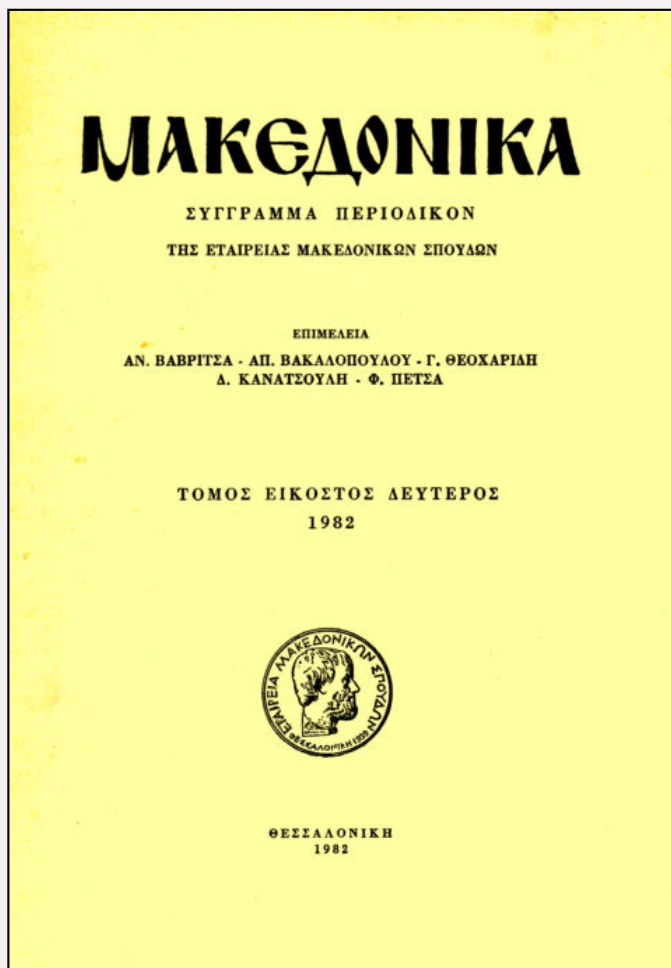


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### Greek image of the Indian society

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## GREEK IMAGE OF THE INDIAN SOCIETY

Indians were not mentioned in classical literature till a comparative by late period of Greek History. It is doubtful if any information regarding the Indians reached Greece before the rise of the Persian empire. In Homer's *Odyssey* there is a mention of the dark-skinned Ethiopians as remote peoples, one part of them living towards the setting sun, while the other towards the rising<sup>1</sup>. The latter, i.e., the Eastern Ethiopians have been identified by some as Homer's conception of the Indians<sup>2</sup>. It is true the Indians were often confused with the Ethiopians in Ancient Greek literature<sup>3</sup>, but to speculate of them in Homer's reference of Eastern Ethiopians is untenable. It seems to be poet's imagination, for it was thought that the sun being closer to the Earth at its rising and setting points, would darken the complexion of the people in those areas. The Greeks seem to have been acquainted with the Indians at a very late stage, for neither Homer, nor Pindar, nor the Greek dramatists like Sophocles and Euripides had mentioned anything about them.

The Greek knowledge of the Indians began as a result of the rise of Persian Empire, which had touched Greece at one extremity and India at the other. The Indians of the Indus region and the Greeks of the colonized Ionian cities were together serving in the Persian Court. This condition provided an opportunity, which was more favourable for the interchange of the ideas, knowing the advanced civilizations of the Orient the colonized Greeks of Ionia had widened their horizon more than those of their brothers living on the mainland. Thus the introduction of the Indians in the West is owed to these Ionian Greeks. The more well-known among them were the Scylax of Caryanda, Hekataios of Miletus, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, and Ktesias of Knidos.

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1. Homer, *Odyssey*, I, 23-24.

2. McCrindle, *Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, Calcutta 1877, Vol. II, pp. 3-4.

3. For exhaustive references on India-Ethiopia question see Frank M. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1970, p. 277, n. 1. Also see my article: *India vis a-vis Ethiopia-Egypt in classical accounts «Graeco Arabia»*, Vol. I, Athens 1982. The India-Ethiopia Confusion continued to exist among certain classical authors even in the Roman period when as a result of growth in Roman trade with India via Egypt and the Red Sea the geographical knowledge was greatly increased.

