CHAPTER 7.1

MAURYAN EMPIRE

Introduction

- With the foundation of the Mauryan Empire (322 BCE-185 BCE), for the first time in the history of India, the political unity was achieved.
- The history writing has also become clear from this period onwards due to accuracy in chronology and sources. Besides plenty of indigenous and foreign literary sources, a number of epigraphic records are also available to construct the history of this period.

Literary & Non-Literary Sources

Kautilya’s Arthashastra
- Arthashastra in Sanskrit was written by Kautilya, a contemporary and mentor of Chandragupta Maurya. (Kautilya was also called ‘Indian Machiavelli’.)
- The manuscript of Arthashastra was first discovered by R. Shamashastry in 1904.
- The Arthashastra contains 15 books and 180 chapters but it can be divided into three parts:
  - First part deals with the king and his council and the departments of government;
  - Second part deals with civil and criminal law; and
  - Third part deals with diplomacy and war.
- It is the most important literary source for the history of the Mauryas.

Vishakhadatta’s Mudrarakshasa
- The Mudrarakshasa written by Vishakhadatta is a drama in Sanskrit.
- Although written during the Gupta period, it describes how Chandragupta with the assistance of Kautilya overthrew the Nandas.
- It also gives a picture of the socio-economic condition under the Mauryas.

Megasthenes’ Indica
- Megasthenes was the Greek ambassador in the court of Chandragupta Maurya.
- Megasthenes book Indica has survived only in fragments. Yet, Indica gives details about the Mauryan administration, particularly the administration of the capital city of Pataliputra and also the military organization.
Details given on contemporary social life is notable.

Other Literatures

- Apart from these three important works, the Puranas and the Buddhist literature such as Jatakas provide information on the Mauryas.
- The Ceylonese Chronicles Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa throw light on the role of Asoka in spreading Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Archeological Sources

- Among the archaeological sources of the Mauryan period, a considerable amount of numismatic (the study of coins) evidence, some artifacts from archaeological excavations and art objects are available.
- A large number of silver and copper coins which are punch-marked are also available. These appear to have been in circulation throughout the Mauryan period.
- These coins provide some knowledge of socio-economic life of the Mauryan period. For example, Chandragupta was depicted standing with a Greek queen in one of his coins which reveals friendly relations between Magadha and Greece.
- Inscriptions of Asoka engraved on rocks and pillars have supplied the authoritative details of inestimable value.
- Asokan edicts were found not only in the Indian sub-continent but also in Kandhar in Afghanistan.
- These inscriptions are in the form of 44 royal orders and each royal order has several copies. The inscriptions were composed in the Prakrit language and written in the Brahmi script (written from left to right) throughout the empire.
- In the north-western part, they appear in the Kharoshti script written from right to left, and in Kandhar region, it is in the Greek and Aramaic script.
- These inscriptions were generally placed on highways.
- They throw light on the career of Asoka, his external and domestic policies and the extent of his empire.
- Cunningham published Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum (1879), which is a series of collection of inscriptions bearing on the history of Maurya, post-Maurya and Gupta times.
- Junagadh rock inscription of Rudradaman, 150 AD (also known as Girnar rock inscription) also offers some useful inputs into the provincial administration of Gujarat under the Mauryas.

Things to Know

- Epigraphy: The study and interpretation of ancient inscriptions. It is referred to as ‘Lifeblood of history’.
- Paleography: The study of ancient writing systems and the deciphering and dating of historical manuscripts.
- Numismatics: The study or collection of currency, including coins, tokens, paper money, and related objects.
- Largest number of punch-marked coins found under the Mauryas.
- Largest number of coins in general found in the Post-Mauryan period.
- Largest number of clay coins found under the Kushan.
- Largest number of potin and lead coins found under the Satvahan.
- Largest number of gold coins found under the Guptas.
Political History of the Mauryas

Chandragupta Maurya (322-298 BC)

- Chandragupta Maurya was the founder of the Mauryan Empire. Chandragupta has been called Sandrocottus by the Greek scholars.
- He captured Pataliputra from the last ruler of the Nanda dynasty, Dhanananda.
- In this task he was assisted by Kautilya, who was also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta.
- After firmly establishing his power in the Gangetic valley, he marched to the north-west and subdued the territories up to the Indus. Then he moved to central India and occupied the region north of Narmada river.
- In 305 B.C., he marched against Seleucus Niketar, who was Alexander’s General controlling the north-western India, and defeated him and a treaty was signed.
- As per the treaty, Selukas Niketar ceded the trans-Indus territories - namely Aria, Arakosia and Gedrosia - to the Mauryan Empire. He also gave his daughter in marriage to the Mauryan prince. Chandragupta made a gift of 500 elephants to Selukas.
- Megasthenes was sent to the Mauryan court as Greek ambassador.
- Chandragupta embraced Jainism towards the end of his life and stepped down from the throne in favour of his son Bindusara. Then he went to Sravana Belgola, near Mysore along with Jain monks led by Bhadraprabhu and starved himself to death (Sallekhana).

