

Indian Empires

Maurya Empire



Maurya Empire

Gupta Empire

Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.





The start of the Maurya Empire

In 321 BC, the Nanda Empire ruled most of northern India. However, they had been weakened from fighting Alexander the Great's forces in the north west for years.

In 321 BC, **Chandragupta Maurya** defeated the Nanda Empire and began an empire of his own: the **Maurya Empire**. Not much is known about his life before this time.

Chandragupta was aided by his advisor **Kautilya**, who was also influential in developing the government of the new empire.



The empire spanned over 1.9 million square miles at its peak and unified North India for the first time.





The Maurya Empire had three main rulers during its history:

Chandragupta reigned from 321–298 BC. He invaded the region of Magadha and united north-west India by defeating the ruler of the Nanda Empire, founding the Maurya Empire.

Bindusara reigned from 298–273 BC. He was the son of Chandragupta and expanded the Maurya Empire to cover central and eastern India.

Ashoka reigned from 273–232 BC. Bindusara's second son, he conquered an area called Kalinga after a brutal war and ruled almost all of the Indian subcontinent.





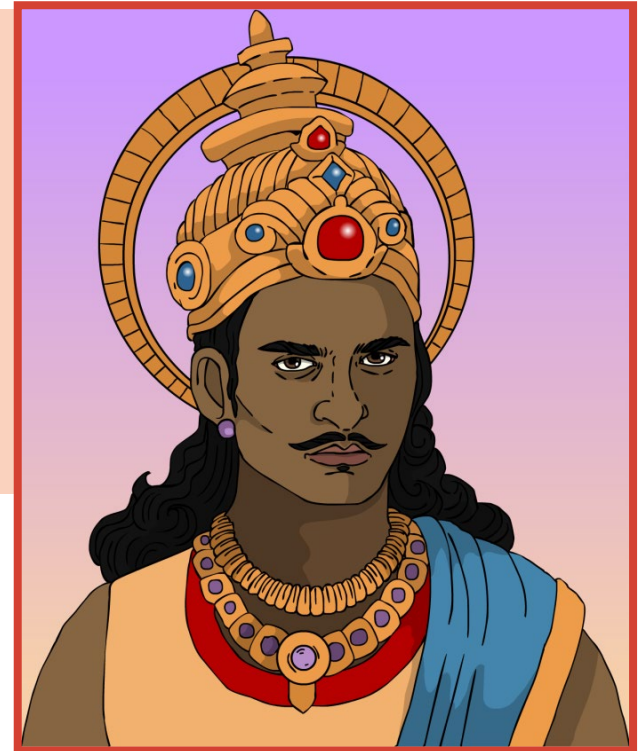
The empire under Chandragupta



Chandragupta headed a **bureaucratic** government, in which the state controlled most aspects of life.

Chandragupta's government was inspired by a text called the *Arthashastra*. This is widely believed to have been written by the philosopher and economist Kautilya, who served as an advisor to Chandragupta.

The *Arthashastra* outlined how a state should be run and gave advice on military strategy and economic policy.



What kind of government does the U.S.A. have today?





The empire was split into four provinces: Tosali, Ujjain, Suvarnagiri and Taxila. They each reported to the central government.

Each province was run by a **kumara** (royal prince) who ruled as the king's representative.

Each province had departments for key sectors such as taxation and agriculture, which followed state rules.

The state also controlled a spy network. Citizens were encouraged to inform soldiers of suspicious behavior.

Why do you think Chandragupta used a spy network?



Chandragupta ruled the Maurya Empire for over 20 years.

Around 298 BC, he **abdicated** the throne and passed it on to his son, Bindusara.

Towards the end of his life, Chandragupta converted to **Jainism** and followed the teachings of a religious teacher called Bhadrabahu. He followed the Jain practice of **Sallekhana**, voluntarily fasting until his death in 297 BC.

Converting to Jainism indicated a change in Chandragupta's aggressive thinking. His empire had been founded on military strategies, but Jain principles focused on non-violence, and Chandragupta began to follow these.

Why might Chandragupta have converted to Jainism?



The empire under Bindusara

Bindusara reigned from 298 until 273 BC. Most information about him comes from legends written several hundred years after his death.

Under his rule, the empire expanded southwards to cover most of the Indian peninsula.

However, he was not able to conquer Kalinga, modern-day Odisha. The region would not become part of the Maurya Empire until the rule of Bindusara's son, Ashoka.



