Unit 6: ALEXANDER'S INVASION OF INDIA AND ITS IMPACT

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Political condition in North West India

6.3.1 Early Persian Invasions

6.3.2 Results of the Contacts

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6.5 Effects of Alexander's Invasion

6.6 Indian Reaction to the Greeks

6.7 Let Us Sum Up

6.8 Further Reading

6.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

6.10 Model Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- discuss the political condition of north-west India before Alexander's invasion,
- trace the early Persian Invasions,
- assess different aspects of Alexander's invasion,
- analyse the effects of Alexander's invasion of India and India's reaction to it.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

The invasion of India by Alexander, the great king of Macedon in 326 B.C. is an important event of far reaching consequence in the ancient Indian history. In this unit we are going to discuss in detail the invasion of Alexander to India and the effects of his invasion in India. As a background to it we will at first discuss the political condition of North-West India during

that period when Alexander entered India through the North-West frontier. The Persian invasions that occurred prior to Alexander's invasions are also being discussed along with the impact of the Persian contact on India.

6.3 POLITICAL CONDITION IN NORTH WEST INDIA

In an earlier unit we have discussed the emergence of different *janapadas* in North India. They often fought among themselves for political and economic supremacy. At last, in the Eastern Gangetic Valley the kingdom of Magadha became most powerful. It occupied many territories and built an Empire. But in the North-West India there was no political unity. It was divided into small kingdoms like Kamboja, Gandhara or Madra. They were fighting very frequently among themselves. The location of these states was also important. Although they were geographically within the Indian sub-continent yet they were linked with Central Asia through many passes. Foreigners could easily enter there by crossing the passes in the Hindukush Mountains. In this section you will be told about some of such attempts.

6.3.1 Early Persian Invasions

On the 6th century B.C. an Empire was built up in Persia, the area of present Iran, Iraq, etc. It was called Achaemenid Empire. By 530 B.C. its Emperor Cyrus crossed the Hindukush Mountains. He was militarily more powerful than the smaller kingdoms of North-Western India. He forced the people of Kamboja and Gandhara to pay tribute to him. After him, another Achaemenid ruler Darius annexed Punjab and the Western part of the Indus and Sind in North-West India in 516 B.C. This area became the most fertile part of the Persian Empire. So, we can say that the North-Western India was ruled by different kings or Emperors at different times. Sometimes it was ruled by the local rulers or chiefs and sometimes by the Persians.



LET US KNOW

Gandhara and Hindukush are mentioned as *satrapies* or provinces in Achaemenian inscriptions. They were known for their prosperity.

6.3.2 Results of the Contacts

There were far reaching results of the Persian contact on North Western India after the early Persian invasions. It was a contact between two cultures which brought many changes of the North Western region.

After coming into contact with Persia many towns of North - West India became cosmopolitan centres. Out of them mention may be made of Gandhara and Takshashila. Indian and Persian learning mingled in these centres. This mixing influenced the different aspects of Indian life. Firstly, Indians struck Persian *Sigloi* type coins. Secondly, you perhaps have heard that king Asoka used many rock inscriptions to propagate Buddhism. He perhaps borrowed the idea of inscription from Persian king Darius. Thirdly, the script Kharosti, which was widely used in North-Western India, was derived from the Persian Aramaic script.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Choose the correct alternative:

a) Kamboja / Magadha was in the North-West India.

b) Emperor Cyrus crossed the Kanchenjunga / Hindukush Mountains.

c) Kharosti / Brahmi script was widely used in North-Western India.

Q 2: Fill in the blanks:

a) Janapadas emerged in ..... India.

b) Darius was an ..... ruler.

c) ..... struck Persian *Sigloi* type coins.

Q 3: Write briefly in 50 words about the early Persian invasions.

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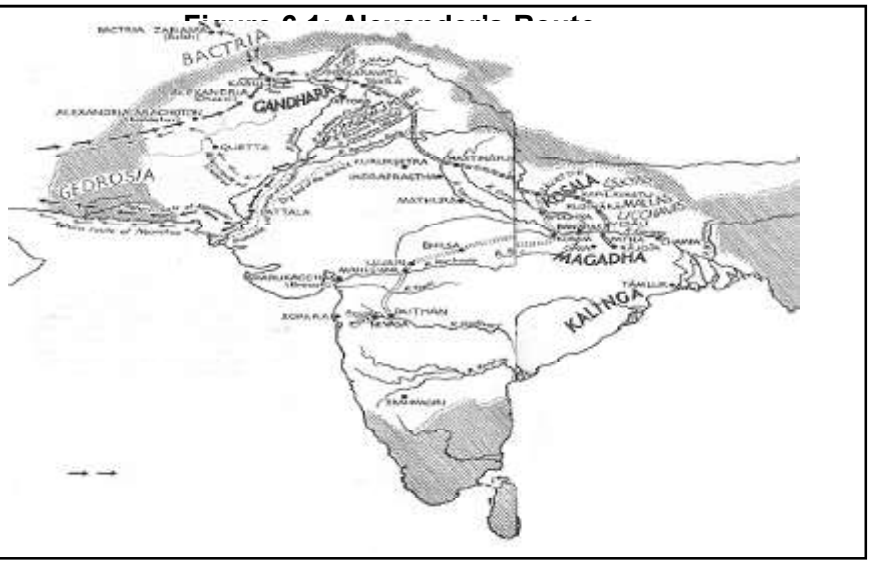
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6.4 ALEXANDER'S INVASION OF INDIA

Alexander(III) the greats was the son of Phillip, the ruler of Macedon. He succeeded his father to the throne of Macedon in 336 B.C. The Greeks and the Persians had fought for supremacy since the 5th century B.C. The Persians invaded Greece. This rivalry continued till Alexander's time. Alexander defeated the Persian king Darius in 334 B.C. at the Battle of Issus. Then he conquered Syria easily and occupied the Gaza strip, Egypt, Babylon, Susa and Persepolis from the Persians one after another. In 327 B.C. Alexander set out from Bactria to conquer India.



