

Madras University Historical Series, No. VIII

General Editor.

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THE MAURYAN POLITY

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UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS

1932

PRINTED AT
THE MADRAS LAW JOURNAL PRESS
MYLAPORE, MADRAS
1932

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE accompanying pages are an amplification of five lectures delivered at the University in 1929-30. The main sources of information are the Kauṭaliya Arthaśāstra, the inscriptions of Aśoka and the fragments of Megasthenes. In the first chapter will be found a critical examination of their authenticity and their value as sources to the history of Mauryan India. I have come to the conclusion that the extant Arthaśāstra is the accredited work of the chancellor of Candragupta Maurya. The inscriptions of Aśoka follow, to a large extent, this all important treatise. Though the fragments of Megasthenes could not be credited with much trustworthiness, they are used as supplementing the primary sources.

One chapter is devoted to the character and extent of the Empire. Three chapters on the Central Administration, and one on the Provincial and Local Governments follow. A careful comparison between the Kauṭaliyan polity and the polity lying behind the inscriptions of Aśoka, confirms the view, as will be seen from these chapters, that the polity behind the Edicts is the Kauṭaliyan polity. The last chapter is on the religion of the Mauryas in general, and that of Candragupta and of Aśoka in particular. A critical study of the relevant inscriptions, not to speak of literary evidences, has led me to conclude that neither Aśoka was a Buddhist nor Candragupta a Jain.

The correspondences between the Arthaśāstra texts and the text of the inscriptions of Aśoka are so glaring that it would be far from the truth to postulate the theory that the

dumb documents left to us as legacy by Aśoka are essentially religious in tone or in character. In the light of new interpretations suggested for different terms and passages of the edicts, it is found that the inscriptions contain much reliable data to re-construct the political history of Aśoka and his predecessors.

In this re-construction of institutions, religious and political, checked and verified wherever possible from the accounts of classical writers, an endeavour is made to establish a thesis as to the character of the Government of the time. The constitution was a benevolent form of monarchy with democratic institutions, almost modern in character.

My grateful acknowledgments are due to Professors S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar and K. A. Nilakanta Sastri for valuable suggestions and guidance in the whole work.

LIMBDI GARDENS,
MADRAS,
11th July, 1932. }

V. R. RAMACHANDRA DIKSHITAR.

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