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## **The Mauryan Age(322BC-184BC)**

The establishment of Mauryan empire was a turning point in the history of Indian territory. The control of this massive empire continued for over a long period of almost 140years over of large part of northern India. After the overthrow of the Nanda Dynasty at Magadh the Mauryas came to prominence. The empire came into being when Chandragupta Maurya stepped into the vacuum created by the departure of Alexander of Macedonia from the western borders of India. In his rise to power, he was aided and counseled by his chief minister Kautilya, who wrote the Arthashastra, a compendium of kingship and governance.

### **Sources of Mauryan Empire:**

The history of their rule is rendered comparatively reliable on account of evidence obtained from a variety of sources. There are three types of sources available about the Mauryan Empire.

#### **Literary Source:**

- **Brahmanical Literature:**

1. Arthashastra of Kutilya/Chanakya/Vishnugupta:  
It is a detailed work on statecraft. Kautilya's work consist of 15 volumes(Adhikarnas). The first five deals with internal administration (tantra), the next eight with inter-state relations (avapa), and the last two with miscellaneous topics.
2. Indica of Megasthene:  
This book was based on his travels and experience in India. The book has not survived but fragments are preserved in later Greek and Latin works, the earliest and most important of which are those of Diodorus, Strabo, Arrian, Pliny.
3. Mudrarakshas of Vishakdutta
4. Rajtrangani of Kalhana
5. Mahabhashya of Patanjali
6. Kathasaritsagar of Somdeva
7. The Puranas (Vishnupurana)

- **Buddhist Literature:**

1. Srilankan Chronicals- Deepvamsha and Mahavamsha.
2. Divyavadana
3. Ashokavandana

4. Mahabodhivamsha
  5. Digghanikaya
  6. Milindpanho
- **Jain Literature:**
    1. Kalpasutra of Bhadrabahu.
    2. Parishishtaparvana of Hemchandra.
  - **Sangam Literature:**
    1. Ahnanur of Mamulnar.
    2. Parnar of Kapilar.
  - **Foreign Accounts:**
    1. Indica of Megasthenes.
    2. Contemporary writings of writers like Nearchus, Onesicritus, Aristobulus .

### **Archeological Sources:**

- **Inscriptions of Chandragupta Maurya:**

The Sahgaura copper plate(Gorakhpur-Uttarpradesh) and the Mahasthan copper plate(Bagaur-Bangladesh) gives a mentions about the granary built during the reign of Chandragupta which also depicts about the draught occurred during his reign.

The Junagarh inscription of Rudradaman is the only inscription which mentions the name of both Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka.

- **Edicts and inscriptions of Ashoka:**

The most authentic Mauryan records however remain the first decipherable inscription issued by Ashoka found at 45 places on the highways in the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan in 181 versions, they were composed in Prakrit language and Brahmi script in greater part of the Mauryan Empire, though in its north-western part they appear in Armaic and Kharoshthi.

### **Achievements of Chandragupta Maurya(322BC-298BC):**

Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of Mauryan empire , succeeded to the Nanda throne in about 321BC at the age of twenty five . The historical texts has it the the Brahmana Kautilya, was his mentor and guide. The origin and early life of Chandragupta Maurya remain obscure. According to brahmanical tradition he was born of Mura , a shudra woman in the court of Nandas. But Buddhist tradition speaks of the existence of his Kshatriya clan called Mauryas living in the region of Goraakhpur adjoining the Nepalese terai.

#### **Early Life:**

According to Justine, Chandragupta Maurya did belong to a royal blood . An anecdote follows that Chandragupta was once found playing a game of Rajkilam in his early childhood, this was the incident when he was noticed by Chanakya . He bought Chandragupta for 1000 Karshapana. Chanakya took him to Taxila along with him and educated him with all the skills required to be a ruler . This led Chandragupta to emerge out as one of the greatest emperors in the Indian history.

#### **Political achievements of Chandragupta Maurya:**

Prior to becoming a ruler he destroyed the power of foreign invaders (Greeks) and the Nanda Dynasty.

#### **Victory over Nandas:**

After gaining victory over the north western frontier area Chandragupta and Chanakya moved towards the Magadh empire . Dhanananda was the ruler of Magadh empire then who once humiliated Chanakya as a result of which he lost his empire later. Besides Puranas, Milindpanho, Mudrarakshasa, Mahavamsha and Parishishtaparvana gives information about the defeat of the Nandas . As Chandragupta took advantage of the growing unpopularity of the Nandas in the last years of their rule . He overthrew the Nandas and established the rule of Mauryan empire.

#### **Victory over the Greeks:**

The Greek accounts add that Chandragupta moved to north west India and subdued the Greek garrisons left behind Alexander. Soon, however Seleucus Nikator gained control of most Asiatic provinces of the Macedonian Empire, and in 305BC he seems to have met Chandragupta in battle .They signed a treaty and entered into marriage alliance . Chandragupta Maurya probably made a gift of 500 elephants to the Greek general and obtained territory across the Indus. Seleucus's ambassador Megasthenes lived for many years at the Mauryan court at Patliputra.

#### **Victory over Western India:**

According to the Girnar inscription (150AD) of Rudradaman, Chandragupta Maurya established his direct control over the western area till Saurashtra. Pushyagupta Vaishya was the governor of the area who is credited for buiildind 'Sudarshan lake' . The Ashokan inscription found from Sopara also proves the control of Mauryan empire over the area.

