

MAURYA DYNASTY: FORMATION OF A VAST EMPIRE

Divya Smriti

Greater Noida West, U.P.

Email: smriti.divya94314@gmail.com

Abstract

The rise of the Maurya dynasty and its transformation into an empire is a significant event in Ancient Indian History. The Mauryan empire displaced the early Magadha Kingdom to gain power over large territories of eastern and northern India. The empire came into existence when Chandragupta Maurya took advantage of the vacuum which got created by Alexander's exit from the western borders of India. Chandragupta Maurya, the originator king of the Mauryan Dynasty materialized the idea of political unification of India. His son Bindusara and grandson Ashoka made their full contribution in marching forward and strengthening the idea of amalgamation. The aim of this paper is to highlight the upsurge of Mauryas and their significant role in laying the footing of political integration of India. The research methodology used in this paper is of explanatory nature and for data collection it relies mostly on secondary sources such as books, journal, websites etc. The thorough analysis of Mauryan dynasty along with its rulers, clearly establishes this fact that the Mauryan empire extended throughout the subcontinent and somewhat further into northwest.

Keywords

Maurya Dynasty, Empire, Unification, Influence.

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Divya Smriti

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Introduction

The Maurya empire was a geologically extensive antiquity, historical powerhouse in olden India governed by the Maurya dynasty from 322-185 BCE. Initiating from the kingdom of Magadha in the North Indian River Plain in the eastern side of the subcontinent, the empire's capital city happened to be Patliputra. Mauryan's were the first empire to encompass most of the Indian-subcontinent. It was the first empire which spread across India, an empire that had its existence throughout all regions of India. It extended throughout central and northern India as well as certain parts of modern day Iran.

Alexandra's death in 320BCE left a large power vacuum and Chandragupta Maurya who was the forefather of Maurya dynasty, took full advantage of this situation. He gathered an army and over powered the Nanda Empire in Magadha. Chandragupta took benefit of the lack of power and unpopularity of the Nanda Empire and managed to capture Patliputra from the last Nanda king, named, Dhanananda. This incident laid the foundation of the Mauryan Empire. In this mission, Chandragupta got assistance from his teacher Chanakya who convinced Chandragupta to conquer the kingdom of Magadha (the Nanda Rulers) in response of his insult by Nanda king, named, Dhanananda. With Chanakya's assistance, Chandragupta Maurya swiftly expanded his power towards westward, across central and western India. By 316 BCE, this Empire had completely occupied north-western India, defeating and conquering the Satraps left by Alexander. He became the pioneer empire to unify India into one state, thereby creating one of the world's largest and strongest empires at its time and the largest ever in the Indian Subcontinent.

Chandragupta Maurya was succeeded by his son Bindusara, whose regime lasted for approximately 25-26- years, continued his father's expansion policy. His expansion policy took the Mauryan empire southwards, with the help of his advisor, Chanakyas. He kept the empire running without much problems while also maintaining possession over its lands. It was because of his expansion policy, that 16 states also got added within the Maurya Empire, which resulted in the Mauryan Empire ruling over almost whole of the Indian peninsula.

Bindusara got succeeded by his son Ashoka, The Great. As a young and dynamic prince, Ashoka by birth was a great commander, his this character helped him in suppressing the revolts in Ujjain and Taxila. His ambitions ensured the reassertion of his empire's superiority in Southern and Western India. The most significant event during his regime was his quest of Kalinga (262-261 BCE) which proved to be the pivotal event of his life. Ashoka was an excellent rural who knew

the diplomacy very well and hence he could expand friendly relations with various states across Asia and Europe.

The Maurya Empire has been of utmost importance as the first sub-continental empire. The glorious reign of the First three Maurya Emperors has an unprecedented contribution in this and this paper mainly highlights the same.

Objective

The main objective of this paper is to bring into light about the rise of Maurya and their important role in laying the foundation of political integration of India.

Research Methodology

The research methodology being used is in explanatory in nature and for the purpose of data collection it relies mostly on secondary sources such as books, journals, websites etc.

