

**Political And Social Conditions During Mouryan Era The Greek  
Ambassador Megasthenes Recored In India**

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**Introduction :**

In 326 B.C. India faced a lot of crisis. The imperial crown of Magadha and the neighbouring provinces was worn by a king who was detested and held cheap by his own people. The land of the five rivers was overrun by Macedonians allied peoples from the west who resolved to incorporate it permanently into their growing empire.

After the death of Alexander the struggle for dominance in Asia was finally settled in fevour of Seleucus Nikator. Seleucus had sufficiently consolidated his hold on his empire with the thought of resuming Alexander's campaign in India and with this object he crossed the Indus.

After the unsuccessful military expedition of Seleucus, friendly relations were established between the Mourya and the Greek rulers of the western countries in Asia, Africa and Europe, some of them sent their ambassadors to the Mourya court. One of them Megasthenes sent by Seleucus to Chandragupta, he lived for some years at Patliputra. He compiled an account of India, its geography, social life and political institutions.

In the present research work, political and social conditions during Mouryan Era in the view of Greek Ambassador Megasthenes have been discussed.

**Political and Social Conditions :**

Megasthenes wrote in 'Indica' a very detailed and interesting account of what he saw and heard. India was a principal source for the

writer. The whole book is lost, at present it survives only in the fragment preserved by later writers, yet it tells us a lot about India.

According to Megasthenes the king used to remain busy the whole day. The king used to leave his palace in times of war, for listening the problems of his subject and giving justice to the people. The king also left the palace for hunting and offering prayers.

In Indica Megasthenes wrote about the safety of the king, when the king used to leave the palace his route was used to be marked off by ropes. It was death penalty for anyone who attempted to enter within the ropes. King was always surrounded by his bodyguards of Amazans, who were in turn escorted by supermen.<sup>1</sup>

While hunting the king shot from a platform, when the hunting game was driven in the open country he rode an elephant. His women guard were armed with every variety of weapons, and rode on elephants or horses or drove in chariots just like men.

Besides his women bodyguards Chandragupta had considerable military forces.<sup>2</sup> He writes that the military organization of Chandragupta was very efficient. A commission of thirty members controlled the army. Each of the six boards was in charge of a separate department, such as 1) Admiralty 2) Infantry 3) Cavalry 4) Chariots 5) Elephants and 6) Transport Commissariat etc. There must have been about 70,000 regular fighting men in army whose salary and equipments were provided by the state.<sup>3</sup>

Megasthenes gives an outline of the civil administration of the country and of the capital. The municipal administration of the city was vested in a council of thirty members. These were divided into six Boards each consisting of five members. Each of this Boards was entrusted with a special duty such as 1) Taking proper care of foreigners 2) Registration of birth and death (3-5) supervision of manufacture, trade and industry and 6) Collection of taxes. The business of the state was carried on by a number of departments each

efficiently managed by one or more officials. The emperor took special interest in the system of irrigation. Fraud in the payment of tax was punished with death.<sup>4</sup>

Megasthenes writes that Communication System was excellent. There was a royal road from the Punjab to Patliputra the capital city. Patliputra was strongly fenced by walls and ditches. Patliputra was built at confluence of two rivers the Ganges and the son. The city was protected by massive timber-palisade, pierced by loopholes through which archers could shoot. Megasthenes gives no details of provincial administration of the empire. But he writes that Chandragupta Mourya's administrative system was highly organized and the country enjoyed peace and prosperity.<sup>5</sup>

Megasthenes wrote about social condition in Mourya period. He says that common people were leading peaceful and prosperous life. Gents and ladies used to wear good cloths. The common people used to wear cotton clothes and rich were using cloths made from silk and linen. People used to consume rice, pulses, fruits, vegetable and milk in day to day meals. On the occasions of festivals and important social functions they used to consume meat and drink wine.<sup>6</sup>

Megasthenes says that in Mourya's period Varna and Ashrama the two characteristic institutions of the Hindu social polity reached a definite stage. No one was allowed to marry out of his own caste or to exercise any calling or art except his own. For instance of soldier could not become a husbandman or an artisan a philosopher. The people are divided into seven classes such as philosophers (Brahmans and Buddhist religious teachers) Husbandmen, Shepherds, Artisans, Soldiers, Civil Officer and Ministers.

According to Megasthenes, the population of India was divided into seven classes. The philosophers belonged to first class. They were inferior in number but were prominent over all from point of view of dignity. There were two categories of philosophers : Brachamanes and

Sarmanes. The Sarmanes not only acted as priests but also worked as physicians.

The second class consisted of husbandmen. They were exempted from fighting and other public services and consequently could devote the whole of their time to village.

The third class consisted of the Shepherds in general, all herdsmen who neither settled in towns nor in villages but lived in tents.

The fourth class consisted of artisans. Some of them were armourers and some made instruments for peasants etc. This class received maintenance from the royal exchequer.

The fifth class was military. The sixth class consisted of overseers. It was their duty to enquire all about happened in India and make reports to the king or to the magistrates.

The seventh class consisted of councilors and Assessors. The king consulted its members. Generals of the Army, the Chief Magistrates and Arbiters usually belonged to this class.<sup>7</sup>

According to Megasthenes. In Pandya kingdom the marriages were performed in childhood of girls like Mourya Kingdom, but military training was imparted to them and they could work as soldier and bodyguard.

Regarding the position of women, some of them pursued philosophy and lived a life of continence. But married women were denied the privilege of sharing with their husbands a knowledge of sacred love.<sup>8</sup>

Polygamy was practised, especially by rulers and noblemen. The care of the king's person was entrusted to women and we have the curious story that a women who killed a king when drunk was rewarded by becoming the wife of his successor.

According to Megasthenes people of this period are honest and truthful and theft is of very rare occurrence. Truth and virtue were highly prized by them.

He says "The inhabitants of India have abundant means of subsistence and famine never visits the country." The country is very rich in minerals and precious stones and the Indians are fond of finery and ornaments. But otherwise they lead plain life.<sup>9</sup>

According to Megasthenes personal freedom is greatly valued and slavery is unknown. All the Indians are free and not one of them is a slave but writer Strabo quotes the customs of court of Patliputra observes that the care of the king's person is entrusted to women who are bought from their parents.

Prof. Rijdevij wrote in *Buddhist India* and "we hear nothing of such later development of slavery as rendered the Greek minds the Roman latitee india or the plantations of Christian slave owners, scenes of misery and oppression for the point the slaves (in India) were household servants and not badly treated and their numbers seem to have been significant because of this Megasthenes must be wrote slavery is unknown.<sup>10</sup>

It has been pointed out by some scholar's that Megasthenes may have been misled by the slavery of one sikritos about the non-existence have heard of the principal laid down in Indian work on polity that no Aryan should be kept in condition of permanent slavery.<sup>11</sup>

Kautilyas '*Arthasastra*' clearly indicate that during this period the customs of slavery was there and even buying and selling of women are admitted.<sup>12</sup>

According to Megasthenes the Indians were ignorant of the art of writing and they had to depend upon their memory. Being simple, they lived happily.<sup>13</sup>

## **Conclusion:**

From the writing of Megasthenes it can be summarized that during the period of Chandragupta Mourya he observed excellent governance and importance of discipline in the society. The people were leading peaceful and prosperous life.

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