Bindusara (298 -273 BC)

- Bindusara was called by the Greeks as “Amitragatha” meaning slayer of enemies.
- He conquered the Deccan up to Mysore. Taranatha, the Tibetan monk states that Bindusara conquered 16 states comprising ‘the land between the two seas.
- The Sangam Tamil literature also confirms the Mauryan invasion of the far south.
- Bindusara received Deimachus as ambassador from the Syrian king Antiochus I.
- Bindusara wrote to Antiochus I asking for sweet wine, dried figs and a sophist. (The latter sent all but a sophist because the Greek law prohibited sending a sophist.)
- Bindusara supported the Ajivikas, a religious sect.
- Bindusara appointed his son Asoka as the governor of Ujjain.

Asoka the Great (273-232 BC)

- Asoka acted as Governor of Ujjain and also suppressed a revolt in Taxila during his father Bindusara’s reign.
- There was an interval of four years between Asoka’s accession to the throne (273 B.C.) and his actual coronation (269 B.C.). Therefore, it appears from the available evidence that there was a struggle for the throne after Bindusara’s death.
The Ceylonese Chronicles, Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa state that Asoka captured power after killing his ninety-nine brothers including his elder brother Susima. The youngest brother Tissa was spared.

According to Taranatha of Tibet, Asoka killed only six of his brothers.

Asoka’s Edict also refers to his brothers acting as officers in his administration.

The most important event of Asoka’s reign was his victorious war with Kalinga in 261 B.C. After the war he annexed Kalinga to the Mauryan Empire.

Although there is no detail about the cause and course of the war, the effects of the war were described by Asoka himself in the Rock edict XIII: “A hundred and fifty thousand were killed and many times that number perished...”

Another most important effect of the Kalinga war was that Asoka embraced Buddhism under the influence of Buddhist monk, Upagupta.

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### Approximate Dates of Maurya Dynasty Rulers

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emperor</th>
<th>Reign start</th>
<th>Reign end</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chandragupta Maurya</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dasaratha</td>
<td>232 B.C.E.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samprati</td>
<td>224 B.C.E.</td>
<td>215 B.C.E.</td>
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<td>Salisuka</td>
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<td>202 B.C.E.</td>
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<td>Devavarman</td>
<td>202 B.C.E.</td>
<td>195 B.C.E.</td>
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<td>Satadhanvan</td>
<td>195 B.C.E.</td>
<td>187 B.C.E.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brihadratha</td>
<td>187 B.C.E.</td>
<td>185 B.C.E.</td>
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(Brihadratha, the last king of the Mauryan dynasty was killed by Pushyaimitra Sunga, the founder of Sunga dynasty.)

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### Asoka and Buddhism

- Asoka appointed special officers called Dharma Mahamatras to speed up the progress of Dhamma.
- In 241 B.C., he visited the birth place of Buddha, the Lumbini Garden, near Kapilavastu.
- He also visited other holy places of Buddhism like Sarnath, Sravasti and Kushinara.
- He sent a mission to Sri Lanka under his son Mahendra and daughter Sangamitra who planted there the branch of the original Bodhi tree.
- Asoka convened the Third Buddhist Council at Pataliputra in 240 B.C. in order to strengthen the Sangha. It was presided over by Moggaliputta Tissa.

### Extent of Asoka’s Empire

- Asoka’s inscriptions mention the southernmost kingdoms - Cholas, Pandyas, Satyaputras and Keralaputras as border states. Therefore, these states remained outside the Mauryan Empire.
According to Rajatarangini, Kashmir was a part of the Mauryan Empire. Nepal was also within the Mauryan empire. The north-western frontier was already demarcated by Chandragupta Maurya.

