UNIT 4

Emergence of State and Empire

Learning Objectives

To enable the students to acquire knowledge on

- the emergence of the first two important empires of India
- the significance of the invasions of Persians and Greeks
- the socio-political changes from 6th century to 3rd century BCE.
- the Pre-Mauryan administration and socio-economic conditions
- the Dharmic state of Ashoka through his edicts

DBPDWA

Introduction

From the sixth century to the third century BCE, North India passed through major political and social changes. Buddhism and Jainism emerged as prominent religions having a large number of followers. These two religious systems were antithetical to the mainstream Vedic religion. As a consequence of new beliefs and ideas propounded by Jainism and Buddhism, the social order largely centred on Vedic rituals underwent a significant change, as people of many religious faiths were part of the emerging society. On the political front, minor states and federations of clans were merged through conquests to create an empire during this period, resulting in a large state, ruled by a *chakravartin* or *ekarat* (emperor or one supreme king). The rise of a centralised empire in the Gangetic plains of present-day Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh changed the social, economic and administrative fabric of the region.

The flat plains and the availability of plentiful water from the perennial rivers, such as the Ganga and its many tributaries, were among the favourable ecological conditions which promoted the rise of a large state in this particular region. Rivers also acted as major waterways for trade and travel. Bimbisara, who was a contemporary of Buddha, started the process of empire building in Magadha. It was strengthened by his son Ajatashatru and then by the Nandas. The empire reached its glory and peaked with the advent of the Mauryan Empire founded by Chandragupta Maurya. The first three Mauryan emperors, Chandragupta, Bindusara and Ashoka, were the best known. After Ashoka, the Mauryan Empire went into decline.

Sources

The names of Chandragupta and his two successors in the Mauryan period are well known now. But reconstructing their lives and careers was a laborious and difficult process for the earlier historians. There are hardly any comprehensive contemporary accounts or literary works which refer to the Mauryan emperors though they are mentioned in various Buddhist and Jain texts as well as in some Hindu works like the *brahmanas*. The *Mahavamsa*, the comprehensive historical chronicle in Pali from Sri Lanka, is an important additional source. The scattered information from these sources has been corroborated by accounts of Greek historians who left their accounts about India following Alexander's campaign in north-western part of the country.

Archaeology and epigraphy are the tools that provide rich information for the historian to understand earlier periods of history. Archaeology is particularly important because excavations reveal the nature of urban morphology, that is, layout of the city and construction of buildings. They also provide concrete information about the material culture of people in the past, such as the metals that were known, materials and tools they used, and the technology they employed.

The archaeological finds in the Gangetic regions give us solid proof about the nature of the urban centres established in the region in course of time. Epigraphical evidence is scanty for the period. The most widely known are the edicts of Ashoka, which have been discovered in many parts of the country. In fact, the reconstruction of the Mauryan period to a great extent became possible only after the Brahmi script of the inscriptions at Sanchi was deciphered by James Prinsep in 1837. Information about other edicts in other parts of the country also became available at that time. It must be remembered that these were the oldest historical artefacts found in India in the nineteenth century, until archaeological excavations unearthed the Indus valley towns of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro in the twentieth century. All the edicts began with a reference to a great king, "Thus spoke *devanampiya* (beloved of the gods) *piyadassi* (of pleasing looks)", and the geographical spread of the edicts make it clear that this was a king who had ruled over a vast empire. But who was this king? Puranic and Buddhist texts referred to a *chakravartin* named Ashoka. As more edicts were deciphered, the decisive identification that *devananampiya piyadassi* was Ashoka was made in 1915. One more edict when deciphered, which referred to him as *devanampiya* Ashoka, made reconstruction of Mauryan history possible.

Let us now turn to two later sources. The first is the rock inscription of Junagadh, near Girnar in Gujarat. This was carved during the reign of Rudradaman, the local ruler and dates back to 130–150 CE. It refers to Pushyagupta, the provincial governor (*rashtriya)* of Emperor Chandragupta. This is of importance for two reasons: (i) it indicates the extent of the Mauryan Empire, which had expanded as far west as Gujarat and (ii) it shows that more than four centuries after his death, the name of Chandragupta was still well known and remembered in many parts of the country. A second source is a literary work. The play *Mudrarakshasa* by Visakhadatta was written during the Gupta period, sometime after the 4th century CE. It narrates Chandragupta's accession to the throne of the Magadha Empire and the exploits of his chief advisor Chanakya or Kautilya by listing the strategies he used to counter an invasion against Chandragupta. This play is often cited as a corroborative source since it supports the information gathered from other contemporary sources about Chandragupta. It is important to note from both these sources that the fame of Chandragupta had survived long after he was gone and became imbibed in popular lore and memory. They thus attest to the significance of oral traditions, which are now accepted as an additional valid source of history.

4.1 Rise of Magadha under the Haryanka Dynasty

Bimbisara

Among the 16 *mahajanapadas*, Kasi was initially powerful. However, Kosala became dominant later. A power struggle broke out between Magadha, Kosala, Vrijji and Avanti. Eventually Magadha emerged as the dominant *mahajanapada* and established the first Indian empire. The first known ruler of Magadha was Bimbisara of the Haryanka dynasty. He extended the territory of Magadhan Empire by matrimonial alliances and conquests. By marrying off his sister to Prasenajit, ruler of Kosala, he received Kasi as dowry. He also married the princesses of Lichchhavis and Madra. He maintained friendly relations with Avanti but annexed Anga by military might. Thus, Magadha became a

powerful and prominent power. During his reign, Bimbisara patronised various religious sects and their leaders. He had an encounter with Buddha as well.

His son Ajatashatru ascended the throne by killing his father. King Prasenajit immediately took back Kasi, which he had handed out as dowry to Bimbisara. This led to a military confrontation between Magadha and Kosala. The struggle lasted until Prasenajit was overthrown and died at Rajgriha, the capital of Magadha Empire. Kosala was then annexed to Magadha. Ajatashatru also fought and won the battle against the Lichchhavis. He defeated the Lichchhavis and the Mallas. Ajatashatru is also believed to have met Buddha in his lifetime. By the time Ajatashatru died in 461 BCE Magadha had become undisputedly the strongest power.

The Haryanka dynasty was succeeded by the Shishunaga dynasty. Shishunaga, a viceroy of Benaras, deposed the last Haryanka king and ascended the throne. The Shishunagas ruled for fifty years before the throne was usurped by Mahapadma Nanda.