Source: *The Culture and Civilisation of ancient India in Historical Outline by D.D. Kosambi*

LET US KNOW



The Persians first invaded Greece in 492 B.C. under their king Darius. A storm destroyed the Persian fleet and they returned. In 490 B.C. the Persians invaded Greece for the second time. They were defeated at the Battle of Marathon. After the death of Darius, his son Xerxes became the Persian king. He also invaded Greece in 480 B.C. The Greeks repeatedly defeated the Persians at the Battle of Salamis. This conflict with the Persians is known as the Persian War.

You may ask if Alexander was an enemy of Persia then why he invaded India. In 326 B.C Alexander entered the Indian provinces which had been under the control of his enemy Darius. He wanted to completely conquer Persia and the Indian provinces were the Eastern most parts of Persia. Secondly, Alexander had a special passion for geographical curiosity. Some Greek scholars believed that the Caspian Sea expanded as far as India. Some others did not hold the same view. It was known as the 'problem of ocean'. Alexander wanted to solve it. Thirdly, he had already heard about the prosperity and beauty of the Indian provinces. Naturally, he wanted to add India to his own Empire.

The political condition of North-West India was favourable for Alexander. By 327 B.C. Alexander had already established himself as the master of Greece and Persia. In North-West India there was no political unity. There were many independent kingdoms and republics or oligarchies. Among the rulers only two were important. One was the ruler of Takshila. His name was Ambhi. The other was Puru or Porus, the ruler of the territory between the rivers Jhelum and Chenab. But these two rulers did not join hands to resist Alexander. Alexander crossed the Khyber Pass and easily conquered the smaller Indian kingdoms and republics.

Figure 6.2: Alexander



Source: *Google Images*

You may have heard about Alexander's meeting with Porus. Before meeting Porus, Alexander marched towards Takshila. Its ruler Ambhi readily accepted Alexander's over lordship. Alexander recruited soldiers at Takshila and collected tribute from this prosperous kingdom. Next Alexander invaded the kingdom of Porus. Porus offered a strong resistance to Alexander. But he was defeated. However, Alexander was very impressed by the bravery of Porus. He made friendship with Porus in this unknown country. Porus was restored to his kingdom. Alexander marched through the streams of the Indus as far as its delta. There he stopped his Indian invasion because his soldiers refused to go further. Moreover, Alexander perhaps also heard that in the Ganges Valley there was a strong kingdom of the Nandas. Whatever might be the cause for the return of Alexander, he divided his army into two divisions. One returned to Greece through the Persian Gulf and the other through the land route along the coast. During his return Alexander defeated many republics on way. The Greeks termed them as *Gana-Sanghas*. These were perhaps the tribal republics. On his way Alexander died in 323 B.C. before reaching his own country. Before leaving India, Alexander had appointed some governors to rule his Indian territory. But after his death nobody showed interest in Indian territories to establish the Greek rule.



LET US KNOW

Alexander is considered one of the greatest generals of all time. Within a short time he was able to build a very vast Empire. Moreover, he followed a conciliatory approach towards those whom he conquered. He established a cultural bridge between the Greeks and the Asiatic countries. For the combination of the qualities of a general and a statesman he is called 'Alexander the Great'.

6.5 EFFECTS OF ALEXANDER'S INVASION

By now, you have developed a fair understanding about what led Alexander to invade India. Alexander stayed in India for about two years. Don't you want to know whether there was any Greek influence on Indian polity, society or economy? Was there an Indian influence on the Greeks? Interestingly, in the contemporary Indian literatures, we do not find any mention about Alexander's invasion of the North-West India. It means that political impact of this Greek invasion was not long lasting. In fact, soon after his departure, the Maurya rulers of Magadha brought the North-Western part of India under their control. But, for Alexander, his Indian campaign was a success. The North-Western provinces were more prosperous and populous than many provinces in his Empire. In India he conquered a larger area than the Persians did. If you look back, you will see that the Persian's occupations of the North-West India brought Indian culture, closer to the Central Asiatic culture. But Alexander's invasion brought ancient India closer to ancient Greek. It established contacts in many fields between these two civilizations. Let us now look some of the important effects of Alexander's invasion in India.

- **Intellectual Effects:** The Greeks were an adventurous people. They had a tendency of keeping records about new areas or provinces. Even before Alexander, some Greek scholars wrote about India based on traveler's accounts. So, on many occasions their accounts on India were not accurate. But Alexander brought with him many Greek scholars. They recorded their impressions on India. Two most famous

scholars were Admiral Nearchus and Onesicritus. From their accounts we can come to know that the culture of the North-West India had some differences with the culture of the Gangetic Valley. Moreover, the Greeks were the first to study history in the world. The historians who accompanied Alexander had left valuable geographical accounts of the North-West India. They also gave dates to all important events of Alexander's campaign. These are definite and helpful for the reconstruction of Indian history. We also get an insight in to the society and economy of the North-West India from such accounts.

