
UNIT 18 MAGADHAN TERRITORIAL EXPANSION

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18.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall outline the territorial expansion of the kingdom of Magadha. This will provide an understanding of how and why it was possible for Magadha to become an 'empire'. After reading this Unit you should be able to:

- identify the location of Magadha and its environs and note its strategic importance,
- learn about some of the sources that historians use for writing on this period,
- have a brief idea of the political history of Magadha during the two centuries preceding Mauryan rule.
- understand the notion of 'empire' in the context of early periods of history,
- trace the chief events leading to the establishment of Mauryan rule,
- learn about the early Mauryan kings — Chandragupta and Bindusara — and their expansionist activities,
- explain the context of the accession and coronation of Asoka Maurya and the importance of the Kalinga War, and
- finally, identify the boundaries of the Magadhan 'empire' at the death of Ashoka.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

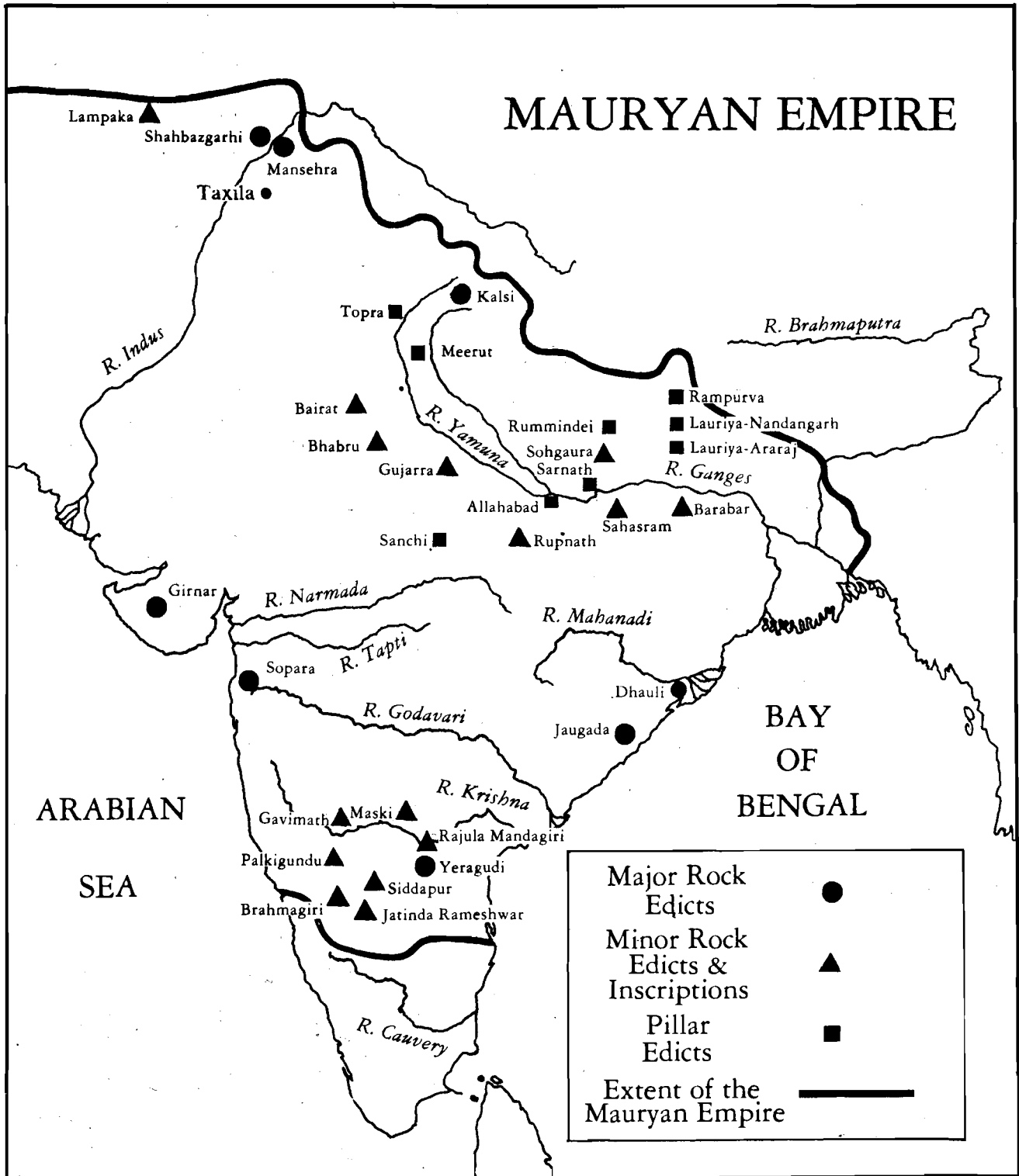
In Unit 15 you were introduced to the various **Janapadas** and **Mahajanapadas** that are known to us from primarily early Buddhist and Jaina texts. The rise of these **Janapadas** and **Mahajanapadas**, which were situated mostly north of the Vindhyas, is dated around the second half of the first millennium B.C. In this Unit we shall be discussing in detail the growth of one of these **Mahajanapadas**, namely Magadha. 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.