Analysis

To analyze the rise and evolution of Maurya Dynasty, the author has presented a detailed analysis of reign of notable Maurya Rulers under different headings:

1. Chandragupta Maurya

The early Magadha Kingdom was replaced by the Maurya Empire to assume power over large area of eastern and northern India. The said Empire came into being when Chandragupta Maurya filled into the vacuum aerated by Alexandra of Macedon's departure from the western borders of India. Chandragupta subjugated the border states, he created a strong army by recruiting young and talented soldiers and marched upon the Magadha Kingdom. He then killed its tyrannical King in the war and ascended the throne. Thus the Mauryan Dynasty was created by him in 323 B.C.E. In the course of attaining power, he was aided, guided and counselled by his Chief Minister, Kautilya (also known as Chanakya), who was the author of the famous book 'Arthashastra' – a compilation of Kingship and Governance. Arthashastra primarily focuses on the practical aspects of the administration.

Chandragupta always advocated the concept of expansion, and hence he adopted an aggressive expansion policy. Selucus Nicator, Satrap of Alexander for the Eastern Macedonian pursuit was defeated and had to surrender his entire territory and kingship under him to Chandragupta along with his daughter and considerable money. He also sent Megasthenese, as a diplomat, to the Mauryan court as Greek ambassador. Megasthenese was the first person from the western world who wrote detailed description of India in his book – 'Indica'.

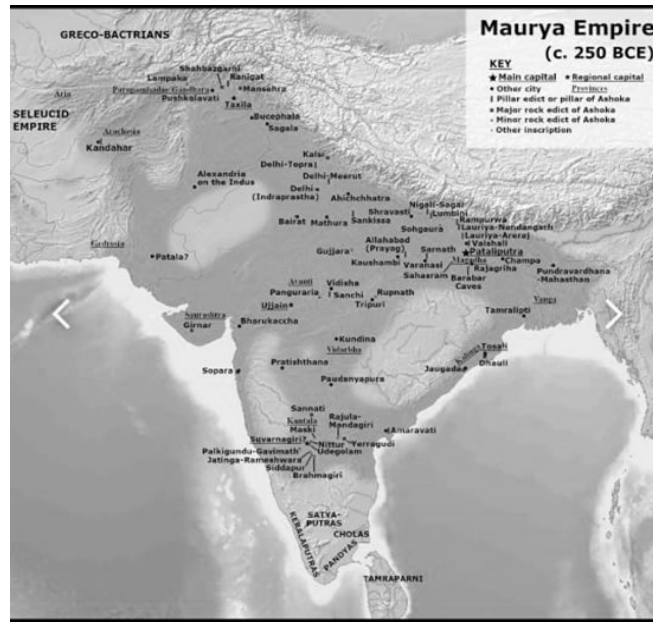
Chandragupta was a great diplomat and a far sighted ruler who used marriage alliances, diplomacy, trickery and war as means to extend his kingdom. Under his reign, Mauryan Dynasty expanded its horizon across Central and Northern India as well as to some parts of modern day Iran as well. Chandragupta Maurya because of his visionary attitude and immense political foresightedness, became the first Ruler who could unified India into one state and thus created one of the World's the-then largest empires.

2. Bindusara

The second Mauryan emperor of Magadha in ancient India was Bindusara, the son of Chandragupta Maurya. He, like his father, also believed in the policy of expansion of the kingdom, and thus was successful in consolidating the great empire acquired by him from his father Chandragupta Maurya. He continued to enjoy the same power as his father and was able to carry the legacy by maintaining his father's large dominions efficiently and he further extended the southern borders to cover the peninsular plateau of India as well. Chanakya was the key person who helped Bindusara in strategizing and panning for the destruction of the kings and ministers of 16 towns. This made Bindusara even more powerful as he became the master of all the territories between the eastern and western sea.

3. Ashoka

After Bindusara, his son Ashoka, ascended the throne.