When we turn to the accounts of these early authors regarding their knowledge of the Indians, we observe that very few accurate informations of them have reached us. However a distinction between the Arayans and the people of non-Arayans stock can be guessed in Scylax's reference of Indian king as of superior race than those of his subjects<sup>1</sup>; in Herodotus's segregation of the warlike peoples of Kaspatyros and peoples with primitive customs<sup>2</sup>; and in Ktesia's differentiation of the white Indians from those of the dark-skinned<sup>3</sup>. In comparison of the civilized Indians, the lives and customs of aboriginals were better known to these authors. Herodotus's account of the primitive tribes seems to be reliable, but references to them in Scylax and Ktesias are not made in an intelligent form which is indicative rather of contact with the stories than their knowledge of the people. From the survived fragments of these early authors India seems to be a country of many races, mainly dark-skinned, with peculiar customs and habits. The dark colour was generally considered as the result of the sun, but on account of having seen some white Indians also Ktesias raised his doubts against this conjecture<sup>4</sup>.

When we come to the account of Alexander's companions we find them mentioning the Indians as a tall and dark people. «Tall and slender and much lighter in movement than the rest of mankind» remarked Nearchos<sup>5</sup>. Onesicritus exaggerately reported that in the shadowless parts of India, there were men five cubits and two spans high<sup>6</sup>. Nearchos's statement may be accepted as nearer to truth for the people inhabiting mainly the North-western region of India only Onesicritus erroneously associated the dark colour of the Indians with the water of land, but Theodectes had argued that it was on account of country's nearness to sun<sup>7</sup>.

The phenomenon of considering Indians as the dark and tall people was repeated by the authors, succeeding the companions of Alexander. Dionysus periegetes, a Geographer of the Roman-age reported Indians as «dark in complexion, their limbs exquisitely sleek and smooth and the hair of their surpassing soft, and darkblue like the hyacinth»<sup>8</sup>. The Indians were remarked by Arrian as «tall in stature, in fact the tallest man in Asia, five cubits, most

1. Scylax, Jacoby Fragments No. 709, F. 5 (Aristotle, Pol., 7, 13, Ip. 1332b).

2. Herod. III 98-102.

3. Ktesias, Jac. No. 688, F. 45/19 (Phot., Bib., 72, 46a, 24-28).

4. Ibid.

5. Nearchus, Jac. No. 133, F. 11 (Arr., Ind., XVII, 1).

6. Onesicritus, Jac. No. 134, F. 11 (Pliny, N. H., VII, 28).

7. Onesic., F. 22 (Strabo, XV, 1, 44).

8. Dion. Perieg. L. 1110-13 (ed. G. Müller, Geographici Graeci Minores, Vol. II, 102 ff., Paris 1855-61).



of them or very little short of it»<sup>1</sup>. King, Poros was reported by Arrian over five cubits in height<sup>2</sup>. He also described the Indians as of darker skin than the rest of mankind, except the Ethiopians<sup>3</sup>. Various authors of the Roman age thought that the Indians who lived in the South bore a somewhat closer resemblance to the Ethiopians, because of their black complexion and black-hair although they were not so snub-nosed nor had the hair so curly. But the Indians who lived in the North were more similar to Egyptians in their colour<sup>4</sup>.

The Brahmanas, Gymnosophists, Philosophers, or Sophists, as variously named were preeminent in the writings of the classical authors. The first reference of them is probably echoed in Herodotus's description of the people who were neither killing any creature, nor sowing any crops, nor living in houses and were subsisting on herbs and on some millet sized grain only<sup>5</sup>.

In the accounts of Alexander's companions the Brahmanas appear in two guises, firstly as inspiring the revolts of peoples, i.e., appearing as a group or community who were in a position to be troublesome to Alexander and secondly as a group of «wise-men» who had greatly influenced the invaders. Nearchos's statement that some of them were involved in the political life while the others were engaged in the study of nature<sup>6</sup>, is in agreement with the Indian evidences. The political and military roles of the Brahmanas are well-known in Indian-History, as several important dynasties of ancient India like those of the Sungas, Kanvas, Satavahanas, etc. were of the Brahmanas. In the very first Indian text the *Rgveda*, the priest is shown taking active interest in state's affairs, thus appearing as a forerunner of the Brahmana statesman<sup>7</sup>. Even in the middle ages Brahmanas had continued to play the role of military protector. Monasteries belonging to them were known as *Akharas*, which were schools of martial arts and monk armies had fought the successive

1. Arrian, *Anab.*, V, 4.

2. *Ibid.*, 19.

3. *Ibid.*, 4.

4. *Ibid.*, VI, 9; Strabo, XV, 1, 13 and 24; Pseudo-Callisthenes, III, 8; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, VI, 70; Apul., *Flor.*, 6; Florus, 4, 12, 62; Lucan, *Phars*, 4, 678 f.