However, in this Unit we do not intend to highlight only the achievements of the Mauryan kings in expanding the territorial frontiers of Magadha. We shall also discuss the notion of an 'empire' in the pre-modern context at two levels:

- i) Various meanings of the term 'empire' which does not simply mean a territorially vast kingdom, and
- ii) the early Indian notions of state and empire.

By discussing these various definitions, it would be possible to understand the various

MAURYAN EMPIRE



views of scholars on the characterization of the Magadhan empire, particularly under the Mauryas.

In this Unit we shall also take into account the political events throughout the period from the fifth to the third century B.C.

The Magadhan Kingdom began to grow during the sixth century B.C. itself. However, this process accelerated considerably under the Nandas and the Mauryas. The location of the Asokan inscriptions indicate that a major part of the Indian sub-continent, excluding the eastern and southern extremities, had come under Magadhan suzerainty. However, after discussing the details of how this expansion took place, we shall introduce you to the view that the composition and texture of the Magadhan empire, in its various parts, was so diverse that to be able to hold it together, direct political control was probably very difficult. This may perhaps explain why Asoka endeavoured to resolve the inherent social tensions in the empire through the introduction of his policy of **Dhamma** (You will learn more about it in Unit-21).

18.2 LOCATION OF MAGADHA

You have been generally introduced to the Kingdom of Magadha as one of the sixteen **Mahajanapadas** in Unit 14 of Block-4.

The **Mahajanapadas** were located over a major part of the Ganga Valley with a few to the north-west and south-west of it. 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 kingdoms that surrounded Magadha were Anga in the east, the Vajji Confederacy to the north, to its immediate west the kingdom of Kasi and further west, the kingdom of Kosala.

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 is such that it has in its vicinity large tracts of alluvial soil. Interestingly, the earliest capital of Magadha, Rajgriha was situated to the south of the river and not near it. This is most plausibly explained from the point of view of its strategic location and, secondly, due to the fact that it lay in the vicinity of iron-encrusted outcrops. It has also been suggested that its accessibility to copper as well as 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 Pataligramma), situated on the confluence of several rivers like the Ganga, Gandak, Son and Pun Pun. 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 and making heavy transport along the river possible. Thus Magadha had certain natural advantages over other contemporaneous kingdoms, though some of which like 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 B.C.

Recent researches have suggested that accessibility to the iron mining areas in particular enabled kingdoms like Magadha and Avanti to not only produce good weapons of warfare but also in other ways. It facilitated expansion of agrarian economy and 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, it must be noted, became a serious competitor of Magadha for quite some time and was also located not far from the iron mines in eastern Madhya Pradesh.

18.3 NOTE ON SOURCES

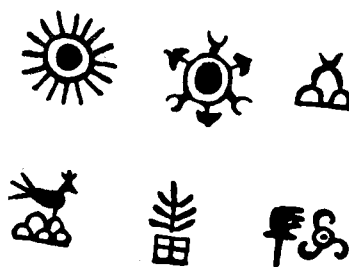
The events and traditions of the middle Ganga plains where Magadha was prominently located, are well preserved in the early Buddhist and Jain literature.

