

History of India up to 1206AD

(18BHI13C)

UNIT 2

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1 Buddhism and Jainism

Jainism

Among the various sects, the sect led by Vardhamana Mahavira (referred to as Nigantha Nataputta by Buddhist texts) bloomed into a religion called Jainism. It was earlier known as Nirgranthas (free from bonds). Mahavira was known as Jina (conqueror) of the soul and hence his sect came to be known as Jainism. According to Jain tradition, Mahavira was not the founder of Jainism. According to Jaina tradition, Risabha was the founder of the sect. He is considered the first Tirthankara. Yajur Veda mentions three of the Tirthankaras, viz., Risabha, Ajitanatha and Aristanemi. Mahavira organised his members into monastic and lay followers.

Life of Mahavira

Vardhamana was born around 540 BCE in Kundagrama, a suburb of Vaishali. He was a member of the ruling family of a *gana-sangha* and his father Siddhartha was the chief of the Jnatrika clan. His mother Trishala was a Lichchavi princess and sister of its chief Chetaka. Mahavira was closely connected to rulers of Magadha, Anga and Videha through his mother.

From his childhood, he was attracted to spiritual life. After the death of his parents, he left his home at the age of 30 and wandered about as a mendicant for 12 years in search of true knowledge. He practiced severe austerities and discarded his garments. During the course of his wanderings, he met Gosala and spent six years with him before they parted due to differences. In the 13th year of his wandering, at the age of 42, Vardhamana attained enlightenment or Nirvana. He then became a Tirthankara and came to be called a Jina or Mahavira (the Great Conqueror). He preached for 30 years and was patronised by the rich and the elite. He died about 468 BCE at the age of 72 in Pavapuri near Rajgriha. He fasted unto death according to Jaina ideals. His death or final liberation was a joyous event for the Jains.

Mahavira had a huge following. In the early stages, his followers were drawn from different sections of the society. However, in course of time, Jainism was confined to the trading and money-lending community. Jainism's insistence on non-violence closed other occupations, including agriculture, as it prescribed refraining from intended or unintended killing.

About 500 years after Mahavira's death, in about 79 or 82 CE, schism occurred in Jainism. Magadha was affected by severe famine and some of the Jaina monks under Bhadrabahu went south to maintain their strict discipline. They remained without garments and

were known as Digambaras (space-clad or naked). Others stayed back under the leadership of Sthulabhadra and adopted a white garment and were known as Svetambaras (white-clad). The schism weakened Jainism in Magadha, but it found ardent followers in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Karnataka.

On the death of Bhadrabahu, Shulabhadra held a Great Council at Pataliputra, which compiled the Jaina canon. It consisted of 12 angas (limbs). Another council was held in Valabhi, Gujarat, in the 5th century CE. It added 12 upangas (minor sections). The Jaina monks not only wrote religious treatises but also promoted secular literature. Acharrangasutra, Sutrakritanga, and Kalpasutra are the earliest Jaina texts. Most of the early Jaina texts were written in Ardha-Magadhi, the language of the common people.

Tenets of Jainism

The central tenet of Jainism is non-violence. No other religion lays as much emphasis on non-violence as does Jainism. It also criticises human emotions. Jainism denies the existence of God. In its early stages, deity was not worshipped in Jainism. It emphasises that salvation cannot be attained by worshipping god or by sacrifices. It stipulates that one can escape misery only by performing austerities.

Mahavira rejected Vedic authority. Hence, Jainism is an unorthodox religion. According to Jainism, the world has no beginning or end. It goes through a series of progress and decline according to an eternal law.

Jainism advocated dualism: the world is made of soul (jiva) and matter (ajiva), which are eternal. The coming together of jiva and ajiva creates karma (action), which leads to an endless cycle of birth and rebirth. To free oneself from karma, one has to practice severe austerities and self-mortification. Therefore, in Jainism, only monks could achieve liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

Triratnas

Jain discipline requires adherence to certain rigorous rules. The Jains are required to follow three principles called Triratnas or Three Gems.

1. Right faith (samyag-darshana);
2. Right knowledge (samyag-jnana);
3. Right conduct (samyag-mahavrata)

Five Great Vows

The monks have to undertake the five great vows (pancha-mahavrata): (1) Not to kill or injure (ahimsa); (2) Not to steal (asteya); (3) Not to lie (satya); (4) Celibacy (brahmacharya); (5) Not to possess property (aparigraha)

Non-Violence

The five vows are common to both the monks and lay followers. The monks were to observe the vows more rigorously than the lay followers. As Jainism placed great emphasis on non-violence, strict observers of the faith wear a muslin cloth around their mouth and nose so that they would not inhale small insects even by mistake. To avoid trampling on ants and other insects, Jain monks used feathers to sweep the path before walking. Jains could not practice agriculture or other crafts that involve killing or injury to living organisms. Hence they took to trading and money-lending and excelled in it. As a result, they were closely associated with urbanisation.

Jainism is an egalitarian religion. It does not sanction any inequality based on birth. It is one's deeds that determine one's status in society and not birth. Jainism believes that "by one's action one becomes a Brahmin, a Kshatriya, or a Vaishya, or a Sudra." Pride based on birth is considered a sin. Women were admitted into the monastic order. However, as a woman one cannot attain salvation. By accumulating merit by good deeds, a woman could be reborn as a man and then strive to attain salvation.

