

Maurya Period (322 BC - 185 BC)

Sources for Mauryan History

I. Literary Sources

1. Kautilya's 'Arthashastra' : It is the most important literary source for the Mauryas. It is a treatise on government and polity. It gives a clear and methodological analysis of political and economic conditions of the Mauryan period.

2. Megasthenese's 'Indica' : Megasthenese was the ambassador of Seleucus Nikator in the court of Chandragupta Maurya. His 'Indica' is foremost among all the foreigners' accounts for Maurya. But its original copy is lost and it has survived only as quotations in the text of classical Greek writers, such as Strabo, Diodorus, Arrian, Plutarch and, Latin writers such as Ptolemy and Justin. It refers to Mauryan administration, 7-caste system, absence of slavery and usury in India etc.

3. Visakhadatta's 'Mudra Rakshasa' : Though it was written during Gupta Period, it describes how Chandragupta Maurya got Chanakya's assistance to overthrow the Nandas. Besides this, it gives an excellent account of the prevailing socio-economic condition.

4. Puranas : Though they are a collection of legends interspersed with religious teachings, they give us the chronology and lists of Mauryan kings.

5. Buddhist Literature : 1. Indian Buddhist text Jatakas (a part of Khuddaknikaya of Suttapitaka which describes 549 stories of Buddha's previous births) reveal a general picture of socio-economic conditions of Mauryan period. 2. Ceylonese Buddhist chronicles Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa describe the part played by Ashoka in spreading Buddhism to Sri Lanka. 3. Tibetan Buddhist text Divyavadana gives information about Ashoka and his efforts to spread Buddhism.

II. Archaeological Sources

1. Ashokan Edicts and inscriptions : There are Rock Edicts, Pillar Edicts and Cave Inscriptions located at several places in the Indian sub-continent. Their importance came to be appreciated only after their decipherment by James Prinsep in 1837 and also the identification of Ashoka as the author of these edicts in the beginning of the 20th century. Majority of them are in the nature of Ashoka's proclamations to the public at large, and only a small group of them describe his own acceptance of Buddhism and his relationship with the Sangha (Community). Though Prakrit was the language used in them, the

script varied from region to region (Kharoshti in the North-West, Greek and Aramaic in the West and Brahmi in the East of India).

2. Other Inscriptions : Junagadh Rock Inscription of Rudradaman, Sohgaora Copper Plate Inscription in Gorakhpur district of U.P., Mahasthan Inscription in Bogara district of Bangladesh. - All these are directly concerned with the Mauryan Period, though they are believed to be not necessarily those of Ashoka.

3. Material Remains : Wooden palace of Chandragupta Maurya, Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), Silver and Copper punch-marked coins found in Kumharar (Patna) and other places are the material remains of the Mauryan peirod.

Ashokan Edicts and Inscriptions	Contents	Found at
14 Major Rock Edicts	Various Principles of Dhamma	Mushera (Hazara, Pakistan) Shahbajgarhi (Peshawar, Pakistan), Kalsi (Dehradun, Uttar Pradesh), Junagadh (Girnar, Gujarat), Sopara (Thana, Maharashtra), Yerragudi (Kumul, Andhra Pradesh), Dhauri (Puri, Orissa), Jaugada (Ganjam, Orissa)
2 Kalinga Rock Edicts	New system of administration after the Kalinga war	Dauri or Tosali (Puri, Orissa), Jaugada (Ganjam, Orissa)
Minor Rock Edicts	Personal history of Ashoka and summary of his dhamma	Sasaram (Bihar), Maski (Andhra Pradesh), Bhabru-Bairat (Rajasthan), Rupanath (MP), Gavimath, Palkig-undu, Siddhpur, Jating

Rameshwar, Brahmagiri (Karnataka)

Ashokan Edicts and Inscriptions	Contents	Found at
Bhabru-Bairat Rock Edicts	Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism	Bhabru-Bairat (Rajasthan)
7 Pillar Edicts	Appendix to rock Edicts	Merrut-Delhi (Chhoti Lata), Topra-Delhi (Badi Lata), Alla abad (UP); Lauriya Nandangadh, Lauria Ar raj and Rampurva (Bihar)
4 Minor Pillar Edicts	Signs of Ashoka's fanaticism to Dhamm	Sanchi (MP), Sarnath and Allahabad(UP)
2 Tarai Pillar Edicts	Ashoka's respect for Buddhism	Rummandei / Lumbini and Nigaliva (Tarai of Nepal)
3 Barabar Cave Edicts	Ashoka's toleranti	Barabar Hills (Gaya, Bihar)

Ashokan 14 Major Rock Edicts

Contents

- I. Prohibition of animal sacrifices and festive gatherings.
- II. Measures of social welfare.
- III. Respect to Brahmanas.
- IV. Courtesy to relatives, elders, consideration for animals.
- V. Appointment of Dhamma Mahamatras and their duties.
- VI. Need for efficient organisation of administration (orders to Dhamma Mahamatras).
- VII. Need for tolerance among all religious sects.
- VIII. System of Dhamma-yatras.
- IX. Attack on meaningless ceremonies and rituals.

