

THE LATER MAURYAS: DOWNFALL OF THE MAURRYA EMPIRE 227

Rajukas were asserting their local independence. That the treasury was exhausted and coins were debased. Drain in treasure was caused by lavish grants of Asoka. In conclusion, we may however agree with Dr. N.K. Sastri that an empire can not be made stable merely by a policy of war. Aurangzeb fought life long wars, yet, he failed to stabilise his empire. There was various other factors that contributed to decline and downfall of the Mauryas. To these factors, we shall now turn over attention.

However, it is reasonable to conclude that Asoka had no direct responsibility for the downfall of the Maurya empire. It collapsed long after his death. There were other factors at work for the disintegration of the Maurya empire and Asoka's policy of non-violence and Dhamma Vijaya did not directly contribute to it.

General causes of Mauryan downfall : Many empires great and small rose and fell in India before and after Asoka. The rulers of these empires did not follow pacifist, non-violent policy like that of Asoka. Yet, these empires collapsed. This fact points to some inexorable natural causes at work in all these cases. Ibn Khaldun did observe an "endless cycle of progress and retrogression of empires. Kingdoms are born, attain maturity and die within a definite period which rarely exceeds three generations i.e. 120 years."¹ This observation is also true in the case of the Maurya empire.

The disintegration of one of the greatest ancient empires of the east was due to a number of dynastic and external reasons. "Dynastic empires can only continue on the supply of able monarchs in the line."² After the death of Asoka there was none among his successors equal to the task of maintaining the unity of the vast empire. "The bow of Ulysses could not be drawn by weaker hands."

Moreover, the successors of Asoka had been reared up in the tradition of non-violence and Dhamma Vijaya. To them the aggressive militarism of Chandragupta became dim. They had neither the strength nor the will to arrest the process of disruption of the empire. No successor of Asoka could really understand and implement the Dhamma Vijaya policy of Asoka except his grandson Dasaratha.

Another factor contributing to the dismemberment of the Maurya empire was the ambition of the Maurya princes. These princes ruling in the provinces identified themselves with the spirit of local autonomy. They threw away their allegiance to the central authority and raised the standard of revolt. "The empire became a shrivelled and attenuated carcase long before Pusyamitra's coup d'etat." Asoka was not farsighted enough to grant autonomous power to

1. Barua—Asoka. P. 354.

2. Sastri—Age of Nandas and Mauryas. P. 247.

the Rajukas in the provinces. They could not be controlled by his successors and caused disruption to the empire. Asoka's successors were too ambitious and due to their surging ambition they probably caused partition of the empire. We learn from Rajatarangini, how Jalauka, one of the sons of Asoka declared himself an independent king of Kashmir and extended his sway up to Kanauj. There might have been a partition of the Maurya empire among Dasaratha and Samprati, the two grandsons of Asoka. Virasena, probably a prince of

The lack of unity among the Maurya princes and the partition of the empire.

the Maurya dynasty snatched Gandhara from the hand of the impotent Maurya king at Pataliputra. Subhagasena, probably another scion of the same dynasty became independent ruler of the north-west and made alliance with Antiochus III. Subhagasena is described by Polybias as "King of the Indians". On the strength of this remark W.W. Tarn has identified him as a member of the Mauryan royal family. Eggemont has identified Subhagasena with the Mauryan king Somsarman mentioned in the Bhagavata and the Vishnu Puranas. Thus, the Maurya empire began to break-up after the death of Asoka.

The Maurya government became unpopular due to high-handedness of the provincial governors. The governors of the outlying provinces particularly committed oppression of the people. The people of Taxila revolted in the reign of Bindusara and again in the reign of Asoka due to oppression by wicked ministers (Dusta-amatyas). The reality of ministerial oppression is further testified by the Kalinga edicts of Asoka in which he urged his official not to torture the people without due causes. In order to prevent such misdeeds, Asoka provided circuits of officials. The loyalty of the provincials to the Mauryas was slowly undermined by ministerial oppression. "The repeated revolt of the distant province of Taxila is perhaps typical of what was happening in other parts of the empire."¹ Dr. N.K. Sastri has argued that the scanty evidences supplied by Kalinga edict and the Divyavadana do not warrant us to hold that there was general prevalence of oppressive government during the Mauryas. Romila Thaper has also supported the view that the revolt of the provincial governors was not a general revolt. There are reasons to believe that Asoka was in perfect control of the administration.