5. Herod., III, 100.

6. Nearchus, F. 23 (Strabo, XV, 1, 66).

7. A. B. Keith in *Camb. Hist. of India*, Vol. I, pp. 95-96. Keith writes, «there is no reason to doubt that a Visvamitra or Vasistha was a most important element of the Government of the early Vedic realm. It is clear too from the hymns which are attributed to the families of the sages that the *Purohita* (priest) accompanied the king into battle and seconded his efforts for victory by his prayers and spells. In return for his faithful services, the rewards of the *Purohitas* of the *Rigveda* tell of the generous gifts of patrons to the poets, and we may safely assume that the largest donations were those of kings to the '*Purohitas*'».

waves of Afghani invaders<sup>1</sup>.

The naked sadhus of Taxila, with whom Alexander and his companions had conversed might be Jain sages, among whom the practice of remaining naked is common even today in one of their sects. The self-immolation, as stated in the case of Brahmana Kalanos<sup>2</sup> by the companions of Alexander finds support in some of the Indian texts. For example in the *Vasistha Sutra* it was stated that the world of Brahman is obtained by entering the fire<sup>3</sup>. In some of the late *Upanishadic* works, it is expressively laid down that the *Sanyasin* (ascetic), who had acquired full insight, may enter upon the great journey, or choose death by voluntary starvation, by drawing, by fire or by a hero's fate<sup>4</sup>. But this was not a general practice, for the attitude of *Sanyasin* was ideally considered one of indifference. It was said, «He should not wish to die, nor hope to live, but await the time appointed as a servant awaits his wages...»<sup>5</sup>.

The episode of Alexander's meeting with the Gymnosophists of Taxila had so much excited the West that the theme was later on embellished by several authors and for 2,000 years the name of the Gymnosophists or naked philosophers, remained common culture of lettered men.

Except the Brahmanas and some warring tribes the other classes of Indian society are not described in the accounts of Alexander's companions. This was left for Megasthenes who made great additions in the Greek stock of knowledge regarding the Indians. He described the seven classes of the Indians, which included Philosophers, Farmers, Hunters and Herdsmen, Craftsmen and Traders, Soldiers, Overseers, and Councillors, i.e., the assessors of the King<sup>6</sup>. The farmers were reported to be largest in number<sup>7</sup>; next were sol-

1. See R. S. Tripathi's remarks in «Indian Historical Quarterly», p. 558.

2. Nearchus, F. 4 (Arrian. Anab., VII, 3, 6); Chares, Jac. No. 125, F. 19 (Athen., 8, 49, p. 437 a).

3. XXIX, 4.

4. P. Deussen, The Philosophy of the Upanisadas, Eng. trans., P. 382 (Edinburgh 1906); F. O. Schrader, The Minor Upanisadas, I, 39, 390 f. (Madras 1912). The great journey is probably wandering on without food until the death takes place. See especially A. B. Keith's article on 'suicide' in Hastings's «Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics», Vol. XII pp. 33-34.

5. Manu, VI, 45 ff. Quoted from A. L. Basham, The Wonder that was India, p. 177 (Fontana 1971).

6. Megasthenes, Jac. No. 715, F. 4 (Diod., Bib., II, 40-41); F. 19a (Arr. Ind., 11-12); F. 19b (Strabo, XV, 1, 39-41, 45, 46-49).

7. F. 4 (Diod., Bib., II, 40, 4); F. 19a (Arr. Ind., XI, XI, 9); F. 19b (Strabo, XV, 1, 40).



diers<sup>1</sup>; the philosophers<sup>2</sup> and councillors<sup>3</sup> were reported as smaller in number. His observation of craft-exclusiveness and endogamy are undoubtedly a characteristic of the rigid caste system, but his seven-fold division has little in common with the four regular or a large number of the mixed castes of India. It seems that Megasthenes had confused the castes with the professions or occupations which he could see going on around him in the 3rd century B.C. He mixed these two and then probably already having Herodotus's seven classes of Egypt<sup>4</sup> in mind evolved his own seven classes. He had recognized the supremacy of Philosophers in the Indian society and found two main groups amongst them, the (Βραχμᾶνας) and (Γαρμᾶνας)<sup>5</sup>. The word «Γαρμᾶνας» in Strabo's account of Megasthenes seems to be mistaken for Σαρμᾶνας, i.e., the Sanskrit *Sramanas*, a word used for Buddhist monks, But in Megasthenes it refers to most likely as ascetics in general irrespective of their particular religious sect. Such distinction between the Brahmanas and ascetics was also known to the companions of Alexander.

In the Roman period similar distinction between the Brahmanas and Sramanas was made Bardessanes of Edessa. Bardessanes had rightly remarked that whereas the Brahmanas were succeeded by the right of birth, the Sramanas (Greek, Σαμανοῖσι) were included from all the groups.