4.2 Nandas: The First Empire Builders of India

About a hundred years after Ajatashatru's demise, the Nandas became the emperors of Magadha in 362 BCE. The first Nanda ruler was Mahapadma. It is believed that he usurped the throne by murdering the last of the Shishunaga kings. Under the Nandas, the empire expanded considerably, and the wealth and power of the Nandas became widely known and feared. Mahapadma Nanda was succeeded by his eight sons, and they were together known as the *navanandas* or the nine Nandas. During the process of empire building, Nandas exterminated many kshatriya clans and subjugated kshatriya-ruled kingdoms, which had still retained a degree of autonomous authority, thus creating a centralised state. An inscription known as the *Hathigumpha* (elephant cave) from Udayagiri near Bhubaneshwar, Odisha, records the aqueduct built by King Nanda three hundred years earlier. This is also indicative of the geographical extent of the Nanda Empire. Though the Nandas were able administrators and had strengthened the Magadha Empire, they were not popular among the people.

4.3 Persian and Macedonian Invasions

The period from the sixth century witnessed close cultural contact of the north-west of India with Persia and Greece. It might be surprising to know that Gandhara and its adjoining regions on the Indus were part of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia. Cyrus, the emperor of Persia, invaded India around 530 BCE and destroyed the city of Kapisha. According to Greek historian Herodotus, Gandhara constituted the twentieth and the richest satrapy of the Achaemenid Empire. The region continued to be part of the Persian Empire till the invasion of Alexander the Great. The inscriptions of Darius I mention the presence of the Persians in the Indus region and include "the people of Gadara, Haravati and Maka" as subjects of the Achaemenid Empire.

Taxila

Takshashila or Taxila is situated in present-day Pakistan. Between the fifth century and fourth century BCE, it was part of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia. Because of its strategic location on the trade route between the

A centralised state required a new administrative framework to govern an extensive territory, the creation of a bureaucracy, resources of money and men for managing the administration and the army. A system of revenue administration had to be developed to raise the funds needed for the state through taxation. Such a political formation led to the development of cities as administrative centres, distinct from villages and rural areas. A large standing army was required for expanding and retaining the empire.

DO YOU KNOW?

The word "Hindu" appears for the first time in an inscription of Darius I at Persepolis, Iran. Darius lists "Hindu" as part of his empire. The word "Sindhu", denoting a river in general and Indus in particular, became "Hindu" in Persian. The Greeks dropped the S and called it Indu, which eventually came to be called Hindu and later India.

East and the West, it emerged as an important centre of learning and culture. Students came from far and wide to Taxila in search of knowledge. The city was brought to light by the excavation carried out in the 1940s by Sir John Marshall. Taxila is considered "one of the greatest intellectual achievements of any ancient civilization". Panini seems to have compiled his well-known work, *Ashtadhyayi*, here.

Impact of Persian Contact

As the north-western part of India came under the control of the Persian Empire from about middle of the sixth century, the region became a centre of confluence of Persian and Indian culture. The Persian contact left its impact on art, architecture, economy and administration of ancient India. The cultural impact was felt most in the Gandhara region. The most significant impact was the development of the Kharosthi script, used in the north-western part of India. It was used by Ashoka in his inscriptions in the Gandhara region. The Kharosthi script was derived from Aramaic used widely in the Achaemenid Empire of Persia.

Like Aramaic, Kharosthi was written from right to left. Persian sigloi (silver coin) is an imitation from the region. The earliest coins in India are traced to the period of the *mahajanapadas*. The Indian word for coin *karsa* is of Persian origin. The coins might have been inspired by the Persian coins. The existence of coins in that period suggests trade links between India and Persia. The Ashokan edicts might have been inspired by the edicts of the Achaemenid king Darius. The Ashokan edicts use the term *lipi* instead of the Iranian term *dipi*.

The Mauryan art and architecture show traces of Persian influence. Mauryan columns of the Ashokan Pillar are similar to the columns found in the Achaemenid Empire. The bell-shaped capital of the columns, especially the lion capital of Sarnath pillar and the bell capital of Rampurval pillar, show resemblance to designs found in the Achaemenid columns. Similarly, the pillared remains of the Palace in Pataliputra display a remarkable similarity to the pillared hall in the Achaemenid capital. However, the craftsmen, though inspired by the Persian art and architecture, gave a definite Indian character to their work.

Connection between Persian and Sanskrit

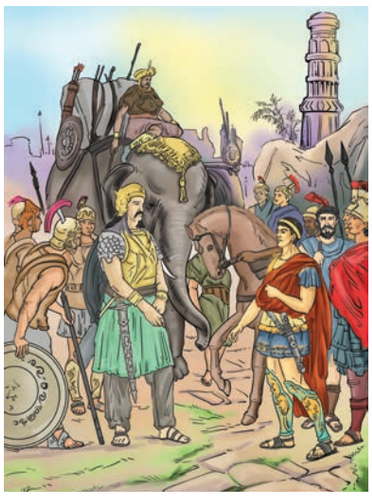
There are linguistic similarities between Rig Veda and Zend Avesta. The term Aryas was also used by the ancient Persians. According to Indologist Thomas Burrow, only phonetic change had occurred overtime. The Bogaz Koi (in North-East Syria) Inscription dating back to 1380 BCE records a treaty between a Hittite and a Mitanni King. It mentions the names of a few Rig Vedic gods such as Indara, Uruvna (Varuna), Mitira and Nasatiya (Ashvins).

4.4 Alexander's Invasion

During Dana Nanda's reign, Alexander invaded north-west India (327–325 BCE). In many ways, the invasion by Alexander is a watershed in Indian history. It marked the beginning of the interaction between India and the West, which spanned many centuries to follow. Greek historians began to write about India, and Greek governors and kings ruled in the north-western region of India, which introduced new styles of art and governance. After his conquests in the Punjab region, Alexander expressed his desire to march further east to attack the Magadha Empire. However, his already tired troops had heard about the great emperor in the east (Nanda) and his formidable army and refused to be engaged in a war against such a powerful adversary.

Emperor Alexander

In 326 BCE when Alexander entered the Indian subcontinent after defeating the Persians, Ambhi, the ruler of Taxila, surrendered and accepted the suzerainty of Alexander. The most famous of Alexander's encounters was with Porus, ruler of the region between Jhelum and Beas. The two armies met in the battle of Hydaspes in which Porus was imprisoned. Later, impressed by the Porus's dignity, Alexander restored his throne on the condition of accepting his suzerainty. His battle-weary soldiers refused to march further. Alexander did not want to proceed against the reluctance of his army. During his return, Alexander died of a mysterious fever in Babylon.