X. Conquest through Dhamma instead of war.

XI. Explanation of Dhamma-policy.

XII.Appeal for tolerance among all religious sects.

XIII.Kalinga war, mention 5 contemporary Hellenic (Greek) kings.

XIV.Inspiration to spend religious life.

Origin of the Mauryas

1. The Puranas describe them as Shudras.

2. 'Mudrakshasa' of Vishakhadatta uses the terms Vrishal / Kulhi (of low clan).

3. The Classical writers, such as Justin, describe Chandragupta only as a man of humble origin.

4. The Junagarh Rock Inscription of Rudrasam (150 AD) has some indirect evidence, suggesting that the Mauryas might have been of Vaishya origin.

5. The Buddhist work, on the other hand, try to link the Mauryan dynasty with the Sakya Kshatriya clan to which Buddha belonged. According to them, the region from which the Mauryas came was full of peacocks (Mor), and hence they came to be known as 'Moriyas'. It is obvious, from this that the Buddhists were trying to elevate the social position of Ashoka (their patron) and his predecessors

6. In conclusion, we can say that the Mauryas belonged to the Moriya tribe and were certainly of a low caste, though it is not clear as to which low caste.

Chandragupta Maurya : 322 BC-298 BC

1. Chandragupta dethroned the last Nanda ruler Dhananand and occupied Patliputra in 322 BC with the help of Kautilya (Chankya).

2. In 305 BC, Chandragupta Maurya defeated Seleucus Nikator, who surrendered a vast territory including Aria (Herat) / Arachosia (Kandhar), Gedrosia (Baluchistan) and Paropanisade (Kabul), in return for 500 elephants. According to treaty between Chandragupta and Seleucus, the Hindukush became boundary between their states.

3. Megasthenes was a Greek ambassador sent to the court of Chandragupta Maurya by Seleucus Nikator.

4. Chandragupta became a Jain and went to Chandragiri Hill, Sravanbelgola (Karnataka) with Bhadrabahu, where he died by slow starvation (Kaya-Klesha / Salekhan).

5. Under Chandragupta Maurya, for the first time, the whole of Northern India was united.

6. Trade flourished, agriculture was regulated, weights and measures were standardised and money came into use.

7. Taxation, sanitation and famine relief became the concerns of the state.

Bindusara : 298 BC-273 BC

1. Chandragupta Maurya was succeeded by his son Bindusara.

2. Bindusara, known to the Greeks as Amitrochates (derived from the Sanskrit word Amitraghata i.e. slayers of foes), is said to have carried his arms to the Deccan (upto Mysore).

3. Bindusara asked Antiochus I of Syria to send some sweet wine, dried figs and a sophist. Antiochus I sent wine and figs but politely replied that Greek philosophers are not for sale.

4. Bindusara patronised Ajivikas.

5. Ashoka fought the Kalinga war in 261 BC in 9th year of his coronation. The king was moved by the massacre in this war and therefore abandoned the policy of physical occupation in favour of policy of cultural conquest. In other words, Bherighosa was replaced by Dhammaghosa.

6. Ashoka was not an extreme pacifist. He did not pursue the policy of peace for sake of peace under all conditions. Thus, he retained Kalinga after his conquest and incorporated it into his empire.

7. Ashoka sent missionaries to the kingdoms of the Cholas and the Pandyas, and five states ruled by Greek kings (Antiochus II, Syria; Philadelphos Ptolemy II, Egypt; Antigonos, Macedonia; Maggus, Syria; Alexander, Epirus). We also know that he sent missionaries to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Suvarnabhumi (Burma) and also parts of South-East Asia.

Ashoka's Dhamma

1. Ashoka's Dhamma cannot be regarded as a sectarian faith. Its broad objective was to preserve the social order it ordained that people should obey their parents, pay respect to Brahmanas and Buddhist monks and show mercy to slaves and servants.

2. He held that if people behaved well they would attain Swarga (heaven). He did never say that they would attain Nirvana, which was the goal of Buddhist teachings.

Later Mauryas : 232 BC-185 BC

1. The Mauryan dynasty lasted 137 years.
2. Ashoka's death was followed by the division of the Mauryan Empire into two parts-Western and Eastern.
3. The Western part came to be ruled by Kunala (son of Ashoka) and the Eastern part came to be ruled by Dasaratha.
4. The last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha, was assassinated in 185 BC by his commander-in-chief, Pushyamitra Sunga, who established his own Sunga dynasty.
5. Causes for the Decline : 1. Highly centralised administration (Romila Thapar) 2. Pacific policy of Ashoka (H.C. Raychaudhuri) 3. Brahmanical reaction (H.P. Sastri)
4. The partition of the Mauryan Empire 5. Weak later-Mauryan Rulers 6. Pressure on Mauryan economy 7. Neglect of North-West Frontier.

