

## The partition of the Empire

- After the death of Ashoka, the Mauryan Empire split into two halves – western and eastern parts. This weakened the empire.
- Kalhana, author of the work Rajatarangini which is an account of Kashmir's history says that after Ashoka's death, his son Jalauka ruled over Kashmir as an independent ruler.
- This partition resulted in invasions from the northwest.

## Highly centralised administration

- Historian Romila Thapar is of the view that the highly centralised administration under the Mauryas became a problem with the later Mauryan kings who were not as efficient administrators as their predecessors.
- Powerful kings like Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka could control the administration well. But weak rulers led to a weakening of the administration and ultimately led to the empire's disintegration.
- Also, the sheer vastness of the Mauryan Empire meant that there had to be a very effective ruler at the centre who could keep coherent all the regions.
- A weakening of the central administration coupled with a large distance to communicate also led to the rise of independent kingdoms.

## Weak monarchs after Ashoka

- The successors of Ashoka were weak kings who could not carry the burden of the huge empire that was bequeathed to them.
- After Ashoka, only six kings could rule over the kingdom for a mere 52 years.
- The last Maurya king, Brihadratha was overthrown by his own army commander, Pushyamitra.
- Only the first three kings of the Mauryan Empire were men of exceptional abilities and character. The later kings were no match in quality to their illustrious ancestors.

## Independence of the provinces

- After Ashoka, under the later kings, the centre's hold over the vast empire began to disintegrate. This led to the emergence of various kingdoms.
- It is already mentioned that Jalauka ruled over Kashmir independently.
- Kalinga became independent.
- According to Tibetan sources, Virasena ruled over Gandhara independently.
- Vidarbha broke away from Magadha. As per Greek sources, a king named Subhagasena (Sophagasenus) began to rule over the north-western provinces independently.

## Internal revolt

- During the rule of Brihadratha, there was an internal revolt led by his army chief Pushyamitra Shunga in about 185 or 186 BC.
- Bana describes in Harshacharita how Shunga killed Brihadratha during an army parade.
- This ended the rule of the Mauryas over Magadha and thence started the Shunga dynasty's rule.

## Foreign invasions

- During the reign of the first three Mauryan kings, no foreign power tried to attack India from the north-west as there was a fear of the mighty Mauryan army.
- But after Ashoka's death, the kingdom split up into two. This led to the Greek king Antiochus to attack India unsuccessfully.
- But in time, foreign tribes attacked and established their kingdoms on Indian soil. The notable ones were the Indo-Greeks, the Sakas and the Kushanas.

### Ashoka's policies

- Some scholars suggest that Ashoka's policies of non-violence and pacifism led to the weakening of the empire.
- Since he stopped waging wars, foreign powers were once again tempted to attack the kingdom.
- Also, he gave a lot of importance and efforts to the propagation of Buddhism.

### Brahminical reaction

- According to some historians, the Brahmins were unhappy with Ashoka's unabashed patronage of Buddhism.
- He had banned animal slaughter which was a sacrifice conducted by the Brahmins.
- But this theory is refuted because many of Ashoka's inscriptions talk of respecting Brahmins.
- Also, Pushyamitra Shunga, a general in the Mauryan army was a Brahmin which proves that they had powerful posts under the Mauryas.