Jainism in Tamilnadu

Jainism spread to Tamil Nadu from about the third century CE. Jaina rock shelters are found in large numbers around Madurai and other places. The mention of death of Kopperuncholan by fasting in chol Purananuru is considered by some to be similar to Jaina practice of sallekhana. Jaina influence is strong in early Tamil literature. Naladiyar, Palamoli, Jivaka Chinthamani, Yapperunkalam Karikai, Neelakesi are some of the prominent Jaina works in Tamil. As early as c. 470 CE a Jaina Dravida Sangha was established in Madurai by Vajranandi, a disciple of Boojya Padha. Jainism has survived in Tamil Nadu and there are several Jaina temples. One of the Jaina temples is at Tiruparuthikunram near Kanchipuram with beautiful ceiling paintings. This part of Kanchipuram was known as Jaina Kanchi.

Decline of Jainism in India

Absence of royal patronage, split amongst Jains as Digambaras and Svetambaras, lack of missionary zeal, factionalism and the severity of practices, and spread of Buddhism as a rival faith led to the decline of Jainism in India.

Buddhism

Among the heterodox sects, Buddhism was the most popular. It went on to emerge as a powerful religion patronised by various rulers. It was so influential that its ideas were adopted by Asoka as a state policy. Though it virtually disappeared from India for nearly a millennium, it spread far and wide and is widely followed even today in the South-east and East Asian countries. In the mid-twentieth century it was revived in India by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

Life of Buddha

Gautama Buddha was born as Siddhartha in the Sakya clan to its king Suddhodhana and his chief queen Mahamaya. His mother Mahamaya dreamt of a white elephant with six tusks entering her womb when she was pregnant. Learned men prophesied that the child would either become 'a Universal Emperor or a Universal Teacher'. While Mahamaya was going to her parents' home, Siddhartha was born in a park in Lumbini near Kapailavastu. Siddhartha grew in luxury as a royal prince. He married Yashodhara and had a son named Rahula. When he was riding on his chariot with his charioteer one day outside the palace, he saw an old man, a sick man, a corpse and finally a religious mendicant. Overcome by remorse at the misery of people, he left his palace in the dead of night in search of eternal truth. He rode in his chariot pulled by his favourite horse Kanthaka and driven by his charioteer Channa far away from the city. He cut his hair and sent it along with his discarded garments and jewellery to his father. This is known as Mahabhiraskramana or the Great Going Forth.

Siddhartha wandered about and joined Alara Kalama as a disciple for a brief period. He also sought guidance from a hermit Uddaka Ramaputta. Siddhartha was not satisfied with their path and practised severe austerities, which left him nearly dead. One day, he ate rice boiled in milk given by a milkmaid named Sujata and began meditation under a pipal tree in Bodhgaya. After 49 days of meditation, he attained enlightenment, at the age of 35. Thereafter, he came to be called Buddha or the Enlightened. He then delivered his first sermon in a deer park in Sarnath near Varanasi. This event is described as Dharmachakra-parivartana or 'wheel of the great law'. He spoke about the Four Noble Truths and the Middle Path. He established Sangha and spread his ideas far and wide. Buddha and his followers travelled for eight months of the year and stayed at a place for four months of the rainy season. At the age of 80, he passed away

in Kusinagara. This is known as Parinirvana. The prominent disciples of Buddha were Sariputta, Maha-moggallana, Mahakaccayana and Ananda. Buddha had a huge following among both the royalty and lay persons.

Buddhist Councils

After the death of Buddha, the tenets and other aspects of Buddhism were decided upon in the councils of Buddhist monks. Over a period of time, four Buddhist councils were held. The First Buddhist Council was held at Rajgriha after Buddha's death. It was headed by Upali. In this council, Upali recited the Vinaya Pitaka. Ananda recited Sutta Pitaka. The Second Buddhist Council met at Vaishali a century after Buddha's death. The Buddhist Order split into two later. One was called the Sthaviravadins or 'Believers in the Teachings of the Elders' and the other known as Mahasanghikas or 'Members of the Great Community'. The Third Buddhist Council was held at Pataliputra. It was convened by Asoka. The Sthaviravadins established themselves strongly and expelled the heretics. The last section called "Kathavatthu" was added to Abhidhamma Pitaka. The Fourth Buddhist Council was held at Kashmir during the reign of Kanishka. Sarvastivadins were an important sect of Buddhism. Its doctrines were compiled in Mahavibhasa.

Buddhist Sects

In course of time, Sthaviravadins, Mahasanghikas and Sarvastivadins emerged as major sects of Buddhism. New ideas emerged among the Sarvastivadins and Mahasanghikas. It led to the emergence of Mahayana and Hinayana (the Great and Lesser Vehicles) in Buddhism. Mahayana or the Great Vehicle became popular and influential in India. Nalanda University was an important centre of Buddhist learning and was patronised by the Palas. It spread to China and Japan. Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle became popular in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand and other South-east Asian countries. By the end of the Gupta period, Vajrayana or the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt emerged. It was popular in Bengal and Bihar. It was influenced by primitive local cults and spread to Tibet in the 11th century CE. The Vikramasila University in Bihar was an important centre of Vajrayana Buddhism.

Buddhism in India began to decline with the onset of the Bhakti movement. Slowly Buddhism came to be influenced by Hindu practices. Soon, Buddhism was incorporated into Hinduism, and Buddha came to be considered as an avatar of Vishnu in some traditions.

