

SECTION 3

Career of Chandragupta Maurya

1. **Early Career** – After the return of Alexander to his country there arose a political chaos in India and a new dynasty of the Mauryas was born, which soon eclipsed the other dynasties. The founder of this dynasty was Chandragupta Maurya about whose parentage and early life very little is known. Some historians try to link him with the Nanda family and say that he was the son of the Nanda ruler by a low-caste woman, Mura by name, from whom was derived the surname Maurya. While there are others who would suggest that he was the member of a powerful Kshatriya tribe known as the Moriyas – a prominent ruling tribe in the time of Buddha. Later on the Nandas conquered their territory and Chandragupta's ancestors were reduced to poverty. Whatever may be the case, it is certain that he held a high place in the Nanda army. But somehow certain differences arose between him and



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his master and he had to run for his life towards the Punjab. It is said that while Chandragupta was still in the Punjab he met Alexander at Taxila and induced him to invade Magadha. But the boldness of his speech offended Alexander and he had to run for safety. It was during this exile that Chandragupta was joined by the renowned Brahmana politician, Chanakya (or Kautilya). It is said that Chanakya was once insulted by the Nanda ruler, so he joined hands with Chandragupta Maurya for the overthrow of the Nanda dynasty.

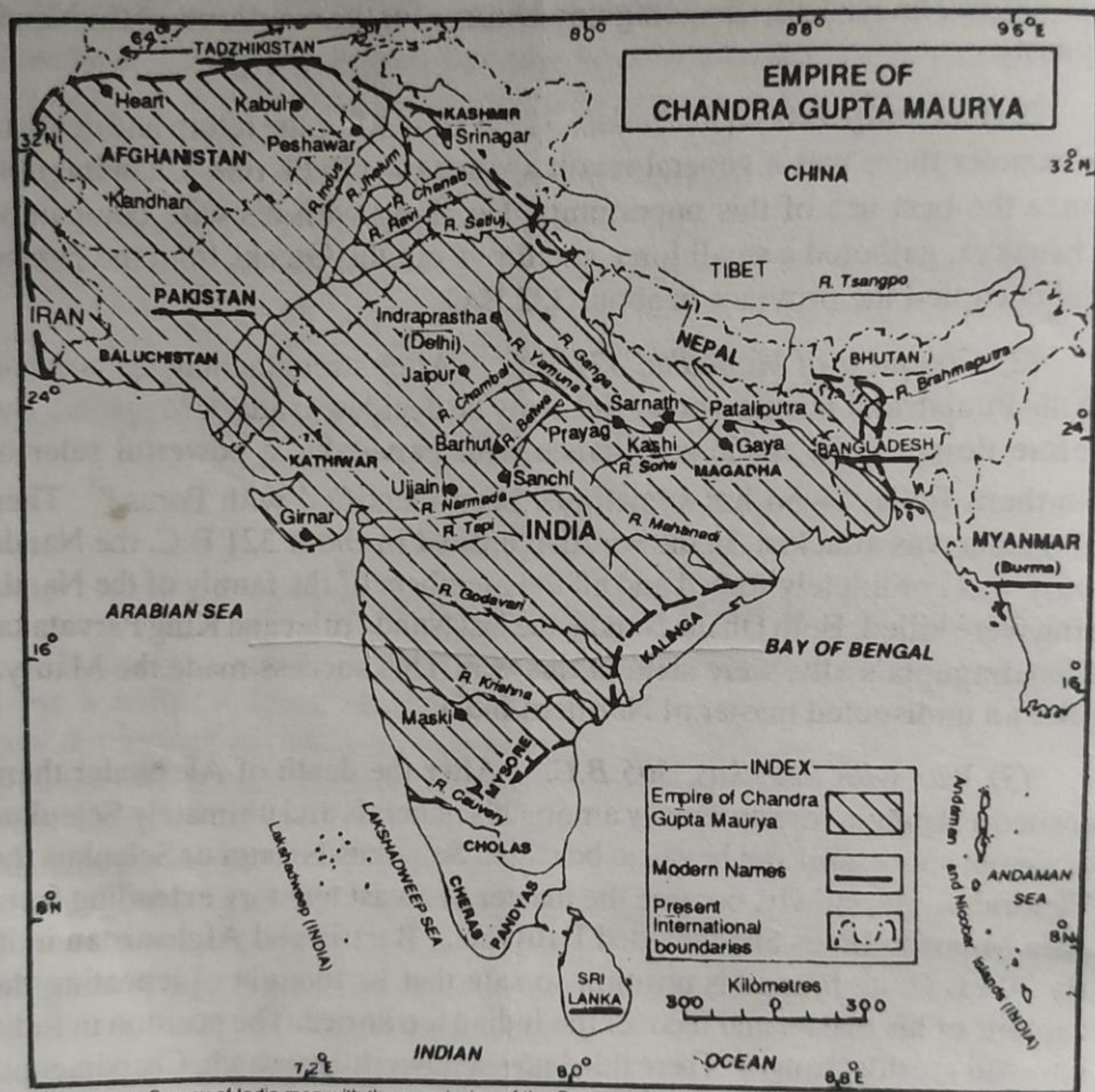
2. His Conquests – (1) Punjab, 322 B.C. – After the return and death of Alexander there was a general revolt against the Greek rule. Chandragupta made the best use of this opportunity. He along with his wise companion Chanakya, gathered a small force and drove out the Greeks from the Punjab and occupied the province in about 322 B.C.

