



- The rise of the Janapadas & Mahajanapadas, which were situated mostly north of the Vindhyas, is dated around the second half of the first millennium BCE
- Magadha has drawn the attention of historians for the last two hundred years. This is so because it had become the nucleus of the political power of the well known Mauryan dynasty
- The Magadhan kingdom began to grow during the sixth century BCE itself. However, this process accelerated considerably under the Nandas & the Mauryas.
- The location of Ashokan inscriptions indicate that a major part of the Indian subcontinent, excluding the eastern & southern extremities, had come under Magadhan suzerainty.
- This may perhaps explain why Ashoka endeavoured to resolve the inherent social tensions in the empire through the introduction of his policy of Dhamma.

#### SOURCES

- The events & traditions of the middle Ganga plains where Magadha was prominently located are well preserved in the early Buddhist & Jaina literature.
- Those pertaining to the early Jaina tradition are the Acharanga Sutra & Suttrakritanga which are considered earlier than the others.
- However they are compiled well after the sixth century BCE at different times.
- For particularly the early events of a political nature, Buddhist & Jaina traditions present them more authentically & directly than do the later Brahmanical accounts of the various Puranas which attempt to provide histories of royal dynasties to the period of the Guptas.
- Later Buddhist chronicles like the Mahavamsa & Dipavamsa compiled in Sri Lanka are significant sources for the events related particularly to Ashoka Maurya's reign.
- These, along with the Divyavadana (preserved in the Tibetan & Chinese Buddhist sources) not being contemporary to the period under discussion, have to be used cautiously as they developed in the context of Buddhism's spread outside India.
- Foreign sources of information which are considerably more relevant, are accounts gathered from Classical writings in Greek & Latin.
- These are impressions of travellers who visited India around that time, and the name of Megasthenes, who visited the court of Chandragupta Maurya, is famous in this respect.
- Megasthenes, however, known to us only through quotations in later Greek writings of Strabo &

Diodorus of the first century BCE & Arrian of the second century CE.

- Since north-west India from about the sixth century BCE till about the fourth century BCE was under the sphere of foreign rule some of the information on the phase of Achaemenian (Persian) rule and later, on the invasion of Alexander, comes to us from the Persian inscriptions & Greek sources like Herodotus' account.
- Ever since its discovery in 1905, the Arthashastra has been considered as an important source of information for the Mauryan period.
- Despite controversy regarding its date, many scholars would like to use a major portion of this text for the Mauryan period.
- They suggest that the text was originally written by Kautilya, the minister of Chandragupta, & commented upon & edited by other writers during a subsequent period.
- Both, inscriptions & coins, are important sources of information as they become significant during the Mauryan period.
- The coins of this period however do not bear names of kings, and they are called Punch-Marked coins because different symbols were punched on them separately.
- Punch-marked coins are known from roughly about the fifth century BCE .
- Mauryan punch-marked series are significant in that they were probably issued by a central authority as is indicated by the uniformity of the symbols used.
- In contrast to the coins, the inscriptional material, particularly for Ashoka's rule is extremely important and unique in content
- They stand out markedly as a physical testimony to the length & breadth of the Magadhan empire at the close of Ashoka's reign.
- The archaeological phase associated with the Northern Black Polished Ware was the period when cities and towns emerged, and during the Mauryan period, as archaeology suggests, there were further changes in the material life of the people.
- Archaeological evidences informs that, elements of material culture started spreading to areas outside the Ganga valley and that they came to be associated with Mauryan rule.

#### THE RISE OF THE MAGADHA

- The mahajanapadas were located over a major part of the Ganga valley with a few to the north-west & south-west. However, of the four most powerful kingdoms, three – Kosala, the Vajji confederacy and Magadha — lay in the middle Ganga valley and the fourth, Avanti was in western Malwa.

