7. India during the Maurya Period

7.1 The Greek Emperor Alexander's invasion

7.2 The Maurya Empire

Do you know?

In the 6th century BCE, a king named Cyrus had established a vast empire in Iran. This empire extended from Northwest India to Rome and to Egypt in Africa. Around 518 BCE, an Iranian Emperor named Daryush had conquered the region to the northwest of India up to Punjab. Daryush had recruited some soldiers from this area into his army. We learn about this from the writings of Greek historians. Political relations between India and Iran were established during the reign of Emperor Daryush. This led to greater exchanges in the fields of trade and art. Emperor Daryush had introduced a uniform currency called 'Darik' in all parts of his empire. This made trading easier. The capital city of Persepolis was built during his reign. Persepolis is in Iran.



Darik

7.1 The Greek Emperor Alexander's invasion

Alexander, the Greek emperor, invaded India's northwestern frontier in 326 BCE. Crossing the Indus (Sindhu) river, he reached Takshashila. On the way, he met with forceful opposition from the local Indian kings. He defeated them all and successfully reached the Punjab. However, in this invasion, his army had to suffer severe hardships. The soldiers were eager to go back home. They rebelled against Alexander and he was forced to turn back. He, therefore, appointed Greek officers to administer the conquered territories. They were called *satraps*. He started his return journey but died on the way back in 323 BCE at Babylon. Today, Babylon is in Iraq.



Emperor Alexander

Alexander's campaign led to an increase in the trade between India and the western world. The historians who accompanied Alexander introduced India to the western world through their writings. Greek sculpture influenced Indian art, giving rise to the Gandhara school of art. The Greek kings minted characteristic coins. On one side, the coin had a picture of the king who had minted the coin and on the other side, a picture of a Greek god. The name of the king was also written on the coin. Alexander's coins were of the same type.



Alexander's silver coin - both sides

Later, Indian kings also started minting similar coins.

7.2 The Maurya Empire

Chandragupta Maurya : Chandragupta Maurya founded the Maurya Empire. People were tired of the tyrannical rule of the Nanda king of Magadha, Dhanananda. Chandragupta Maurya brought it to an end and established his own rule in Magadha around 325 BCE. He won Avanti and Saurashtra and began to extend the boundaries of his empire. After Alexander's death, a struggle for power began among the *satraps* he had appointed. Seleucus Nicator was Alexander's General. He became the King of Babylon after Alexander's death. He invaded the northwest frontier region of India and the Punjab. Chandragupta Maurya successfully resisted his aggression. The defeat of Seleucus Nicator led to the inclusion of the northwest region of Kabul, Kandahar and Herat in the Maurya Empire.

Do you know ?

Vishakhadatta, the Sanskrit playwright, wrote a play called 'Mudrarakshasa'. It relates how Chandragupta Maurya defeated Dhanananda and established an independent power. The plot gives special importance to the contribution of Arya Chanakya, also known as Kautilya.

Megasthenes, Seleucus Nicator's ambassador stayed back at Chandragupta Maurya's court. His book 'Indica' is an important source for the study of India during the Maurya period.

There is an inscription stating that Emperor Chandragupta Maurya had built a dam called 'Sudarshan' near Junagadh in Gujarat State.

