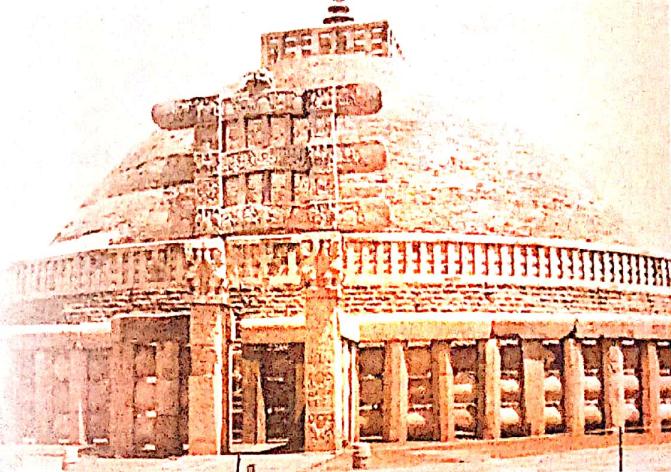


CHAPTER 4

The Mauryan Empire



SYLLABUS

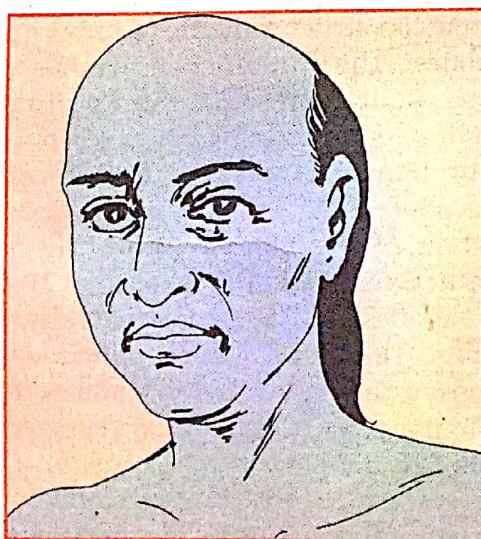
The Mauryan Empire

Sources: *Arthashastra*, *Indika*, *Ashokan Edicts*, *Sanchi Stupa*.

Political history and administration (Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka); Ashoka's Dhamma.

THE MAURYAS

The Mauryan empire was founded in the 4th century BC by Chandragupta Maurya. He organised a powerful army and laid the foundation of a vast empire. He overthrew the Nandas from Magadha and the Greek Satraps from the North-West Frontier and unified a large part of the Indian subcontinent under his centralised government. His successor Bindusara kept the Mauryan Empire intact and further extended its boundaries.



Chanakya

The reign of Bindusara's son, Ashoka constitutes one of the brightest periods in the Indian history. After the Kalinga War, Ashoka devoted his life to human welfare. He considered his subjects as his children. He built many marvels in art and architecture, some of which have survived up to this day.

SOURCES

LITERARY SOURCES

(i) **Arthashastra of Kautilya:** Of all the literary sources on the history of the Mauryas, the most important source is the *Arthashastra*, written by Kautilya, also known as Vishnugupta and Chanakya. He was the advisor and Prime Minister of Chandragupta. *Arthashastra* is written in Sanskrit. It is a comprehensive manual that deals with politics, rules of diplomacy, principles of administration and other such political topics. This book was discovered in 1909 and its English translation is now available.

(ii) **Indika:** Megasthenes was the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandragupta Maurya. He was sent as an ambassador to the court by Seleucus Nicator, the Greek ruler. He wrote a book named *Indika* which contains his impressions of what he heard and saw during his stay in India. Megasthenes' original *Indika* has been lost, but its fragments still survive in the writings of later Greek authors like Strabo, Arrian and Diodorus. Megasthenes wrote the following account about what he saw in India.

"The occasions on which the emperor appears in public are celebrated with grand royal processions. He is carried in a golden palanquin. His guards ride elephants decorated with gold and silver. Some of the guards carry trees on which live birds, including a flock of

trained parrots, circle about the head of the emperor. He is normally surrounded by armed women. He is afraid that someone may try to kill him. He has special servants to taste the food before he eats. He never sleeps in the same bedroom for two nights".

