

Land Route Between India and Europe and Contribution of Aledander – A Study

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Abstract

A Their most memorable clash was at the Battle of Hydaspes (Jhelum) against Porus, the ruler of the Paurava kingdom of western Punjab. For more than 25 centuries it was believed that Alexander's forces had defeated the Indians. Greek and Roman accounts say the Indians were bested by the superior courage and stature of the Macedonians. More than a thousand years after Alexander's death, the myth-making reached absurd and fantastic proportions with the arrival of a new genre known as the Greek Alexander Romance (2), a fictional account of Alexander's Asian campaigns composed of a conglomeration of the rumours surrounding his rule. The destruction of the Persian Empire and the defeat of the Indian kingdoms were the highlights that drove the popularity of the Alexander Romance in Europe. A version of this story was included in the Koran in which Alexander is called Dhulkarnain. During the colonial period, British historians latched on to the Alexander legend and described the campaign as the triumph of the organised West against the chaotic East. Although Alexander defeated only a few minor kingdoms in India's northwest, in the view of many gleeful colonial writers the Greek conquest of India was complete. In reality much of the country was not even known to the Greeks. So handing victory to Alexander is like describing Hitler as the conqueror of Russia because the Germans advanced up to Stalingrad. In 1957, while addressing the cadets of the Indian Military Academy, Dehra Dun, the great Russian general Georgy Zhukov (3) said Alexander's actions after the Battle of Hydaspes suggest he had suffered an outright defeat. In Zhukov's view, Alexander had suffered a greater setback in India than Napoleon in Russia.

Alexander's invasion of India is regarded as a huge Western victory against the disorganised East. But the largely Macedonian army may have suffered a fate worse than Napoleon in Russia. In Part 1 we discuss the stubborn Indian resistance to the invasion; Part 2 will examine whether it was Alexander or Porus who won the Battle of Hydaspes. In 326 BCE a formidable European army invaded India. Led by Alexander of Macedon it comprised battle hardened Macedonian soldiers, Greek cavalry, Balkan fighters and Persians allies. Estimates of the number of fighting men vary – from 41,000 according to Arrian to 120,000 as per the account of Quintus Curtius.

Napoleon had invaded Russia with 600,000 troops; of these only 30,000 survived, and of that number fewer than 1,000 were able to return to duty. If Zhukov compared Alexander's campaign in India to Napoleon's disaster, the Macedonians and Greeks must have retreated in an equally ignominious fashion.

Key words: Alexander, India, Indian subcontinent, Europe, land route.

Introduction

After a long siege, Alexander decided to cross the river Indus after consolidating his position in the conquered territories. It is said that he constructed a sixteen-mile bridge at Ohind and here the envoy of Ambhi, the ruler of Taxila, met Alexander. From Ohind Alexander proceeded to Taxila, where the ruler Ambhi and the ruler of the Abhisara tribe became subordinates to him. Purushottama or Porus, the ruler of the territory of Jhelum opposed Alexander in the battle of Hydaspes. In this battle, Purushottama was defeated by a stratagem, but in the end Alexander, recognizing the bravery and valour of Purushottama returned the territory to him. Purushottama appears to have accepted the overlordship of Alexander. Commemorating his victory, Alexander built the cities of Boukephala and Nikala near the Jhelum River. Alexander then crossed the Chenab and defeated the tribes living between the Chenab and the Ravi. The army of Alexander revolted when asked to cross the Beas and as Alexander failed to convince them, he ordered retreat of the army in 326 BC, after constructing twelve huge altars on the river Beas. On the way back, Alexander had to face the opposition of many hill tribes and he died at the age of 33 in 323 BC in Babylon near Baghdad. His sudden death was followed by confusion and partition of the Greek empire in 321 BC and his power on the Indian soil was shattered to pieces. A debate is going on among historians regarding the impact of the invasion of Alexander. There is a view that Alexander's invasion of India is a landmark in the history of India. Alexander, the son of Philip of Macedonia, is considered one of the great conquerors of the ancient world. He ascended the throne at the age of twenty in 335 BC. Alexander, who was fired by an ambition to become the world conqueror, gathered a large army and started his conquests in 334 BC. After consolidating his position by conquering neighbouring powers, he became busy in waging war with Persia between 334 and 330 BC and conquered Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt. In his wars with Persia, a decisive battle was fought at Arbela in 331 BC. Alexander captured and destroyed Persipolis, the capital of Persia and built a new city called Alexandria. By 328 BC, Alexander took the title of "Great King of Persia". Alexander then turned his attention towards India and divided his army into two parts. Alexander himself led a part of the army while the other part was sent to India under the command of Hephaeston and Perdikkas, Alexander's army was opposed by the tribal chief Hasti or Aster, whose capital was Pushkalavati and after a bitter struggle Alexander won a victory. Later Alexander had to face the Asvayanas who fought very bravely before he defeated them.