#### **Victory over Southern India:**

The victory of Chandragupta Maurya over Southern India is mentioned in Ashoka's inscriptions, Jain texts and Sangam literature. He gained control over the area of Northern Karnataka. Jain texts mentions about his visit to Shravana Belgola(Karnataka) and Chandragiri mountain. The sangam text 'Mamulnar' and 'Ahnanur' also gives a detailed information about his control over southern territories.

According to Jain sources, Chandragupta embraced Jainism towards the end of his life and stepped down from the throne in the favour if his son. Accompanied by Bhadrabahu, a Jain saint, and several other monks, he is said to have gone to Sravana Belgola near Mysore, where he deliberately starved himself to death in the approved Jain fashion.

Chandragupta Maurya was a great warrior, empire builder and a skilled administrator. He became the first great historical emperor of India. Many historians consider him to be the first hero of India's war of independence, Liberator of India as well as the first ruler of the integrated India. He is also credited for having maintained the first international matrimonial alliance as a part of his diplomatic policy with the daughter of Seleucus named Helena. Thus, he is considered to be the founder of the first empire ever in the Indian history named the Mauryan empire.

## **Ashoka(273BC-232BC)**

The history of Ashoka is reconstructed on the basis of his inscriptions that are classified into Major Rock Edicts, Minor Rock Edicts and Minor Pillar Edicts , cave inscriptions . In 2750 T.Fanthelar discovered the inscription of Ashoka but it was James Princep who first studied his inscriptions in 1837.

#### **Major Rock Edicts:**

They are fourteen in number and found at eight places . They are:

1. Girnar (Gujarat)
2. Shahbazgarhi(Peshawar)
3. Dhauli(Odisha)
4. Junagarh(Odisha)
5. Kalsi(Uttarakhand)
6. Mansehara(Pakistan)
7. Yerragudi(Andhra Pradesh)
8. Sopara(Maharashtra)

### **Minor Rock Edicts:**

1. Rupnath inscription(Madhya Pradesh)
2. Sasaram (Bihar)
3. Mirzapur(Uttar Pradesh)
4. Bhabru(Rajasthan)
5. Maski, Brahmagiri, Nettur, Jatingrameshwaram, Palkinath, Govimath, Sannati(Karnataka)
6. Yerragudi, Rajulmandgiri(Andhra Pradesh)

### **Major Pillar Edicts:**

They are six in numbers and there are seven inscriptions written on it:

1. Delhi-Topra = It is the most popular pillar edict. All the seven inscriptions are written on it . Firoz Shah Tughlaq called it Minar-i-Zaheen.
2. Delhi-Meerut
3. Prayag
4. Lauria-Araraj(Champaran,Bihar)
5. Lauria-Nandangarh(Champaran,Bihar)
6. Rampurva(Champaran, Bihar)

### **Minor Pillar Edicts:**

1. Sanchi
2. Sarnath
3. Kaushambi- the name of Ashoka's wife Karuvaki is mentioned on this pillar that's why it is called Queen's pillar.
4. Rummendai- it gives us information about the taxation system of Mauryan empire . Bhag and Bali was two types of taxes . Ashoka came here after 20<sup>th</sup> year of his coronation.
5. Nigliva

Nearly a hundred years ago Ashoka was merely a shadowy Mauryan king mentioned in the Puranas. In 1837 James Prinsep deciphered an inscription in Brahmi referring to a king called Devanam Piyadassi(beloved of Gods). According to the Buddhist sources Ashoka usurped the throne after killing all rival claimants(99 brothers) and began his reign as a tyrant, but this seems to be untrue as Ashoka in his 5<sup>th</sup> Major Edict mentions about his family and brothers. Buddhist literature document Ashoka to be the cruel king who underwent a change of heart after experiencing the Battle of Kalinga(261BC). After the war he embraced Buddhism. He became benevolent king, driving his administration to make a just and bountiful environment for his subjects.

He was the son of Bindusar and Subhadrangu. Right from his childhood Ashoka showed great promise in the field of administration . Bindusar impressed by his skill and knowledge appointed him as the governor of Ujjain/Avanti. Different sources produces different titles of him a few of the are- Ahokvardhan(vishnupurana), Buddhaskya(Maski inscription), Magadhahiraj(Bhabru inscription), Maharajkumar(Pangudaria inscription ), Piyadassi king(Barabar cave inscription), Devnampiyadassi(Rumendai, Nigliva and Girnar inscription).

### **Kalinga War(261BC)**

After becoming a ruler Ashoka fought a single battle that was the battle of Kalinga. According to Romila Thappar Ashoka chose to attack over Kalinga in order to gain his control over the prosperous trade of Kalinga. This war is mentioned in the 13<sup>th</sup> Major Rock Edict. Ashoka fought this battle in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of his reign in 261BC. Nandaraj was the contemporary ruler of Kalinga(mentioned in Hathigumpha inscription). In this battle almost one lakh people lost their lives and almost one lakh fifty thousand people were captivated. All this bloodshed had a deep impact on Ashoka which ultimately changed his personality from a warrior to a saint as a result of which he gave up the policy of Digvijaya and adopted the policy of Dhammavijaya. This was the turning point of Magadha's imperialistic spread which was started by Bimbisara with the victory of Anga came to an end with the victory of Kalinga. Kalinga was later made the part of Mauryan empire and was divided into two parts i.e upper Kalinga(capital-Tosali), southern Kalinga(capital-Samapa) for the administrative convenience.