The Greek accounts of India indirectly helped India in many ways. The Greeks came to know about India clearly after the invasion. Their literary persons started writing about India and Indians in their works. These were performed or studied in many countries, particularly in Europe. The Europeans became curious to know about India and its people. In fact, these Greek accounts introduced India and the Indians to the Western world.

- **Commercial Effects:** Alexander's invasion opened four different routes between India and Greece. These were by land as well as by sea. The Greek merchants and craftsmen used this routes to trade with India. Alexander's generals, like Seleukos, after his death, founded some small kingdoms on the North-West India. These were the centres of trade between India and Greece.
- **Greek Settlement:** The Persians had established their control over a part of the North-West India and the South-East Greece almost of the same time. Ever since then, some Greeks, who became the subjects of Persia, came to the Persian part of India. They settled there even before Alexander's invasion. But after Alexander annexed these areas to his own Empire there were more Greeks settlements. The most important of them were in the cities of Alexandria in Kabul, Sindh and Boukephala on the Jhelum. These areas were later occupied by the Mauryas. But the Greeks did not completely leave these areas and continued to reside there.
- **Paved the way for Empire building:** The Persians and their ruler

Darius were defeated by the Greeks. The Indian states under Persian rule became independent. So, when Alexander came to India there were many independent small Indian kingdoms existing in the North-West frontier of India. Alexander defeated them and brought most of them under one political control. It indirectly helped the Maurya rulers to bring these areas under their Empire. Again, in some traditions it has been mentioned that Chandragupta Maurya, who founded the Maurya dynasty, acquired some knowledge of military generalship and organization from Alexander. Later, he used it against the Nandas of Magadha and was able to establish a new dynasty.

- **Indian impact on the Greeks:** When Alexander left India, he was accompanied by some Indian scholars. One of them went as far as Babylon. He held that Greeks were influenced by some Indian philosophical ideas. Some scholars of ***agnosticism*** were perhaps initiated by the influence of Indian ***atheist*** philosophy like that of the *Charvaks*. One of such Greek agnostic's philosophies was *Neo-Platonism*. It survived for many centuries in Europe.

6.6 INDIAN REACTION TO THE GREEKS

Different sections of the Indian society had different views on the Greeks. In some of the Brahmanical texts the *Yavanas* or Greeks were severely criticized. The Brahmanas regarded the Indian rulers as Kshatriyas or *rajanyas*. They depended on the patronage of these rulers for their social status. So, when Alexander destroyed the Indian states, the Brahmanas perhaps felt insecure. Moreover, Alexander was accompanied by some Greek scholars and had little regard for the brahmanas as intellectuals. Again, the Brahmanas always insisted on a society based on four divisions on grade. On the other hand, a Greek society had only two divisions. These were the slave and the master. However, you have learnt that in the Gana-Sanghas or Rajyas of India there were also two divisions in the society-the rulers and the ruled. These were mainly centres of unorthodox thinking like Buddhism. The Buddhist did not believe in the four divisions of society based on caste. They curiously looked at the Greek

way of division as an alternative to the caste system.



ACTIVITY 6.1

Locate the different states annexed by Alexander in a map.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Whom Alexander defeated at the Battle of Issus in 334 B.C.?

.....

Q 5: Who was Ambhi?

.....

Q 6: Name two Greek scholars who accompanied Alexander.

.....

Q 7: Who were the Yavanas?

.....

Q 8: Write True / False:

a) The Persians invaded Greece.

b) By 326 B.C. Alexander had already established himself as the master of Greece and Persia.

c) Alexander's invasion brought ancient India closer to ancient Greek.

d) The Buddhist did not believe in the four divisions of society based on caste.



6.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit you have learnt that-

- The North-West India was divided into small kingdoms and had no political unity. These kingdoms were linked up with Central Asia through many passes. As such the kingdoms were vulnerable to attack from

Central Asia. There were invasions from Persia under Emperor Cyrus and Darius who annexed Indian territory into their kingdom. The Indian society was influenced in many ways by the Persian settlement.

- But the most important invasion was of Alexander, the ruler of Macedon, who invaded India in 326 B.C. as a part of his campaign against the ruler of Persia, Darius. Alexander wanted to completely conquer Persia and the Indian provinces were the eastern most parts of the Persian Empire.
- This invasion of Alexander left long lasting impact on the intellectual and social life of India.



6.8 FURTHER READING

1) Majumdar, R. C. (edited). (1980). *The Age of Imperial Unity (The History and Culture of the Indian People)*. Kolkata, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

2) Majumdar, R.C., Raychaudhuri, H.C., Datta, K. (1986). *An Advanced History of India*. New Delhi, Macmillan India Ltd.

3) Sharma, L.P. (1981). *Ancient History of India (pre-historic Age to 1200 A.D.).* New Delhi, Vikas Publication House Pvt. Ltd.

4) Thapar, Romila. (2002). *The Penguin History of Early India from The Origins to A D 1300*. New Delhi, The Penguin Group.



6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: a) Kamboja, b) Hindukush, c) Kharosti

Ans to Q No 2: a) North, b) Achaemenid, c) Indians

Ans to Q No 3: The Persian Emperor Cyrus attacked India by 530 B.C by crossing the Hindukush Mountains and forced the people of Kamboja

and Gandhara to pay tribute to him. After him another Persian or Achaemenid ruler Darius annexed Punjab and the Western part of the Indus and Sind in North-West India in 516 B.C.

