INTRODUCTION

I. THE NATURE AND VALUE OF CLASSICAL ACCOUNTS.

Since the beginning of Indological studies the accounts preserved in classical writings have formed a very valuable source of information. This was mainly due to the fact that there was no history of pre-Muslim India written by the ancient Indians themselves, and consequently very little was known of its political history. Although a mass of Indian literature belonging to the same period supplied a great deal of information on other aspects of history, its value was considerably lessened by two important factors. In the first place, this literature dealt mostly with religious or semi-religious topics and threw only a very dim light on secular affairs, specially political history. Secondly, its value, as it is, was considerably reduced by the fact that not even an approximate date could be assigned to the various literary sources. The classical accounts, on the other hand, were more concerned with topics other than religious, and the dates of almost all of them were known with a fair degree of accuracy.

Although more than a century has passed, the above statement in regard to this relative merit of classical accounts as a source of information for ancient Indian history still holds good. It is true that archaeological discoveries have increased the quantity and value of Indian sources. But they do not render the classical accounts of less value to any extent, for the two do not, generally speaking, cover the same ground. In any case, the Indian literary sources have not substantially increased in value, and the importance of classical writings remains as great today as ever. Nevertheless some improvements are noticeable in both. A few more literary texts of great value have been discovered in India, and we now possess better editions and more accurate translations of the classical texts.

An attempt has been made to collect in this single volume, all the classical texts that throw any light on Indian history and culture. This qualifying phrase explains why the accounts of Ktesias, and the stories of fabulous races, or of birds and animals, and sundry other topics of this nature have been omitted in this volume. Ktesias, of Cnidus in Caria, born in the 5th century B.C., was physician to the Achaemenian King of Persia, Artaxerxes Mnemon, for twenty years (418-398 B.C.). He wrote a treatise
on India, fragments of which alone have survived in the writings of later authors. Rawlinson rightly observes that the Indica of Ktesias "is full of extravagant stories of monstrous people and strange animals, and adds practically nothing to our knowledge of India." The grotesque legends about India, which were favourite topics of many classical and medieval authors, are mostly derived from the work of Ktesias. It has been translated by McCrindle.

The collection of all useful classical texts—a task not so far attempted by anybody—naturally draws our attention to the variety and richness of this source of information. The data supplied by them cover, in varying degrees, a wide range of subjects such as political history and constitutional forms, administrative institutions, military equipments and rules of warfare, physical and economic geography, trade and commerce, social and economic conditions, morals and religion, and a variety of topics bearing on general manners and customs of land and people.

These are not, of course, always dealt with in a systematic manner, but valuable information on these and other topics lies scattered about in the following pages. It is impossible therefore, to exaggerate the importance of a thorough study of these accounts, now available in a handy form, to every student of Indian history and to those who take any special interest in ancient Indian history. It is, however, necessary at the very outset to draw attention to the limitations of this volume. The compiler has no knowledge of either Greek or Latin, and makes no claim to any critical study of the texts or to any originality or novelty in presenting them translations made by other scholars. His sole object has been to bring together the accounts, lying scattered in a large number of volumes, and sometimes forming a very small part of the works in which they occur. He has tried to modify old translations in the light of later ones and has reduced the critical or explanatory notes to a minimum. These notes figured very prominetly in older translations, and sometimes their volume even exceeded that of the text itself. These will be found wanting in the present volume. The progress of Indology has not only rendered most of these notes practically useless, but sometimes they are even calculated to lead astray a beginner in this study. They no doubt still possess some value in the history of the progress of Indological research, but the compiler regarded any such value as outweighed
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by the advantage of compressing all the accounts in a single volume. He has not, however, altogether neglected the task, and has supplied a few select notes which might be of some help and guidance to the readers. The only exception to this is the second section dealing with Alexander’s invasion of India. The identification of tribes and localities, and the relative value of the different accounts, have been discussed in a large number of special works dealing with the subject. A bare reference to them would take a large space, and even this would not be satisfactory from any point of view. Something will be said of these accounts later in this Introduction. For the rest, the reader is referred to the writings of V. A. Smith and W. W. Tarn, and the works referred to by them. Having made this short review of the nature of the accounts we may now proceed to take a bird’s-eye view of their contents.