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES

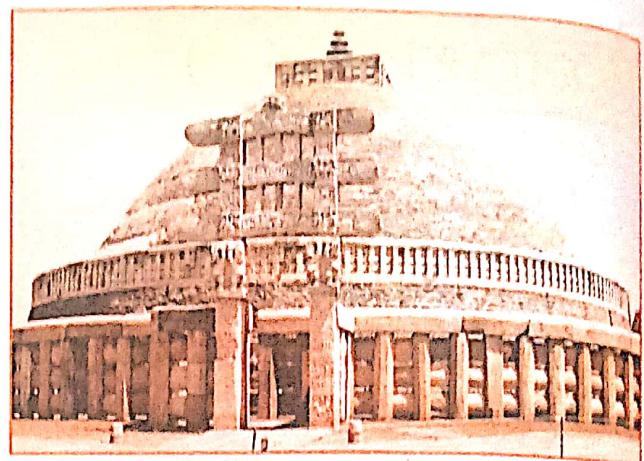
(i) **Edicts of Ashoka:** An edict is a decree issued by a Sovereign. The edicts of Ashoka form the most important source of Mauryan history. They are the oldest, best preserved and precisely dated records of India. These edicts are inscribed on rocks and pillars throughout the country and include 14 Major Rock edicts, Seven Pillar edicts and a number of Minor Rock edicts. The inscriptions on these edicts provide a useful insight into the life and ideals of Ashoka in particular and about the history of the Mauryas in general.

Except those at Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra, which are inscribed in the Kharosthi script running, like Arabic, from right to left, the rest are all engraved in the *Brahmi lipi*, written from left to right.

The most important event of Ashoka's reign was the conquest of Kalinga. The indescribable sufferings and atrocities of the Kalinga war deeply touched Ashoka's conscience and he made a solemn resolve not to take up arms any more. The war drum (*bherighosha*) was silenced forever, and henceforth were heard only the echoes of '*Dhammaghosha*', the call to non-violence and universal peace.



Ashokan Edict



Sanchi Stupa

In pursuance of his policy of non-violence, Ashoka prohibited killing of animals for sacrifices; advocated restraint in the number that had to be killed for consumption; protected some of the animals, and in general condemned cruel acts against animals. Reference to protection of animals is made in the *Rock Edict-I* which states,

"Formerly, in the great refectory and temple of the heaven-beloved king *Piyadasi*, daily were many hundred thousand animals sacrificed for the sake of meat food. So even at this day while this religious edict is under promulgation, from the sacrifice of animals for the sake of food, some two are killed, or one is killed; but now the joyful chorus resounds again and again that henceforward not a single animal shall be put do death."

— (As translated by James Princep).

(ii) **Sanchi Stupa:** A stupa is a semi-spherical solid dome-like structure made of unburnt bricks and stones. The Buddhist stupa has special significance. It represents the spiritual body of Buddha containing his relics such as hair, teeth or bones. A casket containing these relics is placed at the base of the dome. The foundation of the Sanchi Stupa was laid by Ashoka at Sanchi about 45 km from Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. There are four gateways in four directions. They have carved panels depicting events from the life of Buddha and some tales from Jataka stories. Buddha is represented by symbols like the peepal tree, lotus, or a wheel. The pillars are surmounted by capitals which contain sculptures of lions. The most important of these capitals is the Lion Capital, a sculpture

showing four Asiatic lions standing back to back, on an elaborate base that includes other animals. It was officially adopted as the *Emblem of India*, in 1950.

THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA

Chandragupta Maurya was the founder of the Mauryan Empire. Not much is known about his childhood. According to a legend he had been dismissed from the service of Nandas who ruled before him. He met Kautilya at Takshila. Kautilya, who later became famous as Chanakya, was the son of a Brahmin. Kautilya too was wronged by the Nandas. He, therefore, joined hands with Chandragupta to destroy the Nanda dynasty.

After a long series of battles with Chandragupta, the Nanda capital at Pataliputra fell. This led to the emergence of a new dynasty — the Mauryan dynasty with Chandragupta Maurya as the emperor.

Alexander, the Greek ruler had conquered many states in the North-Western part of India. After his death his territories in the Indian subcontinent were taken over by Chandragupta Maurya. With the help of Chanakya he embarked on the consolidation process of his empire.

In 305 BC, India was again attacked by Seleucus, a former general under Alexander. Chandragupta defeated Seleucus. According to the treaty signed with Seleucus, Chandragupta got Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Baluchistan from the Greek commander. Seleucus gave his



Ashoka's visit to a Stupa (from Sanchi Stupa)

daughter Helen, in marriage to Chandragupta. After this victory Chandragupta appointed Pushyagupta as the governor of his North-Western province. He then proceeded to the south and captured some territories there.