Buddhist Literature

The Buddhist texts were compiled in Pali. The Pali canons are called as the Tripitakas (Three Baskets). They are Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka. Vinaya Pitaka deals with monastic rules and moral disciplines. Sutta Pitaka dwells upon discourses and teachings of Buddha. Abhidhamma Pitaka expounds Buddhist philosophy. The Sutta Pitaka, which contains the teachings of Buddha, is divided into five groups or Nikayas. They contain popular works such as Theragatha and Therigatha (Hymns of the Elder Monks and Nuns) and Jataka tales (Buddha's deeds in previous births as Bodhisattva).

Other important Buddhist works include Milinda Panha, a discussion between Greco-Bactrian king Menander and Buddhist monk Nagasena, and Ceylonese chronicles Dipavamsa (Island Chronicles), Mahavamsa (Great Chronicle) and Culavamsa (Lesser Chronicle).

Four Noble Truths of Buddha

The four noble truths prescribed by Buddha are as follows:

1. The Noble Truth of Suffering: Birth, age, death, unpleasantness, separation, unfulfilled wish.
2. The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering: thirst for pleasure, power, long life, etc. are the causes for sorrow.
3. The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (Nirvana): complete stopping or release from sorrow.
4. The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to Cessation of Suffering: the Noble Eight fold Path or the Middle Path.

Buddhism believed in karma and the doctrine of rebirth. Past actions determine one's condition in this birth. To be free from karma or the cycle of rebirth is to attain nirvana. It can be attained by following the Middle Path.

Buddha's Middle or Eightfold Path

(1) Right Views; (2) Right Resolve; (3) Right Speech; (4) Right Conduct; (5) Right Livelihood; (6) Right Effort; (7) Right Recollection; (8) Right Meditation.

Hence Buddha did not mention or talk about God. He neither accepted nor denied the existence of God. Buddhism advocated equality. It preached non-violence or ahimsa and love towards all. However, it was a moderate religion compared to Jainism's insistence on ahimsa. It promoted trade and capitalism as it was against waste and advocated frugality. Jobs involving

any form of killing were forbidden. Trade in weapons, living beings, meat, liquor and poison were not permitted.

Buddhism in Tamil Nadu

Buddhism spread to Tamizhagam from about third century BCE. Asokan inscriptions found in the Deccan region vouch for the spread of Buddhism to southern parts of India. Archaeological evidences also reveal the existence of a Buddhist complex of the fourth century CE in Kaveripattinam. Quoting Pattinapalai, Noboru Karashima refers to merchants in Kaveripattinam who as vegetarians were opposed to animal sacrifice. From this one could presume the influence of Buddhism in Tamil country. Manimekalai by Sattanar one of the twin epics of the post-Sangam age is a Buddhist literature. Similarly the now extinct Kundalakesi is a Buddhist epic. Kanchipuram in the early Christian era was a flourishing Buddhist centre. Dinnaga and Dhammapala who headed the famous Nalanda University were renowned Buddhist scholars from Kanchipuram. Hiuen Tsang who visited Tamil country mentions in his travel accounts about several Buddhist Stupas built by Asoka in Kanchipuram.

A Buddhist temple was built in Nagapattinam at the request of a Chinese ruler during the reign of Pallava king Narasimhavarman II (CE 695-722). Chinese monk Wu-hing visited the monastery. In CE 1006, during the reign of Rajaraja I, Srivijaya King Mara-wijayottungavarman built a Buddhist temple in Nagapattinam. It is called the Soolamani-varma-vihara.

Decline of Buddhism in India

Buddhism faced divisions from time to time. Division into various splinter groups like 'Hinayana', 'Mahayana', 'Vajrayana', 'Tantrayana' and 'Sahajayana' led Buddhism to lose its originality. Pali and Prakrit were the spoken languages of people of north India and it was through these languages the message of Buddhism was spread. But ever since the times of Fourth Buddhist Council held during the reign of Kanishka, Sanskrit had come to be adopted. Buddhism thereupon became unintelligible to common people.

Buddhism also lost its royal patronage after Harshavardhana. In contrast, the Vedic religion got royal patronage first from Pushyamitra Sunga and later from imperial Guptas. The role of the exponents of Bhakti movement like Ramanuja, Ramananda also helped to Toramana Coin restore the glory of Vedic religion.

The invasion of Huns gave a deathblow to Buddhism. Toramana and Mihirakula, the two Hun chiefs had a deep-seated hatred for the Buddhists and they almost liquidated the Buddhists living in the north-west India. To make matters worse, the Rajput rulers who could

not reconcile to the Buddhist concept of non-violence, and as ardent advocates of Vedic religion started persecuting the Buddhists. Finally the invading Arabs and Turks forced the Buddhist monks to flee from India and seek asylum in Nepal, Tibet and Ceylon. In consequence Buddhism faded away in India.

2 Rise of Magadha- Alexander's Invasion

Rise of Magadha and Alexander's Invasion

In the beginning of the 6th century B.C., northern India consisted of a large number of independent kingdoms. Some of them had monarchical forms of government, while some others were republics. While there was a concentration of monarchies on the Gangetic plain, the republics were scattered in the foothills of the Himalayas and in north western India. Some of the republics consisted of only one tribe like the Sakyas, Licchavis and Mallas. In the republics, the power of decision in all matters of state vested with the Public Assembly which was composed of the tribal representatives or heads of families. All decisions were by a majority vote.

