

# Alexander's Invasion of India and its Effects

(A) **1. Alexander the Great** – Alexander is counted as one of the greatest conquerors of the world. He was the son of King Philip of Macedonia. He was born in 356 B.C. and every care was taken to impart him the best education. Aristotle, the best philosopher of his days, was appointed as his teacher. He ascended the throne at the age of twenty and at once he embarked upon the policy of conquests. Within a very short time he over-ran many countries of the world including Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, Turkistan, Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Bactria etc. Alexander was perhaps the first conqueror who dared to conquer the whole world and achieved a great success in his object. It is because of this achievement that Alexander is generally called as 'Alexander the Great'.



*Alexander the Great*

**2. Alexander's Invasion of India** – After conquering Kabul in 328 B.C. Alexander also thought of conquering India. Consequently in about 326 B.C. he invaded India. First of all various independent tribes (including Assakenos) who inhabited the hilly tracts *beyond Indus* faced the foreign invader. Though the Assakenos gave a tough resistance, they were defeated and killed in thousands. Then many other hilly chiefs themselves submitted to Alexander.

After consolidating his position, Alexander marched forward and crossed the river Indus by constructing a bridge of boats near Ohind. Here at Ohind he met the representatives of *King Ambhi* of Taxila, who offered his

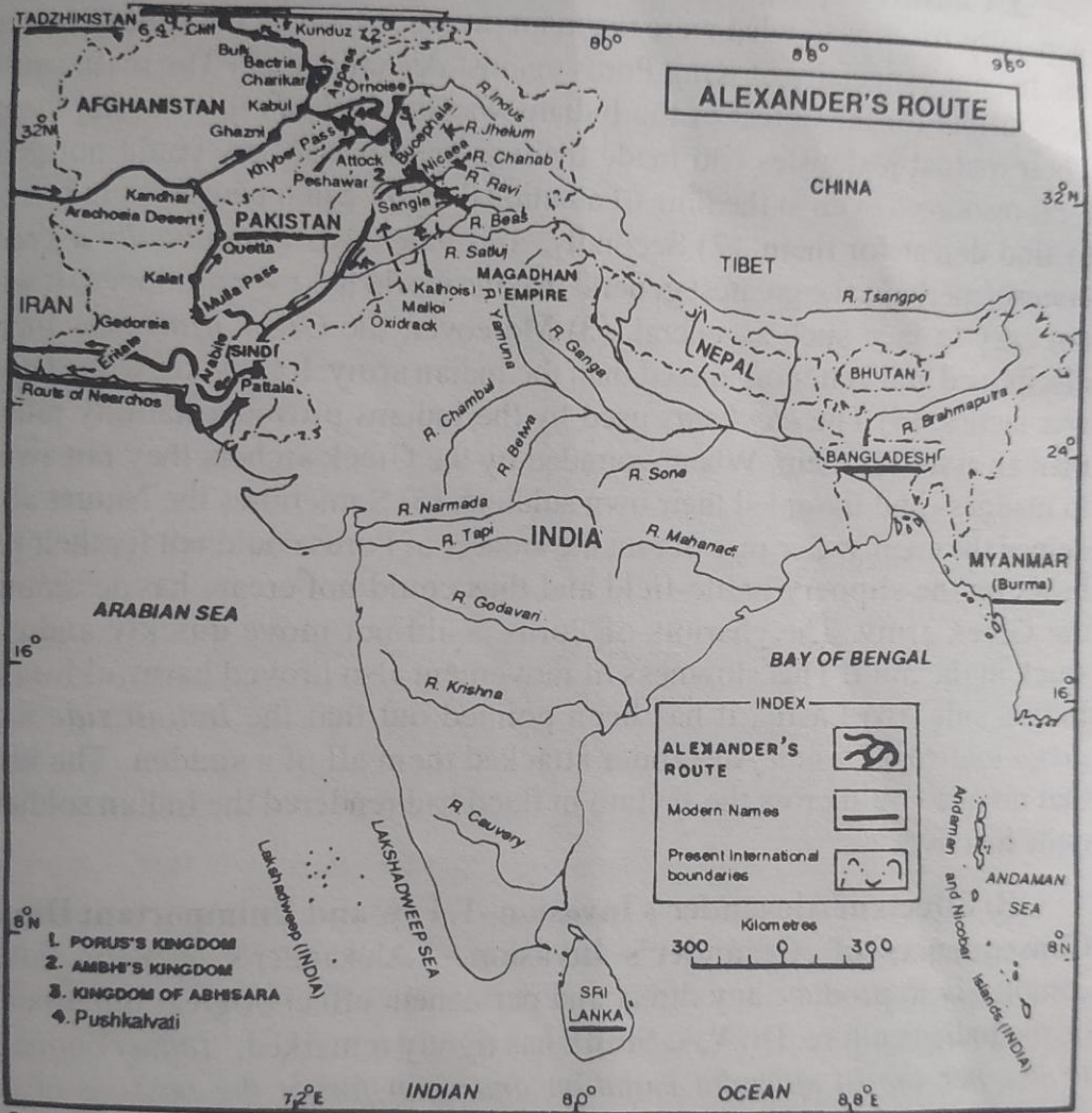
services to him against Porus and other Indian chiefs. What could have been better to Alexander than this ? Alexander at once marched forward and reached Taxila where King Ambhi was already prepared to help him with all his forces and resources. Alexander treated him with generosity and gave him many valuable gifts. Then a message was sent to King Porus to submit, but he flatly refused and got ready for a fight.

