

# A Research Review of Historical Sources in context with the Origin of Mauryan State

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## Abstract

The Mauryan Empire, which existed from approximately 321 B.C. to 185 B.C., was the first pan-Indian empire, encompassing the majority of the Indian subcontinent. It encompassed portions of modern-day Iran and central and northern India. Chandragupta Maurya, the first ruler of the Mauryan Empire, began consolidating land as Alexander the Great's influence began to decline. Chandragupta took advantage of the power vacuum left by Alexander's demise in 323 B.C. by collecting an army and overthrowing the Nanda power in Magadha, in present-day eastern India, thus establishing the Mauryan Empire. After being crowned king, Chandragupta acquired additional territory through force and alliances. Chief Minister Kautilya, also known as Chanakya, advised Chandragupta and contributed to the legacy of the empire. In addition to being a political strategist, Kautilya is well-known for composing the Arthashastra, a leadership and government-focused treatise. The Arthashastra describes how a state's economy and authority should be organised. The administration of Chandragupta closely resembled that described in the Arthashastra. The Arthashastra was notable for its emphasis on espionage. Kautilya suggested to the monarch that vast networks of informants serve as the ruler's surveillance force. The emphasis on deception demonstrates a pragmatic and almost cynical perspective on human nature. Around 300 B.C., Bindusara, Chandragupta's son, ascended the throne. He ensured the empire's efficient operation while maintaining its domains. Ashoka, the son of Bindusara, was the third head of the Mauryan Empire. Ashoka left his imprint on history by erecting massive pillars of stone inscribed with his edicts. Ashoka reconsidered his commitment to expanding the empire after conducting a violent campaign against Kalinga (a region on the central-eastern coast of India) and instead turned to Buddhism and its doctrine of nonviolence. Numerous of his edicts urged people to renounce violence and live in harmony with one another, two fundamental Buddhist principles. His dynasty continued to rule after Ashoka's demise, but the empire began to fragment. In 185 B.C., the last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha, was murdered by his commander-in-chief, Pushyamrita, who went on to found the Shunga Dynasty.

**Keywords:** Mauryan, Kautilya, Arthashastra, Ashoka, Sources, Origin, Theory

## Content

The present research examines the sources of Mauryan empire from a political standpoint, with a concise discussion of the state's origins and fundamental terms. In Indian history, the Mauryas are significant for more than one reason. They are regarded as India's earliest historical dynasties. The arrival of the Mauryas marks the beginning of a new era in India's political and cultural history. The first instance of political unity in India occurred during the reign of the Maurya dynasty. Chandragupta Maurya initiated this process, and his successors Bindusara and Ashoka brought it to its conclusion. During the reign of Ashoka, the Mauryan empire encompassed almost all of modern-day India, with the exception of portions of the country's northeast and southeast. In the west, its borders extended west of the Indus River up to the Hindukusha line. Therefore, it is possible to state that the Mauryas accomplished the natural boundary line of India, which mediaeval monarchs such as Akbar and modern Britons aspired to but could not attain. Chandragupta Maurya, the originator of the Maurya dynasty, expelled the Greeks from north-western India. With the establishment of this dynasty, political

unity was achieved in India. Again, it was under the Mauryas that a uniform system of administration was established throughout the empire, earning the praise of modern authors for its efficiency and seamless operation. The consistent administration of Chandragupta and his successors contributed to the cultural cohesion of the country. Additionally, the Mauryas established political and cultural ties with other civilised monarchs, such as Seleucus. In summary, India has enjoyed the bounties of sustained calm in this age. Particularly during the reign of Ashoka, the focus shifted from territorial expansion to promoting the spiritual and material well-being of the subjects. Ashoka, the greatest of the Mauryan emperors, formulated a moral-social code in the form of the policy of dhamma, which is based on the principles of tolerance and peaceful coexistence and suggests how people should coexist in a multicultural society and how the state should act in such a society. According to G.M. Bongardlevin, "It was during the Mauryan period that the social structure, the varna and caste system, and the major institutions of ancient Indian society and state emerged and took form.

Mauryan can be traced back to a number of sources. There are two categories of literature among literary sources: religious and secular. The most significant religious literature sources are Buddhist. Diverse jatakas paint a general picture of the socio-economic condition of the Buddhist period, which continued to a significant extent during the Mauryan period. Certain sections of Buddhist scriptures, such as the Dgha Nikyaya, are crucial for determining the impact of Buddhist ideas on the political sphere at the time; for instance, the concept of Chakravarti (or universal sovereign) is a political concept.

