



Achaemanid's Influence on Maurya Dynasty

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Abstract

The age of Cyrus, founder of Achaemenids dynasty, is known as the beginning of the relationship between Iran and India. King Cyrus extended his reign to the East and reached the border of India during his war in central Asia. According to historical documents, Cyrus and after him Darius, calculated the northwest regions (Kabul and Indus) as their lands, that age has been called Zoroastrian era by Indian historians. We can tell about influence of Achaemenids in India: One-third of gold that flowed into the imperial treasury of Iran came as tribute from India which was sent to the treasury of the kingdom as tribute are from India. Iranians stayed in India till 320 B.C.E as Alexander the Great attacked Iran, and Indians came to help the Achaemenids king to fight against Alexander in the war. Dr. Spooner, famous Indologist, believes that forming the Mauryan dynasty in India was not only on the basis of Alexander dominating west Asia but also the Achaemenids dynasty influenced the Mauryan dynasty. Mauryans imitated Achaemenids form of government. The



history of India may be traced from the time of the Achaemenids, who first developed so highly the art of empire-building among the Aryans. The Achaemenids built good roads, studded with posts; raised strong forts and grand palaces; developed a centralized and efficient administration; minted coins on a uniform system of weight; and engraved their orders and ideas in numerous stone inscriptions. All these features appear in the first empire of India, the Mauryan empire, which, rising on the ruins of the Achaemenids empire in the Indus valley, spread all over India. Alexander the Great intervened between the two empires and the accounts of his Indian conquests give some idea of the unrecorded similar exploits of Darius I on one hand, and Chandragupta and Ashoka Maurya on the other.

Keywords: Achaemenids, Cyrus, Darius I, Maurya, Ashoka, Alexander

Introduction:

The Persians invaded India by crossing the Hindu Kush mountains in order to get the tribute of the tribes of Gandhara, Kamboja and trans India region. When the Persians possessed north western subcontinent (presently eastern Afghanistan Punjab) India supplied mercenaries to the Persian army on order to fight Greeks. The city of Taxila became a center of Vedic and Iranian learning. Indian life was highly influenced by the Persian ideas. Persian ascendancy in northern India ended with Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia in 327 B. C. The first political contact between Persia and India was



established during the reign of Emperor Cyrus, the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty. Cyrus extended his control up to Indian Ocean. These accounts have been mentioned by writers Herodotus, Xenophon, Strabo and Arrian.

Xenophon makes a reference to an Indian ruler sending an embassy of money to Cyrus, probably in payment of tribute. Based on these references it has been believed that Cyrus conquered the frontier regions between India and Persia. According to Ctesias, Cyrus died of a wound inflicted in a battle by an Indian. It was a battle in which the Indians were fighting on the side of Derbikes. These Derbikes might have been a frontier tribe. According to some scholars there was a political control that was established by old Persia on northern India in pre-Achaemenian period. The son and successor of Cyrus, Cambyses (530-522 B. C.) could not pay attention towards India as he was too much pre-occupied by rebellions in his own empire. His son Darius I made decisive conquests in India as his inscriptions speak of Persian dominion in India. The inscriptions at Persopolis and at Nakhsh-e-Rustam mention the northern Punjab as part of his empire. According to writer Herodotus India was the twentieth Satrapa or province of the Persian Empire. However it is difficult to determine the exact extent of the Persian control over India. The Persian possessions in India comprised the valley of the Indus from Kalabagh to the sea, including



the whole of Sind and a considerable portion of the Punjab as well as east of Indus River.

Darius I was succeeded by Xerxes (468-465 B.C.) He continued his hold over Indian provinces as he secured the services of Gandharians and 'Indians' to fight his battles against the Greeks.

The Persian hold over these Indian regions lasted till 330 B.C. Darius III, the last of the Achaemenian rulers sought reinforcements from India in order to check the progress of Alexander of Macedonia. The Persian Empire under the Achaemenian dynasty came to an end in 330 B.C. when Alexander defeated Darius III in the battle of Arbela. Then effects of Persian Invasion of India: It paved the way for Alexander to conquer India.