Surrender of Porus to Alexander, 1865 engraving by Alonzo Chappel (modern representation)

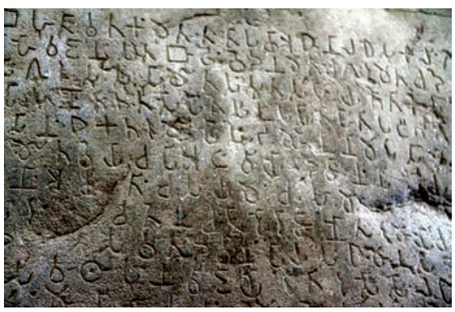
The Impact of Alexander's Invasion

Alexander's invasion led to the establishment of Greek satrapies in the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent. Trade routes opened up with the West. There were four different trade routes in use, which facilitated the movement of Greek merchants and craftsmen to India, establishing direct contact between India and Greece. As trade contact increased, many Greek settlements were established in the northwest of India. Alexandria near Kabul, Boukephala near Peshawar in Pakistan and Alexandria in Sindh were some of the prominent Greek settlements.

The Greek accounts of India provide valuable information but with a bit of exaggeration. Alexander's death created a void in the north-west, facilitating the accession of Chandragupta Maurya to the throne of Magadha. It also helped him to conquer the numerous small chiefdoms in the north-west and bring the region under his empire.

4.5 Mauryan Empire

Contemporary accounts by Greek historians show that Chandragupta was a youth living in Taxila when Alexander invaded India. Greek historians have recorded his name as "Sandrakottus" or "Sandrakoptus", which are evidently modified forms of Chandragupta. Inspired by Alexander, Chandragupta led a revolt against the Nandas years later and overthrew them. Chandragupta achieved it either by inciting the people to rise against an unpopular monarch, or by soliciting their support in overthrowing an unpopular king. Chandragupta established the Mauryan Empire and became its first emperor in 321 BCE.



Ashoka Rock Edict at Junagadh

We know from the Junagadh rock inscription (referred to earlier) that Chandragupta had expanded his empire westward as far as Gujarat. One of his great achievements, according to local accounts, was that he waged war against

the Greek prefects (military officials) left behind by Alexander and destroyed them, so that the way was cleared to carry out his ambitious plan of expanding the territories. Another major event of his reign was the war against Seleucus, who was one of Alexander's generals. After the death of Alexander, Seleucus had established his kingdom extending up to Punjab. Chandragupta defeated him in a battle some time before 301 BCE and drove him out of the Punjab region. The final agreement between the two was probably not too acrimonious, since Chandragupta gave Seleucus 500 war elephants, and Seleucus sent an ambassador to Chandragupta's court. This ambassador was Megasthenes, and we owe much of the information that we have about Chandragupta to *Indica*, the account written by Megasthenes. The original of this work is lost, but many Greek historians had reproduced parts of his account describing the court of Chandragupta and his administration.

Seleucus Nicator

Chandragupta

Chandragupta was obviously a great ruler who had to reinvent a strong administrative apparatus to govern his extensive kingdom. (The system of governance and polity is discussed in the next section.) Chandragupta was ably advised and aided by Chanakya, known for political manoeuvring, in governing his empire. Contemporary Jain and Buddhist texts hardly have any mention of Chanakya. But popular oral tradition ascribes the greatness of Chandragupta and his reign to the wisdom and genius of Chanakya. Chanakya, also known as Kautilya and Vishnugupta, was a Brahmin and a sworn adversary of the Nandas. He is credited with having devised the strategy for overthrowing the Nandas and helping Chandragupta to become the emperor of Magadha. He is celebrated as the author of the *Arthasastra,* a treatise on political strategy and governance. His intrigues and brilliant strategy to subvert the intended invasion of Magadha is the theme of the play, *Mudrarakshasa.*

Chandragupta
(modern representation)

Bindusara

Chandragupta's son Bindusara succeeded him as emperor in 297 BCE in a peaceful and natural transition. We do not know what happened to Chandragupta. He probably renounced the world. According to the Jain tradition, Chandragupta spent his last years as an ascetic in Chandragiri, near Sravanabelagola, in Karnataka. Bindusara was clearly a capable ruler and continued his father's tradition of close interaction with the Greek states of West Asia. He continued to be advised by Chanakya and other capable ministers. His sons were appointed as viceroys of the different provinces of the empire. We do not know much about his military exploits, but the empire passed intact to his son, Ashoka.

Bindusara ruled for 25 years, and he must have died in 272 BCE. Ashoka was not his chosen successor, and the fact that he came to the throne only four years later in 268 BCE would indicate that there was a struggle between the sons of Bindusara for the succession. Ashoka had been the viceroy of Taxila when he put down a revolt against the local officials by the people of Taxila, and was later the viceroy of Ujjain, the capital of Avanti, a major city and commercial centre. As emperor, he is credited with building the monumental structures that have been excavated in the site of Pataliputra. He continued the tradition of close interaction with the Greek states in West Asia, and there was mutual exchange of emissaries from both sides.

Ashoka

The defining event of Ashoka's rule was his campaign against Kalinga (present-day Odisha) in the eighth year of his reign. This is the only

Emperor Ashoka Devanampiya

recorded military expedition of the Mauryas. The number of those killed in battle, those who died subsequently, and those deported ran into tens of thousands. The campaign had probably been more ferocious and brutal than usual because this was a punitive war against Kalinga, which had broken away from the Magadha Empire (the Hathigumpha inscription speaks of Kalinga as a part of the Nanda Empire). Ashoka was devastated by the carnage and moved by the suffering that he converted to humanistic values. He became a Buddhist and his new-found values and beliefs were recorded in a series of edicts, which confirm his passion for peace and moral righteousness or *dhamma* (*dharma* in Sanskrit).