Some of the texts of the Buddhist tradition are compiled as the **Tripitikas** and the **Jatakas**. Those pertaining to the early Jain tradition are the **Acaranga Sutra** and **Sutrakritanga** which are considered earlier than the others. All these were however written or compiled well after the sixth century B.C., at different times. For particularly the early events of a political nature, Buddhist and Jaina traditions represent them more authentically and 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** and **Dipavamsa** compiled in Sri Lanka are significant sources for the events related particularly to Asoka Maurya's reign. These, along with the **Divyavadana** (which is preserved outside India in the Tibetan and 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 and are near-contemporary, are accounts gathered from classical writings in Greek and 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 is, however, known to us only through quotations in later Greek writings of Strabo and Diodorus of the first century B.C. and Arrian of the second century A.D. Since north-west India from about the sixth century B.C. till about the fourth century B.C. 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 and Greek sources like Herodotus' account.

Ever since its discovery in 1905, the **Arthashastra** of Kautilya has been considered an important source of information for the Mauryan period. Today, several new views on the date of the **Arthashastra** have emerged, some of which suggest that it should not be considered in totality a text written in the Mauryan period. Thus, it is suggested on the basis of a statistical method that some of the chapters of the **Arthashastra** should be dated to the first two centuries of the Christian era. However, many other 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, and commented upon and edited by other writers during a subsequent period.

Both inscriptions and coins as important sources of information for understanding the early history of India 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 are punched on them separately. Though this type of coin is known from roughly about the fifth century B.C., the 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 for particularly Asoka Maurya's rule is extremely significant and unique in content. There are fourteen major edicts, seven minor rock edicts, seven pillar edicts and other inscriptions of Asoka located at prominent places near towns and trade routes in various parts of the Indian sub-continent. They **markedly stand out** as a physical testimony to the length and breadth of the Magadhar empire at the close of Asoka's reign.



1. Symbols on Punch-Marked Coins.

Archaeology as a source of information has, in recent years, yielded considerable data on the material cultures of the Ganga Valley. The nature of this archaeological material has already been discussed in Unit 15 of Block 4. We know that 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. From Archaeology we also know that many elements of material culture started spreading to areas outside the Ganga Valley and that they came to be associated with Mauryan rule.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Tick the right answer (✓).

Magadha was surrounded by the following **three** kingdoms:

- a) Avanti, Kosala, Anga
- b) Anga, Kosala, Vajji Confederacy
- c) Anga, Vajji Confederacy, Kassi
- d) Avanti, Kasi, Kosala

2) Describe the important sources for reconstructing the history of Magadha in about five lines.

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3) List three important factors which were advantageous for the growth of the Magadhan Kingdom.

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4) Mark which of the following statements is right (✓) or wrong (×).

- a) Inscriptions are the most important source of information for the pre-Mauryan period.
- b) The Mauryan punch-marked coins have uniform symbols.
- c) The **uttarapatha** was a route which followed the course of the river Ganges.
- d) Pataliputra was situated south of the river Ganges.
- e) Megasthenes' account of India is known to us through later writers.

18.4 POLITICAL HISTORY OF PRE-MAURYAN MAGADHA

Under Bimbisara who was a contemporary of the Buddha and who, like the Buddha, lived in the 6th – 5th century B.C. Magadha emerged as a controller of the middle Ganga plains. Bimbisara 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 part of the district of Kasi as dowry. He had cordial relations with the king of Gandhara. These diplomatic relations can be considered as a sign of the strength of Magadha. To the east of Magadha lay the Kingdom of Anga whose capital Champa

ruled over 80,000 villages. Tradition tells us that Bimbisara was imprisoned by his son Ajatasatru who is said to have starved him to death. This is reported to have taken place around 492 B.C.

Internal troubles and the succession of Ajatasatru 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 Kasi and broke the earlier amicable relations by attacking his maternal uncle Prasenajit, the king of Kosala. The Vajji Confederation of people whose **Mahajanapada** lay to the north of the Ganga was Ajatasatru's next target of attack. 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. His 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 Kasi and Vaisali, the capital of Vajji **Mahajanapada**, had been added to Magadha, making it the most powerful territorial power in the Ganga Valley.