## Ashoka's Dhamma

Initially Ashoka followed Brahmin religion. It is said about Ashoka and Bindusara that they use to feed to 60,000 brahmins daily(Mahavamsa). But after the Kalinga war he converted himself to Buddhism. According to Srilankan chronicle it was Nigrodha who taught about Buddhism to Ashoka . According to Divyavadana and Huen-Tsang Samudra(Balpandit) an ex-merchant from Shravasti helped Ashoka in conversion to Buddhism and Uppgupta taught him Buddhism. After embracing Buddhism he remained a simple adorer for 2.5years. Then he entered Buddhist sangha and became a Bhikshu Gatik, those who lived for sometime in viharas are known as Bhikshu Gatik. But he never became a Buddhist monk rather always remained an adorer.

Ashoka gained fame in the world due to his Dhamma. The Sanskrit word Dharma is called Dhamma in Prakrit . The basic subject of all the inscriptions of Ashoka is his policy of Dhamma. The definition of Dhamma is produced by Ashoka in his 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> pillar edict. In order to influence his subjects to follow it Ashoka mentioned a few good points of Dhamma in his inscriptions such as:

- No killing of humans.
- No destruction of properties.
- To serve and respect parents and adults.
- To respect the mentors and teachers.
- Good behavior with the slaves and servants.
- To spend less.
- To preserve less.

After the Kalinga war Ashoka began to talk about Dhammaghosha in place of Bherighosha. In the 13<sup>th</sup> Major Rock Edict Ashoka considers Dhammavijaya to be the greatest victory. Romila Thappar is of view that Ashoka adopted this policy of Dhamma in order to maintain a religious unity in his huge empire but it turned out to be a failure in the long run as the situation and the competition to gain the power kept on increasing gradually. A few historians compare Ashoka's Dhamma to the Southern victory of Samudragupta, Sindh victory of Harshavardhana. Ashoka was the first ruler in the world history carried out this policy of Dhamma imperialist i.e victory without violence.

### **Steps taken by Ashoka to spread his Dhamma:**

- Beginning of Dhamma-yatra:  
Ashoka began Dhamma-yatra in the place of Vihara-yatra. He visited Bodhgaya in the 10<sup>th</sup> year of his reign((259BC) and Lumbini in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of his reign(249BC). Divyavadan gives a detailed description of his Dhamma-yatra. It is believed that Ashoka spent almost 256 nights in his Dhamma-yatra.
- Appointment of royal officials for the propagation of Dhamma:  
For the propagation of Dhamma Ashoka appointed a new category of ministers named 'Dhammamahamatra'. In his 5<sup>th</sup> Major Rock Edict Ashoka mentions about the appointment of royal officials in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of his reign(256BC). Besides Dhammamahamatras other officials such as Yukta, Rajukka, Pradeshika etc too were given the responsibility of propagating the principles of Dhamma.
- Organization of Dharmashravana and Dharmopadesha:  
In order to propagate the principles of Dhamma various officials visited to different parts of the empires as well as world and influenced people to adopt it.

The Mahavamsa gives the list of the names of propagators of Dhamma who went to numerous places inside and outside the country after 3<sup>rd</sup> Buddhist council to spread the principles of Dhamma . They are:

- Majjhantika- Kashmir and Gandhar.
- Mahadeva-Mahishmandala.
- Rakkshita- Banvasi.
- Majjhima-Himalaya region.
- Sona and Uttara-Suvarnabhumi.
- Maharakshita-Greek countries.
- Dharmarakshita-Aparantaka(Sindh, Kathiawar).
- Mahadharmarakshita- Maharashtra.
- Mahendra and Sangamitra-Srilanka.

The list of the names of these Dharmapracharakas are also found in Deepvansha and Samantpasadika. The stupa number 2 of Sanchi stupa also bears the names of 10 pracharakas.

Thus, according to H.C Raichaudhary Ashoka he was as strong as Chandragupta Maurya, as versatile as Samudragupta was and was as patient as Akbar. He was famous among his subject for his works of welfare. He was the first one to teach the principle of 'live and let live' and political violence to be against the religion to the world. He initially became the follower of Buddhism and spent a huge sum of money in its propagation as a result of which Buddhism soon became a widely followed religion. Hence, despite giving up the policy of war and imperialism he still managed to consolidate his huge empire received by him in legacy, thus, Ashoka is always remembered among the great rulers of Indian history.

## **Mauryan society, Art and Economy:**

### **Mauryan Society:**

#### **Varna system:**

Varna system had completely developed during the time of Mauryas. There were four types of Varna i.e Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra and their work was decided according to their Varna . Brahmins were the uppermost among all the four Varnas then Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras respectively. Apart from these four Varnas Kautilya in his Arthashastra talked about Varnashankaras such as Nishad, Magadh, Sut, Veg, Chandals, etc. Kautilya considered them to be shudras.

Megasthenese described the Mauryan society in detail. According to him, the ancient Mauryan society consisted of seven divisions such namely philosophers, farmers, soldiers, herdsmen, artisans, magistrates and councilors. According to him philosophers were first in this system and last were the councilors as according to their population councilors were less in number. Megasthenese talked about two types of philosophers first one was Brokamen i.e household philosophers and the second one was Saramen i.e sanyasi philosopher. In the time of any crisis or natural calamity they use to do predictions and make people aware of the coming catastrophe.

According to Megasthenese no one could marry the girl or boy of any other caste and no one could adopt the occupation of other caste but philosophers were exception to this. According to Diodorus, artisans were free from taxation because they were the servants of government or state. During this time shudras were given the right of Varta. Kautilya considered shudras as farmers.

#### **Condition of women:**

In comparison to Smriti age their condition was better during the Mauryan age. They the right to remarriage and Niyog. But they were not allowed to go outside without the prior permission of her husband . Kautilya talked about 8 types of marriage.