Edicts of Ashoka

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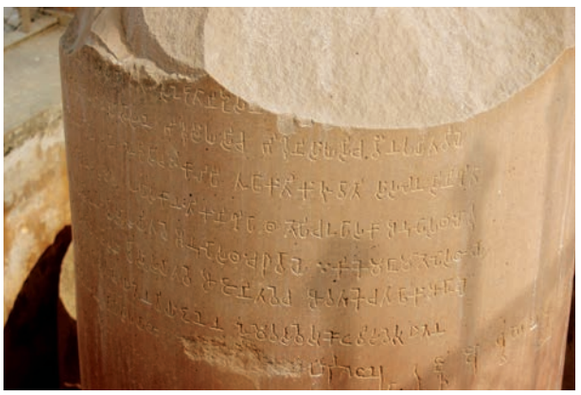
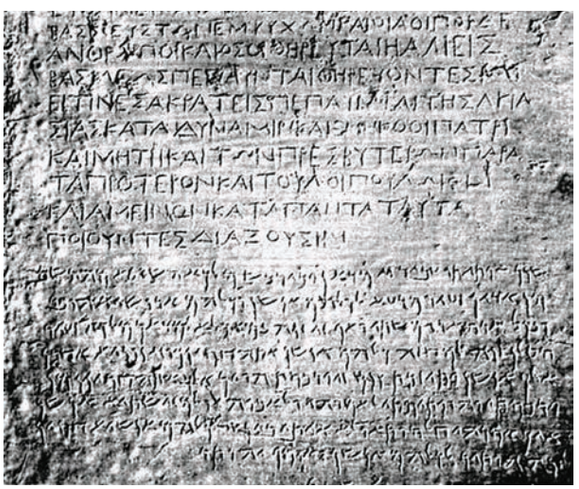
The edicts of Ashoka thus constitute the most concrete source of information about the Mauryan Empire. There are 33 edicts comprising 14 Major Rock Edicts, 2 known as Kalinga edicts, 7 Pillar Edicts, some Minor Rock Edicts and a few Minor Pillar Inscriptions. The Major Rock Edicts extend from Kandahar in Afghanistan, Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra in north-west Pakistan to Uttarakhand district in the north, Gujarat and Maharashtra in the west, Odisha in the east and as far south as Karnataka and Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh. Minor Pillar Inscriptions have been found as far north as Nepal (near Lumbini). The edicts were written mostly in the Brahmi script and in Magadhi and Prakrit. The Kandahar inscriptions are in Greek and Aramaic, while the two inscriptions in north-west Pakistan are in Kharosthi script.

The geographical spread of the edicts essentially defines the extent of the vast empire over which Ashoka ruled. The second inscription mentions lands beyond his borders: "the Chodas

Edicts of Ashoka (238 BCE), in the Brahmi at British Museum



The Ashoka edicts at Saranath



Rock Edict - Kandahar in Afghanistan

Rock Edict of Ashoka, Dhauli, Odisha

(Cholas), the Pandyas, the Satiyaputa, the Keralaputa (Chera), even Tamraparni, the Yona king Antiyoka (Antiochus), and the kings who are the neighbours of this Antioka". The edicts reveal Ashoka's belief in peace, righteousness and justice and his concern for the welfare of his people. By rejecting violence and war, advocating peace and the pursuit of *dhamma*, Ashoka negated the prevailing philosophy of statecraft that stressed that an emperor had to strive to extend and consolidate his empire through warfare and military conquests.

Third Buddhist Council

One of the major events of Ashoka's reign was the convening of the Third Buddhist *sangha* (council) in 250 BCE in the capital Pataliputra. Ashoka's deepening commitment to Buddhism meant that royal patronage was extended to the Buddhist establishment. An important outcome of this *sangha* was the decision to expand the reach of Buddhism to other parts of the region and to send missions to convert people to the religion. Buddhism thus became a proselytizing religion and missionaries were sent to regions outlying the empire such as Kashmir and South India. According to popular belief, Ashoka sent his two children, Mahinda and Sanghamitta, to Sri Lanka to propagate Buddhism. It is believed that they took a branch of the original *bodhi* tree to Sri Lanka.

Ashoka seems to have ruled until 232 B.C (B.C.E). Sadly, though his revolutionary view of governance and non-violence find a resonance in our contemporary sensibilities, they were not in consonance with the realities of the times. After his death, the Mauryan Empire slowly disintegrated and died out within fifty years. But the two centuries prior to Ashoka's death and the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire were truly momentous in Indian history. This was a period of great change. The consolidation of a state extending over nearly two-thirds of the sub-continent had taken place with formalised administration, development of bureaucratic institutions and economic expansion, in addition to the rise of new heterodox religions and philosophies that questioned the established orthodoxy.

Ashoka's visit to the Ramagrama
Sanchi Stupa Southern Gate

4.6 The Mauryan State and Polity

The major areas of concern for the Mauryan state were the collection of taxes as revenue to the state and the administration of justice, in addition to the maintenance of internal security and defence against external aggression. This required a large and complex administrative machinery and institutions. Greek historians, taking their lead from Megasthenes, described the Mauryan state as a centralised state. What we should infer from this description as a centralised state is that a uniform pattern of administration was established throughout the very large area of the empire. But, given the existing state of technology in communications and transport, a decentralised administrative system had to be in place.

This bureaucratic set-up covered a hierarchy of settlements from the village, to the towns, provincial capitals and major cities. The bureaucracy enabled and required an efficient system of revenue collection, since it needed to be paid out of taxes collected. Equally, the very large army of the Mauryan Empire could be maintained only with the revenue raised through taxation. The large bureaucracy also commanded huge salaries. According to the *Arthasastra,* the salary of chief minister, the *purohita* and the army commander was 48,000 panas, and the soldiers received 500 panas.