The Buddhist literature Anguttara Nikaya gives a list of sixteen great kingdoms called 'Sixteen Mahajanapadas'. They were Anga, Magadha, Kasi, Kosala, Vajji, Malla, Chedi, Vatsa, Kuru, Panchala, Matsya, Surasena, Asmaka, Avanti, Gandhara and Kambhoja. The Jain texts also contain references to the existence of sixteen kingdoms. In course of time, the small and weak kingdoms either submitted to the stronger rulers or gradually got eliminated. Finally, in the mid-6th century B.C., only four kingdoms – Vatsa, Avanti, Kosala and Magadha survived.

Vatsa

The Vatsa kingdom was situated on the banks of the river Yamuna. Its capital was Kausambi near modern Allahabad. Its most popular ruler was Udayana. He strengthened his position by entering into matrimonial alliances with Avanti, Anga and Magadha. After his death, Vatsa was annexed to the Avanti kingdom.

Avanti

The capital of Avanti was Ujjain. The most important ruler of this kingdom was Pradyota. He became powerful by marrying Vasavadatta, the daughter of Udayana. He patronized Buddhism. The successors of Pradyota were weak and later this kingdom was taken over by the rulers of Magadha.

Kosala

Ayodhya was the capital of Kosala. King Prasenajit was its famous ruler. He was highly educated. His position was further strengthened by the matrimonial alliance with Magadha. His sister was married to Bimbisara and Kasi was given to her as dowry. Subsequently there was a dispute with Ajatasatru. After the end of the conflict, Prasenajit married the daughter of Bimbisara. After the death of this powerful king, Kosala became part of the Magadha.

Magadha

Of all the kingdoms of north India, Magadha emerged powerful and prosperous. It became the nerve centre of political activity in north India. Magadha was endowed by nature with certain geographical and strategic advantages. These made her rise to imperial greatness. Her strategic position between the upper and lower part of the Gangetic valley was a great advantage. It had a fertile soil. The iron ores in the hills near Rajgir and copper and iron deposits near Gaya added to its natural assets. Her location at the centre of the highways of trade of those days contributed to her wealth. Rajagriha was the capital of Magadha. During the reign of Bimbisara and Ajatasatru, the prosperity of Magadha reached its zenith.

Bimbisara (546 – 494 B.C.)

Bimbisara belonged to the Haryanka dynasty. He consolidated his position by matrimonial alliances. His first matrimonial alliance was with the ruling family of Kosala. He married Kosaladevi, sister of Prasenajit. He was given the Kasi region as dowry which yielded large revenue. Bimbisara married Chellana, a princess of the Licchavi family of Vaishali. This matrimonial alliance secured for him the safety of the northern frontier. Moreover, it facilitated the expansion of Magadha northwards to the borders of Nepal. He also married Khema of the royal house of Madra in central Punjab. Bimbisara also undertook many expeditions and added more territories to his empire. He defeated Brahmadata of Anga and annexed that kingdom. He maintained friendly relations with Avanti. He had also efficiently reorganized the administration of his kingdom. Bimbisara was a contemporary of both Vardhamana Mahavira and Gautama Buddha. However, both religions claim him as their supporter and devotee. He seems to have made numerous gifts to the Buddhist Sangha.

Ajatasatru (494 – 462 B.C.)

The reign of Ajatasatru was remarkable for his military conquests. He fought against Kosala and Vaishali. He won a great success against a formidable confederacy led by the Licchavis of Vaishali. This had increased his power and prestige. This war lasted for about

sixteen years. It was at this time that Ajatasatru realized the strategic importance of the small village, Pataligrama (future Pataliputra). He fortified it to serve as a convenient base of operations against Vaisali. Buddhists and Jains both claim that Ajatasatru was a follower of their religion. But it is generally believed that in the beginning he was a follower of Jainism and subsequently embraced Buddhism. He is said to have met Gautama Buddha. This scene is also depicted in the sculptures of Bharhut. According to the Mahavamsa, he constructed several chaityas and viharas. He was also instrumental in convening the First Buddhist Council at Rajagriha soon after the death of the Buddha.

The immediate successor of Ajatasatru was Udayin. He laid the foundation of the new capital at Pataliputra situated at the confluence of the two rivers, the Ganges and the Son. Later it became famous as the imperial capital of the Mauryas. Udayin's successors were weak rulers and hence Magadha was captured by Saisunaga. Thus, the Haryanka dynasty came to an end and the Saisunaga dynasty came to power.

Sisunaga dynasty

The genealogy and chronology of the Saisunagas are not clear. Saisunaga defeated the king of Avanti which was made part of the Magadha Empire. After Saisunaga, the mighty empire began to collapse. His successor was Kakavarman or Kalasoka. During his reign the second Buddhist Council was held at Vaisali. Kalasoka was killed by the founder of the Nanda dynasty.

Nandas

The fame of Magadha scaled new heights under the Nanda dynasty. Their conquests went beyond the boundaries of the Gangetic basin and in North India they carved a well-knit and vast empire. Mahapadma Nanda was a powerful ruler of the Nanda dynasty. He uprooted the kshatriya dynasties in north India and assumed the title ekarat. The Puranas speak of the extensive conquests made by Mahapadma.

The Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela of Kalinga refers to the conquest of Kalinga by the Nandas. Many historians believe that a considerable portion of the Deccan was also under the control of the Nandas. Therefore, Mahapadma Nanda may be regarded as a great empire builder. According to the Buddhist tradition, Mahapadma Nanda ruled about ten years. He was succeeded by his eight sons, who ruled successively. The last Nanda ruler was Dhana Nanda. He kept the Magadha empire intact and possessed a powerful army and enormous wealth.

The fabulous wealth of the Nandas is also mentioned by several sources. The enormous wealth of the Nandas is also referred to in the Tamil Sangam work Ahananuru by the poet Mamulanar. The flourishing state of agriculture in the Nanda dominions and the general prosperity of the country must have brought to the royal treasury enormous revenue.

The oppressive way of tax collection by Dhana Nanda was resented by the people. Taking advantage of this, Chandragupta Maurya and Kautilya initiated a popular movement against the Nanda rule. It was during this time that Alexander invaded India.

Alexander's Invasion of India (327-325 B.C.)

Political Condition on the eve of Alexander's Invasion After two centuries of the Persian invasion, Alexander from Macedonia invaded India. On the eve of his invasion, there were a number of small kingdoms in north-western India.

The leading kings were Ambhi of Taxila, the ruler of Abhisara and Porus who ruled the region between the rivers of Jhelum and Chenab. There were many republican states like Nysa. In short, north-western India remained the most disunited part of India and the rulers were fighting with one another. They never come together against common enemies. Yet, it was not easy for Alexander to overcome so many sources of opposition.

Causes of the Invasion

Alexander ascended the throne of Macedonia after the death of his father Philip in 334 B.C. He conquered the whole of Persia by defeating Darius III in the battle of Arbela in 330 B.C. He also aimed at further conquest eastwards and wanted to recover the lost Persian Satrapy of India. The writings of Greek authors like Herodotus about the fabulous wealth of India attracted Alexander. Moreover, his interest in geographical enquiry and love of natural history urged him to undertake an invasion of India. He believed that on the eastern side of India there was the continuation of the sea, according to the geographical knowledge of his period. So, he thought that by conquering India, he would also conquer the eastern boundary of the world.

Battle of Hydaspes

In 327 B.C. Alexander crossed the Hindukush Mountains and spent nearly ten months in fighting with the tribes. He crossed the Indus in February 326 B.C. with the help of the bridge of boats. He was warmly received by Ambhi, the ruler of Taxila. From there Alexander sent a message to Porus to submit. But Porus refused and decided to fight against Alexander.

Then Alexander marched from Taxila to the banks of the river Hydaspes (Jhelum). On the other side of the river he saw the vast army of Porus. As there were heavy floods in the river, Alexander was not able to cross it. After a few days, he crossed the river and the famous battle of Hydaspes was fought on the plains of Karri. It was a well-contested battle. Although Porus had a strong army, he lost the battle.

Alexander was impressed by the courage and heroism of this Indian prince, treated him generously and reinstated him on his throne. Alexander continued his march as far as the river Beas encountering opposition from the local tribes. He wanted to proceed still further eastwards towards the Gangetic valley. But he could not do so because his soldiers refused to fight. Hardships of prolonged warfare made them tired and they wanted to return home. Alexander could not persuade them and therefore decided to return. He made arrangements to look after his conquered territories in India.

He divided the whole territory from the Indus to the Beas into three provinces and put them under his governors. His retreat began in October 326 B.C. and the return journey was not free from ordeals. Many republican tribes attacked his army. Anyhow he managed to reach beyond the Indus. On his way he reached Babylon where he fell seriously ill and died in 323 B.C.

Effects of Alexander's invasion

The immediate effect of Alexander's invasion was that it encouraged political unification of north India under the Mauryas. The system of small independent states came to an end. Alexander's invasion had also paved the way for direct contact between India and Greece.

The routes opened by him and his naval explorations increased the existing facilities for trade between India and West Asia. However, his aim of annexing north-western India to his empire was not fulfilled due his premature death. His authority in the Indus valley was a short-lived one because of the expansion of the Mauryan Empire under Chandragupta Maurya.

3 The Mauryas – Asoka

Mauryan Empire

Contemporary accounts by Greek historians show that Chandragupta was a youth living in Taxila when Alexander invaded India. Greek historians have recorded his name as “Sandrakottus” or “Sandrakoptus”, which are evidently modified forms of Chandragupta.

Inspired by Alexander, Chandragupta led a revolt against the Nandas years later and overthrew them. Chandragupta achieved it either by inciting the people to rise against an unpopular monarch, or by soliciting their support in overthrowing an unpopular king. Chandragupta established the Mauryan Empire and became its first emperor in 321 BCE.

We know from the Junagadh rock inscription (referred to earlier) that Chandragupta had expanded his empire westward as far as Gujarat. One of his great achievements, according to local accounts, was that he waged war against the Greek prefects (military officials) left behind by Alexander and destroyed them, so that the way was cleared to carry out his ambitious plan of expanding the territories. Another major event of his reign was the war against Seleucus, who was one of Alexander's generals. After the death of Alexander, Seleucus had established his kingdom extending up to Punjab. Chandragupta defeated him in a battle some time before 301 BCE and drove him out of the Punjab region. The final agreement between the two was probably not too acrimonious, since Chandragupta gave Seleucus 500 war elephants, and Seleucus sent an ambassador to Chandragupta's court. This ambassador was Megasthenes, and we owe much of the information that we have about Chandragupta to *Indica*, the account written by Megasthenes. The original of this work is lost, but many Greek historians had reproduced parts of his account describing the court of Chandragupta and his administration.

