

# **DECLINE OF THE MAURYAN EMPIRE**

# Introduction

- Mauryan rule as the first experiment in imperial government in India
- Chandragupta Maurya, Bindusara and Ashoka were successful in establishing an imperial authority over a large number of kingdoms
- They were able to introduce a new concept in the governance of a large territory
- However, the imperial authority of the Mauryas began to weaken after the death of Ashoka, about 232 BCE
- It finally collapsed in and around 185 BCE with the murder of the last Mauryan king, Brihadratha

# Factors which led to the disintegration or decline of the Mauryan empire

## i. Ashoka's responsibility

- Pro Buddhist policy led to the revolt of the Brahmanas
- His obsession with non-violence led to the emasculation of the army
- No direct evidence to support the argument
- Because his instruction through the edicts was to see to the welfare of the Brahmanas as well
- Even Pushyamitra Sunga being a Brahman rose to the rank of a Commander-in-chief of the Mauryan army
- The army was not disbanded and warning was given to the forest tribes that he will use force if necessary

## ii. Financial Weakness

- Huge expenses to maintain the army and the complex and elaborate bureaucracy
- Cost of establishing settlements on the newly cleared land
- Public welfare scheme which by the time of Ashoka increased
- The treasury was further burden with the appointment of the *Dhamma Mahamattas* and maintenance of army during Ashoka's reign whereas the resources were not increased
- All these affected agriculture, trade and commerce
- Thus the financial difficulties of both the rulers and the ruled led to the decline of the empire

### iii. Monarchical system of government

- King as the nucleus of power to whom loyalty was directed
- A powerful and strong king would be able to run the empire efficiently
- A change of king mean a re-alignment of loyalty or even worse a change of officials
- This norms of personal loyalty had the danger of the official either forcibly supporting the new king or opposing him
- Once a weak king ascended the empire will be affected
- The later Mauryan kings were probably and constantly faced with this situation

#### iv. Division of the empire

- The death of Ashoka was followed by the division of the empire
- His many sons were not united and parcelled out the empire among them
- This affected the efficiency of the empire
- It became an easy target for invaders

## v. Quick succession and weak successor

- The empire had been organized in such a way that it need strict supervision
- After the death of Ashoka none of the rulers could actually settled down and be in control of things
- They could not formulate either new policy of governance or maintain the old one
- They politically weakened the empire and therefore lost administrative, economic and military control of it

## Conclusion

- The argument that Ashoka was responsible cannot be accepted in the light of the contemporary evidence
- The explanation that economic problem was the reason has also been taken into consideration
- Neither monarchical government, quick succession nor weak successors can be satisfactorily explained as the reason
- The different forces together were responsible for the decline of the Mauryan rule