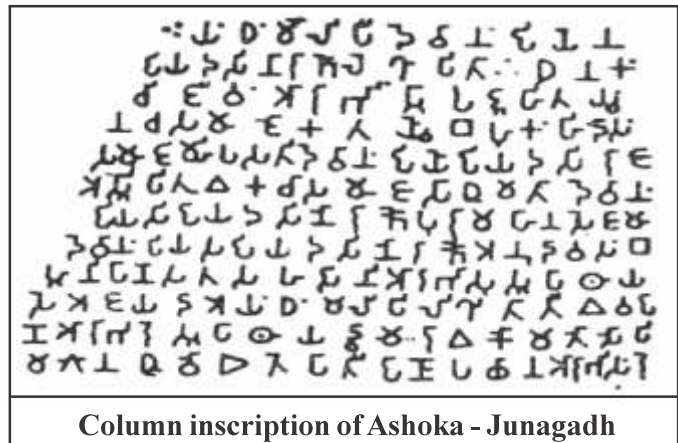


In Indian History, the emergence of Maurya Empire is viewed with great significance. This empire began with Chandragupta Maurya (321 B.C.). Several sources are available to study the history of Mauryan age. The most important source is 44 inscriptions. The language of inscriptions is Pali. Stone inscription of Asoka is the oldest relic of written documents. The currency coins of that time too have been found. The palace made by Chandragupta Maurya and its remnants and the idols too present before us the history of that time.

Among the other important sources of studying the history of Maurya are the 'Arthashastra' of Kautilya and Indica written by Megasthenes. 'Arthashastra' is the important book written during Maurya administration. It explains the principles of governance, the type of state, the rules and the works the officers have to perform, duties of citizens and relation with foreign countries. Greek ambassador Megasthenes had come to the court of the king. He had written a book named Indica. He has described about the



Column inscription of Ashoka - Junagadh

Mauryan cities and their administration. He has described in detail about the administrative system of Patlaiputra and made important note on the varna system of India. Deepvansha of Sri Lanka and such other Buddhist books are also good sources of the history of Mauryan Empire. "Mudraarakshasa", the play written by great play writer, Vishakhadatta also throws light on the Mauryan Empire history.

'Arthashastra' of Kautilya

Economics was written by the teacher of Chandragupta Maurya, Kautilya, also known as Chanakya. It is a great book, which explains the type of the Mauryan-time state, its principles and the function of the king. He had remained a guide to Chandragupta and Bindusara. He had constructed the saptang principle of state. He has also explained the tax system and its political form. However it does not seem that this book was written by only one person because it also contains the mention of officers of the time of Ashoka. This indicates that some addition must have been done in later time. However, in order to know the ancient political system, the 'Arthashastra' of Kautilya is the best historical material.

Political Condition Prior to the Rise of Mauryan Age

It has already been discussed in the preceding chapter about the rise of Magadha state, Iranian attack and Macedonian (Greece) attack. The biggest effect of the attack of Sikander is that Kautilya and Chandragupta had some success in Punjab and that increased their strength. They raised an army in 321 B.C. which was able to defeat Dhanananda, the last ruler of Nanda dynasty and established Mauryan Empire. Chandragupta had a huge army of Dhanananda at his disposal, which helped in developing the Mauryan Empire very quickly.

Chandragupta Maurya (321 B.C. to 297 B.C.)

Maurya Empire began with Chandragupta Maurya (321 B.C.). He ruled over it till 297 B.C.. During this time he conquered states of North India including Gujarat from North-West of India. In 305 B.C. Chandragupta

Maurya fought against Greek king Seleucus Nicator, in which probably Chandragupta was a winner. After this, there was a peace agreement between both and the daughter of Seleucus was married to Chandragupta Maurya. Due to this, the rule of Chandragupta was expanded up to Central Asia. The ambassador of Seleucus, Megasthenes had come to the court of Chandragupta. Thus from the time of Chandragupta, the tradition of having relations with foreign rules had begun. When he died, his son Bindusar received a great Empire in heritage. According to Jain tradition, Chandragupta handed over the empire to Bindusar and went with Jain Muni Bhadrabahu to South India (Mount Chandra, Shravan Belagoa) and left the body (kayaklesha).

