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The Kushana Empire – History Study Material & Notes

The Kushanas had originally belonged to the regions of western China. They are also known as the 'Yuehchis'. The Kushanas defeated the Shakas and the Pahlavas/Parthians and went on to create a big empire in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Northern parts of India.

The first important ruler of the Kushana dynasty was 'Kujula Kadphises' or Kadphises I. He occupied the valley of Kabul and had also issued coins in his name. He was then succeeded by his son, Wima Kadphises or Kadphises II. He had conquered the areas of Northern India till Mathura. He had issued coins proclaiming himself as a Shiva devotee and as the ruler of whole world.

There after the Kushana empire was ruled by Kanishka. He is considered the most important ruler of the Kushana dynasty.

Kanishka's Reign and Buddhism:

Kanishka usurped the throne in AD 78, and then started a new era, what is known to us as the 'Shaka era'. Under the rule of Kanishka, the Kushana empire reached its maximum territorial limits. This empire extended from the Central Asia to the northern India, while including Varanasi, Kaushambi and Sravasti in Uttar Pradesh region.

The political significance of Kanishka's rule is largely due to his achievements in form that he integrated central Asia with north India under a single empire. This allowed for intermingling of different distinct cultures and also increased the inter regional trading activities.

Kanishka remains famous in history as the great patron of Buddhism. He is credited with convening the fourth Buddhist Council at Kundalavan, located at present day Harwan near Srinagar in J&K. In this 4th Buddhist Council, a large number of Buddhist scholars took part. This council is important in the history of Buddhism for the developments. In this council that Buddhism got split into two different schools – **Hinayana and Mahayana**. About 500 monks had attended the Council. This Council had prepared an authoritative commentary on the **Tripitakas** and the Mahayana doctrine was given final shape here.

Kanishka is also known to patronize the **Gandhara and Mathura schools of sculptural art**. He also built a giant stupa to house the Buddha's relics in the his capital city of Purushapura located at present day Peshawar. That building was intact in its magnificence when the Chinese pilgrim Fahien had visited that area when he arrived in the early 5th century AD. The Kushana power had gradually declined from the early 3rd century AD.

Kanishka had also sent missionaries to the Central Asia and China to propagate the new faith of Buddhism. The Buddhist chaityas and viharas were also built in different places. He also patronised the Buddhist scholars – Vasumitra, Asvagosha and Nagarjuna. It should be noted

that Asvagosha was a great philosopher, poet and dramatist of his time. He was also the author of Buddhacharita. While Nagarjuna came from south India, he adorned the court of Kanishka.

Kushana Polity and Administration:

Nothing much is known about the administrative machinery of the Kushanas. Perhaps the whole empire was divided into provinces, each ruled by a mahakshatrapa (a military governor), who was assisted by a kshatrapa; but how many provinces were there in the empire, is not known. Sources indicate that Kushana horsemen wore trousers while riding. A headless statue of Kanishka found at Mathura reflects the same. A prominent feature of Kushana polity was the title of devaputra , i.e., son of God, used by the Kushana kings. It indicates the claim to divinity by the Kushana kings.

The Contributions of Kushanas:

The Kushanas occupy a special place in the ancient Indian history because of their contribution to various aspects of life. Their vast empire helped in the growth of internal and external trade. It resulted in the rise of new urban centres. The rich state of economy under the Kushanas is also evidenced by the large number of gold and copper coins that they struck. Even in literature and medicine, India made progress. Charaka, known as father of Ayurveda, wrote a book on medicine called Charaksamhita whereas Asvaghosha, a Buddhist scholar, wrote

Buddhacharita, a full length biography of the Buddha. Both these scholars were believed to be the contemporaries of king Kanishka. The Kushanas patronized the Gandhara and the Mathura schools of sculptural art which are known for producing the earliest images of Buddha and Buddhisattavas.

The Successors of Kanishka and the End of Kushana rule:

The successors of Kanishka had ruled for another one hundred and fifty years. His son Huvishka kept the empire intact. While Mathura became an important city under his rule, like his father Kanishka he was also a patron of Buddhism religion.

The last significant Kushana ruler was Vasudeva. The Kushana empire got much reduced in his rule. Various inscription with his name are found in and around Mathura. He was a worshipper of Siva. And after Vasudeva, petty Kushan princes ruled for sometime in northwestern India after which the empire faded away.

The Kushana Empire emerged in which region of the Indian subcontinent?