2 Political History and Allied Topics

A very elaborate description of the Indian expedition of Alexander has been given by classical writers, and they have, incidentally, preserved very brief but highly interesting accounts of the rulers and States with whom he came into contact, specially the Prasii and the Gargaridae. But with the exception of this, the information on the political history of India is very scanty. The bare reference to the Indian Satrapy of Darius (1), short accounts of the Nanda Kings (129, 172, 199) and the Maurya Emperor Chandragupta (193, 199), passing references to some Indo-Greek rulers (286-7, 303, 427, 449), and mention of some Indian embassies to Roman Emperors (282, 346, 451-3, 473-82),—these practically exhaust all the information supplied by the classical writers on the political history of India. There are some references to the history of India in remote antiquity (223), but they are of little value.

The knowledge possessed by the classical writers about the Prasii and the Gargaridae, ruling over the whole of North India to the east of the Beas river up to which Alexander advanced, was very vague and indefinite. This applies even to their military strength, about which Alexander made extensive enquires and

1 V. A. Smith, The Early History of India, W. W. Tarn, Alexander the Great.
2 The figures within brackets refer to the pages in the Text.
must have secured fairly reliable accounts (172). In the first place, while they are represented as a united nation under a single king by Diodorus (172) and Curtius (128), Plutarch (198) refers to them as separate nations under different kings. Secondly, while the first two authors give the numbers of the cavalry and chariots of the kingdom, respectively as 20,000 and 2,000, Plutarch increases their number four times, and the number of elephants given by the three are, respectively 4,000, 3,000, and 6,000. Pliny (342) refers to a standing army of 600,000 (or 60,000?) foot soldiers, 30,000 cavalry and 9,000 elephants. When it is remembered that these numbers must have been recorded by contemporary writers on the basis of the information collected by Alexander, whom they accompanied, it is difficult to account for these discrepancies.

More important than the historical accounts are the incidental references to the democratic and oligarchical forms of Government in various States in the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). Of particular interest is the reference to the Oligarchy in Nysa (20-1) and the Republics of the Cathacans (47, 259), the Sibor (136, 174), Agalassians (175), Sabaracae (151), Sambastar (180), Mallans (64), Oxydracians (62), Abastamans (75), Xathians (75), Ossadians (75), Sodrai (181), and many others not specifically named (47). Expressions are used which indicate that the Republics were fairly common in those days in India (226). Tauna (183) had a form of Government closely resembling that of Sparta, with two hereditary kings of two different families, and a Council of Elders ruling the whole State with paramount authority.

A great deal of light is thrown on the civil, military, and municipal administration, and special interest attaches to the reference to the vital statistics and care for foreigners (238, 268-9), about which very little is known from other sources.

The mode of fighting is referred to in connection with the campaigns of Alexander, and the military equipments of the Indian army are described by various writers (230) who speak a great deal of elephants (238, 413-16, 264) and horses (420)—two animals which figured prominently in warfare and also in ordinary pursuits of life. Reference is also made to trained ferocious dogs used for hunting purposes (127, 171).

A great deal is said of the King. We have a fine description of the capital city (224) and royal palace (415), and the routine-
life and habits of the King (271, 388), such as his hunting expedition, rubbing of the body, hair-washing ceremony (280), his processions and festivals (280-81). Of particular interest are references to King's Amazonian bodyguards and constant plots against his life (271). There are references to criminal punishment (271, 455) and general aversion of the people towards litigation (270).

There has been much discussion regarding the views of the classical writers about ownership of land. All of them aver that the land belonged to the King, though a somewhat different view is found in Indian literature. As regards the payment of rent, the statement of Diodorus (237) was contradictory to the corresponding passage of Strabo which was originally translated as follows. — "The husbandmen till it on condition of receiving one-fourth of the produce." The new translation by Jones (264) tallies with the statement of Diodorus, namely, that 'besides the land-tribute the husbandmen pay a fourth part of the produce to the King.' But Bernard Brebner proposes that the phrase 'besides the land-tribute' is a wrong translation of the Greek text which really means, 'in the absence of special arrangement.' If we accept this interpretation, we may conclude, on the testimony of the classical writers, that the husbandmen paid one-fourth of the produce as rent, unless there were any special arrangement in modification of this normal rent.

