Jain, Ajivaka and other interpretations of it. Although he gave land, food and money to the Buddhist Sangha, he similarly supported other spiritual traditions. Thus, the Pillar Edicts mention gifts to the Sangha and the Cave ascriptions deed sites to the Ajivakas. Legend maintains that a third Buddhist council was convened in his reign and that he laboured intensely to preserve the unity of the Sangha—an effort that ultimately failed—but the edicts speak only of purifying the order. Scholars tend to believe that no third council took place, or that Ashoka had little to do with it, but the absence of detailed testimony in the edicts may only show that he saw no value in recounting publicly his role in the inner affairs of the Sangha.

Remembering Ashoka ★

Ashoka's Empire soon passed out of memory. However, the ideal he upheld as Arya-putra (prince) and Dharma-putra (son of Dharma) increased in lustre with each passing epoch. Generations which could not recollect the Mauryans, not point out the boundaries of their realm, nor even read the edicts, nonetheless remembered the great king, 'beloved of gods', who taught Dharma and lived what he espoused who had set the standard against which subsequent rulers were measured and often found wanting, and who had

promulgated a simple yet fundamental doctrine of tolerance and civility based upon respect for the spiritual aspirations at all people to adhere to the Dharma, they recalled that there had been a minor golden age and know that it was possible for human beings to experience a golden age again.

the empire. He had two grades of ministers: Muntrigan, who were the advising ministers of the highest order and general ministers who were the members of the Cabinet, Mantri Parishad. All the ministers were hand-picked by the emperor himself and all, had to possess some minimum qualification and pass tests to fetch the job. The important members of the Mantri Parishad included Yuvarajas, Mahamantris, Purohitas, Sempats, etc. At every stage, the king had to consult them and seek their cooperation.

AMATYAS-BUREAUCRATS OR OFFICIALS OF THE THRONE

These were the civil servants who were selected as heads of the different departments. They reported directly to the mantris and were promoted to become mantri after completing successfully their tenure as Amatyas. Each department had an Adhyaksha (Chief) who was responsible for carrying out that particular function of administration. Some important amatyas are given ahead:

Administrative nomenclature in the Mauryan rule

- ❖ King the Premier (Swamti)
- ❖ Advisor(s) to the king (Mantri Parishad)
- ❖ Bureaucrats or officials of the throne (Amatyas)
- ❖ Departmental heads of the empire (Adhyakshas)
- ❖ Workers of the empire (Karmikas)
- ❖ Chief treasurer (Sannidhata)
- ❖ Chief tax collector (Samaharta)
- ❖ Tax collectors who collected tax from special tribes (Vachabhuvikas)
- ❖ Chief of law and order (Dandapala)
- ❖ Commander-in-chief of the army (Senapati)
- ❖ Commander-in-chief of the forts (Durgapati)
- ❖ Detectives and spies of the empire (Gudhapurushas)

- ❖ Magistrates of cities (Mahamatyas)
- ❖ Tax collectors in rural areas (Sthanika)
- ❖ Head of accounts and audit (Ashtapataladyaksha)
- ❖ Head of agriculture (Sithadhyaksha)
- ❖ Head of rivers and irrigation works (Samprathi)
- ❖ Governor of the province (Rastrapata)
- ❖ Officers who looked after the frontier provinces (Antamahamatras)
- ❖ subordinate officers to look after the king's income (Yuktas)
- ❖ Official to measure land and fix up boundaries (Rajukas)
- ❖ Heads of Rajukas in different provinces (Purushas)
- ❖ Custodians of Dharma (Dharmamahamatras)
- ❖ Police and revenue (Pradeshikas)
- ❖ Head of the village (Gramika)
- ❖ Head of a group of Gramikas (Gopa)
- ❖ Head of the city (Nagrika)

Rock Edict XI

There is no gift that can equal the gift of Dharma, the establishment of human relations on Dharma, the distribution of wealth through Dharma or kinship in Dharma.

Rock Edict XIII

Devanampriya, the conqueror of the Kalingas, is remorse now, for this conquest is no conquest, since there killing, death and banishment of the people. Devanampriya keenly feels all this with profound sorrow and regret. But, what is worse than this, there dwell in that country Brahmanas, Shramanas and followers of other religions and householders who have the duty of tendering due service to elders, to mother and father and to gurus, of showing proper courtesy to friends, comrades, companions and relatives, as well as to slaves and servants and firm devotion to Dharma. To these, injury, death or deportation may have happened. And the friends, comrades, companions and relatives who still retain undiminished affection for those affected, by the war, are terribly pained by this calamity.

To Devanampriya, Dharmavijaya-conquest by Dharma —is the most important victory.

