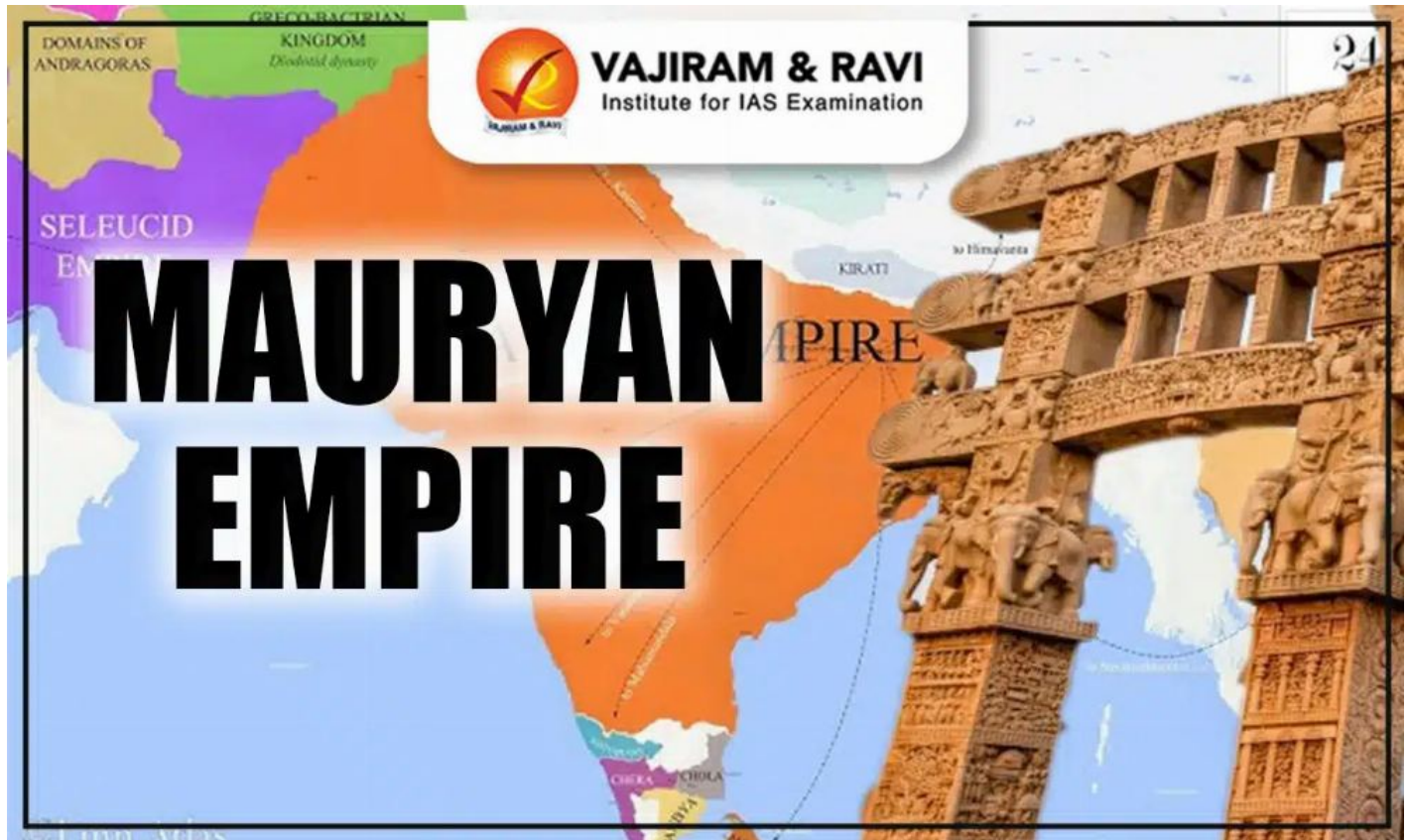


Society, Economy & Religion During the Mauryan Era

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Society and Religion during Mauryans

- **Megasthenes** and later Greek authors describe Indian society at the time of Mauryas as being divided into seven distinct groups – **philosophers, cultivators, hunters and herders, artisans and traders, overseers (spies) and the king's counsellors.**
 - These occupations were **hereditary** and
 - **Intermarriage** between groups was not allowed.
- **Strabo** further divided them into the **brachmanes** (Brahmanas) and **garmanes** (shramanas).
 - They were considered **public benefactors**, making prophecies and were exempted from paying taxes.
- **Religion:** Chandragupta took recourse to **Jainism** in his later years, and Bindusara favoured the **Ajivikas**. Asoka adopted Buddhism in his personal life, though he never imposed Buddhism on his subjects.

Agrarian society

The bulk of the population was engaged in agriculture. All accounts speak of the profusion and diversity of crops achieved due to the profitable combination of highly **fertile soil, rivers, and plentiful rainfall**.

- Non-agrarian activities such as **the herding of animals** were practised even within villages.
- **Kautilya** even listed animals among the items that were assessed and taxed.
- **Status of Women:** Women occupied a **high position** and freedom; and were employed as the King's personal bodyguards.
 - They were permitted to **divorce or remarry**.