The Dipavamsha and the Mahvamsha may also be considered primary sources, as they elaborate on Ashoka's role in the propagation of Buddhism. Legendarily, the Divyavadna portrays Ashoka. These Buddhist texts are also useful for tracing the origins of the Mauryas. In addition, they describe the ascension of Chandragupta Maurya to the throne of Magadha, the coronations and biographies of Bindusara and Ashoka, and Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism.

Jaina sources such as the Kalpstraa, Parishistparvaa, and Bhadrabhucharitata throw insight into Chandragupta Maurya's life and activities. Vishakhadatta's various Purnasnas and Mudrrkshaskshas are significant. Sanskrit that will put light on the history of the Mauryas. A compilation In Purnasr, a catalogue of Mauryan incidents are included. The Purans can also be used to determine the origin of the Mauryas.

Kautilya's Arthashastra is the most significant source of secular literature from the Mauryan period. Regarding the date of the Arthashastra, there is much debate. R. Shamasastry, N.N. Law, V.A. Smith, Fleet, and K.P. Jayasawal argue that the famous minister of Chandragupta Maurya authored the Arthashstra, his magnum opus. Winternitz, Jolly, Keith, and D.R. Bhandarkar, on the other hand, believe that it is a later composition, composed in the early centuries of the Christian era.

The second school (which considers the Arthashstra to be a later work) argues that if the book was written by Kautilya, the Mauryan prime minister, it is odd that it does not contain any references to the Mauryan empire and its administrative machinery, which are so well documented in Greek sources. The fact that Kautilya's own opinions are quoted in the third person suggests that he was not the actual author of the work. Shamasastry and K.P. Jayasawal disapprove of these findings. They endorse Kautilya, the premier of Chandragupta, as the author of the text. The claim that the author was unfamiliar with a vast empire is false, as he states that the chakravart's jurisdiction extends from the Himalayas to the ocean. The book describes the infrastructure and organisation of a large empire that was a rare occurrence in the history of India. Therefore, it is possible to extrapolate that the author of the Arthashastra was familiar with the Mauryan empire, despite not mentioning it by name. Regarding the third-person reference to Kautilya, it is customary for Indian authors to allude to themselves in the third person singular as opposed to the first person singular. Thus, the third-person reference to Kautilya does not inherently indicate that he was not the author of the book.

It is accepted the Arthashstra is the primary literary source for Mauryan historiography because other sources, primarily archaeological sources such as the edicts of Ashoka, complement the Arthashstra, and thus we find a correlation between the actual politics of the Mauryans and the verses of the Arthashshtra. Common to both the Ashokan inscriptions and the Arthashastra are numerous institutions. Similarities between terms used in the Arthashstra and Ashokan edicts indicate that the Mauryan rulers were familiar with the text. It appears that the book was originally a Mauryan document, though it was edited and revised in later centuries. This research paper's description of the Mauryan state relies heavily on Kautilya's Arthashastra.

The Arthashastra differs from many other ancient Indian texts in that its formulations are secular. In Dharmastras works (such as Manusmriti), only one section is devoted to Rjdharma or Dandanti (Politics). In contrast, the

central theme of Arthashastra is the study of state, although the monarch is expected to comprehend the Vedas and philosophy. The Arthashastra consists of fifteen volumes. Book I discusses the numerous problems associated with governance; Book II discusses civil administration in great detail; and Books III and IV address civil, penal, and personal law, respectively. The duties and responsibilities of the courtiers and retainers of the monarch are discussed in Book 5. Book VI is crucial because it describes the nature and functions of the seven state elements. The remaining nine books are devoted to an exhaustive discussion of foreign policy issues, the circles of kings and the policy to be followed in relation to its various members (the Mandala Theory), the means to establish one's ascendancy among them (sma, dma, danda, bheda), the appropriate time for war and peace and the manner in which warfare was to be conducted.

In addition to these indigenous literary sources, foreign visitors' classical compositions in Greek and Latin are also significant literary sources. First among these is the account of Megasthenes, who as the representative of the Greek king Seleucus Nikator visited the court of Chandragupta and stayed in the capital Pataliputra for some time. His classical compositions are called Indika/Indica. Unfortunately, the original document has been lost, and only quotations from it remain in numerous classical texts. Megasthenes was cited by later Greek authors such as Strabo, Diodorus, and Arrian. However, whenever we interact with a literary source, we must be wary of its veracity. Different religious sources, such as Buddhist sources, are biased because they intended to demonstrate the superiority of Buddhism over other religions. Cross-verification of evidence from multiple sources, such as archaeological sources, could be a solution to this issue.