There are also good grounds to believe that during the Later Mauryas, the Maurya court and nobilities were divided into two rival factions. One of these was headed by the general Pushyamitra Sunga and the other by a minister, who managed to appoint his own sons as governors of Vidisa and Vidarbha. The quarrel among rival factions in the Maurya court destroyed the vigour of the administration.²

1. R.K. Mookherjee—Age of Imperial Unity. P. 91.

THE LATER MAURYAS: DOWNFALL OF THE MAURRYA EMPIRE 229

D.D. Kosambi has pointed out that the economic decline of the Mauryas contributed to their downfall. That the Mauryas were suffering from financial scarcity is proved by the fact that the Mauryas enhanced taxes and imposed taxes even on actors and prostitutes. The Maurya punch-marked coins show signs of debasement. Romila Thaper has however pointed out that material remains

Economic causes of Mauryan downfall.

of the Maurya period do not present the picture of a declining economy. The archaeological remains of Hastinapura and Sisupalgarh show the nature of technological and artistic advance. The pottery of the Later Maurya and Early Sunga period was of fine clay and highly polished. They testify the prosperity of the Age. There is definite improvement in town planning, house planning and terracotta modelling, head making etc. Asokan system of administration and political unification considerably contributed to prosperity of the country. Perhaps the hoarding of coins by some merchants in the Gangetic valley led to temporary scarcity of currency, which may account for the debasement. That, however, did not effect the economy of the country. The rising bourgeois devoted their extra wealth to building of stupa and monasteries. The Bharhut, Sanchi, Nagarjuni excavations bear testimony to it. Hence, the theory of economic decline does not stand. Subsequently Thaper has revised her views. She has accepted the Kosambi thesis that since the time of Asoka the annual expenditure of the Mauryan government far exceeded the annual income. Thaper has agreed with the point that high-salaried officials whose number was not small and the expenses of maintaining a vast army caused a drain of the resources. Moreover, the expansion of habitation in newly cleared areas caused a good deal of drain on the treasury. The flourishing state of Bharhut or Hastinapur sculpture conceals the internal economic decay. *Secondly*, Thaper has further pointed out that there was no uniform economic growth in different parts of the empire. The developed economy of the core areas like Prasi or Magadha which was enriched by the flow of revenue and resources from other regions left the outlying regions in undeveloped stage. These regions were rather exploited for the sake of metropolitan region. Thaper has remarked, "The Mauryas were unable to restructure the economy of the core and the peripheral areas which made the empire short-lived."¹ The primary concern of the Mauryan administration was to extract revenue from different areas from existing sources and use it for the metropolitan core areas. This created alienation in outlying areas. Thaper has said "this fact explains why the imperial idea never really took root in Indian sub-continent in early times in spite of the rhetoric of texts and inscriptions."² Moreover, revenue was collected mostly from the areas under plough. Hence a revenue was inadequate

1. Romila Thaper—The Mauryas Revisited. P. 28-9.

2. Ibid.

to bear the huge expenses of the Mauryan bureaucracy and army. Further, Bongard Levin has recently stressed the view that Asoka squandered the accumulated resources of the state by his lavish grants to the Buddhist monks and spending for the construction of Viharas and for charitable purpose. The 'Asokavadana' states the laments of Asoka for his financial impotency. The ministers who were probably Brahmanas restrained the emperor by taking over power from his hands during the closing years of his reign. The financial scarcity which started during Asoka's reign could not be set aside by his successors.

M.M.H.P. Sastri has advocated the theory that Asoka's patronage to Buddhism and his prohibition of animal sacrifice and his introduction of Dana Samata and Vyavahara Samata antagonised the Brahmanical community. (See above for details). That they were hard hit by Asokan injunctions. They rose in a revolt under the Brahmana General Pushyamitra Sunga and killed the last Maurya ruler Brihadratha. Pandit Shastri's view has been refuted by Dr. H.C. Raychaudhury point by point. Asoka was not a fanatical and sectarian Buddhist. He was tolerant to the Brahmanas and Sramanas and other sects. He did not do any thing particular that might offend the Brahmanas. Asoka's son Jalauka has been praised by Brahmana historians like Kalhana. There is no direct evidence to support the theory of Brahmanical revolution. What Pushyamitra did was merely coup d'etat by which he killed an effete ruler, who had lost almost his authority (See above for details).

The refutation of Pandit Sastri's theory by Dr. Raychaudhury is refuted by Bongard Levin. He has cogently pointed out that the absence of Asoka's inscriptions during the closing years of his reign lends support to the theory that Asoka lost de-facto power and remained as a mere titular ruler in this period. The ministers were antagonised by his pro-Buddhist and anti-Brahmanical policy. They took over power from his hands on behalf of his grandson Samprati. The testimony of the Asokavadana need not be dismissed. Levin has commented "Asoka's pro-Buddhist policy, which he carried in the last years of his life, gave rise to a strong opposition, especially among the Brahmanical circles that were still strong both economically and politically". (See above section on Brahmanical Revolt for details).