Chandragupta's empire extended from Kabul and Kandahar in the North-West to Mysore in the south; and from Bengal in the east to Saurashtra in the west.

According to the Jain tradition, after ruling for 24 years, he renounced the world. He handed over the kingdom to his son, Bindusara.

BINDUSARA

Bindusara succeeded his father, Chandragupta Maurya. The Greek historian Athenaeus calls him a 'slayer of foes'. He conquered many parts of South India after defeating sixteen rulers. During his rule he faced a revolt in Takshila. It was quelled by his second son Ashoka, who was the governor there. Bindusara maintained friendly relations with the rulers of Greece.

ASHOKA

Ashoka succeeded to the throne after his father Bindusara's death. On ascending the throne, Ashoka took the title of '*Devanampriya*' (The Beloved of the Gods) and '*Priyadarshi*' (The Beautiful One).

Kalinga War

After ascending the throne, Ashoka fought the famous Kalinga War. According to Megasthenes, the Greek historian at the court of Chandragupta



Lion Capital

Maurya, the ruler of Kalinga had a powerful army comprising infantry, cavalry and elephants. Ashoka faced tough resistance. According to the Rock Edict XIII, both sides suffered losses, but people of Kalinga suffered the most. Though Ashoka won the war, it had far reaching consequences for him and his empire.

Consequences of Kalinga War

The Kalinga War had a profound effect on the policies and personality of Ashoka.

- The death and destruction caused by the Kalinga war brought about a great change in the personal and political life of Ashoka. He abandoned the policy of 'conquest by force' (*bherigosha*) and ambition of 'victory in all directions' (*Digvijay*) and embraced the policy of religion (*Dhammagosha*).
- Kalinga changed Ashoka's personal life. He stopped hunting and eating meat and abandoned the life of luxury.
- The prisoners of war were used for agricultural work. It resulted in an increase in production and brought about economic prosperity in his empire.

(iv) Ashoka himself went on tours to preach Buddhism to people. He also sent missionaries to the various parts of the world. He sent his daughter, Sanghamitra and son, Mahindra to Sri Lanka to propagate Buddhism.

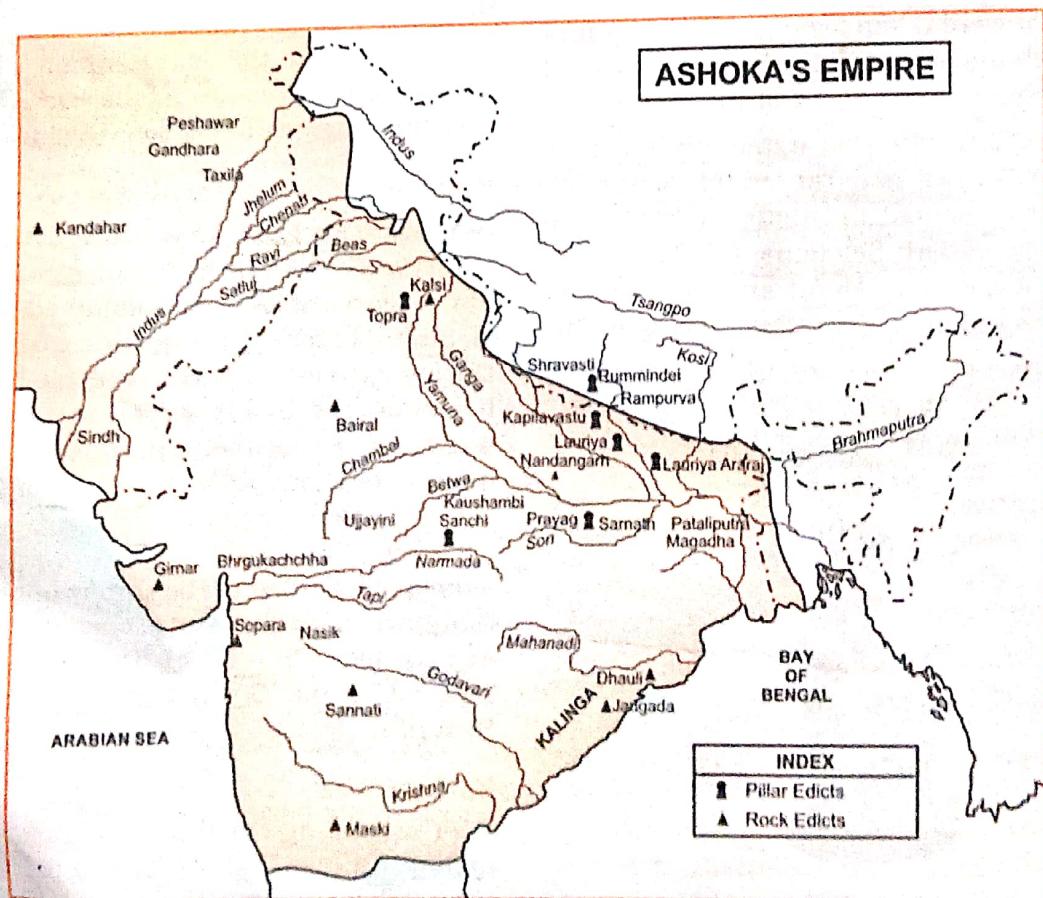
(v) Ashoka, after the Kalinga War, embraced Buddhism and followed the Buddhist principles in his State Policy like non-violence and disapproval of empty rituals.