Asoka’s Dhamma

Although Asoka embraced Buddhism and took efforts to spread Buddhism, his policy of Dhamma was a still broad concept. It was a way of life, a code of conduct and a set of principles to be adopted and practiced by the people at large.

His principles of Dhamma were clearly stated in his Edicts.

The main features of Asoka’s Dhamma as mentioned in his various Edicts may be summed as follows:
- Service to father and mother, practice of ahimsa, love of truth, reverence to teachers and good treatment of relatives.
- Prohibition of animal sacrifices and festive gatherings and avoiding expensive and meaningless ceremonies and rituals.
- Efficient organization of administration in the direction of social welfare and maintenance of constant contact with people through the system of Dhammayatras.
- Humane treatment of servants by masters and prisoners by government officials.
- Consideration and non-violence to animals and courtesy to relations and liberality to Brahmans.
- Tolerance among all the religious sects.
- Conquest through Dhamma instead of war.

- The concept of non-violence and other similar ideas of Asoka’s Dhamma are identical with the teachings of Buddha.
- Asoka did not equate Dhamma with Buddhist teachings.
- Asoka's Dhamma signifies a general code of conduct. Asoka wished that his Dhamma should spread through all social levels.

The Rock Edicts which talk about dhamma are as follows:

- **Major Rock Edict I**: Declares prohibition of animal sacrifice and holiday of fest gatherings.
- **Major rock edict II**: Relates to certain measures of social welfare which are included in the working of dhamma. It mention about medical treatment for men and animals, construction of roads, wells, tree planting etc.
- **Major Rock Edict III**: Declares that liberty towards Brahmans and Sramanas is a virtue, respect to mother and father, etc are all good qualities. Asoka refers Major Rock Edict III to Anusamyana or ‘tour of inspection’ which some categories of officials has to undertake once every five years for expounding dhamma and for official work.
- **Major Rock Edict IV**: The edict comments that due to the policy of dhamma, the lack of morality and disrespect towards Brahmans and Sramanas, violence, unseemly behaviours to friends, relatives and others, and evils of this kind have been checked. The killing of animals to a large extent was also stopped.
- **Major Rock Edict V**: Refers to the appointment of Dhamma-mahamattas for the first time in the twelfth year of his reign. These special officers were appointed by the king to look after the interests of all sects and religions and spread the message of dhamma in each nook and corner of the society.
- **Major Rock Edict VI**: It is an instruction to dhamma-mahamattas. They are told that they could bring their reports to the king at any time, irrespective of whatever activity he may be engaged in. The second part of the Edict deals with speedy administration and smooth transaction of business.
- **Major Rock Edict VII**: It is a plea for toleration amongst all the sects. It appears from the edict that tensions among the sects were expressed intense perhaps in open antagonism. The plea is part of the overall strategy to maintain unity.
- **Major Rock Edict VIII**: States that dhammayatras or tours would be undertaken by the emperor. The earlier practice of the emperor of going out on hunting expeditions was given up. Dhammayatras enabled the emperor to come into contact with various sections of people in the empire.
- **Major Rock Edict IX**: Attacks ceremonies performed after birth, illness, marriage and before setting out for a journey. It talks about censure passed against ceremonies observed by wives and mothers. Asoka instead lays stress on the practice of dhamma and uselessness of ceremonies.
- **Major Rock Edict X**: Denounces fame and glory and re-asserts the merits of following the policy of dhamma.
- **Major Rock Edict XI**: It is a further explanation of the policy of dhamma. Emphasis is on respect to elders, abstaining from killing animals, and liberality towards friends.
Facts to Know

Asoka in rock Edict XII and many other edicts prescribes the following codes to be followed:

- Obedience to mother and father, elders teachers and other respectable persons.
- Respect towards teachers.
- Proper treatment towards ascetics, relations, slaves, servants and dependents, the poor and miserable, friends, acquaintances, and companions.
- Liberality towards ascetics, friends, comrades, relatives and the aged.
- Abstention from killing of living beings.
- Non-injury to all living creatures.
- Spending little and accumulating little wealth.
- Mildness in case of all living creatures.
- Truthfulness.
- Attachment to morality.
- Purity of heart.