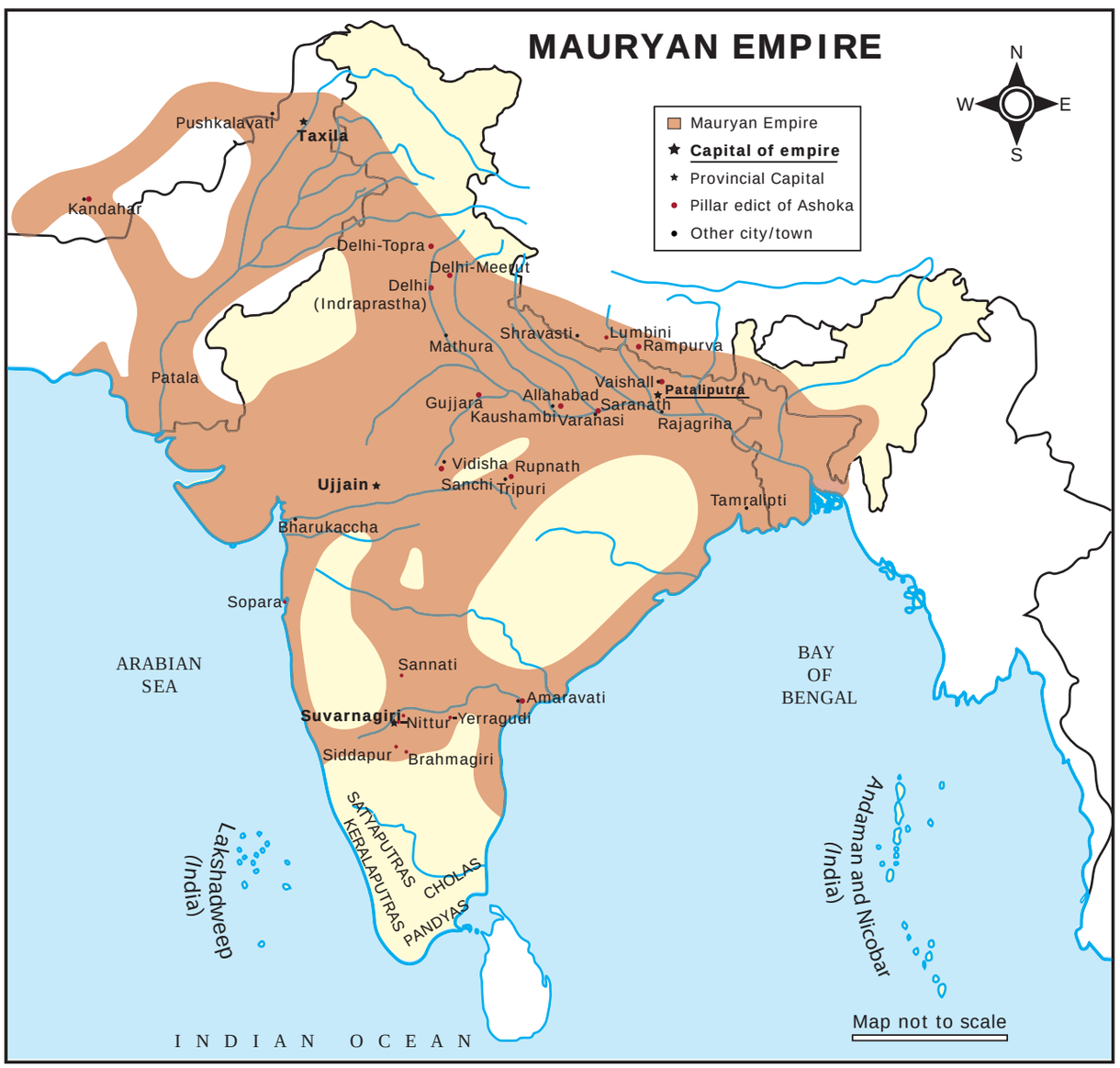
If we multiply this by the number of infantry and cavalry, we get an idea of the enormous resources needed to maintain the army and the administrative staff.

Arthasastra

Perhaps the most detailed account of the administration is to be found in the *Arthasastra* (though the work itself is now dated to a few centuries later). However, it must be remembered that the *Arthasastra* was a prescriptive text, which laid down the guidelines for good administration. If we add to this the information from Ashoka's edicts and the work of Megasthenes, we get a more comprehensive picture of the Mauryan state as it was.

Provincial Administration

At the head of the administration was the king. He was assisted by a council of ministers and a *purohita* or priest, who was a person of great importance, and secretaries known as *mahamatriyas*. The capital region of Pataliputra was directly administered. The rest of the empire was divided into four provinces based at Suvarnagiri (near Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh), Ujjain (Avanti, Malwa), Taxila in the north-west, and Tosali in Odisha in the south-east. The provinces were administered by governors who were usually royal princes. In each region,



the revenue and judicial administration and the bureaucracy of the Mauryan state was replicated to achieve a uniform system of governance. Revenue collection was the responsibility of a collector-general (*samaharta*) who was also in charge of exchequer that he was, in effect, like a minister of finance. He had to supervise all the provinces, fortified towns, mines, forests, trade routes and others, which were the sources of revenue. The treasurer was responsible for keeping a record of the tax revenues. The accounts of each department had to be presented jointly by the ministers to the king. Each department had a large staff of superintendents and subordinate officers linked to the central and local governments.

District and Village Administration

At the next level of administration came the districts, villages and towns. The district was under the command of a *sthanika,* while officials known as *gopas* were in charge of five to ten villages. Urban administration was handled by a *nagarika*. Villages were semi-autonomous and were under the authority of a *gramani,* appointed by the central government, and a council of village elders. Agriculture was then, as it remained down the centuries, the most important contributor to the economy, and the tax on agricultural produce constituted the most important source of revenue. Usually, the king was entitled to one-sixth of the produce. In reality, it was often much higher, usually about one-fourth of the produce.

