

MODULE-3
MAURYAN AND MUVENTAR
TOPIC- THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

MAURYAN EMPIRE –c. 321-185 BCE

- Founded by Chandragupta Maurya, who succeeded to Nanda throne in 321BCE
- Had the support of a Brahmin, Kautilya, who was his mentor & guide in acquiring the throne & in keeping it
- Suggested by range of stories that relate his rise to power from Buddhist & Jain texts & in the play Mudrarakshasa by Vishakadatta
- Built on foundations laid by Nandas
- First 3 rulers were Chandragupta Maurya(324/321-297 BCE), Bindusara(297-273 BCE), Ashoka(268-232 BCE)

- Rule of later Mauryas continued till 185 BCE
- Buddhist texts like Digh Nikaya, Mahavamsa & Divyavadana- Mauryas are described as belonging to a Kshatriya clan called Moriyas, who ruled at Pipphalivana
- Parishishtaparvan describes Chandragupta as the son of the daughter of a chief of a village of peacock tamers
- Mudrarakshsa of Vishakadatta – Chandragupta as being of low social origin
- Brahmanical tradition- Chandragupta was born of Mura, a sudra women in the court of Nandas

- **Chandragupta** first established himself in Punjab & then moved eastwards & gained control over Magadha
- There is tradition regarding Chandragupta overthrowing the Nandas with the help of Chanakya or Kautilya- described in Sanskrit drama Mudrarakshasa of Visakadatta
- Only inscriptional reference to Chandragupta is **Junagarh inscription** of the Saka king Rudradaman- attributes the beginning of the construction of a water reservoir known as Sudarsana lake to Chandragupta's reign

- Greek sources mention war b/w Chandragupta & Seleucus Nikator, the Greek viceroy-in return for 500 elephants, Seleucus gave him his daughter & the territories of eastern Afghanistan, Baluchistan & the area west of Indus
- Chandragupta is mentioned in Greek sources as Sandrocottos & Pataliputra as Palibothra

- **Bindusara** – succeeded Chandragupta
- Chandragupta abdicated his throne in favour of his son & became a Jain follower & went to Sravanabelagola & died there
- Bindusara is mentioned as Amritaghata (slayer of the foes) in Sanskrit & Amritachades in Greek
- Buddhist sources- silent on Bindusara
- Greek sources- Antiochus, King of Syria, sent an ambassador Deimachus & Ptolemy II Philadelphos, the ruler of Egypt sent an ambassador named Dionysius to Bindusara's court
- Fragmentary inscription at Sanchi refer to Bindusara

- Bindusara's death was followed by a four-year succession conflict
- Bindusara wanted his son Susima to succeed him
- But **Asoka** was supported by Bindusara's ministers
- Buddhist sources mention Asoka killing his 99 brothers- give lot of details about Asoka
- But we have to be critical of Buddhist sources as Buddhist tradition present Asoka as a great ideal king
- Asoka's mother mentioned in Buddhist sources- Subhadraṅgi or Janapadakalyani

- To Buddhist tradition Asoka's mother was kept away from the king by palace intrigue- when she gave birth to a child she exclaimed 'I am now without sorrow' – thus child named as Asoka
- Wives of Asoka- Devi, Asandhimitta, Tissarakhita, Padmavati
- Allahabad- Kosam pillar inscription- Asoka's queen Karuvaki
- Romila Thapar- Asoka was his personal name, Priyadarsi was an official name, probably began to use after his coronation & Devanampriya(Beloved of the gods) was his royal title

- Asoka after the violence perpetrated during the Kalinga war after 8th year of his reign renounced war & practised non-violence
- Held the 3rd Buddhist council presided by Moggaliputa Tissa at Pataliputra
- Sent missionaries to spread Buddhism in various parts of the world including Srilanka, West Asia & Egypt
- Sent his son Mahindra & daughter Sanghamitra to Srilanka to propagate Buddhism
- Buddhist texts credit Asoka as the ruler who constructed 84,000 stupas all over the world

- 1993- archaeologist found a relief sculpture of Asoka & his queen belongs to the Satavahana period from Kanaganahalli in Karnataka
- Distribution of Asoka's inscription suggests the extent of Mauryan empire
- Extended almost the entire subcontinent except the southernmost parts
- Mauryan empire extended to Karnataka by the time of Asoka
- Empire declined rapidly after Asoka
- Came to an end when the last king Brihadratha was killed by his military commander Pushyamitra, who founded the Sunga dynasty in 185 BCE