3. Geography

The geographical account may be broadly divided into two classes, namely the narratives of men who actually visited parts of India, and general description by people who gathered information from various sources.

As regards the first, the typical examples are the account of Nearchus (313-336) and the anonymous work called The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (288-312). The first belongs to the fourth century B.C., and the second nearly four hundred years later. Both describe the coastal voyage between the Persian Gulf and the mouths of the Indus, and the difference between the two accounts shows the marvelous advance in navigation in these waters, and the wonderful progress in human culture in these regions, during
the interval of four centuries.

The nature of the voyage between the Suez coast and the mouth of the Ganges, along the coast, the names of ports with imports and exports and other economic data, and the detailed accounts of the trade and commerce carried on between India and the Western countries, supplied by the Periplus are of unique importance, as they are not known from any other source. In particular, apart from vague and general reference in literature, this book supplies the only positive evidence that is so far known regarding the ships built in India, and the Indian traders sailing and establishing settlements in Western waters (297,299).

A very interesting account of a voyage to Egypt by a body of Indian adventurers of whom one alone reached his destination, is told by Posidonios (283). Eratosthenes records the distances from the Caspian gates to India (286). There are also detailed accounts of Taprobane or the island of Ceylon (345-8, 436).

To the second class of geographers belong Strabo, Pliny, Arrian and Ptolemy. The Greeks had been long interested in general geographical studies. The World Hecataeus (c. 500 B.C.) was the first Greek geographer who knew of the continents, Europe and Asia, and regarded Africa as a part of the latter. His geographical work, Survey of the World, is lost. He referred to Indus, Indus, Gandara, Kasparys and a few other peoples on the Indus.

Next came Herodotus (1) who travelled widely. He rejected the theory, then current among the Greeks, that the earth was flat. But he had a very poor knowledge of India. He only knew that it was one of the remotest provinces of the Persian empire towards the East. Herodotus lived from c. 484 to 431 B.C.

Nearly two hundred years later flourished Eratosthenes (c. 240 B.C.), the famous librarian of the great library established in Alexandria by the Ptolemies. He was a mathematician, and laid the foundation of a really scientific geography. He accepted the theory that the earth is spherical. It is believed by some that this theory was first propounded by Thales (640-546 B.C.), but others give this credit to Pythagoras who flourished in the sixth century B.C. In any case, it was Eratosthenes who based his geography on this idea, and, according to Bunbury, his geographical description is not only much nearer to the truth than that of

5. History of Ancient Geography, 1655.
Ptolemy, who flourished four hundred years later, but it is actually a nearer approximation to truth than was reached by modern geographers till about two centuries ago. He described India on the basis of the accounts supplied by the companions of Alexander and Megasthenes. He also utilized the data supplied by the Register of Statham or Marches.

Strabo (244-287), who flourished about two centuries after Eratosthenes, wrote his geography in order to correct the earlier works on the subject. He had a very critical mind and had fuller information of the world on account of the extensive Roman empire. His views on the older classical writers on India and the difficulty of securing accurate data about the country would be clear from the opening paragraphs of his account (244 ft.). Strabo’s account is a rich mine of information about India and is not confined to geographical details, including trade routes.

Pliny (337-50) not only describes the position, boundaries and physical characteristics of India, but gives a long list of races inhabiting India and refers briefly to the routes of voyages to and from India with reference to the western lands. His notices about India are fuller, because he flourished in the first century A.D. when there was an increasing trade between the Roman Empire and the east, and the discovery of Hippalus (306, 337, 339) enabled the western sailors to go direct to India and avoid the long coastal voyage. But Pliny (A.D. 23-79), though a later writer than Strabo, was less critical “His love of the marvellous disposed him to accept far too readily even the most absurd fictions”

About a century after Pliny flourished Arrian and Ptolemy who were contemporaries, both belonging to the middle of the second century A.D. Arrian’s geographical account of India is contained, partly in his account of Alexander’s expedition (23 ff.) and partly in the Indika (214 ff.) Arrian has also preserved the account of the coastal voyage of Nearchus from the mouths of the Indus towards the west (313 ff.), to which reference has been made above.

Ptolemy is the most renowned among the classical scholars who wrote geographical accounts of India. For a detailed discussion of his geographical work, reference may be made to pp. 351 ff.