- The Magadha was surrounded by different kingdoms - Anga in the east, the Vajji Confederacy to the north, Kashi to its immediate west & Kosala to further west.
- Magadha can be identified with the modern districts of Patna, Gaya, Nalanda and parts of Shahabad in the present-day state of Bihar. Geographically, Magadha's location was such that it had in its vicinity large tracts of alluvial soil.
- The soil could be easily cleared off the heavy overgrowth with the use of iron implements and proved extremely fertile.
- Various varieties of paddy were grown as mentioned in the early Buddhist texts. This enabled the farmers to produce considerable surplus which augmented the taxes.
- Magadha also had access to an easy supply of elephants. In fact, Magadha was one of the few which used elephants on a large scale in the wars and thus had an edge over others.
- The elephants could be procured from the east.
- Nandas, according to the Greek sources, maintained 6000 elephants.
- Elephants had an advantage over horses and chariots, because they could be used to march across marshy lands and areas which had no roads or other means of transport.
- R. S. Sharma feels that the unorthodox character of the societal set up in Magadha allowed it to become more receptive to expansionist policies of its rulers.
- Magadha had a happy admixture of Vedic & non-Vedic people who were different in their outlook than those of orthodox Vedic societies.
- Interestingly, the earliest capital of Magadha, Rajagriha (Girivraja) was situated to the south of the river and not near it. Rajagriha was surrounded by five hills and proved to be impregnable
- It not only enjoyed a strategic location, but also lay in the vicinity of iron-encrusted outcrops.
- Its accessibility to copper & to the forests of the present-day southern Bihar region can effectively explain why early Magadhan kings did not choose to have their capital in the most fertile plains of the Ganges valley but in a comparatively isolated region.
- The capital of Magadha did, however, shift to Pataliputra (originally Pataligrama) situated on the confluence of several rivers like the Ganga, Gandak, Son
- The rivers could be used as communication routes by the army. Besides, being surrounded by rivers made its position impregnable, functioning as a veritable water fort (jaladurga)
- Pataliputra became the capital of Magadha under the Mauryas. This enabled Magadha to effectively command the Uttarapatha (northern route) which lay to the north of the river Ganges, along the foothills of the Himalayas.
- The river also came to be used as one of the main arteries connecting Magadha with different regions & making heavy transport along the river possible. Thus, Magadha had certain natural advantages over other contemporaneous kingdoms
- Avanti to its south-west, Kosala to its north-west and the Vajji Confederacy to its north were equally powerful at the turn of the sixth century BCE.
- Recent researches have suggested that accessibility to the iron mining areas in particular enabled kingdoms like Magadha & Avanti to not only produce good weapons of warfare but also in other ways.
- It facilitated expansion of agrarian economy & thereby, the generation of substantial surplus, extracted by the State in the form of taxes.
- This in turn enabled them to expand and develop their territorial base. Avanti, became a serious competitor of Magadha for quite some time and was also located not far from the iron mines in eastern Madhya Pradesh.
- Avanti had defeated the Vatsas of Kaushambi & planned to invade Magadha.
- Ajatshatru, in response to this threat, began the fortification of Rajgir; the remains of the walls can be still seen. Invasion, though, did not take place finally.
- Magadha was located in a region which had abundance of timber. Megasthenes has remarked about the wooden walls and houses of Magadha.
- Remains of wooden palisades of the 6th century BCE have been discovered to the south of Patna.
- Timber could be easily used to manufacture boats through which the Magadhan army could advance towards the east and the west.

#### THE PRE-MAURYAN MAGADHA

- Under Bimbisara, who was a contemporary of the Buddha, lived in the 6th - 5th century BCE, Magadha emerged as a controller of the middle Ganga plains.
- According to Ashvaghosha's Buddhacarita, Bimbisara belonged to the Haryanka dynasty.
- He is considered to be the first important ruler of Magadha. With political foresight he realised the importance of establishing dynastic relations through marriage with the royal house of Kosala.
- Through this alliance he acquired a village in Kashi as dowry. He had cordial relations with the king of Gandhara.
- To the east of Magadha lay the kingdom of Anga whose capital Champa was an important commercial centre as a river port
- Bimbisara is reported to have ruled over 80,000 villages. Tradition tells us that Bimbisara was imprisoned by his son Ajatashatru (prince Kunika) who is said to have starved him to death.

