

## 7. THE MAURYAN DYNASTY AND ASHOKA

(322 B.C.-185 B.C.)

You must have seen our national flag. The chakra between the saffron, white and green stripes looks very beautiful. From where has this chakra come ? This chakra is taken from the Sarnath pillar which was built by Ashoka of the Mauryan dynasty. Usually we find that in history importance is given to those rulers who have won great battles. But Ashoka was different - he won the hearts of the people by taking a religious path. He ruled on the basis of love, sympathy and compassion.



Pic. 7.1 National Symbol of India

### How many spikes are there in the Ashoka Chakra?

We shall talk about Ashoka in detail. But first we shall discuss about Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara, who belonged to the Mauryan dynasty and ruled before Ashoka.

Ashoka's grandfather Chandragupta Maurya was a brave king. With Chanakya's help he defeated Ghanananda the ruler of Magadha. Besides several northern and western states he defeated Seleucus Nikator - the general of Alexander and stopped the advancement of the Greek kings. Later on, Seleucus made friends with Chandragupta and sent Megasthenes as his messenger to the Mauryan court.

Chanakya was a great writer. He wrote 'Arthashastra' (Economics) where he explained how a strong and efficient government should be organized. Megasthenes has described India of that time in his book 'Indica'. He has written that Indians were civilized people. They would not lock their houses. Mostly they lived in villages and did farming. Soldiers were paid well etc.

After Chandragupta, his son Bindusara became the king. He extended the Mauryan empire by conquering several southern states.

After Bindusara, Ashoka sat on the throne. By now the Mauryan Empire was a big and powerful empire. Ashoka, too, was very brave like his father and grandfather. He attacked and conquered Kalinga and added it to the empire.



Pic 7.2 Ashoka chakra

### THE KALINGA WAR

It is usually seen that kings were happy when they win a battle. Ashoka was not happy after winning the Kalinga war. As many soldiers were killed, thousands were wounded and several women and children were left helpless. All this made him feel that winning a war was useless. He decided to give up war and adopt the path of peaceful conquest. He adopted the policy of 'dhamma' (dharma) to win the hearts of



the people, which would be beneficial for the people. He got his ideas and feelings engraved on the rocks, so that it would reach the common people-

**“I won Kalinga, eight years after becoming the king”**

**“It has made me very sad. Why so ? When an independent state is defeated, lakhs of people die there, and are driven out of their state as prisoners. Brahmins and monks living there are killed.”**

**“Those farmers who behave very politely with their relatives, slaves and labourers- are also killed and are separated from their dear ones.”**

**“This way war has had effects on all sorts of people. It makes me very sad. After this war I have followed religious principles sincerely and have taught others to do the same.”**

**“I believe that it is better to win with religion than with war. I am getting these things engraved so that even my sons and grand sons do not think of going to war.”**

## **DHAMMA OF ASHOKA**

Ashoka's dhamma had no gods or goddesses, nor were there any yajnas or fastings. No pooja etc; were necessary to follow dhamma. You must be wondering how can there be dhamma without any fastings and poojas. Actually the dreadful destruction, after the Kalinga war had changed the thinking of Ashoka.

Ashoka considered himself as father of his subjects. He used to be very sad when he would see people talking lies, doing wrong deeds, using violence against animals, and clashing with each other in the name of religion. He thought over these things and felt that as the ruler it was his duty to show the right path to his people. He appointed special officers called 'dharmamahamatra' to interpret and implement royal orders. He had his edicts engraved on pillars and rocks set up in public places all over his empire.