Ajatasatru is said to have ruled from 492 B.C. to 460 B.C. He was succeeded by Udayin (460-444 B.C.). During Udayin's reign the Magadhan kingdom extended in the north to the Himalayan ranges and in the south to the Chhota Nagpur hills. He is said to have built a fort on the confluence of the Ganga and the Son. Despite the vastness of Magadha's territories, Udayin and 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 Banaras, was placed on the throne in 413 B.C. 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 and the Ganga Plains as a whole that the invasion of Alexander took place in north-west India in 326 B.C., often considered the beginning of the historic period in India. The Nandas are therefore, often described as the first empire-builders of India. It must however be underlined that they did 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 when they tell us about their vast army which is said to have consisted of 20,000 cavalry, 200,000 infantry, 2000 chariots and 3000 elephants. We also have some indications that the Nandas had contact with the Deccan and South India. Their control of some parts of Kalinga (modern Orissa) is indicated in the Hathigumpha inscription of king Kharavela, who ruled in Orissa from the middle of the first century B.C. Some very late inscriptions from the south Karnataka region also suggest that parts of the Deccan may have been included in the Magadhan empire under the Nandas. Most historians suggest that by the end of the reign of Mahapadma Nanda the first phase of the expansion and consolidation of the Kingdom of Magadha had taken place. That 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. It is clear, however, that there was no encounter between the Kingdom of Magadha and the Greek conqueror.

The Nanda rule came to an end by 321 B.C. Nine Nanda kings are said to have ruled and by the end of their rule they are said to have 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 lay in its advantageous geographical location, its access to the iron mines and the control it had come to exercise over important land and river trade routes. In the next part of this Unit we turn to take a look at Magadha as an 'empire' and the **Mauryan** control of it.

18.5 NOTION OF 'EMPIRE'

Before we talk of the Mauryan empire, let us try to understand what an 'empire' means. This is necessary because we often indiscriminately use the term empire in

relation to all types of kingdoms or states. Further, we somehow seem to think that ancient, medieval and modern empires were all identical in nature. Obviously, the nature of the British empire of modern times or even the Central Asian Mongol empire of the medieval times could not have been identical with the nature of the Mauryan empire. There were important differences between empires in different periods of history, and when we study the history of an ancient empire, it is important that we understand what essential elements constituted an empire.

18.5.1 Modern Views on Definition of 'Empire'

Most often 'empire' is understood to designate a political system which has under a central control a vast expanse of territories not all of which are necessarily culturally homogeneous. The centre in this definition is embodied either in the person of the king or emperor or, in the political institution which is organised to hold together the territories under one control. The term 'Imperial' comes from the Latin word *imperium*. This indicates relative concentration of authority at the centre. The centre controls territorially contiguous units which ultimately attain some symbols of common political identity. Generally, the Roman empire in the ancient world is taken as the classical example to which all others, including the Mauryan, are then compared.

This definition, however, should not be understood as connoting sovereign nation states some of which built vast empires in modern times. The nature of the central authority in early empires was either dependent on the charismatic personality of rulers and leaders and their exploits and most importantly, their upholding of a certain order of things which are sanctioned by tradition.

The common view about the Magadhan empire of the Mauryas is that it could best be understood as a centralized bureaucratic empire. This kind of an 'empire' was prevalent in other parts of the world as well.

Centralized bureaucratic empires were usually established through the military and other exploits of individuals, generally in periods of turmoil, strife and unrest of various kinds, and thus the establishment of their rule is considered to have brought about peace and order. At the same time it would be natural for such empires to have enemies because in their rise to power they must have either usurped or challenged various interest groups. In new territories their policy of aggrandizement nurtures animosity. The rulers have therefore, to make allies, passive or active, to implement their aims through either matrimonial or diplomatic alliances.

In terms of political goals such empires visualize a unified centralized polity in which decision making is monopolized. This means that they replace earlier traditional or local tribal authorities. In the rise and success of such empires geo-political factors are usually said to shape their activities. It was absolutely essential for such empires to be able to mobilize various resources, those of economic raw materials and man-power in particular. For active political support these empires were usually dependent on urban economic, cultural and professional groups and in a passive sense, from the wider social strata of peasants and urban lower classes. Recruitment from upper class groups ensured the proper functioning of administrative bodies. In the ultimate analysis the administration thus evolved was expected to work for exploitative purposes. In other words, in the early empires, there was a high degree of inequality in society, permitting the privileged groups and the privileged regions to exploit the resources produced by others.