The political systems of Persia did influence the administration of Mauryan dynasty. The Persians introduced Armanic form of writing. The Satrapa system of administration introduced by the Persians in their Indian provinces served as a model to later dynasties especially the Sakas and the Kushanas.

And development of trade: The Persian rulers did much to promote geographical exploration and promote trade and commerce. The exploration of the Indus and the Arabian Sea by Scylax opened a new water-route.

When the western and north-western India formed parts of the Persian Empire which extended up to Asia Minor in the west, Indian trade got a



boost.Indian ivory and teak were popular in markets of Persia.All the Ashokan rock inscriptions in north-west India were engraved in the Kharoshti script.There is a possibility that this idea of inscribing ethical exhortations on rocks in the form of royal proclamations were borrowed from Persia.There are certain similarities between the Achae menid inscriptions and those of Ashoka.And Impact on Art:The Mauryan rulers adopted certain Persian ceremonies and rituals. Mauryan art was influenced by the Persian art to some extent.One can see traces of the Persian influence in the Mauryan sculptures and in Ashoka pillars.

The Architecture of the Mauryan period was completely influenced by Persian architecture. And at the last, Influence on Coinage :The Persian silver coins were circulated in India. These coins were known for their refined minting and elegant looks . The Indian rulers adopted similar techniques to mint their coins on the Persian model.At the last, Historical and Archaeological evidence show close relation between Iran and India in Art,Architecture and culture.These relations are not limited to only one part of their history and it existed for thousands of years between these two civilizations.Although Iran and India were neighbours for several centuries and until recent age this connection strongly exists. The period between sixth Century B.C till the fall of the Persians was the golden age of Indo-Iranian cultural ties even though we talk about common ancestors dating back to the Aryan migrations.In India we can observe a huge Cultural Exchange



between them during Achaemenid period in Iran and Mauryan rule in India. This cultural exchange, covered many aspects of Art and Architecture of both civilizations. We can find similarity of symbols and art designs which used commonly in their art and architecture during this period. Most of these symbols are moral and religious symbols in nature and execution which indicate to the same origin of these two people. These cultural exchanges existed for several centuries and were a Bilateral Cultural Exchange.

Sometimes concepts and symbols moved from Iran to India and sometimes it was the reverse flow. Study of similar symbols can be a key to find other cultural and religious aspects of both civilizations. It can also be helpful for anthropological studies of Indo-Iranian people and throw light to the dark parts of their history if any. (1)

Achaemenid's Influence on Maurya according to Excavation of Patliputra

As long ago as 1896 a summary excavation brought to light a column-capital of a familiar Achaemenid pattern. It has the steeped impost, side-volutes and central pattern of its Persian prototypes. Its design, if not its execution can be attributed to an earlier phase of the transplanted Achaemenid craftsmanship. Two stone legs of a throne of Persian type were also found. Subsequently, in 1912, a more ambitious but still very incomplete excavation seems to have uncovered some part of a large pillared hall, represented by an



unframed cluster of some eighty monolithic columns showing the Persian polish.

In front of them is a row of massive timber rafts, presumably designed to carry platform of monumental staircase. Inadequate though the evidence be, it is tolerably clear that we have here a Persian dewan or Apadana or audience-hall, and that were confronted once more with a deliberate, Persianization, that bespeaks the presence of imported ideas and imported master-mason.

Beside the inscriptions, there is some more archaeological evidence for the history of Ashoka. It shows clearly that the most of the equipments of Ashokan imperialism had been borrowed from Persia. According to Sir Mortimer Wheeler, an authority on Indian archaeology, says I have already suggested the likelihood that at the end of the sixth century B.C.E, when Achaemenid Persia acquired its Indian province, Persia supplied India, not merely with administrators, but also with new materials and ideas above all, with the use of iron, which now appears in India for the first time, and the idea of a currency, which was minted at Taxila in native guise but on Persian standards, and emerged in the Ganges basin in or shortly after the 5th century B.C.E. Persia moreover lent India the Aramaic alphabet which, with Aramaic speech, had



been the official medium of communication throughout the Achaemenid empire.

