

MODULE-3
MAURYAS AD MUVENTAR
TOPIC-SOURCES OF MAURYAN HISTORY- INDICA OF
MEGASTHENES

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INDICA OF MEGASTHENES

- Ambassador of Seleucus Nicator to Mauryan court at Pataliputra
- Wrote 'Indica' on his travels & experience in India
- But the book is lost and available only in quotations or fragments in the works of later writers like Arrian, Diodorous etc- they are not uniform
- Graeco- Roman writers was interested to write about Indian subcontinent but they differed in opinion of Megasthenes reliability & acuuracy
- Strabo & Pliny- highly critical

- Arrian-more thrusting
- Diodorus – neutral on Megasthenes
- Later writers selected from Megasthenes book the bits that they thought would interest the audience
- References about India
- Described about the country, its size & shape, rivers, soil, climate, plants, animals, production, administration, society, legends etc
- Detailed description about fauna- elephants, monkey, horse-training, elephant hunting etc

- Worship of 'Dionysius' (Siva) & Herakles (Vasudeva Krishna)
- Cited similarities b/w Brahmin & Greek views
- Idealised India by stating that farmers were not harmed in war, no slavery, theft was rare etc
- Also stories such as of one-horned horses with heads like deer, huge snakes & river Sitas in which nothing would float
- Gold digging ants of north-western mountains
- Historians debated on veracity of Megasthenes
- Megasthenes & Deimachus accused each other of falsehood

- Megasthenes – was seeking a Utopian society in India
- Confused due to alien character of the material they were handling with
- Example- description of 7 castes in India
- Romila Thapar- reference on 7 castes in India
- 7 divisions of Indian society-
- 1. philosophers
- 2. cultivators
- 3. herdsmen
- 4. artisans & traders
- 5. soldiers
- 6. overseers
- 7. councilors

- Thapar – because the description is on Indian society the term ‘caste’ has commonly & arbitrarily used
- They are a list of important divisions of population involved in the functioning of society
- Greek references to Megasthenes ‘Indica’ represent India through a double filter
 - 1. Megasthenes interpretation of what he saw or hear
 - 2. later Greeco-Roman writers interpretation of Megasthenes account
- Citations from ‘Indica’ - shows ancient Greek perceptions on India about the history of subcontinent in the 4th c BCE

- Historians use 'Indica' with much greater rigour & critical approach
- Romila Thapar- even those texts & their context require a more critical approach
- Thapar – those text & context require a more critical investigation before their statements can be taken as facts