18.5.2 Indian Notion of Chakravarti-Kshetra

In understanding the Mauryan phase of the Magadhan empire, or indeed, any other 'empire' of ancient India, it may be useful to know how an ideal emperor was viewed in ancient literature. The idea of an emperor is expressed through the Sanskrit term *Chakravarti* and the sphere of his 'imperial rule' by the term *chakravarti-ksetra*. Though in early Brahmanic texts kings performing sacrifices like *Ashvamedha* and *Rajasuya* are mentioned, it is only in the *Arthashastra* that a clear idea is given of what a *chakravarti-ksetra* was. It is said to be the land which extended north to south from the Himalaya to the seas (of the Indian Ocean) and measured a thousand *yojanas*. There is no doubt that the *Chakravarti* ideal reflected conventional ideas about Indian ruler's sphere of influence and, infact, it was an ideal never achieved, except perhaps by Asoka. On the other hand, this aspiration of universal conquest is

constantly emphasized in exaggerated terms in both literary and epigraphical sources. Historians have often taken these reflections to indicate the actual achievement of large territorial conquests by kings and thus misreading the ideal for the actual achievements.

The **Arthashastra**, and several other texts, also list the different limbs (**angas**) which together made a **rashtra** (state). Of the seven limbs of the State mentioned in the **Arthashastra**, the king, is made out to be the most powerful. The seven elements (**saptanga**) of the State in the general texts on ancient Indian polity are stated to be ministers (**mantri**), ally (**mitra**), taxes (**kara**), army (**sena**), fort (**durga**), land or territory (**desh**) and to these, the **Arthashastra** significantly adds an eighth element, the enemy (**shatru**). In defining the king as the most powerful being in the State, Kautilya the author of **Arthashastra** also expects him to have exceptional qualities. You will read more about how the king organised the State and administered his empire in Unit 20. Some of these ideas about state and empire as defined above have led historians for some time to consider Magadha under the Mauryas to have become a despotic state with the king controlling all regions of the empire through a centralized administration. This has now been questioned, and we shall review some of these views below. One can, however, clearly say that the success of Magadha marked the triumph of a monarchical form of political organisation over other, such as **ganga-samgha** forms, of political organisation.

Check Your Progress 2

Use space given below for your answers:

- 1) Tick the right answers using the code given below:
The early kings of Magadha entrenched its stability by achieving the following:
- i) shifting the capital to Pataliputra
 - ii) conquering the Anga capital of Champa
 - iii) expanding the frontier upto Gandhara
 - iv) incorporating the neighbouring kingdoms through war and alliance
 - v) capturing the iron mines of Avanti
- code
- a) i, ii, iii
 - b) i, iv, v
 - c) ii, iv
 - d) iii, v

- 2) To what extent do you think that the Nanda rule in Magadha was significant?
Write in five lines.

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- 3) On the basis of the definitions given above about what constitutes an empire, how would you describe the Mauryan empire? Answer in about five lines. Also discuss it with the Counsellor at the Study Centre.

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- 4) Mention which of the following statements are correct (✓) or wrong (×).
- The Magadhan empire can be described as a conquest empire.
 - The Magadhan empire can be described as a centralised bureaucratic empire.
 - The most important element of State in early texts was the army.
 - The ideal of a Chakravarti was achieved by most ancient Indian kings.
 - The king in the *Arthashastra* was expected to have exceptional qualities.

18.6 ORIGIN OF MAURYAN RULE

It has been suggested by D.D. Kosambi that the most immediate and unexpected byproduct 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. According to Classical sources, Chandragupta is supposed to have even met Alexander and advised him to attack Magadha which was under the unpopular rule of the Nandas. Though this is difficult to verify, both Indian and Classical sources suggest that Alexander's retreat resulted in the creation of a vacuum, and, therefore, it was not difficult for Chandragupta to subdue the Greek garrisons left there. However, 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 B.C. while now it is generally accepted as 321 B.C.