This map shows the Maurya Empire under Bindusara.



The empire under Ashoka

Bindusara's death resulted in a succession dispute.

According to legend, Bindusara wanted his eldest son to take over. However, Bindusara's advisors favored another son, **Ashoka**. Keen to become ruler, Ashoka arranged for his brother to be assassinated and took the throne.

Ashoka expanded the empire by conquering Kalinga after a brutal war.

Witnessing the devastation of this war, Ashoka afterwards converted to Buddhism and practiced non-violence.



This map shows Maurya Empire expansion under Ashoka's rule.



Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism put a stop to all military conquest and violence.

He spread Buddhist practices to the rest of the empire by commissioning pillar **edicts** to be built across India. The edicts were inscribed with calls for conservation of fauna, protection of animals, and lenient criminal sentences.

Ashoka adopted the teachings of Buddha and pledged to follow the **Six Cardinal Perfections**. Although Buddhism did not become the state religion, it spread rapidly to other parts of the world due to Ashoka.



Why do you think religion had such a great influence on Ashoka and Chandragupta?



The Mauryan economy was built on agricultural production. Most citizens worked as farmers. Land was intensively farmed and areas of jungle were cleared so that more land could be cultivated.

The government depended on tax collected from the land. Agricultural goods could be taxed up to a third by the state.

Other taxes introduced for state revenue included: an artisan tax on **artisans** and traders, water tax on areas of water storage and trade duties.

State-owned industries such as mining also contributed to the economy and the empire became very wealthy.

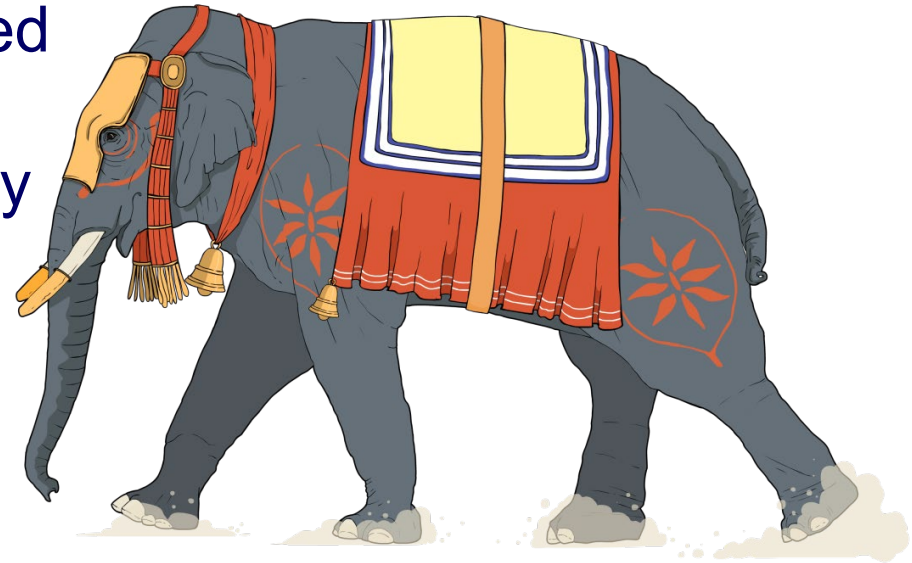
Why might the state have imposed high taxes on farmers?



Soldiers made up the second biggest proportion of the population. The Maurya Empire retained a large standing army throughout its history.

Megasthenes, an Ancient Greek historian and explorer, described the military as having over 600,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry as well as 5,000 chariots and 9,000 war elephants.

Armored elephants were used for cutting down and terrorizing enemy soldiers.



How do you think this compared to the size of armies in other ancient civilizations?



The Maurya Empire benefited from the Himalayan and Hindu Kush mountains. They separated India from East Asia and the Middle East, which reduced the chance of invasion.