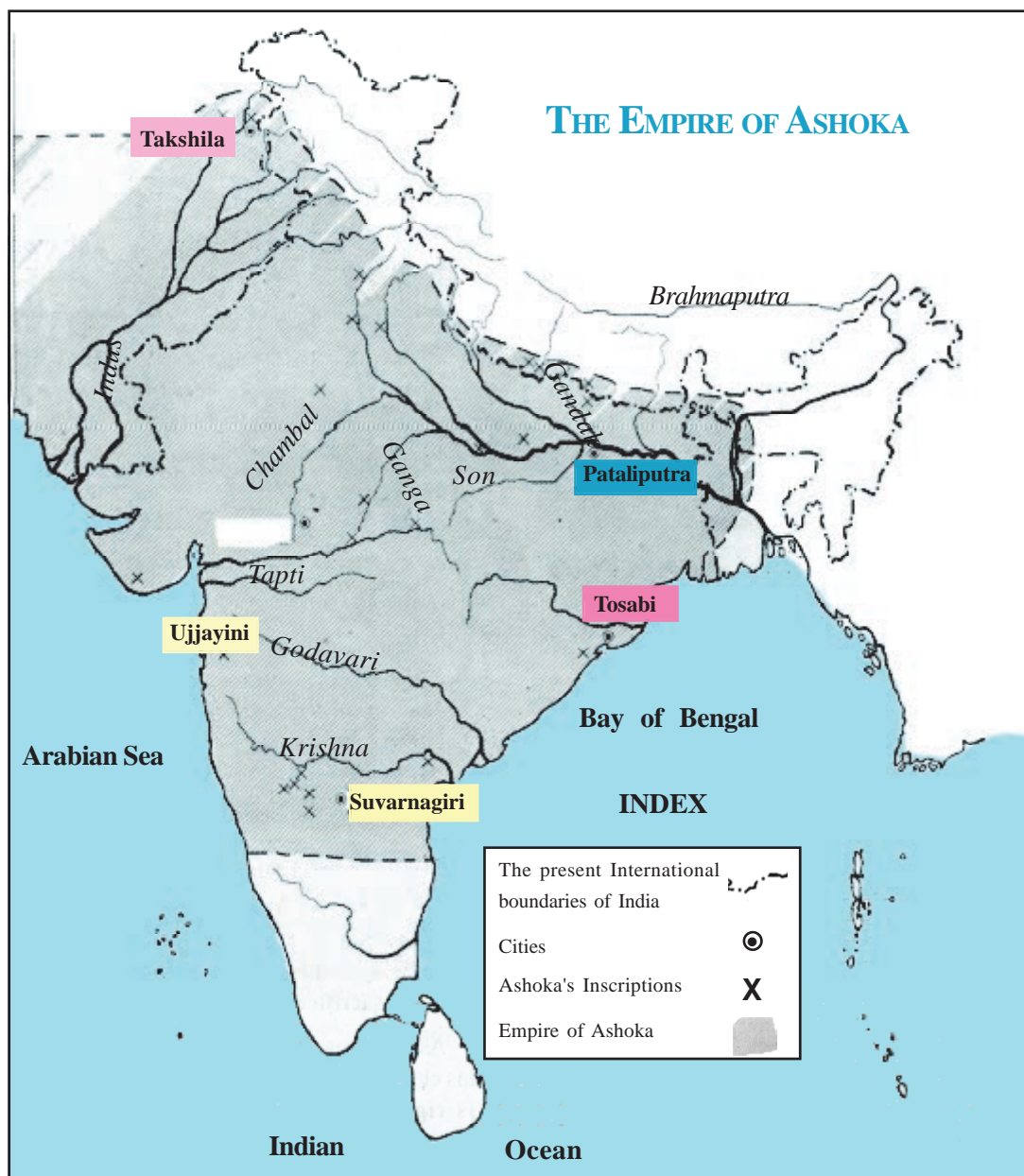
Pic7.3 Ashok Pillar

- 1. “No animal should be killed here. No sacrifices should be done. Earlier several animals were killed daily for the royal kitchen. Now only three- two peacocks and a deer - are killed. In future even these will not be killed.”**
- 2. "It is good to obey our parents. It is good to be generous towards our friends, relatives and labourers. It is good to spend little and save little.”**



3. “People perform various ceremonies on several occasions, such ceremonies should be performed, but they give little benefits. There are certain traditions which give more benefits - which are these? They are to respect elders, treat servants and slaves politely; not to be cruel to animals; give charity to brahmins and monks etc.”
4. "Use constraint while spreading your religion. To exaggerate the goodness of your religion and criticise other religions - both are wrong. At every place and every occasion one should show respect to other communities because if this is done then your community rises and other communities are also benefitted.”

Ashoka had got these edicts engraved in the Prakrit language.



Map 7.1



## ADMINISTRATION

In map number 7.1 you saw how large was Ashoka's empire. His capital was Patiliputra. It was not easy to rule such a large kingdom. He was assisted by a council of ministers called the Mantriparishad. The large empire was divided into four provinces. Taxila in north, Suwarnagiri in south, Tosali (Tosabi) in east and Ujjaini in west. Each province was placed under a governor called Kumara, who was usually a member of the royal family. There were several officers who would assist them in their work at the city and village level. They would collect taxes from farmers, artisans, businessmen and would punish those who disobeyed the orders of the king.

Besides them, there were other senior officers too who were called mahamatra. They would tour the entire kingdom and see to the administration. Ashoka himself would travel to interior villages to keep an eye on the work of the officers and to know the real condition of his subjects. He got several roads built with shady trees on either side. Several hospitals and inns were built and many wells were dug.

**Can you recall any other king like Ashoka who had worked for the benefit of his subjects ?**

Ashoka followed Buddhism, but he gave respect and donations to all religions. He would ask his people also to listen to and respect other religions too. Ashoka encouraged artists. The figure of four lions on our government documents and currency belongs to Ashoka's time. Even to day we are reminded of Ashoka when we see the statues and stone pillars at Sarnath and other places.

The Mauryan dynasty continued for about fifty years after Ashoka. Then it was replaced by several small kingdoms.

Ashoka's Sarnath pillar has been adopted as our national emblem because Ashoka's messages stand for the special significance of love, peace, compassion and respect to all religions.

## EXERCISE

### I. Make pairs:

	A	B
1.	Seleucas	Ruler of Magadha
2.	Bindusara	Prakrit language
3.	Ghanananda	Ashoka's father
4.	Ashoka's rock engravings	Greek general



## II. Answer the questions:

1. How did Chandragupta Maurya establish such a large empire?
2. Why did Ashoka take a vow that he would not go for war?
3. What steps had Ashoka taken for proper administration in his empire?
4. What do you think about Ashoka's 'dhamma'?
5. In the map of India, mark the empire of Ashoka.
6. How Ashoka used to reach the order of his state .Find out?

## III. Let us do something new

Make a list of those things where you can see Ashoka's symbols.

Discuss the things you observe in these symbols.