Causes for Policy of Dhamma

- The policy was nurtured in the mind of Asoka and through it he attempted to resolve some of the tensions within the society.
- Asoka’s private beliefs and his own perceptions of how he should respond to the problems of his empire were responsible for the formulation of the policy of dhamma. The immediate social environment in which Asoka grew up influenced him in the later years of his life.
- The Mauryan kings are known to have adopted an ecclesiastical outlook. Chandragupta took recourse to Jainism in his later years and Bindusara favoured the Ajivikas. Asoka himself adopted Buddhism in his personal life, though he never imposed Buddhism on his subjects.
- By the time Asoka ascended the throne, the Mauryan imperial system had become a complex phenomenon and encompassed various cultures, beliefs, and social and political patterns. Asoka had to either maintain the structure by force, which would incur tremendous expenses, or to define a set of social norms which would be acceptable to all, cutting across all social practices and religious beliefs.
- Asoka was aware of the tensions with the rise of heterodox sects like Buddhism, Jainism and Ajivikism had generated in society. They were all opposed to the domination of the Brahmanas in some way or the other and had a growing number of supporters. But the Brahmanas continued to have strong hold on society and some measure of hostility was inevitable. It was essential to bring a climate of harmony and mutual trust in a situation such as this.
- There were obviously many areas within the empire where neither Brahmanical system nor the major heterodox sects prevailed. Asoka himself refers to the country of the Yavanas where neither Brahmanical nor Brahmanical culture was in vogue.
- Besides, there were many tribal areas in the empire where people were obviously not familiar either with Brahmanical or heterodox ideas. To make the empire survive and to bring some measure of cohesion within the empire in the midst of such diversity it was essential that there should be some common pattern of behaviour and common approach to the problems of society.
- The complexity of the state system demanded an imaginative policy from the emperor which required minimal use of force in such a large empire having diverse forms of economy and religions. It could not have been controlled by an army alone. A more feasible alternative was the propagation of a policy that would work at an ideological level and reach out to all sections of the society.
An Estimate of King Asoka

- Asoka was "the greatest of kings" surpassing Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar and other renowned Emperors of the world.
- According to H.G. Wells, "Amidst the tens and thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, the name of Asoka shines and shines almost alone, a star".
- Asoka Dhamma is so universal that it appeals to humanity even today.
- He was an example in history for his benevolent administration and also for following the policy of non-aggression even after his victory in the war. His central ideal was to promote the welfare of humanity.

Later Mauryas

- Asoka's death in 232 B.C. was followed by the division of the Mauryan Empire into two parts - western and eastern. The western part was ruled by Kunala, son of Asoka and the eastern part by Dasaratha, one of the grand sons of Asoka.
- Due to the Bactrian invasions, the western part of the empire collapsed. The eastern part was intact under Samprati, successor of Dasaratha.
- The last Mauryan king was Brihatratha, who was assassinated by Pushyamitra Sunga.

Foreign Relations

- The Asokan inscriptions are one of the main sources in this regard which mention contemporary rulers in other parts of the world.
- The foreign relations of the Mauryas can be divided into distinct phases- the initial phase of expansion and the latter phase or the phase of consolidation.
- The initial phase was marked by an aggressive foreign policy and a policy of securing trade routes and subjugating the Greek settlements in the north and north-west regions. The incorporation of central India gave them control over Dakshinapatha and brought them into the peninsula. The initial phase of expansion came to an end after the Kalinga war.
- During the second phase, the emphasis shifted to consolidation and having friendly relations with immediate neighbours and also with far off countries. Asoka was the main proponent of such a policy and he was probably influenced by diplomatic requirements, geographical proximity and trade needs.
- In Rock Edict XIII, Asoka has referred to five contemporary rulers.
  - Antiyoka (Antiochus II of Syria)
  - Turmaya (Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt)
  - Antikini (Antigonus of Macedonia)
  - Maka (Magas of Cyrene)
  - Aliksudaro (Alexander of Epirus)
- The reference to these rulers is in the context of dhammavijata (victory by dhamma) indicating that missions were sent to these rulers with the message of dhamma.
- These missions successfully established friendly contact for the Edict mentions that the greatest victory, i.e., victory by dhamma had been achieved in these regions.
The relations of the Mauryas with the powers in the south have been cordial.

No Asokan inscriptions have been discovered so far in the regions ruled by the Cholas, Pandyas, Keralaputras and Satyaputras - the major independent powers in the south.

Rock Edict XIII mentions about dhammavijya in these regions as well.

Sri Lanka remained another friendly neighbour again due to the policy of dhamma.