- This is reported to have taken place around 492 BCE.
- Internal troubles and the succession of Ajatashatru to the throne of Magadha did not change its fortune.
- In terms of expansionist policies, the new Magadhan king followed a decisively more aggressive policy.
- He gained complete control over Kashi & broke the earlier amicable relations with Kosala by attacking his maternal uncle & the king of Kosala, Prasenajit.
- The Vajji confederacy, a gana sangha, that lay to the north of the Ganga, was Ajatashatru's next target of attack.
- Its control could have given him access to river trade. The principalities represented two divergent political systems.
- This war was a lengthy one and tradition tells us that after a long period of sixteen years he was able to defeat the Vajjis only through deceit by sowing the seeds of dissension amongst them with the help of his minister, Vassakara.
- Magadha had achieved a superior military technology due to the use of two weapons, mahashilakantaka (a large sized catapult used for hurling rocks) & rathamusala (a chariot fitted with a mace which caused terrific destruction when driven through the enemy ranks).
- Ajatashatru's invasion of the kingdom of Avanti, the strongest rival of Magadha at that time, did not materialise though preparations are said to have been made for it.
- However, during his reign Kashi and Vaishali (the capital of Vajji) mahajanapadas had been added to Magadha, making it the most powerful territorial power in the Ganga valley.
- Ajatashatru is said to have ruled from 492 BCE to 460 BCE. He was succeeded by Udayin (460-444 BCE).
- During Udayin's reign the Magadhan kingdom extended in the north to the Himalayan ranges & in the south to the Chhota Nagpur hills.
- He is said to have built a fort on the confluence of the Ganga & the Son.
- Despite the vastness of Magadha's territories, Udayin & the four kings who succeeded him were unable to effectively rule and the last of these is said to have been overthrown by the people of Magadha
- Shishunaga, a viceroy at Benaras, was placed on the throne in 413 BCE. The rule of the Shishunaga dynasty too was of short duration and gave way to the rule of the Nanda dynasty headed by the usurper Mahapadma Nanda.
- It was during the rule of the Nandas in Magadha & the Ganga plains as a whole that the invasion of Alexander took place in north-west India in 326 BCE, often considered the beginning of the historic period in India.
- The Nandas are therefore, often described as the first empire-builders of India. However they did not inherit a large kingdom of Magadha which they then extended to more distant frontiers.
- In the later Purana writings, Mahapadma Nanda is described as the exterminator of all kshatriyas. It is further suggested that he overthrew all the contemporary ruling houses.
- The Greek classical writings describe the might of the Nanda empire consisted of 20,000 cavalry, 200,000 infantry, 2000 chariots and 3000 elephants.
- Their control of some parts of Kalinga (modern Odisha) is indicated in the Hathigumpha inscription of king Kharavela, who ruled in Odisha from the middle of the first century BCE.
- Some very late inscriptions from the south Karnataka region also suggest that parts of the Deccan may have been included in the Magadhan empire by the Nandas
- Most historians suggest that by the end of the reign of Mahapadma Nanda the first phase of the expansion & consolidation of the kingdom of Magadha had taken place.
- Taxes were regularly collected through regularly appointed officials indicating that taxes were given priority.
- One aspect of the consolidation of Magadha was the strengthening of the agrarian economy through the construction of canals & irrigation projects even as far as Kalinga (Odisha)
- This foreshadowed the later restructuring of the economy under the Mauryas who were able to resurrect an imperial structure based on an extensive agrarian economy.
- The north-west was still under various small chiefdoms is attested by the Greek writings describing Alexander's invasion of the Punjab around this time.
- There was no encounter between the kingdom of Magadha and the Greek conqueror.
- The Nanda rule came to an end by 321 BCE. Nine Nanda kings are said to have ruled and by the end of their rule they had become very unpopular.
- Chandragupta Maurya took advantage of this situation to ascend the throne of Magadha.
- Despite all these dynastic changes, Magadha continued to remain the foremost kingdom in the Ganga valley
- Deeper reasons for the success of Magadha : – Advantageous geographical location, its access to the iron mines and the control it had come to exercise over important land and river trade routes.

#### MAGADHA UNDER THE MAURYAS

- According to D.D.Kosambi, the most immediate & unexpected by-product of Alexander's invasion of

the north-west was that it hastened the Mauryan conquest of the whole country.

- He has argued thus because since the tribes of Punjab had already been weakened, it was not difficult for the Magadhan army under Chandragupta to conquer the whole of Punjab.
- Most of the Gangetic valley was already under the control of Magadha.
- Both Indian & Classical sources agree that Chandragupta overthrew the last of the Nanda king and occupied his capital Pataliputra and this success is linked with his accession to the throne in around 321 BCE.
- According to Classical sources, Chandragupta is supposed to have even met Alexander & advised him to attack Magadha which was under the unpopular rule of the Nandas
- Though this is difficult to verify, both Indian & Classical sources suggest that Alexander's retreat resulted in the creation of a vacuum, therefore, it was not difficult for Chandragupta to subdue the Greek garrisons left there.
- What is not clear is whether he did this after his accession to the throne of Magadha or before it. Some scholars date his accession to 324 BCE while now it is generally accepted as 321 BCE.
- According to Indian tradition Chandragupta was assisted by brahmin Kautilya, also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta in rise to power.
- Tradition describes of the overthrow of the Nandas by Chandragupta, at twenty-five years of age, he was in fact a weak ruler & the real ruler of the empire was Chanakya.
- The Arthashastra is attributed to Chanakya who is said to have been well-versed in the political principles of warfare & aggrandisement but was also deeply knowledgeable about the organization of the state & society to ensure that the empire did not collapse.
- Though the caste affiliation of the Mauryas remains obscure, it is significant that the most important rulers of this dynasty turned to the heterodox sects later in their lives.
- Several sources point to the role of the brahmana Kautilya as the advisor & the motivating force behind Chandragupta cannot be ignored.
- The Puranas even suggest that Chanakya had appointed Chandragupta as the king of the realm.
- One can perhaps suggest that the Mauryas rose to power in a society which was never very orthodox.
- In the north-west had been considerable contact with foreigners & Magadha itself was looked down upon in orthodox Brahmanical tradition. Besides, it was considerably exposed to the ideas of the Buddha & Mahavir
- Historians, understand the Mauryan State as an empire primarily in terms of its territorial extent, attribute great importance to the role

