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SELECT SPECIMENS
OF THE
THEATRE OF THE HINDUS,
TRANSLATED
From the Original Sanscrit.

VOL. III.

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BY

HORACE HAYMAN WILSON, Esq.

Secretary to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, &c.

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THE
MUDRA RAKHASA,
OR
THE SIGNET OF THE MINISTER,
A DRAMA

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL

SANSCRIT,

BY

HORACE HAYMAN WILSON, ESQ.

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PREFACE.

The *Mudrá Rákshasa* is a drama of a very different description from either of the preceding, being wholly of a political character, and representing a series of Machiavelian stratagems, influencing public events of considerable importance: those events relate to the history of *Chandragupta*, who is very probably identifiable with the *Sandrocottus* of the Greeks, and the drama therefore both as a picture of manners, as well as a historical record, possesses no ordinary claims upon our attention.

The object of the Play is to reconcile *Rákshasa* the hostile minister of *Nanda*, the late king of *Palibothra*, to the individuals by whom, or on whose behalf, his Sovereign was murdered, the *Brahman Chánakya* and the Prince *Chandragupta* : with this view, he is rendered by the contrivances of *Chánakya*, an object of suspicion to the prince with whom he has taken refuge, and is consequently dismissed by him : in this deserted condition he learns the imminent danger of a dear friend whom *Chánakya* is about to put to death, and

in order to effect his liberation surrenders himself to his enemies—they offer him, contrary to his expectations, the rank and power of prime minister, and the parties are finally friends : it is unnecessary to describe the plot more fully in this place.

Simple as is the subject of the Drama there is no want of action in its development. The stratagems of *Chánukya* are varied, numerous and well connected, and although there is occasionally some want of probability in their execution, yet they are made to contribute very successfully and ingeniously towards the production of their combined result. It must be acknowledged, that the political code from which they emanate, exhibits a morality not a whit superior to that of the Italian school, but a remarkable, and in some respects a redeeming principle, is the inviolable and devoted fidelity, which appears as the uniform characteristic of servants, emissaries and friends ; a singular feature in the *Hindu* character which it has still not wholly lost.

The author of the Play is called in the prelude, *Visákha-datta* the son of *Prithu* entitled *Mahárájá* and grandson of the *Sámanta* or chief *Vateswara Datta*. We are not much the wiser for this information, as we can scarcely venture to conclude, although it is not impossible, that the *Chouhan* chief of Ajmer, *Prithu Rai*, who was killed at the end of the twelfth century by the *Mohammedans*, is here intended. There is nothing unusual in a prince's being an author, or at least a reputed one, and the closing speech of the Drama clearly refers to the victorious progress of a foreign foe, whom it may not be unreasonable to connect with the *Ghorian* invasion.

The late Major Wilford has called the author of the *Mudra Rākshasa*, ANANTA, and quotes him as declaring that he lived on the banks of the *Godāverī* (As. R. V. 280.) This however must be an error, as three Copies, one of them a *Dekhni* manuscript in the *Télugu* character, have been consulted on the present occasion, and they all agree in the statement above given.

There is a commentary on the Drama by *Vatēswara Misra*, a *Maithila Brahman*, the son of *Gauripati Misra*, who has laboured with more pains than success to give double interpretation to the composition, and to present it as a system of policy as well as a Play—Another commentary by *Guhasena* is said to exist, but it has not been met with, and the one referred to, owing to the commentator's mystification of obvious meanings, and the exceedingly incorrect state of the manuscript, has proved of no advantage.

It may not here be out of place to offer a few observations on the identification of *Chandragupta* and *Sandrocottus*. It is the only point on which we can rest with any thing like confidence in *Hindu* history, and is therefore of vital importance in all our attempts to reduce the reigns of their kings to a rational and consistent Chronology. It is well worthy therefore of careful examination, and it is the more deserving of scrutiny, as it has been discredited by rather hasty verification, and very erroneous details.

Sir Wm. Jones first discovered the resemblance of the names, and concluded *Chandragupta* to be one with *Sandrocottus*. (As. R. IV. 11.) He was however imperfectly acquainted with his authorities, as he cites 'a beautiful poem' by *Soma-*

deva, and a tragedy called the Coronation of *Chandra*, for the history of this prince : by the first is no doubt intended the large collection of tales by *Somabhāta*, the *Vrihat Kathā*, in which the story of *Nanda's* murder occurs—the second is in all probability the play that follows, and which begins after *Chandragupta's* elevation to the throne. In the fifth volume of the *Researches*, the subject was resumed by the late Col. Wilford, and the story of *Chandragupta* is there told at considerable length, and with some accessions which can scarcely be considered authentic—he states also that the *Mudrá Rākshasa* consists of two parts, of which one may be called the coronation of *Chandragupta*, and the second his reconciliation with *Rākshasa*, the minister of his father. The latter is accurately enough described, but it may be doubted whether the former exists.