The most important archaeological sources are the edicts of Ashoka. There are three varieties of Ashokan edicts: rock edicts (both main and minor rock edicts), pillar edicts, and cave inscriptions. Rock edicts consist of fourteen major rock edicts located at Kalsi, Mansehra, Shahabzgarhi, Girnar, Sopara, Yerragudi, Dhauri, and Jaugada; and a number of minor rock edicts and inscriptions at Bairat, Rupanath, Sahasram, Brahmagiri, Gavimath, Jatinga-Rameshwar, Maski, Palkigundu, Rajula-Mandagiri, Siddapura, Yerragudi, Gurjarra, and Jhansi. Seven pillar edicts exist at Allahabad, Delhi-Topra, Delhi-Meerut, Lauriya-Araraja, Lauriya-Nandangarh, and Rampurva. Other inscriptions have been discovered in the Barabar Caves (three), Rummindei, Nigali-Sagar, Allahabad, Sanchi, Sarnath, and Bairat. Recently, a minor Greek and Aramaic inscription was discovered in Kandahar. The language of Ashokan inscriptions is Pali, and the script is Brahmi; however, two important rock edicts at Mansehra and Shahabzgarhi are written in Kharosthi, a script derived from Persian Aramaic. Among other archaeological sources, coins are the most significant. They consist primarily of silver and copper coins with pierce marks, as well as silver bar coinage. These coins have been discovered in significant quantities, suggesting that they circulated throughout the empire. The lack of names and dates on these coins, however, diminishes their significance as a source of information regarding Mauryan history. There is also absence of unanimity among historians and historical sources regarding the origin of the Mauryas. There are four prominent viewpoints in this respect.

This study was developed by D.B. Spooner, who conducted excavations in Pataliputra, regarding the origin of the Persepolis. Spooner identifies Persia as the origin of the Mauryas. Several similarities between the social, political, and religious institutions and customs of Mauryan India and Persia are highlighted. He compares the art of Maurya to Persian art. However, Spooner's viewpoints are inadmissible due to the fact that numerous institutions and customs in Mauryan India and Persia were entirely distinct and had no resemblance.

**Shudra Origin:** In some Puranas, the Mauryas are characterised as primarily shudra and unrighteous (shdra-prystv- adhrmikh). The Mudrrkshasa of Vishakhadatta refers to the Mauryas with the terms vrishal, kulahna, and Nandnvaya. Kshemendra and Somadeva allude to him as prvanandasuta, the authentic Nanda's son. According to Ratnagarbha, the Commentator on the Vishnupurna, Chandragupta was the son of Nanda by a woman named Mura, and he and his descendants were known as the Mauryas. Dhundiraja, the Mudrrkshasa commentator, informs us that Chandragupta was the foremost son of Maurya, who was the son of the Nanda monarch Sarvarthsiddhi and Mura, the daughter of a vrishal. Vrishal typically signifies "son of shudra"

However, this does not appear to be an accurate theory regarding the origin of the Mauryas, as the majority of these sources are post-Mauryan and do not approach the issue objectively and impartially. Regarding the term vrishal used in the Mudrrkshasa to refer to Chandragupta, Radha Kumud Mookerji explains, "a passage in the drama itself (III.18) uses the term vrishala as a term of honour to refer to one who is vrisha among kings, the best of kings." Since the Mauryan emperors did not rigorously adhere to the tenets of traditional brahminism, brahmins may have developed negative and prejudiced views of their ancestry. According to H.C.

Raychaudhuri, "vrishal" referred to kshatriyas who did not rigorously adhere to the dharma code of conduct. The most significant source refuting this view is Kautilya's Arthashastra. Kautilya was a strong advocate for varnashrama. Multiple references in the Arthashastra instruct the various varnas to conduct their own dharma and not to interfere with the dharma of others. How could a person like Kautilya have aided the ascent to power of a shudra?

