

**A PEEP INTO THE EARLY HISTORY OF
INDIA: FROM THE FOUNDATION OF
THE MAURYA DYNASTY TO THE
DOWNFALL OF THE IMPERIAL GUPTA
DYNASTY; 322 B.C.-CIRCA 500 A.D.**

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SIR RAMKRISHNA GOPAL BHANDARKAR

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From the Foundation of the Maurya Dynasty
to the Downfall of the Imperial
Gupta Dynasty.

(322 B.C.—*circa* 500 A.C.)

Ramakrishna
BY
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WITH A PREFACE
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PREFACE.

Sir Ramkrishna Bhandarkar's *Peep into the Early History of India*, like his monumental contribution to the Bombay Gazetteer on the Early History of the Deccan, has become a classic of its kind. Delivered originally in Poona in the form of a lecture nineteen years ago, it subsequently appeared in the pages of the Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. It is a model of lucid writing upon what might otherwise easily become a wearisome and complicated subject, and for this reason it forms an admirable introduction to the study of the period. A student who starts with this bird's-eye view may proceed with less diffidence to the more detailed accounts in works such as Mr. V. A. Smith's, and to original authorities like McCrindle's Megasthenes. One of Sir Ramkrishna's objects is to call the attention of his countrymen to the necessity of using the information supplied by coins, inscriptions and archæological remains, and the writings of foreign travellers, in reconstructing the past history of their land. As is well-known, the science of history finds no place in orthodox Sanskrit learning, and it was not until western scholars drew attention to these matters that any steps were taken in this direction. But with the spread of modern ideas, it remains for Indian Students to take upon their own shoulders these branches of research. To such, Sir Ramkrishna's advice is invaluable at the present day, when the revived spirit of Indian nationalism inclines writers to fasten eagerly upon any facts which tend to the glory of their past civilization. Nothing is more fatal to the historian than the patriotic

bias, for it invariably leads him to form prejudiced and unjustified conclusions. "Nothing but dry truth should be his object", says this distinguished scholar, who has so resolutely practised in his writings what he here preaches, and it is to be hoped that the younger generation which is following in his steps will be not unmindful of his words.

The essay begins with the rise of Buddhism. As Sir Ramkrishna points out, Buddhism is only a sect of Hinduism. Its tenets are not even novel. Its chief doctrine, *viz.* that it is *karma* which transmigrates, is anticipated in the Upanishads. It did not, contrary to popular opinion, seek to undermine caste. But it *did* deny the authority of the Vedas and the efficacy of the Vedic sacrifices, and this was the real cause of the hatred of the Brahmans towards it. Buddhism, with its insistence on the ethical side of religion and its cosmopolitanism, had a salutary effect on Indian politics. It encouraged liberal intercourse with the outside world which Brahmanism discouraged. Under the various Buddhistic dynasties, shipping flourished, ambassadors went and came to and from Syria and Egypt, and later, Rome. The Bodhisatva himself, according to the *Jâtakas*, was once born as the son of a master-mariner of Broach. The Bodhisatva and Jains, like the Puritans of 17th century England, were the trading-classes. Sir Ramkrishna mentions in his essay on the Early History of the Deccan how much the great cathedral caves of Karla and other places in Western India owed to the guilds of merchants of the time. With the Brahmanic revival and the insertion in the codes of Manu of regulations which branded those who ventured overseas with the stigma of impurity, commerce declined and India dropped out of her position among the trading nations of the East.

The greatness of India commences with the Maurya dynasty. Of Chandragupta, the author does not say very much. But his reign is of great importance, if only on account of the marked influence that Persian culture exerted upon India at that time. Chandragupta's vast and complicated bureaucracy was organized upon most efficient lines, but those who look upon India's past as Golden Age, would do well to consider the oppressive tyranny and the cruel severity of the whole system. Sir Ramkrishna was, of course, writing long before the epoch-making discovery of the *Artha Śāstra* (whether this be a genuine product of the pen of Kautilya or not) threw a flood of new light on the problem of Mauryan administration. On Asoka, on the other hand, the author is very clear and explicit, and his summary is most interesting. With the break-up of the Mauryan Empire, a number of tribes from Central Asia, the Yavanas or Bactrian Greeks, the Sakas, the Kshatrapas, the Parthians and the Kushans found their way through the North-West frontier into the Panjab and Western India. With the Kushans, the long supremacy of Buddhism came gradually to an end. The simple teaching of the Hinayana system had been replaced by the vast and complicated pantheon of the Mahayana, and the time was ripe for a Brahmanic revival. This came under the Guptas, and the author fitly concludes his essay with an account of the great literary Renaissance of that period.