Chandragupta

Chandragupta was obviously a great ruler who had to reinvent a strong administrative apparatus to govern his extensive kingdom. (The system of governance and polity is discussed in the next section.) Chandragupta was ably advised and aided by Chanakya, known for political manoeuvring, in governing his empire. Contemporary Jain and Buddhist texts hardly have any mention of Chanakya. But popular oral tradition ascribes the greatness of Chandragupta and his reign to the wisdom and genius of Chanakya. Chanakya, also known as Kautilya and Vishnugupta, was a Brahmin and a sworn adversary of the Nandas. He is credited with having devised the strategy for overthrowing the Nandas and helping Chandragupta to become the emperor of Magadha. He is celebrated as the author of the *Arthashastra*, a treatise on political strategy and governance. His intrigues and brilliant strategy to subvert the intended invasion of Magadha is the theme of the play, *Mudrarakshasa*.

Bindusara

Chandragupta's son Bindusara succeeded him as emperor in 297 BCE in a peaceful and natural transition. We do not know what happened to Chandragupta. He probably renounced

the world. According to the Jain tradition, Chandragupta spent his last years as an ascetic in Chandragiri, near Sravanabelagola, in Karnataka. Bindusara was clearly a capable ruler and continued his father's tradition of close interaction with the Greek states of West Asia. He continued to be advised by Chanakya and other capable ministers. His sons were appointed as viceroys of the different provinces of the empire. We do not know much about his military exploits, but the empire passed intact to his son, Ashoka.

Bindusara ruled for 25 years, and he must have died in 272 BCE. Ashoka was not his chosen successor, and the fact that he came to the throne only four years later in 268 BCE would indicate that there was a struggle between the sons of Bindusara for the succession. Ashoka had been the viceroy of Taxila when he put down a revolt against the local officials by the people of Taxila, and was later the viceroy of Ujjain, the capital of Avanti and a major city and commercial centre. As emperor, he is credited with building the monumental structures that have been excavated in the site of Pataliputra. He continued the tradition of close interaction with the Greek states in West Asia, and there was mutual exchange of emissaries from both sides.

Ashoka

The defining event of Ashoka's rule was his campaign against Kalinga (present-day Odisha) in the eighth year of his reign. This is the only recorded military expedition of the Mauryas. The number of those killed in battle, those who died subsequently, and those deported ran into tens of thousands. The campaign had probably been more ferocious and brutal than usual because this was a punitive war against Kalinga, which had broken away from the Magadha Empire (the Hathigumpha inscription speaks of Kalinga as a part of the Nanda Empire). Ashoka was devastated by the carnage and moved by the suffering that he converted to humanistic values.

He became a Buddhist and his new-found values and beliefs were recorded in a series of edicts, which confirm his passion for peace and moral righteousness or dhamma (dharma in Sanskrit).

Edicts of Ashoka

The edicts of Ashoka thus constitute the most concrete source of information about the Mauryan Empire. There are 33 edicts comprising 14 Major Rock Edicts, 2 known as Kalinga edicts, 7 Pillar Edicts, some Minor Rock Edicts and a few Minor Pillar Inscriptions. The Major Rock Edicts extend from Kandahar in Afghanistan, Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra in north-west Pakistan to Uttarakhand district in the north, Gujarat and Maharashtra in the west, Odisha in

the east and as far south as Karnataka and Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh. Minor Pillar Inscriptions have been found as far north as Nepal (near Lumbini). The edicts were written mostly in the Brahmi script and in Magadhi and Prakrit. The Kandahar inscriptions are in Greek and Aramaic, while the two inscriptions in north-west Pakistan are in Kharosthi script.

The geographical spread of the edicts essentially defines the extent of the vast empire over which Ashoka ruled. The second inscription mentions lands beyond his borders: “the Chodas (Cholas), the Pandyas, the Satiyaputa, the Keralaputa (Chera), even Tamraparni, the Yona king Antiyoka (Antiochus), and the kings who are the neighbours of this Antioka”. The edicts stress Ashoka’s belief in peace, righteousness and justice and his concern for the welfare of his people. By rejecting violence and war, advocating peace and the pursuit of dhamma, Ashoka negated the prevailing philosophy of statecraft that stressed that an emperor had to strive to extend and consolidate his empire through warfare and military conquests.

Third Buddhist Council

One of the major events of Ashoka’s reign was the convening of the Third Buddhist sangha (council) in 250 BCE in the capital Pataliputra. Ashoka’s deepening commitment to Buddhism meant that royal patronage was extended to the Buddhist establishment. An important outcome of this sangha was the decision to expand the reach of Buddhism to other parts of the region and to send missions to convert people to the religion. Buddhism thus became a proselytizing religion and missionaries were sent to regions outlying the empire such as Kashmir and South India. According to popular belief, Ashoka sent his two children, Mahinda and Sanghamitta, to Sri Lanka to propagate Buddhism. It is believed that they took a branch of the original bodhi tree to Sri Lanka.

Ashoka died in 231 BCE. Sadly, though his revolutionary view of governance and non-violence find a resonance in our contemporary sensibilities, they were not in consonance with the realities of the times. After his death, the Mauryan Empire slowly disintegrated and died out within fifty years. But the two centuries prior to Ashoka’s death and the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire were truly momentous in Indian history. This was a period of great change.