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### Mauryan Administration

#### Central Administration

- Under the Mauryan Empire, for the first time India attained political unity and administrative uniformity.
- After establishing the empire, the Mauryas organised a very elaborate system of administration. Megasthenes has left detailed accounts of the system of government under Chandragupta. His account can be supplemented by that of Kautilya.
- With the increase in the size and administrative needs of the state from a small tribal state to a territorial empire, there was a corresponding increase in the powers of the king.
- The king emerged as the supreme head of the state military, judicial, executive and legislative functions.
- The concept of law as the legal expression of socio-economic and political rules, customs was made subordinate to the concept of royal decree, having an independent validity of its own.
- The existing theories on statecraft and kingship were implemented by Chandragupta into a pattern of highly centralised administration for the vast empire.
- The other six elements of state, as mentioned in the Arthashastra of Kautilya are, amatyā or bureaucracy, anapada or territory, durga or the fortified capital, kosa or the treasury, danda or the coercive machinery and mitra or the allied powers.
- The necessity to share the king’s authority was some kind of check on him. Kautilya says that “the king shall employ minister (mantrin) and also a council of ministers (mantriparishad).” He says “all kinds of administrative measures are presided by deliberations in a well formed council.”
- Megasthenes also says that the king was assisted by a council whose members were noted for wisdom.
- The king appointed a council of ministers called mantriparishad. There were various other officials, who helped him perform his duties. These officials were known as amatyas, mahamatras and adhayakshas.
- Arthasastra gives a list of 27 adhayakshas or superintendents who were responsible for running various economic departments like agriculture, mining, weaving, trade, etc.

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<td>Officials</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mantrin</td>
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<td>Mantriparishad Adhyaksha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purohita</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senapati</td>
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Revenue Department

- **Samharta**, the chief of the **Revenue Department**, was in charge of the collection of all revenues (from all types of sources) of the empire.
- The **revenues** came from land, irrigation, customs, shop tax, ferry tax, forests, mines and pastures, license fee from craftsmen, and fines collected in the law courts.
- The **land revenue** was normally fixed as **one sixth of the produce**.
- The **main items of expenditure** of the state were related to king and his household, army, government servants, public works, poor relief, religion, etc.
- Land revenues were known as **Sita** from crown lands and **bhaga** from the cultivators. Other known rural taxes were Pindikara, Hiranya, Bali, and Pranaya.
Army

- The Mauryan army was well organized and it was under the control of Senapati.
- According to Greek author Pliny, the Mauryan army consisted of six lakh infantry, thirty thousand cavalry, nine thousand elephants and eight thousand chariots.
- The salaries were paid in cash. It seems that the six wings of the armed forces the army, the cavalry, the elephants, the chariots, the navy and the transport, were each assigned to the care of a separate committee.
- Each wing was under the control of Adyakshas or Superintendents. Megasthenes mentions six boards of five members each to control the six wings of the military.

Judicial and Police Departments

- The king was at the head of the judicial administration and constituted the highest appellate court in the realm.
- In villages and towns, cases were settled by the gramavradha and nagara vyavaharika mahamatra respectively.
- Rajukas were equal to modern district magistrates.
- Kautilya mentions the existence of both civil and criminal courts - dharma (like modern Civil Court) and kantaka shodhana (like modern Criminal Court).
- There were also subordinate courts at the provincial capitals and districts under Amatyas.
- Different kinds of punishment such as fines, imprisonment, mutilation and death were given to the offenders.
- Torture was employed to extract truth. Police stations were found in all principal centres.
- Both Kautilya and Asokan Edicts mention about jails and jail officials.
- The Dhamma Mahamatras were asked by Asoka to take steps against unjust imprisonment.
- Remission of sentences has also been mentioned in Asoka’s inscriptions.

Facts to Know

- Both Kautilya and Megasthenes provide knowledge about the system of Municipal administration.
- Arthasastra contains a full chapter on the role of Nagarika or city superintendent. His chief duty was to maintain law and order.
- Megasthenes refers to the six committees of five members each to look after the administration of Pataliputra.
- These committees looked after:
  - Industries
  - Foreigners
  - Registration of birth and deaths
  - Trade
  - Manufacture and sale of goods
  - Collection of sales tax.

Census

- The Census was regular during the Mauryan period.
- The village officials were to number the people along with other details like their caste and occupation. They were also to count the animals in each house.
- The census in the towns was taken by municipal officials to track the movement of population both foreign and indigenous.
- The data collected were cross checked by the spies.
- The Census was a permanent feature in the Mauryan administration.

