

The Mauryan Empire (321 B.C.E. to 185 B.C.E.)

The Indian subcontinent is difficult to unite politically due to its three major geographic regions:

- The Northern Plain (fertile and well watered by the Indus and Ganges rivers).
- The Deccan Plateau (dry and sparsely populated)
- The Coastal Plains [**GHATS**] (the flat areas along the east and west coasts, good for farming, fishing and trading)



The Mauryan Empire emerged from battles between several kingdoms across the northern plains. The victor was Chandragupta Maurya who began by conquering the Ganges River Valley and most of northern India. His descendants moved southward, dominating the Deccan Plateau. The Maurya dynasty ruled over the first united Indian empire.

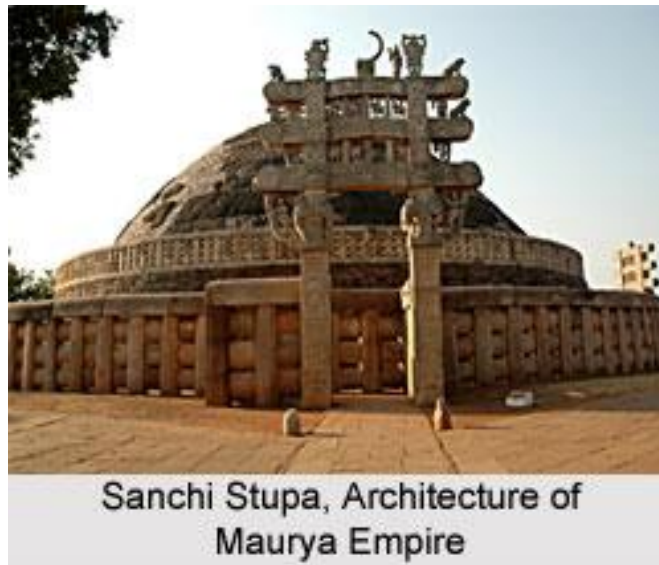
The Maurya dynasty established an efficient bureaucracy and strong government. They built a monument to their success at the capital city of Pataliputra. They constructed excellent harbors and roads and established a wealthy trading network. Factories and shipyards were owned by the government and became an excellent source of revenue through taxation.

Maurya rule was harsh. Chandragupta created a secret police force, to remove his enemies and report on crime and corruption within the empire. The consequences were brutal if found guilty.

The Rise of Ashoka/Asoka

Chandragupta's grandson Ashoka/Asoka ruled differently. He opposed brutality and began an era of peaceful rule. He turned to Buddhism hoping that by moral example the empire would flourish. He was tolerant of other beliefs but wanted to spread Buddhism across Asia and sent missionaries from India to carry the word of Buddha.

The Maurya dynasty united much of India for the first time. It was a Golden Age where peace, prosperity and trade flourished. The capital of Pataliputra was one of the richest and largest cities of its time. It promoted education by building schools and a library. Religion was important and the role of Buddhist missionaries was important to it spreading across India and into surrounding regions along the overland and maritime trade routes. Commodities most valued from India were textiles, gems, and spices.



The decline of the Maurya Dynasty was rather rapid after the death of Ashoka/Asoka. One obvious reason for it was the succession of weak kings. Another immediate cause was the partition of the Empire into two regions. This led to an easy defeat during the advances of Alexander the Great.