

LEADERSHIP IN ANCIENT ASIA

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ASIA is large, and Ancient Asia endured a long time. Perhaps Western Asia had better be left out of a short discussion, so that attention will be directed toward India and China. Also the vast time known as prehistory, vaguely remote in its beginning and not the same everywhere as regards its ending, may as well also be left out of the picture. How can anyone know who were the leaders, how they came to lead, and what their leadership was like, in the days of

“Old, forgotten, far-off things,
And battlefields of long ago”?

In lands and times where the great man was not suffered to enter upon the long sleep naked, impoverished, and alone, but was given his weapons, his ornaments and his dog, his chair, his chariot, and his horses, yes, also his charioteer, and his menservants and maidservants: even then we can know only a little about his greatness and the fear or reverence in which he was held while alive. As for his policies and powers, nothing remains to explain them — perhaps no record can be found even of his name.

At any rate, this is not the place for attempting to trace what can be known of Asiatic leadership before the time of written records. Only that will serve which was written down in some translatable language and in some enduring form. Even thus, so much has perished and so much has been damaged, so much error has been introduced and so much truth has been edited away, that judgment must often be suspended and conclusions must often be held tentative.

Not yet, if ever, can it be known with certainty how the political ideas of one quarter of Asia influenced those of other quarters. The temptation arises to derive from the imperial system of Alexander of Macedon, itself a later link in a long chain of Western Asiatic dominion, the patterns of rule which appeared after one or two generations in the India of Chandragupta Maurya, grandfather of Asoka; and in the China of Shih Huang Ti, builder of the Great Wall.

Whether or not these more or less contemporary leaders in India and China knew much or anything about each other's personalities, lands, or ways, the knowledge which survives about them in their own countries may help the present age to understand not only Hirohito and Chiang Kai-shek, but also Mussolini and Hitler, and possibly MacDonald and Franklin Roosevelt. Perhaps Asian man differs essentially from European man: perhaps two thousand years have profoundly changed the character of humanity and, therefore, of the men who are permitted to become leaders; perhaps twentieth-century leaders anywhere on the earth are a new breed, a novel emergence of leadership: but if none of these things are true, then the leadership of Ancient Asia can be studied with modern profit.

Now the Asia of two dozen centuries ago, while we call it ancient, was of course very modern, in the paradoxical sense of being at the time very old. Through long previous ages primitive types of leadership had developed into methods of government. With unnumbered throes a system of local relationships had grown to durability in village and town life, with headmen and councils, and with captains, priests, nobles, and scholars. Larger units had arisen, warring and shifting, more or less closely governed by petty lords, princes, and kings; the latter with ministers to aid them in their functions, a chief adviser and executive, a chief priest, a commander-in-chief for the army, and other regularized leaders of the different aspects of human life. A tendency always existed toward permanency, so that a leader, whether wonder-worker, smith, priest, or king, should not only remain such while he lived, but should also hand on his preëminence to a son or relative, so that his family would for a long time stand out above the common run of mankind. But the hereditary leader was always expected to render valuable services in one way or another, usually in many ways, to his followers and his community. If he should become unable to do this, if for example, as a commander he should fail to win victory, or worse yet, if he should fail in organizing and leading the defence of the community, then he and his family were subject to deposition and perhaps destruction. The right of revolution existed in both Ancient India and Ancient China, should the favor of the gods or the mandate of heaven be withdrawn, as revealed by oppressions and disasters.

But revolution itself needs leaders. The people, when in an un-

differentiated homogeneous mass, can act only as a mob which may destroy blindly, but can hardly at all build up. In fact, the shreds of leadership that may remain in almost any antiquated system are ordinarily sufficient to maintain the *status quo* against unorganized dissatisfaction, however great. Revolution then involves a change of leadership, following a struggle between the old leader and the new. Perhaps this was once done, as some have thought, in an unwitnessed duel with sharp swords within the shadow of a sacred tree; but leadership could not be changed so simply in the Ancient Asia of historic times. In fact the problem was very similar then and now. Not only can the rise of modern dictatorship be better understood by studying the ancients, but the contrary is also true, that the rise of contemporary leaders helps explain that of Chandragupta Maurya and Shih Huang Ti.

