

CHAPTER-16

MAURYAS AND KUSHANS



After studying this chapter you learn :

- That first ever empire of India was Mauryan empire.
- About the prominent ruler of Mauryan dynasty - Ashoka his achievements, administration and contribution to art and architecture.
- About the history of Kushans, administration and contributions of Kanishka.
- Locating (marking) the region of Ashoka's empire on the India map.

The Mauryan Empire

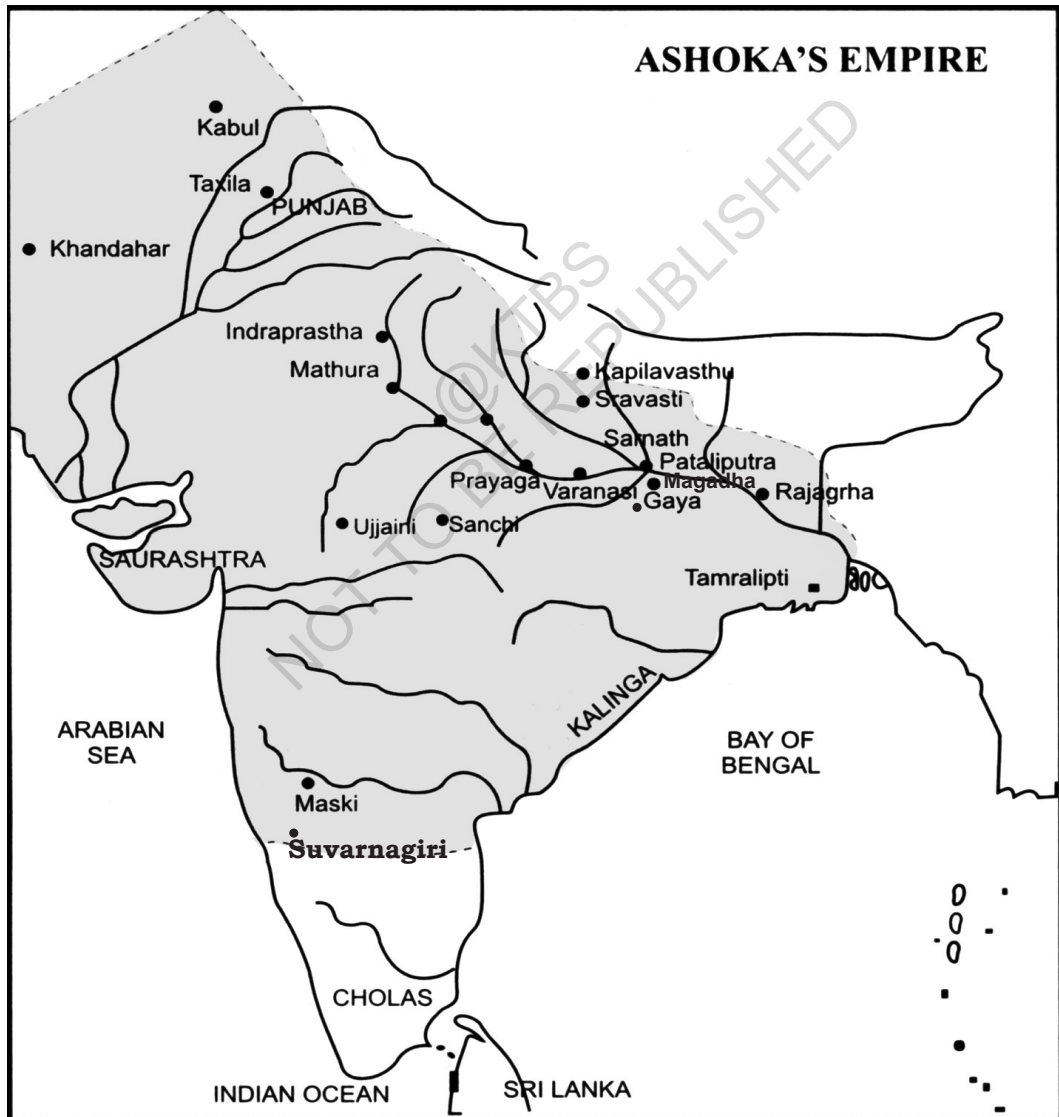
The Mauryan empire was the first Indian empire. They ruled the kingdom from Magadha. Chandragupta Maurya, Bindusara and Ashoka are the prominent kings of this dynasty. The dynasty was established by Chandragupta Maurya. The Greek ambassador Megasthenes recorded the fame of Chandragupta in 'Indica' and immortalized him. The contents of 'Indica' are not known to us since this work has been lost. But certain descriptive excerpts have been found in the works of some Greek writers. Vishnugupta was Chandragupta's minister. He became widely known as Kautilya, and Chanakya. His ideas are described in the work 'Arthashastra'.

Arthashastra

In 1902, R. Shamasastri a renowned Sanskrit scholar, found the manuscript of Arthashastra written by Kautilya in the Oriental Library of Mysore. The Arthashastra is not merely economics as understood by the western world. Arthashastra contains topics like principles of administration of a kingdom, the responsibilities of a king and his ministers, foreign policy, financial management, etc. Stress is laid on the spy network and military system. Even after thousands of years, Kautilya's Arthashastra has been attracting scholars by its uniqueness.

