

Accession of Chandragupta Maurya According to Jain Traditions

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Abstract

This paper studies the Jaina tradition impact on Chandragupta Maurya and his subsequent conversation to Jaina philosophy in Shravanabelagola. Chandragupta Maurya (c. 321 - c. 297 BCE), known as Sandrakottos (or Sandrokottos) to the Greeks, was the founder of the Maurya dynasty (4th to 2nd century BCE) and is credited with the setting up of the first (nearly) pan-Indian empire. Aided by his mentor and later minister Chanakya or Kautilya (c. 4th century BCE), he set up a vast centralized empire, details of whose functioning, society, military and economy are well preserved in Kautilya's Arthashastra.

There is little authentic information about Chandragupta's life. The ancestry of the Maurya Emperor Chandragupta is shrouded in mystery as different literary sources give different information's of the origin of the Mauryas. A commentator on Vishnu Puran first propounded the theory that Chandragupta Maurya was the son of Mura, one of the wives of the King Nanda. In the drama of Mudrarakshsa, Chandragupta is mentioned as "Vrishala, Kulahina, Mauryaputra" etc. From these terms it is interpreted that Mauryas were of sudra origin.

The Buddhist chronicle, 'Mahaparinirvana sutta' describes the Mauryas as Kshatriyas, ruling over Pippalivana and belonged to the clan of the Sakyas to which Gautama Buddha belonged. The "Mahabodhivamsa", "Digha Nikaya", "Divyavadana" describe the Mauryas as kshatriyas. According to Jaina Parisisthaparvan, Chandragupta was the son of a daughter of the chief of a village of peacock tamers or Mayura-poshaka. Both aristocratic and humble (sudra caste) origins have been ascribed to him. In his youth he served under the Nandas, the rulers of Magadha; he fought them for the throne, but he failed and fled to the northwestern part of the country. There he joined with the invading Greco-Macedonians and convinced Alexander the Great to wage war against the Nandas. After Alexander had left India, Chandragupta led a struggle to expel all the Greco-Macedonians from the country. He succeeded in doing so and resumed the fight for Magadha. After deposing Dhana Nanda, he ascended the throne himself. In subsequent wars, Chandragupta subjugated all of northern India and founded the Indian Mauryan empire. In 305 B.C. he repulsed the invasion of Seleucus I Nicator. In accordance with the peace treaty they signed, Chandragupta gave Seleucus 500 elephants, in exchange for which he acquired a large area west of the Indus River and received the daughter of Seleucus as his bride. According to some sources, Chandragupta adopted Jainism in 293 B.C. and became a Jain monk.

Keywords— Divyavadana, Chandragupta, Jainism, Magadha, Mauryas, Mahabodhivamsa, Nandas

Introduction

It is evident from the Maurya sculptures that peacock was dear to the Maurya dynasty. Coming from among the peacock tamers, Chandragupta carried the dynastic name of Mauryas. He came to the notice of Chanakya, who took him away to Taxila. Thus, it is historically reasonable to believe that Chandragupta was a Kshatriya and belonged to the Moriyas of Pippalivana. Early Life and Conquests of Chandragupta Maurya: The ancestry of Chandragupta Maurya has been known from the above discussion. It is generally accepted by the historians that he belonged to the Moriyas of Phppalivana. The Buddhist chronicle, "Mahavamsa Tika" throws light on the early life of Chandragupta. According to it, his father was a chief of the moriya clan and was killed in a battle. His widowed mother escaped to a city called Purushapur or Pataliputra where she gave birth to a son, who came to be known as Chandragupta. However, in a helpless state his mother left him and went away. He was then brought up by a cowherd who subsequently sold him to a hunter. He engaged this boy to tend cattles. It was right from his childhood that Chandragupta had exhibited signs of extraordinary intelligence and leadership. One day while Chandragupta was playing a mock royal court with his friends and administering justice like a learned judge, Chanakya (Kautilya) happened to pass by that way. He was impressed by the intelligence of the boy and purchased him from his adopted father.

