

The Depictions of Ancient India in the Primeval Literary Works

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Abstract

It is this that the depictions of India are found even in Ancient Literature. Thus, it is an undeniable fact that the portrayals of various international writers at the juncture in their literature were significant so far as their depiction of India in Literature is concerned. Does the Literature of Ancient time depict India aptly? Yes, it does and impart information concerning the Indian life of antiquity.

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Ancient history is the aggregate of past events from the beginning of writing and recorded human history and extending as far as post-classical history. The phrase may be used either to refer to the period of time or the academic discipline. The span of recorded history is roughly 5,000 years, beginning with the Sumerian cuneiform script, with the oldest coherent texts from about 2600 BC.[2] Ancient history covers all continents inhabited by humans in the period 3000 BC - AD 500.

Herodotus, called the Father of History, was often the first historian to gather his materials in detail, test their precision to a specific scope, and arrange them well-fashioned and vibrant. What Prof. Joshua Mark points out is pertinent:

Herodotus c. 484 - 425/413 BCE) was a Greek writer who invented the field of study known today as 'history'. He was called 'The Father of History' by the Roman writer and orator Cicero for his famous work *The Histories* but has also been called "The Father of Lies" by critics who claim these 'histories' are little more than tall tales. (World History Encyclopedia/ Herodotus)

The Histories, his masterpiece and the only work he is known to have produced, seems to record his investigations.

Homer was a great Epic poet. What James Lloyd remarks is apt:

Homer (c. 750 BCE) is perhaps the greatest of all epic poets, and his legendary status was well established by the time of Classical Athens. He composed (not wrote, since the poems were created and transmitted orally, they

were not written down until much later) two significant works, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; other works were attributed to Homer, but even in antiquity, authorship was disputed. In conjunction with Hesiod, Homer acts as a great pool of information for the Greeks about their gods. Homer is the earliest poet in a Western culture whose works have survived intact. (World History Encyclopaedia/Homer)

It is believed that, just as Homer mainly utilised a tradition of oral poetry chanted by wandering minstrels, so Herodotus appears to have used a tradition of storytelling, collecting the oral histories he chanced upon in his travels. These oral histories often contained folk-tale motifs. On the subject of India, he recounts an account of ants who threw up mounds of gold dust. It was at one time recognised that the afterwards became a permanent component in the classic notion of India. The facts on which the account was based appear now reasonably clear. It is pretty apparent that Gold-dust was brought as tribute by the tribes of Dardistaii in Kashmir and was called by the Indians *pipilika*, 'ant gold'. It can be seen that when Herodotus said that the ants were the size of dogs and fiercely attacked anyone carrying off the gold, it had been perhaps suggested that the account was derived from people who had been chased by the formidable dogs kept by the native miners.

Of course, all this was incidental to his writings about the struggle between Greece and Persia. He travelled through Asia Minor to Egypt and then went back to Greece. He was the first person to imagine India as a mystery. India was at the very edge of the *oikumene* - the known world. It is possible to believe that all kinds of fantasies could be found in this land at the edge of the earth. Fabulous beasts and spiritual athletes, great wealth - all woven into a fantastic mosaic, such an image of India persisted until the time of Alexander's invasion in 326 BCE.

The Advent of Alexander changed every aspect of History in India. It may be accurate, but it would be better to be continuous and say that Alexander the Great invaded India in 327 BCE, and to this expedition, we owe all our fundamental knowledge of Indian history in ancient times. Before Alexander's invasion, we have only the Vedas,

dating from about 1400 BCE, the Code of Menu (900-300 BCE), the sacred legends of the Ramayana (400-350 BCE), and the Mahabharata (500-250 BCE) to depend upon. George Birdwood rightly remarks:

Alexander the Great destroyed Tyre, made himself master of Egypt B.C. 332, took Babylon, and finally subjugated Persia B.C. 331. He invaded India B.C. 327, and to this expedition, we owe all our fundamental knowledge of Indian history in ancient times. Before Alexander's invasion, we have only the Vedas, dating from about B.C. 1400, the Code of Menu, B.C. 900-300, the sacred legends of the Ramayana, B.C. 400-350, and the Mahabharata, B.C. 500-250, to depend upon. Even the later Puranas, composed during the revival of Brahmanism, between the decline of Buddhism and the Mahommedan conquest, which gives us the dynastic history of India from the time of Chandragupta, the Sandrocottus of the Greeks, treat principally of mythology and doctrine. Neither by Homer, Pindar, nor Euripides, are India or its people mentioned by name. Aeschylus mentions "the wandering Indians," and Sophocles "Indian gold-" but although they knew its name, they knew nothing of the country, and it was not until the Persian war that the Greeks became aware of the existence of the enormous peninsula lying east and southward of the Indus. It is more than probable, however, that Homer confounded India with Africa under the general name of Ethiopia, Avhile by later Greek writers sometimes Ethiopia is called India. Alexander believed that he would find the sources of the Nile in India. The first Greek who speaks of India by name is Hecatasus of Miletus, B.C. 549-486. The knowledge of Herodotus was limited to the satrapies of Darius, the twentieth of which included the part of India subject to Persia. The Bible's first and only mention of India by that name is in the Book of Esther _circa B.C. 450, ch. i. 1, and ch. viii. 9] wherein we are told that Ahasuerus reigned "from. " India even unto Ethiopia, over an(a) (Birdwood) hundred and seven and " twenty provinces." This Ahasuerus was Xerxes, and the feast he held "in Shushan the palace," in the third year of his reign, was to arrange the invasion of Greece" (13)

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It can be argued that all our genuine knowledge of India dates from Alexander's invasion of the Punjab, where he crossed the Indus at Attock in April 327 BCE, the first authentic date in Indian history. The research shows that Several of Alexander's officers wrote descriptions of different parts of his route, and thus the ancients became possessed of the separate narratives, most of which have since perished. It is to the information collected by the officers of Alexander, Seleucus, and the Ptolemies, condensed, extracted, and reduced to a consistent shape by Diodorus, Strabo, Pliny, and Arrian, during the first century before and the first century after Christ that we owe most of our knowledge of ancient India. Arrian, the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, almost a contemporary of Arrian, the author of the Indica and the Anabasis Alexandri, gives us a minute account of the sea-borne trade of India and the coasts of the Erythrean Sea generally. Alexander's expedition and the embassies of Seleucus carried our knowledge of India from Punjab to the mouths of the Indus and the valley of the Ganges; the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea extended it to the whole Malabar coast, and the Coromandel, as far as Masulipatam. Eratosthenes, the Alexandrian geographer, 276-161 BCE, describes India fully.

Nonetheless, the history of Strabo is the best general account we have of India. Strabo (63/64 BCE - 24 C.E.) was a Greek historian, geographer and philosopher. Travel throughout the Mediterranean and Near East, especially for scholarly purposes, was popular during this era and was facilitated by the relative peace enjoyed throughout the reign of Augustus (27 BCE - 14 C.E.). It is not known precisely when Strabo's Geography was written. Someplace its first drafts around 7 C.E., others around 18 C.E. The India of Strabo is the India of the Maurya dynasty of Magadha, 325-118 BCE, the most brilliant and best known of the early Indian dynasties, to which Saudrocottus (Chandragupta Maurya) belonged, whose grandson, Asoka, established Buddhism as the State religion of India, 250 BCE. At that date, the most intimate relations existed between India, Syria and Egypt, and the arts and literature and science of India reached their highest perfection. According to Vincent A. Smith, "Europe was practically ignorant of India until the veil was lifted by Alexander's operations and the reports of his offices." (12)

The Chinese first knew India during Emperor Wuti of the later Han dynasty in the second century before Christ. They called this land Yuantu or Yin-tu, a variation of Hindu or Sindhu. In the official record of the Tang dynasty in the seventh century CE, India was a country of five divisions. After the name of the best known and the wealthiest province, the royal dispatches called India Magadha. Some other times, it was known as the Kingdom of the Brahmins.

Of the five divisions or Five Indies mentioned above in the timeline, the narration confines the northern stretch of India. It included Punjab alongside Kashmir and the adjoining hills with eastern Afghanistan today beyond the Indus River. The districts of Kabul, Peshawar, Gazni and Banu were all under the ruler of Kapisa, whose capital was possibly at Charikar, known today as Alexandria in the Caucasus.

Most of what is known of the ancient world comes from the accounts of antiquity's own historians. Although it is important to take into account the bias of each ancient

author, their accounts are the basis for our understanding of the ancient past. A fundamental difficulty of studying ancient history is that recorded histories cannot document the entirety of human events, and only a fraction of those documents have survived into the present day. Furthermore, the reliability of the information obtained from these surviving records must be considered. Few people were capable of writing histories, as literacy was not widespread in almost any culture until long after the end of ancient history.

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