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## **UNIT 4 : THE MAURYAN EMPIRE: CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA AND ASOKA-CONQUEST AND ADMINISTRATION**

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### **4.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- trace the chief events leading to the establishment of Mauryan rule,
- learn about the early Mauryan kings - Chandragupta and Bindusara - and their expansionist activities,
- explain the context of the accession and coronation of Asoka Maurya and the importance of the Kalinga War,
- know about the vast administrative apparatus on which the Magadhan empire built up,
- familiarise yourself with its various branches and offices, their powers and functions, and
- differentiate among forms of administration at various levels.

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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The Magadhan Kingdom began to grow during the sixth century BCE. However, this process accelerated considerably under the Nandas and the Mauryas. The locations of the Asokan inscriptions indicate that a major part of the Indian sub-continent, excluding the eastern and southern extremities, had come under Magadhan suzerainty. Mauryan had a vast territory to control and had an administrative apparatus for doing it. This apparatus covered within its range various levels of administration; administration of the core region (Magadha) of the empire, regional centres, peripheral areas, cities, villages and so on. Besides sustaining the King's authority and order, the administration took into its fold a wide range of activities concerning justice, army, espionage, revenue collections, handicrafts, etc. From a variety of sources like the text of *Arthashastra*, Greek accounts and the Asokan inscriptions we get a fairly good idea of the Mauryan empire and their administrative system.

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## 4.2 ORIGIN OF MAURYAN RULE AND CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA

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It has been suggested by D.D. Kosambi that the most immediate and unexpected by product of Alexander's invasion of the north-west was that "it hastened the Mauryan conquest of the whole country." He has argued thus because since the tribe of Punjab had already been weakened, it was not difficult for the Magadhan army under Chandragupta to conquer the whole of Punjab. Most of the Gangetic Plains was already under the control of Magadha. According to Classical sources, Chandragupta is supposed to have even met Alexander and advised him to attack Magadha which was under the unpopular rule of the Nandas. Though this is difficult to verify, both Indian and Classical sources suggest that Alexander's retreat resulted in the creation of a vacuum, and, therefore, it was not difficult for Chandragupta to subdue the Greek garrisons left there. However, what is not clear is whether he did this after his accession to the throne of Magadha or before it. Some scholars date his accession to 324 BCE while now it is generally accepted as 321 BCE.

According to Indian tradition Chandragupta was assisted by the Brahmin Kautilya, also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta, to rise to power. It is further suggested on the basis of a play of the sixth century CE which in its description of the overthrow of the Nandas by Chandragupta, hints that at his accession to the throne at twenty-five years of age, he was in fact a weak ruler and the real ruler of the empire was Chanakya. The *Arthashastra* is attributed to Chanakya who is said to have been well-versed in not only the political principles of warfare and aggrandisement, but was also deeply knowledgeable about the organisation of the State and society to ensure that the empire did not collapse.

Though the early years of Chandragupta's reign are little known, most historians agree to assign either a 'low caste' or a tribal origin to the Maurya family. According to some accounts Chandragupta was the son of the last Nanda king by a "low born" woman called Mura, from her came the family name Maurya. The Buddhist tradition tells us that he was a member of the Moriya clan of Pippalivana and thus suggests that this dynasty was in some way linked to the tribe of the *Sakyas* to which the Buddha belonged. In this explanation the family name Maurya is said to have been derived from the name of the tribe. This also indirectly implies that as an old family of chiefs they were in some senses *Kshatriyas*. The Puranas do not link the Nanda and Maurya dynasties, though they too describe the latter to be Shudras. The Brahmanical perception about them is however based on its earlier idea of the Magadhan society generally being unrighteous and of mixed caste origin. The Classical sources which know of the last Nanda king also do not link these two dynasties, though Chandragupta, known to them as Sandrakottus, is described to be of low origin. It is also suggested that the name ending 'Gupta' in Chandragupta's name, and the later episode of Asoka's marriage to the daughter of a merchant of Vidisa, lend credence to the view that the Mauryas could have been of Vaishya origin.

Though the caste affiliation of the Mauryas remains obscure, it is significant that the most important rulers of this dynasty turned to the heterodox sects later in their lives. On the other hand, the several sources that point to the role of the Brahmin Kautilya as the advisor and the motivating force behind Chandragupta cannot be ignored. The Puranas even suggest that Chanakya had appointed Chandragupta as the king of the realm. One can perhaps suggest that the Mauryas rose to power in a society which was never very orthodox. In the north-west there had been considerable contact with the foreigners and Magadha itself was looked down upon in Orthodox Brahmanical tradition. Besides, it was considerably exposed to the ideas of Buddha and Mahavira. It was thus amidst considerable turmoil social and political that Chandragupta was successful in ascending the throne of Magadha.

Many historians who understand the Mauryan state as an empire primarily in terms of its territorial extent, attribute great importance to the role Chandragupta Maurya played in ruthlessly stemming the tide of foreign interference in the north-west and suppressing indigenous rulers in west and south India. Source material on the exact nature of these military exploits is wanting and therefore, one has to construct these details on the basis of accounts which are available for his successors who inherited this empire.

Both Indian and Classical sources agree that Chandragupta overthrew the last of the Nanda kings and occupied his capital Pataliputra and this success is linked with his accession to the throne in around 321 BCE. As mentioned earlier, the political rise of Chandragupta was also linked with the invasion of Alexander in the north-west. The years 325 BCE - 323 BCE were crucial in the sense that many of the governors who were stationed in the north-west after Alexander's invasion were assassinated or had

to retreat and this enabled Chandragupta to gain control of this region rather quickly. Here, it needs to be stated that there is an uncertainty about whether Chandragupta routed the foreigners first or defeated the Nandas. In any case both these tasks were complete by 321 BCE and the state was set for further consolidation.

One of the first major achievements of Chandragupta Maurya on the military front was his contact with Seleucus Nikator who ruled over the area west of the Indus around 305 BCE. In the war that ensued Chandragupta is said to have turned out victorious and eventually, peace was established with this Greek viceroy in around 303 BCE. In return for 500 elephants Seleucus gave him eastern Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the area west of the Indus. The Satrapies thus called were Arachosia, Paropanisadae, Aria and Gedrosia. A marriage alliance was also concluded. Further, Seleucus sent an ambassador called Megasthenes who lived in the court of Chandragupta for many years. This achievement meant that the territorial foundation of the Mauryan empire had been firmly laid with the Indus and Gangetic plains well under Chandragupta's control.

It is suggested by a majority of scholars that Chandragupta ultimately established his control not only in the north-west and the Ganges plains, but also in western India and the Deccan. The only parts left out of his empire were thus present day Kerala, Tamil Nadu and parts of North-eastern India. Details of the conquests in different parts of India are lacking. The Greek writers simply mention that Chandragupta Maurya overran the whole country with an army of 600,000. The conquest and subjugation of Saurashtra or Kathiawar in the extreme west is attested in the Junagadh Rock Inscription of Rudradaman of the middle of the second century CE. This record refers to Chandragupta's viceroy or governor, Pushyagupta by name, who is said to have constructed the famous Sudarshana Lake. This further implies that Chandragupta had under the control the Malwa region as well. With regard to his control over the Deccan too we have late sources. These are some medieval epigraphs informing us that Chandragupta had protected parts of Karnataka.

The Tamil writers of the Sangam text of the early centuries CE make allusion to the "Moriyar" which is said to refer to the Mauryas and their contact with the south, but this probably refers to the reign of Chandragupta's successor. Finally, the Jaina tradition informs us that Chandragupta having become a Jain abdicated the throne and went South with Bhadrabahu, the Jain saint. At Sravana Belgola, the Jaina religious centre in south Karnataka, he spent the rest of his life and died in the orthodox Jain way by slow starvation.

Bindusara, the son of Chandragupta, is said to have ascended the throne in 297 BCE. There is comparatively little known about him from either Indian or Classical sources. To the latter he is known as Amitrochates. They also inform us that he had contacts with the Seleucid king of Syria, Antiochus I, whom he requested to send him sweet wine, dried figs and a sophist.

In a very late source of the sixteenth century, in the work of the Buddhist monk Taranath of Tibet, we are told of Bindusara's warlike activities. He is said to have destroyed kings and nobles of about sixteen cities and reduced to submission all the territory between the eastern and western seas. The descriptions of early Tamil poets' of the Mauryan chariots thundering across the land probably refer to his reign. Many scholars believe that since Asoka is credited to have conquered only Kalinga, the extension of the Mauryan empire beyond the Tungabhadra must have been the work of his predecessors. It can therefore be suggested that it was probably in Bindusara's reign that the Mauryan control of the Deccan, and the Mysore plateau in particular, was firmly entrenched.