Col. Wilford was right also in observing that the story is briefly related in the *Vishnu Purāna* and *Bhāgavat*, and in the *Vrihat Kathā*, but when he adds, that it is told also in a lexicon called the *Kāmandakī* he has been led into error: the *Kāmandakī* is a work on *Niti* or *Polity*, and does not contain the story of *Nanda* and *Chandragupta*—The author merely alludes to it in an honorific verse, which he addresses to *Uchinakya* as the founder of Political science, the *Machivavel* of India.

The birth of *Nanda* and of *Chandragupta*, and the circumstances of *Nanda's* death as given in Col. Wilford's account, are not alluded to in the play, the *Mudra Rākshasa*, from which the whole is professedly taken, but they agree generally with the *Vrihat Kathā* and with popular versions of the story : from some of these perhaps, the King of

Vikātpalli, *Chandra Dās*, may have been derived, but he looks very like an amplification of *Justin's* account of the youthful adventures of *Sandrocottus*. The proceedings of *Chandragupta* and *Chánakya* upon *Nandu's* death, correspond tolerably well with what we learn from the Drama, but the manner in which the catastrophe is brought about (p. 238) is strangely misrepresented. The account was no doubt compiled for the translator, by his *Pundit*, and it is therefore but indifferent authority.

It does not appear that Col. Wilford had investigated the Drama himself, even when he published his second account of the Story of *Chandragupta*, (As. R. IX. 94) for he continues to quote the *Mudrá Rákshasa* for various matters which it does not contain—of these, the adventures of the King of *Vikātpalli*, and the employment of the Greek troops, are alone of any consequence, as they would mislead us into a supposition that a much greater resemblance exists between the Grecian and *Hindu* histories than is actually the case.

Discarding therefore these accounts, and laying aside the marvellous part of the story, I shall endeavour, from the *Vishnu* and *Bhágavat Purānas*, from a popular version of the narrative, as it runs in the South of India, from the *Vrihat Kāthā** and from the play, to give, what appear to be the genuine circumstances of *Chandragupta's* elevation to the throne of *Palibothra*.

* For the gratification of those who may wish to see the story as it occurs in these original sources translations are subjoined; and it is rather important to add that in no other *Purāna* has the story been found, although most of the principal works of this class have been carefully examined.

A race of Kings denominated *Saisunāgas* from *Sisunāga* the first of the dynasty, reigned in *Magadhā* or *Behar* : their capital was *Pātaliputra* and the last of them was named *Nanda* or *Mahapadma Nanda*—he was the son of a woman of the *Sudra* caste, and was hence, agreeably to *Hindu* law, regarded as a *Sudra* himself. He was a powerful and ambitious prince, but cruel and avaricious, by which defects, as well as by his inferiority of birth, he probably provoked the animosity of the *Brahmans*—he had by one wife eight sons, who with their father were known as the nine *Nandas*, and according to the popular tradition he had by a wife of low extraction called *Murá*, another son named *Chandragupta* : this last circumstance is not stated in the *Purānas* nor *Vrihat Kathā*, and rests therefore on rather questionable authority ; at the same time it is very generally asserted, and is corroborated by the name *Maurya*, one of *Chandragupta's* denominations, which is explained by the Commentator on the *Vishnu Purāna* to be a patronymic formative, signifying the son of *Murá*. It also appears from the play, that *Chandragupta* was a member of the same family, as *Nanda*, although it is not there stated that he was *Nanda's* son.

But whatever might have been the origin of this prince, it is very likely that he was made the instrument of the insubordination of the *Brahmans*, who having effected the destruction of *Nanda* and his sons, raised *Chandragupta*, whilst yet a youth to the throne—in this they were aided by a Prince from the north of India, to whom they promised an accession of territory, as the price of his alliance. The execution of the treaty was evaded, very possibly by

his assassination, and to revenge his father's murder, his son led a mingled host against *Magadhá*, containing amongst other troops, *Yavanas*, whom we may be permitted to consider as Greeks—the storm was averted however by jealousies and quarrels amongst the confederates: the army dispersed, and *Malayaketu* the invader, returned baffled and humbled to his own Country. *Chandragupta* reigned twenty four years and left the kingdom to his son—We have now to see how far the classical writers agree with these details.

The name is an obvious coincidence. *Sandrocottus* and *Chandragupta* can scarcely be considered different appellations—But the similarity is no doubt still closer. Athenæus as first noticed by Winford, (As. R. V. 262.) and subsequently by Schlegel, (*Indische Bibliothek*,) writes the name *Sandrakoptus*, and its other form, although more common, is very possibly a mere error of the transcriber: as to the *Andracottus* of Plutarch the difference is more apparent than real, the initial sibilant being often dropped in Greek proper names.