Ans to Q No 4: Persian king Darius.

Ans to Q No 5: Ruler of Takshila.

Ans to Q No 6: Admiral Nearchus and Onesicritus.

Ans to Q No 7: Yavanas were the Greeks.

Ans to Q No 8: a) True, b) False, c) True, d) True



6.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each question in about 50 words)

Q 1: Who was Darius?

Q 2: When did Cyrus cross the Hindukush Mountains?

Q 3: Who regarded the Indian rulers as Kshatriyas or rajanyas?

Q 4: Mention one commercial effect of the Alexander's invasion of India.

B) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Write a short note on Alexander.

Q 2: Analyse the political condition of north India on the eve of Alexander's invasion of India.

Q 5: What were the invasions that took place in India through its North-West frontier? What was the impact of the invasions?

C) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Write an essay on Alexander's invasion of India.

Q 2: Discuss the impacts of the Alexander's invasion of India.

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UNIT 7: THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 The Rise of the Maurya

7.4 Ashoka and his *Dhamma*

7.5 Mauryan Administration

- 7.5.1 Central Administration
- 7.5.2 Provincial Administration
- 7.5.3 The Army

7.6 Disintegration of the Mauryan Empire

7.7 Let Us Sum Up

7.8 Further Reading

7.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

7.10 Model Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- trace the foundation of the Mauryan empire,
- discuss Ashoka and his Dhamma,
- discuss the Mauryan Administrative system,
- know about the disintegration of the Maurya Empire.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

In unit 5 we have already discussed the sixteen *mahajanapadas.* In the 6th century B.C the entire northern territory was divided into 16 *mahajanapadas*. Among the sixteen *mahajanapadas*, there was Magadha, which became the most powerful *mahajanapada* between the 6th and the 4th century B.C. The growth of Magadha culminated in the emergence of the Mauryan Empire. In this unit we will discuss the rise and fall of the Mauryan Empire. There are numerous sources available to recreate the

history of the Mauryan period. These sources may be generally divided into two categories: Literary and Archaeological.

Literary Sources

The Buddhist literature such as the *Jataka* tales provides information on the socio-economic conditions of the Mauryan period. The Buddhist chronicles- *Mahavamsa* and *Dipavamsa*, describe Ashoka's contribution towards spreading Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The Buddhist texts *Ashokavadana* and *Divyavadana* gives information on Ashoka's early life. The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* informs us that the Maurya were a Kshatriya clan. The Jain sources such as *Bhagavati Sutra* and *Uttaradhayana Sutra* refer to the Mauryan period and the interaction between Jain monks and the Mauryan rulers. *Parishishta Parvan*, written by Hemchandra, describes Chandragupta's life including his embrace of Jainism.

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is the most important literary source in Mauryan history. It is divided into 180 *prakaranas* (sub-divisions) and 15 *adhikarnas* (parts). It has almost 6,000 *slokas*. It provides historical insight into the Mauryan Empire by explaining its current political and administrative organisation, economic policies, military strategies, foreign relations, law and justice, and social and cultural milieu. Additionally, it gave us insightful knowledge about Mauryan politics and daily life. *Mudrarakshasa* is a Sanskrit historical play in which the author Vishakadatta wrote about King Chandragupta Maurya's rise to power in Northern India with the help of Chanakya or Kautilya, his *guru*.

Megasthenes, who lived around 300 B.C., was the envoy of the Persian King Seleucus-I in the court of Chandragupta Maurya at Pataliputra for several years. As a keen observer in the Mauryan court, he wrote the book *Indica*, which has only survived in fragments, as stated by Diodorus, Strabo, and, most significantly, Arrian. Megasthenes' thorough depiction of seven divisions of the Indian society in *Indica* is particularly interesting. These divisions present an intriguing and, in reality, the first complete picture of the Indian society as seen by a foreign visitor to India's capital and surrounds.

Archaeological Sources

The most significant source of information for the Mauryan period is Ashoka's inscriptions. Ashoka was the first Indian ruler to issue edicts and

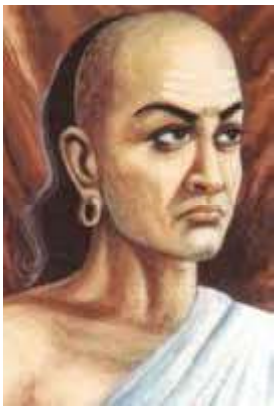
inscriptions. Inscriptions on monoliths, stones, and other hard materials provide valuable historical information, on property ownership, political victories, hymns, *slokas*, monumental stories, and praise for the king. Ashoka's Edicts are divided into four categories based on their size (major and minor) and type of inscription (rock or pillar). These inscriptions include 14 Major Rock Edicts, 7 Pillar Edicts, and several lesser rock inscriptions. Ashoka authored these edicts. They are narrated in the first person and provide deep insights into King Ashoka's ideas and speech. The edicts are written in the Prakrit language and Brahmi script, with occasional use of the Kharosthi script (in the subcontinent's northwest). Ashoka's inscriptions on stone structures have been discovered in northwestern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan, western India (Gujarat and Maharashtra), southern India (Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh), and eastern India (Orissa), indicating a network of administrative control that extended from Pataliputra. They are often etched into natural rock formations. The Sahgaura copper plate (Gorakhpur-Uttar Pradesh) and the Mahasthan copper plate (Bagaur-Bangladesh) refers to the granary established during Chandragupta's reign, as well as the drought that ensued.