4. Economic Condition

We learn a great deal from these geographical works and other texts about the trade and commerce between India and the western countries.

They give an account of the rich mineral, agricultural and other economic products of India. They also describe its people, plants, and animals, and also repeat sundry tales about them carried by traders and travellers. Reference is made to trade with Greece by the system of barter (450). An interesting item was the export of Silk (450). The Pearl fishery (416-7, 222) formed an interesting topic of classical writers. There is also reference to the working of the mines (233). The fertility of the land was an object of admiration. The classical writers hold before us a life of ease and opulence (233, 450-1) which was not disturbed by famine and scarcity. This is chiefly accounted for by a convention tacitly obeyed by warriors never to ravage lands or molest cultivators even during the heat of the War (233, 264).

The statement that 'famine has never visited India' (233) is contradicted by Indian literature which refers to famine even in ancient days. Reference is made, for example, in Jain literature to a terrible famine at the time of Chandragupta Maurya. The Indians were also highly developed in arts and crafts. Reference may be made to the statement of Neaerichus (279).

5. General Manners and Customs

The classical writers were naturally attracted by the peculiar social customs and institutions. The division of the people into seven castes is described in some detail (236, 263). It is, however, obvious that Megasthenes, who seems to be the only source of information on this point, had no accurate idea on this subject. He evidently mistook the people, following same professions or occupations, as forming endogamous classes in society. In any case, his seven castes have little in common with the four regular, or a large number of mixed, castes which certainly flourished in India after him. It has been suggested that he got his number seven from Indian informants, but this is very unlikely, for the mystic or stereotyped figure seven nowhere appears in Indian lite-

7 The Cambridge History of India, 165.
rature along with caste divisions. It is more likely that he knew of social divisions based on occupations, and also of the prevalence of endogamy, among some communities in India. He mixed these two and then evolved his ‘Caste’ on the basis of various professions and occupations with which he became familiar. It has been rightly observed that the seven castes or classes of Megasthenes may truly reflect the various activities which a Greek resident at Pataliputra could see going on round about him in the third century B.C. This is quite in keeping with what may be reasonably inferred from the writings of Megasthenes about his lack of critical judgment.

The inability of the classical writers to understand the social institutions of foreigners like Indians, and a consequent tendency towards easy generalisation from isolated facts or concrete instances, are clearly proved by many statements made by them. A notable instance is furnished by the categorical statement that there were no slaves in India (244, 271). This cannot be true, as slavery is referred to in ancient Indian Smritis or law-books and in other literary works. Smritis as well as the secular Arthasastra make classifications of slaves according to the circumstances of their origin, and describe their rights and disabilities as well as the ways by which they can be manumitted. The only rational explanation of the error into which the classical writers fell is furnished by the extremely miserable lot of the slaves in Greece and Rome. Evidently the western writers would not regard as slaves those who spent their lives more like domestic servants. They looked around for the wretched species of humanity, known as slaves in the West, who were treated more like chattels than human beings—and found none. Hence they wrote that slavery was unknown in ancient India. Some writers, however, referred to the existence of slaves in some States of India (271) but regarded it as peculiar.

Another instance in which the ignorance of the classical writers is difficult to explain is the statement, attributed to Megasthenes, that the Indians were ignorant of the art of writing. Strabo quotes this (270) as well as another statement of Megasthenes which credits the Indians with a knowledge of writing (264). Strabo also refers to a statement of Nearchus to the effect that the Indians write missives on linen cloth, immediately adding, how-

8 Ibid., 409
9 See Appendix I
ever, that the other writers say that the Indians make no use of written characters (279). Curtius refers to the use of the barks of trees for writing (104), and though he belongs to a later period, seems to describe the state of things prevailing in Alexander's time. There is, however, hardly any doubt that the art of writing was known to the Indians at the time of Megasthenes, and even much earlier. This is proved by the inscriptions engraved on rocks and pillars during the reign of Asoka, about half a century later. These letter is are so well formed that there must have been an anterior period of development of writing extending over centuries.

The classical writers throw some light on dress and ornament (270, 281), food and manner of taking it (270, 403, 455), funeral (270, 223), rubbing of body (270), private dwelling houses (223, 388) and the urban life of India which had innumerable cities (223).

