

IRANIAN AND GREEK INVASION OF INDIA

IRANIAN INVASION ON INDIA

The Iranians invaded India in the 6th century B.C, when king Darius I ruled over Iran. He invaded India and occupied the territories in the North-Western Frontier Province, Sind and Punjab in 516 B.C. These parts remained with the Iranian Empire till Alexander's invasion of India.

A few important points about the Persian Invasion of India:

- Cyrus, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire in ancient Iran invaded the North-Western front of India in 550 BCE.
- At that time, there were many small provinces like Gandhara, Kamboja, and Madra who were constantly fighting one another.
- At that time, Bimbisara of the Haryanka dynasty was ruling over Magadha.
- Cyrus succeeded in bringing under Persian control all the Indian tribes west of the Indus like Gandhara.
- Punjab and Sindh were annexed by Darius I, Cyrus's grandson.
- Son of Darius, Xerxes, could not move ahead with the further conquest of India because of war with the Greeks. He had employed Indian cavalry and infantry.

IRANIAN INFLUENCE OF INDIA

India had close relations with Persia (Iran) from very ancient times. Iranian contacts with India lasted for about two centuries (516 to 326 B.C). These contacts had many important results which are as under:

(a) *Encouragement to Trade*: The mutual contacts helped in the growth of trade between the two countries. The India Traders and merchants now reached distant places in the Vast Persian Empire to dispose of their goods. Similarly, the Persian goods began to flow smoothly into India.

(b) *An Idea of Unified Empire*: India learnt the necessity of a strong and united empire to repel the foreign invasions. It was for the first time that the small, scattered and mutually quarreling states of India realized how essential it was to join hands together to meet the common enemy.

(c) *India's Political Weakness Exposed*: The Persian invasion and India's defeat to defend her frontiers exposed India's political weakness. This weakness encouraged the foreigners to invade the frontiers of India. The Iranians were followed by the Greeks, the Sakas, the Kushans and the Huns.

(d) *Settlement of Foreigners on Indian Soil*: A large number of foreigners, the Greek the Persians, Turks etc settled down in the North –Western parts of India. With the passage of time they completely absorbed among the Indians.

(e) *Impact on Art and Architecture*: The Iranian art also influenced the Indian art. Ashoka, followed the Iranian custom of preaching ideals by inscribing them on the stone pillars. The Indians also learnt the art of polishing.

(f) *Kharoshthi Script*: The Indians adopted the Kharoshthi Script of Iran. It was written from right to left.

(g) *Interchange of Indo Persian culture*: Indian Scholars and philosophers went to

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Persia and exchanged their views freely with the intellectuals of that country. This contact brought about a great change in the outlook of the people and brought the people closer.

India's Political, Religious, Social and Economic Conditions on the eve of Alexander's Invasion.

At the time of Alexander's invasion in 326 B.C., the general condition of India was as follows:

1. *Political Condition:* At that time, there was not any mighty empire in India and the whole country was divided into several small republics and monarchical states which were constantly fighting with one another. Across the Beas River the strong Magadha Empire had neither the will or time to intervene in the political changes occurring in the states lying to the west.

(a) *Political Condition in the Trans-Indus States:* There were probably four hill-tribes to the west of the Indus, of whom the most powerful were the Assakenos who ruled quite independently.

(b) *Ambhi's Kingdom:* The kingdom of Taxila lay between the river Indus and Jhelum. It was ruled by Ambhi who was the sworn enemy of his neighbouring ruler Porus.

(c) *Porus's Kingdom:* Porus ruled over the territory which lay between the Jhelum and the Chenab. He maintained a strong army which fought well against Alexander.

(d) *Younger Porus and the Glausai Tribe:* The territory between the Ravi and the Chenab was ruled by the Younger Porus, who was a relative of Porus and tribesmen of the Glausai Tribe who had their own separate areas.

(e) *The Territory between the Ravi and the Beas Rivers:* The territory was ruled by several independent tribes. Of them the most powerful were the Kathois with their capital at Sangla.

(f) *The Magadha Empire:* To the east of the Beas lay the mighty empire of Magadha which was ruled by the Nandas who had a huge powerful army consisting of 2,00,000 foot soldiers, 60,000 horses, 1,000 to 6,000 elephants and 2,000 four-horse-drawn chariots. Its capital city was at Patliputra.

(g) *Tribal Republics of the Southern Punjab:* In the Southern parts of the Punjab, which lay on the Alexander's route, when he was returning to Greece, were the warlike tribal republics of Sivi, Kshudrakas and Malloi, etc. They made Alexander's retreat a difficult affair.

(h) *The Indus Valley Tribes:* There were several independent tribes in the Indus Valley. Among them, the most important were the Mausikanos and the Sofrai tribes.

2. *Social Condition:* People led a simple life. Thefts were uncommon. However, the customs of Sati, polygamy and slavery were prevalent. In the light of the Greek accounts, that some of the people were forced to sell their daughters because of poverty, we can conclude that the moral decay had set in the society. However, the Indians had made much progress in the field of art, architecture, literature and education.

