

THE SUNGAS (PART-3)

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

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO ART AND CULTURE

- The Sunga Empire played an important role in patronizing Indian culture at a time when some of the most important developments in Hindu thought were taking place. The richness of India's spiritual tradition, from which the whole world has gained insight, owes much to this period. The Sunga rulers helped to establish the tradition of *royal sponsorship of learning and art* that would be continued by later dynasties, ensuring that Indian culture remained vital and creative.
- The period saw a *flowering of the visual arts, including small terracotta images, larger stone sculptures, and architectural monuments* such as the chaitya hall at Bhaja, the stupa at Bharhut, and the renowned Great Stupa at Sanchi.

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- Most notably, *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and Mahabhasya* were *composed* in this period. It is also noted for its subsequent mention in the *Malavikaagnimitra*. This work was composed by Kalidasa in the later Gupta period, and romanticized the love of Malavika and King Agnimitra, with a background of court intrigue.
- Artistry on the subcontinent also progressed with the *rise of the Mathura school*, which is considered the indigenous counterpart to the

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more Hellenistic Gandhara school of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

- During the historical Sunga period (185 to 73 B.C.), Buddhist activity also managed to survive somewhat in central India (Madhya Pradesh) as suggested by some architectural expansions undertaken at the stupas of Sanchi and Barhut, originally started under King Ashoka. It remains uncertain whether these works were due to the weakness of the control of the Sungas in these areas, or a sign of tolerance on their part.

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- The script used by the empire was a variant of Brahmi script and was used to write Sanskrit
- The Shunga art style differed somewhat from imperial Mauryan art, which was influenced by Persian art. In both, continuing elements of folk art and cults of the Mother Goddess appear in popular art, but are now produced with more skill in more monumental forms. The *Shunga style* was thus seen as '*more Indian*' and is often described as the more indigenous.

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- The *Bharhut* stupa at Madhya Pradesh from the Mauryan times saw the railings reconstructed by the Sunga dynasty, many parts of it are presently at museums in India. The decorations on the railings are ornate and depicted with *yakshas*, *yakshis* and *Kubera*, their leader. Medallions with floral patterns, busts of kings, *Jataka* tales and scenes from the life of the Buddha. The *yakshas* are depicted on the uprights. The art was executed over a period of time by different craftsmen and artisans from India.
- Additions like the railings and modifications to the Great *stupa* at Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh (which was built under King Ashoka of the Mauryas), was also done under them. The style is continuation of Mauryan

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period. The human figures are seen wearing heavy and elaborate jewellery having metal beads. Though the early *Sunga* rulers were against Buddhism, Buddhist art flourished with the Mathura school.

Thus the Sunga period witnessed many contributions in the field of art and culture. The period greatly contributed to the enrichment of Indian culture.



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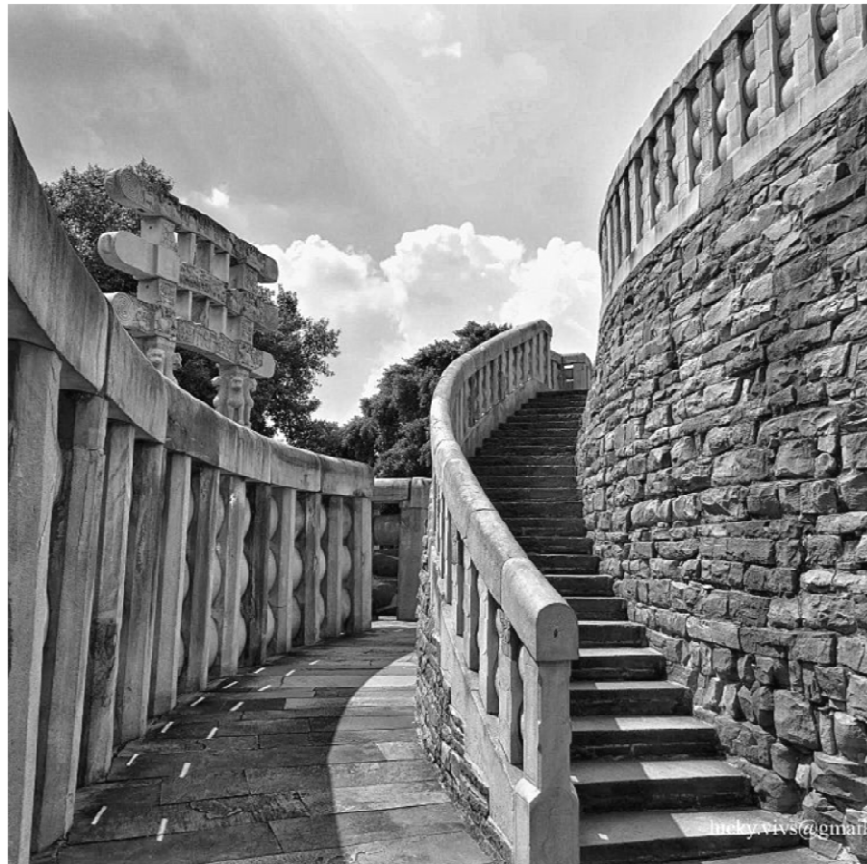
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