- I. Brahma vivah- A Brahma marriage is where a boy is able to get married once he had completed his studenthood or Brahmacharya. Brahma marriage has the most supreme position of the eight types of Hindu matrimony. But the girl's father would make sure that the boy whom he wishes to marry his daughter must have the knowledge of Vedas.
- II. Daivya Vivah- In this type of marriage girl's family waited for a specific time to get her married. In case if the girl doesn't get a suitable groom she would be married to a place where sacrifices are conducted.
- III. Arsha Vivah- In this type of marriage the bride was married in exchange of two cows.
- IV. Prajapatya Vivah- this is something like a present day arrange marriage. Monetary transactions are not a part of the prajapatya marriage.
- V. Gandharva Vivah- It was similar to love marriage.

- VI. Asura Viva- In this marriage there is no compatibility between the bride and the groom rather the girls is exchanged in lieu of money.
- VII. Rakshasa Vivah - In this type of marriage the groom forged battle with the bride's family, win over them and carry the bride away to convince her to marry him. Due to the forcible attempt it is not considered as right.
- VIII. Paishaya Vivah- In this type of marriage the bride was forced against her wish to marry. The man captivated the girl of his choice and intoxicated her and married her while she remained unconscious.

Kautilya considered divorce as salvation. Both husband and wife had the right to take divorce. Kautilya considered women to be Anishkasini and Asuryapansaya. There were also some other category of women such as:

- a) Ganika(courtesans)- They were appointed by the state.
- b) Rupajiva- They did independent prostitution. They use to pay tax to the state. They had their own organization and its head were known as Bandhikposhaka. They who served wine were known as Peyshalrupa. Kautilya suggested them to live in the southern part of the empire.
- c) Samrangniya(bodyguards)- Kautilya and Megasthenese both mentioned about them. They were the female bodyguard of Chandragupta Maurya.

### **Sati system and Slave system:**

Slave system was prevalent in the society. Kautilya mentioned nine types of slaves . According to him Aryans cannot be slaves in any condition. Only Malechas and non-aryans could be made slaves. But according to Megasthenese there was no slavery in India. According to Kautilya , son or daughter of any slave with the king would be considered as his legitimate child. Kautilya has not given any information about sati system. But Strabo mentioned that sati system was prevalent among the Kath tribes of Punjab.

### **Entertainment / Amusement:**

There were several ways of entertainment such as hunting, acting, magic, drama, painting, etc. Citizens use to entertain themselves through Vihara-yatra, Samaj and Pravahana. Pravahana was a social function which included a gathering when organized.

### **Mauryan Art and Architecture:**

The origin if monumental stone sculpture and architecture in the Indian subcontinent goes back to the Harappan civilization. However, after the decline of Harappan civilization, there is a long gap and it is only in the Mauryan period that monumental stone sculpture and architecture appeared on the scene again.

### **Court Art:**

- **Royal Buildings:**

The Greek historian Megasthenese described the palaces of the Mauryan empire as one of the greatest creation of mankind and Chinese travelers Fa-Hian called Mauryan palaces as god gifted monuments or the monuments built by god not by humans. About Patliputra Megasthenese mentions that towns were surrounded by wooden wall where a number of holes were created to let the arrow pass by. A ditch was dug with the size of 60feet and 600 feet wide along with the wall. The town had 64 entrances and 570 towns.

The royal assembly building situated in Kumhrars was a hall with 80 pillars. Its roof and floor were made of woods and its size was 140 feet long and 120 feet wide . Patanjali also mentioned Chandragupta's Rajsabha in his Mahabhashya. Arian/Eriyan compared Chandragupta's palace with the buildings of Susa and Ekbatan.

- **Pillars:**

The majestic free standing Ashokan pillars symbolize the axis of the world that separated heaven and earth. Ashoka mainly used these pillars for the propagation of Dhamma. Ashokan pillars are quite similar to each other in form and dimension. They are made of Red Sand Stone at Chunar(Mirzapur). They are considered to be monolithic with a height 12 to 14 meters. Ashoka's first pillar was found from Vaishali known as Koluha pillar. In terms of art and architecture Sarnath pillar of Ashoka is the best example of it. The smallest pillar is Rummendei pillar and the safest pillar till now is Lauriya Nandangarh pillar.

There are two types of pillars:

- i. Inscribed pillars.
- ii. Non-inscribed pillars.

There are 10 pillars which have inscriptions written on them. Kaushambi pillar, Vaishali pillar, Rampurva pillar and Sankisha pillars are non-inscribed pillars. Basically Ashokan pillars are divided in four categories:

- i. Shaft
- ii. Capital/bell
- iii. Platform/ Abacus

A cylindrical bolt joins the top of the shaft to the capital – a stone carved in the shape of an inverted lotus(bell capital). On top of this is abacus(platform) which supports the crowning animal or animals. The abacus is square and plain in earlier pillars and circular and curved in later ones. The motifs associated with the Ashokan pillars have a rich and varied symbolism.

**Motifs associated with pillars:**

- a. One Lion- It appears on the pillars of Vaishali, Lauriya Nandangarh and Rampurva pillars.
- b. Elephant – An elephant capital was found at Sankisha.
- c. Bull- It was found on the Rampurva pillars.
- d. Four Lions- On Sarnath and Sanchi pillars.

- **Caves :**

The Mauryan period saw the beginning of rock cut cave architecture. The Barabar and Nagarjuni hills contain several caves which are built by Ashoka and Dasharatha. The caves are simple but have highly polished interiors. The only sculpture ornamentation is a relief carving on the doorway of a cave known as Lomas Rishi Cave. The doorway is modeled after the wooden ones. Over the entrance are two bands of relief carvings. The upper one has a lattice work design, the lower one has a lattice work design showing elephants approaching stupas. These caves were dedicated by Ashoka and Dashratha to the Ajivakas.

