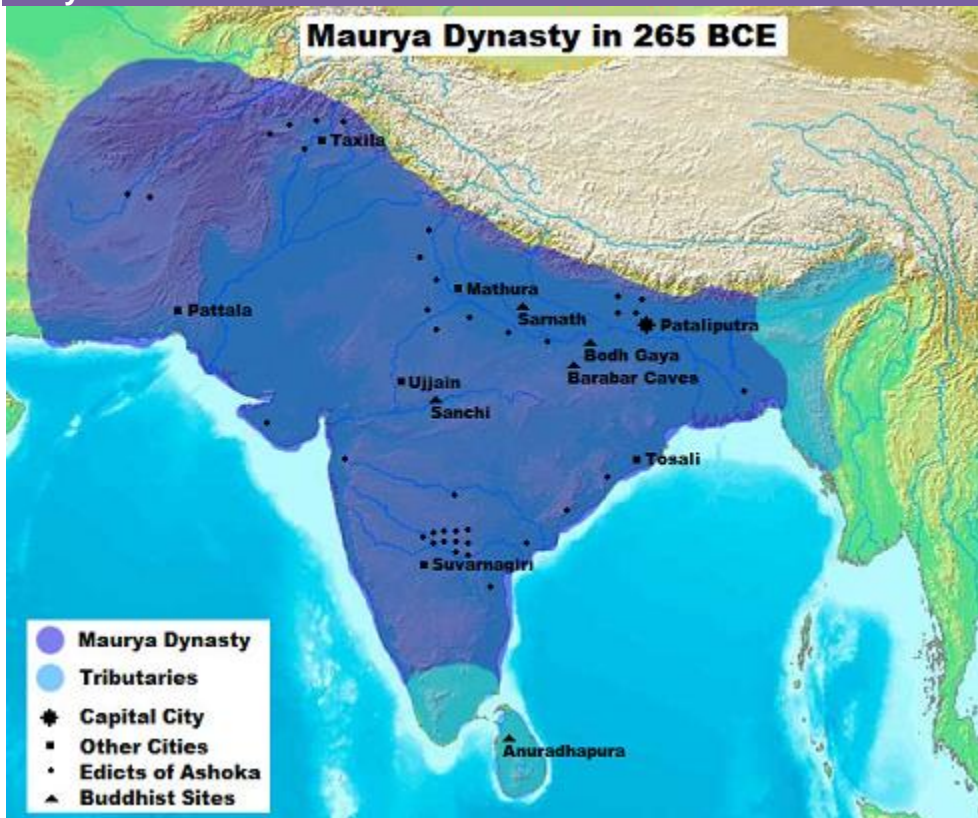


Early life



- Son of Mauryan Emperor Bindusara and Subhadrangi. Grandson of Chandragupta Maurya.
- His other names were Devanampiya (Sanskrit Devanampriya meaning Beloved of the Gods) and Piyadasi.
- Considered one of India's greatest emperors.
- He was born in 304 BC.
- His reign lasted from 268 BC to 232 BC when he died.
- At its zenith, Ashoka's empire stretched from Afghanistan in the west to Bangladesh in the east. It covered almost the whole Indian subcontinent except present Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and modern-day Sri Lanka.
- Ashoka built many edicts all over India including in present-day Nepal and Pakistan.
- His capital was at Pataliputra (Patna) and had provincial capitals at Taxila and Ujjain.

Rise to power

- Ashoka was not the eldest son of Bindusara and so was not the heir presumptive.
- Bindusara wanted his elder son Susima to be crowned the next king.
- But Ashoka was trained in military and weapons and showed great skills as an administrator when he was made the governor of Ujjain.
- In the war of succession that followed Bindusara's death in 272 BC, Ashoka emerged victorious aided by his father's ministers.
- When he became the king, he was said to be bad-tempered, ruthless and very cruel.

- He even built a torture chamber to torture his prisoners to death. This earned him the moniker Chandashoka (cruel Ashoka).
- Once he became the king, he started expanding his empire by conquest. In the ninth year of his reign, he waged a war with Kalinga (in present-day Odisha).

Conversion to Buddhism

- The battle with Kalinga fought in 265 BC was personally led by Ashoka and he was able to vanquish the Kalingas.
- Whole cities were destroyed and more than a hundred thousand people were killed in the war.
- The horrors of war disturbed him so much that he decided to shun violence for the rest of his life and turned to Buddhism.
- Ashoka's 13th Rock Edict describes the Kalinga war vividly.
- He now became Dharmashoka (the pious Ashoka) from Chandashoka.
- In about 263 BC Ashoka converted to Buddhism. Moggaliputta Tissa, a Buddhist monk became his mentor.
- Ashoka even conducted the third Buddhist Council at Pataliputra in 250 BC under Moggaliputta Tissa's presidency.

Ashoka Dhamma Notes

Ashoka's Dhamma (or Dharma in Sanskrit)

- Ashoka established the idea of paternal kingship.
- He regarded all his subjects as his children and believed it the king's duty to look after the welfare of the subjects.
- Through his edicts, he said everybody should serve parents, revere teachers, and practice ahimsa and truthfulness.
- He asked everyone to avoid animal slaughter and sacrifice.
- He expounded humane treatment of animals, servants and prisoners.
- He advocated tolerance towards all religions.
- He sought conquest through Dhamma and not war.
- He sent missions abroad to spread the word of the Buddha. Notably, he sent his son Mahinda and daughter Sanghamitra to Sri Lanka.
- Most of his edicts are written in Pali and Prakrit in Brahmi script. Some are written in the Kharoshti and Aramaic scripts also. There are some edicts written in Greek as well. The language depends on the location of the pillar.

Sources of information about Ashoka

- There are two main sources: Buddhist sources and Ashoka's edicts.
- James Prinsep, a British antiquary and colonial administrator was the first person to decipher Ashoka's edicts.
- Ashokavadana (Sanskrit) written in the second century AD, Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa (Sri Lankan Pali chronicles) give most of the information about Ashoka.