According to Indian tradition Chandragupta was assisted by the Brahmin Kautilya, also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta, to rise to power. It is further suggested on the basis of a play of the sixth century A.D. which in its description of the overthrow of the Nandas by Chandragupta, hints that at his accession to the throne at twenty-five years of age, he was in fact a weak ruler and the real ruler of the empire was Chanakya. The *Arthashastra* is attributed to Chanakya who is said to have been well-versed in not only the political principles of warfare and aggrandisement, but was also deeply knowledgeable about the organisation of the State and society to ensure that the empire did not collapse.

Though the early years of Chandragupta's reign are little known, most historians agree to assign either a 'low caste' or a tribal origin to the Maurya family. According to some accounts Chandragupta was the son of the last Nanda king by a "low born" woman called Mura; from her came the family name Maurya. The Buddhist tradition tells us that he was a member of the Moriya clan of Pippalivana and thus suggests that this dynasty was in some way linked to the tribe of the Sakyas to which the Buddha belonged. In this explanation the family name Maurya is said to have been derived from the name of the tribe. This also indirectly implies that as an old family of chiefs they were in some senses Kshatriyas. The *Puranas* do not link the Nanda and Maurya dynasties, though they too describe the latter to be Shudras. The Brahmanical perception about them is however based on its earlier idea of the Magadhan society generally being unrighteous and of mixed caste origin. The Classical sources which know of the last Nanda king also do not link these two dynasties, though Chandragupta, known to them as *Sandrakottus*, is described to be of low origin. It is also suggested that the name ending 'Gupta' in Chandragupta's name, and the later episode of Asoka's marriage to the daughter of a merchant of Vidisa, lend credence to the view that the Mauryas could have been of Vaishya origin.

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. On the other hand, the several sources that point to the role of the Brahmin Kautilya as the advisor and 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 there had been considerable contact with the foreigners and Magadha itself was looked down upon in Orthodox Brahmanical tradition. Besides, it was considerably exposed to the ideas of Buddha and Mahavira. It was thus amidst considerable turmoil—social and political—that Chandragupta was successful in ascending the throne of Magadha.

Many historians who 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. Source material on the exact nature of these military exploits is wanting and therefore, one has to construct these details on the basis of accounts which are available for his successors who inherited this empire.

Both Indian and Classical sources agree that Chandragupta overthrew the last of the Nanda kings and occupied his capital Pataliputra and this success is linked with his accession to the throne in around 321 B.C. As mentioned earlier, the political rise of Chandragupta was also linked with the invasion of Alexander in the north-west. The years 325 B.C. – 323 B.C. were crucial in the sense that many of the governors who were stationed in the north-west after Alexander's invasion were assassinated or had to retreat and this enabled Chandragupta to gain control of this region rather quickly. Here, it needs to be stated that there is an uncertainty about whether Chandragupta routed the foreigners first or defeated the Nandas. In any case both these tasks were complete by 321 B.C. and the state was set for further consolidation.

One of the first major achievements of Chandragupta Maurya on the military front was his contact with Seleucus Nikator who ruled over the area west of the Indus around 305 B.C. In the war that ensued Chandragupta is said to have turned out victorious and eventually, peace was established with this Greek viceroy in around 303 B.C. 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. A marriage alliance was also concluded. Further, Seleucus sent an ambassador called Megasthenes who lived in the court of Chandragupta for many years. This achievement meant that the territorial foundation of the Mauryan empire had been firmly laid with the Indus and Gangetic plains well under Chandragupta's control.

It is suggested by a majority of scholars that Chandragupta ultimately established his control not only in the north-west and the Ganges plains, but also in western India and the Deccan. The only parts left out of his empire were thus present day Kerala, Tamil Nadu and parts of North-eastern India. Details of the conquests in different parts of India are lacking. The Greek writers simply mention that Chandragupta Maurya overran the whole country with an army of 600,000. The conquest and subjugation of Surashtra or Kathiawar in the extreme west is attested in the Junagadh Rock Inscription of Rudradaman of the middle of the second century A.D. This record refers to Chandragupta's viceroy or governor, Pushyagupta by name, who is said to have constructed the famous Sudarshana Lake. This further implies that Chandragupta had under the control the Malwa region as well. With regard to his control over the Deccan too we have late sources. 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 A.D. make allusion to the "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 Jain saint. At Sravana Belgola, the Jaina religious centre in south Karnataka, he spent the rest of his life and died in the orthodox Jain way by slow starvation.