Let us then look somewhat more closely at Alexandrian India and its need of and opportunity for an ambitious aspirant to supreme power. Information is unusually abundant, considering the age and the fact that the peoples of India were comparatively uninterested in the external achievements of mankind. Nevertheless, many of the details of Chandragupta's rise to power are either lacking or variant.

Perhaps we do not always remember that three of the principal theaters for Alexander's performances were similar: the Greco-Macedonian, the Persian, and the Indian peoples, in linguistic, religious, and cultural conditions, were derived from a common ancestry of perhaps only ten to twenty centuries previous. The three groups could understand each other far better than we can understand any of them. An extraordinarily successful adventurer from Macedonia, conqueror of Persia, might well provide the pattern for a younger aspirant to vast empire in India.

Māgadha was in those years an important kingdom in the lower Ganges valley. Its capital Pātaliputra, near the modern Patna, was a great and flourishing city. Two hundred years earlier, this kingdom had been immortalized for much of Asia by the life and teachings of Gautama Buddha, a religious and philosophical reformer, whose somewhat subversive teachings contained fresh and increasing popular appeal. The Nanda dynasty had held the throne for about a century, and had scandalized aristocratic opinion by its disregard of caste. In fact Alexander was told about 326 B.C. that

the reigning Nanda "was a man of worthless character, the son of a barber, and that he had obtained the throne by the murder of his predecessor, whose chief queen he had corrupted."

Had Alexander's soldiers not refused to go farther from home, he might with no great difficulty have crossed to the Ganges, followed it down, and broken the power of the Nandas; the Macedonian empire would then have been extended across North India, and no opportunity might have come to Chandragupta. As it was, the young man — some say that when he visited the camp of Alexander he was not yet of age — had to sustain no rivalry from the westerners for thirty years, until in middle life his power had become more than a match for that of Seleucus, called from his successes elsewhere Niketor, the Victor.

Clearly people of substance and position in Māgadha and its dependencies — particularly the Brahmans, who might be called the bourgeoisie or capitalists of the time — had had enough of the Nandas and were ready to support one who might overthrow them. The tale that Chandragupta was the illegitimate son of a Nanda king smacks of an attempt to improve his social standing and legal right by false genealogy. More probably he was a capable middle-class youth whose superior military capacity led to his advancement to the position of *Senāpati* or Commander-in-chief of the Nanda army. A first attempt at revolt led to defeat. Chandragupta escaped and fled the country. He had perhaps already received the support of the shrewdest man of the age, the Brahman Chanakya, or Kautilya, who in that case escaped with him. These two, a military genius and a crafty statesman and diplomat, were the combination which built the first great Indian Empire.

Chandragupta and Chanakya, probably starting with a nucleus of Māgadhas similarly in exile, gathered a confederacy of powers in the upper Ganges valley, and returned to meet the Nanda king in battle. They slew him and entered Pātaliputra victorious. The next steps perhaps were to encompass the death of their chief ally and to force the submission of the rest. Chandragupta was then king of Māgadha and overlord of much else. As king he acquired all the powers of traditional and settled leadership. In addition he built up a great empire. During his twenty-four years of rule and the similar span of his son, Bindusara, nearly all of the Indian peninsula, besides Afghanistan and Baluchistan at the west, was brought

together, to be delivered about 274 B.C. into the hands of his famous grandson Asoka.

Few particulars remain describing the expansion of Chandragupta's government over so wide a domain. Whether from lack of power in spite of the Machiavellian assistance of Kautilya, or from deliberate policy, the component kingdoms and republics of the lands acquired were not sufficiently destroyed or dissolved into a centralized unity, so as to produce a continuously permanent type of organization. Probably the religious forces were too great to be coped with. Apparently Chandragupta himself was carried out of power by overwhelming religious emotion; if so be, he became a devout Jain, abdicated in favor of his son, and finally starved himself to death. Such an ending fits closely the pattern of Hindu practice, aside from the relatively temporary attitudes of Buddhism. His grandson, the Buddhist Asoka, could become an ascetic and a devotee, and still could hold the throne to the end of his days.

