A
GUEST LECTURE
ON
INDIA THROUGH THE AGES

By

Dr.G.GOPALA SWAMY

Retd. Principal

SVSS Arts & Science College, Athili

Date & Time: **01-10-2018 at 10:00AM**

Venue: E-Class Room

Sri Y.N College (A), Narsapur.

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY & TOURISM

Sri YN College (A), Narsapur

A Guest Lecture was conducted by the Department of History on **01-10-2018 By Dr.G.Gopala Swamy**, Retd. Principal SVSS Arts & Science College, Athili. On the Topic "**INDIA THROUGH THE AGES".** In this Guest Lecture 09 Staff members and 78 Students Participated.

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Dr.ARS KUMAR
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Guest Lecture
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INDIA THROUGH THE AGES

THE ANCIENT AGE

As the mind's eye travels backwards across the wide plains of Northern India, attempting to re-people it with the men of olden time, historical insight fails us at about the seventh century B.C. From that date to our own time the written Word steps in to pin protean legend down to inalterable form.

And yet before this seventh century there is no lack of evidence. The Word is still there, though, at the time, it lived only in the mouths of the people or of the priesthood. Even if we go so far back as B.C. 2000, the voices of men who have lived and died are still to be heard in the earlier hymns of the Rig-Veda.

And before that?

Who knows? The imaginative eye, looking out over the vast sea of young green wheat which in many parts of the Punjab floods unbroken to the very foot of the hills, may gain from it an idea of the wide ocean whose tide undoubtedly once broke on the shores of the Himalayas.

The same eye may follow in fancy the gradual subsidence of that sea, the gradual deposit of sand, and loam brought by the great rivers from the high lands of Central Asia. It may rebuild the primeval huts of the first inhabitants of the new continent--those first invaders of the swampy haunts of crocodile and strange lizard-like beasts--but it has positively no data on which to work. The first record of a human word is to be found in the earliest hymn of the Aryan settlers when they streamed down into the Punjab. When?

Even that is beyond proof. The consensus of opinion amongst learned men, however, gives the Vedic period--that is to say, the period during which the hymns of the Rig-Veda were composed--as approximately the years between B.C. 2000 and B.C. 1400.

But these same hymns tell us incidentally of a time before that. It is not only that these Aryan invaders were themselves in a state of civilisation which necessarily implies long centuries of culture, of separation from barbarian man; but besides this, they found a people in India civilised enough to have towns and disciplined troops, to

have weapons and banners; women whose ornaments were of gold, poisoned arrows whose heads were of some metal that was probably iron.

All this, and much more, is to be gathered in the Rig-Veda concerning the Dasyas or aboriginal inhabitants of India. Naturally enough, as inevitable foes, they are everywhere mentioned with abhorrence, and we are left with the impression of a "tawny race who utter fearful yells."

Who, then, were these people?

Are we to treat the monotonous singing voice which even now echoes out over the length and breadth of India, as in the sunsetting some Brahman recites the ancient hymns--are we to treat this as the *first* trace of Ancient India? Or, as we sit listening, are we to watch the distant horizon, so purple against the gold of the sky, and wonder if it is only our own unseeing eyes which prevent our tracing the low curve that may mark the site of a town, ancient when the Aryans swept it into nothingness?

"The fiction which resembles truth," said the Persian poet Nizami in the year 1250, "is better than the truth which is dissevered from the imagination"; so let us bring something of the latter quality into our answer.

Certain it is that for long centuries the reddish or tawny Dasyas managed to resist the white-skinned Aryas, so that even as late as the period of that great epic, the Mahabharata--that is, some thousand years later than the earliest voice which speaks in the Vedic hymns--the struggle was still going on. At least in those days the Aryan Pandavas of whom we read in that poem appear to have dispossessed an aboriginal dynasty from the throne of Magadha. This dynasty belonged to the mysterious Naga or Serpent race, which finally blocks the way in so many avenues of Indian research. They are not merely legendary; they cross the path of reality now and again, as when Alexander's invasion of India found some satrapies still held by Serpent-kings.It is impossible, therefore, to avoid wondering whether the Aryans really found the rich plains of India a howling wilderness peopled by savages close in culture to the brutes, or whether, in parts of the vast continent at least, they found themselves pitted against another invading race, a Scythic race hailing from the north-east as the Aryan hails from north-west?