(2) Conquest of Magadha, 321 B.C. – After strengthening his position in the Punjab and raising a powerful army he decided to attack Magadha. But before doing so he made an alliance with Parvataka, a powerful ruler of Northern India, “who has sometimes been identified with Porus.”¹ Then Magadha was attacked. In the war that ensued in about 321 B.C. the Nanda army was completely routed and all the members of the family of the Nanda king were killed. Both Dhana Nanda, the last Nanda ruler and King Parvataka, Chandragupta’s ally, were slain in this war. This success made the Maurya ruler an undisputed master of Northern India.

(3) War with Seleukus, 305 B.C. – After the death of Alexander there ensued a struggle for supremacy among his generals and ultimately Seleukus came out successful and began to be called Seleukus Nicator or Seleukus the Victorious. He, slowly, became the master of a vast territory extending from Asia Minor to Indus and included Babylonia, Bactria and Afghanistan in it. By 305 B.C. he found his position so safe that he thought of repeating the exploits of his master and recover the Indian territories. The position in India now had greatly changed. There ruled now a powerful monarch, Chandragupta Maurya. So when Seleukus invaded India in 305 B.C. he had to face defeat and to agree to the terms dictated by Chandragupta Maurya. Seleukus had to surrender not only the four provinces of Herat, Kandhar, Kabul and Baluchistan to Chandragupta but also he had to give his daughter in marriage to the Mauryan ruler. Thus enmity gave place to closer relations and Chandragupta Maurya presented about 500 elephants to Seleukus and he in turn sent his representative, named Megasthenes, to Chandragupta’s court at Pataliputra. Because of Chandrgupta’s success against Seleukus, the limits of the Mauryan empire were extended upto the Hidukush “the scientific frontier of India”.

1. Dr. Tripathi : *History of Ancient India*, Chap. VIII.

(4) *Other Conquests and Extent of Chandragupta's Empire* – As regards other conquests of Chandragupta Maurya no definite details are, however, available. From the Junagadh Rock Inscription of Rudradaman we come to know that Chandragupta had ruled that state and appointed a Governor there. Similarly, some Mysore inscriptions and Jain traditions refer to the conquest



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.

of Mysore by Chandragupta Maurya. Some Tamil writers (Mamulanar and Paraniar) would suggest the invasion of Far South by the same ruler. The Greek writers (Justin and Plutarch) also refer him as the master of the whole of India.

Thus Chandragupta's empire was a very vast one. It extended from Bengal in the east to the Hindukush in the west and from the Himalayas in the north to certain areas even south of the Vindhyas. It included the modern territories of Kabul, Herat, Kandhar, Baluchistan, Punjab, U.P., Bihar, Ben-

gal, Gujarat, Kathiawar and many other areas beyond the Vindhya ranges.