This name is however not the only coincidence in denotation that may be traced. We find in the play that *Chandragupta*, is often called *Chandra* simply, or the moon, of which *Chandramas* is a synonyme, and accordingly we find in *Diodorus Siculus*, the King of the *Gangaridæ*, whose power alarms the Macedonian, is there named *Xandrames*: the *Aggramen* of *Quintus Curtius* is merely a blundering perversion of this appellation.

There are other names of the Prince, the sense of which, though not their sound, may be discovered in classical writers. These are *Vrishala*, and perhaps *Maurya*—the first

unquestionably implies a man of the fourth or servile caste—the latter is said by Wilford to be explained in the *Jāti Viveka* the offspring of a barber and a *Sudra* woman, or of a barber and a female slave (As. R. V. 285.) It is most usually stated however to mean the offspring of *Murá*, as already observed, and the word does not occur in any of the Vocabularies in the sense attached to it by Col. Wilford.* It is sufficient however to observe that the term *Vrishala*, and frequent expressions in the Drama, establish the inferior origin of *Chandragupta*, a circumstance which is stated of the King of the *Gangaridæ* at the time of Alexander's invasion by Diodorus Siculus, Quintus Curtius and Plutarch.

According to the two former of these writers *Xandrames* or *Chandramas* was contemporary with Alexander: they add that he was the son of the queen by an intrigue with a barber, and that his father being raised to honour and the King's favour, compassed his benefactor's death, by which he paved the way for the sovereignty of his own son, the ruling prince. We have no indication of these events in the Hindu writers, and *Chandragupta*, as has been noticed, is

* Major Todd considers Maurya a probable interpolation for *Mori* a branch of the *Prámdra* tribe of Rajputs who in the 8th century occupied Chitore—He observes also that *Chandragupta* in the *Puránas* is made a descendant of *Sehesnag* of the *Takshak* tribe, of which last no other mention has been found, whilst instead of *Sehesnag* the word is *Sisunaga*, and with respect to the fact of the prince's belonging to the *Prámdra* tribe no authority is cited. Major Todd like the late Col. Wilford is sparing of those specific references, which in all debateable points are indispensable. See Transactions, Royal Asiatic Society. 1. 211.

usually regarded as the Son of *Nanda* or at least a relative. It may be observed that his predecessors were *Sudras*, and the character given to *Mahapadma Nanda* in the *Vishnu Purana*, agrees well enough with the general tenor of the classical accounts as to his being of low origin and estimation, although an active and powerful prince. If *Nanda*, be the monarch alluded to, there has been some error in the name, but in either case we have a general coincidence in the private history of the monarch of the *Gangaridæ*, as related by the writers of the East or West.

If the Monarch of Behar at the time of Alexander's invasion, was *Nanda*, it is then possible that *Chandragupta*, whilst seeking, as the Hindus declare, the support of foreign powers to the North and North west of *India*, may have visited Alexander, as asserted by Plutarch and Justin—We cannot however attach any credit to the marvellous part of the story as told by the latter, nor can we conceive that a mere adventurer, as he makes *Sandrocottus* to have been, should have rendered himself master of a mighty kingdom, in so brief an interval, as that between Seleucus and Alexander, or by the aid of vagabonds and banditti alone.

Although therefore the classical writers had gleaned some knowledge of *Chandragupta's* early history, it is very evident that their information was but partially correct, and that they have confounded names, whilst they have exaggerated some circumstances, and misrepresented others. These defects however are very venial, considering the imperfect communication that must have subsisted between the Greeks and Hindus, even at the period of Alexander's invasion, and the interval that elapsed before the accounts

we now possess were written : these considerations rather enhance the value of both sets of our materials : it is more wonderful that so much of what appears to be the truth should have been preserved, than that the stories should not conform in every particular.

However questionable may be the contemporary existence of Alexander and *Sandrocoptus* there is no reason to doubt that the latter reigned in the time of Seleucus Nicator, as Strabo and Arrian cite the repeated declarations of Megasthenes that he had often visited the Indian Prince. Seleucus is said to have relinquished to him some territories beyond the Indus, and to have formed a matrimonial alliance with him—We have no trace of this in the Hindu writers, but it is not at all improbable. Before the Christian era the Hindus were probably not scrupulous about whom they married, and even in modern days, their princesses have become the wives of Mohammedan Sovereigns. *Chandragupta* however had no right to be nice with respect to the condition of his wife, and in whichever way the alliance was effected, it was feasible enough, whilst it was a very obvious piece of policy in *Chandragupta*, as calculated to give greater security to his Empire and stability to his reign—The failure of Seleucus in his attempt to extend his power in India, and his relinquishment of territory, may possibly be connected with the discomfiture and retreat of *Malayaketu*, as narrated in the Drama, although it may be reasonably doubted whether the Bactrian monarch and the king of *Magadhá* ever came into actual collision. It is very unlikely that the latter ever included any part of the Punjab, within his dominions, and at any rate it may be questioned, whether