There is evidence even in the voice of the Rig-Veda for this. To begin with, there is the evidence of colour-colour which was hereafter to take form as caste. We have mention not of two, but of three divergent complexions. First, the "white-complexioned friends of Indra," who are palpably the Aryans; next, "the enemy who is flayed of his black skin"; and lastly, "those reddish in appearance, who utter fearful yells."

It seems, to say the least of it, unlikely that a single aboriginal race should be described in two such curiously different ways.

As for the fearful yells, that is palpably but another way of asserting that the utterers spoke a language which was not understood of the invaders. "Duye think the Almighty would be understandinsiccan gibberish," said the old Scotch lady when, during the Napoleonic war, she was reminded that maybe many a French mother was praying as fervently for victory as she was herself. The same spirit breathes in many a Vedic hymn in which the Dasyas are spoken of as barely human. "They are not men." "They do not perform sacrifices." "They do not believe in anything." These are the plaints which precede the ever-recurring prayer--"Oh! Destroyer of foes! Kill them!" And worse even than this comes the great cause of conflict--"*Their rites are different*."

So the story is told. These Dasyas, "born to be cut in twain," have yet the audacity to have different dogma, conflicting canons of the law. Even in those early days religion was the great unfailing cause of strife.

These same hymns of the Rig-Veda, however, give us but scant information of the foes who are called generally Dasyas, or "robbers." But here again divergence creeps in. It is impossible to class "the wealthy barbarian," the "neglecters of sacrifices," who, "decorated with gold and jewels," were "spreading over the circuit of the earth," whose "iron cities" were to be destroyed, who were to be "slain whether weeping or laughing, whether hand to hand or on horseback, whether arrayed in hosts or aided by missile-hurling heroes"--it is impossible, surely, to class these enemies with the mere robber brutes of whom it is written that they "were slain, and the kine made manifest."Were then these tawny-hued foes, with the mention of whom wealth is invariably associated, in reality the ancestors of the treasure-holding Takshaks or Nagas, that strange Snake race of which we read in the Mahabharata, and of which we hear again during the invasion of Alexander?

At least there is nothing to prevent us dreaming that this is so; and while we listen to the voice of some Brahman chanting at sunset-time the oldest hymns in the world, there is nothing to hinder us from trying to imagine how strangely these must have fallen on the ears of the "neglecters of sacrifices, the dwellers in cities, rich in gold and beautiful women," of whom we catch a passing glimpse as the stately Sanskrit rhythm rolls on.

The sun sets, the voice ceases, and the far-away past is no nearer and no further from us than the present.

THE VEDIC TIMES

{B.C. 2000 TO B.C. 1400}

Before entering on its history it is necessary to grasp the size of the great continent with which we have to deal. Roughly speaking, India has fourteen and a half times the area of the British Isles. Of most of this country we have next to no history at all, and in the time which is now under consideration we have to deal only with the Punjâb, the "Land of the Five Rivers," the area of which about equals that of Great Britain. That such lack of information should exist is not wonderful, since, for all we know, this upper portion of India may then have been on the shores of a still-receding sea; indeed, colour is given to this suggestion by the remembrance that the five rivers of the Punjab plain to this day act as huge drain-pipes which deprive the intervening country of surface moisture. Naturally, this fact, in the days when all India, save for its few isolated ranges of central mountains, must have been one vast swamp, was an immense boon to humanity.

The geographical area, therefore, with which we have to treat in the Vedic period is very limited. It is a mere patch on the present continent of India, bounded on the north by the snowy Himalayas, on the south by the Indus (and probably by the sea), on the west by the Suleiman Mountains, while on the east lay the unknown, and possibly marsh, land of the Ganges and Jumna Rivers.

Curiously enough, although we speak of this very tract nowadays as the "Land of the Five Rivers," in Vedic times the rivers were counted as seven. That is to say, the Indus was called the mother of the six--not five--streams which, as now, joined its vast volume. In those days this juncture was most probably in comparatively close proximity to the sea. Of these six rivers only five remain: the Jhelum, the Chenab, the Ravi, the Beas, the Sutlej. The bed of the sixth river, the "most sacred, the most impetuous of streams," which was worshipped as a direct manifestation of Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, is still to be traced near Thaneswar, where a pool of water remains to show where the displeased Goddess plunged into the earth and dispersed herself amongst the desert sands.