Though Bindusara is called "slayer of foes", his reign is not very well documented, and, therefore, the extent of his conquests can only be arrived at by looking at a map of the empire of Asoka who conquered only Kalinga (Odisha). His religious leanings are said to have been towards the Ajivikas. Buddhist sources suggest the death of Bindusara around 273-272 BCE. After his death there was a struggle for succession among his sons for about four years. Ultimately, around 269-268 BCE Asoka was crowned Bindusara's successor.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) Mention which of the statements are correct (√), or wrong (×).
  - a) On the advise of Chandragupta, Alexander invaded Magadha. ( )
  - b) The Nanda and Mauryan families were related by blood. ( )
  - c) Chandragupta was able to defeat Seleucus Nikator. ( )
  - d) Chandragupta and Bindusara conquered India upto Kanyakumari. ( )
  - e) Bindusara had contacts with the Seleucid king, Antiochus-I. ( )
- 2) What are the various ways in which the caste/origin of the Mauryan family can be explained? Give some of the views in about five lines.

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**4.3 ASOKA MAURYA**

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Till about 1837 CE Asoka Maurya was not a very well-known king. In that year James Prinsep deciphered a Brahmi inscription referring to a king called Devanampiya Piyadasi (Beloved of the Gods). This was compared with what was

known from the Sri Lankan chronicle Mahavamsa and then it could be established that the king of the inscription was indeed Asoka Maurya. The fame of Asoka is due to the fact that he turned away from war and tried to establish a system of rule based on the principle of Dhamma. Below, we discuss some relevant details of his early life, the Kalinga War and the extent of the Mauryan empire during his reign.

### **4.3.1 The Kalinga War**

During his father's reign Asoka served as a Viceroy at Ujjain and also at Taxila. It is suggested that he was sent to Taxila for a special purpose, namely, to quell a revolt. After being successful at Taxila, the Buddhist sources tell us, he was sent to Ujjain as Viceroy. The events in his personal life here, like his marriage to a Vidisha merchant's daughter and the birth of their two children Mahindra and Sanghamita, are said to have had a great influence in turning Asoka towards Buddhism. Many of the details about his early life come from the Buddhist chronicles, and, therefore, certain ambiguities in them cannot be denied.

About the accession of Asoka too there are several versions, but there is some general agreement that he was in fact not the crown prince (Yuvaraja). Therefore, he was involved in a struggle against other princes before he ascended the throne. His portrayal as an extremely wicked king before his conversion to Buddhism is undoubtedly exaggerated in Buddhist accounts so as to enhance his piety as a Buddhist. It is necessary to point out that though Buddhism played a significant role in Asoka's later life, one has to discount those versions that depict him as a fanatic or bigot. An idea of the King's personality and beliefs comes through more clearly from his many inscriptions in which his public and political role are both described. They also suggest his conversion to Buddhism to have taken place after the Kalinga War.

Though Asoka's predecessors had intruded into the Deccan and the South and perhaps conquered parts of it, Kalinga, *i.e.*, the present-day State of Odisha, still had to be brought under Mauryan control. It was of strategic importance as it controlled routes to South India both by land and sea. Asoka himself in Rock Edict-XIII describes his conquest of Kalinga which is said to have taken place eight years after his consecration, around 260 BCE. In this war the Kalingans were completely routed and "One hundred thousand were slain, and many times that number died." Though on the battlefield Asoka, was victorious, the inscription goes on to describe his remorse which then ultimately turned him towards Dhamma. A policy of conquest through war was given up and replaced by a policy of conquest through Dhamnavijaya. This was meant to work both at the State and personal levels, and totally transformed the attitude of the king and his officials towards their subjects. During Asoka's reign the Third Buddhist Council met at Pataliputra in 250 BCE. This council decided to send missionaries to various regions. Accordingly Asoka sent his people outside India to spread Buddhism.

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## 4.4 CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

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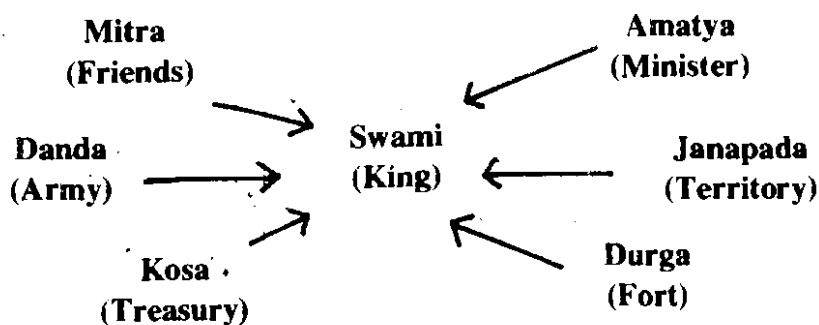
The Mauryan Empire had many major administrative units like the centre and the regions which had various sub-units down to the village. All these units had their own administrative set up but they came under the central authority. The Central administration can be classified under following heads:

- |                              |                             |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| i) The King                  | v) Espionage network        |
| ii) The Council of Ministers | vi) Law and justice         |
| iii) City Administration     | vii) Revenue Administration |
| iv) Army                     | viii) Public Welfare        |

### 4.4.1 The King

The King was the supreme authority of the state. All basic policy matters as well as crucial decisions were taken by the King. The *Arthashastra* has mentioned that if over an issue the traditional law (Shastra) holds a different point of view from that of the King's law, it was the King's law which prevailed. The Mauryan Empire, in fact, represents a centralised political system under which the monarchy had emerged victorious over the *gana-samghas*. The *Arthashastra* gives final authority to the King in all aspects of administration. It gives the King primacy among the seven components of the state.

#### The Seven Components



The argument in favour of King's central position in the *Arthashastra* is because it is the King who:

- appoints or removes the ministers (Amatyas),
- defends the treasury and the people,
- works for the progress and welfare of the people,
- punishes the evil, and

- influences the people (*Praja*) through his morality.

But not everyone was fit to be a King and the *Arthashastra* also mentions certain necessary virtues for the King like:

- birth in a high family (*uchchakula*),
- capability to keep under control various small kings and officials,
- sharp intellect,
- truthfulness, and
- upholder of Dharma, etc.

Not only this, but the *Arthashastra* specifies certain subjects which the King should master in order to carry out his functions. He should undergo military training and have knowledge of various departments of economic life (*Vartta*), writing (*Lipi*) etc. The *Arthashastra* further goes on to explain his conduct and daily routine.

The *Arthashastra* also lays down three-basic pre-conditions for successful administration of the empire by the King:

- i) he should pay equal attention to all matters,
- ii) he should remain vigilant and active for taking action or corrective measure, and
- iii) he should always discharge his duties.

Besides, he had to be constantly accessible to his advisors and officials. That the King did so is also evident from the account of Megasthenes and from the Asokan edicts.

By the time of Asoka the Mauryan Empire had consolidated its position. An important development in the King's position now was the emergence of a paternal attitude towards his subjects. In the Dhauli inscription Asoka states:

*“All men are my children and just as I desire for my children that they should obtain welfare and happiness both in this world and the next, the same do I desire for all men.”*

But in spite of this paternal attitude the monarch was conscious of his absolute authority. For example in the same inscription, addressed to the officials at Tosali and Samapa, he states:

*Whatever I approve of that I desire either to achieve by taking action or to obtain by effective means . . . . . and these are my instructions to you.*



There is no doubt that Asoka kept the welfare of the people as the prime aim of administration but in terms of political analysis he was an absolute monarch. By adoption of the title *Devanampiya* (beloved of the Gods) Asoka according to Romila Thapar, made "*an attempt to emphasize the connection between kingship and divine power, perhaps even to the degree of excluding the intermediaries, the priests.*" This, in fact, indicates that the King was now exercising his authority in religious matters also.

#### **4.4.2 Council of Ministers**

The *Arthashastra* as well as the Asokan inscriptions refer to a Council of Ministers (*Mantriparishad*). The *Arthashastra* mentions that the work of the state cannot be carried out without assistance. It mentions that "as the chariot cannot move on one wheel hence the King should appoint ministers and listen to their advice". Similarly the, Girnar Rock Edicts of Asoka mention about the functions of the Council:

- Rock Edict III implies that the *Parishad* was expected to see that new administrative measures were carried out by different categories of officials.
- Rock Edict VI mentions that the ministers can discuss the King's policy during his absence, suggest amendments, and decide upon any important matter which the King has left to them. Yet the Council had to report its opinion to the King immediately.