Then Kautilya took him to Taxila to educate and train him with an object of the destruction of the Nanda dynasty. Chandragupta received education in humanities, arts, crafts and military science under the care and guidance of Kautilya. Chanakya had a very sad experience with the ruling king Dhana Nanda at Pataliputra. Chanakya was a learned Brahmin of Taxila who had come to Pataliputra for higher recognition. But Dhana Nanda humiliated him for his ugly appearance. His personal dignity was so much affected that he took a vow that he should try to destroy the Nanda king. It was at that time he came across Chandragupta whom he utilized for the purpose. Chandragupta came to the lime light of politics sometimes in 326 B.C. or 325 B.C. when he came to the camp of Alexander in Punjab. Both Plutarch and Justin, the Greek classical writers, mention that Chandragupta came to the camp of Alexander and requested him for the other throw of the Nandas. However Alexander felt so angry with his courage that he ordered for his arrest and execution. Chandragupta saved his life by a speedy flight. Justin tells that after this incident Chandragupta fled to the forest tract of Vindhya region. Then he raised an army from among the brave tribes of north-west and Punjab. Thus by strengthening his position, Chandragupta started his career of conquest.

We can divide the conquest of Chandragupta into four phases, viz., war of liberation from the Greeks, political revolution against the Nandas, the war with Seleucus, and other conquests. It was not an easy task for Chandragupta to liberate north-west from the yoke of Greeks. The Greek Satrapas of Alexander were exercising their control with the help of Macedonian garrison. However an undercurrent of Indian protest was working in the North-West as it is evident from the murder of Greek Satrapas Nicanor and Philoppos in 323 B.C. The death of Alexander and the conflict among his generals made the position of Greeks weak in India. Chandragupta took full advantage of the situation. Justin describes the story of liberation as follows. "India after the death of Alexander had shaken, as it were, the yoke of servitude from its neck and put his governors to death. The author of this liberation was Sandrocottus (Chandragupta)."

Objective:

The present paper looks at the accession of Chandragupta Maurya to Jain tradition and also the impact of the Jaina philosophy on Chandragupta Maurya

The Overthrow of the Nandas:

Chandragupta then turned his attention towards the overthrow of the Nandas. His task became easy as Agrammes or Dhana Nanda was very unpopular with his subjects. Chandragupta adopted various strategies to overthrow the Nanda power. According to Jaina and Buddhist traditions, Chandragupta, at first committed the blunder of attacking the centre of Magadha itself, but failed.

Mahavamsa Tika narrates a story in this regard that after this defeat while Chandragupta concealed himself in an old woman's hut, he overheard the old woman scolding her child who had burnt his fingers for eating the cake from the middle and not from one side. Chandragupta took it as a lesson and commenced the second attack from the frontier, guarded his rear and then besieged Pataliputra and killed Dhana Nanda. According to the Jaina writer Hemachandra, Dhana Nanda was not killed, but was allowed to leave the capital. By his conquests of Punjab, Sind and Magadha, Chandragupta made himself the master of the entire Indo-Gangetic plains and beyond, as far as the Hindukush.

According to Plutarch and Justin Chandragupta had the whole of India under his possession. But this statement appears to be an exaggeration of facts. According to H.C. Roychoudhury, "Chandragupta Maurya is the first historical founder of a great empire in India." Thus the Maurya Empire under Chandragupta Maurya extended up to the borders of Persia in the north-west; in the east it consisted of Magadha and probably Bengal, in the west it was bounded by the western sea near Saurashtra; in the south it extended up to the Chitaldrug district of Mysore and Nellore district of Madras with Pataliputra as its capital. Chandragupta Maurya was not only a great conqueror and an empire builder but also he was one of the efficient and greatest administrators of India. He had organized a very elaborate system of administration. We know about it from the account of Megasthenes and the Arthashastra of Kautilya.

Besides the Indika of Megasthenes and Arthashastra of Kautilya, the inscription of Asoka and Rudradaman and literary sources like Divyavadana and Mudrarakshyasa also throw light on Mauryan administration. On the basis of these sources we can form an idea about the Mauryan administration. The Mauryan administration can be divided into three branches namely Central Administration, Provincial Administration and Local Administration. The central administration consisted of the king, the council of ministers, advisers and other high officials. The Maurya king was an absolute ruler. He was at the apex of administration. His ideal of kingship was benevolent despotism. The main principle of administration was welfare of the people. He was the head of the executive, the law giver, and the supreme judge. He was also the supreme commander-in-chief. With all these powers, the king was working as an enlightened despot for all practical purposes.