Bindusar (297 B.C. to 273 B.C.)

After Chandragupta, his son, Bindusar came to the throne, who was as effective as his father. Actually he had played a major role in the victories of Chandragupta Maurya. However, not enough information is available about him compared to Chandragupta and Ashoka. He also had given importance to the Greek and other global rules of that time in cultural exchanges. In his time, in his empire there were five capitals of five provinces. Ashok was the head of Ujjainee province, his elder son was that of Takshshila province. There are proof s of revolt in Takshshila during the time of Bindusar. Bindusar believed in life-long (aajivaka) sect (sampradaya). The borders of Maurya Empire had already expanded from Central Asia to South India.



Extent of Ashok's Empire

Emperor Ashoka (273 B.C. to 232 B.C.)

A successor to Bindusar, Ashoka developed an excellent system of administration. According to Bauddha tradition, Ashoka assassinated 99 of his brothers and acquired the throne. However the historians do not agree to it. The only important war by Ashoka in his life time was with Kalinga (261 B.C.). In this war thousands of people lost their lives and the same number of people were made prisoners of war. Because of this bloodshed Ashoka repented and he gave up the policy of expanding his empire by war. He adopted the path of Dharma (religion) to conquer. He spent his entire life in the expansion and propagation of Buddhist religion. After Ashoka, his successors were unable to preserve the empire, and the last king of Maurya dynasty, Bruhdrath was assassinated by his commandant

Pushpamitra Shung, who destroyed the empire. Thus a great empire was destroyed.

Emperor Ashoka and Buddhist Religion

In the Indian history Ashoka is in the front row of greatest rulers. In comparison to his political policies his religious policies were more special and benevolent. Most of the historians opine that Ashoka had accepted Bauddha Dharma and had been propagating and spreading the principles of Buddhist religion through Dhamma. The religion of Ashoka was the religion of humanity. It was based on the ideal social relations and conduct. He established such an ideal society and insisted the people to walk on that path. Though he was a Buddhist, he had equal respect for all the religions. Therefore he can be considered the propagator of human religion.

In some of the stone inscriptions of Ashoka, there are features of Dhamma. In the stone inscriptions there is a mention of kindness, donation, truthfulness, holiness, good thought and good conduct. People should respect mother-father, elders, brahmins and shramanas.



Emperor Ashoka

In order that people practise and follow religious life, he had appointed officers named as dharmamahapattas. It is mentioned that king Priyadarshin respects all the religions. He had advocated people to adopt the ideals of Buddhist religion.

In other stone inscriptions, there is an insistence. He has said that the people remain away from anger, jealousy, violence and misconduct. Social gatherings and fairs must be stopped. And the killing of animals also had to stop. He had almost stopped the killing of animals in his royal kitchen.

For the welfare of the people, he had told to construct good roadways, hospitals, wells and rest houses for the citizens.

The empire of Ashoka was huge. There were various kinds of people of various cultural, social and religious beliefs, who lived side by side. Due to emergence of difference of opinions there could be political conflict. In order to solve it, he had two alternatives: (1) to increase the number of soldiers, for which tax had to be increased. However due to increase in tax people might turn against the state. (2) To establish unity and good will among the people of different cultural and social groups. Ashoka accepted the latter. In the history of India he was the first exponent of a policy of good will and peace instead of war and invasions.



Sanchi's Stupa

Maurya Administrative System

The Mauryas initiated an excellent system of administration. One gets the idea of administrative system from Kautilya's 'Arthashastra'. In the administration the role of king was pivotal. For the assistance in administration a council of ministers was formed. However the ultimate decision was of the king with regard to tax-system, law, justice, war and external affairs. King used to gather shrewdly the information about the administrative officers. The network of espionage of Mauryas was unique. The king used to give information through inscriptions on stones. It is written in stone inscription of king Ashoka that even a common man could approach king as and when required. For him, the people were like his children to him and as a king he thought good of all.