There are also arguments that the significance of the event was much exaggerated, or that it was underestimated. Interestingly, not even a single Indian literary text, Hindu, Buddhist or Jainas, of the contemporary times or of later date makes the faintest allusion to Alexander or his invasion. What could be the reason for this silence? Could it be that he could not come to the mainland of India, i.e., the Gangetic Valley and that he succeeded only over small, petty chieftains and hill tribes? It is a fact that he invaded the border area of India, but failed to establish a sound political power structure that could transit Greek ideas into India.

His stay in India was only for 19 months, which was spent in fighting or planning to fight. Though there was no significant direct impact of his conquest, indirectly it opened up contacts between east and west culturally, and promoted trade contacts by opening up a communication network. We cannot accept the view of Hennessee that all the later developments of India depended indirectly upon the institutions of Alexander. Even V.A. Smith admits that India was not totally Hellenised but followed a policy of "splendid isolation". We may agree with the view of R.K. Mukherjee that the invasion of Alexander indirectly promoted the awareness and need for political unification under a large kingdom. We also can agree with R.C. Majumdar that it was only a raid leaving no permanent marks. Culturally, the Gandhara art is a good

example of the impact of the Greek artistic tradition on Indian art. The Greek influence on Indian astronomy is remarkable, and the Greek influence on Indian coins is to be remembered. In conclusion, it can be said that though India was not Hellenised because of Alexander's invasion or raid, the Greek impact on Indian culture of later times is of considerable importance.

Objective:

This paper seeks to explore Alexander invasion of India the first European to invade Indian subcontinent and its consequences for India Europe exchange

Herodotus the father of history setting for Alexander

In the fourth century BC, the Greeks and the Iranians fought for the supremacy of the world. Under the leadership of Alexander of Macedonia, the Greeks eventually destroyed the Iranian empire. Alexander conquered not only Asia Minor and Iraq but also Iran. From Iran he marched to India, obviously attracted by its great wealth. Herodotus, who is called the father of history, and other Greek writers had painted India as a fabulous land, which tempted Alexander to invade it.

Alexander also had a strong passion for geographical inquiry and natural history. He had heard that the Caspian Sea continued on the eastern side of India. He was also inspired by the mythical exploits of past conquerors whom he wanted to emulate and surpass. The political condition of north-west India suited his plans. The area was parceled out into many independent monarchies and tribal republics, which were strongly wedded to the soil and had a fierce dedication to the principality in which they lived. Alexander found it easy to conquer these principalities one by one. Among the rulers of these territories, two were well known: Ambhi, the prince of Taxila, and Porus whose kingdom lay between the Jhelum and the Chenab. Together they might have effectively resisted Alexander's advance, but they could not put up a joint front; and the Khyber pass remained unguarded. Following the conquest of Iran, Alexander moved on to Kabul, from where he marched to India through the Khyber pass in 326 BC. It took him five months to reach the Indus. Ambhi, the ruler of Taxila, readily submitted to the invader, augmenting Alexander's army and replenishing his treasure.

When he reached the Jhelum, Alexander encountered the first and the strongest resistance from Porus. Although Alexander defeated Porus, he was impressed by the bravery and courage of the Indian prince. He therefore restored his kingdom to him and made him his ally. He then advanced as far as the Beas river. He wanted to move still further eastward, but his army refused to accompany him. The Greek soldiers had grown war-weary, and diseased. The hot climate of India and ten years of continuous campaigning had made them terribly homesick. They had also had a taste of Indian fighting qualities on the banks of the Indus, which made them desist from advancing further. As the Greek historian Arrian tells us: 'In the art of war the Indians were far superior to the other nations inhabiting the area at that time.' In particular, the Greek soldiers were told of a formidable power on the Ganges.

