

(As they move through Pāṭaliputra, they take in its splendour—towering wooden ramparts with watch towers, majestic palaces and buildings, lively streets. Ira gestures towards a bustling market filled with traders from distant lands.)

"You must visit our main market before you leave! Our king welcomes travellers from all over, so you'll get silk from China, spices and gems from the south, fine clothes from different regions—there's nothing you won't find in Pāṭaliputra!"

"What are those people over there doing?" asked Dhruv.

"Oh, these are street acrobats; they build human pyramids, sing and dance, or act in short plays to entertain people. Sometimes, they perform in front of the king!"

"Your king sounds very powerful," remarked Bhavisha. "Does he rule the region around Pāṭaliputra?"

"Much more than that!" answered Ira. "He rules over a vast land, far, far beyond this city. His authority extends over many villages, towns and kingdoms. My uncle told me that it takes close to two months on horseback to reach the borders of the territory!"

"That sounds bigger than just a kingdom... What do you call it?"

"It is called an Empire," Ira stated with evident pride.

What is an Empire?

Language Spoken in Rome

The word 'empire' comes from the Latin 'imperium', which means 'supreme power'. Simply put, an empire is a collection of smaller kingdoms or territories over which a powerful ruler or group of rulers exert power, often after waging war against the smaller kingdoms. The smaller territories still had their own rulers, but they were all **tributaries** to the emperor, who ruled the whole territory from a capital, usually a major centre of economic and administrative power.

In ancient Sanskrit texts, words commonly used for 'emperor' made this clear; they included *samrāj*, meaning 'the lord of all' or 'supreme ruler'; *adhirāja* or 'overlord'; and *rājādhirāja* or 'king of kings'.

Tributary:
A tributary, in our case, is a ruler or a state that has submitted to an emperor and pays tribute—that is, money, gold (or other precious metals), grain, livestock, elephants or other valuable goods produced in their kingdom and is given to the emperor as a sign of submission, loyalty or respect. A synonym for 'tributary' is 'vassal', and another way to express this is to say that the tributary or vassal kingdoms accepted the emperor's overlordship.