Ashoka's leadership quality can be well established with the fact that at his young age itself, he was able to suppress the revolts in Ujjain and Taxila. Once he grew up as a monarch, he was very ambitious and aggressive in his approach. The inheritance of kingship what Ashoka got from his ancestors was large, but a small kingdom on the far east coast, named Kalinga was outside its pale. As per Ashoka's aggressive nature and also the inherited expansion policy, Ashoka decided to conquer Kalinga as well so that it also becomes part of his kingship. The war that Ashoka ensued got bloody and long. Kalinga resisted to the last man but fell in front of the mighty Ashoka and its powerful army.

Although Ashoka's army succeeded in overpowering Kalinga forces, in this unprecedented war, an estimated 1,00,000 (1 lakh) soldiers and civilians were killed in the furious warfare which also included over thousands of Ashoka's own army men, hundreds of thousands of people both civilians and families of the army men were adversely affected by the said destructive and unprecedented destructive war. Upon learning about the mass human massacre which turned into holocaust, Ashoka personally witnessed the devastation and he began feeling remorse. This made a huge impact on Ashoka and he considered himself guilty for such mass killing. This ignited a sense of self-guilt in him and hence, after Kalinga, Ashoka did not attack any other kingdom rather adopted the path of harmony and proceeded on a mission of peace. His pursuit to conquer Kalinga proved to be the pivotal event of his life. Ashoka then embraced the teachings of Buddhism and renounced any and all kinds of war and violence forever. Ashoka continued to maintain a large and powerful army, but his policy to maintain such large and strong army changed from conquering land and kingdoms to maintaining peace and harmony among kingships. In this regard, he also extended his friendly hands and expanded friendly relations with states across Asia and Europe. He continued his pursuit to spread Buddhism, by sending out missionaries to travel around the countries.

He built several Stupas which is an important form of Buddhist religious architecture containing relics and he also repaired the older ones. In the modern times, 'The Great Stupa' situated in Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh is one such example of notable Stupa created during the reign of Ashoka.

Another significant construction from Ashoka's regime which left its mark on history was erection of large stone pillars inscribing edicts that he issued. These large stone structures can be found throughout the subcontinent ranging from as far west as Afghanistan and as far south as Andhra. These edicts of Ashoka basically are his policies and accomplishments. In addition to his policies and accomplishments, these edicts of Ashoka also contained social and cultural attributes

of his empire, mainly emphasizing Buddhism, without condemning any other religions. This is important to mention here that, the edicts of Ashoka are well-known to be an early written document emphasizing and promoting religious tolerance. Ashoka's vision, his ability to analyze political issues and over 40 years of peace, harmony and prosperity during his regime, made Ashoka one of the most successful, popular and famous kings in Indian history. He remains to be an idealistic personality of inspiration even for modern India, especially whenever it come to religious tolerance for each other.

Conclusion

After going through this detailed analysis, it is clear that the origin and continuity of Maurya dynasty marked the beginning of a new era in ancient Indian history. The foundation of the Maurya dynasty was laid on the ruins of the Nanda dynasty which was strengthened during Maurya dynasty. Chandragupta took full advantage of the void created by Alexander's absence and hatred of people towards Nanda dynasty. He conquered Nandas and took control and became ruler of the most powerful kingdom i.e. Magadha. In this process, he laid the foundation stone of a strong Maurya dynasty. Bindusara, his son, further expanded the dynasty towards down south. Bindusara's son, Ashoka, further added Kalinga to the already vast empire, this shows the expansion policy of this dynasty which got succeeded from one generation to other. However, the brutal conquest of Kalinga led Ashoka to abandon military conquest and he then embraced Buddhism and instated 'Dharma' as the state ideology.

Political unification of India was the key contribution of Maurya dynasty which finds its place even in modern India. Factors like political stability, economic prosperity and unified central government were also some of the major elements of The Maurya empire which finds its relevance in today's India. India during Mauryan period also cherished the idea of social concord, religious metamorphosis and expansion of knowledge art and culture.

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