The stream never reappears; but its probable course is yet to be traced by the colonies of Saraswata Brahmans, who still preserve, more rigidly than other Brahmans, the archaic rituals of the Vedas. The reason for this purity of rite being, it is affirmed, the grace-giving quality of Mother Saraswati's water which, with curious quaint cries, is drawn in every village from the extraordinarily deep wells (many of

which plunge over 400 feet into the desert sand), at whose bottom the lost river still flows.

Into this Land of the Seven Rivers, then, came--somewhere about two thousand years before Christ--wanderers who describe themselves as of a white complexion. That they had straight, well-bridged noses is also certain. To this day, as Mr Risley the great ethnologist puts it, "a man's social status in India varies in inverse ratio to the width of his nose"; that is to say, the nasal index, as it is called, is a safe guide to the amount of Aryan, as distinguished from aboriginal blood in his veins. One constant epithet given to the great cloud-god Indra--to whom, with the great fire-god Agni, the vast majority of the hymns in the Rig-Veda are addressed--is "handsome-chinned." But the Sanskrit word *sipra*, thus translated "chin," also means "nose"; and there can be no doubt that as the "handsome-nosed" one, Indra would be a more appropriate god for a people in whom, that feature was sufficiently marked to have impressed itself, as it has done, on countless generations.

Whence the Aryans came is a matter still under dispute. That they were a comparatively civilised people is certain. The hymns of the Rig-Veda, which were undoubtedly composed during the six hundred years following on the Aryans' first appearance in the Punjab, prove this, as they prove many another point concerning these the first white invaders of India. How the idea ever passed current that they were a pastoral people is a mystery, since from the very first we read in these hymns of oxen, of the cultivation of corn, of ploughing, and sowing, and reaping.

"Oh! Lord of the Field!" reads one invocation. "We will cultivate this field with thee! May the plants be sweet to us; may the rains be full of sweetness; may the Lord of the Field be gracious to us! Let the oxen work merrily; let the man work merrily; let the plough move merrily! Fasten the traces merrily; ply the goad merrily.... Oh! Fortunate Furrow! speed on thy way, bestow on us an abundant crop--sow the seed on this field which has been prepared. Let the corn grow with our hymns, let the scythes fall on the ripe grain. Prepare troughs for the drinking of animals. Fasten the leathern string, and take out water from this deep and goodly well which never dries up. Refresh the horses, take up the corn stacked in the field, and make a cart to convey it easily."

Practically Indian agriculture has gone no further than this in close on four thousand years.

It is true that a hymn to the God of Shepherds finds occasional place in the Rig-Veda, but in these there is an archaic ring, which seems to point to the Aryan

wanderings before India was reached. One of them begins thus: "Oh! Pushan, the Path-finder, help us to finish our journey!"

From purely religious hymns, naturally, one has no right to expect a full crop of information concerning the political and social life of the times in which they were composed, yet the light which the Rig-Veda throws upon these dark ages is luckily surprising; luckily, because we have absolutely no other source of knowledge.

From it we learn something of commerce, even to the extent of the laws regulating sale and usury. We learn also of ships and shipwrecks, of men who, "taking a boat, took her out to sea, and lived in the boat floating on the water, being happy in it rocking gracefully on the waves"; from which we may infer that our early Aryan brothers did not suffer from sea-sickness. There is also a phrase in fairly constant use, "the sea-born sun," which would lead us to suppose that these writers of hymns had often seen sunrise over an Eastern ocean.

Many kinds of grain were cultivated, but the chief ones seem to have been wheat and barley. Rice is not mentioned. Animals of all sorts were sacrificed, and their flesh eaten; and as we read of slaughter-houses set apart for the killing of cows, we may infer that the Aryan ancestors of India were not strict vegetarians.

But all mention of food, even sacrificial food, in the Rig-Veda fades into insignificance before its perfectly damnable iteration concerning a fermented drink called "Soma." Scarcely a hymn finds finish without some mention of it, and pages on pages are full of panegyrics of the "exhilarating juice," the "adorable libation," "the bright effused dew of the Soma, fit drink for gods." And apparently for men also, since we read that the "purifying Soma, like the sea rolling its waves, has poured out on men songs, and hymns, and thoughts." An apotheosis of intoxication, indeed!

It appears to have been the fermented juice of some asclepiad plant which was mixed with milk. The plant had to be gathered on moonshiny nights, and many ceremonials accompanied its tituration, and the expressing of its sap.

