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Post Mauryan India – History Study Material & Notes

India after Mauryas was not a very remarkable period for political solidarity but it saw development of Indian culture to a great extent. There were invasions from various foreign tribes but the Indian society absorbed these infiltrators and continued its development by making alterations and additions in itself. This period proved the strength of Indian culture and society to withstand invasions.

After the successors of Ashoka failed to keep the empire intact, various small kingdoms emerged in the face of Indian subcontinent. The Mauryan Dynasty was soon replaced by the Sunga dynasty.

The Sunga Dynasty:

The founder of Sunga dynasty was Pushyamitra Sunga (187-151 BC). He had assassinated the last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha to capture the throne. By this time much of the Mauryan empire was disintegrated.

- The southern parts were under the Satvahans.
- The North-western areas were facing Bactrian Greek invasions.
- Pushyamitra Sunga struggled to keep the area under his control.
- He kept the Greek invasions in check, this has been considered his major achievement.
- Pushyamitra was a supporter of Brahmanical traditions. He revived the practice of 'Ashwamedha yajna'.
- He also contributed in construction of the Buddhist stupa at Barhut.

After the death of Pushyamitra, his son Agnimitra became ruler. He conquered the Vidarbha area.

The last ruler of Sunga dynasty was their 9th ruler, Devabhuti. He was murdered by his minister Vasudeva Kanva.

Importance of Sunga Rule: The Sunga defended the Gangetic valley from foreign invasions. They revived the Brahmanical traditions (Ashwamedha). They also promoted other religions and Sanskrit language.

Kanva Dynasty:

It was founded by Vasudeva Kanva. This dynasty was Brahmin in caste, believed to be descendants of Rishi Kanva. The kingdom at the time of Vasudeva Kanva was much reduced in its extent. Not much is known about the rulers of this dynasty. The last king of Kanvas was Susarman.

The Satvahana Dynasty:

After the decline of Mauryan Empire in Deccan, the Satavahanas became politically prominent in the middle of the 1st century BC. They were the most important native successors of Mauryas.

Gautamiputra Satakarni (1st century A.D.) was the greatest of the Satavahana rulers. He extended the Satavahana rule by defeating the Shaka ruler Nahapana of Western India. The kingdom of Gautamiputra Satakarni extended from river Krishna in south to the river Godavari in north. The Satavahana capital was situated at Pratishthana (modern day Paithan near Aurangabad in Maharashtra).

The Chedis/Chetas of Kalinga:

In the middle of 1st century B.C. , Kalinga rose to power under the king Kharavela. He was a Jain as mentioned in his inscriptions. He made various conquests which are recorded as his achievements on an inscription, known as Hathigumpha inscription, located in the Udayagiri hills near Bhuvaneshvar, Orissa. This inscription is named such because the image of an elephant is carved out of stone next to the boulder carrying the inscription. Not much is known about this dynasty other than the Hathigumpha inscription.

The Bactrian Indo-Greeks:

After death of Alexander in 323 BC, various Greeks settled on the north-western boarder of India in the present day north of Afghanistan. It should be noted that the rulers of Bactria are called the Bactrian-Greeks, because they were Hellenistic (Greek) in their ancestry. During the time of Pushyamitra Sunga the invaders were ruled by Demetrius. However, the most revered Indo-Greek ruler was King **Menander**. His empire included the southern Afghanistan and Gandhara region(to the west of Indus). He has been referred to as king Milinda who finds mention in the famous Buddhist text '**Milindapanho**' -in which philosophical questions asked by Milinda to Nagasena (the Buddhist author of the text) are described in detail. The capital of his kingdom was Sakala (Sialkot). He later embraced Buddhism. Also, a Greek ambassador Heliodorus adopted Vaishnavite religion and erected the **Garuda Pillar** at Besnagar. The Greek influence in India then lasted for more than a century after the death of King Menander.

The Sakas Dynasty:

The Sakas also known as the Scythians captured Bactria from the Greek rulers and followed the footsteps of the Greeks to extend their rule over the northwestern parts of India. There were two distinct groups of Sakas – Northern Satraps who ruled from Taxila ; and the Western satraps who ruled over Maharashtra. The founder the Saka rule in India in the 1st century B.C. was **Maues**. And his successor Azes I, is considered to be the founder of the 'Vikrama era'. The most famous of the Shaka rulers was **Rudradaman I** who ruled in the middle of 2nd century AD. He is known to have undertaken the repairs of the Sudarshana Lake, which was originally built during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya. This has been mentioned on an inscription which he got engraved at Girnar/Junagarh in Gujarat. This inscription is the first royal inscription of India which is composed in chaste Sanskrit. Saka rulers of Taxila were overthrown by the Parthians.

