

## Alexander and Chandragupta Maurya - The Great

### Why in news?

The use of the suffix 'great' has become uncommon in modern history-writing as historians have moved away from the political triumphs of rulers to the society, economy, art and architecture of their times.

### Who is Alexander?

- Alexander was born in 356 BC at Pella in ancient Greece, and succeeded his father, king Phillip II, to the throne at the age of 20.
- Over the next 10 years, Alexander led campaigns across large parts of West Asia and North Africa.
- In 327 BC, Alexander crossed the Indus, the farthest frontier of the old Persian empire, and began his Indian campaign that lasted about two years.
- The king of Taxila surrendered to Alexander, but beyond the Jhelum he was challenged by the legendary warrior Porus.
- In the **battle of Hydaspes**, Alexander won, but was impressed with Porus and returned his kingdom.
- Alexander wished to march towards Gangetic basin but upon reaching the Beas, his generals refused to go further.
- Alexander was forced to turn back and died in the ancient city of Babylon, to the south of today's Baghdad.

### Why is Alexander called to be the great?

- Alexander came to be called 'great' because of his excellent military conquests which amazed the European writers and chroniclers.
- He had established the largest empire the world had seen until then, which stretched across modern western and central Asia, before he turned 30 years of age.
- He had travelled some 1,000 miles from Macedonia conquering seven nations and more than 2,000 cities.
- Alexander is believed to have died undefeated in any battle.

## Who is Chandragupta Maurya?

- Chandragupta overthrew the unpopular last king of the Nandas, Dhana Nanda, and occupied his capital, Pataliputra.
- Chandragupta's political mentor and chief adviser was **Chanakya** (also known as **Kautilya and Vishnugupta**) who wrote **Arthashastra**, the pioneering Indian treatise on political science, statecraft, military strategy, and economy.
- Guided by Kautilya and by his own military prowess, Chandragupta established mastery over the Gangetic plains and north-west and was successful against Seleucus Nicator, the successor to Alexander.
- Some matrimonial alliances followed as well, and during the campaign and afterward, there was considerable cultural contact between the Mauryans and the Greeks.
- The territorial foundation of the Mauryan Empire had been laid, with Chandragupta controlling the Indus and Ganges Plains and the borderlands.

## What made Chandragupta, the great emperor?

- With Pataliputra at its imperial centre, the Mauryan Empire for the first time unified most of South Asia.
- Chandragupta was the architect of an empire who controlled the plains of both the Indus and the Ganga which stretched until the eastern and western oceans.
- He laid the foundation of an extensive and efficient system of centralised administration and tax-collection that formed the bases of his empire.
- Trade and agriculture were reformed and regulated with the building of infrastructure and standardisation of weights and measures, and provisions were made for a large standing army.

## What is the relevance of Chandragupta and Alexander?

- Historians estimate the year of Chandragupta's rise to power from 324 BC to 313 BC, however, it is generally accepted that he ascended the throne in 321 BC.
- This would place him after Alexander had left India and just before the Greek emperor's death in Babylon.
- Greek sources suggest that Chandragupta may have been in communication with Alexander during the latter's Indian campaign.
- A L Basham notes that classical sources speak of a young Indian named **Sandrocottus** who is identical with the Chandragupta Maurya.

- Basham concluded that the emperor Chandragupta Maurya, who rose to power soon after Alexander's invasion, had at least heard of the conqueror, and perhaps derived inspiration from his exploits.

### **What is the perspective attributed to greatness?**

- In Indian history, 'great' has been used for the emperors Ashoka, Rajaraja and Rajendra Chola, and Akbar, among others.
- The world history notes Roman emperor Constantine, the Persians Cyrus and Darius, Herod, king of Judea, Catherine and Peter of Russia, and Frederick of Prussia as great.
- The use of the suffix 'great' has become less common in modern history-writing as historians are focusing on the society, economy, art and architecture of the rulers rather than their political victory.
- They have subjected the rulers' apparent greatness to new perspectives through a re-evaluation of old sources and by referencing those that have been discovered more recently.

### **Reference**

1. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/alexander-and-chandragupta-maurya-a-short-history-of-war-empire-and-greatness-7626667/>