In later years, of course, the Soma ritual expanded into something very elaborate, and no less than sixteen priests were required for its proper fulfilment; but in the beginning, it is evident that each householder prepared the drink, and offered some of it, and of his food also, to Indra the cloud-god first, then to Agni the fire-god, and so by degrees (increasing with the years) to a host of smaller gods--the Winds, the Dawn, Day, Night, the Sun, the Earth.

For these ancient Aryans had not far to look for godhead. They found it simply, naturally, in themselves, and in all things about them, as the secret verse which to this

day is held in sacred keeping by the twice-born amply shows. For there can be small doubt that the closest rendering to the original meaning runs thus:--

"Let us meditate on the Over-soul which is in all souls, which animates all, which illumines all understandings."

Mankind makes but small advance with the years in metaphysics, and it needed a Schopenhauer to reinvent the Over-soul--after how many generations? Who can say?

Only this we know, that a few centuries after Christ, a Chinese pilgrim to India committed himself to the assertion that "Soma is a very nasty drink!"

There is no trace in these Vedic hymns of the many deplorable beliefs, traditions and customs, which in later years have debased the religious and social life of India.

The Aryans worshipped "bright gods," and seem to have been themselves a bright and happy people. We hear nothing of temples or idols, of caste or enforced widowhood. Indeed, the fact that the language contains distinct, concrete, and not opprobrious terms for "the son of a woman who has taken a second husband," and for "a man who has married a widow," proves that such words were needed in the common tongues of the people. Neither is there any trace of, nor the faintest shred of authority for, either suttee or child-marriage.

So the ancient Aryan rises to the mind's eye as a big, stalwart, high-nosed, fair-skinned man, with a smile and a liking for exhilarating liquor, who, after long wanderings with his herds over the plains of Central Asia--where, reading the stars at night, he sang as he watched his flocks to Pushan the Path-finder--looked down one day from the heights of the Himalayas over a fair expanse of new-born land by the ripples of a receding sea, and found that it was good.

So for many a long year he lived, fighting, ploughing, and praying--with copious libations--to Indra, the God of Battles, and to Agni, the humble, homely God of Fire, who yet was the invoker of all Gods mysteriously connected with the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, the very Lightning.

And one of the prayers to the god who "comprehended all things," who "traversed the vast ethereal space, measuring days and nights and contemplating all that have birth," ran thus:--

"Take me to the immortal and imperishable abode where light dwells eternal."

We have not gone much further. The cry which rises in the Rig-Veda is the cry of to-day:--

"From earth is the breath and the blood; but whence is the soul? What or Who is that One who is ever alone; who forms the six spheres; who holds the unborn in His Hand?"

Yet the religious feeling of these primitive Aryans was not all tinged by doubt, by sadness; some of their hymns to the Dawn breathe the spirit of deep joy which is in those who recognise, however dimly, that the One of whom they question is no other than the Questioner.

So let us conclude this chapter with a few verses collated from these hymns.

"Many-tinted Dawn! Th' immortal daughter of Heaven!
Young, white robed, come with thy purple steeds;
Follow the path of the dawning's the world has been given,
Follow the path of the dawn that the world still needs.

"Darkly shining Dusk, thy sister, has sought her abiding,
Fear not to trouble her dreams; daughters, ye twain of the Sun,
Dusk and dawn bringing birth! O Sisters! your path is unending;
Dead are the first who have watched; when shall our waking be done?

"Bright, luminous Dawn; rose-red, radiant, rejoicing!
Shew the traveller his road; the cattle their pastures new;
Rouse the beasts of the Earth to their truthful myriad voicing,
Leader of rightful days! softening the soil with dew.

"Wide-expanded Dawn! Open the gates of the morning;
Waken the singing birds! Guide thou the truthful light
To uttermost shade of the shadow, for--see you! the dawning
Is born, white-shining, out of the gloom of the night."

Surely there is something in these phrases, taken truthfully from the original and strung together consecutively so as to give the spirit which animates the whole, that makes us of these later times feel closely akin to those who sang thus in the Dawn of Days.

THE GREAT MAURYAS

{B.C. 321 TO B.C. 184}

We come here to one of the landmarks of Indian History. There were seven kings of the Maurya dynasty; of these, two gained for themselves an abiding place in the category of Great World Rulers. Their names are Chandra-gupta's and Asoka. Grandfather and grandson, they made their mark in such curiously divergent ways that they stand to this day as examples of War and Peace.