(vi) He got erected several pillars and edicts to spread the teachings of Buddhism. He ordered the construction of 84,000 Stupas to keep the relics of Buddha. He gave donations to Buddhist viharas.

(vii) On account of abandonment of war there was a decline in military preparedness and efficiency.

Extent of Ashoka's Empire

After his victory at Kalinga, Ashoka's empire extended from Hindukush in the north-west to river Pennar in the south. It also included some parts of Nepal in the north and Kabul, Herat and Kandahar provinces outside the present boundary of India.



MAURYAN ADMINISTRATION

Pan-Indian Character: The Mauryan empire beginning with Chandragupta Maurya was vast, with an all-India character.

Seleucus, whom Chandragupta defeated in war, had handed him four provinces of Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Baluchistan. These remained with the Mauryan empire right up to the end of Ashoka's rule. During Bindusara's rule, Ashoka reached Takshila and quelled the revolt there. After Bindusara had established his rule over South India no other king ever ruled over the whole of India. The fact that Chandragupta Maurya spent his last years at Shravanabelagola in Karnataka speaks volumes about the all India character of the Mauryan empire.

The chief advantages of the Pan-Indian character of his empire were the following:

- It marked the end of small states.
- It helped in establishing trade links with foreign countries.
- It made India strong and helped the Mauryan kings face foreign aggressions successfully.
- After Ashoka's victory over Kalinga, the era of conquests and wars was over. It helped the Mauryan kings to pay more attention to social and economic life of the people. Hence, there was an all-round economic prosperity.

Administration

It was Chandragupta Maurya, under the guidance of Chanakya, who laid the foundations of an elaborate system of administration. Chanakya wrote a book 'Arthashastra' in which he describes the principles of politics and the art of administration. Chandragupta's son Bindusara retained the same system and Ashoka made some changes necessitated by the change of heart after the Kalinga War.

- Ashoka added a new fifth province, Kalinga in the existing four provinces, with Tosali as its capital.
- The Mauryan centralised monarchy became a paternal despotism under Ashoka. In one of his Edicts, Ashoka says, 'all men are my children'.
- Ashoka simplified many rigorous practices related to administration regarding

THINK ABOUT IT.

The existence of an early postal system in India can be found during the reign of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya. In order to exercise control over his vast empire Chandragupta Maurya used the pigeon post for communication between the capital city and the provincial capitals. The pigeon post system continued even during the time of Emperor Ashoka. The letters in little cachets were tied to the feet of trained pigeons which were made to fly to specific destinations and thus important messages were sent. How was speed of delivery and privacy of messages ensured? Trace the use of and authenticity pigeon post till date.

taxation and crop collection. This helped to increase productivity and economic activity across the Empire.

- Ashoka appointed Mahamatras (Governors) to look after the welfare of his subjects.

Mauryan administration had two main divisions—Civil Administration and Military Administration.

Civil Administration: The Civil administration had two main divisions—the Central Government and the Provincial Government.

(i) Central Government: The Mauryan government was centralised and was managed by several officers of different ranks. The king was the supreme authority and his throne was hereditary. He was also the supreme judge. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandragupta Maurya, in his book *Indica* and Chanakya in the *Arthashastra*, tell us about the Mauryan administration.

Ashoka brought about some changes in the administrative system of Chandragupta Maurya. He appointed *Mahamatras* (governors) to look after the welfare of his subjects.