- a) Northwest India
- b) Central India
- c) South India
- d) Northeast India

Solution: a) Northwest India

The founder of the Kushana Empire was:

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

Solution: a) Kanishka

The Kushana Empire reached its peak during the reign of which ruler?

- a) Kanishka
- b) Vima Kadphises
- c) Huvishka
- d) Vasudeva I

Solution: a) Kanishka

The Kushanas were originally:

- a) Greeks
- b) Persians
- c) Bactrians
- d) Scythians

Solution: c) Bactrians

The Kushanas played a significant role in the spread of which religion in Central Asia and India?

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

Solution: c) Buddhism

Kanishka was a patron of Buddhist art and convened the famous Buddhist council at:

- a) Mathura
- b) Sarnath
- c) Nalanda
- d) Kashmir

Solution: d) Kashmir

The Kushanas had extensive trade connections with which ancient civilization?

- a) Roman Empire
- b) Chinese Empire
- c) Egyptian Empire
- d) Persian Empire

Solution: a) Roman Empire

The Kushanas issued gold coins called:

- a) Dinar
- b) Rupiya
- c) Tanka
- d) Drachma

Solution: a) Dinar

The Kushanas adopted which script for their inscriptions?

- a) Brahmi
- b) Kharosthi
- c) Devanagari

d) Greek

Solution: b) Kharosthi

Which city became the capital of the Kushana Empire during the reign of Kanishka?

a) Pataliputra

b) Mathura

c) Taxila

d) Varanasi

Solution: c) Taxila

The Kushanas introduced which architectural element to Indian art and architecture?

a) Stupa

b) Dome

c) Pillars

d) Arch

Solution: b) Dome

The Gandhara School of Art, known for its Greco-Buddhist style, flourished under the patronage of the Kushanas in which region?

a) Punjab

b) Bihar

c) Rajasthan

d) Madhya Pradesh

Solution: a) Punjab

The Kushanas were overthrown by which dynasty in the 3rd century CE?

a) Guptas

b) Mauryas

c) Pallavas

d) Cholas

Solution: a) Guptas

The Kushana Empire played a crucial role in the Silk Road trade route, connecting which two regions?

- a) East Asia and West Asia
- b) South Asia and Central Asia
- c) Africa and Europe
- d) North America and South America

Solution: b) South Asia and Central Asia

Kanishka's era marked a significant development in the field of astronomy. Who was the famous astronomer and mathematician in his court?

- a) Aryabhata
- b) Varahamihira
- c) Brahmagupta
- d) Vasumitra

Solution: d) Vasumitra

The Kushana Empire saw the fusion of Indian and Central Asian cultures. This is evident in the artistic style known as:

- a) Gandhara art
- b) Gupta art
- c) Pallava art
- d) Chola art

Solution: a) Gandhara art

Kanishka's empire extended as far as:

- a) Afghanistan and Pakistan
- b) Myanmar and Thailand
- c) Sri Lanka and Maldives
- d) Nepal and Bhutan

Solution: a) Afghanistan and Pakistan

The Kushana Empire declined due to invasions by which foreign power in the 4th century CE?

- a) Greeks
- b) Persians
- c) Huns
- d) Mongols

Solution: c) Huns

The Kushanas were known for their patronage of which form of literature?

- a) Sanskrit poetry
- b) Tamil literature
- c) Persian literature
- d) Pali scriptures

Solution: a) Sanskrit poetry

Kanishka's court language was:

- a) Sanskrit
- b) Prakrit
- c) Greek
- d) Bactrian

Solution: d) Bactrian

The famous Buddhist text, the "Mahavibhasa," was compiled during the reign of Kanishka by the Buddhist scholar:

- a) Nagarjuna
- b) Vasubandhu
- c) Asanga
- d) Katyayana

Solution: a) Nagarjuna

The Mathura School of Art, known for its sculptures depicting Hindu deities, flourished during the Kushana period under the influence of which ruler?

- a) Kanishka
- b) Huvishka

- c) Vasudeva I
 - d) Kujula Kadphises
- Solution: b) Huvishka

The Kushana Empire saw the rise of the cult of:

- a) Shiva
 - b) Vishnu
 - c) Buddha
 - d) Devi
- Solution: b) Vishnu

The Kushanas introduced a new calendar known as the:

- a) Saka era
 - b) Vikram era
 - c) Gupta era
 - d) Kushana era
- Solution: a) Saka era