

II-7. On the Ashes of the Magadh Empire

Rationally selected means can destroy rational thought.

- Klemens Szaniawski

The Vedic culture of the Indo-Ary appeared in the Sindhu Valley about 1000 years after the demise of the Dravidian civilization in Mohanjodaro, Harappa and Kaliganga. The Indo-Aryan influences on the Vedic culture are attributable to the multiple influxes of Iranian, Ionian and other groups from the Middle East. In 518 BCE Darius annexed the Western Sindhu valley as the 20th colony of the Iranians. Under the name of "five rivers" (*punj-ab*) it provided more "tributes" (taxes) than any other Iranian colony.

Flux of people to the Ganga Valley was probably facilitated by the down stream flow of the rivers towards Varanasi and Patliputr. Much of the way these rivers remain navigable in both directions for 9 months a year. The only other means of transport included elephants and ox-carts. The migrants introduced horse which provided the advantage of speed and maneuverability. It is also likely that the immigrants brought some food crops, and possibly new diseases against which the local populations and crops did not have resistance. There are indications that the region was periodically devastated by epidemics during the period of Aryan migration. All together such factors probably worked to the advantage of the immigrants.

As this region became center for trade and learning, its reputation attracted more invaders from the West. After the murder of his father, at the age of 20 Alexander came to power in Macedonia. Possibly as a distraction against the internal strife in his kingdom Alexander moved his armies East and South. With

brute force, cunning, deceit, and propaganda he marched through the crumbling Persian Empire. In 326 BCE Alexander came to the South-Eastern edge of the Persian Empire. His army refused to cross the Western-most branch, called Sindhu (Indus), of the five rivers of the Punjab province of the Sindhu Valley. On their return the expedition disintegrated before reaching home. While trying to find a sea route for the way back home, the Greek army moved south along the Western bank of Sindhu. In the delta region on the Arabian Sea they encountered new diseases. On the way back Alexander died (-323c) in Babylon with thwarted dreams.

In 315 BCE Chandrgupt defeated Seleucus Nicator, a Greek general who had come to Punjab and Afghanistan region in the wake of the retreat of Alexander. Sindhu Valley, and the region to the West up to Herat, Kandhar (Ganddhar) and Kabul were annexed into the Maurrya Empire. As the war settlement Seleucus married off his daughter to Chandrgupt. In return Seleucus received a suitable place in the Patliputr court. For the first time both the Ganga Valley and the Sindhu valley were under the same ruler. Chadragupt ruled from Patlipur. His Chief Minister, Chanakya Kautilya, advised: "*With increasing strength make war; when you have a clear advantage over a neighbor, march against him; do not disturb the customs of a newly conquered people.*"

Such a large territory (Figure II-2) could only be ruled through an extensive bureaucracy as is apparent from the edicts and other accounts. Even from the most modern standards it was clearly one of the most enlightened systems of governance. It was possibly based on the model of the city-states that had evolved in the region during the preceding 1000 years. In all likelihood, the city-states remained relatively autonomous as the tax-paying districts within the Empire. The operating motto for the

subsistence of the emperor and Empire is quoted in *Arthshastr* (which is ascribed to Chanakya Kautilya but in its present form it was compiled some 500 years later by Vishnugupt):

*In the happiness of his subjects lies a king's happiness,
In the welfare of his subjects, his welfare,
A king's good is not that which pleases him,
But that which pleases his subject.*

After 24 years of rule, the mighty Emperor abdicated power to his son in 298 BCE. As a historical footnote it is noteworthy that for the preceding 300 years the throne at Patliputr had changed hands through patricide. It is not clear why Chandrgupt Maurrya retired to Shravanbelgola that lay well beyond the border of his own Empire. It is also intriguing that about 40 years earlier Chadrgupti, the young ruler of Ujjain had become follower of Bhadrabahu (Essay II-9). Could it be that Chadrgupti of Ujjain is same person as Chandrgupt Maurrya? It is not impossible. A few years after the death of Bhadrabahu, around 328 BCE Chanakya and Chandrgupt made alliance to overthrow of Magadh Empire two years later.