His description of the monastic life is a graphic one<sup>6</sup> and adds valuable informations to our knowledge. The division of the philosophers between the Brahmanas and *pramnai* was mentioned by Strabo<sup>7</sup>. The *pramnai* seem to be the *pramamikas*, i.e. the flowers of the different Philosophical systems, who were also the Brahmanas but had rejected that group of the Brahmanas which had faith in vedic rituals. Ptolemy, the Geographer spoke about the Brahmanas who were known as «Βραχμᾶναι Μάγοι»<sup>8</sup>. They seem to have been originated from the Persian Magis but after their immigration in India were assim-

1. F. 4 (Diod., Bib., II, 41, 2); F. 19a (Arr. Ind., XII, 2).

2. F. 4 (Diod., Bib., II, 40, 1); F. 19a (Arr. Ind. XI, 2) F. 19b (Strabo, XV, 1, 39).

3. F. 19a (Arr. Ind., XII, 7); F. 4 (Diod., Bib., II 41, 4).

4. Herod., II, 167. The Egyptians were divided into seven classes named after their occupations; priests, warriors, cowherds, swineherds, tradesmen, interpreters and pilots. For Megasthenes' reliance on Herodotus, see T. S. Brown, The Reliability of Megasthenes in «American Journal of Philology» 76 (1955) 18-33. Also see O. Murray, Herodotus and Hellenistic Culture, in «Classical Quarterly», XXII (1972) 208 ff.

5. F. 33 (Strabo, XV, 1, 59).

6. Bardessanes, Jac. No. 719, F. 2 (Porph., De. Abst., 4, 17, 2-4).

7. Strabo, XV, 1, 70-71.

8. Cl. Ptolem., Geog., VII, 1, 74.

lated into the Hindu population and got the rank of the Brahmanas<sup>1</sup>. The Brahmanas were greatly eulogised in the Roman-age by the authors like Dio-Chrysostom, Philostratos, and several others<sup>2</sup>.

Regarding the wives of the Brahmanas, Alexander's companion Nearchus had said that they were well-versed in the study of philosophy and allowed to lead even an ascetic life<sup>3</sup>. This statement is in agreement with the reality for many of the philosophical works of Ancient India are credited to women.

The classical accounts reveal that the women in India were not left behind than those of their male partners. Diodorus reports the whole army of women which gloriously fought with Alexander<sup>4</sup>. The women archers, guarding the Indian King were seen by Megasthenes<sup>5</sup>. The administration of the Pandya nation in India was reported to have been carried by a woman<sup>6</sup>. According to Megasthenes some of the women among the Brahmanas were also studying philosophy and doing ascetic practices<sup>7</sup>. Contrary to Nearchos, Megasthenes erroneously reported that the Brahmanas having families were not sharing their knowledge of philosophy with their wives<sup>8</sup>. This may be true in few cases which Megasthenes might have seen, but it cannot be taken as a general truth. His another statement that the wives were prostituting themselves<sup>9</sup> is against a brilliant picture of ideal relationship between husband and wife, which have been a well-known, feature of Hindu Society. From Megasthenes's statement, it may be guessed, that the ideal was not unoften far removed from practice.

The first definite evidence of *sati* custom, i.e. burning of widows with their deceased husbands has come to us through the accounts of Alexander's companions. The custom according to them existed only among certain tribes. Aristobulus observed, that the wives were glad to be burned up along with their deceased husbands and that those would not submit to it were held in disgrace<sup>10</sup>. Relating a story regarding the origin of this custom, Onesicri-

1. Mc Crindle, Ancient India as described by Ptolemy, p. 349 (re-edited by S.N. Majumder, Calcutta 1927).

2. See esp. Dio. Chrysostomos, Oration, XXXV, 434 and XLIX, 538; Hierocles in Stephanus of Byzantium, 1. c. Βραχμᾶνες; Philostratos, Apoll. Tya., VI, 11; Philon, Quod. om. prob. liber sit, XI, 74.

3. Nearchos, F. 23 (Strabo, XV, 1, 66).

4. Diod., Bib., XVII, 84, 5.

5. Meg., F. 32 (Strabo, XV, 1, 55).

6. F. 13a (Arrian, Ind., IX).

7. F. 33 (Strabo, XV, 1, 60).

8. F. 33 (Strabo, XV, 1, 59).

9. F. 32 (Strabo, XV, 1, 54).

10. Aristobulus, Jac. No. 139, F. 42 (Strabo, XV, 1, 62).



tus reported that in the country of Cathaea the women were falling in love with young men, deserting their husbands or poisoning them. This law of *Sati* was therefore instituted with a view to abolish this practice of administering poison<sup>1</sup>. Such story does not occur in any Indian account and seems to be either fabrication of the traveller or a certain tale current among the natives, from whom Onesicritus might have taken. Repeating this story the Hellenistic author Diodorus added that the custom was not compulsory, but those who chose to remain widows to the end of their lives were for ever excommunicated from the sacrifices and other solemnities as being an impious person. Therefore, rather than endure the excess of infamy which would attend its refusal, women were willingly submitted to the death ordained. Diodorus's description of the custom at the funeral of the Indian General Keteus reveals that becoming *Sati* was considered to be the highest honour and the wives used to contend with each other for that<sup>2</sup>.

