

# THE SUNGAS (PART-2)

B.A.(HISTORY )PART-1, PAPER-1

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# HORSE SACRIFICE

After usurping the imperial throne Pushyamitra tried to achieve his mission of consolidating his power for unifying the whole country once again, fighting against the forces from within and without. The group of the rival partisans among the bureaucracy was either imprisoned or suppressed by show of arms at his command and by generating confidence with a prospect of better and efficient government (service security and salary security). Pushyamitra was popularly known as *senapati*. The Puranas refer to him as *senani*. The *Malvikagnimitram* calls him *senapati*. while it gives the epithet *Rajan* to his son Agnimitra.

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The Harshacharita also styles him only a senani. It is only in the *Divyavadana* that Pushyamitra is called as a rajan. The Buddhist writer *Taranatha* also refers to him as a Brahman king. This reference to Pushyamitra as king in the Buddhist literature which alleged him as the persecutor of Buddhism and the absence of this epithet rather presence of the epithet senapati in most of the Brahmanical literature related to him may be explained by the fact that Pushyamitra might have intended to show that what he did was in the interest of the motherland. Very soon after his accession to the throne of Magadha Pushyamitra restored the time-honoured Vedic rite of horse sacrifice after its long abeyance.

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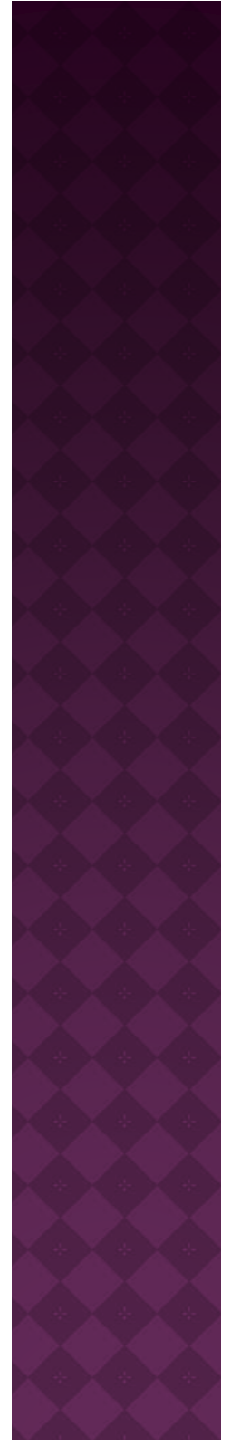
It is known from the *Mahabhashya of Patanjali* and the *Ayodhya Inscription of Dhanadeva*. The horse-sacrifice, no doubt, exposed the undisputed sovereignty of a king. In the case of Pushyamitra it had other significance, for it brought his canopy a major section of old fashioned people who clung to bloody sacrifices, cow-killing and meat-eating. The sentiment in favour of respecting animal life, technically called the 'Ahimsa doctrine', had a large share in the people; burdensome rules of conduct. The propagation of '*Ahimsa*' by Asoka necessarily produced a sharp conflict of ideas and principles of conduct between the adherents and the old fashioned people.

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This brought a reaction against the sanctity to animal life, from the highest to the lowest, all tuned against it. Pushyamitra might have utilized that sentiment. Pushyamitra, after occupying the throne, established himself as the sovereign of the erstwhile Maurya dominion. He tried his best to unify the fast disintegrating empire by bringing as much as possible all the power centres of the Maurya empire within the sub-continent. The dominions of Pushyamitra extended to the river Narmada and included the cities of Pataliputra, Ayodhya, Vidisa and if the authors of the Divyavadana and 'History of Buddhism in India' of Taranatha are to be believed, Jalandhara and Sakala.

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It appears from the evidence of Divyavadana that he continued to reside in Pataliputra which still remained, as of old, the capital of the new dynastic rule. The Ma!avikagnimitram proves that Vidisa was given in charge of crown prince Agnimitra who served as his father's viceroy. While a cousin of Agnimitra, namely Virasena was given the charge of frontier fortress on the bank of the Narmada in order to check the unwillingness of the South-West regions to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Sunga monarch.



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The Malavikagnimitram also refers to Agnimitra's war with the adjoining state of Vidarbha which resulted in the acknowledgement of the suzerainty to the house of Pushyamitra by the ruler of Vidarbha. In the Ayodhya Inscription, Dhanadeva, king of Kosala, claims to be the sixth in descent from senapati Pushyamitra. In that case it is not unlikely that Dhanadeva's forefather, a near relative of Pushyamitra was the governor of Kosala under his suzerainty and thus the region seems to have been included in the dominions of Pushyamitra. And as the local dynastic coinage of Kausambi, Mathura and Panchala did not start on a regular basis before the latter half of the 2nd century B.C. these kingdom are also likely to have

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been included within Pushyamitra's empire'. In the Act V of the *Malavikagnimitram*, *Kalidasa* refers to a conflict between prince Vasumitra who escorted, as the Commander-in-Chief of the army of Pushyamitra along with other hundred princes, the sacrificial horse for the second horse-sacrifice and a Yavana on the south bank of the *Sindhu*. Though there is controversy as to the identification of this river Sindhu, we may accept the generally accepted view that this Sindhu was the famous river Indus of the Punjab'. We are also informed that Vasumitra returned safely with the sacrificial horse after defeating the Yavanas. If the testimony of the *Rajatarangini* is to be believed, it is proved that Pushyamitra's sword took him to the gate of Kashmir, that is *Darabhisara*.



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On the basis of epigraphic evidence we may undoubtedly accept that Pushyamitra Sunga performed two horse-sacrifices. By performing two horse-sacrifices he demonstrated that he had thoroughly consolidated his position over a greater part of the empire for no monarch could let loose the sacrificial horse without making sure of its safe return. From whatever we know from the combined testimony of the literary and epigraphic sources of the extent of the empire at least of the first Sunga monarch, most of the local kingdoms of the Madhyades'a seems to have been included within the Sunga dominion. It is not, therefore, impossible that the local ruling houses in Ayodhya, Kausambi, Panchala, Mathura, Vidisa etc. originated with Pushyamitra's provincial governors.

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Some of whom might have been either members of his family (as in Vidisa) or matrimonially connected with it as that of Dhanadeva's family of Ayodhya .His successful performance of two horse-sacrifices clearly prove that the whole of northern India including the part of northern Deccan was under the complete subjugation of Pushyamitra.

He died in 148 B.C. after ruling for 36 years. But by his achievement he find a distinct place in the Indian history. He was not only a great military general but also a good organizer and farsighted ruler. He showed his great courage by boldly facing the Greek attack. He well organized his empire and strengthened it. He was not only an imperialist and able administrator but also a great patron of art and literature. (To be continued)