In India, script was modified to suit the local Prakrit language and, as Kharoshti, was used by Ashoka for his inscription in the north-west. Even as far south as Brahmagiri, the Ashokan scribe has added a word in this alien Kharoshti, though elsewhere in metropolitan India the Brahma script was unchallenged. But the Persian contribution to India did not end with iron and currency and Kharoshti. These were the symbols of that new security which advanced imperial rule imposed along the highway and of a new burgeoning of inter-regional trade. Local capitals which were also caravan cities sprang up besides the main routes: probably Begram north of Kabul; certainly, as recent work has shown, Charasada (Pushkalavati or Lotus City) on the Peshawar plain; and far-famed Taxila in the Punjab (2). Indeed in Aryan India the term architecture can first be applied unreservedly to the famous sandstone columns, which Ashoka set up as memorials after his conversion to Buddhism.

On some of these columns he subsequently carved his pious injunctions to his subjects.

It has long been recognized that these columns, without precedent in Indian architectural forms, represent in partibus the craftsmanship of Persia. Actually, the name, Persepolitan, which is commonly given to



them by writers in Indian architecture is not altogether happy, since the innumerable columns of Persepolis are invariably fluted, whereas those of Ashoka are unfluted, as indeed was substitute, Persian custom. But as for, Persepolitan, we substitute, Persian, or better still, Achaemenid, there can be no dispute. The Chunar sandstone from which Ashoka's columns are wrought is superbly carved and finished with a lustrous polish of a kind which in India is characteristic of no other age. This is a Persian accomplishment. The masonry of the palaces of Darius and Xerxes goes to the extreme of highly polished stones, looking, when well preserved, like mirrors of black marble. Equally, Persian are the famous lions which crowned the Ashokan column at Saranath, near Banaras, and have been assumed as the republican badge of India.

Rock cut:

The mention of rock-carvers recalls another debt of Ashoka's to Persian prototypes. From the seventh century B.C. if not earlier, tombs in the likeness of pillared halls had been cut into the cliffs of Media and Persia. In India, the first of a long and distinguished series of rock-cut structures, were carved in the time of Ashoka out of the hard gneiss of the Barabar hills, nineteen miles of Gaya in southern Bihar. It is significant that they reproduce wooden building: a round hut with a thatched roof, shrine with a vaulted, wood, roof, a monumental doorway imitating bamboo and



timber. In other words, the more grandiose Persian idea is adapted to the Indian idiom

At the same time on the Persian tradition of polished stonework surface of the interiors of these humble cells has been varnished until it resembles glass or metal.

Description of Megasthenes from Pataliputra (Capital of Ashoka)

Megasthenes was sent by Seleukos as an ambassador to the court of Chandragupta at Pataliputra.

He describes as situated at the junction of the Son and Ganges, as being more than 9 miles and 1-3-4 miles wide. In other words, it was stretched out along the bank of the Ganges in a fashion similar to that of the modern Patna.

In the royal palace, as we are told by Aelian, following Megasthenes, there was much that was calculated to excite a similarity and with which neither Susa, with all its costly splendor, nor Ecbatana, with all its magnificence, can vie. In the parks tamed and cultivated plants and tree branches which the art of the woodman has deftly interwoven. There are also tanks of great beauty in which they keep fish of enormous size quite tame. The whole description significantly reminiscent of a Persian paradise. Majumdar several times mentioned the influence of Achaemenid on Maurya art. He said: The origin of this court-art the Mauryas has a subject of keen dispute among



scholars. But the general opinion seems to be that the impetus originally came from outside, from Iran of the Achaemenid emperors. One of the most important functions of Mauryan court-art, like Achaemenian court-art, was to impress and overawe the populace with the power and majesty of its rulers. To this function can be traced the compactness of the solid animal figures, their exaggerated forms and their conventional appearances, also the most imposing stateliness of the columns. (3)