- **Stupas :**

Stupas were burial mounds prevalent in India from Vedic period. The word stupa comes two times in Rig veda. It is a symbol of Mahaparinirvana of Buddha and is also considered as axis of universe. Stupas consist of a cylindrical drum with a circular dome and a Harmika and a Chhatra on the top. A circular terrace(medhi) enclosed by a railing, surrounds the dome, on which the faithful are to circumbulate in a clockwise direction and this gallery is known as Pradakshinapath. The entire structure is enclosed by a low wall called Vedika, which is punctuated at the four cardinal points by Toranas(gateways).

The core of stupa was built using unburnt bricks while the outer surface was made by using burnt bricks. The toranas were decorated with wooden sculptures . In stupas mainly death remains were kept. Sanchi stupa in Madhya Pradesh is the most famous of the Ashokan stupas. Piprahwa stupa in Uttar Pradesh is the oldest one.



There are several important stupas which are built by Ashoka for example: Bharhut stupa, Sanchi stupa, Dharmarajjika stupa at Sarnath and Taxila, Bodhgaya stupa and Bairat stupa. Ashoka reign marked an important stage in the history of Buddhist stupa architecture.

- **Viharas:**

The Viharas in India were originally constructed to shelter the monks during the rainy season, when it became difficult for them to lead the wanderer's life. In Patliputra Ashoka built Ashokaram vihara and Kakuttaram Vihara.

### **Folk Art:**

- **Stone Sculpture:**

Several large stone sculptures have been found at various sites in and around Patna, Mathura, Madhya Pradesh and other places. Many of them represent Yaksha and Yakshi. Other important examples of stone sculptures include the statue of a nude male figure found at Lohanipur at Patna. It is carved out of Chunar sandstone and has a polished surface. Didarganj Yakshi was found at Didarganj village at Patna. The earliest mention of Yakshi can be found in Silpaddikaram, a Tamil text.

- **Terracotta:**

They flourished with the expansion of the urban centers. They include male and female figurines, animals and carts. They are made of mud and are mostly found from Ayodhya. Pottery of the Mauryan period is generally referred to as Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW). Kosambi and Patliputra were the centres of NBPW pottery.

### **Foreign influence on Mauryan Art:**

Is there any foreign influence on Mauryan Art or not? Is a matter of controversy. Several historians like Spooner, John Marshall and Niharranjan Ray accept the influence of foreigners on the Mauryan art by giving following points:

- i. It has been suggested that Ashoka got the idea of inscribing his proclamations on the pillars from Persians.
- ii. The foreign influence has been identified in the polished surface of the Ashokan pillars and the animal motifs.
- iii. It has been pointed out that the word *dipi* and *lipi* occur in the inscriptions of Darius as well as Ashoka.

But the above facts cannot be accepted completely. Historians have also drawn attention to the many differences between the Mauryan and the Persian arts:

- i. The pillars of Persian art are built of separate segments of stone whereas, the Mauryan pillar is monolithic.
- ii. Mauryan pillars do not have any base whereas, Persian pillars do have base.
- iii. The Mauryan type abacus and independent animals carved in the pillars are absent in the Persian art.

While there may be some similarities in specific features, the effect of the whole is completely different. Moreover, while having pillars inscribed with his messages on Dhamma, Ashoka transformed them into epigraphic monuments of unique cultural meaning.

## **Mauryan Economy:**

### **Revenue System and Taxation:**

The primary source of revenue for the state was land revenue. The royal share of the produce of the soil is known as Bhaga generally amounted to one-sixth. It was based on the land used by each individual cultivator, not on the village as a whole, and also in accordance with the quality of the land. Asoka reduced it to one-eighth of the produce in the district of Lumbini where Lord Buddha was born. There are two types of lands:

1. **State land/ Rajkiya Bhoomi**- the income derived from this land is known as Sita. Those farmers who used their own seeds and farming tools for doing agriculture use to keep half of the produce to themselves and those farmers who were provided with seeds and farming by the state were allowed to keep one-third or one-fourth with themselves and rest part was sent to the state.
2. **Private land/ Niji Bhoomi**- the income derived from this land is known as Bhaga. This land belonged to the farmers. They had to pay one-fourth or one-sixth as tax.

Tax was collected both in cash and kind. Rajukka did the measurement of land. Tax free villages were known as Pariharaka and tax free land was known as Udwalik or Parihar. There was also a concept of emergency tax known as Pranay tax. According to Kautilya this tax could only be imposed once during the reign of a king. These were various other sources of income of the state. The state charged toll tax and trade tax on the article sold. There was forest tax, tax on intoxicants, mine tax, irrigation tax, etc.

Under the Mauryas, some groups of the people were exempted from taxes. Brahmanas, students, women, blind, deaf, etc. were exempted from taxation.

### **Agriculture:**

Most important feature of the economy was agriculture. According to Kautilya is the best industry. Kautilya mentioned about three crops in a year whereas Megasthenese mentions about two types of crops. The economy of the state was based on agriculture, animal husbandry and trade. These three were all together known as Varta. Basically the Mauryan economy was agrarian and the majority of the people were agriculturist. It was during the Mauryan period that the transition to agriculture was completed in India and agriculture became the basic economic activity of the people. The principal crops were rice, barley, millet and wheat. There are also references to sugarcane, fruits and vegetables.

