

Social Condition under the Mauryan period

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Introduction:

Mauryan Empire was also an outcome of the socio-economic developments. We get enough information on the social and economic life from the Greek accounts, Kautilya's Arthashastra and other literary sources of the period.

Social division:

Megasthenes, the author of "Indica" writes that the Mauryan Society was divided into seven castes. It seems that the occupations were mistaken for castes. The fourfold caste system - the Brahmana, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Sudra - existed. The seven castes of the Mauryan times were.

Philosophers

Farmers

Soldiers

Herdsmen

Artisans

Magistrates

Councillors.

The philosophers included Brahmins, Soldiers, Magistrates and Councillors were probably Kshatriyas. The other Caste people were Sudras. The first three Castes of the fourfold order were more privileged than the Sudras.

The Vaisyas, who became rich through commercial activities vied with the Brahmins and the Kshatriya. But they could not gain supremacy in the Society.

Caste System :-

The Caste System was rigid. Inter Caste marriages and interlining were not permitted.

Occupations were hereditary. But the Caste rigidity might have been reduced by the influx of foreigners and the influence of Jainism and Buddhism.

Slavery:

Megasthenes says that there was no slave system in India. But slaves existed in Indian society. The inscription of Asoka and the Arthashastra of Kautilya speak about the existence of slaves. The slaves in India were treated kindly.

Women:

Women were respected in society. But they were not treated on equal terms with men. Polygamy was followed. The welfare of women was looked after by Superintendents.

Women of the Mauryan time were found to have been in several occupations. Women served as philosophers and body guards also. Divorce was

in vague. widow marriages were known.

The existence of the practice of "sati" was referred to by the Greeks. Women had superstitions. Prostitution was widely prevalent. There was an officers "Ganikadhyaksha" to protect prostitutes.

Ethics :-

The Mauryan people are frugal in their living and they had a mild and gentle behaviour.

Theft and speaking lies were absent. There were no written agreements or contracts. These conditions indicate that the people were bound by morality and culture.

Asoka's edicts refer to occasional social gathering of a large number of people. These gatherings were generally held in honour of Hindu gods.

proper age of marriage of the girl was 12 years, whereas 16 years was considered to be the right age for the marriage of a boy. Bigamy was the order of the day. Kautilya mentions eight types of marriages. Among them four viz.,

- * Gandharva
- * Asura
- * Rakshasa and
- * Paishacha

Food and Drinks:

Kautilya's Arthashastra mentions that meat eating was a common feature of the society. There were sellers of cooked rice and bread sellers in the land. A big parlor was attached to all houses. The wine shops served as a residential place for the prostitutes.

Games and Amusements:

Hunting was most prominent during this time. The king used to

Shoot arrows from the terraces.
Besides these viharayatrae there

existed various other games and
amusements in the society. Among
them the most prominent were
the battles between the men and
animals.

Economic Conditions

1. Agriculture
2. Occupations
3. Metallurgy
4. Skins and Hides
5. Drinks
6. Trade
7. Coinage

Agriculture :-

Agriculture was the main occupation during this period. Megasthenes mentions that majority people were agriculturists, peasants and farmers. The land was fertile. The means of irrigation were simple.

There were two seasonal rainfalls in India and the farmers reaped the harvest twice a year. Kautilya has given a description of ploughed, unploughed and rocky lands. The land was tilled with the help of oxen.

According to the Junagadh Inscription, Pushpagupta an official of Chandragupta got Sudarshan lake constructed for irrigation in Saurashtra. In addition to this Arthashastra mentions canals

tanks, wells, ponds and rivers as means of irrigation.

Kautilya also mentions about the manure made of the mixture of ghee, honey, fats, cowdung and powdered fish. It was used in order to increase the fertility of the soil.

Wheat, gram, maize, rice, barley, sugarcane, mustard, peanuts, cotton, tobacco, potatoes, water-melons, etc. were the main crops of the Mauryan State. The fruit gardens were of mangoes, grapes, lemons, etc.

occupations:

There were many cloth centres during this period. Among them Kasi, Vatsa, Madura, Vengi, etc. were prominent centres. According to Kautilya and Megasthenes cotton was produced in great quantity.

During these days cloth was prepared out of the leaves and bark of the trees and the fibre of many kinds. Woollen clothes and blankets were produced. Muslin clothes

were produced during this period. Sikan
clothes were imported from China.

Metallurgy:

Gold, silver and iron were utilised
by the people during this period.

Megasthenes and Kautilya have
mentioned about these metals in their
books. Diving and finding pearls, jewels,
shells and diamonds from the sea was
the most difficult task. The utensils
were made of metal.

Besides, forests were considered
as great wealth.

Skins and Hides:

Arthashastra mentions different
kinds of skins, skins of different
animals were used for manufacturing
many things.

Drinks:

Arthashastra mentions the following
six types of drinks.

- i) Madaka
- ii) Pratyano
- iii) Asava
- iv) Mairaya

v) Arishta

vi) Madhes

Trade :

There was brisk external and internal trade. Strabo mentions about this foreign trade. Slave trade was carried on by sea and land routes. The big ships were known as "pravana". There were ports and harbours.

Coinage :

Gold, silver and copper coins were used during this period. The coins were made by the state foundries.