The power of the Council might have varied from time to time; yet its primary role remained that of an advisory body. This was because the final authority vested with the King. There was no fixed number of ministers and Kautilya mentions that it should be decided according to the needs. But he opined that "a large council is beneficial for the King". He has also listed the issues on which the King should consult his ministers. These included:

- consultation on how to start the works which the state wants to undertake,
- to determine the manpower and finances involved in carrying out these works,
- to determine the areas-where the works have to be carried out, and
- finding solutions to deal with calamities, etc.

Kautilya mentions that the work should be carried out according to the majority verdict (Bhuvyist) in the council but in case the King feels that the majority verdict will not be able to achieve the goal, he should decide according to his own thinking.

He makes it clear that the "ministers should see to it that the King's orders are carried out properly".

An interesting point mentioned in the *Arthashastra* is the criteria or the qualifications for the appointment of ministers. For example the person should be such as not to be lured by wealth, not to succumb to pressure, etc. *i.e.*, he should be a *Sarvopdashudha* (purest of all). There are also references to an inner council (*Mantrins*) - small group of ministers who would be consulted on issues which needed immediate attention.

We do get references about eighteen departments (*Tirthas*) of the central government in the *Arthashastra*. For example the *Karmantika* looked after the industries, the *Antarvamsika* looked after the King's security and the *Sannidhata* looked after the treasury, etc.

#### 4.4.3 City Administration

Megasthenes has given a vivid description of administration in *Palibothra* (Patliputra). This account, though different from that in the *Arthashastra*, helps us in understanding the city administration during this period. In this account the city council was divided into six sub-councils or committees and each committee had five members:

- 1) The first committee looked after industry and crafts. Its functions included inspection of such centres; fixing the wages, etc.
- 2) The second committee looked after the foreigners. Its functions included; arranging for their food, stay and comfort, security, etc.
- 3) The third committee's work was registration of births and deaths.
- 4) Looking after trade and commerce, the functions of the fourth committee included- inspection of weights and measures, controlling the market, etc.
- 5) The fifth committee inspected the manufactured goods, made provisions for their sale and a strict watch was kept to distinguish between new and second-hand goods.
- 6) The sixth committee collected taxes.

Interestingly, there is no mention of such committees in the *Arthashastra* in spite of the well-defined plan of city administration. However, we do find in this planning almost all the functions mentioned by Megasthenes. For example, in *Arthashastra* the functions of the fourth committee are performed by the *Panyadhyaksha*, the collection of taxes (Sixth Committee) was the responsibility of *Sulkadhyaksha* and registration of births and deaths was the work of *Gopa*. The head of the urban administration was called *Nagariaka*. He was assisted by two subordinate officials - *Gopa* and *Sthanika*. Besides these, there were a host of officials whose functions have been elaborately defined. For example:

- *Bandhanagaradhyaksha* looked after the jail.
- *Rakshi i.e.* the police, was to look after the security of the people.
- Work in the centres where goods were manufactured was looked after by a host of superintendents like the *Lohadhyaksha*, *Sauvarnika*, etc.

*Arthashastra* also refers to variety of activities of city administration, regulations related to them and penalties on their breach. These included:

- Sanitation and water sources
- checking adulteration,
- watch over inns, and
- pre-cautions against fire, etc.

The law enforcers were not above the law. For example in case the *Rakshina* (policeman) maltreated a woman, he had to face severe punishments. At the same time if the citizens broke any of the regulations they were subjected to penalties. For example, if any citizen moved out during the curfew hours at night and his explanation for this did not come under the exempted categories, he had to pay a heavy fine. Thus, we can say that the city administration during this period was elaborate and well planned.

#### 4.4.4 Army

The Nanda kings had a strong army and it is interesting that the army which Kautilya and Chandragupta had raised to defeat the Nanda king consisted of mercenary soldiers. Both the Greek and Indian literary sources refer to this. Later on the size and organisation of Chandragupta's army became fairly large. For example, According to Pliny's account it consisted of 9000 elephant, 30000 cavalry and 6000 infantry. Plutarch's account refers to 6000 elephants, 80000 horses, 20000 foot soldiers and 8000 war chariots. These accounts may be exaggerated but the retreat of Seleucus, descriptive account of army administration in *Arthashastra* and the violent Kalinga war in Asoka's time point towards a large and well organised military set up under the Maurya. According to Megasthenes the branches of the army consisted of:

- infantry,
- cavalry,
- elephants,
- chariots.
- transport, and
- admiral of the fleet

Each branch was looked after by a committee of 5 members. Kautilya has referred to *Chaturangabala* (i.e. infantry, cavalry, chariots and elephants) as the main components of the army -each under a commander.

**Salaries of Army Officers**

<b>Senapati</b>	—	<b>48000 Pana</b>
<b>Nayaka</b>	—	<b>12000 Pana</b>
<b>Mukhyas</b>	—	<b>8000 Pana</b>
<b>Adhyakshas</b>	—	<b>4000 Pana</b>

There was a separate department to look after the production and maintenance of a variety of armaments whose chief was known as *Ayudhagaradhyaksha*.

There is a detailed description of the work of various *Adhyakshas*. For example the *Rathadhyaksha* also had to look after the construction of chariots and the *Hastyadhyaksha* looked after the elephant force. The *Arthasastra* also refers to the recruitment policy, war plans and fortifications, etc.

There is no doubt that the state spent a large amount of revenue in maintaining its army, which in the long run might have adversely affected its treasury.

#### **4.4.5 Espionage**

The Mauryan administration had a well-knit system of espionage. A watch was kept practically on all important officials as well as on general public. The main tasks of the spies recruited involved:

- keeping an eye over the ministers,
- reporting on government officials,
- collecting impressions regarding the feelings of citizens, and
- know the secrets of foreign rulers, etc.

For these activities they would seek the help of various people like cooks, barbers, etc. They would themselves adopt various guises like ascetics, students, etc., to seek information. At times they even directly reported to the king on matters of importance. In fact the *Arthasastra* mentions a well-knit system of espionage.

#### **4.4.6 Justice and Punishment**

In order to maintain social order, smooth functioning of the administrative system and flow of revenues to the state an orderly legal system was established under the Mauryas. The *Arthasastra* is full of codes listing punishments for various offences. These included a vast range from violation of marriage laws, divorce, murder adulteration, wrong weights, etc. There were various kinds of courts to try the offenders of law or settle disputes at various levels. If the *Gramika* had judicial powers at the village level there were also courts at the level of *Janapada* and the centre. Two kinds of courts are mentioned in the *Arthasastra*:

- 1) *Dharmasthiya* i.e. courts which decided personal disputes.
- 2) *Kanhkmaba* i.e., courts which decided upon matters related to individuals and the state.

For example, the first kind of courts would settle issues related to disputes over *Stridhana* (wife's wealth) or marriages etc., and the second category of courts dealt with wages to workers, conduct of workers, murder, etc. The courts functioned under

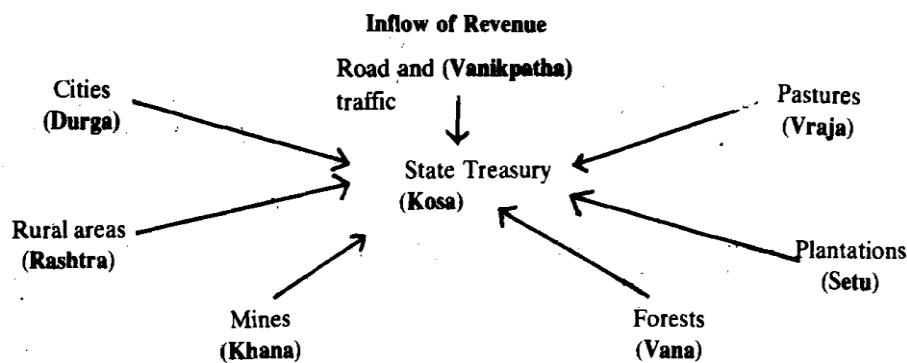
certain regulations. Cases were properly registered and ample opportunity given to produce witnesses and plead on one's behalf. The sources of law, as mentioned by Kautilya, were:

- 1) *Dharma*
- 2) *Vyavahara i.e.*, current legal codes,
- 3) *Chraritra i.e.*, customs, and
- 4) *Rajasasana i.e.*, the royal decree.

The king was the upholder of *Dharma* and held the supreme judicial power. According to Megasthenes the incidence of crime committed in Maurya India was not very high. But the range of punishments mentioned in the *Arthasastra* indicates that breach of laws and crimes were not uncommon in the Mauryan social fabric. Hence, this need for a severe Penal code. However, due stress was laid on evidence and the witness. Cases were decided by a "body of arbitrators" with a system of appeal to the king. However, it is worth mentioning here that the penalties in *Arthasastra* were based on Varna hierarchies meaning that for the same kind of offence a *Brahmana* was punished much less severely than a Sudra.

