

Maurya Empire UPSC Notes

In Ancient India, many significant empires evolved. One of them was the Mauryan empire. Founded by Chandragupta Maurya, the Mauryan empire was an important dynasty in our history.

History of the Maurya Empire

Chandragupta Maurya founded the Mauryan Empire with the help of Chanakya. Chandragupta's rise to power is surrounded in controversy and mystery. The throne of Magadha was seized by Chandragupta Maurya from the last Nanda king. He then moved to conquer the northern India that was beyond the Magadha borders. Alexander's successors were driven out by Chandragupta from the western region and he went ahead to extend his reach towards eastern Iraq and Afghanistan. Chandragupta Maurya laid the foundation of a robust and efficient central government. Chanakya, his highly capable chief minister, played a prominent role in achieving this with the help of his intelligence network.

Natural History

- The Mauryans were the first ones to provide a unified political entity in the country.
- Forests were viewed as resources by the Mauryas.
- The elephant was regarded as the most significant forest product. They were used in battles, since it was cheaper to catch, tame and train the wild elephants for warfare.
- Separate forests were designated by the Mauryas in order to protect lions and tigers for skin.

Mauryan Administration

- The imperial capital of the Mauryan Empire was at Pataliputra and the empire was categorized into four territories.
- According to the Ashokan edicts, the four provincial capitals were Taxila, Ujjain, Tosali and Suvarnagiri.
- Kumara or the royal prince was the chief of the provincial administration. He served as the king's representative and governed the provinces.
- The Defence and expansion of the empire is accredited to the army, regarded as the largest army during the Iron Age.
- Ashoka renounced warfare, he continued to maintain his large army in order to instill peace and stability across his Empire.

Achievements

- During the Mauryan Empire that the military security and political unity in South Asia allowed for a collective economic system that resulted in enhancing trade and commerce.
- Agricultural productivity also increased.
- The farmers instead paid tax to a strict yet fair nationally administered system as devised by the principles mentioned in the Arthashastra.
- A single currency across India was established by Chandragupta Maurya.
- The revenue collection was systematized, and a number of public works and waterways were commissioned.
- The exports of the country consisted of exotic foods, silk goods, spices and textile.
- The exchange of technology and scientific knowledge with West Asia and Europe further enriched the Empire.
- The construction of hospitals, roads, canals, rest-houses, waterways and other public works were also sponsored by Ashoka.

Capital of Mauryan Empire

- Pataliputra was the capital of the Mauryan Empire.
- The Mauryan Empire lasted from about 321 to 185 BCE.
- The area around Pataliputra was under the direct control of the Emperor.
- There were five political centres in the Mauryan Empire including the capital Pataliputra and the provincial centres of Taxila, Ujjayini, Tosali and Suvarnagiri.
- The third Buddhist council was held at Pataliputra.
- Kautilya's Artha-Shastra was the important literary source for the Maurya's.
- Chandragupta Maurya is the founder of Mauryan Dynasty.
- Ashoka was the most famous Mauryan ruler and he was the first ruler who tried to convey his message to the people through inscriptions.
- The Mauryan empire started declining due to invasions, defections by southern princesses after the death of Ashoka.

Maurya Dynasty

The Mauryan dynasty was founded by Chandragupta Maurya (324/321- 297 BCE) who conquered almost the whole of the north, the north-west and a large region of Peninsular India.

Chanakya was the Teacher of Chandragupta Maurya, who was also his Chief Minister. He was a teacher and scholar at Taxila. His other names are Vishnugupta and Kautilya. He was also a minister in the court of Bindusara. He is credited to be the master strategist behind the usurping of the Nanda throne and the rise of the Mauryan Empire through his student, Chandragupta. He wrote Arthashastra which is a treatise on statecraft, economics, and military strategy. Arthashastra was rediscovered by R Shamasastry in 1905 after it had disappeared in the 12th century.

Important Rulers of Mauryan Empire

The Mauryan Empire had rulers who were famous for their sovereignty. Below table gives the list of Mauryan Empire kings,

Maurya Dynasty – Kings

Chandragupta Maurya	(324/321- 297 B.C.)
Bindusara	(297 – 272 B.C.)
Asoka	(268 – 232 B.C.)

