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Paper III: History of India II

(BG/BB)

Sixteen Mahajanapadas:

In the sixth century B.C. there was no paramount power in India. According to '*Anguttara Nikaya*', the Buddhist text and '*Bhagavati Sutra*', the Jain text – sixteen large states or '*Mahajanapadas*' emerged in the age immediately prior to the rise of Buddhism. These '*Mahajanapadas*' were 1. Kashi, 2. Koshala, 3. Anga, 4. Magadha, 5. Briji, 6. Malla, 7. Chedi, 8. Batsa, 9. Kuru, 10. Panchala, 11. Matsya, 12. Shurasena, 13. Ashmaka, 14. Avanti, 15. Gandhara and 16. Kamboja. Most of these states were situated basically in North India excepting Ashmaka (Deccan). Other than *Briji* and *Malla* which were republics, all other states were ruled by kings. At that time conflict was going on among these Mahajanapadas to establish supremacy over others. As a result of that, defeating and occupying others twelve Mahajanapadas - Koshala, Batsa, Avanti and Magadha were emerged very powerful monarchical states. They again fought among themselves for political hegemony and lastly Magadha emerged victorious and subsequently rose to the position of the first historical imperial state in India.

Rise of Magadha

Actually the rise of Magadha as a first historical empire in India was possible due to the worthy leadership of very promising rulers of four subsequent dynasties in ancient India. They were Haryanka dynasty, Sisunaga dynasty, Nanda dynasty and of course Mauryan dynasty.

Haryanka Dynasty:

Bimbisara (545 B.C.): The rise of Magadha was started with the accession of Bimbisara (assumed the epithet *Shrenika*) in 545 B.C. Bimbisara strengthened his position by matrimonial alliances with the ruling families of Koshala, Videha, Lichchhavi and Madra. He married **Koshaldevi**, sister of Koshalan king Prasenjit and obtained Kashi village, as dowry. Kashi village yielded revenue of one lakh of rupees per year. Bimbisara also married **Chellana**, daughter of Chetak, Lichchhavi chief of Vaishali; **Vasabi**, a Videhan prince and **Khema**, a daughter of the king of Madra.

Being strengthened by these matrimonial alliances, Bimbisara attacked and annexed Anga by defeating king Brahmadata. This was the beginning of the expansion of Magadha. According to **Dr. H. C. Roychoudhury**, the expansion of Magadha which started with annexation of **Anga** ended with the conquest of **Kalinga** by Asoka.

Bimbisara also maintained a friendly relation with **Prodyut**, king of Avanti and **Pukkusati**, king of Gandhara.

He shifted his capital from Girivraja to **Rajagriha**.

Ajatasatru (493 B.C.) assumed the epithet Kunik. According to Buddhist tradition he killed his father to become the king.

He married Vajira Kumari, daughter of King Prasenjit of Koshala.

During his time thirty-six republics including Vriji and Malla formed a confederacy and started war with Magadha. Ajatasatru with the help of his prime minister namely Bashmakar was able to make division in the confederacy. The war continued for sixteen years and ultimately Ajatasatru came into victorious and annexed the kingdom of Vaisali.

According to *Dr. H. C. Roychoudhury*, the most potent cause of this war was the rising imperialism of Magadha.

First Buddhist Council held at Rajgriha.

Udayin or Udaybhadra (459 B.C.) – was the son and successor of Ajatasatru. He ascended the throne of Magadha in 459 B.C. by killing his father.

He is chiefly remembered as the founder of the city of Patliputra at the confluence/junction of the Ganga and Sone rivers. He transferred his capital there.

Following the death of Udayin **Anuruddha, Munda** and **Nagadashaka** –three weak rulers ruled Magadha in quick succession.

According to Buddhist tradition they were all patricides. Being disgusted with the rule of the patricidal dynasty people banished Nagadashaka and raised Sisunaga, a popular minister, to the throne of Magadha in 430 B.C.