Course of Alexander's invasion

No easy victories Alexander's troubles began as soon as he crossed the Indian border. He first faced resistance in the Kunar, Swat, Buner and Peshawar valleys where the Aspasiens (Iranian Aspa, Sanskrit Asva = horse) and Assakenoi (Sanskrit Asvakas or Asmakas, perhaps a branch of, or allied to, the Aspasioi), challenged his advance. Although mere

specks on the map by Indian standards, they did not lack in courage and refused to submit before Alexander's killing machine. The Aspasiens hold the distinction of being the first among the Indians to fight Alexander. The Roman historian Arrian writes in 'The Anabasis of Alexander' that with these people "the conflict was sharp, not only from the difficult nature of the ground, but also because the Indians were...by far the stoutest warriors in that neighbourhood".

The intensity of the fighting can be measured from the fact that during the siege Alexander and his two of leading commanders were wounded. Alexander was hit by a dart which penetrated the breastplate into his shoulder. But the wound was only a slight one, for the breastplate prevented the dart from penetrating right through his shoulder. In the end the guile and superior numbers of Alexander's army won the day. The Macedonians captured 40,000 men and 230,000 oxen, transporting the choicest among the latter to their country for use as draft animals. Alexander next attacked the hill state of Nysa, which probably occupied a site on the lower spurs and balleys of the Koh-i-Mor. It was governed by a body of aristocracy consisting of 300 members, Akouphis being their chief. The Nysaens readily submitted to the Macedonian king, and placed at his disposal a contingent of 300 cavalry. According to Rama Shankar Tripathi (5), the Nysaens claimed descent from Dionysius. "This gratified the vanity of Alexander, and he therefore allowed his weary troops to take rest and indulge in Bacchanalian revels for a few days with their alleged distant kinsmen."

Greek guile defeats Massaga Alexander's next nemesis was the Assakenoi who offered stubborn resistance from their mountain strongholds of Massaga, Bazira and Ora. Realising the gravity of this new threat from the West, they raised an army of 20,000 cavalry and more than 30,000 infantry, besides 30 elephants. The fighting at Massaga was bloody and prolonged, and became a prelude to what awaited Alexander in India. On the first day after bitter fighting the Macedonians and Greeks were forced to retreat with heavy losses. Alexander himself was seriously wounded in the ankle. On the fourth day the king of Massaga was killed but the city refused to surrender. The command of the army went to his old mother, which brought the entire women of the area into the fighting. Realising that his plans to storm India were going down at its very gates, Alexander called for a truce.

Typical of Indian kingdoms right through history, the Assakenoi agreed to their eternal regret. While 7,000 Indian soldiers were leaving the city as per the agreement, Alexander's army launched a sudden and sneaky attack. Arrian writes: "Undaunted by this unexpected danger, the Indian mercenaries fought with great tenacity and "by their audacity and feats of valour made the conflict, in which they closed, hot work for the enemy". When many of the Assakenoi had been killed, or were in the agony of deadly wounds, the women took up the arms of their fallen men and heroically defended the citadel along with the remaining male soldiers. After fighting desperately they were at last overpowered by superior numbers, and in the words of Diodoros "met a glorious death which they would have disdained to exchange for a life with dishonour". (Hindu women like Rani Padmini, who preferred to jump into the fires of jauhar rather than become captives, can trace their tradition of self-sacrifice and valour to antiquity.) After the fall of Massaga, Alexander advanced further, and in the course of a few months' hard fighting captured the important and strategic fortresses of Ora (where a similar slaughter followed), Bazira, Aornos, Peukelaotis (Sanskrit = Pushkaravati, modern Charsadda in the Yusufzai territory), Embolima and Dyrta. (Due to the peculiar Greek orthography most of these cities are now impossible to identify or decipher.) However, the fierce resistance put up by the Indian defenders had reduced the strength – and perhaps the confidence – of the until then all-conquering Macedonian army. Faceoff at the river In his entire conquering career Alexander's hardest encounter was the Battle of Hydaspes, in which he faced king Porus of Paurava, a small but prosperous Indian kingdom on the river Jhelum. Porus is described in Greek accounts as standing seven feet tall. In May

326 BCE, the European and Paurava armies faced each other across the banks of the Jhelum. By all accounts it was an awe-inspiring spectacle.