On the morals of the Indians the classical writers have expressed divergent views Curtius has condemned the court-morality in strong language (105). He even goes so far as to say that amidst this corruption of morals who would expect to find the culture of philosophy (105-6)? On the other hand, Strabo gives an almost exactly opposite view (269-70). Apart from incidental references, a great deal is said about the Brahmanas and Sramanas, the latter including both Buddhists and Jains (Ch XIII. 187, 237, 263-4, 173 ff., 298 ff.). But the Brahmanas were not all recluses or devoted to religious pursuits. Some of them took active part in politics and were great fighters (1, 81, 278). Reference is also made to religious practices (280) and to the Indian conception of immortality of soul (450).

6 Reliability of the Classical Accounts

Finally, it is necessary to consider the question how far the classical accounts may be relied upon as accurate information. In order to judge this question properly, we may begin with the different accounts of Alexander's expedition. Of this there were contemporary records by trustworthy men. Yet a perusal of the different accounts that have reached us raises grave doubts whether they are all derived from a common reliable source. A few concrete examples may be cited to illustrate the nature of
these differences.

Both Arrian and Curtius Rufus refer to the capture of an Aspasian city by Alexander (8, 107). According to the former, Alexander’s soldiers, ‘being enraged because the besieged had wounded Alexander, slew all whom they took prisoners’. But according to Curtius, ‘Alexander massacred all the inhabitants in order to strike terror into the people’, and he had previously issued this order, which was thus a part of his policy! There is also serious divergence between the two writers regarding the route followed by Alexander after this incident. According to Curtius, Alexander next conquered Nysa, and then proceeded to Massaga and Aornus. But Arrian places these expeditions, and many others, before he reached Nysa. As regards the capture of Massaga, Curtius emphasizes the role played by the movable towers (110), while Arrian makes no reference to them (13). Similarly, Arrian justifies the massacre of the Indian mercenaries at Massaga on the ground that they had treacherous intentions (13), but, according to Diodorus, Alexander treacherously attacked the mercenaries, being actuated by an “implacable enmity” against them (162). According to Arrian and Justin, the people of Nysa offered no resistance (20, 188), but Curtius says that ‘the defenders risked an engagement (107). The detailed account of the fight and the strategy by which Aornus was conquered is given differently by Arrian (16-18), Curtius (111-12) and Diodorus (163-4).

The accounts given by different writers about Alexander’s crossing the Hydaspes vary in essential points. Curtius (118), for example, does not refer to the two crossings mentioned by Arrian (34), due, according to the latter, to the “ignorance of the locality”. Plutarch says that Alexander first crossed over to an island and then advanced from the island and reached the other bank (196). What happened after the crossing of the river is differently described by different writers. According to Aristobulus Alexander easily routed the Indians in the sixty chariots under the command of the son of Porus (36). Ptolemy says that the son of Porus had arrived at the head of 2,000 cavalry and 120 chariots, but they gave way after the first charge of Alexander, and 400 of their cavalry, including the son of Porus, fell in the contest (36-7). Curtius says that this advance force consisted of 100 chariots and 4,000 horse led by the brother of Porus, and there was a regular battle in which “it would be hard to say which
side suffered most" when the chariots of Porus charged the Greeks (119). Plutarch says that the force of Porus consisted of 1000 horse and 60 chariots and these were routed by Alexander (196). There are also discrepancies in the accounts of the main battle between Alexander and Porus.

Now Aristobulus and Ptolemy both accompanied Alexander and were present in the battlefield. Plutarch says his account is based on the description of the battle given by Alexander himself in his letters (196). How are we then to explain all these discrepancies? Arrian undertook the task of writing a comprehensive account of Alexander's Indian expedition. He wisely allowed the authority of two generals, Ptolemy and Aristobulus, who actually took part in the expedition. Yet he simply records the different versions without any comment. Being a junior contemporary of Plutarch he must have been aware of the existence of Alexander's letters containing what should be regarded as the most authentic account of his battle with Porus. But he makes no reference to these letters. It is difficult, therefore, to avoid the conclusion that even Arrian, not to speak of others, cannot be regarded as a critical historian, in the sense in which we understand the expression today. It would, therefore, be unreasonable to attach a great value to the different accounts of the expeditions of Alexander, except on those points on which there is a general agreement.