Chandragupta Maurya (324/321 – 297 BCE)

- The Mauryan dynasty was founded by Chandragupta Maurya with the assistance of Chanakya/Kautilya.
- The Maurya Empire was founded in 322 BCE by Chandragupta Maurya, who had overthrown the Nanda Dynasty and rapidly expanded his power westward across central and western India in order to take advantage of the disruptions of local powers in the wake of the withdrawal by Alexander the Great 's armies.
- Greek accounts mention him as Sandrokottos.
- Alexander had abandoned his India conquest in 324 BC and within a year, Chandragupta had defeated some of the Greek-ruled cities in the north-western part of the country.
- According to legend, the teacher Chanakya convinced his disciple, Chandragupta Maurya, to conquer the the kingdom of Magadha (the Nanda Empire) when he was insulted by its king Dhana Nanda.
- Chandragupta Maurya expanded the Maurya Empire north and west as he conquered the Macedonian Satrapies and won the Seleucid-Mauryan war.
- In its time, the Maurya Empire was one of the largest empires of the world.
- He was the chief architect of the Mauryan empire who first established himself in Punjab and then moved eastwards to gain control over the Magadhan region.
- Chandragupta built a vast empire that included Bihar, good portions of Orissa and Bengal, western and northwestern India and the Deccan.
- His reign lasted from 321 BC to 297 BC.

Bindusara (297 – 273 BCE)

- Bindusara is son of Chandragupta.

- Also known as Amitrochates (destroyer of foes) by the Greek scholars while the Mahabhasya refers to him as Amitraghata (killer of enemies). The Ajivika sect mentions a fortune-teller who prophesied to Bindusara about his son Ashoka's future greatness.
- Bindusara is believed to have extended the Mauryan Empire to Mysore as well.
- Bindusara conquered the land between the Arabian sea and the Bay of Bengal. The Tibetan monk who wrote a 17th-century history of Buddhism, Taranatha, states that one of Bindusara's lords, Chanakya, destroyed the nobles and kings of 16 towns and made him master of all the territory between the eastern and western seas.
- As per the Greek source, he had diplomatic ties with western kings. According to Strabo, Antiochus (Syrian king) sent Deimachus as an ambassador to Bindusara's court.
- He had appointed his son, Ashoka as the governor of Ujjain.
- He ruled from 297 BC to 273 BC.

Ashoka (268 – 232 BCE)

- Bindusara died in 272 BCE, and was succeeded by his son, Ashoka the Great (304-232 BCE).
- As a young prince, Ashoka (r. 272-232 BCE) was a brilliant commander who crushed revolts in Ujjain and Taxila.
- Ashoka's army succeeded in overwhelming Kalinga forces of royal soldiers and civilian units, an estimated 100,000 soldiers and civilians were killed in the furious warfare, including over 10,000 of Ashoka's own men. Hundreds of thousands of people were adversely affected by the destruction and fallout of war.
- There was a four-year succession conflict after the death of Bindusara in 273 BCE. Bindusara wanted his son Susima to succeed him. With the help of a minister named Radhagupta and after killing 99 brothers, Ashoka (son of Bindusara) acquired the throne.
- Ashoka embraced the teachings of Buddhism, and renounced war and violence. He sent out missionaries to travel around Asia and spread Buddhism to other countries.
- Ashoka implemented principles of ahimsa (the principle of "to not injure") by banning hunting and violent sports activities, and ending indentured and forced labor (many thousands of people in war-ravaged Kalinga had been forced into hard labor and servitude).
- Ashoka expanded friendly relations with states across Asia and Europe, and sponsored Buddhist missions. He undertook a massive public works building campaign across the country.
- Ashoka was one of the greatest kings of all times, and is regarded as the first ruler to maintain direct contact with his people through his inscriptions. The other names of the emperor include Buddhaskya (in the Maski edict), Dharmasoka (Sarnath inscription), Devanampiya (meaning beloved of the gods) and Piyadassi (meaning of pleasing appearance) given in the Sri Lankan Buddhist chronicles Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa.
- Ashoka appointed Dharma Mahamattas to propagate dharma among various social groups including women (in the 14th year of his reign).
- During his second Dharmayatra tour (in the 21st year of his reign), he visited Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha.

- He banned animal sacrifice, regulated the slaughter of animals for food and established dharmashalas, hospitals and sarais throughout his kingdom.

Interesting Facts about the Mauryan Empire

- The Lion Capital of Ashoka at Sarnath is the national emblem of India.
- The Mauryan Empire grew and succeeded during the Iron Age.
- Some friendly kingdoms not conquered by the Mauryan Empire were the Pandyas, Cheras and Cholas.
- At its apex, the Mauryan Empire was not only the largest empire in the history of the country but also across the globe.
- Sources reveal that Chandragupta Maurya and Chanakya built a coalition with the Himalayan King Parvataka, often identified with Porus.
- The Mauryan Empire is considered as the country's first centralized power; its administration was extremely efficient.
- The Mauryan army was one of the largest armies across the globe. It was well-trained and a pro at using several formations at the battlefield.
- Chanakya and Chandragupta Maurya are credited with standardizing weights and measures.
- Chandragupta established a system of a single currency across his empire.

Conclusion

Decline of the Mauryan Empire was approximately half a century after the demise of Ashoka, the great Mauryan Empire began to crumble. By the mid-2nd century BCE the empire shrunk to its core areas with outlying provinces falling apart. The primary cause of the decline of the great Empire was successive weak rulers after the death of Ashoka.