Chandragupta Maurya played in ruthlessly stemming the tide of foreign interference in the north-west and suppressing indigenous rulers in west and south India.

- First major achievements of Chandragupta Maurya on the military front was his contact with Seleucus Nicator who ruled over the area west of the Indus around 305 BCE.
- Chandragupta is said to have turned out victorious and eventually, peace was established with this Greek viceroy by around 303 BCE.
- In return for 500 elephants Seleucus gave him eastern Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the area west of the Indus.
- The Satrapies thus called were Arachosia, Paropanisadae, Aria and Gedrosia.
- Seleucus sent an ambassador called Megasthenes who lived in the court of Chandragupta for many years.
- The territorial foundation of the Mauryan empire had been firmly laid with the Indus & Gangetic plains well under Chandragupta's control.
- Chandragupta ultimately established his control in the north-west, the Ganges plains, western India & the Deccan.
- The only parts left out of his empire were thus present-day Kerala, Tamil Nadu & parts of north-eastern India
- Details of the conquests in different parts of India are lacking.
- The conquest of Saurashtra or Kathiawar in the extreme west is attested in the Junagadh Rock Inscription of Rudradaman of the middle of the second century CE
- This record refers to Chandragupta's viceroy or governor, Pushyagupta, who is said to have constructed Rise of Magadha the famous Sudarshana lake
- This further implies that Chandragupta had under control the Malwa & Deccan as well
- These are some medieval epigraphs informing us that Chandragupta had protected parts of Karnataka
- The Tamil writers of the Sangam texts of the early centuries CE make allusion to "Moriyar" which is said to refer to the Mauryas and their contact with the south, but this probably refers to the reign of Chandragupta's successor
- Finally, the Jaina tradition informs us that Chandragupta having become a Jain abdicated the throne and went south with Bhadrabahu, the Jaina saint.
- At Shravanabelagola, the Jaina religious centre in south Karnataka, he spent the rest of his life and died in the orthodox Jaina way by slow starvation
- Bindusara, the son of Chandragupta, is said to have ascended the throne in 297 BCE. There is



comparatively little known about him from either Indian or Classical sources.

- Bindusara is known as Amitrochates. He had contacts with the Seleucid king of Syria, Antiochus I, whom he requested to send sweet wine, dried figs and a sophist.
- Sixteenth century source, in the work of the Buddhist monk Taranath of Tibet, we are told of Bindusara's war-like activities.
- He is said to have destroyed kings & nobles of about sixteen cities and reduced to submission all the territory between the eastern and western seas
- The descriptions of early Tamil poets of the Mauryan chariots thundering across the land probably refer to his reign
- Many scholars believe that since Ashoka is credited to have conquered only Kalinga, the extension of the Mauryan empire beyond the Tungabhadra must have been the work of his predecessors.
- So, it is suggested that it was probably in Bindusara's reign that the Mauryan control of the Deccan, and the Karnataka plateau in particular, was firmly entrenched.
- Though Bindusara is called "slayer of foes". Due to lack of documentation of his reign the map of the empire of Ashoka has followed. He conquered only Kalinga (Odisha)
- His religious leanings are said to have been towards the Ajivikas.
- Buddhist sources suggest the death of Bindusara around 273-272 BCE. After his death there was a struggle for succession among his sons for about four years.

#### ASHOKA

- Till about 1837 Ashoka was not a very well-known king. In that year James Prinsep deciphered a Brahmi inscription referring to a king called Devanampiyasa (Beloved of the Gods).
- This was compared with what was known from the Sri Lankan chronicle Mahavamsa and then it could be established that the king of the inscription was indeed Ashoka.
- The fame of Ashoka is due to the fact that he turned away from war and tried to establish a system of rule based on the principle of Dhamma.

