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/

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