SOURCES OF REVENUE

The Mauryan treasury had many sources of income and always had a very sound financial health. Land revenue was the main source of income which accounted to one-fourth of the revenue. Other sources of income included tax on salt, forest, mining, import duties, export taxes, various penalties were also collected from the courts, The regular tax was one-fourth of the income which was as described in the Arthashastra. Trade tax was one-fifth of the total value and the state taxed all manufactured and imported goods. Tax evasion was seldom as culprits were punished severely. The Samhantas, the Sannidhata and the Akshapataladyaksha made sure that there was no scarcity of funds in the royal treasures for meeting expenses on public welfare, pay of royal court, ministers and officials, salary of employees, construction of roads and bridges, development of irrigation facilities, production of forests and supporting thriving army.

ECONOMY

Industry and trade were well developed and to promote them, roads and waterways were maintained. Metal works were prevalent and the usage of copper, lead, tin, bronze, iron was common. Other industries included the ones producing dyes, gums, drugs, perfumes and pottery. The industries were classified into private and public sectors.

ESPIONAGE

Mauryan rulers maintained a powerful and trustworthy secret police. They were the eyes and ears of the king. However, the police did not interfere with the day-to-day life of the people. Mauryans, apart from their armed strength, depended upon the dictum of international diplomacy to expand the Mauryan Empire. Arthashastra suggests that infiltration, spies, winning over the enemy's people, siege and assault are the five means to capture a fort and should be preferred to the use of full armed force. There were two types of

spies: (i) Samstah—these were stationary spies, consisting of secret agents like kapatika (fraudulent disciples); udasthita (recluses), vaidehaka (merchants) and tapasai (ascetics), (ii) Sancharah—wandering spies, including emissaries termed satri (classmates); tikshana (firebrands) and rashada (poisoners), Women were an integral part of the spy network. There are accounts of women spies under the name of parivarjikas (wandering nuns); bhikshukis (mendicants) and vnshalis (courtesans).

MILITARY

An efficient military administration was responsible for making the Mauryan rulers being among the most powerful rulers of their times. A commission of 30 members administered military, which was divided into six boards, as follows: Board 1. The Fleet Admiralty—it cooperated with the admiral of the fleet; Board 2. Infantry—there were more than 6 lakh ft soldiers in Chandragupta's army; Board 3. Cavalry—more than 30,000; Board 4. War Chariots—the number of chariots is riot recorded; Board 5. War Elephants—more than 9,000; Board 6. Transport and Supplies—defensive armour was supplied to men, elephants and horses. Transport animals included horses, mules and oxen. The army was provided with ambulance services, which contained surgeons and supplies of medicine and dressings. In addition, women were provided for preparing food and supplying beverages during the lime of action.

The senapati (commander-in-chief) had the overall charge of the war office. All departments connected to the war office were under his control. He was highly qualified in military affairs. The war force consisted primarily of (i) Senapati the overall incharge of the army and the highest paid official, (ii) Prasasta, (iii) Nayaka and (iv) Mukhva The central government would bear the cost of maintaining the military. The government paid cash salaries to the army. However, the armies used to collect some token tax from the villages or towns it used to pass through during their campaigns and training exercises. Some villages used to provide soldiers for the army: they were given many subsidies or tax cuts by the central government. No similar organization is recorded elsewhere in history, and the credit of devising such efficient machinery

must be divided between Chandragupta and his exceptionally able ministers.

LAW AND ORDER, COURTS OF JUSTICE

Kautilya's Arthashastra gives a fair account of the prevailing justice system in the Mauryan era. The king sat in the court to administer justice. As to the king's legislative function, we should note that the Arthashastra called him Dharmapravartaka and included the Rajasasana among the sources of law. Therefore, at the head of the judiciary stood the king himself. Rulers imparted impartial decisions, thus safeguarding the sanctity of justice. Ashoka had created a special post of Dhramamahamatras who carried out the dual role of preachers as well as judges. They went from place to place to preach the code of conduct and the principles of dharma as well presided over the litigations and gave their decisions. The judicial system had two organs: Dharmastya—which presided over civil cases such as disputes of marriages, dowry, divorces, loans, property, etc. and Kantakoshdhana—which dealt with cases of criminal nature such as robbery, theft, commercial crimes like counterfeit coins or blackmailing, etc. Besides these courts, there were special tribunals of justice, both in cities (nagara) and rural, area (janapada), presided over by Vyavaharika Mahamatras and Rajukas.

CENSUS

The administration made it mandatory that the officials knew everything about everybody within their jurisdiction. They kept a check over any type of movement of individuals or tribes. Thus, they- kept a permanent census of people and information in the form of name, caste (gotra), occupation, age, marital status, family etc. Such records enhanced the central government's hold over the public for the purpose of taxation and monitoring the efficacy of welfare activities.

