

Q. Extent of the Empire of Chandragupta Maurya

Introduction: As India's emperor, the expansion of the Maurya Empire under Chandragupta Maurya's leadership is a highly significant event in ancient first historical Indian history. Since the era of the Sixteen Mahajanapadas, the state system in ancient India existed in a fragmented structure; under Chandragupta Maurya and the Maurya Empire he established, it took on a pan-Indian form. The overall structural development of the then-unorganized Indian state system occurred alongside his imperial expansion, especially in response to foreign invasions.

Major Conquests and Achievements

- **Victory against the Macedonians (Lower Indus Valley and Punjab):**
 - Chandragupta's first success against the Macedonians occurred in the lower Indus Valley.
 - His dominance over Punjab was established later. After the Greek governor Eudemus left India in 317 BCE, Chandragupta extended his authority over that region.
 - The Greek historian Justin acknowledged that Chandragupta brought an end to Macedonian rule in India.
- **Victory against the Nandas:**
 - With the cooperation of Kautilya (Chanakya), defeating the Nanda King Dhana Nanda and capturing Magadha was an extraordinary imperial achievement.
 - Following the capture of Magadha, the Ganges basin came under his control. Consequently, using Magadha as his center, Chandragupta proceeded to expand his empire across all of India.
 - Contemporary Greek historians support this; Plutarch noted that after capturing Magadha, Chandragupta prepared to conquer all of India with an army of approximately 600,000 soldiers.

Expansion into Southern and Western India

- **Extent in South India:**
 - Historians debate whether the Maurya Empire extended to South India during Chandragupta's reign.
 - However, ancient Tamil texts mention the "Vamba Moriyar" (newly risen Mauryas) expedition, which many identify as Chandragupta Maurya's army.
 - Furthermore, Ashokan inscriptions have been discovered in the Chitradurga district of Karnataka (Siddapur, Brahmagiri, and Jatinga Rameshwar). Since neither Ashoka nor his father Bindusara conquered this region, it indicates Chandragupta's empire extended to far-off Karnataka.
- **Western India:**
 - Maharashtra was also part of the empire, evidenced by Ashokan inscriptions found at Sopara in the Thane district.
 - The Junagadh rock inscription of Mahakshatrap Rudradaman confirms that the Gujarat region of Western India was included in Chandragupta's empire.

Evaluation:

In conclusion, it can be said that Chandragupta's empire likely extended across almost the entire Indian subcontinent, with the exceptions of Balochistan, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and undivided Assam. His victory against Seleucus later extended the borders of his kingdom westward to the frontier of Iran. While the claims by Plutarch and Justin that he conquered "all of India" may contain some exaggeration, they serve as recognition of the massive scale of Chandragupta's realm.

Introduction:

The Maurya Empire once stretched from the foothills of the Hindu Kush mountains to the Pennar River in Andhra Pradesh. Under Chandragupta Maurya, it repelled the armies of Alexander and Seleucus, establishing a strong centralized administration that protected India from foreign invasions and projected Indian cultural and spiritual values onto the world stage. It is therefore a subject of great historical curiosity how this empire collapsed within just half a century of Ashoka's death. Historians analyze this downfall from various perspectives, ranging from Ashoka's personal responsibility to economic crises, over-centralization, and the theory of a "Brahminical Revolution".

The Theory of Brahminical Revolution

In 1910, Pandit Haraprasad Shastri argued in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* that the Maurya Empire's foundation was weakened by intense resentment from the Brahmin community, leading to a revolution that fragmented the empire.

- **Social Status and Animal Sacrifice:** Shastri argued that the Mauryas were of Shudra origin. Ashoka's adoption of *Dhamma* (non-violence) and his imperial decree banning animal sacrifices struck a blow to the economic and ritualistic interests of the Brahmins. This interference by a Shudra-born ruler in ancient traditions fueled deep-seated resentment.
- **The "False Gods" Declaration:** Citing an interpretation of Ashoka's Minor Rock Edicts, Shastri suggested that Ashoka claimed to have shown that the "gods" (referring to Brahmins who were considered earthly gods) were false. This public declaration is believed to have further angered the Brahmin community.
- **Intervention in Traditional Rights:** The creation of the *Dhamma Mahamatras* (officers of righteousness) allowed the state to intervene directly in the activities and traditional privileges of the Brahmins.
- **Legal Equality (*Danda-samata*):** Ashoka emphasized the principles of *Danda-samata* (equality in punishment) and *Vyavahara-samata* (equality in legal procedure). This stripped Brahmins of their long-held legal immunity, such as exemption from the death penalty.

According to Shastri, this accumulated discontent culminated in 187 BCE when Pushyamitra Shunga, a Brahmin general, assassinated the last Maurya emperor, Brihadratha, effectively ending the dynasty.