#### 4.4.7 Revenue Administration

State revenues, during the Mauryan period, were derived from various channels. Kautilya has listed different resources from where revenue flowed into the state treasury which was looked after by an official *Sannidhata*.

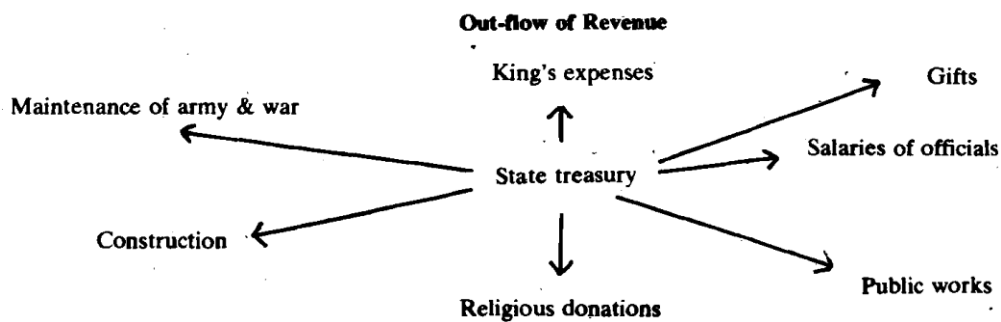


All these resources had their own sources of collection in their areas. For example:

- The cities collected revenues in the form of fines, sales tax (*Sulka*), exercise on sale of liquor, a kind of income tax imposed on the rich, etc. (The *Arthasastra* lists 21 such taxes collected by the *Durga*). The revenues from the rural areas were appropriated by the state in the form of income from Crown lands (*Sita*), land revenue (*Bhaga*) from cultivators, taxes on orchards, ferry charges, etc.
- As all the mines were under the control of the state, the mineral wealth was a regular source of income for the state.

- Taxes were levied on merchants travelling by road or water ways.
- Taxes on exports and imports, etc.

There were certain collections made directly by the state from the concerned people. For example, the gamblers had to part with five percent of their winnings to the state and the merchants had to pay when their weights were tested and certified by the state officials. The state control over armament industry and salt trade increased its revenues. The state was also empowered to impose taxes in case of emergency for increasing its earnings. There were various departments to collect, regulate and manage the state revenues. Most of the revenue collections which went to the state treasury had their outflow in the form of expenditure on army, administration, salaries, king, etc.



The King had the right of granting remission of land revenue for we find that Asoka had reduced the *Bhaga* (state's share in agricultural produce) of the village Lumbini to  $\frac{1}{8}$  since it was the birth place of Buddha.

#### 4.4.8 Public Works

The Mauryan state took a keen interest in public works. The account of Megasthenes and the *Arthashastra* refer to these works:

- The state took considerable interest in irrigation because it could be a major source of revenue. Megasthenes has mentioned officials who supervised irrigation. In *Arthashastra* also there are references to various modes of irrigation like dams, ponds, canals etc. There were certain regulations regarding the use of water resources and breaking these was a state offence. The state also encouraged people for repairing dams at their own initiative and for this land revenue remissions were granted. In the inscription of Rudradaman (written in the middle of second century CE) there is mention of the construction of a water reservoir (*tadaga*) called Sudarsana during Chandragupta's times. This was obviously built to facilitate the supply of water.
- There are a many references to medicine men of various kinds during this period like ordinary physicians (*Chikitsakah*), midwives (*Garbhavyadhi*) etc.

From Asokan inscriptions we know that medical treatment and medicines were available to both men and animals.

- The state also helped its citizens during natural calamities like floods, famines etc.
- The *Arthashastra* mentions that the King should look after orphans, old unattended women, etc. To what extent these were actually carried out we do not know.
- An important aspect of public works was the laying down and repair of roads and opening inns.

Thus, we can say that the state did spend a certain amount from its revenues on public works. This must have increased during the time of Asoka due to his concern for public welfare and paternal attitude towards his subjects.

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## 4.5 REGIONAL AND LOCAL UNITS OF ADMINISTRATION

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We know that in the Mauryan state all powers were vested in the King and that the core area of the state was characterised by a highly centralised administrative system. But at the same time no administrative control could be effective in a vast empire unless it devised certain administrative means also to control the regional or local levels. After its territorial expansion the Magadha state established administrative control at the provincial and local levels.

### 4.5.1 Provincial Administration

The head of the Provincial administration was the *Kumara* (royal prince) who used to govern the province as the King's representative. For example, Asoka had been the *Kumara* of Ujjayini and Taxila before becoming the King. The *Kumara* was in turn assisted by *Mahamatyas* (*Mahamatras* during Asoka's period) and a council of ministers. From Asokan edicts we get the names of four provincial capitals-Tosali (in the east), Ujjain (in the west), Suvarnagiri (in the south), and Taxila (in the north). Certain areas within the province were administered by governors who may have been minor rulers of the areas. We can say this because the Junagadh inscription of Rudradaman mentions Tushaspa, a yavna, as a governor of Junagadh area during the time of Asoka. The same inscription, however, says that during Chandragupta Maurya's time his representative in that area was a Vaisya Pushyagupta.

The council of ministers at the provincial level not only acted as a check on the *Kumara* but at times had direct relations with the King.

Among the senior officials were the *Mahamatras*. The *Arthashastra* mentions them in the sense of ministers whereas the Asokan edicts mention them as performing various activities like looking after the border areas, judicial work and *Dhamma*

*Mahamatras* who looked after religion. Their appointment, it appears, could be made both by the King as well as the Kumara. Another category of high officials was that of *Amatyas*. This category too must have held special powers for it was against their arbitrary actions that the people of Taxila revolted during the reigns of Bindusara and Asoka.

#### **4.5.2 District and Village Level Administration**

The administrative units included a set up at the district level consisting of a number of villages and at the same time each village had its own administrative unit. The officials listed at the level of district during this period were *Pradeshta*, *Rajuka* and *Yukta*, the former being the overall in-charge of the district. Their functions included:

- survey and assessment of land,
- tours and inspections,
- revenue collection, and
- maintaining law and order, etc.

At times, the King was in direct touch with these officers. For example, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Pillar Edict -Asoka grants to the *Rajukas* "independent authority" to carry out some of his instructions in relation to public welfare. He also vested in them certain powers which they might not have had earlier. The *Yukta* was a junior officer giving secretarial kind of assistance to the other two. There were also checks and balances on the powers of each category of officials.

The Asokan edicts, however, do not throw much light on village level administration. But there are references of administration in the *Arthashastra*. It appears that the officials at this level were local people appointed and assisted by the villagers. The term mentioned for such officials is *gramika*. The set up at this level must have varied according to local conditions. But we do find *Gopa* and *Sthanika*, two types of officers, acting as intermediaries between the district and village level administrative units. Their functions included:

- demarcating village boundaries,
- maintaining records of lands used for various purpose,
- recording income and expenditure of people, and
- recording taxes, revenues and fines, etc.

But the villages did have a certain amount of autonomy in administering their affairs.

It is clear that the Mauryan state employed a large number of officials at all levels of administration. An important aspect worth noting for this period is the payment of salaries in cash. We have references to a commander-in-chief receiving 48,000 *panas*, a soldier receiving 500 *panas* and a labourer 60 *panas*. This indicates the predominance of money economy and at the same time tremendous burden on the state treasury. This perhaps explains the obsession in the *Arthashastra* with the



problem of extracting and generating revenues and taxes from land revenue to tax on gambling, etc.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Which of the following statements are right or wrong? Mark (√) or (×).
- a) The state's efforts to increase its revenues contributed towards the expansion of Magadha. ( )
  - b) According to *Arthashastra* the Council of Ministers verdict was final before the King. ( )
  - c) The adoption of a paternal attitude towards his subjects was a new development in relation to King's attitude in Indian polity. ( )
  - d) There is no description of city administration in the account of Megasthenes. ( )
  - e) The King was central to the seven components of the state in Kautilya's scheme. ( )
  - f) The Mauryan state spent a huge amount on the maintenance of army. ( )
  - g) The Mauryas had no system of espionage. ( )
  - h) During this period there were certain rules and regulations for the functioning of courts. ( )
  - i) The King had no right to grant revenue remissions. ( )
  - j) The state spent money for public welfare. ( )

2) Fill in the blanks:

- a) The Mauryas had a ..... (simple/complex) form of administration.
- b) By adopting the title *Devanampiya* Asoka tried to ..... (establish a/delink the) connection between the king and ..... (earthly/devine) power.
- c) According to Megasthenes the City Council was divided into ..... (three/six) sub-committees of ..... (two/five) members each.
- d) The *Arthashastra* has ..... (elaborately/minutely) defined the functions of various officials.
- e) The provincial administration was headed by ..... (*Amatya/Kumara*).
- f) At the village level judicial powers were vested in ..... (Pradeshtat/Gramik).
- g) State control over mines ..... (decreased/increased) its sources of revenue.