At the central level, the king was assisted by the council of ministers (*Mantri Parishad*) headed by the Prime Minister. Each minister was responsible for his department. The council of

ministers included the chief Pujari of the state called Purohit; Senapati, who advised the king on matters related to war and peace; the head treasurer called Samidhata; and Samaharta, the taxation expert. The other important officers were Accountant General, one in charge of agriculture, Superintendent of mines, Superintendent of Ports, Controller of Commerce, as well as the Superintendent of Weights and Measures.

(iii) Provincial Government: Ashoka made alterations only in the central government and not in the provincial government. During his grandfather's time there were four provinces and after the addition of Kalinga in Ashoka's time, there were five provinces as shown below:

Province	Capital
1. Magadha	Pataliputra
2. Gandhara (North-western Province)	Takshila
3. Avanti (Eastern Province)	Ujjain
4. Southern Province	Swamagiri
5. Kalinga	Tosali

Head of the province was called Kumar or Aryaputra. Only the princes were appointed to this position. During Ashoka's time the Kumar was assisted by the Governor (Mathamatra). According to some rock and pillar edicts of Ashoka, besides the Mathamatra, other officers took active part in the administration of the provinces. Pradeshika collected taxes. Rajuka performed the functions of modern day Tehsildar or revenue officer. The Yuktia was the treasurer.

(iii) District Administration: The provinces were divided into districts called Janapadas. Their administration was looked-after by Pradeshika, Rajuka and Yuktia.

(iv) Administration of Cities: Important cities, the capitals of provinces as given earlier, had their own administrative system. The head of the city was called Nagaradhyaksha. According to Megasthenes, the administration of Pataliputra, the capital city of the Mauryan empire was looked after by a committee of 30 members.

(v) The Revenue System: The land revenue was the chief source of income in the Mauryan

empire. It was one-sixth to one-fourth of the produce. Two kinds of taxes, namely Bali and Bhaga are mentioned in the Edicts of Ashoka. Bhaga was levied on agricultural produce and the cattle at the rate of one-sixth. According to historians Vincent Smith and Shamashasti, Bali was a religious tribute.

Toll tax was imposed on articles which were brought for sale. Taxes were levied on liquor shops and gambling houses. Some taxes were collected from forests and mines. From the revenue collected, the state provided various facilities like roads, irrigation, hospitals and met other expenses of the state.

(vi) The Spy System: Chandragupta Maurya had a wide network of spies in his empire. There were spies against the spies and on important matters more than one agent was asked to collect information. The king was always kept informed of the working of the bureaucracy.

(vii) Military Administration: Chandragupta Maurya maintained a huge army consisting of infantry, cavalry, elephants and chariots. According to Megasthenes the Mauryan Army consisted of 6,00,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry, and 9000 war-elephants. According to another source, the Mauryas maintained 8000 chariots. The chief weapons used were bows, arrows, shields, swords, etc.

The king was the commander-in-chief of the army. The whole army was under a military commission of thirty-members. The Mauryas also had a well-laid recruitment policy. The soldiers were paid salary in cash. The Mauryan king had built forts at strategic places for safety and security of the empire.

ASHOKA'S DHAMMA

After the Kalinga war Ashoka became the people's king. He embraced Buddhism but did not impose it on his subjects. He wanted his subjects to follow such a Dhamma that may be based on the unifying principles of all major religions of the world. The Dhamma as described in Ashoka's Edicts is not a religion or religious system, but a Moral Law, a Common Code of Conduct or an Ethical Order, which is a common meeting ground of all religions.

Principles of Dhamma

Ashoka's Dhamma has the following salient points:

(i) Respect for elders and love for children.

- (ii) Ahimsa or non-violence.
- (iii) Good deeds or good karma would give happiness to man in the next birth.
- (iv) He taught people to respect all religions.
- (v) He disapproved empty rituals.

IMPACT OF DHAMMA ON SHOKA'S IMPERIAL POLICY

(i) Religious unity: People belonging to different religions followed their emperor's policy of religious tolerance.

(ii) Moral values: People under the influence of Dhamma started living a moral life.

(iii) End of crimes: The policy of Ahimsa did have a great moral impact on people. Thefts, crimes and other such activities almost came to an end.

(iv) Public welfare: With the policy of conquests and wars having come to an end, Ashoka's Dhamma helped officials to undertake public welfare and public work schemes. This resulted in prosperity and helped people to lead a peaceful life.