Bindusara, the son of Chandragupta, is said to have ascended the throne in 297 B.C. There is comparatively little known about him from either Indian or Classical sources. To the latter he is known as Amitrochates. They also inform us that he had contacts with the Seleucid king of Syria, Antiochus I, whom he requested to send him sweet wine, dried figs and a sophist.

In a very late source of the sixteenth century, in the work of the Buddhist monk Taranath of Tibet, we are told of Bindusara's warlike activities. He is said to have destroyed kings and 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 Asoka is credited to have conquered only Kalinga, the extension of the Mauryan empire beyond the Tungabhadra must have been the work

of his predecessors. It can therefore be suggested that it was probably in Bindusara's reign that the Mauryan control of the Deccan, and the Mysore plateau in particular, was firmly entrenched.

Though Bindusara is called "slayer of foes", his reign is not very well documented, and, therefore, the extent of his conquests can only be arrived at by looking at a map of the empire of Asoka who conquered only Kalinga (Orissa). His religious leanings are said to have been towards the Ajivikas. Buddhist sources suggest the death of Bindusara around 273-272 B.C. After his death there was a struggle for succession among his sons for about four years. Ultimately, around 269-268 B.C. Asoka was crowned Bindusara's successor.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Mention which of the statements are correct (✓), or wrong (×).
 - a) On the advise of Chandragupta, Alexander invaded Magadha.
 - b) The Nanda and Mauryan families were related by blood.
 - c) Chandragupta was able to defeat Seleucus Nikator.
 - d) Chandragupta and Bindusara conquered India upto Kanyakumari.
 - e) Bindusara had contacts with the Seleucid king, Antiochus-I.
- 2) What are the various ways in which the caste/origin of the Mauryan family can be explained? Give some of the views in about five lines.

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18.7 ASOKA MAURYA

Till about 1837 A.D. Asoka Maurya was not a very well known king. In that year James Prinsep deciphered a Brahmi inscription referring to a king called **Devanampiya Piyadasi** (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 Asoka Maurya. The fame of Asoka 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**. Below, we discuss some relevant details of his early life, the Kalinga War and the extent of the Mauryan empire during his reign.

18.7.1 The Kalinga War

During his father's reign Asoka served as a Viceroy at Ujjain and 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 Asoka 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 Asoka too 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 so as to enhance his piety as a Buddhist. It is necessary to point out that though Buddhism played a significant role in Asoka'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.



2. Asokan Pillar (Lauriya, Nandangarh)



3. Bull Crowned Column (Rampurva)



4. Asokan Capital Column (Sarnath)

They also suggest his conversion to Buddhism to have taken place after the Kalinga War.

Though Asoka's predecessors had intruded into the Deccan and the South and perhaps conquered parts of it, Kalinga, i.e., the present-day State of Orissa, 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. Asoka himself in Rock Edict XIII describes his conquest of Kalinga which is said to have taken place eight years after his consecration, around 260 B.C. In this war the Kalingans were completely routed and "One hundred thousand were slain, and many times that number died." Though on the battlefield Asoka, 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.

18.7.2 Magadha at Asoka's Death

The location of the various Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts through which Asoka 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 Maneshra near Peshawar, Kalsi near Dehra Dun, Sopara in Thana district, Girnar near Junagarh in Kathiawar, Dhauli near Bhuvaneshwar and Jaugada in Gangam district of Orissa. In Karnataka, the Minor Rock Edicts appear among other places at Siddapura, Jatinga-Rameshwara 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 Asoka's inscriptions are found in Delhi (originally located at Topara near Ambala and Meerut), Kausambi in Uttar Pradesh, Lauriya Araraj, Lauriya Nandagarh and Rampurva in Bihar; Sanchi, near Bhopal; Sarnath, near Benaras; and Rummindei in Nepal. The exact location of these sites is indicated in the map attached to this Unit and gives a clear idea of the large territorial spread of the empire under Asoka. The placement of the edicts also highlights the care with which they were located on important trade routes linking river and road traffic. Therefore, as suggested by recent writings on the subject, access to raw materials appears to have been the main motivation particularly in controlling the Peninsula.