Provincial and Local Administration

- The Mauryan Empire at the time of Asoka was divided into four provinces with their capitals at Taxila, Ujjain, Suvarnagiri and Kalinga.
The provincial governors were mostly appointed from the members of royal family (known as Kumar-Mahamatras) and were responsible for the maintenance of law and order and collection of taxes for the empire.

The district administration was under the charge of Rajukas (revenue collection), Sthaniks (District officer), and Yukta (Tax collector).

Village administration was in the hands of Gramini and his official superior was called Gopa who was in-charge of ten or fifteen villages.

### Economy

- The Mauryan economy was an expanding economy and the state took a keen interest in consolidating and promoting its economic gains.
- State not only controlled and coordinated the activities of the peasant, manufacturers and traders, but also directly participated in the production and exchange of different commodities.
- The state very strictly regulated the economic activities.
- The economy of northern India during the Mauryan times was predominantly agrarian.
- There were two distinct categories of land:
  - Rastra land, practically belonging to the cultivator, and
  - Sita land, settled as well as formed directly under crown supervision.
- Taxes on the former type of land were one-sixth of the harvest.
- The peasants also paid pindakara, which was collected from villages as group.
- Some of the villages were marked for performing drudgery for the state in lieu of taxes.
- Some villages, with pastoral bases, paid taxes in the form of cattle and dairy products.
- The Mauryan government also provided irrigation facilities to the peasantry.
- The Arthashatra refers to a water tax which was regularly collected wherever the state assisted in providing irrigation.
- One of Chandragupta's Governors, Pushyagupta was responsible for building a dam across a river near Girnar in western India, resulting in famous Sudarshan lake to supply water for irrigation.
- Cattle breeding in the peasant society had become an adjunct of agriculture, but there were still certain pockets which pursued pastoral economy. Herds were maintained not only by the state but also by wealthy individuals.
- Fishing and hunting were practiced as a means to livelihood especially by the tribes and the practitioners of these occupations had to pay one-tenth of their catch to the royal storehouse.
- Asoka stopped the indiscriminate killing of animals and introduced many measures for the welfare of people who practiced it.
- Under the Mauryas, the most important industry was that of mining and metallurgy and the state had a monopoly over it and state controlled everything from processing to refining.
- The major metals mentioned as being under state control included gold, silver, copper, iron, tin, bitumen and lead. The state sold out most of these metals to the traders, the artisans, the gold smiths and the individual manufacturers.
- But the state had the monopoly in manufacturing of arms, certain type of implements and ships. The craftsmen who were employed for this purpose were given wages.
- The state also had a monopoly in the production of salt.
Some of the other important industries of the period were textile manufacturing, carpentry, pottery, stone-cutting, lapidary, work in ivory and bone.

Textile industry had reached a high level of specialisation and we get reference of fine cotton clothes, woolen blankets and linen dukula fabrics. Mathura, Kalinga, Vanga, Vatsa and Mahisa were important centres of textile.

### Art & Architecture

- The Mauryans constituted a notable epoch in the field of art and architecture and introduced stone and other durable raw material for architecture and sculpture.
- Some references to large walls at Rajgriha belonging to the 6th century B.C., have been found, but they are in the nature of an exception.
- In the early Buddhist texts, there are many references to different types of buildings of the Mauryan period but unfortunately none of them has survived. The latest artistic record of the Mauryan period are the Asokan inscriptions.
- The archeological evidence suggest that in the pre-Mauryan Period, Indian architects worked in wood but during the Mauryan period they started experimenting with rock-cut architecture.
- The remains of the palace at Pataliputra (modern Patna) which were discovered first in 1914-15 and then again in 1951 are very fragmentary, but they definitely indicate the presence of a pillared hall as a part of a large building complexes.
- The floor and the roof of the hall were made of timber. The round and tapering pillared halls were made of Chunar sandstone.
- The similarities between this palace at Pataliputra and the Achaemenid palaces at Persia are too close, however, the rise of timber for the construction of floor and roof was totally indigenous tradition. Both Magasthenes and Fa Hien have praised the beauty of this palace.
- The rock cut architecture and stupa architecture also started with the Mauryans. The earliest specimens of the rock cut architecture of the Mauryan period are the three caves found at Barabar cut out of hard granite. These are Lomas Rishi Cave, Karna Choupara, Sudama, and Vishva Karma Cave.
- The most important from architectural point of view is Sudama. It has several Chambers. The outer chamber is rectangular with a vaulted roof while the inner chambers are circular with a hemispherical domed roof.
- The caves in Nagarjuna hills were carved out on the same pattern. The best among these is the Gopika cave. All these caves are worked by the typical Mauryan architectural characteristics of a bright polish shining from their roof as well as walls.
- Asoka built a number of stupas throughout his empire but majority of them were destroyed during foreign invasions. The best example is the famous Sanchi stupa with massive dimensions. It was originally built with bricks but later enlarged after the time of Asoka.
- Of the stupas, the Sanchi stupa and the Bharhut stupa are most important. Both were made of bricks. Both stupas, have a hemispherical dome placed on a low circular wall which is further crowned by a parasol. The structures are surrounded by a passage of circumambulation fenced off by a railing wall.
- The animal capitals pillars of Asokan period are found in very large numbers. These were generally made of a single block of stone. The accuracy in proportions and carving make it very clear that these were manufactured by very mature and sophisticated artists.
  - Each pillar consists of two parts, the shaft and the capital.
  - The shaft is circular and slightly tapering.
  - The average height is 50 feet, 50 tonnes in weight and the circumference 50 inches.
The capital was divided in three parts:

- The invested lotus,
- A locus, and
- The crowning animals.

The crowning animals include elephant, lion and bull.

The figure of a bull at Rampurwa in Bihar has been appreciated for its naturalness and the four lions set back to back on the Sarnath pillar for its execution.

From the stylistic point of view, the Bakhira pillar seems to represent the initial attempt, while the Sarnath pillar the culmination. (However, Vincent Smith has argued that the Sarnath lion capital may have been the work of fareing artists, because a century later when the same type of sculpture was attempted on the South gateway at Sanchi, it failed.)

Besides, the Achemenian pillars are to some extent similar to these pillars but on deep observation major difference can be found between them.

- The Achemenian pillars are made of separate pieces of stone while the Mauryan Pillars are monolithic.

Achemenian pillars have a base while the Mauryan pillars have no ground base.

The symbolism in the Mauryan capital is purely Indian and the lustrous polish is a Mauryan speciality.

The architecture of the Mauryan period also includes the carving of an elephant on the rock at Dhauli and the over life-sized figures of yakshas and yakshini from Patna. The figure of elephants has no artistic sense, but it draws the attention of the people to the inscription nearby. The most conspicuous feature of the yaksha and yakshini figures is the contrast between the fully rounded and well-modeled front and almost flat surface at the back.

Terracotta objects of various shapes and sizes have been found at many Mauryan sites from Pataliputra to Taklashhila. These objects include idols, toys, dice, beads and ornaments. On some of them, the influence of Hellenic art is clearly visible.

A continuation of the tradition of making mother goddesses in clay which goes back to the proto-historic period is revealed by the discovery of these objects at Mauryan levels. However, they have a well defined shape and a clear ornamentation. Some of them were made even by using moulds.

Mauryan art and architecture develops some indigenous character but it cannot be neglected that the Mauryan period have been influenced by trade and cultural relations with Iran and the Graeco-Roman world. In such a situation it was quite natural that the more developed artistic and architectural touching of Iran and the Roman world would have flowed towards India and was absorbed and assimilated by the people. However, the Mauryan art was a parenthesis in the development of the indigenous art of India.

## Causes of Decline of Mauryan Empire

- The causes for the decline of the Mauryan empire have been widely debated by scholars.
- The traditional approach attributes the decline to Asoka’s policies and his weak successors.
- Another approach holds the inadequate political and economic institutions to sustain such a vast empire.
- Asoka’s pro-Buddhist policies antagonized the Brahmins who brought about a revolution led by Pushyamittra Sunga. But Asoka never acted against Brahmins.
- Asoka’s policy of non-violence reduced the fighting spirit of his army was another charge against him. But Asoka had never slackened his control over his empire despite following a pacifist policy.
Therefore, solely blaming Asoka for the decline of the Mauryan empire may not be correct because Asoka was more a pragmatist than an idealist.

There are multiple causes for the decline of the Mauryan empire such as weak successors, partition of empire and administrative abuses after Asoka’s reign. The combination of these factors speeded up the breakup of the Mauryan empire and facilitated Pushyamitra Sunga to drive away the Mauryan power and establish the Sunga dynasty.