3) Discuss in about ten lines the relations between the King and the Council of Ministers...

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4) On what basis we can say that the Mauryan city administration was well organised? Write in about ten lines.

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5) Discuss in about ten lines the sources of revenue and expenditure of the Mauryan state.

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6) List in five lines the main features of village administration

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## **4.6 LET US SUM UP**

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In this Unit we have attempted to introduce to you the details on the rise and territorial expansion of Magadha. It is hoped that after going through this Unit you have been able to learn: details pertaining to the origin of the Mauryan family and their early history, the expansionist policies of Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara,

issues surrounding the accession of Asoka Maurya and his activities upto the Kalinga War, and Mauryan administrative set up at the central and provincial level.

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## 4.7 KEY WORDS

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<b>Dhamma/Dharma:</b>	Literally 'universal order' but in its use in Asokan inscriptions it is translated to mean 'piety'.
<b>Sophist:</b>	A philosopher, literally 'one meant to deceive'.
<b>Espionage:</b>	spy system
<b>Surplus:</b>	Amount left over when all consumption requirements have been met. In an economic sense the difference between the value of goods produced and wages paid.
<b>Uttarapatha:</b>	Northern route usually referring to the land route running along the foothills of the Himalayas.
<b>Vice-royalties:</b>	administrative units under the jurisdiction of a Viceroy appointed by the King

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## 4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) (a) × (b) × (c) ✓ (d) × (e) ✓
- 2) See Sec. 4.2

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) (a) ✓ (b) × (c) ✓ (d) × (e) ✓ (f) ✓ (g) × (h) ✓ (i) × (j) ✓
- 2) (a) Complex (b) Establish a; divine (c) Six; five (d) Elaborately (e) Kumara (f) Gramika (g) Increased
- 3) See sub.sec 4.4.2
- 4) See sub.sec 4.4.3
- 5) See sub.sec 4.4.7
- 6) See sub.sec 4.5.2

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## SUGGESTED READINGS

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## UNIT 5 : POST-MAURYAN POLITIES: KUSHANAS AND SATAVAHANAS

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### Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Kushanas
  - 5.2.1 Nature of Kushana State
- 5.3 Satavahana
  - 5.3.1 Nature of Satavahana State
    - 5.3.1.1 Socio-Economic and Political Background
    - 5.3.1.2 Administrative Structure of the State
- 5.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.5 Key Words
- 5.6 Check Your Progress Exercises

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### 5.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- analyse the rise of new kingdoms in the post-Mauryan period.
- understand the political development that took place under Kushana and Satavahana dynasties.

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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After the Mauryas a large number of big and small kingdoms emerged in different parts of Indian subcontinent. The Sunga dynasty succeeded the Mauryas at Magadha, the Satavahanas emerged as a great power in the Deccan. The Indo-Greeks, the Sakas, the Parthians and the Kushanas also ruled over several territories in India. The intermingling of various races, Indian as well as foreign had far reaching consequences on the social and cultural life of India. In this unit we are going to discuss the rise of two important powers in the Indian history and their impact *i.e.* Kushanas and Satavahanas.

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### 5.2 KUSHANAS

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The Kushana Period is one of the most important periods in the history of Indian culture. According to Chinese historians, the Kushanas were a section of the *Yuch-chi* race. They established their rule in the North-west part of India after destroying the Saka empire. They also made a significant contribution to the art and religion of the Country.

The first powerful ruler of the Kushana dynasty was Kujula Kadphises. He established an empire which extended between the rivers of Oxus and Sindh. His empire comprised Bactria, Afghanistan, East Iran and the North Western part of India. It is evident from his coins that he defeated the last Yavana ruler and extended the Kushana empire up to Taxila. His period of rule was full of struggles and wars.

Vima Taktu was the son and successor of Kujula Kadphises. However, except his name from Rabatak inscription nothing is known about his life and career. He was succeeded by his son Vima Kadphises, who was a brave and courageous ruler. He extended his empire from Taxila to many parts of Northern India. He followed the imperialistic policies of his father. His empire touched the boundaries of Roman empire in the West, China in the North and the Satavahana kingdom was situated in the South-East. He issued a large number of coins which tell about the power and religion of Vima Kadphises. He adopted the titles of 'Maheshvara', 'Sarva-Lokeshwara', 'Maharaja' etc.

Vima Kadphises was succeeded by Kanishka, who was undoubtedly the greatest king of all the Kushana rulers in India. The most reliable year of the accession of Kanishka was 78 CE. According to the historians, Kanishka started a new era in this year. He incorporated Rajasthan, Punjab, Malwa, Saurashtra and Uttar Pradesh into his ancestral kingdom. The most significant event of the Kanishka's reign was the war with China and conquest of three Chinese Provinces namely Khotan, Kashgar and Yarkand. Kanishka was influenced by the natural beauty of Kashmir. He conquered Kashmir and annexed it to his empire. He also laid the foundation of a town Kanishkapur in the memory of his conquest. He believed in the divine right of Kingship. He ruled in an autocratic manner. But he had to share power in practice with his provincial satraps. The provincial satraps probably enjoyed good deal of local autonomy. It was a common practice of the Kushana emperors to appoint the crown prince as co-ruler.

According to noted historian N.N. Ghose, "*Kanishka was a foreigner by birth, but an Indian by choice and a devoted Buddhist of Mahayana school by faith*". A galaxy of great scholars such as **Asvaghosha**-the Buddhist writer, **Nagarjuna**- the philosopher, **Mathara**- the politician, **Vasumitra**- the Buddhist scholar, **Charaka**-the physician adorned the Court of Kanishka. The coins of Kanishka point to the gradual transformation of his religious belief towards Buddhism. According to the legend, Kanishka came in contact with **Asvaghosha** and was very much impressed by his teachings. During his reign, the famous Fourth Buddhist Council was convened in Kashmir and the convocation was presided by **Vasumitra**. The purpose of the Council was to codify and collect different views on Buddha's teachings and to write commentaries on them in the light of new developments.

### 5.2.1 Nature of Kushana State

The geographical spread of the Kushana coins and inscriptions as well as the richness of the Kushana layers in terms of archaeological material found in various sites from Central Asia to Varanasi would on the face of it suggest the existence of a well organised, centralised state. However, the available administrative details appear to be far from satisfactory. It is said that the political organisation did not

possess the rigid centralisation of the Mauryas. The inscriptions and coins do not indicate a powerful and large administrative machinery. We however, come across grandiloquent titles of the rulers such as maharaja, *ratatiraja* (king of kings), devaputra (son of God), etc. Kanishka and his successors used the title *shaonano-shao* (*shahanushahi* being its Persianized form) as a prefix to their names on the coin legends. Even the epithet Kaiser or Kaisara was used. Kanishka, for example, in an inscription at Mathura represents himself as *maharaja-rajatiraja-devaputra-shahi*. The Kushana titles on the one hand suggest their superior position in relation to other petty rulers and chieftains and on the other point to the possible influences which went into their making. While maharaja was an old Indian title, encountered as early as the Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela, *rajatiraja* was of Sanskrit origin and had been used by the Sakas. The term devaputra being close to the Chinese idea of “mandate of heaven” may have had something to do with such influences.

The details of provincial and local administration are hazy. It is doubtful if the Kushanas exercised direct administrative control over all parts of their territories. Below the king there seems to have been the Kshatrapas at the provincial level. It has been suggested that there were about five to seven satrapies. Contemporary sources do not provide sufficient information about such administrative units or the Kshatrapas themselves. The Sarnath Buddhist image inscription of the time of Kanishka refers to the reinstatement of two Kshatrapas who were the descendants of a Mahakshatrapa. In some cases people erected a stupa and sangharama in honour of the kshatrapa. This was analogous to the system of giving religious donations to ensure the well-being of the Kushana kings. Such evidence points to the autonomous status of the Kshatrapas. There are references to vishayas as administrative units and the grama at the bottom of the hierarchy constituted the basic unit of administration. We come across terms like Dandanayaka and Mahadandanayaka, offices which combined civil and military functions, and the Kshatrapas seem to have exercised their power through these officials. However, as in the case of the Kshatrapas here too their territorial jurisdiction and functional aspects are far from clear. There are references to some other officials like bakanpati (incharge of religious affairs), danapati (to do with donations) and the padrapala, who looked after uncultivated land around the villages. In the region of Mathura the gramika as the village headman seems to have looked after the maintenance of local law and order. The importance of the institution is also borne out by other contemporary references. Manusmriti refers to the term gramasyadhipati and in the Shanti parva we come across the expression gramadhipati. The Kshatrapas were also known as gramasvami. All these indicate the importance and authority of the village headmen. The guilds similarly may have played an important role in the administration of urban centres.