There were many ministers in the council of ministers, who were known as amatyas, mahapattas and adhyakshas. A list of 27 various portfolios, their ministers and adhyakshas is found in the administrative system of Mauryas. The 'Arthashastra' of Kautilya gives such a list. For example, the agriculture department was called Seeta and the head was called Seetadyaksha. Apart from it, Office of external affairs, Mine department, Trade department and Army-department were the most important ones. Among the employees or officers, the office of Samaharta was very important. In modern times what the collector does, such a work was assigned to Samaharta. He used to collect taxes and law and order was also under him. He was the administrative head of the district and the entire administrative system worked under him.

In the Maurya Empire the army's contribution was quite huge. According to one Greek author, the Maurya army had 6 lakhs infantry; 30,000 cavalry; 9,000 elephant lore; and 8000 chariots. It seems that these figures are a bit exaggerated. But it is clear that they had a huge army. Megasthenes has mentioned different roles of different branches. He has also told the story of the security guard (antapala) of the fort.

Megasthenes has given important information about the organization system of Pataliputra. According to his opinion, six committees of 5 members each took care of the administration of Pataliputra. In modern times what we call passport was known as *mudra* in the times of Mauryas. One committee kept information on import-export taxes and another of the statistical data of birth and deaths. Thus many features of modern governance can be seen during Maurya reign.

The judiciary system too of Mauryas was highly efficient. The king was the highest judge. Their judiciary system had reached the level of the villages. Both the *Diwani* and *Faujdari* types of courts were found. In villages the *panchayat* did the work of Justice. There were two types of courts namely *Dharmasthiya* and *Kantakashodhan*, which were eventually turned in *Diwani* and *Faujdari*. Maurya Empire was divided in to four parts except the capital of Magadha. The capital of North-West was Takshashila, and Suvarnagiri that of South India. Tosalee and Ujjainee were of East and West India respectively. Mostly the princes, who were known as ‘*kumar*’, were appointed in these places. The intention of the king was that by working as a head of a part, he might be ready to undertake the entire empire. However, the administrative system of the centre was under the king himself. From Chandragupta Maurya to Ashoka there was continuity in the administrative system.

The Economic System of the Maurya Period

The main base of Economic system was agriculture. The Maurya administration tried to use the unproductive land. They even searched for new places and helped the people to reside in new villages from the dense populations. The king was the owner of all the land; *Sitadyaksha* was the head of Agriculture system. However the farmer himself was the owner of his land. Mauryas understood the importance of irrigation. Chandragupta inspired the people to construct Sudarshan Lake. The farmers having irrigation facilities were taxed more.

During the Maurya Empire, trade and commerce had developed to new heights. Varanasi, Mathura, Gandhar, Ujjain, Bengal and Gujarat were important centres of trade and commerce. The production of metal was an important economic activity. The transportation was managed by water way and land ways. Pataliputra was in constant touch with the entire India through various trade ways. It used to remain in constant contact from Bengal to Takshashila and Takshashila to the markets of Centrai Asia. Tamralipi in West Bengal and Bharuch in Gujarat of Western India were international ports. Chandragupta made a special way from Tamralipti via Takshashila to Central Asia, which was repaired by Sher Shah and later by Dalhousie in 19th century. It was later known as Grand Trunk Road.

The important aspect of trade was the development of sculpture. The traders and the skilled workers unitedly worked making chains or guild. The production of iron was monopolized as it was an important metal useful in agriculture, trade and military. The super officer, *lohadhyaksha* was keeping a watch over it.

The Society of Mauryan Period

After the advent of Bauddha and Jain dharms some changes had evolved in the fields of religion and society. However the Varna system was still very strong. But due to the development of trade and commerce, there was an improvement in the status of Vaishya and Shudras. Shudras were then associated with agriculture and sculpture.

Mauryan Art, Architecture and Inscriptions

Mauryan Empire has contributed a great deal in the ancient Indian sculpture and art. Megasthenes has described that Chandragupta Maurya resided in a majestic Palace in Pataliputra. But because it was a wooden palace nothing of it remained. During this period the art of carving of idols from stones was quite developed. Such examples are found in Rampurva, Lorianandagadha and Ashoka pillars in Sarnath. Our national symbol of the four lions is copied from the columns of Ashoka in Sarnath. These columns are round, carved out from a single stone. These columns were made out of sand stones of Chunar village, near Mirzapur of Uttar Pradesh. They were then erected in different parts of India. It is an example of the excellent transport system. Among the caves of the Mauryan time found in mountains, the important ones are those found from mounts of Barabar near Gaya in Bihar. The cave of Lomesh rishi is the best among those caves. Idols of stones and mud have also been discovered. They are well polished. Prominent are the yaksh and yakshnees idols found near Didarganj.