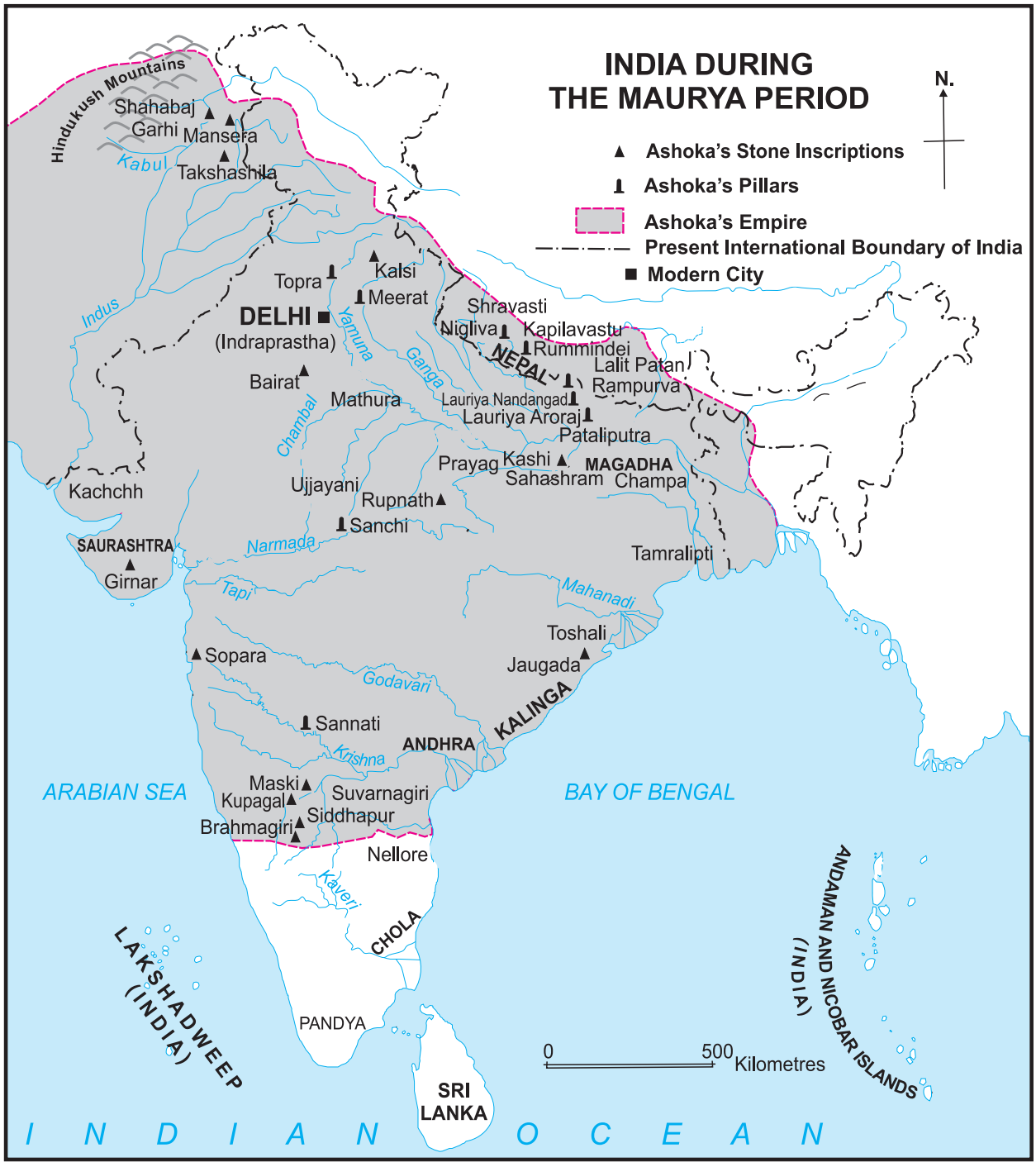
Do you know ?

According to the Jain tradition, it is believed that Chandragupta Maurya had accepted the Jain religion. Towards the end of his life, he abdicated the throne and spent his remaining years at Shravanabelagola in Karnataka. That was where he breathed his last.

Emperor Ashoka : After Chandragupta renounced the throne, he was succeeded by his son Bindusara. After Bindusara's death, his son, Ashoka succeeded to the throne in 273 BCE. Ashoka had been appointed the Governor of Takshashila and Ujjain before he came to the throne. As the Governor, he had successfully crushed the revolt at Takshashila. After becoming the Emperor of Magadha, he launched a campaign against the State of Kalinga. Kalinga occupied the region of today's Odisha State. Emperor Ashoka conquered Kalinga.

Ashoka's empire extended from Afghanistan in the northwest and Nepal in the north to Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in the south, and from Bengal in the east to Saurashtra in the west.

The Kalinga War : Ashoka was deeply moved by the bloodshed of the Kalinga war. He decided never to wage





Always remember...

The message of Emperor Ashoka

- It is good and right to serve one's parents.
- The victory which arouses compassion and love is the real victory.



Try this.

Mark on an outline map of India, the places where inscriptions and edicts of Emperor Ashoka are located.

a war again. He came to believe that truth, non-violence, compassion and forgiveness were the important values. Ashoka wanted to spread these teachings among the common people and therefore, he had pillar edicts and stone inscriptions engraved throughout his kingdom. These writings are in the Brahmi script. In these inscriptions, he is referred to as 'Devanampiyo Piyadasi' (Beloved-of the-Gods and He who Looks on with Affection). Another inscription states that eight years after he ascended the throne, he made the conquest of Kalinga and had a change of heart on seeing the devastation it caused.

An inscription of Emperor Ashoka at Delhi-Topda shows that he had put strict restrictions on the hunting of bats, monkeys, rhinoceroses and on setting fire to forests.