For analyzing the political system, the administrative details are rather insufficient. How the different levels of administration related to one another is not known. Given the small size of the administrative machinery and the abundance of Kushana coins, particularly in gold and copper, it is said that the officials would have been paid in cash. Deriving from the autonomy of the Kshatrapa and the use of such terms as *rajatiraja*, *Mahakshatrapa* and *Mahadandanayaka*, denoting the existence of lesser

rulers, there have been efforts to look for feudatory relations in the Kushana polity. It may be mentioned that instead of invoking such parallels (viz. feudatory relations) one may, as in the case of the Sakas, see it as an incorporative political system.

The pre-occupation of the Kushanas with the legitimation of their power and their non-sectarian, broad-based syncretic religious policy in the background of the paucity of information related to administration raises questions which have a bearing on the nature and structure of the Kushana state. To elaborate, the Kushanas used high-sounding titles derived from a variety of cultural contexts. Titles like devaputra unmistakably sought to link them with divinity. This aspect is further elaborated in their coins. The obverse of the Kushana coins shows the king engaged in rituals before a fire altar, his bust emerging from the clouds, flames emanating from his shoulders or a nimbus or halo around his head. The context in each case is clearly supernatural. The evidence for religious donations by people for the well-being of the kings and the institution of devakulas under the Kushanas, involving the housing of the statues of dead rulers in temple like structures, together suggest the efforts towards bestowal of divinity status to the kings or conferring of this status to the kings. The reverse of the Kushana coins bear Indian (Hindu and Buddhist), Greek and Persian symbols and deities, indicating their syncretic religious ideology. It may be of interest to note that there is archaeological and epigraphical evidence to show that numerous later day Hindu sects associated with Saivism and Vaishnavism thrived along with Buddhism and Jainism under the Kushanas in northern India. The Kushanas seem to have accepted and reinforced the assimilative nature of Indian socio-religious and political system.

Turning to the socio-cultural situation obtaining within their empire one observes the prevalence of numerous languages, religions and cultures. The population in Bactria was already composite by virtue of having integrated varied influences. North Indian society was characterised by rich diversity, the Upper and Middle Gangetic plains being different from the ancient Punjab. In the Punjab and adjoining regions there were a number of Gana samghas, which outlived the Kushanas and continued up to the Guptas, suggesting the existence of varied socio-economic and political patterns. The official language of the Kushana state was Bactrian written in Kushanised Greek script. Sanskrit too was in use and records were written in Brahmi and Kharosthi as well. A coin of Kanishka found near Termez on the Oxus bears legends in Bactrian on the obverse and Sanskrit on the reverse. The extensive territory of the Kushanas inhabited by various ethnic groups, speaking different languages and practising diverse religions made it necessary for the state to adopt a liberal and accommodative approach.

The Kushana state characterised by ethnic, linguistic and cultural pluralism tried to integrate varied groups by being non-sectarian accommodating variety and developing a syncretic ideology. Thus, the state tried to sustain and perpetuate itself by being responsive to the aspirations of diverse groups. That explains the adoption of multiple royal titles and the accommodation of numerous deities from various traditions, across the empire. The Kushana titles and motifs on the coins show how zealously they tried to legitimize their rule.



With the establishment of Kushana power in Gandhara and Indus region the land trade from Ganges to Euphrates and sea trade across Arabian sea and Persian Gulf to Rome flourished and expanded. The silk route passed through Kushana territories in central Asia and it was linked with China and Asian provinces of Roman Empire. Kushanas might have imposed tolls on caravans passing through this route. Kushana gold and copper coins indicate that internal trade flourished under them. Kushana rule led to the establishment of new settlement with an admixture of population. This must have led to mobility in society and with the increase in the number of crafts and guilds and growth of foreign trade the rigidity of the caste system weakened especially in the trading ports and towns. Kushanas had established trade links with the Romans. The adoption of the title Caesar (Kaisarasa) in the Ara (Attock) inscription of the year 47 throws light on Kushana contacts with the Romans. Both the Kushanas and the Romans minted gold coins to be used in trading transactions. Kushanas were the beneficiaries in this trade. They also established trading relations with South East Asia, China and Central Asia in this period. There is no evidence for state monopoly in any sector of the economy nor for that matter state intervention in day-to-day economic transactions. It seems to have been a non-intrusive state allowing for a good measure of autonomy at various levels. However, it did play an important role in encouraging trade and other commercial activities. Under Kanishka and his immediate successors integrative forces seem to have prevailed over tendencies to fission or break away. If the Kushanas borrowed aspects of political ideas and organisation from their predecessors and contemporaries, their coinage, titles and images, sculptures, kingship, including the deification of the ruler, influenced the Guptas and other polities in early medieval India.

The rulers of Kushana dynasty were great patrons of art. Kanishka's reign is a landmark in the realm of art and architecture. Four eminent schools of sculpture developed from four centres. They were Sarnath, Mathura, Amravati and Gandhara. Each school of sculpture had a separate style of its own. The Gandhara school had a significant progress in Kanishka's reign. In art, the reign of Kanishka is marked by the growth of two distinct styles, one Indian and the other exotic. The Indian style is represented by the headless statue of Kanishka at Mathura and the image of Buddha found at Sarnath. The exotic school known as Gandhara art was the Graeco-Roman art applied to Buddhist subjects found in Gandhara region. The Gandhara art flourished on Buddhist theme.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

1) Read the following statements and make right (✓) or wrong (×). ,

- i) The Kushanas belonged to the Yueh-chi Tribe. ( )
- ii) Vima Kadphises was the father of Kanishka. ( )
- iii) Kanishka was a follower of Buddhism. ( )
- iv) Gandhara is located in south India. ( )
- v) Mathura was famous for Graeco-Roman art. ( )

2) Who were the Kushana? Give an account their important rulers. Answer in five lines.

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3) Discuss the rule of Kushana dynasty. Answer in ten lines.

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### 5.3 SATAVAHANA

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The earliest dynastic rule in peninsular India was that of the Satavahanas. In history dynastic rule or monarchy is generally equated to the state and it is valid so long as the former is found resting on class structured societies. The state is found only in a differentiated economy or stratified society. However, until recent years the term, state was used in Indian historiography without such theoretical presuppositions. Earlier on historians recounted the history of the dynasty with a ruler wise focus on the nature of administration and they debated over the dates of succession. Later when historians tended to be theoretical, the debates revolved round theoretical models. The former viewed the Satavahanas as an independent state while the latter theorised it a Mauryan transplant or a secondary formation. Now the debate is about the degrees of theoretical rigour. In the most rigorous sense of the theory, the origin of the state is not external for it is integral to the society's internal dynamic. Naturally the state gets neither diffused nor transplanted. It is inevitably *sui generis*. So the concept of secondary state formation is a misnomer.

#### 5.3.1 Nature of Satavahana State

The Satavahana state, as in the case of any other state, has to be studied against its socio-economic background and hence at the outset, it is imperative to characterise the social formation and examine the institutional features of the political process therein. Unfortunately, the existing historiography hardly gives enough knowledge about the life of the people in those days to characterise the social formation. However, it is important for a student studying the discipline to know the available knowledge and use it for understanding the process of state formation.

### 5.3.1.1 Socio-Economic and Political Background

By third century BCE the Krishna-Godavari valleys had witnessed the rise of agrarian localities of paddy cultivation as the place name Dhanyakataka or Dhamnakada suggests, presupposing specialisation of arts and crafts, trade networks, urban enclaves, social differentiation and the entailing political processes. However, it was obviously not more than a simple hierarchy of the landed households (*gahapati-s*) and their servants (*dasas and bhrtaka-s*) at the level of production relations. The agrarian localities were small compared to the large uplands and forest tracks inhabited by the 'tribal' people who constituted the majority. Paithan was the region's nerve centre of economic activities and its strategic importance in the context of trade and urbanism also accounts for its Buddhist and Jain importance as well as the Mauryan political control. The ports of transmarine commerce, such as Barygaza, Supara and Kalyan added to the region's significance. The Mauryan control in its turn further enhanced its importance and in the process over the years, gave rise to a local ruling aristocracy transcending the structure of the 'tribal' political relations. It is out of this aristocracy that the line of the Satavahana rule began. In short, the historical context of the emergence of the Satavahana state relates to the differentiated economy and stratified societies in the Krishna-Godavari valleys.