*Battle with Porus* – Porus then arrayed his army on the eastern bank of the Jhelum. The river Jhelum was then in flood and Alexander was for some time on the horns of dilemma as to how to cross the river. At last on one dark night he moved his forces about 16 miles upward and crossed the river from a sharp bend. Then he made a sudden attack on the Indian forces which were taken unawares. A fierce battle was fought in the Karri plain. Porus and his forces gave a heroic fight but ultimately Alexander came out victorious. In this battle about 12,000 soldiers were killed and 6,000 were taken prisoners. Porus himself was wounded while fighting and was taken prisoner. When brought before Alexander the latter asked him, “*How should I treat you ?*” “*As kings treat a king,*” was the prompt reply. This bold answer impressed Alexander so much that he returned all the territory of Porus and thus won over an enemy by his generous policy and kind treatment. To commemorate this victory Alexander is said to have laid the foundation of two cities Bucephala and Nicaea at the site of the battle.

*Alexander's March up to the Beas River* – After his fight with Porus Alexander marched eastward and while crossing the river Chenab he attacked the territories of the Younger Porus and the Glausai tribe and conquered them. This newly conquered territory was put under the charge of King Porus the elder. Then he crossed the river Ravi but here he met with a tough resistance. The Kathois of Sangla (or modern Sialkot) proved to be very stubborn but in the end they had to bow under the heavy pressure of the Macedonian forces. The town of Sangla was raised to the ground. The conquest of Sangla struck terror in the minds of the neighbouring tribes who submitted of their own accord. Alexander then advanced to reach the banks of Beas.

*Alexander's Return* – Alexander had proceeded upto the Beas with a view to conquering the Magadha Empire, but here his fatigued army refused to cross the river. Alexander tried his best to rouse the morale of his soldiers but to no avail. One reason for their refusal to march forward was that they had grown weary of the continuous fighting and had begun to feel home-sick. Another reason might be that they did not want to fight a risky battle with the Nandas who were masters of vast resources and had a very powerful army. When all efforts proved futile, Alexander hesitatingly gave orders of retreat. But before retreating he got constructed twelve gigantic stone altars on the bank of the Beas with a view to marking the eastern limits of his empire. No trace of these altars is, however, to be found now.

From the Beas Alexander returned to the Jhelum to make administrative arrangements in the frontier provinces of his empire. He divided the whole territory from the Indus to the Beas into three provinces and put them under the charge of different governors. Some portion of the Macedonian army was also left in India to assist the governors in maintaining law and order in these



Based upon Survey of India map with the permission of the Surveyor General of India. The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles measured from the appropriate base line.

provinces. Then he got constructed a fleet of about 2,000 boats to facilitate his return journey down the Jhelum up to the sea. But this return journey was not an easy affair. Many republican clans inhabiting the southern Punjab attacked the returning Greek soldiers. The Sivas, Kshudrakas, Mallois and Mousikanos and such other tribesmen harassed the Greek soldiers and even inflicted a wound on Alexander. This enraged Alexander who gave orders of the general massacre of the republican tribesmen. In this way the Greek forces reached Pattala in Sind. Here Alexander made two divisions of his army, one was sent under Nearchos by sea and the second was led by Alexander himself.

It passed through Baluchistan and Persia and reached Babylonia (or modern Baghdad) in about 323 B.C. Here Alexander fell seriously ill and died, when he was hardly thirty-three years of age. With the death of Alexander all that he had achieved in India was undone within two years of his death.

**3. Causes Responsible for the Defeat of the Indians** – Now a question generally arises as to what were the main causes responsible for the defeat of the Indians especially of King Porus against Alexander. (1) The main cause responsible for the defeat of the Indians was the *lack of unity* among them. Their mutual jealousies had made them so selfish that they could not pool their resources even at the time of a national crisis. Such people were bound to find defeat for them. (2) Secondly, *Alexander was undoubtedly a great general*, perhaps the greatest general that the world has ever produced. It was not easy to face such a general. (3) Moreover, the *Greek army* was more disciplined and better organized than the Indian army. It fully knew the latest war-tactics. (4) The *elephants* used by the Indians proved a liability rather than an asset for them. When wounded by the Greek archers they ran away in madness and trampled their own soldiers. (5) Sometimes the Nature also helped the enemy. Because of rain the archers of Porus could not fix their big bows on the slippery battle-field and thus could not create havoc among the Greek army. The chariots of Porus could not move quickly and got stuck in the mud. This slowness of movement also proved harmful for the Indian side. (6) Lastly, it has been pointed out that the *Indian side was taken unawares* when Alexander attacked them all of a sudden. The idea that no one could cross the Jhelum in flood had rendered the Indian soldiers quite inactive.