

# **The First Empire of India:**

## **The Mauryan Empire**

The Mauryan empire was the first and the largest of the empires established in ancient India. The establishment of the Mauryan empire marks the passage of Indian history from darkness to light. Before the Mauryas the chronology in Indian history is controversial. The advent of Maurya period functions like a light-house in the chronology of Indian history. Chronology becomes definite with the establishment of the Mauryan empire.

(An era of political unity ushers in India with the beginning of the Maurya period. Chandragupta Maurya, founder of the Mauryan empire, was the first historical king of India. He established a vast empire by putting an end to the existence of small and petty states. Ashoka, the Great, who gave the world a message of love and peace, too belonged to the Mauryan dynasty.)

### **Sources of the Mauryan History**

Following are the main sources of history of the Mauryan period:

### 1) Indica of Megasthenese

Indica of Megasthenese is an important source of Mauryan history. Megasthenese was a Greek historian who was sent as an ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya by Seleukus. He stayed there during the period 302-298 B.C. He has given a vivid account of the administration of Chandragupta Maurya and of the social, economic, religious conditions of the day in his work Indica. Indica is not available in its original form now, but its parts and passages are found in the works of later Greek writers in the form of quotations.

### 2) Arthashastra

Arthashastra, parts of which were probably composed by Kautilya<sup>11</sup>, the well-known Brahman scholar and believed to be the Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya, is another important source of the Mauryan history. It provides us important and valuable information regarding the Mauryan administration and political condition of that time.

### 3) Mudrarakshasa of Vishakhadatta

Mudrarakshasa is a historical drama written by Vishakhadatta in the 5th century. It tells us how Chandragupta Maurya in alliance with Chanakya destroyed Nanda dynasty by diplomacy. We come to know from this drama that Chandragupta Maurya belonged to a low caste.

### 4) Jaina and Buddhist Literature

The Jaina texts like Kalpasutra of Acharya Bhadra Bahu and Parishista Parvan of Hemchandra and the Buddhist texts like Digha Nikaya, Dipavamsa, Mahavamsa, Mahabodhi Vamsha and Divyavadan provide sufficient information regarding the Mauryan period and the Mauryan rulers.

### 5) The Puranas

The Puranas also furnish ample information regarding the reconstruction of the history of the Maurya period. Vayu Purana and Matsya Purana in particular provide valuable information about Maurya period. However, it must be kept in mind that in Puranas history has been mixed up with fable and folklores.

## **6. Inscriptions and Coins**

Inscriptions are the most important and authentic source of the Mauryan history. The inscriptions have been engraved on rocks, caves and pillars etc. There is a clear mention of Chandragupta Maurya in Junagarh inscription of Rudradaman. It also provides us information regarding the expansion of Chandragupta Maurya's empire in Western India. Inscriptions of Ashoka are the most significant source of the history of the Mauryan period. The coins of the Mauryan rulers also throw light on the history of that period.)

## **7. Buildings and Monuments**

The buildings and monuments of the Maurya period also help significantly in the reconstruction of the Mauryan history. The remains of Pataliputra, the Stupas of Sanchi and Bharhut etc. throw ample light on the civilisation and culture of that period.)