

# Ancient Indian History UPSC CSE

(Prelims + Mains)  
Supplementary Study Material

Module 6: Iranian and Macedonian  
invasion

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# Iranian and Macedonian Invasions

## Iranian Invasion

- The Achaemenian rulers of Iran, who expanded their empire at the same time as the Magadhan princes, took advantage of the political disunity on the northwest frontier.
- The Iranian ruler Darius penetrated north-west India in 516 BC and annexed the Punjab, west of the Indus, and Sindh. This area was converted into the twentieth province or satrapy of Iran, which had a total number of twenty eight satrapies.
- The Indian satrapy included Sindh, the north-west frontier, and the part of Punjab that lay to the west of the Indus. It paid a tribute of 360 talents of gold, which accounted for one third of the total revenue Iran received from its Asian provinces.

## Results of the Contact

- The Indo-Iranian contact lasted for about 200 years. It gave an impetus to Indo-Iranian trade and commerce.
- Iranian scribes brought into India a form of writing that came to be known as the Kharoshthi script. It was written from right to left like the Arabic. Some Ashokan inscriptions in north-west
- India were written in the third century BC in this script, which continued to be used in India till the third century AD.
- Iranian coins are also found in the north-west frontier region which points to the exchange of goods with Iran.
- The monuments of Ashoka's time, especially the bell-shaped capitals, owed something to the Iranian models. Iranian influence may also be traced in the preamble to Ashoka's edicts as well as in certain terms used in them. The Iranian term *dipi*, the Ashokan scribe used the term *lipi*.

## Alexander's Invasion

In the fourth century BC, under the leadership of Alexander of Macedonia, the Greeks eventually destroyed the Iranian empire. From Iran he marched to India.

- The political condition of north-west India suited his plans. The area was parcelled out into many independent monarchies and tribal republics, which were strongly wedded to the soil and had a fierce dedication to the principality in which they lived.
- Among the rulers of these territories, two were well known: Ambhi, the prince of Taxila, and Porus whose kingdom lay between the Jhelum and the Chenab.
- Following the conquest of Iran, Alexander moved on to Kabul, from where he marched to India through the Khyber pass in 326 BC. When he reached the Jhelum, Alexander encountered the first and the strongest resistance from Porus. Alexander defeated Porus.

## Effects of Alexander's Invasion

The immediate effect of Alexander's invasion was that it encouraged political unification of north India under the Mauryas.

- The system of small independent states came to an end.
- Alexander's invasion had also paved the way for direct contact between India and Greece.
- The routes opened by him and his naval explorations increased the existing facilities for trade between India and West Asia.
- His authority in the Indus valley was a short-lived one because of the expansion of Mauryan Empire under Chandragupta Maurya.

### Extra input:

#### Political Condition on the eve of Alexander's Invasion

- On the eve of Alexander's invasion, there were a number of small kingdoms in northwestern India.
- The leading kings were Ambhi of Taxila, the ruler of Abhisara and Porus who ruled the region between the rivers of Jhelum and Chenab.
- There were many republican states like Nysa.
- The northwestern India remained the most disunited part of India and the rulers were fighting with one another.
- They never came together against common enemy.

#### Causes of the Invasion

- Alexander ascended the throne of Macedonia after the death of his father Philip in 334 B.C.
- He conquered the whole of Persia by defeating Darius III in the battle of Arbela in 330 B.C.
- He also aimed at further conquest eastwards and wanted to recover the lost Persian Satrapy of India.
- The writings of Greek authors like Herodotus about the fabulous wealth of India attracted Alexander.
- Moreover, his interest in geographical enquiry and love of natural history urged him to undertake an invasion of India.
- He believed that on the eastern side of India there was the continuation of the sea, according to the geographical knowledge of his period. So, he thought that by conquering India, he would also conquer the eastern boundary of the world.

#### Battle of Hydaspes

- In 327 B.C. Alexander crossed the Hindukush Mountains and spent nearly ten months in fighting with the tribes.
- He crossed the Indus in February 326 B.C. with the help of the bridge of boats.
- He was warmly received by Ambhi, the ruler of Taxila.
  - From there Alexander sent a message to Porus to submit, but Porus refused and decided to fight against Alexander.
  - Alexander marched from Taxila to the banks of the river Hydaspes (Jhelum).
  - As there were heavy floods in the river, Alexander was not able to cross it.
  - After a few days, he crossed the river and the famous battle of Hydaspes was fought on the plains of Karri.
  - Although Porus had a strong army, he lost the battle.
  - Alexander was impressed by the courage and heroism of this Indian prince, treated him generously and reinstated him on his throne.
  - Alexander continued his march as far as the river Beas encountering opposition from the local tribes.
  - He wanted to proceed still further eastwards towards the Gangetic valley, but he could not do so because his soldiers refused to fight.
  - Hardships of prolonged warfare made them tired and they wanted to return home and Alexander could not persuade them and therefore decided to return.
  - Alexander made arrangements to look after his conquered territories in India and divided the whole territory from the Indus to the Beas into three provinces and put them under his governors. His retreat began in October 326 B.C. Many republican tribes attacked his army.
  - On his way he reached Babylon where he fell seriously ill and died in 323 B.C.