Archæology is an ever-growing science, and, as we have indicated above, there are many points in which subsequent discoveries have modified or thrown open to doubt some of the statements made when this essay was published nineteen years ago. On one only, however, is there likely to be any serious difference of opinion. Mr. V. A. Smith in his *Early History of India* supports the

theory that Kanishka's accession took place in A. D. 78, *i. e.* that the Saka era dates from his coming to the throne. It is now, however, generally held that the first Kushan Monarch was Kadphises I, *c.* A. D. 40-78, and the second was Kadphises II, A. D. 78-110. Thus the Saka Era was founded not by Kanishka but by Kadphises II. Kanishka succeeded about A. D. 120 and reigned till about 182. The Kushan Empire broke up at the death of Vasudeva, about 220. Sir Ramkrishna has always stood out for a later date for the Kushans. He thinks that the Saka Era was founded by a Saka King; that the Saka and Indo-Parthian dynasties intervened, and the Kushans belong to the third and fourth centuries A. C. However, *adhuc sub judice lis est*, and we must await the further revelations of archæology for a final answer.

H. G. RAWLINSON.

Dharwar, 1919.

INTRODUCTORY.¹

I think I may take it for granted that an Indian who has received English education and has been introduced to the ancient history of European countries, naturally has a desire to be acquainted with the ancient history of his own country, to know by whom and how that country was governed in ancient times, or how its social and religious institutions have grown up and what revolutions the country has gone through; but means for the satisfaction of this desire are wanting. India unfortunately has no written history. There are some chronicles written by Jainas and others referring to kings and princes who lived from about the eighth to the eleventh centuries of the Christian era and ruled over Gujarat and Rajputana. There are also lives of individual kings such as the Śrī-Harshacharita of Bâna and the Vikramânkadeva-charita of Bilhaṇa. The hero of the former ruled over Northern India in the first half of the seventh century, and of the latter over Southern India in the latter part of the eleventh and the early part of the twelfth century. The Purânas contain genealogies of certain dynasties. With these exceptions, sometime ago we had absolutely no knowledge of the history of the different provinces of India before the foundation of the Mahomedan Empire. But the researches of European and some Native scholars and antiquarians have thrown considerable light over this dark period. The knowledge hitherto gathered cannot be pronounced to be very satisfactory or to be as good as written books would have supplied. Still, it is sufficient to give us a general idea of the political, social,

¹ This article consists of a lecture read in March last (1910) before a Poona audience, but afterwards considerably amplified,

and religious movements that took place from remote times to the arrival of the Mahomedans. The materials for these researches I shall here shortly describe.

First,—Gold, silver and copper coins of ancient kings are found in all parts of the country, especially in Northern India, when old mounds composed of the ruins of buildings are dug out. These coins bear certain emblems, and also legends in ancient characters containing the names of the Princes who issued them, and sometimes of their fathers, with occasionally the date of their issue. From these we derive a knowledge of the kings and dynasties that ruled over the provinces in which the coins are found.

Secondly,—We find inscriptions engraved on rocks and columns and on the remains of ancient temples wherein occur the names of Princes, and sometimes of the provinces ruled over or conquered by them. In the case of temples and other benefactions we have the names of the donors, their profession, the description of the nature of their gift and sometimes the name of the king in whose reign the gift was made. Again, we find in digging old ruins, charters of land-grants made by Princes, inscribed on plates of copper. The grants therein recorded were made to individual Brahmans or to temples or Buddhistic Vihâras. These copper-plate inscriptions often give a full genealogy of the dynasty to which the grantor belonged, together with the most notable events in the reign of each of the princes belonging to the dynasty. Often-times, there is a mere vague praise of the different kings which can have no historical value but one who possesses a little critical power can without much difficulty distinguish between what is historically true and what is not. A very large number of such grants has been found in our own Maratha country, in consequence of which we have been able to construct a sort of continu-