Sisunaga Dynasty:

Sisunaga: Sisunaga continued the aggressive policy of the kings of the Haryanka dynasty. He annexed Avanti.

Vaisali was made the capital of Magadha.

Kalasoka or Kakavarna: Sisunaga was succeeded by his son Kalasoka or Kakavarna.

He transferred his capital to Patliputra.

His name is associated with the **Second Buddhist Council, held at Vaisali.**

Mahapadma Nanda assassinated him along with his sons and usurped the throne of Magadha.

Nanda Dynasty:

Mahapadma Nanda: Mahapadma Nanda was the founder of the Nanda dynasty. According to *Puranas*, *Jain* and *Buddhist* texts he was belong to sudra origin. In spite of his humble birth/origin he proved himself to be a powerful ruler. He conquered kingdoms like – Ikshvaku, Panchala, Kalinga, Asmaka, Kashi, Kuru, Shurasen and Mithila. Mahapadma Nanda brought the entire north India under his control. No Indian king before him had ruled such a big empire.

Puranas describe him as '*Ekkrat*', '*Sarvakshatrantaka*' and '*Second Parasurama*'.

According to Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee, “ Mahapadma Nanda was the first great historical emperor of northern India”.

Dhana Nanda: After Mahapadma Nanda his eight sons ascended the throne of Magadha one after another. Dhana Nanda was the last Nanda king. He had a huge army consisted of 20,000 cavalry, 200,000 infantry, 3,000 elephants and 2,000 chariots.

Dhana Nanda was so powerful that when Alexander's soldiers heard of the military strength of the Magadhan empire they expressed their unwillingness to proceed to Magadha. So, Alexander went back from India.

Alexander invaded India in 327 B.C.

Dhana Nanda was very unpopular because of imposition heavy taxes on the people. Taking advantage of this situation **Chandragupta Maurya** overthrew Dhana Nanda with the help of **Kautilya**, a shrewd Brahman and founded the Maurya Dynasty in Magadha.

The Nandas built canals and carried out irrigation projects.

Maurya Empire and Foreign Invasions

The Maurya rule marked the beginning of a new epoch in the history of India. This age witnessed remarkable progress in all spheres of life. The history of Mauryas, unlike that of the earlier ruling houses, is rendered reliable by a variety of evidences drawn from such sources as the Buddhist and the Jain tradition. The Greek accounts like works of Megasthenes, Pliny, Arrian and Justin; the '**Arthashastra**' of **Kautilya**, **Kathasarit Sagar** of Somdeva Bhatta, **Brihatkatha Manjuri** of Kshemendra are chief sources of information regarding this age. The first decipherable inscription of Ashoka (deciphered by *James Princep in 1837*) and his various *edicts*, the archaeological remains are also valuable sources of information.

The **Puranas** and *Mudrarakshasa* of *Vishakhadutta*, though belongs to later date, through light on the history of the Maurya.

Chandragupta Maurya: Chandragupta Maurya was the founder of Mauryan dynasty. Brahmanical sources (*Mudrarakshasa*) say that the name Maurya was derived from '**Mura**' a shudra woman in the court of Nandas, and Chandragupta was son or grandson of that woman. Vishnu Purana also mentions him of low origin i.e. shudra. But the Buddhist and Jain sources ascribed him a Kshatriya status. His early career is shrouded in mystery.

Meeting with Alexander:

Chandragupta came into limelight in 326-25 B.C. According to *Justin* and *Plutarch*, Greek writers, Chandragupta met Alexander in his camp in the Punjab and solicited his help in uprooting the Nandas. But Alexander took offence to his outspokenness and gave order to kill him. Chandragupta, however, saved himself by a quick flight.

Occupy the Magadhan Throne:

Thereafter he formed an army with the tribal people living in the forests of the Vindhyas and overthrew Nandas from the throne of Magadha between 325-322 B.C. In those days the vast area from the border of the Punjab to the Godavari in the south was known as the Magadhan empire.