3. *Economic Condition:* Agriculture, trade and various crafts were practiced by the people. The trade was developed. The Indian traders travelled to far off countries where they sold woolen blankets, hides, horses, elephants and precious stones. The traders were prosperous and the trade was controlled by the state. Coins were also used as the medium

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of exchange.

4. *Religious Condition:* The practice of worshipping the images of Lord Rama and Krishna had been firmly established. The rivers (especially the Ganga) and the trees were also worshipped. The sacred trees were never cut or injured. The hold off Brahmanism was supreme though Buddhism and Jainism were also gaining ground. The Brahmanas were held in high esteem ever by the rulers.

EFFECTS OF ALEXANDER'S INVASION OF INDIA

Not direct Consequences of Alexander's Invasion.

Alexander's invasion was an unimportant event in the History of India and as such it did not leave any permanent mark on its civilization due to several reasons:-

(1) *His Untimely Death.* Alexander had an ambition to annex his Indian conquests to his Greek empire. That is why he left several of his governors and a large part of his army back in India. But his untimely death put to an end all his plans.

(2) *Short Stay in India.* Alexander stayed in India for a short period of 19 months. Almost all this time, he spent in fighting battles. In this atmosphere of war and distrust neither the Greeks nor the Indians could have an open heart to understand each other. In such a condition, how could the Greek civilization influence the civilization of India.

(3) *Merely a Border Invasion.* Alexander could not penetrate deep into the country and thus, his invasion remained more or less like a border raid. There was, therefore, remote possibility of its influencing the Indian civilization.

(4) *The Indian Civilization was already well-deployed.* The Indian civilization was already well-developed and the Indian people did not lag behind in any field than any other people in the world. They, therefore, found nothing worth-while that they could learn from the Greek invaders.

(5) *Founding of the Mauryan Dynasty.* No sooner did Alexander turn his back, all his Indian territories were occupied by Chandragupta Maurya and thus even the last vestiges of the Greek invasion were obliterated.

INDIRECT CONSEQUENCES OF ALEXANDER'S INVASION

Though Alexander failed to plant his Greek civilization in India, nor could his invasion produce any direct consequences of permanent nature yet his invasion was not a total failure. It cannot be called a 'non-event' in the Indian history. It produced several indirect consequences, some of these were as under:

(1) *It helped in the Founding of the Mauryan Dynasty.* Alexander's invasion had reduced the strength of the various states as well as the warlike tribes of the Punjab, so that it became quite easy for Chandragupta to subdue them. Otherwise, Chandragupta Maurya had to face strong resistance from his Indian counter-parts.

(2) *It helped in promoting India's Unity.* One significant result of these petty state and warlike tribes being crushed by Alexander was the task of establishing a strong empire became too easy.

(3) *Relations with Western Countries.* Alexander's invasion opened four new routes between India and Europe so that India could now have direct relations with the European countries. The discovery of these routes also encouraged trade. Several Indian traders, artisans and religious scholars went to other countries and some people came to India from other countries. In this way, Indian contacts with Europe developed rapidly.

(4) *Help in building Indian Chronology for subsequent Events.* Alexander's invasion helped in the construction of the Indian history. He invaded India in 326 A.D. a date which helped us a lot in determining the Indian chronology. Indian texts especially the Purans have ignored to record events in chronological order. Megasthenes and other Greek writers have written a lot about the contemporary Indian society. Their

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descriptions have proved valuable in this respect. The historians who accompanied Alexander have given an important information about the social and economic conditions of India.

(5) *Foundation of the Greek States.* After Alexander's departure, the Greek generals who were left in India established their independent states on the North Western Frontiers of India. In this way, the Indians came in contact with the Greeks and both of them benefited from each other. The Indians learnt from the Greeks the art of making beautiful idols and coins. The Gandhara School of Art is a direct consequence of the Greek art. The Indians also learnt a lot from the Greek astronomers. On the other hand, the Indians greatly influenced the philosophy and several Greeks embraced the Hindu faith.

CAUSES RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEFEAT OF THE INDIANS BY ALEXANDER:

Alexander the tremendous superiority of a trained army over the vast and unwieldy Hindu armies. He had found routes to India by land and sea. He completely altered the balance of power and the political completion of North Western India. Some of the main causes responsible for the defeat of the Indians were the following:

1. The main cause of defeat was the lack of unity among the Indian rulers. Their mutual jealousy had made them utterly selfish. They could not pool their resource even at the time of national crisis.

2. Alexander was undoubtedly a great general, perhaps the greatest general that the world has ever produced.

3. The Greek army was more disciplined and better organized than the India unwieldy and untrained, indisciplined armies.

4. The Greek soldiers were familiar with the latest tactics.

5. The elephants used by the Indians proved a liability rather than an asset for them. When wounded by the Greek archers they ran away in madness and trampled their own soldiers.

6. Nature also seemed to favour the Macedonians. Because of rain and storm the Indian archies could not use their bows effectively on the slippery battle field.

7. The Chariots could not move quickly and got stuck in the rain soaked mud. This slowness of movement proved very detrimental to the Indian side.

8. The Indian side was taken unawares when Alexander attacked them all of a sudden. The idea that no one could cross the Jhelum in flood had rendered the Indian soldiers quite inactive and careless.