Source of Revenue

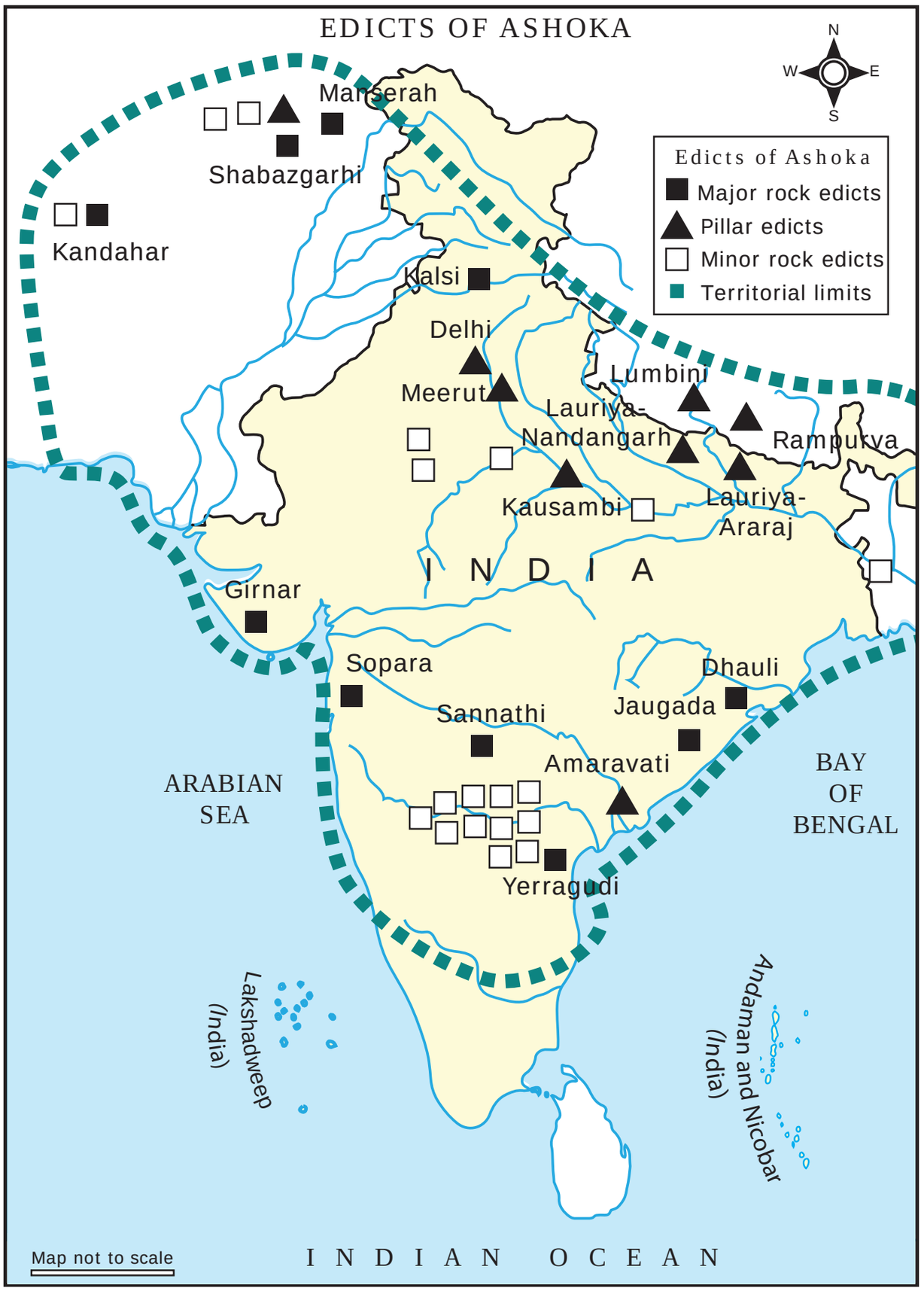
The *Arthasastra*, recommended comprehensive state control over agricultural production and marketing, with warehouses to store agricultural products and regulated markets, in order to maximise the revenues from this most important sector of the economy. Other taxes included taxes on land, on irrigation if the sources of irrigation had been provided by the state, taxes on urban houses, customs and tolls on goods transported for trade and profits from coinage and trade operations carried on by the government. Lands owned by the king, forests, mines and manufacture of salt, on which the state held a monopoly, were also important sources of revenue.

Judicial Administration

Justice was administered through courts, which were established in all the major towns. Two types of courts are mentioned. The *dharmasthiya* courts mostly dealt with civil law relating to marriage, inheritance and other aspects of civil life. The courts were presided over by three judges well-versed in sacred laws and three *amatyas* (secretaries). Another type of court was called *kantakasodhana* (removal of thorns), also presided over by three judges and three *amatyas*. The main purpose of these courts was to clear the society of anti-social elements and various types of crimes, and it functioned more like the modern police, and relied on a network of spies for information about such anti-social activities. Punishments for crimes were usually quite severe. The overall objective of the judicial system as it evolved was to extend government control over most aspects of ordinary life.

Ashoka's Dharmic State

Ashoka's rule gives us an alternative model of a righteous king and a just state. He instructed his officials, the *yuktas* (subordinate officials), *rajjukas* (rural administrators) and *pradesikas* (heads of the districts) to go on tours every five years to instruct people in *dhamma* (Major Rock Edict 3). Ashoka's injunctions to the officers and city magistrates stressed that all the people were his children and he wished for his people what he wished for his own children, that they should obtain welfare and happiness in this world and the next. These officials should recognise their own responsibilities and strive to be impartial and see to it that men were not imprisoned or tortured without good reason. He added that he would send an officer every five years to verify if his instructions were carried out (Kalinga Rock Edict 1).



Ashoka realised that an effective ruler needed to be fully informed about what was happening in his kingdom and insisted that he should be advised and informed promptly wherever he might be (Major Rock Edict 6). He insisted that all religions should co-exist and the ascetics of all religions were honoured (Major Rock Edicts 7 and 12). Providing medical care should be one of the functions of the state, the emperor ordered hospitals to be set up to treat human beings and animals (Major Rock Edict 2). Preventing unnecessary slaughter of animals and showing respect for all living beings was another recurrent theme in his edicts. In Ashoka's edicts, we find an alternative humane and empathetic model of governance. The edicts stress that everybody, officials as well as subjects, act righteously following *dhamma*.

4.7 Economy and Society

Agriculture

Agriculture formed the backbone of the economy. It was the largest sector in terms of its share in total revenue to the state and employment. The Greeks noted with wonder that two crops could be raised annually in India because of the fertility of the soil. Besides food grains, India also grew cash crops such as sugarcane and cotton, described by Megasthenes as a reed that produced honey and trees on which wool grew. These were important commercial crops. The fact that the agrarian sector could produce a substantial surplus was a major factor in the diversification of the economy beyond subsistence to commercial production.

Crafts and Goods

Many crafts producing a variety of manufactures flourished in the economy. We can categorise the products as utilitarian or functional, and luxurious and ornamental. Spinning and weaving, especially of cotton fabrics, relying on the universal availability of cotton throughout India, were the most widespread occupations outside of agriculture. A great variety of cloth was produced in the country, ranging from the coarse fabrics used by the ordinary people for everyday use, to the very fine textures worn by the upper classes and the royalty. The *Arthasastra* refers to the regions producing specialised textiles – Kasi (Benares), Vanga (Bengal), Kamarupa (Assam), Madurai and many others. Each region produced many distinctive and specialised varieties of fabrics. Cloth embroidered with gold and silver was worn by the King and members of the royal court. Silk was known and was generally referred to as Chinese silk, which also indicates that extensive trade was carried on in the Mauryan Empire.