Morality of Chandragupta's Empire:

In the work of administration the king was assisted by a council of Ministers or Mantri Parishada who were noted for wisdom. Besides the Mantri Parishada, there was a smaller body of advisers or counselors known as Mantris constituting the inner cabinet. It consisted of the Mantrin (Prime Minister), the Purohit (Royal Priest), the Senapati (commander-in-chief) and Yuvaraja (Crown prince).

There were also other high officials who supervised different branches of administration. They were Samharta (Collector General), Sannidhata (Officer in charge of treasury), Darvarika (Gate Keeper), Antarvesika (Officer in charge of harem), Prasathi (Inspector General of Prisons), Pradestri (Divisional Commissioner), Nayaka (City constable), Paura (Governor of the capital), Vyavaharika (Chief justice), Mantri Parisadadhyakshya (President of the council) Dandopala (Police chief), Durgapala (Officer in charge of home defences), and Antapala (Officer in charge of frontier defenses).

From Kautilya's Arthashastra it is known that there were about 26 departments managed by the ministers. Different departments were the Kost (Treasury), Akara (Mines), Loha (Metal), Lausana (Mint), Lavana (Salt), Suvarna (gold), Kosthagara (Store house), Ayunhadhagara (Armory), Pautava (weights and measure), Mana (measurement of time and space), Sulka (tolls), Sutra (Spinning and weaving) Seta (Cultivation of crown lands), Sura (liquor) Suna (Slaughter houses), Mudra (Passports), Vivita (Pastures), Dyuta (Gambling), Bandhanaghara (jails), Gau (cattle), Nau (Shipping), Pattana (Ports), Ganika (Countesans), Samastha (trade) Devata (religious institutions) and the army superintendents those of Patts (infantry), Asva (Horse), Hasti (elephant) and Ratha (Chariots).

Thus the Maurya administration was a highly centralized bureaucracy. The Ministers discharged their duties for the welfare of the unemployed, widows, destitute, orphans, and Musicians etc. The Government of Chandragupta paid much attention to the welfare works.

Dharmasthaniya Administration of Justice:

The king was at the apex of judicial administration. There were chains of courts right from the village tribunals at the bottom. The village headman and village elders usually settled the smaller disputes within their local areas. There were two types of higher courts namely civil and criminal.

The civil courts were known as the “Dharmasthaniya” courts. The civil courts were presided over by three Amatyas assisted by three learned Brahmins called Dharmasthas. These courts dealt with cases of disputes as on marriage, divorce, dowry, inheritance of property, houses, lands, boundaries, debts, contracts etc. The criminal courts termed as the “Kantakasodhana” courts were presided over by three Amatyas assisted by a number of spies and agents. These courts tried murderers, traitors to the country, political offenders, thieves, violators of Laws, and criminals.

According to Megasthenes, the Maurya system of punishment was very severe and crimes were extremely rare. Fines, forced labour, whipping, mutilation and execution were methods of punishment. Kautilya refers to a number of prevailing modes of torture, and suggests that, “those whose guilt is believed to be true shall be subjected to torture”.

In the time of Asoka justice was tempered with kindness. Asoka instructed his Mahamatras to avoid causeless imprisonment and harassment of people. Several officials were employed by Asoka to tour the provinces after three or five years and it was their duty to see that no injustice was done to the people.

Megasthenes refers to war office which consisted of 30 members. The 30 members were divided into 6 Boards of 5 members each. The first board was in-charge of navy. The second board was in-charge of transport, commissariat, and army service. The third board was in-charge of infantry. The fourth board dealt with cavalry. The fifth board was concerned with war-chariots and the sixth board was in-charge of elephants. From Kautilya’s Arthashastra it is known that entire army worked under the control of the Senapati or the commander-in- chief. There were other army officers of rank next to the Senapati like the Prasasta, the Nayaka, and the Mukhya. There were also forts to defend the frontiers of the empire as well as its capital.