EXERCISES

I. Multiple-Choice Questions

A. Choose the correct answers to the questions from the given options.

1. Chandragupta Maurya established a vast empire overthrowing
 - (a) Guptas and Chalukyas
 - (b) Nandas and Greek Satraps
 - (c) Rashtrakutas and Nandas
 - (d) Greek Satraps and Guptas
2. Which of the following is correct?
 - (a) Bindusara : Slayer of foes
 - (b) Chandragupta : The most beautiful one
 - (c) Bindusara : Favourite of gods
 - (d) Ashoka : The greatest one
3. Ashoka abandoned _____ and embraced _____
 - (a) Bherigosha, Digvijay
 - (b) Dhammadosha, Bherigosha
 - (c) Bherigosha, Dhammadosha
 - (d) Dhammadosha, Digvijay
4. Which of the following was NOT a consequence of the Kalinga War?
 - (a) Ashoka abandoned the life of luxury
 - (b) Increased agricultural output
 - (c) Increased military preparedness
 - (d) Increased Buddhist missionary activity.
5. What was an advantage of the Mauryan administration having a pan-Indian character?
 - (a) More attention paid to socio-economic life of people
 - (b) Increased uprising in small provinces
 - (c) Increased area to be protected from foreign invaders
 - (d) All of the above.
6. Which of the following were provinces in the Mauryan Empire?
 - (a) Magadha, Avanti, Kalinga and Cholamandalam
 - (b) Magadha, Gandhara, Avanti, Kalinga and Southern Province
 - (c) Magadha, Takshila, Ujjain and Tosali
 - (d) None of the above.
7. Which of the following were officers in the Provincial Government?
 - (a) Purohit, Senapati, Sannidhata, Samaharta
 - (b) Mahamatra, Prashika, Rajuka, Yukta
 - (c) Pradeshika, Rajuka, Yukta
 - (d) Bali, Bhaga

B. Read the two statements given below and select the option that shows the correct relationship between (A) and (B).

II. Short Answer Questions

1. State any two sources of information about the Mauryan Empire.
 2. Who wrote *Arthashastra*? What is its importance?
 3. What is the importance of Ashoka's edicts?
 4. Who wrote the Indika? What does it contain?
 5. What is a stupa? Name one stupa built by Ashoka.
 6. How did Chandragupta Maurya establish the Mauryan dynasty?
 7. What is the importance of the Kalinga war in the personal life of Ashoka?
 8. What was the impact of Ashoka embracing the policy of Dhammagosha?
 9. Name the two taxes mentioned in the Edicts of Ashoka.
 10. How did the king keep himself abreast with whatever was happening in his kingdom?
 11. What is meant by Ashoka's Dhamma?
 12. Give the basic principles of Ashoka's Dhamma.
 13. What was the impact of Dhamma on Ashoka's policies?

III. Structured Questions

1. With reference to the sources of information on the Mauryan Empire, explain briefly the significance of the following:
 - (a) Arthashastra
 - (b) Indika
 - (c) Sanchi Stupa
2. With reference to Mauryan Empire, answer the following questions:
 - (a) Give a brief account of how Chandragupta established the Mauryan Empire.
 - (b) Give a brief account of the Kalinga war and its consequences.
 - (c) Name four important ways in which Buddhism spread under the royal patronage during the Mauryan times.
3. With reference to Mauryan administration, answer the following questions:
 - (a) Why is Chandragupta Maurya regarded as the chief architect of the system of administration?
 - (b) Briefly describe the main features of civil and military administration under Mauryan rule.
 - (c) Explain briefly the Pan-Indian character of Mauryan administration.
4. With reference to the Mauryan administration, write short notes on the following:
 - (a) The Central Government.
 - (b) District Administration.
 - (c) Revenue system.
5. Study the Ashokan Edict given on the right and answer the following questions:
 - (a) What is an edict? Where are these edicts inscribed?
 - (b) What is the significance of edicts as a source of information?
 - (c) Explain briefly the importance of Ashoka's edicts, giving example from one of his edicts.
6. Study the picture given on the right and answer the following questions:
 - (a) Name the structure given in the picture. Name the dynasty and the king who built it.
 - (b) Where is it located? Mention any two architectural features of this structure.
 - (c) What is the significance of a Buddhist Stupa?



Picture for Q.No. 5



Picture for Q.No. 6

IV. Thinking Skills

1. Imagine that you met a person, whose family suffered the consequences of the Kalinga War waged by Ashoka. Describe the horrors of the war as told by him. State the differences which you find between the Kalinga War and the modern warfare.
2. Explain the symbolism preached by the sculpture on the Emblem of India.
3. You are given an opportunity to pen the text of an Ashokan Edict. Briefly list what would you write.

