

THE KUSHANAS (PART-2)

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

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ACHIEVEMENT OF KANISHKA

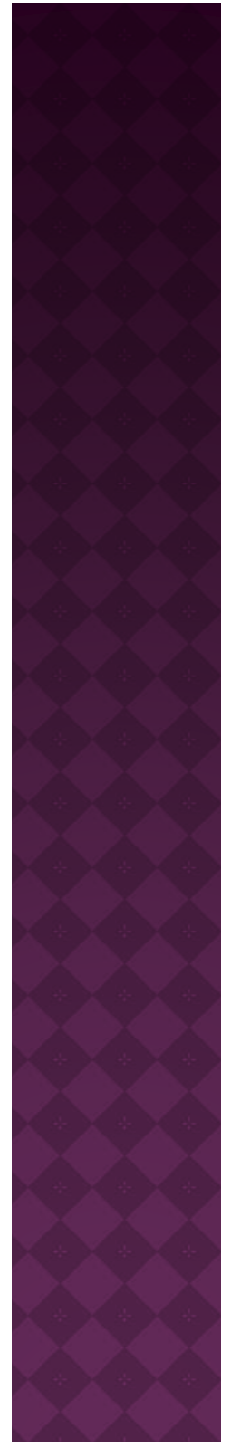
History has recognized Kanishka as one of the greatest monarchs of ancient India. As a conqueror, an empire-builder, a patron of Buddhism, and a promoter of culture, Kanishka played an important role to earn that distinction. Though of foreign origin, Kanishka became an Indian in very sense of the term. Even though he ruled over vast territories outside India, he ruled over them as an Indian king. He was also the only Indian King to have ruled over an extensive region of Central Asia and to have conquered lands beyond the *Pamirs*. As a conqueror, he undoubtedly played a most heroic part.

ACHIEVEMENT OF KANISHKA

His empire also went by its distinctive character. The Kushana Empire in fact was the largest empire in India after the fall of the Maurya Empire and before the rise, of the Gupta Empire. Politically, Kanishka linked up his Indian territories with Central Asia. In order to maintain his supremacy over the external conquests, he established his capital in the north-west at *Purushapura or Peshawar*. That he gave his empire a sound administration is evident from the fact that there were no internal revolts during his rule. His continuous conquests also show that he maintained a mighty army.

ACHIEVEMENT OF KANISHKA

There was no external invasion or internal unrest because of his power. True to the traditions of the ancient Indian monarchy, Kanishka tried for the unification of as much of India as possible and succeeded in bringing large portions of the northern, the north-western and the western India under his imperial authority. The real greatness of Kanishka rests on his role as a Buddhist. Like Asoka, he took up the cause of Buddhism in true missionary spirit.



ACHIEVEMENT OF KANISHKA

The court of Kanishka was one of the best royal courts of ancient times with the most illustrious persons to adorn it. By patronizing men like *Asvaghosha*, *Vasumitra*, *Charaka* and *Nagarjuna*, Kanishka demonstrated his own genius as a great king. Similarly, by his liberal policy towards other religions, he manifested the true spirit of Indian culture which went by assimilation and synthesis of different faiths.

Last but not the least, Kanishka's encouragements of the *Gandhara Art* opened up a vast opportunity for the evolution of the Indian artistic genius. For all these distinctions Kanishka occupies a high position among the rulers of India. He is remembered today for the *foundation of the Saka Era* which has been accepted for the National Calendar of India.

ACHIEVEMENT OF KANISHKA

He built Stupas, monasteries, relic towers, Chaityas, and other Buddhist monuments in great numbers. Like Asoka, Kanishka also held a *Buddhist Council* to give the Buddhist Samgha new direction, and to settle religious disputes and controversies. As Asoka opened path for the missionaries towards Ceylon, Myanmar and South-East Asian countries, Kanishka prepared ground for *missionary activities in Tibet, China and Japan*. In a sense, Kanishka followed the traditions and examples of Asoka for the propagation of Buddhism beyond the boundaries of India.

IMPACT OF CENTRAL ASIAN CONTACTS

The coming of the foreigners established intimate contacts between central Asia and India. The turn of the millennium had been a period of central Asian intervention in the history of Northern India that took the form of conquest, migrations and commerce.

- ❖ The second Greek conquest of India of Demetrius, Eucratides and Menander penetrated deep into the Indian Territory with the obvious purpose of setting up an empire.
- ❖ India and China were brought closer through the interlinking Oases and through Kushana territory bordering both.
- ❖ The Sakas and the Kushanas strengthened the idea of the Divine origin of kingship.

IMPACT OF CENTRAL ASIAN CONTACTS

They took exalted titles 'Rajadhiraja' (king of kings), 'Daivaputra' (son of heaven), Soter (Savior) and Kaisara (caesor).

- ❖ The Kushanas introduced the Satrap system of Government where as the Greeks followed the practice of military Govern ship.
- ❖ The Sakas and Kushanas added new ingredients to Indian culture and enriched it immensely. They settled in India for good and completely identified themselves with its culture. Since most of them came as conquerors, they were absorbed in to Indian society as a warrior class i.e., Kshatriyas.
- ❖ Given the territorial span of the contact, and the intermingling of people, royal patronage had to extend to variety of religions-Buddhism, Jainism, Bhagavata and Saiva sects, Zoroastrianism and Hellenistic cults.

IMPACT OF CENTRAL ASIAN CONTACTS

- ❖ They also patronized and cultivated the Sanskrit literature.
- ❖ The Kushanas were the first rulers in India to issue Gold coins on a wider scale.
- ❖ The foreign princes became enthusiastic patrons of Indian Art and Architecture.
- ❖ The Greek rule is memorable on account of the introduction of Hellenistic art features in the north-western India. Indian craftsmen came into contact with the Greeks and the Romans, especially in the north-western frontier of India in Gandhara.

IMPACT OF CENTRAL ASIAN CONTACTS

- ❖ The Kushanas brought together masons and other artisans trained in different schools and countries. This gave rise to several schools of Art: Central Asian Art, Gandhara Art and Mathura Art.
- ❖ Gandhara School of Art originated during the reign of Indo-Greek rulers but the real patrons of this school of Art were the Sakas and the Kushanas, particularly Kanishka.
- ❖ The Gandhara School made sculptures of Buddha in various sizes, shapes and postures. The hair of the Buddha was fashioned in the Graeco-Roman style. A large number of monasteries were built from First to Fourth century A.D.
- ❖ The influence of the Gandhara art also spread to Mathura although it was primarily a centre of indigenous art.

IMPACT OF CENTRAL ASIAN CONTACTS

- ❖ Mathura School of Art produced beautiful images of Buddha exhibiting the spiritual feeling in his face which was largely absent in Gandhara School of art. It also produced several stone images of Vardhamana Mahavira.
- ❖ The Mathura School also carved out the images of Siva and Vishnu along with their consorts Parvathi and Lakshmi.