Council of Ministers and Other High Officials:

He succeeded in conquering most of the Indian subcontinent. With his accession to the throne Jainism assumed a new phase in the Indian history. According to the Jain texts he is believed to have been born in a high family of kshatriya caste. Chandragupta Maurya had a firm inclination towards Jainism. A Jain tradition related in the Tiloyapannatt and Rajavalikatha claims him to be a Jain. According to a Jain text Lord Mahavira preached among the Mauryas. One of the chief apostles of Mahavira was a Moriyaputta and there were also many other Moriyaputtas who became his disciples. Chandragupta has always been styled as a Jain king. Apart from Indians, many Greek historians have mentioned about the existence of Jain monks within the empire of Chandragupta. Megasthenese, the Greek emissary to Chandragupta's court, mentions of Sarmanas (Sramanas) in his empire. He also says that Chandragupta submitted to the devotional teaching of the Sramanas.

The Jain religion undoubtedly gained much importance in Magadha during the time of the later Saisunagas, the Nandas and the Mauryas. Jainas habitually employ Brahmanas for their domestic ceremonies but in Mudra- Rakshasa, a Jain ascetic has been mentioned as being a special friend of the minister Rakshasa, who served first the Nanda and then the new sovereign.

Renunciation of Chandragupta Maurya retiring Shravanabelagola

The important occasion of Chandragupta Maurya's reign was the forecast of a twelve years famine. At that time Acharya Bhadrabahu was the head of the Jain church. According to the Jain text Rajvaliya Katha, the king saw sixteen dreams. He requested Bhadrabahu to interpret the dreams. The latter explained all the dreams and according to the last one, he predicted a famine of twelve years.

The copper plate inscription of Sohagaura in the Gorakhpur district and Mahasthana inscriptions in the Bogra District provide evidences of this famine. It also describes about the precautions taken by the affected persons. The inscriptions have been written in Brahmi script during the time of Chandragupta Maurya.

Fearing the consequences and complexities of the prophecy of Bhadrabahu, a large number of Jains moved towards the South. This also included Bhadrabahu. Chandragupta, who was a follower of Bhadrabahu, gave up his throne. He crowned his son Simhasena and went to South. Both the teacher and pupil lived at a foot hill for some years after which Bhadrabahu died in the orthodox Jain way Sallekhana. He had completely rejected food. Chandragupta being the main disciple performed his funeral rites. After this event, Simhasena's son Bhaskar came to South India. He respected Chandragupta and had erected a town named Belgola.

Conclusion

Maurya Empire was founded in 322 BCE by Chandragupta Maurya, who had overthrown the Nanda Dynasty, and rapidly expanded his power, with Chanakya's help, westward across central and western India. His expansion took advantage of the disruptions of local powers in the wake of the withdrawal westward by Alexander the Great's armies. By 316 BCE, the empire had fully occupied Northwestern India, defeating and conquering the satraps left by Alexander. Chandragupta then defeated the invasion led by Seleucus I, a Macedonian general from Alexander's army, and gained additional territory west of the Indus River.

Chandragupta Maurya lived at Shravanabelagola for several years in a cave. There he spent his time worshipping the foot-prints of his teacher Bhadrabahu. He finally ended his life following the Jain fashion. According to the Tibetan account Kautilya saw the abdication of Chandragupta Maurya. The Mauryan Emperor Chandragupta Maurya retired to Shravanabelagola along with Bhadrabahu, a disciple of Lord Mahavira around 300 B.C to become a Jain ascetic, after handing over his kingdom to his son Bindusara. Thus, Jainism became popular in Karnataka during that period. There are some 500 inscriptions in Shravanabelagola recording the slow death by starving of the Jain ascetics.

Chandragupta was influenced to accept Jainism by the sage Bhadrabahu I, who predicted the onset of a 12-year famine. When the famine came, Chandragupta made efforts to counter it, but, dejected by the tragic conditions prevailing, he left to spend his last days in the service of Bhadrabahu at Shravanabelagola, where Chandragupta fasted to death.

There are some Jain temples (Bastis) and Jain mutts in the smaller Chandragiri hill. The most important among them is the Chandragupta Basti built by Emperor Ashoka who is the grandson of Chandragupta.

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