

THE KUSHANAS (PART-1)

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

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INTRODUCTION

Kushans or Kuei-Shang were one of the five Great Yueh-chi (tribes) principalities. Their original homeland was Central Asia. In the 1st Century A.D., Kujula Kadphises (Kadphises I) brought together these five principalities and founded the Kushan Empire. A nomadic people from the steppes of north central Asia living in the neighbourhood of China, the Kushanas first occupied Bactria where they displaced the Sakas. Then they gradually moved to the Kabul valley and seized the Gandhara by crossing the Hindu Kush replacing the Greeks and Parthians. The Kushans movement in India can be traced back to the first century A.D. during Kadphises I time.

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Kadphises I (15 – 64 A.D.)

- He was the founder of the Kushana dynasty.
- He became the master of the Gandhara and Kabul regions and issued coins South of Hindu Kush.
- Consolidated his power in Bactria.
- Kingdom extended from the frontiers of Persia to the Indus.

Kadphises II (64 – 78 A.D.)

- Kadphises II also known as Wima Khadpises conquered the whole of North Western India as far as Mathura.

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- He issued gold coins with high sounding title like “*the lord of the whole world*”
- Kadphises II became a convert to Saivism and proclaimed himself as Maheswara on his coins. The obverse of his coins represent him on a couch or standing sacrificing at an Alter or even riding a chariot drawn by two horses.
- The abundance of gold and copper coins issued by Kadphises II indicated the prosperity of the Kushana empire.
- He maintained close links with China
- An inscription found at Rabatak in Afghanistan

RULERS

mentions that he was the son of VimaTaktu and the father of Kanishka.

- During his time the influence of the Sakas and Parthians came to an end.

Kanishka (78 – 120 A.D.)

- Kanishka was the most important ruler of the Kushana dynasty.
- He was the founder of the Saka Era which starts from 78 A.D.
- At the time of his accession his empire included Afghanistan, Gandhara, Sindh and Punjab.
- From the Si-yu-ki and Rajatarangini, it is clear that Kanishka conquered Kashmir.
- He erected a large number of Monuments there and also founded a town known as Kanishkapura

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- The discovery of a large number of Kanishka's records at Mathura and the Sanchi museum inscription seem to suggest that Rajputana, Malwa and Saurashtra also formed part of Kanishka's dominions.
- The Buddhist tradition states that Kanishka after capturing Pataliputra, Asvaghosha, the great Buddhist philosopher, fell into his hands and he brought that sage along with him.
- Asvaghosha was one of the greatest literary luminaries of the court of the Kanishka.
- Kanishka might have conquered at least a portion of Magadha. This view is supported by the fact that a

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- large number of coins of Kanishka have been found from Ghazipur to Gorakhpur
- He waged war against the Sakas of Western India. Sakas acknowledged the supremacy of Kanishka and also surrendered a portion of Malwa to him.
- He also fought against the Chinese and acquired the territories of Khotan, Yarkand and Kashgar. Kanishka secured the Chinese princes as hostages whom he treated with kindness
- In the latter part of his reign, he suffered reverses in the north and north east because of the victories of Pancho, a famous general of the Chinese emperor Ho-ti.

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- His empire outside India suffered diminution, although his extensive empire in India remained intact during his lifetime.
- His empire extended from Gandhara in the west to Benares in the East, and from Kashmir in the North to Malwa in the South.
- Capital was Purushapura (modern Peshawar). Mathura was another important city in his empire.
- ***Kanishka and Buddhism:***
 - (1) Kanishka's name and fame is more due to his association with the Buddhist faith. Like Ashoka, Kanishka did some solid service for the spread of Buddhism.

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- (2) Buddhist Chaityas, Stupas and Viharas were built in different places.
- (3) Patronized Buddhist scholars like Vasumitra, Asvagosha and Nagarjuna
- (4) Kanishka convened the fourth Buddhist Council at Kundalvana in Kashmir.
- (5) He patronised Buddhism although he was very tolerant in his religious views.
- (6) He also propagated the Mahayana form of Buddhism and he was largely responsible for propagating it in China.

RULERS

- His coins contain a mix of Indian, Greek and Zoroastrian deities.
- He was also a patron of art and architecture. The Gandhara School of art flourished under him.
- Nagarjuna was the great scholar, philosopher and also a scientist. He enunciated the theory of relativity in his great work Madhyamika Sutra. He has been styled as Indian Einstein.
- Vasumitra wrote Mahavibhasha Sastra.
- Charaka, the author of 'Charaka Samhita', flourished in the court of Kanishka. He was an authority on medicinal Science.
- Parsva and Mathava were the other prominent scholars who adorned the court of Kanishka.

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➤ *Kanishka as a Builder*

(1) The Monuments constructed under the patronage of Kanishka are found at Taxila, Peshawar, Mathura and Kanishkapura.

(2) Mathura became a great centre of Art

(3) An important art object of this period is a statue of Kanishka which is headless – an excellent specimen of portrait sculpture of the Kushana period.

➤ *Successors of Kanishka*

Kanishka's immediate successor was Vasishka. He was the founder of Jushkapura, identified with the modern Zugar near Srinagar and the township of Jayasvanipura. Vasishka was succeeded by Huvishka. Like Kanishka he was also a patron of Buddhism.

RULERS

The last important ruler was Vasudeva. He took the title Shaono Shao Vasudeva Koshano. His name suggests that by his time the Kushanas were totally Indianized. He was a worshipper of Siva, as is evident from the figure of Siva and bull on his coins. The history of the Kushanas after Vasudeva is shrouded in obscurity in the absence of any literary and archaeological evidence. The dismemberment of mighty Kushana empire was hastened by the Persian invasions. One of the causes for the downfall of the Kushanas was the rise of independent republics like the Yaudheyas, Kunindas and Malwas and finally the Guptas.

(To be continued)