- Chandragupta occupied Magadhan throne in 321 B.C. with the help of ‘**Chanakya**’ (Kautilya).
- He had allied with a Himalayan chief **Parvataka**.

War of Liberation against the Greeks:

Thereafter, Chandragupta engaged himself to the task of expelling the Greeks from North Western India. After the death of Alexander the people of North Western India rose in revolt against the Macedonian rule. Chandragupta took advantage of the situation and launched an attack on the Greeks. Justian, a famous Greek historian writes, “India after the death of Alexander (323 B.C) had shaken, as it were, the yoke of servitude from its neck and put his governors to death. The author of this liberation was Sandrocottus (Chandragupta)”. By 321 B.C. the Greek forces were totally driven out.

War and Treaty with Seleucos:

It is known that after the death of Alexander his vast empire was divided among his generals. Syria and India fell to Seleucos’s share. In order to recover his Indian territory, Seleucos arrived on the banks of river Indus as the head of his army. The war took place between the two sides in 305 B.C. Historians are silent about the result of the war but they have referred to the signing of a treaty between Seleucos and Chandragupta. According to the terms of the treaty Seleucos had to cede to Chandragupta the territories of **Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Makran** in exchange of 500 elephants.

- From the terms of the treaty it is almost clear that Chandragupta won the battle. The treaty also provided for an matrimonial alliance.
- Seleukas probably gave one of his daughters (**Helen**) marriage to Chandragupta and sent an ambassador i.e. **Megasthenese** to the Mauryan court in order to strengthen the friendly relations between Syria and India. **Indika** of Megasthenese is an important source not only for the administration of the city of Patliputra but also of the Mauryan Empire as a whole.

Other Conquests and Extension of the Empire:

According to Plutarch, a famous Greek historian - Chandragupta with an army of Six hundred thousand men overran and subdued all India. The Junagadh inscription of Rudradamana testifies to the annexation of **Sourastra** in western India by Chandragupta. Chandragupta also conquered **Malwa** and **Konkan**. Overthrowing the Nandas, he gained the territory up to Godavari river in the Deccan but he extended it further. His sway extended up to **Chitaldrug district in Mysore and Tinevelli district in Tamilnadu** in the Deccan. In the eastern India Bengal was included in his empire. The **Brahmi** inscription of Mahasthangarh and **Hiuen Tsang's** account refer to it. No Indian king before him had ever built a vast empire like this. **Dr. H. C. Roychoudhury** has described him as the '*first historical founder of a great empire in India*'.

- Towards the end of his life, he adopted Jainism (300/ 298 B.C.), abdicated the throne and fasted unto death in an orthodox Jain manner at **Sravan Belagola** near Mysore on Chandragiri hill.

It is found that through the ages the Indian potentates had a dream to form an all India empire, but somehow they were not able to do that. It was Chandragupta

Maurya who first almost realised this dream. Starting his career as a soldier of fortune he succeeded in building a vast and sovereign empire in India. Not only that, he set up an efficient administrative system which helped to stabilise his empire. Therefore, as the founder as well as consolidator of the Mauryan Empire, he deserves a unique place of pride among the Indian rulers in all times.

Bindusara (300/298-273 B.C.):

He was son of Chandragupta and known as '*Amitraghata*' (slayer of foes), besides the master of the land between the two seas. He continued the friendly links with Syrian king Antiochus I and is stated to have requested him for a present of figs and wine together with a sophist. Antiochus sent figs and wine but replied that Greek philosophers were not for export.

- He also received a Greek ambassador '**Daimachos**' from Antiochus I.
- Pliny tells that **Ptolemy II Philadephos** of Egypt sent an envoy '**Dionysios**' to Bindusar's court.
- Tradition credits him the suppression of a revolt at Taxila , who later appointed his son Ashoka for further redressal of grievances against the misrule of **wicked bureaucrats** (dustanatyas).
- Bindusara did not make any territorial conquest.

N.B.: Students are advised to go through the study materials again and again and prepare you for upcoming examination.

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