The Parthians:

The Parthians were Iranians in origin and had strong cultural connection with the Shakas,. Thats why these both groups are referred to as 'Shaka-Pahlava'. The inscription that indicates the Parthian rule in the northwestern area of Pakistan is the 'Takht-i-Bahi' inscription at Mardan near Peshawar. It is dated in 45 AD, and refers to Gondophernes /Gondophares as a Parthian ruler. He is believed to have taken up Chritianity by association with St. Thomas.

The Kushanas:

The Parthians were followed by the Kushanas alos known as Yuehis or Tocharians. They were one of the five clans in the Yuechi tribe. And there were two successive dynasties in the Kushanas.

The first dynasty was founded by Kadphises, who ruled for 28 years from A.D. 50. This had two Kings, Kadphises I and II or Vima Kadphises. Kanishka was the greatest Kushana king who spread his kingdom beyond the western Himalayas also. He popularized Buddhism in Tibet, China, and Central Asia.

Post Mauryan Developments in Culture & Society – History Study Material & Notes

Art and culture in the post Mauryan period was primarily with religious undertone. The two most important features that characterise art and architecture of this period are the construction of Stupas, and the development of regional schools of Sculpture. These topics remain a favorite of various examiners also. Therefore this article will serve as good revision tool.

The idols of Buddha were carved out for the first time in this period of Ancient Indian history. Due to contact with the foreigners coming from northwest, a specific distinct school of art known as the 'Gandhara School of Art' also developed in this period. This school of sculpture was influenced by the Greek and Roman styles/art forms.

The Stupas:

Basically, A stupa is a large hemispherical dome having a central chamber in which the relics of Buddha or some prominent Buddhist monk were kept inside a small casket.

The base of stupa was surrounded by a path meant for clockwise circumambulation/pradakshina. It was enclosed by a wooden railing, which later developed to be made in stone.

Three prominent stupas belonging to this period are located at Bharhut and Sanchi, both fall in Madhya Pradesh, were originally built by Ashoka but were subjected to enlargement later.

The **Bharhut Stupa** in its present form and structure was from middle of 2nd century B.C. It has important sculptures and its railings are made of red stone.

At **Sanchi**, three big stupas were constructed in this period. The biggest was built originally by Ashoka, and later enlarged to double its size.

Other Stupa are located at Amravati and **Nagarjunkonda**, both in Andhra Pradesh.

The **Amravati Stupa**, attained its final shape in the 2nd century A.D.

It should be noted that the sculptures on the stupas are based on themes of Jataka and other Buddhist stories.

Rock Cut Architecture:

The post Mauryan period marks a progress in the rock cut architecture apart from stupas. A large number of temples and halls as well as places of residence for monks were made in this period. These structures were cut out of the solid rocks near Pune and Nasik in Maharashtra, this was under the Satavahanas. The places of worship generally had a shrine cell with a large stupa that are placed in the centre. These places were known as **Chaitya** and the rock cut structure that are used as the residence for monks were called a **Vihara**.

Schools of Sculptural Art:

The 1st century had witnessed the division of Buddhism in two different sects of Hinayana and Mahayana. The Mahayana Buddhism then encouraged Buddha's worship like a god in human form. Thus as a result, a large number of Buddha images were constructed in different regions across India. There were three major schools for sculptural art and culture, which developed in this period. These schools are – the Mathura school of art, the Gandhara School of art and the Amravati school of art.

The Mathura School of Art:

This prominent school of art developed at Mathura in UP. The Mathura school's major contribution to the contemporary art was the type of images of Buddha which were created as the precedent of the art form. The Mathura artists were using local red stone which had black spots to create the Buddha images.

The Mathura school yielded a large number of sculptures of Jaina deities as well besides the ayagapatas (stone slabs) to place objects of worship on them.

There was Brahmanical influence on the art of Mathura school, which is evident in the sculptures. Also, during the Kushana period a number of sculptures of brahmanical deities were also carved, like Kartikeya, Vishnu and Kubera. These show that Brahmanical influence.

The Gandhara School of Art

The Gandhara School of art developed around the area surrounding Peshawar. This school of art was at its peak during the 1st and 2nd century A.D.

This region had seen successive rule of the Greeks, the Mauryas, the Sungas, the Shakas, and the Kushanas for many centuries. This gave a distinct character to the Gandhara school of art. Since it began around the Christian era, it has also been known as Graeco-Roman, Indo Greek, Graeco-Buddhist art form because it has all the influences coming from the Roman, Greek and Indian styles.

