

## **Magadha Empire UPSC Notes**

The Magadha Empire is considered as the first empire in Indian history. The Magadha Empire was founded when the four Mahajanapada-Magadha, Kosala, Vatsa, and Avanti were engaged in a struggle for domination from the 6th century BC to the 4th century BC. Magadha emerged as the most powerful and prosperous kingdom in northern India. The Magadha Empire encircled the rule of three dynasties over time – Haryanka Dynasty, Shishunaga Dynasty, and Nanda Dynasty. Finally, Magadha emerged victoriously and was able to gain sovereignty. It became the most powerful state in ancient India.

The timeline of the Magadha Empire is estimated to be from 684 BCE to 320 BCE. Magadha is situated in modern Bihar. Jarasandha, who was a descendant of Brihadratha founded the empire in Magadha. Both are talked about in the Mahabharata.

## **Magadha Kingdom**

Magadha was an ancient kingdom located on the Indo-Gangetic plains in eastern India and spread over what is today the modern state of Bihar. There were constant conflicts between various Mahajanapadas and ultimately Magadha emerged as the largest Empire. The 1st Dynasty to rule Magadha was Haryanka (founded by Bimbisara).

In 326 BCE, when Alexander the Great was camped at the river Beas on the westernmost part of India, his army mutinied, and they refused to march further east. They had heard about the great Magadha kingdom and were unnerved by stories of its might.

## **The Dynasties of Magadha Empire**

The extension of the Magadha Empire was seen through three dynasties. The first one was the Haryanka **dynasty (544 BC to 412 BC)**. Then came the **Shishunaga dynasty(412 BC to 344 BC)**. And the third one was the **Nanda dynasty(344 BC to 322 BC)**. Let's discuss the three dynasties that ruled during the Magadha Empire.

#### **Haryanka Dynasty(544 BC to 412 BC)**

Haryanka was the first important and powerful dynasty in the Magadha Dynasty. There were three rulers in the Haryanka Dynasty. The founder of the Magadha Empire Bimbisara was from the Haryanka dynasty. The other two rulers were Ajatashatru and Udayin.

#### **Bimbisara**

According to the Buddhist chronicles, Bimbisara ruled roughly for fifty two years (544 BC to 492 BC). Magadha came into existence under the rule of Bimbisara.

The first Magadhan king used to follow the policy of conquest and aggression. He was a ruler who was not satisfied with what he had. To strengthen his position, he even used marriage as a policy. This helped him to gain enormous diplomatic prestige and paved the way for expanding Magadha westward and northward.

Bimbisara had three wives. His first wife was Kosaladevi, the daughter of the Koshalan King. He received a Kashi village in dowry that used to yield a revenue of 100,000(in terms of coins). This marriage calmed down the hostilities between Bimbisara and the King of Kosala.

His second wife Chellana was a Lichchhavi princess from Vaishali. She gave birth to his son Ajatashatru. With this relation he secured the northern frontier. The third marriage alliance was with the chief of Madra clan of Punjab. He married Khema, the daughter of the chief.

- Bimbisara was the son of Bhattiya.
- He ruled over Magadha from 544 BC to 493 BC.
- He was the contemporary and follower of the Buddha. Also he was said to be an admirer of Mahavira.
- Had his capital at Girivraja (Rajgir).
- He is also known by the name Sreniya.
- He was the first king to have a standing army.
- He started the practice of using matrimonial alliances to strengthen his political position.

- He had an effective and excellent administrative system. The officers occupying high posts were divided into three – executive, military and judicial.
- Later on he was killed by his own son Ajatashatru.

### **Ajatashatru**

Ajatashatru grasped the throne of Bimbisara by killing his father. He was son of Bimbisara and Chellana. He ruled Magadha from 492 BC to 460 BC. Ajatashatru followed the footsteps of his father. Throughout his reign he was an aggressive expansionist.

Ajatashatru looked towards conquering Koshala and Kashi. The war was fought between Ajatashatru and the Koshala King. The Koshala King was compelled to give his daughter to Ajatashatru to purchase peace. Kashi was also offered to him to end the war.

- After that Ajatashatru made war with Vaishali.
- It took sixteen years to win Vaishali.
- He expanded the Magadha empire by adding Kashi and Vaishali to it.
- He embraced Buddhism.
- He convened the First Buddhist Council at Rajagriha just after the death of Buddha in 483 BC.
- He won wars against Kosala and Vaishali.
- Ajatashatru was succeeded by Udayin.

### **Udayin**

Udayin was the son of Ajatashatru. He ruled Magadha from 460 BC to 444 BC. He was instrumental in building a fort at the confluence of the Ganges and Son at Patna. Later on he was succeeded by his son Anuruddha by assassination. Anuruddha was succeeded by his son Munda and Munda by Nagdosoka.

The people of Magadha started losing faith in Magadhan rulers due to the continuous dynastic feuding. So they imposed Shishunaga as their ruler. This was the foundation of the Shishunaga dynasty.

- He shifted the capital to Pataliputra (Patna).
- Last of the major Haryanka rulers.
- Succeeded by three kings – Aniruddha, Manda and Nagadasaka.

### **Shishunaga Dynasty(412 BC to 344 BC)**

According to Sri Lankan chronicles, the people of Magadha revolted during the reign of Nagadasaka and placed an Amatya (minister) named Shishunaga as king. The **Shishunaga Dynasty** ruled **Magadha** from 412 BC to 344 BC. The two most popular rulers of the Shishunaga dynasty are Shishunaga and Kalasoka.