The consolidation of a state extending over nearly two-thirds of the sub-continent had taken place with formalised administration, development of bureaucratic institutions and economic expansion, in addition to the rise of new heterodox religions and philosophies that questioned the established orthodoxy.

4 Mauryan Administration

The major areas of concern for the Mauryan state were the collection of taxes as revenue to the state and the administration of justice, in addition to the maintenance of internal security and defence against external aggression. This required a large and complex administrative machinery and institutions. Greek historians, taking their lead from Megasthenes, described the Mauryan state as a centralised state. What we should infer from this description as a centralised state is that a uniform pattern of administration was established throughout the very large area of the empire. But, given the existing state of technology in communications and transport, a decentralised administrative system had to be in place.

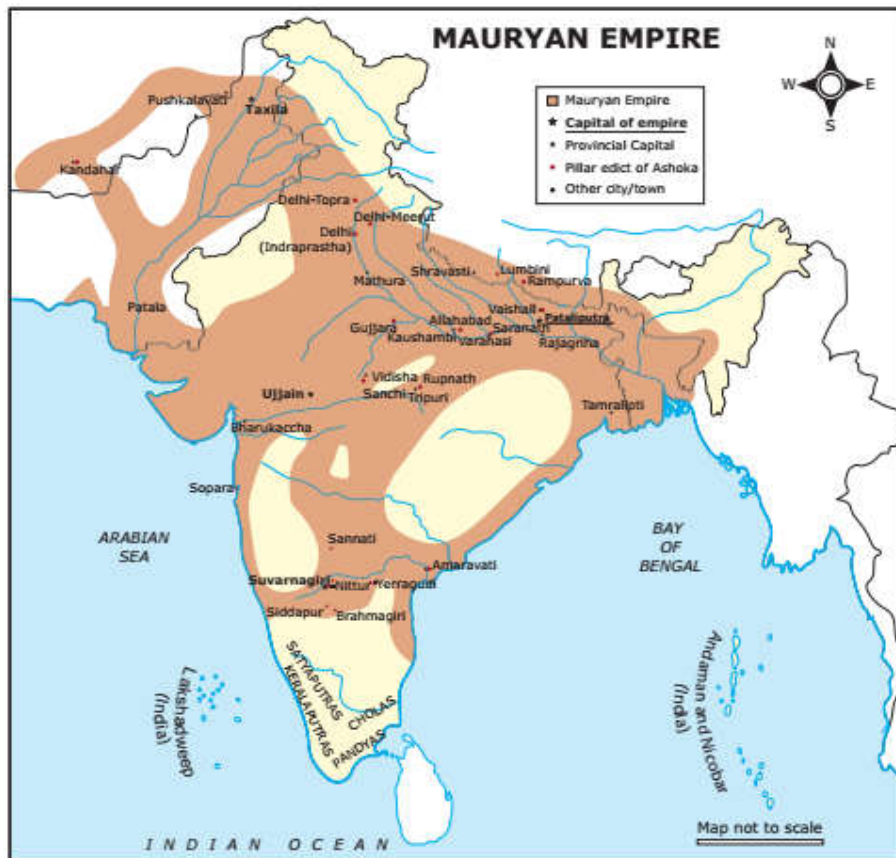
This bureaucratic set-up covered a hierarchy of settlements from the village, to the towns, provincial capitals and major cities. The bureaucracy enabled and required an efficient system of revenue collection, since it needed to be paid out of taxes collected. Equally, the very large army of the Mauryan Empire could be maintained only with the revenue raised through taxation. The large bureaucracy also commanded huge salaries. According to the Arthashastra, the salary of chief minister, the purohita and the army commander was 48,000 panas, and the soldiers received 500 panas. If we multiply this by the number of infantry and cavalry, we get an idea of the enormous resources needed to maintain the army and the administrative staff.

Arthashastra

Perhaps the most detailed account of the administration is to be found in the Arthashastra (though the work itself is now dated to a few centuries later). However, it must be remembered that the Arthashastra was a prescriptive text, which laid down the guidelines for good administration. If we add to this the information from Ashoka's edicts and the work of Megasthenes, we get a more comprehensive picture of the Mauryan state as it was.

Provincial Administration

At the head of the administration was the king. He was assisted by a council of ministers and a purohita or priest, who was a person of great importance, and secretaries known as mahamatriyas. The capital region of Pataliputra was directly administered. The rest of the empire was divided into four provinces based at Suvarnagiri (near Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh), Ujjain (Avanti, Malwa), Taxila in the north-west, and Tosali in Odisha in the south-east. The provinces were administered by governors who were usually royal princes. In each region, the revenue and judicial administration and the bureaucracy of the Mauryan state was replicated to achieve a uniform system of governance. Revenue collection was the responsibility of a



collector-general (samaharta) who was also in charge of exchequer that he was, in effect, like a minister of finance. He had to supervise all the provinces, fortified towns, mines, forests, trade routes and others, which were the sources of revenue. The treasurer was responsible for keeping a record of the tax revenues. The accounts of each department had to be presented jointly by the ministers to the king. Each department had a large staff of superintendents and subordinate officers linked to the central and local governments.