### **Industries:**

The prime industry during the Mauryas were spinning and weaving yarns. Madura, Aparant, Kalinga, Kashi, Vatsa and Mahishmati are mentioned as important cotton textile centre in Kautilya's Arthashastra. Cloth industries were regulated by state. Kautilya mentions three varieties of Dukula which were the products of Vanga and Pundra. In the same context Kautilya mentions linen fabrics of Kasi and Pundra. Bengal, Kamrupa and Banaras were the chief regions famous as centres of textile industry.

As regards to costlier textiles, there were references to silk cloth. Kautilya mentions Kauseya along with Chinese fabric of Chinese manufacture. That shows that silk of Chinese origin competed with those made in India. The manufacture of wool was an old and indigenous industry. Kautilya refers to varieties of fabrics of sheep's wool. Wood work is a very old Indian industry. The art of the carpenter had attained a high skill. The perfection of the craft in the Mauryan period can be seen in the wooden platform excavated near Patna.

### **Communication and Transport:**

Roads and ports were important ways of communication. There were mainly four roads:

1. **Uttarapath-** Purushpur to Tamralipti. According to Megasthenese this road was 1300 miles long. It was constructed by Chandragupta Maurya and during the reign of Sher Shah Suri this road was known as Sadak-i-azam. During the time of Lord Auckland it was known as Grand Trunk Road.
2. **Dakshinapath-** Shravasti to Pratishthan.
3. The third road connected Bhrigukacch to Mathura.
4. The fourth road began from Champa to Kaushambi.

### **Ports:**

Barbairikam- It was located in Sindh, Bhrigukacch(Bharoach)- Greeks called it Berigaja, sopra, these three ports were situated in the western parts of the empire. Tamralipti was the important port on the eastern side. Mauryans had trade relations with Babylonia, Niarcus and Arian mentioned that Indian traders used to wear shoes of white leather and sell Mukta(pearls) in the markets of Greece. Kautilya in his Arthashastra mentioned about the import duties which was 10% on the imported goods. State also participated directly in trade and commerce. State had monopoly over some products such as wine, salt, mine, ships, forest, etc. The highest authority of trade was known as Panyadhyaksha.

### **Trade and Commerce:**

The rise of the Nandas and the Mauryas helped greatly to improve India's inland and foreign trade. External trade was carried on with Syria, Egypt, Greece, etc. in the west. After the conquest of Kalinga with its sea port on the eastern coast of India. It was carried on with the countries of South-East Asia and China. The state controlled foreign trade and licenses were given for that purpose. The chief articles of export were spices, pearls, diamonds, sandalwoods, ivory, cotton cloth, silk yarn, muslin, etc. The principal imports were linen, silver, gold, dry fruits, etc.

The Mauryan state exercised a rigid control over all trade and industry. The superintendent of commerce(panyadhyaksha) fixed the prices of commodities and intervened wherever there was a glut of any commodity. An important aspect of Mauryan economy was the state monopoly of mining and metallurgy. It was a source of great income. The superintendent of mining was Akradhyaksha whose duty was to prospect for new mines and reopen old and disused ones. The state enjoyed unrestricted monopoly in the trade of salt and superintendent looked after salt mines. There was a superintendent of iron and he looked after the manufacture of things from iron.

### **Weights and Measures:**

Dron- to weight the grains, Nivartan- to measure land, Aratni- to measure rain, Suvarnamashak/ Rattika was the smallest unit of measurement. Manadhyaksha worked under Pautvadhyaksha did the supervision of weights and measurement.

### **Coins:**

In Arthashastra coins were called as 'Roop'. Other types of coins are:

1. Nishaka/Suvarna- Gold coins.
2. Karshapan/ Dharan/ Pann- silver coin.

Pann was the major coin of Mauryas. It was regulated by the state. These are also called punch marked coins. Several images such as of snakes, peacock, trees were punched on these coins. The coins had only images and did have any information or inscription written on it.

3. Mashak/ kakini- there were copper coins.

In Arthashastra it is mentioned that there were state minting factories also and its head was known as Lakshanadhyaksha. Rupdarshaka was known as the examiner of coins. The economic month of Mauryas started from July.

## **The Mauryan Administration:**

The Mauryas organized a huge administrative system. A detailed account of it is produced in the Indica of Megasthenese and Arthashastra of Kautilya. Chandragupta Maurya was not only a ruler but also a capable administrator. The administrative set-up established by him continued and his successors and no change was felt necessary except that Ashoka tried to liberalize it further and elaborated the public duties of the state officials. The basic principles of Mauryans lost their hold over the administration.

### **King:**

The king was the pivotal head of the state . He had legislative, executive and judicial power. He was the supreme commander of the army and planned military operations with Commander-in-chief. There are no references to any election of kings in contemporary records, either indigenous or foreign. Usually, the eldest son succeeded to the throne. Kautilya put great emphasis on the education and training of the king in the art of governance and administration. According to him, the body of politics gets diseased if the king lacks discipline and is ignorant. Hence, the king must be introduced with the four branches of human knowledge i.e Anviksiki(philosophy), Trayi(the three Vedas), Varta(economics), Dandaniti(science of governance). The king should practice self-control and conquer just, anger, greed, pride, haughtiness and vainglory.