Concerning Chandra-gupta's usurpation of the throne of the Nine Nandas, something has already been said. It has also been mentioned that while still almost a lad, he met with Alexander during the latter's brief summer among the Punjab Doabs or Two-waters, so called because they are the fertile plains which lie between the rivers.

The identification, indeed, of the Sandracottus mentioned by Greek writers with Chandra-gupta has been of incalculable value in enabling historians to fix other dates. It has been, as it were, a secure foundation for a superstructure which has grown, and still grows, year by year, and in which every new stone discovered is found to fit accurately in its place.

At the time of this meeting, Chandra-gupta was a nameless adventurer, a political exile from Magadha. Who he really was seems doubtful. The illegitimate son, it is said, of one of the Nine Nandas by a beautiful low-caste woman (from whose name, Mura, the titular designation of the dynasty Maurya is taken), it is hard to see whence came the young man's undoubted claim to be of the Shesh-nag, or Serpent race; for the Nandas were as undoubtedly of low-caste origin themselves. It is possible, therefore, that some further history of wrong may have existed to make Chandra-gupta claim kinship with the Serpent-Kings whom the Nandas had ousted, and hold himself, like any young pretender, a rightful heir.

Be that as it may, he was ambitious, capable, energetic, and seized the first opportunity given him of rising to power.

This came with the news of Alexander's death in B.C. 323. In the instant revolt of conquered India which followed, he took a prominent part, and found himself, in B.C. 321, with an army at his back which, having accomplished its purpose and given its leader paramount power in Punjab, was eager to follow his fortune elsewhere.

He led it to Magadha, and taking advantage of the Nanda king's unpopularity, slew every male member of the family.

This was the Eastern etiquette on such occasions; the sparing of a brother or an uncle being considered a weakness sure to bring speedy repentance in its train.

Except in as far as the principals were concerned, this revolution appears to have been easy and bloodless. At least so we gather from the play called the "Signet of the Minister," which, though not written till nearly twelve hundred years after the event, seems fairly trustworthy in fact.

In itself it is so studiously realistic, so palpably free from all appeal to the imagination, as to form a marked contrast to all other dramas of the period. It is most likely the first purely political play that ever was written, for, excluding love passages and poetical diction, it deals entirely with the stir of plot and counterplot. Chanakya, the wily Brahman--whose advice had been Chandra-gupta's best weapon in gaining the throne--realising the insecurity of that throne without the hearty support of the nobles and, above all, of the late King's Prime Minister, sets himself by sheer diplomacy to cut the ground from beneath the feet of his master's enemies, and, succeeding, yields up his signet of office to the appeased Rakahasa, whose final aside when he accepts it--"Oh! vile Chanakya--say rather, Wise Chanakya, a mine of wisdom inexhaustible! Deep ocean stored with excellent rare gems"--shows that he feels himself overmastered by sheer wit.

But the whole play is well worth reading; some of it--notably the parts in prose-reminding one of Shakespeare.

The remainder of Chandra-gupta's career, however, was anything but bloodless. It was scarcely possible that it should be so, considering that he began life as a nobody and ended it as undisputed Emperor of India from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea. A man of iron nerve, born to conquer, born to rule, he went on his way undeviating, holding his own despite the constant threats of his enemies, despite the danger of constant plots; a danger which made perpetual precaution necessary. He never occupied the same bedroom two nights in succession; he never during the daytime slept at the same hour.

A story is told of Chanakya's wily vigilance for his master. He noticed one day a long caravan of ants on the wall of the king's room carrying crumbs. This was enough for Chanakya. Without an instant's hesitation, the royal pavilion was ordered to be set on fire and, as the plaint runs:--

"The brave men who were concealed

In the subterranean avenue that led
To Chandra-gupta's sleeping chamber, so,
Were all destroyed."

So far as one can gather, Chandra-gupta's character was not a lovable one; but there can be no question of his power to rule men wisely and well. Megasthenes' account of Paliputra gives us a marvellous picture of the grip which Government kept on the people; and kept for their good. Every department was legislated for with the utmost care, and though the whole system of government was based on the personal power of the king, it was far from being a mere arbitrary autocracy. His greatest contemporary was Seleukos Nikator, who in addition to ceding Kabul, Herat, and Kandahar to him, bestowed on him his daughter in marriage.