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS

The empire was divided into a number of provinces which were subdivided into ahara or

vishayas (districts). The exact number of provinces in Chandragupta's time is not known, but Ashoka maintained at least five provinces: (i) Utrapatha (capital—Taxila); (ii) Avantiratta (capital—Ujjain); (iii) Dakkhinapatha (capital—Suvarnagiri); (iv) Kalinga (capital—Tosali) and (v) Prachya (capital—Pataliputra). The outlying provinces were ruled by the royal blood princes (Kumaras) and the home province of Prachya was directly ruled by the emperor. Besides the Imperial provinces, Mauryan India included a number of territories that enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy. The Arthashastra mentions a number of Sanghas, that is, political, economic and military corporations or confederations, evidently enjoying autonomy in certain matters (such as Kamboja and Saurashtra).

VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION

The administrative and judicial business of the villages was carried on by gramikas (village elders). The Mauryan administration omitted the gramika from the list of salaried officials of the government. The king's servant in the village was gramabhritaka. Above the gramika, the Arthashastra placed the gopa, who looked after about five villages and the sthanika who controlled one quarter of a janapada (district). The work of these officials was supervised by samahartri with the help of the pradeshtis. Rural administration must have been highly efficient. The tillers in villages devoted much of their time cultivating the land as they used to receive adequate protection and security.

MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION

Prominent cities had a local self-government. The city of Pataliputra was governed by a 30-member municipal council. It was divided into six main boards, which had five members in each. Each member was incharge of a particular function. The six boards were: (i) Board 1—evaluation of goods manufactured, industry, labour and their wages, etc.; (ii) Board 2—dedicated to foreign visitors and other guests of the empire; (iii) Board 3—controlled census figures, more importantly, birth and deaths records; (iv) Board 4—maintained standards like measurements, prices commodities and living indices; (v) Board 5—law and

order departments, which also carried out trails of culprits and supervised government employees to eliminate chances of corruption, etc.: and (vi) Board 6—tax collectors, who made sure that every citizen paid one 'tenth' or the 'tithe' as taxes to the government.

Mauryan Culture

ARCHITECTURE AND SCULPTURE

Royal palaces, stupas (Sanchi and Barhut), monasteries and cave dwellings were built throughout the kingdom. Ashoka is said to have built around 84,000 stupas all over his empire. Stupas were made of burnt bricks and stones. They were circular in shape and sheltered by an umbrella type canopy at the top. The Sanchi stupas in Madhya Pradesh are the most famous stupas along with the stupas of Bahrut. The festoons of these stupas are carved with Buddha tales, teachings and religious matter. Ashoka's pillars (the seven pillar edicts and Tarai pillar inscriptions) and pillar capitals were constructed. It is said that Ashoka erected close to 30 pillars. The most significant among these is the pillar of Sarnath. The emblem of the Indian Republic has been adopted from the four lion capital of this pillar. The royal palaces of the Mauryan era were made of wood and, therefore, no longer exist. But the accounts of Megasthenes (the Greek Ambassador to Patna) describe the grandeur of these palaces and Fa-hien (from China) has mentioned a description of the foundations of these royal palaces. Both travellers have described these palaces to be superior to the ones in their countries. Cave dwellings and temples were built for meditation by Jains and Buddhists. The mountainous caves provided the necessary solitude conducive for attaining salvation. Ashoka and Dasaratha

Maurya made some cave temples, which are famous for their outer architecture and carved interiors. The Gaya cave temples in the Barabar Mountain are fine examples of the Mauryan cave temples. Kama Champar and Sudhama were renowned chieftains of Ashoka's era.

EDUCATION AND LITERATURE

Gurukuls and Buddhist monasteries developed with royal patronage. The Universities of Taxila and

Banaras are gifts of this era. Edicts were engraved on rocks in the form of 44 royal orders aimed at moulding general behaviour and educating people. Kautilya's Arthashastra, Bhadrabahu's Kalpa Sutra, Buddhist texts like the Kathavastu and Jain texts such as the Bhagwati Sutra, Acharanga Sutra and Dasvakalik compose some of the important Literature of this era. Five significant authors (Arrian, Aristabulus, Justin, Megasthenes and Strabo) gave their accounts on the Mauryan Empire in a book called Indica (means, the India). Dharmaraksha and Kashyapamathan translated Buddhist texts and teachings into Chinese to further spread Buddhism in China.

CAUSES OF DECLINE OF THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

The great Mauryan Empire declined because of (i) weak successors; (ii) oppression by officials in outlying areas leading to revolts; (iii) Greek invasion of the north-west; (iv) policy of ahimsa and Ashoka's pacifism weakened their aggressive military stand; (v) reaction of the Brahmins against the policy of Ashoka; (vi) vastness of the empire and Wars; (vii) the Enormous expenditure on the army and payment to bureaucracy created a financial crisis for the Mauryan Empire; and (viii) highly centralised character of the Mauryan government and bureaucracy. The empire broke up 50 years after the death of Ashoka.

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