Romila Thapar supports the Vaishya Origin theory. Romila Thapar contends, citing Epigraphica Indica, that the A.D. 150 Junagarh rock inscription of Rudradaman names the vaishya Pusyagupta as the provincial governor of the Mauryan king Chandragupta. Pusyagupta was Chandragupta's brother-in-law. It is plausible that Chandragupta appointed his brother-in-law to rule the empire's western province. This would suggest that the Mauryas may have been of vaishya descent, as the suffix "gupta" is known to have been widely employed by vaishyas. Romila Thapar, citing references from Justin, asserts that European classical authors described Chandragupta as a man of humble origin. The vaishya origin theory complements this perspective on modest origins. However, this perspective is also unsatisfactory because brahmins and kshatriyas have held the title gupta. Kautilya's given name as an infant was Vishnugupta. Also, Kautilya, a staunch supporter of the varna system, would not have assisted a vaishya in becoming king, as this violates the varna system's principles.

Buddhist and Jaina literature formulate this theory regarding the origin of Kshatriyas. The descriptions of foreign travellers and certain archaeological sources also corroborate this viewpoint. Buddhist authors have attempted to establish a connection between the dynasty and the Shkya tribe to which the Buddha belonged. Peacocks (mayura in Sanskrit and mora in Pali) abounded in the area from which they originated. Consequently, they became known as the Mauryas.

H.C. Raychaudhuri also supports this view, stating that "in the sixth century B.C.E., the Moriyas were the ruling clan of the small republic of Pippalivana, which was likely situated between Rummindei in the Nepalese Tarai and Kasia in the Gorakhpur district." The Buddhist text Divyavadna also mentions Bindusara, son of Chandragupta, as a Kshatriya associate. According to the Mahavamsa, Chandragupta was a member of the Moriya kshatriya lineage.

The theory of kshatriya origin more satisfactorily explains the origin of the Mauryas. Kautilya was an ardent supporter of the varna system. According to the traditional varna system, each varna had specific responsibilities. The preferred duty of a kshatriya was to rule and protect society. They alone were authorised to possess firearms. Chandragupta's ascent to the throne is supported by Kautilya, a staunch defender of the varna system. This further demonstrates that the Mauryas were kshatriyas.

The Arthashastra depicts the state as an organisation comprised of seven organs or constituents (saptanga). These seven elements are, Svami, Amatya, Janapada, Durga, Kosa, Danda and Mitra.

The fourth century B.C., when the Mauryan empire was founded, was an era of great turmoil in Indian history. Alexander invaded India in 326 B.C.E. and defeated some small border kingdoms. But the main centre of power at that time was Magadha, with Pataliputra as its capital. The first dynasty to rule Magadha was the Hariyanak, under which powerful monarchs like Bimbisara and Ajatashatru ruled. This dynasty was replaced by the Shishunaga, and the Naga dynasty itself was overthrown by Mahapadma, the founder of the Nanda dynasty. At the time of Alexander's conquest of India, a descendant of Mahapadma, named Dhananand was ruling the kingdom of Magadha.

According to numerous sources, the origin of the Nanda rulers was low caste. Dhananand, the last king of Nanda, was unpopular with his subjects. With the assistance of Kautilya, Chandragupta Maurya defeated the last Nanda sovereign and established the Maurya dynasty. He also constrained the authority of Alexander's successor Seleucus, who, after Alexander's collapse, emerged as the most potent of Alexander's military generals. After Alexander's demise, his generals engaged in a conflict of succession. Seleucus triumphed in the contest and consolidated his control over the complete Greco-Asian empire. As an ambitious individual, he desired to recover Alexander's lost conquests in India. The two monarchs concluded a treaty of brotherhood following a conflict between Seleucus and Chandragupta Maurya. The fact that Seleucus gave Chandragupta his daughter in marriage served as additional proof of this. He dispatched an envoy by the name of Megasthenes to the court of Chandragupta, who composed a magnificent account of Pataliputra, the Mauryan capital, and his kingdom. The recognition of Hindukush as the border between the Magadhan and Greek kingdoms was the most significant political element of this treaty. Thus, the first historical sovereign of India protected a natural border. After Chandragupta, two famous monarchs strengthened and expanded the empire: Bindusara

(Chandragupta's son) and Ashoka (Bindusara's son). During the reign of Ashoka, the grandeur of the Mauryan empire attained its pinnacle. After Ashoka, however, its decline began, and in 185 B.C., the last Mauryan ruler was slain by his own commander-in-chief, Pusyamitra Sunga, who established the Sunga dynasty. Thus, the Mauryan empire came to an end.

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