Chandra-gupta died in B.C. 297, having reigned for twenty-four years. A short enough time in which to have accomplished so much; for at the day of his death, the only portion of the vast continent of India which did not acknowledge his rule was a strip of sea coast country about Cuttack, on the Bay of Bengal, and that part of the lessening peninsular which lay southward, beyond a line drawn through Mangalore and Madras.

His son Bindu-sara reigned in his stead. Of him we know nothing; not even if he was born of the Grecian princess. Only this is on record, that he was extremely fond of figs, and, presumably, of learning; for a letter of his to Antiochus, the son of Seleukos Nikator, asks naïvely for the purchase and despatch of green figs and a professor! To which the dignified reply is still extant that the figs shall be procured and forwarded, but that by Grecian etiquette it was indecorous either to buy or sell a professor!

Bindu-sara had this merit: he handed on the empire which he had received intact to his son, after a reign of five and twenty years.

So let us pass to Asoka, who, next to Akbar the Great Moghul, was the greatest of all Indian kings. Curiously enough, both these monarchs, Asoka and Akbar, ruled India through its imagination. Both claimed pre-eminence as apostles of a Faith in the Unknown; both appealed to the people on transcendental grounds.

At the time of his fathers death in B.C. 272, Asoka was Viceroy of the Western Province. He had previously ruled in a similar position in the Punjab, where his headquarters had been Taxila, the Serpent City. Chosen as Crown Prince from amongst numerous other sons on account of his ability, he had been given this semi-independent control, partly because of his ungovernable temper, which earned him the nickname of "The Furious." He thus seemed to take after his grandfather, Chandra-

gupta, who, with all his many virtues, was unquestionably cruel and arrogant. But Asoka was not to follow in his ancestor's footsteps. Forty years afterward, when his long and peaceful reign, marred by but one war, had come to an end, he had earned for himself the well-deserved title of "The Loving-minded One, Beloved of the Gods." A great change in any man's life; but nothing to the change which his life was to bring into his world.

In B.C. 260, when he came under the mingled influence of Buddhism and Jainism, those creeds were little more than sectarian beliefs confined to the India which had given them birth. When he died, Buddhism had spread through Asia, and had touched both Africa and Europe. Asoka has been called the Constantine of Buddhism, but he was more than that. The creed which brought him comfort was not, as Christianity was in Constantine's time, already a power to be reckoned with, it was simply the belief of a few enthusiasts, a few select souls who sought almost sorrowfully for some solution of the Great Secret.

What was the cause which led the Emperor of India, in his luxurious autocracy, to join himself to this Search? Undoubtedly it was remorse; remorse for the numberless lives needlessly sacrificed, the needless suffering entailed on humanity by the one war of his reign--the conquest of Kalinga, a maritime province on the sea-board of the Bay of Bengal. We have this remorse with us still in the marvellous edicts engraven on rock and pillar, which, outlasting Time itself, tell to wild waste and deserted ruins their story of one man's struggle towards the light. One can almost hear the break, as of tears, in the voice that clamours still of "the regret which the Beloved-of-the-Gods felt at the murders and the deaths and the violence."

This regret, then, was the cosmic touch which drove Asoka to find comfort in preaching the doctrine of the sanctity of life. Was it Jainism which influenced Asoka most, or was it Buddhism? Doctors differ; only this we know, that it was through Asoka's exertions that the latter became the creed of one-third of the human race. For the energy of the man was incomparable. His missionaries were everywhere. "Let small and great exert themselves," is the cry still carven upon stone. "The teaching of religion is the most meritorious of acts.... There is no gift comparable to the gift of religion ... it is in the conquests of religion that the gods takes pleasure." So his yellow-robed monks went forth beyond the confines of his visible, tangible world, and found their way to Egypt, to Greece, to Syria. Their influence is still to be traced in other religions, though no record exists of their labours.

Thus for some thirty years of his life Asoka set himself to alter the faith of the world. Why? And how? Because he believed with a whole heart, not in ritual or dogma, but in something which--hard to be translated--is best rendered by the "Law of

Piety." And this his edicts explain to be "mercy and charity, truth and purity, kindness and goodness."

A good creed even in these later days. Not to be improved upon by conformists or non-conformists!

As to how this gospel of good-will was to be preached we learn from these edicts also. It is by example, by tolerance, by "gentleness and moderation in speech."