Rudradaman's Junagarh rock inscription is distinctive in its references to Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka. The Mauryan emperors issued punch-marked coins. The coins were made of silver and copper. These punch-marked coins bear consistent symbols, indicating that they were issued by the central ruling authority. They are referred to as "*karshapana* coins" and do not specifically name the issuing body. They did, however, have the peacock, hill, and crescent symbols. They comprised the Mauryas' imperial currency. *Arthashastra* referred to various denominations of silver coins called *panas* and copper coins known as *mashkas*. They provided us with significant information on the economic realities of the Mauryan period. The distribution of coinage illustrates the geographical limits of the Empire. Archaeological remains at Kumrahar, Bulandibagh Taxila, Mathura, and Bhita revealed a wider range of items that emphasised urban elements. Material evidence in the form of Viharas, Stupas, and Ashokan Pillars found across the Mauryan Empire is the primary sources for studying the Mauryan art and architecture.

7.3 RISE OF THE MAURYA

The rise of the Maurya and the foundation of the Mauryan Empire are considered a landmark event in Indian history. This Empire was founded by Chandragupta Maurya by defeating the Nandas in 321 B.C. It is said that he was guided by a Brahmana named Kautilya or Chanakya, who was traditionally believed to be the Prime Minister of Chandragupta.

Figure 7.1: Kautilya or Chanakya



Source: *Google Images*

Historians have used a variety of sources to learn about the rise of Chandragupta Maurya and his Empire. We have different opinions about the origin of the Mauryas. According to Buddhist traditions, they were a branch of the Kshatriya *Moria* class associated with the ***Sakyas***. But according to the Puranic tradition, Chandragupta Maurya was the son of the last Nanda king from his Sudra concubine, Mura. The name Maurya is believed to be derived from his mother's name Mura.

Chandragupta Maurya took advantage of the growing weakness and unpopularity of the Nandas in the last days of their rule. Though Chandragupta's military strength was inferior to that of the Nandas, his superior strategy helped him. Once he established his control over the Ganga plain, he moved to the North-West. He liberated North-Western India from the Greek General Seleukos Nikatar, the successor of Alexander the Great.

A treaty was signed in 303 B.C. and some Seleucid territories were ceded to the Mauryan kingdom. There was also a possible marriage alliance between the two royal families. Thus, the territorial foundation of the Mauryan Empire was laid and Chandragupta established his control over the Gangetic plains and the Indus Valley.

The Mauryan contact with the Greeks was important for territorial expansion, as well as for the development of friendly relations between the two. It led to the creation of a new cultural development. Besides, exchange of envoys between the Mauryan and the Seleucids, there was also the exchange of envoys with the Greek states of the West. Seleukos sent an envoy, Megasthenes to the Mauryan court. The latter spent considerable time at the capital Pataliputra and in his treatise *Indika* he had left a valuable account of the city and also of Indian society.

According to Jaina tradition, Chandragupta became an ardent Jaina towards the end of his life. He made his son Bindusara, the king of Magadha, become an ascetic. He went to South India and there he ended his life by regulated slow starvation in the orthodox Jaina manner.

Bindusara ascended the throne in about 297 B.C. According to Buddhist tradition he was associated with the ***Ajivika*** sect. A Tibetan history of the Buddha suggests that Bindusara campaigned in the Deccan. However it is not sure whether this land was occupied by Bindusara or his son Asoka. He too continued to exchange embassies with Greece and showed interest in Greek philosophy. Bindusara died in 272 B.C. By then a large part of India had come under Mauryan sovereignty.



LET US KNOW

The account of Megasthenes does not exist in full. But quotations occur in the works of several subsequent Greek writers. These fragments have been collected and published in the form of a book called *Indika* or An Account of India.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



Answer the following questions:

Q 1: Who founded the Mauryan Empire?

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Q 2: Who was Kautilya?

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Q 3: Who was the Greek envoy to the Mauryan court?

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Q 4: When was Mauryan Empire established?

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Q 5: Who ascended the throne after Chandragupta Maurya?

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Q 6: Write a note on the foundation of the Mauryan Empire (within 60 words).

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7.4 ASOKA AND HIS DHAMMA

Asoka who ascended the Mauryan throne after his father's death was well known for his *Dhamma*. He was a great ruler. But it was his *Dhamma* which made him a popular ruler and which won the hearts of his subjects. In this section we are going to discuss about the religious policy of Asoka which centred round the *Dhamma*. Before going into it we will discuss in brief the early life of Asoka.

- **Early Life of Asoka**

Bindusara was succeeded by his son Asoka, who is considered the

greatest of the Mauryan rulers. We can know about Asoka through his edicts distributed over a large part of India. They give us a detailed account about his life and various activities. The edicts of the earlier half of Asoka's reign were inscribed on rock surfaces and are therefore called the Minor and Major Rock edicts. In the later part of his reign, his edicts were inscribed on well polished sandstone monolithic pillars which are called Pillar Edicts.

Figure 7.2: Asoka



Source: *Google Images*



LET US KNOW

In 1834 James Prinscep deciphered the Brahmi script in which the edicts of Asoka were inscribed. Though most of the Asokan edicts were written in Prakrit, some edicts found in North-West of India were in Aramaic and Greek languages. Most Prakrit edicts were written in Brahmi script. However some edicts of North-West were written in Kharosti. Greek and Aramaic scripts were used for edicts in Afghanistan.