District and Village Administration

At the next level of administration came the districts, villages and towns. The district was under the command of a sthanika, while officials known as gopas were in charge of five to ten villages. Urban administration was handled by a nagarika. Villages were semi-autonomous and were under the authority of a gramani, appointed by the central government, and a council of village elders. Agriculture was then, as it remained down the centuries, the most important contributor to the economy, and the tax on agricultural produce constituted the most important source of revenue. Usually, the king was entitled to one-sixth of the produce. In reality, it was often much higher, usually about one-fourth of the produce.

Source of Revenue

The Arthashastra, recommended comprehensive state control over agricultural production and marketing, with warehouses to store agricultural products and regulated markets, in order to maximise the revenues from this most important sector of the economy. Other taxes included taxes on land, on irrigation if the sources of irrigation had been provided by the state, taxes on urban houses, customs and tolls on goods transported for trade and profits from coinage and trade operations carried on by the government. Lands owned by the king, forests, mines and manufacture and salt, on which the state held a monopoly, were also important sources of revenue.

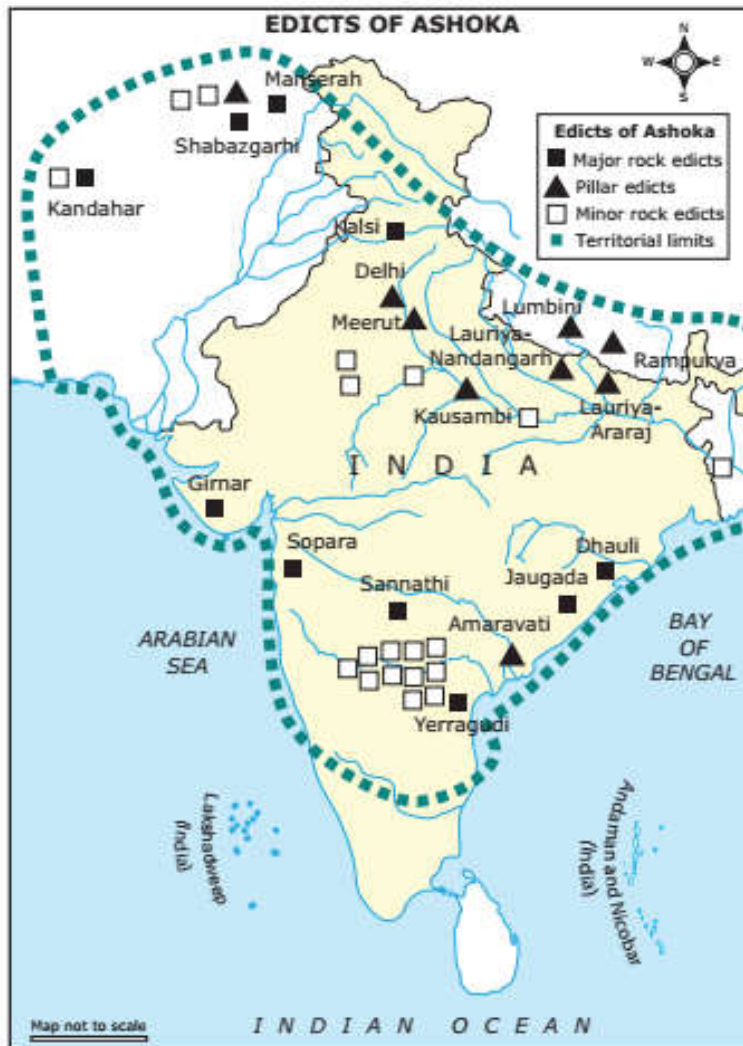
Judicial Administration

Justice was administered through courts, which were established in all the major towns. Two types of courts are mentioned.

The dharmasthiya courts mostly dealt with civil law relating to marriage, inheritance and other aspects of civil life. The courts were presided over by three judges well-versed in sacred laws and three amatyas (secretaries). Another type of court was called kantakasodhana (removal of thorns), also presided over by three judges and three amatyas. The main purpose of these courts was to clear the society of anti-social elements and various types of crimes, and it functioned more like the modern police, and relied on a network of spies for information about such anti-social activities. Punishments for crimes were usually quite severe. The overall objective of the judicial system as it evolved was to extend government control over most aspects of ordinary life.

Ashoka's Dharmic State

Ashoka's rule gives us an alternative model of a righteous king and a just state. He instructed his officials, the yuktas (subordinate officials), rajjukas (rural administrators) and pradesikas (heads of the districts) to go on tours every five years to instruct people in dhamma (Major Rock Edict 3). Ashoka's injunctions to the officers and city magistrates stressed that all the people were his children and he wished for his people what he wished for his own children, that they should obtain welfare and happiness in this world and the next. These officials should recognise their own responsibilities and strive to be impartial and see to it that men were not imprisoned or tortured without good reason. He added that he would send an officer every five years to verify if his instructions were carried out (Kalinga Rock Edict 1).



Ashoka realised that an effective ruler needed to be fully informed about what was happening in his kingdom and insisted that he should be advised and informed promptly wherever he might be (Major Rock Edict 6). He insisted that all religions should co-exist and the ascetics of all religions were honoured (Major Rock Edicts 7 and 12). Providing medical care should be one of the functions of the state, the emperor ordered hospitals to be set up to treat human beings and animals (Major Rock Edict 2). Preventing unnecessary slaughter of animals and showing respect for all living beings was another recurrent theme in his edicts. In Ashoka's edicts, we find an alternative humane and empathetic model of governance. The edicts stress that everybody, officials as well as subjects, act righteously following dhamma.