When the writers differ even in respect of the essential points of the military campaign, one need not feel surprised at the difference on less important details. Thus we have divergent accounts of the manner in which Porus fought and was made prisoner, as well as his talk with Alexander when brought before him (42, 123, 189-90, 197). As regards the speech of Coenus, explaining causes of the discontent of the soldiers, the differences are more serious still. Curtius makes him emphasize the utmost misery of the soldiers with elaborate details (134). Diodorus and Plutarch both omit any reference to the speech of Coenus. Diodorus refers to the "utmost misery" with details, and describes how Alexander tried to win over the soldiers by allowing them to plunder and bribing their wives and children (173). Plutarch explains how the battle with Porus depressed the spirits of Alexander's soldiers, and made them oppose any further advance against Indians whose rulers possessed a mighty force, compared with which, the forces of Porus, which they had beaten with utmost difficulty, almost sink into insignificance (198). But the long
speech put by Arrian in the mouth of Coenus (54-6) does not contain the slightest reference to any of these things. As regards the death of Bucephalus, the favourite horse of Alexander, Arrian says it died a natural death and not from any wound (43), whereas Strabo says it fell during the battle with Porus (258). As regards Alexander's heroic exploit in a city of the Malloi, where he was severely wounded, Justin says he alone leapt from the wall into the citadel and 'single-handed fought against thousands' (191) Diodorus adds that Peucetas alone joined him at the critical moment (177). Arrian says that three men leaped down, more or less at the same time as Alexander, and fought in front of the King (69). It being a memorable episode in the whole campaign, the transference of the scene to the dominions of the Sudrae by Curtius (140) and the difference among others on vital points are not easy to explain. Similarly, the writers differ in their accounts of the war memorial erected by Alexander to mark his furthest advance. According to Arrian, Alexander constructed twelve altars equal in height to very large towers (57), and this is supported by Strabo (285). According to Justin Alexander only "ordered a camp to be made of an unusual size" (190) Curtius (135) and Diodorus (173) refer to both altars and camps of unusual character.

It is easy to multiply such instances of discrepancy on serious topics in regard to a subject on which the classical writers had the best possible source of information. Nor is it necessary to refer to some accounts of Alexander's invasion which hardly contain any truth (209, 213). The natural inference is that the classical writers did not make a very careful and critical study of the sources available to them, and their standard of historiography was not very high. This is fully corroborated by what has been said of the classical accounts of the Indian embassies to Rome by Piaulx (Appendix II).

Next to Alexander's companions who wrote about his Indian expedition, Megasthenes is the oldest classical writer who had a first-hand knowledge of India and ample opportunity of gathering information. His Indika, or the collection of Fragments preserved in later writings, has long enjoyed the reputation of being a rich mine of useful and authentic information about India. The question how far the Fragments, usually ascribed to him, can really be accepted as such, and may be relied upon as authentic, has been fully examined in Appendix I. It will appear from what has
been said there that the adverse comments against Megasthenes by ancient writers like Strabo, Pliny and Arrian are fully justified, and modern scholars have no right or reason to ignore them. On the whole, it is easy to distinguish critical writers like Strabo and Arrian from the host of others who preceded them and were justly condemned by them as credulous and uncritical. The remarks of Strabo and Pliny, particularly those quoted on pp. 246 ff., cannot be lightly dismissed, and a modern historian should not accept any statement of the early classical writers as true without corroborative evidence. This also applies to the later writers who seem to have derived much of their information from older sources. The unreliable character of the classical accounts is best shown by the mutually contradictory and palpably wrong statements about the absence of slavery, ignorance of writing, etc., and the many absurd tales of men and beasts, and unnatural phenomena solemnly reported by them.

How ridiculously absurd might be the stories told even by those who professed to be eye-witnesses, may be illustrated by the story of Iamboulos (142) which was recorded by Diodorus. Reference may be made in this connection to Strabo's remarks on Onesicritus (258) and Crates (262), and the lack of agreement among the historians about Calanus (279). Dion Chrysostom accepted as true the statements, recorded in the Puranas, of rivers flowing with wine or honey, and added that these were not fictions but facts asserted by those who came from India (433).