However, for the early life of Asoka we have to depend upon the Buddhist account. According to Buddhist tradition he was appointed governor of Taxila and Ujjain during the reign of Bindusara.There is a controversy regarding his accession to the throne. Whether he ascended the throne immediately after his father's death or whether there was a four year ***interregnum*** involving a struggle for the throne with his brothers is not very clear.

Figure 7.3: Asoka's Empire



Source: *Google map*

The most important event in the early life of Asoka was the famous campaign in Kalinga in about 260 B.C. It was possible that the main motive behind this campaign was to obtain resources from Kalinga, to safeguard the trade routes with the peninsula or to give Kalingans a lesson for overthrowing Magadhan control. But the large scale deaths in the war moved the king. After this incident he became attracted to Buddhism. But the conversion did not take place immediately. It took almost two and a half years for him to embrace Buddhism.

During Asoka's reign the Third Buddhist Council met at Pataliputra in 250 B.C. This council decided to send missionaries to various regions. Accordingly Asoka sent his people outside India to spread Buddhism.

- **Asoka's Religious Policy**

The Kalinga war opened a new chapter in the life of Asoka. He developed a philosophy based on his interpretation of *Dhamma*. *Dhamma* is the ***Prakrit*** form of the Sanskrit word Dharma, which means the universal law or righteousness. However, Asoka gave it a wider meaning.

The *Dhamma* which Asoka preached was not simple piety but the specific code of moral duties laid down for the common people. Asoka wanted to transform Buddhism into a popular religion. His edicts are, therefore, of two kinds: (a) The smaller group of edicts was addressed to the Buddhist *Sangha*. These edicts describe his adherence to Buddhism and his relationship with the Buddhist *Sangha* or community of monks. (b)The larger group of edicts on the rock surfaces is more important. The Minor Rock Edicts and Major Rock Edicts and the Pillar Edicts define Asoka's concept of *Dhamma*.

Some historians thought that there was no difference between Asoka's *Dhamma* and Buddhism. But from his edicts it appears that Asoka wanted to use his *Dhamma* to reduce social conflict and intolerance. He especially emphasized tolerance towards all people and towards their beliefs and ideas. Therefore, the principle of *Dhamma* was defined in such a way that it should be acceptable to people belonging to any religious sect. However, his *Dhamma* was influenced to a great extent by the teachings of Buddha, especially the emphasis on non-violence and proper behaviour towards all.

One important principle of Asoka's *Dhamma* was harmonious living. Therefore, he discouraged assemblies and gatherings which created differences of opinions. Another principle of *Dhamma* was non-violence. He discouraged war conquest by violence and prohibited killing of animals on certain specified occasions. However, Asoka recognized the occasions where violence was unavoidable.

Asoka opposed the practice of many orthodox ceremonies and maintained that the practice of morality was more important than the observance of rituals. Rock Edict XI is concerned with the practice of morality, such as giving respect to the elders, being charitable towards friends, slaves and servants, etc.

Asoka appointed *Dhammamahamatras* for propagating *Dhamma*. The activities of the *Dhammamahamatras* were not restricted to any particular community. They were expected to work impartially among all sects.

Thus, for Asoka *Dhamma* was a way of life based on harmonious blending of social ethics, moral virtues and civic responsibility. However, his policy of *Dhamma* did not succeed. It may be because he was too much occupied with his efforts to spread Buddhism and he did succeed in transforming this local creed in the Gangetic Valley into a world religion.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q 7: Who succeeded Bindusara?

.....

Q 8: Where did the Third Buddhist Council meet?

.....

Q 9: Asoka was appointed as governor of .....and ..... during the reign of Bindusara.

Q 10: Into how many types Asoka's edicts can be divided?

.....

Q 11: Whom did Asoka appoint for propagating Dhamma?

.....

7.5 MAURYAN ADMINISTRATION

The Mauryan dynasty organized a very elaborate system of administration. We can collect information about the Mauryan administration from the accounts left by Megasthenes, Kautilya's *Arthasastra* and the inscriptions or edicts of Asoka.

7.5.1 Central Administration

The king was the pivot of the administrative structure in the Mauryan Empire. He had absolute power in the administration.

However, the king was expected to consult with his ministers, but the final decision lay with him.

The king was assisted by a Council of Ministers, the *Mantri Parishad*. According to *Arthasastra,* two important officers in the central administration were *Sannidhata* (the treasurer) and *Samaharta* (the chief collector). The treasurer was the custodian of the realized revenue. The chief collector supervised the collection of revenue from the whole kingdom.

Another important officer of the Mauryan administration was the *Adhyakshas* or superintendents. We find mention of about 32 superintendents in charge of different departments. They were linked to local administration and the central government. The different departments were treasury, mines, metals, mint, salts, gold, trade, forest produce, weights and measures, tolls, agriculture, infantry, horses, chariots, elephants, shipping, cattle, gambling, jail, ports, etc.

One-quarter of the total revenue was reserved for salaries of the officials and for public works. The salaries of the higher officials were very high. Public works covered a wide range of activity - building and maintaining roads; wells and rest houses; planting trees; irrigation projects; maintaining the army; running the mines; the grants of the royal family to the religious institutions and individuals and the maintenance of the royal family.