The Edicts also describe people on the borders of the empire and this confirms the delineation of the empire noted above. 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. They are mentioned along with 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 Asoka'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' (**Raja-vishaya**) from the bordering territories (**pratyanta**). Just as 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 Srilanka 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 Asoka. However, simultaneously, there was also a conscious attempt to end all wars in his empire. The extension of the principle of non-violence to state policy was a unique experiment that was never repeated in the annals of the political history of India. Often, in writings of different historians, Asoka has been idealized as a benevolent despot. This tends to overlook the more enabled Asoka to ideologically control a vast empire which otherwise would perhaps have been difficult to rule. Finally, though the findspots of the Mauryan inscriptions are on well known trade routes, some of them bordering peripheral zones of the empire, it still remains to be conclusively decided whether the regions where no evidence of inscriptions is found, were controlled in the same way as those where they were found. Both, the questions

about the administrative control of the Mauryas and the policy of **Dhamma** shall be taken up for detailed study in Units 20 and 21.

Check Your Progress 4

1) Write a note in about five to six lines on why there was a change in the policy of conquest under Asoka?

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2) Use the code given below to identify which of the following statements about Asoka are correct:

- i) Asoka was the crown prince and the successor to Bindusara.
- ii) During the latter half of his life he turned towards Buddhism.
- iii) Asoka inscriptions were inscribed when conquest of a region had been made.
- iv) He replaced the policy of conquest of war by conquest of **dhamma**.
- v) Asoka in his inscriptions is usually known as Davanampiya Piyadassi.

Code:

- a) ii, iv, v
- b) i, iii, iv
- c) ii, iii, iv
- d) i, iv, v

18.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have attempted to introduce to you the way in which the first historical empire can be studied and also the details on the rise and territorial expansion of Magadha. It is hoped that after going through this Unit you have been able to learn:

- the importance of the strategic location of Magadha and factors responsible for its rise,
- the sources that can be used for writing about the political history of Magadha, in particular with Mauryan rule,
- the chief events in the early history of Magadha before the rise of Mauryan rule,
- the explanation about the notion of 'empire' in the context of early period of history,
- details pertaining to the origin of the Mauryan family and their early history,
- the expansionist policies of Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara,
- issues surrounding the accession of Asoka Maurya and his activities upto the Kalinga War, and
- the extent of the Magadhan empire at the death of Asoka.

18.9 KEY WORDS

Aggrandizement: Aggression.

Autocratic: An absolute ruler whose authority is unchallenged.

Benevolent Despotism: Good or benign ruler but who exerts absolute control.

Chakravarti-Ksetra; The sphere of influence of a chakravarti or universal emperor.

Confederacy: League or alliance of states

Contiguous: Adjacent or adjoining each others.

Dhamma/Dharma: Literally 'universal order' but in its use in Asokan inscriptions it is translated to mean 'piety'.

Satrapy/Satrapies: A term originally derived from an old Iranian institution, it referred to the provinces into which an empire was divided and which were placed under the charge of satraps.

Saptanga: Seven limbs or parts.

Sophist: A philosopher, literally 'one meant to deceive'.

Surplus: 'Amount left over when all consumption requirements have been met'. In an economic sense the difference between the value of goods produced and wages paid.

Uttarapatha: Northern route usually referring to the land route running along the foothills of the Himalayas.

Yojanas: Unit of measurement in ancient India.

18.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) (c) (✓)
- 2) Consult Sec. 18.3
- 3) See Sec. 18.2
- 4) (a) × (b) (✓) (c) × (d) × (e) (✓)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) (c) (✓)
- 2) See last part of Sec. 18.4
- 3) See Sec. 18.5 and also consult Sec. 18.6
- 4) (a) × (b) (✓) (c) × (d) × (e) (✓)

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) (a) × (b) × (c) (✓) (d) × (e) (✓)
- 2) Consult Sec. 18.7.1

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See Sub-sec. 18.8.2 and Map
- 2) Consult Sub-sec. 18.8.1
- 3) (a) (✓)