The theme of sculptures in Gandhara school is predominantly Buddhist, but the style is Greek. The chief patrons of the Gandhara school of art were the Shakas and the Kushanas. The stones used for making the idols of Buddha and Bodhisattava were primarily **blue-grey schist**. The chief characteristics of the Gandhara school of art is its beautiful portrayal of human figures complete with distinguished muscles of the body.

In the sculptures, Buddha is depicted with a distinct type of garment draped in Graeco-Roman fashion, with very curly hair. These beautiful images are considered the best pieces of sculptures of Buddha.

The Amravati School of Art:

The Amravati school of art had flourished in Andhra Pradesh region located between the lower valley of river Krishna and Godavari. Major patrons of Amravati art form were the Satavahans of Deccan, but it continued even later.

This art flourished between 150 BC and 350 AD. The sculptures of Amravati school of art are mainly found located on the railings, the plinths and other such parts of the stupas.

The representations on the sculptures include the themes of stories from the life of Buddha. That is why an important characteristic of the Amravati school is its 'narrative art'.

There are medal- lions carved in a particular manner that they depict an event in a very natural way. For instance, one of the medallion depicts a whole story about taming of an elephant by Buddha.

Another significant feature of the Amravati art is- use of white marble for carving the figures of humans. The specific emphasis on human figures over the nature is also a distinct feature of the Amravati art school.

The decline of the Mauryan Empire led to the rise of various regional kingdoms. Which among the following was not one of these kingdoms?

- a) Satavahanas
- b) Kushanas
- c) Guptas
- d) Cholas

Solution: d) Cholas

The Sunga dynasty emerged as a ruling power after the fall of the Mauryan Empire. Their capital city was:

- a) Pataliputra
- b) Ujjain
- c) Mathura
- d) Vidisha

Solution: b) Ujjain

The Kushana Empire, which played a significant role in the Silk Road trade, was ruled by:

- a) Kanishka
- b) Ashoka
- c) Harsha
- d) Chandragupta I

Solution: a) Kanishka

The Satavahana dynasty, also known as the Andhras, ruled over a large part of South India. Their capital city was:

- a) Pratishthana
- b) Amaravati
- c) Pataliputra
- d) Ujjain

Solution: a) Pratishthana

The rock-cut caves of Ajanta and Ellora are associated with which dynasty?

- a) Sungas
- b) Satavahanas
- c) Kushanas
- d) Guptas

Solution: b) Satavahanas

The Gupta Empire is often regarded as the "Golden Age" of ancient India. Its most famous ruler was:

- a) Chandragupta Maurya
- b) Ashoka
- c) Harsha
- d) Chandragupta I

Solution: d) Chandragupta I

The Gupta Empire witnessed significant advancements in which field?

- a) Architecture
- b) Mathematics
- c) Literature
- d) All of the above

Solution: d) All of the above

The Gupta period is known for its significant contributions to mathematics. One of the most notable achievements was the concept of:

- a) Zero
- b) Decimal system
- c) Pi
- d) Algebra

Solution: b) Decimal system

The Chinese traveler Fa-Hien visited India during the reign of which Gupta ruler?

- a) Chandragupta I

- b) Samudragupta
- c) Chandragupta II
- d) Kumaragupta I

Solution: c) Chandragupta II

The famous iron pillar located in Delhi, known for its corrosion resistance, was erected during the reign of:

- a) Chandragupta Maurya
- b) Ashoka
- c) Samudragupta
- d) Chandragupta II

Solution: d) Chandragupta II

The Ajanta Caves, renowned for their Buddhist paintings, are located in which present-day state of India?

- a) Maharashtra
- b) Madhya Pradesh
- c) Uttar Pradesh
- d) Bihar

Solution: a) Maharashtra

The Huna invasions in North India were successfully repelled by which Gupta ruler?

- a) Chandragupta I
- b) Samudragupta
- c) Chandragupta II
- d) Kumaragupta I

Solution: c) Chandragupta II

The Harsha Empire, also known as the Vardhana dynasty, flourished in which part of India?

- a) North India
- b) South India
- c) East India
- d) West India

Solution: a) North India

Harsha is famous for his play "Nagananda," which was written in which language?

- a) Sanskrit
- b) Prakrit
- c) Tamil
- d) Pali

Solution: a) Sanskrit

The famous Chinese traveler Xuanzang visited India during the reign of which ruler?

- a) Chandragupta I
- b) Samudragupta
- c) Chandragupta II
- d) Harsha

Solution: d) Harsha

The Pala dynasty, known for its patronage of Buddhism, ruled over which region of India?

- a) Bengal
- b) Gujarat
- c) Karnataka
- d) Punjab

Solution: a) Bengal

The Nalanda University, one of the oldest universities in the world, was founded during the reign of which dynasty?