Nicolaus Damaescanus: corroborates Diodorus in stating that the custom of *Sati* was a voluntary choice<sup>3</sup>. The custom was further mentioned by Aelian<sup>4</sup> and Philo<sup>5</sup>. The latter had instanced this practice, in order to justify the act of Abraham, who had sacrificed his own son.

The observation of Classical authors regarding the position of women can be corroborated by the Indian evidences also. The Amazonian body guards of the king were mentioned in the *Arthashastra*, in the Chapter on personal safety. Armed with bows, they were posted near the king's bed chamber, and were receiving him on getting up from his bed<sup>6</sup>. That the Pandaeon nation of the South was governed by a female was not unlikely for matriarchy prevailed in South India<sup>7</sup>. In Megasthenes's description of ascetic women studying philosophy, we may recognize the *Brahmavadini* women, i.e., life long students of sacred texts. The grammarian Panini referred to women students of Vedic studies<sup>8</sup>, while Katyayana in his *Varttika* mentioned the women teachers, who were teaching philosophy<sup>9</sup>. Regarding the custom of *Sati* it may be said that although certain historical instances of the custom may be

1. Onesicritus, F. 21 (Strabo, XV, 1, 30).

2. Diod., Bib., XIX, 33.

3. Nic. Dam. Jac. No. 90, F. 124 (Joann. Stob. Anthol., IV, 55, 18).

4. Aelian, *Varia Historia*, VI, 18.

5. Philo, *On Abraham*, 182-183.

6. *Arth.*, I, 21, 1.

7. See Aitekar, *Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, p. 220 (Beraras 1956).

8. *IV*, 1, 63.

9. *On IV*, 1, 48.



furnished<sup>1</sup> to corroborate the classical authors it was not a binding. Many well-known ladies of ancient India, such as Prabhavati devi (Queen of the Vakataka dynasty of the South), Mayanalla devi (mother of Jayasimha Siddharaja of Gujrata), Karpura devi (mother of the Chahmana Prithviraja III of Ajmer), and Alhana devi (mother of the Kalchuri Narasimha of Tripuri) did not practice this rite, but were greatly respected on account of devotion to their husbands<sup>2</sup>.

For the types of marriages among the Indians, our information in Greek accounts come from Alexander's companions and Megasthenes only. Three types of marriages were encountered by Alexander's followers. Marriage with mutual consent, i.e.<sup>3</sup>, the *Gandharva Vivaha*<sup>4</sup>, the winning of a bride through some ordeal, i.e.<sup>5</sup>, the *Svayamvara* custom and the marriage by purchase<sup>6</sup>, which was known as the *Asura Vivaha*<sup>7</sup> in the text of *Manu*, and was greatly condemned. According to Aristobulus, the marriage by purchase was prevalent among those, who by reason of poverty were unable to marry their daughters. As an eye witness of this Custom in the region around Taxila, Aristobulus reported that the girls were brought to market place for sale and were left to be examined by the persons interested. They cohabited on such terms as may be agreed upon<sup>8</sup>.

Regarding the marriage custom of the Indians, Megasthenes stated that the Indians married many wives, whom they bought from their parents, giving in exchange a yoke of oxen. The polygamy was found more common among the Brahmanas. Explaining the reason for this Megasthenes said that they had many wives in order to have numerous children<sup>9</sup>; for from many wives the number of earnest children would be greater; and since they had no servants, it was necessary for them to provide for more service from child-

1. The wife of Goparaja, the general of the Gupta King Bhanugupta is known to have ascended the funeral pyre of her husband in A.D. 510. Some queens of Kashmir and Queen Rajyavati of Nepal (8th century) performed the *Sati* rite. Gundambe, the wife of Nagadeva a minister of Calukya Satyasraya of the Deccan (10th century) burnt herself with her husband, who had lost his life in a battle. During the reign of the Cola King Rajendra I of South India, a Sudra woman Dekabee had become *Sati* in 1057 A.D. King Harskavadhana's mother Yasomati also became *Sati*. The existence of a large number of *Sati* memorial tablets in Central India and Deccan prove, that the practice was common in this region.