Human Tragedy of the attack

The 34,000 Macedonian infantry and 7000 Greek cavalry were bolstered by the Indian king Ambhi, who was Porus's rival. Ambhi was the ruler of the neighbouring kingdom of Taxila and had offered to help Alexander on condition he would be given Porus's kingdom. Facing this tumultuous force led by the genius of Alexander was the Paurava army of 20,000 infantry, 2000 cavalry and 200 war elephants. Being a comparatively small kingdom by Indian standards, Paurava couldn't have maintained such a large standing army, so it's likely many of its defenders were hastily armed civilians. Also, the Greeks habitually exaggerated enemy strength. According to Greek sources, for several days the armies eyeballed each other across the river. The Greek-Macedonian force after having lost several thousand soldiers fighting the Indian mountain cities, were terrified at the prospect of fighting the fierce Paurava army. They had heard about the havoc Indian war elephants created among enemy ranks. The modern equivalent of battle tanks, the elephants also scared the wits out of the horses in the Greek cavalry. Another terrible weapon in the Indians' armoury was the two-meter bow. As tall as a man it could launch massive arrows able to transfix more than one enemy soldier. Indians strike The battle was savagely fought. As the volleys of heavy arrows from the long Indian bows scythed into the enemy's formations, the first wave of war elephants waded into the Macedonian phalanx that was bristling with 17-foot long sarissas. Some of the animals got impaled in the process. Then a second wave of these mighty beasts rushed into the gap created by the first. The elephants either trampled the Macedonian soldiers or grabbed them by their trunks and presented them up for the mounted Indian soldiers to spear them to their deaths. It was a nightmarish scenario for the invaders. As the terrified Macedonians pushed back, the Indian infantry charged into the gap. In the first charge, by the Indians, Porus's son wounded both Alexander and his favourite horse Bucephalus, the latter fatally, forcing Alexander to dismount. (6) This was a big deal. In battles outside India the elite Macedonian bodyguards had provided an iron shield around their king, yet at Hydaspes the Indian troops not only broke into Alexander's inner cordon, they also killed Nicaea, one of his leading commanders.

According to the Roman historian Marcus Justinus, Porus challenged Alexander, who charged him on horseback. In the ensuing duel, Alexander fell off his horse and was at the mercy of the Indian king's spear. But Porus dithered for a second and Alexander's bodyguards rushed in to save their king. Plutarch, the Greek historian and biographer, says there seems to have been nothing wrong with Indian morale. Despite initial setbacks, when their vaunted chariots got stuck in the mud, Porus's army "rallied and kept resisting the Macedonians with unsurpassable bravery".

Macedonians: Shaken, not stirred The Greeks claim Porus's army was eventually surrounded and defeated by Alexander's superior battle tactics, but there are too many holes in that theory. It is acknowledged by Greek and Roman sources that the fierce and constant resistance put up by the Indian soldiers and ordinary people everywhere had shaken Alexander's army to the core. They refused to move further east. Nothing Alexander could say or do would spur his men to continue eastward. The army was close to mutiny. These are not the signs of a victorious army, but a defeated group of soldiers would certainly behave in this manner. Says Plutarch: "The combat with Porus took the edge off the Macedonians' courage, and stayed their further progress into India. For having found it hard enough to defeat an enemy who brought but 20,000 foot and 2000 horse into the field, they thought they had reason to oppose Alexander's design of leading them

on to pass the Ganges, on the further side of which was covered with multitudes of enemies.” The Greek historian says after the battle with the Pauravas, the badly bruised and rattled Macedonians panicked when they received information further from Punjab lay places “where the inhabitants were skilled in agriculture, where there were elephants in yet greater abundance and men were superior in stature and courage”.

Indeed, on the other side of the Ganges was the mighty kingdom of Magadh, ruled by the wily Nandas, who commanded one of the most powerful and largest standing armies in the world. According to Plutarch, the courage of the Macedonians evaporated when they came to know the Nandas “were awaiting them with 200,000 infantry, 80,000 cavalry, 8000 war chariots and 6000 fighting elephants”. Undoubtedly, Alexander’s army would have walked into a slaughterhouse. Hundreds of kilometres from the Indian heartland, Alexander ordered a retreat to great jubilation among his soldiers. Partisans counterattack The celebrations were premature. On its way south towards the sea via Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan, Alexander’s army was constantly harried by Indian partisans, republics and kingdoms. In a campaign at Sangala in Punjab, the Indian attack was so ferocious it completely destroyed the Greek cavalry, forcing Alexander to attack on foot. In the next battle, against the Malavs of Multan, he was felled by an Indian warrior whose arrow pierced the Macedonian’s breastplate and ribs. Says Military History magazine: “Although there was more fighting, Alexander’s wound put an end to any more personal exploits. Lung tissue never fully recovers, and the thick scarring in its place made every breath cut like a knife.”