### **Shishunaga**

- Shishunaga was the viceroy of Kashi before becoming the king of Magadha.
- His greatest achievement was that he destroyed the power of Avanti and brought an end to the 100 year rivalry between Avanti and Magadha.
- The capital was at Girivraja.
- He annexed Avanti and brought an end to the long rivalry between Magadha and Avanti.
- Later shifted the capital to Vaishali.

### **Kalasoka**

- Shishunaga was succeeded by his son Kalasoka.
- Kalasoka shifted the capital back to Pataliputra.
- He conducted the Second Buddhist Council at Vaishali.
- Kalasoka was the last Shishunaga ruler.
- He was succeeded by Mahapadma Nanda.
- He was killed in a palace revolution that brought the Nanda dynasty to the throne.

### **Nanda Dynasty(344 BC to 322 BC)**

The Nandas were the last rulers of Magadha. During their rule Magadha had reached new heights of power and supremacy. The Nandas were very rich. This was the first non-Kshatriya dynasty and it lasted from 345 BCE to 321 BCE. The first ruler was Mahapadma Nanda who usurped the throne of Kalasoka.

### **Mahapadma Nanda**

Mahapadma Nanda was the first ruler of the Nanda dynasty. He is called the “first historical emperor of India.” (Chandragupta Maurya is the First Emperor of India). He killed Kalasoka to become the king.

- Mahapadma proved to be the most powerful ruler of Magadha.
- He extended the Magadha empire by conquering Kalinga.
- He murdered Kalasoka to become the king.

- He is also called “Sarva Kashtriyantaka” (destroyer of all the Kshatriyas) and “Ekkrat”.
- He conquered many kingdoms including Kalinga, Koshala.
- His sovereignty lasted for twenty-eight years from 367 BC to 338 BC.
- He was succeeded by his son Dhana Nanda.

## Dhana Nanda

**Dhana Nanda** was the last Nanda ruler. He was so powerful that even Alexander dared not to move towards Magadha. At that time Alexander was invading North-Western India.

- He is said to be one of the 8 or 9 sons of Mahapadma Nanda.
- He proved to be weak and finally the rule of Magadha was supplanted by that of the Maurya dynasty
- Dhana Nanda was overthrown by Chandragupta Maurya. which led to the foundations of the Mauryan Empire in Magadha.
- He is referred to as Agrammes or Xandrames in Greek texts.

## Kings in Magadha Empire

King	Important Events
<b>Bimbisara</b> (Founder; Capital: Rajagriha)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was the contemporary of Buddha and Mahavira</li> <li>• He followed the three-pronged policy               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Matrimonial Alliances: He married the princess of Kosala, Lichchavi, and Madra clan</li> <li>◦ Friendship with strong rulers: e.g. He sent his royal physician ‘Jivika’ to Avanti King</li> <li>◦ Conquest of weak neighbors: He conquered Anga (Champa was an important trading center)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### Ajatshatru

- Similar to Bimbisara, he followed expansionist policy using modern machines e.g. he used war engine to throw stones like catapults ( Mahashilakantaka) and Chariot with mace (Rathamusala)
  - He conquered Varanasi and Vaishali to his kingdom
- His meeting with Buddha is depicted in sculptures of Barhut
- He arranged 1st Buddhist Council

### Udayin

- He founded the new capital at Patliputra (on the confluence of River Ganga and Son )
- Haryanka dynasty started to deteriorate after him due to weak rule and Parricide (killing of parent and other relatives)

### Shishunaga

- Shishunaga was an Amatya (minister) during Magadha Period. He became king and founded the Shishunaga dynasty
- He defeated Avanti and made it part of Magadha, thus bringing an end to 100 years of rivalry between Magadha and Avanti

### Kalasoka

- 2nd Buddhist council was held at Vaishali during his reign.
- He was killed by Mahapadma Nanda (founder of the Nanda dynasty)

### **Mahapadma Nanda**

- He founded 1st non-Kshatriya dynasty as several sources say he belonged to lower caste
- He is known as Empire builder (Ekarat): acquired Kalinga and Kosala to Magadha (Hathigumpha inscription)

### **Dhanananda**

- He was the last king and become unpopular due to his oppressive taxes and exploitation. Chandragupta Maurya took advantage of such discontent and founded the Maurya dynasty
- During his reign, Alexander invaded India but did not cross the Beas River due to the powerful army of Nandas

## **Reasons for the Rise of Magadha**

### **Geographical Factors**

Magadha is located in the upper and lower part of the Ganges Valley. It is located on the continental route between west and east India. The soil in this area is fertile. Rain is enough. Magadha is surrounded by rivers on the three sides of Ganges, Son, and Campa, making the area unable to be occupied by the enemy. Rajgir and Pataliputra are both strategically located.

### **Economic Factors**

Magadha had huge deposits of copper and iron. Due to its location, you could easily control the trade. It had a large population that could be used for agriculture, mining, city building, and the military. The dominance of the Ganges meant economic hegemony. The Ganges was important to trade in northern India. With the annexation of Anga by Bimbisara, the Champa River was added to the Magadha Empire. Champa was important in trade with Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and South India.

### **Cultural Factors**

Magadan society has an unorthodox character. It is a fusion of Aryans and non-Aryans. The emergence of that religion and Buddhism triggered a revolution in philosophy and thought. They strengthened the liberal tradition. The society is not ruled by Brahmins, and many of the kings of Magadha are from "low"

#### **Political Factors**

Magadha is fortunate to have many powerful and ambitious rulers. They have a strong standing army. The availability of iron allowed them to develop advanced weapons. They are the first kings to use elephants. The great king also established a good administrative system.