2. The cultural Heritage of India, Calcutta 1967, Vol. II, pp. 597-98.

3. Onesic., F. 21 (Strabo, XV, 1, 30).

4. Manu, III, 32.

5. Nearchos, F. 23 (Strabo, XV, 1, 66).

6. Aristob., F. 42 (Strabo, XV, 1, 52).

7. Manu, III., 51.

8. Aristob., F. 42 (Strabo, XV, 1, 62).

9. Meg., F. 32 (Strabo, XV, 1, 54).

ren<sup>1</sup>. For the age of bride, Megasthenes informed that among the Pandayan people of India the girls were married at the age of seven and the men lived at most forty years<sup>2</sup>. The early marriage among this particular tribe was in consistence with the fact of their short life-span.

So far as the Indian evidences are concerned polygamy was not encouraged in early legal literature. The *Narada Smriti* mentioned that a polygamist was unfit to testify in a court of law<sup>3</sup>. The text *Arthashastra* laid down various rules which discouraged wanton polygamy, including the payment of compensation to the first wife<sup>4</sup>. The ideal models of Hindu marriage are the hero Rama and his faithful wife Sita. However, polygamous marriages were so frequently mentioned that we may assume their prevalence among all sections of ancient Indian community, who could afford. In the epic literature the great heroes like Krishna, Duryodhana, Bhima, Arjuna, Dasaratha, etc. were reported to have many wives. Megasthenes's reference to the privileged position of the Brahmanas in connection with polygamous marriage is attested by the *Smriti* writers, who recommend more wives for the Brahmanas than those of the other castes<sup>5</sup>. The mention of purchasing bride in exchange of a pair of oxen is in conformity with the custom of the *Arsha Vivaha*<sup>6</sup>, recognized by the Hindu legal texts. Although, Megasthenes's observation of the seven years age of bride can be corroborated by a passage of *Manusmriti*<sup>7</sup>, it was not at all common. The most of the evidences in the epics *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are overwhelmingly in favour of the marriage of well-developed and grown up girls. The heroines of Sanskrit dramas and fictions were apparently full grown when they married and the actual historical examples such as that of Rajyasri, sister of Harsha, also support this view<sup>8</sup>. The numerous inscriptions discovered give little or no indication of child marriage<sup>9</sup>.

The slavery was found to be absent in India by the Greek travellers. Whereas Alexander's companion Onesicritus found its absence in the Indian land of Mousicanos only<sup>10</sup>, Megasthenes extended the phenomenon for the Whole

1. Meg., F. 33 (Strabo, XV, 1, 59).

2. F. 13a (Arr. Ind. IX. 1).

3. Narada, I, 90.

4. Arth. III, 2.

5. Manu, III, 13; Baudhayana, I, 16, 2-5; Vasistha, I 24-25; Vishnu, XXIV, 1-4; Yajna Valkya, I, 57; Paraskara Grihya Sutra, I, 4, 8-11.

6. Manu, III, 29.

7. Manu, IX, 94.

8. R. C. Majumdar, Age of Imperial Unity, Bombay 1953, p. 561.

9. Basham, The Wonder that was India, Fontana book 1971, p. 167.

10. Onestc., F. 20 (Strabo, XV, 1, 34).



of India<sup>1</sup>. It would be a remarkable feature if, it were true. But there are so many references to the system of slavery in the Indian texts that it is difficult to accept Megasthenes statement as true. In fact, while viewing India the Greek travellers had in their mind the slavery as known to them. Indian slavery was so different to a Greek observer from the slavery he knew at home that it was difficult for him to recognize it. D. D. Kosambi has argued that slavery of the Greek type did not develop in India because at the time of the invasion, the conquering Aryans had tribal property, not private property<sup>2</sup>.

As to the food of the Indians, Herodotus had described the primitive cannibals<sup>3</sup>, fish eaters<sup>4</sup>, and the vegetarian ascetics, living mainly on some millet sized grain<sup>5</sup>. Ktesias had heard the Indian cheese and wine as the sweetest<sup>6</sup>. Megasthenes had found the rice-pottage as the main meal of the Indians<sup>7</sup>, which was true for the region where he was mainly staying. He found meat-eating common even among the Brahmanas. According to him only the ascetics, and the Brahmanas during the period of their studentship were not eating meat<sup>8</sup>. In the Roman age, the vegetarianism of the Indians was greatly eulogized by Philostratos. He stated that the Brahmanas had taught the sages of Egypt to avoid animal food and from them Pythagoras took his rule of life, who was in contact with the Egyptians<sup>9</sup>.

Regarding the wine-drinking, the companions of Alexander had observed the Indians as lover of alcoholic drinks<sup>10</sup>, but Megasthenes declared that the Indians never drank wine except on some sacrificial rite<sup>11</sup>. A papyri text of the Roman period refers to the sale of wine as forbidden in some part of Southern India<sup>12</sup>. But Plutarch erroneously went on to mention India as an introducer of wine<sup>13</sup>.

