

## 6<sup>th</sup> – Ashoka, The Emperor Who Gave Up War I



### What is An Empire?

An empire consists of several kingdom or states that have been brought under the control of a single ruler. Of the 16 Mahajanapads that emerged, Magadha was the strongest.

### The Invasion of Alexander the Great

- The Macedonian king, Alexander the great, was one of the world's greatest conquerors. His empire stretched from Macedonia in Greece to the borders of the river Beas in Punjab.
- Alexander wanted to conquer India, tempted by the stories he had heard of India's wealth. Alexander's invasion weakened the entire smaller kingdom in the north of the Indian subcontinent, making it easier for Chandragupta Maurya to conquer them.

### A very big kingdom: an empire:

- The lions that we see on our notes and coins have a long history. They were carved in stone, and placed on top of a massive stone pillar at Sarnath.
- Ashoka was one of the greatest rulers know to history and on his instructions inscriptions were carved on pillars, as well as on rock surfaces. The empire that Ashoka ruled was founded by his grandfather, Chandragupta Maurya, more than 2300 years ago.
- Chandragupta was supported by a wise man named Chanakya or Kautilya. Many of Chanakya's ideas were written down in a book called the Arthashastra. There were several cities in the empire.
- These include the capital Pataliputra, Taxila, and Ujjain. Taxila was a gateway to the northwest, including central Asia, while Ujjain lay on the route from north to south India. Merchants, officials and crafts persons probably lived in these cities.
- There were villages of farmers and herders. In some area such as central India, there were forests where people gathered forest produce and hunted animals for food. People in different parts of the empire spoke different languages. They probably ate different kinds of food, and wore different kinds of clothes as well.

### Dynasty

- When members of the same family become rulers one after another, the family is often called a dynasty. The Mauryas were a dynasty with three important rulers- Chandragupta, his son Bindusara, and Bindusara's son, Ashoka.

### Chandragupta Maurya

- Around 325 BCE, an ambitious young man by the name of Chandragupta overthrew the Nandas and established the Mauryan Empire. He did this with the help of his mentor, **Kautilya** (or Chanakya).
- Kautilya was a minister in the court of Dhanananda, the last ruler of the Nanda dynasty Chandragupta and Kautilya first attacked and conquered the outer parts of the Nanda Kingdom, areas which had been weakened by Alexander's invasion.
- They thus conquered Punjab, Malwa and Saurashtra. They finally captured Pataliputra, the capital of Magadha, in 321 BCE.
- Seleukos was defeated by Chandragupta in 305 BCE and was made to surrender extensive territories - the areas of Kabul, Heart, Kandahar (in present- day Afghanistan) and Baluchistan (in present-day Pakistan).



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- Seleukos also gave his daughter in marriage to Chandragupta, thus establishing peace between the two states. Megasthenes, a Greek ambassador, stayed at Chandragupta's court at Pataliputra for several years. By the end of Chandragupta's rule, the kingdom of Magadha had become an empire.

- The Mauryan Empire now stretched from the Hindu Kush in the west to Bengal in the east, and from the Himalayas in the north to the Narmada in central India.

### Bindusara

- Chandragupta was succeeded by his son, Bindusara. Bindusara ruled from 297 to 273 BCE. An able son of an able father, he is said to have conquered 16 states, and extended the Mauryan Empire greatly.

### How are empires different from kingdoms?

- Emperors need more resources than kings because empires are larger than kingdoms, and need to be protected by big armies.

- So also they need a larger number of officials who collect taxes.

### Ruling the empire

- As the empire was so large, different parts were ruled differently. The area around Pataliputra was under the direct control of the emperor. This meant that officials were appointed to collect taxes from farmers, herders, crafts persons and traders, who lived in villages and towns in the area. Officials also punished those who disobeyed the ruler's orders.

- Many of these officials were given salaries. Messengers went to and fro, and spies kept a watch on the officials. And of course the emperor supervised them all, with the help of members of the royal family, and senior minister.

- There were other areas or provinces. Each of these was ruled from a provincial capital such as Taxila or Ujjain. Although there was some amount of control from Pataliputra, and royal princes were often sent as governors, local customs and rules were probably followed.

- Besides, there were vast areas between these centers. Here the Mauryas tried to control roads and rivers, which were important for transport, and to collect whatever resources were available as tax and tribute. For example, the Arthashastra tells us that the north-west was important for blankets, and south India for its gold and precious stones.

### Ashoka, a unique ruler

- The greatest king of Mauryan dynasty was Ashoka, a king who was inspired by Buddhism to conquer people with kindness rather than war.

- The most famous Mauryan ruler was Ashoka. He was the first ruler who tried to take his message to the people through inscriptions most of Ashoka's inscriptions. Most of written in the Brahmi script.

- Ashoka, the son of Bindusara, ascended the throne in around 273 BCE (through it is believed that he had his coronation only in 269BCE, after defeating his brothers).

- He tried to extend the frontiers of the Mauryan Empire with fresh conquests. He finally turned his attention to the kingdom of kalinga. In 261B, Ashoka attacked Kalinga.

- **Ashoka's war in kalinga**

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- Kalinga is the ancient name of coastal Orissa. Ashoka fought a war to conquer Kalinga. However, he was so horrified when he saw the violence and bloodshed that he decided not to fight any more wars.
- He is the only king in the history of the world who gave up conquest after winning a war. The turning point of Ashoka's life was his conquest of Kalinga (Odisha). Kalinga was a powerful kingdom at the centre of important trade and pilgrimage routes. Bindusara tried to capture it but failed. For Ashoka, the possession of Kalinga became essential.
- The conquest of this kingdom was bloody, and many thousands of soldiers and common people were killed. The sight of the battlefield filled Ashoka with horror and dismay. Shocked at what he had done, he vowed never to wage war again. Soon after, Ashoka became a Buddhist.
- He adopted the policy of ahimsa or non-violence. He was now filled with compassion, and felt the need for 'right living'. The year after the Kalinga war, Ashoka is said to have gone on his first Buddhist pilgrimage to Bodhi Gaya, where Buddha had attained enlightenment.
- Ashoka carved his policy of dhamma—i.e., a person's duty to live according to certain religious and social codes—on pillars, caves and rocks. These edicts were spread throughout the land, so that people could read and follow them.

### What was Ashoka's Dhamma?

- Ashoka's dhamma did not involve worship of a god, or performance of a sacrifice. He felt that just as a father tries to teach his children, he had a duty to instruct his subjects. He was also inspired by the teachings of the Buddha.
- There were a number of problems that troubled him. People in the empire followed different religions, and his sometimes led to conflict. Animals were sacrificed. Slaves and servants were ill treated. Besides, there were quarrels in families and amongst neighbors.
- Ashoka felt it was his duty to solve these problems. So, he appointed officials, known as the dhamma mahamatta who went from place to place teaching people about dhamma. Besides, Ashoka got his messages inscribed on rocks and pillars, instructing his officials to read his message to those who could not read it themselves. Ashoka also sent messengers to spread ideas about dhamma to other lands, such as Syria, Egypt, Greece and Sri Lanka.
- He built roads, dug wells, and built rest houses. Besides, he arranged for medical treatment for both human beings and animals.