Emperor Ashoka

Ashoka is a famous king of this dynasty. Five important city centres can be identified during this period. They were the capital of the Mauryas, Pataliputra, Taxila, Ujjain, Kalinga and Suvarnagiri. These were major link routes too. Taxila was the gateway to north-west India. Ujjain was the route to trade from north to south. Kalinga was the gateway to the sea through the river Ganges. Suvarnagiri was in the Deccan region, i.e., the modern Karnataka. All these areas were trade routes and were in contact with one another.



The Battle of Kalinga

Eight years after his coronation, Ashoka conquered Kalinga. About 150000 soldiers were captured in this battle and about 1,00,000 people died during the battle. Seeing death and suffering the battle had caused, Emperor Ashoka was moved. He was saddened by the realisation that innumerable, innocent people who had been in perfect harmony with their fellow-human beings and were leading simple, virtuous lives, had either died or been wounded and separated from their loved ones. This was the reason that after conquering Kalinga, Ashoka experienced deep regret and, inspired by 'Dhamma', advocated peace.

Ashoka divided his vast empire into different provinces and ruled. His politics and aspirations were expressed through edicts. These edicts have been the first ever inscriptions available to us. Ashoka's titles like 'Devanam Priya', 'Priyadarshi' were referred in his inscription. Ashoka was transformed after viewing the huge loss of life during the Kalinga war. Compassion as preached by Buddha influenced Ashoka. He spread the teachings of Buddha throughout the country. He appointed Dharma Mahamatras for this purpose. His views on Dharma are expressed in his edicts. These are well-known as Ashoka's Dharma.

Many of the edicts issued by Ashoka are in Prakrit language and in Brahmi script. Ashoka's rock edicts have been found at Brahmagiri of Chitradurga district in Karnataka.

The capital found in the Sarnath pillar of Ashoka has been adopted by the Indian government as National Emblem.



The Dharmachakra
engraved on the pedestal

We see extensive growth in trade and agriculture during this time. The government had adopted various measures to improve agriculture. Special tax concessions were given towards this end. There were many officials to carry on the administration of the vast empire. A permanent army was also found

necessary. To carry out all these activities, taxes were needed. Land tax was the main source of income for the king and various officials served in collecting taxes. Spies kept the king informed. They had established control over trade and commerce by regulating sea and land routes.

The Kushans

After the Greeks, it has been the Kushans who have influenced Indian history and culture. They gave special impetus to the spread of Buddhism. The Mahayana sect received greater encouragement under their patronage. Gandhara sculpture flourished during their time.

An important dynasty after the Mauryas is that of the Kushans. They were basically from a nomadic tribe which had migrated to India from Central Asia. They were the progeny of Yuchi. The Sakas and the Parthians were the other foreign communities that had settled in the north-western part of India. The Kushans defeated the Sakas and the Parthians, and settled in the Gandhara region.



Gandhara style Buddha

The founder of this dynasty was Kujaladakphesus. Vimakadphesus and Kanishka are the noteworthy kings of this dynasty. The Yuchis were basically tribals. The Yuchi factions became united under the leadership of Kujaladakphesus. He crossed the Hindu Kush range and settled in Kabul and Kashmir. During the time of Vimakadphesus, gold coins were brought out. From then onwards, the Kushans minted mainly gold and copper coins.

Kanishka came after Vimakadphesus. During his reign, the Kushan dynasty flourished greatly. He established his rule in 78 C.E. and heralded a new era. This era is called the 'Saka' era.

Kanishka's rule had spread up to Sanchi in the south and Banaras in the east. His kingdom, which included Central Asia too, was a vast empire. Purushapura was his capital. Mathura was another significant town of his time.

Due to the patronage given by Kanishka, Buddhism could prosper much more than before. We get to see many Buddhist scholars like Nagarjuna, Aswagosh, Vasumitra, Sangaraksha and others at this time. The fourth Buddhist conference was held at Kashmir under the leadership of Kanishka. Like Ashoka, even Kanishka sent missionaries to Central Asia and China to spread Buddhism. During his reign, art and architecture got encouragement.

Buddhist Conferences			
<i>Councils</i>	<i>Patronage</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Chairman</i>
<i>First Buddhist council</i>	<i>Ajatashatru</i>	<i>Rajgriha</i>	<i>Mahakasyapa</i>
<i>Second Buddhist council</i>	<i>Kalasoka</i>	<i>Vaishali</i>	<i>Sabakami</i>
<i>Third Buddhist council</i>	<i>Ashoka</i>	<i>Pataliputra</i>	<i>Moggaliputta Tissa</i>
<i>Fourth Buddhist council</i>	<i>Kanishka</i>	<i>Kunadavana</i>	<i>Vasumitra</i>

EXERCISES

I. Fill in the blanks with suitable words :

1. Chanakya came to be known as _____.
2. The capital of the Mauryas was _____.
3. The founder of the Kushan dynasty was _____.
4. The new era of Kanishka's reign is called the _____.

II. Answer to the following questions in brief :

5. Name the important cities of Ashoka's period.
6. Describe Ashoka's administration.
7. Which dynasty did the Kushans belong to?
8. What was the extent of Kanishka's empire ?

III. Activities :

1. Collect more information about Gandara Sculpture art.
2. Collect information from your teacher about the Buddhist Conference which took place during Kanishka's rule.