In the light of these observations what reliance can be placed on those statements which appear to be unnatural or absurd on the very face of them? Typical examples of such statements are furnished by what Megasthenes says about the men and women of the Caucasus (271), the statement of Aristobulus about customs at Taxila (276), the two statements, recorded by Strabo, namely 'that the women are permitted to prostitute themselves if the husbands do not force them to be chaste' (270) and 'that a woman who kills a King when he is drunk receives as her reward the privilege of consorting with his successor' (271); the statement of Megasthenes that the women of the Pandaian realm bear children at the age of six (455), and those seven years old are of marriageable age (222), that the Pandaean nation is governed by females (458), that the men who live longest die at forty (223); that no private person is permitted to keep a horse or elephant (264) which is contradicted by another equally absurd statement
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of Nearchus (266); that there is no remedy at law for recovering loan or deposit (455), and the oft-repeated stories of gold-digging ants (2, 266). It may be argued that some of these statements, however incredible it might appear to us today, might well be true in those days. Arrian, for example, had tried to show that the girls might be marriageable at the age of seven (223). Even if we accept it, the question arises, how far we are justified in believing in them merely on the strength of assertions of persons whose credulity and lack of critical sense have been proved beyond doubt. Writers like Megasthenes, who could accept, as true stories of men without any mouths or noses, or with ears large enough to sleep in (272), of gold-digging ants (266), and of river Silas on which nothing floats (219, 234), would easily believe in the stories of the women in Caucasus and Pandai without any question. Those who can swallow a camel would hardly strain at a gnat. It is interesting to note that the classical writers themselves accuse each other of falsehood and exaggeration.

7. VALUE OF THE CLASSICAL ACCOUNTS.

The value of the classical accounts is also reduced by the fact that we have clear evidences of the texts being tampered with in later times. The distances given by Pliny, as recorded in the translations of McCrindle and Rackham, show such wide divergences that they must have relied on two different texts, one or both of which were evidently altered in later times.

The classical writers also suffered from a superiority complex. They held that the nations conquered by Alexander were barbarians, and became civilized by contact with the Greeks, by whose influence alone barbarism was crushed and a better morality superseded a worse (204). No wonder that they readily believed that Homer's poems were translated and sung by the Indians (414, 448), and that some Indian rulers paid allegiance to Constantine (453).

The net result of all this discussion is that we must dismiss from our mind the notion that the statements of classical writers have any special claim to be regarded as true or authentic, and based on ascertained facts. In particular, the older generations that preceded Strabo were, generally speaking, very uncritical, and therefore much less reliable than writers like Strabo and Arrian, who possessed a more rational mind and a much higher critical
faculty, as evidenced by their questioning the truth of absurd statements or unnatural phenomena which the earlier writers glibly reported as true. It may be, that many of these were not deliberate liars or fabricators of facts, but were misled by imperfect knowledge of Indian language and manners, false report of Indian informants, and fables or allegories recorded in Indian literature. But while these considerations may weigh with us in our judgment of their moral character, they should not, in any way, affect our view of the reliability of their accounts. One who is guilty of recording false stories, from whatever causes, and has been proved to be incapable of rational discrimination between what is probable or natural and what is not, forfeits all right to be regarded as a reliable recorder of events or things even where they do not exceed the bounds of probability. This does not mean that we shall reject all their statements. It means only this that where these statements are in consonance, and not in conflict with what we may reasonably conclude from other evidences, we may provisionally accept them as true. But we must not regard them as specially sacrosanct in character, and shall be ever ready to reject them in the light of new facts which might be adjudged to possess a greater degree of reliability, after considering all that has been said above of the general nature of classical accounts.

Reference has been made above to the sense of critical judgement possessed by writers like Strabo and Arrian. But this was impaired, to a certain extent, by their lack of first-hand knowledge of India and dependence on writers whom they were foremost in denouncing. Thus Strabo and Arrian accepted many statements, because extraordinary things are always associated with an unknown foreign country (223). Strabo reproduced, without comment, two contradictory statements about the knowledge of the art of writing in India (264, 270), and Arrian argued that the statement that girls attained marriageable age at seven, might after all be true (223).

In conclusion, it must be clearly explained that the observations and comments made above must not lead one to suppose that the classical writers were inferior to others in that age or in the ancient world. No better specimens of foreign accounts than those of the classical writers have reached us. They are the very best that we yet know of, but are not good enough according to modern standard.