The excavations of the historic site of Patliputra led Dr. Spooner to what he calls the Zoroastrian period of Indian History. The theory that the Zoroastrians had extended their sway as far as the Gangetic valley and ruled at Patliputra as imperial rulers came as a surprise to the scholarly world. The Iranians, it is possible, had come to India to fight with Chandragupta, the founder of the Mauryan dynasty, and lived in India as subject races. Some of these served as chiefs and petty Rajas in the Mauryan times and they probably had a hand in the erection of the Mauryan palaces, which were built after the style of the Persepolitan Halls. There are good reasons for believing that the regal pomp of the Mauryan Court was to some extent copied from Iran and that the Mauryas employed Iranians as soldieries, architects, masons and in other capacities. The stone architecture on a large scale, sculpture and the erection of monuments with inscriptions were due to Iran's influence on the

Mauryas. It is even possible that the Mauryan palaces were imitated from those at Persepolis. It is also not improbable that Zoroastrian doctrine, tradition and ritual had some share in the formation of Mahayana Buddhism. (4)

The Mauryan Empire of India was the sequel to the Achaemenid Empire of Persia, not its reflection. (5)

Art history in Ashoka age

The six surviving animal sculptures from Ashoka pillars form the first important group of Indian stone sculpture, though it is thought they derive from an existing tradition of wooden columns topped by animal sculptures in copper, none of which have survived. There has been much discussion of the extent of influence from Achaemenid Persia, where the column capitals supporting the roofs at Persepolis have similarities, and the rather cold, hieratic style of the Sarnath sculptures especially shows obvious Achaemenid and Sargonid influence. Very similar four-lion sculptures are on the capitals of the two columns supporting the south torana of the Ashokan or Satavahana enclosure wall round the Great Stupa at Sanchi. Like other Ashoka pillars, the one at Sarnath was probably erected to commemorate a visit by the emperor. (6)

Symbolism



What is being preached may be symbolised by the group of four lions of the capital. A group of four lions joined back to back symbolizes a group of four things of equal importance. The lion is frequently used as a symbol of the Buddha, as at Sanchi and the animals on the abacus below also have symbolic meaning in Buddhism (7)

Religious influences from Persia

Regarding the religious influences from Persia, it may be noted that the people of Taxila (Capital City of Gandhara), used to expose their dead to vultures, which was a distinctive feature of the Magian (a priestly caste in Zoroastrianism way of life. This practice was one that had been introduced by the Persian settlers in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. as it is practiced by the modern Parsees. It is, therefore, reasonable to infer that originally this Magian custom of disposing of their dead must have been introduced at Taxila by the Achaemenians (we already mentioned about similarities of religious and its influences on ancient Iran and India). (8)

Conclusion:

At the last, Historical and Archaeological evidence show close relation between Iran and India in art, Architecture and culture. These relation dose not limited to only one part of their history and it dose existed for thousands of years between these to civilization. Although Iran and India was neighbor for several centuries and until recent



age this connection strongly exist, but In this field, first millennium B.C.E. was the golden age of Indo-Iranian cultural tie in India we can observe a huge Cultural Exchange between them during Achaemenid period in Iran and Mauryan dynasty. This cultural exchange, covered many aspects of art and architecture of both civilization. we can find similarity of symbols and art designs which used commonly in their art and architecture during this period. Most of these symbols are moral and religious symbols which indicate to same origin of these two people. These cultural exchanges existed for several centuries and were a Bilateral Cultural Exchange. Sometimes concepts and symbols moved from Iran to India and sometimes it was the reverse flow. Study of similar symbols can be a key to find other cultural and religious aspects of both civilizations. It can be also helpful for anthropological studies of Indo-Iranian people and throw light to dark parts of their history.

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