In the highly centralized administration king use to appoint ministers, high officials and established a well planned system of supervision and inspection. King was assisted by his council of ministers which were headed by Mantriparishadadhyaksha. The Mantriparishada was also head of the civil servants called Adhyakshas or Amatyas who kept in touch with all sections of the society and made a highly skilled secretariat divided into several departments. Some of these departments and their Adhyakshas are listed below:

Sannidhata(Royal Treasury)

Akaradhyaksha( Mines superintendent)

Suvarnaadhyaksha(gold superintendent)

Panyaadhyaksha(commerce superintendent)

Kupyadhyaksha(forest officer)

Lavanadhyaksha(Salt department)

Sitadhyaksha(Agriculture)

The Mauryan kings upon the following advice of Kautilya “in the happiness of the subjects lies the happiness of the king, in their welfare, his welfare, he should not consider good which pleases himself, he should consider good that pleases his subjects.” The king had a strong bodyguard. He was protected by a platoon of 24 elephants when he went out for hunting or inspection.

### **Ministers:**

Next to the king, minister occupied an important place in the politics. The view of Kautilya is that real sovereignty is to be achieved by three fold powers i.e Mantrisakti(statesmanship), Prabhusakti(treasury), Utashsakti(energy and enthusiasm). According to Kautilya “ sovereignty is possible only with assistance. A single wheel can never move, hence he shall employ ministers and hear their opinion. According to him ministers are the eye of king.”

The council of ministers is called Parishad. Kautilya refers to two kinds of ministers i.e the Mantrins and the Amatyas. The Mantrins constituted the inner circle of the Parishad which corresponded to the modern cabinet. They included the Prime Minister, the Purohita, the Commander-in-chief and the Yuvraj. Dwarika, Antar vamsika, Prashasta, Samharta and other Amatyas constituted the outer circle of Parishad. Policies were framed by the cabinet while the Amaytas carried them out. In addition to the Amatyas the Mantri Parishad included the leaders of the Paur-Janapada. They were called Mahamatyas. Kautilya was in the favour of of a small cabinet. He advised the king to consult three or four ministers as advice of one was not desirable. The ministers were no doubt directly responsible to the king for the due discharge of their duties.

### **Paura-Janapada:**

The Paura Janapada was the assembly of the people of the town and the country. This assembly could demand Anguttaras or favours from the king in times of crisis . This assembly could undertake social work and give relief to the poor and helpless . The Paura Janapada acted as a powerful check on royal authority. The provinces were also known as ‘chakra.’ Ashoka himself used to visit the provinces to check the proper law and order. The broader division of the provinces are as follows:

- Northern Uttarapath(Taxila)
- Western Avantipatha(Ujjain)
- Central Province(Magadha)
- Eastern Prachyapath(Toshali/Kalinga)
- Southern Dakshinapatha(Suvarnagi)

In each province there was a governor or viceroy who was sometimes a prince of royal blood. The princes, when appointed as viceroys were called Kumar Mahamatras while the rest of the viceroys were simply designated as Mahamatras. It is believed that there was an advisory committee like council of ministers at the centre to help every Mahamatra. There were many other officers who helped him to carry on the administration. According to Dr.Altekar, the provincial government was required to maintain law and order, collect taxes for the central government cooperate in the work of its different departments and keep a watch over the feudatories and frontier people. Provinces were further divided into mandals(commissionaries) and its head was known as Pradeshta.

### **District Administration/ Aahar/ Vishay:**

Each was administered by officers i.e Pradeshika, Yukta and Rajukka. Pradeshika was senior and Rajukka was subordinate. Yukta was subordinate to both of them. It was duty of Pradeshika to tour the kingdom every five year and collect details of the administration. The revenue and general administration was carried on in the districts by Sthanikas and Gopas with their own staffs of officials. The Gopa had charge of five to ten villages in which he supervised the maintenance of boundaries, registered gifts, sales and mortgages and kept an accurate census of the people and their material resources. The Sthanika had similar duties in the district under his charge and the Gopa necessarily functioned under him. The Sthanikas were responsible to Samaharta who commanded the services of Pradeshtris who were identical with the Pradeshikas of the Ashoka inscription for the supervision of local administration. In the district administration there were superintendent of different grades for different departments.

### **Village Administration:**

The village was the smallest unit of administration in charge of an official called Gramika . He was not the paid servant of the crown but an elected official of the village . That explains the omission of his name from the salaried list of officials given by Kautilya. Village elders(gram-viddhas) are often mentioned in the Arthashastra and they had a share in guiding and assisting the people generally and assisting the officials of the government in disposing of petty disputes arising in the village.

### **Municipal Administration:**

Megasthenese gives an elaborate description of the administration of Patliputra and it may be presumed that other important towns were governed in a similar manner. According to Megasthenese, Patliputra was controlled by a municipal commission of 30 members who were divided into 6 boards of five members each. The first board was concerned with the industrial arts. Its duty was to check adulteration and fix the rates of fair wages; the second board was concerned with foreigners. Foreigners were closely watched by the officials who provided suitable lodgings, escorts and medical attendance, the third board was concerned with systematic registration of births and deaths, the fourth board was concerned with trade and commerce. It regulated sales and enforced the use of duly stamped weights and measures, the fifth board was responsible for the supervision of manufactures, and the function of sixth board was the collection of tithes on the value of goods sold. All the municipal commissioners in their collective capacity were required to control all the affairs of the city and keep in order the markets, temples, harbours and public works.