LET US KNOW

Some changes in the Mauryan administration were brought about by Asoka. Traditional Mauryan concept of kingship was softened by Asoka's paternalistic concept. In a separate Kalinga edict, Asoka declared- 'All men are my children'. Asoka appointed a new class of officials known as *Dhammamahamatras* to promote the material and spiritual well-being of the people.

The administration of the capital Pataliputra was well planned. It was looked after by a Municipal Commission consisting of thirty members. The commission was divided into six boards or committees of five members each. These committees looked after industrial arts, foreigners, registration of births and deaths, trade and commerce, manufactured articles and collection of tax and sold goods.

Espionage was recognized as an official activity in the Mauryan Empire. A large number of spies were appointed who transmitted secret and confidential reports to the king. Spies helped to maintain contact with even the remote parts of the Empire.

7.5.2 Provincial Administration

There were five major political centres in the Mauryan Empire, as mentioned in the Asokan inscription. We have already discussed about that the capital Pataliputra had well planned administered. The other four centres were: Taxila, Ujjain, Tosali and Suvarnagiri. They were each placed under a governor who usually belonged to the imperial family. Governors of smaller units were selected from local people. Senior officers called *Pradeshikas* visited the provinces every five years to check the administration. Another group of officers called *Rajukas* were appointed both in cities and villages to look after the judicial matter. *Yukta* was appointed for recording information coming from various sources.

According to Arthasastra, provinces were further sub-divided into *Vishayas* or districts and district into villages. In each village, there was an accountant and a tax collector. The *gramas* or village headman was responsible to them.

7.5.3 The Army

The Mauryan Empire maintained a huge army. According to the account of a Roman writer called Pliny, Chandragupta maintained

600,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry and 9000 elephants. Another source tells us that Mauryas also had 8000 chariots. Megasthenes mentions that a committee with six sub-committees was responsible for coordinating military activity. Of these, one looked after the navy, the second managed transport and provisions, the third was responsible for infantry, the fourth for horses, the fifth for chariots and the sixth for elephants. According to Megasthenes, the soldiers received regular pay from the state. Kautilya mentions a *Navadhyaks* or superintendent of ships. Therefore it is possible that the Mauryans possessed a navy.



LET US KNOW

The Mauryans had chosen their provincial centres very carefully. Both Taxila and Ujjain were situated on important long-distance trade routes. Suvarnagiri was possibly located in one such way that facilitated the collection of gold from the mines of Karnataka.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q 12: Who was the head of the administration in the Mauryan Empire?

.....

Q 13: Who looked after the collection of revenue in the Mauryan Empire?

.....

Q 14: How many political centres were there in the Mauryan Empire?

.....

Q 15: Who was Samaharta ?

.....

Q 16: Who was Adhyaksha?

.....

Q 17: Who was Pradeshika?

.....

Q 18: Who was Navadhyak?

.....

Q 19: Prepare a note on the central administration of the Mauryas? (Answer in about 60 words)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

7.8 DECLINE OF THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

Asoka died in about 232 B.C. With his death, the Mauryan Empire began to disintegrate. The last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha, was assassinated by his Brahmana commander Pushyamitra Sunga. Following this Pushyamitra established the rule of the Sunga dynasty.

Earlier, it was accepted that Asoka's policy was mainly responsible for the decline of the Mauryas. It was believed that his inclination towards Buddhism offended the Brahmanas, who revolted against him. But if we consider his policy we see that Asoka repeatedly emphasized on showing respect to Brahmanas and Shramanas.

It is also said that Asoka's policy of non-violence weakened the Mauryan army. As a result, the foreign invaders got an opportunity to attack the Empire. But this cannot be accepted as we have already discussed in the previous section that though Asoka accepted the policy of non-violence, yet he mentioned the use of violence where necessary.

Therefore, the causes for the decline of the Mauryas must lie elsewhere. The pressure on the Mauryan economy can be considered as a cause for the downfall. The vast expenses of the Empire to maintain an army, to pay the ministers and to meet the cost of establishing settlements in newly cleared land could have drained the treasury.

Although Mauryan economy was based on agriculture, yet it might be possible that the revenue collected from agriculture was not sufficient to maintain the whole Empire. Probably the Mauryas did not restructure the economy sufficiently to provide long-term support to the Empire.

Mauryan administration was also in a way responsible for the decline of the Empire. In the Mauryan Empire the Emperor was the central figure around whom the administration revolved. When a ruler changed, the new ruler was required to possess the capability to attract the loyalty of the people by being an efficient administrator. But the successor of Asoka lacked this essential quality.

In the Mauryan administration the process of recruitment was arbitrary. Local governors had the power to change their officers. So many a time they chose a person of their choice ignoring the capability.

Another problem was the absence of representative institutions in the Empire. For a vast Empire like that of the Mauryas, representative institutions were required to stabilize public opinion.

It is very essential for the survival of the state to get loyalty of the people. But in the Mauryan system, loyalty was directed to the social order. Because of the interdependence of caste and politics, gradually caste was given higher status than politics. According to Arthasastra, a state should have seven limbs - the king, the territory, the administration, the treasury, the capital, coercive powers, and allies. Gradually, Brahmanical text emphasized on two factors for the existence of a state- one was ***Danda*** and the other was ***Varnasramadharma***. Gradually the *varna-ashrama-dharma* became more important than the state.