Metal and metal works were of great importance, and the local metal workers worked with iron, copper and other metals to produce tools, implements, vessels and other utility items. Iron smelting had been known for many centuries, but there was a great improvement in technology after about 500 BCE, which made it possible to smelt iron in furnaces at very high temperatures. Archaeological finds show a great qualitative and quantitative improvement in iron production after this date. Improvement in iron technology had widespread implications for the rest of the economy. Better tools like axes made more extensive clearing of forests possible for agriculture; better ploughs could improve agricultural processes; better nails and tools improved woodwork and carpentry as well as other crafts. Woodwork was another important craft for ship-building, making carts and chariots, house construction and so on. Stone work–stone carving and polishing–had evolved as a highly skilled craft. This expertise is seen in the stone sculptures in the *stupa* at Sanchi and the highly polished Chunar stone used for Ashoka's pillars.

Sanchi Stupa

A whole range of luxury goods was produced, including gold and silver articles, jewellery, perfumes and carved ivory. There is evidence that many other products like drugs and medicines, pottery, dyes and gums were produced in the Mauryan Empire. The economy had thus developed far beyond subsistence production to a very sophisticated level of commercial craft production.

Crafts were predominantly urban-based hereditary occupations and sons usually followed their fathers in the practice of various crafts. Craftsmen worked primarily as individuals, though royal workshops for producing cloth and other products also existed. Each craft had a head called *pamukha* (*pramukha* or leader) and a *jettha* (*jyeshtha* or elder) and was organised in a *seni* (*sreni*or a guild), so that the institutional identity superseded the individual in craft production. Disputes between *srenis* were resolved by a *mahasetthi,* and this ensured the smooth functioning of craft production in the cities.

Trade

Trade or exchange becomes a natural concomitant of economic diversification and growth. Production of a surplus beyond subsistence is futile unless the surplus has exchange value, since the surplus has no use value when subsistence needs have been met. Thus, as the economy diversified and expanded, exchange becomes an important part of realising the benefits of such expansion. Trade takes place in a hierarchy of markets, ranging from the exchange of goods in a village market, between villages and towns within a district, across cities in long-distance overland trade and across borders to other countries. Trade also needs a conducive political climate as was provided by the Mauryan Empire, which ensured peace and stability over a very large area. The rivers in the Gangetic plains were major means for transporting goods throughout northern India. Goods were transported further west overland by road. Roads connected the north of the country to cities and markets in the south-east, and in the south-west, passing through towns like Vidisha and Ujjain. The north-west route linked the empire to central and western Asia. Overseas trade by ships was also known, and Buddhist *Jataka* tales refer to the long voyages undertaken by merchants. Sea-borne trade was carried on with Burma and the Malay Archipelago, and with Sri Lanka. The ships, however, were probably quite small and might have hugged the coastline.

We do not have much information about the merchant communities. In general, long-distance overland trade was undertaken by merchant groups travelling together as a caravan for security, led by a caravan leader known as the *maha-sarthavaha*. Roads through forests and unfavourable environments like deserts were always dangerous. The *Arthasastra*, however, stresses the importance of trade and

Mauryan coin with arched hill symbol on reverse

Karshapana-Bindusara

ensuring its smooth functioning. Trade has to be facilitated through the construction of roads and maintaining them in good condition. Since tolls and octroi were collected on goods when they were transported, toll booths must have been set up and manned on all the trade routes. Urban markets and craftsmen were generally closely monitored and controlled to prevent fraud. The *Arthasastra* has a long list of the goods – agricultural and manufactured – which were traded in internal and foreign trade. These include textiles, woollens, silks, aromatic woods, animal skins and gems from various parts of India, China and Sri Lanka. Greek sources confirm the trade links with the west through the Greek states to Egypt. Indigo, ivory, tortoiseshell, pearls and perfumes and rare woods were all exported to Egypt.

Coins and Currency

Though coinage was known, barter was the medium of exchange in pre-modern economies. In the Mauryan Empire, the silver coins known as *pana* were the most commonly used currency. Hordes of punch-marked coins have been found in many parts of north India, though some of these coins may have been from earlier periods. Thus while coins were in use, it is difficult to estimate the extent to which the economy was monetised.

Process of Urbanisation

Urbanisation is the process of the establishment of towns and cities in an agrarian landscape. Towns can come up for various reasons – as the headquarters of administration, as pilgrim centres, as commercial market centres and because of their locational advantages on major trade routes. In what way do urban settlements differ from villages or rural settlements? To begin with, towns and cities do not produce their own food and depend on the efficient transfer of agricultural surplus for their basic consumption needs. A larger number of people reside in towns and cities and the density of population is much higher in cities. Cities attract a variety of non-agricultural workers and craftsmen, who seek employment, thereby forming the workforce for the production of manufactured goods and services of various kinds. These goods, in addition to the agricultural products brought in from the rural countryside, are traded in markets. Cities also tend to house a variety of persons in service-related activities. The *sangam* poetry in Tamil and the Tamil epics provide vivid pictures of cities like Madurai, Kanchipuram and Poompuhar as teeming with people, with vibrant markets and merchants selling a variety of goods, as well as vendors selling various goods including food door to door. Though these literary works relate to a slightly later period, it is not different in terms of the prevailing levels of technology, and these descriptions may be taken as an accurate depiction of urban living. The only contemporary pictorial representation of cities is found in the sculptures in Sanchi, which portray royal processions, and cities are seen to have roads, a multitude of people and multi-storeyed buildings crowded together.

Urbanisation in Sixth Century BCE

One of the first pre-requisites for urbanisation is the development of an agricultural base. This had evolved in the Indo-Gangetic plain and from very early on there are references to cities like Hastinapura and Ayodhya. By about sixth century BCE, urbanization had spread to the *doab* and many new city centres like Kaushambi, Bhita, Vaishali and Rajagriha, among others, are mentioned in the region. Buddhist texts about Buddha's preaching were always located in urban centres. Cities developed primarily because of the spread of agriculture and wet rice cultivation, in particular in the *doab* region, after the marshy land was drained and reclaimed for cultivation. The fertile soil and plentiful availability of water from the perennial rivers made it possible to raise even two crops of rice, and the production of a large agricultural surplus to feed the cities. The improvements in iron technology also had an impact on economic life both in rural and urban areas. As Magadha grew, many regional

centres like Ujjain were also incorporated into the empire.

Housing and Town Planning

Towns were often located along the rivers, presumably for ease of access to transportation. They were surrounded by moats and a rampart to provide defensive protection. They were always open to attacks since treasuries holding government revenue were housed in them, in addition to the fact that as trading centres, the local people and merchants were also wealthy. As the towns became more prosperous, the quality of the houses, which were built of mud brick and even of fired brick, improved. Towns also had other facilities like drains, ring wells and mud pits, testifying to the development of civic amenities and sanitation. Excavations from the Mauryan period show that the standard of living had improved as compared to the earlier period. The houses were built of brick, and the cities had ring wells and soak pits. There was a quantitative increase in the use of iron and the variety of iron artefacts.