Consequences on Indo Europe relation through land route

This was obviously the kingdom of Magadha ruled by the Nandas who maintained an army far outnumbering Alexander’s. So, despite the repeated appeals by Alexander for their advance, the Greek soldiers refused to budge. Alexander lamented: ‘I am trying to rouse the hearts that are disloyal and crushed with craven fears.’ The king who had never known defeat at the hands of his enemies had to accept defeat from his own men. He was forced to retreat, and his dream of an eastern empire remained unfulfilled. On his return march Alexander vanquished many small republics until he reached the end of the Indian frontier. He remained in India for nineteen months (326-325BC) of continual battle, leaving him barely any time to organize his conquests. Still, he made some arrangements. Most of the conquered states were restored to their rulers who submitted to his authority. His own territorial possessions were however divided into three parts and placed under three Greek governors.

He also founded a number of cities to maintain his power in this area. Effects of Alexander’s Invasion: Alexander’s invasion provided the first occasion when ancient Europe came into close contact with ancient South Asia. Alexander’s Indian campaign was a triumphant success. He added to his empire an Indian province which was much larger than that conquered by Iran. However, the Greek possessions in India were soon lost to the Maurya rulers. The most important outcome of this invasion was the establishment of direct contact between India and Greece in various fields. Alexander’s campaign opened up four distinct routes by land and sea, paving the way for Greek merchants and craftsmen, and increasing the existing facilities for trade.

Although we hear of some Greeks living on the north-west even prior to Alexander’s invasion, the invasion multiplied Greek settlements in this area. The most important of these were the city of Alexandria in the Kabul region, Boukephala

on the Jhelum, and Alexandria in Sindh. Although the entire area was conquered by the Mauryas, the Greeks continued to live under both Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka. Alexander was deeply interested in the geography of the mysterious ocean which he saw for the first time at the mouth of the Indus. He therefore dispatched his new fleet under his friend Nearchus to explore the coast and search for harbours from the mouth of the Indus to that of the Euphrates. As a result Alexander's historians left valuable geographical accounts and also clearly dated records of Alexander's campaign, which enable us to definitively establish Indian chronology for subsequent events. Alexander's historians also provide us with important information about the social and economic conditions of the time. They tell us about the sad system, the sale of girls in marketplaces by poor parents, and the fine breed of oxen in north-west India. Alexander sent from there 200,000 oxen to Macedonia for use in Greece. The art of carpentry was the most flourishing craft in India, and carpenters built chariots, boats, and ships. By destroying the power of petty states in north-west India, Alexander's invasion paved the way for the expansion of the Maurya empire in that area. According to tradition, Chandragupta Maurya, who founded the Maurya empire, had seen something of the working of Alexander's military machine and had acquired some knowledge that helped him to destroy the power of the Nandas.

Conclusion

Ambhi helped him against Porus, Sasigupta, ruler of one of the frontier hill states accepted his suzerainty in the very beginning, and even Porus helped him in his further conquests after being defeated by him. All this helped Alexander who was diplomatic enough to draw advantage from the mutual jealousies of the Indian rulers and befriend some of them. Some historians have assigned the credit of Alexander's success to the superiority of his arms and skill in warfare. V.A. Smith writes, "The triumphant progress of Alexander from the Himalayas to the sea demonstrated the inherent weakness of the greatest Asiatic armies when confronted with European skill and discipline." But this view is not accepted by the majority of historians. Of course, Alexander was a great commander and the Greek phalanx (infantry drawn up in close order) and the horse-archers of Central Asia proved very much effective against Indian chariots, elephants and long bows and arrows, but it did not prove their unchallenged supremacy. Alexander did not fight against an equal match in India. If he had fought against the ruler of Magadha, probably, the result would have been different.

His area of conquests in India remained limited to the north-western frontier and Punjab, which was divided into small principalities, which were definitely weaker in men, material and the art of fighting against Alexander's forces. Further, these kingdoms of the north-west failed to offer a united resistance to Alexander. They were jealous of each other. Ambhi, the ruler of Taxila had enmity with the elder Porus and the king of Abhisara while the elder Porus and his relative, younger Porus, were definitely each other's rivals. Only the Malavas and the Kshudrakas gave a unique example, pooled their resources and offered a combined resistance to Alexander while he was on his back journey. Besides, a few Indian rulers gave substantial help to Alexander in his conquests.

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