- a) Sungas
- b) Satavahanas
- c) Guptas
- d) Palas

Solution: d) Palas

The Chalukya dynasty, known for its architectural marvels like the temples at Pattadakal and Aihole, ruled over which region of India?

- a) Deccan
- b) Bengal
- c) Kashmir
- d) Rajasthan

Solution: a) Deccan

The Rashtrakuta dynasty, known for its military conquests and patronage of art and literature, ruled over which region of India?

- a) Deccan
- b) Bengal
- c) Kashmir
- d) Rajasthan

Solution: a) Deccan

The Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty, which had its capital at Kannauj, ruled over which region of India?

- a) North India
- b) South India
- c) East India
- d) West India

Solution: a) North India

The Chola dynasty, known for its maritime trade and temple architecture, flourished in which part of India?

- a) South India
- b) North India
- c) East India
- d) West India

Solution: a) South India

The Western Chalukya dynasty, also known as the Kalyani Chalukyas, ruled over which region of India?

- a) Deccan
- b) Bengal
- c) Kashmir
- d) Rajasthan

Solution: a) Deccan

The Delhi Sultanate was established by which dynasty?

- a) Khilji dynasty
- b) Tughlaq dynasty
- c) Slave dynasty
- d) Lodi dynasty

Solution: c) Slave dynasty

The Vijayanagara Empire, known for its grand architecture and patronage of the arts, was founded by:

- a) Krishnadevaraya
- b) Bukka Raya I
- c) Harihara I
- d) Devaraya II

Solution: c) Harihara I

The Mughal Empire in India was founded by:

- a) Akbar
- b) Aurangzeb
- c) Shah Jahan
- d) Babur

Solution: d) Babur

The Maratha Empire, which challenged Mughal authority in India, reached its zenith under the rule of:

- a) Chhatrapati Shivaji
- b) Bajirao I
- c) Balaji Baji Rao

d) Peshwa Madhavrao I

Solution: c) Balaji Baji Rao

The Anglo-Maratha Wars took place between the Maratha Empire and which colonial power?

a) British

b) French

c) Dutch

d) Portuguese

Solution: a) British

The British East India Company defeated the last independent Nawab of Bengal, Siraj ud-Daulah, in the Battle of:

a) Plassey

b) Buxar

c) Panipat

d) Waterloo

Solution: a) Plassey

The British introduced the "Doctrine of Lapse" policy during the rule of which Governor-General of India?

a) Lord Cornwallis

b) Lord Dalhousie

c) Lord Canning

d) Lord Curzon

Solution: b) Lord Dalhousie

The Indian Rebellion of 1857, also known as the Sepoy Mutiny, began in which city?

a) Meerut

b) Delhi

c) Lucknow

d) Jhansi

Solution: a) Meerut

The Shunga dynasty, which succeeded the Mauryan Empire, patronized which form of art?

- a) Painting
- b) Sculpture
- c) Literature
- d) Dance

Solution: b) Sculpture

The famous stupa at Sanchi, known for its elaborate carvings and architectural beauty, was commissioned by:

- a) Ashoka
- b) Kanishka
- c) Harsha
- d) Chandragupta I

Solution: a) Ashoka

The Satavahanas, who ruled in South India, were patrons of which art form?

- a) Painting
- b) Sculpture
- c) Literature
- d) Music

Solution: c) Literature

The Andhra Ikshvaku dynasty, a successor of the Satavahanas, was known for its patronage of:

- a) Architecture
- b) Music
- c) Drama
- d) Sculpture

Solution: c) Drama

The Mathura School of Art, known for its sculptures depicting Hindu gods and goddesses, flourished during the reign of which dynasty?

- a) Sungas

- b) Kushanas
- c) Guptas
- d) Pallavas

Solution: b) Kushanas

The Gupta period is often referred to as the "Golden Age" of Indian art and literature. Which ruler was particularly known for his patronage of the arts?

- a) Chandragupta I
- b) Samudragupta
- c) Chandragupta II
- d) Kumaragupta I

Solution: c) Chandragupta II

The Ajanta Caves, famous for their exquisite murals depicting Buddhist themes, are located in which present-day state of India?

- a) Maharashtra
- b) Madhya Pradesh
- c) Uttar Pradesh
- d) Bihar

Solution: a) Maharashtra

The Ellora Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage site, showcase a unique blend of Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain art. They are situated in which state of India?