At least on the surface, after Chandragupt the Maurrya Empire flourished with peace and quite under the leadership of Bindusar. Ashok, the grandson of Chandrgupt, went on to consolidate the empire on the Southeastern edge. The Kaling region was ruled by the Kharvel dynasty. Besides its independence, and prosperity from the sea-trade, it was also hospitable to monks who had fled earlier from the Ganga Valley. The slaughter at the battle of Kaling left Ashok overwhelmed. According to the rock-inscription at the battle site (see Essay II-5), Ashok immediately proceeded to amend his ways by stopping slaughter of animals for the royal kitchen. Following the "righteous way" he brought the golden age to his people with an

enlightened model of governance. Encouraged by this success Buddhism also began to offer a non-divine legitimacy to kings and their actions. One of the noblest utterances of Ashok from an edict, paraphrased by Jawaharlal Nehru, speaks highly of the political aspirations, if not the climate, of the era:

"All sects deserve reverence for one reason or another. By thus acting a man exalts his own sect and at the same time does service to the sects of other people."

In spite of such exalted views, a pernicious element had set in the statecraft. Under the influence of Chanakya the system was backed with a powerful military and an extensive network of spies. Its aphorism was: *"government is the science of punishment."* In its cold blooded cunning and deceit it matches the Machiavellian approach of the Italian bureaucrat born 1700 years later. The system used ruthless organizations. According to A. L. Basham (*The Wonder that was India*, 1963) kinds of spies included: *"Brahmans unable to make a living by their learning, merchants fallen on evil days, barbers, astrologers, humble servitors, prostitutes, peasant, and orphans raised to become fortune tellers and holy men."* Environment of secrecy also set the groundwork for a total destruction of the 2500-year old Ganga Valley civilization. What flourished under the protection of city-states could not withstand the transition to the glory days of the Maurrya Empire. As the monks moved out, the Empire also disintegrated within a few decades never to recover again.

Bounded rationality

We all make decisions and operate within limits. Possibly driven by the external ideals of power and good, the Maurya Empire extended limits of the conception of the power in the Ganga Valley. The drive was fueled by the shrewd and cunning dominated by another brand of "bounded rationality" epitomized by The *Arthshastr* of Kautilya (ca -315 c). It matches the confidential advice (ca 1480 CE) by a bureaucrat Machiavelli for the benefit of his masters the Medici of Italy. It was published under the title *The Prince* after his death in 1532. Such ideas have been brought into the analysis of economic behaviors as "bounded rationality" (Simon, 1982). All such behaviors cater to instincts of self-interest at some cost to others. Although survival under duress may require such means, they are used all too often for the so called 'greater good.' I believe the rise and fall of the Maurya Empire, and possibly of most Empires, are driven by such inconsistent and contradictory rationalizations designed to further more nefarious 'cause.'

Insight: A fundamental property of the stable system is called Nash equilibrium. It is a strategy profile in which no player can strictly benefit from unilaterally changing its strategy while all other players stay fixed. Crux of the Machiavellian and Chanakya strategies is to eliminate the dominant counter strategy, and then benefit from the chaos. It is clearly short-sighted. Many counterbalancing strategies are required to support a complex system. Invariably, it is nearly impossible to identify and eliminate all the counterbalancing strategies without destroying the system itself.

Thoughts about the uses of the past

- * Dangerous things are those that we do not know, and that ain't so (Mark Twain).
- * He who stops is lost (An ancient Egyptian Italian saying).
- * Things that don't get better get worse (Ellen Sue Stern)
- * Pick your fights carefully. Do not try to defend indefensible.
- * Wish carefully. It might come true and you may have to live with the consequences.
- * The major problems in the world are the result of differences between the way nature works and the way people think (Gregory Bateson).
- * There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening (Marshall McLuhan)
- * Everyman takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world (Arthur Schopenhauer).
- * A civilization progresses from Agriculture to paradox (E. M. Cioran)
- * Dare to be naive (Buckminster Fuller).
- * Great Ideas in world come into the world as gently as doves (Albert Camus)

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