The government described by Kautilya in his *Arthasāstra* is presumably that of Chandragupta, with himself as chief adviser, albeit somewhat perfected — one can hardly say idealized. This government was strong and severe, efficient and penetrating. Its spies watched everything and everybody, from the food in the kitchen to the guard on the frontier. Its foreign policy was decidedly practical: a neighbor was an enemy to be subjugated; a non-adjacent power was a friend and ally to be cultivated, until the intervening neighbor should have become incorporated. Victories were to be won if need be by infantry, cavalry, chariots, and elephants; but preferably by the more peaceful methods of treachery, bribery, suspicion, and dissension.

A standing army, apparently of no less than 700,000 men, was controlled by a war council of thirty men, working in six committees of five each. The capital city was also ruled by a council of thirty, working in six committees or boards. An imperial system was thus devised, capable of lasting through three reigns. Broken up, and imitated at intervals later, it served remotely as a model for the British unification of India.

The rise to power of Shih Huang Ti bears at first sight even less resemblance to that of recent dictators than the rise of Chandragupta. In both cases, however, connection with the previously ruling family was expected by custom, and provided in legend, if

not in fact. The accepted story is that the father of the great Chinese emperor was a shrewd merchant, Lü Pu-wei, who about 260 B.C. gave up his beautiful wife to be the wife of the crown prince of Ts'in, but who did not entirely cease his friendship for the lady. (A similar doubt of paternal descent exists, it may be remembered, as regards the powerful and able Macedonian dynasty in the East Roman Empire, eleven centuries later.) The prince became king of Ts'in in 249 B.C., and at his death three years later the beautiful lady's son Prince Chung became the king of Ts'in. Twenty-five years afterward Chung assumed the imperial title by which he is commonly known, Shih Huang Ti.

China in 246 B.C. was restricted in size and population and divided feudally. Though the great philosophers of the three previous centuries had planned the good life for individuals and governments, settled peace did not prevail internally; and organized strength did not exist sufficient to protect the Chinese against the barbarians from the north and west. In recent decades, however, the kingdom of Ts'in had been gaining at the expense of its Chinese neighbors, and a machine of government of considerable strength had been built up. The king had a premier with a cabinet of six lesser ministers, the mandarins of Heaven, Earth, and the Four Seasons, who had charge of departments of general supervision and household affairs, agriculture, religious business, military affairs, punishments, and public works. The king's government was connected with the population by groups of officials and by feudal nobles, whose prerogatives and occasional rebellions were the source of much trouble. Tradition whose fidelity to fact cannot here be evaluated, contrasted earlier golden times with contemporary crudities. Progress, as so often in human affairs, was expected to be attained by looking backward.

Shih Huang Ti like Chandragupta had capable advisers, to whom no doubt much of his successful imperial construction was due. During the first years of his reign his alleged father, Lü Pu-wei, was chief assistant. After Lü's disgrace in 238 the scholar Li Ssü became prime minister and, in that office, outlived his lord. Capable helpers can, however, by no means account wholly for the success of Shih Huang Ti. An extraordinarily powerful personality was there, ever striving and driving. Fragments of barrier walls were joined together firmly on the north to complete the still existing Great Wall of China. Armies of infantry, cavalry, and chariots

conquered successively the component states of older China, and dissolved their organization into the central unity. The planning of these achievements was only the beginning. The barbarians beyond the Wall were subdued by energetic expeditions. Troops accustomed to victory went southwest and south, until not only were the present boundaries of China proper reached, but peoples in Indo-China gave allegiance.