The successors of Asoka could not maintain the mighty fabric of the Empire. Immediately after his death, one of his sons Jalauka set up an independent principality in Kashmir. Another prince, Virasena made himself independent in Gandhara. Vidarbha or Berar also separated from the Mauryan Empire. The Greek evidence further confirms the loss of the Northern provinces to the Bactrian Greeks.

LET US KNOW



Kautilya occupies a unique place in the history of India. He aroused a national spirit among the Indians to throw out the Greeks from the soil of India. For this purpose he advised Chandragupta to unite the warring tribes and republics. As the Chief Advisor and Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya, he rendered a valuable service in running the state. He wrote Arthasastra, a book on the art of government and state craft. He described in detail the various duties of the ruler, the role of the king's advisors, welfare duties of the government, spy system and administration of justice. It also contains rules to regulate different social relations.



ACTIVITY 7.2

Make a list of the successors of Asoka.

.....



7.9 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt that,

- Chandragupta Maurya had established the first Indian Empire with the help of his Prime Minister Kautilya or Chanakya. After establishing himself in the Gangetic plains, he moved towards North-West India and liberated that part from the Greek General Seleucus Nikatar. By a treaty in 303 B.C. Chandragupta secured some Seleucid territories. He established political as well as cultural contact with the Greeks. His son Bindusara succeeded him in 297 B.C, who too exchanged embassies with the Greeks. He ruled till 272 B.C. and brought a large part of India under Mauryan sovereignty.
- Asoka, the son of Bindusara ascended the Mauryan throne after his

father's death. He was the greatest of the all Mauryan rulers. The Kalinga campaign greatly changed his life and he became a Buddhist. He initiated a unique religious policy termed as Dhamma. Through his Dhamma, Asoka tried to reduce social conflict and intolerance. Though his Dhamma was not successful, but he successfully spread Buddhism and made it a world religion.

- The Mauryans had a centralized administration where king the was all powerful. The king was assisted by a Council of Ministers or Mantri Parishad. Every department had a superintendent to look after it. The provinces were placed under governors and senior officials called Pradeshikas visited the provinces every five years to check the administration. The Mauryans had a huge army with a committee having sub-committees under it to coordinate military activity.
- With the death of Asoka, there started the decline of the Mauryan Empire. His sons established themselves independently. The Mauryan economy was weak and could not hold the pressure of the Empire for long. The Mauryan administration centered round the Emperor and the successors of Asoka were weak and inefficient. They failed to attract the loyalty of the people which affected the Mauryan administration. The recruitment policy of the Mauryans was too arbitrary. There was also no representative institution in the Mauryan Empire. All these collectively led to the downfall of the Mauryan Empire. The Sunga dynasty succeeded the Mauryan dynasty.



7.10 FURTHER READING

1) Majumdar, R.C., Raychaudhuri, H.C., Datta, K. (1986). *An Advanced History of India*. New Delhi, Macmillan India Ltd.

2) Sharma, L.P. (1981). *Ancient History of India (pre-historic Age to 1200 A.D.)*. New Delhi, Vikas Publication House Pvt. Ltd.

3) Thapar, Romila. (2002). *The Penguin History of Early India from The Origins to A D 1300.* New Delhi, The Penguin Group.

4) Tripathi, Ramashankar. (1999). *History of Ancient India*. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

7.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Chandragupta Maurya

Ans to Q No 2: Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya

Ans to Q No 3: Megasthenes

Ans to Q No 4: 321 B.C.

Ans to Q No 5: Bindusara

Ans to Q No 6: Chandragupta Maurya by overthrowing the Nandas in 321 B.C. founded the Mauryan Empire. He was guided in his efforts by Chanakya who was traditionally believed as his Prime Minister. After establishing his control over the Gangetic Plain, he liberated North-Western India from the Greek General Seleukos Nikatar and secured some Seleucid territories by a treaty in 303 B.C.

Ans to Q No 7: Asoka

Ans to Q No 8: Pataliputra

Ans to Q No 9: Taxila, Ujjain

Ans to Q No 10: Two

Ans to Q No 11: Dhammamahamatras

Ans to Q No 12: The King

Ans to Q No 13: *Samaharta*

Ans to Q No 14: Five

Ans to Q No 15: Chief Collector

Ans to Q No 16: Superintendent

Ans to Q No 17: Senior Officer

Ans to Q No 18: Superintendent of Ships

Ans to Q No 19: The central administration of the Mauryas centred round the king who enjoyed absolute power in the administration. He was assisted by a Council of Ministers or Mantri Parishad. There were also superintendents in charge of different departments which were linked

up to both the local administration and central government. The king had a good espionage system.



7.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each question in about 50 words)

Q 1: When did Bindusara ascend the throne?

Q 2: Asoka was well known for his…… (Fill up the blank)

Q 3: What was the function of a *Yukta*?

Q 4: Who authored *Arthasastra*?

B) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Narrate the contact of the Mauryans with the Greeks. What was the impact of the Indo-Greek contact?

Q 2: Write a note on the early life of Asoka?

Q 3: How did Kalinga campaign influence the life of Asoka?

Q 4: How does Arthasastra help us to know about the Mauryas?

C) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the foundation of the Mauryan Empire.

Q 2: How did Asoka promote Buddhism? Discuss his concept of Dhamma.

Q 3: Describe the administrative system of the Mauryan Empire.

Q.4: Assess the causes behind the downfall of the Mauryan Empire.

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