Emperor Ashoka

Emperor Ashoka's work for the spread of religion : Ashoka had embraced Buddhism. He had convened the Third Religious Council on Buddhism at Pataliputra. Ashoka sent his own son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra to Sri Lanka for the spread of Buddhism. He also sent *Bauddha bhikkhus* to West Asia and Central Asia for spreading Buddhism. He also built many *stupas* and *viharas*.



Try this.

Prepare a report about the public welfare activities carried out by the institutions in your locality.

Public welfare activities : Emperor Ashoka laid stress on the creation of facilities for the welfare of the people. For example, he made provisions for free medicines and medical treatment for people as well as for animals. He built many roads and planted trees for shade on both sides of the roads. He dug wells and built *dharmashalas*.

Administration during the Maurya period : Pataliputra was the capital of the Maurya empire. For the sake of administrative convenience, the empire was divided into four regions, each with its own capital.

1. Eastern region - Toshali (Odisha)
2. Western region - Ujjayani (Madhya Pradesh)
3. Southern region - Suvarnagiri (Kanakgiri in Karnataka)
4. Northern region - Takshashila (Pakistan)

There was a Council of Ministers which advised the King in matters of administration. There were many officers working at different levels. There was an efficient intelligence service which kept an eye on the administration and on the movements of enemies.

Life of the people during the Maurya period : During the Maurya period, agricultural production had great importance. Trade and other occupations

had also prospered well. There were many occupations like carving and engraving on ivory, weaving and dyeing cloth, and metal work. Black, glazed pottery was also produced. Ship building was carried out on a large scale. In metal work, the technology of making articles of other metals as well as those of iron had developed.

Different festivals and functions were celebrated in villages and towns. Dance and music concerts were a part of entertainment. Wrestling bouts and chariot races were popular and so were board games and chess. Chess was called Ashtapad.



The Lion Capital



Do you know ?

The official seal of the Government of India is based on the capital or pillarhead of the Ashoka pillar at Sarnath. The Ashoka pillar has four lions. On a horizontal strip below each lion, there is a wheel or *chakra*. We can view only one of these *chakras* at a time. There is a horse on one side and a bull on the other side of the *chakra*. Similarly, on the side that is not in view on the seal, there is an elephant and a lion on either side of the *chakra*.

Art and Literature : During the period of Emperor Ashoka, the art of rock cut sculpture was promoted. The pillars erected by Ashoka are excellent specimens of Indian sculpture. There are excellent carvings of animals like the lion, elephant, bull on these pillars. The *chakra* or wheel on the Ashoka pillar at Sarnath has a place



A cave at Barabar

of honour on the Indian national flag. The pillar has lions on all four sides but only three are visible from the front. This is the official seal of the Government of India. The cave sculptures at Barabar Hills carved during the period of Ashoka are well-known. These caves are in Bihar. They are the oldest cave sculptures in India.

After the death of Emperor Ashoka, the Maurya Empire began to decline. After the Mauryas, many new States and some empires also emerged in India. The Maurya Empire was the largest empire in ancient India. In the next chapter, we shall discuss the political and cultural happenings in the post-Maurya period.



Exercise

1. Answer in one sentence.

(1) Why did the *satraps* begin to fight among themselves?

(2) Who did Ashoka send to Sri Lanka for the spread of Buddhism?

(3) What were the occupations of the people during the Maurya period?

(4) Which animals' engravings are found on the pillars erected by Emperor Ashoka?

2. Can you explain?

(1) Satrap

(2) Sudarshan

(3) 'Devanampiyo Piyadasi'

(4) Ashtapad

3. Recall and describe :

(1) The extent of Chandragupta Maurya's empire.

(2) The extent of Ashoka's empire.

4. Match the following.

Group A	Group B
(1) Emperor Alexander	(a) Ambassador of Seleucus Nicator
(2) Megasthenes	(b) Emperor of Greece
(3) Emperor Ashoka	(c) Emperor of Rome
	(d) Emperor of Magadha

5. What is your opinion?

(1) Alexandar had to turn back.

(2) Coins of Greek kings were characteristic.

(3) Emperor Ashoka decided never to wage war again.

6. Describe in your own words.

(1) Public welfare works of Emperor Ashoka.

(2) Means of entertainment and sport of the Maurya period.

Activity :

(1) Find out about the public welfare activities carried out by the people's representatives in your area and write in detail about them.

(2) Read more about the life of Emperor Ashoka and make a presentation based on it in the form of a play.

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