### **Judicial Administration:**

The Mauryan state had very efficient judicial system. The king was the fountain head of justice. There were two classes of courts. Dharmasthiya court and Kantakshodhan court. Dharmasthiya(diwani) were civil courts which decided cases relating to contract, gift, agreement, sales, marriages,etc. Kantakshodhan(faujdari) courts were criminal courts which dealt with the cases of theft, robbery, murder, sex offences,etc. The supreme court was at the capital and was presided by the king as the chief justice. There were subordinate courts at the headquarters of the provinces, divisions and districts. Villages had in addition popular courts consisting of village elders who tried minor cases. The Mauryan penal code was very severe. It sanctioned torture, trial by ordeal, mutilation of limbs,etc. Capital punishment was in vogue under Ashoka even after his conversion to Buddhism

### **Espionage:**

Kautilya had put a great emphasis on the espionage system which was intended to promote progress, efficiency and stability in the state. Both men and women used to work as spies. During Mauryan period they had several names such as:

Overseers- Megasthenese

Inspectors- Stabo

Gudha-purush- In Kautilya's Arthashastra

Mahamatyapasharpa was the head of the spies . Mainly there were two types of spies:

1. Sanstha- they were stationed at one place.
2. Sanchara- they used to wander in the empire.

Spies were kept not only by the emperor but also by all the important officials of the state. They were deputed to foreign countries also. With the help of spies , the emperor kept himself informed with all the relevant affairs of the state.

### **Military Organisation:**

The Mauryas maintained a large well equipped army which was three times larger than the Nandas. The Mauryan army consisted of four wings i.e the infantry, the cavalry, the elephants and chariots. The fighting force of the Mauryan government consisted of 60,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry and 9000 elephants. The Arthashastra refers to camel and ass corps as well. The administration of the army was looked after by a war office consisting of 30 members who were divided six boards of 5 members each :

1. The first was incharge of the navy.
2. The second board was concerned with transport.
3. The third board dealt with infantry.
4. The fourth board was concerned with cavalry.
5. The fifth board was incharge of the chariot.
6. The sixth board was incharge of elephants.

Senapati was the head of the department. Kautilya divided the army into three parts :

1. The permanent army of the king.
2. The mercenary army.
3. The armies of the municipalities

In the words of Dr. G.M Bongard- Levin, the Mauryan age is marked by the spread of iron, the development of agriculture, crafts and trade, the growth and towns, etc. Kautilya names the science of economy among the four basic sciences, comprising the teaching of agriculture, cattle- raising and trade. The use of iron enabled new areas to be developed in particular, the densely wooded tracts of land along the Ganges.

### **Decline and Disintegration of the Mauryan Empire:**

The Mauryan Empire was the first empire in the history of India. It witnessed many great rulers such as Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka who carried out their rule in their own unique ways and maintained a huge empire for decades. But the empire turned unfortunate in its last few years and began to decline due to the following reasons:

- **The neutral policies of Ashoka failed to support supremacy of the Brahmins:**  
This view was given by Pandit Harprashad Shastri. According to him Ashoka's policies agitated the Brahmins which led to their anti-reactions and ultimately to the Brahmanic revolution. This is proved by the murder of Brihadratha the last Mauryan emperor by his Brahmin commander-in-chief Pushyamitra Sunga. But this view was condemned by Hem Chandra Rai Chaudhary who produced that if the policies of Mauryas was anti-brahmin they would never have a Brahmin as their commander-in-chief. In the real sense it was only an armed revolt for the usurpation of power which should not be viewed as a religious battle.
- **The non-violent and peaceful policies of Ashoka:**  
This was the view of Hemchandra Rai Chaudhary. He has criticized Ashoka by calling him a ruler away from reality and a dreamer. Though this cannot be considered as being completely as he did not completely adopt the policy of peace. As in his 13<sup>th</sup> Major Rock Edict he talks about the punishment to be given to those who did not follow Dhamma. Bhandarkar too condemned his policy of Dhamma and considered it to be a reason for the decline of Mauryan empire.

- **Exploitative rule of provincial Amatyas:**

There are evidences of local revolts during the time of Bindusara as well as Ashoka at Taxila. The subjects of Taxila declared that they were not against the emperor Ashoka but were against the local Amatyas. This depicts that the Amatyas were turning despotic gradually. According to Niharranjan Rai the main reason behind the decline of Mauryan empire was the revolts of the subjects.

- **Economic decline:**

This view was given by D.D Koshambi. It is clear that the Mauryas exhibited a huge empire. Thus, they maintained a huge amount of taxes. On the other hand Ashoka gave huge grants to the Buddhist monks and monasteries. According to Divyavadana when Ashoka was denied to use his royal treasury for grants he began to make those grants using his personal property which led him to empty his personal wealth as well as the royal treasury. According to Patanjali the Mauryan kings in the end began to sell the idols of their Gods and Goddess in order to fill their empty treasury. Thus, this became a major factor for their decline.

- **Extreme centralization of administration and power:**

According to Romila Thappar there was a lack of sovereignty among all the administrative units as right from centre to the lowest unit of administration was intervened by the state. A strong network of bureaucrats and spies established in every nooks and corners of the empire. This complicated the whole system. After the death of Ashoka the weak successors led to the weakening of the state which led to the transformation of administration from centralized to decentralized and ultimately contributed to the decline of the empire.

- **The spread of new scientific knowledge to the extreme parts of India:**

It is believed that the Magadha empire witnessed a few new discoveries and inventions in its last decades for example use of coins, cross sectional and mixed crops cultivation, etc. Prof. Ramsharan Sharma is of view that industrial and scientific development is a factor for the development and building of any empire thus, when these developments began to reach to extreme parts of India which led to the rising of new powers for example Satvahanas. These new powers led to the weakening of Mauryas.

- **Weak successors and disintegration of the empire:**

One of the most important factor behind the success of the Magadha imperialism was the the rise of strong rulers one after another but after Ashoka the graph declined and weak successors succeeded him one after another. Thus, they took the empire towards its decline. Moreover, after the death of Ashoka the empire was disintegrated which ultimately led to its decline.



