

Revision Notes

Chapter – 8

Ashoka the Emperor who gave up War

- By the end of the Vedic period, the Aryan tribal settlements spread across the Indo-Gangetic plains grew into territorial divisions like Janapadas.

- One of the most powerful Janapadas, was that of Magadha under the Mauryas.

- **Rise of Magadha:**

- (i) The rise of Magadha is attributed to the fertile plains along the river Ganga.

- (ii) King Brihadratha was the first ruler of Magadh. King Bimbisara of the Haryanka dynasty was overthrown by the Shishunanga dynasty. The last Shishunanga ruler Kalasoka was assassinated by Mahapadmananda in 345 BCE, the first Nanda ruler.

- (iii) Around 326 BC, Greek ruler Alexander invaded India. At that time Magadha was ruled by Nandas.

- (iv) The Nanda rulers who had humiliated Chanakya were overthrown by Chandragupta who established the Mauryan empire in 321 BC with his capital at Patliputra.

- (v) Besides Patliputra, Ujjain and Taxila were also important cities in Chandragupta's reign. Taxila was a gateway to the North-West, including Central Asia, while Ujjain lay on the route from North to South India.

- (vi) Chandragupta captured Punjab, Gujarat, Afghanistan. He even defeated Greek ruler Seleucus Nicator in 305 BC. Chandragupta thereafter built one of the largest empires ever in Indian sub-continent.

- (vii) Chandragupta's empire extended from Bengal to most of the Indian sub-continent. After unifying India, Chandragupta established a strong central administration from Patliputra.

- (viii) After ruling for 25 years, Chandragupta became a Jain ascetic and gave his kingdom to his son Bindusara who further expanded it southwards.

• **Ashoka: From a Warrior to Messenger of Peace:**

- (i) Bindusara was succeeded by his son Ashoka, the greatest Mauryan emperor.
- (ii) He undertook military campaign against Kalinga. After defeating it he saw a pool of blood and was so much moved that he decided not to fight any more wars.
- (iii) The sight of large scale killing moved Ashoka and he embraced Buddhism.
- (iv) He began to spread the teachings of Buddha not only in India but also abroad.
- (v) His philosophy called 'Dhamma' was spread all over. Ashoka's dharma did not involve worship of God, or performance of sacrifice. He preached peace, tolerance, shunning violence, stopping animal sacrifice and respect of slaves by their masters.
- (vi) He sent missionaries called 'Dhamma Mahamattas' to Sri Lanka, Burma and South-east Asian countries to teach people about Buddhism.

• **Mauryan Administration:**

- (i) The Central administration was headed by the king who was the supreme judge and the law giver.
- (ii) The Mauryan Empire was divided into four provinces with imperial capital at Patliputra. The area around Patliputra was under the direct control of the emperor.
- (iii) The provincial administration was headed by a governor who was generally a Kumara or an Aryapura.
- (iv) Kumar was assisted by Mahamatyas and council of ministers.
- (v) The provinces were divided into district or Janapada. It had three important officials called Pradeshika, Rajuka and Yukta.
- (vi) Officials were appointed to collect taxes. Officials also punished those who disobeyed rulers orders. Many of these officials were given salaries.
- (vi) Centres of regional power were protected with forts (durga) while state operations were funded with treasury (kosa).

• **Military System:**

- (i) The Mauryas had established a vast empire with the help of a powerful army.
- (ii) Megasthenes, a Greek ambassador served Chandragupta in his court for four years and wrote Indica, in which he described Chandragupta's administration.
- (iii) The Arthashastra, written by Chanakya mentions three types of soldiers namely, hereditary fighting class, mercenaries willing to fight for any government which engaged their services; and artisans.
- (iv) The army consisted of 6,00,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry, 3,000 chariots and 9,000 elephants.
- (v) The army administration was under a commander-in-chief.
- (vi) There were six specialised departments to look after the military administration.
- (vii) Further the king appointed a number of trusted secret servicemen as spies. It helped the king to know what people thought about him.

• **Achievements of Mauryas:**

- (i) The agriculture was the main occupation of the Mauryas.
- (ii) In addition, merchants were also found in large numbers.
- (iii) Division in society was based on the different occupations of people.
- (iv) The position of women also underwent a change. Though they were respected they had to face discrimination. Purdah system was not known but the practice of sati was prevalent.
- (iv) Mauryan art and architecture in the form of stupas, viharas, pillars and rock edicts is very popular.
- (v) Megasthenes Indica and Kautilya's Arthshastra are two valuable sources of knowing about the Mauryas.
- (vi) The state became weak politically and financially after the death of Ashoka and started declining.