Administrative and Structural Weaknesses:

- **Imperial Vastness:** The sheer size of the empire made it difficult to maintain central authority due to poor communication between distant regions.
 - **Bureaucratic Frailty:** While the Maurya administration was well-structured, it suffered from bureaucratic weaknesses. Regional officials were often recruited from the same social groups, leading to local administrations being dominated by specific factions that the central government could not easily control.
 - **Personalized Loyalty:** Dr. Romila Thapar notes that the empire relied heavily on personal loyalty to the Emperor rather than loyalty to the "State" as an institution. When weak rulers succeeded Ashoka, they lacked the personal charisma required to maintain the subjects' allegiance, leading to a decline in national unity.
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Weak Successors and Economic Crisis:

- **Lack of Competent Leadership:** No leader after Ashoka was capable of managing the vast empire. Dr. Hemchandra Raychaudhuri remarked, "*His sceptre was the bow of Ulysses which could not be drawn by any weaker hand*". Texts like the *Gargi Samhita* mention the tyranny of the Maurya ruler Salisuka, while the *Rajatarangini* notes that Ashoka's descendants established independent kingdoms, directly causing the empire's fragmentation.
 - **Economic Decline:** D.D. Kosambi pointed to a severe economic crisis, noting that late Maurya coinage showed a significant increase in alloy content compared to pure silver, indicating financial strain. D.N. Jha supports this in *Ancient India - An Introductory Outline*. Furthermore, Nihar Ranjan Ray suggests that the Mauryas imposed heavy taxes on the common people to solve this crisis, leading to widespread protests.
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The Responsibility of Ashoka:

Historians like Dr. H.C. Raychaudhuri argue that Ashoka cannot be fully absolved of responsibility.

- **Abandonment of Militarism:** By replacing *Bheri-ghosha* (the sound of the war drum) with *Dhamma-ghosha* (the sound of righteousness), Ashoka abandoned the traditional militaristic policy of Magadha.
- **Military Decay:** Because the army was largely unused during his long reign, it lost its strategic efficiency and tactical prowess, essentially breaking the "backbone" of the empire.

Final Evaluation:

While Ashoka is often blamed, many historians argue that his pacifism was not the sole cause. Dr. Nilakanta Sastri points out that there is no concrete evidence that Ashoka completely disbanded or disarmed the military. While his policies may have contributed to the empire's softening, other factors like economic strain, weak successors, and administrative decentralization were equally active. Even if he had followed the expansionist policies of his grandfather, the empire likely would have fallen eventually. Despite the empire's collapse, the moral and cultural dominance Ashoka established for India remains a landmark in world history.

Introduction:

In the corridors of ancient Indian history, one of the most profound examples of individual humanitarian thought is the **Dhamma** of Emperor Ashoka. Its enduring relevance was highlighted by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who, in his farewell address, reminded a distrustful and conflict-ridden world of Ashoka's ethical principles, the reciprocity of human relationships, and the concept of conquering the world through love. Scholars such as Romila Thapar, Rhys Davids, and Amartya Sen maintain that Ashoka's Dhamma is a universal humanitarian ideal aimed at the upliftment of society, remaining as pertinent in the 21st century as it was in antiquity.

The Core Characteristics of Dhamma:

Ashoka's Dhamma was not a rigid religion but a synthesis of various ethical and administrative values:

- **Integration of Humanitarian Qualities and Good Conduct:** In his **Second Major Pillar Edict**, Ashoka defines Dhamma through six essential characteristics:
 1. **Apasinave (Apasnava):** Freedom from the inclination toward sin. This requires overcoming passions like cruelty, anger, pride, and jealousy.
 2. **Bahukayane:** The welfare of many (the common good).
 3. **Daya:** Compassion.
 4. **Dane:** Charity or gift-giving.
 5. **Sache:** Truthfulness.
 6. **Sochaye:** Purity of mind and soul.
 - In the **Seventh Major Pillar Edict**, he reiterates these traits and adds a seventh: **Madabe** (Courtesy/Gentleness).
- **Self-Evolved Moral Values:** Ashoka's Dhamma eschewed ritualism in favor of "Chittashuddhi" (purification of the heart) and humanitarian generosity. In his **Second Major Rock Edict**, he emphasizes:
 - Respect for parents and elders.
 - The awakening of a sense of brotherhood.
 - Kindness toward animals and birds.
 - Essentially, it was a self-evolved essence of human values that transcended caste, creed, and religion.

- **Secular Liberalism**: A prime example of his secular outlook is found in the **Seventh Major Pillar Edict**, where Ashoka publicly advocates for showing respect to followers of all sects. He believed that the true purpose of religion is fulfilled not just through personal practice, but by honoring the faith of others.
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Debated Aspects of Dhamma

- **Relationship with Buddhism**: While it is a historical fact that Ashoka embraced Buddhism after the Kalinga War, the nature of his *Dhamma* remains a subject of debate. It is important to note:
 - Dhamma does not mention the **Four Noble Truths**, the **Eightfold Path**, or **Nirvana**.
 - References to the Buddha or the Sangha (the monastic order) are absent in the general Dhamma edicts.
 - While inspired by Buddhist ethics, he prioritized the universal, social aspects of the faith to make it accessible to all.
 - **A Tool for Royal Authority**: Historian Bratindranath Mukherjee suggests that through the propagation of Dhamma, Ashoka sought to ensure the loyalty of his subjects. In the **Seventh and Thirteenth Major Rock Edicts**, Ashoka mentions "**Dridhabhatita**", which translates to firm devotion or loyalty to the king. Thus, the "USP" of Dhamma was a dual-purpose strategy: spreading humanitarian values while simultaneously consolidating royal authority across the empire.
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Evaluation

In conclusion, Ashoka's Dhamma was not a replica of any specific institutional religion. While it may have served a political need for cultural unity and administrative stability, it was ultimately built upon the eternal humanitarian truth that "**Humanity is above all**".