Hindu Kush
Mountains

Thar Desert



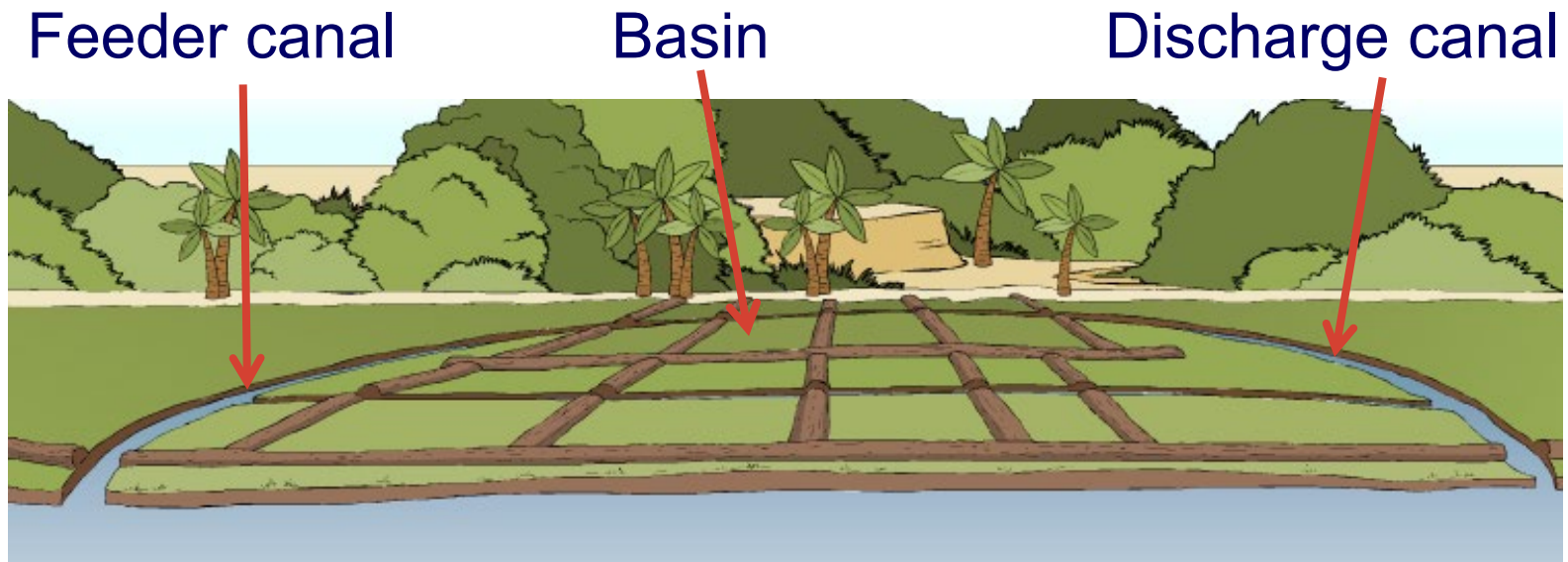
Himalayas

However, the empire was also home to the Thar Desert in the north: one of the hottest and driest climates on earth. Droughts were common in many areas, so the **monsoon** season was very important for survival.

Do you know what a monsoon is?



Irrigation systems were used to collect rainwater from Monsoons. Water could then be used throughout the year when the climate was hot and dry. **Basin irrigation** was a common system:



If a monsoon did not occur one year, it had a catastrophic effect on **crop yields**. This would lead to potential famine and a decrease in trade.



As well as selling agricultural products, Mauryan trade benefited from India's natural resources and laborers produced spices, textiles and silks.

Mauryan goods were traded as far afield as east Africa, China and the **Hellenistic** (Greek) states. Some of these were reached by means of ocean trade routes.

The **Khyber Pass** provided an efficient route through the mountains to the Greek states through modern-day Pakistan.



Mauryan art and architecture was influenced by Greek works, partly due to trade relations. Chandragupta married a Macedonian princess, who also may have introduced some Greek designs to the Maurya Empire.

This **capital** (column top) from Pataliputra, a Mauryan city, shows Greek stylistic influences such as rosettes and volutes (scrolls).

Art in the Maurya Empire transitioned from woodwork to stonework. This was particularly prevalent during Ashoka's reign, where stone carving was featured on his Buddhist pillar edicts.



After the death of Ashoka in around 232 BC, the Maurya Empire began to decline. This was due to a range of issues:

Independence of territories: several of Ashoka's territories reverted to independence soon after his death.

Weak rulers: no successor could maintain the level of control the previous three generations had exerted over the empire.

Vastness of empire: The Maurya Empire was too large to control efficiently as it was hard for leaders to communicate.

The Maurya Empire ended in 185 BC. Its final leader, Brihadratha, was stabbed to death by one of his generals. This led to the start of the **Shunga** dynasty.



Keywords