Slavery

- According to **Megasthenes**, there was no concept of slavery in India.
- But some other sources mentioned **situations that led to enslavement** – a person could be a slave either by birth, by voluntarily selling themselves, by being captured in war, or as a result of **judicial** punishment. **Kautilya** also described different kinds of slaves.
- **Ashokan Major Rock Edict V:** Concerns about the policy towards **slaves**. He mentions in this rock edict, "Every Human is my child".
- **Religion:** Chandragupta took recourse to **Jainism** in his later years, and Bindusara favoured the **Ajivikas**. Asoka adopted Buddhism in his personal life, though he never imposed Buddhism on his subjects.

Economy during Mauryans

- **Agrarian Economy:** The settlement of permanent villages was recognised in the **Arthashastra** as a method for expanding the agrarian economy.
 - These settlements ensured a sound and stable resource base for the State to extract taxes, and the land tax formed the bulk of it. This process of settlement was called **janapadanivesa**.
 - Agriculture in other areas of the Mauryan State, known as **janapada territories**, was, in all probability, carried on privately.
 - **Sita or crown lands:** In these areas, the King's and the State's rights of possession, cultivation, mortgage and sale were naturally superior.
 - **Sitadhyaksa**, or superintendent of agriculture, supervised the cultivation works here.

Land Revenue

Mauryan rule constitutes a landmark in the history of the improvement of the system of taxation in ancient India.

- **Samaharta:** Collector general of revenue for the Mauryan Empire. He had control over the expenditure part also.
- **Sannidhata:** Officer-in-charge of the treasury and store.
- **Bhaga (land tax):** 1/4th of the produce paid by the peasants.
- The peasants paid a tax called **pindakara** paid by husbandmen, which was assessed on groups of villages.
- Other taxes were **Bali** and **Hiranaya** (paid in cash).

Trade

The Jataka stories frequently refer to caravan traders carrying large quantities of goods to different parts of the country.

- **Trade routes:** The main trade routes in northern India were along the Ganges River and the Himalayan foothills.
 - Megasthenes also talks of a land route connecting the **North West** with Pataliputra.
 - In the south, it was connected to Central India and in the South-east to **Kalinga**. This eastern route turned southwards to reach Andhra and Karnataka finally.
 - The overland route to countries of the West went via **Taxila (near Islamabad)**.
- **Internal trade** was considerably beneficial because river transport improved once the forests around the Valleys had been cleared under State initiative.
- The artisans during the Mauryan period were organised along **guidelines**. The well-known guilds were **metallurgists, carpenters, potters, leatherworkers, painters, textile workers** etc.
 - The State employed some artisans like armourers, shipbuilders, and stone builders. They were exempt from payment of taxes because they rendered **compulsory labour services to the State**. Other artisans who worked for the State were taxed, like spinners, weavers, miners, etc.
- The State's policy, particularly under **Bindusara** and **Ashoka**, to have peaceful and friendly relations with the Greeks also gave a fillip to foreign trade.
- **Panyadhyaksha:** Superintendent of commerce whose duty was to fix prices of goods.
- **Samsthadhyaksha:** look after the markets and check the unfair practices of the traders.
- **Pautavadhyaksha:** superintendent of weights and measures
- **Navadhyaksha:** facilitated state boats for transport and helped regulate river transport and collect ferry charges.
- **Sulkadhyaksha:** superintendent of tolls.
- **Rajapanya:** different goods produced by states.
- **Akaradhyaksha:** Superintendent of mines

Reasons for the decline of the Mauryan Empire

The imperial authority of the Mauryas began to weaken with the death of **Ashoka (232 BCE)** and finally collapsed in 180 BCE.

- **Successors of Ashoka:**
 - After Ashoka, the empire got **fragmented**, and there was a quick **succession of rulers**. This weakened the imperial control over the administration.
 - The quick succession of kings made this difficult, as none of the rulers needed help to settle down and control things.
 - These rulers ruled only for a **short period** and, therefore, could not formulate either new governance policies or maintain the old ones.
- **Other Political factors for disintegration:**
 - **Dhamma-mahamattas** (large body of officials of State) had become very powerful and oppressive during the latter half of Ashoka's reign.
 - Once the **centre became weak**, the provinces, too, started breaking away.

- **Weak rulers for a short duration resulted** in an overwhelming number of new **officials** constantly emerging and owing only personal loyalty to their respective kings rather than to the State.
- The **complex system of spies** under the later Mauryas collapsed, which led to **corruption**.
- **Economic factors:**
 - Gradually, the **State monopoly of metals was being lost**. The demands on iron, so crucial for the expanding **agrarian economy**, could no longer be met by **Magadha** alone.
 - Expansion in cultivation, extensive use of forest wood and deforestation, in general, may have led to **floods and famines**. There is, in fact, evidence of a big famine in north **Bengal** during the Mauryan period.
 - In a **centralised administrative system**, the problem of not having enough revenues created many other acute difficulties. To enhance the revenues, the **Arthashastra** suggested that taxes should be imposed even on actors, prostitutes and so on.

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