- a) Maharashtra
- b) Madhya Pradesh
- c) Karnataka
- d) Rajasthan

Solution: a) Maharashtra

The Harsha Charita, a biography of Emperor Harsha, was written by:

- a) Kalidasa
- b) Bana Bhatta

- c) Ashvaghosha
- d) Amara Simha

Solution: b) Bana Bhatta

The Pala dynasty, known for its patronage of Buddhist art and learning, ruled over which region of India?

- a) Bengal
- b) Gujarat
- c) Karnataka
- d) Punjab

Solution: a) Bengal

The Nalanda University, one of the oldest universities in the world, thrived during the reign of which dynasty?

- a) Sungas
- b) Satavahanas
- c) Guptas
- d) Palas

Solution: d) Palas

The Pala period witnessed the development of a unique style of temple architecture known as:

- a) Dravidian style
- b) Nagara style
- c) Vesara style
- d) Pala style

Solution: d) Pala style

The Chalukya dynasty, known for its architectural marvels like the temples at Pattadakal and Aihole, flourished in which region of India?

- a) Deccan
- b) Bengal
- c) Kashmir
- d) Rajasthan

Solution: a) Deccan

The Rashtrakuta dynasty, famous for its patronage of art and literature, developed a distinctive style of temple architecture known as:

- a) Dravidian style
- b) Nagara style
- c) Vesara style
- d) Rashtrakuta style

Solution: c) Vesara style

The Ellora Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage site, were carved out of:

- a) Sandstone
- b) Granite
- c) Basalt
- d) Marble

Solution: c) Basalt

The Hoysala dynasty, known for its intricate temple architecture, ruled over which region of India?

- a) Deccan
- b) Bengal
- c) Kashmir
- d) Rajasthan

Solution: a) Deccan

The Bhakti movement, which emphasized devotional love and worship, gained prominence during the Post Mauryan period. It was influenced by which religion?

- a) Buddhism
- b) Jainism
- c) Hinduism
- d) Islam

Solution: c) Hinduism

The Alvars and Nayanars were associated with which religious movement of the Post Mauryan period?

- a) Bhakti movement
- b) Sufi movement
- c) Buddhist revival
- d) Jain reform

Solution: a) Bhakti movement

The Bhakti movement had a profound impact on the development of regional languages. Which language became the medium of expression for the Alvars in South India?

- a) Tamil
- b) Telugu
- c) Kannada
- d) Malayalam

Solution: a) Tamil

The Sufi movement, which emphasized mystical devotion, gained popularity during the Post Mauryan period. It was influenced by which religion?

- a) Buddhism
- b) Jainism
- c) Hinduism
- d) Islam

Solution: d) Islam

The Chishti order of Sufism was founded by:

- a) Moinuddin Chishti
- b) Nizamuddin Auliya
- c) Baba Farid
- d) Rumi

Solution: a) Moinuddin Chishti

The Bhakti and Sufi movements emphasized religious tolerance and harmony. One of the prominent exponents of this syncretic tradition was:

- a) Kabir
- b) Guru Nanak
- c) Ravidas
- d) Basava

Solution: b) Guru Nanak

The Pahari school of painting, known for its vibrant colors and depiction of nature, emerged in which region of India?

- a) Punjab
- b) Gujarat
- c) Rajasthan
- d) Himachal Pradesh

Solution: d) Himachal Pradesh

The Mughal Empire in India was known for its patronage of which form of art?

- a) Painting
- b) Sculpture
- c) Literature
- d) Music

Solution: a) Painting

The Mughal ruler Akbar established the "Ibadat Khana" (House of Worship) to promote religious discussions among scholars from different faiths. Where was it located?

- a) Fatehpur Sikri
- b) Agra
- c) Delhi
- d) Lahore

Solution: a) Fatehpur Sikri

The Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan built the magnificent Taj Mahal as a mausoleum for his beloved wife. In which city is it located?

- a) Agra
- b) Delhi
- c) Jaipur
- d) Lucknow

Solution: a) Agra

The Bhakti and Sufi movements had a significant impact on the development of Indian music. Which style of classical music emerged during this period?

- a) Hindustani classical music
- b) Carnatic classical music
- c) Rabindra Sangeet
- d) Qawwali

Solution: a) Hindustani classical music

The development of Indian dance forms, such as Kathak and Odissi, was influenced by the Bhakti and Sufi traditions. Which ruler was known for his patronage of dance and music?

- a) Krishnadevaraya
- b) Akbar
- c) Ashoka
- d) Harsha

Solution: b) Akbar

The Post Mauryan period witnessed the emergence of regional literature in various languages. Which literary work, composed in Tamil, became a classic of Tamil literature?

- a) Ramayana
- b) Mahabharata
- c) Silappadikaram
- d) Manimekalai

Solution: c) Silappadikaram