Shih Huang Ti reorganized thoroughly the government of his vastly increased dominions. Feudal relationships were ruthlessly destroyed. An imperial hierarchy of officials was created, including a minister of war, a minister of the interior, a chief of the palaces, a chief justice, and a supervisor of barbarians, whose functions in a system which knew no foreign countries were the nearest possible to those of a minister of foreign affairs. The ministry of public works sketched out many features of a New Deal—a road system, canals, irrigation works, and the like, not to speak of that major enterprise of all time, the Great Wall. The Emperor traveled constantly, supervising what was being done and formulating new plans. Taxation bore more and more heavily; conquest and glory presented bills which could not easily be paid. Government bonds had not yet been invented.

Dissatisfaction found leaders among the scholars, who discerned too many innovations and too serious departures from the models of the golden past. The vigorous emperor was not to be balked. He ordered a burning of all books, except certain practical works, and decreed that scholars who might disobey should be punished, even unto death. Nor did his threats fail of execution. This action came as near as was possible in China to an attack upon religion and the church, and caused the Emperor from that day until now to be ranked as a very wicked man. Like Chandragupta he appears to have chosen heretical views in his later years, conforming his belief and practice to the lower superstitious side of Taoism. The circumstances of his burial and of the succession to the throne seem to have become adorned with legendary additions before one hundred years had elapsed.

Nevertheless, the system which he established, taken up promptly by strong emperors of the earlier Han dynasty, became the substantial framework of Chinese political life, which endured even until our own age.

Certain general points of comparison and contrast may be made between these ancient leaders in India and China, and *Il Duce* and *Der Fuehrer* of today. All four leaders rose to control in established civilizations with well-developed governments. All reached power by accepted methods, adapted to the time and place: Chandragupta killed his predecessor in battle; Shih Huang Ti was born of the legal wife of a prince who became a king; Mussolini was appointed Prime Minister of Italy; Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany, and his exceptional powers were granted by the Reichstag, representing the people. All four leaders demanded absolute obedience; all suppressed rival parties; all reorganized their nations internally with a mixture of conservatism and novelty. All appear to have obtained active support from the propertied and privileged classes by appearing to save these groups from worse leaders than themselves. All were men of tremendous energies; all apparently were propagandists and showmen; all were incessant travelers within their boundaries.

Let us look quickly at certain contrasts in the activities of these men, aside from the difference of twenty-four centuries in time and half the world in space.

In the first place, each of the two great ancients had one or more conspicuously able helpers, who shared the continuous burden of government and took the blame for much of the "dirty work." The modern dictators are their own prime ministers; their loads are comparatively much heavier. Again, the quantity of human blood poured out, in severe punishments, repression of revolts, and conquest, shows up to the present moment a great preponderance for the ancient leaders; obviously the comparison in this respect can now be only tentative; the modern leaders have not ended their stories.

A similar reservation must be made as regards imperial advance. Chandragupta and Shih Huang Ti rank by territorial measure among the world's great conquerors. Mussolini has not yet clear title even to parts of Ethiopia. Hitler can point only to the Saar basin. But the modern leaders have both indicated what they would like to do. Mussolini has talked of restoring the Roman Empire, which included among other territories all of France, Spain, and the Balkan Peninsula, with a large part of Britain. Hitler has thought not only of the Corridor, Alsace-Lorraine, and Austria; but also of

undefined areas in Russia, and of a great colonial domain. Give Mussolini the forty years of Shih Huang Ti; give Hitler the twenty-four years of Chandragupta: and what may they not accomplish in a divided and irrational world? Nevertheless — and here is the last point of contrast — the two ancient leaders seem to have had a far freer hand than the moderns can possibly have; the former started from the strongest and richest regions in their respective worlds: while the latter are each overshadowed by contemporary powers, banded together in a League of Nations to restrain them. But perhaps this contrast is not as sharp as at first sight it may seem. Energy, will, concentration, and flaming purpose have wrought miracles in the past, and may work miracles again. Chandragupta and Shih Huang Ti built great empires: Mussolini and Hitler have not yet been defeated in the pursuit of similar ambitions.