Ashoka : 273 BC-232 BC

1. It appears from the available evidence (Buddhist literature mainly) that there was a struggle for the throne among the princes on the death of Bindusara.
2. According to Buddhist tradition, Ashoka usurped the throne after killing his 99 brothers and spared Tissu, the youngest one. Radhagupta a minister of Bindusara helped him in fratricidal struggle.
3. This war of succession accounts for interregnum of four years (273-269 BC), and only after securing his position on the throne, Ashoka had himself formally crowned in 269 BC.
4. Under Ashoka, the Mauryan Empire reached its climax. For the first time, the whole of the sub-continent, leaving out the extreme south, was under imperial control.

1. Mauryan kings -----> Chandragupta

2. Other names of the king-> Sandrocottus-Strabo, Justin Androcottus-Arrian, Plutarch Vrishala / Kulahina(i.e. of low clan) - Vishakhadatta (Mudrarakshasa)

3. Ambassador (Greek king)--> Megasthenes (302-298 BC) (Seleucus Nikator-Persia and Babylonia)

1. Mauryan kings -----> Bindusara

2. Other names of the king-> Amittrochates - Greek texts Vindupala - Chinese text Sinhasena - Jain text Bhadrāsara - Vayu Purana

3. Ambassador (Greek king)--> Dimachos (Antiochus I - Syria) Dionysius (Philadelphos / Ptolemy II-Egypt)

Mauryan Administration

I. Central Administration

1. The king : The Mauryan government was a centralised bureaucracy of which the nucleus was the king. According to Kautilya / Chanakya there are 7 elements of states (Saptanga theory)-Raja (the king), Amitya (the secretaries), Janapada (territory), Durg (Fort), Kosa (the treasure), Sena (Army) and Mitra (Friend). The king was regarded as the soul among all the seven elements of the state.

2. The Mantri Parishad : The king was assisted by Mantri Parishad, whose members included - (i) The Yuvaraja (the crown prince) (ii) The purohita (the chief priest) (iii) The Senapati (the commander-in-chief) (iv) a few other ministers.

Important officials

1. Sannidhata----- Chief treasury officer

2. Samaharta ----- The collector general of revenue

3. Vyavaharik ----->(Dharmastha) Chief Justice of Dharmasthiya Nyayalaya (Civil Court)

4. Pradeshta----- -->Chief Justice of Kantakashodhan Nyayalaya (Criminal Court)

5. Dhamma Mahamatra-> A new post created by Ashoka, empowered with the dual functions of propagating Dhamma and taking care of the common folk for their material well-being.

6. Rashtrapala / Kumara----> The viceroys in charge of a province

7. Pradesika----->They were the modern district magistrate

8. Rajukas----->They were the later day Patwaris and responsible for surveying and assessing the land

9. Yukta ----->A subordinate revenue officer of the district level

10. Sthanika ----->The collecting officer directly under the control of the Pradeshika

11. Gopa ----->Responsible for accounts

12. Nagaraka ----->The officer in charge of the city administration

13. Akshapatala ----->Accountant General

14. Sitaadhyaksha---->Supervised agriculture

15. Panyadhyaksha --->Superintendent of commerce

16. Samsthaadhyaksha->Superintendent of Mark

17. Pautavadhyaksha ->Superintendent of weights and measures

18. Navaadhyaksha --->Superintendent of ships

19. Sulkaadhyaksha---> Collector of tolls

20. Akaradhyaksha --- Superintendent of mines

21. Lohadhyaksha ----->Superintendent of Iron

II. Provincial Administration

1. Uttarapath i.e. Northern Province

Taxila

2. Avantashtra i.e. Western Province

Ujjain

3. Prachi i.e. Eastern and Central Province

Patliputra

4. Kalinga i.e. Eastern Province

Toshali

5. Dakshinapatha i.e. Southern Province

Suvarnagiri

Note :

According to the Junagadh Rock Edict of Rudradaman, Saurashtra was governed by Pushyagupta, the vaishya, at the time of Chandragupta Maurya and by the Yavan king Tushaspa at the time of Ashoka.

Administrative Unit Head

1. Chakra (i.e. province)

Rashtrapala / Kumara

2. Ahar / Vishaya (i.e. District)

Pradeshika (administrative) and Rajuka (land revenue)

3. Sangrahana (a group of 10 villages)

Gopa

4. Gram (i.e. village)

Gramika

III. Municipal Administration

1. Kautilya devoted a full chapter to the rules of the Nagarak i.e. city superintendent. His chief duty was maintenance of law and order.