3. Administration of Chandragupta Maurya – Chandragupta Maurya was the first historical emperor of India. He was not only a great conqueror but also a great administrative genius. The administrative machinery founded and organised by him worked well with little variations here and there, throughout the Mauryan period. (For full details see Section 3).

4. Character of Chandragupta Maurya – Chandragupta Maurya was a great personality and there were many attractive things in his character, which deserve a special mention.

(1) *Lover of Beauty and Splendour* – Chandragupta Maurya was a great lover of beauty and he led a very splendid life. His palace was unique in its beauty and was provided with all sorts of comforts and luxuries. It had beautiful parks, artificial lakes and every means of enjoyment. Whenever the king appeared before the public he was always in his best, embroidered and shining clothes. While going on a journey he often used horses and elephants.

(2) *Lover of Hunting and other Sports* – Chandragupta Maurya was a great lover of hunting. He had kept some special forests reserved for himself where the ordinary people could not hunt. Whenever the king used to go on his hunting excursions all his route was marked with ropes and one could cross it only on pain of death. He was also fond of witnessing elephant, bull and ram fights and took great interest in ox-racing.

(3) *A Lover of Justice* – Chandragupta Maurya was a great lover of justice and had established regular courts throughout the length and breadth of the country. Punishments were very harsh. It was because of this that in Pataliputra, which had a population of about 4,00,000, the daily average of theft was not more than eight pounds. The king himself took a great interest in the administration of justice and had appointed special spies to search and apprehend the criminals.

(4) *A Clever Diplomat* – Chandragupta was a very shrewd and clever diplomat. To develop friendship with such a clever politician as Kautilya, was an act of great wisdom and far-sightedness on the part of Chandragupta. It was because of his wisdom and cleverness that he made the best use of the restlessness that prevailed in the Punjab after the return and death of Alexander and became the first historical monarch of India. It was not an ordinary job to become the master of a vast empire while starting from a humble position.

(5) *A Benevolent Despot* – Chandragupta Maurya ruled like an autocratic head of the state and laid the foundation of an administration which was somewhat severe in its nature. But he was not a tyrannical despot and he never misused his vast powers. If he made some severe rules it were for the welfare and safety of his people. The unsettled condition of the country also required some severity. He had always the good of his subjects at heart. According to

Megasthenes, "He sat all day, not suffering himself to be interrupted, even though the time arrived for attending to person." **Kautilya** says, "He gave special attention to hospitals, sanitation, famine, poor-relief and countless other works of public benefit and public utility."

5. Achievements of Chandragupta Maurya – Chandragupta Maurya was the first historical emperor of India, who not only turned the foreigners out of his motherland but also gave her the long-needed unity and laid the foundation of a well-balanced administrative system. **Prof P.L. Bhargava** rightly remarks : "He (Chandragupta) is usually considered as the first historical Emperor of India. He was undoubtedly the mightiest ruler of his time and one of the most lustrous stars in the firmament of monarchy."

(1) *Achievements as a Conqueror* – Chandragupta was nothing more than a homeless wanderer, when he was turned out of Magadha by the Nanda ruler. But because of his abilities as a soldier and a great military genius he laid the foundation of a mighty empire. He had given an ample proof of his military generalship by defeating the formidable armies of the Nandas and those of Seleukus Nicator. By his all round conquests he left behind him a vast empire which extended from Bengal in the east to the Hindukush in the west and in the south it extended beyond the Vindhya. (Details of his conquests may be referred to as given above.)

(2) *Achievements as an Administrator* – Chandragupta was a great administrative genius who gave an efficient system of government to his country and thereby laid the foundation of an empire which lasted for many years after his death. (Now for details of Chandragupta's Administration see below Section 3 of this very Chapter.)

6. Chandragupta Maurya's Death – Chandragupta died in 297 B.C. after a reign of about 24 years. According to the Jain traditions he abdicated his throne in favour of his son Bindusara and then retired to Mysore, along with a Jain saint, named Bhadrabahu. It is said that according to true Jain traditions, he starved himself to death.