Some twenty-four inscriptions and a few hoards of coins besides literary references mainly including the Jain and Buddhist accounts, and puranic genealogies constitute the main sources of Satavahana history. The rule persisted under about 30 kings covering roughly four and half centuries from around 234 BCE down to 207 CE. Needless to say that there would be gaps and discontinuities in the royal genealogy covering such a long span of centuries. There were interruptions of the Scythians, Greeks and Parthians.

King Simuka, probably also called Satavahana as the Jain tradition shows, was the founder of the dynasty. Like many a dynastic name, Satavahana is variously interpreted and there is no consensus as to how it derives its meaning. The term *sata* means *dana* (gift) and *vahana*, the bearer seem to make better sense than other derivations that scholars have put forward. All the puranas agree on the fact that Simuka's reign lasted 23 years. He seems to have caused the construction of Jain *basati-s* and Buddhist *Caitya-s*. Simuka's brother Kanha (Krishna) who ascended the throne as the next king, extended the kingdom to Nasik if not beyond. His reign seems to have lasted 18 years. Siri Satakarni (Satakarni), son of Krishna was the next king after whose title most of the Satavahana rulers came to be known, as exemplified by Cakora Satakarni, Mrgendra Satakarni, Gautamiputa Sri Yajna Satakarni and so on. Satakarni is another curious name like Kumbhakarna, Jatikarna, Lambodara, and the like that defies easy derivation. Hathigumpha inscription refers to Kharavela of Kalinga to have sent his army to the west disregarding Satakarni. The synchronism of Kharavela with Satakarni has enabled historians to determine the latter to have a contemporary of Kharavela. Apilaka and Hala are two other important successors in the line. Hala's reign witnessed the heyday of economic growth, military exploits and cultural achievements.

The Satavahana rulers were patrons of both sramanas and brahmanas. The construction of Jain and Buddhist monuments earned them religious merit and higher status while the conduct of vedic rituals and *mahadanas*, legitimacy as kshatriyas. It is striking that the Satavahanas maintained *gotra* names of the Vedic brahmanas. They were followers of matrilineal system or the cross-cousin system of marriage, especially with father's sister's daughter. However, their succession followed the system of patriarchal inheritance.

The Satavahana reign got interrupted by the Sakas, Kushanas, Parthians, Yavanas etc. The Kshatrapa Nahapana's coins as well as the epigraphs at Nasik and Karle show that the Nasik and Pune Districts had become part of Nahapana's kingdom, obviously captured from the Satavahanas. It appears that during the period of the later Satavahanas, the kingdom shrank itself to the region around Paithan. Soon Gautamiputra Satakarni restored the large extent of the kingdom and enlarged it further up to Vidarbha, Rajaputana, Malwa and northern Konkan. In the south it extended up the Kanarese country. Gautamiputra was succeeded by Vasishtiputra Pulumavi who ruled for 24 years. According to the puranic genealogy, the next Satavahana king was Siva Sri Satakarni followed by Sivamaka Sada, Madhariputra, Sri Yajna Satakarni, Vasishtiputra Cada Sati and Pulumavi-III. It is believed that the line of rulers came to an end with Pulumavi-III.

### **5.3.1.2 Administrative Structure of the State**

The Satavahana state was structured by the dominance of the monarch, a miniature variant of the Kautilyan *vijigishu* assisted by a team of *amatyas*, *senapati-sandandanayaka-s*. It seems to have incorporated chieftains of the agrarian localities as *samanta-s* and of 'tribal' zones as *rathika-s* and *bhoja-s*. Epigraphs mention *mahasamanta*, *maharathika*, *mahabhoja*, *mahasenapati*, and *mahadandanayaka* showing that they worked as higher level constituents of a hierarchical structure. This is not to suggest that it was a well-organised bureaucracy with defined structure and function. Their functions were not just what their name presupposed. For instance, *mahasenapati* was a provincial ruler too like *mahasamanta* and for that matter, any high-ranking dignitary was a local ruling authority. The dignitaries, who constituted the nuclei of the king's power structure, were the most prominent among the *gahapati-s* (*swami-s*) of the *nagara-s* and *grama-s*. The *gahapati-s* of the *nagara-s* were merchants, generally called *vanija* or *negama*. They were organised into a corporation called *nigama* headed by *sethi* or *sreshthi*.

It needs no special mention of the fact that the structure of the Satavahana state was not of a centralised character in any pure sense, which even the Mauryan was not. We cannot say that the higher functionaries were under the direct control of the king and that all the powers of the state emanated entirely from the capital. It was a strong monarchy at the heart of the kingdom with the provincial or regional rulers and chieftains in the periphery accepting the king's suzerainty reinforced by the standing army under the *mahasenapati* stationed at the capital.

The Satavahana state followed by and large the Mauryan revenue system that was based on regular returns from agriculture, trade and industry as well as from a

variety of periodically exacted taxes. The Satavahanas had crown lands and the revenue from them was substantial. The state enjoyed monopoly over all the mines of metals and minerals and the salt production. The lands held by the *gahapati-s* were subjected to more than one tax. An important source of revenue was the tax levied on merchant *gahapati-s* and merchandises. As it was a money economy, all the dues to the state were appropriated in cash. There seems to have prevailed a high rate of interest, *i.e.*, 12% per month, suggestive of a state of deflation. The variety and distribution of the Satavahana coinage indicates how great was the demand for money as medium of exchange, measure of value and means of payment. The Saka, Kushana, Nahapana Kshatrapa coins co-existed with those of the Satavahanas who struck such coins again as their own. Coins were minted with the name or legend of kings and hence their distribution was symbolic of the king's identity and the extent of his dominions. This accounts for the Satavahanas' reproduction of their intruders' coins, as for example Nahapana's silver coins restruck by Gautamiputra Satakarni.

Under the Satavahana rule, agriculture, trade, markets and urbanisation made headway. Amaravati, Naneghat, Pune, Bhaja, Karle, Kanheri, and Nasik were the major towns and trade centres developed in the age of the Satavahanas. These were centres of Jainism and Buddhism as the vestiges of several *basati-s*, *caitya-s*, *vihara-s* and *stupa-s* in the region indicate. The funding and joint patronage of these monuments by the monks, merchants, local chieftains and kings shows the group relations and processes of power that manifested as the Satavahana state.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Analyse the socio-economic and political background which contributed to the rise of Satavahana state.

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- 2) Discuss the nature of administration during Satavahana.

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## 5.4 LET US SUM UP

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In the post-Mauryan period several powers dominated the political scene in north India. An important feature of this period was the rise of the power of Indo-Greeks, Sakas, Parthians and Kushanas who intruded through the north western frontier into India from central Asia and Iran. The most important among these were the Kushanas. With the establishment of Kushan state trading activities received great impetus. In the social and cultural sphere assimulative and syncretic tendencies emerged and were strengthened. In the Deccan this period was marked by the emergence of the Satavahana state.

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## 5.5 KEY WORDS

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<b>Amatya</b>	: Minister
<b>Caitya</b>	: Sacred spots or small groves of trees on the outskirts of a village which might also include a stupa.
<b>Dandnayaka</b>	: Captain in the Army. Manu Smriti: Law book of Manu composed in its final form in 2nd and 3rd century A.D.
<b>Nahapana</b>	: A great satrap of saka clan (Ksaharata).
<b>Prasasti</b>	: Eulogy
<b>Santiparva</b>	: 12 <sup>th</sup> book of the Mahabharata which contains passages on state craft and human conduct and was included in the epic in the early centuries of Christian era
<b>Seleucids</b>	: Greek rulers of Bactria who derived their dynastic name from the Greek general of Alexander, Seleucus Nikator.
<b>Senapati</b>	: General
<b>Stupa</b>	: Domes having a central chamber in which the relics of Buddha were placed
<b>Vijigishu</b>	: King who desires conquest
<b>Vihar</b>	: A Buddhist monastery
<b>Vishayas</b>	: Districts

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## 5.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i)  $\sqrt{\quad}$  ii)  $\times$  iii)  $\sqrt{\quad}$  iv)  $\times$  v)  $\times$
- 2) See sec. 5.2
- 3) See Sub-sec. 5.2.1

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-sec. 5.3.1.1
- 2) See Sub-sec. 5.3.1.2

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## SUGGESTED READINGS

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Singh, U., 2009. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India – From the Stone Age to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century*, Delhi: Pearson.

Tripathi, R.S., 1942. *History of Ancient India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas.