2. Megasthenes then gave account of the system : 6 committees of five members each, and their functions ; 1st - Industrial Arts, 2nd - Entertainment of Foreigners, 3rd — Registration of Births and Deaths, 4th — Trade and Commerce, 5th- Public sale of manufactured goods, and 6th- Collection of taxes on the articles sold (1 / 10th of purchase price).

IV. Army

1. The most striking feature of Mauryan administration was the maintenance of a huge army. They also maintained a Navy.

2. According to Megasthenes the administration of Army was carried by a board of 30 officers divided into 6 committees, each committee consisting of 5

members. They are (i) Infantry (ii) Cavalry (iii) Elephants (iv) Chariots (v) Navy (vi) Transport.

3. In the Mauryan period, there were two types of Gudhapurushas (detectives) - Sansthan (Stationary) and Sanchari (Wandering).

Economy

1. The state controlled almost all economic activities.

2. Tax collected from peasants varied from 1 / 4 to 1 / 6 of the produce.

3. The state also provided irrigation facilities (Setubandha) and charged water-tax.

4. Tolls were also levied on commodities brought to town for sale and they were collected at gate.

5. The state enjoyed monopoly in mining, forest, salt, sale of liquor, manufacture of arms etc.

6. Sohgaura (Gorakhpur district, U.P.) copper plate inscription and Mahasthana (Bogara district, Bangladesh) inscription deal with the relief measures to be adopted during a famine.

7. Important ports : Bharukachch / Bhauch and Supara (Western coast), Tamralipti in Bengal (Eastern coast)

8. During Mauryan period, the punch-marked coins (mostly of silver) were the common units of transactions.

Society

1. Kautilya / Chanakya / Vishnugupta is not as rigid on the Varna system as the earlier Smritis were.

2. Kautilya's 'Arthashastra' looked upon the Shudras as an Aryan community which is distinguished from Malechha or non-Aryan community.

3. Reduction of gap between the Vaishyas (most of whom were now concentrating on trade though others continued cultivation) and the Shudras (quite a few of whom were now agriculturists and others being artisans).

4. Megasthenes states that Indian society was divided into 7 classes : 1. Philosophers 2. Farmers 3. Soldiers 4. Herdsmen 5. Artisans 6. Magistrates 7. Councillors. The 'classes' mentioned above appear to have been economic than social.

5. Though Megasthenese stated that there were no slavery in India; yet, according to Indian sources, slavery was a recognised institution during Mauryan reign. It appears that Megasthenese was thinking of slavery in full legal sense as it existed in the West.

6. Women occupied a high position and freedom in the Mauryan society. According to Kautilya, women were permitted to have a divorce or remarry. Women were employed as personal body-guards of the king, spies and in other diverse jobs.

Mauryan Art

1. Anand Coomarswamy classified Mauryan Art into two groups

Royal/Court Art : The Royal Palace of Chandragupta Maurya (Kumhrar Patna) and City of Patliputra, Ashokan Pillars, Caves, Stupas etc.

Folk/Popular Art : (i) Figure Sculpture of Yaksha-Yakshini etc. e.g. Yaksha of Parkham (Mathura), Yakshini of Besanagar / Vidisha (M.P.) Chanwar-bearer Yakshini of Didarganj (Patna), (ii) Terracotta objects

2. The Mauryas introduced stone masonry on large scale during Ashoka.

3. Fragments of stone pillars and wooden floor and ceiling indicating the existence of an 80-pillared hall have been discovered at Kumhrar on outskirts of Patna. Seeing this Fahien remarks as follows : ' These palaces are so beautiful and excellent that they appear to be the creation of God rather than of men' .

4. The pillars represent the masterpieces of Mauryan sculpture. Each pillar is made of single piece of sandstone, only their capitals, which are beautiful pieces of sculpture in form of lion or bulls, are joined with pillar on the top.

5. Four lion capital at Sarnath and Sanchi. Lioned capital of Sarnath was adopted as 'National Emblem' of India on 26 Jan., 1950.

6. Single lion capital at Rampurva and Lauriya Nandangarh.

7. Single bull capital at Rampurva.

8. A carved elephant at Dhauli and engraved elephant at Kalsi.

9. The Mauryan artisans who started the practice of hewing out caves from rocks for monks to live in. The earliest examples are Barabar caves (Sudama, World Hut, Chaupada of Kama, Rishi Lomesh) in Gaya (Ashokan). The other examples are Nagarjuni caves in Gaya (Dasharath)

10. Stupas were built throughout the empire to enshrine the relics of Buddha. Of these, the most famous are at Sanchi and Bharhuta.

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