City of Pataliputra

Pataliputra was the great capital city in the Mauryan Empire. It was described as a large and wealthy city, situated at the confluence of the Ganga and Son rivers, stretching in the form of a parallelogram. It was more than 14 kilometres in length and about 2½ kilometres wide. It was protected by an outer wall made of wood, with loopholes for shooting arrows at enemies. There were 64 gates to the city and 570 watch towers. There was a wide and deep moat outside the wall, which was fed by water from the river, which served both as a defence and an outlet for sewage. There were many grand palaces in the city, which had a large population. The city was administered by a corporation of 30 members. Ashoka added to the magnificence of the city with the monumental architecture that he added to the capital, like the many-pillared hall.

Art and Culture

Most of the literature and art of the period have not survived. Sanskrit language and literature were enriched by the work of the grammarian Panini (c. 500 BCE), and Katyayana, who was a contemporary of the Nandas and had written a commentary on Panini's work. Buddhist and Jain texts were primarily written in Pali. Evidently many literary works in Sanskrit were produced during this period and find mention in later works, but they are not available to us.

The *Arthasastra* notes the performing arts of the period, including music, instrumental music, bards, dance and theatre. The extensive production of crafted luxury products like jewellery, ivory carving and wood work, and especially stone carving should all be included as products of Mauryan art.

Many religions, castes and communities lived together in harmony in the Mauryan society. There is little mention of any overt dissension or disputes among them. As in many regions of that era (including ancient Tamil Nadu), courtesans were accorded a special place in the social hierarchy and their contributions were highly valued.

Decline of the Mauryan Empire

- The highly centralized administration became unmanageable when Ashoka's successors were weak and inefficient. A weakened central administration with a large distance to communicate led to the rise of independent kingdoms.
- After Ashoka's death, the kingdom split into two. There were invasions from the north-west. The notable groups that undertook military expeditions and established kingdoms on Indian soil were the Indo-Greeks, the Sakas and the Kushanas.
- The last ruler Brihadratha was killed in (c.185 B C (BCE)) by his commander-in-chief Pushyamitra Sunga who founded the Sunga dynasty that ruled India for over hundred years.

SUMMARY

- *Gana-sanghas* in course of time became the larger *mahajanapadas* and of the 16 kingdoms, Magadha eventually emerged as the most powerful.

- The first known ruler of Magadha was Bimbisara, followed by his son Ajatashatru. Mahapadma Nanda started the Nanda dynasty.
- The invasion of north-west India by Alexander in 326 BCE opened up trade with the West. After the death of Alexander, Chandragupta founded the Mauryan Empire.
- The three notable Mauryan rulers, Chandragupta, Bindusara and Ashoka, established a centralised state. The system of Mauryan administration came to light through the accounts of *Arthasastra* and *Indica*.
- Mauryan Empire set in a new phase in Indian history as trade and commerce grew manifold during this period.
- Mauryan Empire continued the earlier tradition of consolidation of the empire. The truly revolutionary change that was attempted was Ashoka's exhortations to his officials and people to follow *dhamma*, abjure violence and lead a moral life.
- Mauryan Empire marked a distinct phase in Indian history with significant advances in technology and economic and social development, and created the framework for a large, centrally administered, state.

EXERCISE

DCQX3V

I. Choose the Correct Answer

1. Brahmi script in Ashoka's pillar inscription was deciphered by _____.
   (a) Thomas Saunders
   (b) James Prinsep
   (c) Sir John Marshal
   (d) William Jones
2. The first known ruler of Magadha was _____ of the Haryanka dynasty.
   (a) Bimbisara (b) Ajatashatru
   (c) Ashoka (d) Mahapadma Nanda
3. A comprehensive historical chronicle in Pali from Sri Lanka serving as an important source for the Mauryan Period is _____.
   (a) *Mahavamsa* (b) *Deepavamsa*
   (c) *Brahmanas* (d) *Mudrarakshasa*
4. The play _____ by Visakadatha describes Chandragupta and his accession to the throne of the Magadha Empire.
   (a) *Mudrarakshasa* (b) *Rajatharangini*
   (c) *Arthasastra* (d) *Indica*
5. Megasthenes'work _____describes the court of Chandragupta and his administration.
   (a) *Indica* (b) *Mudrarakshasa*
   (c) *Ashtadhyayi* (d) *Arthasastra*
6. The _____ was a prescriptive text for good administration.
   (a) *Arthasastra* (b) *Indica*
   (c) *Rajatharangini* (d) *Mudrarakshasa*

II. Write Brief Answers

1. How did Bimbisara extend the territory of Magadhan Empire?
2. Write a note on Mahapadma Nanda.
3. What made Alexander the Great to restore the throne of Porus ?
4. What are the features of a centralised state?
5. Give a brief note on the literary sources for the study of Mauryan state.
6. In what ways did the invasion of Alexander make a watershed in Indian history?

III. Write Short Answers

1. Mention the urban features revealed by archaeological findings.
2. Explain the features of the monarchies or kingdoms on the Gangetic plains.
3. Highlight the impact of the invasion of Alexander the Great on India.
4. What do you know of Ashoka's campaign against Kalinga?
5. Discuss the extensive trade on textiles carried on during the Mauryan period.

6. Write a note on the commodities traded between India and West and Central Asia.

IV. Answer the following in detail

1. Explain the sources for the study of the Mauryan Empire.
2. Describe the salient features of Mauryan polity.
3. Highlight the impact of Persians on India.
4. Give an account of the edicts of Ashoka.

Activity

1. Preparing a chart with information on the edicts of Ashoka.
2. Discussion on the outcome of the conquest of Kalinga.
3. Comparing the present-day system of administration with the Mauryan administration.
4. Making an album with pictures of Sanchi-Saranath pillars and Magadha and Mauryan kings.

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GLOSSARY

antithetical	contrasting	முரண்பட்ட
inciting	inducing	தூண்டும்
acrimonious	bitter	கசப்பான
manoeuvring	planned action	சூழ்ச்சி
adversary	enemy	விரோதி
negate	nullify	செயல்படாததாக்கு
proselytizing	attempt to convert one's religion	மதமாற்ற முயற்சி
empathetic	showing concern for others	மற்றவர் உணர்வினை மதித்தல்