Dr. H.C. Raychaudhury, has advocated the theory that Asoka's non-violent policy was mainly responsible for the collapse of the Mauryan empire. Asoka's advocacy of non-violence, his policy of Dhamma Vijaya demoralised the army and the bureaucracy. Asoka frittered away the conquering energy of the Mauryan army by his religious policy. (See above for details). Scholars have refuted Dr. Raychaudhury's view on various grounds. Asoka never made his grip on the

administrative machinery loose in spite of his advocacy for non-violence. He did not disband the army or the bureaucracy. His non-violence was not an absolute one. He permitted limited killing of birds and animals for food in the royal kitchen. Though, he was struck by remorse at the bloodshed in the Kalinga war, though he prized the policy of Dhamma Vijaya, he did not return the kingdom of Kalinga to the people of that country. In spite of his love for non-violence, he did not fail to warn the rebellious forest tribes about his military strength and power to punish them. Moreover, the Mauryan empire began to crack almost half century after the death of Asoka. The later should not be held responsible for this. (See above for details). However, on a sober consideration of the matter, the spirit of Asoka's Dhamma Vijaya policy was not at all understood and pursued by his successors except Dasharatha. Hence, the non-violent Dhamma Vijaya policy i.e. a policy of toleration with position of strength was spoiled by the Later Mauryas.

Scholars like Romila Thaper have advocated some fundamental causes for the break-up of the Mauryan empire. "The decline of the Mauryan empire can not be satisfactorily explained by quoting military inactivity, Brahmin resentment, popular uprisings or economic pressure. The causes were much more fundamental....."

[i] The Mauryan administration was highly centralised and the officials were under direct control of the ruler. This condition demanded perpetual ability on the part of the ruler. Asoka's successors did not possess the quality of their ancestors. This led to disintegration of the empire.

[ii] The officials owed their loyalty to the king and not to the state. The change of the king led to change of officials. There was no continuity in the bureaucratic set-up. During quick and frequent changes of rulers, the administration collapsed. There could not develop a well-trained stable bureaucracy to bear the load of government during emergency.

[iii] The officials were recruited from a privileged group who were called councillors and assessors by Megasthenes. They formed a closed community detached from the people. So Asoka had to employ spies to collect informations. As a whole the government became increasingly detached from the people. When these privileged officials belonging to a particular class were engaged in partism conflict for power, the administration went to rack and ruin. There was no representative system which could act as a bridge of contact. Centralised administration should have been balanced by extensive public contact. The appointment of Dharma Mahamatras was no answer to the basic problem. The lack of effective public contact failed to create a sense of belonging to the state among the people, particularly those who lived in distant regions. In the Maurya Age the concept of nationhood had not developed. The vast empire of the Mauryas

1. Romila Thaper. P. 201.

had no underlying unity. Only a bureaucracy held the disjoint limbs together. When the bureaucracy became demoralised the empire began to fall to pieces.

[iv] Economically, the Gangetic valley which was the heartland of the Maurya empire was well developed and prosperous. Deccan lands were economically backward. North was commercially prosperous and the fertility of the land at the Gangetic basin is proverbial. The Mauryas did not try to promote the economy of South India. Kalinga was conquered. Very little was done to promote its economy. This disparity and divergence in economic development sapped the unity of the empire.

[v] The towns and urban areas of the Mauryan empire received best attention of the Maurya government. The rural areas remained neglected. The cultural and economic standard of the urban and rural areas widely differed. According to Romila Thaper, "The more sophisticated cities and trade centres were a great contrast to the isolated village communities." There was wide political and social divergence between various regions. When the great hand of Asoka was removed, the forces of disintegration set in.

Romila Thaper's views.

The Greek Invasion.

While the internal factors were accelerating the process of disintegration, the Greek invasion under Euthidemus and Demetrius hastened the break-up of the empire. Polybias and the author of 'Gargi Samhita' have pointed out that the Greeks or the Yavanas entered into the Madhya Desa and captured Pushpapura or Pataliputra perhaps in the reign of Salisuka. The impact of the Yavana inroad destroyed the hold of the Maurya government over the provinces, particularly in the north-west.

The final coup-d'etat by Pushyamitra.

While domestic and external factors were thus hastening the collapse of the Maurya government, the coup d'etat of Pushyamitra Sunga in 187 or 185 B.C. led to the ultimate collapse of the Mauryan rule. Pushyamitra, the commander-in-chief of the Maurya army took advantage of the prevailing confusion. He murdered his master Brihadratha—the last Maurya emperor before the very eyes of the army and usurped the throne by a coup. With the death of Brihadratha, the dynasty founded by Chandragupta Maurya came to an end and the Maurya empire collapsed with it.

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