1. Meg., F. 32 (Strabo, XV, 1, 59).

2. Kosambi, On a Marxist Approach to Indian Chronology in «Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute» 31 (1950) 262. Also see, B. Breloer, Kautilya Studien, II, pp. 11-14, 68-69; R. P. Kangle, Kaut. Arth. III, 187.

3. Herod., III, 38 and 99.

4. III, 98.

5. III, 100.

6. Ktesias, F. 45 (48).

7. Meg. F. 32 (Strabo, XV, 1, 53).

8. Meg. F. 33 (Strabo, XV, 1, 54).

9. Philost., Apoll. Tya., VIII, 4.

10. Chares, Jac. No. 125, F. 19a (Athen., X, 49, P. 437 AB).

11. F. 32 (Strabo, XV, 1, 53).

12. D. L. Page, Select Papyri (Loeb), Vol. III, p. 343.

13. Plutarch, Moralia, 957B.



Like the Greek accounts, the Indian sources also furnish contradictory passages regarding teetotaling. For the drunkard, Manu has recommended the sign of tavern to be impressed on his forehead with hot iron, as a punishment<sup>1</sup>. But on the other hand Kautilya, who is said to be a contemporary of Megasthenes, gave a detailed account of the various kinds of liquors popular in his days<sup>2</sup>. According to Panini, the drink was common especially among the Kschatriyas, the nobility, and, the kings<sup>3</sup>. Arguna and Krishna in the *Mahabharata* were described as taking wine when exhausted, and the Yadavas were notorious addicts to wine<sup>4</sup>. In the *Ramayana*, the feast of wine and meat is said to have been arranged even by the sage like Bharadvaja for the prince Bharata and his retinue<sup>5</sup>. And yet there are passages in the great epic, which condemn drinking and class it among the heinous sins. In fact the moral objection to alcohol was from the very beginning and the religious precepts were condemning this evil, but in real practice they were not regularly followed. The Brahmanas as a class were comparatively free from this evil and Megasthenes's statement could be applied for them only. However, as a result of the growing influence of the moral ideals preached by the Brahmins<sup>6</sup>, Buddhists, and the Jains, the tendency of teetotaling was continuously increasing, culminating only in the medieval period.

The Indians were described as a lover of ornaments both by Alexander's companions<sup>7</sup> and Megasthenes<sup>8</sup>. Megasthenes said that, in contrast to the general simplicity of their lives, the Indian loved to adorn themselves. Their robes were embroidered with gold, their ornaments set with precious stones, and they wore gay coloured linen garments, and were accompanied with sun shades. Contrary to this it was also reported that the Indians liked to wear white clothing and not coloured garments<sup>9</sup>. Regarding the people of Cathaea Onesicritus spoke about their love for beauty<sup>10</sup>. The same was extended by Megasthenes as general feature of the country<sup>11</sup>.

1. Manu IX, 239. Also see Manu, IX, 13, 80; XI, 49, 57, 91-99, 147-52; XII, 56.

2. Arthashastra, II, 25

3. Panini, V, 2, 112.

4. See R. C. Majumdar, Op. Cit., p. 578.

5. Ramayana, II, 91.

6. Basham op. cit. p. 216.

7. See Onesic., F. 21 (Strabo, XV, 1, 30; Nearchos, F. 11 (Arr. Ind. XVI, 3-4).

8. Meg. F. 32 (Strabo, XV, 1, 54).

9. Strabo, XV, 1, 71.

10. Onesic., F. 21 (Strabo, XV, 1, 30).

11. Meg., F. 32 (Strabo, XV, 1, 54).

As to the disposal of the deads, Alexander's companion Aristobulus had said that the deads were exposed to vultures<sup>1</sup>, which may be true only for a section of people living in frontier region, on account of the influence of Iran. Regarding the tombs of the Indians, Megasthenes, as preserved by Strabo, stated that they were simple and mounds raised over them were very small<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand Arrian, quoting Megasthenes related that the monuments to the dead were absent in India, because the Indians considered the virtues which men had displayed in life, sufficient to preserve their memory after death<sup>3</sup>.

The Indians in general were put in very high esteem in the works of classical authors. The land was described as of unusual beauty<sup>4</sup>, genial seasons<sup>5</sup>, great prosperity<sup>6</sup> and blest in highest, while its people were called as degree<sup>7</sup>, the most just, healthiest, long-lived, very tall, honest, truthloving, peaceful and most fortunate on the earth<sup>8</sup>.

Ktesias of Knidos, whose work on India is well-known for marvels, was the first to attribute uprightness to Indians. Among the companions of Alexander, the greatest admirer of the Indians was Onesicritus. It was probably on account of his cynic background that he was attracted towards the Indians and their philosophy<sup>9</sup>. Megasthenes's admiration of the Indians was possibly aimed to show the country of his stay more civilized than the other countries known to Greeks. His *Indika* appears to be an attempt to show that «India is an even better land than Hekataios's Egypt, a Platonic ideal state with philosophers on the top and that all civilizations spring from India not Egypt»<sup>10</sup>.