"Government by religion, law by religion, progress by religion." This was Asoka's rule, and in it he stands alone as the only king who has subordinated all things to a faith which must only be preached in gentleness and moderation.

The first series of fourteen edicts were cut on rocks in various parts of his kingdom, from Attack on the Indus to Cuttack on the Eastern Sea, during the twelfth and thirteenth year of Asoka's reign. They are, therefore, the first-fruits of his conversion. They range over a vast number of subjects, but in each of them there is a personal note which justifies the belief that they are verily the words of the king, and not the mere drafts of some secretary.

On the other hand, the Minor Rock edicts were carven in the last year of Asoka's reign, and thus gain an additional interest from being the farewell of a king to the people whom he had striven so hard to lead into the Way of Peace. In one of them he says that the truest enjoyment for himself has been making men happy by leading them to follow the path of religion, that "with this object he has regulated his life"; yet, though he has "promulgated positive rules, it is solely by a change in the sentiments of the heart that religion makes true progress." The edict ends thus: "So spakePiyadasi, Beloved-of-the-Gods. Wherever this edict exists on pillars of stone let it endure to remote ages."

It has endured. The Prakrit language in which it was engraven--the spoken language of those times--has passed; but Asoka's words are not of Time, they are of Eternity.

He was a great builder, but few of his buildings remain to this day. What their magnificence must have been we may judge by the topes at Sanchi, where the eye wearies in following the intricacy of ornament, the brain is bewildered in attempting to re-fashion in imagination the whole stupendous structure as it must have been. But here and there some monolithic sandstone pillar still remains, slender, perfect in proportion and execution, still bearing in close-carven character Asoka's message to his people, to the world.

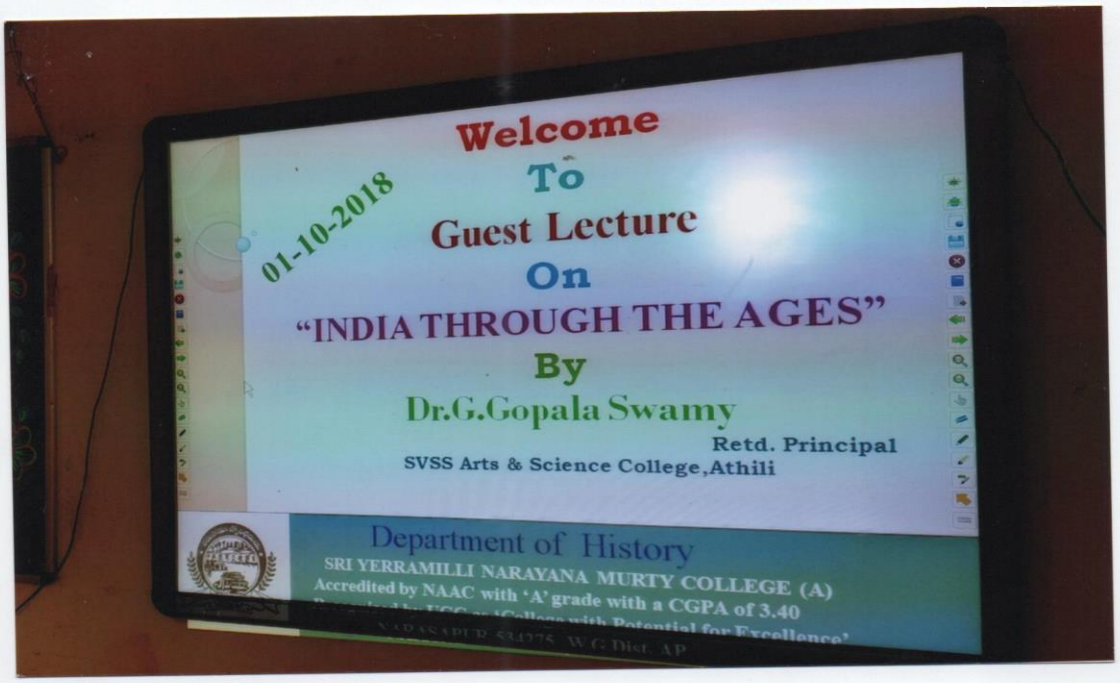
Strange, indeed, that the West knows so little of him! Strangest of all that the twentieth century, with its Peace Party and its Anti-Vivisectionists, should not put Asoka's name as President in perpetuity of their organisations. Asoka, who more than a thousand years upheld the equal rights of animals with men to the King's care, and openly adjured his successors to follow in his steps, and not "to think that a conquest by the sword deserves the name of conquest."

