

Chandragupta Maurya

(B.A-I, Paper I)

Anuradha Jaiswal

Chandragupta Maurya succeeded to the Nanda throne in 321 B.C. He belonged to the Maurya tribe, but his caste was, probably of Vaishya category. According to Brahmanical tradition he was born of Mura, a sudra woman in the court of the Nandas. But an earlier Buddhist tradition speaks of the existence of a kshatriya clan called Mauryan living in the region of Gorakhpur adjoining the Nepalese terai. The Parishtaparvan describes Chandragupta as the son of the daughter of a chief of village of peacock trainers (mayura poshakas) The Mudrarakshasa refers to Chandragupta as being of low social origin. Dhundiraja commentator on the Vishnupurana states that Chandragupta was the eldest son of the Nanda King Sarvathasiddhi by Mura, daughter of a vrishala (hunter). However in Buddhist texts like in, Digha Nikaya, Mahavamsa and Divyavandana, the Mauryas are described as belonging to a Kshatriya clan called the Mauryas, who ruled at Pippalivana.

Chandragupta took advantage of the growing weakness and unpopularity of the Nandas in the last days of their rule. With the help of Chanakya, who is known as the Kautilya, he overthrew the Nandas and established the rule of the Mauryan dynasty. Chandragupta may have first established himself in Punjab and then moved eastwards until he gained control over the Magadha region. Justin the Greek writer, says that Chandragupta overran the whole of India with an army of 600,000. This may or may not be true. But Chandragupta liberated, north -western India, from Seleucus, who ruled over the area west of the Indus. In the war with the Greek viceroy, Chandragupta seems to have come out victorious. Peace was concluded between the two, in return for

500 elephants, Seleucus gave him eastern Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the area west of the Indus. Chandragupta thus built up a vast empire which included not only Bihar and good portions of Orissa and Bengal, but also western and north-western India and the Deccan. Leaving Kerala, Tamil Nadu and parts of north-eastern India, the Mauryas ruled over the whole of the sub-continent. The only definite inscriptional reference to Chandragupta is in the 2nd century B.C, Junagarh inscription of Rudradaman, which attributes the beginning of the construction of a water reservoir known as the Sudarshan lake to Chandragupta's reign. Some later inscriptions and Jaina texts suggest a connection between Chandragupta, Jainism and Karnataka. A number of places in the Shrava Belgola hills have the word Chandra as their suffix. Jaina texts speak of the relationship between Chandragupta and the Jaina saint Bhadrabahu. Chandragupta's trans-Vindhyan conquests are suggested by Graeco-Roman sources. The Junagarh inscriptions of Rudradaman indicates that Chandragupta's conquests extended up to Saurashtra in Gujrat. Thus Chandragupta seems to be the chief architect of the huge Mauryan empire.

Imperial Organisation- The Mauryas organised a very elaborate system of administration. Megasthenes accounts speak about it. Megasthenes was a Greek ambassador sent by Seleucus to the court of Chandragupta Maurya. He lived in the Mauryan capital of Patliputra and wrote an account not only of administration of the city of Patliputra but also of the Mauryan empire as a whole. The account of Megasthenes can be supplemented by the Arthashastras of Kautilya. Although the Arthashastra was finally compiled a few centuries after the Maurya rule, some of the books contain material that is genuine and give authentic information about the Maurya administration and economy. These two sources thus help us in giving information regarding Chandragupta's administrative system. He was basically an autocrat, who concentrated all power in his hands. According to Megasthenes the king was

assisted by a council whose members were noted for wisdom. The empire was divided into a number of provinces and each province was placed under a prince who was a scion of the royal dynasty. The provinces were divided into still smaller units. Patliputa, Kausambi, Ujjain and Taxila were the most important cities. The administration of Patliputra which was the capital of the Mauryas, was carried on by six committees, each committee consisted of five members. These committees were entrusted with sanitation, care of foreigners, registration of birth and death, regulation of weights and measures and similar other functions.

The most striking feature of Chandragupta's administration is the maintenance of a huge army. According to Pliny, the Roman writer, Chandragupta maintained 600,000 foot-soldiers, 30000 cavalry and 9000 elephants. They also maintained about 8000 chariots. The administration of the armed forces, according to Megasthenes was carried out by a board of 30 officers divided into six committees, each committee consisting of five members. The Mauryas military strength was almost three times that of the Nandas. The vast expenses of the army, was probably through income collected from the peasants, which varied from one-fourth to one-sixth of the produce. The Mauryan period constitutes a landmark in the system of taxation in ancient India. In times of emergency, peasants were compelled to raise more crops. Further, mining, sale of liquor, manufacture of arms too contributed to revenue to the royal exchequer.

Chandragupta thus established a well-organised administrative system and gave it a sound financial base. The administrative mechanism was backed by an elaborate system of espionage. Further there was a remarkable contribution to art and architecture too. Megasthenes states that the Mauryan palace at Patliputra was as splendid as that in the capital of Iran. Fragments of stone pillars and stamps, indicating the existence of a 80-pillared hall, have been discovered at Kumrhar, on the outskirts of modern Patna.