#### KALINGA WAR

- During his father's reign Ashoka served as a Viceroy at Ujjain & also at Taxila. It is suggested that he was sent to Taxila for a special purpose, namely, to quell a revolt.
- After being successful at Taxila, the Buddhist sources tell us, he was sent to Ujjain as viceroy.
- The events in his personal life here, like his marriage to a Vidisha merchant's daughter and the birth of their two children Mahinda and Sanghamita, are said to have had a great influence in turning Ashoka towards Buddhism

- Many of the details about his early life come from the Buddhist chronicles, and, therefore, certain ambiguities in them cannot be denied.
- About the accession of Ashoka, there are several versions, but there is some general agreement that he was in fact not the crown prince (Yuvaraja). Therefore, he was involved in a struggle against other princes before he ascended the throne
- His portrayal as an extremely wicked king before his conversion to Buddhism is undoubtedly exaggerated in Buddhist accounts to enhance his piety as a Buddhist.
- Though Buddhism played a significant role in Ashoka's later life, one has to discount those versions that depict him as a fanatic or bigot.
- An idea of the king's personality and beliefs comes through more clearly from his many inscriptions in which his public and political role are both described.
- They also suggest that his conversion to Buddhism took place after the Kalinga war.
- Though Ashoka's predecessors had intruded into the Deccan and the south and perhaps conquered parts of it, Kalinga, i.e., the present-day state of Odisha, still had to be brought under Mauryan control.
- It was of strategic importance as it controlled routes to south India both by land and sea
- Ashoka himself in Rock Edict XIII describes his conquest of Kalinga which is said to have taken place eight years after his consecration, around 260 BCE.
- In this war Kalinga was completely routed and 'One hundred thousand were slain, and many times that number died'.
- Though on the battlefield Ashoka was victorious, the inscription goes on to describe his remorse which then ultimately turned him towards Dhamma.
- A policy of conquest through war was given up and replaced by a policy of conquest through Dhammavijaya. This was meant to work both at the state and personal levels, and totally transformed the attitude of the king and his officials towards their subjects

#### MAGADHA AT ASHOKA'S DEATH

- The location of the various Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts through which Ashoka preached his policy of Dhamma gives us a fair idea of the extent of the Magadha empire during his reign.
- There are fourteen Major Rock Edicts, seven Pillar Edicts and some Minor Rock Inscriptions which give us this information.
- The Major Rock Edicts are located at Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra near Peshawar, Kalsi near Dehradun, Sopara in Thane district, Girnar near Junagarh in Kathiawar, Dhuli near Bhubaneswar and Jaugada in Ganjam district of Odisha.

- In Karnataka, the Minor Rock Edicts appear among other places at Siddapura, Jatinga-Rameshwaram and Brahmagiri.
- Other Minor Rock Edicts are found at Rupnath near Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh; Sahasram in Bihar; Bairat near Jaipur in Rajasthan and Maski in Karnataka.
- The Pillars bearing Ashoka's inscriptions are found in Delhi (originally located at Topara near Ambala and Meerut), Kaushambi in Uttar Pradesh, Lauriya Araraj, Lauriya Nandangarh and Rampurva in Bihar; Sanchi, near Bhopal; Sarnath, near Benaras: and Rummindei in Nepal.
- Rock edicts were located on important trade routes linking river and road traffic.
- Recent studies shows that access to raw material was the main motivation in controlling the peninsula.
- The Edicts also describe people on the borders of the empire, and this confirms the delineation of the empire.
- In the south are mentioned the Cholas, Pandyas, Sataputras and Keralaputras as people living outside the Mauryan empire.
- Inside the empire too there were people of diverse origins and diverse cultures. For example, in the north-west are mentioned the Kambojas and Yavanas.
- Mentioned about other peoples like the Bhojas, Pitinikas, Andhras and Pulindas who can be located in parts of western India and the Deccan.
- Apart from studying the locations of Ashoka's edicts on a map, the exact extent of his empire can be ascertained, to some extent by distinguishing the 'conquest territories' (Vijita) and 'royal territories' (Rajavishaya) from the bordering territories (pratyanta).
- The territory of the Seleucid king Antiochus-II lay outside his empire in the north-west, so were the territories of the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Keralaputras and the Satyaputras, as also the island of Sri Lanka lay outside his empire in the south.
- In the east the empire of the Mauryas seems to have included north and south Bengal
- The Magadhan empire thus reached its greatest territorial expansion under Ashoka.
- However, there was also a conscious attempt to end all wars in his empire.
- Finally, though the find spots of the Mauryan inscriptions are on well known trade routes, some of them bordering peripheral zones of the empire.
- Yet not known about the regions outside the territory without inscriptions were controlled by him or not
- Inside the territory there are regions where inscriptions are not found but they were controlled by Ashoka



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