What manner of man Asoka was outwardly, we have no means of knowing; but those who know of his life can picture him in his yellow monk's robe, wearied yet unwearied, pondering over his lifelong problem. "By what means can I lead my people into the path of peace?"

Unwearied because of the spirit which inspires the words, "Work I must for the public benefit"; wearied because, "Though I am ready at any hour and any place to receive petitions, I am never fully satisfied with my despatch of business."

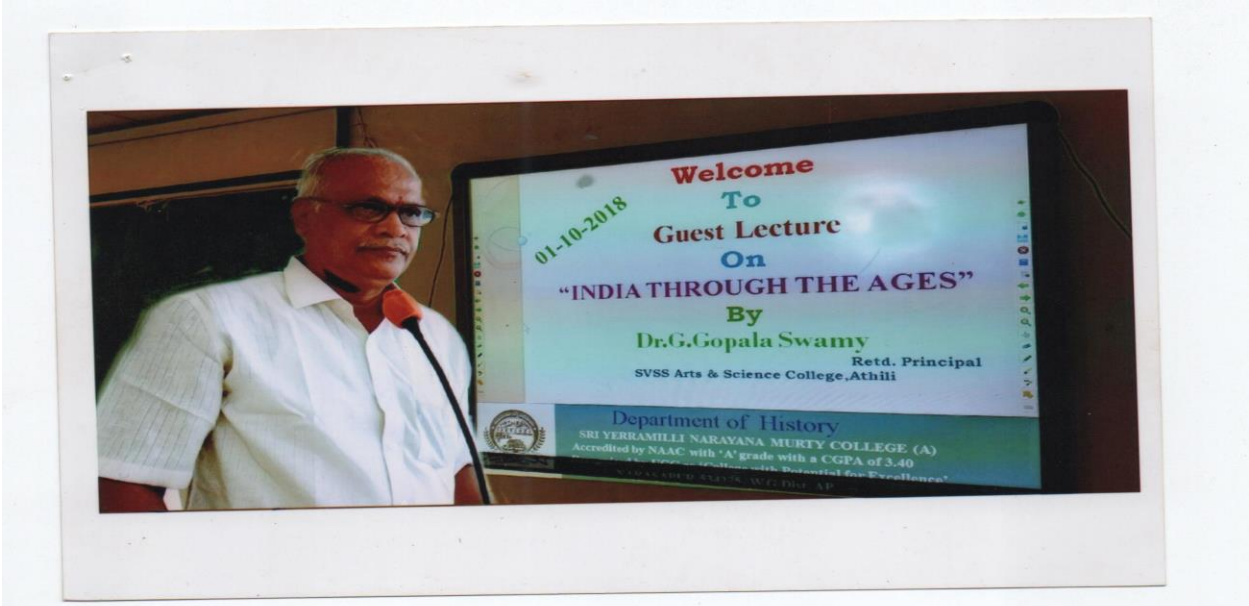
He died in B.C. 231, leaving his empire intact, and was apparently succeeded by a grandson. After him came five kings, all mere names. The duration of the dynasty was 137 years, and as 89 of these belonged to the combined reigns of Chandra-gupta, Bindu-sara, and Asoka, the remaining six kings have but eight years apiece. Long enough, however, to disintegrate, to dissipate the vast empire of Asoka. So much so, that before continuing the story of what may be called the central kings of India, it is necessary to give a side-glance at the outlying provinces where, on the removal of Asoka's firm grip on Government, various minor dynasties began to rise into a power superior to that of Magadha.

INIVITATION



FALICITATION TO THE CHIEF GUEST Dr. G. GOPALA SWAMY.

DR.G.GOPALA SWAMY, RETD.PRINCIPALSVSS ARTS & SCIENCE COLLEGE,ATHIL. GIVING HIS KEY NOTE ADDRESS



STUDENTS AND STAFF IN THE SEMINAR HALL.

OUR STUDENT P.MANIKANTA GIVING SPEECH.

OUR STUDENT K.SRAVANI GIVING SPEECH

VOTE OF THANKS GIVEN BY MR. S.SOMA SEKHAR HOD OF HISTORY