1. Aristobulus, F. 42 (Strabo, XV, 1, 62).

2. Meg., F. 32 (Strabo, XV, 1, 54).

3. Meg., F. 15 (Arr. Ind., X, 1).

4. Diodorus Siculus, Bib., II, 15.

5. Nearchus, F. 23 (Strabo, XV, 1, 67).

6. Dio Chrysostomos, Orat., XXXV, 18 ff.

7. Strabo, I, 2, 32; II, 5, 32.

8. There are numerous references to such virtues of the Indians. See esp. Ktesias, F. 45 (16, 30, 32); Xenophon, *Cyros*, II, 4, 1-9; Nearchus, F. 10b (Strabo, XV, 1, 45) and F. 11 (Arr. Ind., XVII, 1); Onesicritus, F. 20 (Strabo, XV, 1, 34); Meg. F. 4 (Dio. Sic., II, 36, 40, 42); F. 15 (Arr. Ind. X, 1); F. 16. (Arr. Ind. X, 8); F.19a (Arr. Ind., XI, 9 and XII, 5); F. 32 (Strabo, XV, 1, 53-54); F. 33 (Strabo, XV, 1 59); Dionysius Periegetes, 1135 (Geographi Graeci Minores, Vol. II, p. 173); Clement of Alexandria, *Strom*, III, 194; Philostratos, *Apoll. Tya.*, VI, II; Dio Chrysostomos, Orat., 35.

9. For the Cynic elements in the work of Onesicritus, see T. Brown, *Onesicritus*, Berkeley 1949, Chap. II.

10. O. Murray, *Herodotus and Hellenistic Culture*, «Classical Quarterly», XXII (1972), 208 ff.



In the Graeco-Roman age, we notice that the general tendency was to claim the superiority of Graeco-Romans and condemn foreigners. But it is noteworthy that the Indians were an exception to this rule. Besides Greece and Rome, the Imperial authors saw humanity only in distant India. The other foreigners like Germans, Gauls, Thracians, Armenians, Parthians, etc. were treated as uncivilized<sup>1</sup>.

The superiority of the Indians was probably felt on account of their wisdom in philosophy. In the Imperial age the great admirers of the Indians were generally those whose own thoughts were similar to Indians. Dio of Prusa later called Chrysostomos, a wandering preacher of Stoic-Cynic philosophy romanticized Indians on account of his philosophical background, like that of Onesicritus. The idealization of Indians by Philostratos was under the influence of Neo-Pythagorism, whose doctrines like those of transmigration of soul, asceticism, monasticism, vegetarianism, etc. were similar to Indian thoughts. The striking similarities between Indian and certain schools of Greek philosophy led certain authors to recognize the influence of India on Greek philosophy. The philosophers like Pythagoras<sup>2</sup>, Democritus<sup>3</sup>, Plato<sup>4</sup>, Apollonius of Tyana<sup>5</sup>, Lycurgus<sup>6</sup>, and Demetrius of Sounium<sup>7</sup> were reported to have derived their knowledge from India and it was claimed as the original home of philosophy<sup>8</sup>.

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1. See J. P. V. D. B a l s d o n, *Romans and the Aliens*, London 1979, pp. 63-64.

2. P h i l o s t r a t o s, *Apoll. Tya.*, VIII, 7. The influence of India on the thoughts of Pythagoras has been recognized by majority of the Scholars. See esp. S c h r o e d e r, *Pythagoras und die Inder*, Leipzig 1884; G a r b e, *Philosophy of Ancient India*, Chicago 1897, p. 39; H. G. R a w l i n s o n, *India, A Short Cultural History*, London 1937, p. 55; R a d h a k r i s h n a n, *Eastern Religion and Western Thought*, Oxford 1939, p. 142-43; G o m p e r z, *Greek Thinkers*, Vol. I, New York 1953, p. 127.

3. A e l i a n, *Varia Historia*, IV, 20. Also see D i o g. L a e r t., IX, 34.

4. P a u s a n i a s, IV, 32, 4.

5. P h i l o s t r a t o s, *Apoll. Tya.*, I, 18.

6. A r i s t o c r a t e s, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecarum*, ed. Müller, Vol. IV, p. 332 in P l u t a r c h, *Lycurgus*, C. 4.

7. L u c i a n, *Toxaris (Friendship)*, 34. Demetrius of Sunium (1st. C.A.D.) was a cynic philosopher.

8. L u c i a n, *Drapetai (Runways)*, 6, 8.