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## UNIT 6 : THE CHOLAS

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### Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Sources
- 6.3 Early Cholas
- 6.4 Cholas in Sangam literature
  - 6.4.1 Karikala Chola
  - 6.4.2 Nalankilli and Nedunkilli
  - 6.4.3 Kocengannan
- 6.5 Social conditions
- 6.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.7 Key Words
- 6.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

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### 6.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit you will be able to learn about:

- the origin of early Cholas.
- various early Tamil literatures those are helpful for understanding history of early Cholas
- social condition of early Cholas

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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The Cholas of the pre and post Sangam period (200 BCE – 200 CE) were one of the three main kingdoms of the ancient Tamil country. Their early capitals were Uraiyur and Kaveripattinam. Along with Pandyas and Cheras, Chola history goes back to the period where written records were scarce.

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### 6.2 SOURCES

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Ancient Tamil Nadu contained three monarchical states, headed by kings called *Vendhar* and several chieftaincies, headed by the chiefs called by the general denomination *Vel* or *Velir*. Still lower at the local level there were clan chiefs called *kizhar* or *mannar*. The Tamil area had an independent existence outside the control of these northern empires. The Tamil kings and chiefs were always in conflict with each other mostly over property. The royal courts were mostly places of social gathering rather than places of dispensation of authority, they were centres for distribution of resources.



The names of the three dynasties, Cholas, Pandyas, and Cheras, are mentioned in the Pillars of Ashoka (273–232 BCE) inscriptions, among the kingdoms, which though not subject to Ashoka, were on friendly terms with him. The king of Kalinga, Kharavela, who ruled around 50-40 BCE, mentioned in the famous Hathigumpha inscription of the confederacy of the Tamil kingdoms that had existed for over 100 years.

Another source for the available information of the early Cholas is the early Tamil literature of the Sangam Period. Karikala Chola was the most famous early Chola. He is mentioned in a number of poems in the Tamil Sangam literature. There are also brief notices on the Chola country and its towns, ports and commerce furnished by the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. *Periplus* is a work by an anonymous Alexandrian merchant, written in the time of Domitian (81–96 CE) and contains precious information of the Chola country. Writing half a century later, the geographer Ptolemy has more to tell us about the Chola country, its port and its inland cities. Mahavamsa, a Buddhist text, also recounts a number of conflicts between the inhabitants of Ceylon and the Tamil immigrants from Chola Country.

Chronicles such as the *Yalpana Vaipava Malai* and stone inscriptions like Konesar Kalvettu recount that Kulakkottan, an early Chola king and descendant of Manu Needhi Cholan, was the restorer of the ruined Koneswaram temple and tank at Trincomalee in 438 CE, the Munneswaram temple of the west coast, and as the royal who settled ancient Vanniar (not to confuse with present day Vanniar or Palli caste).

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### 6.3 EARLY CHOLAS

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The inscriptions of the Medieval Cholas are replete with history about the Early Chola kings. The Cholas were looked upon as descended from the sun. These historic incidents speak of the Chola king *Kantaman*, supposed contemporary of the sage Agastya, whose devotion brought the river Kavery into existence. There is also the story of the king Manu who sentenced his son to death for having accidentally killed a calf. Mahavamsa portrays King Elara who was defeated by Duttha Gamini (C. 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) as the just king who had a bell with a rope attached at the head of his bed, so that all who sought redress might ring it. King Sibi who rescued a dove from a hawk by giving his own flesh to the hungry hawk was also part of the early Chola history.

These historic incidents received enormous emphasis in the later Chola period in the long mythical genealogies incorporated into the copper-plate charters of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. The earliest version of this is found in the Anbil Plates which gives fifteen names before Vijayalaya Chola including the historical ones of Karikala, Perunarkilli and Kocengannan. The Thiruvallangadu Plate swells this list to forty-four, and the Kanyakumari Plate runs up to fifty-two. There are other lists gathered from literary works such as *Kalingathuparani*. No two of these lists agree, although some names and details are common to all.

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## 6.4 CHOLAS IN SANGAM LITERATURE

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The earliest Chola kings of whom we have tangible evidence are those mentioned in the Sangam literature, written in the period 200 BCE–200 CE. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to piece together an internal chronology of the Sangam works. Due to this, we know of several rulers, but not their chronology. All three kings have been portrayed as fighting the war or involved in feeding both the armies at that legendary war.

### 6.4.1 Karikala Chola

Karikala Chola (c. 90 BCE) stands pre-eminent amongst all those mentioned in *Pattinappaalai*. Karikala's father was Ilamcetcenni, a brave king and a hard fighter. 'Karikala' means 'elephant feller' or 'charred leg', which is assumed to be a reference to an accident by fire which befell the prince early in his life. *Pattinappaalai* describes this accident and the enterprising way in which the prince escaped and established himself in the Chola throne. *Pattinappalai* is a long poem on the then Chola capital Kaveripattinam. This work also describes the numerous battles Karikala fought against the other two Tamil kings in one of which the Chera king was disgraced (received a wound on his back) and committed suicide. Karikala thus broke the confederacy that was formed against him and established hegemony over Pandyas and Cheras.

In later times Karikala was the subject of many legends found in the *Cilappatikaram* and in inscriptions and literary works of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. They attribute to him the conquest of the whole of India up to the Himalayas and the construction of the flood banks, Grand Anicut, of the Kaveri River with the aid of his feudatories. These legends however are conspicuous by their absence in the works of Sangam.

### 6.4.2 Nalankilli and Nedunkilli

The poet Kovur Kilar mentions a protracted civil war between two Chola chieftains Nalankilli and Nedunkilli. Nedunkilli shut himself in a fort in Avur, which was being besieged by Mavalattan, Nalankilli's younger brother. The poet chided Nedunkilli to come out and fight like a man instead of causing untold misery to the people of the city.

In another poem, the poet begs both the princes to give up the civil war as whoever wins, the loser will be a Chola.

### 6.4.3 Kocengannan

*Kalavali* by Poygayar mentions the Chola King Kocengannan and his battle with the Chera king Kanaikkal Irumporai. The Chera was taken prisoner and Poygayar, who was a friend of the Chera, sang a poem praising the Chola King Kochchengannan in 40 stanzas. The Chola king, pleased with the work, released the Chera. *Kalavali* describes the battle fought at Kalumalam, near the Chera capital. Kocengannan is one of the 63 nayanars.

Kocengannan became the subject of many instances in later times and is portrayed as a pious Siva devotee who built many fine temples for Siva along the banks of the river Kaveri.

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## 6.5 SOCIAL CONDITIONS

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Sangam literature gives an unusually complete and true picture of the social and economic conditions during the early Chola period. The culture is best described as an amalgam of the Dravidian and Aryan. The stories of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* were well known to the Tamil people, shown by the claims of some kings to have fed both the opposing army in the Mahabharata War. The claim that Shibi, who gave his own flesh to save a dove, as a Chola is obviously influenced by northern legends.

The land of the Cholas was fertile and there was ample food. Sangam poems say that the Chola country watered by the river Kaveri in a space in which an elephant could lie, one can produce enough grain to feed seven.

Hereditary monarchy was the prevailing form of government. Disputed succession and civil war was not uncommon. The sphere of the state activity was limited. In a society steeped in respect for custom, even the most perverse dictator could not have done much harm.

The Chola monarchs were approachable by subjects and justice was meted out directly by the king in most occasions. This is in marked contrast to the magnificent empires of the later Cholas where the Emperor was kept much away from contact with the lay people. The kings often took the field in person in battles and if the king was killed or wounded in battle, his army immediately gave up the fight and surrendered.

The trade that flourished between the Chola country and the ancient Roman Empire is given in much detail by *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (C. 75 CE).

### Check Your Progress

- 1) Write in about ten lines on sources of early Cholas.

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- 2) Discuss about the early Chola rulers. Answer in ten line.

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## 6.6 LET US SUM UP

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There is very little information available regarding the origin of early Cholas. Its antiquity is evident from the mentions in ancient Tamil literature and in different inscriptions. There are also brief notices on the Chola country and its towns, ports and commerce furnished by the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, and in the slightly later work of the geographer Ptolemy. *Mahavamsa*, a Buddhist text written down during the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, recounts a number of conflicts between the inhabitants of Ceylon and Cholas in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. Cholas are mentioned in the Pillars of Ashoka inscriptions, where they are mentioned among the kingdoms which, though not subject to Ashoka, were on friendly terms with him.

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## 6.7 KEY WORDS

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**Chieftain** : the leader of a tribe or clan

**Immigrant** : a person who has come into a foreign country to live there permanently

**Inhabitant** : a person that lives in a place

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## 6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress

- 1) See sec. 6.2
- 2) See sec. 6.4

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## SUGGESTED READINGS

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Allchin, B. and Allchin, R., 1988. *The Rise of Civilisations in India and Pakistan*, New Delhi.

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