Fall of Maurya Empire

Mauryas had a huge army and effective administration, which ruled over major parts of India. But after the death of Ashoka, the Maurya dynasty diminished. The Empire was divided in two parts. East belonged to king Dasharatha whereas Western empire was under the rule of king Samprati. The obvious question is how such a great Empire could collapse so suddenly.

Some historians put the blame on Ashoka for the fall of Maurya Empire. Ashoka came under the effect of Bauddha dharma and adopted peaceful policy which made the army weak. Simultaneously, the Brahmins became the foes because of the preferential treatment given to Bauddha Dharma. Ashoka had banned the animal sacrifices, which had its impact on the religious rituals and that impacted the economic condition of Brahmins. Pushamitra Shunga was the Brahmin general of Mauryan ruler, Bruhadratha. He assassinated the last of Maurya rulers and established the rule of Shunga dynasty. Some historians blame the weak successive kings for the fall of Maurya dynasty.

Some historians suggest that the economic administration was responsible for the fall of the empire. Mauryas had monopolized the trade and commerce and even the coins of Mauryan times seem simple. The money must have been over spent in administration and religious or charity works resulting into the decline of economy. In such a huge empire the central system was in the hands of dynastic tradition. The successors after Ashoka could not maintain the balance between the centre and the provinces.

Contacts with Foreign Countries

India's contact with foreign countries began with Chandragupta Maurya. Chandragupta established political and cultural relations with the Greeks. Seleucus Nicator had a war with him. After that, he married the daughter of this Greek ruler. Thus the foreign policy began with the marriage of Chandragupta Maurya. Megasthenis was the Greek ambassador in his court. During Bindusar and Ashoka, the contacts with foreign countries continued. Greeks used to call Bindusar amitraghata. Bindusar had also strong political relation with the ruler of Suria. During Ashoka's time, there emerged special political and cultural contacts with Egypt and Shreelanka.

Heritage of Maurya Age

In the Indian history, Mauryan Empire was the first great Empire. From the point of view of expansion in the Indian history it is unique. It can be compared with the British Empire, which came much later. The border of the Empire was from South Karnataka to Central Asia, which was unique for that time.

This empire gave India a special state system. Its administration system was not only important for ancient times but in Indian History it has a great significance. Its administration was secular and of modern type. Its tax format was peculiar. The administration was comprehensive from province to the villages. Everyone's duties were decided. Ashoka had even appointed new officers called dharmamahamatra for peaceful policy. In short, administration was involved in the works of the welfare of the people.

EXERCISE

1. Answer the following questions in detail :

- (1) Explain the condition prior to the establishment of Maurya Empire.
- (2) Discuss the achievements of Chandragupta Maurya.
- (3) Describe the contribution of Emperor Ashoka in the development.
- (4) Explain the administration system of Maurya period.
- (5) Give information about the art of Maurya period.

2. Answer the following questions briefly :

- (1) What message is received from the inscriptions of Ashoka?
- (2) Write in a short note on Bindusara.
- (3) Write about the 'Arthashastra' of Kautilya.
- (4) Give an idea of Indica.
- (5) Explain the relation of Maurya Empire with foreign countries.

3. Choose the correct option from the given alternatives and give answers :

- (1) In which script are the inscriptions of Ashoka ?
(A) Brahmi (B) Kharoshthi (C) Aramaic (D) All three
- (2) By what, did Ashoka repent ?
(A) Junagadh (B) Karnataka (C) Ujjain (D) Kalinga
- (3) Who is the author of 'Arthashastra' ?
(A) Chanakya (B) Kalidasa (C) Ashoka (D) Chandragupta
- (4) Megasthenes was an ambassador of which country?
(A) Syria (B) Iran (C) Iraq (D) Greece
- (5) Whose daughter was Greek girl Helen to whom Chandragupta had married?
(A) Megasthenes (B) Seleucus (C) Alexander (D) Philip

